

MHC Reconnaissance Survey Town Report

CHELSEA

Report Date: 1980

Associated Regional Report: Boston Area

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: November, 1980

Community: Chelsea

I. TOPOGRAPHY

City occupies 1.86 square miles on a peninsula formed by the Mystic and Charles Rivers and Mill Creek. The city was formerly surrounded by marshes, cut up by several small streams into which sewers once had their outlets. The western slope drains into Island End River, a small tributary of the Mystic, while the rest of the city is drained by the Chelsea River, which winds around two sides of it, separating it from East Boston, and by Mill Creek, which separates it from Revere. From the salt marshes the surface of the town rises to four considerable drumlins which dominate the town: Mts. Washington and Bellingham, Powder Horn Hill (the highest, at 230 feet), and Naval Hospital Hill.

II. POLITICAL BOUNDARIES

Originally established as Winnisimmet by Samuel Maverick ca.1625 and annexed to Boston 1634 with original eight mile line of 1636 surviving as Everett boundary. Included as part of Chelsea town grant 1739 with Boston boundary along Chelsea Creek. Formed as independent town in 1847 with division of North Chelsea (Revere) along Mill Creek, and incorporated as a city in 1857.

III. HISTORIC OVERVIEW

Industrial urban city on northern axis of Boston Harbor. Located along Mystic River estuary as a peninsula between Island End River and Chelsea Creek with important native sites reported on Powder Horn Hill and Mt. Washington. Extremely early English settlement as Winnisimmet trading post by Maverick before 1630 with site potential at Naval Hospital reservation. Early ferry to Boston established by mid-17th century with division of grants as family estates and tenant farms, including one apparent First Period house site as later Colonial rebuilding. Estate farms remain through 18th century with some military activity along Chelsea River during Revolution. Peninsula linked to Boston via Chelsea Bridge and Salem Turnpike during early 19th century, including location of US Naval Hospital with original granite period buildings of architect design.

Operation of steam ferry and railroad access to Boston by mid-19th century creates speculative building development including original period depot at Washington Street. Town center extends from landing site to civic focus along Broadway with affluent suburban neighborhoods along Washington Street to Powder Horn Hill including period Victorian houses and up Mt. Bellingham with early surviving Garden Cemetery. Ferry village area retains brick business and residential rows of Boston style along Winnisimmet Street with surviving porticoed Greek Revival houses along Marginal Street. Extensive industrial district developed along railroad corridor across Chelsea Creek to Island End River flatlands with intermixed workers buildings. Pattern of expansion continues through late 19th century with development along Broadway axis to Eastern Avenue with mixture of multiple family house types. Secondary focus at Prattville around base of Mt. Washington with resort hotel on Powder Horn Hill, including original period buildings as Soldiers Home. Massive urban fire of 1908 destroys extensive portion of original town center, including status residential district on Mt. Bellingham. Fire area rebuilt as multiple family district of three-deckers and apartments in modest Historic Revival style. Town center reconstructed on original site, including pre-fire Neoclassic City Hall with brick business blocks along Broadway axis. Industrial fringe development expands around Chelsea Creek and railroad corridor through mid-20th century isolates residential districts. Present growth suffers by immigrant influx and effect of recent fire in industrial area. Nevertheless, the urban center retains commercial vitality and the pre-fire neighborhoods remain remarkably stable with residential fabric intact, especially along Washington Avenue.

IV. CONTACT PERIOD (1500-1620)

A. Transportation Routes:

Terminus of routes to Mystic tidewater from interior highlands around coastal marshes. Primary trail appears as Washington-Park Streets around Mt. Washington, Powder Horn Hill and Mt. Bellingham with western branch as County Road to Malden River. Other possible branches are conjectured to Chelsea Creek fishing grounds at Mill Hill.

B. Settlement Patterns:

No archeologically documented sites reported. However, several sites known from literature. Dincauze (1974) notes period burials at "Winnisimmet" but does not specify location; these may be the same as group of burials found near Winnisimmet Street (Chamberlain, 1908). Other probable period sites noted on Powderhorn Hill as well as on Mt. Washington in adjacent

Everett. Additional sites likely along Island End River (especially in the less disturbed areas of the Navy Hospital property) and Mill Creek.

