

# MHC Reconnaissance Survey Town Report

## TYNGSBOROUGH

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: Tyngsborough

## I. TOPOGRAPHY

Located on rolling riverine terrain and adjacent uplands. Inland areas are more rugged and rocky. Glacial outwash features throughout town. Variable soils--deep glacial soils in riverine lowlands, increasingly thin and rocky in uplands, Merrimack River dominates both landscape and drainage. Several large ponds and numerous streams flow directly into Merrimack; extreme western sections enter via Salmon Brook. Large areas of upland bog/swamp.

## II. POLITICAL BOUNDARIES

Part of town of Dunstable, 1673. Became first or eastern precinct of Dunstable, 1755 (subsequent to division of the town by Massachusetts/New Hampshire boundary, 1741). Incorporated as District of Tyngsborough, 1789. Became Town of Tyngsborough, 1809.

## III. HISTORIC OVERVIEW

Outlying suburban town on primary corridor between Boston and New Hampshire. Located along Merrimack River with probable native sites along valley and former terraces of Massapoag Pond in western section. Early axis of settlement along Merrimack with First Period garrison house sites along west bank and remains of mid-17th century Wamesit Indian Praying village on Tyngs Island. Instability of frontier delayed settlement until early 18th century with agriculture along Merrimack valley and limited sites in surrounding uplands. Few surviving Colonial period houses, primarily cottage plan in western section and two-story along river. Location of town center by mid-18th century at Merrimack ferry crossing with modest expansion during early 19th century creating period village. Improvement of transport linkages to Boston by mid-19th century fosters granite quarrying, but no outstanding industrial sites beyond local mill dams at Massapoag Pond and Lawrence Brook. Late 19th century expansion of Lowell created recreational landscape around Mascuppick Lake with trolley lines to Dracut. Continuing tourist economy through mid-20th century formed commercial strip along west bank of Merrimack (Route 3) with period highway and bridge across river. Present suburban expansion from southern New Hampshire pressures development of Merrimack corridor, although authentic historic landscapes remain along river roads and in western highlands along Westford line.

## IV. CONTACT PERIOD (1500-1620)

### A. Transportation Routes:

Located along Merrimack River with access to interior uplands. Conjectured trails follow along river terrace on east side as Sherburne-Lawdale-Frost Roads with access to native site on Tyngs Island (Wiscasuck) and projected link to Tyng's Pond (Mascuppick Lake) and on west side as Tyng-Old Tyngsboro-

Farwell Roads through town center. Trail to interior and Nashua River presumed as Kendall Road. Other possible routes appear to follow along Massapoag Pond as Massapoag Road and a possible location projected along Meadow Brook along the axis of Westford Road to town center, although no alignment survives.

B. Settlement Pattern:

No documented period sites; however, sites with probable period occupation located on Tyngs Island and east side of Merrimack near Frost Road. Additional sites likely along Merrimack especially at rifts and confluence points as well as terraces and knolls adjacent to major tributary streams and ponds. This should be an area with a high density of sites.

C. Subsistence Pattern:

A regional center for access to anadromous fish runs in Merrimack. Good agricultural land along river. Merrimack also served as major corridor for European trade during period.

D. Observations:

Though little data presently available, an important and largely intact area with high potential for major period sites.

V. FIRST SETTLEMENT PERIOD (1620-1675)

A. Transportation Routes:

Native trails remain as highways, especially along west side Merrimack and access to Dunstable along Kendall Road

B. Population:

Probably some native inhabitants, varying seasonally throughout period. A few colonial settlers after 1660.

C. Settlement Location:

A few scattered colonial farms on riverine lowlands, little information available on these. Best known was Tyng Farm (Tyng Road) established about 1670.

D. Economic Base:

Fur trade was impetus for initial colonial settlement. Fishing, subsistence agriculture and grazing as well. Apple orchards established before end of period.

E. Observations:

At the edge of the frontier, but also on a main line of development and trade--Merrimack valley. Too remote and too exposed to support more than a few hardy pioneers.

## VI. COLONIAL PERIOD (1675-1775)

### A. Transportation Routes:

Formation of town center at ferry crossing during 18th century creates local radial road pattern. On east side as Coburn-Parham and Willowdale Roads, on west side as Westford Road with network of interior roads to Massapoag Pond along Chestnut, Scribner, Groton and Davis Roads. Loop around town center as Cummings and Locust Roads by late 18th century.

### B. Population:

Much of native population from Wamiset Praying town relocated on Tyng's Island from 1676-1686 (then to Canada). Only one colonial family (John Tyng's) remained during King Philip's War. Continued border warfare inhibited most settlers until after 1725. After this, steady growth. Church list of 1762 had 46 names (estimate of 40 families).

