

# MHC Reconnaissance Survey Town Report

## WEYMOUTH

Report Date: 1979

**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: December 1979

COMMUNITY: Weymouth

### I. TOPOGRAPHY

Located on gently rolling glacial outwash plain. Features include drumlins, eskers and kame terraces. Sandy/gravelly but fertile soil. Out crops of slate in northern section of town, of granite in the southern. Irregular but accessible coastline between two river estuaries - Weymouth Fore (Monatiquot) and Back Rivers. Two other small rivers (Mill and Old Swamp) drain interior ponds and bogs into these estuaries. Large areas of swamp and bog in upland of southern third of town.

### II. POLITICAL BOUNDARIES

Initial settlement of Wessagusset, 1622. By 1630 part of Massachusetts Bay Colony. Incorporated as Town of Weymouth, 1635. Boundaries are Mt. Wollaston line (1635) then Braintree line (1640) on west; Bare Cove or Hingham line (1636) on east; Old Colony Line (1640) to south. Note: town still retains these 17th century boundaries. Divided into two precincts, north and south, 1723.

### III. HISTORIC OVERVIEW

Favorable coastal location on main axis to interior with good access to Boston Harbor and South Shore. Important Woodland settlement area with numerous potential sites. Historically important as site of early European settlement (Wessagusett) on Boston Bay (1622) with original town boundaries intact (1636). Developed several local centers of activity along coast and interior with typical period architecture, some of early date. Industrial expansion of coastal and mill sites with craft manufacture, especially boots and shoes. Eventually tied to Boston metropolitan area by turnpikes, railroads, trolleys and highways. Dispersed settlement pattern with no dominant center. Good Colonial-Federal examples in Weymouth Landing and Weymouth Heights and Victorian in S. Weymouth.

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

#### A. Transportation Routes:

Important junction of coastal and interior trail system. Documented paths include the coastal trail (Commercial St) and its branches to Wessagusset Beach (N. Wey.). North and Sea Sts and portions of East, Green and Neck Sts. North/south interior trails to Great Pond Summer Columbian, Forest and Randolph Sts. and Middle, Pond and Thicket Sts. with a portion of the original path intact between Park and Middle Sts (WPA, 1937), with branch of the main trail to Accord Pond (Hingham) as Pleasant and Pine Sts. (Weymouth Historical Society, 1923)

#### B. Settlement Pattern:

Eleven reported sites with Woodland components - Four are specified as Late Woodland, one as Contact. Located on glacial outwash features along river estuaries and large interior ponds. Extensive occupation in areas along bay and on leeward side of islands.

#### C. Subsistence Pattern:

Seasonal hunting, fishing and gathering as well as agriculture. Concentrated occupation because of proximity of marine food resources - clam flats and fish runs. Accessible coastline made this a prime location for 16th century and early 17th century native-European trade.

D. Observations:

An area of extensive native settlement during period, due to potential for food gathering and for trade with Europeans. Site potential should be considered high. Also, probable location for temporary European fishing/trading camps of mid-16th to early 17th century.

V. FIRST SETTLEMENT PERIOD (1620 - 1675)

A. Transportation Routes:

Native trail system remains as primary network with "way to Abington" laid out in the mid 17th century as Front and Pond Sts from Weymouth Landing to S. Weymouth (WHS, 1923) and improvement of coastal highway - Commercial St from Hingham to Braintree. Suspected secondary roads of the period include Winter St from Front to Middle and Essex St from Middle to Commercial.

B. Population:

Small groups of English immigrants before 1630. Major influx 1635 - Joseph Hull and 21 families (100 people) from Weymouth, Dorset, brings population to 350. By 1640, 150 families (900 people). Population pressure relieved by emigration inland (i.e. 1643, group to Rehoboth). Subsequent population growth was gradual.

C. Settlement:

First settlement by Thomas Weston's Company, 1622 - east side of King's Cove (Adams, 1891). Failed within a year. Re-established by Sir Ferdinando Gorges' Company, fall 1623. Episcopal church built that year. First locus of settlement on "Plain" between Great Hill and head of Mill cove - called "Old Spain" (North Weymouth). Soon extended across mill cove toward King Oak Hill. Second locus around outlet of Whitman's Pond, extended NW towards King Oak Hill (East Weymouth). Contemporary descriptions by Thomas Morton (1634) and William Wood (1633). Old North Cemetery, a surviving landscape feature. Severe problems during King Phillip's War - two major raids (Feb, 1675 and March, 1676) plus several minor. Considerable property damage.

