

# MHC Reconnaissance Survey Town Report

## MONTGOMERY

Report Date: 1982

Associated Regional Report: Connecticut Valley

**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

Date: June, 1982

Community: Montgomery

I. Topography

Montgomery is situated in the eastern foothills (Hampden Hills) of the Berkshire Mountains of western Massachusetts. Locally, the greatest elevations occur in the central portion of Montgomery where average over 1000 feet above sea level. From central Montgomery, these uplands drop steadily to the west and east to elevations as low as 323 feet and 600 feet, respectively. A narrow strip of bottomlands borders the Westfield River in the northwestern portion of town. Extensive pockets of marshland occur throughout central Montgomery. Montgomery falls within the Westfield River drainage. The town's only bodies of freshwater are the Westfield Reservoir and several small ponds.

II. Political Boundaries

Originally granted as part of Westfield New Addition in 1713. Incorporated as town of Montgomery in 1780 with Northern district annexed from Norwich (Huntington) and Southampton in 1792. Southern boundary established in 1792 with formation of Russell from New Addition.

III. Historic Overview

Rural suburban hill town isolated on secondary roads from Westfield corridor. Located on mountain front of Berkshire highlands with impressive views of Connecticut Valley. No reported native sites in area, although limited potential along Westfield River and possible quarry locations at Mt. Tekoa. Late Colonial settlement from Westfield along upland plain of Main Road with meeting house center established after Revolution. Limited agricultural potential, primarily sheep raising, with several well preserved early Federal farmsteads in authentic landscape settings along axis of Main Road. Town center rebuilt during mid-19th century with intact Greek Revival church and school of simple design. Opening of Boston and Albany railroad on Westfield River had little impact upon highland settlement with gradual decline of population through Industrial period. Some attempted resorts on Mt. Tekoa from Westfield with original airway beacon from Early Modern period on Pitcher Road. Present development increasingly suburban with affluent residential growth along scenic mountain roads from Montgomery Center. Much of the area remains isolated, especially along Westfield River, while Main Road retains significant historic character despite suburban development.

IV. Contact Period (1500-1620)

A. Transportation Routes:

Located in mountain highlands along Westfield River with few obvious routes of accessibility. Conjectured trails from Woronoco valley around Mt. Tekoa appear to follow Moose Meadow Brook to Montgomery

plain, possibly as Pitcher and Tekoa Roads. Trails north from Moose Meadow Brook around Bungy Mountain and Horse Hill are difficult to locate, possibly as North Road around Lizzie Mountain and segments of Main Road along Roaring Brook to Westfield River. Other highland trails around Mt. Tekoa to Westfield River might follow Pomeroy Road around Shatterack Pond.

B. Settlement Patterns:

There were no reported Contact period sites. The only evidence of any native settlement was the reference to the recovery of some Archaic period and unspecified native artifacts along Main Road. The Montgomery area probably had limited native period settlement primarily because of the prevalence of rugged uplands and the general absence of large water sources and good agricultural land. Native settlement probably occurred primarily on the Westfield River floodplain, the bluffs overlooking the river and the more moderate uplands of central Montgomery.

C. Subsistence Patterns:

Agriculture was possible on the Westfield River Floodplain and the uplands of central Montgomery and in the vicinity of Westfield Reservoir. Good sources of fish were available in the Westfield River and Russell Pond of adjoining Russell. The Falls adjacent to Roaring Crow Brooks confluence with the Westfield were probably a focal point to total native fishing. The area's extensive rugged uplands provided an excellent habitat for wild game traditionally sought by the natives.

D. Observations:

Montgomery along with nearby hill towns such as Russell Tolland, Granville and Southwick was probably part of peripheral lands utilized by the natives of Woronoco (Westfield) primarily as a hunting and fishing area. Attention should be focused on the Westfield River floodplain, the bluffs overlooking the river and the town's central uplands as areas with the greatest potential for extant period sites.

V. Plantation Period (1620-1675)

A. Transportation Routes:

Native trails remain as intermediate routes around Mt. Tekoa to upper Westfield valley.

B. Population

Montgomery may have had a small native population when considering the absence of a colonial settlement.

C. Settlement:

There would have been little change in the settlement patterns of natives utilizing the area. Colonial settlement was not initiated until the mid-1760s.

D. Economic Base:

This area probably continued to be utilized by Woronoco natives as a peripheral resource area.

Colonial harvesting of local resources probably did not take place during the Plantation period since considerable tracts of more attractive Connecticut River valley lands were available to the east.

