

FORM A - AREA

Assessor's Sheets USGS Quad Area Letter Form Numbers in Area
101, 102, 106 W

Massachusetts Historical Commission
220 Morrissey Boulevard
Massachusetts Archives Building
Boston, MA 02125

Town: Groton

Place: West Groton

Photographs

X *See continuation sheet*

Name of Area: West Groton

Current Use: Residential/commemorative/
/educational/commercial/industrial

Construction Dates or Period: c. 1680-1970

Overall Condition: Fair-excellent

Major Intrusions and Alterations: Approximately 13
modern or rebuilt residences; few modern materials

Acreage: Approximately 50

Sketch Map

X *See continuation sheet*

Recorded by: Sanford Johnson

Organization: Groton Historical Commission

Date (Month/Year): 10/06

AREA FORM

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION:

Describe architectural, structural and landscape features and evaluate in terms of other areas within the community. See Continuation Sheet X

Introduction

West Groton is an industrial and residential village which owes its existence to its water power and to the building of the railroad in 1847. It is the location of the former Groton Leatherboard manufacturing company (now the River Court retirement community at 8 West Main Street), the former Thompson Box and Reel Mill (now the Carvers' Guild, manufacturers of reproduction mirrors on Cannery Row off Townsend Road) and a disused branch of the Boston and Maine Railroad (formerly the Peterborough and Shirley Railroad). Architectural resources consist of fair to well-preserved residential, industrial, educational, commercial and civic properties built during the Federal to Early Modern Periods. It is located in north-central Middlesex County along the banks of the Squannacook River. Most buildings are residential but commercial and industrial resources exist as well as a church, school and multiple unit residential construction. Sixty two buildings exist in the district, all but 8 having been built before 1960 (four, including the River Court retirement residences and three houses, have been extensively rehabilitated). The predecessor to the existing West Main Street Bridge over the Squannacook was built in 1915 and replaced in 1996. Architectural styles include Federal, Gothic Revival, Stick, Colonial Revival and Victorian Eclectic. Boundaries of the district are determined by changes in density of historic resources and by topographic changes.

Development

Prior to 1847, West Groton was a sparsely settled village of the primarily agricultural town of Groton. Land was in use as farmland and small-scale milling operations until the construction of the Peterborough and Shirley Railroad in 1847. A grist and saw mill run by Thomas Tarbell and others existed at the current site of the River Court residences by that time as did a small chapel on Pepperell Road.

Residences in the area were built in small numbers after 1855. They were the homes of budding industrialists, their employees and some farmers. Simple Victorian Eclectic style houses were constructed adjacent to a few Federal style residences of larger scale. Occupants of these distinct building types formed a cohesive neighborhood which ultimately contained two mills, a railroad station, two Churches, small retail establishments and a combination community hall and fire house (now Squannacook Hall at 33 West Main Street).

Streetscapes

West Main Street is the principal thoroughfare in West Groton and passes east to west at the southern end. The site of the current West Main Street Bridge over the Squannacook River was occupied by an early predecessor by 1795. Most residential development took place between the junction of Pepperell Road and the house at 111 West Main Street, approximately a half mile to the east, during the mid to late 19th century, although there are approximately five residences from the Federal Period. Victorian Period houses tend to be smaller and less refined in their designs than their Federal counterparts with the exceptions of 65 and 74 West Main Street and 17 and 39 Pepperell Road.

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The older buildings on West Main Street were built in the early 19th century and are located closer to the west end. The Rockwood House at **13 West Main Street (MHC #126)** was built c. 1800 with symmetrical fenestration in the façade and small window openings. The Abel Tarbell House at **16 West Main Street (MHC #124)** was built of brick c. 1800 and occupied a site overlooking the river and the early mill site. The house at 54 West Main Street is of a smaller scale and lesser quality design but appears to retain some elements of early construction such as the low corner post height. The house at 17-19 West Main Street may have been built during the early 19th century and exhibits a 2 ½-story, 5x3-bay, ridge-hipped form, and may have been built as a two family house. The easternmost late 18th-early 19th century house in the West Main Street Area is the Graves-Blood House at **94 West Main Street (MHC #122)**. The brick construction, symmetrical façade, large barns and surrounding fields lend some prominence to the farm that is now in use as an abattoir. It is a 4x1-bay, side-gabled, 2 1/2-story building with a 2-story ell attached to the south (rear). Outbuildings include three barns and a silo visible from the road in addition to two more outbuildings to the south. The house is located close to West Main Street and is the only commercial agricultural operation in the village.

Buildings on West Main Street from the second half of the 19th century include the Victorian Eclectic style Squannacook Hall at **33 West Main Street (MHC #266)** and the Stick style Christian Union Church at **35 West Main Street** which are the area's most ornate buildings from the period. The numerous wood frame Victorian Eclectic style houses, however, most of which are two to two and one half stories in height, are predominant. An unusual local design appears in the house at **25 West Main Street** which has elements of the Gothic Revival style although it appears from the Shingle style elements to have been built after 1850, the time of that style's popularity. Other unusual designs for West Groton are the two front-gabled, 2-story houses at **64 and 68 West Main Street** which are distinguished by their low-pitched roofs, a form that appears in many mill villages in Massachusetts but not elsewhere in Groton. Many well-preserved Victorian Eclectic examples exist, including those at **65 West Main Street** which is a 2 ½-story, cross-gabled form with a prominent gable front cornice, three-sided bay window and carved brackets over the side-hall entry. It appears to have been built for a client with above average means by virtue of its size and site upon a low hill set back from the road. A house of similar scale and design quality exists at **74 West Main Street** which lacks the elevated setting but includes a gable front barn clad in wood clapboards built c. 1900. More typical of the street are the houses at **91, 93 and 95 West Main Street** which share a common design and appear to have been built at the same time, c. 1900. These are closely spaced 1 ½-story, front-gabled forms with two-bay facades, gable returns, side-hall entries and center brick chimneys. The most intact example of the three is at **95 West Main Street**. Other 19th century houses on West Main Street are mainly Victorian Eclectic style examples with alterations such as vinyl and aluminum siding, enclosed porches and structural additions. The Clover Leaf Store at **9 West Main Street**, built c. 1880, is a small, front-gabled, wood frame grocery store that faces south and is sited immediately adjacent to the intersections of Pepperell Road, Townsend Road and West Main Street. A flat-roofed storefront with display windows and vintage sign above appear to be unaltered from the mid 20th century.

