

MHC Reconnaissance Survey Town Report

BRAINTREE

Report Date: 1979

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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I. TOPOGRAPHY

Located on rolling glacially sloped terrain. Fertile though often gravelly soil especially along river plains. Numerous outcroppings of granite and slate particularly in northwest section. Drainage is predominantly to the northeast towards Massachusetts Bay via Monatiquot River. Monatiquot is formed by confluence of Moore's Farm River, from Great Pond, and Cochato. Estuary of the Monatiquot is called the Weymouth Fore River and provides some access to the coast. Large areas of bog and swamp in southeast and southwest sections of town.

II. POLITICAL BOUNDARIES

Primary original boundaries include Weymouth line (1635) on east, Old Colony line (1640) to south, Dorchester Grant line (1636) on west. Originally part of Boston common land. Incorporated as town of Braintree 1640. Divided into two precincts, north and south, 1708. Addition of a middle precinct, 1727. North precinct incorporates as Quincy, 1792. South precinct incorporates as Randolph, 1793. Remaining middle precinct of original town is current Braintree.

III. HISTORIC OVERVIEW

Coastal location on Massachusetts Bay at junction of regional trail system. Settled in mid-17th century from Boston. Historically important as site of Braintree Iron Forge (1646) with axis of development along Monatiquot River mill sites expanded in 18th and 19th century. Became regional junction of South Shore railroad lines and eventually absorbed into suburban fabric of metropolitan Boston in early 20th century with street railways and auto highways. Architectural range is of modest rural and suburban design with few outstanding period structures. Town histories often confused with Quincy in colonial period.

IV. CONTACT PERIOD (1500-1620)

A. Transportation Routes:

Important juncture of coastal and interior trails from Massachusetts Bay to south coast. No documented Indian paths in histories. However it appears obvious that the "way to Plimouth" (1633 Winthrop map) through Braintree around the Monatiquot Fore River (Commercial St) is the coastal trail from the Neponset to Cohasset-Plymouth. Moreover, it seems logical that Liberty St. from the Monatiquot to Great Pond, Weymouth is the route of a former north/south trail from the coastal basin. It is also suspected that a secondary N/S trail along the west bank of the Monatiquot around Elm Sunset Lake to Randolph follows recent Granite, Pond Washington Sts. It is also possible that Washington St. from S. Braintree (Rt37) follows a trail location to Holbrook (Holbrook, 1972).

B. Settlement Pattern:

Three reported sites with late woodland components; located on well drained knolls or terraces adjacent to fresh water ponds. Other areas of likely

site location include terraces and knolls along both the Monatiquot estuary and fall lines and sheltered terraces near headwater ponds.

C. Subsistence Pattern:

Seasonal hunting, fishing and gathering as well as agriculture. Increased hunting and trapping during contact period as demand for furs increases.

D. Observations:

Probably extensive native occupation during this period. Area has all the necessary environmental diversity to support a late woodland population: good agriculture land, access to coastal food resources, uplands for hunting and winter camps, quarries for lithic materials (in northwest section). Proximity to coast suggests contact period sites are probable as well.

V. FIRST SETTLEMENT (1620-1675)

A. Transportation Routes:

Primary location along main Boston-Plymouth highway, (Commercial St), probably native trail, indicated as "way" by 1633 (Winthrop map), laid out 1648 as highway. Junction of N/S roads along Monatiquot along former trails Liberty St (Iron Works Road 1647) and Washington-Pond and Granite Sts (1650's), with early linkage along Monatiquot as Elm St. (1640's), now relocated at junction with coast highway-Commercial St, but former loop at Cedar St. jct.

B. Population:

No specific figures available. An estimate of two dozen families by end of period, mostly from northern Braintree (now Quincy).

C. Settlement:

Primary locus was "Monoticot Fields", high ground along north side of Monatiquot River (now area around Elm and Middle Streets). No specific information on dates or builders of first houses. Secondary locus between Great Pond and Moore Farm River; John Moore, 1658.

D. Economic Base:

Initially farming, grazing and fishing during spring through fall; lumbering during winter. Major crops: peas, corn and barley. Inhabitents of Braintree subsist "by raising provisions and furnishing Boston with wood" (Maverick, 1660, p.239). "Common Fields" system used for agriculture due to shortage of good land (resulting from absentee ownership). Lumber included both cedar for shingles and clapboards and oak for framing and ship building. By 1675, at least one sawmill built on the Monatiquot; Symon Lynde, 1617 (Forman, p.126). Unique and important feature of this period, attempt to develop iron production. Grant of 3,000 acres to John Winthrop, Jr. and associates in 1644. Important as location of water power site on Monatiquot of Braintree Iron Forge (1646), adjunct to Braintree Furnace (1644 Quincy) operated by Richard Leader as companion to Hammersmith (Saugus Iron Works - 1645) during mid 17th century. Used local bog iron and wood-charcoal (Holbrook). Failed in 1653, however, one of the earliest efforts to produce iron from local materials in North America.