C. Subsistence Pattern:

An area of diverse food resources, especially shellfish in tidal estuaries, and fish. Good horticultural land available. Also an area with prime accessibility to coast for trade, probably was a major location for period trade between natives and Europeans.

D. Observations:

An area of dense native settlement, one terminus of the seasonal axis stretching along the Mystic/Malden rivers from the estuaries to the headwater ponds and lakes. Identity of these people is not clear. Were identified as "Aberginians" in 1628. An Algonquin people probably part of the Pawtucket/Penacook group rather than the Massachusett, who were centered in the Neponset/Fore river area.

V. FIRST SETTLEMENT PERIOD (1620-1675)

A. Transportation Routes:

Native trails improved as local highways with primary route from Lynn and Malden as Washington Street to early ferry landing (1631) as Winnisimmet Street from Park Street.

B. Population:

Earliest settlement by 1625. By the end of the period four farms established which probably fixed the population at no more than 50 until the early years of the 19th century.

C. Settlement Patterns:

Early English trading post of Samuel Maverick on Mystic River tidelands (Naval Hospital site) by 1625, predated Massachusetts Bay Colony plantations. Winnisimmet ferry to Boston creates landing site around Maverick Farm during 1630s. Later division of Maverick estate by Bellingham into tenant farmsteads around Chelsea peninsula during mid-17th century with estate houses along Washington Street axis.

D. Economic Base:

First ferry from Boston established ca.1630. Winnisimmet Co. (incorporated nearly 200 years later), chartered 1638. Nevertheless, economy probably limited by subsistence agriculture and fishing.

VI. COLONIAL PERIOD

A. Transportation Routes:

Local highways remain from 17th century to Winnisimmet ferry landing as Washington-Park Streets with access roads around Mt. Bellingham and Fenno Hill to Cary and Shurtleff estates on Chelsea Creek.

B. Population:

No identified population growth. Probably remained at 30-50 level.

C. Settlement Patterns:

Bellingham estate farms remain along Washington Street axis through mid-18th century with ferry landing site at Winnisimmet Street. Tidemill established on Mill Creek (1734) with original site still intact.

D. Economic Base:

Agricultural economy probably limited to farming and some fishing.

E. Architecture:

Residential: Although Chelsea was the site of the area's earliest known building (fortified Maverick House, 1624) and at least one tavern, related to the establishment of the Winnisimmet Ferry (1634), is known, nothing remains above ground of either structure. Portions of the Bellingham House (1659), however, do survive, incorporated within the Cary-Bellingham House, probably enlarged twice, ca.1750 and again, in 1772; this highstyle hip roofed Georgian house is Chelsea's finest surviving 18th century dwelling. Other period structures are not known to survive but the record indicates that most were simply detailed central chimney vernacular houses with at least one early gambrel roofed house (ca.1700) known.

Institutional: Two schools are known to have been constructed during the period, one between 1709 and 1739, at the town center, and the other, in 1749, at Winnisimmet.

VII. FEDERAL PERIOD

A. Transportation Routes:

Improvement of access to Boston as Chelsea Bridge (1802) over Mystic River from Charlestown with extension of Broadway from bridgehead as Salem Turnpike (1804) between Mt. Bellingham and Powderhorn Hill.

B. Population:

Virtually stationary population 1801-1825. Only three new buildings in town, and those replaced three that had been demolished. Although population of three towns---Chelsea-Revere-Winthrop -- at 721 by 1830, only 30 lived within the present limits of the city at that date.

C. Settlement Pattern:

Opening of Chelsea Bridge to Charlestown creates tavern settlement at Broadway bridgehead by 1810 with additional nucleus of Naval Hospital complex (1827) on original Maverick farmsite. Secondary focus around Pratt Farm on Washington Avenue at head of Mill Creek by early 19th century.

