

History of Huntington MA
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Huntington began as part of Plantation No. 9 in June 1762. In 1765, Plantation No. 9 was named Murrayfield. In 1773, Murrayfield was divided and the eastern portion was incorporated as the town of Norwich. The town was named for Norwich Connecticut from which many of the early settlers came.

Present-day Huntington village was called “Falley’s Crossroads” after the owner of the tavern there. It lay at the intersection of three towns – Blandford, Chester, and Norwich – and two counties – Hampden and Hampshire. The jurisdictional quirks presented by the situation of the village were tolerated until the coming of the railroad around 1840 inflated both the importance and the political tension of the village.

The confusion of town and county boundaries that divided the village had some surprising consequences. A man could commit a crime and evade prosecution simply by crossing the street. Local folklore tells of a wedding that was held in the old Williams House that had to be moved to the kitchen in order for the ceremony to be legal. The county license of the officiating justice of the peace was only good there – the town line ran through the building and the kitchen was in a different county.

To ease the difficulties, a complicated land-swap was engineered that exchanged parts of Blandford, Chester, Russell, Montgomery, and Norwich, resulting in the town boundaries we know today. It was incorporated in 1855 as the new town of Huntington, named in honor of Charles P. Huntington, the Northampton attorney who crafted the arrangement.

Huntington is closely associated with the Westfield River. All three branches of the river flow into the town as discrete entities, combining into the main stem in Huntington. Due to the ready supply of water, industry began early in Huntington’s history with sawmills, tanneries, and basket-makers.

With the arrival of the railroad and the ready access to more remote markets it made possible, Huntington’s waterpower was applied to paper and textile manufacturing. Two important mills developed – the Chester Paper Company on Mill St., and the Little and Stanton Woolen Mill on Russell Road (renamed Upper Russell Rd. with the relocation of the state highway in the 1930’s). Both of those businesses continued operation well into the 20th century, but both are gone now.

In the early days of the twentieth century, Huntington was at the end of two trolley lines. The Springfield Street Railway extended through Westfield and Russell to the Huntington town common. Its rails were laid along much of what became the Jacob’s Ladder Trail right of way – stone embankments from the trolley are visible in many locations along the Trail. Just a few yards away from the end of that trolley line was the end of the Huckleberry Line which ran over the hills to East Lee. Political differences prevented the two lines from merging. By the end of the second decade of the century, both trolley lines were defunct.

Today, Huntington is primarily a bedroom community. Retail business continues in both the downtown area and along the first couple of miles of Rt. 112. Farming has always been an important part of the community and it continues today, although considerably diminished.

For many years, Huntington has hosted the start of the Westfield River Wildwater Races – at 56 years, the longest continuously-run canoe race in the country.

While there is but a scant three miles of Jacob's Ladder Trail in Huntington, the intersection with the southern terminus of Rt. 112 roughly at the mid-point makes it an important part of the road.