

# MHC Reconnaissance Survey Town Report

## LEVERETT

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.



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## MHC RECONNAISSANCE SURVEY REPORT

DATE: 1982

COMMUNITY: Leverett

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### I. TOPOGRAPHY

Leverett is one of the southernmost towns in Franklin County. The town is dominated by moderate to rugged uplands that abut the eastern side of the Connecticut River Valley. These uplands gradually increase from elevations that generally range from 600 feet to 850 feet in western Leverett to heights frequently over 1,000 feet in the easternmost portion of town. The highest point is Brushy Mountain (1,260 feet) located in east-central Leverett. Additional prominent elevations include Jackson Hill (921 feet) situated slightly south of the village of North Leverett, Diamond Match Ridge (1,123 feet) north of Moore's Corner and Morse Hill (1,219 feet) immediately west of the Leverett/Shutesbury line. These uplands are broken by several intervalles and plains, most prominent of which is Long Plain located in southwestern Leverett. The town lacks any major waterways. Northern Leverett is drained by the Sawmill River which flows northwest into the Connecticut River. Central and southern Leverett are drained by Long Plain Brook and Roaring Brook. The town's only fresh water body is Leverett Pond, a natural pond situated immediately northwest of the village of Leverett. Local soil is basically a sandy, gravelly loam.

### II. POLITICAL BOUNDARIES

Originally included as part of Swampfield (Sunderland) grant from Hadley in 1673 with plantation abandoned during King Philip's War in 1675 and re-established as part of Sunderland in 1718. Northern boundary defined with Montague district in 1754 from Sunderland and southern boundary defined with Amherst in 1759 along original Hadley grant line. Eastern boundary defined with Roadtown (Shutesbury) by 1761 with later definition in northeast corner by Wendell. Established as town of Leverett from Sunderland in 1774, defining western boundary.

### III. HISTORIC OVERVIEW

Secondary highland corridor between Amherst and Orange with native sites reported at Long Plain and suspected around Leverett Pond and Sawmill River from adjacent Connecticut Valley. Settled from Sunderland during mid 18th century with notable examples of early cottages along Hemenway Road in North Leverett. Town focus established at Leverett Center after Revolution with some Federal houses on Montague Road and on Long Plain. Development of mill sites during Early Industrial period with cottage villages intact at East Leverett and Moores Corner, including original lumber mill and Greek Revival church at North Leverett. Farming remained limited at Long Plain through early 20th century with local highway corridor developed along Sawmill River with roadside gas pumps and store at North Leverett. Present growth obvious from Amherst along Route 63 to Leverett Center

with expensive suburban housing in highlands and horse farms around Morse Hill. North Leverett retains remarkable integrity of elements around sawmill with village character intact at Leverett Center.

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

##### A. Transportation Routes

Secondary highland corridor with connections to Connecticut Valley from central uplands. Primary north-south trail apparently followed Long Plain Road (Route 63) from Amherst (Leverett 1974:49). Primary east-west trail likely followed along Sawmill River as North Leverett and Hemmenway Road from Morse Hill with possible connecting trail south to Leverett Pond and Long Plain as Rattlesnake-Montague Road. Other possible trail routes from Leverett Pond apparently followed Shutesbury Road to East Leverett and Long Hill Road from Long Plain (Sylvester 1879: II, 734).

##### B. Population

Leverett had no reported Contact period sites. Native period occupation probably focused on the lowlands adjacent to the lower portion of Long Plain Brook and the vicinity of Leverett Pond. A series of undated native sites were reported along Long Plain Brook, extending approximately two miles north from a point immediately above the intersection of Long Plain Road and Leverett Street. Secondary native sites may have been established on the Doolittle Brook and the Sawmill River Valley. A number of undated native artifacts have been recovered in North Leverett near the Sawmill River.

