

# MHC Reconnaissance Survey Town Report

## EAST BROOKFIELD

Report Date: 1984

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: 1984

COMMUNITY: East Brookfield

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### I. TOPOGRAPHY

East Brookfield is located in the southwestern portion of Worcester County. It lies on the western slopes of a southerly extension of the central uplands, and its generally rounded hills form the eastern boundary of an area of lower, level land dominated by the Quaboag River Valley. Elevations range from 900 feet above sea level along the eastern and southern borders to 600 feet along the western border.

The Seven Mile River and East Brookfield River, which join just below East Brookfield village, are the major rivers draining the town. A number of smaller streams flow through swampy valleys among the hills in the eastern portion of town before joining the broad, flat Seven Mile and East Brookfield rivers. Three large ponds are in the town: Furnace Pond, or Lake Lashaway, created to provide water power in the late 18th century and enlarged in the early 19th century, Quaboag Pond, and Quacumquasit Pond, which form part of the southwestern boundary of the town.

East Brookfield lies within the area of Brookfield series soils, one of three major north-south soil belts in Worcester County. Brookfield loam and stony loam predominate, with the stony loam over most of the southern and eastern portions of the town. Paxton loam occupies the several drumlins scattered through this area. West of the town center is a broad level plain composed of Merrimac sandy loam, brown phase. This soil is derived from glacial and terrace deposits laid down under shallow moving water. It represents a shallow terrace at the eastern edge of glacial Lake Brookfield. Large clay deposits found among the terrace and former lake bed sediments provided the raw materials for potteries and brickworks from the 18th century to the early 20th century.

Crop yields from the Merrimac and Brookfield soils were fair to good in the major crops of hay, corn, grains, and potatoes.

### II. POLITICAL BOUNDARIES

Small part included in 1660 Quaboag Plantation grant, provisionally established as town of Brookfield in 1673. Included in enlarged, eight-mile-square township granted in 1718. Northern boundary established with creation of town of North Brookfield in 1812. Incorporated as a town from Brookfield in 1920.

### III. HISTORIC OVERVIEW

Residential and agricultural community on several Quaboag River tributary corridors, with reputed native village site on southeast

shore of Quaboag Pond, and other sites likely at Lake Lashaway. Eastern periphery of 18th century Brookfield, with dispersed, agricultural settlement. Industrial development at early 19th century forge/mill focus south of Lake Lashaway further stimulated by 1839 Western Railroad connection, and 1876 location of North Brookfield branch junction. Lakeside cottage development occurs in the 20th century. Some significant functional, agricultural landscapes remain.

#### IV. CONTACT PERIOD (1500-1620)

##### A. Transportation Routes

Junction of East Brookfield River, Seven Mile River, and Great Brook tributary corridors. Main east-west trail conjectured along north side of Seven Mile River corridor, south of Lake Lashaway (Main Street-East Brookfield Road, with alternate east branch Baker Hill Road along east shore of Lake Lashaway to Main Street). Seven Mile River ford, with south trail conjectured on Podunk Street-East Sturbridge Road. West branch on Shore Road north of Quaboag Pond. South branch on West Sturbridge Road. East branch on Flag Street.

##### B. Settlement Pattern

This area lies in the larger Nipmuck subregion known as Quaboag, adjacent to the pond of the same name and based on the word Squabaug. This area was one of the most intensely visited by collectors, and evidence indicates sites on the pond as well as Lake Lashaway. This area was very close to proposed base camps.

##### C. Subsistence Pattern

The proposed village sites to the west provided a base for seasonal gathering by the dispersed members of the Quaboag group. Fishing and agriculture were taken up here by small family and task groups.

#### V. PLANTATION PERIOD (1620-1675)

##### A. Transportation Routes

The Contact period trails continue in use. Main east-west trail improved as part of Worcester-Brookfield road by 1673.

##### B. Settlement Pattern

This area is located to the east of the Ipswich grant of 1660 based on a Native American purchase. Colonials neither settled nor used this area, except crossing on its roadways, so Contact period patterns continued. Some natives joined a proto-praying town in the Brookfield area.

### C. Subsistence Pattern

No known colonial use, so a continuation of patterns established during the Contact period.

## VI. COLONIAL PERIOD (1675-1775)

### A. Transportation Routes

The main east-west trail is laid out as the Post Road in 1753. The Brookfield-Charlton road is also established (Shore Road-East Sturbridge Road).

### B. Population

Few figures are available since the area was part of Brookfield, and then Third Parish. In 1750 the area has been estimated to contain 32 households, but this seems doubtful (Roy). Later estimates claim 17 households. The area, with Third Parish, included 954 individuals in 164 families in 1776. The area's Congregationalists worshipped in Brookfield, but as early as 1748 the area is said to have had Baptist residents.

