

MHC Reconnaissance Survey Town Report

ORLEANS

Report Date: 1984

Associated Regional Report: Cape Cod and the Islands

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.

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MHC RECONNAISSANCE SURVEY REPORT

DATE: 1984

COMMUNITY: Orleans

I. TOPOGRAPHY

The town of Orleans is located on outer Cape Cod, immediately north of the "elbow" at Chatham. Its distance from Boston is approximately 90 miles by land. The town is bounded to the north by Eastham, to the east by the Atlantic Ocean, to the west by Harwich and Brewster, and to the south by Chatham.

Geologically, the town is divided primarily by two surficial deposits. The Nauset Heights deposits are present in the East Orleans, Barley Neck, and Pocket areas. This deposit actually represents an extension of the Sandwich moraine, a hilly area stretching across the entire Cape from Bourne to Orleans. The second surficial deposit in Orleans is the Harwich outwash plain deposits covering most of the town west of Pleasant Bay. Dune and beach deposits are present along both the Atlantic and Bay shores. Lake and lake bottom deposits are present between Namskaket and Rock Harbor creeks. Marsh and swamp deposits are also present in the area of Nauset Marsh, Pleasant Bay and the Rock Harbor, Namskaket and Little Namskaket creeks. Elevations in the town average around 50 feet or less. However, heights of over 100 feet are also present.

Soils within the town are generally thin sandy loams and characteristic of the surficial deposits noted above. Soils within the Nauset Heights Deposits are mostly gravelly sand, pebble to cobble gravel, clayey silt, till and boulders as much as tens of feet in diameter common (Oldale, et al. 1971). In Harwich Outwash Plain deposits soils are mostly medium to very coarse sand and pebble to cobble gravel. Till and large boulders are also present in the upper parts of its distribution. The necks of land in the town are the most fertile.

Orleans was once probably covered with a heavy growth of oak and pine timber which was cut for fuel and shipbuilding. Today, young pines and oaks cover much of the town.

While considerable subsurface drainage exists in the town, surface drainage is also present in the town's many fresh water ponds and tidal estuaries. No rivers or creeks are present in the town which are not affected by tidal action. Major fresh water ponds and lakes include Baker Pond, Pilgrim Lake, and Crystal Lake. Major creeks and rivers include Rock Harbor Creek, Little Namskaket Creek, Namskaket Creek, Namequoit River, and the River. Other major bodies of salt water include the Town Cove, Nauset Harbor, Little Pleasant Bay, and Pleasant Bay.

Several islands and large bodies of salt marsh are also present in the town. Hopkins Island is present in the Town Cove with several smaller grass islands in the Nauset Marsh area. In the Pleasant

Bay area, several larger islands are present. These islands include Pocket, Sampson, Hog, Sipson, and Little Sipson islands. Extensive salt marshes are also present in the town. All creeks along the Cape Cod Bay shoreline contain salt marshes. However, the largest marshes are present in the Nauset Marsh and Pleasant Bay areas.

Orleans also contains several coastal inlets which offer potential harbor locations for vessels of small classes. Nauset Harbor and the Town Cove offer the most direct access to the Atlantic Ocean. However, Nauset Inlet is blocked by a shifting sand bar. Pleasant Bay also offers several potential harbors. However, waters in the bay are shallow and access to the ocean is a distance away in Chatham. Of the creeks along the bay shoreline, Rock Harbor affords the best facility but is impassible at low water.

II. POLITICAL BOUNDARIES

Most of the present territory of Orleans was included in the initial Nauset Grant (later Eastham) of 1640. The southwest territories were retained as part of a native reservation. Eastern boundary of Satucket purchasers was established in 1641 and subsequently confirmed as the boundary between Eastham and Harwich (incorporated 1694) in 1705. This line ran through present Orleans territory from Namskaket Creek southeast to Arey's Pond, with a strip at Potanumaquut reserved for the native population (east of Harwich Road?). This territory was divided between the town towns in 1712. The South Precinct of Eastham was established in 1723. In 1772 the Eastham-Harwich border (present Orleans-Harwich/Brewster line) was shifted west to Baker Pond. The South Precinct of Eastham was incorporated as Orleans in 1797. Northern boundary with Eastham was adjusted in 1867.

