

# MHC Reconnaissance Survey Town Report

## AUBURN

Report Date: 1984

Associated Regional Report: Central Massachusetts

**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.

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# MHC RECONNAISSANCE SURVEY REPORT

DATE: 1984

COMMUNITY: Auburn

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## I. TOPOGRAPHY

The town of Auburn lies in the south-central portion of Worcester County, forming part of the western slope of the Blackstone River drainage basin. As a result, its lands generally slope downward to the north and east, from elevations almost 900 feet above sea level on the drumlins and hills along the Oxford and Leicester borders to less than 500 feet above sea level in the river valleys and along the boundary with Worcester. Three major brooks--Wellington, Dark and Kettle--flow northerly and easterly, eventually joining to form the south branch of Blackstone River. Several large ponds and reservoirs are today part of Auburn's water system, with much of the lightly settled western portion of town protected as watershed land.

Auburn's soils, deep deposits of glacial till, consist largely of Charlton stony fine sandy loam, Sutton loam, Paxton loam of the drumlins, and Hinckley gravelly sandy loam and loamy sand on terraces in the stream valleys. The soils are generally stony, and as a result much land was used for pasture with some mowing and crops in the less stony areas. Exceptions are the areas on Pakachoag and Prospect Hills and south of Auburn Center, where rich Paxton and Sutton loams are found. These areas were formerly the locations of extensive and prosperous farms.

## II. POLITICAL BOUNDARIES

Incorporated as town of Ward in 1778, from parish set off from Leicester, Oxford, Sutton, and Worcester. Name changed to Auburn in 1837. Part annexed to Millbury in 1851. Bounds with Oxford established in 1908.

## III. HISTORIC OVERVIEW

Upland suburban community, on north-south highland corridor, with 17th century Christian Indian village on Pakachoag Hill. Brief European settlement on Pakachoag Hill in 1670s, with first permanent settlement in 1720s on Pakachoag Hill in the north and Prospect Hill in the south. Dispersed 18th and 19th century textile manufacturing villages at Stoneville and Pondville. Major 20th century development as streetcar and early automobile suburb of Worcester, with some fringe industrial growth. Heavily impacted by Interstate 90 (Mass. Pike), Interstate 290, and Route 52 corridor and interchange development; continued suburban growth; central shopping mall development; and more recent industrial park expansion. Notable survivals include early 19th century worker housing cluster, dispersed 18th and 19th century vernacular farmhouses, and Pondville mill site.

#### IV. CONTACT PERIOD (1500-1620)

##### A. Transportation Routes

North-south corridor along tributaries of French and Blackstone rivers, with main trail conjectured as Oxford Street (along eastern base of Prospect Hill)-Central Street-Pakachoag Street (along crest of Pakachoag Hill). Possible alternate route Oxford Street north.

##### B. Settlement Pattern

Like so much of Worcester County, sites reported for this area are of unknown cultural affiliation. The area is well watered by ponds, Leesville and Stoneville in the north, Auburn and Pondville in the east, and Eddy in the south, as well as several brooks: Kettle in the north, Stone in the south, and Dark in the center. Areas adjacent to these water sources should yield short-term occupations by small groups. Pakachoag Hill was the reputed location of a village, site of more dense and long-term occupation by a subgroup of Nipmucks.

##### C. Subsistence Pattern

The model for the area describes the village as a densely occupied base camp for fishing and agriculture, with small family and task groups leaving seasonally for fishing, hunting, and other resource procurement activities in the surrounding area.

#### V. PLANTATION PERIOD (1620-1675)

##### A. Transportation Routes

Contact period trails continue in use.

##### B. Settlement Pattern

When Eliot visited Pakachoag in 1674, it was the residence of 20 families of ca. 100 individuals of the Nipmuck group, under John Horowanninit. It was also the meeting place for representatives from the surrounding praying groups. The increased presence of colonials in the area through this period brought disease and warfare, reducing the native population. Some of this area was granted to colonials by the General Court--in 1657 to Increase Nowell of 3,200 acres, and in 1662 to Malden of 1,000 acres.

