

# MHC Reconnaissance Survey Town Report

## WENHAM

Report Date: 1986

**Reconnaissance Survey Town Reports**, produced for MHC's Statewide Reconnaissance Survey between 1979 and 1987, introduce the historical development of each of the Commonwealth's municipalities. Each report begins with an historic overview, a description of topography, and political boundaries. For the purposes of the survey, the historic period has been subdivided into seven periods: Contact (1500–1620), Plantation (1620–1675), Colonial (1675–1775), Federal (1775–1830), Early Industrial (1830–1870), Late Industrial (1870–1915), and Early Modern (1915–1940/55). Each report concludes with survey observations that evaluate the town's existing historic properties inventory and highlight significant historic buildings, settlement patterns, and present threats to these resources. A bibliography lists key secondary resources.

Town reports are designed for use together with a series of town maps that demarcate settlement patterns, transportation corridors and industrial sites for each historic period. These maps are in the form of color-coded, polyester overlays to the USGS topographic base map for each town on file and available for consultation at MHC. For further information on the organization and preparation of town reports, readers should contact MHC.

Users should keep in mind that these reports are now two decades or more old. The information they contain, including assessments of existing knowledge, planning recommendations, understanding of local development, and bibliographic references all date to the time they were written. In some cases, information on certain topics was not completed. No attempt has been made to update this information.

Electronic text was not available for digital capture, and as a result most of the reports have been scanned as PDF files. While all have been processed with optical character recognition, there will inevitably be some character recognition errors.

The activity that is the subject of the MHC Reconnaissance Survey Town Report has been financed in part with Federal funds from the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior. However, the contents and opinions do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the Department of the Interior. This program receives Federal financial assistance for identification and protection of historic properties. Under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, and the Age Discrimination Act of 1975, as amended, the U.S. Department of the Interior prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, national origin, disability or age in its federally assisted programs. If you believe you have been discriminated against in any program, activity or facility as described above, or if you desire further information please write to: Office of Equal Opportunity, National Park Service, 1849 C Street, N.W., Washington, D.C., 20240.



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## MHC RECONNAISSANCE SURVEY REPORT

Date: April 1986

Community: Wenham

### I. HISTORIC OVERVIEW

Wenham is an agricultural town of low-lying terrain in central Essex County. Native sites are probable in the vicinities of Wenham Swamp and Wenham Lake. Principal transportation axes were in place by mid-seventeenth century: Bay Road (Route 1A) to Beverly and Topsfield Road. First European settlement ca. 1635 in Wenham Lake area, and first meetinghouse by 1641. Incorporated by 1643, the town's population was essentially stable until 1730. Dispersed agricultural settlement characterized the Colonial period community, with limited congregation of activities and population in the meetinghouse vicinity. Economic mainstays were agriculture and husbandry.

In the early 19th century a period of growth began. The 18th century core at Cherry and Larch Row attracted limited institutional building and modest residential construction. Elite dwellings were drawn to 1A axis. Drastic change accompanied the mid-19th century arrival of the eastern Railroad. The leather industry was established, a period of major institutional building commenced in the Common and Route 1A vicinity, and commercial activities began to cluster along the 1A corridor. Agriculture remained the town's mainstay, supplemented by shoe manufactory and icecutting.

During the Late Industrial decades, Wenham's economic efflorescence faded. With the opening of streetcar connections from Beverly (to the south) up 1A to Hamilton (Wenham's northern neighbor) by 1887, the town's commercial and manufacturing sectors found themselves unable to compete with those in the adjacent towns. Wenham's evolution into a primarily residential community began. Shoe manufacturers moved to Lynn or elsewhere, commerce declined, and agricultural efforts directed from grains and meats to the dairy products and market vegetables were needed in the adjacent urban communities. Commuting patterns began at this time, increasing numbers of Wenham residents traveling to adjacent towns for employment opportunities. Residential construction escalated along the still-prestigious Route 1A corridor, with scattered and more modest building along the town's rural routes.

Stability from the turn of the century ensued until the 1940s, when the impending construction of Route 128 spurred residential building throughout the town. Modest, low-slung dwellings encircled the historic core at Cherry Street near 1A, and spread throughout the rural town, occupying much of its earlier agricultural acreage. Route 1A's historic fabric suffered intrusion of automobile-related commercial activities, and continues to lie at greatest risk.

## II. POLITICAL BOUNDARIES

In 1639, land was granted to the inhabitants of Salem plantation to establish Salem Village, now Wenham. In 1643, Wenham was formally incorporated as an independent town. In 1679 the bounds between Wenham and Beverly were established, and in 1905, those between Wenham and Hamilton.