III. HISTORIC OVERVIEW

Orleans is a resort community on outer Cape Cod, immediately north of the elbow, between Pleasant Bay to the south and Town Cove and Nauset Harbor to the north. Native sites are reported at Town Cove, Nauset Marsh, and Pleasant Bay. Native villages are reported to have existed, but site locations remain unconfirmed. Early 17th century European exploration and visitation is highly probable. Initial colonial settlement occurred ca. 1642 in Skaket area between Namkaket Creek and Rock Harbor Creek at the southern edge of the Nauset Plantation focus. Local native settlement consolidated in the south at Potanumaquut reservation (with Christian meetinghouse), which persisted through the early 18th century. Dispersed colonial settlement on the north and east necks became sufficient for establishment of South Parish Eastham in 1723, with meetinghouse site south of Town Cove. Shore-oriented, dispersed settlement continued through the 18th and early 19th centuries, with cod fishing and shellfish harvesting. An early 19th century Cape Cod Bay focus was established at Rock Harbor Landing, while local civic and religious activities consolidated south of Town Cove through the mid 19th century. Late 19th century decline in cod and mackerel fisheries was partly offset by the growth of a railroad depot

commercial center west of Town Cove after 1865, by local industrial development (primarily clothing manufacturing), and by commercial agricultural development, including a local poultry specialization. By the early 20th century, summer resort development on Pleasant Bay had been initiated, and growth has continued along the town's shore areas. Intensive auto-oriented commercial development along Routes 6A and 28 have significantly altered the Orleans Center area west of Town Cove, and little of the depot focus remains. While suburban development has been widespread, the Rock Harbor and civic center clusters remain partly intact, and numerous outlying 19th century farmhouses survive.

IV. CONTACT PERIOD (1500-1620)

A. Transportation Routes

Exact locations of Contact period native trails are unknown for Orleans. However, several trails are indicated on the basis of earlier period site locations, the distribution of environmental resources, and the sightings of natives and explorations by early European travelers. At least two major trails were probably present. One trail likely existed along the Cape Cod Bay shore: a continuation of trails in Eastham to the northeast and Brewster over to the west. This trail probably skirted the interior limits of tidal creeks and marshes along the shoreline. This trail was probably a major transportation route connecting Orleans with other Cape areas. It may also have been important as an access to drift whales along the coast as well as hunting and the gathering of wild plants and shellfish. A second major trail also probably existed from the Town Cove area southward along the westward boundary of Pleasant Bay to the Chatham/Harwich area. Other trails likely spurred from this trail leading around the eastern shoreline of the Town Cove and to the Weeset, Tonset, Nauset Heights, Barley Neck, and Pocket areas. Additional trails also probably led to interior fresh water ponds and the numerous necks, coves, and rivers of Pleasant Bay as well. The barrier beach along the Atlantic coastline also probably contained a trail, although the shifting nature of sands in the area makes it unlikely a specific route was continually used.

B. Population

Little direct evidence exists from which accurate population estimates can be made regarding native populations in the Outer Cape area. Furthermore, while individual accounts often subdivide Outer Cape native populations into subgroups such as Nauset, Pamet, Monomoyicks, etc., the term Nauset Indian generally applies throughout the Cape area. Mooney (1928:4) lists 1,200 Nauset natives before the 1617-19 epidemics. This number was reduced to ca. 500 by 1621 (Mooney and Thomas 1910:40-41). As indicated above, these statistics probably refer to the entire native population of the Outer Cape area. Furthermore, it is doubtful whether or not those estimates are entirely accurate.

The Orleans area may have been one of the most populated areas along the Outer Cape during the Contact period. The Town Cove, Weeset, Tonset, and Nauset Heights areas were apparently populated during this period. The necks and shores along Pleasant Bay in South Orleans were also settled areas. Thus even conservative estimates of local native populations likely exceed a few hundred individuals during the earlier stages of the period. Following the epidemics late in the period the numbers were apparently severely reduced.

Europeans were not settled in Orleans during this period. However, passing fishermen, explorers (Gosnold, Mayflower [Bradford], Champlain, etc.) and shipwrecks (e.g. Sparrowhawk) brought transient visitors.

C. Settlement Pattern

European settlements did not exist in Orleans during this period. However, some contact between Native Americans and Europeans in the Orleans area undoubtedly took place as European explorers and fishermen frequented the area long before settlement. For example, Gosnold may have visited the area as early as 1602, followed by Champlain in 1605. Later, in 1620, explorers from the Mayflower may also have explored the area.

Natives had settled the Orleans area for some time prior to European contact. Known Late Woodland period sites are present throughout much of the town, particularly in areas bordering the Town Cove, Nauset Marsh and Pleasant Bay areas. Late Woodland period artifact listings and general town provenience also indicate the extent to which this area was settled during that period. All known sites and artifact listings generally exhibit site locational preferences for various coastal estuarine areas.

While Contact period sites are known for the Orleans area, village type sites are unknown. For example, Champlain's early account (drawings) notes pallisaded areas with structures and garden areas in the vicinity of Nauset Harbor. However, no physical evidence of these sightings exists. Other gaps also exist between native sightings by early settlers and explorers and contemporary corroboration of these sightings. For example, in the early 17th century, ten men traveled from Plymouth to Nauset (present-day Eastham or Orleans) to recover a lost boy whom the natives were holding. The Europeans met the sachem Aspinet and several natives, yet no village sites are presently known for the area. A similar situation occurred after the wreck of the Sparrowhawk in ca. 1626. At that time, natives living in the South Orleans area aided the disaster victims, yet no villages known here either. Native village sites should exist in the Orleans area; the problem is pinpointing exact locations. As noted above, Contact period sites are known for the area. However, these are usually burials or multicomponent sites where Contact period artifacts were found. Contact period artifacts have been found at the Hayward's Portanimicutt Site, the Peck Site on Arey's Pond, and at an unnamed site at Camp Viking off Namequoit Road. All three of the previously noted sites are in the South Orleans area. In the

Nauset Harbor area, known Contact period sites are not present in Orleans. However, Champlain's account does speak of sites in the Orleans area of the harbor and the Contact period Hemingway Site is present in Eastham but also bordering the harbor.

