

MHC Reconnaissance Survey Town Report

BELCHERTOWN

Report Date: 1982

Associated Regional Report: Connecticut Valley

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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MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION
William Francis Galvin, Secretary of the Commonwealth
Chair, Massachusetts Historical Commission
220 Morrissey Blvd.
Boston, MA 02125
www.sec.state.ma.us/mhc
mhc@sec.state.ma.us / 617-727-8470

MHC RECONNAISSANCE SURVEY REPORT

DATE: July, 1982

COMMUNITY: Belchertown

I. TOPOGRAPHY

Belchertown is dominated by a complex of moderate to rugged uplands. The greatest elevations occur in the northernmost portion of the town, where the uplands average approximately 1000 feet in height. The most prominent points are an unnamed peak immediately south of the Munsell cemetery (1075 feet), West Hill (1070 feet), and Junket Hill (1070 feet). The uplands moderate steadily to the south with the lowest elevations occurring in southern Belchertown. This area is characterized by gently rolling hills averaging slightly over 400 feet above sea level. Drainage is poorest in central and south central Belchertown, where large areas of marshland are situated. The dominant local water sources are the Swift River and the Quabbin Reservoir. The Swift River forms the town's eastern boundary as it flows south into Palmer and the Ware River. Establishment of the Quabbin Reservoir in the late 1930s resulted in the inundation of the northern course of the Swift River.

The only natural bodies of fresh water are a complex of ponds northwest of the village of Belchertown and Lake Holland, and Arcadia and Metacomet Lakes. Cold Spring has traditionally been utilized by travellers journeying on the "Old Bay Path".

Local soils are predominantly gravelly, excluding the fertile sandy loam of southern Belchertown.

II. POLITICAL BOUNDARIES

Belchertown was originally included as part of the Equivalent Lands in 1713, with its western boundary at the Hadley (Amherst) line of 1663. Initial grants were surveyed and sold to proprietors in 1727 as Cold Spring Plantation, and the church was organized in 1737. Incorporated as Belchertown in 1761 with the northern boundary at Pelham (1742) and southern boundary at Palmer (1752), its eastern line was established at Swift River. Packardsville district was annexed to Pelham in 1788 and the Caldwell Brook area was included as part of Enfield in 1818. The Enfield district was re-annexed in 1927 with the formation of the Quabbin Reservoir along the Swift River. Enfield was disincorporated as a town in 1938.

III. HISTORIC OVERVIEW

A rural suburban hill town on the primary corridor between Northampton and Worcester, Belchertown is located on the edge of the central highlands along the upper Swift River Valley, with native sites suspected around Metacomet Lake, Turkey Hill, and Cold Spring. It was an early corridor of travel between the Connecticut Valley and Brookfield during the Plantation period,

with an important watering site at Cold Spring. There was early settlement from Northampton as upland grazing land, with a town center established by the mid 18th century. Colonial farmsteads survive at Pond Hill with a period gambrel house, and at Cold Spring with a brick cottage. The town center was developed as the primary civic and commercial focus around Belchertown Common during the Federal period, with some well-preserved houses along the axis of Main Street (Route 181). Outlying Federal houses remain on Wright Street at Hop Brook.

There was increasing development of craft industries during the Early Industrial Period, with regional railroad connections to Belchertown Center, including notable carriage and palm-leaf hat production. Swift River mill sites were developed at Bondsville (Palmer), and West Ware, with some surviving workers' housing. Important expansion of agriculture occurred during the mid 19th century, with numerous period dairy farms along Jabish Brook and Broad Brook, and including several Greek Revival houses and decorated barns. Belchertown Center continued as the civic and commercial focus, with an array of Greek Revival and early Italianate buildings around the Center Common, highlighted by a notable Romanesque library. A related Victorian village remains at the Dwight depot with a Queen Anne church.

Agriculture was maintained as the primary activity in the southern section through the mid 19th century, with some dairy barns remaining around Turkey Hill and Cold Spring. Increasing development of suburban resort activity from Amherst during the Early Modern period resulted in summer cottages at Metacomet and Arcadia Lakes. Belchertown Center was retained as local and commercial focus, including the survival of an early gas station on the town common. Location of Belchertown State School created a Colonial Revival brick campus with original concrete industrial shop along the railroad corridor. Development of the Quabbin Reservoir flooded the upper Swift River, and the construction of the Windsor Dam along the Route 9 axis resulted in a Neo-Georgian administration building and related housing.

