

# MHC Reconnaissance Survey Town Report

## WEBSTER

Report Date: 1983

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.

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: 1983

COMMUNITY: Webster

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### I. TOPOGRAPHY

The dominant feature of Webster's topography is Lake Chaubunagungamaug, a large lake approximately three miles long and 1 1/2 miles wide, located in the center of the town. To the east of the lake lies the rough stony ground which is the western edge of Douglas Rocky Woods, rising to more than 900 feet above sea level on Wood Hill. To the southwest a low ridge of glacial till rising to more than 600 feet above sea level separates the lake from the narrow French River Valley, while northwest from East Village to the French River and the Oxford line continue the broad glacial terraces and outwash plains which began just below North Oxford.

The soils of Webster are not as good as those of neighboring towns of Charlton, Dudley, Oxford, and Sutton, resembling more the sandy glacial till soils of Douglas. Fairly good agricultural land is found on the terrace deposits which surround the lake and on the outwash plain to the northwest, but the remainder consists of the less productive, stony Gloucester series soils and rough stony land.

The town was initially attractive because of the large and unfailing water power provided by the French River and Lake Chaubunagungamaug. It was here that Samuel Slater concentrated a large portion of his manufacturing capital in the erection of seven cotton and woolen mills by 1832.

### II. POLITICAL BOUNDARIES

Part originally included the five-mile square of land west of Lake Chaubunagungamaug reserved for the Nipmuck Indians in 1681. Incorporated as a town in 1832, from parts of Dudley, Oxford, and certain unincorporated territory (Oxford South Gore) in Worcester County. Bounds with Douglas established 1841.

### III. HISTORIC OVERVIEW

Urban-industrial center on the French River corridor, with native village site north of Lake Chaubunagungamaug. Sparse, dispersed 18th century settlement of marginal, peripheral lands of Dudley and Oxford. Early 19th century Slater textile manufacturing developments on French River and Mill Brook tributary at North, East, and South Villages. Sustained 19th century urban-industrial expansion, stimulated in part by 1840 rail connections, with

commercial center development at Depot Village. Polyglot immigrant labor population, including significant German and Polish groups. Variety of 19th century residential neighborhoods remain intact, with notable survivals of early worker housing.

Intensive 20th century recreational cottage development on Webster Lake. Recent Route 52 corridor development, industrial park construction, and suburban growth continue to threaten a variety of structures and sites.

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

##### A. Transportation Routes

French River corridor, with rocky uplands east of Lake Chaubunagungamaug. Trail from west to lake from Freeman's Brook tributary (Perryville Road-Ash Street-abandoned road). North-south trail from Oxford to Thompson, Connecticut east of lake (Old Oxford Road-Worcester Road-Thompson Road). Trail east of lake over rocky highlands to Wallum Lake (Gore Road-Upper Gore Road).

##### B. Settlement Pattern

The presence of the large Lake Chaubunagungamaug indicates a high potential for sites during this period, though none are known except by rumor. Fishing here undoubtedly brought large numbers. The translation of the lake's name, meaning "boundary fishing place" suggests that the area divided neighboring groups, but it is not known if this division was between smaller tribal groups, the Pegas on the west, from the Manchaug and Waentuck to the west; or less likely, the Nipmucks from the Mohecans, farther to the south.

##### C. Subsistence Pattern

The lake provided a base and location for winter fishing. Neighboring areas were exploited seasonally from here: the uplands during winter for hunting, adjacent rivers for seasonal runs of fish in spring, and to corn fields in summer.

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

##### A. Transportation Routes

Contact period trails continue in use.

##### B. Settlement Pattern

Settlement continues to focus on the large lake, which becomes the basis for the new praying town named Chaubunagungamaug after it.

Gookin numbers nine families and 45 individuals in residence here. He adds that the village was the best instructed of the new towns, taught by Joseph of Hassanemesit (Grafton), and the dwelling place of Black James. No known colonial settlement.

### C. Subsistence Pattern

Contact period patterns persist until the formation of the praying town when a more settled pattern was adopted by some converted individuals.

## VI. COLONIAL PERIOD (1675-1775)

### A. Transportation Routes

Peripheral area of Dudley and Oxford, with trails improved as roads from Oxford meetinghouse (Old Oxford Road, Cudworth Road-Kingsbury Road), and from Dudley meetinghouse (Main Street, North Main Street, School Street).

