

MHC Reconnaissance Survey Town Report

NORWOOD

Report Date: 1980

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: January 1980

Community: Norwood

I. TOPOGRAPHY

Located on riverine marsh/meadow and adjacent wooded uplands. Higher and rockier ground in west and north sections. Extensive meadow along Neponset River, especially in east and southeastern parts of town. Rich fertile soil in lowlands. Uplands drained by numerous streams. Drainage east into Massachusetts Bay via Neponset River.

II. POLITICAL BOUNDARIES

Part of Dedham grant, 1636. During late 17th and early 18th centuries known as "southerly part" of Dedham. Became Second Precinct of Dedham, 1729. Frequently referred to as "Tiot" (Algonquin toponym), in 1738 the Neponset River became the boundary between the Second Precinct and Stoughton (Canton); incorporated as Town of Norwood, 1872.

III. HISTORIC OVERVIEW

Important industrial community on suburban fringe of Boston set along main north/south axis to Providence. Native sites along edge of Neponset marshes with important regional trail. Transitional area at limit of Massachusetts Bay settlement in 17th century with lumbering and tavern sites along post road through 18th century with some surviving houses of the period. Substantial economic growth with turnpike and railroad from Boston by mid-19th century with industrial sites along railroad corridor. Good period factory complexes, including unusual survival of ink kilns from 1850s and extensive late 19th century towered factories. Original Colonial and Federal Period rural development overwhelmed by urban growth. Town center divided between workers' district along railroad corridor with 19th century vernacular cottages and 20th century three-deckers; status suburban district on highlands with good Italianate and later Historic Revival houses, although many major Victorian examples now lost. Commercial district developed as urban center with brick business blocks and impressive late Gothic Revival public buildings by early 20th century, including stone railroad bridges over major intersections. Autohighway and airport development in Neponset Marshes and garden suburb in highlands by mid-20th century.

IV. CONTACT PERIOD (1500 - 1620)

A. Transportation Routes:

Located along axis of routes from Neponset to south interior and Narraganset Bay. Primary trail documented along western edge of Neponset Marshes following south along Washington, Neponset and Pleasant Streets. Possible branches to river are conjectured for East and Neponset Streets.

B. Settlement Pattern:

One site with possible period occupation reported. Preferred locations are well-drained terraces and knolls overlooking Neponset River and marshlands.

C. Subsistence Pattern:

Seasonal hunting and fishing. Extensive marsh areas also important for gathering food and raw materials (cordage, fiber, etc.). Likely wintering area for Neponset (later Punkapoag) Tribe.

D. Observations:

This area, plus neighboring Canton and downriver to Milton, was apparently "core area" of the Neponset (Punkapoag) Tribe. Site potential should be high; however, extensive developing and filling may have destroyed many of the most sensitive areas.

V. FIRST SETTLEMENT PERIOD (1620 - 1675)

A. Transportation Routes:

Native trails remain as primary axis along Washington, Neponset and Pleasant Sts as post road to Providence. Cedar Swamp sawmill (Walpole) road established in 1660s along highground to west from Washington St through Norwood Center (original location lost) to Walpole St. Dean St conjectured for period along north bank of Neponset.

B. Population:

Apparently no European inhabitants during period.

C. Settlement:

No European settlement. Probably intermittent native occupation related to Punkapoag Plantation across Neponset River.

D. Economic Base:

Native hunting, fishing and gathering.

E. Architecture:

No buildings extant.

F. Observations:

Despite some roads from Dedham village to sawmill (Walpole), apparently no European settlement in or direct use of this area.

VI. COLONIAL PERIOD (1676 - 1776)

A. Transportation Routes:

North/south highways remained primary routes south from Dedham, post road shifted to Washington-Walpole Streets (Route 1A) by the 1740s. Secondary roads linked surrounding towns along Winter and Nahatan Sts to Clapboardtree St (Westwood), Summer St to Sharon and East and Neponset Sts to Canton and Myled and Wilson Sts to Walpole in mid-18th century. Old Lincoln Road may also date from this period.

