

MHC Reconnaissance Survey Town Report

RUSSELL

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: June 1982

Community: Russell

I. Topography:

Russell consists primarily of rugged uplands that are situated on the eastern periphery of the Berkshire Mountains. The majority of these uplands average over 1000 feet in height with the greatest elevations occurring primarily in southern Russell. The town's highest peak was located in southwestern Russell and had an elevation of 1304 feet. These uplands were broken by several intervalles located in the northern portion of Russell. Isolated pockets of marshland are present in central Russell. The Westfield River cuts through the northeastern periphery of town while the Little River runs through southernmost Russell and ultimately feeds into the Westfield River in Westfield. The town's sole natural source of freshwater is Russell Pond which drains into the Westfield via Pond Brook. The remaining freshwater body is a portion of the Cobble Mountain Reservoir situated in southwestern Russell.

II. Political Boundaries:

Originally granted as part of Westfield New Addition in 1713. Southern and western boundaries established with Blanford by 1741 and Granville by 1775. Incorporated as town of Russell in 1792 with Montgomery line as northern boundary.

III. Historic Overview:

Rural industrial hill town on primary corridor from Connecticut to Housatonic valley. Located along Westfield River at mountain front of Berkshire highlands with native sites reported at Russell Pond and Salmon Falls (Woronoco) on Westfield, including quarry potential at Russell Mountain. Early route of colonial travel along Knox Trail with tentative settlement from Westfield by mid 18th century. Original meeting house center formed at Russell Pond after Revolution with early cemetery at Boy Scout Camp. Limited agricultural potential, primarily sheep raising, with few late 18th century farmhouses along Routes 20 and 23. Town center relocated to Westfield River with opening of turnpikes and railroad to Berkshires during Early Industrial period, including surviving Greek Revival houses on Russell Main Street. Westfield waterpower sites developed for paper milling during mid 19th century with well preserved factory village at Crescent Mills of Greek Revival style and Victorian example at Woronoco. Corridor of early auto travel by First World War with original highway bridges along Routes 23 and 20, including early concrete example at Woronoco mills. Little River Gorge acquired for Springfield reservoir with Cobble Mountain dam and parkland of early 20th century design. Present development most obvious as suburban housing on mountain vistas of Knox Road with intensive recreational use of Russell Pond and Little River. Through routing of Mass Turnpike has little affect on historic landscape, while highway traffic of Route 20 threatens integrity of Crescent Mills village

and suffers economic isolation of Woronoco.

IV. Contact Period 1500-1620

A. Transportation Routes:

Located in mountain highlands along Westfield and Little River. Primary western route from Woronoco plain to Housantonic valley apparently followed General Knox Road from Little River to Russell Pond and west along Potash Brook (Route 23). An intermediate trail along the Westfield River to Salmon Falls (Woronoco) is suspected on the south bank (Route 20) with possible continuation around Mt. Nero (Stathmore Park) to Bradley Brook (Russell Center) and North around Turtle Bend Mountain. Secondary trail connectors include possible routes along Potash Brook to Salmon Falls (Route 23) and Stage Brook to Russell Center. There is little topographic logic of a trail along the Little River Gorge to Cobble Mountain, although some elements of the Appalachian Mountain Club trail system might duplicate original native routes along Pitcher Brook.

B. Settlement Patterns:

There were no reported native period sites in Russell. Four unidentified native burials were discovered along the west branch of the Westfield River in the vicinity of Salmon Falls in the late 19th century (Pitaniak 1970:17). An additional unidentified burial and artifacts were exposed in Woronoco Park near Munn's Meadow and Little River in the first decade of the 20th century (Ibid). Native settlement probably focused along the Westfield River bottomlands and Salmon Falls because of the presence of good agricultural land and its proximity to an excellent source of fish. The Potash Brook interval and the moderate hills overlooking Russell Pond were probably additional focal points of native period settlement.

C. Subsistence Base:

Native horticulture would most likely have taken place on the Westfield River and Potash Brook bottomlands and the moderate uplands southwest and south of Russell Pond. The Westfield River, particularly Salmon Falls, and Russell Pond were probably excellent fishing areas. Hunting most likely took place in the rugged uplands occurring throughout Russell.

