

SHOWCASING POWNAL

With the Pownal Historical Society



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I. INTRODUCTION

Project Goals

Big picture goal

The overarching goal of this project is to showcase the rich history and beauty of Pownal in order to enliven the town and encourage economic development. Pownal is the oldest “settled” town in Vermont, once known as the Peaceful Valley for its picturesque landscape, and sometimes called the Southern gateway to Vermont. During the late 1960s it became a bustling locale because of the Green Mountain Racetrack, but when jobs were lost and tourism declined after its closing, Pownal’s economy waned.

Despite Pownal’s disappearance from national attention, a handful of small businesses remain, and its residents appreciate its beauty. In the hopes of enticing new visitors, residents, and businesses, we have created a platform to centralize and advertise historical sites and current day attractions: a website for the Pownal Historical Society.

Deliverables

The Pownal Historical Society website includes several *History* pages on Pownal’s churches, cemeteries, schools, people, places, and maps. It also includes an *Explore* tab, with sections on recreation and businesses (past and present), as well as a tab for *Driving Tours*. Although the website is launched, our clients will have the ability to continually add and alter information to reflect the evolving interests and needs of Pownal residents.

The “Churches” driving tour is complete and will guide visitors to each of the five churches in Pownal. It includes written directions, a colorful graphic map, and links to the church *History*

pages. Our clients plan to use the “Churches” driving tour as a template for tours they will create in the future.

Lastly, we conducted and recorded interviews to learn more about Pownal's history and residents, provide content for website pages, and provide content for a potential podcast which may be published by the Pownal Historical Society down the line. This has helped us develop a more holistic view of Pownal. The stories of Pownal residents are important and should be shared, and the Pownal Historical Society website is a means to do so.

Reasoning Behind the Project

The Town Plan for the Town of Pownal, published in 2019, was a joint effort headed by the Pownal Planning Commission with staff from Land Works, the Bennington County Regional Commission, the Selectboard, an administrative assistant (Linda Sciarappa), and a legal assistant (Megan L. Grace). The project was funded by the Municipal Planning Grant program and administered by the Vermont Department of Housing and Community Development. It is a comprehensive report with topics ranging from economic development to natural resources, and an invaluable resource for anyone interested in Pownal’s past, present, and future.

Section 3.3 of the Town Plan, “Economic Development Goals, Objectives, and Actions,” includes two Statewide Goals created by the Vermont legislature. Pertinent to this project, Statewide Goal #2 is “to provide a strong and diverse economy that provides satisfying and rewarding job opportunities and that maintains high environmental standards, and to expand economic opportunities in areas with high unemployment or low per capita incomes.” Following

from Statewide Goal #2 are five goals specific to economic development in Pownal; each has multiple objectives and action items.¹

Pownal Economic Development Goal #3 is to “enhance Pownal’s appeal as a seasonal and tourist destination as well as a profitable destination for businesses to locate and for prospective residents to live,” and the corresponding Objective for that goal is to “increase the region’s visibility and its visitor tourism economic activities through partnerships with allied groups in the region and through local activities and initiatives that highlight Pownal’s unique traits.” A few of the Action items are particularly relevant to this project. One is to “create informational materials for the town’s website describing and mapping Pownal’s historic, environmental, scenic, recreational, and cultural assets” (#3), and another is to “work with the Pownal Historical Society to promote Pownal as a heritage tourism destination...” (#7). The website we created with the Pownal Historical Society does just that. It includes a History section, with educational pages on the town’s historical assets, such as churches, cemeteries, schools, historic people, and maps.²

To highlight Pownal’s present day assets, we created an *Explore* page with two sections: *Recreation* and *Businesses*. Under *Recreation*, there are individual pages on several locations for recreation in Pownal, such as the Hoosic Bend Trail, Mountain Meadow Preserve, Barber Pond, and Center Street Skatepark. This section is in line with Pownal Economic Development Goal #4: “Use the extensive natural, scenic, and recreational resources to provide recreational opportunities for both Pownal residents and visitors,” as well as its Objective: “Encourage, support, and promote recreational events and opportunities.”

¹ Town of Pownal Planning Commission et al., “Town Plan,” *Bennington County Regional Commission* (April 2019), 13.

² Town of Pownal Planning Commission et al., “Town Plan,” 15.

The *Businesses* section includes the stories of the past businesses that have shaped Pownal, such as the North Pownal Tannery and the Green Mountain Racetrack, adding to the informational aspect of the website. It also includes the stories of the present businesses in Pownal, like Hill Top Farm, Winchester’s Store and Deli, Gammelgården Creamery, local artisans, and more. The goal of this page is to increase the visibility of Pownal’s businesses for residents and visitors alike.

Finally, the website provides visitors the chance to explore Pownal via guided driving tours. The first driving tour has been created, and it focuses on the five standing churches in Pownal. The “Churches” driving tour is to be used as an example and template for future driving tours centered on various subject areas, such as schools, cemeteries, places, and general highlights in each of the four villages of Pownal: Pownal, North Pownal, Pownal Center, and East Pownal. Overall, we hope that the website builds community by sharing Pownal’s rich history, beauty, and present-day assets.

II. BACKGROUND

Vermont

Vermont is one of the most rural states in the country, with approximately 61% of the population residing in rural areas. In this small, rural state, people and communities are often isolated, hindering access to necessary opportunities and institutions to thrive. In a report produced by UVM's Office of Engagement and Center for Rural Studies, a diverse group of 75 leaders from different sectors with different interests convened in eight turntable sessions; a common thread emerged that economic success includes a resilient economy with a combination

of actors from the nonprofit sector, as well as large and small businesses. Schaffer et. al defines resilient community economic development as the “blending of economic development and community development as a holistic approach to community problem solving.”³ Under ideal socioeconomic conditions, community economic development would enable a sustainable array of diverse employment options, giving Vermonters the ability to choose their jobs according to their interests and skill sets.⁴ Simultaneously, this would increase community resilience by equipping people with resources to respond to and adapt to disruptions.

Livable wages are integral to building a resilient economy and escaping intergenerational poverty. While there are many job openings in Vermont, they tend to be the lowest-paying and are not always aligned with desired employment options (Figure 1).⁵ As of August 2021, the unemployment rate in Vermont was 3.0%.⁶ In addition to job opportunities, viable options for healthcare, housing, neighborhood, and education are important.⁷ Vermont lacks adequate affordable housing availability and the year-round housing stock is declining.⁸ Vermont has the second highest rate of second-home ownership after Maine; in 2017, 17% of housing units in the state were second homes.⁹

³ Ron Shaffer, Steve Deller, and Dave Marcouiller, “Rethinking Community Economic Development,” *Economic Development Quarterly* 20, no. 1 (2006): 62, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0891242405283106>.

⁴ Christopher Koliba et al., “Amplifying Vermont’s Economic Resilience: A Community Economic Development Roundtables Report,” UVM’s Office of Engagement and Center for Rural Studies (August 2021): 10, https://www.uvm.edu/sites/default/files/Office-of-Engagement/Roundtable_Report_3.pdf.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 12.

⁶ “Department of Labor,” Vermont’s Unemployment Rate holds at 3.0 percent in August | Department of Labor, September 17, 2021, <https://labor.vermont.gov/press-release/vt-unemployment-jobs-report-august-2021>.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 9-10.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 23.

⁹ Anne Wallace Allen, “Study: Vermont Is No. 2 Nationwide for Second Home Ownership,” *VTDigger*, August 6, 2019, <https://vtdigger.org/2019/08/05/study-vermont-is-no-2-nationwide-for-second-home-ownership/>.

Moving from surviving to thriving entails improving access to quality education for youth and increasing food security in the rural isolated areas of Vermont.¹⁰ According to the report, the key challenges identified that Vermont faces are workforce, equity, affordability, investment, education, broadband, digital economy, housing, infrastructure, environment, demographics, healthcare, transportation, and coordination.

Vermont has a history of agriculture, and this is a keystone of Vermonters’ identity that should be retained while growing the economy. The town of Pownal seems to share this sentiment. Over the years, the main industries that support the state’s economy have shifted from timber, to sheep, to dairy, which is now in decline. There were two dairy farms in Pownal until 2019, when Strohmaier Dairy Farm closed its doors. Now, Hill Top Farm is the only dairy farm left, in addition to a micro dairy, Gammelgården Creamery. Moreover, part of Vermont’s aesthetic appeal derives from this history of agriculture and farmland.

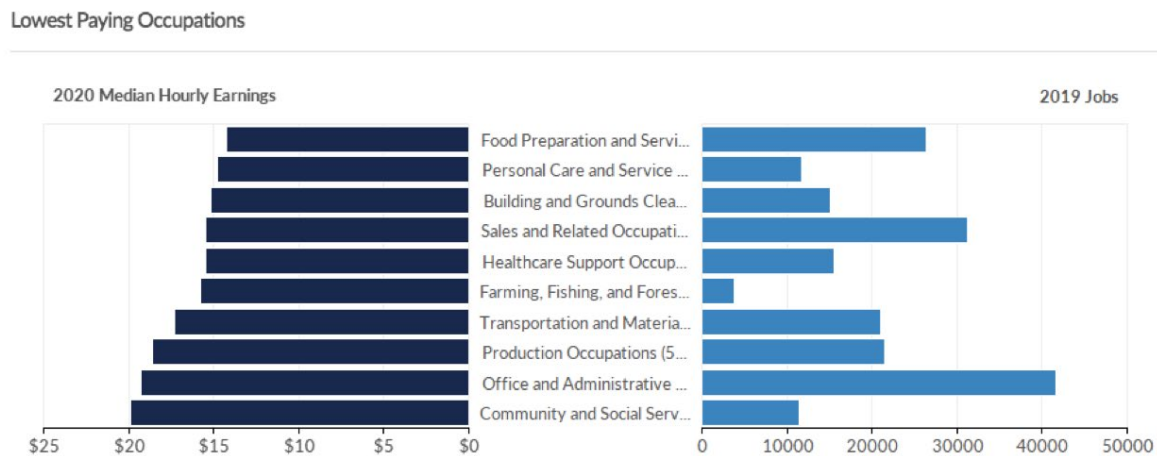


Figure 1. Lowest paying occupations in Vermont. Retrieved from EMSI, July 21st, 2021.

