

THE ESTETICS OF THE  
NEW ENGLAND  
TOWN COMMON

By

Alfred Howe Todd

B.S. Lehigh University  
(1947)

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree of  
Master in City Planning

at the

MASSACHUSETTS INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY  
(1950)

Signature of Author \_\_\_\_\_  
City Planning Dept.  
May 19, 1950

Certified by \_\_\_\_\_  
Thesis Supervisor

\_\_\_\_\_  
Chairman, Departmental Committee on Graduate Students  
✓

The Graduate House  
Mass. Inst. of Tech.  
Cambridge, Mass.  
May 19, 1950

Professor Frederick J. Adams  
Department of City and Regional Planning  
Massachusetts Institute of Technology  
Cambridge, Massachusetts

Dear Professor Adams:

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the  
degree of Master in City Planning, I submit this thesis entitled  
"The Esthetics of the New England Town Common".

Respectfully,

Howe Todd

#### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The author wishes to express his gratitude to Dean Wurster, Prof. Kevin Lynch, and Prof. Gyorgy Kepes for their inspiration and assistance in the accomplishment of this thesis, and to Dr. Sigfried Giedion for his persistent emphasis upon the social values of the Civic Center.

He also wishes to thank Mrs. Louise A. Kent, author of "Village Greens in New England", and Mr. B. A. Benjamin, of the Massachusetts State Planning Board, for their suggestions as to the best towns to visit on the survey tour.

The generosity of George Nez in lending the author valuable camera equipment for the aerial photographs is also deeply appreciated.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
	Introduction	1
I	The Town Common	3
II	The Esthetic Experience	6
III	Procedure	10
IV	Conclusions	13
	Appendix A.	24
	Washington	25
	Grafton	29
	Framingham	34
	Shirley Center	39
	Longmeadow	44
	Boston	48
	Bedford	52
	Waltham	55
	Upton	60
	Leominster	64
	Connecticut	25
	Massachusetts	29
	"	34
	"	39
	"	44
	"	48
	New Hampshire	52
	Massachusetts	55
	"	60
	"	64
	Appendix B.	69



## INTRODUCTION

"The ugliness of our streets, our houses, and our cities is a realistic interruption of what might, ideally speaking, be perpetual<sup>1</sup> delight."

A thesis on the beauty of the New England town common is more pertinent to the field of City Planning than one may suspect. An investigation into the esthetics of these spaces should enrich and enlarge one's appreciation for physical design. This is needed today, for there are many designers and planners who cannot visualize or understand the effect of their two-dimensional plans. Either they have no conception of what the dimension of their plans will produce, or they forget or misinterpret the vertical element of their plans, or, in elevation drawings, the unseen horizontal dimension is not fully appreciated.<sup>2</sup> The construction of models helps to eliminate the possibility of these errors to a large extent, but even with the use of models, the full esthetic, social, and psychological impact of the masses, spaces, and voids constructed is often misinterpreted.

A critical analysis of the esthetics of the various town commons throughout New England may be helpful in the understanding of the element of "scale". It should also illustrate the great psychological effects of enclosed spaces, masses, and voids. Subconsciously people relate the appearances of these commons to their own human functions. "We perceive space by direct empathic response to be large or small in proportion to the amount of space that our own bodies occupy."<sup>3</sup>

The study of the social function of the New England town common is also valuable in developing an understanding of esthetics. The community function of the common in most of the New England towns today is an important feature just as it was in the Greek Agorae and the Roman Fora of ancient history. There are few cities or towns in our modern society where this type of civic center may be studied.

There is no implication here that these town commons should be imitated. This is not the purpose of this thesis. The point is, why are some beautiful? - why are some ugly? This is frankly a study of esthetics. Swinging from an over emphasis of beauty in the early part of the century, planners today tend to ignore esthetic values. Planners should seize all opportunities for esthetic creation in the solution of every problem where this does not destroy economic and social values, - sometimes even when it does.

This thesis will study a number of commons, analyzing them, determining if possible the elements or principles of design which make them beautiful. It is hoped that a better appreciation of the importance of esthetics in design will be produced, as well as a body of knowledge which may be applied to city planning design in the future.

CHAPTER I  
THE TOWN COMMON

An understanding of the sociology and history of the town common is important to a complete appreciation of its beauty. This would make an interesting thesis in itself, but here another type of analysis has been made, supplemented by a brief study into the social and historical background.

Philosophers and dreamers since ancient times have envisioned social and economic "Utopias" and "Garden Cities", but it was the colonial New England town that produced the essential elements of common holding of land, and cooperative ownership and direction of the community that was a practical and successful illustration of such an idea.<sup>5</sup> This "yankee communism", as Lewis Mumford calls it, was not the result of a directed attempt to produce such a socialized neighborhood.<sup>6</sup> The presence of the indians, the geography of the land, and the nature of the pilgrims all combined to develop such a community.

The small group of original inhabitants of an early New England town might be thought of as "co-partners in a corporation," jointly owning a large tract of land for the purpose of cultivation and the forming of a "civic and religious society." These puritans were in a wild savage land, the rights and powers in their hands, and from the beginning they saw a desperate need for common sense and for cooperation.

This produced a tight, compact unit, - socially and physically. The land policies, though not feudal, were the best features of the old

land tenure of the medieval period. The "co-partners" each had approximately an equal share of the freehold land, and the use of the common lands.

The most important of the common lands was located at the center of the town. Although this common, like the others, was sometimes used for timber, agriculture, or grazing, it served a special function in the life of the community. Not only was it a military training ground and a safe pastorage for animals at night, it was the civic center and heart of the community. Down through the centuries the chief functions of the town have been located here - the meeting house, the school, the churches, the library, the Grange Hall and fraternal groups. This common functions somewhat as the Greek Agora. The people of the community gather here for political, religious, commercial and educational, as well as purely social purposes.

In many cases, other common lands have been preserved. Timber tracts or old grave yards on the edges of some towns are still known as "commons". This thesis is not concerned with this type of common, but is interested only in the esthetics of the common land at the town center.

There are many examples of the importance of the town common in the lives of the New England people. It was on the Lexington common that a handful of minutemen started the Revolutionary War. It was on the Cambridge common that General Washington took command of the colonial troops.<sup>7</sup> In Salem, witches were hanged from trees on the common. The Boston common has been used as an assembly point for troops in every war this country has been engaged in. It was here that Quakers were hanged from the Old Elm. Here the Whig mass meetings were held, and the aristocratic citizens

of Beacon Hill gathered or promenaded at twilight. Many carnivals and celebrations have been presented, and during the latter part of the 19th century, coasting was so popular with the children and adults alike, that overpasses had to be built to protect the pedestrians.

Today many of the New England town commons still serve as the social, religious, and civic center of the community. In some cases, however, the towns have shifted, leaving the town common as an isolated park. In other cases, traffic or commerce has encroached upon it until many of its uses have been destroyed. Nevertheless, the town common is still held dear in the hearts of most New Englanders. It is endeared because of past usages, traditions, and folklore, as well as the attachment that is continually engendered by contemporary usage.

Town commons are found in many different shapes. Some are triangular, some are polygonal, while others are long strips along each side of a main street. Many people have misunderstood this irregularity, believing that the towns were inefficient and non-functional. The exact opposite was true. From the very beginning function determined the designs of the town. As an example of this, it can be seen how the towns formed at a later period, untroubled by Indians, often had long main street commons - convenient to all, rather than the compact central common formed in the earlier period.

As different needs, problems, and uses produced town commons of varying physical design and function, a general over-all definition is difficult. They have been defined as "an area of land in the midst of a community about which the settlement developed, and which was utilized in common by the citizens for such purposes as military training, pastorage, agriculture, sites for public buildings, and a general gathering place."

## CHAPTER II

## THE ESTHETIC EXPERIENCE

Everyone is sensitive to the beauty or the lack of beauty in a view or perception that is experienced. Some people are more appreciative than others - realizing when and why they respond to esthetic appearances. Others react subconsciously, being critical, yet never really knowing why a perception is pleasing or displeasing.

This thesis, being a critical analysis of the beauty of the commons, is concerned with determining why they are pleasing or displeasing. Such an analysis should be made as objective as possible. This chapter is added, therefore, to define in a summary fashion the esthetic experience, - hoping that the following discussions will be more understandable in the light of this explanation.

"Whatever life may be, it is an experience. Between birth and death it is the stimulation and response of a living body, of 'five little senses startling with delight,' of muscle twitching to answer with action, of a tongue moved to utterance and a mind provoked to thought.

Whatever experience may signify, it is irretrievably there. It may be intensified and heightened or dulled and obscured. It may remain brutal and dim and chaotic; it may become meaningful and clear and alive. For a moment in one aspect, for a lifetime in many, experience may achieve lucidity and vividness, intensity and depth. To effect such an intensification and clarification of experience is the province of art."<sup>10</sup> Art then, changes the 'dead spots' - the dull moments in this disorgan-

ized world-into living experiences of delight. This is what is meant by the esthetic experience or the experience of beauty.

In this analysis of town commons, it is the appearances that produce the beauty which must be analyzed. The value that an appearance may have for producing beauty is spoken of as esthetic value. These esthetic values are described as functional values, formal values, or expressive values.

#### FUNCTIONAL VALUES:

The value of function or 'fitness' exists when the perception of an object indicates that it fulfills its specific use. This value consists of a "primary function" (the essential purpose, the actual use as a means to an end), which must be expressed 'honestly'. There is also the secondary value of "appropriateness" (the relatedness of an object to its environment).  
11

A prominent member of the 'functionalist school' summarized the value of fitness by saying; "Fitness of the parts of the design for which every individual thing is formed...is of the greatest consequence to the beauty of the whole. This is so evident, that even the sense of seeing is itself so strongly biased by it, that if the mind, on account of this kind of value in a form, esteem it beautiful, though on all other considerations it be not so, the eye grows insensible of its lack of beauty, and even begins to be pleased, especially after it has been a considerable time acquainted with it."  
12

#### FORMAL VALUES:

This is the value that the object has due to its pattern - its

organization, regardless of its purpose or function. The two chief formal values are "unity" and "variety".

"UNITY" is a oneness, a perception of the various parts as a whole, as one thing. If the number of elements are not related and combined, it becomes confusing - it is beyond the range of vision.

Unity is achieved by three main organizing principles: "dominance", the subordination of minor elements to one or two leading motifs in the pattern; "harmony," the principle of similarity among the elements, determined by size, shape, position, spacing, value, scale, and proportion; and "balance", the principle of equilibrium among the elements - attained through symmetry or asymmetry.

"VARIETY" is the diversity which is needed because sight is quickly satisfied and demands a changing scene.

Variety is achieved by three main organizing principles: "thematic variation", the individual differences among the elements; "contrast", the marked differences, opposite in type and character; and "rhythm", the harmonious recurrence of an accent or stress.

Unity and variety must supplement one another, for extreme unity would produce monotony, while extreme variety would cause chaos.

#### EXPRESSIVE VALUE:

This is the character or quality of the form that we feel in terms of ourselves. "We are completely anthropomorphic, and hopelessly



egocentric. We understand only in the light of our experience, and so we refer the whole visible world to ourselves as a yardstick, interpret all the data it offers us in terms of our own past history. We are as prone to 'feel ourselves into' a tree as into a ball player. We have stood in the presense of a great Oak and felt the impulse to take our stance more firmly on the ground. We have soared gracefully in the summer skies as we watched a hawk above us, and something of ourselves flies swiftly with every plane followed by our eyes."

13

This process of identifying ourselves with objects, and with the acts and situations of other people is called "Empathy". It is the ability of the body to feel in its own emotions, due to past experience and memory, what it perceives in external objects. Empathic response is involved to a great extent in all of the expressive values, as well as in some of the formal values.

The chief characters which produce the empathic response (hence expressive values) are: lines, space, mass, weight and force, movement, color, texture, light and shade. For instance we follow lines with our eye. Its movement or direction has a meaning, thus horizontal lines are restful, jagged ones exciting.

Space implies freedom of movement. We adapt ourselves instinctively to space and are pleased or displeased to the degree in which our desire for movement is thwarted. Colors, also textures, make an impression - black suggests death, yellow suggest gaiety, etc.

14

## CHAPTER III

## PROCEDURE

The procedure followed in this thesis does not produce any "scientifically" determined results. A subjective study such as this, with innumerable variables, involving personal judgements, and greatly influenced by emotions and past experience would be hopelessly confused by any attempt to adhere strictly to the scientific method.

The approach to this thesis developed from the assumption that the causes of the beauty or ugliness of a common could be determined from inspection. The preceding chapter on esthetics stated that the beauty of a form was due to functional, formal, or expressive values. The problem then involved determining what elements or features of the common produced these values.

Many New England commons throughout Connecticut, Massachusetts, and New Hampshire were visited (see Appendix B,) and notes and photographs made of their esthetic qualities. A selected few of the most beautiful and the ugliest were analyzed in more detail, using a "check-list" as a guide for their investigation. (The detailed analysis of these commons is found in Appendix A.) This check-list insured a more or less similar basis for comparison of these commons and it prevented the omission of any points for consideration during the analysis.