D. Economic Base:

Chelsea Bridge and Salem Turnpike Co. established toll bridge to Charlestown 1802-3. Despite this new route, however, as late as 1830, town was "of no importance except as a market garden and thoroughfare" (McClintock, 1884). Probably some brickmaking during this period.

E. Architecture:

Residential: A few twin rear wall and paired chimney single and double houses from the Federal Period survive on lower Broadway and on Washington Street north of the railroad tracks. Little is recorded about the architecture of this period, a time during which Chelsea was noted as a summer resort for wealthy Bostonians, but it is probable that at least a few more substantial and ambitious highstyle Federal houses may have been built in response to that development.

Institutional: In 1792, a poor farm was established at Eustis and Nichols Streets in Prattville and in 1805, a school was built at the town center. Most significant was the establishment in 1827 of the Marine Hospital in a three-story granite building (Alexander Parris).

VIII. EARLY INDUSTRIAL PERIOD

A. Transportation Routes:

Continued improvement of Boston access across Mystic with steam ferry (1831) and omnibus service over Chelsea bridge to Ferry Village (Chelsea Center). Additional connections provided with Marginal Street and Eastern Avenue across Chelsea Creek (1834) and Meridian Street Bridge to East Boston (1857) from ferry landing. Grand Junction-Eastern Railroad link from East Boston to Everett through Chelsea by 1853 with depot at Washington Street (still intact with original station). Early horse railroads from Boston over Chelsea Bridge by 1860 with local service to Prattville on Washington Street and inter-urban route to Lynn on Broadway.

B. Population:

Population of 30 expanded very rapidly with establishment of steam ferry to East Boston. Further impetus given by railroads, reduction of the ferry fare from East Boston, and in 1852 by the Cary Improvement Co., which began development of Cary Farm section. By 1870 population had reached 18,547, of which about 18% were foreign born.

C. Settlement Pattern:

Operation of steam ferry to Chelsea during 1830s prompts subdivision of Bellingham estate with grids laid out over Mt. Bellingham along Central Avenue with focus around Garden Cemetery (ca.1840), and across Island End tidelands with axis along Second Avenue. Additional subdivision along Eastern Avenue over Mill Hill and backslope of Powder Horn Hill. Commercial and civic focus developed at Ferry Village (Chelsea Center) around junction of Park-Broadway-Washington Streets with affluent residential expansion along slopes of Mt. Bellingham and around railroad depot along Washington Avenue to Powder Horn Hill during mid 19th century. Secondary settlement focus remains at Prattville at junction of Washington and County Roads. Worker's district extends into Island River flatlands along Everett Avenue with industrial corridor along Eastern Railroad to Chelsea Creek.

D. Economic Base:

Establishment of steam ferry 1831-2 by Winnisimmet Company crucial in spurring company's land sales. Though ferry lost as much as \$15,000 a year for many years, growth of Winnisimmet was very rapid. First store, 1832. Pioneer manufacturer, the machine shop (1836) and foundry (1846) of Bisbee, Endicott & Company, the first of many companies in the 19th and 20 centuries to locate along the water edge of the town. India

rubber factory established in the rubber boom of the 1830s short-lived. Town's entry into manufacture of paints and varnishes was probably begun in the 1840s. In 1842 James Cross set up the first coal tar boiling plant in the U. S. on Marginal Street, supplying by 1852 pitch and tar to the inventors and manufacturers of tarred paper and composition roofs. Thomas H. Carruth, later superintendent of Chelsea Oil, manufactured linseed oil, whiting, putty, and paints on Marginal Street, as did H. N. Coburn's factory. Salmon Miller & Son produced varnish near the East Boston Bridge. By 1855 the manufacture of oils, varnishes, and paints dominated the industrial economy of Chelsea and amounted to over \$650,000.

