

MHC Reconnaissance Survey Town Report

LINCOLN

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: March, 1980

COMMUNITY: Lincoln

I. TOPOGRAPHY

Located in hilly upland watershed area. Some exposed bedrock especially in southern part of town but terrain heavily reworked by glacial scouring and outwash processes. A gravelly to rocky soil. One large and several smaller ponds plus large areas of upland bog/swamp. Drainage into three systems; southern and eastern parts drain south into Charles River; western part into Sudbury; northeast corner into Shawsheen.

II. POLITICAL BOUNDARIES

Most of town included in Concord grant, 1635. Remnant of original boundary survives on southwest side. Became second precinct of Concord, 1746. Settlers in outlying sections of Lexington (1713) and Weston (1713) joined with second precinct of Concord to petition for separate town. Result was Town of Lincoln, incorporated 1754, known as "Niptown."

III. HISTORIC OVERVIEW

Affluent suburban town on historic western axis of Boston. Located on intermediate highland between Charles and Concord Rivers with potential native sites around Sandy and Fairhaven Ponds. Settlement corridor to Concord by mid-17th century with some presumed First Period houses. Formation of town center during mid-18th century with several well-preserved Colonial houses, especially along Concord Battle Road (National Historic Park). Limited water power sites along Stony Brook, primarily agricultural economy through 19th century with a number of houses of Federal, Greek Revival and Victorian style. Town center retains village scale with range of original civic buildings of architect design. Increasing suburbanization of landscape by rural estates during mid-20th century, with notable examples of Revival and Modern style houses around town center. Suburban pressure is modified by historic conservation and regulation of residential development.

IV. CONTACT PERIOD (1500-1620)

A. Transportation Routes:

Located on intermediate highland between Charles and Sudbury Rivers. Traverse trails linking river valleys are conjectured to follow Mill Street/North Great Road-Old Virginia Road around Hobbs Brook to north and Old Sudbury-South Great Road across Stony Brook to south with probable branch along Codman-Concord Roads to Walden Pond (Concord). It appears likely that a trail connected Sandy Pond with Stony Brook and the Concord River but precise location is unknown, perhaps along Sandy Pond Road with links along Lexington and Tower Roads as possibilities.

B. Settlement Pattern:

No documented period sites. Several unspecified sites along Sudbury River (especially near Fairhaven Bay) and on Elm Brook. Sites also likely near Sandy and Beaver Ponds.

C. Subsistence Pattern:

Fresh water fishing in ponds, upland hunting/gathering. Limited agriculture especially along Sudbury. Close enough to rivers for access to fish runs.

D. Observations:

Not an area with high potential for period sites. Nipmuck-related sites possible near ponds but generally the kind of rugged upland watershed which served as buffer area between inland and coastal tribes.

V. FIRST PERIOD SETTLEMENT (1620-1675)

A. Transportation Routes:

Native trails remain as local highways with location of North Great Road (Route 2A) to Concord by mid-17th century.

B. Population:

Few if any colonial inhabitants.

C. Settlement:

Very limited; a few scattered farms possible along north and south branches of Great Road.

D. Economic Base:

Subsistence agriculture.

E. Observations:

The outlying, less desirable and accessible sections of the Concord, Watertown and Cambridge grants.

VI. COLONIAL PERIOD SETTLEMENT (1676-1776)

A. Transportation Routes:

Location of Lincoln town center by mid-18th century promotes radial highways from meetinghouse including Trapelo, Bedford, Lexington, Weston, Lincoln and Baker Ridge Roads. Primary E/W highways improved as North Great Road (Route 2A) and South Great Road (Route 117) during Colonial period with Concord Road (Route 126) around Fairhaven Pond.

B. Population:

Slow growth prior to 1700 with steady development afterward. By 1754, 690 inhabitants. Census of 1765 listed 646 inhabitants, 99 families and 84 houses.

