

MHC RECONNAISSANCE SURVEY REPORT

Date: _____ Community: Marshfield

I. TOPOGRAPHY

Coastal lowland. Gravelly to sandy soils. Marshes to the north along the South River, extensive marshland to the south in Green Harbor. Drainage north to the North River via Cove Brook, east to the South River via Macomers Creek, Branch Creek and Broad Creek, south to Green Harbor via Wharf Creek and Bass Creek. South River and North River confluence at the new inlet in 1898. Mouth of Green Harbor extensively altered 1809.

II. POLITICAL BOUNDARIES

First settled in 1632. Boundaries were established in 1643. Part ceded to Pembroke in 1712. The "Two Mile" was annexed from Scituate in 1788. East Marshfield becomes Marshfield Hills in 1890.

III. HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

Marshfield is a suburban community on Massachusetts Bay. The town achieved a certain notariety during the 18th and 19th century, first for being the home of Governor Winslow and Peregrine White (the first white child born in Plymouth Colony) and secondly for being the home of Daniel Webster. Throughout the study period the town has generally relied on a resource exploitative economic base. First settlement of the town was in the area of original native occupation in the Green Harbor area. While the 17th and early 18th century was primarily agricultural the northern portion of the town had closer ties to the North River and its shipyard economy. Packet boats that served the North River as early as 1670 provided a communications link with Boston as well as Plymouth. Whites Ferry located near the old inlet of the North River handled the rigging of all North River shipyard production. This balance with the northern portion of the town possessing a dual economic base (ship construction and rigging and agriculture) and the southern portion concentrating primarily on agriculture continued to the beginning of the 19th century. The early 19th century saw the introduction of a small industrial base in the form of several cotton mills and a nail factory, however, this base remained consistently small throughout the century and by 1865 agriculture regained almost total dominance of the economy.

✓ Daniel Webster's choice of Marshfield as a residence probably acted as a spur to the development of summer communities at Brant Rock and Cut River in the mid-19th century; the opening of the Duxbury and Cohasset Railroad in 1871 cemented this trend toward summer development. The Portland Storm of 1898 which closed the old inlet of the North River effectively tied the development of the Humarock section of Scituate to that of Marshfield. The early 20th century remained basically pastoral with further summer development in coastal areas. This balance remained generally in effect until the highway construction boom of the mid-50's and 60's which has severely impacted the southern portion of the town.

IV. CONTACT PERIOD (1500-1620)

A. Transportation Routes:

✓ Coastal fishing areas eccentric to main corridors of travel between North River and Plymouth Bay. Primary east/west trail between Missaucatucket (Green Harbor River) and Namassakeeset (Pembroke Ponds) documented as Plain Street (Route 139) with original loops around Furnace Brook (Marshfield Historical Commission, 1968 map). Connections to Plymouth Bay around Black Mountain apparently preserved as Bay and King Philips Baths (1968 map) along Green Harbor River with probable branches to coast as Careswell and Ocean Streets (Route 139). Trail system between South and North River marshes followed Summer Street with cross route over Marshfield Hills as Forest Street with original segments apparently intact around Two Mile Grant (Union Street). Reported use of "Indian Ferry" across North River to Scituate at Route 3A bridge site (Hurd, 1884, .1138). Questionable trail indicated across Marshfield Neck between South and Green Harbor Rivers (1968 map).

B. Settlement Pattern:

Two possible contact sites located on both sides of Ferry Street and on the Governor Winslow House property. Samuel Champlain noted village sites in these general locations during his 1605 voyage off the coast of southern New England. Extensive archaeological evidence of shellfish remains and lithic tools and debris have been exposed on the town's eastern shore and west of the Green Harbor River. Two possible wintering sites are present several thousand feet north of the village of Marshfield.

C. Subsistence Pattern:

Diverse natural resource base capable of maintaining considerable population. Good agricultural lands (John Smith noted presence of corn fields in 1614), interior waterways and Massachusetts Bay serve as excellent sources of fish and shellfish, wooded uplands provide excellent potential for wild game. European - Indian trade probably integral part of indigenous economy due to area's accessibility to the coast (Smith traded with native population early in 17th century).