##### C. Subsistence Pattern

Although somewhat reduced by colonial presence, the native population continued patterns established during the Contact period.

## VI. COLONIAL PERIOD (1675-1775)

### A. Transportation Routes

Peripheral area of surrounding towns, with roads leading to their centers. Oxford-Central-Pakachoag-Elmwood Streets are improved as highways, with Oxford Street as an alternate route.

### B. Population

Little information is available for the area prior to incorporation. When the area was made a precinct of Worcester in 1773, it included 25 families from there, 12 from Sutton, 9 from Oxford, and 7 from Leicester. Within nine months, 22 more families were counted, bringing the total population to ca. 350.

### C. Settlement Pattern

The area now Auburn was the adjacent corners of four towns: Worcester (1684), Sutton (1715), Oxford (1693). The first settlers in this area came in the 1720s. The first petition for independence came to the General Court in 1742 for a five-mile square area. At precinct formation in 1773, more residents were apparently settled in the western, more level portion of the town.

### D. Economic Base

Little information exists on the town due to late date of precinct formation. Portions are part of Worcester and Oxford, both classified by Pruitt for 1771 as Egalitarian Farm Towns. For this area then, we can extrapolate low commercial development, community wealth, agrarian poverty and propertylessness. These are accompanied by moderate corn production and agrarian prosperity. Grist mills were established in the Pondville area by the end of the period.

### E. Architecture

**Residential:** Eleven examples of Colonial period dwellings have been inventoried. All are center chimney, five-bay houses, both one and two stories in height. The earliest recorded surviving structure is a one-story, five-bay, center chimney plan at the corner of Coolidge and Stone Streets. Many more survivals masked in later additions are likely to exist.

**Institutional:** The first meetinghouse in Auburn, begun in 1773 and completed in 1783, was a traditional 50 x 40 foot structure. The Center School at Tuttle Square (South and School Streets) was erected in 1729. The structure has been moved, altered, and now serves as a residence.

**Commercial:** The Drury Inn, said to be the first in town, was built ca. 1765 as a traditional center chimney plan. The old inn was altered in 1903 and now exists as a two-story, five-bay, end chimney structure.

## VII. FEDERAL PERIOD (1775-1830)

### A. Transportation Routes

Colonial roads remain in use, with focus on meetinghouse (1778) center.

### B. Population

The first accurate population figure is for 1790, when the total was 473. Growth thereafter was moderate, reaching 690 by 1830. The church was gathered in 1776. The town included a number of Baptists from its incorporation, and they gathered a church of 28 in West Auburn in 1815. The town sent representatives to the conventions preceding Shays Rebellion, and area sympathizers joined the Oxford group.

### C. Settlement Pattern

Continued dispersed agricultural settlement. Meetinghouse completed in 1786. Small nucleation at meetinghouse center, and at small-scale industrial developments at Stoneville, Pondville, and Warrendale.

### D. Economic Base

At the close of the 18th century, Auburn was a sparsely settled agricultural area, with the smallest population of all the towns in Worcester County (532). A survey in 1794 noted three gristmills, four sawmills, a fulling mill, and a windmill for grinding grain on Prospect Hill. Mixed husbandry predominated, with sheep- and cattle-raising, dairying (butter and cheese), and cultivation of grains the major activities. The agricultural focus of the town was reinforced by the few small industries carried on through the period: the manufacture of plows, scythes, and woodenware for farmers' tools, begun about 1820 in two shops near the town center; a tannery in West Auburn, established in 1777 by Jonah Goulding; boot- and shoemaking, introduced in the early 1820s on a putting-out basis by Worcester factories which sent out boots and shoes to be finished by Auburn farmers and their families in their homes.

