

DISCOVER TURNERS FALLS

Nestled along the Connecticut River, this extraordinary historic mill town has blossomed from its industrial roots to become a hub of artistic inspiration, recreational adventure and natural beauty. The history of Turners Falls has been greatly influenced by its geology and geography. The Great Falls have been vital to area residents for over 10,000 years. This self-guided walking tour will give you a brief overview of the geology and history, and then guide you on an easily walked loop that covers many of the downtown historical landmarks.

GEOLOGICAL HISTORY

Most of the visible geology in Turners Falls dates back over 200 million years when there was a large shallow lake in the area. The prominent rock outcrops are primarily red sandstone, formed by iron bearing mud and sand that deposited in the lake. Dinosaurs coexisted with tropical plants and insects as this area was then near the equator, due to the continents very slowly drifting. Many dinosaur footprints have been found in Turners Falls and Gill. Plant fossils and trace fossils from insects and worms are readily seen in some of the downtown rock outcroppings which are tilted 30 to 40 degrees to the east. This tilting occurred as the deposited materials grew heavier and slowly sank. Over the years, the Connecticut River has eroded away newer layers of earth, laying bare the ancient bedrock.

NATIVE AMERICAN HISTORY

The Connecticut River was of great importance to many Native Americans for food and transportation. The Mohawk Trail, then known as "the trail to Mohawk," was also an important transportation route. It ran from the Hoosic valley in New York, across the Hoosac divide, and down the Deerfield valley to the Connecticut River. Where the river and the trail intersected was the site of an important Native American village for approximately 10,000 years. This village was across the river from what is now Turners Falls, and was known as "Wissatinnewag" or "place of the shining waters," and was also known as "Peskeompskut" or "place of the split rock." It was one of the oldest continuously settled areas in North America and is on both the state and federal Registers of Historic Places. The village was a place of diplomacy, intermarriage and trade for many of the New England tribes, including the Narragansett, Pocumtuck and Abenaki. Visitors were especially numerous in the spring during the shad and salmon runs. Trade materials included dried fish and stone tools made from local rock. Because warfare was not permitted by agreements between the tribes in this vital area, the village was unguarded.

Sadly, the village of Wissatinnewag was also the site of the Turners Falls Massacre, one of the earliest massacres of non-combatants in the history of Native/Colonial relations. Captain William Turner, for whom the village of Turners Falls is named, led a colonial militia attack upon Wissatinnewag the morning of May 19, 1676. The Native warriors were away, possibly on a diplomatic mission, and three hundred women, children and elders, many still sleeping, were either shot or forced by Turner and his men into the river where they drowned in the falls. Those who survived left the area shortly thereafter, and historical accounts indicate various other tribes, including the Abenaki, Mohawk, and Narragansett, took them in.

INDUSTRIAL HISTORY

The village of Turners Falls was designed and built by industrialist Colonel Alvah Crocker in the 1860s. He envisioned building another Holyoke or Lowell, with canals for power, massive mills, and nearby tenement housing for the workers. J. Russell Cutlery, Keith Paper Co., Esleek Power Co., Montague Paper, Turners Falls Paper and the Griswold Cotton Mills all lined up along the power canal between 1869 and 1940. German, French Canadian, Polish, Italian, Lithuanian, Bohemian and Irish immigrants came to work in the various mills and factories. Beginning in the 1940s, the mills began closing and downsizing. Turners Falls was devastated economically by the loss of its major employers.

For further historical information, consult the sources below, all of which are housed at the Carnegie Library.

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TURNERS FALLS

HISTORIC DOWNTOWN WALKING TOUR

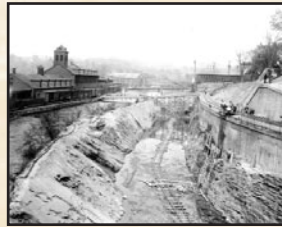


1. GREAT FALLS DISCOVERY CENTER • 2 AVENUE A

The walking tour begins at the Great Falls Discovery Center, an interpretive museum of the Connecticut River watershed's rich natural, cultural and industrial history. The rectangular brick building on the right, the "Great Hall", is the former machine shop of the **Montague Paper Company**. Alvah Crocker started Montague Paper in 1868 and its primary product was newsprint. The Great Hall is the only surviving building of the 5 acre, 15 building complex, which stopped operation in the 1920s. *Proceed down the driveway to the right of the Great Hall towards the canal.*

2. POWER CANAL

The original canal in Turners Falls with its nine locks was first used in 1798 to allow boats to bypass the falls. This allowed riverboats to travel from Long Island Sound up the Connecticut River, all the way into Vermont. The river served as an early, very important highway and source of commerce. Rum, sugar and molasses were among the commodities sent upstream, and logs were floated down the river to lumber mills. By the 1840s, the railroads had taken over most of the transportation needs and the canal and locks fell into disuse. In the 1860s, with the development of Turners Falls, Alvah Crocker rebuilt the canal and the dam to provide power.



