

MHC Reconnaissance Survey Town Report

BELLINGHAM

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: February 1980

Community: Bellingham

I. TOPOGRAPHY

Located on rolling lowland, glacial outwash plain. Drumlins, kame terraces and other outwash features; many deposits of sand and gravel. Great elevation occurs in center of town between Charles River to north and Blackstone drainage to south. Several ponds and streams feed into both river systems. Large areas of cedar swamp and bog as well.

II. POLITICAL BOUNDARIES

Part of Dedham grant, 1636. Unclaimed land between Mendon and Wrentham, divided at public meeting, 1714. Town of Bellingham established, 1719.

III. HISTORIC OVERVIEW

Rural industrial town divided between Charles (Massachusetts) and Blackstone (Rhode Island) Rivers with dispersed centers. Native sites reported along main trails in South Bellingham and suspected sites along Charles River paths. Early axis of settlement to Mendon during 17th century, but no permanent town center until early 18th century. Some surviving Colonial period houses in North Bellingham with cottage types predominating. Agricultural landscape of late 18th century intact around South Bellingham. Early 19th mill sites for cotton factories in North Bellingham with late 19th century granite mills of Fall River type. Well preserved craft villages with mid-19th century cottages survive at Caryville and Rakeville. Urban development of Woonsocket (Rhode Island) extended into Crooks Corner by early 20th century with multiple family house types of central Massachusetts, remains of trolley amusement park at Silver Lake and early highway strip activities to South Bellingham. Town center now dismembered by shopping plazas and gradual expansion of suburban development from Boston and Providence along main highways.

IV. CONTACT PERIOD (1500-1620)

A. Transportation Routes:

Located between Charles and Blackstone Rivers with main trails along E/W axis of watersheds. Primary route along Charles is conjectured as Hartford Avenue around Stall Brook with a probably branch to Lake Pearl (Wrentham) as Taunton-Main-Mechanic Streets through Bellingham Center. A second set of probable routes linked Peters River with the Blackstone following the axis of Pulaski Boulevard into Woonsocket with a junction of trails at Crooks Circle. It appears logical that a N/S trail linked the two networks, possibly along Center Street (South Bellingham) to Silver Lake and Lily Hole-Long Pond, although no surviving trails exists.

B. Settlement Pattern:

No documented period sites reported. Possible site locations include well-drained terraces and knolls adjacent to larger lakes and ponds and at confluence points on both Charles and Peters Rivers.

C. Subsistence Pattern:

Freshwater fishing in lakes and ponds, hunting/gathering.

D. Observations:

Little known about this area. Nipmuck sites possible on lakes and ponds, but more likely a buffer area between Nipmuck people (located on upland plateau/lake country) and Narragansetts (located on Narragansett Bay and tributaries).

V. FIRST SETTLEMENT PERIOD (1620-1675)

A. Transportation Routes:

Native trails remain as route network, with highway from Medway to Mendon (1670) along Hartford Avenue.

B. Population:

Apparently none.

C. Settlement:

Apparently none: vague tradition of a garrison house north of North Bellingham cemetery.

D. Economic Base:

None.

E. Observations:

Too remote for settlement. Marginal land located between period settlements at Mendon and Wrentham.

VI. COLONIAL PERIOD (1676-1776)

A. Transportation Routes:

Location of meeting house in Bellingham Center by early 18th century forms radial highway network including South Main and Center Streets to Crooks Corner and North Main Street to North Bellingham. Secondary roads of the period include E/W links of Cross, Wrentham, North and Chestnut Streets, with Lake and Maple Streets alternate N/S highway to North Bellingham.

B. Population:

About 40 families at time of land division, 1713. Many Baptists and Quakers. Gradual growth throughout 18th century. By 1765, census listed 462 inhabitants in 82 families and 72 houses.

C. Settlement:

Slowly settled after 1700. Scattered farms throughout town, especially along Hartford Street. Two focal points: Rawson's farm (North

Bellingham) and Grove Street/Hartford Street area. First meetinghouse (Congregational) built, 1720 (South Main and Blackstone Streets). Due to poor location and Baptist/Quaker resistance, disbanded 1756. (Congregationalists in northern part of town went to west precinct Medway.) Baptists built their own meetinghouse, 1744 (South Main and High Streets); area called "Crimpsville". One of the few period Baptist churches in Massachusetts. Used for town meetings. Scattered farms throughout southern part of town. An unfinished Universalist meetinghouse in Crooks Corner. Stronger ties to Rhode Island in this area.

