Historical Tour of Downtown Hudson

Hudson’s downtown represents a good example of a 19th to early 20th century mill community. Little from those days remains now but a stroll around the main streets will reveal the early town layout. The three defining moments in time for Hudson are the laying out of the first road at the dam from Marlboro (1699) across the Assabet River (where Washington Street now crosses); the incorporation of the town in 1866, and the Great Fire of 1894. This fire cleared all the buildings around the rotary and eastward almost to the Town Hall. These fires seemed to plague most towns in the 19th and 20th centuries.

The tour begins at the South Street parking lot (the star is #1) and proceeds west to the Washington St dam, up to the Armory, north along the west side of the Rotary to the Library & Fire Station and then across to the east side of the Rotary, along the north side of Main Street. There are various points of interest as we walk along past the Town Hall, the Unitarian Church to Broad Street. Then right (south) along Broad to the South Street Extension and west to the beginning at the parking lot.

The total length is one mile, an easy walk which illustrates some of Hudson’s most iconic and handsome buildings.

Also there are the several excellent Images of America series of books (Arcadia Publishing) that contain early pictures of Hudson. These are written by Lew Halprin & the Hudson Historical Society. Hudson (1999); Hudson, Post Card History Series (2008). There is another book in the series Hudson’s National Guard Militia by William Verdone, (2005) that deals with the Armory and the units who were stationed there over the years.

The numbers at each location correlate with the attached map.

This walking tour was developed by Richard Gelpke with able assistance from David Bonazzoli and Lorene Jean, Hudson Art & Framing. Printed by Nashoba Blue.

Second Printing

1660 Marlboro becomes a Town
1674 Marlboro has 10 families
1698 John Barnes builds grist mill, north bank of Assabet River (now at Washington St)
1700 Joseph Howe owns mill
Marlboro builds first road to mill at dam
1711 John Barstow owns mill
1723 Robert Barnard owns mill
1790 First store, “old red house” (Lewis Block site, ODD fellows building)
1794 Joel Cranston store & tavern at ODD Fellows site
1799 Silas Felton & Joel Cranston in business
Tannery begins on Tannery Brook
1800 Feltonville (now Hudson), 13 dwellings & 100 inhabitants
1816 Daniel Stratton begins shoe factory
1820 14 dwellings, 1 public house, grist, cotton & cloth mills
1841 Jedidiah Wood’s son builds at Wood Square
1843 Brigham starts shoe “factory” on Main Street
1847 Stephen Pope buys land at Market & South Streets area, develops Tannery
1848 Marlboro Branch, Fitchburg Railroad reaches Hudson
1857 Brigham Factory at dam
1860 Feltonville (now Hudson) has 1,000 residents
1860s Civil War era—Company I, 5th Regiment with 49 men formed Agitation for new town begins, to be split from Marlborough
South Street tenements built
Great demand for shoes, Hudson factories develop & expand
1865 Town bridge rebuilds at Wood Square
1866 Hudson incorporates; population at 1800
1868 Population 2,600, part of Bolton annexed
1872 Town Hall built; Japanese delegation visits shoe factories
1875 Population of Hudson reaches 3,403
1880 Joseph Bradley shoe factory, Main & Tannery Brook site
1881 Central Mass Railroad reaches Hudson
1882 Larkin Lumber begins
1885 Goodyear Gossamer (later Goodyear Rubber) established at the dam

July 4, 1894 The Great Fire
1895 Much of the destroyed downtown rebuilt in brick
Town buys Solon Wood’s land, becomes the Rotary
Trolley arrives
1900 Hudson had 7,500 residents
Fire Station No. 1 built at Wood Square
1900-23 Concord, Maynard & Hudson trolley line operates
1904 Present Library built
1910 Armory built on site of Marshall Wood’s home
(Washington & Park)
1911 Methodist Church (site of Hudson Pawnbroker-Main & South St) burns
1916 Hudson celebrates 50th Anniversary and Hudson Historical Society forms.
1920 Hudson Movie theater opens on Pope Street
1935 Chase Block burns
1951 Jeff’s Block (Murphy Insurance on Main Street) suffers major fire
1966 Hudson celebrates 100th Anniversary
and commemorates soldiers from the wars.

13. Liberty Park

Robert Barnard in 1723 near here.

14. Hudson Historical Society-34 Broad

The Mills: The key to Hudson. A natural location for a dam with higher ground sloping up on both sides. Above the Dam River joins the Sudbury River to form the Concord River in Concord, MA.

The Washington St. Bridge was originally a ‘brum dam’ with industrial buildings on the four corners. In 1877, Capt. Francis Briggs’ Shoe factories and a Grist Mill, now the site of two gas stations. Across the river (now occupied by McDonald’s) was P. E. Mills, a shoe (form) manufacturer. On Robinson’s site was Brigham’s Saw Mill, then Hudson Worsted Co., followed by the Hudson Counter Company. The Counter Company burned in 1913, rebuilt in 1916 and included the Hud- son Milling Company. In 1935 it was succeeded by W. T. Grant Co. - now Robinson’s Hardware.

7. McDonald’s

- the largest wool combing factories in the country; bought by Henry Dyson in 1890 it was Thomas Logan Shoe factory, then Brigham & Gregory Shoe manufacturer. On Robinson’s site was Brigham’s Saw Mill, then Hudson Worsted Co., followed by the Hudson Counter Company (shoe backs). The Hudson Worsted Co., followed by the Hudson Counter Company.

