

MHC Reconnaissance Survey Town Report

PHILLIPSTON

Report Date: 1984

Associated Regional Report: Central Massachusetts

Reconnaissance Survey Town Reports, produced for MHC's Statewide Reconnaissance Survey between 1979 and 1987, introduce the historical development of each of the Commonwealth's municipalities. Each report begins with an historic overview, a description of topography, and political boundaries. For the purposes of the survey, the historic period has been subdivided into seven periods: Contact (1500–1620), Plantation (1620–1675), Colonial (1675–1775), Federal (1775–1830), Early Industrial (1830–1870), Late Industrial (1870–1915), and Early Modern (1915–1940/55). Each report concludes with survey observations that evaluate the town's existing historic properties inventory and highlight significant historic buildings, settlement patterns, and present threats to these resources. A bibliography lists key secondary resources.

Town reports are designed for use together with a series of town maps that demarcate settlement patterns, transportation corridors and industrial sites for each historic period. These maps are in the form of color-coded, polyester overlays to the USGS topographic base map for each town on file and available for consultation at MHC. For further information on the organization and preparation of town reports, readers should contact MHC.

Users should keep in mind that these reports are now two decades or more old. The information they contain, including assessments of existing knowledge, planning recommendations, understanding of local development, and bibliographic references all date to the time they were written. In some cases, information on certain topics was not completed. No attempt has been made to update this information.

Electronic text was not available for digital capture, and as a result most of the reports have been scanned as PDF files. While all have been processed with optical character recognition, there will inevitably be some character recognition errors.

The activity that is the subject of the MHC Reconnaissance Survey Town Report has been financed in part with Federal funds from the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior. However, the contents and opinions do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the Department of the Interior. This program receives Federal financial assistance for identification and protection of historic properties. Under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, and the Age Discrimination Act of 1975, as amended, the U.S. Department of the Interior prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, national origin, disability or age in its federally assisted programs. If you believe you have been discriminated against in any program, activity or facility as described above, or if you desire further information please write to: Office of Equal Opportunity, National Park Service, 1849 C Street, N.W., Washington, D.C., 20240.



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IN COMPLETE

MHC RECONNAISSANCE SURVEY REPORT

DATE: 1984

COMMUNITY: Phillipston

I. TOPOGRAPHY

II. POLITICAL BOUNDARIES

Included as part of original "Narragansett Number Six" grant of 1730 and "Payquage" grant of 1732. Incorporated as town of Gerry from parts of Templeton and Athol in 1786. Parts annexed to Royalston in 1759 and to Athol in 1806. Name changed to Phillipston in 1814. Part annexed to Templeton in 1892.

III. HISTORIC OVERVIEW

Phillipston is a rural, residential community in the northwest Central Uplands, south of the Millers River, on an historic, east-west highland corridor to the Connecticut Valley. Native sites are probable at Queen Lake. First permanent European settlement, delayed by native hostilities, occurs ca. 1751 as a peripheral area of Narragansett Number Six (Templeton) and Payquage (Athol). Parish meetinghouse site is established by 1779. Dispersed agricultural settlement continues through the 18th and early 19th century, with the development of a small civic focus at the meetinghouse center. A small early 19th-century textile manufacturing focus emerges at East Phillipston (Goulding Village) followed by woodenware manufacturing here and at Powers Mills. Abandonment of agricultural lands and population decline extends through the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Some recreational cottage development occurs along Queen Lake. Postwar suburban growth has extended into town from Athol and possibly Gardner, but the major modern impact has been the relocation of Route 2 across the northern part of town. Some notable 18th century farmhouses remain, particularly on Prospect Hill in the west and east of Queen Lake. Phillipston Center survives as a largely intact Federal civic focus, and industrial and turnpike related 19th-century dwellings remain along Baldwinville Road and at Phillipston Four Corners.

IV. CONTACT PERIOD (1500-1620)

A. Transportation Routes

Highland tributary area south of Millers River. Northwest/southeast trail from Payquog to Queen Lake conjectured as Athol Road-Barre Road-Burnshirt Road-Petersham Road. East/west trail south of Queen Lake inferred on Templeton Road. North/south trail to South Royalston Falls (Millers River) conjectured as South Royalston Road.

B. Settlement Pattern

Archaeological and documentary evidence on the area at this time is extremely scarce. There are no recorded sites. The population density is presumed to be low due to the upland character of the land, with only short-term visits by small groups. The area's major body of water, Queen Lake, and the town's numerous brooks, provide possibilities for occupation.

C. Subsistence Pattern

Small family and task groups visited the area seasonally for resource exploitation, primarily through hunting and fishing.

