

MHC Reconnaissance Survey Town Report

SHUTESBURY

Report Date: 1983

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.



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MHC RECONNAISSANCE SURVEY REPORT

DATE: JANUARY 1983

COMMUNITY: SHUTESBURY

I. TOPOGRAPHY

Shutesbury's 27 square miles is the 12th largest total among Franklin County towns. The community is one of the southernmost towns within the county bordering on the northern boundary of Hampshire County. The town is dominated by a complex of rugged, broken uplands. One section consists of a ledge that overlooks the length of the West Branch of the Swift River. These uplands generally reach between 900 feet and 1200 feet in elevation. The highest point is an unnamed hill (1270 feet) located approximately one mile southwest of the village of Shutesbury. Shutesbury Village is situated on one of the highest elevations (1225 feet) in town. Additional elevations include Ames Hill (1097 feet) which overlooks Lake Wyola, Mt. Mineral (1165 feet) southeast of Ames Hill, an unnamed hill (1194 feet) southeast of Shutesbury Village and January Hills (945 feet) in southwestern Shutesbury. The town's two largest waterways, the West Branch of the Swift River and its main course, cut through the eastern uplands and drain into the Quabbin Reservoir on the southernmost portion of Shutesbury's eastern boundary. Completion of the reservoir in the late 1930's resulted in the inundation of portions of the present towns of Shutesbury, Pelham and New Salem. Lake Wyola, situated in the town's northwestern corner, is Shutesbury's only natural body of freshwater.

II. POLITICAL BOUNDARIES

Originally granted as Roadtown in 1735 from Lancaster with western boundary at Hadley (Amherst) and Sunderland (Leverett) from 1673. Southern boundary defined by equivalent lands (Pelham) in 1736 and eastern boundary with New Salem in 1753 (south part now included within Quabbin Reservoir). Incorporated as town of Shutesbury in 1761 including northern district to Ervingshire (Wendell). Northern boundary defined with formation of Wendell in 1781 from Shutesbury and southeast boundary with Prescott in 1822 from New Salem, subsequently reannexed to New Salem in 1927 with creation of Quabbin Reservoir along Swift River.

III. HISTORIC OVERVIEW

Rural suburban hill town on secondary corridor between Amherst and Athol. Located in central highlands with drainage to Swift River and Connecticut valley and suspected native site potential around Lake Wyola. Settled during mid-18th century as Roadtown on Lancaster highway to Sunderland with meetinghouse location at Shutesbury Center and garrison fort site on Wendell Road during French and Indian War. Early milling operations developed at Locks Village and Roaring Brook before Revolution. Shutesbury Center remained as local civic

focus through early 19th century with landmark Federal meetinghouse and well preserved cottages along Prescott Road to West Cemetery and original farmsteads on Wendell, Pelham Hill and Cooleyville Road uplands. Local economic center developed at Locks Village during mid-19th century with mill dam at Lake Wyola and Greek Revival church on Wendell line. Attempted resort development at Mineral Mountain springs after Civil War with no surviving evidence. Dairy farming remained as upland agriculture through early 20th century with summer resort cottages at Lake Wyola. Present development most evident as affluent suburban expansion from Amherst to Pratts Corner and Baconville with primary regional corridor along Route 202. Shutesbury Center retains authentic village character around town green, while Locks Village remains as local recreational focus around Lake Wyola.

IV. CONTACT PERIOD (1500-1620)

A. Transportation Routes:

Intermediate highland corridor between Quabbin valley and Connecticut River. Probably east-west trail from Swift River to Roaring Brook may have followed axis of Cooleyville-Leverett Road over Shutesbury center hill. Conjectured north-south trail from Swift River to Lake Wyola may have followed Camel Brook to Locks Pond Road. Likely southeast route from Sunderland to Pelham Brook apparently followed axis of Old County Road through Pratts Corner. Other possible trails may have been located across Pelham Hill Road to Shutesbury Center hill.

B. Settlement Patterns:

There were no native Contact period sites. Period occupation was probably limited because of the area's hilly terrain and absence of large freshwater bodies or waterways. Period sites most likely concentrated in the vicinity of Lake Wyola, the West Branch (Swift River) valley and under the waters of the Quabbin Reservoir. Additional sites may have been established on the gentle uplands of central Shutesbury.