Native place names also provide indications of the extent to which natives either inhabited and/or used the Orleans area. For example, several locales in the East Orleans area are still known by their native names. These areas include Weeset, Tonset, Nauset Heights, and Pocket Neck. In the western portion of town, Nanskaket still refers to a local area. Rivers and roads also retain native names. They include Little Namskaket and Namskaket creeks, the Namequoit River, Namequoit and Portanimicut Roads, plus others. Orleans retains more native names than any other Outer Cape town.

Thus, known Late Woodland and Contact period sites, artifact listings with general town provenience, native sightings by early settlers and explorers, as well as native place names all provide evidence of settlement in the Orleans area during the Contact period. Those sources of evidence also provide corroboration of regional and Cape settlement preferences for coastal areas such as estuaries, tidal rivers, and ponds.

D. Subsistence Pattern

Since European settlements were not present in the Orleans area during this period, European subsistence probably followed that of the native inhabitants in the area. While some food was undoubtedly carried with early explorers, traders, and fishermen, the bulk of their subsistence was probably secured through hunting, fishing, the gathering of wild plants and shellfish and the trade, stealing, or purchase of agricultural products (e.g., corn or turkey wheat) from the local Native Americans.

Native American subsistence during the Contact period in the Orleans area was probably similar to that practiced in other Cape areas. The combined use of wild and domesticated food resources formed the basis of the subsistence system. It is unknown at present exactly when agriculture or, more specifically, horticulture, was introduced to the natives in the Cape Cod area. However, in the Contact period sufficient quantities of corn, beans, and squash were being purchased for storage and at times for sale or trade to English settlers. Shellfishing, fishing, and hunting were also important subsistence pursuits. In Orleans, numerous tidal areas contain mixed beds of virtually every type of shellfish available in the Cape area. In particular, soft shell clams have been historically important and plentiful in the Town Cove and Nauset Harbor area. Both fresh and salt water species of fish are also available in the Orleans area. Orleans's several fresh water ponds contain numerous species of fish for consumption. In particular, alewives are present in the Pleasant Bay area and may have had a wider distribution in the past. Pleasant Bay, Nauset Harbor, the Town Cove, Cape Cod Bay, and the Atlantic Ocean also provided a wide variety of fish for

utilization. Sea mammals, such as whales and seals, were also available.

The wetlands and forested areas of Orleans provided numerous species of mammals for hunting. Wolves were present as well as deer and various furbearers. Various species of ducks were also present in fresh water wetlands and coastal estuarine areas.

V. PLANTATION PERIOD (1620-1675)

A. Transportation Routes

Major transportation routes in the present-day Orleans area continued to be native trails throughout this period. Few Europeans were settled in Orleans at this time. Thus, roads were not needed for settlement areas. Natives likely continued use of paths they had used during earlier periods in the East Orleans, Pleasant Bay (South Orleans) and Namskaket areas. Upgraded native trails or new paths were likely from the local of settlement in Eastham (north of Town Cove) to the Skaket area where Nicholas Snow settled early.

B. Population

Native American population in the Outer Cape and Orleans area were in constant decline during this period. Some may have remained in the Nauset Heights or Tonset area. However, native lands in this area may have been used strictly for agricultural purposes and not residential. In South Orleans, natives were present as a group at Potanumaquat well into the 18th century. A reservation had been established for them in this area.

Settled European populations were not present in Orleans until 1643-44 when Nicholas Snow and his family (possibly five to seven individuals) settled the Skaket area at the time of Eastham's initial settlement. Little additional settlement occurred until the following Colonial period. The population locus in the area was to the north and west of the Town Cove in present-day South Eastham.

C. Settlement Pattern

Settlement of present-day Orleans occurred during the initial settlement of Nauset or Eastham in 1644. At that time, Nicholas Snow settled the Skaket or Namskaket area of Orleans between Namskaket and Rock Harbor Creek. Snow was one of the original seven committee members to settle the Nauset Plantation; the only one of which to settle in the Orleans area. Each committee member settled on a 200-acre tract of farmland. Additional settlement of the Orleans area was slow during the Plantation period as the locus of settlement for the Nauset Plantation and Eastham was to the north and west of the Town Cove. However, some settlement did occur in Orleans, predominantly around the Town Cove and East Orleans area. Orleans was not made a separate parish of the town of Eastham until 1718 and a separate township in 1797.

