

MHC Reconnaissance Survey Town Report

WALES

Report Date: 1982

Associated Regional Report: Connecticut Valley

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: 1982

COMMUNITY: WALES

I. TOPOGRAPHY

Wales terrain was characterized by rugged uplands which extended throughout the eastern portion of the Connecticut River Valley study unit. A considerable portion of these uplands stood 1000' or more in elevation. The slope of these hills moderate somewhat toward the town's geographical center. The landscape's north-south grain was reflected in the uplands and waterways. A handful of minor tributaries of the Quinnebaug River flowing down from Brimfield cut through the uplands. Several small ponds were scattered about the southern half of Wales. Limited upland marsh. The soil was basically sandy.

II. POLITICAL BOUNDARIES

Originally included within Plantation Adjoining Springfield in 1701 and established within town of Brimfield by 1714. Southern boundary at Massachusetts-Connecticut state line surveyed in 1714 from original 1642 Woodward and Saffery line. Western boundary set in 1760 with formation of Monson from Brimfield. Established as independent town of South Brimfield (including Holland) in 1762 with northern boundary at Brimfield line. Eastern boundary surveyed along County Road in 1783 with formation of Holland as independent town from South Brimfield. Name changed from South Brimfield to Wales in 1828.

III. HISTORIC OVERVIEW

Small upland town on secondary corridor between Sturbridge and Stafford, Connecticut. Located at headwaters of Quinnebaug drainage between rugged hills with suspected native site at Lake George. Settled from Brimfield during mid-18th century as South Brimfield parish with town center along extended street. Well-preserved Late Colonial burying ground at Lake George and reported Hessian cemetery near Vinica Brook. Modest development during Federal period with limited agricultural potential. Town center retains remarkable early 19th-century character as street village, including several stylish brick houses and Greek Revival meeting house (now derelict). Other period landscapes preserved on Haynes Hill and along Stafford Road. No significant growth during Industrial period but limited development in Early Modern period with summer cottages around Lake George. Present growth related to recreational land use around Brimfield State Forest and Lake George with town center intact as potential historic district, although some abandonment of notable buildings.

IV. CONTACT PERIOD (1500-1620)

A. Transportation Routes:

No native trails documented through area. However it would appear probable that a secondary focus of trail routes was centered around

Lake George and a major east-west regional trail is documented as Longmeadow Path from Monson apparently following east from Norcross Ponds to Vinica Pond along Vinica Pond to Lake George (Moulton, map p.37). Other conjectured trail routes from Lake George appear to follow course of Holland Road east and Hollow Road north to Quinnebaug River. Southern route from Lake George is probable along Union Road to South Meadow and Massapaug Pond in Connecticut.

B. Settlement Pattern:

There were no reported native sites in Holland. Native period settlement would have focused around Lake George, an area favored with a moderate amount of good agricultural land and fresh water. The site of the town's first burial ground situated on the northern edge of the lake may have also have been utilized as a Contact period burial site when considering its location on a slight rise and proximity to the lake. Additional but smaller sites may have been established on the summits of the moderately sloping uplands bordering the Lake George area.

C. Subsistence Patterns:

Potential agricultural land was situated primarily around Lake George. Fishing would have taken place in the handful of streams and ponds. Extensive uplands and marsh offered excellent habitats for wild game.

D. Observations:

As with neighboring Holland, Wales lacked sufficient agricultural land and freshwater sources to support an extensive native population. Local settlement would have focused on the fertile lowlands of Brimfield. In turn, the Wales, Holland, Brimfield area appears to have located on the periphery of a major native settlement node located to the northeast in the Brookfields. This settlement center is reputed to be the primary seat of the Quabaugs. Regionally, the Quabaugs probably were politically affiliated with the Nipmucs, the dominant native group in Central Massachusetts until the early seventeenth century.

V. PLANTATION PERIOD (1620-1675)

A. Transportation Routes:

Native trails remain as regional connectors with local focus of routes around Lake George. Longmeadow Path from Monson apparently followed along Vinica Brook to Lake George and east to Quinebaug River as Holland Road (Moulton, map p.37).

B. Population:

There were no figures for a native population. Colonial settlement did not take place until the early eighteenth century.

C. Settlement Patterns:

No reference to native period settlement.

D. Economic Base:

Assuming natives remained in the area, it is doubtful there were substantial changes in their traditional subsistence patterns.

