

Printed Resources at the Gleason Public Library for Researching Carlisle's History

Carlisle: Its History and Heritage

Ruth Chamberlin Wilkins, published by the Carlisle Historical Society, 1976, revised 2002.

Ruth Wilkins' book remains the most important resource for the study of Carlisle history. Written in 1976 as a bicentennial year project, and revised in 2002, it is a survey of the town's history from its settlement through the mid-1970s. The book covers town government, economy, religion, infrastructure, community organizations and institutions, and its involvement in military affairs. It also addresses Carlisle's periods as a district of Concord and Acton, its early nineteenth-century establishment as a town, and its growth and expansion across eras. Entertainment, holidays, traditions, and customs are also included. There is an abundance of information here about many of Carlisle's people and families, as well as the town's transition over time from a quiet farming community to a thriving suburb with a deep sense of community.

A lifelong resident of Carlisle, Mrs. Wilkins was the Town Clerk, a teacher at the Carlisle Public School, and worked at the Gleason Public Library. She spent a lifetime immersed in town life and public service.

Carlisle, Composite Community: Historical Facts Concerning the Settlers in Present Carlisle, Massachusetts, in the Colonial Period

Donald A. Lapham, printed 1974.

Donald Lapham's book has a narrower scope than Ruth Wilkins' history of Carlisle. Using information in deeds, wills, genealogies, and family histories, Lapham traces the history of Carlisle's colonial-era families. The book is illustrated with photographs of old houses, gravestones, and other local images. Like Ruth Wilkins, Don Lapham was a lifelong resident of the town, with roots going back many generations.

History of the Town of Carlisle, Massachusetts, 1754-1920 (with biographical sketches of prominent persons)

Sidney A. Bull, printed 1920.

Sidney Bull's history of Carlisle is a survey of the town's history from its first incorporation as a district in 1754 to 1920. Bull uses the same historical survey format as Ruth Wilkins, but writes in an early twentieth-century voice. In addition to people, institutions, and events, Bull includes chapters on epitaphs, selected biographies of leading citizens, and a selection of historical documents. Illustrated with late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century photographs.

Images of America: Carlisle

Carlisle Historical Society, Portsmouth, NH: Arcadia Publishing Company, 2005.

The newest book on Carlisle presents the town's history through visual images of its people, institutions, and traditions. The history of the town is presented here in photographs, most from the collections of the Gleason Public Library and the Carlisle Historical Society, and some from private collections, seen here for the first time. Gleaned from a variety of sources, the book makes hundreds of Carlisle images easily accessible in one place for the first time. Subjects addressed include farms, businesses, schools, churches, houses, community life, celebrations, landscapes and landmarks, fires and storms, and portraits of a selection of Carlisle citizens.

Old Houses and Families of Carlisle, Mass. (with contributions and compilations by old inhabitants and other interested persons, illustrated with 495 photographs)

Martha Fifield Wilkins, unpublished manuscript, donated to the Gleason Public Library by the author, 1941.

This nuanced, detailed history of Carlisle was painstakingly researched over a ten-year period, and written in beautiful calligraphic longhand. It is profusely illustrated with photographs, sketches, newsclippings, and ephemera.

The twenty-five volumes that make up what are locally known as the Wilkins' Notebooks provide extensive and unique documentation of Carlisle's history. Throughout the 1930s, Carlisle resident Martha Fifield Wilkins researched houses in town built before 1830. She compiled the histories of these houses from deeds and other documents, family lore, and local history resources. Extensive genealogy is integrated with the house histories, including in-depth histories of selected families. Enhancing the histories of houses and people are colorful descriptions of community institutions, events, and traditions. Local folktales and unique anecdotes enliven the narrative.

Mrs. Wilkins' research was both wide-ranging and detailed so that some of the information here cannot be found in any other resource. She drew deeply on the knowledge and memories of Carlisle residents, many of whom had ancestors going back to the region's earliest settlers; others who had for generations made Carlisle their home, often in the same house.

Complimenting the text are the nearly 500 photographs found throughout the notebooks. Mrs. Wilkins included several photographs of each house, most of which were taken between 1900 and 1940, but also older images when available. The photographs provide researchers with a rich visual history of Carlisle's past.

Martha Fifield Wilkins came to Carlisle at the turn-of-the-twentieth century when her husband, Reverend Benson Perley Wilkins, became the minister of the Carlisle Congregational Church. Within a short time, illness curtailed his tenure in the pulpit, but Mrs. Wilkins became one of the town's leading citizens. Her years in Carlisle were marked by public service, both through the Congregational Church and independently. She was the driving force behind the establishment of the Carlisle Historical Society, which she helped found in 1933, and which, along with her writing, laid the groundwork upon which Carlisle's history has been preserved.