European rights to the Orleans area were predominantly purchased from Mattaguason, sachem of Monomoyick. Mattaguason sold the original purchasers all lands known as Pocket, including the two islands lying before Potanumaquut. The Nauset beach area and other islands in Pleasant Bay were also included, except for Pocket Island, which remained in native hands for a short while. The purchase also included the territory known as Namskakket extending northward to lands of the sachem George. Other lands were also reserved for the natives. In East Orleans a small neck of land was reserved for the natives to grow corn on. However, the largest tract of land reserved was a strip of land in the Potanumaquut area of South Orleans. By the end of the Plantation period, all natives remaining in the area were settled on this reservation land.

D. Economic Base

Orleans was inhabited by both Europeans and natives during this period. Pokansket Indians, locally known as Nausets and Monomoyicks, continued to combine wild and domesticate food resources as their subsistence base. Corn agriculture was important and may have been concentrated in the Town Cove and Nauset Harbor area. In particular, Champlain's 1605 map of the Nauset Harbor area illustrates native huts surrounded by palisades with gardens inside in what might be the Tonset area. The agricultural importance of this area to local natives is further attested to by the fact that when the natives sold the rights to the English (ca. 1644), a small tract of land was reserved on a small neck bordering a harbor on the eastern side of the tract purchased so the natives could have cornfields. This area may be the Nauset Heights or Tonset area. Hunting and fishing were also still important. Shellfish and whales were still exploited by natives in the area, as indicated by the fact that when the natives sold the land rights they retained the privilege of digging shellfish in the Town Cove area and a share of the blubber of any drift whales (as determined by the English).

When Eastham was settled in 1644, the only one of the original seven proprietors and his family to settle within the present limits of Orleans was Nicholas Snow. Snow settled the Skaket area in the general vicinity between Namskakket and Rock Harbor creeks. Orleans's European agricultural development began at that time. Snow's settlement was followed shortly thereafter by other settlers primarily interested in farming. Corn, rye, wheat, vegetables, and large quantities of English hay were grown as well as fruits such as apples and pears. Animals were also important, as indicated by the growing of English hay and the grazing potential of Orleans's vast salt marshes. Cattle, pigs, sheep, horses, and oxen were probably present. Domesticate fowl such as chickens, ducks, and geese may also have been present.

In addition to agriculture and husbandry, European settlers also likely hunted, fished, and gathered wild plants and shellfish to supplement their subsistence base. However, it is also likely that commercial fishing and shellfishing also began at this time. Orleans's creeks and harbors, particularly Rock Harbor Creek and
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Nauset Harbor, probably attracted a limited number of individuals interested solely in fishing, or interested in seasonally supplementing their agricultural pursuits. The herring, cod, and whale fishery were probably the earliest fisheries originated. Shellfishing probably focused on soft shell clams in the Town Cove area; a few locally owned vessels of small class may also have been built. It is not known for certain whether or not mills were constructed during the period. However, if they were they were probably tidal mills with the possibility that only one mill serviced the entire new settlement (present Orleans and Eastham). Remnants of tidal mills exist on Salt Pond in present Eastham and Mill Pond in present Orleans. However, it is unknown when and by whom they were constructed.

VI. COLONIAL PERIOD (1675-1775)

A. Transportation Routes

Orleans remained a part of Eastham until its incorporation in 1797. As a result, most new roads were not laid out until after that date. However, some old roads existed: one major roadway was laid out early from Eastham to Satucket (Deyo 1890:750, which in 1668 was connected with the road along the Cape (King's Highway). This road was subsequently developed in places as the regular County Road running along the northwest side of the Town Cove. Local secondary roads were also developed at this time leading to the East Orleans area in the vicinity of Beach Road and the Barley Neck area along what is now Barley Neck Road. A road also existed to South Orleans in the vicinity of Route 28.

B. Population

Orleans' native population rapidly disintegrated during this period. In 1712 the reservation lands were split up and divided among the local towns. By the close of the period, it is unlikely enough natives remained to be a cohesive political or social unit.

Throughout the Colonial period, the Orleans area or the Southern Precinct of Eastham, continued to be settled. However, populations were not concentrated in the style of villages. Instead, dispersed or scattered farm populations were present. Deyo (1890:750-51) presents population or "settlers" for the town of Orleans. These "settlers" include: Tonset, 56; Central part, 25; Potanumaquut Area (South Orleans), 22; Skaket area, 15; Rock Harbor area, 19. Accordingly, 137 "settlers" are listed for Orleans in 1797. At these figures represent heads of families, a total estimate for the Orleans area might include 685 individuals, assuming five persons per family. Natives, Blacks, and other nonwhite or free persons are not included.

C. Settlement Pattern

The pace of European settlement in the Orleans area increased at a rapid rate throughout the Colonial period. In fact, possibly by the end of the period Orleans' population growth exceeded that of its parent town Eastham. This increase was fact by the time of MHC Reconnaissance Survey Town Report: Orleans

Orleans' incorporated in 1797. Most of Orleans' settlement during the period was in the northern and eastern parts of the township. Throughout this period there were no concentrated villages. Instead, scattered homes and farmsteads characterized the town. In time (during the 19th century) the area between the Skaket/Rock Harbor area and the Town Cove would come to be called the Centre or Village of Orleans.

