

Swanzy Center

A booklet of historic maps, photographs, and historical notes illustrating the evolution of the village streetscape and showing how much or how little things have changed



ca. 1890

The old meeting house, site of Swanzy Town Hall, and Mt. Caesar Union Library were photographed ca. 1890 with newly planted trees in front. The white pines native to the area were reintroduced as street trees in the late 1800s.

Read *History of Swanzy*, 1892



1940s

A 1940s view of the 1914 Swanzy Town Hall and Mt. Caesar Union Library showed the tall white pines at 50-60 years old. The small fire engine house visible through the trees stood beside the Town Hall until 1967.

Swanzy Old Photographs



Today

Today, the buildings appear as they have since the pines were taken down in the 1980s-90s. The fire department is in the lower level of the Town Hall.

Preservation Company 2017

This booklet highlighting Swanzey's historic town center was prepared by Preservation Company in cooperation with the New Hampshire Division of Historical Resources, the New Hampshire Department of Transportation, the Federal Highway Administration, and the Town of Swanzey, under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act to mitigate adverse effects of the NH Route 32/Sawyers Crossing Road intersection project and includes historic resources. The Swanzey Civic Historic District was determined eligible for the National Register of Historic Places in 2018 and includes individually listed National Register and New Hampshire State Register properties.

Swanzey has the benefit of several local historical organizations and active citizen historians. Many historic photographs can be found on-line through the Swanzey Old Photographs Facebook page, the Swanzey Preservation Society and Old Homestead Association pages, and locally in the collections of the Mt. Caesar Union Library and the Swanzey Historical Museum.

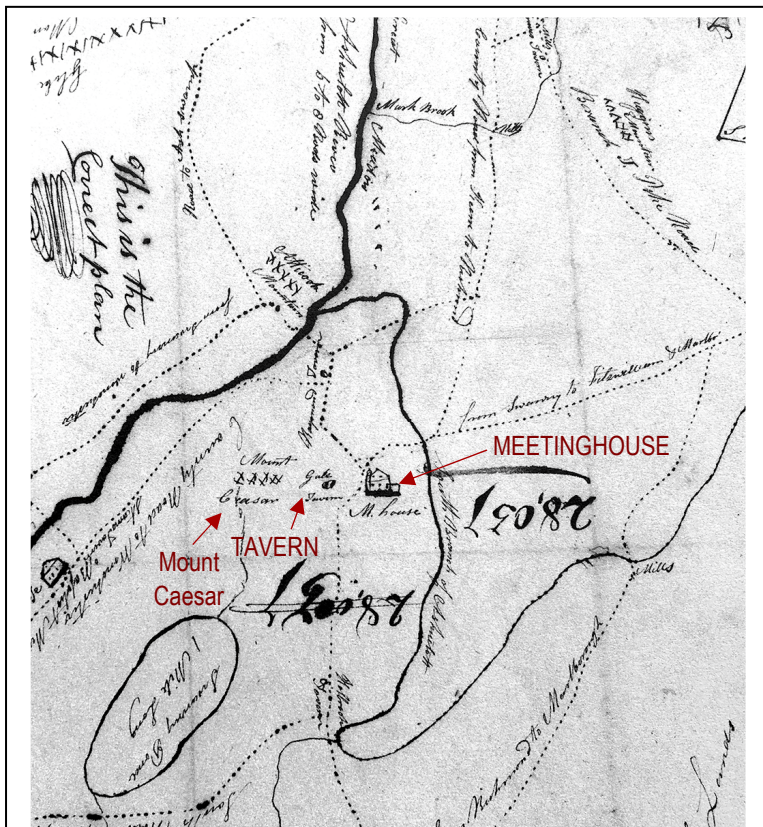
Preservation Company 2021

Swanzy Center, Swanzy P.O., Centre Swanzy, or just Swanzy

The colonial settlers determined the location for the town's center in the early 1700s, and it has remained the civic center of the town's five historic villages. Swanzy Center on Old Homestead Highway/NH 32 displays a collection of public buildings and sites that were built over two centuries. The town hall, public library, grange hall, church, town cemetery, three schools and school district office, an outdoor theater and the long-time town home for the elderly are there, all within a quarter-mile radius. In the mid-twentieth century, the location was the focus of public life when the new centralized elementary and high schools were built.

Swanzy's historical development represents common trends in the history of the state. The town of Lower Ashuelot, as it was called, was settled in the 1730s at the same time as Upper Ashuelot/Keene. The town center was sited in the river valley where the best farmland was located. The broad plain of flat land was an ancient lakebed. A division of 63 house lots was laid out on a 1½-mile long main street parallel to the South Branch Ashuelot River. The regular spacing of the homesteads is still evident in the village streetscape on Sawyers Crossing Road and Old Homestead Highway. In addition

to these home lots in the center, each farm had a separate parcel of meadow and upland elsewhere. Like all towns on the southern edge of the state, Lower Ashuelot was part of Massachusetts until 1740 and its first families moved up from there. In 1747, due to ongoing conflicts with the French and Indians, they fled south again and did not return for several years. In 1753, New Hampshire issued a new charter creating the Town of Swanzy. The Town hired a minister, began construction of a meeting house, and established a burying ground. The tall white pine trees that covered the plains provided valuable timber as the land was cleared for farming. The light dry soil was suited to crops of grains like corn, oats, rye, and buckwheat. The population grew rapidly from over 300 people in the 1760s, to reach 1,200 by the end of the century.



