

VILLAGE OF HARRISVILLE

The village of Harrisville is one of two villages placed on the National Register of Historic Places, the other being Oakland. The Nipmuck River, originating on the Massachusetts border directly north of Harrisville, joins the Clear River here on its way down to the Blackstone. At the Tinkham Mill site there was a saw and gristmill in 1800, a spindle shop, then a cotton mill in 1832. Five buildings were here by 1893 for the manufacture of fancy worsted cloth. Mr. Tinkham bought out Mr. Farwell in 1884, and continued on for many years. William Tinkham owned the mill complex shown above and needed a better way to get supplies to his mills and the finished product shipped out. He was prime mover with mill owner A. L. Sayles of Pascoag in bringing the railroad to Burrillville. William Tinkham's son Ernest leased the mill complex to Austin T. Levy in 1916 after his father's death. In December 1919, all four mills, along with 61 tenements, were purchased by the Stillwater Company. The tradition of first quality worsted cloth continued until the mills closed and moved south in the 1950s. In her will in 1894, Jesse Smith's widow donated the money to erect a Library. By 1900, the building was finally started. The first two floors contained businesses, the Town Hall, Court House, and a very small library. The third floor was used as an assembly hall with a bowling alley in the basement. In the mid 1930s, Austin T. Levy decided to dismantle it and construct separate buildings. He also reconstructed two of the local churches, the Berean Baptist and the Universalist Church, and thus was rewarded with his concept of a typical New England village. Mr. Levy's contributions to the town were tremendous. Levy raised cattle at the Sherman Stock Farm for shipment to the Bahamas where he started the beef industry there. The Sherman Stock Farm was originally purchased by Sumner Sherman in 1855 from Othaniel Young and contained 200 acres. By successive purchases, the limits of the farm were increased to over 1000 acres. The massive barn was built in 1876 and was considered the largest in New England. It was 100 feet long and 40 feet wide, but was destroyed by fire 100 years later in 1976. There were two other mill complexes in the Harrisville area. The first was the Graniteville Mill built by Syra and Stephen Sherman. It burned but was rebuilt in 1882. In later years it was used for storage by the Stillwater Mills. In the 1980s it had to be taken down for safety reasons after many years of disuse. The second was the Whipple Mill off East Avenue built in 1846. During the Civil War, this mill made woolen blankets and uniform cloth for the Union soldiers. By 1929 the mill was closed and the village sold piecemeal at auction. Most of our mills have disappeared over the years and now our industries are of a different kind.

Harrisville is now considered the center of Town because of the Town Hall in the middle of the historic district. It is a beautiful place to live just like all the other individual villages in the Town of Burrillville.

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