The check-list included the following elements:

- 1) SHAPE: The shape of the entire common and enclosed space.
- 2) SIZE: The size of the entire common and enclosed space.

- 3) CROSS SECTION: The cross section thru the area, showing the relationship of the height of the buildings and trees to the open space. Also shows approximate slope of the ground.
- 4) SLOPE OF THE GROUND: The detailed slope of the common.
- 5) EXISTING FUNCTION: The contemporary uses and function of the common and surrounding buildings.
- 6) ENCLOSING WALLS: The trees, hills, or buildings around the common which form the walls that enclose the space.
- 7) LANDSCAPE PLANTING: The trees, shrubbery, ground cover, vines, and flowers in the area.
- 8) ACCESSORIES OR TRIM: The signs, benches, fences, walls, monuments, fountains, flag poles, plaques, etc. used about the common.
- 9) SURFACE TEXTURE AND COLOR: The color and texture of the surfaces of the buildings, trees, ground, roads, and other forms found about the common.
- 10) SCALE: The relative dimensions, without difference in the proportion of the parts.
- 11) APPROACH: The approaches into the common. Also the more distant approaches into and through the village itself.
- 12) MICROCLIMATOLOGY: The particular climatic conditions (wind, fog, heat, humidity, etc.) found to prevail in the small area of the common.

Lack of time precluded detailed study of all of the commons which would be worthy of mention in a more comprehensive investigation. Some of these were given a cursory analysis on the 1700 mile trip through New England, others were missed entirely. The conclusions were derived from a detailed study of 10 commons and the impressions obtained in visiting 131 others.

## CONCLUSIONS

In an investigation of esthetics, it is extremely difficult to reach positive conclusions which dogmatically say exactly what causes beauty. Qualifications should be added to many of the seemingly absolute statements in this chapter, but it is felt that attaching too many vague stipulations would be very confusing, and therefore, they have been omitted.

The chapter on Esthetic Experience stated that the values which create the beauty of an appearance are the functional, formal, and expressive esthetic values. This analysis of the beauty of the New England town common confirmed this classification of values, as every esthetic point noticed was included in one of them, and in general, the greater the number of functional, formal, and expressive values present in an area, the more beautiful was the result. Apparently, they are as influential in Civic Art as they are in the other arts.

There are three main qualities which appear to be inherent in the beautiful common. In every case these three qualities seemed to dominate the overall general impressions. They are: "character", "coherence", and "pleasantness".

CHARACTER: Most important of these is what may be called (for lack of a better word) the "character". In a beautiful common there is always a clear immediate realization of a certain character or quality of the particular situation. The more vivid, rich, and complete the quality of the situation, the more beautiful is the common. Although these impressions can never be actually separated from the individual, they "seem" to be inherent in the common itself, unrelated to the observers' personal sensations.

With different size cities, with different site locations, and different existing functions, various commons have a diversity of characters. In general, the character of the typical town common is one in which human values and relations dominate. It is as if the community has turned its back upon the outside world and has here through the common set up a "primary relationship" with all the people of the town. The churches, town hall, libraries, stores, residences, etc. that are in the area all combine to humanize the atmosphere.

The quality of the situation is developed chiefly by functional values of the features of the common for it is not enough that they "be something and do something", they must also "say something." The shape and size of the common, the slope of the ground, and the approaches\* to the common all help to produce a vivid picture of the situation. Symbolism of the white color and shape of the meeting house, the tall elms, the green grass, the band stand, the monuments, etc., also increases the clarity of the situation.

COHERENCE: By "coherence" is meant the interrelationship of the parts of the whole, the internal relatedness of things of the common, the harmony that exists due to properly related components. The objects for different purposes are in their proper place. It is noticed in some of the commons that the forms are arranged "just right," satisfying the expectancy and desires of the observer. The amount related (extensive) as well as the degree of consistency (intensive) enhances the beauty.

---

\* Mr. B. A. Benjamin of the Mass. State Planning Board prepared a map showing the location of the most beautiful scenery and terrain in the state of Massachusetts. He also spotted the locations of the most beautiful town commons on this map. It is interesting to note that the majority of the town commons that he rated beautiful fell within the areas of most beautiful terrain.

The quality is due mainly to the formal values produced by such things as the proportions, masses, and spacings of the buildings, the similarities of architectural treatment, the window patterns, or the consistency of the landscape planting.

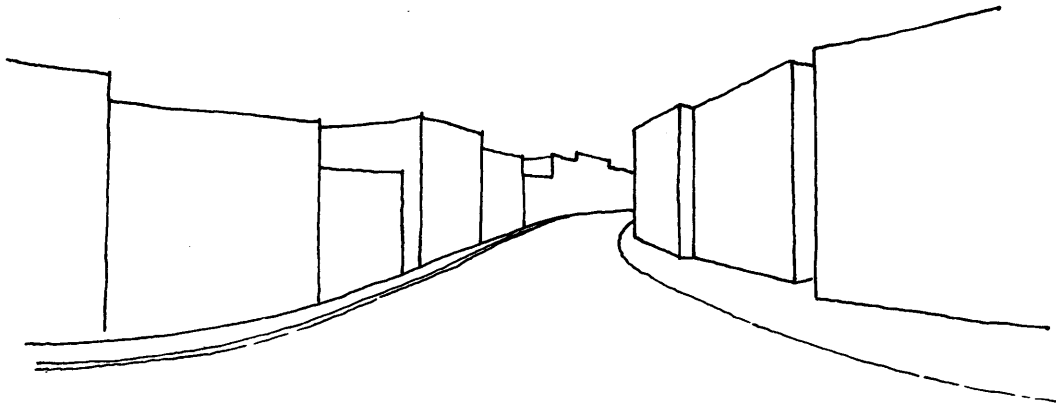
PLEASANTNESS: The last of the three significant qualities found in a beautiful common is the quality of pleasantness. Although the "character", or the "coherent" quality may stimulate a pleasant emotion, these pleasures are felt to be incidental to the important conditions outside the individual, while the pleasures referred to here are individual sensations which are consciously personal ones. These pleasures are due to numerous things; the warmth of the sun, the coolness of the shade, the breezes, or the empathic response to the expressive values of the lines, spaces, lights, shadows, textures, colors, etc., in the area. Past environment, past experiences, and memories cause these pleasures to differ with different people, therefore when designing, one must design for what is assumed will satisfy and "delight" the normal man.

These are the three most outstanding qualities found in a beautiful common. The following discussion will be devoted to a more detailed description of particular good and bad principles of design as applied to different features of a common, keeping in mind always that "character, coherence, and pleasantness" are the desired ends - attained through the use of functional, formal, and expressive esthetic values.

SHAPE:

The shape of the common or rather the shape of the enclosed space plays an important role in the explanation of the character of the common. Generalizations are difficult, but it may be said that usually a rectangular

or oblong shape is better than a square shape, for it is less confusing, and has a major axis from which to develop the layout. However, the length should not be in excess of the width to such an extent that compact grouping is impossible. Triangular shapes are very poor, due to their non-functional areas in the acute angles, and due to their generally open corners. The funnelling sides lead the eyes to the corners where the view should be blocked, but where there is usually only a road leading off into space. This weakness may be partially corrected by designing the roads so as to visibly complete the enclosure. The commons of Grafton and Leominster have corners which illustrate this well.



A pleasant feeling of space is created by such a perspective due to viewing the more distant building beyond the closer ones. This spaciousness or feeling of depth is also created by a common with an irregular shape in which the area seems to flow from one enclosed space into another. People adapt themselves to the spaces in which they stand, and to look beyond a close building which presents a reference for scale into another enclosed space produces a feeling of freedom of movement. The composition of groups of enclosed spaces in which different views occur as one moves about the area also makes the common more interesting and varied.



TRAFFIC:

The growth and consequent encroachment of traffic upon the common has probably done more than anything else to destroy its beauty. The speeding or parked cars, the necessarily wide pavement all are incongruous with the human atmosphere desired. The common in Reading, Mass., is one of the best examples of the desecrating effect of traffic. With a major highway and four major streets running through this small common, one is more conscious of the exhaust fumes and pounding traffic than of any amiable qualities of the area.

If major traffic must come through the area, the common should at least be offset to one side of the road, rather than completely enclosed by traffic as is usually the case. The trend seems to have been to make a rotary of the common . Nothing could be worse.

Minor roads in the area are not harmful, if designed properly.

Several design principles which are successful are:

- (1) Make the roads as narrow as possible - of a pavement which is suitable to the functional, formal, and expressive values desired.
- (2) Have the roads gently depressed so they do not interrupt the continuity of green unless seen at close range.
- (3) It is often pleasant to have the roads designed in an informal curving manner rather than in stiff straight lines.
- (4) In some cases where heavy traffic or parking cannot be excluded, and where the common is large enough, it may be desirable to depress the road five or six feet so as to remove the automobiles from view.

SITE:

The site chosen for the common has of course an important effect upon the resultant "character". In some cases, such as Wakefield, or Lancaster, Mass., a beautiful lake or distant view is used as a setting for the common. The combining of nature's scenic beauty with the common is effective, yet should be done only under careful consideration. Will this maintain the character desired, or will the scene dominate the area to such an extent that the civic and social value is secondary to its scenic value? It was found that in the majority of cases distant scenic views were more detrimental than helpful to the total effect. In the first place, the opening up of such an enclosed space, even to the scene of a lake or mountain range, lessens the intimacy of the space and reduces the prominence of the important buildings. It also seems to destroy the "human feeling" of the situation. No longer is it a small area at the heart of the town made by, controlled, and used by the people of the community. The result is very good, however, where the normal gaps between the buildings of the enclosing walls are closed by hills in the distance.

A perfectly flat site is the most usable, but a gently sloping one can be very effective. In Harvard, Mass., for instance, the ground rises gradually up to the church which dominates the area, making it much more imposing. It was found that a convex surface is more beautiful than a concave surface. This may be due to a personal association of swampy ground or dampness to a concave surface.

### LANDSCAPE PLANTING:

No conclusions were reached as to whether the trees should be planted in a formal or informal pattern, or just which type of tree should be used. Both elms and maples are successfully used, in formal and informal patterns. The expressive values of the trees are different, however, and make considerable difference in the total esthetic value produced. The elm, being tall, with smooth bark, vertical limbs, and a graceful arch, is very aloof and inspiring. It is particularly suited to use in the common and is planted in almost all of them in a regular pattern. The maple, shorter, with rough bark, and horizontal limbs, is more intimate and informal than the elm. It is more suited to a rustic informal common with an irregular pattern.

Shrubbery or flowers should not be used except in limited instances. Low shrubs are successfully used as a border around buildings, but other attempts to place bushes or flowers at intersections of walks or around monuments are unattractive.

One detail of a common which is important is the transition from road or path to grass. It should be smooth, even, and clean, confirming the simplicity of the area.

### TRIM:

The conclusions reached regarding the trim or accessories are more definite than the others. The fewer the better, and where accessories are used they must have a strong functional value. Many instances were noted throughout the survey tour where needless fences, benches, signs, waste baskets, telephone poles, and other gadgets marred the beauty.

As Camillo Sitte emphasized, monuments, flag poles, band stands, etc. should not be centrally located, but should be placed around the border of the area where they would have a more imposing effect.

#### ENCLOSING WALLS:

The enclosing walls are an important factor in the beauty of the common. Certain aspects have been discussed under the "shape". Here it should again be emphasized that they be enclosed. This is quite important.

The silhouette of the enclosing wall should be unified and should help to create the dominance of the most important building. The spire on the New England church usually serves that purpose well. The outline of the buildings should not be so similar that there is no variety, and yet extreme variances, especially in proportions of the buildings or of the irregularity of outline, create ugliness.

#### SCALE:

The human body is the yardstick for the measurement of scale, as we associate our bodies to spaces and masses which we see about us. It has been stated that the common is a human area, so the scale must be such that the area is comprehensible in its entirety to the individual. Distances should be short enough to be easily walked or "called" across, and the buildings should not be over 3 or 4 stories.

#### SIZE:

The size of a common must be large enough to present adequate frontage on the perimeter for the uses which are needed. For the usual enclosing walls of two-story buildings, it was found that 400' to 500'

was a good dimension for the lesser dimension in an oblong or rectangular shape. At this distance, the area is still small enough for human recognition across it, and yet not so small as to crowd the uses or people.

#### FUNCTIONS PRESENT:

Some commons are purely residential, being surrounded by residences only, others are purely religious and civic, being composed of public and semi-public buildings, while others are surrounded by commerce only, or are a mixture of them all. Any one of these may be beautiful, but it was found that maximum beauty was possible only when a proper balance of all of the uses were present. Commerce, contrary to the belief of many New Englanders, is not detrimental to the beauty of the area in itself. In fact, a proportionate amount of commercial activity is essential to the maintenance of the complete situation of the ideal common. The problem is to keep a proper balance, and to prevent any one use from over-running the others.