Present development is most obvious along the route 9 corridor from Amherst to Belchertown Center, where intense commercial activity is rapidly eroding the historic highway landscape. Belchertown Center retains period character around the village green, but its integrity is increasingly restricted by commercial renovation. Agriculture remains viable in fertile lands along the route 181 corridor, although many dairy farms appear abandoned or in disrepair. Recreational activity is centered around the Quabbin Reservation, with affluent suburban development expanding on the periphery.

IV. CONTACT PERIOD (1500-1620)

A. Transportation Routes

Belchertown was an important corridor from the Connecticut Valley to the Swift River and the central highlands (Quabaug). The primary east-west trail is documented as Bay Path between the

Swift River fordway and Metacomet Lake as Cold Spring-Mill Valley Roads (Route 181) to Main-Central Streets (Route 9) through Belchertown Center to Bay Road and Pond Hill (Barber 1839:314; Doubleday 1968:3). An alternate route from Bondsville fordway (Palmer) appears probable as West Street-Bardwell-Three Rivers Roads along Jabish Brook, with a loop to Turkey Hill over Broad Brook as Broad-Turkey Hill-Old Springfield Roads. A logical trail along the north-south axis of the Swift River from Three Rivers (Palmer) apparently followed South-Michael secondary route from Metacomet Lake north along Hop Brook is conjectured as Federal Street around Arcadia Lake to Old Amherst Road (Route 9 axis). The connecting trail north to the Pelham uplands is not directly evident, although it may have followed the axis of Route 202 along upper Jabish Brook to East Hill.

B. Settlement Patterns

There are no reported Contact period sites. Evidence of an Early and possibly Middle Woodland period occupation site has been encountered in the general vicinity of the junction of the Boston and Main Railroad and Franklin Street (Mulholland, Drinkwater, Lamberg-Karlovsky 1980:33). An unidentified native site has also been reputed to be located north of the village of Belchertown, approximately six miles from the above-mentioned Woodland period site (Ibid.). Native period sites were most likely situated on the Swift River intervalle and the moderate uplands of southeastern Belchertown, particularly in the vicinity of Cold Spring (fresh water source). Local tradition states that the spring had been utilized by individuals traveling on the Old Bay Path (Routes 9/181) long before Belchertown's initial settlement in the early 18th century. Additional native sites may have been established adjacent to Metacomet Lake, Arcadia Lake, and Lake Holland and the village of Belchertown. The latter site was the location of periodic native "burns" of the woodlands in order to flush out wild game.

C. Economic Base

Native horticulture would have been most likely restricted to the Swift River bottomlands, two moderate upland tracts in north-western Belchertown. The focal point of native fishing would probably have been Lake Holland, Arcadia and Metacomet Lakes, and the Swift River. The town provided an excellent habitat for wild game with its extensive wooded uplands. As mentioned above, the hill on which lies the present village of Belchertown was the traditional site of regular native hunting drives.

D. Observations

Belchertown's moderate resource base and location between the three suspected primary native period settlement areas of Agawam (Springfield), Norwottuck (Hadley/South Hadley) and Quabaug (Brookfield) suggests that the town was utilized primarily as a seasonally occupied resource area by native inhabitants of these population centers.

The greatest likelihood of surviving evidence of native period occupation should occur adjacent to the Swift River and south-eastern Belchertown, particularly in the vicinity of Cold Spring. Vestiges of native sites may remain near Metacomet and Arcadia Lakes and Lake Holland. Establishment of the Quabbin Reservoir may have resulted in the inundation of period sites situated adjacent to the northern portion of the Swift River.

V. PLANTATION PERIOD (1620-1675)

A. Transportation Routes

Native trails were improved as regional paths. A primary east-west route between Brookfield and Northampton has been maintained as Bay Path from the Swift River fordway to Cold Spring, and Pond Hill as Bay Road (Doubleday 1968: p.3).

B. Population

Small bands of natives probably continued to occupy this area seasonally.

There was no pre-1675 permanent colonial population.

