

# MHC RECONNAISSANCE SURVEY REPORT

DATE NOVEMBER 1982

COMMUNITY: CUMMINGTON

## I. TOPOGRAPHY

Cummington is one of the southernmost towns in Franklin County. The town is situated in the Berkshire Hills of western Massachusetts. Local terrain consists of a complex of drumlins that generally range between 1500 feet and 2000 feet in elevation. These uplands, aside from those of Monroe, are the highest in the Connecticut River Valley study unit. The highest point is Bryant Mountain (2080 feet) located in northwestern Cummington. Other prominent elevations include an unnamed mountain (1952 feet) south of Bryant Mountain, Burnett Hill (1451 feet) in northwestern Cummington, an unnamed peak (1540 feet) southeast of Burnett Hill and The Mount (1436 feet) situated on the Cummington/Chesterfield line. The Westfield River cuts through these uplands running the width of the town on a west-southeast axis. The Westfield is fed by the Swift River and several brooks that flow north and south into the river. Southern Cummington is drained by several additional brooks that flow south into Worthington. The town lacks any freshwater bodies. Local soils are primarily a glacial till, excluding the alluvium of the Westfield River floodplain.

## II. POLITICAL BOUNDARIES

Originally surveyed as Plantation Number 5 in 1762 with southern boundary at Plantation Number 3 (Worthington) and western boundary at Plantation Number 4 (Windsor). Incorporated as the town of Cummington in 1779 including northern district of Hatfield Equivalent (Plainfield) and southwest section from Plantation Number 2 (Peru). Plainfield district established as a town in 1785 defining northern boundary with eastern boundary established in 1788 from Swift River gore with Goshen, Ashfield and Chesterfield.

## III. HISTORIC OVERVIEW

Rural industrial hill town on primary western corridor from Northampton to Pittsfield. Located in Berkshire uplands with native sites suspected along Westfield River valley. Settled from Plymouth County during Colonial period with primary axis along the State Road from Goshen including a few mid-18th houses on Burnett Hill. Original meetinghouse center on Cummington Hill after Revolution with several late 18th century cottages intact including notable Plymouth gable example on Powell Road.

Significant relocation of settlement from uplands to Westfield River valley during Federal period with formation of commercial and civic center at Cummington village, including early houses on Main Street. Industrial activity developed during mid 19th century on Westfield mill sites at Swift River and West Cummington, intact as Greek Revival village with church. Dairy farming maintained on Cummington Hill with period barns, fairground at Mount Road and Victorian retreat of

Bryant Homestead. Lack of railroad limits industrial activity along Westfield valley, while Cummington village remained as local center through early 20th century with location on Route 9 auto highway, including period garage and Historic Revival town hall. Present expansion obvious as suburban housing on Cummington Hill and the Stage Road with problems of economic decline noted at West Cummington and Swift River villages. Cummington Center retains authentic character as street village preserved by Route 9 bypass.

IV. CONTACT PERIOD (1500-1620)

A. Transportation Routes:

Highland corridor across Berkshire uplands between Housatonic and Connecticut valley. Probable east-west trail is suspected from Westfield River gorge (Chesterfield) along Tower Brook to Cummington Hill as Fairground-Hill-Potash Road and west down north slope of Bryant Mountain as Bryant Road (now abandoned) to Westfield River (West Cummington). Alternate east-west trail is conjectured along Westfield River valley (Route 9 axis) with probable fords at Swift River, Cummington Village, Forge Village and West Cummington, although no historic evidence documents valley route. Connecting north-south trails may be located along Willicot Road (from Goshen) and Old Country Road (from Windsor), with possible axis along Mill Brook (from Plainfield).

B. Settlement Patterns:

There were no reported Contact period sites. Native occupation probably focused along the Westfield floodplain, especially in the vicinity of the present villages of Cummington and West Cummington. Both of these locations were the site of moderate tracks of potential cropland and the Westfield River and several minor tributaries. An additional riverine period site likely was established at the confluence of the Westfield and North Branch Swift Rivers. Smaller native hunting encampments were probably scattered throughout Cummington's extensive uplands. Native quarry sites may have been situated on the hill immediately southeast of Burnett Hill and south of Dawes Cemetery. Both of these sites were the locations of historic whetstone quarries operating in the 19th century.