D. Economic Base:

Primarily agricultural and grazing. Crops included wheat, rye, oats, corn. Considerable dairy activity - butter and cheese produced and sent to Boston. Maverick notes that Weymouth live "like their neighbors who have commerce with Boston". Fishing also a major activity, both for local use and export. Some lumbering. Good milling potential especially at outlet of Whitman Pond. Grist and saw mill built there by William Waltham, 1640. Also tidal gristmill on Mill Cove, 1669. Products primarily for local use. Other resources included salt - produced by evaporation from 1635 (History of Weymouth p. 78) on and bog iron, used by Braintree Work, 1645. Some local shipbuilding.

E. Architecture:

Extant architecture of the settlement period is likely to be limited to central chimney Cape Cod cottages and two-story houses, although it is extremely unlikely that they retain their original appearances. The large number of dwellings built in the mid-17th century to accommodate the town's relatively large population, makes it likely that some houses in the two major areas of original settlement possess portions of settlement-period structures. The lack of a single town center in subsequent periods may have encouraged survivals from this period by dispersing pressures for development rather than focusing them on an old center, as was the case in many other communities.

F. Observations:

Located on major trail network and with ample resources, an early and successful area for development. Also a 'staging area' for movement further inland. Economic success based on providing Boston with food and wood.

VI. COLONIAL PERIOD (1676 - 1776)

A. Transportation Routes:

Road network remained intact from 17th century. Primary coast highway from Boston-Hingham along Commercial St. from Weymouth landing to East Weymouth Ctr. Main post road to Abington and Plymouth along Front and Pond Sts.

B. Population:

Slow, gradual growth. Estimate of 128 heads of family (850 people), 1678-79. Approximately 1,200 people in 1752, rising to 1,471 in 1776; no known non-English settlers.

C. Settlement:

Primary area of development was around Whitman Pond outlet (Weymouth-East Weymouth). First school built, 1681. Gradual shift towards interior during period, especially along Pleasant and Middle Streets. Mills were a factor in this: William Reed, pre-1700, sawmill - Pleasant St. and Old Swamp river; Gideon Tirrell, 1693, fulling mill and Sayle's Mill, 1700 - Middle St. and Mill River. Two new loci of settlement: 1. South Weymouth area east of Great Pond known as "Old City" after 1700 focus of settlement prior to 1720. Shift north to "Great Plain" (South Weymouth) after 1720. Church built on what is now Columbian Square, 1723. School built same year. Focal point for south precinct. 2. Weymouth Landing - shipbuilding and settlement around mouth of Smelt Brook, late 17th century. Arnold's Tavern, pre-revolutionary war.

D. Economic Base:

Continued reliance on agriculture and dairying. Fishing also remained important. Various efforts to formalize - a joint-stock fishing company established during early 1700's. Increased milling activity, especially along Mill river - primarily sawmills and gristmills. Products both for local use and export to Boston. Some attempt to exploit mineral resources - after 1700, bog iron removed from many of the Ponds. Some quarrying of slate for roofing.

Shoemaking was already a major industry in the town. By the mid 18th century,

shoemakers, working with 2-3 apprentices and 2 or more journeymen out of shops called "10-footers" produced custom work for specific customers.

#### E. Architecture:

Building types of the period include houses, barns, two meetinghouses, some schoolhouses and "ten footer workshops". Of these, only houses remain in any substantial number. The most popular local house-types were central-chimney Cape Cod cottages, followed by central-chimney houses; the largest concentrations appear to remain along Commercial Street and scattered around South Weymouth. In addition, a limited number of gambrel-roofed cottages were built, of which at least one remains (Pond Street).

#### F. Observations:

Development continued along the coastal zone with ever increasing movement inland as well. Located on main transportation routes and with good agricultural and lumber production, Weymouth served as an important supplier of raw materials to Boston and developed a diversified community.

### VII. FEDERAL PERIOD (1775 - 1830)

#### A. Transportation Routes:

Colonial network remained intact as both east-west coastal and north-south interior amplified by turnpikes (Wood 1919) of early 19th century from Braintree-Quincy (Boston) from Weymouth Landing to Hingham (Washington St) 1805. Primary link between Quincy and Hingham as turnpike (1812) through N. Weymouth as Bridge St. (Route 3A). First bridge over Fore River by Hingham and Quincy Bridge and Turnpike Co. (1812). Secondary cross links in S. Weymouth, West and Union Sts. probably in early 19th century.

#### B. Population:

After a brief levelling off of population growth (1776 - 1790), growth of Weymouth's population was continuous throughout this period with the largest increases occurring between 1810 and 1830; at the close of the period only 7 residents were noted as being foreign born; the formation of new churches began in 1810 and included 2 new congregations by 1830.

#### C. Settlement Location:

Continued development of multiple centers from original Colonial pattern in Weymouth Heights, to Weymouth Landing (Fore River) and E. Weymouth (Back River) with S. Weymouth and North Weymouth (Bridge St) emerging as distinct areas; by middle part of period Weymouth Landing had become the town's leading commercial center, aided by the opening of the Boston-Plymouth Turnpike (Washington St) in 1805.

