

# MHC Reconnaissance Survey Town Report

## OXFORD

Report Date: 1983

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.



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](http://www.sec.state.ma.us/mhc)  
[mhc@sec.state.ma.us](mailto:mhc@sec.state.ma.us) / 617-727-8470

# MHC RECONNAISSANCE SURVEY REPORT

DATE: October, 1983

COMMUNITY: Oxford

## I. TOPOGRAPHY

The topography of Oxford is dominated by the valley of the French River, which flows north to south through the entire length of the town, and its several tributaries, which drain the eastern half of the town. In the northern portion of the town, the river descends more than 200 feet in two miles, providing power in the past to many water-powered mills.

The center of the town is dominated by a large plain, measuring 1.5 by 1 mile and formed as a broad stream terrace by rapidly moving water from the retreating glacier. South from this plain these glacial deposits continue in the French River valley, containing some of the most important agricultural soils of Worcester County. At the Dudley and Webster boundary the French River valley narrows between a rough, stony ridge on the west, rising several hundred feet above the surrounding surface to more than 700 feet above sea level, and hills of glacial till on the east. Much of Oxford's remaining surface is covered by excellent agricultural soils, including Sutton, Paxton and Charlton Loams, which yield good crops of grains, hay and vegetables.

## II. POLITICAL BOUNDARIES

Included in large 1681 grant by Nipmuck Indians to Joseph Dudley, William Stoughton, Robert Thompson and others. Lands annexed in 1731, 1734. Part included in new town of Dudley, 1732. Part established as district of Charlton, 1754. Prish set off from Oxford and other towns established as Ward (later Auburn) 1778. Parts of Charlton annexed, 1789, 1809. Part of Sutton annexed 1793. Oxford South Gore annexed 1807. Part included in new town of Webster, 1832. Oxford North Gore annexed 1838. Bounds with Charlton and Millbury established in 1907, with Auburn in 1908.

## III. HISTORIC OVERVIEW

Residential, industrial, and agricultural community on the French River corridor, with native village site on alluvial plains. 1686 French Huguenot settlement east of river, subjected to repeated native attacks, with final abandonment in 1704. Resettled in 1713, with meetinghouse site established by 1717. Dispersed 18th century agricultural settlement on alluvial plain and eastern highlands, with significant agricultural landscapes remaining. Federal village development at Oxford Center at regional transport junction. Early 19th century textile manufactory on French River at North Oxford and villages west of Center. Commercial focus established at Oxford Center with 1840 rail connection. Sustained 19th century linear textile mill expansion northward along French River corridor, with many partially intact village remains. Suburban expansion from recent Route 52 corridor development may threaten remaining agricultural landscapes.

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

##### A. Transportation Routes:

North/south French River corridor with numerous tributary trails leading in and out of the central valley. Primary northeast/southwest regional route "Bay Path" from Massachusetts Bay to Connecticut through southern part of town probably between Slater's and Robinson Ponds, north of Fort Hill (Sutton Avenue, old road to Fort Hill Road, along contours to Holbrook Road), then across the valley (Harwood Street) to French River ford, after which the trail splits, with one route south along the French River corridor (Webster Street), and one other continuing southwest (Larnard Road-old trail). An alternate east/west trail north of this one (Lovett Road - Sutton Avenue - Charlton Street), which also branches (Dudley Road or Southbridge Road). Northeast trail inferred along Wellington Brook tributary (Old Worcester Road). Inferred northern French River trail along Prospect Street-Leicester Road. Some north/south trail must have run through the central valley, probably near the later Main Street location.

##### B. Settlement Pattern:

Consisting primarily of upland, it is not surprising that few sites are known from the town. The banks of the French River, as well as the numerous ponds in the southeast, were probable locations of short term campsites.

##### C. Subsistence Patterns:

With so few terraced areas the town was probably frequented only for short term exploitation. Fishing on ponds and the French River, and hunting in the uplands would be part of the seasonal rounds from larger, more permanent base camps to the south, east and north.

#### V. PLANTATION PERIOD (1620-1675)

##### A. Transportation Routes:

Contact period trails continue in use.

