

# MHC Reconnaissance Survey Town Report

## CHESTER

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.

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: June 1982

Community: Chester

### I. TOPOGRAPHY

Chester was characterized by a rugged upland terrain which was part of the eastern foothills of the Hoosac Range. These uplands are some of the highest in the Connecticut River Valley study unit with elevations generally ranging between 1100' and 1400' above sea level. The greatest heights occur in western Chester where a number of upland peaks extend well over 1500'. The most prominent points are Round Top Hill (1794'), Holcomb Hill (1713'), and Gobble Mountain (1652'). In eastern Chester, the uplands rarely reached over 1300', the maximum height being 1560' on a peak immediately east of Fays Hill. The presence of these rugged uplands has been a major factor in discouraging establishment of a well developed food system. Primary routes avoid the most extreme elevations and extended through the valley lands. These uplands are broken by two tributaries of the Westfield River. The West Branch originates in Washington, extends in a southeasterly direction from the northwestern corner of Chester to the town's southeastern corner and into Huntington. The Middle branch also drains to the southeast but further east from the Chester/Worthington line into Huntington. Fertile intervalles parallel both of these tributaries providing the town with its only expanse of good agricultural land. The town's only freshwater bodies are Round Hill Pond and a recently completed reservoir established on the Middle Branch in the vicinity of Littleville. Upland marsh is scattered primarily about eastern Chester. Local soil, aside from the sandy loam of the river valleys, is a gravelly, strong loam.

### II. POLITICAL BOUNDARIES

Originally established as Plantation Number 9 by the Massachusetts General Court in 1762 with southern boundary at Blandford line (1741). Divided for general sale by William Williams in 1763 and established as town of Murryfield in 1765, including present area of Huntington. Western boundary established at Becket line in 1765 and northern boundary with Worthington in 1768. Eastern district separated as Norwich (Huntington) in 1773 and northwest corner as Middlefield in 1783. Name of Murryfield changed to Chester in 1783 and northeast corner annexed to Worthington in 1799. Southeast corner annexed to Norwich in 1853 and established as town of Huntington in 1855.

### III. HISTORIC OVERVIEW

Rural industrial hill town on primary western corridor from Springfield to Pittsfield. Located in Berkshire highlands along upper Westfield River with native sites suspected in narrow valleys of middle and West Branch. Bleated Colonial settlement by Scotch Irish with mid 18th century town division highways intact around upland meetinghouse site at Chester Center. Limited agricultural potential, primarily highland grazing for sheep and cattle, with timber resource on upland slopes. Some late 18th century houses remain along Chester Center and landmark church of Greek Revival design. Increasing shift of economic activity from uplands to Westfield valley during Early Industrial period with saw mills along middle branch at Littleville (now Littleville Reservoir Site), Dayville and particularly North Chester with intact village

of early 19th century character. Opening of Boston and Albany along West Branch created industrial center at Chester (Factories) with Greek Revival/period houses and early depot on Main Street, and monumental stone arch bridges intact from original Western Railroad at Middlefield line. Continued industrial expansion of Chester (Factories) during late 19th century with specialized production and Victorian style suburban housing of emery, including well-preserved shop complex of original firm. Improvement of Route 20 as early auto highway along Westfield River maintained Chester (Factories) as local economic and civic center with period Revival brick library and town hall. Present development most obvious as suburban home sites along scenic upland roads with intensive recreational use of upper Westfield River, especially around Littlefield Reservoir. Chester depot district appears deteriorated with potential threat to historic station, while Chester Center retains authentic integrity of character around town common.

#### IV. CONTACT PERIOD

##### A. Transportation Routes

Restricted corridor of travel along upper Westfield River through Berkshire highlands. No documented trails, although logical routes would appear to follow southeast-northwest along west branch of Westfield River as axis of Route 20, including original northbank location on Old State Road, and along Middle Branch of Westfield River as River Road. A possible highland trail is conjectured as Bromley-Chester Hill Roads to Day Brook and Holcomb Hill with likely connectors to Westfield River branches along Johnson Hill and Kyle Roads.

##### B. Settlement Patterns

No reported native sites (prehistoric or contact). The predominance of rugged upland terrain strongly suggests the Chester area was utilized primarily by small native hunting bands during the fall, winter and early spring months. Small short-term hunting camps were probably established in the vicinity of the town's upland streams and marshlands.

