

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.

