

MHC Reconnaissance Survey Town Report

BOLTON

Report Date: 1983

Associated Regional Report: Central Massachusetts

Reconnaissance Survey Town Reports, produced for MHC's Statewide Reconnaissance Survey between 1979 and 1987, introduce the historical development of each of the Commonwealth's municipalities. Each report begins with an historic overview, a description of topography, and political boundaries. For the purposes of the survey, the historic period has been subdivided into seven periods: Contact (1500–1620), Plantation (1620–1675), Colonial (1675–1775), Federal (1775–1830), Early Industrial (1830–1870), Late Industrial (1870–1915), and Early Modern (1915–1940/55). Each report concludes with survey observations that evaluate the town's existing historic properties inventory and highlight significant historic buildings, settlement patterns, and present threats to these resources. A bibliography lists key secondary resources.

Town reports are designed for use together with a series of town maps that demarcate settlement patterns, transportation corridors and industrial sites for each historic period. These maps are in the form of color-coded, polyester overlays to the USGS topographic base map for each town on file and available for consultation at MHC. For further information on the organization and preparation of town reports, readers should contact MHC.

Users should keep in mind that these reports are now two decades or more old. The information they contain, including assessments of existing knowledge, planning recommendations, understanding of local development, and bibliographic references all date to the time they were written. In some cases, information on certain topics was not completed. No attempt has been made to update this information.

Electronic text was not available for digital capture, and as a result most of the reports have been scanned as PDF files. While all have been processed with optical character recognition, there will inevitably be some character recognition errors.

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MHC RECONNAISSANCE SURVEY REPORT

DATE: 1983

COMMUNITY: Bolton

I. TOPOGRAPHY

The surface of Bolton is composed of gently sloping hills ranging in elevation from 250 feet above sea level in the valley of the Nashua and Still Rivers in the northwest to 600 feet in the central portion of the town. This central high town is also the division between the Nashua and Assabet watersheds. The lack of any major streams and rivers through the town contributed to the low level of manufacturing activity during the 19th century as few water power sites existed.

Because of the gradual slopes of the hills much of the land is cultivable. On the north side of Rattlesnake Hill, large deposits of limestone have been quarried since the early 18th century.

II. POLITICAL BOUNDARIES

Established as a town from part of Lancaster (1645) in 1738. Part included in district of Berlin, 1784. Part of Marlborough annexed 1829. Bounds with Marlborough established 1838. Part annexed to Hudson 1868.

III. HISTORIC OVERVIEW

A residential and agricultural community on the uplands east of the Nashua River Valley, on an historic E.W. corridor. Possible native sites at West and Little Ponds. European settlement ca. 1675 on Lancaster 2nd and 3rd division lands east of Nashua Valley, on sunny slopes of Wataquadock Range. Prosperous, dispersed 18th century agricultural development, with 19th century orchard and dairy specialization. Early 19th century central village. No major 19th century industrial development. Many farmsteads intact, with notable agricultural landscapes surviving, on Wataquadock and Long Hills. A residential suburb for surrounding industrial towns, and more recently an exurb for the greater I-495 corridor.

IV. CONTACT PERIOD (1500-1620)

A. Transportation Routes

Primary east-west routes follow Long Hill and Main Streets merging, continue east along Main St. and Wilder Road toward the Nashua confluence, and possibly alternate route over Wataquadock Hill to lower Nashua. North/South route continues from Clinton/Lancaster toward Harvard along Still River.

B. Settlement Patterns

Located directly east of the Nashua River from the more permanent camps of the Nashua group of Nipmucks located in Lancaster and Sterling. Small and short term camps.

C. Subsistence Patterns

Seasonal use of the hilly area primarily for hunting and possibly agriculture.

V. PLANTATION PERIOD (1620-1675)

A. Transportation Routes

Continued use of native-trails by colonials from Lancaster north to Groton and second division lands, and east to Sudbury and also to second division lands.

B. Settlement Patterns

This area, with daughter town Berlin, was the southeast portion of the Lancaster grant of 10 mi by 8 mi from Nashaway Solan in 1643. Evidence of some colonial settlement on the Wataquadock Hill as garrisoned house there attacked in 1674. Reduced native use in this period as Nashaways withdraw to the west and epidemic and Mohawk wars kill many.

C. Subsistence Patterns

Reduced, perhaps eliminative, native exploitation. Colonial use as outlying fields of Lancaster Population, primarily as upland.

