

# MHC Reconnaissance Survey Town Report

## TEWKSBURY

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: April, 1980

COMMUNITY: Tewksbury

### I. TOPOGRAPHY

Located on slightly rolling lowland terrain. A glacial outwash plain with drumlins, several small kettle lakes and a sandy to gravelly soil. Somewhat better quality alluvial soils near Merrimack. Large areas of bog/swamp throughout town. Drainage into two systems--northwest corner drains into Concord/Merrimack; rest of town drains into Shawsheen which meanders through eastern side of town. Grain of underlying bedrock forms watershed division through center of town.

### II. POLITICAL BOUNDARIES

Originally granted as portions of Mrs. Winthrop's Farm (Trull Brook area), 1641; Wamiset Praying Town, 1653; and Town of Billerica, 1655. Unsuccessful attempt to form town of "Wamiset," 1725. Established as Town of Tewksbury, 1734. Considerable territory along Merrimack and Concord lost to Lowell during 19th and early 20th centuries.

### III. HISTORIC OVERVIEW:

Suburban town on Lowell-Boston corridor. Located on uplands between Concord and Merrimack Rivers with suspected native sites along river trails and Shawsheen valley. Originally settled from Billerica during mid-17th century, but town center formation delayed until early 18th century with frontier instability of King William's War. Few productive milling sites or surviving Colonial period houses, except in North Tewksbury. Development of Lowell during mid-19th century created transportation corridor of railroads through town, with junction village at Wamiset, including original residential fabric. Town center retains overlay of historic period development, with well-preserved village common and Victorian houses. Shift of agricultural development to market gardening early 20th century with several examples of surviving greenhouses and watertowers. Continued expansion of suburban development from high status axis of Lowell (Belvidere) to North Tewksbury and on trolley lines through town center. Present growth continues along established suburban corridors with highway access to Boston with expansion of fringe landscape from Lowell.

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

#### A. Transportation Routes:

Located on interior upland near Merrimack and Concord Rivers with lower floodplain of Shawsheen. Conjectured trails across area around local ponds to gain access to fishing rivers. Probable routes include Shawsheen, Chandler-Pinnacle Streets and alternate possibility Chapman-Pleasant-North-Kendall Streets from Long Pond to Round Pond (Andover). Routes along Merrimack and Concord Rivers include River Road around Trull Brook and Old Billerica Road

across Marginal Brook. It also seems likely that a branch trail circuited the Great Swamp, possibly as Clark-Main-Old Boston Roads from Wamiset to Tewksbury Center.

B. Settlement Pattern:

Several sites reported with possible period components; located on well drained terraces overlooking Shawsheen River, Heath Brook and Great Swamp. Other unspecified sites reported along Shawsheen, its tributary brooks and on south side of Round Pond. Additional sites likely in all these areas as well as along Merrimack, upper meadows of Trull and Bacon Brooks and adjacent to Ames and other ponds.

C. Subsistence Pattern:

Access to major fish runs in both Concord and Merrimack; possibly in Shawsheen as well. Some areas of good agricultural land. Good potential for hunting/gathering.

D. Observations:

An area more likely to have many small sites (both specialized, i.e., fish processing, and general habitation) than a few large ones. Essentially a corridor and resource area between major occupation areas in Andover and Lowell.

V. FIRST SETTLEMENT PERIOD (1620-1675)

A. Transportation Routes:

Native trains remain primary routes with improvement of Shawsheen Street as Billerica-Andover Road, River Road as Chelmsford-Andover Road, and Old Billerica Road and Billerica-Chelmsford Road to Wamiset Praying Town by mid-17th century.

B. Population:

Probably a small, seasonally varying native population. Apparently no colonial inhabitants.

C. Settlement:

Small native settlements probable along Merrimack, Shawsheen and adjacent to ponds.

D. Economic Base:

Fishing, limited agriculture, hunting/gathering.

E. Observations:

A fringe area between Billerica and Andover. Apparently no colonial settlement. As a result, probable that mid-17th century native sites may survive.

## VI. COLONIAL PERIOD (1675-1775)

### A. Transportation Routes:

Highways remain from 17th century. Location of Tewksbury town center on Round Pond trails creates radial road pattern during mid-18th century including Astle-Main-Old Boston-Main Streets as primary east/west post road with cross routes as North, East, Pine and Rogers Streets from meetinghouse.

### B. Population:

Apparently little or no colonial inhabitants prior to 1700. Gradual settlement from Billerica during early decades of 18th century. About 60 names on tax list at incorporation. Census of 1765 listed 776 inhabitants in 147 families and 103 houses.