##### C. Subsistence Patterns

As mentioned above, hunting was probably the predominant subsistence activity undertaken in the Chester area. Limited horticulture may have taken place in the intervals adjacent to the west and middle branches of the Westfield River. Local fishing probably focused on the West and East Branches.

##### D. Observations

The Chester area was likely part of the upland periphery of the heavily settled Connecticut River Valley. Native groups from the valley region, particularly the settlement centers at Woronoco (Westfield) and Nonotuck (Northampton), probably relied on Chester and adjoining upland territory as a resource area. One source suggests natives from as far west as the Hudson River Valley (Mohicans) utilized this area for hunting and fishing (Thorbahn, Pagnter, Ulrich 1975:8) There is good likelihood of extant period sites due to the continued rural nature of the town. However, archaeological evidence will probably be minimal because of the small size and transitory nature of hunting/fishing camps.

## V. PLANTATION PERIOD

### A. Transportation Routes

Native trails along Westfield River branches remained as secondary routes through Berkshire highlands.

### B. Population

Chester probably continued to be occupied by small bands of natives during the fishing and hunting seasons. There was no colonial settlement until the 18th century.

### C. Settlement

The native settlement patterns probably were basically the same as those suggested for the contact period.

### D. Economic Base

The natives likely maintained the traditional seasonal subsistence rounds outlined for the Contact period. Native trapping of beaver probably was initiated locally with the establishment of Springfield as an English fur trade center in the late 1630s. Reputedly, the entire Westfield drainage was trapped for beaver by the Woronocos by this date (Thorbahn, Pagnter, Ulrich 1975: 8).

Colonial use of this area was most likely limited to some hunting and fishing by residents of valley towns such as Westfield, West Springfield and Northampton.

### E. Observations:

Chester probably continued as a peripheral area utilized primarily by the valley's native population.

## VI. COLONIAL PERIOD

### A. Transportation Routes:

Formation of Murryfield town division and meetinghouse site (1763-66) created radial highway pattern from Chester Center along axis of Bromley-Chestnut Hill roads. Period highways included Lower Chester Hill, Mica Mill, Abbot Hill, North Chester and Johnson Hill Roads with Lyman and Elder Roads as rangeway divisions. Natural locations along Westfield River branches improved as regional highways with Old State Road Route 20 along West Branch and Worthington Road along middle Branch and over Little Canada Hill.

### B. Population

A small native population may have occupied the Chester area well into the 18th century when considering the late date of colonial settlement and the limited colonial population during this period. At the time of the first extensive colonial settlement (1762), there were 19 settlers residing in Chester. By 1765, this figure had grown to 405 inhabitants, Chester's population remained the same in 1776. These settlers were primarily Irish

and Scottish who moved from a number of Connecticut River study unit towns as Blandford, Granville, Westfield, Northampton, Southampton and Pelham and several Connecticut communities including Enfield, Torrington and Wallingford.

### C. Settlement

There is no reference to native settlement locations. A small number of colonial homes were established in southwestern Chester probably along the West Branch intervalle prior to the formal distribution of township settlement lots in the early 1760s (Thorbahn, Pagnter, Ulrich 1975: 11-12). The establishment and surveying of Township #9 (Chester, Huntington) in 1762 witnessed the first extensive settlement of Chester. Township #9 was one of ten created in western Massachusetts, at this time, as part of a public auction of state lands to raise revenues for Massachusetts. Settlers were provided with 108A lots and retained ownership after meeting several stipulations including payment of a F50 bond, construction of a building on property within three years of settlement and six year occupation of the tract. Period settlement concentrated in the vicinity of Chester Hill Road. By ca. 1775, a small primary settlement mode had developed in the vicinity of Chester Center, the site of the town's first meetinghouse (ca. 1770). Scattered homes were constructed in the uplands west and east of Chester Hill Road.

### D. Economic Base

Chester's economy focused primarily on agriculture. Emphasis was placed on the raising of livestock (cattle and sheep) due to the extensive areas of uplands. Crop production was limited and occurred basically in the West Branch and Middle Branch intervalles. The town's most eroded fertile land. There probably was a considerable amount of timbering undertaken in Chester's extensive uplands. Industrial operations were limited despite the presence of extensive stretches of water capable of powering mills. The only mill whose location is relatively well established is a sawmill erected by Jonathan Clapp prior to 1765 on the Middle Branch in the vicinity of Littleville. One source claims the archaeological remains of mill on Cook Brook south of Cherry Tree Hill was constructed by John Chandler in ca. 1746 (Thorbahn, Pagnter, Ulrich 1975: ). However, there is no conclusive evidence supporting this claim. Three possible pre-1775 mills were situated on the Middle Branch slightly north and south of North Chester.

