

MHC Reconnaissance Survey Town Report

WELLESLEY

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.

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MHC RECONNAISSANCE SURVEY REPORT

DATE: January, 1980

COMMUNITY: Wellesley

I. TOPOGRAPHY

Located in rocky highlands within loop of Charles River and on adjacent rolling plain to west. Prominent elevations in central part of town, many areas of exposed bedrock. Rather rugged country for agriculture, except in western part of town and along Charles. Stony soil, drainage into Charles from several directions. Some streams and upland ponds. Major water system is Morses Pond/Lake Waban drainage into Charles on west side of town.

II. POLITICAL BOUNDARIES

Part of Dedham grant, 1636. Section of Watertown/Dedham line still intact as northern border. Part of Town of Dedham common lands during 17th century. Part of Town of Needham, 1711. Set off as West Precinct of Needham, 1774. Incorporated as West Precinct of Needham, 1778. Incorporated as Town of Wellesley, 1881.

III. HISTORIC OVERVIEW

Affluent suburban community on the primary western corridor of metropolitan Boston. Located on the edge of the Charles River basin traversed by local trail with possible native sited at water crossings. On periphery of Natick Praying Town with mid-17th century mill site at Lake Waban. Charles River mill sites at Lower Falls developed by early 18th century and settlement focus at Wellesley Center by mid 18th century with few surviving two story Colonial houses. Economic development in early 19th century with location of primary Boston turnpike and railroad along western axis. Good examples of period stone mills along Charles River and suburban houses around town center, with notable Greek Revival alms House (Country Club) in original condition. Location of Boston's first and second water supply conduits with several excellent late 19th century structures, including fine stone aqueduct across Waban Brook, and town pumping station of picturesque design. Continued development of area as status residential district in late 19th century with significant examples of suburban estate design by Boston architects around Wellesley campus and good Victorian civic building along commuter railroad axis. Increasing suburban expansion in early 20th century with early autoparkway link to Boston (Route 9) and numerous fine landscaped subdivisions.

IV. CONTACT PERIOD (1500-1620)

A. Transportation Routes;

Located on major western routeway to Charles and Blackstone Rivers to southwest from Boston Bay, although isolated by Charles River crossings. Important native trail documented (Fiske, 1917) from Newton to Natick with "Wading place" at Lower Falls then along Walnut and Washington Sts. around Maugus Hill (native site) to Lake Waban (native site) following lowland corridor with former loop at Linden St. Secondary paths are conjectured to link south with Charles River at Needham along Rosemary Brook and possibly around Waban and Fuller Bks. Conjectured western branch along Central St. on north side of Lake Waban.

B. Settlement Pattern:

A few documented period sites. Preferred locations-rockshelters and well drained terraces overlooking Charles or major tributary. Additional sites quite likely, especially along Morses Pond/Lake Waban/Charles River drainage. Native sites reported near Lower Falls of Charles and along creek between Glen Road and Charles River (Fiske, 1917, p.5).

C. Subsistence Pattern:

Good fishing potential, especially at falls on Charles. Morses Pond/Lake Waban probably important spawning areas. Good potential for additional food gathering and agriculture along these waterways as well.

D. Observations:

Little known about pattern of native occupation during period. Area was somewhat isolated by topography and location of Charles, however, Charles was also major artery for movement and trade. Close enough to coast for European contact material to be present.

V. FIRST SETTLEMENT PERIOD (1620-1675)

A. Transportation Routes:

Native trails remain primary axis to southwest and Indian Praying Town at Natick along Walnut and Washington Sts. with western branch along axis of Central St.

B. Population:

A few inhabitants, mostly native; located along Charles.

C. Settlement Pattern:

Some scattered native settlement along Charles. After 1650, most were related to Natick Praying Town. Some Dedham land grants during period but no settlement. Single exception was Andrew Dewing, built a "garrison house", 1656, on Charles near site of Nine Arch bridge (off Grove St., opposite Alden Estate - Fiske, 1917).