¹⁰ Koliba et al., “Amplifying Vermont’s Economic Resilience,” 10.

Socioeconomic Profile

Population

The following data are pulled from the Town Plan for the Town of Pownal, written by the Town of Pownal Planning Commission and published in 2019, unless otherwise noted. The Town Plan cites the US Census (1980, 1990, 2000, and 2010), the Vermont Housing Finance Agency, and American FactFinder.

As of the 2010 Census, Pownal had a population of 3,527, making it the fourth most populous town in Bennington County.¹¹ There were 1,429 households; town records indicate that these included 1,038 residential properties, 44 vacation homes, 252 mobile homes without land, and 115 mobile homes with land. There were also 44 commercial properties and one commercial apartment.¹² According to the Bennington Regional Planning Commission, there were 1,614 housing units in Pownal in 2010.¹³

Pownal has a largely white population (95.7%) that is aging. In 2019, the median age was 43.9 years (up from 43.3 at the 2010 Census and 38.5 at the 2000 Census). In 2019, nearly 40% of the population was over 50 years old.

From 1790 to 1960, the population of Pownal remained relatively stable, fluctuating between 1,400 and 2,000. Rapid population growth occurred from 1960 until 1990, when the population more than doubled, increasing by 134%. During the same 30-year period, Vermont's population increased just over 60%. After 2000, the population of Pownal began to decline

¹¹ Town of Pownal Planning Commission et al., "Town Plan," 6.

¹² Parks, *Pownal 250th Anniversary Edition*, 180.

¹³ Bennington Regional Planning Commission. "Pownal." <http://www.bcrvt.org/pownal.html>

slightly. Projections by the Vermont Agency of Commerce and Community Development indicate that the population may either increase slightly or decrease into the 2020s and 2030s depending on which scenario is used for projections (one assumes a migration rate similar to that of 1990-2000, and the other a rate like that of 2000-2010). Either way, it is likely that Pownal's population will continue to age; in both scenarios, the population aged 25-39 and over 55 increases, while the population belonging to other age classes decreases.¹⁴

Education

The high school graduation rate in Pownal is consistent with national rate (87%), but the proportion of college educated residents (18%) is much lower than both state (36%) and national (30%) rates.

Income and Poverty

Income and poverty status estimates taken from the Vermont Housing Finance Agency in 2010 are presented in the table below. In 2010, Pownal's median household income was \$57,267, and its poverty rate was 9.4%. The child poverty rate and the poverty rate for people over 65 years old, 24.0% and 21.5%, respectively, were both elevated compared to the rates for the state.¹⁵ Additionally, according to the Vermont Agency of Education's Child Nutrition Programs, 96.33% of students at Pownal Elementary School are considered low-income.¹⁶ These statistics are important because the significant wealth disparity in Pownal is collapsed in looking at the

¹⁴ Town of Pownal Planning Commission et al., "Town Plan," 7-8.

¹⁵ Town of Pownal Planning Commission et al., "Town Plan," 9.

¹⁶ Vermont Agency of Education Child Nutrition Programs, "Annual Statistical Report: Percent of Students Approved for Free and Reduced-Price School Meals, School Year 2019-2020," 22, <https://education.vermont.gov/sites/aoe/files/documents/edu-nutrition-2020-free-and-reduced-eligibility-report.pdf>.

median household income. The wealthier residents’ wealth offsets the widespread financial insecurity of many other residents, making the dire economic realities for many residents of Pownal invisible in median statistics.

Table 3. Income and poverty status for the Pownal, Bennington County and Vermont for 2010. (Vermont Housing Finance Agency, 2016)			
	Pownal	Bennington County	Vermont
Median household income	\$57,762	\$50,221	\$54,267
Overall poverty rate	9.4%	11.5%	15.5%
Child poverty rate (under 18 years)	24.0%	15.1%	21.7%
People over 65 years old	21.5%	31.7%	9.4%

Figure 2. Income and poverty status estimates data taken from the Vermont Housing Finance Agency.

Town Governance

In the Town of Pownal, the Selectboard deals with three main types of affairs: legislative, administrative, and quasi-judicial. Composed of five elected representatives, including the chair and vice-chair, the Selectboard oversees and manages town matters.

Angie Rawling, Selectboard chair until 2024, has lived in Pownal since she was three years old. According to her, the most significant change in Pownal over her lifetime has been the shift away from industrial jobs and the general lack of job opportunity within Pownal; most people travel outside of the town to work. Rawling disclosed that the Selectboard has brought up the issue of economic development and hopes to see new businesses open in town; they plan to check into the town’s bylaws to see if certain areas can be developed. While Rawling is the Board chair, she stressed that she values collaborative decision-making with input from the other Board members and town residents.

Though Rawling has only been on the Selectboard for two years, she was on the school board for 17, providing interesting insight from her experiences there. She mentioned that many of the children do not have access to electricity and sometimes running water, so out of necessity, the school has come to offer these services; at school, the students can wash themselves and their clothes and have access to food. In Rawling's opinion, there is a lack of understanding from the higher-income residents who do not understand the extent of poverty in the town. According to Rawling, since she began the main issues that have been brought to the Selectboard revolve around jobs, property upkeep, and ATVs (Interview with Angie Rawling 12/02/21).

Bill Botzow, on Economic Development

Bill Botzow is a sculptor and former member of the State House, where he served as chair of the Committee of Commerce and Economic Development. He worked in the legislature for 16 years and has lived in Pownal since 1982. Bill explained, in terms of economic development, that "you have to set up the conditions so that people, in their own inventiveness, can prosper." Innovation and competition are important, but a necessary ingredient for economic development is access to capital. Pownal does not have a place to go, or a system set up, for residents (looking to fix up a storefront and open a small business, for example) to gain access to capital. Bill explained that Bennington has a revolving loan fund, but Pownal lacks anything like it. He also stressed the importance of early childhood development as a long-term strategy for economic development; supporting the centers in Pownal that do this work is critical.

Bill believes that there is potential for economic development related to recreation in Pownal, renewable energy, local artists, and more. He loves living in Pownal because the place

allows him to relate to the woodlands, the world around him, and his own thoughts. He explained that “most people want the same thing: peace, health, and the opportunity to do their best work” (Interview with Bill Botzow 11/19/21).

Brief History of Pownal

The Mohicans

A local archeologist, Gordon Sweeney, dug in Pownal for years and found hundreds of early objects and artifacts on the banks of the Hoosic River in the twentieth century. Based on his findings (400-500 arrowheads and projectile points and some shards of pottery and stone tools), he believes that there were probably no sizable or permanent Mohican settlements in Pownal. Rather, it is likely that the land that is now Pownal was inhabited for several thousand years by small groups of hunters and travelers. Sweeney posits that if there ever was a long-term Mohican settlement in Pownal, its evidence has likely been erased by river floods or construction of the railroad in the 1850s.¹⁷

Though the Mohicans probably did not settle in the region permanently, their history is a part of the history of the town. Joseph Parks declared that the Mohicans had winter hunting camps in Pownal between around 1650 and 1750, and the Mohicans became involved in the fur trade after European contact.¹⁸ Parks described moments of peace and conflict between the Mohicans and the Mohawks during this period, which he suggests were heightened by fur trade

¹⁷ Joseph Parks, *Pownal: A Vermont Town's Two Hundred Years and More, 250th Anniversary Edition*, ed. Raymond and Dawn Rodrigues (Manchester Center: Shires Press, 2010), 1.

¹⁸ Joseph Parks, *Pownal: A Vermont Town's Two Hundred Years and More* (Hoosick Falls: A—B Graphic Art Service, 1977), 1-2.

competition. The reader should be cautioned that these narratives are told from the perspective of settlers, rather than the Mohicans themselves. Earlier Pownal historians, including Grace Greylock Niles and T.E. Brownell, proposed that there was also evidence of cornfields managed by the American Indians in Pownal which suggested summer habitation, though their sources of information are unknown.¹⁹

Journalist Lauren Stevens proposes that, despite the widely accepted colonial narrative that the Mohicans were simply passing through Pownal, it is possible that they did settle permanently. Stevens argues that the wealth of artifacts found by Sweeney, his predecessor Alonzo Whipple in the nineteenth century, and archaeologist with the Mahingan Institute in Monterey David W. Parrott suggest that there is evidence of a settlement dating back 4,000 years.²⁰

The Dutch & The Town Charter

It is estimated that the first Dutch settlers arrived in Pownal between 1728 and 1748. New Englanders came around thirty years after the Dutch; the estimated date for their arrival is 1762, though no records exist to confirm this. Unlike other towns under New Hampshire grants, Pownal was settled before the New Hampshire grant of Pownal, and it is accepted as the first settled town in Vermont.²¹

¹⁹ Parks, *Pownal*, 4-5.

²⁰ Lauren R. Stevens, "Lauren R. Stevens: The View from White Oaks: Establishing - and Acknowledging - the Truth of This Land's First Inhabitants," *The Berkshire Eagle*, August 2, 2021, https://www.berkshireeagle.com/opinion/columnists/lauren-r-stevens-the-view-from-white-oaks-establishing-and-acknowledging-the-truth-of-this/article_2ec5fe98-f3b6-11eb-be1b-9377bb3916a9.html.

