

# MHC Reconnaissance Survey Town Report

## LUNENBURG

Report Date: 1984

Associated Regional Report: Central Massachusetts

**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

DATE:

COMMUNITY: Lunenburg

### I. HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

Lunenburg is a rural, suburban community at the eastern edge of the Central Highlands, along the secondary Mulpus Brook and Catacoonamug Brook corridors. Native pond sites are likely in the south at lake Wahlom (Unkechewalom), Lake Shirley (Catacoonamug), and Massapog Pond. First European settlement in 1718 was attracted by Mulpus Brook and Catacoonamug Brook meadowlands, and a meetinghouse site was established by 1729. The town remained a garrisoned frontier outpost through the first half of the 18th century, with facilities from native hostilities in the northwest (now Ashby) as late as 1749. Dispersed agricultural settlement persisted through the late 18th and early 19th century, while the meetinghouse center developed northward as a civic and commercial focus on the east-west county highway (Massachusetts Avenue). Railroad connections passed through the town's southern and southwestern peripheries, and no major concentration of 19th century industry developed. Late 19th century electric streetcar connections from Fitchburg and Leominster in the southwest led to suburban growth and the establishment of an amusement park complex at Whalom Lake. Early automobile suburb development continued at Wahlom Lake and along Route 2 (now 2A). Widespread post-war suburban development persists, and may threaten remaining functional agricultural landscapes in the south (particularly Leominster Road and Lancaster Avenue), and the northeast (Flat Hill, Mulpus Road). Recent civic and commercial development along Route 2A has infringed on Lunenburg Center, although much of the mid-19th century structure remains intact.

### II. POLITICAL BOUNDARIES

Established as a town in 1728 from "South Town" part of Turkey Hills grant of 1719, including Woburn Farms (granted 1664), Dorchester Farms (granted 1717), and several small 17th century grants. Additional lands granted in 1732, 1733. Part established as town of Fitchburg in 1764.

### III. TOPOGRAPHY

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

#### A. Transportation Routes:

Mulpus Brook corridor with Whalom Pond/Massapog Pond focus in south. East/west trail south of Mulpus Brook inferred as Elmwood Road over Flat Hill-Pine Street-Arbor Street-Northfield Road-Chestnut Street-White Street. Northern upland branches conjectured on Highland Street-West Townsend Road, and Townsend Harbor Road. Southern trail past Massapog Pond inferred as Lancaster Avenue-Shirley Road- Fort Pond Road, with east branch to Catacoonamug Brook on Shirley Road. Southwest branch to Whalom Pond inferred as Leominster Road-Elm Street-Whalom Pond.

B. Settlement Pattern:

Like most northern Worcester County towns no archaeological sites are reported in the town. Several ponds in the town, Lake Shirley, Massapog Pond, Lake Whalom, and Hickory Hills Lake, provide likely shores for occupation. Other possibilities include dry knolls near Mulpus Brook in the north. Low density and short-term occupation is predicted in these upland areas, from base camps on the Nashua in Lancaster, and in Sterling.

C. Subsistence:

The area was visited seasonally by small task and family groups, primarily for hunting and fishing.

V. PLANTATION PERIOD (1620-1675)

A. Transportation Routes:

Contact period trails continued in use.

B. Settlement Pattern:

Among the Native American peoples, the patterns of the Contact period continue. Towards the period's end two tracts are granted to individuals: in 1663 a grant of 204 acres to Nathaniel Walker near the Shirley line, in 1672 a grant of 150 acres to Frances Adams, also located in the east.

C. Subsistence:

A continuation of patterns established during the Plantation period, with some reduction due to the formation of Praying Towns, and the increased presence of colonials and fur trading.

VI. COLONIAL PERIOD (1675-1775)

A. Transportation Period:

Native Trails are improved as roadways from the meetinghouse center (1729) to outlying farms and surrounding communities. Important early routes include the road east to Groton (Massachusetts Avenue-Arbor Street-Pine Street-Elmwood Road), south to Lancaster (Lancaster Avenue-Shirley Road; Fort Pond Road), and Northfield Road west (ca. 1736). Other routes connect to Ashby and the Townsend villages in the north, and to Leominster and later Fitchburg in the south and west.

