

FITCHBURG
MASSACHUSETTS

Fitchburg is identified by its hilly terrain and the North Nashua River flowing generally west to east through the city. Before European settlement, it was traveled by, and a hunting ground of, the Nashaway Branch of the Nipmuc Tribe and others.

Around 1735, the first non-indigenous resident, David Page of Groton, built a garrison near the west end of what is now Pearl Street. Later other early settlers sought to incorporate this western part of Lunenburg as a separate township. Around 1745 Amos and Ephraim Kimball constructed a dam to power a gristmill and sawmill. Over this early period other mills were established. In 1764 the new town of Fitchburg was formed.

By 1845 the railroad reached Fitchburg from Boston and ushered in three-quarters of a century of industrial expansion, rapid growth, prosperity, and fame for Fitchburg, and Fitchburg became a city in 1872. Factories were next to the river and railroad and residential neighborhoods grew on or near the slopes of the hills near the river.

Growing industries and different decades of time have attracted many residents with different ethnic backgrounds. Today, Fitchburg's rich cultural, institutional, business, and industrial heritage lives on in its people, built environment, rich architecture, and many monuments.

Sources: William A. Emerson "Fitchburg, Massachusetts, Past and Present" Doris Kirkpatrick "The City and The River"

WHAT
HISTORIC AREAS
REPRESENT

These Historic Districts highlight six downtown areas and their contributions to Fitchburg's heritage. Four are recognized as National Register of Historic Places, and two, The Upper Common and the Academy Street Educational districts are currently pending NR recognition.

The National Register of Historic Places is the official list of the Nation's historic places worthy of preservation. Authorized by the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, the National Park Service's National Register of Historic Places is part of a national program to coordinate and support public and private efforts to identify, evaluate, and protect America's historic and archeological resources: www.nps.gov/subjects/nationalregister/

The Monument Park area also includes a larger dashedline boundary that Fitchburg has established as a Local Historic District. This special designation helps preserve and protect the distinctive characteristics of buildings and places in this special area.

This brochure was designed and created by the Fitchburg Historical Commission with help from the Crocker Center for Civic Engagement at Fitchburg State University. The Historical Commission, an appointed body of the City of Fitchburg, is charged with "the preservation, promotion and development of the city's historical assets."

Additional resources on Fitchburg's heritage can be found at the following:

- MACRIS MAPS**
<https://maps.mhc-macris.net>
- FITCHBURG HISTORICAL SOCIETY**
www.fitchburghistoricalsociety.com
- FITCHBURG PUBLIC LIBRARY**
www.fitchburgpubliclibrary.org
- FITCHBURG HISTORICAL COMMISSION**
www.ci.fitchburg.ma.us/327/Historical-Commission

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FITCHBURG

DOWNTOWN
HISTORIC
AREAS

HISTORIC AREAS MAP



DOWNTOWN ARCHITECTURE OF H. M. FRANCIS

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|---|---|---------------------------------------|--|
| 1. SCHOOL STREET SCHOOL 1869 | 6. FITCHBURG ART MUSEUM 1885 | 12. ACADEMY ST. SCHOOL 1869 | 19. BELDING & DICKINSON BUILDING 1866 |
| 2. ADD'N UNITARIAN CHURCH 1888 | 7. ELM ST. CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH 1903 | 13. WALLACE WAY STAIRS 1902 | 20. COGGSHALL & CARPENTER BLOCK 1877 |
| 3. GERMAN CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH 1892 | 8. PHOENIX BUILDING 1893 | 14. FITCHBURG HISTORICAL SOCIETY 1911 | 21. FIRST UNIVERSALIST CHURCH, 1886 |
| 4. SWEDISH CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH 1893 | 9. PROCTOR BLOCK RENOVATION C. 1880 | 15. ADD'N FITCHBURG ARMORY 1914 | 22. ROLLSTONE CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH 1868 |
| 5. CALVINISTIC CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH 1897 | 10. TORREY & WOOD BLOCK RENOVATION 1911 | 16. YMCA 1894 | |
| | 11. ADD'N CITY HALL 1879 | 17. CUTLER BLOCK 1896 | |
| | | 18. SAFETY FUND NATIONAL BANK 1894 | |

