

MAIN STREET PITTSFIELD, NEW HAMPSHIRE

The theme of this year's calendar is Main Street during the days of transition, from "horse and buggy" to automobiles, and from buildings and streets illuminated by gas to ones illuminated by electricity. This is the period of Pittsfield's greatest prosperity, the end of the Nineteenth and the beginning of the Twentieth Centuries.

A decade after the town's founding one could walk from John Cram's residence, a large two-story unpainted house at the top of Factory Hill, along not much more than a footpath toward Clark's Pond, now the swimming pool. Few buildings would be in sight and certainly no large homes.

By the second and third decades of the Nineteenth Century, things had changed significantly. On the north side of the road going southeast from John Cram's there was a strong log fence all the way to where the Episcopal Church is today. It separated the "highway" from a field owned by Esquire Cram that was filled with very large pine stumps. Captains Joshua and William Berry, Enoch Brown, and Dudley Lyford (later colonel), held drills in the field for the old Pittsfield infantry known as the "Pittsfield Grenadiers." In marching their men they had to go around the stumps as best they could. Later the stumps were dug out, the logs removed, and the stumps put in their place. Later yet, the stumps were removed and a stonewall was erected. About where the Episcopal Church is located there was a small pond, which was drained to make way for Reuben T. Leavitt's home and store.

David Fogg erected the first house on the northern side of the road. It was a large, unpainted house that was used for a tavern and store. Later owned by W. Bryant Drake and used as a hotel, it burned in 1865. In 1875 Governor Hiram Tuttle built his mansion on the same spot. Traveling southeast the next building was the small house of Esq. William Butters, a trader, justice of the peace and Pittsfield's second postmaster. Unfortunately, it was consumed in the Drake Hotel fire. Next on the road came the Old Meetinghouse, a two-story, unpainted church-town hall, finished in 1789. Today it is the Community Center. The only other house on the north side of Main Street was that of Theodore Clark, a farmer and clothier from whom the name Clark's Pond is derived. It was a little to the east of the Old Meetinghouse.

On the south side of Main Street heading southeast from Cram's house there were no buildings for quite a distance. An exact description of this side of the road is lost to history but an early Pittsfield historian suggested that it might have had a row of locust trees, a fence of pine stumps, and piles of pine boards drawn from the sawmill laying there to dry. We know that this side of the street was elevated with a dirt path along it, which was used as a sidewalk.

The first building on that side of the street was the Long House, named for its low, long shape. Hanson Hyte kept it as a tavern and boarding house. It was located just across the street from the Old Meetinghouse and was where the well-known preacher, the Rev. Benjamin Sargent, lived. Then came a forest, followed by a thick alder swamp and bog where Pittsfield Common is now located.

Just as the people of those early times would be stunned to see what their community became, current Pittsfield residents may be equally stunned to see what the community was like a century ago.

What follows is a pictorial walk down Main Street c1900-20 from the top of Factory Hill to the beginning of South Main Street at Pittsfield Common.