²¹ Parks, *Pownal*, 25.

Farming

Agriculture is a key component of Pownal's history that informs the pastoral legacies and rural character of the town. Although there are only a few functioning farms remaining, Pownal has a history of a successful sheep-raising industry. In the 1830s a French diplomat in Portugal sent back Merino sheep, which commenced the sheep boom of the 1840s. Suited for the hilly, grassy landscape of Pownal, there were about six sheep to one resident in 1840, on par with other areas in the state. Though the sheep boom was short lived, it reshaped the landscape of Pownal, and Vermont more generally, through the cutting down of forests and erection of stone walls that still stand today. After the Civil War, sheep raising declined significantly, and no commercial sheep raising businesses exist in Pownal today.²²

As a town with a long history of farming, it is unsurprising that as of 2019, around 2,200 acres of land in Pownal were used for agriculture. Beyond preserving the rural character of the town, the push to protect agricultural lands is motivated by a desire to maintain the possibility of growing local food. These agricultural products not only help feed the local population, but also are desired by tourists, as are Vermont-made products more generally.²³ Dairy, beef, maple sugaring, and produce farms not only contribute to local food resiliency, but also maintain the bucolic character of the town. The farming industry is one of the town's current assets, which is important to consider in the discussion of economic development.

²² Joseph Parks, *Pownal*, 61.

²³ Town of Pownal Planning Commission et al., "Town Plan," 37.

Forests

Forests are another critical element of Pownal's history, with a legacy of sawmills and forest-based industry. As of 2019, Pownal's Forest District was 9,800 acres, established under the 1995 Zoning Bylaw. Conveniently, these lands are unsuitable for development because of topography, soil conditions, high elevation, and inaccessibility. Additionally, the forests are very delicate environments, unsuitable for built structures. That said, some areas can support recreational structures such as camping areas, informational signage, and certain types of toilets (chemical incinerator or privy type toilets).

Of the three tracts of land owned by the town on the West Mountain, one approximately 40-acre parcel has a successful timber harvest—a present day remnant of the town's forest-based industry. The profits from this harvest go back into managing the land. Another parcel, over 750 acres, is where the North Pownal Tannery once stood. This plot has been transitioned into the Strobridge Recreation Center for the public to enjoy. These areas are meant for the purposes of forestry, conservation, and public use.

Currently, the town lacks a consistent and cohesive forest management program. Its absence prevents responsible stewardship of the land and the protection of valuable natural resources. If qualified personnel create proper forest management plans, there may be potential to capitalize on harvesting forest resources. Additionally, adequate management could increase access to attractive recreational activities (hiking, horseback riding, cross country skiing, picnicking, hunting, etc.) for both Pownal residents and visitors.²⁴

²⁴ Town of Pownal Planning Commission et al., "Town Plan," 38.

The Mills

The importance of mills to Pownal's economic development began in the eighteenth century with the first gristmill that was water-powered by a dam built on the Hoosic; this site later became the Tannery. Mills were a keystone in Pownal's economic life, with two grist mills and five sawmills by 1840. These early grist mills and sawmills were small-scale operations, which did not depend on the hydroelectric power harnessed through damming large rivers—a clear difference from larger cloth-weaving and woolen mills which were sited along the Hoosic River in Pownal.²⁵

The Tannery

In 1935, a nineteenth century woolen mill located between Rt. 346 and the Hoosic River in North Pownal was converted into the North Pownal Tannery. Part of the 28-acre site was a facility for hide tanning and finishing owned by the Pownal Tanning Co., which was active until 1988 when it declared bankruptcy and closed because of the threat of fines from the VT Agency of Environmental Conservation. Between 1937 and 1962, the Tannery discharged untreated wastewater into the Hoosic River, contaminating the site. Although a lagoon system to receive Tannery wastewater was constructed from 1962 to 1971, and a landfill created in 1982 for dredged up sludge from the lagoons, it was quickly filled. The site was placed on the EPA National Priorities List (NPL) in January 1999 and cleared for redevelopment in 2004. This area has been converted into the Strobridge Recreation Center.²⁶

²⁵ Parks, *Pownal*, 63.

²⁶ "Pownal Tannery Site Profile," EPA (Environmental Protection Agency, October 20, 2017), <https://cumulis.epa.gov/supercpad/SiteProfiles/index.cfm?fuseaction=second.cleanup&id=0101463>.

Green Mountain Park

While the economic opportunities afforded by mills waned in the twentieth century, a new business arose that changed the landscape of Pownal: the Green Mountain Racetrack. Sited on a former corn field along the Hoosic River, the track opened in May 1964. It was used for horse racing between 1964 and 1976 and greyhound racing beginning in 1973, a concession made by the Legislature to improve business. The track was a major employer in the area, bringing people to Pownal as visitors. Many also settled in the town. The track paid for 22% of the town's taxes in 1976.²⁷ Along with the racetrack existed "gasoline filling stations, dairy farmers who delivered their milk and eggs, auto repair shops, restaurants, bars, corner markets and specialty retailers, barber shops, salons, a bank branch, motels, boarding houses, cottages for seasonal workers," in addition to employment opportunities for "skilled and unskilled laborers, loggers, cooks, farriers, baby sitters, waitresses, meat cutters, and tradesmen."²⁸

Between the 1970s and 1990s, Pownal was a vibrant and bustling hub. When the racetrack closed in 1992, the supporting businesses experienced economic hardships and many of them wound up going out of business shortly thereafter. Not only were jobs lost from the racetrack itself, but also from the supporting businesses that no longer had the demand afforded by the racetrack. While many of the companies closed or left, many of the people stayed. The racetrack's influence on communities of Pownal and culture is palpable.²⁹

²⁷ Parks, *Pownal*, 110-111.

²⁸ Town of Pownal Planning Commission et al., "Town Plan," 4.

²⁹ Ibid.

Once decommissioned as a racetrack, the building continued to be used for other community events; Lollapalooza was held there in 1996, and several antique car shows were hosted at the site between 2005 and 2008.³⁰ After sitting unused for years, the building was destroyed by a devastating fire in 2020, and it is currently under private ownership by Green Mountain, LLC with Stephen Soler as the managing partner.³¹

Transportation Infrastructure

Poised at the convergence of the Green Mountains, Taconics, and the Berkshire Hills, Pownal comprises four villages that cover a large geographic area (46.7 square miles total) necessitating transportation considerations. Because Pownal is dispersed and fragmented with fast-moving roads, Pownal is not very walkable. Pownal lacks safe and plentiful biking or walking paths and sidewalks, although a new bike path along the historic trolley path connecting Bennington and Pownal, VT to Williamstown, MA is currently being considered.³² Where Pownal does have paths, they are for recreation. Over the years, Pownal's transportation infrastructure has evolved to shape the configuration that exists today.

The trolley system emerged in the early 20th century as the dominant form of public transportation. With an expanding regional trolley system to connect New York, Vermont, and Massachusetts, the Berkshire Hills Trolley was built in 1903. Originally an executive car, the

³⁰ Chad Abramovich, "The Old Green Mountain Racetrack (and Pownal Peculiarities)," *Obscure Vermont*, February 14, 2021, <https://obscurevermont.com/the-old-green-mountain-racetrack-and-pownal-peculiarities/>.

³¹ Jim Therrien, "Pownal Board Wants Owner to Deal with Guttled Grandstand," *Bennington Banner*, September 14, 2021, https://www.benningtonbanner.com/local-news/pownal-board-wants-owner-to-deal-with-guttled-grandstand/article_5bddb358-14d6-11ec-a255-173e0b53f8c8.html.

³² Jim Therrien, "Report Due by Fall on Bennington-Pownal-Williamstown Trolley Trail Bike Path," *Bennington Banner*, August 2, 2020, https://www.benningtonbanner.com/archives/report-due-by-fall-on-bennington-pownal-williamstown-trolley-trail-bike-path/article_39591439-615c-534b-807f-551ddf8cc8e8.html.

trolley was later converted to general service that ran from Bennington through Pownal Center to Williamstown and North Adams, MA. In 1907, the trolley system expanded further in Massachusetts, and the Berkshire Hills trolley ran on a line that went from Bennington to Great Barrington, running through Pownal, North Adams, Pittsfield, Lenox, and Stockbridge. At the time, the trip cost one dollar, with an additional 25 for a seat. By increasing mobility for those living along the trolley line, this trolley system opened opportunities for unskilled laborers to work in the surrounding area and strengthened the local economy. With the rise of the automobile, the trolley system declined significantly in the 1920s. The Berkshire Street Railway System shut down in 1929, limiting the ease with which Pownal residents could commute to jobs in nearby towns.³³

In the 1950s, the Massachusetts State Highway Department carried out a project that included the relocation of Rt. 7 in Pownal which was completed in 1960. This infrastructure project extended into the late 1970s early 1980s with the construction of the current Rt. 7 between Bennington and Dorset. Moved mostly along the old trolley route in Pownal, the new Rt. 7 fragmented the villages of Pownal (Pownal, Pownal Center, North Pownal, and East Pownal) by separating Pownal village and Pownal Center. The road was widened to three lanes and built to have a more gradual incline than the original Rt. 7, which is now known as Historic Vermont 7A. The moving of the road involved the cutting through of rock ledges, reshaping the topography and community in Pownal. Eliminating the scenic, slower-moving drive up old Rt. 7, this new

³³ Christopher Huffaker, "Local Historian Retraces Bennington's Trolleys," *The Berkshire Eagle*, February 4, 2015, https://www.berkshireeagle.com/arts_and_culture/entertainment/local-historian-retraces-benningtons-trolleys/article_cef418b4-9c68-5d9f-b963-14c1becb7083.html.; Craig Light, "Bennington's Bygone Trolleys," *Vermont News Guide*, February 16, 2016, <https://vermontnews-guide.com/benningtons-bygone-trolleys/>.

roadway encouraged faster and more frequent traffic and set the stage for considerations of “Super 7” that begins north of Bennington.³⁴

Community

The dispersed landscape of the villages of Pownal complicates fostering a sense of community. While there is no true town center in North Pownal or East Pownal, Pownal and Pownal Center have a central street that attempts to serve this purpose. There is no single community center in Pownal, but churches in each village aim to fill this void by creating a place for the community to gather, though membership is low. The Solomon Wright Library in the village of Pownal is another space for community members to gather.

