

# MHC Reconnaissance Survey Town Report

## ESSEX

Report Date: 1985

**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: 1985

Community: Essex

### I. HISTORIC OVERVIEW

A town of undulating terrain in eastern Essex County, Essex was home to the Pawtucket (Agawam) Indians. Multiple Woodland sites found, and Contact period activity likely, although not confirmed. Known as Ipswich's Chebacco Parish, the area's first European settlement in 1634 with granting of land to Ipswich residents. Route 133 ( ) laid out by 1651; boatmaking, mills and dwellings along the Ipswich River by 1673. Meetinghouse center established in 1679 in the central town with dispersed agricultural settlement pervasive through the end of the century.

Federal period Essex with nodes of settlement at the Falls, Essex Center and South Essex. Building of Causeway (1811) led to commercial/civic coalescence of Essex and South Essex, while increasing sizes of constructed boats led to shifts of shipbuilding from the Falls also to the Causeway area. Farming fishing and shipbuilding comprise the town's economic mainstays.

In the mid-19th century, a major intensification of the road network in the central village provided now a direct line (via Martin Street) with the Falls district. Civic and commercial focus still in the Causeway vicinity, with the western Causeway (Main at Martin) emerging as the town's primary commercial corridor. Residential building accelerated in both the Falls and South Essex areas particularly, with the first cottage construction at Conomo Point in 1860.

With the arrival of mass transit facilities (railroad, 1872; street railway, 1893) another realignment of activities occurs. Industrial focus shifts from the Causeway (and shipbuilding) to depot areas along the river, from the Falls district to South Essex. Manufactories multiply. Residential construction follows route of street railway and scatters north and east through the rural town. Tourism begins to boom, as seasonal cottages proliferate on the town's lakefront and coastal properties. Shipbuilding activities show some decline while shoe manufacturing increases.

Another growth spurt in 1940 when impending Interstate 95/Route 128 construction enhances the town's appeal as both residential and recreational locale. Contemporary town spared the brunt of commercial auto-development with the adaptive reuse of existing fabric appearing to provide the backbone of current development strategies.

### II. POLITICAL BOUNDARIES

By 1819, the Chebacco Parish (1748) of 17th century Ipswich Plantation gained sufficient population and was incorporated as an independent town. Since the late 19th century, although

undergoing a slight shifting of political boundaries both in the extreme southeastern corner of the town and in the southwest at Chebacco Lake, Essex has essentially remained unchanged since its incorporation.

### III. TOPOGRAPHY

The town of Essex is located in the southeastern portion of Essex County, Massachusetts. Physiographically, the town lies within the New England Seaboard Lowland, a relatively smooth coastal strip of land with some hills usually below the 400 and 500 foot contours. Locally, coastal Essex County contains more hilly country than other Seaboard Lowland areas. Elevations in southern areas average 100 feet or less with several hills approaching 200 feet or more. Along the coast, elevations average 20 feet or less with some hills approaching 50 to 100 feet or more.

Bedrock deposits in the Essex area are characterized by igneous formations throughout most of the town. Quincy granite is the most common type present. Limited distributions of Beverly syenite and Quartz syenite are also found in southern and southeastern areas of town. The only sedimentary rocks found in Essex belong to the Westboro or Grafton quartzite group. These deposits are also found in southern and southeastern areas.

Soils in the Essex area represent a mixture of formations through glacial outwash, organic deposits, windblown deposits and recent alluvial deposits. Soils of the Ipswich-Westbrook-Udipamments association are present in tidal wetland areas throughout the northeastern portion of town. These soils are deep and found in nearly level areas. They range from very poorly drained mucky soils found in organic deposits to excessively drained mucky soils found in organic deposits to excessively drained sandy soils formed in windblown sand. Soils of the Chatfield-Hollis-Rock outcrop association are found throughout most of the southern half of town south of Essex Center. These soils are found in deep or shallow deposits in gently sloping to steep areas. They are generally well-drained loamy soils formed in glacial till and contain areas of exposed bedrock. Soils of the Boxford-Scitico-Maybid association are found north of the town center to tidal areas. These soils are deep and found moderately well drained to very poorly drained loamy soils formed in lacustrine or marine sediments. West of the town center soils of the Canton-Woodbridge-Freetown and Merrimac-Hinckley-Urban land associations are found. Both soils are found in deep deposits and nearly level to steep areas. The latter are excessively drained and sandy soils formed in outwash deposits and urban development. The former association includes well-drained loamy soils found in glacial till to poorly drained mucky soils formed in organic deposits. Soils belonging to the Freetown-Fluvaguents association are found in limited areas in the southeastern and southwestern portion of town.

Major drainage in Essex is through the Castle Neck and Essex Rivers which both drain into Essex Bay. Other than Chebacco Lake, few ponds exist in the town. Freshwater swamps and meadow are common in many areas.

The original forest growth in Essex and in Essex County in general consisted of a mixed growth of white pine, oak, chestnut, poplar, maple, birch and some other hardwoods and conifers. However, secondary growth patterns cover most of the town today. These patterns are characterized by second growth oak and chestnut in uplands to scrub and pitch pine in areas of droughty and sandy soils. Some birch, cedar, juniper and white pine are also present.

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

##### A. Transportation Routes

Native American transportation routes in the Essex area likely emphasized water travel along the Castle Neck River, Essex River and Essex Bay. Conjectured trails were also probably present along rivers and streams, particularly those leading to the coast and major rivers noted above. A major north/south coastal route may also have existed on Rt. 133 and detoured around the Essex River to Rt. 22 and Apple Street.

##### B. Population

Essex was inhabited by members of the Pawtucket group which extended from the Saugus/Salem area north to the York area of Maine. Locally, this group is commonly referred to as the Agawam Indians who may have been a subtribe of the Massachusetts but seemed to be under the leadership of the Penacook. Gookin (1792) lists ca. 3,000 men belonging to Penacook group prior to the 1617-19 epidemics, while Mooney (1928:4) lists 2,000 men belonging to the Penacook group, as many as 12,000 natives, probably exaggerated. The Native American population in the Essex area may have numbered in the vicinity of 200 or more individuals during much of this period. Following the epidemics, fewer than 100 natives likely remained.

