

MHC Reconnaissance Survey Town Report

SPENCER

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.

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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
mhc@sec.state.ma.us / 617-727-8470

MHC RECONNAISSANCE SURVEY REPORT

DATE: 1983

COMMUNITY: Spencer

I. TOPOGRAPHY

Roughly shaped like an elongated rectangle 4 miles by 9 miles, Spencer is located in central Worcester County, within the southern extension of the uplands region. Most of the town lies between 800 and 1000 feet above sea level (a.s.l.); several drumlins rise to almost 1100 feet a.s.l., while the ponds, rivers, and valleys lie between 700 and 850 feet. The lowest part of town is in the Seven Mile River Valley south from Hillsville and west toward East Brookfield, where elevations reach only 600-650 feet a.s.l.

Spencer is drained by a number of large and small streams. The Seven Mile River is the largest and flows from the northern boundary of the town in a southerly direction until it joins with the lesser, northerly-flowing Cranberry River about one mile southwest of Spencer Center. These two rivers and their tributary streams drain much of western and northern portions of the town as part of the Quabog/Chicopee River drainage basin. The remaining southeastern portion of the town is drained by streams that flow into Stiles Reservoir and south as part of the French/Thames River basin.

This drainage pattern roughly parallels two different soil type clusters. The area north and west of Turkey Hill Brook and the Cranberry River is dominated by soils of the Brookfield Loam series with pockets of Charlton Loam and Paxton Loam. The area south and east of these rivers consists largely of Charlton Loams, again with occasional pockets of Paxton Loam on the drumlins. The Brookfield soils are mostly stony loam, a shallow glacial till derived principally from schist and granite. Its surface is hilly and because of the presence of the surface stone and liege outcrops, cultivation is limited. Much of the land, however, is well suited to mowing and permanent pasture; as a result dairying and raising of livestock dominated. The Charlton and Paxton Loams range from stony to fine loam. The stony loams are best suited for permanent pasture and mowing while the finer loams rate among the most important and agriculturally productive in the county. Along the rivers, terraces of glacially-formed and deposited Merrimac and Hinkley soils are found.

II. POLITICAL BOUNDARIES

Included in eight mile square "Towtaid" purchase of 1686, and in town of Leicester, established 1714. Boundary with Brookfield established in 1730. Made a district from part of Leicester, 1753. Incorporated as a town 1775.

III. HISTORIC OVERVIEW

A large, upland residential, agricultural, and industrial community on the Seven Mile River. On an historic EW corridor from the coastal lowlands to the Connecticut Valley, with permanent European settlement as peripheral area of Leicester ca. 1727, and meetinghouse site established by 1743. Dispersed 18th century and 19th century agricultural settlement. Woolen textile manufacturing is initiated SW of meetinghouse center in 1810, and wire drawing is initiated at Wire Village on Turkey Hill Brook in 1812. Large mid-19th century boot and shoe industrial concentration draws many French Canadian workers. Growth of central village further stimulate by 1878 branch railroad connection. Significant peripheral areas retain functional agricultural landscapes, most notably in the NW and SW. South Spencer remains as a largely intact, original 1840s depot village. Mid-19th century Upper Wire Village housing survives. Spencer Center retains much of its 19th century scale and detail, with segregated industrial/worker housing suburban growth has partially concentrated as lakeside development, or as peripheral expansion of Spencer Center, Route 9 commercial strip development has concentrated near western border. Industrial park development on South Spencer Road indicates continued potential residential pressure on remaining agricultural areas.

IV. CONTACT PERIOD (1500-1620)

A. Transportation Routes:

Upland tributaries of Seven Mile River. Main E/W route probably Main Street. Alternate west route conjectured on Pleasant Street-Smithville Road. Alternate east branch on Greenville Road-Kingsbury Road-Rawson Road. SW trail around Stiles Reservoir conjectured on Chickering Road-Clark Road-Bacon Hill Road. Northern trail along Seven Mile River corridor conjectured on Pleasant Street-North Spencer Road.

B. Settlement Pattern:

There are no sites of known cultural affiliation in the town. It is expected therefore that sites will be found along the Seven Mile River and Cranberry Meadow River as well as the ponds in the east. Visits were short, for resource exploitation from the larger more permanent base camps.

