EVERY town holds its fascinations for all who look close enough. Each has its own story of how it came to be and where it is heading. These signs tell some of the episodes in the story of Athol, Massachusetts. Our hometown glimpses make up the bigger picture of America.

The Athol Bicentennial Commission undertook the "Athol History Trail" project in 1975-1976 in the belief that the more one knows a town, the more he or she is likely to appreciate it and do things for it.

Most of these sites are on private property so please respect them and do not trespass.

A SUGGESTION

Athol's road system is complex because the town was born as twin villages, divided by a river. The trail mapped in this paper, therefore, is zigzag. There is no way to simplify it while taking in all 24 sites.

You may want to tackle the entire route in one trip. You may prefer making your own simple route. One way is to stay on Pleasant St., Main St., and up No. Orange Rd. ... and add side trips later.

There's plenty to see... Happy Exploring!

PLEASE DRIVE CAREFULLY

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...and suggested route of the Athol History Trail

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MAP Athol History Trail...16,17.

13 4th Meetinghouse | Main St. | 18.
14 Town Pound       | Main St. | 19.
15 Pioneer Homesite | Main St. | 20.
16 Fort House       | Exchange St. | 21.
17 Captured by Indians | Pequig Ave. | 22.
18 Indian Meadow    | So. Main St. | 23.
20 Oldest House     | Moore Hill Rd. | 25.
22 Sentinel Elm     | Moore Hill Rd. | 27.
23 Scalped by Indians | Moore Hill Rd. | 28.
24 Colonial Home    | Chestnut Hill Ave. | 29.

Appreciation...30.
Find Special Thanks...31.

Total Length: 16 Miles
Leisurely Driving Time: 1 Hour
The settlers of Pequoig, living in constant danger from Indian attack, built forts "in which, at the close of day, or at the alarm of danger, all the families in the vicinity gathered for mutual safety and protection."

The first pioneers of our town came here from Hatsfield on Sept. 17, 1735, tracing their way through the wilderness by marked trees. They were the families of Richard Morton, Samuel Morton, Ephraim Smith, John Smeed, and Joseph Lord. From these first five families our community was born.
2nd Meetinghouse
1741 - 1772
Pioneers worshipped
and governed in
a crude cabin here.
Fearing Indians,
they kept muskets
at their sides. In
the yard were a
whipping post and
stocks to punish
wicked men and
naughty boys.

3. 634 Pleasant St.

Old Toll Gate
From 1830 to 1832, travelers on this
5th Mass. Turnpike paid a fare to get
past a toll gate. It swung across
the roadway from a toll house.

This meetinghouse was built 12 rods (198 feet)
south of East Fort, after the first pioneer
church on Napgoad Street burned. There
was only one pew; it being reserved for the
preacher. The 20 families did their praying
and singing on planks set up on wooden
blocks. From this beginning, Pleasant Street
was to remain the "center" of town for 100 yrs.

The 5th Massachusetts Turnpike coming
out of Boston in the early 1800s was the
first major highway built across the state.
To pay for its upkeep toll houses were set up
every few miles. Travelers paid a few cents to
get to the next toll gate.
It was called the "Underground Railroad," a network of citizens who helped slaves escape from their southern masters. Under cover of darkness, "conductors" such as Dr. George Hoyt took these fugitives into their homes to feed and shelter them, and send them on to their next stop.

For the Indians of New England, this path formed the main "High Road" (mostly hill country) running from south to north. It began on the ocean shore in Connecticut, and blazed through this inland forest to their great hunting and trade regions of the far north. The Pequoit Indians welcomed these travelers.
After their bloody attack on Lancaster, the Indians marched 45 weary miles to this place with all of their women, children, aged, and captive. The large boulder in the Millers River here is called "Rowlandson Rock". It marks the place of crossing.

One of the first public acts of the settlers of Pequaig was to build a house of worship. They chose this hillside near Mill Brook for the site. Their first burial ground was nearby. This small and rough cabin was used only for a short time, and was not yet finished, when flames destroyed it.
How many pioneers were buried here is not certain. At one time 40 graves could be clearly traced. A few of the names are known. Residents still debate whether Indians also were buried here, but there is no firm tradition or proof. In its center is seen the First Settlers' Monument, raised on July 4, 1859 by school children pulling on a rope.
John Brooks Tavern was a famous stagecoach stop between Boston and Brattleboro as the junction to five directions. Excited children watched the daily hustle of rattling coaches, foaming steeds, the transferring of passengers and mail, changing horses, and dust clouds heading 'round the bend.

