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United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service



# National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional certification comments, entries, and narrative items on continuation sheets if needed (NPS Form 10-900a).

### 1. Name of Property

historic name Ramsdell Public Library  
other names/site number N/A

### 2. Location

street & number 1087 Main Street  not for publication  
city or town Great Barrington (Village of Housatonic)  vicinity  
state Massachusetts code MA county Berkshire code 003 zip code 01236

### 3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,  
I hereby certify that this  nomination  request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.

In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:

national  statewide  local

*Brona Simon*

*June 2, 2014*

Signature of certifying official/Title Brona Simon, SHPO, MHC

Date

State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria.

Signature of commenting official

Date

Title

State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

### 4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

- entered in the National Register  determined eligible for the National Register
- determined not eligible for the National Register  removed from the National Register
- other (explain:)

*Joe Edison H. Beall*  
Signature of the Keeper

*7-25-14*  
Date of Action

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**5. Classification**

**Ownership of Property**  
 (Check as many boxes as apply.)

|                                     |                  |
|-------------------------------------|------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/>            | private          |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | public - Local   |
| <input type="checkbox"/>            | public - State   |
| <input type="checkbox"/>            | public - Federal |

**Category of Property**  
 (Check only one box.)

|                                     |             |
|-------------------------------------|-------------|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | building(s) |
| <input type="checkbox"/>            | district    |
| <input type="checkbox"/>            | site        |
| <input type="checkbox"/>            | structure   |
| <input type="checkbox"/>            | object      |

**Number of Resources within Property**  
 (Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

| Contributing | Noncontributing |                |
|--------------|-----------------|----------------|
| 1            |                 | buildings      |
|              |                 | sites          |
|              |                 | structures     |
|              | 1               | objects        |
| 1            | 1               | <b>Total 2</b> |

**Name of related multiple property listing**  
 (Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing) N/A

N/A

**Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register**  
 N/A

N/A

**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions**  
 (Enter categories from instructions.)

public library

**Current Functions**  
 (Enter categories from instructions.)

public library

**7. Description**

**Architectural Classification**  
 (Enter categories from instructions.)

Classical Revival

**Materials**  
 (Enter categories from instructions.)

foundation: stone (1906) and concrete (1928-30)

walls: Roman brick

trim: marble

asphalt shingle and rubber membrane;

roof: metal

other:

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### Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance of the property. Explain contributing and noncontributing resources if necessary. Begin with a **summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, setting, size, and significant features.)

#### Summary Paragraph

The Ramsdell Public Library is located in Berkshire County, in the village of Housatonic within the town of Great Barrington. The property consists of the library itself and a metal library sign on the front lawn that is less than 50 years old, and thus noncontributing. The library sits on Main Street about a block west of MA Route 183, which roughly follows the Housatonic River in a north-south direction between Lenox on the north and Great Barrington on the south. The Ramsdell Library faces south on the north side of the street between the Housatonic Congregational Church (NRIND, 2002) on the east and Blessed Theresa Catholic church on the west. It is set back approximately 50 feet from the sidewalk, consistent with the setbacks of the two flanking churches. Main Street is both residential and institutional between its intersection with Front Street next to the Housatonic River on the east and High Street on the west. It is lined with boulevard trees, sidewalks, and mostly single-family houses on the south side of the street. The library is located on a roughly rectangular lot of three quarters of an acre whose elevation, like adjacent lots on the north side of Main Street, rises steeply at the rear (or north) to a wooded area. Existing buildings on this block of Main Street represent popular mid to late 19<sup>th</sup>-century residential styles, and extend to the early 20<sup>th</sup>-century Classical Revival style, of which the library is the outstanding institutional example. It is a 1½-story building with Roman brick walls and marble trim dominated by a central, projecting portico, with an entry flanked by two tall Ionic columns. This medium-sized masonry building represents a sedate and dignified example of a small-town, turn-of-the-century library.

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### Narrative Description

The story of building the Ramsdell Library starts with an agreement signed August 2, 1905, between T. Ellis Ramsdell and McLean & Wright, architects, of Boston, MA. T. Ellis Ramsdell was the son of Theodore H. Ramsdell (1833-1903), a New Hampshire native who came to Housatonic in 1864 as superintendent of the Monument Mills and eventually became its owner. As a wealthy industrialist and resident of Housatonic, Ramsdell's will directed his heirs to erect and equip a public library to benefit the residents of the village. He left a widow and four grown children, and it was his son, T. Ellis Ramsdell, who signed the agreement in 1905 with the two Boston architects to design the library building.

They chose the Classical Revival style and designed a 1½-story building, including a raised basement, with a half-story second floor containing a large meeting room (Photo #1) and several small storage rooms. The overall dimensions of the library building were 65 feet deep by 48 feet wide. As is typical of the style, the symmetrical front façade has a ceremonial flight of stairs leading up to a large, central pedimented projecting portico and entrance that was supported by giant, smooth-marble Ionic columns flanking the double doors. These two columns are flanked, in turn, by projecting undecorated pilasters supporting a marble lintel inscribed "The Ramsdell Public Library" above the entrance. Above the front entrance is a marble semicircular light with keystone flanked by the upper portions of the two columns. The tall, double oak doors at the entrance are each divided into two lights. These doors are surrounded by molded marble trim, a plain, flat frieze above, and a molded marble sill on which rests a foliated cartouche fronting a semicircular light surrounded by flat marble molding topped by a marble keystone. The projecting pediment above has a frieze and horizontal cornice with a course of large dentils, which extends the length of the front facade above the frieze. A tympanum, also dentillated, is decorated with a foliate design surrounding an open book. The raking cornice has a split fillet.

The side walls of the main entrance stairway are topped with two large, fluted, iron lamp standards with opaque round globes. The steps leading to the front doors have wrought-iron railings that were not original to the building. The corners

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of the walls at the projecting portico are decorated with a course of large marble quoins that contrast with the yellow-brick walls and draw the eye to the entire front portico. The roof is a low-pitched deck style and barely visible behind the tall plain parapet. At the east and west rear ends of the roof are two brick chimneys topped by molded stone copings and trim.

Exterior walls are light-yellow Roman brick trimmed with marble at the raised basement, portico, windows, cornice, and stairs. Befitting the style, the expanses of brick wall are punctuated only by the fenestration above the raised basement. Marble window lintels on the first story are jack-arched with decorative keystones, tying together the three-part windows. On each of the side elevations at the first story is a projecting curved-glass bay window, with continuous wooden cornices decorated with a dentil course and continuous marble window sills in the bays (photo 2). These two identical windows light the original west and east reading rooms, the east room now used as the children's reading room. Low three-part windows also decorate the frieze below the dentillated cornice, providing light to the second-story meeting room. The raised basement itself is faced in marble blocks topped with a slightly projecting stone molding forming a watertable. A date block, "A.D. 1906" is located on this watertable to the right (east) of the front entrance. The raised basement is punctuated by raised windows and a side access hatch on the east exterior leading to the basement.

