

MHC Reconnaissance Survey Town Report

WALPOLE

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: January 1980

Community: Walpole

I. TOPOGRAPHY

Located on irregular upland terrain. Numerous outcroppings of bedrock plus glacial outwash features dominate landscape. Gravelly soil; fertile but limited by rockiness and poor drainage. Neponset River is primary drainage system, flowing NE towards Massachusetts Bay. Secondary drainage, especially in north and west parts of town, is into Charles River system. Numerous streams and ponds in uplands; large areas of cedar swamp and marsh in lowlands, especially in western section.

II. POLITICAL BOUNDARIES

Part of Dedham grant, 1636. Fragment of Dedham/Dorchester line, 1636, remains as current southeast border (includes Dedham Rock, one of original boundary reference points). Area referred to as "Sawmill" or "Sawmill hamlet" during 17th century. Incorporated as Town of Walpole, 1724.

III. HISTORIC OVERVIEW

Early industrial center on outer limits of Boston fringe along main axis of transport to Providence-Narragansett Bay. At headwaters of Neponset River with productive fishing and hunting grounds for Mass. Bay coastal tribes. Extensive Cedar Swamp to south bounded limits of settlement and was site of mid-17th century sawmill which focused development by early 18th century from Dedham mother town. Expansion of industrial and commercial activities in early 19th century with turnpike and railroad. Continued growth into early 20th century with trolley and autohighway development from Boston-Norwood along traditional N/S axis, including early concrete highway bridge and gas stations.

IV. CONTACT PERIOD (1500 - 1620)

A. Transportation Routes:

On primary axis of regional trail network from Massachusetts to Narragansett Bays - trending NE-SW along Neponset Valley around Highlands. Best documented is Neponset-Wollomonopoag Trail from Dedham to Sharon along Old Post Road through East Walpole and Walpole Heights. A secondary network to the west is noted in town histories around the Uplands to the Neponset and Cedar Swamp from Dedham-Westwood to Wrentham following North St into Walpole Center with branch along north side of swamp as West St and conjectured branch along south side of swamp as Spring St to Oak St following South St to South Walpole. A crosslink from the Neponset to Wollomonopoag Pond (Sharon) is suspected along the axis of Common St. Similarly, a cross trail through the Highlands to the Charles River (Medfield) is documented from North St to Foundary St (Medfield) as unnamed path around south side of swamp near former Norfolk County Farm. Precise location of trail junction in Walpole Center is not clearly understood.

B. Settlement Pattern:

No documented sites reported; however, probable period sites along Neponset and adjacent ponds. Well-drained terraces and knolls most likely locations. Mention of artificats from Bird Pond section of Neponset (Lewis, 1905, p. 16; Delue, 1925, p. 16).

C. Subsistence Pattern:

Inland hunting and wintering area for Neponset (later Punkapoag) Tribe, especially along lower portion of Neponset River. Rocky uplands and cedar swamps part of unoccupied buffer area between Neponset Tribe on east and Wamponoags and Narragansetts to south and west.

D. Observation:

Example of maximum inland penetration (along a major waterway) by a coastal tribe. Site potential in eastern part of town, especially near river, should be considered fairly high.

V. FIRST SETTLEMENT PERIOD (1620 - 1675)

A. Transportation Routes:

Native trail system along Neponset remained as location of highways, notably the post road to Wollompoag - Billings Farm (Sharon) as Old Post Road - portions of which still remain in original configuration at Walpole Heights (near Baker St on Sharon line). New highways of the period linked surrounding settlements with sawmill at Cedar Swamp in 1660s, including primary road to Dedham as Main St (14) and secondary links from Walpole Center to Medfield as Elm St (27) and to Billings Pond (Sharon) as Common St/South, North and West Sts remain as highways from native trails.

B. Population:

Small, probably a dozen families or less. Mostly from Dedham village.

C. Settlement:

After 1660, limited settlement on high ground between Neponset and Spring Brook. Some scattered farmsteads; possible sites of Isaac Chenery's house, 1670, and a "garrison house" reported in northern part of town near Medfield border (Karl West).

D. Economic Base: Focused around lumber and saw milling, especially cedar. Mill built near School Meadow Brook and Neponset, 1659 (Joshua Fisher and Eleazer Lusher). Some subsistence farming and prospecting for metals.

E. Architecture:

None extant.

F. Observations:

A small settlement established to provide a specific product - lumber. Despite quasi-legal land sales, Neponset (Punkapoag) Tribe retained hunting/fishing rights and continued traditional seasonal occupation.