### B. Population

Some evidence of continued native population early in the period, disappearing by the end. Colonials in the area from ca. 1731 but numbers unknown because a part of Dudley. Baptists probably in this area from 1744.

### C. Settlement Pattern

When the Nipmucks sold their land in this area to Stoughton and Dudley in 1681 a portion of their five-mile reservation fell within the present towns of Dudley and Webster; the area lay from Lake Chaubunagungamaug west to Dudley Center. Soon, however, the sales of the reserve to colonials reduced the claim substantially, with sale of 8,000 acres in 1707, a square mile in 1724, the confirmation of a grant to Dudley in 1731, so that by the second quarter of the century the Native holdings were exclusively within the Webster area. Sales continued so that only 200 acres remained at period's end. This was the only praying town in Worcester County to exist in 1684, but no Native Americans are listed in the 1765 census.

Colonial settlement began after the incorporation of the parent town of Dudley in 1731. Information is scarce, but the water power resources are presumed to have attracted grist and sawmill development.

### D. Economic Base

Little information available, but agriculture probably supplemented by grist and sawmill privileges on the French River, and fishing in the large lake.

### E. Architecture

One mid- to late-18th century dwelling is recorded; this is a single-story, four-bay, center chimney house. No other apparent period survivals.

## VII. FEDERAL PERIOD (1775-1830)

### A. Transportation Routes

Colonial roadways continue in use, with the addition of two turnpikes. The Gore Turnpike (chartered 1825) connects the Slater Mills (East Village) to the Ninth Massachusetts Turnpike in Douglas (Gore Road-Douglas Road). The Central Turnpike is incorporated in 1826, completed by 1829 (Main Street-East Main Street-Sutton Road) with abandoned section between Slater Mills and Cudworth/Sutton Road intersection.

### B. Population

Few figures available, since the area was still part of the towns of Oxford and Dudley and the unincorporated Gore. The Baptists organized a society here in 1798, reorganizing in 1814 with 55 members. They received preachers from Thompson, Connecticut, as well as the black Rev. Paul from Boston. Universalists existed, meeting informally, as did the Methodists until a society was formed by 15, ca. 1825.

### C. Settlement Pattern

Small pre-1812 population with dispersed farms, mainly north and west of lake. Several textile manufacturing villages develop in the second decade of the 19th century. Slater Mills built at northern outlet of lake (later East Village) 1811-12, with worker housing on Worcester Road/Thompson Road. Textile manufacturing on French River at South Village (later Depot Village/Webster Center) after 1820. Baptist (1825-26) and Methodist Episcopal (1828) meetinghouses are built at South Village.

### D. Economic Base

Prior to the introduction of textile manufacturing in 1810, Webster, then a part of Dudley, contained several grist mills, sawmills, triphammer shops, and an iron furnace. Ore for iron-making was supplied from a hill along Mine Brook. Most of its residents were engaged in agriculture, but the stony soil over most of the town kept agricultural production at a low level. Only on the sandy terrace deposits along the lake, on the outwash plain in the northern portion of the town, and in the area west of the lake the lands yielded moderate levels of hay and grain. Sheep and cattle were kept, though their numbers were not very high. East of the lake, the rough stony ground remained mostly wooded through the period, forming the western edge of the area known as Douglas Woods.

Textile manufacturing was first established on the site of North Village around 1810, when the Village Cotton, Woolen, and Linen Co. was incorporated. It was followed by the erection of a cotton mill at the northern end of Lake Chaubunagungamaug in 1812 by Samuel Slater, an Englishman who was the first in America to successfully manufacture cotton thread and yarn by water power in Pawtucket, Rhode Island in 1793. In 1815 the Slater and Howard Woolen Mill was erected, also at East Village, and in 1816 a company was organized and mill erected on the French River, at what later became Chaserville, but on the Webster side. This mill was operated as the Dudley Cotton Mfg. Co. Slater expanded his operations with a new woolen mill erected on the French River at what became South Village in 1821, and in 1824 Slater purchased the former Village Factory, dwellings, and water privilege at what became North Village. By 1832 the North Village cotton mills employed more than 150 men, women and children, the East Village mills 43, and the South Village mills about 130. The woolen mill produced broadcloths, cassimeres, and satinets worth more than \$110,000 while the cotton mills produced sheetings, shirtings, thread, and satinet warp worth \$90,000 in 1832. Most goods were sold in New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore, and Charleston, and some cotton goods were sold to the newly opened markets of South America. Until 1829, all weaving was put out to area handweavers, as Samuel Slater was one of the last manufacturers to switch to power looms. Hundreds of area residents were provided work weaving in their homes for more than a decade.

