

# Downtown Littleton

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## Walking Tour

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*A glimpse into the history that shaped the character of a remarkable New England town.*

*Own Building and Opera House.*



## LITTLETON WALKING TOUR

### West to East

*Numerals in the text denote plaques.*

- 1 First Congregational Church
- 2 Littleton Diner
- 3 Masonic Temple
- 4 U.S. Post Office And Court House
- 5 Community House
- 6 Thayers Inn
- 7 Parker's Marketplace
- 8 Littleton Public Library
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- 13 Brackett Block
- 14 Kilburn Block
- 15 Chutter Block
- 16 Harrington Block
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- 18 Eames Building
- 19 Jax Jr. Cinemas
- 20 Tilton's Opera Block/Sundman
- 21 Methodist Church
- 22 Salomon Block
- 23 Town Building
- 24 Veterans' Memorial Bridge

Littleton lies on a long natural shelf above the Ammonoosuc River. It is the most up-to-date community in northwestern New Hampshire and its Main Street is very much alive, especially in summer...

Owing to its position Littleton is a trading center for a large part of this region. Its stores have a metropolitan air about them, well suited to the large summer population that comes to Littleton for supplies. Its railroad station, which serves Bethlehem and Franconia as well as Littleton, is the busiest north of Concord.

New Hampshire: A Guide to the Granite State  
*Works Progress Administration, 1938*

**M**ain Street owes its appeal to topology, economics and civic pride. On a ridge north of the Ammonoosuc River, 60 feet above the riverfront mills, Main Street's commercial district arose along an 1820 coach road. Manufacturing and shipping neighborhoods developed on the river below, and later, across the river by the railroad tracks. Churches, retailers, bankers, attorneys, fraternal orders and innkeepers gravitated to Main Street. Such enterprises tended to erect attractive edifices that established the street's quality — a grace maintained by the near-absence of warehouses, barns, depots, factories, silos and smoke stacks.

Civic pride is apparent in the harmonious visual themes that evolved in the late 19th century, especially in the repetition of decorative elements from older buildings to newer structures. The people who created Main Street's charm and dignity did not simply erect blocks, they paid homage to their neighbors. Leading citizens made

their homes on Main Street, paying the neighborhood their highest compliment.

The eye-pleasing surroundings, both topographical and architectural, assure that Main Street remains a source of enjoyment and pride. In May 2003, the National Main Street Center and National Trust for Historic Preservation named Littleton a Great American Main Street Community for the town's achievements in downtown revitalization.

This tour begins in the vicinity of the Post Office at the west side of downtown. It proceeds eastward toward the Town Building. **BOLDFACE** type indicates that a building has a plaque that displays more information. In local usage the word “block” may refer to a single building rather than the property between two streets.

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“Twenty years ago there was one store and a tavern in the place; now it is a widespread village on the side of a large hill, which is stripped of its forest. The woods on the other bank are yet untouched. Scarcely a field is to be seen under tillage, and the axe seems almost the only tool in use.”

Retrospect of Western Travel  
—*Harriet Martineau. Published in London, 1838*

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**W**hite settlers traveled up the Connecticut River and established two hamlets in the township on the Connecticut and Ammonoosuc Rivers where Native Americans had occupied seasonal fishing camps. Ammonoosuc means “narrow fishing river” in the Native American Abenaki language. The first meetinghouse (1815) was erected midway between the two settlements. (A plaque near Partridge Lake marks the site.) Because the Connecticut River was too broad and turbulent for primitive mills, settlers migrated to “Ammonoosuc Village,” where, in 1832, they built the **FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH** (1) on “Meetinghouse Hill.” They called the stormy Reverend Drury Fairbank (1772–1853) to the pulpit. During his pastorate, the church was irreverently



*The original First Congregational Church, erected in 1832.*

known as “The Ironworks” for Fairbank’s fiery sermons. Later, it was a forum for abolitionists, two of whom were jailed in 1844 for interrupting services with zealous appeals. In 1874, in the course of extensive renovation, two steeples, 110 and 170 feet high, replaced the original roof-mounted tower. The prevailing Queen Anne vogue was blended with the original English Gothic style.

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Main Street’s first sidewalks (built of stone) were installed on the south side of the street, in 1844. At the corner of Church and Main, note the retaining walls of unfinished stone. The walls arose when Meetinghouse Hill was excavated in the 1930s to reduce the grade on Main Street.

East of the church, on the corner of Saranac Street, imagine the air redolent with the fragrance of baking bread. On this corner was Bilodeau’s Bakery, founded by Quebec immigrant, Edward Bilodeau in 1902. By the 1940s, his fleet of a dozen trucks was distributing more than 10,000 loaves a day. The rambling, wood-frame, bakery building was razed in 2000 to make way for Ammonoosuc Green, an apartment and retail office complex.