##### C. Settlement Pattern

Numerous Woodland but no Contact period sites are known for the Essex area. However, environmental variables, later 17th century documentary sources and the high density of Woodland period sites indicate sites of this period should be present. For example, the mouths of the Castle Neck and Essex Rivers may have been good site locations as well as these areas along the coast. Known Contact period sites are present on Castle Neck in Ipswich opposite these areas. In addition to habitation and village type sites, special purpose sites such as fishing sites, shell middens and burials were also probably present. These sites may have been located on the coast or along the periphery of interior wetlands such as ponds, swamps and streams.

##### D. Subsistence Pattern

Native Americans in the Essex area subsisted on a variety of seasonally determined activities, including hunting, fishing, the collecting of wild plants and shellfish, and horticulture.

Hunting was a major activity focusing on larger mammals such as deer and smaller fur bearers. Sea mammals such as seals and drift whales may have also been hunted in the Plum Island Sound and Essex Bay area. Upland game birds and ducks were available in and around freshwater wetlands, riverine areas and in marshlands along the coast. Interior ponds, streams and rivers afforded a variety of freshwater fish. Larger rivers such as the Castle Neck and Essex Rivers may have contained seasonal runs of smelt, alewives, shad, salmon and sea-run trout. A variety of marine species of fish would have been available in the Essex Bay, Plum Island Sound and Atlantic Ocean. Several species of terrestrial as well as fresh and salt water plants in the Essex area provided a valuable food resource. The Essex Bay and coastal Atlantic Ocean presently contain several species of shellfish which may have been available during the Contact period and shell midden sites verify this expectation. Domesticated plants such as corn, beans, pumpkins, squash and tobacco were important. The location of native fields are currently unknown, however, they were likely located along the shores of Essex Bay, the Essex River or Castle Neck River.

## V. PLANTATION PERIOD (1620-1675)

### A. Transportation Routes

Indian trails likely continued in use in the Essex area throughout most of the Plantation period. Water travel was also important particularly in the Essex River and Essex Bay areas. An early horsepath and cartway were established connecting the Chebacco area with Ipswich shortly after 1634. This roadway, roughly in the area of Rt. 133, was laid out as the highway to Essex ca. 1651 including its southern extent which led to Gloucester. A westerly horsepath or cartway also likely extended along western Ave from Essex Center to the Hamlet (Hamilton) linking up with the Bay Road. Hatfield's road and path or roadway to Thompson's Island also existed during this period. At least two ferries were in operation over the Essex River. One ferry was established shortly after 1634 which continued until 1666 when a horse bridge was built over the River (Chebacco River/Essex River). A ferry also existed crossing the river near the mills at the falls on the Chebacco River.

### B. Population

Essex was first settled in 1634 by individuals from Ipswich. Settlement in this area was slow and growth did not accelerate until the 1670s and 1680s. By 1650, 10 to 12 families representing 50 to 60 individuals may have resided in the area. This population may have risen to 100 to 150 individuals by 1675. Black slaves were likely living in the town during this period. Residents paid ministerial taxes and worshipped in Ipswich. Early town settlers were of English decent, of the Congregational faith.

### C. Settlement Pattern

Little is known regarding the Native American settlement patterns in Essex during this period. Natives may not have resided in the town at all by this time. Secondary sources note the presence of

Indian wigwams in the town but do not offer specific descriptions or locations of these areas. Early settlers were not pressured by local natives. Europeans received native title to the area in ca. 1638 when John Winthrop Jr. purchased the rights to Agawam from Masconomet.

European settlement in Essex was made in ca. 1634 shortly after grants of several hundred acres each were made to Ipswich residents. Little is currently known who the first settlers were or where they settled. European settlement increased at a slow rate characterized mainly by dispersed farmsteads. Village life was also beginning in Essex. Dwelling houses, mills and shipmaking were beginning to concentrate around the river and falls. By 1673 unsuccessful attempts were begun to set the Chebacco area off as a separate parish. Aside from private lands that were granted or purchased, much of Essex remained Ipswich common lands throughout this period.

#### D. Economic Base

As Colonial settlers established themselves in the Essex area, hunting and gathering wild foods were important to their subsistence. However, the combined use of agriculture and husbandry were clearly the most important aspects in the economic lives of Essex's early settlers. Indian corn, wheat and barley were the most important food crops grown as well as rye when possible. Fruit and vegetables were grown but grains were the most important food produce. Shortly after settlement, the production of vegetable fibers from hemp and flax were also important products. Salt marsh hay was extensively exploited from the marshes surrounding Essex Bay. Husbandry was also an important activity in Essex. Cattle, horses, sheep, and swine were the most important farm animals. Oxen and fowl were also present. Shipbuilding and fishing were important in Essex shortly after settlement. By 1668 common lands were set aside in Chebacco as acres for Ipswich residents to build ships. Smaller vessels characterized shipbuilding during this period, possibly shallops or later Chebacco boats named after the area where they were first built. Fishing was also conducted in this area. John Perkins was granted the privilege of constructing a weir on the Chebacco River in 1636. After boats were built, hook and line fishing also began in the river and in coastal water. Mill construction in Essex may have been associated with shipbuilding. By 1671 at least four sawmills were present at or near the falls on the Chebacco River, far exceeding the needs of local farmers. Gristmills were not present during the Plantation period indicating farmers probably carried grains to Ipswich. Carpenters, ropemakers, malsters and smithies were also likely present during this period.

### VI. COLONIAL PERIOD (1675-1775)

#### A. Transportation Routes

Native trails likely had been upgraded to horse paths or cartways by this time. The highway to Essex (Rt. 133) continued to be the major northern transportation corridor through the town. The

southern road probably extended from the South Essex area. In 1700 a bridge replaced the ferry crossing over the Essex River in the vicinity of the town's mills. The present road to Thompson's Island was laid out in 1697. In 1699 the road to Gloucester was laid out extending Rt. 133 easterly probably along a previous cartway or horse path. A road way also existed westerly in the vicinity of Rt. 22 linking Essex with the Hamlet Parish in Hamilton. Smaller unnamed ways and roadways were also laid out as new settlements demanded.