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Buildings from the 20th century are interspersed with earlier development but do not define the character of the area to as great a degree as the Victorian residences. The **Squannacook Engine House No. 2** was built of brick in 1958 at 46 West Main Street and has a relatively small side-gabled one-story form. A Ranch style house at **34 West Main Street** was built c. 1950 and is set back farther than usual from the road. Also, the Hale Village retirement condominiums, built c. 1990, exist at **56-58 West Main Street** and blend well due to their scale and close proximity to the previously existing houses.

Pepperell Road is the site of approximately 16 buildings, most of which are residential. Historic examples along this section of road are wood frame houses of 1 ½ to 2 ½ stories in height and are in fair to excellent condition. Pepperell Road predates Townsend Road as an alternate route into West Groton and appears in place on the 1832 Butler map. The oldest house on the road in the village is the wood frame Sedley House at **18 Pepperell Road (MHC #127)**, built c. 1740 in the Colonial style. More common are the Victorian Eclectic designs such as those at **17 and 39 Pepperell Road** which are both 2 ½-story, front-gabled, wood shingled houses with attached barns that appear to have been built at the same time as the houses, c. 1890. Architectural details common to both examples are the patterned wood shingles in the front gable peaks, brackets either at the eaves or at the cornice of the porches and ell's projecting to the south, creating complex roof and floor plans. Additional Victorian Eclectic style houses of 2 ½ stories are at **25, 51, and 55 Pepperell Road**, the latter having a detached carriage barn from around the time of original construction, c. 1900. The houses at 13 and 37 Pepperell Road are less ornate but are likely older. The minimal detail reveals simple 1 ½ - 2-story side-gabled forms that are common to buildings from the 1850s, the time when these parcels are first occupied on historic maps. Pepperell Road has the highest concentration of **modern houses** with four, located at **4, 42, 48 and 56**. At the northern end of the area, the **Tarbell School** at 73 Pepperell Road occupies a corner lot at St. James Avenue. The 1914 Bungalow and Colonial Revival style school building, now in use as administrative offices for the school department, is built of yellow brick and is comparable in scale, design and materials to the Boutwell School on Hollis Street in Groton Center.

Townsend Road is the site of additional Victorian Eclectic style houses, also from around the turn of the 20th century. Four examples with front-gabled, 2-story forms exist at **28, 48, 40 and 60 Townsend Road**. The latter two are more well-preserved with original cladding and details such as carved brackets supporting entry porches, gable returns and bay windows. The house at **66 Townsend Road** is 2 ½ stories tall, clad in aluminum clapboards and has a detached barn from c. 1900 as well as a detached garage from c. 1950. The cement block garage built c. 1920 at **30 Townsend Road** has stepped gables and quarry-faced cinderblock construction.

St. James Avenue is the site of two buildings. The modern house at the eastern end was built c. 1990. The **St. James Catholic Church** on the north side of the street was built in 1929 by the priest at the time and his parishioners. The cobblestone construction is unique in West Groton as is the scale although some details, while rendered in stone, are similar in concept to those on the Christian Union Church at **35 West Main Street**. The bell tower, gabled entry porch on the east side and the arched stained glass windows stand out in

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this regard. Buttresses of cobblestone and cut capstones, segmental arched window openings done in cobblestone and the Gibbs surround at the main entry reflect a locally unusual English Revival influence not found in town other than in the Chapel on the Groton School Campus. The remainder of the land on St. James Avenue is given over to parking for the church and **Tarbell School at 73 Pepperell Road**, leaving an impression of decreased density at the northern edge of the West Groton Area.

Selected Descriptions

Squannacook Hall at 33 West Main Street is an institutional scaled, 3x5-bay, front-gabled, Victorian Eclectic style building of 2 1/2-stories. The side-hall entry is covered by a gable-roofed porch with clipped gable, exposed rafter ends and a 3-pane transom. Decorative features include the clipped gables in the front and rear elevations, gable returns, corner boards and the band of wood shingles laid across the façade between floors in stagger-butt and sawtooth patterns. Windows are mainly 6/6 double-hung sash with hoods; exceptions are the paired 4/4 double-hung units in the center bay of the second story, the rose window in the front gable peak and the small awning windows in the west side of the first story of the façade that occupy the space formerly occupied by the fire engine door. The building is in fair condition due to its vinyl siding, the Plexiglas storm window over the rose window in the gable peak and the addition of the concrete ramp at the front door. The building, one of a few institutional designs on the densely residential West Main Street, occupies a narrow parcel with pavement on the east side and little in the way of landscaping. Alterations include the infill of the original vehicle door in the west side of the façade and construction of an entry porch over the pedestrian door in the east.

