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Royalston Historic District boundaries

Relevant documents

The following documents are referred to below. Many of them are available on-line on the Town web site:

- A. May 6, 2014 letter from Vyto Andreliunas to the HDC, with excerpts from the zoning and historic district bylaws and assessors' maps
- B. Royalston Historic District map filed at the Registry of Deeds
- C. 1980 Final report of the Royalston Historic District Study Committee, with a map on the last page (pdf file).
- D. 1974-1979 Historic District boundaries proposals, from the HDC Archives (pdf file)
- E. Post 1996 version of Assessors' map #7
- F. 1980 Attorney General Historic District Documents (pdf file)
- G. 1979 Preliminary Report of the Royalston Historic District Study Committee (pdf file)

Background:

The Local Historic District

The Royalston Local Historic District was established in 1980. According to the bylaw (see A and C) its boundary is specified on a Map titled "Historic District Map of the Town of Royalston", dated January 1979. No copy of such a map could be located recently.

A map of the "Royalston Historic District" is on file at the Worcester Registry of Deeds, Plan Book 636 Page 44 (see B), and reproduced below. It is undated and was filed in 1990. It shows physical features (stone walls, roads, streams...) but not a well-marked boundary. A district map, similar to the map at the Registry of Deeds, was also found in the HDC archives together with some early material describing the district boundaries (see D). Part of the southeast corner is missing from that map.

The creation of the 1980 Historic District was based on a final report of the Royalston Historic District Study Committee (whose chair was also the Planning Board chair). A copy of the final report (see C) was found in the

Massachusetts Historical Commission archives. On its last page it shows the same map as the one in the HDC archives, but with the addition of a solid black line presumably delimiting the Historic District. In 2019 several copies of a similar map printed on legal paper were found in the Town Hall basement. One is reproduced below. The Attorney General approved a copy of that map, with road names added, in 1980 (F). Its north part is missing, probably because the original was on legal size paper. It is reproduced at the end of this document. However as noted below, some of the physical features are misplaced.

Both versions of the study committee report contain a "metes and bounds" description of the Historic District, which provide an excellent understanding of boundaries when read together with the HDC maps.

The zoning districts

The zoning bylaw, as revised in 1987 under the auspices of the Planning Board, defines 3 zoning districts. It may have been felt at the time that the Local Historic District had to coincide with a zoning district. This may be desirable for a number of reasons but it is not mandated by law or regulations. Changes to zoning districts do not affect the local historic district, and conversely.

At any rate in 1987 the Royalston Historic Residential zoning district was defined by reusing the metes and bounds description of the Local Historic District. While the wording in the zoning bylaw appears to come from an early version of the study committee report, it describes exactly the same boundaries as the final report. Thus at the time the Local Historic District and the Historic Residential zoning district nominally coincide.

The zoning districts were not represented on a map in the zoning bylaw. However the assessors showed the zoning district boundary on their maps. Unfortunately the assessors' maps and the representation of the zoning district boundaries have evolved over the years, although the zoning district definitions had not changed since 1987.

In 2014 the Planning Board considered changes to the Zoning Bylaw and communicated with the Historic District Commission to avoid causing undesirable impacts. This has led to some research on the local historic district boundaries, which have revealed some minor discrepancies in a number of areas. Those discrepancies are reviewed below.

In 2015 new zoning bylaws were adopted. They define the Historic Residential District as coinciding with the Local Historic District. A Zoning Map was also produced. On that map the boundaries of the Historic Residential District do not coincide with those of the Local Historic District studied here.

2014 review of the boundaries of the Local Historic District

Discrepancies between the various representations of the boundaries can be divided in 4 categories

1. The commonly understood limits of both the historic district and the zoning district do not coincide with the metes and bounds description in the South West corner of the district.
2. Some features on the HDC map are not drawn at the correct position on the map (or are described too succinctly).
3. Some features on the assessors' maps are not drawn at their correct positions.
4. The zoning district boundary is not shown at the correct position on the assessors' maps (or on some versions thereof).

Below we follow the items in the metes and bounds description of the zoning district and we comment on issues that have been found by walking parts of the boundary and by examining maps.

- Commencing on the north side of N.E. Fitzwilliam Road at the corner of the stone wall immediately east of the Carbone house, crossing the road at that point to the south side to a stone wall thence westerly along that wall to the N.E. corner of the land owned by Leonard and Marie Campo.

The area of the Carbone house is confusing for a number of reasons:

- The house has been demolished, only a cellar hole remains.
- The area is located in a small valley on the side of Frye Hill. An intermittent stream flows south in the valley.
- What appears to be the driveway to the property is in fact the old road¹. After climbing from the 11 NE Fitzwilliam Rd it reached a flat area where the side valley widens, crossed the stream (over a nice culvert) and kept climbing eastward on the side of the hill, going straight to the Newton mill. In the 19th century the present road was created further to the South, skirting the hill and descending to the Newton mill.

