

# MHC Reconnaissance Survey Town Report

## HINGHAM

Report Date: 1979

**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:

Community: Hingham

### I. TOPOGRAPHY

Located on coastal plain and adjacent uplands. Glacial outwash features (drumlins and kame terraces) dominate the coastal lowlands. Sandy/gravelly but fertile soil especially in northern half. A well-protected though shallow harbor. Southern sections are rocky and more irregular upland terrain. Drainage is north into Mass. Bay (Hingham Bay); Weir River is prominent feature with some drainage into Weymouth Back River on west. Few natural ponds - Accord Pond the only large natural fresh water body. Several areas of inter-tidal and freshwater marsh on coastal lowlands, while large areas of bog and swamp occur in uplands.

### II. POLITICAL BOUNDARIES

Original boundaries include Weymouth line (1636) on west and Old Colony Line (1640) to south. First settlement called Bare Cove, 1633. Incorporated as town of Hingham, 1635. Cohasset became Second Precinct, 1717; remainder of Hingham became First Precinct, 1721. Cohasset incorporated separately, 1771; South Hingham became Second Precinct of Hingham.

### III. HISTORIC OVERVIEW

Affluent metropolitan Boston suburb with extraordinarily rich array of historic sites and structures. Coastal location on axis of major route-ways to South Shore with several documented Woodland sites around harbor and interior river valley (Accord Pond). Important 17th century settlement of early date with direct English transfer with valuable remains of forts from King Philip's War, nationally historic meetinghouse and several First Period houses, all of which need professional documentation for 17th century dates. Town center and Main Street contain finest range of Colonial and Federal architecture in southern metropolitan area, many with advanced high style period details, in addition to numerous examples of regional Cape cottage plan and several suspected period barns and out-buildings. Typical 19th century industrial activity with numerous mills and craft shops, in addition to fishing activity in harbor. Hingham Center retains nearly complete array of commercial fabric, including railroad depot and bank. Increasing development of resort economy with numerous suburban estates of late 19th century, including World's End by Olmstead. Linked to Boston by turnpikes, railroads, trolleys and autohighways by 20th century with location of U.S. Navy complex during Second World War with impressive industrial structures.

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

#### A. Transportation Routes:

On axis of two major trail systems. One along the coastal route around the southern edge of Massachusetts Bay, conjectured to follow Fort Hill, South, Main East and Hull Sts. from Weymouth Back River around Hingham Harbor to Wier River at Hull. The second the main interior trail from

Massachusetts Bay to North River and Plymouth south-east apparently along the axis of Whiting St. (Route 53) along the Plymouth River around Penniman Hill to Accord Pond although no present evidence of its location is recorded. A secondary trail linking Hingham Harbor with Accord Pond is postulated along the Wier River valley, portions of which might well follow the present course of Union and Lazell Sts to Liberty Plain. In addition Ward St. appears to follow the location of a trail from Bear Swamp to Plymouth River.

B. Settlement Pattern:

Only a few sites reported with documented Woodland occupation. Preferred locations are well-drained glacial outwash features along coast and in Weir River valley as well as on islands.

C. Subsistence Pattern:

Environmental diversity sufficient to support a sizable population. Extensive clamming flats, excellent fishing potential in Weir (note the name) River, uplands for hunting, good agricultural land - all the components for a late Woodland economy. Easily accessible coast makes this a likely area for both proto-historic native sites and transient European fishing/trading/ exploration settlements.

D. Observations:

While little has been reported, should be an area with extensive period occupation. Town history notes native materials found in "several locations" and mentions period burials along shore at Downer Landing, Planter's Hill, harbor islands and along Weir River outlet (History of Hingham, Vol. 1, Part 2, p. 355). Site potential should be considered very high.

V. FIRST SETTLEMENT PERIOD (1620 - 1675)

A. Transportation Routes:

Basic highway system followed existing native trails, along the coast from Weymouth to Hull as Fort Hill, South, Main, East and Hull Sts, and to Plymouth from Weymouth from Accord Pond north-west along the present axis of Route 53 along the Plymouth River. The settlement of Hingham town center (1635 - 1636) formalized the location of house lots along South, North, Lincoln and Main Sts around Mill Brook. Secondary divisions along the Wier River to Accord pond seem likely by the mid-17th century with Main St as the primary link between Hingham Center and the Plymouth Way (Accord Pond). A series of divisioned highways from Main St is also conjectured for the mid-17th century evident in the locations of Pleasant, High, Free, Prospect and Scotland Sts. In addition it appears likely that local highways were laid out around Hingham Harbor in the 17th century, notably Summer St and Martin's Lane to World's End and Downer Ave to Crow Point.

