

MHC Reconnaissance Survey Town Report

WESTHAMPTON

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.

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MHC RECONNAISSANCE SURVEY REPORT

DATE: December 1982

Community: Westhampton

I. Topography:

Westhampton is located in the foothills of the Green Mountains of Vermont. Local terrain is characterized by moderately sloping uplands that frequently reach over 1200 feet in elevation. Prominent points include Mt. Pisgah (1543 feet) located near the town's border with Huntington, Dry Hill (1508 feet) and Spruce Hill (1436 feet) north and southeast of Mt. Pisgah, respectively and Breakneck Hill (1328 feet) in southwestern Westhampton. Elevations drop considerably in the southern half of eastern Westhampton rarely extending over 700 feet. Local drainage is excellent. Marshland is limited to three small tracts in southwestern Westhampton. The upper two thirds of town is drained by the North Branch of the Manhan River, a tributary of the Connecticut, while southwestern Westhampton is drained by the Manhan's main branch. Westhampton's only bodies of freshwater, Pine Island Lake and White Reservoir, are both manmade. Local soil is basically sandy and gravelly.

II. Political Boundaries:

Originally part of Northampton grant (1654) and surveyed as West or Long Division in 1690. Northern boundary defined as Northampton grant line with Chesterfield by 1762, western boundary with Murryfield (Norwich-Huntington) by 1765 and southern line with Southampton by 1750. Incorporated as town of Westhampton in 1778 with eastern boundary at Northampton line.

III. Historic Overview:

Rural Hill town on secondary corridor between Northampton and Chester. Located in western uplands of Berkshire hills with possible native sites along North Branch of Manhan River to Connecticut Valley. Settled from Northampton by mid 18th century with some Colonial houses preserved along original Shirkshire Road (Route 66) and in Westhampton Center. Meeting house established at Westhampton center after Revolution with limited agricultural potential along Roberts Meadow Brook and North Branch-Manhan Rivers through early 19th century with Federal period farmsteads along Route 66 and Stage Road. Upland slopes developed for sheep grazing and timber resources with Early Industrial saw mill surviving on Easthampton Road. Farming maintained along valley lands through mid 19th century with several period Greek Revival houses along Route 66, Chesterfield and Easthampton Roads. Westhampton Center remained as civic focus with well-detailed period houses and modest town hall in Federal-Greek Revival style. Considerable abandonment of upland farming during 19th century with gradual development of recreational potential by early 20th century from Northampton around Pine Island Lake. Secondary villages developed along Route 66 corridor at Loudville and Babcock Corners. Present growth most evident as suburban expansion from Northampton on highland vistas of Route 66 corridor and as secluded sites around Pine Island Lake. Town center retains authentic historic character as isolated village, while dairy farms maintain agricultural landscape along local river valleys.

IV. Contact Period (1500-1620)

A. Transportation Routes:

Intermediate corridor between upper Manhan and Westfield Rivers through western uplands. Primary east-west trail apparently followed Main Road (Route 66) from North Branch of Manhan across upland vales (Sylvester, 1879, I, p. 287 (Judd, 1866)), with probable northern trail along Roberts Meadow Brook as Chesterfield Road. Secondary connector is conjectured as North-South Roads through Westhampton Center with possible route along Sodom Brook as Stage Road to Tob Hill (Ibid, p. 287).

B. Settlement Patterns:

There were no native sites reported in the Westhampton area. Native occupation of the area during the Contact period was probably limited due to the absence of good agricultural land and major waterways and freshwater bodies. The fertile floodplains of Northampton would have been much more attractive to valley natives. Local native settlement was probably restricted to small, short term hunting and fishing camps scattered about the uplands and adjacent to area waterways, particularly the Manhan River.

C. Subsistence Patterns:

As mentioned above, native fishing and hunting likely took place in the uplands and local water sources.