D. Observations:

High likelihood of considerable indigenous settlement due to environmental diversity and potential for Indian - European trade. Rich natural resource base and accessible coast suggests area was utilized as a temporary habitation site by 16th and early 17th century European fishermen and explorers. Native political affiliation with Mattakeesett Indiana of Pembroke.

V. FIRST SETTLEMENT PERIOD (1620-1675)

A. Transportation Routes:

Native trails improved as local highways with main route between Plymouth and Pembroke as Plain-Webster Streets (Route 139) during mid-17th century (Marshfield Historical Commission 1968 map). Little apparent survival of roads at original Winslow town site (1641).

Reorientation to Marshfield town center during late 17th century with bridges across Furnace Brook and connecting highways to North River as Main and Ferry Streets. North River ferries to Scituate established at Main Street - Route 3A (1637), Ferry Street (1638) and Union Street (1644) (Hurd, 1884, 1138).

B. Population:

No population figures available. However, evidence suggests considerable increase in population after 1640.

C. Settlement Pattern:

Initial settlement c. 1632 although there may have been a handful of settlers inhabiting the area several years prior to that date. Majority of first planters emigrated from Plymouth and Duxbury in addition to a small number of Welsh immigrants (1640). Principal focal points of early settlement occurred at the mouth of the Green Harbor River (site of Daniel Webster estate), Marshfield Neck and Rexhame. First church/meeting house (1641) located in the vicinity of the Winslow cemetery. Considerable increase in settlement rate after 1640 with new homes established off of Parsonage Street and the area extending west from Union Street to Marshfield/Norwell town line (portion of the "Two Miles").

D. Economic Base:

Local economy based primarily on farming, fishing and timbering. Farm livestock included cattle, horses, sheep and hogs. Extensive salt marshes provided livestock fodder and bedding and thatch for roof construction. Fisherman sought herring, shad, cod, halibut and shad of the interior waterways and Massachusetts Bay for local consumption and export (Massachusetts Bay and England).

A salt works and fish curing operation was located east of Snake Hill (Marshfield Tercentary Committee 1940: 172). Extensive forests provided wood cutters with substantial wood supply. Some mill production. Grist mill established at "Wetwash" site in 1654 while saw mill constructed by Walter Hatch immediately south of Hatch's Pond in 1670.

E. Observations:

Community established as an offshoot of Plimoth with large number of early settlers emigrating from Plymouth. However, diverse natural resource base encouraged establishment of politically and economically stable settlement. Focal point of economy was export trade (timber and fish) with Massachusetts Bay and England.

VI. COLONIAL PERIOD (1675-1775)

A. Transportation Routes:

Highways remain from 17th century. Relocation of meeting house to Marshfield in early 18th century emphasizes radial network from town center at head of South River with primary routes to North River as Main Street (Route 3A) and to Pembroke as Plain Street (Route 139). Ferries maintained at North River to Scituate at Main Street, Ferry Street and Union Street crossings. Secondary system of roads laid out around Marshfield Hills and North Marshfield as Union, Spring, Valley and Forest Streets, perhaps by late 17th century.

B. Population:

Seven males killed in King Philip's War when serving with English military forces. No evidence of pre-1765 population. Minimal growth in last decade of period. Population of 1147 people in 1765, increasing to 1157 in 1776.

C. Settlement Pattern:

Settlement gradually spreading north of the original node (Marshfield Neck/Rexhame and the Green Harbor River area). The first locus was situated on the site of the present village of Marshfield and was known as the South Parish. Meeting house built in 1705, succeeded by a second structure in 1758. Area also location of Tim Williamson's "ordinary" (1673). Second locus located in Marshfield Hills and designated the North Parish. Meeting house constructed in 1735. Development of shipbuilding industry on both sides of the North River appears to be a major factor in northern settlement.

D. Subsistence Pattern:

Continued dependence on agriculture. Expansion of fishing with increased emphasis on offshore operations. Profitability of stream fishing minimal largely due to mills depopulation of stream fish (blockage of fish runs). Fishing vessels ranging as far north as Cape Sable.

