



# Freedom's Way Heritage Association



## Priority Landscapes

Harvard's heritage landscape identification meetings were conducted in 2006 under the auspices of the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation in partnership with Freedom's Way Heritage Association. Town residents, some of whom represented town boards and local non-profits, attended the meetings. Most communities identified several priority landscapes as highly valued and contributing to community character that needed to be permanently protected or preserved. Unlike other communities that chose to identify specific priority landscapes, such as a neighborhood or vista, Harvard residents were emphatic that the character of their town could not be defined by isolated areas. Thus, the participants identified a series of critical concerns related to heritage landscapes and community character. These are town-wide issues that are linked to a group or category of heritage landscapes, not to a particular place. There are undoubtedly other heritage landscapes that were not identified during this process. Future planning meetings might select other sites. The list as selected in 2006 is as follows:

### **Agricultural Landscapes**

Farming has formed the core of Harvard's economy since the town was founded in 1732, and the presence of agriculture remains central to the town's identity. Orchard-covered hills, open fields with livestock grazing, farmstands, and fresh picked fruit and vegetables are all part of the experience of living in Harvard. Its farms and orchards constitute its most valued and its most vulnerable resources.

### **Dark Sky**

Harvard is one of several communities in the Freedom's Way area that mentioned the importance of moderating light pollution at night. This is a particular concern to Harvard residents for two reasons. One is the presence of the Harvard Smithsonian Observatory, which requires a dark sky for maximum effectiveness of the telescope. The other is a large correctional facility to the west of Harvard in Shirley that emanates a bright orange glow from its sodium vapor lights in an otherwise dark and rural area.

### **Devens**

A substantial area in the northwest corner of Harvard became Fort Devens in 1917 and was administered by the US government for many years until the fort was decommissioned in 1996. The former Fort Devens is now owned by a quasi-state agency, MassDevelopment. Devens development poses a challenge for Harvard because it was historically part of the community but has been controlled by outside entities.

### **Historic Resources**

Planning for Harvard's Rural Landscapes listed historic resources as another of the four key elements that define the rural character of the community. Harvard's buildings are readily recognizable and have long been a source of community pride.

### **Open Space Linkages**

Harvard already has extensive conservation land and open space. Some of it is town-owned; some belongs to organizations such as the Harvard Conservation Trust; and other parcels are in private or institutional ownership. Many of Harvard's large natural areas are regional landscapes shared by several communities and administered by state and federal government agencies.

### **Scenic Roads and Community Gateways**

Harvard residents place very high value on their scenic roads. Planning for Harvard's Rural Landscapes listed the view from the road as another of the four key elements that define the rural character of the community. It identified roads as the "public face of Harvard, the threads that tie the town together..." Subsequent to the conclusion of the Harvard Reconnaissance Study, DCR and Freedom's Way helped the town of Harvard conduct a pilot project to complete an updated scenic road inventory with descriptions and photo documentation of each of the roads in Harvard; include design criteria for driveway cuts and tree or stonewall repair or removal; develop policies for road maintenance and reconstruction that was subsequently adapted by Town Meeting. For the Harvard Roads Final Report visit <http://www.freedomsway.org/towns/harvard/harvard.html>

### **Also cited by the report were:**

*Special Trees*—those in prominent locations or of historic importance

*Views*—those of local scenic importance and those that are regional in scale

*Village Centers*—there are three main centers, the Harvard Center Common, Still River Village and Shaker Village

*Waterways*—the Nashua River and many streams, brooks and ponds

*Portions of the above text have been excerpted from the Harvard Reconnaissance Report, part of the Freedom's Way Landscape inventory of 22 Freedom's Way communities. The full text can be downloaded at: <http://www.mass.gov/dcr/stewardship/histland/essex.htm>  
See individual reports and maps by town name.*