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*Bilodeau's Bakery in the 1930s.*

In the 1930s, to grab the attention of motorists, a new, eye-catching architecture evolved, exemplified by the “diner car” restaurant. A 25-seat “parlor car” appeared on the site of **THE LITTLETON DINER (2)** in 1930, to be replaced in 1940 by this Sterling Diner, a stainless steel classic manufactured by the J.B. Judkins Company of Merrimac, MA.

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Across the street to the west is another reminder of how Main Street adapted to the automobile: the 1948 Littleton Motel. Built alongside an 1873 dwelling owned by Dr. T.E. Sanger, it is said to be the oldest motel in the state.

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The diner’s neighbor to the east is the 1909 **MASONIC TEMPLE (3)**, the street’s sole example of Beaux Arts Classicism. Anti-Masonic sentiment delayed the establishment of a Lodge in Littleton until 1859. The Lodge was named for Dr. William Burns (1783–1868), the town’s second practicing physician. In 1865, members of the Burns Lodge built the Union Block, which stood between today’s Harrington and Chutter Blocks. They erected the present edifice on the site of the Union House, the village’s first (1826) tavern. It was financed by subscription and owned by a private society separate from the Lodge. The building’s disciplined symmetry was echoed years later in the design of the Public Library and the U.S. Post Office.



*The Masonic Temple in 1911.*

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By the 1890s, stately residences lined much of Main Street’s north side, fronted by lawns that sloped steeply to the sidewalk. Evident where the sidewalk cuts into the hillside are many examples of skilled stonemasonry. At the corner of Maple Street, the wall that bordered the lawn of the now-vanished H. Southworth house serves into its second century.

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The mansion of Dr. William J. Beattie (1865–1913), a founder of Littleton Hospital, was purchased and demolished in 1933 to make way for the 1935 U.S. **POST OFFICE AND COURT HOUSE (4)**. A local yarn holds that the government sent the wrong plans, and this commanding structure was intended for a major city. The truth is more interesting. In 1892, the U.S. Congress selected Littleton as the site for a federal court. The facilities were first in the Oak Hill House (a hotel which once stood at the top of Jackson Street), then in a Main Street bank.

By the end of World War I, Littleton’s was one of New Hampshire’s two federal courts. Prohibition violations and bankruptcies crammed the docket. When U.S. Senator George Moses (R-NH) rose to power and prominence, in 1932, he successfully lobbied for a new federal courthouse, and the Beattie mansion was acquired. The sitting judge at that time was George F. Morris who worked with



*The grand residences of Doctors Beattie and Moffet stood at the corner of Main and Maple Streets, now site of the Post Office and Courthouse.*

the architect to evolve a handsome exterior reflecting a century of Main Street motifs. The cost of construction was \$265,000.

Since opening in 1935, it has also served as Littleton's post office. Federal court sessions ended in 1974, and the building has since housed the Littleton District Court.

The **COMMUNITY HOUSE (5)** is the last survivor of the once elm-shaded row of grand residences (with maples having replaced the stricken elms). Banker Charles F. Eastman (1841–1912) built this building as his home in 1884. The Littleton Community Center was organized in 1919 for the purpose of buying the house with a bequest of \$10,000 from the estate of attorney and entrepreneur Daniel C. Remich (1852–1917). Its rich interior appointments are preserved, and it is open to the public. Note the corbelled chimneys, multiple roof surfaces and coach entrance (*porte cochère*) of this exemplar of the Queen Anne style.

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A stylish wall of finished granite fronts the Community House. The plaque on the matching stone post honors Walter N. Heald, who was Town Clerk for 47 years. Behind the mansion is a carriage house that is used for public functions.

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*Thayers Inn in the 1930s.*

**THAYERS INN (6)** opened in 1850, marking a major innovation in the hospitality trade: It was a railroad hotel, successor to the stagecoach tavern. Thayer's White Mountain Hotel (it lost the apostrophe in the 1930s) catered to the new commercial traveler and the equally novel vacationer—a more polished clientele than the teamsters and drovers who had frequented the muddy turnpikes. Until the 1890s and the mass production of the Pullman Sleeper Car, railroad hotels served as plush overnight berths for train passengers. Commensurate with its refined amenities, Thayers presented a facade of Classical, Italianate and Gothic elements that set the template for Main Street's future architecture. Because of the speed by which railroads were built in the 1850s, few such hotels secured a lasting foothold before the rails pushed ahead to the next town. Littleton, however, was the terminus of the White Mountain Line for almost 20 years, from the locomotive's arrival in 1853 until it reached Lancaster in 1870. This interval, and "Daddy" Thayer's promotional flair, established the hotel as a renowned landmark, a requisite stop for touring dignitaries. It became a coach hub serving the grand resort hotels, and Thayer's own splendid Concord Coach was a trademark of the village's newfound sophistication. Thayers was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1982.