The residents of Orleans applied to become a separate parish in 1718 when the town funds were to be used to build a new church north of the Town Cove (present-day Eastham area). Subsequently, in 1723, the South Precinct of Eastham became a separate parish from other town areas to the north. This act began the split of the townships. Only one meetinghouse existed in the South Parish until 1804.

Most settlement in the Orleans area was directed toward agricultural pursuits. However, maritime interests were also becoming important. The Town Cove and Nauset Harbor were important for shellfishing and cod fishing. The Rock Harbor area also developed as a fishing area and eventually there was a packet line to Boston. Commercial and residential settlement followed these maritime interests.

D. Economic Base

As Orleans' population grew during the Colonial period, its economic base expanded on foundations laid during the Plantation period. Agriculture continued to grow until nearly the entire town was under cultivation by the early 19th century. Tidal mills may have still been in use on Mill Pond, Arby's Pond, and Sparrow Pond. Several wind mills were also constructed; however, they all appear to have been built after the Colonial period. Major shipbuilding was never great in Orleans, although some small vessels were built. The cod and mackerel fishery also continued to grow as well as the soft shell clam fishery as a source for bait. Coasting was also important, particularly the packet business with Boston. Overall, the town was distinctly agricultural with some maritime focus. Natives were still present in the South Orleans area, probably continuing subsistence trends established during earlier periods. Some natives probably served as crew on fishing and whaling vessels.

E. Architecture

Residential: Based on extant examples, the most frequently appearing house type was the 1 1/2-story, interior chimney, double-pile, gable roofed house. In contrast to other area towns, only three- and four-bay examples survive, dating from mid century.

Institutional: A meetinghouse for the native population existed in 1685 but its appearance is unknown; a Congregationalist meetinghouse of 1718 is also of unknown appearance.

A schoolhouse was built here in 1762, but its appearance and survival are unknown.

VII. FEDERAL PERIOD (1775-1830)

A. Transportation Routes

In the late 18th century, the primary routes through town remained the old King's Highway (County Road) corridor through the northwest (abandoned Pond Road-Route 28-Route 6A), and the road southwest to Harwich (Route 28-Route 39). Local roads led east to the town's outlying necks and shores, including Tonset, Nauset Beach, and Barley Neck. New roads were added and old ones improved after incorporation in 1797, although Barber (1839:49) could still comment four decades later that "the roads here, as in most towns in the vicinity are, on account of the sand, tedious and heavy." In 1814, a landing place was established at Rock Harbor in the northwest, and a new road (Rock Harbor Road-Main Street) was built to connect it to the center village. With packets to Boston, Rock Harbor became the focus of local shipping. By period's end, a new County Road (Route 6A) had been established west into Brewster.

B. Population

The Federal period was one of growth for Orleans, as for most Cape towns. Her 63% growth rate between incorporation in 1797 and 1830 was about average for the county. Although the population wouldn't peak until 1840, like Wellfleet and Eastham, Orleans' greatest growth period was in the 1820s, when the town grew at an average rate of 44.6 persons per year. By 1830, Orleans had 1,789 residents.

The Portanimicut Reservation was set up on the border of Harwich and Brewster (1790), but only a small number of Native Americans lived there. The land was sold in 1820 and the last native living there died in 1863. This area was affected by the 1816 regional epidemic. The local members of the Baptist church (eight in number) set up a society in 1826 but declined in number later in the 19th century. Methodists in the town established, briefly, a Reformed society, ca. 1820. In 1827 the Rock Harbor Academy was established, operating until 1855. Temperance advocates prohibited alcohol consumption at the church raising of 1829.

C. Settlement Pattern

At the time of its incorporation as a town from South Parish Eastham in 1797, the settlement of Orleans remained dispersed, with the greatest concentration of houses in the north and east. Twenty years later, the distribution remained similar, with settlement most dense at Namskaket Neck on Cape Cod Bay where the Rock Harbor landing was established in 1814, along the County Road, and along the road to Tonset Neck east of Town Cove. After 1800, saltworks were built at many coastal sites, with concentrations at Namskaket, Pocket Neck, and on the east shore of Town Cove.

The 1718 South Parish meetinghouse was retained at the East Main Street/Meetinghouse Road site, though enlarged and repaired in MHC Reconnaissance Survey Town Report: Orleans

1800. The structure was replaced by a new Congregational church in 1829. A year earlier, a Baptist Church had been built just to the southwest on the south side of School Road near Monument Road. In 1827 an academy was built to the west at the Main Street/Harwich Road intersection. While these three local institutional buildings were within the general proximity of each other, no central village concentration had emerged by period's end, and the main local focus was at Rock Harbor landing.

