

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Registration Form

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This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name CAMBRIDGE GRANT HISTORIC DISTRICT

other names/site number RUSSELL HILL

2. Location

street & number 205-287 RUSSELL HILL RD., 15 WILKER ROAD not for publication

city or town ASHBURNHAM vicinity

state MASSACHUSETTS code MA county WORCESTER code 027 zip code 01430

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this ☒ nomination
☐ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of
Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property
☒ meets ☐ does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant
☐ nationally ☐ statewide ☒ locally. (☐ See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Brona Simon

Signature of certifying official/Title Brona Simon
Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer, Massachusetts Historical Commission

April 25, 2001

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property ☐ meets ☐ does not meet the National Register criteria. (☐ See continuation sheet for additional Comments.)

Signature of certifying official/Title

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby certify that this property is:

☐ entered in the National Register

☐ See continuation sheet.

☐ determined eligible for the
National Register

☐ See continuation sheet.

☐ determined not eligible for the
National Register

☐ removed from the
National Register

☐ other (explain):

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

Cambridge Grant HD
Name of Property

Worcester, MA
County and State

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply)

(Check only one box)

- ☒ private
☐ public-local
☐ public-State
☐ public-Federal

- ☐ building(s)
☒ district
☐ site
☐ structure
☐ object

Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing

Noncontributing

12 building

6 sites

structures

objects

18 Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

0

Name of related multiple property listing

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

DOMESTIC: single dwelling, secondary structure

AGRICULTURE: barn

INDUSTRY: tannery

EDUCATION: school

FUNERARY: cemetery

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

DOMESTIC: single dwelling, secondary structure

FUNERARY: cemetery

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions)

EARLY REPUBLIC: Federal, vernacular

MID 19th CENTURY: vernacular

EARLY 20th CENTURY: vernacular

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation granite

walls weatherboard, shingle, brick, vinyl

roof asphalt

other granite, marble

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

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Continuation Sheet**

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Cambridge Grant Historic District
Ashburnham (Worcester), MA

7. DESCRIPTION

The Cambridge Grant Historic District is a tract of approximately 322 acres in the eastern part of the town of Ashburnham, comprising a sizable segment of the original colonial land grant of somewhat over 1000 acres. Located fifty miles northwest of Boston and thirty miles north of Worcester, the district spreads over the gentle southern and eastern slopes of Russell Hill, an elongated north-south moraine whose crest, at an elevation of 1368 feet, is strewn with glacial boulders. Rising from the southern foot of Russell Hill is the steep northern slope of Jewell Hill, an abrupt, rocky, wooded prominence reaching 1411 feet above sea level. This is the western edge of the watershed of the Merrimack River.

These hills, together with Mount Watatic to the north and Mount Wachusett to the south, constitute the first prominent rise in the central Massachusetts land mass, which climbs gradually northwestward from this point toward the Appalachian range. To the east, the land falls sharply away to meet the broad littoral plain of eastern Massachusetts, with the result that views from here stretch fifty miles to the Blue Hills near Boston. The city's skyline can be plainly seen on clear days. The surrounding woodland is a mixture of conifers, dominated by white pine, spruce and hemlock, and deciduous trees, including red oak, beech, maple, poplar and birch. Mountain Laurel abounds in the woods, and the high rocky clearings are blanketed with wild blueberries.

The western boundary of the historic district falls near the center of the original Cambridge Grant. The designated area stretches north and south on either side of the old town road and extends eastward to the border of the town of Ashby. The narrow central artery, known as Russell Hill Road, may be followed eastward from the western boundary past ancient stone walls lined with mature maples as far as the Ashby line. The road passes well-preserved Federal-period farmhouses and outbuildings surrounded by open pasture and woodland, with impressive distant views along the way. Not far from the Ashby border, Wilker Road turns from Russell Hill Road toward the northern portion of the old grant, where orchard, field, and woodland on both sides surround another large and well-preserved early farmstead. There are no non-contributing structures to detract from the pristine rural New England setting, despite the district's proximity to built-up areas. There are in this compact rural neighborhood seven houses dating from 1788 to 1834, plus six barns and other outbuildings. Contributing elements include an old family burial ground, a spring in use since before 1819, an 18th century brick kiln site, a farm pond, remnants of three dams, an early 20th century summer cottage, and foundations of barns, a tanning shop, and an early schoolhouse.

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Contributing Structures

The Thomas Russell House [MHC #251][photos 6, 12] is a vernacular, five-bay, 1 1/2-story, 18th-century cape with pitch roof, and a central chimney slightly forward of the ridge. A one-story rear ell wraps around the northwest corner, substantially enlarging the original structure. The ell evidently dates from the 19th century and has a Victorian chimney sized for stoves. It is extended by a small one-story addition at the northwest corner and a 20th-century enclosed porch on the west side. The main block of the house and street-facing portion of the ell are clapboarded, with unadorned box cornices and flush vergeboards; the portion of the ell not visible from the road is shingled. All window trim is plain. Double-hung 6/9 sash are modern replacements of the originals, which were removed in the 1980s. Late 19th century blinds with movable louvres were removed after 1964. The simple entrance is flanked by broad fluted pilasters, which are crowned by square blocks in place of capitals detailed with concentric square sunk fillets. There is a shallow full cellar under the main block, with dry stone walls capped with cut granite slabs. The chimney foundation shows signs of many old repairs and consists of stone and brick with embedded reused hewn and mortised timbers. There are three fireplaces on the first floor, the one in the southwest room has a beehive oven beside it. Much of the existing interior trim is early and probably original.

The oldest extant dwelling in Cambridge Grant, this house was built by Thomas Russell on John Adams' land, probably shortly after Russell's purchase of a plot of farmland across the road in 1788. Its almost Spartan simplicity inside and out may likely be due to the still-pioneer character of the territory at that time.

The John Adams, Jr. House (Handley Farm) [MHC 254] [photos 5, 9-11] is a two-story, late Georgian, double-pile house built of red brick made on the site, with a stringcourse between the stories, over a basement course of cut granite slabs. It is a five-bay, double interior-chimney, pitch-roof building. A molded box cornice at the eaves wraps across the gable ends of the house, forming steep pediments with the raking end cornices. The front entrance, surmounted by a semicircular light, is cut cleanly into the masonry, trimmed only by radiating brick voussoirs. Window openings have exceptionally wide granite sills and lintels. Double-hung sash have 12/12 lights on the first floor and 8/12 in the second story and attic. A secondary entrance on the east facade is capped by a simple rectangular four-light transom. At the rear is a later 1 1/2-story clapboarded frame ell with a third large chimney, and there is an attached gable-fronted barn, also finished with clapboards. Windows in the ell and barn have 6/9 double hung-sash, and there is a 13-light transom over the barn entrance. Gabled dormers in the ell hold paired 6/6 windows.

This is the most ambitious house in Cambridge Grant, built for the son of the first settler about 1798. It was

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then the largest house in town as well as the first one built of brick, and it was still described in the mid 19th century as the finest house in Ashburnham. Unusual even when new, its pedimented gables were quite fashionable in the 1790s, and its clean-cut unadorned entrance was exceedingly modern, while the stringcourse between stories was oddly archaic. Its rectangular stone lintels are unusual as well. Brick voussoirs or keystone lintels are normal in brick buildings of this period; broad, unadorned rectangular granite lintels like these would not commonly be seen in this region until the arrival of the Greek Revival style, over thirty years after the Adams house was built. The four-panel entrance door and turned newel post in the style of the 1850s indicate there were some Victorian renovations. The interior was further modernized between 1909 and 1916. The brick bake oven in the northeast room was taken out and the fireplace rebuilt while others of the nine known fireplaces were altered and mantels were removed. Wide arches were opened up between the front rooms and the central staircase to create an open floor plan across the front of the house and partition walls between the rear rooms of the main block were removed to create a single "common room," 37 feet long. There is nevertheless significant early wood finish remaining; and a second brick oven has been uncovered, attached to the remains of yet a tenth fireplace in the 19th century ell.

Sensitively preserved, the house reflects many generations of change and adaptation, and continues to be one of the most distinguished in the town. John Adams, Jr. and 19th century owner Nathan Handley were important landowners, and a significant portion of their impressive holdings remains with the property. The present house lot is nearly twenty acres, and a parcel of 62 acres across the road (part of the original John Adams, Sr. property) protects the farm's environment from inappropriate development.

The Walter Russell Adams House [MHC 256][photos 14, 15] is a large five-bay, single-pile, center-entrance frame house with hip roof, twin end-wall chimneys, and rear ell. A lateral, one-story, pitch-roofed shed (built from early reused barn timbers) extends to the west from the rear ell, and a modern enclosed porch is on the east. There is a large detached bank barn west of the house, with a smaller barn connected to its east end and another small barn or shed connected to its south front. The house is clapboarded, with plain corner boards and simple molded box cornice. The large west chimney is original and serves fireplaces in the first and second floors of the main block; the much smaller east chimney is a later replacement. The entrance is flanked by sidelights consisting of 2/2 operable sash above wooden aprons, and is capped by an elliptical louvred fan, the whole surmounted by a classical entablature with broad frieze carried on Tuscan pilasters displaying exaggerated entasis. The windows have simple original molded trim and later 2/2 double hung sash. The louvred blinds show a distinct local characteristic found in other early 19th century houses in the vicinity: while rectangular upper and lower sections have typical horizontal louvres, a square middle section

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contains louvres which run vertically. The foundation consists of a full cellar under the main block, with dry stone walls capped with cut granite slabs.

The house was evidently built shortly after Walter Russell Adams acquired the land from John Adams in 1814. It was long known as one of the most prosperous farms in Ashburnham, built on what was acknowledged the best farmland in the town. Today the house, outbuildings and site are virtually unchanged from their appearance in an engraving published in Ezra Stearns' History of Ashburnham in 1887. Inside, much of the wood finish is original, including the simple straight-run staircase with slender Federal newel post and square balusters. Handsome six-panel doors have shallow flat panels framed by delicate raised ogee moldings. This trim is very similar to that in the Walter Russell House nearby, and some molding profiles are identical. The interiors in both houses may have been finished by the same carpenter, but it appears at least as likely that their nearly matching trim was purchased ready-made from the same local supplier. The west parlor on the first floor contains later Greek Revival trim and mantel.

The front portion of the ell is evidently of the same period with the main block, and consists of a single large room -- the original kitchen, with brick fireplace and beehive oven. Characteristic of kitchen ells in two-story, single-pile Worcester County houses of the Federal period, this one has small, nearly square windows tucked tightly under the eaves in the attic story. This ell was later extended toward the rear. A stud removed in renovations is preserved in the house, and bears the inscription "WA 48" -- probably a lumber dealer's mark indicating Walter Adams' purchase in 1848. The long shed attached to this ell is built of reused hewn timbers, a number of which display old purlin mortises from their former use as barn roof rafters. They are identical to roof timbers in the small barn discussed below.

The large 19th century bank barn west of the house is covered with unpainted vertical boards. While New England barns normally sat low to the ground and had side-wall entrances well into the 19th century, this barn is built upon an embankment and has a high stone foundation and a gable-wall entrance. These are features typical of early Pennsylvania barns, and not normally found in New England before the 1830s. This may be the earliest surviving bank barn in the region, built after John Adams' visit to his son James in Pennsylvania in 1834. Attached to its east end by a short hyphen is a 22' by 36' English style barn with side-wall entrance. Manifestly of earlier origin than the large barn, its hewn timber frame displays construction more typical of the 18th century than the 19th. Front and rear walls were raised as pre-assembled bents with flared corner posts (19th century bents are normally raised parallel to the end walls and have unflared posts). Tie girts are laid over the front and rear plates in the 18th century manner, rather than framed into them as in 19th century barns. The early roofing system consists of large principal rafters mortised at two-foot intervals for common purlins (later replaced with paired common rafters between the original principal rafters). An early layer of vertical sheathing boards cut on a sash saw is visible inside, but is largely covered

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outside by later sheathing. All nails presently visible even in the earlier sheathing layer are transitional machine-cut nails with thick regular heads and burrs on adjacent edges, indicating a date of ca. 1810-1840. Either the framing is archaic, or this is an older barn recovered early in the 19th century. As the building is now underlaid by split granite slabs, it is possible that it was moved and repaired after construction of the present house. Given the early construction style of its frame, it appears to be one of the "buildings thereon standing" mentioned in the 1814 deed from John Adams. If so, it is the sole structure known to survive from the original John Adams farm, and one of the oldest buildings in Cambridge Grant.

At the corner of Wilker Road and Russell Hill Road is a small manmade farm pond, partly enclosed by an earthen berm. Presently maintained for fire protection, it may have been created originally either as a fire pond or as a watering hole for livestock. Much of the adjacent land remains untouched by development, and contributes materially to the historic appearance of the district. The house lot is 10 1/2-acres, and the parcel of meadow and wood across the road contains about 13 1/2-acres.

The Timothy Fletcher House (Cambridge Grant Farm) [MHC 257] [photos 1, 2, 8, 13] is another two story, single-pile, hip-roofed Federal dwelling of five bays with center entrance. It may have been built before 1816, when Josiah Fletcher sold the land to Timothy Fletcher "with the buildings thereon," but it is more likely that it was built between then and 1820, when a deed to Asa Woods described a boundary running between "the old and the new house by the town road." More modest in scale than the Walter Russell Adams House, the Fletcher House has the two rear-wall chimneys and low hip roof characteristic of many Worcester County houses of the period. There is an integral rear kitchen ell with rear-wall chimney typical of one-pile Federal houses in this region, plus a long lateral ell connected to a large 19th century barn with gable end to the road. There are modern hip-roofed dormers in the ells, and a modern enclosed porch is appended to the north end of the main block. The entrance consists of a partial entablature raised on simple Tuscan pilasters, enclosing a six-panel door flanked by sidelights and crowned by a shallow elliptical louvred fan. There is a simple molded box cornice on the main block of the house. The 6/6 window sash are modern replacements, and other early finish is disguised beneath vinyl siding. Nonetheless, the house and connected buildings constitute a handsome example of a successful 19th century farm, and in recent years much of the old pasture and crop land surrounding them has been cleared of encroaching forest, presenting an increasingly rare present-day view of what these prosperous farms looked like when surrounded by broad open fields. The house lot alone contains 43 acres, while the half meadow, half wooded lot across the road contains 40 acres more. Both parcels were part of the Fletcher farm by 1781.

The Walter Russell House [MHC 253] [photos 6, 18, 26-28, 31] was built in 1823 on a two-acre house lot purchased from John Adams, Jr. in 1822. It is a two-story, single-pile, five-bay, hip-roofed frame house with brick end walls. One of only three Federal brick-end houses constructed in Ashburnham, it is the only

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two-story example remaining. Like the other one-pile houses in this area, it has a rear kitchen ell of a period with the main block. Behind the ell is a long lateral one-story shed, which formerly connected to an English barn with entrance on the long front elevation. Its foundation terrace and stone doorstep may still be seen east of the shed. Fenestration consists of 6/6 sash with original molded trim and louvred blinds in the main block; newer 6/6 sash in the shed and first story of the ell; and six-light casement windows under the eaves in the attic story of the ell. There is a simple molded box cornice. The exterior finish consists of clapboards and broad cornerboards on the front of the main block, and cedar shingles on the rear wall of the main block and on the ell and shed. Across the front of the house is a full-width one-story Victorian veranda with elaborate turned posts and jigsaw balusters. The porch roof conceals the entablature of the Federal entrance, but the unusually slender Tuscan pilasters that supported it and the piers against which they stand are visible, as is the original six-panel door with rectangular four-light transom.

A remarkable feature of the exterior is that the bricks of the west end were laid in common bond, while Flemish bond was used on the east end -- a suggestion that two masons were at work simultaneously, particularly as the remainder of the house appears to have been built all at one time. Running bond was used over window openings in both ends. Its failure on the east end resulted in the insertion of brick voussoirs above the first story window after 1920. The original foundation consists of a dry stone-wall cellar under the center portion of the main block, capped at the front with cut granite slabs. It stops several feet short of the brick ends, which rest on granite slabs laid directly on the earth. At the rear, the original cellar was later extended beneath the kitchen ell. The ell has been much altered, and its fireplace and chimney no longer exist. The house lot has been kept clear of growth, as have the fields across the road, preserving the open landscape and the distant views. One of these parcels, a steep seven-plus acre pasture referred to in numerous old deeds as "the side hill piece," has been conveyed with the house for generations.

Inside, the main block of the house retains all of its original wood finish in the east parlor, the stair passage, and the two front bedrooms, including molded chair rails, wide floor boards, a simple Federal staircase and banister, and fine mantelpieces. The outstanding interior decorative element consists of two large murals painted ca. 1824-1825 by the itinerant artist Rufus Porter, discussed in detail under Section 8 below [photos 26-28].

The Ward and Mary Russell House (Burbank house) [MHC 252][photos 6, 19] is a vernacular, five-bay, pitch-roof cape with two interior chimneys and an integral one-story angular ell with connected carriage shed. Built in 1834 by Mary Russell and her cousin/husband Ward Russell, it is constructed in a conservative late Federal style with some Greek Revival decorative details. The exterior is clapboarded, with simple cornerboards. Vergeboards at the gables are nearly flush with the wall face. Fenestration

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consists of original 6/9 double-hung sash with slender muntins and simple molded trim downstairs in the main block, and 6/6 sash in the gable ends and the (later) rear dormers. Fenestration in the ell has been changed in recent renovation from a small 6-pane casement to 6/6 sash. The entrance has a stylish seven-panel door with raised fields, flanked by 2/3 operable double-hung sash with paneled aprons below. Its trim consists of stock molded boards with Grecian corner blocks. The carriage shed has plain rectangular board-and-batten doors with remarkably long forged iron strap hinges. The foundation was originally of dry fieldstone at the front and sides, capped with cut granite slabs, and all brick at the back, with the interior H-plan brick foundation of one chimney intact. During renovation in 1994, the house was moved back 30 feet and set upon a new concrete foundation faced with granite. The original granite foundation slabs were reused in landscaping.

Virtually all of the original interior wood finish is intact, including wide pine and hemlock floorboards and all four original mantels. The wood trim is of the most modest vernacular sort except in the east parlor, where, as at the front entrance, fashionable Grecian trim in a more pretentious style (probably bought from a stock source) was used. All interior wood finish in the main block was carefully preserved during recent renovations, including hand-painted grey and yellow ochre marbleizing on the east parlor baseboards. Fine early cupboards in the pantry, with original brass hardware, were removed during renovation.

The Russell-Burbank barn foundation [photo 20] is located just west of the Ward & Mary Russell house. A long bank barn of five or six bents, it was connected to the carriage shed, with its ridge running parallel to that of the house. Although not presenting its gable end to the road in the later 19th century manner, it was nevertheless newer in style than the neighboring English-style barn at the Walter Russell House across the road, having entrances at both gable ends and a large open cellar below. The massive stone foundation of the cellar, which underlay the eastern three quarters of the barn, remains intact, although now bisected by a modern driveway. Although the once-open fields around the house have largely returned to forest, much land remains with the property and is undeveloped. Behind the barn site, a stone-wall-lined farm lane runs south toward Jewell Hill's western shoulder -- through 42 acres of new-growth forest that was once broad open pasture and orchard.

The James Adams, Jr. House (MHC 255) is a two-story, five-bay frame building with low hip roof, central entrance and twin rear-wall chimneys, set upon cut granite slabs over a dry fieldstone cellar. It was evidently built by James Adams, Jr., shortly after his acquisition of the land in 1826. The front entrance has a six-panel door flanked by 20th century full-length sidelights with unremarkable board trim. There is no

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surviving evidence of any decorative surround, although Oscar Carlson, Jr., whose father renovated the house between 1913 and 1918, stated that there was originally a louvred fan over the entrance like those on nearby houses. The current owners are in the process of restoring it. There is a simple secondary entrance on the south elevation near the rear wall. Fenestration consists of modern 6/6 double-hung sash. Vinyl siding has recently been removed and replaced with appropriate quarter-sawn clapboards.

Inside, the house has been significantly altered, but it retains a good Federal dogleg staircase and some other early wood finish, including fine wide floorboards and both Federal and Greek Revival doors and door trim. Although this is framed as a single-pile house, one upstairs room is divided into one large front chamber and one smaller one behind. The other upper room was formerly also divided, into a small front chamber and a larger rear one. On the first floor, the left-hand room is likewise divided into a large front room (now a kitchen) and a smaller back room (evidently the original kitchen, with some early wood finish intact). In the north parlor is a good Federal mantel which may be original to this house, but may have been moved here from the nearby Walter Russell Adams House during early 20th century renovations. The present owners have undertaken a sensitive preservation of the remaining early interior features of this house, as well as a gradual restoration of its exterior finish based on careful research.

The small detached barn is a well-preserved early post and beam structure with vertical plank covering. The gable end faces the road, with nearly flush vergeboards above and wide double sliding wooden doors below. Its south front holds four square single-sash twelve-light windows at ground-floor level; its loft on the north is lighted by four like windows placed tightly under the eaves. Below them are two more of these windows and a secondary entrance on the north wall. A small meadow remains clear of overgrowth south of the barn, and recent clearance of encroaching pine forest on the north and west has returned much of the landscape to its former openness. Behind the house is a small stone dam formerly used in connection with the morocco tanning business. The house lot is slightly over six acres. To the east, the house and barn overlook the 13 1/2-acre south pasture of the Walter Russell Adams property.

The Russell-Burbank Cemetery (MHC 804) [photos 21-22] is a small family burial ground, centered in a sloping pasture on the southern side of Russell Hill Road. It is enclosed by low stone walls and shaded by beautiful old trees, including an immense copper beech and mature hemlocks and oaks. The original plot is 40 by 50 feet, and is located 70 feet east of the Ward Russell House and across the road from the Walter Russell House. It contains fifteen monuments bearing the names of eighteen members of the Russell and Burbank families, with dates of death ranging from 1848 to 1970. There are a number of white marble Victorian stones, including two with decorative Gothic panels and one in the form of a Grecian stele capped by a classical urn. One 20th century stone is a natural grey granite boulder with veins of white quartz, mica,

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and black crystals; another has a granite plinth set with a very large crystal of green tourmaline. In the late 19th or early 20th century, the north wall of the cemetery, just three feet from the road, was reconstructed with mortar joints, probably as a defense against damage from snow plows. The side and rear walls remain unmortared, like those enclosing the surrounding fields. In 1996 the tumbling side walls were expertly repaired and the rear wall was rebuilt with the original stones eight feet south of its original placement, enlarging the enclosed area to 40' x 58'. The cemetery is accessible on foot only. Entrance is by a simple four-foot-wide opening in the north wall. Although pine forest has overtaken much of the pasture land to the south, the area around the cemetery has been kept open, and there are impressive views across the south shoulder of Russell Hill and to the top of Jewell Hill.

