

# MHC Reconnaissance Survey Town Report

## WELLFLEET

Report Date: 1984

Associated Regional Report: Cape Cod and the Islands

**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: 1984

COMMUNITY: Wellfleet

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### I. TOPOGRAPHY

The town of Wellfleet is located on outer Cape Cod, midway between Chatham and Provincetown. The town is approximately 95 miles from Boston by land and 65 miles by water. It is bounded by Eastham to the south, Truro to the north, the Atlantic Ocean to the east and Cape Cod Bay and Wellfleet Harbor to the west. Topographically, the town is divided by its surficial geological deposits. In the south, in the area of Marconi Beach and the Eastham town line, relatively flat table lands exist representing Eastham plain deposits. Elevations average 50 feet or less in this area, although some heights as high as 105 feet are present in dunes along the Atlantic shoreline. Aside from the flat lands noted above, most of the township is covered by a range of hills which continue to Provincetown. Geological deposits in these areas include the Older Wellfleet plain deposits in the northern portion of town and around the harbor, and the Younger Wellfleet plain deposits in the vicinity of Cahoon and Le Count Hollow. Elevations in these areas frequently reach heights of 100 feet or more. Other areas such as valleys, tidal streams, and kettlehole depressions and ponds approach sea level elevations. Dune, beach, and marsh deposits exist in coastal areas and in valleys.

Soils in the town are generally thin sandy loams and characteristic of the surficial deposits noted above. All three plain deposits are characterized by mostly gravelly fine to very coarse sands. Soils are not particularly well suited for grains.

Wellfleet was once covered with a heavy growth of oak and pine timber which was cut primarily for shipbuilding. Today, much of the town is covered with young pine (scrub) and shrub vegetation. Some barren areas are also present, particularly in coastal locations.

Drainage in the town is primarily from east to west through several brooks, rivers, creeks, and ponds. Major brooks, rivers and creeks include the Herring River, Blackfish Creek, Duck Creek, and Bound Brook. Several deep kettlehole ponds also exist, including Herring, Gull, Higgins, Long, Great ponds, and others. The sandy nature of the soils indicates considerable subsurface drainage exists also.

Several islands and large bodies of salt marsh also exist in Wellfleet along its western coastline. Major islands include Bound Brook, Griffon and Lieutenant's islands. Extensive salt marshes are present around these islands and in the area of Wellfleet Harbor.

Wellfleet Harbor, or Bay, in general has traditionally provided anchorage for vessels of large classes. Along the shoreline,

these harbor areas have been important. The northerly part of Wellfleet Bay was known as River Harbor or the Outer Harbor. Duck Creek Harbor is near the center of town and Blackfish Creek in the southern part of the bay.

## II. POLITICAL BOUNDARIES

Northern boundary with Truro was established with creation of town of Nauset (later Eastham) in 1646. Billingsgate parish of Eastham was formed in 1722, and the southern boundary with Eastham was created with its establishment as the district of Wellfleet in 1763. Wellfleet was incorporated as a town in 1775.

## III. HISTORIC OVERVIEW

Wellfleet is a coastal resort community located midway along the outer arm of Cape Cod, at Wellfleet Harbor on Cape Cod Bay. Numerous native sites are likely in the estuarine environment of the Wellfleet Harbor area. A local, late 17th century native settlement is reputed to have persisted at "Punomksuit." While early 17th century European exploration was likely, permanent colonial settlement occurred only after ca. 1660, as the northern area of the town of Eastham. The fishing, whaling, and oystering potential of the Wellfleet Harbor area soon attracted colonial settlement to harbor islands and tidal creek areas, with secondary interior agricultural settlement. By 1722, population in what had come to be known as Billingsgate was sufficient for separation as a parish from Eastham. Billingsgate Parish meetinghouse was located at Chequesset Neck in 1722, then relocated east to Duck Creek in 1735. Silting in of small outer harbors led to the centralization of the growing commercial mackerel and oyster industries at Duck Creek in the early 19th century, and a flourishing village developed near the Duck Creek wharves. Summer Methodist Camp Meetings were held locally in the early 19th century until their removal to Eastham. A small secondary center developed at South Wellfleet near Blackfish Creek. By 1850, Wellfleet Village had become an important regional commercial center, and local civic and religious activities relocated here. Rail connections (1870) brought continued commercial consolidation, but with the local decline of fishing in the late 19th century came the end of the town's economic boom. Summer estate and resort hotel development soon followed, however, notably along Holbrook Avenue and Mayo Beach, even as local population continued to decline through the early 20th century. Transatlantic radio transmission facilities were located south of LeCount Hollow in 1903. By the 1920s, oystering had ceased to be a significant part of the town's economy. Tourism has continued to stimulate local development to the present, although National Park Service land acquisitions east of Route 6 have prevented new construction on the Atlantic shore. Wellfleet Center has become a regional art and craft gallery and studio focus, as well as a commercial center oriented toward summer residents, with continued significant alteration and reuse of the remaining 19th century building fabric. Wellfleet Harbor has become an active pleasure-boating center. Components of outlying and dispersed

19th century settlements survive along the Route 6 corridor to the north and at South Wellfleet at Paine Hollow.

