

MHC Reconnaissance Survey Town Report

REVERE

Report Date: 1981

Associated Regional Report: Boston Area

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: 1981

Community: Revere

I. TOPOGRAPHY

City occupies 6.32 square miles along the Atlantic Ocean, bounded on the north by the Pines River, and on the south by the Chelsea River, its tributary, Mill Creek, and Belle Isle Inlet. Revere Beach is a 4-1/2 mile crescent which stretches from Point of Pines, the town's northernmost extremity, to Grovers Cliff, just over the Winthrop line. Large portions of the town are still low-lying salt marshes, particularly the large area north of Brown Circle. Virtually all is glacial drift, worked over by tides and rivers. This lowland topography is dominated by two groups of drumlins in the western and southeastern portions of the town. Fenno Hill is the highest of the western group (192 feet), followed by Newgate and Shurtleff Hills. Youngs Hill (134 feet) and Beachmont rise prominently above the sea between Crescent Beach and the Winthrop line. Cherry Island Bar, upon which the Great Ocean Pier was constructed in 1881, is the residue of a third coastal drumlin. The town's initial commerce and development occurred in the corridor between these two groups of hills.

Franklin Park is the truncated portion of the old "panhandle," a 17th century surveying error. This 200-acre parcel, isolated from the rest of Revere by a broad salt marsh, is the only part of town which lies in the Fells Upland District. The fault line which separates the Boston Basin from the upland is nowhere so dramatic as here where U.S. Route 1 sweeps out of the marshland at the base of cliffs 170 feet in height.

II. POLITICAL BOUNDARIES

Initially called Rumney Marsh and acquired by Boston 1634 with original 8 Mile Line of 1636 surviving as Everett-Malden and Saugus boundaries. Rumney Marsh meeting house established 1710 with later formation as town of Chelsea 1739. Renamed North Chelsea 1847 with separation of Chelsea (Winnissimet) along Mill Creek and Winthrop 1852 at Short Beach Creek. Renamed Revere 1871 and incorporated as city in 1914.

III. HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

Seaside suburban city on Boston-Salem corridor. Located on Massachusetts Bay at edge of Boston Basin with reported native sites on Fenno Hill and along Revere Beach tidelands. Early area of English settlement from Boston during 17th century called Rumney Marsh. Formation of original Chelsea meeting house

at Revere center by early 18th century with well-preserved Late First Period burying ground and authentic tide mill on 1640 mill site on Mill Creek. Primarily estate farms on coastal marshes through early 19th century when turnpike and railroad established Boston and Salem connections. Town center remained at Beach Street focus with some surviving period houses along Broadway and School Streets. Increasing development of Revere Beach as summer resort during mid-19th century, with direct Boston railroad access prompting subdivision of coastal highlands. Summer cottages of Victorian design remain at Beachmont and on Young's Hill, while town center preserved civic focus with Gothic Church and Neo-Classic library. Rapid expansion of Revere Beach as regional amusement center by early 20th century with suburban trolley connections to Boston and Lynn. Only cast iron bandstands remain of large Victorian complex that included beachfront arcades and roller coasters. Inland areas developed as modest suburban housing along Malden Street and Park Avenue including some concrete Bungalow examples. Civic architecture retains high quality design with several notable fire stations and municipal facilities at Revere Beach in modified Mission style. Commercial center shifts to Youngs Hill by mid-20th century with development along Beach and Shirley Streets as three-decker district. Affluent residential area established at Point of Pines with unique examples of period houses including Historic Revival and Moderne designs along Revere Beach Blvd. Extensive system of autoparkways constructed through area from Boston with early traffic interchanges and commercial architecture. Recent program of urban renewal along Revere Beach has removed nearly all historic fabric, while Young's Hill area appears to suffer from abandonment and decay. In contrast original town center retains village scale as seaside hilltops preserve original summer resort character.

