

MHC Reconnaissance Survey Town Report

HOLLISTON

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.



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MHC RECONNAISSANCE SURVEY REPORT

Date: February 1980

Community: Holliston

I. TOPOGRAPHY

Located on rolling, occasionally rugged upland terrain. Several areas of exposed bedrock. Strong evidence of glacial reworking -- a definite N/S grain to landscape, many glacial outwash features. A rocky, gravelly soil. Several streams cut through uplands, basically in a southerly direction, into Charles. Some ponds, notably Lake Winthrop. Large areas of upland cedar bog and swamp between elevations.

II. POLITICAL BOUNDARIES

Area initially composed of individual land grants, 1659-1670. Part of Town of Sherborn, 1674. Incorporated as Town of Holliston, 1724.

III. HISTORIC OVERVIEW

Outlying suburban town of metropolitan Boston located on intermediate highlands between Charles and Sudbury Rivers. Set on main axis of native trails to southwest interior with village sites reported at Lake Winthrop for Contact period. Zone of early English settlement during 17th century with agricultural economy and formation of town center by mid-18th century. Development of local craft industries of shoes and straw bonnets with railroad connection during mid-19th century creates pre-urban village with variety of suburban housing forms and well-preserved examples of high-style brick and stone period houses. Restricted economic growth by early 20th century offset by increasing development of suburban landscape along main highways.

IV. CONTACT PERIOD (1500-1620)

A. Transportation Routes:

Intermediate highland between Charles and Sudbury Rivers. Principal trails follow SW direction to interior with documented trail from Sherborn around Bogastow Brook to Lake Winthrop (native site) around Bullard-Central Streets and Strawberry Hill portions apparently still intact (Morse, p. 273). Alternate route from Sherborn presumed to follow Whitney-Washington Streets to base of Mt. Hollis (Route 16) with loop to Lake Winthrop and continue as Washington Street to Braggville (route 16). Conjectured branch around Mt. Hollis and Chicken Brook followed axis of Hollis-Prentice Streets. It is also likely that a N/S trail linked with Sudbury River along Jar Brook, but location is uncertain.

B. Settlement Pattern:

Some sites with probable period occupation. A major multi-component site (called Mucksquit) on SW sided Lake Winthrop (Wennakeening), both Woodland and contact material reported. Other sites also noted around lake. Area between Fiske and Central Streets along Dopping Brook also reported to contain period sites (called chabboquasett).

C. Subsistence Pattern:

Variety of resources available -- fresh water fishing in Lake Winthrop, anadromous fish in Charles, upland and marshland hunting/gathering, adequate agricultural land. Cleared fields reported along Dopping Brook by early settlers.

D. Observations:

Though evidence is patchy, an apparent area of semi-permanent native settlement, possibly the 'core area' for a Wipmuck group which ranged through the area between the upper Charles and upper Sudbury.

V.

FIRST SETTLEMENT PERIOD (1620-1675)

A. Transportation Routes:

Native trails extended as highways by mid-17th century, notably route to Mendon around Bogastow Brook to Lake Winthrop used by Eliot for praying towns in 1650s, and trail around Mt. Hollis (Route 16). New Grant roads from Medway (1660) set around Lake Winthrop.

B. Population:

Very small, perhaps two or three inhabitants.

C. Settlement:

After 1660 single dwellings on Mt. Hollis (Jasper Adams) and off Central Street above Dipping Brook (William Hefffield?).

D. Economic Base:

Limited agriculture and grazing (sheep).

E. Observations:

More wilderness than frontier, some inroads from Sherborn and Medfield. Too exposed for much development to occur.

VI.

COLONIAL PERIOD (1675-1775)

A. Transportation Routes:

Trails remain from mid-17th century with shift of main highway along Washington Street (Route 16) through Holliston center by 1680s. Location of meetinghouse by early 18th century prompts radial roads from Holliston center as Concord-Ashland-Highland and Winter Streets to north and Norfolk and Fisk Streets to south. Western roads around Cedar Swamp by mid-18th century include Gorwin Drive over Miller Hill (portions abandoned) and Adams-Marshall Streets.

B. Population:

Steady growth after first decade of 18th century. By 1728 estimate

of 150 inhabitants and 30 farms. By 1753, approximately 400 inhabitants (53 dead in Great Sickness). Census of 1765 listed 705 inhabitants in 115 families and 103 houses.