### E. Architecture

Residential: The one-story, five-bay "cape" remained popular into the early years of the Federal period. Domestic buildings were generally conservative, vernacular structures with little high style ornamentation. The traditional center chimney form continued to be popular in both one- and two-story examples, while a few double chimney houses made inroads into the building vocabulary. End chimney houses, including one brick example, appear in significant numbers in proportion to more traditional plans.

Institutional: A Baptist meetinghouse, built ca. 1815 in Warrendale, burned in 1863. School buildings are recorded in secondary sources by the 1790s. The West Auburn Schoolhouse of 1825 still stands at the corner of Central and Prospect with a 1924 Colonial Revival addition on the main facade.

Commercial: The Otis Pond residence dating from the fourth quarter of the 18th century served as a tavern on the common. A one-and-a-half-story, six-bay store survives. The building was raised to two stories later in the 19th century and received subsequent early 20th century additions.

Industrial: A fulling mill existed at Stoneville prior to 1835.

## VIII. EARLY INDUSTRIAL PERIOD (1830-1870)

### A. Transportation Routes

The early 19th century road system continues in use. The Boston and Albany railroad passes through the western part of town, opening service to Springfield in 1839, but with no Auburn station. The Norwich and Worcester Railroad begins service through Auburn in 1840.

### B. Population

Overall population growth continues during the period, nearly doubling during the 40-year period, from 690 in 1830 to 1,178 in 1870. A large portion of this can be attributed to increasing manufacturing employment, so that by 1875 as many men (ca. 150) were employed in farming and industry, with an additional 100 women in the latter. This brought first the Irish, and later Canadians, to the town, and the foreign-born group grew to 20% of the population during the period. Although the Congregational society continued, the Baptists disbanded and met with the North Oxford society. Masses began in the town in 1867 and two years later St. Joseph's was established as a mission of Worcester parishes. Select schools operated in the town from the 1840s. A social library was formed in 1830, followed by a church library in 1838. In 1869, the town abolished its school districts.

### C. Settlement Pattern

Dispersed agricultural settlement continues. Textile manufacturing develops at Stoneville and Pondville, with worker duplex rows and boarding houses in the 1830s, and expansion in the 1860s. A depot center develops after the railroad is established in 1840. Some linear residential development occurs along Central Street between the meetinghouse center and the depot.

### D. Economic Base

Factory-organized manufacturing did not successfully appear in Auburn until the 1840s. However, a brick woolen mill and housing for workers were built in 1834 in the northern part of town by

Jeremy Stone, after whom the village took its name of Stoneville. The mill ceased operation during the 1837 Panic, and in 1839 was converted to cotton production under the name of the Stoneville Mfg. Co. By 1870, the manufacturing complex at Stoneville included the cotton mill, a machine shop, tape factory, and blacksmith shop, and employed more than 130 men and women in the production of sheetings and tapes worth more than \$140,000.

A second textile operation was introduced during the 1850s in Pondville, where a saw and grist mill was converted to yarn production. In 1862, B. F. Larned introduced satinet machinery. During the Civil War, the factory employed 69 men and women and produced satinets and Union cassimeres. Fires occurred in 1865 and 1870, but the mill was rebuilt each time. Larned also owned and operated a shoddy factory north of the center on Dunne Pond.

Paper manufacturing was established in 1837 by Daniel Haywood above Stoneville, where he built a four-story mill. In that year, 52 tons of paper were produced by three men. A flood in 1856 carried the mill away and it was never rebuilt.

Leather and woodworking were small but important industries in Auburn. The Warren family succeeded Goulding in the tannery in 1807 and continued to operate the tannery for three generations. Although no boot and shoe factories were erected in Auburn, the craft was carried on in numerous shops and homes through the period. In 1875, 60 men and women were employed in custom work and finishing of boots and shoes. Auburn's forests provided fuel and building materials to Worcester and Millbury. By 1865, 800,000 feet of boards, up to 3,800 cords of firewood, and large quantities of lathe, clapboards, and shingles were cut and prepared annually.