D. Observations:

Native settlement was probably limited to moderate due to the general rugged terrain of Russell and the absence of extensive freshwater sources. Russell was probably part of the periphery of the native settlement center of Woronoco situated in present Westfield. Period sites are most likely to have survived along the Westfield River and the Russell Pond uplands.

V. Plantation Period 1620-1675

A. Transportation Routes:

Native trails remain as regional route system from Westfield to Housatonic valley with primary path along Knox Road around Russell Mountain.

B. Population:

A small native population probably inhabited Russell during this period particularly when considering the absence of a colonial settlement.

C. Settlement Patterns:

Native settlement patterns probably remained basically the same as those suggested for the Contact period.

D. Economic Base:

There may have been an increase in native fishing and hunting in this area due to the initiation of colonial settlement in Westfield.

The presence of large tracts of agricultural land in Westfield and Russell's rugged terrain would have discouraged colonial utilization of the Russell area.

E. Observation:

Future research should determine the degree of native utilization of Russell during the Plantation period. The existing sources make no reference to the native presence.

VI. Colonial Period 1675-1775

A. Transportation Routes:

Improvement of General Knox Road as primary east-west highway from Connecticut Valley to Albany during Revolution with difficult grade around Russell Mountain as Devils Stairs along Little River Gorge.

B. Population:

It is unclear if Russell had a post-1675 native population. Colonial settlement did not take place until the 1780 s..

C. Settlement Patterns:

There was no reference to native or colonial period settlement. Apparently the availability of higher quality agricultural land closer to the Connecticut River continued to discourage colonial settlement in Russell.

D. Economic Base:

Colonial utilization of the Russell area was probably limited to the quarrying of local stone and lumbering by Westfield area residents

E. Observations :

This area continued to be of little interest to Connecticut River Valley settlers. However, research should attempt to define the extent of pre-settlement colonial activities such as quarrying and lumbering in Russell.

VII. Federal Period 1775-1830

A. Transportation Routes:

Location of first meeting house at Russell Pond(1792) established radial pattern from Knox Road, including Woronoco Heights and South Quarter Roads to Blanford. At the same time there was significant improvement of Westfield River corridor as the primary highway(Route 20) from the Connecticut Valley to the Berkshires with a connecting link to Blanford as Stage Road. Relocation of the town center to Russell (1826) required secondary set of connecting highways as Moss Hill Road to Blanford and Dickinson Hill Road to Russell Pond. Additional improvement of Westfield River corridor with Eighth Massachusetts Turnpike (Route 20) in 1800 through Russell Center to Housantonic Valley with parallel of Hampden and Berkshire Turnpike in 1829 along Potash Brook to Blandford (Route 23).

B. Population:

Russell's population grew slowly from the time of its incorporation in 1792 (431 residents in 1800) to 1830 (507 residents).

C. Settlement Patterns:

Meeting house location established on Knox Road (1792) around original Russell Pond settlement. Civic center relocated north to Russell (1826) along Westfield River after opening of Massachusetts Turnpike (Route 20), with secondary settlement along Hampden Turnpike(Route 23).

D. Economic Base:

Russell had very limited industrial development in the Federal period, the town's economy being primarily engaged in agricultural pursuits. The town appears to have experienced a commerical growth in Russell village not felt in the neighboring hill towns. In 1818 Thomas Frye erected a small cotton mill of 252 spindles at what later became Crescent Falls. Although its yarn and cloth(produced by 4 men and 7 women) was valued at \$6,300 in 1820, by 1845 its annual product was limited to \$788 worth of cotton twine.

At Woronoco in the 1820s, the Hampshire and Hampden Canal Company constructed a feeder dam a short distance above the village, as well as a long canal feeder along the river's west bank to supply the main canal in Westfield.

Architecture

Residential: Comparatively few Federal period houses were observed in Russell. Most of those noted were center chimney five bay wide cottages located along General Knox Trail. At least one gambrel roof center chimney cottage was observed on General Knox Trail just south of Route 90, but all other period houses incorporate gable roofs. One gable front Federal building with a center entrance (possibly a school) was observed in the same area.