##### B. Settlement Pattern:

Continuation of Contact period pattern.

#### VI. COLONIAL PERIOD (1675-1775)

##### A. Transportation Routes:

Main trails are improved as Colonial roads, and north/south Main Street corridor established, French Huguenots (1686) settle along Connecticut Path, with alternate roads to north/south valley corridor (Huguenot Road) and to fort (Fort Hill Road). Major east/west road remains Sutton Avenue/Charlton street with

alternate east branch along Lovett Road and south/west branch to Woodstock, CT on Harwood Street /Larnard Road. Various secondary roads are established to upland farms east and west of the a valley (Prospect Street, Federal Road, Dona Road, Old Charlton Road).

#### B. Population:

At earliest settlement the French settlers numbered 52 in 1687, six years later their numbers had expanded to between 70 and 80. These Frenchmen had migrated from Rochelle to London after the Edict of Nantes, and there came into contact with Thompson who recommended them to the colony and his fellow proprietors. Their primary leaders were Gabriel Baernon and Isaac Bertrand, Dr. Tuffeau and they brought an Anglican ordained minister to serve them. Shortly after, rumored and actual attacks by the native population as well as the departure of the minister, caused the abandonment of the settlement. By 1699, 8-10 families had returned but renewed attacks during Queen Anne's War led to a second abandonment in 1704. They may have later founded the French Protestant church in Boston that same year. Native Americans were still resident in the North Oxford area, numbering with Woodstock, 40 families. The French settlers were repeatedly accused of selling them rum.

About 10 years after the French abandonment, the proprietors received permission to settle 30 English families in the area. In 1720, 30 men and women signed the covenant at church formation. Their minister Campbell was a spokesperson against the New Light movement that resulted from the revivals of the Great Awakening, causing friction with the neighboring town, Sutton, whose minister was a revival enthusiast. Few population figures are available but by 1749 only 20 men participated in the last land division. In 1765 total figures equalled 890, in 1776, 1,112.

#### C. Settlement Pattern:

After the sale of Nipmuck lands in this area by Black James in 1682, a group of Boston and London men received a grant, measuring 12 x 9 miles, that included present Oxford as well as parts of Charlton, Dudley and Ward. This group, including Joseph Dudley, William Stoughton, Daniel Cox, Robert Thompson, John Blackwell and Thomas Freaks, after several years in attempting settlement, granted to Huguenot emigres a total of ca. 12,000 acres in the eastern portion of the large grant. That area included the present extent of the town. Specific settlement was located in the southeast on Huguenot and Fort Hill Road. The buildings included a church and fort, in addition to housing. It appears from later land transfers after the French abandonment that one of the leaders, Bernon, held the land for the group. The site was abandoned during King Philip's war, and only sparsely settled thereafter before a second abandonment during the subsequent Indian Wars, 1704. The proprietors granted the land to English settlers in 1713. Among themselves these 30 settlers divided the eastern part of the grant in five divisions, the last in 1749. The initial houselots were large, for the most part located along

the primary north/south artery. The first meetinghouse was located at the northwest corner of Main and Sutton Roads, near the burying ground ( ) and training field ( ). In 1748, when the second meetinghouse was constructed, it was located to the north at the helping to stop attempts at the formation of a north parish.

#### D. Economic Base:

Sources indicate that the French rapidly set up mills to complement the primary agricultural focus: both a grist and a saw mill to the south of the houses on the plain. Mention is also made of attempts at permission to supply naval stores, and to manufacture hats and gloves, and of shipping skins to Boston and New York. The English too took advantage of the towns' water ways for numerous mills on the French River.

The cedar swamps were useful for providing fencing, clapboards, shingles and coopers materials. Important also was potash. The plain provided the best land for tillage, while outlying areas were useful for fruit, hay, and grazing.

The town is classified by Pruitt as an egalitarian farm community ranking high on commercial development and agricultural prosperity though few farms yield high numbers of bushels of grain per acre. At the same time, it ranked low on both wealth and poverty. Still, anxiety over the economic difficulties of the pre-Revolutionary period were felt and are reflected in the town's discussion of setting up a workhouse for the employment of the poor.

