

MHC Reconnaissance Survey Town Report

LEYDEN

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: 1982

COMMUNITY: Leyden

I. TOPOGRAPHY

Leyden is one of the northernmost towns in Massachusetts. Its northern border abuts that of southern Vermont. The town's 9,684 acres is one of the smallest totals for Franklin County towns. Leyden is dominated by three ranges of north-south uplands that are part of the eastern foothills of the Green Mountains of Vermont. These uplands generally range between 1000 feet and 1200 feet in elevation. The highest point is Frizzell Hill (1310 feet) situated east of the village of Leyden. Other prominent points include an unnamed peak (1275 feet) in Leyden State Forest, Gates Hill (1220 feet) located northwest of the previous peak, Katley Hill (1011 feet) southwest of Leyden Village and Ball Mountain (1254 feet) in southeastern Leyden. Deposits of copper and smaller amounts of gold and silver have been recovered from the town's northwestern uplands. Large outcrops of white quartz are situated on the top of Frizzell Hill. These uplands are broken by a number of intervalles, two of which were the fertile Beaver Meadow in northeastern Leyden and a tract south of the village of Leyden. Leyden's primary waterway is the Green River. This river demarcates the town's western boundary and separates it from Colrain. The Green River is fed by several brooks that flow from the western uplands into the river. The eastern portion of town is drained by several tributaries of the Fall River, most notably Shattuck and Couch Brooks. These waterways flow east and southeast into the Fall River in Bernardston. Leyden's only body of fresh water is the Greenfield Reservoir located in the southeastern portion of town.

II. POLITICAL BOUNDARIES

Originally granted as part of Fall Town (Bernardston) in 1735 with western boundary at Boston Township Number 2 (Colrain) and southern boundary at Deerfield (Greenfield) line of 1673. Lot divisions surveyed in 1739 with northern boundary established as Province Line (Vermont) in 1741. Southwest section annexed to Colrain in 1779 with western boundary along the Green River. Established as Leyden district in 1784 from Bernardston and incorporated as a town in 1809. Southeast section annexed to Bernardston in 1889 along Eden Road.

III. HISTORIC OVERVIEW

Isolated rural hill town on suburban corridor from Greenfield to Vermont. Located in southern highlands of Green Mountains with enigmatic stone structures reported along Eden Trail and potential native sites along Glen Brook. Colonial settlement from Bernardston disrupted by French and Indian War with some late 18th century houses well preserved around Beaver Meadow, including period burying ground and later sawmill. Expansion of upland agriculture during Federal Period with several surviving farmsteads on Old County Road near

original meeting house site and on Frizzell Hill, site of Dorrittee religious community. Green River mill village developed at West Leyden from Colrain with period cottages, while civic focus relocated to Leyden Center during the mid 19th century, with Greek Revival town hall and village houses, including broad gable examples. Continued upland dairy farming through the 20th century, with period barns on East Glen Brook and recreational expansion from Greenfield with reservoir and summer cottages along the Glen Brook gorge. Present growth most evident as suburban housing from Vermont in West Leyden and along Greenfield Road around Glen Brook. Leyden town center retains authentic village character preserved by isolation, with historic landscape intact around Beaver Meadow.

IV. CONTACT PERIOD (1500-1620)

A. Transportation Routes

Isolated highland corridor with access to Deerfield valley. Secondary north-south trail from Picomeagan (Greek River) reported following south flank of Ball Mountain to Fall River (Bernardston) and highland route to Beaver Meadow reported following Eden Trail to Frizzell Hill and possibly as Hunt Road to Glen Brook (Ames 1959:14,19; Costello 1975: map). Alternate north-south route from Green River may have followed Glen Brook to Old County Road and connecting west along Hubbard Brook to Green River (West Leyden), and along Greenfield Road to Beaver Meadow (Leyden Center).

B. Settlement Patterns

There were no reported native Contact period sites. Period occupation was probably limited to small fishing and hunting encampments established at the base of the western uplands that overlook the Green River; along Glen Brook, particularly in the vicinity of the intervale south of Leyden Village and Leyden Glen; along Shattuck and Beaver Meadow Brooks, especially in Beaver Meadow, East Hill and Frizzell Hill. The last three locations may also have been sites of small horticultural villages.