First documented evidence of shipbuilding. Establishment of White's Ferry Yard's on the South River east of Holly Hill in 1705. Shipbuilding, however, doesn't flourish until late 18th and early 19th centuries. Timbering provided local shipbuilders with raw materials for ship construction. Development of grist and saw mill complex adjacent to southern portion of Union Street in first half of 18th century. Excavation of iron in town common (village of Marshfield) in first decade of 18th century (Marshfield Tercentary Committee 1940: 66).

E. Architecture:

Residential: Marshfield retains a number of 18th century houses and cottages with several houses dating to the Late First Period (1675-1725). Well-preserved clusters of period residences stand at North Marshfield, around Hatch Pond in the Two-Mile section and at the intersection of Webster and Careswell Streets. Two-story, center-chimney houses and story-and-a-half center-chimney cottages appear to have been constructed in roughly equal numbers. While a few of the town's several hip-roofed center-chimney houses may date from the Colonial period, most houses and cottages were built with gable roofs and only one gambrel-roofed cottage is known; also, while most period structures are substantial with five-bay facades and double pile plan, no highstyle or ambitiously-detailed houses are known. Surviving Late First Period houses include the Isaac Winslow house (1699), a two-story, three-bay center-chimney structure with an early Georgian portico, and several center-chimney, double-pile plan houses at Hatch Pond dated to the 17th century; mid-17th century dates are ascribed to several houses but remain to be verified. In addition to residences, it is likely that a few Colonial period outbuildings survive; at least one probable 18th century barn stands on Corn Hill Lane and others may survive, particularly in the Union Street area.

Institutional, Commercial: Meetinghouse of the First Parish were built in 1641 at Green Harbor with a second building constructed in 1657 on the site of the present First Congregational Church. In 1728, the Second Parish Church was built at Marshfield Hills. In 1745, an Episcopal church was established on Grove Street. The first school was built in 1761 on Main Street in Marshfield Hills. The Proctor Bourne store at Marshfield Center was established in the 18th century in a house dated to 1674.

Industrial: The Hatch grist mill on Union Street, a two-story shingled building with a gable roof is said to date to 1752; while portions of the structure may date to the Colonial period, the mill appears to have been remodelled in the early 19th century. No other period industrial structures are known.

F. Observations:

Increased settlement north of Green Harbor/Marshfield Neck area along inland transportation routes and vicinity of interior water sources. Fishing and export trade (local and international) continue to grow in importance. Mill and shipbuilding industries play a secondary role in community's economic development. Settlement emerges relatively unscathed from King Philip's War.

VII. FEDERAL PERIOD (1775-1830)

A. Transportation Routes:

Road system in place from 18th century. Improvement of North River crossings with bridges at Union Street (1801) and Main Street (1824) (Richards, 1901, p. 141). Green Harbor River cut through Bluefish Point (1806) reorienting connection to Brant Rock from Rexhame.

B. Population:

Steady growth in population during this period from 1157 in 1776 to 1565 in 1830. Impossible to determine how much of this increase due to the annexation of the "Two Mile." Baptist society formed, 1788, meeting house constructed in Standish. Second Baptist meeting house was built in North Marshfield in 1826. Methodist Episcopal Church established 1824 north of Marshfield.

C. Settlement:

Factory development at Hatch Pond and Chandler's Pond created nodes of settlement activity. Some growth occurred at existing nodes particularly at Marshfield Hills.

D. Economic Base:

Peak of shipbuilding on the North River, with at least two yards (Rogers and Smith's) known. By first decade of 19th century, North River towns said to be building as many as ten vessels annually, though Rogers Yard apparently closed as early as 1819. By second decade of century, early manufacturing center developed at Marshfield Village where, under influence of Ezra Weston, Marshfield Cotton and Woolen Company (incorporated 1811) erected two wood-frame mills on the South River (as well as boarding houses) to manufacture cotton sail cloth. Azel Ames, who had worked with Richard Wheatley in building cotton machinery for Beaumont's cotton mill in Canton, came to Marshfield expressly, Richards notes, to build the MC & W's mill -- said to be "the eleventh cotton mill in the United States" (Stone, 67-68). By 1837 the two mills were producing \$21,800 worth of textile products with 1,896 spindles and 52 hands. The second decade also saw the arrival of Jesse Reed at Furnace Brook to start a nail factory. Despite his earlier success with nail and tack machines in Hanover, his works here do not appear to have been a success. By 1837 he had joined forces with Charles Walker on Bares Brook in manufacturing tacks.