Within the Congregational Society constant problems over salary bring dismissal of the minister (1784) and a period without leadership. Later the Society meets also in a second, south meetinghouse. The division within this society is partially responsible for the early formation of a Universalist Society, including 60 Oxford and Gore residents, as well as those of seven neighboring towns, totaling 130. The town also includes some Baptists from 1793.

Some Tories are reported in the north. Later, the town is reported to have contained many pro-Shays citizens who joined the group in Ward/Auburn. A Masonic Lodge was formed in 1797, which removed to Sutton in 1815; a second Lodge was formed in 1825 but disappeared during the anti-Masonic 1830s. A similar gentile impulse brought the formation of a series of select schools and subscriptions libraries, Society Library (1792), and Social (from Revolution ). The provisional army formed in 1799 was billeted and drilled there.

#### E. Architecture:

Residential: The common house form appears to have been the center chimney plan. A noteworthy example is the two-story, five-bay center chimney house (1713-20) on the east side of Hudson

Road. The asymmetrical facade suggests the house might have been a three-bay "half-house" with the addition of two bays in the late eighteenth century.

Institutional: The first meetinghouse was created between 1713 and 1721 on the Old Common north of the present center. The structure measured 30 x 30 feet. Circa 1739, this first building was replaced by a larger meetinghouse measuring 50 x 50 feet having unshuttered entrances on three sides.

A school house measuring 20 x 14 with chimneys at each end built on the old common near the meetinghouse in 1736. In 1751, a house for the school teacher was built near by. this building (16 x 18 feet) was sold in 1762.

Commercial: By 1739, there were licensed innkeepers in Oxford and by the end of the period at least two taverns were in operation.

## VII. FEDERAL PERIOD (1775-1830)

### A. Transportation Routes:

Colonial highways continue in use, with the addition of the Central Turnpike (1826-27) through the southeast part of town, and the Stafford Turnpike ( ) through the extreme northwest corner.

### B. Population:

After an initial loss due to the established of Ward/Auburn from the northeast corner, population growth is steady and increases during the final decade. From a total of 1000 in 1790, the figure reaches 1562 in 1820, and 2034 in 1830. Small numbers of immigrants are present by the period's end, and manufacturing employment increases greatly from 53 in 1820 to 258 in 1840, while in agriculture more slowly from 255 in 1820 to 347 in 1840.

### C. Settlement Pattern:

Dispersed agricultural settlement spreads to the town's western highlands and a more intensive north/south linear concentration develops along Main Street extending from the Old Common south beyond Sutton Avenue. The institutional focus shifts away from the Old Common with the Universalist Church (1793) built near the Sutton Avenue intersection, and the 3rd Congregational Church (1829), 3 blocks north.

Early cotton textile mill development occurs on the French River at Rockdale north of the center (west of Prospect Street) in 1814. Later textile mills are built at Buffumville (1825) and Hodges Village (1826).

### D. Economic Base:

Like most towns of Worcester County and inland New England, Oxford's economy was based on mixed crop agriculture with a

special focus on sheep and livestock raising. Forest industries and minor metalworking were important specialized activities during the late 18th century and early 19th century. In 1794, 6 sawmills, 3 gristmills, 2 fulling mills, and 2 triphammers were in operation. Large quantities of wood were burned for charcoal to be used on the forges and hammershops, and for potash, one of the few products sent out of town for sale before 1800. At least 6 potash works operated in the town at that time.