The three by three-bay **Christian Union Church at 35 West Main Street** is a highly ornate yet relatively small example of Stick style design. The building, unique in West Groton, has a cross gabled form of two stories, a square tower between the gabled roof sections capped by a bell turret, pyramidal roof and finial. The base of the tower has an open gable-roofed porch covering the main entry. Decorative features are numerous and include the spindle frieze in the bell turret and the porch, carved gable ornaments with quatrefoils and trefoils at the two main gables and in the gable of the entry porch, corner boards, corner brackets, peaked window hoods, stagger-butt shingles in the gable peaks over wood clapboards below, beltcourses between the different siding materials arched stained glass window in the façade, an oculus in the side gable and double-hung stained glass windows in the remaining openings. A brick addition was made to the rear of the church in the 1950s adjacent to the original side-gabled rear ell. The church is well maintained and adds a level of refinement to the west end of the road.

The Federal style **Tarbell House at 16 West Main Street (MHC #124)** is a brick 5x3-bay, side-gabled 2 1/2-story house with a rear wood-frame ell of 1 story. Decorative features are the symmetrical fenestration in the façade, molded cornice, four tall brick chimneys at the corners of the roof and gable returns. Windows are 6/6 double-hung sash with plain trim, stone sills and no lintels or arches over the openings. The center entry has simple trim and a transom; a secondary entry exists at the southwest corner of the west side elevation. The rear ell is a wood clapboard, 4-bay, gable form with a single brick chimney near the center of the roof ridge.

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The house is well-maintained and is a locally rare brick Federal style example. The setting is adjacent to the railroad, just west of which is largest building in West Groton, the former Groton Leatherboard factory, now in use as senior housing; west of the factory is the Squannacook River

The former **Groton Leatherboard factory (MHC #s 182-188)**, now the River Court retirement community, was built of brick in several stages during the early 20th century. The very low-pitched bracketed, gable roofed, one-story principal elevation faces north from its site at the west end of West Main Street. A pair of brick two-story masses project to the rear or south and form a roughly U-shaped complex. Entry to the complex is through the covered drive east of the northern building. Parking and green space occupy the courtyard. The complex is the area's largest resource and occupies a site immediately adjacent to the Squannacook River, the 1996 West Groton Bridge, the junctions of West Main Street, Townsend Road and Pepperell Road. Within the last decade, it was the subject of a certified rehabilitation and adaptation for use as housing which resulted in its listing in the National Register of Historic Places in 2002.

The Asa Tarbell House at **6 West Main Street (MHC #125)** is an ornate brick house with elements of the Federal style, built c. 1800. The five by two bay form has a side-gabled roof, symmetrical fenestration in the façade and a center entry. Decorative features are the corbelled eaves, gable returns and four tall chimneys at the corners of the roof. Windows are 6/6 double-hung sash with flat brick arches above. The entry is trimmed with sidelights and a transom. A shed-roofed porch covers the north side of the first story of the façade.

The former **Sampson Mill** on Cannery Row is west of the southern end of Townsend Road adjacent to the Squannacook River. The complex of buildings appears to have wood shingle exterior with elements of the Bungalow and Colonial Revival styles. It is likely that significant repairs have been made which are difficult to discern. Buildings here are 1-2 stories in height with shallow pitched gable roofs. The complex contains two large buildings, perhaps 30'x70' and four cabin sized outbuildings in use as woodworking shops.

Landscape Features

The area north of the east abutment of the West Groton Bridge is a small park that is the former site of the West Groton Station. Grass, flowers, a parking lot and a bench now occupy the site overlooking the river and the mill pond south of the former Sampson Mill. The diminutive size of the .16 acre park is consistent with the relatively dense development that characterizes West Groton, however, there is a parcel of privately owned open space between the houses at 16 and 34 West Main. Also, the farm at **94 West Main Street** adds an agricultural sensibility to the east end of the area.

Conclusion/Comparison

West Groton is the town's principal village outside the larger Groton Center and contains a higher level of building density than other parts of the town due to the small lots. The Christian Union Church, Squannacook Hall and modern Fire Station give it a civic function while commercial activity continues to take place at the

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Clover Leaf Store at **9 West Main Street**. The intersection of five streets in front of the store, the bridge over the Squannacook and the former leatherboard mill adjacent to the south are primarily responsible for the character of the village and define the core of the surrounding area. While synthetic siding has been applied to several houses and the Squannacook Hall, most buildings retain their original exterior materials. Most historic architectural design features also survive. The design of the West Main Street Bridge, built on a modest scale in 1996 to replace its 1915 predecessor, has been carried out with ornamental concrete balustrades and does not appear as an inappropriately large modern piece of construction. It also incorporates a stone date plaque from the earlier structure, lending some sense of the history of the river crossing.

HISTORICAL NARRATIVE:

Explain historical development of the area. Discuss how the area relates to the historical development of the town. See Continuation Sheet X

Introduction

Prior to settlement by Europeans, the area of West Groton was the site of Native American travel along the Squannacook River for its supply of freshwater fish and of overland travel along the current route of West Main Street. A fordway is also thought to have existed near the current West Groton Bridge before 1655. While the Town of Groton was the site of around 300 settlers by 1675, very few lived in the village of West Groton. Attacks by Native Americans on the white population from 1676-1724 slowed growth of the town, particularly in areas away from the town center and in the west part of town along watercourses which facilitated travel by raiding parties. Subsequent settlement occurred around the bridge and mills built here by the 18th century but agriculture remained the predominant activity. Nineteenth century industrial activity increased both in West Groton and a mile to the north at the current site of the Hollingsworth and Vose paper mills and coexisted with farming as a way of life into the 20th century. Perhaps eleven families lived in the area by the mid 1800s according to maps from 1847 and 1875, a number that remained fairly constant until the late 19th century. After that time, development increased as a result of growing employment opportunities offered by the expanded Groton Leatherboard and Sampson Reel mills. Judging by the approximate dates of the houses in the village, the growth of the late 19th century and very early 20th century was short lived and resulted largely in the collection of historic resources we see today.