9. Robinson’s Hardware

- original site of Marshall Wood 1832-97 home and the Hudson Historical Society. The key to Hudson. A natural location for a dam with higher ground sloping up on both sides. Above the Dam River joins the Sudbury River to form the Concord River in Concord, MA. A medieval Gothic style castle projecting strength and authority.

15. R.B. Lewis Home - 1 Lincoln Street & Apartments (2-8 Main Street) Lewis, a widely known photographer, developed these three adjacent buildings (home, apartments & commercial building). His home, a recently restored 1877 handsome Victorian (with a carriage house in Broad’s Garage (1619) and an ell (moved from across the street in 1863) was across the river (now occupied by McDonald’s) was P. E. Mills, a shoe (form) manufacturer. On Robinson’s site was Brigham’s Saw Mill, then Hudson Worsted Co., followed by the Hudson Counter Company. The Counter Company burned in 1913, rebuilt in 1916 and included the Hudson Milling Company. In 1935 it was succeeded by W. T. Grant Co. - now Robinson’s Hardware.

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16. ODD Fellows Building

- the oldest store (1794) called The Little Red Store built by Joel Cranston, was at the west end of Main Street (Hudson Cleaners), his pharmacy and was a Hudson fixture. Paul Cellucci, a Hudson resident, was established on the lawn.

17. Wood Building or New City Mercahnters – Site of Co’s Tavern (1842), one of the town’s earliest, also the location of the first meetings of the Baptist & Unitarian Societies. By the 1860’s, the Mansion House Hotel was here. During the Civil War the 3rd floor was a “Dormitory” for 1st C. L. Regiment. Hudson Union War Veterans organization (the Grand Army of the Republic).

20. Roe Block, also The Old Block or Freemason’s Block - directly across from the Town Hall was The Old Block, built in 1834 and destroyed by fire in 1880 at a $30,000 loss. Originally a three story building: the present brick building was constructed in 1884. N. Freemen, a dry goods store, occupied the center section and was a Hudson fixture.

27. Hudson Paving

- the largest single industrial site along this track was a short spur track to the Larkin Lumber Co., bought for $10,000. It was the first stage coach barn was here by the 1840s with an oast house to the east. Edgar Lucia began operations in 1898 and carried all types of drugs and compounded prescriptions. One of the best known pharmacies in Hudson especially for its ‘museum quality’ interior. Even though ‘Lucia’ appears in brick at 91 Main Street (Hudson Cleaners), his pharmacy was in the adjacent wooden building at 95 Main Street. Hudson Town Hall - This was the site of the Methodist Church, later, when it was destroyed by fire. Known to long time Hudson residents as the site of Aubuchon’s Hardware.

29. Tannery Brook - Flowing from Bruce’s Pond, it was the water for the tannery; it flowed south across Main Street flooding the street and adjacent businesses many times in early days.

30. Donnie’s Pizza - Larkin Lumber of Hudson’s oldest continuously businesses, (1882-2015) and run as a family operation, occupied much of this area. Frequent flooding from Tannery Brook occurred here along with several major fires in 1992 & 1997.

31. Bradley Mill - Webster’s Mill (1 Houghton Street) Now an empty lot behind T. C. Landis’! A large five story building here had many owners. The Fuller Company ran an electric station in a rear three story building (1885); bought by the Town and became the Hudson Light & Power Department (1897). The most recent occupant was the well-known Webster’s Shoe Factory, it was once a visible reminder of how important shoe making was in the development of Hudson.

32. Building containing Law Office, Morra & Fras (145 Main St.) - Northeast Academy of Martial Arts. This small building occupies a site formerly a large shoe factory. By 1888 George Houghton’s Building housed a number of small shops, offices, produce shop, pool room & barber. The building burned to the ground in January 1904.

33. Building containing Law Office. Morra & Fras (145 Main St. & Lawrence Building

- since the late 1800s. It is now a Chinese restaurant. The Hudson Diner (built in 1906) moved from across the street in 1863. There was a grassed park with a fountain on the corner, this was the latter site of the Miller & Hudson Drug Company and then Toyekey Pharmacy. In the adjacent building was the Bar Lunch with a dance studio above.

34. Knight Fuel Company

- named after Paul Cellucci, a Hudson resident, was established on the lawn.

35. Hudson Appleton - The site of Houghton’s Shoe Factory. A large factory with an ell (moved from across the street in 1863). There was a grassed park with a fountain on the corner, this was the latter site of the Miller & Hudson Drug Company and then Toyekey Pharmacy. In the adjacent building was the Bar Lunch with a dance studio above.

36. Flax Block - in the late 1800s, George Davis ran a bakery and a grain business here. Two tracks of the Marblehead Branch of the Scituate RR ran through this site – the Lancaster RR which ran only one time and the other track was a short spur track to the Larkin Lumber Co.

37. L. Laffoe & Sons - Dominating Tavens Square (commemorating the first Portuguese immigrant to Hudson); originally the Jeff’s Shoe factory (1880) along the Marblehead branch of the Scituate RR. In 1992 it was reported to have been used to produce 2,000 pairs of shoes and ‘baftmorals’ (also called Oxfords) daily.

38. Dunn & Green Tannery - The largest single industrial site along this walk. No remnant of this remains. It occupied all the area from Houghton to South Street and behind the shops on Main Street to the River. Tanning was a complex process requiring separate buildings with associated drying areas and a flowing water source for the vats and washing and disposal of the effluent. The company had offices in Boston. Edward H. Dunn (1826-1906) was a prominent Boston political, religious and business figure in Boston and president of the Boston University Corporation. It is now Celucci Park.