At the rear of the building is an addition measuring 29 feet deep by 59 1/2 feet wide (Photo #2). It does not quite cover the entire rear or north original wall and is only flush with the original west wall. This addition was designed by the firm of Harding and Seaver of Pittsfield, Massachusetts, in 1928 and completed in 1930, largely for additional stack area to accommodate an additional 10,000 volumes as well as other updates. It was designed to extend the old stack room (originally the back of the building) to make a continuous stack space (Photo #3; fig. 1). To the west of the stacks in the new addition is an enlargement to the west reading room, behind which is a reference room, 14 by 17 feet, and a study room measuring 10 by 14 feet. The study room is separated from the reference room by a transomed glass-and-oak door flanked by two fixed-light interior windows.

The interior of the building opens to an anteroom with a stairway wrapping around the exterior walls and leading upstairs to the second-floor meeting room. This opens into the rotunda (Photo #4), which functions as a circular lobby and leads straight back to the circulation desk and stacks beyond, or into the west reading room (Photo #5), or into the east reading room, now used for children's books and activities. Each opening in the lobby is flanked by unfluted columns with Doric capitals flanking oak and glass doors with glass transoms. The floor is ceramic tile in red and black on a white background in a Greek meander pattern. The column finishes, which appear to be marble, are actually multi-colored scagliola resembling stone. This process allows plaster to imitate stone and is done by mixing marble dust, sizing, and various pigments in decorative patterns or designs. In the case of the Ramsdell Library, the scagliola imitates a rich marbled look and gives richness and depth to the columns in the lobby.

The interior finishes are consistent throughout. Walls and ceilings are plaster. Floors are oak, window and door trim is oak, all windows on the main floor have window transoms, and all interior doors are single-paneled. The central three-part windows in the first-floor bay windows and at the front and rear walls are 1/1 lights (Photo #5). All window transoms have fixed lights, and door transoms are moveable. Fireplaces in the reading rooms are oak with console supports under the mantels and decorative brick around the fireboxes (Photo #6). Oak fireplace moldings are beaded or molded for added texture and interest. The east reading room fireplace surround is wine-colored glazed tile, and the west reading-room surround is tan Roman brick.

The second floor is accessible from the front entrance via a stairway or by the back service stairs. It contains some small storage rooms and a large meeting room, known as "Library Hall," with plaster walls, oak floors, a raised stage at the rear or north end of the building, and a skylight, now enclosed (Photo #7). Because of the low ceiling, the east and west walls of the meeting room are knee walls tucked under the roof. The low three-part windows at the cornice level provide some natural light. What are thought to have been the original wooden chairs in the meeting room were removed in November 2012 and are now located in the basement. The room is used for occasional meetings and for storage of old newspapers from the Ramsdell Library, as well as Great Barrington Historical Society and Historical Commission files, artifacts, documents, records, and photographs.

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The raised basement is accessed from the first floor by an east staircase. It is unfinished, and has four paneled-oak doors, concrete floors, and rubblestone foundation walls. The staircase leading to the first floor is in the original basement and is sheathed in vertical, wooden beadboard. The 1928-1930 rear addition has an excavated basement, as well as brick and fireproof-tile walls and flooring on the first floor, and is supported by concrete pillars. The original front of the basement is supported by metal posts. There is a small toilet in the east wing at the rear of the basement. Basement floors are concrete throughout, and the heating system is newer.

#### Alterations and Updates:

The largest change to the library building was a rear addition completed in 1930 with some other attendant changes. Harding and Seaver, a Pittsfield architectural firm, designed the addition in 1928. The library was closed from August to early December, 1930 while construction took place. The objective (fig. 1) was to enlarge the reference room behind the west-side reading room by removing the rear wall of the original building, thus doubling the size of the reference area and adding a new rear workroom for the library staff behind the enlarged reference room. East of this in the new addition, room was provided for six additional book stacks. The 1930 changes included improvements to lighting and storage. The shelving in the new stack room was steel shelving. Behind the east reading room in the original building, an additional private one-stall lavatory was added. The new addition had oak floors to match the originals. On the second floor, "Library Hall," used for community meetings, was re-plastered and repainted and the woodwork varnished. A new double Ideal boiler was installed in the basement, and a new coalbin was built. New electric lighting was installed throughout. The cost of these renovations totaled \$12,500 (*The Berkshire Courier*, March 13, 1958; the *Sunday Union and Republican*, December 7, 1930).

Other changes to the building have come in the form of routine maintenance, wear and tear, or updating. For example, when the library roof had a small leak in 2002, routine repairs were made by the Department of Public Works through Fairview Roofing Company, contractor, which consisted of replacing the asphalt-shingled half of the main roof, and repairing the rubber-coated half and repairing portions of the rear roofing (Neville, *The Berkshire Record*, March 22, 2002). According to Gary Leveille, Historical Society archivist, six or seven years ago the former roof was left uncovered while being repaired. While it was open, the second floor was damaged by a major rain storm. The water damage required repairs including patching, re-plastering, and painting the walls in Library Hall. The original 1906 roof was slate. The latest roof, not visible from the lawn, is metal, according to Leveille. The glass inserts in the exterior double front doors were originally solid oak. About 25 years ago, the oak panels were removed and the current glass was installed, according again to Leveille.

In 2010, the Board of Trustees began talks on constructing an elevator and addressing other accessibility items, according to James Stark (Form B updated March 2010 for GBR.0267). Around June 2012, the circulation desk was moved forward, partially projecting into the rotunda. Earlier, at an unknown date, some stacks had been removed from the original stack area to make room for a long work table (Photo #3).

#### **Archaeological Description**

While no ancient Native American sites have been identified on the library property, sites may be present. One site is recorded in the general area (within one mile). That site, the Monument Mills Site (19-BK-124), is located less than 1,000 feet from the nominated property on the west bank of the Housatonic River. Documented Native resources in the vicinity of the Congregational Church on the east side of the Ramsdell Library lot have demonstrated the potential for ancient resources to survive in areas with similar locational characteristics (slope, soil drainage, proximity to wetlands) as the library and in the overall general area. Environmental characteristics of the property also indicate the presence of several locational criteria (slope, soil drainage, distance to wetlands) that are favorable for the presence of ancient sites. The library is located on a well-drained, sloping, riverine terrace within 1,000 feet of the Housatonic River. The library lot has a natural rise of about ten feet to the rear of the property and is wooded and hilly. Given the above information,

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the small size of the lot (less than one acre) and impacts associated with library construction dating from 1906, a moderate potential exists for locating ancient Native American resources on the library property.

