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Plympton Village Historic District
Plympton, Plymouth County, MA

8. NARRATIVE STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Plympton Village Historic District in the center of Plympton is a linear village centered on an historic common and flanked by an historic burial ground. The area and the buildings retain a high degree of integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association, fulfilling Criteria A and C of the National Register at the local level.

Under **Criterion A**, the District has served as a focal point for the Town since its earliest days of European settlement. At the District's center lies the Plympton Green, a linear strip of common land established in 1702, five years before Plympton's incorporation as a Town. The Green served first as a burying place and military training ground, and housed the first meetinghouse (c. 1695-1698). By the 20th century, it had become a commemorative space, holding the Civil War monument, Veterans' Memorial, bandstand, and at the northernmost end, a 14-acre cemetery. Throughout the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries, religious, civic, commercial, and residential properties developed around the Green, including the First Congregational Church and Cemetery (1830), Parsonage (1853-54), Plympton Public Library (1905), Center School (1935) and the Firehouse (1975).

Under **Criterion C**, the District contains intact buildings and landscapes from the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries and exhibits an array of architectural and landscape architectural styles, as well as many fine examples of funerary art. While the Greek Revival style predominates (reflecting the period of greatest prosperity), the area also contains buildings reflecting the Georgian, Federal, Queen Anne, Second Empire, and Colonial Revival styles. The tree-lined, long, linear form of the Plympton Green typifies the design of commons in many New England towns. The monuments and carvings of both the Hillcrest and First Congregational Church Cemeteries display the materials of the local environment as well as the work of notable local stonecarvers.

CRITERION A: PATTERNS OF HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT

Originally a part of Plymouth, present-day Plympton received its first European settlers sometime between 1670 and 1680. In 1695, the western precinct of Plymouth, which included present-day Plympton and Carver, was established. Forty-five families resided in the precinct at the time. Plympton was incorporated as a separate town on June 4, 1707. The Town's size was reduced on various occasions in the 1700s and 1800s, through setting off land to form the neighboring towns of Kingston, Halifax, Middleborough and Carver. Plympton achieved its current configuration in 1863, when the boundary with adjoining Halifax was finalized (MHC 1981:1; Sherman 1907:3-4; Wright 1973:23).

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In the 17th and 18th centuries, Plympton's economic base was primarily agricultural, and early white settlements concentrated along Brook and Crescent streets and in two primary nodes located in North Plympton and around the Plympton Green. Topographical constraints discouraged significant changes in Plympton's road system, which has changed little from the end of the 1700s to the present day. For example, Main Street, which bisects the Plympton Village Area, probably served as the primary north-south route during the Contact Period (1500-1620), as it does today. Consequently, Plympton's early settlement pattern persisted through the 1800s, with new development focused along existing roads. Eighteenth and 19th-century industrial pursuits were limited and were sited mainly near the Winnetuxet River, located to the south of the Plympton Green, although some small mills were located along streams in other parts of town. Almost all of the industrial sites in Plympton had disappeared by the 1920s (MHC 1981:1-3).

Colonial Period (1670-1780)

The Plympton Village Area has served as a focal point for the Town since its earliest days of European settlement. Shortly after the establishment of the western precinct of Plymouth in 1695, a meetinghouse was erected on the southern end of the present-day green. This structure was probably built between 1695 and 1698, when a separate parish was organized to serve the residents of the new precinct. It was replaced around 1714, when a new meetinghouse was erected on the green. This, in turn, was replaced with a third meetinghouse, built around 1772 at the location of the present-day Civil War Soldiers' Monument. None of these three buildings survives. A fourth meetinghouse, the present-day **First Congregational Church at 254 Main Street** (MHC #18, 1830, Photo #5), across the street from the green, was built in 1830 (see below).

The **Plympton Green** (MHC #901, 1702, Photos #2 and 4) was established at a town meeting held in Plymouth on March 16, 1702, when the town voted to set aside 30 acres for use by the ministry and as a militia training green and burial ground. This land was surveyed by William Shurtleff and Samuel Sturtevant on April 23, 1702. (Of these thirty acres, all but the training green and burial ground was sold by the parish during a period of financial trouble in 1843.) In 1706, an acre of land was cleared by Benjamin Soule and Isaac Cushman to create a burying ground (**Hillcrest Cemetery**, MHC #801, 1706, Photo #10). Burials began soon after, concentrated in the portion of the cemetery located near the intersection of present-day Main Street and Palmer Road (*A History of the First Congregational Church* 1998:7-11; Sherman 1907:3, 7; Wright 1973:23, 57). The cemetery features numerous headstones carved by

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Nathaniel Fuller and the Soule family, Plympton residents (Benes 1969; Forbes 1989:85-86). Most are slate slabs featuring a semi-circular tympanum, though round-arched and rectangular slabs are also present. There are numerous stones carved by Nathaniel Fuller, including those of William Coomer (d. 1741) and Elizabeth Parker (d. 1743), as well as by Ebenezer Soule (1710-1792), a Plympton native.

In the 18th century, the Plympton Green served many purposes. As noted above, Plympton's first three meetinghouses were located on the present-day green. At various times, the green also included the Town Pound and stocks. An armory stood at the southern end of the green (a some point, the building was split in half and each half was moved to Parsonage Road to a location outside the Plympton Village historic district boundary). A Liberty Pole was erected in 1774, near the site of the present-day Grange Pump. Jonathan Parker, the town minister from 1731 to 1776, cultivated the north end of the green and had a barn on the property. A fence ran along the west side of his field, which extended from the present-day Civil War Soldiers' Monument to the burial ground (Sherman 1907:7; Wright 1977:417; Wright 1981:41).