#### E. Architecture

Residential: One-story, center chimney houses constructed of wood frame and cut granite blocks were noted. A few double and end chimney two-story houses occur. One end chimney house is frame with brick end walls; the second, and most outstanding is the George B. Slater House, built of granite. Both are double-pile plans. The Slater House stands in the North Village and was constructed in 1827. The two-story, five-bay, double-pile, end chimney plan is constructed of coursed granite blocks. Late 19th century rounded dormers project from the hipped roof on the front and sides. An Italianate/Stick Style porch was also added in the late 19th century. An early 19th century barn survives, to the southeast. Currently, the house is undergoing an unsympathetic renovation. Most of the carefully landscaped garden and orchard have already been destroyed.

Multi-family worker housing for the Slater Mills comprises a large part of the surviving domestic architecture of 19th century Webster. The quality and quantity of worker housing is outstanding and is documented in the inventory. Both frame and masonry units exist; the most popular form appears to have been one-story, six-bay, double chimney duplexes with entrances at the outside ends of the main facade. Examples occur in frame, but are primarily of granite with alternating narrow and wide courses. Four-unit examples also survive, and there are some with corbelled brick cornices. Two-story units do not appear to have been as frequently built as the one-story units; however, several six- and seven-bay, two-story brick units with double chimneys survive.

Center chimney examples seem to occur less frequently. These structures were built from the 1820s on through the end of the Early Industrial period with very little variation, making it difficult to date them from exterior observation alone.

**Institutional:** Between 1825-26, a Baptist church was erected. The Methodist Episcopal church (no longer standing) was built in 1828. The North Village schoolhouse, constructed ca. 1812, was once used by the Baptist, Methodist, and Universalist congregations before each had its own building. A brick schoolhouse survives from 1821.

**Industrial:** Between 1829 and 1830, Slater Mills began erecting the granite mill buildings which survive today.

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

### A. Transportation Routes

The north/south Norwich and Worcester Railroad (1840) is built along the French River corridor, with depot in South Village. The Southbridge Branch, Boston, Hartford and Erie Railroad, is constructed from the East Thompson, Connecticut junction, west of the lake and through the Depot Village by 1865.

### B. Population

From its incorporation in 1832, the town's population growth was rapid and substantial, more than quadrupling from 1,168 that year to 4,765 in 1870. The manufacturing focus of the town was clear in the employment figures, with 381 compared with 148 farmers, and tripling to 1,098 males and 499 females in 1875. The proportion of foreign-born in the town was one of the county's highest and well above the county's average figure, expanding from 32.5% in 1855 to 40.7% in 1875. Predictably, the Irish dominated initially, only to be replaced by large numbers of Canadians here and in neighboring towns. Also important was the early migration of Germans to the town, who would continue to grow in importance in the late 18th century. Not surprisingly a large number of denominations formed churches here at this time, including Congregationalists, numbering 41, in 1838; a second Methodist Society in the East Village from 1833-67 when the two merged; Universalists formed a society in 1869, and Episcopal Church of the Reconciliation a year later. Catholics were served from St. John's in Worcester from 1844 until the formation of the parish of St. Louis in 1853. By the end of the period, many voluntary associations were established, for Yankees, including Masons (1859), temperance groups; for workers, the Sons of Industry; for Germans, Masons (1863); and for the French, Artesians. Educational endeavors were also numerous, including establishment of a town high school (1855), and voluntary efforts including a Lyceum and Library Association.

### C. Settlement Pattern

Industrial and residential expansion continues in North and East Villages. Major development occurs in Depot (South) Village, which becomes the commercial, institutional, and residential focus after the 1840 rail connection. A new North Village mill is built in 1836, with subsequent period additions. Worker housing is added east of the mills on Pearl, North Main, and Slater Streets. East Village mill additions are made from 1844-54. Residential development extends westward on East Main toward the Depot Center, and some worker housing is added to the established area west of the mills. The second Methodist Episcopal church is built in the East Village in 1833.