D. Economic Base

Much of what we know of Orleans in this period is from the detailed "Description" prepared in September 1802 and published by the Massachusetts Historical Society the same year. Although some vegetables were raised, it was only enough to satisfy the needs of the inhabitants.

"Butter is made for summer use, and a little cheese. Some cattle are fattened, and several sold in the townships below The land of Orleans [the author went on] being cultivated by none but the old men and small boys, the flower of the people, between the ages of twelve and forty-five, are engaged in the cod-fishery.

None of the fishing vessels were owned by Orleans natives, all sailing from "Duxbury, Plymouth, Chatham, Provincetown, and other places. The only vessels belonging to Orleans are three coasters, which bring firewood and lumber from the district of Maine, and one packet, which sails to Boston from Rock Harbor."

In 1820, the sale of the remaining lands of the Potanumaquuts brought added revenue for town projects. Among them was an unsuccessful channel below Strong Island, and, in 1837, the first town house.

Clams in 1802 were found "nowhere in greater abundance than at Orleans" J.W. Barber reported. Between 100 and 200 "of the poorest inhabitants" were paid \$3/bbl. to harvest them in 1845.

Landing built at Rock Harbor in 1814. Packets were reported to have later sailed to Rhode Island and New York from landings on Nauset Harbor (on River Road) but this is little documented in the sources. At no time was the coastwise or packet traffic significant enough to be reported in the state census.

E. Architecture

Residential: The most frequently appearing house type remains the 1 1/2-story, interior chimney, double-pile, gable roofed house. During this period, there was a more even distribution of the various subtypes: ca. 7 of three bays, ca. 20 of four bays, and ca. 10 of five bays. Most of the three-bay examples incorporate lateral ells. About a quarter of the four-bay examples and half of the five-bay examples employ extended stud height to add space in the attic story. A single example is known of a double interior chimney, five-bay house type. A small number of 2 1/2-story houses were built during this period. Most (ca. 5?) are three bays in width, with a side entry and hip roof; one four-bay example is known, as is a five-bay, double interior chimney example, both with hip roofs.

Institutional: Many meetinghouses were built during this period but no appearances are known: for Native Americans (1790), new Congregational (1804), Reformed Methodist (1870), and Baptist (1828). A new Congregational meetinghouse was constructed in 1829; it was a gable front structure with paired doors with lancet heads and above a central palladian arrangement at windows, but also a lancet head in the center. The belfry had an arcade. New schoolhouses were constructed in the town 1800-03, but their appearance is unknown. In 1827 Rock Harbor Academy constructed a two-story building with a hall above classrooms.

Commercial: The Higgens Tavern must have been the town's, and perhaps the region's, most significant period structure. Only one wing now survives, but the earlier form included a large main block with lateral wings that housed a stage office and store, and a ballroom. That remaining wing is two stories in height under a hip roof, three bays in width with end chimney and quoins.

VIII. EARLY INDUSTRIAL PERIOD (1830-1870)

A. Transportation Routes

Improvements at Rock Harbor were made in 1833, and the early 19th century roads remained in use through the period. In 1865, the Cape Cod Central Railway extended service east from Yarmouth to Orleans, which remained the line's terminus for five years. In 1870, service was extended north from Orleans to Wellfleet Center.

B. Population

Orleans continued to grow until 1840, when it reached a peak population of 1,974--a figure it would not reach again until the early 1950s. Between 1840 and 1870, the town's population declined steadily, reaching 1,323 in the latter year. In 1855, the largest group of foreign-born residents were 16 natives of Ireland.

Early in this period the town established a poor farm (1831). The Ladies' Benevolent Society took on many philanthropic activities and war work (1842). In 1833 a Universalist Society was formed in the town. In 1837 the Methodists reorganized as an Episcopal Society. A Library Association was formed in East Orleans in 1854.

C. Settlement Pattern

In the 1830s, institutional growth continued at the meetinghouse center area. A Universalist church was located between the Congregational and Baptist church in 1833, and a town house was built across from this in 1837. That year, a Methodist church was located opposite the academy building to the west. Cottage residences were built at Rock Harbor, and linear development continued along the Rock Harbor Road-Main Street-Beach Road corridor through the meetinghouse center, with a residential concentration east of the Congregational Church. Smaller concentrations of cottages developed in the southwest on the Harwich and Orleans roads, in the northeast at Tonset Neck, and in the southeast at Barley Neck and Namequoit. Little new period residential expansion took place after the population peak of

1840. With the completion of the Cape Cod Branch Road to a terminus at Orleans in 1865, the depot area northwest of the meetinghouse center on Main Street became the local commercial focus, with stores serving neighboring towns. Small-scale industrial development was also stimulated, and in 1867 a carriage factory was opened south of the depot.

