

MHC Reconnaissance Survey Town Report

SHERBORN

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.



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MHC RECONNAISSANCE SURVEY REPORT

Date: February 1980

Community: Sherborn

I. TOPOGRAPHY

Rugged upland watershed area between Sudbury and Charles drainage systems. Prominent bedrock outcrops throughout town, many glacial outwash features. Rocky soil. Large areas of bog and swamp scattered through town. Most drain south and east into Charles.

II. POLITICAL BOUNDARIES

Land grants to individuals from 1643. Area referred to as 'Boggestow'. Incorporated as Town of Sherborne, 1674. Original boundaries were altered considerably by formation of other towns, especially Framington (1700) and Holliston (1724).

III. HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

Suburban agricultural town on intermediate highlands southwest of Boston. Limited native site potential, but important link between Charles and Sudbury Rivers. Early settlement area along Charles with garrison forts and mill of mid-17th century. Emergence of town center along local postroad during Colonial period with well-preserved 18th century houses along outlying highways. Restricted development of farming economy through mid-19th century and limited growth of town center with representative buildings from Federal to Victorian periods arrayed as street village. Orchard and dairying landscape preserved into mid-20th century with estate district along Charles River. Increasing suburban development along main highways from metropolitan Boston threatens integrity of town center.

IV. CONTACT PERIOD (1500-1620)

A. Transportation Routes:

Located in intermediate highland between Charles and Sudbury Rivers with network of cross trails. Primary route documented in histories as "Connecticut Path" from Framingham to SW (Ashland), with apparent location around Beaver Dam swamp along axis of Western Avenue and Curve Street. Probable trails from Natick to SW include Everett-Main-Washington-Greenwood-Ash-Hollis Streets (Route 16 through Sherborn Center) with cross trail from Sudbury (South Framingham) to Charles (Medfield) conjectured as Kendall-Coolidge-Main Streets (through Sherborn Center). Other possible cross trails to Charles River include Forest-Goulding-Woodland Streets and Clark-Snow Streets around Farm Pond.

B. Settlement Pattern:

No documented sites reported. Probable area for sites include well-drained terraces and knolls overlooking Charles River and around Farm Pond.

C. Subsistence Pattern:

Fishing potential in Charles River plus hunting and gathering in riverine marsh/meadowlands. Little area suitable for agriculture.

D. Observations:

Not an area with a high probability for period sites. Terrain is too rough. More likely a buffer zone between areas of more concentrated settlement. Some temporary camp sites are possible along Connecticut Path in northwest part of town.

V. FIRST SETTLEMENT PERIOD (1620-1675)

A. Transportation Routes:

Native trails remain as primary highways, especially Connecticut Path from Framingham and roads from Natick around Charles to original town settlement at Main Street (King Philip's Bridge site). Bridges across Charles at Main at Farm Street by 1650s.

B. Population:

About twenty families by end of period.

C. Settlement:

Scattered farms throughout eastern part of town, especially in south Sherborn area. Many of these were "garrison houses". First settlers, 1652. Old South Cemetery (Main Street) in use after 1655. No village center.

D. Economic Base:

Subsistence agriculture and some grazing. Most efforts went towards survival.

E. Observations:

A thinly settled, frontier area.

VI. COLONIAL PERIOD (1676-1776)

A. Transportation Routes:

Location of Sherborn town center by late 17th century reorients radial highways from meetinghouse with Maple-Pleasant and Farm Streets as E/W highways and Mason Hill Road to Holliston by early 18th Century. Cross links provided as Brush Hill Road and Prospect Street.

B. Population:

Largely depopulated during King Philip's War, gradual recovery afterwards. By 1721, 408 inhabitants. Census of 1765 listed 643 in-

habitants in 113 families and 106 houses.

C. Settlement:

Scattered farms re-established throughout town after King Philip's War. First meetinghouse about 1685, cemetery also laid out. No real village emerged around it despite building of first school adjacent, 1728. Areas inland from Charles generally settled during 18th century.

D. Economic Base:

Primarily agriculture and grazing, some dairying. Orchards and fruit growing became important during 18th century. Few mills listed for town: sawmill (Thomas Sawin) Course Brook, after 1679. Surprising, an area noted for gunsmithing (Thomas Holbrook) just prior to Revolution.

E. Architecture:

Residential: A relatively large number of houses of this period remain, particularly in the southern and eastern parts of the town where many former farmhouses stand far back from roads, in their former fields. Central-chimney two-storey type of house appears to have been the dominant local house type, followed by a much smaller number of central chimney cottages; several twin-chimney two-storey houses exist at the town center and on major roads. Little Georgian decorative trim is evident, although the scale of several twin-chimney houses suggests that they may have once had Georgian doorways and other trim.

Institutional: Town's meetinghouse built 1684-85, replaced in 1726 by a new meetinghouse which was enlarged in 1770 and demolished in 1829-30; first schoolhouse built 1729; town pond built 1770. Private academy founded 1774.

Commercial: At least one tavern built, essentially domestic in scale with central chimney two-storey plan.

Industrial: Probable wood-frame saw and grist mills on water power sites.

F. Observations:

Remained a thinly settled agricultural area. No village development and little if any industry.

VII. FEDERAL PERIOD (1775-1830)

A. Transportation Routes:

Colonial highways remain from 18th century with focus at town center. Hartford turnpike to SW through Sherborne Center as Washington-Main-Eliot Streets (Route 16) and local branch over Brush-Paul Hills as Hunting Road with original road intact from early 19th century.

B. Population:

Population remained basically stable during period, fluctuating in 800 range; Second Congregational Church formed in 1830 due to an ideological division in the First Congregational Parish.

