

# MHC Reconnaissance Survey Town Report

## TOPSFIELD

Report Date: 1985

**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: 1985

Community: Topsfield

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## I. HISTORIC OVERVIEW

Now a town of horsefarms and affluent residential development, Topsfield was originally a part of the 17th century plantations of Ipswich and Salem. Few native sites have been found, although early settlement activity is likely along riverine and coastal margins. Earliest land grants were to Ipswich residents in 1634-42. Incorporation was by 1650, with meetinghouse center established by 1658. By the Colonial period, there were hints of a centralized, stable village (Topsfield Road at High Street) but settlement generally was dispersed through the end of the century.

Overwhelmingly an agricultural town, change arrived with the construction of the Newburyport Turnpike 1803/04 through central Topsfield. Halfway between Newburyport and Boston, the town became a major stage stop-over point. Taverns and hotels proliferated. With arrival of the railroad (1853) came an increase in manufactories and an era of prosperity. Shoe shops abounded throughout the town, new streets were laid out, and residential construction boomed. By the Late Industrial decades, however, growth and new building had slowed, agriculture again became the town's mainstay, and dairying rose in importance. Not until the early 20th century and the impending construction of Interstate 95 did Topsfield attract a large-scale residential commuter population. After 1945 particularly, a flurry of construction occurred. New homes were erected singly and were scattered throughout the town.

Topsfield has risen to the status of affluent residential exurb of the Greater Boston Metropolitan Area. Its extraordinary 19th century meetinghouse center, meanwhile, has survived intact.

## II. POLITICAL BOUNDARIES

Originally a part of both the 17th century plantations of Ipswich and Salem, Topsfield was incorporated as an independent town in 1650. It was not until 1659, however, that the line between Topsfield and Salem was finally settled, the juncture with Ipswich being finalized soon thereafter. The town's boundaries have experienced little alteration since that time.

## III. TOPOGRAPHY

The town of Topsfield is located in the central portion of Essex County, Massachusetts. Physiographically, the town lies within the New England Seaboard Lowland, a relatively smooth coastal strip of land with some hills usually below the 400 and 500 foot contours. Locally this area of Essex County contains more hilly country than other Seaboard Lowland areas. In Topsfield, land surfaces are generally irregular with the highest points in the

central portion of town from its northern to southern border. From this area land surfaces slope easterly and westerly. Several locations in town exceed 200 feet in height with elevations in the 50 foot range also common. Major drainage in Topsfield is through the Ipswich River and numerous smaller brooks. Some of the brooks include Howlett Brook, Mile Brook, and Nichols Brook. Several small ponds are also present, particularly near the Ipswich River. These ponds included Rockery Pond, Waterfowl Pond and Teal Pond. Freshwater swamps are present in many areas.

Bedrock deposits in the Topsfield area are characterized by igneous formations throughout the town. Salem gabbro-diorites (diorite and gabbro diorite) are the dominant bedrock type throughout most of the town. Other bedrock formations include Dedham grano-diorites and Quincy granites which occur along the town's eastern border and in the central portion of town. Soil types in Topsfield are characterized by two major associations. Soils of the Paxton-Woodbridge-Montank association are present near the junction of Rt. 1 and Rt. 97 and in northeastern and southern areas. These soils occur in deep, nearly level to steep deposits. They are generally excessively drained sandy and loamy soils found in outwash deposits. Limited distributions of the Canton-Charlton-Sutton association are also present in the town. These soils occur in deep, nearly level to steep deposits along the town's western boundary. They are generally well-drained loamy soils formed in friable glacial till. The original forest growth in Topsfield and Essex County in general consisted of a mixed growth of white pine, oak, chestnut, poplar, maple, birch and some other hardwoods and conifers. However, secondary growth patterns characterized most of the town today. These patterns are characterized by second growth oak and chestnut in the uplands as well as scrub oak and pine. Some birch, cedar, juniper and white pine are also present.

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

##### A. Transportation Routes

Native American transportation routes in the Topsfield area likely emphasized water travel along the Ipswich River and its tributaries such as Mill Brook and Howlett Brook. Conjectured trails were also probable along rivers, streams and wetlands. An inland trail may also have existed in the Rt. 97, Rowley Street and Salem Road areas.

##### B. Population

Topsfield was inhabited by members of the Pawtucket group which extended from the Saugus/Salem area north to the York area of Maine. Locally this group is commonly referred to as the Agawam Indians who may have been a sub-tribe of the Massachusetts under the leadership of the Penacooks. Gookin (1792) lists ca. 3,000 men belonging to the Penacook group prior to the 1617-19 epidemics while Mooney (1928:4) lists 2,000 men, as many as 12,000 natives,

probably exaggerated. The Native American population in the Topsfield area may have numbered in the vicinity of 200 or more individuals during much of this period. Following the epidemics, fewer than 50 natives likely remained.

#### C. Settlement Pattern

Few Woodland and no Contact period sites are known for the Topsfield area. However, environmental variables and later 17th century documentary sources indicate sites of this period should be present. For example, well drained areas along the Ipswich River and the periphery of other major wetlands may have been good site location. In addition to habitation and village type sites, special purpose sites, such as fishing sites, burials and quarries, were also probably present.