## III. TOPOGRAPHY

The town of Wenham is located in the central part of Essex County, Massachusetts. It lies at north latitude 42 degrees 36" and west longitude 70 degrees 52". The town is bounded on the north by Hamilton, the east by Manchester, the south by Beverly and the west by Danvers and Topsfield. It is approximately 6 & 1/2 miles in length and ranges from 1/2 mile to 2 & 1/4 miles in width. Physiographically the town lies within the New England Seaboard Lowland, a relatively smooth coastal strip of land with some hills usually below the 400 and 500 foot contours. Locally, coastal Essex County contains more hilly country than other Seaboard Lowland areas. In Wenham, the general surface is level with several low and swampy areas. Elevations are generally 100 feet or less with some hills exceeding 100 to 150 feet. Lord's Hill at 173 feet is the highest in the town.

Bedrock deposits in the Wenham area are characterized by igneous formations throughout the town. Quincy granite is the most dominant type present. Some formations of Beverly syenite and Salem gabbro-diorite (diorite and gabbro-diorite) may be present along the town's western boundary.

Soils in the Wenham area represent a mixture of types formed through glacial outwash, organic deposits, alluvial and urban development. Soils of the Merrimac-Hinckley-Urban land association are the most common group found mainly in the central portion of town. These soils are found in deep deposits in nearly level to steep areas. They are loamy and sandy soils formed in outwash deposits and in areas where soils have been altered by urban development. Soils of the Chatfield-Hollis-Rock outcrop association are found in the eastern portion of town. These soils occur in deep and shallow deposits in gently sloping to steep areas. They are generally well drained loamy soils formed in glacial till containing acres of exposed bedrock. Soils belonging to the Paxton-Montauk-Urban land association are found in the extreme western and southwestern portions of Wenham. They occur in deep deposits and nearly level to steep areas. They are well drained loamy soils formed in glacial till and areas where natural soils have been altered by urban development. Soils of the Freetown-Fluvaguents association are found in the northwestern portion of town. They occur in deep and nearly level deposits. They are generally very poorly drained loamy and mucky soils found in organic deposits and recent alluvium.

Major drainage in Wenham is through Wenham Swamp which eventually drains into the Ipswich River (approximately 1500 acres) in the northwestern portion of town and Wenham Lake (over 200 acres) in the southern portion of town. The Miles River drains southerly through the central portion of town. Smaller ponds, 30 acres or less, include Cedar Pond, Muddy Pond, Pleasant Pond and Coy's Pond. Several other swamps, ponds, and creeks are also present.

The original forest cover in Wenham included a heady growth of pine mixed with all species of oak, chestnut, poplar, maple, birch and some other hardwoods and conifers. Manchester woods, an original extensive forest was located at the east end of town. Secondary growth patterns cover most of the town today. These patterns are primarily characterized by second growth oak and chestnut in uplands as well as white pine, birch, cedar and juniper.

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

##### A. Transportation Routes

Native American transportation routes in the Wenham area likely emphasized water travel along rivers, brooks and the margins of major wetlands such as Wenham Swamp or Wenham Lake. Conjecture trails may have also been present in the vicinity of Topsfield Road and the Main Street (Route 1A)/Arbor Street areas. The latter route may have provided a land trail to accompany water travel at the Miles River. These trails would have provided inland transportation corridors between the Salem area to the south and Ipswich /Topsfield/Essex area to the north.

##### B. Population

Wenham was inhabited by members of the Pawtucket group which extended from the Saugus/Salem area north to the York area of Maine. Locally, this group is commonly referred to as the Agawam Indians who may have been a subtribe of the Massachusetts but seemed to be under the leadership of the Penacook. Gookin (1674) lists ca. 3,000 men belonging to the Penacook group, as many as 12,000 natives, probably exaggerated. The Native American population in the Wenham area may have numbered in the vicinity of 100 or more individuals during much of this period. Following a series of epidemics in the early 17th century, fewer than 25 individuals, if any, likely remained.

##### C. Subsistence Pattern

Native Americans in the Wenham area subsisted on a variety of seasonally determined activities including hunting, fishing, the collecting of wild plants, possibly shellfish and horticulture. Hunting was a major activity focusing on larger mammals such as deer and smaller fur bearers. Sea mammals such as seals and drift whales may have been hunted to the south in the Beverly Harbor areas. Upland game birds and ducks were available in and around

freshwater wetlands and riverine acres. Ponds, streams and rivers afforded a variety of freshwater fish. Smelt and alewives may have been available in the Miles River. Several species of terrestrial as well as fresh water plants in the Wenham area also provided a valuable food resource. Nearby shellfish beds in the Beverly area presently contain several species of shellfish which may have been available during the Contact period. Domesticated plants such as corn, beans, pumpkins, squash and tobacco were important. The locations of native fields are currently unknown, however, they were likely located along the shores of the Miles River, Wenham Swamp, Wenham Lake or other important wetlands.

