

Welcome to Chester Depot and Historic Stone Village

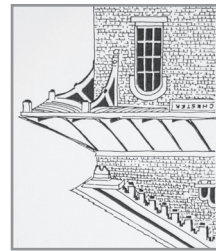
When the stone houses were being built along North Street in the 1830s and 1840s, there were two parishes in Chester—North and South Chester. Both village sections were about equal in size and importance. Travelers from Boston to Montreal followed the Green Mountain Turnpike through a covered bridge into North Chester and along its double row of maples and elms. A route from Boston to Albany and Saratoga Springs went along today's Main Street.

The railroad's arrival in 1849 replaced stagecoach travel and shifted Chester's economic balance toward South Chester. Tracks were laid about halfway between the two rival villages, and a third section of town, Chester Depot, began to develop. A town hall and fire house confirmed the Depot's central location, and businesses and factories soon followed. Mills and factories changed or disappeared; the talc mill, the Depot's major industry, burned in 1955. The feed-and-grain store and grocery store near the railroad station are survivors from this era.

North Chester's first stone house was constructed in 1834 and the last, in 1845. The vernacular architecture of this little cluster of buildings built by villagers for its working people captured the public's imagination in the 20th century. Some say the name "Stone Village" was created by the owner of an antiques shop in one of the houses.

Research for this brochure included town records and archived newspapers with help from present stone-house owners. Many of these reports and records are compiled in Chester Historical Society's 2011 book, *The History of Chester*. Local history is a blend of fact and hearsay, which makes fascinating reading, and stories change with new information.

1. Depot Railroad Station

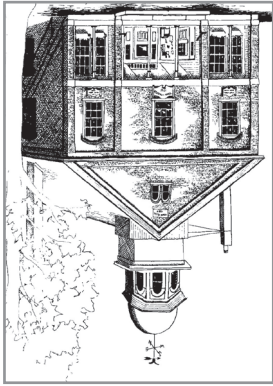


Built 1871
563 Depot Street

The arrival of the first public train on the Rutland & Burlington Railroad on July 18, 1849, opened the Depot to increased business and importance. The rail line linked the Connecticut River valley at Bellows Falls and Lake Champlain at Burlington.

The original small wood-frame station, built in 1849 as a rest stop for passengers, was located beside today's Smitty's Market. It was replaced in 1851 by a larger wood-frame building on the present location. After that structure burned in 1871, the Central Vermont Railroad built the present station—cherry-red brick with green trim and fine Italianate details. In addition, it has a mechanical semaphore signal. The State purchased the line in 1963 and leased it in part to the Green Mountain Railroad. Today there are daily freight runs as well as occasional scenic train rides.

2. Chester Town Hall



Built 1884
556 Elm Street and Depot Street

This imposing, 2-1/2-story red brick building signifies its purpose: to link Chester's North and South Village with space for meetings and official town business. It features a tall wood cupola and a central recessed entrance flanked by two classical steel columns and triple-hung windows. At one time, the Chester Depot post office and a restaurant occupied either side of the entry. More recent occupants were the Police Department and, in the basement, the Town Jail.

A fire alarm that shook the building was on the roof. The large second floor was once used for roller skating, movies, and winter carnivals. It was renovated in 2019 to provide space for Town Meetings and public and private functions.