C. Settlement:

Scattered farms after 1680, especially around Sandy (Great or Flint's) Pond and Beaver Pond. Gradually increased settlement along north and south branches of Great Road. First meetinghouse built 1747 on south slope of Lincoln Hill--a compromise location midway between major roads. Town center developed around meetinghouse after 1750. First school built 1762 in town center. Farms and mills throughout town by mid-18th century.

D. Economic Base:

Primarily agriculture (corn, other grains, flax) and grazing (cattle and sheep). Apples (cider) an important supplement. Mostly small yeoman farms (30 acres). Considerable lumbering. Sawmills after 1690 on Halfway Brook (Farmer Pond) and Hobbs Brook. By end of period up to five additional saw/grist mills on Stony Brook, Elm Brook and Hobb's Brook (now under Cambridge reservoir). Besides lumber, cord wood sold to Boston. Some quarrying of marble and production of lime in area south of Sandy Pond. Said to have been a glassworks on the crest of Lincoln Hill, early 18th century (Brooks). No other information available. Taverns mentioned on both north and south branches of Great Road but no specific data available.

E. Architecture

Residential:

Recorded architecture of the period is almost entirely dominated by vernacular central-chimney two-story houses, few of which have any decoration other than very simple entry surrounds. At least one country estate (The Grange-Codman House) was built during this period on a site which was terraced and formally laid out; one or two others of slightly lesser quality may also have been built in more level, less hilly sections of the town.

F. Observations:

Through part of early 17th century grants, developed as a mid-18th century agricultural and milling community

VII. FEDERAL PERIOD (1775-1830)

A. Transportation Routes:

Colonial highways remain from 18th century with major E/W link as Concord Turnpike (Route 2) across Hobbs Brook by early 19th century.

B. Population:

Slight decline in population throughout period; no foreign-born population likely. Methodists present c. 1798; however, no church built within Lincoln.

C. Settlement Location:

No real enlargement of settled area; some new construction at town center.

D. Economic Base:

One reference to a woolen mill (Brooks), presumably very short lived. No other references to this activity. Town remained agricultural with small cottage industry in boots and shoes. By 1837 two tanneries were cited but with very small production. Several saw and grist mills remain in operation for most of century.

E. Architecture

Residential:

More houses were built than would be expected from population statistics. The largest number of new houses were of the two-story rear-wall chimney plan with low pitched roofs and simple Federalist style trim. A smaller number of twin-chimney and hip-roofed houses were also built, particularly at the town center and in the vicinity of Concord and Great Roads. These houses had slightly more elaborate Federalist-style decorative details and included at least one late-Georgian, high-style brick house of c. 1790 (Lincoln Survey). Cottages are rare; those present were 1-1/2 stories high with central or rear-wall chimneys, and may have been built as late as c. 1840.

Institutional:

Five school houses owned by town throughout period although legal school districts were never established; private academy (Liberal School) founded 1792; school house built 1793, sold to town 1810.

Commercial:

Buildings with partial use as tavern/inn likely to have existed; otherwise no commercial buildings likely to have been built.

Industrial:

Except for small-scale grist and saw mills, and small workshops, no industrial architecture likely.

VIII. EARLY INDUSTRIAL PERIOD (1830-1870)

A. Transportation Routes:

Highways and turnpikes in place from early 19th century. Fitchburg railroad (1844) extended from Boston to Concord through South Lincoln around Stony Brook wetlands.

B. Population:

Stable total population, slight decline in native population offset by small foreign-born population, mostly Irish immigrants. Unitarian Society founded, 1841.

C. Settlement Location:

Small expansion of center; otherwise, little change in settled area.

D. Economic Base:

Arrival of railroad in 1844 changed agricultural economy from production for local consumption to one of providing for Boston markets, initially in fruit and dairy products, later with larger vegetable harvests.

E. Architecture

Residential:

Small range of style; nearly all new houses of the period were side-hall plan two-story houses of very simple Greek Revival or Italianate design, nearly no cottages were built. High-style of the period was restricted to individual examples at the town center, including one temple-front Greek Revival style house, possible one or two Italianate houses and one Second Empire style house (c. 1865-1875).

