

TOWNS OF BERKSHIRE COUNTY

by the Springfield Photographic Society

ADAMS

Photographer: John Grimaldi

Susan B. Anthony was born Feb. 15, 1820 in Adams, a town named in 1778 for Samuel Adams, a signer of the Declaration of Independence. Anthony was a leader in the anti-slavery, temperance, women's suffrage and women's rights movements and helped pave the way for the 19th Amendment to the Constitution which gave women the right to vote. Adams was settled by Quakers and Baptists from the Smithfield, R.I., area in the 1760s.

ALFORD

Photographer: Nick DeCondio

The Alford Village Church, finished in 1826, is well preserved to this day. The town of Alford was settled in 1750 as a farming community that was bought from the Stockbridge Indians in the Shawanon Purchase of 1756. Alford is named for Col. John Alford of Charlestown, known for sponsoring a theology professorship at Harvard College's Divinity School. The town has a rich industrial history of sawmills, grist mills and a tannery. Today it is a residential community for its 486 residents who enjoy its forested landscape, and abundant wildlife. Alford farms sell their products in local stores and farmer's markets.

BECKET

Photographer: Gwen McNierney

A Dallas Black Dance Theatre dancer, with the beautiful Berkshire Mountains as a backdrop, springs through the trees at Jacob's Pillow. The Pillow, a National Historic Landmark in Becket, was chosen as a landmark for its importance in America's culture and history and holds the honor of being the country's only landmark dance institution. The history of the Pillow, which lies on a mountain top, dates back to the early 1930s and today continues to showcase various dance genres.

CHESHIRE

Photographer: Bill Turney

A replica of Cheshire's mammoth cheese greets visitors to the town. In the election of 1800, Cheshire supported Thomas Jefferson for president, rather than native son John Adams. There was the only town in Berkshire County so aligned. When Jefferson won, the town's farmers decided to present Jefferson with a wheel of Cheshire Cheese from the milk of the town's cows. The 1,235-pound wheel was dragged by a team of six horses to a boat that sailed it to Washington, D.C.

CLARKSBURG

Photographer: Madeline Duval

Firefighters stand beside a pump truck at the Clarksburg Volunteer Fire Company. The group was formed in 1937 after a fire the previous December consumed the combination schoolhouse and Town Hall in the Briggsville section. The town was settled by Capt. Matthew Ketchum, Col. William Bullock and Nicholas Clark in 1769. Clarksburg began as a mostly agrarian community, with mills springing up along the waterways in the 19th century. Mills made cashmere and others supplied gunpowder during the Civil War. Bordering Vermont, the town now has a population of about 1,770.

DALTON

Photographer: Darlene Anderson

The Crane & Co. Old Stone Mill Rag Room was built in 1844 and is one of the oldest surviving buildings of the company's papermaking business. The building was originally used for processing rags and now houses the Crane Museum of Papermaking. The Crane family started making paper in 1801 and in 1878 acquired an exclusive government contract to manufacture the paper used in all U. S. currency, which they still hold to this day. The paper used for currency is a special blend of 75 percent cotton and 25 percent linen, hence the name the "Rag Room."

EGREMONT

Photographer: Karen Lemoine

Egremont farmers, like Turner Farms, sell their produce at roadside stands where the honor system prevails. The town, which borders New York, is comprised of two villages, North Egremont and South Egremont. The first Europeans, the Dutch, settled on land the Mohicans had lived on for generations. Eventually, English colonists settled as well and incorporated the town in 1761. While agriculture has been the most consistent industry, the many rivers and streams in the area led to saw and grist mills being built to serve the community. The Appalachian Trail cuts through Egremont via the Jug End Recreation and Wildlife Management Area.

FLORIDA

Photographer: Walt Lawrence

Construction of the Hoosac Tunnel began in 1851 and was finished in 1877. It lies beneath Hoosac Mountain with its east portal in Florida, MA. It emerges 4.75 miles to the west in North Adams. The tunnel has a storied history and is the subject of several books. The tunnel is nicknamed the Bloody Pit owing to the 195 men who died during its construction. And it is rumored to be haunted.