*The Parker Mansion in the 1920s.*

**PARKER'S MARKETPLACE (7)** was the site of the 1885 Ira Parker mansion. The Parkers were tanners who became glove makers. Ira Parker secured the rights to an improved tanning process and personally traveled Coös County to buy deer hides for his gloves. In 1889, he oversaw the merger of his and two other glove companies into the Saranac Buck Glove Company, which, by 1900, employed more than 250 people and produced 984,000 pairs of gloves annually. The factory was located on Saranac Street (formerly Factory Street), and some of its riverside buildings have survived into the 21st century as thriving art studios and retail centers.

Also surviving at the Saranac site is a steel suspension pedestrian bridge built by the town in 1938 to serve Saranac employees. It replaced a 1903 wooden suspension destroyed by the 1938 hurricane. (Before 1903, a rope-tow ferry crossed the millpond above the now-breached dam.) This bridge has secured perpetual care in a bequest by the builder, Littleton native Kenneth E. Curran (1912–2003). It was his first public works project. He would form Curran-Lavoie, Inc., which, decades later, constructed most of the bridges on the region's interstate highways. In 1938 Curran discovered that the underground anchors for the cables were

wrapped in deer hide. “The lanolin from the deer hide had kept that steel as new as the day it was milled...” Curran left the Saranac deer hide in place.

Saranac's Parker was at one time Littleton's largest landowner. His business partners included Sylvester Marsh (1803–1884), who constructed the Mount Washington Cog Railway. Parker sold his share of Saranac in 1898, and went to Lawrence, Massachusetts, to revive Arlington Mills. His 20-room Queen Anne mansion became an inn, Elliott Hall. In 1920, the Father Daniel O'Neil Council No. 1835 of the Knights of Columbus acquired the inn for its headquarters. In 1987, local businessmen rebuilt the mansion as Parker's Marketplace, which preserves much of the original interior while incorporating several of Main Street's visual themes in the exterior facade.



*Saranac Glove Co., circa 1900.*

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Up School Street, one may glimpse Littleton High School, a 1955 building that replaced a burned-down 1926 school, which had replaced the razed 1868 school—all on the same site. All Saints Episcopal Church (1875) is a rare example of “Stick Gothic” design, a transitional style that linked Gothic architecture with the coming Victorian Queen Anne style. Note the decorative “stick” trusses at the roof peak.

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*Littleton High School, circa 1930.*

After four attempts over nearly a century, a permanent public library was established in 1890. From rented quarters in the **ROUNSEVEL BUILDING (#17)**, it moved to the new Town Building in 1895, and then in 1906 to the present **LITTLETON PUBLIC LIBRARY (8)**, a Carnegie bequest. To meet Andrew Carnegie’s conditions, the Town pledged \$1,500 per year for operations and secured land for the building. Carnegie bequeathed \$15,000 for construction, which was completed in 1906. The library houses the Kilburn collection of White Mountain art and the world’s second largest collection of Kilburn stereoscopic views. Visually, the building presents an eclectic blend of Georgian and neo-classical styles—decorations of a richness ambitious for a structure of moderate size.

On the Library’s lawn, a bronze sculpture commemorates the Littleton-born author Eleanor Hodgman Porter (1868–1920) who created the sunny character Pollyanna in 1913. The **STATUE OF POLLYANNA (9)**, by New Hampshire sculptor Emile Birch, was installed in June 2002. The statue was commissioned by the Eames family of Littleton who founded Pollyanna of Littleton New Hampshire, Inc., a non-profit organization that “promotes, preserves and enhances the legacy of Eleanor H.



*The unveiling of the Pollyanna sculpture in June, 2002.*

Porter and oversees the use of Pollyanna of Littleton as a public attraction, cultural asset, resource, and positive inspiration for the community and others.” This sculpture was recognized as the state’s “Best Public Art” by *New Hampshire Magazine* in 2002. Few visitors can resist posing near the statue and imitating Pollyanna’s exuberant gesture for a keepsake photo. The Town fathers proclaimed for perpetuity the second Saturday in June as Pollyanna Day, a day of ceremonies that celebrate “gladness”.



*Porfido's Market, circa 1935.*

The open-air produce displays and broad awnings of **PORFIDO'S MARKET (10)** have been a Main Street landmark for decades. Immigrant Emilio Porfido (1891–1954) purchased this lot in 1934,

after selling fruits and vegetables at several other Main Street locations. Three generations of Porfidos have owned and operated this colorful monument to “Littleton’s fruit man.”

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“I was much surprised, most happily, I confess, to find how far removed Littleton is from the sleepy, slothful, unkempt, average country town. From the station we smoothly rolled to the hotel over an asphalt pavement, the streets were ablaze with lights, scores of cyclists sped past us on their silent steeds, and the crowded sidewalks, all were widely at variance with my preconceived idea of the little mountain village where I was to find quiet and rest.”

