

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

DATA SHEET

FOR NPS USE ONLY

RECEIVED APR 5 1976

DATE ENTERED MAY 24 1976

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORMSEE INSTRUCTIONS IN HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

1 NAME

HISTORIC Shirley Shaker Village

AND/OR COMMON

Massachusetts Correctional Institution, Shirley

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER

Harvard Road

CITY, TOWN

Shirley and Lancaster

VICINITY OF

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

Fourth

STATE

Massachusetts

CODE

025

COUNTY

Middlesex (Worcester)

CODE

017 (027)

3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY

☒ DISTRICT☐ BUILDING(S)☐ STRUCTURE☐ SITE☐ OBJECT

OWNERSHIP

☒ PUBLIC☐ PRIVATE☐ BOTH

PUBLIC ACQUISITION

☐ IN PROCESS☐ BEING CONSIDERED

STATUS

☒ OCCUPIED☒ UNOCCUPIED☐ WORK IN PROGRESS

ACCESSIBLE

☐ YES: RESTRICTED☐ YES: UNRESTRICTED☐ NO

PRESENT USE

☐ AGRICULTURE☐ COMMERCIAL☐ EDUCATIONAL☐ ENTERTAINMENT☐ GOVERNMENT☐ INDUSTRIAL☐ MILITARY☐ MUSEUM☐ PARK☐ PRIVATE RESIDENCE☐ RELIGIOUS☐ SCIENTIFIC☐ TRANSPORTATION☒ OTHER Corrections inst.

4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME

Department of Correction, Frank A. Hall, Commissioner

STREET & NUMBER

Leverett Saltonstall Building, 100 Cambridge Street

CITY, TOWN

Boston

VICINITY OF

STATE

Massachusetts 02202

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE,

REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC. Middlesex County Registry of Deeds (Worcester County Registry)

STREET & NUMBER

208 Cambridge Street (2 Main Street)

CITY, TOWN

Cambridge

(Worcester)

STATE

Massachusetts

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE

Inventory of Historic Assets of the Commonwealth

DATE

1975

☐ FEDERAL ☒ STATE ☐ COUNTY ☐ LOCALDEPOSITORY FOR
SURVEY RECORDS

Massachusetts Historical Commission

CITY, TOWN

Boston

STATE

Massachusetts 02108

7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION

___EXCELLENT
☒GOOD
___FAIR

___DETERIORATED
___RUINS
___UNEXPOSED

CHECK ONE

___UNALTERED
☒ALTERED

CHECK ONE

☒ORIGINAL SITE
☒MOVED DATE _____

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The Shirley Shaker Village is located on the southern border of the Town of Shirley and extends into the northernmost section of the Town of Lancaster. The Village is centered primarily on either side of Harvard Road which runs north and south. To the west of the district is a ridge, once covered with orchards, and fields slope easterly to the Nashua River.

There are nineteen buildings in the district, fourteen of which were part of the original Shaker Village. This represents a large part of the original village which was composed of twenty-six structures. Most of the buildings line Harvard Road, while others have been moved (#9, #13, #14, #4, and #5) just a short distance from their original sites. Which buildings were moved has been determined by the presence of poured concrete foundations laid when the Industrial School for Boys moved the buildings in the early twentieth century. Two other buildings have been removed from the village entirely - the original meeting house which was moved in the 1950's to the Hancock Shaker Village in Hancock, Massachusetts, and the Shaker hospital which was moved in 1906 and is now a residence near the exit to Shirley off Route 2. The district includes both brick buildings and clapboard buildings. The brick structures are said to have been built of local brick made in Lancaster.

The district is part of a larger complex known as the Massachusetts Correctional Institution at Shirley. The other MCI buildings were built during the twentieth century, but their materials (brick, stone, clapboard) do not impose upon the Shaker area; and a rural setting, with open fields and tree-shaded streets, is maintained throughout.

The buildings at Shirley were not unlike buildings in other Shaker villages. They possess the same simplicity and ingenuity that marks them as distinctive. A number of descriptions by visitors to the Shirley village offer a vivid picture of the buildings themselves. William Bentley, who visited Shirley in 1795, was impressed by the sturdy construction of the meeting house and found the rooms in the dwelling houses to be clean, orderly and well furnished. In 1875 William Dean Howells wrote of his impressions of "the unpapered walls, the scrubbed floors hidden only by rugs and strips of carpeting, and the plain flat finish of the wood-work. Each chamber accommodates two brothers or two sisters, and is appointed with two beds, two rocking chairs, two wash stands, and a wood stove with abundance of rugs There were few tokens of personal taste in the arrangement of the rooms."