C. Settlement Patterns

Native settlement patterns probably remained basically the same as those suggested for the Contact period.

Colonial residents of Northampton, Hatfield and Hadley reputedly occupied Belchertown during the summer months when driving their cattle into the area and harvesting the local woodlands for turpentine and candlewood.

D. Economic Base

There were probably minimal changes in the natives' traditional subsistence patterns, excluding the probability of commercial contacts established with settlers inhabiting the relatively accessible river towns of Hadley, South Hadley, Chicopee, Springfield, Northampton, and the Brookfields.

As mentioned above, Connecticut River Valley residents utilized Belchertown for livestock grazing and lumbering.

E. Observations

Belchertown appears to have been utilized as a resource area by both the study unit's native and colonial populations. Future research should clarify the extent and location of the seasonal habitations established by the valley town residents. It is doubtful that archaeological remains of these sites survive, considering their short-term use.

VI. COLONIAL PERIOD (1675-1775)

A. Transportation Routes

The primary east-west route between Brookfield and Northampton was maintained as Bay Road from the Swift River Bridge to Metacomet Lake, and Pond Hill via Cold Spring. Location of Belchertown meetinghouse (1740) created a radial highway network from the town center, including east-west State-Jabish Streets and Hannum-Jackson Streets, with an important connector from the West Ware bridge at the Swift River as Sargent-Ware Road (Route 9), now abandoned in part near Windsor Dam. Other highways formed from period improvements included roads along Bachelor and Hop Brooks, including Stebbins-Wright Street around Pond Hill, and Amherst-Federal Streets around Arcadia Lake. Several secondary connectors of the period included Allen Street from Metacomet Lake, Gulf and Mountain Roads around West Hill, and a series of local highways around Turkey Hill as Rockrimmon-Booth Roads with connections to Ludlow and Palmer as South Street and Bower Road.

B. Population

It is unclear if a native population occupied Belchertown after King Philip's War (1675-1676).

In 1731 (initial settlement date), five or six colonial families inhabited Belchertown; by 1739 the colonial population had increased to 20 families. This figure had more than doubled to 50+ families by 1752, and by 1765 Belchertown had only increased to 68 families and 418 inhabitants. However, a resurgence in colonial population growth occurred between 1765 and 1776, with a figure of 972 residents in 1776. The vast majority of the town's settlers were former residents of the Connecticut River Valley towns of Northampton, Hatfield, and Hadley.

C. Settlement Patterns

Belchertown was originally included within the "Equivalent Lands" which consisted of the towns of Pelham, Prescott, Ware, and a portion of Enfield. The first attempts to initiate settlement of the Belchertown area were undertaken shortly after the tract's purchase in 1727 by seven Boston area residents. The proprietors sought to encourage the settlement of "Cold Spring" by Connecticut River Valley town residents by offering 500 acre grants to each settler. The initial colonial settlement occurring in Belchertown consisted of a handful of scattered homes established in ca.1731 in central and western Belchertown, including the present village of Belchertown, the junction of Sargent and Main Streets, George Hannum Street (between its junction with Boardman and Jackson Streets), and Stebbins Street, in addition to the general vicinity of Cold Spring. A primary settlement node appears to have begun developing in the vicinity of the village of Belchertown in the 1740s with the erection of a Congregational meetinghouse (ca. 1738), and the "Old" or "Forward" Cemetery (1742), approximately 3/4 mile southeast of the meetinghouse on Mill Valley Road. Additional development occurred in the town center in the 1750s and 1760s with the construction of the town pound (ca.1758).

D. Economic Base

Agriculture was the primary economic pursuit during this period. Livestock grazing occurred throughout the town's moderate uplands. Crop production was modest, primarily because of the limited amount of fertile alluvial soils. The best cropland was situated in southern Belchertown and the Swift River bottomlands. Extensive timbering probably took place throughout the town's woodlands. Although the available secondary sources make no reference to pre 1775 industrial operations, it is likely that there were some period industrial facilities in Belchertown, considering the presence of several potential millstreams. Probable focal points of local industry would have been Jabish Brook near the town center and the Swift River. The former location was the site of two grist mills, an undesignated mill, and an ironworks in ca. 1794. A grist mill and a sawmill were located on the rapidly running Swift River, slightly south of its junction with Ware Road at this date.

