

MHC Reconnaissance Survey Town Report

SOUTHWICK

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: May, 1982

COMMUNITY: Southwick

I. Topography

Southwick is dominated by two mountain ranges(, Provin) located on the western and eastern boundaries of the town. The western portion of Southwick consists of a complex of moderate to rugged uplands which extend north and south into Westfield and Connecticut respectively. This area generally ranges between 300-900 feet in height. The highest elevation in Southwick, Sodom Mountain , 1126 feet above sea level, is located in the northwest corner of town. East of a line extended north from the Congamond Lakes the uplands grade down to a combination of lowlands and gently rolling hills with elevations averaging approximately 225-250 feet. Marshlands are scattered throughout Southwick. Local soil is rocky in the uplands and sandy in the lowlands. A small area of rich loam extends around the periphery of the Congamond Lakes. Southwick falls within the Westfield River drainage with area streams flowing primarily out of the Congamond Lakes into the Westfield River. The Congamond Lakes are Southwick's only freshwater pond complex.

II. Political Boundaries:

Originally claimed by Connecticut as part of Woronoco territory during the 1640's, but included within Massachusetts patent by 1647. Formed as part of Westfield grant in 1669 with Springfield (Agawam) line drawn at East Mountain. Connecticut-Massachusetts boundary disputed during 17th century with final survey drawn in 1713-1716. Southwick established as district of Westfield in 1770 and as independent town in 1775 with northern line at Westfield and western boundary at Granville. Connecticut annex around Congamond Lakes created in 1800 from petition of Roger Moore with final line established by 1804(Barber, 1839, p.288; Sylvester, 1879 II, p.1087).

III. Historic Overview:

Rural suburban town on fringe of metropolitan Springfield. Located along mountain front of Connecticut valley with native site potential likely around Congamond Lakes. Belated settlement from Westfield during mid-18th century as agricultural community with attempted efforts to drain Congamond Ponds. Some late Colonial houses remain along north-south axis of Route 10 and Vining Hill Road with cemetery marking original meeting house site at Jackson Road. Continued agricultural expansion through Federal period with town center relocated to Southwick Hill noted by landmark period church of excellent design and stylish houses in authentic village setting. Location of Hampshire and Hampden canal along Congamond Ponds had little effect upon settlement pattern and has left little visible trace on the landscape. Town center remained at Southwick Hill during Industrial period with extension to railroad depot, including some early Romantic styled houses. Introduction of tobacco during mid-19th century maintained prime agricultural land along Great Brook and Vining Hill with several Greek Revival farmhouses on outlying roads and period barns intact along South Meadow Road.

Development of local resort community around Congamond Lakes during Early Modern period with increasing expansion of Springfield along Route 57 corridor. Town center remained along Route 10 with notable Art Deco school of early design and original filling station with pumps at Slab Brook. Present development most obvious around junction of Routes 57 and 10 with commercial expansion threatening integrity of historic town center. Suburban development affecting outlying farmland along Route 57 to Loomis Road, while summer homes around Congamond Lakes indicate signs of economic difficulty.

IV. Contact Period(1500-1620)

A. Transportation Routes:

Secondary corridor of regional routes along mountain front connecting Congamond Pond with Woronoco valley. No defined trails documented in histories. Documented north-south routes along Great Brook from Woronoco appear to follow Foster-North Longyard Roads and possibly Powder Mill Road to Congamond Pond (Davis, 1970, p.14). East-west trail routes to Congamond from Connecticut seem probable on South Longyard and Point Grove Roads with likely route over hills to Shurtleff Brook along axis of Route 57 as Hillside Road. Secondary north-south trail along Shurtleff Brook apparently follows Loomis Road. A north-south trail is conjectured along west side of Congamond, possibly along Route 10 axis of Great Brook.

B. Settlement Patterns:

There were no reported native Contact period sites in Southwick. Two unidentified native sites were situated in the moderate uplands of northeastern Southwick while a third was located near the eastern shore of Middle Pond. Native period settlement probably focused around Congamond Lakes when considering this area's good agricultural land and the recovery of a large quantity of cultural material from the vicinity of the lakes over the years. Small, short-term hunting camps were probably established in the uplands west and northeast of the Congamond Lakes.