The most identifiable town center in Pownal is in Pownal Center; the geographic center of the town and home to the first meeting house where the Pownal Center Community Church now stands, Pownal Center is also home to the Town Office, Center Street Skatepark, the Pownal Center Cemetery, and the buildings that once were once the general store and motel. Center Street, the old Route Seven, has been designated a ‘Village Center’ by the Vermont Agency of Commerce and Community Development in 2018. This historic district designation not only recognizes the preservation of this traditional New England village defined as a clustered mixed-use area for residential, civic, religious, and commercial purposes, but also contains economic incentives for revitalization efforts, as well as training and technical support to entice new

³⁴ Parks, *Pownal*, 107.

businesses.³⁵ This initiative gives breaks in permitting to allow for growth, while continuing to emphasize the traditional importance of a village center for concentrated economic development.

III. METHODS

Research & Interviews

Our research began with a reading list that our clients provided us, including Joseph Parks' *Pownal—A Town's Two Hundred Years and More* (and its *250th Anniversary Edition*, edited by Raymond and Dawn Rodrigues), Grace Greylock Niles' *History of the Hoosic Valley*, Pownal Historical Society's *Images of Pownal*, and Lauren Stevens' *Dispatches from the Beyond Place, Tales of the Hoosic River*. They also provided us with historic maps of Pownal and recommended we look at the 2019 Town Plan and the Norwich Vermont Historical Society website for inspiration. Throughout the duration of the project, we came across other useful primary sources, such as news articles, recommended by interviewees.

One of our project deliverables was interviews with Pownal residents. To begin, we conducted interviews with several residents to learn more about the five churches in Pownal. We interviewed Pastor Jayson Dominey of Faith Church and Pastor Michael Carrel of North Pownal Congregational Church (NPCC). Ted Church joined us for the latter interview, and he shared personal anecdotes from his many years at NPCC. To expand our understanding of the community at Pownal Center Community Church, Our Lady of Lourdes, and Methodist Church,

³⁵ Vermont Department of Housing and Community Development, "Village Center Designation Program: Application Guidelines," Vermont Agency of Commerce and Community Development (January 2021): 2, <https://accd.vermont.gov/sites/accdnew/files/documents/CD/CPR/CPR-VC-Application-Guidelines.pdf>.

we interviewed former member Linda Hall, former member Dale Matuski, and current member Mary Louise Mason, respectively.

Next, when we shifted the focus of the project to businesses, we conducted interviews to illuminate the history of Pownal's past businesses and spread the word about its current businesses. We had an informal conversation with Jim Winchester of Winchester's Store and Deli, who also told us about his time working as a starter at the Green Mountain Racetrack. We spoke with Diane Murphy, who was an employee at North Pownal Tannery during the 1960s, and her husband, Lawrence Murphy. We visited a number of Pownal's farms, interviewing Marilyn and Crystal Gardner of Hill Top Farm, Stina Kutzer of Gammelgården Creamery, and John and Joy Primmer of Wildstone Farm. We also visited the studio of Jackie Sedlock, a local potter.

Finally, we conducted interviews with the goal of learning more about challenges related to economic development in Vermont. Bill Botzow, a local sculptor who served for twelve years on the State House Committee on Commerce and Economic Development, proved a critical resource. Natasha Baranow, a Williams graduate ('18) and Research Specialist at UVM's Center for Rural Studies, brought to our attention a report on economic resilience in Vermont, which added to our understanding of the issues Vermonters face. Finally, Angie Rawling, the current elected chair of the Selectboard in Pownal, spoke candidly with us about her role and about Pownal.

Overall, our interviewees were invaluable resources who helped us develop a more personal, holistic view of the town. Where appropriate, the information from interviews was used in write ups on website pages to supplement the historical information on the website with the stories of real people. The interview recordings may also be used in the future by our clients

as content for a Pownal Historical Society podcast, which would be a means to share the experiences, both struggles and successes, of the residents of Pownal.

IV. WEBSITE

Website Structure

- A. About Us
- B. History
 - 1. Churches
 - a) Faith Church
 - b) North Pownal Congregational Church
 - c) Pownal Center Community Center Church
 - d) Pownal United Methodist Church
 - e) Our Lady of Lourdes Roman Catholic Church
 - 2. Cemeteries
 - 3. Schools
 - 4. People
 - 5. Places
 - 6. Maps
- C. Explore
 - 1. Recreation
 - a) Mountain Meadow Preserve
 - b) Center Street Skatepark
 - c) Hoosic Bend Trail
 - d) Barber Pond
 - 2. Businesses
 - a) Past
 - (1) Sheep Raising
 - (2) The Mills
 - (3) North Pownal Tannery
 - (4) Green Mountain Racetrack
 - b) Current Local Businesses
 - (1) Gammelgården Creamery
 - (2) Hill Top Farm
 - (3) Wildstone Farm
 - (4) Winchester's Store and Deli
 - (5) Jackie Sedlock, Potter
- D. Driving Tours
 - 1. Churches
- E. Contact Us

Completed Pages (taken directly from pownal.org)

**Sources are on website*

About Us

Pownal Historical Society, Inc. is a 501(c)3, not for profit corporation, founded in 1994 for the purpose of capturing, preserving, and sharing Pownal's history. We take our mission, goals, and our role as historians very seriously. We are proud to be the Keeper of Pownal's history and are dedicated to keeping it safe and available to all.

For more than 25 years, we have shown our dedication by hosting hundreds of Presentations and Events pertaining to Pownal and surrounding areas. We maintain relationships with other groups and organizations as well as the town governing body and provide assistance whenever we can. Some examples include:

1. Helping hundreds of researchers working on their Family History. Genealogy plays a big role in our Society's contribution to preserving Pownal's history. Pownal shows up in many family histories for ancestors came to or through Pownal from RI, MA, and CT.
2. Sharing Pownal's history with Pownal Elementary School 4th grade students for 13 years including helping them to write a book each year on a Pownal subject. Donating dictionaries to every third grader each year for many years. Supplying the School with a flag and flagpole, and classroom equipment.
3. Financially supporting meaningful causes in our community including the Pownal Center Community Church Steeple Restoration Fund, Solomon Wright Public Library, Fire Department, Community Christmas Tree Lighting, Churches and more.

4. PHS played a major role in celebrating Pownal's 250th Anniversary in 2010 by hosting a Town wide Birthday Party which included the reading of Pownal's Charter. Governor James H. Douglas attended at our invitation.
5. Researched, surveyed, and sought designation from the State of Vermont for the Pownal Center Historic District, a uniquely preserved road in the center of town. The new Historic District was dedicated in 2010 with a Ceremony and installation of a bronze plaque designed and donated by PHS.

Churches

Faith Church

Historical Information

Constructed in the 1840s, a framed edifice became home to the Baptist Church of Pownal Village. When that church burned down around 1910, it was replaced with a stone structure with stained glass windows in 1911 that still stands today.

The Pownal Baptists built their church in 1843, the same year that William Miller, an evangelist visiting Bennington, advised the congregation that the world would all end. Pastor Miller believed that the Second Coming would take place on October 22, 1843, so everyone was encouraged to dispose of worldly goods and prepare for the event. In some places, people put on white robes and spent the day waiting on rooftops, haystacks, and hilltops.

However, many thought that the church was built more out of a spirit of competition with the Methodists rather than Pastor Miller's prophecy. An early newspaper account showed that an annual meeting was attended by both the Baptist and the Methodist. Coincidentally, the Pownal Methodists built their new church the following year, 1844.

The Baptist Church served other community functions throughout the years, home of the Pownal Library for about 80 years until the Solomon Wright Library was built in 1966. Then, in 1950, when the Oak Hill School was condemned, the church was called upon to fill community needs; two classrooms were moved to the basement of the church, and the Pownal Center one-room school was utilized while repairs were made. Repairs and bracing of the side porch walls and steps were completed in 1951 by William E. Dailey and the Pownal Baptist Church Association.

Some important figures and groups that are part of the church's history of include: Sunday School teacher and superintendent Bertha Rhodes, Williams College students who conducted Vacation Bible School, longtime church organist and soloist beginning in 1957 Joan (Rathbun) Cannell, Faith Christian Fellowship Pastor Jerry Frey, and current Faith Church Pastor Jayson Dominey.

Current Functioning

Faith Church has grown steadily over the course of the six and half years that Pastor Jayson Dominey has been in Pownal. When he first began, there were 1-2 families who attended Sunday service, but, four years later, the number of community members visiting the church had grown to 50. The numbers of visitors have continued to rise too, and Faith Church experienced a significant increase when they shifted to online services during the COVID-19 pandemic. As the numbers grew, so did the giving, according to Pastor Dominey. Pastor Dominey believes Faith Church has the potential to become the center of the community in Pownal, and his goal is to learn from the community and listen to their needs and desires. Faith Church places an emphasis on openness; it's a place that is open to anyone, where people can be open with each other.

