

# MHC Reconnaissance Survey Town Report

## STONEHAM

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: Stoneham

### I. TOPOGRAPHY

Town occupies six square miles of a high plateau above the Boston Basin, its surface broken into numerous small hills and hollows. Two well-marked valleys run from north to south, one including Spot Pond, Wright's Pond, and (in Medford) Gravelly Brook; the other, the Winchester reservoirs and Meetinghouse Brook. In the Middlesex Fells, which encompasses the southern half of this plateau in Stoneham, there are several prominent peaks, the most notable being Bear Hill (311 feet).

Although the town lies entirely within the Mystic watershed, its brooks run off opposite sides of the plateau, to join, on the west, the Aberjona in Winchester; and on the east, Malden River. Of the two principal brooks, Sweetwater and Spot Pond, only the latter was used for any appreciable waterpower in Stoneham.

A deposit of "marble" north of Bear Hill was worked during the 19th century.

### II. POLITICAL BOUNDARIES

Originally part of Charlestown grant (1658) with independent town formation (1725) within approximate boundaries. Gradual adjustment during mid-19th century from neighboring towns along east and west boundaries by Woburn, Wakefield and Melrose to present form.

### III. HISTORIC OVERVIEW

Suburban industrial town on primary northern axis of metropolitan Boston. Located on highland plain beyond Middlesex Fells with apparent native planting fields around town center area and possible sites on Spot Pond. Early area is isolated settlement from Charlestown by mid-17th century on Farm Hill with Scotch-Irish element. Town center formation by mid-18th century with some surviving period houses on peripheral roads. Location of Andover-Medford Turnpike reoriented town center to Main Street by early 19th century stimulating local industrial prosperity of shoes and taverns with several surviving Greek Revival porticoed cottages.

Primary development during mid-19th century with unusually well-preserved Victorian suburban neighborhood, including several Octagon houses, notable period church and other eclectic residential forms. Town center also contains set of brick period business blocks of Mansard and Italianate style. Portions of date 19th woodframe shoe factories remain along railroad industrial district among 20th century additions which include early Concrete and Moderne examples. Later suburban expansion from Boston along autohighways and trolley lines with landmark period gas station, MDC Zoo and pumping station near Spot Pond, with Revival residential district on Farm Hill. Present development pressures from Routes 128-93 have totally overwhelmed north Main Street area, while town center and historic residential fabric remains remarkably intact.

IV. CONTACT PERIOD (1500-1620)

A. Transportation Routes:

Local corridor of routes around Boston Basin highlands between Mystic and Saugus valleys. Conjectured trails follow SW/NE across northern plain along Forest Street and Marble-Summer-Bow-Green Streets with intermediate N/S route apparent along Marble-Warren-Central-Waverly High Streets through town center and over Farm Hill. Probable links south to Malden and Mystic (Medford) follow Franklin and Pond Streets with likely circuit around Spot Pond along Woodland Road, although no documentation in histories.

B. Settlement Pattern:

No documented period sites known. Probable sites located north of Spot Pond (Doleful plain area reputed as native 'planting fields') and east of Spot Pond on grounds of New England Sanatorium. Likely winter camps around Spot and other ponds.

C. Subsistence Pattern:

Basically upland hunting, gathering, and winter ice fishing.

D. Observations:

Likely a resource and wintering area for native groups on adjacent coastal and riverine plains.

V. FIRST PERIOD (1620-1675)

A. Transportation Routes:

Native trails remain as local highways with primary E/W link between Woburn and Reading following Forest and Marble-Summer-Green Streets. Apparently no formal road south to Spot Pond and Mystic-Medford.

B. Population:

No known European population until very end of period. Only Perry (1935) claims 1640 settler in Haywardville area.

C. Settlement Patterns:

Isolated farmsteads on Charlestown End grant by 1660s with documented sites along north slope of Farm Hill (High Street) and Doleful Plain (Marble-Summer Streets).

D. Economic Base:

None, though see Population, above. Perry claims that a sawmill was built in 1640 at the outlet of Spot Pond, but this is unsubstantiated in the other sources.

VI. COLONIAL PERIOD (1675-1775)

A. Transportation Routes:

Highways intact from 17th century with main E/W routes between Woburn, Reading and Malden. Meetinghouse center prompts radial roads to east (Franklin Street) and south (Pond-Woodlawn Streets) to Medford around Spot Pond.

