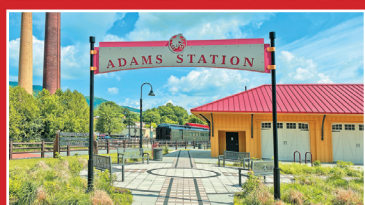
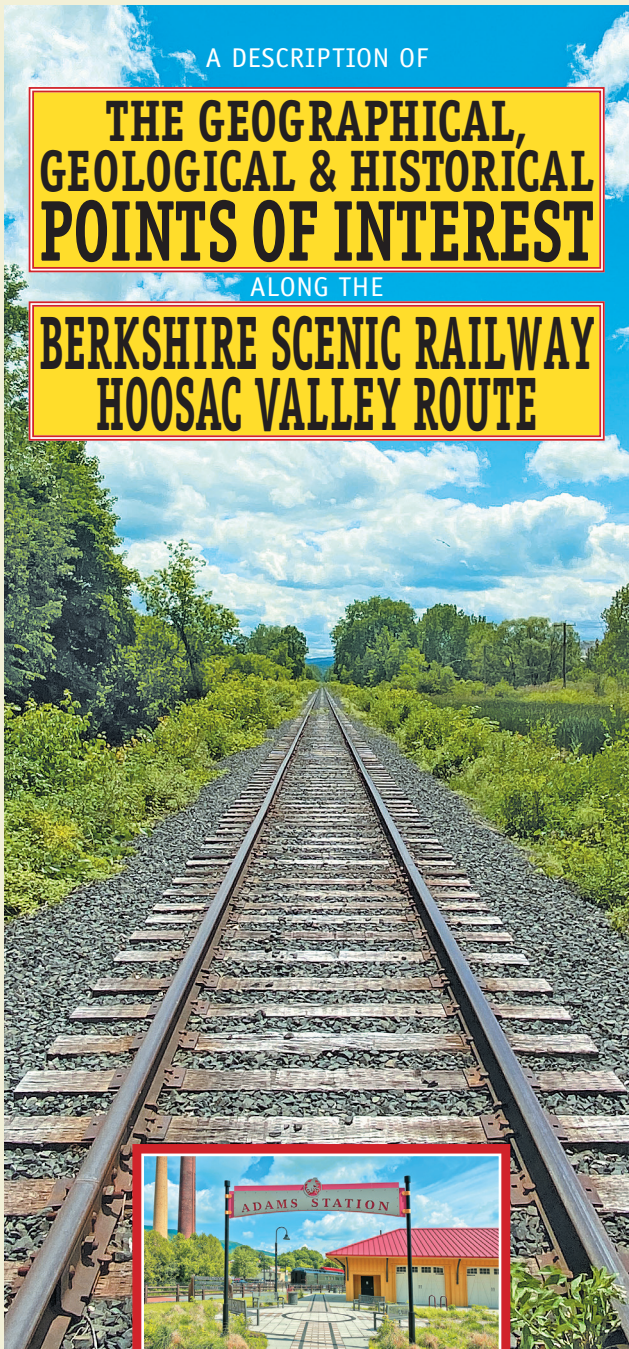


A DESCRIPTION OF

# THE GEOGRAPHICAL, GEOLOGICAL & HISTORICAL POINTS OF INTEREST

ALONG THE

# BERKSHIRE SCENIC RAILWAY HOOSAC VALLEY ROUTE



**Orient Yourself!**

The east is on your right and  
the west is on your left.

# BEFORE DEPARTURE

The boarding platform lies between a parking lot and the Hoosic River. The parking lot was the site of **Berkshire Cotton Mfg. Co.** Mill #2 (1892–1961). At the parking lot's southern end, the smokestacks of the former boiler house and Mill #1 still stand. The company's first cotton cloth shipped from Mill #1 in 1890, just weeks before a tariff took effect to protect American textile manufacturers from foreign competition. Named for President William McKinley (his statue beckons a few blocks southwest, across from the library), the tariff ushered in an era of unparalleled prosperity for the town. Adding two more mills before 1900, the company became the second largest employer in



Berkshire Mill #3 & Main Offices

Berkshire County. The mills attracted nine ethnic groups, consequently five languages were preached from pulpits on Sundays. The mill's raw material, cotton, was picked by African-American sharecroppers and former slaves. In 1929, "The Berkshire Mills," as they were locally known, merged with three other mills across New England to become Berkshire Fine Spinning Associates. In 1955, it combined with a nylon producer and was renamed **Berkshire-Hathaway**. The Adams factories closed in 1958. Seven years later, Warren Buffett bought the parent company, sold off the textile operation, converted it into a stock-holding company, and made himself one of the richest men in the world.

