

MHC Reconnaissance Survey Town Report

WESTON

Report Date: 1980

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

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

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

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

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: January, 1980

COMMUNITY: Weston

I. TOPOGRAPHY

Located on rugged upland plateau with intermittent areas of tillable plain, especially in central part of town. Much of southern and northern sections are quite rocky. Only a few upland streams, drainage primarily southeast into Charles River. Some drainage in western part of town into Sudbury River. Several areas of bog/marsh, especially in northwest.

II. POLITICAL BOUNDARIES

Part of Watertown grant, 1636. Called "the Farms" or "Farmer's District." Became the "most westerly precinct" of Watertown, 1698. Incorporated as Town of Weston, 1713. Much of northern part of town set off to form Lincoln, 1746.

III. HISTORIC OVERVIEW

Attractive suburban town on the perimeter of metropolitan Boston. Set within the uplands between the Charles and Sudbury Rivers on the primary path to the western interior with potential for native sites along the water courses and rocklands. Settled by the mid-17th century from Watertown with numerous fertile plains, some of which are still actively planted, with a few fine examples of late First Period (lean-to) houses of early 18th century date. Location on Boston Post Road fostered traveler's economy, with excellent mid-18th century taverns of historic importance and several good period houses of central chimney plan throughout the area. Highway prosperity continued through early 19th century with simple Federal style houses of good proportion and notable examples of wayside lawyer's offices. Limited industrial potential and little effect of railroad upon growth patterns; few examples of Greek Revival or early Victorian styles. Increasing attraction as affluent suburb by late 19th century with several excellent early Shingle Style and Colonial Revival houses in estate settings with good civic buildings of the period by noted Boston architects. Residential estates continue through mid-20th century with many revival style houses and a few unique Modern examples in outlying areas. Prime location provided axis for metropolitan water supply aqueducts in early 20th century and original portion of Boston beltway.

IV. CONTACT PERIOD (1500-1620)

A. Transportation Routes:

Located between the Charles and Sudbury Rivers on the primary western corridor from the Boston basin to interior. Main trail to Connecticut valley followed axis of Boston Post Road (Route 20) from Stony Brook to Wayland, with former loops at Sibly Road and Crescent Street. Inner portion of Mohawk Trail to northwest interior follows Stony Brook as North Avenue (Route 117) around Cat Rock Hill. Fragment of branch trail to Natick follows Winter Street around

Nonesuch Pond and probably linked with Connecticut Path along course of Wellesley Street. Secondary trail to Sudbury River is conjectured to follow Concord and Sudbury Roads around wetlands. Other possible native trails to Weston Center might include Church and Newton Streets.

B. Settlement Pattern:

No period sites reported. Some potential for sites along Charles, around Nonesuch Pond and along the Connecticut Path.

C. Subsistence Pattern:

Not an area with a high potential for supporting native occupation. Too rocky, very few ponds. Some possibilities for fishing in Charles as well as hunting and trapping.

D. Observations:

Apparently little native occupation despite proximity to Charles River and coast. Probably a buffer area between coastal tribes of Massachusetts Bay/Lower Charles and inland groups from Sudbury River west.

V. FIRST SETTLEMENT PERIOD (1620-1675)

A. Transportation Routes:

Native trails continued as highways, especially Post Road (Route 20) from Watertown to Sudbury by mid-17th century.

B. Population:

Quite limited, perhaps a dozen families.

C. Settlement:

A few scattered farms throughout central portion of town.

D. Economic Base:

Agriculture and grazing.

E. Observations:

Although located within primary development corridor west from Boston, limited development during period. Despite name ("The Farms"), only limited areas good for agriculture.

VI. COLONIAL PERIOD (1676-1775)

A. Transportation Routes:

Emergence of Weston Center by early 18th century promoted radial network from spine of Post Road including Newton and Wellesley Streets to the

south with branch at Glen Road, and Church-Lexington, Connant, and Concord-Merram Streets to the north--some of which may have been part of systematic divisions yet undocumented. Post Road (Route 20) remains primary east-west highway through Weston Center, with portion of Concord highway as North Street (Route 117) and new east-west highway across southern uplands as South Street (Route 30) by mid-18th century.

B. Population:

Gradual growth after King Philip's War. Tax roll of 1708 listed 78 individuals; 1712 tax roll listed 121, probably heads of family (these included people in what is now Lincoln). Census of 1765 listed 768 inhabitants, 126 families and 105 houses.

C. Settlement:

Scattered farms along Post Road, Wellesley and Lexington Streets. Village center emerged around meetinghouse and spread along Post Road. Meetinghouse begun 1695, complete, 1710. New meetinghouse begun on common land, 1721. Controversy over location during 1740s resulted in establishment of Lincoln. Village was largely a strip development along Post Road.

