

Historical and Cultural Resources

Draft Existing Conditions

Introduction

Identifying and recognizing local historical and cultural resources cultivates a sense of place for the residents of Wrentham and creates opportunities to connect people with places, experiences, and stories that are important to them and their communities. Honoring the Town's history and culture is intrinsically connected to other goals of community planning – like economic development, housing, and land use patterns. Economic development goals like supporting tourism and finding new opportunities for small businesses can be complemented by promoting Wrentham's history in coordination with neighboring communities and the region as a whole. Housing goals may be achieved by leveraging historic structures in rehabilitation projects. Land use goals aimed at preserving rural and open space lands also serve to protect Wrentham's rural heritage. The 2004 Wrentham Master Plan recognized the nexus between preserving Wrentham's history and culture with other community planning goals, and many strategies from that plan have been implemented.

Progress since the 2004 Master Plan

The Town has been busy implementing several strategies aimed at recognizing and preserving Wrentham's unique cultural and historical resources:

- Created a historic plaque program
- Adopted the Community Preservation Act in 2016
- Preserved the Old Fiske Library Museum

Quick Facts

- Historic Resources
 - 367 listings within the Massachusetts Cultural Resource Information System (MACRIS)
 - 5 National Register of Historic Places listings
 - 90 Massachusetts State Register of Historic Places listings
 - Nearly 100 sites recognized through the local Historical Plaque Program
- Cultural Activities
 - Old Fiske Library Museum
 - Crackerbarrel Fair
 - Wrentham Arts on the Common
- Municipal Tools/Admin Capacity
 - Historical Commission
 - Demolition Delay
 - Cultural Council
 - Community Preservation Act

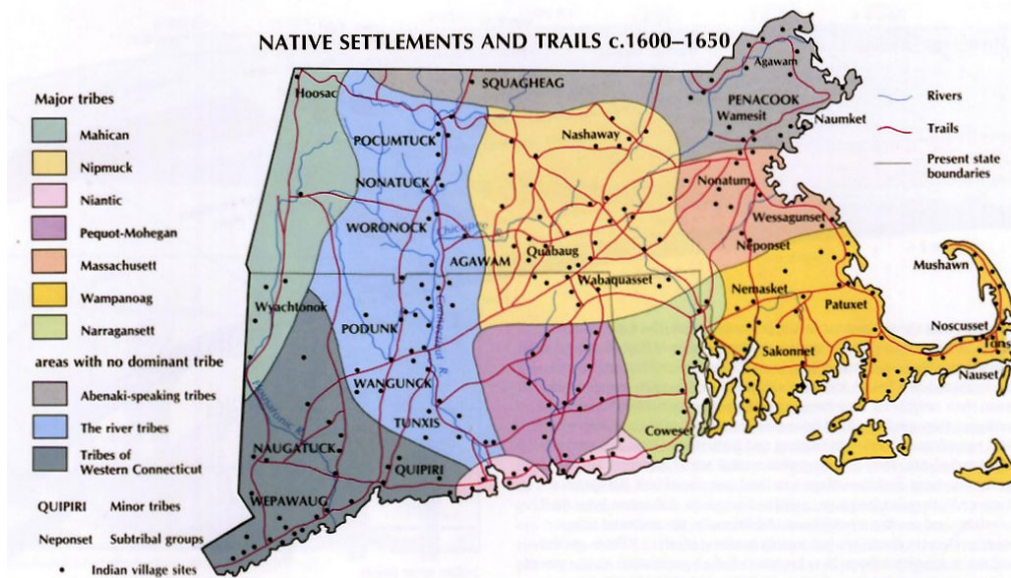
Key Themes/Findings

- Preservation efforts, largely led by the Town's Historical Commission, Cultural Council, and Community Preservation Committee, focus on actively seeking out and **preserving artifacts** of Wrentham's history. The Town recently awarded Community Preservation Act funds to hire an archivist.
- Several properties are eligible for inclusion on the National Register of Historic Places or the State Registry; however, there are currently **minimal efforts to undertake the designation process**. The Town has also not conducted a historical and architectural survey in recent years. The lack of designation and surveying activities could result in a loss of historic resources.

- **Town Common serves as an active community gathering space**, with several different events happening throughout the year. Phase II survey findings show that residents associate Town Common with some of their fondest memories. Volunteers are active in maintaining the landscaping and seasonal décor. The Common and surrounding downtown buildings are eligible for but have not been designated as a historic district. Pursuing a historic designation for Town Common and the surrounding district could create additional funding opportunities for future improvements and programming.
- Phase I of the Master Plan identified a shortage of smaller homes and inconsistencies between the current zoning bylaw and historic development patterns. Some of the older neighborhoods in Wrentham, including those along the lakes as well as along East Street, Taunton Street, and Thurston Street, would be illegal to build under current zoning. **By not allowing development in the same character as some of the treasured historic neighborhoods, over time, new development could erode the Town's character.** See the Land Use element for more discussion about existing and allowable lot sizes.
- Like many communities across New England and nationwide, additional work is needed to ethically **document, interpret, and share the history and culture of Wrentham's residents and visitors of color, including Indigenous peoples.** Stories like that of Cesar Chelorr, an enslaved person born in Wrentham who is said to be the first documented plane-maker in North America, is one example of a story that could be more widely shared and further researched.
- Wrentham residents' **enthusiasm for preserving Wrentham's culture and history** is exhibited through activities (like Wrentham Day, Arts on the Common, poetry readings, etc.) organized by the Historical Commission, Cultural Council, Community Preservation Committee, and other community organizations.