B. Population:

Slow growth after King Philip's War. By 1730, fourteen families (about fifty people). By 1736, seventy-eight people taxed. Surge of growth after 1744. By 1765, 431 people. Between 1763-93, many young adults (about fifty) leave to establish Francestown, N.H.

C. Settlement:

Initial settlement area along Neponset River near Old Post Road (Pleasant St), now South Norwood. Old Ark Tavern (Henry White) operating by 1688, located just south of bridge on Post Rd (remnants discovered in 1930s near Morrill Ink Factory - Tolles, 1973, p. 125). Another tavern reported for same period, further north on Post Road near Neponset Meadows. Mostly scattered farms along river, slow development of a town center. A meetinghouse begun for both South Dedham and Clapboardtrees (Westwood), 1732 (near Nahatan and Prospect Streets) - not completed. South Dedham built its own meeting house, 1736 (Walpole St). First school built, 1740 (Garfield and Pleasant Streets). Gradual shift away from river and development of town center on higher ground near meeting-house. Strengthened by change in Post Road route after 1751. Secondary locus: Post Road (Washington St) near Purgatory Brook - John Ellis's Tavern, 1730; a sawmill after 1730

D. Economic Base:

Primarily farming and grazing plus winter lumbering. Tanning developed as a secondary occupation throughout period. Some milling, mostly for local consumption: 1678, sawmill (Ezra Morse), Hawes Brook; 1699, saw and grist mill (Ezra Morse, son), Neponset - east side (near Water St); 1730, grist mill (Charles Guild) Neponset - near Post Rd; 1776, tannery (Abner Guild), Howes Brook - Tannery Pond.

E. Architecture:

Residential: Small size of population and subsequent development make examples of the period rare; earliest extant house (Dean Street - ca. 1700) is two-story central-chimney structure with lean-to ell; nearby on Neponset Street is a central chimney Cape Cod cottage of possible 18th century origin; two other possible 18th century origin; two other possible 18th century central chimney houses exist (Walpole Street at Laurel Road and Washington Street near Fairview Road). Other buildings of the period are not apparent; any house with a tradition of 18th century construction should be regarded as exceptionally rare within the town.

Institutional, commercial and industrial: No known buildings extant.

F. Observations:

A small, closely knit agricultural community which despite its close proximity to Dedham and Clapboardtrees (Westwood) maintained a strong sense of identity.

VII. FEDERAL PERIOD (1775 - 1830)

A. Transportation Routes:

Colonial highways remain in place with new axis established along Norfolk and Bristol Turnpike (1806) as Washington St from post road (Norwood Center) to Walpole along west side of Neponset. Secondary streets link Norwood Center including Prospect and Cross Streets by early 19th century.

B. Population:

Included in census of Dedham, no separate figures available; Universalist congregation formed, 1828.

C. Settlement Location:

Scattered village formed along Washington Street between Granite and Walpole Street; small cluster of buildings developed on Washington Street near Chapel Street; elsewhere scattered farmhouses.

D. Economic Base:

Few major industries. Tanning began as early as 1776. Winslow Tannery on Endicott Street founded c. 1826. The extensive complex (now housing a variety of smaller tenants) was in use as a tannery in the first decades of the present century.

By 1823, the village center contained two workshops, two stores and one tavern (Tolles, p. 108).

E. Architecture:

Residential: No high-style architecture evident; most widespread house-type appears to be two-story house with symmetrical center-entrance facade, low-pitched roof and interior rear-wall chimneys; examples of this type exist on Washington, Mylod, Neponset and Pleasant Streets. Also present are two-story twin-chimney houses with two-room deep floor plans (Neponset and Pleasant Streets), a small number of hip-roofed houses and some Cape Cod cottages (Neponset and Pleasant Streets). Decorative trim is generally restricted to the entry, the most elaborate of which have pilasters and a moulded cap framing the door and a small semi-circular transom (similar to doorways of the period in Westwood and Walpole).

Institutional: New Unitarian Meetinghouse (1829); 18th century meetinghouse rebuilt (1828), neither extant; possible brick schoolhouse (altered by addition of Mansard roof) at the junction of Summer and Pleasant Streets.

Commercial and industrial: No known structures extant.