There were at least two documented pre 1775 taverns operating at Belchertown as well. Samuel Bascom was operating a tavern as early as ca. 1733 on Bay Road in the vicinity of Pond Hill, while Nathaniel Dwight ran a tavern between ca. 1750-1775, probably in or near the present village of Belchertown. It appears that Captain Asel Dunbar and Elisha Warner operated a tavern on Federal Street in the second half of the 18th century.

E. Architecture

Residential: There are only three surviving Colonial period structures recorded in Belchertown: two houses and a cottage. Though few, Belchertown's Colonial houses are atypical, and as such, of note. The earliest, the Lincoln House (ca. 1755), has double interior chimneys and a hip roof, rather than the predominant center chimney and gable roof. The Parsons House (ca. 1770) exhibits a similar form. Both houses incorporate projecting porticos. The only cottage of the period is a ca. 1757 gambrel roof appears to have been comparatively rare in the region. Unfortunately, a 1960s shed roof addition on the front obscures the Colonial gambrel.

Institutional: The first meetinghouse was erected in 1738 and finished in 1746. In 1767 three schoolhouses were built.

F. Observations

Belchertown's Colonial period development appears to have been hampered mainly by its limited to moderate agricultural potential and the indigent background of a large portion of the town's population. The majority of the local farms produced only enough crops, livestock, and livestock products for family consumption. However, the settlement's location on the "Old Bay Path" (Bay Road/Route 9/Route 181) provided Belchertown with access to the markets of Northampton and Boston. Archaeological remains of the Colonial Period community are most likely to survive in the vicinity of Mill Valley Road and Cold Spring Road and west of

Route 9 (the western portion of Route 9). Future research should detail Belchertown's Colonial period settlement patterns and industrial operations, since the existing secondary sources provide an incomplete picture of these facets of the town's development.

VII. FEDERAL PERIOD (1775-1830)

A. Transportation Routes

Improvement of north-south corridor between Pelham and Palmer with location of Route 202 and Bondsville Road (Route 181). Other period roads included expansion of local highways from Palmer and Ludlow as Barretts Junction and Three Rivers Road.

B. Population

Belchertown experienced the greatest growth that it would experience for a century in the Federal Period. Between 1776 and 1830 the town more than doubled in size, reaching 2,491 in the latter year. Most of this growth, however, occurred in the decades 1790-1810, when the town grew by about 39 residents a year.

C. Settlement Patterns

Civic and commercial focus expanded at Belchertown Center with a mill village developed at Bondsville (Palmer) on the Swift River. Agriculture continued as the primary activity around early centers at Cold Spring and Pond Hill, with expansion along Jabish Brook to Turkey Hill.

D. Economic Base

Belchertown in the Federal period was largely an agricultural town. By 1830, eleven mill privileges were in use by saw and grist mills, in addition to two carding machines and two fulling mills. Large quantities of wool were reported and the country made excellent pasturage for cattle. The only exception to this agricultural economy and the business which brought at least statewide attention to the town by mid-century--was the manufacture of carriages.

Carriage making seems to have begun in Amherst, though by the 1820s Belchertown had an active industry. Mason Abbey of Amherst is said to have made the first one-horse wagon in the vicinity by 1808, though in 1809 he moved to Belchertown (Judd, p. 383), where the business expanded in the 1820s. By 1832, thirty men were reported making carriages in Belchertown--predominantly one-horse pleasure wagons--worth annually \$18,000. Various wagon parts were made in all parts of the town. The business in fire engines alone. Nevertheless, Amherst's carriage production (primarily the firm of Knowles and Theyer) considerably exceeded that of Belchertown until the 1840s.