C. Subsistence Pattern:

The area was visited for seasonal extraction of the resources of the area, visiting upland areas for hunting and the waterways for fishing.

V. PLANTATION PERIOD (1620-1675)

A. Transportation Routes:

Contact period trails continue in use.

B. Settlement Pattern:

Continuation of patterns established during the Contact period, with reduction due to increased colonial presence and the formation of praying towns.

C. Subsistence Pattern:

Continuation of patterns established during the Contact Period.

VI. COLONIAL PERIOD (1675-1775)

A. Transportation Routes:

Native trails are improved as roads and highways. Three E/W roads are the main routes. the post road to Springfield (Main Street) is established by 1625. The south county road (Chickering Road-Clark Road-Bacon Road) is laid out in 1756. The north county road (Thompsons Pond Road-Browning Pond Road) is established in 1757. Secondary roads connect outlying farms to the meetinghouse center, and lead to surrounding towns.

B. Population:

Three families settle in the town by 1727, growing to 150 inhabitants by 1740, and over 500 13 years later. In 1765, the first reliable figure, the total was 664, in 1776, it was 1042.

The town ordained its first minister in 1744, with 9 males signing the covenant. He came to the ministry late in life, after conversion after hearing Whitfield, and served the town til period's end, without noted difficulties.

C. Settlement Pattern:

Originally the town was part of the Leicester 8 mile grant of 1686. When genuine settlement began after 1713, this portion was reserved for proprietor profit while the east was taken up. At that time the proprietors each received two lots of 250n acres, followed by meadow and upland division in the 1730s. Proprietors soon began to sell their land, and the town's first settler, Nathaniel Bemis, built on Main St. near the western border. The neglect of this area by the residents of the settlers section to the east, plus increasing population led to agitation of independence from 1741, became a parish in 1744, granted as district status in 1753. The town's center served as the meetinghouse location, on 2 acres for a training field; a pound and burying ground were added later.

D. Economic Base:

In the town's early history, the 2nd quarter of the eighteenth century its development was hampered by the resistance of the parent town, Leicester, to invest in improvements to the proprietor's western half. In addition, the two areas shared the burden of a large number of non-resident landowners who did not contribute to the town's upkeep. Like most towns in the area, it was characterized by dispersed farmsteads. The town's first mill was built in the Wire Village in 1740.

E. Architecture:

Residential: The center chimney, single-story plan appears to have been the predominant form for the period with the earliest recorded structure dated 1742. The Reverend Joshua Eaton House(1745) in the "Upper Village" is/was a two-story plan. A limited number of period dwellings survive, (centered on Bacon Hill Road) and the four-bay fenestration is disproportionately in evidence. The Elias Howe birthplace conformed to this type, being one-story with a centered chimney (the house is not recorded in the inventory and was not observed in the field; an illustration in Hurd(?) makes it difficult to date, probably late 18 century).

Institutional: First meetinghouse (35 feet x 45 feet), 1743; second meetinghouse on site of original (47 feet x 56 feet), 1771-72. School houses by 1766.

Commercial: Jenks Tavern on Main Street in center (site of Massasoit Hotel) by ca. 1788; also Mason House and Livermore House at approximately same period (?).

VII. FEDERAL PERIOD (1775-1830)

A. Transportation Routes:

Colonial roads and highways continue in use, with the Post Road (Main Street) remaining the primary E/W route.

B. Population:

Growth during this period was steady, the total increasing from 1042 in 1776 to 1618 in 1830. The largest increase took place during the war and post-war period of 15 years.

Toward the period's end two new denominations formed societies in the town. With the Leicester society languishing, a Baptist group met in North Spencer, attracting communicants from many neighboring towns, from 1819. Later, in 1830, a Universalist Society was formed, meeting in the town center. The town appointed a school committee in 1815, and purchased a town farm in 1825.

C. Settlement Patterns:

Dispersed agricultural settlement continues. Some linear residential growth occurs along Main Street in the meetinghouse center, where a tower and cupola are added to the second meetinghouse in 1802. The building is enlarged in 1838. Textile manufacturing begins in the valley just SW of the meetinghouse in 1810. Wire manufacturing is initiated in the NE part of town on Turkey Hill Brook in 1812. A Baptist Church is built in the NE corner of town on Thompsons Pond.