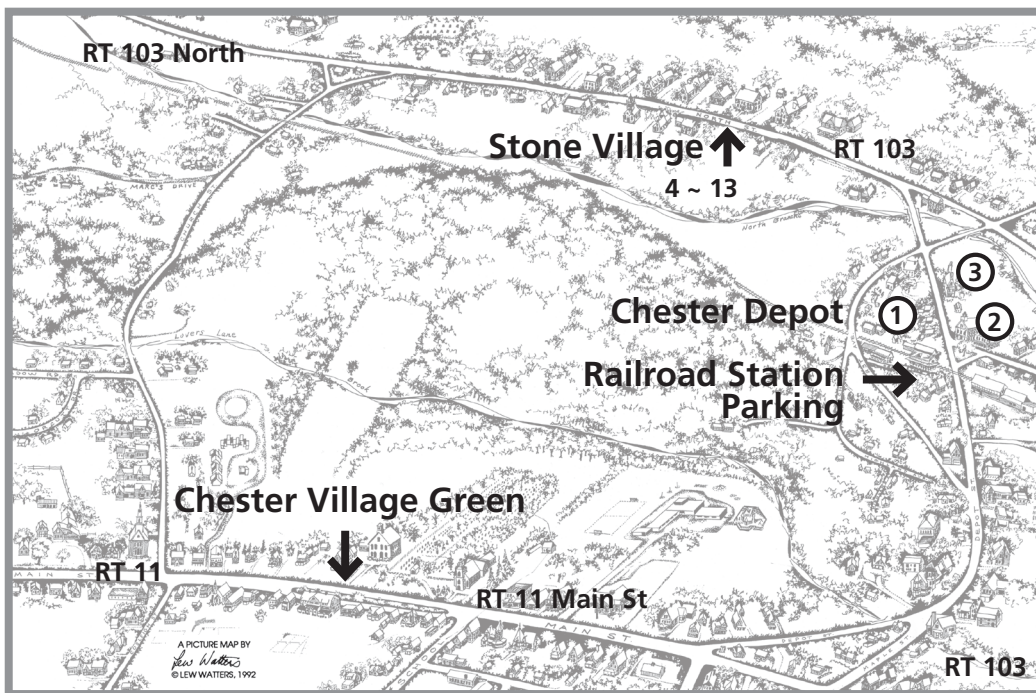
3. Yosemite Engine House



Built 1879
792 Depot Street
(Fire District No. 2)

This 2-1/2-story frame structure, perched alongside its water source, the Williams River, is likely the only twin-towered fire station in the nation. It was built in 1879 to hold equipment for Chester's fire company for North Village and Chester Depot. Canvas hoses were hung to dry in the taller north tower, and the alarm in the shorter bell tower still rings when its rope is pulled from the second-floor meeting space. Every year both Chester fire companies had a parade followed by a baseball game and a dance at Town Hall.

Illustration Key:
Carol Leofanti 9,
Ian and Polly Montgomery
4,5,6,8,10;
I. J. Nichols 3;
William Sargent cover;
Lew Watters map, panel,
1,2,7,11,12,13.



- The tour begins at Chester Depot's railroad station (1) and Town Hall (2), proceeds west along Rt 103, stopping at the Yosemite Engine House (3), and continues west into Stone Village (4-13).
- All ten stone buildings can be viewed from the east side of Rt 103 and are listed by their street numbers. Use the crosswalk at the church to walk on the sidewalk along the west side of Rt 103 and perhaps continue farther west to the North Chester Cemetery.
- For restaurants and shopping, walk east on Rt 103 to Chester's Main St and Village Green on Rt 11.

The Architecture of Stone Village

Stone Village architecture reflects the transition from Federal to Greek Revival styles. Federal style is symmetrical, with a center front doorway usually trimmed with a fanlight above and sidelights. Later, as Americans identified with Greece and democracy, they favored the Greek Revival style, in which the gable end of the house faces the road, suggesting a Greek temple front. Stone Village interpretations mingle the two styles with local building designs.



This walking tour of three historic Chester Depot buildings and the ten Stone Village Historic District buildings complements Chester Townscape's earlier brochure, "Take A Walk Along Main Street in Historic Chester Village." Together, they link the three sections of Chester into very walkable adventures.