There is a high potential for locating historic archaeological sites on the library property. According to the Barnes and Farnham map of 1904, the Ramsdell Library Lot 3 contained two private houses and associated outbuildings. At the east side of the present lot was the original 1809 Abel Sheldon House, later owned by H.H.B. Turner, with two outbuildings at the rear of the lot up against the hill. The house was moved to West Stockbridge, freeing up the lot for the Ramsdell Library. Structural evidence may survive for the Sheldon and Turner homes and related barns, stables, and outbuildings for the farmsteads. Occupational-related features (trash pits, privies, wells) may also survive related to both occupations of the property. Historic trash areas or middens may survive in and around the library lot, either associated with Sheldon or with Turner, who bought the property when he moved to Housatonic in 1876. To the west of the Turner House lot was the home of Mrs. N. D. VanDeusen, torn down to make way for two subsequent Catholic buildings. All told, these occupations (including the Ramsdell Library occupation) reduce the potential for finding undisturbed ancient Native American or historic archeological sites on the library lot today. However, scattered historic artifacts and below-ground historic features may survive. While it is possible that structural evidence of outbuildings, archaeological features, and artifact distributions associated with the operation and maintenance of the library are present, no evidence to support their existence has yet to be identified.

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**8. Statement of Significance**

**Applicable National Register Criteria**

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

**Criteria Considerations**

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- A Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B removed from its original location.
- C a birthplace or grave.
- D a cemetery.
- E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F a commemorative property.
- G less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years.

**Areas of Significance**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

Community Planning and Development

Social History

Architecture

**Period of Significance**

1906-1964

**Significant Dates**

1906 (date block) to 1908 (given to the town)

1928-30 (rear addition)

**Significant Person**

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

**Cultural Affiliation**

N/A

**Architect/Builder**

1906: McLean, William H. & Wright, Albert Hayden (Boston architects); 1928-30: Harding, George C. & Seaver, Henry M. (Pittsfield architects); Edward Hoyt Shaw, 1906 contractor.

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**Period of Significance (justification)**

The Period of Significance extends from construction of the library, which began in 1906, to 1964, the standard fifty-year cutoff for National Register eligibility.

**Criteria Considerations (explanation, if necessary)**

None.

**Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph** (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance and applicable criteria.)

The Ramdell Public Library, Great Barrington, MA, meets Criteria A and C for listing in the National Register of Historic Places, and is significant on the local level. Under Criterion A, it is eligible under Community Planning and Development for its contribution to the design, growth, and development of the village of Housatonic in Great Barrington in the early 20th century, and under Social History as an important part of the private and public efforts to promote the welfare and enhance the lives of the town's citizens. The library meets Criterion C on a local level as a well-designed and finely wrought example of an early 20th century, small-town, Classical Revival-style library, designed by two well-known architectural firms: the Boston firm of William H. McLean and Albert Hayden Wright, architects of the original building, and the locally admired Pittsfield architectural firm of Harding and Seaver, who designed a sympathetic rear addition in 1928-1930.

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**Narrative Statement of Significance** (Provide at least one paragraph for each area of significance.)

**Criterion A:**

**Housatonic History:**

The history of civic improvements, including the construction of a library, follows the settlement and growth of industries and population in Housatonic, a village in Great Barrington, MA. Great Barrington was established as a town in 1761, but the lands on both sides of the Housatonic River at the village of Housatonic were part of the "Equalizing" land, which the proprietors in 1749 decreed should be laid out in a manner to equalize the home lots of the original settlers. These lands were not subdivided until 1770. The village of Housatonic, now within the incorporated boundaries of Great Barrington, was not settled until 1809. It was situated five miles north of Great Barrington, at a place where the Housatonic River furnished abundant waterpower with a drop of 76 feet in the three miles upstream of the village. In its early history, the settlement of Housatonic lay entirely on the west side of the river. Industrial development occurred in 1809 on the upper water privilege, with the damming of the river. By 1818, the small settlement was known as "Babylon," and Eber Stone established a mill manufacturing spinning wheels. In 1825, Ransom Whitmore of East Haddam, Connecticut, began operating his own cotton mill on the site of Stone's spinning-wheel operation by taking the mill site and associated riparian rights. In 1827, "Babylon" became "Deansville" after Sprowell Dean and a partner, Perley D. Whitmore, purchased the mill. In 1835, Whitmore's mill became the Housatonic Manufacturing Company, when Wells Laflin purchased the primary ownership. At that time, the name of the village changed again, this time permanently, to "Housatonic." Failing in 1848, the company was incorporated in 1850 as Monument Mills. Subsequently, this upper privilege became the location of Monument Mills Mill No. 1. At the lower water privilege, a shop making chairs was begun, followed by a shoe-last factory in 1837 known as Wawbeek Mills, which continued until 1856. The Waubeek Mill building eventually became part of Monument Mills Mill No. 2.

Two significant events happened in 1850. The village of Housatonic was boosted by the arrival, in January 1850, of the Housatonic Railroad, which opened a line from Van Deusenville through Lee to Pittsfield, going through Housatonic village. This little town with its waterpower was made doubly attractive by the addition of available and efficient rail

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service. In May 1850, Monument Mills was incorporated by John C. and Asa C. Russell and John H. Coffing, beginning a long period of successful cotton manufacturing. First, under the direction of John M. Seeley, and after 1865, under the control of Theodore G. Ramsdell, Monument Mills became the largest manufacturer of jacquard woven cotton bedspreads in the United States. By 1885, Child's Berkshire County history noted that Monument Mills had a huge operation with 68 jacquard looms and 1,800 spindles, and employed 350 hands, who turned out 330,000 quilts and 2.7 million pounds of plain, fancy, double-twisted cotton warps per year. It operated continuously in Housatonic until it closed in 1956.

Theodore Ramsdell (1833-1903), long associated with the Monument Mills, arrived in Housatonic in 1864. In 1865, Ramsdell became Superintendent, a post he held for 22 years. Subsequently, Ramsdell was promoted to Agent, then General Manager, then Vice-President, and finally owner. He served until his death in March 1903. He was succeeded by his sons T. Ellis Ramsdell and Thomas S. Ramsdell. Theodore was well-known for his interest in the mill workers and in the betterment of the village. His will left a bequest of \$25,000 to erect and equip a public library to be built on the lot adjacent to the 1893-1894 Congregational Church, of which Ramsdell was a member, and to which his wife Mary Spencer Ramsdell of West Stockbridge, eventually bequeathed money.

T. Ellis Ramsdell carried on his father's wishes for a Housatonic Library, starting in 1905 when architects were hired and plans were drawn up. The Theodore Ramsdell bequest paid for the lot and the building, as well as its accouterments and books. Construction began in 1906, and was completed in 1908 as a private enterprise of the Ramsdell family. It became the Ramsdell Public Library when it was formally deeded to the Town of Great Barrington in accordance with the elder Ramsdell's wishes on June 26, 1908. T. Ellis Ramsdell was acting Treasurer of the Library in 1908, and continued his activity throughout the first decades of its existence, serving as a library trustee for 47 years.