#### D. Subsistence Pattern

Native Americans in the Topsfield area subsisted on a variety of seasonally determined activities including hunting, fishing, the collecting of wild plants and shellfish, and horticulture. Hunting was a major activity focusing on larger mammals such as deer and smaller fur bearers. Natives in the Topsfield area may have also travelled to the coast to exploit sea mammals such as seals and drift whales in the Plum Island Sound. Upland game birds and ducks were also hunted, particularly in wetlands, and meadows surrounding riverine areas. In the Ipswich River, seasonal runs of shad, smelt, alewives, salmon and trout may also have been available. Several species of terrestrial as well as freshwater plants provided a valuable food resource. Gathering may have also seasonally focused on shellfish at the coast in nearby Ipswich. Domesticated plants such as corn, beans, pumpkins, squash and tobacco were important. Native fields were likely located along the Ipswich River or its tributaries and wetlands.

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

#### A. Transportation Routes

Indian trails likely continued in use in the Topsfield area throughout most of the Plantation period. Limited water travel also probably existed in the Ipswich River. European land transportation in Topsfield actually began before settlement. During the late 1630's Ipswich residents (tenants, squatters and grant holders) travelled an Indian trail to the New Meadows area where several large grants were given. This travel developed into a cartway from Ipswich Village to Gravelly Brook in the area of the Topsfield/Ipswich Road. A ford existed at Howlett Brook. The cartway also roughly followed Perkins and Howlett Street which were not officially laid out until ca. 1640. As settlement increased and a village developed, Main Street and the Salem Road were laid out in 1656 creating a north/south corridor through the town and a link to Salem. Maple Street was also probably laid out at this time. Many roads or ways were developed in the 1660's although not all were officially laid out. Mill Street, North

Street and Oak Street existed in the area of Boxford Street at this time. North of the Main Street area, Haverhill Street was laid out in ca. 1668 from the Topsfield Meetinghouse. This roadway completed the north/south corridor through the town and linked to the Main Street/Salem Road area. Other roadways laid out late in this period included Pond Street (1668-69), parts of Ridge Street (1666-67), and Washington Street. Balch's Bridge, also known as Town Bridge, Wooden Bridge and Walsh's Bridge, is probably the oldest bridge in the town. The original bridge was erected before 1653 over the Ipswich River on Salem Street. An old fordway existed about 150 feet downstream from the bridge.

#### B. Population

Although the village at New Meadows was not officially started until 1643, several Ipswich colonists resided in the area by that date as tenants, squatters and in one possible instance as a holder of large land grants given out in the late 1630s. It is unlikely that population exceeded 25 to 50 individuals. The first accurate recording of Topsfield's early population is from 1661 when 30 commoners were listed. Records before that date were destroyed in a fire. In 1668, 46 men, possibly 230 individuals listed as those who paid a county rate tax. By 1675 the town's population may have risen slightly above this figure to around 250 individuals. While the village at New Meadows had a minister as early as 1639, when Topsfield was incorporated in 1650 the town was without a church or minister.

#### C. Settlement Pattern

Little is known regarding the Native American settlement patterns in Topsfield during this period, and natives may not have permanently resided in the town at all by this time. The early settlers were not pressured by local natives. Land title was previously obtained for Topsfield when John Winthrop Jr. purchased the rights for Agawam from Masconomet in 1638-39. European settlement in the Topsfield area may have begun as early as 1634-35 as four of the regional company of 13 men who settled Agawam were granted lands in the back country that would later become Topsfield. Between 1639 and 1642 nine grants were given in the Topsfield area ranging from 300 to 800 acres. A total of 4375 acres comprising about one-half of the town's acreage was granted, predominantly to Ipswich residents. Nearly all of these grants were on the north side of the Ipswich River. Until this time the Topsfield area was nameless and referred to as the back country of Ipswich. Colonists were likely living in the area by this time, but are presumed to be squatters or tenants of the earlier land grants listed above.

The court at Salem made the first move to officially sanction a settlement in Topsfield when in 1639 it ordered that all lands between Salem and the river not belonging to any other town or person should belong to the said village. This order was not adopted until 1643 when Topsfield was officially started, though not incorporated, as the village at New Meadows. Only one of the original proprietors who received large grants in the late 1630s

and early 1640s ever resided in Topsfield. Instead, these grants were mainly profit-making ventures for the owners. During the 1640s and 1650s several of the larger grants were broken up through sales and leases to tenants creating smaller farms ranging from less than 10 acres to 100 acres or more. Farms were probably dispersed and not concentrated as references to the area as a village might suggest. Most of the original larger grants were broken up in the 1670s and 1680s when they were divided among the heirs (usually sons) of the original proprietors. Some large grants in excess of 500 acres remained although most were 100 to 200 acres or smaller.

After Topsfield's original grants were given, a large amount of common land remained. Small parcels of commonland were present in the various sections on the south side. The division of 1661 is the earliest surviving record of commonland division in Topsfield. At that time 500 acres on the south side of the river was laid out as common to shared by 30 inhabitants for perpetuity. Timber rights and the remaining common land on the south side of the river were divided in 1664. However, even after the division several large tracts of land were held as common property. The division of common land was based upon the amount of ministerial taxes each person paid the previous year. Each share was equal to 10 acres. Seven men who paid more than 50 shillings would receive a treble share of 30 acres, 15 men who paid between 25 and 50 shillings received a double share of 20 acres and 10 men who paid less than 20 shillings received a single share of 10 acres. Each share was drawn by lot and lands divided.

