

# MHC Reconnaissance Survey Town Report

## BEDFORD

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.

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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# MHC RECONNAISSANCE SURVEY REPORT

DATE: March, 1980

COMMUNITY: Bedford

## I. TOPOGRAPHY

Located on rolling riverine lowland and adjacent hilly uplands. N/S grain to landscape with glacial outwash features dominant. Eastern part is rockier and more rugged. A sandy to gravelly soil. Only a few small ponds. Extensive marsh/meadow throughout west and southern sections. Drainage is north via Concord for western part of town; NE via Shawsheen for eastern third.

## II. POLITICAL BOUNDARIES

Incorporated as Town of Bedford, 1729 from sections of Concord (1635) and Billerica (Winthrop Farm, 1638, and part of Cambridge Shawsheen grant, 1641).

## III. HISTORIC OVERVIEW

Historic suburban town of metropolitan Boston. Located along Concord River valley and headwaters of Shawsheen; with native sites along river meadows. Early English settlement with trading house and mill sites along Shawsheen by mid-17th century. Several documented First Period houses, some before King Philip's War. Productive agricultural economy and formation of town center during mid-18th century with involvement of Battle of Concord and preservation of period houses. Local economy stimulated by location on Boston-New Hampshire corridor. Well-preserved Federal period town center including meeting house and high-style residential examples. Little industrial activity during 19th century, except for boot and shoe crafts. Gradual incorporation within Boston suburban fabric with streetcar routes by early 20th century stimulated by location of government facilities including veterans' hospital and air force base by mid-20th century. Bedford is now within immediate zone of Boston highway belt with intense pressure of land development between Routes 128 and 3, especially with electronics plants around Hanscom Field. Town center retains integrity of historic periods with authentic, early Colonial landscapes along back roads relatively intact.

## IV. CONTACT PERIOD (1500-1620)

### A. Transportation Routes:

Located on Concord River valley with interior drainage to Merrimack along Shawsheen. Trail systems follow north/south grain along valley with documented routes as Shawsheen-Pages Streets to Pine Hill and North Road. Alternate trail along river meadows apparently followed North Road to Nike site across swamp (?) to Pigeon Hill and Concord Road (Brown, 1968, p. 36). Other trail possibilities include Spring Road past Fawn Lake to Page Street and a likely route around Hartwells Hill (Hanscom Field).

### B. Settlement Pattern:

No documented period sites reported; however, several unspecified sites known along Concord and are on Shawsheen (Crosby Hill). Additional sites likely along both rivers, especially at confluence points and rifts (fords) and on terraces overlooking marshes (especially facing south).

C. Subsistence Pattern:

Access to major fish runs in Concord and possibly Shawsheen. Good agricultural land available. Potential for both lowland and upland hunting/gathering.

D. Observations:

A border area between inland, freshwater people (Nipmuck) and more coastal-riverine oriented tribes (Pawtucket). Characteristics of neither group are well understood. Area sites may help clarify this.

V. FIRST SETTLEMENT PERIOD (1620-1675)

A. Transportation Routes:

Native trails remain as primary highways, notably Shawsheen-Page Streets around Shawsheen River. Apparently river trail around Concord meadows re-aligned in 17th century as Concord and North Roads to Billerica. Other likely highways of the period include Davies Road, Springs Road, and Old Billerica Road and original portion of Route 62 around early Shawsheen mill sites.

B. Population:

Small colonial population; estimate of ten families by end of period.

C. Settlement Pattern:

A "trucking house" (trading post) reported in Shawsheen valley, 1642; exact location unknown, probably on or near Danforth/Webster Tavern (Page Street). Scattered farms along Concord and North Roads by end of period.

D. Economic Base:

Agriculture and grazing. Seasonal lumbering. Probably same for trading. Michael Bacon's saw mill on Shawsheen, by 1670.

E. Observations: Essentially outlying rural frontier sections of Concord and Billerica.

VI. COLONIAL PERIOD (1676-1775)

A. Transportation Routes:

Primary highways remain from 17th century. Location of Bedford town center in mid-18th century creates radial road pattern from meeting house, including Great Road (Rt. 225), Concord, North and South Roads. Other local highways of the period link mill sites as Dudley and Wilson Roads and network around Cedar Swamp (Hanscom Field) as Hartwell and Wood Roads.

B. Population:

Slow growth during late 17th century and early 18th century due to frontier warfare. Forty-six people on 1728 tax roll. Fairly rapid growth after incorporation. Census of 1765 listed 457 people in 72 families and 67 houses.