Colonial Period 1675-1775

Francis Marion Boutwell has stated in "Old Highways and Landmarks of Groton, Massachusetts" that the majority of Groton residents lived close together along Main and Hollis Street in Groton Center during the period of first settlement, although pressure to expand the population and bring additional acreage under cultivation led in 1713 to the first of five subsequent divisions of publicly held lands. The Massachusetts Historical Commission *Town Report* for Groton notes that there were a few scattered farms on the west side of the Nashua River by 1710, promoting settlement of the village of West Groton as a secondary locus of the town by 1750, perhaps as a result of the land division process. Grist, saw, dye and carding mills existed on the

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Squannacook River by 1744 run by Thomas Tarbell, former town clerk from 1704-1705, 1731-1733 and from 1745-1756 (These offices may have been filled by more than one man named Thomas Tarbell. There were 6 males named Thomas, all related to each other but of different generations born between c. 1646 and 1758.). Additional owners of the mill privilege in the 18th century were Jonathan Morse and Samuel Woods. Travel from West Groton to Groton Center, presumably over West Main Street, Long Hill Road and Farmers Row, was facilitated by construction across the swampy ground of the slightly elevated central section of Broadmeadow Road near Groton Center in order to provide the western residents with easier access to the First Parish Church, rebuilt in 1714-1716. Also, the MHC report notes that secondary radial roads in the town including Townsend and Pepperell Roads were built or extended. Butler notes in his 1848 history of Groton that there were five bridges over the Nashua and Squannacook Rivers by 1750, one of which was likely to have been in the vicinity of the current village. Carl Condit, in the first of his two volume work entitled American Building Art, describes bridges from the period as pile and beam structures which means that wood pilings driven vertically by hand into the river bed were joined by horizontal beams, perhaps supported at the corners by diagonal braces such as are found in a timber frame house. The beams supporting the deck were no more than 15' to 20' in length, thus requiring several short spans to cross the river. Condit notes that floating bridges also existed in the region at the time but it is not known which type was used here.

Disagreements between Native Americans in the region and the European settlers in Groton and elsewhere were rife for a period of nearly 50 years beginning in 1676 and lasting until the final attack on a Groton farmer in 1724 or 1725. The earliest attacks took place in the town center but later the Native Americans grew more likely to attack outlying residents west of town and west of the Nashua River. While no sources indicate specifically that such activities took place within the village of West Groton, the possibility exists and the threat of attack probably played a role in the gradual settlement of the area.

Voters of Groton directed selectmen in 1681 to form a school at public expense. Little is known about its location or curriculum and, since there is nothing further in the record on the subject until 1703, it is likely that the school was established and in operation at that time. The number of locations for schools increased to five in 1741 and seven in 1742; among them may have been West Groton.

Federal Period 1775-1830

Travel routes to West Groton along Long Hill Road and West Main Street were in use by the white occupants at the time of the 1795 Prescott map of Groton which depicts a bridge and a mill on each side of the Squannacook River at the current sit of the former Groton Leatherboard Mill (now the River Court retirement residences at 8 West Main Street). It was in the late 18th century that American bridge builders learned construction of masonry coffer dams, which offered better footing in the river bed, and of the truss bridge, a form that allows for increased length of spans and hence increased durability in the face of flooding streams. Although it is not documented that Groton benefited from these improvements immediately upon their availability, it is possible that news of the two-span truss bridge over the Connecticut River between New Hampshire and Vermont built in 1785 and of the multi-span bridge comprised of several short spans and two

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intermediate trusses in Newburyport, reached the town at some point. Green notes on page 137 of Volume 3 of his town history that bridges in Groton in 1790 were made of wood which was a potential material for a truss bridge or a pile and beam bridge.

The Tarbell grist and saw mill remained in operation at the former Groton Leatherboard site through the Federal Period. Most businesses were conducted in merchants' houses in town at the time although no known examples of this arrangement exist for the village of West Groton. While industrial activity was increasing, the majority of West Groton residents remained involved in agriculture as a means of making a living. Crops were mainly for subsistence although some were undoubtedly shipped to Lowell after that city's founding late in the period. Fruit would have been a particularly common cash crop. Butler's notes from 1828-1829 indicate the route from Groton Center to West Groton was called the Road to Squannacook. Dr. Green states that a chapel was built at West Groton on the Pepperell Road in 1827 for Reverend John Todd, the town's first Congregational minister in 1825. This may be the house at **13 Pepperell Road**.

Architecture

The brick house at **16 West Main Street (MHC #124)** is described in Caleb Butler's field notes from 1828-1829 as it currently exists: a two-story brick house with four chimneys and five windows across the front. It was owned by Abel Tarbell whose occupancy is depicted on the 1832 Butler map. An owner named A. Tarbell is shown on the 1847 and 1856 maps and was likely the same person. Mr. Tarbell may have been a descendant of the Colonial Period miller who operated a grist and saw mill starting in 1744 on the opposite side of the future railroad right of way. He was taxed in 1830 for ownership of a house valued at \$2,500. By 1847, his property was worth \$3,000 and he had additional real property and personal assets worth \$5,000. The 1855 census reveals that Mr. Tarbell was born c. 1773 and had the title "Esquire". He also served as Master of the Groton Masons Lodge and is given the title Colonel in Butler's history of the town.

