

# MHC Reconnaissance Survey Town Report

## SOUTHBRIDGE

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 RECONAISSANCE SURVEY REPORT

Date: 1983

Community: Southbridge

### I. TOPOGRAPHY

Southbridge is located in the southwestern corner of Worcester County just to the north of the Connecticut border. Its surface consists of a series of parallel north-south ridges in the western 2/3 of the town, with less defined, lower hills and ridges in the eastern 1/3. This topographical difference also marks a change from Brookfield series soils in the western portion to Charlton series soils in the eastern area. Elevations range from more than 1,000 feet above sea level in the south and southwest to 600-700 feet above sea level on the north and east borders.

Cutting a narrow, steep sided valley through the north central portion of the town is the Quinebaug River. The drop in elevation of more than 100 feet as the river winds approximately five miles through the town in a southwestern direction provided a number of good water power sites, as did its several tributary streams.

Both the Brookfield and Charlton series loams, ranging from stony to fine loams, are valuable lands for agriculture. The best of the loams, when cleared for cultivation or left for pasture, are also fairly productive.

### II. POLITICAL BOUNDARIES

Poll parish of "Honest Town" created from parts of Charlton, Dudley, and Sturbridge, 1801. Incorporated as Town of Southbridge from parts of Charlton, Dudley, and Sturbridge, 1816. Part of Dudley annexed 1822. Part of Sturbridge annexed 1839. Bounds with Sturbridge established 1871. Bounds with Charlton and Dudley established 1907.

### III. HISTORIC OVERVIEW

Urban-industrial center on the Quinebaug River corridor, with native sites possible at river falls areas. First European settlement probably ca. 1733, with Moses Marcy mills. Dispersed 18th century agricultural settlement as peripheral area of Sturbridge, Charlton, and Dudley. Early 19th century textile manufacturing of several Quinebaug River power sites, with major industrial concentration at Globe Village, and commercial/institutional core at Southbridge Center. Commercial and industrial growth further stimulated by 1866 railroad connection, with major late 19th century industrial development by American Optical at Lensdale, and central commercial district growth. Immigrant labor population includes large proportion of French Canadians. Variety of 19th century worker housing and residential districts remain intact. Sustained American Optical growth appears to have maintained local economic base and impact of post-war development/deterioration on historic urban landscape appears relatively light.

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

##### A. Transportation Routes

Quinebaug River corridor through steep highland ridge and valley belt, with transport foci at river fords. Primary east-west trail conjectured north of river (Reynolds Road-Guelphwood Road-Charlton Street-Paige Hill Road-Main Street). Quinebaug corridor trail south of river (River Road). North-south trail to Woodstock from Westville ford to Elm Street-Lebanon Hill Road.

##### B. Settlement Pattern

No sites of any cultural period are reported for the town but the presence of the Quinebaug River as well as upland ridges indicates high potential for a variety of site types. Adjacent to the river, particularly at its falls, and on the banks of ponds to the south-west, fishing sites are expected. In the hilly areas, hunting and other small scale sites should exist.

##### C. Subsistence Pattern

The seasonal round form larger base camps brought Native Americans to this area to hunt and fish.

#### V. Plantation Period (1620-1675)

##### A. Transportation Routes

Native trails continue in use, with the main north-south route becoming the path from the settlement at Woodstock to that at Brookfield, and the east-west trail becoming part of the route from Boston to Springfield.

##### B. Settlement Pattern

Patterns of land use established by the Native population in the Contact period are presumed to have continued during the Plantation period are presumed to have continued during the Plantation period. Some reduction is expected due to increased colonial presence and the formation of praying towns. No colonial settlement.

##### C. Subsistence Pattern

The seasonal exploitation of resources in the town continued during this period.

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

##### A. Transportation Routes

Trails and early roads are improved as local roads from dispersed farmstead to Sturbridge. Centers in Dudley, Charlton.

B. Population

No figures are available for this period.

C. Settlement Pattern

This area was settled late in the period from the three towns which contributed territory when the area became a parish during the Federal Period. The major portion was granted as part of Sturbridge in 1738 and settled thereafter. Smaller portions were part of Charlton (1754) and Dudley (1731). In addition to the gradual establishment of dispersed farmsteads, the Quinebaug River mill sites attracted settlement, prior to official incorporation. BY 1761 the area was made a school district of Sturbridge.

