

MHC Reconnaissance Survey Town Report

WESTWOOD

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: Westwood

I. TOPOGRAPHY

Located in rugged upland watershed between Charles and Neponset Rivers. Several areas of exposed bedrock; glacial outwash features prominent in landscape. A stony/gravelly soil. Uplands drained by numerous brooks, both south to Neponset and north to Charles. Numerous small ponds and bogs in uplands between elevations.

II. POLITICAL BOUNDARIES

Part of Dedham grant, 1636. Became Third (or West) Precinct of Dedham, 1737. Neponset River became Dedham/Stoughton (Canton) boundary, 1738, adding eastern section. Area frequently referred to as "Clapboardtrees." Incorporated as Town of Westwood, 1897.

III. HISTORIC OVERVIEW

Suburban town on Boston metropolitan fringe outside main north/south transport corridor. Native sites focused on Neponset marshes to east and bedrockhighlands to west with important regional trails. Early settlement from Dedham as fringe area in 17th century with agricultural development by mid-18th century on level plain (Westwood). Further growth in early 19th century with rural prosperity and limited industrial potential with a good range of period examples including small village common at Clapboardtrees and Nahatan Street with Federalist meeting-house, several Federal-style houses; expansion of estate district from Boston by early 20th century with impressive period Revival homes around edge of highlands and speculative suburban development on trolley routes and industrial corridor (Islington). Continued growth in mid-20th century along autohighway routes with good period gas stations (Route 109) and concrete bridges (Route 128). Colonial and Federal era landscape overwhelmed by suburban development.

IV. CONTACT PERIOD (1500 - 1620)

A. Transportation Routes:

Set astride regional axis of routes south from Neponset and Charles Rivers to interior and Narragansett. Major north/south trails included portions of High St (Route 109) from highlands (Route 128) to Westwood Center - around Buckmaster Pond as Pond St to High St and around Bubbling Brook at North St. The primary regional trail linking the Charles and Neponset followed East St from Dedham to Washington St (Islington), but locations have been greatly altered. Branch trails are documented into the highlands along Carry St to Cat Rock.

B. Settlement Pattern:

No documented sites from period reported; however, area around Buckmaster Pond noted for aboriginal occupation (including probable period sites) (Feuerty, 1972, p. 94). Winter refuge sites probable around other sheltered ponds. Period sites also possible on well-drained terraces overlooking Neponset and adjacent marsh.

C. Subsistence Pattern:

Sheltered sites near upland ponds probably used as winter refuge and ice/ fishing camps. Seasonal sites for fishing, gathering and agriculture along the Neponset. One, possibly more, lithic quarries in northwest part of town.

D. Observations:

Part of the "core area" of the Neponset (later Punkapoeg) Tribe. While greatest site density is probably near Neponset River, the upland used for hunting, quarrying of lithics and wintering sites. Site potential is fairly high.

V. FIRST SETTLEMENT PERIOD (1620 - 1675)

A. Transportation Routes:

Native trails remained as location of highways, as East and High Sts from Dedham. Improvements of the period included main road from Dedham south along axis of Washington St through Islington (Route 1A) - although original location has been lost, and improvement of High St around Buckmaster Pond past Satan's Kingdom. Secondary highways from Dedham include Sandy Valley Road around Purgatory Brook and possibly Summer St along Meadow Brook.

B. Population:

No Colonial inhabitants; possibly intermittent native occupation.

C. Settlement:

Several land grants to individuals but apparently no permanent settlement.

D. Economic Base:

Possibly some lumbering.

E. Architecture:

No buildings extant.

F. Observations:

Too close to Dedham village for separate settlement; too far from village center for Dedham residents.

VI. COLONIAL PERIOD (1676 - 1776)

A. Transportation Routes:

Main highways from 17th century continued as High St (Route 109) and Providence Post Road as Washington St (Route 1A). Secondary roads developed around focus of Clapboardtrees at Westwood include Clapboardtree,

Nathan, Fox Hill Sts with branching roads from Pond Plain as Winter and Oak Sts and routes around highlands as Summer and Dover Sts. Links from Dedham to Neponset River include Canton and Downy Sts.

B. Population:

Slow growth after King Philip's War. By 1737, 52 people listed on tax roll; by 1744, 62 people. Census of 1765 showed 313 inhabitants (54 families).

C. Settlement:

Primarily scattered farmsteads, especially in central part of town. A meetinghouse begun, 1731 (Nahatan St), finished in 1740. Location of meetinghouse a major factor in decision to separate from rest of Second Precinct (Norwood). Despite separation, no major settlement area developed. Other loci of limited development include: along Post Rd. (Washington St.) - notably Blue Hart Tavern (Jeremiah Dean) 1741 (Washington and East Sts); strip from Buckmaster Pond northeast along Pond and High Sts - tavern (Joseph Ellis) after 1730 (?).