The earliest buildings in the district were described by a visitor in 1831 as being painted yellow with a few painted white. The brick buildings in the village were probably built sometime after 1840 when a brick factory nearby became a source for new masonry buildings.

One of these brick structures was the Administration Building (#12) which reflects the design of a similar Shaker office in Canterbury, New Hampshire. With the exception of the addition of two front porticos and five dormers, the exterior remains relatively unchanged. The North Family Office Building (#2) is also brick and has granite lintels. Brick dentil work provides a touch of the decorative in this otherwise simple design. The shed dormers, portico and fanlight were alterations made by the Industrial School for Boys. The North Family Office housed the Massachusetts State Police Barracks in the early 1950's.

continued

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CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 7

PAGE 1

#7:

The North Family Farmhouse (#3) is one of the earliest buildings in this Shaker village. It is three stories high and eight bays wide. There are brick chimneys on either end of the ridge roof, and the shuttered windows have six-over-six lights. There has been little change to the facade, although two ells were added to the rear by the Industrial School for Boys.

Today buildings #12, #11, #5 and #4 serve as residences for correctional personnel. The other Shaker buildings are unoccupied.

Map Key:

1. North Family Shaker Barn and auxillary farm buildings
2. North Family Office Building
3. North Family Farmhouse
4. Shaker building
5. Shaker building
6. Brick Shaker Dormitory
7. Church Family building
8. Brick Shaker Dormitory
9. Shaker building
10. Shaker Ice House and pond
11. Brick Ministry Shop
12. Administration Office
13. Shaker building
14. Shaker building
16. Holy Hill
17. Shaker cemetery

8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW			
☐ PREHISTORIC	☐ ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	☐ COMMUNITY PLANNING	☐ LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	☒ RELIGION
☐ 1400-1499	☐ ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	☐ CONSERVATION	☐ LAW	☐ SCIENCE
☐ 1500-1599	☐ AGRICULTURE	☐ ECONOMICS	☐ LITERATURE	☐ SCULPTURE
☐ 1600-1699	☒ ARCHITECTURE	☐ EDUCATION	☐ MILITARY	☐ SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
☒ 1700-1799	☐ ART	☐ ENGINEERING	☐ MUSIC	☐ THEATER
☒ 1800-1899	☐ COMMERCE	☐ EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	☐ PHILOSOPHY	☐ TRANSPORTATION
☐ 1900-	☐ COMMUNICATIONS	☐ INDUSTRY	☐ POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	☒ OTHER (SPECIFY) Shakers
		☐ INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES

BUILDER/ARCHITECT

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Shirley Shaker Village is significant as one of the survivors of New England settlements made by the members of the Shaker faith.

The Shaker community at Shirley began in 1793 on a site about two miles from the Shirley Station on the Fitchburg Railroad. The land was a gift of four wealthy citizens - Elijah and Ivory Wildes, John Warren, and Nathan Willard. The Wildes' farms consisted of 250 acres of woods and flat intervals. Later, as the Shakers grew in size and prospered, surrounding properties, including some in the Shirley town center, were purchased and at the end of the nineteenth century the Shakers held over 2000 acres.

The Shirley Community was made up of three "families" - the North Family, Church Family and South Family. The arrangement of the buildings was similar to that in other Shaker villages - with the structures neatly lining either side of the main road. The early settlement made use of some of its benefactors' homes. Elijah Wilde's house was the nucleus for the Church Family as was his brother Ivory's house for the North Family. Over the line in Landaster Nathan Willard's house was used by the South Family.

The Shirley Shaker village began with forty-four adult members who in 1797 signed the Shirley Covenant proclaiming a Shaker Society. The covenant was based on the original one from Mount Lebanon (New York) signed two years earlier. The Society continued to attract members, and by 1853 there were about 150 residents in the Shaker Village at Shirley.