C. Subsistence Patterns:

Some native horticulture may have been undertaken on the gentle uplands immediately north of Lake Wyola and the portion of the Swift River Valley inundated by the Quabbin Reservoir. Native fishing probably took place on Lake Wyola's gentle uplands, the West Branch and the former Swift River Valley (Quabbin Reservoir) and in the vicinity of Shutesbury's marshlands. Fishing most likely occurred primarily in Lake Wyola, the West Branch and the Swift River.

D. Observations:

Shutesbury was probably a resource support area for the large native settlements situated on the Hadley and Sunderland lowlands. Native use most likely was heaviest during the spring, late fall and winter months. Those areas with the greatest potential of extant period sites should be north of Lake Wyola and the West Branch and Swift River Valleys (includes Quabbin Reservoir).

V. PLANTATION PERIOD (1620-1675)

A. Transportation Routes:

Native trails remained as intermediate routes from Connecticut Valley to interior highlands.

B. Population:

Shutesbury probably continued to be occupied by small to moderate sized hunting and fishing bands.

The area lacked a colonial population until the 1730's.

C. Settlement Patterns:

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

D. Economic Base:

Native subsistence patterns likely remained similar to those outlined for the previous period.

E. Observations:

Shutesbury probably continued to be utilized primarily as a resource area by the Norwottuck settlements situated in Sunderland and Hadley. Colonial interest in the area was discouraged by Shutesbury's absence of high quality agricultural land. Considerable tracts of more productive land were available in the Middle Connecticut River Valley during this period.

VI. COLONIAL PERIOD (1675-1775)

A. Transportation Routes:

Significant improvement of east-west corridor with Lancaster Road to Sunderland (1735) apparently following Coolyville-Leverett Road from Swift River to Roaring Brook (Holland, 1855, II, p.429; Sylvester, 1879, II, p.758). Establishment of Roadtown grant and survey of lots (1737) with location of meetinghouse at Shutesbury center (1739) formed basic highway division alignment including north-south Pelham Hill, West Pelham, Town Farm, and Wendell-Locks Pond Road to Lake Wyola. Other period highways included east-west Prescott Road from Shutesbury Center and Locks Village Road to Montague and Wendell.

B. Population:

Shutesbury probably continued to be occupied periodically by small native bands into the 18th century.

Little growth occurred in the colonial population until the second half of the 18th century. In c.1737, the Colonial settlement consisted of 7 families. By 1765, the community had increased to

59 families (56 houses) and 330 individuals. This last figure had almost doubled in 1776 when the population stood at 598 individuals. A large number of period settlers were former residents of Lancaster (Sylvester 1879:II, 758). A substantial number also reportedly moved from Sudbury (Barber, 1839: II, 758). By the end of the period a small Baptist faction existed within the predominantly Congregational population.

C. Settlement Patterns:

None of the available secondary sources locate native period sites. Colonial settlement grew out of a 1734 petition for land made by 95 Lancaster area laborers who constructed a public road from Lancaster to the Connecticut River. Settlement followed shortly after the petition's acceptance in 1735. Period settlement of the township of "Roadtown" was planned and generally scattered until late in the period. A small primary settlement node had developed on the site of the village of Shutesbury Center probably by the late 1740's. This location was the site of the community's first meeting-house (c.1739). A "fort" was built on Locks Pond Road approximately a half mile north of the village of Shutesbury in c.1748. By the 1750's, a small settlement node had probably been established in the general vicinity of Lock's village. Additional period settlement probably took place on Locks Pond Road, Leverett Road, Cooleyville Road, Prescott Road and Pelham Hill Road. The town emerged unscathed from the Indian Wars of the 18th century.

D. Economic Base:

Colonial settlers focused primarily on livestock production and probably lumbering. Crop production was hindered by the area's limited quantity of good agricultural land. Local industrial development was modest until late in the period. The community's first mill was probably constructed sometime after 1737 when Jon Burt and others were contracted to build and operate a grist mill for local use (Sylvester 1879: II, 759). Shutesbury's first gristmill was constructed by Benjamin Harris in southeastern Shutesbury on Harris Brook in c.1747. Operation of a third mill was begun in c.1754 when Jonas Lock established a grist mill on Lock's Pond probably in the vicinity of Locks Village. By 1771, 4 tanneries were operating in the community. However, this figure may include tanning facilities established in present Wendell since it was then part of Shutesbury.