At any rate "the corner of the stone wall" can easily be found without confusion on the west side of the stream, as can the "corner of the land", now the limit between the Chase-Gospodarek property and the conservation land on the South side of the road.

- Thence southerly along the stone wall and on the bearing of S7 W until intersecting the southerly running small stream.

No problem. This is mostly wetlands.

¹ Thanks to Stephen Chase for pointing this out.

- Thence southeasterly along the stream until it meets the pond. Thence easterly along the north edge of the pond to its dam. Thence along the stream to where it breaches an east-west wall.

No problem.

- Thence easterly along the wall to its end. Thence southerly along a sparse wall to its end. Thence easterly along the wall behind the "Wilcox" house to a corner. Thence southerly along the wall to the abandoned town highway.

This is a little confusing but makes sense when seen in conjunction with the map. The wall marking the East side ("southerly along the wall") is very conspicuous.

- Thence directly across the road and west toward the center of town along the South edge of the highway to the stone wall marking the east limit of the Turner property to a corner.

The assessors' map in A is incorrect. It places the boundary along the South edge of Old Winchendon Highway instead of going down to and crossing the road (i.e. road 68). This is significant because the meadow in front of Pat Jackson's house, south of old Winchendon Highway, is not included in the Historic District by the assessors. Note also that the small stream flowing in this area is not drawn accurately on the HDC map. It actually veers west and passes under the old Route 68 and then under the current Route 68.

- Thence westerly along a stone wall marking the southern bound of land of Gerald Chaisson and the Raymond School, and ending at the town dump road.

No problem.

- Thence directly across the road and southerly along a stone wall to a corner, thence westerly along a stone wall to where it meets the stone walls of the Old Royalston Cemetery.

No problem. The "westerly along a stone wall" refers to the northern edge of the transfer station area. The land has been filled, covering the stone wall. The wall reappears further to the West.

- Thence westerly along the stone wall marking the cemetery bound to a corner.

No problem.

- Thence continuing west on a line of sight (270 degrees) across land of Katherine Cole to a stone wall, then northerly along that wall to the south side of the Athol Road.

This line of sight is across a parcel of land now owned by Henry Cole, West of the cemetery. Only the part of the parcel along the road is in the Historic District, a larger part on the South side is not. However the map found at the MHC, and the map approved by the Attorney General the assessors' maps do not include this area in the Historic District. They all show the West cemetery wall as marking the limit of the District. Interestingly the final reports states: "The small tract of land in the southwest corner of the proposed District includes a memorial nature walk", but this area was dropped.

- Thence across the road to the stone wall, and then easterly toward town to the northerly running stone wall that marks the bound between properties of Katherine Cole and Herbert Peterson.

On the HDC map the “northerly running stone wall” is positioned too far to the West (in the continuation of the West cemetery wall). The assessors’ map is correct.

- Thence northerly along that wall to a westerly running wall behind the Stowe house.

No problem

- Thence westerly along that wall to an iron pipe (about 75 feet).

The iron pipe could not be found recently, a metal detector may reveal its position.

- Thence northerly along a line to sight (the edge of the field and on a bearing of approximately 010 degrees) to a stone wall running east-west and marking the south bound of land belonging to Bundschuh.

The assessors map incorrectly shows a zig-zag line. It should be in the direct continuation of the wall referred to in the next paragraph.

- Thence across the wall and northerly along a stone wall to the Warwick Road.

No problem

- Thence across the road to a stone wall of the west edge of the John and Ann Spaulding property and thence northerly along that wall to the North Fitzwilliam Road.

No problem

- Thence along the road and westerly along it to a gatepost, thence northerly about 100 feet to the end of a northerly running stone wall marking the west edge of the Humphrey Nash property.

No problem

- Thence along that wall and on a bearing of approximately 20 degrees across the brook flowing easterly to the northern end of the Nash property.

Not yet walked. The assessors’ maps 7 in A and E and the HDC maps appear to agree.

- Thence continuing northerly along a wall marking the west bound of the Mildred White property to an east-west running wall.

Not yet walked. The assessors’ maps 7 in A and E and the HDC maps appear to agree.

- Thence easterly along that wall to northerly running wall (a large oak tree grows in the intersection of the walls).

Not yet walked. The assessors’ maps 7 in A and E show the boundary in the middle of a lot, which is unlikely if it follows a wall.

- Thence northerly along that wall to an east-west wall marking the northern bound of the Eldora Bowers property.

This wall is clearly visible. However the assessors maps 7 in A and E place the boundary in the middle of the next lot to the North.

- Thence easterly along that wall to Frye Hill Road.