Understanding Wrentham over time

The place now known as Wrentham is located within the homeland of the Wampanoag people. The Wampanoag people have lived in this area for millennia, along with the Nipmuc, Massachusetts, and Narragansett peoples, using the land for hunting and fishing grounds. This crossroads for the Indigenous peoples of southeastern New England became a settlement for English colonists in the 1600s. Wrentham was colonized initially as part of the Dedham community. In 1673, Wrentham incorporated as a town and since that time, has grown from an agricultural community to a bustling town center connected to other parts of New England by rail first and eventually Routes 1 and 1A and Interstates 495 and 95. These transportation improvements would eventually attract both industrial manufacturing opportunities and tourists drawn to the beautiful lakes and natural resources in the valley's foothills.





Caption 1: Indigenous homelands and settlements at the time of Wrentham colonization. Source: <https://native-land.ca/maps/territories/wampanoag/>

Caption 2: Wampum Corner Railroad Station, 1890s. Source: "Wampum Corner Station," SAILS Digital History Collections, accessed December 6, 2021, <https://sailsinc.omeka.net/items/show/1809>.

Caption 3: Seasonal tourism at Lake Pearl in the 1940s. Source: Sun Chronicle

Today, Wrentham continues to value the Town's unique heritage, largely through the Town's Historical Commission. The Commission is charged with preserving, maintaining, displaying, collecting, and sharing Town history. Wrentham's Cultural Council awards state-funded grants for cultural programming in the Town and works with the Historical Commission to host events and curate exhibits at the Old Fiske Library/Museum. More on the Town's preservation efforts is included later in this report.

History of Wrentham

First Peoples

The Wampanoag people used the land now known as Wrentham for hunting, fishing, farming, and village areas. Oak Point, near Creek Street, was the site of the King Philip Oak, where Metacomet, the Native American sachem, or leader, of the Wampanoag people is said to have held council. Metacomet became sachem in 1662, and for many years, he oversaw trading between the English colonists and Native peoples.

Colonization of Native Lands

English settlers first came to the area as an early outgrowth of the Plymouth Colony. Present-day Wrentham was originally part of the Dedham colony. In 1635, the General Court of Massachusetts annexed Native lands from Watertown to Rhode Island as the Dedham community. In 1673, Wrentham incorporated as a town, apart from the Dedham colony.¹

King Philip's War

Like many parts of New England, as the colonial inhabitants of Wrentham and the surrounding areas encroached on the Wampanoag territory, conflicts arose. While treaties were entered into by all groups, agreements were not often honored. In 1675, three Wampanoags were hanged in Plymouth Colony – this violence spurred a bloody war. The Wampanoag peoples, along with Native tribes across New England, attacked colonial villages from Maine to Rhode Island over a period of six months. Colonial militia retaliated, and the conflict became known as King Philip's War (King Philip was Metacomet's English name). In Wrentham, nearly all the existing buildings at the time were burnt to the ground. Eventually, the colonial militia overwhelmed the Native peoples, resulting in several public executions and enslavement of others. The Wampanoags lost much of their territory, and the residents of Wrentham rebuilt and

¹ A History of Dedham, Massachusetts by Frank Smith, 1936.
<https://archive.org/details/historyofdedhamm00smit/page/n111/mode/2up?ref=ol&view=theater>

expanded the town settlement. While some Wampanoags remained in the Wrentham area, many were killed or sold into the West Indies slave trade.

Agricultural Roots

Entering the 1700s, the Wrentham settlement saw a rise in farming and population. Early activities centered on farmsteads, land clearing, timbering, pasturage, and farming occupancies. These small farms were quite independent, providing most of their daily needs from their farming and household industries. Over time, some farms were able to grow and expand, specializing in crops which were more successful and able to bring higher prices at market. However, the gradual improvement of local roads into a reliable regional system and the introduction of the railroad supported a transition from farming to more town-centered occupations.

A growing town center

As colonial settlement progressed and the population of the area increased, town center and neighborhood areas became established. The town center grew up around the Common, with church and civic buildings grouped around it, along with mercantile buildings, forming a focal point for town gathering. The Original Congregational Church of Wrentham, which is listed on the National Register of Historic Places, formed in 1692. Containing the early crossroads and what became the Post Road between Boston and Providence (now known as Route 1), Wrentham rapidly became a fixture on the colonial scene.

Other neighborhoods, more clearly seen today in Sheldonville, emerged as local farming centers with smaller scale commercial and civic components to serve these immediate needs. Over time, the central portions of these neighborhoods came to have more residences built along the main roads, cementing the community. Outside of Wampum Corner, these neighborhoods never developed sufficient density or economic value to drive the creation of outlying business centers. As farming uses declined, the residential aspects have become dominant in most of these areas, with newer homes occupying many of the farms, while other fields have regrown into forests.

Industrialization

Growing industrialization in the late 1800s accelerated changes to Wrentham, as transportation made it easier to bring goods to and from market, increased personal mobility with better roads and the introduction of railroads, and the gradual decline of the farming homestead. The railroad also spurred limited development of industry, making the chief regional markets in Boston and Providence more accessible. Industry really took off once the steam engine was perfected and brought into general use, due to the lack of usable waterpower in Wrentham. Like many New England towns, a small industrial district emerged close to Downtown and the Wampum Corner railroad station, eventually specializing in metal casting and machining. Without ready access to high quality raw materials, fuels, or local markets, industrial development was dependent on a skilled workforce drawn from nearby farms. While important, industrial production never developed into the dominant characteristic of the town or spawned a diversified complex of related industrial production. Wrentham's industry remained loosely tied to regional manufacturing, a position that continues into the present.



Sheldonville Boat Works working housing at 1098 West Street. During the 1800s, it was common for factories in the area to provide worker housing. Many of these multi-family homes have been documented in MACRIS. Source: MACRIS

Wrentham, the tourist destination

The introduction of the railroad, generally paralleling today's Route 1A, helped to cement the position of the Downtown and assisted the rise of commercial businesses. The rustic summers and adjacency of the lakes attracted city dwellers looking for weekend respite from urban life. Early lake activities were characterized by religious organizations and social uplift, but over time the recreational and relaxation aspects became more prominent. Wrentham was soon a renowned minor resort area, with much comment on its beautiful and quintessential New England village character, at a time when other regional villages were being rapidly altered by the forces of the industrial revolution. The appeal of the lakes led to residential settlement in the form of seasonal camps and cabins in the area. These have been slowly converted and winterized to be year-round dwellings.