D. Economic Base:

Probably some agriculture and grazing by Natick Indians. Sawmill built by Natick Indians, 1658, on Natick Brook (Location unclear - either at outlet of Lake Waban or between Morses Pond and Lake Waban). Destroyed by whites during King Philip's War, saw blades taken to Sudbury, (Clarke, 1912, p. 390). Probably the earliest, inland sawmill in Massachusetts.

E. Observations:

Through known and claimed by colonials, too inaccessible to be utilized or settled. Primary users of area were native people from Natick. Site potential - both Dewing's "garrison house" and the Natick sawmill should be considered importance archaeological sites and high priorities for preservation if still intact.

VI. COLONIAL PERIOD (1676-1776)

A. Transportation Routes:

Primary western and southwestern axis remains from 17th century with cross links established by early 18th century to Needham along Cedar, Oak-land, Forest, Brook-Great Plain and Dover-Grove Sts to Needham and Dedham to Washington St. spine with focus upon Wellesley Ctr and link to north

A. Transportation Routes: (cont.)

along Weston Road. Second bridge across Charles River at Lower Falls established by mid 18th century with Washington Street and branch to Weston as Glen St. Cross road extended around interior hills linking Lake Waban with Rosemary Brook as Benevenue to Wellesley Ave., portions discontinued across Babson Institute in 19th century. Similar cross road around west side of Lake Waban as Pond St. by mid - 18th century.

B. Population:

Gradual growth post King Philip's War and especially during early decades of 18th century. Census data for 1765 was included as part of Needham. At least one person (Samuel Welles) believed to have established a farm/summer estate here in the 1760s (Washington St - Hurnewell Estate - Fiske, History of Wellesley, p.15)

C. Settlement:

Main axis of settlement ran along Washington St. between two local points: (1) lower Falls of Charles - Benjamin Mills tavern, 1705, and several mills (see below). Both settlers and influence from Newton and Watertown area; (2) Morses Pond/Lake Waban drainage - two undated, but pre-revolutionary taverns: Samuel Morese's, Bullard's (Washington St.) Settlers and influence from Sudbury. Natick and Sherborn. Third major source of development from Dedham via Needham - along Great Plain St. and Rosemary Brook. First school built, 1728 (Wellesley Hills). After Needham meeting house burned, 1773, West Precinct raised their own, 1774, despite objections. Some scattered native occupation continued-especially a mixed native/negro "colony" on south shore of Lake Waban.

D. Economic Base:

Primarily agricultural and grazing plus some winter lumbering. Two areas of milling activity: (1) lower Falls of Charles - Benjamin Mills, 1704 multipurpose mill - sawing, grinding, fulling; Jonathan Willard, 1704, ironworks plus a multipurpose mill (partly on Newton side), (2) Morses Pond/Lake Waban - Joseph Hawes/John Laker, after 1711, unspecified mill on Bogle (Hawes) Brook; Edward Ward, 1733-1750, unspecified mill on Natick Brook (between Morses Pond and Lake Waban).

E. Architecture:

Very little apparent remains; residential: few examples; those most likely to date from this period are central chimney two-story houses and some twin-chimney two-story houses; there is no evidence that Cape-Cod Cottages were ever built here, none are evident; one two-story house with a gable-on-hip roof exists (Pond Street) although it may have been moved to its present site. institutional, commercial, industrial: only one meetinghouse, one or two school houses (post 1728) and several small mills were built, none of which are believed to remain.

F. Observations:

An unsettled 'pocket' between larger areas of First Period settlement - Dedham to south, Newton to east, Watertown to north, Sudbury to west, - settled by the convergence of settlement from all these areas.

VII. FEDERAL PERIOD (1775-1830)

A. Transportation Routes:

Colonial highways remain in place with axis along Washington St. to Wellesley Ctr. and western road to Framingham along Central St. Boston and Worcester turnpike (Route 9) laid across highlands from Upper Falls Newton to Natick in 1810 with toll gates at Weston Road and junction with Washington St at Wellesley Hills. Secondary interior turnpike laid from Wellesley Ctr to Needham and Natick along Central St. and Wellesley Ave.