To the east of the railroad tracks is the concrete channel of the **Hoosic River Flood Control Project**. After Adams

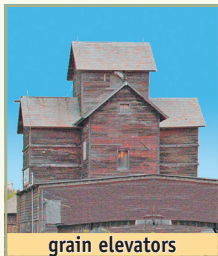


suffered four devastating floods within 50 years, town officials lobbied the federal government for assistance. The result was the town's largest public works project (1952-58) which reconstructed two

miles of the river to accommodate 150% more water than what flowed in the 1938 Hurricane. Shortly after the train departs, it passes the first of three waterfalls and stilling basins designed to slow rushing flood waters. After the first basin, one of the river's tributaries, Tophet Brook, enters. Steep ravines farther up the brook create a forceful flow of water that deposits piles of rocks and silt into the Hoosic.

The squat, 1½-story duplexes on the edge of Route 8 were once referred to as **Paddy Row**, so-called, as an ethnic slur against the Irish Catholic immigrants who lived there. They arrived via this rail line, in the late 1840s, shortly after it became operational. The first Catholic Mass in Adams was celebrated in one of those homes.

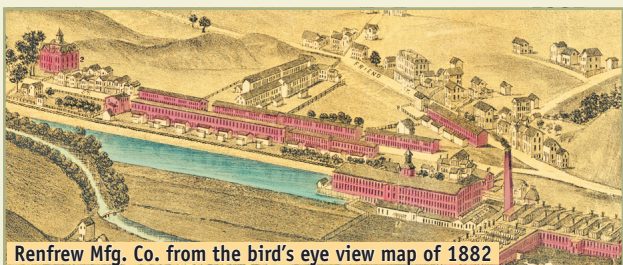
The tall, unique, wooden structure on the east side of the train is the former **Hoosac Valley Coal & Grain Co.** In the days when people heated their homes with coal-burning stoves and required feed for their horses, cows, and chickens, they depended upon this business.



grain elevators

## RENFREW

At the first street intersection, we enter an area developed shortly after the Civil War by two Scottish natives. **Renfrew Mfg. Co.**, the largest employer in Adams prior to the Berkshire Mills, wove ginghams, plaids, and checkered damask cloth. Giving rise to the largest of the 11 “villages” that sprang up around factories operating along the river and railroad, the company built long, brick row houses for its workers. Once lining both sides



Renfrew Mfg. Co. from the bird's eye view map of 1882

of Route 8, the structures are architecturally similar to the mill housing of industrial Great Britain. Renfrew Mfg. Co. was initially powered by both coal furnaces and water turbines. To your east is the levee that retained the 3-acre mill pond, the last of seven in town created to furnish industrial power. When the largest fire in Adams history engulfed the mill complex in 1984, the pond offered needed water, its depth dropping a full 3 inches to extinguish the blazing inferno.

The **Renfrew Passenger Station**, one of two such structures still standing in Adams (the other lies a ¼ mile south of the boarding platform), can be seen at the next street intersection. Originally built in 1880, it was restored in 2003. A passenger station in Cheshire also survives.





## THE LARGEST RAIL CUSTOMER ON THIS LINE

To the west rises a view of **Specialty Minerals, Inc.** Lime has been quarried from this site since the 1830s. The

lime (calcium carbonate), along with limestone and marble, are the sedimentary deposits of shellfish that fell to the bottom of the Iapetus Ocean millions of years ago. Such deposits run the length of Berkshire County, with other lime quarries in Lee, West Stockbridge, and Canaan, Conn. The tanker cars you see from the train's windows carry the white "gold" across the country, to be used in construction materials, agricultural products, medicine, and paper.

To your east, the first of several corn and hay fields appear. **Agriculture** is still active along the route, and crops can be seen in various stages of growth.