The construction of a library building in Housatonic was a watershed event, coming slightly before the 1909 100th anniversary of the settlement of the village. When the library building was formally given to the town of Great Barrington in 1908, the population of Housatonic was around 3,000, and it was not one in town that the new library represented culture and progress and a considerable public improvement.

The period around the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, particularly its first decade, was a time of significant growth and prosperity in the village. In 1899, the uncompleted new Owen Mill Building was bought by the American Writing Paper Company and the highway past Housatonic was raised and improved. In 1904, the old burying ground was abolished and the remains were moved from a location in the vicinity of the river at a railroad grade crossing to the new Greenlawn Cemetery on the Van Deusenville road. Front Street was then laid out and an improved sewage system was introduced in 1906. In 1907, Owen Park, a new park, was constructed. In 1907, Monument Mills bought the Glendale woolen mill and erected the second largest power plant on the Housatonic River. A year after the Ramsdell Library was deeded to Great Barrington on June 26th, 1908, Monument Mills built a large addition to its mill and built a number of tenements for its employees. In 1911, the Housatonic Water Company became profitable and in 1912 a new concrete bridge was built across the Housatonic River just below Monument Mills, which was shared with the Berkshire Street Railway, who built their car barns in Housatonic in 1913.

The location chosen for the new library gave it a certain validation and significance in Housatonic. It was close to Monument Mills for the convenience of its employees, to the home of its major benefactor and owner of the mills, and to the two main churches in the village. The lot selected for the new library had been the location of the first pioneer house built in Housatonic, in 1809, by Abel Sherman. According to Taylor's *History of Great Barrington, Part I*, pp. 267-368, Sherman was an early settler from Rhode Island and went into business with Stephen Sibley, a clockmaker, building the first dam where the upper dam of the later Monument Mills was eventually located. The house, now the Ramsdell Library lot, was eventually sold to Harvey H. B. Turner. The Barnes and Farnham 1904 map shows a house and two rear sheds belonging to "H.H.B. Turner" immediately west and adjacent to the Congregational Church. The Turner family was in New Haven, CT, by 1630, and their descendants were among the earliest settlers of Great Barrington. H.H.B. Turner moved to Housatonic in 1876 and died in 1907. He was an early Prohibitionist, a librarian for 20 years, an assessor, and

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vice president of the Great Barrington Savings Bank. Turner's house came into possession of the Ramsdell family, and the house was "moved up High Street over the West Stockbridge line" (Berkshire Courier, Taylor, ed., *History*, footnote, p. 368).

The new library site was only five lots west of Theodore G. Ramsdell's house, "The Gables" (1099 Main Street North), which he built in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century at the east end of Main Street, and which, in turn, was just across the street from the Monument Mills office (extant) at the corner of Main Street and Front Street (Route 183). In short, the library was built some 550 feet west of the Monument Mills complex (NR 1983), which is along Front Street at the intersection of Main Street. Finally, the library was prominently located between the Roman Catholic St. Bridget's Society property on the west and the 1893 Housatonic Congregational Church (NR 2002). The St. Bridget's Society property became the site of the Corpus Christ Roman Catholic Church (now Blessed Theresa Church).

The construction of Great Barrington's first dedicated library building in 1906-1908, the Ramsdell Public Library in Housatonic, and the 1913 new library building in Great Barrington, the Mason Library, were prime examples of the type of philanthropy that shaped the faces of many towns in western Massachusetts in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Ramsdell Public Library in Housatonic was Great Barrington's first building to be designed exclusively for library purposes, although there had been earlier libraries housed in various locations in both Great Barrington and Housatonic. According to Taylor's history of Great Barrington, there was a so-called "Union Library" in the Great Barrington store of Samuel Whiting in 1800, housing a small collection of books, which functioned until the books were sold at public sale in January 1823. In 1861, the Great Barrington Library Association was formed as a stock company, capitalized at \$650. This group joined with two other early libraries in town, the Agricultural Library and the library of the Hope Fire Company, in 1881 under the name "Great Barrington Free Library" with a combined 1,030 books housed in one room in the town hall. It expanded to two rooms in 1887. In 1897, the town voted to spend \$12,000 on a private home to house the library, which was then moved out of the town hall.

Meanwhile, the arrangement for a library in Housatonic prior to the Ramsdell Library was in the private hands of Henry D. Cone, manager of the Owen Paper Company, and his wife. Cone started the free library in 1869-1870 in a brick storehouse on Owen Paper Company land on the east side of the Housatonic River. This library was designed to especially benefit Cone's employees, although it was free to all in town. With his wife, Cone maintained and supplied new books to a library and reading room, and the collection grew. By 1895, it had 4,000 books and a circulation of 10,000. But Mr. Cone's business went bankrupt in 1894, and the library closed upon his death in 1896. It was then that Theodore G. Ramsdell stepped in and expressed a desire to build and equip the village with a modern library. When he died in 1903, it was found that his will set aside \$25,000 for a library. After the Ramsdell Library was completed, it was given to the town of Great Barrington in 1908.

Five years after the Ramsdell Library was given to the town, the Mason Library was completed and dedicated on July 13, 1913. It, too, was a bequest: Mary A. Mason, of New York, a summer resident, gave \$50,000 in 1910 to the town of Great Barrington for a library. It was named for her husband, Capt. Henry Hobart Mason, and was designed by Blanchard and Barnes of New York in the Colonial Revival style and built of brick with white marble trim.

#### **Ramsdell Public Library History:**

Because the Ramsdell Library was not turned over to the Town of Great Barrington until 1908, the private planning and construction of the library were not particularly well covered in the local press. The contract between T. Ellis Ramsdell and the architects, McLean and Wright, was signed on August 2, 1905. Eight months later, on April 7, 1906, after plans had been drawn up and designs approved, *The Berkshire Daily Press* noted that the two large marble pillars designed to flank the front entrance were "about completed." They had been cut by hand from square blocks, each about 15 feet long. By June 16th, the *Press* reported that the library pillars were ready to stand at the entrance of the new library and would be placed during the week by Foreman Smith and his men. In addition, the metal cornice was almost all installed and the public would soon be able to see how the exterior would look when completed. Eleven days later on June 27th, the *Press*

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noted that the pillars were now in place at the entrance, and the outside stonework was about finished. The extra-heavy roof timbers were almost ready to receive the slate roofing. By July 5th, the stonecutters were working on the new building and the roofers were putting on the slate, a job that would take them another two weeks to complete. The date block on the raised-basement watertable reads "A.D. 1906," and it is known that by October 31, 1907, *The Berkshire Courier* advertised that the new library was offering an entertainment as part of the "Library Course" in the new building, so the library was open to the public by late 1907. In the January 2, 1908, *Courier*, readers learned that a "Miss Woodin was engaged in cataloguing the new books for the Ramsdell Library."