C. Settlement:

After King Philip's War, gradual settlement throughout eastern part of town, especially along Washington Street and Jar Brook. Village center emerged on Washington Street between Mt. Hollis and Bogastow Brook. Meetinghouse built and cemetery laid out, 1725-31. First schools built, 1738 -- one in village center, another for western part of town (South and Washington Streets). At least two taverns in village center by mid-18th century. Small farms throughout town by end of period.

D. Economic Base:

Agriculture and grazing, particularly sheep. Processing of wool a cottage industry. Some lumbering, especially for cedar. Considerable milling: grist and sawmill at Jar Brook/Bogastow Brook, after 1680; at least two additional mills on Jar Brook after 1720; sawmill on Chicken Brook, 1724; an ironworks, 1747 on Beaver Brook(?). Several taverns on Washington Street by mid-18th century, both in village and outside.

E. Architecture:

Residential: High-style houses (if any were built) would be likely to exist in the vicinity of Washington Street, although none are apparent; vernacular building appears to have been dominated by the use of the two-story, twin (interior) chimney house-plan followed by a slightly smaller number of central chimney, two-storey houses; a small number of central chimney Cape Cod cottages may also have been built although few are evident.

Institutional: Meetinghouse built 1724-25; three schoolhouses built 1738 for three school districts; no other institutional buildings recorded.

Commercial: No specialized commercial structures likely to have been built with possible exception of taverns along Washington Street.

Industrial: Grist and saw mills only.

F. Observations:

Gradual transformation from a routh, outlying frontier community to a prosperous rural town. Combination of good resources and access (Washington Street) allowed community to develop.

VII.

FEDERAL PERIOD (1775-1830)

A. Transportation Routes:

Highways remain in place from 18th century with main road through town center to Boston as Washington Street (Route 16).

B. Population:

Population declined 1775-1800; rose after 1800, rapid rise began after 1820; no new religious societies formed.

C. Settlement Location:

Primarily linear development along Washington Street with small clusters at Braggville, Metcalf, Holliston Center and East Holliston.

D. Economic Base:

Boot and shoe manufacture as cottage industry by 1793 -- initiated by Ariel Bragg at Braggville; elsewhere soon after. Cottage industry in straw braid and bonnets initiated by Leland in 1815. Small thread mill on Winthrop Brook (Linden Street).

E. Architecture:

Residential: Vernacular forms of preceding period probably continued to be built to 1800-1810; wide variety of Federalist style two-storey house plans employed, including end-wall chimney and rear-wall chimney plans with and without hip roofs; also present are a moderate number of high-style examples, generally with four room plans and end wall chimneys. A moderate number of central chimney cottages also exist. All levels of house building contain pattern-book decorative details, especially entries with semi-circular transoms and ornately leaded glass.

Institutional: New Federalist style meetinghouse built 1823; eight school districts established 1801; first town hall built 1825.

Commercial: No construction recorded, although small scale building of stores (possibly as parts of houses) and taverns/inns likely.

Industrial: Shoe-maker's workshops built after 1793; first manufacturing mill built 1814 (thread mill) -- appearance uncertain.

VIII. EARLY INDUSTRIAL PERIOD (1830-1870)

A. Transportation Routes:

Highways remain from early 19th century. Branch railroad from Framingham to Milford (1848) around Holliston center to Braggville with stone viaduct over Bogastow Brook at East Holliston.

B. Population:

Rapid growth to 1860, after which population declined slightly; moderately large foreign-born population (primarily Irish) present by ca. 1845-55; new religious societies formed including Methodist (1831), Universalist (1836), Baptist (1860), Episcopal (1864) and Catholic (pre-1870).

C. Settlement Location:

Continued linear development along Washington Street, particularly between Metcalf and East Holliston; side streets developed at Holliston Center marked by slight social segregation with cottage districts east of Washington Street (in the vicinity of railroad bed) and wealthier districts along Washington Street and, to a lesser extent, on hillside sites northwest of Washington Street.

D. Economic Base:

East Holliston developed rapidly as small industrial center including sawmill, forge and auger factory, small cotton mill, and in 1837, Houghton & Joslyn, manufacturer of copper pumps. Its successor (after 1851), South Wilder & Co. shipped hand pumps all over the world, surviving until after World War II. Value of straw and leather goods produced continued to rise. The town's single straw factory, erected in 1862, by 1865 produced \$100,000 worth of straw goods manufactured now from imported Chinese braid. The first large shoe factory is not believed to have been erected until 1879 (Rees).