V. PLANTATION PERIOD (1620-1675)

A. Transportation Routes

Established trails continue in use.

B. Settlement Pattern

The near absence of settler contact characterized this period on the colonial frontier. Native patterns established during the Contact period continued, modified only by the secondary contact, with possible reduction of population by the epidemic of the 1630s in the Connecticut Valley to the east.

C. Subsistence Pattern

As in the settlement pattern, the influence of colonials on established contact patterns was essentially secondary, with basic systems remaining unchanged.

VI. COLONIAL PERIOD (1675-1775)

A. Transportation Routes

Peripheral area of Templeton and Athol with roads radiating from Templeton Center in the east. These included the road northwest to Royalston (Colony Road-Royalston Road), west to Athol (Templeton Road #2, Ward Hill Road, abandoned road west), to Millers River, Athol (Brooks Village Road, abandoned route to Baldwin Hill Road), and southwest to Petersham (Templeton Road #1, Queen Lake Road). In the southeast runs a north/south road from Royalston to Barre (Riley Switch Road-Williamsville Road).

B. Population

Few figures are available due to late settlement and dependent status. Petition for precinct status included 41 of Templeton's portion and 14 of Athol's in 1773.

C. Settlement Pattern

Phillipston was originally the western half of the town of Templeton, laid out as Narragansett #6 grant to soldiers of King Philip's War, and first settled in 1751. This delay in settlement was due primarily to the danger of intratribal and intracolonial frontier conflicts that broke out repeatedly during the 18th century. Population came more slowly to this section, but the distance to Templeton Center brought precinct status in 1774, including a section of Athol to the north. Settlement of dispersed farmsteads were slightly more numerous in the southern section.

D. Economic Base

Included as part of Templeton, the area was classified as a Poor Agrarian Town in 1771 by Pruitt. This was based on low ratings for commercial development and community wealth, moderate corn production and agricultural prosperity, plus a combination of high agricultural poverty with low propertylessness. This cluster of attributes and the resulting classification is common throughout the new towns of the county's northern and western uplands.

E. Architecture

Residential: Few apparent survivals from the period. One two-story, center chimney plan was observed as well as a two-story, double chimney house with a pyramidal roof which may be early Federal period.

Institutional: Reference to an inn in 1774.

VII. FEDERAL PERIOD (1775-1830)

A. Transportation Routes

The east-west Fifth Massachusetts Turnpike opens ca. 1800 on a route north of Phillipston Center (Mohawk Trail-Brooks Village Road). From the 1780s, north-south roads are improved from the meetinghouse center, including Petersham, Barre, Athol, Baldwinville, and Royalston Roads.

B. Population

The town's population grew rapidly during its early years, from 740 in 1790 to 932 in 1830. This figure represents the town's largest size until surpassed in 1975. This expansion included a group that migrated to the town from Truro, on Cape Cod. The town was slow to form a church, waiting until 1785, and did not settle a minister until 1788. He was later dismissed, moved to Ashby where he became avowedly Unitarian, the probable reason behind his problems with the church. The town formed, with Templeton, a Thief Detecting Society in 1796. Masons joined the lodges in Athol, Gardner, and finally Templeton. The town changed its name in 1814 in response to the policies of Gerry's policies as

governor, particularly the redistricting which gave birth to the term "gerrymander."

C. Settlement Pattern

Dispersed agricultural settlement continues. The meetinghouse is built ca. 1780, and a small residential cluster develops nearby and extends north on Baldwinsville Road. A secondary cluster develops at Powers Mills at the Turnpike/Baldwinsville Road intersection north of the center. Textile manufacturing is established at East Phillipston after 1811.

D. Economic Base

Still classified in 1784 as part of Templeton, the area shared a high proportion of unimproved land, 78.5%. A moderate amount, 2.2%, was under tillage, with small amounts used for mowing and meadow, 7.8%, and pasturage, 11.2%.

E. Architecture

Residential: Very few buildings seem to remain from the period, despite the slight rise in population by 1840. Two two-story, center chimney plans were noted, both pedimented doorways. A rear wall chimney plan was also observed.

Institutional: Meetinghouse completed ca. 1785. Town voted to build three schools in 1790. One gable end building survives in the Center.

VIII. EARLY INDUSTRIAL PERIOD (1830-1870)

A. Transportation Routes

The early 19th-century roadways continue in use. The Vermont and Massachusetts Railroad (1847) passes through the north, with nearest depot at South Royalston.