B. Population:

About 200 people emigrated from vicinity of Hingham, East Anglia between 1633 - 1639. Gradual steady growth throughout period.

C. Settlement:

Primary settlement along Bare Cove and west along North St. An organized, nuclear village with drawn or assigned houselots. Settlement extended NW to Broad Cove (Lincoln St.), SW along North and South Sts., and SE on Main St. First meeting house built, 1635 (site destroyed, 1831) on Main St, near Derby Academy. First school built, 1661, near meeting house. Major area of settlement bracketed by three "forts" built 1675: on Fort Hill, in Hingham Center, and behind meeting house. Secondary loci of settlement: south on Main St at Hingham Center (Lower Plain); between Summer and Hull Sts., area known as "Rocky Nook." Scattered farms along coast and south of Hingham Center towards Liberty Plain. Ungranted lands surveyed into three "divisions," 1670.

D. Economics Base:

Despite coastal location, an inland-oriented economy. Primary emphasis on farming and grazing, many orchards as well. Dairying and tanning are related enterprises. Foodstuffs and leather exported to Boston. Lumbering was other major business. Products for export included framing timber, board, some masts. Cooperage (both wet and dry) was a major cottage industry. Some shipbuilding - Thomas Turner, 1637, Gase Point. Both grist and sawmills from an early date: Anthony Eames (1643), Thomas Jay (1653) - both located in village near cove. Very little commercial fishing.

E. Architecture:

No structures of this period are believed to remain (Cummings - Framed Houses of Mass. Bay, p. 105); however, local tradition attributes pre-1675 construction dates to several houses; the relatively large size of Hingham and its freedom from destruction during King Philip's War make it more likely than in neighboring towns that portions of pre-1675 buildings may remain in heavily altered states or that materials from pre-1675 buildings have been re-used in the construction of existing buildings as in the case of the Enoch Whiton House, 1083 Main St (Cummings, p.179).

F. Observations:

A tightly organized and cohesive town, in large part due to common East Anglian ancestry of most inhabitants. Carry-over of many East Anglian traits: preference for nuclear settlement; emphasis of agriculture and cottage industry rather than maritime occupations. Probably the most prosperous and prominent of the South Shore Mass. Bay towns.

VI. COLONIAL PERIOD (1675 - 1775)

A. Transportation Routes:

Existing highways from the First Period remained as primary network, including coastal road from Fort Hill-South-North-Main-East and Hull Sts., with Main St to Accord Pond (Route 228) and East St to Weymouth. Secondary roads to fringe uplands and mill sites were established by the early 18th century, including the network around Triphammer Pond (Leavitt St) and Turkey Hill, and cross streets such as Hobart, Hersey New Bridge, Wier and Gardner Sts.

B. Population:

2,506 inhabitants in 1765 (including Cohasset). Steady growth during period. Some settlers from Scituate settle southern sections of town.

C. Settlement:

Only minor raids during King Philip's War - some farms burned in Liberty Plain and adjacent area. Little disruption otherwise. Gradual expansion of village, especially NW towards Broad Cove (Lincoln St) and south towards Hingham Center. Secondary meeting house built, 1681. Steady development inland along Main St post King Philip's War; mills serve as catalyst. Settlement loci include: South Hingham (Glad Tidings or Great Plain) - Focal point for development in southern part of town - meeting house built, 1742, school built 1752; Liberty Plain - primarily an agricultural area; Queen Anne's Corner - an undated sawmill at Accord Brook outlet. Scattered farms along coastal plain, especially east towards Cohasset and in Weir valley (Cushing farm, 1690). Three additional land divisions (# 4 - 6) made during 1740s.

D. Economic Base:

Continued emphasis on agriculture and grazing, along with dairying and tanning as related specialties. Lumber remained major industry with increase in milling: by 1692, John Jacob's mill, Crooked Brook river (Cushing Pond), by 1700, John Jacob's mill, Crooked Brook river (Cushing Pond), by 1700, Mathew Cushing's mill, Triphammer Pond (called Saw Mill Pond). Products were framing lumber, boards, clapboards and shingles. Cooperage, wet and dry, was dominant cottage industry - barrels for export; boxes, tubs and "Hingham buckets" for local and regional use. Gradual increase in maritime-related occupations. Several small shipyards throughout period, mainly along Town Cove. Ship timber and masts produced locally. After 1750, some commercial fishing.