Early stages of the textile industry, clothier's works and wool carding machines introduced in 1805, were supplanted by mechanized, factory-organized spinning mills in 1813. In that year, Samuel Slater of Pawtucket, R.I. established a cotton spinning mill in a portion of Oxford that later was incorporated as the town Webster in 1832. By 1822 Slater, in company with Edward Howard, operated 2 cotton mills and a woolen mill, with another mill under construction. The first textile mill within the present limits of Oxford was erected by the Oxford Central Cotton and Woolen Manufacturing Co. in 1816 north of Oxford Center. Other mills followed and by 1832, 2 woolen mills, a cotton thread factory, and 3 cotton mills had been erected and villages of North Oxford, Texas, Hodges Village and Buffumville had been developed. Total value of textile goods produced was \$190,200 with 357 men, women and children employed. Until 1822, only spinning was carried out in the mills, weaving was put out to local handweavers. In 1822 power looms were introduced at North Oxford and by 1824 most mills wove their cloth on these machines within their factories. Many of the early companies were organized by Oxford men, but they also attracted investors from the surrounding towns and from Boston, the Blackstone Valley, and Rhode Island.

Oxford was also known during this period for its millwrights. Ezra Davis of Oxford was the leading millwright in Worcester County in the early 19th century, building waterwheels, fulling mills, and shafting for new factories. Davis and his associates must have been rather conservative in their building tradition and techniques, as the substitution of metal for wood in shafting, gearing, and wheels gradually reduced their influence. Also, they are reported to have opposed leather belting as a replacement for gear power transmission, a marked improvement in the efficient functioning of a mill.

Metal working was carried out in Oxford from the late 18th century. At South, later Webster East Village, a furnace and forges were in operation between 1798 and 1805. At least 5 triphammers and scythe works were established during this period, and in 1814 a nail machine, which cut and headed nails mechanically, was introduced in 1814. Cotton machinery was also manufactured in Oxford; in 1832, 10 men were employed in Thomas Chatman's shop to produce \$6600 worth of machines.

Boot and shoe making began about 1820 when Elihu Harwood, a former apprentice of Col. Arial Bragg, the founder of the shoe industry in Milford, began manufacturing in Oxford. This became the principal industry of Oxford Center, where most boot and shoe

workers were clustered. By 1832 \$15,000 worth of shoes were made by 25 men. Boot and shoe making supported a tannery, which in 1832 manufactured \$2200 worth of leather annually.

#### E. Architecture:

**Residential:** The center chimney plan appears to have remained the common form for the Federal period. The center village probably contained more "innovative" residential buildings, i.e. the use of brick for hipped roof dwellings.

**Institutional:** The second meetinghouse ca. 1739 was repaired and enlarged in 1793 by the addition of a 12' x 12' porch with tower and bell on the south entrance and by closing the east and west entrances. Hurd describes these modifications as giving the building a "modern plan." A Universalist meetinghouse was erected ca. 1791-93 which measured 43' x 46' with a porch of the Tuscan order. The building now serves commercial uses. In 1829, a new church was built on the old common for "recently reorganized" (Jewitt) Congregational Society.

**Commercial:** Ca. 1814 the Lamb Mill tavern and springs in North Oxford was operating. The buildings burned in 1877. Refinements made in 1823 to Richard Olney's tavern, and about this time a tavern already existing at the old common was enlarged.

**Industrial:** Development began during first quarter of the nineteenth century. The 1794 grist mill at Phoenix Village was a clothier's works by 1821. A woolen mill was in operation at Hodges Village in 1826.

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

#### A. Transportation Routes:

The Boston and Albany Railroad (1838) passes through the northern tip of Oxford, with however no station in town. More importantly, the north/south Norwich and Worcester Railroad (1840) is laid out along the French River corridor, with a depot at Oxford Center.

#### B. Population:

Initially the town loses population with the formation of Webster in the south in 183, from 2034 in 1830 to 1742 in 1840. Growth continues until 1860 when population reaches 3034 before the town enters a long period of stasis, culminating the period at a figure of 2669. Some growth comes from the expansion in the manufacturing component which more than doubles during the period while agriculture drops. Immigration accounts for a foreign-born population of 18.19%, near the county average figures but far below the major industrial centers to the south. Throughout the period the Irish are the most numerous within this group, followed by growing numbers of French Canadians, as well as small but consistent numbers of English.