Despite the several small, thriving industries, the town remained very much an agricultural community. Mixed husbandry was still the rule through the period, but many farmers were beginning to focus their efforts on dairying and supplying produce to the growing manufacturing communities of Worcester and Millbury. Whole milk sales by 1865 totalled nearly 39,000 gallons, and as forests were cut for building materials and fuel, the land was converted to mowing and pasturage. Orcharding and vegetable- and poultry-raising increased, while cultivation of grains fell off considerably. Between 1855 and 1865 alone, the amount of land devoted to corn, rye, barley, and oats fell by more than 250 acres.

#### E. Architecture

Residential: Traditional center and double chimney houses declined in popularity in favor of the gable end, side-passage plan. The greatest number of these occur at the end of the period, with late Greek and Italianate trim. Many are one-and-a-half-story units and are linked to the development of the mill towns, particularly Stoneville in this period. Stoneville also retains some traditional, Greek Revival worker housing, including two-story, six-bay, double chimney,

multi-family units and some later (ca. 1860) one-story, six-bay, end chimney duplexes. Single-story, end chimney, four-bay duplexes also survive.

Institutional: St. Joseph's Roman Catholic church, a one-story, gable end, frame Gothic Revival structure, was built in Stoneville in 1869.

Industrial: Mill building erected in Stoneville in 1834.

## IX. LATE INDUSTRIAL PERIOD (1870-1915)

### A. Transportation Routes

The Webster Branch, Boston and Albany Railroad, is built in 1885, with a junction with the Albany road in the southeast part of town. By 1900, electric streetcar service opens through Auburn from Worcester to Oxford/Charlton. From Worcester, the line runs on Elmwood-Hampton-Southbridge-Central-Southbridge Streets through Auburn Center and into Oxford. A second line from Worcester runs on a new right-of-way (later Pinehurst Avenue-Bryn Mawr Avenue), then southeast along the Webster Railroad grade into Oxford.

### B. Population

Population growth continued, and accelerated, nearly tripling during the period. From a total of 1,178 in 1870, the town grew slowly for ten years to 1,317 before a brief drop in 1885 to 1,268. Growth continued slowly through 1900, when the total reached 1,621; in the next 15-year period the increase was dramatic, doubling to 3,281 in 1915. Immigration to the town continued so that the foreign-born proportion grew to a high of 32.3% in 1895. Throughout this period, French Canadians were the most numerous, with the Irish diminishing; Swedes increased in the town, equal in numbers to the Canadians by 1915; other small groups included English and Germans, and later Russians. Although the groups' total increased, their proportion in the town fell, to 26.6% in 1915. Manufacturing continued to grow in importance, employing 625 men and 135 women by 1915, figures that represent over half of all employment for that year. The town formed a free public library in 1873. High school students attended in Worcester. An Episcopal mission from Worcester, St. George's, existed from 1906 to 1916.

### C. Settlement Pattern

Late 19th century reconstruction and minor expansion of established institutional and industrial centers occurs. Major streetcar suburbs develop from Worcester in the north part of town after ca. 1900. A Catholic Mission Chapel is built at Stoneville in 1870. The Pondville industrial complex is rebuilt after a fire in 1880. New town hall and church are built in the Center after the meetinghouse is destroyed by fire, 1896. A Library is built in the Center in 1911.

Several areas of suburban development occur in the north, with most construction in 1910-15, including "Elm Hill" (northwest slope of Pakachoag Hill east of Southbridge Street), and the Oxford Street/Bryn Mawr Avenue area. In addition, the Worcester-Southbridge Street Railway Company builds an amusement park, "Pinehurst," between Pinehurst Avenue and Oxford Street ca. 1900.