The library building officially became the property of Great Barrington on June 26, 1908, when the deed was transferred to the town and recorded in the registry. The deed formally conveyed the site, building, books, and equipment, all funded by Ramsdell's bequest of \$25,000, and an additional sum, making the total cost \$40,000. The contractor was E. H. Shaw.

During its early decades the library was managed by Miss Lydia Fuller, its first librarian, who served for seventeen years until she was "forced to resign in 1925 because of poor eyesight." She was succeeded by her assistant of several years, Miss Helen G. Brown, and her newly appointed assistant, Mrs. Eleanor Busby. On June 26, 1928, the 20th anniversary of the date that the Ramsdell Library officially became the property of the town of Great Barrington, a newspaper article noted that the number of books and periodicals in circulation had steadily increased to 26,590 by 1927, and the number of books in the library had increased to 12,000.

In addition to conventional library use, there have been a number of social uses for the library building, as is common in small towns. The top floor of the library has a stage and was used for plays, readings, and dances for many decades. In addition, residents had free use of a loom owned by the library. A knitting group has met in the library, and various meetings are scheduled there, such as the May "Cleanup Day" (*The Berkshire Eagle*, March 6, 2008). The upper floor was used for meetings of the historical society and the Great Barrington Historical Commission beginning in 1975. This floor also became archive storage, and it houses the Society's museum collections of historical art and artifacts, as well as an extensive photograph collection. Currently, the upper library room houses both the society's and the commission's archives, according to Historical Society archivist Gary Leveille.

#### **Criterion C:**

#### **Architecture:**

The Ramsdell Public Library is significant on a local level as a fine example of a small, early 20<sup>th</sup>-century Classical Revival-style library. Its original architects were the Boston firm of William H. McLean and Albert Hayden Wright. The building was designed, beginning in 1905, and construction was completed in 1908. It appears to have been a design reused by the architects in at least two later small-town libraries: the ca. 1909-1910 Shedd-Porter Memorial Library in Alstead, NH, and the ca. 1912 Weeks Memorial Library in Lancaster, NH.

The Ramsdell Library displays excellent historical physical integrity both inside and out. A one-story addition with raised basement was added to the rear of the building in 1928-1930 by the well-known Pittsfield firm of Harding and Seaver. The interior alterations to the library building are minor and the building retains integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association.

The integrity of location, setting, feeling, and association is tied to the north side of Main Street and the immediate area, and to the lives of the Ramsdell family itself. The library is flanked by two churches, the 1893-1894 Housatonic Congregational Church (NR 2002) on the east at 1089 Main St., and the St. Bridget, now St. Theresa, Roman Catholic Church on the west. The library is in keeping with the mixed-use institutional and residential function of Main Street. At the east end of Main Street, across the railroad tracks, is Monument Mills itself, and at the south side of Main Street is the former office of Monument Mills at 1100 Main Street. Across from that stands the house of the library's benefactor Theodore Ramsdell, owner of Monument Mills. On the south side of Main Street, across from the library, are the

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Monument Mills Workers Cottages. Theodore Ramsdell and his wife Mary were also active members of the congregational church, which received Mrs. Ramsdell's bequest when she died. Their sons, T. Ellis and Thomas S., were involved individually in both the church and the library.

The Classical Revival style became popular around 1895 in American architecture for private and public buildings alike. It followed various 19<sup>th</sup>-century revival styles, and its closest predecessor was the Colonial Revival style, beginning in the 1880s, with which it occasionally overlapped. Classical Revival was also a smaller-scaled example of the Neo-Classical Revival, beginning around 1895, but on a more monumental scale and used for important American buildings, especially museums, courthouses, memorials, and federal buildings. Classical Revival style harked back to the beginnings of American democracy and its roots in Greek and Roman thought, which were celebrated in 1876 at the Centennial International Exhibition in Philadelphia. The Classical Revival-style Ramsdell Library was designed with a front ceremonial set of stairs leading up to a two-story, front-centered portico. Detailing was Greek inspired. The Classical Revival was a dignified, quiet, and substantial style that was a perfect fit for small-town libraries and their role in American life. Following the World's Columbian Exhibition in Chicago in 1893, it became a very popular choice for architects throughout the United States at the turn of the century.

The design, workmanship, and materials of the library building are of high quality and measure favorably with a number of other small libraries in smaller towns in the region. The original architects, William Herbert McLean and Albert Hayden Wright, displayed a keen sense of function and design. Since the Ramsdell design was used for at least two other libraries, the architects seem to have been pleased with their Housatonic design. The materials and workmanship of the Ramsdell Library are notable. The exterior stone trim is marble, and the two giant Ionic columns at the front entrance were each cut out of a single stone and brought to the site, possibly from the marble quarries around Stockbridge, although there is no historical documentation on this. The tile floor design in the rotunda is well executed in a lovely multi-colored Greek meander pattern, and the architectural detail in the architrave and frieze of the rotunda is carefully designed and executed and topped by large dentils drawing the eye upward. This architrave is also supported by columns finished in scagliola, to imitate a multi-colored rich marbleized finish. The oak woodwork throughout retains its original finish, and lends quality and substance to the interior.

#### William Herbert McLean

William H. McLean was born in Boston, grew up in Newton, and attended the Massachusetts College of Art. According to his obituary in the *Middleboro Gazette* (Jan. 15, 1943), he spent more than 25 years maintaining an office in Tremont Temple, Boston, and residences at 78 Washington Avenue and in Nahant. He designed more than 60 schools and 40 libraries, mostly in New England. He drew up the plans for the Vermont and New Hampshire statehouses at the Eastern States Farmers Exposition in West Springfield, MA. His obituary also mentions the Provincetown High School, the North Attleboro Public Library, Bellows Free Academy at St. Albans, Vt., and the Middleborough Memorial Senior High School in Middleboro, MA. McLean is buried in Mount Auburn Cemetery in Cambridge, MA.

