

MHC Reconnaissance Survey Town Report

MARLBOROUGH

Report Date: 1980

Reconnaissance Survey Town Reports, produced for MHC's Statewide Reconnaissance Survey between 1979 and 1987, introduce the historical development of each of the Commonwealth's municipalities. Each report begins with an historic overview, a description of topography, and political boundaries. For the purposes of the survey, the historic period has been subdivided into seven periods: Contact (1500–1620), Plantation (1620–1675), Colonial (1675–1775), Federal (1775–1830), Early Industrial (1830–1870), Late Industrial (1870–1915), and Early Modern (1915–1940/55). Each report concludes with survey observations that evaluate the town's existing historic properties inventory and highlight significant historic buildings, settlement patterns, and present threats to these resources. A bibliography lists key secondary resources.

Town reports are designed for use together with a series of town maps that demarcate settlement patterns, transportation corridors and industrial sites for each historic period. These maps are in the form of color-coded, polyester overlays to the USGS topographic base map for each town on file and available for consultation at MHC. For further information on the organization and preparation of town reports, readers should contact MHC.

Users should keep in mind that these reports are now two decades or more old. The information they contain, including assessments of existing knowledge, planning recommendations, understanding of local development, and bibliographic references all date to the time they were written. In some cases, information on certain topics was not completed. No attempt has been made to update this information.

Electronic text was not available for digital capture, and as a result most of the reports have been scanned as PDF files. While all have been processed with optical character recognition, there will inevitably be some character recognition errors.

The activity that is the subject of the MHC Reconnaissance Survey Town Report has been financed in part with Federal funds from the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior. However, the contents and opinions do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the Department of the Interior. This program receives Federal financial assistance for identification and protection of historic properties. Under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, and the Age Discrimination Act of 1975, as amended, the U.S. Department of the Interior prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, national origin, disability or age in its federally assisted programs. If you believe you have been discriminated against in any program, activity or facility as described above, or if you desire further information please write to: Office of Equal Opportunity, National Park Service, 1849 C Street, N.W., Washington, D.C., 20240.



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MHC RECONNAISSANCE SURVEY REPORT

DATE: March, 1980

COMMUNITY: Marlborough

I. TOPOGRAPHY

Located on hilly upland terrain. Some rocky outcrops, especially in eastern part of town. Contours shaped by glacial action. Rocky to gravelly soil. A highland watershed--one natural lake, a few small ponds, several streams. Southern and eastern parts of town drain in Sudbury, northern and western drain into Assabet. Areas of upland bog/swamp scattered through rocky eastern third of town.

II. POLITICAL BOUNDARIES

Part of Sudbury grant, 1638. Part granted for Indian Praying Town, 1654. Grant to establish new colonial plantation at "Whipsufferadge," 1659. Incorporated as Town of Marlborough, 1660. Indian Praying Town lands annexed, 1700. Town boundaries and size diminished by formation of new towns: Westborough (1717), Southborough (1727), Berlin (1784) and Hudson (1866). Incorporated as City of Marlborough, 1890.

III. HISTORIC OVERVIEW

Small industrial city on historic corridor to western uplands. Located on headwaters of Assabet River with potential native sites around Fort Meadow Reservoir/Lake Williams Indian Plantation on Ockoocanganset Hill with early English town at Marlborough Center by mid-17th century destroyed during King Philip's War. Recovery by early 18th century as trading center on Boston Post Road. Some surviving houses of Colonial period on outlying roads of two-story lean-to plan with potential 18th century structures around town center. Limited early 19th century industrial development of craft shoe and straw fosters mercantile prosperity with several examples of temple front Greek Revival houses in central town. Railroad connections by mid-19th century promote expansion of shoe industry with rapid formation of urban characteristics including multiple family house types, variety of ethnic groups, and brick Victorian business district by early 20th century. Later development restricted by isolation from primary Boston corridor and decline of shoe industry, although early airport remains. Recent pressure of suburban expansion from metropolitan Boston with regional highways has seriously threatened both historic rural landscape and integrity of town center with continued growth expected for the future.