Denominational proliferation excelerates during this critical period, The Baptists reach numbers sufficient for the formation of a society in North Oxford in 1837. A Methodist Society was formed in 1835, and an Episcopal parish, Grace Church, was formed in 1864. The town establishes a poor farm in 1831. Libraries continue to be important and multiply, adding a Library Association and Farmers, and finally through a gift to the town, a Free and Public in 1868. After censure from the state, a grammar school was established (1853) only to be promptly replaced by the more up-to-date high school (1855). The abolition of the district system of common schools brought debate, from 1854 and was not replaced by the town system until 1867.

### C. Settlement Pattern:

Continued intensification of the linear Main Street commercial/residential/institutional concentration, particularly after the location of the Worcester-Norwich Railroad (1840). Continued development as well as small industrial nuclei, with a linear clustering along the French River at North Oxford, and secondary concentration west of Oxford Center at Hodges Village and Buffumville.

Barber notes 40 houses (1839) in the center area. The railroad depot (1840) locates at the southern end of the Main Street corridor (Sutton Avenue/Main Street intersection). Subsequently, a number of churches located nearby, including the Methodist Episcopal Church (1841), St. Roch's Catholic Church (1856), moved and enlarged 1866). However, the 1839 town house is located on the Old Common at the northern end of Main Street.

High income residential development continues on the Main Street corridor. The residential area is also extended east and west on the Sutton Avenue/Charlton Road axis. Some construction takes place parallel to Main to the west. The area east of the railroad and south of Sutton Avenue is developed for worker housing focused around the shoe factory (also east of railroad). Other industrial development occurs along the railroad corridor, particularly the cotton twine mill south on Hugnot Road.

A linear cluster of textile mills develops at North Oxford along the French River corridor (Prospect Street-Leicester Street) as far north as Larned Village. These include the Hugnot Mills (1839, stone factory 1852), Sigourney Mills (1838, rebuilt after 1852 fire), Rockdale Mills (1814 mill burns 1853), and Protection Mills (1831, rebuilt after fire 1839, rebuilt after fire 1870). Worker housing develops along Prospect Street, Leicester Street, and the area becomes a secondary institutional focus, with North Oxford Baptist Society Church (1837), and the High School (1855-56). Small, earlier industrial developments continue in the west on old Haworth Road; and at Buffumville, where the 1825 mill burns in 1842, and is replaced in 1843.

#### D. Economic Base:

Oxford's textile industry and the manufacture of boots and shoes were the principal industries of the town during this period. Together they stimulated and supported a period of growth from the late 1840s to the 1860s, during which the value of goods produced doubled between 1845 and 1855 and again by 1865. It was during the early and mid 1860s that consolidation of the Texas and North Oxford mills occurred. Edwin Bartlett and Joseph Burroughs purchased and operated the four lower mills in those villages, the upper two in cotton and lower mills in woolen production. Seven mill seats were occupied for textile manufacturing during this period on a 3 mile stretch of the French River from Comminsville in the north, where a flannel manufactory was built in 1865, to where the Wellington Brook enters the French River, the site of a mill that burned in 1837. Textile mills were also operated at Hodges Village, Buffumville, and at Lowes Pond.

The decades of the 1840s and 1850s, despite the tremendous growth that occurred, were particularly difficult. With the exception of the mill at Hodges Village, every textile mill was burned at least once, and most closed periodically due to financial reversals. This frequent turnover of product, ownership and building, when combined with the important technological advances in organization and machine efficiency then being made, help to explain the increased production and sales with a smaller work force by the end of the period. In 1837, 4 cotton mills and 5 woolen mills employed 333 in the production of nearly \$500,000 worth of goods; by 1865 only 2 cotton mills, 3 woolen mills, and a shoddy, mill remained. Employing less than 100, these mills produced flannels, cassimeres, cotton cloth and yarn with more the \$767,000.

This growth was uneven, as production fell into the 1840s then rose steadily, fueled by government uniform contracts during the civil war. Value of goods produced doubled between 1855 and 1865, largely a result of a more expensive product rather than increased production.

Boot and shoe making peaked during the 1850s; in 1855 421,000 pairs of shoes and 6,200 pairs of boots, valued at \$263,800, were manufactured by 742 employees. By 1865 the transformation of the industry had begun, as only 375 people manufactured 246,000 pairs of shoes worth \$296,500.

