

LEARNING AHEAD

CULTURAL ITINERARY FOR WESTERN MASSACHUSETTS



**HilltownFamilies.org**
COMMUNITY-BASED EDUCATION NETWORK

Learning Ahead:
Cultural Itinerary for Western Massachusetts
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This program is funded in part by Mass Humanities, which receives support from the Massachusetts Cultural Council and is an affiliate of the National Endowment for the Humanities.

Learning Ahead:

Cultural Itinerary for Western Massachusetts

Seasons: Sept & Oct

Andrea Caluori-Rivera

Edited by Sienna Wildfield

Hilltown Families, Inc.
www.HilltownFamilies.org



SEASONS SEPT & OCT

"The earth is fat in fall, dripping milk and honey into the mouths of wild creatures and into the souls of humans who will soon be entering their own form of hibernation in front of flickering fires and flickering screens. It seems that all the other seasons have been building up to this one. As nature writer Hal Borland put it: 'It was for ripeness in and all around us that winter passed and spring and summer found us.'"

- Ted Williams, *Wild Moments*

Who am I? Where am I? These are the fundamental questions proposed by the humanities. Inquiries related to local **history**, **literature**, and **education** inspire us to think deeply about the places where we live and how our identity fits into the context of our community and the seasons.

Looking through a seasonal lens, a September and October cultural itinerary for Western Massachusetts includes:

- Participation in local **CULTURE**: Agricultural Fairs and Fall Festivals
- **PLACEMAKING** through annual events: Guided Tours and Plein Air Paint Outs
- Gathering and preparing seasonal **FOOD**: Apples and Pumpkins
- **VALUE** based engagement: Intergenerational, Skillsharing, and Community Meals
- Marking the **SEASON** with annual events: Back-to-School and Halloween
- Engaging in local **HABITAT**: Nature Trails and Fall Foliage
- **INTEREST** based learning: Domestic Arts, Pastry Arts, and Paranormal



Hilltown Landscape. Ashfield, MA.
Photo Credit: Sienna Wildfield

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September

Local Traditions & Culture: Agricultural Fairs

As summer winds down and signs of autumn appear, annual agricultural fairs throughout Western Massachusetts mark the season with celebrations of local culture through the lens of farming traditions. Beginning as early as August, these annual fairs honor the unique character of towns throughout our region, fostering community pride and strengthening intergenerational relationships through a shared interest and experience. With a stroll through exhibition halls on the fairgrounds and experiencing traditional skills, crafts, and customs, visitors can support their interests through various learning opportunities while cultivating relationships and strengthening a deeper sense of place.



Heath Agricultural Fair
Photo Credit: Sienna Wildfield



Cumington Agricultural Fair
Photo Credit: Sienna Wildfield

Agricultural fairs help to preserve our local history by showcasing the skills, crafts and home-grown produce unique to rural life that have been cherished and passed on for generations. Through participation in these rich traditions we support the preservation of culture, local history, and a connection to place. The agricultural fair's long-standing presence in New England history reminds people of the importance of gathering to celebrate and share, even during difficult times, in order to foster a sense of community and collaborative spirit. Many fairs are over 150 years old and have even taken place during some of our country's most difficult economic periods and war time. These generations-old traditions of agriculture, self-sufficiency, and resiliency in rural communities

afford families opportunities to participate in intergenerational community-based traditions while offering a myriad of entertainment and skill-sharing experiences inspired by a shared interest in traditional crafts, history, land, and art.

Domestic Arts

Fairs are a great way to explore the domestic arts and understand the quality of items made by hand. Exhibition halls at agricultural fairs are filled with different handmade crafts and culinary arts, such as quilts, preserves, knitwear, canned goods, and pies - all tokens from our past that still have a place in our present today.

Quilts

Learning how to quilt takes skill-building and patience, but is a wonderful way to integrate an exploration of the humanities by learning about quilting techniques and patterns that have been used during different historic time periods. The creative process of quilting allows the quilter to think about color theory, pattern, design, and assembly. Some quilts are commemorative or refer to a particular period in someone's life or may have been received as a gift. Even family trees were sometimes included in the quilt-making process.

Curious to know more about the history of quilts and their stories? Check out the Massachusetts Quilt Documentation Project at www.massquilts.org.



Handmade Quilts
Cumington Agricultural Fair
Photo Credit: Sienna Wildfield

This project documents historic quilts from all over the state as a way to preserve their heritage and record the history of quilt-making in Massachusetts. You can also check out the book *Massachusetts Quilts, Our Common Wealth*, through your local library which includes chapters related to the geographical, social, and political influences on quilting in Western Massachusetts and across the state.

Make quilting even more multi-disciplinary by adding in a literature study of Lisa Campbell Ernst's *Sam Johnson and the Blue Ribbon Quilt*. A literary guide can be downloaded at hilltownfamilies.wordpress.com/literary-guides.

Knitting

Knitting is the production of many hands: from the sheep to the shepherd who raises and shears them, to the spinners at the wheel and the hands that knit the garment. Knitting celebrates this agricultural process and local fiber production in Western Massachusetts. In fact, in the 19th century there was a huge merino wool boom in the Hilltowns when farmers used their pasture land to raise merino sheep and meet the demand for this luxuriously soft wool. Now there are many breeds of sheep raised in the region and other fiber animals that produce different textured wools for making knitwear. At agricultural fairs, support an interest in knitting and textile arts by visiting with farmers and their animals, learning about different breeds, and then making your way to the exhibition hall to see some of the beautiful hand-knitted garments on display. Knitting, yarn dyeing, and spinning are a rich part of women's history in New England. The art of knitting and fiber dyeing offer a hands-on method for learning about design, color theory, farming, and even plant science via natural plant dyes.



Sheep Barn at Red Gate Farm
Photo Credit: Sienna Wildfield

Interested in learning to knit? Find a knitting meet-up group or someone in your community that already knows how to knit and ask them to teach you! A wonderful opportunity for intergenerational collaboration, knitting is a great way to engage older neighbors, hear their stories, and make a scarf too! The long tradition of knitting is a useful skill that can be passed down from generation to generation, supporting connections through engagement between youth and elders.