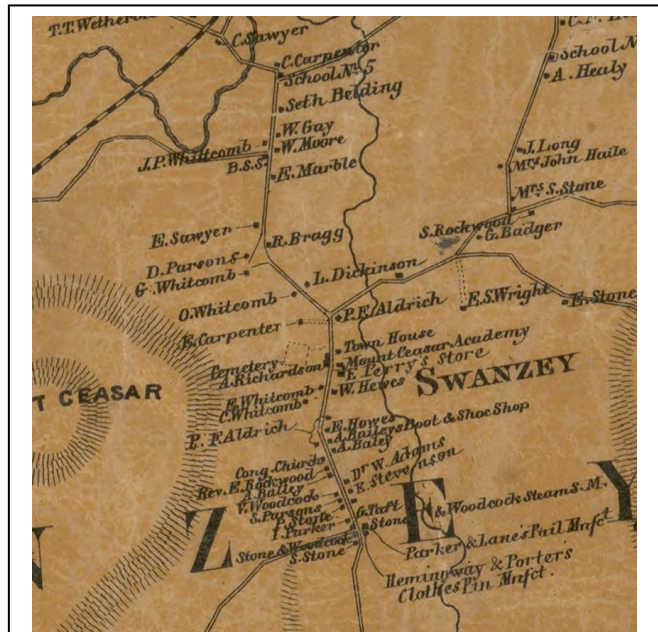
Early Maps of Swanzy, 1734-1892

The 1805 map shows the 1796 meeting house, site of Swanzy Town Hall. The tavern across the street would have served churchgoers from outlying parts of town on Sundays especially since the church was unheated. Another tavern was near Sawyers Crossing where the predecessor of today's covered bridge over the Ashuelot River was built in 1771. This is the earliest map labeling Mount Caesar.

The road up the South Branch Ashuelot River valley was an early route of travel between Massachusetts and Vermont, now NH 32. In 1796, when a new meeting house was built, it was located on the main road where the Swanzezy Town Hall is today rather than set back on Meeting House Hill. The street was widened in front to accommodate traffic and parking of horse-drawn vehicles. The original eight-rod width established then coincides with the present 132' road right-of-way in front of the Swanzezy Town Hall. In the early 1800s, traffic shifted to new roads through the mill villages that were developing in East and West Swanzezy.

As in many New Hampshire towns, government and religious activities continued in the central village, even as riverfront industrial areas became the population centers. More than 1,800 people lived in Swanzezy by the 1830s, still a long way from the current population of over 7,000. The meeting house was used for public meetings and functions, and for services of the Congregational Church and later the Universalist Church. For over twenty years, Swanzezy had its own private secondary school, Mt. Caesar Seminary, then Swanzezy Academy.

During the late nineteenth century, stores operated in various homes and there was a hotel across from the town house. Most village residents were farmers. Other jobs listed in the census were minister, hotelkeeper, blacksmith, shoemaker, house painter, and carpenter.



Fagan 1858

The 1858 Cheshire County map shows the Town House and Academy, village homes and businesses. E. Perry's Store was in the house that still stands just south of the Library. At the south end of the village, at today's Sawmill Drive, there were a steam-powered sawmill and woodenware shops.

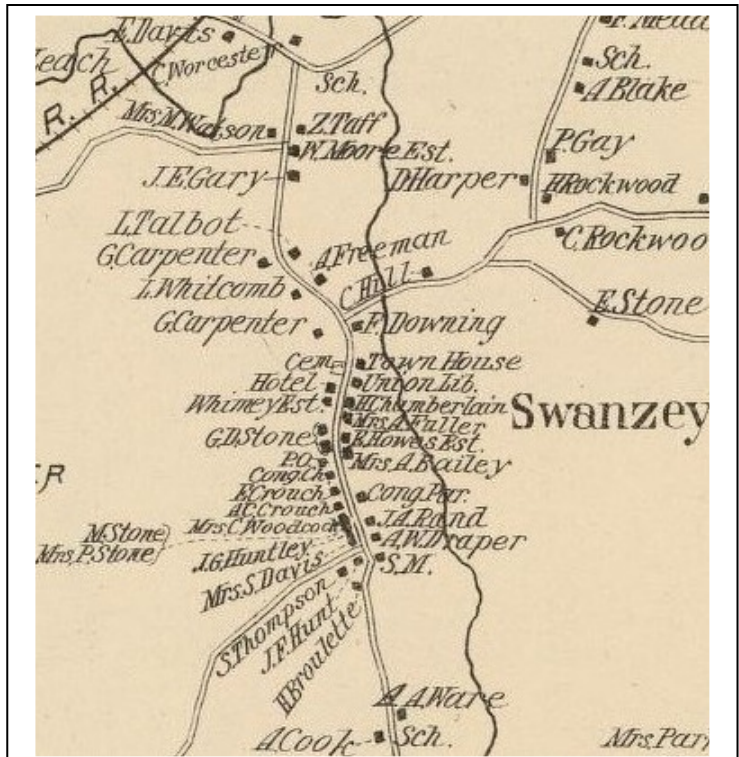


This 1890s view facing northeast shows the cemetery at the left. In the middle are the hotel and farmhouse on the sites of the Grange and Wilcox School. In the back next to the Mt. Caesar Union Library was the 1796 meeting house that was replaced by the town hall after it burned down in 1913. It was a simple 1½-story gable front building. The steeple was removed around 1850 when the building was no longer used for church services and was remodeled to serve as the town house.