Boot and shoe making well established in this period as cottage industries; state census in 1817 recorded 114 shoemakers. Large crops of saltmarsh hay, 165 farms, and numerous small mills added to town's economic life, though a note on the town's 1794 map commented: "There are seven corn mills and one cloth mill in Marshfield, but two corn mills with a good supply of water would do the work they all seven do."

E. Architecture

Residential: Many well-detailed and substantial Federal period houses were built in Marshfield with especially well-preserved groupings in North Marshfield and Marshfield Hills. A great variety of residential buildings were constructed with a number of highstyle buildings as well as more modest houses and cottages. Double interior and end wall chimney, two-story, gable-roofed houses with Georgian pedimented entrance porticos began to be built in the 1770s and '80s with steeply-pitched hip-roofed, center-chimney. Georgian houses becoming a popular ambitious housetype of the 1790s. By the turn of the century, end-chimney and brick end-wall Federal houses with more shallowly-pitched hip roofs were being constructed, with both double pile and more modest one-room deep examples known. A few houses retain elaborate leaded fan and sidelights but most houses of the period have simpler segmental transoms with sidelights. Center and end-chimney, gable-roofed cottages, the more ambitious examples with pedimented dormers across the facade, were also built in numbers in North Marshfield, Marshfield Hills and also along Plain and Ocean Streets in the south of town.

Institutional, Commercial: None of the period's institutional structures are known to survive. A Baptist meetinghouse was built in 1788 on Plain Street at Standish (no longer extant) with a Methodist church established in 1819 on Ferry Street (no longer extant). Of the seven district schools appearing on the 1830 map, none survive. At least one store is known, Rogers Store (1823), on Main Street at Marshfield Hills.

VIII. EARLY INDUSTRIAL (1830-1870)

A. Transportation Routes:

Highway system remains unchanged through mid-19th century. No railroad through area.

B. Population:

Slight growth in population from 1830 to 1850, from then until 1860 population remained fairly constant, sharp drop in 1870. In 1855 there were 94 foreign born the majority from Ireland. Trinitarian society formed in Marshfield Hills in 1835. Methodist Church at Zion Hill 1857.

C. Settlement: (1830-1870)

Almshouse (1833) and Town House (1838) built on Main Street north of Furnace Street. Beginnings of summer development at Cut River and Brant Rock.

D. Economic Base:

Marked decline in shipbuilding along the North River generally, though by this period Marshfield may already have been less dependent on that industry than other North River towns. For much of the period Marshfield retained a maritime prosperity based on fishing and coasting business, though by the 1850s both her textile mills and iron works had disappeared. To some extent this manufacturing was replaced by the manufacture of boxes and of boots and shoes. By 1865 there were nine sawmills in operation, several producing lumber for three box making establishments, of which, like other North River towns, Marshfield had its share. In the same year boot and shoe manufacture was valued at over \$119,000, with new shops built in the '60s and after. The second highest in the value of industrial product in 1865 was clothing manufacture -- an industrial aberration in the state census statistics. In that year, five establishments reported employing 223 women (the largest single employee group next to farming) and producing \$116,432 worth of ready-made clothing -- possibly related to Civil War contracts.

With improvement in transportation to Boston, agriculture received a new boost. In 1865, 268 farms were recorded, producing especially large quantities of beef and pork, in addition to other agricultural products. The same year saw the formation of the Marshfield Agricultural Society, now one of the oldest cattle and horticultural shows.

E. Architecture:

Residential: With Marshfield's shipbuilding prosperity, two-story, center-entrance Greek Revival and Italianate houses continued to be constructed at North Marshfield and Marshfield Hills. Picturesque villas are almost unknown, as the typical ambitious house of the period remained conservative in plan detailing. Although nominally a more modest form, at least a few well-detailed sidehall cottages in the Greek Revival style were built in the north of town while elsewhere in the town, the shift from center-entrance to sidehall plan houses was generally evident in the construction of simple Greek Revival and transitional Greek Revival/Italianate cottages, with a concentration of mid-19th century houses at Holly Hill. In coastal areas, especially along Marshfield Neck, one-and-a-half story, center-entrance Cape Cod-type cottages appear to have remained popular into the 1840s, with several Greek Revival Capes located on Ocean Street.

