

Brattleboro Historic District

Brattleboro, Windham County, Vermont



As with many New England communities, Brattleboro's roots began with the creation of a nearby fort to protect its settlers from frequent Native American raids. Close to the present day downtown area, Fort Dummer was built in 1724, providing security as well as a trading location for the English settlers.

By 1753 more land was cleared and the town was chartered in the name of its title owner, William Brattle, Jr. Although Brattle was quite diversified in his professions as a preacher, lawyer, doctor and legislator, he never had actually visited the town in which he held the charter, before passing away in 1776.

Over the next century Brattleboro's population continued to grow, adding a gristmill and sawmill on the Whetstone Brook, post office at the Arms Tavern, and rail system through the center of town. With the convergence of travelers along the Connecticut River and from the east and west mountain areas, Brattleboro gained importance from the trade and transportation of grain, lumber, turpentine, tallow and pork.

In addition to being a natural trade route, a pure spring was discovered in 1840 along the Whetstone Brook, designating Brattleboro as a tourist destination. Dr. Robert Wesselhoeft launched the Brattleboro Hydropathic Establishment, or the "water cure", in 1846. Affluent visitors from around the United States and abroad came to Brattleboro for water treatments, which included submersion in the cold springs and a healthy diet regime. The water cure operated until 1871.

Shortly after the water spa was founded, the Estey Organ Company began its operation, employing more than 500 people at the height of its production time and marketing its reed organs worldwide.

Brattleboro entered the 20th century as a vital regional center with a bustling Main Street of movie theaters, department stores and restaurants. Today, the Brattleboro Downtown Historic District encompasses sixty-two buildings in the town's center, extending the entire five-block length of Main Street parallel to the Connecticut River on the east. Multi-story brick commercial buildings dominate the southern three-block stretch of Main Street while civic and religious buildings can be found along the northern stretch, giving the historic district an urban appearance. Historic architectural styles range from the Greek Revival to the Modernistic, with examples from the Victorian period being the most numerous. Although most storefronts have been altered, the buildings generally retain much of their historic integrity. Few modern intrusions have appeared to disrupt the prevailing nineteenth and early twentieth century character of the historic district.

Sources:

<http://www.mollystarkbyway.org>

<http://www.brattleboroareaguide.com/history.html>