IV. CONTACT PERIOD (1500-1620)

A. Transportation Routes:

Located on edge of interior highland along axis of western trails. Most important is Connecticut Path documented in town histories which follows location of Boston Post Road (Route 20) through Marlborough Center around Williams Lake with numerous former loops. Secondary branches to the Sudbury River are conjectured as Concord Road with a possible alternate as Hemenway Street, and Farm Road around Fort Meadow with a possible

branch as Parmenter Road. It appears likely that a trail north to the Assabet River followed around the base of Ockoocanganset Hill, possibly as Pleasant Street with a probable branch as West-Berlin-Bigelow Streets.

B. Settlement Pattern:

One probable period site overlooking Flagg Swamp. Unspecified sites reported on Ockoocanganset Hill and adjacent to Fort Meadow reservoir. Other likely site locations include well drained terraces and knolls overlooking Assabet River and Williams Lake; also rockshelters along Flagg Swamp, Millham and other brooks.

C. Subsistence Pattern:

Fresh water fishing in lakes and ponds, seasonal fish runs in Assabet, good agricultural land, hunting/gathering.

D. Observations:

Patterns for this period are poorly understood, largely because little data is available. Current evidence suggests only limited occupation with sites related to Nipmuck (inland, fresh water) people rather than coastal tribes.

V. FIRST SETTLEMENT PERIOD (1620-1675)

A. Transportation Routes:

Native trails remain as highways with improvement of Connecticut Path (Route 20) as road to Marlborough Plantation by the mid-17th century.

B. Population:

Small native population at Praying Town after 1654. By 1674 totaled about fifty people (ten families). Colonial settlers from Sudbury (Wayland) after 1658. About forty families (210 people) in 1670.

C. Settlement:

Native Praying Town established 1654. Original settlement location unclear, but close to traditional "Planting Fields" on Ockoocanganset Hill. Praying Town grant included whole northeast quadrant of present town. About 1610, Praying Town settlement was apparently shifted to be more distant from English settlement (probably moved to Fort Meadow Brook area. First colonial settler, 1658. Thirty-eight house lots granted 1660. Small, clustered settlement developed on Post Road between Ockoocanganset and Fairmount Hills extending toward Williams Lake. First meetinghouse built, 1666; burying ground 1675. Impending hostilities with natives resulted in establishment of eight "garrison houses" and a "garrison."

D. Economic Base:

Praying Town economy based on limited agriculture and orchards. Colonial settlement primarily for access to meadow land (hay). Agriculture and grazing (specifically cattle). Town brand registered with General Court, 1662. John How's tavern located on Post Road in village after 1661.

E. Observations:

The primary westward extension of Sudbury (Wayland). A small but thriving community. Considerable tension between Prying Indians and colonial settlers resulting from close proximity of settlements.

VI. COLONIAL PERIOD (1676-1776)

A. Transportation Routes:

Highways remain from 17th century with primary axis along Boston Post Road (Route 20) through Marlborough center. Extension of local highways from meeting house during 18th century include Berlin Road, Millham and Elm Streets to west, Williams and Forest Street to southwest, Bolton, Stevens and Hosmer Streets to north, Stow and Concord Roads to northeast, and Framingham and Brigham Streets to south.

B. Population:

Native population removed to Deer Island during King Philip's War; a few return afterward. Some depopulation of colonial settlement as result of King Philip's War. By 1680, about 200 inhabitants. Steady growth during late 17th century and especially after Indian lands annexed in 1700. By 1700, 530 people; by 1720, approximately 800. Census of 1765 listed 1,287 inhabitants in 213 families and 183 houses (included parts of Berlin and Hudson).