B. Population:

Five years after the division ofouselots, nine families were located in the town in five garrisons; a year later only 10 of the 26 houses constructed were inhabited. With incorporation in 1728, there were 28 men in the town. With the abandonment of some of the northern towns in 1736-44, this area was part of the northern line

of settlement; soldiers were stationed in town, which was attacked in 1748. Settlement occurred more rapidly thereafter and the population reached 743 in 1765 and 978 in 1776.

The town's first minister was ordained in 1728 but soon dismissed for not having a grave and sober enough demeanor. Barber claims that many of the early settlers came from Ireland and Scotland.

C. Settlement Pattern:

The area now Lunenburg was legislated as part of the Northtown (Townsend) and Southtown (Lunenburg) and Fitchburg) in 1719 in the area known as Turkey Hills. In addition to the individual grants of the late Plantation period, two towns owned substantial acreage here: a 1664 grant of Woburn was reconfirmed in 1716, laid out in the southeast, and equalled 2000 acres; and an additional 1000 acres were granted the next year to the town of Dorchester, just west of the above. Eighty proprietors were admitted to the town at the price of one pound per 50 acres. In 1720 the first lots were surveyed, in the eastern section of the large grant but their size is unknown. The first meetinghouse was also located here in the center of the present town, but to the east of the whole grant.

D. Economic Base:

Very little information is available on the town.

E. Architecture:

Residential: Few period survivals. The center chimney house appears to have been the predominant building type.

Institutional: First meetinghouse (35' x 45') built in 1728. Second meetinghouse (45' x 60') built in 1749. Schoolhouse erected near meetinghouse in 1741.

VII. FEDERAL PERIOD (1775-1830)

A. Transportation Routes:

Colonial highways continued in use with the addition of a new east/west county road through Lunenburg center to Fitchburg in 1830 (now Route 2A-Massachusetts Avenue).

B. Population:

The town's population remained quite stable during this period, as it would until the early 20th century. The total figure of 1265 in 1776 grew to only 1317 by 1830; the period high was 1371 in 1810, period low 1209 in 1820. Late in the period a Unitarian minister withdrew from his post due to disagreements with an Orthodox church. A Methodist society was formed in 1803, and built a meetinghouse ten years later. Some migration took place to New Hampshire towns including Winchester, Walpole, Charlestown and Rindge.

C. Settlement Patterns:

Dispersed, upland agricultural settlement continues. Some residential concentration occurs near the meetinghouse center, with linear development south on Lancaster Avenue, and less intensive development north on Highland Street toward the North Cemetery. The first Methodist Church (1813) is located north of the North Cemetery on Northfield Road, the Second Methodists Church (1829) is relocated further south on Highland Street.

VIII. EARLY INDUSTRIAL PERIOD (1830-1870)

A. Transportation Routes:

The early 19th century roads continued in use, with the addition in 1870 of the New Townsend Road along the western border, and Leominster Road south of the Center. The Fitchburg Railroad (1845) passes through the Southeast and Southwest corners of town.

B. Population:

The town's population declines slowly during this period, from 1317 in 1830 to 1121 in 1870. Agriculture remains the overwhelming employment in the town, peaking in the first half of the period when nearly five times as many men were farmers as mechanics and operatives. Small numbers of immigrants came to the town, 6.4% in 1855 and 4% in 1865, primarily from Ireland, and smaller numbers from England and Canada. The Trinitarian members of the First Parish withdrew from their own church in 1835. Within the Methodist Church, the minister participated in the Millerite movement in 1842. An Academy operated in the town from 1839 to 1866. A Farmers Club was formed in 1848.

C. Settlement Patterns:

The focus of the center village shifts north of Massachusetts Ave. with the relocation of the Third Congregational Church (1830), the Academy (1839), the first Town House (1839) and the Orthodox Church (1844). New residential development occurs west of this civic focus on the new County Road (Massachusetts Ave.)

