

MHC Reconnaissance Survey Town Report

BERLIN

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.

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: 1983

COMMUNITY: BERLIN

I. TOPOGRAPHY

Berlin lies in a low range of hills between the Nashua and Assabet River valleys. Its surface generally slopes to the southeast so that all its streams, the largest of which is North Brook, flow into the Assabet River which crosses the town's southeast corner.

Much of the area north of West Berlin and Berlin Center rises to 500 feet in stony hills with some granite and gneiss bedrock outcrops. South and east of the valley of North Brook and its fine agricultural soils marks the north and west limits of Glacial Lake Assabet. Few water power sites exist in the town, accounting for the generally small amount of manufacturing during the 19th century.

II. POLITICAL BOUNDARIES

Established as a district from parts of Bolton and Marlborough, 1784. Part of Lancaster annexed, 1791. Bounds with Northborough established and part of each town annexed, 1806. Incorporated as a town, 1812. Bounds with Marlborough, Hudson, and Clinton established 1905.

III. HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

A residential and agricultural community in the uplands between the Nashua and Assabet River valleys, with possible native site at Bates Pond (Hudson Reservoir). Possible late 17th century European settlement from Lancaster and/or Marlborough. Dispersed 18th century agricultural settlement, with early 19th century experimentation in hops production. 19th century civic center village, and small industrial villages develop at West Berlin, South Berlin, and Carterville. Small scale boot and shoe production declines after 1870s. Little early 20th century development, but post-war population has doubled, with suburban development from near manufacturing towns and more recent exurban growth as part of I-49 corridor.

IV. CONTACT PERIOD (1500-1620)

A. Transportation Routes

Primary route from northeast to southwest across central plain toward Nasua in Boylston, avoiding uplands to the north and south, following Central and Linden.

B. Settlement Patterns

A large number of rumored sites adjacent to ponds including south and west of Gates Pond, east of Hog Swamp on Wheeler Hill, and in the west near Clamshell Pond, Clinton. More permanent camps of the Nashaway group of Nipmucks located to the west in Lancaster and Sterling, and to the southeast at Marlborough.

C. Subsistence

Seasonal hunting in hills, fishing at ponds, from base camps to the west.

V. PLANTATION PERIOD

A. Transportation Routes

Continue use of native trails plus Lancaster Road to town center houselots.

B. Settlement Patterns

This area included in two adjacent colonial towns of large territorial extent: the largest portion was the southeast corner of Lancaster, plus a section of Marlborough's northwest section. The Lancaster segment was part of the 10 mile by 8 mile grant by Nashaway Sholan in 1643. Epidemic (1633) and Mohawk wars (1660s) as well as white settlement in Lancaster reduce native population and use. Area included in outlying second division of lands by Lancaster colonials; some evidence of settlement on them in location of garrison at Carr Randall intersection at end of period.

C. Subsistence

Reduced use by native population. Colonial division into fields of upland village.

VI. COLONIAL PERIOD (1675-1775)

A. Transportation Routes

Continued use of earlier routes plus additional north-south roads to Bolton and Northboro including: Sawyer Hill and Highland to Friends community in Fryville, and Derby-Randall toward Bolton.

B. Settlement Patterns

After King Phillip's War, earliest resettlement in this area was to the south, near Assabet River, in portion that was Marlborough. Slow settlement of remaining area until its separation from Lancaster with the formation of the town of Bolton in 1738. Between the ? formation of this area as South Parish of Bolton in 1778, settlement increases, with individuals

taking up dispersed farmsteads in all sections. Orientation until then towards Bolton enter to the north. Parish formation due, primarily, to the Goss Valley division in the town of Bolton where majority wanted a replacement for the authoritarian Tory minister Goss.

C. Population

Few figures available while part of the town of Bolton. (Settlers from Woburn and Watertown.) In 1738 ca. 17 families with total population of 50; by 1778, ca. 80 families.

D. Economic Base

Little information available for period prior to incorporation. Primarily agricultural with pasturage in the northern uplands and grain cultivation in the central plain. Saw and grist mill at West Berlin by 1735.