#### D. Economic Base:

Continued expansion of mill sites with lumber and milling, shipbuilding on Fore and Back rivers. Turnpikes serve traveler's with taverns and toll houses. Shoemaking continued to be done out of "10-footers" but by the late 18th century, an increasing amount was "extra-sole" work sold in Boston by retail houses. In the early 1800's, capitalist-entrepreneurs intervened, first selling shoes directly for the shoemaker, and by 1808, setting up central shops, "putting out"

various phases of the work to local shoemakers. The central shop developed rapidly after 1820, one man in a central shop providing work for 40 domestic workers.

E. Architecture:

Abundant examples of late Georgian and Federalist houses ranging from vernacular cottages to a small number of high style examples; popular house-types remained the same as the Colonial period until ca. 1790 - 1810 when hip-roofed Federalist houses began to be built. Especially noteworthy are the dentilled mouldings, pedimented doorways, fluted pilasters, modillioned cornices and other late Georgian pattern-book details which appear on a relatively large number of houses and cottages with vicinity of Weymouth Landing, Commercial Street and Weymouth Heights. Also present are a variety of Federalist style mouldings, doorways and other details built on houses of varying types. Other building types of the period such as barns, "ten-footers" and district schools may remain, although likely to be altered in appearance and use.

F. Summary Observations:

Economic expansion of Colonial industries, with coastal location and proximity to urban Boston by turnpikes produced several settlement centers and a range of good period architecture, much of which retains excellent late Georgian decorative details.

VIII. EARLY INDUSTRIAL (1830 - 1870)

A. Transportation Routes:

Federal period road systems remain intact with railroad linkage to Boston along historic axis. Interior from Plymouth through S. Weymouth as Old Colony (1845) and coastal from Hingham through E. Weymouth and Weymouth Ctr and Weymouth Landing as South Shore (1849). Cross linkage established on Broad St between E. Weymouth and Weymouth Landing.

B. Population:

Growth was particularly rapid throughout this period reaching a peak of 2,373 new residents added between 1850 and 1860 (42% increase); total increase in population for the period was 6,173 (217% increase), of which slightly more than 1,000 were foreign-born immigrants, including nearly 1,000 Irish; 8 new religious societies were formed including a Catholic parish (1851-1859).

C. Settlement Location:

Expansion of industrial centers, especially at E. Weymouth and Weymouth Landing, with secondary growth at S. Weymouth and N. Weymouth leaving Weymouth Heights as historic area with civic functions. Weymouth Landing (E. Braintree) remained primary economic center as an "aggregate of villages" (WPA, 1937).

D. Economic Base:

Significant industrial growth in mid-19th century with a diverse economic base. Iron foundry in East Weymouth (1830's) produced nails and tacks for exploding shoe industry. Lumber yards (1840's) in Weymouth Landing major transshipment point for country. Decline in shipbuilding at Weymouth Landing for railroad. Shoemaking throughout the town in "ten-footers" supplying central shops for markets in Louisiana and California. According to Torrey (1953), the McKay machine was conceived by Edward French of South Weymouth (1858-62).

By the late 1850's the large export orders - to California, Louisiana, and elsewhere had forced consolidation of many operations under one roof. First true "factories" appear (e.g., J.S. Fogg (1857), S. Weymouth).

The commercial development of the town was worked by the establishment of 2 banks (1832 and 1833), an insurance company (1833) and a newspaper (1867), of which the banks and insurance company were located in Weymouth Landing.

E. Architecture:

Although building from this period included a wide range of types, commercial, industrial and institutional buildings have been generally heavily altered or demolished with the notable exceptions of the Fogg Factory (S. Weymouth) and a granite mill structure at East Weymouth. House types of the period range from center-entrance cottages with interior end wall chimneys to several temple-front Greek Revival style houses. In general, side-hall cottages with simple Greek Revival, Italianate Second Empire and other Victorian details form the largest number of houses extant, particularly in the vicinities of North and East Weymouth. The most ambitious houses of the period are of side-hall or center entrance plans with simple details in one of the several styles then current. In general, there is little evidence of architect-designed houses, although as early as 1846 parts of the town were being occupied as the summer residences of Bostonians (Hayward-Gazetteer) some of which may have been designed by architects.

F. Summary Observations:

Economic prosperity from industrial growth, produced an extended set of local centers with a mix of activities including shoemaking and iron foundaries.

IX. LATE INDUSTRIAL (1870 - 1915)

A. Transportation Routes:

Road and railroad systems remained intact from mid 19th century. Street railway routes expanded from Boston-Quincy to Weymouth in 1890's. Primary route between Weymouth Landing and E. Weymouth along Broad St. with branch to North Weymouth and Upper Neck beach along Middle, North, Neck and River Sts. Link to S. Weymouth from Weymouth Landing-E. Braintree via Front and Main Sts and from E. Weymouth along Pleasant St with branch to Rockland on Union St.