D. Economic Base:

Despite a difficult period following the Revolutionary War, when a contingent of economically-pressed farmers from Spencer joined the insurgents in Shays' Rebellion, farming continued as a livelihood and way of life for most of Spencer's population into the mid-19th century. Most farmers raised grains, hay, and livestock; the more prosperous ones sent surplus beef, pork, butter and cheese, and potash from the town to market. When manufacturing was introduced after 1810, local markets gained importance as the non-farm population increase.

In 1795 water-powered industry in Spencer consisted of 5 gristmills, 5 sawmills, and 2 clothiers' mills. By 1830 the town contained 8 shops, an oil mill, and 3 textile mills along its streams and rivers; most of the manufacturing establishments began as a direct response to the embargo of English goods and subsequent war.

Textile manufacturing began in 1810 when two woolen spinning mills were erected in the town center; by 1832 they employed 51 and wove more than 72,000 yards of broadcloth and satinet worth more than \$90,000. Second in importance at the close of the period was the manufacture of boots and shoes. Begun in 1812 by Josiah Green, who produced pegged boots and shoes, the industry by 1832 employed 32 in the production of footwear worth \$23,650. The inexpensive boots and shoes were made largely for sale in the south for slaves. Between 1825 and 1840, 4 boot and shoe peg factories operated in Spencer. A rotary peg cutting machine was invented by John Bemis during this period.

The third major industry established in the early 19th century was wire drawing. In 1812, Elliot Prouty began to draw wire at a mill at the Upper Wire Village. Wire Manufacturing in Spencer was initially stimulated by the Embargo-created shortage of imported wire needed in neighboring Leicester's card manufactories. The industry expanded to 5 establishments and 16 employees by 1832 and produced nearly 37 tons of wire. Four of the five wire works were concentrated in and around the Upper and Lower Wire Villages on Turkey Hill Brook; the fifth was located nearby on the Seven Mile River.

Minor industries begun during the period included several gin distilleries in operation between 1813 and 1815, a powder mill

established in 1813 along Seven Mile River, and 2 scythe, hoe , and cultry works, established in 1809 near the Upper Wire Village.

The relatively small population increase (165) between 1810 and 1830 illustrates the small scale of industrial organization and production prior to 1830. The majority of Spencer's population remained farmers. The laborers in the textile mills, boot and shoe shops, and wire mills were largely supplied by native families.

E. Architecture:

Residential: A very limited number of survivals outside the center; two-story, central chimney forms observed in the field and one two-story, double chimney and an end chimney, all five bays, with the exception of a four-bay example at the corner of Bacon Hill road and Chickering which displays Greek exterior trim but the form of a late 18th century building as well as older sash.

Institutional: Cupola and bell added to 1771 meetinghouse, 1801; Baptist meetinghouse in North Spencer, 1820 (demolished early 20th century). Engine house, 1830. At least ten school houses by 1795.

Commercial: Probably tavern standing at Silby's Corner on Route 9; two-story, gable roof.

VIII. EARLY INDUSTRIAL PERIOD (1830-1870)

A. Transportation Routes:

The early 19th century roads continued in use. In 1841, one Western Railroad opens service through the SW of the center village.

B. Population:

Population growth during this period was significant, more than doubling over the forty year period. During the first decade, the town lost population, dropping to 1604 in 1840, but grew steadily thereafter. the largest growth was experienced during the final 5 years of the period, when the total jumped from 3024 to 3952. During the second half of the period immigration added to the population and constituted 22-24% of the total. The Irish and Canadians came in nearly equal numbers at this time, as did a small number of English. The number of all employment types expanded with the total population; in 1820 agriculture employed 154 and manufacturing 60 while twenty years later the figures were 369 and 172 respectively.

From 1832 the town had a high school, funded by the Congregationalists until taken over by the town in 1856. Soon after, an agricultural Library was founded, which merged with the Young People's Library Association in 1864, becoming public 1870. Both the Universalist and Baptist Societies dissolved ca. 1850.

the Methodist Episcopal formed a class as early as 1831, forming a church in 1845. Most significantly, the large Roman Catholic immigrant population brought a mission to the town in 1853.

C. Settlement Pattern:

Significant growth in the central village area occurs both north and south of Main Street with development of industrial, commercial, and residential activities. The secondary industrial focus at Wire Village expands, and a railroad village develops at Spencer Depot. Rural post office hamlets develop in the north at Hillsville and North Spencer.