### E. Architecture:

Only one house is documented to survive from the Colonial period. That is a center chimney, five bay, center entrance house with integral lean-to, located at Chester Center on Chester Hill Road. It is a well detailed structure dated to 1769. The town's isolated location and late settlement (ca. 1760) diminish the likelihood of survival of many other period buildings although a few center chimney cottages at Chester factories could date from the period. Construction of the first meetinghouse, at Chester Center, was begun ca. 1763 but was not completed until ca. 1773; the meetinghouse measured 45' x 45' x 20'.

### F. Observation

Blandford's rugged terrain, limited agricultural land and restricted access to the Connecticut River valley economic and population centers discouraged early

settlement and inhabited the community's development into more than a sparsely populated, rural hill town. Chester's initial establishment as an improved township is a phenomena limited primarily to the upland communities of the Connecticut River Valley Study unit. As with several other study unit towns, portions of the township's original lot lines survive today as local roads such as Lyman and Elder Roads. The archaeological potential for the town's period settlement is good, particularly in Chester Center. An inventory of Chester's existing colonial period architectural and archaeological resources should be established since the town currently lacks one.

## VII. FEDERAL PERIOD

### A. Transportation:

Improvement of Westfield River as primary route from Springfield to Pittsfield with eighth Massachusetts Turnpike (1800) along Old State-Route 20 Middlefield Roads. Primary highway to Chester Center remained as Chester Hill Road from Chester Village (Huntington). Secondary improvement of connectors to Blandford along Walker Brook as Route 20 and Blair Brook as Round Hill Road.

### B. Population

Chester's population in the Federal period peaked in 1800 when the town reported 1,542 residents. Between 1800 and 1830 the town witnessed a slight but steady decline, reaching 1,407 in the latter year.

### C. Settlement

Civic focus remained at Chester center with growth of local mill villages along middle Branch at North Chester, Dayville and Littleville, and along West Branch of Westfield River at Chester factories (Chester). Agriculture continued as primary economy with sheep raising and dairying on upland vales.

### D. Economic Base

Chester's initial industrial development occurred on the Westfield River's West Branch at North Chester, where John Stevens by 1794 had built a mil for pressing linseed oil, in addition to grist, saw, and fulling mills. Early in the 19th century Issac Stevens and Co. erected a small spinning mill, though by 1832 it still employed only six persons. Another Stevens built a windowshade factory to make window curtains or shades from wooden splints.

Chester's major development in the Federal period, however, (excluding Chester Village, now Huntington) was at Chester Factories, where Spencer Clark began a substantial tannery, probably not long after the construction through there of the eighth Massachusetts Turnpike, laid out in 1880. In 1809 Clark, William Hubbard, and others incorporated the Hampshire Leather Manufactory (apparently becoming the Hampden Leather Mfg. after the county was erected in 1812.) By 1820 the tannery was probably the largest in the county, with 360 vats and \$24,000 in sole leather produced annually. By 1832, its product was worth \$40,000 second highest in the Connecticut Valley study unit after a Cummington tannery which William Hubbard founded in 1805. Despite the size of the business, however, the tannery employed only ten men in 1820. A more extensive firm at Chester Factories was the Chester Glass Company, which hoping for large profits due to the interruption of English glass during the War of 1812 the company erected large glass house and a row of tenements at

considerable expense. Once in operation it was reported to have employed as many as 50 men. But its casting sand was imported from Washington in Berkshire County and its clay from Philadelphia, and when hostilities ceased the company closed.

On the Middle Branch by 1830 there were small mill villages at Dayville and a Littleville. At the latter location Benjamin Little had built a tannery (103 vats in 1830), a bedstead factory, a sawmill, using Clapp's 1765 mill privilege.