Repurposing the Wrentham Rail Line

Phase I of the Wrentham Master Plan includes an economic development strategy to pursue a walking/biking trail along the existing railroad bed connecting Downtown and the Premium Outlets. The rail trail could be part of the larger Metacomet Greenway project. Historical markers could be installed along the rail trail to highlight Wrentham's history at the turn of the twentieth century, when rail first came to Wrentham.

Suburbanization and Present-Day Wrentham

Over the course of the twentieth century, new roadways would make Wrentham more accessible to new residents. First, Route 1 opened Wrentham up as a tourist stop as travelers went from Maine to Florida. Once interstates 95 and 495 were built, suburbanization was right around the corner. People could now live in Wrentham and easily commute to nearby employment centers. Slowly, more farms were lost as subdivisions were built. Today, Wrentham is still a small community nestled between farms and open space. Downtown, Sheldonville, and Wampum Corner are still vibrant small village centers where residents go for neighborhood services. The Premium Outlets near the I-495 junction provide shopping opportunities and serve as a regional attraction. Route 1A remains a busy route between Boston and Providence.



Caption: Premium Outlets

Historic and Cultural Assets

Historic and cultural assets can be buildings or structures in the built environment (including engineering structures like dams or bridges, agricultural buildings, fences, etc.), but these assets can also be in the form of community events and cultural organizations. Both tangible and intangible cultural assets together form a cultural framework of a place. In communities across New England and the United States, archaeological resources, like early remnants or earthworks, also contribute to the cultural identity of a community. Native American artifacts and cultural landscapes, as well as unmarked burial grounds – particularly those connected with Native American and African American communities – are often disturbed through development and are particularly deserving of recognition, preservation, and protection.

Historically Designated Resources

Traditionally, preservation of historic and cultural resources has focused on the tangible resources like buildings, structures, and objects. There are three primary ways to designate and preserve resources:

- **National Register of Historic Places** is the official list of the Nation's historic places worthy of preservation. This national program coordinates and supports public and private efforts to identify, evaluate, and protect America's historic and archaeological resources. Properties are eligible for the National Register if the property is *significant* – meaning it is associated with events, activities, or developments that were important in the past; associated with the lives of people who were important in the past; represent significant architectural, landscape, or engineering achievements; or has the potential to yield information about our past through archaeological investigation. National Register listings also must generally be at least 50 years old and look similar to the way they did in the past. Resources may be evaluated and deemed “eligible” for listing but not undergo the formal designation process.
- **Massachusetts State Register of Historic Places** was established in 1982 as a comprehensive listing of buildings, structures, objects, and sites that have received local, state, or national designations. The State Register is administered by the Massachusetts Historical Commission. The State maintains the Massachusetts Cultural Resource Information System (MACRIS), a comprehensive database of inventoried resources and designation statuses.

Benefits to National Register Historic Designation

- Federal Tax Credits when resources are preserved and/or revitalized
- Federal income, estate, and gift tax deductions for charitable contributions in the form of conservation easements
- Federal Historic Preservation Grants (administered by State Historic Preservation Offices)
- State Historic Grant and Tax Programs

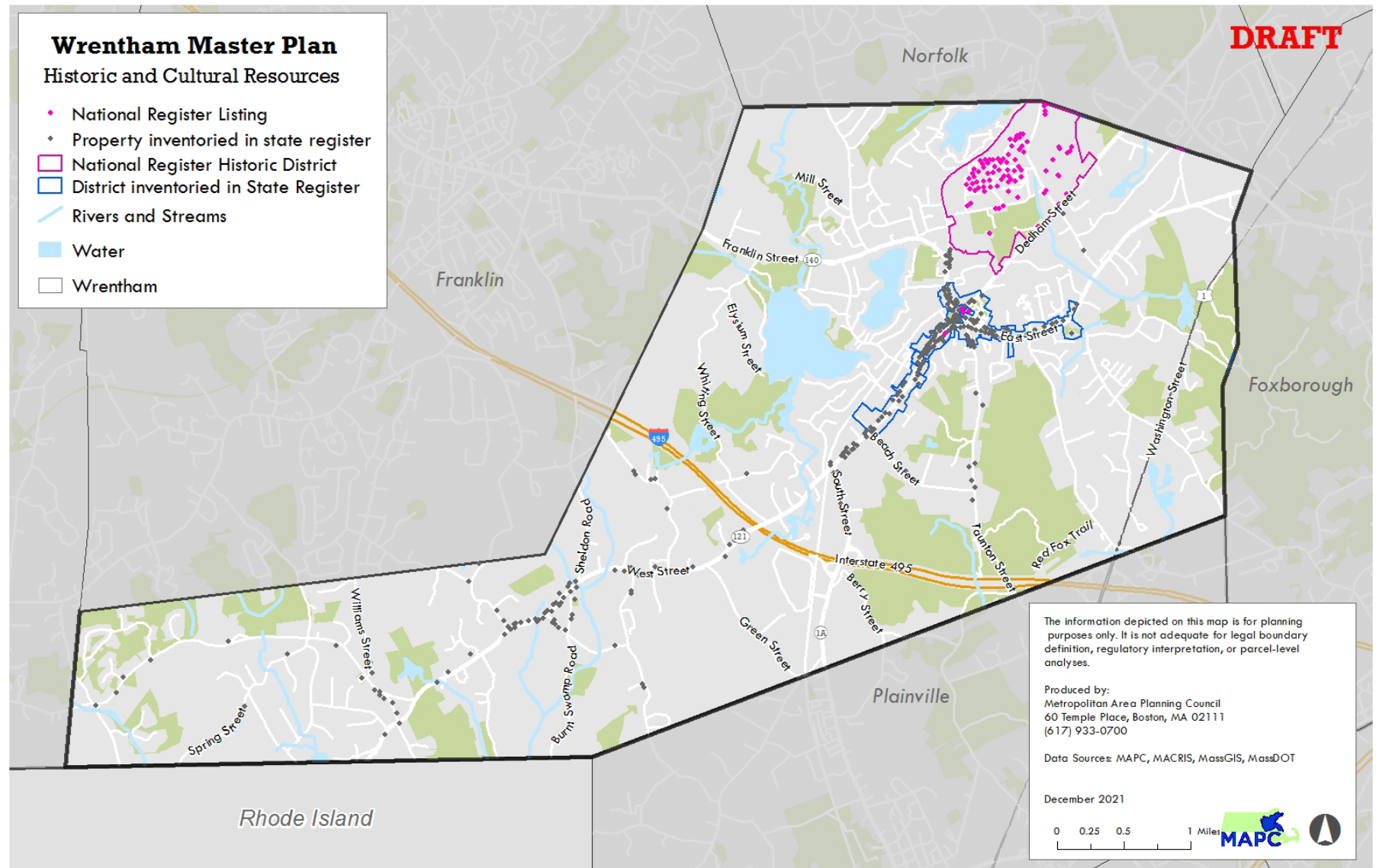
Find out more here:

https://www.nps.gov/subjects/nationalregister/upload/NR_Brochure_Poster_web508.pdf

- **Local designation**, which can take the form of regulatory protections and designations or community recognition, like Wrentham's Plaque Program. Wrentham does not have a codified local designation program (such as a historic district bylaw or other designation) beyond recognition through the Plaque Program.

Wrentham Historic Designations	
Total Historic Resources inventoried in the Massachusetts Historical Commission's Cultural Resource Information System (MACRIS)	367
National Register of Historic Places	
Historic Districts	3
Individual Listings	2
State Register of Historic Places	
Districts (inventoried)	7
Districts (listed)	3
Buildings (inventoried)	323
Buildings (listed)	68
Burial Grounds (inventoried)	5
Burial Grounds (listed)	1
Markers (monuments and plaques)	10
Structures, including misc. outbuildings and engineering infrastructure (inventoried)	22
Structures, including misc. outbuildings and engineering infrastructure (listed)	18

Map 1 – Historic and Cultural Resources



National Register of Historic Places

- Wrentham State School
- Massachusetts State Hospital and State Schools
- Original Congregational Church of Wrentham, 1 East Street
- Roebuck Tavern, 21 Dedham Street
- Plimpton-Winter House, 127 South Street

Massachusetts State Register of Historic Places

- Wrentham State School
- Massachusetts State Hospital and State Schools
- Original Congregational Church of Wrentham
- 68 individual buildings
- Wrentham State School cemetery



Photo Caption: The Franklin St. Bridge over abandoned railroad, shown here from 1889, is an example of a historic engineering structure. Source: MACRIS



Photo Caption: The Original Congregational Church of Wrentham is a historic church in Wrentham, with its first congregation formed in 1692. The present church is a Greek Revival structure built in 1834. The church has a four-stage tower (rebuilt after the New England Hurricane of 1938) and a tetrastyle Doric portico. The building underwent a modernizing renovation in 1878, at which time many of the windows were modified to have rounded tops; many of these changes were reversed during renovations in the 1950s. The church building was listed in the NRHP in 2014. (Sources: MACRIS (photo); https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Original_Congregational_Church_of_Wrentham)

Arts, Cultural, and Historic Resources not formally designated

Many historic designation programs focus on tangible resources with rigid criteria that can sometimes prevent unique cultural assets from being designated or recognized. It is important for communities and their plans to still acknowledge and celebrate cultural resources and nodes in the community such as dance studios, language schools, or civic clubs. These places contribute to and help shape the cultural framework of a community. The table below, informed by Phase II community survey findings, notes some of these arts, culture, and historic resources to try to provide a more complete picture of Wrentham's history and culture. Some of the resources below could be formally recognized through the Town's local recognition processes.

Valued Arts, Culture, and Historic Resources not formally designated
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Old Fiske Library/Museum and associated cultural programs, including museum days and holiday openings for Memorial Day, Wrentham Day, and Holiday Open House. Other programming has included a socially distanced poetry open mic nights on the library lawn and holiday markets. The Old Fiske Library/Museum also has curated displays of artifacts from the Wrentham Historical Commission.• Working landscapes like Big Apple Farm, Mount Saint Mary's Abbey, and the Wrentham Developmental Center farmland. These places remind residents and visitors of Wrentham's agricultural history.• Wrentham State Forest includes cultural resources like cow commons, stone walls, colonial roads, rock carvings, and a former mill site.• Local sporting events, often school-sponsored, at the Town's various park and recreation facilities.• Joe's Rock is a southwest facing cliff that rises above a former cranberry bog. The lookout provides sweeping views of the Wrentham area.• Longstanding Town events and activities that bring the community together, including the Crackerbarrel Fair, Wrentham Arts on the Common, and Wrentham Day.• Lake Pearl and Sweatt Beach provide community gathering spots near the Town's water resources.• The Fiske Public Library hosts events and digital history exhibits. Current exhibits include the Helen Keller exhibit, based on Keller's time spent in Wrentham; the Joseph MacDougald Railroad Connection; and two high school yearbook collections (for Wrentham High School and King Philip High School).• Town anniversary celebrations – the town is currently planning for the 350th Anniversary in 2023.• Water trough in Town Common² – this artifact dates back to the late 1800s and is said to have been the first monument erected in the Town Common. Residents and visitors would stop and let horses and dogs get drinks. The trough no longer works, but the Wrentham Garden Club maintains landscaping around the artifact.• Daniel Cook Store and Hall is right next to Sweatt Park and is a good example of 1800s Victorian architecture. The ornate woodwork on the building façade is a landmark to both drivers along Route 1A and pedestrians visiting downtown.• The Sheldonville Schoolhouse, built in 1869, is now known as Little Red Schoolhouse.³• Premium Outlets serves as a community gathering spot for residents and visitors, especially young adults in the area.