##### C. Subsistence Patterns

Some native horticulture may have taken place on the Long Plain delta (south of the Central Vermont Railroad and Long Plain Road intersection) and the lowlands south of the junction of Mantain Brook and Shutesbury Road. Leverett Pond was probably the focal point of local native fishing. Secondary fishing sites were likely established along Long Plain Brook, Sawmill River and Doolittle Brook. Native hunting probably occurred on local lowlands such as those adjacent to Long Plain Brook, the southernmost portion of Doolittle Brook and Leverett Pond in addition to scattered locations in Leverett's uplands.

##### D. Observations

The Leverett area was probably part of the eastern periphery of the heavily settled Connecticut River floodplain situated in Sunderland. Period encampments established in Leverett were most likely small to moderate in size, since the area's local resource base was not capable of supporting semi-permanent village occupations. This area and Sunderland appear to have fallen under the control of the Norwottucks centered in the towns of Northampton and Hadley. Regionally, the Norwottucks were loosely affiliated with the Pocumtucks, a label applied to the various native groups inhabiting the Middle Connecticut River Valley in the 17th century. The greatest likelihood for extant

period sites would be on the Long Plain Brook delta, the southernmost portion of the Doolittle Brook lowlands and adjacent to Leverett Pond.

## V. PLANTATION PERIOD (1620-1675)

### A. Transportation Routes

Native trails remained as regional routes from Connecticut Valley to central highlands with primary paths following Long Plain Road and Sawmill River valley.

### B. Population

A small native population probably continued to utilize Leverett during this period.

### C. Settlement Patterns

Native settlement patterns most likely were similar to those suggested for the Contact period.

### D. Economic Base

Native subsistence patterns probably were much like those of the preceding period. Establishment of a colonial market for animal pelts and furs likely encouraged increased native hunting and trapping of fur bearing animals.

Colonial residents of Hadley may have hunted and lumbered in the Leverett area on occasion.

### E. Observations

Leverett continued to be utilized primarily as a secondary settlement area. Colonial interest in this area was limited, largely because of the availability of higher quality land along the Connecticut River.

## VI. COLONIAL PERIOD (1675-1775)

### A. Transportation Routes

Improvement of east-west corridor from central highlands with Lancaster Road to Connecticut Valley (1733), apparently following Roaring Brook trail from Roadtown (Shutesbury) to East Leverett (Leverett 1974:55). Location of Leverett meeting house (1775) established radial highways from town center, including Shutesbury Road to Long Plain and Juggle Meadow-Teewaddle Road from East Leverett. Connecting highways to Sawmill River (North Leverett) included Jackson Hill, Crane Hill and Brushy Mountain trail.

### B. Population

Small native hunting and fishing bands may have sporadically occupied Leverett during the Colonial period. In ca.1750, approximately

14 families lived in the vicinity of the village of Leverett. It is unclear how many families lived outside of this location. The town's population numbered 296 residents in 1776.

### C. Settlement Patterns

Colonial settlement was limited and generally scattered. It appears that initial colonial settlement took place in ca.1727 when Samuel Montague purchased a 10-acre lot immediately east of Leverett Pond. In ca.1737, Thomas Adams established a home in southwestern Leverett on the town's line with Amherst. Substantial settlement probably did not take place until the mid 18th century, much of it the result of settlement expansion in Sunderland. By this date, a small settlement node had developed in the village of Leverett. This location was the site of the town's first meeting house (completed in ca.1776). Other homes were erected west of this node on the Long Plain delta. Late period settlement occurred in the vicinity of the village of North Leverett as a result of settlement expansion in present Montague. This area was the site of a small community of Baptists. Originally these residents and those Baptists inhabiting Montague attended church services in the latter town (church established, ca.1767). However, by the end of the period, Baptist services had shifted to North Leverett where they were held in Elder Montague's home on Jackson Hill Road. Some additional contemporary settlement took place in eastern Leverett.

### D. Economic Base

Agriculture was the primary occupation of colonial residents. Crop production was modest because of the limited amount of good agricultural land. Livestock grazing probably took place in the town's moderate uplands. The town's industrial base is poorly documented. Period mills may have been built on the Sawmill River and Doolittle and Roaring Brooks, based on the presence of several mills on these waterways on a 1794 map of Leverett.

