

NORTH AMHERST'S ECONOMIC HISTORY

This document was prepared by W. D. Cowls, Inc., with the help of Historian James Avery Smith, as part of Cowls' redevelopment of its sawmill site and associated properties in North Amherst.



Corner of North Pleasant and Meadow Streets, (undated post card)

Today, only four commercial enterprises, the Fisher Home Hospice; House of Teriyaki Restaurant; Kendrick Property Management; and the Black Walnut Inn remain at the intersection. No non-residential enterprises are south of the Fisher Home in North Amherst.



Post Office and Trolley Line on North Pleasant Street, (undated post card)



19th century paper mill on the Mill River in North Amherst

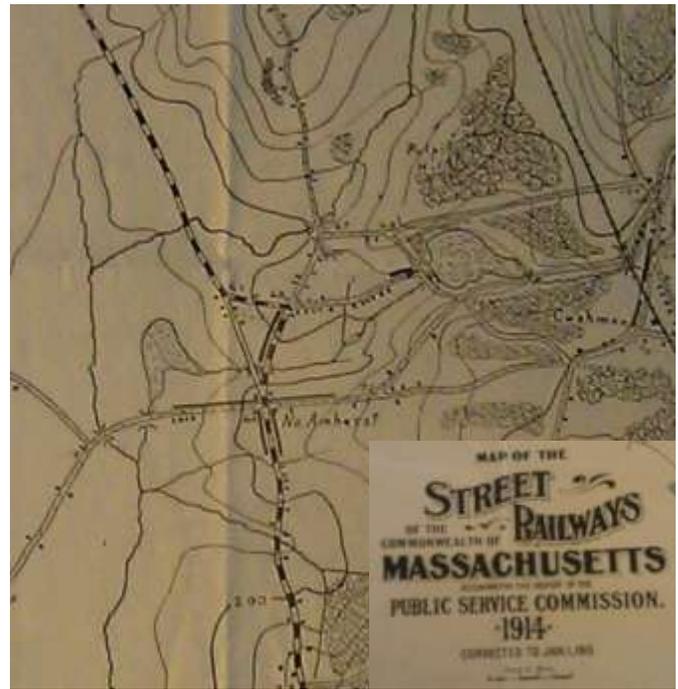
Early North Amherst populations and businesses were primarily north of and adjacent to the Mill River, along what are now Sunderland Road, Montague Road, Summer Street, and Factory Hollow. This part of Amherst has been referred to as the Dirty Hands District by long time locals.

On the Cowls Home Farm, onions were boxed, bagged, processed and shipped from industrial packaging barns north of Cowls Road. Lumber was manufactured and sold on Cowls Road's south side. For 300 years Cowls Road acres served as log and lumber concentration and sales yards.

One major contributor to the 19th century boon of industry between Sunderland and Montague Roads, that solidified the Commercial Triangle, was the North Amherst Branch of the Amherst-Sunderland Street Railway.

The Amherst-Sunderland Street Railway was incorporated in 1896 and Walter D. Cowls, who lived at 134 Montague Road, was the force behind its creation. W. D. Cowls' lumber was the trolley ties and the rocks from his rock crusher at the Notch were the track bedding.

One hundred years after W.D. Cowls' glassed-in front porch was built as a community trolley stop, the PVRTA bus system recognized the continuing public transportation need and put a bus stop in the same location in front of 134 Montague Road.



Early map indicating trolley line route and development along Montague Road north of the Mill River

The first tracks of Amherst's street railway system ran from downtown Amherst to Cowls Road in North Amherst. As it traveled north from downtown it stopped at "Mass Aggie" where a brick and stone trolley stop remains today. In North Amherst the trolley went past the church and library, past Riverside Park (which then was really a park!) up Route 63, took the corner west at 134 Montague Road, and stopped at the depot on the north side of Cowls Road where the trolleys were kept in Cowls barns at night. The trolley system's powerhouse was also located north of Cowls road.



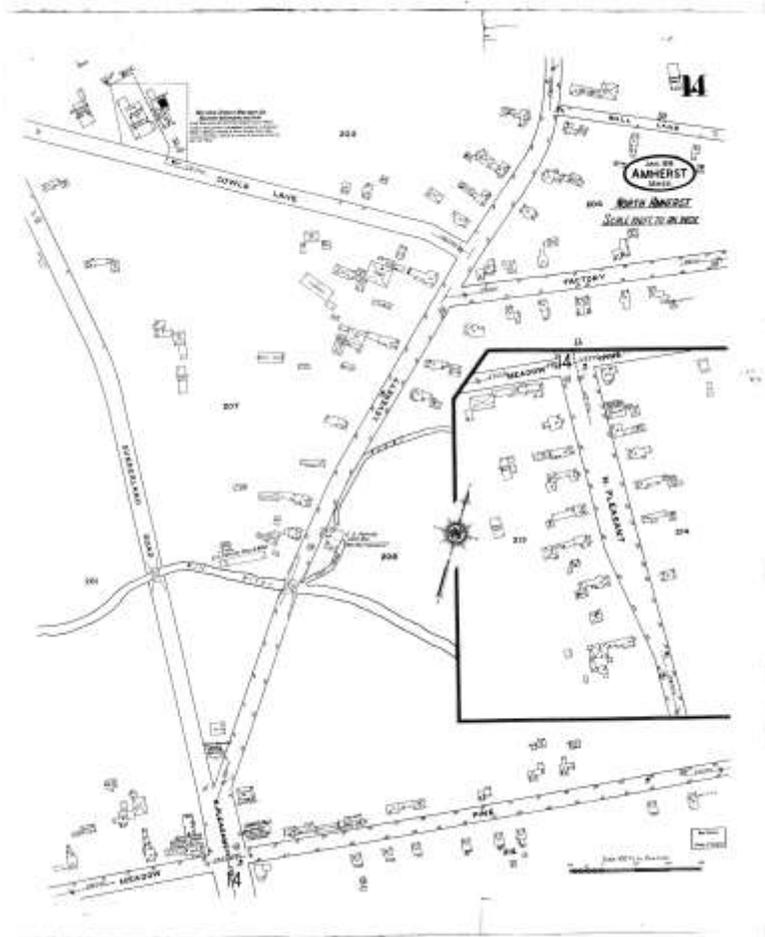
116 and 134 Montague Road with trolley tracks and wires