IV. CONTACT PERIOD (1500-1620)

A. Transportation Routes:

Conjunction of routes from highland interior to coastal lowlands. Trail locations appear to follow in loop around Fennos Hill from Saugus and Mystic Rivers as Salem Street-Washington Avenue (N/S) with circuit of Fenno-Beach-School-Malden Streets around edge of Chelsea Creek and Pines River. Trail routes to ocean tidelands (Revere Beach) from Fenno Hill apparent as Beach Street to seacoast with N/S extensions to Point of Pines and Short Beach-Beachmont to Winthrop peninsula. Other possible branches conjectured as Revere and Winthrop Streets to tidemarsch behind Revere Beach.

B. Settlement Pattern:

Several period burials known although exact locations are unclear. Most were from the 'Revere Beach' area and probably near Youngs Hill (19-SU-1 and 2). Other period sites reported on Fenno Hill. Additional sites likely along Mill Creek, well drained knolls adjacent to Pines River and marshes and on Youngs and Beachmont Hills.

C. Subsistence Pattern:

An area of diverse resources; shellfish, fish and other marine materials, freshwater and brackish marshes for hunting and gathering, good horticultural land. Also an area with easy access to Europeans and a likely location for period trade between natives and Europeans.

D. Observations:

Part of the coastal resource area used by the native groups living on the northern edge of the Boston basin. Estuaries of the Saugus and Mystic Rivers bracket the area which served as a focal point for these people who were probably part of the group referred to as Pawtucket/Penacook.

V. FIRST SETTLEMENT PERIOD (1620-1675)

A. Transportation Routes:

Native trails improved as highways with primary route from Saugus to Winnisimmet Ferry (Chelsea) as Washington Avenue with loop to ocean beach as Malden-School-Fenno and Beach Streets with connection to Pullin Point (Winthrop) along Winthrop Parkway.

B. Population:

First allotments of Rumney Marsh made in 1637. Twenty-one parcels sold, gradually reduced by sale and repurchase to 7 farms -- those of Parker, Newgate, Keayne, Cogan, Tuttle, Cole, and Penn.

C. Settlement Patterns:

Apparently individual farmsteads established during mid-17th century along primary highways of Fenno, Beach and Malden Streets, although precise information is lacking.

D. Economic Base:

Primarily farming. Portion of produce sent to Boston from a landing established on Mill Creek ("Mr. Newgate's landing place"), later site of Slade Mill. Throughout this period and the next, of the three towns, Winnisimmet (now Chelsea), Rumney Marsh (Revere), and Pullen Point (Winthrop), Revere maintained the largest population, with the most active commercial center.

VI. COLONIAL PERIOD (1675-1775)

A. Transportation Routes:

Highways remain from 17th century with focus of routes at Chelsea meeting house (Revere center) on Beach-School Streets. Primary N/S highway between Salem and Chelsea Ferry maintained as Washington Avenue.

B. Population:

By 1739, about 40 houses in what is now Chelsea, Winthrop and Revere. Of these, about 26 were in Revere, with 10 in Chelsea and 4 in Winthrop. Population in the vicinity of 100 persons. By 1765 this number had risen to probably about 250-300.

C. Settlement Pattern:

Formation of town center with Rumney Marsh meeting house (1710) and burying ground at Beach and School Streets with tide mill at Mill Creek created focus of activity around Fenno Hill area during mid-18th century. Individual estate farms remain on Malden Street and along Washington Avenue from late 17th century.

D. Economic Base:

Continued agrarian economy with increasing quantities of produce shipped to Boston markets. Tide mill established 1734 at landing site, the only grist mill between Lynn and Malden.

E. Architecture:

Only one residential structure of the period is known to survive and that is a two-story, gambrel-roofed house on School Street, which, to judge by the steep and narrow quality of its gambrel, appears to be a fairly early example, c. 1735.

The gambrel roof is known in at least one other example, the Nicholas Baker house, a First Period structure which probably received its gambrel roof in the early 18th century (demolished 1904). As far as can be determined, the Church of Christ at Rumney Marsh, though drastically remodelled in 1856 and 1886, is the original building constructed in 1710. As built, the church had the typical meetinghouse form with a center entrance on the long side and a single stage belfry tower projecting from the end.

VII. FEDERAL PERIOD (1775-1830)

A. Transportation Routes:

Improvement of connections between Boston and Salem with turnpike through town center as Broadway (1803) and bridges across Mill Creek and Pines River.