Wallpaper manufacture was also begun in the 1840s. By 1855 it was second in value of product, the Boston & Chelsea Paper Co., alone producing \$60,000 worth. John Wilder began the manufacture of Salamander safes in 1843, and about the same time John and W. H. Dufur had constructed the first tannery in the town, by 1855 producing leather valued at \$120,000. In addition, small craft industries in both boot and shoemaking and in snuff and cigars came into being. By 1865, the latter had reached an annual production value of over \$40,000.

Chelsea clay proved valuable both for brickmaking and pottery. By 1845, 67 men were employed producing \$28,500 worth of bricks; Amos Seavey manufactured stoneware.

One of Chelsea's principal manufactures was that of the Magee Furnace Co. (1864) which produced an internationally known line of stoves and furnaces. Shipbuilding was carried on for most of the 19th century; in 1856 there were five shipyards.

Following the success of the Winnisimmet Co., the Cary Improvement Company was established in 1852 to subdivide the old Cary Farm, an area encompassing about 1/3 of the town. As an inducement for a Boston furniture company, in 1855 they constructed a five-story brick block on the marsh, now the site of Forbes Lithograph. Chelsea's prominence in the manufacture of elastic webbing was begun in the same vicinity with the construction in 1863 of the Elastic Fabric Company factory for the manufacture of elastic thread. The first manufacture of elastic web in the U.S. had taken place only the year before. In 1866 the company invited Thomas and William Martin to the U. S. from Leicester, then the center of this industry. In 1874 they would both leave to form their own elastic fabric concern in the same vicinity.

E. Architecture:

Residential: Ferry Village began to be developed after 1831 and with the lowering of the Winnisimmet Ferry fare in 1846 came an increase in population with an attendant rise in residential construction. Well-preserved neighborhoods of modest end and interior chimney transitional Federal/Greek Revival and sidehall Greek Revival houses stand west of Broadway below Summer Street. Similar construction covered the lower slopes of Mt. Bellingham prior to the 1908 Fire but very little, save a group of three temple front Greek Revival houses (1842) and a very few frame structures along Marginal Way, survives. The area south of Washington Street developed somewhat later with similarly modest sidehall Italianate single and double houses, while more ambitious and elaborate center entrance Italianate houses were constructed along Washington Street and on the lower slopes of Powderhorn Hill; concentrations of Greek Revival/Italianate and highstyle Italianate houses remain along Gardner Street with at least one notably well-preserved and highly decorative cupolaed Italianate house on _____ Street. Toward the end of the period, in neighborhoods to the north, mansard cottages began to be built as a modest alternative to multiple unit dwellings like the double house, the mid-century's most typical solution to the problem of housing a rapidly expanding population. A few well-preserved and ornate highstyle examples of this cottage form survive on Franklin Street.

Institutional: A number of important municipal and institutional buildings were built in the mid-century, most of them later destroyed by the Fire. Two schools were built, in 1833 and 1845, but the most important structure, architecturally, built before 1850 was the brick Greek Revival town hall (1835). Also constructed was an engine house (1835) for the engine which was purchased after the first of Chelsea's three major fires (1834). Expansion at the Naval Hospital included the construction of a brick Italianate Commandant's House (1856) and several other utilitarian brick and stone structures.

Commercial: At Broadway and Everett Streets, in 1832, John Low built a store, which also housed the post office; late 19th century photographs show Broadway built up with, among later building types, two and three story frame Greek Revival/Italianate commercial buildings, the Low store probably resembling these, many of which were constructed during the period. In 1858, a four-story Italianate brick hotel with an (early) mansard roof was constructed on Powderhorn Hill.

Industrial: Although industry was well established at Ferry Village by 1847, few industrial structures of the Early Industrial Period are known to survive, with the exception of Italianate/Gothic Revival railroad depot (ca.1855?) on Heard Street.

IX. LATE INDUSTRIAL PERIOD

A. Transportation Routes:

Further expansion of streetcar service from Chelsea Center with local routes on Central Street to East Boston, Everett Street to Everett and Hancock-Washington Streets to Revere by late 19th century.