B. Population

After a brief period of expansion, the town now entered one of slow decline extending into the third quarter of the 20th century. From a high of 932 in 1830 the total fell to 693 in 1870, with the largest loss, over 100, in the decade of the 1840s. The proportion of foreign-born was one of the county's smallest, averaging 6%. Overwhelming employment in agriculture.

the rise in religious enthusiasm brought out Universalist and Methodist sentiments in the town. Dissatisfaction with the Calvinist minister of First Parish turned some members to the influence of a Methodist circuit preacher, and church formation in 1830. This resulted in a suit over the distribution of ministerial funds, which were thereafter used for the poor. In 1833 Universalists calling themselves the Independent Religious Society built a meetinghouse but met antagonism in the town, arson was attempted, and the structure was rebuilt in Templeton in

1838. The town formed a public library in 1860. After several years of unsuccessful attempts, the district school system was dismantled in 1869.

C. Settlement Pattern

A few residential additions are made at Phillipston center, and a Universalist church (1833) is built to the north of the Center Cemetery. The church is reputed to have been removed to East Templeton, possibly in 1859, for use by the Methodists. At Powers Mills, some small-scale chair manufacturing and residential expansion moves west on Turnpike Road and south on Royalston Road. A Methodist Church is built here in 1849. A small residential cluster develops northeast on Royalston Road (Lambstown). Manufacturing continues at East Templeton, with chairs and toys replacing textiles.

D. Economic Base

E. Architecture

Residential: Single-story, center chimney house noted and one that appears to be a single-story, double chimney plan. Some two-story, five-bay dwellings noted in the center. Gable end, side-passage plans and gable end center entry, five-bay houses also observed.

Institutional: Meetinghouse remodelled ca. 1830 and presents Greek Revival columned gable end facade.

Methodist meetinghouse erected in 1849. Building may survive as the gable end Church of Christ in Phillipston Four Corners. Independent Religious Universalist Society built meetinghouse in 1830s, but it was sold to the East Templeton Methodists ca. 1870(?).

IX. LATE INDUSTRIAL PERIOD (1870-1915)

A. Transportation Routes

Street railway service is operating by the 1890s from Athol to Gardner along the Mohawk Trail.

B. Population

The pattern of population decline continues through this period, from 693 in 1870 to 390 in 1915. The foreign-born proportion in the town remained small, just over 6%, except for a brief increase to 9.4% in 1895. This group was very diverse, including numbers of Irish, English, French Canadians, Finns, and Poles so small as to suggest independent family groups. Agriculture remained the overwhelming employment and a Grange was formed in 1879. The Methodist church was reorganized in 1877. The town joined with Royalston, Hubbardston, and Templeton in 1889 to hire a superintendent of schools, paying its proportional one-tenth of the cost.

C. Settlement Pattern

Little development occurs during the period.

D. Economic Base

E. Architecture

Residential: Little or no significant building survives. Cottages began to be built on Queen Lake in the early 1890s.

Institutional: The town hall, a frame, gable end, Stick Style building, was constructed in 1892. This building, which also contained the town library, remains in the Center.

X. EARLY MODERN PERIOD (1915-1940)

A. Transportation Routes

By the mid 1920s, the east-west Mohawk Trail auto corridor (old Route 7, later Route 2) is improved across the northern part of town through Phillipston Four Corners (Powers Mills). Secondary local roads are improved from South Royalston through Phillipston Center (Royalston Road-Baldwinsville Road-Petersham Road), and across the south from Templeton to Petersham (Queen Lake Road-Templeton Road #1).

B. Population

After so many years of decline, this period shifted to fluctuation with overall growth. The population grew from 390 in 1915 to 481 in 1940, with a brief dip to 354 in 1920, and 357 in 1930. The proportion of foreign-born grew, nearly doubling in raw figures, and measuring 10.4% at period's end. The town remained overwhelmingly rural, with 42.2 so classified, and ranking seventh in the county. Like many other area towns, this character resulted in the formation of a country haven for city dwellers, in this case a camp for New York City girls at Queen Lake.

C. Settlement Pattern

The major period development is the concentration of recreational cottages around Queen Lake (formerly Phillipston Road) in the southeast.

D. Economic Base

E. Architecture

Residential: Gable end, side-passage plan noted and an early 20th-century two-story, square house. More cottages built around Queen Lake; survivals appear to be small, one-story frame houses.

Institutional: Queen Lake Camp for Girls was founded ca. 1920 with up to 35 cottages, a dining and recreation hall.

XI. SURVEY OBSERVATIONS

No inventory exists for Phillipston. Little development seems to have taken place, and there are very few surviving buildings.

XII. SOURCES