C. Settlement Pattern:

Increasing numbers of farms throughout town but with no focus until incorporation. Village center developed along Great Street-meeting house built and cemetery established, 1729; town school on common, 1742; at least one tavern prior to 1730.

D. Economic Base:

Agriculture and grazing, dairying a major specialty. Seasonal lumbering. Some milling: John Wilson, grist and sawmill on Vine Brook, 1680; Lane's

sawmill, Peppergrass Brook, mid-18th century. Some charcoal burning in southern part of town; also digging of yellow ochre for "Bedford yellow" paint. Several taverns: Danforth/Webster on Page Street, from 1729; Walter Pollard's, Carlisle and North Roads, by 1738; Jeremiah Fitch's, Great Street, 1766.

E. Architecture Residential: By far, the largest number of houses recorded for the period were vernacular examples of the two-story, central-chimney type; only one cottage (demolished) has been recorded in secondary sources, and that was a central-chimney structure with a gambrel roof. Several high-style examples of Georgian architecture (ca. 1770-75) existed at the town center and were attributed to a local architect (Reuben Duren); at least two of these had twin-interior chimneys, hip roofs, quoins, rusticated entries and other high-style features. Elsewhere, high-style Georgian entries existed on scattered houses.

F. Observations: Outlying sections of Concord and Billerica evolved into a cohesive, prosperous rural community during mid-18th century.

## VII. FEDERAL PERIOD (1775-1830)

### A. Transportation Routes:

Highways remain in place from 18th century. Bridge and causeway over Concord to Carlisle (1795) focuses junction of Concord-Billerica roads. Middlesex Turnpike (1806) cuts across NE section over Shawsheen River.

### B. Population:

Gradual increase in population throughout period; no foreign-born population known. No new religious societies formed.

### C. Settlement Location:

Scattered farmsteads, village at town center with greatest concentration of houses near the junction of Concord and North Roads, and near the junction of Great Road and South Road.

### D. Economic Base:

Agricultural economy with continuing production of "Bedford Yellow" from yellow ochre deposits principally in southern part of town. Some leather tanning carried on for local consumption, support growing home industry in boot and shoe making.

E. Architecture Residential: Full range of building from high-style to vernacular throughout period. Georgian style details remained popular until ca. 1800-1810. Federalist style house plans and details came into gradual use ca. 1790-1810. High-style throughout period characterized by use of hip roofs, end-wall chimneys, brick end-walls (occasionally) and square floor plans. The most widespread house-type after ca. 1800-1810 seems to have been the two-story rear-wall chimney type, followed by central chimney and rear-wall chimney cottages. In general, the most elaborate examples of the period and the greatest variety of house types occurred at Bedford center, including several double houses.

Institutional: Elaborate, Federalist style meeting house (First Parish) built 1816-1817. 5 school districts created, 1792, new school houses built soon after in all districts except Center where a converted house remained in use until ca. 1829 when a two-story brick school house/town hall was

built at center. Private Female Seminary established, 1797, no building seems to have been built.

Commercial: Several taverns and stables at town center to serve traffic between Boston and Concord, New Hampshire after ca. 1823; stores likely although none were recorded in secondary sources.

Industrial: Small scale, wood-frame shops for shoe making after ca. 1805-1810; little or no mechanized manufacturing.

#### VIII. EARLY INDUSTRIAL PERIOD (1830-1870)

##### A. Transportation Routes:

Turnpikes and roads remain from early 19th century. No railroads through area during period.

##### B. Population:

Rapid growth, 1830-1840, followed by slower growth until 1855 and decline thereafter; small foreign-born population made up mostly of Irish immigrants. Church of Christ (Trinitarian) founded 1828-1831; First Parish became Unitarian, 1831.

##### C. Settlement Location:

Some scattered building along major roads, most new development occurred at Bedford Center.

##### D. Economic Base:

Some industrial growth in this period with the establishment of a paper mill. Jonathan Bacon invented, patented and manufactured a blind fastener--the "most approved article of its kind." Census reports also refer to manufacture of gold leaf. The home manufacture of boots and shoes ended just before the Civil War.

E. Architecture Residential: Federalist style and house-types of preceding period remained popular until ca. 1840, after which Greek Revival style became dominant. Little of the Greek Revival style construction was high-style; only one temple-front house seems to have been built; examples are divided between side-hall cottages, side-hall houses, and center-entry twin-chimney houses. Decorative details appear to have been derived from pattern books and frequently combined Federalist and Greek Revival style motifs.

