



Heritage Corridor Feasibility Study Begins

This is the first of four Newsletters which will be issued during a 5 month process to assess the feasibility of designating a region extending from Lexington west to Gardner as a National Heritage Corridor.

In 1993, a group of citizens, planners, historians and town officials from Lexington, Acton, Littleton and Harvard formed a grassroots organization known as the Freedom's Way Heritage Association. Our goal is to seek federal designation as a National Heritage Corridor to preserve the area's nationally significant historic, cultural and natural resources. The region is rich in historic sites, trails, landscapes and viewsheds which are important in our country's founding and the establishment of our American philosophies of freedom, conservation and social justice. The overriding concern of this organization is to plan for appropriate, sustainable growth while protecting the qualities of this unique area.

The final corridor boundary will be determined through evaluation of the significance of resources and level of grass roots support in the region's communities. A network of people is being organized to ensure that a quality product is produced and supported by all the of the interests needed to successfully implement a National Heritage Corridor. For this purpose, the Freedom's Way Heritage Association and the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Management have announced the selection of ICON architecture, inc., to conduct a feasibility study for national heritage designation.

Since its founding, the Freedom's Way Heritage Association has compiled data to identify the area's special character. Local areas of national interest will also be identified during the feasibility study. The "Evolution of Democracy" and "Man's Changing Relationship to His Environment" are the initial themes which have been proposed for the Heritage Corridor. Places in the corridor contributed to the emergence of democratic principles, the American Revolution, our concepts of freedom, experimentation and invention. The so-called "American Renaissance" involved many early American philosophers who chose to live in this area. The grassroots efforts of the Freedom's Way Heritage Association are receiving support from Senator Robert A. Durand, Commissioner Peter Webber and U.S. Congressmen Martin Meehan and John F. Tierney. The Massachusetts Department of Environmental Management is funding the \$50,000 feasibility study.

Any interested person is encouraged to attend the four public meetings that will take place during the feasibility study process. Liaison people will be identified within each community to identify key people to participate in the public process. The goal is to arrive at a regional consensus.

Freedom's Way Heritage Association Steering Committee

The Members of the Steering Committee include:

Freedom's Way Association
Mildred Chandler
Marge Darby
Robert Farwell
Mass. Department of Environmental Management
James Baecker
African American/Nipmuc History
Elisabeth Tennessee
**Metropolitan Area Planning Council/
Minuteman Advisory Group**
Judith Alland
Minuteman Historical Societies
George Krusen
Montachusetts Regional Planning Commission
George Kahale
Nashoba Valley Chamber of Commerce
Deborah La Pointe
Nashua River Watershed Association
Robert Levite
Museum of Our National Heritage
Thomas Leavitt
Mass. Historical Commission
Judith McDonough
National Park Service
Nancy Nelson
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Janet Kennedy

Consultants:

ICON architecture, inc.
Jonathan Lane, Principal-in-Charge
Beatrice Bernier, Project Manager

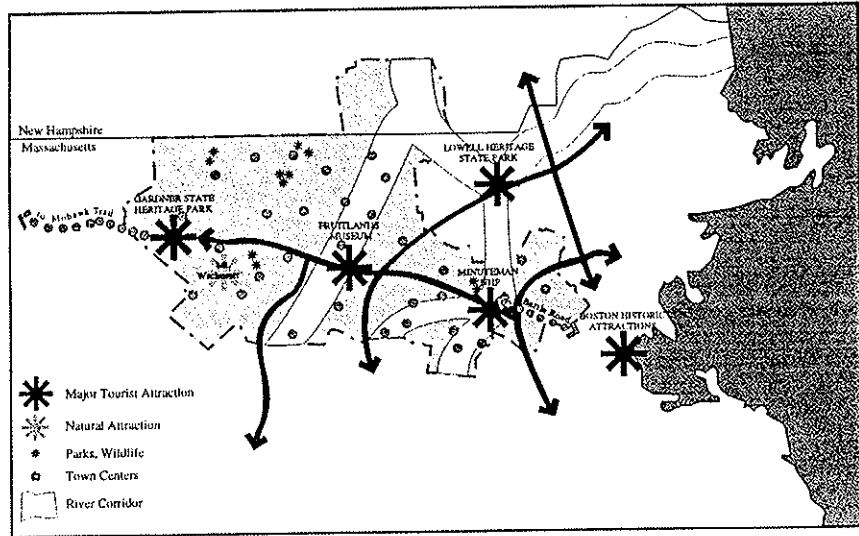
**For more information or to be placed on the
feasibility study mailing list please contact:
Mildred Chandler or Marge Darby at the
Freedom's Way Heritage Association
43 Buena Vista Street, MA 01433;
Tel: (508) 772-3654**

