

# MHC Reconnaissance Survey Town Report

## TEMPLETON

Report Date: 1984

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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# MHC RECONNAISSANCE SURVEY REPORT

DATE: 1984

COMMUNITY: Templeton

16-10-1984  
DRAFT

## I. TOPOGRAPHY

## II. POLITICAL BOUNDARIES

The "six-mile-square," veterans' plantation, Narragansett Number Six is granted in 1730 and established as the town of Templeton in 1762. The eastern corner, including lands east of the Otter River, is assigned to the new town of Gardner in 1785. A tract of land along the length of the town's western border is included in the new town of Gerry (Phillipston after 1814) in 1786. Part of Phillipston is annexed in 1892.

## III. HISTORIC OVERVIEW

Templeton is a residential and industrial Central Highland community on the upper Burnshirt River and Trout Brook tributaries, southwest of the Otter River, on an historic east/west corridor to the Connecticut Valley. "Mine Hill" grant is made in the southeast in 1730, and a local sawmill is built in 1743, but permanent European settlement is delayed by native hostilities, and does not occur until 1751. The first meetinghouse is built in 1755. Dispersed agricultural settlement continues through the 18th and early 19th centuries, with the development of a commercial and residential focus at the meetinghouse center after the establishment of the Fifth Massachusetts Turnpike in 1800. A smaller turnpike hamlet develops at Brooks Village to the west.

Small-scale manufacturing, particularly of tinware, develops at the center village, but early 19th century industrial activity becomes more intensive along the Otter River corridor. Here textile manufacturing and later a foundry locate at Otter River in the north a tanning and milling center develops at Baldwin's Mills, which also grows as the southern terminus of the Fitzwilliam Turnpike after 1805. Chair and woodenware manufacturing lead to continued 19th-century growth at Baldwinville and East Templeton, while Otter River expands as a textile manufacturing and store foundry village. By the late 19th century, Baldwinville, at the junction of two regional rail lines, becomes the town's dominant commercial and residential focus, surpassing the Center village. Late 19th- and early 20th-century institutional additions include the Blake Hospital Cottages for Children in Baldwinville, and the Fernald State School Colony on former highland farms in the northwest. The Birch Hill Dam flood control project (1943) has removed parts of Baldwinville. Suburban development, largely from Gardner, has located largely in the east near the Route 68 and 101 corridors. Some agricultural landscapes remain, mostly to the south of the center. A number of representative late 18th- and early 19th-century farmhouses remain. The 19th-century villages retain significant proportions

of their residential, commercial, and civic architecture, including the landmark Elias Carter meetinghouse at the center, and octagon houses at East Templeton.

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

##### A. Transportation Routes

Highland tributary area south of Millers River corridor, on Otter River and upper Burnshirt River. East-west trail from Crystal Lake (Gardner) to Queen Lake (Phillipston) inferred as Gardner Road-Main Street-Petersham Road. Southeast branch to Meetinghouse Pond (Westminster) inferred as Partridgeville Road-Pail Factory Road-abandoned way to Whitney Street. Northern highland route to Otter and Millers rivers conjectured as Baldwinville Road-Otter River Road #2-North Main Street-Lord Road-abandoned road to Depot Road to Otter River crossing and Otter River Road. North-south highland trail from Baldwinville Falls to Burnshirt Hills (Hubbardston) conjectured as Bridge Street-Baldwinville Road-South Road.

##### B. Settlement Pattern

Archaeological and documentary evidence on the area at this time is extremely scarce. Recorded artifacts are of unknown location as well as cultural affiliation. Density of population is presumed to be low in an essentially upland area, with occupation consisting of small family or task groups visiting seasonally for specific resource exploitation. The Otter River provides the major site for site location, with secondary possibilities on East Templeton, Greenwood, Partridgeville, and Stone Bridge ponds.

##### C. Subsistence Pattern

Small family and task groups visited the area seasonally primarily for hunting and fishing activities.