Faith Church is a community center for people of all ages; there is a nursery and daycare center, as well as a place to host community events like outdoor movie nights. While visitors and residents of neighboring towns are undoubtedly invited in, Pastor Dominey stressed the importance of Faith Church as a locale for the people of Pownal. Offering a place to gather, socialize, grab a coffee, find solace, and promote local artists and businesses, Faith Church hopes to continue to unite, strengthen, and support the Pownal community. As a nonprofit, the church collects donations to have a monetary reserve to support community members in need. In thinking about the future, Pastor Dominey hesitated to make any definite claims, but said he hopes for Faith Church to become bigger and better; the goal is generational transformation.

North Pownal Congregational Church

Historical Information

The land upon which the church stands was donated by respected resident Andrew Whipple, and in 1849 a society was created with the intent of erecting a two-story dual function academy or public school and church. The lower story was occupied by the 'academy,' laying the foundations for the church which would occupy the upper level. When Williams College man and Williamstown resident O. S. Nutting (1848) raised a thousand dollars, the church construction was begun and completed.

With pride from the community, on May 11, 1851, Williams College President Mark Hopkins rode over on horseback to preach the dedicatory service to the congregation of ten members, their friends, and visitors from surrounding towns. And thus began the building of a strong relationship between Williams and the church, with Williams called upon to supply various pastors and church leadership. Stipulated by Nutting before he raised the funds, the church was

dedicated as a Congregational church. As the only Protestant church in North Pownal then and now, the church welcomes membership from every denomination except those of the Roman Catholic faith. Its broad, undenominational character remains.

In the winter of 1852, local Baptists asked for permission to use the church auditorium every Sunday at 5 p.m. to have regular services led by Reverend Mr. Arthur (father of President Chester H. Arthur). Minister. Arthur came over from his own church in Hoosick to preach, and in his sermons, he assailed the Congregationalist's baptism practice. The debate escalated quickly, and excitement in the community was wild: "Everybody tried to be a theologian. Never were the Scriptures searched so diligently before. 'Peters on Baptism' was learned by heart, and his Greek phrases [were] quoted by those who had never studied the language. Groups of men stopped on the sidewalk and talked theology. The laborer in the cornfield leaned on the handle of his hoe, and with his index finger in his palm disserted learnedly on the meaning of baptism."

Although the Congregationalists repeatedly asked Reverend Mr. Arthur to abandon his afternoon services, he refused, and they resorted to a unique plan. The Congregationalists attended his next Baptist service, and every time that he was in the midst of his most effective arguments, "they joined in a rousing hymn and finally sang the surprised pastor out of church."

In March 1910, the church burned down. The present building was dedicated in 1911. In 1919, the pulpit was supplied by the pastor of the Pownal Baptist Church, now known as Faith Church, and later by young men in the community. In 1934, the pulpit was supplied by the pastor of the Pownal Methodist Church.

(Information adapted from Colburn Pinkham, 1910, revised 1939)

Current Functioning

North Pownal Congregational Church is pastored by Michael Carrel, who began in 2015 and replaced Pastor Gary Rodgers in 2017. Taking over for Pastor Gary Rodgers, church membership dropped from around 50 people to 20, but at this writing, 2021, membership is increasing. In the past eight months, the church has gained about ten new members.

When Pastor Gary Rodgers, who preceded Pastor Michael Carrell, came in 1997, there were only six members of the church. While Rodgers was pastor, church membership reached 80-90 people, with the help of his wife who brought in people from Grace Christian School, where she taught. Around this time, the church also hosted vacation bible school and sports camps, which boosted membership. In the past few years, these events have been less successful, so Pastor Michael Carrel is searching for new ways to bring in community members that includes focusing on personal relationships; he has joined the fire department to reach new groups of people and increase the sense of community.

Under Pastor Gary Rodgers, temporary additions were added to the church with the help of teams from the Southern Baptist Convention. Recently, some of the temporary trailer additions have become permanently part of the church, including a teens lounge/hangout room, new kitchen, and gathering space. There is also a nursery and play area for younger children. Because there are few youths involved with the church at the moment, these spaces are underutilized, so Pastor Michael Carrel is looking for new uses.

In the future, Pastor Carrel hopes to see new churches built in the area to increase Christianity in the area. Starting in neighboring areas, he would like to see new churches spark excitement and new membership, breathing life into Pownal and the surrounding communities.

Pownal Center Community Center Church

Historical Information

The meetinghouse for the town that became known as Pownal was built of logs in 1789 on the highest point of a plot of land that was granted for public use in the town's 1760 charter. In 1849, Union Church, which would later become Pownal Center Community Church, replaced the meetinghouse at a cost of \$2,875. The head of every household, religious or not, was approached by a committee and urged to help with the construction of the church. One farmer and his sons from the west side of town cut several logs and hauled them six miles, from his woodlot to the Bushnell and Barber sawmill at the outlet of Perch Pond (now known as Barber Pond). From the sawmill, the crew then brought the lumber all the way to the Center. The church, a large square building that resembled most other churches in New England country towns at the time, was built in the middle of the town "green" (Brownell, 1889). It had old fashioned pews and a gallery that extended around three of its sides. The church hosted many funerals, and on those occasions the building was filled to its utmost capacity, although the average Sunday congregation was small.

The church was first organized by the Baptists in 1794 (long before the construction of Union Church) but also received Methodist support and has always been open to any denomination. The church and the Town of Pownal are joint owners and have shared in the maintenance of the building. For years, town meetings were held on the first floor of the church, but as Pownal's population grew they were moved to the elementary school, and voting moved to the firehouse.

The Carriage Barn, where early settlers tethered their horses while they attended service, is adjacent to the church. It was restored with approval from the Selectmen in 1976 for the celebration of the U.S. Bicentennial and has been used for social and fundraising events. For (30?) years, the Women's Fellowship hosted an annual Pie Festival during what is now Indigenous People's Day weekend. This event was their claim to fame, and drew in townspeople and visitors alike, who traveled to Pownal Center to sample over 150 varieties of homemade pies. Linda Hall, a former member, would spend hours baking—from noon on Friday until Sunday morning—and contribute 30 pies to the festival. The Fellowship also hosted a strawberry festival in June where they made and sold sundaes, shortcakes, and biscuits.

In 2006, the 11,000-pound bell tower of Pownal Center Community Church was successfully removed because it had been leaning and was deemed an imminent safety concern by an engineering consultant. The Selectboard authorized \$5,000 for the project. The Greater Heights Tree and Land Management firm and the Burgess Brothers Construction Company worked together to lift the bell tower from the building roof and place it in a wooden "crib." The removal project lasted two and a half days; it was delayed several times because the tower did not separate easily from the rest of the building. Careful work was done to secure the bell and ensure the tower remained intact. Someday, everyone in town hopes to see the day that the bell tower is replaced.

Stories From a Former Member: Linda Hall

One former member of the Church, Linda Hall, recounts her experiences at Pownal Center Community Church beginning when she joined in 1978. According to Linda, the church functioned largely as a community support center and family place, despite the relatively low numbers of

people attending services. The Church held events that excited the wider Pownal community, such as perennial plant sales, Sunday dinners, the strawberry festival, and the annual pie festival. Although the strawberry festival and Sunday dinners phased out before her time, Linda says they were successful fundraisers and residents looked forward to strawberry shortcake and traditional home-cooked chicken pot pie dinners.

Pownal United Methodist Church

Historical Information

Before the construction of Pownal United Methodist Church in the 1840s, traveling ministers and circuit riders filled the village's spiritual needs, and camp meeting revivals were hosted at the homes of the faithful. When the church was served by circuit riders, services took place in district schoolhouses or in the homes of members. The advent of the circuit rider was a social occasion of great moment—days of cooking, baking, cleaning, and general excitement preceded his arrival. All preparations were complete by evening time on Saturday and the Sabbath was observed.

The original Pownal United Methodist church was designed by architect Noel Barber and built by the men of the church starting in 1840. Timber was donated by Mr. and Mrs. John Hall from their farm on the west side of the Hoosic River. Other materials were donated by the church members. The men of the church raised the frame, under the watchful eye of Barber, and the women provided them meals.

The Pownal United Methodist Church is the oldest church in Pownal, dedicated in 1844 with a membership of 115. Oliver Spicer became the first pastor. By 1886, membership had dwindled to 61. The Reverend Philip Goettel came to the village and during his four years as

pastor, church membership nearly doubled. [One sentence about him that is confusing and we should ask about]. During his ministry, an annex and shed were added to the church, and stained-glass memorial windows were installed in the sanctuary. The parsonage was built in 1887 for \$1,100, again by the hands of the congregation who provided the funding and materials.

The church was a spiritual and social center of the community until a fire, that may have been started by a painter's blowtorch, destroyed it on August 8th, 1980. It had been standing for 136 years prior. The community immediately set about raising funds to rebuild the church. Just one year later, on August 8th, 1981, the new church was dedicated.

Our Lady of Lourdes Roman Catholic Church

Historical Information

North Pownal did not have a Catholic Church until Our Lady of Lourdes filled this void in 1897. Before then, the predominantly French Village was served by priests who ventured by train from Rutland once a month to hold mass. Mass was held in private homes, and the sermon was half in French, half in English.

Beginning in 1887, mass was moved to the upstairs of Fred Smith's General Store. Father Odette, a priest who came over from Rutland, hosted it there. When they made the monthly trip to Pownal, the priests stayed at the Tatro Farm (now Rudd's), the old homestead of Victoria Cooper.