#### PRESERVATION AND CONTROL OF ESTHETIC VALUES

The problem of esthetic control is very difficult. If the common and the surrounding buildings are developed completely in the beginning, the issue is only one of preservation. This is not the case generally, however, and the question is, how can it be made certain that the area will develop in a beautiful and proper fashion. The size of the city, the civic pride of the people, and the location of the common all effect the degree of control which is possible. In general, absolute control is impossible, as it should be. The control of the location and design of the public buildings is rather complete, and provides the opportunity to place

the dominant buildings, thereby creating a core which directs the future growth. The general location and shape of private construction can be affected through the height, bulk, set-back, and use requirements of the zoning ordinance, although the detailed esthetic and architectural controls are possible only through private deed restrictions or stipulations under variances of the zoning ordinance.

Strong civic pride in the town should be encouraged as this will cause the citizens to demand that esthetic values be created or preserved. It is good to have an agency such as the planning or park commission, historical society, or improvement society act in an advisory capacity about all changes which are made on the common - even to such incidental matters as the color, design, and placement of purely functional trim such as street signs, fire plugs, and highway markers.

Every attempt should be made to prevent the placing of parking lots in such a location as to destroy the beauty. In some cases, this may be prevented by using the power of the city to control the entrances or exits to the lot.

#### APPLICATION TO FUTURE PLANNING WORK

Today the plans for a construction job are completed in the drafting room, whereas the town common grew with on-the-site construction which produced a naive and irregular layout. It would be senseless to simulate this effect that took centuries to develop in our modern plans. Yet the inspiration of the beautiful old common should stimulate modern planners to something other than fruitless imitation. If we could pull from the common those qualities which elevate "human values" and apply them to modern

building methods and modern life then we could build an environment for the future which would help to organize the life of this disorganized society.

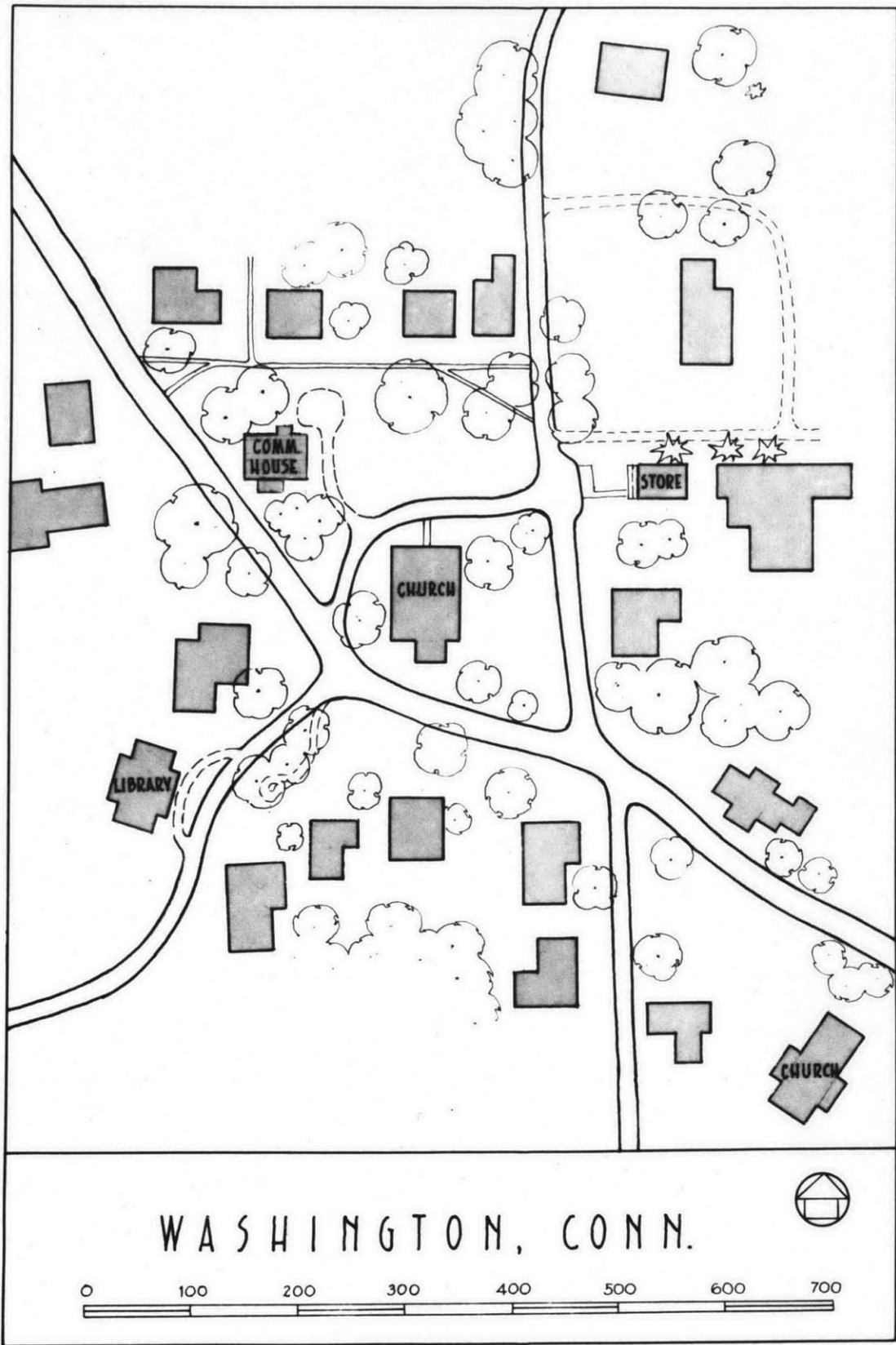
People today do not have a well-defined sociological status, and are confused and unsure as to their social needs and wants. The cities have grown in a frenzy of efficiency and mechanization into a monotonous sprawl. They have lost all "human scale", and have become so large that no civic center can function as the town common does. Since this civic center, or focus for group life cannot function for large cities, the place to apply the social and esthetic values of the common is on the community level. There is opportunity through the construction of large-scale projects, urban redevelopment, and the New Town programs for planners to create and control every aspect of their plans. Imitation of the common is false, but application of many of its social functions and principles of design should be applied not only in the future community or neighborhood centers, but in all site planning.

Although this was purely an esthetic study, the social and psychological significance of physical design upon individuals was illustrated so strongly to the author that he feels a detailed study of the social implications of various courts in housing projects would make a very interesting study.

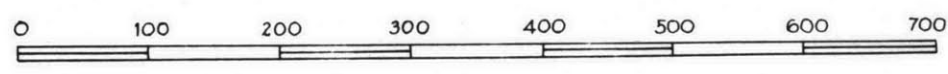
Due to the shortage of time during the analysis, nothing constructive was concluded about the effect of the microclimatology. An investigation into the effect of the microclimate upon some limited area would be another interesting possibility for a future thesis.

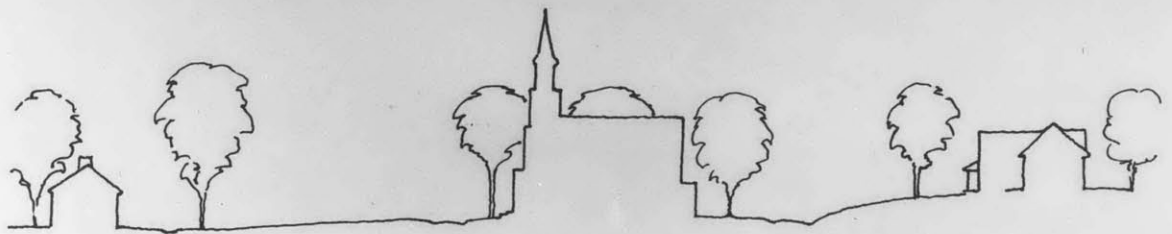
APPENDIX A





WASHINGTON, CONN.





← 450' →

## WASHINGTON, CONN.

The Washington common is undoubtedly the most beautiful of any that was visited in this study. It is square in shape with a beautiful church in the center. Large old elms are scattered throughout the area. Although the town shifted to the river with the industrial boom, this green on top of the hill still serves a primary social function for the people of the town through the use of the church, community house, library, and drugstore.

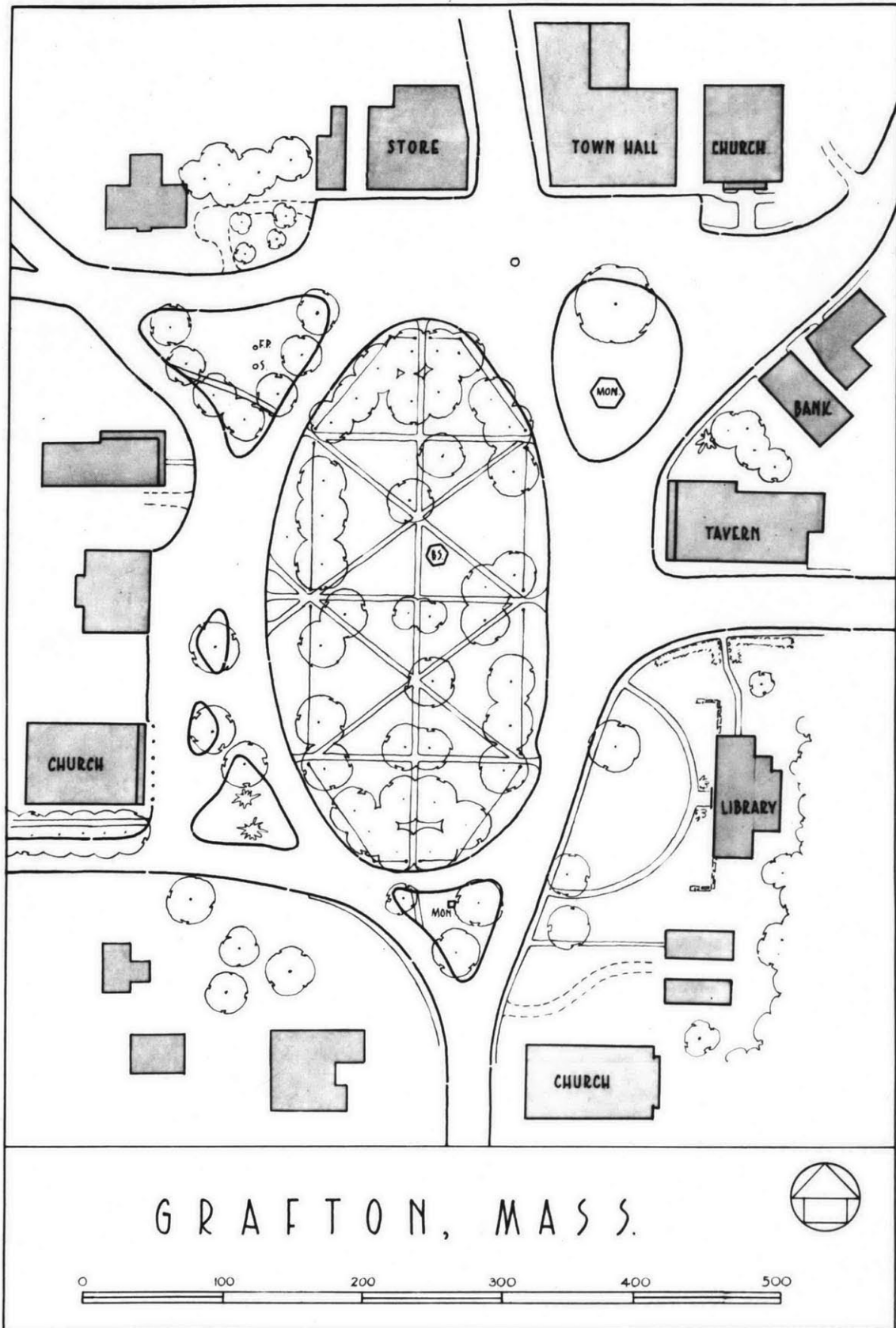
There is a wonderful unity that is felt throughout this entire common. This is due to several factors. It is due to the dominance of the church. It is due to the harmony and balance caused by the size, spacing, and symmetry of the buildings and trees. It is due to the straightforward manner in which the buildings express their function.

An interesting variety also exists. The church being in the center, and the main road cutting diagonally across the common, prevent its true shape from being easily recognized. <sup>15</sup> To an observer, it appears to be composed of numerous connecting enclosed spaces. Some of these are on different levels due to the slope of the ground. (This also increases the variety and interest.)

The effect of spaciousness that is created by being able to look from one of these enclosed areas to another is very pleasant. As can be seen by the photographs, the view past the nearer buildings to the more distant ones increases this effect.