E. Architecture:

No surviving structures, although Iron Works is known to have had complex of buildings (Hartley 1951). One MHC survey date "1663" for house on Washington St, probably site only. Garrison house of 1675 (KPWar) at Elm St. (Iron

Works area) per tradition (Bates, 1898)

F. Observations:

Important location on coastal highway between Boston and Plymouth during early and mid 17th century. Limited growth during period primarily small farmsteads. Embryonic development of water power to process local lumber and iron. Site potential: any remnants of Winthrop Forge should be high priority for preservation/protection. Bates located site near Middle and Elm Streets, noting recovery of "iron bars" and "a view of slag" (Bates, 1897, p.18).

VI. COLONIAL PERIOD (1675-1775)

A. Transporation Routes:

Basic network of 17th highways along coast and south along Monatiquot expanded is secondary roads in late 17th century and early 18th century. Middle Street (1690) from Iron Works, South Street (1720's) along Cochato to Randolph and West St. to Great Pond (although possibly of early 17th date). Several former loops on Washington and Liberty Sts. of 17th and 18th date. Plain St appears of 18th date, although location over Monatiquot now altered to Grove St.

B. Population:

Gradual growth during late 17th century. When town divides in 1708, South precinct has 71 families, approx. 450 people. All 18th century figures are for entire town of Braintree (including Quincy). Steady growth up to Revolution.

C. Settlement:

Gradual expansion from "Monoticot Fields" are both along river and major N/S road (Washington Street). Areas around fall lines in Monatiquot developed for willing potential. First meeting house built 1706 (near Washington and Elm Streets) burying ground Elm St (1714) good period slate stones; first school 1716. Other loci of settlement: Braintree Highlands - "The Plantation" of Rev. Samuel Niles, 1712 (on grounds of Norfolk County Hostital) also two sawmills on Cranberry Brook by 1750; East Braintree - a fulling mill, John Bowditch, 1680.

D. Economic Base:

While farming and grazing remain important, a shift to milling as a major economic activity. Sawmills predominate: on Monatiquot - John Hubbard, 1682 (probably on site of Winthrop forge); Samuel Miles, 1731 (on site of a cira 1675 mill) plus others unspecified; on Moore Farm River - William Hunt, after 1730; on Cranberry Brook - two sawmills by 1750. Fulling of cloth another major activity: Symore Lynde, 1671; John Bwoditch, 1680 (near Commercial Street): Hobart Clark 1760 (near Adams St.) - all on Monatiquot. Several of these are also mentioned as grist mills. Note: either designed as multipur;ose or were frequently converted. Little success in developing iron resources. Only exeception was 'forge' of William Hunt, 1730, Moore Farm River. Used bog iron from Great Pond. Possible earliest quarrying of "Quincy" granite from quarry off Harvard St. about 1740 (used in King's Chapel, Boston). First half of 18th century, gradual regulation of granite quarrying by town of Braintree. Shipyards on Monatiquot - Fore river cited for 17th and 18th centuries.

E. Architecture:

Extant examples of the period consist primarily of a large number of center-entrance, central chimney capes scattered throughout the town with especially large concentrations in East Braintree in sites scattered along the Monatiquot River; a relatively small number of center chimney and twin chimney 2 story houses

remain near Commercial Station East Braintree and in several locations along Washington Street and to a lesser degree along Libert Street, little evidence of high style architecture.

It is unlikely that any industrial or institutional buildings remain; a possible exception may be Boston's Hollis Stret Church which was moved here by the Union Religious Society in 1810 and remained in use at least as late as 1884.

F. Observations:

Development built around water power and lumber. Iron does not play a major role. Remains basically an agricultural community but with enough mills to process its products for both local use and export. Developed as district town center along coastal roads by early 18th cnetury.

VII. FEDERAL PERIOD (1776-1820)

A. Transportation Routes:

Basic colonial network remains intact with additional linkage between E. Braintree and Braintree Center on Union Street and South Braintree and Quincy on Town and Granite Sts. (quarries). Turnpike from Quincy to Weymouth (E. Braintree) in 1803 as Quincy Ave. (Route 53) links to Boston focus and secondary link to Braintree Ctr on Hayward and Howard Sts., all early 19th century.

B. Population:

After decline of population figures, reflecting the separation of Randolph and Quincy, local population grew steadily from 1800-1830 although at a relatively slow pace; no foreign born population; religious diveristy begins in 1819 (Union Religious Society).