E. Observations:

This period is a virtual blank in secondary sources dealing with the Wales area.

VI. COLONIAL PERIOD (1675-1775)

A. Transportation Routes:

Establishment of South Brimfield town center at head of Lake George created radial highway pattern from meeting house during 1730's (Hyde, Goodhue map 1877). Major roads of the period include Haynes Hill Road north to Brimfield, Reed Hill Road west to Monson, State Route 19 south to Connecticut line, with improvement of existing native trails as Union and Holland Roads south and east of town center. Other meeting house roads of the period apparently include McBride, Monson and Hitchcock Roads to western area, and Walker and Ainsworth Hill Roads from Lake George (Smith's Pond).

B. Population:

It is unclear whether a post-war native population existed within Wales. The only figures for the colonial population encompass all of South Brimfield (Wales and Holland). This district had 850 residents in 1776. The majority of Wales' first settlers came from Springfield and Brimfield. A smaller number hailed from Salem. A diversity of settlers occurred later in the period with individuals moving from eastern and southeastern Massachusetts (e.g., Roxbury, Middleboro) and Connecticut (e.g., Union, Tolland, Windham, Mansfield).

C. Settlement Patterns:

Settlement did not take place in Wales until the late 1720's despite this area's inclusion in the original 1701 grant made to several Springfield entrepreneurs. It appears that the threat of native attack and a legal dispute involving lands within Old Brimfield discouraged earlier settlement. The first reputed settlers were Anthony Needham and John Bullen who erected homes in c.1726 adjacent to Lake George, a choice quite likely based on the presence of good agricultural land, a source of fresh water and a suspected native trail. Succeeding homes were established in this locale focusing primarily along the portion of Route 19 that paralleled Lake Goerge. Additional but somewhat more dispersed settlement occurred further north along Route 19. Wales' first burial ground was established in c.1732 on a

small hill overlooking the northern shore of Lake George. Wales' first meetinghouse (c.1760) appears to have been situated adjacent to the northwestern shore of Lake George. This edifice was built in response to growing religious tensions among the residents of the District of South Brimfield. The conflict ultimately led to the district's division into east (Holland) and west (Wales) parishes in 1765. The West parish was established as the center of South Brimfield's Baptist population while the East parish served the district's Congregationalists. Secondary sources provide little idea of how the settlement fared during the Indian wars of the first half of the 18th century.

D. Economic Base:

Wales' economy was based on agriculture, most of it probably occurring adjacent to Lake George and the lower portions of the hills surrounding the lake. Little evidence of mill industry most likely due to the small number of potential mill streams. A c.1750 grist mill was erected by Shubael Dimmick on "Mill Brook". Phineas Durkee established a tannery in c.1752.

E. Observations:

Wales was situated on the eastern frontier of the Connecticut River Valley throughout most of the Colonial period. Even with the elimination of the Indian threat by the mid-eighteenth century, this settlement remained basically a rural hill town with a limited economy. The considerable number of former Connecticut natives and the community's proximity to this state suggests there were fairly extensive social and commercial ties with Connecticut. The town's continued rural nature points to the excellent likelihood of extensive portions of Wales' Colonial period settlement surviving archaeologically. The area adjacent to Lake George and the northern half of Route 19 should be regarded as especially sensitive.

F. Architecture:

Residential: Several cottages and a house of the Colonial period are known to survive in Wales. The earliest of these for which a date is given is the Nelson Cottage of c.1740, a five bay center chimney structure, but at least one house, the Munger House on Main Street, appears to be earlier still. The Munger House is a two-story, ell-plan structure with a half hip roof and center chimney. On the entrance facade, the first floor exhibits a five-bay fenestration but elsewhere, the pattern is three bays to a wall. The half hip roof, ell plan and three bay fenestration are typical of early 18th-century construction in the region and so may indicate a construction date in the 1730's. Another early residence is the Darius Rogers cottage (c.1750).

Institutional: The earliest religious society in Wales were the Baptists, organized c.1734-1736. This fact runs counter to the predominant pattern of Congregationalism as the primary civic/religious entity. A meetinghouse was not erected by the Baptists until c.1760 (or 1763). The structure, which stood 45' x 35' x 20', was never finished and was later sold to a Connecticut parish.

VII. FEDERAL PERIOD (1775-1830)

A. Transportation Routes:

Local highway system retained focus around South Brimfield town center at Lake George (Smith's Pond). Main north-south highway from Brimfield improved as Route 19 following Wales Brook from Holland Road. Stafford Turnpike located through southeast corner in 1803 (Lovering, 1915, map).