D. Economic Base:

Agriculture and grazing, supplemented by winter lumbering. Some milling of products, primarily for local use. Sawmill, Purgatory Brook near Washington St., 1730 (Feuerty lists several other mills but gives no data or source, p. 14).

E. Architecture:

Residential: Little appears extant, probable that very few houses were built. Central Chimney 2-story houses of probable 18th century construction located on High Street north of Pond Street and sparsely along East and Canton Streets; date of 1680 and even 1732 reported in Westwood Inventory seem unlikely. Several central chimney Cape Cod cottages of possible 18th century origin, although none appear to be associated with first settlement.

Institutional: 1st meetinghouse demolished and replaced 1808-1809; town-owned buildings owned by Dedham - schoolhouses unlikely to remain.

Commercial: Probably no buildings extant except tavern(s) now in use as residences; tavern at East and Washington Street reputed to date from 1740s; date unverifiable from building's much altered exterior.

Industrial: No buildings extant.

F. Observations:

Initially the outlying farms west of Dedham village. Evolved into a small, but politically astute community determined to separate itself from its neighbors - somewhat unusual for an agricultural community of limited size. Available data on town is often vague and incomplete, in part because early town records are intermixed with Dedham's.

VII. FEDERAL PERIOD (1775 - 1830)

A. Transportation Routes:

Colonial highway systems remained in place with important junctions at Pond Plain (Westwood) Clapboardtrees and Islington. Regional turnpikes from Dedham south include Hartford St around Twin Pine Hill and Washington St (Route 1A) in early 19th century. Secondary roads of period include links between Westwood and Islington as Gay, Nathan and Everett Sts.

B. Population:

Included with Dedham figures; separated figures unavailable.

C. Settlement Location:

Relatively residential settlement along High Street between Nahatan Street and Fox Hill Road; limited building along Clapboardtree Street; small cluster on High Street at Mill Street; sparse building along East and Canton Streets.

D. Economic Base:

Industrial growth was the most pronounced in this period as the number of small sawmills and iron works expanded. One of the more concentrated areas of mill development after 1815 was between the ponds along Mill Street. (Today this is a wooded residential area.) Both the Draper Iron Foundry and E. F. Talbot's Oil Cloth factory got their start in this period though both saw their greatest success after moving to Norwood in the late 1840s. Bonnet making was initiated as a cottage industry by Betsey Baker.

E. Architecture:

Residential: As in preceding period, it is likely that the actual number of houses built was small; the most evident Federalist house-type is two stories high with a symmetrical center entrance facade and interior rear wall chimneys, examples with pitched roofs and with hip roofs are present. Other houses from the period occasionally have interior endwall chimneys or more frequently have a two-room-deep floor plan with twin chimneys. Locally unique is a double house built on Canton Street during this period. In general, decorative trim is restricted to the entry; a widespread entry design consists of a small semi-circular transom set above the front door, framed by pilasters and a moulded cap. Wide use is made of lean-to additions. Many farm outbuildings extant.

Institutional: Major survivals consist of two simple Federalist-style meetinghouses (Baptist and Congregational) at the junctions of High and Oak and Nahatan and Clapboard Treestree streets; also extant are a number of one-story houses with three-window sidewalls and low-pitched roofs which appear to be converted schoolhouses of the early nineteenth century; none seem to remain in original form.

Commercial: Likely commercial use of buildings along High Street, particularly at junction of Hartford and High Streets; however, no buildings for commercial use only are evident.

Industrial: No buildings extant.

VIII. EARLY INDUSTRIAL PERIOD

A. Transportation Routes:

Highway system remained from early 19th century. Railroads from Boston south along traditional Neponset corridor as Boston and Providence (1835) - now AMTRAK mainline and Norfolk Co RR (1849) along Washington St axis through Islington, in part abandoned right-of-way (Routes 1 and 128 jct).

B. Population: Not separated from Dedham figures.

C. Settlement Location: Nearly no enlargement of settled area; some filling in of unoccupied lots along High Street and rebuilding of earlier structures.

D. Economic Base:

The arrival of the railroad in Norwood in the late 1840s finished any possibility for further industrial development in the town. A number of industries from Westwood relocated in Norwood to be near the railroad. Gradually Westwood became a farming community, sending large quantities of milk to Boston. There are no known structures surviving of Westwood's industrial history.

