

# MHC Reconnaissance Survey Town Report

## HOLBROOK

Report Date: 1979

**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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I. TOPOGRAPHY

Located on irregular, glacially shaped upland terrain. Upland plain in center portion of town is rocky but tillable. Drainage is predominantly north via Cochato River. Numerous bogs and swamps in east and southwest sections. Terrain has a generally N/S orientation. One large pond - part of Cochato drainage.

II. POLITICAL BOUNDARIES

Primary boundaries formed by Old Colony line (1640) to the south and Weymouth line (1635) to east. Prior to 1640 known as Cochato; claimed by Braintree in 1640 although most was Boston Common land; 1708 south precinct of Braintree formed, including modern Holbrook; 1727 becomes part of Braintree's new south (third) precinct; 1793 incorporated as part of Randolph; 1872 incorporated as Holbrook. Additional partition with Avon in 1888.

III. HISTORIC OVERVIEW

Coastal interior town at fringe of Boston Bay development, remained unsettled in 17th century, corridor for N/S trail and road system. Developed local center in 18th century with limited industrial prosperity from shoemaking in early 19th century evolved as town center by mid 19th century and slowly absorbed into suburban fabric of Boston and Brockton in 20th century. Remains pleasant example of late 18th and 19th centuries with fine town center retaining a variety of house types and styles representing all periods of the town's development.

IV. CONTACT PERIOD (1500-1620)

A. Transportation Routes:

On north/south axis of trail network from Mass. Bay to S. Shore/Taunton. Route 37 (N. & S. Franklin Sts.) cited as "Indian Trail" (Holbrook Centennial, 1972). It also seems likely that Pine and Pond Sts. was native trail from Great Pond Weymouth. Both apparently joined/branched together at Braintree line.

B. Settlement Pattern:

No documented late Woodland or Contact period sites.

C. Subsistence Pattern:

Inland hunting and trapping for furs.

D. Observations:

An area with little or no native occupation during the period. Probably used by coastal tribes for hunting and trapping. Low site potential. Note retention of some native place names.

V. FIRST SETTLEMENT PERIOD (1620-1675)

A. Transportation Routes:

North/South axis provided by native trails along highground, widened as highways in mid-17th century Bridgewater Road (Route 37-N&S Franklin Sts) Iron

Works Road (Pond and Pine Sts) 1648 (Holbrook Centennial 1972).

B. Population:

No data

C. Settlement:

No documented settlement during period.

D. Economic Base:

Forested high ground between main highways used as a charcoal source for Braintree Forge - deeded as Iron Works land, 1646-47. Area now between Pine/Plymouth/North Franklin Streets.

E. Architecture:

None

F. Observations:

Little or no European settlement during period. Finge land with limited economic value; resources more readily available in other areas.

V. COLONIAL PERIOD (1676-1776)

A. Transportation Routes:

Secondary routes laid out in mid 18th century from spine of main highway (Route 37) and town ctr. Union St. (1771) (c1750) Plymouth St (1753). With north/south highway along Cochato River from Braintree - Center St. (1724) and South St. (Holbrook Centennial, 1972).

B. Population:

Apparently little or no settlement before 1710. Main period of growth is after 1750.

C. Settlement:

First house built in 1712 by John French. Scattered settlement with town center developing on high ground east of Cochato River along main N/S highway (Franklin St.) from Braintree. Most settlers from Braintree, Quincy and Weymouth. Known as the East Village. First school house 1750; cemetary laid out 1754.

D. Economic Base:

Probably similar to Randolph - summer farming/grazing; winter trapping and lumbering. Appartently some mills on Cochato after 1750 but no specific references. No important resource.

By middle of the 18th century shoemaking was a major town industry. By the 1770's the handicraft stage was well advanced, in which custom work was done for specific customers, often out of kitchen ells or special shops called "ten footers" (roughly 10 feet square).