MONUMENT PARK

This area, designated both a National Register Historic District and a Local Historic District, each with slightly different boundaries, centers on Monument Park built in 1874 to commemorate Fitchburg’s 142 Civil War dead. On Main Street and to the west of the park once stood the c.1844 Trinitarian Church, the scene of meetings and protests against slavery. A late 19th-century major renovation of the site created a grand commercial building that was again replaced by the current 20th-century office building. The 1891 Armory at 14 Wallace Ave, now the Senior Center, was designed by Robert P. Wait and Olin W. Cutter and has a later 1914 drill hall addition designed by local architect H. M. Francis and Sons. The northern end of the park includes the 1871 High Victorian Gothic original Worcester County Superior Court designed by E. Boyden and Son, the 1904 current Fitchburg District Court (old Post Office), and the 1912 (old) Fitchburg Historical Society building at 50 Grove Street. Christ Church at 569 Main Street, built in 1868, was designed by New York architect Richard Upjohn. The 1894 old Y.M.C.A. building at 533 Main St., whose elaborate upper stories were removed after a fire, was designed by H. M. Francis. Buildings south of Main Street include Fitchburg’s Youth and Main Library designed by Carl Koch in 1950 and 1964 respectively, the 1883 High Victorian Fay Club, designed by Richard M. Upjohn, and the “Lucy’s Barn” carriage house to its rear.



H.M. FRANCIS

Henry Martyn Francis (1836–1908) opened his architectural firm on Fitchburg’s Main Street in 1868, renaming his company H.M. Francis and Sons in 1902 when his two sons, Frederick L. and Albert F., joined the firm. Their work left an architectural legacy in Fitchburg and New England that included over 30 school buildings, 25 churches, 15 libraries, numerous public and commercial buildings, and hundreds of residences, all in a variety of architectural styles. This “overlay” district represents many of the firm’s still-standing work in Fitchburg’s downtown area and stretches from the School Street School at its western end to the Rollstone Church on Main Street in the east. The district includes two school buildings, six institutional buildings, seven commercial buildings, and seven churches. Of his churches, the tall-spired Rollstone Church at 199 Main Street was one of his earliest works (1868), and the 1897 Calvinist Congregational Church (Casa de Gracia y Restauración) at 820 Main represents a grand brownstone rendition in the Romanesque Revival style. Of Francis’s many commercial buildings along Main Street, seven still stand. These include the Belding and Dickinson Building (1866), Coggs Hall and Carpenter Block (1877), Safety Fund National Bank Building (1894), Cutler Block (1896), Torrey-Wood Building (renovation 1911), Proctor Block (remodel, ca. 1880), and the Phoenix Building (1893). All of these buildings are statements of architectural beauty and style and are a major contribution to Fitchburg’s architectural heritage.



CROCKER FIELD

Dedicated on June 21, 1918, Crocker Field was a gift of Alvah Crocker II, grandson of Alvah Crocker, the founder of the first Fitchburg paper company. Crocker purchased a four-acre parcel of land along the bend of the Nashua River at the junction of Main, River, and Circle Streets known as the Circle Street baseball field. He hired the Olmstead Brothers of Brookline, sons of noted landscape architect Frederick Law Olmstead, to produce a plan incorporating a baseball diamond, football field, tennis courts, and a running track. The final design included a grand fieldhouse, covered and open stadiums seating about 2,800 spectators, and iron fencing with an entry gatehouse-ticket booth, all influenced by the Classical Revival style. The site of the existing tennis court is original. Another tennis court, which once stood northwest of the uncovered stadium no longer exists. Locations of the track and playing fields have been changed from their original positions. These and other changes over time were made possible by the enlargement of the site with the acquisition of an additional piece of property at the corner of Broad and River Streets in the 1920s. To support the complex, Crocker deposited \$38,000 in bonds whose interest was to be used for continued upkeep. Crocker Field remains both a strong educational and visual asset to the City and a tribute to a family that gave back to its community.



