

MHC Reconnaissance Survey Town Report

HAWLEY

Report Date: 1982

Associated Regional Report: Connecticut Valley

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.

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MHC RECONNAISSANCE SURVEY REPORT

DATE: 1982

COMMUNITY: HAWLEY

I. TOPOGRAPHY

Hawley is an upland town located in the Berkshire Hills of western Massachusetts. The local uplands are some of the highest in the Connecticut River Valley study unit. Elevations frequently reach over 1750'. The highest point is an unnamed hill (2080') in the northwestern corner of Hawley immediately west of Hawks Mountain (1880'). Other prominent peaks include Parker Hill (2020') and a second unnamed peak (1995') situated in the Hawley State Forest near the Hawley/Plainfield line. Forge Hill (1434') contained a deposit of iron ore utilized in a local early 19th century iron production operation. The rugged terrain moderates into a series of rolling hills in southeastern Hawley. This area encompasses the town's best agricultural land. Hawley's western uplands are broken by the Chickley River which enters from Charlemont and winds through three-quarters the length of Hawley finally flowing west into Savoy. The Chickley is fed by a large number of local streams and brooks. Several small waterways are present in eastern Hawley. The largest, Clesson Brook, flows into Buckland. Drainage is good, excluding south central Hawley, the site of several moderate sized marshlands. Local freshwater bodies are restricted to two mill ponds and a mineral spring (Moody Spring) located in the Hawley State Forest between West Hawley and Parker Hill.

II. POLITICAL BOUNDARIES

Originally granted as Plantation Number 7 in 1762 with western boundary at Plantation Number 6 (Savoy). Eastern section granted as part of Hatfield Equivalent lands (1744) with southern boundary at Huntstown (Ashfield). Northern boundary defined with Charlemont in 1774 and eastern boundary with Buckland in 1779. Incorporated as town of Hawley in 1792 with southern section annexed to Plainfield in 1803 defining southwest boundary.

III. HISTORIC OVERVIEW

Rural recreational hill town with access to Mohawk Trail. Located in Hoosac highlands with possible native sites along Chickley Brook and quarries conjectured in Hawley State Forest. Settled from Deerfield valley and Ashfield before Revolution with original meetinghouse site marked at Hawley and Forget Road from late 18th century. Limited agricultural potential along Hawley Road upland with some early 19th century cottage farmsteads intact, including notable example on Bell Road to Buckland. Similar expansion along Chickley Brook from Charlemont with brick Federal farmstead on Pudding Hill Road and on West Hill Road to Savoy. Local industrial development of Chickley Brook mill sites with iron production at

Forge village, including well preserved Greek Revival church and related cottages at Forge Hill bridge, and period stone dam at Hallockville Pond. Civic activities relocated to South Hawley by mid-19th century with Greek Revival town hall and adjacent cemetery. Gradual expansion of recreational activity during early 20th century from Mohawk Trail with rustic bungalows near Charlemont line to Pudding Hollow and period summer camp at Hallockville Pond. Present growth evident as recreational housing on scenic vistas and around Hawley State Forest, although much of the area remains as isolated mountain economy.

IV. CONTACT PERIOD (1500-1620)

A. Transportation Routes:

Intermediate highland corridor from Deerfield valley to Berkshire uplands. Probable north-south trails likely followed Chickley River along West Hawley Road (Route 8A) to Kings Corner and Plainfield Ponds over highway, and along East Hawley Road to Cranberry Swamp with southwest branch to Plainfield Ponds possibly as Hallockville and South Road and south to Ashfield. Connecting trail also likely from Shelburne Falls along Clesson Brook as Buckland Road and West Hill Road to Savoy.

B. Settlement Patterns:

There are no reported native period sites. The area's moderate to rugged upland terrain and absence of a large water source suggests native occupation of Hawley was restricted to small hunting and fishing encampments. These sites most likely situated adjacent to area streams or brooks such as the Chickley River or the moderate uplands of southeastern Hawley.

C. Subsistence Patterns:

Some native horticulture may have been undertaken locally, particularly in the upper portion of the Chickley River intervalle and the previously mentioned uplands of southeastern Hawley. However, these two locations were utilized primarily as fishing and hunting sites by the native population. Additional hunting probably took place in the remainder of the town's uplands.