#### B. Population

Essex may have had a Colonial population of 100 to 150 individuals at the start of the Colonial period. This population doubled by the end of the 17th century when Chebacco Parish in Ipswich had about 300 souls (Crowell 1868:110). The most intense period of parish growth in Essex occurred from 1695-1718 when the town's population almost doubled, to as many as 600 individuals. By 1775 the Essex population may have risen to 800 or 900 individuals. A decrease in fishing and shipbuilding during the Revolutionary War likely effected the town's population. Native Americans did not live in Essex during this period. Black slaves were present. Essex was not founded as a town but grew as a parish of Ipswich. By 1677 a number of residents in the area applied to Ipswich for lease to employ a preacher. In 1679 Chebacco residents were freed from paying ministerial taxes in the First Parish and allowed to hire a preacher on their own. Essex was now known as the Ipswich Second Parish or Chebacco Parish. Early worship and town meetings were held in private houses as the First Parish would not give permission to build a meetinghouse. A church was gathered by 1681. By 1702 a school house was erected on the common. In 1746 religious unrest by "New Lights" led to the creation of the Sixth Parish of Ipswich later that year, incorporated in 1748. In 1774 the Second and Sixth Parishes of Ipswich (both in Essex) reconciled and joined assuming the name of the Second Parish.

#### C. Settlement Pattern

Land patterns which developed in Essex during the Plantation period continued throughout most of the Colonial period. Essex was settled by the sons and daughters of Ipswich's founding generation. Thus, much of the town's settlement occurred in the 1670s and 1680s. Larger land grants which characterized the town's first settlers were on the decline. Chebacco's settlers averaged about 140 acres per holding worth 60% of the town ownry between 75 and 160 acres. As Ipswich residents, Essex land holders who paid the town's ministerial tax were entitled to benefit from Common land divisions. These divisions, many of which were in the Essex area, occurred in 1702, 1707-1709 and 1720. In 1720 Ipswich made the final division of common land granting rights to over 7,000 acres. Over 900 acres of this land were in Chebacco, mostly heavily wooded land between Chebacco Pond and the Wenham border.

An unauthorized meetinghouse was built by 1679 and some residents were prosecuted for its construction. In 1681 the First Parish granted one acre to the Chebacco Parish for a graveyard. The

meetinghouse was rebuilt in 1717. The Sixth Parish erected a meetinghouse in 1752 where the present meetinghouse stands.

#### D. Economic Base

While most aspects of agricultural and husbandry continued to be important throughout the Colonial period, fishing and shipbuilding were now of great economic importance. From 25 to 30 Chebacco boats sailed from Essex fishing the Atlantic coastline and erecting fish flakes on Hog Island, the north end of Warehouse Island, Thompson's Island at Clay Point. Fishermen were given special rights to common lands to erect fish flakes and cut timber. Fishermen also had special rights to soft shell clams, abundant in the Essex/Ipswich area, both a food resource and major supply of bait for cod fishermen. Chebacco boats characterized the fishing vessels used in the Essex area. These vessels, of 10 to 12 tons burden, were made in several small boat yards along the river. Larger vessels were not made during this period. Shipbuilding was apparently pursued according to the needs of local fishermen and coastal merchants. The needs of shipbuilding increased to the point that by 1706 at least five sawmills were in operation in the Essex area. In 1682 the Wade sawmill was erected at the falls. John Brunham removed his mill in 1687 to erect a new mill near the Story mill at the falls. In 1693 he erected a mill near the launching place below the falls on the Essex River. Other trades present in Essex by the end of this period included ropemakers, coopers, gunsmiths, wheelwright, carpenters, glovers, tailors, soapmakers, malsters, tanners and curriers.

#### E. Architecture

Residential: Several town examples are attributed to the first period architecturally. Swamp Hill Farm (1667) is said to be a rare, north shore plank construction house. The 1684 David Burnham house was restored by George Fancis Dow and Russell Kettel. Both are 2 & 1/2 story, central entry and chimney types. The Butman house of 1690-1725 is a four bay saltbox. The Simon Butler house of 1690 is 1 & 1/2 story, five bay, center entry and chimney examples. Nearly as common are 1 & 1/2 story examples, including three and five bay, center entry examples as well as four bay examples. Evidence of Georgian planning considerations are rare and limited to large 2 & 1/2 story houses, a five bay double interior chimney house, a six bay house with a pair of large interior chimneys (probably the result of additions) and an L-plan, five bay house.

Institutional: The Parish built its first meetinghouse in 1679, measuring about 42 x 36 feet. A second house was constructed in 1719, measured 52 x 42 feet, with 21 foot studs, three galleries, and a turret "after the fashion" of Andover (Crowell 1868:84). With separation the new religious society constructed a meetinghouse of the same size but with no turret. The first school was built here in 1695. The second schoolhouse was built in 1757 on the same site and measure 21 x 18 feet with eight foot studs and five windows. In 1761 a schoolhouse of unknown appearance was constructed at the Falls.



## VII. FEDERAL PERIOD (1775-1830)

### A. Transportation Routes

Colonial period roads continued in use and were improved. Streets laid out during the period include Western Ave by passing Story Street, Southern Ave (beyond Apple Street) to Manchester, Grove Street and Forest Ave extended, Harlow Street out to Concord Point, and Spring Street at the meetinghouse center. In 1811, a new bridge was built over the Essex River, two to three rods southwest of the old one. In 1823, a second was constructed, this with a 24 foot draw. 1820 saw the Essex Canal Company incorporated and a canal opened from the Chebacco River to Fox Creek. The canal was 1/2 mile long and its purpose was the transportation of lumber from the Merrimack Hinterland. In 1811 the Causeway was constructed, now joining Essex center with South Essex. It was repaired in 1824.