C. Subsistence Patterns:

Native horticulture may have been undertaken on the Westfield River floodplain, particularly in the previously-mentioned Cummington and West Cummington village sites. The most likely native fishing sites were located adjacent to the villages of Swift River, Cummington, and West Cummington. Native hunting probably took place throughout local uplands. Deer Hill was heavily populated with deer until the late 18th century.

D. Observations:

Cummington probably maintained a small to moderate native population. The town's location on a major east-west corridor extending west from

the Connecticut River Valley and the presence of a varied resource base suggests Cummington area was primarily utilized as a resource area by the Connecticut River natives, particularly the Norottucks inhabiting Hatfield and Northampton. The potential for surviving period sites is greatest in the Westfield River valley.

V. PLANTATION PERIOD (1620-1675)

A. Transportation Routes:

Native trails remained as regional routes across Berkshire uplands from Northampton to Albany with probably route over Cummington Hill and secondary path along Westfield River (Route 9 axis).

B. Population:

Cummington probably continued to be occupied by small to moderate sized bands of natives during the Plantation period. The first colonial settlement was not established until the 1760 s.

C. Settlement Patterns:

Native settlement patterns most likely were similar to those suggested for the Contact period.

D. Economic Base:

This area probably witnessed increased native usage (i.e., fishing, hunting, horticulture) due to colonial settlement on the more attractive Connecticut River Valley lands, the traditional focal point of native settlement with the study unit. The establishment of colonial fur trading centers in Westfield, Northampton and Springfield likely encouraged native involvement in Anglo-Indian trade.

The only colonial utilization of the Cummington area would have been restricted to occasional hunting forays in local woods.

E. Observations:

Cummington probably remained primarily a native resource area. Colonial use and settlement was discouraged by the area's considerable distance from the Connecticut River settlements, its rugged terrain and exposure to native attacks.

VI. COLONIAL PEIROD (1675-1775)

A. Transportation Routes

Primary east-west axis relocated north of Westfield River as Stage Road (c.1765) from Goshen to Forge Village. Westfield River valley (Route 9) remained secondary axis as east-west corridor. Survey of Plantation Number 5 (1762) established division grid across Cummington Hill including Trow, Honey, Powell and Cummington Roads on coordinate axis. Other highways of the period including connecting

links to Stage Road from Westfield valley as Nash and Harlow Roads and secondary grid from Cummington Hill with Trouble Street, Porter Hill and Mount Road.

B. Population:

Cummington probably had a small native population until colonial settlement in the late 18th century.

In c.1765, eight colonial families were settled in Cummington. By 1783 the community (present Cummington and Plainfield) had 851 residents. The majority of Cummington's settlers were former Abington and Bridgewater residents. A small number migrated from Northampton and Medford.

C. Settlement Patterns:

The French and Indian Wars of the 18th century had no impact on the colonial community since it was not established until after termination of the wars. Initiation of the settlement of Cummington was begun with the creation and sale of Township #5 to Colonel John Cuming and 25 other individuals in 1762. These absentee proprietors then sold individual tracts to prospective settlers. Each settler received similarly sized tracts by lot - 1st Division, 102 acres; 2nd Division, 100 acres; 3rd Division, 90 acres. The first settler was reputedly Samuel Brewer who settled in 1762 and was responsible for surveying township and individual lot boundaries. He constructed a home slightly northwest of the junction of Porter Hill and Lyman Flat Roads. Virtually all of the Colonial period settlement occurred in Cummington's uplands. Homes were not constructed in the Westfield River Valley during this period because of its susceptibility to annual flooding and the presence of "disease breeding" marshlands. Period settlement was generally dispersed. Between c.1762 and 1769, homes were established south of Trow Road to the west and Route 9 to the east. The 1770s witnessed settlement expansion north within a short distance of Route 9 and north of the Westfield along or slightly north of Stage Road. By the end of the period, a small node had developed in the vicinity of the junction of Dodwells Hill and Potash Hill roads. The community lacked a meetinghouse until c.1782. A smallpox hospital was established in c.1774 slightly south of Ladd Brook's intersection with Porter Hill Road.