In the Depot Village, a commercial center develops on Main Street east and west of the depot. Religious institutions are dispersed, with the only concentration at the Main/Church Street intersection, where the 3rd Methodist Episcopal Church (1867) and Congregational Church (the old First Methodist Episcopal Church of 1828, enlarged 1842-47) face each other across Main Street. The Universalist Church (1867) locates closer to the tracks on School Street, while the St. Louis Catholic Church (1851-55; enlarged 1865) is built to the east on Lake Street. The Baptist Church (1867-68) locates even further east on East Main. The high school/town hall, built in 1855, burns in 1870. Industrial expansion continues along the French River corridor, with textile mills west of the Main/East Main intersection and shoe shops (after 1850) along Main and clustered around the depot.

Residential expansion primarily occurs south and west of the Main Street/French River corridor, with the main linear extensions on School, Lake and East Main Streets. Development also extends north on North Main. Slater worker tenements are built near the mills on Main Street, and a block east on Prospect Street. Worker housing is also constructed in the area between the French River and the railroad (Union Street, Pleasant Street, Chase Avenue) and on High Street east of the tracks. School Street is developed as an early period high income corridor, with linear extension south past Hill Street. Middle income housing construction takes place southeast of the School/Hill Street intersection and Main Street continues as a residential corridor east of Bakery Street. The highest density residential area is that one block south of Main from School to Bartlett Streets and along Negus and Prospect Streets.

### D. Economic Base

Textile manufacturing, which dominated Webster's economy by the start of the period, continued to be the leading industry. However, after the construction of the Norwich and Worcester Railroad through the town in 1840 and the introduction of shoe manufacturing during the 1840s, the town's economic base experienced steady growth through the period as a number of shops and small manufacturing ventures were established. By 1870 the town's population had tripled; a second rail line, a branch of the Boston, Hartford and Erie Railroad, was constructed through the

town in 1866; Depot Village became the commercial center of the town, stimulated by the railroads and the concentration of shoe shops; and more than 60 merchants and traders were located in the town, making Webster a regional commercial center.

Slater's mills, operated under the firm of Samuel Slater and Sons, greatly expanded their operations during the period. Through the 1840s and 1850s, additions were made and new buildings were erected at all three villages. By 1875 the woolen mills at South Village employed 711 operatives and contained 36 sets of machinery, the second highest number of sets in the country. At North Village, 410 men and women were employed in 1875 spinning and weaving cotton cloth, while at East Village the processes of bleaching, dyeing and finishing were concentrated. Production increased through the period, reaching up to 3.5 million yards of cotton cloth and 200,000 yards of woolen cloth annually in the years before the Civil War. During the war, the woolen mills manufactured blankets and uniform cloth for the Union Army; by 1865 the output of the mills was more than 2 million yards of cambric and 238,000 yards of broadcloth worth nearly \$1.7 million. High Civil War-period production had increased the value of manufactured goods in Webster from \$355,000 in 1855 to more than \$2.1 million in 1865.

Shoe manufacturing, which followed textile manufacturing in importance, was begun in 1843 by Henry Bugbee, who came to Webster as the agent of a Natick, Mass. shoe manufacturer. Bugbee brought shoe parts out in Natick to be bound and bottomed in Webster homes. Fifty to sixty men and women were so employed until the late 1840s, the women doing the shoe binding and the men the bottoming. By 1865 a number of shops, concentrated at Depot Village, employed 206 men and 79 women in the production of 284,000 pairs of shoes worth \$414,000. Before the Civil War, production and employment were even higher; most of the shoes made were cheap brogans, sold in the South for slave wear and in the West. After the war, production shifted to a higher quality shoe and continued to increase in value.

A number of other industries were established in Webster during the period. The manufacture of caps was carried on briefly in the 1850s and straw bonnets and hats and silk bonnets were made during the 1850s and 1860s. The manufacture of custom-made clothing was begun in the early 1860s and by 1865 four shops produced clothing worth \$12,800.

Lumber and woodworking industries also flourished during the period. Up to 300,000 feet of boards and 4,800 cords of firewood were cut annually, and during the 1840s several thousand bushels of charcoal were burned to supply a forge and hollowware furnace. Wagon and railroad car manufacturing, chair and cabinetmaking, the manufacture of coffins, and several sash, blind and door mills operated between the 1840s and early 1870s. Tin and sheet iron ware were produced as early as 1837, and by the 1850s the town supported a bakery, brewery, marble gravestone cutter, and a Daguerrotype photographer. A weekly newspaper was established in 1859 and in 1868 the Webster Five Cents Savings Bank was

organized. Further evidence of the town's maturity was the creation of a water works in 1867.

