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Elaboration of a settlement system: the New England village in the federal period

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Abstract

Contemporary New England villages arose as nineteenth-century central places. The emergence of these commercial places reflected not the creation of something new out of whole cloth but an elaboration of an existing settlement system, a legacy of the colonial period and a manifestation of long-standing cultural habit. Town centers, more or less equally spaced and comprised of little more than a meetinghouse and a tavern, served as foci for town activities, as *auxiliary central places*. Most of the considerable localized economic exchange that characterized the colonial period occurred at *dispersed places*. The emergence of true central places about colonial town centers in the federal period marked a shift in scale or a general and widespread development of extra-local exchange, division of labor, and provision of centrality—the ability of a place to provide goods and services beyond the needs of its residents. Central places became accretions of full-time nonfarmers, of storekeepers, artisans, and professional people. Moreover,

these places were interlinked to form a system of central places and, although a sorting process took place, the system was both a material manifestation of contemporary economic experience and an elaboration of the colonial settlement system.



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