E. Architecture:

No dwellings of the Colonial period are known to survive. Houses of the period were probably modest structures, either cottages or houses of three bays width. Center chimney plans undoubtedly predominated. In 1735, the proprietors of the town voted to build a meetinghouse with dimensions of 40' x 30' x 20'; that first meetinghouse was not constructed, however, and in 1739, it was voted to build a slightly larger building. The meetinghouse (45' x 35' x 20') was completed in 1740 and stood until 1820. A 30'

A mineral spring discovered near the town center in 1808 became a popular attraction after a hotel (later called the Pool Tavern) was built upon the spot.

E. Architecture:

Residential: The earliest surviving houses observed in the field appeared to date from the Federal period. Approximately a dozen structures were noted. Nearly all of these were modest center chimney cottages with five bay fronts and gable roofs. Examples were noted on Wendell, Prescott, West Pelham, Pelham Hill and Montague Roads. A few sidehall plan cottages, probably dating from the 1820s, were observed on Prescott Road west of the village center. The only dated property of the period is the center chimney Benjamin Ray cottage (1784).

Institutional: The Baptist Society, organized in 1787 from a 1778 New Salem society, was the strongest religious body of the period. The present Federated Church (1827) was constructed as a union meetinghouse by the four denominations then active in the town, the Baptists, Congregationalists, Unitarians and Universalists, with the Baptists owning half of the structure. The Federal/Greek Revival structure stands two-and-a-half stories tall with a three bay facade with pilasters and end gable pediment. One steeple consists of a square base surmounted by two octagonal stages and a dome and was possibly added as late as 1862. In 1829, the Universalists separated to form their own society. The only other institutional building of the period surviving is the West School (c.1820), a very well-preserved one-story schoolhouse with a side entrance and two bay by three bay dimensions. Also of note is an extant early 19th century wooden mileage marker; the marker, a small square structure approximately 4' in height has a hipped cap with a monitor.

VIII. EARLY INDUSTRIAL PERIOD (1830-1870)

A. Transportation Routes:

Primary east-west corridor remained as Leverett Road through Shutesbury Center with Locks Pond-Wendell Road to Locks Village. No railroads projected or constructed through area.

B. Population:

Shutesbury's population remained relatively stagnant, gaining and losing small numbers until the late 1850s. Between 1855 and 1860, the town lost 15% of its population, and by 1870 it had lost over a third, reaching 614 in the latter year. In 1855, only three of the town's residents were foreign born.

C. Settlement Pattern:

Shutesbury Center remained as local civic focus with secondary settlement at Baconville and Pratts Corners along axis of upland

farming district. Continued development of Locks Village as local economic and civic center with Methodist church (1851) at Wendell line, and resort hotel at Mineral Mountain (1867).

D. Economic Base:

Timber products remained the town's chief industry in an economy which remained strictly agricultural. By 1855, fifteen sawmills produced 2,281,000 feet of lumber, third highest figure among the 26 Franklin County towns. Much of the lumber was carted overland through Leverett and Sunderland to the Connecticut River, where it was rafted downstream (pre-1846?). By 1865, however, the quantity of lumber cut in Shutesbury had fallen off 40% from the figure a decade earlier, while the town's share of the county production had declined from 12% to 6%. This sharp drop may also be reflected in the population figures, which took their first substantial decline in the years 1855-60. Much of the timber production may have gone into charcoal. In 1865 Shutesbury produced 59,000 bushels of charcoal -- 70% of Franklin County's production that year.

Other wooden products included chairs and cabinetware; trays, felloes, and bungs; broom and brush handles; baby carriage wheels; and the wooden rakes of William Crossman.

Presumably as a reflection of the business in Leverett and Amherst, Shutesbury women also did a significant home business in making palm-leaf hats. At the industry's peak in 1845, 350 women were employed braiding hats valued at \$10,000 -- third highest value in the county after Orange and Leverett.

A second mineral spring was discovered east of Locks Pond, and the Mount Mineral Spring Company, incorporated in 1867, built a large hotel to accomodate visitors and invalids. The hotel burned in 1876, however, and was apparently not rebuilt.

E. Architecture:

Residential: A modest amount of residential construction took place in the period; approximately two dozen structures, mostly cottages with a few two-story houses, were observed in the field. Most of the cottages exhibit center chimney plans, five bay fronts with center entrances and gable roofs. Sidehall plans were employed with some frequency but there were relatively few double interior chimney, center hall plan structures noted. Two-story houses were observed at Locks Village and on Prescott Road with cottages noted on Locks Village, Wendell, Prescott, West Pelham and Pelham Hill Roads. With the exception of a few Italianate cottages, probably built in the 1860s, the Greek Revival style was universal and probably indicates construction dates in the 1830s and 1840s for most houses.