B. Population:

Wales' population remained relatively stagnant during the Federal period after Holland was taken off. In 1830, the population, 665, was only 59 residents above the figure in 1790.

C. Settlement Patterns:

Civic and economic activities remained focused around town center, extended as street village along Route 19.

D. Economic Base:

Mostly agricultural town with small saw and grist mills established, though Copeland reports that

there was some attempt at manufacturing, wagons, and occasionally carriages, farm tools, and various articles of wearing apparel, chiefly hats, being the main products.

A tannery established in the 1750's spurred the nascent boot and shoe industry and by 1837 Wales reported the second highest value of boots and shoes in the county, after Brimfield.

Probably spurred by the tariff of 1828, the Wales Woolen Mfg. Company erected a small woolen mill in 1828-29.

E. Architecture:

Residential: Approximately a dozen Federal houses are known to survive in Wales. Most of these are center chimney cottages, although a few cottages with either end or double chimneys are also known. Two-story houses are more unusual with only a few center chimney examples known. Almost all of the period houses incorporate the standard five-bay-wide facade, but half and three-quarter plan cottages are also known. In addition to these, at least one cottage on Stafford Road, dated 1813, includes a half-story attic with eyebrow windows in the cornice. Remaining period structures are simply detailed, vernacular buildings.

Institutional: In 1802, the Baptist society constructed their second meetinghouse, known as the Union House as it was used collectively by the Universalists and Congregationalists as well as by the Baptists themselves. The building as originally conceived was probably a two-story structure with a center entrance in the gable front wall. Its

present appearance dates from an 1845 remodelling. The building has always functioned for a number of purposes and apparently, the Town House was located on the first floor with the church auditorium on the second. While the Universalists had organized as early as c.1780, a Congregational faction did not organize until 1819.

VIII EARLY INDUSTRIAL PERIOD (1830-1870)

A. Transportation Routes:

Highway system remained intact from Federal period with little improvement. No railroads constructed or projected through area.

B. Population:

Wales' population, contrary to that of many of her neighbors, remained relatively stagnant. In the period after the Civil War, however, with the expansion of the woolen mills, Wales started to grow. In the five years 1865-70, the town grew by almost 20%, reaching 831 in the latter year. Of the town's 1855 population, only 3% were foreign born -- 9 from Ireland and 11 from England.

C. Settlement Patterns:

Wales town center remained as civic and economic focus developed modestly as extended street village from Lake George to base of Haynes Hill.

D. Economic Base:

Wales in the Early Industrial period became an important woolen town under the Wales Mfg. Company, and later the Shaw Mfg. Company. By 1855 the woolen mills produced almost a third of the satinet made in the county, valued at \$125,696. By 1865 the mills employed over 100 men and women and represented by far the largest industry in town. Even the manufacture of boots and shoes -- 22% of the county production in 1855 -- had dwindled to nothing by that date. Two small brick yards, a box shop, and a small soap factory were also in operation in 1865.

E. Architecture:

Residential: The Early Industrial period was one of relative activity in terms of house construction. During the period, a number of houses were constructed along Route 19 (Main Street) and the town acquired much of its present-day appearance. Sidehall plan houses and cottages were constructed in almost equal numbers to more conservative center hall structures. Houses and cottages also seem to have been built in almost equal numbers. Approximately 60 residences of the period are known to survive, most at the town center. Among these are several brick houses including the Dimmock House, the Cornelius Miller House (c.1830) and the Plympton House (1837). Of these, perhaps the finest is the Dimmock House, a sidehall Greek Revival/Italianate design with a gable light consisting of a circle enclosed in a triangle; that

detail used by Asher Benjamin in the Alexander House (1811) in Springfield, was a common motif of stylish houses of the 1830's and '40's. Other notable houses are the Souls House (1843), a temple-front late Greek Revival sidehall plan structure, and the Louisa Soule House (c.1860), a sidehall Italianate house with a shallow hip roof and double one-story wings. Builders operating in the town during the Early Industrial period were Daniel N. Green and Calvin Vinton.

Institutional: The major institutional construction of the period was the Greek Revivalization of the 1802 Baptist meetinghouse c.1845. At that time, a Doric portico and two-stage square belfry were added to the structure. In 1830, a Methodist church was organized with a meetinghouse built in 1832. Although an Adventist society was formed in 1842, no church was built.

