

# MHC Reconnaissance Survey Town Report

## PALMER

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: July 1982

COMMUNITY: Palmer

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## I. TOPOGRAPHY

Palmer is one of the northernmost towns in Hampden County. The town is situated in the central uplands of Massachusetts. Local terrain consists primarily of a complex of drumlins that generally range between 600 and 1000 feet in elevation. Elevations gradually increase from west to east. The highest point is Colonel's Mountain (1,194 feet) located in the northeastern corner of Palmer. Additional prominent elevations include Pattaquattic Hill (1,094 feet), approximately two miles southwest of Colonel's Mountain, King's Mountain (705 feet) immediately north of Palmer Center, Mt. Dumplin (741 feet) south of the village of Thorndike and Baptist Hill (800 feet) located in southwestern Palmer. The Ware, Quaboag and Chicopee rivers meet in southwestern Palmer at the village of Three Rivers. From here, they flow west as the Chicopee River and drain into the Connecticut River in Chicopee. The Quaboag delineates most of the town's eastern and southern borders while the Swift River defines a portion of Palmer's northern border. The town has a number of fresh-water bodies, four of which were glacially created kettle holes. They include Pattaquattic Pond, Forest Lake, Lilly Pond and Crystal Lake. Local soils are basically the glacial till of the uplands and the rich alluvium of the floodplains.

## II. POLITICAL BOUNDARIES

Originally settled as private land grant district in ca. 1728, Palmer was called The Elbows with an eastern and southern boundary at the Chicopee River and a western boundary at the Swift River. The western line at Worcester County (Warren) was surveyed in 1741. It was established as the independent town of Palmer in 1752 with a Baptist annex from Brimfield (Monson) along Post Road. Its northern boundary with Ware was established in 1761 with later adjustments.

## III. HISTORIC OVERVIEW

An upland industrial town with a complex pattern of mill villages, Palmer is located along a primary corridor between Springfield and Boston. Situated in rugged highlands on the upper Chicopee valley at the junction of the Quaboag, Ware, and Swift rivers, there are reported native sites on the floodplain around Pattaquattic Pond and documented fish weir at Three Rivers.

Initial settlement is reported in the early 18th century along the river valleys with private grants by Scotch-Irish immigrants. Formal town settlement was established by the mid 18th century at Palmer Old Center, including a surviving burying ground and period house. Much of Palmer's agricultural potential was realized by the Revolution with farmsteads along the valley bottoms and upland vales, including a notable survival on St. John Street.

There was rapid development of waterpower sites for textiles during the early 19th century with the formation of independent mill villages at Bondsville, at which there are well preserved period workers' cottages, Three Rivers and Thorndike, with excellent examples of granite towered mills of mid-19th century style. The opening of the Western Railroad along the Quaboag River promoted growth of the Palmer depot as a primary commercial center of the area, with fragments of Greek Revival housing surviving around the railroad yards. There was continued development of industrial activities through the late 19th century, with abandonment of the Colonial town center and expansion of Palmer Depot along the axis of Main Street, with Victorian civic buildings, including a notable granite church and important railroad station by Richardson, with period truss bridges. The mill villages maintained their industrial expansion through the early 20th century with large factory complexes at Three Rivers with Early Modern commercial district including neon signs and a landmark Art Deco church along the High Street axis. Palmer Center also developed through the mid 20th century with an affluent district of historic revival homes and a business district along the Main Street axis, including a well preserved period diner and gas stations. Early airport survives intact along the Ware River at Emery Street. Present development remains stable, with serious signs of industrial decay at Bondsville and Thorndike threatening period mill villages. Suburban expansion continues along the upland valleys with access to Massachusetts Turnpike.