D. Economic Base

The high quality of Quinebaug mill sites attracted development prior to official settlement, in the 1730s by Moses Marcy. The soils here were reported in the 19th century as superior to those of Sturbridge and suited to dairying.

E. Architecture

Residential: Settlement by second quarter of 18th century, but few recorded survivals/examples; one single-story, five-bay, center chimney plan recorded.

Institutional: First school building erected in 1754.

Commercial: Early saw and grist mills by 1730s.

VII. FEDERAL PERIOD (1775-1830)

A. Transportation Routes

Roads on the south side of the river are improved, particularly between the center and Globe Village (Main Street). Colonial roadways continue to be used.

B. Population

By 1796, population reached numbers sufficient to generate interest in independent status as town or parish. In 1798 there were 72 taxpayers in the Sturbridge portion, 23 in the Dudley and 20 in the Charlton. The petition of 1800 was signed by 87 men, and when incorporated included 90 men. The formation was unusual in its organization by individuals rather than territory, remedied in 1808 when the later owners and occupants of the estates were ordered to act as the original petitioners in parish affairs. In 1814 when petition was made for the town, 177 men signed it. The total population in 1820 equalled 1,066, and in 1830, 1,444.

Just as the town was unusual in its poll parish status, its initial church formation was non-traditional. Acknowledging the

diversity within the large population, the parish agreed to build a meetinghouse that would be shared by the several denominations. The Congregationalists were organized by 21 men and women in 1801; they were incorporated as a parish within the new town of Southbridge in 1816 and included ca. 60 men and thier families. The Baptists formed a society the same year by ca. 120 men and their families. They took over the use to the original meetinghouse building. Methodists and Universalists also worshipped in the town but did not yet form societies. The town held a Lyceum, briefly from 1826 to 1834. Temperance society was formed in 1827 and advocated total abstinence in 1829.

#### C. Settlement Pattern

As late as 1811, settlement continues to consist of dispersed farmsteads, with a small cluster of building around the 1797 Baptist meetinghouse at the Main/Elm intersection. Textile manufacturing is introduced in 1813, and three distinct industrial clusters develop by 1830. Growth in the Center Village extends west of the Baptist meetinghouse to Central Street, and south along Elm Street to the Congregational meetinghouse (1822). A cotton mill (1813) is built on the north end of Central Street, with worker housing north of the Quinebaug River on Paige Hill Road.

A second industrial center develops at Globe Village, with an 1814 cotton mill and an 1816 brick mill. The village is established north of the river, with worker housing along Main Street. A secondary residential cluster develops southwest of Globe Village at the South-West Street intersection. A third industrial development occurs southeast of the Center Village around the Columbian textile mills (1821) along the Quinebaug, with worker housing on the south side of Main Street. Small secondary hamlets develop in the southern part of town at the alpine drive (Brickyard Road)/Lebanon Hill Road intersection; and at the Crops Road/North Woodstock Road intersection.

#### D. Economic Base

During the late 18th and early 19th centuries Southbridge, still unincorporated and part of Sturbridge and Charlton, was primarily involved in agriculture. The excellent soils on the ridgetops and slopes yielded large corps of hay, grains and fruit, while the stony soils were well suited for parturage of cattle and sheep. Several saw and grist mills were located on the Quinebaug River and lesser streams since the mid 18th century, and by the 1790s at least two clothiers' and wool carding shops had been established, one at Globe Village, the other at the old Marcy Mill or Central Mills site. These were the forerunners of the numerous textile mills established after the Embarge and War of 1812 which formed the early foundation of Southbridge's economic growth.