VI. COLONIAL PERIOD (1675-1775)

A. Transportation Routes

Addition of north/south routes between dispersed farms and neighboring communities: South Bolton Road; Berlin Road to Fryville; Green and Harvard Roads; East End from Main Street. Additional east/west route in the north along Sugar and Golden Run Roads.

B. Settlement Patterns:

Settlement begins slowly after King Phillip's War, first near Wataquadock Hill, where one garrison located by 1704. Increasing numbers of residents on dispersed farms to warrant establishment of new town in 1738. Meeting house, pound, parsonage, inn, but little else near the town center.

C. Population

Few figures available. Eleven released from Lancaster Church with formation here in 1741. Friends mentioned in town records as early as 1742, members of Salem monthly meeting. By 1779 preparative meeting and community located in south, on Berlin border at Fryville, with own burying ground and school.

Baptists worshipped with Northboro or Still River groups. One of region's earliest church dispute over ministerial authority results in split between pro ministerial veto and Toy Goss, ca. 9

male members, and his replacement, Walley, chosen by the (18) majority from 1770 to 1789. The formation of the south parish in 1778 was, in part, a response to this division.

D. Economic Base:

Primarily agricultural economy with early lime kilns and potash, plus two saw/grist mills. Pasturage in uplands, plus grain cultivation. Some indication of increasing concern with the poor reflected in increase in warning out of non residents (1750s) followed by the initiation of setting the poor to work as well as an attempt at constructing a workhouse (1762).

E. Architecture:

Residential: Some settlement in Bolton region before 1676 is possible with resettlement shortly after King Phillip's War. No record of any buildings predating 1700. Major house form for period appears to be two-story, five-bay center chimney. Some five-bay double chimney houses are recorded. Cottages are documented but few appear to survive.

Institutional: First meeting house is erected in 1740. School house erected near meeting house in 1744. In 1760 town voted to establish five school districts, each to be 16' x 16' with chimneys.

Commercial: Little, if any, commercial activity in region aside from taverns and inns which existed throughout the period beginning in 1718.

Industrial: Used saw and gristmills, tanneries for period; coopering and cider mills; lime quarry in operation by end of period.

VII. FEDERAL PERIOD (1775-1830)

A. Transportation Routes

The colonial highways remain in use with several through-routes. The East/West Great Road runs from Lancaster through the center to Stow and Boston (Wilder Street, Main Street). A North/South highway from the Great Road runs to Marlborough (Long Hill Road). A North/South route runs through the center (Harvard Road, Berlin Road). In 1806, the Lancaster-Bolton Turnpike (Main Street east of Nourse Road) opens a more direct East/West route.

B.. Population:

1776 population (1210) includes most of Berlin district formed 1784. Population increased (+392) from 1790 to 1830 (1253). Greatest growth 1810-1820 (+192). Quaker monthly meetings begin 1791. Second Congregational meeting house built 1793. Hillside (Evangelical) church formed 1830s with members from Berlin, Bolton, Lancaster, Harvard, and Stow. Social library formed 1800.

C. Settlement Patterns

Continued prosperous, dispersed agricultural settlement, with many large, high-style residences. Society of Friends meeting house built in southern part of town ca. 1799. Second Congregational meeting house ("large, elegant..." Whitney) built 1793. Residential concentration (probably 1810) in center on drier, south side of Main Street, west of meeting house. Store at Main Street/Berlin Road intersection. Smaller residential clusters dispersed along Main Street.

D. Economic Base

The rich forests and geologic deposits of Bolton supplemented its agricultural economy from the early 18th century. A lime deposit was discovered in 1736 on the north easterly side of Rattlesnake Hill and was quarried into the mid-19th century yielding 15,000-20,000 bushels of lime annually. Two brickyards on the east shore of the Nashua River were in operation before the end of the 18th century, producing 200,000 bricks annually in 1793. Two saw mills, two potash works, and several cooperages were in operation in the 1790's as were two gristmills and a fulling mill. Early in the 19th century a hatmaker and two tanneries, one in Wataquodock Brook in the south and another in the center, were established.

E. Architecture

Residential: Degree of carry-over of the central chimney form from Colonial period is hard to determine. Emergence of double chimney end and rear wall chimneys characterize the period. The majority of these have hipped roofs. Two brick yards were in operation by 1793 resulting in a significant number of brick houses dating roughly from 1810-1830. Four double chimney brick houses are documented as well as two end chimney and three rear wall chimney brick constructions. Three substantial brick dwellings display symmetrical five-bay ell facades. Of the three popular period house forms, the double and rear wall chimney types appear to have been the most popular.