B. Population:

By 1678, six inhabitants or families. By 1725 population had grown to probably about 250-300, in perhaps 50 houses, though no identifiable village center. In 1765 this number had grown slightly to 340, with 59 families in 54 houses.

C. Settlement Pattern:

Primary areas remained at Farm Hill and Doleful Plain through mid-18th century with meetinghouse location of 1726 midway between as town center.

D. Economic Base:

First settled as "Charlestown End" in 1670s. Grist mill by early 18th century on Spot Pond Brook. Agricultural and dairy products and livestock for local consumption. Generally, Hurd wrote, town was "inferior to neighbors in territory, population, and wealth."

E. Architecture:

Residential: Several center chimney houses with early 18th century dates are recorded, including one gambrel-roofed example, but only two 18th century, center chimney houses are known to survive: both on Elm Street along the Wakefield border.

Institutional, Commercial, Industrial: The first meeting-house was built in 1726 and stood at Summer and William Streets; in addition, at least one schoolhouse and one mill are recorded. No known extant structures.

VII. FEDERAL PERIOD (1775-1830)

A. Transportation Routes:

Road system in place from 18th century. Introduction of Medford-Andover Turnpike N/S across highlands (Main Street) 1806 reorients town center with E/W radials at William and Spring Streets to Woburn and Melrose.

B. Population:

Virtually no growth until after about 1800. In succeeding two decades, population doubled, reaching 732 by 1830.

C. Settlement Pattern:

Reorientation of town center from meetinghouse to Andover Turnpike by early 19th century along Main Street from Marble to Elm Streets.

D. Economic Base:

Most of the population engaged in agriculture, though a large proportion also produced shoes out of numerous small shoe shops. By the early 1830s, 200 men and women were engaged full or part time in these shops.

Only in what was later to become Haywardville was there any appreciable use of waterpower. In the 1820s William Barrett had a dyeing establishment there, and Perry made reference to a chocolate factory.

E. Architecture:

Residential: A few vernacular Federal period houses may survive in the Farm Hill section. The record indicates that as late as 1818, center chimney, gambrel-roofed cottages were being constructed; this suggests that stylistic change occurred slowly and that most of the Greek Revival houses surviving (some of which might date from the end of the Federal period) probably were constructed after 1830.

Institutional, Commercial, Industrial: No known extant structures.

VIII. EARLY INDUSTRIAL PERIOD (1830-1870)

A. Transportation Routes:

Continued improvement of E/W links from town center along Montvale Avenue to Malden and Elm Street to Wakefield by mid-19th century. Early horse railroad, from Melrose to town Center on Franklin-Main Streets by 1860, with steam railroad branch from Woburn along Sweetwater Brook around town center (1862).

B. Population:

In the decade 1840-50 population doubled, made possible largely by new tannery and burgeoning shoe industry. Very slight growth during the Civil War, but by 1870 population had doubled the figure in 1850, reaching 4,513. Of this number, about 10% were Irish immigrants, with smaller numbers from English-speaking Canada and England.

C. Settlement Pattern:

Commercial center forms at Main-Central Street along N/S highway with industrial district along Sweetwater-Montvale axis at Main-William Streets. Affluent residential area develops along Wright Street S/W of business area with modest residential to east along Franklin-Summer Streets.

D. Economic Base:

In 1865 shoes were produced valued at over \$850,000 by 450 men and 290 women. This expansion was made possible by the construction of the Stoneham Branch RR (1861-2) and the erection of several substantial tanneries and currying shops,

the William Tidd Tannery (c. 1840) being one of the earliest. Government contracts during the Civil War gave shoe and leather manufacturers a strong boost. Between 1865 and 1871 Stoneham's growth in manufacturing was greater than any city or town in the country except Somerville and Cambridge.

The other major manufactured product of the period was rubber. In the 1840s Elisha Converse began a "rubber mill" in Haywardville. In 1858 this was purchased by Nathaniel Hayward, one of the inventors of the vulcanization process and then at the peak of his career. The Haywardville Rubber Works was in prosperous operation between 1858 and 1870. In 1865 the company employed 150 operatives producing rubber goods (rubber shoes, pails, spittoons, and the like) worth over \$600,000.