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

##### A. Transportation Routes

Specific locations of Contact period Native American trails are unknown for Wellfleet during this period. However, several trails are suggested on the lines of earlier site locations, the distribution of environmental resources, and sightings of natives and explorations by early European travelers. At least two major trails were probably present. One trail likely existed along the Atlantic coast; a continuation of a trail that probably passed through similar areas in Truro and Eastham. This trail likely followed the high bluffs overlooking the Atlantic shoreline. This trail may have been important in connecting farmed areas and for sighting drift whales and ocean-going shales. A second trail also likely existed along the Cape Cod Bay and Wellfleet Harbor shoreline. This trail likely skirted the periphery of various coastal wetlands in the area. Secondary trails likely extended from the major trail(s) leading to coastal shellfishing areas and settlements. Secondary trails also probably extended to interior ponds as well.

##### B. Population

Little direct evidence exists from which accurate population estimates can be made regarding native populations in the Outer Cape area. Furthermore, while individual accounts often subdivide Outer Cape native populations into subgroups such as Nauset, Pamet, Monomoyicks, etc., the term Nauset Indian generally applies throughout the Cape area. Mooney (1928:4) lists 1,200 Nauset natives before the 1617-19 epidemics. This number was reduced to ca. 500 by 1621 (Mooney and Thomas 1910:40-41). As indicated above, these statistics probably refer to the entire native population of the Outer Cape area. Furthermore, it is doubtful whether or not those estimates are entirely accurate.

The present limits of the town of Wellfleet may have and likely did support a significant native population during this period. However, little evidence is present on which concrete demographic estimates can be made. It is also possible that major native populations in the area were to the north in the Pamet area of Truro. Nevertheless, native populations in the present-day Wellfleet area may not have exceeded 100 to 200 individuals.

A European population was not present in Wellfleet during this period.

##### C. Settlement Pattern

European settlements did not exist in Wellfleet during this period. However, some contact between Europeans and Native Americans in the Wellfleet area undoubtedly took place as European explorers and fishermen frequented the area long before

settlement. For example, Gosnold may have visited the area as early as 1602, followed by Champlain in 1605. Later, in 1620, Captain Standish and other Mayflower explorers explored the Wellfleet area, particularly in the vicinity of Billingsgate Point.

Native Americans had settled the Wellfleet area for some time prior to European contact. Known Late Woodland period sites are present in the town, particularly in the Wellfleet Harbor area. Late Woodland period artifact listings with general town provenience also indicate the extent to which this area was settled during that period. All known sites and artifact listings generally exhibit site locational preferences for various coastal estuarine areas. This locational preference is particularly true for shell midden sites which are common and many probably of Late Woodland origin.

Actual Contact period village sites are unknown for the Wellfleet area. However, actual artifactual evidence is present at some sites, indicating natives were present during this period. For example, brass and copper have been found at some sites, possibly indicating Contact period components at these sites. Burial and/or ossuary sites may also be present with Contact period components as well. However, to this date no evidence is available to identify Contact period habitation type sites.

Native place names are not particularly common in the Wellfleet area today. However, those names that are present may be indicative of areas once important to Wellfleet's native inhabitants. Those names include Pamet Point Road, Chequesset Neck and Chequesset Neck Road, King Philip Road and Indian's Neck.

Thus, known Late Woodland and Contact period sites, artifact listings with general town provenience, and possibly native place names all provide evidence of native settlement in the Wellfleet area during the Contact period. Those sources of evidence also provide corroboration of regional and Cape settlement preferences for coastal areas such as estuaries, tidal rivers, and ponds.

#### D. Subsistence Pattern

Since European settlements were not present in the Wellfleet area during this period, European subsistence probably followed that of the native inhabitants in the area. While some food was undoubtedly carried with early explorers, traders, and fishermen, the bulk of their subsistence was probably secured through hunting, fishing, the gathering of wild plants and shellfish and the trade, stealing, or purchase of agricultural products (e.g., corn or turkey wheat) from the local Native Americans.

Native American subsistence during the Contact period in the Wellfleet area was probably similar to that practiced in other Cape areas. The combined use of wild and domesticate food resources formed the basis of the subsistence system. It is unknown at present exactly when agriculture or, more specifically, horticulture, was introduced to the natives in the Cape Cod area. However, in the Contact period sufficient quantities of corn,

beans, and squash were being purchased for storage and at times for sale or trade to English settlers. Shellfishing, fishing, and hunting were also important subsistence pursuits. In Wellfleet, numerous tidal areas contain mixed beds of virtually every type of shellfish available in the Cape area. In particular, oysters have been historically important and plentiful in the Wellfleet Harbor area. Both fresh and salt water species of fish are also available in the Wellfleet area. Wellfleet's several fresh water ponds contain numerous species of fish for consumption. In particular, alewives are present in the Herring River and numerous ponds and may have had a wider distribution in the past. Wellfleet Bay, Cape Cod Bay, and the Atlantic Ocean also provided a wide variety of fish for utilization. Sea mammals, such as whales and seals, were also available.

The wetlands and forested areas of Wellfleet provided numerous species of mammals for hunting. Wolves were present as well as deer and various furbearers. Various species of ducks were also present in fresh water wetlands and coastal estuarine areas.