In the late 1700s, the **Reverend Ezra Sampson House at 255 Main Street** (MHC #17, late 18th century, Photo #12) was erected by the town's new minister on the east side of the green. This was the first of several residences to be built along the green's eastern perimeter, and points to the long history of homes fronting on the Plympton Green. Reverend Sampson served Plympton until 1796, when he moved to Hudson, New York and became the editor of a newspaper (*A History of the First Congregational Church* 1998:12; Bricknell 1974:8). He was distantly related to Deborah Sampson, the Revolutionary War soldier and Plympton native (b. 1760) for whom a boulder (MHC #903, 1906) was placed on the Plympton Green. Deborah Sampson lived on Elm Street (outside the district), and after marrying c. 1785, moved to Sharon. Ezra Sampson and Deborah Sampson shared the same great-grand parents, Isaac Sampson and Lydia Standish.

Federal Period (1780-1830)

Throughout the 18th century, Plympton's population fluctuated as boundaries were adjusted and neighboring towns were set off. The inland location and the shortage of good farmland kept the community fairly small with a population of 956 residents in the 1790 census declining to 861 residents in 1800 (after the boundary with Carver was established). By 1830, the population of Plympton was up to 920, but would fall again in 1831 when a portion of the town was annexed to neighboring Halifax.

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The shortage of arable land that limited colonial settlement made Plympton more attractive to artisans, craftsmen, and merchants who could take advantage of the town's established network of roads and perhaps acquire homelots more cheaply. A shovel factory with a water-powered forge and triphammer on the Winnatuxet River was established in 1786 by Jonathan Parker and operated until 1860. The first of several small textile mills was established in 1812 when a cotton factory was constructed on the Winnatuxet River south of the town center. The town also supported a number of small gristmills and sawmills.

The Plympton Village area began to take on its current appearance in the early to mid-19th century. As in other Massachusetts communities during the same period, the image of the green or common changed from a place on which public buildings were located to that of an open park-like space surrounded by buildings.

The erection of the **First Congregational Church at 254 Main Street** (MHC #18, 1830, Photo #5) in 1830 was probably one of the most significant developments of the period. Following the separation of church and town in 1827, the church began to establish itself as an independent entity. Around the same time, the parishioners debated whether to repair the existing meetinghouse, which had been built on the green around 1772, or to erect a new facility. Ultimately, Polly and Jonathan Parker, the son of Reverend Parker, donated a lot of land on the west side of Main Street and Whittemore Peterson of Duxbury was hired to erect a new meetinghouse on the site.

The ca. 1772 meetinghouse was razed in April 1830, and construction of the new building began the following month. Measuring 66' x 44', the new building cost \$3,364 and featured a steeple and a 1,100 pound bell, which was cast by George W. Holbrook of Medway for \$386. (The steeple has since been damaged and reconstructed several times: after being struck by lightning in the 1850s, after a gale in 1928 and after Hurricane Carol in 1954.) The building was dedicated in front of a crowd of 800 on September 29, 1830, and the first service was held on October 4 of that year. Later alterations included the addition of the entry portico in 1903, through a donation from Maria L.H. Pierce of Middleborough, a Plympton native who provided funds for the erection of a new Library around the same time (*A History of the First Congregational Church* 1998:13-19; Sherman 1907:5; Wright 1973:75-76).

Numerous residences were built in the Plympton Green area during this period, as well. The first of these was the large, Georgian-style **Reverend John Briggs House at 1 Elm Street** (MHC #21, ca. 1801) located at the corner of Main and Elm streets. The residence was built on land

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given by the parish to Reverend Briggs when he assumed the ministry in 1801. He served as Plympton's minister until 1807 (Bricknell 1974; Sherman 1907:6). The **Rev. John Briggs outbuilding at 274 Main Street** (MHC #84, early to mid-19th century) may have been built around the same time as an outbuilding to the Briggs House; a small structure appears in its location on the 1857 map.

The **Martin Perkins House at 4 Mayflower Road** (MHC #24, ca.1820), a Federal-style residence, was built around 1820 (Bricknell 1974). Research indicates that Martin Perkins, or possibly his heirs, retained ownership until at least 1879; on both the 1857 and 1879 maps, the name "M Perkins" appears next to the property (Walling 1857; Walker 1879). In the 1867 directory, Martin Perkins is listed as a carpenter.

Early Industrial Period (1830-1870)

Plympton's population of 920 people in 1830 rose to a peak of 1,000 residents in 1855, then settled at 804 by 1870 (after the boundary between Plympton and Halifax was adjusted in 1863). The local economy in the early industrial period was still primarily based on skilled crafts and trades with continuing efforts to harness limited waterpower on small manufacturing sites. Cotton and woolen mills, the Parker shovel factory and piecework shoe manufacturing were the largest employers. The only railroad link passed through the northern part of Plympton in 1845.

By the mid-19th century, the Plympton Green area looked much as it does today, as evidenced by the appearance of almost all of the extant properties in the area on the 1857 atlas (Walling 1857). The 1857 map shows a town center that accommodated many uses, including civic, religious, residential, and commercial activities.