GREAT BARRINGTON

Photographer: Tom Stratton

The Mahawie performing Arts Center was built in 1904 by a coalition of businessmen led by John H.C. Church. The name Mahawie (Muy-HAY-We) means the place downstream from the Housatonic River. It is derived from the Berkshires Mahican settlers. It opened in 1905 with a capacity of 1,000, first playing vaudeville acts then silent movies in 1914, followed by the talkies in 1929. The theater was renovated in 1930, downsizing capacity to 750. Threatened with demolition in the late 1980s, it was saved by the Great Barrington Downtown Historic District in the early 1990s. The theater has run programs continuously since its opening more than 115 years ago.

HANCOCK

Photographer: Joyce Doty

The Society of Believers, known as the Shakers, made their home in Hancock from 1790 to 1959. The Shakers were known for excellence in manufacturing, gardening and farming. They made beautiful furniture, managed medicinal, vegetable and flower gardens, and tended to livestock. They used sustainable gardening and agricultural practices. Their round stone barn is renowned for its architectural design. Hancock Shaker Village became a living history museum in 1960 and was designated a National Historic Landmark in 1968. The town, founded in 1776, now has a population of more than 700 residents.

HINSDALE

Photographer: Daniel Meder

The Mickey Mouse Bridge is a well-known and beloved landmark to the 1,919 residents of Hinsdale. The original artwork was created by 14-year-old Dick Burke in 1949. Artist Allen Freshler designed the painted trolley car, dedicated to those who survived a 1910 trolley accident. The trolley travelled the rail overpass, transporting workers from Pittsfield and Hinsdale to the Dalton Woolen Mills. The bridge is a popular spot for local children and serves as a backdrop for special-occasion photos.

LANESBOROUGH

Photographer: Dee Nacewicz

Lanesborough's Veterans War Memorial Tower stands atop Mount Greylock, tallest peak in Massachusetts, and can be seen at night for 70 miles. Among the first towns to be settled in Berkshire County, Lanesborough, first a farming community, became a prosperous mining and industrial center. Iron was discovered and marble became a major resource in the 1840s. The town shares Pontoosuc Lake, a popular recreation area, with Pittsfield. Berkshire Mall is a major employer in the town of about 3,000 residents.

LEE

Photographer: Tim Donelan

Lee is known as the Gateway to the Berkshires because it provides one of only two exits on the Massachusetts Turnpike that serve the county. The most famous breakfast place in Lee is Joe's Diner. At the top of Main Street the diner sits so close to the tracks you could touch passing trains from the back window. Joe's Diner has been in the same location for 67 years. Customers far and wide know the diner as the backdrop for Norman Rockwell's iconic 1958 Saturday Evening Post cover "The Runaway." The painting of a policeman and a runaway boy sitting at the counter of Joe's Diner is one of Rockwell's most popular paintings. A copy hangs in Joe's Diner.

LENOX

Photographer – Kevin Fay

Lenox is one of the most well-known towns in the Berkshires, with every season attracting thousands of visitors for its scenery, arts and activities. Here you will find Ventfort Hall Mansion and Gilded Age Museum, Shakespeare & Company, The Mount (Edith Wharton's Estate) and world famous Tanglewood, summer home of the Boston Symphony Orchestra. Tanglewood is an outdoor concert venue, with thousands of visitors listening to the music while enjoying picnics on the huge lawn during July and August. Tanglewood annually draws over 350,000 visitors who come to hear a vast range of musical forms and styles.

MONTEREY

Photographer: Karen Geaghan

The Bidwell House Museum, set in the Berkshire hills, is an elegant Georgian saltbox built circa 1760 as a parsonage. Authentically restored, filled with period furnishings, and surrounded by 192 acres of beautiful grounds and hiking trails, the museum tells the story of the early settlement of the county. The history of the town is also that of Tyringham, since Monterey (or South Tyringham) was not incorporated as a separate town until 1847. The first permanent settlers were Lt. Isaac Garfield, Thomas Slaton and Capt. John Brewer who arrived in 1739.

MT. WASHINGTON

Photographer: Kevin Fay

Blueberry Hill Farm is an organic farm on heavily forested East Street, the main road through Mount Washington. The blueberry bushes were planted in 1941 by Robert W. Austin, who determined that the only viable crop that would grow in the highly acidic soil was blueberries, and they have thrived since that time. Dottie Bonbrake (seen here) has worked for the Austin family who grow three varieties of high bush blueberries that you can pick yourself beginning in late July. Mount Washington, a hill town in the very southwest corner of Massachusetts, is known for Bash Bish Falls, the tallest waterfall in the Bay State. It also has the smallest population of any town in the Berkshires.