In the center, textile manufacturing continues to expand along Valley Street south of Main Street. Boot and shoe manufacturing is widespread along Main Street, with many smaller shops throughout the village. The Main Street commercial cluster develops between Maple and Elm. Institutional activities remain for the most part on the hillside of Main Street east with the Universalist Church (1833), Methodist Church (1847), High School (1857), and Third Congregational Meetinghouse (1860). The town house (1839) is located further west at the Main/Maple intersection, and the Catholic Church (1853) is distinctly separate on the southern highland at Maple/Prospect.

A distinct immigrant worker residential zone emerges in the industrial village south of Main Street, with single-family cottages and multi-unit structures on Elm/Temple, Mechanics, Maple, and Chestnut Streets, extending south and up the hill to Prospect Street. Higher income residences locate on the hills on Cherry Street, and east on Main Street, and north on High Street and Pleasant Street.

Outside the center area, the settlement at Wire Village to the NE expands, with housing extending south on Paxton Street. A settlement of residences and boot and shoe shops develops at Spencer Depot with the opening of railroad service in 1841.

D. Economic Base:

Spencer's economy and population experienced a steady expansion during the period with particularly rapid growth after the Civil War. The three major industries remained boot and house making, textile manufacturing, and wire drawing; by the late 1830s, boot and shoe manufacturing was dominant. The value of agricultural goods also increased through the period as Spencer's farms began to turn more towards dairying and hay production, with a growing emphasis on the sale of raw milk as butter and cheese production moved from the farm to the factory.

The production of leather goods, led by boots and houses, increased steadily after a setback during the 1837 panic which closed a number of shops. In 1855, 328 men and women made 205,000 pairs of boots valued at \$410,000. Two tanning and currying establishments produced nearly \$59,000 worth of hides. The Civil War forced a second, temporary, setback to the industry, a result

of the loss of southern markets for Spencer's cheap boots and shoes. A successful switch to a higher quality product resulted in a doubling of the work force and value of boots produced by 1870. The work force increased to 1108 by 1875 (nearly 1/5 of the total population) in 12 firms, which produced more than \$2 million worth of boots and shoes. The largest firm was that of Isaac Prouty and Co., which operated on Main Street in a large complex of frame and brick buildings (now demolished). Most boot and shoe shops and factories were clustered in Spencer Center; the exception was the location of the Lyford Boot Factory and a shoe shop in Spencer Depot along the Boston and Albany Railroad.

The textile industry was also concentrated in the town's Center, where in 1870, 3 mills were located on a small stream south of Main St. A fourth mill operated on the Seven Mile River west of the Center. Production in the mills included broadcloth, satinets, cassimeres, cotton sheeting, yarns, denims and batting. Woolen manufacturing predominated through the period, but during the 1840s, three of the four mills then in operation briefly produced cotton goods. A shift to finer woolen goods after the Civil War boosted production; in 1875, three woolen mills employed 109 operatives and produced goods worth \$340,000. An instrumental figure in Spencer's textile industry was William Upham, who came to Spencer from Warren in 1845. He eventually held interests in all four of the town's textile mills. In 1876, he joined with a Mr. Sagendorph in the construction of a new woolen mill on Mill St. in the town Center.

The wire industry experienced more than tenfold growth in production during the period. In 1832, 5 manufactories employing 16 produced 36 tons of wire, valued at \$182,700. A significant figure in this growth was Richard Sugden, who in 1845 emigrated from England. In 1847 he and Nathaniel Myrick - a fellow worker in a Leicester Wire Manufactory - purchased the wire drawing mills in Spencer's Upper Wire Village. A third mill, operating at the Lower Wire Village since 1830, was purchased by Sugden in 1876; all three were incorporated as the Spencer Wire Co. Other metal working trades in Spencer included 2 scythe and hoe manufactories which operated until the early 1850s, a small tinware manufacturer between the 1850s and 1870s, and several blacksmiths.