Existing National Heritage Areas

In 1986 the U.S. Congress established the Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor in Massachusetts and Rhode Island. The Blackstone River Valley conveys the story of 19th century textile industry in New England, the canal-building era and the diverse immigrant population that came to the valley in search of jobs. The Heritage Corridor also provides technical assistance to promote local economic development.

At the end of 1996, the U.S. Congress designated eight new National Heritage Areas, including the Essex County Heritage Area in Massachusetts which interprets the maritime and industrial heritage of North Shore communities. These are a new type of designations which offer the potential for federal support but, more importantly, provide a common basis for citizens, communities and private interests to develop, protect, and use their resources for mutual, long term benefit. These National Heritage Areas represent a new chapter in heritage development which is marked by strong local leadership and control, coupled with the potential for federal assistance, both financial and technical, without a significant federal presence or property interest.

The seeking of national recognition is strictly voluntary and with your involvement the Freedom's Way Heritage Corridor could join these successful precedents.



The Study Area involves a multiplicity of resources including: Minuteman National Historic Park, Gardner State Heritage Park, Route 2 Corridor, Fruitlands Museum, Historic Town Commons, River Valley, and major wildlife preserve and recreation areas.

What is a National Heritage Corridor ?

A National Heritage Corridor is a regional approach to preserving the unique history, natural resources, cultural heritage, and physical features of a large regional landscape. A National Heritage Corridor or Area is a federal designation by the National Park Service, Department of the Interior, with a local emphasis on management. Such designation is meant to unify people, entire cities and towns, businesses, heritage organizations, environmental groups and state government in a common cause by working together to preserve and enhance the region's special identity.

The feasibility study is the first phase of the designation process and must include a definition of the important elements of the landscape and how these are linked to the story line and themes of the region. To be effective a Heritage Area and its landscape should convey compelling stories which are of national significance. A Heritage Area must be more than a collection of resources and related themes; it requires public and/or private management capacity to accomplish important goals.

National Heritage Corridors are designated by acts of Congress. Proponents of a National Heritage Corridor must demonstrate to Congress an area's uniqueness, national significance and the ways it might serve as a model for sensible growth management. For this feasibility study, the Freedom's Way Heritage Association wishes to pursue National Designation which will require meeting several "tests":

Resource Quality - are natural and man-made resources intact and of sufficient national importance to warrant designation?

Regional Themes - is the region's story of national significance and can it be sufficiently linked to the existing resources to enable it to be appreciated by residents and visitors?