## V. PLANTATION PERIOD (1620-1675)

### A. Transportation Routes

Contact period native trails likely continued to be used by both natives and Europeans in the area. Limited European settlement did not occur until late in the Plantation period. At that time native trails were probably upgraded to cartpaths with the addition of some new paths in the new settlement areas around Wellfleet Harbor. Some development of the Old King's Highway may have occurred late in this period. However, extensive development and use of this route did not occur until the Colonial period.

### B. Population

Native American populations in the Outer Cape and Wellfleet area were in constant decline during this period. Some natives likely remained in the area. However, no known settlement or demographic figures are available. Most Outer Cape natives were settling in the Orleans area to the south and possibly some individuals were to the north, in Truro.

While some transient Europeans may have been present earlier, Wellfleet's European population did not begin until late in the Plantation period after ca. 1660. From that point until 1675 at the close of the period, population grew slowly, probably limited to a few families at the most.

### C. Settlement Pattern

Wellfleet was included as the Northern Parish or Precinct of Eastham (commonly called Billingsgate) from 1723 to 1763. Throughout and before that time period the Wellfleet area was dealt with as a part of Eastham. Some settlement may have occurred in the Wellfleet area during this period. However, little, if any, documentation exists to support this settlement.

Some Europeans were probably present on a transient or temporary basis. Wellfleet Harbor afforded excellent anchorage for vessels of most classes (tonnage). Thus, various explorers and fishermen likely anchored in the harbor and explored local shore areas at different times. The oyster fishery in Wellfleet Harbor may also have attracted Europeans at an early date.

Natives were still likely present in Wellfleet during the Plantation period for a variety of reasons. First and foremost is the fact that a native settlement or reservation was present in the area after 1674 (Conkey, Buissevain and Goddard 1978:178). This settlement was probably a continuation of earlier native settlements. Another factor indicating the potential for native settlements in Wellfleet during this period is the town's coastal resource potential. Wellfleet Harbor was rich in oysters, various species of fish and drift whales, all important components of the local natives' subsistence base. Accordingly, it is unlikely an area as environmentally rich as Wellfleet Harbor would go unsettled. However, little physical evidence in terms of cultural materials is present to support settlement expectations.

#### D. Economic Base

Wellfleet was part of Eastham during this period and was not a locus of European settlement. Some Europeans may have been present in the township. However, if present, they were probably concerned primarily with fishing and the oyster fishery and may have been present seasonally only. Otherwise, both Europeans and any natives in the area probably hunted, fished, and gathered wild plants and shellfish in a similar manner as done in earlier periods. Natives in the area probably continued to grow corn as well as exploit wild food resources. Wellfleet Harbor was also likely a locus for the drift whale fishing as well for both Europeans living in the Eastham settlement and local natives.

### VI. COLONIAL PERIOD (1675-1775)

#### A. Transportation Routes

While some native trails likely continued in use during this period, Europeans were rapidly constructing new roadways and stage routes. The north/south King's Highway was the major route through the area connecting Eastham with Provincetown. This road remained the major stage route until its importance was diminished by the County Road, which was laid out from the village of Wellfleet to Truro. During the first half of the 17th century, one road existed through the center of town which was followed by another road in ca. 1763 in the area of Main Street through the center of the village. This road was made possible when a bridge was built over Duck Creek at that time. The road originated at the King's Highway a little eastward of Duck Creek and was extended in 1764. Other local secondary roads also existed to the various necks and harbors along the coast.

## B. Population

Little evidence exists indicating that natives were still living in the present-day Wellfleet area during this period. If they were, they were likely living as isolated residents and not as a group. Natives may also have been living in the area temporarily as even through they sold the lands to the Europeans, they still retained fishing rights in the area.

While Wellfleet's European population grew slowly during the 17th century, population growth grew rapidly in the 18th century. Wellfleet's first census of 1765 listed 917 individuals in the township, followed by 1,235 individuals in 1776. Wellfleet's population growth rates indicated by these figures may have exceeded those of both present-day Orleans and Eastham during the same time period.

## C. Settlement Pattern

While some limited European settlement may have occurred in Wellfleet during the Plantation period, actual settlement of town areas did not occur until late in the 17th century during the Colonial period. At that time, settlement began in several areas in the western portion of the township, focusing on coastal areas such as Billingsgate Island, Great Island, Bound Brook Island and Duck Creek Harbor. Maritime interests apparently influenced the locations of first settlement. Duck Creek, while an area of dense settlement, was not the town center until the 19th century. Wellfleet became the northern Precinct or Parish of Eastham in 1723. In 1763 Wellfleet was set off as a district and later that year incorporated. Two Colonial period meetinghouses were built. The first was built in 1712 on Chequesset Neck (Deyo 1890:803). The second was built in 1734 at the head of Duck Creek.

Little information is present regarding native settlements in Wellfleet during the Colonial period. However, sources are available indicating they were present. Conkey, Boissevain, and Goddard (1978:178) in the Handbook of North American Indians indicate a native town or reservation named Punonakanit was present in the Wellfleet area after 1674. However, little information beyond the fact that the settlement was there is available. It appears reasonable to assume natives were still present in Wellfleet during this period. However, whether or not they were present in a significant social or political group is debatable. Natives may also have been present as crew aboard fishing and whaling vessels as this was a common practice at the time.