D. Economic Base

In 1837 Orleans reported 33 vessels and 264 men (the vast majority of the eligible voters) engaged in the cod and mackerel fishery. Although this was the fourth highest in the study unit after Provincetown, Truro, and Wellfleet, in the number of ships, Orleans was the second ranking town after Provincetown in the value of cod, reporting \$55,100 worth. In less than a decade these figures dropped precipitously. By 1845, only 75 men and 9 vessels were so employed.

Clams continued to be a major source of income for Orleans natives. In 1855 Orleans was the only town in the county to report a harvest of "shellfish": 5,000 bushels valued at \$2,000. In the same year Orleans briefly entered the whaling industry: 4 vessels employed 125 men that year.

As Rock Harbor's prominence declined, the town center shifted inland. Orleans was the most successful of the outer Cape towns to adopt agriculture. The town reported 77 farms in 1865, more than any town east of Dennis.

E. Architecture

Residential: Like other area towns, expansion during the early years of this period produced a building boom. The range of house forms continued to include the 1 1/2-story, interior chimney, double-pile, gable roofed house, at this time primarily with extended stud height. The largest number (about five) were three-bay examples with lateral ells; equal numbers (three each) of four and five bays survive. A single example appears to be a single pile four-bay form with rear ell. The largest number of houses constructed at this time were in the new gable front form, with a three-bay facade, side entry, and double pile depth. The majority (about 20) are 1 1/2 stories in height; about half of these employ a lateral ell. Another ca. 10 are 2 1/2 stories and most employ an ell of some kind. The majority of all the above housetypes use ornament derived from the Greek Revival, in wide cornice boards and door surrounds; one example of a single story Ionic porch is known. An exceptional house of the period, the Capt. Linnell House (1851), is 2 1/2 stories in height under a hip roof with a cupola; it is a three-bay form with side entry and lateral ell, with a colossal Ionic portico. The gable form remained popular through the 19th century and later ornament was employed on them, including Italianate and Queen Anne elements.

Later in the period some houses were built in the Second Empire style. These too were primarily three-bay double-pile, two-story houses with both center and side entries, under a mansard roof.

More elaborate examples are also known, of the large three-story height and more elaborate detailing, including porches and bellevederes.

Institutional: Town religious organizations continued to construct new meetinghouses. The reorganized Methodists constructed a meetinghouse ca. 1837, small gable front in form, single story in height and simple pilasters; it has been added to and remodelled several times. The Universalist (1843) church was a gable front structure with a pair of entries and windows above, and a lancet in the gable; the remaining ornament was Greek Revival in mode, including cornice board and corner pillasters; it no longer stands.

More of the institutional structures were constructed by the town. In 1837 funds from the sale of reservation lands were used to construct a town hall of unknown appearance. With the consolidation of the school districts, several large schoolhouses were built; 2 1/2 stories high with a gable roof, the facade was four bays wide with entry in the outermost bay; one was sold to the Odd Fellows in the 1880s.

Commercial: The railroad depot (1865) strongly resembles others in the area, a 1 1/2-story, hip roofed structure with a wide bracketed overhang.

IX. LATE INDUSTRIAL PERIOD (1870-1915)

A. Transportation Routes

The mid 19th century road and rail network remained in use through the period. Snow Wharf was built in Town Cove in 1879.

B. Population

Between 1870 and 1905, Orleans population continued to decline, in company with the decadence of the fishing industry. By the latter date, with a resident count of 1,052, the town had lost over 20% of her 1870 population. In the last decade of the period, however, Orleans began to grow, probably as a result of the town's growing commercial importance on the lower Cape. Her foreign-born residents in 1905 amounted to 6.2% of the total population -- about half the county average but typical of the outer Cape average (excluding Provincetown).

C. Settlement Pattern

The depot center continued to develop as the town's commercial focus, and changes and additions were made at the civic focus to the east. Stores and commercial blocks were built on Main Street near the depot in the 1870s and 1880s, and new residential and commercial development also extended east along the County Road (6A) and Chatham road, where the Snow Store and Wharf was built on Town Cove (1879-81). Industrial development continued in the depot area with the establishment of a pants factory in 1888. To the east a new town hall was relocated to Main Street at Monument

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Road in 1873, to the northeast of the previous site. The same year a new poor house was located south of the Methodist Church. The Snow Library was built in 1877 at the old academy site on Main Street and Chatham Road. The Congregational church was replaced in 1888, and the next year the Baptist church was removed. Little new residential growth occurred, although by period's end a small concentration of summer houses had been built along Nauset Beach east of Nauset Heights.

D. Economic Base

With the loss of jobs and income as a result of the decline of the cod and mackerel fisheries, Orleans entrepreneurs turned to land-based industries, particularly the manufacture of pants, shirts, and overalls, begun by Cummings & Howes in 1873. Two years later its product value, \$42,000, amounted to 85% of the town's total manufactured product, giving Orleans a county rank of 7th in the total value of goods made and work done in the county. By 1890, 200 men and women were reported employed in the trade. Other businesses -- including makers of carriages, harnesses, and gravestones -- virtually all employed less than five persons each.