The Shakers were hard-working people, espousing "freedom from debt, owing no man anything." Applesauce making was the main industry at the Shirley Village, although there were other industries such as broom-making, the manufacture of dish and floor mops, the making of jellies, dry sweet corn, and maple sugar, the raising of garden seed and blackberries, and the preparation of herbs. In later years, as the membership dwindled, the few sisters and brothers made what little money they could by selling milk to the townspeople and harvesting the timber on their vast acreage.

The Shaker Society at Shirley was dissolved in 1908 and the remaining Shakers sold their goods and moved to the Harvard village. The land and buildings were sold to the Commonwealth of Massachusetts for an Industrial School for Boys. The school used many of the Shaker buildings, rehabilitating and rearranging them to suit their purposes.

Presently the village is used by the Massachusetts Department of Corrections as a pre-release penal institution for rehabilitated criminals. The Department of Correction hopes to restore the Shaker buildings through the development of a training program whereby inmates will learn restoration skills which will, in turn, lead to employment upon release.

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Bolton, Ethel S. Shirley Uplands and Intervales. Boston, 1914.
Chandler, Seth. History of Shirley. Fitchburg, 1883.
Butler, Caleb. Maps of 1830 and 1847. Boston, 1832.
Howells, William Dean. The Undiscovered Country. Boston, 1880.
Howells, William Dean. Three Villages. Boston, 1884.

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY 11 acres

UTM REFERENCES

A	1, 9	2, 8, 2	8, 4, 0	4, 7	1, 1	2, 7, 0	B	1, 9	2, 8, 1	6, 0, 0	4, 7	1, 0	7, 4, 0
	ZONE	EASTING		NORTHING				ZONE	EASTING		NORTHING		
C	1, 9	2, 8, 2	1, 8, 0	4, 7	1, 2	3, 0, 0	D						
	ZONE	EASTING		NORTHING				ZONE	EASTING		NORTHING		

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION The district begins at the north end on Harvard Road at the entrance gate to the correctional facility and runs west about 300 feet, then south behind the barn about 300 feet, then east about 100 feet to an institution road and south along this road 6000 feet to the Shaker burial ground, then around the base of Holy Hill (Shaker Hill), then east to Harvard Road, then north and sharply east about 700 feet, then running west 500 feet and then parallel to Harvard Road to the point of beginning.

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
		Middlesex	017
STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
		Worcester	027

11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

Judy Dobbs and Sandra R. Farnsworth and Sandra C. Wolfe

ORGANIZATION

Massachusetts Historical Commission

DATE

March 23, 1976

STREET & NUMBER

294 Washington Street

TELEPHONE

617-727-8470

CITY OR TOWN

Boston

STATE

Massachusetts 02108

12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL

STATE X

LOCAL

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER SIGNATURE

Elizabeth Reed Amador

TITLE

Executive Director, Massachusetts Historical Commission

DATE 3/25/76

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

DATE 5/24/78

ATTEST

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE 5.24.78

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
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CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 10

PAGE 2

Shirley Shaker Village, Shirley and Lancaster, Massachusetts (Middlesex and Worcester Counties)

The boundaries of the district include the locations of the sites of 12 buildings no longer standing. The only foundation still visible is that of the Meeting House on Harvard Road. Evidence of the other sites has been obliterated by landscaping and other projects of the Department of Corrections.

Boundary description (revised):

The district begins at the north end on Harvard Road at the entrance gate to the correctional facility and runs west along an institution road, then curving south along the road behind the barn about 300 feet, then east 100 feet to another institution road. The boundary runs south along the west side of this road to an institution road in Lancaster, just over the Lancaster/Shirley line, thence west about 50 feet on the south side of this road, thence south behind #9 about 3000 feet to the Shaker burial ground and around the base (topographical line) of Holy Hill (Shaker Hill). The boundary then turns east to Harvard Road and runs north on the east side of the road to a point about 100 feet south of an institution road running east. The boundary runs east (parallel to the institution road) about 700 feet, then 100 feet north, then west along the north side of the institution road to a point about 75 feet from Harvard Road, thence north parallel to and 75 feet from Harvard Road to an institution road where the boundary turns to the east side of Harvard Road where it runs to the point of beginning.