E. Observations:

Montgomery was a limited use peripheral area for the Connecticut River Valley's native and colonial populations. The only prospect for extant period archaeological evidence would be possible native occupation in the same areas as listed for the Contact period.

VI. Colonial Period (1675-1775)

A. Transportation Routes:

Improvement of east-west route from Westfield to Chester as Main Road across Moose Meadow plain and down Roaring Brook before Revolution.

B. Population:

Montgomery may have had a handful of native occupants. None of the available sources provide figures for the area's colonial population. At the time of Montgomery's incorporation in 1780, Old Montgomery (Montgomery, Russell) only had a population of approximately 400 colonial residents. The majority of the town's settlers were formerly residents of Westfield.

C. Settlement Patterns:

Colonial settlement of Montgomery was encouraged by termination of the French and Indians wars in 1763 and the low sale prices of local tracts. Initial settlement appears to have occurred shortly after 1763 with the appearance of Ephraim Avery who built a home in the vicinity of Mt. Tekoa. It appears the area's rugged terrain discouraged extensive settlement although a small settlement node probably had been established on Main Road in the vicinity of the Center Cemetery by the end of the Colonial period.

D. Economic Base:

The town's economy was based primarily on agriculture, particularly live-stock and dairy production and lumbering. There was no mention of period mill operations in the available secondary sources. However, a sawmill and grist mill complex appearing on a 1794 map of Montgomery in north-western Montgomery on Roaring Crow Brook along with a sawmill on Moose Meadow Brook and a second gristmill and sawmill complex in the vicinity of Westfield Reservoir may pre-date 1775.

E. Observations:

Montgomery's location in the hill country of Western Massachusetts was a major factor in limiting its development to little more than a peripheral agricultural, lumbering community. Access to the more extensively developed towns of the Connecticut River valley was difficult due to the area's rugged terrain and the poorly developed transportation network. The likelihood of surviving period archaeological sites is probably greatest in central Montgomery. The settlement's Colonial period history is poorly documented by secondary sources. At present, the town lacks an inventory of local architectural resources.

VII. Federal Period (1775-1830)

A. Transportation Routes:

Location of meeting house(1797) on Main Road sets pattern for radial highways from town center. These included Russell, Southampton, Pitcher and North Roads with improvement of east-west highway as New State Road along Crow Brook.

B. Population:

Montgomery's population fluctuated in the Federal period in the 500s ranging between 449 in 1790 and 604 in 1820.

C. Settlement Pattern:

Meeting house location established at Montgomery Center(1797) on Main Road with primary village maintained at junction of North and Pitcher Roads from Colonial period.

D. Economic Base:

From the earliest years of its history, one early 20th century writer noted, Montgomery has been an agricultural town, without appreciable water power to stimulate manufacturing. In 1794, four grist and saw-mills were mapped in the survey of the town, and this number remained largely unchanged for 60 years.

E. Architecture:

Residential: Approximately a dozen Federal houses and cottages are believed to survive in the town. Almost all of these are center chimney structures, five bays wide with center entrances. All are simply detailed vernacular structures. In addition to these structures, a few cottages of less than five bays width were observed as well. These include a three-bay wide, end chimney cottage on New State Road and a four bay wide interior chimney cottage on Russell Road. Period houses were observed on New State, Carrington, Russell and Main Roads. Only one house possibly dating as early as the 18th century was observed in the town. This is located on Russell Road and is a five bay facade, center chimney house: the rear wall of the house preserves a three bay configuration which may indicate the original construction. Three

bay wide houses were a relatively common regional form in the 18th century.

Institutional: The first meetinghouse in Montgomery was built in 1797 by the Congregational Society; no particulars of the structure are known. The first schools in the town were organized in 1786; it is not known when the first schools were built. By 1830, six schools stood in the town. Also by 1830, a town house had been built adjacent to the meetinghouse on Main Road.

#### VIII. Early Industrial Period (1830-1870)

##### A. Transportation Routes:

Primary east-west highway through town center remained as Main Road from Westfield to Chester. Significant improvement of regional corridor from Connecticut Valley to Berkshires with location of Western Railroad along Westfield River gorge during 1838-41, although little impact upon local road system.

##### B. Population:

Montgomery's population peaked in 1840 with the unexpectedly high figure of 740 residents. For the rest of the period, the figure fluctuated downward, reaching 318 in 1870. Only 6 residents were reported of foreign birth in 1855, five of whom were Canadian.