### C. Settlement Pattern

This area was part of the expanded grant of Brookfield. As early as 1720 it was recognized as a section of the larger town. A number of the town's early land divisions were located here, so settlement was rapid after resettlement. Analysis of a 1750 census shows 40% of the settlers of Brookfield, West Brookfield, and East Brookfield were living in the area now East Brookfield, but this seems suspect (Roy). By 1753, residents of the north portion, led by Harrington, began petitioning for annexation to Spencer, to whose meetinghouse they claimed to be nearer. Petitions for additional areas for annexation came in 1764 and 1772. The pattern of settlement consisted of dispersed farmsteads located along the roadways, oriented to the parent town to the west, and specifically to Third or South Parish.

### D. Economic Base

Very little information is available on this period, but as part of Brookfield, the area benefited from the general prosperity of the town. The area north of Lake Lashaway was developed with mill privileges, including a sawmill in 1733 and a clothier by 1734.

### E. Architecture

Residential: One period survival noted: a single-story, five-bay, asymmetrical center chimney dwelling dated 1767.

## VII. FEDERAL PERIOD (1775-1830)

### A. Transportation Routes

The colonial roadways continue in use, with the addition of a direct lowland link between South Brookfield and the industrial area south of Lake Lashaway.

### B. Population

Again, few figures are available for this section of Brookfield, although the two areas probably held under 1,000 people throughout the period. The Baptist community was served by a preacher from 1788, built a meetinghouse in 1795, and incorporated in 1800. In 1812, a group of Universalists began meeting in the area, and built a meetinghouse in 1820. By 1830 the area consisted of two school districts.

### C. Settlement Pattern

Eastern periphery of town of Brookfield, with continued dispersed agricultural settlement. Baptist church (1795) located near eastern border on Post Road; Universalist (1820) church near southern border on Sturbridge Road. Small mill/furnace focus south of Lake Lashaway.

### D. Economic Base

Although East Brookfield remained a part of Brookfield until 1920, when it was incorporated as a town, it maintained a separate identity from the late 18th century, eventually becoming the most industrialized and diversified village of the two. Like Brookfield, agriculture was the major pursuit of its residents through the 18th and early 20th century, focused on sheep- and cattle-raising and the cultivation of grains, hay, and root crops. East Brookfield's surface was much more uneven, broken, and swampy than that of Brookfield, and except for the broad plain west of the village, had few level expanses especially suited to large-scale cultivation. The numerous streams supported nearly half of the saw, grist, and clothiers' mills found in the Brookfields during the late 18th and early 19th century.

The first major industrial enterprise occurred in 1825 and 1826 when a large dam was constructed across the Seven Mile River and enlarged Lake Lashaway (Furnace Pond). A saw and grist mill were built and the Worcester and Brookfield Furnace was incorporated by prominent men from Worcester and Brookfield. Iron was obtained from Brookfield and vicinity, but difficulty in obtaining continuous and sufficient supplies of ore eventually caused the failure of the furnace. In 1832 it employed 25 men and produced 300 tons of castings, principally machinery, some stoves, ploughs, and hollow ware. By 1830, the area which became East Brookfield contained five sawmills, three grist mills, several potteries, the furnace, and a fulling and clothier's mill.

## E. Architecture

Residential: Small number of survivals noted. Center chimney seems to have been the popular plan. Two one-story, five-bay double chimney houses noted, one dated 1791. Two, two-story brick houses survive: an 1814 Flemish bond with pyramidal roof and center chimney, fanlight over main entrance on Route 9 in the center, and a single-pile structure with jack arches and hipped roof. Also noted is a two-story, frame, five-bay house with a lean-to and fanlight. Another period example noted is a two-story, five-bay structure that probably had a center chimney but now displays two small off-center chimneys. The rear of the north end of the house has a lean-to and may be the older (third-quarter 18th century?) section, while the south end wall is finished with a hipped roof extending into a two-story ell, which may be a later (first-quarter 19th century) addition.

## VIII. EARLY INDUSTRIAL PERIOD (1830-1870)

### A. Transportation Routes

Service on the Western Railroad opens in 1841 along the East Brookfield River/Great Swamp corridor, south of Lake Lashaway.

### B. Population

No reliable figures are available for the area, which remains part of Brookfield. Some manufacturing developed in the village of East Brookfield, while Podunk remained agricultural. At the end of the period (1868) the northern areas again agitated for independence, objecting to high taxes.

### C. Settlement Pattern

Growth of East Brookfield's village is stimulated by 1841 railroad connection. Cotton textile manufacturing is added to the established industrial area along the East Brookfield River. The Baptist church is relocated west on Main Street to a site southwest of Lake Lashaway. A village develops between the lake and the railroad corridor, with a residential cluster in the Main/Mechanic/Pleasant Street area, and a secondary linear development on Main Street west of the Baptist church, with small extensions on School, Maple, North, and South Streets.