C. Subsistence Base:

Native horticulture was most likely restricted to the Congamond Lakes and land in the vicinity of South Longwood Road and Mount Vining Road. Much larger, richer tracts of agricultural land were available in nearby Westfield. The Congamond Lakes and the Westfield and Little rivers of southern Westfield were probably the primary focal points of native fishing. The extensive uplands of Southwick provided excellent habitats for wild game.

D. Observations:

Southwick probably had limited to moderate native period settlement when considering the rugged nature of the majority of the area's terrain. Extensive native settlement would have more likely occurred in the vicinity of the rich agricultural land and water sources of nearby Westfield. There is an excellent likelihood of the recovery of archaeological evidence of Contact period native settlement in the vicinity of the Congamond lakes. Efforts should be made to locate and identify, if possible, the cultural material recovered from the Lakes area, particularly the collection

in the possession of Yale University(as of 1970).

V. Plantation Period (1620-1675)

A. Transportation Routes:

Native trails remained as regional routeways with primary north-south path likely along Route 10 from Westfield to Suffield, Connecticut. A secondary east-west route from Agawam to Congamond Pond apparently maintained along South Longyard Road.

B. Population:

It is unclear what the extent of Southwick's native population was during the Plantation period however, the lack of a colonial population suggests there was some native period settlement.

There first permanent colonial settlement did not occur until the early 18th century.

C. Settlement Pattern:

It appears as though Southwick lacked both permanent and seasonal colonial settlement during this period, despite Southwick's inclusion in the town of Westfield (incorporated 1669). There was little need for its use as grazing or cropland since present Westfield contained large amounts of both.

D. Economic Base:

No evidence of Colonial utilization of this area during this period.

E. Observation

Little is known about Southwick during the Plantation period. The area probably was utilized only by the natives as a settlement and resource location.

VI. Colonial Period(1675-1775)

A. Transportation Routes:

Location of Southwick meetinghouse between Johnson and Great Brook (1774) created radial road pattern from town center by Revolution. Primary north-south highway located along Route 10 axis with east-west highway across mountain ridge as Klaus Anderson-Curtis Roads. Secondary feeders included Fred Jackson, Bugbee and Davis Roads with north-south highway along mountain ridge as Hastings-John Mason-Mort Vining Roads. Other east-west connectors appear as Cline, Cohoes Hill and Will Balmer Roads, with Vining Hill Road as cross link from Shurteff Brook to Congamond Pond. Main east-west highway from Agawam improved as Feeding Hills Road (Route 57) by Revolutionary War.

B. Population:

By c.1754, 34 families had settled in Southwick. The colonial population had increased to 841 residents by 1776. The vast majority of the community's population were members of the Congregational Church. However, prior to the Revolution a small number of Baptists from Suffield, Connecticut had settled in area.

C. Settlement Patterns:

King Philip's War had no impact on Southwick due to its lack of a colonial community. None of the existing secondary sources made reference to the loss of life or property destruction during the French and Indian wars of the late 17th century and 18th century. The first settlement occurred in c.1734 with the appearance of Samuel Fowler who established a home in the northern section of Southwick in "Poverty Plain" settlement was spurred on by the establishment of Westfield outer commons grant in 1731. Initially settlement was scattered, occurring in five areas: 1) just below Poverty Plains 2) South Longyard (probably South Longyard Road area), 3) near the junction Curtis Road and Route 10, 4) western portion of Southwick, 5) southern portion of Southwick (Southwick Bicentennial Commission 1970:15). By the early 1770's a primary settlement node had developed in the vicinity of Route 10 and Curtis Road, the general location of the town's first (c.1773) meeting house.

D. Economic Base:

Southwick residents focused on agriculture. An unsuccessful attempt was made by an English company in c.1750 to drain the Congamond Lakes and utilize the reclaimed land for agricultural purposes. The town had a limited industrial component. The majority of local industrial production entailed a complex of powder mills, possibly as many as five operating at one time, on Great Brook (vicinity of Powder Mill Road?) established prior to 1775 by Captain Matthew Laflin. These mills are reputed to have supplied powder for the colonial forces throughout the American Revolution, including at the Battle of Bunker Hill. A pre-1775 grist mill was erected on Great Brook near its junction with South Longyard Road.