C. Settlement:

Remnants of native population live in SW part of town and near Williams Lake. Town barely survived King Philip's War; everything destroyed except garrison houses. Rebuilding of meetinghouse started 1677, but not finished. Larger meetinghouse raised, 1688. First school built, 1690. Remained a fairly concentrated village largely because frontier warfare was a serious threat. Several outlying farms nevertheless protected by system of 26 "garrison houses" until 1713 (end of Queen Anne's War). With more stable conditions, number of outlying farms increased.

D. Economic Base:

Agriculture and grazing--cattle for meat and dairy purposes. Orchards an important secondary activity; cider and brandy made for both local consumption and export to Boston. At least two taverns on Post Road: Samuel How's, located in village and William's located near Williams Lake.

E. Architecture

Residential:

As in neighboring towns (Hudson and Stow) several central-chimney houses have a tradition of having begun as one- or two-room cottages; however, few cottages are evident from this period. The most widespread house-type of this period was the central-chimney two-story form, a small number of which had 1/2 to 3/4 facades; however, they existed in far fewer numbers than the central-chimney type. Little high-style is likely to have existed.

F. Observations:

Though an area of high potential, growth was limited by border warfare and raids until early decades of 18th century. Acquisition of Praying Town lands was other major concern of 17th century town. With resolution of both issues, town developed as center of a prosperous agricultural area.

VII. FEDERAL PERIOD (1775-1830)

A. Transportation Routes:

Colonial highways remain in place with Post Road as primary route. Boston-Worcester turnpike bypasses Marlborough through Southborough.

B. Population:

Fluctuations occurred during period, although general trend was for gradual increases; Second Parish (Unitarian) formed in West Village, 1808; Universalist Society formed, 1818-1825; no apparent foreign-born population.

C. Settlement Location:

East Village (Main and Maple Streets) and West Village (Pleasant and Main Streets), some scattered country estates probable.

D. Economic Base:

Only substantial waterpower available at Feltonville (now Hudson), outside of present city limits. Primarily agricultural economy with considerable activity in fruit growing, particularly apples and the production of cider. Cottage industry in shoemaking begun about 1815; by 1837 amounts to \$41,200 annual value of production. Some early home work in straw bonnet making; declining by 1837.

E. Architecture

Residential:

Little high-style late Georgian likely, although late Georgian doorways and details remained in use as late as 1805; high-style Federalist architecture present in East Village and in at least one country estate, high-style houses were varied in plan, but most were built of brick or of wood with brick end walls. More modest examples of the style were mixed between twin-chimney and rear-wall chimney plans; few (if any) cottages were built.

Institutional:

New meetinghouse at East Village, 1806; Unitarian Meetinghouse at West Village, 1808; Universalist Meetinghouse, 1827, appearance unrecorded; town hall built after separation of church and town, 1808; 7 school districts in 1790 (one may have been within present bounds of Hudson), increased to 8 within bounds of modern Marlborough, one-room school houses built throughout period; private academy founded 1826, school house built 1827.

Commercial:

Stores and taverns likely to have existed at East and West Villages as a result of heavy travel through Marlborough, little information recorded.

Industrial:

No mills likely to have been built with exception of grist and saw mills.

VIII. EARLY INDUSTRIAL PERIOD (1830-1870)

A. Transportation Routes:

Roads remain from early 19th century with railroad connections to Marlborough center from Framingham and Hudson (now abandoned) in 1850s.

B. Population

Extremely rapid growth of population after 1840, available statistics reflect, in part, the growth of Hudson (formerly Feltonville) which was not set off as a separate town until 1866. Large foreign-born population present after c. 1845-50, primarily Irish and Canadian. New religious societies: Union Congregational Society (1832--united with First Parish, 1835); Methodist Episcopal (1853); Baptist (1868); Roman Catholic (present c. 1854), Parish established (1864); Universalists (reorganized 1865) French Catholic Parish (1870).