B. Population:

After 1870, local population grew steadily, but by smaller amounts than it had between 1840 and 1870; of the 4,959 new residents added in this period approximately 1500 were foreign born; of these, the largest numbers were from Great Britain, Nova Scotia and Italy; although Irish immigrants remained the largest foreign-born group, their total number declined after reaching a peak of 1,107 in 1885.

C. Settlement Location:

Continuation of multi-centered pattern with continued development at Weymouth Landing and E. Weymouth as well as the emergence of a new commercial district at the junction of the street railway (Broad and Middle Sts) in early 20th century. Commercial districts remain at Columbian Sq. (S. Weymouth) and

Washington Street (Weymouth Landing). Development of N. Weymouth began with building of some summer cottages and 3 hotels (1876-1888) and was carried forward by large, speculative subdivisions of land (1890's-1909), the development of which continued into the 1920's. Weymouth Heights by-passed by most development. Residential development on hill west of Washington St at Weymouth Landing.

D. Economic Base:

Limited expansion of industrial base, especailly shoe manufacturing in S. Weymouth along Main St axis, and E. Weymouth along Commercial St. Closure of early 19th firms, including iron and lumber, with modest expansion of ice cutting on Whitman's and Great Ponds in 1880's. Expansion of fertilizer and fireworks from fish-farm nitrates in late 19th century, eventually limited by abandonment of fish runs in early 20th (WPA, 1937); steep decline in value of local production and employment between 1895 and 1905, perhaps reflecting a temporary recession.

E. Architecture:

A full range of building types constructed during this period; in general, major public and commercial buildings were designed by Boston architects.

1) Domestic frame houses in a wide range of sizes and architectural styles were constructed in all of the town's villages during this period; the largest number are cottages and modest two-story houses; there is little evidence of many architect designed houses, except perhaps, in some of the subdivisions in N. Weymouth.

2) Institutional architecture of the period is represented by a large number of schoolhouses built between 1879 and 1915, designed by several different Boston architects; also, there exists a smaller number of modest churches, town library and other small public buildings.

3) Commercial architecture has been largely removed by more recent construction, although one exceptional Queen Anne style block remains at Columbian Square (S. Wey.) together with several wood-frame commercial buildings.

4) Industrial: few new complexes built; modern demolition has removed most, except for the Keen Lumber Yard (Commercial St) and some mill buildings in E. Weymouth.

F. Summary Observations:

Continued growth of industrial base and linkage to Boston metropolitan street railway system produced expansion of local centers, especially S. Weymouth. Focus of town remained fragmented around numerous small commercial nodes. Separate development of ocean-front property.

X. EARLY MODERN (1915 - 1940)

A. Transportation Routes:

Railroad and Street railway system declined with abandonment of local trolley routes in 1920's-1930's. New autohighway network for metropolitan Boston built through area along traditional routes. Coastal link to Nantasket-Hingham along former turnpike in N. Weymouth (Bridge St. Route 3A), and interior north/south route along old turnpike Main St Route 18. Primary south-shore route from Boston around S. Weymouth as Route 128-Park Ave.



B. Population:

Continued growth throughout this period as Weymouth became a commuter suburb of Boston. Especially rapid growth after World War II, with the addition of approx. 21,000 new residents between 1945 and 1960.

C. Settlement Location:

Continued fragmentation of local centers with new commercial areas along autohighway routes in S. Weymouth (Park and Main Sts.) in N. Weymouth (Bridge St) and secondary intersections of Middle and Washington Sts (Center Square) with High School and City Hall in 1930's. Suburban development along coastal highland in N. Weymouth and E. Weymouth overlooking Boston Bay continued.

D. Economic Base:

Restriction of industrial activities through general economic decline, although shoe industry remains active. Last phase of shoe factory development brought last holdouts of domestic manufacture into factory production with spread of McKay machine (1860's, 70's) and Goodyear Welt Maching (after 1875). Two or three large factories survived into the mid 20th century.

Limited shipbuilding continued to 1930's at Weymouth Landing. Suburban growth and the burgeoning electric power industry caused Boston Edison to locate (1923) on naviable coal-carrying waterway and close to suburban communities it hoped to serve. Naval airstation (1942) with blimp hanger (demolished) in S. Weymouth.

E. Architecture:

Modest architectural examples of period in residential design, historic revivals. Neo-Colonial civic examples in Town Hall of 1930's. Some concrete industrial factories of period (shoe - Main St), and good period gas stations, expecially on Main St (Route 18); principal commercial development limited to one-story structures along Bridge Street (Route 3) and Washington St. (Weymouth Landing).

F. Summary Observations:

Industrial decline offset by expansion of suburban-resort along coastal sites and auto-highway routes to south interior. Modest period examples of conservative design, except in industrial architecture.

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