The earliest attempt at textile manufacturing occurred in 1811 when a cotton factory was established at Westville, capitalized at only \$6,000. In 1812 a cotton spinning mill was established at Globe Village in an old linseed oil mill by James and Perez

Wolcott and incorporated in 1814 as the Globe Mfg. Co. It was soon followed by a woolen mill, which in 1819 was joined with the Globe Mfg Co. to form the Wolcott Woolen Mfg. Co., capitalized at \$140,000. Wolcott brought in several new Boston investors, built a brick mill in 1823, and the "Big Dam" across the Quinebaug River in 1827. Further downstream the clothiers' works and wool carding operation at the Marny Mills site was adapted to the manufacturers of wool yarn and cloth in 1814 with the establishment of the Charlton Mfg. Co. In 1816 this was reorganized as the Southbridge Factory Co., which failed in 1818 and then became the Central Mfg. Co., operated by numerous parties until the mill burned in 1825. A cotton mill was erected in 1813 or 1814 on the site of the later Dresser Mfg. Co., operated by a partnership made up of investors from Southbridge and Providence. The mill experienced many changes of ownership by Boston and Providence investors throughout the next two decades, as did many of the other mills in Southbridge, a result of the very unstable nature of the early textile industry and repeated periods of depression and prosperity.

At the Lensdale area of the present American Optical Co., a cotton mill was erected in 1821 by Ebenezer D. Ammidown, who eventually became the owner of four textile mills in Southbridge. In 1825 this firm was organized as the Columbian Mfg. Co.

Another industry established in this period which later became an important part of Southbridge's economy was the manufacture of cutlery, begun in 1818 by Dexter Harrington. Shoemaking was also carried on in several shops and probably in many farmhouses as a cottage industry.

#### E. Architecture

**Residential:** Limited number of period dwellings recorded or noted in the field. Of note are two brick, double-pile; one with double chimneys and gabled monitor, 1810-1820, and one with end chimneys (original?) and roof subsequently raised in Italianate period. Two single-pile end chimney houses noted and one two-story, center chimney plan.

**Institutional:** Poll parish meetinghouse serving Congregationalists, Baptists, Methodists, and Unitarians erected in 1797. A separate Congregational meetinghouse was built in 1821. Globe Village erected a schoolhouse during the 1820s.

**Commercial:** Ammidown Hotel in operation by 1816. Second hotel erected ca. 1825.

**Industrial:** William Sumner cotton mill erected 1813; later conveyed to Central Mills Co. (1863). Cotton and woolen mills at Globe Village by 1814. Columbian Cotton Mill building erected in 1821, burned in 1844. Wolcott brick mill built in 1823.

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

### A. Transportation Routes

New Road (Worcester Street) is built to Charlton City and Charlton Depot to the north. The Southbridge Branch of the New England Railroad, although chartered in 1849, does not reach its terminus in Southbridge Center until 1866.

### B. Population

With the expansion of manufacturing in this period, population growth was substantial, more than tripling from 1,444 in 1830 to 5,208 in 1870. The great increase in industrial employment was undoubtedly the attraction, reaching 539 in 1840, and 1,099 in 1875, while agriculture peaked at 219 in 1840 and dropped to 173 in 1875. The number of immigrants in the town was quite large, and the foreign-born portion of the population grew from 34% in 1855 to 42.9% in 1875. As in most county towns the Irish were most numerous in the early years, so that by 1855 they accounted for half of the foreign population. From an early date, however, Canadians came to the town and early, 1865, they came to dominate. By 1875 they accounted for 62% of the foreign-born and 27% of the total population.

With the expansion and diversification of the population came further denomination formation. In 1834 the Methodists formed a separate society, followed by the Universalists in 1838. The Baptists formed a second society, Central Baptist, in 1842. In 1854 an Evangelical church was established in Globe Village by the Hamilton Woolen Co. Catholic masses were celebrated in the town as early as 1840; as their numbers increased, a church, St. Peter's, was built in 1853. By 1858, the Catholic population equalled 1,673 and with Charlton and Sturbridge became a parish of ca. 2,000 souls in 1865. In 1870 the parish was divided into an Irish and French church.

A Social Library was formed in 1832, another with the high school in 1857. A high school was funded by private contributions from 1841 until 1854 when the town took it over. A Masonic lodge was formed in 1859.