E. Architecture:

Residential: Wide variety present both in the scale and styles of houses built during this period. Greek Revival style represented by temple front houses and cottages as well as by side hall houses, although the largest number of examples of the style are side-hall cottages; a small number of carpenter Gothic cottages and houses (ca. 1840-60) exists; exceptional examples of Italianate villas exist of which the most high-style have "L" plans and low hip roofs, other examples include a small number of center-entrance and side-hall houses; the largest number of Italianate style houses are simple side-hall cottages. Little Second Empire architecture exists. An unusually large number of houses retain original fences (iron and wood), granite retaining walls and granite gate posts.

Institutional: Three new churches built (Methodist, 1833; Universalist, 1838-39; Baptist, 1866), two remodelled (Universalist, 1854; Congregational, 1845, 1850, 1859), one begun but not completed (Episcopal, ca. 1870); churches of 1830s retained Federalist/Greek Revival designs, while those after the mid-1840s were either of Gothic or Italianate design. Eight school districts in use throughout period; private high school(s) present after 1831, public high school instituted 1850-51. Italianate style (architect-designed) Town Hall built 1851; possible firehouse at Metcalf (ca. 1865-75).

Commercial: Probably limited to one and two-storey wood-frame blocks at current town center and at East Holliston; at least one two-storey temple front block built (ca. 1845) although much of commercial center was destroyed in fire of 1875; train depots built by 1847-50.

Industrial: Gradual passing of one-storey shops in favor of two to five-storey wood-frame factories (straw and shoe making) located along railroad bed, factories bore elements of Italianate style but were mostly astylistic.

IX. LATE INDUSTRIAL PERIOD (1870-1915)

A. Transportation Routes:

Rail and road system intact from mid-19th century with street railway route from Ashland-Framingham to Milford through Town center over Concord-Washington Streets.

B. Population:

Peak reached in 1875 after which population declined continuously until 1900; foreign-born population remained stable in number although Irish declined in numbers, particularly by the early twentieth century when Russians became the town's second largest foreign-born group. No new religious congregations known.

C. Settlement Location:

No significant expansion of built-up area; fire destroyed much of commercial center in 1875.

D. Economic Base:

In addition to straw and leather goods, the manufacture of woollens was added with the establishment in 1881 of the Holliston Mills on the former cotton factory site in East Holliston. Also in East Holliston was the Shawmut Waxed Paper Co. on Woodland Street, held to be the first factory in the country to produce this product (Rees). (The company survived into the 1960s when the increased use of aluminum foil and plastic films closed the business). In 1875 there were ten boot and shoe factories in town. At the very end of the period the largest shoe factory in town was erected, the landmark Goodwill Shoe Co. of Arthur Ashley Williams.

E. Architecture:

Residential: Nearly no new building during period; it is unlikely that contemporary styles are represented by more than one or two modest examples.

Institutional: New church building and remodelling were primarily in Gothic Revival style (Catholic Church, 1873; Methodist Church remodelled, 1874); grading introduced to center school by 1890 when town had five grammar, nine lower, one intermediate and one high school (some of these schools may have shared the same buildings); public library built 1903 (with Carnegie donation?).

Commercial: Center re-built with wood-frame, two-storey blocks (ca. 1875-95), primarily of Second Empire and Queen Anne styles; one brick bank block (Second Empire style) built 1872; four railroad depots in operation during period.

Industrial: Little new construction seems to have occurred after 1880s, essentially of same scale and materials as industrial construction of preceding period.

X. EARLY MODERN PERIOD (1915-1940)

A. Transportation Routes:

Rail and highway network remains intact with abandonment of trolley route in 1920s. Regional auto highways through Holliston center by 1930s, E/W as Route 16 (Washington Street) and N/S as Route 126 (Concord-Washington-Summer Streets).

B. Population:

Small, steady increase in population throughout period.

C. Settlement Location:

No basic change from preceding period.

D. Economic Base:

Though the town's manufactured output appears to have peaked in the 1870s or early '80s, many of the town's established firms (with the exception of straw manufacture) continued well into the Early Modern period.

E. Architecture:

Residential: New construction probably restricted to modest Bungalows, little evidence of Colonial Revival style.

Institutional: Little new building except for brick schoolhouses (Colonial Revival style) probably following changeover to a fully graded school system (ca. 1915-25?).

Commercial: Some one-storey frame structures (astylistic) and brick automobile service stations built along Fiske Street near town center and at East Holliston.

Industrial: No apparent new construction.

XI. SOURCES

Morse, Abner, A History of Sherborn and Holliston (1856).

Rees, Dorothy, Holliston, Massachusetts 1724-1974 (1974).

Bragg, Ernest A., The Origin and Growth of the Boot and Shoe Industry in Holliston Where It Began in 1793 (1951).