No problem

- Thence directly across the road to the west side and on a bearing of 100 degrees along a line of sight (to include the Carlton Wilcox barn) to a stone wall running north-south.

There are some issues. The road is bending here, so “directly across the road” is slightly to the NE as shown on the HDC map. The barn has been extended to the North, so that the boundary line is now inside the barn. Also the assessors’ maps 7 in A and E do not appear to place the old Frye house at its correct location, relative to the stone wall on the Bowers property at 19 Frye Hill Rd. They also show a line of sight that is more like 80 degrees (i.e. NE instead of SE).

The “stone wall running north south” is an extremely long wall starting near NE Fitzwilliam Rd and running N along the side of the hill well north of its highest point. Its N half separates the Carbone property from its neighbors to the West. Its S half runs inside the Carbone property, where it veers somewhat to the SE, in order to remain on the East side of the side valley referred to in “a” above.

We have seen 3 versions of the assessors’ map 7 showing different boundaries. The one in A) places the East boundary of the Historic District West of the north-south wall. The one in E) fixed that issue but ignored the change of direction of the north-south wall. A third version, a large map in Vyto’s possession, appeared to be more accurate, but it has not been checked carefully.

- Thence south along that wall to the Carbone property and continuing south along the wall on the Carbone property to the starting point on the N.E. Fitzwilliam Road.

This short paragraph is too simple. The north-south wall stops at the old NE Fitzwilliam Rd, on the East side of the stream. However the starting point in “a” is on the modern NE Fitzwilliam Rd, on the West side of the stream. Thus the boundary has an edge, a few dozen feet long, in the wet area between the old and the new roads.