D. Observations:

Southampton was situated on the periphery of the heavily settled Connecticut River Valley and probably was utilized primarily as a resource area for the native occupants of Nerwottuck (Northampton). There is limited likelihood of extant archaeological remains of native occupation because of the low visibility of short-term fishing/hunting incampments.

V. Plantation Period (1620-1675)

A. Transportation Routes:

Secondary path from Northampton to Westfield River appears to have followed Main Road (Route 66) from upper Manhan River.

B. Population:

The local native population was probably restricted to small hunting and fishing bands occupying the area during the spring, fall and winter months. Westhampton lacked a colonial population until the 1760s.

C. Settlement Patterns:

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

D. Economic Base:

As part of Northampton's western common lands, the Westhampton area probably was utilized as grazing and timberland by Northampton residents.

E. Observations:

Westhampton remained a resource area for native and colonial inhabitants of the Connecticut River Valley settlements. Colonial settlement of this area was discouraged by its limited agricultural potential and vulnerability to native attack.

VI. Colonial Period (1675-1775)

A. Transportation Routes:

Improvement of east-west regional route with Shirkshire Road (1762) from Northampton to Murrifield(Chester) as Main Road (Route 66) following existing path (Sylvester, 1879, I. p. 287 Judd, 1866). Secondary regional highways apparently laid out before Revolution include Chesterfield Road and north-south axis of Southampton-Reservoir Roads. Connector to formative town center at Westhampton followed Easthampton-Stage Road with bridge across Sodom Brook(1768) at mill site.

B. Population:

The native population appears to have been restricted to small hunting and fishing bands. Westhampton probably lacked a native population after the influx of colonial settlers in the 1760s.

At the time of initial colonial settlement (1763), the colonial population consisted of 2 families and 19 individuals. The next 16 years witnessed a gradual increase in the community's population. In 1770, Westhampton was composed of only 16 families. This figure had increased to 60 families by 1779. Most period settlers were former Northampton residents. A small number of inhabitants moved from Southampton and South Hadley.

C. Settlement Patterns:

The first colonial settlement took place in c.1762 when Abner Smith is reputed to have moved from Chester or Murrayfield and settled on the banks of the Manhan River near "Deacon Lyman's home" (Sylvester 1879: II, 287). However, he only remained for 1-2 years. Long-term settlement of Westhampton did not commence until c.1767. From this date until 1770, settlement focused along Main Road between its intersection with Edwards and Lead Mine Roads. Later period settlement occurred north of this area along South and Stage Roads. By the end of the Colonial period, a primary settlement node had been established in the vicinity of the junction of these two roads. A secondary settlement node had developed in northeastern Westhampton in an area enclosed by North, Chesterfield and Bridgeman's Roads. Several homes were constructed on Lead Mine Road, in the 1770s as part of a secondary settlement node that had been established in the vicinity of Southampton's lead mine complex. Scattered homes were established outside of these three focal points on Northwest Road near its junction with

Chesterfield Road, Kings Highway/Easthampton Road, Turkey Hill and Lyman Road.

D. Economic Base:

The primary pursuit of local residents was agriculture. Farmers focused on livestock grazing due to the lack of good cropland. There was some maple sugar production on land south of Main Road near the home of William J. Lyman. Most area farmers cut timber in Westhampton's woodlands. A large portion of this wood was sold as timber and firewood to Northampton. Some residents worked in Southampton's lead mine. Several period mills were established in Westhampton shortly after the town's settlement. King's sawmill is reputed to have begun operation in c. 1762 (Sylvester 1879: II, 288). A second sawmill was established in the late 1760s on Robert's Meadow Brook. Timothy Pomeroy appears to have established a tavern in 1768 to accommodate the employees of the lead mine.