The Great Bridge built (over the Essex River) in 1824 was a wooden drawbridge with two sections, the draw being opened by means of a chain and windlass arrangement.

### B. Population

Essex was not incorporated until after 1810. Population in Essex increased from 1107 individuals in 1820 to 1333 individuals in 1830 with a growth rate of 20.42%. In 1820 Essex contained 1.48% of the total population of Essex County. This figure rose to 1.62% in 1830.

A total of 105 Chebacco men served in the Revolution. After the war a group left the town for Londonderry, N.H. between 1785-1790.

A second religious society was formed in 1808, of the liberal Christian denomination, viewing to "lay aside all party names", and related to similar organizations originating in Vermont, and active until 1827. In 1829 a Universalist Society was formed. The town had six school districts by mid-period, and attempted to start a Latin school in 1806. A Social Library was formed in 1802 followed by a Debating Society in 1829. A Light Infantry was also active until 1837.

### C. Settlement Pattern

By 1800, Ipswich's Chebacco Parish (the area of contemporary Essex) claimed three nodes of settlement and industrial activity, each near the river and each claiming an independent schoolhouse. To the west was the Falls District, at Apple Street and Western Avenue. By century's beginning it was already an area bustling with sawmills, shops and shipbuilding activity. North of the river, at the western end of the Causeway at Martin Street, was the town's central village and primary residential and commercial focus. To the east was the area of contemporary South Essex, on the Causeway's eastern end at Main and Southern Avenue.

Main Street between Maritime Street and Western Avenue, having attracted the town's meetinghouse and North District schoolhouse by 1800, was also the Federal town's densest corridor of residential building. Inasmuch as Essex center's Pickering, Winthrop, Lower Western Avenue and Maritime Street were all of post-Federal origin, it was to upper Western Avenue, and Story and Spring Streets that residential construction was attracted. Although a secondary focus of settlement activity occurred at Main Street and Southern and Eastern Avenues in South Essex, dispersed agricultural settlement remained persistent through the end of the period.

During the first quarter of the century, primary shipbuilding activities shifted from the Falls area to the Causeway (thus accommodating the larger size of constructed boats). As such, Essex Falls began its relative decline in importance within the town, and South Essex, its ascent. The town's incorporation in 1819 sparked a decade of improvements to the central village. The chapel of the Congregational church was erected in 1820; the town's powderhouse, also 1820; a firehouse in 1824. A post office was established in 1821 and a poor farm in 1825. By 1831, Essex claimed 157 dwelling houses and 8000 superficial feet of wharves.

#### D. Economic Base

The principal economic activities of Essex inhabitants were farming, boat-building and fishing. Because much of the town's land was covered by marsh, farmers were of necessity engaged primarily in stock-raising. Because animal husbandry was less time consuming than cultivation of the soil these same farmers also made shoes, fished and built boats.

The marshes in the eastern portion of the town were excellent land for the cultivation of a large salt hay crop. "The prodigious output of these tidewater fields enabled Chebacco to support a large livestock population and...to export hay to neighboring communities" (Jedrey 1979:62). Sheep were the chief animal raised early in the period. According to Jedrey, salt hay was a fine food source for a non-dairying animal like sheep. At the beginning of the period there were about 1000 sheep and the vast majority of agricultural acres were devoted to these and other animals as pasture or mowing land. Wool, accordingly, was an important agricultural product. A mill for carding this wool was operated during the period. Some sheep were also exported live to West Indies. Only about 10% of farm land was devoted to tillage and this was cultivated for domestic consumption. Two gristmills ground locally grown grains.

Spare time and economic necessity caused Essex farmers to turn their attention to boat-building, fishing and shoemaking. Winter months were probably devoted to shoemaking and the warmer season to making and using small fishing boats. Essex residents designed and built the reknowned "Chebacco boat". Prior to 1800 more than 2000 of these boats were in use around Cape Ann. In that year forty boats were engaged by Essex men in fishing on the eastern shore. Over the next quarter-century small boat-building declined

as the cod and mackerel industry diminished. Beginning in the 1820's larger vessels were built in Essex and a ship yard was established at Fall's landing. In 1821 the Proprietors of the Essex Canal were incorporated and a 1/2 mile long canal was dug from the Essex River to the Ipswich River, thus facilitating the transport of inexpensive shiptimber from interior New England. In 1828 forty vessels were constructed by local ships carpenters, serviced by several sawmills.

Boat and shipbuilding and fishing prompted the development of rope and line manufacturing in Essex. There were at least three ropewalks established during the period, two prior to 1820 and another in 1825. Other ancillary crafts included blacksmithing and the manufacture of sails, pumps, blocks and masts. A tanyard or two would also have been formed in the Federal town.

#### E. Architecture

Residential: Only a small number of houses are dated to this period. Most common survivals are 2 & 1/2 story, five bay, center entry, double interior chimney houses. A hip-roofed example of the center chimney form is known. Smaller house are similarly 2 & 1/2 stories, five bay and center entry facade, but utilize L-plans and combine an interior and a rearwall chimney. An isolated example is known of a gable front, three bay, center entry house of 1 & 1/2 stories.

Institutional: The reunited parish built a new meetinghouse in 1793, measuring 44 x 62 feet with 26 foot studs; its tower was 90 feet tall and 12 feet square and a porch was located on the west end. A small hearse house dating to 1819 is a gable roofed structure with a wide entry. A chapel was built next door in 1820, measured 24 x 36 feet, and housed an audience room, library, and selectmen's office. The Christian Society constructed a meetinghouse in 1809, a plain structure of 30 feet square with a flat roof; it was taken down in 1843. A third school was built south of the river in 1779. This and the original north schoolhouse were rebuilt in 1801; the latter was 20 feet square with nine foot studs, a chimney, hip roof, a six windows. When the south district was subdivided in 1811, two new schoolhouses were built; the eastern school was 16 x 20 feet. A powderhouse was constructed in 1820. The poorfarm purchased in 1825 measured 30 x 50 feet.