D. Observations:

Hawley's limited resource base was only able to support a small native population. This area was most likely utilized as a secondary hunting and fishing site by the Pocumtucks centered in present Deerfield. Native fishing and hunting was more apt to focus on the more productive Deerfield River valley in Charlemont, Buckland and Shelburne. Scattered archaeological evidence of period sites may be present in the Chickley River intervalle.

V. PLANTATION PERIOD (1620-1675)

A. Transportation Routes:

Native trails remained as regional routes to Deerfield valley from Berkshire uplands.

B. Population:

Hawley probably was occupied by small native hunting and fishing bands during the spring and winter months.

This area did not have a colonial population until c.1770.

C. Settlement Patterns:

Native settlement patterns probably were similar to those described for the preceding period. However, Hawley may have witnessed increased native use with the onset of colonial settlement in valley towns such as Deerfield and Whately, in the second half of the 17th century.

D. Economic Base:

The natives probably maintained their traditional subsistence patterns. However, the development of the Anglo-Indian fur trade in the Middle Connecticut River Valley in the 1630s likely encouraged increased native emphasis on trapping of fur-bearing animals.

E. Observations:

Hawley remained essentially a native hunting and fishing area. Serious colonial interest in the study unit's western periphery did not materialize until the early to mid 18th century when land in the more attractive Middle Connecticut River Valley had become increasingly difficult to obtain.

VI. COLONIAL PERIOD (1675-1775)

A. Transportation Routes:

Improvement of native trails from Deerfield valley with regional highways along West and East Hawley Road and connecting routes along South, Hallockville and Buckland Road.

B. Population:

There were no figures for a local native population.

At the time of the first colonial settlement of Hawley in 1771, the community consisted of four families. This figure had grown to seven families and 22 individuals in 1772. A slightly more than tenfold increase in Hawley's population occurred between 1772 and 1776. By the latter date, the town had 244 residents (Atkins 1881:37). These settlers came from a number of towns including Sunderland, Brimfield and Bozrah, Connecticut.

C. Settlement Patterns:

The colonial settlement lacked a well-defined nucleus. The first homes were established in c.1771 by four families. Between this date and 1775, settlement occurred in northeastern Hawley, in the vicinity of Pudding Hollow Road and Kings Corner. Several families from Bozrah, Connecticut established the hamlet of Bozrah near the Charlemont/Hawley border. The settlement did not erect its first meetinghouse until c.1794. Until then, local residents probably attended the Congregational Church located in Charlemont.

D. Economic Base:

Local residents focused primarily on agriculture. Good cropland was restricted to the southeastern portion of Hawley. A considerable amount of lumbering probably took place in local woodlands. None of the available sources made reference to period industrial operations. Grain and timber was probably transported to Charlemont mills where it was processed.

E. Observations:

The small population and dispersed settlement of Hawley was typical of most communities situated on the western periphery of the Connecticut River Valley study unit. The rugged terrain and limited resource base in this region made it difficult to establish economically viable and heavily populated settlements. Commercial contact with the settlement/commercial center of Deerfield was facilitated by Hawley's proximity to the Mohawk Trail, a major east-west transportation corridor that passed through Charlemont. Archaeological evidence of period settlement should survive throughout Hawley because of the town's continued rural makeup.

VII. FEDERAL PERIOD (1775-1830)

A. Transportation Routes:

Location of Hawley meetinghouse (1793) established radial highway system from town center including Forget, Hallockville and Pudding Hollow Roads. Connecting highways over highlands included East and Bell Road to Buckland, Forge Hill to West Hawley, Middle Road to Plainfield and Ashfield Road.

B. Population:

Hawley's population grew by 120.9% between 1776 and 1790 -- the fourth highest growth rate (after Colrain, Conway, and Ashfield) of any town in the county for those early years. Between 1790 and 1820, the population grew by another 102%, peaking in the latter year at 1,089 persons. In that year the town began a gradual decline which lasted 125 years. The town's overall rate of growth for the period 1790-1830 was 92.3%, the third highest of any town in the county.

C. Settlement Pattern:

Meetinghouse established civic focus at Hawley Square (1793) with upland agriculture along Forget and Hawley Road to Ashfield. Local economic focus developed on Chickley River at Forge village around iron manufacture with meetinghouse on Forge Hill Road (1825). Secondary settlement extended along Chickley River at Pudding Hollow, West Hawley and Kings Corner to Hallockville, with parallel development along Hawley Road at Bozrah and South Hawley to Ashfield.