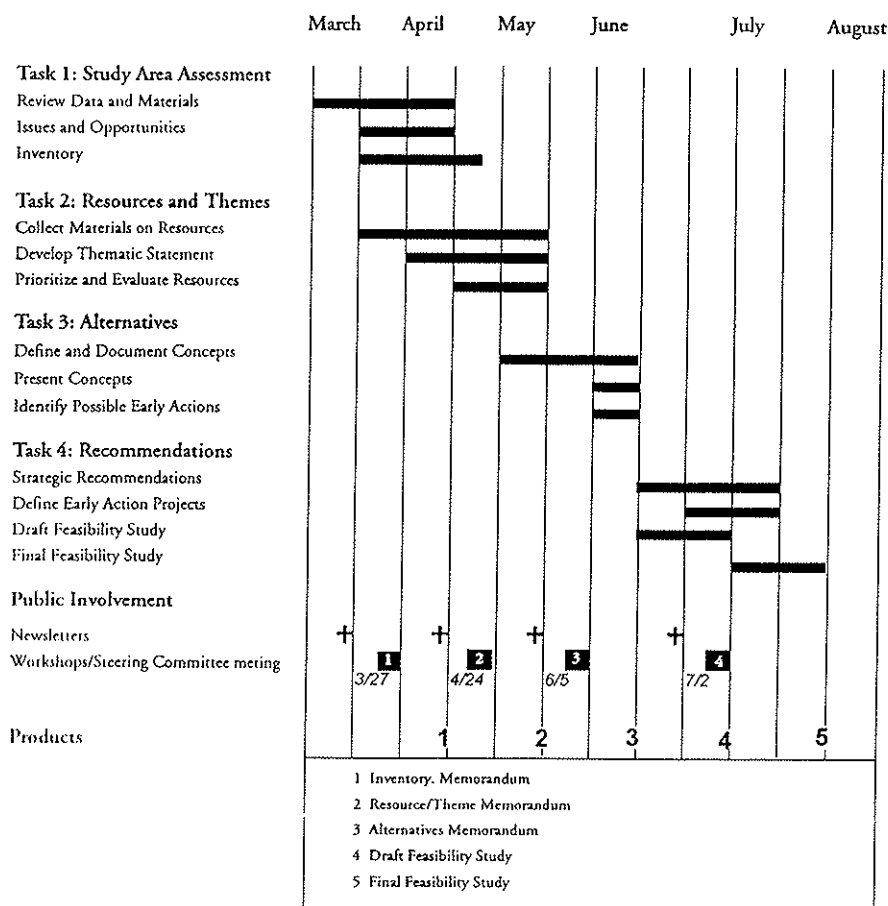
Potential Visions - can a plan be conceived which is responsive to resources and achievable within reasonable constraints?

Local Support - do local entities recognize the importance of their resources and is there the will to act in concert to protect them while implementing a plan?

The Freedom's Way area is an ideal candidate for such designation. The challenge will be to ground these concepts in the "place" of the proposed area. Within the proposed corridor are an abundance of local and regional organizations with considerable expertise in these subjects. What is lacking is the coordination to unite the regional interests through the enhancement of common goals. We hope to encourage partnerships between local and regional groups, to bring history and place together.

FEASIBILITY STUDY PROCESS

Project Schedule



The above schedule presents the key tasks, events and products for the Feasibility Study. Public involvement will be critical to the successful outcome of the work and will occur continuously throughout the study. Four workshops will be held during the process to insure a meaningful level of public involvement and newsletters will be distributed prior to each workshop. The four workshops would be as follows:

Workshop 1: Issues and Opportunities (Task 1) - will provide the opportunity for groups of residents, business people, public agencies, and interest groups from across the study area to share their perceptions about the region and its potentials. The workshop will also be a key vehicle for collecting data.

Workshop 2: Resources and Themes (Task 2) -will present initial inventory findings and conclusions, and will be followed by participants' input on key resources and initial ideas for the Heritage Area.

Workshop 3: Alternatives Charette (Task 3) - will engage participants along with the Steering Committee, to join the consultants in a brainstorming session during which alternative approaches for organizing, interpreting and implementing an Heritage Area will be developed and assessed.

Workshop 4: Feedback on Recommendations (Task 4) - will present the draft feasibility study including a slide show to the Steering Committee and the public to elicit comments, additions and modifications.

Meet the Consultants:

ICON architecture, inc.

ICON architecture, inc. is a Massachusetts based firm, the merged entity of Lane Frenchman and Associates and City Design Collaborative. Nearly twenty years ago, the principals of ICON completed the pioneering Lowell National Historic Park plan, which was a trail-blazing partnership to preserve and use historic resources. ICON has assisted many clients to define new types of Heritage Areas which capitalize on their particular resources and opportunities.

Recent plans prepared by ICON include the Augusta Canal National Heritage Area and South Carolina National Heritage Corridor which have been endorsed by the National Park Service and designated by the U.S. Congress in 1996. ICON has planned and designed many State Heritage Parks including five of seven locations in the Massachusetts Heritage State Park Program and several Heritage State Parks in Pennsylvania. ICON's Heritage Area plans have led to substantial project implementation commitments from public and private sectors.

ICON staff for this assignment includes:

Jonathan Lane, Principal-in-Charge

Beatrice Bernier, Project Manager

John Shields, Urban Designer

John Ryther, Landscape Architect

Lucia Vasak, Landscape Architect

OF FURTHER INTEREST...