Agricultural production on the 60-80 farms that operated during the period remained mixed, although dairying became most important by the end of the period. By 1865 the number of milk cows in town peaked at 245. That year, 23,625 gallons of whole milk and 3,400 lbs. of butter were sold. While the amount of land devoted to hay increased, that devoted to grains steadily decreased. Acres in potatoes and vegetables also increased through the period, as local markets for produce grew. The Slater company operated its own farms at East and North Villages. In 1855 the North Village farm alone owned 65 cows, 60 bulls, and 101 oxen. Vegetables, meat, and dairy products were supplied to employees from these farms.

### E. Architecture

**Residential:** During the early portion of the period, the single-story, center chimney plan seems to have been the most frequently built. Both one- and two-story double chimney, double-pile houses also survive from this first half of the period. End chimney houses occur much less frequently; however, the two examples noted were both substantial double-pile plans, one being of brick construction with a hipped roof. The ubiquitous gable-end, side-passage plan becomes the more common form and carries over into the latter half of the period. The traditional center and double chimney plans all but vanish during the 1850-1870 period. Five-bay, center entry gable end plans occur infrequently. Second Empire style dwellings adopt either the side-passage plan or center entry form; one five-bay, center entry survives.

As in the previous period, the abundance of surviving worker housing is overwhelming. The same forms are employed throughout this period, as well as the same materials as found in the Federal period units.

**Institutional:** A second Methodist Episcopal Church was built in 1833 near the East Village. In 1834, a Greek Revival Roman Catholic Church (no longer extant) was constructed for the French Canadian population. In 1842, a Congregational church was built. By the mid 1850s, a "plain . . . brick" St. Louis Roman Catholic Church had been built and was enlarged in 1865. St. Anthony of Padua Roman Catholic church (demolished), a frame Victorian Gothic structure, was erected in 1867. In that same year, a Universalist church was built and the Methodists erected their third church opposite the site of the first structure on Main Street. Between 1867-68, the Baptists built a granite, gable-end, Gothic style church. In 1870, the Church of the Reconciliation was constructed by the Episcopalians. The frame board and batten structure, now unfortunately sheathed in aluminum siding, is attributed to Richard Upjohn.

The first town hall was constructed of brick in 1855. The two-story structure measured 40x60 feet.

An opera house was built in 1867 which consisted of three-and-a-half stories with a five-bay gable end facade with center entry.

Commercial: The Sheldon Hotel was built in 1868 on the site of a ca. 1830 structure. The Sheldon continued in operation as the DeWitt until it closed in 1931; the building was demolished in 1939. The Joslin House, ca. 1844, was considered the town's primary hotel during the 19th century.

Other commercial buildings began to appear in the center by the 1850s. The McQuaid Block dates to 1862. A frame two-story, nine-bay Greek/Italianate commercial structure survives from this period built by Slater. The brick Spaulding Block was erected in 1866. An early two-story commercial row survives from the first part of the period.

Industrial: Slater mill buildings continued to be built into the 1840s and expanded throughout the period. The distinguished wide and narrow coursed, granite buildings characterize the Slater Mills and the worker housing of the period.

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

### A. Transportation Routes

The north-south Webster Branch, Boston and Albany Railroad opens service in 1885. By 1900 the north-south street railway is in service in the French River corridor from Oxford/Worcester through East Village and Depot Village south of Thompson, Connecticut (Old Oxford Road-East Main Street-School Street) with a new right-of-way south of Ash Street.

### B. Population

Although growth slowed some during this period, it continued to be rapid and steady, nearly tripling from 4,763 in 1870 to 12,565 in 1915. Immigrants continued to make up a significant part of the town, reaching their highest percentage, 41.7%, in 1885. Thereafter, the figure dropped, particularly between 1905 and 1915 when it reached 33.2%. Germans and French Canadians dominated, until the former with Austrians became most numerous in 1905. The Poles also increased during the period and by 1915 became overwhelming in numbers, accounting for more than 40% of the town's foreign-born population. Manufacturing occupations too continued to grow, more than doubling during the period until 2,636 men and 1,066 women were so employed.