### C. Settlement Pattern

Period of major industrial, residential and commercial growth, with the commercial/institutional focus at Southbridge Center, and the main industrial concentration at Globe Village. New secondary industrial centers develop at Shuttleville and Sandersdale. At Southbridge Center, the commercial focus continues around the Main/Central Street intersection, with the core area on Main Street between Central and Hamilton. Some multi-story brick blocks are built in the late 1860s, after the rail connection is established. The institutional center appears to be the Congregational meetinghouse (remodelled 1839, 1869) and Town Hall (1838) on Elm Street, but churches are also dispersed along Main Street, including Baptist (1848, replaced 1864), Universalist

(1842), Methodist Episcopal (1843), and Baptist Society (just north on Hamilton). Saint Peter's Catholic Church locates to the north at Hamilton/Marcy Streets, between Globe Village and the Center, and near the railway depot. Industrial development continues along the Quinebaug River corridor northeast of the center and along the north side of the river. A number of factories, including American Optical (1869) located to the east of the Center near the new Columbian Mills (1866). Barber (1839)notes a "flourishing village" of 40 to 50 houses. By 1870, a high income corridor extends along Main Street west toward South Street, and east beyond the cemetery, between Central and Hamilton fills with middle income and worker housing, and worker duplexes are built on Foster Street, south of the Central Mills.

At Globe Village, Hamilton Woolen continues expansion along the Quinebaug River corridor, with and 1831 mill, and an 1838 brick mill (rebuilt after 1850 fire). The Free Evangelical Church (1868) is built on Hamilton Street. Worker housing (some brick) is built north of the river off Pleasant and Gilmore Streets and south of the river along West Street, with a duplex cluster on Union and Cross Streets. In addition, a middle income district develops between Main and South Street on High and Sayles Streets.

In the eastern part of town, a secondary industrial cluster develops at the Ashland Mills (1843), which burn in 1849. The area revives with the construction of the Sandersdale print works (1867-1869), stimulated by the establishment of the railroad in the Quinebaug corridor. A row of worker duplexes is built along River Road. In the western part of town a smaller industrial cluster develops around the Litchfield Shuttle works across the river from Westville.

#### D. Economic Base

During this period Southbridge experienced steady growth, based largely on continued expansion in the textile industry. Population nearly quadrupled to 5,200 and the building trades expanded as two brickyards, several cabinet and woodworking shops, and a number of lumber mills provided materials for the town's physical growth. A variety of commercial institutions such as banks and shops, characteristic of a growing urban area were established. Also introduced during this period were the manufacture of frames and grinding of lenses for eyeglasses and the long-awaited rail connections through Southbridge in 1866.

In 1832, four cotton mills and one woolen mill produced more than \$245,000 worth of goods, including cotton batting, sheetings, yarn, and wool broadcloths and employed more than 300 men, women, and children. The largest of these was the recently organized Hamilton Woolen Mfg. Co., which succeeded the Wolcott Woolen Mfg. Co., destroyed by a flood and collapse of the "Big Dam" in 1829. The two Boston proprietors greatly expanded the works by rebuilding and raising the dam three feet, erecting a six-story brick mill in 1836 which more than doubled the capacity for making broadcloth, introducing the manufacture of delaines, and erecting



a cotton warp mill in 1844 and another mill in 1849. After a fire in the six-story brick mill, it was rebuilt in 1851; the lower mill was built in 1860, and an extensive reservoir was constructed in the town of Holland. Capital was increased to more than \$1,000,000 during this period.

By 1865 three cotton mills and three woolen mills produced more than 10 million yards of sheetings, cassimeres, corset jeans, and Mousseline delaine valued at more than \$4.5 million, and employed nearly 1,400 men and women. In Shuttleville the Litchfield Shuttle Works were established in 1845; by 1865 they produced more than 32,000 shuttles and employed 20.

Despite its overall expansion, the growth of the textile industry was far from even. Repeated fires and long periods of inactivity at several of the millsites were common. For example, the mill of the Central Mfg. Co., organized in 1837 by Ebenezer D. Ammidown was built that year on the former site of a mill that burned in 1825. After the 1821 Columbian Mfg. Co. mill burned in 1870 and was not reoccupied. In Sandersville, a cotton mill built in 1835 burned in 1849 and the site remained undeveloped until 1864 when James Sanders of Providence, Rhode Islnd purchased the water privilege and erected the Sandersville Print Works for calico printing. Those mills that continued in operation, with the exception of the stable Hamilton Woolen Mfg. Co., underwent frequent changes in ownership by Boston and Rhode Island investors.