### C. Settlement:

Tyng House served as a garrison, and was sole survivor of King Philip's War. By 1685, a second garrison house built (Henry Farwell's). Settlement limited for first fifty years of period by unstable frontier conditions and high percentage of town lands controlled by absentee owners. After 1730, increased settlement scattered throughout town but concentrated along riverine lowlands on west side of Merrimack. A few inhabitants on east side by mid-century. First precinct meetinghouse built 1755 near intersection of Kendall and Farwell Roads. Became nucleus for small town center. First school reputedly built 1775.

### D. Economic Base:

Primarily agriculture and grazing. Fishing remained important, probably for fertilizer as well as food. Some orchards. Mills included: saw and grist mills (James Gordon), outlet of Flint Road, (Tyngsborough Village) from 1750; a possible period mill at outlet to Tyng's Pond (Mascuppic Lake). An unspecified tavern, apparently in town center, toward end of period.

### E. Architecture

#### Residential:

Most widespread house type seems to have been vernacular, central-chimney two-story plan scattered examples of which bore high-style mid- or late Georgian entries. Also built during period were several central-chimney Cape Cod cottages and several ambitious twin-chimney two-story houses, including at least one example with a gambrel roof (demolished). Most houses of the period were built in the central and eastern portions of the town; few were built in the west end of the town.

### F. Observations:

Remained an exposed frontier area until third decade of 18th century. Development was primarily along Merrimack corridor but gradually diffused inland as conditions stabilized.

## VII. FEDERAL PERIOD (1775-1830)

### A. Transportation Routes:

Colonial highways remain from 18th century with improvement of main routes along Merrimack corridor as turnpikes including Middlesex Road (Route 3A) and Dunstable Road from Chelmsford. Wicasee Canal constructed around Tyng's Island 1813-14 by proprietors of Middlesex Canal as part of a chain of small Merrimack River canals linking Concord, New Hampshire with northern terminus of Middlesex Canal at Lowell.

### B. Population:

Rapid increase between 1790 and 1800 followed by smaller increases throughout remainder of period. No known foreign-born population. First Parish incorporated 1890 although established in 1750s and organized into a recognized parish 1789-90.

### C. Settlement Location:

Village established at Tyngsborough Center at the junction of Farwell, Kendall and Westford Roads.

### D. Economic Base:

"Many farms produce annually from 100 to 200 barrels of cider. The town has three sawmills (Bridge Meadow Brook, Tyng's Pond (Mascuppic Lake), Massapoag Pond) and one grist mill (First Pond), one wool-carding machine (First Pond), two taverns (and) two stores..." (Nathaniel Lawrence, 1815, quoted in Hurd, p. 372). Edge tool factory begun near foot of Locust Pond (Farwell Road). Granite shipped downriver from several local quarries.

### E. Architecture

#### Residential:

Vernacular types of the preceding period probably continued to be built until c. 1800-1810. Federalist style introduced by 1803. Houses built in the Federalist style ranged from simple central-chimney cottages and rear-wall chimney houses which were the most numerous of the various plans to several twin chimney and end-wall chimney examples built partially or entirely of brick; high-style examples, particularly those built along the Merrimack River at the town center, tended to be ornately decorated with both late Georgian and Federalist style details.

#### Institutional:

No church buildings constructed. One school house built prior to 1809. 6 school districts established between 1809 and 1815, one school house built in each.

#### Commercial:

Only two stores present during period, both were probably located in houses or buildings used for some other purpose; 2 taverns present during much of period.

Industrial:

Saw and grist mills present; no known mechanized mills.

VIII. EARLY INDUSTRIAL PERIOD (1830-1870)

A. Transportation Routes:

Turnpikes and highways realigned from early 19th century with extension of railroad from Lowell to Nashua, New Hampshire (1838) along west bank through town center. Chain ferry across Merrimack at Tyngsborough Center.

B. Population:

Peak of 870 reached in 1840, followed by steady decline until c. 1865-70. Small foreign-born population (approximately 3% of total population) present after c. 1850; made up of two or three Irish families. Baptist Society active 1835-1864; Universalist Society formed 1840, Evangelical Society formed 1868.

C. Settlement Location:

Little or no change in settled area.

D. Economic Base:

Manufactures limited by want of sufficient waterpower. "Large quantities of granite quarried and shipped down river. Pawtucket Dam in Lowell built with Tyngsborough granite. Brush factory begun (c. 1830?) at Farwell Road site by Oliver Washburn, inventor of Washburn Dresser Brush used in most cotton mills" (Tyng Book). Sawmill established at First Pond site. Box factory (c. 1865) on Dunstable Road.