*1898 Extract from a letter written by a visitor.  
—Picturesque and Progressive  
Littleton and the White Mountains*

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*The Bugbee Block (center), circa 1910.*

The **BUGBEE BLOCK (11)** perches on the corner of what used to be West Mill Street, now a walkway to riverfront properties. The offices of Dr. Ralph Bugbee, Jr. (1821–1893) occupied this Italianate edifice when it was built in 1857. Beneath its bracketed cornice and decorative frieze, a succession of retailers offered clothing, hardware, books, jewelry, carpets and sporting goods. It was called the Courier Block from 1920 to 1974, when the weekly newspaper (est. 1889) was published from here.



*The Littleton Grist Mill before restoration. Painting by Dr. Millard S. Clark.*

The village’s first engine of enterprise was Solomon Mann’s mill, erected in 1797 and faithfully restored 200 years later as **THE LITTLETON GRIST MILL (12)**. Mann soon had neighbors. The river sustains a 235-foot drop as it runs through Littleton—with a 144-foot drop in elevation in the village district. (Niagara Falls drops 183 feet.) At times during the 1800s, as many as six dams simultaneously harnessed the river’s power for industrial purposes. That era is evoked by the rebuilt Mann mill, to the extent of milling grain products for today’s market.

The mill’s clerestory windows that interrupt the slope of the roof provided daylight for upstairs and are characteristic of New England mills. The loose stone foundation, the earliest surviving example of the mason’s art in the village, may be viewed from the interior. A classic New England mill, adaptable to grinding, sawing or processing textiles, the Littleton Grist Mill is the oldest commercial structure in New Hampshire north of the state capitol.

A 2004 covered footbridge reaches 350 feet from the mill to the south bank. The Riverwalk Covered Bridge is a reminder of Littleton’s Peter Paddleford (1785–1859), designer of the Paddleford Truss, which became the prevalent covered bridge pattern in NH and VT (perhaps due to the fact that Paddleford failed to patent it!). The footbridge, due to its expected capacity, did not require the muscular Paddleford design. It is a simple and



sturdy Warren Truss. State, local and private funds made this span possible.

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Between Mill Street and the Bugbee Block, modern structures replaced buildings destroyed by fires in the 1930s and 1970s.

Across Main Street, Clay Street climbs to where St. Rose of Lima Catholic Church (1913) may be glimpsed. It was constructed of fieldstones gathered locally and brought to the site by parishioners. The vacant lot on the corner of Clay and Main was the site of the home of Henry L. Tilton, who built Tilton's Opera Block (#20). His ornate mansion was razed in the 1970s leaving this superior, cut granite wall intact.

The adjacent bank structure is on a site that has hosted banks since the 1880s. In 1913, throngs flocked to the courtroom above the bank to glimpse socially prominent Harry K. Thaw, who murdered famed architect Stanford White; Thaw, who had been recaptured in Colebrook, NH after escaping from confinement in New York, stayed at Thayers Inn (#6) during the extradition proceedings.

Looking down Mill Street and across the river to South Street, one might see the cupola on the barn at Benjamin W. Kilburn's grand home in the distance. (His friend, Sylvester Marsh, of Cog Railway fame, lived next door.) Kilburn, the famous stereographer, built the Kilburn Block (#14).

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On the northern corner of Mill Street is Main Street's oldest commercial building, **THE BRACKETT BLOCK (13)** (In local usage the word "block" may refer to a single building rather than individual properties between two streets). Named for the Brackett brothers, William (1785–1859) and Aaron B. (1797–1868). Traders in general merchandise, they constructed the block in 1833 of timber harvested in the village and shaped by an Ammonoosuc River sawyer. The street level resembles its original aspect. The third floor was



*Main Street in the late 1930s, looking east. The Brackett Block is at right.*

added around 1900, at which time the fancy Italianate facade appeared on the upper stories. When the structure was new, it was one of the few meeting places that was neither a tavern nor affiliated with a religious denomination. Littleton's first public Catholic Mass was celebrated here in 1848, and it was one place where the Methodists met before they built their church in 1850. The village's first demonstration of Morse's telegraph was presented here in 1845.

The corner of Jackson Street provides a perspective on a later epoch of commercial architecture. In a matter of months, at the turn of the twentieth century, leading citizens erected three handsome business blocks within months of each other: **THE KILBURN BLOCK (14)**, the **CHUTTER BLOCK (15)** and the **HARRINGTON BLOCK (16)**. Similar in scale (three stories) and structure (brick), each nonetheless reflects the distinct taste of its original owner.