#### D. Settlement Patterns

Several Woodland but no Contact period sites are known for the Wenham area. However, environmental variables, latter 17th century documentary sources and the somewhat high density of Woodland period sites indicate sites of this period should be present. For example, both the Wenham Swamp and Wenham Lake are regionally important inland wetlands for this area of Essex County and may have been good site locations. Both shores of the Miles River may have also been important settlement areas. Known Contact period sites are present to the southeast in Manchester and to the north in Ipswich. In addition to habitation and village type sites, special purpose sites such as fishing sites, shell middens, and burials were also probably present. These sites may have been located along the periphery of wetlands such as ponds, rivers, swamps and streams.

### V. PLANTATION PERIOD (1620-1675)

#### A. Transportation Routes

Indian trails likely continued in use in the Wenham area throughout most of the Plantation period. Water travel may have also been present in the vicinity of Wenham Lake, Alewife Brook and the Miles River. European land transportation in Wenham probably began in the mid to late 1630's as Indian trails were upgraded to horsepaths and cartways leading to early farm grants and grazing acres. A trail also probably existed southerly in the vicinity of Rt. 1A to Beverly Harbor where an early ferry existed linking that side of the harbor with the Salem settlement. Route 1A, also known as the Bay or County Road and Main Street, was laid out by ca. 1644-45 linking Salem and Ipswich. The road to Manchester was also laid out shortly after 1640. Larch Row was laid out at this time connecting the Manchester road with the County Road. A roadway to Topsfield existed during this period from the town center and the Main Street area along Cherry Street to the Route 97 areas. Several unnamed ways likely connected scattered farms with the County, Manchester and Topsfield Roads.

## B. Population

Wenham was probably settled by Europeans before 1635, but little is known about this early population. At incorporation in 1693 there were about 150 inhabitants. Between 1642 and 1647, 64 males settled in the Wenham area. Allowing for deaths and outmigration, approximately 200 individuals may have resided in Wenham by 1675. Wenham's early inhabitants were all of English decent probably migrating from the Great Wenham and Little Parishes near Ipswich in Suffolk County, England. Congregationalism characterized religious worship in Wenham during this period. Hugh Peters is said to have preached the first religious sermon in Wenham in 1642 but the church was not organized until 1644. In 1656 Reverend Fisk and a majority of the Wenham church removed to Chelmsford. Over the next few years, remaining members may have acted together as a congregation though the church was reported to be in disarray until 1663 when it was reorganized.

## C. Settlement Pattern

Several settlers prior to 1640 may have purchased land independantly from the Indians. However, the title for all Wenham lands did not pass from the natives to colonials until 1700.

Wenham was first settled by Europeans shortly before 1635 in the area of Wenham Lake. During this early period, several large grants of 100 to 200 acres were given to individuals who were then residents of Salem; some of the early grantees lived on their land, others did not. Official settlement occurred in 1639 when the legislature passed an act for the development of a village near the Miles River. Prior to 1642 over 2,000 acres were granted in the Wenham area to about 20 families, in grants of 150 to 200 acres, while several others were in the vicinity of 20 to 80 acres. A small meetinghouse was built in 1641 but few residents were living near that location. In 1642, two residents each granted 10 acres on both sides of the meetinghouse to encourage new settlers to come to the town and to stimulate concentrated village growth in the center of town. This land was divided into two acre lots and given to new settlers providing they build homes for themselves and their families. To further ensure new settlement, the town of Salem also offered grants in the range of five to 10 acres each around the Great Pond.

In 1643 Enon was incorporated, the first town to be separated from the mother town of Salem. Large tracts of land remained within the town that were not immediately divided among individual owners, but held in common and known as commonlands. In total, the Wenham commons totaled 4,000 acres in ca. 1643-44. One land tract of 600 acres was located in the eastern portion of town extending from Grapevine Bridge, as it was then called to the Manchester line. Two other substantial tracts included that part of the Great Swamp lying in Wenham and an area next to Lord's Hill. Smaller tracts existed throughout the town. Ownership of these lands belonged to decendants of the first settlers and

derived their rights through inheritance, purchase, or were voted rights by the town. The town also had the right to grant commonlands to individuals for services rendered to the town or to pay town debts. The management of common lands was the source of considerable debate in the town. Most of these lands were used for cattle grazing and wood cutting for personal use. As early as 1669 votes were introduced in the town to divide all common lands, but these were usually defeated. By 1675 several townspeople who originally had meager holdings increased their total acreage to hundreds of acres through the purchase and division of common lands, and some residents eventually had holdings of over 500 acres.

Wenham's first meetinghouse was built in 1641 near the center of town at or near the location of later meetinghouses. In 1663 a new meetinghouse was built in the area of the square near the Soldiers Monument. A 17th century training field was also present where the later town house was built. The first burial yard in Wenham was present before 1642 probably near the meetinghouse. The Dodges Row Cemetery in Beverly, part of which lies in Wenham was also reported to be in use since the mid-17th century.

