

MHC Reconnaissance Survey Town Report

ROWE

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.

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.



MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION
William Francis Galvin, Secretary of the Commonwealth
Chair, Massachusetts Historical Commission
220 Morrissey Blvd.
Boston, MA 02125
www.sec.state.ma.us/mhc
mhc@sec.state.ma.us / 617-727-8470

MHC RECONNAISSANCE SURVEY REPORT

DATE: November 1982

COMMUNITY: Rowe

1. TOPOGRAPHY:

Rowe is dominated by a complex of uplands that comprise a portion of the Berkshire Hills of western Massachusetts. These uplands are some of the highest in Massachusetts with elevations generally ranging between 1500' and 2000'. Several hills reach elevations of 2000' or more in the northernmost and southeastern portions of town. The town's highest peak is Adams Mountain(2100') located in southeastern Rowe. Several of these uplands have been the sites of late 19th century and early 20th century mining operations. Most notable was the Davis Mine located in the southeastern corner of Rowe and the site of a large iron pyrite mining operation. Talc deposits were mined northwest of the North Cemetery and east of the southernmost portion of Monroe Hill Road. In addition, small quantities of precious metals such as silver and gold were found in Rowe during this period. Rowe is separated from Monroe and Florida by the Deerfield River which extends the length of the town's western border. The town's western slope drains into the Deerfield while Pelham Brook, a tributary of the Deerfield, drains the eastern portion of Rowe. Pelham Lake, the only natural freshwater body, is situated at the northern foot of the twin peaks of Adams Mountain and Todd Mountain(1920').

II. POLITICAL BOUNDARIES

Originally surveyed for the Line of Forts in 1741 and granted as Township Number 10 in 1762 called Myrifiel plantation with northern boundary at Massachusetts-Vermont line and southern boundary with Charlemont(1736), now Davis Mine section. Incorporated as town of Rowe in 1785 with southern section annexed from Charlemont and eastern line with Heath(1785). Western section beyond Deerfield River included within town of Monroe in 1822 and southwest district of Zoar annexed to Rowe in 1838 (Hoosac Tunnel Station).

III. HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

Recreational hill town with intermediate connections to Mohawk Trail and Vermont. Located in Hoosac uplands with native site potential around Pelham Lake meadows and tool quarries suspected along Deerfield River gorge. Colonial settlement established with Line of Forts from Charlemont during mid-18th century with archaeological site of Fort Pelham near Ford Hill Road. Town center established on Middletown Hill before Revolution with several well preserved Federal houses in vicinity. Agriculture limited to upland plateau along Hazelton-Tunnel Road with some early 19th century cottages in original settings. Civic center relocated from highlands to Pelham Brook mill site in Rowe Village during Early Industrial period with authentic board and batten houses and Greek Revival church. Deerfield River gorge utilized as railroad corridor from Hoosac Tunnel with mill site at Monroe Bridge. Development of local copper ore at Davis Mine in southeast section with talus mounds at shaft sites. Expansion of recreational potential from Mohawk Trail auto

access with original rustic cabins at Rowe Camp on Adams Mountain. Present growth evident as suburban development around Pelham Lake and scenic highland vistas. Rowe Village has been restored by Vermont resort proximity, while nuclear power station at Monroe Bridge maintains highway truck corridor around town center.

IV. CONTACT PERIOD (1500-1620)

A. Transportation Routes:

Intermediate highland corridor above Deerfield River gorge. Secondary north-south trails reported from Deerfield valley (Charlemont) to upper Pelham Brook as Kings Highway over west flank of Adams Mountain to Rowe Camp (Brown, 1921, p.39; Costello, Mohawk Trail, 1975) with alternate route suspected along Davis Mine Brook around Todd Mountain (Rowe Historical Society, Davis Mine, 1977, p 3-4). East-west trail across upland plateau to Deerfield River gorge (Zoar) apparently followed axis of Tunnel Road past Pulpit Rock (Brown, 1921, p.15) with secondary route suspected along Pelham Brook to Deerfield River. Trail connections north of Pelham Brook to Vermont remain unclear, possible as Middletown Hill Road along Shippe Brook.

B. Settlement Patterns:

There were no reported native period sites. Two undated native sites were located on the Deerfield River floodplain northwest and northeast of the upper Reservoir-Bear Swamp. Period settlement most likely consisted of fishing encampments established on the narrow Deerfield River floodplain, along Pelham Brook and in the vicinity of Pelham Lake. The presence of a relatively large area of potential horticultural land adjacent to Pelham Lake suggests this location may have been the local focal point of native settlement. Secondary fishing and/or hunting camps could also have been situated on Rowe's streams and brooks, especially those draining into the Deerfield and Pelham Lake.