VIII. EARLY INDUSTRIAL PERIOD (1830 - 1870)

A. Transportation Routes:

Highway system remained in place from early 19th century with primary axis along Washington and Walpole Sts. Railroad constructed along historic corridor south from Dedham as Norfolk Co RR (1849) through Norwood Center to Walpole.

B. Population:

Statistics for early part of period unavailable; population stood at 1,744 by 1875; Irish immigration began ca. 1849-1850 with the arrival of 75 immigrants; by 1875 the Irish had increased to 217 residents; small German immigration in 1850s, 35 individuals by late 1850s (Tolles, p. 104); Catholic congregation of approx. 100 members formed by 1854, no church building until 1863; Baptist Society formed 1858, church built 1859.

C. Settlement Location:

Continued development of town center along Washington and Nahatan Streets; side streets created by subdivision of open land into houselots by end of period; subdivisions only partially developed in vicinity of Railroad Avenue, Nahatan and Prospect Streets, and Vernon and Cottage Streets. Residential segregation emerged with Irish working class district ("Dublin" or "Cork City" in vicinity of Railroad Avenue) modest cottages and houses along Nahatan Street, and middle and upper class district along the west side of Washington Street (south of Nahatan Street) and scattered along Walpole Street.

D. Economic Base:

The arrival of the railroad in 1848 was entirely responsible for sudden surge of industrial activity including establishment of Smith Tannery (in town), expansion of the Winslow Tannery, and the removal of several businesses from Westwood in Norwood including the Draper Iron Foundry and the Talbot Oil Cloth Factory. Morrill's Ink Factory remains the most impressive evidence of this period which for a time was closely allied with the Norwood Gas Light Company.

E. Architecture:

Residential: Full range from simple side-hall cottages for working class occupants to modest two-story side-hall and center entrance houses (mostly Italianate with a small number of Greek Revival and Second Empire examples). High-style houses include at least one exceptional Second Empire house (Walpole and Chapel Streets), several ambitious Italianate houses (Vernon and Cottage Streets, junction Dean and Pleasant Streets), and a heavily altered example, Chapel Street; approx. 340 houses stood at end of period (1873).

Institutional: Village Hall built 1860 (destroyed); only two school-houses throughout period; 4 churches - all replaced.

Commercial: Expansion of commercial activity, stores located in 1st story of Village Hall and in several buildings; none believed extant.

Industrial: Several mill complexes developed including Morrill's Ink Factory (Pleasant) where a 19th century kiln may remain intact in addition to other factory buildings. Most extant mill complexes appear to have undergone rebuilding after the late 19th century.

IX. LATE INDUSTRIAL PERIOD (1870 - 1915)

A. Transportation Routes:

Road and rail remained from mid-19th century with extension of mainline railroad along Neponset River as Walpole and Wrentham branch on elevated grade with impressive stone arch bridges (1891) over Neponset River and Dean St. Street railway expansion south from Dedham (Boston) and north from Walpole and east from Canton focus at junction in Norwood Center after 1896, with routes added along Walpole, Washington, Cross and Neponset Streets.

B. Population:

Sixfold increase in population during period; largest increases between 1900 and 1915; foreign-born population increased to 3,875 out of a total population of 10,977 in 1915; Irish remained largest immigrant group (866 in 1915) although large Scandinavian/Baltic immigration occurred 1900-1915; by 1915 Norwood had 516 Lithuanians, 415 Finns, and 327 Swedes; organizations formed by immigrant groups included Finnish Workingman's Association (pre-1906) and Lithuanian Hall (1914).

C. Settlement Location:

South Norwood (vicinity of Washington, Dean and Lenox Streets) became heavily developed with two and three-family houses, particularly between 1909 and 1915, served as a major residential quarter for the town's immigrant population. Areas along Walpole Street and westward remained middle and upper class residential districts. Subdivisions north of Nahatan Street were primarily working and middle class districts

D. Economic Base:

Several of the new industries of this period were brought in by the action of local residents and/or the town. The establishment of the New York & New England Railroad Machine and Car shops about 1874 was on land donated by the town. Norwood Business Association, founded in 1893, attracted both Norwood Press (initiating town's reputation as a printing town) and Holliston Mills. The end of this period was one of consolidation (the two tanneries merged).