C. Settlement Location:

Several small clusters along Monatiquot valley from E. Braintree to S. Braintree with Braintree Ctr (Washington St) as civic focus. Town house located midway on Washington St. (1829) as industrial center emerges in S. Braintree. Status area remains in 18th century center (Elm St.).

D. Economic Base:

Substantial development of Monatiquot mill sites, especially in S. Braintree in 1820's, with Ames iron and Revere copper (Plain and Washington Sts.), with rebuilding of Colonial sites in E. Braintree. Water canal from Sunset Lake (Little Pond) to Monatiquot and Great Pond in early 19th century. Development of shoe industry in roadside shops after 1800. Little direct remains of industrial structures in S. Braintree. Existing mill privileges utilized more extensively in this period, though most are short lived. Chocolate manufacture by Jonas Welch, mfg. of cotton gins by Braintree Mfg. Co.; Blake & Revere Copper Foundry. The only industry to outlive the period ending in 1830 was Oliver Ames's shovel factory, and his stone factory building --which survived until quite recently--may have been the only industrial vestige of this period. Chocolate manufacture survived at least through 1850 although probably at different sites.

Braintree continued to exploit its location at the head of navigation on the Fore River, and ship building continued in East Braintree.

F. Architecture:

Extant architecture made up mainly of center entrance Capes, both center chimney and interior end-wall chimney types; also hip-roofed Federalist houses with center and end-wall chimneys; simple Federalist decorative details; greatest concentration along Washington Street, particularly near Route 3.

While some district schoolhouses may remain, no institutional, commercial or industrial buildings of the period are apparent, excepting part of a greatly altered town hall of 1830 (Thayer Street).

E. Summary Observations:

Expansion of economy as mill sites are developed in early 19th century, linked to Boston area by turnpikes with general industrial prosperity and new civic focus, especially evident in S. Braintree - Washington St.

VIII. EARLY INDUSTRIAL PERIOD (1820 - 1870)

A. Transportation Routes:

Basic road network from Federal period remains local system with additions of secondary cross links from S. Braintree as Pearl St and Franklin St. Old Colony RR from Plymouth to Boston along Monatiquot through S. Braintree (1845) with branches to Fall River - along Cochato (1846) and Randolph (1866) forming important railroad junction in S. Braintree. Secondary brance from Braintree Ctr along Monatiquot to Hingham (1849) as South Shore (Hartley, 1946).

B. Population:

Increases by approximately 130% during period; immigration begins in 1840's and increases throughout period; Irish form largest foreign born group; Baptist Society formed 1842; no Catholic Church until 1877.

C. Settlement Location:

Continued development of S. Braintree as industrial area fosters small residential grid along Washington and Pearl Streets, with civic center emerging around Town House (French's Common) by 1850's. Secondary development in E. Braintree as adjunct to Weymouth Fore River and along Elm and Commercial Sts.

D. Economic Base:

Industrial expansion of Monatiquot mill sites, especially in S. Braintree, with secondary sites in Braintree Ctr at Middle St. Shoe making develops as major industry, especially along outlying roads as Liberty, Middle and Grantite Sts. by 1857's (Walling, 1957). Same 18th-century sites continue to be utilized during the early part of this period. But several manufacturers which begin in '30s and '40s survive until the last quarter of the century: Morrison Woolen mill; Monatiquot Paper mills; Hobart Mill; Morrison Yarn Factory; Boston Flax, and others.

It was at Hollingsworth and Whitney's Monatiquot Paper Mill about 1842 that the discovery was made of the manufacture of manila paper from old rope, which could be bought cheaply and transformed into a paper strong and almost impervious to water.

Boot factories begin to be represented by substantial investments (3 are over \$10,000 in capital in 1850). Of the 73 manufacturers noted by the 1850 census schedules, 34 were boot manufacturers.

No boot factories have been identified from this period, but a careful map study would probably bring several examples of this important Braintree industry to light. Two woolen mills on Adams St. survive from period, one, probably from 1830's - is now Nightingale Oil.

E. Architecture:

Domestic building of the period focused on Washington Street and dominated by side-hall Greek Revival cottages (with chimneys through facade gables), double-cottages with paired center entries, two-story sidehall houses and a lesser number of simple Italianate houses; a dense area of development exists along Tremont, Hancock, Franklin and Washington Street at South Weymouth. Few architect-designed high-style examples of the period exist, most notable are two temple-front houses.

Industrial buildings of the period were mostly frame structures, none of which are believed to have survived unaltered.

Institutional buildings of the period are few and modest in scale, although one Italianate style former schoolhouse (ca 1857) remains in use as the town's Water Department.

Commercial buildings existed in South Braintree, although none seem to have survived in their original forms.

F. Summary Observations:

Industrial prosperity within existing frame continues to expand settlement along Monatiquot as continuous zone of growth from E. Braintree to S. Braintree, although period exampled remain modest in scale.