D. Economic Base:

Primarily agriculture and grazing but with a commercial center in Village which served surrounding area. This included: dry goods store (Elisha Jones) from 1745; tannery/shoemaking shop (Josiah Hobbs), from 1750; a redware pottery (Abraham Hews), from 1768; also several taverns, some doctors and probably lawyers. A few mills: sawmill (Richard Child), 1679, on Stony Brook; sawmill and grist mill (John Brewer) after 1700 on Cherry Brook (?). Several taverns, especially along Post Road: Thomas Woolson's, 1685-1737; Widow Brewer's, after 1716; Josiah Smith's, after 1757; The Golden Ball (Isaac Jones), after 1768.

E. Architecture

Residential:

Extant houses are predominantly of the two-story central chimney type with center-entrance (usually symmetrical) facades; a small number of similar structures with twin chimneys also exist, including at least two with gambrel roofs. There are no extant Cape Cod cottages, nor is there any tradition that they were even built locally. Some high-style (pattern book) Georgian features exist on houses, mainly in the vicinity of the Boston Post Road (Central Avenue); only two houses attributed pre-1700 dates (MHC Survey).

Institutional:

No known structures extant.

Commercial:

Taverns on Post Road after c. 1685, at least two extant, and well-preserved; of these, the Golden Ball Tavern (1750s) is the town's most elaborate example

of Georgian architecture; stores are believed to have existed after c. 1745, although it is likely that most were located in parts of houses and did not occupy buildings constructed solely for commercial use.

Industrial:

No known structures extant.

F. Observations:

Combination of location on major westward route plus proximity to Boston resulted in development of town as a subregional center. Town records 1712-1754 were lost.

VII. FEDERAL PERIOD (1776-1830)

A. Transportation Routes:

East-west axis remains from 18th century highways, but location of turnpikes north and south of Weston reduce importance of Post Road (Route 20) as primary highway to Boston.

B. Population:

Population virtually unchanged throughout period; Baptist Society organized 1776, Methodist Society organized 1794.

C. Settlement Location:

Some new construction and remodelling of buildings along Boston Post Road and in Kendall Green section; however, no real expansion of settled area; at least one summer estate established (c. 1796-1805) by John Derby of Salem and Boston.

D. Economic Base:

Commercial stagnation gradually set in after the opening of the Boston-Worcester Turnpike (c. 1808-10) drew commercial traffic from Post Road; dry goods merchants continued to act as suppliers for neighboring towns until c. 1830-40.

E. Architecture

Residential:

Good examples of Federal style extant, most examples contain ambitious and high-style decorative elements; major examples scattered along Central Avenue (including one 3-story house) have hip roofs, elliptical-arch arcades and stables (possibly original); less elaborate examples have one-room deep floor plans with rear-wall chimneys or occasionally, two-room deep plans with interior twin chimneys, decorative details are generally confined to the entries; only one one-story cottage is believed to date from this period, however, this structure (MHC Weston Form 302) appears more like commercial/office buildings of its period.

Institutional:

No known structures extant.

Commercial:

Two one-story, hip-roofed, central chimney structures extant (c. 1805-11), both believed to have been built as lawyer's offices; no other known structures.

Industrial:

No known structures extant.

VIII. EARLY INDUSTRIAL PERIOD (1830-1870)

A. Transportation Routes:

Highways remain intact from early 19th century. Location of early railroads west from Boston through fringe of area: Boston & Worcester (1834) around southeast edge of Charles River (AMTRAK) and Fitchburg (1846) along Stony Brook (Boston & Maine).

B. Population:

Small growth in population, mainly between 1840 and 1850, largely attributed to arrival of immigrants, mainly Irish (139 Irish in Weston by 1855).

C. Settlement Location:

No significant changes in settled areas.

D. Economic Base:

Some manufacturing existed, mainly the making of boots and shoes and the manufacturing of cotton and woolen machinery; industrial employment and output reached a peak around 1845-1855 and declined thereafter; boot and shoe making and machinery manufacturing ceased between 1865 and 1875; agricultural employment throughout the period.

E. Architecture

Residential:

Small amount of new building; few examples of Greek Revival style, larger number of simple Italianate houses and several Second Empire style cottages. Most buildings of period are modest side-hall plan houses; no high-style is evident; side-hall cottages exist, but are few; one Italianate style stable remains on Central Avenue converted to a house (MHC Survey).

Institutional:

No churches or meetinghouses extant; two Italianate style one-room school houses extant (c. 1851), one of which is unrecorded (Ware Street) although it remains nearly intact.

Commercial:

No commercial blocks built; rare survival of an Italianate style ice house (1853--347 Boston Post Road--MHC Survey).