UPPER COMMON



The district, centered on Fitchburg’s Upper Common and along Main Street, is bounded by Newton Place to the east and School Street to the west. Fitchburg’s second meeting house, constructed in 1796, once occupied the common. In 1836, it was moved to its present location at the west corner of Main and Circle Streets, and in 1837 the brick First Parish Unitarian Universalist Church was built just off and to the top of the common in the Greek Revival style. The church then deeded the common to the town completing the physical separation of church and state. The district’s eastern end includes the 1967 unique Modern style Wallace Library, the High Victorian Gothic Fay Club and Carriage House, the Classical Revival Fitchburg Gas and Electric Light building, the Greek Revival 1852 City Hall, and the 1927 Fitchburg Theater Block. Farther west on the north side are the c1845/1911 Torrey-Wood Building, the 1832/c1880 Proctor Block, the 1893 5-story Phoenix Building (Fitchburg Historical Society), and the 1842/1853 Heywood-Comee Block and the Crocker, Burbank and Co. buildings. Opposite and on the south side are the 1897 Romanesque Revival Calvinistic Congregational Church (Casa de Gracia y Restauración), the 1847 Joslin House (Boulder Café), the relocated Old Town House (DeBonis & Davin Florists), the elegant 1840s brick townhouses at 910–924 Main and the Battles House with Boulder Gallery next door at 956–960 Main. The upper north side of the common includes the 1974 Philbin Federal Building that replaced several earlier residences including the elegant 1860s Lowe House and the Lucy Helen Hospital next door. Among others, the district is completed by the 1896 Swedish Emanuel Lutheran Church to the left and rear of the First Parish Church and the c.1890 H. M. Francis designed School Street School.

ACADEMY STREET

This district features three of Fitchburg’s historic school buildings and that is centered on the 1869 Second Empire-styled Academy Street School at the corner of High and Academy Streets. This mansard-roofed school is one of the early designs of Fitchburg architect, H. M. Francis. For many years, it served as the high school and later the “Annex” to an adjacent and newer 1894 high school building to the east, also designed by H. M. Francis. This newer high school was destroyed by fire in 1934 and was replaced in 1936 by the current 4-storied Coolidge Shepley Bulfinch designed building now named the Longsjo Middle School. Visually and physically connecting the main southern entry of this school to downtown and Main Street is Wallace Way, an open monumental granite stair connecting Academy Street to Prichard Street. This ascending promenade, designed in 1902 by H. M. Francis, was a gift to the city by local industrialist Rodney Wallace and represents an example of the turn-of-the-century City Beautiful Movement. To the west on Academy Street is the stone porticoed Classical Revival-style 1922 former B. F. Brown School and playgrounds. To the north side of this school is the impressive ca. 1885 Victorian Eclectic two-storied brick Fitchburg City Stable building and to its east the massive and continuous dry-laid, locally quarried stone retaining wall that supports High Street.



MORAN SQUARE



Moran Square is at the east end of Main Street at its intersection with Summer and Lunenburg Streets. The Moran Square National Register Historic District, immediately north of the North Nashua River and Fitchburg’s important railroad corridor, reflects a period of significant industrial development from the mid-19th century into the mid-20th century. It includes the development and expansion of the Simonds Saw and Steel Company (the only building remaining, Simonds Hall), the Sawyer Ordnance/Fitchburg Machine Company (Fitchburg Plumbing), C. H. Brown and Company Steam Engine Manufacturing (Willow Street Apartments), Romanesque Revival C. H. Brown Company Pattern Shop at 21 Myrtle Avenue, the Brown Bag Filling Machine Co. (Harper Furniture/Syndicate Block commercial and apartments) and other firms whose brick factories survive at this end of Main Street. This neighborhood also developed an important commercial and residential focus that includes the well-preserved 1939 Worcester lunch car, Moran Square Diner, at the intersection, the stylish H. M. Francis and Sons designed bay windowed and granite Moran Block (1908), and across Summer Street, the 1893 Summer Street Fire Station. Farther along Summer Street on the south side are the two impressive c.1870 Second Empire-styled double houses of inventor/industrialist Sylvanus Sawyer. Moran Square is finally distinguished by a small triangular island in its center that features the City’s 1924 Spanish-American War monument by Boston sculptor Theo Alice Ruggles Kitson.