The Historic Massachusetts Bay Path

article by local historian, Maryanne MacLeod

The Massachusetts Bay Path, which was to play an important role in the destiny of the country, has its origins in the first aboriginal footsteps through the forest track. In time, this track became well-trodden paths which linked one village to another and which were the basis for the extensive trade routes of native America. In Indian fashion, these paths offered the best view of the land. They forded rivers at their shallowest points, wended pleasantly around the shores of ponds, avoided tangled and swampy wetlands, and traversed the least difficult grades of hills.

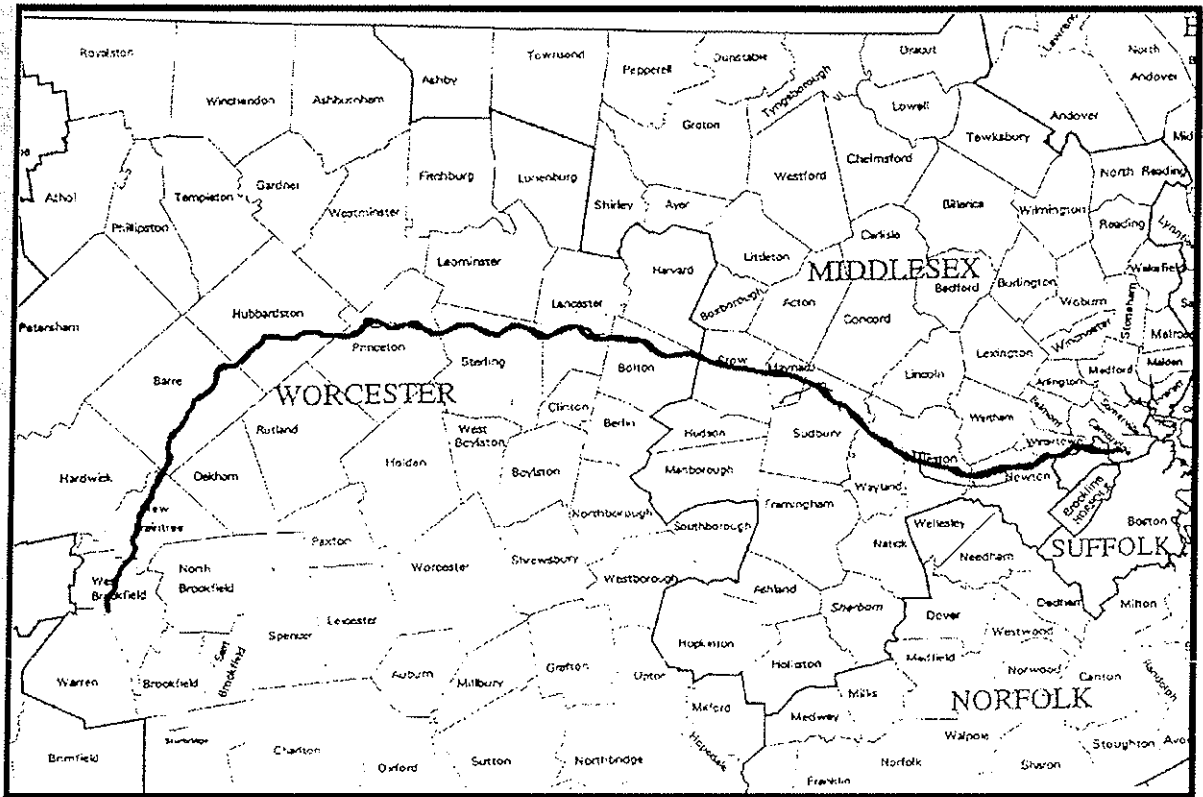
When the European settlers arrived on the shores of New England, the colonists widened these trails: first into cart paths, then into wagon roads. Finally, as the population increased and roads became ever more vital to the New England economy, they became the post roads of colonial times. From the earliest days of settlement, the Massachusetts Bay Colony recognized the importance of passable roads, and the General Court enacted laws to ensure that roads would be built. In 1639, the General Court decreed that each town would lay out a highway connecting it to the adjacent town. Every man would labor one day every year working on the roads. However, roads were seldom well maintained and travel remained infrequent, difficult and often hazardous during the Colonial Era.