3. THE FISH LADDER AND FALLS

On the right, past the old footbridge, is a fish ladder, which allows fish, including shad, lampreys, and Atlantic salmon to bypass the dam and return upstream to spawn in the spring. The fish ladder is open for public viewing from mid-May to mid-June, the height of spawning season. The only view of the Great Falls from downtown is past the fish ladder. This is at least the sixth dam to be built on this site. *Proceed down the bike path by the canal towards the old mills.*

4. MILL BUILDINGS ALONG THE CANAL

Across the canal, the first building you see is the **Indeck Power Plant**, built in 1989 to provide electricity and thermal energy for the adjacent Strathmore mill. With the closing of the mill, the power plant was no longer needed and in 2006, its energy producing machinery was sold and sent abroad. The Indeck building sits near the former site of the **John Russell Cutlery** building constructed from 1868–1870. It was the largest cutlery factory in the world, employing many workers and producing fine knives until the end of nineteenth century. The building stood until 1958 when it was torn down. The next factory, with the letters "KPC" on a smoke stack, was originally the **Keith Paper Co.**, and later the **Strathmore Paper Co.**, which was built in 1871. It was burnt in a fire in 1877, but was quickly rebuilt and continued production until 1994. The next factory down the canal, with "EMCO" on the smoke stack, was originally the **Marshall Paper Company**, which failed and was bought by the **Esleek Manufacturing Co.** around 1900,



and produced particularly high quality typing paper. In 2005, the **Southworth Company** purchased the building. Across the bridge from the former Esleek mill was **Turners Falls Paper**, which was founded in 1897 and produced newsprint. **International Paper** later purchased Turners Falls Paper and most of the buildings were demolished. The surviving buildings now contain a warehouse and the Franklin County Regional Housing Authority.

5. GRISWOLD COTTON MILL

On your right, notice the second metal bridge leading to the former Griswold Cotton Mill, a complex of buildings originally constructed in 1874. Griswold Cotton produced cotton bandages, cheesecloth and bunting. The mill was sold in the 1940s and has changed hands a number of times serving as the the **Rockdale Department Store** and most recently a **Railroad Salvage** store. *Cross over Canal Street and head east on 7th Street towards Avenue A.*

6. PESKEOMSKUT PARK

As you come down 7th street on your left is Peskeomskut Park, which was created in the 1960s. Peskeomskut translates roughly from the Narragansett language as "place of the split rock." The park was completely redone in 2006, when the band shell was added. It also contains one of four Turners Falls public art commissions. *Continue up 7th Street to the intersection with Avenue A.*

7. CARNEGIE LIBRARY • 201 AVENUE A

Across the street, on the corner of 7th Street and Avenue A, stands the Carnegie Library. It was built from 1905 to 1906 and is named after Andrew Carnegie, who donated \$13,500 to pay for its construction. To the right of the library is the **Veterans' Memorial**. *Make a left on Avenue A, staying on the left (west) side of the street, and walk past the park up to 6th street.*

8. STE. ANNE'S CHURCH • 6TH STREET + J STREET

Look down 6th Street from Avenue A, you can see Ste. Anne's Church on the right side of 6th Street. Built in 1885, it was the first Roman Catholic Parish in Turners Falls serving primarily French-Canadian immigrants. In 2005, Ste. Anne's was merged with several other area Catholic churches and the church no longer uses this building. A cell phone tower is now hidden in its steeple. *Continue down Avenue A. to the intersection with 5th Street.*

9. DOWNTOWN TURNERS FALLS

Designated as a national historic district, Downtown Turners Falls features distinctive nineteenth century brick architecture. The corner of 5th Street and Avenue A is a good place to view the downtown area. Most of the buildings were built around the same time in the 1890s with brick from local brickyards. For many years, the bustling downtown provided for almost all of the needs of the local residents. Most buildings had storefronts at street level, and offices, services and apartments on higher floors. Electric trolleys ran down the center of the Avenue, and could be ridden into nearby towns. The brick sidewalks and planters were added in 1985. *Continue up Avenue A to 5th street.*



10. BANK BUILDING • 176 AVENUE A

The **Bank of America** building on the corner of Avenue A and 5th Street has housed many banks and was the site of a notorious bank robbery in 1940. The thieves staked out the bank by renting a room in the apartment building across the street and watching out the front windows. *Continue up on Avenue A just past 5th street.*

11. HIBERNIAN HALL • 152 AVENUE A

The former Hibernian Hall is on the corner of Avenue A and 4th Street. Note the initials "AOH" near the top of the building, which stand for the **Ancient Order of Hibernians**, an Irish social organization. The third floor was a popular dance hall in the early 1900s. Later it was a sports arena and gymnasium with boxing matches and basketball games. In the 1980s, the building was renovated and became part of the Powertown apartment buildings.

