

## North Adams History

Settlers began moving into this area in the 1730s. Col. Ephraim Williams, later to give a portion of his estate to found Williams College, built Fort Massachusetts here in 1741. Near what is now the Price Chopper on Route 2 in North Adams, the fort was built to protect the English settlers in 'East Hoosuck'. Williams was granted 200 acres in return for building a gristmill and sawmill near what is now City Hall. In 1778 the settlement was incorporated and renamed Adams for the Revolutionary patriot Samuel Adams. The south portion (now Adams) was largely agricultural due to rich river sediments, while the north was largely industrial, due to waterpower from the Hoosic River. After completion of the Hoosac Tunnel in 1875, the flourishing north portion separated, becoming the City of North Adams in 1895.

## Economic History

The combination of the Hoosic providing power to the North Adams mills, and the entrepreneurial abilities and hard work of its residents, enabled the city to grow. From the mid 1800s to the mid 1900s the city thrived with shoe manufacturers, a sawmill, cabinet-makers, machine shops, marble works, cotton printing, and electronics. After World War II, like many northern cities, North Adams experienced a serious decline in manufacturing, resulting in a 50% decline in population and an increase in unemployment. Nevertheless the progressive spirit of the city continues, rekindled by its next great entrepreneurial adventure — a new economy based on the arts, educational opportunities, and recreational activities. Surrounded by mountain ranges, fine schools and universities, and populated with industrious, creative people, North Adams is rebounding.

## Hoosic River History

Industrialist Jeremiah Colegrove, who hid a runaway slave in the wheel pit of his gristmill, is said to have told his wife that North Adams was sure to grow, because "all this water power wasn't

put here for nothing." Since the 1750s, the mills in North Adams have been the source of its economic vitality. But the Hoosic River, which flows north like the Nile, also became a convenient way of getting rid of industrial and household waste. And the river often threatened the city with periodic flooding, undermining the mills and toppling houses. The 1869 flood swept away bridges and inundated Willow Dell. Another occurred in 1927, and the Hurricane of 1938 became the storm of record.

In the 1940s, in response to a city appeal for help, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers built the concrete chutes that speed the river safely through North Adams' center. Flooding is controlled and since the 1972 Clean Water Act, the river has become much cleaner. However, the chutes are now aging, have divided the downtown, turned a living river to a sterile flow, and deprived citizens of what could be a dynamic, attractive community feature. A 21st Century approach to flood control, which the River Revival proposes, will create an accessible, healthy river with adjacent green space and bike trails, reconnecting us to the river, revitalizing the city, and benefiting residents and visitors alike.

## What's in a Name

Hoosic, Hoosac, Hoosick, and Hoosuck are all names used for the river. The different spellings are a reflection of the different interpretations of the original Algonquin name for 'place of stone'. The Hoosic spelling is most common in Massachusetts for the river; the Hoosac is common for the mountains, but New York State prefers Hoosick. Whatever the spelling, it is still the same beautiful 70 mile river shared by Massachusetts, Vermont, and New York.