D. Economic Base:

Predominantly agricultural economy with numerous small saw and grist mills in operation by 1830. About 1800 iron ore from Forge Hill began to be processed in a furnace (or forge?) on the Chickley River. Of the extent of the business there is little word, though Elias Goodspeed was one of the operators. The furnace was apparently in operation up to 1825 when the buildings burned. The difficulty of getting the product to market was given as the reason for its abandonment.

Woodworking shops proliferated in this period, producing, by 1832, shingles, boards, cabinetware, and broom handles for Hadley and Hatfield.

Agriculturally the soil made good grazing land with some large herds of cattle and flocks of sheep reported by the 1840s.

E. Architecture:

Residential: Approximately a dozen Federal houses have survived in Hawley. These include equal numbers of houses and cottages with both center chimney and center hall plans. Most of the period houses are located in areas at which later 19th century settlement clustered; comparatively few Federal houses were observed in isolated, discrete settings. Among the finest houses observed were an end chimney, five bay house at the Forge Hill village, a center chimney cottage on East Hawley Road and an end-chimney brick five-bay house on Pudding Hollow Road. Other period cottages were observed at West Hawley, Hawley, and on Forget Road.

Institutional: While the first church was organized, it was not until 1794 that a meetinghouse was constructed. That structure, which had dimensions of 40' x 50', was built by Joseph and Edward Longley, Thomas King, Nathan West and Hezekiah Warriner. In 1824, the first meetinghouse was replaced. Other institutional activity of the period included the organization of the West Hawley Congregational Society in 1825, with a meetinghouse built in the same year, as well as the construction of seven schools, in 1793. No institutional buildings of the period are known to survive.

Commercial: At least one tavern operated in the town in the period. That building stood at the intersection of Forget and East Hawley Roads.

VIII. EARLY INDUSTRIAL PERIOD (1830-1870)

A. Transportation Routes:

Primary highways maintained along north-south axis from Charlemont to Plainfield with improvement of connecting roads to South Hawley Center with meetinghouse relocation (1847). No railroads constructed through area.

B. Population:

As in the majority of towns in the county, Hawley's population continued to decline. Between 1830 and 1870 the town lost over a third of its population, with the greatest loss occurring in the 1850s. In 1855 Hawley had only four immigrants (including two from England).

C. Settlement Patterns:

Civic focus relocated south from Hawley Square to Hawley Center (1847) with continued upland farming along Hawley and Forget Road to Ashfield. Local mill sites remained active along Chickley River at Forge Village, West Hawley and Kings Corner with lumbering on western hill slopes.

D. Economic Base:

Town remained almost exclusively agricultural, though with a limited expansion in small woodworking shops producing broom handles and lather, cheese, and butter boxes. By 1865 the largest industry was in the production of broom handles: that year three one-man shops reported a total product value of \$2100. Four sawmills in operation that year employed another five men. Hawley reported a total Merino wool clip of 8,148 lbs. in 1837 -- fourth highest in the county that year, though the figure declined after that date.

E. Architecture:

Residential: Most of the houses in the town appear to date from the Early Industrial period. These comprise some two dozen houses and cottages with center hall and sidehall plan examples predominating. Most houses exhibit Greek Revival styling, although a few houses with Italianate details were observed. Few clusters of houses developed although areas of relatively solidly settled linear development were common, especially along East and West Hawley Roads and at Pudding Hollow. Center hall cottages with double or end interior chimneys are probably the most common house form of the period. Both five bay wide and four bay wide, center entrance examples are known. Also common was the use of a plan with four bay by three bay dimensions and gable front center entrance orientation. Such cottages, which generally incorporate end gable fenestration similar to that of Cape Cod cottages, were built in some numbers to the south of Heath in Plainfield and Worthington. Examples of the form were observed in Heath on Middle, Pudding Hollow and Hawley Roads. Sidehall plan Greek Revival cottages and houses were built at Kings Corner, West Hawley and the Forge Hill Village. Also built in those areas were a few L-plan Italianate houses of ca.1855. Of note are Greek Revival and Italianate double chimney houses on West Hawley and Middle Roads and an Italianate sidehall plan house at Hawley Center with an elaborate roundarch entrance surround.