#### IV. CONTACT PERIOD (1500-1620)

##### A. Transportation Routes

At the junction of the Ware, Swift, and Quaboag rivers was the focus of the regional trail network from the uplands to the Connecticut Valley. Two major regional routes are documented as: 1) Nashaway Trail southwest along the Ware River as Ware Road (Route 32) to Pattaquatic Ponds with a fordway over the Ware River at State Street and west to a reported ford at the Swift River below Bondsville (Temple:25); 2) an alternate of Bay Path east-west along the north bank of the Quaboag River from the West Brimfield fordway along the axis of the Boston Road (Route 67) with a surviving fragment as Nipmuck Street, through Palmer as Main Street crossing Quaboag at the Wilbraham Street ford and west as Route 20 (Temple:26). Other logical trail routes appear as 1) a north south connector from Pattaquatic Ponds to Quaboag ford along Route 32-Shearer Street with Gates Street branch to the Ware River ford; 2) a north-south connector from the Quaboag ford to Swift River through the Three Rivers district along the axis of Route 181; 3) an east-west route from the Quaboag to Ware River over the northeast highlands as Warren Road and 4) a possible connector from Old Palmer Center to the Quaboag River as Flynt Street around Cedar Swamp (Thompson Lake). Secondary trails might also have existed across the highlands around Pattaquatic Hill. Several fordways were reported at Three Rivers junction, indicating a network of local trail routes around documented fish weirs (Temple: 11-14).

##### B. Settlement Patterns

There were no reported Contact period sites. However, the area's extensive water resources suggest considerable native period

occupation. Native settlement was probably heaviest at the confluence of the Chicopee, Ware and Quaboag rivers. This location was reputedly a major Quabaug fishing site, as indicated by the extant stone fish weir situated a short distance north of the junction of these rivers. The area adjacent to Pattaquattic Pond and Forest Lake were also likely major native sites when considering the prevalence of water sources and agricultural land.

#### C. Subsistence Patterns

The presence of three major rivers and two natural ponds provided the native population with extensive sources of fish. Horticulture was probably undertaken on the lowlands adjoining these rivers and the moderate uplands of eastern Palmer. The town's rugged uplands provided excellent habitats for wild game.

#### D. Observations

Native occupation of the Palmer area was probably greatest during the spring months when the natives sought the spawning fish. The local inhabitants appear to be affiliated with the Quabaugs, a group who historically were centered in the Brookfields. Regionally, they probably fell within territory dominated by the Nipmucs. Most of the town's riverfront and the area surrounding Forest Lake and Pattaquattic Pond should be considered archaeologically sensitive. Particular attention should be paid to the fish weir site. There is need for a complete examination and recording of the site and the adjacent shore of the Ware River.

### V. PLANTATION PERIOD (1620-1675)

#### A. Transportation Routes

Native trails remain as the primary regional routes along the river valleys. Important connectors are maintained as the Nashaway Trail (Route 32) from Lancaster to Springfield and the Bay Path alternate (Route 20) from Brookfield to Springfield with fordways across the Quaboag, Ware and Swift rivers.

#### B. Population

There were no figures for a native or colonial population. None of the sources consulted made any reference to the impact the epidemics of the 1630s had on the local natives. However, Palmer's proximity to the severely depopulated Connecticut River Valley suggests that the local native community suffered considerable losses.

#### C. Settlement Patterns

It is unclear how extensive post-1620 native settlement was. Colonial settlement did not occur until the early 18th century.

#### D. Economic Base

The natives probably retained their traditional subsistence patterns. There may have been some native involvement in the fur trade operation established by William Pynchon in the Springfield area in the late 1630s.

### E. Observations

This period of Palmer's history is poorly understood, as is true with many 18th and 19th century towns of the Connecticut River Valley study unit. The existing sources imply that the English showed little or no interest in the settlement or economic development of these rugged uplands during the Plantation period.

## VI. COLONIAL PERIOD (1675-1775)

### A. Transportation Routes

The east-west regional route from Springfield to Boston along the Quaboag River improved as the Post Road (Route 20) with bridges at Quaboag fords by the mid 18th century. Formation of Palmer town center created radial meeting house roads by the 1740s with Warren, Flynt, Shearer, and High Streets and secondary highways to upland hills as such as St. John Road and Baptist Hill Road. The primary north-south connectors improved as Route 181 and Route 32 from the Boston Post Road. Bridges replaces native fordways across the Ware, Quaboag and Swift rivers by the mid 18th century.