Institutional: A second meeting house erected in 1793. Quakers organize in southern portion of town near Fryville at Berlin line in 1799, build meeting house and school. Baptists organize in 1828, and Hillside Baptist Church is constructed in 1785, town apparently re-districts the schools and in 1790 votes that the center school should be 20' x 20' and the others 18' x 18' each to have a porch and a 8' shed. Inns and taverns throughout period, most popular being Holman which flourished from 1800-1810 (building is now headquarters for Bolton Historical Society and has been extensively altered). General stores developed around the turn of the century. Ca. 1820, a two-story, five-bay brick general store was built in the center.

Industrial: Little major industrial activity: fulling mill, brickyards, combmaking, and quarrying of lime.

EARLY INDUSTRIAL PERIOD (1830-1870)

A. Transportation Routes

The early 19th century road network remains in use. In 1866, Agricultural Branch Railroad (Boston, Clinton, Fitchburg) opens from Northborough to Sterling through the extreme Southwest corner of town.

B. Population

Population stabilizes and fluctuates around 1200, 1830-1855. Increases (+247) 1855 (1255) to 1865 (1802), then sharp drop (-488) by 1870, with loss of part of town to Hudson (1868). Foreign born 9% of population, 1865. Baptist Society formed 1832 (church built 1841). Methodist Society briefly active, 1860-61, Farmers Club formed 1846, becomes Farmers and Mechanics Association, Public Library formed 1856. Union Lyceum active 1859-1869.

C. Settlement Patterns

Development of civic cluster in center, with construction of first Baptist (1841) second Baptist (1866) meeting house; remodelled Congregational church (1844); first (1834), and second (1866) town halls; and Houghton School (1847). Continued residential construction west of civic center of Harvard Street. Linear residential development more extensive, less dense, east of civic center. Sons of Temperance Hall in use, 1870.

D. Economic Base

Bolton experienced an increase in a wide range of manufacturing concerns up to mid-century, when the value of manufactures exceeded \$69,000. By 1837 boots and shoe manufacturing and comb making were established. Forty employees manufactured nearly 21,000 pairs of boots and shoes while 24 workers produced \$21,000 worth of combs in five shops. In the 1830s, the manufacture of cards was introduced; 2000 pairs of cards were sent to the Boston market in 1836. A plough manufactory, a saddle, harness and trunk manufactory, and a shoe box mill were established by mid-century. By 1865 only the pump factory and box mill remained, joined by a churn maker and plumbers' establishment. The preparation of lime had ceased as had combmaking, and the value of manufactures fell to only \$27,000.

Continuity occurred only in the boot and shoe manufacture and in the lumber and various wood working trades. In 1865, four sawmills cut nearly one-half million feet of boards. In 1853 the Bolton Shoe Company was organized and a factory built in Bolton Center opposite the Town House. By the 1870s, this too had closed.

Agriculture also began to be diversified as farmers experimented with various crops during the 1840s and 50s. Several acres of hops were grown and a small quantity of tobacco was raised and manufactured into snuff and cigars between the 1840s and 70s. In

the 1830s and 40s large numbers of mulberry trees were planted and silkworm culture was attempted. Fifty pounds of raw silk were produced in 1845, but the culture was soon abandoned as impractical and unsuited to New England.

By 1875, the shift to milk production in dairying had occurred, as nearly 128,000 gallons of milk were produced that year. Apple orchards increased in size and value, with 85,000 gallons of cider and 23,000 bushels of apples harvested. Cider, vinegar, and lumber accounted for more than 80% of the \$31,000 value of manufactured foods in 1875.

E. Architecture

Residential: Center, end, and double chimney house forms are found in small numbers but by far, the most popular dwelling of the period is the one-two-story three-bay gable end side-passage plan. These are found early in the period with Greek Revival detail and towards the end of the period with Italianate trim. Some later examples are only two bays wide, only one two-story, double chimney multi-family dwellings erected as housing for the Bolton Shoe Company (1845-59) survive.

Institutional: The 1793 meeting house was extensively remodelled in 1844 in the Gothic Revival style. A gothic portico was added, windows were altered to the pointed arch form, the square tower was crenellated and at the same time changes were made to the interior which included replacing the box pews with slip pews and friscaling the plastered walls. The first Bolton Baptist Church building is erected in the town center in 1841 (later to become the fire house), and in 1859 the Hillside Baptist Church founded. A short-lived Methodist society is formed in 1860-61. During the 1860s a new frame gable end Gothic Revival Church is erected by the Baptists. The first two-story gable end structure. The Houghton School was established and a building erected in 1849. Two gabled frame school houses are erected during the period. Mention is made of the brick schoolhouse being rebuilt in 1832. An engine house is documented as early as 1833(?).