The District Three Schoolhouse lot [photos 23-24] is west of the Thomas Russell House on what is now lot 39 / parcel 5 on the town assessors' map. Although the last of its three or four successive buildings was destroyed in the 20th century, its foundation of cut granite slabs 23' by 33' remains in place on the old 100' by 120' lot, about 60 feet from the road. A small mound of scattered bricks evidently from its chimney lies just inside the north boundary of the foundation, as do intermediate support stones for its floor frame. The granite doorstep also remains in place.

The Morocco Shop site [photo 25] is between the schoolhouse lot and the Thomas Russell House on lot 39 / parcel 5. Of the several sites associated with the production of morocco leather on Russell Hill, the one most frequently referred to in old records is the shop of Thomas Russell (later of Walter Russell, later of Ivers Adams and Thomas Russell Adams), said in several deeds to have been located 72 feet north of the road just west of Thomas Russell's house lot. At approximately that location is a 22' by 12' rectangular arrangement of field stones which evidently formed its foundation. Water was carried to the shop in hollow logs from a nearby spring mentioned in the early deeds. This spring, whose opening is protected by large boulders and partially covered by a granite slab, can still be found a few yards north of the northern boundary of the Thomas Russell House lot.

Red Top [photos 16-17] is an early 20th century single-story vernacular frame summer cottage with a low pitch roof, its gable end facing the road. An enclosed lean-to porch spans the front and wraps around the east facade. The ridge is pierced by a stone chimney several feet forward of the original north wall. The exterior covering is of shingles; all trim is severely plain. The cottage is now adapted for multi-season use and extended by a large two-story frame addition on the north. Fenestration consists of 1/1 and 2/2 sash

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from various periods, as well as modern single-light casements. Built on former Handley Farm land purchased primarily for the views, the cottage stands on a lot of just over three acres, and a small adjacent lot contains 1-1/3 acres. The wild blueberry farm behind the house is 42 acres of mostly open land spreading over the rocky crest of the glacial moraine.

Archaeological Description

While no prehistoric sites are recorded in the Cambridge Grant Historic District or in the general area, it is possible that sites are present. Environmental characteristics of the district indicate the presence of several locational criteria (slope, soil drainage, distance to wetlands) that are favorable indicators for many types of prehistoric sites. Several well drained, level to moderately sloping terraces within 1000 feet of wetlands are located on the slopes of the Russell Hill moraine and Jewell Hill. Freshwater wetlands in the area are the headwaters of streams lying within the Nashua River drainage, part of the larger Merrimack River drainage. Most sites should be present in the central portion of the district surrounding the wetlands south of Russell Hill Road and near wetlands on the south to southwest facing slopes of Jewell Hill. High prehistoric site potential may also exist around freshwater springs also reported in the district. Regional prehistoric settlement information and environmental potential for the area indicate potential sites may include smaller campsites and special purpose type sites representing resource gathering activities and quarries. Professor Levi Russell Ward, owner of the Walter Russell House through much of the 19th century, was an artifact collector and a stone axe head from his collection remained in the house when it was purchased in 1920. It is unknown whether the axe was found in the district. Given the information presented above, the size of the district (c. 322 acres), and the availability of undeveloped land, a high potential exists for locating prehistoric resources in the district.

A high potential also exists for locating historic archaeological resources in the district. Additional historical research combined with archaeological survey and testing can help locate structural evidence of many of the 18th and 19th century residences, farmsteads, industries and civic buildings no longer extant in the district. Many homes from the district's early settlers in the 18th century including John Adams, Josiah Fletcher and Ethan Wetherbee are represented on maps as late as 1855 but are gone by 1870. Archaeological evidence may also survive from the Ivers and Thomas Russell Adams House (1820's - 30's) and several outbuildings destroyed after 1982. Structural evidence may also survive from the Captain Thomas Adams (ca. 1778) dwelling house which preceded the Ivers and Thomas Russell Adams House on the same general site. Structural evidence of outbuildings including barns and evidence of occupational related features (trash pits, privies, wells) may also survive as parts of larger archaeological sites and with extant buildings. A barn foundation has been identified adjacent to the Ward and Mary Russell House on

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the south side of Russell Hill Road. Archaeological evidence including structural remains and features associated with industrial sites should also survive in the district. Foundation remains from a Morocco Shop site(tanning site) have been identified between the schoolhouse lot and the Thomas Russell House. Tanning sites may include evidence of a structure, tanning vats that were set in the ground, and water supply that was important in the tanning process. A tanning site may also be present near the John Adams Jr. House (ca.1826) where a small stone dam reportedly built as part of a tanning business also exists. Structural evidence and/or archaeological features may also survive from an 18th century brick making operation near the John Adams Jr. House. The site of at least one civic structure has also been identified in the district. Structural evidence from three or four successive school buildings may survive at the site of the District 3 Schoolhouse at 205 Russell Hill Road. A granite foundation from the last school building, destroyed in the 20th century survives at that location. Occupational related features associated with the school may also exist. Unmarked graves, funerary artifacts and post molds from fence posts marking boundaries may exist at the 19th century Russell-Burbank Cemetery at 224 Russell Hill Road.

(end)

Cambridge Grant HD
Name of Property

Worcester, MA
County and State

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- ☒ **A** Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- ☐ **B** Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- ☒ **C** Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- ☐ **D** Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- ☐ **A** owned by religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- ☐ **B** removed from its original location.
- ☐ **C** a birthplace or grave.
- ☐ **D** a cemetery.
- ☐ **E** a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- ☐ **F** a commemorative property.
- ☐ **G** less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

9. Major Bibliographical References

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- ☐ preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- ☐ previously listed in the National Register
- ☐ previously determined eligible by the National Register
- ☐ designated a National Historic Landmark
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

ARCHITECTURE

AGRICULTURE

ART

EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT

PERFORMING ARTS

SOCIAL HISTORY

Period of Significance

1734-1951

Significant Dates

1766 1916

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

Rufus Porter, Aldrich Bowker

Cultural Affiliation

n/a

Architect/Builder

Primary location of additional data:

- ☒ State Historic Preservation Office
- ☐ Other State agency
- ☐ Federal agency
- ☐ Local government
- ☐ University
- ☐ Other

Name of repository:

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8. HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE

The Cambridge Grant Historic District represents a model of rural New England life in the early nineteenth century. Embodying a rare example of an intact pioneer family neighborhood, it illuminates a settlement pattern followed for much of the interior of the nation. For a community of its size, it has been home to an astonishing number of distinguished citizens, and it is the site of a vigorous local arts community of the early 20th century. Its well-preserved historic buildings retain great integrity of setting, location, association, materials, feeling, and design. Cambridge Grant meets criteria A, B, and C for listing on the National Register of Historic Places

Constructed within the brief period from 1788 to 1834, the Federal buildings at Cambridge Grant are closely related in construction, materials and design. Individual in their specific forms, they are nonetheless substantially alike in their conception, functional arrangement, and aesthetic origins. As such, they form a significant and distinguishable architectural group, typifying vernacular domestic architecture of rural Worcester County at the onset of the 19th century. Happily, the houses and the barns retain most of their exterior and interior architectural detail. Furthermore, as the setting of these buildings is undisturbed as well -- both within the general landscape and in their relationship to one another -- the district as a whole possesses outstanding period integrity

The Russell Hill group therefore qualifies for inclusion in the National Register under criterion A, representing events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history. Additionally, its related houses form a significant and distinguishable architectural group; and, as well-preserved rural vernacular buildings of the Federal period, they embody the distinctive characteristics of their type. They therefore qualify under criterion C as well.

Handley Farm (the John Adams, Jr. House, c. 1798) is an outstanding 18th century brick country squire's mansion, constructed at a time when the vast majority of houses in the immediate region were modest frame cottages. With its unadorned arched entrance (dating from the same year as Bullfinch's clean-cut arches at the new Massachusetts State House), and with its massive granite lintels, it anticipates architectural elements which would not become common, even in the most fashionable New England buildings, for two more decades. Home to Aldrich Bowker during his most productive decades (and site of his popular open-air productions), it is closely associated with the artistic and personal life of this significant figure in American theatre.

The brick-end Walter Russell House (c. 1823-24) contains large admirably preserved murals dating from the

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first or second year of Rufus Porter's long and well-documented career as a painter. For its preservation of these exceedingly rare seminal works by a known master (many of whose murals are now lost), and for its significant role in the start of his career, the Walter Russell House has significance beyond that of its architecture.

The Cambridge Grant

In 1662 a "great bridge" was built across the Charles River between present-day Brighton and Cambridge, Massachusetts, forming a land route between Boston and the towns to the north. The General Court of the colony charged the towns of Lexington, Cambridge and Newton with responsibility for maintaining the bridge. Over time the towns sought relief from the heavy cost of maintenance, and in 1734 they were each granted a thousand acres of unsettled land to develop or sell to ease the financial burden. With a shortage of money, the Court commonly used such grants as the preferred means of payment for military or other public service, as well as for other forms of legal compensation. Newton chose two parcels, one near Petersham, Massachusetts and one at what is now Berwick, Maine; while both Lexington and Cambridge selected undivided parcels in unsettled wilderness lands north of Lunenburg, in what is now Ashburnham. Subsequently five other grants, ranging from four hundred to one thousand acres, were made within the present-day borders of Ashburnham. In 1736, a far larger tract was given to the heirs of sixty soldiers from Dorchester and its environs as compensation for military service in an unsuccessful 1690 expedition to Canada. This vast tract, known as the Dorchester Canada plantation, partially or completely surrounded the six earlier grants (which nonetheless remained autonomous entities). The parcel still belonging to Cambridge was known variously as "The Bridge farm in Dorchester Canada," "Cambridge Bridge farm," "Cambridge farm," or "Cambridge grant." Minor errors made in surveying the extremely hilly southern portion, combined with deliberate allowances made for "swag of the chain," resulted in a tract nearer 1200 acres than the 1000 originally allocated.

Over the next 29 years Dorchester Canada became gradually populated. When, in 1764, the proprietors and inhabitants voted a tax on landholders to promote its incorporation as a town, the uninhabited Bridge Farm, which still belonged to the town of Cambridge, was exempted. But by June of that year a petition for incorporation included all smaller grants within the plantation, and in November the Cambridge proprietors appointed a committee to dispose of their land for money. Dorchester Canada plantation was chartered as the new town of Ashburnham in February 1765, and the Bridge Farm lands, although still owned by the Cambridge proprietors, became part of the newly recognized town.

One of the committee members the Cambridge proprietors had appointed to sell their land in 1764 was Thomas Adams of Menotomy (later West Cambridge, now Arlington). He sold 80 acres in the southeast

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corner of the grant to Joshua Billings in 1766 and 100 acres to his son John Adams in 1768. By 1772 he had acquired the remainder of the southern half of the grant for himself, and he sold or gave it to relatives in five more tracts between 1777 and 1788. The northern half was similarly disposed of by Isaac Stearns of Billerica, in four large tracts sold from 1766 to 1772. Whether Stearns had acquired the northern half of the grant in his own right or was selling it on behalf of the proprietors is not certain from the record. In any event, the town of Cambridge recorded that it had been fully paid for the land by August of 1772. In 1788 a discrepancy between the widths measured at the northern and southern boundaries of the grant was resolved by the simple expedient of redefining the western boundary of Ebenezer Thomas Adams' lot to meet the corner of Peter Polley's lot to the south, thus further increasing the total acreage. Although it was ultimately assimilated into the town of Ashburnham, Cambridge Grant retained its peculiar identity as a separate community of West Cambridge families well into the 19th century -- a manifest reminder of the ancient system which colonial New England governments had used not only to compensate claims and reward public service, but (ultimately more importantly) to advance English settlement and consolidate exploitation of the vast unsettled territories.

By the 20th century much of the Cambridge Grant -- virtually all once exploited as farmland -- gradually returned to forest. Nevertheless, many acres of open field remain, and in the undeveloped forest the early stone wall boundaries are intact. With the sole exception of a portion of the Rindge Turnpike, even the few roads are the same ones laid out at the first settlement. With many homes of the second and third generation of settlers remaining, and astonishingly few new buildings erected, the greater part of the old grant remains completely unspoiled. Within the portion of Cambridge Grant recommended for inclusion in the National Register, only one house dates later than the Federal period. As a remarkably intact survival of the ancient land grant system, the Cambridge Grant district meets National Register criterion A.

The Fletcher Farm

Ebenezer Fletcher purchased 250 acres in the northern half of "the Cambridge Grant farm" from Isaac Stearns in 1772. In 1781 he sold 100 acres "with a dwelling house standing on the same" to his son Josiah. As there is no evidence that Ebenezer Fletcher ever settled in Ashburnham, it is possible that Josiah had the house built in anticipation of settling on his father's land. Later Josiah acquired 50 acres more. In 1816 he conveyed the 150 acres in two equal parcels to Joshua Reed and Timothy Fletcher. According to the 1816 deed there were buildings on each portion by then, and an 1820 deed refers to the property line separating the two as running "between the old and the new house by the town road." The 18th century house is gone, but the 19th century house now known as Cambridge Grant Farm is the "new" house owned by Timothy Fletcher in 1820 and probably built by him around 1816. With its large and well-preserved 19th century barn and broad cleared acreage, Cambridge Grant Farm is a fine example of a prosperous New England farm

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of the Federal period, and the sole significant survivor of the early settlements in the northern half the Cambridge Grant. Allied with the Adams and Russell houses in the adjoining southern portion of the Grant, it forms an essential element in a superb cluster of rural Federal domestic architecture typical of Worcester County, and is therefore eligible for inclusion on the National Register under criterion C.

The Russell-Adams Family Neighborhood

Several structures on Russell Hill Road constitute a rare surviving example of a once-common model of New England rural life: the family neighborhood. Colonists moving into unsettled areas frequently made the move with relatives, banding together to share the burdens of pioneer settlement as well as the potential prosperity offered by large tracts of undeveloped land. When settlement was successful, districts could develop in which all householders might be co-descendants of one or two families. In another settlement pattern, family neighborhoods evolved when the offspring of early settlers built homes on subdivided parcels of their parents' land, creating extended farms which served more than one generation and household unit. While the properties often remained distinct, with recognized boundary lines and separate ownership, the family connection resulted in districts where immediate neighbors were all related either by blood or through marriage. Essentially rural in character, these family neighborhoods did not arise because of the presence of mills or public buildings (notably churches) around which towns and villages typically grew. Instead, family neighborhoods developed because of the economics of available land, the opportunity to pool labor, and the yearning for support and comfort of nearby family -- particularly in isolated rural settings -- in an age when both transportation and communication were slow and uncertain. New England town histories and old town maps abound in records of such early neighborhoods (often, as at Russell Hill, they are still named for the original settlers); but most are no longer recognizable as archetypical family neighborhoods in the sense described. In heavily settled areas subsequent subdivision, reconstruction, building loss, and encroachment of unrelated structures has normally changed the character of such neighborhoods. Even in still-rural areas, the loss of early buildings through fire or other causes has usually left little trace of the old family neighborhood. Russell Hill is an outstanding exception.

The fine structures which comprise this intact early family neighborhood on Russell Hill may be divided into two groups: those of the Russell family at the crest of the hill; and, to the east, those of the Adams family, with whom the Russells were intermarried. The Russell group consists of the following elements:

- * the Thomas Russell and Margaret (Adams) Russell House, built on the north side of the road c. 1788 (MHC 251);

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- * the house of their son Walter Russell and his wife Alona (Lawrence) Russell, built next door in 1823 (MHC 253);
- * the house of their daughter Mary Russell and her husband Ward Russell (a second cousin), built on the south side of the road in 1834, with its adjacent barn foundation;
- * the Russell-Burbank family cemetery, immediately east of the Ward Russell House, established by 1848 (MHC 804).

The barn foundation is pertinent to the concept of the shared family farm. There being no evidence of a barn site at the Thomas Russell House on the north side of the road, either this barn or the older one formerly standing next to the Walter Russell House may have been shared by two of the Russell families.

The Adams group consists of the following structures:

- * the house of Walter Russell Adams and Mercy (Fairbanks) Adams, built about 1815 on land originally belonging to John Adams, Sr., with its large 19th century bank barn and a smaller attached 18th century barn (MHC 256);
- * the house of John Adams, Jr. (Ensign John Adams) and Dolly (Gibson) Adams, built about 1798, with its 19th century ell and barn (MHC 254);
- * the James Adams, Jr. and Mary (Whitney) Adams House, built ca. 1826, with its barn of early date (MHC 255).

John Adams, Sr. of Menotomy (West Cambridge Parish) was the first settler of European descent in the Cambridge Grant. His father, Thomas Adams, had been appointed in 1764 to the committee to sell the land on behalf of the town of Cambridge, had acquired the entire southern half of the Grant. John began clearing Grant land of his father's in 1766, and made "provision for a house" there in 1770. He acquired a large portion of the Grant from Thomas, starting with 100 acres in 1768.

In 1777, Thomas gave 50 acres to his daughter, Lucretia (Adams) Wetherbee. Evidently she and her husband, Ethan Wetherbee, had already removed to her father's remote Cambridge Farm holdings the preceding year, possibly with particular reason. Ethan Wetherbee had been the keeper of the Black Horse

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Tavern in Menotomy, where the Committee of Safety and the Committee of Supplies met; and it was by his warning that Charles Lee, Azor Orne and Elbridge Gerry narrowly escaped capture by the British on the night of April 18-19, 1775 on their way to Lexington. Thomas Adams himself settled here only later, in 1778. In 1788, he sold 81 acres more to his son John. In the same year he sold 147 acres in the western part of the grant to his son, Ebenezer Thomas Adams, as well as 97 acres between John and Lucretia's lands to his grandson Thomas Russell of Charlestown. Russell was the son of Thomas Adams' daughter Hannah (and thus a nephew of three of his neighbors and grandson of another). Furthermore, he was married to his distant cousin Margaret Adams of Menotomy, a niece of Thomas Adams.

From this early settlement of relatives on contiguous acreage, the close association between the Adams and Russell families continued for many years. Still, two distinct family enclaves developed: the Adams compound on the eastern edge of the grant, settled by descendants of John Adams; and the Russell compound at the top of the hill, settled by descendants of Thomas Russell. In 1826, David Russell, a first cousin of Thomas, bought the former Ethan Wetherbee place. Although the Wetherbees were initially part of the larger family settlement, their descendants dispersed. David Russell's son Ward married Thomas Russell's daughter Mary. The Ethan Wetherbee/David Russell buildings are no longer extant. The house is shown on the 1855 map, but was gone by the time the 1870 map was published.

The District Three Schoolhouse and the Morocco Shop

District Three School. In 1774, first three and subsequently five Ashburnham school districts were established, the Russell Hill area becoming district 3, eventually serving the children of the Adams, Russell and Fletcher families. Precisely when the first schoolhouse was built is not known, but either it or a successor building had burned down by 1799, when the town voted funds to establish a school in John Adams' wardroom in its place. Subsequently, a new brick building was erected on the schoolhouse lot. This masonry structure proved too heavy for the lot, which is frequently spongy with drainage from Russell Hill. Around 1846 it was moved to the nearby farm and tannery of Ivers and Thomas Russell Adams, and another wooden schoolhouse took its place. For many years this school provided early education for the Cambridge Grant children (including Melvin Ohio Adams, who became one of the most prominent figures in the region). The District 3 School was discontinued in 1888. Some time after the 1930s, the dilapidated building was removed, but its granite foundation slabs are perfectly preserved on the original schoolhouse lot.

The Morocco Shop. The trade of tanning hides was followed on Russell Hill from the earliest settlement until well into the 19th century, and became the most important industry in the Cambridge Grant other than

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farming. John Adams, the first settler, was a cordwainer as well as a farmer, and is known to have made shoes until the last year of his life, at age 104. His perennial need for shoe leather may account for the fact that his son Levi became a tanner as well as a farmer; and his son James was known as both a tanner and shoemaker. John's nephew Thomas Russell began curing hides specifically for morocco leather after coming to the grant in 1788. His shop is first mentioned in a deed of 1819. Thomas was followed in the morocco trade by his sons Walter and Thomas Jr. Walter was succeeded in the Russell Hill business by Frank Russell, who with a partner moved the business to Ashburnham Center in 1852, where it continued until 1882. An 1830 deed shows that Ivers Adams was by then also known as a morocco dresser; and from 1838 to 1860, he and Thomas Russell Adams carried on a thriving morocco business on Russell Hill. John Adams' grandson, John Adams III, was also referred to as a morocco dresser in an 1826 deed. Finally, another of John Adams' grandsons, James Adams, Jr., was also called a morocco dresser in an 1826 deed, and he had started a morocco business of his own by 1833. James Adams moved to Pennsylvania in 1848, and was succeeded locally in the business by his son Luther B. Adams and his brother Andrew Jackson Adams. With nearly all the Adams and Russell male descendants participating for over fifty years, morocco dressing became both a family trade and an economic mainstay of the community second only to farming.

Apart from the tanning facilities known to have been located at the several farms, the 1855 map of Ashburnham shows two freestanding morocco shops on Russell Hill: the shop of Thomas Russell, Jr., east of the Walter Russell house, and that of Ivers and T. R. Adams, west of the Thomas Russell, Sr. house (which was by then owned by Ivers and T. R. Adams). The latter shop is the original one established by Thomas Russell, Sr. prior to 1819. It was supplied with water which deeds tell us was "carried in logs" from a nearby spring. By following the boundaries listed it is still possible to find the stones which evidently formed the foundation of this shop (between the Thomas Russell house and the schoolhouse lot), as well as the still-flowing spring which provided its water supply.

The schoolhouse and morocco shop foundations and the spring are sites of significant local historic interest, and they may each have some archaeological value as well. In the context of the other surviving structures they make a substantial and unique contribution to understanding the economic and social history of Cambridge Grant.

Rufus Porter

The Walter Russell House boasts remarkably preserved murals by **Rufus Porter**, the most important of early American itinerant wall painters. A large landscape runs the length of the upper staircase, and a smaller romantic scene adorns the overmantel in the master bedroom. Born in West Boxford, Massachusetts

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Other Figures of Note

During the 19th century Cambridge Grant nurtured a surprising number of figures of note for a district of its size. In addition to leaders of local and regional importance, there were several whose influence was more widely felt. While many of their accomplishments were achieved later in life, these men spent all or part of their youth in Cambridge Grant.