Connect an interest in knitting with a discovery of local educational farms in the Hilltowns, including Winterberry Farm in Colrain, MA (www.winterberryfarm.org) and Red Gate Farm in Buckland, MA (www.redgatefarm.org). Both offer community events and programs that connect the interests of learners to local farming practices.

Explore local history and New England culture! Engage in your community by visiting some of the region's local agricultural fairs in September!

Blandford Fair - *Established in 1867*

Blandford, MA: www.theblandfordfair.com

Held on Labor Day weekend on the Blandford Fairgrounds for four days, the Blandford Fair is presented by the Union Agriculture and Horticultural Society.

Belchertown Fair - *Established in 1856*

Belchertown, MA: www.belchertownfair.com

Held on the Belchertown Common in late September for three days, the Belchertown Fair is often themed and is free admission to all fair activities.

Franklin County Fair - *Established in 1848*

Greenfield, MA: www.fcas.com

Held on the Franklin County Fairgrounds in early September for four days, the Franklin County Fair is run by the Franklin County Agricultural Society. Visit their web site for a virtual tour of the fairgrounds and a brief historical essay on the fair by James M. Gildea.

The Three County Fair - *Established in 1818*

Northampton, MA: www.3countyfair.com

Held on Labor Day weekend on the Hampshire, Franklin, and Hampden Agricultural Society's Fairgrounds for four days, the Three County Fair was established to promote the agricultural and domestic arts in their exhibit hall while also providing entertainment and engaging programs for families.

Community Meals

Intergenerational opportunities to gather around the table for a community meal with friends and neighbors are available at nearly every fair. From blueberry pancake breakfast to BBQ chicken dinner, there's something for everyone! Visit fair websites to see what's being served this year and make plans to sit with your neighbors and start up conversations. Let your children learn about local history through stories your elderly neighbors might share, make new friends, and walk away with new community connections.



Community Meal

Photo Credit: Sienna Wildfield

Think about this:

How are the domestic arts practiced today versus 150 years ago?

What are the origins of knitting?

When did the first knitted garment appear?

Learn Locally: Explore your interests!

Interested in learning a domestic art skill to share and exhibit at next year's fair? Explore and engage in community resources to support your interests and education, and get ready for next year's fair!

Local Libraries

Look for books on knitting, quilting, sewing, gardening, farming, canned goods, and different heritage recipes to try at home. Some libraries offer free intergenerational knitting groups and workshops too!

Local Museums

Old Sturbridge Village, Historic Deerfield, and Hancock Shaker Village are all living history museums that explore the domestic arts and agricultural production of the 18th and 19th centuries.

Local Historical Societies

Local historical societies are gems when it comes to exploring local history at a detailed level! The primary source objects and archives they have in their collections are truly unique, representing everyday life of the people who lived in the town throughout the centuries - you won't find these special collections anywhere else! Many Hilltown historical society museums are open seasonally, with early autumn offering an ideal time to visit those that remain open through the season. Here are a handful of societies to visit online to find out about fall open hours and events:

- **Buckland Historical Society Museum:** www.facebook.com/BHSMass
- **Ashfield Historical Society Museum:** www.ashfieldhistorical.org
- **Plainfield Historical Society's Shaw Hudson House:** plainfieldmahistory.org
- **Cumington Historical Society's Kingman Tavern:** www.cumington-ma.gov/Kingman.php
- **Worthington Historical Society:** www.worthingtonhistoricalsociety.org

Connecting to Place through Literature & History: One-Room Schoolhouses & The Schoolroom

In the 1800's, the traditional academic year was quite different in New England. An element of seasonality was incorporated into how the school term was determined. In rural areas, children who helped out on the family farm attended school during the winter and stayed home to assist with the harvest during the summer and fall. In a one-room schoolhouse, grade levels were often mixed and one teacher was responsible for all of the students' learning. A man or woman, the school teacher assigned tasks to each student depending on the pupil's age, grade, and level of advancement.

19th century poet, John Greenleaf Whittier, wrote a poem that describes well a typical country schoolhouse in New England. A Quaker, abolitionist, and native of Haverhill, MA, Whittier is part of a group of poets also known as the schoolroom poets. Whittier, William Cullen Bryant, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, James Russell Lowell, and Oliver Wendell Holmes Sr. were considered the first American poets to bring forth an authentic American voice and rival the British poets. They were referred to as the Schoolroom Poets, Fireside Poets, or Household Poets given



**Little Red School in Charlemont, MA.
Oldest One-Room Brick Schoolhouse in MA
(built 1828)**

Photo Credit: Sienna Wildfield

Poetic Explorations:

Read John Greenleaf Whittier's
"In School-Days"

You can find this poem at poetryfoundation.org

their popularity and widely read works. One of Whittier's poems, "In School-days," describes the memory of an old man as he recalls a fellow student and the life lesson she taught him. When reading this poem, notice the description of the schoolhouse: the warped floors, the schoolmaster's worn desk, and the battered seats of the students - all characteristics that point to a typical 19th century schoolhouse in New England.

In Whittier's poem the first stanza describes the schoolhouse in an interesting way: "a ragged beggar sleeping." Poetry has the power to create a meaningful image through metaphor and description. In this verse, Whittier reflects on the age of the schoolhouse - it's also what lets the reader know that this poem is a memory, a recollection of someone who once attended school there.

Reread the last stanza of the poem. Now observe Whittier's title of the poem once more: "In School-Days." Is Whittier's "school" only the one-room schoolhouse or does Whittier use the idea of learning and school to also refer to a deeper and more profound meaning?

One-Room Schoolhouses

Here in Western Massachusetts there are many preserved historic schoolhouses people can visit to learn more about schooling and education before the 20th century. Print out and take Whittier's poem with you to read as you explore these historic structures.