By 1865 a wide assortment of manufactories and services existed in Southbridge. These included manufactories of cutlery, card paper, railroad cars, coaches, wagons and sleighs, clothing, tinware, pumps, coffins, boxes, ice, baked goods, teeth, and wheel spokes. Two daquerrian and photographic establishments existed as did a harness shop, blacksmith shops, a gas plant, ice house, and planning mills. Two banks were organized during the major period of industrial and commercial expansion. The Southbridge Bank was formed in 1836, followed by the Southbridge Savings Savings Bank in 1848.

The most important new industry was the manufacture of frames and lenses of eyeglasses. Establishment in 1833 by William Beecher, the hand manufacture of these items expanded to several shops, including the American Optical Co., formed in 1869 through the partnership of George W. Wells and R.H. Cole and Co. In 1868 more than 20,000 gold, silver, and steel spectacles valued at more than \$50,000 were manufactured by 35 employees.

Agricultural production in Southbridge increased in value and quantity with the population growth. The value of goods produced on the 117 farms (1865) increased from about \$50,000 in 1845 to about \$110,000 in 1865, with major growth in the dairy, where a decrease in butter and cheese production and an increase in milk sales occurred. Grain cultivation decreased as market crops of vegetables increased. A marked drop in the numbers of sheep also occurred. In 1845 there were nearly 800 sheep in the town; by 1865 there were less than 400. The slaughter of more tha 140,000

lbs. of pigs and cattle in 1865 supported the related industries of a bone grinding and phosphate mill and manufactory of tallow candles and soap.

#### E. Architecture

Residential: Scattered examples of center and double chimney house forms in limited numbers. Three two-story, five-bay, brick, double-pile double chimney houses were noted. One brick, single-pile end chimney house was also observed. Later period houses are generally the typical one-and-two-story, gable end, side-passage plans. Mansard-roofed dwellings occur in the center.

Worker housing consists of three-to six-bay, two-story double chimney duplexes in the first half of the period. One three-story three-bay, double chimney was noted as was a two-story, four-bay, gable end, center entry duplex.

Institutional: By 1837, the Baptist congregation had acquired sole possession of the 1797 meetinghouse. The remodelled building was a two-story gable end structure with a recessed, columned portico. In 1848, they sold this structure and built a new church which burned in 1863 and was replaced by 1866 with the two-story, brick, Romanesque Central Baptist church. A frame, Greek Revival, gable end church was built by the Universalists in 1841. The 1821 Congregational church underwent two remodellings during the period, in 1839 and 1869. A Methodist church was built on Main Street in 1843. The Free Evangelical Church in Globe Village (Methodists, Baptists, Episcopalians, Congregationalists, and Presbyterians) met in "Gothic Hall" until 1869 when Hamilton Mill erected a church for the society. An Irish Roman Catholic church was constructed in 1853. In 1870, the French Canadian population broke away and erected Notre Dame Roman Catholic church.

The first town hall was built in 1837-38 and was a two-story brick structure with a cupola. The building cost \$3,889 to construct and housed both the town offices and the high school.

A two-story brick school, erected in the 1860s, now serves as the police station.

Commercial: A three-story brick hotel, now the Blanchard Building was built in 1860. Depot was built in 1866. Several brick commercial buildings were constructed during the 1860s, the 1868 Victorian Gothic Barnes Building, several three-and four-story Italianate detailed structures, as well as the 1870 Second Empire Whiteford Building.

Industrial: Columbian Cotton Mill rebuilt in 1856 in brick and expanded in 1866. Hamilton Woolen Mills erected four-story stone mill with tower between 1849 and 1852. American Optical Company formed in 1869 and operated from several frame buildings.

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

### A. Transportation Routes

By the 1890s the east-west Sturbridge-Southbridge Electric Street Railway is established along the Quinebaug corridor, entering town from Sturbridge on West Main then through Globe Village on Hamilton Street. Through the Main Street business district, and on the the Sandersdale Railway Depot. A street railway to Charlton Depot and Worcester runs north from Main Street on Central Street-Worcester Street.