The **Nathaniel S. Lucas House at 277 Main Street** (MHC #23, ca. 1840) a simple Cape, was built at the corner of Main Street and Mayflower Road around 1840. The 1857 map shows "N Lucas" as the owner of the property; Nathaniel Lucas is listed as a blacksmith in the 1867 directory (Walling 1857). By 1879, the property was owned by J. Lucas, presumably a descendant of Nathaniel (Walker 1879).

Three residences were built on the east side of the Plympton Green during the mid-19th century, and reflect the popularity of the Greek Revival style at the time. These include the **William H. Soule House at 263 Main Street** (MHC #19, 1843), built in 1843. The Soule family traces its lineage back to the *Mayflower*; George Soule was a passenger on the *Mayflower* and his

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grandson, Benjamin, was one of the first settlers in Plympton (Wright 1977:199-200). As mentioned above, Benjamin Soule was one of two men who surveyed the burial ground in 1706. Research indicates that William H. Soule, who is listed as a "gentleman" in the 1867 directory, retained ownership of the property until at least 1857 (Walling 1857). By 1879, the property had passed to his son, William Strobridge Soule, owner of a trunk manufacturing company in Cambridge, who kept the property as a summer home until his death in 1900 (Walker 1879; Wright 1973:137).

The Greek Revival-style **George Sherman House at 259 Main Street** (MHC #22, ca. 1845, Photo #9), located just north of the William H. Soule House, was built around 1845 by George Sherman, a carpenter (Bricknell 1974; 1867 Directory). The **J. T. Ellis – L. B. Parker House at 271 Main Street** (MHC #83, ca. 1850, located immediately to the south of the William H. Soule House), exhibits some Greek Revival-style features, such as its center-bay entry with sidelights. It is shown on the 1857 map as belonging to the heirs of J.T. Ellis, while by 1879 it was owned by L.B. Parker (Walling 1857; Walling 1879).

Located immediately across the street is another Greek Revival-style building, the **Zacheus T. Parker House at 264 Main Street** (MHC #80, ca. 1850). Labeled "Z Parker" on both the 1857 and 1879 atlases, the house was likely occupied by Zacheus Parker, a trader, who operated a store a few lots to the south (see below) (Walling 1857; Walker 1879; 1867 Directory).

Union Hall / Grange Hall at 270 Main Street (MHC #20, 1852), also executed in the Greek Revival style, was built by a group of residents who objected to the site of the Town Hall, which had been built in 1850 at the intersection of Main and Center streets, north of the Plympton Village Area. Union Hall served as a community gathering space, hosting meetings, dances, concerts, and banquets. Shortly after it was built in 1852, it housed the Samoset Lyceum, which offered lectures, poetry readings, and debates. Union Hall served as a primary school around the turn of the 20th century. Research indicates that the Plympton Grange was meeting in the building by at least 1910; the Grange purchased the building in 1926. In the late 20th century, it served as an office building (1910 Directory: 51; MHC Inventory Form; *Plympton 275th Anniversary Celebration* 1982:3; Wright 1973:25-26, 51; Wright 1977:78-79).

Around 1850, the **First Congregational Church Cemetery** (MHC #800, ca. 1850, Photo #6) was established, presumably due to crowding at the original burial ground at the north end of the green; the first burial, that of Shadrach Standish, took place in the new cemetery in 1856 (Wright 1973:57-58).

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The Greek Revival-style **First Congregational Church Parsonage at 252 Main Street** (MHC #78, 1853-54) was built by the church on land formerly owned by Jonathan Parker, son of the minister. A building committee was formed on March 16, 1853, and a plan for the building, drawn up by committee member Zacheus Sherman, was approved soon after. Lorenzo Miller of Fall River constructed the building, which was completed in the summer of 1854. According to church records, the 25' x 35' residence was to be painted white with green shutters and plastered throughout, and included a parlor, study, nursery, buttery / pantry, a 13' x 15' porch (not extant), three chimneys and door handles of rosewood and glass. The building appears on the 1857 atlas of the town, at which time its front elevation faced the church; the building was rotated to face Main Street and placed on a new foundation in the 1980s (*A History of the First Congregational Church* 1998:27, 43-45; Walling 1857).

Two hotels near Plympton Green offered accommodations for travelers in the mid-19th century. H.E. Briggs operated a hotel at the **Reverend Ezra Sampson House at 255 Main Street** (MHC #17, late 18th century, Photo #12) by at least 1856; a photo in Eugene Wright's *Tales of Old Plympton, Volume I* shows a sign reading "PLYMPTON HOUSE / 1856 / H.E. BRIGGS" (Wright 1977:354). This sign remains with the house today. The 1867 directory lists Herschell E. Briggs as a shoemaker, suggesting that he either supplemented his hotel earnings with a second job or had closed the hotel by that time.

The 1857 map shows D. White's Hotel at the **Reverend John Briggs House at 1 Elm Street** (MHC #21, ca. 1801). In the 1867 directory, Darius White is listed as a farmer; he, too, may have operated his hotel on the side. Other establishments included a store on the west side of Main Street, just north of Union Hall (not extant; see below), and a post office (not extant) and a school (not extant) on the east side of the green, just south of the William H. Soule House at 263 Main Street. As noted above, many of the residences remained in the hands of their original builders or their heirs.

Late Industrial Period 1870-1910

While the late industrial period was not a time of rapid population growth in Plympton, it was a period in which the community began to assume its current character. The decline in population from 804 in 1870 to only 561 residents in 1910 does not include the gradual increase in summer residents who owned or rented property in Silver Lake Grove, a summer resort established in north Plympton by the Old Colony Railroad in 1845.