Industrial: There were many outbuildings used by farmers engaged in making "Chebacco boats." Several small shoe and blacksmiths' shops also dotted the landscape. Three ropewalks were built during the period, one at Essex Falls and two at the North End. Nearby the Burnham ropewalk at the Falls was the Burnham gristmill, before 1794, and the Burnham tanyard. Another tanyard was established near the brook by the old burying ground east of Main Street. A shipyard was established in 1823 at Falls Landing. Another shipyard was established in 1810; the workshop of this yard, a 2 & 1/2 story clapboard structure stands on Eastern Ave. at the intersection with Goodwin Court. In 1823 a saw and gristmill and a wharf 325 feet long were built near the

bridge crossing the Chebacco (Essex) River close to the town center. A wool carding mill was also located at his site, ca. 1800. A wool fulling mill was built on the Essex River near intersection of Apple Street and Western Ave prior to 1794. The Story Sawmill was also built on this privilege ca. 1836. Another sawmill was established at Apple and Andrews Street prior to 1794.

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

##### A. Transportation Routes

By 1836, Essex residents enjoyed daily stage coach service to Salem, and service three times a week to both Ipswich and Gloucester. Although the town had been unsuccessful in 1844, 1850 and 1865/1866 to attract railroad service, by 1867, a daily stage from Essex to Manchester allowed residents access to the Eastern Railroad line.

In 1856, Maritime Street was laid out, joining the Falls District with the central village Southern Avenue was laid out (to Manchester) in 1867. Other roads, laid out for residential development and new to the period, were School Cosswell, Winthrop and upper Pickering Streets. In 1831, Essex claimed 8000 superficial feet of wharves (at Falls Landing near the bridge) which were mostly taken up in shipbuilding. In 1842, the Great Bridge (with the exception of its piers) was completely rebuilt. In 1866, the abutments were retained but a new foundation was laid. The bridge, the third on the present site, now consisted of nearly level roadway.

##### B. Population

Essex grew moderately during the first thirty years of this period, expanding from 1333 in 1830 to 1701 in 1860. During the final 10 years the total fell to 1614 by 1870. the foreign-born in the town equalled 7.6% in 1855, and was equally divided between the Irish-born and Canadians, with an additional handful of English. By 1865 the proportion fell to 5.1% with decreases in each group.

The 1840s were perhaps the period's most active for social and reform movements. The Christian Society was revived in 1849. Temperance organizations continued in popularity, including the Essex Washingtonian Total Abstinence Society (1842) followed by the Sons of Temperance (1849). In 1851 the town organized a Lyceum, which in 1856 merged with the Library Association. In 1860 seasonal visitors began to frequent Conomo Point. Including reenlistments, the town sent 149 men to the Civil War and among these lost 18.

##### C. Settlement Pattern

Growth continued to focus in the Essex Center-South Essex area. While the Falls district saw the addition of a new schoolhouse (1832) and brick mill (1832) and brick mill (1834) it was not until Essex Falls was directly linked with the Meetinghouse Center

(via Martin Street, 1856) that its growth again commenced. Meanwhile the Causeway vicinity became the focus of commercial, civic and residential development during the period, and Essex and South Essex, essentially an uninterrupted corridor of settlement activity.

As shipbuilding reached its peak at mid-peak, improvements to the town were many. In 1832, the post office was moved from the meetinghouse center to the Causeway area (appropriately between Essex and South Essex); in the central village, a Universalist church was erected (1836), the meetinghouse remodelled (1842-1853), and the Spring Street Cemetery laid out (1852). With increasing population in the northern town, in the 1830's the North School District was divided into two and between 1830 and 1845, new schoolhouses built in all districts. A Baptist chapel was erected in South Essex (1849), and additional firehouse built at Thompson's Island (1851) and a new powderhouse built (1834). The western Causeway (Main Street at Pickering) continued its development as the town's primary commercial focus.

The focus of residential construction, as well as industry, shifted considerably from earlier periods. With the opening of Martin Street (1856) and the Falls District's increasing mill activity, residential builders were attracted to the junction of Western Avenue with Story, Apple and Marine Streets. Elsewhere, South Essex experienced its greatest surge of residential development, with dwellings extending from the industrial focus at the Causeway (Main Street) to Upper Southern Ave. In the central village, residential densities increased, especially along Northern Avenue, Spring and Main Streets, while the new Maritime and upper Pickering Streets attracted builders to the vicinity of the river. In addition, in 1860, the first buildings for use as summer cottages were erected on Conomo Point.

#### D. Economic Base

Farming and shipbuilding continued to dominate the economy. While the number of men employed in agriculture increased slightly during the period, the percentage of farmers among all occupations declined from 47% in 1840 to 39% in 1865. Meanwhile, the number of men in shipbuilding (and manufacturing generally) almost doubled to 330 and the percentage grew from 45% to 61%.

In 1831 there were 7007 acres of agricultural land. Equal amounts (42%) were cultivated (hay and tillage) and uncultivated (pasturage and other unimproved land) while the remaining 16% was woodland. Sheep farming became increasingly tenuous as the period advanced. The number of sheep fell to only 168 in 1831 and to a mere 50 in 1865. In fact, animal husbandry in general was declining. The number of all livestock was 35% lower in 1865 than in 1831. This was accompanied by a reduction in acres of pasturage. Nonetheless the tonnage of hay cultivated actually increased, presumably for sale in neighboring towns. Likewise the grain harvest increased early in the period. By 1875 the percentage of land under cultivation had increased to 46% and pasture and unimproved had decreased to 33%. Hay and dairy

products accounted for 61% of the \$92,921 agricultural product in 1865. Other important products were barley, corn, potatoes, apples and dressed meat.

Shipbuilding was the principal manufacturing occupation throughout the period, employing 200 men in 1832 and 150 men in 1865. The size of vessels also increased as the period advanced. From 1832-1837 schooners averaging 57 tons were built. At the peak of shipbuilding, 1851-1853, 160 vessels averaging 75 tons were constructed in about 12 shipyards. Six whaling ships were also built during this period. The three rope manufacturers remained in business throughout the period. Other related occupations were blacksmithing, caulking, engraving and painting. With its ancillary crafts the shipbuilding industry accounted for 85% of the manufacturing product in 1845 and in 1865.