#### E. Architecture:

Residential: A fair amount of residential construction seems to have occurred in the period, to judge but the survival of some dozen federal houses across the town. These include equal numbers of traditional center chimney plan and more stylish double interior chimney plan structures. In addition to the period houses in the town, some half dozen center chimney plan cottages, which may date as early as the late 18th century or as late as the mid-19th century, were also observed in the town. Cottages were noted on Bromley Road, Old State Highway and at Chester Factories. Among the most outstanding federal structures are a double interior chimney plan house with corner quoins at Chester Center and a pyramidal hip roof double interior chimney plan house on Old State Highway near Chester Hill Road. The second house incorporates details such as crown moldings with pulvineated friezes on first floor windows and an entrance surround whose entablature contains the three consoles common to Connecticut Valley doorways. Federal houses at Chester factories are somewhat simpler: the two most notable are a three-quarter plan center chimney house on School Street and double chimney five bay house with a servilliptical entrance surround with fanlight, on Route 20.

Institutional: In 1794, the first meetinghouse at Chester Center was replaced. A Baptist congregation began meeting in the town in 1812. As many as 10 schoolhouses stood in the town in 1830.

### VIII. EARLY INDUSTRIAL PERIOD

#### A. Transportation Route

Continued improvement of Westfield River as primary corridor through Berkshire highlands with opening of Western Railroad (Boston & Albany) along Branch in 1842, including surviving stone arc bridges at Middlefield line. Primary access to Chester Center remained along Chester Hill Road.

#### B. Population

But for an unexplained peak in 1840, Chester's population declined in this period, from 1407 in 1830 to 1253 in 1870. The removal of part of Chester to Huntington in 1853 accounts for perhaps the better part of this loss. In 1855, 8.5 percent of Chester's residents were foreign-born, of whom 67 percent were Irish with smaller numbers from England and Canada.

#### C. Settlement:

Opening of Western Railroad (1842) along Westfield River stimulated development of Chester Factories (Chester) as primary economic center, with secondary mill villages on Middle Branch at North Chester, Dayville and Littleville. Civic focus remained at Chester Center with prime agricultural land along Chester Hill Road as dairy farms.

#### D. Economic Base:

The Early Industrial period, brightened by the arrival of the Western Railroad in 1841, was Chester's period of industrial diversity, with active mill villages at North Chester, Littleville, and Dayville supporting the railroad center at Chester Factories. Dayville expanded with two shoe-peg factories, while William Fay, who had been making bedsteads at the factories, turned to cribs and cradles. In mineral exploration, H.S. Luca's made significant discoveries in Chester which in the 1860's and 1870's made emery one of the town's major exports.

H.S. Luca's came to Chester in 1844. By 1853 he had discovered a method for producing gelatinous silica from the decomposition of serpentine rock, one of Chester's characteristic minerals. The Serpentine Paint and Firebrick Company, incorporated in 1852, built a paint mill in Chester Factories in the early 1850's. More significant, however, was Luca's discovery in 1856 of what appeared to be a vast deposit of iron ore. By 1864, after several unsatisfactory attempts at refining the ore, Luca's determined that the rock contained a large percentage of emery, a mineral hitherto nearly unknown in the U.S. the U.S Government, barred from Turkish emery, became one of Luca's major customers. In 1869 Luca's formed the Hapden Emery Company.

Chester's principal industry throughout the period remained in tanning. In 1885 the town's three tanneries produced a third of all the leather manufactured in the county, close to \$60,000 worth. Three bedstead factories were the largest industrial employer, with a roster of 23 hands.

Sheep had been raised in Chester probably since the Colonial period. Despite the growing importance of dairy products, however, the quantity of wool produced seems to have risen until 1845. In that year Chester's annual wool clip amounted to 11,924 lbs. of Merino wool, the largest amount reported in any town in the county. After 1845, as it did throughout the county, the quantity dropped off sharply.

#### E. Architecture:

Residential: Chester Factories developed as the town's primary village in the period with smaller villages at North Chester and Chester Center. Most of the houses in outlying sections of the town date from the period as do many of the houses at Chester Factories. For larger houses, the traditional center hall plan with end of double interior chimneys remained common through the mid-century; examples of such houses in the Greek Revival and Italianate styles were noted on Bromley Road, East River and Chester Hill Roads. Chester Factories was more evenly settled with small streets of sidehall plan Greek Revival cottages built in the late 1850s and 1860s. The best preserved street of Greek Revival workers cottages is located just south of the depot. In addition to sidehall plan cottages, modest one-and-one-half and two-story Italianate with two or three bay facades placed gable end to the front and entered through side ells were also built at Chester Factories and in rural areas outlying the villages center.