### C. Settlement:

Initial settlement scattered throughout southeast part of town (Shawsheen Street). South Burying grounds (Shawsheen and Main Streets) dates from at least 1714. Basically an outlying area of Billerica. After incorporation, town center established on Main Street as geographic center. Meetinghouse built, 1737 (Main and East Streets). Town cemetery from at least 1749. Scattered farms gradually spread through town after 1730.

### D. Economic Base:

Some agriculture and grazing. Probably considerable lumbering. Some mills reported but with little data: saw mill on Trull Brook (Richard Hall?), 1736; at least one unspecified mill on Shawsheen.

### E. Architecture

#### Residential:

Little recorded from period; extant examples are made up mostly of vernacular, central-chimney two-story farmhouses; at least one central-chimney Cape Cod cottage existed as did at least one central-chimney house with a gambrel roof and Georgian style trim (c. 1770). Several twin-chimney houses with a unique form of gable on hip-roof may date from the end of this period. In general, fewer examples of this period than might be expected based on the town's 1776 population of 821; it is possible that much of the pre-Federal settlement of Tewksbury was focused on the northwestern portion of the town which was later annexed to Lowell.

### F. Observations:

Remained a fringe area. Lack of good agricultural land or other specific resources hinder a more active development. Sources on town are very poor.

## VII. FEDERAL PERIOD (1775-1830)

### A. Transportation Routes:

Colonial highways remain as major roads through early 19th century and improvement of routes to Lowell along Main and Andover Streets.

B. Population:

Population stable until c. 1820-30 when it increased by 50%; however, most of this increase occurred in sections of the town which were annexed to Lowell in 1834. No known foreign-born population; no new religious societies formed.

C. Settlement Location:

Very small village formed at Tewksbury Center and scattered settlement in the vicinity of North Tewksbury, particularly along Route 133 (Andover Street).

D. Economic Base:

Primarily agricultural economy, given early commercial encouragement by proximity to Lowell. One tannery operated throughout most of the century by the Lee family probably established in this period.

E. Architecture

Residential:

Relatively few houses apparent from period; high-style represented by several twin-chimney houses with hip roofs and monitors; other houses of the period were mostly of the rear-wall chimney plan with very simple Federalist style decorative details. Few, if any, cottages built with the possible exception of several rear-wall chimney cottages, which may have been built as late as 1840-45.

Institutional:

Meetinghouse built 1824, town hall built 1825, styles unrecorded. Five school districts established 1794-1795, increased to six in 1801 and to seven by 1818 (one or two of these may have been within the boundaries of modern Lowell), one-room school houses built during period but undescribed in secondary sources. Town poor farm purchased, 1826. Private academy founded 1830, closed shortly thereafter, no building constructed.

Commercial:

No development recorded.

Industrial:

No industrial development within modern town boundaries.

VIII. EARLY INDUSTRIAL PERIOD (1830-1870)

A. Transportation Routes:

Primary roads remain from early 19th century. Area becomes corridor of railroad lines to Lowell, originally with Boston and Lowell (1835) along Woburn Street, Salem and Lowell (1850) around town center (now abandoned

route), and Andover and Lowell (1874) across Great Swamp (now Boston & Maine) with rail junction at Wamiset.

B. Population:

Following a decline between 1830-1840 when sections of Tewksbury were annexed to Lowell, population increased continuously throughout period, with an especially large increase from 1,044 in 1850 to 1,716 in 1855, an increase which is more than accounted for by the admission of 800 inmates to the Tewksbury State Almshouse in 1854. Following the 1854 opening of the state almshouse, Tewksbury had a large foreign-born population (approximately 30% of the total population) made up predominantly of Irish immigrants. A Baptist Society formed in 1843 at North Tewksbury was the only new religious society of the period.

C. Settlement Location:

Large scale development of state almshouse property near town center (1854); some new construction at the town center and at North Tewksbury. Small amount of resort development possible (although not probable) near Silver Lake, where a land company prepared subdivision plans for the lake's Wilmington side in the mid-1850s.

D. Economic Base:

By 1855 tanning and currying was the town's largest industry. Furniture making supplemented this industry, and the 1855 census lists two firms so engaged. One was J. E. Fosler & Co., whose successful trade with California led to development in that decade of knock-down furniture capable of being shipped, with a minimum of wasted space, at great advantage.

E. Architecture

Residential:

Nearly no high-style present; no recorded high-style examples of Greek Revival or Second Empire styles, at least one Italianate villa built (1850s) at town center, along with one cottage bearing elements of Carpenter Gothic style (c. 1850). Most houses of the period seem to have been simple side-hall examples (one and two-story) of the Greek Revival and Italianate styles. In addition, several simple, center-entrance Italianate style houses exist in scattered locations. There is no evidence that workers' housing existed. Any resort development which may have occurred at Silver Lake is likely to have consisted of small cottages with ornate machine-cut trim, like those built in Wilmington (c. 1860-75?).