D. Economic Base:

The town's colonial economy is poorly detailed in existing secondary sources. Local residents probably focused on livestock grazing and lumbering. The area's limited cropland inhibited extensive crop production. Cummington's wooded uplands provided an excellent habitat for wild game sought by colonial settlers. Deer hunting on Deer Hill was so popular that the large deer population was decimated by the late 18th century (Barber 1839:317). Cummington had a limited industrial base despite the presence of a number of waterways capable

of powering mill operations. The first local mill (saw mill) was established by Charles Prescott in c.1764 on Kearney Brook southeast of its junction with Honey Hill Road. A gristmill was erected on Mill River at its junction with the Cummington/Plainfield line. Two taverns were operating during this period. Joseph Farr established a tavern slightly west of Honey Hill Road in c.1770 while William Mitchell began operation of a "public house and tavern" in c.1774 at the Stage and Plainfield Roads intersection.

E. Architecture:

Residential: Cummington was not settled until the late 1760s and 1770s. It is likely that very few houses were built before 1775 and very few have survived. The only freestanding intact buildings of the period are the center chimney, five bay Stephen Farr cottage (1773) and the Josiah Farr cottage (1767). All other colonial structures (approximately a half-dozen) survive as fragments, generally in use as ells for later houses.

F. Observations:

Cummington's dispersed settlement was typical of the "hill towns" established on the western and eastern periphery of the Connecticut River Valley study unit. Despite its location on the unit's periphery, the community had direct access to the commercial centers of Northampton to the east and Albany to the west via present Route 9 and Stage Road. Cummington probably provided these centers with lumber products in return for manufactured goods. Future research should examine these commercial contacts. An additional phenomenon in need of examination is the settlement of a large number of southeastern Massachusetts residents in Cummington. Local secondary sources provide little insight into their selection of this and several other western "hill towns" for settlement. Cummington still retains considerable portions of its period settlement. The 1974 town history Only One Cummington refers to the presence of a number of cellar holes throughout local uplands. In addition, portions of the community's original lot lines laid out in the 1760s and 1770s still survive as local roads. They include Trow Road, Powell Road, Honey Hill Road and Clark Road.

VII. FEDERAL PERIOD (1775-1830)

A. Transportation Routes:

Location of meetinghouse on Cummington Hill (1781-91) required radial connectors within survey grid along axis of Bryant-Potash Hill Road. Primary east-west axis relocated south from Stage Road to Westfield River valley along Old Route 9 with bridges at Swift River (1789), Cummington Village, Forge Village and West Cummington (Streeter, 1974, map 10).

B. Population:

Cummington's population 1790-1830 rose 44.4%, less than the 60.7% county average, but still more than most hill towns. The town reached

its peak population year in 1830, when the number of residents was 1,261. The largest growth period occurred in the last decade, 1820-30, when the town grew on average by over 20 persons per year, probably attributable to the active manufacturing establishments along the Westfield River.

C. Settlement Pattern:

Civic focus readjusted east on Cummington Hill with meetinghouse at Potash Road (1792) from Bryant farm. Significant development of mill sites along Westfield River with industrial activities at West Cummington, Forge Village, Cummington Village and Swift River. Cummington Village emerged as local center with post office (1816) and tavern along Berkshire Trail (old Route 9) with secondary center at West Cummington. Highland farming expanded to limits of cultivation on upland plateau around Cummington Hill with secondary activity along Stage Road from Goshen.

D. Economic Base:

Cummington's major industry for nearly 80 years was in leather tanning, for which the town's supply of hemlock bark and clean water made the town the most important tanning center in the Connecticut Valley for many years. Both major tannery sites (Hubbard and Shaw) apparently were begun in the late 18th century. The arrival of William Hubbard from Hadley in West Cummington established the small village of Hubbardville. For a short time, along with factories in Northampton (William Edwards) and Chester (Spencer Clark), the tannery was part of the Hampshire Leather Mfg. (incorporated 1809). By 1832 Hubbard was producing sole leather valued at \$55,000 -- the highest value of any tannery reported in the three-county Connecticut Valley. The Shaw tannery may have been established by William Mitchell before 1805. Not until 1834, however, did it pass into Shaw control, and its real prominence does not appear until the Early Industrial period.