Brochure Prepared by the Hoosic River Revival

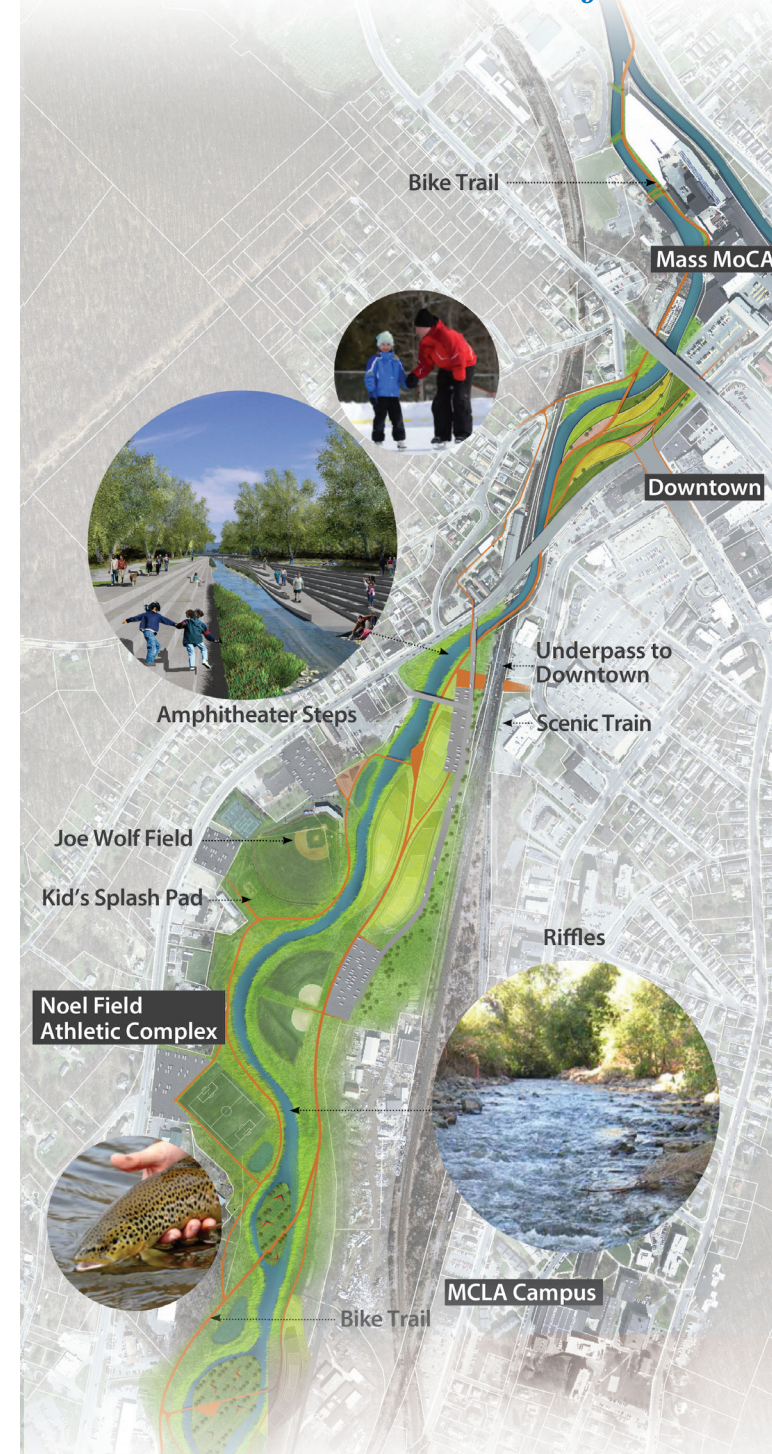
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## Hoosic River South Branch: Site of our Pilot Project



Imagine a revitalized Hoosic River -  
the gem of North Adams



*Reclaiming a Community Treasure in North Adams*

## A Historical Walking Tour

North Adams and the  
Hoosic River

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MASSACHUSETTS COLLEGE OF LIBERAL ARTS





Welcome to North Adams ! We invite you to follow this historical river walk through our city for a glimpse into our colorful past and promising future; begin at our City Hall, corner of Main St. and State Streets.

### 1. City Hall

North Adams, with about 13,000 residents, is the smallest city in the State and is nicknamed the “Steeple City” because of the five adjacent churches you can see down Main Street. Bordering the City Hall parking lot is the South Branch of the Hoosic River, walled and floored in concrete by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in the 1950s to prevent downtown flooding. To begin the tour exit the parking lot and turn left onto Marshall Street.

### 2. MASS MoCA

The Hoosic flows through this complex, built from 1860-1942 by Arnold Print Works, one of the world’s leading manufacturers of printed textiles. During World War II this became headquarters for Sprague Electric, a global company designing and manufacturing state-of-the-art weapon and consumer electronic components, and employing more than 4,000 area residents. After Sprague left in 1985, Williams College curators proposed converting the large, open interior rooms into exhibit space for contemporary art. MASS MoCA is now one of the largest centers for visual and performing arts in the world, with 160,000 visitors annually. Continue on Marshall St. to River Street.



### 3. The Porches Inn

Keeping the North Branch of the Hoosic on your left, you soon see the Porches Inn. In 2001, the Wadsworth family and the Fitzpatricks, owners of the Red Lion Inn in Stockbridge, converted these mill worker houses into a luxury inn. Across the street is a community garden and oven, the latter constructed of bricks from a torn-down MASS MoCA building and stamped BLEAU, perhaps a company owned by one of the many French-Canadians who immigrated here. Continue along River St. to Brown Street.