Because the principal article manufactured was a cheap brogan and a women's heavy pegged lace boot for the Southern and Western markets, the Civil War and a loss of these markets temporarily slowed the industry in Oxford. In 1870, 14 shops and factories were in operation, but by the end of the decade the smaller shops closed, unable or unwilling to set up steam power and mechanize. Nevertheless, the value of shoes made continued to increase with the new production techniques and products adopted by the surviving manufacturers. A number were from Boston or had Boston partners, and many maintained retail and wholesale outlets in Boston. During the peak period of footwear manufacture in Oxford, the town also contained a boot and shoe box factory and at least four manufactories of heeling and inner soling for shoes.

Iron working continued until mid-century as a minor industry. Axes, scythes, bar iron, anchors, chain and other wrought iron goods were manufactured at several forges and hammershops.

Forest industries were quite important during the period, reaching a peak in employment and value during the 1850s. In 1855, 1.1 million feet of boards and 9111 cords of firewood were cut and sold, employing 139 men. They probably supplied the seven forges then operating in Oxford as well as the railroad. Lumber and cordwood were probably also sold in Worcester. By 1865 1.7 million feet of boards and only 2000 cords of wood were cut by only 11 people. The period of 1840 to 1860 was one of great growth in Oxford and the neighboring towns; population in Oxford nearly doubled. The 1860 peak of 3034 inhabitants was not equalled or excelled until 1910.

Oxford's agricultural production roughly paralleled the population trend during this period, though other forces affected production trends as well. The Civil War and abandonment of farms for western lands during the 1860s and 70s lowered population and cultivated land, which had increased in the decades before the war. Production peaked during the mid-1850s with a value of \$122,936, at least three times greater than in 1845. During the 1850s there was an increase in acreage cultivated, acres of mowing, and the number of cattle. Only the number of sheep and the quantities of butter and cheese produced decreased. By 1865 this trend was nearly totally reversed. Acreage under cultivation decreased from 4812 to 2200; of this mowing land fell by almost 1700 acres and cultivated land by more than 800 acres. Prices of goods continued to increase because of wartime demand and inflation, but the value of agricultural goods produced in 1865 fell to \$67,000. The quantity of butter and cheese made continued to decrease as the number of cows fell by 1/3; whole milk sales began to be important as 4400 gallons of milk were sold in 1865. Methods of agriculture were also changing. In 1855 the number of oxen and horses were nearly equal; in 1865 horses outnumbered oxen nearly 2 to 1.

#### E. Architecture:

Residential: Typical mid-nineteenth century house forms can be found with the center village displaying a good representation of types. Center chimney houses continued to be built. Double chimney forms are also found. A two-story, five-bay, Greek temple front dwelling was noted in the center. Gable end, side-passage plans of both one and two stories were popular during the second and third quarters of the century. The Harwood House is an elaborate, brick, two-story, three-bay, side-passage plan with such popular Italianate details as quoins, brackets, and a roof monitor. Several mansard roofed Second Empire dwellings also survived in the center. Multi-family housing probably connected with the mills to the north of the center, was noted in the two-story, four-bay, double chimney duplex dating from mid-century.

Institutional: The remodelled, ca 1739, meetinghouse was sold in 1835 and removed from its site on the old common. Between 1840

and 1841, the Methodist and Episcopal society erected a 33' x 40' church; this was replaced in 1868 with a larger structure measuring approximately 40' x 80'. A Baptist church (53' x 41") was erected in the vicinity of North Oxford in 1837. In 1852, the 1829 Congregational meetinghouse was moved from the north side of the common, the building was remodelled in 1860. St. Roches's Roman Catholic church was built in 1852 and subsequently moved and enlarged in 1867. An Episcopal church, designed by A.H. Esty of Framingham, was erected in 1864 and described as the "most attractive building Oxford and a fine specimen of Gothic architecture" (Jewitt).

A town hall measuring 50' x 32' was built on the site of the old meetinghouse ca. 1739? This building was sold in 1874 when the new Memorial Hall was completed. A schoolhouse (for the center?) was constructed in 1870 at a cost of \$995.00.

