

MHC Reconnaissance Survey Town Report

HAMPDEN

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.

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: March, 1982

COMMUNITY: Hampden

I. Topography

Hampden consists of a complex of rugged uplands and marshy lowlands. The eastern two thirds of the town is dominated by the uplands which are part of the Wilbraham Mountains that extend north into Wilbraham. Generally, they range between 600 to almost 900 feet in height. The greatest elevation is situated in southern Hampden where Pine Mountain extends to 1070 feet. To the west, Minnechoag Mountain reaches 990 feet above sea level. These uplands slope down to the relatively flat, poorly drained lowlands of western Hampden. Heights in the latter area rarely reach over 250 feet. Extensive tracts of marshland occur throughout the lowlands. Several waterways cut through the eastern uplands, most prominent of which is the Scantic River, which enters Hampden at its southwestern corner and extends to the town's southern line. From there, it follows a southwesterly course and eventually drains into the Connecticut River in East Windsor, Connecticut. Virtually all of Hampden's water powered industry was located on the Scantic. The only local bodies of fresh water are a handful of small mill ponds. Local soils consist basically of the gravelly, sandy soils of the uplands to the rich loam of the intervalles and lowlands.

II. Political Boundaries

Originally included within the Springfield grant of Outward Commons in 1685 with its eastern boundary at Brimfield (Monson), Hampden's southern boundary at the Connecticut state line was defined in 1714 from the earlier Woodward and Saffery survey (1642). It was established within the Fourth Precinct of Springfield in 1745 and included within the town of Wilbraham in 1763. Formed as South Parish of Wilbraham in 1782, its western boundary with Longmeadow was defined in 1783. The independent town of Hampden was established in 1878 with the northern boundary at the Wilbraham line.

III. Historic Overview

Hampden is a rural suburban town on the periphery of the Springfield metropolitan area, isolated from major highway corridors. Located on the edge of central uplands and the Connecticut Valley, there are suspected native sites along the north bank of the Scantic River near the town center. It was a secondary corridor of communication from Springfield and Longmeadow during the 17th century, with initial settlement along the Scantic River from Wilbraham during the mid 18th century. Local sawmilling and limited agricultural potential restricted settlement to the Scantic valley with well preserved Colonial Period houses in the town center. Farming was maintained on available bottomland through the early 19th century with several authentic farmsteads of Federal and Greek Revival style along secondary roads. Establishment of textile mills on the Scantic River during the Early Industrial Period created an extended street village from the town center in which are preserved modest mid 19th century examples. Decline of industrial activity after the Civil War maintained the village scale of the town center into the early 20th century, marked by a Georgian Revival town house. At present, secluded vistas of upland roads have attracted affluent suburban estates from Springfield with modest tract development along East Longmeadow and

Wilbraham Roads. The town center retains remarkable historic period authenticity as a village district, and several outlying farmsteads have preserved their rural character despite obvious suburban encroachment.

IV. Contact Period (1500-1620)

A. Transportation Routes

There was a local corridor from the central uplands to the Connecticut River plain. The most obvious trail route across Minnechoag Mountain is probable along the Scantic River valley as Main Street-Scantic Road (north side). Connections to Chicopee Valley (Monson) are conjectured from Scantic River along the axis of South Monson Road, although no trace survives. Likewise, connections to Connecticut plain (East Longmeadow) would appear likely along Watchaug Brook and perhaps along Mill Road. North-south routes along the mountain front are obvious along the axis of Wilbraham-Somers Roads. Other secondary routes along the hill crest appear likely as portions of Monson-Ames Road along East Brook.

B. Settlement Pattern

There were no reported sites in Hampden. The area's rugged terrain and limited water sources would have discouraged extensive native occupation during the Contact Period. Native sites would be most likely to occur in the fertile Scantic River bottomlands.

C. Subsistence Pattern

The area had limited agricultural land, the majority of which occurred in the Scantic River valley and southwestern Hampden. There was good potential for fishing in the Scantic River and some of the area's larger streams. The rugged uplands and swampy lowlands provided a good habitat for wild game.

D. Observations

Hampden was capable of supporting small native bands primarily as a hunting and fishing site and secondarily for agricultural purposes. The area probably functioned as a fringe zone for the natives of the heavily populated Connecticut River Valley. The greatest potential for extant sites would occur in the Scantic River valley.

V. Plantation Period (1620-1675)

A. Transportation Routes

Native trails remained as regional connectors between the mountains and the Connecticut Valley. East-west "Longmeadow Path" appeared to follow the native trail along the Scantic River (Monson History, 1960). A north-south route is probable as Wilbraham-Somers Road from Bay Path (Wilbraham).