Isaac Hill (1788-1851) (son of Isaac Hill Sr., who had moved to Cambridge Grant in 1797, and grandson of first settler John Adams), lived in the district from 1797 to 1802. He later became publisher of the *New Hampshire Patriot*, Clerk of the New Hampshire State Senate, NH State Representative, NH State Senator, Comptroller of the United States Treasury in the Andrew Jackson administration, United States Senator from New Hampshire, and Governor of New Hampshire. As an editor in Concord, NH in the 1840s, he published articles about his youth at Cambridge Grant and about the Adams and Russell families. The Isaac Hill, Sr. farm, where Isaac Hill lived as a youngster, was partly on the 12 acre parcel west of the 42 acre property now associated with the Ward Russell House.

Luther B. Adams (b.1829), son of James Adams, Jr. and great-grandson of John Adams the first settler, was born and raised in the James Adams, Jr. house. He became superintendent of the Boston Chair Manufacturing Co. of Ashburnham, successor to the Winchester Chair Works. The company manufactured the stupendously popular Boston rocker, one of the most widely marketed products in the history of the home furnishings industry. Later it produced huge numbers of Thonet-style bentwood chairs including the sleigh rocker, another remarkable success story in the history of American manufacturing. Ashburnham's most important industry, the firm was an aggressive innovator in mass production techniques and one of the three largest chair manufacturers in the state in the third quarter of the 19th century.

Andrew Jackson Adams (1828-1911), uncle of Luther and grandson of John Adams the first settler, was a partner in the Boston Chair Manufacturing Company. A. J. Adams was the son of James Adams, Sr., of Cambridge Grant, and lived in Ashburnham from 1845 to 1850.

Samuel G. Adams (1825-1886), son of Milton Adams (born in Cambridge Grant in 1801) and great-grandson of first settler John, became Superintendent of Police for the City of Boston.

Ivers Adams (1808-1890), of the Russell Hill Morocco business, was elected Representative to the Massachusetts State Legislature in 1851. He was born in Cambridge Grant, lived in the now-demolished Ivers and T. R. Adams house, and owned the morocco shop whose foundation survives as well as the

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surviving Thomas Russell House, where he evidently housed tannery workers. He endowed the town with a trust fund used for municipal works.

Ivers Whitney Adams (b. 1838), son of Walter Adams (born in Cambridge Grant in 1807) and grandson of Walter Russell Adams, became President and General Manager of the American Net and Twine Company of Boston, the largest manufacturer of its kind in the world in the late 19th century, employing 500 workers. Another benefactor who continued to return to the town, he donated its municipal water system in 1897 and the "Schoolboy of 1850" statue in 1913.

Melvin Ohio Adams (1847-1920), son of Joseph Adams and great-grandson of first settler John, was born and brought up in the James Adams, Jr. house. He became Suffolk County (MA) Assistant District Attorney, but continued to return to the town throughout his life. In private practice in Boston in 1892, he gained national renown for his successful defense of Lizzie Borden in the infamous Fall River ax murder case. Another town benefactor, he donated the Soldiers' Monument in 1905, funded construction of the Dolly Whitney Adams school in 1906, and erected the handsome Celtic stone cross at the Meeting House Hill cemetery in 1916.

The Summer Arts Community

Throughout the 19th century New England farms, with their thin rocky soil, had failed to match the productiveness of the rich farms of other regions, particularly Pennsylvania. Only auxiliary home industries, such as the morocco business at Cambridge Grant, had kept them economically viable. With the opening of the great farmlands of the mid-west and the success of railroads to deliver their produce, the period of real competitiveness for New England farms was all but over. Compounding the challenge, workers had steadily migrated to industrial urban centers since the Civil War. In Ashburnham, even the mighty chair industry was on the wane. Michigan was replacing Massachusetts as a center of furniture manufacturing, and by 1890 Boston Chair, the town's largest employer, had closed. By the turn of the 20th century many of New England's rural communities were facing industrial and agricultural decline and depopulation.

By the early 1900s Ashburnham, once a significant manufacturing center, was well on its way toward becoming a sleepy country village. The town's high elevation and fine lakes made it an attractive summer destination in that age before air conditioning, and it was within easy reach of Boston and Hartford by railroad and automobile. While most new summer residents crowded around the lakes, gradually more of the old homes became summer retreats. Having experienced a boom from the 1820s through the 1840s, the town possessed many fine Federal and Greek Revival houses, sweeping areas of cleared pasture land, and

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very few newer buildings beyond the downtown mill area to detract from its old fashioned charm. At Russell Hill, the Cambridge Grant houses sat at a 1200-1260 foot elevation above sea level and the land fell sharply away to the east, offering cool breezes in summer and an unobstructed view to the Atlantic coast fifty miles away. Already the district had a modest start toward becoming a summer resort. The Walter Russell house had been used mainly as a summer residence by Professor Levi Ward Russell and his heirs since 1858. Nellie Hutchins of Brookline had turned the John Adams, Jr. house into a fashionable vacation residence in 1909 (and in 1913 had bought the James Adams, Jr. home to house servants). By 1916 a small but sophisticated arts community began to evolve.

In that year, **Aldrich Bowker** (1875-1947) purchased the Adams house from Nellie Hutchins. A successful stage actor originally from Ashby, Bowker used it as a seasonal home while performing annually in summer stock at nearby Whalom Park in Lunenburg. As a native son, he became a figure of intense local popularity in an age when regional summer stock theatre was an entertainment medium of real importance. He furnished the Adams house with antiques and reproductions in the colonial revival taste and styled it "Handley Farm" after the 19th century owners. In addition to his popular performances at Whalom Park, Bowker established at Handley farm one of the earliest open-air theatres in the country, inviting other noted actors to participate in productions he mounted on the broad terrace with its panoramic view. In 1920 the well known actor Ainsworth Arnold came from New York to play in W. S. Gilbert's *The Palace of Truth* (in which the playwright Edgar Stehli also played a role); the film actress Bette Davis (who had attended Ashburnham's Cushing Academy) was a guest in the 1930s. Bowker would become best known for his portrayal of "Grandpa" in George S. Kaufman's *You Can't Take it With You*. He played over 500 consecutive performances of the role in the Chicago production, and was the presenter when Kaufman won the Pulitzer Prize in 1937. In these years Bowker continued to spend summers at Handley Farm (and lived there year-round one year). Bowker's sister, Louise Billings, continued to keep Handley Farm as a summer home until 1945.

The Ward Russell House had been the ancestral home to the locally prominent Burbank family since Margaret Russell had married Levi Burbank 1859. Used as a family vacation retreat in the twentieth century, it became a summer studio for Clara Burbank (1862-1927), a floral artist of outstanding merit. After 1927 it served as summer studio for her niece, Amy Burbank of Boston and Belmont, Mass. (1875-1948), an art teacher and accomplished landscape painter. Across the road, two schoolteachers, Mary and Rina Maude Greene, were living in the Thomas Russell house. The Walter Russell house was bought as a summer home in 1920 by Frank Bowker (brother of Aldrich Bowker), an amateur playwright and actor who joined in his brother's open-air theatre productions. Its fine Federal interiors and Rufus Porter murals were maintained, and it was still furnished with over a century of Russell family antiques.

(continued)

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Cambridge Grant Historic District
~~Ashburnham (Worcester), MA~~

Two summer cottages were built between the Walter Russell House and Handley Farm. The first was "Red Top," with its signature red roof, picturesque white birch fence rails, whimsical outbuildings, brightly painted whirligigs, and rustic observation tower (no longer extant) with panoramic views from New Hampshire to Connecticut. The other summer cottage was that of Jeannette Damon (another sister of Frank and Aldrich Bowker, and a teacher at the old District Three School before its closing in 1888). Built about 1925, the cottage was destroyed in the disastrous hurricane of 1938. On both Russell Hill and Jewell Hill, the old pastures, now grown to wild blueberry fields, had become famous for their bountiful crops, and pickers paid to visit them. On the east shoulder of Russell hill, the old Fletcher farm was bought by George and Alice Wallace of Fitchburg, Mass. Like Handley Farm, it was renamed, renovated, and furnished with antiques in the colonial revival taste. Its new name, appropriately, was "Cambridge Grant Farm." Its orchards were maintained by the Wallaces and continued to produce renowned McIntosh apples.

From 1916 until World War II, the heart of the old Cambridge Grant thrived as a small but vital arts colony with many summer residents. It retained its special identity as a distinct district within the town -- as well as its historic role as a family enclave, albeit this time dominated by Burbanks and Bowkers rather than Adams and Russells. Vacation home to artists, writers, teachers, actors, and antiquarians for thirty years, visited by nationally known figures, and the site of one of the region's earliest open air theatres, the Grant's eligibility for inclusion on the National Register is enhanced by its early twentieth century history.

The flourishing of a vital seasonal arts and recreational community from the early 20th century until World War II constitutes another important chapter in the social and cultural life of New England, one that was played out in many summer communities throughout the region. Red Top cottage, the only Cambridge Grant structure not dating from the Federal period, survives as a relic of that significant era. While some summer residents continued to visit their Cambridge Grant properties during the war, the cultural activities which had distinguished the area gradually ceased, and by the war's close, the once-flourishing summer arts community had come to an end.

Recent Preservation Activities

Ashburnham has a town Historical Society, active since 1960, which preserves documents and relics related to the town's history in the old Town House (the former town hall built with the reused frame of the 18th century meeting house). In 1970, Raymond and Barbara Holden's Ashburnham, Massachusetts 1885-1965 recorded town history since the publication of Ezra Stearns' well-known 19th century volume. Kaino Waltari's Focus on Old Houses of Ashburnham, privately published about 1982, catalogued most of the old houses in town, including those in the Cambridge Grant district. In 1986, the town voted to preserve the Dolly Whitney Adams School, which was converted for use as a town library. Presently, the Ashburnham

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Cambridge Grant Historic District
Ashburnham (Worcester), MA

Historical Commission monitors the fortunes of the town's historic resources, including the 1890 Stevens Library building, and uses demolition delay rights within the town center to intervene when historic structures are threatened. Unfortunately, it has not been possible to prevent losses outside the central district. When losses have occurred, however, they have tended to raise consciousness of changes in the town's character and concerns about unrestricted development.

The Ivers and Thomas Russell Adams House was a large two-story, single-pile frame house at the western edge of the Cambridge Grant. Sometime after 1982 the house was destroyed, along with the remnants of the outbuildings, and more of the land was subdivided for new housing. Until then, all of Cambridge Grant had remained distinctly rural, with extensive acreage attached to a number of the old houses. On Russell Hill, there was only one dwelling built later than 1834.

The loss of the Adams house and the beginning of aggressive real estate development spurred an urgent interest in preserving what remained of the Cambridge Grant among the owners of other historic properties in the district, as well as within the town Historical Commission. Several of the Russell Hill houses were inventoried for the Massachusetts Historical Commission in 1988. In 1990, Professor Richard Damon printed a map of the first division of the Cambridge Grant, based on years of research into the deeds. In 1995, Christopher Rice wrote a proposal for land conservation and building restrictions in a research paper for the Conway School of Landscape Design. A proposal to establish a local preservation district was voted on by the town, but failed to pass. In 1997 Allan Small conducted title searches on the extant old houses in the grant to resolve questions regarding original ownership. Town historian Joseph F. von Deck published a seminal history of the district in 1998, identifying early settlers and potential archaeological sites and suggesting directions for further research. Local interest in acknowledging the unique nature of the Grant and preserving its character is very strong.

Archaeological Significance

Since patterns of prehistoric occupation in Ashburnham are poorly understood, any surviving sites could be significant. Prehistoric sites in this area can be important by adding information to our understanding of the role and importance of upland/interior sites along tributary streams of the Nashua/Merrimack River drainage played in the local/regional Native American subsistence and settlement systems. Prehistoric sites in this area could be part of a large, possibly seasonal settlement network of sites based along the Nashua River, the Merrimack River or part of a specialized adaptation to local environments in the uplands and Worcester Plateau locale. Many subsistence and settlement theories indicate prehistoric socio/political/economic boundaries are based along riverine basins. Although sites in this area are ultimately part of the Merrimack

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Cambridge Grant Historic District
Ashburnham (Worcester), MA

River drainage, the area is also in close proximity to drainage areas that are part of the Connecticut River drainage. Prehistoric sites in this area may enable a test of theories relating to riverine adaptations and the importance of sites and settlement/subsistence patterns that are geographically close but in different drainages rather than in the same drainage.

Historic archaeological resources described above have the potential for providing important information on the social, cultural and economic patterns that characterized the evolution of rural country life in a Central Massachusetts upland community during its period of major growth in the 18th and 19th centuries. Additional historic research combined with archaeological survey and testing can help locate residences in the district that no longer survive. This information can help reconstruct the evolution of family neighborhoods in the district and the components of farmsteads within those clusters. It has been suggested that the barn represented by the foundation next to the Ward and Mary Russell residence represents a shared facility by several different families pertinent to the concept of a shared family farm. Historical and archaeological research might also identify other structures that were also shared and important to the shared family farm. Detailed analysis of the contents from occupational related features and the analysis of farm structures might also identify other social, cultural, and economic characteristics that were typical to the concept of a shared family farm. Structural remains and the analysis of occupational related features related to industrial sites in the district may also contribute important information on the relationship of tanning and brick making operations to family farm production and technologies involved in those industries. Structural remains of water- power sites related to tanning industries can contribute important information on the engineering design of those facilities. Important information on the early transport of water might also be obtained from water-power sites. Information relating to the role of 18th and 19th century education in the district may also result from the analysis of structural remains and the analysis of occupational related features at the site of the District 3 Schoolhouse. The location and analysis of unmarked graves at the Russell-Burbank Cemetery may also contribute important information relating to mortuary customs and health in a rural family neighborhood.

(end)

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Cambridge Grant Historic District
Ashburnham (Worcester), MA

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(continued)

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National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number 9 Page 2

Cambridge Grant Historic District
Ashburnham (Worcester), MA

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United States Department of the Interior
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Section number 9 Page 3

Cambridge Grant Historic District
Ashburnham (Worcester), MA

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Worcester Northern District Registry of Deeds, Fitchburg, MA. Books of Grantors and Grantees.

(end)

Cambridge Grant HD
Name of Property

Worcester, MA
County and State

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property c. 322 acres

UTM References See continuation sheet.

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

1. 19 265130 4725920
Zone Easting Northing

3. 19 265620 4724500
Zone Easting Northing

2. 19 265730 4725920
Zone Easting Northing

4. 19 265000 4724170
Zone Easting Northing

— See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Allen F. Small, Consultant, with Betsy Friedberg, NR Director, MHC

organization Massachusetts Historical Commission date April 2001

street & number 220 Morrissey Boulevard telephone 617-727-8470

city or town Boston state MA zip code 02125

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

A USGS map (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A sketch map for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs

Representative black and white photographs of the property.

Additional items (Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO.)

name multiple

street & number _____ telephone _____

city or town _____ state _____ zip code _____

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including the time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reduction Project (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503. NPS Form 10-900 OMB No. 1024-0018 (Rev. 10-90)

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section number 10 Page 1

Cambridge Grant Historic District
Ashburnham (Worcester), MA

10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

UTM References

	zone	easting	northing
1.	19	265,130	4,725,920
2.	19	265,730	4,725,920
3.	19	265,620	4,724,500
4.	19	265,000	4,724,170
5.	19	264,360	4,724,560
6.	19	264,610	4,725,580

Verbal Boundary Description

The nominated district includes portions of Ashburnham Assessors' Maps 38 and 39. Copies are attached, showing the Historic District boundaries and the approximate original boundaries of Cambridge Grant.

Boundary Justification

The boundaries of the Cambridge Grant Historic District are drawn to include the buildings, sites and structures catalogued in the description of the district above, as well as a significant portion of their historic environment, including meadow, wood, pasturage, and blueberry barrens. Property lines traditionally associated with the farms have generally been used, most of which are marked by old stone walls. Larger segments of unbuilt acreage have been included where they are still associated with an extant historic building, and their inclusion is considered representative of the extensive acreage historically characteristic of the Grant properties. Because newer building development remains peripheral, it has not been found necessary to include non-contributing structures, and Grant land affected by recent development has been excluded.

(end_

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number photo Page 1

Cambridge Grant Historic District
~~Ashburnham (Worcester), MA~~

PHOTOGRAPHS

Photographer: Allan F. Small, Belmont, MA

Negatives are with the photographer.

Photographs marked with * are 8 x 10" in size; all others are 5 x 7" or otherwise indicated.

RECENT PHOTOGRAPHS -- General Views

1. View to the east from Russell Hill, showing the Timothy Fletcher farm and the Fitchburg Reservoir (Ashby) in the middle distance. March, 1999.
 2. View to the east from atop Russell Hill, showing blueberry barrens in the foreground, with the Timothy Fletcher farm and Fitchburg Reservoir in the middle distance. March, 1999. *
 3. View to the north across the blueberry barrens at the top of Russell Hill, with Mount Watatic in the distance. March, 1999. *
 4. View of Russell Hill Road, facing east, showing the "side hill piece" on the right. March, 1999. *
 5. The "side hill piece" from the west, with the John Adams, Jr. House on the left. March, 1999. *
 6. View of Russell Hill Road from the north, showing (L-R): the Ward & Mary Russell House, the Walter Russell House, and the Thomas Russell House. March, 1999. *
 7. View of Russell Hill Road from the west, with Walter Russell Adams House and Barns. March, 1999. *
 8. Wilker Road, with Timothy Fletcher House and Barn, from the south. March, 1999.
 9. John Adams, Jr. House (Handley Farm), from the southeast. August, 1998. 247 Russell Hill Road *
 10. John Adams, Jr. House, from the west. August, 1998. *
- (continued)

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section number photo Page 2

**Cambridge Grant Historic District
Ashburnham (Worcester), MA**

-
11. James Adams, Jr. House (Joseph Adams House), from the southeast. August, 1998. 269 Russell Hill Road *
12. Thomas Russell House, from the southwest. August, 1998. 219 Russell Hill Road *
13. Timothy Fletcher House (Cambridge Grant Farm), from the southeast. August, 1999. 15 Wilker Road
14. Walter Russell Adams House (John Adams Homestead), from the south. August, 1998. 287 Russell Hill Road
15. Walter Russell Adams House -- Barns, from the south. March, 1999.
16. Red Top Cottage, from the west. March, 1999. 223 Russell Hill Road
17. Red Top Cottage with modern addition, from the east. March, 1999.
18. Walter Russell House, from the southeast. August, 1998. 227 Russell Hill Road
19. Ward & Mary Russell House, from the northwest. August, 1998. 220 Russell Hill Road
20. Russell-Burbank Barn foundation, from the northeast. March, 1999. Russell Hill Road
21. Russell-Burbank Cemetery, from the northwest. March, 1999. Opposite 227 Russell Hill Road
22. Russell-Burbank Cemetery, from the west. August, 1998.
23. District Three Schoolhouse foundation, from the south. March, 1999. 205 Russell Hill Road
24. District Three Schoolhouse foundation, from the north. March, 1999.
25. Morocco Shop foundation, from the southeast. March, 1999. 217 Russell Hill Road
26. Walter Russell House, upper stair passage: Rufus Porter mural, east wall. March, 1999. *

(continued)

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Cambridge Grant Historic District
Ashburnham (Worcester), MA

27. Walter Russell House, parlor chamber (east chamber): Rufus Porter mural and mantel, east wall. March, 1999. *

28. Walter Russell House, Parlor Chamber: Rufus Porter mural over mantel, east wall. March, 1999. *

HISTORIC PHOTOGRAPHS

Originals / Negatives are with Allan F. Small

29. Russell Hill seen from Jewell Hill, early 1900s. View from the south, showing the Ward Russell farm, with the now-demolished barn to the left of the house and the Russell-Burbank cemetery (hidden by trees) on the right. This view shows the cleared fields both atop Russell Hill and on its southern slope before they were overtaken by forest. 5-1/2 x 3-1/2

30. John Adams, Jr. House, c. 1920. View from the east, showing the porch added by Nellie Hutchins after 1909. Also showing the chimneys before reduction in height and the ell before introduction of the present picture window. 5-1/2 x 3-1/2

31. Walter Russell House in the 1920s. View from the east, showing the English barn which was demolished c. 1953.

ILLUSTRATIONS

32. Walter Russell Adams House. Wood engraving, c. 1886. Published in Stearns' History of Ashburnham, 1887. This view is remarkably unchanged; see #7 above.

33. Playbill from Aldrich Bowker's production of *The Palace of Truth* at Handley Farm, 1920. Original is with Allan F. Small.

(end)

**DISTRICT DATA SHEET
CAMBRIDGE GRANT HISTORIC DISTRICT
ASHBURNHAM (WORCESTER), MA**

MAP#	LOT/PARCEL	MHC#	HISTORIC NAME	ADDRESS	DATE	STYLE	TYPE/ STATUS
1	39/5		District 3 Schoolhouse foundation	205 Russell Hill Road	ca. 1846		SI/C
2	39/5		Morocco shop foundation	215 Russell Hill Road	ca. 1819		SI/C
3	39/7	251	Thomas Russell House	219 Russell Hill Road	ca. 1788	Federal	B/C
4	39/22	252	Ward & Mary Russell House & Barn Foundation	220 Russell Hill Road	1834 mid 19 th c.	Fed/Gr Rev	B/C SI/C
5	39/22	804	Russell-Burbank Cemetery	224 Russell Hill Road	1848		SI/C
6	39/8; 39/21	253	Walter Russell House	227 Russell Hill Road	1823	Federal	B/C
7	39/10; 39/4; 39/9		Red Top	223 Russell Hill Road	ca. 1920	Bungalow	B/C
8	39/11; 39/20	254	John Adams Jr. House & Barn (Handley Farm)	247 Russell Hill Road	ca. 1798	Federal	2B/C
9	39/12	255	James Adams, Jr. House & Barn	269 Russell Hill Road	ca. 1826	Federal	2B/C
10	39/17-18	256	Walter Russell Adams House & Barn (John Adams Homestead)	287 Russell Hill Road	ca. 1815	Federal	2B/C
11	39/14; 39/16	257	Timothy Fletcher House & Barn (Cambridge Grant Farm)	15 Wilker Road	ca. 1816	Federal	2B/C
12	39/4		Spring of Water	behind 219 Russell Hill Road			SI/C
			Series of Fields throughout district				SI/C
	12 contributing buildings			6 contributing sites			



OLD ADAMS HOMESTEAD—EAST PART OF TOWN.