C. Subsistence Patterns

Native horticulture most likely was restricted to Beaver Meadow, East Hill and the previously mentioned Glen Brook intervale. Hunting and fishing sites were probably situated on those locations described in the preceding section.

D. Observations

Leyden's upland terrain and the absence of large tracts of high quality agricultural land and large bodies of fresh water suggest that this area was only capable of supporting a small native population. This town was probably a secondary resource area for the large native villages situated in present Northfield, Gill and Montague. Leyden probably fell within the territory of the Squakheags, a native group traditionally centered in Northfield. Regional affiliation most likely was with the Pocumtucks, who controlled the Middle Connecticut

River Valley in the early 17th century. The greatest likelihood for surviving archaeological evidence of native period occupation should be along the Green River, the Glen Brook intervalle, Frizzle and East Hills and Beaver Meadow.

V. PLANTATION PERIOD (1620-1675)

A. Transportation Routes

Native trails remained as secondary routes from Deerfield north to the Connecticut River Valley from the Green River.

B. Population

The Leyden area likely continued to be occupied by small hunting and fishing bands during this period. The town lacked a colonial population until the first half of the 18th century.

C. Settlement Patterns

Native settlement patterns probably remained basically the same as those described in the Contact period section.

D. Economic Base

Native subsistence patterns most likely were similar to those described for the preceding period. However, the development of the Anglo-Indian fur trade in the Middle Connecticut River Valley probably encouraged increased native hunting and trapping of fur bearing animals. One likely location would be the aptly named Beaver Meadow.

Colonial utilization of local resources probably consisted of no more than occasional hunting and fishing by Northfield settlers.

E. Observations

There was little colonial interest in upland areas such as Leyden because of the absence of high quality agricultural land and the area's exposure to native attack.

VI. COLONIAL PERIOD (1675-1775)

A. Transportation Routes

Settlement of Fall Town (Bernardston) improved native trails to Beaver Meadow from Fall River valley reported along Couch Brook (Ames 1959:14). Military road to Line of Forts (1744) documented as east-west highway from Fall River (Bernardston) to Colrain following from Couch Brook as Hunt Road to Greenfield Road connecting with Green River fordway at Hubbards Brook (Costello 1975: map). Secondary north-south route from Greenfield apparently improved as Old County Road to Brattleboro (Vermont).

B. Population

Small bands of natives probably continued to occupy the Leyden area throughout most, if not all, of the period. This was possible largely

because colonial settlement was sparse throughout the Colonial period.

Leyden's colonial population was extremely small until termination of the French and Indian Wars in the early 1760s. In ca.1743, there were only 3-5 families inhabiting present Leyden. These families abandoned the settlement in ca.1744 and the area remained unoccupied until the early 1760s. The colonial population underwent considerable growth from this point until the end of the period, although none of the sources provide figures. Period settlers migrated from a number of Massachusetts and Connecticut settlements, including those situated in the Middle Connecticut River Valley, the Greater Boston area, and northern and southern Connecticut.

C. Settlement Patterns

Small native sites were probably established in scattered upland locations. The presence of two possible native period burial sites adjacent to Alexander Road suggests native sites may have been located in this area.

Colonial settlement was limited and dispersed. Period occupation was encouraged when the Falltown grant (present Bernardston, Leyden and a portion of Colrain) was made to veterans of the Turners Falls fight (1676) and their descendants in ca.1735. Most of the initial and later period settlement took place in Bernardston. The first homes were probably not established in Leyden until ca.1741. Between this date and ca.1743, several homes were constructed in Beaver Meadow and on East Hill along the Old Proprietors Road. The settlement was abandoned when Anglo-Indian warfare broke out in 1744. Leyden remained unoccupied until the fighting terminated in the early 1760s. Post-1760 settlement was restricted to the eastern portion of Leyden, particularly Frizzell Hill, East Hill and the general vicinity of Beaver Meadow until ca.1771. Not until this date does colonial settlement spread into western Leyden in addition to present Guilford, Vermont. Local residents attended church services in local homes or at the Bernardston meeting house, since Leyden lacked its own facility.