McLean's first known library design appears to have been the Richards Memorial Library in North Attleborough, built in 1894 in Colonial Revival style. The Richards family actually selected the Providence, RI, architectural firm of Gould, Angell and Swift, but the plans were drawn up by William H. McLean. Ramsdell Public Library seems to have set a pattern in the next two library designs by this firm. An extremely similar library design by McLean and Wright is the Shedd-Porter Memorial Library in Alsted, NH, designed and completed in 1909-1910 in the Beaux-Arts or Classical Revival style. It, too, was a gift to the town from private benefactors. The massing and overall size is similar to Ramsdell, with a projecting pedimented portico, Ionic columns, and a staircase leading to the front entrance, similar iron lamp standards, a raised basement, Classical detailing, three-part windows, and the same overall feeling as Ramsdell. McLean and Wright designed another small town library after this in Lancaster, NH, around 1912, which bears a close resemblance to the Ramsdell Library design. It is one story over a raised basement, with a deck roof, quoins, and stone trim, three-part windows, a grand stairway leading to the front entrance and pedimented portico, and a similar curved bay windows in the lateral side reading room.

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The entire corpus of McLean's building designs and architectural contracts is unknown. The Massachusetts Cultural Resources Information System (MACRIS) currently lists only nine properties designed by McLean in the state. Of these, only three in Massachusetts are dated before 1905 when McLean was given the contract for the Ramsdell Library; and one of these, the Needham First Baptist Church (1865), was built before McLean was born in 1871, so he perhaps did an alteration there. He is listed as having done some rowhouses at 408-410 Hanover Street in Boston in 1893 and the Richards Memorial Library in North Attleborough in 1894, before his Housatonic commission. The MACRIS database lists seven commissions between 1917 and 1926 in Massachusetts, five schools and two churches, all in and around towns surrounding Boston.

#### Albert Hayden Wright

The particulars of Albert Hayden Wright's life are not well known. The Massachusetts Cultural Resource Information System (MACRIS) lists sixteen buildings he designed in Quincy; the first two in 1896, and the last two in 1917. The two 1896 buildings were Quincy schools: the Massachusetts Fields School (NR 1990) in Renaissance Revival style with architects Stephen O. Moxon and Schweinfurth and Craig, and the Gridley Bryant Elementary School. The 1900 Cranch Elementary School in Renaissance Revival style was designed by Wright with Anderson-Nichols and Company, and may have been his largest commission before the Ramsdell contract of 1905. Wright is described in Quincy as having worked either by himself or with McLean on his commissions. The other known schools and houses he designed in Quincy were done after McLean and Wright were hired in 1905 to design the Ramsdell Public Library.

#### Edward Hoyt Shaw, contractor

The contractor was Edward Hoyt Shaw (1849-1931). According to local historian Bernard Drew, Shaw's Great Barrington work included the masonry and brickwork on the Mahaiwe Theater (NRIND 2008), the Brewer Block, and an "elevated stone wall in front of Edward F. Searles' Barrington House." He most likely worked with other local contractors on the Ramsdell Library, since *The Berkshire Daily Press* mentions a Freeman Smith and his men working on the pillars and metal cornice on June 16, 1906, and a contractor named Fitzgerald working on the library on September 20, 1906.

The 1928-1930 addition was designed by the well-known Pittsfield architectural firm of Harding and Seaver. It was designed primarily to provide additional stack area at the rear of the original building for another 10,000 books. Their first-known sketch of the addition is dated January 12, 1928.

#### George C. Harding and Henry M. Seaver

When the Ramsdell Library needed more space in 1928, the Town of Great Barrington turned to the Pittsfield architectural firm of Harding and Seaver. Harding and Seaver happened to be working on designing a new parish house or social hall for the Housatonic Congregational Church next door to the library. The finished plans for this parish house were dated April 26, 1928, so the Pittsfield firm was conveniently "in the area." The preliminary plans for an "Addition to the Library Housatonic Mass." show a rear addition with a reference area, study, new lavatory, and expansion of the stacks behind the old stack room designed to hold an additional 10,000 volumes. The new rear addition included reinforced-concrete basement walls, a new coalbin in the basement, repositioning a new pad for a new boiler, tuck-pointing the stone foundation of the original structure, new concrete steps, a new hatchway from the basement to the outside on the east lateral wall, and particular care to reuse and reset windows and sills from the back of the original building into the back and sides of the new addition so as to match the architecture. The Roman brick courses of the new rear addition matched perfectly the Roman brick courses laid in the original exterior walls. The firm was known for this type of attention to detail. A new composition roof was put on the rear addition and new copper flashing installed to match the original. In final plans dated April 17, 1930, interior plaster walls and oak trim were matched to the original to make a seamless alteration and expansion. In short, Harding and Seaver lived up to their reputation as sensitive and competent architects in the design and execution of the rear addition to Ramsdell Public Library.

Both men had plenty of experience with important commissions and clients. By the time they were hired in the late 1920s to design the addition to Ramsdell Library, the Harding and Seaver firm had done other visible commissions in Berkshire County including the Lenox Town Hall (1903), the Museum of Natural History and Art in Pittsfield (1907),

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and the YMCA building on North Street in Pittsfield (1908). They also designed Lathrop Hall (1905) and Memorial Chapel (1914) at Colgate University in Hamilton, NY, and Colby Academy at New London, NH, and a host of Dalton buildings, including family residences, workers' housing, Crane offices, and mill buildings for the Crane Paper Company, all during the early 20th century. They seem to have been a particular favorite with the Crane family and the corporation they ran.

The senior partner of Harding and Sever was George C. Harding (1867-1921), a graduate of M.I.T., who became active professionally in 1896. He was in partnership with another Pittsfield architect, Charles Rathbun, briefly, but the firm dissolved in 1899. After working for a time, he formed a partnership with Henry M. Seaver in 1902, after which the Harding and Seaver firm built a wide and successful practice and executed many Colonial Revival and other revival-style commissions. Following the death of Harding in 1921, Seaver continued alone until 1933, still under the name of Harding and Seaver.

### **Archaeological Significance:**

Since patterns of ancient Native American settlement in Great Barrington are poorly understood, any surviving sites could be significant. Ancient sites on the library property may contribute information for a greater understanding of Native American settlement and subsistence patterns in the uplands of western Massachusetts in general and inland portions of the Housatonic Drainage. Ancient sites in this area can improve our knowledge of Native people along the Housatonic River drainage, and their relationships with other Native socio/political groups to the south in the Connecticut area, to the west towards the Hudson River drainage in New York, or eastward to the Connecticut River locale. Ancient sites in this area may also be important in the study of Native American exchange systems and the role they played in the spread of technologies, ideas, and material goods between the areas noted above and eastern and southern coastal regions. Documented Native resources in the vicinity of the library have demonstrated the potential for ancient resources to survive in areas with similar locational characteristics as the library, and in the overall general area.