B. Population:

Period of marked demographic change. Population continued to rise rapidly, but increasing industrialization attracted large numbers of immigrant workers. In 1890 immigrants had amounted to 28.5% of the city's population, mostly from the British Isles and Canada. Institution of fire codes in Boston's North End together with the reduction of the ferry company's fare to 3¢, and "the crowded North End of Boston overflowed into Chelsea." (Pratt, 1908) By 1908 Chelsea had become the most thickly populated city in the U.S. in proportion to its size, having 40,000 people in less than 2 square miles. (Kopf, 1974) Immigrants amounted to 42.5%, with Jewish refugees from the Russian and Austrian empires making up 22% of the total population. The Fire itself further increased the number of aliens in Chelsea, which in 1915 amounted to 140% of the 1905 level and 84% of the total population of 43,426.

C. Settlement Patterns:

Continued expansion of residential development with primary status neighborhood on Mt. Bellingham with secondary axis along Washington Street at Powderhorn Hill. Industrial district extended along Chelsea Creek around base of Mt. Bellingham by late 19th century with similar infilling around Island End River along railroad corridor. Tenement area follows around peripheral lowland from Chelsea Bridge along Everett Avenue and Broadway to Mill Creek. Commercial and civic center focused at Broadway and Washington Streets with warehouse district at ferry landing on Winnisimmet Street. 1908 Fire extends from industrial district across town center to affluent neighborhood on Mt. Bellingham altering social geography. Entire fire area rebuilt as multiple family district with location of town center retained along Broadway at Washington Street. Quality suburban neighborhood limited to remaining area around Powderhorn Hill on Washington Street with expansion of tenement district on Mill Creek backslope to Prattville. Institutional location on hill sites by early 20th century, with expansion of Naval Hospital and Soldiers Home.

D. Economic Base:

By 1870 there were 155 manufacturing establishments employing 1,650 people. The leading industry was leather currying (6 establishments producing over \$775,000 worth in 1875), followed closely by manufacture of elastic webs (2 firms \$733,000), linseed oil and oil cakes, stoves and furnaces, and cigars and tobacco (8 shops).

In 1871 the Cary Improvement Company decided to turn its vacant clay lands to brick production and constructed an extensive steam brick yard north of Clark Street (later operated by the Boston Brick Co.). On land immediately adjacent, John G. Low founded the J.G. and J.F. Low Art Tile Works, what would become reputedly the largest manufacturer of high-grade art tiles in the world. The product met with instant international favor, and the company maintained an active trade until the death of the founder. Another clay-product concern was the Chelsea Pottery on Marginal Street.

During this period the manufacture of elastic web fabrics expanded in the Cary Farm section. In 1874 Martin & Bros. was established, and 5 years later they engaged another Leicester man, Alfred Hopkins, developing the nationally known "Chelsea Gore." In 1893 Hopkins himself formed the Boston Gore and Web Mfg. Co., boasting the most varied line of woven elastic goods in the U.S. In the meantime, the parent Elastics Fabric Company had reorganized in 1883 as the Revere Rubber Company. Another employee of Elastics Fabric, an expert in the dye department, formed Walker Chemical in 1873. In the 1880s Forbes Lithograph built their monumental complex along the B & M Portland Division.

Samuel Cabot, fresh from study of chemistry at MIT and of the German dye industry in Zurich, purchased the Cross Oil plant in 1877. Cabot pioneered the development of shingle stains, disinfectants, and various types of tars and waterproofing materials, and, in the 20th century, colloidal paints. Tradition of wallpaper manufacture in Chelsea continued by Thomas Strahan & Company (1885), producing art - and later historical -- papers for prestigious addresses around the country and internationally. Existing building (252 Maple St.) constructed in 1907.

The 1890s saw a large influx of new industries including foundries, machine shops, several large shoe factories, a rubber company (bicycle tires), and a manufacturer of the first flexible tubing for electrical wire (American Circular Loom, 1893).