Swanzezy Historical Museum

Swanzy is proud to be the hometown of nineteenth-century playwright and stage actor Henry Denman Thompson. His most famous play, based on local characters, is "The Old Homestead," a musical comedy about a country farmer on a trip to the big city. NH Route 32 is officially named the Old Homestead Highway and there is a New Hampshire Historical Marker about Denman Thompson by the roadside next to the outdoor theater where the play was performed for many years.

Like the public buildings, the homes in the village date from all periods of the town's history. Most occupy the original house sites of the mid-1700s, and while some date to the 18th century, others were replaced over time, resulting in a full range of architectural styles. The farmhouses, some with barns and outbuildings, and the flat open land bordered by tall pine trees, define the rural small-town character of the village.



Hurd 1892

1892 map of Swanzy P.O. shows the district schoolhouses at either end of the village. The Town House, Mt. Caesar Union Library, Carpenter and Downing houses are shown, as well as the hotel on the site of the Grange and the Whitney estate where the Wilcox School was later built. The Post Office was in a small building north of the Congregational Church. The railroad station was just over the Sawyers Crossing bridge.



Published by G. W. Willis Street Scene, Swanzy Center, N. H.

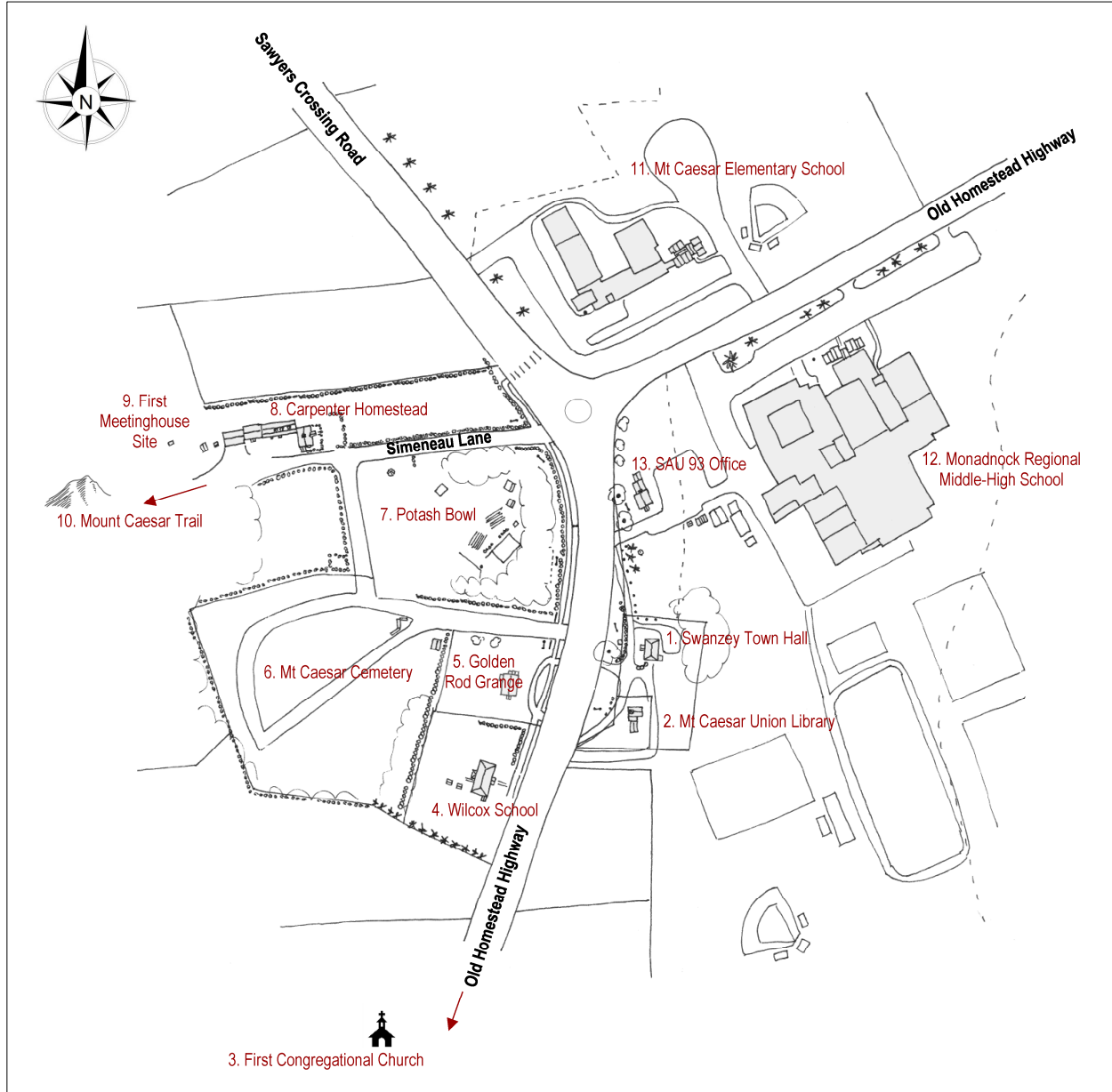
An automobile of the 1910s can be seen in this postcard looking south from in front of the Town Hall, before the road was paved in the 1920s.

The white pines that became a character-defining feature of the village were planted in the late 1800s and for many years tall trees lined both sides of the road from the Congregational Church to the Sawyers Crossing bridge.

Swanzy Historical Museum

Map

The sites and buildings of Swanzev Center can be visited on foot, by car or by armchair tour using the booklet and on-line map and street view functions. A counterclockwise route starts at the Swanzev Town Hall.