C. Settlement Location:

East and West Villages on side streets which were opened for residential subdivisions; two villages gradually grew together to form a single settlement, due in part to the location of the railroad dept in between the two, near Main Street, by 1861 the two villages contained a total of 500 dwellings and a population of 3,000.

D. Economic Base:

Introduction of railroad access to Boston aided orchard products (apples and cider) and in particular shoe production which jumped from annual product valuation of \$41,200 in 1837 to \$2.3 million in 1865. The introduction of shoemaking by teams in 1852 coincided with the introduction of the sewing machine in the same year. Steam introduced in 1858 and by 1860 there were 17 shops.

E. Architecture

Residential:

Greek Revival style present to c. 1855, Italianate present c. 1850-1870, Second Empire by 1860. Some high-style present, although little appears to have been architect-designed; particularly large number of temple-front Greek Revival houses in the East Village and in at least one country estate location; several Italianate villas were built on the hills north of Main Street;

elaborate Second Empire style houses and cottages built in vicinity of Pleasant Street and Fairmount Street; only one octagonal house appears to have been built (demolished?). Elsewhere the large number of houses were side-hall examples (with gabled facades) of Italianate design, followed by a large number of side-hall cottages and a much smaller number of wood-frame row houses and double houses. In general, the West Village seems to have had more cottages than the East Village which seems to have had more houses and row houses.

Institutional:

Transitional Greek Revival/Italianate style churches were built for Union Congregational Society (1853), the Methodist Society (1853), and, perhaps, for the Immaculate Conception Chapel (1854); academic Italianate style Universalist Church built 1865, former town-hall remodelled for Baptist Church (1869), Victorian Gothic style churches built for Immaculate Conception (1864) and St. Mary's French Catholic (1870) Churches. Private academy merged into public high school, 1849, Second Empire style school house built, 1860; 2 large graded school houses built, 1855 at town center (and Feltonville, now Hudson?), larger district schools were also graded, outlying districts remained ungraded; 2 firehouses built in East and West Villages, c. 1849; Victorian Gothic style town hall built, 1869.

Commercial:

Development primarily of wood-frame blocks 2- and 3-stories, along Main Street, Lincoln Street and in scattered locations, mostly Italianate and Second Empire styles; some two-story temple-front blocks in East Village (c. 1840-1855); 2 railroad depots by 1861 at town center; free-standing one-story Italianate brick block built, 1860s.

Industrial:

Mills scattered throughout town center, water power virtually unused; nearly all mills were 3-5 stories high, of wood-frame construction, some Greek Revival style temple-front facades existed although the largest number were Italianate or Second Empire style; brick gas works and octagonal gasometer built c. 1870 (?).

IX. LATE INDUSTRIAL PERIOD (1870-1915)

A. Transportation Routes:

Road and rail system intact with addition of streetcar routes by early 1900s from Framingham to Northborough along the Marlborough-Framingham and Post Roads with branch to Hudson along Mechanic Street and private way around Addition and Hager Hills, portions of which remain intact.

B. Population:

Increased population to 1895; especially large increase occurred between 1875 and 1880 and between 1885 and 1895; slight decline and fluctuation after 1895 until increases after 1910. Large foreign-born population, primarily Irish, until 1890s when French Canadians became the largest foreign-born

group; large Italian population encouraged to settle here as strike breakers after shoeworkers' strike, 1899; new religious societies included Protestant Episcopal (1880s) and Christian Scientist (c. 1915?), other societies were probably formed in the early 20th century but not recorded in existing secondary sources.

C. Settlement Location:

Filling in of undeveloped lots in West Village, expansion at the periphery of the existing center (East and West Villages).

D. Economic Base:

Shoe and bootmaking continued to grow rapidly. By 1905, annual product was valued at \$6,620,000, up from \$2.3 million in 1865. Mechanization and the growth of large factories had reduced the number of factories from 18 in 1875 to 8 in 1905. A number of the large shoe factories are left from this period including Frye (Chestnut and Pleasant Streets) and Rice & Hutchins' Middlesex Shoe factory (Parmenter Square). In 1895, 78% of the city population were employed in shoemaking--vs. 59% for Lynn in the same year (Dodd).