E. Architecture:

Examples of the period vary widely in scale and details. The most common house-types are vernacular examples of central chimney Cape Cod cottages (some with gambrel roofs) and central chimney houses. Less common, but still notable, are a number of twin-chimney houses and some central chimney hip roofed houses. Many of the decorative details may date from the late 18th century, it is possible that some of the stylish decorative trim pre-dates 1775, especially as Hingham was in close contact to Boston.

According to Cummings (p. 105) only four or five houses are documented or likely to date from 1675 - 1700; however, this estimate is likely to be very conservative, referring to buildings which retain important features of their original appearances and some documentary evidence. Shortly after the end of the Colonial Period (in 1790), the U.S. Census recorded 337 houses standing in Hingham; a cursory survey of the town suggests that the majority of these buildings still stand.

In addition to vernacular building, a small body of ambitious/high style architecture exists; the most elaborate is at the corner of Main and

South Pleasant St - MHC - Hingham Form #1708). By the end of the period, at least one other house (Lincoln House - NHL) had been remodelled with a seven opening facade, miming the form of the house at Main and South Pleasant Street.

With the exception of several tavern buildings (which are essentially domestic in scale and plan) no known commercial buildings remain; likewise, no mills of the period are known to survive although several of the mill sites in the southern portion of the town are located on undeveloped land.

The most noted example of the period - The Old Ship Meetinghouse - is believed to be the only extant meetinghouse of the 17th century in New England. Overshadowed by the Old Ship Meetinghouse is a second meetinghouse (Old South Meetinghouse, Main Street), built ca. 1742, remodelled 1793, 1829-30, and 1869.

#### F. Observations:

While retaining many East Anglian characteristics (enclosed farms, emphasis on trade skill, i.e., cooperage), a gradual shift towards a more maritime orientation. With good geographical location, resources and access to markets, the dominant economic (and probably social) community of the southern Mass. Bay area.

### VII. FEDERAL PERIOD (1775 - 1830)

#### A. Transportation Routes:

Basic pattern from Colonial Period remained as highway system. Turnpikes extended from Boston along historic axes, along the coastal route from Weymouth as Lincoln St (Route 3A) (1812) and along the interior route to Plymouth as Whiting St (Route 53) (1803). Connecting links of the period include Beal St from the Hingham Turnpike and East St to Cohasset. Steamboat service to Boston from Hingham Harbor (1820) established commuter links.

#### B. Population:

Following a brief drop from 2,467 (in 1765) to 2,087 (in 1776) Hingham's population remained steady to ca. 1800 - 1810 after which it grew by 1,000 between 1810 and 1830; the growth that occurred during this 20-year period (1810 - 1830) was the most rapid expansion the town experienced until the suburban growth of ca. 1910 - 1930; no significant foreign-born population existed throughout the Federal Period; religious diversity began with establishment of new congregations; Methodist (1818), Baptist (1806-07), Universalist (1823).

#### C. Settlement:

For the most part, growth centered on existing settlement areas, which contained ample space for new construction due to their linear plans; major clusters existed along North and South Streets, Fort Hill Street south of the harbor on the north end of Main Street, and along Hull Street. Elsewhere, clusters existed at Cole Corner (Lower Plain,

1857 - junction of Main and Pleasant Streets), Main Street around Hobart Street, Main Street between High and South Pleasant Streets and Main Street around Gardiner Street.

D. Economic Base:

The fishing industry for mackerel and cord reached peak at end of this period and during it spawned variety of early industrial by-products including a copper and brass foundry (for ship hardware), ship chandelry, pump and block factory, and a variety of shipbuilding interests. Nathaniel Wyeth showed early interest in preserving food by creation along shoreline of extensive salt works, whose product was entirely consumed in packing fish for market. By 1794 cordage was a product of the town, one of the few industries of this period to survive well into the latter half of the 19th century.

The manufacture of umbrellas and parasols was undertaken around 1818, possibly related to availability of linseed oil. No known industrial structures from this period survive.

Commercial ventures of the period include a fire insurance company (1826), a newspaper (1827) and two banks (1833 and 1834).

E. Architecture:

Residential: As in the preceding period, domestic architecture includes a variety of vernacular central chimney cottages and houses and high-style examples. In addition to the house-types of the preceding period, a number of double houses appear to have been built ca. 1780 - 1820; in general, these houses consist of a full house (five windows), to which a half-house (three windows) has been added; in some cases these additions may have housed commercial activity.

Especially noteworthy are the large number of fine entry surrounds which remain throughout the town. The most formal examples of the type, derived from English pattern books, consists of a rusticated surround (with a flat arch over the door), fluted pilasters, and a modillanced cornice. Later in the period, fanlighted entries appear to have gained in popularity over the preceding late Georgian type.