## 4 CURRENT AND FORMER OPERATIONS

You will want to pay careful attention as the next sights come up quickly. **1** Here are the ruins of a mill that produced paper for over 100 years. One of its operators was called **Brightwater Paper** because it drew its water from bright-white, limestone-lined artesian wells. The mills were originally built in the 1880s to produce a pioneer plastic called **Zylonite**. There once was a post office and train station on this line with that name, and townspeople still use it to refer to this part of town but pronounce it *zelnite*. **2** **Holland Co.**, the rail line's second-largest customer, is an active business that processes wastewater treatment and water purification products. **3** The long, brick building with the white structures above it was initially built as a car barn for the **Berkshire Street Railway Co.** Passengers could board a trolley in Hoosick, N.Y., travel to Bennington, Vt., cross over the Massachusetts state line, and travel the length of Berkshire County and into Canaan, Conn., thereby completing the route on the nation's only trolley system to operate in four states. **4** Tiny houses clustered on the edge of the tracks belong to **B&B Micro Manufacturing Co.**, which designs, builds, and manufactures them at this site, primarily as tourist getaways for the hospitality industry.



# ENTERING NORTH ADAMS

■ To the east is the **intervale** of the Hoosac Valley—its widest, flattest expanse—which lies underwater after heavy rains and snow melts. Local dairy farmers still harvest hay from this field to feed their milk cows.

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■ **The Hoosac Range**, which divides the Hudson River and the Connecticut River Basins, rises sharply in the east. Water that falls on our side of the range flows into the Hoosic River, which travels northerly to the Hudson, eventually entering the Atlantic Ocean after passing Manhattan. Water that falls on the other side of the divide journeys through the Cold, Deerfield, and Connecticut Rivers to empty into Long Island Sound.

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■ Once the train crosses the Hodges Crossroad (Rt. 8A), riders will see the Charles H. McCann Technical High School to the east, once the site of **Meadowbrook Arena**, an outdoor boxing venue and ballroom built in 1922. In the last boxing match held there (1947), Sam Baroudi fatally knocked out the young Newton Smith. Archie Moore practiced there before fighting “Rocky” Marciano for the light heavyweight championship in 1955. The ballroom hosted Big Band–era musicians Glenn Miller, Duke Ellington, the Dorsey Brothers, and the first teen pop star, Rudy Vallée.

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■ **Southview Cemetery**, the largest of the five in the city, was initially laid out in 1888 around the Phillips family plot. Dedicated areas memorialize loved ones who pre-deceased their parents as well as veterans and others who died in service to our country.

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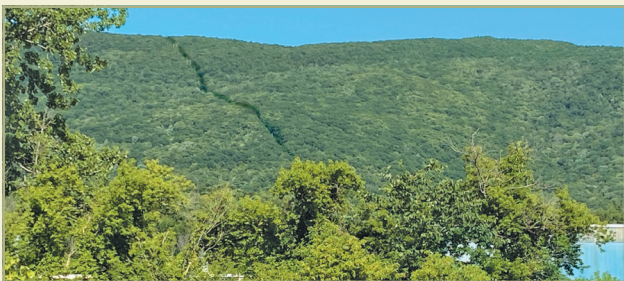
## THE ORIGIN OF THESE 2 TOWNS

Although two separate municipalities today, Adams and North Adams were originally one large settlement called East Hoosuck, named after the river that flows through it. The original boundaries formed a large rectangle encompassing the entire valley, seven miles long and five miles wide, with the east and west borders running over the mountain tops. Two distinct villages formed - one in the north, the other in the south. When the settlement incorporated as a town in 1778, during the Revolutionary War, it was named to honor **Samuel Adams**, famous today for the beer brand but more famous then as a signer of the 1776 Declaration of Independence and an ardent revolutionary.

## A 5-GENERATION-FAMILY BUSINESS

The large blue complex on the east is Morrison Berkshire Co. which manufactures textile-producing machinery sold throughout the world. Originally built by **Hunter Machine Co.**, it began as a foundry operated by James Hunter in 1847, and progressively expanded by four more Hunter generations until 1983.

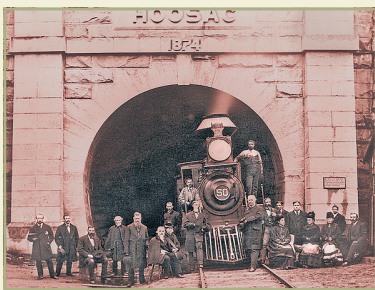
As the train passes Morrison Berkshire Co., observe a notch in the trees running up the hillside. It traces the course of the Hoosac Tunnel from its western portal to its central shaft.