CHARACTERS



King Phanor	Aldrich Bowker
Prince Philamir	Ainsworth Arnold
Chrysal	Edgar Stehli
Zoram	Dr. F. C. Davendorf
Aristaeus	Aaron Task
Gelanor	Frank Bowker
Queen Altemire	Mrs. Jeanette Bowker Damon
Princess Zeolide	Lucia P. Hutchins
Mirza	Bertha F. Cudworth
Palmis	Irene Partridge Ryan
Azema	Edna Richenbacher

Lords and Ladies in Waiting - Musicians

Act 1. Gardens at King Phanor's Country House.
Act 2. The Palace of Truth.
Act 3. Same.

Music under the direction of
Mrs. Albert Wilder.

Aldrich Bowker

will present

AT

HANDLEY FARM

Ashburnham, Mass.

AUGUST 11, 1920

at 3 P. M.

An out-of-door performance of

THE PALACE OF TRUTH

by

W. S. GILBERT

At Handley Farm, Ashburnham, Mass., on August 11th, at 3 P. M., Aldrich Bowker will give an out-of-door performance of W. S. Gilbert's delightful comedy, the "Palace of Truth".

It is a costume play of the fifteenth century. Mr. Bowker will be seen in the roll of King Phanor, who takes his court to the Palace of Truth where everyone is bound to speak the simple, unadulterated truth, which causes very amusing complications.

Mrs. Jeanette Bowker Damon will play the roll of the jealous Queen Altemire, another amusing part.

Miss Lucia P. Hutchins will play the Princess Zeolide. Miss Hutchins is very well known in this locality through her readings and coaching, and will bring to the part a great deal of charm and distinction.

The leading roll will be played by Ainsworth Arnold, a very well known actor. Mr. Arnold comes on from New York for the express purpose of playing Prince Philamir in the out-of-door performance of The Palace of Truth.

Edgar Stehli, who is a well known playwright, as well as an excellent actor, will play Chrysal, the poet.

Zoram, the Musician, will be portrayed by Dr. F. C. Davendorf who saw active service at the front in France with the Medical Staff during our late war, and is an excellent actor as well as physician.

There are many other characters in the play which will all be well played.

Through the play runs the delightful music of Gilbert and Sullivan. The costumes are very beautiful, designed by Frank J. Zimmerer, from the productions of Stuart Walker, the well known theatrical producer.

Handley farm is situated at Ashburnham, one of the prettiest villages in New England, high up in the hills and affords a view that is seldom equalled. The farm is five miles from Fitchburg, two miles from the center of Ashburnham and near the surrounding towns, easy to reach over excellent roads.

In the event of rainy weather, performance will take place the following day.

The admission will be \$1.00, 10c war tax.

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
EVALUATION/RETURN SHEET

REQUESTED ACTION: NOMINATION

PROPERTY Cambridge Grant Historic District
NAME:

MULTIPLE
NAME:

STATE & COUNTY: MASSACHUSETTS, Worcester

DATE RECEIVED: 4/30/01 DATE OF PENDING LIST: 5/17/01
DATE OF 16TH DAY: 6/02/01 DATE OF 45TH DAY: 6/15/01
DATE OF WEEKLY LIST:

REFERENCE NUMBER: 01000626

REASONS FOR REVIEW:

APPEAL: N DATA PROBLEM: N LANDSCAPE: N LESS THAN 50 YEARS: N
OTHER: N PDIL: N PERIOD: N PROGRAM UNAPPROVED: N
REQUEST: N SAMPLE: N SLR DRAFT: Y NATIONAL: N

COMMENT WAIVER: N

___ACCEPT ___RETURN ___REJECT _____DATE

ABSTRACT/SUMMARY COMMENTS:

*Nomination must be returned for technical reasons -
See attached Return Sheet*

RECOM./CRITERIA *Return
Patrick Andrews*

REVIEWER *1* DISCIPLINE *Historian*

TELEPHONE _____ DATE *6/14/01*

DOCUMENTATION see attached comments Y/N see attached SLR Y/N



United States Department of the Interior

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

P.O. Box 37127
Washington, D.C. 20013-7127

IN REPLY REFER TO:

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES EVALUATION/RETURN SHEET

Property Name: Cambridge Grant Historic District
Worcester County, Massachusetts

Reference Number: 01000626

Reason for Return:

This nomination is being returned for technical deficiencies.

Photographs: The photographs are not keyed to the sketch map. Please key the photographs to the sketch map.

USGS Map: The USGS map does not indicate the boundary of the district. On page 63 of the National Register Bulletin "How to Complete the National Register Registration Form" it is noted that for properties having ten or more acres the USGS map must include a polygon locating the property and within the polygon an approximate boundary of the property should be provided. Please indicate, within the polygon drawn on the USGS map, the approximate boundary of the historic district.

Patrick Andrus
Historian
National Register of Historic Places
6/14/2001



United States Department of the Interior

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

P.O. Box 37127
Washington, D.C. 20013-7127

IN REPLY REFER TO:

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES EVALUATION/RETURN SHEET

Property Name: Cambridge Grant Historic District
Worcester County, Massachusetts

Reference Number: 01000626

Reason for Return:

This nomination is being returned for technical deficiencies.

prepared sketch map nb 6/25/01

Photographs: The photographs are not keyed to the sketch map. Please key the photographs to the sketch map.

USGS Map: The USGS map does not indicate the boundary of the district. On page 63 of the National Register Bulletin "How to Complete the National Register Registration Form" it is noted that for properties having ten or more acres the USGS map must include a polygon locating the property and within the polygon an approximate boundary of the property should be provided. Please indicate, within the polygon drawn on the USGS map, the approximate boundary of the historic district.

Patrick Andrus

*shaded NRDIS boundaries
within polygon nb 6/25/01*

Patrick Andrus
Historian
National Register of Historic Places
6/14/2001

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Registration Form

Presub
626



This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name CAMBRIDGE GRANT HISTORIC DISTRICT

other names/site number RUSSELL HILL

2. Location

street & number 205-287 RUSSELL HILL RD., 15 WILKER ROAD not for publication

city or town ASHBURNHAM vicinity

state MASSACHUSETTS code MA county WORCESTER code 027 zip code 01430

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this ☒ nomination ☐ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property ☒ meets ☐ does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant ☐ nationally ☐ statewide ☒ locally. (☐ See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Brona Simon

April 25, 2001

Signature of certifying official/Title Brona Simon
Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer, Massachusetts Historical Commission

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property ☐ meets ☐ does not meet the National Register criteria. (☐ See continuation sheet for additional Comments.)

Signature of certifying official/Title

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby certify that this property is:

- ☒ entered in the National Register
☐ See continuation sheet.
☐ determined eligible for the National Register
☐ See continuation sheet.
☐ determined not eligible for the National Register
☐ removed from the National Register
☐ other (explain):

Signature of the Keeper

Patricia Andrews

Date of Action

8/20/2001

Cambridge Grant HD
Name of Property

Worcester, MA
County and State

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply)

(Check only one box)

☒ private

☐ public-local

☐ public-State

☐ public-Federal

☐ building(s)

☒ district

☐ site

☐ structure

☐ object

Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing

Noncontributing

12

building

6

sites

structures

objects

18

Total

Name of related multiple property listing

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

DOMESTIC: single dwelling, secondary structure

AGRICULTURE: barn

INDUSTRY: tannery

EDUCATION: school

FUNERARY: cemetery

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

DOMESTIC: single dwelling, secondary structure

FUNERARY: cemetery

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions)

EARLY REPUBLIC: Federal, vernacular

MID 19th CENTURY: vernacular

EARLY 20th CENTURY: vernacular

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation granite

walls weatherboard, shingle, brick, vinyl

roof asphalt

other granite, marble

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

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**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

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**Cambridge Grant Historic District
Ashburnham (Worcester), MA**

7. DESCRIPTION

The Cambridge Grant Historic District is a tract of approximately 322 acres in the eastern part of the town of Ashburnham, comprising a sizable segment of the original colonial land grant of somewhat over 1000 acres. Located fifty miles northwest of Boston and thirty miles north of Worcester, the district spreads over the gentle southern and eastern slopes of Russell Hill, an elongated north-south moraine whose crest, at an elevation of 1368 feet, is strewn with glacial boulders. Rising from the southern foot of Russell Hill is the steep northern slope of Jewell Hill, an abrupt, rocky, wooded prominence reaching 1411 feet above sea level. This is the western edge of the watershed of the Merrimack River.

These hills, together with Mount Watatic to the north and Mount Wachusett to the south, constitute the first prominent rise in the central Massachusetts land mass, which climbs gradually northwestward from this point toward the Appalachian range. To the east, the land falls sharply away to meet the broad littoral plain of eastern Massachusetts, with the result that views from here stretch fifty miles to the Blue Hills near Boston. The city's skyline can be plainly seen on clear days. The surrounding woodland is a mixture of conifers, dominated by white pine, spruce and hemlock, and deciduous trees, including red oak, beech, maple, poplar and birch. Mountain Laurel abounds in the woods, and the high rocky clearings are blanketed with wild blueberries.

The western boundary of the historic district falls near the center of the original Cambridge Grant. The designated area stretches north and south on either side of the old town road and extends eastward to the border of the town of Ashby. The narrow central artery, known as Russell Hill Road, may be followed eastward from the western boundary past ancient stone walls lined with mature maples as far as the Ashby line. The road passes well-preserved Federal-period farmhouses and outbuildings surrounded by open pasture and woodland, with impressive distant views along the way. Not far from the Ashby border, Wilker Road turns from Russell Hill Road toward the northern portion of the old grant, where orchard, field, and woodland on both sides surround another large and well-preserved early farmstead. There are no non-contributing structures to detract from the pristine rural New England setting, despite the district's proximity to built-up areas. There are in this compact rural neighborhood seven houses dating from 1788 to 1834, plus six barns and other outbuildings. Contributing elements include an old family burial ground, a spring in use since before 1819, an 18th century brick kiln site, a farm pond, remnants of three dams, an early 20th century summer cottage, and foundations of barns, a tanning shop, and an early schoolhouse.

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Continuation Sheet

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Cambridge Grant Historic District
Ashburnham (Worcester), MA

Contributing Structures

The Thomas Russell House [MHC #251][photos 6, 12] is a vernacular, five-bay, 1 ½- story, 18th-century cape with pitch roof, and a central chimney slightly forward of the ridge. A one-story rear ell wraps around the northwest corner, substantially enlarging the original structure. The ell evidently dates from the 19th century and has a Victorian chimney sized for stoves. It is extended by a small one-story addition at the northwest corner and a 20th-century enclosed porch on the west side. The main block of the house and street-facing portion of the ell are clapboarded, with unadorned box cornices and flush vergeboards; the portion of the ell not visible from the road is shingled. All window trim is plain. Double-hung 6/9 sash are modern replacements of the originals, which were removed in the 1980s. Late 19th century blinds with movable louvres were removed after 1964. The simple entrance is flanked by broad fluted pilasters, which are crowned by square blocks in place of capitals detailed with concentric square sunk fillets. There is a shallow full cellar under the main block, with dry stone walls capped with cut granite slabs. The chimney foundation shows signs of many old repairs and consists of stone and brick with embedded reused hewn and mortised timbers. There are three fireplaces on the first floor, the one in the southwest room has a beehive oven beside it. Much of the existing interior trim is early and probably original.

The oldest extant dwelling in Cambridge Grant, this house was built by Thomas Russell on John Adams' land, probably shortly after Russell's purchase of a plot of farmland across the road in 1788. Its almost Spartan simplicity inside and out may likely be due to the still-pioneer character of the territory at that time.

The John Adams, Jr. House (Handley Farm) [MHC 254] [photos 5, 9-11] is a two-story, late Georgian, double-pile house built of red brick made on the site, with a stringcourse between the stories, over a basement course of cut granite slabs. It is a five-bay, double interior-chimney, pitch-roof building. A molded box cornice at the eaves wraps across the gable ends of the house, forming steep pediments with the raking end cornices. The front entrance, surmounted by a semicircular light, is cut cleanly into the masonry, trimmed only by radiating brick voussoirs. Window openings have exceptionally wide granite sills and lintels. Double-hung sash have 12/12 lights on the first floor and 8/12 in the second story and attic. A secondary entrance on the east facade is capped by a simple rectangular four-light transom. At the rear is a later 1 ½- story clapboarded frame ell with a third large chimney, and there is an attached gable-fronted barn, also finished with clapboards. Windows in the ell and barn have 6/9 double hung-sash, and there is a 13-light transom over the barn entrance. Gabled dormers in the ell hold paired 6/6 windows.

This is the most ambitious house in Cambridge Grant, built for the son of the first settler about 1798. It was

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Cambridge Grant Historic District
Ashburnham (Worcester), MA

then the largest house in town as well as the first one built of brick, and it was still described in the mid 19th century as the finest house in Ashburnham. Unusual even when new, its pedimented gables were quite fashionable in the 1790s, and its clean-cut unadorned entrance was exceedingly modern, while the stringcourse between stories was oddly archaic. Its rectangular stone lintels are unusual as well. Brick voussoirs or keystone lintels are normal in brick buildings of this period; broad, unadorned rectangular granite lintels like these would not commonly be seen in this region until the arrival of the Greek Revival style, over thirty years after the Adams house was built. The four-panel entrance door and turned newel post in the style of the 1850s indicate there were some Victorian renovations. The interior was further modernized between 1909 and 1916. The brick bake oven in the northeast room was taken out and the fireplace rebuilt while others of the nine known fireplaces were altered and mantels were removed. Wide arches were opened up between the front rooms and the central staircase to create an open floor plan across the front of the house and partition walls between the rear rooms of the main block were removed to create a single "common room," 37 feet long. There is nevertheless significant early wood finish remaining; and a second brick oven has been uncovered, attached to the remains of yet a tenth fireplace in the 19th century ell.

Sensitively preserved, the house reflects many generations of change and adaptation, and continues to be one of the most distinguished in the town. John Adams, Jr. and 19th century owner Nathan Handley were important landowners, and a significant portion of their impressive holdings remains with the property. The present house lot is nearly twenty acres, and a parcel of 62 acres across the road (part of the original John Adams, Sr. property) protects the farm's environment from inappropriate development.

The Walter Russell Adams House [MHC 256][photos 14, 15] is a large five-bay, single-pile, center-entrance frame house with hip roof, twin end-wall chimneys, and rear ell. A lateral, one-story, pitch-roofed shed (built from early reused barn timbers) extends to the west from the rear ell, and a modern enclosed porch is on the east. There is a large detached bank barn west of the house, with a smaller barn connected to its east end and another small barn or shed connected to its south front. The house is clapboarded, with plain corner boards and simple molded box cornice. The large west chimney is original and serves fireplaces in the first and second floors of the main block; the much smaller east chimney is a later replacement. The entrance is flanked by sidelights consisting of 2/2 operable sash above wooden aprons, and is capped by an elliptical louvred fan, the whole surmounted by a classical entablature with broad frieze carried on Tuscan pilasters displaying exaggerated entasis. The windows have simple original molded trim and later 2/2 double hung sash. The louvred blinds show a distinct local characteristic found in other early 19th century houses in the vicinity: while rectangular upper and lower sections have typical horizontal louvres, a square middle section

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Cambridge Grant Historic District
Ashburnham (Worcester), MA

contains louveres which run vertically. The foundation consists of a full cellar under the main block, with dry stone walls capped with cut granite slabs.

The house was evidently built shortly after Walter Russell Adams acquired the land from John Adams in 1814. It was long known as one of the most prosperous farms in Ashburnham, built on what was acknowledged the best farmland in the town. Today the house, outbuildings and site are virtually unchanged from their appearance in an engraving published in Ezra Stearns' History of Ashburnham in 1887. Inside, much of the wood finish is original, including the simple straight-run staircase with slender Federal newel post and square balusters. Handsome six-panel doors have shallow flat panels framed by delicate raised ogee moldings. This trim is very similar to that in the Walter Russell House nearby, and some molding profiles are identical. The interiors in both houses may have been finished by the same carpenter, but it appears at least as likely that their nearly matching trim was purchased ready-made from the same local supplier. The west parlor on the first floor contains later Greek Revival trim and mantel.

The front portion of the ell is evidently of the same period with the main block, and consists of a single large room -- the original kitchen, with brick fireplace and beehive oven. Characteristic of kitchen ells in two-story, single-pile Worcester County houses of the Federal period, this one has small, nearly square windows tucked tightly under the eaves in the attic story. This ell was later extended toward the rear. A stud removed in renovations is preserved in the house, and bears the inscription "WA 48" -- probably a lumber dealer's mark indicating Walter Adams' purchase in 1848. The long shed attached to this ell is built of reused hewn timbers, a number of which display old purlin mortises from their former use as barn roof rafters. They are identical to roof timbers in the small barn discussed below.

The large 19th century bank barn west of the house is covered with unpainted vertical boards. While New England barns normally sat low to the ground and had side-wall entrances well into the 19th century, this barn is built upon an embankment and has a high stone foundation and a gable-wall entrance. These are features typical of early Pennsylvania barns, and not normally found in New England before the 1830s. This may be the earliest surviving bank barn in the region, built after John Adams' visit to his son James in Pennsylvania in 1834. Attached to its east end by a short hyphen is a 22' by 36' English style barn with side-wall entrance. Manifestly of earlier origin than the large barn, its hewn timber frame displays construction more typical of the 18th century than the 19th. Front and rear walls were raised as pre-assembled bents with flared corner posts (19th century bents are normally raised parallel to the end walls and have unflared posts). Tie girts are laid over the front and rear plates in the 18th century manner, rather than framed into them as in 19th century barns. The early roofing system consists of large principal rafters mortised at two-foot intervals for common purlins (later replaced with paired common rafters between the original principal rafters). An early layer of vertical sheathing boards cut on a sash saw is visible inside, but is largely covered

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outside by later sheathing. All nails presently visible even in the earlier sheathing layer are transitional machine-cut nails with thick regular heads and burrs on adjacent edges, indicating a date of ca. 1810-1840. Either the framing is archaic, or this is an older barn recovered early in the 19th century. As the building is now underlaid by split granite slabs, it is possible that it was moved and repaired after construction of the present house. Given the early construction style of its frame, it appears to be one of the "buildings thereon standing" mentioned in the 1814 deed from John Adams. If so, it is the sole structure known to survive from the original John Adams farm, and one of the oldest buildings in Cambridge Grant.

At the corner of Wilker Road and Russell Hill Road is a small manmade farm pond, partly enclosed by an earthen berm. Presently maintained for fire protection, it may have been created originally either as a fire pond or as a watering hole for livestock. Much of the adjacent land remains untouched by development, and contributes materially to the historic appearance of the district. The house lot is 10 1/2-acres, and the parcel of meadow and wood across the road contains about 13 1/2-acres.

The Timothy Fletcher House (Cambridge Grant Farm) [MHC 257] [photos 1, 2, 8, 13] is another two story, single-pile, hip-roofed Federal dwelling of five bays with center entrance. It may have been built before 1816, when Josiah Fletcher sold the land to Timothy Fletcher "with the buildings thereon," but it is more likely that it was built between then and 1820, when a deed to Asa Woods described a boundary running between "the old and the new house by the town road." More modest in scale than the Walter Russell Adams House, the Fletcher House has the two rear-wall chimneys and low hip roof characteristic of many Worcester County houses of the period. There is an integral rear kitchen ell with rear-wall chimney typical of one-pile Federal houses in this region, plus a long lateral ell connected to a large 19th century barn with gable end to the road. There are modern hip-roofed dormers in the ells, and a modern enclosed porch is appended to the north end of the main block. The entrance consists of a partial entablature raised on simple Tuscan pilasters, enclosing a six-panel door flanked by sidelights and crowned by a shallow elliptical louvred fan. There is a simple molded box cornice on the main block of the house. The 6/6 window sash are modern replacements, and other early finish is disguised beneath vinyl siding. Nonetheless, the house and connected buildings constitute a handsome example of a successful 19th century farm, and in recent years much of the old pasture and crop land surrounding them has been cleared of encroaching forest, presenting an increasingly rare present-day view of what these prosperous farms looked like when surrounded by broad open fields. The house lot alone contains 43 acres, while the half meadow, half wooded lot across the road contains 40 acres more. Both parcels were part of the Fletcher farm by 1781.

The Walter Russell House [MHC 253][photos 6, 18, 26-28, 31] was built in 1823 on a two-acre house lot purchased from John Adams, Jr. in 1822. It is a two-story, single-pile, five-bay, hip-roofed frame house with brick end walls. One of only three Federal brick-end houses constructed in Ashburnham, it is the only

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two-story example remaining. Like the other one-pile houses in this area, it has a rear kitchen ell of a period with the main block. Behind the ell is a long lateral one-story shed, which formerly connected to an English barn with entrance on the long front elevation. Its foundation terrace and stone doorstep may still be seen east of the shed. Fenestration consists of 6/6 sash with original molded trim and louvred blinds in the main block; newer 6/6 sash in the shed and first story of the ell; and six-light casement windows under the eaves in the attic story of the ell. There is a simple molded box cornice. The exterior finish consists of clapboards and broad cornerboards on the front of the main block, and cedar shingles on the rear wall of the main block and on the ell and shed. Across the front of the house is a full-width one-story Victorian veranda with elaborate turned posts and jigsaw balusters. The porch roof conceals the entablature of the Federal entrance, but the unusually slender Tuscan pilasters that supported it and the piers against which they stand are visible, as is the original six-panel door with rectangular four-light transom.

A remarkable feature of the exterior is that the bricks of the west end were laid in common bond, while Flemish bond was used on the east end -- a suggestion that two masons were at work simultaneously, particularly as the remainder of the house appears to have been built all at one time. Running bond was used over window openings in both ends. Its failure on the east end resulted in the insertion of brick voussoirs above the first story window after 1920. The original foundation consists of a dry stone-wall cellar under the center portion of the main block, capped at the front with cut granite slabs. It stops several feet short of the brick ends, which rest on granite slabs laid directly on the earth. At the rear, the original cellar was later extended beneath the kitchen ell. The ell has been much altered, and its fireplace and chimney no longer exist. The house lot has been kept clear of growth, as have the fields across the road, preserving the open landscape and the distant views. One of these parcels, a steep seven-plus acre pasture referred to in numerous old deeds as "the side hill piece," has been conveyed with the house for generations.