C. Subsistence Base:

Native horticulture probably was undertaken in the proximity of Pelham Lake. Hunting and fishing was likely in the locations mentioned in the preceding section. Native hunting may also have taken place in the moderate uplands north of Pelham Lake.

D. Observations:

Rowe was probably able to support a moderate native population. This area was probably an important fishing and hunting location for the Squakeags of Northfield. The areas adjacent to Pelham Lake, Deerfield River and Pelham Brook appear to have the greatest potential for extant archaeological evidence of native period occupation. The first two locations should be monitored periodically because of their susceptibility to development and erosion.

V. PLANTATION PERIOD (1620-1675)

A. Transportation Period:

Native trails remained as connecting routes from Deerfield River Valley up to upper Pelham Brook.

B. Population:

Small to moderate sized hunting and fishing bands probably continued to utilize the Rowe area. Rowe did not have a colonial population until the mid 18th century.

C. Settlement Patterns:

Native settlement patterns were probably similar to those suggested for the Contact period.

D. Economic Base:

Native traditional subsistence rounds were most likely retained. Colonial settlement of the more attractive Middle Connecticut River Valley during this period may have resulted in increased native use of Rowe area resources. The onset of the Anglo-Indian fur trade in the study unit in the late 1630s probably encouraged greater native focus on the trapping of fur bearing animals.

E. Observations:

Rowe probably remained exclusively a native resource area. Colonial interest in development of Massachusetts' western frontier did not surface until the early-mid 18th century. The continued availability of the varied resource base of the Middle Connecticut River Valley discouraged initiation of serious attempts to settle and develop upland areas such as Rowe.

VI. COLONIAL PERIOD (1675-1775)

A. Transportation Routes:

Location of Fort Pelham on Pelham Brook meadow(1744) required improvement of native trails as military highway with primary north-south road as Kings Highway from Deerfield River (Charlemont) over flank of Adams Mountain and secondary route as Davis Mine Road (Brown, 1921, p.13; Costello, 1975, map). Secondary east-west highway from Fort Shirley (Heath) is reported around Todd Mountain to Pulpit Road (Ibid, p.15) with Hazelton Road apparently laid out as east-west division highway for the Line of Forts. Location of Myrifiel meeting house (1770) on Middletown Hill Road required connecting highway to town center, including east-west axis of Ford Hill-Stage Road around upper Pelham meadows.

B. Population:

Some native occupation probably occurred well into the 18th century. None of the available sources provided complete figures for Rowe's colonial population. In 1773, the colonial settlement had 6 adult male residents (Lockwood 1926: II, 744).

C. Settlement Patterns:

Colonial occupation was initiated when Ft. Pelham was constructed in c.1744 as part of Massachusetts' "line of forts" established on the Connecticut River Valley study unit's northern frontier. The wooden stockade was situated on a hill a short distance northwest of Pelham Lake. It was occupied by a small garrison until its abandonment in c.1754. The civilian settlement that followed was limited and dispersed. The first settler was Reverend Cornelius Jones, the sole proprietor of Township #10 (present Rowe and Monroe), who established a home in c.1770 at the junction of Potter and Cyrus Stage roads. Jones had originally purchased Township #10 in 1762 at a public auction in Boston. Later period settlement took place in and adjacent to the present village of Rowe, northeastern and eastern Rowe. A small meetinghouse was erected in c.1770 slightly south of the junction of Middletown Hill and Ford Hills Roads. Until then, religious services were held in Reverend Jones' barn.

D. Economic Base:

Local residents focused primarily on agriculture, especially livestock production. Crop production was probably restricted to the land surrounding Pelham Lake. Rowe's extensive woodlands most likely encouraged considerable lumbering. The settlement underwent modest industrial development. The first grist mill was built between 1770 and 1775. Artemus Ward established Rowe's first sawmill in c.1775 probably on an unnamed stream (flows south out of Pelham Lake) slightly east of its junction with Zoar Road.

E. Architecture:

No houses dating from the time of Rowe's first settlement in the early 1760s are known to survive. The Reverend Cornelius Jones of Sandisfield, known as the town's original settler, built a small house of split planks (Holland 1855: 419) ca.1762. This reference appears to confirm the suggestion made in local histories of surrounding towns that the first houses built in the region were not of framed post and beam construction (see also Ashfield) but of plank construction. The first meetinghouse, for which no specific information exists, was constructed in 1770.