### B. Population

The native population appeared to be limited to a handful of seasonal occupants. At the time of the first large scale settlement of the Palmer area (ca. 1732), 80 settlers inhabited the "Elbow Tract" (primarily Palmer, portions of Ware and Warren). By 1765, the settlement was comprised of 60 houses, 360 individuals and 75 families. The Palmer population had doubled to 727 residents by 1776. A large proportion of the settlement's early residents were Scotch-Irish (Northern Ireland). Many moved from Connecticut River towns (e.g., Springfield). Smaller numbers were former residents of eastern Massachusetts, Connecticut and New Hampshire.

### C. Settlement Patterns

References to post-1675 native settlement locations were limited and vague. One source stated that there was a single native family living near "Burleigh Bridge" at the time of the initial colonial settlement (Copeland 1902:126).

Apparently, single families returned to the Palmer area from northern locations and established temporary residences on former native sites (Temple 1889:28).

Palmer appears to have suffered little or no damage during the early to mid 18th century Indian wars. Settlement was generally dispersed and tended to focus on the fertile lowlands. Homelots were selected by lot. The remaining unoccupied land was designated as "common" or "undivided." The first settlement occurred in ca. 1716 when John King established a home in present Palmer village, a short distance northwest of the junction of Breckenridge Street and an unnamed brook. Substantial settlement did not take place until the 1720s and early 1730s in the vicinity of Palmer village,

Palmer Center and Three Rivers. The settlement delay was probably due to the fear of native attack and land title disputes. Palmer Center (junction of Warren Street and Route 32) was the site of Palmer's first meeting house (ca. 1735) and Quintin's (ca. 1733) and Thompson's (ca. 1737) taverns. Post 1735 settlement continued in the previously mentioned locales in addition to more dispersed settlement in the rugged uplands of eastern Palmer.

#### D. Economic Base

Palmer had primarily an agricultural economy. Surplus grain was shipped by boat or cart to Springfield. The community had a modest mill industry. The first mill was erected at Pattaquattic Pond in ca. 1730. Several additional pre 1760 mills were constructed at Thorndike and Cedar Swamp Brook (probably between Forest and Thompson Lakes). Captain Patrick Watson established a tannery on the Ware River near "Whipples station" in ca. 1766, while Hugh Moor built a grist and saw mill complex on the Chicopee River one mile below Three Rivers. Pine tar and turpentine were produced locally.

#### E. Architecture

Residential: Only one house documented to the Colonial period is known to survive in Palmer. This is the Aaron King House (1745), a two-story center chimney house with an integral lean-to. The first meeting house was built in 1735; the building, which stood 30 x 36 feet, was later used as a town hall. As organized, the first religious society was Presbyterian rather than the predominant Congregationalist.

#### F. Observations

Palmer's inability to establish a discrete, nucleated settlement appears to be primarily due to the area's rugged uplands and rivers. These geographic features caused the community to develop into several separate settlement pockets, a pattern which continues to persist. However, area rivers likely served as important links with colonial settlements south and west of Palmer. The greatest potential for Colonial period archaeological remains should occur in lightly developed Palmer Center.

### VII. FEDERAL PERIOD (1775-1830)

#### A. Transportation Routes

Regional and local highway pattern remains in place with a focus upon Palmer town center. There was improvement of the regional corridors with the First Massachusetts Turnpike (1796) along the Post Road (Route 20) and the north-south Belchertown-Monson Turnpike (1804) through Palmer town center as Breckenridge Street. Formation of mill villages at Bondsville and Three Rivers in the 1820s required additional connectors from the town center along the High Street axis.

## B. Population

Palmer's population made only marginal gains in the Federal period. In the 40 years between 1790 and 1830, Palmer's population rose by only 428 persons - only slightly more than 10 persons a year, on the average.

## C. Settlement Patterns

The civic focus remained at Palmer town center with agricultural activity along river meadows and upland vales. There was significant development of water power sites in the 1820s with textile mills on the Swift River at Bondsville and Chicopee River at Three Rivers, each with associated mill villages.