B. Population:

Slow growth likely after ca. 1800-1810, associated less with turnpike than with milling at the Lower Falls; small population of Methodists, formed church 1798, but closed soon after.

C. Settlement Locations:

Some development of the east ends of Walnut and Washington Street as part of a village (mostly in Newton) at the Lower Falls; small village formed at Wellesley Center (than West Needham) by ca 1831-36; several houses built around the junction of Route 9 and Washington Street (mostly eliminated by subsequent re-buildings of Route 9).

D. Economic Base:

Paper mills located as early as 1793 (Hoogs) at the Lower Falls, and these mills - as many as eight or ten - dominated the available water power. Supplied paper for both books and Boston newspapers. By end of period introduced new foundry machines, reportedly the first mills in the U.S. to do so (Wiswall).

E. Architecture:

As in preceding period, relatively little was built. Residential: most widespread and easily identified housetype of period was a simple Federal type with a symmetrical center entrance facade, rectangular one-room deep floor plan, and interior rear-wall chimneys, examples of this type scattered in the south-central and eastern part of the town; less common are hip-roofed houses of which two exist on Route 9 (near Natick town line-altered; near junction of Route 9 and Washington Street); a small number of 1½ story cottages also exist with symmetrical facades, rectangular plans and rear-wall chimneys. The most elaborate house of the period (MHC -Wellesley Form 1) makes use of a vernacular form and limited decorative detail. Institutional: town farm established 1828-1830, buildings associated with it (now the Wellesley Country Club) probably post-date 1830. School houses built following formation of school districts (1790s), none extant. No meetinghouse or other public buildings extant with recognition (MHC Wellesley Form 17) Commercial & Industrial : no known structures extant.

VIII. EARLY INDUSTRIAL PERIOD (1830 - 1870)

A. Transportation Routes:

Turnpikes and highways remain from early 19th century. Boston Worcester opened as early railroad (1834) from Newton (Boston) to Natick along Washington-Central Sts lowland through Wellesley Ctr. Branch railroad to Lower Falls from Newton opened 1849 (now abandoned).

B. Population:

Substantial growth of population probable, although separate statistics unavailable; probable presence of an immigrant population after ca. 1840-50, major groups were Irish & English.

C. Settlement Locations:

Continued small-scale expansion near Lower Falls on Walnut & Washington Street; small village formed at junction of Washington Street and Route 9 (named Needham North Parish until 1847, Grantville thereafter; now Wellesley Farms), village extends as far west as Forest Street; expansion of village at West Needham (re-named Wellesley Center - 1862), largest amount of new building along Washington Street near Central Street and along Cottage Street, most development in this area post-dated 1856. Influences on settlement came from several sources among which were a small number of Bostonians who built residences in Wellesley for the believed healthfulness of its climate; also influential were land speculators such as Daniel Ayer of Lowell who created large subdivisions ("Bostonville" - between Forest and Great Plain Streets, and around Kingsbury and Linden Streets), after 1853, believing suburbanization of the area was imminent, few of these subdivisions were even partially developed by 1870, although they established many of the town's present streets. A third influence was the Welles-Humnewell Family who began the development of an enormous family-owned estate on Washington Street during this period.

D. Economic Base:

Advancing paper technology sparks Reuben Ware's Machine Shop (1832; 1853 stone replacement: NR, HABS) which for remainder of century was a leading builder of paper machinery (Boulding). First Boston water supply conduit - Cochituate Aqueduct (1846-48) crossed Charles River on 3-arch stone bridge (extant).