Industrial:

No known structures extant.

IX. LATE INDUSTRIAL PERIOD (1870-1915)

A. Transportation Routes:

Roads and railroads intact from mid-19th century. Location of Massachusetts Central as secondary railroad along east-west axis behind Weston Center (1881). No street railways, although suburban lines from Waltham reach Kendall Green area by early 1900s.

B. Population:

Steady population increase after 1875, accompanied by steady increase in foreign-born population; Irish, English and Nova Scotians remain biggest foreign-born groups throughout period, small Swedish and Italian populations after c. 1900; Congregational Society formed 1891; Catholic Church and Christian Science Church organized around turn of century.

C. Settlement Location:

Development of country estates by Bostonians. Scattered throughout the town, began in either the late 1860s or 1870s, widespread by c. 1890-1900; small industrial village including workers' housing developed 1888-c. 1915 by Francis Hastings who established an organ factory near North America and Viles Street in 1888; limited middle and upper-middle-class suburban development on large lots near Silver Hill, Pidgeon Hill, Webster Road, Newton Street, and along Central Avenue, suburban development appears to have clustered around the town's many commuter railroad stops.

D. Economic Base:

Farming employment remained steady throughout period; industrial employment and production declined until c. 1885 and increased dramatically by 1895 after which it remained steady (increases are, presumably, the result of the establishment of Hasting's organ factory in 1888). Weston Aqueduct and Reservoir (1903; MHC surveyed) constructed as part of Boston's major aqueduct building program to tap Nashua River watershed.

E. Architecture

Residential:

Varied from cottages to high-style estate houses; little Victorian Gothic evident; Queen Anne, Colonial Revival, neo-Tudor/Crafts and eclectic early twentieth century styles represented. Major architect-designed estates in vicinities of Young Road and South Avenue, Love Lane and scattered other locations; large and modest architect-designed suburban houses in vicinities of train station, particularly at town center and Pidgeon Hill. Architects known

to have designed extant houses include Charles Fuller McKim, Hartwell, and Richardson and James T. Kelley; on Concord Road, south of Weston College, there is an elaborate Victorian Gothic pavillion, perhaps an outbuilding of a former estate.

Institutional:

Virtually all public buildings (except school houses) date from the period including Colonial Revival style town hall, three gothic style churches and Gothic style library, all designed by Boston architects; also Colonial Revival style firestation (1911)

Commercial:

Major portion of Central Avenue commercial blocks date from this period, or perhaps c. 1920; blocks range between one and two stories, generally Colonial Revival in style with one Spanish Mission style row; also extant are at least two commuter railroad stations including a well-preserved Victorian Gothic style station on Church Street (c. 1875-80-- Weston Station) and a slightly later wood-frame station (c. 1895) at Kendal Green (Church Street); also extant is a Queen Anne style resort hotel at Kendal Green (MHC Survey).

Industrial:

No known buildings extant.

X. EARLY MODERN PERIOD (1915-1940)

A. Transportation Routes:

Transport system remains in place. Upgrading of primary east-west roads as autohighways in 1930s, including North Street as Route 117, South Street as Route 30, and Post Road as Route 20 with by-pass around Weston Center (1931). Location of Boston metropolitan beltway along Charles River as Route 128 (1950) with original portion intact near Recreation Road as Massachusetts Pike ramps. Location of local airfield in 1920s at South and Brown Streets (now Massachusetts Pike).

B. Population:

Population growth rapid from 1920 to 1935; rapid increased after World War II. Growth primarily a product of Boston-oriented suburbanization.

C. Settlement Location:

Essentially same pattern of development as in preceding period; few tract subdivisions until after World War II.

D. Economic Base:

No industrial production of consequence. Hultman Aqueduct (1938-40) built to bring Quabbin Reservoir water into Boston.

E. Architecture

Residential:

Largest amount of building continued to be large scale houses, generally Colonial Revival in style, particularly those built in the vicinity of Central Avenue; continued purchase of former farms or country estates accompanied by increased interest in restoration of existing farmhouses; modest housing located in vicinity of North Avenue/Conant Road.

Institutional:

Colonial Revival style became dominant for public buildings including church (1923) and for college buildings at Weston College (c. 1920-30).

Commercial:

Some commercial conversion of houses at town center; continued use of Colonial Revival style for commercial architecture.

Industrial:

No significant construction.

XI. SOURCES

Lamson, Daniel, History of the Town of Weston (1913)

Matera, James J., "One Hundred Years of Boston's Water Supply," New England Water Works Association Journal 63 (June 1949), pp. 150 ff.

Dickson, Brenton H., Once Upon a Pung (1963; 1975).