

# MHC Reconnaissance Survey Town Report

## PLAINVILLE

Report Date: 1980

**Reconnaissance Survey Town Reports**, produced for MHC's Statewide Reconnaissance Survey between 1979 and 1987, introduce the historical development of each of the Commonwealth's municipalities. Each report begins with an historic overview, a description of topography, and political boundaries. For the purposes of the survey, the historic period has been subdivided into seven periods: Contact (1500–1620), Plantation (1620–1675), Colonial (1675–1775), Federal (1775–1830), Early Industrial (1830–1870), Late Industrial (1870–1915), and Early Modern (1915–1940/55). Each report concludes with survey observations that evaluate the town's existing historic properties inventory and highlight significant historic buildings, settlement patterns, and present threats to these resources. A bibliography lists key secondary resources.

Town reports are designed for use together with a series of town maps that demarcate settlement patterns, transportation corridors and industrial sites for each historic period. These maps are in the form of color-coded, polyester overlays to the USGS topographic base map for each town on file and available for consultation at MHC. For further information on the organization and preparation of town reports, readers should contact MHC.

Users should keep in mind that these reports are now two decades or more old. The information they contain, including assessments of existing knowledge, planning recommendations, understanding of local development, and bibliographic references all date to the time they were written. In some cases, information on certain topics was not completed. No attempt has been made to update this information.

Electronic text was not available for digital capture, and as a result most of the reports have been scanned as PDF files. While all have been processed with optical character recognition, there will inevitably be some character recognition errors.

The activity that is the subject of the MHC Reconnaissance Survey Town Report has been financed in part with Federal funds from the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior. However, the contents and opinions do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the Department of the Interior. This program receives Federal financial assistance for identification and protection of historic properties. Under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, and the Age Discrimination Act of 1975, as amended, the U.S. Department of the Interior prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, national origin, disability or age in its federally assisted programs. If you believe you have been discriminated against in any program, activity or facility as described above, or if you desire further information please write to: Office of Equal Opportunity, National Park Service, 1849 C Street, N.W., Washington, D.C., 20240.



### 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: February 1980

Community: Plainville

## I. TOPOGRAPHY

Located on rolling upland terrain. Landscape shows north/south grain from glacial scouring. Outwash features and sandy to gravelly soil. Two large lakes and several smaller ponds, all drain south into Narragansett Bay. Large areas of bog/marsh especially in eastern part of town.

## II. POLITICAL BOUNDARIES

Western section part of Dedham grant, 1636; town of Wrentham, 1673. Eastern section part of Dorchester grant, 1638; town of Stoughton, 1726; annexed by Wrentham, 1753. Incorporated as town of Plainville, 1908. Southern boundary is original Old Colony Line, 1640.

## III. HISTORIC OVERVIEW

Rural industrial town on Boston-Providence corridor. Located on headwaters of Tenmile River (Narragansett) with presumed native sites around Mirimichi Lake. Early axis of settlement from Boston during 17th century with permanent agricultural economy by early 18th century. Some surviving Colonial period houses with one notable Georgian example. Economic growth from local craft industries during early 19th century, especially jewelry manufacture from Rhode Island. Emergence of town center at Plainville by mid-19th century characterized by a variety of Victorian styles and surviving wood frame factories. Outlying areas retain agricultural landscape in western portion with several early 19th century houses of cottage type. Early 20th century development of highway corridor to Providence with notable survivals of early gas stations and gradual expansion of suburban housing near main highway routes.

## IV. CONTACT PERIOD (1500-1620)

### A. Transportation Routes:

Located on headwaters of Ten Mile River to Narragansett Bay. Conjectured trails follow N/S grain of topography as Main Street (Route 1A) along Ten Mile River with alternate possibilities as George Street along Old Mill Brook and Taunton Street through Shepardville. Branch trail around Lake Mirimichi to Foxborough appears to have followed axis of Messenger Street (Route 106).

### B. Settlement Pattern:

No documented period sites. Artifacts reported from area around Lake Mirimichi (Shepard's Pond) (Carpenter, 1890, p. 11). Sites also likely on well-drained terraces and knolls adjacent to other ponds and along Ten Mile River.

### C. Subsistence Pattern:

Freshwater fishing in lakes, limited agriculture, hunting/gathering, trapping.