Preservation Company 2021

1. Swanzey Town Hall & Fire Station, 1914/1967

620 Old Homestead Highway

The Swanzey Town Hall, erected in 1914 on the site of the 1796 meeting house after it burned, was the first of several new public buildings that transformed the town center in the early 1900s. It has Colonial Revival hipped-roof form and style details including arched window caps and a pedimented entry porch on classical columns. Inside, the meeting hall has now been divided into offices. The Swanzey Center Fire Department on the lower level is one of three fire stations in town.



A recent view shows the Town Hall as remodeled in the mid-twentieth century. The original rooftop balustrade, dentilled cornice and other decorative elements were removed and a classical and easier to maintain gable roof added over the front door. An addition was built for a storage vault.

Preservation Company 2017



In 1933, the Town Hall was decked out with bunting for Swanzey's 200th Anniversary celebration. The building was not quite twenty years old in this view that shows the original balustrades and cornice.

Swanzey Old Photographs



The Swanzey Center Fire Department has occupied the lower level since 1967. Prior to that, the Swanzey Chemical Company had a small engine house between the Town Hall and Library. It was built in about 1910 and replaced ca. 1940.

Swanzey Old Photographs

2. Mt. Caesar Union Library, 1843/1885

628 Old Homestead Highway

The Greek Revival style building that has been the public library since 1885 is a focal point in the center. It was built in 1843 as a private academy and shows evidence of that history in the upper rooms. Mt. Caesar Seminary and Swanzey Academy was affiliated with the Universalist denomination when it was founded by residents of Swanzey and other area towns. Construction of the building was directed by Lyman Parker and Major Ezekiel Page who were local men. Village residents who worked on the project included Virgil Woodcock, Zadock Taft, and Elijah Carpenter. Granite for the foundation was quarried on Mount Caesar. The triangular front gable on classical posts was intended to represent a Greek temple, a popular form for educational and public buildings.

Small private schools were common in the mid-nineteenth century. They provided high school education when public schooling ended with grade 8. Most were associated with a particular religious denomination, but anyone could attend as long as they were male. Many local boys graduated from Swanzey's academy over 20+ years. Boys from out of town were housed in a boarding house on the site of the Grange Hall. In addition to classrooms and offices, the academy had an assembly hall with a stage, used for lectures and entertainment. Universalist church services were also held there, so the old meeting house next door ceased its religious function. As many as 120 students were enrolled at one time, and seven or eight teachers employed. Swanzey Academy became co-educational in its final years. With declining attendance due to competition from larger institutions and public high schools, it closed in about 1866.

George Carpenter, who lived nearby and had been one of the school's first students, acquired ownership of the building when the shares were auctioned. His wife Lucy J. Carpenter, who was also a graduate, founded the Mt. Caesar Union Library Association with a group of local women in 1880. In 1885, George Carpenter sold the academy building to them for \$1, to be used for literary purposes and the promotion of knowledge. The building was remodeled at a cost of \$7,500 – equivalent to over \$200,000 today – raised by private donations from town residents and former students. An Antiquarian Society was established in 1886. Its collections are now housed in a fireproof addition built in 1972. The back ell was enlarged in the 1980s and a wing added to the side in 1990. In 2018, a capital campaign was launched to raise funds for accessibility improvements. The library was listed in the New Hampshire State Register of Historic Places in 2019. With grant funding in 2020, the historic windows were all restored to working order.



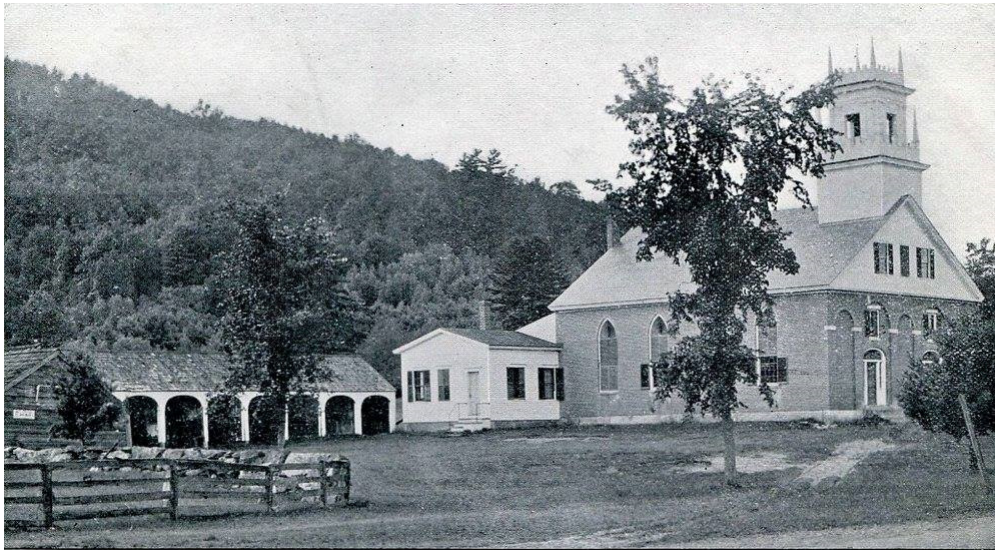
An early 1900s view of Mt. Caesar Union Library showed the growing white pine trees.