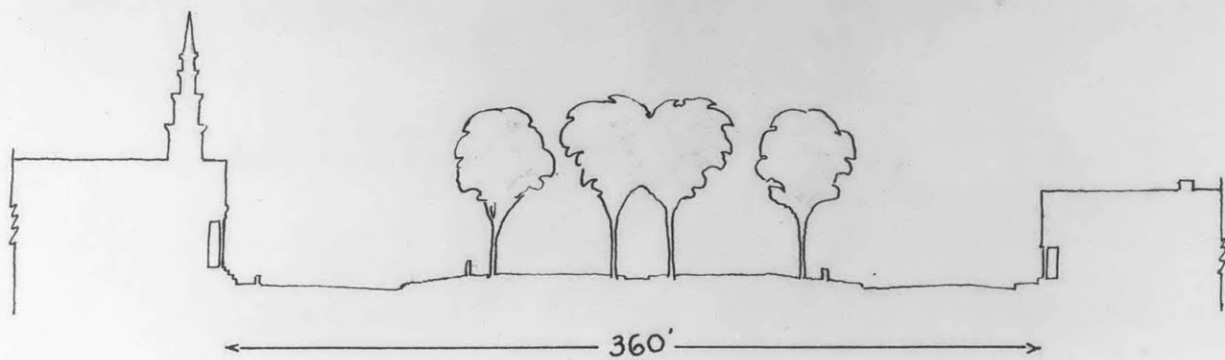
The enclosing walls are definite, although there is considerable space between the buildings. The gaps are filled by the hills in the distance. The approaches and the surrounding country are very beautiful, placing one in an "expectant" attitude before seeing the common. There is no non-functional trim. The grass is well maintained, and the transition from grass to road is cleanly and evenly done.

The treatment of the road is especially good. Luckily the traffic is light, and does not interfere with the pleasantness of the common. The main road is depressed several feet, and therefore is visible only at close range. The curving, flowing roads seem to be an integral part of the common and do not cut it into separate sections.









## GRAFTON, MASS.

The Grafton common is very famous because of its history, because of its beauty, and because it is known to be so "typical" of all New England commons. Every feature expected to be found in a New England common is found here, combined in an extremely interesting and pleasing way.

The six approaches to this common play an important role in the creation of the total esthetic effect. The southwestern approach gives no warning whatever. The road appears to lead into the sky over a hill, and then suddenly one is confronted with a beautiful view of the center of the town laid about a quiet and restful green. This is startling, yet delightful. The other approaches create an "expectancy" for what is seen. The blocked vistas, the church spires in the skyline, the beautiful residential quality of the streets, or the uphill or downhill nature of the approaches seem to imply that something is coming.

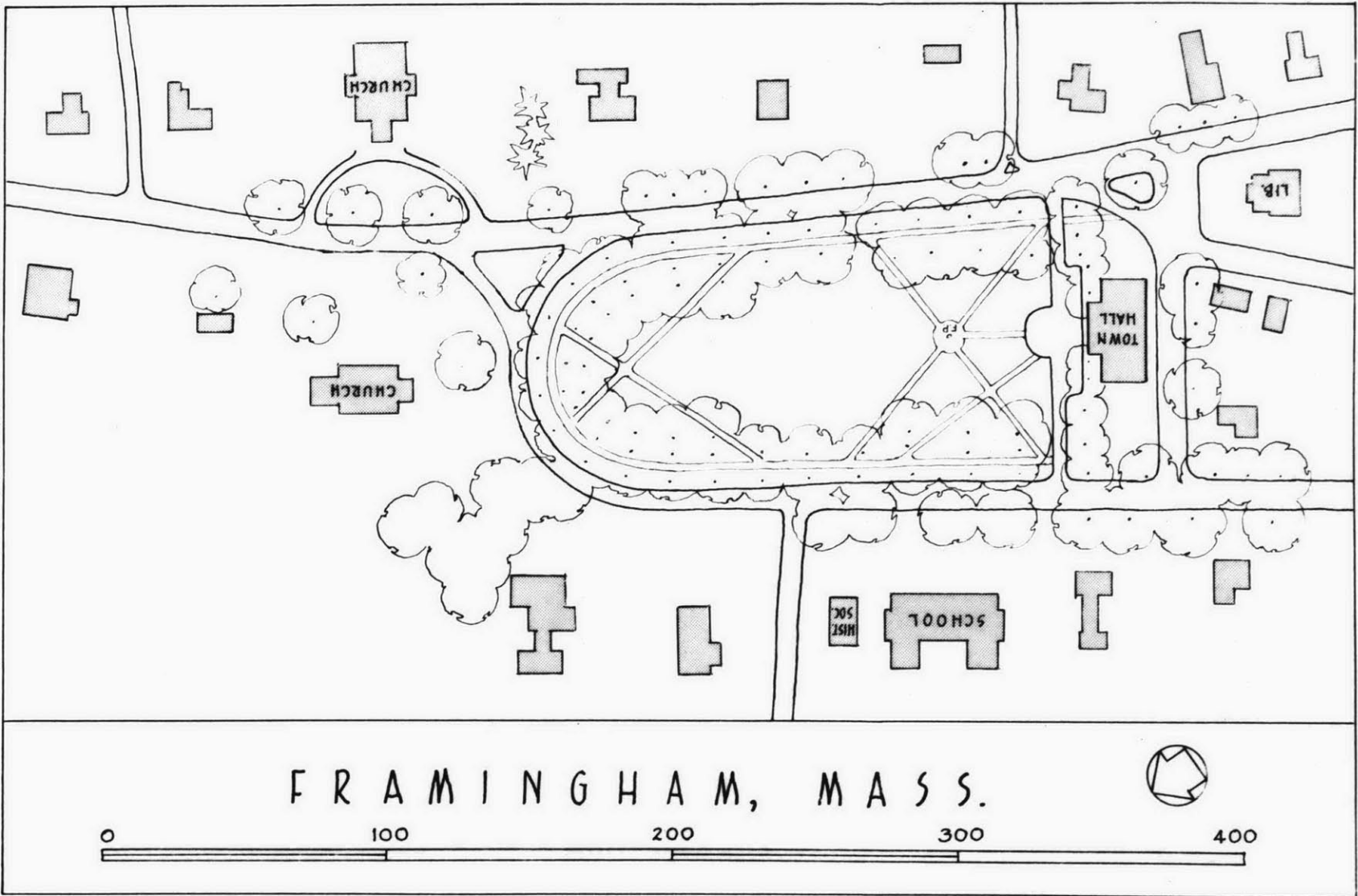
The functional value is also an important factor in the beauty of this common. The various functions are separated into different areas about the common, yet related in an honest and appropriate way. Down in the lower section are the more gregarious uses. Here the commercial area, bank, town hall, and the bus stop facilitate social gathering. The western side is the informal, historical area, with a quasi-private atmosphere. The southern section, high up, is dominated by a church, and has a quiet residential tone. The area around the tavern on the east serves another social function for the men and the "out-of-towners".

The central fenced-in part of the common is felt to belong to each of these areas. There is more here, however, than just a functional



esthetic value. Formal and expressive values are also present, created by the lines and masses of the trees and fence. The many trees soaring into the sky seem to dominate the entire area. The contrast between the area inside the fence with the many trees, and the bare open area outside focuses more attention on these trees. The tall elms encircled by a fence have become symbolic of the common and all that it means. The horizontal lines of the iron rail fence create a restful serene feeling, while the gravelled walks provide soft and informal texture.

The slope of the ground is used well. Contrary to the usual location, this common is on the side of a hill. Uphill is the church with a tall spire that carry the eyes even higher than the hill and the trees; downhill one tends naturally to drift toward the active town center. This is as it should be. The slope of the hill seems to funnel the people to the busiest point.







## FRAMINGHAM, MASS.

All of the civic functions except commerce are found around this lovely common. The area has a quiet residential quality, one end of it dominated by a church, and the other end by the community building.

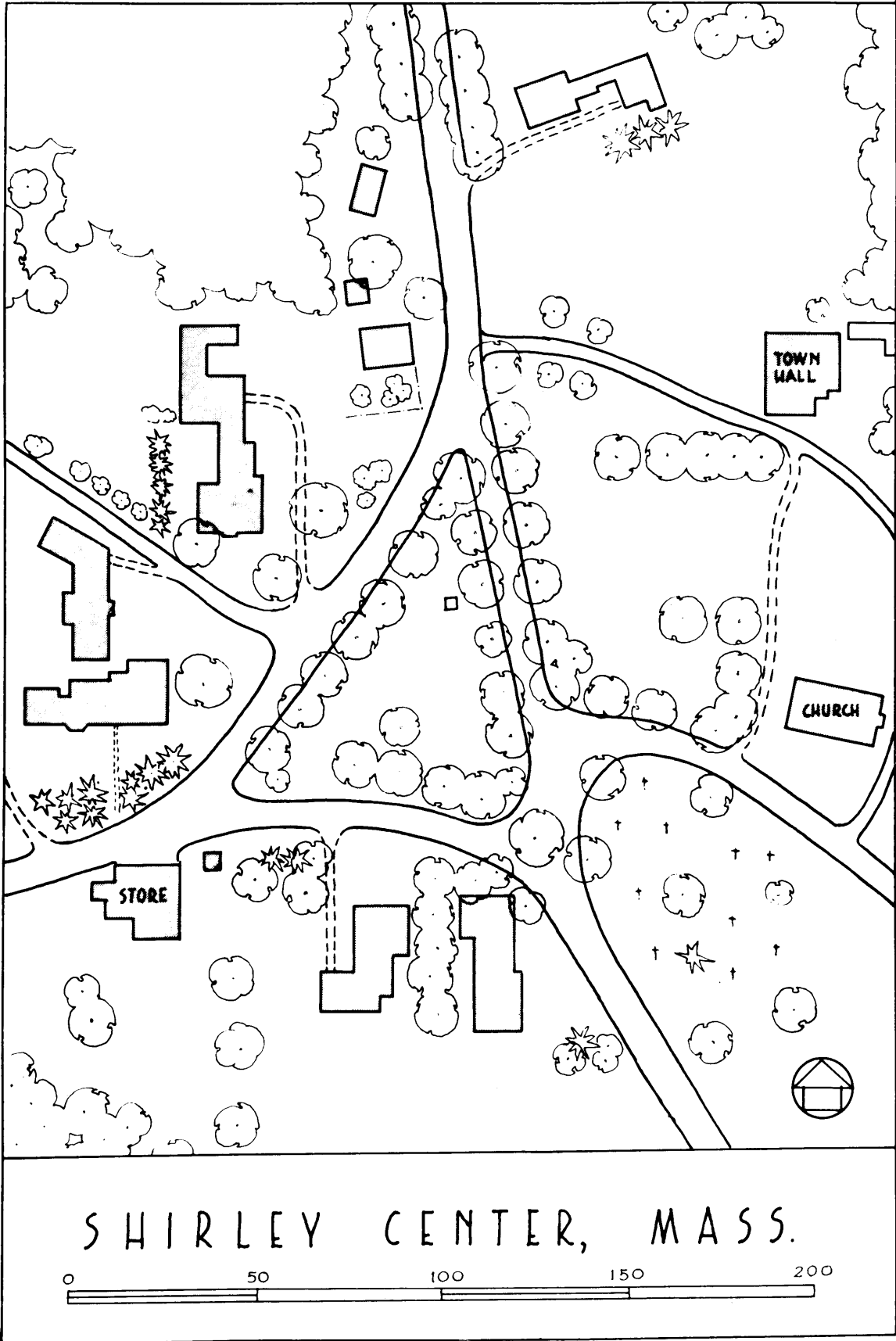
The wide smooth expanse of green grass, and the order and simplicity of the layout is very satisfying, very restful. The uses of the common and the various buildings are immediately understood. The design of the buildings and features clarifies their functions. For instance, the design and the red color of the dominant church is very inspiring. The vertical white pillars, the soaring spire, the brick pattern and the angular lines all stir the emotion. All of these features are repeated in the design of a fountain on the common in front of it. The repetition magnifies the effect. The other church is reduced to a secondary role (although a larger church) by using a smooth mild cream-white finish and by breaking the lines of it with landscaping. The symbolic stained glass window is clearly seen, however, and the religious atmosphere is spread throughout that end of the common.

The approaches to the common are very beautiful. The area is enclosed in all directions, but there is a depth of view due to wide spacing of the buildings. This is quite important to the overall effect.

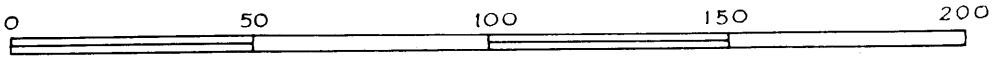
A few benches, a fountain, and a flag pole are the only accessories. The clean neat paths and the absence of other useless or ugly trim enhances the beauty. The trees are large and graceful. Their "Infinite curves" contracted with the symmetry and straight lines of the

building and evergreens creates a pleasing variety.

The proportions and scale of this green and these buildings are very good although a small flat modern house at the edge of the common mars the total effect slightly.