### E. Architecture

Residential: Less than a half dozen houses of the Colonial period survive in Leverett. These include a 1760 center chimney cottage on Montague Street, a center chimney house with five bay front and pedimented center entrance on Long Plain Road, and a center chimney house on Teewaddle Hill Road. Presumably, both of these postdate 1748, the construction date of the Richard Montague House (demolished 1873), described as the oldest house in North Leverett (Sylvester 1879:734). No concentrations of period houses were observed, all of the houses standing in isolated rural settings.

Institutional: The first meeting house in Leverett was constructed in 1774. The meeting house, with dimensions of 40' x 50", was specified to be "as large as the Whately meetinghouse" (Holland 1855:386). A Baptist church organized in Montague in 1767 included a number of North Leverett residents, who later (1791) formed their own society.

## F. Observations

Leverett was the eastern periphery of the Colonial period settlement established in "Old Sunderland." Leverett probably was closely tied to the "Old Sunderland" settlement core situated in Sunderland because of its limited population and economic base. The town had one of the smallest populations in the Connecticut River Valley study unit during this period. Future research should examine the Baptist community situated in North Leverett, since their presence in the study unit was unusual. Archaeological evidence of period settlement is most likely to survive on Long Plain, adjacent to Leverett Pond, the village of North Leverett and the town's eastern uplands.

## VII. FEDERAL PERIOD (1775-1830)

### A. Transportation Routes

Leverett Center remained as the focus of local highway routes from Shutesbury and Amherst with north-south connectors to North Leverett along Montague-Crane Hill Road.

### B. Population

In 1776, Leverett had the smallest population of any incorporated town in the county except for Hawley. Between 1776 and 1830, Leverett had its greatest period of growth, rising from 293 to 939 in 1830, which, but for a short period at mid century, represented Leverett's peak year. The net population growth 1790-1830 was 79.1%, fourth highest in the county for those years.

### C. Settlement Patterns

Civic focus established with meeting house location at Leverett Center (1776) above Fish Pond with primary farming district maintained in Long Plain. Economic focus developed along Sawmill River with civic center formed around Baptist meeting house in North Leverett (1795) and secondary village at Moores Corner. Outlying industrial village formed at East Leverett around Roaring Brook sawmills on Shutesbury Road.

### D. Economic Base

Predominantly agricultural economy with small saw and grist mills established principally along Sawmill River (North Leverett and Moores Corner) and Roaring Brook (East Leverett).

Leverett's long history in agricultural implements probably was initiated in the 1820s. Rufus Putnam began scythe making in 1826. By 1830, there were three scythe shops: two in East Leverett and one in North Leverett. At least eight sawmills were also in operation that year, testifying to the size of Leverett's timber harvests. Of the five patents for turning lathes granted to men in Hampshire and Franklin counties, two were given to Leverett men, W. Patrick (4/24/1827) and J. Moore (1/19/1828). [Was J. Moore connected with D. Moore's later machine shop at East Leverett?] Another patent in 1832 was granted to J. Bisbee of Plainfield for a machine to

turn broom handles, and the Moore and Patrick patents, like a similar 1824 patent in Hadley, may also have been for this purpose.

The largest industry, however, in 1832 was in the making of palm-leaf hats. The industry developed in the late 1820s. By 1832, Leverett women produced \$5,000 worth, the third highest value of any town in the county, after New Salem and Wendell.

#### E. Architecture

Residential: Approximately two dozen houses of the Federal period survive in Leverett. Among these are modest concentrations of houses at North Leverett, East Leverett and Leverett Center, as well as a number of houses located in dispersed rural settings. Federal houses were noted on Long Plain, Montague, Shutesbury and North Leverett Roads. These include a preponderance of center chimney plan structures (both cottages and houses) as well as double interior and endwall chimney houses. A few houses with twin rearwall chimneys, a comparatively rare form, were also noted, with examples on Long Plain and Shutesbury Roads. Although the gable roof form predominated, approximately a half dozen houses with hip roofs, generally an indication of some sophistication, were also observed.