D. Economic Base:

Small-scale agriculture and grazing (cattle and sheep). Generally poor land for agriculture. Some lumbering, especially cedar. Sawmill built 1718 on Charles (North Bellingham); apparently three other mills on Charles by end of period -- all had problems due to irregular water flow. (See Partridge, 1919, pp. 123-24 for a 1773 letter describing town's rather dismal economic condition.)

E. Architecture:

Residential: Very small number of buildings evident, most prominent house type appears to have been central chimney Cape Cod cottage, followed by a lesser number of central chimney two-storey houses; extremely unlikely that any high-style existed.

Institutional: First meetinghouse built 1722, passed out of use as Congregational meetinghouse during 1750s, sold 1774; Baptist meetinghouse built 1744, served as site of town meetings; seven school districts in existence by 1744, but no schoolhouses seem to have been built before the Revolution(?).

Commercial: No buildings except tavern(s).

Industrial: Grist and saw mills(?).

F. Observations:

A poor and struggling rural town. Not well endowed with resources. Sectarian differences further weakened town and prevented evolution of a village center.

VII. FEDERAL PERIOD (1775-1830)

A. Transportation Routes:

Colonial highways remain intact with primary routes, Hartford Avenue to Mendon, Taunton-Mechanic Streets to Wrentham and Pulsaki Boulevard to Wrentham.

B. Population:

Nearly continuous growth throughout period, particularly large increase between 1810 and 1820, presumably due to establishment of mill

at North Bellingham; Universalist Society formed by 1794, Congregational Society incorporated 1821, merged with Universalists, 1825; no significant foreign-born population.

C. Settlement Location:

Major focus around small mill villages at North Bellingham and Caryville, small amount of development around town center.

D. Economic Base:

Primarily agricultural economy though textile manufacture introduced at Caryville (1813) and North Bellingham (1810). By the end of the period three cotton mills and one woolen mill in operation along Charles River. Substantial home boot and shoe production by 1830. Small attempt to develop home production of straw braid and bonnets does not appear to have been long-lived.

E. Architecture:

Residential: Central-chimney 1½ storey cottage remained most widespread house type, although cottages with rear wall and endwall chimneys also existed; central-chimney two-storey houses continued to be built in small numbers during much of period; little evidence of high-style. Small numbers of workers' cottages existed at North Bellingham, including at least two gambrel roof, central chimney cottages (ca. 1815-25).

Institutional: Town Hall with late Georgian plan and details built 1802; Universalist meetinghouse begun (1790s) but not completed; Federalist style Baptist meetinghouse built 1826; number of school districts unrecorded for period, at least one brick schoolhouse built ca. 1810-20 (Crooks Corner).

Commercial: Possible development near Turnpike (Hartford Avenue); one store at town center ca. 1810-1815; at least two taverns present in 1825.

Industrial: Stone mill built at North Bellingham (1810) by stone mason from Blackstone Valley (Partridge, p. 143); stone mill built at Caryville (1813) together with tenements.

VIII. EARLY INDUSTRIAL PERIOD (1830-1870)

A. Transportation Routes:

Highways remain from early 19th century. Railroads traverse area on SW axis linking Boston with Woonsocket as Norfolk Co. (1849) through South Bellingham (abandoned) and New York and New England (1863) through North Bellingham (abandoned). Apparently a branch railroad to Bellingham Center operated briefly in the mid-19th century with remnants of the roadbed intact along Box Pond.

B. Population:

20% increase in population between 1840 and 1850 followed by fluctuations in 1,240-1,413 range; relatively small foreign-born population of which Irish were the largest single group; second Baptist Society incor-

porated at North Bellingham, 1867.

C. Settlement Location:

Expansion of North Bellingham, Caryville, Bellingham Center, Rakeville and Crooks Corner, although none developed into a dominant center.

D. Economic Base:

Four boot and shoe factories built in this period, the largest at Caryville (1848), all under one owner. Production value rises from \$28,000 in 1837 to \$121,675 in 1865. Small factory for manufacture of rakes and other tools established in Rakeville.

E. Architecture:

Residential: Widespread construction of cottages equally divided between side-hall plan and center entry types (twin and end wall chimneys), mostly decorated with simple Greek Revival style details derived from pattern books and related more to Connecticut/Rhode Island details of the style, than to the Boston area; some double cottages built near mills; small body of two-storey side-hall plan Greek Revival style houses. No high-style Italianate or Second Empire style architecture evident; mid-Victorian architecture represented mainly by side-hall cottages and a very few side-hall houses with bracketed trim.