The first meetinghouse was probably built between 1655 and 1658 after the arrival of Reverend William Perkins. A meetinghouse is mentioned in court records after 1658, in what is now the older part of Pine Grove Cemetery. The meetinghouse was built in a convenient location to accommodate Rowley Villages (Boxford) with whom an early church was gathered. While the meetinghouse was the focal point of civic and religious life a dense village was not yet settled in this area. Topsfield residents were still dispersed, mostly north of the Ipswich River. In 1675 a stone wall and watch house were built around the meetinghouse when residents feared attack during Philip's War. Schools were not present in Topsfield during this period.

#### D. Economic Base

As Colonial settlers established themselves in the Topsfield area, hunting and gathering wild foods were important to their subsistence. However, the combined use of agriculture and husbandry were clearly the most important aspects in the economic lives of Topsfield's early settlers. Indian corn, wheat, barley and rye were the most important food crops. Fruit and vegetables were also grown. Shortly after settlement, the production of vegetable fibers from hemp and flax were also important activity in Topsfield. Cattle, horses, sheep and swine were the most important animals on local farms. Oxen and fowl were also present. The manufacture of textiles was also important in

Topsfield immediately following settlement. Spinning and weaving was conducted in most homes and by 1670 some town residents were identifying themselves as professional weavers by occupation. Blacksmiths were in Topsfield probably by 1640-50 as well as coopers (1660) and inn keepers (1660). Copper mining was conducted at the Endicott Mine in 1648 but did not last. Bog iron was mined by 1668 to service the nearby Boxford iron works. Clay pits were also in operation on the southside of the Ipswich River in 1674. Other clay pits were present at the eastern side of town. Topsfield's first mill was erected on Mile Brook followed by the Peabody sawmill in 1672. Tanneries may have also been present during this period.

## VI. COLONIAL PERIOD (1675-1775)

### A. Transportation Routes

Native trails likely had been upgraded to horsepaths or cartways by this time. Main transportation routes through the town continued to be the Ipswich Road corridor to the east, the Boxford Road to the west, Haverhill Street to the north and the Salem Road to the south. Main Street linked each of these routes in the village center. Before 1700, Meetinghouse Lane (1692-93) was laid out as well as the lower part of Central Street (1699). Portions of Main Street were laid out in 1704, Wenham Street in 1706, Oak Street in 1714 and Rowley Street in 1717. Garden Street was probably laid out in ca. 1728 and Cross Street in 1730. North Street was officially laid out in 1762 and Mill Street in 1767. West Street was laid out in ca. 1772 and Mcleod Road in 1774.

### B. Population

Topsfield's population grew slowly but steadily during the late 17th century. By 1677, 57 men representing as many as 285 individuals, took an oath of allegiance and fidelity to the town and colony. This figure increased significantly by 1678 when 74 men representing possibly 370 took the same oath of allegiance. If this growth was due solely to population increase through immigration and birth, it may represent one of the fastest periods of growth in Topsfield's history. By 1762 up to 925 individuals may have resided in Topsfield as 185 men are listed on the meetinghouse seating plan. This estimate may in fact be only as high as 719 individuals, 1.65% of the Essex County total, are listed in Topsfield when the first census was taken in 1765. No Native Americans are listed at that time although 16 "negroes" were present, comprising 2.23% of Topsfield's overall population. By 1776 Topsfield's population increased to 773 individuals or 1.53% of the Essex County whole. This figure represents a growth of 7.51% over the 1765 census. Ethnically, virtually all of Topsfield's population was still of English decent descended from town. Puritan/Congregationalism remained the religion of the town's residents.

### C. Settlement Pattern

Land patterns which developed in Topsfield during the Plantation period continued throughout most of the Colonial period. Most larger proprietary grants were broken up in the 1670s and 1680s

and much of the common lands were divided. Several large tracts of land (500 acres) were still held in common by town residents although even those were broken up by ca. 1722 until only a training field remained. Some large parcels of land were privately owned but the trend was now for much smaller holdings. By the late 17th or early 18th century Topsfield was increasingly developing as a settled, centralized village. The village itself shifted from its original focus at the old meetinghouse south along Main Street to its junction with Washington Street. In 1703 a new meetinghouse was built on the common which was taken down and rebuilt in 1759. A schoolhouse was not built by the end of the Colonial period. In 1694 school was kept in town in private homes. In 1732 the town votes to keep school 2/3 's of the time north of the river and 1/3 on the south side.

#### D. Economic Base

Agriculture and husbandry continued to grow and characterize the economic base of Topsfield during the Colonial period. Grains continued to characterize the main farm products on Topsfield farms with corn increasingly becoming the main crop. Cow, cattle, sheep and swine were still the most important farm animals. Anadromous fish may have been exported into the Ipswich River, however, they were probably of little commercial importance.