## D. Economic Base

Extensive settlement and land use of the present Wellfleet area by Europeans began during the Colonial period. Next to Provincetown, Wellfleet became the town most influenced by the fisheries and coasting industries on the Outer Cape. The cod, herring, and shale and shellfish fisheries were originated early during the Colonial period, possibly extending commercial ventures originated



during the Plantation period. Numerous harbor areas quickly developed, including three at the mouth of Herring River, Duck Creek Harbor, and the overall bay itself for vessels of larger classes. Shipbuilding also probably began early during the Colonial period. However, shipbuilding was intermittent and tied to fluctuations in the fishing industry. In addition, early shipbuilding was probably limited to small, locally owned fishing and coasting vessels of which little documentation exists. Most larger vessels were not built until after the Revolutionary War period. The Duck Creek area became important for shipbuilding. The Duck Creek area and the head of Wellfleet Bay was also the early business center of Wellfleet. Wellfleet's maritime development was halted in 1776 when the town was blockaded by the British with the fisheries being crippled by British privateers.

While Wellfleet's maritime development has received considerable focus in the town's economic development, farming was also important. Colonial farming in Wellfleet followed trends established in the Cape towns. Corn, wheat, rye, vegetables, and English hay were all probably grown. Farm animals such as cattle, sheep, pigs, horses, and oxen were also probably present.

Grist mills were also present in Wellfleet during the Colonial period, their presence testifying to the importance of grain agriculture in the area. In 1765 a wind-powered gristmill was erected on Mill Hill. Other windmills existed on Pamet Point and near the King's Highway in the area of the present village. A waterpowered mill may have been present on Mill Creek.

Little information is present describing the economic subsistence lives of natives still remaining in Wellfleet during this period. However, any natives remaining were likely continuing subsistence patterns established during the Contact, Plantation, or earlier periods. Natives may also have been present in the town as crew members of various fishing or whaling vessels.

#### E. Architecture

**Residential:** Few buildings reliably dated to this period are known for the town, primarily due to missing deed records. Story-and-a-half, double-pile, interior chimney, gable roofed houses are presumed to have been the norm based on later survivals as well as regional patterns; both four- and five-bay types are known. From late in the period a single 2 1/2-story, double-pile, double interior chimney, five bays in width, survives (1774).

**Institutional:** The town's first church was built on Chequesset Neck in 1722; 20 feet square in plan, its appearance is unknown. A new church was built on the present location in 1735-40; unknown appearance and size; enlargement by 18 feet in 1765 made it square and added a square tower with octagonal, domed belfry and paired entry at the gable end.

1922, and at Bound Brook Island from 1823 to 1825. Billingsgate Light, the third lighthouse on Cape Cod, was established in 1822.

#### D. Economic Base

Both cod and whale fisheries revived after the Revolution, although the latter did not last out the period. The five whaling vessels in 1802 doubled as cod boats when whales were scarce. Of the twenty other Wellfleet vessels, four carried Wellfleet oysters to market (Boston, Salem, Newburyport, and Portland), four sought the cod and mackerel off Newfoundland, and the remaining twelve engaged in shore fishing around the Cape, which they then ran into Boston.

In the early 1800s, the island harbors sheltered many cod and mackerel boats, and small fishing communities developed on several. However, as the shifting sands began to fill in these harbors, many of the fishermen began to shift their boats to the deeper water of Duck Creek. This probably occurred in the 1820s, though the first large wharves did not appear until the following decade. (Stetson, pp. 30-31) The growth of Wellfleet's fishing industry in this period is testified to by the erection at the entrance to Wellfleet Harbor of Billingsgate Light (1822), the third light on Cape Cod.

Wellfleet's famous Billingsgate oyster, killed off in an epidemic in 1775, was revived using oysters imported from Virginia rivers, planted for a season in Wellfleet beds, and then shipped to Boston.

In 1795, there were five windmills and one tidemill for grinding grain. After the War of 1812, the town grew enormously. Several manufacturing schemes were proposed in this period, but seem to have come to naught: the Wellfleet Woolen & Cotton Factory, incorporated in 1815, apparently never went beyond incorporation papers; one of its chief incorporators, Josiah Whitman, six years later incorporated the Salt Manufacturing Company of Billingsgate Island "for the purpose of erecting saltworks, flakes for curing fish, and such other improvements as may be found expedient." This company also folded without taking any action.

#### E. Architecture

Residential: By far the most common house type during this period was the story-and-a-half, double pile, gable roofed, interior chimney form. Twice as many are known to be five bays in length (ca. 20) as four bays (ca. 10). About half as many employ extended stud height widening the distance between window head and cornice line; ca. 10 in the five-bay form and ca. 5 in the four-bay form. As in most of the region's towns, ornament was minimal, though some houses employed fanlit entries.

A small number of large 2 1/2-story houses also survive from this period. Like the story-and-a-half form most employ interior chimney and both five- and four-bay examples survive. A single example each of double interior chimneys and end chimneys with

## VII. FEDERAL PERIOD (1775-1830)

### A. Transportation Routes

The primary route through town remained the old, north/south, King's Highway through the end of the 18th century. By period's end, the route north of South Wellfleet was shifted west through Wellfleet Center, and west of Perch Pond to a new Herring River crossing. An alternate road to Truro Center was established along Pamet Point Road. Secondary local roads were extended to the bay and ocean shores. Packet service to Boston was active from 1800 to 1812, and was renewed after the war.