Ezra Graves is the first known owner of the house at **94 West Main Street (MHC #122)** based on Butler's 1832 map. From c 1847-1889, it was under ownership of Edmund Blood, the first of many generations of the family who continue to occupy the house. Mr. Blood was, according to the census from 1855, born c. 1804, married to Mary Blood, working as a farmer with two children, Edmund L. Blood among them.

The House at **6 West Main Street (MHC #125)** is described in Caleb Butler's field notes from 1828-1829 as it currently exists: a two-story brick house with four chimneys and five windows across the front. It was owned from c. 1832-c. 1847 by Asa Tarbell, neighbor and relative of Abel Tarbell of 16 West Main Street. Mr. Tarbell was a Master of the St. Paul's Lodge of Free and Accepted Masons of Groton. A subsequent owner was John Tarbell who is listed as a watchmaker in the census from 1855. His relative, Asa, is also listed as an occupant and a yeoman.

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Early Industrial Period 1830-1870

Travel routes to West Groton from Groton Center were well established by the start of the period. However, the alignment of the bridge over the Squannacook River may have been modified between the time of the 1832 Butler map and the 1856 Walling map. The former suggests but does not indicate with certainty that the bridge departed the Groton side of the river near the current location. The 1856 map depicts the bridge a short distance south of the current location and near the current south side of the River Court retirement residences. Also, the 1856 map shows a road east of and parallel to the bridge access road that may now correspond to the River Court driveway. (The current River Court buildings, built from 1915-1933, were preceded by smaller mills nearer the river.) Another development in travel routes was the establishment c. 1846 of the Townsend Road from the village to the north. Also, construction of the Peterborough and Shirley Railroad, which connected the towns of its name, was completed through West Groton in 1847. Given the accurate location of Townsend Road on the 1847 Butler map and the slightly incorrect alignment of the railroad on the same map, it is likely that the road pre-dated by a short time the construction of the railroad which may have still been in the planning stage when the map was drawn. (The railroad is accurately depicted on most subsequent maps as immediately west of the segment of Townsend Road between the village and Kemp Street to the north.) The railroad station in the village was located on the vacant parcel now reused as a small park northwest of the intersection of West Main Street, Pepperell and Townsend Roads.

Industrial activity increased with the construction of the railroad. While there had been a grist and saw mill in the village since the 18th century, the mid 19th century industrial expansion throughout the region attracted paper manufacturers to West Groton at the current site of the Hollingsworth and Vose plant north of the village and within the village adjacent to the grist and saw mill. Howe's Paper Mills are depicted on the 1856 Walling map at this location. This probably refers to Oliver Howe who Dr. Green describes as a miller of Manila paper starting in 1841 and who also owned mills outside the village on the Nashua River where the current State Route 119 crosses. John Hayward, author of the 1857 gazetteer of Massachusetts, states that of the several paper mills in town, the biggest was in West Groton, probably indicating the Hollingsworth mills to the north. Although the 1846 industrial products statistics do not differentiate between establishments, the leading industry in Groton continued to be papermaking at the two Howe factories employing a total of 12 at the crossing of the Nashua River on Main Street and here in West Groton. The number of paper employees increased to 43 by 1855 although industries in South Groton, also called Groton Junction and later the separate Town of Ayer, had eclipsed the paper business in volume. Construction of the mills in the village as well as the railroad encouraged the establishment of the West Groton Post Office in 1850.

Dr. Green notes that there was in 1868 only one store in the village, a situation that remained until at least the time of the publication of his 1884 pamphlet "The Old Stores and the Post Office of Groton". Other retail activity took place at the Blood Farm at **94 West Main Street** in the form of livestock butchering. Eliot Blood, the current owner of the slaughterhouse, which is still in business, has a butcher's license issued to his ancestor Edmund Blood in 1854. The population of the village, based on the number of houses depicted on historic maps, was in 1832 around 30; in 1847 around 45 and around 60 in 1856. The village was in 1862 the

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birthplace of Edmund Tarbell, nationally renowned artist, head of the faculty at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts and painter of presidents Wilson, Coolidge and Hoover.

Architecture

The house at **54 West Main Street**, which does not appear on the 1832 map, was owned in 1847 by William Kemp Jr., a laborer and miller born c. 1815 and in 1856 by Frederick Adams (who also owned a second house north of the village), a yeoman born c. 1807 according to 1855 census information. It is a modest building in comparison to others in the area and suggests Mr. Kemp and Mr. Adams were working class residents, possibly employed at one of the local paper mills. The house at **75 West Main Street** was occupied in 1847 and in 1856 by L. Shipley and, being built on a similar scale, fits into the same category as 54 West Main Street. **13 Pepperell Road** was occupied in 1847 by Sewall Rockwood, a farmer born c. 1783 according to the 1855 census. Later in the period, this was the first meeting place of the Christian Union Society of West Groton before the construction of their permanent building at 35 West Main Street, built in 1885. In 1856, the owner was Harrison J. Hartwell who worked as a papermaker according to 1855 censuses. He may also have worked at the former Hartwell mill north of the village that was sold to Lyman Hollingsworth in 1853. Residents named Smith and Emmerson shared ownership of a building that no longer exists but was located on the site of the modern Hale Village retirement community. Edmund Blood, owner of the Federal style house at **94 West Main Street** from at least 1847 – 1856, operated his slaughterhouse on the site. A schoolhouse was built c. 1870 near the site of the Christian Union Church but was replaced in 1914 with the existing Tarbell School at the corner of Pepperell Road and St. James Avenue.