Lumber and woodworking were important minor industries. By 1865 more than 1 million feet of boards were cut in five sawmills, an increase from the 300,000 feet cut in 1845. From 2000 to more than 3000 cords the town during this period included chairs and furniture made in two small shops during the 1840s and 1850s; railroad cars, wagons and sleighs during the 1850s; boot boxes; wheel poles; coffins; and sash, doors, and blinds during the 1830s and '40s, and provided part-time home employment to as many as 100 of Spencer's women. Garment manufacture, begun in the 1840s, employed more than 40 women at its peak.

Two powder mills, which produced 162,000 lbs. of powder in 1837, operated until 1840 when they were destroyed by explosions. One mill was rebuilt but a second explosion in 1853 ended the industry in Spencer. The powder produced was sold largely to railroad

companies for use in construction of their rail lines, as well as to the Quincy Granite Co. and other quarries.

The increased emphasis on dairying and the sale of raw milk by Spencer's farmers after the 1860s marked a shift away from cheese-and-butter-making on the farm. By 1870, a cheese factory was in operation in the village of Hillsville; five years later milk sales reached 210,000 gallons.

E. Architecture:

Residential: Double chimney, two-story houses occur infrequently outside the Center during the early portion of the period. Cluster of gable end, Greek period side passage plans at South Spencer as well as an unusual double house with doors in the gable ends (date uncertain). Center village contains a significant number of well-preserved domestic structures spanning all popular styles and forms of the period, from modest gable end Greek houses to elaborately detailed Italianate and Second Empire dwellings. these range along Route 9 and in concentrated neighborhoods to the north and south. Earlier houses seem to occur on the east side of the century along Route 9. Of special note is the two-story, three-bay temple front Ionic house with domed, octagonal cupola and wraparound porch; the vertical board carriage and worker housing is also evident in the Center.

Institutional: 1771 meetinghouse "repaired", 1838, and turned to face south; building burns in 1862 and is replaced following year with present one-story, frame Congregational church. Universalist church erected on corner of Main and Wall Streets, 1833, later sold and used as boot factory (presented factory on site many incorporate church). Methodist church erected, 1847. St. Mary's Roman Catholic, frame church, built in 1853. New engine house, 1849. Two-story, frame(?) gable end school with recessed first floor entry sheltered by double portico of triple arches and Italianate trim built on Route 9, 1856. Three-story, brick District 9 school built, 1867. Between 1867-88, six brick schools were erected.

IX. LATE INDUSTRIAL PERIOD (1870-1915)

A. Transportation Routes:

In 1878 service opens on a branch line from the Boston Albany Railroad at Spencer Depot NE to Spencer Center. By the 1890s, electric streetcar service is in place along Main Street, from the east on the Worcester and Suburb and Street Railway, and from the west on the Spencer, Brookfield and Warren Street Railway. The two lines meet in front of the town hall.

B. Population:

The growth that characterized the Early Industrial Period accelerated for another twenty years so that the total doubles from 3952 in 1870 to 8747 in 1890. It appears that the new immigration by French Canadians can account for a large part of

this expansion: while British American immigrants numbered only 351 in 1865, the French Canadians numbered 1222 ten years later. The foreign-born group during that year reached its highest proportion, 32%, at the same time. The Irish continued to come in large numbers, though now equaling less than half the number of French Canadians. Several Englishmen, with the addition of Swedes from 1895, came to the town. The last twenty-five years of this period brought the first population decline of any significance, dropping to 5994 by 1915. This was paralleled by a drop in the number of foreign born in the town, falling to 17.8% by 1915. During this period the employment types were quite stable: agriculture employed ca. 250 men, manufacturing ca. 1300; only female employment changed with the number growing from ca. 150 to 500. Both groups experienced a dip from 1905 to 1915.

Several of the Protestants denominations experienced a rejuvenation early in the period: a second Universalist society formed in 1877, followed by a Baptist in 1885. The large number of French Canadians stretched the resources of the Roman Catholic church. The expansion brought the formation of a separate parish in 1872, when the town included ca. 2500 Catholics. By 1887, the numbers as well as the distinct ethnic groups within the community led to the division into two parishes. The Irish group worshipped in the new Holy Rosary church while the French Canadians took over the old church until building the new St. Mary's, next door to Holy Rosary, in 1903.