### B. Population

Wellfleet's growth in the Federal period mirrored Truro's. Both towns experienced their only boom period in the decades 1829-40. But whereas Truro's greatest growth was in the second decade, Wellfleet's was in the earlier. Between 1820 and 1830, the town grew at an average rate of 57.4 persons per year -- a rate that the town would not know again until after World War II. By 1830, Wellfleet's population stood at 2046.

The town participated in the Barnstable Convention during the Revolution; opposed the Constitution, 1807 embargo, and War of 1812; participated in blockage running and trade with British. In 1796 formed the Adams Lodge of Masons. In 1807 added grammar to primary schools. Methodists visited early and formed a class in 1802; part of Harwich circuit 1807; became circuit with Truro in 1811. Camp meetings held in South Truro in 1819-23 and at Bound Brook two years longer.

### C. Settlement Pattern

The 18th century meetinghouse site was retained, and by period's end a linear village had developed to the west along Duck Creek, focus for fishing and maritime activities based in Wellfleet Harbor. Outside this area, settlement was dispersed, oriented to the bay shore and the north/south County Road. Outlying island settlement continued at Bound Brook Island, Griffith's Island, and Billingsgate Island.

The meetinghouse south of Duck Creek was enlarged in 1806, and replaced in 1821. A Methodist meetinghouse was located to the north at a hilltop site in 1816. This was enlarged in 1829. By period's end, village growth extended west of the meetinghouse along the County Road-Main Street, including a ca. 1798 Masonic Hall. Residences also clustered north along Briar Lane. After 1800, salt works were concentrated along the shore at Duck Creek, as well as at Herring River and Blackfish Creek. Small settlement concentrations developed in the northwest at Bound Brook Island along the old Duck Harbor Road, and on the southeast side of Griffiths island near Herring River. A smaller cluster developed at the bay side wharf at Paine Hollow south of Indian Neck. Methodist camp meetings were held at South Wellfleet from 1819 to

gable roofs; and hip roof with center chimney and double interior chimney are known for this size house.

**Institutional:** The Congregational Church was expanded in 1806; a new church was built in 1829; the appearance of this third church is unknown. It was rebuilt in 1850; this large church is gable front in form with a large entry porch with center entry and four paired pillasters supporting a full pediment; a square tower sits at the entry end of the gable and partially over the porch, the second tier is pedimented and carries a three-faced clock; its hexagonal open cupola replaces a steeple blown down in 1870; it had a support of eight columns.

The Methodists built their first church in 1816-17, 40 x 30 feet in size, of unknown appearance; it was enlarged in 1829. A photo of a Humane Society Hut shows a simple gable-roofed structure with side entry and center windows in the first story and under the gable.

The town built a town house, 40 x 50 feet, in 1830. Its appearance is unknown, used until 1869 when it was sold for use as a fish warehouse. A poor house of the same year is of unknown appearance.

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

##### A. Transportation Routes

Shipping facilities continued to be improved through the period. A wharf was built at Black Rock in 1831. An important harbor developed on Duck Creek at Wellfleet Center, where wharves (Commercial, Enterprise) were built in the 1830s. Central Wharf was built in 1863, and Mercantile Wharf was added in 1870. The Cape Cod Railway extended service to Wellfleet Center in 1870, and the causeway built across the mouth of Duck Creek blocked any further access to the upstream wharves at Wellfleet Center.

##### B. Population

Wellfleet continued to grow until 1850, when the population reached 2411, a figure still unsurpassed. Almost all of this growth, however, occurred in the 1830s. After 1850, Wellfleet began a steady decline which was not significantly reversed until after World War II. By 1870, the town reported 2135 residents.

Wellfleet had no significant foreign-born population -- the largest number (23 in 1855) being from "British America" (Nova Scotia?). Unlike Truro, the town never had a significant Portuguese population.

Expansion of South Wellfleet, so Congregational and Methodists formed societies there early in the period, but both declined in the 1850s. Expansion continued among the Methodists and Congregationalists at the harbor also, and new large churches were built by each. In 1865 the town purchased all its area

schoolhouses and reorganized the system to include five primary, two grammar, and one high school.

### C. Settlement Pattern

Development of Wellfleet Center accelerated through the mid 19th century with the growth of the fishing, oyster-raising, and shipping industries which focused at wharf and packing facilities concentrated along the west bank of Duck Creek. Commercial Street west of the Duck Creek wharves developed a local and regional business focus, while a new civic/religious center was established to the north on Main Street. Meanwhile, outlying settlements declined after the 1830s, with strong secondary centers remaining only at South Wellfleet and Billingsgate Island.