E. Architecture:

It is unlikely that any Colonial period houses have survived in Southwick. The earliest documented house in the town dates 1778. Other factors discouraging Colonial survivals are the lateness and sparseness of the town's settlement. If any houses have survived, they would probably be located along Routes 10 and 202. Possible surviving period houses include a double interior chimney house with added lean-to near Pearl Brook on Routes 10 and 202 and a gambrel roof center chimney cottage on Loomis Street. The architectural qualities of the first meetinghouse (1773) are not described in secondary sources.

F. Observations:

Southwick's Colonial period history is poorly documented in the available secondary sources. The town's limited agricultural land and industrial potential appears to have discouraged extensive settlement and economic development during this period. However, the powder mill industry established in Southwick and Westfield in the 18th century is the most extensive known operation of its kind in the Connecticut

River valley study unit. The town has considerable potential for surviving archaeological evidence of the Colonial period community because of the general lack of extensive development.

VII. Federal Period (1775-1830)

A. Transportation Routes:

Relocation of meetinghouse to Southwick Hill(1824) required little adjustment in local road pattern. Primary corridor from Westfield remained as north-south Route 10 axis with secondary highway from Agawam along Route 57 and Anderson-Curtis Roads over mountain ridge. Major improvement of period was construction of Hampshire and Hampden Canal to Westfield during 1825-29 along north-south corridor of Great Brook and Congamond Lakes with floating bridge between Middle and South Ponds. Little remains of canal bed except portions near North Pond and along Great Brook.

B. Population:

In 1830 Southwick's population reached 1,355 -- a figure it would not reach again until the 1920's. In part this growth must have been due to the construction of the Hampshire and Hampden Canal through town, 1825-31 (the number of residents grew by 100 in the 1820's), but its major -- and so far unexplained -- period of growth occurred in the decade 1800-1810 when the town grew by 41 percent, a growth for which there is no precedent in other towns in the same decade.

C. Settlement Pattern:

Town center relocated north along Route 10 corridor from Johnson Brook to Southwick Hill with second meetinghouse (1824). Secondary center formed at Gillett Corner around Episcopal church. Location of Hampshire and Hampden canal(1826) developed Congamond Lakes area with little impact upon town center. Agriculture maintained as primary economic activity with farmsteads along Vining Hill and South Longyard Roads.

D. Economic Base:

Earliest powder mill said to have been established by Matthew Laflin, 1757. At unspecified date, five powder mills noted in Great Brook (Bicentennial), but apparently by 1800 this figure had been reduced to one, owned by Theron Rockwell (a name which reappears among the Westfield Powder Mills).

Agriculture remained the town's principal activity throughout the historic periods. The years 1825-30 saw the change-over from part-time to intense cultivation of broadleaf tobacco.

E. Architecture:

Residential: Perhaps as many as two dozen Federal period houses and cottages survive in Southwick. Period houses in a variety of plans were observed with almost equal numbers of double interior chimney and center chimney plan structures noted. Houses appear to outnumber cottages with fully developed five-bay, center entrance houses predominating. Almost all of the houses observed were fairly simply detailed with semielliptical or semicircular fanlights and three-quarter length sidelights.

A few houses incorporating second story Palladian windows were noted. Gable roofs are standard, although the Southwick Inn at the town center, which may date to the period, incorporates a pyramidal hip roof. Most period houses are located along Routes 10 and 202 or on Loomis Road in the western half of town. Other period residences were observed on Feeding Hills and Hillside Roads.

Institutional: in 1783, the original meetinghouse of ten years earlier was replaced. Although no particulars of the building's construction are known, in 1794, a "pulpit and canopy, pews, pulpit window, gallery stairs and breastwork" (Everts, p. 1088) were purchased from Windsor, CT for use in the Southwick Meetinghouse. That structure burned in 1824, at which time, the meetinghouse location shifted to its present site and the meetinghouse now standing was built. A two story Federal/Greek Revival structure with a shallow two-story projecting portico with pediment and surmounted by a three-stage steeple, the Southwick meeting house is one of the finest works of Northampton architect Isaac Damon. The Congregational Church at Southwick Hill was preceded in 1824 by a church built at Gillett Corner; that location proved unpopular and the Southwick Hill site was chosen. The Gillett Corner meetinghouse, a two-story gable roof structure with a shallow porch with pediment, then came into the possession of the Methodist Episcopal Congregation, organized in 1816. In addition to the Congregationalist and Methodist, a Baptist Church was built at Southwick Hill in 1822. That structure, a two-story gable roof building with a center entrance and two-stage tower, was moved c.1927 to Storowton Village (West Springfield) where it was altered to represent a New England town hall.