Institutional: A fair amount of institutional construction accompanied the growth of the town. Foremost was the replacement in 1846 of the 1794



meetinghouse at Chester Center. The present Greek Revival Church is one of the most outstanding examples of the style yet encountered in the study unit. It is a one-and-one-half story building with a flush boarded facade dominated by a massive doric portico in antis. The entrance is surmounted by a pediment and by a massive doric portico in antis. The entrance is surmounted by a pediment and by a two stage steeple. The steeple consists of a square base with re-entrant corners topped by a circular lantern with eight columns and a dome. It is the almost exact duplicate of the New Marlborough meetinghouse, built in 1839 by a Mr. Sikes of Suffield, Connecticut. The closeness of the two designs indicates that the Chester example was constructed either by Sikes or with the Sikes Church in mind. In addition to the Chester Center Congregational Church, a second Congregational Church was organized in 1844 at Chester Factories. The Church built in 1844, was constructed by both the Congregationalists and the Methodists and was used by both until 1847 when the Methodists built their own church. Both churches are still standing. The second Congregational on Middle Field Road, is a simple story and a half Greek Revival structure with a single center entrance and one-stage square belfry; the other church was originally more stylish, with a three bay center entrance facade with pediment and pilasters and steeple with spire, but later alteration (the addition of a fourth bay) has marred the building integrity. The only other institutional building of the period known is a four bay, side entrance school at Chester Center. The Union Church at Littleville (ca. 1845) no longer stands.

Commercial: A number of commercial buildings of the period have survived at Chester factories. Most of these are located adjacent to the depot but a few buildings are located on Route 20. With the exception of one three-story, pyramidal hip roof Italianate hotel (first floor altered), all of the commercial structures are one and two story stores. These include buildings in both Greek Revival and Italianate styles; most probably were originally built three facades bays and center entrances, but all have subsequently been altered with the late 19th and 20th century storefronts.

## IX. LATE INDUSTRIAL PERIOD

### A. Transportation Routes:

Primary corridor remained along Westfield Rivers Boston and Albany railroad with expansion of freight line up Walker Brook to Becket quarries by 1885 (now abandoned with surviving abutments). No street railways lines projected or constructed through area.

B. Chester's population remained static in the Late Industrial period, fluctuating between 1253 (in 1870) and 1450 (1900). The number of foreign-born residents (11.2 percent in 1880) declined to 9% in 1905. In the latter year, newcomers were the Italians, numbering only slightly more than each of the older immigrant groups from Ireland, Canada, and England. The year 1907 witnessed the arrival of a group of Finns from Quincy to work in the granite cutting and polishing yards. By 1914, Hakla reported 38 permanent workers and families established in Chester.

### C. Settlement:

Chester Factories (Chester) emerged as primary economic and civic focus with relocation of town hall (1870) from original Chester Center. Dairying maintained as important agricultural activity on intervals, with local mill villages at North Chester and Dayville along Middle Branch of Westfield River.

#### D. Economic Base:

The emery business, after so promising a start, disappeared as a native product by the end of the period. James Ames, of Chicopee's Ames Manufacturing Company, had bought Luca's original plant by 1870, but litigation between Luca's and Ames over the right to local ore beds forced Luca's Hamden Emery Co. to turn to Turkish ores. By 1883 Ames himself must have found extraction of the local ore unprofitable, for his own firm, the Chester Emery Co., was sold for a small fraction of its worth, and the mines closed down. They were reopened again between 1890 and 1913 by the Hampden Emery and Corundum Company, but the latter year they were closed down for good, and all the mills using local emery torn down.

In the meantime, Luca's had discovered in 1875 a deposit of mica and porcelain clay of Kaolin. A company was formed two years later for the development of the minerals, and a factory erected, probably the Pontousic Mills at the foot of Mica Mill Road.

Despite the prominence of the emery mills, the tannery at Chester Factories (now under George Hapgood) reported the largest product value of any industry in town for much of the period, in 1875 producing hides values at \$64,000.

Chester had 140 farms by the late 1870s (this number declined to 83 in 1905) largely devoted to the production of hay. Corn was the chief grain product with large amounts of butter and cheese produced.

By the 1890s granite quarries had been opened in Otis, with a cutting and polishing year in Chester. In the early 20th century the business expanded as a group of Finns from Quincy moved to Chester to establish an independent cooperative monument cutting plant, incorporated as the Chester Granite and Polishing Works.