IX. LATE INDUSTRIAL PERIOD (1870 - 1930)

A. Transportation Routes:

Railroad is primary linkage system to neighboring urban centers and industrial sites. Local transit provided by street railway system in 1890's along Washington St to Quincy, Holbrook, Grantite and Pond Sts. to Randolph, and Elm Adams Commercial and Quincy Ave to Weymouth. Routes become major links in Boston suburban system, especially through Quincy. Industrial spur to shipyards in E. Braintree as Fore River RR c.1900.

B. Population:

Population remains approximately the same 1870 - 1885; increases steadily after 1885, doubling by 1915; much of growth comes from immigrant population in which Irish, Italians and Nova Scotians were the largest groups.

C. Settlement:

Patterns of development continue from mid-19th century with development focused on Washington and Adams Streets, extending from East to South Braintree;

suburban subdivisions begin to be opened in 1870's - 1890's west of Washington Street (around Thayer Academy), north of West Street, and north and south of River Street, and near the Weymouth line south of Commercial Street (Stetson and Liberty Streets). Braintree Highlands laid out as a grid in 1870's, but not developed until 20th century.

D. Economic Base:

Water power sites still utilized as primary industrial resource along Monatiquoit, especially in S. Braintree but others abandoned. Shoe industry fails to expand from craft shops. Small industrial firms develop along Adams Sts, and substantial expansion of ship building at Fore River yards on Quincy line 1890's.

Municipal Water Supply, 1880's. Braintree Electric Light by 1900's. Many mills change hands around the end of the century and begin to go through a succession of marginal uses. Shoe Factories are still being built (e.g., 39 Hayward; Rice & Hutchins).

Within 30 years of their construction, the repair shops of the Old Colong RR are sold for non-railroad purposes.

The removal of the Boston Flax Co. to Ludlow about 1880 proved a major blow to local economy, Hurd noted.

E. Architecture:

Domestic styles extant include simple examples of side-hall Victorian Gothic and late Italianate houses (Hollis Avenue and West Street), modest Queen Anne architect-designed houses (Liberty Street) and some large-scale Colonial Revival, Queen Anne and eclectic early twentieth century houses (River Street and West Street). Scattered individual examples of Victorian Gothic, Second Empire, and late Italianate houses and cottages exist throughout the area around the Monatiquoit River.

Institutional buildings include an excellent Second Empire/Italianate style library(1873). Architect-designed school houses and other town-related buildings which date primarily from the early 20th century; several late Gothic /Romanesque churches (1890's - 1915) exist in good condition; also Thayer.

Little commercial architecture remains, except one-story stone fronts from the end of the period; nearly no industrial buildings date from this period.

F. Summary Observations:

Suburban expansion from Boston-Quincy along StRy routes link area with urban fabric, while industrial expansion is modified, except in railroad and shipbuilding.

X. EARLY MODERN PERIOD

A. Transportation Routes:

Basic road network remains from 19th century with abandonment of street railway routes in 1930's. Braintree becomes important junction of regional autohighway routes - particularly 128 (1931) around Blue Hills to Five Corners

(West St) S. Braintree and Weymouth (Grove St). Portions of original roadbed survives at Great Pond, West St. Other regional routes N/S along Washington St (Route 37) and old turnpike (Quincy Ave) now Route 53.

B. Population:
largely Boston-related suburban

C. Settlement Location:

Historic pattern amplified by suburban development from Boston along axis of Monaticquoit valley with subdivision in E. Braintree, Braintree Ctr and Braintree Highlands. Status areas expanded from 19th century along West St and Elm St along Washington St corridor. New commercial areas at junction of auto highways (former Route 128) at Five Corners and Grove & Liberty Sts. Civic center expansion around Thayer Academy site on Washington St.

D. Economic Base:

Continued industrial expansion in S. Braintree on 18th - 19th century mill sites, notably Armstrong Cork (Ames) and continued development of Fore River Shipyards on Quincy line with major industrial complex of oil depot (Cities Service), E. Braintree.

Many old water power sites now occupied by succession of fleeting and under-capitalized companies, resulting in physical decline of industrial building stock. The shoe industry continues its decline in the face of competition.

E. Architectural Character:

Suburban Residential designs remain modest with historic revival styles in 1920's and 1930's, some Moderne examples in Braintree Highlands with good period gas stations along former Route 128 (Five Corners, S. Braintree) and former Route 3 (Quincy Ave), with well preserved early example on Commercial St (RR crossing) of 1920's (Wynot Service Station). Commercial examples include potato chip company on Adams St.

F. Summary Observations:

Area absorbed into suburban fabric of metropolitan Boston with autohighways and residential subdivisions. Industrial growth maintained on prime mill sites and coastal locations with major shipyard and oil storage facilities.

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