More ambitious and high-style houses of the period are often hip-roofed Federalist-style houses with symmetrical facades and brick end walls; many are decorated with characteristic Federalist mouldings and, occasionally with Palladian windows. None are known to be architect-designed, although several may have been.

Institutional: Of the four churches built and one remodeled during this period, at least two remain, one of which has been attributed to Charles Bulfinch, architect (MHC - Survey). These buildings preserve a popular Federalist design with their projecting central pavilions, triple entries and low bell-towers. One private school-building remains (Derby Academy, Main Street, ca. 1818). While public school houses of the period probably remain, all have been converted to other uses; for a detailed description of these early school houses and their subsequent remodellings, see History of Hingham (1893), Vol. I, Part 2, pp. 103-109.

Commercial: While no large-scale commercial district developed during this period, there appear to be some former commercial buildings along North Street near Hingham Harbor, in addition to one two-unit row structure on South Street (MHC Survey). At the rear of some house lots are small one-storey workshops, some of which may pre-date 1830.

Industrial: No known buildings extant.

## VIII. EARLY INDUSTRIAL (1830 - 1870)

### A. Transportation Routes:

Existing highway network remained from early 19th century. Cross links around Hingham Center include Centrals Thaxter and Water Sts with Cushing St laid out to Fimville around Liberty Plain. Railroad from Boston follows coastal corridor from Weymouth to Cohasset through Hingham Center along Mill Brook (1849), now abandoned roadbed.

### B. Population:

Growth was steady from 1830 - 1860; a brief decline occurred between 1860 - 65, but was made up by 1870; a large portion of the population increase (approx. 60% in 1855) came from immigration in which the Irish were by far the largest group; Catholic congregation present by 1850, but no church established until 1870 - 76.

### C. Settlement Location:

New building focused on existing centers; resort development began at end of period, see late Industrial Period for details.

### D. Economic Base:

Many industries of this period iron-based; factories include foundries (Eagle Iron Foundry), and factories for production of nails (Weymouth Iron Co.), hammers, edge tools, ploughs, guns, and scales and balances. Both the Charles Whiting Axe and the ploughs produced by Charles Howard were nationally known. The industrial base also included woolen and silk production (1840s, result of State Bounty) and a woolen factory, possibly from this period, survives, still selling woolen sweaters, at the corner of North and South Streets.

The 18th century carpenter-production of the "Hingham bucket" became a full-fledged industry in South Hingham (C. A. Wilder) and the Hingham Cordage Company absorbed the hand-operated rope-walk of the Federal period.

Both the boat and shoe industry and the manufacturers of upholstery trimmings (fringes and tassels) produced a substantial portion of town's industrial product.

Industrial employment reached a peak around 1855 - 1875. Cod and mackerel fishing peaked in 1855 (cash value) although the number of men and vessels employed had reached a peak in 1837. Fishing virtually had ceased by 1875 - 1885.



E. Architecture:

Residential: Very little new building seems to have occurred during this period. Some side-hall cottages exist with Greek Revival, Italianate and (more rare) Gothic Revival details; side-hall houses in different styles exist in scattered locations; however, few high-style examples are evident. At the Lower Plain (junction Main and Pleasant Streets) are several well-preserved Italianate and Victorian Gothic-style houses. Other examples may exist but are unlikely to be numerous.

Institutional: Institutional buildings of this period included several halls and churches which were designed by major Boston architects; among these were Loring Hall (a Lyceum), and Italianate-style building by Annie B. Young (1851) and the Hingham Public Library, reputed to be one of the first Second Empire style buildings in this area, designed by N. J. Bradlee (1869 - burned 1879). In addition, there remains an Italianate-style church at the Lower Plain (junction Main and Pleasant Streets). Also carried out at this time was the landscaping of the Hingham Cemetery.

Commercial: As early as 1832 a resort hotel was built near the steam-boat landing for tourists; however, no hotel buildings remain. The major extant commercial building of the period is a wood-frame Italianate-style block (Main Street between Elm and South Streets) which remains substantially intact.

Industrial: Few if any buildings extant (see D. Economic Base); some one-room, one-story workshops remain at the rear of house lots around Hingham Center.

IX. LATE INDUSTRIAL PERIOD (1870 - 1915)

A. Transportation Routes:

Road and railroad system remained from mid-19th century. Street railway routes extended from Weymouth (Boston) to Nantasket along coastal roads, Lincoln, Fort Hill and North Sts to Hingham Center, connecting to Summer and Rockland Sts to Hull and Main St (Route 228) to Rockland in 1890s. Electric railroad to Nantasket Beach branched along Wier River (1895), now abandoned roadbed.