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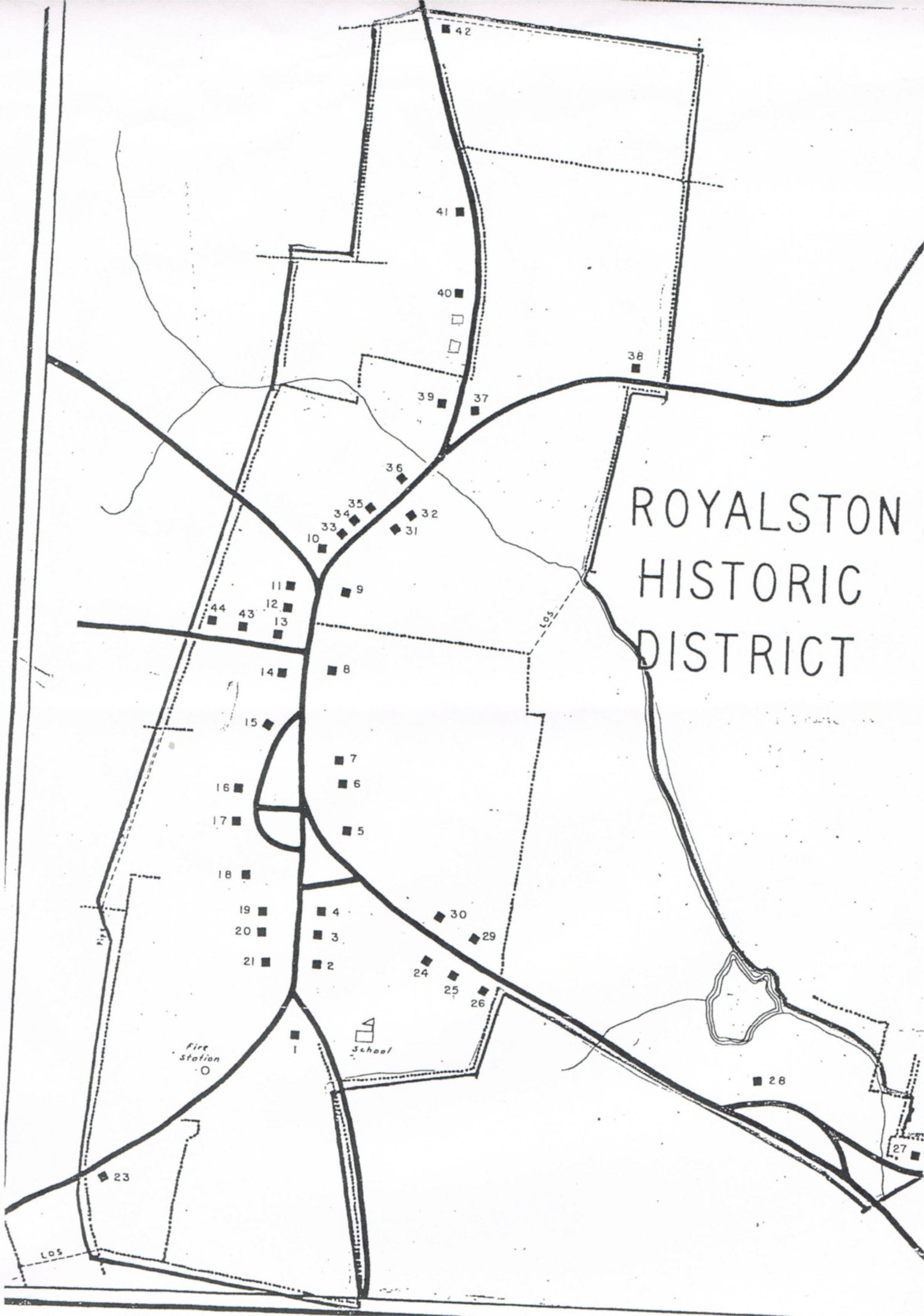
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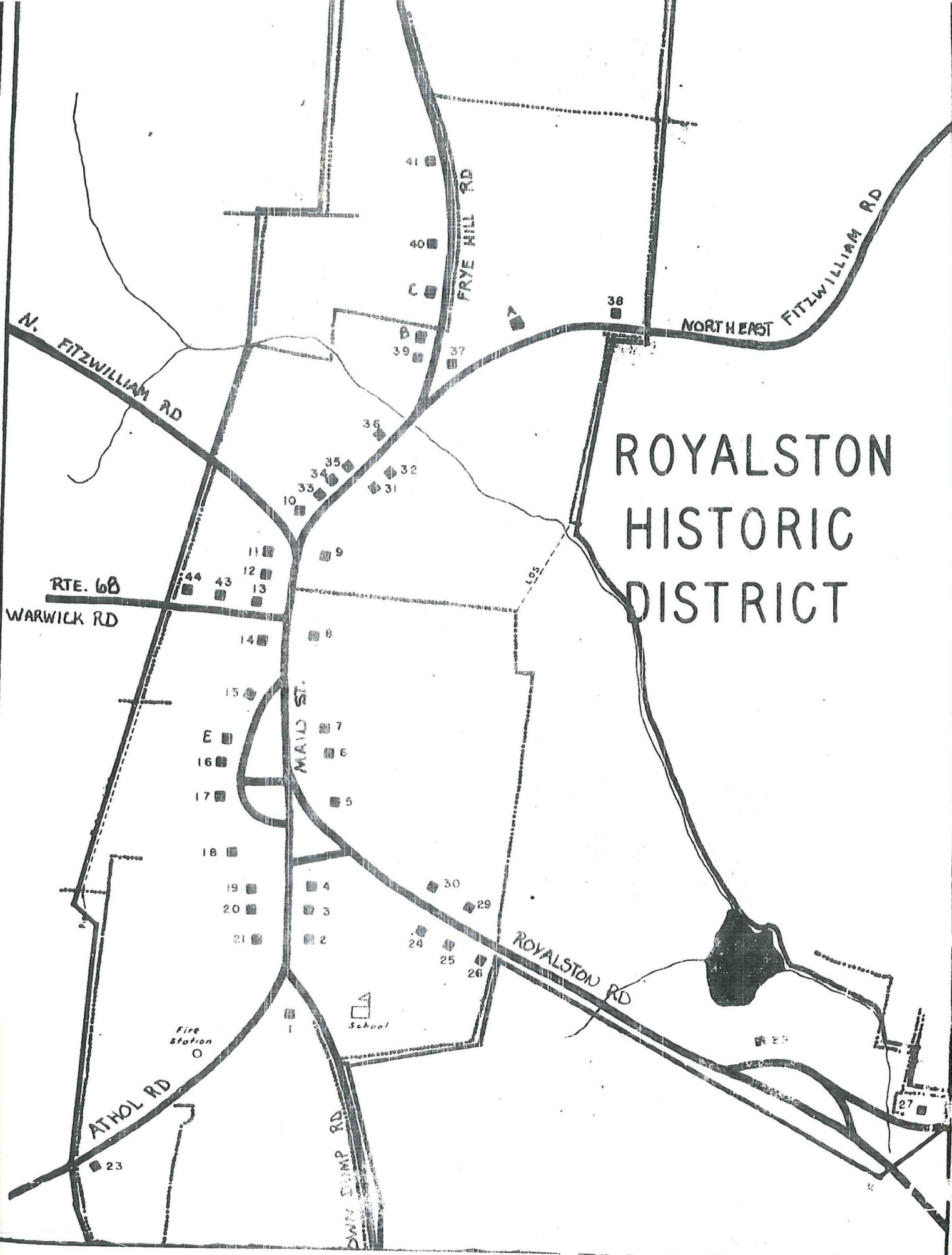
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Register

ROYALSTON HISTORIC DISTRICT





ROYALSTON
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