Essex men also engaged in a small fishing and clamming business. In 1845, 27 vessels fished out of Essex. Clam-diggers gathered about 2000 barrells per year from 1848-68, selling them primarily for bait in Gloucester. Other occupations included shoe making on a small scale (there were 18 shoe shops in 1831), tanning and manufacture of bark, and coopering (three coopers in 1831). In 1831 there were three sawmills, two gristmills, a carding mill, a bark and hide mill and nine blacksmiths shops.

#### E. Architecture

Residential: Early in the period builders continued to favor familiar forms including 2 & 1/2 story, five bay, center entry houses in both double pile and L-plan forms. The new form introduced here is the gable front, three bay, side entry house, here favoring the 2 & 1/2 story version. Smaller gable roofed houses were built, 1 & 1/2 in height, with entry into the center of three bays, and with extended stud height. Most examples are ornamented with Greek Revival elements including corner pilasters, wide cornice boards, and doorhoods, and panelled pilasters. An exceptional Italianate house is a 2 & 1/2 story hip roofed house with a three bay, side entry facade. Small hunting cottages were built by seasonal visitors in the 1860s on Conomo Point.

Institutional: Universalists constructed a meetinghouse in 1836, which measured 56 x 42 feet, with tower with vane was 75 feet. The Christian Baptist Society constructed the Century Chapel which measured 40 x 46 feet. The Congregational Society remodelled by turning and raising its church to two stories in 1842, removing its porch in 1846, adding a new spire in 1852, and adding frescoes to the interior in 1853. Schools were also rebuilt: the new schoolhouse at the Falls measured 33 X 30 feet with 11 foot studs; the 1845 Thompson's Island School had two rooms, and was raised to two stories in 1850; the 1841 South School is unknown in appearance; nor is information available on the 1847 East School. The extant Center School (now the Shipbuilding Museum) is a 2 & 1/2 story structure, measured 28 x 38 feet; an ell was added in 1882. The Falls School of 1867 is an extant, Italianate, 2 & 1/2 story, three bay, center entry structure measuring 31 x 41 feet, with a 30 foot square room on each story, and a belfry.

Industrial: At least ten shipyards and associated buildings were established along Main Street near Eastern Ave. during the period. In 1832 a ship carpenters shop (extant) was built at 79 Western Ave.; 2 & 1/2 stories, clapboard, two by three bays with a door on the front of the second floor. In 1845 a ropewalk was built on Whites Hill by the Mears' Family; in 1847-1848 this ropewalk was moved to a spot between Main and Pickering Streets where it stood until at least 1906.

Transportation: The (1866) Great Bridge was still a wooden bridge, its frame entirely of oak, its covering timbers of pine, and its roadway covered with four inch spruce planks. The bridge, for the first time nearly level, was 72 feet long, 24 feet wide and had a draw of just over 17 feet wide.

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

### A. Transportation Routes

In 1872, the Essex Branch of the Boston and Maine Railroad to Wensham was opened. Drawn to the town, finally, by the potential of the ice business, the line came down the western side of the river and terminated at Essex Center. In 1887 the track was extended to South Essex. The Essex and Beverly Street Railway Company began service in 1893 and connected with the Gloucester Street railway on one end and the Salem and Lynn Street railway on the other. A branch line was added to Ipswich (date unknown).

The town's coastal location both slowed the development of the transportation network and made its maintenance more costly. The first bridge to Hog Island was not constructed until in 1880. Destroyed by storm in 1898, it was never rebuilt. Between 1900 and 1909, the Bay State Dredging Company dredged the entire length of the Essex River, to facilitate the passage of the now larger boats. A new road was laid out from the road to Conomo Point across the marsh to Robbins Island in 1900. In addition, among the new streets laid out within the village center, were Prospect and Maple Streets. As late as 1914, most roads within the town were still covered with gravel. In that year, they began to be treated with oil. The town's major highways remain Rt. 133 (connecting Georgetown and Gloucester) and Rt. 22.

### B. Population

At the end of this period, Essex's population was only slightly higher than at the beginning in 1830. Increasing from 1614 people to 1677, the percentage of growth from 1870 to 1915 was only 3.9%. Nonetheless, the town's population fluctuated, rising and falling repeatedly. The smallest number of people was 1587 in 1895 while the high was 1790 in 1905. By contrast, the percentage and real number of foreign-born rose steadily from 7.4% in 1875 to 19.2% in 1905. Canadians formed the largest ethnic group in every census year, exceeding the combined English and Irish totals. In 1915 the percentage of foreign-born declined to 15.2%, beginning a descent that would continue during the Early Modern Period.

In 1874 a Methodist Episcopal Society and church were established. A Catholic Mission from Gloucester was established in 1914. In 1894 a dispute between Essex and So. Essex over the location of the new town hall was decided in favor of Essex. In 1874 a local Grange was organized but did not last very long. In 1890 the first high school in Essex was established.

### C. Settlement Pattern

With the arrival of railroad transport in 1872, the foci of industrial activity again shifted from the Causeway and its shipbuilding to those areas south of the river now accessible to the railroad. By 1884, the area from Apple to Pond Street in Essex Falls attracted major steam, saw and icehouses; the Essex Depot and spur tracks drew a shoe manufactory, and (by 1877) at South Essex spurs were extended (at Southern Ave and School Street) to a shoe and box factory. In 1880, the town's butchering business was clustered within the nascent commercial corridor forming on Maritime Street from Main to Pickering Streets, while the town's surviving shipbuilding industry remained on the Causeway.

In the century's final decade and with the arrival of the street railway (1893), the pace of development quickened. Essex High School was built (1891); the Liberty Pole (1891); a new town hall (1894) and an additional shoe factory (1899) both erected near the Essex Depot; St. John Baptist Church (1895). The first telephone arrived in 1914; electric lights in 1909; and St. Anne's Catholic Church opened in 1914, in Essex center.