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The local economy continued to be based on skilled crafts and trades, including a shoe factory run by George Randall (see below). In the 1890s, the Randall Brothers also pioneered the beginnings of commercial cranberry production, a viable use for Plympton's many bogs and wetlands. The celebration of the town's 200th anniversary in 1907 also renewed interest in the Plympton Green as an important commemorative space.

Plympton Green (MHC #901, 1702, Photos #2 and 4), the geographical focus of the community since the 17th century, continued to hold a significant place in town. A number of improvements to the green were undertaken by the residents of the Plympton Village area during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. According to town historian Eugene Wright, in 1871 Lewis B. Parker, resident of 271 Main Street, planted a series of maple trees along the west side of the green, across from Z.T. Parker's store. Soon after, George Sherman and Herschel Briggs, who lived at 259 Main Street and 255 Main Street, respectively, planted a number of elms on the north end of the green. Ash trees were planted at the southern tip of the green by Darius White, whose hotel was at 1 Elm Street, in 1873 (Wright 1981:371). A split granite perimeter wall was erected on the south and west sides of the burial ground, thereby demarcating the boundary between it and the green, in the 1880s (Wright 1973:57).

In addition, several monuments and memorials were placed on the Plympton Green during this time period. On October 20, 1886, the Ladies' Memorial Society was formed for the purpose of erecting a monument to commemorate soldiers from Plympton who had served in the Civil War. Led by Mrs. William Fuller, Mrs. Z.E. Sherman, Mrs. Thomas W. Blanchard, and Miss Evelyn Sherman, the Society erected the **Civil War Soldiers' Monument** (MHC #902, 1889) on the green. The monument, which cost \$1,400, was dedicated on November 20, 1889, with war veterans from the area in attendance. Eugene Wright notes that the grounds around the monument were laid out in the 1890s. It is not clear whether this refers to the simple curbing that is still extant or whether any more elaborate design was ever in place (*Plympton 275th Anniversary Celebration* 1982; Wright 1973:26-27).

The **Deborah Sampson Boulder** (MHC #903, 1906), which commemorates the service of Plympton-born Deborah Sampson as a soldier in the Revolutionary War, was installed by the Daughters of the American Revolution of Brockton and the Town of Plympton in 1906 (Wright 1973:27).

The **Grange Pump** (MHC #906, 1911) was installed in 1911, the first of three wells dug by Grange member Levi Gordon for use by the town as a source of drinking water for residents and horses (Plympton Historical Commission).

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Veterans of World War I were recognized with the erection of the **Bandstand** (MHC #904, ca. 1920) around 1920. World War II, Korean and Vietnam War veterans were acknowledged with later plaques on the Bandstand.

Around the same time, **Hillcrest Cemetery at Main Street and Palmer Road** (MHC #801, 1706, Photo #10) was expanded: once with the addition of a two-acre abandoned field to the north just before 1900, and again in 1905, when another acre was added. The name "Hillcrest Cemetery" was initially given to the first area of expansion, but is now applied to the entire burial ground (Wright 1973:58). Research suggests that in the early 1900s, perhaps as part of the expansion to the north and the ensuing improvements, the town tomb was moved from a site along Main Street to its current location at the perimeter of the old burying ground and the newer section to the north. A hearse house, which Eugene Wright describes as "a bleak plain little building" located next to the town tomb, was removed around the same time (Wright 1973:57; Wright 1977:417).

Several buildings were erected in the Plympton Village Area in the last quarter of the 19th century. The **Randall Shoe Shop at 268 Main Street** (MHC #82, ca. 1875, Photo #7) was built by George Randall around 1875, and originally consisted of the five southernmost bays of the present-day building. The 1879 atlas shows the building, labeled "GW Randall S Shop," in its location just north of Union Hall (Walker 1879). Soon after he built the shop, Randall nearly doubled its size with the addition of another five bays to the north, beneath a mansard roof. The factory, which operated off of steam power, manufactured shoes, boots, and leggings, and remained in business for about 20 years.

As of 1902, the building was occupied by Randall Brothers, cranberry growers and trout breeders. (The Randall Brothers were among the first cranberry growers in town, although Plympton's cranberry industry was never as extensive as that of neighboring towns.) Beginning around 1910, it was home to Bryant & Soule, a grocery store owned by Henry Soule and George Bryant of Middleborough and managed by W.F. Jackson (1902-1903, 1910 and 1914 Directories; MHC 1981:13; Wright 1973:21; Wright 1981:359-360).

Built in 1893, the **Z.T. Parker Store at 266 Main Street** (MHC #81, 1893) replaced an earlier store that appears on the 1857 and 1879 maps (Walling 1857; Walker 1879). The business was operated by descendants of Reverend Jonathan Parker until 1908: first by Zaccheus Parker, and then by his son, Zaccheus T. Parker, who had gained experience working in a large store in Framingham (Wright 1981:303-305). In addition to offering "dry goods, groceries, boots and

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shoes," the store functioned as a post office (1902-1903 Directory). Subsequent owners included Mrs. L.F. Dickerson, postmaster from around 1910 to at least 1914 (1910 and 1914 Directories). Most recently the building housed a gift and crafts shop.