Clay pits were still in operation during this period and brick making was conducted on common land by 1697. Brickmaking did not last through the end of this period. Bog iron also continued to be mined and by 1681 the town was forced to regulate its use. At least one and possibly two malt houses were in operation during the Colonial period. A cider mill was in operation by 1751 and was made in houses before this date. A general store was in operation in the village by 1738 as well as one or two inns. Coopers, carpenters, cabinet makers, weavers, tanners and blacksmiths also continued their trades during this period. Timber cutting was important in Topsfield during the Colonial period as indicated by the relatively large number of saw mills present and orders made by the town as early as 1677 to protect timber resources. Plantation period mills continued in use. In ca. 1692 the Dorman sawmill was erected on Rye Brook followed by the Porter sawmill near Nichols Brook in the late 17th or early 18th century. In 1738-40 the Howlett gristmill was erected on Howlett Brook followed by the Howlett sawmill two or three years later.

#### E. Architecture

Residential: Like its neighbors, Topsfield includes a significant number of first period dwellings. Best known is the Parson Capen house of 1683, and restored by the Topsfield Historical Society in 1913. Other examples include: the French-Andrew (1675), and Hubbard (1686) saltboxes; the William Iles (1719) gambrel saltbox; and the Pritchett-Hood (1668), a small three bay, 1 & 1/2 story house. Later in the 18th century, center chimney houses were constructed with symmetrical side elevations; about 10 have gable roofs; both a five bay and a three bay gambrel roof are known. A



single 1 & 1/2 story, five bay example is known. Large houses with pairs of interior chimneys related to the Georgian plan were built in small numbers, about five, including a gambrel example.

**Institutional:** The location and appearance of the first meetinghouse is unknown. The second was built prior to 1658; galleries were discussed and a pulpit added in 1682; a stable and Sabbath day house was added nearby in 1672; it was the defensive center of the town, surrounded by high fence and watch tower. The third meetinghouse was built in 1703, was 42 x 44 feet, and contained both seats and pews. The fourth meetinghouse of 1759 was 54 x 42 feet with 26 foot studs, steeple, and separate seating for men and women.

## VII. FEDERAL PERIOD (1775-1830)

### A. Transportation Routes

Several existing roads were extended or improved during the period. Among these were: Lockwood Lane (1786 and 1813), College Road (1791), Boxford Street (1813), Rea Road (1827), River Street (1771, 1799), Rowley Street (1821), Rowley Bridge Street (1775, 1802, 1829), Salem Street (1807, 1827) Wildes Street (1781, 1818) and most important to the central village, High Street. Extended over the Great Hill in 1783, High Street was laid out from the common to the entry of the former high school grounds in 1795, and its entire length completed by 1805.

In 1803/1804 the Newburyport Turnpike was completed through central Topsfield. The town had been serviced by stage lines since Ezra Lunt's two horse expeditions in 1774 and then by Jacob Hales's four horse coach after 1794. But it was the daily connections provided by the Eastern Stage Company after 1818 that converted Topsfield (at the halfway point between Newburyport and Boston) into the stage center of Essex County.

Topsfield's bridges were many, and formed a critical part of its developing transportation network. Rowley Bridge, built new in 1774, was rebuilt in 1807, 15 feet wide with a stone pier in the middle. Balch's Bridge (over the Ipswich River on Salem Street and also known as the Town Bridge, Wooden Bridge or Walsh's Bridge) was rebuilt in 1805. The Stone Bridge, first built of wood by the Turnpike Corporation in 1803/180, was washed away ca. 1811/1812 and rebuilt. Lamson's Bridge (on Asbury Street) in 1780 became a covered wooden bridge until a new structure was erected in 1813/1814. The Howlett Street Dry Bridge (an underpass for the turnpike ) was built in 1805.

### B. Population

Topsfield's population grew from 773 individuals in 1776 to 1010 individuals in 1830 with an overall growth rate of 30.6%. Population growth was the lowest (.91%) from 1776 to 1790. From 1790 to 1830, Topsfield's population growth increased steadily to a high of 16.63% from 1820 to 1830. Topsfield's population

consistently decreased in comparison to the overall Essex County population. In 1776 the town contained 1.52% of the county population. This decreased to 1.22% in 1830.

Private academies were operated in the town prior to the establishment of the more long-lived Topsfield Academy in 1827. Subscription libraries began with the Topsfield Library Association, active from 1794 - 1836. A poor farm was purchased in 1822.

### C. Settlement Pattern

The division of the town into three school districts in the 1790s (until which time there was little growth) and the construction of the schoolhouses in the northeastern town - centrally at the meetinghouse, and south of the river at River Hill - suggests the tenacity of Topsfield's dispersed pattern of agricultural settlement until the turn of the century decades. Mill activity remained focused along Howlett and Mile Brooks in the east, and the town's core or civic activities, at the meetinghouse at Main Street and Boxford, in the west. By 1803, the meetinghouse vicinity had attracted at least a tavern and post office. The Topsfield Academy was opened in 1827.

The greatest density of combined Colonial and Federal period dwellings were found in the southern (Salem/Garden Street) area and of surviving Federal period structures, in the meetinghouse vicinity. Most dwellings, however, remained widely scattered during the period, Topsfield's southern and western quadrants again attracting the majority of settlement activity.