Wapping Schoolhouse at Historic Deerfield - Deerfield, MA

www.historic-deerfield.org

A one-room schoolhouse built in 1838, the Wapping Schoolhouse is open for visits during special events and school field trips.

Norwich Bridge School - Huntington, MA

www.huntingtonma.us/historical-society/museum.html

Overseen by the Huntington Historical Society and now open to the public, this one-room schoolhouse showcases a collection of books, artifacts, maps, clothing, tools, and other primary source historical artifacts to discover.

South School - Shutesbury, MA

www.historicsouthschool.org

Historic South School's web page has an engaging write-up on education and rural life in the 19th and early 20th century. There you will find a historic

photograph of a 1920's Ford high school bus and paintings by Winslow Homer, including "Snap and Whip" and "The Country School."

The Boyden Schoolhouse - Conway, MA

www.youtube.com/watch?v=ObZvRYCZhv4

Watch the video above to learn more about this one-room schoolhouse that was moved from its original location in Conway, MA, to its new location next to the Conway elementary school. During Conway's annual Festival of the Hills (first Saturday in October), the schoolhouse opens for tours.

Old Sturbridge Village - Sturbridge, MA

www.osv.org

In addition to the many historic houses and demonstrations at this living history museum, visitors to Old Sturbridge Village can also stop in the schoolhouse situated in the recreated 19th century village. There folks can sit in the schoolhouse's "battered seats" as Whittier describes in his poem.

Little Red Schoolhouse - Storrowton Village - West Springfield, MA

www.easternstatesexposition.com/sv/history-of-svm/historical-buildings/the-little-red-schoolhouse-c-1810

Storrowton Village is a museum that depicts a recreated village comprised of 18th and 19th century historic buildings that highlight early American life in New England. Included in their historic house collection is a one-room schoolhouse known as Little Red Schoolhouse.


Think about this:

If you were to describe one of the schoolhouses you visited above, what kind of descriptive words would you use as Whittier does in his poem?

Why were the schoolroom poets also called the fireside poets?

What is the lesson that Whittier shares at the end of his poem? What does he realize about life's school that is different from his childhood days in the one room schoolhouse?

How have learning environments changed since the 1800's and how does it impact education?



Poetry, Place & Hearth: Apples

Park Hill Orchard. Easthampton, MA.
Photo Credit: Sienna Wildfield

Food connects us. It's an integral part of our cultural identity and is often prepared with the intention to enjoy with others. Nothing indicates the beginning of autumn and the fall harvest in Western Massachusetts like the crisp bite of a local apple picked right off the tree, or the sweet taste of a freshly baked apple pie. Apple season is a beloved time of year in New England with apple orchards preserving our heritage, regional identity, and local landscape. By visiting pick-your-own apple orchards you can meet the farmers that grow our food, learn firsthand how apples grow, and engage in the seasonality of the land and the sense of belonging it instills within us. Traditional recipes, the scenic orchard landscapes, and the representation of apples in literature and art remind us of how the apple has become a rich part of our cultural heritage. They also have a place in the poetry of New England and specifically our region in Massachusetts.

Poetic Explorations:

Read Robert Frost's
After Apple-Picking

and

William Cullen Bryant's
The Planting of an Apple-Tree

You can find these poems at poetryfoundation.org

As you explore local places and orchards, read these poems by Frost and Bryant, two of Western Massachusetts' most cherished poets. Both poems offer the opportunity to reflect and recognize this long-standing tradition of harvesting apples.

Poetry & Place

Participate in the tradition of apple-picking and support local agriculture! Check out these orchards and farms in Western Massachusetts for pick-your-own apples!

Park Hill Orchard - Easthampton, MA
www.parkhillorchard.com

Outlook Farm - Westhampton, MA
www.outlookfarm.com

Bear Swamp Orchard & Cidery - Ashfield, MA
www.bearswamporchard.com

Quonquont Farm - Whately, MA
quonquont.com

Clarkdale Fruit Farms - Deerfield, MA
www.clarkdalefruitfarms.com

Bashista Orchards - Southampton, MA
www.gotcider.net



Clarkdale Fruit Farms. Deerfield, MA
Photo Credit: Sienna Wildfield

William Cullen Bryant

Did you know that William Cullen Bryant, a 19th century poet (and Schoolhouse Poet like John Greenleaf Whittier) planted over 800 apple trees on his farm? While the orchard is no longer active, you can still visit the poet's homestead in Cummington, MA. Now a property of The Trustees, The William Cullen Bryant Homestead is open for house tours and other activities in the fall.

www.thetrustees.org/places-to-visit/pioneer-valley/bryant-homestead.html

While visiting the property, take a look at the scenic Hilltown views of the Westfield River Valley, bring a picnic lunch (don't forget your freshly picked apples!) and reread Bryant's poem "The Planting of the Apple-Tree."

Reading Bryant's "The Planting of the Apple-Tree"

The poem's various stanzas walk through the passage of time, starting with the planting of the apple tree and ending with the tree in its old age, as well as the poet who planted it. The tree is more than just the bearer of fruit, but as Bryant nostalgically mentions, is a tree that represents childhood, home, and identity. It provides shade on hot days, perfumes the air with the fragrance of springtime blossoms, and offers a resting place for children playing in the summer. The apple reminds the poet of New England's seasonality and the apple-tree represents a unique American spirit beginning to blossom in the mid-19th century.

Reread the following stanza:

"The fruitage of this apple-tree
Winds and our flag of stripe and star
Shall bear to coasts that lie afar,
Where men shall wonder at the view,
And ask in what fair groves they grew;
And sojourners beyond the sea
Shall think of childhood's careless day
And long, long hours of summer play,
In the shade of the apple-tree."