## HOOSAC TUNNEL

Dedicated in 1875, it consumed 24 years and nearly 200 lives. Until 1916, it was the longest tunnel (at 4¾ miles) in North America, and it remains the longest active transportation tunnel east of the Rockies.

Three years after the tunnel's completion, the population of Adams's north village had grown to almost double that in the south. In 1878, realizing that they would always be overruled by voters in the north, residents in the south spearheaded the effort to split North Adams (now a city) from Adams (still a town).



Adams still retains its rectangular shape and is one of two towns in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts (the other is Barre) whose four borders meet at right angles. Those four corners are presently state-owned conservation lands.

■ Before recycling became mainstream, there were several dealers in junk, scrap, and salvage scattered along this rail line. Their numbers have decreased, but two operations still trade in the castoffs of society.

## INDUSTRIAL NORTH ADAMS

The history of North Adams is similar to that of many cities in Massachusetts. As its economy mushroomed in the last half of the 19th century, its products were shipped throughout the world. Unlike its southern neighbor, it had a diverse mix of enterprises: shoes, leather, cotton and woolen goods, printed textiles, electronics, crackers, textile machinery, and was the terminus of several railroad lines. Attracted by opportunities for employment, immigrants traveled to North Adams from French-speaking Canada, Italy, Ireland, and Wales. At the same era, a sizeable, active Jewish community supported four synagogues.

## PITTSFIELD - NORTH ADAMS RAILROAD

This trunk line opened in 1846, four years after the **Boston & Albany Railroad** was completed passing through Pittsfield, 22 miles to the south. Businessmen in Northern Berkshire collected a sinking fund to guarantee a profit to the railroad company, enticing it to build this connection. The locomotive traveled at 10 mph (similar to the speed you are experiencing), which rivaled that of a stagecoach. Although the iron horse required water and fuel, it didn't need frequent rests or someone to pick up after it.

The transportation upgrade tripled property values in Adams. A two-day trip to Boston was shortened to almost half a day. Bales of cotton that previously came over the mountain by ox cart arrived in abundance overnight. Finished cloth reached markets more quickly and farther away.

## A CRACKER FACTORY

The **H. W. Clark Biscuit Co.** produced a variety of crackers and cookies for appreciative customers throughout the Northeast. The business thrived into the 1920s, when 200 people baked, packaged, and baled their products for rail shipment. The building on the edge of the railroad tracks replaced a plant located closer to the center of town, which burned in 1919. Today it is a residential complex.



H. W. Clark, who had interests in three wholesale grocery businesses as well, was a generous benefactor of the local hospital, Baptist Church, and the YMCA.

# ON THE RETURN TRIP

Here is an opportunity to just view the scenery. While traveling on the valley floor admire the hills that rise up above you. The trees, fields and vistas can have a calming effect. Keep an eye on the Hoosic River as it zigzags in its natural state and attracts ducks, geese and other waterfowl.



## THE HIGHEST PEAK IN MASSACHUSETTS

**Mt. Greylock** is nearly 3,500 ft. above sea level. It is an island-like mountain range stretching for 11 miles long through six towns and contains the three highest points in Massachusetts. The mountain formed 600 million years ago when continents collided. You can reach its peak by car or even circumnavigate the whole massif.

## A FAMOUS AND AN INFAMOUS WOMAN

How is it possible that the little town of Adams is the birthplace of two women who altered the balance of power in the world?

**Susan B. Anthony** was born here in 1820, and her birthplace is a museum at 67 East Road. She devoted her adult life to securing equal rights for women, particularly the right to vote. She died 14 years before women won the right, but the constitutional amendment (the 19th) carries her name.

**Leontyna Petka**, born in Adams in 1913, married Morris Cohen and was then known as



Susan B. Anthony



Lona Cohen

**Lona Cohen**. A day after Hiroshima was bombed, she received secret atomic research from Ted Hall, a physicist at Los Alamos, N.M., which she passed on to the Russians. In 1961, she and her husband were arrested in England and convicted as soviet spies. The Cohens' odyssey was dramatized in the British play *Pack of Lies*. Lona's childhood home—a two-story, medium-green, vinyl-sided house—is seen when the train passes the only residential neighborhood on its route.