



American Independence Byway



Revolutionary War re-enactors at the American Independence Museum. Photo: Ralph Morang

In the century following New Hampshire's first European settlement in 1623, the southeastern portion of what became this state was divided into the four great towns or "plantations" of Portsmouth, Dover, Exeter and Hampton. By the early 1700s, the provincial capital of Portsmouth was a thriving port.

The circular route traveled on the Independence Byway passes through the centers of Exeter and Hampton, and two of the second tier towns that were divided from them, Hampton Falls and Kensington. The route offers an excellent opportunity to see high-style 18th century Georgian and Federal architecture.

Begin at the bandstand (designed by Daniel Chester French) in the center of EXETER, the state's capital during the War of Independence. Plan a visit to the American Independence Museum and walk to the earliest surviving building in town, Gilman Garrison, open in the summer. You can

also shop in the downtown historic district or take a walking tour through Phillips Exeter Academy, founded in 1781. Follow Front Street through the historic district past the Academy and turn left on Pine Street to the Moses Kent Victorian House Museum, open summers.

Route 150, laid out in 1739, passes through the center of KENSINGTON, a town which is the best illustration of the patterns of 18th century agricultural subdivision. It has an outstanding collection of Georgian and early Federal farmsteads still surrounded by expanses of open land.

Turning left (east) on Route 84 the tour passes into HAMPTON FALLS. Route 84, one of the earliest roads, was known locally as the Old Mill Road because it passes the site of the most significant 18th century manufacturing activity in the town.

Turn left (north) on Route 1, established in 1761 as the stagecoach route from Boston to Portsmouth. In the early 20th century, it became the path of the Electric Railway.

Route 1 crosses a significant portion of salt marsh, much of which

has been preserved for conservation use. (This is an excellent area to watch for shorebirds.) The salt marshes were once important as they provided fodder for livestock.

In HAMPTON, settled in 1638, Route 1 became Main Street. In the 19th century, the town center shifted to the area surrounding the railroad depot at the intersection with Exeter Road (Route 27). Route 27 turns

inland again on the original 18th century road from Hampton back to Exeter.

SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS: Guided tours of the American Independence Museum's Ladd-Gilman House are given Wednesday-Sunday, noon-5pm, May 1- October 1.

CONTACT: American Independence Museum, 603-772-2622 or www.independencemuseum.org, Exeter Chamber of Commerce, 603-772-2411; Gilman Garrison (SPNEA), 603-436-3205.