D. Economic Base

Colonial residents focused primarily on limited crop and livestock production. The raising of substantial quantities of crops such as corn and wheat was hindered by the lack of large tracts of productive agricultural land. As in Bernardston, Leyden appears to have been one of the first towns in Massachusetts that began producing moderate quantities of maple sugar by the late 1760s. The settlement's period industrial development is poorly documented by secondary sources. The only reference to a period mill is a sawmill established in the Couch Brook chasm in ca.1767 (Ames 1959:38). Additional pre-1775 mills may have been erected on Shattuck Brook east of Beaver Meadow and Green River, slightly south of West Leyden, opposite Katley Hill and opposite Greenfield Reservoir.

E. Observations

Leyden's lack of a meetinghouse and sufficient defensive and industrial facilities ensured the community's dependence on the mother town

of Bernardston throughout the Colonial period. The community also appeared to have close political and probably economic ties with Deerfield. Future research should clarify the specifics of Leyden's development during this period. Existing secondary sources provide limited details of community growth, particularly settlement patterns and the economy. Archaeological evidence of period settlement should survive throughout Leyden, especially in Beaver Meadow, East Hill and Frizzell Hill.

VII. FEDERAL PERIOD (1775-1830)

A. Transportation Routes

Location of Leyden meeting house (1797) on Old County Road created radial highway pattern from town center with east-west connector as West Leyden-Frizzell Hill Road. Secondary east-west highways of the period included East Glen Road from Frizzell Hill and Alexander Road from Beaver Meadow with highway along Shattuck Brook to Bernardston. West Leyden bridge in place at Green River fordway to Colrain (1830 map).

B. Population

Not until 1790 is Bernardston's population separable from that of Leyden. Nevertheless, for the combined towns, as for Colrain to the west, the period 1765-1790 was one of tremendous growth. Between 1765 and 1790, Bernardston and Leyden together grew by 630%. Between 1776 and 1790, the rate was 176%, the highest growth rate of any town in the county, with Colrain following at 150.3%. Leyden's population peaked in 1800 at 1,095, beginning in that year a decline which lasted for 135 years. By 1830, with a population of 796, Leyden had already lost over a quarter of its 1800 population.

C. Settlement Patterns

Upland agriculture expanded from Beaver Meadow south to Frizzell Hill with formation of Dorrite religious community (1792). Civic focus established with meeting house location on Old County Road (1797) and mill village at West Leyden on Green River. Secondary development of farming south along Glen Brook uplands to Greenfield.

D. Economic Base

Entirely agricultural economy with small saw and grist mills. "In Leyden," write the 1832 enumerator Alanson Clark, "there is very little done in any branch of manufacturing; so little that it was thought unnecessary to visit the place for the purpose of obtaining further information."

E. Architecture

Approximately a dozen and a half houses and cottages of the Federal period survive in Leyden. Almost all of these are located in dispersed, isolated settings across the town. Less than a half dozen of the period structures are two-story houses; of these, center chimney and center hall plans were employed with equal frequency. For the

predominant cottages, center chimney plans and five bay fronts were standard. At least one half cottage (three bay front) and one three-quarter cottage (four bay front) were noted along with one center chimney cottage possibly dating before 1775. Of note are the Dunloe Farmhouse, a double interior chimney with a semi-elliptical fanlight, the center chimney Peter Babcock House (1781) and a pyramidal hip roofed center chimney house on Keets Brook Road. The earliest church in the town was the Baptist Church (organized in 1780; meeting house, 1797). The Methodists organized a society in 1810. The Baptist meeting house had dimensions of 46' x 36' and does not survive. Four school districts were established in 1794. At least two taverns operated in the period; Thomas Well and David Carpenter were the proprietors.

VIII. EARLY INDUSTRIAL PERIOD (1830-1870)

A. Transportation Routes

Relocation of meeting house to Leyden Center (1841) improved highway connections north-south as Greenfield Road along Glen Brook. No railroads projected or constructed through area.

B. Population

Leyden's population continued to decline. Between 1830 and 1870 the town lost over a third of its population, reaching 518 in the latter year.

In 1855, the only foreign-born population in Leyden were 25 natives of Ireland.

C. Settlement Patterns

Civic focus relocated from Old County Road east to Leyden Center with second meetinghouse (1841). Upland farming maintained as primary activity from Beaver Meadow south to Frizzell Hill and Glen Brook. Secondary mill village expanded at West Leyden from Colrain on Green River.