4 - 113 North Street

Built pre-1847

Original owner – unknown

An unusual twist to the Greek-Revival styling of this 1-1/2-story house puts the main entrance on the east side. Its iron parlor stoves were modern conveniences. Built as a parsonage on land purchased from Hannah Hosmer in 1846, it was sold to Springfield lumber dealer Charles Holt in 1847 and then to Samuel Archer in 1856. In 1857 Archer used spring rights from his neighbor to have water piped under the road. Henderson Blanchard, village postmaster and shopkeeper, bought the property in 1864. The current owner, whose family has owned the house since 1965, remembers a large gilt rooster weathervane that her grandmother Alice Farrell had put on the barn cupola.



9 - 166 North Street

Built c. 1843

Original owner – James Johnson

The largest stone house in the village, this 2-story, Federal-style home was built by the Clark brothers in 1843. They deeded it when partially finished as a gift to James Johnson, a cattle dealer, after he cared for an injured Clark family member. Johnson's wife Achsa, their daughter Achsa Emeline and her husband Mason Richardson also lived in the house. In 1855 Richardson added a separate stone coopeage to the side of the house, where he built and repaired cracker barrels and sold crackers.

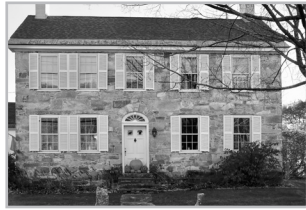


5 - 171 North Street

Built c. 1834

Original owner – Ptolemy Edson, MD

Dr. Ptolemy Edson was a state senator and an important figure in the Universalist Church. He helped establish the town farm and fire district and planned for the rows of elm trees along North Street. Edson, recognizing the practicality of snecked-ashlar construction, built the first stone house in North Village and encouraged its use for the school and church. The 2-story, Federal-style house has an earlier frame section at the rear where Dr. Edson practiced medicine. Known as the "Smallpox Doctor," Edson made house calls on horseback.



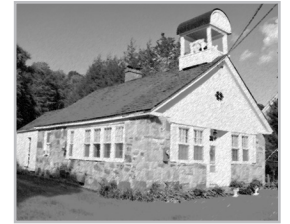
10 - 186 North Street

North Street School

Built 1835

Converted to residence 1973

Thomas Robinson granted land for the Third District School, the second stone building on North Street. The bell in its cupola still rings. Its original entrance was near the rear façade gable. When a row of front windows was added in the early 1900s, clapboard siding replaced the stone above the first-floor level. The front door was added after the building was converted to a home in 1973. Its second owner, Joanne Young, attended this one-room schoolhouse as a child in the 1950s and remembers jumping out one of the front windows for fire drills.



6 - 189 North Street

Built 1840

Original owner – Gideon Lee

Ptolemy Edson encouraged his younger friend Gideon Lee, a farmer, to purchase land for a stone house adjoining Edson's property to the west. The Clark brothers and Arvin Earle built this small, side-hall house with a high-pitched gable roof and attached barn. Greek Revival details enhance the deep-set windows, front door and roof. Lee, his wife Nancy Hosmer, their four children and his mother were living here in 1860. The family's gravestones can be seen in North Street cemetery, where many stone house residents are buried. Elizabeth and Philip Johnson, schoolteachers, lived here from 1967 to 1985.

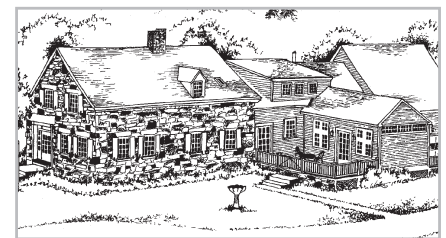


11 - 196 North Street

Built 1844

Original owner – Simeon Sherwin

Three look-alike houses, standing side-by-side, are known as the "Three Sisters" because they share family relationships and a Greek-Revival style for the roof trim, front doorway, and windows. This house, which has large blocks (quoins) of schist and mica at the corners, was built for Simeon Sherwin, a farmer, postmaster and justice of the peace. The master suite extension, with bathroom skylight and gold-plated taps, was added by Olivia Goldsmith, who wrote her bestseller, *First Wives Club*, when she owned the house (1991–1996).