## D. Economic Base

Palmer retained an economy virtually entirely agricultural for most of the Federal period, with little new activity beyond the grist and saw mills established in the preceding period. At Bondsville a small cotton mill was begun about 1816, but it does not appear to have been completed until about 1828 when it was converted to woolens.

The two most significant industries both appeared in the mid 1820s. Thomas Blanchard, the celebrated inventor, in travelling between his home in Millbury and Springfield (where he was installing his gun-stock lathes in the U. S. Armory), is said to have observed the water power potential of the Quabaug River and recommended to his brother, John B. Blanchard (1780-1850), that he relocate his scythe-making business from Dudley (afterward included in Webster) in Worcester County. John B. Blanchard moved his family to what became Blanchardville in 1824, establishing a scythe business which by 1855 would be the largest in the Connecticut Valley.

A year after Blanchard moved to Palmer, the Three Rivers Manufacturing Company built a dam at Three Rivers and started construction of a power canal and a large textile mill. The company was capitalized at a million dollars (well more than the contemporary Chicopee Mfg. Company downstream), but not withstanding its Boston support (in the person of William S. Rogers), the cost of the canal through solid rock proved prohibitive ("the engineers and contractor did not understand the art of effective blasting," it was said), and the company failed.

## E. Architecture

Residential: Perhaps as many as a dozen Federal houses and cottages were observed in Palmer. A range of plan types are represented with approximately equal numbers of center, double and end chimney houses. Many of these have hip roofs rather than the more common gable roofs. In addition to these houses, at least one house with twin rearwall chimneys was noted, at Palmer Center on Warren Street. Federal period houses were observed near Grove Street at Palmer, on Sykes, Main, Pleasant, Nipmuck, Mason and Warren Streets. Probably the finest of these is the three-story Georgian/Federal double chimney MccNiff House (1790) with dormers on Nipmuck Street. A well preserved

fragment of Federal turnpike landscape exists at Palmer Center (Warren/Flynt/Breckenridge Streets). There, two Federal period hip roofed houses stand opposite an early training field. The number of cottages of the period surviving appears to be quite small. No cottages were positively identified for the Federal period, but it is possible that further research would reveal their existence.

Institutional: With the exception of schools, five of which are noted on the 1830 map, very little institutional construction seems to have occurred in the period. A Congregational society was formed ca. 1811, but they apparently did not construct a meeting house until 1847. The only other institutional activity recorded for the period was the organization of a Baptist society in conjunction with Belchertown in 1825.

#### VIII. EARLY INDUSTRIAL PERIOD (1830-1870)

##### A. Transportation Routes

There was significant improvement of regional corridors with the construction of railroads along the river valleys. An original route of the Western Railroad (Boston & Albany) along the Quaboag River opened in 1839 with a depot at Palmer village. The north-south route of the New London Northern and Amherst, Belchertown and Palmer (Central Vermont) opened 1850-1853, creating a regional railroad junction at the Palmer depot. The development of mill villages by the 1840s required local highway connectors with Pleasant-Thorndike Streets between Bondsville and Thorndike and River Street between the Palmer depot and Three Rivers.

##### B. Population

Palmer experienced its greatest population rise between 1830 and 1850 when the town's population more than tripled, rising from 1,237 in 1830 to 3,974 twenty years later. In the decade 1840-1850, the town grew an average of 183 persons a year. Much of this growth can undoubtedly be attributed to the cotton mills and the arrival of the railroad. The railroad also brought Irish immigrants into town in large numbers - 65% of the foreign-born were Irish, with another 20% from Canada, according to the 1855 statistics. Immigrants themselves made up 38% of the population that year.

Palmer's growth slowed markedly in the 1850s. During the early 1860s, as Springfield and the Civil War made inroads on employee roster, Palmer lost over a thousand persons, only partially recovering this number by 1870.

##### C. Settlement Patterns

There was continued expansion of water power sites with textile mills at Bondsville and Three Rivers and the establishment of a factory village at Thorndike on the Ware River in the 1830s. The opening of the Western Railroad created a depot village at Palmer along the Quaboag River in the 1840s with significant expansion of the town grid through the 1850s as Palmer Depot assumed the role as the primary commercial center of the district. Civic functions relocated from Palmer Center to Four Corners in 1845, midway between Palmer Depot, Thorndike, Three Rivers and Bondsville. Palmer Center was abandoned as the civic focus.