B. Population:

By 1830 population of three towns had reached 770, of which probably nearly 700 lived within the present bounds of Revere.

C. Settlement Pattern:

Focus of civic activity remained centered around meeting house with additional emphasis of Salem Turnpike (Broadway) to Chelsea ferry by early 19th century.

D. Economic Base:

Primarily farming. Additional commerce spurred by establishment 1803 of Salem Turnpike. First brickyard begun 1803 along turnpike near Mill Creek by one Cheever. Grist mill, vacant 1795-1823, rebuilt in latter year by John Cutter.

E. Architecture:

Residential: Although at least one highstyle Federal house, the hip-roofed, end chimney Hastings House (1798) once stood in Revere, it was demolished in 1937, so that the predominant Federal housetype to survive is the more modest twin rear wall chimney house, of which some half dozen examples exist. Most of these were built early in the 19th century and stand at the town center. At least one twin rear wall chimney house, the John Green House on School Street, appears to be an early example of the type and may even date to the Colonial period to judge by the comparative massiveness of its chimneys.

VIII. EARLY INDUSTRIAL PERIOD 1830-1870)

A. Transportation Routes:

Early railroad corridor between Boston and Salem on N/S axis as Eastern (Boston & Maine) mainline (1838) across tidemarth with depot at Beach Street. Additional connections with early intercity horse railroad to Salem on Broadway (1860) through town center. Portion of Saugus Branch railroad from Malden to Salem through Revere across Pines River marshes (1854) with bridge at Marshall Street.

B. Population:

Limited growth as first Chelsea , and then Winthrop developed industrial and residential attractions. Between 1855 and 1870 population climbed from 793 to 1,197. Of the 16% foreign-born population in 1865, 12% came from Ireland.

C. Settlement Pattern:

Town center continued to expand around Beach and Broadway axis with local civic and commercial activity. Revere Beach initially developed during 1830s with individual hotels at Point of Pines and Crescent Beach, later stimulated by Boston-Salem railroad link along Beach Street axis by mid-19th century.

D. Economic Base:

Primarily farming economy, though this was supplemented by at least one brickyard along the turnpike, a ropewalk (1846-56) on School Street and the snuff and grist mill operated by Henry Slade, a tobacconist from Boston. The first store in Revere, at Broadway and Beach Street opened in 1835, and a tavern at Point of Pines, named Robinson Crusoe House in 1834, became a famed resort on the isolated neck of land.

E. Architecture:

Residential: Revere's secondary status as the North Chelsea section of Chelsea continued to be reflected in the small numbers of houses and the scarcity of highstyle examples constructed there. Few Greek Revival houses were constructed but the form continued to be popular as late as the 1860s and a few retardataire examples are known whose thin and sticklike moldings belie their late date. Further, it appears that the highstyle temple front form was at best poorly comprehended as one of the two known temple front examples , on Salem Street, incorporates a monumental portico on the gable end wall (with the entrance in the traditional central location on the long wall), the portico

being supported by only three widely spaced columns. Thus, of the few houses surviving from the period, most are simply detailed center entrance Greek Revival structures with a few Italianate examples probably built toward the end of the period.

Institutional: A few institutional structures were constructed in the period, among them the first Town Hall (1835), a temple front Greek Revival structure; the Shurtleff School (1838, demolished 1892), a brick Greek Revival/Italianate structure and the First Congregational Church (1850), originally a small Italianate chapel.

Commercial: A few domestically scaled Greek Revival stores were constructed along with one hotel, the Robinson Crusoe at Point of Pines (1834), probably a Greek Revival structure originally, but rebuilt later in the century in an elaborate Italianate design.

IX. LATE INDUSTRIAL PERIOD (1870-1915)

A. Transportation Routes:

Expansion of railroad connection to beachfront with Boston, Revere & Lynn narrow gauge along Revere Beach by 1875 (in part Blue Line rapid transit with abandoned route to Point of Pines) and branch line to Beachmont along oceanfront (1883) from Revere depot, destroyed by wave action (1885). Streetcar routes extended to oceanfront from Malden and East Boston with service along Revere Beach Blvd. to Point of Pines and local routes to Beachmont on Winthrop Avenue and Fenno Hill on Central-Park Avenue from Revere Center. Connections to Revere Beach from Broadway line established on Beach and Revere Streets with link to Salem Street route on Malden Street by late 19th century.