B. Population:

Population remained in 4,375 - 4,800 range from 1870 - 1905 after which a slow steady increase began; foreign-born population increased throughout period reaching 1,041 (20% of total population) by 1915, Irish remain largest foreign-born group, but decline in number as Italians increase.

C. Settlement Location:

Major new building occurred southwest of Hingham Harbor along Hersey and Elm Streets; Crow Point was subdivided into summer cottage lots in 1870-71 and was developed throughout the period; estates were built along Martin's Lane, north of Rockland Street and individual estates were developed on Squirrel, Bradley and Great Hills.

D. Economic Base:

The Hingham industrial economy appears to have peaked about 1875. By the end of the century, few of the town's 19th century industries remained. The town was essentially isolated and the town's complexion became increasingly residential. Hingham Water Co., 1879.

E. Architecture:

Residential: Relatively little was built until the end of the period when bungalows and modest two-story houses began to be built in scattered locations throughout the town. In the early part of the period (1870s) a number of fanciful Victorian Gothic summer cottages were built on the west side of Hingham Harbor (Downer Avenue and Otis Street) of which several remain in excellent condition. Subsequently, larger scale, architect-designed houses (Queen Anne, neo-Tudor and other late Victorian styles) were built as the foci of estates particularly in the northwest section of Hingham. Related move to town life than to summer use of the coast; development around Hingham Center was more modest, although the more substantial (probably architect-designed) examples of Second Empire, Queen Anne and Federalist Revival styles tended to be built along the north part of Main Street and along Main Street north of Hingham Center. Architects known to have designed houses during this period include Peabody & Stearns (1890 - demolished); Longfellow, Alden & Harlow (1892) and Oscar Thayer (1917).

Institutional: For information regarding school buildings, see History of Hingham (1893), Vol. I, Part 2, pp. 103-109, which describes all the town's schoolhouses up to 1893. Major institutional buildings include several high-style, architect-designed examples of the Queen Anne style, i.e., a town library by Carl Fehmer (1879), an Episcopal church by E. A. P. Newcomb (1881) and a cemetery chapel (1886) by J. Sumner Fowler. Other institutional buildings include simple examples of Victorian Gothic (Catholic church - 1870, P. C. Kelley, architect) and a simple Classical Revival town hall (ca. 1910-15).

Commercial: Limited building of blocks and storefronts along North and Main Street; proposed neo-Tudor Block (James T. Kelley, architect, 1903) probably not built; Old Colony House hotel (Bradlee & Winslow - 1881) destroyed.

Industrial: No significant remains.

X. MODERN PERIOD (1915 - 1940)

A. Transportation Routes:

Electric railway service abandoned in 1920s, replaced by autohighway roads in 1930s following historic corridors, along coastal route to Hull and Scituate around Hingham Center as Route 3A (Lincoln, Otis, Summer and Cushing Way) with branches to Nantasket as Washington Highway and Rockland St (former 128). Main interior route to Plymouth expanded as autohighway Route 128 along Derby and Whiting Sts around Accord Pond and up axis of Main St. Airport (1930s) built at Hewitts Cove, now site of former U.S. Navy depot.

B. Population:

Population growth began in 1915-20 and remained steady until 1940 when it became a much more rapid increase. Between 1945 and 1965 growth was especially rapid; after 1965 population growth slowed slightly.

C. Settlement Location:

Initial growth (1915-1930) focused on existing centers; subsequent growth occurred on subdivision scattered throughout town, but in greater concentrations near waterfront areas and near the former Naval Shipyard.

D. Economic Base:

Major event of period appears to have been establishment of Naval shops at the beginning of World War II, and which is still, adaptively used, a major industrial center for the town.

E. Architecture:

Residential: Modest to large-scale houses built; bungalow and eclectic styles popular early in period, Colonial Revival and restoration became increasingly dominant later in period and up to present.

Institutional: Largest number of buildings are town-related; schools, etc.; varying contemporary styles. Major development was U.S. Naval Shipyard (1930s and 1940s) which contains a large number of large metal frame buildings, now adapted piecemeal to other uses. Also built was a carillon (1926 - W. R. Greeley, architect) near the Old Ship Meetinghouse.

Commercial: Small-scale building of one-story rows in existing center (1920s); limited strip development along Route 3A and at junction of Main and Whiting Streets.

Industrial: Shipyard; see Institutional above.

XI. SOURCES

History of the Town of Hingham (1893),  
3 volumes.

Foley, Mason A., Hingham, Old and New (1935).

Hartwell, George, Hingham's Colonial Industry (1954).