The **KILBURN BLOCK (14)** was the project of Benjamin W. Kilburn (1827–1909), the elder and more adventurous of the two Littleton natives who founded the Kilburn Brothers stereoscopic view company. The company, which flourished from 1865 to 1910 was the most successful of at least four stereoscopic manufacturers in Littleton. Kilburn suffered a stroke just before the block was finished, making it the last of his ambitious endeavors. His



The Kilburn Block with postal delivery vehicles in 1920.

keen appreciation for visual detail is no doubt responsible for the building's "modillions"—ornamental brackets under the corona of the cornice—and other tasteful design elements. It housed the Post Office until 1935.

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By coincidence, the Kilburns' first factory was on the site of today's Harrington Block, where, in 1865 brother Edward Kilburn (1830–1884) had a portrait studio in the vanished McCoy Block. When they outgrew that space in 1867, the brothers constructed a new factory, on the site of today's Chutter Block. (That wooden building was moved to Pleasant Street when Chutter built the present structure.) In 1873, the Kilburns completed the factory structure that still stands on Cottage Street.

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Born in Somerset, England, the Rev. Frederick Chutter (1857–1939) came to the United States as a youth and had been in the dry goods trade in Boston when he was called to the ministry. He was pastor of Littleton's Congregational Church from 1887 to 1890. In 1893, he bought the building the Kilburns had built, since known as the Dow Store, and opened it as the White Store. Around 1900, he erected the **CHUTTER BLOCK (15)**. He also developed two hotels, the Snowden and the Boylston, at Main and Pleasant. Chutter was



The Chutter Block, second from right, in the 1940s.

inordinately well educated (Phillips Andover Academy, Colby College, Andover Theological Institute, Oxford University, etc.) and served on both the school and library boards. After building this handsome structure, he returned to the ministry fulltime and moved to Lebanon, NH. Not long after, he was killed in a car crash.

The Chutter Block would later house the Parker Drug Store, which served Main Street for 48 years in four separate locations. Today, Chutter's store is home to "the world's longest continuous candy counter," as noted in the *Guinness Book of World Records*.

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Between the Chutter and Harrington Blocks is a one-story brick block where a First National grocery store and a J.J. Newberry "five and dime" store flourished. The present structure extends back to Mill Street where it has been rehabilitated to accommodate retail properties. In 1866 this was the site of the spacious Union Block, built by the Masons and used by the Town for Town Meetings in the final years of the 19th century.

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The third brick structure of that generation is the **HARRINGTON BLOCK (16)**, built by James and William Harrington for their grocery market. Although the street level has been modified, the building's engaging design—a different style façade

for each story—is evident. The second story, with its massive granite quoins at the corner and around the windows, is particularly striking.

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From 1868 until the 1880s, the lot at the corner of Jackson and Main, now occupied by the Rounsevel Building was a small park graced by the town’s first bandstand. It was dismantled when the Littleton Coronet Band became too large for the structure.

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When the unimposing **ROUNSEVEL BUILDING (17)** was constructed in 1889 by Royal Dearborn Rounsevel (1830–1907), it was praiseworthy for its spacious quarters. It enlivened the unpaved thoroughfare and harmonized with its wood-frame boxy neighbors. But, very soon it appeared old fashioned, as its old neighbors disappeared in a surge of civic progress. In 1891, the Village Highway Precinct was established to oversee the placing of concrete sidewalks and the paving of Main Street. The Village District (1893) and other local authorities were formed to modernize sewerage, fire alarm and potable water systems.

By the time the extravagant **TOWN BUILDING (#24)** was erected in 1895, the six-year-old Rounsevel Building was already a relic of Littleton’s past. For more than a century, however, it has served as a very useful relic. Among its score of tenants, it has housed a newspaper office, studios for photographers and the Public Library. Today’s old-timers remember when Silsby Electric Service, which sold radios, operated out of the Jackson Street side of the building. For some years in the mid-1900s, during the World Series, Silsby would set up loudspeakers on the roof of the Rounsevel Block Building and broadcast the games for benefit of shoppers and clerks on Main Street.

Royal hosted meetings of the Christian Science Society in his building and was acquainted with Mary Baker Eddy. His building survived two of the town’s terrible fires.



*The Eames Block circa 1920s.*

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Strangers riding through Littleton are impressed by the evidence of industry, enterprise and prosperity. To the casual observer, things look as if the town had simple elbow room and was, so to speak, on easy street. Those who know best, however, know that the keeping up of a flourishing community like Littleton is not child’s play. Littleton prospers because of determined spirit, undaunted courage, hard work.