As the Catholic population grew, the number of churches multiplied, many focusing on specific ethnic groups. A second French church, Sacred Heart, was formed in 1870, the Polish parish of St. Joseph in 1887. A Second Adventist group was formed in 1883, perhaps sharing the belief of C. T. Russell, who believed the millenium had begun in 1874, and whose followers built the Jehovah's Witness publishing empire. A group of Reformed Methodists, who reject the leadership of bishops, formed a society

in east Webster in 1872. The German Evangelical church, Zion Lutheran, was formed in 1895. In 1902, the Slovak Catholics who had been worshipping at St. Joseph's purchased the Universalist meetinghouse and formed St. Anthony of Padua church. The schismatic Polish National Church formed Holy Trinity church in 1903.

Each group formed its own voluntary associations: among the French were St. Jean Baptiste (1881), French Foresters (1909); for the Irish, Hibernians (1893); for the Italians a Knights of Columbus (1897); for the Germans a Turn Verein Vorwaertz Society (1887) among others. The industrial element was reflected in the Sovereigns of Industry and United Workmen organizations.

### C. Settlement Pattern

Industrial and residential expansion continued in the established centers, with major commercial, residential, and institutional growth and diversification as the Depot Village area takes on a larger urban form. Mill expansion continues in North Village, with worker housing infill on Perry Street. Residential expansion also occurs in the East Village, with a row of brick worker duplexes on Hartley Street west of the mills, and a residential cluster on Slater Street north of East Main. The Second Methodist Episcopal Church (1833) is taken over by the French Catholics in 1876.

On South Main in the Depot Village, the commercial center expands eastward with multi-story brick blocks from the 1870s to ca. 1912. A number of new denominational churches are built, mostly in the emerging residential neighborhoods beyond the eastern edge of the area built up by 1870. These include the Protestant Episcopal Church (1870) on North Main, the Church of the Sacred Heart (1895) on East Main, St. Joseph's Church on Whitcomb, the Zion Lutheran Church (1895) on Lincoln, Holy Trinity Polish Catholic Church (1903), and the Second Advent Church at the Myrtle/Park intersection.

Slater Mill expansion continues (particularly 1900-1905), the area near the depot continues as a mixed manufacturing zone, and Bates Shoe opens a large plant on Maple/Mechanic Streets south of the commercial center (ca. 1890).

Significant expansion and infilling of existing residential areas occurs, with linear growth continuing along School and Lake Streets. By the 1890s, infilling is complete in the worker housing area between the French River and the railroad. The School Street corridor extends south beyond Klebart Avenue with a small cluster of high income estates at the southern extend of the built up area. The area between School and High Street is filled with single- and multi-family homes as far as Hill Street. Between School and Lake Street, the high density residential area spreads south to Park Street, with less dense expansion to Boyden and beyond Poland Street. Residences are constructed east between

Lake and East Main to Whitcomb and Lincoln Streets, and extend further to the Eddy Street area.

Outside the established built-up areas, residential development occurs on the east and west shores of Lake Chaubunagungamaug at Wawela Park and Brick Island. The Reform Methodist Church (1872) locates on the east shore of the lake.

#### D. Economic Base

Webster's economy further increased its diversified manufacturing base through the period, though the major industry remained textile manufacturing. Cotton and woolen mills provided most of the town's jobs and a large percentage of the value of goods produced annually. The town experienced steady, uninterrupted growth, as its population nearly tripled between 1870 and 1915. This expansion of the population and economic base further enhanced Webster's role as a regional commercial center. By 1905 there were 105 trading establishments in the town, with goods sold totaling \$1.9 million. It was during the years between 1900 and 1920 that most of Webster's surviving commercial buildings along Main Street were erected.

A major step in the diversification of Webster's economy occurred in 1872 when the Webster Steam Power Co. was founded. Organized by a group of local investors, the company followed the successful examples set in Worcester of erecting buildings and renting space and power to small manufacturers, thus lowering their initial costs of entry into manufacturing. The Webster group erected a three-story machine shop, three-story shoe shop, iron foundry, gristmill, sawmill and box shop in an area bounded by Park Street, Maple Street, Myrtle Street and Elm Street. A fire in 1879 destroyed the foundry and gristmill, but the remaining shops and mill continued into the 1880s and 1890s.