#### D. Economic Base

As Colonial settlers established themselves in the Wenham area, hunting and gathering wild foods were important to their subsistence. However, the combined use of agriculture and husbandry were clearly the most important aspects in the economic lives of Wenham's first settlers. Indian corn, wheat, barley and rye were the most important food crops; fruit and vegetables were also grown. Shortly after settlement, the production of vegetable fibers from hemp and flax were also important farm products. Spinning and weaving of these fibers was probably an important cottage industry at this time. English hay may have been grown by 1675. Cattle, horses, sheep and swine were the most important animals on local farms, as were Oxen and fowl. Even though water power was not very extensive in Wenham, industry was important at an early date. At least, blacksmithing was present by 1670. Town records make no mention of mills before 1653 though some probably existed. The John Dodge mill is reported to be the first mill in the town reportedly built at the site of a saw mill. Richard Dodge may have had an early cider mill. Before 1653 the Hawes mill was built on a brook flowing from Great Pond (Wenham Lake). Peat cutting from the western side of Valley Road was important for both house construction and fuel at an early date. Bog iron was also mine during this period.

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

#### A. Transportation Routes

Native trails had been upgraded to horsepaths and cartways by this time or had become overgrown. The Route 1A corridor, part of the Bay Road system between Ipswich and Salem, continued to develop as

the major route through the town. Locally this road was known as Main Street, the main focus of Wenham's settlement. Easterly transportation continued to focus on Larch Row to the Manchester Road. The Topsfield Road was the main route out of town to the west. Numerous unnamed ways linked farms, common lands and mills.

#### B. Population

Wenham's population increased gradually through the late 17th and early 18th century. After 1730 it remained stationary for 100 years or more. The town's population is said to have been three times larger in 1720 as in 1673. Between 1675 and 1699, 23 new settlers are reported in the Wenham area. In 1733, 114 men paid a poll tax in the town. By 1750, only 106 men are reported paying poll taxes representing a decrease in the town's population. In 1765, Wenham's population contained 564 individuals or 1.3% of the Essex County total; at that time 95 families resided in 72 homes - the ratio of 1.32 families per house. From 1765 to 1775 the town's population rose by 13.12% to 638 individuals representing 1.25% of the Essex County total. In 1765 five Indians and 28 blacks lived in Wenham. Wenham's First Church, Congregational was the only organized church in the town throughout the Colonial period. In 1714 residents of Ipswich Hamlet who were attending worship in Wenham withdrew and formed a church of their own.

#### C. Settlement Pattern

In 1705 all commonlands were divided equally among the town's proprietors. A total of 63 persons held 71 shares in the town's common lands. Land was divided into lots of equal proportion, sectioned off and roads laid out to lots. Commoners were then grouped into companies of eight members into which the lands were divided. Smaller lots of land were sold to pay the cost of the land division. The final division of common lands occurred in 1715 when the Great Swamp and lands in the east end of town were divided. Colonial period settlement continued to concentrate along in the Route 1A/Main Street area particularly between Cherry Street and Larch Row. A meetinghouse, training field, burial yard, homes and taverns were located in this area (1688, 1754). Settlement in the remainder of the town was characterized by dispersed farmsteads. Wenham's first schoolhouse was established in 1700-02. In 1739 the town's first district schoolhouse was erected in the western part of town. The first actual mention of a cemetery in Wenham was in 1681, probably the same burial yard in use from initial settlement on or near the original meetinghouse, Rev. Fisk's farm. Other burial yards in use during this period included the probate Fairfield Cemetery in the western part of town and the Douglas Row cemetery, part in Beverly, part in Wenham.

#### D. Economic Base

Agriculture and husbandry continued to characterize most aspects of Wenham's economic base throughout the Colonial period. Grains remained the main focus of most agricultural production with corn



as the chief crop. Husbandry also continued in importance although as common lands were divided its importance decreased in favor of farming. At least two new blacksmiths were located in Wenham during this period. In 1686 the town's first gristmill was built followed by the Josiah Dodge corn mill near the forge on the Miles River in 1713. Three Colonial period sawmills were also erected. The John Dodge sawmill was built in 1682. In 1691 the Porter sawmill was also built near Lord's Hill. The third sawmill was built in 1700 near where John Leach then resided. One malt mill was probably built in 1699 on a brook near the Ensign Porter house. In 1708 Daniel MacClatlin was granted common land where he dammed a brook for a tannery. The Gott tannery was built later in ca. 1725.