Because of the town's central location between Boston and Newburyport, Topsfield became a major stop-over point for stage travellers and the Turnpike vicinity between High Street and Ipswich Road, a corridor of hotels and tavern. In 1803/1804 the Topsfield Hotel was erected at the High Street intersection and apparently became the best tavern on the Eastern Stage Route. By 1807/1808, another public house (the Topsfield House?) was erected at the Ipswich Road junction with the turnpike and survived for several years. At the time of the turnpike's construction, a large hotel was erected by the turnpike corporation on Town Hill (just south of Ipswich Road). Another hotel operated until 1836 on the former site of the Bailey Shoe factory.

### D. Economic Base

Federal Topsfield was principally an agricultural town. In 1820, 68% of men were employed on farms and only 31% in manufacturing. In 1791, there were 7019 acres of agricultural land. A higher than average percentage (7%) was under tillage. Combined, tillage and haying land represented 34% of the total, while pasturage (59%) and unimproved (7%) accounted for the remaining 2/3's. Farmers devoted considerable attention to raising livestock or slaughtering. There were six slaughtering and tanning shops. Orchardng was also an important use of land. In 1812 there were seven cider mills. Two gristmills and a sawmill were in operation

throughout the period. Those employed in manufacturing included millers, blacksmiths, shoemakers, carpenters and wheelwrights. Shoe manufacturing was conducted in a few small shops. As early as 1793 the town's carpenters and wheelwrights formed a labor union through which prices for their work were determined.

#### E. Architecture

**Residential:** A variety of forms were constructed during the period overwhelmingly of 2 & 1/2 stories and five bays in width. Center chimney houses were built in small numbers. More common were houses with multiple chimneys and modified plans. Large examples included interior and end wall chimneys, double pile houses. Single pile and L-plan examples used end or rear wall chimney placements. Hip roofs were used in only about five examples. Two three-bay examples are known.

**Institutional:** The meetinghouse was remodelled in 1817 when the spire was replaced by a "lantern" or "cap tower resembling the present steeple of the late Doctor Bernard's meetinghouse in Salem (Dow 1940:264)". The town built its first schoolhouses in 1794, in three districts in the town; a fourth was added in the southwest in 1798. In 1827 Topsfield Academy was constructed; it was two stories in height, 45 x 36 feet in size, with a hip roof and belfry; on each story a large classroom was reached through an anteroom from the stairwell.

**Industrial:** Tanning, slaughtering, shoe, blacksmiths and wheelwrights shops may have been built during the period. The only known survival is a shoe shop, ca. 1827, moved in 1841 to 110 North Main St. and extensively remodelled. A large cider mill was built in 1812 (and destroyed by fire in 1880), and two others were erected ca. 1805-1810.

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

#### A. Transportation Routes

The town's street network continued its development. Laid out during the period were Central Street from Main to Summer (1846), Grove Street from Main to Washington (1856), Maple Street from the Turnpike to Central Street (1846), Perkins Street from Meetinghouse Lane to Howlett (1843), Prospect Street as public way (1835) and School Avenue (1868). Other streets widened and improved include: Wildes Street (1854), Washington Street (until 1846), and Oak Street (1836), and Maple Street from Main Street to the Turnpike (1845).

Although the Georgetown and Danvers Railroad Company chartered to run a line from Georgetown through Topsfield and Danvers to Salem in 1844, it was not until 1853 that Topsfield received its first rail service. The Danvers and Newburyport branch of the Boston and Maine Railroad ran from Georgetown through Rowley, Ipswich, Boxford, Topsfield and Wenham until at North Danvers it entered the Essex Railroad. The only station on this line was in Central Topsfield, at Park and Main Street (1853). With the arrival of the railroad, stage service was quickly rendered obsolete.

Topsfield's bridges were improved and continued to increase in number. Partially destroyed in 1837, the Stone Bridge in 1853 was constructed of stone. When the turnpike was widened (date unknown) the bridge became encased in cement. The Iron Bridge of the Boston and Maine Railroad was first constructed in 1854. Destroyed by a storm in 1855, it was rebuilt the following year.

## B. Population

Topsfield's growth during the period was moderate through the first 30 years of the period, expanding from 1010 in 1830 to 1292 in 1860. The total fell to 1212 in 1865, and gained only nine individuals in the next five years. The proportion of foreign-born was 5.4% in 1855, and including the Irish (35), Canadians (15), Scots (11), and English (5). The fall to 4.6% 10 years later can be accounted for almost exclusively by the loss of 10 Scots.

Methodists began meeting in 1830; early in the period camp meetings were held in September, lasting four days, while attendants stayed in tents. Unitarians met in the town between 1829 and 1836. Roman Catholics traveled to Danvers for services after 1859. Private academies for girls continued into the town. An Atheneum was established in 1840. The district schools were supplied with Horace Mann's Common School Library. A Society for Improving Agriculture was formed in 1850.