C. Settlement Patterns:

No major changes appear to take place outside the established centers. Further expansion of the center area is stimulated after the 1878 railroad branch connection and the establishment of a depot between Elm and Mechanic Street. To the north residential infill and extension occurs on Pleasant Street out to Smithville Road and on Lincoln Street beyond Wilson Street. In addition, infill occurs on the High Street high income corridor. To the west, development extends on Main Street, and into a new residential area on the highland north of Main (School, Bell, Franklin, South, Crown Streets). To the east, linear infill occurs on Main Street, with a parallel extension of the Cherry Street high income corridor east beyond Ash to Dale Street. Development of this residential district south of Main Street, also occurs on Erving and Summit Streets with the eastern boundary of Greenville Road, and the southern limit on Holmes and Cottage Streets. Northeast of Main Street development moves west on Grove Street to Hastings Road, with some side street growth to the east and north on Park Street. To the south, infill and extension of the existing French Canadian/Irish residential area develops Valley Temple, Mechanic and Maple Streets, south to Parent, Langvin, and Bemis Streets, east on Clark Street to Ash.

Within the center, the established industrial areas continues to be active, with one addition of an intensive wholesaling/industrial district around the depot between Elm and Mechanic Street on Wall Street. A major expansion also takes place on the Prouty Boot Manufacturing factory north of Main

Street opposite Mechanic Street. The commercial focus, with a number of three-story brick blocks, concentrates on Main Street between Mechanic and Elm Street. The Main Street institutional area persists between the new town Hall (1872) and the Congregational Church, with the addition of the Prouty High School (1888), Baptist Church (1885), and the Universalist Church (1882 on Lincoln Street). The Sugden Library (1888), however, is built adjacent to the commercial center, on Pleasant Street. The Roman Catholic focus remains apart however, with new Irish (1887) and French churches along Maple Street. Several brick schools are built throughout the village during the period.

D. Economic Base:

The post-Civil War expansion and rapid population growth continued into the 1880s. Between 1865 and 1890, population nearly tripled from 3024 to a 19th century peak of 8747, a figure not surpassed until the late 1960s. This rapid expansion, paced largely by the boot and shoe industry's rise to third place in the county, place Spencer behind only Worcester and Fitchburg in Worcester County and 32nd in the state in total value of manufactured goods in 1885. That year 84 establishments in 20 different industries employed about 1300 in the production of \$3.6 million worth of goods. This growth was aided by the construction of a rail line from the Boston and Albany Railroad in Spencer Depot to the Center, and fostered the establishment of two banks: the Spencer Savings Bank in 1871 and the Spencer National Bank in 1875. Gas Works were established in 1886 and by 1888, 12 miles of gas pipe were laid. Spencer also developed into a regional commercial center with 92 trading establishments by 1905.

A period of steadily declining population occurred between 1890 and 1920. However, the value of manufactures continued to increase, indicating the impact of mechanized industry and increased product value. By 1920 production was valued at nearly \$6 million ; the number of persons employed was about the same as in 1885, suggesting much of the population decline was a result of losses in the agricultural and trades sectors.

The leading industry, boot and shoe manufacturing, continued to increase through the period. By 1900 sales totalled nearly \$3 million and employment was over 1400. The major firm was that of Isaac Prouty & Co., which also operated its own tannery. Mechanization, changes in production, and centralization caused many smaller firms to close through the period. In 1916 the Allen-Squire Co. purchased and occupied 4 former boot and shoe factories and became one of the largest manufacturers of men's work shoes in New England, employing 400 operatives.

Wire drawing also expanded. The Spencer Wire Co. by 1916 and a capacity of producing 6.5 million pounds of wire annually; the following year the plant's capacity was doubled. In 1899 a Worcester plant was erected, which by 1916 exceeded the Spencer plant's production.

Textile manufacturing also expanded though not nearly as greatly

as the footwear and wire industries. By 1900, 4 woolen mills, a knitting mill, and underwear factory, a shoddy mill, and ten garment shops and factories operated in Spencer. Other industries during this period included paper and wooden box manufacture, several bakeries, and as many as 12 building firms.

Agriculture on Spencer's decreasing farm acreage intensified through the period. Woodlands increased nearly 5-fold between 1865-1915, and unimproved acreage more than doubled. However, the total number of acres devoted to hay, orchards, and principal crops increased in the early 20th century. By 1905 the town contained 133 farms practicing mixed farming, 26 dairy farms, 2 egg and poultry farms and 2 florists. Dairying accounted for 41% of the \$294,000 value of agricultural goods in 1905, with 409,000 gallons of milk, 49,000 lbs. of butter, and 28,000 quarts of cream marketed.

