

40 White River Junction Historic District

Hartford, Vermont



The White River Junction Historic District is located in the unincorporated Village of White River Junction, one of five villages within Hartford, Vermont. Prior to 1847, one farmhouse stood on the site; however, due to its location at the junction of the Connecticut and White rivers, the Village ultimately developed into a thriving commercial center in the nineteenth century. In addition to being located at the junction of two rivers, five railroads were constructed between 1847 and 1863 all of which terminated in White River Junction; forever linking the village's economic prosperity to the railroad industry. At one point there were fourteen railroad tracks located in the district, making White River Junction the most important railroad village in northern New England by the 1890s. The District was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1980.

Besides providing the obvious transportation facilities and services to the surrounding area, the railroads were also responsible for encouraging the development of a specialized commercial activity within the Village - wholesaling. Many wholesale businesses located within the village took advantage of convenient railroad distribution.

The district surrounds what is now a large, roughly triangular parking lot. This triangular area was originally a swamp that was used as a dump. In 1902, due to heavy citizen participation, the swamp was converted into a tree covered park; then in the 1920s the park was converted to its current form and purpose, a parking lot. The perimeter of the triangle is well defined by commercial blocks, and commercial development that spreads out along the curve of the tracks and along South and North Main Streets.

The triangular area is defined by the tracks of the New England Central (NEC) railroad. The NEC tracks follow the south bank of the White River as it flows in a southeasterly direction into the more southerly course of the Connecticut. The south and west legs of the triangle are, respectively, Gates and South Main Streets. Partially obscured behind a high chain link fence that separates the central business district from the railroad yard, stands the Boston and Maine Railway depot; a Colonial Revival style building crowned by a cupola and a copper weathervane. The depot is now reached by an underground tunnel beneath the tracks.

The White River Junction Historic District represents a unique example of a village community that developed around river and rail transportation. Centered around a major transportation facility which has been revitalized by Amtrak, the historic district includes many historic buildings which reflect architecture in the Greek Revival, Colonial Revival, Richardsonian Romanesque, Italianate, and

Romanesque styles; the predominate urban architectural trends of the late nineteenth century through the first half of the twentieth century. While fires did destroy some buildings over the years, the buildings were usually and quickly rebuilt in the architectural styles of the day. Consequently, the architectural integrity of the village remains virtually unchanged, even today.

With increased competition from trucking and with the completion in 1969 of Interstate 89 and 91 less than one mile to the south and west, respectively, the village has suffered a severe commercial decline. Be that as it may, the intersection formed in White River Junction by Interstates 89 and 91 continues its long held position as the transportation center for eastern Vermont and western New Hampshire.

Sources:

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