Institutional: The present First Congregational church at the Plain and Moraine Streets was constructed in 1838; it is a one-and-a-half story schoolhouse (1857; the only period school known to be still standing) at Webster and Careswell Streets, a double entrance Greek Revival structure. In 1838, the North Community Church (Universalist) was rebuilt by Isaiah Rogers.

Commercial: The only known commercial structure of the period is the Law Office of Daniel Webster (1842), a one-story one-room Greek Revival structure with an end wall chimney standing on Careswell Street.

IX. LATE INDUSTRIAL PERIOD (1870-1915)

A. Transportation Routes:

Coastal railroad opened between Scituate and Duxbury (1871) across North River and along marshland to Sea View and Marshfield Center (now abandoned). No trolley routes through area. Dike road over Green Harbor River (1870) to Brant Rock (Hurd, 1844, p. 1136).

B. Population:

Population remained constant throughout this period (1659 in 1870 to 1725 in 1915). Foreign born population increased from 84 to 1885 to 232 in 1915; there appears to have been a small Portuguese community in 1915. Unitarian society in Green Harbor 1882.

C. Settlement:

Duxbury and Cohasset Railroad began operation in 1871, and was instrumental in the development of summer settlements along the coast. Brant Rock experienced continued development; other summer settlements included Seaview, Rexham and
× Ocean Bluffs. There appears to have been a Portuguese community at Green Harbor.

D. Economic Base:

Little new identified industrial activity. Some small "shoe factories" (possibly not more than large shops) constructed during '70s and '80s, but probably slow decline of both shoe and box manufacture after about 1890. Construction of Duxbury and Cohasset Railroad brought new tide of summer residential prosperity to shoe colonies of Green Harbor and Brant Rock, finally connected after much controversy with dike and bridge across Green Harbor River and salt marsh. Railroad, as well as marsh drainage canals, made possible developing industry in cranberries, and, in the north of town, strawberries, which could be shipped to Boston on early morning trains.

Experimental wireless station erected in 1905 at Brant Rock first to transmit human voice, December, 1906.

E. Architecture:

Residential: During the period, coastal areas began to be developed as resorts; modest, one and two-story late Mansard, Queen Anne, Stick Style and Colonial Revival cottages were constructed in numbers during the 1880s and '90s at Brant Rock and Sea View with large numbers of very modest closely set one and two-story Queen Anne, Colonial Revival and Craftsman cottages constructed after the turn of the century at Ferry Hill, Rexham, Fieldston, Ocean Bluff and Green Harbor. A few more substantial and stylish summer houses in the Queen Anne, Stick, Shingle and Colonial Revival styles were constructed at Sea View and Holly Hill and along Spring and Summer Streets in the northern half of town and directly along Ocean Avenue at Ocean Bluff. Most other period houses are suburban and vernacular Queen Anne, Colonial Revival and Craftsman style single family, two-story structures with examples along older inland roads such as Webster, Union, Ferry and Pleasant Streets. At least a few imposing architect-designed Colonial Revival houses were built around the turn of the century at Marshfield Hills. Only one half-timbered Tudor Revival house is known; almost all large, early 20th century structures houses are clapboarded with over-scaled classical detailing, porches and asymmetrical plans.

Institutional: The most important concentration of institutional buildings of the period stands at the town center on South River Street and includes a well-detailed, two-story, towered Queen Anne Town Hall (1895) and one-and-a-half story, stuccoed Mission Revival Library (c. 1910) along with a Georgian Revival school (see Early Modern). Other period institutional structures include a Shingle Style/Mission Revival chapel at Holly Hill and a two-story shingled Queen Anne G.A.R. Hall at Marshfield Hills. Also built was the Union Chapel (1895), a well-detailed shingled Queen Anne/Craftsman summer chapel at Brant Rock.