##### C. Settlement Pattern:

Civic center remained at meetinghouse site on Main Road with street village at North Road junction. Location of Western Railroad (1842) along Westfield River has little impact upon settlement pattern.

##### D. Economic Base:

No appreciable change in Montgomery's economy. Atwater Moore operated a whip shop. In 1865, 62 farms were reported, employing 85 persons. In 1857, three sawmills and a grist mill were noted.

##### E. Architecture:

Residential: very few houses of the period were observed: probably no more than two dozen houses and cottages of the period have survived in the town. Sidehall plan Greek Revival houses were noted on Avery, Carrington, New State, Russell, Old House and Pitcher Roads. In addition to sidehall plan structures, a few more traditional double interior chimney houses and cottages were noted as well. These were located on Russell Road near Pomeroy Road, on Main Road and on Carrington Road. All of the general absence of Italianate structures reflects the isolation and conservatism of the area with the Greek Revival style predominating through the end of the period.

Institutional: The major surviving institutional buildings of the town date from the period. Most of these are located at the town center on Main Road. They include the one-and-a-half story Greek Revival First Congregational Church(1848), a center entrance one-story Greek Revival building and the Methodist Church(1849), a one-and-a-half story Greek Revival building with a two stage square belfry and a projecting enclosed porch. In addition to these buildings, schools probably built in the period were observed on Carrington Road near Pomeroy Road and on Main Road at Pitcher Road. The Carrington Road building is a one-story structure now incorporated as an ell in a Queen Anne cottage.

IX. Late Industrial Period (1870-1915)

A. Transportation Routes

Little improvement of local highway system, with Boston & Albany (Western) railroad as primary regional corridor along Westfield River.

B. Population:

Montgomery's population declined steadily throughout the period, from 318 in 1870 to 230 in 1915. By 1905 its largest immigrant group was a small community of Italians, 17 of whom claimed a Mediterranean birth.

C. Settlement Pattern:

Montgomery Center maintained as civic focus with extended village on Main Road to Westfield.

D. Economic Base:

The establishment of the Westfield Reservoir, c.1874 on Moose Meadow Brook eliminated Moore's whip shop as well as saw and grist mills on the same stream. The Moores later opened the Mountain House nearby as an inn, and in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Montgomery, "the Hampden County town of Greater Altitude than Magnitude," was boosted as a "summer resort, for which no section of the country is better adapted, where pure air, the best of water, wholesome food, grand scenery, and all that makes for health may be found in abundance". (Mongomery, 1903).

E. Architecture:

Residential: very few houses or cottages of the period were observed. Most of the dozen or so houses noted were simple sidehall plan Queen Anne cottages. Many of these incorporate kneewall framed attic stories. At least one cross-gabled Queen Anne cottage was observed on Carrington Road.

Institutional:

The only known institutional building of the period is the Grace Memorial Library(c.1910), a very simple one-story vernacular frame structure on Main Road at the town center, opposite the Congregational Church.

X. Early Modern (1915-1940)

A. Transportation Routes:

Local road system remained in place with some improvement of Main Road from Westfield as secondary autoroute. No state highways located through area. Regional airway beacon tower located on flank of Ball Mountain by 1938(still intact-Pitcher Road).

B. Population:

Town population fluctuated in the Early Modern period between a high of 230 (1915) and a low of 141 (1930). In 1935, with a population of 174, it was the second smallest town in the county(after Tolland).

C. Settlement Pattern:

No significant change with settlement maintained along Main Road from Montgomery Center.

D. Economic Base:

Raising of stock and production of dairy products remained the dominant economic activity. In the 1930s, a WPA project upgraded the Westfield Reservoir facilities.

E. Architecture:

The only structures of the period voted were a few gable roof center entrance cottages of the 1920s on Carrington Road. One other cottage, a rustically detailed one-story lodge, was noted on Pomeroy Road.

XI. Survey Observations

Montgomery has no completed inventory forms. The bulk of the town's architectural resources consists of Federal period houses and cottages and mid-19th century institutions buildings. Future survey work would probably not encompass more than 25 inventory forms.

Sources

Allyn, Lewis Benajah,"Ancient Landmarks of Montgomery, MA.," (Westfield, 1920). Reprinted in Stone Walls vol. 6, no.2 (Summer 1980), pp. 2-7.

Westfield Times & Newsletter, Historical and Descriptive Sketch of the Town of Montgomery, MA. (Westfield, 1903). Bound clippings in State Library.