Shoe manufacturing maintained its position as the second leading industry through the period, giving employment to more people than all other industries combined, with the exception of cotton and woolens. By the late 1870s, up to 1,000 people worked in Webster's shoe factories, shops, and in home workshops. Several shoe manufacturers survived the period with large, expanded plants. B. A. Corbin and Son, organized in 1862, operated a factory on Main Street into the 1920s. The A. J. Bates Co. of New York City established a shoe manufactory in 1886 near the Webster Steam Power Co. site to manufacture one line of shoes formerly made for them by E. and A. H. Batchelder Co. of North Brookfield. The company expanded several times through the 1890s with a number of additions and new buildings erected, despite a depression and increased labor/management conflict during the mid 1890s.

The Slater Woolen Mills remained the major source of blankets and uniform cloth to the various branches of the U. S. military, as well as providing uniforms to the Pullman service, hotel and other uniformed employees, and broadcloths, flannel, and doeskins for general consumption. By the late 1890s the Slater Woolen Co.

employed 900 men and women while the mills at East and North Villages employed 800 in the production and finishing of cambrics, calicos, and cotton piece goods. The textile industry also suffered during the 1890s and early 20th century. The depression forced the periodic closing of most mills, reductions in wages, and strikes. The Slater companies took the opportunity to modernize their mills, but it was not until the late 1890s that wages were again increased. In 1899 and 1901 the deaths of Horatio Nelson Slater, the son of Samuel Slater, and Henry H. Stevens, the founder of the Stevens Linen Works in Dudley, ended an era in the town's manufacturing history. These two men had managed the two largest manufacturing establishments in Dudley and Webster during a period of long and sustained growth that spanned more than a half century.

Other industries during the period included the manufacture of custom-made clothing, which by 1895 was carried on in 15 shops. During the 1890s, 11 woodworking shops and mills produced furniture, boxes, coffins, carriages, lumber and other wooden goods. Eight shops processed, produced, and repaired metallic goods and machinery. Other small firms produced drugs and medicines, food preparations, cigars, and stone monuments. As the town entered the 20th century, many of the smaller shops disappeared; by 1905 only 16 manufacturing establishments and at least as many repair and service shops remained, but they employed 3,100 men, women and children. By contrast, in 1875, 44 occupations and 27 manufacturing establishments employed 1,600.

Dairying increased to more than 40% of the total value of agricultural goods by 1905, with more than 142,000 gallons of milk and 5,100 lbs. of butter sold annually. When combined with the value of hay and fodder which went largely to feed the dairyherds, this branch of agricultural production totaled more than 70% of the annual total. The acreage of Webster's agricultural lands remained relatively stable through the period. Nevertheless, land use changes occurred: land devoted to hay increased in the early 20th century by 50% over the late 19th century figures. Cropland, market gardens, orchards, and poultry farming also increased.

#### E. Architecture

**Residential:** A few popular style dwellings from the late 19th century, generally gable end, side-passage plans, and at least one substantial Colonial Revival house were observed. Major expansion appears to have been continued in traditional forms of worker housing, primarily one-and-one-half and two-story double chimney duplexes, four-plexes, and six-plexes.

**Institutional:** In 1895, Sacred Heart Roman Catholic church, a Romanesque style stone edifice, was erected. A frame, Victorian Gothic church was built the same year for the Zion Lutheran church. Holy Trinity Roman Catholic church was built in 1903 and is a gable end Gothic style structure. St. Joseph's Roman Catholic church was designed by William Donahue and built between 1913 and 1914 in the late Gothic mode.

Schools were built throughout the period. Earle & Fuller designed the 1871 Rockcastle High School, a two-story, five-bay granite and brick mass with a central pavillion. A new schoolhouse was constructed in the North Village in 1880. Wilson I. Potter designed the two-story, brick Colonial Revival Filmer School built between 1898-99. Wilson also designed the 1905 brick, Colonial Revival Bartlett High School. The Tudor/Gothic Thompson School built in 1912-13 was designed by Walter F. Fountaine.

A two-story town hall measuring 40x60 feet was built in 1860, but burned by 1874.