E. Architecture:

Residential: Most 2 and 3-decker houses as well as side hall houses and cottages limited to simple speculative builder versions of Queen Anne, Colonial Revival and other contemporary style; few, if any, districts

remain unaltered. Few apartment blocks built. High-style houses included a relatively large number of architect-designed Queen Anne mansions and related outbuildings (many demolished or altered) as well as a slightly smaller number of Colonial Revival and neo-Tudor houses (Washington, Day, Bullard and Walpole Streets). At least one major estate (ca. 1915) was built in the north part of the town on the site now occupied by Polaroid Corp.

Apparently no trained architects practiced in Norwood until the end of this period. Influential builders included Tyler Thayer (reported to have built one-half of the houses standing in 1884 - Hurd, p. 512) and Milton Howard who built some of the town's major houses (Hurd, p. 512) and who later advertised himself as an architect (1924-31). Outside architects who worked in Norwood designing houses include J. Lawrence Berry (1906) and G. Walter Capen of Boston.

Institutional: Many public buildings after mid-1890s including schoolhouses, Romanesque Revival-style library (Joseph Neal of Pittsburgh, architect) and central firestation (1906-07); Late Gothic Revival-style churches include Highland Chapel (Cram, Goodhue & Ferguson - 1903), St. Catherine's Church (1908-1910 - Maginnis & Walsh, architects) and Grace Church (1912 - J. Lawrence Berry, architect). Public halls and clubhouses of varying sizes built; Classical Revival-style Masonic Temple was major example (1916 - William G. Upham of Norwood, architect). Unrecorded frame churches exist - likely to have associations to immigrant congregations (South Norwood).

Commercial: Dense development of town center with one, two and three-story row structures, some brick; several faced with cast-stone ashlar and Beaux Arts-style trim.

Industrial: Major expansion of most existing complexes; new mills on Washington Street built for Norwood Press (1894 - Penn Varney of Lynn, architect) on land given by Norwood Business Association to encourage printing industry; other complexes located along railroad lines; no standard building types evident due to varied nature of manufacturers. Elevated railroad bed through the center of town retains several rock-faced granite bridges/underpasses dating from 1891 to early 20th century.

X. EARLY MODERN PERIOD (1915 - 1940)

A. Transportation Routes:

Street railway abandonments by 1920s with construction of autohighway routes in 1933-34 along historic Neponset corridor from Boston to Providence as Route One (rebuilt 1950s) with improvement of Washington and Walpole Sts as Route 1A. Norwood Airport located in Neponset marshes in 1930-32 and expanded as important regional facility in 1940s.

B. Population:

Rapid increases 1915-35; slowed growth, 1935-50; exceptionally rapid growth 1950-65; large-scale immigration ceased after 1915.

C. Settlement Location:

Strong local interest in city planning; planning commission established 1916-1918; plan for Town Square developed 1923, carried out 1927-28; garden suburb of 1,000 acres (Westover) planned around parkways, west of Nichols Street in mid-1920s, only partially developed. Suburban tracts developed around periphery of settled area; general pattern of middle and upper class building westward and working class districts south and eastward; East Norwood only slightly built-up prior to World War II.

D. Economic Base:

The town's industrial growth remained slow, though the location of Providence Highway (Route 1) stimulated commercial interests along that north-south route.

E. Architecture:

Residential: Western sections contained modest period-revival houses, while east and northern sections were built up with astylistic cottages, some bungalows and two-family houses. Little, if any, high-style houses were built during this period.

Institutional: Continued building of schoolhouses (McLaughlin & Burr, 1931) and construction of Late Gothic Revival Style hall as part of Town Square, 1927 (William G. Upham, architect), Colonial Revival Style Post Office (1933 - Upham), and Armory (Nahatan Street).

Commercial: Art Deco-style Norwood Theatre (1927, Upham) built as part of Town Square; other classical style blocks built in downtown; airport built 1930-32; highway-strip development along Route 1 after 1934.

Industrial: Continued use and enlargement of existing buildings. New complexes established after 1940.

XI. SOURCES

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