NEW ASHFORD

Photographer: Megan Weiss

The 1792 schoolhouse, which has served the town of New Ashford as a school, town hall and library since it was built, is a source of community pride. In 1920, New Ashford resident Phoebe Jordan made history by being the first woman in the nation to vote in a presidential election, after ratification of the 19th Amendment, in the little one-room schoolhouse. It has been lovingly restored and maintained by town volunteers.

NEW MARLBOROUGH

Photographer: Larry Sanchez

The 1,000 Acre Swamp is part of the New Marlborough Land Trust. The Berkshire town has many great outdoor spaces, including town and state parks, properties managed by the trust and the Trustees of the Reservation and the Berkshire Natural Resources Council. The 1,000 Acre Swamp has many hiking trails and picnic tables as well as a beautiful lake which is great for fishing.

NORTH ADAMS

Photographer: Kathy Lawrence

For most of the 20th century, North Adams, also known as the Steeple City, had five Catholic churches, a Jewish temple, a Methodist church, a Universalist church and an Episcopalian church. Church was a very important part of people's lives then. By the 1960s, the role of churches began to change. Today, only one Catholic church remains open in town and many of the Protestant congregations have shrunk or closed as well.

OTIS

Photographer: Judy Bolio

The Otis property owners' association, supported by volunteers, puts on a wonderful annual display of fireworks with 2022 marking the 20th year. Boat owners anchor in the middle of the lake to watch the fireworks. The fireworks are set off from Tolland Forest Beach on the Saturday after the 4th of July. The town was established in 1810, having been created from two towns, Bethlehem and Loudon. Travelers settled here for the town's location along the Old Knox Trail. It is known now for outdoor recreation, forests, open fields, streams and ponds and lakes. Familiar sites include Otis Poultry Farm, Otis Ridge Ski Area, Halls store and multiple campgrounds.

PERU

Photographer: Marie Meder

2021 marked the 250th anniversary of Peru, formerly known as Partridgefield. The medallion depicts three symbols: a Minuteman – founders of the town, the Garnet Mountain Monument commemorating 15 World War II soldiers who were killed in a plane crash, and the 400-foot communication tower. The medallion is held by Ed Munch, selectman and Historical Commission member, who created the concept for the design. With a population of 842, Peru is 85 percent forested land, with, at 2,064 feet, the highest altitude in Massachusetts.

PITTSFIELD

Photographer: Rosemary Polletta

A window display in a downtown bank alludes to Pittsfield's place in the history of baseball. The city, the county seat and largest community in the Berkshires, is the first place in the U.S. where the sport is mentioned in a legal document. A 1791 ordinance banned the playing of the game near Bulfinch Church on Park Square. The city produced an array of baseball players who excelled in the major and minor leagues. The city drew its name in 1761 from British Prime Minister William Pitt who championed the colonists' cause prior to the Revolution. Known in the early 1800s as a major wool producer, Pittsfield became home to General Electric Co.

RICHMOND

PHOTOGRAPHER: Marty Espinola

A great blue heron flies from the heron rookery at the rear of the pond in the Audubon Society's Tracy Brook Wildlife Sanctuary in Richmond. The town, now with 1,600 residents, was settled in 1759 and became known for its iron works and farming. The land encompassing present day Richmond and Lenox was purchased from two Indian Sachems. Two villages were created and eventually became one named Richmond. A mountain separating the villages presented communication difficulties and in 1767 the eastern portion became Lenox. In 1785, Richmond's name was changed to Richmond, and in 1787 Lenox and Richmond were established as separate towns.

SANDISFIELD

Photographer: Jim Gillen

There are two sides to Bob Tarasuk. A Sandisfield farmer and logger, he is also an actor. Tarasuk owns and operates Snow Farm in a town founded in 1750 and now home to 900 residents. He and his family grow vegetables and raise chickens, cows, sheep, and pigs. The 67-year-old has appeared in two films, "Bob and the Trees" and "Down with the King." Both were filmed on Snow Farm and at other Berkshire County locations.