E. Architecture:

Residential: Little development except in center where popular styles continue, and some three-deckers were noted. Worker housing survives at Upper Wire Village. Early 20th century cottages on Stiles Reservoir.

Institutional: Congregational church enlarged, 1881 & 1885, new brick Baptist church on corner of Main and Ash (razed, ca 1909?). Church of the Holy Rosary, brick Victorian Gothic, erected between 1883-87. St. Mary's becomes French Canadian church, 1886; new "Venetian Gothic", brick St. Mary's erected, 1903. Prouty High School, 2 and 1/2 -story. Romanesque brick building, erected 1888. Richard Sugden Memorial Library built, 1889; single-story, brick Romanesque building designed by H.G. Wadlin. Second town hall erected in 1871. Brick Romanesque fire house survives from period.

Commercial: Three-story, seven-bay Italianate Massasoit Hotel built on Main Street, 1873, burned 1982. Farmers & Mechanics Assoc. building, 1889; Spencer National Bank, 1875. Several nice period commercial structures, brick and frame with recognizable store fronts survive along Route 9. Early 20th century bath houses survive at Meadow Pond.

Industrial: Fourth quarter nineteenth century mill building at Upper Wire Village.

X. EARLY MODERN PERIOD (1915-1940)

A. Transportation Routes:

Main Street is improved early as the main Boston-New York auto route (route 5-Yellowstone Trail, later Route 20, finally Route 9) until the Route 20 southwest cut-off is completed in the 1930s. By 1940 the road from Charlton Depot through Spencer Center and Hillsville to Paxton Center (Charlton Road-Pleasant Street-North Spencer Road) is upgraded as part of Route 31.

B. Population:

The period of decline reversed itself after 1920, and population grew slowly from 5930 that year to 6641 in 1940. The number of foreign-born within the town declined sharply from 17.8% in 1915 to 9.8% in 1940. Agriculture employment declined sharply to less than 20% what it had been in 1915. Also in manufacturing, the number of male employees declined by ca. 200, and from 60 to 53% of all male employment. Depression put several men out of work, 150, and into emergency employment, 70. Female employment remained steady as just over 400.

C. Settlement Patterns:

Some infill and peripheral residential additions are made to Spencer Center. Cottages are built on most of the ponds, including Brooks Pond in the Northwest, Sugden Reservoir (Lamb's Grove) and Lake Whittemore in the east, Meadow Pond in the southwest, and Stiles Reservoir in the southeast. Spencer State Forest is established in the southern part of town. A CCC Camp is established in the northeast on Thompson's Pond.

D. Economic Base:

Following the First World War, Spencer sustained a slower economic growth but recorded a population increase for the first time since the 1880s. By 1920 the town ranked 16th in Worcester Co. in manufacturing as other towns and cities surpassed it in growth. The Depression of the 1930s seriously affected the town's economic health and halted population growth. By 1931, two of the three textile mills in the town's center and the shoddy mill were gone; the Westville mill suspended operations; the three Upper Wire Village mills of the Wickmire - Spencer Steel Co. (a merger of Spencer Wire Co. and Wickwire Steel Co. of Buffalo occurred around 1920) were vacant. Only the Prouty and Allen-Squire boot and shoe factories, several box factories formed in the 1920s, and the Continental worsted Mill in Spencer Center continued to operate.

Little information regarding the town's agriculture is readily available. Dairying, poultry-farming, orcharding, and market gardening were the major pursuits on Spencer's diminishing farm acreage. Access to Worcester by an electric railway and popularity of the town as a summer resort both before and after the First World War removed further land from cultivation and stimulated suburbanization.

E. Architecture:

Residential: Little major development in domestic architecture noted.

Institutional: Ca. 1940 brick Colonial Revival town hall. St. Joseph's Abbey erected north of center of fieldstone, 1950-57, Harold Meachum, architect.

Commercial: Well-maintained diner in center on Route 9.

XI. SURVEY OBSERVATIONS

Interesting post foundation barn of relatively recent construction noted on Bacon Hill Road. Inventory is very sparse, concentrating entirely on center. Wealth of significant houses in center should be properly recorded; almost all are well-preserved.