During their weekend stays, the priests maintained busy schedules, and attended all sorts of events—weddings, funerals, baptisms and calling on the sick and elderly. Mass, in Latin, was on Sunday morning, followed by the Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament. Then, catechism was taught by the nuns. During the afternoon there were vespers, music, and prayers that were

attended by the priests. The priests usually departed for Rutland on Monday morning, taking a horse and buggy ride to the train.

In 1897 the dream for a Catholic Church in Pownal became a reality. On June 7, 1887, Albert C. Houghton of North Adams, Massachusetts sold a parcel of land in North Pownal to the Diocese in Burlington for just one dollar! Each family then contributed twenty-five dollars to begin construction. More fundraisers followed, including suppers, raffles, and bazaars. Amazingly, one of these bazaars lasted for two weeks and raised \$2000!

The Carpenter brothers from Bennington were contracted to build the church for \$5,700. Purcell and his team of horses prepared the cellar hole and the logs were cut at Tatro Saw Mill. During construction, which lasted about one year, the Carpenter brothers pitched a tent at the site. Father William Plamondon came from Readsboro, Vermont to serve the community and oversee the construction of the church.

In the spring of 1898, the Church opened its doors for the first time. A newspaper account from April 19, 1898, recorded the event: "Services were held in the new Catholic Church at North Pownal for the first time last Sunday. A large number from place (Pownal) went down to the opening service."

However, the official dedication would not occur until October 1898: "On next Wednesday, will occur the dedication of the new Catholic Church at North Pownal. The Archbishop of the diocese and a delegation of priests will officiate. The musical program will be carried out by a choir of forty voices and will be in charge of Joseph Beechard of this village" (newspaper account from October 7, 1898). Bishop John S. Michaud, came from Burlington, Vermont, to dedicate the church. At this time, most of the French parishioners would refer to the

Church as Notre Dame de Lourdes. From some accounts, the dedication was quite an event. A forty-member choir sang and a local orchestra, composed of both Catholics and Non-Catholics, played. Victoria Tatro/Cooper?, a 14-year-old girl, played the organ. She would continue as church organist for the next 26 years. Later, Gail Bates, a Congregationalist, served as organist.

It is interesting to note that the Catholic and non-Catholic people of North Pownal shared a sense of community at the church in the early years. Some of the fundraisers for the construction of Our Lady of Lourdes took place in the Congregation Church and the old grammar school, where the Little League Ball Park is now. Our Lady of Lourdes was ministered to mostly by priests from Readsboro, North Bennington, and Sacred Heart in Bennington. For a while, Father Desaulniers lived at the Tatro Farm while serving as pastor. In 1914 Our Lady of Lourdes became a part of St. Francis de Sales community and remains so today as a mission church of Sacred Heart St. Francis de Sales parish.

Reverend J.D. Shannon became pastor of St. Francis in 1927 and one of his first acts was to install electric wiring, replaster, and redecorate. Before, the church was lit with gas lamps near the Stations of the Cross. Heat was provided by wood stoves in the basement under floor grates. Throughout the years, the Church has been maintained and remodeled, both by professionals and with the sweat equity of its parishioners.

In 1957, some of the ladies of the parish founded Our Lady of Lourdes Guild, the purpose of which was to strengthen the spiritual life of the faith community and to assist the priests with the physical operation of the church and parish. For years, priests and altar boys traveled to Our Lady of Lourdes, a special place of worship, for Sunday and Holy Day masses.

(Written in 1998 - author unknown)

Stories from a Former Member of the Lady's Guild: Dale Maturski

Dale Maturski, a former member of Our Lady of Lourdes, shared her experiences at the church, after she moved to Pownal in 1978 and until its closing in 2011. She reminisced about the events and fundraisers held at the church, from Christmas pageants to ham suppers, to baked goods sales. In the 70s, the church hosted "foodless food sales"; the church distributed a letter about what it had accomplished in the year and church members donated money. At the time, the church membership was about 130 families, and the "foodless food sales" were very successful.

Dale explained that the Ladies Guild was founded in 1964 by a woman named Elenor. The Guild had around 10-15 members, who met once a month in the women's' homes. The Guild made decisions for the church, like how to fundraise. Once, they made a quilt and raffled it off. The Guild also designated the needs of the church, like cleaning or painting. In 1984, the Ladies Guild began meeting at the church after mass. Dale shared some of the accomplishments of the Ladies Guild, and memories from her time at the church, as follows. In 1991, they adopted an international child, who they supported from afar with donations. They fundraised to build a ramp on the side of the building in 1993. Once every year, the Guild took the priest out to dinner at a restaurant. They organized occasional women's retreats at the Carmelites. They also baked Thanksgiving breads for shut-ins during the winter months. The breads were placed in a basket and blessed by the priest, and then distributed to community members. All in all, the Guild was a tight knit community that accomplished many things to benefit Our Lady of Lourdes.

Regarding the closing of Our Lady of Lourdes, Dale explained that there were about 25 members during the late 1990s. The priest at the time was from Bennington, and couldn't come

to Sunday morning services, so weekly mass was rescheduled to 6:15pm on Saturdays. This new time made it difficult for members to attend regularly, especially during the winter months, and attendance plummeted. There were not enough members to keep the church running, and the Diocese of Burlington sold the church in 2017 for \$45,000.

Current Status

In 2017 Craftsman James Gardiner purchased the Our Lady of Lourdes Church for \$45,000 and moved his concrete sink business and himself from Lancaster, PA into the building. His business, Atmosphyre, takes up the main section of the former church while his home encompasses the back section where the altar and sacristy once were. The company creates one-of-a-kind concrete sinks.

Cemeteries

Each cemetery page has been created and contains documents with the available information about who is buried there, usually a list of names which may be useful for genealogy purposes. Photographs are included when available.

People

James Fisk

James Fisk, also known as “Jubilee Jim Fisk” and the “Barnum of Wall Street,” was born in Pownal in 1834. At the time, his father was superintendent of a mill. His mother died when he was very young and the family moved to Bennington when Fisk was three years old, but he was sent to live in Pownal with a widow named Mrs. Polly Albro. Later, after her death in 1853, Fisk

paid \$700 dollars to erect a monument over her grave in Oak Hill cemetery that read: "Erected by James Fisk, Jr. In Loving Remembrance of Long-continued Kindness."

When Fisk was around eight or nine years old, the family moved to Brattleboro and Fisk became a peddler. In an article about the life of Fisk, author Mark Bushnell writes, "Fisk's greatest skill--to sell, sell, sell, by any means possible--seems to have been inborn." He cites an example, according to lore: Fisk's father was selling women's shawls along his route but ran out. Fisk, Jr. had a surplus of tablecloths, which he "touted as the latest fashion in shawls from Boston," and sold.

Fisk joined a traveling circus for a number of years, working behind the scenes and enjoying the glamour and flare of it all, and returned to Brattleboro when he was 18. There, he helped his father grow his peddling into a five-wagon business, Fisk & Son.

A man named Eben Jordan, then president of Marsh and Co. of Boston, which was selling goods to Fisk & Son, noticed how much merchandise Fisk was selling and offered him a job in the city. This point in time marks the beginning of Fisk's career as a robber baron, leading Parks, in his book on Pownal's history, to conclude, "certainly Jim Fisk was no one for his former neighbors to be proud of..." During the Civil war and after much convincing, Jordan sent Fisk to Washington to make contracts to produce textiles for the Union Army. Orders came rolling in and soon demand overcame supply. Fisk sent agents to the South to buy massive amounts of cotton contraband and snuck it into the North. He also sold Confederate bonds to European investors, and these shady practices made him rich.

After the war Fisk became a major player on Wall Street, and in 1866 he formed the brokerage firm Fisk & Belden. The firm issued fraudulent stock to cheat Cornelius Vanderbilt out

of what today would equal roughly \$100 million dollars and maintain control over the Erie Railroad. According to Bushnell, Fisk and his associates let the railroad fall into despair and pocketed enormous sums of money.

The next year, after bribing the members of the New York Legislature in order to evade arrest from his previous stunt, Fisk partnered with Jay Gould in an attempt to corner the gold market. They bought as much gold as possible to inflate its price and bribed public officials to keep government owned gold off the market. When President Ulysses Grant caught wind of the scheme, he ordered \$4,000,000 of government gold sold on the market. The price of gold collapsed which led to intense panic beginning on September 14, 1869, a day long remembered as Black Friday.

He bought the Grand Opera House in New York and made Josephine Mansfield his mistress, despite being married. Mansfield fell in love with another financier, Edward Stiles Stokes, and the pair blackmailed Fisk, who sued them after apologizing to his wife. Stokes was humiliated when the situation was made public, and he fatally shot Fisk in 1872 on the steps of Grand Central Hotel.

Maps

There is a web page with historic maps of the villages of Pownal through the years.

Recreational Areas and Scenic Views

Mountain Meadow Preserve

Take a leisurely walk through the four miles of trails around this beautiful meadow and explore the diverse natural habitats and ecology from small mammals and reptiles (bears, coyotes, bobcats, fox, and deer) to a constellation of flowers and grasses (aster, little bluestem, and fringed gentian).

Ascend to the meadow's overlook to catch a glimpse through the forest of the mountain vistas across 180 acres. Property of the Trustees of Reservations, the Preserve spans areas of Williamstown, MA and Pownal, VT.

Center Street Skatepark

An open space for recreation located in Pownal Center. It's court surface hosts a basketball hoop and ramps for skateboarding. There are also picnic tables and a Little Free Library for anyone to enjoy.