The lines "winds and our flag of stripe and star/ Shall bear to coast that lie afar," refer to the American flag and how the apple is similar - representing an American identity synonymous with the stripes and stars. The subsequent line, "Where men shall wonder at the view,/And ask in what fair groves they grew," highlights the foreigners' curiosity about this wondrous fruit and the desire to know what land it comes from. By adding this line, Bryant emphasizes how the American spirit and cultural identity that is becoming established in the 19th century, is now recognized through the land that cultivates the apple. The wilderness of the woods and pastoral country fields of the New England landscape were considered emblematic of a young American spirit that Bryant, in his poem, explains as being seen abroad through the presentation of the apple: a symbol of the land that produced it and its natural surroundings.

Finally, in this particular stanza, the last few verses "And sojourners beyond the sea/ Shall think of childhood's careless day/And long, long hours of summer play,/In the shade of the apple-tree" again speak to the connection Bryant has established between the apple and the idea of "home" as felt by American travelers abroad.



Quonquot Farm. Whately, MA.

Photo Credit: Sienna Wildfield

When they think of their homeland, their nationhood, they fondly recall childhood memories playing under the apple tree.

The last stanza of the poem refers to Bryant the poet himself. It almost foreshadows the present as you can still visit his homestead where the poet planted hundreds of apple trees. A few old trees in the orchard still remain and the story of the poet is still told through the history of the house and property.

Hearth

In 1828, Lydia Maria Child published her book *The American Frugal Housewife*. It was a popular book utilized by many 19th century women for its recipes, remedies, and home economics advice. It also includes a few apple recipes, such as a common recipe for apple pie. In her 12th edition from 1833 of *The American Frugal Housewife*, Mrs. Child writes:

Apple Pie

When you make apple pies, stew your apples very little indeed; just strike them through, to make them tender. Some people do not stew them at all, but cut them up in very thin slices, and lay them in the crust. Pies made in this way may retain more of the spirit of the apple; but I do not think the seasoning mixes in as well. Put in sugar to your taste; it is impossible to make a precise rule, because apples vary so much in acidity. A very little salt, and a small piece of butter in each pie, makes them richer. Cloves and cinnamon are both suitable spice. Lemon brandy and rose-water are both excellent. A wine-glass full of each is sufficient for three or four pies. If your apples lack spirit, grate in a whole lemon. (p.67-68).



Apple Pie at Ashfield Fall Festival.

Photo Credit: Sienna Wildfield

Curious to try your hand at apple pie? Not sure which apples to select? Ask a farmer! At many pick-your-own orchards, or at local farmers' markets, farmers can usually tell you which apples are best for baking and best for eating.

Think about this:

What family recipes do you still make that have been passed down generation after generation? Can you recall and share the history of their origin with family and friends?

How does Bryant's poem *The Planting of an Apple-Tree* instill a sense of belonging and home through the symbol of the apple tree?

Did you know the "golden apple" is a motif in folklore and tales? Look up the tale *The Judgement of Paris* in Greek mythology. To whom does the apple go in the myth? Why? What major event does this cause later that Homer writes about in *The Iliad*? (Fun Fact: Did you know that Bryant translated *The Iliad* while in Cummington, MA?)



Apple Cider Pressing at Bullitt Reservation. Ashfield, MA.
Photo Credit: Sienna Wildfield

Local Identity & Culture: Autumn in New England and Fall Festivals

Autumn in New England is rich with many traditions inspired by the bounty of the harvest and the seasonality of our region. In addition to the robust fall harvest and autumnal flavors that return to our cooking, the fall colors and cooler temperatures inspire us to head outdoors and honor the season through nature. Fall is a celebration of all that nourishes us: food, art, and recreation; it's a season that invites us to be

together and enjoy the land we love.



Ashfield Fall Festival. Ashfield, MA.

Photo Credit: Sienna Wildfield

During the autumnal months, communities celebrate the change of season with festivals that bridge agricultural and social traditions. These festivities not only celebrate the harvest season but also the cultural traditions that define Western Massachusetts' unique identity. Fall festivals are a community space that act as an intergenerational gathering place for folks to come together in the spirit of the season and share in the harvest and local traditions. Engage in your community and attend a fall festival this season! It's a great way to meet your neighbors, and make new friends while contributing to the preservation of this region's special character, culture, and history.

Annual North Quabbin Garlic & Arts Festival

Late September in Orange, MA

The first North Quabbin Garlic and Arts Festival was held in 1999 at Seeds of Solidarity Farm, later moved to Forster's Farm. There is so much at this festival that nourishes the soul: art, fall foliage, workshops, exhibits, food and more! As the website says, "[The Festival] is a celebration of the artistic, agricultural and cultural bounty of the region. The purpose of the festival is to unite North Quabbin people whose livelihoods are connected to the land and the arts, and to invite both local residents and those who do not live in the region to experience the richness of an area that is often overlooked..." - www.garlicandarts.org



North Quabbin Garlic & Arts Festival

Photo Credit: Sienna Wildfield

Annual Festival of the Hills

First Weekend in October in Conway, MA

Inspired by the town's 1915 celebration, "Pageant of Patriotism in honor of Independence Day," Conway Festival of the Hills took form in 1967 as an annual event, celebrating local talent and culture. Every year, families come to witness a Conway tradition: the skillet toss! Along with the skillet toss there are many activities to behold: a log splitting contest, live music, handmade crafts, parade, pancake breakfast, community dinner, and their most popular event, a book signing with local authors. Conway resident, Holly Hobbie, and other notable authors are known to attend, including Jane Yolen, Heidi Stemple, Natasha Lowe, David Costello, and many others! - www.festivalofthehills.com

Annual Ashfield Fall Festival Columbus Day Weekend in Ashfield, MA

Since 1969, the Ashfield Fall Festival takes place on Ashfield's charming main street and throughout the town every Columbus Day weekend, celebrating town culture, artisans, and Ashfield businesses. The annual giant pumpkin and tallest sunflower contests are something to be seen, along with an intergenerational round of pumpkin games! On the town common, carnival games initiated and facilitated by Ashfield youth take place, giving them an opportunity to develop their creative, social, and business skills in a real world application while contributing to their local culture. Admission is free to this two-day event, happening rain or shine. - www.ashfieldfallfestival.org