MHC Reconnaissance Survey Town Report: Palmer



#### D. Economic Base

The Early Industrial period saw the formation of Palmer's principal textile industry, supported by major railroads in four directions.

The history of Palmer's cotton manufactures is linked to the efforts of John S. Wright, the Boston-based agent who presumably provided the capital and administrative expertise; and to Joseph Brown, a mechanic and engineer from Cumberland, Rhode Island and later Chicopee, who became the managing agent of Palmer's three major mill complexes in this period - the Palmer, Thorndike, and Boston Duck mills. (Brown had also assisted Boston Associate Edmund Dwight in the location of the Boston & Springfield Mfg. Company mill at Chicopee Falls a few years earlier.) The earliest to be established was the Palmer Company (1831), which bought up the assets of the defunct Three Rivers Mfg. Company, and, with the successful introduction of short-staple cotton into fine-goods production, made the company and the village of Three Rivers prosper. Five years later, in company with Boston Associate Israel Thorndike, Wright and Brown established the Thorndike Company, building its first mill on the lower Thorndike privilege of the Ware River in 1837. In 1845-1846 the company built a second mill 750 yards upstream. The same group incorporated the Munroe Company in 1836, though the financial reverses of 1837 apparently caused the company to lease the Bondsville mill until it was absorbed by the Boston Duck Company several years later. The Boston Duck Company was incorporated by Wright, Elijah Loring (ship builder?), and Augustus Fiske (later a Holyoke mill owner) to manufacture heavy sail duck. Joseph Brown became the agent of the new mill. For many years the Bondsville area around the mill was known as Duckville.

In 1855, the four Palmer cotton mills employed over a thousand men and women, producing \$628,707 worth of cotton cloth, approximately 17% of the Hampden County total.

In the meantime, the arrival of the Western Railroad (1839), the New London, Willimantic & Palmer (1850), and the Amherst & Belchertown (1853), had made their common intersection, Palmer Depot, into a bustling railroad town, with a foundry, railroad shops, and three hotels.

#### E. Architecture

Residential: Palmer experienced considerable growth in the Early Industrial period. Mill villages developed at Three Rivers, Thorndike and Bondsville and Palmer Center expanded as the town's commercial center. A substantial portion of the houses now standing in the town were constructed as part of this growth. Neighborhoods of sidehall plan Greek Revival and Italianate houses and cottages were built at Palmer. At Three Rivers, Thorndike and Bondsville, two and three-story rowhouses in the Italianate style were constructed in some numbers. The rowhouses and the few Italianate double houses which were built as well, employ sidehall plans and generally incorporate four to six living units. Very little construction took place in the eastern half of the town, although some isolated farmhouses and cottages were built there in the period. Despite the construction activity of the period, relatively few large and stylish houses were built in the town. Only one temple-front Greek Revival house

is known to survive; that stands at Palmer adjacent to the Memorial Hall.

**Institutional:** Extensive institutional construction occurred in the period. Congregational churches were built at Thorndike and at Palmer in 1847 (not extant). In addition, Methodist (1833) and Baptist (1832) churches were built at Three Rivers, a Methodist church (1856) was built at Four Corners, a Second Baptist (1852) at Palmer and a Methodist church (1847) at Thorndike. Of these, a Gothic/Greek Revival church (possibly originally the Baptist) stands at Three Rivers and the Methodist church remains at Four Corners. In addition, the South Main Street School (1841) at Palmer still stands, a three-bay center entrance Greek Revival/Italianate building.

**Commercial:** Haley's Grain Store (1861), originally built as a railroad warehouse, is a two-story Greek Revival/Italianate building seven bays long; the store is the only documented commercial building of the period. However, other period stores are likely to survive at Bondsville, Three Rivers and Palmer Depot where at least a few simple frame vernacular Italianate commercial buildings are located. Although altered, some of these probably date from the period.

