

Area E - East Lexington

The East Lexington Historic District (Area E) was established as a local historic district by Town Meeting vote in March 1966. It encompasses that section of Massachusetts Avenue from Marrett Road to approximately Hillside Avenue and also includes several houses on Maple Street. The district includes two properties listed on the National Register of Historic Places: Follen Community Church at 755 Massachusetts Avenue and the Stone Building at 735 Massachusetts Avenue.



Follen Church and the Stone Building, c.1860

Located about two miles east on Massachusetts Avenue from Lexington's Center Village, East Lexington developed as a separate entity in the late 18th century. While the older Center Village remained the town's civic center, the East Village became a hub of commercial and industrial activity. Stephen Robbins, Jr. and his son Eli were personally responsible for much of the prosperity of the village. Stephen Robbins introduced the fur dressing industry to the village prior to 1800. The Robbins shop was located at the corner of Massachusetts Avenue and Pleasant Street. The production of fur capes, caps, muffs and other items gave work to over 100 employees at one time. Other businesses that contributed to the economic vitality of the village included tanning, saw and grist mills, wheelwright and blacksmith shops and a store that sold West Indian goods.



Robbins Cemetery

The Robbins family left a number of important landmarks which still stand today. In 1828 Eli Robbins constructed the Brick Store which also housed the East Lexington branch post office from 1836 to 1867 and the East Lexington Branch Library in the 1880s.



Brick Store, 703 Massachusetts Avenue

Robbins Hall (known today as the Stone Building) was erected in 1833 as a combination residence and public meeting hall. The building was used for lyceum lectures and is significant as an early and well-preserved example of the lyceum building. Among the known lecturers was Ralph Waldo Emerson. Prior to the construction of Follen Church, the Stone Building also served as a meetinghouse for the East Village, hosting many notable ministers. In 1892 a Robbins family descendant, Miss Ellen Stone, offered the building to the Town of Lexington for use as a library.

Aside from its historic significance, the Stone Building is an outstanding example of the Greek Revival style as epitomized by its Doric front portico. The building was designed by architect and master builder Isaac Melvin of Concord who based his decorative details on Asher Benjamin's latest pattern book, *The Practice of Architecture* which was published in 1833.



Stone Building, 735 Massachusetts Avenue



Nearly all of the approximately thirty houses built in the village prior to 1840 display the same side-gabled form with five bay wide facades and center entrances.



517 Massachusetts Avenue

What distinguishes the buildings of the East Village are the enrichments of the entrances on a number of these houses and especially the extraordinary collection of doorways inspired by the pattern books of Asher Benjamin. Of special note are the entrances at 715, 782, 870, 884 and 1106 Massachusetts Avenue.



870 Massachusetts Avenue



782 Massachusetts Avenue

One of the last and most interesting of the Asher Benjamin-inspired designs is visible at 627 Massachusetts Avenue. In 1839 fur merchant Ambrose Morell remodeled his brick ended Federal-style house into a Greek temple-form dwelling much like the Stone Building.



Ambrose Morell House, 627 Massachusetts Avenue

The house at 956 Massachusetts Avenue was also originally a brick-ended Federal dwelling. It was updated with a mansard roof, new porch, entablature window lintels and brackets c.1870.



956 Massachusetts Avenue

Functioning for many years as the commercial center of the town, East Lexington also includes a number of non-residential structures in addition to the Brick Store and Robbins Hall.

The building at 837 Massachusetts Avenue was a working tavern from about 1820 until 1843. Another tavern at East Lexington was kept by Stephen Robbins but is no longer standing.



Bowman Tavern, 837 Massachusetts Avenue

The Follen Community Church was constructed adjacent to the Stone Building at 755 Massachusetts Avenue in 1840. The unusual Gothic Revival church with octagonal sanctuary was designed by the first minister of the parish, Dr. Charles Follen and was constructed by Curtis Capell of Groton. Ironically, Dr. Follen died in a steamboat accident the day the church was dedicated. Much of the Gothic ornament was removed when the building was remodeled in the Colonial Revival style in the early 20th century. The Church is individually listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The gambrel-fronted building adjacent to the church (763 Massachusetts Avenue) dates to the early 20th century.



Follen Church, 755 Massachusetts Ave.

The building at 805 Massachusetts Avenue was constructed in 1875 by Augustus Childs who operated a grocery store here in addition to the post office. The post office was discontinued in 1909 and the building later contained Wardrobe's Drug Store. Next door, 803 Massachusetts Avenue was originally the home and shop of John Chisholm, a harnessmaker.



805 & 803 Massachusetts Avenue

The commercial block at 844 to 856 Massachusetts Avenue was erected in 1925.



844-856 Massachusetts Avenue

The former Adams School (now the Waldorf School) was erected by the town in 1912. It replaced an earlier wooden building built in 1859. The new building was designed by Boston architects Brainerd & Leeds. Alterations and additions to the building were made in 1931 and 1950.



Adams School, 739 Massachusetts Avenue

The East Lexington Fire Station stands on the site of the former Village Hall which was erected in 1839 or earlier and housed various religious congregations until it was purchased by the Town and renovated in 1873. Village Hall (seen below) was demolished in 1950.



Courtesy Lexington Historical Society