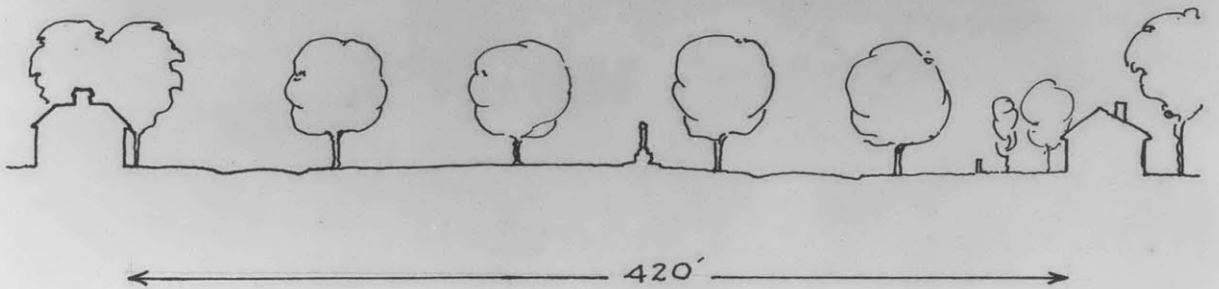


SHIRLEY CENTER, MASS.









## SHIRLEY CENTER

The common in Shirley Center is very pleasant. The thick uncut green grass, the rough bark on the maple trees, the irregular alignment and spacing of the buildings, and the free manner in which the roads pass through the area all combine to produce a very informal atmosphere.

The approaches to the common are of the same character found in the common. Rows of large old maples line the narrow roads, establishing a rustic quality which is continued in the common. The approach from the south rises over a slight incline at the edge of the triangular green. The up-grade and trees in the sky create an "expectancy", yet the observer is surprised by the pleasant common that suddenly surrounds him.

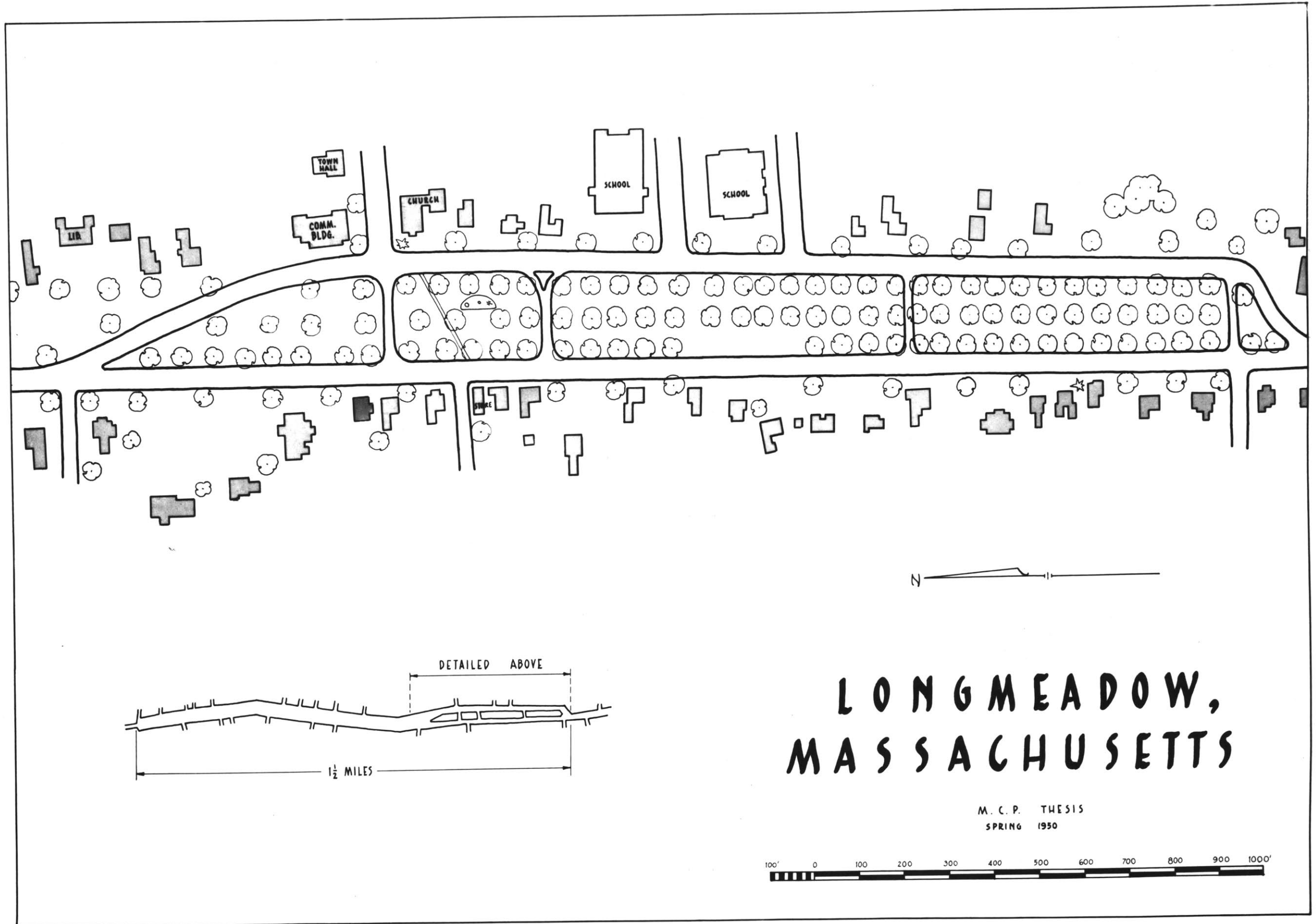
Although the plan shows a triangular common formed by roads, this shape is not obvious from the ground. Only the N-S road has any significant traffic on it, and the other roads do not cut up the area as they usually do in other town commons.

The area is well enclosed. Only one of the roads lead straight away, and it is blocked by a large tree at the common. The esthetics of the area is weakest about the Town Hall, as it is not properly related to the church, is too far away, and does not enhance the dominance of the Church in its present location. The location of the store and the cemetery is very appropriate and adds to the functional value.

The harmony of the area and the contrast and variety created by the building causes a strong formal value. The contrast of the smooth texture of the buildings to the rustic texture of the other components,

and the contrast of the dark shutters to the white and yellow buildings is very interesting.

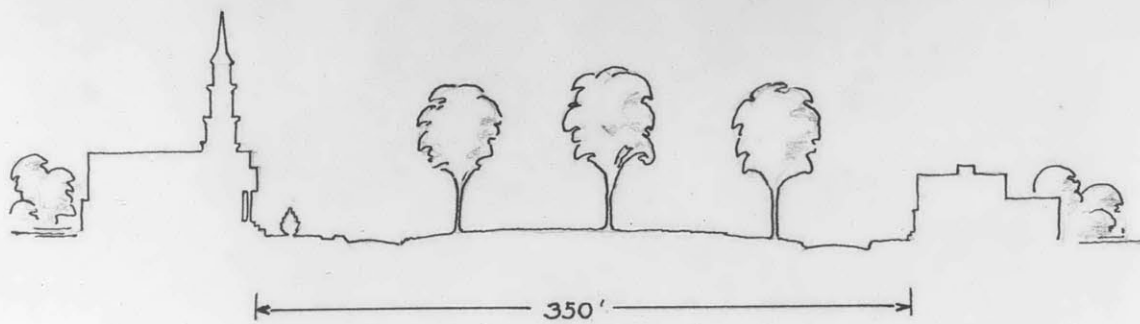
The size of the area is excellent, producing a close friendly atmosphere.



# LONGMEADOW, MASSACHUSETTS

M. C. P. THESIS  
SPRING 1950





## LONGMEADOW, MASS.

The town of Longmeadow is one of the wealthier suburbs of Springfield. The approach to the main common is quite beautiful. Large and attractive homes line public land along each side of the main street,, presenting a clean, neat, and well-kept appearance, and creating a feeling of the community spirit and civic pride of the people of the town.

This long main street common is much more beautiful than others of this type chiefly because of the way it develops into one dominant area - one central point. There are several factors which cause this. They are:

(1) The design of the public buildings express the center. The church with its tall white spire, a large community building, and two schools are at the center of the town. The beautiful and expensive design of these public buildings is further evidence of the civic pride of the town.

(2) The shape of the common creates the same effect. It is widest (hence most important) at this central point. The transition of the common, shifting as it widened, from the outside of the road to the inside, heightens the expectancy for an impressive center.

(3) The slope of the ground is gently up toward the center from both directions.

(4) The spacing of the buildings is closer in the center, thus implying its importance.

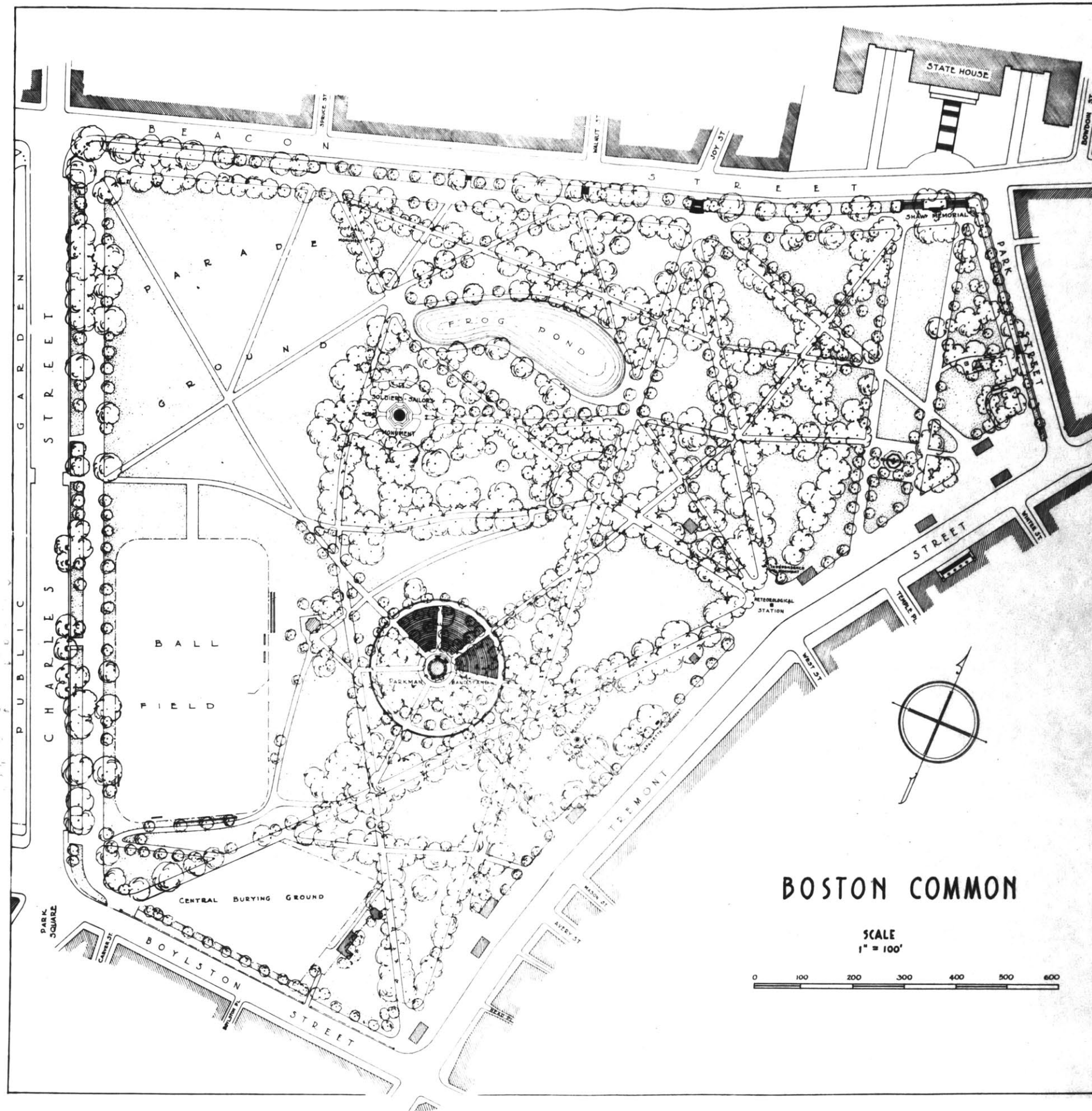
There is no excessive or ugly trim. The few benches are placed only about the central area. The grass is well-maintained, and grows down

to the edge of the pavement, leaving no ragged or bare ground.

The existing function of the common is predominantly a beauty spot. There is an annual speaker or celebration on Memorial Day, but no other organized gatherings occur. Baseball is not allowed. It serves as a promenade and park area in much the same way as the Esplanade along the Charles River in Boston.

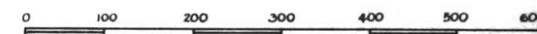
The set-back of the buildings forming the enclosing walls along the main section of the common is varied, forming many interesting enclosed spaces. There is a good view to the distant hills between some of the buildings, since the common runs along the top of a ridge.