E. Architecture:

Residential: Westhampton was not settled until the late 1760s and only eight houses were reported by one source (Everts, 1879) to be standing in 1770. Only two houses are believed to survive from the Colonial period; both are typical of the 18th century architecture in the region. One is a gambrel roofed center chimney cottage (c.1770) on Stage Road. The other structure is the Kingsley House (1768), a center chimney plan house which exhibits three design features common in 18th century houses of the Connecticut Valley: the end gable overhang, second story overhang and integral lean-to. Overhangs were of the hewn variety rather than framed, as was typical in the 17th century. The Kingsley House has one other notable feature: its chimney is faced with a blind arch. The blind arch recalls the pilastered chimneys of 17th century Massachusetts Bay houses and was also noted in Tolland, another late-settled highland agricultural community.

F. Observations:

Westhampton was closely tied to Northampton and Southampton due to its limited economic base and lack of a meetinghouse. Contact with these two communities was facilitated by two major routes. (Reservoir and Southampton Roads, Main Road) that extended through the town. Future research should be devoted to determining the impact development of the Southampton lead mine had on Westhampton's economy. The community has good potential for surviving period cultural resources. A sizeable number of period homes are listed in the town's architectural inventory. The greatest likelihood for extant period archaeological remains should occur along Lead Mine, Main, South and Stage Roads, Turkey Hill and the Chesterfield Road/North Road settlement node.

VII. Federal Period (1775-1830)

A. Transportation Routes:

Establishment of Westhampton Center (1785) created radial highway pattern from meeting house, including North-South Roads and Tob Hill Road. Other period highways across upland intervalles appear as Edwards, Lyman and Mud Hill Roads from Babcock Corners (Route 66) and Northwest Road and Kings Highway to Shack Street in northwest section. Primary east-west highway remained as Main Road (Route 66) from Loudville to Norwich (Huntington).

B. Population:

Between 1790 and 1830 Westhampton's population rose 34.4 percent--about half the county average for the period. In 1830 it peaked at 918 persons, a figure it would not reach again for 140 years. Historian Holland, writing in the 1850s, of the source of the town's growth (from Northampton and Southampton only, of the local towns) wrote,

In those days of puritanic simplicity... the enterprise of removing from adjacent towns to this, then almost an unbroken forest, was esteemed by those interested in it, to be an effort of scarcely less magnitude than an emigration at this day, from New England to Iowa or Minnesota. (V. 2, p.290).

C. Settlement Patterns:

Civic focus established at Westhampton Center with meeting house (1785) and secondary villages at Babcock Corners along Shirkshire Road (Route 66) and around leadmine at Loudville. Agriculture developed as primary activity along North Branch of Manhan River with lumbering in western hill lands.

D. Economic Base:

Economy entirely agricultural, though the land was better suited "for grazing than tillage". Northampton owners continued to graze cattle here, and sheep were also raised. Of industry, the enumerators of the 1832 list of manufacturers wrote: "Nothing in this town except a tannery which uses 320 cords of bark".

E. Architecture:

Residential: The majority of Westhampton's residences are Federal period houses. This reflects the rise in population which occurred in the period. The preponderance of fully-developed five bay center entrance two-story houses (there are almost no cottages of the Federal period) also indicates the overall prosperity of the town in the period. Neither center chimney nor double chimney (center hall) plans predominate, both having been used with equal frequency. What is notable about Westhampton's Federal houses is their simplicity: only two houses known exhibit extra ornament. These are the Ludden House (c.1790) and a house on Southampton Road. Both are conservative in design, with Georgian details such as

pedimented entrance surrounds on porches, modillion cornices and crown-molded lintels. The Ludden House incorporates the wide, double leaved door favored in the Connecticut Valley from the 1780s through the 1840s. The majority of the remaining period houses in the town are very simply detailed vernacular farmhouses. In addition to a cluster at the town center, Federal houses were observed on Main Road, at Loudville, and on Easthampton Road.