By 1900 the influx of immigrant merchants had made Chelsea the center of the rag and junk industry particularly in the blocks north of Second and Arlington. Cheap construction and lack of fire codes gave ready opportunity to the Fire of April 12, 1908, which destroyed nearly half the city and left 15,000 people homeless. Although the commercial and municipal facilities of the city were destroyed, many of Chelsea's industrial plants, located along the periphery of the city, survived.

E. Architecture:

Residential: The bulk of Chelsea's residential architecture dates from this period, with four and five-story brick tenements predominating in neighborhoods south of the railroad tracks and suburban Second Empire, Queen Anne and Colonial Revival single and two family houses north of the tracks. A number of more elaborate Second Empire and Panel Brick bowfront rowhouses of the 1870s, '80s, and '90s survive in the south Broadway area, but the majority of Chelsea's multiple unit dwellings are post-1908 apartment blocks with modest, stock Georgian and Colonial Revival detailing. Suburban two-family houses and triple deckers comprise much of the remainder of Chelsea's Late Industrial construction with at least one area, around Mill Hill, of workers' housing and one concentration, along County Road, of highstyle, possibly architect-designed Queen Anne and Shingle Style houses with conservative Colonial Revival detailing. Lost in the 1908 Fire were a number of pretentious Stick Style and Queen Anne houses in wood and brick built in the 1870s and 80s on Mount Bellingham, a group which included the highstyle Strahan House (architect unknown); the area was rebuilt with triple deckers and two family houses.

Institutional: With a few exceptions, such as the Renaissance Revival Police Court Building (1897; Wilson and Webber) and several schools in the northern section of town, Chelsea's municipal and institutional architecture consists of conservative post-1908 Beaux Arts classical and Georgian Revival construction with at least a few examples by noted architectural firms such as Peabody and Stearns (City Hall; 1910) and E. L. Tilton and Guy Lowell (Public Library, 1910). Highstyle ecclesiastical architecture includes the Romanesque 1st Congregational Church (architect unknown, 1906) on County Road, a well-integrated design in Roman brick, and the field-stone Gothic Revival 1st Baptist Church, among other Gothic and Romanesque Revival examples. Also built were several Renaissance Revival schools and a fire station as well as a Georgian Revival high school, a castellated Armory and a municipal stable (ca. 1909; dem.?) in reinforced concrete, an unusually early instance of the use of that building material.

** possibly J. Williams Beal; see Brockton Inventory, # 41; Central Methodist Church (1900, J. Wms Beal, arch) very similar design*

In 1883, the Soldier's Home was established atop Powderhorn Hill, housed in the 1858 hotel standing there with additional brick Colonial Revival structures constructed later, ca.1900.

Commercial: Several important brick commercial buildings of the 1870s and '80s survive on lower Broadway including a wedge-shaped "flatiron" warehouse and a High Victorian Gothic commercial block (1874); other commercial structures in the Broadway/Washington Central Business District post-date the Fire and consist primarily of three and four-story brick blocks, some with stone facing, in restrained Renaissance, Neoclassical and Georgian Revival styles.

Industrial: A number of early 20th-century industrial complexes, in brick and frame construction with some stylish examples among many utilitarian structures, survive along Eastern Avenue. Also surviving is the three-story frame D. and L. Slade Spice Works (1885), an extremely rare extant tide mill. Also notable is the corbelled brick Queen Anne Chelsea Clock Works factory (1896).

X. EARLY MODERN PERIOD

A. Transportation Routes:

Railroads and trolley routes remain in place through mid-20th century. Location of Metropolitan District auto highway along Mill Creek as Revere Beach Parkway during 1930s and Route 16.

B. Population:

The year 1925 marked the peak of Chelsea's population growth, when the figure reached 47,247. Since that time the number of people has steadily declined, so that in 1975 residents numbered only 25,066.

C. Settlement Pattern:

Limited expansion from post-fire rebuilding with modest development of Mt. Bellingham backslope and Everett Street axis as multiple family area. In contrast, industrial fringe activities extended along Chelsea Creek and Island End River with regional oil storage facilities. Chelsea Center remains along Broadway axis with secondary focus developed along Revere Beach Parkway as commercial strip with similar activity along Eastern Avenue at Mill Hill by mid-20th century. Modest suburban development on Mt. Washington from Prattville with focus around Washington Square.