Commercial: Inns and taverns continue to flourish until mid century. A two-story gable end frame store is recorded by 1833(?).

Industrial: Comb-making appears to dominate the early portion of the period; five factories are documented in 1837. During the 1830s, and unsuccessful attempt to produce silk was made. The boot and shoe industry developed during this period, and from ca. 1840 until the end of the period, the hat making industry was successful.

VIII. LATE INDUSTRIAL PERIOD (1870-1915)

A. Transportation Routes:

No significant changes in town, although the Central Massachusetts Railroad opens service with a station at Bolton/Hudson, in 1881

with a station a "South Bolton." Similarly, the Clinton-Hudson Street Railway begins operations in 1900 through this area.

B. Population:

Population drops (-246) through period from 1870 (1014) to 1915 (768) remaining stable at just under 800, 1895-1915. 55 Irish, 13 Canadians, 1875. 48 Irish, 21 Nova Scotians, 14 Germans, 1885. 26 Germans, 25 Irish, 17 Nova Scotians, with small numbers of other groups present, 1905. Central Temperance Union active 1870s. Reform Club active 1884-85. Grange formed 1887. Library building constructed (1903).

C. Settlement Patterns

Library built (1903) on west side of center. Some cottage development in South Bolton area. Little other development.

D. Economic Base

The late 19th century and early 20th centuries saw further construction of Bolton's manufacturing. By 1895 only three carriages and wagonmakers, a builder, a cider mill, sawmill, and gristmill, and blacksmith/wheelwright remained.

Dairying remained the leading branch of agriculture, valued between 30-35% of the total production during the period, while the quantity of milk produced increased more than 5-fold between 1875 and 1885 alone. Poultry production more than doubled during the same period, rising to 10% of the total nearly even with fruit products. The expanding markets of Boston and the neighboring manufacturing centers of Clinton, Hudson, West Boylston, and Worcester accounted for much of the early growth in Bolton's agricultural output.

E. Architecture

Residential: Population declines steadily throughout the period and this is reflected in the absence of any building activity. The one and two-story side passage plan remains the predominant house form with some two-bay dwellings are generally later and often have an oriel or bay window and occasionally somewhat more elaborate detail (brackets and canopies over the doors) than the earlier three-bay houses.

Institutional: Schools are consolidated during the late nineteenth century and by 1899 are graded. In 1903, a one-and one-half fieldstone Tudor Revival Library is erected.

Commercial: The unsuccessful attempt to bring the railroad through Bolton in 1872 must have contributed to the lack of any commercial development during the period.

Industrial: No development recorded for period; lack of railroad contributes to decline.

IX. EARLY MODERN PERIOD (1915-1940)

A. Transportation Routes:

Automobile highways are developed by mid 1920s and a number of roads are improved, including roads from Clinton (Wataquadock Road), Leominster (Route 117), Hudson (Route 85), and Stow and Boston (Route 117), and the Clinton-Harvard Road (Route 110).

By the 1930s these are paved along with secondary Northsouth roads to Harvard and Berlin. Single runway airport active, mid 1930's.

B. Population

Population remains stable over period 1915 (768) to 1940 (775) but fluctuates irregularly with a high (801) in 1925 and a low (539) in 1935. Emerson School built 1922. Congregational Baptist and Friends Societies unite in Federated Church, 1931.

C. Settlement Patterns

In center, Baptist Church remodelled, 1921. Emerson School built, 1926. Congregational Church burns, 1926, rebuilt 1928, becomes Federated Church meeting house 1931. Little residential development. Some recreational facility development at Little Pond (Camp Resolute) and West Pond (Camp Virginia).

D. Economic Base

Little information is available concerning the early 20th century economy of Bolton. Towards the end of the period, in 1937, the lime quarry was reopened for the production of agricultural lime. Dairying, vegetable gardening, poultry raising, and the cultivation of apple trees continued as the major agricultural pursuits.

E. Architecture

Residential: Very little development evident for period. Small numbers of Colonial Revival influenced dwellings and one remodelling of a 1793 house.

Institutional: Emerson School, a two-story hipped roof brick Colonial Revival structure is built in 1922, Luther C. Greenleaf, architect. 1793 meeting house burns in 1926 and replaced in 1928 by a two-story gable end frame Colonial Revival church designed by Edwin T. Chapin of Worcester.

Commercial: No evidence of significant development.

Industrial: No industrial activity for period.