The other major products in Cummington in this period were cotton and woolen textiles. In the Federal period five woolen mills and two cotton mills were established at Hubbardville (West Cummington), Lightning Bug, and Cummington Village. Two mills in Cummington Village were both incorporated in June 1816 with capitals of \$100,000 each: the Cummington Woolen Mfg. Co., and the Cummington Cotton Mfg. Co. (The latter was the special project of Josiah Hayden, whose sons, Joel and Josiah, became the leading manufacturers of Haydenville in Williamsburg.) Neither of the two cotton mills appear to have been particularly prosperous, though in 1832 Hayden's had the record employment of 34 women and 11 men. The woolen mills (three were located in Lightning Bug), dependent only on a local raw material, survived longer.

Probably during the Embargo years, the raising of Merino sheep was commenced. By 1837 the Merino wool clip amounted to 12,486 lbs. -- 12% of the county total in Merino wool, giving the town third rank in its production, after Worthington and Chesterfield. (Saxony wool, introduced in the 1820s, was even finer; however, of this Cummington reported none in 1837, with neighboring Middlefield producing the record crop.)

## E. Architecture:

Residential: A period of intensive residential construction occurred from 1780 to 1830: more houses and cottages were built in that period than in any one of the succeeding periods. Almost all of the Federal residences are Cape Cod type cottages, of which some three or four dozen examples are known to survive. Five bay facades with center entrances and end wall fenestration with three small fixed panes and three or four double hung sash are typical of these cottages. In addition to Cape Cod cottages, which probably reflect the original settlers' southeastern Massachusetts origins, one other major cottage type was noted. This is the story-and-a-half plus attic cottage with eyebrow windows. Such cottages are essentially two-story houses whose deep gable roofs contain two half-stories; the upper story is lit by narrow half-sized windows at the cornice line. The majority of the period structures are of frame construction but at least two brick cottages are known. In addition to cottages, approximately a dozen and a half two story houses of the Federal period are known. Most of these are located on Plainfield Road at the town center. Center chimney plan structures with gable roofs predominate but double and end chimney, center hall plan houses were also built. Among the most notable of these are the Reuben Melvin House (1782), with double interior chimneys and a hip roof with deck, and the Frazier House (1803) on Potash Hill Road, with a center chimney, hip roof and entrance surround with pediment and fanlight.

Institutional: The meetinghouse, begun in 1782, was completed in 1791 and moved later that year. In 1806, a steeple was added to the building. Other institutional activity included the founding of a Baptist Society in 1821, with a meetinghouse built in 1823 and the founding of an Academy in 1828. The Academy building (1828) is the one of two known surviving institutional structures. It is a two-story structure, three bays wide by four long, with a center entrance. The entrance surround is unusual in that it incorporates an arched transom within a straight entablature. Also standing is the brick District 5 school (1820).

Commercial: The only tavern known to survive is the Kingman Tavern (1800), a center chimney, five bay, center entrance house. At least two other taverns operated in the Federal period.

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

### A. Transportation Routes:

Relocation of civic center to Cummington Village required connecting north-south highways with Plainfield and Fairground Road. Primary east-west axis remained as Old Route 9 along Westfield River valley from Swift River to West Cummington. No railroads projected or constructed through area.

## B. Population:

In the Early Industrial period, Cummington, like most of the towns in the county, lost residents. Due to slight gains in the late '50s and late '60s, however, the net loss for the town amounted to only 17% for the period, and the town finished up the period with 1,037 people.

Cummington had only 37 foreign-born residents in 1855 -- 3.6% of her population and one of the smallest percentages of any town in the county. This figure rivaled her neighboring hill towns: Chesterfield (3.7%), Worthington (3.1%), Plainfield and Goshen (each 1.9%). Twenty-eight of the 37 were from Ireland.