## C. Settlement Pattern

Although its population was stabilizing, manufacturies increased within the town during the period and Topsfield enjoyed its era of perhaps greatest prosperity. The meetinghouse vicinity emerged at this time as the town's undisputed civic core. Although in 1831, a Methodist Episcopal Church was built on the Newburyport Turnpike in the northeastern town, by 1840 it had moved to the common. A new Congregational church building was erected on its former site (at the common) in 1842; in 1853 the present Methodist Episcopal Church was also built on the common. While the town's increasing number of small shoe shops were dispersed throughout rural Topsfield, and milling activities continued along Howlett and Mile Brooks, a rudimentary commercial focus began to take form south of the meetinghouse/civic center along Main Street between the common and the Railroad depot at Park Street. By period's end, this commercial corridor had attracted two shoe manufacturies, several stores, the town's post office and several dwellings.

Residential building increased in pace, the majority of Topsfield's inventoried dwellings claiming their origins during the period. Several streets were laid out in the central village to accommodate the additional construction. South Main Street, High Street between Main and Summer Streets, and Central Streets north of Summer emerged at the most dense (and affluent) corridors of residential development. Other areas attracting relative settlement concentrations were Main Street north from the common to Haverhill Street, Boxford Road running west out of the village

center and upper Prospect Street. Residential construction was also attracted to the turnpike vicinity, in the north at its confluence with mill activities along Ipswich Road, and in the south, along Salem and Garden Streets, also near the turnpike.

With the Civil War, the town's period of relative prosperity ended. Building slowed and in 1860, the Topsfield Academy was closed.

#### D. Economic Base

The local economy gradually shifted away from dependence on agriculture to a mixture of farming and manufacturing. From 1840 to 1865 the percentage employed in agriculture declined from 59% to 42% while percentage in manufacturing increased from 40% to 58%. Farmers raised large hay, potato and corn crops and smaller crops or rye, barley, oats and vegetables. Small flax and tobacco fields were also cultivated. Butchering of animals for Salem, Lynn and other markets was one of the town's principal businesses. In 1850, about 20,000 animals were slaughtered. Butter and cheese were also produced in large quantities. A few hundred pounds of wool were cut from sheep. Growing of fruit and fruit trees was also done on a large scale; thousands of fruit trees were sold.

The principal manufacturing activity was shoe-making. Early in the period three shoe shops employed 25 people and made shoes worth less than \$10,000. By 1845, 361 people (288 men) made \$126,983 worth of boots and shoes, most of which were sold in the south and west. with the loss of the southern market during the Civil War, Topsfield shoe firms turned to manufacturing boots for the army. Following the war there were four factories, three of which made women's and childrens' shoes. Tools needed by these companies were made by a local machinist who also marketed his dyes, knives, and other supplies in other towns. Other manufacturing interests included a carriage maker, a harness maker, and a few blacksmiths, millers, and carpenters.

#### E. Architecture

Residential: Variety continues to characterized the housing stock of this period. Smaller houses increased in popularity, and many of 1 & 1/2 stories were constructed. Most numerous were gable roofed examples of five bays with center entry and extended stud height; most of these were double pile with double interior chimneys, but single pile, rear wall chimney plan examples are known. Gable front examples were also constructed at this time. Nearly all are ornamented with Greek Revival cornice boards and pilasters, but a small number add facade gables associated with the Gothic Revival. Among larger, 2 & 1/2 storied homes, familiar forms remain popular. Most common were the large, double pile double, interior chimney, center entry examples; both Greek Revival and Italianate examples survive among the dozen examples, and several of the latter add facade gables. Single pile and L-plan examples of both styles number an additional dozen. Gable front examples of 2 & 1/2 stories are rare, as are mansard roofed examples in any form.

**Institutional:** The fifth meetinghouse of the Congregationalists was constructed in 1842 from designs by Mark R. Jewett; it is a gable front meetinghouse with square tower, belfry and spire, ornamented with Greek Revival pilasters and cornices, while its recessed entry is screened by Ionic columns in antis; the interior was divided into family pews. Methodists built their meetinghouse in 1831, a square 40 feet on each side under a gable roof, two doors on its facade, with a pulpit between them on the interior and chimney on the opposite wall. The house was move from its probable location in the northeast of the town to the common in 1840. A new, second house was constructed in 1854 from a design by H. Graves of Boston; it is gable front in form with a projecting , pedimented frontispiece of paneled pilasters over its center entry and flanking windows, and a flushboard facade; its first story was the public meeting place, Union Hall. Schoolhouses were rebuilt at mid-century, the center in 1845, the north in 1846, the east in 1847, but no date for the south. In 1868 the town took over the academy for the center primary and town grammar school.

**Commercial:** An 1850 store survives as a 2 & 1/2 story, center entry, eight bay structure that also was used as a residence.

**Industrial:** In 1837 Charles Herrick built a shoe shop on Main Street. It was a one-story frame building. In 1850 it was moved to its present location at 23 High Street and altered. A second story with gabled roof and porch was added. A larger two-story factory was then erected on the Main Street site (also in 1850); ca. 1940 this building was remodelled; it burned completely sometime after. Another shoe shop was built opposite the Herrick factory after 1850 (no remains). Prior to 1841 the Merriam Shoe Shop was built in a field adjoining the Pine Grove cemetery at the junction of Haverhill and Ipswich Roads; it was later moved to its present location at 124 North Main Street and altered substantially. In 1856 Towne's Shoe Factory was erected near the corner of So. Main and Maple Streets; it was moved to Main Street in 1873 and stood next to the Bailey Block. There is no data on appearance. The Stiles Shoe Factory, a two-story building was erected prior to 1867 at the intersection of Summer and High Street (no remains). A carriage shop was built ca. 1830 on Main Street near the railroad tracks; it was later moved to Central street (no remains).