B. Population

There were no figures for the native population. Colonial settlement did not take place until the 1740s.

C. Settlement Pattern

There was no reference to native period settlement. Any native occupation would probably have been restricted to small bands, due to the area's limited resource base.

D. Economic Base

There is no reference to the native economy. Colonial use of this area would have been restricted to lumbering and haying.

E. Observations

The limited data suggests Hampden was considered a low priority area by both the natives and settlers of Springfield.

VI. Colonial Period (1675-1775)

A. Transportation Routes

Settlement of the Scantic River area during the mid 18th century encouraged improvement of the local highways from Wilbraham town center. The primary east-west road was Main Street-Scantic Road along the river with Bennett Street as the highway to Brimfield (Monson). There was a primary north-south route along the mountain front as Somers-Wilbraham Road, with secondary connectors to Hampden Center as Mountain, North, South and Chapin Roads. The east-west connector to Longmeadow was improved as Mill and East Longmeadow Roads.

B. Population

There were no figures for a native population. 1057 settlers inhabited Old Wilbraham (Wilbraham and Hampden) in 1776. Only a small portion of these residents lived in Hampden. The majority of the settlement's early settlers were former Springfield residents. Smaller numbers migrated from Chicopee, Longmeadow, Salem and northern Connecticut. Hampden had a small Baptist population in addition to the predominantly Congregationalist populace.

C. Settlement Pattern

It is unclear if there was any post-1675 native settlement. The first colonial settlement did not take place until ca.1741 with the arrival of Stephen Stebbins, who erected a home on the north side of the Scantic River. The majority of period settlement occurred on the fertile bottomlands of the Scantic River valley. The community's first cemetery ("The Old Cemetery") was established slightly south of the junction of South and Chapin Roads in ca.1755. Additional homes were built along Monson Road in the 1750s and 1760s. Hampden lacked a meeting house since the Old Wilbraham meeting house was situated in Wilbraham.

D. Economic Base

The settlement's colonial economy was based primarily on agriculture. The community had a modest mill industry. The Hampden area's first reputed

mill was erected in the vicinity of the Scantic River's junction with Scantic Road in ca.1750. A second mill was built slightly downstream from the first in ca. 1775. A third mill was constructed on the southern end of Goodwill Pond in ca. 1772. A possible pre 1775 grist, saw and fulling mill complex was located near the junction of Temple Brook and Thrasher Road.

E. Architecture

Residential: There are probably less than a half dozen Colonial Period houses surviving in Hampden. All of those observed were located on the Wilbraham/Somers Road or on Scantic Road. Period structures include a pair of two-and-a-half story center chimney houses, probably dating from the third quarter of the 18th century, if not possibly from the Federal Period. Both houses have five bay, center entrance facades with double leaved doors in the Connecticut Valley tradition. One of these survives in original condition and has a simple door surround with a dentilated entablature. Other early structures are center chimney cottages on Wilbraham Road and at the town center on Scantic Road. One center chimney cottage with a gambrel roof was noted on South Road at the town center.

F. Observations

This area was the primary focus of Old Wilbraham's mill operations. There is a high potential for extant period archaeological remains in the Scantic River valley due to the limited development in this area.

VII. Federal Period (1775-1830)

A. Transportation Routes

There was continued improvement of regional connectors to surrounding towns. The primary link with Springfield was Springfield Road and to Monson as South Monson Road.

B. Population

Hampden's population is inseparable from that of Wilbraham during this period. The population of the two towns together in 1790 was 1,555, of which probably no more than a third lived in the more isolated south parish of Old Wilbraham. By 1830 the combined figure had reached 2,034, though much of this rise may be credited to Wilbraham and the growth of the mills at Jencksville (Ludlow).

C. Settlement Pattern

Location of the South Parish meeting house in 1782 set the focus of the town center along the Scantic River. Agriculture gradually expanded along the alluvial plains of Wilbraham Road and there was local sawmilling in the Scantic valley.

D. Economic Base

Hampden's economy in the Federal Period remained entirely agricultural with probably substantial quantities of corn, rye, and wool produced. MHC Reconnaissance Survey Town Report: Hampden

"It is a matter of unwritten history," historian Copeland wrote in 1902 (v.3, p.547),

that the lands of the South parish were found to be more fertile and accessible and equally desirable for farming purposes as those of the North parish.

Even in the Federal Period, however, Hampden had the bulk of Old Wilbraham's industry: by 1795 there were at least three sawmills, two grist mills, and a fulling mill in use, primarily along the Scantic River.