PROPERTY OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

NRS Number 5-24-76

Title: Shirley Shaker Village
Middlesex & Worcester

Loc. Co., MA

North Family Office
Bldg, Looking W
107.7

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
PROPERTY PHOTOGRAPH FORM

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1 NAME

HISTORIC

Shirley Shaker Village

AND/OR COMMON

Massachusetts Correctional Institution - Shirley

2 LOCATION

CITY, TOWN

Shirley and Lancaster VICINITY OF

Middlesex &

COUNTY Worcester STATE MA

3 PHOTO REFERENCE

PHOTO CREDIT

Sandra R. Farnsworth

DATE OF PHOTO

1975

NEGATIVE FILED AT Shirley Historic District Commission, Shirley, MA

4 IDENTIFICATION

DESCRIBE VIEW, DIRECTION, ETC. IF DISTRICT. GIVE BUILDING NAME & STREET

PHOTO NO. 1077

North Family Office Building (#2), looking west.



PROPERTY OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

NPS Number 5-24-76

Title: Shirley Shaker Village
Middlesex & Worcester

Co. MA

North Family Farmhouse,
Looking W 2 of 7

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
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AND/OR COMMON

Massachusetts Correctional Institution - Shirley

2 LOCATION

CITY, TOWN Shirley and Lancaster VICINITY OF Middlesex &
COUNTY Worcester STATE MA

3 PHOTO REFERENCE

PHOTO CREDIT Sandra R. Farnsworth

DATE OF PHOTO 1975

NEGATIVE FILED AT Shirley Historic District Commission, Shirley, MA

4 IDENTIFICATION

DESCRIBE VIEW, DIRECTION, ETC. IF DISTRICT, GIVE BUILDING NAME & STREET

PHOTO NO. 2 of 7

North Family Farmhouse (#3), looking west.



PROPERTY OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

NPS Number 5-24-76

Title: Shirley Shaker Village
Middlesex + Worcester

Loc. Co., MA

Brick Shaker Dormitory,
looking W

3 of 7

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
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Shirley Shaker Village

AND/OR COMMON

Massachusetts Correctional Institution - Shirley

2 LOCATION

CITY, TOWN Shirley and Lancaster — VICINITY OF

Middlesex &
COUNTY Worcester

STATE MA

3 PHOTO REFERENCE

PHOTO CREDIT

Sandra R. Farnsworth

DATE OF PHOTO

1975

NEGATIVE FILED AT

Shirley Historic District Commission, Shirley, MA

4 IDENTIFICATION

DESCRIBE VIEW, DIRECTION, ETC. IF DISTRICT, GIVE BUILDING NAME & STREET

PHOTO NO. 3 of 7

Brick Shaker Dormitory (#6), looking west.



PROPERTY OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

NPS Number 5-24-76

Title: Hurley Haker Village
Middlesex + Worcester

Loc. C., MA

Church Family Bldg,
Looking SW

4 of 7

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
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Massachusetts Correctional Institution - Shirley

2 LOCATION

CITY, TOWN Shirley and Lancaster — VICINITY OF

Middlesex &

COUNTY Worcester

STATE MA

3 PHOTO REFERENCE

PHOTO CREDIT Sandra R. Farnsworth

DATE OF PHOTO 1975

NEGATIVE FILED AT Shirley Historic District Commission, Shirley, MA

4 IDENTIFICATION

DESCRIBE VIEW, DIRECTION, ETC. IF DISTRICT. GIVE BUILDING NAME & STREET

PHOTO NO. 4 of 7

Church Family Building (#7), looking southwest.



PROPERTY OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

NPS Number 5-24-76

Title: Shirley Shaker Village
Worcester & Middlesex

Loc. Co., MA

Brick Shaker Dormitory,
Looking NW

5 of 7

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
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Massachusetts Correctional Institution - Shirley

2 LOCATION

CITY, TOWN Shirley and Lancaster VICINITY OF

Middlesex &

COUNTY Worcester STATE MA

3 PHOTO REFERENCE

PHOTO CREDIT Sandra R. Farnsworth

DATE OF PHOTO 1975

NEGATIVE FILED AT Shirley Historic District Commission, Shirley, MA

4 IDENTIFICATION

DESCRIBE VIEW, DIRECTION, ETC. IF DISTRICT, GIVE BUILDING NAME & STREET

PHOTO NO. 5 of 7

Brick Shaker Dormitory (#8), looking northwest.