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

### A. Transportation Routes

The street network at the town center was substantially improved and intensified during the period. North Common Road and the High Street extension were laid out by (1884) and Washington Street near the Congregatonal church discontinued (1873) as the area around the town common was redesigned. By 1910, the side streets (in the vicinity of the high school) had been laid out, Topsfield Road (immediately west of the later railroad route) was straightened. In the village center in 1872, Summer Street, Park Street, and Central Street south of Summer, were all laid out for

residential development. North Pine Street (1872) and Valley Road (1900) were opened, and Rowley and Rowley Bridge Streets were improved (1876 and 1873/1883, respectively). In 1904, College Road was discontinued. In 1897, the Topsfield railroad station was moved from Park and Main Street south to Park near Summer.

#### B. Population

After holding even for much of the Early Industrial period, Topsfield's population declined steadily from 1870 to 1900. From 1213 in 1870, the number fell to 1030 in 1900. Thereafter (1900-1915) the population rebounded slightly to end the period at 1173, a 3.2% decline for the whole period. The foreign-born population grew from 5.2% to 24.6%, from 1875 to 1915. Other than English, Irish, and Canadian immigrants, there were Italians late in the period (after 1900). In 1915 there were 126 Italians, 42 Nova Scotian Canadians, and 33 English and Scottish immigrants in Topsfield.

The Farmer's Club or Grange was founded ca. 1878. The Ancient Order of United Workmen founded a lodge with 29 members in 1886, and met in Bailey's Block. In 1875, the public library was established.

#### C. Settlement Pattern

The village center continued to see improvement. In 1873, Topsfield's Town Hall was erected and a public library housed inside. 1897 saw a new school building constructed, adjoining the common, and the railroad depot moved from Main and Park Streets to Park and Summer Streets into a new structure. Residential construction slowed considerably. Continued however, were the tendencies for new dwellings to push outward from the village center and to intensify residential densities along the town's newly created streets.

#### D. Economic Base

Agriculture reassumed its position as the mainstay of the Topsfield economy during the period from 1875 to 1905. The percentage employed in agriculture increased from 42% to 48%. During and following the depression in the 1870s the local shoe industry suffered a sharp decline with the result that manufacturing employment fell from 44% in 1875 to 22% in 1905. During the same stretch commercial employment rose from 11% to 22% and government and professional employment rose from 2% to 7%.

Topsfield farmers turned increasingly to dairying. Milk production increased more than 150% between 1875 and 1895. Consequently, hay and fodder production also increased, while growing grains for human consumption practically ceased. The number of livestock almost doubled 1875 to 1885. Farmers continued to slaughter animals, though on a smaller scale than previously. Poultry raising emerged as an important activity in the 1890s. In 1895 dairy, hay and poultry accounted for 71% of the \$175,000 agricultural product, while fruits and vegetables

accounted for another 17%. Farm acreage expanded early in the period. By 1885 there were 8729 acres of agricultural land, and increases in haying and pasture/acreage paced this growth. The larger tract of haying land (275 acres) was primarily responsible for the above normal percentage of land under cultivation (38% compared to 32% county-wide). Likewise, extensive pasturage resulted in 48% of the land being uncultivated compared to 45% county-wide. Woodland represented only 14% of the land, compared to 23% for the county.

Of the four shoe factories, only one survived the 1970s depression. In 1875 the steam-powered Herrick Co. manufactured \$215,000 worth of shoes (94% of total manufacturing product) and employed about 135 men. Only 20 years later fewer than 50 men made shoes and the total manufacturing product in Topsfield was 66% smaller. Other small manufacturing operations included a blacksmith, a carriage-maker and one grist and sawmill (the other gristmill closed in 1892).

#### E. Architecture

**Residential:** New housing is restricted almost exclusively to large estates. The 1902 Bradley Palmer estate is a field stone hip block with projecting pedimented bays at the center entry and each end. The 1907 Charles Cummings estate is a brick house with asymmetrical massing including projecting pedimented bays. A farm complex from this period includes elaborate shingled, pyramidal-roofed structures. Other single family homes include isolated examples of gable front and gable block Queen Ann houses, as well as pyramidal, four-squares.

**Institutional:** The town built its hall in 1873 from designs by John H. Potter; it is Second Empire/Chateaux in style, the dominant facade design is composed of five bays with a high hip roof and clock tower, center entry under a portico.