With Essex now opened to the region via rapid transit, recreational/tourist traffic increased in volume. In 1876, the railroad company opened Centennial Grove, soon a popular picnic and resort facility. Conomo Point was bustling with summer activity by the early 1890's Chebacco Lake, with only two houses since 1865, by the end of the century had become a favored location for cottages, and a gunning booth was located there. Robbins Island (c. 1900-1910) and Cross Island (by 1903) attracted summer home building. Among the town's permanent residents, building within the town was drawn to those roads newly laid out for development (on Winthrop, Prospect, and lower Pickering Streets in Essex center, on School and Cogswell Streets in South Essex), to the town's rural periphery (on Eastern Ave toward Gloucester, up Northern Ave, to Ipswich, and especially in the vicinity of Southern Avenue to Manchester) and appeared as infill among earlier structures.

### D. Economic Base

The development of factory production of shoes and the emergence of a commercial base were important elements in the economic equation after 1870. While farming was a steady sources of employment (32-33% of all occupations from 1875 to 1905), shipbuilding was not. Thus, despite the new demand for shoe workers, manufacturing employment steadily decreased. As a



percentage of all occupations it dropped from 49% in 1875 to 39% in 1905. Over the same span commercial employment increased from 15% to 23%.

Essex farmers again turned to animal husbandry. Whereas previously they raised sheep, now they concentrated on raising cows for their milk. This shift was attended by important changes in land use. After having fallen to 33% in the previous period the percentage of pasture and unimproved land jumped to 55% in 1885 (compared to a county average of 45%). Meanwhile the percentage of cultivated land dropped sharply, from 46% in 1875 to 22% in 1885 (compared to county average of 32%). Because salt hay was not a good food source for cows (it makes the milk taste sour), farmers turned instead to growing corn for fodder and selling the salt hay. Besides milk and hay, the important agricultural products were vegetables, apples, poultry and wood (23% of all land was wooded, the same as the county average in 1885). Still dairy products and hay accounted for 61% of the \$146,231 total value of agricultural goods in 1895. These were sold in Gloucester.

The demand for fishing schooners enabled the Essex shipbuilding industry to recover from the depression in the 1870s. However, prosperity was shortlived. In 1885 seven shipyards made vessels worth about \$200,000. Only ten years later there were only two shipyards. The demand for vessels significantly larger than Essex schooners adversely affected the local industry. In 1901 the two major shipyards constructed only 30 ships. While the town's ropemakers continued in business producing small-guage ropes and fishing lines, the shipbuilders began buying their heavy rope elsewhere ca. 1890.

Upon the establishment of the S.B. Fuller and Son Shoe Company in 1872, Essex shoe manufacturing emerged from the craft to the factory stage. By 1885 three firms (probably Fuller was the largest) made almost \$375,000 worth of boots and shoes, or 54% of the total manufacturing product. At its height the Fuller Company employed 125 people who turned out almost 1/2 million pairs and the boxes using steampowered machinery. In 1888 the "upper" workers went on strike for three weeks. In response the company reorganized its operations, turning to firms in Lynn for cutting g and fitting of shoe uppers. Thereafter perhaps as many as 50 "upper" workers were forced to find work in the Lynn shoe factories. Despite its early success the Fuller Company was out of business by the end of the period.

Early in the period, when shipbuilding was still thriving, two large steam sawmills were established. These employed several people throughout the early period. During the cider season both of these mills manufactured 40,000 or more gallons of cider. Another important business, ice-cutting, developed around Chebacco Pond after the establishment of the Essex Railroad in 1872. Ice transported by rail to Wensham and beyond constituted a large portion of the freight traffic on the Eastern Railroad. One of the town companies, the Drivers Union Company, had a storage capacity of 20,000 tons. Crafts related to shipbuilding and fishing constituted an additional source of employment.

The prosperity afforded by shoe and ship manufacturing was reflected in the more than 100% increase in manufacturing product value from 1875 to 1885. Similarly the decline of these industries was reflected in the 70% drop in product value from 1885 to 1895.

### E. Architecture

**Residential:** Builders continued to favor the 2 & 1/2 story, three bay, side entry, gable front form through the 1870s and 1880s. As many as half of these houses have the addition of a ell of 2 & 1/2 stories from the rear, lateral wall. Ornament on these houses is extremely simple, but related to the Queen Anne style in its use of complex form. A small number of Mansard houses were built in the town, including a two story, side entry example, and several large, three story, five bay, center entry examples. "The Lighthouse" is an exceptional example of seasonal housing in the town, composed of large lighthouse shape with two story galleries. Other housing in the Conomo Point area included small 1 & 1/2 story gable front and side gable cottage forms. Here (ca. 1890) on Cross Island (ca. 1905) hotels were constructed.

**Institutional:** The methodists constructed a church ca. 1875; it was remodelled ca. 1912, but its appearance is unknown. The Roman Catholics remodelled a bowling alley into St. Ann's Church in 1914; its appearance is unknown. The Shingle Style town hall was built in 1894 from designs by Frank W. Weston; it is raised on a fieldstone basement, and is a large square tower with corner turrets and ogee roof. With the formation of a high school in 1890 a school was constructed, its appearance currently unknown. A new poor farm was constructed in 1901; it is a 2 & 1/2 story block with high hip roof, and a projecting frontispiece of two stories and two bays.

**Industrial:** The Fuller Shoe Factory (1872) was a three story (wood or brick) building, 35 x 63 feet. In 1880 a three story addition (28 x 75 feet) was erected on Southern Ave opposite School St. (no remains). The Proctor Shoe Company erected a factory behind the railroad depot prior to 1884 (no remains). The Story steampowered Sawmill (extant) on Western Ave near Essex Falls was erected in 1872. There are two 1 & 1/2 story brick mills with stone foundations; on the front of the smaller mill (75 x 25 feet approx. ) is a large chimney; the other mill measures approximately 200 x 25 feet. The 1836 Story Sawmill, which stood nearby, collapsed in the late 1890s. A second steam sawmill (no remains) was erected near the Fuller Company on Southern Ave. Cider mills were also erected in association with the two steam mills. Storage buildings for the town ice companies were built near Chebacco Pond. Buildings related to shipbuilding were also built during the period.