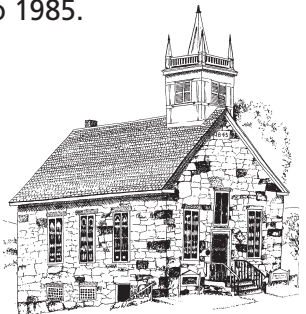
7 - 211 North Street

The Old Stone Church

First Universalist Parish of Chester

Built 1845

Most neighbors belonged to the First Universalist Parish, a lively center with meetings, dinners, and services. The church, organized in 1798, voted to build a new meeting house in 1845. A committee including Ptolemy Edson bought the land for \$50 and paid \$1,766 to build it. In 1846 the Society deeded basement rights to the town to use until a town hall was built. Stained-glass windows added in 1903 and the balustrade and spires on its square steeple tower are Gothic Revival touches.



12 - 228 North Street

Built 1845

Original owner – Marvel Johnson

The middle "Sister" house was built for Marvel and Sally Bemis Johnson, whose daughter Maria and her husband Simeon Sherwin lived next door. Although the 1860 Census lists him as a farmer, Johnson owned many properties in the neighborhood and worked on land deals with Ptolemy Edson and Charles Holt. He sold land to the First Restoration Society for the church, retaining basement rights for the first year. Johnson's store, built on adjacent land, is now the church parking lot.



8 - 146 North Street

Built 1838

Original owner – Granville Spaulding

This is a different building type, with 2-1/2 stories in front and 1-1/2 stories in back. The doorway to a shop on the lower level faces North Street and features an arch of 14 stones honoring Vermont as the 14th state. Granville Spaulding sold sheepskin boots and moccasins created in his tannery at the rear, and his sheep grazed on the hillside. He and his young bride Aurora lived over the shop. Spaulding later owned a "thousand-dollar team" of horses and a covered carriage to take his products to market. After Edwin and Dorothy McPeck bought the property in 1948, the shop became an antiques store.



13 - 250 North Street

Built 1844

Original owner – Henry Sherwin

The third "Sister" house was built for Eliza and Henry Sherwin, Simeon Sherwin's first cousin. Like its siblings, the front façade has four windows and a recessed door with sidelights. Sherwin built a blacksmith shop onto the back of the house, and he worked on constructing the church across the road. He was also a carriage maker; his shop on the property, which was a general store by the 1920s, burned in 1932. In 1979, owners Lew and Bonnie Watters converted the former blacksmith shop into space for Bonnie's doll-making business.



The Stonemasons of Stone Village

The Clark brothers, Addison, Orrison, and Wiley, were Stone Village's primary stonemasons, along with Arvin Earle and Martin Church. The Clarks were Chester natives and lived with their extended family on Mount Flamstead, essentially on top of the stone they used.

This stone, gneiss and sparkling mica schist, is unfit for wall building because it yields slabs only 4–6" thick. However, local stonemasons learned a technique from Scottish stonemasons who built a factory in Cavendish in 1832 using thin strips of stone called snecks to tie the vertical slabs to an inner rubble wall. Snecks act the same way that metal ties secure brick veneer in modern construction. Masons often trimmed the slabs to resemble ashlar stone blocks, and the term "snecked-ashlar" was coined.

The Clarks' methods and signature stone setting give this small community a distinctive style. Oxen hauled the stones on sleds over frozen ground in winter and walls were built the following summer. The mason's pay was \$5 per week plus a gallon of good quality rum.

Stories widely reported in the 20th century claimed that the Clarks were Scottish workers who came to Chester from Canada. However, Green Mountain Union High School (GMUHS) students working on a 2016 architectural project about Stone Village located records showing the Clark brothers were Chester natives. Townscape's search of birth certificates and property deeds later confirmed that the Clark family had been Vermont residents since the 18th century.