E. Architecture:

Dominant house type center entrance, central chimney Capes with occassional twin chimney examples; nearly no 2 story houses; no apprarent high style trim; some barns probably extant; other building types not present

F. Observations:

A small, agricultural town; local products for local consumption.

VII. FEDERAL

A. Transportation Routes:

No new transport routes during period, but Colonial main N/S highways remain focus of economic activity.

B. Population:

Census included with Braintree to 1793 and Randolph 1793 to 1872; probably that growth paralleled that of Randolph as a whole, doubling between 1800-1830; no known immigrant groups except English; village sufficiently populous to build its own Congregational meetinghouse in 1818.

C. Settlement Location :

18th century loosely organized town center continued to develop as focus of activity in early 19th century with mill sites along Cochato (Randolph); principal settlement occurs as linear cluster along North Franklin St. north end of South Franklin St., and along parts of Union and Plymouth Streets near Franklin Street.

D. Economic Base:

Agriculture on upland (Route 37); for mill sites on Cochato River see Randolph, Massachusetts. A hydrate of silica is quarried in Brookville; used locally as a polishing powder for scouring metals. As in Randolph (the West Village), the boot and shoe industry of the east village experienced a period of great expansion. Lincoln's store at the cross roads of major transportation routes, at first a general store dealing in sale shoes, by 1816 served as "central shop", both marketing shoes in Boston and putting out raw stock to be made into shoes. In the years up to the Panic of 1837, the concept of the central shop developed rapidly, with increasing specialization by the domestic shoemakers still working out of the "ten footers".

Although no other industrial structures are known to survive from this period, the kitchen ells and several small "ten-footers" may exist.

E. Architectural:

House types present:

1. Center entrance, central chimney Capes built up to ca 1800-1820.
2. 1½ story cottages with center entrance facades and interior end wall chimneys built ca.1800-1840; generally possess Federalist style doorways with a large number of semi-circular Fanlights; densest concentrations on Franklin and Union Streets.
3. 2 story hip roofed Federalist style houses with center entrance Facades and interior end wall chimneys, simple details, concentrated mainly on Franklin Street near town center.
4. No known institutional, commercial, or industrial buildings extant although it is probable that some small shoe shops remain, converted to other uses.

VIII. EARLY INDUSTRIAL

A. Transportation Routes:

Fall River RR (1846) built along Cochato River (Randolph) follows N/S axis of routeways south of Boston to S. Shore.

B. Population:

Census figures not separately available, included with Randolph; Irish population

in Randolph by 1844 (founding of Catholic Church), reaches a peak of 1,298 Irish in 1855 and declines thereafter; slightly greater number of immigrants in Randolph than Holbrook, based on ratios at time of towns' separation in 1872 when the ratio of total Holbrook population to Randolph population was 1 to 3.2 while that of their foreign born population was 1 to 4.0. Baptist congregation formed 1868-1870.

C. Settlement Location:

Existing town center remains focus of settlement, limited expansion onto several side streets around junction of Union and Franklin Streets; secondary center develops in south part of town at Faxon's Corner (Brookville). Loose clusters develop along Union Street near train station and along Plymouth Street near Weymouth Street.

D. Economic Base:

The early industrial period in the east village, closely tied to that of the west village (Randolph), witnessed the greatest expansion of the boot and shoe industry, particularly in trade with the south. The Civil War also brought large U.S. Army orders to the town, the size and immediacy of these large orders with big profits pushed shoe industrial organization to the limit. As a consequence, by the beginning of the Civil War the factory production - albeit handmade - of shoes in large 2 and 3 story frame structures had evolved.

E. Architectural:

- Domestic: 1. 1½ story, side hall cottages with gabled facades form dominant house type, particularly in Brookville and side streets west of Franklin, cottages of this type occur in Greek Revival and simple mid-Victorian styles.
2. Several large scale frame houses exist on Franklin Street at Holbrook Center; probably for the town's leading shoe manufacturers these houses preserve several excellent, ambitious examples of Greek Revival, Italianate and Second Empire styles.
3. No institutional or commercial buildings are known to survive; only one wood frame shoe factory of 4 story height is known to remain in altered condition (Maple Street).