² https://www.thesunchronicle.com/news/local_news/wrentham-history-takes-a-beating/article_2a77e9ce-8de4-5d6c-9273-679d7772c0b6.html

³ <https://www.norfolkwenhamnews.com/2021/01/29/344331/wrentham-s-little-red-schoolhouse-a-long-history-of-educating-children>



Photo caption: The old Daniel Cook store and hall has been repurposed into a variety of commercial uses over the years. Most recently, a consignment shop. Source: Google.

Origins of Wampum Corner and the Wampum House

While Wrentham celebrates Wampum Corner and the Wampum House as historic Town landmarks, the origins of the name “Wampum” are murky. The Wampum House resource inventory form claims the settlement is “named after Wrentham’s last Indian.” This claim highlights a common but harmful misconception: that no Indigenous peoples in the Northeast survived colonization and its impacts, including displacement, epidemics, and conflicts like King Philip’s War. Another story found on an inventory form for the Wampum House claims that the structure was the only surviving house after King Philip’s War because the Native peoples were afraid to burn the house down as its inhabitants had smallpox (source: Wrentham Historical Society). Understanding and sharing the history of Wampum Corner, from both the Indigenous and colonist perspectives, can work to better appreciate the Indigenous history of Wrentham and tell a more complete history.

Wrentham’s Plaque Program

Wrentham enacted a Plaque Program to promote awareness and pride in Wrentham and its past. The program seeks to educate residents and visitors about houses, buildings, and locations of historical interest or importance. The Sweatt Fund, a local benefactor who sponsors arts and cultural programming in Wrentham, pays for the plaques and once installed, the plaques are owned by the Town. There are almost 100 different homes and sites that have been awarded plaques, with the oldest resource recognized being the Wrentham Center Cemetery, dating back to 1673. The oldest plaqued home is dated 1680.

Future preservation opportunities

During the surveying and inventorying of historic and cultural resources, preservation professionals will often deem properties “eligible” for the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP), if they find that the resource appears to meet the designation criteria. Because Wrentham has not actively pursued designating or listing resources on the NRHP, there are key properties or areas that are eligible and could be listed on national or state registries in the future⁴:

- **Town Common** qualifies for designation as a NRHP historic district. The area is dominated by the Common, the archetypal church and the historic Old Fiske Library. Its commercial structures are most prominent in the two-story wood framed commercial blocks dating from the early twentieth century. Just off the Common are the Town Hall and District Court buildings, both from the mid-20th century. Imposing Victorian residences are also sited near the Common, some of which have been converted to professional offices and other uses. Significant residences are found on the main roads to all sides of the Common, some dating back to early colonial settlement. There is a significant series which extends south towards Wampum Corner, creating a fine ensemble. Town volunteers, like the Landscaping Committee, improve the overall appearance of the Town Common with seasonal landscaping and décor.
- **Wampum Corner** was home to the Town’s railroad station in 1892 and has served as a commercial hub for the town since the mid-1700s. Today, the area is characterized by a series of modest commercial buildings dating from early to twentieth mid-century, many of which are

⁴ See the 2004 Wrentham Master Plan for additional background on preservation gaps.

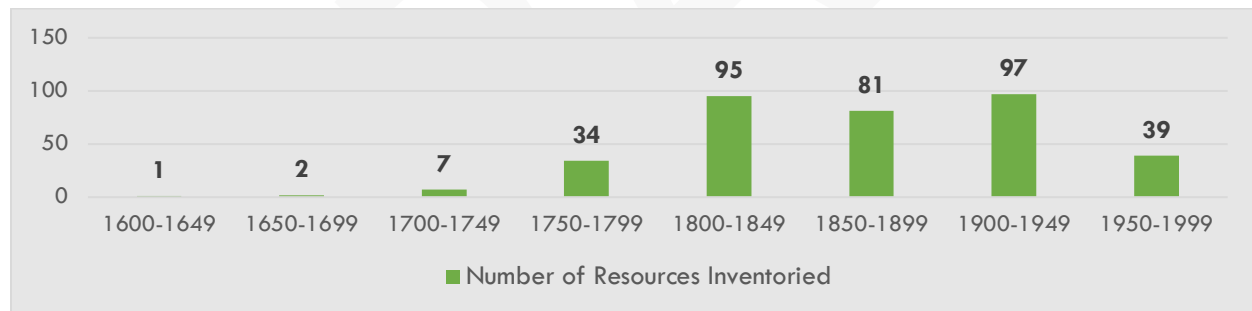
oriented to food, automotive, and other personal services. This area, together with residences set back from the main intersections, form a significant portion of the neighborhood. One special residence, the **Wampum House**, was built in 1700 and is currently maintained by the Historical Commission. The house is a full cape with its gable end to the street and a one-story addition to the rear. Because of its age and nearly unaltered condition, this house is one of Wrentham's important early houses, according to the MACRIS inventory form, and eligible for the NRHP.

- **Individual historic homes and outbuildings** – Several of the older residences in Wrentham exhibit various eras of construction, style, and use. The post-federalist, religious and intellectual ferment of the Great Awakening, and pre-Civil War era periods are particularly well-represented. These older residences could qualify for NRHP or state designation. Many of the owners of these properties take pride in the history of buildings, affixing plaques and dated signboards indicating early builders and property owners. The structures are also treated with care, as repair and restoration efforts are high quality and often historically accurate.
- **Civic and institutional buildings** - Older civic buildings, particularly the churches and civic/institutional buildings like the **Old Fiske Library/Museum** and **Mount Saint Mary's Abbey**, are well qualified for historic status.