#### V. PLANTATION PERIOD (1620-1675)

##### A. Transportation Routes

Established trails continue in use.

##### B. Settlement Pattern

Located between major areas of both native and colonial population change during this period were the result of secondary contacts. The epidemic of the 1630s probably affected the population from the Connecticut Valley to the east. Thereafter established patterns continue within a reduced population.

##### C. Subsistence Pattern

A continuation of patterns established during the Contact period.

## VI. COLONIAL PERIOD (1675-1775)

### A. Transportation Routes

A radial network of both local and regional traffic develops through the meetinghouse center after ca. 1753. The main east-west route passes from Westminster through the Center to Payquage (Athol) on Main Street-Athol Road-Phillipston Road, with Millers River branch on Athol Road. Roads also extend from the Center southwest to Petersham (Petersham Road); south to Hubbardston (South road-French Road); and north to Winchendon (Baldwinville Road-Bridge Street). The road from Westminster to Royalston extends across town as North Main-Underwood Road-abandoned way to Norcross Hill Road. The road from Barre north to Royalston follows Rice Road and abandoned roads north.

### B. Population

Colonial settlement in Templeton began in 1751 when Elias Spender responded to bounty offers. Two years later the number of families had risen to between 18 and 20. In 1765, the total population was 348, and it expanded greatly during the next decade to 1,016 in 1776.

The town formed its first church in 1755 with 12 members, but dismissed their minister after only four years. Although the second pastor remained in his pulpit for nearly 50 years, his ministry was fraught with difficulties, from familiar conflicts over salary, followed by predictable accusations that he was a Tory.

### C. Settlement Pattern

The area now Templeton, Phillipston, and western Gardner was laid out as the bounty grant Narragansett #6 for distribution to soldiers of King Philip's War in 1733. The proprietors first met in 1733 and laid out 123 lots of 40 acres each. Settlement was slowed by continued frontier conflicts, and few proprietors transferred to the township. After bounties were offered to settlers and permanent residents came, further divisions of town lands were made, of meadow (four acres) in 1750, a second upland division (70 acres), a third (40 acres) in 1753; two later divisions brought the total to 180 acres and the final remaining lots were sold off in 1786. The first meetinghouse was located southeast of the present building in 1755; a lot of eight acres was granted in 1759 to include the house in the southwest as well as a burying ground. Settlers located their dispersed farmsteads primarily in the east and south parts of the town.

### D. Economic Base

Late settlement means little information available on the town. Agriculture was practiced on dispersed farms. After several unfilled contracts, a mill built in East Templeton in 1753 was burned, but the first permanent mill was located in Baldwinville by Thomas Sawyer of Bolton in 1755. The town was characterized as

Poor Agrarian by Pruitt for 1771, as were most northern county towns for which information is available. Commercial development and community wealth were low, and agrarian poverty was high, predictable in a new community. The farmers' grain output, however, was moderately high, ranking in the second quarter statewide.

#### E. Architecture

Residential: Center and double chimney houses characterize domestic building of the period. Oldest house said to be 1760. Few period survivals recorded.

Institutional: First meetinghouse (40 x 50 feet) built ca. 1755.

Commercial: Two-story, five-bay center chimney plan (1763) tavern recorded as having been located on the Common.

### VII. FEDERAL PERIOD (1775-1830)

#### A. Transportation Routes

The colonial roads continue in use, with the improvement of the east/west route through the Center as part of the Fifth Massachusetts Turnpike ca. 1800 (Main Street-Athol Road-Caruth Road). In 1805, the Worcester-Fitzwilliam Turnpike is chartered to be built from the New Hampshire line at Royalston south to Worcester. Construction lags, however, and only the segment to Baldwin's Mills (Baldwinville) is completed (ca. 1815). In Templeton the route remains as Elm Street.

