

MHC Reconnaissance Survey Town Report

SHARON

Report Date: 1979

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.



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MHC RECONNAISSANCE SURVEY REPORT

DATE: December 1979

COMMUNITY: Sharon

I. TOPOGRAPHY

Located on a rocky upland terrain. Numerous outcroppings; little tillable ground except for plain area southwest of Lake Massapoag. Watershed area between Neponset River to north and Narragansett basin to south. Many bogs and swamps in low lying areas. Several ponds; largest is Lake Massapoag, a major headwater for east branch of Newport.

II. POLITICAL BOUNDARIES

Part of Dorchester "New Grant" (1636). Became part of South Precinct of Dorchester, 1715. Part of town of Stoughton, 1726. Become second parish of Stoughton, 1740 and district of Stoughtonham, 1765. Incorporated as town of Stoughtonham, 1775. Name changed to Sharon, 1783.

III. HISTORIC OVERVIEW

Boston suburb with distinctive topographic features of hills and pond. On main north/south corridor from Boston to Providence with early trail and Colonial tavern sites on post roads. Limited industrial potential with early recreational suburban development from Boston in 19th century. Typical regional architectural forms of modest variety from 18th to 20th centuries, with few extraordinary structures but several potential 17th century Contact and First Settlement sites of importance.

IV. CONTACT PERIOD (1500-1620)

A. Transportation Routes:

Bay Road Main north/south trails from Neponset to Narragansett along east and west edge of town. Documented trails include Old Post Road to S. Main Street around Moose Hill, and Bay Street around Rattlesnake Hill. It is also conjectured that trails linked with Massapoag Pond with probable routes along Walpole and Mowhawk Streets.

B. Settlement Pattern:

Few documented sites; none from the Late Woodland or Contact period, probable winter refuge sites.

C. Subsistence Pattern:

Inland hunting and trapping, seasonal fishing at Massapoag outlet, winter ice fishing on ponds.

D. Observations:

Sections of town are well suited to winter use by coastal tribes sheltered site areas, ponds for ice fishing, good fall and winter hunting,

Massapoag a major spawning ground for alewife (Sharon, A History, p. 56, 109). While little reported evidence, potential for sites should be considered significant around major ponds.

V. FIRST SETTLEMENT PERIOD (1620-1675)

A. Transportation Routes:

Native trails extended as highway routes. Primary north/south roads from Neponset (Canton) to Providence as Old Post Road--portions of which survive in original form at Pine Street, and road to Taunton as Bay Street ^{Road} on Stoughton line.

B. Population:

Very limited during period. Less than dozen families.

C. Settlement:

Catalyst for settlement was Old Post Road. At halfway between Boston and Providence, a logical spot for taverns. "Wainman's Ordinary" operating by 1657 in area south of Wolomolopoag Pond known as "Pole Plain." Dorchester tried to encourage settlement in this area after 1661, but with little success. First permanent settler, Roger Billings, 1672.

D. Economic Base:

Providing lodging and services along Post Road. Probably some agriculture, grazing and lumbering.

E. Architecture:

Only one building constructed (1657); not extant (Wainman's Ordinary--a tavern).

F. Observations:

Area was too peripheral for settlement during period. Settlement that did occur was a result of the Post Road. Site Potential: if intact, "Wainman's Ordinary"--a valuable mid-17th century tavern site. Location cited as on 1794 map, south of Wolomolopoag Pond on Post Road (Sharon, 1976, p. 14).

VI. COLONIAL PERIOD (1675-1775)

A. Transportation Routes:

Highways remained intact from 17th century with new cross links between Pole Plain (S. Sharon) and Canton on S. Main and Canton Streets (1700) with secondary systems of radial roads from Sharon Center in mid-18th century as Norwood (Route 27) Pond and Mountain Streets with original early 18th century division grant lines surviving as Morse and Lakeview Streets south of Massapoag Pond. Other local roads of period include highways around Moose Hill as Upland and Moose Hill Roads as network around Massapoag Brook as East Street to Sharon Center.

B. Population:

Settlers from Dorchester after 1680 began to occupy scattered sites Pole Plain; by ca. 1737 community was sufficiently populous to build meetinghouse; by 1776 population stood at 1,261 including sections later incorporated as Foxborough.