PROPERTY OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

NPS Number 5-24-76

Title: Shirley Shaker Village
Middlesex & Worcester

Loc.: Co, MA

Shaker Ministry Shop,
looking NE

6 of 7

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
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Massachusetts Correctional Institution - Shirley

2 LOCATION

CITY, TOWN Shirley and Lancaster _____ VICINITY OF

Middlesex &
COUNTY Worcester STATE MA

3 PHOTO REFERENCE

PHOTO CREDIT Sandra R. Farnsworth

DATE OF PHOTO 1975

NEGATIVE FILED AT Shirley Historic District Commission, Shirley, MA

4 IDENTIFICATION

DESCRIBE VIEW, DIRECTION, ETC. IF DISTRICT, GIVE BUILDING NAME & STREET

PHOTO NO. 6 of 7

Shaker Ministry Shop (#11), looking northeast.



PROPERTY OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

NPS Number 5-24-76

Title: Abisley Shaker Village
Middlesex & Worcester

Loc. Co., MA

Shaker Administration
Bldg, Looking NE

7 of 7

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
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Massachusetts Correctional Institution - Shirley

2 LOCATION

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COUNTY Worcester STATE MA

3 PHOTO REFERENCE

PHOTO CREDIT Sandra R. Farnsworth

DATE OF PHOTO 1975

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PHOTO NO.

Shaker Administration Building (#12), looking northeast.

7 of 7



PROPERTY OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

76000271

Shirley Shaker Village
Middlesex Co MA

SHAKER: SHIRLEY, MASS.
(MIDDLESEX COUNTY)
Dwelling House

SHAKER

10/77

PHOTOGRAPH BY
WALTER SMALLING, JR.



PROPERTY OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

76000 271
Shirley Shaker Village
Middlesex MA

SHAKER: SHIRLEY, MASS.
(MIDDLESEX CO.)
MINISTRY SHOP

10-77

PHOTOGRAPH BY
WALTER SMALLING, JR.



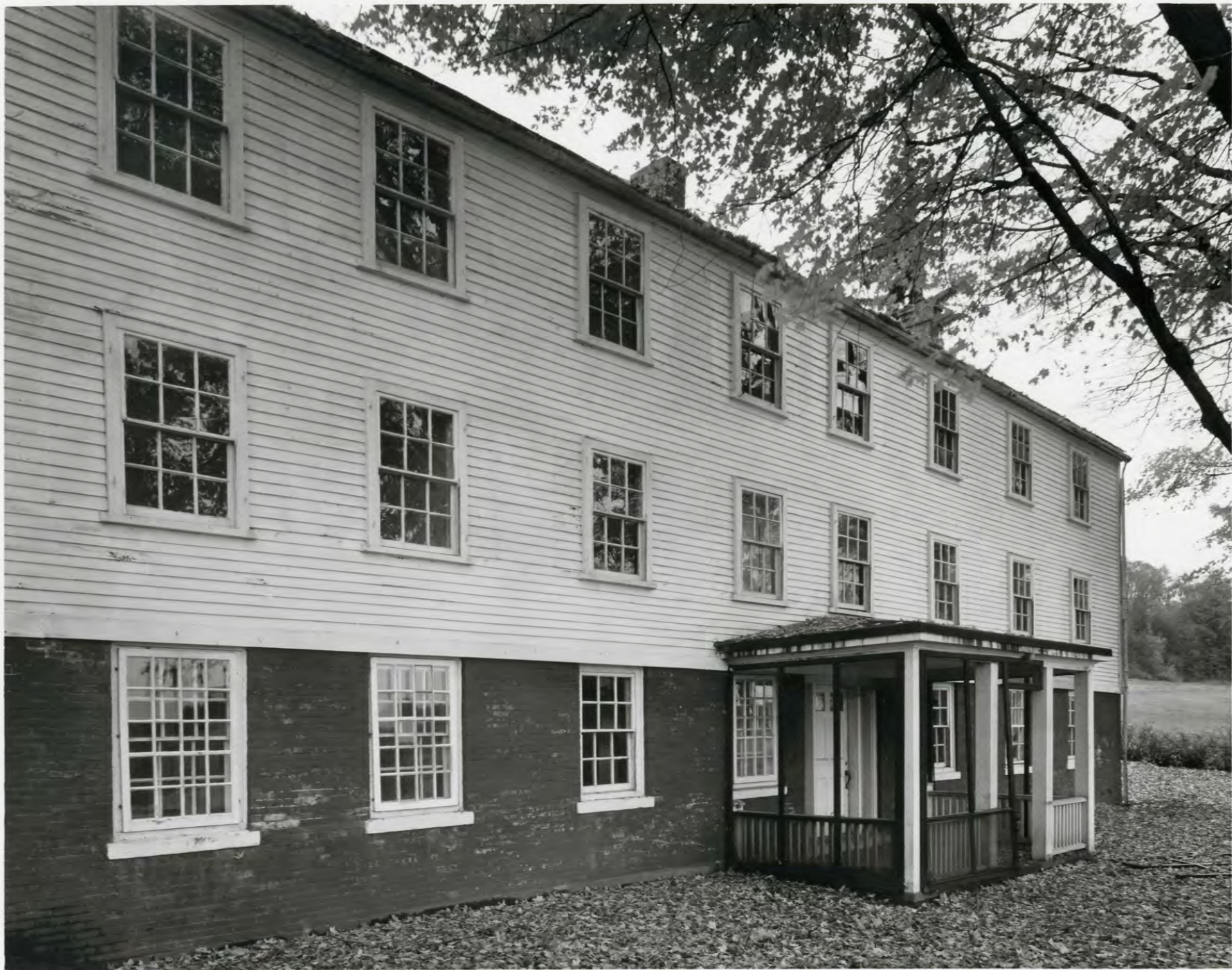
PROPERTY OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