Two residences in the Plympton Village Area exhibit features of the Queen Anne style which, though common elsewhere in the late 19th century, was relatively rare in Plympton (MHC 1981: 13). The **Joshua V. Peck House at 2 Parsonage Road** (MHC #85, ca. 1894, Photo #8) does not appear on the 1879 atlas, but is shown on a map from 1903 (Walker 1879; Richards 1903). Today the chimney is painted with "1894," the presumed date of construction. From at least 1903 to 1914, the home was owned by Joshua V. Peck, a blacksmith and wheelwright. The blacksmith shop was located in an **outbuilding** (MHC #85, late-19th century) that still stands on the property (Richards 1903; 1903, 1906, 1910 and 1914 Directories).

The **Gilbert H. Randall House at 260 Main Street** (MHC #77, ca. 1890) also exhibits features typical of the Queen Anne style, such as a complex roof line, a combination of wood clapboard and scalloped shingle sheathing, bay windows, and an offset entry with pedimented porch. Research suggests that the house may have replaced an earlier building; a structure appears on this lot in the 1857 map, but the property is empty as of 1879. By 1903, the existing residence had been erected which, in combination with visual analysis, suggests a construction date of ca. 1890 (Walling 1857; Walker 1879; Richards 1903). As of 1903, the property was owned by Gilbert H. Randall, owner of Randall Brothers cranberry growers and trout breeders at 268 Main Street (see above).

Early Modern Period (1910-1954)

Plympton's year-round population remained small throughout the first half of the 20th century, staying under 1,000 until 1940. The population of the town has increased steadily and dramatically since the end of World War II.

Small mills and manufacturing sites proved not to be economically feasible in the 20th century, but Plympton did become more popular as a summer retreat. Commercial cranberry cultivation continued to increase and the production of cranberry packing barrels was a major component of the local economy until the use of wooden boxes and plastic cartons became widespread. The rural electrification program in the 1920s made electrical service available throughout the town. Main Street and other major roads were paved with asphalt for the first time in the 1920s to accommodate automobile traffic.

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By the early 20th century, virtually all of the buildings included in the Plympton Village area had been constructed and the major landscapes – the Plympton Green, Hillcrest Cemetery and the First Congregational Church Cemetery – had taken on their current form. As in the rest of town, little development took place in the Plympton Village area in the early to mid-twentieth century, with two notable exceptions: the **Plympton Public Library at 248 Main Street** and the **Central School at 5 Palmer Road**.

The **Plympton Public Library at 248 Main Street** (MHC #77, ca. 1905) was erected at the north end of the Plympton Village Area around 1905, through the efforts of the Town of Plympton Improvement Association (later the Town of Plympton Library Association) which was formed in the summer of 1894. Since its establishment in 1891, Plympton's library had been housed at the Town House. With the aid of a \$3,000 donation from Maria L.H. Pierce of Middleborough, a Plympton native, a new, \$5,000 building was constructed at the corner of Main Street and Palmer Road.

The Library was designed in the Colonial Revival style by R.L. Young, an architect from Boston, and built by E. Laurence Glover of Halifax. A Reading Room was added in 1918-1919, but removed during a renovation and expansion in the early 1990s ("Plympton Public Library;" Wright 1973:27-28). Early librarians included Betsy W. Sherman, who served from the establishment of the library in the Town House in 1891 until 1894; John Sherman, who oversaw the construction of the Library during his tenure from 1894 to 1911; and Helen Robbins, who headed the library as of 1914 (Wright 1973:21, 1914 Directory).

The **Central School or Plympton Elementary School at 5 Palmer Road** (MHC # 88, erected 1935, Photo #11) opened in 1935 and replaced the previous system of three smaller district schools (Shaw School, Town Hall School, and Stevens School). It accommodated children in grades K-8 who were transported by bus from their homes throughout town.

A Special Town Meeting was called in December 1933 to consider whether to take advantage of a 30% grant for new school construction offered by the Federal government under the National Recovery Act. The application was not immediately successful, so the Town voted in April 1934 to proceed without Federal aid. The Plympton Library donated two acres of land and two more acres were purchased from Nellie Stedman and Eugene Wright.

The architect selected for the school was Harry L. Meacham of Worcester. Charles H. Curtiss served as consulting engineer. William F. Germain of Millbury (MA) was the general

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contractor. The WPA program provided assistance in grading the school site and preparing the playing fields. The local PTA donated playground equipment in 1940.

While there was no new residential construction around Plympton Green in the early 20th century, garages (either newly-constructed or adapted from older buildings) became more common. Many of the older residences were retained by heirs of the original owners, including members of the Briggs, Parker, Peck, Sherman and Soule families. Increasingly, some properties were occupied only in the summer.

As of 1910, Emily F. Walton and Eugene W. Briggs (from Brockton) spent summers at the **Reverend John Briggs House at 1 Elm Street** (MHC #21, ca. 1801) and the **Reverend Ezra Sampson House at 255 Main Street** (MHC #17, late 18th century), respectively. Susan Emeline Soule and her daughter, Mabel, remained at the **William H. Soule House at 263 Main Street** (MHC #19, 1843) during the summers from at least 1902 to 1914. Rebecca Parker summered at the **J. T. Ellis – L. B. Parker House at 271 Main Street** (MHC #83, ca. 1850) during the same period (1902-03, 1906, 1910 and 1914 Directories; Wright 1973:137). Residents of the area in the mid-20th century included members of the Eldridge, Harriman, MacFarlane, Proctor and Robbins families (*Plan of Plympton Green* 1952).