Institutional:

Greek Revival style meetinghouse (Unitarian) built 1841-42 by Stow builder, resembling meetinghouse and town hall in Stow; Italianate style First Parish meetinghouse built 1860. Temple-front Greek Revival style town hall built, 1848, used also as high school, four other school houses present throughout period.

Commercial:

Stores and post office planned for first story of town hall (?); otherwise, little development likely except depot and grain elevator at South Lincoln (?).

Industrial:

No industry present; architecture probably limited to saw mills, grist mills and shoe makers' workshops, although shoe making never employed more than 8, and it disappeared between 1865 and 1875.

IX. LATE INDUSTRIAL PERIOD (1870-1915)

A. Transportation Routes:

Road and rail system remain in place. No suburban trolley routes through area.

B. Population:

Gradual growth of population throughout period, relatively large foreign-born population made up primarily Irish and Nova Scotian immigrants with a moderate number of Italian immigrants after the 1890s; gradual growth after c. 1885-1890 of wealthy Bostonians occupying suburban houses and country estates. Episcopal Parish founded 1873-74, two other religious groups present, although not named in local histories, may never have formed independent societies.

C. Settlement Location:

Some widely scattered suburban development in the vicinity of South Lincoln; small-scale expansion of town center along major roads; scattered country estates, generally on hilltop sites overlooking water (Sandy Pond Fairhaven Bay) also redevelopment of former farms as country estates.

D. Economic Base:

No change in economic emphasis. Greenhouses and truck gardens prevalent.

E. Architecture

Residential:

Small number of examples prior to c. 1890-1900, although full range of styles present, beginning with Queen Anne style. High-style of period consists of several Queen Anne, several eclectic 20th century, many Colonial Revival and many Federalist Revival style houses in estate settings; slightly more modest, but still high-style were the several Queen Anne, Colonial Revival and eclectic style houses built at Lincoln Center. Modest buildings of the period consisted of some side-hall plan Italianate style houses (1870-1880), Queen Anne style cottages and side-hall plan cottages built in the vicinity of South Lincoln. High Victorian Gothic and Second Empire styles appear almost entirely absent.

Institutional:

Wood-frame Victorian Gothic style Episcopal Church built c. 1874; Romanesque Revival style First Parish Church/Parish House built, 1891. Victorian Gothic style high school built 1872; four other school houses remained in use (?) until c. 1908 when, graded, central school was built (Colonial Revival style). Queen Anne style public library built 1884; Colonial Revival style town hall built, 1892.

Commercial:

Conversion of former town hall (1848) to commercial use, c. 1892; grain elevator and store at South Lincoln by 1880s; little other development likely.

Industrial:

No development.

X. EARLY MODERN PERIOD (1915-1940)

A. Transportation Routes:

Improvement of road system as autohighways in 1930s with Concord Turnpike as multi-lane Route 2 from Boston, South Great Road as Route 117 and Concord Road as Route 126. Location of Bedford Airport (Hanscom Airfield) in Elm Brook meadow during 1940s with original hangers intact.

B. Population:

Decline between 1915 and 1920 followed by steady increases throughout remainder of period.

C. Settlement Location:

Same tendencies as in preceding period.

D. Economic Base:

No further development known.

E. Architecture

Residential:

Colonial/Federal Revival style houses continued to be built as estate main houses, smaller scale examples of similar styles, as well as some bungalows were built at South Lincoln and along sections of Concord Road and Route 2.

Institutional:

No new building recorded in secondary sources.

Commercial:

Automobile garages built (Concord Road and Route 2), some farm stands probably built (Route 2), little other development.

Industrial:

No development.

XI SOURCES

- _____, An Account of the Celebration by the Town of Lincoln (1905)
Brooks, Paul. The View from Lincoln Hill (1970)
Shattuck, Lemuel. History of Concord (1835)
Torres-Reyes, Ricardo Farming and Land Uses (in the Minute Man National Historic Park) (1969)