E. Architecture

Residential:

All contemporary styles represented, largest number of examples were of Victorian Gothic/Queen Anne style and eclectic early 20th century styles. High-style (architect-designed) examples of Queen Anne, late Italianate and Colonial Revival styles in vicinity of Church Street and Pleasant Street. Side-hall examples of transitional Victorian Gothic/Queen Anne north of Main Street, in vicinity of Maple Street and in vicinity of Main and Pleasant Streets. Modest examples of Dutch Colonial and Bungalow styles scattered throughout town with slightly greater concentrations north of Main Street in West Village. Small number of wood-frame row houses (south of Main Street, c. 1890), three deckers and apartment houses (West Village-Main Street and Mechanic Street). Astylistic cottages in vicinity of Mechanic Street and South Street.

Institutional:

Queen Anne style churches built 1887 (Episcopal) and 1889 (Baptist); Colonial Revival style chapel built c. 1915 (Christian Science). Renaissance Revival style Post Office (c. 1905), Classical Revival style Town Hall (1905-06), Romanesque style Armory (1905); brick firehouses, 1895 (astylistic) 1909 (elements of classical); Colonial Revival style High School, 1897; Public Library (Classical Revival style-1904); some multiple room brick school houses and parochial schools built in town center. Several institutional buildings of this period are the work of major Boston architects.

Commercial:

Development scattered, greatest concentration on Main Street where solid rows of 2 to 4 story, brick commercial blocks were built in nearly all contemporary styles; late in period some one-story row stores were built; outside of main commercial center, some brick blocks were built particularly along Mechanic Street, although most blocks were wood-frame Second Empire or Queen Anne styles.

Industrial:

Mostly wood-frame factories of the same basic plans as those built in preceding period, although larger in scale and more utilitarian in exterior design. Some utilitarian brick and concrete factories were built in vicinity of Maple and Howe Streets after c. 1905.

X. EARLY MODERN PERIOD (1915-1940)

A. Transportation Routes:

Abandonment of trolley routes by 1920s and improvement of local highways as auto roads during 1930s including main E/W regional highway as Route 20 and N/S Route 85 through Marlborough center. Airport location in 1930s on Broad Meadow with original hangers and period structures still intact.

B. Population:

Fluctuation of population with a high of 16,236 achieved in 1925, but no permanent increase; secondary sources do not record new religious congregations during this period.

C. Settlement Location:

Development confined to existing center, little expansion of built-up area; small number of cabins built on lakes in northern part of town (?).

D. Economic Base:

Statistics are lacking. Shoemaking apparently continued strong until the depression. By this time, other manufactures included paper boxes (Dennison factory, 1925), wire goods, shoe machinery, metal products, cosmetics, and textile soaps.

E. Architecture

Residential:

Little high-style present. "Dutch Colonial" houses (1-1/2 stories) seem to have been most popular type of house; small number of bungalows present. Very small number of cabins on lakes (c. 1925-40?).

Institutional:

Little new construction apparent, except for construction of at least four brick school houses (4-8 rooms each) in various neighborhoods at Marlborough Center (1916-1931), all Colonial Revival style; addition to High School; enlargement of parochial schools (?).

Commercial:

Major buildings of period were two neo-Classical style brick blocks; most commercial building seems to have been one and two stories high, often consisting of the extensive alteration of existing blocks; cast-stone trim, eclectic design.

Industrial:

Concrete factory additions and buildings in the vicinity of Maple Street and one Moderne Style, stucco covered factory (c. 1935-40) on Mechanic Street.

XI. SOURCES

Bent, Samuel A., The Wayside Inn (1897).

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(Harvard, 1976).