C. Settlement Location:

New building focused on Main Street, particularly near its junction with Washington Street.

D. Economic Base:

Agricultural pursuits remained dominant in town's economy. Probably about 1800 cottage industries in both shoemaking and straw bonnet manufacture developed. Neither appear to have grown beyond home production.

E. Architecture:

Residential: Vernacular styles of the preceding period probably remained current until ca. 1800-1815; Federalist style houses varied in scale and plan, most widely built type was two-storey rear-wall chimney plan with pitched roofs, hip-roofed examples of this plan as well as twin interior chimney plans with hip roofs exist around the town center and possess more elaborate Federal style decorative details than other building types of the period do. Also present are a small number of late-Federal cottages with center entrance facades but with varied chimney placement.

Institutional: Two(?) meetinghouses built 1830, styles unclear (it is possible that the buildings' Greek Revival details were added later); seven school districts established (ca. 1790); powder house built 1800. Private academy existed during much of period at town center.

Commercial: No apparent specialized commercial structures except for tavern(s).

Industrial: Continued saw and grist mills on water privileges; two-storey stone shop (ca. 1820-40) built as a edge tool shop at town center.

VIII. EARLY INDUSTRIAL PERIOD (1830-1870)

A. Transportation Routes:

Turnpike and highways remain from early 19th century. Branch railroads from Framingham traverse N/S around highlands as Milford Brook (1847) along Beaver Dam-Dopping Brooks and Framingham and Mansfield around Sherborne Center (1870).

B. Population:

Increased population up to 1860 after which decline began; small foreign-born population, primarily Irish after ca. 1840-50; Methodist Episcopal Society formed 1848, disbanded 1854.

C. Settlement Locations:

Little change in built-up area, although the largest number of new houses were built at the north end of the town center on Main Street near its junctions with Coolidge and Everett Streets.

D. Economic Base:

Agriculture remains virtually the sole industry with increasing emphasis on apple and cider production. In 1853 Jonathan Holbrook built a large brick cider mill, reputedly the largest in the country (Shaughnessy, p. 229).

E. Architecture:

Residential: Relatively narrow range of house types present; the the largest number of houses are side-hall examples of Greek Revival and Italianate styles; side-hall and "L" plan cottages (mainly Italianate and Gothic) form second largest group of houses, few have more than brackets as decorative trim. Examples of high-style architecture are almost non-existent with the exception of one Italianate style house (ca. 1850-55) and possibly several properties in the eastern section of the town.

Institutional: Two churches remodelled, one in Greek Revival style (1840s?), the other in Italianate style (1859), third church constructed 1848 passed out of use 1884. Town-owned buildings included wood-frame Italianate style Town Hall/High School (1858-59); seven school districts existed throughout period.

Commercial: Few buildings constructed although one two-storey temple front building (1840s) may have been for exclusive commercial use (Main Street); by the late 1860s, several one-storey, gable-facade stores had been built with virtually no decorative trim; three wood-frame railroad stations built by 1880s.

Industrial: Cider-mill re-built after 1856 fire, Second Empire style employed for subsequent additions, if not for the re-building itself.

IX. LATE INDUSTRIAL PERIOD (1870-1915)

A. Transportation Routes:

Roads and railroads remain from mid-19th century. No street railway service.

B. Population:

Although total population for the town increased up to 1920-25, the population of modern Sherborn remained the same or declined slightly; all population increases occurred in a northwestern corner of Sherborn which was ceded to Framingham in 1924-25 as its population was made up

of workers from the Para Rubber Company of South Framingham and of inmates at the state's Women's Prison (1874-77); little foreign-born population outside area ceded to Framingham.

C. Settlement Locations:

No important changes in built-up area; a small number of country estates were established along the Charles River and in the south-central part of the town.

D. Economic Base:

Construction of Framingham & Mansfield railroad a further spur to agricultural pursuits. In 1870 there were 20 cider mills and Holbrook was shipping his product to Europe. There were also eight cranberry meadows, and dairies shipped large quantities of milk to Boston.

E. Architecture:

Residential: Nearly no new building; houses of the period are likely to be restricted to modest examples of contemporary styles, except on country estates where more elaborate examples are likely to be found, particularly of the Colonial/Federal Revival style of ca. 1905-1925.

Institutional: High-style Victorian Gothic style schoolhouse (brick and stone) built 1873-74 (demolished), late Gothic library built 1913-14; graded school built at town center, 1909-10; wood-frame almshouse built 1898. No new churches built.

Commercial: Nearly no building.

Industrial: Expansion of cider vinegar mill in 1880s (Forest Street); mill burned 1909 and re-built; little, if any, other industrial development.

X. EARLY MODERN PERIOD (1915-1940)

A. Transportation Routes:

Early 19th century roads upgraded as auto highways in mid-20th century through Sherborn Center as Route 16 (Eliot-Washington Streets) and Route 27 (Main Street).

B. Population:

No change throughout period, except due to ceding of North Sherborn to Framingham, 1924-25; Catholic mission formed 1924.

C. Settlement Location:

Little new building, except for several country estates in east and south-central part of town.

D. Economic Base:

No further development of existing industries. Period witnessed winding down of commercial agriculture and closing of last cider mill before 1940.

E. Architecture:

Residential: Too little new building for generalization, except that the Colonial/Federal Revival style seems to have maintained its popularity for the few high-style houses built during this period.

Institutional: No new public buildings; almshouse converted to church 1924.

Commercial: Little new construction with probable exception of one-storey brick or concrete block automobile service stations.

Industrial: No new building; cider vinegar mill closed prior to 1940.

XI.

SOURCES

Bigelow, William, History of Sherburne, Massachusetts (1830).

Shaughnessy, Anne C., History of Sherborn (1974).