Institutional:

Greek Revival style Baptist Meetinghouse built at North Tewksbury, 1843. Eight school districts active during period, one-room wood-frame school houses built, Italianate style after c. 1860; schools apparently remained ungraded. State Almshouse built 1852-1854, as one of three established by the General

Court, complex of buildings housed an average of 1,000 inmates after having housed as many as 1,200 during the Financial Panic of 1857.

Commercial:

No recorded commercial development; 3 railroad depots present by 1875.

Industrial:

No apparent development of mill complexes; manufacturing probably carried out in wood-frame shops.

IX. LATE INDUSTRIAL PERIOD (1870-1915)

A. Transportation Routes:

Road and railroad remain from mid-17th century with expansion of electric trolley service from Lowell east through Tewksbury on Astle-Main Streets through town center and Andover Street through North Tewksbury in early 1900s.

B. Population:

Increases recorded throughout period except for temporary decline between 1905 and 1910. A large foreign-born population was present throughout period, rising to 47% of total population by 1915; throughout the period Irish immigrants were the largest foreign-born group, followed by a much smaller number of English immigrants. No new religious societies recorded; however, detailed secondary sources report reliably only up to c. 1890.

C. Settlement Location:

Development of town center onto side streets; cottage colony developed near Silver Lake; very small village developed at Wamiset; suburban development from Lowell occurred in North Tewksbury.

D. Economic Base:

Although the existing tannery and a chemical factory were both in operation, the primary occupation of the townspeople was in agriculture. Cabbages, principal crop but many other varieties of fruits and vegetables also raised. One of the oldest farms, Patten & Co., moved to Tewksbury from Lowell in 1877.

E. Architecture

Residential:

Housing of the period was for the most part made up of simple, side-hall examples (one- and two-story) of the late Italianate (bracketed) style, the Queen Anne style and eclectic early 20th century design. With the exception of several cottages, the Second Empire and Victorian Gothic styles were absent. More ambitious housing consisted of suburban-scale Queen Anne and Colonial Revival style houses built primarily at the town center and at North Tewksbury. Extremely modest bungalows and cottages were built at Silver Lake, although many lots in the area remained undeveloped.

### Institutional:

Baptist Church altered in Queen Anne style, 1887. New Town Poor Farm built 1889-1890. High School established and grading of central school carried out 1887; graded schools subsequently built 1894 (Foster School-Queen Anne style), and c. 1900-1905 (Shawsheen School-Colonial Revival), one-room school houses probably remained in use until c. 1900-1920. State Almshouse rebuilt after 1833, most new construction probably carried out c. 1895-1910, for conversion to a state hospital, most new structures were eclectic in design, containing elements of Colonial Revival and Queen Anne styles.

### Commercial:

Virtually no development of stores (only one at the center in 1890); scattered development of green houses for nurseries and market gardening, c. 1890-1915.

### Industrial:

Chemical works and machine shop established at West Tewksbury (1880s-1890s), expanded c. 1900-05; no manufacturing complexes developed.

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

### A. Transportation Routes:

Abandonment of streetcar routes in 1920s and improvement of Colonial highways as autoroads. Along east/west axis as Route 38 (Main Street) and Route 133 (Andover Street).

### B. Population:

Decline after having reached a peak of 5,265 in 1915, steady increase recorded thereafter; fluctuations in population may have reflected changes at the State Hospital such as the closing of old buildings and transferral of patients while new buildings were under construction. No information available on local foreign-born population or on new religious societies.

### C. Settlement Location:

Essentially the same as the preceding period.

### D. Economic Base:

In addition to the dominant market gardening activity, the town developed in this period a reputation as a "carnation town" and many hot houses raised flowers commercially. In 1930 New England Power built Tewksbury Substation introducing power from Vermont to Lowell, Lawrence, Worcester and Boston over a 230 kv 126-mile line, at that time the highest voltage line in New England.

### E. Architecture

#### Residential:

Same basic trends evident as in preceding period, i.e., ambitious suburban houses (Colonial Revival style) built at town center and at North Tewksbury



(Wamiset). No high-style likely for period.

Institutional:

Colonial Revival style Congregational Church built at Town Center, 1923. Gradual consolidation of schools into central graded schools, at least one Colonial Revival style school house built c. 1930 (Center School). Colonial Revival style town hall built 1920. Small amount of new construction at State Hospital, mostly Colonial Revival style, with some neo-Medieval elements.

Commercial:

Continued development of nurseries and truck farms (?), some strip development possible along Main Street.

Industrial:

Little new construction likely.

XI. SOURCES

Patton, Harold, A History of the Town of Tewksbury, 1964.  
Pride, Edward W., Tewksbury: A Short History, 1888.