#### B. Population

The formation of Phillipston in 1786 is reflected in the apparent drop in population during the first 15 years of the period, from 1,016 in 1776 to 950 in 1790, but represents a near doubling in density. Continuous growth was sustained throughout the period, reaching 1,506 in 1830.

The parish and church continued to have disagreements with Sparhawk, their minister. Most significant was his position on his veto power over church decisions and his involvement in the Bolton suit over the same issue when he refused communion to an anti-veto partisan in that controversy. This led to a withdrawal of 17 members in 17882 to form a Baptist society. For several years the society served many surrounding communities and was the "parent" of five other area Baptist societies, and was located north of the center on the Baptist Common.

#### C. Settlement Pattern

Dispersed agricultural settlement continues, with growth concentrated at the meetinghouse center and at secondary transportation hamlets to the north and west. Small-scale industrial development focuses at several waterpower sites in the north and east.

The second meetinghouse is built in 1811 on the west side of the common, and in the early 19th century the common area develops as a residential, commercial, and industrial center. Residential development extends from the common north on Baldwinville Road as far as Otter River Road, south on Wellington Street and South Road, and east on Gardner Road. A tinware shop is established in 1825, and other small shops are operated in the area. To the west of the Center on the turnpike, Brooks Village develops as a small transport hamlet. A second hamlet develops to the north of the Center, on Baldwinville Road at the crossing of the northwest road to Royalston, and the Baptist church is built here in 1799.

The town's major industrial center of the period is at the Factory Village (later Otter River) on the Otter River in the east, where a woolen mill is built in 1823, and a small residential cluster develops. Partridgeville continues as a small milling focus in the southeast. At Fales Village (later East Templeton) a milling center develops, to which scythe manufacturing is added ca. 1820. In the north a small cluster develops at Baldwin's Mills on the Otter River, which becomes the southern terminus of the partially completed Worcester-Fitzwilliam Turnpike.

#### D. Economic Base

Agriculture: A high proportion of the town's land, 78.5%, remained unimproved in 1784, with an additional, tiny, .25% classed as unimprovable. A moderate amount, 2.2%, was under tillage, with small amounts used for mowing and meadow, 7.8%, and pasturage, 11.2%.

#### E. Architecture

Residential: Development appears to increase substantially based on surviving buildings. Two-story, center and double chimney plans predominate with two brick double chimney houses recorded. Two-story, single-pile, hipped roof, rear wall chimney plans also popular. One single-pile, end chimney house with hipped roof recorded. Single-story, center chimney plans also noted in fairly significant numbers.

Institutional: Second meetinghouse erected in 1811, designed/built by Elias Carter and Jonathan Cutting. The building has been remodeled since then in 1859 (Bagden and Ball of Worcester) and 1897. The present structure retains the gable end form with a slightly advanced (and somewhat ill-proportioned) portico and a bell tower/steeple (see Peter Benes, "The Templeton Run and the Pomfret Cluster: Patterns of Diffusion in Rural New England Meetinghouse Architecture, 1647-1822." Old-Time New England Vol. 68, 1978).

In 1799 the Baptists built a meetinghouse on the "Baptist Common." This structure was moved near Baldwinville and enlarged in 1840, and in 1869 it was moved to Baldwinville, renovated, and a spire added. The present structure is basically Greek Revival, a gable end form with a recessed entry and Doric portico.

Commercial: Two-story, seven-bay Whitney Tavern with two interior chimneys was built in 1782.

Industrial: The 1825 two-story frame tin shop now functions and the Grange Hall in the Center.

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

##### A. Transportation Routes

The Vermont and Massachusetts Railroad opens service along the Otter River corridor through Otter River and Baldwinville in 1847. Elsewhere, the early 19th-century roadways continue in use.