76000271
Shirley Shaker Village
Middlesex MA

SHAKER: SHIRLEY, MASS
(MIDDLESEX CO.)
Dwelling House (?)

PHOTOGRAPH BY
WALTER SMALLING, JR.

10-77



76000271

Shirley Shaker Village
Middlesex Co MA

SHAKER: SHIRLEY, MASS.

PROPERTY OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

PHOTOGRAPH BY
WALTER SMALLING, JR.

10/77

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2 LOCATION

CITY, TOWN Shirley and Lancaster _____ VICINITY OF

Middlesex &
COUNTY Worcester

STATE MA

3 MAP REFERENCE

SOURCE Sketch map by Sandra R. Farnsworth

SCALE not to scale

DATE 1975

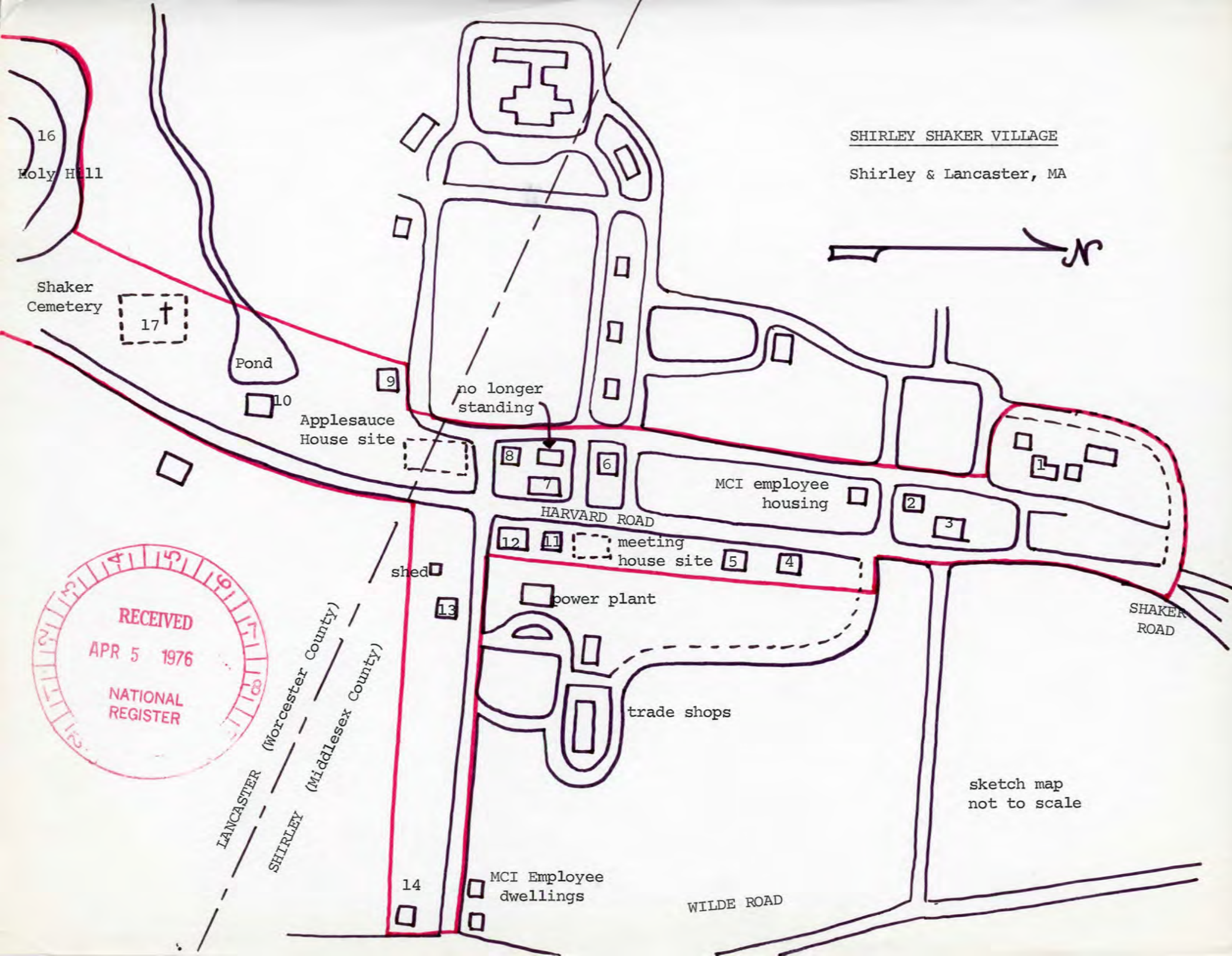
4 REQUIREMENTS

TO BE INCLUDED ON ALL MAPS

1. PROPERTY BOUNDARIES
2. NORTH ARROW
3. UTM REFERENCES

SHIRLEY SHAKER VILLAGE

Shirley & Lancaster, MA



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CITY, TOWN Shirley and Lancaster—VICINITY OF

Middlesex &
COUNTY Worcester

STATE MA

3 MAP REFERENCE

SOURCE USGS, Shirley Quadrangle

SCALE 1:24000

DATE 1965

4 REQUIREMENTS

TO BE INCLUDED ON ALL MAPS

1. PROPERTY BOUNDARIES
2. NORTH ARROW
3. UTM REFERENCES



C 19/282180/4712300

AMS 6669 II SW-SERIES V814

DATE 5-6-76

TELEPHONE REPORT

TIME OF CALL
2:00

AM
PM

1. CALL ☒ TO: ☐ FROM (Name)

Judy Dobbs

2. ADDRESS (Tel. No. if needed)

Mass

3. SUBJECT, PROJECT NO., ETC.

SHIRLEY SHAKER VILLAGE