E. Architecture

Residential: Limited settlement prior to 1676; resettlement beginning ca. 1700. One of the earliest documented settlers is John Moore who built on the southeast side of Waraquadock Hill ca. 1720. Typical house form of the period is the two-story, five bay center chimney plan. Few one-story center chimney or two-story double chimney plans survive although the former is likely to have been popular early in the period. Relatively low survival rate for period.

Institutional: No evidence of development during period.

Commercial: A tavern or inn is recorded as being established in 1748.

Industrial: Saw and grist mills built between 1752-1760 at West Berlin.

VII. FEDERAL PERIOD (1775-1830)

A. Transportation Routes

The colonial roads continue to be used, with the primary highway the eastwest road through the center (Linden Street, Central Street). Secondary roads lead to Lancaster (Lancaster Road), Bolton (Highland Street), and Northborough (Pleasant Street).

B. Population

Calculated as part of Bolton to 1738. Population increases (+180) from 1790 (512) to 1830 (692). Second Parish Church formed, 1779. Quaker monthly meetings begin, 1791 New congregational meetinghouse built 1825-1826. Unitarian/Orthodox split 1830.

C. Settlement Patterns

Continued dispersed agricultural settlement. Second parish meetinghouse construction begins 1779. Store opened at meetinghouse center, 1810. New meetinghouse built in 1825. Center residential development on north side of common and Main Street west of common. Cross roads village development at West Berlin.

D. Economic Base

Throughout the 18th and early 19th century Berlin was almost exclusively an agricultural town. A potash works was operated in late 18th century, but it was soon discontinued. About 1810 wire drawing was carried out in the northwest part of town but that too soon ended. By 1837 three boot and shoe makers, 1 combmaker, a hatmaker, and 3 basketmakers had worked in town, producing only \$1150 worth of goods. Two gristmills and three sawmills served the town in 1830.

Mixed agriculture of hay grains, and cattle raising dominated until the early 19th century. About 1810 the cultivation of hops as a market crop was undertaken, and one year 13,000 lbs. were harvested. By 1830 the number of hopyards began to decline.

E. Architecture

Residential: Center chimney, five bay house remains popular, at least for early portion of period. Double chimney form, which may be a late colonial development, is prevalent with at least one hipped roof example. Relatively little use of end or rear wall chimney types and few brick dwellings. One hipped roof, two-story five-bay brick end chimney recorded. Of note is an unusual two-story five-bay double pile stone dwelling with interesting chimney placement located in the northwest section of town. The back rooms have rear wall chimneys and the chimneys in the two front rooms, while located in the end walls, are so far forward that the fireplaces must be located in the outside corner of each room.

Institutional: First meetinghouse is erected in 1779. Second Orthodox meetinghouse is built in 1826 on the site of the original structure. The building is an elegant, gable end plan with a three-bay vestibule of rounded arch openings surmounted by three arched windows with fan-shaped blinds and topped by similarly protected lunette. Square tower with domed cupola completes the building (the interior was altered in 1859 to provide a second story). In 1830, a two-story, gable end Evangelical Congregational meetinghouse was constructed. Four school districts were created in 1785, and shortly thereafter (1792), four school buildings, measuring 18' by 22' were constructed. 1814 powder house.

Commerical: Howe tavern opened in center in 1803; much altered late in century and currently resembles a two-story gable end side-passage with a three-bay gabled wing, all presenting a flush facade. The tavern also serves as a store.

Industrial: Saw and grist mills concentrated i n West Berlin.

VIII. EARLY INDUSTRIAL PERIOD (1830-1870)

A. Transportation Routes

The early 19th century roadways continue in use, Agricultural Branch Railroad (Boston, Clinton, and Fitchburg) opens service through western part of town from Northborough to Sterling, 1866, with stations at West Berlin and between the Center and South Berlin.

B. Population

Population increases (+414) from 1830 (692) to a period peak in 1860 (1160), then declines to 1870 (1016). Foreign-born 6% of the population in 1865. Unitarian society disbanded by 1844. Methodist episcopal Society active 1856-1860s. Berlin Private Academy (Methodist, also 1856-1860s). Female Benevolent Society formed 1840. Three lyceums active, 1830-1860. Farmers and Mechanics Association formed ca. 1860.