After 1830, a town house was located along the County Road (Route 6) opposite the Congregational church and cemetery. At the same time a poor farm was located to the north. The town house was sold and removed in 1869. Period economic activity focused to the west of the old meetinghouse center. Harding Wharf (1830) was built on the west side of Duck Creek. With the opening of Commercial Wharf (1835) to the south at Mayo Beach, the Commercial Street business corridor was established south from Main Street. Subsequent period wharf construction included Enterprise Wharf (1837) on the east side of Duck Creek, Central Wharf (1863) just west of Commercial Wharf, and Mercantile Wharf (1870) west of the Mayo Beach lighthouse (1839). Stores were added on Main Street, but the primary concentration of business activity was the north end of Commercial Street where banks, insurance companies, shipfitting industries, merchants' stores and residences, and the office of the deputy customs collector were all built. By 1850, an apartment block for sailors' families was located here. Other new residential development extended along East Commercial Street north of Duck Creek, on Main Street, and north on Briar Lane. In 1843, the new Methodist church was relocated south to the village on Main Street west of School Street. After 1844, the Universalists met nearby in the old Masonic Hall. In 1850, the Congregational society relocated to a new Main Street church just east of School Street. In 1866 the Universalists located next to this in Union Hall. New schoolhouses were built as a result of population growth, but the ca. 1860 high school was located north of the village near the Methodist and Oakdale (1858) cemeteries.

A secondary settlement focus developed early in the period at South Wellfleet, where a wharf was built on the south side of Blackfish Creek. In 1833, the South Congregational Church was built near the County Road, and the next year a Methodist church was located just to the south. The Congregational church was subsequently (ca. 1870) moved to Wellfleet Center to become the town hall. The settlement at Billingsgate Island at the mouth of Wellfleet Harbor persisted, with thirty houses, a school, and store by mid-century. In 1857, a new lighthouse was built here. Elsewhere, some dispersed cottage clusters developed along the County Road north of the village near Perch Pond, and in the south near Fresh Brook.

#### D. Economic Base

As the Government did in Truro's heyday at Snow's Beach, the Government in 1839 erected a light at the head of Wellfleet Bay, known as Mayo's Beach Light. By 1845, gazetteer-author Hayward wrote that Wellfleet was "one of the most thriving towns in the state." Sixty vessels made up the mackerel fleet -- more than anywhere else in the study unit, and second only to Gloucester. On the boats, 480 men were employed, also the largest number in the unit. As early as 1837, there were three establishments reported for the inspection and packing of mackerel, much of which was sent salted to southern and western markets.

As Duck Creek became the principal harbor, the great wharves began to appear, testimony to the success of the mackerel business. The River Wharf Company constructed one of the first "prior to 1840... with packing houses and fitting-out store." Other investor groups built (among others) Commercial Wharf (1835), Enterprise Wharf (prior to 1837), Central Wharf (1863), and the last, Mercantile Wharf (1870).

In connection with the revival of the fishing industry, some shipbuilding was also undertaken. Henry Rogers built eight vessels in the years 1848-53.

Between 1830 and 1870, Wellfleet also maintained a "virtual monopoly on oystering in New England," the WPA Guide reported (p. 504). Thousands of bushels were annually imported by Wellfleet vessels from rivers of Virginia, planted in Wellfleet beds, and later marketed in Boston. (Statistical figures for this oyster prominence are not available before 1875; in the latter year, there is no evidence of it.) One oysterman to survive in contemporary literature is Henry David Thoreau's host, John Newcomb, who lived not far from Newcomb Pond.

#### E. Architecture

Residential: The construction of story-and-a-half, double-pile, gable roofed, interior chimney forms continued into the early years of the period. Most common was the five-bay form, with extended stud height; smaller numbers are known for the four-bay form, and at least one three-bay form survives. These remain simple in exterior detail, with some examples of Greek Revival door surrounds.

Early in the period, the gable front forms were adopted and during this period of rapid growth these became the most common form in the town. Story-and-a-half, three-bay, double-pile, interior chimney types were by far the most numerous. Approximately 25 survive in this basic form and another 25 with a perpendicular wing attached to the side. Also numerous were the 2 1/2-story variations of this form: ca. 25 examples have perpendicular side ells, ca. 10 have not. About five examples survive of 1 1/2-story but four-bay wide examples of the gable front double-pile form. One example survives of a five-bay gable front double pile 2 1/2-story house.

Nearly 90% of these have ornament in the Greek Revival mode, wide cornice boards, and door surrounds. In only about 10% of these houses bargeboards or brackets and door hoods are used as ornament; the Higgins House is an example of the Gothic variation. Occasionally, the entry is into the perpendicular ell; an elaborate example of this form is the Simeon Atwood House (ca. 1855) where the gable front block is ornamented by three roundheaded windows on the first floor and a round window in the gable. Here there is greater variety in the gable window arrangements than in other areas. In addition to the standard paired windows in the 1 1/2 story type, there are occasional examples of small square windows on either side, similar to the side elevation of the earlier gable roofed form. Not unrelated in form are the town's mansard roof houses with side entries and three bays; most are two stories in height (ca. 6) and ca. 2 three-story examples are known.

A small number of 2 1/2-story houses retained the gable roof, double interior, center entry form. In the two Greek Revival examples, there are three bays with cornice boards, pillasters, and molded door surrounds. Italianate examples include three-bay and five-bay examples; one includes a two-bay pedimented projecting center portion with entry into its side; another includes a belevedere.

The town is unusual in the construction of a small number of multifamily houses at this time. Now known as the Bradford Apartments, the largest of these is four units within a 2 1/2-story gable roofed structure with ornamental pillasters, cornice and door surround; each unit is three bays in width with a side entry. Two units are paired with adjacent entries. A smaller, two-unit example also survives.