BOSTON COMMON

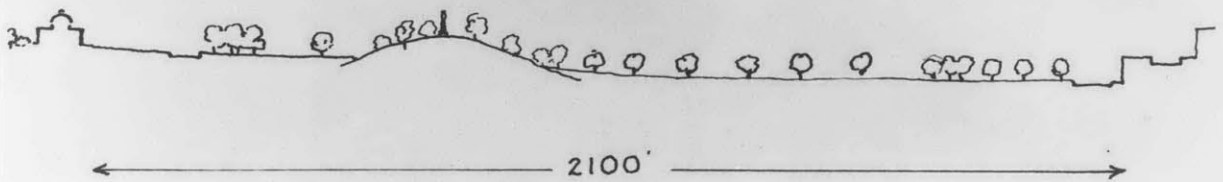
SCALE  
1" = 100'



Boston, Mass.







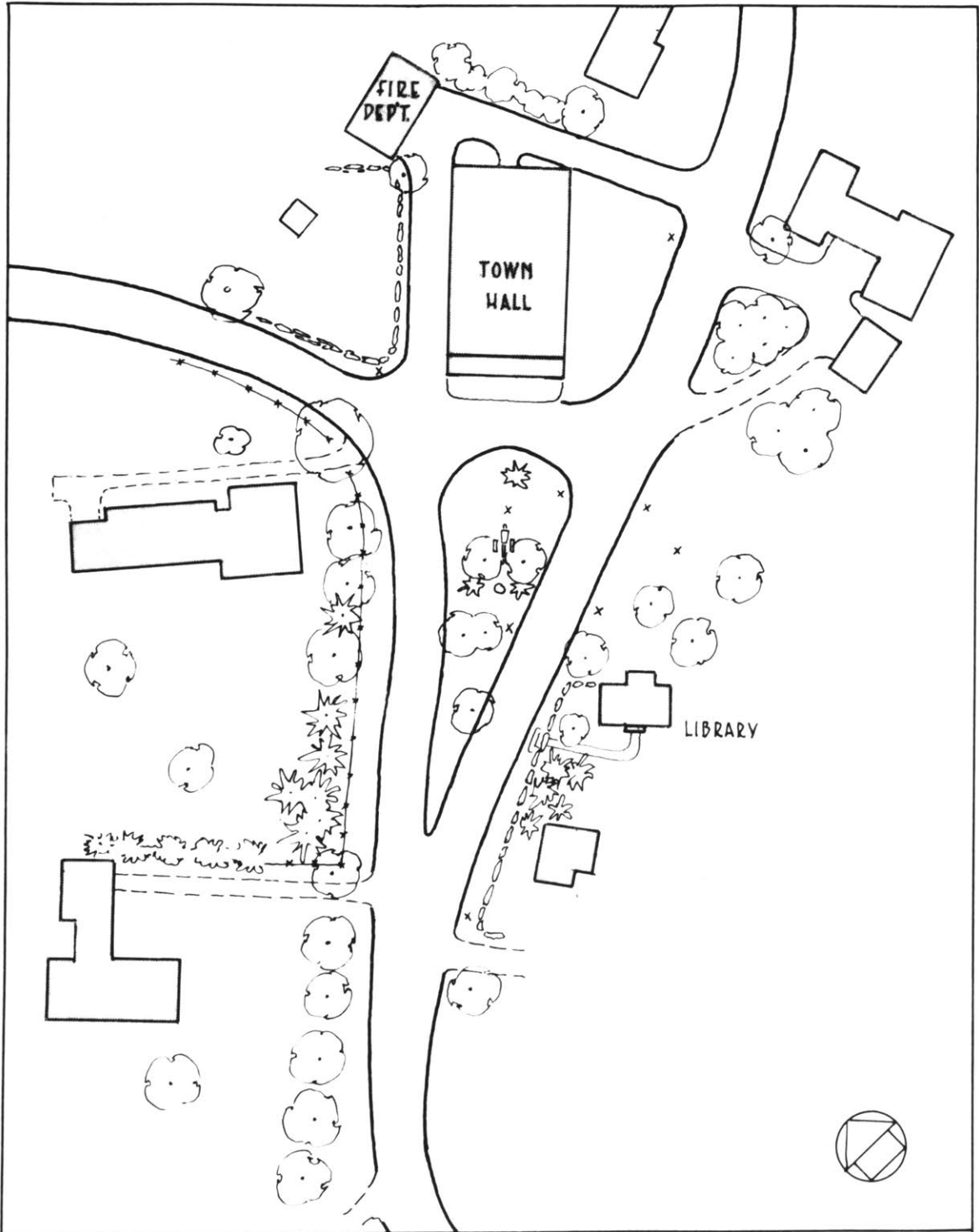
## BOSTON, MASS.

The largest common of them all is the Boston Common. Its size makes comparison with other town commons difficult other than on a very subjective plane.

The metropolitan area that it serves is so large that "face-to-face" relations of the people cannot be maintained through the activities on the common as they are in the smaller towns. This is not due to a lack of activities, however, as there are many various uses to which the common is put. As Justice Hanify said, "for about three centuries the inhabitants as a community, as individuals, families, groups, companies, regiments, audiences, have sought and found rest, recreation, edification, and inspiration on the Common." <sup>16</sup> This common has done more than any of the others to create the symbolic feature of the New England Town Common. Many attempts have been made to encroach upon this common, but they have always failed for the people would not allow it. The Boston Common represents to them everything that is good in their government, their history, and their religion.

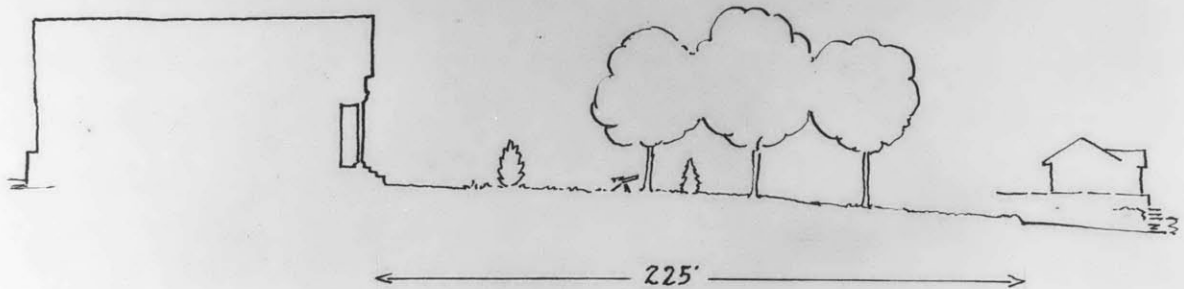
The land itself is a wonderful spot of nature in the midst of the monotonous metropolitan sprawl. The contrast of the natural setting of the pond, trees, and grass to the man-made urban city around it is delightful.

The variety of the common formed by the undulating ground, the varying uses and the open and wooded sections makes it very interesting. The manner in which the ground slopes uphill to the State House is quite effective. Also the central location increases its functional value.



BEDFORD, NEW HAMPSHIRE





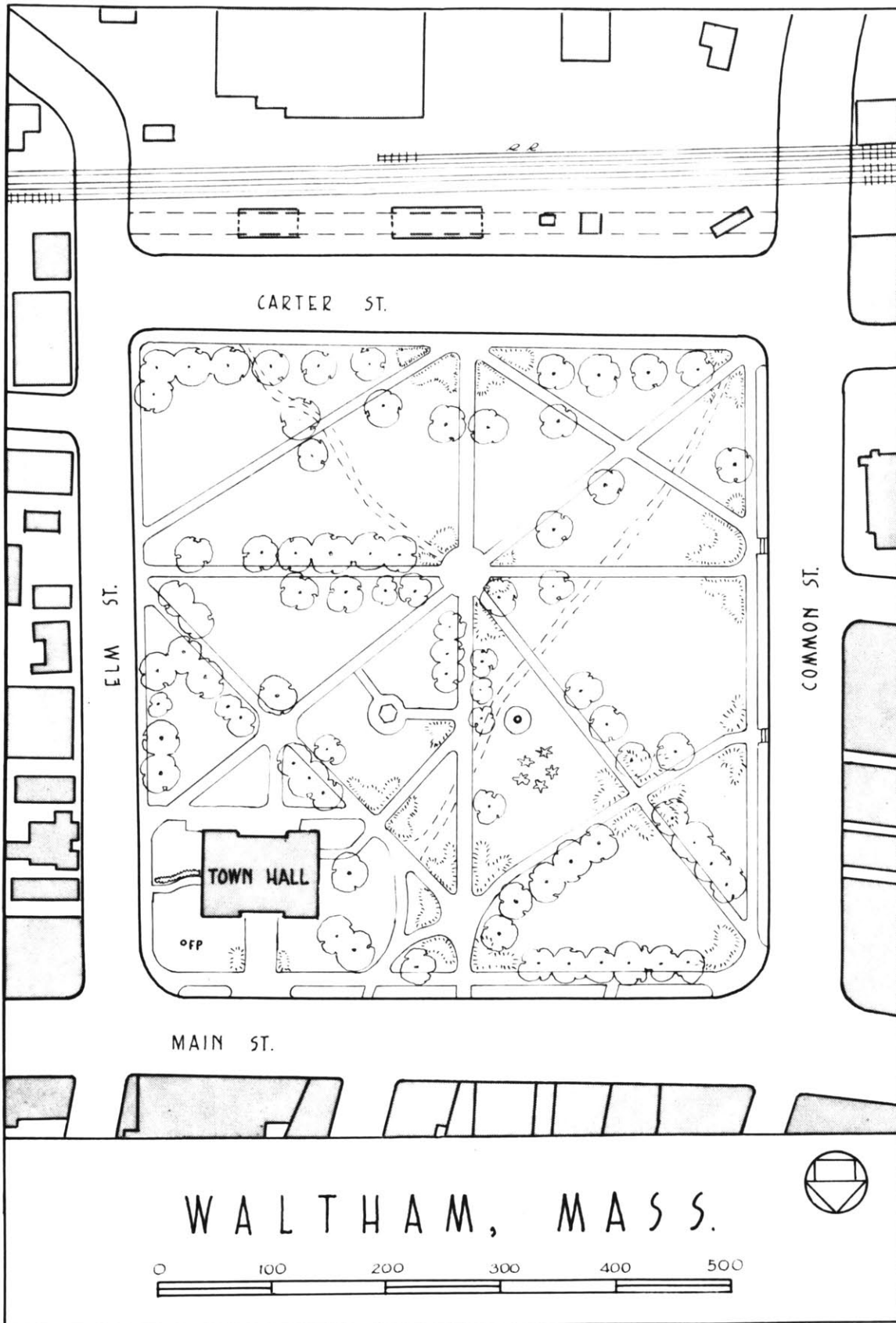


## BEDFORD, NEW HAMPSHIRE

The Bedford common is very ugly. The town hall, being a very beautiful, but a very large building without a spire, creates a massive heavy expressive value. More space is needed in front of it. The common is much too small. The little triangular patch of ground cannot serve any function except maybe as a "rest for the eyes". It is far from this, however, as there is no grass; there are almost as many telephone poles as there are trees, and the main features (a stone plaque, a cannon, and four trees) are jammed together in the center within a radius of 5 feet.

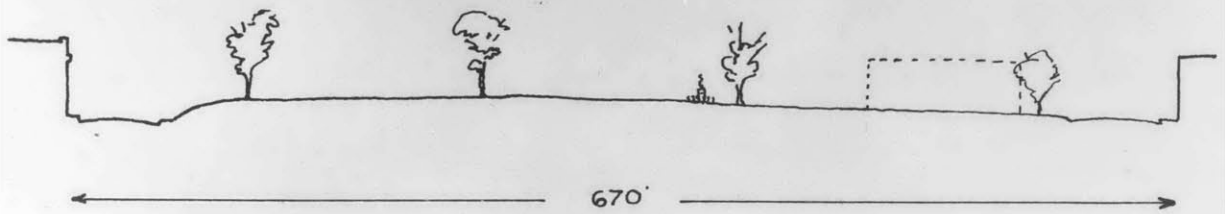
The common is made to appear even smaller by the "hemingin" effect of spruces planted along the edges of the yards on each side of it. These screens of evergreens are used by the residences in an attempt to shut out the traffic disturbances, but they reduce the spaciousness of the area and shut from view the lovely homes. The result is a small cramped enclosed space, disrupted by traffic and towered over by the large town hall, a view of which is marred by telephone wires.

The enclosing walls are weak because the buildings and trees form an irregular and jumbled variety. There is no unity. There is too much dominance of one building, and not enough harmony of spacing or size of the others. The entire N-E side is open to an ugly and unattractive view.