Institutional: The only institutional activity recorded for the period was the construction of a Baptist meeting house at North Leverett in 1794 and the building of the first schoolhouse ca.1800. At North Leverett is a two-story sidehall plan building which may have been built as a school, sometime after 1800.

### VIII. EARLY INDUSTRIAL PERIOD (1830-1870)

#### A. Transportation Routes

Improvement of regional corridor from Amherst with New London and Northern Railroad (Vermont Central) to Montague following Long Plain valley around Mount Toby (ca.1858) with depot at Leverett Station.

#### B. Population

But for small gains in the 1850s, Leverett's population entered into a period of slow decline between 1830 and 1870, losing small numbers of residents in most five-year periods. By 1870, the town was 62 persons less than it had been 40 years before.

Leverett's foreign-born population in 1855 was limited to two Irishmen.

#### C. Settlement Patterns

North Leverett continued as primary economic area along Sawmill River, extending east to Moores Corner and Dudleyville. Local civic focus maintained at Leverett Center along Montague Street with secondary economic activities developed around the railroad depot at Leverett Station(1858) and at East Leverett sawmills on Roaring Brook. Limited farming district remained in Long Plain to Sunderland and on Sawmill River to North Leverett with lumbering on highland slopes.

#### D. Economic Base

Predominantly agricultural economy though with increasingly diversified industries at mill powers of Sawmill River and Roaring Brook.

By 1855, there were ten sawmills in town producing 1.5 million board feet of lumber annually. Four shops made hoes and scythes, while a fifth, Graves & Sons in North Leverett, turned out 65,000 sets of scythe-snathe mountings worth \$9,000, the town's largest manufactured product value that year.

The year 1845 saw the peak of the palm-leaf hat production in Leverett, as in other towns in the valley. Leverett's interest in the industry may have been introduced from the adjacent town of Amherst to the south, which in 1845 was the leading town in the valley for palm-leaf hats. Leverett, in 1845 second only to Orange in the county production, employed 230 women in the home manufacture of these hats. As factory production took over the business in other locations, production dropped sharply. By 1865, only ten women were so employed.

Another important industry of the Early Industrial period was in the commercial manufacture of charcoal. Peter Kimball in East Leverett is believed to have started making charcoal for sale about 1825. As late as 1845, only two towns in the county reported charcoal production - Leverett and Bernardston. Leverett's production, 24,000 bushels, represented 75% of the county production. A decade later, ten towns reported charcoal production, increasing by 677%; Franklin's 248,650 bushels ranked second in the state to Berkshire; and within the county, Leverett, with a production of 60,000 bushels, ranked second to Erving. The industry in Leverett employed 14 men that year, the largest number employed in a single Leverett industry outside of farming. In 1865, as more efficient methods were developed, Leverett's charcoal production, along with the county's, declined to a fraction of its earlier prominence. While Franklin production declined sharply to sixth place in the state, Hampshire production correspondingly rose nearly 650%, itself reaching second place.

Leverett's industries also included a small woolen mill in East Leverett (employed four in 1865), two small tanneries, and, by 1860, pails and tubs in the Graves shop in North Leverett.

#### E. Architecture

Residential: A large number of houses and cottages were built in the period, most apparently before 1850. Clusters of Greek Revival structures developed or expanded at North Leverett, Moores Corner, East Leverett and Leverett Center. Infill along outlying roads continued. Cottages were the predominant house form for the period, but a number of two-story houses were also built. In general, more traditional center chimney or double interior chimney plans prevailed. Use of the sidehall plan was less common but sidehall plan houses and cottages were noted on Long Plain, Montague and North Leverett Roads. Exceptional structures include a five-bay, front gabled Greek Revival cottage on Montague Road, a Greek Revival cottage with Gothic Revival lancet-windowed dormers on Long Hill Road, and a T-plan Gothic Revival cottage at North Leverett.