#### E. Architecture:

Residential: Residential construction continued at Chester Factories but dropped off in most outlying areas of the town. At the Chester Factories, construction consisted primarily of modest worker's housing. Story and one half sidehall plan Stick Style and Queen Anne cottages were built on small side streets at the village center. On Middlefield Road and on Route 20 west of the center, two and a half story style and Queen Anne double houses were built in some numbers while on Route 20 east of the center, some more elaborate Stick Style, Queen Anne and Colonial Revival single family houses were constructed. Residential construction outlying Chester factories consisted of vernacular sidehall or ell plan cottages. After 1900, one story gable roofed Colonial Revival and Craftsman bungalows were built in some numbers along Route 20. Most of these have center entrance plans, raised basements and shed dormers.

Institutional: The only institutional buildings of the period were built at Chester Factories. These include: St. John's Catholic Church (ca. 1900) on Middlefield Road, a story and one half shingled Craftsman Style structure with timber stickwork, and a school (ca. 1900) on Route 20. The school, a two and one half story brick hip roofed building with Colonial Revival details, probably included the high school in addition to all lower grades. The only other institutional buildings of the period noted was a one story brick Queen Anne building on Route 20, known as a fraternal lodge.

Commercial: Approximately a half dozen commercial buildings were built adjacent to the Boston and Albany depot at Chester factories. The foremost of these are a three-story frame Queen Anne Colonial Revival apartment block (ca. 1895) with first floor retail space and the depot itself, a one-story frame Stick Style buildings with an overhanging gable roof supported on trusses. Other period commercial buildings are more modest one and two story Italianate and Queen Anne stores.

Industrial: The only industrial building noted is a utilitarian four story brick structure on Route 20 at Chester Factories.

A. Transportation Routes:

Significant improvement of Westfield River as primary auto corridor through Berkshire highlands with location of U.S. Route 20 along West Branch and Walker Brook including original concrete bridge at Old State Road and dated bridges (1924) at Chester. Becket quarry railroad along Walker Brook abandoned by 1935.

B. Population:

Between 1920 and 1925 Chester's population rose by 16 percent (expansion of the granite industry?); in other years, however, the population declined, so that in 1940 the number of residents reached 1,284, down from 1,344 in 1915. As late as 1975, Chester's population was still declining.

C. Settlement:

Economic and civic center maintained at Chester (factories) with development of auto commercial activities along Route 20.

D. Economic Base:

The two remaining abrasive factories and the granite business provided the major manufacturing employment. Chester abrasive mills were supplied with corundum from mines in the Carolinas. In 1930 employment at Cortland Grinding Wheels Corp. was about 100 hands; the Hamilton Emery and Corundum Co. employed a third that number. Two granite operations employed 275 men, though a portion of this work force probably worked in the quarries in Otis.

E. Architecture:

Modest residential construction continued at Chester factories into the 1920s with Colonial Revival bungalows and smaller gable roof vernacular cottages built along Route 20 and in scattered locations outlying the village center (Old State Highway, Chester Hill Road). Institutional construction was confined to Chester factories, and consists of two buildings, the Hamilton Library (c. 1925) and the Chester Town Hall (ca. 1935). The Hamilton Library is a simple two-story brick building with projecting entrance bays with stepped Modern details in concrete. The Town Hall is a two story brick hip roof building incorporating Georgian Revival and Modern details.

Commercial: The most outstanding commercial building of the period is two-story, concrete fueling station and restaurant located on Route 20. The building is faced with rock-faced concrete blocks and features a reverse curve

shaped parapet. At least one other commercial building, a two story roadhouse, stands on Route 20 east of the town center. At Dayville is an intact 1920's fairground (Littleville Fair) with some half dozen frame barns, pens and service buildings.

## XI. SURVEY OBSERVATIONS

Chester has only two completed inventory forms. Survey work should document streetscapes and major institutional, commercial and residential buildings at Chester Factories, noting the few surviving Federal period houses, the Early Industrial churches, Late Industrial school and Early Modern town hall and public library. Other areas to be surveyed are the three remaining villages in the town: Chester Center, North Chester and Dayville. A National Register district is recommended for Chester Center, site of the first meetinghouse and the oldest village in the town, at which are standing the 1846 Congregational Church, a school (ca. 1835), the finest 18th century house in the town, several later houses of note and the town burying ground.

Industrial: The town's inventory included only the railroad station and the Chester representative of a group of railroad bridges along the Boston and Albany (NR, 4/11/80). An early concrete arch (Old State Road) and several pony and through trusses could be added to the list of bridges. Major omissions from Chester, however, are the two abrasive factories, built in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

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