Recent history (since 1954)

Plympton's current population of about 2,700 residents is the largest in the town's history and reflects improvements in transportation as well as the widespread impact of suburbanization. Although Plympton retains the feel of a small town, it has increasingly functioned as an outer suburb for larger urban centers in southeastern Massachusetts and northern Rhode Island. Commercial cranberry bogs are still in operation, but not on the same large scale as in nearby communities. The most striking change in the landscape occurred in the 1970s when hundreds of acres of woodland were cleared for cultivation by the Cumberland Farms company. The town still has very limited commercial activity.

After World War II, the development of suburban housing and the nationwide Baby Boom resulted in a greater number of school age children in Plympton, but most new residential development took place outside of the Plympton Village area. The **Central School** was enlarged with a sizable addition to the west in 1955, but the continued increase in student population, the effort to accommodate special needs students and the introduction of mandatory kindergarten resulted in the need for a new school. The Central School was replaced by the newly-constructed Dennett School in 1973.

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Rather than leave the old school vacant or try to rent it, the Town voted to move the municipal offices from the old Town House to the former Central School in 1975. The school was renovated in 1985, 1989, and 2000 to better suit the new use. The old Town House was rented to the Historical Society for a museum, archive, and meeting hall.

The only non-historic building in the Plympton Village area is the **Plympton Firehouse at 3 Palmer Road** (MHC # 87, 1975). Set between the Library and the Town House (former Central School), the Plympton firehouse is the culmination of almost 20 years of debate about the needs of the mostly-volunteer Fire Department, the best location for a new station and the cost of modernization. As early as 1950, the Fire Department was complaining at each annual Town Meeting that its existing facilities were too small for all of the department's vehicles and equipment to be kept inside.

In 1966, Town Meeting approved the appointment of a committee to look into the prospect of a new fire station and to consider possible locations. By 1970, it had become a joint Fire Station – Police House Study Committee and was “working for a badly needed and adequate station.” The Town's Capital Expenditures Committee recommended that the town address the need for a new elementary school first, and then turn attention to the needs of the Police and Fire Departments.

In 1971, Town Meeting rejected the idea of constructing a new combined police and fire station and directed architect Kenneth F. Parry of Quincy to evaluate the feasibility of remodeling the former elementary school (Central School) on Palmer Road. When the estimated cost of converting the school to a police and fire station came in at \$73,339 that idea was rejected.

In 1973, the Fire Station – Police House Study Committee announced that they had rejected all possible sites except “the location at the rear of the paved parking area at the old elementary school.” The 1974 Town Meeting approved \$140,000 for construction of a new fire station. Architect Kenneth F. Parry of Quincy was selected as the designer and the Ferguson Construction Company, Inc. of Plympton was selected as the General Contractor.

The new firehouse was occupied in the spring of 1975 and formally accepted by the Town on August 25, 1975. The new structure was featured on the cover of the Town's Annual Report.

The **Plympton Green** has changed little in the last fifty years, except for minor curbing and drainage improvements connected to the improvement of Route 58 (Main Street).

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Hillcrest Cemetery has also survived with very few changes although it is still actively used for burials. As with the green, the cemetery has been marginally affected by roadside improvements along Main Street (Route 58). The more dramatic effects seem to come from natural weathering and biological growth that have obscured or damaged the carvings and inscriptions on many stones. There is also evidence of damage at the base of many stones, most likely from mowers and trimmers used to maintain the cemetery.

For the most part, the residential and institutional buildings in the Plympton Village area retain their historical form, materials and exhibit a high level of architectural integrity. Although there are examples of vinyl siding, replacement windows and modern additions, the impact is not widespread. As in most communities, home ownership has changed more rapidly in recent years with the older Eldridge and Proctor families on Plympton Green joined by members of the Dunn, Gilcrest, Lewis, Martin, Porter, Siegfried and Smith families by the 1970s (1974, 1978 and 1980 Street Lists).

The most significant alterations in the proposed district have occurred at the institutional buildings. The **First Congregational Church** was expanded with the addition of a Christian education center in the late 1980s and a large wing housing the Parish Hall / Chapel in 1998 (*A History of the First Congregational Church* 1998:27, 38; Batson). A chapel, built in 1886, was demolished to make room for the additions. The **Plympton Library**, was also renovated and expanded in the early 1990s with a sympathetic new addition that doubled its size.

CRITERION C: SIGNIFICANT ARTISTS AND CRAFTSMEN

While the architectural achievements of local carpenters and builders in the Plympton Village area are often fairly modest, the work of local stonecarvers represented in the Hillcrest Cemetery is considered quite noteworthy. Hillcrest Cemetery in Plympton, because of its great age and continuous use, is recognized as having one of the finest assortments of carved grave markers in southeastern Massachusetts.

The carvings and inscriptions in Hillcrest Cemetery represent the work of several generations of 18th century stonecarvers and their descendants and successors. The stones and markers also illustrate the evolution of mortuary art and memorial styles throughout the 18th and 19th century. The Farber Collection of Gravestone Photographs at the American Antiquarian Society in Worcester includes 31 images from Plympton representing 17 individual stones by three groups of carvers (8 stones by Nathaniel Fuller, 6 by Ebenezer Fuller and sons, 2 by Bildad Washburn, as well as one by "multiple carvers").

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The earliest, most prolific and best-documented stonecarver in Plympton was **Nathaniel Fuller (1687-1750)**. Extensive research conducted by historian Peter Benes identified more than 300 Fuller gravestones in cemeteries throughout southeastern Massachusetts (Benes, *Nathaniel Fuller, Stonecutter of Plympton, Massachusetts*). Most of the stones are green slate, quarried locally. Although probate and land records list Fuller as housewright and mason, his fame today is based on his stonecarving.

