

Wellington As Neighborhood

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The Village of Wellington, settled in 1818, dominates twenty-five square miles of very flat and fertile farmland. The Berkshire County, Massachusetts, migrants, having common social customs, aesthetic standards, and religious preferences (Congregational/Presbyterian), transferred their New England community identity to their new home. Before 1850 the isolated town built a network of goods and services whose interdependence furthered the sense of friendship. Meanwhile, a strengthened spiritual interest provided a shared haven in the face of pioneer adversity.

When the Cleveland-Columbus-Cincinnati railroad was built through Wellington in 1850, the influx of immigrants with differing customs and religions threatened the comfortable neighborhood. By the late 1850's the abolition question, demanding attention as a result of the celebrated Oberlin-Wellington Slave Rescue Case, had divided the town. The unifying force after 1850 was its economic system: the agricultural community had industrialized its dairy farms, exporting their cheese and butter via the railroad. During this period of prosperity were built many extant Victorian structures centered around the village square.

As the cheese industry moved westward and the railroad declined in the early 20th century, Wellington remained a static community, with just enough industry to trade for its outside needs. However, with the advent of the shopping mall and improved highway travel, the town's small family businesses have gradually given way to a strip of franchises whose depersonalized atmosphere discourages neighborliness. While still giving the visual impression of a close-knit town, Wellington's neighborhoods are filled with neighbors whose distant workplaces and transience make them strangers.