E. Architecture

Residential:

Very little new construction seems to have occurred during period. Examples are limited to a few simple Greek Revival and Italianate style side-hall cottages and houses. No high-style seems to have been built.

Institutional:

Greek Revival style churches built 1835 (Baptist) and 1836 (Congregational-First Parish); Victorian Gothic style Evangelical Church built 1868 but not recorded in secondary sources. Baptist Church of 1835-36 sold to Town of Tyngsborough as town hall and school, 1864.

Commercial:

No known development.

Industrial:

See economic base.

IX. LATE INDUSTRIAL PERIOD (1870-1915)

A. Transportation Routes:

Rail and road system in place from mid-19th century. 600-foot Tyngsborough Iron Truss bridge across Merrimack built 1873-74 at site of ferry. Street railway lines extended from Lowell by early 1900s along Merrimack corridor, to Tyngsborough center along Middlesex Road from North Chelmsford, and to Tyng's Pond (Lake Mascuppig) from Dracut along Lakeview-Coburn-Frost Roads to Husdon, New Hampshire. Pedestrian suspension bridge built across Merrimack to country club on Tyng's Island, said to be longest of type and width in country (1908; 1914).

B. Population:

Population steady in 604-665 range until 1895-1900 after which steady increases began. Foreign-born population grew more rapidly than total population until it reached nearly 20% of total population in 1915; the largest foreign-born group was made up of Canadian, both English and French. No new religious societies recorded in secondary sources.

C. Settlement Location:

Scattered settlement in the vicinity of Middlesex Road and along Pawtucket Boulevard near Tyngsborough Bridge. Some development of summer cottages may have occurred (c. 1890) at Tyng's Pond (Mascuppig Lake) and along the Merrimack River north of Tyngsborough Bridge.

D. Economic Base:

Primarily agricultural, with continued success of granite quarries. Second wooden box factory begun at village center (First Pond) by John Uplon, by 1909 furnishing electricity. Wooden boxes led list of manufactured products. Others included brushes (Farwell Road site) and wool cloth and blankets (at Butterfield Mill). Two steam sawmills at Massapoag Pond.

E. Architecture

Residential:

Little variety in architecture of period; most examples were of side-hall plan (both cottages and two-story houses) with bracketed astylistic trim. Small number of suburban Queen Anne style and early 20th century eclectic houses built along the east bank of the Merrimack River, c. 1900-15 and northward from Tyngsborough Center (c. 1890). No apparent high-style present.

Institutional:

No new churches recorded; two-room Queen Anne style school house built 1890, probable centralization of schools during early 20th century. Colonial Revival style library built, 1905. Vesper Country (Boat) Club established on Tyng's Island, 1895. St. Joseph's Novitiate built c. 1900, eclectic style.

Commercial:

Several one- and two-story wood-frame store buildings at Tyngsborough Center and near Tyng's Pond (Mascuppic Lake) (c. 1910-15?), largely astylistic.

Industrial:

No significant development.

X. EARLY MODERN PERIOD (1915-1940)

A. Transportation Routes:

Trolley routes abandoned in 1920s with improvement of highways as auto-roads, notably Middlesex Road as Route 3 (now 3A) to New Hampshire. Kendall Road as Route 113 to Dunstable, and upgrading of Westford Road and Sherburne Road in 1930s. Steel truss arch bridge (1930-31) replaced 19th century span across Merrimack with local bridges over Flint Pond Brook in town center.

B. Population:

Steady growth of population throughout period, became particularly rapid after 1925. No secondary source information recorded for foreign-born population or for new religious societies. Note: It is possible that part of the population increase was due to the establishment of the Academy of Notre Dame.

C. Settlement Location:

Along the west bank of the Merrimack River south of Tyngsborough Center, along the east bank of the Merrimack River north of Tyngsborough Bridge and in the vicinity of Mascuppic Lake.

D. Economic Base:

Primarily agricultural. No further industrial development. Flint Pond box factory torn down for bridge approach, 1931.

E. Architecture

Residential:

New construction was made up almost entirely of modest bungalows and rustic cabins; no high-style is apparent.

Institutional:

Academy of Notre Dame, brick academy building in late Gothic Revival style built c. 1930-1932.

Commercial:

Same scale and trends as in preceding period, new construction was largely astylistic.



Industrial:

No development.

XI. SOURCES

- Tyngsborough Bicentennial Commission, The Tyng Book (1976).  
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"The Old Butterfield Mill," vol. 29 (1924), p. 1, 13.  
"Wiccasaukee Island: Its Suspension Footbridge..." vol. 26 (1921),  
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