## C. Settlement Pattern:

Cummington Village developed as primary civic and commercial center with local church (1838) replacing Cummington Hill meetinghouse (1840) as civic focus. Industrial activity expanded at West Cummington with local church (1839) and paper mill (1857) as street village along old Route 9. Secondary mill villages also expanded at Swift River and the Forge along Westfield River valley. Upland dairy farms maintained on Cummington Hill around former town center with lumbering on western hill land of Bryant Mountain.

## D. Economic Base:

Tanning continued to dominate Cummington's economy. By 1845 there were four tanneries, employing 34 men and producing \$115,800 worth of leather, half the value of all the leather produced in Hampshire County. A decade later, though both employment and value had shrunk, the value recorded, \$44,000, represented 61% of the county total. In this period Hubbard sold his tannery (1846) and the Brackley Shaw tannery became "the biggest in the country," according to Streeter (p.262), though there is little documentation of this. Shaw's sons later went on to establish tanneries in Maine and Canada, "and are now [wrote Horace Miller in 1881] the most successful leather dealers in America."

For a brief period in the 1830s, Cummington flirted with silk culture. More than 26,000 mulberry trees were planted and Amos Cobb (related to Dedham's Jonathan Cobb?) erected a cocoonery on Porter Hill Road.

The period also saw the peak of the wool clip and of woollen production in Cummington, in 1837. By 1845 the removal of the tariff on foreign woolens sharply reduced the demand for both fine woolens and the local raw material. The two Lloyd mills at Lightning Bug survived for most of the period, primarily producing cheap satinets.

A whetstone quarry had been opened as early as 1770. By 1855 there were four shops producing scythe stones according to Holland, with a value of \$8,000 -- the second highest product value in town.



Perhaps the most unusual product, however, were scythe snathes. Silas Lamson in Sterling (Worcester County) is said to have secured a patent on the crooked snathe about 1800 (though the only two patents credited to him at Sterling by the Patent Office Index are dated 1828 and 1834). In 1833, in search of ash timber, he moved to Shelburne Falls (Franklin County) with sons Ebenezer G. and Nathaniel. He seems, however, to have simultaneously set up a shop south of Cummington Village in 1834, about the time he was awarded the critical patent for the fastening device holding the blade and snathe together. Two years later (1836), twenty men -- more than anywhere else in the Connecticut Valley -- were employed in Cummington making scythe snathes, valued at \$12,000. At that time this was the only instance of its manufacture in Hampshire County, though even at Shelburne Falls only 15 men were reported making snathes. In 1844 Lamson and A. F. Goodnow formed the firm of Lamson & Goodnow, and, in addition to the shop at Shelburne Falls (now employing 75 men), apparently opened that year two Lamson and Goodnow snathe shops at opposite ends of Cummington Village (see Streeter refs. 208 and 262). The firm held on to both locations for ten years and then consolidated their operation at Shelburne Falls. By 1865 scythe snathes were no longer produced in Cummington.

In the meantime, other wooden products were being developed at West Cummington, the Center, and Swift River. In West Cummington Henry Elder began producing bedsteads and other furniture; Gardiner and later Harlow produced broom and brush handles. At the Center the Bradley brothers specialized in towel racks in the 1850s, and N. S. Stevens started making pen holders in 1860. At Swift River both W. H. Guilford and N. B. Crosby made tool handles or pen holders of various kinds.

#### E. Architecture:

Residential: The building boom of the Federal period continued into the Early Industrial. Cottages remained the predominant house form. In addition to the traditional five bay center entrance plan, other plans used were the sidehall plan and an asymmetrical plan consisting of a two bay wide block appended by a side ell containing the entrance. Modest cottages of all three types were built at West Cummington, Cummington Village and Swift River, the town's three major villages. Most are Greek Revival or Greek Revival/Italianate in styling although a few cottages with Gothic Revival details such as scalloped valences and bargeboards were built. Two story houses were somewhat more common for the Early Industrial period than they were for the Federal period. In the villages and in outlying locations, double and end chimney center hall houses with five bay facades and center entrances were built throughout the period. Among the notable houses of the period are the William Cullen Bryant Homestead (early 19th century, enlarged 1866; National Historic Landmark) and the Gilbert Richards House (1843), a gable front Greek Revival house with a five bay, center entrance facade.