Late Industrial Period 1870-1915

By the start of the Late Industrial Period, the alignment of the bridge over the Squannacook River had been altered to its current location according to the Beers atlas of 1875 which also shows the curved dam in its current location. The bridge that preceded the current structure was built in 1915 according to the stone plaque that has been re-integrated into the existing design. Population of the village, based on the depiction of 14 houses on the 1875 atlas, was around 70 people. Dr. Green noted that the formerly small settlement known as Squannacook Village had “sprung up” by the end of the 19th century to a population in 1889 of around 100 according to the atlas of that year. Settlement of the village remained densely gathered around the mills and the junction of West Main Street, Pepperell and Townsend Roads. This pattern would become more spread out in the first decade of the 20th century with the construction through West Groton of a street railway between Ayer and Greenville, New Hampshire.

The Tarbell School was built near the site of 25 West Main Street between 1856 and 1875. Previously, youngsters attended school at the District School #4 at the corner of Kemp Street and Pepperell Road which had been built prior to 1832, the time of construction of brick schools on Chicopee Row and at 76 Farmers Row. The increase in population resulted in the establishment of the West Groton Branch of the Groton Public Library. This was located in the Tarbell School (now demolished; this was the predecessor to the

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existing Tarbell School on Pepperell Road which was built in 1914 according to designs by architect H. G. Hunter) near the site of 25 West Main Street starting in 1915 and then in a house on the site of the River Court residences in 1933. Another effect of the increased population was the founding in 1886 of the Squannacook Engine Company #2 at the current Squannacook Hall at **33 West Main Street**. Previously, fire alarms at Groton Center had failed to arouse the volunteer fire fighters in this section. The West Groton Water District was founded in 1911 with a clientele of 80 households by the end of 1912. The Christian Union Methodist Church was established in West Groton in 1884. The group also bought a parsonage on Pepperell Road and Bixby Hill Road in 1907. The former chapel used by Reverend John Todd at 13 Pepperell Road had become a house by 1899.

Economic activity increased in the village during the period to include E. H. Sampson's Groton Leatherboard factory on the same site as the current River Court residences by 1875 and said by previous GHC researchers to have been the first in the nation. (Leatherboard is imitation leather typically produced by pulping and compressing scrap leather and wood pulp.) In the 1875 State Census of Manufactures and Occupations, with the town of Ayer listed separately after its founding in 1871, the manufacture of leatherboard and paper dominated the industrial output of the town. Manufacture of reels and boxes by Thompson and Bixby at or near the same location as the current Carvers' Guild on Cannery Row (a recently named offshoot of Townsend Road), was begun in the 1890s and continued into the 20th century. The reel and box manufacturing operation was moved c. 1890 from a site north of west Groton along with some of the factory housing now located on Townsend Road. Houses at 40 and 28 Townsend Road are thought to have been moved to the village from their former location near the original mill at the Townsend town line. The leatherboard mill was primarily a wood frame building with a coal fired brick boiler house and three wood store houses around the turn of the century. The leatherboard factory would retain this configuration until c. 1915 when it was replaced after a fire with the first of the current brick buildings that comprises the River Court retirement community, built in stages between 1915 and 1933. Also, the wood frame Thompson saw and planning mill existed in the village by 1896.

Architecture

One of the most visible buildings from the period is the Christian Union Church at **35 West Main Street**. The Stick Style design was constructed in 1885 for a parish of 85 original members and meant to serve all denominations. Prior to worshipping in their own church, members numbering around 15 met in private homes in the 1860s and later, with membership rising to 60, at the District School #4 at the corner of Kemp Street and Pepperell Road. Official organization of the Christian Union Society of West Groton took place in January, 1885 and an appropriation of \$1,500 in February of the same year. Cornerstone ceremonies were held in April, 1885 and dedication ceremonies on October 7, 1885. The parish purchased a house for their minister, B. F. Gustin, in 1907 at the corner of Pepperell Road and Bixby Hill Road. Additional events in the history of the society were the establishment of the Ladies Aid Society in 1912, installation of the stained glass windows in memory of Joseph Shepley and George and Mary Bixby, the merger with the Union Congregational Church in 1950, sale of the parsonage in 19th the 1950s, addition of the rear brick addition for a parish hall in 1953 and

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addition of stained glass windows in memory of Mr. and Mrs. Elliot Blood Sr. and a stained glass window given by Edna Dargis and Mr. and Mrs. Roland Sawyer. The church remains an active part of the West Groton community and is one of two remaining churches in the village. The Catholic St. James Church is on St. James Avenue and was built in 1929.