#### E. Architecture

**Residential:** The town's best documented first period houses are the Thomas Fiske (formerly Claflin-Richards, ca. 1698) and the Goldsmith-Pickering (ca. 1700), both employing plank construction. The former was originally a single room on each story with an entry porch and rear ell, with other additions bring it to its present form in 1723 and by 1768; it has been restored. The latter's original form measures 40 by 20 feet of two stories on the south and one on the north; it was later brought to a full two stories, and ells added to east and west. The town's inventory claims that seven other houses included portions dating to the 17th century but later expanded. Only a small number of houses in the town survive in the familiar 2 & 1/2 story, center chimney, symmetrical side gable form. About four houses are known that employ double interior chimneys associated with Georgian planning considerations; both gable and gambrel roof forms are used. A single pile, rear wall house is said to date to this period.

**Institutional:** The town's first meetinghouse was constructed ca. 1641; it was soon replaced (1663) by a meetinghouse measuring 24 feet square with 12 foot studs; a third house may have been built, with a turret, in 1688; repairs were made in 1714. A new meetinghouse was built between 1748 and 1754, measuring 52 by 42 feet, with 20 foot studs, with galleries and a steeple; this steeple was removed in 1759, replaced soon after with one measuring 12 feet square. A schoolhouse of unknown appearance was constructed in 1739.

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

#### A. Transportation Routes

Wenham's transportation network was nearly complete by period's end. Its major arteries were the old Ipswich turnpike (present Route 1A), linking Boston and Salem via Wenham and Newburyport to Portsmouth, and Topsfield Road, connecting Beverly with Lawrence. The town's first public transportation came with the arrival of the Portsmouth and Boston Stage Company. Because it followed the

Ipswich Turnpike, taverns were constantly active within the town. By 1838, eight to twelve stages passed daily through Wenham.

#### B. Population

During this period, the town's population fell by 4% from 638 in 1776 to 611 in 1830, reaching its lowest point, 476, in 1800. In 1830 only the town of Middletown was smaller (within the region). The town suffered small pox epidemics during the 1770's and sent 137 men to fight in the Revolution. In 1810 some townsmen attempted, but failed, to establish an academy. The Congregational society suffered internal divisions early in the century, and later a revival in 1826. Baptists in the town, initially converted by a town teacher, attended in Danversport, and in Beverly, before a society was formed in 1826. Three school districts operated in the town.

#### C. Settlement Pattern

Experiencing sluggish growth early in the period, after 1812 prosperity returned, manufactories flourished and commerce was revived. Near the 18th century core on the Old Post Road (Route 1A) at Cherry and Larch Row, a post office was opened in 1809, and a Baptist meetinghouse erected in 1826. The town's leather industry was just beginning, still located in the outbuildings of individual dwellings. A mill site was located at the Miles river, but such enterprises never multiplied within the town.

Residential building was perhaps at its highest during the period, although compared to other Essex towns, it remained modest in pace. Elite dwellings were attracted to route 1A itself, the vicinity of the meetinghouse the most desired location for building. Modest homes were erected on adjacent Cherry Street and Larch Row, and an outlying pocket of dwellings emerging at the intersection of Larch and Dodge Row, where a meetinghouse was erected. On the whole, homes were principally scattered, along the town's rural roadways.

#### D. Economic Base

Wenham was a small agricultural town in which the vast majority of inhabitants were employed on the farm or in a few trades that served the needs of farmers. The percentage of people employed in agriculture rose to 69% by the beginning of the 19th century. In 1791, 247 acres (6.7%) of the 3650 total farm acres were under tillage, an average percentage for Essex County. 25% of the land was devoted to hay and 42.7% to pasturage. Horses, oxen, swine, steers and cows, and perhaps sheep grazed on this land. Another 25% of the land was wooded or otherwise unimproved.

There were very few artisans in Wenham. The percentage employed in various crafts declined from 18% in the last quarter of the 18th century to 5% in the first quarter of the 19th century. In all there were nine kinds of artisans, including shoemakers,

bricklayers, coopers, joiners, masons, housewrights and millers. The town had a gristmill and a sawmill. Inhabitants relied on neighboring Beverly to meet their needs for market goods. While there was some economic inequality in Wenham it was minor compared to a commercial town like Beverly. In 1790, 20% of Wenham's taxpayers controlled 50 -60% of real property and 59% of personal property; in Beverly, by contrast, the equivalent percentages were 70% and 89%.

#### E. Architecture

Residential: Only a small number of houses are dated to this period, consistent with the substantial population loss suffered at the turn of the century. Double chimney forms were used; building presumably focused on the expansion of smaller, existing homes as in the Goldsmith-Pickering house. An exceptional brick, 2 & 1/2 story house with end wall chimneys and a half round entry dates to 1826.

Institutional: The First Parish church's steeple was blown down, and replaced by a lower one in 1815. The newly formed Baptist Society built a meetinghouse in 1826, measuring 51 x 38 feet with a tower and steeple. The appearance of town schoolhouses is unknown.

Industrial: Shoe and other artisans shops may have been erected during the period.