Commercial: The Marshfield Fairgrounds were established in 1867, but it appears that most of the extant structures on the grounds date from the Late Industrial Period and were probably constructed c. 1905. These include a variety of frame Queen Anne utilitarian sheds, barns, and halls. While it is likely that one and two-story frame commercial structures of the early 20th century have survived at Marshfield Center or along Ocean Avenue, none are known.

X. EARLY MODERN PERIOD (1915-1940)

A. Transportation Routes:

Primary roads improved as regional autohighways with north-south Route 3A (Main Street) across North River with original bridge (1933), and east-west Route 139 (Plain-Ocean Streets) with loop to Ocean Bluff and Brant Rock.

B. Population:

Appears to have been a significant drop in population between 1915 and 1920 but picked up again in 1925, then a slow growth to 2419 in 1940. Post war population has increased 10 fold to 19,450 in 1975. Catholic missions established in Green Harbor (1919) and Brant Rock (1920's). First Church of Christ Scientist in Marshfield Hills in 1929. By 1940 there was no longer a Protestant church in Green Harbor.

C. Settlement:

Residential zoning produced residential districts in 1929. Little in the way of new development until the 1960's. Extensive apartment and single family suburban-type development along Route 139.

D. Economic Base:

No new industrial activity identified, though several small waterpowered saw and woodworking mills remain in operation. One, operated by Franklin Decker Hatch on Two-Mile Brook (MHC #199) remained in use until 1965 when it was acquired by the Marshfield Historical Society. Period brought to an end by cessation of passenger service on New Haven's South Shore Division.

E. Architecture:

Residential: A few Colonial Revival and Dutch Colonial houses were built as infill housing in established neighborhoods at Sea View, Marshfield Hills and along Church, Ferry, Pleasant, Webster and South River Streets, no new areas were developed in the period. Summer cottages and bungalows continued to be constructed at Ocean Bluff, Fieldston, Rexham, Ferry Hill, Green Harbor and Brant Rock; most of these are very modestly finished, hip or gable-roofed blocks with very simple Craftsman detailing, such as exposed rafters and overhanging eaves.

Institutional: Only two institutional structures are known for the period, St. Anne's Church on Ocean Avenue, a very modest Mission Revival structure of the late '30s and a brick Georgian Revival school at the town center on South River Street.

Commercial: One and two-story commercial blocks of the 1920s are known to survive at Brant's Rock; other smaller, one-story blocks, service stations and garages of the period also survive along Ocean Avenue and Plain Street.

XI. SURVEY OBSERVATIONS

Existing survey concentrates on pre-Revolutionary sites within the town and does not note outstanding Federal and early 19th century residential architecture at North Marshfield and Marshfield Hills as well as important late 19th century resort development, particularly at Brant Rock (potential district also at North Marshfield, Marshfield Hills, Brant Rock). Potential district also at Fairgrounds/old Town Hall/Library at South River Street (19th century institutional center of town). Many survey forms lack photographs, stylistic information and/or historical documentation. Significant 17th, 18th and early 19th residential/agricultural architecture follows entire North River axis; potential survival of 18th century outbuildings should be noted.

Industrial: Virtually no industrial resources survive in Marshfield apart from the Deacon Joel Hatch Sawmill (MHC #199). Several peripheral structures need to be surveyed, however. These include the factory boarding house on Chandler's Pond and a late 19th century grain store along the former railroad alignment at 844 Webster Street. In addition, many of Marshfield's mill sites remain undisturbed and should be closely examined. An unusual find was the very late survival (demolished c. 1948) of what appears from photos to be a wood-frame, 3-1/2 story Federal period textile mill, known in its last days as "the wet wash." The site, at the intersection of routes 3A and 139, is now the town's War Memorial Park.

Development Pressures: Most obvious effects along Route 139 corridor from Route 3 interchange (Boston axis) to Marshfield Neck with development overwhelming historic fabric of Marshfield town center and Standish district. Seacoast areas subject to storm damage and commercial activity at Rexhame, Ocean Bluff with original Victorian period fabric intact at Brant Rock. Marshfield Hills and Sea View districts retain authentic Federal character isolated from Route 3A corridor.

XII. SOURCES

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Marshfield, Mass. Board of Trade, Marshfield's Open Door, 1640-1940, Tercentenary Celebration (n. p., 1940).

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