#### E. Architecture:

Residential: The earliest houses which survive in numbers in Stoneham are the simple Greek Revival cottages and houses of workers associated with Stoneham's shoe industry, established in 1837. Most of these are sidehall plan houses, concentrated east of Main Street between Spring and Summer Streets. A few more ambitious Greek Revival houses, with porticos, are located along Main Street and are probably related to the establishment of the Reading and Andover Turnpike. Many more simple, vernacular sidehall Italianate cottages and houses were built in response to the shoe industry; these are found east and just west of Main Street at the center of town and along early routes like Franklin, Spring, Elm and High Streets. In addition, a few pretentious Italianate villas, the later examples with mansard roofs, were constructed by the town's leading citizens in the neighborhood just west of Main Street along Maple, Warren and Chestnut Streets; a few of these survive. Also surviving are at least two octagon houses with Italianate detailing, one on Spring Street at Washington and the other on Pine Street.

Institutional: The most important surviving institutional building is the Greek Revival Congregational Church (c. 1845) on Main Street at the town center; the design is a severe, four-square version encountered less often than the usual porticoed form. Also constructed in the period were several ambitious granite Italianate buildings around the New England Sanatorium.

Commercial: Several important and well-preserved mid-19th century Italianate and Romanesque Revival brick commercial blocks survive at the town center, including one very early four story panel brick example with a shallowly pitched roof similar in design to the Masonic apartments in Medford (1850).

Industrial: At least one shoe factory probably dates from this period; the Sanborn & Mann factory on Main Street, a five story structure with a High Victorian Gothic stair tower.

IX. LATE INDUSTRIAL PERIOD (1870-1915)

A. Transportation Routes:

Expansion of trolley routes to Stoneham center by late 19th century from Woburn on Montvale Avenue, from Redding on Main Street, from Wakefield on Elm Street and from Melrose on Franklin Street. N/S link to Medford over Middlesex Fells by electric railway line follows route from Main Street between Winthrop and Deer Hills with original roadbed and concrete bridge still intact from early 1900s.

B. Population:

Two peaks of population growth in the Late Industrial Period -- 1880-85 and 1905-10 -- both preceded by periods of decline in the absolute population. Depressed business condition of the mid-1870s was probably responsible for the earlier decline; the latter, largely the result of the annexation of part of the town by Wakefield in 1889. By 1915 the population had reached 7,489. Of these, roughly 18% were foreign-born. The number of first generation Irish had declined to about 6% of the total population, while greater numbers were arriving from Nova Scotia.

C. Settlement Pattern:

Basic development remained constant with commercial center along Main Street at Central and residential districts east and west. Industrial area along railroad north of town center and quality suburban south along Wright Street with extension of development along Elm and Franklin trolley lines.

D. Economic Base:

By 1891 there were 27 boot and shoe manufacturers, most of them operating multi-story frame factories with anywhere from 25 to 365 hands. Nearly half of the companies had been established in the 1870s; 7 in the 1880s; and 6 had been formed in the period 1890-91. Almost all dealt in women's and children's shoes. The two largest factories were those of T. H. Jones on Franklin Street and Sanborn & Mann, whose extant five story frame factory at 426 Main Street is now a furniture warehouse. According to Standish (1937), the Sanborn & Mann building (later J. L. Grover) was built in 1858 and reputed to be "one of the first shoe factories in the U. S. to employ



steam power for labor saving purposes. In this factory was used the first heeling machine" (p. 60). These two factories were close to the center of the shoe and leather manufacturing district -- an area roughly bounded by Hancock, Main, Common, and Pine Streets. In 1875 shoe production was valued at over \$2 million. In the same year there were 5 substantial tanneries, which themselves produced a product worth over \$560,000.

While the shoe community prospered, however, Haywardville declined. The taking of Spot Pond for a water supply by "the 3 M's" -- Malden, Melrose, and Medford -- made the waterpower on Spot Pond Brook worthless. The rubber company closed; the buildings fell into decay; and Haywardville's population dwindled. The village's fortunes were revived briefly in the early 1890s by a plan to extend the Stoneham Branch through the Haywardville area to meet the B & M in Melrose. These hopes were ultimately dashed in 1896 by the taking of much of the Fells Reservation area by the MDC. Parts of the rubber factory were cut up and moved to Ravine Terrace in Melrose. Spot Pond became an MDC distributing reservoir for the metropolitan area high service.