Institutional: A Baptist society (organized in 1787) built a meetinghouse in 1792 at Russell Center. Dissolved between 1805 and 1811, the society had reorganized by 1816 and constructed a new meetinghouse in 1826. No architectural details of those first two structures are known. Contrary to the general pattern of ecclesiastical settlement, the Congregational Church was not established in Russell until 1800; soon after, a Methodist church was established. The two congregations built a Union Meetinghouse in 1820, which stood until 1830, at Russell Pond. In 1805, two schools were constructed in the town; by 1830, the number of schools had increased to four. None of these are known to survive.

Commercial: Two taverns once stood in the town, on General Knox Trail and one on Pine Hill Road. Neither of these is known to survive.

VIII Early Industrial Period 1830-1870

A. Transportation Routes:

Continued improvement of Westfield River as primary western corridor to Berkshires with location of Western Railroad along northbank in 1841. Connecting bridge over Westfield River to Russell Center (Depot Street) and to Montgomery (Carrington Road) from railroad station.

B. Population:

Russell, unlike the hill towns around it, experienced a rise in population as the railroad, and then the paper mill, brought new workers into town. In the peak year, 1855, with 677 residents, 20.9 percent were foreign born. Of these, a low 56 percent were Irish, followed by 23 percent from Canada, and 18.3 percent from England. In the period's subsequent years, 1855-70, the population fluctuated, reaching 635 in 1870.

C. Settlement Pattern:

Opening of Western Railroad (1842) expanded development of Russell Center with street village on Main Street to Westfield River depot. Secondary center formed at Crescent Mills on Westfield River (1858) with workers housing along Route 20 axis.

D. Economic Base:

With the arrival of the Western Railroad in 1841, Russell got her first paper mill, at Crescent Mills. In 1855, as one of eight paper mills in the county, the mill employed 80 men producing \$60,000 worth of paper, giving the town third place among Hampden County towns (after West Springfield and Westfield). Its product value represented 13.6 percent of all paper produced in the county. In 1858 the mill was acquired by Chaplin & Gould, under whom it expanded significantly, producing, by 1865, writing paper valued at \$165,000.

The arrival of the railroad along the Westfield River made the extensive water power of the river a major asset to local boosters. Wrote Hayward in 1847:

Russell possesses an immense water power, with an abundance of wood and stone, and other building materials; and all within six hours ride of Boston. If Russell does not become "another Lowell," it surely bids fair to become a great auxiliary to the domestic industry of the state.

Although small sawmills lined several of the smaller streams, the potential of the Westfield River as slow to be developed. Not until 1872 was a mill built on the Westfield at Woronoco; not until 1908 at Russell Falls.

In the village of Russell, a large tannery was the major employer supporting in turn two whip lash factories.

E. Architecture:

Residential: During the period, settlement developed in the northern half of the town at the village of Russell and to a lesser degree at Crescent Mills, at the end of the period. Most of the structures built along the side streets which developed between Route 20 and the Westfield River were sidehall plan Greek Revival and Italianate cottages and houses. Some of these incorporate small fixed windows in the frieze. In addition to that more modest housing, one more elaborate Greek Revival/Italianate sidehall plan house with a two-story recessed side portico was constructed at the village center. That house, probably built ca.1860, is a provincial version of Westfield's most sophisticated side portico Greek Revival house, the Snow House (1830, Chauncey Shepard). In addition to the houses at the village center, five bay, center entrance facade vernacular Italianate farmhouses and cottages, with double interior chimneys, were built along Routes 20 and 23 along General Knox Trail and on South Quarter Road. By the end of the period, housing for workers at the Chapin and Gould/Crescent Mills had begun to be constructed

in the extreme northern part of the town. This consisted of approximately a half dozen two-and-a-half story gable roof double houses of conservative Greek Revival/Italianate design.

Institutional: In 1853, the present Congregational Church at Russell Center was constructed at a cost of \$2400. It is a simply detailed one-and-a-half story Greek Revival building. No other institutional buildings of the period are known to survive.