Institutional: The first meetinghouse of the Westhampton parish (organized 1779) was built in 1785. That structure, which had dimensions of 40' X 50', was demolished in 1816, and replaced by a 70' x 52' meetinghouse designed by Northampton architect Isaac Damon. That Damon was hired to design the town's meetinghouse is another indication of Westhampton's prosperity in the Federal period. Unfortunately, the Damon structure burned in 1829. The present meetinghouse (60' x 52') was built on the same foundations by Major Caleb Loud and his son in that year. It is a two-and-a-half story Federal/Greek Revival structure with a shallow two-story porch containing triple entrances. All the second story windows have round heads. In 1860, a spire was added to the two-stage square belfry. The first school in the town was built at Babcock's Corner in 1782. In 1786, there were six school districts in the town. By 1830, eight schools had been built in the town. A Union Church was founded in 1829 but had dissolved by 1850. Its site is unknown.

Industrial: The Loud Family Mill (1816), a two story structure four bays long by two bays wide, is the only known Federal industrial building surviving.

VIII. Early Industrial Period (1830-1870)

A. Transportation Routes:

Local highway system remained focused around Westhampton Center with abandonment of upland roads around western hills. Primary regional routes remained as Main Road (Route 66) and Chesterfield Road from Northampton. No railroads projected or constructed.

B. Population:

Westhampton was one of 13 towns in the county to register a declining population. In the first two decades alone, the town lost one third of its population as residents moved to more central locations (Northampton) or to the midwest. In 1855, 5 percent of its population was foreign born--a figure not unlike the 6.3 percent reported by Huntington or the 6.6 percent of Southampton, and slightly less than half the county average. All but one of those counted as foreign-born were natives of Ireland.

C. Settlement Patterns:

Civic focus remained at Westhampton Center with agricultural settlement along Main Street axis (Route 66) from Loudville. Lumbering extended in western hills with sheep grazing on upland vales replacing abandoned farmland.

D. Economic Base:

Westhampton's chief product was in firewood and lumber, sold in Northampton for building purposes and wood stoves, furnaces, and locomotives. By 1853 nine sawmills were in operation at least part time on local streams. In addition, the town experienced a limited industrial diversity (elsewhere characteristic of the period) with the establishment of a small (1 person) brass foundry (the firm, Bruce & Armitage, made harnesses), turning shops, and a shop which turned out tooth powder boxes. As a measure of this manufacturing strength, however, the value of butter produced in 1865 (\$7253) outgrossed all the other manufactured products enumerated combined.

E. Architecture:

Residential: Despite a rapid decline in population in the early years of the period, a fair number of houses were built. Almost no houses were built from 1850 until 1940; thus nearly all of Westhampton's houses are Federal and Greek Revival structures, built between 1790 and 1850. In general, houses of the Early Industrial period are smaller than those built in the Federal period. Two-story houses were built but most were sidehall plan structures which normally included only two first floor rooms rather than the four or five common for center chimney and center hall houses. In addition, cottages were built in numbers for the first time in the Early Industrial period. Almost all of these are center chimney Greek Revival structures, five bays wide with a center entrance. A few center hall (double chimney) houses in vernacular Greek Revival and Italianate designs were built. Of note is a low hip roofed, square plan Italianate house on North Road; as far as is known, it is the only house of that relatively sophisticated Italianate design in the town. It probably relates to houses of similar design then being built in Northampton.

Institutional:

At least three institutional buildings of the Early Industrial period have survived. These are the Town Hall (c.1840) and two schools, the Hill School (c.1860) and the Chesterfield Road School (c.1840). The Town Hall is a simple one-story Greek Revival building with a Doric portico in antis. The Chesterfield Road school, a one-and-a-half story frame building, is somewhat unusual in that it is entered through a side ell. The Hill School on Route 66 at Southampton Road, is a one-story brick building, two bays wide with an offset entrance on the gable front. It exhibits corbelled raking eaves, then commonly used on smaller vernacular Greek Revival cottages and schools. The Davenport House at the town center once served as the Town Hall and a school building; a two-story vernacular Italianate structure, the house's former institutional function is reflected in its entrance location. The entrance occupies the center of the three-bay gable front, rather than the usual side position. One other store is known (Sylvester Judd House, 1839); it too has a three bay gable front with a center entrance.