D. Observations:

While no sites are presently reported in the town, concentration of sites downstream on the Ten Mile River suggests occupation in this area as well. Within the boundary area between Nipmuck (freshwater, inland) people and coastal tribes -- Wamponoag to south and east, Narragansett to west/southwest.

V. FIRST SETTLEMENT PERIOD (1620-1675)

A. Transportation Routes:

Native trails remain as highways in 17th century with primary N/S highways to Wrentham as Main and Taunton Streets, and SW post road as Messenger Street.

B. Population:

Possibly some native inhabitants. No colonial settlers.

C. Settlement:

None known.

D. Economic Base:

Native hunting and trapping.

E. Observations:

An area beyond the colonial frontier. Probably used as a resource area by native people and possibly by settlers in Wrentham.

VI. COLONIAL PERIOD (1675-1775)

A. Transportation Routes:

Highways remain from 17th century. Formation of local village on Main Street (Plainville Center) by mid-18th century with radial roads to interior as Bacon, Warren, Fuller, High-Hawkins and Bow-Rhodes Streets many of which retain original character with period stone walls. Taunton Street (Shepardville) also forms local network during 18th century.

B. Population:

Gradual growth during 18th century. No specific figures available.

C. Settlement:

Half dozen houses in Dorchester grant section (1696 map); four were concentrated along Post Road (Messenger Street) south of Turnpike Lake. Scattered farms spread south from Wrentham during 18th century. Taunton Street and Route 1A were main lines for development. No village center emerged during period.

D. Economic Base:

Agriculture and grazing. Some lumbering. An undated sawmill on Old Mill Brook.

E. Architecture:

Residential: Extremely few examples of period; no high-style likely to have been built. Majority of houses were probably one-storey cottages with central-chimneys, the largest of which were of the Cape Cod type, others appear to have had one-room plans; at least one central-chimney cottage was built with a gambrel roof. It is likely that few two-storey houses were built.

F. Observations:

An outgrowth of Wrentham south into good agricultural country.

VII. FEDERAL PERIOD (1775-1830)

A. Transportation Routes:

Colonial highways remain in place with main Boston-Providence turnpike across Mill Brook (Turnpike Lake) by early 19th century (Route 1).

B. Population:

Little growth; no separate religious congregations present.

C. Settlement Locations:

Scattered farmsteads, Shepardville (post 1792) and near Plainville Pond; no significant village in town.

D. Economic Base:

"Small cotton factory" noted on 1795 Wrentham map at Shepardville, by one local historian held to have been the third cotton factory in the country to have undertaken cotton spinning by water power (Warner), possible considering owner Susannah Shepard's dealings with Providence merchants. No other known manufacturing or cottage industries.

E. Architecture:

Residential: No late Georgian high-style likely; Federalist high-style restricted to decorative details of at least one twin-chimney house, few, if any, other examples likely. Central-chimney cottage remained most widespread house-type; some central-chimney houses possible along South Street, although equally likely that most of these post-date 1830.

Institutional: One or two schoolhouses possible, not mentioned in secondary sources; no churches or meetinghouses.

Commercial: No building likely.

Industrial: Stone grist mill at Plainville Pond; cotton mill at Shepardville, post-1792 appearances undescribed.

VIII. EARLY INDUSTRIAL PERIOD (1830-1870)

A. Transportation Routes:

Turnpike and highways remain from early 19th century. No railroads through the area during this period.

B. Population:

Moderate growth of population after mid-1840s; separate statistic not available, although the number of foreign-born was probably small throughout period; no separate religious societies present.

C. Settlement Location:

At Plainville center along Bacon and South Streets.

D. Economic Base:

Jewelry production begun in this period at Slackville (now Plainville Centre), already thriving in adjoining Attleborough. \$8-10,000 annual value of production ca. 1842 using former stone grist mill, at the location of the present Plainville Stock Co.

E. Architecture:

Residential: Almost no high-style present; individual examples of Greek Revival and Italianate exist; most wide-spread house types were central chimney houses (Greek Revival style to ca. 1860), central chimney cottages (Greek Revival and Italianate styles), and side-hall cottages (Greek Revival, Italianate and some Second Empire style).

Institutional: Two or three school districts likely to have existed throughout period, at least one Greek Revival style schoolhouse and possibly one Italianate style schoolhouse built -- extant?