Fuller's long career reflects his own skill and artistic development as well as the changing tastes of his colonial patrons. His carved gravestones are almost always cut in the traditional three-lobed arched shape with a winged skull or death's head in the tympanum at the top of the stone and a wide geometric border enclosing the inscription. The earliest identified stones carved by Nathaniel Fuller date from 1710 to 1725 and include flat, sober motifs and compass-based designs. His middle-period stones dating from 1726 to 1740 are marked by more elaborate lettering in the inscriptions and a more three-dimensional representation of the death's head at the top of the stone. The later stones from 1740 to 1750 show a more animated approach to iconography and even an exploration of freehand lettering.

In Hillcrest Cemetery in Plympton, Fuller's work is represented by several superb examples, including the gravestone of Sarah Soul (d. 1716) with its simple skull and compass-based border in low relief; the gravestone of Isaac Cushman (d. 1727), with a deeply-shadowed border; the tall (4 1/2 foot high) grave marker of Lieutenant Samuel Bradford (d. 1740) with a winged death's head and deeply-carved scrolled border; the gravestone of Mrs. Sarah Bryant (d. 1741/42), a double-lobed stone with a feathered background; the gravestone of Ebenezer Lobdel (d. 1748), with a double scrolled border and a scrolled backdrop to the death's head. The gravestones of Lydda King (d. 1711), Mrs. Joanna Briant (d. 1736), and Daniel Prat (died c. 1740) also show Fuller's distinctive touch.

Seth Tinkham (1705-1751) of Middleborough and Carver (Massachusetts) worked in the same time frame as Fuller and may have competed with him for commissions. Because Tinkham and other carvers used the same three-lobed green slate as Fuller and the standard iconography of a severe skull in the tympanum and a decorative border enclosing the inscription, further research and documentation are required to identify examples of Tinkham's work.

William Cushman (1715-1758) of Middleborough and **Nathaniel Hayward (1720-1794)** of Bridgewater and Carver represent the second generation of stonecarvers whose work survives in cemeteries in Plympton and nearby towns. They too used the local green slate and the traditional

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three-lobed stone with a winged skull or death's head in the tympanum, but gradually developed a motif of more geometrical faces on the headstones. As with Seth Tinkham, the work of William Cushman and Nathaniel Hayward will require further research and documentation in order to identify distinguishing features .

Ebenezer Soule (1710-1794) of Plympton began his career in stonecarving about 1754. With five sons to follow him in the trade (Ebenezer Jr. 1737-1811, Asaph 1739-1823, Coomer 1747-1777, Beza 1750-1835 and Ivory 1760-1846), the influence of the Soule family of stonecarvers in Plympton is especially strong. The Soules typically used the same green slate as other carvers, but created a distinctive iconography based on traditional forms. The restrained winged skulls of the early period were gradually replaced by bewigged or wild-haired heads known by gravestone aficionados as "Medusa stones." Toward the end of the 18th century, the Soule clan began carving realistic "portrait" heads with curled wigs and scalloped collars that represented a new and more peaceful view of the transition from death to eternal life.

The Soules' work in Hillcrest Cemetery is illustrated by several gravestones, including: the gravestone of Elijah Bisbee (d. 1743) with its distinctively bovine skull; the gravestone of Luke Perkins (d. 1748) with its wild-haired Medusa; the gravestone of Samuel Wright (d. 1773) with a smiling bat-winged cherub; the grave marker of Jonathan Parker (d. 1776) with an angelic portrait; the gravestone of Olive Soule (d. 1795) with a smiling winged cherub; and the gravestone of the second Elijah Bisbee (d. 1804) with a winged cherub and a Memento Mori inscription. The influence of the Soules extends far beyond southeastern Massachusetts, since members of the family carried their trade inland to Worcester, Barre, and Deerfield, and to Hinsdale in southwest New Hampshire.

Bildad Washburn (1762-1832) of Kingston and Carver was strongly influenced by the work of the Soule family and may have learned stone carving from them. His work is represented in Hillcrest Cemetery by the gravestones of Gideon Bradford (d. 1793) and Captain Thomas Loring (d. 1795). Washburn's stones present a very capable rendition of the winged portrait head, but without the stylistic flair of other carvers.

The evolution of mortuary art and memorial motifs in the 19th century follows prevailing artistic trends with a focus on simple tablet stones and obelisks, increased use of marble as a material, more poetic inscriptions and a refined use of romantic symbolism such as weeping willows, clasped hands, Christian crosses and lambs. While the Hillcrest Cemetery includes many good examples of the new Romantic style, the 18th century burial ground stones which illustrate early Puritan traditions are the most notable resources in the cemetery.

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SUMMARY

The buildings, sites and structures of the Plympton Village historic district preserve and illustrate the long history of the town and the significant forces and events that have contributed to its development. The establishment of the town's first National Register Historic District around Plympton Green will highlight the history of the community and contribute to planning for its future.