F. Observation:

As part of the line of forts, Rowe was an important cog in the defensive buffer that kept the Middle Connecticut River towns relatively free of French and Indian attacks in the 1740s and 1750s. The settlement's limited economic development probably caused it to rely heavily on river towns such as Deerfield and Northfield for manufactured goods. Growth of Rowe's colonial settlement and economy did not take place until after the Revolution. It is interesting to note that Reverend Cornelius Jones is one of a few period land speculators who settled on their Western Massachusetts holdings. Rowe's continued rural nature suggests there is an excellent likelihood for con-

MHC Reconnaissance Survey Town Report: Rowe

siderable archaeological evidence of period settlement. To date, the site of Fort Pelham is in little danger of development.

VII. FEDERAL PERIOD (1775-1830)

A. Transportation Routes:

Development of Rowe town center on Middletown Hill extended local highway grid across Pelham plateau with primary axis constructed along Pelham Brook as Zoar Road (1786) and secondary links as Brittingham, Tunnel and County Road. Connecting highway to Deerfield River gorge at Monroe Bridge located along Lord Brook as Monroe Hill Road. Other period highway included Leshires and Cross Road around Porter Hill and Dell Road to Heath Center.

B. Population:

Rowe's population grew by 61.6 percent between 1790 and 1830, peaking in 1820 at 851 persons. Much of this growth, amounting to 46 percent, occurred in the decade 1800-1810. After 1820, Rowe's population began a relatively constant decline which was not arrested until 1945. In 1830 the population stood at 716.

C. Settlement Pattern:

Civic focus reaffirmed with second meetinghouse on Middletown Hill Road (1793). Upland agriculture expanded to limits of highland plateau along axis of Hazelton Ford Hill Road to Vermont line. Economic focus developed on Pelham Brook at Rowe Center with satinet mill (1812) and street village along Zoar Road. Western district along Deerfield River developed for lumbering potential to Monroe Bridge.

D. Economic Base:

Predominately agricultural economy with small saw and grist mills established along Pelham Brook. Small tannery established by 1800, followed by fulling mill in 1808. During the War of 1812, Erastus and Moses Gleason enlarged the mill with the addition of 60 spindles for the manufacture of satinet.

By 1832 the largest industry reported was the tannery of Harrington and Nelson, about half of whose \$2500 product was leather used in carding machines. Small quantities of window springs, and as in Heath, rakes were also produced.

E. Architecture:

Residential: Approximately a dozen houses and cottages of the Federal period stand in the town. Most of these are center hall plan houses with end or double interior chimneys, indicating construction dates between 1800-1830. Period houses were noted on Zoar, Ford Hill, Pond and Hazelton Roads. The majority of the houses are individual farmhouses located in dispersed, linear settings. One of the earliest houses in the town may be a gambrel roofed center chimney cottage on Zoar Road. One or two other early cottages are believed to survive as two-story houses: a Federal period house on Zoar Road with a framed clapboard second story and brick first story may indicate an unusual adaptation wherein a framed cottage was later raised to two-story height by the construction of a brick first story. The Cape Cod cottage fenestration pattern of the end gable of the Pond Road house seems to suggest an early date. Other notable houses of the period are a five bay, center

chimney hip roofed house and a double chimney hip roofed house with double five bay facades (probably a Tavern) on Hazelton Road and a twin rearwall chimney hip roofed house on Ford Hill Road.

Institutional: the second meetinghouse was built in 1793 and survived "as a monument of antiquity" (Holland 1855: 421) through the mid-19th century. In addition to the Congregational Society, other religious societies operating in the town included the Baptist (organized 1810), and the Methodist (classes, 1800; meetinghouse, 1828). In 1785, three schools were built in the town. One of these (East District) was of Stone (Sylvester 1879: 775); a 19th century photograph indicates that the structure was two bays long by one wide with a side entrance. A Library Association was organized in 1797

Commercial: Four taverns operated in the period, the earliest of which was the Ambrose Potter Tavern (1780). The hip roofed, double five bay facade house on Hazelton Road may be one of these Federal taverns.

VIII. EARLY INDUSTRIAL PERIOD (1830-1870)

A. Transportation Routes:

Local road system remained focused along Pelham Brook axis to Rowe Center as Zoar Road with east-west connecting highways to Heath. Significant regional improvement of Deerfield River corridor with construction of Hoosac Tunnel (1866) and opening of Troy and Greenfield Railroad along north bank of gorge from Zoar (1868), now Boston and Maine. Local highway connections to tunnel site included Tunnel Road around Black Swamp.