Gaps in inventorying historic and cultural resources

Several properties have met the 50-year threshold for NRHP designation since the last resource evaluation was conducted, meaning there may be additional properties eligible for the NRHP or state registry. Figure 1 below shows the number of resources identified from different periods of Wrentham's history (beginning with colonial times). The few resources from pre-1600 shows a gap in Indigenous history of the area. The low number of resources inventoried after 1950, despite this period being a significant period of growth for the Town, demonstrates a need to do a new historical and cultural resource survey.

Figure 1 – Number of Inventoried Resources in Wrentham by Time Period



Source: *Massachusetts Historical Commission Inventory (MACRIS), November 2021*

Telling the Complete Story of Wrentham

The Massachusetts Historical Commission Inventory database (MACRIS) categorizes inventoried resources by area of significance. Analyzing Wrentham's resources in this context can help identify gaps in local research and preservation efforts. Wrentham has no documented resources related specifically to women's history. The only Wrentham resource tied to "Ethnic Heritage" (a MACRIS area of significance) is the grinding stone used by Indigenous people, located at the site of the Old Fiske Library/Museum. Reviewing resources through the lens of "significance" shows that research and documentation efforts have been dominated by White male history. Local preservation efforts that seek out the stories of non-White residents and communities, as well as women and LGBTQ communities, can enrich the telling and understanding of Wrentham's history.

Threats to historical and cultural resources

Lack of local regulatory protections as development occurs - Without an active preservation movement and local regulatory protections in place, historical and cultural resources are more likely to be lost as development occurs. The 2004 Wrentham Master Plan mentioned that new development patterns that include cul-de-sacs, Approval Not Required (ANR) sites⁵, and insensitive site design (including for infill) erode the older settlement patterns. While Wrentham does have a demolition delay bylaw that grants Historical Commission oversight on demolition requests for buildings on the National Register of Historic Places or otherwise deemed “significant”, the review process is subjective due to the lack of formally designated properties within the Town. The bylaw only can prevent demolition, which means resources are left vulnerable to significant alterations that may diminish historic or architectural quality and preclude them from future formal designation. With so few historic homes and properties designated, very few are protected from demolition. The Town also lacks design guidelines for new construction or infill development, leaving room for historic landscapes and districts to be altered dramatically.

Natural Hazards and climate-related threats – The Town completed a Hazard Mitigation Plan in 2018, which identified Wrentham’s hazard risk. Wrentham is at risk of experiencing flooding, which can be detrimental to existing historic and cultural resources. As climate change is likely to increase the severity and frequency of flooding events and other hazards like thunderstorms, nor’easters, and blizzard or snow events, it will be important for the Town to consider how best to protect and mitigate damage. See the Energy and Sustainability chapter for more information about flooding risks in Wrentham.

Gaps in research – the gaps in Wrentham’s existing historic inventory mentioned in the previous section represent a significant threat to resources that have yet to be research and identified. If research and archiving efforts do not shift to other topic areas, such as women’s history, LGBTQ history, or the stories of Black, Indigenous, or other peoples of color, resources may inadvertently be lost.

Opportunities for Future Work

The Town has committed to preserving and celebrating its rich history and culture. The Historical Commission, Cultural Council, and other municipal and civic organizations work together to document and share Wrentham’s history with residents and visitors. To inform future work, the following opportunities have been observed.

Leverage historic and cultural asset clusters

Wrentham’s historic development patterns have resulted in natural clusters of historic and cultural resources (see Map 2). Wampum Corner, Town Common, and the State School have already been identified in MACRIS as potential historic districts. Sheldonville could also qualify as a historic district, due to the area’s cohesion as a residential settlement. Sheldonville homes embody a building spurt beginning in the 1830s and continuing through the Victorian era. Colonial revivals mix with late Victorian mansards, carpenter Gothic, and hints of the federalist styles. Homes show great levels of detail and ornament, with varied and articulated masses, some from initial composition, while others bear the mark of long-term accretions of farmhouses and barnyards. Most of the buildings address the roads, some being quite close. In the center of Sheldonville, buildings are sited much nearer to their neighbors than in outlying areas. Stone fences and hedges are distinguishing features. Targeting preservation efforts to these clusters of resources could be effective in preserving the overall integrity of areas and generating economic development opportunities, like historic walking tours (see Economic Development Strategy 7 from Phase I of the Master Plan).

⁵ An “Approval Not Required” project is a type of subdivision that does not require a formal review process by the Planning Board. Generally, all lots shown on an ANR plan must have frontage on an existing public way, except in the case of land transfers between properties. For more information, see: <https://www.mass.gov/files/documents/2016/07/rn/anrhandbook.pdf>

Wrentham Master Plan
Historic and Cultural Resources

- National Register Listing
- Property inventoried in state register
- National Register Historic District
- District inventoried in State Register
- Rivers and Streams
- Water
- Wrentham

Franklin

Wampum Corner

Sheldonville

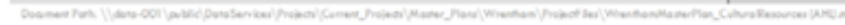
Spring Street

W. Main Street

Rhode Island

Sheldon Road

Berry Street



Further economic development goals

During Phase I of the Master Plan, the first Economic Development goal states, “Pursue strategic and innovative strategies for new economic opportunities in Wrentham, including leveraging Wrentham’s major attractions such as the Premium Outlets, Rice Complex, and natural, agricultural, and **historical resources.**” Several of the economic development strategies to achieve this goal present opportunities to leverage historic and cultural resources. Marketing historic sites with signage, branding, and wayfinding, particularly along existing and future walking and bike routes to regional destinations, can educate about Wrentham’s history (See Economic Development Strategies 1, 2, 4, and 7.) Art installations that interpret stories and themes from different periods in Wrentham’s history could also be an effective way to highlight the Town’s history and culture.