E. Architecture

Residential: During the Federal Period, nucleated settlement began to occur at the present town center at Scantic and North Roads. Several prominent Federal style houses are located at the town center, including a double chimney, hip roofed Federal house with a side ell, attached carriage sheds and barn; this structure's central location and extensive outbuildings suggest that it may have been built as a tavern. Other Federal structures are a hip roofed, center chimney Federal house in brick on Scantic Road at the town center and a number of center chimney Federal houses on the Wilbraham Road. Most of these are of a single room's depth and incorporate five bay, center entrance facades. A few of the more stylish houses of the period feature simple entrance surrounds with transom lights and three-quarter sidelights articulated with double muntins in a grid pattern.

Institutional: The earliest institutional buildings in the town were built in the Federal Period and include the first meeting house of the Second Parish (1785), a second unidentified meeting house, and four schools. None of these structures are believed extant and no particulars are known for the Second Parish meeting house.

Industrial: Several industrial buildings, several grist and saw mills, and a clothworks were built along the Scantic River in the Federal Period, but none are known to survive.

VIII. Early Industrial Period (1830-1870)

A. Transportation Routes

The local highway system remained stable with the focus of routes to Hampden town center along the Scantic River. No railroads were constructed or projected through the area.

B. Population

Hampden's population remains inseparable from that of Wilbraham during this period, although there was relatively little change in the combined figures between 1830 and 1860 - approximately 2,000 people. What growth is evident (by 1870 the figure had reached 2,330) may be due to the development of South Wilbraham (Hampden) as a manufacturing center. By 1855, eight percent of the population of the two towns were foreign born, the vast majority of whom were Irish (83%).

C. Settlement Pattern

Establishment of textile mills along the Scantic River created a street village from the town center along Main Street by the Civil War. Farming was maintained along the open plain to Springfield and Longmeadow with local farmsteads in the upland vales.

D. Economic Base

Although Hampden's economy remained predominantly agricultural, the waterpower afforded by the Scantic River proved increasingly attractive, and in the 1850s and 1860s South Wilbraham became the manufacturing center of Old Wilbraham.

By 1837 the wool clip from sheep in Wilbraham and Hampden amounted to over 6,000 pounds annually. Sumner Sessions built the first small woolen mill in 1845, producing satinets, a low-grade wool cloth with a cotton warp, which found a ready use in men's ready-to-wear clothing. The mill was followed in 1858 by the erection of a second mill, the Ravine Woolen Mill. During the Civil War, both mills prospered and expanded, the earlier becoming the Lacousic Woolen Mills and the town's largest manufacturer. Luther Sage, closely associated with the operation of both mills, erected a third in 1865, the Scantic Woolen Mill, to manufacture fancy cassimeres.

At least two tanneries were also in operation as well as a small paper mill producing straw board paper. At the center of town Marcus Beebe operated a plough shop, and until the Civil War carried on a small but successful southern trade.

E. Architecture

Residential: A number of Greek Revival and Italianate houses were built at the town center and along the Wilbraham Road, among them several unusual and well developed structures of architectural significance. These include a well detailed brick end chimney transitional Federal/Greek Revival house on Somers Road and two very fine Italianate houses at the town center. These are a low hip roof, end chimney, double pile plan villa with a two-story portico with cast-iron balustrade located at the junction of Mountain and North Roads, and a double chimney five-bay wide Greek Revival/Italianate house with very ornate detailing on Scantic Road just east of the town center. Details on that house consist of an entrance surround with heavy console brackets supporting a hood and bracketted window hoods on all the windows. More typical are sidehall Greek Revival and transitional Greek Revival/Italianate houses, examples of which, dating from the 1840s through the end of the period, are scattered across the town, both at the center and along outlying roads. Especially notable is a well preserved Gothic Revival house on Somers Road; the house, a one-and-a-half story building with a entrance surmounted by a gable, retains board and batten siding and label hoods on all the windows.

Institutional: The earliest surviving institutional buildings at the town center date from the Early Industrial Period and comprise a

well preserved grouping at the intersection of Scantic and North Roads. These include two Greek Revival buildings, a two-story, end chimney, center entrance Academy building (now the Hampden Historical Society) with a square belfry and one-story Ionic portico, and a two-story meeting house with double entrances on a three-bay facade and two-stage square belfry. Both buildings probably date ca. 1840.

Industrial: Several frame industrial buildings of varying sizes are thought to survive from the period. These include several small one-story buildings along the Scantic River at the town center as well as a two-story frame building (ca. 1850) of some length on Scantic Road at Wilbraham Road.