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

#### A. Transportation Routes

Existing roads continued in use and were improved. New to the period were Arbor Street running north from the central village. Stage travel reached its greatest volume in 1838 when 17 stages ran through the town daily. In 1838, however, steamcars began to run through the central town over the eastern Railroad, completed as far east as Ipswich that year. The town's railroad stations were two: the Wenham depot was located just over the town line in Hamilton, and the north Beverly station, in Beverly near the Wenham line. With the arrival of rail service, stage travel was rapidly discontinued. In 1853, the Newburyport and Wakefield branch of the Boston and Maine Railroad was opened through the western town. The nearest station was at the Putnamville Flag station in Danvers.

#### B. Population

The town dramatically reversed its Federal period trend and increased by 61% from 611 in 1830 to 985 in 1870, and four region towns were now smaller in population. The foreign-born included only 61 Irish and 23 Canadians in 1855. Within 10 years the proportion fell from 8.5% to 4.1%, only 38 individuals.

A Female Benevolent Society was formed in 1833. The town voted against the sale of intoxicating liquors during the second quarter of the century. A library, lyceums and debating clubs were formed. A fourth district school was added at the Neck and a high school was organized in 1854. A fire company was formed in 1835, and a second in 1849.

### C. Settlement Pattern

Although still a small settlement wedged among Essex's larger and more prosperous towns, Wenham experienced its greatest growth during the period. A Baptist meetinghouse was erected (1831), a new 1st Parish meetinghouse, (1843), and a new town hall (opposite the symbolic core at the common) (1854). The fire department was reorganized and new engine house erected (1849), and a new Baptist meetinghouse built after the earlier burned down (1860). The leather business continued its growth, small shops now scattered from Cedar Street north to upper Larch Row. Commercial establishments were few, but clustered along 1A in the meetinghouse vicinity and north, toward adjacent Hamilton. By this time, Wenham had been outpaced by its northern neighbor, its own commercial businesses stifled as residents began to look to Hamilton for many of its services.

Residential building again occurred at two levels. Elite construction was small in scale during the period, but attracted to Route 1A. Modest dwellings were erected throughout the rural town, but especially on the side streets of the central village. The residential densities of Cherry and Larch Row increased, and building was attracted to Arbor and Cedar Streets.

### D. Economic Base

While farming remained the principal economic activity, especially early in the period, some shoe manufacturing was pursued as well. Farmers produced small quantities of butter and milk, english mowing and wet meadow hay, corn and grains, potatoes, cranberries. Considering the size of the town, there were many livestock. In 1865 almost 100,000 lbs of dressed meat was produced. That year there were 68 farms and total acreage was up 18% from the previous period to 4331 acres. 72% or 3131 acres were improved land, including hay and pasture land, while 28% was wooded or unimproved, figures similar to the previous period. There was one sawmill.

Shoemaking was done on a small scale early in the period. In 1832 eighteen men made shoes worth less than \$10,000. By 1855 more than 200 men and women were engaged in producing shoes both for local shoe manufacturers and on consignment from shoe firms in Danvers and Lynn. 87% of the 234,000 pairs of boots and shoes made in 1855 were for Danvers and Lynn shoe manufacturers. Some tanning of leather was also done during the Civil War by a Mr. Flint who established a tannery. Other manufacturing and trades

included blacksmithing, house construction, morocco dressing, production of chaises, wagons and saddles and ice cutting. In 1843 Charles Landers established as ice cutting business on Wenham Pond and ran the firm quite successfully until 1850 when he sold it to Addison Gage and Co.

#### E. Architecture

**Residential:** Although residential building increased during this period, traditional forms persisted. Two examples are known of 2 & 1/2 story, center chimney houses with Greek Revival ornament; about 4 related houses share the center chimney but are 1 & 1/2 stories in height with extended stud height. More common were houses with multiple chimneys. Rear wall and L-plan houses of 2 & 1/2 stories remain popular with Greek Revival ornament. Facade gables were applied to 1 & 1/2 story houses with double interior chimney to create a Gothic cottage. Later in the period Italianate ornament was employed on large, 2 & 1/2 story, double interior chimney houses. Gable front forms are rare and appear only in exceptional examples using L-plans, including the Kimball houses with a large Doric portico, a large Italianate houses with long wall entries, and five bay center entry, cross gable form.

**Institutional:** The First Congregational Church built a new meetinghouse in 1843; measuring 60 x 54 feet, the gable front includes a Doric in antis screen to its paired enties, a flushboard facade, with square tower topped by an octagonal belfry and spire; in 1853 it was lengthened by 15 feet to seat 600. After their church burned in 1859 the Baptists built a new church from designs by George Hanson; the gable front church has a semi-attached tower with steeple and pinnacles, lancet openings, and Gothic ornament. In 1837 the town used its allocation of federal surplus revenue to rebuild its schoolhouses, but their appearance is unknown; the town had five schoolhouses, in each of four districts, as well as a grammar/high school. In 1854 the town hall was constructed, two stories over a basement in a T-plan with cupola and Italianate ornament; its overall dimensions were 38 by 54 feet, with a projecting ell measuring 16 x 20 feet; the first floor held school, recitation, dressing, and selectmen's rooms, with a hall and anteroom above. Enginehouse #1 was built in 1849, a small structure with hip roof, short side to the street, with a later addition to accommodate two engines.