Commercial: The Oxford Bank building was constructed in 1856.

Industrial: The DeWitt Bros. thread mill ca. 1832-33 burned in 1842 and was rebuilt the following year. The mill was enlarged in 1872 (then in wool manufacturing). A satinnet mill developed in North Oxford on the site of the 1728 grist mill. This structure burned in 1839 and was replaced with a frame cotton factory which, in turn, burned in 1852. A stone mill was then built on the site. A woolen in or near this site burned in 1856 and was rebuilt in 1858. Satinets were introduced to the former clothiers works (1821) in Phoenix Village in 1831. By 1838, this was a cotton factory which subsequently burned in 1852 and was replaced. A stone mill was erected in 1831 at Protection (?) cotton mill. This burned and was rebuilt in 1839; the structure was destroyed by fire again in 1870 and replaced the following year.

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

### A. Transportation Routes:

The north/south Webster Branch, Boston and Albany Railroad (1885), is built along the eastern edge of the French River corridor. Two electric street railway lines provide local service by 1900; the north/south line from Worcester to Webster enters south of the Boston and Albany tracks (right-of-way later Route 12), then on Prospect Street-Main Street. the east/west line from Worcester to Southbridge enters town north of the Boston and Albany rail line and the follows a right-of-way (essentially road bed of later Route 20) through Larned Village (Texas).

### B. Population:

For most of the period the stasis characteristic of the Early Industrial continues until the last decade. Population numbered 2669 in 1870 and only 2677 in 1900, with a high figure of 2938 in 1875 and a low of 2355 in 1885. Between 1905 and 1915 population grows from 2927 to 3476, beginning a period of renewed expansion. The number of foreign born within the town increases accounting for over 21% by period's end. By 1875, Canadian immigrants

outnumbered the Irish, and continued to be the predominant group. By 1915 small numbers of Poles, Germans and Russians, as well as continuing English, add to the town's diversity. The numbers of agricultural employment ca. 200 remains consistent, while manufacturing fluctuates from 576 in 1875 to 438 in 1905, and 652 in 1915.

With increasing numbers of Catholics within the town parishes were formed, St. Roch in 1886, followed by St. Ann's in North Oxford in 1906. With depression early in the period, tramps increased and a tramp house was established in 1878. Voluntary association are formed including the Huguenot Memorial (1881), the Grange (1885) and the Agricultural Society (1886).

#### C. Settlement Pattern:

Some institutional, industrial, and residential additions are made in the established centers, with some additional industrial development in the northern part of town. In Oxford Center, a civic focus is established with Memorial town hall (1873, with 1888 tower), library (1903) and High School (1912, rebuilt after 1914 fire).

Residential infill occurs, particularly in the area southeast of the Main Street/Sutton Avenue intersection. North on Main Street, the Chaffee Brothers Box Factory is established on Dona Street on the rail corridor.

At North Oxford the main institutional addition appears to be Saint Anne's Church 1906, though an earlier church is on the site by 1895). Further north, a Satinet Mill is built at Comminsville, along with worker housing.

#### D. Economic Base:

Oxford's economy of the late 19th and early 20th centuries fluctuated between depression and prosperity. The economic growth of the years during and immediately following the Civil War slowed in the 1870s with manufactured goods increasing by less than 10% between 1865 and 1875, compared to 82% growth of the previous decade. The depression of the mid and late 1870s appears to have seriously hurt Oxford, as its manufacturing output fell to only \$480,000 in 1885, largely the result of a depression in the textile industry. Agricultural production, however, recovered and increased to \$139,000 in 1885. A recovery in the textile industry during the late 1880s and through the 1890s resulted in a new peak in production and employment in 1905. Total goods produced that year equalled \$4.8 million with 1629 persons employed. By 1900 ten textile mills were in operation. A new industry that rapidly expanded was the box, cloth board, and lumber business of the Chaffee Brothers Co., established in 1893. One of its major products was the Chaffee patented cloth board for winding silk, woolens, cotton, felt and knit goods. This product was sold to textile mills across the country and in England.