D. Economic Base:

Despite the early efforts of the Board of Control (1908-11) to plan for a progressive city, Chelsea's rebirth was accomplished with few substantial changes. No comprehensive fire codes were enacted, and the rag and scrap businesses relocated in the same areas they had been prior to the Fire. Even the small frame tar paper factory close to the origin of the fire was rebuilt. In 1961, Chelsea was still "the junk capitol of the Nation." Although the fire of October 14, 1973 destroyed only 18 blocks, it started in an abandoned rag company building on Summer Street less than 200 yards from the start of the 1908 fire.

Most of the industries active in 1910 continued well into the Early Modern period, decades best characterized in particular by the expansion of the shoe industry and the oil company terminals. In 1929 alone at least three shoe factories located in Chelsea and close to a dozen others were in active operation in 1930. One of the largest was the four-story factory of A. G. Walton & Company (1906) which in 1930 employed 1000 operatives. Oil company terminals built in this period included facilities of American Oil (1917), the Texas Co. (1928), Quincy Oil, Jenny Oil (1929; '32), and Gulf Oil (1937; 1949).

E. Architecture:

Residential: Simple Colonial Revival and Craftsman style two family houses and triple deckers were built along upper Broadway and on the north side of Powderhorn Hill; similar construction filled in upper Washington Street. A few cottages are known, but bungalows are not common.

Institutional: A few Colonial and Georgian Revival schools were probably constructed in the 1920s, but the most architecturally significant municipal/institutional structure completed in the period is the Chelsea Memorial Stadium (1935), a Moderne structure built of reinforced concrete, apparently retaining its original wooden fence with stepped Art Deco detailing.

Commercial: A number of 1920s commercial blocks with Georgian and Tudor detailing were constructed at the town center, with more modest storefronts at secondary neighborhood centers. At least a few well-preserved Moderne commercial blocks incorporating glazed brick and glass block detail remain at the town center.

XI. SURVEY OBSERVATIONS

The industrial portion of Chelsea's survey is limited to two factories: Strahan Wallpaper (1907) and Chelsea Clock (1896). Nevertheless, Chelsea has several structures dating to the early industrial period including the Chelsea Dye House (1848?, William and Spruce Streets), the Austin Bakery (108-110 Marginal Street), and the Parker, White & Co. chair factory (150-158 Marginal). Although the extensive Boston Elastic Fabric plant is gone, its three contemporary offshoots along Dudley, Spencer, and Webster Streets are largely intact from the 1880s, together with their Neoclassically-detailed 1918 successor factory, built by Everlastik, Inc. (181 Spencer). At Mill Creek, the Forbes Lithograph plant (1880s), still has distinctive architectural elements remaining. Four other concerns which predate the 1908 Fire are the two-story brick factory of the Boston Rubber Company on Winnisimmet Street, the wood-frame American Circular Loom Building (Suffolk and Highland), Swett (later Griffin) Car Wheel behind 80 Gerrish Street, and the Chelsea Wire Fabric Co., whose small brick plant at 960 Broadway was built immediately north of the now vanished Low Art Tile works. Major industrial complexes which postdate the fire are the 1906 Walton Shoe Factory (Maple & Heard Sts.) and three large brick box factories, two of which are on Gerrish Street. The third was the extensive brick and granite plant of the Charles N. Atwood Box Company at Carter & Vale Sts., still largely intact, including a small brick office with pyramidal slate roof at 180 Everett. The brick and concrete Cabot Paint Works on Marginal Street was built immediately following the fire, and one of the earliest oil company terminals in Chelsea, on Eastern Avenue, was built by the American Oil Company in 1917. The 1923 steam-powered marine railway (William and Pearl Streets) is one of three known surviving marine railroads operated by steam.

The area from Winnisimmet Square to the waterfront is currently being proposed as a National Register district.

XII. SOURCES

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