

MHC Reconnaissance Survey Town Report

FRANKLIN

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.



MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION

William Francis Galvin, Secretary of the Commonwealth

Chair, Massachusetts Historical Commission

220 Morrissey Blvd.

Boston, MA 02125

www.sec.state.ma.us/mhc

mhc@sec.state.ma.us / 617-727-8470

MHC RECONNAISSANCE SURVEY REPORT

Date: February 1980

Community: Franklin

I. TOPOGRAPHY

Located on rolling glacial outwash plain and adjacent hilly uplands. A few areas of rocky outcrop, especially in eastern part of town. Terrain primarily shaped by glacial outwash. Gravelly to sandy soil. Some upland ponds plus many areas of bog and swamp. Drainage by several brooks is primarily north into Charles River.

II. POLITICAL BOUNDARIES

Part of Dedham Grant, 1636. Part of Town of Wrentham, 1673. Became second (western) precinct of Wrentham, 1737. Incorporated as Town of Franklin, 1778. Northeast corner incorporated as a part of Norfolk, 1870.

III. HISTORIC OVERVIEW

Suburban industrial town on periphery of Boston-Providence axis. Junction of regional trails from west and south with suspected native sites at Uncas and Populatic Ponds. Within zone of 17th century settlement, but no permanent sites until after King Philips War. Town center formation by mid-18th century with some surviving Colonial period houses and mill sites on outlying roads. Modest industrial development during mid-19th century from straw bonnets and rail junction advantage. Town center contains wide range of Victorian structures from commercial blocks and brick factories to multiple family and suburban high-style houses with core around Dean Junior College of late 19th century. Secondary mill village at Unionville with stone factories and cottage housing of mid-19th century. Portions of agricultural landscape remain intact in fringe areas from early 20th century with examples of period summer camp at Uncas Pond. Increasing pressure of suburban development along interstate corridor from metropolitan Boston.

IV. CONTACT PERIOD (1500-1620)

A. Transportation routes:

Located on watershed between Charles and Blackstone Rivers. Primary N/S trail conjectured as Chestnut-King-Washington Streets around Franklin Center with possible branches to the Charles as Daniels-Elm Streets along Shepard's Brook and as Forest Street over Dix Brook to Plainville. Primary E/W trail from Lake Pearl (Wrentham) through Franklin Center and Unionville as East and West Central Streets around Mine Brook with probable link to Uncas Pond along axis of Uncas Brook. Other N/S trails through area seem likely, but locations undetermined.

B. Settlement Pattern:

No documented period sites reported. Unspecified sites along Shepard's Brook and Beaver Pond. Other likely areas include well-drained terraces and knolls overlooking Charles River and Populatic Pond.

C. Subsistence Pattern:

Seasonal fish runs (Populatic Pond apparently a terminus). Fresh water fishing in upland ponds. Hunting/gathering both along Charles and in uplands.

D. Observations:

Little information available. Seems like some period sites should be present. On the border between traditional Nipmuck territory (upper Charles/upland lakes) and coastal tribes -- Narragansetts to south and Wampanoags to east.

V. FIRST SETTLEMENT PERIOD (1620-1675)

A. Transportation Routes:

Primary trails from Wrentham remain as highways during mid-17th century, with King Philips War battle site at Indian Rock (Jordan Street).

B. Population:

Very slight.

C. Settlement:

No colonial occupation. Some native settlement (Wampanoag?) around Uncas Pond.

D. Economic Base:

Subsistence agriculture, hunting/gathering.

E. Observations:

Too remote, too poor in resources to merit colonial attention.

VI. COLONIAL PERIOD (1676-1776)

A. Transportation Routes:

Main highways in place from 17th century. Location of meetinghouse in Franklin Center results in radial road network by mid-18th century including Oak, Maple, Lincoln and Mill Streets to the north and Summer, Union, Washington to the south. Secondary network links with mill sites at Unionville as Pond, Grove, Forge Hill and Spring Streets, and network along Charles as Pond and Partridge Streets.

B. Population:

Gradual growth during 18th century. Estimate of 800 inhabitants by end of period.

C. Settlement:

Apparently no 17th century settlement. Brief fight during King Philip's War at Indian Rock. Scattered farms throughout town during 18th century -- little clustering of settlement. Meetinghouse built, 1741 (west of Maple Street) but no village center emerged during period. Slight development around milling areas on Central Street (west of Unionville) and along Washington Street.

D. Economic Base:

Small-scale farming and grazing (cattle and sheep), some milling along Mine Brook: Fairbank's sawmill after 1717; at least one other sawmill and a gristmill by end of period. A small ironworks also on Mine Brook, 1736.