##### B. Population

For the major part of the period the town's population continued to grow, from 1,552 in 1830 to 2,890 in 1865, with the largest increase, nearly 500, between 1850 and 1855. Immigration of foreign-born workers into the town is responsible for a substantial proportion of this growth, the group accounting for 376 or 14.4% of the total population. As in most county towns, the Irish were dominant during the third quarter of the 19th century, with smaller numbers of English, Canadians, and Germans. The size of this group fluctuated slightly during later years of this period and the 1870s and 188s, and included increasing numbers of both French and English Canadians.

A primary attraction to these newcomers was the increase in manufacturing symptomatic of this period, rising rapidly among male occupations from 43 males in 1820 to 318 in 1840 and 497 in 1875. Traditional agriculture fluctuated in response to the rise of these mill communities, from 143 males so engaged in 1820, a century peak in 1840 at 305, and 225 in 1875.

As in so many other towns, the early years of this period brought a split between Trinitarian and Unitarian members of church and parish. Here the latter retained the building while eleven of the former view withdrew to form a church of the same name in 1832. The town formed the center of a Methodist circuit including four neighboring towns in 1840, formed a church of 24 members three years later, but disbanded in 1848; their building was moved from Phillipston where it had been used by Universalists of both towns briefly; they reorganized in East Templeton in 1860. Also in 1840 the Baptists relocated to the east, between Otter River and Baldwinville near the expanding manufacturing employment, and into Baldwinville in 1866. The more extreme aspects of the Great Revival were felt in the town through the presence of Millerites, followed by Second Adventists in East Templeton from 1843, who formed a church in 1853. The immigrant Irish of this area received occasional mass celebration from 1845 out of Worcester and built a church in Otter River, St. Martin's, in 1853/54, and became an independent parish in 1864.

A rapid multiplication of education-related institutions were formed. Voluntary groups included the Templeton Union Library

Association, Social Library, and Ladies Social Circle, ca. 1835, as well as a Library Society in East Templeton in 1854. A private academy or high school operated between 1830 and 1837, with occasional terms thereafter. In 1856 the town opened a public high school, operating one term in the Center, and one in Baldwinville. In 1827 the town purchased a poor farm.

### C. Settlement Pattern

Significant growth occurs in the manufacturing village of Baldwinville and Otter River on the Otter River corridor, in part stimulated by the 1847 railroad connection. East Templeton also grows as an industrial center. The Center Village continues as the town's main institutional focus.

In Templeton Center, the Trinitarian Society Church is built northeast of the Second Meetinghouse, and the Methodist Society church is active from 1844 to 1859. A town hall is built north of the Second Meetinghouse in 1848. Commercial activities concentrate at the south end of the common. Residences and shops are added to the central area, with the main directions of growth to the east and southeast.

Major period developments, however, occur to the north and east. Industrial growth occurs at Baldwinville, where chair manufacturing and other small-scale industries concentrate along the Otter River corridor. The Baptist church, after being relocated between Otter River and Baldwinville in 1840, is moved to Elm Street in 1869, north of the developing commercial focus at the Elm/West Street intersection. Residential growth also occurs to the north on Elm Street and west on Pleasant Street. South of the river, homes are built on Baldwinville Road and Mechanic Street.

At Otter River (formerly Factory Village) expansion in manufacturing includes a stove foundry (1836) and new textile complex east of the railroad depot. Residential development concentrates mostly north of the river between Depot Road and West Street, with extensions west toward the railroad, east on West Street, and south of the river on Depot Road. St. Martin's Catholic Church is built on West Street in 1854.

Chair and woodenware manufacturing also expand at East Templeton along waterpower sites north of Gardner Road and east of East Templeton Pond. Residential growth extends east and west on Gardner Road, and south on South Main and Cottage Streets. The Methodist Society builds a church here in 1859, and a commercial/institutional focus is established at the northwest corner of the Main Street/Gardner Road intersection.