C. Settlement:

Initially "Pole Plain" area. Billing's Tavern operating by 1685--a well known stopping place on the Post Road and the focal point for early settlement. Was located near I95 and S. Main Street (apparently recently destroyed, Sharon, 1976, p. 18). Main Street laid out in 1700 connecting Pole Plain area with towns on the Milton line. First meetinghouse built on Pole Plain, 1737. Second locus of development at Massapoag outlet, later known as Cobb's Corner. Good milling potential on Massapoag outlet--grist and sawmill, Samuel Bird, after 1730. Noyes Tavern (Chemming Street) operating by 1767. With change in Post Road route, 1751, Billing's Tavern and Pole Plain area decline, development shifts to Cobb's Corner.

D. Economic Base:

Summer farming and grazing; winter lumbering. Cedar cut for shingles and clapboards. Nathaniel Morse cut oak for export to Boston shipyards, 1761 (Pratt, 1935, p. 17, 23). After 1724, bog iron removed from Massapoag. First local attempt to smelt iron, Ebenezer Mann Furnance, 1772, on Gavin's Pond. This was purchased by Edmund Quincy and Richard Gridley, 1770 along with rights to all Massapoag ore. Designed to cast hollow ware (kettles and pots) but in May, 1775 successfully cast first cannon. Cannon and shot produced throughout the Revolution.

E. Architecture:

Remaining buildings are mainly farmhouses and perhaps, some barns. Most houses of the period are central-chimney cottages with a lesser number of two-story houses. Extant buildings are scattered along early roads, particularly Main Street and streets southwest of Lake Massapoag. Any concentration of houses which may have existed at Sharon Center has been obscured by later development.

F. Observations:

An agricultural community located along major transportation route. Though area was marginal for agriculture, lumber and iron ore resources provided exportable products and promote development. Site Potential: the Quincy and Gridley foundry, first one to cast cannon in North America, a potentially important industrial/technological site. Located near outlet to Gavin's Pond (see Sharon, 1976, pp. 72-73; 123-24).

VII. FEDERAL PERIOD (1775-1830)

A. Transportation Routes:

Colonial highway network remained intact, with improvements of east-

west cross road through Sharon Center as North Main Street (Route 27) to Stoughton in early 19th century. No turnpikes.

B. Population:

Remained virtually unchanged, throughout period; Baptist congregation formed 1812, but too small to build church until 1833; Trinitarian congregation formed 1822.

C. Settlement Location:

No important expansion of settled area.

D. Economic Base:

In order to extract bog iron, Lake Massapoag given new outlet in 1787 at north end of lake, possibly changing lake's watershed and affecting Canoe River mill privileges. Five mill privileges created in 60-foot fall between Lake and Billings Streets a mile distant.

E. Architecture:

More evidence of new building and remodelling exists than would be expected based on the town's stable population and agrarian economy. Extant buildings of the period conform to vernacular types of the Colonial period with the addition of a small number of hip-roofed Federalist style houses with twin chimneys. Especially noteworthy are 3 stone houses built near the period's end (MHC Forms 13, 55 & 94). No public commercial or industrial buildings of the period remain, with possible exception of some former district school houses.

VIII. EARLY INDUSTRIAL PERIOD (1830-1870)

A. Transportation Routes:

Early 19th century highway system remained intact. Primary route of Boston and Providence railroad set along Massapoag Brook through Cedar Swamp (1835), although no local effect. Depot below Sharon Center on Colonial mill sites at Norwood Street.

B. Population:

Although population increased throughout this period, the actual numbers of residents was small, increasing from 1,023 in 1830 to 1,508 in 1870; by 1865, the town contained 140 foreign-born residents, of whom 105 were Irish.

C. Settlement:

New building occurred on existing roads around Massapoag Brook and Sharon Center. In addition at least one hotel (the Lake House--pre-1858) stood on Lake Massapoag.

D. Economic Base:

The two principal industries were the knife works established in 1835

by the Ames family of Easton to be later operated by H. A. Lothrop & Co.; and a substantial cotton duck mill built by George H. Mann.