This public transportation system was very popular and expanded North Amherst's reputation as a business and social center, and as a destination. In 1897, in its first year of operation, trolley conductors collected 2377 fares on Independence Day alone.

Beyond a hub of transportation for people, the Cowls Road trolley depot in North Amherst Village Center was a significant freight loading area for

lumber, coal, onions, traprock, and other merchandise. Every morning farmers would meet the trolleys at the Cows Road barns to have their milk delivered to the community. Because of the connection of the street railway to the B&M Railway line, and later when the street railway line was extended north to Sunderland and South to Holyoke, local agricultural and industrial products were transported from Cows Road to points farther away.

The Amherst division of the Holyoke Street Railway Company (post 1907 sold and re-named) ran cars from Sunderland and Pelham to Amherst every hour, but from North Amherst to Holyoke twice every hour.



1916 Sanborn Insurance Map

Triangle, historic Amherst Zoning maps recognized the northern part of North Amherst Village as its commercial center and encouraged residential density around it. In the 1940s-60s, besides lumber manufacturing and sales, the Cowls site held a significant dairy industry with milk processed, packaged and shipped in pint to ten gallon containers. In the mid-1900s the west side of Montague Road was a significant industrial center of town with Puffer and Cows/Jones road construction and real estate development businesses based there.

Riverside Park in North Amherst Village Center was a popular destination created by the Holyoke Railway Company to attract weekend trolley customers. This site remains a highly popular destination since Amherst's largest recreational center and pool complex is located directly north of there today.

According to a presentation made by historian Estelle Rule to the Pelham Historical Society on May 14, 1991, Cows' original trolley car barns "were blown down in a heavy wind. The next barns were built on South Pleasant Street." They are now used by Amherst DPW.

The North Amherst Trolley line was discontinued in 1928 due to the popularity of cars and trucks.

After the era when trolley tracks outlined North Amherst's Commercial

James Avery Smith, former Town of Amherst Engineer and well known historian, researched the economic history of North Amherst, which was largely north of the Mill River. Mr. Smith found 15 businesses were operating in the area between 1900 and 1925 and the number grew to 30 by the mid-20th century. Although the types of businesses changed periodically, that number held solid through the turn of the 21st century with 26 remaining today. These businesses include:

- Street Railway offices, depot and barns
- Power Station
- Lumber mill/planing mill/offices
- Agricultural production, processing packaging and large scale shipping operations
- Brown's Westville Mill, Broom factory
- Puffer Grist Mill, then Grist Mill Gift Shop (separate ownership, same location)
- Dickinson General Store
- E S Puffer Coal and Ice Wood Company
- S P Puffer Construction Corp
- Dairy / Milk Processing / Distributing
- Holden Lumber Company
- Ashley Garage
- Hobart Dairy
- Wood's Paint and Paper Antiques
- Slack Land Surveying
- Haskins Carpenter Shop
- North Amherst Post Office
- Matusezco Trucking
- Riverside Park Apartments (48 units) and Shops (8) and
- US Post office – with an independent zip code for North Amherst
- Auction house
- Roosters restaurant
- Stan's Sport Shack
- Peter Pan Bus Company Garage
- Ainsworth Dodge
- Cows Building Supply
- Pro Sensing Engineering
- Ernie's Towing
- North Amherst Motors
- Potter's Auto Rental
- Amherst Machine Shop
- Westcott Packers/Movers
- Cows Building Supply
- Staab Ford Auto Sales
- Auto repair
- Gas station
- Paint Shop
- Electrical Appliance Shop
- Mike's Westview Café/ The Harp Irish Pub
- Vincent's Liquor Store

- Swartz Farm, Market, Processing and Shipping
- Survival Center
- Watrobas grocery and liquors
- Big Guys Liquors
- Cumberland Farms
- Captain Video/Candy
- Pizza Shops
- Laundry
- North Amherst Farmer's Market
- Head Start
- Blacksmith Shop
- Amherst Lockworks
- Bank Branch and two separate ATMs
- E & J Transportation
- Aristocrat Hairdressers
- Barber Shop
- Crossman's watch and clock repair
- Artist studios
- Daisy's Restaurant
- Bates General Store

North Amherst has/had the following public/municipal buildings/uses:

- North Amherst Church and parish hall
- North Amherst Library
- North Amherst School/teen center
- North Amherst Fire Station (now a private home)
- Little League Park
- Mill River Pool, ball fields, and Recreation Area
- Cherry Hill Golf Course



Historic North Amherst Public Library (undated photo)