E. Architecture

Residential: A number of houses and cottages were built along Federal and Main Street and Mill Valley Road, with a concentration of period structures around the town common. In addition to these locations, Federal houses were observed on Wright, Turkey Hill, and Bardwell Roads. Double chimney plan houses outnumber center chimney examples; this pattern is reminiscent of the Colonial period, for which no center and two double chimney plan houses have survived. The predominance of double chimney plans for both periods suggests a degree of regional innovation. Another indication of Federal period stylishness is the predominance of hip and pyramidal hip roof forms, which outnumber gable roofs on houses of the period. In addition to double and center chimney plan houses, a few end chimney and sidehall plan houses were observed as well. At least one house (Edwin Bridgeman House, 1815) has a five-bay, gable front, center entrance plan. Cottages are less common than houses for the period and are generally located away from the town center. Most of those observed have center chimneys and five-bay facades. Of note for the period is the extensive use of brick. Approximately a half dozen houses of brick have survived. These include several houses on Main Street, all of which have been surveyed, as well as a house on Wright Street near Goodell Road, which is not included in the inventory. This is an end chimney structure with a round arch entrance. Probably the finest house of the period is the Stone House (1827), an end-chimney fieldstone house with transitional Greek Revival detailing.

Institutional: The present First Congregational Church was erected in 1789. As originally built, the structure was entered from the center bay of the five-bay wide south wall (the long side of the building) and featured a square bell tower on the west end. In 1828, the church was enlarged by cutting in half and inserting additional bays. The present two-story gable roof porch was added at that time, encircling the existing bell tower. In 1825, a splinter group of the parish formed the Brainerd Church. A Baptist Society organized in 1795, building a meetinghouse in 1814. Other activity included the establishment of a Methodist church in 1823. Nine school districts were organized in 1794.

Commerical: Several taverns operated on Federal Street in the period. The only extant commercial building known is the Hampshire National Bank building (1835 and 1839), a two-story gable roof brick structure at Main and State Streets.

VIII. EARLY INDUSTRIAL PERIOD (1830-1870)

A. Transportation Routes

There was continued improvement of the north-south corridor with the Amherst and Belchertown Railroad in 1852 from Palmer along the axis of Jabish and Broad brooks to Arcadia Lake and Hop Brook.

B. Population

Belchertown's population peaked in 1860 after forty years of relatively slow growth. In the thirty years, 1830-1860, the town grew by only 218 new residents--an average of seven per year. After 1860 the population declined steadily for 60 years. IN 1855, five percent of the population were foreign born, well under the 13% county average. Of these, slightly more than half were Irish, with another 32% Canadian.

C. Settlement Patterns

Belchertown Center continued as the primary civic and commercial focus of the area, with a reorientation of activity to the railroad depot on State Street (Route 21). Industrial activity expanded at Bondsville (Palmer) along the Swift River, with a secondary depot village at Dwight along Scarboro Brook. Dairy farming expanded along Jabish Brook from Cold Spring to Turkey Hill and around the Pond Hill district at Bachelor Brook.

D. Economic Base

The limited industrial development that Belchertown did have peaked in the Early Industrial Period with the development of two small paper mills, F.M. Bardwell's Belchertown Woolen Company at Bardwell Village, and a small fork factory. But for the paper mills (on the Swift River), most of the water power was provided by Jabish Brook. In addition, Belchertown women produced substantial quantities of palmleaf hats for a time (10% of the county total in 1845).

But the major business throughout most of the period was the manufacture of one-horse pleasure wagons. (Belchertown, wrote Orra Stone in 1930, was the "Detroit of the carriage industry.") In 1855, the peak record year, 166 men were employed making wagons worth \$90,750 annually. Of these, two of the largest firms, J. Packard and Co., and H.T.Filer and Co., each employed 40-50 men and turned out 300+ wagons annually. Tertius and Samuel Cowles employed twelve in that year (1855) but would later come to be one of the best known of the Belchertown carriage makers, shipping their products to Persia and Australia. Fifth Avenue stage coaches were also produced in Belchertown in large numbers.

E. Architecture

Residential: Extensive residential construction occurred in the 1830s, 40s and 50s, apparently declining somewhat after 1860. A number of houses were built at the town center with development extending out Federal, State, Mill Valley and Springfield Streets. Secondary residential construction took place on West Street along the Swift River in the extreme southwestern corner of the town. That development, from 1850 on, stemmed from industrialization in Bondsville (Palmer), just across the river. Sidehall cottages and houses in the Greek Revival and Italianate styles predominate. Double chimney plan (five-bay, center entrance facade) cottages and houses are also quite common. In addition to

these standard house types, a few houses were built with center entrance five-bay facades and gable ends to the street; the "Beehive" (ca. 1840) is a good example of this form, which combined the traditional five-bay facade with the gable front orientation of the Greek revival. For both houses and cottages, Greek Revival details, such as rectilinear door surrounds with transoms and sidelights, predominate; fully developed Italianate details are unusual. Of special note are the town's two Gothic Revival houses, the Calvin Bridgeman House (1846) on the common, and a board and batten cottage on State Street. The Bridgeman House, with a two-story porch recessed behind a large lancet arched opening, is a very rare example of its type. Also noteworthy is an intact group of sidehall Greek Revival Italianate cottages (ca. 1840-45) on Maple Street.