Archaeological Significance

Since patterns of ancient Native American settlement in Plympton are poorly understood, any surviving sites located in the town or in the vicinity of the Green could be significant. Ancient sites in this area could be important by contributing information related to Native American subsistence and settlement activities on the coastal plain of southeastern Massachusetts and at the headwaters of the Taunton River drainage. While Native settlement and subsistence patterns in the Taunton River basin are one of the better-documented river drainage basins in Eastern Massachusetts, the headwaters of that drainage are poorly documented. Ancient sites in the district may contribute important information that helps document site type, function, and variability in this area and their relationship to larger, regional Contact Period cores. Core areas to the south and southwest include the Taunton River/Narragansett Bay Core with major Contact Period Native settlements at Titicut, Nemasket, and Wampanucket. The Buzzards Bay Core is also located south of the district, extending north to the Wampanucket area. The North River/Plymouth Core, Pembroke Ponds Core is also located north and east of the district with major Native Contact Period Native settlements in Mattakeeset and Patuxet (Plymouth). Ancient sites in the district locale may contain important information that documents the presence of Contact Period Native Core areas during earlier ancient periods and/or the development of cores in those areas. Ancient sites in this area may contain information that tests the importance of drainage system boundaries versus geographic proximity and their influence on Native American subsistence and settlement systems. Ancient sites in the district may also contain important information related to Native lithic technologies and food procurement and processing activities.

Historic archaeological resources described above have the potential to contribute important information related to the development of the Plympton Green Historic District as the center focus of a linear village in the late 17th and early 18th centuries and the evolution of that focus in the 20th century as a commemorative space for the town. Historical research combined with

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archaeological survey and testing may contribute important information related to the architectural, social, cultural, and economic characteristics that typified the district and the town during its long period of historical development. Historical research combined with archaeological survey and testing may locate the exact sites of the town's first three meetinghouses responsible for the institutional/religious community focus that developed around the green. Structural evidence associated with each meetinghouse may contribute important architectural information relating to late 17th and 18th century institutional buildings, possible patterns of adaptive reuse for consecutive structures, and site integrity. Archaeological research in the vicinity of each meetinghouse structure may also locate facilities associated with the activities conducted at each structure. Barns, stables, outbuildings, and occupational-related features (trash pits, privies, wells) may exist around each meetinghouse structure. Evidence may exist that identify the reuse of some facilities from one meetinghouse to the next. Structural evidence may also exist that identifies the location and design of other municipal facilities on the green including the 1774 liberty pole, town pound, stocks, and armory. Structural evidence may exist from a chapel (1886) demolished in the 1980s or 1998 when an addition was added to the First Congregational Church. Archaeological evidence may survive that identifies architectural details from the chapel and any parts of the structure that were incorporated into the existing church.

Historical research combined with archaeological testing may locate unmarked burials in the vicinity of the Hillside Cemetery (1706) and at the First Congregational Church Cemetery (ca. 1850). Identification and mapping of unmarked burials may help identify accurate boundaries and burial patterns for each cemetery. Unmarked graves may exist and the current pattern of gravestones may not, in every instance, represent their actual placement. Gravestones were frequently removed from older cemeteries then later replaced, at times in different locations. Descendants of individuals also erected gravestones as commemorative markers after their deaths. This scenario has been observed at several burying grounds in Massachusetts. Archaeological research can help identify these graves as well as later unmarked graves resulting from stolen, damaged, and overgrown stones. Seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth century unmarked graves may also be present representing paupers and other unknown persons. Archaeological research can also help test the accuracy of the existing boundaries at the cemetery. Marked bounds may not accurately represent the actual cemetery boundaries. Some burials, possibly those of unknown persons, paupers or other indigent persons, may have intentionally been buried outside the cemetery boundary. Artifact distributions may also be present associated with funerary or memorial services for specific individuals at their time of death or individuals and groupings of individuals at later dates.

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Much of the above information can be obtained through unobtrusive archaeological research. That is, information can be obtained by mapping artifact concentrations and the locations of features such as grave shafts and post molds without disturbing actual skeletal remains. Important stylistic information and verse can be recorded from gravestones. Remote sensing techniques of investigation might also prove useful. Social, cultural and economic information relating to the 18th and 19th century Plympton settlement can be obtained in this manner, however, more detailed studies can be implemented through the actual excavation of burials and their analysis. Osteological studies of individuals interred at the burial ground have the potential to offer a wealth of information relating to the overall physical appearance of the town's inhabitants, their occupations, nutrition, pathologies and cause of death. Much of the information presented above can be used to determine the actual number of individuals interred at the burial ground. Documentary records and archaeological testing can determine whether actual human remains were moved with the stones or if the move was commemorative only. Commemorative graves may lack burial shafts and human remains or contain partial reburials. The overall context of the grave, including material culture remains can provide information on burial practices, religious beliefs, economic status, family structure, and numerous other topics relating to the individual, the overall settlement and, the Plympton society.

Historical and archaeological research may contribute important information related to residential settlement in the district and early patterns of agricultural development. Archaeological evidence may survive from 17th and 18th century farmsteads that may have been located in the vicinity of the Plympton Green. While no archaeological sites from this period are known, one 18th century residence and several 19th century extant residences and farmsteads are documented in the district. At potential archaeological sites, structural evidence of residential buildings may survive. Structural evidence of barns, stables, outbuildings, and evidence of occupational related features may survive at both archaeological sites and around existing 18th and 19th century structures in the district. Identification and mapping of the structures and features listed above may help identify the evolution of farmsteads and residential sites in the district through time. Important information may also exist that identifies the architectural characteristics of residential and agricultural related buildings and the internal configuration buildings and features on farmsteads and residential sites. Detailed analysis of the contents of occupational related features may contribute important information related to the social, cultural, and economic characteristics of the inhabitants in the district from the 17th through 19th centuries.

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