Institutional: A number of institutional buildings of the period survive. Foremost among these are the Village Congregational Church (1838), the West Cummington Congregational Church (1839) and its Parish House (1847), all Greek Revival structures. Of these, the Parish House is perhaps the finest, with a Doric portico in antis. The churches are more typical with one-and-a-half story main blocks with shallow entrance porches and square belfries. The West Cummington church features Gothic lancet windows and pinnacles while the Village Church incorporates a spire. Other institutional buildings are the District 2 School (1861) and the Bryant School (1867). The Bryant School is exceptional in that it incorporates Italianate detailing, including an arcaded portico with round arches.

Commercial: At least one tavern of the period, the Union House Hotel (1846), survives at Cummington Village. It is a center chimney, five by four bay structure with two story verandas.

X. LATE INDUSTRIAL PERIOD (1870-1915)

A. Transportation Routes:

Primary east-west axis remained along Westfield River valley through Cummington Village (Old Route 9). No railroads or street railways constructed through area.

B. Population:

Like the majority of towns in the county, Cummington's population continued to decline. Between 1870 and 1915 the town lost 377 residents -- 36% of her 1870 population.

The town's foreign-born population took on small numbers from Canada by 1880. In 1915, the total foreign-born population was only 6.8%, some 20 percentage points behind the county average.

C. Settlement Pattern:

Cummington Village remained as civic and commercial focus along Berkshire Trail (old Route 9) with secondary centers at West Cummington and Swift River at local mill sites. Highland dairy farming maintained on Cummington Hill with gradual development of summer boarding trade.

D. Economic Base:

In the Late Industrial period paper making became the principal employer in West Cummington. A small paper mill had been built in 1856 on the site of Hubbard's tannery, but apparently not until the establishment of the L. L. Brown Paper Co. in 1870 at the site did the mill develop a significant employee roster. Like the tannery before it, the mill benefited from the ample supply of clean water provided by the Westfield River. For a brief period in the late 1870s, a second paper mill operated at the opposite end of the village. The closing of the Brown mill in 1908 was a major blow to the village.

At the Center and at Swift River the dominant industries were the products of the woodworking shops -- wooden handles, penholders, and the like -- though it is unclear how long many of them survived. Prominent among them was the pencil and penholder factory of N. S. Stevens at the Center.

Dairy products gained ground after the establishment of the Cummington Creamery, a major butter producer for the region. Maple syrup and apples were also important.

#### E. Architecture:

**Residential:** Little construction took place in the Late Industrial period. Most of the houses built were constructed at Cummington Village and Swift River. In general, small Stick Style and Queen Anne cottages predominate, most with sidehall or L-plans; the L-plan cottages consist of a main block intersected by a side ell with entrance. Polygonal bays and verandas are common features. Most of the two-story and larger houses in the town were built for institutional or commercial purposes. Among these are the Italianate Minot Grant (1871) and Queen Anne Lyman (1894) Houses, both large and well-developed houses which incorporated ells containing stores. The Village Church Parsonage (1891), a two-and-a-half story pyramidal Queen Anne style house, and Bryant Library house (1872), a stucco Gothic Revival structure, are two further examples.

**Institutional:** Several institutional buildings were built in the period, among them the Bryant Library (1872), a granite mansard roofed building, The Queen Anne Hillside Agricultural Society fairgrounds (1884) and the West Cummington Baptist Church (1894), a vernacular Queen Anne building now in residential use.

**Commercial:** In addition to the residential/commercial complexes mentioned above, several one and two-story stores were built at the village center in the period. Among these are a well-preserved two-story Queen Anne structure with the three bay wide center entrance facade typical of late 19th century commercial buildings. Other one-story structures with three bay wide facades were also built at West Cummington and Swift River. On Route 9 at Potash Hill Road stands a much altered early 20th century roadhouse.

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

#### A. Transportation Routes:

Improvement of east-west corridor along Westfield valley as primary auto highway Route 9 from Swift River to West Cummington with original sections as Old Route 9 through Cummington Village. Secondary north-south highway defined as Route 112 from Worthington over Cummington Hill to village center.