B. Population:

As in the majority of towns in the county, Rowe's population continued to decline. Between 1830 and 1870 the town lost 18 percent of its population, though small gains were made in the late 1850s and 1860s.

In 1855 Rowe was the only town in the county to report not a single immigrant.

C. Settlement Pattern:

Civic focus relocated from Middletown Hill to Pelham Brook at Rowe Center (c.1845) around local craft mills. Upland agriculture maintained along Hazelton-Ford Hill Road with lumbering in Zoar district to Monroe Bridge. Construction of Hoosac Tunnel (1865-75) fostered local development along Deerfield River (Florida-Monroe).

D. Economic Base:

Economy remained predominantly agricultural, though with an expanding industry in small woodworking shops. The town is said to have produced wooden placer basins used in the California gold fields. A tool shop (Horace Brown made planes and other bench tools), a tannery, and small cabinetware shops were also reported in 1855. But the largest single industry was the small woolen mill built in Factory Village in 1836 by a group of Rowe men incorporated as the Franklin Manufacturing Company. By 1845, employing fifteen men and women,

the mill produced \$23,375 worth of satinnet -- 21 percent of the value of the county satinnet production that year. After 1845 and the increasing popularity of imports, the mill was never so prosperous.

In 1865, 92 farms produced apples, butter, cheese, wool, etc. Work was in full progress on the Hoosac Tunnel. The Troy and Greenfield Railroad was completed along the Deerfield River in 1868. In the early 1860s the Deerfield had been dammed just above Hoosac Tunnel Station and a compressor building (on the Florida side) put into operation in 1866 to supply the pneumatic drills.

E. Architecture:

Residential: Approximately two dozen houses and cottages of the Early Industrial period stand in the town. Of these, the majority are cottages, many of which are quite well detailed. Clusters of period cottages were observed on Zoar Road just west of the town center and along Pond Road. Other Early Industrial period structures were observed on Cyrus Stage, Middletown Hill, Ford Hill and Brittingham Hill Roads. The majority of the cottages observed (especially those at the town center) incorporated sidehall plans and Greek Revival details. A number were only two bays wide rather than the standard three bays. Among the sidehall plan cottages was one cottage (ca. 1845) with a projecting end gable and recessed portico; such fully developed Greek Revival forms are rare on small buildings. Other well-detailed cottages included a T-plan Gothic Revival cottage with board and batten siding and valanced eaves and an Italianate sidehall cottage with well-preserved sawn trim. In general, houses and cottages outlying the town center retained somewhat more traditional plans. In addition to a few center chimney Greek Revival cottages, several five bay wide, double interior chimney cottages, among them one particularly well-preserved example on Ford Hill Road, were also observed. Of special note was a board and batten sided, center chimney, five bay Greek Revival cottage on Zoar Road, with peaked window lintels and one-story veranda with peaked arches.

Institutional: In 1845, a new meetinghouse was built by the First Congregational Church. In addition to that structure, which apparently stood until c.1890, the Orthodox Congregational Society (organized 1833) built a meetinghouse in 1834. The Orthodox Society had disbanded by 1856. Only one school of the period, a one-story three by one bay, side entered Greek Revival school on Zoar Road, is known to survive.

IX. LATE INDUSTRIAL PERIOD (1870-1915)

A. Transportation Routes:

Continued improvement of railroad corridor along Deerfield River gorge with construction of narrow gauge Hoosac Tunnel and Wilmington along east bank to Vermont (1886-92) with connections at Hoosac Tunnel Station and depot at Monroe (now abandoned). Local highway system remained focused along Zoar Road to Rowe Center from Charlemont. No street railways constructed through area.

B. Population:

As in the majority of towns in the county, Rowe's population continued to decline, despite the success of the Davis Mine and the new community of miners. Presumably the losses from other areas of town more than made up for the gains

made at Davis. By 1915 the population stood at 424, some 27 percent less than the figure 45 years previous.

Almost all of the subsurface hands at the Davis mine were foreign-born: at first imported from Cornwall, and later from Italy and Austria. By 1905 Rowe had a 22.8 percent immigrant population. Of the 122 foreign born, 45 were from Italy, 38 from Austria.

C. Settlement Pattern:

Civic and economic focus remained along Pelham Brook at Rowe Center with high-land agriculture around Middletown Hazelton Road. Development of copper mine at Davis Brook (1882) in southeast section created local settlement along Davenport Road. Construction of Deerfield dam at Monroe Bridge (1886) and railroad connections stimulated growth of local mill village (Monroe).