Institutional: Late Federalist meetinghouse (Trinitarian) with Gothic details, built 1831-33; First Parish meetinghouse remodelled 1849. Italianate style town hall/schoolhouse built at center 1856; 1854 new school houses built in North, West and South Districts, East Schoolhouse remodelled. Town Farm purchased, 1833.

Commercial: Inns and public houses at center during most of period; resort hotel established at Bedford (Mineral) Springs ca. 1835-1840, enlarged 1856, after which the property contained a hotel, bath house, stable and bowling alley, grounds altered 1867. Wood-frame commercial blocks with gabled facades likely to have existed at town center, none recorded in secondary sources.

Industrial: Small shoe shops passed out of use by end of period; paper mill built 1840, appearance unrecorded.

#### IX. LATE INDUSTRIAL PERIOD (1870-1915)

##### A. Transportation Routes:

Secondary railroad network created at Bedford Center with Middlesex Railroad from Lexington to Concord (1874) and narrow gauge route of Bedford and Billerica (1878), briefly operated but rebuilt in 1880s, now abandoned.

Suburban street railways routes from Boston to Bedford center in early 1900s along Concord-Great Road and North Street to Billerica-Lowell.

B. Population:

Slow growth to 1885 followed by more rapid growth until 1900, stable population 1900-1910, followed by moderate growth. Foreign-born population increased throughout period; largest group was Irish, followed by Nova Scotia immigrants. Roman Catholic mission chapel established by 1885.

C. Settlement Location:

New development focused on suburban development of side streets at Bedford Center, particularly on streets between the Great Road and railroad bed.

D. Economic Base:

No visible industrial growth, though market for agricultural products stimulated increasing trade in milk, poultry, fruit and vegetables. Pharmaceutical Laboratory built at Bedford Springs.

E. Architecture Residential: Little high-style present; most houses of period are modest examples of Victorian Gothic style cottages (1870s), Queen Anne style houses and cottages (1880s-ca. 1900), and a small number of bungalows (ca. 1910-30).

Institutional: Victorian Gothic Style chapel (Catholic) built 1885; Trinitarian Church altered and enlarged, 1886. Schools graded 1885 and 2-year high school established, 1885; Queen Anne style central school (Union School) built at center, 1891.

Commercial: Queen Anne style hotel at Bedford Springs, built ca. 1888-95. Queen Anne style pharmaceutical laboratory built at Bedford Springs ca. 1892. Victorian Gothic style railroad depot built at Bedford Center, ca. 1873-74, second depot built at Bedford Springs, ca. 1888. One-story (astylistic) wood-frame store fronts built at Bedford Center (ca. 1900).

Industrial: Pharmaceutical laboratory (see commercial above); two-story wood-frame factory and grain mill built near Bedford Center depot ca. 1875-80; little industrial development.

X. EARLY MODERN PERIOD (1915-1940)

A. Transportation Routes:

Trolley routes abandoned in 1920s. Autohighway routes along existing roads through Bedford center as Route 62 (Concord-Great Road-Brooksbie-Burlington Roads), Route 225 (Great Road-Carlisle RD) and Route 4 (Great Road-North Road).

B. Population:

Rapid growth of population after ca. 1925, reflecting hospital population and (after 1939) air force base population; no information available on foreign-born population; no new religious societies formed.

C. Settlement Location:

Continued development at Bedford Center; small number of scattered country estates; major Veterans Hospital on Springs Road after 1927. Army airfield in Cedar Swamp (Hanscom Air Force Base) established during Second World War with surviving period structures.

D. Economic Base:

Small manufacturers around depot including metal novelty maker and Bedford Spinning Company. Other industrial growth limited in face of residential expansion.

E. Architecture Residential: Small number of high-style, eclectic estate houses (ca. 1915-30) built in country locations; bungalows and modest Colonial Revival style houses built elsewhere.

Institutional: Colonial Revival style junior high school built 1928-29. Colonial Revival style complex of brick buildings begun in 1926 and enlarged throughout period by Veteran's Administration; Bedford Airbase (now Hanscom Field) planned ca. 1939.

Commercial: Several one and two-story Colonial Revival style blocks at center.

Industrial: No new development.

## XI. SOURCES

Brown, A.E. History of Bedford 1891

Brown, Louise Wilderness Town, Story of Bedford 1968

Brown, Louise A Revolutionary Town 1975