IX. Late Industrial Period (1870-1915)

A. Transportation Routes

The highway system remained as the local focus on Hampden town center with no steam or street railroads through the area.

B. Population

The first year of Hampden's recorded population, 1880, was also the peak year for the next sixty years. From a high of 958 persons in 1880, Hampden's population steadily declined as local employment dwindled, mills closed, and agriculture became less profitable. In 1905 the town reported only 561 residents, of whom 30 were Irish-born. Not until nearly 1940 did the town regain its size as documented in 1880.

C. Settlement Pattern

The closing of textile mills stabilized the town center along the Main Street axis with farming maintained along Wilbraham Road.

D. Economic Base

In the decades immediately following the Civil War, all three woolen mills prospered. The Lacousic Woolen Mills, employing 75-80 people, were the town's largest mills, producing fancy cassimeres - a product also of both the Ravine and Scantic mills in the 1870s. The projection of a railroad through Hampden from Springfield to Providence must have stimulated numerous expectations, as its failure to materialize must have also dampened them. A granite quarry which opened on Chapin Road closed when it was learned that there would be no railroad to transport its product to market.

Without a railroad, the competition of larger mills in urban centers was a deterrent to quality production. In 1877 the Scantic mill converted to yarn manufacture and later to blankets. The Lacousic burned in 1892 and was not rebuilt; and the Ravine Mill burned in 1904.

For a time tobacco was successfully grown in Wilbraham and Hampden, but by the 1880s the popularity of the local dark tobacco had been eclipsed by lighter varieties. After 1885 the production of charcoal

became a successful business. Brick charcoal kilns on Scantic Road were erected that year and at their peak did a thriving business supplying the powder mills in Hazardville (Town of Enfield, Connecticut).

E. Architecture

Residential: Most of the residential construction of the Late Industrial Period occurred along Scantic Road west of the town center and scattered along Somers/Wilbraham Road. The most outstanding collection of late 19th century residences are a group of one-and-a-half and two-story workers' houses on Scantic Road west of the center. These are late examples of the Gothic Revival style with double chimneys and center gables with sawn ogee bargeboards. Approximately a dozen houses of this type, probably built ca.1880, possibly by the South Wilbraham Manufacturing Company, survive on Scantic Road. A number of other sidehall Stick Style, Queen Anne, and Colonial Revival single family houses were built along Wilbraham/Somers Road, at the town center and scattered along outlying roads. Later turn of the century cottages and houses with jerkin head hip or gambrel roofs were built on the Wilbraham/Somers Road, probably as part of streetcar development.

X. Early Modern Period (1915-1940)

A. Transportation Routes

The highways remained as secondary routes only, with no state autoroutes through the area.

B. Population

The population remained relatively static between 1910 and 1930, numbering approximately 650 persons. In the 1930s, the town's population began to rise at a modest rate of about 30 new residents a year, many of whom presumably commuted to work in Springfield. By 1940 Hampden's population had reached 1,023, a figure only slightly higher than the town's size in 1880. (In 1960 that figure had doubled; and doubled again in 1975).

C. Settlement Pattern

There was limited development of the area with the town center maintained as the civic focus. Agriculture continued along Wilbraham Road with small crossroads commercial activity at the Main Street junction.

D. Economic Base

No new industries were identified within this period. The town returned to a predominantly agricultural economy with probably dairy and poultry farms.

E. Architecture

Residential: Very few residences were built in the Early Modern Period. Those observed consist primarily of small one and two-story shingled

gambrel roof Colonial Revival houses, most located in the western half of town. The only known institutional building of the period is the Town Hall and Library building (ca.1920) at the town center, a one-story brick gable roof Colonial Revival building with a cupola and offset projecting entrance bay with pediment.

XI. Survey Observations

Industrial: There is no town survey to speak of. Surviving industrial structures are equally limited, although attention should be paid to the boarding house of the Scantic Woolen Mill and the Ravine Mill Dam.

Hampden has no inventory at the present time. An inventory for the whole town is feasible and recommended. District potential exists at the town center which includes late 18th and 19th century residential, institutional, and commercial buildings. Some half dozen outstanding residential buildings in the Federal, Greek Revival, and Italianate styles are known across the town.

XII. Sources

Bryans, Miriam, A Century Walk Along the Scantic, 1878-1978 (Hampden, 1978).

Howlett, Carl C., "The History of Hampden, Mass.," articles in the Hampden, Mass. Report of the Town Officers (Hampden, 1953-1962).

-----, Early Hampden, Its Settlers and the Homes They Built (Hampden, 1958).