E. Architecture:

Residential: Central-chimney one-storey cottages appear to have been the most wide-spread pre-1776 house type, although examples of this type vary widely in size and proportions; a moderate number of two-storey central chimney houses exist in the north and east/central parts of the town; little (probably no) high-style present.

Institutional: First meetinghouse built 1739-40, no description except that it possessed diamond-pane casement windows; no schoolhouses built.

Commercial: No development except taverns(?).

Industrial: Iron works, 1736; grist and saw mills.

F. Observations:

A rather marginal outlying agricultural area growing out of Wrentham during the 18th century. Little coalescence as a town during period.

VII. FEDERAL PERIOD (1775-1830)

A. Transportation Routes:

Colonial highways remain from 18th century, with no direct turnpikes. Radial roads from North Bellingham include Beech and Plan Streets.

B. Population:

Steady growth until 1820-30 when growth slowed; no large foreign-born population; no new religious congregations formed.

C. Settlement Location:

Part of growth was probably centered on the City Mills section, now part of the town of Norfolk; development around present town common and in scattered small clusters throughout the town.

D. Economic Base:

Dominant industry straw bonnets, beginning 1799, first factory, 1812. 1837 census records five cotton mills, at least one on Mine Brook at Unionville. Boot and shoe-making third in industrial growth.

E. Architecture:

Residential: As in preceding period central chimney cottages remained dominant house type, particularly east of the Common along Pleasant Street; a lesser number of two-storey central chimney houses was built; hip-roofed Federalist style houses and rear-wall chimney types of Federalist houses were built in very small numbers. High-style decorative details are few, and are restricted to entries.

Institutional: Second meetinghouse built 1789 with porches on each end; tradition states that noon houses existed in front of the meetinghouse throughout this period; first school appropriation, 1778, six schoolhouses built by 1795.

Commercial: Little building likely except at town center, possible construction of one-storey commercial buildings ca. 1810-1830.

Industrial: First straw factory established 1812; possible one-storey shoe shops built in small numbers.

VIII. EARLY INDUSTRIAL PERIOD (1830-1870)

A. Transportation Routes:

Highway system remains from early 19th century with primary rail link to Boston and Woonsocket as Norfolk Co. Railroad (1849) through Franklin Center around Magotty Hill and Mine Brook (in part abandoned).

B. Population:

Steady growth throughout period; apparent lack of change between 1865 and 1870 reflected separation of the eastern part of Franklin to be included in the new town of Norfolk; relatively small foreign-born population (approximately 10% of total population) made up mainly of Irish immigrants; new religious societies were South Franklin Congregational Society (1855), Universalist Society (1856), Catholic parish (1857), Methodist Society (1853) and Baptist Society (1868).

C. Settlement Locations:

Major focus of development at Franklin Center on side streets created by subdivision; smaller scale development at Unionville after 1839.

D. Economic Base:

Straw goods production rises steadily throughout period, the number of factories peaking at seven by about 1870. By 1865 only one cotton mill remaining in Franklin but rapid growth of woolen factories, sparked by

Frank Ray at Unionville in 1849 well under way. Ray is believed to have used the first shoddy picker in the country (according to Morse), first preparing wool shoddy to sell to others, and later making it into cloth himself.

E. Architecture:

Residential: Transition Federal-to-Greek Revival (ca. 1830-40); Greek Revival and Italianate (1850-70) were the most widespread styles, a small number of Gothic style (1860-70) and Second Empire style houses (late 1860s) were also built; for all contemporary styles, the side-hall cottage plan was the most widely built; center-entry and side-hall two-storey houses form the highest level of Greek Revival style building, while Italianate high-style is represented by several ornate villas in addition to more modest side-hall plan houses; Second Empire style is represented by a very few high-style houses and several cottages, all of which may have been built in the 1870s. In general major houses of the period were built around the Common, along Central Street and along Main Street.

Institutional: Temple-front Greek Revival style meetinghouses built 1840 (First Congregational), 1851 (remodelling of second town meetinghouse for Catholic parish) and 1856 (South Franklin); Italianate style church built 1858 (Universalist); Baptist Chapel built 1869. Temple-front town hall built 1842; private high school built 1836; public high school established 1868; number of school districts may have increased by two or three, graded school may have been established at town center in 1860s. Dean Academy established as Universalist Secondary School, 1867, main building constructed in "French Lombardic" style -- burned 1872.

Commercial: Free-standing wood-frame blocks (one and two-storey) along Main Street near railroad tracks, mostly bracketted (Italianate) with some Second Empire style (ca. 1865-75).

Industrial: Primarily two and three-storey wood-frame factories (some brick possible) with low-pitched roof and open eaves, used as straw works, cotton and shoddy mills.