Institutional: Two important institutional buildings were added to the town common during the period. These are the Brainerd Church (1836; now St. Francis), a one-and-a-half story chapel with a pediment parapet (ca. 1820) and the Old Town Hall (1865, Harrison Root, builder). The Old Town Hall is a well-developed example of the Italianate style with a flushboard facade articulated with quadrant cornered piers and roundhead windows. An institutional building which did not survive was the Belchertown Classical School (1836).

Commerical : Belchertown is unusual in that a number of period commerical building have survived. Almost all of these are one-and-a-half or two-story gable front vernacular Italianate building with center entrances flanked by large windows. These include the Hopins Store, Filer Storehouse, and Undertakers Block. The Bridgeman Block (1839-1845) is by far the most substantial commercial building of the period, however, being a two-story five-bay brick block with a brick modillion cornice. The Filer Storehouse and another building, Filer's Carriage Shop, a two-story Greek Revival/Italianate building two bays wide with a center entrance bay, were associated with the carriage building business for which Belchertown was noted in the 19th century.

IX. LATE INDUSTRIAL PERIOD (1870-1915)

A. Transportation Routes

There was continued expansion of the railroad system with the Athol Branch along the Swift River from Ludlow to Bondsville and West Ware in 1873 (now abandoned to the Quabbin Reservoir). A secondary route from Ware to Amherst emerged as the Central Massachusetts Railroad in 1886, which paralleled the Central Vermont through Belchertown Center and Dwight (now abandoned in part). There was attempted construction of the Hampden Railroad from Ware to Springfield through Bondsville (Palmer) in 1911, with a massive roadbed along the Hampshire County line, including concrete abutments that are intact at Three Rivers and Barretts Junction Roads. No street railway lines were projected or constructed through Belchertown.

B. Population

Belchertown's population continued to decline throughout the period, from 2,428 in 1870 to 2,062 in 1915. Although its immigrant population rose in the same period, the principal foreign groups represented remained the Irish and French Canadians, with by 1905, a small group of Austrians.

C. Settlement Pattern

Commercial and civic activity remained focused at Belchertown Center, with the axis of development along Main Street. Industrial activity continued at Bondsville (Palmer) along Swift River with dairy farming along the axis of Jabish Brook.

D. Economic Base

By 1886, only two or three small carriage shops remained of Belchertown's once flourishing trade. A soapstone factory had been started at Barretts Junction, but its raw material was imported from New Hampshire, and it does not appear to have lasted long. No other new industries were identified in the period.

Belchertown's agricultural products dominated the county lists. In the number of farms, and the quantity of hay, butter, and eggs, Belchertown ranked first in Hampshire County in 1880. Tobacco and indian corn were also important products. In the value of its agricultural products in general (\$149,347), Belchertown ranked third after Hadley and Amherst. By 1905 Belchertown was the leading milk producing town in the county. It also had the largest number of farms (298) and reported the second highest value of dressed poultry in the county.

E. Architecture

Residential: In general, construction in the period was confined to the town center and, after 1900, to the resort areas of Arcadia Lake and Metacomet Lake. Most of the houses constructed were fairly simple, vernacular Colonial Revival structures with embellished sidehall plans and modest detailing. At least two architects worked in Belchertown in the period, Henry Hoag and New York architect Henry Kilburn. Kilburn remodelled two Federal houses, the Clapp and Doolittle houses, in 1883-84. Hoag's own cottage (1887) is one of the two's very few mansard roofed buildings. Very much more modest than the suburban houses at the center were the lake cottages at Arcadia and Metacomet. These are one-story, hip or gable roof frame structures intended for summer use only, of which perhaps as many as two dozen were built ca. 1915. Also of note are two large barns built in the period: one, an Italianate structure, stands at the State Experimental Station at Cold Spring, while the other (1880, Henry Hoag) with mansard, Stick Style and Queen Anne details, is located on State Street near the State School.