Many shoe shops were erected during the period, most of them ten-footers attached to or near a residential structure. A few larger shoe factories were also constructed. In 1853 the firm of Jones, Foster and Perkins built a factory of unknown materials at an unknown location. The shops of other artisans many also have been built.

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

### A. Transportation Routes

Existing roads were upgraded and new streets opened. Among them were Porter and School Streets in the northern town, and several cross streets in their vicinity. Monument Street was opened from the Meetinghouse to Cherry, and Topsfield Road was extended to Cedar. Streetcars were first run from Gloucester Crossing in Beverly to the Soldier's Monument in Wenham (following Route 1A) in 1886. Later that same year, lines were extended to the Wenham Station in Hamilton and to the Camp Meeting Grounds at Ashbury Grove (up Ashbury Street) in Hamilton. By 1910, the Boston and Northern Electric street railway (following 1A) was in operation. Branch lines connected Wenham with the Gloucester and the Salem/Lynn trolleys.

### B. Population

Wenham had the fifth smallest population in Essex County in 1870, with a total of only 985 people. Despite growing by 15% to 1068 in 1915 the town had fallen to third smallest in the study unit. The foreign population increased from 54 people in 1875 to 171 in 1915 but still measured only 16% of the total. Throughout the period Canadians, English, Irish and Scottish immigrants dominated the foreign-born. By 1905 a few Swedes, French and Germans had immigrated. The Wenham Veteran's Association was organized in 1876, the Wenham Mutual Benefit Association was organized in 1876 and incorporated in 1883. In 1887 there were five schools, a grammar school, a primary school and three mixed schools, the East, West and Neck Schools. Beginning in 1909 Helen Clay Frick began a summer visit program for working girls from Lynn and Lowell on a large farm purchased by her father.

### C. Settlement Pattern

Its commercial activities now completely overshadowed by those in Hamilton, Wenham continued its development as a residential outlier rather than as a viable commercial center. Municipal improvements include the erection of the Union Block (1870), a Baptist Chapel (1873), a Civil War monument (1878), and a new fire house (1901), all along the Route 1A axis. Its leather industry having declined, agriculture was the town's mainstay. As such, buildings continued to be drawn to the town's rural roads, to its agricultural landscapes, or to the northern town, near the growing commercial nucleus and Camp meeting activities in South Hamilton.

### D. Economic Base

As the few shoe manufacturers moved to Lynn or elsewhere, Wenham reverted to its agricultural character. The number of farms held steady at about 65 throughout the period. However, the size of farms diminished as the emphasis shifted from grains and meat to dairy, poultry and market vegetables. In 1885 there were 4753

acres of agricultural land, whereas in 1905 there were only 3817. Despite this drop the percentage of land under cultivation increased from 53% in 1885, compared to a county average of 32%, to 43% in 1905. In 1905 there were 62 farms of which nine were dairy farms and five were poultry farms. In addition there were ten market gardens. The town did not have a saw or gristmill after 1885 as the Miles River had become increasingly sluggish. The value of agricultural products more than doubled between 1875 and 1905 when it totalled almost \$125,000. Dairy products accounted for 28% of the total, market vegetables for 15% the products of mines and quarries for 8.3%, and poultry products for 7.5%.

While very little manufacturing was pursued locally (only \$34,00 in goods produced in 1875 and even less in 1895) many Wenham inhabitants travelled to Lynn, Beverly and elsewhere to work in the shoe industry. In fact, there were almost as many men employed in manufacturing as in agriculture. In Wenham there were two small shoe firms, a blacksmith, and house carpenters and two clothiers, employing a total of 20 people in 1895. The Gage Ice Co. folded ca. 1882. As the period advanced the number of men employed in retail and wholesale trades and transportation increased. By 1915, 102 men (34.9%) more than in either farming or manufacturing, worked in this sector of the economy again probably in neighboring towns.

#### E. Architecture

Residential: New housing starts remained moderate during this period. Two story, side entry, and three-story, center-entry mansard roof houses were built. Those in the Queen Ann were comparatively simple in form; known examples include L plan and cross gable examples of the gable front form, and pyramidal main block examples. Early in the twentieth century a small number of Shingle Style houses were constructed including a gable block, gambrel block, and double gable front examples. Revivals of Colonial forms are also known, including Dutch Colonials, Georgians, and Capes. (Following sentence doesn't make sense) Exceptional houses, Proctor-Meade house (ca. 1925), a brick house of three stories combining Georgian and Tudor elements, of 2 & 1/2 stories with lateral 1 & 1/2 story ells, and a large stone Tudor estate.