### D. Economic Base

### E. Architecture

**Residential:** Primary house forms appear to have been the gable end, side-passage plan, particularly in the early portion of the



period. A few center and double chimney houses continue to be built, especially single-story Greek Revival center chimney plans. Side-passage form remains dominant throughout the period, but building activity appears to drop as the period progresses, based upon surviving structures. The five-bay, center entry, gable end plan also appears to have been quite common, one example having pointed arch windows. A mid-century board and batten, asymmetrical, single-story house is recorded. Of special note was the two octagonal houses from ca. 1860-70.

Institutional: A Trinitarian church was built on the east side of the common in 1833 and existed through the end of the period, but is no longer standing. A Methodist church was built in the Center ca. 1840, but the congregation did not remain active for more than a decade. A Methodist society had a gable end, Greek Revival building in East Templeton. St. Martin's Roman Catholic Church, a frame, gable end building with a square side tower, was built in Otter River in 1853. The building is now aluminum sided.

A town hall was built in 1843 and used later as a school as well.

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

### A. Transportation Routes

The north-south Ware River Railroad, with one station west of Templeton Center, opens service through Baldwinville in 1873. By the early 1890s, east-west electric streetcar service from Athol to Gardner is established through Templeton Center (Athol Road-Gardner Road), with a branch north at East Templeton to Otter River and Baldwinville (North Main-Otter River Road-Depot Road-Route 68).

### B. Population

Overall, the town's population expands during this period, from 2802 in 1870, to 4081 in 1915. Early in the period, however, the figure drops gradually to 2,627 in 1885, before rising to 2,999 five years later, and dipping to 2,915 in 1895. The proportion of foreign-born citizens in the town fluctuated with the total population during the early years of the period, between 12% and 14%, before expanding to 20.3% in 1915. Within this group the Irish decreased in importance as that wave of immigration gave way to first the French Canadians, who outnumbered them by 1895, and later to the Poles and Russian Finns in the early 20th century. Manufacturing employment continues to expand for males, from 497 in 1875 to 716 in 1905 and 737 in 1915. Agricultural employment, however, drops from 225 in 1875 to 138 in 1905, but jumps to 388 ten years later.

With the expansion at Baldwinville, the Baptists relocated there in 1869. Shortly thereafter, however, a subgroup withdrew and formed a Congregational Society there in 1874. An unknown Protestant group, perhaps nondenominational, attempted unsuccessfully to meet in Otter River, but could not compete with the established churches in Baldwinville and the Center.

Remaining East Templeton Adventists "reactivated" briefly after an unusually dark day in 1881.

The town expanded the availability of high school education by adding terms in Otter River and East Templeton in 1873, but adopted a modification of centralized schooling after building high schools in the Center and Baldwinville. In 1889 the town combined with Phillipston, Royalston, and Hubbardston to hire a school superintendent. A bequest to the town resulted in the formation of the Boynton Public Library in 1873, as well as the availability of five shares in the Boston Athenaeum for worthy local scholars.

The town formed a chapter of the Grange in 1885. Later in the century a second wave of voluntary associations were formed, including Village Improvement Societies (1890), and a Womens Club (1899). The reputation of healthful rural areas brought the Hospital Cottages for Children to the town in 1882, while girls from Boston's South End came for brief stays in 1911-13.

#### C. Settlement Pattern

Baldwinville, served by two rail lines after 1873, emerges as the town's main industrial focus, and little growth occurs in the other local centers. At Otter River, a few industrial and residential additions are made. East Templeton loses its chair manufacturing, while the remaining woodenware factory expands, and some residential growth occurs to the southeast on School Street. Residential additions are made at the Center, particularly west on Athol Road, and in 1885 the Boynton Library is built north of the Orthodox Church.