D. Economic Base:

In the early 1870s, the mill at Factory Village continuing their activity, the village supplanted the old center at the seat of local government. The major event of the period was the opening of the Davis Mine in 1882. Its development in the early 1880s came at a time when iron pyrites was just beginning to replace brimstone as a source of sulphuric acid.* At its height, the Davis Sulphur Ore Company was called "the premier sulphur property in America" (Stone, p.477). The Davis ore was particularly favored because of its lack of arsenic. Over 250 men were employed in the mines -- Cornish at first and later men from Austria and Italy -- and the large village of Davis grew up in the vicinity of the mine. In its heyday the mine was responsible for an annual local payroll of \$100,000, much of its spent in Rowe and Charlemont, whose merchants and farmers profited considerably thereby. With Davis's death in 1905, maintenance of the mine shafts declined, and after several serious cave-ins, in August, 1911 operations were halted.

The opening of the Davis Mine set off a flurry of other mineral activity. Copper silver, and small amounts of gold were found in the area of Zoar, talc mines were opened, first by the Foliated Talc Company in 1905, followed a year later by the Massachusetts Talc Company, which built elevators and loading buildings in Zoar. The talc enterprise was closed in 1911, however, when a fire completely destroyed the plant at the grinding mill.

In 1886 Holyoke's premier paper mill builders, the Newton Brothers, constructed a narrow-gauge railroad the Hoosac Tunnel and Wilmington from the Troy and Greenfield's Hoosac Tunnel Station up the Deerfield River to their paper mill in Readsboro, Vermont. The small tourist trade that developed, however seems primarily to have affected Monroe Bridge.

*In the U.S. introduction has been credited to H.J. Davis, the New Yorker who opened and operated the mine until his death in 1905.

E. Architecture:

Almost no residential construction occurred in the period. Institutional construction included the building of a two-story frame Queen Anne Town Hall and a shingled one-story gable roofed Unitarian Church (ca. 1900) with an offset granite bellcote entry. Also of the period is a one-story gable roofed Craftsman School with banded windows(ca. 1910) on Zoar Road.

X. EARLY MODERN PERIOD (1915-1940)

A. Transportation Routes:

Improvement of local roads as auto highways with secondary connections to Charlemont along Zoar Road from Rowe Center.

B. Population:

With the closing of the mines, Rowe's population diminished even more rapidly. In the period 1915-1940 the town lost 45 percent of its population, finishing the period at 233. Five years later, the town reached its nadir at 178 persons.

C. Settlement Pattern:

Local civic and commercial focus remained at Rowe Center with development of recreational potential around Pelham Lake and at Rowe Camp (1924) on Adams Mountain. Upland farming maintained along Ford Hill-Hazelton Road with secondary economic focus and Monroe Bridge.

D. Economic Base:

No new industries identified. In 1927 the New England Power Company extended their Deerfield River hydro-electric capacity with the construction of the Sherman Dam and hydro-electric station -- a portent of the post World War II developments of the Yankee nuclear (1950s) and Bear Swamp Pumped Storage (1974) electric generating facilities.

E. Architecture:

The only construction of the period was the building around Pelham Lake of several one-story gable roofed summer cottages in the 1920s.

XI. SURVEY OBSERVATIONS

General: Rowe has no survey. Future survey should record all surviving Federal and Early Industrial period structures, as well as significant 19th century institutional buildings. Of note in the town are the large number of well-detailed Federal and Greek Revival structures. Attempts to identify any surviving plank frame cottages and to document the use of plank frame construction in the town should also be made.

Industrial: Though the town has marked the locations of most of its 19th century industrial locations on Pelham Brook, apparently none but the small Browning Bench tool shop appear to survive. Particularly noteworthy is the 20th century hydro and nuclear electric generating facilities.

XII SOURCES

Brown, Percy Whiting, "An Historical Sketch of Rowe", Pocumtuck Valley Memorial Association History & Proceeding 7 (1921-29), 73-114.

_____, History of Rowe, Massachusetts (1921) (2nd edition, Cleveland, 1935).

Healy, Allan, Charlemont, Massachusetts, Frontier Village and Hilltown (Charlemont, 1965). (Account of Davis Mine.)

McCarthy, Helen, The Story of the Davis Mine, Rowe, Massachusetts, 1882-1911 (Rowe, 1967).

Rowe Historical Society, The Story of Myrifiold Plantation, 1762-1785: The Town of Rowe, Incorporated 1785 (Rowe, 1975).