IX. LATE INDUSTRIAL PERIOD (1870-1915)

A. Transportation Routes:

Little improvement of transportation system with local highways remained focused around Wales town center. No trolley routes constructed or projected through area.

B. Population:

With the expansion of the woolen mills, Wales reached her peak population in 1880, with 1,033 persons. From that time, the town began a rapid decline so that by 1915, with a population of 337, the town had lost 67% of its population in 35 years. Franch Canadians and Irish were the two major immigrant groups in the 1905 foreign-born population, 17% of the total.

C. Settlement Patterns:

Town center maintained as civic and economic focus with little expansion of activities.

D. Economic Base:

In 1875 350 men and women were employed in six woolen mills, making \$867,000 worth of woolen goods -- about 96% of the total value of Wales' manufactured products. The Shaw Manufacturing Company had been incorporated in 1848, taking over the assets of the Wales Mfg. Company. Several new mills were built in the 1860's and '70's. By 1891, there were still three woolen mills in operation. In 1913, the Avon and Germania mills produced woolen goods.

Residential: Residential construction continued at an active pace through the early years of the period, apparently declining after 1900. Most of the structures built were modest, cottages predominating. Late Italianate sidehall plan cottages as well as a few sidehall plan cottages with mansard roofs were built in the 1870's and '80's at the town center. In the 1890's, several substantial but conservative

double chimney, center entrance Queen Anne houses of brick were constructed at the town center. In addition to these houses, somewhat simpler and more modest frame vernacular ell-plan houses, entered through a side ell, were also constructed. After 1900, some modest resort development consisting of one-story craftsman-derived cottages occurred around Lake George.

Institutional: In contrast to residential construction, a fair amount of institutional construction occurred in the period. Important institutional buildings include St. Monica's Roman Catholic church (1901), a one-and-a-half story Colonial Revival structure with a pair of gable roof porches on the facade, and the Baptist church of Wales (1916), a small Queen Anne/Gothic Revival frame building with an offset square entrance tower. The Wales Library may have been organized in this period: it is housed in the 1841 Stephen Fisk House. Other institutional buildings include the Hollow Road School (c.1875 with 1901 addition). A two-story Italianate building, and the Hears House at the Wales Cemetery, a small one-story shed built c.1900.

Commercial: The only known commercial construction for the period is a two-story, five-bay wide store with a mansard roof and dormers, located on Main Street and built c.1875. The building once functioned as the post office.

X. EARLY MODERN PERIOD (1915-1940)

A. Transportation Routes:

Improvement of local highways as regional autoroads with primary north-south highway from Brimfield to Stafford CT as Route 19 through town center.

B. Population:

Although Wales made some temporary population gains in the '20's, the period closed in 1940 only 30 persons above the figure in 1915.

C. Settlement Pattern:

Town center continued as civic focus with modest development of summer homes around Lake George by end of period.

D. Economic Base:

Most of the town was devoted to market gardens, dairy farms, and woodlands. One small textile mill remained in operation in 1937.

E. Architecture:

Residential: Residential construction virtually ceased in the period, with the notable exception of resort construction at Lake George, which continued steadily through the 1920's. There, in several developments, a number of one-story gable or hip roof summer cottages were built. Similar construction occurred on Fiderman Road, where several one-story cobblestone cottages were built.

Institutional: The only known construction was the Baptist Church (1916); see Late Industrial period.

Commercial: The most significant commercial building of the period is the Wales Country Store (1924), a one-story, frame building with a flat roof and center entrance flanked by plate glass window bays. A few other more modest gable and flat roofed frame stores were built along Main Street in the period.

XI. SURVEY OBSERVATIONS

Wales' building inventory appears to be complete. A priority for the town is the stabilization and reuse of the 1802 Baptist meetinghouse/Town House structure on Main Street. The building has been vacant for a number of years and is in slowly decaying condition. It is a structure intimately bound to the town's social history and is architecturally one of Wales' finest buildings. Surviving Baptist churches of an early date are comparatively rare; in that respect as well the Wales church is of considerable significance. Another vacant building of note is the Wales Country Store, for which a new commercial use should be encouraged: it is a well preserved example of early 20th-century commercial architecture.

XII. SOURCES

Green, Dorothy and Elsie Davis, Wales Bicentennial Celebration, 1762, 1962 (Wales, 1962). (Not examined.)

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