—*The Manchester Union Leader, January 31, 1924*

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The above excerpt is from a report on the 1924 fire that destroyed the Northern Hotel, the Premiere Theatre, the Boylston block and the Snowden Block—all of which stood on the site of the **EAMES BUILDING (18)** and **JAX JR. CINEMAS (19)**. Before the ashes had cooled, Groveton, NH native John B. “Jack” Eames (1891–1951), owner of the Premiere Theatre, made arrangements to purchase the destroyed Boylston and Snowden properties. (Between the Rounsevel Building and the Eames Building is a public way, Hillview Terrace, and a structure that sits back from the street. Constructed by Jack Eames, it has served as a filling station, a taxi service, a furniture store and a home to two nightclubs, The Galleon and Jeremiah’s, which were popular venues for such performers as the Boston band Aerosmith.) On the site of the adjacent

properties, at the corner of Main and Pleasant, Eames built a new 800-seat Premiere Theatre, which included an eight-lane bowling alley, offices and retail spaces. In 1941, this theatre hosted the world premiere of *The Great Lie*, starring Bette Davis, who vacationed in nearby Sugar Hill. The premiere coincided with a public celebration of Miss Davis' birthday, and throngs attended a party for her after the screening.

A second fire, in 1949, destroyed this block, and Eames responded by posting a sign on the smoking rubble: "Watch this corner grow! New Hampshire's finest theatre to be built here." He opened the Jax Jr. Cinemas on March 17, 1951.

The indomitable Eames, dubbed "The Dean of New England Motion Picture Exhibitors," operated theatres in several local towns through his Interstate Amusement Company. During his 30-year residence in Littleton, he acquired and improved numerous properties, including Thayers Hotel. He died only nine months after the Jax Jr. opened. The theater remains an Eames family operation, and Jack's sons, John and Jere, and grandson Jack, participate in the ownership of such landmarks as the Tilton Block, the Harrington Block, the Salomon Block and the Littleton Grist Mill.



*Main Street looking west in 1909.*

A peek inside the double doors of **TILTON'S OPERA BLOCK (20)** reveals a vestibule with grand staircase to the second level where Henry

Lowell Tilton (1828–1909) made provisions to construct a hall for concerts. An ardent lover of music, Tilton was president of the town's Musical Association and participated in organizing and promoting concerts. When he built his Opera Block in 1881, he expected that the town would need a larger venue for performances. He designed his 160-by-50-foot block to accommodate a future auditorium that would extend to the river's edge, but subsequently determined that the community would not unite behind such a venture. Music-lovers would incorporate an "opera house" into the **TOWN BUILDING (#23)** 14 years later. (In the late 1800s, the "theatre" had unsavory connotations, so performance halls were called "opera houses.")

Tilton was a Vermont native who came to Littleton at age 20. He worked as a store clerk and saved enough for his passage to San Francisco and the Gold Rush. Within three years he proved himself an able entrepreneur selling everything from drinking water (for "a bit a bucket") to hardware. He returned to Littleton with sufficient wealth to become an investor in several enterprises, notably timber, real estate and banking. He built a grand hotel, The Mount Pleasant, nearby in Carroll, NH, and, surprisingly, was an active financier in the city of Spokane, Wash.

His block is the town's largest brick structure and its details would influence the design of subsequent Main Street buildings—repeated tribute is paid to Tilton's keystoned windows and textured brick. The **TILTON BLOCK** and **SALOMON BLOCK (#22)** have cast iron first-story facades—quite rare in rural New England towns.

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In December 1945, on the second floor of Tilton's Opera Block, Fannie and Maynard Sundman launched the **LITTLETON STAMP & COIN CO.**, a mail order firm that became nationally prominent. Still family-owned, Littleton Coin Company is one of America's largest numismatic retailers, serving coin and paper money collectors nationwide. It is now located in the Littleton Industrial Park.

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Littleton in many ways, is a model town. It has an air of industry and prosperity. Its streets are clean... not a saloon to be seen. It is the home of Daniel Remich, one of New Hampshire's best-known and energetic men...

—*Rochester Courier July 11, 1901*

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The spire on the **METHODIST CHURCH (21)** was the first of Littleton's many spires. (The steeple on the earlier Congregational Church had a flat roof.) Built on the site of a tavern, the church with Doric columns on its Greek Revival portico was dedicated on January 8, 1851. In the 1880s, the Methodists renovated most of their churches by jacking up the sanctuaries and putting in ground-level meeting halls. This happened here in 1888, when a pilastered façade and Palladian window replaced the original portico. The Methodists had been meeting in Littleton since 1800, but this was their first permanent home.



*The Salomon Block circa 1917. The Civil War monument was moved to the Glenwood Cemetery in the 1950s.*

Jacob M. Salomon was a Groveton, NH native who dealt in dry goods. When his store on this site burned, he built the **SALOMON BLOCK (22)**, an angled Georgian Revival showpiece, in 1912. (The plaque is near the bridge.) This building may be seen as the culmination of three decades of Main Street development begun by H.L. Tilton's Opera Block. Indeed Salomon (1878–1945) echoed his neighbor's cast iron moldings and keystone

windows. A flag-topped dome originally crowned the rounded corner, and the building housed the Star Theater, the town's first movie theater. Guttled by fire in 1917, the block was rebuilt, with the same façade.