#### E. Architecture:

Residential: Stoneham retains a high proportion of well-detailed suburban Second Empire, Stick and Queen Anne houses which survive with much of their original detailing intact. Concentrations of these moderately pretentious houses are found west of Main Street between Marble and Maple Streets, east of William Street between Spring and Franklin Streets and (with less frequency) along lower Main Street. Simple Stock and Queen Anne cottages and houses, with a few mansard cottages, remained dominant in the neighborhoods east of the center.

Institutional: The finest institutional structure surviving from the period is the Shingle Style Romanesque Revival Baptist Church on Main Street (1891, architect unknown). Other institutional buildings include two Stick Style churches, the Unitarian and St. Patrick's, a yellow-brick Colonial Revival library, several Georgian Revival schools, a Romanesque Revival fire station and the Georgian Revival Stoneham Historical Society, a building unusual for its concrete block construction (there are also a few concrete block houses in the town).

Commercial: Stoneham retains one notable commercial building for this period: the Boston and Maine Railroad station, a well-detailed brick Richardsonian Romanesque structure on Pine Street (c. 1900). Modest Queen Anne storefronts of the 1890s stand on Franklin Street and at the town center.

Industrial: The only highstyle, architect-designed industrial structure in Stoneham is the M.D.C. Pumping Station on Spot Pond, a Georgian Revival structure built in 1900 to designs of Shepley, Rutan & Coolidge. Other industrial buildings are utilitarian frame and concrete structures.

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

### A. Transportation Routes:

Linking trolley routes abandoned by mid-20th century except for Middlesex Fells line. Improvement of local roads as auto highways with primary N/S Route 28 (Main Street) to Medford-Boston and Metropolitan District Commission roads around Spot Pond and Fells (Woodland and Border Roads).

### B. Population:

Substantial population growth well into the mid-1930s, with greatest increase between 1920 and 1925. By 1935 number of persons in Stoneham reached 10,841. Pattern sharply reversed 1935-40 by depression-era decrease. Growth between 1940 and 1965 had doubled the 1930 population.

### C. Settlement Pattern:

Gradual suburban development from neighboring towns along main roads with affluent residential area on Farm Hill (High Street) and commercial strip along north Main Street from factory district. Recreational and institutional development of Spot Pond area with New England Sanatorium and MDC Zoo along Woodland Road.

### D. Economic Base:

By 1925 there remained only three large shoe factories, though the value of their annual product was put at \$1.5-2 million. Total annual output of the 17 companies present was listed at \$3.4 million. One of these was E. L. Patch, a pharmaceutical manufacturer established in the town in 1889, which by the 1920s had become a leading firm in the developing cod liver oil industry.

E. Architecture:

Residential: Limited residential construction in the 1920s consisting primarily of modest single family Craftsman-derived houses with few examples of the more ambitious Dutch Colonial or Colonial Revival. A few bungalows, mostly modest Colonial Revival types, were built.

Institutional: A few Colonial Revival schools were built but little other construction is probable.

Commercial: The Georgian Revival Stoneham Savings Bank was completed in 1927; the other notable commercial structure in the town is a well-preserved Beacon gas station, a Colonial Revival building with a dome and lantern in imitation of the Massachusetts State House dome (192 ). Other commercial structures include one and two story brick storefronts dating from the '20's.

XI. SURVEY OBSERVATIONS

Carole Zellie of Landscape Research is currently preparing an extensive survey of Stoneham. Existing MHC survey is virtually non-existent.

Among the noteworthy extant structures are the Sanborn and Mann Shoe Factory (426 Main Street), virtually the only survivor of an industry which once dominated the town, and a significant structure in its own right; and the 1900 MDC pumping station at Spot Pond, a monumental neo-classical engine house designed by Shepley, Rutan and Coolidge with landscaping by Olmstead. Both are worthy of National Register nominations.

Noted also was a two-cylinder Skinner Vertical Uniflow stationary steam engine and generator held on standby in the power house of the New England Memorial Hospital. (The machine was moved to its present site in 1960 from Salem Harbor Fish Pier.)

XII. SOURCES

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