

APPENDIX B: SOUTHBRIDGE COMMUNITY HISTORY & PROFILE

Southbridge emerged as a breakaway from the towns of Sturbridge, Charlton and Dudley, centering around the Quinebaug river and incorporated in 1816. The town's initial development was based on the woolen and cotton mills, located in the western part of Southbridge. In 1833, the genesis of what became the world-renowned American Optical Company, started in the Hartwell Building. Fiber optics has developed as a branch of the optical industry.

SOUTHBRIDGE COMMUNITY PROFILE

Southbridge is located in the south central portion of the Commonwealth, nearly equidistant from the cities of Hartford, Springfield, Providence and Worcester. Comprised of about 21 square miles, Southbridge is an eclectic blend of hilly and flat land, farmland and developed land, industry and downtown, and suburban, urban, and rural neighborhoods.

Southbridge has a Town Manager/Town Council form of government with five geo-political precincts. The Town Manager reports to a nine-member Town Council and its five subcommittees.

The 2000 U.S. Census reports a population of 17,214. The census states that 27.7% of Southbridge residents are age 0-19. In Southbridge 6.6% of the population is under 5 years of age in comparison to 6.3% statewide. Young children, in fact most children, cannot come to the library without parental assistance. Households with children under 18 are one of the largest users of library service. The number of residents between 20-34 is 21.2%, the number of residents between 35-54 is 27.8%, and the number of residents between 55-64 is 8.1%. The median age is 35.8 years.

The 65 and older population is 15.1%, which is slightly higher than the state average of 13.5%. Traditionally as the population ages, library use has declined. This was due to a number of factors, including lack of transportation, lack of mobility and poor health. A more recent trend is for older residents to use the library more. These new factors for use include longer life, more free time, better health, improved financial situation, and interest in lifelong learning activities.

Southbridge's population is 75.7% white non-Hispanic. The Hispanic population at 20.2% is significantly above the state average, and the black population at 1.4% is significantly below the state average. The foreign born population at 5.4% is well below the state average of 12.2%.

In Southbridge, 25.2% of residents are employed in management, professional, and related occupations; 15.3% of residents are employed in service occupations; 26.4% of residents are employed in sales and office occupations; 1% of residents are employed in farming, fishing, and forestry occupations; 9.6% of residents are employed in construction, extraction, and maintenance occupations; and 23.4% of residents are employed in production, transportation, and material moving occupations. The mean travel time to work for Southbridge residents is 24.3 minutes.

In Southbridge, 13% of residents make less than \$10,000, 8.3% of residents make \$10,000-\$14,999, 15.9% of residents make \$15,000-\$24,999, 13.9% of residents make \$25,000-\$34,999, 15.3% of residents make \$35,000-\$49,999, 20.6% of residents make \$50,000-\$74,999, 6.7% of residents make \$75,000-\$99,999, 5.0% of residents make \$100,000-\$149,999, 0.7% of residents make \$150,000-\$199,999, and 0.6% of residents make \$200,000 or more.

Fifteen percent of Southbridge residents live in poverty compared to a state level of 9%. The per capita income in Southbridge is \$18,514, well below the statewide per capita income of \$25,952. In Southbridge, the median household income is \$33,913, compared to Worcester county median household income of \$47,874, and the statewide median household income of \$50,502. These below state average income levels negatively affect on the community's ability to raise funds for town services, including library services. In addition, traditionally, the higher the income of residents, the higher the use of the library.

Of Southbridge's 7,077 total occupied housing units, 44.9% are owner occupied, and 55.1% are renter occupied. 33.3% of households have individuals under 18 years, and 26.1% of households have individuals 65 years and older. Home ownership has a positive impact on library use. As more Southbridge families own their own homes, library use will increase. Families with individuals under 18 years of age are more active library users.

Southbridge has five schools, the West Street School (Grades 04-05), Eastford Road School (Grades Pre-kindergarten-01), Charlton Street School (Grades 02-03), Mary E. Wells Junior High School (Grades 06-08) and Southbridge High School (Grades 09-12). Students also may attend the Trinity Catholic Academy (Grades Pre-kindergarten-08), Montessori Children's House (Grades Pre-Kindergarten-Kindergarten) and Southbridge Christian Academy (Grades Pre-Kindergarten-10)

Among Southbridge residents 25 years and older 71.4% have a high school diploma or higher compared to the state average of 84.4%. 12.5% have a bachelor's degree or higher, and 3.8% have a graduate or professional degree. The percentage of the population with a bachelor's degree or higher is below the state average, which is 33.2%. Because these residents have less knowledge and skills, they require more assistance from the library to use resources.. The Jacob Edwards Library provides an important service by helping Southbridge residents with their daily information needs and personal learning using computers and electronic materials.