Hoosic Bend Trail

A perfect place for a scenic stroll along the river, and also provides opportunities for picnicking, fishing, kayaking, and birdwatching! The trail begins in North Pownal. To get to the trailhead, turn onto Dean Road from VT-346. To the right, just before the bridge that crosses the Hoosic, is an access road that leads to the treatment plant. Walk down the road until you see trail signs and a boardwalk. Dogs are welcome on leash. The trail is maintained by volunteer community members.

Past Businesses

North Pownal Tannery

The North Pownal Tannery was an important economic business in Pownal from the 1930s to 1980s. Although the Tannery was decommissioned in 1988 and designated as a Superfund site in 1999, the Tannery was a locus of community life where a sense of family was cultivated between workers. One former Tannery worker, Diane Murphy, shared her experience of working in the Tannery.

Born in 1942, Diane Murphy grew up in Williamstown and moved to North Pownal where she worked in the Tannery between 1960 and 1969. At the Tannery, Diane carried out a multitude of tasks from sorting to hanging to softening and quality checking the sheep and cow hides. The hides came in by train straight from the slaughterhouse and left as finished products by trailer car and by train, after being processed. The tanning process involved several intricate steps and used toxic chemicals that were discarded into the Hoosic River, which Diane recalled people believed to be a “cleansing agent” in her early years working there. The Tannery was also responsible for the construction of the Fire Department and was involved in managing the water supply for many houses in North Pownal.

As a young woman at the time of her employment, Diane remembers the work to be physically demanding and fast-paced, requiring teamwork. Collaboration was the spirit of the Tannery, though, as many of the employees were family or at least acting as such. Diane described the Tannery as a family-oriented place, with the workers’ kids popping in after school and their dogs napping on the millroom floors. Diane actually began working at the Tannery when her oldest daughter was six weeks old and worked through three pregnancies.

The sense of community was one aspect of the Tannery that Diane emphasized. Beginning work at 7:00 in the morning and ending at 3:30 in the afternoon, with a midday lunch break, the

Tannery workers spent most of the day in the facility. Many of the workers worked for many years and lived nearby, if not in North Pownal then in Adams, MA or Petersburg, NY. Diane lived in North Pownal right up the hill from the Tannery, making her commute short and convenient. Because of this close proximity with around half of the workers living in North Pownal, according to Diane, the workers congregated when they finished work, often grabbing a beer and drinking outside the convenience store next to the Tannery at the 3:30 mill whistle that signaled the end of the workday. Life in North Pownal was centered around the Tannery, with the convenience store right next door. The store provided workers with everything they needed from food to clothes to candy and beer to ammunition and gasoline. On pay-day, checks were also cashed at the store. After going through a divorce, Diane decided to leave the Tannery and eventually leave North Pownal, seeking community elsewhere. She went on to work on a chicken farm where she ended up meeting her current husband, Lawrence Murphy; the couple currently resides in Williamstown (2021).

Current Local Businesses

Gammelgården Creamery

Stina Kutzer grew up in Middlebury and moved from Arlington to Pownal in 1984, where she raised three children and now has three grandchildren. Since the 70s, she had dreamed of starting a small dairy. In 2004, Stina's husband Peter gifted her a calf named Babette for her birthday. Babette gave birth to twin daughters, so by 2006, Stina had a small herd of cows. At the time the local food movement was just beginning to take hold. She began making butter, since jersey cows are known for their butterfat, but wanted to find a purpose for the leftover skimmed

milk. In the kitchen Stina experimented with straining and different combinations of cultures, and once she found one that she liked, she began sampling the yogurt-like product at Mighty Food Farm, where her daughter worked at the CSA.

Stina created Gammelgården's signature SKYR, modeled after an Icelandic cheese. One of Stina's sisters, who lives in Middlebury, gave her a couple of gallons of tapped maple syrup, and Peter suggested that she try putting it in the SKYR. The samplers loved it! Today, Maple is the most popular flavor of SKYR. Another is SKYR with jam, which Gammelgården gets from Sidehill Farm in Brattleboro.

With the help of her sister and business partner, Marta Willett, Stina opened the farmstead Creamery in 2010 on 10 acres in North Pownal. Since then, SKYR has become one of the area's favorite local products. Gammelgården SKYR is ubiquitous in neighboring Williamstown and can be found in over twenty stores in New England, including two stores in Boston (Bacco's and Formaggio). Impressively, Gammelgården remains a modest operation; all Gammelgården products are handmade and hand-packaged by the Creamery's five employees, and Peter handles the deliveries. Stina makes two to three batches per week. Each takes about 56 to 85 gallons of milk and consists of about 600 single serve SKYRS and 150 larger containers of popular flavors (Maple and Plain). They also make butter and buttermilk. When Gammelgården needs more milk than their small herd can supply, they purchase it from other dairy farmers in Pownal.

Hill Top Farm

Hill Top Farm is a family-run farm that manages over 700 acres in Pownal. Protected by the Vermont land trust, the lands of Hill Top Farm are protected as farmland in perpetuity.

Though it was established in 1982 as a veal farm by the Gardner family, it has since transitioned to dairy and beef. One of the last operational farms left in Pownal, Hill Top produces organic Northeast Organic Farming Association of Vermont (VTNOFA) certified dairy products, as of 2002, and USDA certified beef, as of 2011. The Farm is currently operated by the Gardener's, with Marilyn running the dairy operation and Crystal managing the beef business. The family's wood-fired maple syrup (using wood from timber stand improvements on the farm and in the area), organic beef, natural pork, whole chicken, and eggs are sold at a shop on the farm.

The Farm is far more than a commercial operation, but a family business created on the lands that the Gardeners grew up on. Marilyn and Marc Sr raised two of their sons, Matt and Marc on these lands, and later Marc married Crystal who joined the family business. Though the business is very successful, and Hill Top is proud to sell organic products, the Farm faces several hardships around retaining their organic certifications. Another challenge that the Farm faces is lack of access to labor for maintenance like hay chopping in the summer.

Wildstone Farm

High school sweethearts, Joy and John Primmer grew up and lived in Williamstown, MA during their early years. After travelling around Williamstown and over to Pownal, they eventually decided to live permanently in Pownal.

The Primmers bought 10 acres of land in East Pownal, part of the current day Wildstone Farm land in 1984. Intending to grow food and live off their land, they began to grow a personal garden. In 2001, the Primmers bought 11 more acres of land adjacent to their existing land, comprising the 21-acre farm that exists today which is part of Elijah Barber's farm started in the late 18th century. After growing for some years, the Primmers were approached by Wild Oats

who expressed interest in selling their produce. Accepting this offer, Wildstone sold wholesale at Wild Oats for 25 years. When this business arrangement was no longer favorable for the Primmers, they decided to pivot.

Now Wildstone conducts direct sales and operates under a CSA program in which 40-45 members have a free choice share for ten weeks: November through March or April through October. The CSA food distribution model is built on trust and collective responsibility. The members provide farmers with the capital and a guaranteed market in advance of their growing and then claim the produce when it is harvested. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Wildstone updated their website to include a purchasing shop that allows members to select produce to fill their boxes, keeping track of inventory online through an online service rather than by hand, as they had been previously. This has saved the Primmers a significant amount of time and labor and improved their business functioning. They also sell at Bennington Farmers' Market.

A family farm, the Primmers still work their land from sunrise to sunset, tending to their crops, harvesting by hand, and upkeeping the property. Wildstone has produced Certified Organic vegetables since 1989, the first Certified Organic farm in Bennington County; they are Vermont Organic Certified and Real Organic Project Certified. Since the early 2000s, the Farm has been growing in high tunnels and a root cellar, allowing them to grow produce through the winter in the cold and windy environment at 1,400 feet above sea level. They primarily use hand tools and have a small walk-behind tractor, and do not use synthetic fertilizers, pesticides, fungicides, or herbicides.

Jackie Sedlock Pottery

Jackie Sedlock has been making pottery for thirty years and has lived at the end of Mason Hill Road in Pownal for ten. She began her career in graphic design, and while working in a company's basement in Pittsfield during the late 1980s, realized she needed a fresh start and wanted to be a potter. She traveled for a few years and ended up in Williamstown where she met her mentors, Ray Bub and Susan Nykiel. Jackie became their apprentice; she learned how to throw pots and run a studio. Her education proved invaluable and the apprenticeship model inspired her current operation, Jackie Sedlock Pottery. After her apprenticeship, she received her BA in Bennington. In final year she started a pottery program at the Buxton School in Williamstown which she ran for eight years.

In Jackie's own words, since 2004, she has been "making pottery slowly." She and her husband bought their house in Pownal in 2012, where they formed ideas about how to live; the landscape and their connectedness to the outdoors is important to her work. The building where her studio is now was originally used to house dump trucks. It was made of corrugated metal with a dirt floor, and Jackie's husband, a contractor, helped transform it to a studio space with a residence upstairs. The residence has become a place for experienced artists and beginners alike to land and hone their craft. It can sleep eight people comfortably in bunk beds and has a shared kitchen and bathroom. Jackie believes that in the world of studio ceramics, the best way forward for students is education and practical experience; she wants visitors to explore themselves and the artistic process through clay.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Jackie passed her time making works of art in the wood-fired kiln just across the driveway from her studio. The kiln is an attraction for other potters, and

some stay for months at a time to work. Jackie is willing to teach anyone what they'd like to learn, from how to throw a pot, to firing in the wood-kiln, to using ash glazes.

Jackie explained that their property was once a dairy, Mason Hill Farm. The foundation for the farmhouse still exists on the property. It used to be open to visitors for \$1 per night, and people would come to draw and paint the expansive views from the once-clear cut site.

Driving Tours

The first driving tour is for the churches in Pownal. Included is a graphic map of Pownal, with stickers at each church location, and a set of written instructions that lay out the driving tour loop.