**Pumpkin games at the
Ashfield Fall Festival.**

Photo Credit: Sienna Wildfield

Westhampton Fall Festival Mid-Late October in Westhampton, MA

The newest festival in the Hilltowns, the Westhampton Fall Festival, began in 2005 in support of community-based learning and a celebration of local culture and civic organizations. Held in the town center, activities often include tours of the local church steeple and Blacksmith Shop Museum, demonstrations of traditional farming and artisan skills, a community supper, bonfire, sing-a-long, and their trademark event, the Great Pumpkin Roll! Call the library for date and time. - 413-527-5386

Think about this:

Pumpkin Games at the Ashfield Fall Festival. Skillet Toss at the Conway Fall Festival. Pumpkin Roll at the Westhampton Fall Festival. These are all unique activities that put their stamp on each town celebration. What is unique about your town? Can you think of annual community events, social activities, or even town history that is special to where you live? How do these moments in your town strengthen your sense of place?

October

On the Trail: Exploring Literature, Art & History through Nature Trails

In *The Maine Woods* (1864), Henry David Thoreau writes:

Talk of mysteries! – Think of our life in nature, – daily to be shown matter, to come in contact with it, – rocks, trees, wind on our cheeks! The solid earth! the actual world! the common sense! Contact! Contact! Who are we? where are we?

Before asking the questions “Who are we? Where are we?” Thoreau already provides his readers with the solution to discovering the answers: “think of our life in nature,” He

urges the reader to come into contact with nature - to experience the natural world.

This interaction with the outdoors can help us build a deeper sense of self and place - hence Thoreau’s final questions are left unanswered to provoke the reader, as if the author is directly telling you “go outside and discover! See yourself in nature, as a part of it!”

In Western Massachusetts we are so fortunate to have easy access to nature in our communities through local trails, nature preserves, and forests.

This diversity of options inspires area naturalists and conservation-minded enthusiasts to lead guided walks, hikes, and river paddling trips, teaching the richness of our Hilltown landscapes and biodiversity.



Chesterfield Gorge. West Chesterfield, MA.

Photo Credit: Sienna Wildfield

Hiking is an engaging way to explore seasonal patterns with family and friends. It requires very little gear, just walking shoes, a water bottle, and a map! You can also bring a trekking pole to keep your footing steady. Art activities such as sketching, painting, and journaling encourage hikers to thoughtfully observe the macro and micro patterns found in their surroundings. Like Thoreau on his hike up Mt. Katahdin in Maine, take a moment to reflect on your engagement with the outdoors. Bring a notebook with you to write down your thoughts, ideas, questions, and observations. Prefer sketching to writing? Use your sketchbook and pencil to sketch the different trees, wildflowers, and water features you encounter on your path. Each time you venture outdoors, follow the same format until you have a notebook or sketchbook filled with different places and trails, filling your notebook with nature-based inspiration.

Guided Hikes Resources

Looking for a guided hike or walk to join? Many local land trusts and conservation organizations offer guided hikes as a part of their community programs. Here is a short list of area non-profit conservation organizations that lead monthly hikes on local Western Massachusetts Trails:

Kestrel Land Trust

www.kestrreltrust.org

Hilltown Land Trust

www.hilltown-land-trust.org

The Trustees

www.thetrustees.org

Franklin Land Trust

www.franklinlandtrust.org



Franklin Land Trust
Guyette Farm in Plainfield.
Photo Credit: Sienna Wildfield

Self-Guided Hikes in Western Massachusetts

The following is a list of places to discover in your community with friends, family, or on your own. Before exploring, become aware of the literary, artistic, and historic connections that some of these places offer.

Easy Hikes in Western MA:

- **Chesterfield Gorge, West Chesterfield**
- **Dinosaur Footprints, Holyoke**
- **Field Farm, Williamstown**

Field Farm features a garden with 13 modern sculptures, including works by artists Henry Ferber and Richard M. Miller. For architecture enthusiasts, the artistic play between Field Farm and The Folly's mid-century design elements and the natural landscape surrounding them is compelling.

Moderate Hikes in Western MA:

- **Bear Swamp, Ashfield**
- **Bear's Den, New Salem**
- **Bullitt Reservation, Ashfield**
- **Chapel Brook, Ashfield,**
- **Land of Providence, Holyoke**
- **Little Tom Mountain, Holyoke**
- **Dry Hill, New Marlborough**
- **McLennan Reservation, Tyringham and Otis**
- **Mt. Warner, Hadley**
- **Mountain Meadow, Williamstown**
- **Notchview, Windsor**
- **Questing, New Marlborough**
- **Tyringham Cobble, Tyringham**
- **Bradley Sanctuary, Williamsburg**
- **Breckenridge Sanctuary, Williamsburg**
- **William Cullen Bryant Homestead, Cummington**



Bullitt Reservation in Ashfield, MA.
Photo Credit: Sienna Wildfield

At the William Cullen Bryant Homestead explore old growth forest on the Rivulet Trail. This same woods inspired Bryant to write his 1823 poem "The Rivulet." This poem and other nature poetry by Bryant are placed on interpretive displays along the trail for visitors to read. Bring along your notebook to contribute your own poetic musings too!

- **Bartholomew's Cobble, Sheffield**

Take the trail that leads you to the historic Ashley House, listed in the National Register of Historic Places, a significant site of the Upper Housatonic Valley African American Heritage Trail. Elizabeth Freeman, also known Mum Bett, enslaved in the Ashley House, was the first black slave to successfully sue for and win her freedom.

Strenuous Hikes in Western MA:

- **Glendale Falls, Middlefield**
- **Monument Mountain, Great Barrington**
- **Peaked Mountain, Monson**
- **Petticoat Hill, Williamsburg**
- **Skinner State Park, Hadley**

Hike the Holyoke Range and to the top of Mt. Holyoke's summit. This mountain features a summit house at the top and incredible views of the Connecticut River Valley. It was also the summit scene that Thomas Cole painted in his famous 1836 painting of the Connecticut River Oxbow. Thomas Cole and William Cullen Bryant were great friends and their literary and artistic works helped to inspire the early start of the American land conservation movement. Although Cole's painting is at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the mountain and the same inspiring view are here right in the Pioneer Valley!