C. Settlement

Civic development in center, including town house (1830), and second meetinghouse remodelling (1860). Residential development north of center in Centerville, Small boot and shoe shops at factories in Center Village and South Berlin. Parker Shoe Factory in center.

D. Economic Base

Manufacturing remained a minor concern until the late 1860s, when a number of townsmen joined in the erection of a shoe factory in 1868. The steam-powered, four story factory was built in Berlin Center and employed three hundred in the production of boys' and youths' shoes. By 1870 it was joined by three small shoe shops in Berlin Center and four shoe shops and factories in South Berlin, all very short-lived. In 1875 only the original factory remained; it produced \$150,000 of the \$171,000 worth of manufactured goods made in Berlin that year.

The only other industry of note was lumbering and the production of wooden goods. By 1865 a planning mill and three sawmills prepared nearly one-half million feet of boards and shingles for market. For a brief period straw and palm leaf hat were manufacture in the 1840, and a small stone quarry was operated. In the 1860 \$8,000 worth of drugs and medicines were prepared by Hartshorn's Medicines and Extracts, but like most other ventures, did not remain long in Berlin, removing to Boston in 1870.

Berlin's agriculture remained mixed, devoted largely to hay, grains cattle, dairying, and apple orchards. After the 1850s more vegetables and several market gardens appeared supplying nearby manufacturing town markets of Clinton and Northborough. After 1866, when the Agricultural Branch Railroad was extended through Berlin to Clinton, local farmers turned increasingly to milk production for the Boston market. By 1875, 70,687 gallons of milk were sent along with 14,712 lbs. of butter. Hay still accounted for the largest share of the \$90,000 agricultural production - 22%, followed by milk -12%, and apples -8%.

During the late 1830 and 1840 Berlin farmers, like many other New England farmers in search of a marketable cash crop, were caught up in the silkworm craze, planting hundreds of mulberry trees for future silkworm food. However, the worms were unable to survive the climate and perished and silkworm cultivation quietly passed.

E. Architecture

Residential: Some one-and-two story center and double chimney forms persist, but typical dwelling of the period is the gable end, side passage plan of either one of two stories. Predominant stylistic characteristics are Greek Revival and Italianate with one Gothic example. Two-bay types with definite Italianate features appear late in the period.

Institutional: Methodist church built in late 1850s. Fifth school district center is created in 1836. In 1856, the town abolishes the district system, and the following year five new school buildings, each costing approximately \$1,000, are built. Berlin Academy created in 1832; from 1843 until its demise in 1857, held in former Evangelical Congregational meetinghouse. A second town house is erected in 1870, a two-story, three-bay gable end structure with late Greek Revival detail. Town farm is established in 1855 with the purchased of a 1780 house.

Commercial: The Belmont House Hotel began operation in 1868. Documented as an 1820s residence, the building in its heyday was a 2 and 1/2, five bay gable end, temple front structure with a two-story wrap-around portico recessed beneath a large pediment; various additions were apparently made to the rear. Draper's Hotel was in operation by 1870. An 1854 gable end store with a brick first floor survives. The Fitchburg, Framingham, and New Bedford Railroad was built through Berlin in 1866 with two stations: one at West Berlin and the other between Berlin Center and South Berlin.

Industrial: Town primarily agricultural. Major period industry was shoe manufacturing. Parker shoe shop, built in 1868, was a 30' x 100', 3 and 1/2 story, three-bay (gable end) factory (burned 1883).

IX. LATE INDUSTRIAL PERIOD (1870-1915)

A. Transportation Routes

Central Massachusetts Railroad opens east/west line through town, north of center and through West Berlin, 1881. Clinton-Hudson Street Railway begins service in 1900, with car barn power plant in West Berlin. From Clinton, line follows Berlin Road to West Berlin, the east on Willow Road to Carterville, south on Highland Street to Berlin Center, and finally east on Central Street to Hudson.