With the full knowledge that the Ramsdell Library building replaces previous occupations at this site in 1905-1908, and again in 1928 and 1930, it is unlikely that large-scale architectural or structural remains survive. However, historic archaeological resources associated with the VanDeusen or Turner houses on the library lot have the potential to provide information on the social, cultural, and economic characteristics that typified a segment of the Housatonic population that evolved from a rural agricultural settlement to a center for manufacturing and commerce in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This may particularly true of the east side of the lot where the buildings associated with H.H.B. Turner stood. Turner's lot was the location of the first pioneer house built in Housatonic in 1809, so that it goes back to the very beginnings of permanent settlement in Housatonic. Any artifacts or structural evidence of the previous buildings or evidence of occupational-related features here have the potential to yield important cultural, social, or economic information on the early European history of Housatonic up to 1904. Any archaeological evidence of outbuildings or artifact distributions associated with the library's occupation of the property after 1904 could contain important information related to the operation and maintenance of the library, details of library construction, and activities conducted on library grounds.

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Name of Property

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Personal Communication: Gary Leveille, Great Barrington Historical Society Archivist, various, summer and fall, 2112.

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**Previous documentation on file (NPS):**

preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67 has been requested)  
 previously listed in the National Register  
 previously determined eligible by the National Register  
 designated a National Historic Landmark  
 recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # \_\_\_\_\_  
 recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # \_\_\_\_\_  
 recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # \_\_\_\_\_

**Primary location of additional data:**

State Historic Preservation Office  
 Other State agency  
 Federal agency  
 Local government  
 University  
 Other

Name of repository: \_\_\_\_\_

Ramsdell Public Library  
Name of Property

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County and State

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): GBR.267

**10. Geographical Data**

**Acreage of Property** less than one acre  
(Do not include previously listed resource acreage.)

**Lat/Long** 42.258143 -73.365918

**UTM References**

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

|   |      |         |          |   |      |         |          |
|---|------|---------|----------|---|------|---------|----------|
| 1 | 18   | 634822  | 4679731  | 3 |      |         |          |
|   | Zone | Easting | Northing |   | Zone | Easting | Northing |
| 2 |      |         |          | 4 |      |         |          |
|   | Zone | Easting | Northing |   | Zone | Easting | Northing |

**Verbal Boundary Description** (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

The boundary of the nominated property is shown on the Town of Great Barrington's (Village of Housatonic) Assessors' Sheet 2 as Lot 3.

**Boundary Justification** (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The nomination consists of the entire parcel historically associated with the Ramsdell Public Library.

**11. Form Prepared By**

name/title Norene Roberts with Betsy Friedberg, National Register Director  
organization Massachusetts Historical Commission date May 2014  
street & number 220 Morrissey Boulevard telephone (617) 727-8470  
city or town Boston state MA zip code 02125  
e-mail [betsy.friedberg@sec.state.ma.us](mailto:betsy.friedberg@sec.state.ma.us)

Ramsdell Public Library  
Name of Property

Berkshire MA  
County and State

**Additional Documentation**

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:** A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.  
A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.
- **Continuation Sheets**
- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items.)

**Photographs:**

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map.

**Name of Property:** Ramsdell Public Library  
**City or Vicinity:** Great Barrington (Village of Housatonic)  
**County:** Berkshire **State:** MA  
**Photographer:** Norene A. Roberts  
**Date Photographed:** April 5, 2012 for photos # 1-7; Photo # 8 taken November 8, 2012.

1. View facing north of front facade
2. View facing northeast
3. View facing north from original stacks to newer 1928-30 stacks
4. View facing northeast from rotunda toward east reading room
5. View facing west from rotunda to west reading room
6. View facing northwest from west reading room toward original reference room to the north
7. View facing north toward the stage on second floor meeting room
8. View facing south at original building's rear wall (left) and east wall of 1928-30 addition (right)

**Property Owner:**

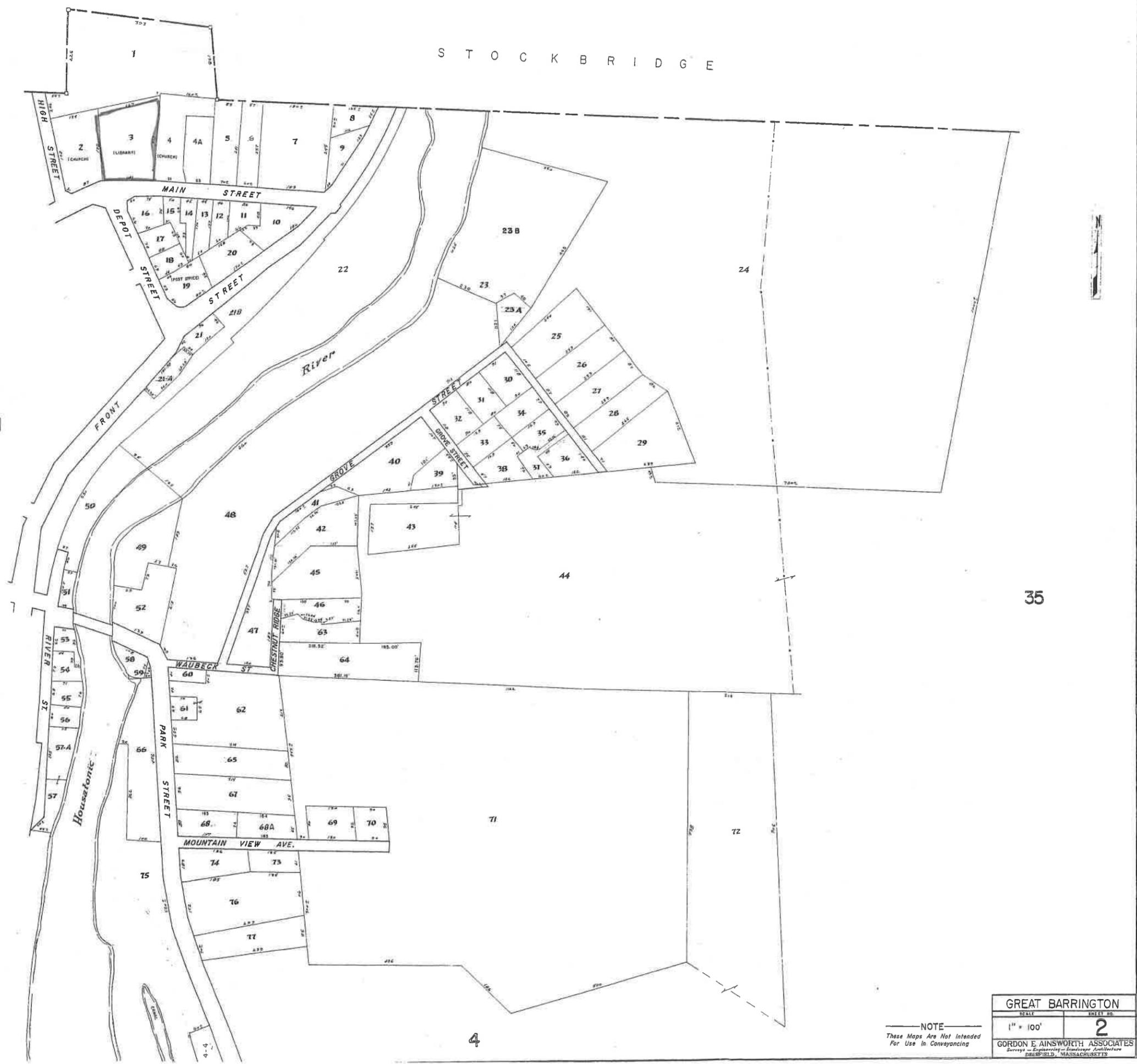
(Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO.)

name Town of Great Barrington  
street & number 334 Main Street telephone 413-528-1619  
city or town Town of Great Barrington state MA zip code 01230

**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:** This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 460 et seq.).