Swanzey Historical
Museum

3. First Congregational Church of Swanzey, 1836

679 Old Homestead Highway

The brick First Congregational Church was built in 1835-36. It was the third meeting house in the village and the first to separate the church from the town-owned town hall. The builder was carpenter Virgil Woodcock (1806-1875) who lived a few houses south of the church in the village. He and other carpenters in the region employed designs promoted by architectural handbooks like those of Asher Benjamin. During the 1830s-40s many congregations moved out of old public meeting houses to respect the separation of church and state. The nearby towns of Troy, Jaffrey, Richmond, and Westmoreland all have similar brick Congregational churches with wooden bell towers from the same period. Swanzey's brick meeting house is nearly identical to the church in Troy built by Woodcock the year before this one. It combines elements of the older Federal style, like the arched doorways and blind arcade, with a Greek Revival style pedimented gable end and a square tower, and the pointed arch windows and spires of the Gothic Revival.



CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH. SWANZEY, N. H.

There were horse sheds on the site of the present fellowship hall to shelter carriages and wagons in inclement weather.

More traditional street trees like the young elm seen here were planted along with the pines

Swanzey Old Photographs



After many years, the building was in serious need of repair. It was rehabilitated in 2013-2015 including restoration of the wooden tower.

Bing Streetside 2015

4. Wilcox School, 1925

633 Old Homestead Highway

The Wilcox School was the central village elementary school during the second quarter of the twentieth century. Before it was built, an 18th century house and connected barns stood on the site, and children attended schoolhouses at the north and south ends of the village, in districts that had been established in the 1770s. In 1924, after renting additional classroom space from the Mt. Caesar Union Library for some years, the Town voted to build a new school. The Swanzey Center School opened in 1925. It contained two large rooms, one for grades 1-4 and the other for grades 5-8. In the late 1930s, it was renamed for Allen Wilcox who had provided the land. After Mt. Caesar Elementary School was built in the 1950s, the old school became offices and meeting space, now the Wilcox Building of the Monadnock Regional School District.



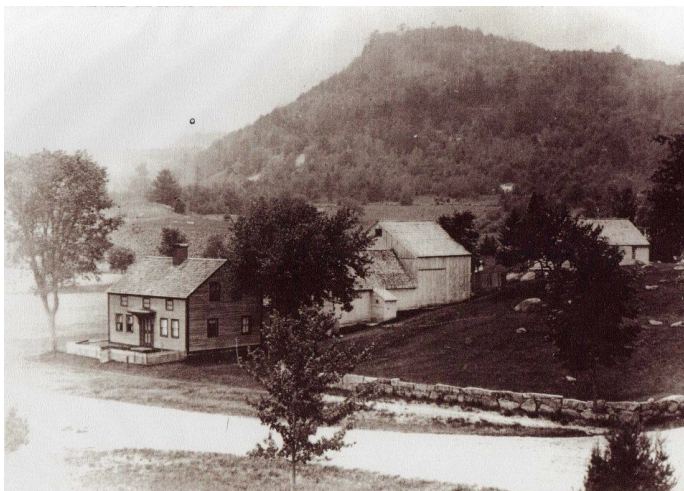
Swanzey Center School when it was new in the late 1920s. There were two teachers for 20+ pupils.

Swanzey Historical Museum



The building looks unchanged even though it had indeed changed from the original. After a tree fell on it in 2013, it was restored with a new roof, siding, doors, and windows that replicate the originals.

Preservation Company 2017



This photo shows the eighteenth-century house with connected barns that stood on the site of the Wilcox School, not long before it burned down in the 1890s. The stone wall can still be seen today. A worn dirt track alongside the road served as sidewalk until it was paved with asphalt around 1970.

Swanzey Old Photographs

5. Golden Rod Grange No. 114, 1916

625 Old Homestead Highway

The Golden Rod Grange is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. It is owned by the Town and maintained with assistance from the Swanzeey Preservation Society. The Grange hall was built in 1915-16, on the site of the hotel and former academy boardinghouse that burned down around 1900. The Grange had met in the Town Hall for many years. When the Golden Rod Grange No. 114 formed in 1886, George and Lucy Carpenter were founding members, as they had been of the library. The Grange was a cooperative, fraternal organization aimed at assisting farmers and their families to greater productivity and profitability. The focus was on education and community service, through agricultural fairs, suppers and socials, lecture programs and volunteerism. There was a Grange hall in nearly every town in New Hampshire and the Grange was the primary social organization outside of church in many communities. With 125 members at one point, the Golden Rod Grange No. 114 was the second largest in the county after Keene. The Grange hall was built to host a variety of activities, with a large lodge room and stage upstairs and a large kitchen and a dining room for functions and meetings on the ground floor. Swanzeey's Grange, active for many years, was awarded a National Certificate of Honor by the National Grange in 1942 and the Significant Service Award for Community Work in 1956. Grange membership declined throughout the state with a shift away from rural life and agricultural activities in the late twentieth century. The building was deeded to the Town in 1992.



127 shovel full of dirt Grange Hall 1915

Groundbreaking for the new Grange Hall in 1915. Note the hearse house and vault of the cemetery in the background.

Swanzeey Old Photographs



Preservation efforts are ongoing to rehabilitate the Grange hall for public meeting space. A conditions assessment was completed in 2019 with funding by the Town, Swanzeey Preservation Society, and a NH Preservation Alliance Grant. In 2020, voters approved funding for building stabilization.