Institutional: Baptist Chapel built by mill owner at North Bellingham, 1847; nine schools operated by a single school committee by 1841, although the number of schoolhouses built is not recorded in local histories.

Commercial: Several free-standing wooden structures (one and two storeys) built at Caryville, North Bellingham and at the town center (ca. 1865-75), primarily astylistic with machine cut decorative trim.

Industrial: Enlargement of existing textile mills, use made of low-pitched roofs resembling Blackstone Valley/Fall River mills; small shoe shops built after 1848, one wood-frame shoe factory built (burned 1875) three-storeys high, wood-frame construction, undecorated Italianate design.

IX. LATE INDUSTRIAL PERIOD (1870-1915)

A. Transportation Routes:

Road and railroads remain in place with additional E/W rail link through Bellingham Center as Franklin Branch (1883). Network of street-car routes opened in early 1900s between Woonsocket and North Bellingham along Pulaski Boulevard to Maple Street - Hartford Avenue as extensive right-of-way to trolley park at Silver Lake with roadbed well-preserved in South Bellingham. Cross route through Bellingham Center linked Franklin with Milford along Mendon-Mechanic Streets.

B. Population:

Fluctuation of population until ca. 1890-95, increase between 1890-1900

and after 1910; large growth of foreign-born population after 1890s, Irish remain largest single group, followed by French Canadians until ca. 1910 when French Canadians became the largest group; Catholic mission formed ca. 1894.

C. Settlement Location:

Same as preceding period until ca. 1900-1910 when Crooks Corner and southwestern portions of town became a suburb of Woonsocket, Rhode Island; small resort/amusement park development at Silver Lake (ca. 1910-25)(?).

D. Economic Base:

Boot and shoe production continued to rise until the death of owner Fairbanks (early 1880s?) brought business to a halt. Purchase of North Bellingham mill by Ray Woolen Co. of Franklin brings new capital to production of satinet and woolens. Company absorbed for a time by the giant American Woolen Co. in 1899. At Caryville, Taft, McKeon and Co., new owners of the mills there, also went into satinet production. Despite these changes, town historian Fairbanks wrote in 1884 that "farming alone constitutes the chief industry".

E. Architecture:

Residential: Pre-1900 development dominated by side-hall cottages (astylistic) at North Bellingham and Caryvill, a small number of modest late Queen Anne style houses were also built in these areas; post-1900 development consisted of modest late Queen Anne style houses and bungalows sparsely scattered in the north part of the town; post-1900 development in the southwest part of the town consisted of bungalows, two-family houses (astylistic) and a small number of three-deckers.

Institutional: At least one multiple-room schoolhouse built 1873 (town center); three schools built (remodelled) 1906; high school established in existing building 1896, closed soon after; late Gothic style wood-frame churches built at North Bellingham, 1895 (Catholic) and 1908 (Baptist); public hall built at Crooks Corner ca. 1910.

Commercial: Same building types as preceding period, most development located at Crooks Corner, related to suburban growth; five railroad stations built by 1876.

Industrial: Construction of at least one granite mill building during 1880s (North Bellingham) and expansion of wood-frame mills at Caryville (1880s), continued use of undecorated (Italianate) mills with low-pitched roofs, and open eaves, physically resembling mills in the Blackstone Valley and Fall River.

X. EARLY MODERN PERIOD (1915-1940)

A. Transportation Routes:

Street railway and much of railroad route abandoned by mid-20th cen-

ture. Auto highways rebuilt on existing roads with primary N/S Route 126 from Woonsocket to North Bellingham and E/W Route 140 from Milford to Franklin intersecting at Bellingham Center.

B. Population:

Growth of population to a peak in 1930 followed by a slight decline until 1940-45.

C. Settlement Location:

Primarily suburban growth in southwestern section of town; limited resort amusement park development around Silver Lake, it is possible that similar development exists around Lake Hiawatha.

D. Economic Base:

Two principal mills, North Bellingham and Caryville, continue in textile production throughout period but had become virtually only industries remaining in town. Commercial development in the south part of town, oriented toward Woonsocket.

E. Architecture:

Residential: Continued construction of modest bungalows and two-family (astylistic) houses; some modest rustic cabins built in resort locations.

Institutional: Little recorded new construction, probably school-house construction near Crooks Corner.

Commercial: Rustic cabins in resort location used as restaurants, etc. -- small body of buildings.

Industrial: No new building(?).

XI.

SOURCES

Partridge, George, History of Bellingham, Massachusetts (1919).