Inside, the main block of the house retains all of its original wood finish in the east parlor, the stair passage, and the two front bedrooms, including molded chair rails, wide floor boards, a simple Federal staircase and banister, and fine mantelpieces. The outstanding interior decorative element consists of two large murals painted ca. 1824-1825 by the itinerant artist Rufus Porter, discussed in detail under Section 8 below [photos 26-28].

The Ward and Mary Russell House (Burbank house) [MHC 252][photos 6, 19] is a vernacular, five-bay, pitch-roof cape with two interior chimneys and an integral one-story angular ell with connected carriage shed. Built in 1834 by Mary Russell and her cousin/husband Ward Russell, it is constructed in a conservative late Federal style with some Greek Revival decorative details. The exterior is clapboarded, with simple cornerboards. Vergeboards at the gables are nearly flush with the wall face. Fenestration

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Cambridge Grant Historic District
Ashburnham (Worcester), MA

consists of original 6/9 double-hung sash with slender muntins and simple molded trim downstairs in the main block, and 6/6 sash in the gable ends and the (later) rear dormers. Fenestration in the ell has been changed in recent renovation from a small 6-pane casement to 6/6 sash. The entrance has a stylish seven-panel door with raised fields, flanked by 2/3 operable double-hung sash with paneled aprons below. Its trim consists of stock molded boards with Grecian corner blocks. The carriage shed has plain rectangular board-and-batten doors with remarkably long forged iron strap hinges. The foundation was originally of dry fieldstone at the front and sides, capped with cut granite slabs, and all brick at the back, with the interior H-plan brick foundation of one chimney intact. During renovation in 1994, the house was moved back 30 feet and set upon a new concrete foundation faced with granite. The original granite foundation slabs were reused in landscaping.

Virtually all of the original interior wood finish is intact, including wide pine and hemlock floorboards and all four original mantels. The wood trim is of the most modest vernacular sort except in the east parlor, where, as at the front entrance, fashionable Grecian trim in a more pretentious style (probably bought from a stock source) was used. All interior wood finish in the main block was carefully preserved during recent renovations, including hand-painted grey and yellow ochre marbleizing on the east parlor baseboards. Fine early cupboards in the pantry, with original brass hardware, were removed during renovation.

The Russell-Burbank barn foundation [photo 20] is located just west of the Ward & Mary Russell house. A long bank barn of five or six bents, it was connected to the carriage shed, with its ridge running parallel to that of the house. Although not presenting its gable end to the road in the later 19th century manner, it was nevertheless newer in style than the neighboring English-style barn at the Walter Russell House across the road, having entrances at both gable ends and a large open cellar below. The massive stone foundation of the cellar, which underlay the eastern three quarters of the barn, remains intact, although now bisected by a modern driveway. Although the once-open fields around the house have largely returned to forest, much land remains with the property and is undeveloped. Behind the barn site, a stone-wall-lined farm lane runs south toward Jewell Hill's western shoulder -- through 42 acres of new-growth forest that was once broad open pasture and orchard.

The James Adams, Jr. House (MHC 255) is a two-story, five-bay frame building with low hip roof, central entrance and twin rear-wall chimneys, set upon cut granite slabs over a dry fieldstone cellar. It was evidently built by James Adams, Jr., shortly after his acquisition of the land in 1826. The front entrance has a six-panel door flanked by 20th century full-length sidelights with unremarkable board trim. There is no

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surviving evidence of any decorative surround, although Oscar Carlson, Jr., whose father renovated the house between 1913 and 1918, stated that there was originally a louvered fan over the entrance like those on nearby houses. The current owners are in the process of restoring it. There is a simple secondary entrance on the south elevation near the rear wall. Fenestration consists of modern 6/6 double-hung sash. Vinyl siding has recently been removed and replaced with appropriate quarter-sawn clapboards.

Inside, the house has been significantly altered, but it retains a good Federal dogleg staircase and some other early wood finish, including fine wide floorboards and both Federal and Greek Revival doors and door trim. Although this is framed as a single-pile house, one upstairs room is divided into one large front chamber and one smaller one behind. The other upper room was formerly also divided, into a small front chamber and a larger rear one. On the first floor, the left-hand room is likewise divided into a large front room (now a kitchen) and a smaller back room (evidently the original kitchen, with some early wood finish intact). In the north parlor is a good Federal mantel which may be original to this house, but may have been moved here from the nearby Walter Russell Adams House during early 20th century renovations. The present owners have undertaken a sensitive preservation of the remaining early interior features of this house, as well as a gradual restoration of its exterior finish based on careful research.

The small detached barn is a well-preserved early post and beam structure with vertical plank covering. The gable end faces the road, with nearly flush vergeboards above and wide double sliding wooden doors below. Its south front holds four square single-sash twelve-light windows at ground-floor level; its loft on the north is lighted by four like windows placed tightly under the eaves. Below them are two more of these windows and a secondary entrance on the north wall. A small meadow remains clear of overgrowth south of the barn, and recent clearance of encroaching pine forest on the north and west has returned much of the landscape to its former openness. Behind the house is a small stone dam formerly used in connection with the morocco tanning business. The house lot is slightly over six acres. To the east, the house and barn overlook the 13 1/2-acre south pasture of the Walter Russell Adams property.

The Russell-Burbank Cemetery (MHC 804) [photos 21-22] is a small family burial ground, centered in a sloping pasture on the southern side of Russell Hill Road. It is enclosed by low stone walls and shaded by beautiful old trees, including an immense copper beech and mature hemlocks and oaks. The original plot is 40 by 50 feet, and is located 70 feet east of the Ward Russell House and across the road from the Walter Russell House. It contains fifteen monuments bearing the names of eighteen members of the Russell and Burbank families, with dates of death ranging from 1848 to 1970. There are a number of white marble Victorian stones, including two with decorative Gothic panels and one in the form of a Grecian stele capped by a classical urn. One 20th century stone is a natural grey granite boulder with veins of white quartz, mica,

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and black crystals; another has a granite plinth set with a very large crystal of green tourmaline. In the late 19th or early 20th century, the north wall of the cemetery, just three feet from the road, was reconstructed with mortar joints, probably as a defense against damage from snow plows. The side and rear walls remain unmortared, like those enclosing the surrounding fields. In 1996 the tumbling side walls were expertly repaired and the rear wall was rebuilt with the original stones eight feet south of its original placement, enlarging the enclosed area to 40' x 58'. The cemetery is accessible on foot only. Entrance is by a simple four-foot-wide opening in the north wall. Although pine forest has overtaken much of the pasture land to the south, the area around the cemetery has been kept open, and there are impressive views across the south shoulder of Russell Hill and to the top of Jewell Hill.

The District Three Schoolhouse lot [photos 23-24] is west of the Thomas Russell House on what is now lot 39 / parcel 5 on the town assessors' map. Although the last of its three or four successive buildings was destroyed in the 20th century, its foundation of cut granite slabs 23' by 33' remains in place on the old 100' by 120' lot, about 60 feet from the road. A small mound of scattered bricks evidently from its chimney lies just inside the north boundary of the foundation, as do intermediate support stones for its floor frame. The granite doorstep also remains in place.

The Morocco Shop site [photo 25] is between the schoolhouse lot and the Thomas Russell House on lot 39 / parcel 5. Of the several sites associated with the production of morocco leather on Russell Hill, the one most frequently referred to in old records is the shop of Thomas Russell (later of Walter Russell, later of Ivers Adams and Thomas Russell Adams), said in several deeds to have been located 72 feet north of the road just west of Thomas Russell's house lot. At approximately that location is a 22' by 12' rectangular arrangement of field stones which evidently formed its foundation. Water was carried to the shop in hollow logs from a nearby spring mentioned in the early deeds. This spring, whose opening is protected by large boulders and partially covered by a granite slab, can still be found a few yards north of the northern boundary of the Thomas Russell House lot.

Red Top [photos 16-17] is an early 20th century single-story vernacular frame summer cottage with a low pitch roof, its gable end facing the road. An enclosed lean-to porch spans the front and wraps around the east facade. The ridge is pierced by a stone chimney several feet forward of the original north wall. The exterior covering is of shingles; all trim is severely plain. The cottage is now adapted for multi-season use and extended by a large two-story frame addition on the north. Fenestration consists of 1/1 and 2/2 sash

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Cambridge Grant Historic District
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from various periods, as well as modern single-light casements. Built on former Handley Farm land purchased primarily for the views, the cottage stands on a lot of just over three acres, and a small adjacent lot contains 1-1/3 acres. The wild blueberry farm behind the house is 42 acres of mostly open land spreading over the rocky crest of the glacial moraine.

Archaeological Description

While no prehistoric sites are recorded in the Cambridge Grant Historic District or in the general area, it is possible that sites are present. Environmental characteristics of the district indicate the presence of several locational criteria (slope, soil drainage, distance to wetlands) that are favorable indicators for many types of prehistoric sites. Several well drained, level to moderately sloping terraces within 1000 feet of wetlands are located on the slopes of the Russell Hill moraine and Jewell Hill. Freshwater wetlands in the area are the headwaters of streams lying within the Nashua River drainage, part of the larger Merrimack River drainage. Most sites should be present in the central portion of the district surrounding the wetlands south of Russell Hill Road and near wetlands on the south to southwest facing slopes of Jewell Hill. High prehistoric site potential may also exist around freshwater springs also reported in the district. Regional prehistoric settlement information and environmental potential for the area indicate potential sites may include smaller campsites and special purpose type sites representing resource gathering activities and quarries. Professor Levi Russell Ward, owner of the Walter Russell House through much of the 19th century, was an artifact collector and a stone axe head from his collection remained in the house when it was purchased in 1920. It is unknown whether the axe was found in the district. Given the information presented above, the size of the district (c. 322 acres), and the availability of undeveloped land, a high potential exists for locating prehistoric resources in the district.

A high potential also exists for locating historic archaeological resources in the district. Additional historical research combined with archaeological survey and testing can help locate structural evidence of many of the 18th and 19th century residences, farmsteads, industries and civic buildings no longer extant in the district. Many homes from the district's early settlers in the 18th century including John Adams, Josiah Fletcher and Ethan Wetherbee are represented on maps as late as 1855 but are gone by 1870.

Archaeological evidence may also survive from the Ivers and Thomas Russell Adams House (1820's - 30's) and several outbuildings destroyed after 1982. Structural evidence may also survive from the Captain Thomas Adams (ca. 1778) dwelling house which preceded the Ivers and Thomas Russell Adams House on the same general site. Structural evidence of outbuildings including barns and evidence of occupational related features (trash pits, privies, wells) may also survive as parts of larger archaeological sites and with extant buildings. A barn foundation has been identified adjacent to the Ward and Mary Russell House on

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the south side of Russell Hill Road. Archaeological evidence including structural remains and features associated with industrial sites should also survive in the district. Foundation remains from a Morocco Shop site(tanning site) have been identified between the schoolhouse lot and the Thomas Russell House. Tanning sites may include evidence of a structure, tanning vats that were set in the ground, and water supply that was important in the tanning process. A tanning site may also be present near the John Adams Jr. House (ca.1826) where a small stone dam reportedly built as part of a tanning business also exists. Structural evidence and/or archaeological features may also survive from an 18th century brick making operation near the John Adams Jr. House. The site of at least one civic structure has also been identified in the district. Structural evidence from three or four successive school buildings may survive at the site of the District 3 Schoolhouse at 205 Russell Hill Road. A granite foundation from the last school building, destroyed in the 20th century survives at that location. Occupational related features associated with the school may also exist. Unmarked graves, funerary artifacts and post molds from fence posts marking boundaries may exist at the 19th century Russell-Burbank Cemetery at 224 Russell Hill Road.

(end)

Cambridge Grant HD

Name of Property

Worcester, MA

County and State

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- ☒ **A** Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- ☒ **B** Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- ☒ **C** Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- ☐ **D** Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- ☐ **A** owned by religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- ☐ **B** removed from its original location.
- ☐ **C** a birthplace or grave.
- ☐ **D** a cemetery.
- ☐ **E** a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- ☐ **F** a commemorative property.
- ☐ **G** less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

9. Major Bibliographical References

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- ☐ preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- ☐ previously listed in the National Register
- ☐ previously determined eligible by the National Register
- ☐ designated a National Historic Landmark
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

ARCHITECTURE

AGRICULTURE

ART

EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT

PERFORMING ARTS

SOCIAL HISTORY

Period of Significance

1734-1951

Significant Dates

1766 1916

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

Rufus Porter, Aldrich Bowker

Cultural Affiliation

n/a

Architect/Builder

Primary location of additional data:

- ☒ State Historic Preservation Office
- ☐ Other State agency
- ☐ Federal agency
- ☐ Local government
- ☐ University
- ☐ Other

Name of repository:

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8. HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE

The Cambridge Grant Historic District represents a model of rural New England life in the early nineteenth century. Embodying a rare example of an intact pioneer family neighborhood, it illuminates a settlement pattern followed for much of the interior of the nation. For a community of its size, it has been home to an astonishing number of distinguished citizens, and it is the site of a vigorous local arts community of the early 20th century. Its well-preserved historic buildings retain great integrity of setting, location, association, materials, feeling, and design. Cambridge Grant meets criteria A, B, and C for listing on the National Register of Historic Places

Constructed within the brief period from 1788 to 1834, the Federal buildings at Cambridge Grant are closely related in construction, materials and design. Individual in their specific forms, they are nonetheless substantially alike in their conception, functional arrangement, and aesthetic origins. As such, they form a significant and distinguishable architectural group, typifying vernacular domestic architecture of rural Worcester County at the onset of the 19th century. Happily, the houses and the barns retain most of their exterior and interior architectural detail. Furthermore, as the setting of these buildings is undisturbed as well -- both within the general landscape and in their relationship to one another -- the district as a whole possesses outstanding period integrity

The Russell Hill group therefore qualifies for inclusion in the National Register under criterion A, representing events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history. Additionally, its related houses form a significant and distinguishable architectural group; and, as well-preserved rural vernacular buildings of the Federal period, they embody the distinctive characteristics of their type. They therefore qualify under criterion C as well.

Handley Farm (the John Adams, Jr. House, c. 1798) is an outstanding 18th century brick country squire's mansion, constructed at a time when the vast majority of houses in the immediate region were modest frame cottages. With its unadorned arched entrance (dating from the same year as Bullfinch's clean-cut arches at the new Massachusetts State House), and with its massive granite lintels, it anticipates architectural elements which would not become common, even in the most fashionable New England buildings, for two more decades. Home to Aldrich Bowker during his most productive decades (and site of his popular open-air productions), it is closely associated with the artistic and personal life of this significant figure in American theatre.

The brick-end Walter Russell House (c. 1823-24) contains large admirably preserved murals dating from the

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first or second year of Rufus Porter's long and well-documented career as a painter. For its preservation of these exceedingly rare seminal works by a known master (many of whose murals are now lost), and for its significant role in the start of his career, the Walter Russell House has significance beyond that of its architecture.

The Cambridge Grant

In 1662 a "great bridge" was built across the Charles River between present-day Brighton and Cambridge, Massachusetts, forming a land route between Boston and the towns to the north. The General Court of the colony charged the towns of Lexington, Cambridge and Newton with responsibility for maintaining the bridge. Over time the towns sought relief from the heavy cost of maintenance, and in 1734 they were each granted a thousand acres of unsettled land to develop or sell to ease the financial burden. With a shortage of money, the Court commonly used such grants as the preferred means of payment for military or other public service, as well as for other forms of legal compensation. Newton chose two parcels, one near Petersham, Massachusetts and one at what is now Berwick, Maine; while both Lexington and Cambridge selected undivided parcels in unsettled wilderness lands north of Lunenburg, in what is now Ashburnham. Subsequently five other grants, ranging from four hundred to one thousand acres, were made within the present-day borders of Ashburnham. In 1736, a far larger tract was given to the heirs of sixty soldiers from Dorchester and its environs as compensation for military service in an unsuccessful 1690 expedition to Canada. This vast tract, known as the Dorchester Canada plantation, partially or completely surrounded the six earlier grants (which nonetheless remained autonomous entities). The parcel still belonging to Cambridge was known variously as "The Bridge farm in Dorchester Canada," "Cambridge Bridge farm," "Cambridge farm," or "Cambridge grant." Minor errors made in surveying the extremely hilly southern portion, combined with deliberate allowances made for "swag of the chain," resulted in a tract nearer 1200 acres than the 1000 originally allocated.

Over the next 29 years Dorchester Canada became gradually populated. When, in 1764, the proprietors and inhabitants voted a tax on landholders to promote its incorporation as a town, the uninhabited Bridge Farm, which still belonged to the town of Cambridge, was exempted. But by June of that year a petition for incorporation included all smaller grants within the plantation, and in November the Cambridge proprietors appointed a committee to dispose of their land for money. Dorchester Canada plantation was chartered as the new town of Ashburnham in February 1765, and the Bridge Farm lands, although still owned by the Cambridge proprietors, became part of the newly recognized town.

One of the committee members the Cambridge proprietors had appointed to sell their land in 1764 was Thomas Adams of Menotomy (later West Cambridge, now Arlington). He sold 80 acres in the southeast

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corner of the grant to Joshua Billings in 1766 and 100 acres to his son John Adams in 1768. By 1772 he had acquired the remainder of the southern half of the grant for himself, and he sold or gave it to relatives in five more tracts between 1777 and 1788. The northern half was similarly disposed of by Isaac Stearns of Billerica, in four large tracts sold from 1766 to 1772. Whether Stearns had acquired the northern half of the grant in his own right or was selling it on behalf of the proprietors is not certain from the record. In any event, the town of Cambridge recorded that it had been fully paid for the land by August of 1772. In 1788 a discrepancy between the widths measured at the northern and southern boundaries of the grant was resolved by the simple expedient of redefining the western boundary of Ebenezer Thomas Adams' lot to meet the corner of Peter Polley's lot to the south, thus further increasing the total acreage. Although it was ultimately assimilated into the town of Ashburnham, Cambridge Grant retained its peculiar identity as a separate community of West Cambridge families well into the 19th century -- a manifest reminder of the ancient system which colonial New England governments had used not only to compensate claims and reward public service, but (ultimately more importantly) to advance English settlement and consolidate exploitation of the vast unsettled territories.

By the 20th century much of the Cambridge Grant -- virtually all once exploited as farmland -- gradually returned to forest. Nevertheless, many acres of open field remain, and in the undeveloped forest the early stone wall boundaries are intact. With the sole exception of a portion of the Rindge Turnpike, even the few roads are the same ones laid out at the first settlement. With many homes of the second and third generation of settlers remaining, and astonishingly few new buildings erected, the greater part of the old grant remains completely unspoiled. Within the portion of Cambridge Grant recommended for inclusion in the National Register, only one house dates later than the Federal period. As a remarkably intact survival of the ancient land grant system, the Cambridge Grant district meets National Register criterion A.

The Fletcher Farm

Ebenezer Fletcher purchased 250 acres in the northern half of "the Cambridge Grant farm" from Isaac Stearns in 1772. In 1781 he sold 100 acres "with a dwelling house standing on the same" to his son Josiah. As there is no evidence that Ebenezer Fletcher ever settled in Ashburnham, it is possible that Josiah had the house built in anticipation of settling on his father's land. Later Josiah acquired 50 acres more. In 1816 he conveyed the 150 acres in two equal parcels to Joshua Reed and Timothy Fletcher. According to the 1816 deed there were buildings on each portion by then, and an 1820 deed refers to the property line separating the two as running "between the old and the new house by the town road." The 18th century house is gone, but the 19th century house now known as Cambridge Grant Farm is the "new" house owned by Timothy Fletcher in 1820 and probably built by him around 1816. With its large and well-preserved 19th century barn and broad cleared acreage, Cambridge Grant Farm is a fine example of a prosperous New England farm

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of the Federal period, and the sole significant survivor of the early settlements in the northern half the Cambridge Grant. Allied with the Adams and Russell houses in the adjoining southern portion of the Grant, it forms an essential element in a superb cluster of rural Federal domestic architecture typical of Worcester County, and is therefore eligible for inclusion on the National Register under criterion C.

The Russell-Adams Family Neighborhood

Several structures on Russell Hill Road constitute a rare surviving example of a once-common model of New England rural life: the family neighborhood. Colonists moving into unsettled areas frequently made the move with relatives, banding together to share the burdens of pioneer settlement as well as the potential prosperity offered by large tracts of undeveloped land. When settlement was successful, districts could develop in which all householders might be co-descendants of one or two families. In another settlement pattern, family neighborhoods evolved when the offspring of early settlers built homes on subdivided parcels of their parents' land, creating extended farms which served more than one generation and household unit. While the properties often remained distinct, with recognized boundary lines and separate ownership, the family connection resulted in districts where immediate neighbors were all related either by blood or through marriage. Essentially rural in character, these family neighborhoods did not arise because of the presence of mills or public buildings (notably churches) around which towns and villages typically grew. Instead, family neighborhoods developed because of the economics of available land, the opportunity to pool labor, and the yearning for support and comfort of nearby family -- particularly in isolated rural settings -- in an age when both transportation and communication were slow and uncertain. New England town histories and old town maps abound in records of such early neighborhoods (often, as at Russell Hill, they are still named for the original settlers); but most are no longer recognizable as archetypical family neighborhoods in the sense described. In heavily settled areas subsequent subdivision, reconstruction, building loss, and encroachment of unrelated structures has normally changed the character of such neighborhoods. Even in still-rural areas, the loss of early buildings through fire or other causes has usually left little trace of the old family neighborhood. Russell Hill is an outstanding exception.

The fine structures which comprise this intact early family neighborhood on Russell Hill may be divided into two groups: those of the Russell family at the crest of the hill; and, to the east, those of the Adams family, with whom the Russells were intermarried. The Russell group consists of the following elements:

- * the Thomas Russell and Margaret (Adams) Russell House, built on the north side of the road c. 1788 (MHC 251);

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- * the house of their son Walter Russell and his wife Alona (Lawrence) Russell, built next door in 1823 (MHC 253);
- * the house of their daughter Mary Russell and her husband Ward Russell (a second cousin), built on the south side of the road in 1834, with its adjacent barn foundation;
- * the Russell-Burbank family cemetery, immediately east of the Ward Russell House, established by 1848 (MHC 804).

The barn foundation is pertinent to the concept of the shared family farm. There being no evidence of a barn site at the Thomas Russell House on the north side of the road, either this barn or the older one formerly standing next to the Walter Russell House may have been shared by two of the Russell families.

