

Facts about the First Congressional District of Massachusetts

The 1st Congressional District -- spanning Berkshire, Hampden, Hampshire, Franklin, Worcester and Middlesex Counties -- is the largest congressional district in Massachusetts. It is framed by Connecticut to the South, New York to the west, and Vermont and New Hampshire to the north. Primarily a rural district, the 1st District geographically constitutes close to 40% of the state, yet represents only one-tenth of Massachusetts' population.

The diverse 1st District includes everything from picturesque college towns to rural hamlets and mid-size industrial communities. Rich in history, the area was the frontier for the first colonists. Farming initially dominated the region's economy, but in the last century agriculture has given way to mill towns and larger industries.

As a tourist destination, the 1st District provides many attractions. The Berkshires are a major draw for vacationers, offering charming mountain landscapes and cultural treasures such as the summer retreat of the Boston Symphony at Tanglewood, Jacob's Pillow in Becket, the Norman Rockwell Museum in Stockbridge, and the Clark Art Institute in Williamstown. During the 19th Century, Edith Wharton, Herman Melville, Henry David Thoreau, and several other famous writers and artisans made their homes in these rolling hills.

The central part of the district, the Pioneer Valley, is western Massachusetts' primary corridor for living, working, traveling and enjoying the sites of rural New England. Among the numerous quaint cities and historic mill towns lies the sprawling Connecticut River, which was recently honored as an American Heritage River. Some of the many highlights savored by its residents include Shelburne Falls, Montague, historic Deerfield, and Holyoke.

The scenic Mohawk and Johnny Appleseed Trails follow State Route 2 through the northern part of the District and supply visitors with tourist attractions and picturesque countryside vistas. The eastern portion of the 1st District is largely dominated by the industrial cities of Fitchburg-Leominster and Gardner, which have been renowned as plastics and furniture industry capitals of the U.S.

Another defining feature of the 1st District is its colleges and universities. The 1st District is home to 8 of Massachusetts' 30 state college campuses -- the University of Massachusetts/Amherst, Fitchburg State, Westfield State, Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts, and community colleges in Berkshire, Greenfield, Holyoke, and Mount Wachusett. The 1st District also includes several small, private colleges such as Williams College, Amherst College, and Simons Rock College in Great Barrington. A notable concentration of colleges known as the five-college area (three of which are in the 1st District) consist of Amherst College, Smith College, University of Massachusetts/Amherst, Mt. Holyoke and Hampshire College.

While the 1st Congressional District of Massachusetts is notable for its rich history and scenery, the large presence of colleges and universities ensures that the region will continue to be one of the most unique in the country.

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