**Industrial:** No known industrial buildings erected.

**Transportation:**

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

#### A. Transportation Routes

By the 1930s service over the section of the Newburyport and Danvers Branch of the Boston and Maine Railroad north of Topsfield Village had been discontinued. Between 1950 and 1954, Interstate 95 was constructed through southwestern Topsfield. The town's major local routes remain Topsfield and Ipswich Roads, running east/west and the Newburyport Turnpike (U.S. Rt. 1A) running north/south. In 1926, Pemberton Road was laid out when part of Asbury Street was relocated in 1925 and a new bridge constructed; Lamson's Bridge was discontinued. Town's Bridge was replaced by a concrete bridge in 1920s, and Balch's Bridge (wooden), by a cement structure in 1932.



## B. Population

At the period's opening, Topsfield's population experienced a rapid loss (23% in five years, from 1173 in 1915 to 900 in 1920) and then began to steadily climb. By 1955, Topsfield could claim 2208 residents and a growth rate of an amazing 88% during the period. It's foreign-born population fluctuated in absolute numbers but declined as a percentage of the whole, from 24.6% in 1915 to 15.1% by 1940. In 1915, fully 43% of Topsfield's foreign-born were Italians. Statistics are unavailable thereafter.

## C. Settlement Pattern

Gathering momentum as the period progressed, Topsfield recorded a period of unparalleled growth. Although the village center witnessed few improvements, St. Rose's Church was erected, 1922; a library, 1935; and the schoolbuilding at the common was razed to its foundations, 1935. Commercial, industrial and residential construction boomed. Main Street between the common and Prospect Street evolved into an exclusively commercial corridor of activities (late in the period, a small plaza being constructed); the intersections of U.S. Route 1 (the turnpike) with Central Street and with Ipswich Road became secondary (auto-oriented) modes of commercial enterprises; and the turnpike north of Camp Meeting Road began its development into a commercial/industrial strip of the automobile age.

With the construction of Interstate 95 through southeastern Tosfield, suddenly the picturesque rural town was pulled within commuting distance of the region's major metropolitan centers. Its evolution as a residential and increasingly affluent exurb commenced. Construction began to take form, as in Boxford, of single-family dwellings on large lots in the town's outer periphery, but also, closer to the village center and just getting their start during the period, as suburban-style neighborhoods of winding streets and cul-de-sacs.

## D. Economic Base

Upon the liquidation of the Herrick Shoe Co. early in the period, Topsfield was without a single significant manufacturing firm until ca. 1945. Even agricultural operations declined. Many of the active farms were converted to estates. In 1915, 36% worked in agriculture, 35% in manufacturing, 18% in commerce and 5% in government and professions. By 1954 only one person was listed as working on a farm. Four manufacturing firms were established after the war, employing 59 people or 17% of the total. One of these, the Roflan Co. made microphones, antennas, and electro-mechanical components. Another 7% worked in construction. The Topsfield Fair stimulated the economy for a short time every fall, providing jobs in service and retail firms. In 1954, four service and 13 wholesale and retail firms employed 252 people, or 73% of all those employed that year.

## E. Architecture

**Residential:** Early in the period an additional estate, the Saltonstall/Sears/Coolidge House of 1922, was constructed in brick from designs by Phillip Richardson; it consists of a large hip block of 2 & 1/2 stories and five bays connected by lateral hyphens to similar pavillions, and Georgian Revival in style. Later in the period, small tract housing was constructed near the town center and major roads.

**Institutional:** After federation of the Congregational and Methodist churches, the latter was used as the Parish house. St. Rose's Roman Catholic Chapel was constructed in 1922; it is a small, gable front structure with paired entries with stickwork hoods, small rose window, corner turrets, and belfry. The town built its brick Colonial Revival high school in 1932; it is rectangular and nine bays in length, with pillasters accenting the central bays and pedimented entry surround; several additions, including a central partial third story, have been made. A town library was built in 1935, also of brick, 1 & 1/2 storied hip-block with roundheaded windows and Doric portico; it was designed by Harold Field Kellog and partially funded by the National Industrial Recovery Act.

**Industrial:** No known industrial buildings erected.

## XI. SURVEY OBSERVATIONS

Topsfield's inventory of around 200 forms presents a reasonable survey of its important buildings. Although remaining a town known for its horse farms and its breathtaking scenery, Topsfield nevertheless swarms with a growing commuter population and as a result, is sacrificing substantial sections of its meadowland to residential tract developments. Areas west and north of the village (especially north and south of Boxford Road and north of Ipswich and Camp Meeting Roads) have already succumbed to suburban-style building. Areas east and south, with its less predictable topography, continues to attract individually constructed (and more affluent) dwellings on picturesque forested lots. The village center remains intact, a jewell of 19th century new England building, but northern Route 1 (the turnpike) claims everything from industrial condominiums to office parks. Its intersections with Ipswich Road and Central Street are now but a mishmash of commercial/industrial activity. The Main Street commercial corridor has become little more than a visually distasteful commercial strip. Topsfield's Historic District (at the common and north) is protected, but the rural town faces very real threats from both commercial and residential development.

## XII. FINDING AID

18th & 19th century dwellings	South Main Street from Prospect to Maple Street
18th & 19th century civic and residential buildings	Main Street from the common north to Haverhill & Ipswich Roads
Node of 18th century dwellings	Intersection, Rowley Hill Street & Salem Road.
Agricultural meadows/horse country with scattered 18th and 19th century dwellings	Rowley Hill Street, River Road, Salem Street

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