Commercial: Several one and two story stores with three bay facades and center entrances were built at Russell Center in the period. The first depot of the Boston and Albany Railroad was built ca.1842; it does not survive.

Industrial: The first major industrial building built in the town was Chapin and Gould paper mill (Crescent Mills) built in 1858 and added to in 1870. This is a three to four story brick vernacular Italianate building with a gable roof and end gable stair tower, located on Route 20 at the northern edge of town.

IX. Late Industrial 1870-1915

A. Transportation Routes:

Continued improvement of Westfield River corridor with extension of interurban trolley route from Westfield to Huntington in 1905 along Route 20 axis. (no remaining evidence).

B. Population:

Russell's population rose from 635 in 1870 to 1,104 in 1915, nearly doubling in the 45 year period. Despite this rise, the change in population was one of relatively slow growth in most years (averaging 4-5 persons per year), and even of decline (1890-1900; 1905-1910). By contrast, Russell's real growth can be isolated to three distinct periods: 1875-80 (36 persons per year on average); 1900-1905 (52 persons); and 1910-1915 (27.8 per year).

In 1880 Russell's 23% immigrant population lagged behind the 28.3 percent county average; by 1905 it exceeded it, with 36 percent to the county's 30 percent. In 1880 Ireland, England, and Canada were still the major sources of immigrants; in 1905 Italians made up over 49 percent of Russell's foreign-born residents, followed by Austrians and Poles with another 19 percent.

C. Settlement Patterns:

Civic and economic focus remained at Russell Center with access along Main Street to railroad. Secondary mill village established at Woronoco (1872) along Westfield River with factory village maintained at Crescent Mills.

D. Economic Base:

. In 1872 the Westfield firm of Jessup & Laflin built the second paper mill in Russell at Salmon Falls (later called Fairfield; and now Woronoco). By 1880, the two paper mills, at Crescent Falls and Salmon Falls, employed 241 men and women and had an annual production valued at over \$355,000 . The two mills dominated the economy of the town for the remainder of the historic periods. By about 1890 the Fairfield Paper Company alone employed 700 workers, sheltered in company boarding houses and tenements. In 1908 a third paper mill, the Russell Falls Paper Company, began operation opposite the village of Russell.

Probably in the 1870s or 1880s, Norcross Brothers, the prominent Worcester contractor and operator of major brownstone quarries in East Longmeadow, started a brickyard for the manufacture of a "high class" light or yellow brick. Although the firm supplied brick for a major Springfield theatre and the Massachusetts State House extension, sufficient clay was not available to keep the yard open. (Is this related to the Blandford Brick and Tile Co. operation in Russell?)

In 1909 the City of Springfield, augmenting its water-supply with the Borden Brook Reservoir in Granville and Blandford, built a Diversion Reservoir and dam along the Little River, just inside the Russell town line. (The Reservoir remained integral to the Little River Supply system when the Cobble Mountain Reservoir and hydro-electric plant were built two decades later).

E. Architectural:

Residential: Small workers' cottages and houses continued to be built at Russell Center through the period. Many of these are late Italianate and Queen Anne sidehall plan structures. In addition to these structures, a few sidehall plan Queen Anne cottages with Gothic Revival bargeboards were built as well. In the 1890s and through the end of the period, Queen Anne two-family houses were built at the center as well. At Woronoco and at Crescent Mills, two-and-a-half story duplexes and fourplexes were built around the turn of the century. Most of these are modestly-detailed Queen Anne, Stick Style and Craftsman style structures. On Carrington Road at Woronoco, the housing is somewhat more varied with Stick, Shingle and Colonial Revival duplexes and fourplexes. Commonly, the houses incorporate two or four three bay wide sidehall plan units placed back to back with central entrances. Small porches and shed dormers or a center gable are typical decorative features.

Institutional: The two major institutional buildings of the period are the Town Hall and Russell Center School (now library), both built ca 1910. The Town Hall is a two-and-a-half story Tudor Revival building of brick with half timbered gables; the school is a one-story Tudor Revival building of brick, somewhat altered through additions of the 1960s.