However, significant expansion takes place in Baldwinville.. Paper and chair manufacturing facilities are added along the Otter River corridor, and new woodenware factories are built to the north in the sector between the Fitchburg and Ware River railroads. After 1888, greenhouses, producing winter vegetables, are located along the rail lines. New residential growth north of the river occurs west of the Fitchburg Railroad, on Elm Street, in the Pleasant Street area (Summer, Fessendon, Forest Streets), and along North Main Street. South of the river, residential growth continues along the Baldwinville Road corridor, on Prospect and Mechanic to the west, and on Cottage and Vernon (including 1898 school) to the east. Residential infill also occurs in the Cross, Elm, North Main triangle. The commercial center extends along Central Street toward the railroad. A Memorial Society Church is built on Elm Street in 1883. On North Main to the northeast, the Blake Hospital Cottages for Children is opened in 1882.

#### D. Economic Base

#### E. Architecture

Residential: Common building type of the period is the gable end side-passage plan and asymmetrical, popular floor plans typical of the era. Most are frame, although at least one brick (1898)

dwelling is recorded. The Colonial Revival appears in modest forms and the "Dutch Colonial" style was noted in the villages. An 1886, two-story, brick, four-unit block with bay windows and corbelled cornice is in Baldwinville.

**Institutional:** The Goodell Memorial Congregational church, a gable end Stick Style building with a corner tower, was constructed in 1883. A two-story, brick Colonial Revival elementary school was built in Baldwinville in 1898. The Stick Style Baldwinville high school burned in 1921.

The one-story brick library (1885) was designed by Ernest W. Maynard, Boston.

The Hospital Cottages for Children (1882) are a complex of several Queen Anne/Romanesque style brick buildings.

The brick Baldwinville fire station dates from 1910.

**Commercial:** A four-story brick commercial structure is located in Otter River on the site of the Otter River Hotel. A Colonial Revival (1901) three-and-a-half-story, gambrel-roofed inn stood until 1961. The ca. 1890 bank building is a two-story, brick structure. A late 19th century, brick, one-story depot is recorded.

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

### A. Transportation Routes

The regional east/west Mohawk Trail auto corridor (old Route 7, then Route 2) is established through Otter River and Baldwinville, with a new southeast connector to Athol. By ca. 1930, an alternative east/west route through East Templeton and Templeton Center is improved, with a new Athol Road connector to Route 2 near the western border. By the mid 1930s, the Templeton Center alternate route becomes Route 2, as the original road becomes new Route 68 (southeast) and 32 (southwest, later 202) through Baldwinville. By period's end the road to Gardner Center from East Templeton is upgraded as Route 101.

### B. Population

Little information is available on the town during this period. Total population expands gradually from 4,081 in 1915 to 4,601 in 1940, with a dip during the Depression, when the total fell by just over 200 between 1925 and 1930. The foreign-born proportion dropped rapidly from 20.3% in 1915 to 6.7% in 1940. The rural population, 737 in 1940, equalled 16% of the town's population.

The pattern of voluntary associations continued with the formation of children's scout groups (1915, 1916, 1936) and a garden club (1930).

### C. Settlement Pattern

Development slows, but Baldwinville continues as the dominant manufacturing center. Little change occurs at Templeton Center, with some residential development to the east along Gardner Road. At Otter River, residential growth extends along West Street east toward Gardner. At East Templeton residential development occurs south of Gardner Road toward East Templeton Pond, south on School Street, and east on West Broadway to the Gardner line. Furniture, box, and paper manufacturing continued to expand at Baldwinville through the 1920s. Extension of the residential area northwest of Elm Street continued, with infill south of Otter River. Some new homes were built east, in the West/Highland Street area. Schools were added in the main centers in the 1920s. Many 19th century industrial sites were destroyed or altered by the 1938 hurricane and flood.

### D. Economic Base

### E. Architecture

Primary house types are the symmetrical Colonial Revival and Four Square plan.

Institutional: Schools built in the 1920s and 1930s in Otter River, Baldwinville, East Templeton, and the Center.

## XI. SURVEY OBSERVATIONS

Inventory good, although tends to concentrate on buildings up to the mid-19th century, with less emphasis on later 19th and early 20th century construction.

## XII. SOURCES