### B. Population

Although population growth slowed somewhat during this period, it still resulted in more than doubling, growing from 5,208 in 1870 to 14,217 in 1915. Although immigration remained high for the county, it fell from a high of 42.9% foreign-born in 1875 to 34.7% in 1915. Throughout the period French Canadians dominated, the Irish remained second in numbers, and small numbers of English and Scots came. By 1905 more eastern groups came to the town, including Swedes, Poles, and by 1915, Italians and Turks.

To accommodate these groups, new churches were formed: Notre Dame for the French in 1870, and later Sacred Heart in 1908. In 1916, the Poles formed St. Hedwig. An Orthodox Church was formed in 1910, followed by an Albanian Autocephalic Church, the first in the country, in 1912. In 1888 the Congregation Ohavath Zion was formed by the town's Jews. In 1885 a newspaper editor believed that over 50% of the people in the town could not read English. The town operated a poor farm from 1862 to 1921.

### C. Settlement Pattern

Industrial, commercial, and residential expansion continue, as Sturbridge Center, Globe Village, and the American Optical facilities at Lensdale coalesce into one urban-industrial complex. In the Main Street commercial center, vertical expansion continues with multi-story brick blocks built through the period. A new town hall/high school is built on Elm Street in 1889 and a new fire headquarters in 1899. Notre Dame French Catholic Church (1870) is built on Pine Street, near the earlier Irish Catholic church. Industrial expansion continues, most notably east of the Center at Lensdale, where American Optical mill expansion (1872, 1888, 1899) takes place in the old Columbian Mills area along the Quinebaug corridor.

Residential growth is widespread and intensive. At Globe Village, development extends north of the river along Plimpton, Pleasant, Fiske and Clark Streets, and west along the Main Street corridor. South of the Center, residential growth moves laterally from the Elm Street corridor, east to the cemetery, and west toward Marcy Street and Hillside Park. North of the Center, intensive infill occurs along the Hamilton Street streetcar corridor and around the Catholic institutional complex. A distinctive French Canadian worker neighborhood core develops between the rail corridor and

the Quinebaug River west of American Optical, with extensions south of the tracks, across Main Street east of the cemetery, and north of the river around the Charlton Street/Worcester Street/Mechanics Street triangle.

#### D. Economic Base.

By the turn of the 20th century, the long dominant textile industry had been superceded by optics as the town's most important industry, led by the continually expanding American Optical Co. By 1915, nearly 4,000 were employed at that plant alone.

This rapid growth in the optics industry was launched by the introduction of machinery into the production process in 1780. The one person largely responsible for this was George W. Wells who entered the business in 1864 and became president of American Optical Co. in 1891. His experience with the machinery at the Hamilton Woolen Mfg. Co. enabled him to develop new machines and tools which greatly improved the production process. Over the next four decades the company grew beginning with the erection of a plant in 1872 on Central Mills Co. land and concluding with the erection of the brick and concrete plants at Lensdale between 1898 and 1908. Other firms included the Southbridge Optical Co., incorporated 1883, and the Dupont Central Optical Co, formed in 1900.

In contrast, the textile industry experienced little additional growth, losing one mill, the Columbian Mfg. Co., to fire in 1880. The industry maintained its strength, however, as the surviving mills continually improved their operations. The Hamilton Mfg. Co. underwent rapid expansion between 1907 and 1912, but it was nothing like the growth experienced in the decades before the Civil War.

The cutlery industry also expanded during this period. Harrington Cutlery was joined by Stephen Richard Co. and I.P. Hyde and Co. in the manufacture of shoe and leather knives supplied to the factories of Boston, Lynn, Haverhill, Salem, and the Brookfields, as well as cloth, rubber, meat, and putty knives. As the population of Southbridge grew to more than 14,000 by 1915, the town gained importance as a regional commercial center for southwestern Worcester County. In 1905, 106 trading establishments, the sixth largest number in the county, were operating here.

The agricultural production of Southbridge remained strong through the period, led by the steadily increasing value and quantity of dairy products, especially milk. By 1905, the dairy accounted for \$53,000 or 43% of total agricultural production followed by hay, stray and fodder (29%), and poultry products (7.6%).

#### E. Architecture

Residential: The Center displays late 19th century and early 20th century dwellings, primarily gable end with Greek Italianate,

Second Empire and Queen Anne details, North of the Center are some late Queen Anne style and Colonial Revival houses and several Four Square houses. Three deckers with exterior stairs were also observed.