B. Population:

Establishment of land companies and shore railroads sparked boom in summer, and later year-round, homes beginning in 1872. Between 1870 and 1900 the population doubled every decade. By 1915, the population, at 25,178, was 21 times the 1870 figure. The foreign-born population, 27% in 1905, was largely made up of residents from Ireland, Nova Scotia, and England.

C. Settlement Pattern:

Rapid development of Revere Beach with steam railroad access during 1870s. Residential subdivisions platted on Beachmont and Young's Hill as modest summer resort by late 19th century with center of activity at Crescent Beach pier (1881) along beachfront.

Later subdivision of interior lands along Revere, Malden and Park Avenue trolley routes during early 20th century. Civic focus remained at Revere center with commercial activity along Broadway at base of Fenno Hill.

D. Economic Base:

Boston Land Company purchased James Sale Farm at Beachmont in 1872, chartering narrow gauge railroad 1875 to connect development with Boston and Lynn. Developments at Crescent Beach (Pavilion Hotel, 1876) and Point of Pines (Pines Hotel, 1881) followed. Great Ocean Pier on Cherry Island Bar (1881), reputed to be the largest pier in the country at the time, also built by land company interests to bring ferry service from Lynn and Boston.

Early electric light plant built at Point of Pines (c. 1882?) to supply hotel. On basis of its success, North Shore Company formed to supply Oak Island and Crescent Beach. Entire beach illuminated by electric lights from Ocean Pier to Point of Pines July, 1884 using three lighting stations. In 1888 North Shore Company supplied first electric overhead trolley railroad at Crescent Beach. The same year it was authorized to supply the town with street lights.

By 1896 beach covered with bathhouses, eating places, and line of the Narrow Gauge. Taken over in that year by Metropolitan Park Commission, with relocation of railroad and later construction of Revere Beach Parkway. Peak of beachfront development reached with construction of Wonderland, 1906 -- an amusement park called "the Coney Island of New England." Early demise in 1911 laid to high operating costs.

Industrial activity encouraged by new building campaigns included two additional brickyards along Broadway and the terra cotta works on School Street of David McIntosh. Railroad Street industrial development begun in this period with 5-bay engine house by Boston & Maine Railroad, Durant Paint Factory, a wool waste plant, and Suburban Gas Company.

E. Architecture:

Residential: Significant residential development commenced with the Late Industrial period. First to be developed was the Beachmont section to which a narrow gauge railroad was completed in 1875; thereafter, the section filled in quickly with many well-detailed suburban cottages and houses in the Stick, Second Empire and Queen Anne styles. Elaborately massed, picturesque rooflines are a favored design element of many of these houses, at least some of which were probably constructed as summer cottages.

Later, around the turn of the century, Young's Hill began to be built up with many Colonial Revival three-deckers; residential construction was spurred after 1908 by the arrival of displaced Chelsea fire victims. With the exception of these two sections, other areas experienced less rapid development. The crest of Young's Hill was built up with suburban single family Queen Anne and Stick Style houses but most of the remaining residential construction consists of Queen Anne and Colonial Revival two-families and three-deckers with concentrations of well-detailed houses along Lincoln, Proctor and Mountain Streets and less ambitious examples north of Revere Street.

Institutional: Most of Revere's institutional buildings were constructed during the period with many substantial and well-detailed Renaissance and Colonial Revival structures built including the Town Hall (1899), the Revere High School (1908), and several other brick and frame schools as well as a number of churches, including two Shingle Style churches at Beachmont (St. Paul's, 1887; Trinity, 1882) and one outstanding late High Victorian Gothic church (Immaculate Conception, 1893), a frame structure with well-proportioned wooden detailing. The most imposing structure built in the period is the highstyle Beaux Arts classical Library (1903, probably McLean and Wright, architects, Boston, who did 1903 Carnegie Library of same design in Rockland [see form #39/72]). The Revere library is an elaborately detailed domed building donated by Andrew Carnegie. Although it is undoubtedly architect-designed, the Library's architect is not known, nor does it seem that the design is a local product, but more probably emanates from an architect affiliated with Carnegie.