IX. LATE INDUSTRIAL PERIOD (1870-1915)

A. Transportation Routes:

Highway system intact with expansion of branch line railroads to Rhode Island (1877) along Miscoe Brook (abandoned) and to Bellingham along Mine Brook through Unionville (1883). Street railway routes linked Franklin with Wrentham along East Central Street, with Milford-Bellingham and West Central Street and with Medway along Lincoln Street by early 1900s.

B. Population:

Growth of population by 250% although increases alternated with slight declines; rapid growth of foreign-born population after 1875, Irish were largest foreign-born group until the turn of the century when Italians became more numerous; Swedenborgian Society formed but not incorporated, 1873.

C. Settlement Location:

Expansion focused mainly on new side streets laid out on all sides of the town center, minor development at Unionville.

D. Economic Base:

Franklin's greatest period of industrial growth. The development of felt machinery and its early use by Ray in 1870 prompted not only the expansion of the Ray Woolen Co. (seven mills by 1884) but numerous imitators such as the Norfolk Woolen Company's mill on Grove Street (MHC Survey #35). In straw bonnet manufacture, the introduction of the hydraulic press and the sewing machine in the early '70s increased production but forced all but two firms to close or consolidate, as did Snow, Basset & Co. which as a result built the present four-storey frame factory at the end of Dean Avenue in the 1880s. A brief experiment to manufacture sugar from beets in 1879 was abandoned for lack of beets that could be economically raised. In addition to machine shops for the manufacture of woolen machinery, there were also new products, including rubber boots and "a new kind of fancy cotton goods (manufactured) with imported English machinery" by the new Franklin Cotton Mfg. Co. (granite factory at Unionville, MHC Survey #30). Three canning factories prepared local agricultural products.

E. Architecture:

Residential: Varied styles and widely varied scales of house building present at town center; astylistic and Victorian Gothic side-hall cottages built largely on streets in vicinity of railroad beds and southeast of main railroad line ca. 1870-1890; more ambitious side-hall houses and high-style examples of Victorian Gothic, Second Empire and Queen Anne styles located around Common, Central Street and eastward from Main Street. Individual, high-style examples of Beaux Arts classical and Colonial Revival exist in the foregoing locations; extremely small amount of workers' housing built at Unionville ca. 1885.

Institutional: Two architect-designed, Gothic churches built, 1871 (Congregational) and 1872-3 (Methodist); Queen Anne style church built 1895 (Congregational). Probable construction of multiple-room school buildings at center until 1906 when a brick neo-medieval school building was built (School Street). Beaux Arts/Classical style library donated to town (ca. 1900); no firehouses built by town prior to mid-1880s; Dean Academy rebuilt (1874) and enlarged (ca. 1900) in high Victorian Gothic style, brick construction.

Commercial: Solid development of two-block long strip of Main Street near railroad bed with row buildings, mixed between wood-frame and brick construction; gabled-facade structures of preceding period continued to be built to ca. 1880-90; row structures of Queen Anne, Second Empire and Beaux Arts Classical styles; two railroad depots present by 1876.

Industrial: Construction of stone and brick factories (1880s) at Unionville, brick factories at town center (1870-90) and wood-frame structures (1870-1900) in scattered locations, all generally two-four storeys with low-pitched roofs, deep open eaves and side-wall stair towers.

X. EARLY MODERN PERIOD (1915-1940)

A. Transportation Routes:

Street railway lines abandoned by 1920s with auto. highway routes along existing roads by 1930s. Main E/W Route 140 (East and West Central Streets) through Franklin Center.

B. Population:

Relatively small growth.

C. Settlement Locations:

Same as preceding period, although with some scattered building in outlying southern sections of the town.

D. Economic Base:

Strength of woolen industry in Franklin appears to have kept open many of the companies dealing in wool and felt, several surviving into the 1950s. No major new factory complexes appear to have been built, however.

E. Architecture:

Residential: High-style of period represented by Colonial Revival, Dutch Colonial and neo-medieval style houses of varied scale (ambitious to estate quality) located at the northern and eastern edges of the town center. Western and southern sections of the town center contained simple bungalows and modest two-storey houses with bungalow style details.

Institutional: Late Gothic style Catholic Church built (1920s) and late Gothic style chapel (School Street -- 1920s); new high school built 1926-27, other public school buildings at town center likely to have been built.

Commercial: One-storey brick and "cast-stone" blocks built at town center, along Main Street (ca. 1915-25).

Industrial: Little new building, astylistic additions to existing mills.

XI. SOURCES

Blake, Mortimer, A History of the Town of Franklin, Massachusetts (1879).