F. Summary Observations:

Industrial property in mid 19th focused on existing town center where houses of widely varying scale were built in close proximity to each other, demonstrating the local range of individual wealth and a lack of social segregation by economic class. Railroad on west side of town has little impact on existing mill sites.

IX. LATE INDUSTRIAL

A. Transportation Routes:

Highways remain intact from Colonial period and RR from E. Industrial. Street railway expansion in 1890's along existing highways linking Branintree (Boston area) with Brockton along traditional N/S routes North and South Franklin Sts.

B. Population:

Growth occurred at an even pace until 1890-95 when a decline began and lasted to ca 1905 after which slow growth resumed. Throughout period foreign born population remained steady at approx. 1/8 of total; largest foreign born group was Irish, although the total number of Irish foreign born declined; Methodist congregation formed 1868-1882.

C. Settlement Location:

Continued focus on existing town center demonstrated by location of town hall (1872) and Fire Station (1881). Small grid of side streets extended southward from Union Street and west to Franklin Street (1870-1880); single side street north of Plymouth St. and east of Franklin St. by 1888. Secondary center continues in Brookville, later a streetcar corner and outlying of Brockton development.

D. Economic Base:

Shoe industry limited expansion, -with suburban proximity to Brockton and Braintree (Boston). Remains modest regional center. The two remaining shoe factories - Whitcomb and Paine (1885) and the Avon Sole company both date from this period. Major collapses at local manufacturing occurred ca 1890-95, with a slow partial recovery by 1905-1910; decline of local industry led to stagnation of town until suburban expansion of Brockton, Braintree and Boston began to influence the periphery of town in early 20th century.

E. Architecture:

- Domestic:
1. 1½ story side hall cottages continue as a popular type, although relatively few built.
  2. Several large scale (possibly architect designed) houses along Franklin Street at town center, examples of late Italianate and Victorian Gothic styles; two especially fine examples of Queen Anne style.
  3. Institutional buildings-associated with formation of town government including town hall (1872 and 1878), fire station (1878), schools and congregational church (1878) around town center.
  4. Industrial buildings - mostly, if not entirely, frame-built to 1885, nearly no buildings after.
  5. Commercial buildings; non apparent in town center, small suburban shopping area at Brookville (ca 1900-altered).

X. EARLY MODERN

A. Transportation Routes:

Street railway abandonment (Route 37), in 1920's, Autohighway paved on traditional N/S axis of Franklin Street as Route 37 in 1930's.

B. Settlement Location:

Continued occupation but little expansion of town center; subdivision along outlying roads from Brockton/Braintree

C. Economic Base:

Little industrial activity and only modest suburban expansion. Main autoroute (Rt. 37) fosters commercial development especially at Brookville and on Braintree line.

D. Architectural Character:

No outstanding architectural examples from period, but some commercial structures-gas stations in Brookville local examples of type; free standing single-family houses form major building type.

E. Summary Observations:

Limited suburban expansion and industrial stagnation produce static landscape except along autohighway route north/south from Braintree-Brockton.

XI. SOURCES

Coty, Wesley Town of Holbrook, A History (no date)  
used as the historical section in Holbrook Centennial, 1872-1972

Hazard, Blanche Organization of the Boot and Shoe Industry in Massachusetts Before 1875. (1921) (Excellent on industry in general and on particular on Randolph and Holbrook, essential to an understanding of the town's industrial life.

SURVEY OBSERVATION AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

At present only two buildings have been surveyed in Holbrook. Any survey of the town should seek to identify outlying forms related to 18th settlement of the town. Special attention should be given to identifying early small scale shoe shops (ca 1800-1850) including those which have been adapted to other uses. Much of the town center, especially North Franklin Street retains a full range of house types from the late 18th to the late 19th century, generally well preserved, and should be considered as a potential historic district, together with its related institutional buildings.