**Industrial:** The major industrial buildings of the period are the Thorndike Company mill #1 (1837) and mill #2 (1845-46). These are both five-story granite structures with very flat gambrel roofs (probably rebuilt) and seven-story stair towers with brick bell housing (later).

## IX LATE INDUSTRIAL PERIOD (1870-1915)

### A. Transportation Routes

Continued expansion of railroad system along the river valleys created a complex interlace of secondary regional routes around Palmer mill villages. The Ware River Railroad from the Palmer depot north through Thorndike to Ware opened in 1870; the Athol Branch Railroad through Three Rivers and Bondsville opened in 1873 along the Swift River (abandoned in part) and the Central Massachusetts Railroad from Ware to Amherst through Bondsville opened in 1887. There were aborted railroad projects through Palmer, including a monumental roadbed of the Hampden Railroad (1911) across the Ware-Swift River river plain with a surviving concrete abutment at Pleasant Street and an unknown roadbed of a railroad along the Quaboag River at King's Brook with a concrete abutment visible from the Massachusetts Turnpike bridge at Route 67. Electric trolley lines extended from Springfield during the early 1900s connecting the Palmer depot with mill villages. Routes follow east-west along the Route 20 axis of Main Street with north-south link to Thorndike along Route 32 and branches to Three Rivers on High Street and Bondsville from Four Corners on Palmer Street (Route 181). Interurban trolley route to Ware from Thorndike follows River Street to amusement grounds at Forest Lake and north along the surviving roadbed to the Ware line.

## B. Population

In the Late Industrial period, Palmer grew at an average rate of about 129 persons a year. In the three decades 1870-1900, the town doubled in size; by 1915, it was three times what it had been in 1865, reaching 9,468. In 1905, 36% of the population were foreign born. Of this number, 40% were Austrians, 23% French Canadians, 15% Germans, and 6% Poles.

## C. Settlement Patterns

The Palmer depot was expanded as the primary commercial and residential focus of the district along the Quaboag River plain to Blanchardville, with a business district along Main Street and industrial fringe activities along the railroad. Continued expansion of water power sites occurred with the establishment of a mill village on the Quaboag at Shearer Street. There was growth of extended residential development along the High Street trolley line between Three River and Thorndike with a town center at Four Corners.

## D. Economic Base

Cotton goods remained the town's leading product during this period (in 1875 valued at \$1.3 million), giving the town a rank of 5 (out of the 21 Hampden County towns) in total value of manufactured products. Charles Stevens, of Ware's Otis Company, had been one of the original incorporators of the Ware River Railroad in 1851. With the opening of the line between Palmer Depot and Ware in 1870, the Otis Company moved into the Three Rivers plant of the Palmer Company. The second largest industry was in straw hat manufacture (\$204,312), begun in 1869 at the depot. The scythe works had closed in 1872 with the death of John Blanchard.

In the last quarter of the 19th century, Palmer's new industry was concentrated primarily at Palmer Depot. A good part of this development appears to have been connected with Worcester County products, wire and carpets. The 1871 carpet firm of Parks and Wade was succeeded in 1874 by the Palmer Carpet Company. George F. Wright, a Clinton inventor, had patented a wire-cloth painting machine in 1872. By 1883, he had moved to Palmer where he started the Wire Goods Co., probably in conjunction with the adjacent Palmer Wire Company, begun the previous year. J.S. and H.P. Holden began a woolen mill in 1883, two years later purchasing the defunct Palmer Wire Company plant to manufacture tinned wire for mattresses and brooms. The later history of the Wire Goods Company remains obscure, but by the turn of the century, the Wright Wire Company was one of Palmer's largest employers.

Another newcomer to Palmer Depot was the English firm of Woolrich & Company, whose patented "Ridge's Food for Infants and Invalids" was manufactured after 1874 in a building at the corner of Pine and Thorndike streets. John Woolrich, an English chemist, had first settled in Malden in 1870 before moving to Palmer in 1874 on account of its superior transportation facilities.