**Institutional:** With the expansion of South Wellfleet, both Congregationalists and Methodists constructed meetinghouses. The first (1833) was later moved and became the town house, which burned in 1960. It was a two-story, gable roofed structure with a square tower and open ogee roofed belfry and paired entries at the gable end; the present building is a reconstruction. The house of the Methodists is unknown in appearance (1834), and was taken down during the 1850s.

The Methodists at the harbor rebuilt their meetinghouse in 1843. It was 67 x 57 feet in size, gable front in form with a large pedimented entry porch supporting a square tower; the cupola including an open arcade. It was raised higher on its basement and remodelled in 1863.

A photo reveals a small schoolhouse of board and batten finish with its entry the only opening in its gable end and two windows on each side. Two larger examples are 2 1/2 stories in height with a bracketed cornice, center entry and a window on either side in the gable end. One survives at Pond Hill, used by the South Wellfleet Neighborhood Association.

Toward period's end, the town built a high school, an early surviving example. It is 2 1/2 stories in height with hooded entries divided by a central window, three in the second story, single lanat in the gable; side elevation shows a central bank of three windows and two single at either end; each floor is marked by a contrasting frame belt course and ornamental shingles in the gable.

Commercial: With the expansion of the harbor village during the early years of the period, stores began to congregate there. Most were 1 1/2-story, gable front structures with center entries and large windows on either side; some have little surviving ornament.

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

### A. Transportation Routes

With the arrival of rail service came the demise of the packet service to Boston, and the last boat left Mercantile Wharf in 1871.

Rail service on the Cape Cod Branch of the Old Colony Railraod was extended north from Wellfleet Center in 1873 through Truro to Provincetown. Commercial Wharf south of Wellfleet Center at the head of Wellfleet Harbor continued as the major local shipping point.

### B. Population

Wellfleet's population continued to decline -- from 2135 in 1870 to less than half that number, 936, in 1915. Most of the town's foreign-born residents were Canadian, the largest single group being from Nova Scotia.

### C. Settlement Pattern

Significant expansion of the Wellfleet Center settlement ended with the decline of the local fishing industry after the 1870s, but by 1900, summer resort development had been initiated. The Commercial Street business district consolidated in the area north of the railroad depot, and a new Masonic Hall (1877) was built at the head of Commercial Street at the Bank Street intersection. Changes occurred in the Main Street civic focus, as the Congregational church was remodelled in 1873, the high school was moved to an adjacent site in 1889, and the Methodist Church was replaced after burning in 1891. Local Catholics initially worshipped after 1891 in a converted schoolhouse east of the Village, but a growing congregation led to the building of Our Lady of Lourdes Church on Main Street in 1912.

Summer resort activity was initiated by the establishment of Lorenzo Dow Baker's five-acre summer estate, "Belvernion," west of Commercial Street on Baker Avenue in the 1870s. Baker subsequently built the Chequessett Inn on Mercantile Wharf in 1885, and promoted the Wellfleet Yacht Club. Village high-income resort and hotel development concentrated along Holbrook Avenue west of Commercial Street. Outside the village, a hotel was



located at Indian Neck on the bay, and in 1914, Camp Chequesset, a nautical camp for girls, was opened east of Duck Creek.

Period development on the Atlantic Coast remained sparse, but included two significant additions: the location of government Life Saving Station facilities at Cahoon Hollow in 1872, and the construction of Marconi's radio towers on bluffs south of Le Count Hollow in 1903.

#### D. Economic Base

In 1875, Wellfleet still retained the second largest mackerel fleet (after Provincetown) in the study unit with 50 vessels returning with nearly 36,000 barrels of fish. As late as 1883, when the Mercantile Wharf was enlarged, this business was still growing. By 1905, however, the larger size of vessel made popular by the shipyards of the Civil War, made Wellfleet a less than satisfactory harbor. The mackerel catch that year was so small as not to have even been recorded.

The coming of the railroad to Wellfleet was a mixed blessing: while it brought and popularized the tourist industry and provided rail shipping for Wellfleet mackerel and oysters, it also constructed a dike across the mouth of Duck Creek, sealing off the upper reaches of the creek to all but the smallest vessels. Where today is marsh and tidal flats, deep-draft vessels once berthed.

The oyster business continued to thrive, however, sometimes running as high as 200,000 bushels annually. However, by the turn of the century, the competition of Chesapeake Bay oysters was severely hurting the local industry. In part to resist the decline, L.D. Baker introduced the first gasoline-powered oysterboat, the Cultivator, in 1902.

The town made a strenuous effort to recapture some lost employment with land-based manufacturing. In 1887 the town voted to subsidize for five years a shoe factory, though the company lasted only a few months in Wellfleet. A pants factory took over the building in 1889. One of the largest firms in town was the oil works begun in 1873 to manufacture watch oil from the blackfish and other species. Small carriage and iron work shops were also initiated in this period.

The most significant event in this period was the establishment of the Marconi station in 1903 -- the installing of the first high-powered radio-transmission equipment capable of sending and receiving transatlantic messages. The station, however, was in operation for only 14 years, its work being divided up in 1917 between the government station at Truro and RCA's commercial wireless station at Chatham.