VI. COLONIAL PERIOD (1676 - 1776)

A. Transportation Routes:

Highways from 17th century remained in place. Primary post road shifted from Old Post Road to Main and West Sts through Walpole Center in 1750s with secondary radial highways from Walpole Center in mid-18th century as High and East Sts. Other highways of the period are conjectured to include Bullard St and Baker St, and Moose Hill Road (Sharon).

B. Population:

Slow growth following King Philip's War. Increased after 1705 when "common lands" between Neponset and Dorchester line opened for settlement. Forty-eight names listed on 1726 tax roll. Gradual growth after 1735, as milling develops.

By 1765, Walpole contained 792 individuals, 106 families and 100 houses increased to 967 by end of period; however, population of modern Walpole's boundaries may have included slightly more, as parts of present town were annexed from neighboring towns in the 19th century.

C. Settlement:

A "reservation" for Neponset (Punkapoag) natives briefly established 1685 along Bird Pond section of Neponset and south to Washington St (DeLue, 1925, pp. 13-16). Intermittent native occupation into 18th century. Village center, "sawmill hamlet," grew gradually. Renamed Walpole, 1724. Meetinghouse constructed 1726-36. Brass Ball Tavern, from 1742 (Ezekial Robbins) served growing traffic between Dedham and Wrentham. Increased traffic after 1750 when Post Road route changed to go through Walpole. First school built, 1758. Other loci of development included East Walpole-Roe Buck Tavern after 1720 (Nathaniel Kingbury), cornered old Post Road and Coney St. Scattered farmsteads, especially along Neponset and along North and South Streets (1720s-1730s).

D. Economic Base:

Combination of agriculture and grazing during summer, and winter lumbering. Throughout period, milling potential developed along Neponset and other streams for processing these products. Products both for local use and export, especially to Dedham. Other major local resource is iron, "forges" and smelters.

E. Architecture:

Residential: Extant vernacular types (some of which probably post-date 1775) indicate that two-story central chimney houses formed the largest body of dwellings (major concentrations along Lincoln Road, junction of

Baker and High Plain Streets along North Street north of Fisher Street and near the junction of Plimpton and East Streets); less widespread, but also evident are a number of central-chimney Cape Cod cottages in scattered locations along Winter Street and North Street of which the Goss House (1712) is the earliest. One gambrel-roofed cottage on South Street (MHC-Survey Form #70) appears to be unique in the town. Local tradition suggests that the Cape Cod cottage form may have been more widespread during the town's settlement.

Institutional: Built in 1725, the town's first meetinghouse was replaced in 1762; in 1783-85 a new meetinghouse with east and west end wall porches was built, with salvaged material from the 1762 meetinghouse. The 1783-85 meetinghouse was completely remodelled in the late 1830s and provides the frame of the Unitarian Church at Walpole Center (extant).

Commercial: No obvious commercial buildings remain, although former taverns may exist as dwellings.

Industrial: No known remains.

F. Observations:

While initially a satellite of Dedham, town developed its own identity and interests during first decades of 18th century. An unusually large amount of "industrial" development at an early date. Good archaeological potential for early mill sites.

VII. FEDERAL PERIOD (1775 - 1830)

A. Transportation Routes:

Colonial period highways remained through 18th century. Regional turnpikes between Boston and Providence followed traditional axis NR/SW along Neponset. Primary route is Norfolk and Bristol (1806) east of Walpole Center as Washington St. Secondary turnpike from Walpole Center to Wrentham (1812) across Cedar Swamp as Main St - now Route 1A. Crossroads of the period include High - Plain Sts to Sharon (Route 27) and Winter, Cedar and Pine Sts from South Walpole.

B. Population:

Population remained consistently around 1,000 until 1810 after which it grew to 1,442 by 1830; no known foreign-born population; religious diversity and separation of town and church at the end of this period, following the formation of a Methodist Society (1822) and an Orthodox Congregational Society (1827).

C. Settlement Location:

Period marked by the creation of several villages both as a result of turnpike traffic along Washington Street and as a result of the development of mills. Major new settlement was at South Walpole. Some limited development of East Walpole may have occurred at the end of this period along Washington Street immediately north of Bird Pond. Development continued at Walpole Center with new houses built along Main Street (Walpole-Wrentham Turnpike of 1812), around the Common and scattered along East St.

D. Economic Base:

Textiles, paper, and agricultural tools the primary manufactured products. Earliest cotton and woolen mills probably established in 1810s, often incorporating (e.g., Boston & Walpole Mfg. Co.; Walpole Union Mfg. Co.) in the next decade. Joshua Stetson, a leading producer of agricultural implements at Stetson Pond, by 1796. Stetson, from Sharon, was reputed to have learned his trade "at Randall's" (Lewis, p. 195) and his Stetson hoe won wide reknown. Bird continued paper manufacture at the 1717 site. The manufacture of straw hats became a major cottage industry.