D. Economic Base

"Leyden," wrote Holland in 1855, "is strictly an agricultural town, and its soil is well adapted to grass and most kinds of grain. The products for market are mostly beef, pork, wool, butter, and poultry. There are three grist mills in the town, four saw mills, and three small broom handle establishments." Bernardston and Leyden reported large quantities of Merino wool. In 1837 the town ranked sixth and seventh in the county respectively. By 1845, Leyden's wool clip, which had remained constant when virtually all others had declined, ranked fourth. In 1865, the town still was an important wool producer.

Some stone was also taken from a Leyden quarry for the Connecticut River Railroad bridge over Fall River in Bernardston (1846), but its general inaccessibility prevented its further use.

E. Architecture

Approximately a dozen and a half houses and cottages are known to survive from the Early Industrial period. Of these, most are cottages, with center chimney plan structures prevailing. Only a few houses with sidehall or center hall plans are known. Greek Revival and Italianate houses were observed on Greenfield, Brattleboro and Frizzell Hill Roads and at the town center. At least one gable front Greek Revival cottage with a deep two-story roof was observed, on Frizzell Hill Road.

Surviving institutional buildings of the period include the United Methodist Church (1841), a two and a half story Greek Revival church with two-stage square belfry, and two one-story frame schoolhouses, one with a side entrance and one with a center entrance. During the Early Industrial period, a Universalist Society (1830-33) and a Wesleyan Methodist Society (1842) were founded; after the construction of the town center meeting house (1841) by the Baptists, all three groups met there.

IX. LATE INDUSTRIAL PERIOD (1870-1915)

A. Transportation Routes

Leyden Center remained as focus of local highway system with primary axis along Greenfield Road. No street railways constructed.

B. Population

Leyden's population continued to decline. Between 1870 and 1915, the town lost a third of its 1870 population, reaching 344 in the latter year.

Between 1895 and 1905, Leyden reported a population gain of 45 new residents. In the latter year, the town had the abnormally high immigrant population of 17.6% of the total residents in town, ten points above the figure 25 years earlier and 8 points above that a decade later. The largest ethnic group among the new arrivals were 33 Italians (45% of the total number of immigrants). The reason for this sudden rise is unclear.

C. Settlement Patterns

Leyden Center maintained as local civic focus with dairy farming on surrounding uplands to Beaver Meadow and Old County Road. Expansion of Greenfield water system with Glen Brook reservoir (1870-1905) in southern highlands.

D. Economic Base

The only manufactories in town in 1879 were three sawmills and three gristmills. The total value of their product, \$2,454, ranked the town 24th among the 26 towns in the county. The Glen Spring Cheese Factory had been erected at Leyden Center in 1870, but it closed down after a short time, according to Ames "because of outside competition." The last water-powered mills, at Beaver Meadow, closed in 1906 with

the death of the owner.

In 1871 and again in 1905, the Greenfield Aqueduct Company constructed reservoirs on Glen Brook to supply Greenfield, immediately to the south.

E. Architecture

Very few buildings were built in the period. The only structures observed were a few small cottages on Greenfield Road and at the town center. The one-story one-room Colonial Revival Robertson Library at the town center was built in 1913.

X. EARLY MODERN PERIOD (1915-1940)

A. Transportation Routes

Local highway improved as auto routes with secondary north-south axis from Greenfield to Leyden Center as Greenfield Road. No state highways designated through area.

B. Population

Leyden's population continued to decline until 1935, when the town reached its nadir of 253 persons. By 1940, probably influenced by Greenfield to the south, the population had risen to 260.

C. Settlement Patterns

Local civic focus remained at Leyden Center with upland farming on surrounding hills. Continued expansion of Greenfield water supply along Glen Brook with recreational activity in highlands.

D. Economic Base

No new industries identified.

E. Architecture

The only period structures noted were a few gambrel and gable roofed Colonial Revival cottages of the 1920s, the shingled one-and-a-half story Colonial Revival Town Hall (1930) and a concrete block garage of the 1920s, on Greenfield Road.

XI. SURVEY OBSERVATIONS

General: Leyden's inventory records most pre-1870 houses in the town as well as the primary institutional buildings. The inventory, completed by the Franklin County Arts Council, incorporates almost no historical data whatsoever. Historical data, including use, construction date and original owner should be completed. Of particular note is the preservation of the town's 19th century agricultural landscape.

XII. SOURCES

Ames, William Tyler and Marsha F. Ames. History of Leyden, Massachusetts, 1676-1959 (Orange, 1959).