4. DETAILS OF DISCUSSION

SHE WILL SEND A CLEARER VERBAL BOUNDARY
DESCRIPTION + WILL CHECK FOR LOCATIONS OF SITES OF
OTHER 12 BUILDINGS. THE IMPORTANT SITES ARE WITHIN
BOUNDARIES, THOSE THAT ARE NOT MAY BE BUILT OVER, BUT
SHE WILL CHECK.

NAME OF PERSON PLACING/RECEIVING CALL

TITLE

OFFICE

H f hutz

ENTRIES IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

STATE MASSACHUSETTS

Date Entered MAY 24 1976

Name

Location

Shirley Shaker Village

Shirley Vicinity
Middlesex (Worcester) Counties

Newbury Historic District

Newbury
Essex County

Also Notified

Hon. Edward M. Kennedy
Hon. Edward W. Brooke
Hon. Robert F. Drinan
Hon. Michael J. Harrington

State Historic Preservation Officer
Mrs. Elizabeth R. Amadon
Executive Director, Massachusetts
Historical Commission
294 Washington Street
Boston, Massachusetts 02108

cc: Regional Director,
North Atlantic Region
(PR:MMott:cam:5/25/76

Shaker Village honored

PAGE ONE

Special to the ITEM

Shirley Shaker Village, Harvard Road, Shirley and Lancaster, nominated for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places by the Massachusetts Historical Commission has been accepted, State Secretary Paul Guzzi, Chairman of the Commission, has been informed by Gary Everhardt, Director of the National Park Service in the United States Department of the Interior.