Industrial:

The Parsons Sawmill, a two story frame building, two bays wide by four bays long, is the only surviving period industrial building known. It stands on Easthampton Road.

IX. Late Industrial Period (1870-1915)

A. Transportation Routes:

Road system remained intact with regional highway as Main Road (Route 66) and local connectors to Westhampton Center. No street railways projected or constructed through area.

B. Population:

Though the town's population continued to decline, it was at a much slower rate, losing only 157 persons in the 45 years 1870-1915. At the later date the population stood at 430 persons. The town's foreign-born population remained under 10 percent for most of the period, with Ireland and French speaking Canada the birthplace of most.

C. Settlement Pattern:

Westhampton Center maintained as civic focus with farming along Main Street corridor (Route 66). Lumbering and grazing continued on western uplands.

D. Economic Base:

In the 1870s, as the use of coal increased in homes, businesses, and railroads, the demand and value of firewood was sharply reduced. Also the new steam mills at Mount Tom (Northampton, at the Oxbow) were now producing more slab wood than they could dispose of promptly, further lowering the value of Westhampton firewood.

Other products also saw new competition. Western beef, butter and cheese produced in quantity and shipped cheaply by rail to Northampton, Westfield and other towns cut sharply into local grazing products.

Local pundits, observing the declining population, predicted that the town would soon disappear as a civic organization and

become a wood-lot of Northampton again; the wild animals may once more live in the ancient haunts, wolves howl upon the slopes of the mountains, and bears prowl along the banks of Turkey Brook, Sodom Brook, and the Mahan River.

Nevertheless, sawmills and turning mills remained for much of the period.

E. Architecture:

Residential: Very few houses were built in the Late Industrial. Approximately a half dozen houses of Late Industrial date were observed in the town. Almost all are very simple sidehall plan vernacular Queen Anne cottages with gable roofs. Examples were noted at Loudville, at the town center and in a few scattered outlying locations. One more substantial Queen Anne house with a tower was observed on Main Road.

X. Early Modern Period (1915-1940)

A. Transportation Routes:

Improvement of east west regional highway as Route 66 (Main Road) from Northampton to Huntington (by 1925) and secondary connectors to Westhampton Center and Chesterfield.

B. Population:

The town's population reached its nadir in 1920 with a resident count of 305, rising slowly from that point to 405 in 1935. Despite the small gain 1920-35, the town's population over the entire period declined, and not until the 1960s were any appreciable gains made.

C. Settlement Pattern:

Civic focus remained at Westhampton Center with recreational development of Pine Island Reservoir from Northampton as modest summer resort. Agriculture maintained along Route 66 corridor with lumbering in hill land.

D. Economic Base:

No new industries identified. Major economic activities, however limited, were in dairying, general farming, and lumbering.

E. Architecture:

Residential: A few one and one-and-a-half story cottages with gable or gambrel roofs were built in the town. The more substantial cottages exhibit Colonial Revival styling. Period houses were observed on South, Stage, North and Easthampton Roads. Also noted was a two-story brick Colonial Revival house on North Road at Turkey Brook.

Institutional: The only institutional building of the period is the Center School on North Road. It is a frame Colonial Revival Building typical of schools of the period, with a raised basement, hip roof and entrance pavilion with pediment.

XI. Survey Observations:

General: Westhampton's survey records all pre-1850 structures; as this includes most of the houses in the town, the inventory is virtually complete. Post-1850 buildings, such as the Center School and the towered Queen Anne house on Main Road, might be added at a later date. In general, historical and architectural information on inventory forms is thorough, however, specific dates of house construction, if available, would be helpful. Date plaques on houses in the town exist; that information should be transferred to inventory forms.

XII Sources

Holland, Josiah G., History of Western Massachusetts. Volume II (Springfield, 1855).

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