E. Architecture:

Residential: Little Victorian architecture present. Small number of Greek Revival-style cottages (side hall and center entrance) and houses around junction of High and Gay Streets. Also, scattered farmhouses built with rectangular, twin-chimney plans, but decorated with simple Greek Revival trim and Italianate brackets (Fox Hill Road and High Street). Relatively large number of barns either built or remodelled ca. 1850-70.

Institutional: Nearly no new building except for 2-story schoolhouse (1847 - altered) on High Street.

Commercial: No buildings constructed for exclusive commercial use are evident.

Industrial: Continued small-scale manufacturing at Mill and High Sts - no buildings extant.

IX. LATE INDUSTRIAL PERIOD (1870 - 1915)

A. Transportation Routes:

Road and rail network remained from mid-19th century. Street railway expansion from Dedham (Boston) south in early 1900s along Washington St through Islington to Norwood, and along High St through Westwood Center to Medfield.

B. Population:

Relatively high percentage of foreign-born residents by 1905 (320 out of 1,136 total); Irish form the largest group, followed by Nova Scotians and Germans.

C. Settlement Location:

Large portions of Islington (north of East Street) laid out by 1888 but only sparsely developed as late as 1915; after ca. 1890-95 large portions of Westwood along Canton Street (East Westwood), south of Clapboardtree Street and in the northern part of the town (Fox Hill, Grove and Summer Streets) developed as large estates for wealthy Bostonians (including members of the Forbes, Codman and other Brahmin families).

D. Economic Base:

Beginning of suburban/estate economy; no industrial development.

E. Architecture:

Residential: Most lavish buildings of the period include several large-scale mansions built as the main houses of country estates; in addition, some existing Federalist and earlier farmhouses were restored and altered when some former farms were converted to estates. Architects known to have done residential work in Westwood include Parker, Thomas and Rice (3 commissions). As much of this development was overflow from Dedham and Dover, and since many of the same families built estates in each town, it is likely that the firm of Kilham & Hopkins and James Purdon (active in Dover and Dedham) also designed houses in Westwood. Major examples remain of Federalist Revival architecture (Grove and Summer Sts), Queen Anne and Colonial Revival architecture (High and Fox Hill Sts), and eclectic early 20th century designs (south of Clapboardtree St).

Modest residential development of the period was mostly restricted to Islington where a moderate number of very simple Colonial Revival and late Queen Anne-style houses were built.

Institutional: Classical Revival town hall (ca. 1900-1915); one-story library built from plans by Henry Bailey Alden (early 20th century ?); extant schoolhouse on Main Street, built 1874, H. Graves of Boston, architect (MHC Survey, Westwood Form #22); Norfolk Country Club at Westfield and Summer Streets by 1909 (no apparent buildings extant).

Commercial: Small-scale conversion of existing buildings on High Street and Washington Street by addition of storefronts.

Industrial: No apparent buildings extant.

X. MODERN PERIOD (1915 - 1940)

A. Transportation Routes:

Abandonment of street railway routes in 1920s along High St and 1930s along Washington St. Regional autohighway routes from Boston in 1930s

include circumferential Route 128 with original route intact as Station St and concrete bridge (1931) over Neponset (Route 128 station) and Boston-Providence highway as Route 1 around Islington - now rebuilt (1950s). Local improvements include Art Deco concrete bridge at Canton St (1936) over Neponset, and improvement of High St as Route 109 in 1930s. Westwood Airport located on Pond Plain in 1920s at High and Pond Sts - now housing development.

B. Population:

Steady growth of population 1920-present with particularly large increases 1940-45, 1950-1965; Boston-oriented commuter suburb after opening of Route 128.

C. Settlement Location:

Scattered, expensive individual houses in north and central part of town; post-World War II tracts in the vicinity of Pleasant Hill, Westwood Center and Islington; most recent tracts opened along Canton Street.

D. Economic Base:

Suburban development.

E. Architecture:

Residential: Strong tradition of Colonial Revival throughout period; more modest examples at Pleasant Hill, Westwood Center and Islington made use of current plans (split-level, ranch, etc.) but with Colonial Revival-style trim.

Institutional: Contemporary schoolhouses (brick) built to accommodate population increase.

Commercial: Limited strip development along High St, most new buildings and alterations (World War II-present) have a thin veneer of Colonial Revival motif; additional post-1935 strip development along Washington St.

Industrial: No buildings extant.

X. SOURCES:

Smith and Walling, Map of the Town of Dedham, Boston: 1851.

Walker Lithograph & Publishing Co., Atlas of the Towns of Needham, Dover, Westwood, Millis and Medway, Norfolk County, Mass., Boston: 1909.

Cooke, George W., A History of the Clapboard Trees or Third Parish, 1887.

Feuerty, Marjory R., West Dedham and Westwood, 1972.

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