The Squannacook Hall and Engine Company #2 was built next door to the Christian Union Church at **33 West Main Street** in 1887. One year prior, a volunteer fire company in West Groton was formed of "good, active, young men" who kept the town's oldest fire engine, the "Torrent" built by the engineer Loammi Baldwin Jr. in 1802, on the property of a private individual in a shed that allowed changes in weather to deteriorate the apparatus. The problem of equipment storage was addressed by construction of Squannacook Hall and Engine House for the Engine Company #2 while fire whistles were blown at the nearby leatherboard factory until the 1950s. This was the town's second firehouse, the other being located in Groton Center. The entire town at this time employed 3 engineers and 69 men, 25 of whom were in the Squannacook Company. The resident directory from 1888 lists Patrick Kane as the foreman of the company, John Dugan as the assistant foreman and W. V. Bixby as the clerk. Twenty five men served in the company at that time. Originally, the façade of the building had a side hall entry with no porch in the east side and a vehicle door for the "Torrent" in the west. Construction, which cost \$2,462.97 (\$962.67 over budget), was carried out by 13 different men listed in town reports as laborers who earned between \$1.90 and \$58. George Woods, however, earned \$498 for his labor which suggests him as the primary builder on the job. A public meeting hall was located on the upper floor and furnished with settees and a stove. Uses of the building included the fire station (a purpose it served until construction across the street of a new brick station in 1958), first meeting place for the West Groton Water Supply District in 1911, meeting place for the boy scouts starting in the 1940s and the West Groton Community Club which sponsored athletic events, village improvement projects, field days, dances and holiday parties starting in 1946. Renovations to Squannacook Hall in 1977 provided for the building's use by Groton's senior citizens which continued until 1996 when the Council on Aging moved east to the former VFW building on West Main Street.

Older houses changed ownership in some cases including **6 West Main Street** which was owned in 1875 by Adams Archibald, a Canadian-born lumber agent and C. H. Bixby in 1889. Mr. Archibald was in 1865 listed in the census as the depot master. E. H. Sampson, the owner of the former Groton Leatherboard mill, owned the house at **13 West Main Street** between 1875 and 1889 and G. W. Canney had ownership of the house at **54 West Main Street** in 1889. Houses built from 1870-1915 include most of those on West Main Street. The house at **74 West Main Street** appears to have been occupied by L. E. Williams in 1889. Edmund Blood, owner of the farm at **94 West Main Street**, had the houses at **91 and 93 West Main Street** built around 1889 with money he earned from the sale of his land for construction of the branch of the Peterborough and Shirley Railroad located east of the village. Other houses on the street built during the later part of the period include **41, 55, 57, 59, 65, 81, 85, 95 and 111 West Main Street**. Houses on **Pepperell Road** that have construction dates between 1870 and 1915 include those at numbers **17, 39, 51 and 55**. **Townsend Road** has a similar number of houses from the period including numbers **28, 40, 48, 56 and 60**. The house at 66 Townsend Road appears on the 1889 atlas to have been owned by T. Leonard. Most un-attributed houses post-date the

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publication of the 1889 Walker atlas which is the primary source for construction dates in the Late Industrial Period. The Clover Leaf Store at 9 West Main Street was built as a grocery store for C. H. Bixby c. 1878.

Early Modern Period 1915-1945

Based on the fact that approximately 38 residences existed in the village in 1930, there were an estimated 190 residents. The population was involved mainly in manufacturing although there were at least 8 residents who owned more than one house, suggesting rental properties, possibly for mill employees unable to purchase their own homes, were a source of income for several in West Groton. Mill employees were increasingly of Irish descent judging by the surnames on the 1930 map by Dana Somes and worked at either the Sampson box and reel mill at the current site of the Carvers' Guild on Cannery Row, the Groton Leatherboard mill (now the River Court retirement community) south of the junction of West Main Street, Townsend and Pepperell Roads or north of the village at the Hollingsworth and Vose paper mill. A major change in the appearance of the village came in 1914 with the destruction by fire of the wood frame Groton Leatherboard mill which was rebuilt in brick shortly thereafter. In 1930, Orra Stone wrote in his History of Massachusetts Industries that the Groton Leatherboard had acquired a single client in New York City called the Certified Dry Mat Corporation which sold the Groton Product to 400 newspapers across the country. Principal employees were Winthrop Sheedy, President; Carl A. P. Lawrence, Vice President and Michael Sheedy, Treasurer.

The St. James Catholic Church was built of cobblestone in 1929 on the street that bears its name. Commercial activity beyond manufacturing included the small scale operations of the C.H. Bixby (also called the Bixby-Webber Company in the 1918 resident directory) general store at its current site (**9 West Main Street**), a pool and bowling hall at an unknown location run by J. Philorum Duquette and a garage, possibly for repair of automobiles and probably located in the cast cement block building at **30 Townsend Road**, run by Noble A. Nutt. The current post office at 1 Pepperell Road was said by Boston University researchers to have been built c. 1860 as a storehouse for the Bixby Store and was adapted for use as a post office c. 1930. The building (without street number, assessor #101 12) at the northern side of the east abutment of the bridge over the Squannacook was built sometime prior to 1896 and after 1889 according to Sanborn fire insurance maps and the Walker atlas. It is depicted as a residence with a porch across the east facing façade.

Architecture

Architecture from the period that highlights the character of the village includes the St. James Catholic Church at **29 St. James Avenue**, built in 1929. Along with the parishioners, the priest, Edward Mitchell, took a prominent role not only in the fundraising but in the construction, hauling stone from Townsend in a wagon, overseeing construction, acquiring recycled building materials and personally laying up stone. The architect was William B. Colleary of Boston who drew the plans in 1924.