As new towns were settled ever westward in the 17th century, the groundwork for the Massachusetts Bay Path, linking each colonial village, was laid out. The Path began in Cambridge on the northern bank of the Charles River, and slowly wended its way westward. Though it is not possible to pinpoint exactly its original location, it is believed that it passed near present day Mount Auburn Street and on to Weston near the Golden Ball Tavern. By 1638, it extended to Sudbury with a branch to Concord.

The founding of Lancaster in the 1640's not only increased trade with the tribes of the Nipmuck confederacy but led to colonial settlement in Springfield and Brookfield and a further necessity for roads. In 1648, Governor John Winthrop recorded in his journal that a new way had been found to Springfield, which avoided most of the hills. This way stretched across Maynard and Stow in the vicinity of present day Route 117, crossed over Wattaquodock Hill in Bolton and on Wattaquodock into Lancaster, where the most prosperous trading house in Massachusetts was located. From Lancaster, it crossed into Sterling, over the Wekepeke Hills, and into Princeton over the North Row Roads. By the 1660's, it traversed the Barre Plains, dipped south to New Braintree and the frontier settlement of Brookfield and ended in Springfield. The main path crossed the Connecticut River and led into the Iroquois country of New York; but a branch led south to Hartford.

Mary Rowlandson is believed to have traveled over the Bay Path after her capture in the February 1676 attack on Lancaster during King Phillip's War, and again after her release at Redemption Rock in Princeton in May of 1676. The Path was much used during King Phillip's War to move troops and supplies as well as by settlers fleeing to Boston to escape the ravages of war.

Roads in the 17th century were rude and travel over them was difficult at best. Depending on the season, roads were sometimes impassable. Frequently, the location of the road shifted to better terrain or to accommodate an influx of settlers. One of the problems of precisely placing the Bay Path is illustrated by its route through Bolton. According to Bolton historians, depending on the season and the condition of the road, the path passed either over present day Wattaquodock Hill Road or Old Country Road. Usually, the roads were better suited to foot travel than to loaded wagons. But in an age when horses and wagons were few, most people did not travel beyond their immediate town, except on foot.



Approximate Massachusetts Bay Path Route between Cambridge and West Brookfield

BY THE WAY...

MARCH 27

Freedom's Way Heritage Association
The first Workshop is coming up this month, see 'WHAT'S AHEAD'

APRIL 8

Nashua River Association
Lovely Lichens
Lichenologist Elisabeth Kneiper, will tell us all about the wonderful and mysterious lichens in New England.
Call 508 448-0299

MAY 10

Fruitlands Museum
Past Landscape: Historic Land Use on Makamachekamuck Hill
Join Curator Micheal Volmar for a tour of the grounds and learn about the past uses of the land. Call 508 456-3924

JUNE 20-22

New England Native American Institute
Solstice Spiritual Gathering
at the Sterling Springs Campground,
Call 508 886-6073

UPDATE...

A **Discovery Tour** of the feasibility study area was conducted over a three day period on March 4, 5 and 7, 1997. This tour involved Steering Committee members Mildred Chandler and Marge Darby, DEM's Project Manager Jim Baecker, and ICON staff members Jon Lane and Beatrice Bernier. About 30 communities were visited providing an initial baseline understanding about the corridor and its resources.

WHAT'S AHEAD...

Meeting Notice/Workshop 1: you are invited to participate in the first of four public meetings on **Thursday, March 27, 1997.** The meeting will be held from 7:00 to 8:30 PM at the Fort Devens Officers Club.

Directions: From Rt. 2, and I-495 interchange go West 6.5 miles to "Fort Devens-Jackson Road", (exit #37B), go North on Jackson Road 1 mile from gate house to T-junction at Girvey St.; turn left and go 350 ft.; turn right on Sherman Ave. and go to the entrance of the Officers Club, (1-storey building on Right, adjacent to the parade ground.)

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This newsletter is an invitation to membership. Your involvement can make a difference by helping to shape our area's plan. Together, we can protect our area's uniqueness through the creation of a Freedom's Way National Heritage Corridor.



Freedom's Way Heritage Association
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