

MHC Reconnaissance Survey Town Report

WORTHINGTON

Report Date: 1982

Associated Regional Report: Connecticut Valley

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

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

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

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

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MHC RECONNAISSANCE SURVEY REPORT

DATE: October 1982

MAY 31 1984

COMMUNITY: Worthington

MASS. HIST. COMM.

I. Topography:

Worthington is situated on the eastern fringe of the Hoosac Range, an offshoot of the Green Mountains. Local terrain is characterized by moderate uplands rarely less than 1350' in elevation and frequently extending over 1600' above sea level. The greatest elevations occur in northwestern Worthington where hills such as Bashan Hill (2033') and Knolls Hill (2011') extend over 2000'. From these two points an observer can see into eastern New York and southern Vermont and New Hampshire. The uplands drop steadily in elevation as they extend south until they average approximately 1100' in southeastern Worthington. A number of small to moderate sized tracts of upland marshland are scattered about Worthington. Local uplands are broken by a series of streams and brooks that drain primarily into the Middle Branch of the Westfield River which extends through western Worthington the length of the town and the Little River situated in southeastern Worthington. Two natural falls are present on the Middle Branch of the Westfield and the Little River. West Worthington Falls is located one half mile south of the village of West Worthington while Bradley Falls is located near the village of South Worthington. The only freshwater body is a small ice pond created in the mid 19th century and situated in southeastern Worthington.

II. Political Boundaries:

Originally surveyed as Narragansett Township Number 3 in 1762 with eastern boundary at New Hingham (Chesterfield), northern boundary at Township Number 5 (Cummington), western boundary at Township Number 2 (Peru) and southern boundary with Murryfield (Chester) by 1765. Incorporated as town of Worthington, after Colonel John Worthington, in 1768. Southwest district included as part of Middlefield in 1783 with boundary at Middle Branch of Westfield River, and South Worthington section at Burton Hill annexed from Chester in 1799.

III. Historic Overview:

Rural recreational hill town on secondary corridor between Westfield and Pittsfield. Located in Berkshire highlands with native sites reported on Middle Branch of Westfield River and Indian oven at Ringville. Settlement established during Colonial period with notable mid 18th century parsonage on site of original meeting house at West Street and Connecticut Valley doorway at Worthington Corners. Agricultural potential limited to upland plateau along axis of Route 112 with some early Federal farmsteads intact including notable mansion at Corners. Civic focus relocated to Worthington Center after Revolution with competing crossroads village At Worthington Corners, both with early 19th century village houses. Civic center finally established midway with Greek Revival town house at Watts Pond. Upland farming maintained through mid 19th century with several period houses along Dingle Road to Cummington and Kinney Road to Chester and landmark Gothic house at Ringville. Small mill villages formed at South Worthington on Little River with well preserved church and adjacent houses and at West Worthington on Middle Branch. Area remained agricultural through early 20th century

with gradual development of summer resort activity, including period bungalows at Worthington Corners. Present development most evident as suburban housing along scenic vistas of Routes 112 and 143 eroding agricultural landscape, especially around Worthington Corners. Outlying areas remain isolated preserving integrity of historic fabric at South Worthington and on West Hill.

IV. Contact Period (1500-1620)

A. Transportation Routes:

Intermediate highland corridor between Westfield River and Housatonic valley. Probable north-south trail apparently followed axis of Little River (Route 112) as Main Road to Watts Stream (Worthington Center) and north as Riddle-Windsor Road (Route 143). Connecting trails likely branched to Middle Branch of Westfield River (West Worthington) along McCormick Road (Route 143) and possibly from Watts Stream (Ringville) as Will Road. Other trails probably followed from West Brook to Bronson Brook along Dingle Road.

B. Settlement Patterns:

There were no reported Contact period sites. As with the upland areas situated east and west of the Middle Connecticut Valley, native period settlement in Worthington was probably restricted to small to moderate sized hunting and fishing encampments established in the uplands and adjacent to area waterways. The most likely locations would have been the Middle Branch of the Westfield River, particularly the broad valley areas (undated native site(s)) situated approximately $\frac{1}{2}$ mile above the village of West Worthington) and West Worthington Falls; the Little River, especially in the vicinity of Bradley Falls and the moderate uplands in the vicinity of Worthington Corners.

C. Subsistence Patterns:

Native horticulture was probably limited to small tracts established in the broader portions of the Middle Westfield River valley and Worthington Corners. Native fishing likely focused at West Worthington and Bradley Falls, probable locations for annual fish runs. Hunting probably took place throughout the local uplands and marshlands.

D. Observations:

Worthington's location on a branch of the Westfield River suggests this area was probably utilized as an important fishing area by the Woronocos centered in present Westfield. The area may also have been utilized by the Norotucks situated in Northampton, Hatfield and Hadley. Both of these groups appear affiliated with the Pocumtucks, a group concentrated in the Middle Connecticut River Valley. Worthington's proximity to the New York border suggests the likelihood of relatively frequent contact with the Mohicans situated in the Hudson Valley. The greatest potential for extant native period sites should be in the Middle Westfield River valley, particularly at West Worthington Falls, the Little River, most notably Bradley Falls and Worthington Corners. Future efforts should be

devoted to establishing an inventory of native sites since presently none exists for Worthington at the MHC.

V. Plantation Period (1620-1675)

A. Transportation Routes:

Native trails remained as regional routes through uplands along Westfield River branches.

B. Population:

The Worthington area probably continued to be occupied by native hunting and fishing bands. The area lacked a colonial population until the 1760s.

C. Settlement Patterns:

Native settlement patterns probably remained basically the same as those suggested for the preceding period. However, Worthington may have witnessed increased native settlement with the onset of colonial settlement in Westfield and the Middle Connecticut Valley.

D. Economic Base:

Native subsistence patterns were most likely similar to those outlined for the Contact period. However, native trapping of furbearing animals probably received increased emphasis with the establishment of the Anglo-Indian fur trade by William Pynchon in the Middle Connecticut Valley in the late 1630s. Colonial utilization of the Worthington area probably did not occur until well into the 18th century.

E. Observations:

Research should be undertaken to determine the extent of native utilization of local resources during the Plantation period. Particular attention should be focused on the extent of local commercial trapping of fur animals. Secondary sources virtually ignore this period of Worthington's history.

VI. Colonial Period: (1675-1775)

A. Transportation Routes:

Survey of Township Number 3 (1762) established division highway grid across upland plateau. North-south highways included West, Patterson and Fairman Roads, and east-west highways Sam Hill-Harvey, Radicuit, Guard, Cross and Prentiss Roads. Location on meeting house at West Road (1769) created radial connecting highways as Scotts Road to Chester and Starkweather Road to Westfield River. Major improvement of east-west corridor with Chesterfield Road (1756) through Worthington Corners and West Worthington as Hinsdale Road across West Hill (Slyvester, 1879, p. 454)). Secondary system of local highways developed along West Brook from Worthington Corners as Old North/ Williamsbury and Dingle Roads (Route 112-143). Primary north-south highway from Chester remained as Main Road (Route 112).

B. Population:

Secondary sources suggest natives continued to occupy Worthington until shortly before colonial settlement.

The majority of the colonial settlement's residents migrated from Connecticut and central and eastern Massachusetts.

C. Settlement Patterns:

The foundation for the colonial settlement of Worthington was initiated with the establishment and sale of Township Number 3 in a public auction in Boston to John Worthington and five other speculators for £1860 in 1762. The proprietors encouraged settlement by selling land at low prices and in the case of Worthington with the donation of 1200 acres of land for use as school and ministerial lots and construction of a town grist mill on Steven's Brook. The first settlement occurred in 1763 or 1764. This and subsequent period settlement was generally dispersed. The majority of homes were erected along the community's major routes - Hinsdale Road/Chesterfield Road, Hinsdale Road/Route 112, West Road/Scotts Road/Brook Road. Additional settlement took place near Bashan Hill on Route 143 and Windsor Road, Cummington Road and the southernmost portion of McCormick Road. The community's first meeting house was built immediately west of the junction of Sam Hill Road and West Street in c.1768. Worthington's first cemetery (Center Cemetery) was laid out at about the same time on Sam Hill Road slightly east of the meetinghouse. Construction of the first school house occurred several years later (c. 1773) immediately east of the intersection of Route 112 and Radiker Road.

D. Economic Base:

Local residents focused on livestock and crop production. Despite the hilly nature of Worthington, farmers were able to raise moderate quantities of crops primarily because of the quality of local soil. Lumbering was an additional important economic pursuit. Local industrial development was limited. The only documented period operation was the grist mill erected by Colonel Worthington between 1765 and 1769 on Steven's Brook slightly west of its junction with the town's eastern boundary. Period mills may have been erected on the southern portion of the West Branch of the Westfield and Little River in the vicinity of Ringville and Converse Cemetery. The town's first tavern was opened by Alexander Miller in ca.1768 on "Belden Road".

E. Architecture:

Residential: Only one house pre-dating 1775 is known to survive in the town. This is a three-bay, center-entrance facade, center chimney house on North Road (Route 112), dated 1770. The structure appears to have been heavily restored ca. 1970.

Institutional: The first meetinghouse was constructed in 1764 (Brown and Joslyn, in The Hampshire History [1964] date the first meetinghouse to 1769). In 1771, the town's first schoolhouse was built.

F. Observations:

Worthington's location on the western periphery of the study unit suggests the community had commercial contacts with communities situated in eastern New York (e.g., Albany) as well as study unit commercial centers such as Westfield and Northampton. Local produce, livestock and timber was probably sent to these communities in exchange for manufactured goods. There is a high probability of archaeological evidence of the period settlement surviving throughout Worthington because of the town's rural nature. A number of period lot lines are delineated by local roads. They include West Street, Sam Hill Road/Harvey Road, Adams Road, Prentiss Road and Fairman Road.

VII. Federal Period

A. Transportation Routes:

Relocation of meeting house to Worthington Center (1792) improved regional connections along Main Road to Chester and to Worthington Corners as Clark Street (Route 112) to Williamsburg. Primary east-west highway remained as Chesterfield-Hinsdale Road through Worthington Corners and West Worthington with north-south corridor as Main Road-Windsor-Riddle Roads through Worthington Center (Route 112).

B. Population:

Worthington's population 1790-1830 rose 5.6 percent, the lowest rate of any town in Hampshire County. The town reached its peak population of 1,391 in 1810, and then began a gradual decline that lasted 135 years. In 1830 the population stood at 1,179.

C. Settlement Pattern:

Relocation of meeting house from West Street to Worthington Center (1791) established civic focus along Route 112 axis with further relocation north to Watts Pond (1825). Secondary villages developed at Worthington Corners along Chesterfield Road and at mill sites at Ringville on Watts Stream and at West Worthington along Westfield River. Agriculture expanded to limits of highland economy around town center with lumbering on upland slopes. Small hamlets developed along Bronson Brook at Stevensville and Sampsonville on Dingle Road.

D. Economic Base:

Largely agricultural economy with five sawmills, two grist mills, a fulling mill, and James Blackmer's 1791 linseed oil mill in operation in 1795.

At some time during the Federal period two small tanneries were established at West Worthington -- tanneries which by the 1830s would make up over 65 percent of the town's recorded manufactured product value. Cummington, the town immediately to the north, in this and the succeeding period was the center of the tanning industry in the three-county Connecticut Valley. Chester, on the south, ranked second in the valley in 1832. Thus it is perhaps not surprising that the industry, limited as it was in 1832 (\$2100) developed in Worthington. One of the West Worthington tanneries in 1832 was operated by Spencer Clark, who had begun the great 360-vat tannery in Chester Factories before 1809.

Probably also in the Federal period the Merino breed of sheep began to be introduced into the town. The Merino sheep was first imported from Spain during the Embargo years for its fine wool, though there is no evidence until 1837 of its extent in Worthington. In the 1830s the Merino was subject to a craze that seems to have affected Worthington the hardest of any town in the Valley.

E. Architecture:

Residential: Worthington experienced significant expansion in the Federal period. This expansion is reflected in the large number of Federal period structures surviving in the town. Approximately two dozen period houses and cottages were observed. These include a range of sizes and forms from simple vernacular farmhouses to large and elaborately detailed structures. Center chimney plan cottages do, however, comprise a majority of the structures. Center chimney cottages survive at West Worthington, Worthington Corners, Worthington Center and South Worthington and were also observed on Worthington River, Clark, Dingle and Scotts Roads. Cottages at South Worthington include several gable front examples with Cape Cod cottage gable fenestration and center entrances. While most cottages in the western Hampshire area exhibit Cape Cod cottage end gable fenestration (characterized by the presence of small fixed panes in the peak and the base of the roof gable), gable front orientation and center entrances combined with Cape Cod fenestration have been observed only in South Worthington and adjacent Ireland Street in Chesterfield. Approximately a half dozen Federal houses survive in the town. Most are center chimney plan structures but a few center hall houses are known. Houses noted on Clark, Dingle and Chesterfield Roads were all of the center chimney plan with one well-detailed example on Clark Road which incorporates a semicircular fanlight and pediment in the door surround. The most outstanding house of the period is an early 19th century house at Worthington Corners, probably the house identified as the Jonathan Woodbridge House (MASS: 124) in the Historic American Buildings Survey. The Woodbridge House (1806) is a two-story, double interior chimney with a decked hip roof and a long ell with carriage sheds to the rear. Of outstanding quality is the detailing of the house which includes a three-story frontispiece consisting of fanlit entrance surround with projecting Ionic porch surmounted on the second floor by a Palladian stairhall window and on the third by a low pediment containing a lunette. All original fabric, including clapboards and window glass, appears to be intact. Also of note is an end chimney house on Hinsdale Road, Colonial Revivalized with a monumental Ionic portico.

Institutional: In 1780, the first meetinghouse was remodelled. In 1791, it was voted to move and refinish the meetinghouse but this was not accomplished until 1825. In 1828, a Methodist society was established at South Worthington with a meetinghouse built in 1829-30.

VIII. Early Industrial Period (1830-1870)

A. Transportation Routes:

Local highway system remained focused around Worthington Center and Worthington Corners with axis along Main and Chesterfield Roads. Improvement of north-south corridor along Little River to South Worthington as Route 112 axis. No railroad projected or constructed through area.

B. Population:

Like the majority of the towns in the county, Worthington's population continued to decline. Between 1830 and 1870, the town lost 27 percent of its population with three quarters of the loss occurring in the last 15 years, 1855-70.

In 1855 Worthington had 35 foreign-born residents -- 3.1 percent of her population and one of the smallest percentages of any town in the county, though it rivaled her neighboring hill towns: Cummington (3.6 percent), Chesterfield (3.7.percent). 24 of the 35 immigrants were from Ireland.

C. Settlement Patterns:

Civic focus remained north of Worthington Center with secondary center at Worthington Corners. Mill villages further expanded along Little River at South Worthington and Ringville, along Westfield River at West Worthington and along Bronson Brook at Sampsonville. Upland farming maintained on highland plateaus around town center with lumbering in western hill land.

D. Economic Base:

The woolen industry in the U.S. received a strong boost in 1828 with the imposition of a high tariff on both imported wool and woolen cloth. With a premium now being paid for fine wool, many farms began to develop large flocks of Merino and Saxony sheep. Western Massachusetts was particularly affected and in the Connecticut Valley many towns reported substantial quantities of saxony or merino wool. Few towns were more affected by the craze than Worthington, which by 1837 reported an annual merino wool clip of 27,000 pounds -- 26 percent of the entire county's production, and the largest quantity reported of any town in the three county Connecticut Valley. The amount of wool clipped reached its peak in 1845 with 32,064 pounds (29 percent of the county total), but thereafter with the removal of high duties in 1846, fell rapidly. (In 1855, 9000 pounds, though 35 percent of the county production).

In the first decades of the period, tanning was the other major industry. By 1845 the two West Worthington tanneries produced \$37,500 worth of leather. About this time, one of the tanneries was acquired by Horace Cole, a leather dealer who came to Chesterfield, and then to Worthington from New York City. About 1855 he built a large shoe factory at Four Corners, which with a product worth \$27,690 (45 percent of the county production in boots and shoes) was the largest recorded value in the Valley, but for Springfield and Wales (both Hampden County). Cole was the town's largest industrial employer (45 men and women) at that time. His product may have been aimed at the Southern market, as there is no reference to it in the 1865 census reports or later.

The other major locus of manufacturing in the Early Industrial period was at Ringville, where Elkanah and Thomas Ring developed a woodworking business. Initially they produced window curtains made of wooden slats (did they pick this up from Jude Stevens in Chester?), but their principal fame was in the manufacture of children's wagons and carriages, sent into almost every state in the Union. Probably in the 1840s the Rings moved to Knightville, in Huntington, but children's wagons and sleds continued to be made at Ringville (as well as, apparently, in South Worthington). In 1855 both Worthington and Huntington reported equivalent values in this product.

The hardwood forests of the Hampshire highlands produced a variety of other woodworking industries as well, often shared with neighboring towns. Bedsteads were made in Blandford, Chester, and Huntington in this period, as well as in Worthington. Basket making (native ash was a popular material) seems to have appeared earliest in Huntington, though by 1855 in Worthington and Chesterfield. Window curtains and children's wagons and sleds were other migratory products. Handles, particularly plane and broom handles were made extensively in surrounding towns, and both Chesterfield and Worthington shared the manufacture of sieve rims and banjo hoops.

E. Architecture:

Residential: Residential construction continued at a fairly steady pace through the Early Industrial period. Most of the structures built are sidehall cottages in the Greek Revival style. At South Worthington, however, the center entrance end gable cottage continued to be built through the 1830s. Relatively few houses in the Greek Revival style were built but most incorporated center hall plans with double interior chimneys and five bay facades. The most outstanding house of the period is a board and batten Gothic Revival house notable for the unusual narrow projecting two-story buttresses which frame the entrance and several bays. Similar buttressed entrance treatment was observed on a Greek Revival cottage at West Worthington and undoubtedly indicates the work of a local builder of some creativity.

Institutional: Several institutional buildings were constructed in the period including the Town Hall (1855), the South Worthington Methodist Church (1848), the West Worthington Methodist Church (1847) and several schools. One school, the Town Hall and The South Worthington church are the only buildings extant. The Town Hall is similar to other Town Halls in the region in that it is a one-story Greek Revival structure with a Doric portico in antis. The South Worthington Church is a well-preserved one-story Greek Revival building with a two-stage belfry and spire. Also built in the Greek Revival style was the tiny West Worthington Church, a one bay by three bay one story building with square belfry, probably demolished ca.1940. Schools of the period included the board and batten Gothic Revival Ringville School (ca. 1860, burned) and School (extant), a two-bay by two bay side entered frame building, on Clark Road.

Commercial: The only surviving commercial structure known for the period is the Cole's Store (1845; now Corners Grocery), a well-preserved two-story building with three facade bays and center entrance; originally carriage sheds stood to the side of the building, which now exhibits Italianate details.

IX. Late Industrial Period (1870-1915)

A. Transportation Routes:

Highway system remained around Worthington Center and Worthington Corners with primary axis along Main Road (Route 112) from South Worthington. No trolley lines constructed through area.

B. Population:

As in the majority of towns in the county, Worthington's population continued to decline. Between 1870 and 1915 the town lost 242 residents -- 28 percent of her 1870 population.

Worthington's foreign-born population gained only slightly during the period. In 1915, immigrants (Canadians dominated the list) had risen to 6.1. percent.

C. Settlement Pattern:

Worthington Center maintained as civic focus extending to secondary crossroads at Worthington Corners. Industrial villages remained active at South and West Worthington with gradual decline of small hamlets at Ringville and Sampsonville. Dairy farming continued on upland plateaus with lumbering along Westfield River valley. Summer tourist economy introduced around Worthington Corners with small hotels.