Institutional: Construction of public buildings shifted from ecclesiastic to municipale during the remainder of the historic period. A 1901 fire house is a hipblock of 2 & 1/2 stories for two engines with rear hose tower and an extension for stairs to the upper dormitory and office. The 1907 school is a 2 & 1/2 story frame hip block raised on a basement with center entry flanked by banks of windows; its size was doubled in 1920. The Wenham Golf Club of 1898 is of unknown appearance.

Commercial : The known stores surviving from the late 19th century follow the common 2 & 1/2 story, gable front, center entry form.

Industrial: A Morrocco leather dressing factory was erected in 1886, complete with steam power. With the exception of the power house, the 2 & 1/2 story clapboard structure with ridge roof still stands at 158 Main Street. The building has been slightly altered. Additions were also made to the Gage and Co. ice houses prior to 1882. A blacksmith shop-carriage shop erected in 1890, a 1 & 1/2 story clapboard building with a low store foundation, ridge roof, shed dormer and side facade, still stands at 105 Main Street; the building now houses a Texaco gas station.

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

### A. Transportation Routes

Little has changed in 20th century Wenham's transportation network. Two principal north/south highways serve the town; Route 97 (Topsfield Road) runs southeast into Wenham from Haverhill, and Route 1A runs south from Seabrook N.H. and Salisbury, Massachusetts. Route 128, Boston's circumferential highway, skirts Wenham to the south, but provides the townspeople with rapid connections to regional transit via Interstate 95. Rail service continues via the Gloucester branch of the Boston and Maine Railroad. Commuting time to Boston averages 45 minutes. In the 1930's the town's trolley system was dismantled.

### B. Population

After exercising sluggish growth during the turn-of-the-century decades, Wenham grew slowly but steadily during the period, finally tallying a population increase of 110% from 1068 in 1915 to 2245 in 1955. Its foreign-born comprised only 16% of the town's population in 1915 and had fallen to 12.4% by 1940. Among the nativities important in 1915 were Canadians (all of Nova Scotia) (23%), English (21%) and Irish (22%).

In the 1952 presidential election, 88.5% of the town's voting population opted Republican and 11.5% Democratic.

### C. Settlement Pattern

Growth essentially came to a standstill. Late in the period, however, with the impending construction of Route 128 to the south, the construction of single family dwellings increased in pace in the rural town. Modern commercial intrusions appear to have considered Wenham too peripheral to make substantial inroads into its historic fabric. It's only municipal improvement, was the opening of a golf club in 1929.

### D. Economic Base

Wenham was gradually transformed from an agricultural community to a wealthy suburb during the period. While some land continued under cultivation, many farms were converted to estates. Still,



even at the end of the period agriculture was the most important industry, followed by the service industry and retail trade. In 1954 these were four service firms employing 28 people and three retail firms employing 24 people. Another 15 people worked in three small unclassified manufacturing firms.

#### E. Architecture

**Residential:** Large homes in historic revival styles continued to be built in small numbers prior to the Depression. Three examples are known of stucco English Tudor cottage forms as well as an eclectic Renaissance house. Smaller year round homes followed more familiar forms including pyramidal roofed four-squares, of one and two stories, three bay capes, three bay Colonial Revival houses of two stories, as well as ranch houses from the 1950s.

**Institutional:** The Lakeview Golf Club was built in 1929 but no information on appearance is available. In 1941 the Iron Rail Vacation House was constructed of brick in a Georgian Revival design to house offices and gymnasium in the large hip block with small rectangular ell; it was built by Helen Clay Frick's organization. The 1953 Elementary School was designed by Irving Hersey of Durham, a long low brick hip block with central projecting entry pavillion and related later additions.

**Commercial:** A restaurant built in 1930 has been altered, but is now a 1 & 1/2 story structure with a gable roof, center entry, dormers and rear ell. A 1947 equipment storage building is one story, flat roofed, of cinderblock construction.

**Industrial:** No known industrial construction.

#### XI. SURVEY OBSERVATIONS

The Wenham inventory of about 125 forms provides adequate coverage of this small town.

Never a large center or settlement, Wenham's historic fabric lines its roads, and especially Route 1A. But it is on this interface that degradation has been most severe, in all of Essex County's towns, but particularly here. Route 1A has suffered the intrusions of modern commercial strip development, and many of its historic buildings, either razed or altered to new functions. The heart of Wenham lies on Route 1A, and the threat to its survival is enormous. The northernmost part of town (at Hamilton) now lies at greatest risk.

#### XII. FINDER'S AID

18th and 19th century residential  
and civic buildings

Route 1A at the  
meetinghouse

Federal and Early Industrial dwellings

Cedar Street and Cherry  
near 1A

Rural crossroads village

Larch Row at Dodge Row  
and Grapevine Road

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