Economic Development Strategy 3 calls for the Town to create opportunities for local businesses, through on-site farmers markets, food trucks, craft markets, or other temporary pop-up events. Locating temporary events near historic resources can add a cultural component to special events and publicize the historic significance of Town sites. Wrentham’s historic farms and rural landscapes also provide an opportunity for unique pop-up events and markets.

Economic Development Strategy 8 acknowledges an opportunity for Downtown Wrentham to become a wedding destination. Formally designating potential wedding venue sites on the National or State Registers can help promote the venues and expand funding options for renovation or revitalization efforts (see the Funding Opportunities section below for more information). The Town can also consider what other kinds of special events, such as cultural fairs or maker exhibits, could be hosted at historic sites. Consideration for the events that occurred at historic sites, particularly those that harmed communities of color, should also be taken into account when determining whether to host events.

Expand housing opportunities

A key finding from the Housing element done during Phase I noted a shortage of smaller homes and inconsistencies between the current zoning bylaw and historic development patterns. Some of the older neighborhoods in Wrentham, including those along the lakes as well as along East Street, Taunton Street, and Thurston Street, would be illegal to build under current zoning. By not allowing development in the same character as some of the treasured historic neighborhoods, over time, new development could erode the Town’s character. (see also Housing Goal 3) Affording minimum lot size flexibility in key areas of the Town where there was historically denser settlement patterns could also complement transportation goals to create more compact, walkable neighborhoods in areas like Downtown Wrentham, Wampum Corner, or Sheldonville.

Many communities have leveraged vacant historic commercial, civic, or institutional buildings to create new mixed-use developments that include different housing types and neighborhood services. The Wrentham Development Center and Crosby Valve/Tyco sites both represent redevelopment opportunities where historic and cultural resources can be integrated and serve as an amenity. (see also Housing Goal 1)

Existing Preservation Efforts and Tools

Wrentham Historical Commission

The Wrentham Historical Commission is a volunteer-based commission that was established in 1967. The Commission is responsible for preserving, maintaining, displaying, collecting, and sharing artifacts and stories of the Town’s history. The Commission maintains the [Wampum House](#), a cape-style farmhouse at 677 South Street in Wampum Corner that dates from around 1740. The Commission also executes the Town’s demolition bylaw and historic plaque program. The Commission meets monthly at the Old Fiske Library/Museum.

Demolition Bylaw

The demolition bylaw, Article 7.60, Section 2 in Wrentham's General Bylaws, was enacted in 2002. The bylaw requires any home proposed to be demolished that is fifty years or older and/or listed on the National or State Registers of Historic Places must be reviewed by the Historical Commission for approval.

Historic Plaque Program

Paid for by Sweatt Funds and administered by the Historical Commission, this program recognizes homes or buildings that are at least 100 years old. The plaques note whether an event of historical interest occurred at the location or if a place was the residence of an individual of historical significance. The purpose of the program is to promote awareness and pride in Wrentham. Almost 100 different homes and sites have been awarded plaques, with the oldest landmark being the Wrentham Center Cemetery, which dates back to 1673. The oldest plaqued home is dated 1680. More information on the program and how to apply for plaques is [available here](#).

Old Fiske Library Museum

The Old Fiske Library was built in 1894 and has since been renamed the Old Fiske Museum. The museum was renovated in 2010 and hosts a variety of exhibits and open houses throughout the year. The Historical Commission's gallery features historical artifacts from Wrentham's rich history.

Archival Efforts

The Wrentham Historical Commission maintains a vast collection of artifacts related to Wrentham's history. Current and former residents donate artifacts to the Commission, who then archive, curate, and display artifacts at the Old Fiske Library Museum. In 2018, the Commission hired the Northeast Document Conservation Center (NEDCC) to complete a Preservation Needs Assessment. The assessment evaluating the buildings and environments as they relate to the preservation needs of materials; examined current policies, storage, and handling procedures; and assessed the general conditions of materials. According to the Needs Assessment, the Wrentham Historical Commission possesses:

- 1,000 bound volumes
- 1,500 issues of newspapers
- 10,000 documents and manuscripts
- 250 maps
- 65 posters
- 25 audiovisual materials, including film, CDs, and magnetic tape
- Artwork including 25 pieces on paper, 25 paintings, and 12 textiles
- Photograph collection comprised of 10,000 prints, 1,000 negatives, and 1,500 slides
- Approximately 2,000 artifacts

The Needs Assessment, through a questionnaire of Commission members, identified that priority collections and items include the Cowell paintings and Wrentham Whig Party Banner. Many pieces of the collection still need to be processed, archived, and prioritized. The Preservation Needs Assessment outlines recommendations for archiving and maintaining the collection, with an emphasis on activities that provide the broadest benefit to all collections, rather than a small number of items. Read the complete report [here](#). The Commission, along with the Community Preservation Committee, refers to the Needs Assessment recommendations when determining projects to fund through Wrentham's Community Preservation Act funding.



Photo credit: Town of Wrentham

Wrentham Cultural Council

The Wrentham Cultural Council, comprised of volunteers, is a local branch of the Massachusetts Cultural Council. It is responsible for reviewing and awarding grants for cultural programming in the Town. The Cultural Council works with the Wrentham Historical Commission to host events and curate exhibits at the Old Fiske Library/Museum. The Council also sponsors the annual Arts on the Common festival each spring. The Council's vision statement is, "Enhance the vitality of the Wrentham community by engaging residents in the arts, humanities, and interpretative sciences." This vision is carried out through the collective support of Wrentham's arts and culture community, which includes supporting local dance schools and musicians, summer music programs for area youth, and events like poetry readings and documentary screenings.

