

49 Lyme Common Historic District

Lyme, New Hampshire



The Lyme Common Historic District is comprised of more than sixty structures that front the Lyme Common and the surrounding network of six roads which intersect at the Common. The centerpiece of the district is the common itself, a unique, long and narrow open area running in an east-west direction. The buildings facing the north side of the common have a Main Street address while those on the south side are given a numerical designation with "On the Common." Despite fires and other changes through the years, due to residents' dedication to historic preservation, the Common remains true to its historic beginnings.

Most of the buildings in the district are set on relatively flat lots. Several houses retain picket fences representative of fences outlining the properties in the 19th century. When approaching the Historic District, the landscape changes from open fields to a relatively dense pattern of development characterizing the village. Grant Brook is the southern boundary for the District. The majority of buildings are residential in nature, constructed originally as single-family residences. In recent years, some, most notably those fronting the common and Union Street have been converted to commercial use, though care has been taken to preserve the overall residential character.

The construction of the meetinghouse in 1781 established Lyme Plain as the center of activity for the town. The simple building served as both a town hall and church for nearly thirty years before it was relocated further west along the Common to make way for a church. A town common does not appear on the original Town Plan, but took form after construction of the meetinghouse. Constructed between 1809 and 1811, the Lyme Congregational Church was the visual anchor of the District, and was built under the direction of master builder John Tomson, who was the great, great, great, great, grandson of John Tomson who built the first church at the Plymouth Colony. Decorated by a central Palladian window, pavilion front, ornate fan lit doorways and an unusual three stage tower, the church is one of the region's finest examples of a Federal style meetinghouse. The restored sheds behind the Congregational Church represents the longest line of contiguous horse sheds in New England, and possibly in the United States.

In terms of its linear common and the density of vernacular 19th century structures retaining their integrity with minimal commercial evolution, the Lyme District is without parallel in the

region. The long rectangular nature of the common, which is the centerpiece of the Lyme Plain Village, is a unique landscape form locally, and contrasts sharply to the more spacious, square-shaped greens seen in other New Hampshire communities such as Haverhill, Hanover and Lebanon, and Norwich, Vermont.

Construction dates in the district range from the late 1700s to the 1980s, though the majority pre-dates the Civil War. With the exception of the brick school, library, jail and a single brick house, all of the buildings are of frame and clapboard construction. Though a few have been covered in synthetic sidings all can be characterized as being in good to excellent condition. The Lyme Common Historic District is largely intact and an example of a traditional rural New Hampshire townscape. Historically functioning as the local center of religious, educational, political and social activity, the buildings in the district largely predate the Civil War. With the exception of door surrounds, there is a general lack of stylistic detailing on the structures.

Today, Lyme Plain continues to provide a core of community services for local residents without sacrificing its sense of place to modern construction.

The Lyme Common Historic District was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1988.

Sources:

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