## WALTHAM, MASS.

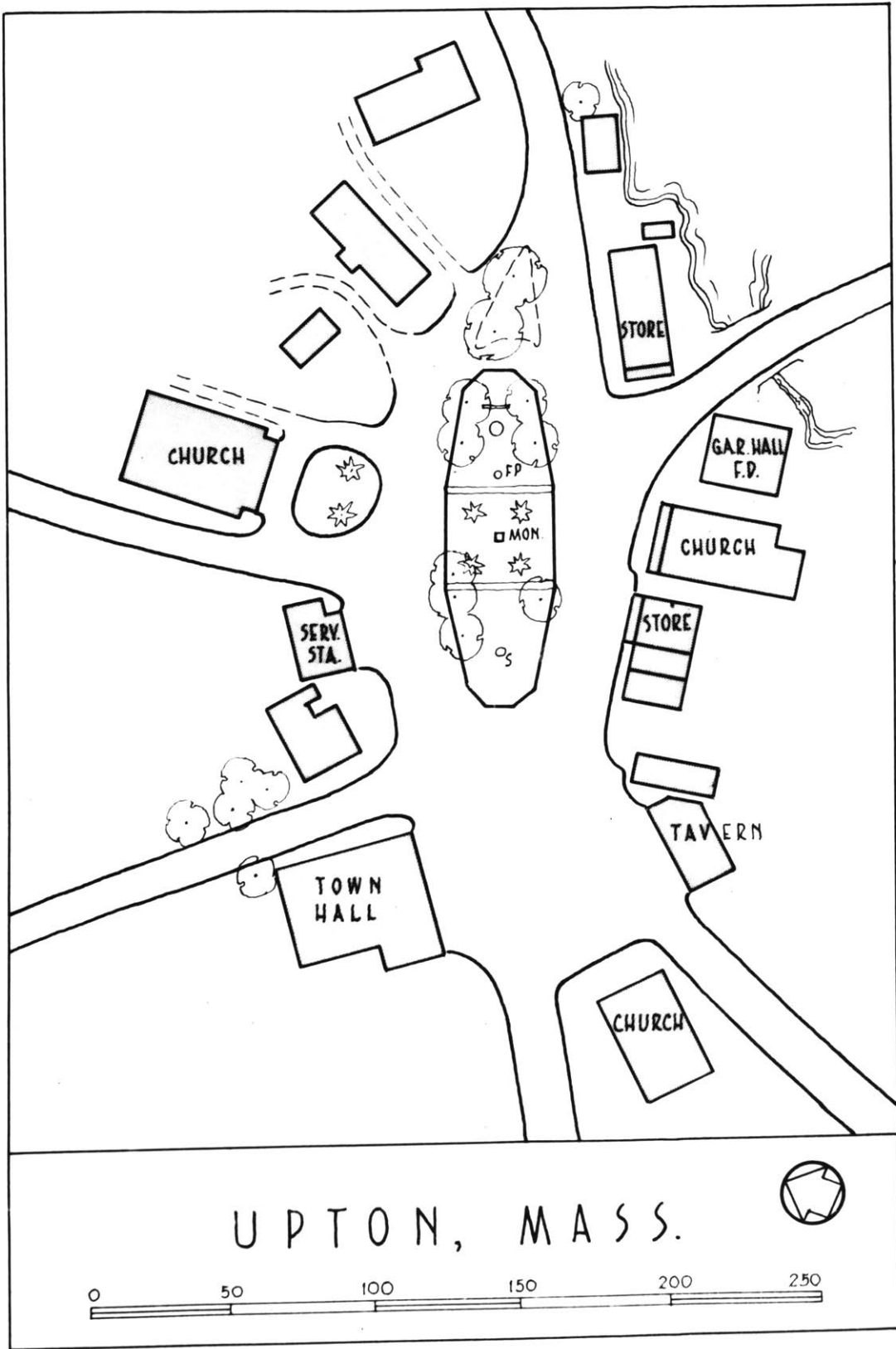
Built in 1905 during the "city beautiful" movement of that period, the common in Waltham today is extremely ugly. It is surrounded on three sides by commerce, and on the fourth by industry.

The landscaping is hideous. Many of the trees were destroyed by the hurricane of 1938, and those that remain are shabby and ill-shaped. The expressive values created by the lines and shapes of these trees with their stumpy limbs are very irritating and disturbing. The shubbery is planted thickly around the intersections of the paths, serving no function other than to block the views and movements of the pedestrians. The irregularity of the shape and layout of these shrubs as well as their senseless location is awkward. Vernon Lee said, "Beauty has come to be associated with all our notions of order, of goodness, of health, and of a complete life."<sup>17</sup> This landscape exemplifies death, misery, and uselessness.

The trim also adds to the ugliness of the common. The main corner of the common is cluttered with signs, fountains, and various other ornaments. Throughout the common there are many useless stakes and stumps. Ugly cast iron fences have been placed around monuments and trees. These nonfunctional accessories disrupt the overall "rightness" of the common. They weaken the functional value.

Although there are many paved walks, their misplacement is illustrated by the dirt paths worn across the grass in other directions. These dirt paths, combined with other grassless areas, illustrate the unfitness of the area, and also add more agitation to an already restless feeling.

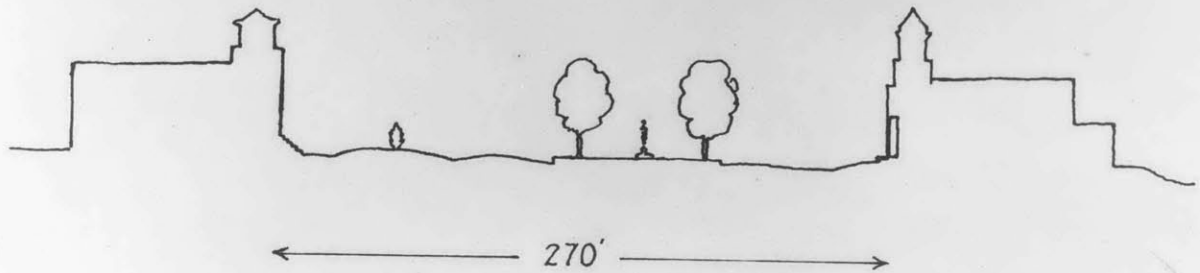
Again, as in other unpleasant commons, the enclosing walls are a confused variety of heights, and masses, and one corner in particular (S-W) falls away to nothing due to the way the street opens up the enclosure. All is not bad however. The manner in which the streets are depressed far enough to hide the automobiles is successful, and the size of the common is about right for the height of the enclosing walls, the size of the city and the functions it serves.



UPTON, MASS.







## UPTON, MASS.

The Upton common is unpleasant. The general shape of the enclosure is interesting and the site is on the edge of a beautiful pond, yet the total esthetic effect is very poor.

This is a good example of the result of excessive road surface. The small patch of green grass is negligible in the large sea of hard surface roadway. The black patched macadam surface reflecting heat and appearing hard, is discordant with the character desired of a common. The wide expanse of pavement at the western end of the common is not needed, and is a detriment to the functional value of the whole. Telephone lines and poles effectively cut the open space in every direction.

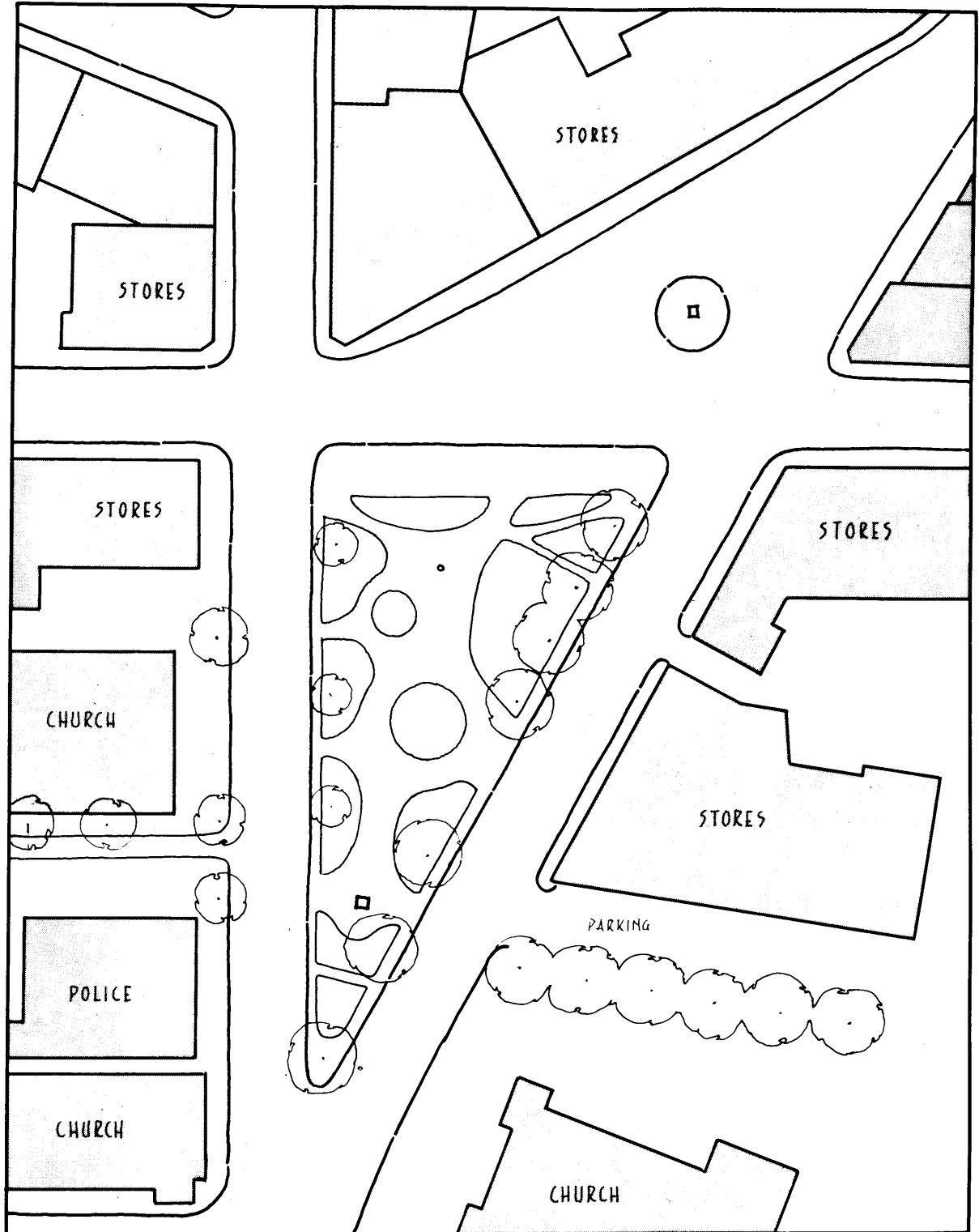
The silhouette of the enclosing walls is another major cause of the ugliness of the common. The detailed outline of some of the individual buildings is confusing and disturbing due to the extreme variety.

The scale of the various buildings is too varied. The filling station and repair shop, and several of the other buildings are too small or too low in relation to the other structures.

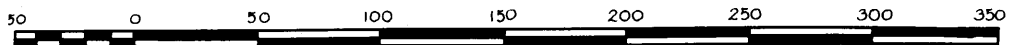
The color of the buildings does not help. The two churches are white, but the majority are grey, cream, red or green. There is no overall unity - no dominant feature or idea in the entire area.

The common itself is too small, has too few trees, too many accessories, and is dominated by the traffic and parking.

The roads which lead straight away from the common destroy the enclosed feeling which is desired.

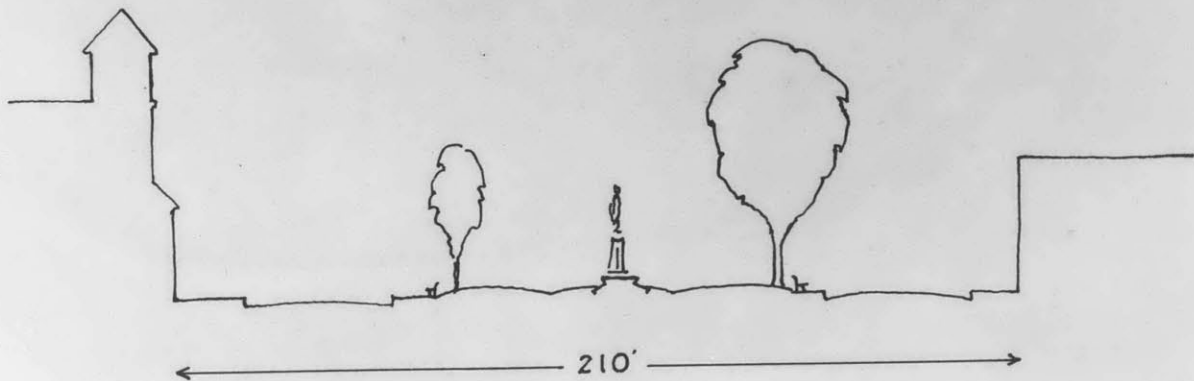


# LEOMINSTER, MASS.









## LEOMINSTER, MASS.

The common in Leominster is triangular in shape, and is located in the center of the town. The surrounding buildings are predominantly commercial, although the N-W area does have some religious and civic buildings. None of these are dominant buildings however, which unify the area, or serve as a central focus.