Recommended Reading

Explore nature and the woodland forests through reading and literature. Here are recommended titles and poetry available through your local library:

- *Walking with Thoreau: A Literary Guide to the New England Mountains* by William Howarth
- "The Rivulet" (poem) by William Cullen Bryant
- *The Maine Woods* by Henry David Thoreau
- *Wild Moments* by Ted Williams

Think about this:

Nature writing prompt: What is your favorite season and why?

Why is conservation important to preserving outdoor spaces and our cultural heritage?

What are three small ways that you can integrate land conservation and nature preservation into your life?

Can you identify both macro and micro patterns that repeat in nature through the seasons? How do similar repeating patterns take form within your community?

Engaging the Fall Landscape: Fall Foliage & the Artist's Canvas

Autumn's rich and brilliant colors have inspired artists and writers to revere the fall landscape, capturing its spirit through art, poetry, and prose. The dazzling red, orange, and yellow hues are breathtaking, but fall foliage peak season truly only lasts a few days, so be sure to check when it's predicted to peak with this

handy online map: newengland.com/fall/foliage/peak-fall-foliage-map

VISTAS

The best leaf peeping excursions are ones that not only happen during a countryside drive or a solitary hike in the woods, but up high with a view! Once you know when the foliage will peak, make a trip to a nearby vista for a view that has inspired painters and poets for centuries.

Vistas in the Pioneer Valley

- Mt. Tom State Reservation in Holyoke
- Mt. Holyoke in Hadley's Skinner State Park
- Mt. Sugarloaf State Reservation in Deerfield
- Historic Poet's Seat Tower in Greenfield

Vistas in the Hilltowns

- Shelburne's High Ledges Wildlife Sanctuary or Fire Tower Trail (which give very different views from two separate points on the same ridge)
- Pony Mountain in Ashfield
- Goshen fire tower at the DAR State Forest

Vistas in the Berkshires

- Berkshire Natural Resource Council's Hoosac Range Trail in North Adams
- Observation tower at Stockbridge's Laura's Tower Trail



Fall foliage in the Hilltowns
Photo Credit: Sienna Wildfield



Plein Air Painting.
Historic Downtown Northampton.
Photo Credit: Sienna Wildfield

Plein Air Painting

En plein air is a French expression meaning “in the open air.” It’s used in English to describe a painting style that occurs outdoors. Made possible historically by the manufacturing of paint into tubes, artists no longer had to mix their paints in the studio from chemical compounds, freeing them to travel outdoors for inspiration. When participating in plein air painting, artists become fully engaged with the fall landscape through perspective, composition and, most importantly, color! Watercolors are the most portable and easiest to clean up, but plein air painting can be done in any medium - oil paint, acrylic, pastels, etc. - and by any age.

In the Hilltowns of Western Massachusetts, there are many plein air painting groups that meet-up weekly or monthly to head out to beautiful locations to paint together. They are artists capturing the beauty of our regional landscape on canvas and in sketchbooks. Occasionally, a Paint Out is organized. Paint Outs are organized plein air events that invite painters of all skill levels to come and paint at the same location. Visit the Massachusetts Plein Air Artists Meetup page to find or organize a plein air outing in Western Massachusetts: www.meetup.com/painter-84

There are many artists in the Hilltowns that are plein air painters. You can see their work on display at local galleries and artisan shops around the region. Many of these painters offer classes at their studios or onsite plein air painting workshops for self-directed teens and lifelong learners:

- **Jacqueline Brodeur of Westhampton:** jackiebrodeur.blogspot.com
- **Lewis Bryden of Hadley:** www.lewisbryden.com
- **Paula Gottlieb of Cummington:** www.paulagottlieb.com
- **Hilltown Plein Air Painters:** hilltownpleinairpainters.blogspot.com
- **Christine Labich of Amherst:** christinelabich.com
- **Robert Masla of Ashfield:** www.maslafineart.com
- **Jim Murphy of Conway:** www.jimmurphyfineart.com

Plein Air Painting Locations

Many artists love to paint en plein air in the Hilltowns of Western Massachusetts. Here are four favorite painting locations recommended by a few artists:

The William Cullen Bryant Homestead in Cummington

The Bryant Homestead's beautiful views of the Westfield River Valley and the varied grounds and rich landscape offer compositions of fields, meadows, large trees, roads, barns, architecture, and old growth forest. Given William Cullen Bryant's friendship with the 19th century Hudson River School painters, and his love of landscape painting, it's a beautiful location to honor Bryant, Thomas Cole, Asher B. Durand, and New England's historical art tradition.

Before heading out to the Homestead, be sure to stop at the Smith College Museum of Art to take a look at one of Asher B. Durand's woodland interiors. The painting, on display in the museum's permanent collection, is a great example of how the local landscape inspired artists. Durand's paintings have an instantaneous quality to them - it's almost as if you are there with him on the trail, looking down the same wooded path. Durand and Thomas Cole were certainly a part of a movement that inspired painting the landscape outdoors, or *en plein air*.

The Bullitt Reservation in Ashfield

The Bullitt Reservation offers a quaint country dirt road, beautiful fall views, and two lovely historic barns; a perfect quintessential New England landscape to paint.

Chapel Brook in Ashfield

Known in the summer for waterfalls and natural waterslides, this beautiful location has a deep woods feel and provides many interesting geological features to paint and explore.

Skinner State Park in Hadley

Really want to entrench yourself in local art history? Then paint at the summit of Mt. Holyoke! The mountain (not the college!) is the site of Thomas Cole's 1836 painting "View from Mount Holyoke, Northampton, Massachusetts, after a Thunderstorm" (commonly known as "The Oxbow"). This painting portrays the Connecticut River Valley and highlights Cole's interest in depicting two parts of the American landscape: pastoral farmland and wild forest.