Institutional: Two institutional buildings of the period are known to survive. These are the Congregational Church, built in 1836 when the Congregationalists left the union meetinghouse, and the

Town Hall, constructed c.1835. Both buildings are modest one-story vernacular Greek Revival structures three bays wide by three bays long. The Congregational Church was later purchased by the Grange. Other than schoolhouses, of which several were probably built before 1855, when the number of districts in the town was ten, the only other institutional building recorded was a Methodist meetinghouse. Methodists organized in 1845, building a meetinghouse in 1851. It is not thought to survive.

IX. LATE INDUSTRIAL PERIOD (1870-1915)

A. Transportation Routes:

Local road system remained focused around Shutesbury Center with connections to Locks Village and Baconville. No trolley lines constructed through area.

B. Population:

Shutesbury's population continued to decline steadily throughout the period, gaining only slightly in the years 1910-15. By 1915 the town showed a net loss of 57% of her 1870 population, giving the town the honor of being the smallest town in the county. The town's immigrant population climbed in the same period. By 1915 small communities of Austrians and Italians made up the bulk of the 18.4% immigrant population.

C. Settlement Pattern:

Local civic activities remained at Shutesbury Center with dairy farming on surrounding uplands to Baconville. Locks Village expanded as local industrial focus with axis along Jennison Road to Wendell line.

D. Economic Base:

By 1875, though timber production was down from the earlier period, it accounted for 86% of the town's total value of manufactured products. The \$10,057 value ranked the town as 20th among the 26 Franklin County towns. By 1885, with 294,000 feet of timber produced by six sawmills, the town ranked 8th in the county, with 4% of its production. Other wooden products included chairs, hay rakes, and wooden hubs.

E. Architecture:

Residential: Very little residential construction took place in the period, except, after 1900, at Lake Wyola (Locks Village) where some summer resort development occurred. Vernacular one-story frame cottages (less than a half dozen examples) were noted

on Wendell and Prescott Roads. At Lake Wyola, one-story early 20th-century cottages were built in some numbers. Among these are a few well-detailed cottages incorporating cobblestone foundations, chimneys and proches, as well as novelty sided or shingled hip and gable roofed cottages.

Institutional: Two institutional buildings were constructed at the village center. These are the M. N. Spear Memorial Library (1893) and the Shutesbury Center School (c.1915). The Library is notable as a colorful example of the Tudor Revival style; a one-and-a-half story frame building with a gable on hip roof, it incorporates a clapboarded lower story with an exuberantly half-timbered attic. The school is a more utilitarian Colonial Revival structure, one story with a gable roof.

X. EARLY MODERN PERIOD (1915-1940)

A. Transportation Routes:

Improvement of local highways as secondary auto routes with east-west axis as Leverett-Prescott Road, altered by Quabbin Reservoir (1927) and local connections to Locks Village from North Leverett.

B. Population:

Shutesbury's population, but for the years 1925-35, continued to decline. By 1940, with a population of 191, the town had reached its nadir. As in 1915, Shutesbury retained its position as the smallest town in the county.

C. Settlement Pattern:

Continued development of Locks Village as local economic focus with summer cottages surrounding Lake Wyola. Shutesbury Center remained as local civic focus; dairy farming along uplands. Gradual expansion of Amherst suburban activities to Pratts Corner with Atkins Reservoir on Nourse Brook and flooding of Prescott farming district for Quabbin Reservoir (1927).

D. Economic Base:

No new industries identified. One sawmill at Pratt's Corner remained in operation in 1937.

E. Architecture:

Almost no construction occurred in the period with the possible exception of the building of a few cottages at Lake Wyola.

XI. SURVEY OBSERVATIONS

Approximately a dozen structures have been inventoried in Shutesbury. These include the town's 19th century institutional buildings and a

handful of residences. Future efforts might include completion of forms for additional Federal and Greek Revival residences as well as more thorough documentation of previously inventoried buildings. Construction dates and original owners' names should be incorporated on existing forms.

XII. SOURCES

Shutesbury, Mass., Shutesbury, 1737-1937, Commemorating the 200th Anniversary of the Town (Shutesbury?, 1937?).