## E. Architecture

**Residential:** Most of the finest houses in Palmer date from the Late Industrial period. The majority of these are located at Palmer (or, as it was known in the 19th century, Palmer Depot) with more modestly styled houses generally situated in the outlying villages of Three Rivers, Thorndike and Bondsville or along secondary roads. Well detailed and substantial Stick Style, Queen Anne and Shingle Style houses are located along Brown, Squiere, Grove and Knox Streets. The houses on Knox Street are particularly fine. Smaller sidehall Queen Anne single family and gable roofed Queen Anne and Colonial Revival two-family houses are located south of Main Street, in the Pearl Street area and also on Main Street west of the center. In the manufacturing villages of Three Rivers and Bondsville, vernacular Queen Anne fourplexes, two-families and rowhouse tenements were built in some numbers along Main Street in both villages. There was less construction in the period at Thorndike. Although a few were observed at Three Rivers, there were comparatively few three-deckers built in Palmer. Of note are several brick rowhouses (ca. 1880) in Three Rivers. In addition, an intact group of Queen Anne fourplexes stands on Three Rivers Street.

**Institutional:** A number of important institutional buildings were built in the period. These include the Memorial Town Hall (1890, R. H. Robertson), a two-and-a-half story brick Romanesque Revival building with terracotta trim, St. Paul's Universalist Church at Palmer Depot, a granite Victorian Gothic structure (ca. 1865) with an offset spire tower, the Second Congregational Church (ca. 1895) on Pearl Street, a well-developed Queen Anne/Shingle Style building, and frame Queen Anne/Gothic Revival churches at Bondsville and Thorndike. In addition to these buildings, several schools were built, the most outstanding of which is a brownstone and yellow brick Colonial Revival/Queen Anne school (ca. 1890) on Main Street at Palmer Depot.

**Commercial:** A number of two and three story frame and brick vernacular Victorian Italianate and Queen Anne commercial buildings were constructed at Palmer Depot in the 1890s and after the turn of the century; many of these are well detailed and fairly well preserved. One of the best of these is a three-story brick Italianate building off Pearl Street near the Depot. The Boston and Albany Depot (1881, H. H. Richardson) is clearly the most significant commercial structure of the period; it is a brownstone and granite hip roof structure typical of Richardson's depots. In addition to the buildings at the town center, a good grouping of commercial buildings stands at Three Rivers while both Thorndike and Bondsville contain at least one notable commercial building each.

**Industrial:** Major industrial buildings were constructed at both Palmer Depot and Three Rivers in the period. Both are large-scale, five-story brick Romanesque Revival complexes of some size which which appear to have been constructed primarily between 1890 and 1920.

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

### A. Transportation Routes

Street railway system abandoned during the 1920s and improvement of local highway system as regional autoroutes. Primary east-west highway rebuilt as Route 20 with bridges over Quabog River and interchange at Route 67 (1938). North-south connectors through Palmer include Route 32 to Ware and Monson and Route 181 to Belchertown with Art Deco bridge (1937) at Bondsville. Early flying field located along Ware River bottomland surviving with original period hangar and outbuildings (ca. 1930) as Metropolitan Airport on Emery Street.

### B. Population

In the first decade, 1915-1925, Palmer's population expanded at a rate hitherto unexperienced by the town. Between 1920 and 1925 alone the population rose by an average of 230 persons per year reaching 11,044 in the latter year - a figure that the town would not reach again until the 1960s. After 1925, the population fell precipitously, continuing its decline until 1940 when it bottomed out at 9,149. The reasons for this sharp drop are unclear but may relate to the closing of the Thorndike Mills and the merger of the Bondsville and Three Rivers mills.

### C. Settlement Pattern

Palmer Depot continued as the focus of urban expansion with business district along Main Street and expansion of affluent residential area to the highlands around Knox Pond. Industrial activity extended along the Quaboag River from Route 32 bridge (Blanchardville) to Route 20 bridge creating fringe district along the railroad corridor. Growth of secondary activity continued along High Street axis between Three Rivers and Thorndike with civic center midway at Four Corners. Local business districts and residential areas were maintained in Bondsville, Three Rivers and Thorndike with related civic functions. Modest expansion of recreational facilities at Forest Lake and Thompson Lake with isolated estate district on Baptist Hill.