View an interactive image of the painting at www.explorethomascole.org/tour/items/49/decode. (Can you see where the artist inserted an image of himself painting en plein air?)

The summit at Mt. Holyoke is an easy place to set-up a plein air painting station and provides artists with stunning views of the Connecticut River Valley below. During the summer, the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation offers interpretive tours of the summit house where you can learn more about the art and natural history of the mountain.

Think about this:

How do you think American landscape painting helped to inspire the early conservation movement in the late 19th century?

What interesting colors stand out to you during fall foliage walks? Which trees' leaves turn which colors? Make note and learn to read your landscape!

Why do you think the manufacturing of paint into tubes helped shape the way artists such as the impressionists (Monet) and post-impressionists (Van Gogh) paint in the style that they did?

From the Pumpkin Patch to Home: History through Food

There are a myriad uses for pumpkins! One of America's oldest native crops, modern day uses include carving as ornaments for Halloween, prepared as pies, and highlighted as a main attraction in

agricultural fairs (i.e., largest pumpkin contests) and fall festivals (i.e., pumpkin roll & pumpkin games). Needless to say, pumpkins are an integrated part of our fall traditions in Western Massachusetts.

Pumpkin Patches

An active way to engage with local agriculture is at farms with pick-your-own pumpkin patches. Learn first-hand how pumpkins are grown while selecting the perfect pumpkin for your Halloween Jack O'Lantern or pumpkin pie.

PYO Pumpkin Farms

- Whitney's Farm Stand - Cheshire
- McCray's Farm - South Hadley
- Ioka Valley Farm - Hancock
- Fletcher Farm - Southampton
- Howden Farm - Sheffield
- Randall's Farm and Greenhouse - Ludlow
- Westview Farms Creamery - Monson



Warner Farm in Sunderland
Photo Credit: Sienna Wildfield



Open Hearth Cooking at Historic Deerfield
Photo Credit: Sienna Wildfield

Pastry Arts

Colonial Americans did not celebrate Halloween; their interest in pumpkins was food-based rather than a holiday decoration. Support a farm to table interest by incorporating fresh pumpkin into your culinary adventures. Remember Lydia Maria Child from September's "Poetry, Place & Hearth: Apples" itinerary and her recipe for apple pie? Pumpkin was also a common pie in 19th century New England. Her recipe from 1832 is as follows:

"For common family pumpkin pies, three eggs do very well to a quart of milk. Stew your pumpkin, and strain it through sieve, or colander. Take out the seeds and pare the pumpkin, or squash, before you stew it; but do not scrape the inside; the part nearest the seed is the sweetest part of the squash. Stir in the stewed pumpkin, till it is as thick as you can stir it round rapidly and easily. If you want to make your pie richer, make it thinner, and add another egg. One egg to a quart of milk makes very decent pies. Sweeten it to your taste, with molasses or sugar; some pumpkins require more sweetening than others. Two tea-spoonfuls of salt; two great spoonfuls of sifted cinnamon, one great spoonful of ginger. Ginger will answer very well alone if you use enough of it. The outside of a lemon grated in is nice. The more eggs, the better the pie;

some put an egg to a gill [quarter-pint] of milk. This should bake from forty to fifty minutes, and even ten minutes longer, if very deep.” - Lydia Maria Child, The American Frugal Housewife (1832)

Experience life in an early New England kitchen at Historic Deerfield during an open hearth cooking demonstration. Learn about traditional fall harvest foods, including pumpkins and apples, and discover their culinary importance during the Colonial era. During the fall and winter months, cooking demonstrations with museum interpreters dressed in period clothing allow visitors of all ages to see what life was like in Colonial New England and how food (including pies!) were cooked on an open hearth.

After learning how pies were historically prepared and baked, try a modern version of Lydia Maria Child’s pie! Check out from your local library the *Old Sturbridge Village Cookbook: Authentic Early American Recipes for the Modern Kitchen*. In this book, you’ll find the modern version of Lydia Maria Child’s recipe for pumpkin pie.

The beauty of baking a pumpkin pie is that it uses so many hearty ingredients produced on the farm. Baking pies offers lessons in understanding self-reliance and our region’s agricultural heritage. Eggs, butter, flour, maple, pumpkins - all of these ingredients are produced locally. Baking pumpkin pie from scratch engages the past through the present moment by experiencing an early American baking tradition similar to the way it was done back in the 1800’s.

Who was Lydia Maria Child? Known as one of American's first literary women, her contributions extend beyond the culinary arts. The National Women’s History Museum website has reprinted a brief biography originally found in the *American Women's History: An A to Z of People, Organizations, Issues, and Events* by Doris Weatherford. It is an informative read for anyone interested in women’s studies, Colonial history and literature:

www.nwhm.org/education-resources/biography/biographies/lydia-maria-child

Community Celebrations

Called “pompsions” by the first European colonists, pumpkins were an essential food for winter survival - and they were grown in many more varieties than they typically are today. The custom of carving pumpkins into Jack O’Lanterns was introduced to American culture by Irish immigrants who traditionally carved Jack O’Lanterns from root vegetables, including turnips and potatoes. New large hybrids of pumpkins were later grown specifically for carving.

Annual October events that bring communities together through the lens of food (pumpkins) and culture (Halloween) include:

- Enchanted Forest at Hitchcock Center in Amherst:
www.hitchcockcenter.org
- Franklin County Pumpkinfest in Turners Falls:
www.facebook.com/pumpkinfest
- Pumpkin Carving at Chesterwood in Stockbridge:
www.chesterwood.org
- Pumpkin Festival at Look Park in Florence:
www.lookpark.org
- Pumpkin Walk-About at the Stockbridge Library:
stockbridgelibrary.org
- Pumpkin Walk in Washington Town Park:
www.washington-ma.com



Jack O'Lanterns in Ashfield

Photo Credit: Sienna Wildfield

Think about this:

What differences do you notice between the recipe Child gives and the types of recipes we use today? How have recipe descriptions changed based on the innovation of cooking appliances?