D. Economic Base:

Wooden products represented Worthington's principal industry during the Late Industrial period. By 1875 there were six basket making shops, as well as a bedstead factory and loom fixture works at West Worthington. Ringville was still the principal source of children's wagons and sleds. Horace Cole is credited with developing South Worthington. Cole was apparently connected with the mills there, though he built a cheese factory, 1874-5, at the Corners. A creamery was built at Ringville in 1894.

It is unclear how long many of these industries survived. By 1912 South Worthington, with two basket shops and the penholder factory of C.E. Bradley Co., appears to have become an important center. Stevensville, like West Chesterfield, had a prosperous manufacturer of hardwood banjo and drum hoops.

E. Architecture:

Residential: While the number of houses built in the period was smaller than the number built in the previous periods, it nonetheless constitutes a more significant level of activity than found elsewhere in the region. Most of the houses built were sidehall plan Queen Anne houses and cottages, but one double house and a few L-plan houses are also known. Period houses were observed at Worthington Center, Ringville and on Worthington River Road. The most outstanding house of the period is an asymmetrical plan, Stick Style house on North Road opposite Radiker Road. The house incorporates incised gable screens, gables with board and batten siding and an elaborately detailed veranda. After the turn of the century, Worthington began to develop as a relatively elite summer resort. Several well-detailed architect designed Colonial Revival cottages were built on Hinsdale Road at Worthington Corners and elsewhere in the town. In addition, earlier houses were occasionally remodelled with Colonial Revival detailing. Two such houses are located on Hinsdale Road. One, an end chimney Federal house, was monumentalized with an overscaled Ionic portico while the other, a center chimney cottage, was embellished with an overhanging kicked eave in the Dutch Colonial manner.

Institutional: Construction activity in the period included the building of the present Congregational Church (1888, Walter Owens, Albany) and the establishment of the Conwell Academy (1894) in South Worthington. The church an asymmetrical shingled Queen Anne structure with a square entrance tower, replaced the 1825 meetinghouse, which burned in 1887. The Conwell Academy operated for only a few years but the structure, a simple two story frame building, still stands at South Worthington. The Huntington Library, located in a semi-domestic gambrel roofed Colonial Revival building at Worthington Corners, was built in 1915.

Commercial: The Worthington Inn (demolished), a large three-story Colonial Revival building with dormers, gables and verandas, was built in 1900. An other indication of resort development in the town was the establishment of the Worthington Golf Club in 1904.

X. Early Modern Period (1915-1940)

A. Transportation Routes:

Improvement of local highways as regional auto roads with primary north-south axis as Route 112 from Huntington and South Worthington to Worthington Corners and north to Cummington along Dingle Road. Secondary east-west axis defined as Route 143 from Williamsbury through Worthington Corners and West Worthington around West Hill as McCormick Road. Other period highways included West Worthington Road along Westfield River and Windsor Road from Route 143.

B. Population:

Between 1915 and 1940 Worthington continued to lose residents, though virtually all of this loss occurred in the period 1915-1920, when the town lost a third of her population. Small gains in the next 15 years offset this loss allowing the town to finish the period with a net loss of only 23 percent. By 1940 the population stood at 471. The town's nadir was not reached until 1945, at 363.

C. Settlement Pattern:

Civic focus maintained at Worthington Center as street village along Route 112 with commercial focus at Worthington Corners. Secondary mill villages maintained at South and West Worthington with upland farming around town center developed by local economy.

D. Economic Base:

No new industries identified. Dairy farming increasingly emphasized after 1900.

E. Architecture:

Very little residential construction occurred in the Early Modern period; only scattered cottages were built across the town. The Town Hall was remodelled in 1933 and in 1941, the Conwell School was built.

XI. Survey Observations:

General: No inventory has been completed in Worthington, which is architecturally, one of the finest and best-preserved towns in the region. Significant areas include all of the town's villages as well as a stretches (high meadow) of Route 112 between Ringville and Worthington Center.

XII. SOURCES

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