



Town of North Smithfield

Historic District Commission

Union Village Historic District

Date Established: January 1973 (National Register: November 28, 1978)

Geographic Location: The Union Village Historic District is approximately a half-mile long section of Great Road (Route 146A), beginning with parcels located on Park Drive, and continuing with parcels located along Great Road and following Northwesterly to Milton Avenue, Woonsocket Hill Road, Bellevue Avenue, Homestead Avenue, Warren Avenue, Morse Avenue, Pound Hill Road, Westwood Road, and Hillview Avenue to an area ending with Lapre Road (see Union Village Historic District Boundary Map).

General Description: The Union Village Historic District includes parcels encompassing many representations of 18th and early 19th century structures of historical and architectural significance, as well as several other compatible late 19th and 20th century buildings. During the early 19th century, Union Village underwent rapid development, with earlier farms joined along Great Road by the substantial dwellings which characterize the village today. During the stagecoach trading era, taverns along Great Road, a main thoroughfare between Providence and Worcester, thrived with competition and began to establish a prosperous community. This was conversely followed by a time of slow decline with the advent of mass manufacturing and the Industrial Age.

Today, Union Village exists as a suburban, residential community with the main businesses and commercial buildings of centuries before being converted into residences while maintaining the charming character of a time gone by, widely differing in age, diverse in style. Each house is distinct in design and architecture, yet their detail as seen in their porches, entryways, entablatures, window and door configurations, cornices, and associated trim, all create a sense of unity through their situation along Great Road and their setting among fine old trees and well-landscaped surroundings.

Historical Development: "Here, one of North Smithfield's first settlers lived – James Arnold. His house, built about 1690 and much expanded later, is still standing. The Quaker Arnolds erected a meetinghouse nearby in 1721, on Great Road. It served northern Rhode Island's substantial Quaker community. Union Village is fundamentally, however, a highway village. A crossroads settlement, its history is founded in its site at the juncture of a major north-south thoroughfare linking Providence to Worcester and an east-west route running from Boston to Connecticut. Highway use prompted the establishment of several inns here. The first was opened in 1733 by Joseph Arnold. In 1739, his brother Thomas opened a second tavern, which was later run by his son Peleg. The tavern gained renown during the Revolutionary War and was enlarged in about 1790.

The first decades of the 19th century were the Golden Age of Union Village. Within about ten years, almost a dozen buildings were erected. Union Village was then an important transportation nexus for northern Rhode Island, a commercial center for the surrounding agricultural hinterland, a gathering place and center of education and religious services. In about 1804, two new taverns were built: the Seth Allen Tavern, at the corner of Pound Hill Road, and the George Aldrich Inn,

across the road. These two taverns maintained a lively competition for highway trade for a number of years during the stagecoach era, and several notables visited, including the Marquis de Lafayette during his 1825 trip to this country. In 1805, the Smithfield Union Bank was incorporated. The first bank in northern Rhode Island, it opened here for forty-six years, until its business was transferred to Woonsocket in 1851. Originally named as Woonsocket because of the nearby hill, the village was renamed Union Village after the bank, probably when the post office was established. A schoolhouse was erected on Pound Hill Road in 1807, and in the following year the Smithfield Academic Society was incorporated. Built in 1810, the academy attracted students from all parts of New England and more distant areas. Union Village's period of prosperity was short lived, however. Without waterpower, it had no industry. Woonsocket and other surrounding villages became industrialized and urbanized. The completion of the Providence and Worcester Railroad in 1847, by-passing Union Village, dealt a severe blow to the stagecoach trade. Taverns began to close, the bank moved in 1851, the academy closed in 1852, and the post office was moved to Woonsocket. In the second half of the 19th century, Union Village sank into a genteel decline as a secluded hamlet. During the first half of the 20th century, the village became a residential suburb of Woonsocket with the construction of a street railway from Woonsocket to Pascoag through the village and, later, with the full flowering of the automobile age and associated highway improvements. Traffic along Great Road remained moderately heavy until the North Smithfield Expressway, built in 1960, absorbed all the through traffic. Today, the well preserved and maintained village again is a quiet, residential community, its major buildings along Great Road registering more than two centuries of the history of North Smithfield."

--The preceding excerpt was taken from Historic Architectural Resources of North Smithfield, Rhode Island: A Preliminary Report, September 1980, through the Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission.