

MHC Reconnaissance Survey Town Report

DOVER

Report Date: 1980

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: January 1980

COMMUNITY: Dover

I. TOPOGRAPHY

Located on rocky upland terrain in watershed area between Charles and Neponset Rivers, also on lowlands adjacent to Charles. Central and eastern sections quite rugged. Exposed bedrock and glacial outwash features prominent. Soil is fertile but rocky. Many upland springs with numerous bogs between elevations. Drainage primarily north and west to Charles, secondarily southeast to Neponset.

II. POLITICAL BOUNDARIES

Part of Dedham grant, 1636. Referred to "Springfield Parish" after 1729. Became Fourth precinct of Dedham, 1748. Incorporated as district of Dover, 1784. Became Town of Dover, 1836.

III. HISTORIC OVERVIEW

Affluent Boston suburban community set between the western and southwest axis of metropolitan expansion. Located on the fringe of rocky upland with the Charles River valley at the edge, the area has numerous documented native sites and the potential of evidences of Colonial period contact, especially around Powissett Plain. Early corridor of development from Dedham to Natick with some First Period houses of early 18th century date. Restricted growth through the mid-19th century with emergent town center at Dover and several limited industrial water sites along Charles, but evidences of regional craft activities in shoe and straw bonnets. Little impact of railroad during mid-19th century. Increasing desirability of area as status estate district by early 20th century with restoration of historic period houses and substantial examples of revival style estates along the Charles River valley. The area remained purposefully isolated from mid-20th century autohighway expansion and continued as a suburban estate community with period examples of Modern residential architecture and a Neo-Colonial town center.

IV. CONTACT PERIOD (1500-1620)

A. Transportation Routes

Located on upper basin of Charles River intermediate zone between south and west interior corridors. Documented trails (Smith 1915) include path from Dedham to Natick on south side of Charles as portions of Wilsondale Rd. (from Westwood) Strawberry Hill Rd (now discontinued) around Noanct Brook, Cross St (in part relocated) and the highground along Claybrook Rd. to Natick. A second trail is documented from Natick around Pegan Hill south to Medfield following Pleasant, and Farm Sts - portions of which have been substantially relocated to highground near Smith St. The possibilities of secondary interior trails across the upland and Powissett Plain are conjectured to follow the contours from Noanct Brook to Tubwreck Brook into Westfield. The Ohio trail-from Wilsondale Rd. is also a link with the Westwood uplands and Pond Plain, as is the possibility of Hartford St - portions of which follow cross trail.

B. Settlement Pattern:

Only one documented site reported; other probable. Likely areas include well drained terraces and knolls overlooking Charles River (especially at confluence with major tributaries) and sheltered areas adjacent to natural upland ponds. Powissett and Noanct Plains cited as occupation areas (Smith, 1897 pp. 9-10)

C. Subsistence Pattern:

With complex and varied topography, potential for most important period activities: agriculture in riverine lowlands; fisheries in Charles and major tributaries; hunting, trapping; winter refuge sites in the uplands. Several felsite quarries reported in uplands as well.

D. Observations:

Late Woodland and Contact Period. Occupations in upper Charles drainage are not well understood. Hints of occupation but extent of settlement and identity of inhabitants not known. Because of location and topographical diversity, site potential in Dover should be considered high. Sites would be important not just for understanding pattern within town but within whole upper Charles basin.

V. FIRST SETTLEMENT PERIOD (1620-1675)

A. Transportation Routes:

Native trails along Charles River from Dedham to Praying Town at Natick and settlement at Medfield remained as primary highways with minor adjustments. Bridges across Charles River are established in the 1650's to Needham-Fischer's Bridge (Cross St-Claybrook Rd) and to Sherborne at Bridge St.

B. Population:

Apparently some native population although effects of 1633 smallpox epidemic were devastating. Very few if any colonial inhabitants.

C. Settlement :

Some native settlement along Noanct Brook (Fishingweirs at confluence with Charles. Only European settlement was farm of Henry Wilson (after 1640) near Powissett Brook close to (Westwood /Dedham) line (Wilsondale).

D. Economic Base:

Served as a resource area for Dedham village. Good pasture land along Charles; clay dug for brick as early as 1645, Clay Brook(between Church and Haven Sts); firewood and lumber. Site of saw mill begun 1638 on Charles river (Abraham Shawe) may be within town.

E. Observations:

Despite rugged topography, a natural corridor for expansion of Dedham westward, especially along Charles. Necessary resources - land; water & lumber all available. To some extent, this line of development blocked by establishment of Praying Town at Natick (1651).

VI. COLONIAL PERIOD (1675-1775)

A. Transportation Routes:

Realignment of Charles River trail to Natick in 1687 follows present Dedham St to Dover Ctr around Trout Brook as Haven St and links with existing Farm Road to Natick and Medfield. Secondary roads develop in radial pattern from Dover Ctr by early 18th century including Walpole St to Powissett Plain and Powissett St. and link to Medfield Post Road (Route 109) by 1719. Mid-18th century expansion

from Dover Ctr as Church St; causway over Trout Brook as Springdale Ave high road over Oak Hill as Centre St to Medfield. Post Road bridge to Needham at Dedham St near Powissett Br by mid 18th century.

B. Population:

Show growth after King Philip's War. By 1732, fifty-one people listed on tax roll. Show but steady growth during 18th century. Census of 1762 listed 352 inhabitants and 49 houses in parish.

C. Settlement Pattern

Scattered farms along Charles River (Dedham St.) and west from Charles (along Farm St.) after 1720. A brick and white oak plank "Fortification" built over looking Farm Road bridge (over Charles) - of unspecified age, possibly from King Philip's War. Many people retained strong ties with Medfield or South Natick. Meeting house built on high ground east of Trout Brook, 1750-1754. First school built across from meeting house, 1764. Daniel Whiting's tavern, 1761 - on Dedham St. northside of common. Despite this nascent town center, no central settlement emerged.

D. Economic Base:

Agriculture and grazing with some winter lumbering and charcoal making. Some "early mill" sites mentioned on Charles, Noanct Brook and Trout Brook, but no specific location or data given. Other mills included: sawmill on Noanct Brook, 1753 (Thomas Richards).

E. Architecture: Residential: Local tradition that "broken roof" (gambrel) cottages were widespread during early settlement (Smith. Founders...p.16) none appear extant; predominant houses types extant seem to post-date 1710-1720 & are central chimney with a symmetrical cater-entrance facade and the central chimney $\frac{1}{2}$ house; decorative details are few, some of the quoins, entries etc. which now exist may be period details taken from other buildings of reproductions. Architecturally, the most outstanding buildings of this period are a 3/4/house with 2nd story overhangs (Walpole St - MHC Form #4), the Caryl House (Dedham Street - HABS & MHC Survey) and a central chimney house of 1701 (Claybrook Road) which was moved to its present site from New Hampshire (MHC Survey).

Insitutional: no known

Commercial & Industrial:

F. Observations:

Ruggedness of terrain plus relative lack of good agricultural land limited growth of town. Despite water power potential, milling was not of major importance. "Fortification" site on Smith St. near Farm Bridge has good potential.

VII. FEDERAL PERIOD (1775-1830)

A. Transportation Routes:

Colonial highway network radiating from Dover Ctr. remained intact with minor adjustments. Willow and Mill Sts linked with bridge to Needham, and Pine St from centre across highlands to Medfield by early 19th century. Turnpike from Dedham to Medfield built across southern highlands (1806) as Hartford St from Westwood with tool house at Walpole St.

B. Population:

Population stable (485-548) throughout period with minor fluctuation; several Catholic (Irish) present prior to 1832 but not in sufficient numbers to form a seperate church.

C. Settlement Pattern:

Continued occupation of settled areas; small clusters developed around Farm At. and Springdale Avenue and at Centre Street and Springdale Avenue.

D. Economic Base:

Limited water power potential. Charles River dammed in late 18th century (Mill St) with succession of mills for nails and iron rolling by early 19th century creating Charles River Village. Small mill site at Powissett Brook failed by early 19th century. Household craft industry of boots and shoes as well as straw bonnets connected with regional development in Westwood-Medfield. Some shoe shops may remain along Farm St., especially at junction with Springdale. Local supply of wood for Boston market.

E. Architecture: Residential: Limited number of new houses and apparent enlargement and remodelling of existing houses; no apparent dominance of any simple house-type; range of extant structures includes small numbers of central chimney cottages, hip-roofed Federalists, and twin-chimney and rear-wall chimney two-story houses. There are no apparent high-style architect-designed houses, although several of the hip roofed Federalists are ambitious in their decoration.

Institutional: Major building was a meeting house (1810-1811) modelled after the First Religious Society of Roxbury Meeting house (1804) at Elliott Square Roxbury; Dover Meetinghouse built by Capt. Elias Dunbar of Roxbury - structure burned 1839. One-room schoolhouses built, most demolished or moved and rebuilt for other uses.

Commercial & Industrial: Tavern at Town center, some small workshops/stores built, although most commercial activity was carried out in houses; no structures of this period are believed to remain unaltered.

VIII. EARLY INDUSTRIAL PERIOD 1830-1870)

A. Transportation Routes:

Colonial highways remained in place with little modification during 19th century, except for Centre St to Cross St. Charles River railroad extended from Needham to Medfield in 1861 through Dover Ctr. (RR depot of 1866 still intact) along Trout Brook. No direct streetrailway service, but peripheral routes from Needham to Natick along Dover St., and Westwood to Medfield along Route 109 in early 1900's abandoned by First World War.

B. Population:

Small increases occurred 1830-1855 when a peak of 745 was reached; 1855-1870 population declined back to 616-645 level; much of the population increase between 1830 and 1855 was made up of Irish immigrants (145 in 1855) whose number declined to 64 by 1865, Baptist Congregation formed with Needham residents and chapel built in 1838; 2nd Congregational Society formed 1838, chapel built in 1839.

C. Settlement Pattern:

Slightly increased density in two existing village clusters; possible small village around slitting & nail mill.

D. Economic Base:

Farming remained most wide-spread activity although several manufacturing enterprises were attempted, of which the largest was a Rolling, Slitting & Nail Mill which employed 40 by 1845 but had passed out of existence by 1855; the small-scale manufacture of boots and shoes employed 9-15 through-out the period until 1855-65 when it ceased. Continued limited growth of home craft industries, especially straw bonnets (Smith 1897, 282) with local female labor, also palm leaves and knitted hosiery.

E. Architecture: Residential: Few houses of the period evident; of those extant side-hall cottages with simple Greek Revival style details are the most common; a small number of simple side-hall houses existed; very few Italianate style houses.

Institutional: Construction of 3 meeting houses 1837-1839 formed major body of public buildings, all were extremely simple structures with Greek Revival and Gothic details, at least two of these structures remain, slightly altered (MHC Survey) Continued use of one-room schools.

Commercial: Very little commercial activity, no known structures extant unaltered.

Industrial: No known structure extant.

IX. LATE INDUSTRIAL PERIOD (1870-1915)

A. Transportation Routes:

No major changes from Early Industrial routes.

B. Population:

Population remained in 636-727 range from 1870 to 1905 after which it began a quick increase to 999 in 1915; much of this increase was made up of foreign born residents who numbered 166 in 1905 and 338 in 1915; of these 116 were Irish, 47 Italian and 42 Nova Scotian.

C. Settlement Pattern:

Small amount of building in existing two centers, major new building after ca 1900 consisted of estates along the Charles River (Dedham St and Claybrood Rd) and in greater density along Farm and Walpole Streets.

D. Economic Base:

Farming continued, although the number employed by farming declined throughout period; manufacturing fluctuated in size but did not employ more than 31 people during the period; after ca 1895-1900 the town's Boston dependent, suburban economy grew.

E. Architecture: Residential: The most widespread development of the period consisted of the assembling of large country estates (some containing 300-400 acres) by wealthy Bostonians. At least 18 estates developed between 1901 and 1914. In some cases, existing Georgian or Federal period farm houses were fancifully restored and enlarged, while in others large new houses and related out buildings were built in the various eclectic styles then popular (Neo-Tudor, Federal & Colonial Revivals, Beaux-Arts, as well as at least 2 concrete houses) Most of these estates were designed by Boston architects, including James Pusdon; Parker, Thomas & Rice, Kilham & Hopkins, and J. Harleston Parker. A few smaller-scale modest houses were built in the vicinity of the town center, styles such as the Second Empire and Queen Anne are represented by only a few simple examples each.

Institutional: Victorian Gothic style town hall built 1880-81 (T.W. Silloway, architect)-destroyed; gradual abandonment of one-room schools with the construction of the Sanger School (1888, Allen & Kenway, architects) and the Caryl School (1910, Cummings & Harvard, architects); Historical Society, Sawin Memorial Hall.

X. EARLY MODERN PERIOD (1915-1940)

A. Transportation Routes:

Highways remain from 19th century with stone bridges across Charles River. Autoroute 109 in 1930's but Dover Ctr remained isolated from regional routes.

B. Population:

Drop in population 1915-20; steady increases after 1920; especially rapid increases after 1950; predominantly Boston - oriented suburban population.

C. Settlement Pattern:

Continued development of country estates; after WW-II some small-scale subdivisions created; modern residential development has tended to consist of the subdivisions of large estates into small properties, which are nonetheless, large by suburban standards.

D. Economic Base:

No significant industrial development and decline of market agriculture for residential estates by mid-20th century.

E. Architecture: Residential: Estate development to ca 1930 dominated by Colonial and Federal Revival style, architect-designed buildings; subsequent development divided between simpler (builder-designed) Colonial Revival houses and a small number of contemporary architect-designed houses and a small number of contemporary architect-designed houses in estate areas.

Institutional: Major new building of period was the Colonial/Federal Revival style, Dover Town Hall (1925 - Kilham, Hopkins, & Greley architects).

Commercial: - Limited primarily to one- Colonial Revival style building at the town center (MHC Survey) and the adaptation of existing house to partial commercial use.

Industrial: No significant new building.

XI. SOURCES

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