E. Architecture:

Residential: Vernacular types of the preceding period probably continued to be built until ca. 1800-1820. Most popular Federal house-type was 2-story house with a symmetrical center-entrance facade, interior rear-wall chimneys and a low-pitched or hipped roof.

An exceptionally well-preserved village of this period exists at South Walpole where several of the town's most elaborately decorated Federal houses remain, together with a Federal tavern, possible small mill and two wooden rows of workers' houses.

Institutional: No churches extant; schoolhouses built in 1790s and after, probably altered or demolished; town pound extant from 1790 (MHC Survey), powder house built of brick in 1811 (extant?).

Commercial: Former tavern at South Walpole (1807), other taverns likely along Washington Street; possible store or counting room (one-story hip-roof structure on Washington Street, East Walpole - may also be a former schoolhouse).

Industrial: No major mills extant; former grist/sawmill (?) at South Walpole converted to house.

VIII. EARLY INDUSTRIAL PERIOD (1830 - 1870)

A. Transportation Routes:

Road system remained in place from early 19th century with extension of Fischer St from Main to North as period improvement. Boston and Providence railroad axis followed traditional corridor along Neponset. Railroad link to Walpole as Norfolk Co RR (1849) from Dedham to Woonsocket along Neponset and north of Cedar Swamp. Regional crosslink as Mansfield and Framingham (1870) created junction at Walpole Center with route across Cedar Swamp to South Walpole mills and to Medfield along Mill Brook. Original locations at grade.

B. Population:

Population increase of nearly 1/3 occurred between 1840 and 1850; increase in population was very small throughout remainder of period; foreign-born population (mostly Irish) arrived between 1840 and 1855; small Catholic church formed by 1855.

C. Settlement Location:

Expanded development of Walpole Center along radial roads with emergence of status residential district along Common St by 1850s, and workers' district along High St. Cemetery fringe in mid-19th century - notable early Rural Cemetery (c. 1835) on North St Hill overlooking Center. Continued development of East Walpole-Plimptonville along East St as mill village with dispersed center along Washington St with secondary villages at South Walpole and West Walpole.

D. Economic Base:

Cotton and paper manufacture expanded in this period, particularly after establishment of F. Bird at present site in 1838. Textile materials began to diversify as threads and twines came into production. At least two machine shops (Morey's Pond and Blackburn Pond) were established, and the manufacture of cord clothing was carried on from 1845 until the early 20th century at Stetson Pond; businesses present in 1852 include 7 cotton mills, 2 woollen mills, 4 paper mills, 3 grist mills, 3 sawmills, 1 twine mill, 2 foundries, 2 machine shops, 2 axletree shops, 1 hoe shop, 1 bleachery, 1 bonnet shop, 4 carriage shops, 1 hat manufactory, 1 boot manufactory, 1 card manufactory, 6 variety stores. Industrial employment increased until ca. 1840 and remained steady until ca. 1865 when a slight decline occurred, perhaps due to the Civil War.

E. Architecture:

Residential: New houses of the period range between simple side-hall cottages to ambitious examples of center-entrance and side-hall Italianate-style houses. The most outstanding high-style examples of the period are located along Common Street. Elsewhere, examples of various styles exist in scattered locations.

Institutional: Major institutional buildings of the period are two Greek Revival-style meetinghouses (Walpole Center and South Walpole) from the 1830s and 1846. The town's first 2-story schoolhouse was built in 1830 (either demolished or moved and altered). In South Walpole, a public hall (now converted to housing) remains from this period; throughout period, district schoolhouses remained in use.

Commercial: Of the small number of stores and offices which existed at Walpole Center and East Walpole, most probably occupied adapted houses or small structures which have since been removed; at Walpole Center an altered Italianate (?) block remains on the west side of the Common, perhaps a farmer hotel or boardinghouse.

IX. LATE INDUSTRIAL PERIOD (1870 - 1915)

A. Transportation Routes:

Road and rail system remained from mid-19th century. New secondary railroad constructed along industrial belt of Neponset as Walpole and Wrentham (c. 1890) through East Walpole and around fringe of Walpole Center across Cedar Swamp with bridges at road crossings - stone abutments and steel girders. Street railway routes extended from Foxborough in

early 1900s through Walpole Center to Norwood along Washington, Common and Main Sts with branch to East Walpole along East and Washington Sts. Highway improvements of period include very early concrete bridge (1911 date) over Neponset at Main St in original condition.

B. Population:

Population grew slowly to ca. 1895, after which more rapid growth occurred until 1915; of 2,353 increase during period, nearly 50% came from new foreign-born residents of which the largest groups were Irish, Nova Scotian and, after 1905, Italian.