Institutional: In 1885, the Congregational church replaced the 1821 meetinghouse with "large and elegant edifice of brick". A new town hall, incorporating the high school and memorial hall, was built in 1889 (the old one was torn down). The new building of brick trimmed in brownstone and terra cotta measured 119 x 75 feet with a 137-foot tower.

A brick Romanesque fire station was constructed in 1889. In 1914, the Jacob Edwards Memorial Library, a brick Colonial Revival building, was designed and built by Little and Browne of Boston.

Commercial: In 1872, the Masonic Hall, IOOF building, and the Savings Bank building were constructed. The C.A. Dresser House and the Globe Village House were both operating hotels. Numerous brick commercial blocks went up between the late 1870s and the end of the period. The stucco railroad depot with tile hipped roof was erected during the period.

#### X. EARLY MODERN PERIOD (1915-1940)

##### A. Transportation Routes

By the early 1920s, the streetcar lines are abandoned, and replaced by improved auto highways, including Main Street to Fiskdale and Sandersdale Depot, and Worcester Street to Charlton Depot (old Route 93, later Route 169). By the early 1930s, old Route 93 is extended south to North Woodstock, Connecticut (old North Woodstock Road) and the Sandersdale Road (Route 131) is improved through the Quinebaug corridor to West Dudley/Quinebaug.

##### B. Population

The town's population growth slowed considerably during this period of war and depression, from 14,217 in 1915 to 16,825 in 1940. The number of foreign-born within the town decreased markedly from 34.7% at the outset of the period to 19.7% at its end. Still, the town attracted French Canadians in the greatest numbers, followed by fewer than half the number of Italians and Poles, and a small number of English. In 1924 a Roumanian Orthodox Church was established, and in 1930 a Jehovah's Witness organization.

##### C. Settlement Pattern

Development continues in the commercial/institutional core, with the commercial district extending up Central Street and Hamilton Street. Downtown additions include a library (1917), post office (1928) and Worcester County National Bank (1929). Residential growth continues at Globe Village north in the Pleasant Street area, and south out of the High Street district southwest along South Street and south between Highland and West Streets. South

of the Center, expansion continues along Marcy, Dresser, and Hartwell Streets, and south along Woodstock Road and Elm Streets. The worker housing district west of American Optical extends south development along Worcester Street, Charlton Road, and Guelphwood Road. Worker cottages are built east of the mills on the river bluffs between Lensdale and Sandersville.

#### D. Economic Base

Unlike many manufacturing towns in Worcester County, Southbridge was able to maintain and expand its industrial base through the decades before the Second World War. The American Optical Co. grew to employ more than 4,500 in the late 1920s and operated four branch plants in Worcester, Cambridge, and Canada in addition to the large factories in Southbridge. In 1929 several smaller optical shops consolidated in the formation of the Independent Optical Co.

The manufacture of cutlery also expanded, as the Hyde Mfg. Co. opened the period with the erection of a new brick plant in 1917. In 1926 the Richards Cutlery firm was purchased by the Parlor Wire Goods Co. of Worcester, which continued to operate the local trim.

The Hamilton Woolen Mfg. Co. continued to dominate the local textile industry. Numerous improvements led to the discontinuation of cotton production, replacement of obsolete machinery, purchase and refitting of the Central Mills plant, and the erection of a new dye house between 1917 and 1929. The introduction of new fabrics, a line of men's wear and a line of up-to-date and properly styled women's wear, allowed Hamilton to remain competitive in the world market. In 1927 the company employed 1,400 people and operated 59,000 spindles and 1,200 looms in 27 factory buildings. Other textile firms in operation were the Southbridge Printing Co., taken over by a New York group in 1927, and the Litchfield Shuttle Co. which continued into the 1930s with 125 employees.

Dairying continued to be the leading type of agricultural production, supplemented by poultry and market gardening.

#### E. Architecture

Residential: Little major development during period.

Institutional: 1928 U.S. Post Office building, a one-story, brick Colonial Revival structure, designed by James Wetmore.

Commercial: A Colonial revival style brick bank was designed by Burnham Brother of Chicago (?) in 1929.