E. Architecture: Residential: a full range of styles and scale of building is present. Major examples of architect-designed Italianate and Gothic style houses and gate lodges remain on the Humnewell Estate (Arthur Gilman and Gridley Bryant, architects). The most elaborate local levels of Greek Revival taste is displayed in two side-hall plan, temple-front houses (MHC-Wellesley Forms 53 & 33), otherwise there is little evidence of the Greek Revival style, except for a few very simple **side-hall** cottages. The largest number of houses of the period are Second Empire or Italianate in style, with examples of center-entrance and side-hall plans; the most notable clusters of these types occur near the east end of Washington Street; on Washington Street near Bird Hill Avenue, along the southern end of Cliff Road, near Rockland and Linden Streets, and south west of Grove and Central Streets; a unique (unrecorded) Italianate house with tower and observatory (?) exists at the junction of Route 9 and Kingsbury Street. Cottages of the period are main "1" plan and side-hall structures, visible in the largest numbers along Cottage Street and around Weston Road and Linden Street (although these are slightly later); possible remains of Ridge Hill Farm's many pavilions and follies, along Dover Street, although most of the farm (built 1869-80) was in Needham.

Institutional: Simple one-room schoolhouse (1858) extant (MHC - Wellesley Form 15); town farm building (1838) extant, now in use as Wellesley Country Club (Form 27) no other public buildings believed extant; Congregational Church built 1835, rebuilt as main building Dana Hall School, 1881 - extant?

Commercial: No apparent commercial structures of period extant with the exception of the former Wellesley Hills railroad station (c. 1855?) which has since been moved and converted to a house (MHC - Wellesley Survey) and the frame Boston & Worcester "mahogany" station (moved to Linden Street), whose fine decorative details are currently being covered with aluminum siding (Urann).

Industrial: Two stone mills (ca 1830-60) with ridge roofs remain in altered condition near lower Falls, otherwise no known structures extant.

IX. LATE INDUSTRIAL PERIOD (1870 -1915)

A. Transportation Routes:

Road and rail system remains from mid-19th century. Street railway routes extended from Newton to Natick through Wellesley Ctr along Washington and Central Sts. in 1890s. High speed interurban trolley line-built along Boston-Worcester turnpike (Route9) in early 1900's, emphasizing main western axis through Wellesley. Mainline railroad operated as commuter line from Boston (AMTRACK) with depots at Wellesley Ctr and Wellesley Hills from 1880's.

B. Population:

Rapid increase in population after Civil War, greatest increases between 1885-1905, followed by a decline 1905-1910 and increase 1910-1915; large increases in foreign-born population were Irish, Italian and Nova Scotian; Catholic Church formed 1881, Unitarian Society formed at Wellesley Farms, 1869-1871; Catholic mission organized at Wellesley Center, 1911; Episcopal Church formed 1894; large number of social clubs and civic associations formed including Women's Club (1890), Wellesley Club (1889), Village Improvement Societies (1905,1906) and Wellesley Country Club (1910).

C. Settlement Locations:

Preference for hilltop or hillside sites for new subdivisions; widespread middle and upper middle class suburban development at Wellesley Center southeast of Washington Street, several blocks north and south of Washington Street at Wellesley Hills and several blocks east and west of Cliff Street, also between Washington Street and Route 9 eastward toward Washburn Avenue, more modest suburban districts and areas of cottages built north of Weston Road and Linden Street and near the Lower Falls; some estates built Grove and Benvenue Streets.

D. Economic Base:

Most paper mills still active in 1870, by century's end had ceased operation. Town becomes increasingly residential. Of the major 19th century industries, only Henry Word's Paint Factory still in operation by 1900. Second water supply conduit - Sudbury Aqueduct (1876-78) crossed Waban Brook on monumental series of nine brick arches (extant). Wellesley Waterworks (1885).

E. Architecture: Residential: Wealthier districts, particularly the inner (southern) section of Wellesley Hills built up with large architect-designed houses of Queen Anne, Colonial Revival, Arts & Crafts/Tudor styles with a smaller number of Victorian Gothic style houses, particularly around Bird Hill Avenue, Longfellow Road and Route 9. More modest districts built up with late Victorian Gothic cottages and sidehall plan two-story houses built in various styles, although largely undecorated. Individually outstanding examples of Victorian Gothic, Queen Anne and Colonial Revival styles built on Humnewell Estate (Washington Street) by major Boston architects; i.e. Henry Van Brunt, Shaw & Humnewell and Sturgis & Brigham, all remain intact.