The music hall built in 1882 (demolished) was a three-and-a-half-story frame structure with a five-bay gable end facade displaying storefronts on the first floor. A German Hall was erected in 1875 and a Turnverian Hall in 1895. The truncated hipped roof brick pumping station was built in 1893. Arthur F. Gray designed the park house for the center in 1898-99. The first fire station was the two-story brick structure with tower designed by Earle & Fuller in 1874.

Commercial: The 1862 McQuaid Block was converted to the Maanexit Hotel in 1899, a four-and-a-half-story gable end structure with a monumental portico (demolished 1960s). A handsome collection of brick commercial blocks survives with structures dating from 1878 to 1912.

Industrial: Expansions and additions occurred between the late 1870s and the first years of the 20th century.

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

### A. Transportation Routes

By the 1920s, local roads are paved and improved as auto highways. The main roads include north-south Route 12 along the French River corridor (New Worcester Road-East Main Street-South Main Street) through downtown Webster; and the north-south road to Thompson, Connecticut, Route 193 (Thompson Road).

### B. Population

After so many decades of rapid growth, population figures fluctuate during this period. Overall, the town experienced growth, from 12,565 in 1915 to 13,186 in 1950, but the high figure was reached in 1925 at 13,389. As immigration slowed the percentage of foreign-born within the town decreased, to 18.2% by 1940, but Poles, French Canadians, Germans and Italians continued to be the primary representatives. A synagogue for the congregation of Sons of Israel was formed in 1919 and a second Lutheran church was formed in 1925.

### C. Settlement Pattern

Expansion and diversification continues in and around the downtown core area during the first half of the period, and intensive cottage development occurs on the shores of Webster Lake. The commercial area continues to expand eastward on South Main with early 1920s multi-story brick blocks. A municipal focus is established at the Main/Lake Street intersection, with a Library (1921) and Municipal Building (1928). Dispersed religious diversity continues, with Sons of Israel Synagogue (1919) on High Street, Emmanuel Lutheran Church (1926), and Greek Orthodox Church (1924). Residential development continues to extend south along School Street; east toward the lake between East Main and Lake Streets to Park Avenue/Thompson Road (with less intensive expansion between Lake Street and Lake Parkway); and to the north in the triangle between North Main, East Main, and Slater Street.

Cottage development on Webster Lake takes place on the west shore (Birch Island,, Union Point, Point Pleasant, Point Breeze), the south (colonial Park), and on the east (Kildeer Island).

### D. Economic Base

World War I and the decade which followed brought increased prosperity to Webster's industries. Production in 1905 was valued at \$5.8 million; in 1920 the total reached \$16.7 million. Although the figure declined to \$10 million by 1927, a number of new firms were established during the decade which further broadened the economic base: the Packard Mills, 1921, women's wear woollens, 100 employees; the Maanexit Spinning Co., 1923, merine and wool yarns, 80 employees; the Chilton Co., 1924, woolen yarns, 200 employees; Puritan Mill, silk goods, 300 employees; the Waterhouse Co., moved from Rhode Island in 1927 to assemble motor bus bodies, 58 employees; and optical, casket, cutlery, and pillowcase manufacturers, who together employed 170.

Changes occurred at the Slater mills. During World War I they suspended all work on civilian orders and produced only U. S. government orders for the army, navy and Red Cross. More than 5 million yards of cotton and 3 million yards of woolen cloth were produced during the war. In 1923, the woolen mills at South Village were sold to the American Woolen Co., which operated the mills until 1954. The North Village works shifted to rayon and cotton production during the early 1930s. In 1936 the operations were gradually phased out and moved south. The closing of the North Village mills was a serious blow, putting nearly 1,000 people out of work. However, the remaining textile mills and several large shoe firms continued to operate through the period. By 1940, the twenty manufacturing establishments which existed in the town employed 3,141 men and women and the value of goods produced increased to \$11 million.

Agriculture in Webster continued much as it had in the early 20th century. Dairying, poultry-raising, market gardening, and orcharding were the major activities. Increasing suburbanization

and population growth caused the conversion of some farmland to residential use.

#### E. Architecture

Residential: No apparent major residential development.

Institutional: The gable end, Gothic style Emmanuel Lutheran Church was erected in 1926. The Colonial Revival brick library dates from 1921. The two-story, brick, Colonial Revival town hall was designed by M. A. Dyer and built between 1926-28.

Commercial: Several early to mid 1920s brick commercial blocks were built and one notable Art Deco market building.