### 4. Brown Street Bridge

The bridge provides a fine spot to view the merging of the North and South branches of the Hoosic River, on its way to Vermont and New York where it will empty into the Hudson. The iconic arch is a gas line—not a MASS MoCA installation. Return to River St., walk past Marshall St., and turn right onto Holden St.. At Main St., take a left and check out the commercial establishments, many in historic buildings built in the early 1900s. A left onto charming Eagle St. brings you to a major intersection with Route 2/Union St/Mohawk Trail. Go right onto Union Street.

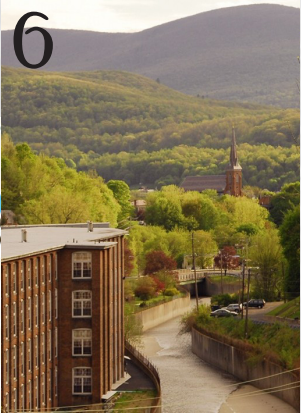


### 5. Willow Dell

Just before crossing the Hoosic River, turn right into Willow Dell (just Dell, no Street or Road in its name). On your right sits the former Wall-Streeter Shoe Co., which in the early 1900s manufactured shoes sold in every major US city. This crescent-shaped area was once home to immigrant mill workers whose homes were subject to serious flooding. Condition of the aging chutes is evident in the fallen section of the wall here. Note the still-standing water tower, part of the fire protection system of the former Barber Leather Co. You might enjoy Willow Walk (a project of the local E3 alternative learning program) that takes you along the Hoosic River to Miner St. Alternatively, return to Union St., turning right to see the North Adams Tourist Bureau in front of the Windsor Mill, known until the 1950s for its fine cotton dyeing and printing.

### 6. Eclipse Mill

Continuing up Union St., walk between the Eclipse Mill and the Delftree buildings, once a single complex occupied by Hoosac Worsted and later by Sprague Electric. The former Delftree owners grew shitake mushrooms. The Eclipse Mill now contains two art galleries and 40 artists’ loft/studios. Note the flood control chutes for the North Branch of the Hoosic which begin here. After visiting the galleries, retrace your steps on Union Street, left up Miner St., then right onto Main Street.



### 7. Public Library

Sanford Blackinton, prosperous owner of several large woolen mills along the Hoosic River, constructed this historic building as a private home in 1865 for a hefty \$75,000. In 1895, North Adams’ first mayor, A.C. Houghton, purchased the home and donated it to the city as a library. Consider taking a half-mile walk up Church St. to see many historic homes and Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts. Repeatedly honored by U.S. News & World Report as ‘one of the top ten public liberal arts colleges’ (2012-2015), MCLA offers both undergraduate and graduate programs.

### 8. Heritage State Park

Return to Main St., pass by City Hall, and across from Subway look for the pedestrian walkway, which provided easy access for mill employees who lived in this mostly Italian-American neighborhood. Maybe a train will pass underneath and enter the Little Hoosac Tunnel on your right. Turn sharp left off the bridge, and bear right around Building #6, formerly a grain warehouse. Note the ten-ton capacity crane that was used to unload cargo from trains. You are now entering the State Park.

Originally the North Adams railroad yard, this Park commemorates the construction of the historic 4.75 mile Hoosac Tunnel. Efforts to get through the Hoosac Mountain barrier between Boston and Albany, NY began in 1819 and finally succeeded in 1875, at a cost of 195 lives and more than 21 million dollars. Learn more at the Hoosac Tunnel Visitors’ Center and the North Adams Museum of History and Science, and enjoy a meal at the Pub. At the end of the last building, take a left, cross under the Route 8 bridge, and over the Hoosic River.

### 9. Noel Field/Hoosic River Revival Pilot Project

You are now standing at the site of North Adams’ first RR Station, soon to be the northernmost terminus of the Hoosic River Revival pilot project. Follow the cobble-dirt road, bearing slight right to walk along the concrete wall; climb a little hillock, to Noel Field and the South Branch of the Hoosic River. In the 1930s the local Sons of Italy played an exhibition game here against the Brooklyn Dodgers, with player/coach Babe Ruth, who failed to get a hit. This area is now the site of many recreational activities. Consider a walk along the berm and imagine a bike trail and a revitalized, accessible, boatable, fishable Hoosic River! On the reverse side is a drawing of the River Revival’s proposed restoration here.

To complete the tour, return on the cobble walkway and cross the vehicle bridge to Route 8 and Main Street. Turn right for downtown North Adams.

We do hope you have enjoyed this visit of our city!

The entire Walking Tour is approximately 4.3m/7km.

Use the QR code for additional walking tour information.



Imagine a revitalized Hoosic River - the gem of North Adams