### D. Economic Base

Through the early 1850s the iron furnace and machinery manufactory below Furnace Pond was the principal industry in East Brookfield. Reorganized after failure from difficulties in obtaining a steady and sufficient supply of iron ore, the air and cupola furnaces operated at about one half of the 1832 capacity through the period, producing about 150 tons of hollow ware and castings annually. Machinery built included shingle mills, lathes, breast and tub wheels, shoemakers' rolling machines, pumps, and such tools as hammers, cutlery, and straw cutters. During the 1840s, brickmaking was revived, and by 1865 two brickyards employed 12

and produced 700,000 bricks annually. Several wheel and spoke manufactories were established, the largest that of G. Forbes and Co. located off Mechanic Street and along the Seven Mile River, which produced 100,000 wheels in 1865.

Textile manufacturing was established during the 1850s near the furnace. In 1855, 900,000 yards of denim were produced by 30 men and 43 women. The Civil War interrupted production for a period as the Southern market and cotton supplies were cut off, but following the war the Brookfield Mfg. Co. was established and cotton flannel manufacturing was resumed. Additional manufacturing and craft production in East Brookfield included a soap factory, several blacksmith shops, and a shoe shop.

Although independent agricultural statistics for East Brookfield are lacking during this period, it is likely that the town's farms followed the trends evident in the other Brookfield towns. Cattle-raising, dairying, and growing of hay increased in importance as sheep-raising and grains other than corn declined. Butter and cheese were the major products of the dairy, as milk could not yet be safely and economically transported the long distances to the urban markets of Boston or Springfield.

#### E. Architecture

Residential: Concentration of brick buildings in center, mainly popular one- and two-story gable end dwellings with Greek Revival and Italianate trim. One two-story, gable end late Greek/Italianate double house noted. Also, several double chimney, two-story, five-bay Greek Revival houses (one with a hipped roof) and two double-pile double chimney houses noted. The side-passage, gable end continued to be the predominant form, often built in brick with advanced brick hood moulds and brick cornices throughout the period, especially in the center. Double chimney houses continued to be built; one two-story, five-bay Gothic Revival-detailed example was noted in the center. Also observed was a two-story, six-bay, double entry structure with three chimneys dating from the third quarter of the century.

Institutional: A Greek Revival, temple front church is located on Route 9 in the center. A Greek Revival brick school survives on Sturbridge Road in the southeast section of town.

### IX. LATE INDUSTRIAL PERIOD (1870-1915)

#### A. Transportation Routes

Branch to North Brookfield is opened on Boston and Albany Railroad in 1876. Electric streetcar service is established along Main Street by the 1890s, with a branch to North Brookfield on East Brookfield Road.

#### B. Population

There are still few figures available, but the village of East Brookfield contained 1,082 individuals in 238 families in 1895. A

literary society was formed in 1878. Camp meetings, denomination unknown, took place in the 1880s. After the burning of the Universalist church, a Union Chapel was constructed in 1882. A Roman Catholic mission was formed in 1885, St. John's. In 1888 a Societe St. Jean-Baptiste was formed. A chapter of the International Order of Red Men was formed in 1900. The East Brookfield Club (1909) united for town betterment without regard to partisan issues. A number of sports clubs were also formed.

### C. Settlement Pattern

Some industrial growth continues along the railroad corridor, with the addition of a brickyard and a bicycle factory. St. John's Roman Catholic Church is established in a former schoolhouse in School Street in 1891. Some peripheral additions and infill occur in the established village residential area, with some additions south of the river on Howe Street. Lashaway Park is established on the east shore of the lake. Cottage development (Quaboag Heights) occurs on the east side of Quaboag Pond toward the end of the period. Union Chapel (1882) in the southeast, north of Flag Street, replaces the Universalist church.

### D. Economic Base

The period following the Civil War saw a large expansion in East Brookfield's manufacturing activity, led by textile and iron and steel manufacturing. During the 1880s three woolen mills were established and employed nearly 300 operatives in the manufacture of cloth, yarn, and shoddy. The cloth mill was established in 1880 by N. Sagendorph, an influential textile manufacturer in Spencer. The East Brookfield Woolen Co., founded in 1883, became the largest producer of shoddy in the eastern states, second in the U. S. Ownership of the mills changed hands frequently as they suffered dull trade and labor strife during the 1890s and early 1900s. At the Mann and Stevens Mill, weavers struck for one full year in 1905 over the system of fines to be assessed for imperfect work.