The Adams group consists of the following structures:

- * the house of Walter Russell Adams and Mercy (Fairbanks) Adams, built about 1815 on land originally belonging to John Adams, Sr., with its large 19th century bank barn and a smaller attached 18th century barn (MHC 256);
- * the house of John Adams, Jr. (Ensign John Adams) and Dolly (Gibson) Adams, built about 1798, with its 19th century ell and barn (MHC 254);
- * the James Adams, Jr. and Mary (Whitney) Adams House, built ca. 1826, with its barn of early date (MHC 255).

John Adams, Sr. of Menotomy (West Cambridge Parish) was the first settler of European descent in the Cambridge Grant. His father, Thomas Adams, had been appointed in 1764 to the committee to sell the land on behalf of the town of Cambridge, had acquired the entire southern half of the Grant. John began clearing Grant land of his father's in 1766, and made "provision for a house" there in 1770. He acquired a large portion of the Grant from Thomas, starting with 100 acres in 1768.

In 1777, Thomas gave 50 acres to his daughter, Lucretia (Adams) Wetherbee. Evidently she and her husband, Ethan Wetherbee, had already removed to her father's remote Cambridge Farm holdings the preceding year, possibly with particular reason. Ethan Wetherbee had been the keeper of the Black Horse

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Tavern in Menotomy, where the Committee of Safety and the Committee of Supplies met; and it was by his warning that Charles Lee, Azor Orne and Elbridge Gerry narrowly escaped capture by the British on the night of April 18-19, 1775 on their way to Lexington. Thomas Adams himself settled here only later, in 1778. In 1788, he sold 81 acres more to his son John. In the same year he sold 147 acres in the western part of the grant to his son, Ebenezer Thomas Adams, as well as 97 acres between John and Lucretia's lands to his grandson Thomas Russell of Charlestown. Russell was the son of Thomas Adams' daughter Hannah (and thus a nephew of three of his neighbors and grandson of another). Furthermore, he was married to his distant cousin Margaret Adams of Menotomy, a niece of Thomas Adams.

From this early settlement of relatives on contiguous acreage, the close association between the Adams and Russell families continued for many years. Still, two distinct family enclaves developed: the Adams compound on the eastern edge of the grant, settled by descendants of John Adams; and the Russell compound at the top of the hill, settled by descendants of Thomas Russell. In 1826, David Russell, a first cousin of Thomas, bought the former Ethan Wetherbee place. Although the Wetherbees were initially part of the larger family settlement, their descendants dispersed. David Russell's son Ward married Thomas Russell's daughter Mary. The Ethan Wetherbee/David Russell buildings are no longer extant. The house is shown on the 1855 map, but was gone by the time the 1870 map was published.

The District Three Schoolhouse and the Morocco Shop

District Three School. In 1774, first three and subsequently five Ashburnham school districts were established, the Russell Hill area becoming district 3, eventually serving the children of the Adams, Russell and Fletcher families. Precisely when the first schoolhouse was built is not known, but either it or a successor building had burned down by 1799, when the town voted funds to establish a school in John Adams' wardroom in its place. Subsequently, a new brick building was erected on the schoolhouse lot. This masonry structure proved too heavy for the lot, which is frequently spongy with drainage from Russell Hill. Around 1846 it was moved to the nearby farm and tannery of Ivers and Thomas Russell Adams, and another wooden schoolhouse took its place. For many years this school provided early education for the Cambridge Grant children (including Melvin Ohio Adams, who became one of the most prominent figures in the region). The District 3 School was discontinued in 1888. Some time after the 1930s, the dilapidated building was removed, but its granite foundation slabs are perfectly preserved on the original schoolhouse lot.

The Morocco Shop. The trade of tanning hides was followed on Russell Hill from the earliest settlement until well into the 19th century, and became the most important industry in the Cambridge Grant other than

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farming. John Adams, the first settler, was a cordwainer as well as a farmer, and is known to have made shoes until the last year of his life, at age 104. His perennial need for shoe leather may account for the fact that his son Levi became a tanner as well as a farmer; and his son James was known as both a tanner and shoemaker. John's nephew Thomas Russell began curing hides specifically for morocco leather after coming to the grant in 1788. His shop is first mentioned in a deed of 1819. Thomas was followed in the morocco trade by his sons Walter and Thomas Jr. Walter was succeeded in the Russell Hill business by Frank Russell, who with a partner moved the business to Ashburnham Center in 1852, where it continued until 1882. An 1830 deed shows that Ivers Adams was by then also known as a morocco dresser; and from 1838 to 1860, he and Thomas Russell Adams carried on a thriving morocco business on Russell Hill. John Adams' grandson, John Adams III, was also referred to as a morocco dresser in an 1826 deed. Finally, another of John Adams' grandsons, James Adams, Jr., was also called a morocco dresser in an 1826 deed, and he had started a morocco business of his own by 1833. James Adams moved to Pennsylvania in 1848, and was succeeded locally in the business by his son Luther B. Adams and his brother Andrew Jackson Adams. With nearly all the Adams and Russell male descendants participating for over fifty years, morocco dressing became both a family trade and an economic mainstay of the community second only to farming.

Apart from the tanning facilities known to have been located at the several farms, the 1855 map of Ashburnham shows two freestanding morocco shops on Russell Hill: the shop of Thomas Russell, Jr., east of the Walter Russell house, and that of Ivers and T. R. Adams, west of the Thomas Russell, Sr. house (which was by then owned by Ivers and T. R. Adams). The latter shop is the original one established by Thomas Russell, Sr. prior to 1819. It was supplied with water which deeds tell us was "carried in logs" from a nearby spring. By following the boundaries listed it is still possible to find the stones which evidently formed the foundation of this shop (between the Thomas Russell house and the schoolhouse lot), as well as the still-flowing spring which provided its water supply.

The schoolhouse and morocco shop foundations and the spring are sites of significant local historic interest, and they may each have some archaeological value as well. In the context of the other surviving structures they make a substantial and unique contribution to understanding the economic and social history of Cambridge Grant.

Rufus Porter

The Walter Russell House boasts remarkably preserved murals by **Rufus Porter**, the most important of early American itinerant wall painters. A large landscape runs the length of the upper staircase, and a smaller romantic scene adorns the overmantel in the master bedroom. Born in West Boxford, Massachusetts

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in 1792, Porter led a long and uniquely distinguished life, chronicled in Jean Lipman's 1980 biography, Rufus Porter Rediscovered. Porter's accomplishments over 92 years included stints as a shoemaker's apprentice, militiaman, musician, sleigh and drum painter, boat painter, school teacher, builder of watermills, silhouette cutter, portrait painter, dance instructor, prolific inventor, printer and publisher. Between his other activities he found time to invent a paddle boat (1823) and invent a flying machine (1820), of which he exhibited working models in 1847 and 1853; publish plans for a rotary plow and a hot air ventilation system (1841-42); invent the revolving rifle (1844), which he sold to Colonel Colt for \$100; establish the *Scientific American* (1845), publish plans for an elevated railroad; invent and demonstrate a prefabricated movable house (c. 1857); as well as patent a steam engine (1858) and an air pump (1863).

Porter began his mural painting career in New England in 1824. His earliest murals were done in north central Massachusetts and south central New Hampshire in this year and the year following, all in towns near Ashburnham. His early style is unmistakable. It is characterized by crude modeling, stippled foliage, large "feather duster" trees painted with half the foliage in yellow ochre and the other half in black (for light and shadow), dark rubbery tree trunks framing the edges of landscape scenes, and naive shifts in perspective. At the Gardner Davis house in New Ipswich, NH, painted about 1825, Porter used a distinctive border of scrolls and rosebuds. It is known only from Nina Fletcher Little's ca. 1950 photographs for American Decorative Wall Painting; the murals themselves were destroyed shortly after the pictures were taken. The Russell House's murals exhibit all the characteristics of Porter's earliest attempts at mural painting, including the only extant example of the scroll and rose border known, and a related border of rambling rose vines. In addition, they exhibit several favorite Porter motifs which he and his disciples used for years afterward: a schooner, a stenciled rowboat with a man at the rudder, a distant stand of buildings, a militiaman in uniform, and a dramatic waterfall scene with rocks and cliffs.

In 1980 Lipman reported that "Porter-decorated houses ... [were] rapidly vanishing," while many other murals were being painted over or irreparably damaged by over-restoration. Unlike many of Porter's murals which have suffered from being covered with wallpaper or paint, the Russell murals are remarkably untouched. For many years when the house was used only in summer, they were covered by muslin curtains hung on the wall which protected them from light and dirt. In 1995 they were professionally cleaned by Linda L. Donovan of Warner, NH, using only approved and reversible conservation methods. As outstandingly preserved examples of Rufus Porter's earliest work (no earlier wall painting has been documented), these murals are a cultural treasure of great rarity.

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Other Figures of Note

During the 19th century Cambridge Grant nurtured a surprising number of figures of note for a district of its size. In addition to leaders of local and regional importance, there were several whose influence was more widely felt. While many of their accomplishments were achieved later in life, these men spent all or part of their youth in Cambridge Grant.

Isaac Hill (1788-1851) (son of Isaac Hill Sr., who had moved to Cambridge Grant in 1797, and grandson of first settler John Adams), lived in the district from 1797 to 1802. He later became publisher of the *New Hampshire Patriot*, Clerk of the New Hampshire State Senate, NH State Representative, NH State Senator, Comptroller of the United States Treasury in the Andrew Jackson administration, United States Senator from New Hampshire, and Governor of New Hampshire. As an editor in Concord, NH in the 1840s, he published articles about his youth at Cambridge Grant and about the Adams and Russell families. The Isaac Hill, Sr. farm, where Isaac Hill lived as a youngster, was partly on the 12 acre parcel west of the 42 acre property now associated with the Ward Russell House.

Luther B. Adams (b.1829), son of James Adams, Jr. and great-grandson of John Adams the first settler, was born and raised in the James Adams, Jr. house. He became superintendent of the Boston Chair Manufacturing Co. of Ashburnham, successor to the Winchester Chair Works. The company manufactured the stupendously popular Boston rocker, one of the most widely marketed products in the history of the home furnishings industry. Later it produced huge numbers of Thonet-style bentwood chairs including the sleigh rocker, another remarkable success story in the history of American manufacturing. Ashburnham's most important industry, the firm was an aggressive innovator in mass production techniques and one of the three largest chair manufacturers in the state in the third quarter of the 19th century.

Andrew Jackson Adams (1828-1911), uncle of Luther and grandson of John Adams the first settler, was a partner in the Boston Chair Manufacturing Company. A. J. Adams was the son of James Adams, Sr., of Cambridge Grant, and lived in Ashburnham from 1845 to 1850.

Samuel G. Adams (1825-1886), son of Milton Adams (born in Cambridge Grant in 1801) and great-grandson of first settler John, became Superintendent of Police for the City of Boston.

Ivers Adams (1808-1890), of the Russell Hill Morocco business, was elected Representative to the Massachusetts State Legislature in 1851. He was born in Cambridge Grant, lived in the now-demolished Ivers and T. R. Adams house, and owned the morocco shop whose foundation survives as well as the

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surviving Thomas Russell House, where he evidently housed tannery workers. He endowed the town with a trust fund used for municipal works.

Ivers Whitney Adams (b. 1838), son of Walter Adams (born in Cambridge Grant in 1807) and grandson of Walter Russell Adams, became President and General Manager of the American Net and Twine Company of Boston, the largest manufacturer of its kind in the world in the late 19th century, employing 500 workers. Another benefactor who continued to return to the town, he donated its municipal water system in 1897 and the "Schoolboy of 1850" statue in 1913.

Melvin Ohio Adams (1847-1920), son of Joseph Adams and great-grandson of first settler John, was born and brought up in the James Adams, Jr. house. He became Suffolk County (MA) Assistant District Attorney, but continued to return to the town throughout his life. In private practice in Boston in 1892, he gained national renown for his successful defense of Lizzie Borden in the infamous Fall River ax murder case. Another town benefactor, he donated the Soldiers' Monument in 1905, funded construction of the Dolly Whitney Adams school in 1906, and erected the handsome Celtic stone cross at the Meeting House Hill cemetery in 1916.

The Summer Arts Community

Throughout the 19th century New England farms, with their thin rocky soil, had failed to match the productiveness of the rich farms of other regions, particularly Pennsylvania. Only auxiliary home industries, such as the morocco business at Cambridge Grant, had kept them economically viable. With the opening of the great farmlands of the mid-west and the success of railroads to deliver their produce, the period of real competitiveness for New England farms was all but over. Compounding the challenge, workers had steadily migrated to industrial urban centers since the Civil War. In Ashburnham, even the mighty chair industry was on the wane. Michigan was replacing Massachusetts as a center of furniture manufacturing, and by 1890 Boston Chair, the town's largest employer, had closed. By the turn of the 20th century many of New England's rural communities were facing industrial and agricultural decline and depopulation.

By the early 1900s Ashburnham, once a significant manufacturing center, was well on its way toward becoming a sleepy country village. The town's high elevation and fine lakes made it an attractive summer destination in that age before air conditioning, and it was within easy reach of Boston and Hartford by railroad and automobile. While most new summer residents crowded around the lakes, gradually more of the old homes became summer retreats. Having experienced a boom from the 1820s through the 1840s, the town possessed many fine Federal and Greek Revival houses, sweeping areas of cleared pasture land, and

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Cambridge Grant Historic District
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very few newer buildings beyond the downtown mill area to detract from its old fashioned charm. At Russell Hill, the Cambridge Grant houses sat at a 1200-1260 foot elevation above sea level and the land fell sharply away to the east, offering cool breezes in summer and an unobstructed view to the Atlantic coast fifty miles away. Already the district had a modest start toward becoming a summer resort. The Walter Russell house had been used mainly as a summer residence by Professor Levi Ward Russell and his heirs since 1858. Nellie Hutchins of Brookline had turned the John Adams, Jr. house into a fashionable vacation residence in 1909 (and in 1913 had bought the James Adams, Jr. home to house servants). By 1916 a small but sophisticated arts community began to evolve.

In that year, **Aldrich Bowker** (1875-1947) purchased the Adams house from Nellie Hutchins. A successful stage actor originally from Ashby, Bowker used it as a seasonal home while performing annually in summer stock at nearby Whalom Park in Lunenburg. As a native son, he became a figure of intense local popularity in an age when regional summer stock theatre was an entertainment medium of real importance. He furnished the Adams house with antiques and reproductions in the colonial revival taste and styled it "Handley Farm" after the 19th century owners. In addition to his popular performances at Whalom Park, Bowker established at Handley farm one of the earliest open-air theatres in the country, inviting other noted actors to participate in productions he mounted on the broad terrace with its panoramic view. In 1920 the well known actor Ainsworth Arnold came from New York to play in W. S. Gilbert's *The Palace of Truth* (in which the playwright Edgar Stehli also played a role); the film actress Bette Davis (who had attended Ashburnham's Cushing Academy) was a guest in the 1930s. Bowker would become best known for his portrayal of "Grandpa" in George S. Kaufman's *You Can't Take it With You*. He played over 500 consecutive performances of the role in the Chicago production, and was the presenter when Kaufman won the Pulitzer Prize in 1937. In these years Bowker continued to spend summers at Handley Farm (and lived there year-round one year). Bowker's sister, Louise Billings, continued to keep Handley Farm as a summer home until 1945.

The Ward Russell House had been the ancestral home to the locally prominent Burbank family since Margaret Russell had married Levi Burbank 1859. Used as a family vacation retreat in the twentieth century, it became a summer studio for Clara Burbank (1862-1927), a floral artist of outstanding merit. After 1927 it served as summer studio for her niece, Amy Burbank of Boston and Belmont, Mass. (1875-1948), an art teacher and accomplished landscape painter. Across the road, two schoolteachers, Mary and Rina Maude Greene, were living in the Thomas Russell house. The Walter Russell house was bought as a summer home in 1920 by Frank Bowker (brother of Aldrich Bowker), an amateur playwright and actor who joined in his brother's open-air theatre productions. Its fine Federal interiors and Rufus Porter murals were maintained, and it was still furnished with over a century of Russell family antiques.

(continued)

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Cambridge Grant Historic District
Ashburnham (Worcester), MA

Two summer cottages were built between the Walter Russell House and Handley Farm. The first was "Red Top," with its signature red roof, picturesque white birch fence rails, whimsical outbuildings, brightly painted whirligigs, and rustic observation tower (no longer extant) with panoramic views from New Hampshire to Connecticut. The other summer cottage was that of Jeannette Damon (another sister of Frank and Aldrich Bowker, and a teacher at the old District Three School before its closing in 1888). Built about 1925, the cottage was destroyed in the disastrous hurricane of 1938. On both Russell Hill and Jewell Hill, the old pastures, now grown to wild blueberry fields, had become famous for their bountiful crops, and pickers paid to visit them. On the east shoulder of Russell hill, the old Fletcher farm was bought by George and Alice Wallace of Fitchburg, Mass. Like Handley Farm, it was renamed, renovated, and furnished with antiques in the colonial revival taste. Its new name, appropriately, was "Cambridge Grant Farm." Its orchards were maintained by the Wallaces and continued to produce renowned McIntosh apples.

From 1916 until World War II, the heart of the old Cambridge Grant thrived as a small but vital arts colony with many summer residents. It retained its special identity as a distinct district within the town -- as well as its historic role as a family enclave, albeit this time dominated by Burbanks and Bowkers rather than Adams and Russells. Vacation home to artists, writers, teachers, actors, and antiquarians for thirty years, visited by nationally known figures, and the site of one of the region's earliest open air theatres, the Grant's eligibility for inclusion on the National Register is enhanced by its early twentieth century history.

The flourishing of a vital seasonal arts and recreational community from the early 20th century until World War II constitutes another important chapter in the social and cultural life of New England, one that was played out in many summer communities throughout the region. Red Top cottage, the only Cambridge Grant structure not dating from the Federal period, survives as a relic of that significant era. While some summer residents continued to visit their Cambridge Grant properties during the war, the cultural activities which had distinguished the area gradually ceased, and by the war's close, the once-flourishing summer arts community had come to an end.

Recent Preservation Activities

Ashburnham has a town Historical Society, active since 1960, which preserves documents and relics related to the town's history in the old Town House (the former town hall built with the reused frame of the 18th century meeting house). In 1970, Raymond and Barbara Holden's Ashburnham, Massachusetts 1885-1965 recorded town history since the publication of Ezra Stearns' well-known 19th century volume. Kaino Waltari's Focus on Old Houses of Ashburnham, privately published about 1982, catalogued most of the old houses in town, including those in the Cambridge Grant district. In 1986, the town voted to preserve the Dolly Whitney Adams School, which was converted for use as a town library. Presently, the Ashburnham

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Continuation Sheet**

Section number 8 Page 13

**Cambridge Grant Historic District
Ashburnham (Worcester), MA**

Historical Commission monitors the fortunes of the town's historic resources, including the 1890 Stevens Library building, and uses demolition delay rights within the town center to intervene when historic structures are threatened. Unfortunately, it has not been possible to prevent losses outside the central district. When losses have occurred, however, they have tended to raise consciousness of changes in the town's character and concerns about unrestricted development.

The Ivers and Thomas Russell Adams House was a large two-story, single-pile frame house at the western edge of the Cambridge Grant. Sometime after 1982 the house was destroyed, along with the remnants of the outbuildings, and more of the land was subdivided for new housing. Until then, all of Cambridge Grant had remained distinctly rural, with extensive acreage attached to a number of the old houses. On Russell Hill, there was only one dwelling built later than 1834.

The loss of the Adams house and the beginning of aggressive real estate development spurred an urgent interest in preserving what remained of the Cambridge Grant among the owners of other historic properties in the district, as well as within the town Historical Commission. Several of the Russell Hill houses were inventoried for the Massachusetts Historical Commission in 1988. In 1990, Professor Richard Damon printed a map of the first division of the Cambridge Grant, based on years of research into the deeds. In 1995, Christopher Rice wrote a proposal for land conservation and building restrictions in a research paper for the Conway School of Landscape Design. A proposal to establish a local preservation district was voted on by the town, but failed to pass. In 1997 Allan Small conducted title searches on the extant old houses in the grant to resolve questions regarding original ownership. Town historian Joseph F. von Deck published a seminal history of the district in 1998, identifying early settlers and potential archaeological sites and suggesting directions for further research. Local interest in acknowledging the unique nature of the Grant and preserving its character is very strong.

Archaeological Significance

Since patterns of prehistoric occupation in Ashburnham are poorly understood, any surviving sites could be significant. Prehistoric sites in this area can be important by adding information to our understanding of the role and importance of upland/interior sites along tributary streams of the Nashua/Merrimack River drainage played in the local/regional Native American subsistence and settlement systems. Prehistoric sites in this area could be part of a large, possibly seasonal settlement network of sites based along the Nashua River, the Merrimack River or part of a specialized adaptation to local environments in the uplands and Worcester Plateau locale. Many subsistence and settlement theories indicate prehistoric socio/political/economic boundaries are based along riverine basins. Although sites in this area are ultimately part of the Merrimack

(continued)

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**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section number 8 Page 14

**Cambridge Grant Historic District
Ashburnham (Worcester), MA**

River drainage, the area is also in close proximity to drainage areas that are part of the Connecticut River drainage. Prehistoric sites in this area may enable a test of theories relating to riverine adaptations and the importance of sites and settlement/subsistence patterns that are geographically close but in different drainages rather than in the same drainage.

Historic archaeological resources described above have the potential for providing important information on the social, cultural and economic patterns that characterized the evolution of rural country life in a Central Massachusetts upland community during its period of major growth in the 18th and 19th centuries. Additional historic research combined with archaeological survey and testing can help locate residences in the district that no longer survive. This information can help reconstruct the evolution of family neighborhoods in the district and the components of farmsteads within those clusters. It has been suggested that the barn represented by the foundation next to the Ward and Mary Russell residence represents a shared facility by several different families pertinent to the concept of a shared family farm. Historical and archaeological research might also identify other structures that were also shared and important to the shared family farm. Detailed analysis of the contents from occupational related features and the analysis of farm structures might also identify other social, cultural, and economic characteristics that were typical to the concept of a shared family farm. Structural remains and the analysis of occupational related features related to industrial sites in the district may also contribute important information on the relationship of tanning and brick making operations to family farm production and technologies involved in those industries. Structural remains of water- power sites related to tanning industries can contribute important information on the engineering design of those facilities. Important information on the early transport of water might also be obtained from water-power sites. Information relating to the role of 18th and 19th century education in the district may also result from the analysis of structural remains and the analysis of occupational related features at the site of the District 3 Schoolhouse. The location and analysis of unmarked graves at the Russell-Burbank Cemetery may also contribute important information relating to mortuary customs and health in a rural family neighborhood.