Community Preservation Committee

Wrentham became a Community Preservation Act (CPA) community in 2016. The Act allows Wrentham to create a local Community Preservation Fund for open space protection, historic preservation, recreation, and affordable housing. The Community Preservation Committee was formed to administer the program. Funds earned and granted through the CPA are an important tool for historic preservation and rehabilitation of important historic landscapes and buildings. Since 2016, the Town has funded 13 projects, of which one has fallen into the category of historic preservation – the restoration and preservation of the framed paintings by Joseph Goss Cowell a Wrentham resident and renowned artist, sculptor and designer. At the November 2021 Town Meeting, the Town approved \$35,000 to fund a part-time archivist position and the purchase of supplies to catalog and preserve the Historical Commission's significant artifacts. The Committee also adopted a [Community Preservation Plan](#) in 2021 that includes three historic preservation goals focused on historic artifact acquisition and preservation.

Funding opportunities

A variety of funding opportunities, in the form of grants and direct funds, are available to municipalities and non-profit organizations focused on historic preservation and supporting arts and culture.

- Community Preservation Act (CPA)** – The funds gathered under this program can be used for historic preservation; however, there are some restrictions. The funds may be appropriated for a building, structure, vessel, real property, document, or artifact that is either on the National Register of Historic Places or has been determined by the Wrentham Historical Commission to be significant in the history, archaeology, architecture, or culture of Wrentham. Appropriated funds may only be used for acquiring, preserving, rehabilitating, or restoring those eligible resources. Properties acquired for historic preservation using CPA funds require a permanent historic

preservation restriction to be placed on then, approved by the Massachusetts Historical Commission and filed with the Registry of Deeds.

- **Federal Historic Preservation Tax Credits** – A 20% tax credit is available for the rehabilitation of historic, income-producing buildings that are determined by the Secretary of the Interior, through the National Park Service, to be “certified historic structures.” A certified historic structure is a building that is listed individually in the National Register of Historic Places or located in a registered historic district and certified by the National Park Service as contributing to the historic significance of that district. Rehabilitation work must comply with the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for Rehabilitation. Owner-occupied residential structures are not eligible for this tax credit.
- **Massachusetts Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credits** – Massachusetts administers this program, which is set to expire in 2027. Under the program, a certified rehabilitation project on an income-producing property is eligible to receive up to 20% of the cost of certified rehabilitation expenditures in state tax credits. The Massachusetts Historical Commission certifies the projects and allocates available credits. Selection criteria ensures the funds are distributed to projects that provide the most public benefit. Criteria include affordable housing, preservation, potential for loss, statement of need, geographic distribution, feasibility, public support, state of utility, and economic impact.
- **Grant opportunities**
 - **State Cultural Council funds** – Wrentham is awarded \$5,000 that can be split into mini-grants to support cultural projects in the Town. This grant program is administered by the Wrentham Cultural Council.
 - **Sweatt Memorial Trust** – The Sweatt Memorial Fund is a trust that was left to the Town in the early 20th century. Using the Trust, the Town awards grants to projects that benefit the Town but may not be covered by the Town budget. The Sweatt Fund Advisory Committee oversees the funding process. In the past, Wrentham’s Landscaping Committee, Cultural Council, and Historical Commission have received funds to support a variety of projects, from electricity for outdoor events at Sweatt Park and the installation of a Persian Gulf War Memorial to display cases for the Old Fiske Library/Museum.
 - **Additional grant opportunities** include:
 - [National Trust for Historic Preservation funds](#)
 - [Economic Development Association Tourism Grants](#)
 - National Endowment for the Arts - [Grants for Arts Projects](#), [Challenge America](#), [Our Town](#)
 - [Mass Humanities Grants](#)
 - [Cultural Facilities Fund](#), a partnership between Mass Cultural Council and MassDevelopment
 - MassDevelopment [Commonwealth Places](#)
 - Historic New England [Community Preservation Grants](#)
 - [Massachusetts Historical Commission Survey and Planning Grant Program](#)
 - [National Park Service Historic Preservation Fund grants](#)
- **Alternative funding mechanisms**
 - **Preservation Loan Funds** – In Arlington, Massachusetts, a nonprofit organization – Arlington Preservation Fund, Inc. – has been formed for the purpose of providing low-interest loans to owners of historically significant properties in Arlington. Initiated through a Community Development Block Grant, the fund is administered by a nine-member board appointed by the Arlington Select Board. Eligible properties are located within the town’s local historic districts, listed on the NRHP, documented through Historical Commission inventories, or otherwise deemed significant by the Board. Preservation restrictions are

- applied to the areas of work funded by the loans for twice the term of the loan unless the property is in a local historic district. More information on the program is [available here](#).
- **Use Allowances for Historic Preservation** – Zoning use regulations can provide financial incentives for historic preservation. By moderately increasing allowable income-producing activities within historically significant properties, the zoning code can help create supportive conditions for historic preservation. Examples of incentives could include the allowance of an additional by-right housing unit within structures certified as historically significant or the allowance of a set of home-based occupations that would not disrupt or alter the historic character of the building or surrounding neighborhood.

Community Engagement

Findings from the town-wide survey conducted during Phase I of the Master Plan indicate the importance of historical and cultural resources to Town residents. Nearly a quarter of respondents said history and historical sites are Wrentham's greatest strengths. While overall, residents desire more community events, particularly people of color saw more opportunities for stronger community and social networks in the Town, and more diversity overall. Preserving and enhancing cultural resources and activities can strengthen the community and make it more welcoming. Respondents also noted that the Town Common serves as a potential gathering space, with opportunities for more investment to continue making improvements to the park.

Interviews with members of the Historical Commission, Cultural Council, and Community Preservation Committee were conducted to inform the existing conditions analysis. The Phase II town-wide survey findings most relevant to cultural resources are reflected as well.

Feedback from the public forums, focus groups, and steering committee will be incorporated into this element as goals and strategies are discussed.