#### D. Economic Base

The prosperity stimulated by the Civil War continued into the 1880s, as the textile industry continued to dominate the local economy. The death of C. W. Smith, the owner of the Stoneville cotton mill, in 1880, and a fire and changes in ownership at the Pondville satinet mill after 1883 caused the mills to be idled. Production dropped from \$240,000 worth of goods in 1880 to only \$116,000 in 1885. A depression in the textile industry during the mid 1890s prevented a return to prosperity, as the Pondville and Stoneville mills again changed hands a number of times, sat idle for up to a year, and were eventually sold at public auctions. In 1901, the mills were purchased by the Worcester Carpet Co. and a New York firm and put into operation; by 1905 these mills produced carpet yarn and ladies' woolen dress goods worth more than \$600,000. The town's population doubled between 1900 and 1915, the largest growth in a 15-year period since settlement. However, several firms did close during this period. The shoddy mill on Dunne Pond near Auburn Center burned in 1877 and 1887, finally closing in the early 20th century. The Warren Tannery burned in 1893, but continued at a new site in West Auburn into the early 20th century before closing.

During the difficult years of the 1880s and 1890s, the workers employed in manufacturing in Auburn fared poorly, working in old and poorly capitalized facilities. The total real, cash, and credit capital invested in the town's industries in 1885 was \$38,715; only the 12 most agricultural towns in the county had less capital invested in manufacturing. The average annual wage of a person employed in manufacturing was \$314 in 1895, well below the county average of \$432 and the third lowest in the county.

The town's agricultural sector, however, experienced steady growth in the value of agricultural goods and the number of individual farms, although farm size and total farm acreage decreased. Dairying and market gardening showed the greatest increase. Whole milk sales, only 38,900 gallons in 1865, totalled more than 524,000 gallons in 1905. Market gardens increased from eight acres in 1885 to 198 acres in 1905, the sixth largest acreage in the county. Egg and poultry farms and orchards also increased; by 1905 nearly 10% of the \$319,180 total value of agricultural goods was from poultry.

Farming became much more intensive by the early 20th century. In 1895, 81 mixed husbandry farms averaged 55 acres; in 1905, there were 165 such farms averaging 22 acres. Hay, an important cash

crop as well as feed for the dairy herds, was grown on almost twice as much land in 1905 as in 1865.

#### E. Architecture

**Residential:** The two- and three-bay, gable end, side-passage plan was built in large numbers in the 1880s and 1890s around the mill villages of Stoneville and Pakachoag and on Central Street northeast of the center along the railroad. Modest Queen Anne dwellings were built during the 1890s. Some late, one-and-a-half-story, double chimney mill housing survives in Stoneville. Early bungalowoid forms appeared during the latter portion of the period, concentrated around Stoneville and Pakachoag.

**Institutional:** Improvements were made to the interior of the original 1783 meetinghouse; however, the structure burned in 1896. The present First Congregational church replaced the old meetinghouse. Erected in 1896, the church is a Craftsman influenced building with a tall tower and arched porch entry designed by Edwin T. Chapin of Worcester. The first town hall was constructed in the same year and in the same mode, possibly another Chapin design (the town officers had previously been located in the basement of the meetinghouse).

A ca. 1900, two-story school of molded concrete block and frame was built adjacent to St. Joseph's Church in Stoneville and appears to have replaced an earlier school building on the site.

The Merriam Library, a one-story, three-bay, Flemish bond brick, Colonial Revival edifice, was built in the Center in 1910.

#### X. EARLY MODERN PERIOD (1915-1940)

##### A. Transportation Routes

By the 1920s, local roads are improved as automobile highways, as the electric streetcar system is phased out. However, the Bryn Mawr line continues operations into the 1930s. Southbridge Street (Route 12) is improved as a highway in the 1920s. By 1930, a new east-west regional highway (Route 20-Southwest cut-off) is opened through the southeast half of town, with junction with Route 12 in the southwest.