Commercial: Commercial buildings of the period include simple one and two story frame stores on Route 20 and a one-story brick filling station on Route 23 with an overhanging end gable enclosing the pumps.

Industrial: The Jessup and Laflin (later Strathmore) paper mills at Woronoco were constructed in this period (1874-1887). Early buildings consist of three story brick Romanesque Revival structures subsequently framed by utilitarian three and four story brick additions. The three story reinforced concrete power plant of the mill may also date from the period (probably ca. 1912).

X. Early Modern Period 1915-1940

A. Transportation Routes:

Early improvement of local highway was regional autoroads with rebuilding of Blandford Turnpike as Route 23, including three dated bridges (1915) over Potash Brook intact. Abandonment of Westfield River trolley line through Russell Center and improvement of Massachusetts Turnpike as U.S. Route 20 through Woronoco and Russell Center with dated bridge (1924) over Stage Brook. Local bridge over Westfield from Woronoco to Strathmore plant appears to be early concrete example (ca.1915).

B. Population:

Russell's population continued to expand rapidly through the early 1920s. In the decade 1915-25, the town grew by over 26 percent, reaching 1,398 in the latter year--a figure it would not reach again until after 1955. After 1925, despite a slight growth in the early 1930s, the town's residents count declined, reaching 1,242 in 1940.

C. Settlement Pattern:

Russell Center maintained as civic and economic focus, with factory villages on Westfield River at Crescent Mills and Woronoco. Improvement of Route 20 as primary autoroad stimulated commercial highway activity around Russell Center.

D. Economic Base:

Horace A. Moses had been superintendent of the Agawam Paper Co. in Mittineague (West Springfield). In 1892, he organized the Mittineague Paper Co. in that place to manufacture a variety of fine and specialty art papers. When in 1911 Moses bought the Woronoco Paper Co. mill (the former Fairfield Paper Co.), both Mittineague and Woronoco plants were merged into one new corporation, the Strathmore Paper Company. Two years later, in 1913, after a thorough study of modern papermaking at home and abroad, Moses built a second plant at Woronoco, representing "the last word in facilities for making high-grade paper" (Stone, 676). With the expansion of Strathmore at Woronoco, the company also expanded the workers housing and community facilities available in the village.

In 1916, the Westfield Paper Company bought the plant of the Russell Falls Paper Company to produce glassine paper. The Chapin and Gould management continued to operate the paper mill at Crescent Falls.

A major event of the period was the construction of the Cobble Mountain Dam, 1928-30, damming the Little River near the town boundary with Blandford. The reservoir, though primarily in Blandford, provided a 22.5 billion gallon water supply for the city of Springfield. When it was completed, the 1500-foot thick dam was said to be "the highest earthen dam in the world" (Blandford Bicentennial).

E. Architecture:

Residential: Colonial Revival bungalows, most one story tall with center entrance plans, gable roofs and broad shed dormers, were built in modest numbers at the town center. Also built were several simple two-story Colonial Revival houses with pyramidal hip roofs. Simple cottages of the period were also built along South Quarter Road, General Knox Trail and Route 23.

Institutional: The only institutional construction of the period known was the building of Our Lady of the Holy Rosary Church at Russell Center in 1926. The church is a one-story shingled Craftsman design with Tudor Revival details.

Industrial: A two-story, brick Georgian Revival office building with an asymmetrical plan and flat roof was built by the Strathmore Paper Company, ca. 1925 at Woronoco.

XI. Survey Observations

The only structures inventoried in Russell are the Strathmore and Crescent Mills. Future survey should document residential development at Russell Center, including major institutional buildings. Survival of Federal period structures on Routes 20 and 23 should be investigated.

Industrial: Further study should be given to the Woronoco Mill No. 2 and its associated housing, the Russell Falls Paper Company, and the two Springfield Water Works dams on the Little River: the 1909 Diversion Dam and the Cobble Mountain Dam(1928-30).

XII. Sources

Kites, Clifford L., "I remember Crescent Mills, " 4-part series in Stone Walls vols. 5 and 6 (1979-81).

Russell, MA, 175th Anniversary Committee, 175th Anniversary of the Town of Russell, 1792-1967 (Westfield, 1967).