B. Population

Population declines, 1870 (1016) to 1885 (899), then remains stable to 1895 (897). Population increases in 1900 (1003), then drops to previous level, with period low (865) in 1915. 22 Irish, 13 Canadians in 1875. 33 Irish, 11 English, 1885. 18 Nova Scotian, 17 Irish, 13 English, smaller numbers of many other groups present 1905. Unitarian Society revived 1878-1888. Berlin Grange formed 1886. Berlin branch, Lyman school for Boys opened 1895. Village Improvement Society 1900-1917.

C. Settlement

Civic Growth in center, with second town hall (1870), Unitarian Church (1882), Methodist Episcopal Church (1887). South Berlin Shoe Factory built in 1882, burns 1884. Recreational development on east side of Gates Pond (Hudson Reservoir) by 1890s.

D. Economic Base

Manufacturing further declined through the early 20th century. In 1903 last remaining shoe factory was closed and operations were moved to Malden. The only other establishment recorded in Berlin in 1895 were four building firms, 2 lumber mills, and 2 metallic goods manufacturers.

Agriculture, however, continued to prosper. Asparagus became an important crop sold on the Boston market. In 1885, 41,000 bunches, grown principally on the southern portion of the town, were sent to the market. By 1905 vegetables accounted for 10% of total agricultural production.

Dairying continued to be the leading agricultural activity, comprising 32% of the total value in 1905. In 1835, 246,000 gallons were produced, and the quantity continued to increase into the 20th century as more productive milk cows were bred. Hog and poultry-raising and orcharding were expanded in the 20th century; by 1905 poultry products ranked third behind the dairy and hay at 14% of total production.

E. Architecture

Residential: Little apparent development. A few traditional double chimney and one center chimney house forms recorded. Isolated examples of modest Queen Anne and one Victorian Gothic house.

Institutional: Revival of Unitarianism results in construction of Victorian Gothic Church in 1881. Methodists build a Victorian Gothic structure in 1887 on site of former Parker Shoe Company building. High School held briefly in town hall from 1875-1879. In 1906, the five 1857 school buildings are extensively remodeled, and in 1911 a second story is added to the center schoolhouse. In 1915 a two-story, hipped roof fieldstone structure is built to serve as a crippled children's home.

Commercial: Former town form (???) is converted to a hotel in 1885. Between 1895-1900, five general stores are operating in town; at the Center, Carterville, West Berlin, and two at South Berlin. Boston and Maine Railroad constructed in 1893. One-story gabled brick structure (1899-1900) which served as Berlin Street car plant and Barn survives.

Industrial: One-story structures (brick) with corbelled cornice survives at West Berlin.

X. EARLY MODERN PERIOD (1915-1940)

A. Transportation Routes

Street railway service ends 1924. Road improved for automobile traffic in 1920s, with main highway the east/west road from Hudson to Clinton through the center (Route 62). Secondary roads improved to Bolton (Highland Street) and Northborough (Pleasant Street).

B. Population remains stable from 1965 (865) to 1920 (868), then rises in 1925 (1075) and remains at that level to 1940 (1057). Board of Trade organized, 1916 Public Library built, 1928. Lyman school closed, 1942.

C. Settlement Patterns

Public Library built in center, 1928. Little other development.

D. Economic Base

The second and third decades of the twentieth century saw the introduction of several new manufacturing concerns and the expansion of others. A builder/contractor, established 1905, prospered during the 1920 employing as many as 35 carpenters, plasterers and painters. A manufactory of sink tubs was begun in 1916 and continued in operation through the 1930s, as did an ironing board manufacturer established in 1921 on Central Street.

In the agricultural sector milk production continued to increase despite the drop in number of milk cows by almost one-half. By 1940, 2 million pounds of milk were produced annually by only 308 sows. A modern dairy plant was built in 1925 to process the milk and cream.

Poultry-raising also increased. Between 1920 and 1925 the number of chicken and turkeys doubled; by 1940, 83,600 dozen eggs were produced annually.

E. Architecture

Residential: A variation of the side-passage plan found in Berlin consists of the same basic three bay gable end facade; however a slice has been cut forming the corner of the main facade and along the side wall, creating a porch with a second side entry to the passage. This form differs in plan from the standard side-passage type in that the passage does not extend the full length of the house. The plan is double pile, yet the side passage is only as deep as the front room.