Preservation Company 2017

6. Mt. Caesar Cemetery, 1755/1853

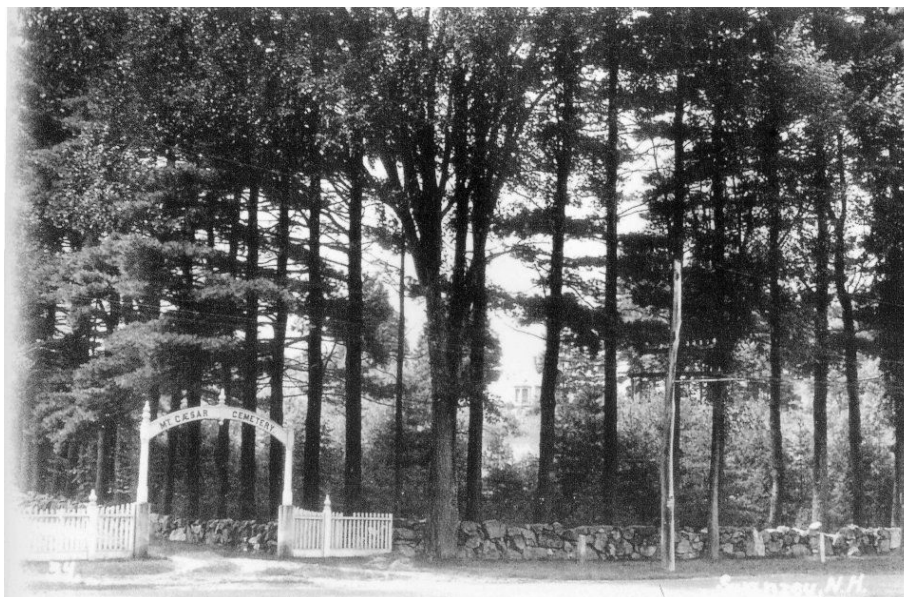
623 Old Homestead Highway

The cemetery contains burials from the earliest settlement and is still in use. The oldest part of the cemetery is the northern end toward the First Meeting House Site. The Carpenter family had its own plot enclosed by granite stone walls in the corner near their homestead. The oldest engravings bear death dates of 1755. There are about thirty-five gravestones with dates in the 1700s. Wood markers or rough stones would have marked other burials. The cemetery contains outstanding local examples of gravestone carving. They were probably the work of itinerant carvers who traveled through the region offering their services to the recently bereaved. Winged cherubs and floral borders were used from the 1750s through the 1790s, replaced by urn and willow motifs that were popular into the mid-1800s. Victorian obelisks and marble gravestones date from the later nineteenth century. The southern half of the 6.5-acre cemetery was added in 1853. The site was laid out in avenues and enclosed with stone walls. By 1890 more space was needed and a new cemetery opened south of the village. For those who cannot visit in person, all the stones have been photographed for Findagrave.com.



The hearse house, built in about the 1890s, was designed for a horse-drawn vehicle. The granite receiving tomb was constructed in 1859 by stone mason Alfred Seaver of West Swanzey.

Preservation Company 2017



This late 1800s view shows the cemetery gate at the roadside. On the right, the future site of the Potash Bowl theater was then part of the Carpenter farm. The Carpenter house is visible through the trees.

Swanzey Old Photographs

7. The Potash Bowl, 1939

621 Old Homestead Highway

The Potash Bowl amphitheater is an historic resource unique to Swanzey. Generations of families and neighbors participated in the community theater production of *The Old Homestead* play, whose author, Denman Thompson (1833-1911), based its characters on boyhood memories of West Swanzey and time spent at Mt. Caesar Seminary. The play opened in Boston in 1886, and the successful production toured the country for over 25 years, including runs on Broadway. Thompson played the lead role of Uncle Joshua Whitcomb, who was said to be a combination of real Swanzey residents, Joshua Holbrook and Captain Otis Whitcomb. It was Whitcomb's home on Sawyers Crossing Road just north of here that came to be identified as "The Old Homestead house." Denman Thompson's own homestead was a large Victorian house and barn in West Swanzey, which he built on the site of his mother's family home. The play continued into the 1910s under the management his son Frank Thompson, with Henry Horton as Joshua Whitcomb. Two decades later in 1933, when Swanzey celebrated its 200th Anniversary and marked Denman Thompson's "100th birthday," three acts of the play were performed on the Keene City Hall stage, with Horton reprising the lead role, and several Thompson relatives among the cast.

The long-running revival of *The Old Homestead* - performed by local amateur actors, right in the village where the play was set - began in 1938 as a fundraiser for the community association and churches. The Town of Swanzey owned the sloping land in the front corner of the old Carpenter homestead that was a perfect natural amphitheater. Volunteers constructed a stage and benches and created sets and costumes. In July of 1939, the Swanzey Players performed two sold-out shows with audiences of over 2,000! It became an annual event, with as many as 50 persons involved as cast and crew members. Live oxen were used in the show as they had been in Thompson's day. The play ran for one weekend a year, scheduled to coincide with a full moon to enhance the lighting. The site is still owned by the Town and maintained by the Old Homestead Association established for that purpose in 1942. The stage and scenery were rebuilt in 1979 after an arson fire, sparking renewed interest in the play. The twenty-first-century audience shrank however, and the show closed in 2016 after 75 seasons. Now the stage provides a local venue for summer concerts. The community remains committed to maintaining it, repairing the roof after a 2018 windstorm brought down some of the iconic white pine trees.



The existing wooden seats were an Eagle Scout project in 1996. The lighting booth was rebuilt in the 1970s. The original floodlights were preserved.

Preservation Company 2017



The Potash Bowl amphitheater had wooden benches for about 1,000 people, with lawn seating in back. This photo from the 1950s shows the original stage that burned in 1978.

Swanzey Historical Museum



The stage rebuilt in 1979 had fireproof concrete walls backstage. The bandstand platform was built for the Old Homestead Band in the 1960s. The stone wall in front of the stage was added in the 1950s in place of a painted wooden set piece.