Very little coasting trade was carried on. In 1865, Wellfleet had only five vessels (the county as a whole reported 313). However, one of the most famous coastal voyages was that of Lorenzo Dow Baker (1840-1908) who in 1870 made a voyage to the tropics with a cargo of mining equipment. His return trip with a cargo of bananas

became the start of the Boston Fruit Company (1885), and United Fruit in 1899. A pioneer in the Jamaican tourist trade, Baker built an ultra-fashionable hotel, the Chequesset Inn, thus playing a substantial role in making Wellfleet a popular summer resort town.

#### E. Architecture

**Residential:** With the decline in the fishing and population, few new dwellings were constructed in the town. Two large Queen Anne houses survive, 2 1/2 stories in height with corner towers and porches. One has a main block with gable roof, the other a block of gable front form. A large Colonial Revival house was constructed for Isaiah Young in 1890; it is six bays in length, with entry in the end bay, 2 1/2 stories in height with a gable roof and bracketed cornice.

An undated photo in Stetson (1963) illustrates a row of summer cottages resembling in form those best known in conjunction with campgrounds. Story-and-a-half in height, high pitched roof, gable front with center entry into three-bay facade with a single center window in the gable, they employ front and side porches with very plain supports and little ornament. Their location and survival are unknown.

**Institutional:** After their church burned in 1891 the Methodists rapidly rebuilt. The primary block consists of two large cross-gable segments, each ornamented with large lancet arches with interlacing mullions; a square entry tower rises from the corner of these intersecting sections with large corner pinnacles and spire. The town's first Catholic church was a modified schoolhouse, gable front, center entry with extant Greek Revival elements, modified by stained glass windows (ca. 1900). In 1912 Our Lady of Lourdes was built in a Classical Revival style; it is a small structure, stuccoed, with center entry with roundheaded doorway into a pilastered and pedimented porch at the gable end. The windows are roundheaded and a small belfry sits on the ridge at the entry end.

The Cahoon's Hollow Life Saving Station is known from a photograph. It was 1 1/2 stories with a gable roof at one end and a modified hip roof at the other that rises to a square observation area; there are double doors for lifeboats at the storage end, and a single window and entry at the gable end for residents.

The town's depots were frame with stick ornament; at Wellfleet the structure was two stories with a hip roof and wide overhang; at South Wellfleet a smaller structure of a single story and gable roof was built; these are not known to survive.

Of the several meeting halls that once were built in the town, only the Masonic Hall survives; it is a two-story, mansard structure, three bays wide with a center entry tower.

Commercial: Hotels from this period are not known to survive. Wellfleet Hotel was a three-story mansard with center entry and tower; Hollbrook House a simple long gable roof structure of 2 1/2 stories with front porch; Indian Neck Mansion Hotel was a large gable block with cross gambrel ells at either end, a large octagonal tower, and multiple porches; the Chequesset Inn was long and wide, 2 1/2 stories, gable roofed, with multiple dormers.

Retail structures continued to be built in the gable front forms in small numbers.

The Marconi Station (1903) was a low, single-story structure dominated by its hip roof with wide overhang forming a full wraparound porch.

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

### A. Transportation Routes

By the mid-1920s, a new, U.S. Route 6, automobile corridor was established through town. The highway was laid out on a new route west of the rail corridor from the Eastham border to South Wellfleet, then continued along the old County Road through Wellfleet Center and Truro. By period's end, a local connector east was improved to Cahoon Hollow.

### B. Population

The first inroads into the town's declining population were made by the growth of the town's summer residents. In 1925, the population had reached 786 persons, its nadir. As the automobile made travel to and from the Cape more popular, summer residents became year-round residents. In the early years of the Depression, 1930-35, the town expanded at a greater rate (25 persons per year) than at any time since the 1830s.

### C. Settlement Pattern

Little development occurred during the period. Resort development focused on Chequesset Neck Road, where the Chequesset Country Club was located in 1931. Cottage clusters developed on Lieutenant Island on the bay side, and at Le Count Hollow (Wellfleet by the Sea) on the Atlantic shore. Serious erosion of Billingsgate Island began in 1915 and rapidly accelerated, necessitating abandonment of the once thriving settlement. By 1935 all that remained was a tidal mud-flat.

### D. Economic Base

Wellfleet's oyster harvests declined sharply in this period. In 1915, Wellfleet was second only to Barnstable (Cotuit?) in the value of oysters harvested (\$158,874). Between 1916 and 1926, the number of oysters harvested fell from 16,000 to 1800 barrels. Part of the decline was due to the removal of the empty shells for fertilizer, as well as to the oysterman's habit of leaving no large bivalves on the ground to spawn. (Tarbell, 178-9)

The tourist industry in this period became the town's principal economic sustenance.

### E. Architecture

Residential: Still few new homes were built during this period. The year-round population remained focused in the harbor village. Summer residents purchased older outlying houses. Others built single-pile, gable roofed cottages in the new beachfront clusters on the bay. Small numbers of larger houses survive, including the two-story, gambrel roof form of five bays with center entry and shed dormers from the ridge.

Institutional: The only known structure built was the Chequessett Country Club (1931), a seven-bay, 1 1/2-story, center chimney form resembling an expanded Cape Cod house.

## XI. SURVEY OBSERVATIONS

Recent activity on this survey has resulted in reasonably complete coverage of the town's resources.

## XII. SOURCES

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