Institutional: Most of the town's extant institutional buildings date from the period. Foremost among these are the West Hawley Congregational Church (1847), the Hawley Congregational Church (1847) and the Pudding Hollow schoolhouse (ca.1840). All are Greek Revival structures. The West Hawley church, a one-and-a-half story, double entrance structure with pilasters and a square steeple, forms the focus of a very well-preserved period village on West Hawley Road at the base of Forge Hill. The one-and-a-half story Hawley Center church, with a center entrance and square belfry,

stands on a new meetinghouse site, approximately a half mile south of the two previous meetinghouses. The steeple, which originally topped the belfry, blew down in 1917. Of special note is the one-story, two bay side entered Pudding Hollow School (ca.1840). The school, which stands at the intersection of Middle and Pudding Hollow Roads, is remarkable for its apparently intact state of preservation. While the East Hawley Road school probably survives, it was not specifically identified in the field; no other schools of any period are known extant in the town.

Commercial: Two taverns, the Joy Tavern at South Hawley (1830-1843) and the Ezra Williams Tavern (ca.1850), are the only commercial enterprises recorded for the period. These may survive but were not identified in the field.

IX. LATE INDUSTRIAL PERIOD (1870-1915)

A. Transportation Routes

East Hawley and West Hawley Road (Route 8A) maintained as local regional highways with abandonment of east-west roads over highlands (Hawley State Forest).

B. Population:

Like the majority of towns in the county, Hawley's population continued to decline. Between 1870 and 1915 the town lost another third of its population, though slight gains were made in 1880 and 1905. In the latter year the town reported 92 immigrants of various nationalities (an unusually high 20.5%), with the largest group (55%) being French Canadians.

C. Settlement Pattern:

Local civic focus maintained at Hawley Center with surrounding upland agriculture along Hawley Road to Ashfield. Gradual decline of economic activity along Chickley River at Forge village, West Hawley and Kings Corner.

D. Economic Base:

By 1875 there were 8 saw or woodworking mills with a total product value of \$4570 -- nearly 70% of the total value of manufactured goods in Hawley that year. After Sunderland, Monroe, and Leyden, Hawley had the fourth smallest manufactured product value of any town in the county. By 1890 the number of woodworking mills had declined even further, with only three sawmills reported.

E. Architecture:

Very little construction of any kind took place in the period. Most of the houses observed (less than a dozen examples) were very simple vernacular cottages with gable roofs and L plan or traditional four

or five bay long, rectilinear plans. Examples of these types were observed on East and West Hawley Roads. After the turn of the century, some shingled rustic summer cottages with gable and hip roofs were built on Hawley Road. Eight schools stood in the town in 1877.

X. EARLY MODERN PERIOD (1915-1940)

A. Transportation Routes:

Improvement of local roads as regional auto highways with West Hawley Road as primary route from Charlemont (now Route 8A).

B. Population:

Hawley's population continued to decline until 1945, reaching its nadir of 203 in that year. The net loss for the period 1915-40 amounted to nearly 40% of the 1915 count.

C. Settlement Pattern:

Hawley Center remained as local civic focus with development of recreational activity from Charlemont along West Hawley Road to Pudding Hollow and around Hallockville Pond (K of C Camp).

D. Economic Base:

No new industries identified, though woodworking industry continued by F. Deane Carter in West Hawley. In 1927 he began producing small wooden 'buttons' or 'plugs' used railroad signal fuses, turning out about 24,000 gross of the inch-long wooden pieces annually.

E. Architecture:

The only buildings of the period observed were a group of one-story shingled structures with gable roofs and long rectangular configuration. Possibly built as a fair or campground, they appear to date ca.1940.

XI. SURVEY OBSERVATIONS

General: Hawley has no inventory to date. Future inventory should include structures at the town's two primary villages, Hawley and West Hawley, as well as along major roads: West Hawley, East Hawley, Middle, Pudding Hollow and Forget. Of particular note is the well-preserved quality of housing and agricultural landscape along Pudding Hollow Road and the intact survival of the 19th century meetinghouse village at Forge Hill.

XII. SOURCES

Atkins, William Giles, History of the Town of Hawley, Franklin County, Massachusetts from its First Settlements in 1771 to 1887 (West Cummington, 1887).

Johnson, Louise Hall, History of the Town of Hawley, Franklin County, Massachusetts, 1771-1951, with Genealogies (Mystic, CT, 1953).

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