Preservation Company 2017

The Potash Bowl name is unique. It is a play on words, referencing the large, rounded iron pot in which the industrial chemical potash was produced, and the popular name for some of the best-known football stadiums of the era. Potash, the generic term for various mined and manufactured salts containing the mineral potassium, was historically produced from wood ashes by leaching or boiling off. It was used in soap, dyes, cleaners for wool, bleach for cloth, and in other products like glass and gunpowder. The ashes produced by burning hardwood like oak and maple were an early cash crop for farmers. In the nineteenth century, local storekeepers took fireplace ashes in trade and they were collected in a convenient central location like this one. According to the old Swanzey Players Souvenir Programs, which contain a wealth of information, “We tried to call it the Carpenter Amphitheatre, but the historic term, Potash Bowl caught the fancy – seemed to fit – and hence the name.”

8. Carpenter Homestead, 1808/1930

1 Simeneau Lane

The home of the Carpenter family on Meetinghouse Hill was a town-owned, assisted-living facility for the elderly for over three generations. Simeneau Lane was named for the long-time caretakers. The Carpenter Home was established in 1930 when the Town accepted a bequest from Mrs. Lucy J. Carpenter of 230 acres of land and buildings to be used as a home for the poor and unfortunate of the town. In recent years, the small 16-bed assisted living facility became difficult to license and finance and it closed in 2019.

The early nineteenth-century Cape Cod farmhouse with a center chimney was the second on the site. The first was built by the Reverend Ezra Carpenter (1698-1785) when he came to town in 1753 with his wife and eight children to serve as minister. It was built on land that was provided near the meeting house. It became a large farm that was passed down in his family. This house was built around 1808 by his grandson Elijah Carpenter, a successful farmer who served terms as county sheriff and state legislator. Stone for the foundation and granite walls may have come nearby Mount Caesar where there is evidence of quarrying. It became the home of George Carpenter (1828-1915) and his wife Lucy Jane Whitcomb (1834-1928) when they married in 1864.



George and Lucy Carpenter had no children, so they employed farm laborers who sometimes boarded with them. Ann Naylor kept house and lived with Mrs. Carpenter for several decades. This early twentieth century photo shows the house as it looked in the Carpenters' day. They called it Valley View Farm, because it overlooked fields along the river before the pine trees grew in.

Mt. Caesar Union Library



For almost 90 years, the Carpenter Home served the community as elderly housing. The connected farm appearance is still much the same, although it has vinyl siding and replacement windows.

Preservation Company 2017

9. First Meeting House Site, 1753/1926

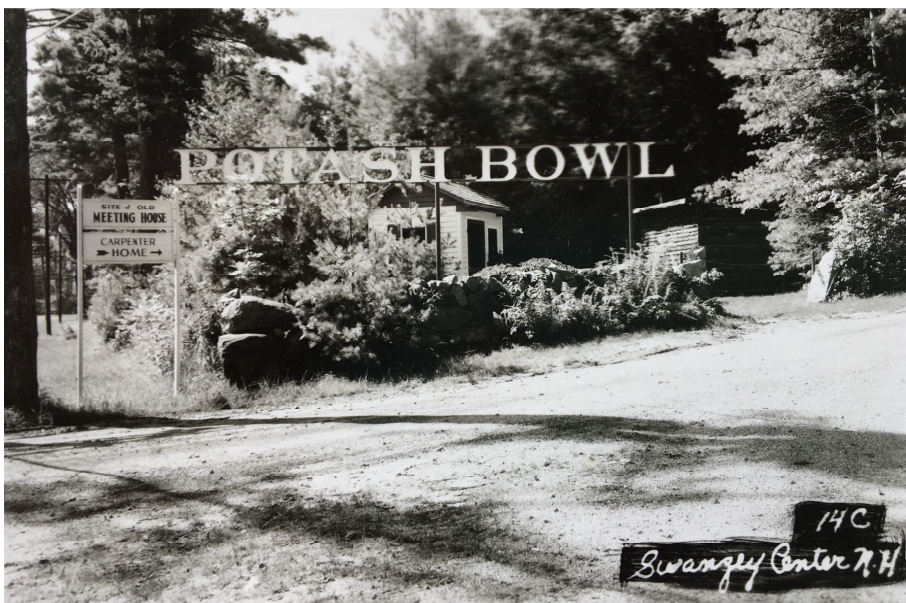
Simeneau Lane

The site of the first meeting house is on the hill behind the Carpenter Homestead and north of the town cemetery. A granite marker was placed there by members of the Golden Rod Grange in 1926, at the time of the U.S. Sesquicentennial (150th). Despite the inscription, “The first meeting house in Swanzey was built on this ledge 1737,” that date was the first vote of the citizens of Lower Ashuelot to build a meeting house. They set aside the elevated site as common land, midway on the street of house lots. The first building there may have been a schoolhouse, and a fortified building/garrison was built there in the 1740s, but the First Congregational Church organized in 1741 held its services in private homes. It was not until after the settlers left and returned that the first meeting house was erected in 1753-55, and it took years to finish. According to the town history, hurricane damage in 1765 took six years to repair. The building stood on the ledge, 50' by 40' feet on the ground and two stories tall, probably with a pitched roof. Inside, a meeting house of this period typically had the pulpit on the north wall and galleries ran around three sides. The first Swanzey meeting house was used for church services and public meetings for about four decades. After it was replaced by the more central building in 1796, the land became part of the Carpenter Homestead and the old building was taken down.