Institutional: Both the Baptist and Congregational Societies constructed new meetinghouses (both of which are extant) in the 1830s. The Congregational Church (1838) is notable for its Gothic Revival detailing. A double entrance one-and-a-half story Greek Revival building with a square belfry, the building incorporates lancet windows. The two-story Baptist Church (1836) at North Leverett is less well-preserved, having lost its steeple, but it follows the same basic form with double entrances and a square belfry. Other societies organized (but defunct by ca.1860) were the Freewill Baptist (1835) and the Unitarian/Universalist (ca.1835). The present Town Hall was constructed in 1845; as built, the building was a single story in height with double entrances and gable front with pilasters. Its present appearance dates from an 1895 remodelling. Six school districts existed in the town in 1878; however, none of them are known to survive.

## IX. LATE INDUSTRIAL PERIOD (1870-1915)

### A. Transportation Routes

Vermont Central remained as primary north-south axis to Amherst and Greenfield through Long Plain valley. No trolley lines constructed in the area.

### B. Population

Leverett's population continued its period of slow decline, losing a total of 98 persons by the end of the period in 1915. By 1905, the largest single group of immigrants were 18 French Canadians.

### C. Settlement Patterns

Economic activities maintained around North Leverett sawmills with secondary village at Moores Corner along Sawmill River. Local civic functions remained at Leverett Center with economic activities at Leverett Station and at East Leverett mill village. Commercial farming continued on Long Plain to Sunderland.

### D. Economic Base

By the beginning of the Late Industrial period, Leverett had lost to more central locations much of the diversity that characterized the preceding period. In 1875, nine sawmills made up nearly half of the town's annual product value, with scythe snaths (1 shop) and woolen goods (1 mill) making up most of the remaining. The year 1875 also saw the beginning of a new industry - wooden boxes produced by Frary & Gates at Leverett Center. A second box mill, a branch of F & G's successor, was built in 1908 at East Leverett, and the town had great, though unrealized, hopes for an industrial revival. In 1885 Leverett sawmills produced 458,000 feet of lumber - fifth highest in the county. Three sawmills, two grist mills, and Myron Graves's North Leverett pail shop were listed in 1890.

In 1881, Leverett's charcoal industry received a boost by the construction on Coke Kiln Road of brick charcoal kilns by Amos Howard. The Bramlages (1974) reported that they were "the first kilns of this type built in Massachusetts" (p.35), perhaps a reference to the brick construction.

## E. Architecture

Residential: Comparatively little residential construction occurred in the period. There were no new villages established; construction was confined to scattered infill in existing villages and along outlying roads. In general, cottages with sidehall plans and modest Queen Anne detailing predominated. Examples of such construction were noted on Long Plain, Montague, and North Leverett Roads.

Institutional: Limited institutional construction took place in the period. The only new building recorded for the period was the Moores Corner Congregational Church (1896), a small Queen Anne structure with an offset square entrance tower. In 1895, the Town Hall was raised to two stories and lengthened.

## X. EARLY MODERN PERIOD (1915-1940)

### A. Transportation Routes

Improvement of north-south corridor from Amherst to Montague with auto Route 63 following Long Plain Road and secondary east-west connector to Orange as North Leverett Road along Sawmill River.

### B. Population

Leverett's population continued its slow decline, reaching its nadir of 594 in 1945. In 1940, at 688, Leverett had lost another 91 persons since 1915.

### C. Settlement Patterns

Local civic focus remained at Leverett Center extending along Montague Road with secondary center at North Leverett along Sawmill River.

### D. Economic Base

No new industries identified. Both the Leverett Center box shop of Beaman & Marvel and the Howard charcoal kiln remained in operation, the former employing 35 men. The town also produced maple sugar and maple syrup.

## XI. SURVEY OBSERVATIONS

There are no completed inventory forms for Leverett. Areas to be surveyed include Leverett Center, North Leverett, East Leverett and Moores Corner. Of special note is the quality of preservation of the late 18th/early 19th century character of the town. North Leverett and Moores Corner are particularly well preserved.

Industrial: The Sawmill River between Shutesbury and Montague has an extraordinary wealth of standing industrial structures which should be further studied. Of particular interest is the sawmill at North Leverett, still operating on waterpower. Also standing are the charcoal kilns on Coke Kiln Road, the only known example to survive in the study unit and reputedly the earliest of their type in the state.

XII. SOURCES

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