Contact Us

This page contains the Pownal Historical Society's email, address, and a contact form.

V. CONCLUSION

The Pownal Historical Society website is meant to showcase Pownal's rich history, while at the same time highlighting its current assets, for residents and visitors alike. This interplay is important because the town's history paints a clearer picture of present day Pownal and can inform future solutions and endeavors. Additionally, the website is the first centralized platform that highlights Pownal's assets so that they are more accessible and easier to find. We hope that the website becomes a tool to entice new businesses.

Throughout the semester, we have learned the value of collaboration and of diverse perspectives. Our interviews with Pownal residents and small business owners were the critical deliverable of the project and helped shape it. While we have made headway on the website and set the framework, it is incomplete, and should be added to. The *Contact Us* page includes a form that anyone can leave suggestions in. In multiple places on the website, we encourage viewers to reach out with comments. In this way, we hope that the website builds community.

Finally, while Pownal's history is important and unique, other small towns in New England face similar issues and could benefit from the framework. Just as we used other town websites for inspiration, we hope that the Pownal Historical Society website can be a model for others.

VI. FUTURE RECOMMENDATIONS

While the website now exists as an important resource for the town, it is unfinished. Several pages wait to be created, and the areas that are the least populated with information are schools, people, places. Furthermore, the current local businesses could be expanded significantly to create a more representative profile of the town. There is a significant population

of artists practicing in Pownal who could be featured. The recreational areas and scenic views section could also benefit from being added to because some of these sites could prove to be exciting tourist destinations, if highlighted on the website. Many of these gems are known by locals but obscured from visitors and newcomers to the area. There is the potential to collaborate with experts in certain subject areas to fill in gaps in subject matter and provide suggestions of ways to improve this resource.

One subject instance that could benefit from bringing in experts and members of the Stockbridge-Munsee Band of Mohicans is for the creation of the Mohicans page. Consultation and conversations with the NAGPRA representative for the Stockbridge-Munsee Community, Bonney Hartley, and other relevant members or scholars should inform this page, considering the existing research and accepted information about Mohicans in Pownal is incomplete and seems to reinforce colonial narratives.

Another area that should be addressed and added to the website is the prevalence of mobile home parks in Pownal. When the Racetrack came to Pownal, mobile home parks sprung up to accommodate the influx of employees, and a significant portion of the current Pownal population still lives in mobile home parks. This aspect of the town could be addressed in a section entitled “Homes of Pownal” on the website, which would address both historic homes like the Mooar Wright house (possibly the oldest house in Vermont) and the mobile homes.

Though one driving tour has been created, the “Churches” driving tour, several others could be created, including one on cemeteries, schools, historical places, as well as a general driving tour that highlights some of the most beloved spots in each of the four villages, entitled “Intro to Pownal.” The “Churches” driving tour is to serve as an example. A graphic map that

shows the roads and waterways of Pownal (Figure 3) was created, and stickers marking distinct locations can be added for each driving tour. The “Churches” map has stickers marking each of the five church locations (Figure 4), and the section also includes written directions to follow the tour. In the future, the driving tours can be strengthened by the addition of audio segments from relevant interviewees, historical photographs, and a digital interactive map to follow (i.e., Google Maps). While the driving tours will have short audio segments, another rich area to explore and present on the website is podcasts. Because we captured significant raw footage in our interviews, these audio recordings could be translated into captivating podcasts that share the stories, successes, and hardships of Pownal residents.

An interesting section to consider emphasizing is the rise of ecotourism in Pownal to encourage the creation of other environmentally friendly additions to the town, such as EV charging stations. Some existing spots for ecotourism include the bottle redemption center located on Rt. 7, the hydroelectric dam on the Hoosic River, and the PV panel field visible from Rt. 7. In Bennington County, Pownal leads in terms of solar projects, with the largest commercial PV array at the former Green Mountain Racetrack.³⁶ The existing renewable energy projects include a hydroelectric dam at Dean Rd., and solar arrays at the former racetrack, Barlow Pit at Dean Rd., and Northwest Hill Rd.³⁷

In the hopes of increasing solar and renewable energy sources in suitable locations, the Town Plan (2019) maps potential locations for the development of renewable energy projects.³⁸ By increasing awareness of existing eco-friendly infrastructure, the website could spur

³⁶ Town of Pownal Planning Commission et al., “Town Plan,” 6, 76.

³⁷ Town of Pownal Planning Commission et al., “Town Plan,” 79.

³⁸ Town of Pownal Planning Commission et al., “Town Plan,” 116-119.

excitement at the prospect of adding new projects. Continuing to pursue these green initiatives will cast Pownal as a progressive and future-oriented town, as well as saving energy and costs long-term.

To ensure the long-term maintenance and improvement of the site, work could be continued by other Williams students through the creation of a position through the College. This position could be an opportunity to gain tangible experience with web design, historical research, or pursuits of economic development. This position could be as an unpaid volunteer, funded through CES as a summer internship, a winter study internship, or a student employment position through the Center for Learning in Action (CLiA). This position would allow a student to engage with the broader community in this area and develop skills that are not typically honed in the classroom, such as marketing and graphic design. The next steps are to craft these job and internship proposals to gauge interest in working on this project and assess the feasibility of funding from the aforementioned sources.

To maximize the utility of this resource, the Pownal Historical Society and the town should promote the website through newsletters and other promotional platforms. This resource has the potential to bring in new visitors, residents, and businesses through showcasing the town's history and assets, but people must be aware that this resource exists. As mentioned on the site, "The purpose of this website is to share Pownal's rich history, beautiful landscape, and present-day assets, as well as the stories of its residents. We recognize that it is incomplete and look forward to adding more information. Please do not hesitate to reach out with any questions, comments, or suggestions." By acknowledging that the website is a work in progress, we hope to encourage people to reach out and contribute to the construction of this resource; it should be

a collaborative effort with input from all members of the town. Hopefully, this would increase the sense of community and belonging in Pownal.

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APPENDIX

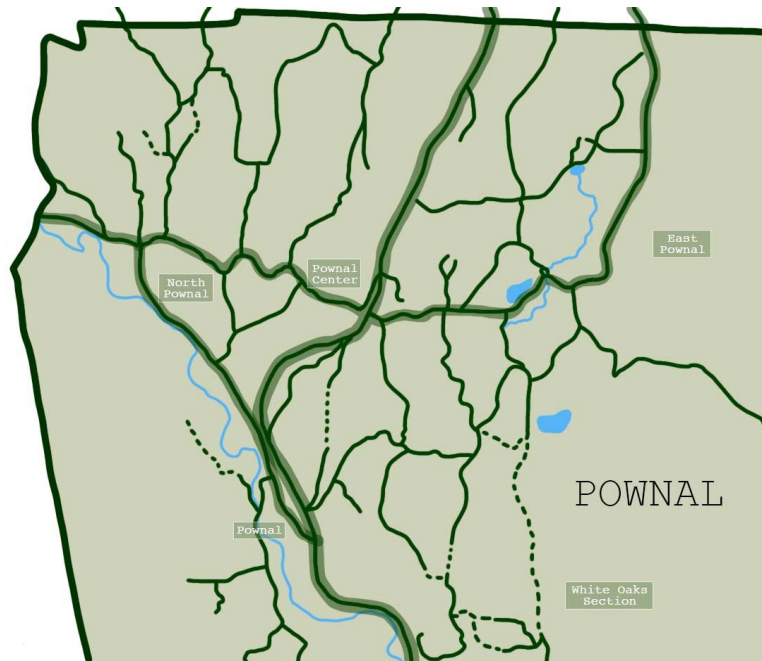


Figure 3. Graphic map of Pownal that includes major roads and waterways. Stickers can be added to this base map to indicate locations for each of the driving tours.

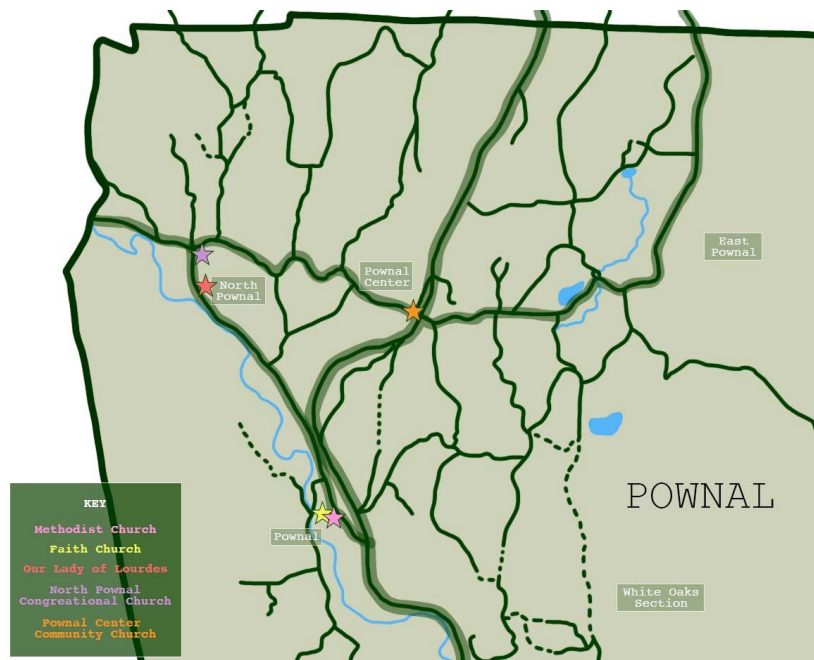


Figure 4. Churches Driving Tour map. Each star sticker indicates one of the church locations to stop at during the tour.