Dispersed agricultural settlement continued, with many small cooperage shops. The Fitchburg Railroad depot (1845) is located in the extreme southern part of town.

E. Architecture:

Residential: Center chimney houses continue to be built, rear wall chimney houses also noted.

Institutional: Methodist meetinghouse located on Northfield Road in 1813. Second Methodist building constructed in 1829. By 1785, five district school buildings were built. Increases to nine by 1792.

IX. LATE INDUSTRIAL PERIOD (1870-1915)

A. Transportation Routes:

By the 1890s, electric streetcar service is established from Fitchburg and Leominster to Whalom Park in the southwest (Summer Street - then Northeast along new right-of-way to Electric Avenue, with loop west of Whalom Lake, then south to Leominster). A branch is also established north to Lunenburg Center (Prospect Street - Leominster Road ) and a line runs across the southern part of town for North Leominster to Shirley/Ayer (right-of-way north of Fitchburg Railroad to Goodrich Street - then along Shirley Road).

B. Population:

The town's population remained stable through the end of the nineteenth century, varying little from 1100. In 1895 the total expanded to 1237, to 1332 in 1900, to 1393 in 1910, and to 1610 in 1915. Agriculture remains the predominant employment, outnumbering manufacturing 3 to 1 through most of the period. In 1915, however, the ratio had shifted to 1.5 to 1. Immigration to the town increased from 5.5% in 1875 to 14.7% in 1915. Many different countries contributed including Ireland in the early years, English and French Canada, England, Scotland, and later Finns.

C. Settlement Patterns:

The significant period development is the growth of streetcar suburbs of Fitchburg and Leominster in the southwest in the Baker District (north of Summer Street and east of Baker Pond), and around Whalom Park on the west side of Whalom Lake (both south of the park, and north of the lake). In the center, some residential development occurs east on Massachusetts Avenue.

E. Architecture:

Residential: Relatively stable population is reflected in little building activity. Gable end houses with modest period trim predominate. Some double chimney houses are built. Predominant form of the period is the gable-end house, both side-passage plan and five-bay, center entry version.

Institutional: Third meetinghouse (50' x 64') is gable-end Greek Revival structure with recessed entry. Orthodox meetinghouse constructed in 1844. The 1829 Methodist meetinghouse is completely remodelled in 1870 to resemble period revival style designs.

A town hall was built in 1839 and subsequently sold and moved in 1867 when the town bought the Unitarian Church and Converted it to a town hall.

A new center school building was constructed in 1835. An academy was built in 1841 and then subsequently sold to Fitchburg in 1867.

X. EARLY MODERN PERIOD (1915-1940)

A. Transportation Routes:

By the early 1920s the east/west Mohawk Trail auto corridor is established through Lunenburg center on Massachusetts Avenue (old Route 7, then Route 2, now Route 2A). A branch to Groton in the east becomes Route 25. A new Route 13 corridor is built from Leominster northeast to Townsend west of Whalom Lake (Electric Avenue - Chase Road). Other local roads are paved and improved as automobile highways.

B. Population:

The town's population continued to grow as a suburb of Fitchburg, from 1610 in 1915, to 2195 in 1940. The proportion of foreign-born expanded slightly from 14.7% in 1915 to 16.4% in 1940. That same year 26.2% of the population was classified as rural.

C. Settlement Patterns:

Streetcar and early automobile suburban development continues in the southwest. Concentrations of residences occur on parallel Streets north and south of Whalom Road west of Whalom Lake, and along Route 2/13 (Massachusetts Avenue) from the Fitchburg border east. Some cottage development occurs along the west side of Shirley Reservoir, and in the north Dickson Reservoir (Hickory Mills Lake) is created. Some early automobile-related commercial activities occur on Route 2.

Residential; Some Colonial Revival and Four Square plans. Cottages along Lake Shirley.

XI. OBSERVATIONS:

Very poor inventory; essentially of no value. No information, including dates on forms, and obviously no research on any buildings.