##### B. Population

Overall population growth continued rapidly, from 3,281 in 1915, more than doubling to 6,629 in 1940. The foreign-born continued to diminish proportionally, from 26.6% in 1915 to 16.4% in 1940. Manufacturing employment continued to be important through the period's end, when over 500 men were so employed, with an equal number in crafts; the total equalled over half of the total employment. Clerical employment increased for both men and women, and overtook manufacturing for the latter group. A Lutheran mission was established in Stoneville in 1920, and a chapel in

Pakachoag in 1929; the Episcopalians reorganized in 1930. Students continued to attend Worcester high schools until the town formed its own in 1937.

#### C. Settlement Pattern

Continued heavy streetcar and early automobile suburbs develop from Worcester, primarily in the north. Church and school construction serves this suburban population. Some industrial development occurs along the Southbridge Street corridor. Period suburban development is heaviest in the following areas: the north slopes of Pakachoag Hill; the Woodland Park/Boyce Street area east of Oxford Street; the Oxford Street/Bryn Mawr Avenue corridor; Auburn Street; and the Central/South Street area south of Auburn Center. Churches include Lutheran (1924) and Episcopal (1933) in the Stoneville area, and Pakachoag Chapel (1929, rebuilt 1934). A half dozen schools are built in the 1920s, with a High School on Auburn Street (1936). Fringe industrial expansion south from Worcester along Southbridge Street/railroad corridor, with two concrete manufacturers, a rendering company, and a chain manufacturer by the late 1930s.

#### D. Economic Base

The period between the two world wars brought a number of changes in Auburn. The automobile and truck replaced the horse and wagon as a means of transportation and for hauling goods, and thus greatly reduced the need for hay, to which one third of Auburn's farmland had been devoted prior to World War I. This opened more land for the residential development needed to accommodate the growing population, which more than doubled between 1915 and 1940. Most of this growth was a product of Worcester's continued expansion and Auburn's development as a suburban residential community rather than internal growth in Auburn. In 1940, only 403 wage earners were employed in Auburn, an increase of less than 150 from 1905. The town did gain several new industries during the late 1920s and 1930s: the Worcester Rendering Co., which employed 50 and processed tallow, grease, poultry feed, fertilizers, and furs; the Baldwin Duckworth Co., which employed 200; and two concrete block manufacturers. The textile mills at Pondville and Stoneville survived the Depression despite several periods when operations ceased. The value of manufactured goods in 1940 totaled \$2,328,532.

By the late 1930s, there were four major dairies in Auburn: the Worcester Milk and Cream Co., Hillcrest Dairy Farms, H. P. Hood and Sons, Inc., and Mapleside Farms (the latter two were on Pakachoag Hill). Several large market gardens and orchards of peach and apple trees were cultivated.

#### E. Architecture

A large number of bungalows and 1930s and 1940s style Colonial Revival houses are clustered around the Center, Stoneville, and Pakachoag. A few triple deckers were built at Stoneville. No

high style or large-scale domestic dwellings were erected. One 1925 fieldstone and shingle house is recorded.

Institutional: Bethel Evangelical Lutheran Church erected in 1924. St. George's Episcopal mission purchased St. Thomas' Church building from Cherry Valley (?) and moved it to Auburn ca. 1933. Pakachoag Chapel Association building erected during this period.

The brick Colonial Revival Auburn High School was erected in 1935 to the design of Lucius W. Briggs of Worcester. An eight-room school was erected in Stoneville in 1926, followed by the construction of the Julia Bancroft School in 1927. A new school was built in 1928 at Elm Hill. In 1930, the Mary D. Stone School was constructed in the Center.

Commercial: Diner is located on Route 20 west of Oxford Street.

Industrial: A 1925 brick mill stands on the west side of Route 12 in Pakachoag. Fires destroyed the Stoneville mill in 1941 and the Pondville mill in 1952.

#### XI. SURVEY OBSERVATIONS

Auburn has a comprehensive inventory which covers all periods up to the Early Modern more than adequately. The inventory summary provides a concise overview of the town's architectural development. Field work verified the inventory and supplemented it with the addition of early 20th century housing.

#### XII. SOURCES