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Office of Planning and Performance Management, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.

S T O C K B R I D G E



THE TOWN OF GREAT BARRINGTON  
 ASSESSOR'S OFFICE USES A BASE MAP  
 FOR EACH PAGE OF ITS TAX MAP FILE  
 THAT ARE UPDATED ANNUALLY. WE DO NOT  
 HAVE A SIMILAR MAP FROM A SPECIFIC  
 HISTORICAL YEAR THAT REPRESENTS  
 INDIVIDUAL PARCEL CONFIGURATIONS.

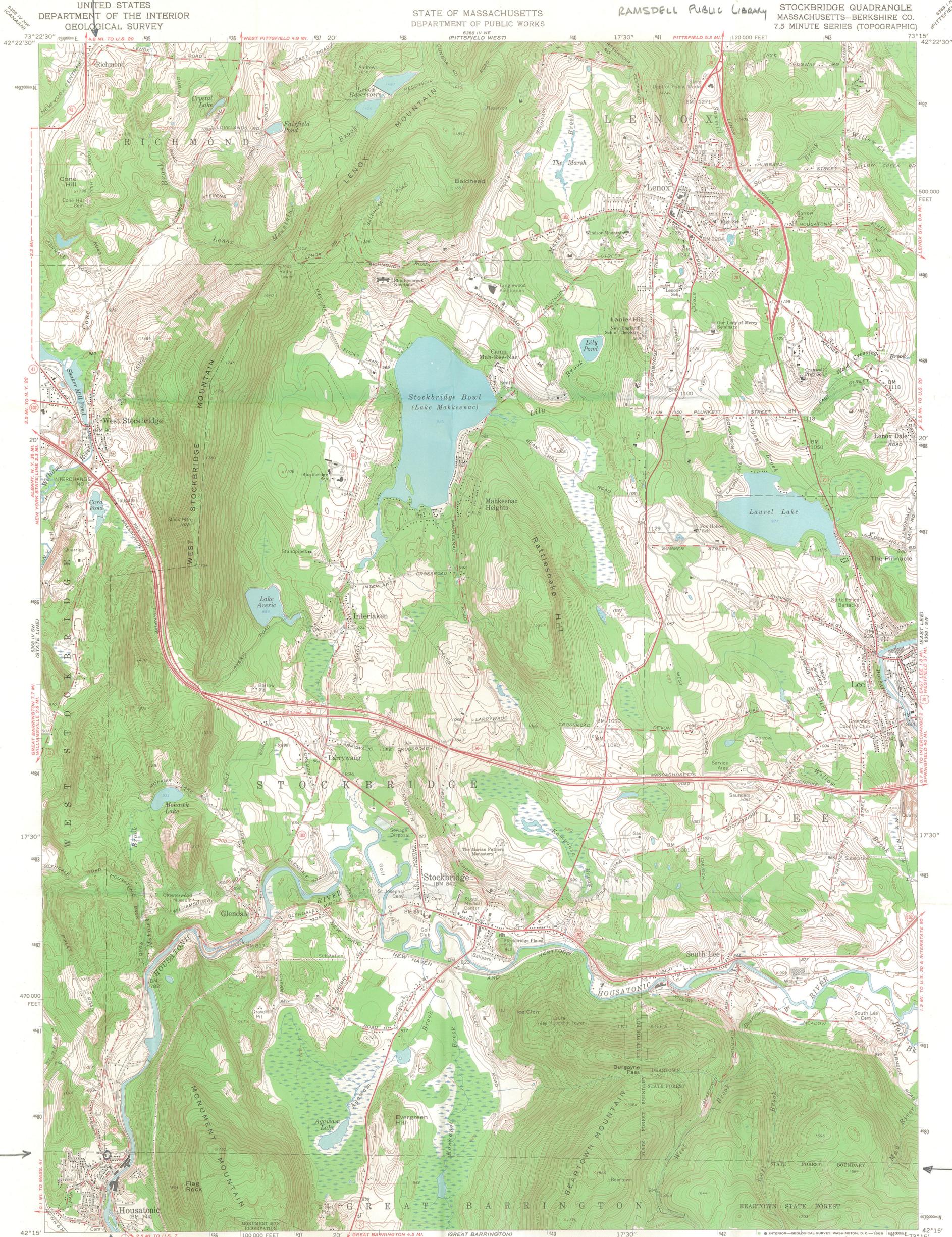
*Chris*

8-9-2012

CHRISTOPHER J. LAMARRE  
 PRINCIPAL ASSESSOR

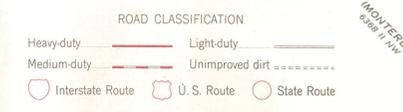
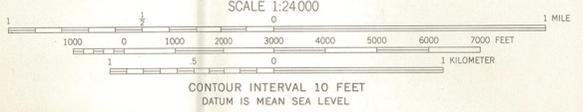
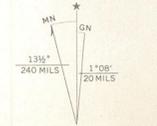
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|  |           |
|--|-----------|
| GREAT BARRINGTON   |           |
| SCALE  | SHEET NO. |
| 1" = 100'  | 2         |
| GORDON E. AINSWORTH ASSOCIATES<br><small>Survey - Engineering - Landscape Architecture<br/>     DEERFIELD, MASSACHUSETTS</small> |           |



Zone 18  
E - 634822  
N - 4679727

Mapped, edited, and published by the Geological Survey  
Control by USGS, USC&GS, Massachusetts Geodetic Survey, and  
Massachusetts Harbor and Land Commission  
Topography by photogrammetric methods from aerial photographs  
taken 1942. Field checked 1944. Revised 1959  
Polyconic projection. 1927 North American datum  
10,000-foot grid based on Massachusetts coordinate system,  
mainland zone  
1000-meter Universal Transverse Mercator grid ticks,  
zone 18, shown in blue  
Fine red dashed lines indicate selected fence and field lines where  
generally visible on aerial photographs. This information is unchecked



STOCKBRIDGE, MASS.  
N4215-W7315/7.5

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AMS 6368 IV SE-SERIES V814

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