(end)

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Cambridge Grant Historic District
Ashburnham (Worcester), MA

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(continued)

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Section number 9 Page 2

Cambridge Grant Historic District
Ashburnham (Worcester), MA

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(continued)

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Section number 9 Page 3

Cambridge Grant Historic District
Ashburnham (Worcester), MA

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(end)

Cambridge Grant HD
Name of Property

Worcester, MA
County and State

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property c. 322 acres

UTM References See continuation sheet.

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1. 19 265130 4725920
Zone Easting Northing

2. 19 265730 4725920
Zone Easting Northing

3. 19 265620 4724500
Zone Easting Northing

4. 19 265000 4724170
Zone Easting Northing

See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Allen F. Small, Consultant, with Betsy Friedberg, NR Director, MHC

organization Massachusetts Historical Commission date April 2001

street & number 220 Morrissey Boulevard telephone 617-727-8470

city or town Boston state MA zip code 02125

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A **sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs

Representative **black and white photographs** of the property.

Additional items (Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO.)

name multiple

street & number _____ telephone _____

city or town _____ state _____ zip code _____

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including the time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Project (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503. NPS Form 10-900 OMB No.

United States Department of the Interior
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**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section number 10 Page 1

**Cambridge Grant Historic District
Ashburnham (Worcester), MA**

10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

UTM References

	zone	easting	northing
1.	19	265,130	4,725,920
2.	19	265,730	4,725,920
3.	19	265,620	4,724,500
4.	19	265,000	4,724,170
5.	19	264,360	4,724,560
6.	19	264,610	4,725,580

Verbal Boundary Description

The nominated district includes portions of Ashburnham Assessors' Maps 38 and 39. Copies are attached, showing the Historic District boundaries and the approximate original boundaries of Cambridge Grant.

Boundary Justification

The boundaries of the Cambridge Grant Historic District are drawn to include the buildings, sites and structures catalogued in the description of the district above, as well as a significant portion of their historic environment, including meadow, wood, pasturage, and blueberry barrens. Property lines traditionally associated with the farms have generally been used, most of which are marked by old stone walls. Larger segments of unbuilt acreage have been included where they are still associated with an extant historic building, and their inclusion is considered representative of the extensive acreage historically characteristic of the Grant properties. Because newer building development remains peripheral, it has not been found necessary to include non-contributing structures, and Grant land affected by recent development has been excluded.

(end_

United States Department of the Interior
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National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number photo Page 1

Cambridge Grant Historic District
Ashburnham (Worcester), MA

PHOTOGRAPHS

Photographer: Allan F. Small, Belmont, MA

Negatives are with the photographer.

Photographs marked with * are 8 x 10" in size; all others are 5 x 7" or otherwise indicated.

RECENT PHOTOGRAPHS — General Views

1. View to the east from Russell Hill, showing the Timothy Fletcher farm and the Fitchburg Reservoir (Ashby) in the middle distance. March, 1999.
 2. View to the east from atop Russell Hill, showing blueberry barrens in the foreground, with the Timothy Fletcher farm and Fitchburg Reservoir in the middle distance. March, 1999. *
 3. View to the north across the blueberry barrens at the top of Russell Hill, with Mount Watatic in the distance. March, 1999. *
 4. View of Russell Hill Road, facing east, showing the "side hill piece" on the right. March, 1999. *
 5. The "side hill piece" from the west, with the John Adams, Jr. House on the left. March, 1999. *
 6. View of Russell Hill Road from the north, showing (L-R): the Ward & Mary Russell House, the Walter Russell House, and the Thomas Russell House. March, 1999. *
 7. View of Russell Hill Road from the west, with Walter Russell Adams House and Barns. March, 1999. *
 8. Wilker Road, with Timothy Fletcher House and Barn, from the south. March, 1999.
 9. John Adams, Jr. House (Handley Farm), from the southeast. August, 1998. 247 Russell Hill Road *
 10. John Adams, Jr. House, from the west. August, 1998. *
- (continued)

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Section number photo Page 2

Cambridge Grant Historic District
Ashburnham (Worcester), MA

-
11. James Adams, Jr. House (Joseph Adams House), from the southeast. August, 1998. 269
Russell Hill Road *
12. Thomas Russell House, from the southwest. August, 1998. 219 Russell Hill Road *
13. Timothy Fletcher House (Cambridge Grant Farm), from the southeast. August, 1999. 15
Wilker Road
14. Walter Russell Adams House (John Adams Homestead), from the south. August, 1998.
287 Russell Hill Road
15. Walter Russell Adams House -- Barns, from the south. March, 1999.
16. Red Top Cottage, from the west. March, 1999. 223 Russell Hill Road
17. Red Top Cottage with modern addition, from the east. March, 1999.
18. Walter Russell House, from the southeast. August, 1998. 227 Russell Hill Road
19. Ward & Mary Russell House, from the northwest. August, 1998. 220 Russell Hill Road
20. Russell-Burbank Barn foundation, from the northeast. March, 1999. Russell Hill Road
21. Russell-Burbank Cemetery, from the northwest. March, 1999. Opposite 227 Russell Hill
Road
22. Russell-Burbank Cemetery, from the west. August, 1998.
23. District Three Schoolhouse foundation, from the south. March, 1999. 205 Russell Hill
Road
24. District Three Schoolhouse foundation, from the north. March, 1999.
25. Morocco Shop foundation, from the southeast. March, 1999. 217 Russell Hill Road
26. Walter Russell House, upper stair passage: Rufus Porter mural, east wall. March, 1999. *

(continued)

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Continuation Sheet

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Cambridge Grant Historic District
Ashburnham (Worcester), MA

27. Walter Russell House, parlor chamber (east chamber): Rufus Porter mural and mantel, east wall. March, 1999. *

28. Walter Russell House, Parlor Chamber: Rufus Porter mural over mantel, east wall. March, 1999. *

HISTORIC PHOTOGRAPHS

Originals / Negatives are with Allan F. Small

29. Russell Hill seen from Jewell Hill, early 1900s. View from the south, showing the Ward Russell farm, with the now-demolished barn to the left of the house and the Russell-Burbank cemetery (hidden by trees) on the right. This view shows the cleared fields both atop Russell Hill and on its southern slope before they were overtaken by forest. 5-1/2 x 3-1/2

30. John Adams, Jr. House, c. 1920. View from the east, showing the porch added by Nellie Hutchins after 1909. Also showing the chimneys before reduction in height and the ell before introduction of the present picture window. 5-1/2 x 3-1/2

31. Walter Russell House in the 1920s. View from the east, showing the English barn which was demolished c. 1953.

ILLUSTRATIONS

32. Walter Russell Adams House. Wood engraving, c. 1886. Published in Stearns' History of Ashburnham, 1887. This view is remarkably unchanged; see #7 above.

33. Playbill from Aldrich Bowker's production of *The Palace of Truth* at Handley Farm, 1920. Original is with Allan F. Small.

(end)

**DISTRICT DATA SHEET
CAMBRIDGE GRANT HISTORIC DISTRICT
ASHBURNHAM (WORCESTER), MA**

MAP#	LOT/PARCEL	MHC#	HISTORIC NAME	ADDRESS	DATE	STYLE	TYPE/ STATUS
1	39/5		District 3 Schoolhouse foundation	205 Russell Hill Road	ca. 1846		SI/C
2	39/5		Morocco shop foundation	215 Russell Hill Road	ca. 1819		SI/C
3	39/7	251	Thomas Russell House	219 Russell Hill Road	ca. 1788	Federal	B/C
4	39/22	252	Ward & Mary Russell House & Barn Foundation	220 Russell Hill Road	1834 mid 19 th c.	Fed/Gr Rev	B/C SI/C
5	39/22	804	Russell-Burbank Cemetery	224 Russell Hill Road	1848		SI/C
6	39/8; 39/21	253	Walter Russell House	227 Russell Hill Road	1823	Federal	B/C
7	39/10; 39/4; 39/9		Red Top	223 Russell Hill Road	ca. 1920	Bungalow	B/C
8	39/11; 39/20	254	John Adams Jr. House & Barn (Handley Farm)	247 Russell Hill Road	ca. 1798	Federal	2B/C
9	39/12	255	James Adams, Jr. House & Barn	269 Russell Hill Road	ca. 1826	Federal	2B/C
10	39/17-18	256	Walter Russell Adams House & Barn (John Adams Homestead)	287 Russell Hill Road	ca. 1815	Federal	2B/C
11	39/14; 39/16	257	Timothy Fletcher House & Barn (Cambridge Grant Farm)	15 Wilker Road	ca. 1816	Federal	2B/C
12	39/4		Spring of Water	behind 219 Russell Hill Road			SI/C
			Series of Fields throughout district				SI/C
			12 contributing buildings	6 contributing sites			



OLD ADAMS HOMESTEAD—EAST PART OF TOWN.

CHARACTERS



King Phanor	Aldrich Bowker
Prince Philamir	Ainsworth Arnold
Chrysal	Edgar Stehli
Zoram	Dr. F. C. Davendorf
Aristaeus	Aaron Task
Gelanor	Frank Bowker
Queen Altemire	Mrs. Jeanette Bowker Damon
Princess Zeolide	Lucia P. Hutchins
Mirza	Bertha F. Cudworth
Palmis	Irene Partridge Ryan
Azema	Edna Richenbacher

Lords and Ladies in Waiting - Musicians

- Act 1. Gardens at King Phanor's Country House.
Act 2. The Palace of Truth.
Act 3. Same.

Music under the direction of
Mrs. Albert Wilder.

Aldrich Bowker

will present

AT

HANDLEY FARM

Ashburnham, Mass.

AUGUST 11, 1920

at 3 P. M.

An out-of-door performance of

THE PALACE OF TRUTH

by

W. S. GILBERT

At Handley Farm, Ashburnham, Mass., on August 11th, at 3 P. M., Aldrich Bowker will give an out-of-door performance of W. S. Gilbert's delightful comedy, the "Palace of Truth".

It is a costume play of the fifteenth century. Mr. Bowker will be seen in the roll of King Phanor, who takes his court to the Palace of Truth where everyone is bound to speak the simple, unadulterated truth, which causes very amusing complications.

Mrs. Jeanette Bowker Damon will play the roll of the jealous Queen Altemire, another amusing part.

Miss Lucia P. Hutchins will play the Princess Zeolide. Miss Hutchins is very well known in this locality through her readings and coaching, and will bring to the part a great deal of charm and distinction.

The leading roll will be played by Ainsworth Arnold, a very well known actor. Mr. Arnold comes on from New York for the express purpose of playing Prince Philamir in the out-of-door performance of The Palace of Truth.

Edgar Stehli, who is a well known playwright, as well as an excellent actor, will play Chrysal, the poet.

Zoram, the Musician, will be portrayed by Dr. F. C. Davendorf who saw active service at the front in France with the Medical Staff during our late war, and is an excellent actor as well as physician.

There are many other characters in the play which will all be well played.

Through the play runs the delightful music of Gilbert and Sullivan. The costumes are very beautiful, designed by Frank J. Zimmerer, from the productions of Stuart Walker, the well known theatrical producer.

Handley farm is situated at Ashburnham, one of the prettiest villages in New England, high up in the hills and affords a view that is seldom equalled. The farm is five miles from Fitchburg, two miles from the center of Ashburnham and near the surrounding towns, easy to reach over excellent roads.

In the event of rainy weather, performance will take place the following day.

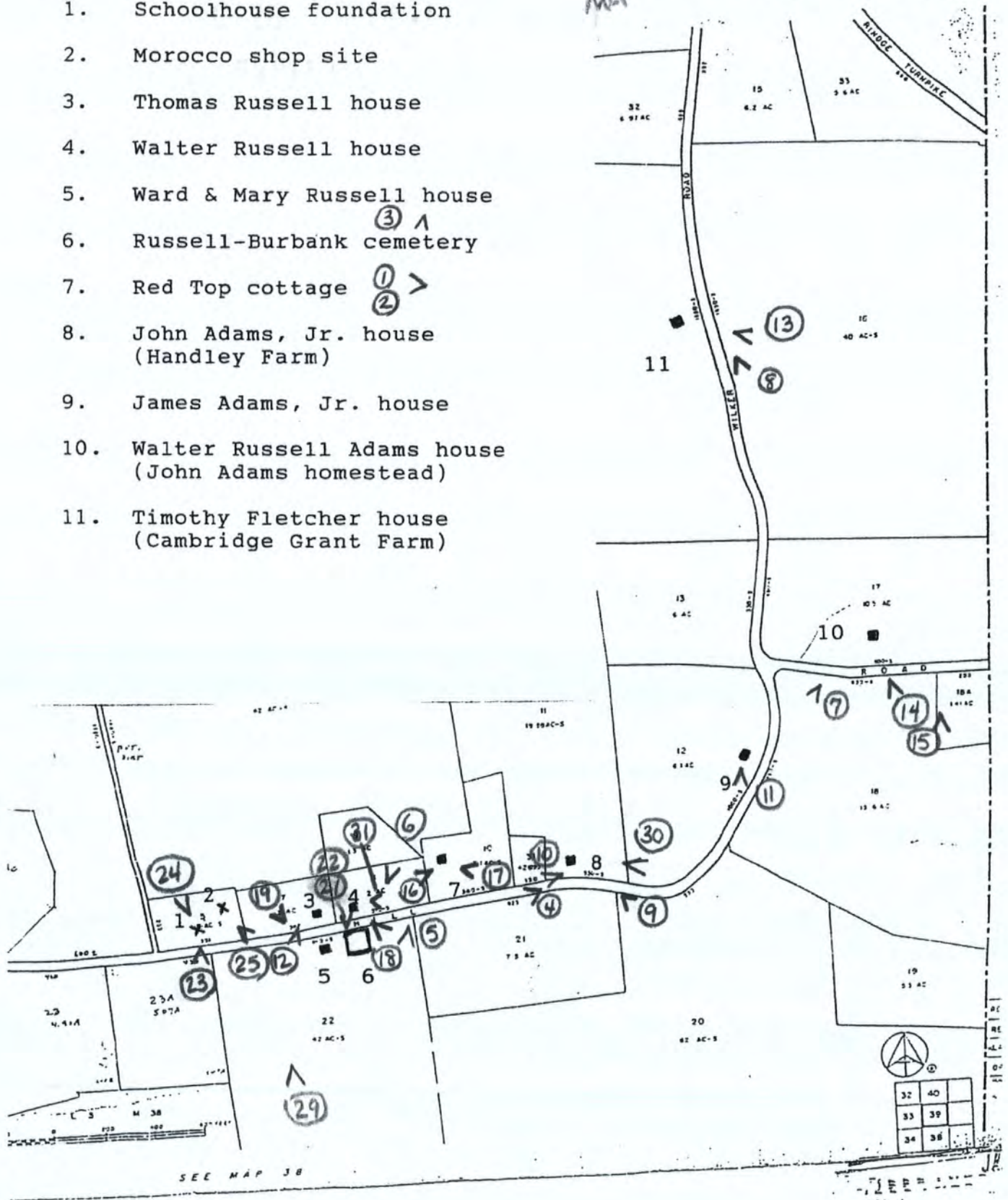
The admission will be \$1.00, 10c war tax.

photo locations

Buildings, Structures, Sites

1. Schoolhouse foundation
2. Morocco shop site
3. Thomas Russell house
4. Walter Russell house
5. Ward & Mary Russell house
6. Russell-Burbank cemetery ^③ ^
7. Red Top cottage ^① >
^②
8. John Adams, Jr. house
(Handley Farm)
9. James Adams, Jr. house
10. Walter Russell Adams house
(John Adams homestead)
11. Timothy Fletcher house
(Cambridge Grant Farm)

CAMBRIDGE GRANT HD
ASHBURNHAM (WORCESTER)
MA



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
EVALUATION/RETURN SHEET

REQUESTED ACTION: RESUBMISSION

PROPERTY Cambridge Grant Historic District
NAME:

MULTIPLE
NAME:

STATE & COUNTY: MASSACHUSETTS, Worcester

DATE RECEIVED: 7/05/01 DATE OF PENDING LIST:
DATE OF 16TH DAY: DATE OF 45TH DAY: 8/20/01
DATE OF WEEKLY LIST:

REFERENCE NUMBER: 01000626

DETAILED EVALUATION:

___ACCEPT ___RETURN ___REJECT _____DATE

ABSTRACT/SUMMARY COMMENTS:

*On resubmission, the photos have been keyed to
a site map and the boundary of the district has
been indicated on the USGS map.*

RECOM./CRITERIA *accept A, B, C*

REVIEWER *Patricia Andrews*

DISCIPLINE *Historian*

TELEPHONE _____

DATE *8/20/2001*

DOCUMENTATION see attached comments Y/N see attached SLR Y/N



①

ALLAN SMALL
MARCH 1999

TIMOTHY FLETCHER FARM
(CAMBRIDGE GRANT FARM)
CAMBRIDGE GRANT HISTORIC DISTRICT
WORCESTER COUNTY, MA

PHOTO #1 - VANTAGE POINT II



ALLAN SMALL
MARCH 1999

②
TIMOTHY FLETCHER FARM
CAMBRIDGE GRANT H.D.

WORCESTER COUNTY, MA

PHOTO # 2 - VANTAGE POINT II



3

ALLAN SMALL
MARCH 1999

GENERAL VIEW - RUSSELL HILL
CAMBRIDGE GRANT HISTORIC DISTRICT
WORCESTER COUNTY, MA

PHOTO #3 - VANTAGE POINT 7



(4)

ALLAN SMALL
MARCH 1999

RUSSELL HILL ROAD AND THE "SIDE HILL PIECE"
CAMBRIDGE GRANT M.D.
WORCESTER COUNTY, MA

PHOTO #4 - VANTAGE POINT BETWEEN PROPERTIES 6 AND 7



(5)

RUSSELL HILL ROAD AND THE
JOHN ADAMS, JR. HOUSE, FROM
THE "SIDE HILL PIECE"

CAMBRIDGE GRANT H.D.

WORCESTER COUNTY, MA

ALLAN SMALL
MARCH 1999

PHOTO #5 - VANTAGE POINT BETWEEN PROPERTIES 6 AND 7



ALLAN SMALL

MARCH 1999

6

RUSSELL HILL ROAD

CAMBRIDGE GRANT H.D.

WORCESTER COUNTY, MA

PHOTO # 6



⑦.

WALTER RUSELL ADAMS HOUSE

CAMBRIDGE GRANT H.D.

WORCESTER COUNTY, MA

PHOTO # 7 - VANTAGE POINT 10

ALLAN SMALL

1999 - MARCH



(8.) CAMBRIDGE GRANT FARM
(TIMOTHY FLETCHER HOUSE)
CAMBRIDGE GRANT H.D.
WORCESTER COUNTY, MA

ALLAN SMALL
MARCH 1999

PHOTO #8 - VANTAGE POINT II



9

JOHN ADAMS, JR. HOUSE (HANDLEY FARM)
CAMBRIDGE GRANT H.D.
WORCESTER COUNTY, MA

ALLAN SMALL
AUGUST 1998

PHOTO #9 - VANTAGE POINT 8

Processing by
Kodak
APR. 1999 SA

2



(10.)

JOHN ADAMS, JR. HOUSE (HANDLEY FARM)
CAMBRIDGE GRANT H. D.
WORCESTER COUNTY, MA

PHOTO #10 - VANTAGE POINT 8

ALLAN SMALL
AUG. 1998



11.

JAMES ADAMS, JR. HOUSE (JOSEPH ADAMS HOUSE)

CAMBRIDGE GRANT H.D.

WORCESTER COUNTY, MA

ALLAN SMALL

AUGUST 1998

PHOTO # 11 - VANTAGE POINT 9



12.

ALLAN SMALL

AUGUST 1998

THOMAS RUSSELL HOUSE

CAMBRIDGE GRANT H.D.

WORCESTER COUNTY, MA.

PHOTO #12 - VANTAGE POINT 3



13

TIMOTHY FLETCHER HOUSE
(CAMBRIDGE GRANT FARM)

CAMBRIDGE GRANT HISTORIC DISTRICT
WORCESTER COUNTY, MA

PHOTO #13 - VANTAGE POINT II

ALCAN SMALL
AUGUST 1998

Processing by
Kodak
APR. 1999 SA



14.

WALTER RUSSELL ADAMS HOUSE
CAMBRIDGE GRANT HISTORIC DISTRICT
WORCESTER COUNTY, MA

PHOTO # 14 - VANTAGE POINT 10

Processing by
Kodak
APR. 1999 SA

2
ALLAN
SMALL

AUGUST
1998



15.

WALTER RUSSELL BARNES
CAMBRIDGE GRANT H.D.
WORCESTER COUNTY, MA

ALLAN SMALL
MARCH 1999

PHOTO # 15 - VANTAGE POINT 10



16.

"RED TOP"

CAMBRIDGE GRANT H.D.

WORCESTER COUNTY, MA

ALLAN SMALL

MARCH 1999

PHOTO # 16 - VANTAGE POINT 7



(17.)

"RED TOP"

CAMBRIDGE GRANT H.D.

WORCESTER COUNTY, MA

PHOTO # 17 - VANTAGE POINT 7

ALLAN SMALL

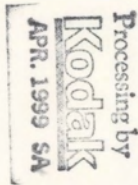
MARCH 1999



18.

WALTER RUSSELL HOUSE
CAMBRIDGE GRANT HISTORIC DISTRICT
WORCESTER COUNTY, MA

PHOTO # 18 - VANTAGE POINT 4



ALLAN SMALL
AUGUST 1998



(19.)

WARD AND MARY RUSSELL HOUSE
(BURBANK HOUSE)

ALLAN SMALL
AUGUST 1998

CAMBRIDGE GRANT H. D.
WORCESTER COUNTY, MA

PHOTO # 19- VANTAGE POINT 5

Processing by
Kodak
APR. 1999 SA

2



(20.)

RUSSELL-BURBANK BARN FOUNDATION
CAMBRIDGE GRANT H.D.

WORCESTER COUNTY, MA

PHOTO #20 - VANTAGE POINT 5

ALLAN SMALL
MARCH 1999



21.

