

A Brief History of Longmeadow, Massachusetts

William Pynchon, a Puritan leader and Treasurer of the Massachusetts Bay Company, led an expedition of men up the Connecticut River hoping to establish a trading post and Puritan “plantation.” The year was 1636. They came upon meadow land near the Agawam and Connecticut Rivers that appeared to be ideally suited for farming and grazing. More important, the land was rich in beaver. At that time in Europe beaver pelts were much in demand and commanded large sums of money. Pynchon drew up an agreement with the Agawam Indians to purchase this land, known to the Indians as “Masacksic” or “the long meddowe.”

Until 1645 the long meadow was in use as a common pasture, to be shared equally by all residents. At this time the land was divided into lots and given to specific families. Copies of a map showing these land grants are displayed in various places around town, including at Town Hall and in the Storrs House. Some land was used to attract settlers with specific skills or talents needed by the developing community. A road from Springfield to the meadows was completed, making it easier to move supplies and beaver pelts between Springfield and Pynchon’s warehouse downriver at what is now Warehouse Point, CT.

The first house was built in the meadows about 1649. Most of the landowners already had homes in Springfield. Indeed, what we today call “Longmeadow” remained part of Springfield until the early 1700’s. Residents of the meadows conducted most of their business in Springfield, where they also traveled several times a week to attend church services. A terrible flood in the meadows in 1695 caused residents to realize the need to move their settlement to higher ground. In 1703 permission was granted to settle on “the hill” (our current Longmeadow Street) and to begin to establish a community separate from Springfield. By 1714 several houses had been built around a common green, a new meetinghouse was under construction on the Green itself and the search was on to employ a minister. The young Rev. Stephen Williams was soon hired. Already widely known as a captive after the Deerfield massacre, Rev. Williams served as the first minister of First Church from 1716 until his death in 1782.

In the years that followed Longmeadow slowly grew. More houses cropped up around the Green and farms were built up and down Longmeadow Street. By the 1750’s houses appeared in the eastern part of Longmeadow in the area we now know as East Longmeadow. Still predominately a farming community, small shops and businesses were established around and on the Green. By 1767 the town realized a need for a larger meetinghouse and a “raising” was held to replace the original. Like most communities large and small in the colonies, Longmeadow was touched by the ever-louder calls for Revolution. April 21, 1775 saw farmers from Longmeadow joining with Minutemen from Springfield’s militia to rush to assist fellow colonists in Lexington and Concord. The impending war divided citizens here, as elsewhere, neighbor against neighbor, Patriot against Tory. On October 17, 1783, Longmeadow was incorporated as the first community in the newly formed Commonwealth of Massachusetts. Paperwork had been filed for incorporation before the Revolution, but with the outbreak of war it was shuffled aside.

The “East Village” section of Longmeadow split off from the “West Village” in 1894 to form the separate town now called East Longmeadow. At that time the population of East Longmeadow numbered about 1600, leaving what we now think of as the town of Longmeadow with a population of about 570. East Longmeadow by this time was an economically and ethnically diverse community with many businesses and industries, a busy railroad yard and a dozen operational red sandstone quarries. A map of Longmeadow from that year shows approximately 100 homes, most concentrated up and down Longmeadow Street.

The arrival of the trolley line in 1896 linking Springfield to Connecticut via Longmeadow Street created rapid growth. Longmeadow was now officially a “streetcar suburb.” “South Park Estates” was the first of many new subdivisions to be built within easy access to the trolley. It was soon joined by “The Elms”, Crescent Road , “Greenwood Manor, ” Colony Hills, etc., etc. By mid-century Longmeadow had become a town with charming town buildings, an elegant Community House, several schools and a population approaching 15,000.

The Indians were very accurate when they named their land “Masacksic” or “long meddowe.” The long meadow provided a source of food, livelihood and safe haven for those early Puritan pioneers. Today, of course, Longmeadow is much changed and probably would be unrecognizable to its earliest inhabitants. However, with a brief ride into the Meadows of today, and a little imagination, one can easily conjure up visions of the land that first attracted William Pynchon’s expedition so long ago.

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