*The Town Building circa 1896.*

The **TOWN BUILDING (23)** is the Main Street's focal point. Its Queen Anne heritage is evident from its many angles and four-story octagonal tower. Before its construction, town business was conducted in private halls and rented space. Citizens acquired the site from a blacksmith and budgeted for \$15,000 toward the construction. Leading citizens, notably Daniel Remich (1852–1917), who was the son-in-law of Benjamin Kilburn, pushed for more ambitious features, and by the time it was completed in 1895, it cost \$33,836. The architect was Howard & Austin of Brockton, Massachusetts. The interior has housed town offices, courtrooms, library, police station and jail, as well as the Eureka Hose Company and a Rococo opera house. In the basement were stables for the horses who pulled the fire engine. The illuminated Seth Thomas tower clock was a gift from Benjamin W. Kilburn. This building was named to the National Historic Register in 1976.

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It is most beautifully situated upon the Ammonoosuc and Connecticut Rivers, having fifteen miles of territory lying along the last named stream. This river, as it passes through the town site, flows over masses of rock-bed and projecting ledges, that frequently rise into miniature crags on either bank, upon the levels of which, or along their terraced edges, the buildings of the village stand...

Littleton Chamber of Commerce 1921

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*The covered bridge (at left) on the site of today's Veteran's Memorial Bridge. The sign warns of a \$2.00 fine for galloping horses.*

To complete your tour, walk across the **VETERANS' MEMORIAL BRIDGE (24)**. The first "Cottage Street Bridge" was erected here in 1810, and a covered bridge spanned the river from 1839 to 1894. By an act of the NH Senate, the present bridge was designated the Cottage Street Veterans' Memorial Bridge and dedicated on Memorial Day of 2003. It displays 47 plaques honoring Littleton veterans killed in action in America's wars from the Civil War to Operation Iraqi Freedom. Two other plaques recognize a Medal of Honor winner and 16 Littleton soldiers who perished from disease or other causes during the Civil War and World War I. The bridge—recognizing individual veterans from a single town—is purported to be the only of its kind in the nation. The Littleton VFW maintains

the memorial, which was funded by hundreds of individuals and businesses. Upstream may be glimpsed factory structures—the descendants of the 19th century "Scythe Factory Village." Downstream are the Littleton Grist Mill and Riverwalk Covered Bridge .



*Littleton's Boston & Maine railroad station, circa 1900.*

Across the bridge and perched on the river bank is a brick and ceramic block structure with some wood trim. Originally built as Downing's Garage, it was one of the first structures in the state constructed specifically for the sales and service of automobiles. Herbert H. Downing advertised his Ford showroom as "fireproof" and it indeed boasted a sprinkler system to go with its non-combustible construction.

This Cottage Street neighborhood has several claims to history. A brief walk to the abandoned railroad tracks rewards the visitor with a glimpse of the Boston & Maine railroad station and structures that served as freight sheds. Up Cottage Street's hill is the Kilburn Brothers stereograph factory, now apartments, but obviously of industrial origins. Nestled back from the road is the modest Brackett House, which dates from the 1850s and was the residence of the Main Street merchants of that name.

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The tour may complete a loop by taking Riverglen Lane to the Riverwalk Covered Bridge and ascending to Main Street.

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*The state's newest covered bridge, the Riverwalk Covered Bridge, recalls the town's classic 19th century spans.*

IN LITTLETON, THE PAST IS PROLOGUE, and Main Street proves that this town's future is shaped by a rich heritage. As the Littleton Chamber of Commerce observed in 1921:

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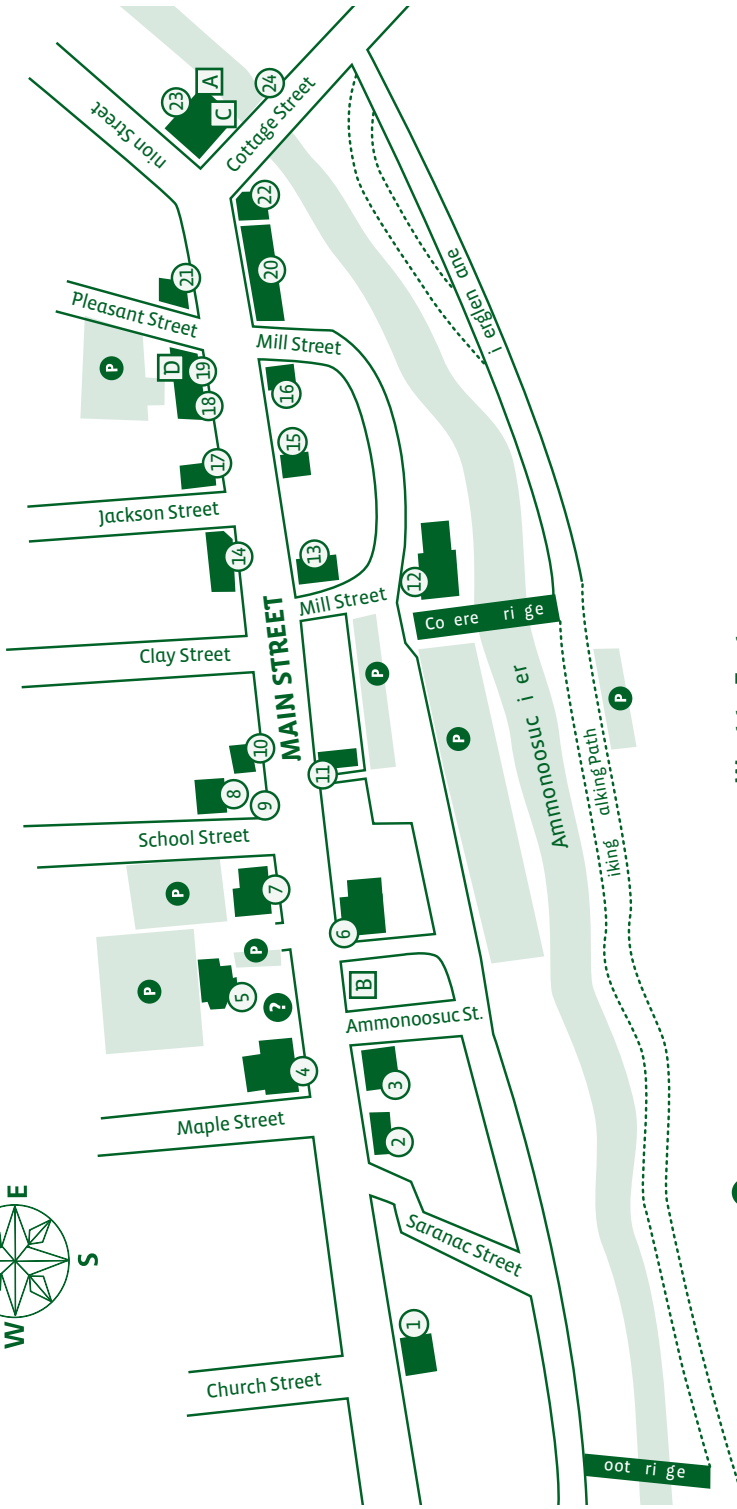
“On the north bank of the river, the main street of the village, with its row of buildings on either side, seems to occupy a sort of natural shelf, that has been broadened and levelled to fit it for community uses, and which looks down upon the stream it overhangs as Alpine villages are frequently found occupying in European countries. From this main street steep elevations, that would be called mountains anywhere else, rise to fairly magnificent heights, their sides dotted with hamlets and individual estates, and summer hostleries, among which the village roads and driveways course most attractively, inviting the sojourner to cloud-seeking visits and excursions, and promising most abundant rewards for all efforts made in climbing them.”

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—*Littleton Chamber of Commerce, 1921*

*Since its publication in 2001, A Walking Tour of Downtown Littleton, NH was named the Best Walking Tour in New Hampshire by NH Magazine in its Very Best of New Hampshire for 2002. This updated edition, also researched and written by Jim McIntosh, was published in '07 and '11. Jim thanks the many people who aided his research, notably the staff of the Littleton Public Library, Glenwood Cemetery sexton Paul Harvey, Jack Colby who edited Littleton—Crossroads of Northern New Hampshire, Karen Keazirian of Pollyanna of Littleton New Hampshire, Inc. and historians Linda McShane, George McAvoy and Frances Heald.*





**P** Parking

**?** Information

**SPECIAL THANKS TO OUR SPONSORS...**

- Littleton Coin Company
- Littleton Main Street, Inc.
- A) Littleton Area Chamber of Commerce
- B) Town of Littleton
- C) Littleton Area Historical Society  
...and the many volunteers to the organizations listed above.
- Jax Jr Cinemas
- D) The Eames Partnership & Eames Realty  
Pollyanna of Littleton New Hampshire, Inc.

**West to East**

- |                                 |                               |
|---------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 1) Congregational Church        | 13) Brackett Block            |
| 2) Littleton Diner              | 14) Kilburn Block             |
| 3) Masonic Temple               | 15) Chutter Block             |
| 4) US Post Office & Court House | 16) Harrington Block          |
| 5) Community House              | 17) Rounsevel Building        |
| 6) Thayers Inn                  | 18) Eames Building            |
| 7) Parker's Marketplace         | 19) Jax Jr. Cinemas           |
| 8) Littleton Public Library     | 20) Tilton's Opera Block      |
| 9) Pollyanna Sculpture          | 21) Methodist Church          |
| 10) Porfido's Market            | 22) Salomon Block             |
| 11) Bugbee Block                | 23) Town Building             |
| 12) Littleton Grist Mill        | 24) Veterans' Memorial Bridge |