By 1856 there were on Beaver Brook a dam and saw and grist mill; later made wooden boxes, many of which were sold to Canton's Rising Sun Stove Polich works. (Although the box factory has seen several fires and reconstructions, the present Sharon Box and Lumber Co. is the direct industrial descendant of this mill.)

Rattlesnake Hill supplied iron ore and granite for the Canton Viaduct (1834-35).

Active cottage industry in boot and shoe manufacturing in a small evidently highly localized community ("Shoemaker Valley"), which in 1855 was producing 29,604 pairs of boots selling in Boston, New York, and Philadelphia. (By 1892, the industry had died out.)

E. Architecture:

Major house types were side-hall and center-entrance Greek Revival style cottages, together with a small number of 2-story houses at Sharon Center; some very simple Italianate and Second Empire houses and cottages; at least one octagonal house built on Lake Massapoag (since demolished). Nearly no remaining commercial or industrial buildings; altered Greek Revival style church (1842).

IX. LATE INDUSTRIAL PERIOD (1870-1915)

A. Transportation Routes:

Road and railroad systems remained from mid-19th century. Street railway extended from Canton and Norwood in early 1900s along N. and S. Main Streets (Route 27) to Sharon Heights.

B. Population:

Population declined (1870-1875) and remained below 1870 level until 1890 after which it increased steadily until 1915; much of the increase after 1890 was made up of foreign-born, who numbered 489 in 1915 (out of a total population of 2,468); the largest foreign-born groups were the Irish and Nova Scotians; by mid 1880s, Sharon was reported to have had a summer population of approx. 500.

C. Settlement Location:

Some construction of hotels (3 by 1876) and summer cottages along the north and east sides of Lake Massapoag; development (small-scale) of Sharon Heights and streets between Sharon Center and Lake Massapoag; proposed subdivision west of Main Street ("Pleasant View") laid out by 1876, but not developed until 20th century.

D. Economy:

Rising importance of resort business after 1870; promoted locally by mid-1880s, resulted in construction of 3 hotels and numerous boarding

houses; tourist drawn from Providence and Boston by Lake and reputedly pure air.

None of the manufacturing industries noted survived the opening years of the 20th centuries with the exception of the box company.

E. Architecture:

Except for a "Colonial" style town hall of 1884 (altered), a tuberculosis sanatorium, and several hotels (demolished and altered), few major public, industrial, or commercial buildings existed in the town. The largest number of buildings were modest houses and cottages; many of these bear influences of the Queen Anne and Victorian Gothic styles; however, few are stylistically pure, most are eclectically decorated and appear to have been designed by builders. Along the east side of Lake Massapoag are slightly more ambitious houses of various styles, some architect designed. Despite the claims of local boosters, Sharon was a modest, small-scale resort throughout much of the period.

X. EARLY MODERN PERIOD (1915-1940)

A. Transportation Routes:

Road and rail systems remain from 19th century with abandonment of street railway in 1920s. Commuter rail depots on Boston-Providence mainline at Sharon and Sharon Heights. Autohighway routes on Colonial roads with bridges over rail line in 1930s as Route 27-N. Main-Norwood Streets and S. Main Street to Foxborough and new alignment of Massapoag Avenue to Easton.

B. Population:

Remained stable until suburban growth after 1945.

C. Settlement Location:

Some new building around town center and on subdivisions north of the town center and on plain west of Lake Massapoag.

D. Economic Base:

None of significance.

E. Architecture

Residential:

Free-standing frame houses of varying styles built in subdivisions and along older routes.

Commercial:

Limited redevelopment of town center with small scale stores and conversion of former houses to commercial use.

Industrial:

No significant new building.

Institutional:

Mainly town-owned buildings as required by expanding population (schools).

XI. SOURCES

Gould, Jeremiah, "Annuals of Sharon, Massachusetts," (1830) in Publications of the Sharon Historical Society, No. 1 (April 1904)

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Sharon, Massachusetts -- A History (1976)

Baldwin, Thomas W., Vital Records of Sharon, Massachusetts to the Year 1850 (1909)

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Hunton, Daniel, History of the Town of Canton (1893)