Institutional: Exceptionally large amount of building designed by Boston architects and representative of then current high style. Major buildings include Queen Anne style Town Hall/Library (Shaw & Hunnewell, arch'ts), and High School - also 4 other schoolhouses built between 1869 ad 1902; water works established (Ernest Boyden, arch't) 1885. Wellesley College campus built up after 1871 with examples of Italianate, Queen Anne, Gothic Revival, ad Collegiate (late) Gothic Revival desgined by various architects including J.A. Schweinfurth, - Ware & Van Brunt; Rotch & Tilden; Hammatt Billings, Shepley, Rutan & Coolidge; and other; most buildings remain excellently preserved, Dana Hall School established 1881, campus developed in early 20th century with Classical/Colonial Revival style buildings; Babson Institute Campus developed 1920s-50s; Academy of the Assumption founded 1893, retains brick-and stone main building and cobbled gate lodge (Gothic - ca 1900). Most churches in town date from this period and are architect designed examples of various phases of the Gothic Revival, ranging between Victorian Gothic (1870-72, demolished) to Perpendicular Gothic - 1901-02 (Wellesley Hills Congregational Society, George Newton architect).

Commercial: Some astylistic late Victorian brick blocks (2-story) and Colonial Revival style blocks (one and two-story) built on Washington Street both at Wellesley Center and at Wellesley Hills (junction of Forest Street), little evidence of any pre-1890 commercial blocks; two commuter train stations extant both granite, Romanesque Revival style - one on Washington Street near Cliff Road (altered-derelict) by Shepley, Rutan & Coolidge after HHR's death. (Van Rensselaer, p. 140).

Industrial: No significant building during period.

X.

EARLY MODERN PERIOD (1915-1940)

A. Transportation Routes:

Street railway service abandoned by 1930's with expansion of autohighway routes along former turnpike as express highway State Route 9. Original parkway style interchanges remain from 1932 at Cedar, Washington and Weston Sts. as fine examples of period.

B. Population:

Continued suburban growth, particularly rapid growth between 1920 (6,224) ad 1930 (11,439), followed by only slightly slower growth between 1930 ad 1940 (15,127); population grew to 26,071 by 1960 after which it has leveled off.

C. Settlement Locations:

Upper-middle class development of Wellesley Hills (North of Route 9) along winding roads (1920-present) and of areas along Grove & Dover Streets (1920 - present) and along Forest Street. More modest house built in eastern sections of town (vicinity of Cedar, Oakland & Hunnewell Streets), in Wellesley Falls and in vicinity of Weston Road.

D. Economic Base:

No significant industrial base within the town; continued affluence due to wealthy suburbanization.

E. Architecture: Residential: Large, well-detailed examples of Colonial Revival and neo-Medieval styles in wealthier areas; elsewhere more modest examples of Colonial Revival and particularly of Dutch Colonial Revival (ca 1915-30) in Wellesley Falls area; small numbers of bungalow along Weston Road and in eastern section of town; in general, less individual, architect-designed building than in preceeding period.

Institutional: Construction by town of several late Gothic style buildings, including Wellesley Hills Branch Library (1928-Hampton Shirer, architect), also at least one fire station (Blackall, Clapp & Whittermore, architects); additional school houses built, varying styles. Continued construction of late Gothic style buildings at Babson Institute. Proposed Channing Sanitarium (Kilham & Hopkins, architects, 1917) not built?

Commerical: Construction of a large number of one-story Classical Revival and Colonial Revival style blocks and some 2-story buildings at Wellesley Center and at Wellesley Hills. At least two unusually fine late Gothic Revival commerical buildings built on Washington Street (Wellesley Hills) prior to 1931 (Illustrated in Town of Wellesley : Semi-Centennial 1881-1931. Jordan & More Press, 1931). Some strip development along Route 9 ad along Linden Street.

Industrial: No significant new building until, prehaps, at the end of the period near Lower Falls ad Route 128.

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