12. SPINNER PARK • AVENUE A + 4TH STREET

Across 4th street is Spinner Park, a pocket park created in 1985 as part of the downtown streetscape revitalization. The park features a bronze sculpture of a female textile worker, honoring the contribution women made to the town's industrial past. *Walk up 4th St. to the next building behind the park.*

13. THE AMERICAN HOUSE • 25 4TH STREET

The American House with its wide white porch was once a hotel. It was built in 1896 and remodeled in the 1970s. In the late 1800s, working men would eat and drink here after driving logs on the Connecticut River, hence it was the site of some notorious brawls. It is now an apartment house.



14. OLD POLICE STATION

Next door to the American House is the old police station, which was originally built as the Montague Town Hall. The town jail and highway department were on the first floor of the building and the 2nd floor served as the district court. For a while the Jewish community held their services here. The old station is now an apartment building. *Continue north on Avenue A to 3rd street and then cross Avenue A at the traffic light.*

15. CUTLERY BLOCK

Look down the left hand side of 3rd Street. The row of apartments, known as the Cutlery Block, was built in the 1860s to house the **John Russell Cutlery** workers. The tenements originally provided only cold-water plumbing and outhouses, and several tenants kept pigs behind the building. These units are still rented out as apartments, and were recently refurbished.

16. COLLE OPERA HOUSE • 85 AVENUE A

On the right (east) side of Avenue A and the corner of 3rd street is **The Hallmark Museum of Contemporary Photography**. This building was originally the Colle Opera House, built by Fred and Marie Colle and opened in 1874. It was designed for multiple uses, the first floor housed stores and offices and the town's first library. The second floor theater seated 1,000 people and was lit by five giant chandeliers. The stage showcased vaudeville, melodramas, animal and minstrel shows. Movies were first shown there in 1914. After 1927 it served mostly recreational purposes, including bowling and miniature golf. In the late 1960s the Renaissance Community commune bought the building, along with the Shea Theater, and gutted it. The building was completely renovated around 2004. *Walk next door to the Shea Theater.*

17. SHEA THEATER • 71 AVENUE A

The Shea Theater, next door to the Colle Opera building on the right side of Avenue A, opened in 1927 and was built by Dennis Shea. The Shea played different movies every night along with vaudeville acts, live stage shows, and local plays. The theater ran on and off until the 1960s, when it was bought by the Renaissance Community commune and was used as a concert space and recording studio. The Shea Theatre underwent major renovations as a local community development project, and reopened in 1989. It now works with regional artists and professional touring companies who offer programs in music, theater, and dance with performances from February through December. *Continue up Avenue A to 2nd street.*

18. CROCKER BANK BUILDING

Look across Avenue A at the corner 2nd Street. The Crocker Bank Building was built by Alvah Crocker around 1869 and housed both the **Crocker Savings Bank** and the **Crocker National Bank**. The building housed the **Mechanics Lodge of Masons** for many years as well as offices, stores, and boarding rooms until it was gutted by fire in 1998 and restored several years later. Today, it continues to house offices and apartments.



19. GRAND TRUNK HOTEL

Across 2nd street from the Crocker building is the former site of the Grand Trunk Hotel. It was built around 1872 by Bernard Farren, and was originally called the **Farren Hotel**, but Farren, who did not drink alcohol, insisted the name be changed when a bar was added. The hotel was built in the French Second Empire style of architecture, with four stories topped by a mansard roof. There were 40 rooms on the top three floors, and the first floor held a bank, bar, and barbershop. Unfortunately, the hotel was torn down in the 1960s because it needed new wiring. Near this site a variety of prehistoric Native American artifacts have been found. A photo of the hotel can be found on the bottom of the cover of this brochure. *Continue up Avenue A to 1st street.*

20. THE TURNERS FALLS COMPANY

The Town Hall, on the right (east) side of Avenue A and First Street, contained the original offices of the Turners Falls Company, a utility company founded in 1866 by Alvah Crocker. They rebuilt the dam and power canal and leased the water rights to the early industries. They also generated hydroelectric power at the falls and built Turners Falls Number One Station in 1906 on Power Street, which is still in use. In 1942, the Turners Falls Company merged with the **Western Massachusetts Electric Company** and in 1964 the town bought the building for use as Town Hall.