### D. Economic Base

No history encountered in the course of the reconnaissance survey included the Early Modern period, an unfortunate omission, since population figures indicate a sharp change in the prosperity of the town in the mid 1920s. In 1926 the Otis Company purchased the Boston Duck and Bondsville Bleaching operations, adding those facilities to the mill already operating at Three Rivers. The Thorndike Mills appear to have closed about this time, as the upper mill (No. 2) was purchased in 1927 by the S. C. S. Box Company.

One of Palmer's largest industries and a mainstay of the town economy was the wire mill, by 1930 run by the Wickwire-Spencer Steel Co. The old Palmer Carpet Mill, since the 1890s directed by M. J. Whittall Associates of Worcester, expanded in the 1920s. Among new industries in Palmer in the early 1920s were Better Brushes, Inc., founded in 1919 by former Fuller Brush directors.

## E. Architecture

**Residential:** A substantial number of houses were constructed in Palmer between 1915 and 1930. Most of the period houses were built at Palmer Depot, west of Route 32 and north of Main Street, and at Three Rivers, north of Main Street. Most of the houses built were simple one-and-a-half story hip or gable roof vernacular Colonial Revival cottages. At Palmer Depot, however, a number of well-detailed stucco Craftsman bungalows with details such as massive splayed porch posts were built along Squiere and Brown Streets. Also of note is the use of concrete block construction for period residences. A number of bungalows and two-family houses either wholly or in part of concrete construction were built at Three Rivers and at Palmer Depot. Many of these have either rusticated or imitation cobblestone surfaces.

**Institutional:** Probably the two most significant institutional buildings of the period, architecturally, are the Palmer High School (1922), a two-story brick Georgian Revival building with Beaux Arts details and the Palmer Post Office, a monumental neoclassical structure of yellow brick with an Ionic colonnade. Other period institutional buildings were not noted but are likely to include schools.

**Commercial:** Commercial construction continued at the town center through the 1920s. Among the notable buildings are the Moderne Mielane Drug Store with a stepped parapet and the Palmer Restaurant with a streamlined Moderne enamel facade (possibly 1940s). Also of note is the Day and Night diner, a Worcester Diner ca. 1939 (?). Other commercial buildings are more modest one- and two-story decorated masonry or frame structures. Similar buildings were built at Three Rivers and Bondsville.

## XI. SURVEY OBSERVATIONS

Palmer's inventory covers perhaps one-tenth of the significant structures in the town. It concentrates on high style residential (pre-1850) and institutional architecture. It excludes notable late 19th century residential and institutional development at Palmer Depot and does not cite the predominance of well preserved workers' housing (1840-1925) at Three Rivers, Thorndike and Bondsville. Potential districts exist at Thorndike and at Palmer Depot on Knox (Stick Style) and Squiere (bungalows) Streets. Commercial and industrial structures are overlooked almost completely.

**Industrial:** Palmer's survey includes only three industrial structures: the 1881 H. H. Richardson station and the two granite cotton mills in Thorndike. (The survey forms have incorrectly identified them: the earlier 1837 mill is at the lower Ware River privilege; Mill No. 2 (1845-46) is at the upper privilege.) All three structures should be considered NR eligible. The extant

workers' housing and power canals at Thorndike suggest a district nomination for the entire village.

Other structures which should be identified include the Boston Duck Company ruins and warehouse at Bondsville, the Palmer Mill at Three Rivers, and the Palmer Wire Mill (recently Colorado Fuel & Iron's Wickwire Division). Freight depots exist at Palmer Depot (two separate brick structures), Three Rivers and Bondsville. The latter, along with the adjacent single-track pin-connected trestle over the Swift River, may date to the construction of the Central Mass. Railroad in 1887. Two other bridges over the Swift River in Bondsville are also worthy of note: a pin-connected pony Pratt truss carrying State Street (now closed); and a 1937 concrete bridge with pylons carrying Route 181.

## XII. SOURCES

Temple, Josiah Howard, History of the Town of Palmer, Mass.  
(Palmer, 1889).