C. Settlement Location:

Walpole Center expanded as primary civic and commercial focus in late 19th century with distinctive social-economic residential districts along Common and workers along South and High in fringe industrial areas. Gradual growth of East Walpole as secondary focus with suburban development along Pleasant St - East St and trolley routes along Washington and Walpole Sts.

D. Economic Base:

By the 1870s and '80s there were several textile support firms, though the cotton and woolen companies themselves had moved to better capitalized sites. Several dealt in cotton waste and shoddy (such as that on Diamond Pond, now the South St. plant of the Kendall Company). S. Gray's Walpole Bleach & Dye Works and the Walpole Color Works both took advantage of the new color chemistry to manufacture fabric dyes. Emery was processed in South Walpole at the Rucadue privilege.

E. Architecture:

Residential: Range of house types from simple side-hall cottages to ambitious, possibly architect-designed examples of Italianate, Second Empire, and Queen Anne styles; little high-style evident. Most ambitious houses of the period are located in the vicinity of Common Street and High Plain Street, including some simple hip-roofed, bracketted Italianate and shingled (late) Queen Anne-style houses, some with corner towers. Several noteworthy and surprisingly sophisticated Queen Anne (workers'?) cottages (with oriel windows and overhanging gables) exist on the north end of West Street.

Institutional: Major new building was a Victorian Gothic-style town hall (1881 - J. William Beale, architect) and a 2-story frame schoolhouse on Stone Street. New churches included one Catholic, one Episcopal and one Congregational, all probably architect-designed. Also built in this period was a 1-story Beaux Arts-style library building, donated by Andrew Carnegie and designed by J. Lawrence Berry (1903); Norfolk County Farm developed on North Street (outbuildings late 19th-20th century).

Commercial: Major commercial focus was Walpole Center where false-front wooden blocks were built (ca. 1890-1910) with Queen Anne-style details; few remain intact with the notable exception of the 2-story block at the

northeast corner of Main and East Streets. Toward end of period construction of Beaux Arts and Colonial Revival-style blocks occurred at Walpole Center; 1-story storefront development along Washington Street at East Walpole; a small Italianate-style train depot (ca. 1875-1880) remains north of High Plain St at Walpole Center.

Industrial: Of varied types and construction, most of Walpole's factory buildings appear to date from this period and the beginning of the modern period. Major complexes exist at Bird Pond, east of Washington Street north of Bird Pond, at the junction of Elm and West Streets and at South Walpole.

X. EARLY MODERN PERIOD (1915 - 1940)

A. Transportation Routes:

Road and rail system remained in place with abandonment of street railway routes in 1919. Major improvements along historic Boston and Providence axis as Route 1 4-lane superhighway in 1930s around South Walpole - Walpole Heights and East Walpole. Main St paved as autohighway Route 1A in 1920s with cross-regional Route 27 through Walpole Center as Elm-East-Plain Streets.

B. Population:

Major increase in population 1920-30; population steady 1930-40; rapid growth 1940-70, growth slowed 1970-75.

C. Settlement Location:

Primary focus remained in Walpole Center with high status residential area along Common Street but gradual convergence of development from East Walpole along East St - Baker - Washington Streets to Walpole Heights by mid-20th century with Route 1 axis in 1930s and strip commercial growth along Walpole St from Norwood and Main St south from Center. Post-World War II suburbanization has occurred mainly in the central and eastern sections of the town, leaving large rural areas relatively untouched in the west and northern sections of Walpole. In 1913-14 Walpole established a Planning Commission which established standard lot/building line limits, prohibited 3-deckers and commissioned a landscape plan for public park.

D. Economic Base:

The manufacture of paper and building materials dominated the town's industrial base. In South Walpole the Bird Machine Company (incorporated in 1909 as the Wandel Screen Manufacturing Co.) developed a rotary screen for the manufacture of paper. L. F. Fales, in the center of Walpole (still in operation) developed the multiple-needle sewing machine.

E. Architecture:

Residential: Mainly modest free-standing frame houses, little evidence of high-style, architect-designed houses. Some Colonial Revival-style building, but primarily contemporary ranch and split-level houses.

Institutional: One memorial hall and schoolhouses of 1920s built in Colonial Revival style; Fisher School at North Walpole designed by Russell Sturgis (1926).

Commercial: Marked re-building of Walpole Center with architect-designed, red-brick Colonial Revival style blocks of 1920s-30s; construction of 1-story storefronts and highway strip development (post-1930) along Washington Street and, more recently, along Main Street south of Walpole Center; gas station development along parts of Route 1A (1920s-'30s).

Industrial: Limited addition to existing plants.

XI

SOURCES

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