Not sharing in the prosperity was the boot and shoe industry which ceased operation in the early 1890s. The four-story factory of the A. L. Joslin Co., the only shoe manufactory that survived into the 1890s, suffered several strikes and continued labor problems and was gone by 1898.

Agricultural production increased in the dairy, fruit orchard, vegetable gardens, poultry-raising, and in acres of mowing land. By 1905, Oxford farms were producing 403,000 gallons of milk; dairying made up more than 30% of the \$276,000 value of agricultural goods produced that year. This was an increase in value of 120% over the 1815 figure, and signalled a tremendous improvement in Oxford's farms and methods. Much of the advancement in agricultural method can be at least partially attributed to the activities of the Grange and Oxford Agricultural Society, formed in 1885 and 1886. The Society promoted agricultural knowledge and new method of management through educational activities and annual fairs, which stimulate competition among farmers.

Although total farm acreage decreased by almost 2000 acres, the number of farms nearly doubled between 1895 and 1905. The size of general farms fell to an acreage of 28 acres from 75, while dairy farms increased from 9 to 20 farms and became slightly larger. The amount of land devoted to poultry-raising also increased, growing from 16 to 207 acres in 1905. Value of product per acre, due to specialization and improved management, doubled during this period.

#### E. Architecture:

Residential: Little apparent residential development of this period. Traditional and popular forms retained. Population increase towards end of period reflected in construction of scattered bungalows and Four Square houses.

Institutional: Memorial Hall, a two-story, brick and sandstone Victorian Gothic pile, was erected in 1873. The building, designed by Earle & Fuller of Worcester, housed the public library on the first floor and town offices on the second.

In 1903-4, Cutting, Carleton & Cutting of Worcester designed the Colonial Revival Larned Memorial Free Public Library. The building is constructed of Milford pink granite and light gray brick with granite trim.

### X. EARLY MODERN PERIOD (1815-1940)

#### A. Transportation Routes:

By the early 1920s (if not earlier) Route 12 (Prospect Street-Main Street) is established as a major north/south automobile route from Worcester to Norwich, CT. ca 1930, the new Route 20, southwest cut-off, is established through North Oxford, essentially along the earlier streetcar right-of-way, with an early rest area near the town's western border. Improved secondary highways include

the roads form Oxford Center to West Sutton and Charlton Center, and form North Oxford to Rochdale (Route 56).

B. Population:

The population growth that began in the last decade of the Late Industrial Period continued during this period. The total increased from 3476 in 1915 to 4623 in 1940, with only one trough, 1930, when the figure dipped briefly to 3943. The number of foreign immigrants to the town dropped significantly from 21.5% to 12.6%. The town's population includes 8.5% classified as rural.

C. Settlement Patterns:

Residential development occurs around the edges of the center area, on Rocky Hill Road north/west and south on Main Street (Route 12) near the Holbrook/Howard Street intersection. In the far north residential development extends into Oxford south from Rochdale.

D. Economic Base:

Oxford's early 20th century remained, though it lost some of its gains during the early 1920s. A brief economic upturn in the late 1920s raised industrial production temporarily before the depression of the 1930s again slowed Oxford's economy.

The war-time prosperity of the late teens gave way in the early 1920s as production dropped from the pre-war high of \$4.8 million to \$2.7 million in 1922. Expansion in the textile trade accounted for cotton, woolen and shoddy mills operated in 1928 and employed nearly 800 operatives. The Chaffee Brother Co. continued to expand its lumber and lumber products business, eventually employing 200 woodsmen in the processing and handling of 10 million feet of board. The shoe industry was reintroduced by the C.A. Grosvenor Co. of Worcester which erected a plant in town.

Few statistics are available on Oxford's agricultural production during the 1920s and 1930s. Nevertheless, dairying, orcharding, and poultry-raising remained important, though more and more land reverted to woodlands or was developed.

E. Architecture:

Residential: Little apparent development for the period. Modest housing of the 1920-1930 era is found clustered south of the center on Route 12 at the junction of Holbrook and Harwood.