The town voted in 1827 to erect its first Town House, two stories high, for use both as a public hall and church. Town meetings were held on the lower floor. Upstairs, John Crosby conducted an informal high school called "Athol Academy." Congregationalists worshipped on the 2nd floor, until they built their own edifice three years later.
BUILT ON AN ACRE OF LAND DONATED BY SAMUEL SWEETZER "FOR THE PUBLIC WORSHIP OF GOD FOREVER," THIS MEETING HOUSE WAS USED IN ITS EARLY DAYS FOR RELIGIOUS SERVICES ONLY. THE TOWN DECLARED A HOLIDAY FOR ITS DEDICATION ON DEC. 3, 1828. REMODELED IN 1847, IT WAS ATHOL'S SEAT OF GOVERNMENT UNTIL 1921.

IN EARLY TIMES, ALL COMMUNITIES KEPT AN ANIMAL POUND. FIELD DRIVERS CAUGHT AND TOOK INTO THIS STONE ENCLOSURE ANY COW, HORSE, OR SWINE FOUND STRAYING, ESPECIALLY IF THEY WERE DOING DAMAGE. IF THE OWNER WAS KNOWN, HE WAS NOTIFIED; IF NOT, A DESCRIPTION OF THE ANIMAL WAS PUBLICLY POSTED.
15. 116 Main St.

PIONEER HOMESITE 1737-1815
THE DOWNTOWN AREA BEGAN IN 1737 WHEN JESSE KENDALL BUILT A SMALL HOME IN THE PRESENT MIDDLE OF MAIN STREET. INDIANS MENACED THIS VALLEY, BUT THE HOUSE STOOD FIRM FOR 70 YEARS.

16. Exchange St.

FORT HOUSE 1745-1755
ON A SMALL HILL HERE THAT WAS REMOVED IN 1828, SAMUEL KENDALL BUILT FOR ALL "A GARRISON HOUSE, PLANNED TO THE FIRST STORY." IT PROTECTED THE FEW LOWLAND SETTLEMENTS FROM INDIAN ATTACK.

The pioneer Kendalls, Samuel and son Jesse, owned nearly all of the downtown area when it was hostile wilderness. Jesse built his home in 1737....When Main Street was laid out in 1815, the house was moved to 47 Freedom Street and stood until 1875. Jesse Kendall had sold these 80 prime acres in 1795 to Simeon Fish for 700 British pounds.

More pioneer homes began sprouting up in this lowland midway between the East Hill and West Hill settlements. A means of protection against Indian raids was needed for these isolated families. The garrison house was built on top of a knoll that gave a wide view of this valley.
Jason Babcock came here at age 18, and bought most of this meadow and hillside. One day his cows strayed into the west side woods and he went to look for them. Suddenly shots rang out from Indians in hiding, and Babcock was slightly wounded. The war whoops were heard by men at the mill near the present YMCA. They ran to his rescue but he was already carried off.

"... Konkeput was their chief. They built their council fires on these plains, gathered the wild grain on these meadows, hunted the deer on these hills. Here they gave their sons and daughters in marriage, and here they buried the bones of their fathers. Relics of these noble men yet remain. But that once happy tribe is gone, faded away..."
Mount Pleasant Cemetery
Land donated by Samuel Morton before 1745. A memorial to many town founders.
It has a marker to Ezekiel Wallingford, killed by Indians during a moonlit raid.

19.
No Orange Rd. at Mt. Pleasant

20.
35 Moore Hill Rd.

Oldest House in Athol
Built in 1736 by Aaron Smith as a log cabin, later enlarged. Menaced by Indians in 1746 and raided of food by Daniel Shays Army in 1787. Later served as a tavern and stagecoach stop.

The East Hill and West Hill pioneers were separated by two miles of wilderness and a river crossed by foot at a fording place off No Orange Rd. It became clear another burial place was needed for the settlers living north of the river. The land was donated by Samuel Morton.

Its beginning was as a two-room log cabin. The timbers were dove-tailed together so that wooden pegs or nails were not needed. His descendants added a second floor, and a major restoration in 1969 gives the house its modern look, but much of the original interior structure remains.
"...Our ancestors relate how, as night spread its mantle of darkness over the forest and around their infant settlement, all would gather together in the garrison and sit silently without lights, listening with cautious ear to every external sound, querying if each uncommon noise might not be the signal of danger from the hostile Indians..."

"The Sentinel Elm for more than 200 years created a dramatic silhouette on this hilltop. Used in early days as a "spy tree" by Indians and pioneers alike, in later years it became a favorite picnic spot. The tree is preserved in story, poetry, photography, art, and song. The elm was visible for twenty miles, and it was said that on a clear day Boston Harbor could be seen from its top branches. A bronze plaque marks where it stood."
Indians lay in ambush here in Wallingford’s cornfield and made noises like vandal bears to draw him out. A hundred yards from the fort, the Indians jumped from hiding and surrounded him. He turned and ran but in passing a fence was shot in the thigh and fell. Tomahawk and scalping knife ended his life.

A soldier of the War for Independence, John Haven Jr. was one of Ethan Allen’s “Green Mountain Boys” who captured Fort Ticonderoga, on May 10, 1775. Two years later his military service was completed, the war moved into the south, and he came home and built this house. It stands as a model of colonial sturdiness and design.
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