Institutional: Several important institutional buildings were constructed at the town center during the period. The finest of

these is the Clapp Memorial Library (1883-87), Henry Kilburn), a cruciform red brick and terracotta Queen Anne building with a red tile roof and central octagonal tower. Other buildings added to the common were: the Hope Methodist Church (1823), moved to Belchertown from Springfield in 1872 and remodelled in the Romanesque Revival Style; the Queen Anne Congregational Parish House (1888); and octagonal bandstand (1878); and the Fire Station (1902), a two-story hip roof building with its hose-drying tower intact.

Commercial: A few commercial buildings were built in the town center, the largest of which is the Morey Block (ca. 1895), a two-and-a-half story Queen Anne/Colonial Revival building with storefronts on the first floor and residential space above. Also in the period, Belchertown experienced some popularity as a summer resort and a few houses, such as Peeso, were converted to hotels.

X. EARLY MODERN PERIOD (1915-1940)

A. Transportation Routes

There was improvement of local highways as regional auto roads. A primary east-west corridor was constructed as Route 9 from Ware to Amherst with a bridge at the Swift River (1931) and connecting parkways to Windsor Dam (Quabbin Reservoir). The primary north-south highway from Athol to Holyoke was Route 202 through Belchertown Center with a secondary north-south highway as Route 21 from Ludlow to the Swift River Valley, discontinued from Route 9 north with the construction of the Quabbin Reservoir in 1938. A local connector was Route 181 to Palmer, with an Art Deco bridge at Bondsville (1937).

B. Population

Belchertown's declining population was suddenly halted in the early 1920s with the construction of the State School in 1922. In the fifteen years 1920-1935 the number of residents grew by over 87%, reaching 2,905 in the latter year. As a result, Belchertown led the county with an overall growth rate for the period of 69.8%.

C. Settlement

Belchertown Center remained as the civic and commercial focus with further expansion west along the railroad axis with the location of Belchertown State School (1922). Highway commercial activity development along the Route 9 axis with a secondary center at the junction of Federal Street (Route 202). There was expansion of recreational activity with summer cottages at Metacomet and Arcadia lakes from Amherst (Route 9 axis). Formation of the Quabbin Reservoir required clearance of Upper Swift River farmland (1927), and an administrative center was constructed at Windsor Dam (1938). Agriculture was maintained on the fertile farmland of Jabish Brook with industrial activity at Bondsville (Palmer).

D. Economic Base

No new industries identified in this period. The town's residents were mostly engaged in dairy farming and growing MacIntosh apples. Belchertown gained a small part of what was formerly Enfield with the development of the Quabbin Reservoir, 1929-39.

E. Architecture

Residential: Very little residential construction took place in the period. At the town center, a few simple Colonial Revival cottages with stucco finish were constructed. Other small cottages were built at Arcadia and Metacomet lakes. Some conversion of earlier buildings to multiple family use took place in the period as well.

Institutional: Institutional construction around the town common with the erection of the Lawrence Memorial Hall (1923, Malcolm B. Harding), a brick and concrete Tudor Revival town hall, and the Center School (1922, Malcolm B. Harding), a utilitarian one-and-a-half story brick structure. Major construction occurred at the State School, established in 1922. The State School campus includes a number of two and three story utilitarian brick Colonial Revival service and administration buildings and smaller stucco Craftsman dormitories.

Commercial: Two commercial buildings are of note: these are the Belchertown Motor Sales (1918), a two-story stucco auto dealership, and Henneman's Exxon (1939), a one-story gas station with a curvilinear office.

XI. SURVEY OBSERVATIONS

Belchertown's survey is complete for the town center area and records most outstanding or early buildings in outlying sections. Several notable buildings were not included in the local inventory, however, and should be added to the inventory when updating is done. These include several Federal Period houses (one of brick) on Wright Street and Early Industrial workers' housing near Bondsville. Area forms should be completed for the State School.

XII. SOURCES

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