Why are some pumpkin hybrids better for pies than others? What heirloom varieties are grown today and what are their origins?

In addition to pumpkins and apples, what other local harvests inspire community celebrations?

In addition to pumpkin pie, what other family recipes can be passed down from generation to generation?

Rediscovering the Past: Cemeteries, Hauntings & Local History



Mount Cemetery in West Chesterfield

Photo Credit: Sienna Wildfield

Towns across Western Massachusetts have tales of haunted historic buildings, ghost sightings, and supernatural suspicions that lead people to wonder whether a place is haunted or not. Haunted tales are sometimes rooted in actual events or historical accounts from people of the past, and can add to the lore of a place.

Cemetery Tours

An experiential way to learn about local history while satisfying an intrigue for ghost stories is to participate in a guided cemetery tour. With some local cemeteries nearing their 400th birthday, Western Massachusetts' burying grounds are community-based resources filled with primary source artifacts that support an interest in history. Through facilitated tours, often hosted by local historical societies, self-directed teens and lifelong learners can explore local graveyards together in order to deepen their understanding of community history.

Folks wishing to engage in self-guided tours of a historic cemetery can visit Longmeadow's Olde Burying Yard section of the Longmeadow Cemetery, where a collection of headstones serve as a museum chronicling the town's history. Some gravestones can be explored via virtual tour, while others must be located in person. Historic Northampton also offers virtual tours of the city's Bridge Street Cemetery, a 300-year-old graveyard that is the final resting place of many notable Northampton residents.

- Olde Burying Yard:
www.longmeadowhistoricalsociety.org/olde_burying_yard.html
- Bridge Street Cemetery Virtual Tour:
www.historic-northampton.org/virtual_tours/cemetery.html



Mount Cemetery in West Chesterfield

Photo Credit: Sienna Wildfield

Graveyards are filled with stone markers that chronicle a community's history. Everything from the names of buried people to the style of the stone can tell visitors something about the time period to which a headstone dates back. Photographing and sketching gravestones is a creative way to explore local cemeteries, alongside a self-guided or facilitated tour.

Local Hauntings

Many historic tales of hauntings are passed down through oral histories of places. Through word of mouth, legends and ghost stories are passed down from generation to generation and become a part of a town or city's character. Curious to explore some of Western Massachusetts' haunted places? Here are several to add to your itinerary:

Deerfield Inn at Historic Deerfield

Some claim to have seen a ghost of Cora Carlisle, the Inn's owner from the 1930's. Others have professed to witnessing a ghost known as Hershel in Room 148.

Theodores' Tavern in Springfield

Investigators from the SciFi Channel's *Ghost Hunters* came to Theodores' Tavern to see whether the historic building was haunted or not. Many say they have heard whispering and footsteps, or have seen apparitions!

Smith College's Sessions House in Northampton

There's a Revolutionary War legend that Lucy Hunt died of a broken heart after being separated from the man she loved, General Burgoyne. The Sessions House was the 18th century home of Lucy's family. The two lovers used to secretly escape to a hidden staircase in the house to spend time together. It is said that Lucy Hunt still haunts that staircase today!

The Mount in Lenox

Once home to American author, Edith Wharton (1862-1937), this historic house museum hosts ongoing ghost tours through the "most haunted parts" of the estate. Claiming to be "haunted by formless horrors" in her earlier years, Wharton wrote several ghost stories during her career. Firsthand accounts have reported paranormal activity and even film and audio have captured unexplained sounds and visual activity.

Literature Spotlight

The Legend of Sleepy Hollow is a short story by American writer Washington Irving. Irving's story doesn't take place in Massachusetts, but it does show how the idea of a legend or history is passed down and often used as a way to tell the story of a haunting. Hauntings and history go together because ghosts sightings are seen as apparitions of people from the past in the present and future.

Think about this:

How do ghost stories connect the world of fiction with history?

Why do you think stories of mystery and the macabre are interesting to us?

What other famous American writer can you think of that wrote tales of mystery and horror? Hint: "Nevermore!"

ABOUT HILLTOWN FAMILIES

Who am I? Where am I? These are the fundamental questions proposed by the humanities. Inquiries related to local history, literature, and education inspire us to think deeply about the places where we live and how our identity fits into the context of our communities and the seasons.

Hilltown Families' mission is to support the common good of our community through the development of a sense of place by a shared understanding in the value of self-directed learning through community engagement. These learning values are referred to as "community-based education" and are accessible and inclusive to an intergenerational audience. This process of learning unites community members through shared interests, establishes a shared history, and deepens a connection to place.

Hilltown Families believes in creating resilient and sustainable communities by developing and strengthening a sense of place in our children and citizens through community-based education and engagement. Established in 2005 by Sienna Wildfield, Hilltown Families identifies, curates, and shares community-based learning opportunities that reflect back to the community its potential while impacting the culture. Community members of all ages are encouraged to engage in repeating social and environmental patterns that support interests, building upon seasonal cycles to support learning found in the intersections of food, habitat, and culture within community resources, events, and opportunities.

Funded in part by Mass Humanities, *Learning Ahead: Cultural Itinerary for Western Massachusetts* is a bimonthly publication produced by Hilltown Families that sheds light on embedded learning opportunities found in cultural resources that exist within the geography, history, and cultural traditions of the Hilltowns and surrounding area.

With these seasonal itineraries, self-directed teens, lifelong learners, and families are encouraged to engage together in cultural opportunities that support similar interests, resulting in a shared history and a strengthened sense of place.

By emphasizing place-based exploration through humanities inquiry, these cultural itineraries connect residents of all ages to their place, helping to shape a more comprehensive understanding of our cultural identity, heritage, and history. This contributes to establishing meaningful relationships between young people, elders, and more active citizens.

Hilltown Families is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization. www.HilltownFamilies.org

 **HilltownFamilies.org**
COMMUNITY-BASED EDUCATION NETWORK