RUSSELL - BURBANK CEMETERY
CAMBRIDGE GRANT H.D.
WORCESTER COUNTY, MA

ALLAN SMALL
MARCH 1999

PHOTO # 21 - VANTAGE POINT G

Processing by
Kodak
APR. 1999 SA

2



22.

RUSSELL-BURBANK CEMETERY
CAMBRIDGE GRANT H.D.
WORCESTER COUNTY, MA

ALLAN SMALL
AUG. 1998

PHOTO #22 - VANTAGE POINT 6

Processing by
Kodak
APR. 1999 SA

2



23.

DISTRICT THREE SCHOOLHOUSE FOUNDATION
CAMBRIDGE GRANT HISTORIC DISTRICT
WORCESTER COUNTY, MA

PHOTO # 23 - VANTAGE POINT 1

ALLAN SMACC
MARCH 1999



(24)

DISTRICT THREE SCHOOLHOUSE FOUNDATION

CAMBRIDGE GRANT H.D.

WORCESTER COUNTY, MA

PHOTO # 24 - VANTAGE POINT 1

ALLAN SMALL

MARCH 1999



25.

MOROCCO SHOP FOUNDATION

CAMBRIDGE GRANT HISTORIC DISTRICT

WORCESTER COUNTY, MA

PHOTO #25 - VANTAGE POINT 2

ALLAN
SMALL

MARCH 1999



(26.)

RUFUS PORTER MURAL - STAIR PASSAGE
WALTER RUSSELL HOUSE
CAMBRIDGE GRANT H.D.
WORCESTER COUNTY, MA

ALLAN SMALL

MARCH 1999

PHOTO 26 - PROPERTY #4 ON DISTRICT MAP

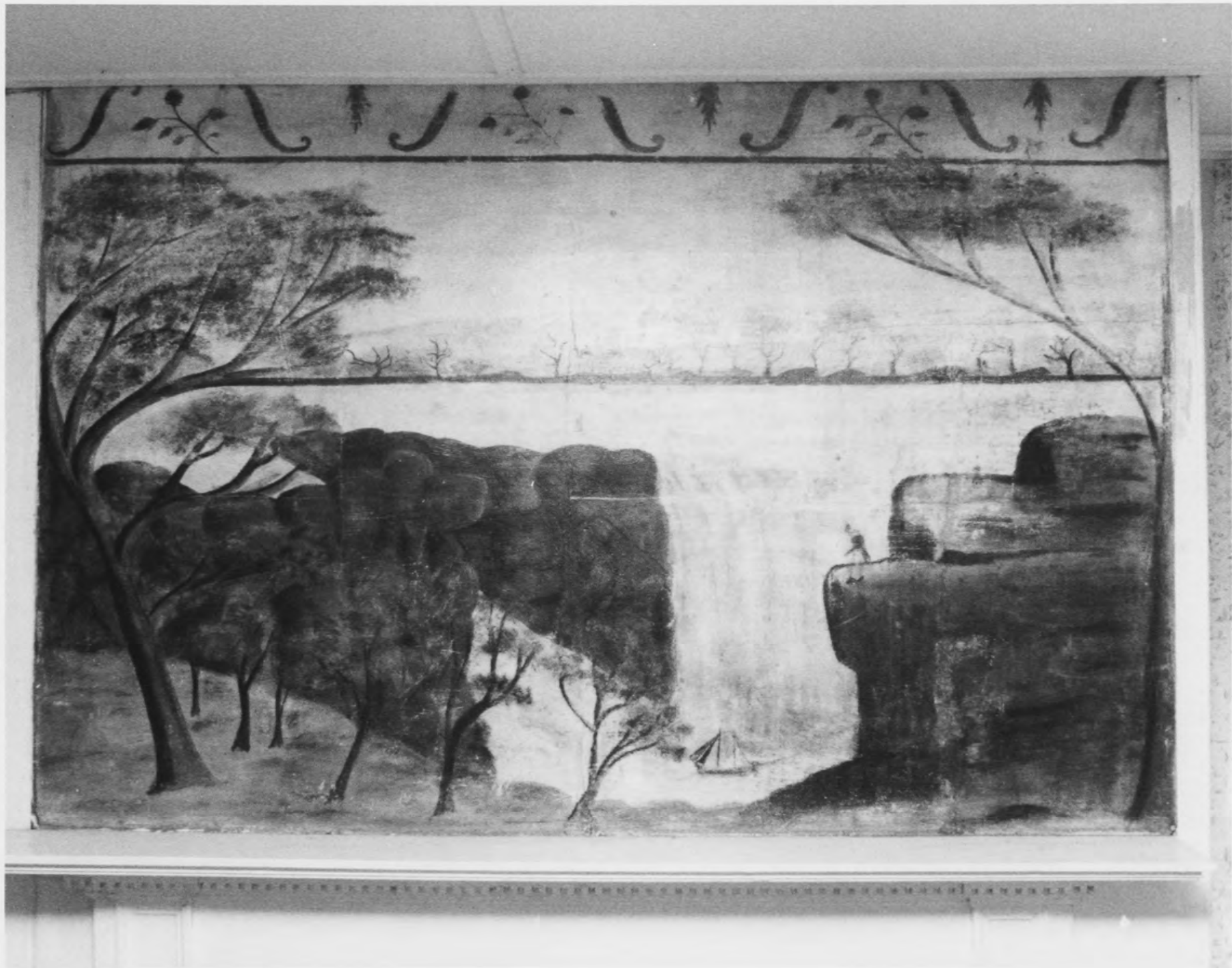


(27.)

RUFUS PORTER MURAL - EAST CHAMBER
WALTER RUSSELL HOUSE
CAMBRIDGE GRANT H.D.
WORCESTER COUNTY, MA

PHOTO # 27 - PROPERTY # 4 ON DISTRICT MAP

PHOTO: ALLAN SMALL, MARCH 1999



28.

RUFUS PORTER MURAL - EAST CHAMBER
WALTER RUSSELL HOUSE
CAMBRIDGE GRANT H.D.
WORCESTER COUNTY, MA

PHOTO # 28 - PROPERTY # 4 ON DISTRICT MAP

PHOTO: ALLAN SMALL, MARCH 1999



(29.)

WARD AND MARY RUSSELL HOUSE, C. 1900
CAMBRIDGE GRANT H.D.

WORCESTER COUNTY, MA

PHOTO # 29 - VANTAGE POINT 5

(30.)

HANDLEY FARM, C. 1920
(JOHN ADAMS, JR. HOUSE)
CAMBRIDGE GRANT H.D.

WORCESTER COUNTY, MA

PHOTO # 30 - VANTAGE POINT 8



(31.)

WALTER RUSSELL HOUSE , C. 1928 - ?
CAMBRIDGE GRANT H. D.
WORCESTER COUNTY, MA

PHOTO # 31- VANTAGE POINT 4

ORIGINAL/NEGATIVE
WITH: ALLAN SMALL
BELMONT, MA
1999



CONVERSION SCALES	
Feet	Meters
15000	4500
14000	4000
13000	3500
12000	3000
11000	2500
10000	2000
9000	1500
8000	1000
7000	700
6000	500
5000	300
4000	200
3000	100
2000	50
1000	25
500	12.5
200	5
100	2.5
0	0

Feet	Meters
1	3048
2	6096
3	9144
4	12192
5	15240
6	18288
7	21336
8	24384
9	27432
10	30480

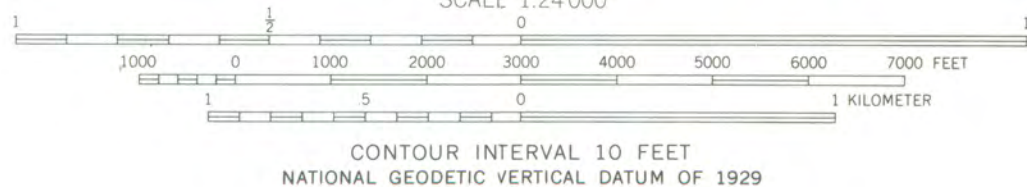
To convert feet to meters
multiply by 0.3048

To convert meters to feet
multiply by 3.2808

CAMBRIDGE
GRANT HD
ASHBURNHAM (WORE) MA
UTM REFERENCE

- 265130/4725920
- 265730/4725920
- 265620/4724500
- 265000/4724170
- 264360/4724560
- 264600/4725580

Mapped, edited, and published by the Geological Survey
Control by USGS, USC&GS, and Massachusetts Geodetic Survey
Topography by planetable surveys 1943 and 1944
Revised 1965
Polyconic projection. 1927 North American datum
10,000-foot grids based on Massachusetts coordinate system,
mainland zone, and New Hampshire coordinate system
1000-meter Universal Transverse Mercator grid,
zone 19
Fine red dashed lines indicate selected fence and field lines where
generally visible on aerial photographs. This information is unchecked



ROAD CLASSIFICATION	
Heavy-duty	Light-duty
Medium-duty	Unimproved dirt
State Route	

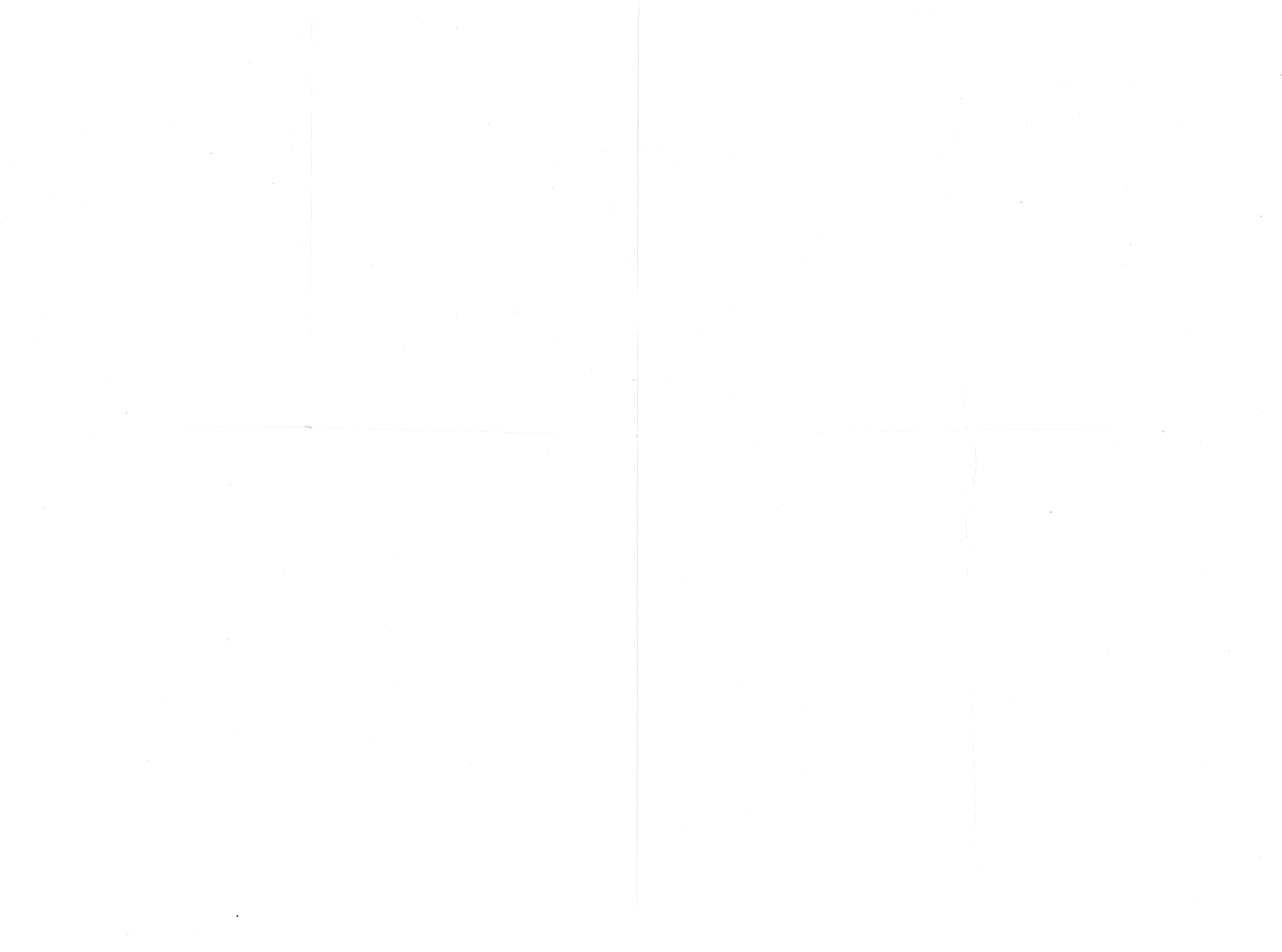
ASHBY, MASS. - N. H.
N4237.5-W7145/7.5

1965

AMS 6669 III NE-SERIES V814

THIS MAP COMPLIES WITH NATIONAL MAP ACCURACY STANDARDS
FOR SALE BY U. S. GEOLOGICAL SURVEY
DENVER, COLORADO 80225, OR RESTON, VIRGINIA 22092
A FOLDER DESCRIBING TOPOGRAPHIC MAPS AND SYMBOLS IS AVAILABLE ON REQUEST

CAMBRIDGE GRANT HD
ASHBURNHAM (WORCESTER), MA
USGS map



ASHBURNHAM, MASSACHUSETTS

ASSESSORS MAPS

SEE MAP 40

L 3
M 40

L 18B/D/F/G
M 33

SEE MAP 33

L 22
M 33

CACT ROAD

PVT. HILL

RIDGE TURNPIKE

WILDER ROAD

ROAD

ASHBURNHAM

PREPARED UNDER THE DIRECTION OF THE
ASHBURNHAM BOARD OF ASSESSORS
BY
AVIS AIRMAP, INC.
BROOKLINE - BRAINTREE - HARTFORD

200 0 200 400 600 FEET

SEE MAP 38



32	40
33	39
34	38

REV. BY AVIS
REV. BY AVIS
LAST N° USED
ORIGINAL ISSUE
NUMBER NOT USED
MAP 39
Revised To
January 1, 1966

ASHBURNHAM, MASSACHUSETTS

ASSESSORS MAPS

L 20
M 39

3
12.3 AC

L 28
M 39

L 24
M 39

L 22
M 39

L 51
M 34

2A
41.8 AC

2
53.3 AC

2B
4.75 AC

2C
18 AC-S

9
96 AC-S

10
10 AC-S

8
1.6 AC-S

11
49.2 AC-S

7A
3.76 AC

7
20.74 AC-S

5B
9.5 AC

12
8.1 AC-S

5C
25 AC-S

5A
17.7 AC

16
5 AC

28
5.4 AC

6
3.3 AC-S

L 18
M 37

24
3.9 AC

25
2.5 AC

23
5.2 AC

26
8.8 AC

27
10.1 AC

22
5.57 AC

21
13.2 AC

19
7.6 AC

18
7.8 AC

17
7.7 AC

1
7.4 AC

14
4.1 AC

14A
32820

15
5.1 AC

22A
1.5 AC

1AC-S

700-S

700-S

700-S

700-S

700-S

700-S

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700-S

700-S

SEE MAP 34

L 50
M 34

L 5 M 37
PREPARED UNDER THE DIRECTION OF THE L 19
ASHBURNHAM BOARD OF ASSESSORS
BY
M 37

AVIS AIRMAP, INC.
BROOKLINE - BRAINTREE - HARTFORD

200 0 200 400 600 FEET

SEE MAP 37



33	39
34	38
35	37

REV. BY	AVIS	1988
REV. BY	AVIS	1987
REV. BY	AVIS	1986
LAST N ^o USED		
ORIGINAL ISSUE		1985

MAP 38

Revised To
January 1, 1988

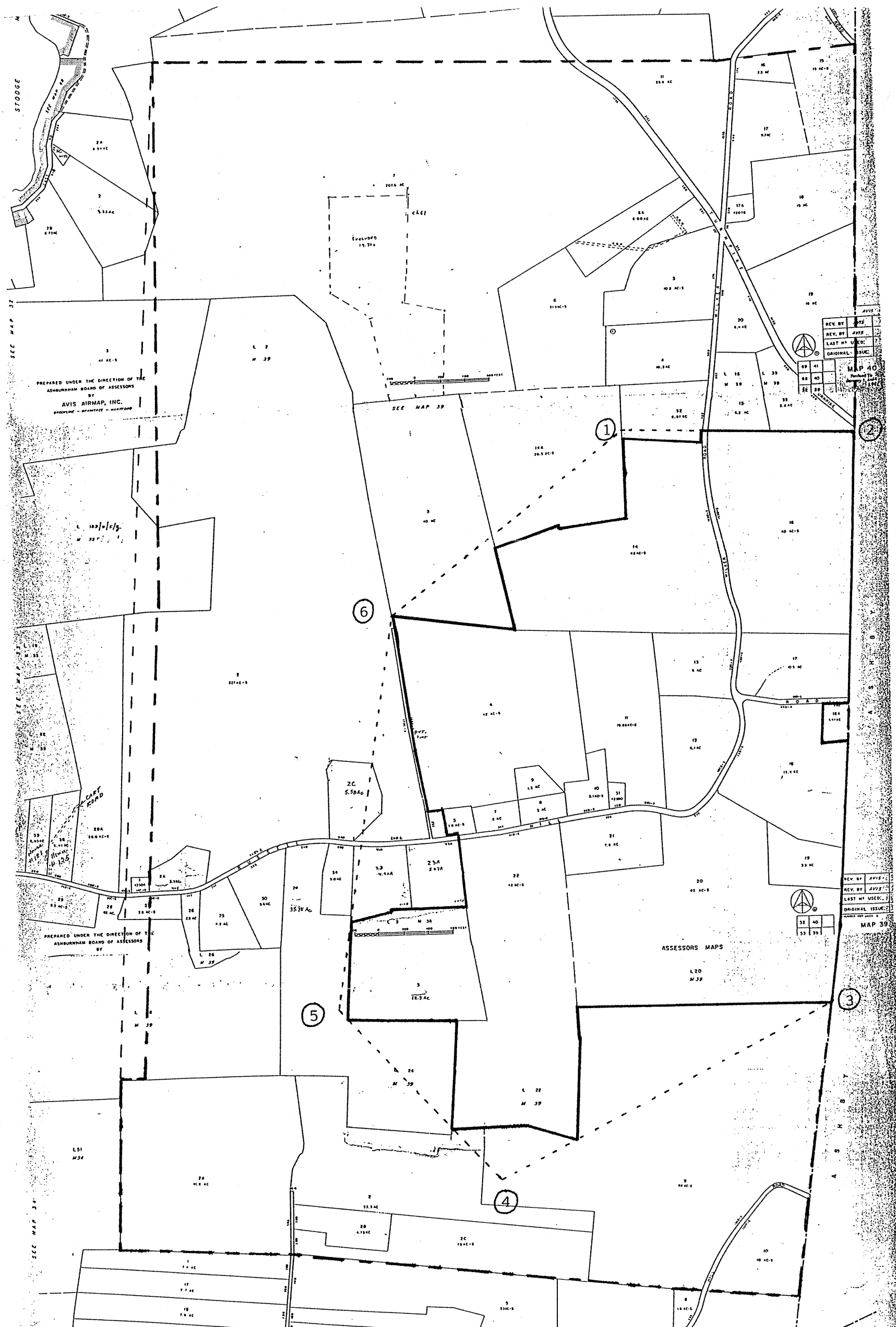
1144

1144

1144

1144

100 90 80 70 60 50 40 30 20 10 0



BF TAX
RECEIVED

AUG 13 1996 KAP

July 31, 1996

Mr. Terrence Adams
Preservation Planner
Massachusetts Historical Commission
226 Morrissey Boulevard
Boston, MA 02125

MASS. HIST. COMM.

Dear Sir,

Please be advised that the intent of this letter is in response to a proposed action of my neighbor, Mrs. Parker Rice of Russell Hill Road, Ashburnham, MA, to include my property for application in the National Register of Historic Places.

This said property is referred to in her letter to you dated 11/7/95 as Form # 257 - Sisson property.

While I fully respect the value of such an honorable proposition, I maintain as the landowner of such named nominated property, to object to this listing.

Would you kindly see to it that this objection be registered with the State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO).

Thank you for your considerations.

Sincerely,



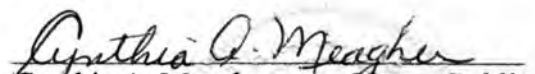
Richard T. Sisson
Cambridge Grant Farm
Wilkes Road
Ashburnham, MA 01430

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

August 5, 1996

Worcester, ss.

Then personally appeared the above named RICHARD T. SISSON and acknowledged the foregoing instrument as his free act and deed, before me,


Cynthia A. Meagher Notary Public

My commission expires: February 23, 2001



The Commonwealth of Massachusetts
William Francis Galvin, Secretary of the Commonwealth
Massachusetts Historical Commission

April 19, 2001

Ms. Carol Shull
National Register of Historic Places
Department of the Interior
National Park Service
Mail Stop 2280, Suite 400
1849 C Street, NW
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Ms. Shull:

Enclosed please find the following nomination form:

Cambridge Grant HD, Ashburnham (Worcester), MA

The nomination has been voted eligible by the State Review Board and has been signed by the State Historic Preservation Officer. The owners of the properties included in the district were notified of pending State Review Board consideration 30 to 45 days before the meeting and were afforded the opportunity to comment.

One letter of objection has been received.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Betsy Friedberg".

Betsy Friedberg
National Register Director
Massachusetts Historical Commission

Enclosure

Cc: Christina Sargent, Ashburnham Historical Commission
Allen Small, Preservation Consultant



The Commonwealth of Massachusetts
William Francis Galvin, Secretary of the Commonwealth
Massachusetts Historical Commission

June 25, 2001

Mr. Patrick Andrus
Historian
National Register of Historic Places
National Park Service
P.O. Box 37127
Washington, DC 20013-7127

Re: Cambridge Grant Historic District (Reference # 01000626)
Ashburnham (Worcester Co.), MA

Dear Patrick:

Enclosed is the resubmission of the Cambridge Grant HD nomination, addressing technical deficiencies raised in your letter of June 14, 2001.

1. Photographs are now keyed to a sketch map of the district.
2. USGS map is now modified by a shaded outline of the approximate district, within the polygon boundary marking.

I trust that questions raised with the first submission have been answered. Please contact me if you have further questions.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Philip Bergen".

Philip Bergen
Preservation Planner
Massachusetts Historical Commission

enclosure