Commercial: Small number of gable-facade wood-frame blocks built along South Street, near Bacon Street, one and two-storeys; most elaborate blocks were two-storey hip-roofed Italianate structures of which at least two were built (ca. 1860-1875).

Industrial: Primarily one and two-storey wood-frame structures, utilitarian.

IX. LATE INDUSTRIAL PERIOD (1870-1915)

A. Transportation Routes:

Belated railroad connection to Attleborough and Wrentham along Ten Mile Brook through Plainville center (1892), now abandoned. Streetcar route along Main Street through town center by early 1900s.

B. Population:

Relatively rapid growth in 1870s-1880s, although total population was small; small foreign-born population made up of English Canadian and German immigrants (1905); Congregational Society formed 1884, Mormon Society formed before 1887, post-1890 history not fully recorded in secondary sources, one or two other congregations probably formed ca. 1890-1910.

C. Settlement Locations:

Plainville center on newly laid-out side streets east of South Street.

D. Economic Base:

Succession of owners and partnerships in jewelry industry as value of product continues to rise, estimated at \$500,000 by 1890 (Warner). By 1890, jewelry the only manufacturing industry in Plainville.

E. Architecture:

Residential: Little high-style present, individual ambitious examples of Victorian Gothic and Queen Anne styles exist. Side-hall cottages of mixed Victorian Gothic/Queen Anne style and of astylistic mid-Victorian design were the most widespread house type, followed by a smaller number of side-hall two-storey houses of similar design to that of the cottages; a small number of Second Empire style cottages were built ca. 1865-75 (Bacon Street).

Institutional: Victorian Gothic style high-school/public hall constructed ca. 1875-80, replaced by Colonial Revival style high-school/town hall (1905-6); wood-frame Queen Anne style firehouse built ca. 1904. Wood-frame Victorian Gothic style church (Bacon Street) ca. 1880-95; two-storey astylistic Mormon chapel (pre-1887), Greek Revival style schoolhouse converted to chapel (Taunton Street); G.A.R. Hall built using existing two-storey wood-frame structure (ca. 1880).

Commercial: Little new construction apparent, some commercial conversion and alteration of existing buildings.

Industrial: Construction throughout period of utilitarian design, wood-frame factories, two and three-storeys high; some industrial brick construction ca. 1900, near Plainville Pond, south of Bacon Street.

X. EARLY MODERN PERIOD (1915-1940)

A. Transportation Routes:

Trolley route abandoned with auto highways along existing roads in 1930s as Route One superhighway between Boston-Providence, with secondary Route 1A (Main Street) through center and Route 106 to Foxborough as Bacon-Messenger Streets.

B. Population:

Fluctuation in 1300-1600 range, but little permanent increase during period.

C. Settlement Location:

Same as preceding period.

D. Economic Base:

Some expansion of jewelry factories and development of several related industries -- gold and silver refining; coppersmiths. No other new industries noted.

E. Architecture:

Residential: No high-style likely; some bungalow building apparent, the most elaborate examples of which were located on South Street, south of Bacon Street; individual examples of Dutch Colonial cottages; as much of the new construction occurred on vacant lots in partially developed subdivisions of ca. 1870, there are likely to be few (if any) districts of early modern houses.

Institutional: Little new building likely, although references for the period are not available through secondary sources.

Commercial: Little new building apparent; most elaborate structure appears to have been a gas station (South Street) built out of an ornate Italianate/Second Empire style cupola or pavilion.

Industrial: Little new building; small amount of utilitarian brick and concrete construction possible in factory north of Bacon Street at railroad tracks.

XI. SOURCES

Carpenter, Robert W., History and Directory of Foxborough (1890).

Warner, Samuel, "History of the Towns" (of Wrentham and Norfolk),  
Directory of Wrentham (1890).

#### PLAINVILLE SURVEY OBSERVATIONS

The existing Plainville survey records approximately 35 buildings in all four categories, although little historical background has been included for any property. The survey includes buildings on the town's two major (old) roads, South and Taunton Streets, while buildings in outlying districts and on side streets have been mostly ignored. Further survey work should concentrate on identifying outlying farmsteads, most of which can be expected to contain vernacular cottages. Second, the development of Plainville center as an industrial village should be recorded with an eye toward the mid- and late Victorian development of the Village's cottage districts and also toward a more complete survey of South Street where several (locally) important houses and commercial blocks have been overlooked.