The **Groton Leatherboard mill**, incorporated in 1899, operated in a wood frame building until 1914. During this period, there were two stock houses and a dry house, also of wood, south of the mill which occupied the

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current site. A small brick building housed a coal-fired boiler at the east side of the complex and was opposite the rear ell of 16 West Main Street. Water power was also in use in 1906 according to Sanborn Fire Insurance maps. The blacksmith and carpenter shops were attached to the west side of the complex, closest to the Squannacook River. Space for rolling, beating, machining, bleaching, cutting and finishing were also on site. The company began reconstruction in brick after destruction of the complex by fire in 1914. The northernmost section has the date of 1915 on a carved stone in the façade. Additional stones bear the dates 1918, 1926, 1928, 1933 and 1936. Architects involved in the construction included I. W. Jones in 1915 and H. T. Kimball and his firm Cole and Kimball in 1926, 1928 and 1936. Operations continued until at least 1978, but in 1996, the buildings were acquired by the town. More complete documentation of the complex, which was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 2002, exists on **MHC B-forms #182-188**.

The collection of historic residential architecture remained largely as it was during the Late Industrial Period, consisting mostly of modest Victorian Eclectic style designs. By 1930 according to the Somes map of that year, residents of West Main Street included Mrs. Mary Sliney (this name may be spelled incorrectly), Flora Boutelle, Albert Burr, Lilla Shipley and the butcher Charles E. E. Blood, all of whom owned more than one house which suggests they rented property to tenants. Additionally, there were Henry Adams, a carpenter from Groton Center who owned two houses in the village. Clarence Thompson owned the house at 16 West Main Street, referred to on the map as the "Tarbell House" which suggests some level of awareness of the village's history. Pepperell Road residents included Mary and James Moran, a laborer at or near 13 Pepperell Road; Mrs. Allan Sedly, a summer resident from Dorchester at 18 Pepperell Road; Noble A. Nutt, the station agent at 25 Pepperell Road as well as the blacksmith, Lawrence Strand, James O'Sullivan and George Webber. Townsend Road residents or homeowners included Lawrence Strand at or near numbers 16 and 30; Noble A. Nutt at or near 28; Michael McGowan at or near numbers 40 and 42; Miss Maude Tatman at 48; Lilla Shipley at 56; Mrs. Mary O'Mealy at 60 and James Fallon at 66 Townsend Road. The overall sense of the village is a working class enclave with its local economy based on the mills and on property rentals, probably to mill employees.

Modern Period 1945-2000

Houses at 34 West Main Street, Hale Village at 56-58 West Main Street, 32 Pepperell Road, 40, 42 Pepperell Road, 52, 56 Pepperell Road, 32 St James Avenue were all built between 1950 and 1990. The West Groton Store was run by the Bissell Family in 1945 and employed a young WWII veteran named Win Sherwin, later the store's owner. After running his own establishment, called the Clover Farm Store, a short distance to the east on West Main Street, Mr. Sherwin and his brother Lonnie, also a WWII veteran bought the building at 9 West Main Street and moved their operation there where it remained until the present time. The "West Groton" sign above the "Clover Farm" is a remnant of the West Groton railroad station preserved by the Sherwins who worked as store clerks and owners for over 70 years. The store is scheduled to close this coming winter. The Fire Station at 46 West Main Street was built across the street from its former home, Squannacook Hall, in 1958. The Department of Public Safety Fire Safety Records list Robert M. May as the architect although Mr. May was actually the owner of the May and Hally fuel delivery service in Groton

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Center on Court Street and probably functioned as an untrained designer in this case. Also, the River Court residences occupies a historic mill complex but was significantly rebuilt during a certified rehabilitation project in the late 1990s. The West Groton Bridge was rebuilt in 1996 to replace the predecessor from 1915. The building north of the east abutment was used as a residence, later as a thrift store and is now vacant. Two houses on Townsend Road are currently undergoing extensive renovations and, while they appear to be historic, it is difficult to tell much about the original design. Events during the period included the closure of the West Groton branch of GPL in 1974.

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☒ Recommended as a National Register Historic District. *If checked, you must attach a completed National Register Criteria Statement Form.*

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National Register of Historic Places Criteria Statement Form

Check all that apply:

Individually eligible

Eligible only in a historic district

Contributing to a potential historic district

Potential historic district **X**

Criteria: **X** A B **X** C D

Criteria considerations: A B C D E F G

Statement of significance by: Sanford Johnson

The criteria that are checked in the above sections must be justified here.

The West Groton Area is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places as a district under criteria A and C. Its significance is at the local level. The buildings' historical associations with farmers, mill hands and industrialists in Groton, as well as educational, civic and religious activities further their significance and establish the area's eligibility under Criterion A. Four houses exist that were built during the 18th and early 19th century. Civic buildings include the 1887 Squannacook Hall, 1914 Tarbell School and the 1885 Christian Union Church. Industrial components that survive include the former Groton Leatherboard Mill, now in use as a retirement community and the former Sampson Mill, now the Carvers' Guild. The buildings, structures and landscape retain significant architectural elements of 18th, 19th and early 20th century design which contribute to the historical character of the area and make it eligible under Criterion C. Elements of the Colonial, Federal, Greek Revival, Victorian Eclectic and Colonial Revival styles are in evidence. The buildings and landscape retain integrity of design, materials, setting and workmanship.

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16 West Main Street



16 West Main Street

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94 West Main Street



6 West Main Street

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13 West Main Street



25, 29 West Main Street

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65 West Main Street



74 West Main Street

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8 West Main Street



8 West Main Street

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8 West Main Street



33 West Main Street

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35 West Main Street



West Main Street, Pepperell and Townsend Roads

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64, 68 West Main Street



91-111 West Main Street

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17 Pepperell Road



39 Pepperell Road

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73 Pepperell Road



18 Pepperell Road

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Sampson Mill, Cannery Row off Townsend Road



48, 56, 60 Townsend Road

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40, 30, 28 Townsend Road