The First Meeting House marker installed in 1926 is 100 years old.

Preservation Company 2017



In the mid-twentieth century, a sign near the Potash Bowl entrance directed visitors to the site of the Old Meeting House.

Mt. Caesar Union Library

10. Mount Caesar Trail

off Simeneau Lane

In 2018 the Town of Swanzezy purchased 200+ acres of the Carpenter land including the slopes and summit of Mount Caesar. They paid \$175,000 into the Lucy Whitcomb Carpenter Trust to carry out the purposes of Mrs. Carpenter's bequest. Mount Caesar is a defining feature of the town center, rising sharply above the west side of the valley, to a peak 915' above sea level. There are panoramic views from the Mount Caesar Trail, which is a 1.5-mile round-trip hike to the top and back, sometimes with indistinct trail markings. The trail begins on the old logging road at the end of Simeneau Lane behind the Carpenter Homestead, and parking is nearby at the edge of the cemetery. The road, built in the nineteenth century for logging, later accessed an aircraft beacon light erected on the summit in the 1940s.

Local tradition says the mountain was named for Freeman Caesar, a freed slave, who came from Massachusetts with the Carpenter family in the 1750s. Reverend Carpenter was a "pre-abolitionist," against slavery before it became a popular movement. Caesar is said to have moved up to a cabin on the hillside behind the Carpenter house and so it became known as Caesar's Mountain.



Mount Caesar was illustrated in an 1872 view from Swanzezy Center in the fields near the Congregational Church. At this time, the lower slopes were used for pasture and the top was logged.

Swanzezy Old Photographs



1958 map shows the wooded mountain and open land in the valley.

USGS 1958

11. Mt. Caesar Elementary School, 1953

585 Old Homestead Highway

The town center was selected as the site for a consolidated elementary school to combine the district schools of Swanze Center, North and East Swanze. In 1951, 15½ acres of flat farmland was acquired from the Downing family whose home is now the Monadnock Regional School District office. The new school was built and furnished for \$175,000. The architect was John Holbrook of Keene, who designed the 1950 addition to the Cutler School elementary school in West Swanze. The builder was industrial and commercial contractor James J. Viette of Keene. Construction took place during 1952 and students returned from vacation to open the new Swanze Consolidated School on January 3, 1953. At first the school served grades 1-8, each with its own classroom, and a total of nearly 200 pupils. However, as the region grew, an addition was needed within just a few years, and the upper grades were relocated to West Swanze. Modular units were added in the 1990s.



Students from other parts of town traveled to the central school by school bus.

Swanze Old Photographs



The newly built elementary school had white pine trees in front.

Swanze Historical Museum



The red brick building retains its original stone veneer front with recessed entry and tall rectangular brick chimney. The many large windows were filled in for energy efficiency in 2016.

Preservation Company 2017

12. Monadnock Regional Middle-High School, 1962

580 Old Homestead Highway

Monadnock Regional School for grades 7-12 opened in 1962 for students from Swanzey, Fitzwilliam, Gilsum, Richmond, Roxbury, Troy, Surry and Sullivan. The regional school district was formed in 1961 by towns that had previously paid high school tuition to Keene and elsewhere. Swanzey was chosen as it was centrally located and offered flat open land. A large parcel of farmland was purchased from Ellis Wyman who lived in the farmhouse on the corner that is now the Monadnock Regional School District Office.

Plans for the new high school were drawn by John Holbrook along with the architecture and engineering firm of Mitchell P. Dirsa and Joseph F. Lampron who designed many schools including the 1960 Memorial High School in Manchester, the 1964 expansion of Keene High School, and Dover High School in 1967, as well as churches and dormitories, in modernist or International styles.

At the end of the twentieth century, the building was enlarged by additions and infill. A new wing, with expanded library and ten classrooms, was built in 1994-95. According to the district website, as of 2021, Monadnock Regional Middle-High School had about 840 students.



Dirsa and Lampron of Manchester and John Holbrook of Keene were the architects. The contractor was MacMillin Construction Company of Keene.

New Hampshire Architect 1961



The front of the building retains characteristic 1960s elements, though the windows and doors have been filled in.

Preservation Company 2017

13. Monadnock Regional School District Office, ca. 1850 600 Old Homestead Highway

The Monadnock Regional School District (NH SAU 93) office is in an old farmhouse, once part of a farm that included most of the elementary and high school grounds. The original settler was Dr. Calvin Frink who was an army surgeon during the Revolutionary War. According to the population census, in the mid-nineteenth century Paul and Luvana Aldrich lived here with their five children, several farm laborers, and a servant who boarded with them. From the 1870s to the 1950s, the Downing family owned the farmstead and 140 acres, with open fields stretching to the river on both sides of the road. Franklin and Mary L. Downing also had five children, and eldest son Fayette Downing inherited the farm. Arlon and Leona Downing took over in the 1920s and were still farming the land when they sold it to Ellis Wyman in the early 1950s. He had moved from East Swanzey and stayed on for some years after the high school was built. The Monadnock Regional School District acquired the building in 1969.



The original form of the farmhouse and the Greek Revival style front entrance are unchanged though the siding and windows are all new. Some of the farm outbuildings can be seen among the high school shops.

Preservation Company 2017



A view from the 1940s looking south on Old Homestead Highway toward the Town Hall, shows the street side white pine trees. The Downing farmhouse is on the left, Potash Bowl entrance on the right.

Swanzy Historical Museum

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2019 Google Earth Streetview