The entire town was under cultivation in 1890, Deyo reported, yielding corn, rye, vegetables, and large quantities of English hay. The largest farm crop was in poultry products. By 1905 Orleans ranked second in the study unit (after Barnstable) in the value of eggs and dressed poultry produced.

In 1890 the isolation of the Eastham terminus of the French Atlantic Cable induced the Compagnie Francaise des Cable Telegraphiques to relocate the cable station in Orleans; a direct transatlantic cable was laid in 1898.

E. Architecture

Residential: During the early years of this period, forms and styles of the mid-century continued to be built. Some Second Empire examples may date from these years, and gable front houses were decorated with period ornament. A small number of houses were constructed in the large Queen Anne form. All are 2 1/2 stories in height, and in most the main block of the house was a hip roofed rectangle, three bays in width. They employ bay windows, projecting, pedimented bays, facade gables, and porches to vary wall surfaces. Shingle Style buildings are more rare, but include a large gable example. Also known are L-plan 1 1/2-story shingled houses with bay windows and shed dormers.

The town replaced its hall in 1873; this structure, later used as a theater, is two stories high with a hip roof, and the facade is three bays with a center covered entry and facade gable with small round window, overall Italianate in design. Schools were constructed during the period, but their appearance is unknown; a new poor farm was constructed in 1873, operated until 1887. With the establishment of the Lifesaving Service (reorganized 1871), a station was built here in the form similar to others in the area: the gable entry with large doors for boats, small area for

quarters for attendants, with shingle ornament. The Snow Library (1877-1952) was constructed in a Gothic style: stone foundation, brick walls, half-timbered gables, entry at the side, and a facade gable over a tier of three windows. The Congregational Church was renovated ca. 1888; a large central lancet window was located in the gable, the entries were redesigned with bracketed pediments, the wall cover was covered with ornamental shingles and pent belt courses. The town had a Grange Hall; its appearance is unknown.

Industrial: The only building whose appearance is known is the Cummings & Howes pants factory of 1878: a large, 2 1/2-story gable roofed main section with two wings; later a former roller skating rink was used for machinery, the main area was later used as a dry goods store, and wings let to other retailers. The rink burned in 1908, the remainder in 1973.

Commercial: The Shattuck House (stood until ca. 1930) was a five-bay, 2 1/2-story gable front form with full lateral ell, porch and deck. The French cable building (1891?) is a wide gable front 1 1/2-story structure with center entry between bay windows and a projecting gabled bay on the side. Mansard roof structures exist in association with this complex.

X. EARLY MODERN PERIOD (1915-1940)

A. Transportation Routes

In 1920, the County Road through the northwest part of town was improved as U.S. Route 6. By the mid 1920s, Route 28 south (Chatham Road) through South Orleans had also been paved. By period's end, the local Main Street-Beach Road corridor had been improved from Rock Harbor through the center to Orleans Beach, with a southeast branch on Barley Neck Road.

B. Population

But for the five years during the World War I period, the population of Orleans continued to rise, from 1,166 in 1915 to 1,451 in 1940. The period of its greatest rise occurred in the early 1930s, when the town grew on average by over 48 persons a year, probably as summer cottages were converted to year-round residences.

C. Settlement Pattern

Summer resort development accelerated during the period, particularly after the mid 1920s, and auto-oriented commercial development took place along the improved U.S. Route 6 (now 6A) corridor, including the first Howard Johnson's restaurant (1935). In 1923 a new town house was located on School Road at the civic center area. Resort home development was scattered at Namskaket Neck on the bay shore, and in the southeast on Little Pleasant Bay. Larger clusters developed at Rocky Point (Gibson Road) on town Cove and at Nauset Heights near the Atlantic shore.

D. Economic Base

In 1918 Orleans most famous economic mainstay was the Mayo Duck Farm, hatching 50,000 ducklings a season. "Catering to Tourists is now the most profitable occupation," the WPA Guide noted in 1937.

E. Architecture

Residential: Like its neighbors, Orleans holds a small number of houses from this brief period. Most of these are of the 2 1/2-story pyramidal roofed type, both three and five bay forms. There are isolated examples of early suburban house types, including Dutch Colonials and modern Capes.

Institutional: The newly formed Episcopal Church constructed a small eclectic church in 1933 and expanded it greatly shortly thereafter in 1938. The primary facade of Holy Spirit is composed of a gable mass with narrower gable entry porch dominated by a large fanlight and sidelights that surround the door; on either side low gabled ell's extend, with a simple steeple marking their intersection.

A fire station was built in 1925; its appearance is unknown. A new high school was built in 1938 in a Colonial Revival style, two stories in height under a hip roof with projecting Doric porch and cupola.

Commercial: A restaurant (Howard Johnson's) was constructed in 1935 and illustrates period chain features of tile roof with overhang and dormers.

XI. SURVEY OBSERVATIONS

Survey has been restricted to the villages at the town's center, Rock Harbor, and Namskakett.

XII. SOURCES

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