Again as in the Upton common there is an excess of street surface and a deficiency of green grass. The common also serves as a traffic rotary.

The triangular shape for a common is a basically poor shape, as its lines attract your attention to the corners which are usually open and weak. The S-E corner of this common is not as bad as the others, as the street is curved, thereby enclosing the space quite pleasantly.

The height of the enclosing walls around the churches and civic buildings is quite good, although the parking lot adjacent to one of the churches disrupts the enclosure and is inharmonious with the character of a common. The height of the stores to the East is much too small.

The large elms on one side of the common, and the small saplings on the other make it appear off balance. The color about the common is quite drab. Brown-red brick and gray stone is the prevailing building material.

The trim is poor. Tall wire fences around beds of violets are actually silly looking. The area given to paths is immense considering the small size of the common. A centrally located flag pole is one factor

which causes the paths to be so large.

The photograph of the people sitting around the periphery, looking away from the common is a good illustration of the esthetic value of this common.

APPENDIX B

The following is a list of the towns and cities visited for this thesis. The asterisk behind some means no common was found. Those capitalized are the ones that received detailed analysis.

Connecticut:

Bantam	Granby	Roxbury
Berlin	Guilford	Stamford
Branford	Hamburg*	Suffield
Bridgeport	Hebron	Thompsonville
Bridgewater	Lebanon	Uxbridge
Brookfield*	Litchfield	WASHINGTON
Clinton	Madison	Waterbury
Colchester	Middleton	Watertown
Danbury	Milford	Webster
Douglas	Moodus	Westbrook
Durham	Norwalk	Westport*
East Haddam*	Old Lyme	Woodstock
Fairfield*		

Massachusetts:

Acton	Groveland	Oakham
Amherst	Hadley	Paxton
Asburnham*	Hardwick	Peabody
Ashby	Harvard	Pepperell
Athol	Hubbardson	Petersham
Ayer*	Hudson	Reading
Barre	Huntington	Royalston
Belchertown	Ipswich	Rowley
Billerica	Lancaster	Rutland
Bolton	Lee	Salem
Boxboro*	Leicester	Saugus*
BOSTON	Lennox	Sherborn
Bradford	LEDMINSTER	SHIRLEY CENTER
Brookfield	Lexington	Southboro
Concord	LONGMEADOW	Southboro
Deerfield	Lynn	South Deerfield
Dover	Lynnfield	South Gardner
FRAMINGHAM	Maynard*	South Natick
Georgetown	Middleton*	Stockbridge
GRAFTON	Milford	Sudbury
Granville	Newbury	Sunderland
Great Barrington	New Marlboro*	Templetown
Greenfield	North Adams	Tolland*
Groton	North Reading	Topsfield

Townsend  
UPTON  
Wakefield  
WALTHAM  
Warre  
Wayland

Wenham  
Westhampton  
Weston  
West Boxford  
West Brookfield  
Winchendon

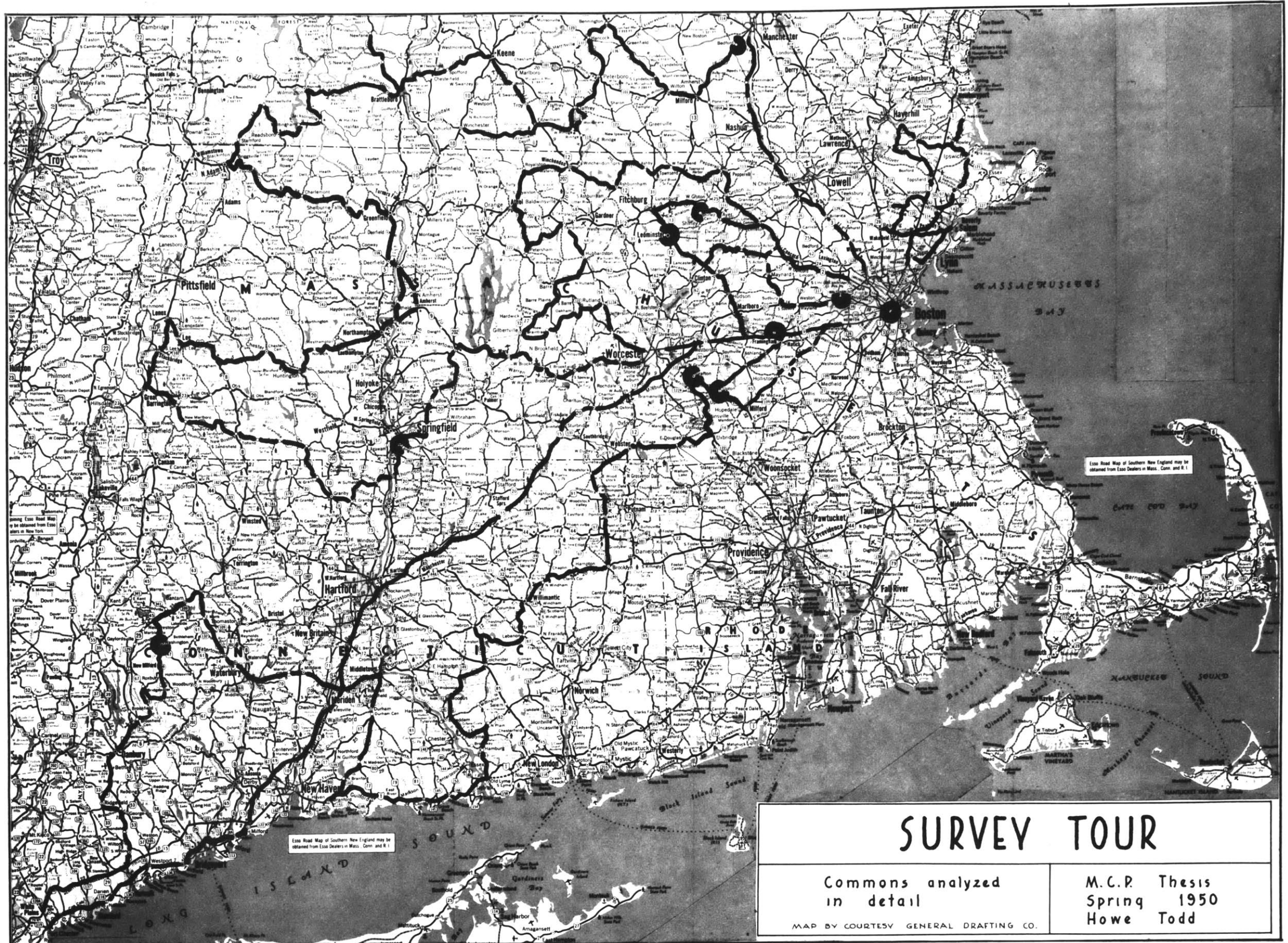
New Hampshire:

BEDFORD  
Bennington\*  
Brattleboro  
Fitzwilliams  
Greenfield\*  
Hancock

Jacksonville\*  
Jaffrey  
Keene  
Milford  
Newfane  
Peterboro

Readsboro  
Richmond\*  
Troy\*  
West Rindge  
Wilton  
Winchester





# SURVEY TOUR

Commons analyzed  
in detail

M.C.P. Thesis  
Spring 1950  
Howe Todd

MAP BY COURTESY GENERAL DRAFTING CO.

Route of Survey

## FOOTNOTES

- 1.) Edman, Arts and The Man, p. 16.
- 2.) Creighton, T. H., Building for Modern Man, p. 91.
- 3.) Torrosian, Abram, A Guide To Esthetics, p. 52.
- 4.) Olmsted, F. L., Proceedings on the Second National Conference on City Planning, - Rochester, N. Y., Univ. Press Cambridge, p. 30., 1911
- 5.) Weeden, W. B., Economic and Social History of New England, 1620-1789, p.51.
- 6.) Mumford, Lewis, Sticks and Stones, p. 28.
- 7.) Eliot, S. A., A.M.D.D., A History of Cambridge, Mass., p. 110
- 8.) Howe, M. A. DeWolfe, Boston Common Scenes from Four Centuries.
- 9.) Cram, Robert, New England Town Commons, p. 9
- 10.) Edman, Irwin, ARTS AND THE MAN, p. 9
- 11.) Hoffman, Hans. Search for the Real, p. 90
- 12.) Hogarth, The Functional Tradition, Architectural Review, p. 67.
- 13.) Teague, W. D., Design This Day, p. 193.
- 14.) Scott, G., The Architecture of Humanism, p. 228.
- 15.) Camillo Sitte says that a large building should not be placed in the center of an open space. This is true when it is obviously the situation, but here the roads, the irregularity of the enclosing walls, and the slope of the ground conceal the fact.
- 16.) Hanify, "Reservation and Report," Superior Court, p. 342
- 17.) Teague, W. D., Design This Day, p. 5



## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Contril, Henry, Understanding Man's Social Behavior: Preliminary Notes, Princeton, N. J., 1947.
- Cram, Robert N., New England Town Commons, Landscape Architecture Thesis, Harvard, 1922.
- Creighton, T. H., ed., Building For Modern Man, Princeton University Press, 1949.
- Deming, William S., The Church on The Green, Brentano's, Hartford, 1941.
- Edman, Irwin, Arts and the Man, Mentor Books, 1949.
- Edman, Irwin, The Philosophy of Santayana, Modern Library, 1936.
- Eliot, S. H., A.M.D.D., A History of Cambridge, Mass., Cambridge Tribune, 1913.
- Fallon, R. B., "Form Still Follows Function", Progressive Arch., Dec. 1947, p. 20.
- Firey, Walter, Land Uses in Central Boston, Harvard Univ. Press, Cambridge, 1946.
- Furst, Herbert, The Eye of the Beholder, Apollo, 40: 8-9 J1. '44.
- Giedion, Siegfried, "On The Force of Esthetic Values", Architectural Record, June, 1947.
- Greeley, William, R., "Village Centers in Old New England", House Beautiful, vol. 45, May 1919, p. 280. vol. 47, Jan. 1920, p. 20.
- Hazen, Rev. Henry A., History of Billerica, Mass., A. Williams and Co., Boston, 1883.
- Hegemam, Werner, and Elbert Pelts, American Vitruvius, Civic Art, N. Y., The Architectural Book Publishing Co., 1922.
- Hoffman, Hans, Search For The Real, Addison Gallery of American Art, 1948.
- Howe, M. A. De Wolfe, Boston Common Scenes from Four Centuries, Riverside Press, Cambridge, 1910.
- Hubbard, Henry V., The Appearance of the City, Planners Journal, Jan.-Feb., 1937.
- Hudson, A. S., History of Sudbury, Mass., Town of Sudbury, 1889.
- Hudson, Charles, History of The Town of Lexington, Wiggin and Lunt, 1868.
- Kent, Louise, A., Village Greens in New England, Barrows and Company, N. Y., 1948.
- Mumford, Lewis, "Monumentalism, Symbolism and Style," Architectural Review, April 1949, p. 173.

BIBLIOGRAPHY, (Cont'd)

- Mumford, Lewis, Sticks and Stones, W.W. Norton and Co., N.Y., 1924.
- Olmsted, F. L., "Introductory Address on City Planning", Proceedings of the 2nd National Conference on City Planning, University Press, Cambridge, 1911.
- Paige, Lucius R., History of Cambridge, Mass., Riverside Press, Cambridge, 1877.
- Pepper, S. C. The Basis of Criticism in The Arts, Harvard Univ. Press, 1945.
- Read, Herbert, Art Now, New York, 1948.
- Reed, Henry Hope, Rome, The Third Sack., Architectural Review, Feb. 1950.
- Saarinen, E., The City, Its Growth, Its Decay, Its Future, Reinhold Pub. Co., 1943.
- Scott, Geoffrey, The Architecture of Humanism, Scribner's Sons, N. Y., 1924.
- Sharp, Thomas, The Anatomy of The Village, Penguin Books, 1946.
- Sitte, Camillo, The Art of Building Cities, Reinhold Publishing Co., N.Y., 1945.
- Stevens, Herbert, On Reading Sette, A.I.P. Journal, Summer, 1946., p. 30.
- Teaque, W. D., Design This Day, Harcourt Brace and Co., N. Y., 1940.
- Torossian, Aram, A Guide To Esthetics, Stamford Univ. Press, Calif., 1937.
- "The First Three Centuries", City of Cambridge, 1946.
- "The Functional Tradition", Architectural Review, vol, CVII #637 Jan. 1950.
- "The Passing of The Village Green", House and Garden, vol. 46:3, Sept. 1924, p.68.
- Unwin, Raymond, Town Planning in Practice, Ernst Benn Limited, London, 1932.
- "Village Greens For Town Betterment", House and Garden, vol. 49:6, June 1926, p.112.
- Waugh, F. A., The Town Common, Massachusetts Agricultural College, 1916.
- Webster, Clarence M., Town Meeting Country, Duell, Sloane, and Pierce, N. Y., 1945.
- Weeden, W. B., Economic and Social History of New England, Mifflin and Co., 1890.