**Transportation:** Of the three depots of the Boston and Maine Railroad within the town (in Essex Falls south of Apple Street and Western Ave, in Essex Center behind today's town hall, and in South Essex west of Main Street and Southern Ave), none survive. A car barn for the street railway, located in Essex Falls at Western Ave and Apple Street, no longer survives.

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

### A. Transportation Routes

In the 1920s public transportation began to feel the competition of the automobile. Although the Conomo Station was repaired at this time, the Boston and Maine railroad had to turn to the town for financial support. In 1942 train service was discontinued, and bus service to Beverly and Gloucester began. Although bus transport to Beverly was soon discontinued because of poor roads, service to Gloucester remains. In the early 1940s an airport operated for a short time in northern Essex. In 1945, the Essex River was again dredged, and in 1949 a new bridge constructed on Apple Street.

In 1924, extensive repairs were made to Rt. 133 from the Ipswich line to Essex Center. To ease abruptness of the junction of Martin and Main Streets as Rt. 133 turned to cross the Causeway, the Catholic Chapel was moved back from the road and another building moved nearer to the bridge. Because of the volume of tourist and recreational traffic by 1945, congestion had become a major problem on Route 133 at the Essex Causeway. Route 128 had been planned as the solution. By the mid-forties, circumferential highway had been completed, to Essex, and by 1954, it extended to Gloucester.

### B. Population

Continuing a trend of fluctuating decline begun at the turn of the century, the population of Essex fell by 17.4% between 1915 and 1940 from 1677 to 1384. At that time, growth recommenced, and between 1940 and the close of the period, the town's population increased 47% rising to 2034 residents. For the period as a whole, the town logged a growth rate of 21%. The foreign-born of Essex accounted for 15.2% of its population in 1915. Involved in a 20th century trend of decline, by 1940, this figure had fallen to 6.6% of the 1915 foreign-born population, Scottish immigrants accounted for 59% of the total.

In 1925, an Essex Grange was organized and in 1926 its Ladies' Auxilliary was also organized; the American Legion moved into the old Center School building (1935); the Essex Historical Society organized in 1937.

### C. Settlement Pattern

Although early in the period growth had slowed to such an extent that Essex lost not only its rail services (by 1932) and its high school (1940), the town's seasonal and recreational population continued to increase. By 1926, three to four booths hawked fried clams on the Causeway; a golf course was opened (1932); the number of pleasure boats on the river was increasing; and building in the town's summer homes sections at Conomo Point and Chebacco Lake, continued.

With the completion of Route 128 in 1954, not only was the snarl of automobiles plaguing the North Shore relieved, but Essex became accessible to commuting populations from the greater Boston Metropolitan Area. As its population increased, so did improvement within the town. The Universalist Church, having burned in 1946, was rebuilt (c. 1950-1955); a new Catholic church building was dedicated (1951); the Burnham Library renovated (1953); the land of the Essex Station was converted into a park (1949); the Essex School was built (ca 1950-55); Richardson's Hall was purchased by the Grange and renovated (1938/1939). Martin Street between Pickering and Main Streets continued as the town's densest commercial corridor, but such activities now extended uninterrupted from the intersection of Northern and Western Avenues along Main Street, across the Causeway and into South Essex as far as Grove Street.

#### D. Economic Base

The decline of Essex's principal industries continued. Both farming and manufacturing had practically ceased by the end of the period. A few farms continued in business with dairying constituting the principal activity. There were also three poultry farms in 1944. From 1915 to 1955 the number of people employed in agriculture fell from 223 to about 5 - 10. In 1921 clam-digging and the manufacture of fishing line were still important activities, as was some shipbuilding. A descendant of one of the earlies ropemakers ran the Mears Improved Line Company which sold fishing lines nationally. By the end of the period wholesale and retail trade employed the majority of Essex workers.

#### E. Architecture

Residential: No 20th century homes have been inventoried. New construction of housing was apparently limited to new summer cottages in traditional 1 & 1/2 story forms.

Institutional: The Universalist church was raised to two stories in 1930, but burned in 1946; its replacements appearance is currently unknown. In 1951 a new Roman Catholic church was built in a Colonial Revival style.

### XI. SURVEY OBSERVATIONS

The Essex inventory includes numbered structures through 250 but many forms are missing, including the file 25 to 50, and the majority of forms in the folder of higher numbers. Few 20th century structures have been included.

In the Main Street/Causeway vicinity, although it is a thoroughly commercial strip, its 18th and 19th century building fabric continues to be utilized. Modern structures are few, and the authenticity of this early tourist strip is at least partially preserved. It is the commercial corridor at Martin Street (between Main and Prospect Street) whose integrity has been sacrificed to modern development.

Main Street between Martin and Western Streets (one of the town's earliest residential foci) and secondarily Main Street in South Essex, are currently threatened by infiltrating commercial concerns.

## XII. FINDER'S AID

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|---|--|
| 1. Colonial/Federal period dwellings<br>(17th & 18th century)         | Story Street immediately<br>south of Belcher.                      |
| 2. Colonial/Federal period dwellings<br>(18th century)                | Main Street vicinity<br>between Martin and<br>Western Ave          |
| 3. Cluster, Early Industrial period<br>(mid 19th century) residential | Western Ave at inter-<br>section with Story and<br>Martin Streets. |
| 4. Late Industrial period (1870-1900)<br>residential                  | Winthrop Street between<br>Martin and Maple Streets                |
| 5. Colonial/Federal period<br>(18th & 19th century) residential       | Western Ave between<br>Winthrop and Pickering<br>Streets.          |
| 6. 19th century maritime tourist<br>corridor, the Causeway            | Main Street from Martin<br>Street to South Essex.                  |

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