It is significant as one of the survivors of New England settlements made by members of the Shaker faith. The Village is located on the Southern border of the Town of Shirley and extends into the Northernmost section of the Town of Lancaster. It is centered primarily on either side of Harvard Road which runs North and South. To the West of

the district is a ridge, once covered with orchards, and fields slope Easterly to the Nashua River.

There are 19 buildings in the District, 14 of which were part of the original Shaker Village. This represents a large part of the original village which comprised 26 structures. The Shaker community at Shirley began in 1793 on a site about two miles from the Shirley Station on the Fitchburg Railroad. The land was a gift of four wealthy citizens - Elijah and Ivory Wildes, John Warren and Nathan Willard. The Wildes' farms consisted of 250 acres of woods and flat intervals. Later, as the Shakers grew in size and prospered, surrounding properties, including some in the Shirley town center, were purchased and at the end of the 19th century, the Shakers held over

2,000 acres.

Families

The Shirley community comprised three "families" - the North Family, the Church Family and the South Family. The arrangement of the buildings was similar to that in other Shaker villages - with the structures neatly lining either side of the main road. The early settlement made use of some of its benefactors' homes. Elijah Wildes' house was the nucleus for the Church Family as was his brother Ivory's house for the North Family. Over the line in Lancaster, Nathan Willard's house was utilized by the South Family.

The Shaker village in Shirley began with 42 adult members who, in 1797, signed the Shirley

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★ Shaker Village

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Covenant proclaiming a Shaker Society. The covenant was based on the original one from Mount Lebanon (New York) signed two years earlier. The Society continued to attract members and, by 1853, there were about 150 residents in the Shaker village at Shirley.

The Shakers were hard-working people, espousing "freedom from debt", owing no man anything. Applesauce making was the main industry at the Shirley Village, although there were other industries such as broom-making, the manufacture of dish and floor mops, the making of jellies, dry sweet corn, and maple sugar, the raising of garden seed and blackberries, and the preparation of herbs. In later years, as the membership dwindled, the few sisters and brothers made what little money they could by selling milk to the townspeople and

harvesting the timber on their vast acreage.

Dissolved

The Shaker Village at Shirley was dissolved in 1908 and the remaining Shakers sold their goods and moved to the Harvard village. The land and buildings were sold to the Commonwealth of Massachusetts for an Industrial School for Boys. The school used many of the Shaker buildings, rehabilitating and rearranging them to suit their purposes.

The buildings at Shirley were not unlike buildings in other Shaker villages. They possess the same simplicity and ingenuity that marks them as distinctive. A number of descriptions by visitors to the Shirley village offer a vivid picture of the buildings themselves. William Bentley, who visited Shirley in 1795, was impressed by the sturdy construction of the meetinghouse and found the rooms in the dwelling houses to be clean, orderly and well furnished. In 1875, William Dean Howells wrote of his impressions of "the unpapered walls, the scrubbed floors hidden only by rugs and strips of carpeting, and the plain, flat finish of the woodwork. Each chamber accommodated two brothers or two sisters and was appointed with two beds, two rocking chairs, two wash stands and a wood stove with abundance of rugs. There were few tokens of personal taste in the arrangement of the rooms."

Buildings

The earliest buildings in the district were described by a visitor in 1831 as being painted yellow with a few painted white. No brick buildings in the village

One of these brick structures was the Administration Building, which reflects the design of a similar Shaker office in Canterbury, N.H. With the exception of the addition of two front porches and five dormers, the exterior remains relatively unchanged. The North Family Office building is also brick and has granite lintels. It housed the Massachusetts State Police Barracks in the early 1950's. The North Family Farmhouse is one of the earliest buildings in this Shaker village. It is three stories high and eight bays wide.

The district is part of a larger complex known as the Massachusetts Correctional

institution at Shirley. The other MCI buildings were erected during the 20th century, but their materials (brick, stone, clapboard) do not impose upon the Shaker area; and a rural setting with open fields and tree-shaded streets, is maintained throughout.

Presently the village is used by the Massachusetts Department of Corrections as a pre-release penal institution for rehabilitate criminals. The department hopes to restore the Shaker building through the development of a training program whereby inmates will learn restoration skills which will, in turn, lead to employment upon release.