SAVOY

Photographer: Eileen Doherty

The Tower family cemetery, located deep in the woods of the Berkshire town of Savoy, contains remnants of several graves from the mid-19th century. They mark the resting places of Orrin and Florinda Tower and their eight children, most of whom died young. There are 21 cemeteries in this town of 36 square miles, many of them telling the story of a family from the town's history. Founded in 1797, the town sits at an elevation of 1,720 feet and has about 680 residents. It was originally part of Northern Berkshire Township #6, which included Adams, North Adams, Cheshire and Lanesborough.

SHEFFIELD

Photographer: Eileen Donelan

A quarried marble marker on Egremont Road in Sheffield marks the site of the last battle of Shays' rebellion. The rebellion was a series of violent protests staged during 1786 and 1787 by a group of American farmers who objected to the way state and local tax collections were being enforced. While skirmishes broke out from New Hampshire to South Carolina, the most serious acts of rebellion occurred in Massachusetts, where years of poor harvests, depressed commodity prices and high taxes had left farmers facing the loss of their farms or even imprisonment. The rebellion is named for its leader, Revolutionary War veteran, Daniel Shays of Massachusetts.

STOCKBRIDGE

Photographer: Kevin Fay

Stockbridge is one of the best-known towns in the Berkshires, and Norman Rockwell is its most famous citizen. He lived here from 1953 until his death in 1978 at the age of 84. His depiction of Main Street at Christmas could be his most famous painting. That and many more of his works can be seen at the Norman Rockwell Museum in town. Here we have a photo of one of the real-life recreations of his painting.

TYRINGHAM

Photographer: Richard Harper

The Santarella Estate, aka the Gingerbread House, in Tyringham was the creation circa 1920 of Sir Henry Hudson Kitson, an English-born sculptor known for his detailed depictions of American military heroes. Kitson spent the last 25 years of his life transforming an old barn into an exquisite, surreal, storybook cottage. The quaint magical setting also contains a small cluster of other fairytale buildings nestled in a lush garden bursting with flora and fauna, brooks and ponds. Now, the site is owned by Joshua Williams and Shaun Mosley who live in the cottage. They list the farmhouse and two silos on the property on Airbnb.

WASHINGTON

Photographer: Larry Sanchez

Almost half of Washington is home to the October Mountain State Forest. The Appalachian Trail is a great way to explore the southern regions of the state forest. Generally, on flat or gentle grades, the trail passes a series of remote beaver ponds ranging from ones with an active beaver population to those long-abandoned and slowly returning to the forest. These ponds attract and sustain a wide variety of wildlife, from moose and bears to ducks and tadpoles.

WEST STOCKBRIDGE

Photographer: Darlene Anderson

West Stockbridge has been the home of Charles H. Baldwin & Sons since 1888. Five generations of the Baldwin family have been producing pure vanilla extract in town since then and still produces it onsite in their Center Street store where it has been located since 1912. The extract is made in the original copper percolator, aged in 100-year-old barrels and shipped around the world. The Baldwins also produce many other extracts and flavorings, and the store carries a variety of retro items, baking goods, toys and more.

WILLIAMSTOWN

Photographer: Denis Duquette

The will of Col. Ephraim Williams, an officer in the Massachusetts militia who was killed in the French and Indian War in 1755, included a bequest to support and establish a free school in West Hoosic, provided the town change its name to Williamstown. In 1793, Williams College was named after him and established as the second oldest college in the state, behind Harvard. Ranked nationally since 2004 as the top liberal arts college, Williams makes up the core of the town. Incorporated in 1765, the town is also home to Clark Institute and Williamstown Theater Festival.

WINDSOR

Photographer: John Grimaldi

Remnants of a swimming hole are evident on the east branch of the Westfield River running through Windsor Park State Forest. The dam that created the swimming hole was dismantled 11 years ago when the state closed the park and all that's left are the stone pillars. The state plans to reopen the site. Founded on July 4, 1771, the town was called Gageborough in honor of British General Thomas Gage, but the name was changed due to the general's Revolutionary War affiliation. Windsor's more than 800 residents enjoy kayaking, hiking, hunting and winter sports. The town, with scenic vistas and pristine wilderness, has a history of milling, logging, and farming.