Commercial: The greatest number of commercial structures built in the period were hotels, ballrooms, gardens and amusement parks which lined the length of Revere Beach. These included a number of exuberant Beaux Arts-derived designs, such as the Great Ocean Pier (1911-1939), as well as a few anthropomorphous amusement structures and some more restrained Queen Anne and Shingle Style hotels. The only elements of this development to survive are several sets of cast iron pavilions with gazebos along Revere Beach Boulevard.

Industrial: Two notable industrial complexes survive in Revere: these are the three-story frame structures of D. and L. Slade's Spice Mills (1885) and the late 19th century frame buildings of the Rowe Quarry on Salem Street. Both are utilitarian in design.

X. EARLY MODERN PERIOD (1915-1940)

A. Transportation Routes:

Railroads and trolley routes maintained through mid-20th century. Extensive system of autoparkways constructed to Revere Beach by Metropolitan District Commission during 1930s with N/S Shore Road (Route 1A) including Art Deco draw bridge across Pine River (1932), E/W Revere Beach Parkway including original interchange at Broadway (1930) and U. S. Route One (C1) as American Legion Highway-Squire Road around Revere Center with connecting traffic circles to MDC parkways. Also improved during period Revere Street as Route 60 and Winthrop Avenue Parkway to Suffolk Downs Raceway with interchange at Route One (1933) and original truss bridge over B & M mainline. Early airport location at Rumney Marsh on Squire Road by 1930s. (Now Northgate Shopping Center)

B. Population:

Population continued to rise, though at a slower rate, until 1930, when it reached 35,680. After a decade of slow decline, it began a slow rise in 1940, but in the succeeding 35 years this growth amounted to only 6,000 persons, making a total of 41,292 in 1975.

C. Settlement Pattern:

Continued expansion of residential subdivisions along primary transit routes with formation of commercial core along Shirley-Beach Streets at base of Young's Hill and secondary center at Beachmont on Winthrop Avenue. Revere Beach developed as major amusement resort with focus of activity at Crescent Beach pier. Affluent residential area established at Point of Pines by mid-20th century with tenement district around Young's Hill. Commercial strip development centers along American Legion Highway corridor from East Boston with industrial fringe activity around Chelsea Creek oil storage facilities.

D. Economic Base:

Closing of brickyards accompanied by little new industrial growth, though the existing reinforced concrete waste company factory on Railroad Street dates to this period.

E. Architecture:

Residential: While a number of simple Craftsman-derived two-family houses were constructed in Revere in the 1920s, much of the town remained undeveloped until after 1940. Sections of Park Avenue, the southern side of Revere Street and areas south of Shirley Street filled in with wide-eaved, hip-roofed single and two family houses, while along Revere Beach Boulevard and at Point of Pines, summer houses in more exotic styles began to be built. Several notable Mission Revival designs and at least one stuccoed Moderne house stand along the Boulevard. Few highstyle buildings were constructed elsewhere in the town.

Institutional: Several brick Georgian Revival schools and one Georgian Revival synagogue were constructed as well as a Colonial Revival Post Office (1937) and a Renaissance Revival Church (St. Theresa's, 1926).

Commercial: Conservative Colonial Revival structures such as the Telephone Exchange Building (1924), were constructed along with a number of one and two story commercial blocks in Revival styles; an especially well-preserved concentration of 1920s storefronts survives along Shirley Street. Two important International Style buildings, Wonderland Dog Track and Suffolk Downs Racetrack (Mark Linenthal; grandstand in East Boston) were constructed in 1935. The last surviving Beach-related structure is the General Edwards Inn (1923), a three-story Colonial Revival Building.

XI. SURVEY OBSERVATIONS

Most of Revere's few industrial buildings were identified in the city's survey. One, the kiln of the Durant Paint & Varnish Co. on Railroad Avenue, has been demolished. Of the other two structures on Railroad Avenue unidentified, the four story reinforced concrete factory at #134, and the B & M engine house, only the latter merits further attention. This 5-bay facility is an unusual survivor of a building type which could once be found in virtually every railroad community of any size.

XII. SOURCES

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