The iron furnace continued in operation until the early 1890s and produced cast iron and steel tools and implements. Several small manufacturers joined in the production of shoe leather cutters and other accessories for the shoe industry of the neighboring towns, steel chucks, frictionless axle bearings for the Boston Horse Car Co., wheel and carriage parts, and small machines. In the 1890s and early 1900s, several companies produced pneumatic speedway and road carriages, wheels, and running gears. The manufacture of carriage parts and wheels was begun prior to the Civil War. By the early 1870s, the Forbes and Doane Carriage Wheel factory was the largest in New England. In 1905 wagon jacks were also manufactured in East Brookfield.

Brick- and pottery-making expanded into a major industry during this period, reaching their peak in the 1880s and 1890s when at least three brickyards and a pottery were in operation. Repeated fires in drying houses and kiln houses eventually closed the brick and pottery works. At the peak, the yards produced several



million bricks per month. In the 1870s, a steamboat was used to carry the finished brick across Quaboag Pond from a brickyard and in the 1880s the Quaboag Pond Railroad was built to carry bricks between the yards and to carry commuters between the lakeshore and the village.

The agricultural trends of the Civil War years continued. Dairying increased in importance, and whole milk sales rose as farmers produced less butter and cheese on their farms and sold their milk to cheese factories and to the Boston market. Poultry-raising became increasingly important as several farmers specialized in this activity.

### E. Architecture

**Residential:** Limited number of scattered gable end and double chimney dwellings from the fourth quarter of the century, including a two-story, five-bay, brick house. Late 19th century cottages along east side of Lake Lashaway.

**Institutional:** Union Chapel (now Masonic Temple) of 1882 on Sturbridge Road in southwest part of town is a modest Queen Anne structure with a gable end facade and shingled surfaces. Universalist church (ca. 1890-1900) is a late Gothic stone structure with a square corner entry tower. A ca. 1900 frame school building stands in the center.

**Commercial:** The center retains a cluster of two- and three-story brick commercial buildings with segmental arched windows. A Richardsonian style depot of granite block and sandstone also survives.

## X. EARLY MODERN PERIOD (1915-1940)

### A. Transportation Routes

Main Street is improved early as part of the main early auto route from Boston to New York (Route 5, later Route 20, finally Route 9). By the mid 1920s, the road to North Brookfield is improved as a local connector, and in the 1930s the road south to Charlton City is upgraded.

### B. Population

At incorporation in 1920, the town's population of 829 consisted of 258 families and the town held 283 houses. It grew to 1,016 in 1940. The town's population consisted of 11% foreign-born, and 21% rural in 1940. With independence, the town formed its own library (1921), began sending its children to North Brookfield High School, and joined the Charlton Poor Farm Association. Its voluntary associations included a Girls' Progressive Club, a WCTU, a Community Club (for improvement) and Civic (war-related) Club. A summer camp was also located in the town.

### C. Settlement Pattern

In the village, residential development continues to focus around Lake Lashaway, with extensions northwest on East Brookfield Road and Blaine Street, west on Main Street, and along the east shore. In the southwest, cottages are built on the east shore of Quacumquasit Pond.

### D. Economic Base

The period immediately following the First World War was one of prosperity and modest expansion, followed by the Depression of the 1930s and the closing of several of the manufacturing plants. By 1940, only the McLan Hat Company remained.

The Daniel Mfg. Co. was established in 1916 and occupied the textile mill at the site of the furnace. The firm produced men's and women's wear woolens and cassimeres. After a decade of expansion the mill employed up to 300 men and women. The Mann and Stevens Woolen Co., incorporated in 1897 and totally moved to East Brookfield when Worcester acquired its water privilege in Manville, Leicester, employed more than 100 in the production of woolen and worsted cloth. The Depression, accompanied by strikes and shutdowns, closed both mills by 1935. The Daniels Co. relocated in LaPorte, Indiana and the Mann and Stevens mills were sold at auction in 1939. The Daniels Co. mill was purchased by the McLan Hat Co., a subsidiary of H. McLacklan Co. of Danbury, Conn. Up to 1,500 dozen felt hats were produced daily in the factory. In 1920, the Lakeview Counter Co. was established, an expansion into East Brookfield by a Brockton shoe counter manufacturer. This firm also did not survive the Depression.

East Brookfield's agriculture declined during the period as marginal lands were taken out of cultivation and residential development took other lands. The development of a resort community along Lake Lashaway (Furnace Pond) and Quaboag Pond removed additional land from agricultural use. Dairying and poultry-raising remained the major activities on the surviving farms, and market gardening and orchards made gains as the non-agricultural population grew.

### E. Architecture

Residential: Cottages clustered along east side of Lake Lashaway. Scattered examples of bungaloid dwellings noted and a cluster of Four Square plans in the center along Route 9.

Commercial: Concrete block gas station (1930-40) noted in center.

## XI. SURVEY OBSERVATIONS

No inventory exists for East Brookfield. Both the center and the outlying areas of town merit documentation.