Commercial: The only commercial structure known for the period was the Fowler tavern (1780) at Southwick Village. It is not known whether or not the tavern is extant.

VIII. Early Industrial Period (1830-1870)

A. Transportation Routes:

Abandonment of canal operation by 1845 replaced by parallel Canal Railroad in 1855 as secondary north-south connector to Westfield. Some infilling of local roads along Great Brook valley with tobacco industry.

B. Population:

From a peak of 1,355 in 1830, Southwick's population declined fairly steadily to 1100 in 1870. To this decline may be attributed the greater attraction of Westfield and other growing towns. Of the 47 immigrants in town in 1855, 43 were Irish, probably settlers who arrived as canal builders in the late 1820's.

C. Settlement Pattern:

Town center maintained at Southwick Hill with expansion along Depot Street to railroad by Civil War. Farming remained as primary activity on Vining Hill and Great Brook plain with introduction of commercial tobacco.

D. Economic Base:

Cigar making had been introduced into the Connecticut Valley at nearby Suffield in 1810. By the 1850's, the valley towns of Agawam, Southwick, Springfield, and Westfield all produced substantial quantities of cigars. (Neither Hampshire nor Franklin counties reported any cigar production.) Of these town, Southwick, at the peak of production, produced a product valued at \$21,685--placing the town fourth in the ranks of cigar

manufacturing towns. By 1865 the quantity of tobacco grown had shot up dramatically (the town was second after Westfield), but the cigar makers were moving to more central locations like Westfield.

Gunpowder was produced throughout the period by Theron Rockwell, though the mill's peak year was in 1837 when powder worth \$32,725 was produced. Other products included telescopes by Amasa Holcomb (until 1875, when he moved the business to Springfield). Holcomb had been a surveyor on the Hampshire and Hampden Canal under Eli Whitney Blake. Several small distilleries (unlocated) turned local grains into alcohol; and the production of whips and whip lashes represented overflow production from Westfield.

E. Architecture:

Residential: Farmsteads grew up along the town's outlying roads while the main route through town (Routes 10 and 202) became more densely developed with single family houses. Settlement concentration at Southwick Hill became evident. Although dispersed, development remained diffuse and consisted primarily of side-hall plan two-story houses in styles ranging from the Late Federal through the Greek Revival to the Italianate. Commonly, these houses incorporated rectangular transom lights in the gable end and slightly recessed or flush entrance surrounds with transoms and three-quarter length sidelights. By the end of the period, sidehall houses were being built with shallow projections or ells at right angles reflecting the influence of asymmetrical Italianate plans. The traditional five-bay, center entrance house with double interior chimneys continued to be built through the mid century, along with more conservative center and double interior chimney center entrance cottages. Kneewalling framing was also in use by the end of the period. A few houses and cottages of four bays width are also known. Some of the town's best period houses are located on Loomis Road, Depot Street, Vining Hill Road and Routes 10 and 202.

IX. Late Industrial Period (1870-1915)

A. Transportation Routes:

No significant change in route system. Primary corridor along north-south axis with railroad through Southwick Center. No streetcar lines projected or constructed through area.

B. Population:

Southwick's population continued to decline until 1890, when it reached a low of 914 persons. From 1890 until 1910 it rose slowly, reaching 1,020 in the latter year. The figure for 1915, 1,365, is an otherwise unexplained aberration, significantly above the figures before or after it.

In 1905 the number of immigrants had swelled to 17 percent of the town's total population. Of these Sweden accounted for 22 percent, Austria, 15 percent, Italy, 11 percent; and Poland, 10 percent.

C. Settlement Pattern:

Town center maintained along Route 10 axis from Depot Street with tobacco and dairying as primary agricultural activities.

D. Economic Base:

No new industries identified; powder mill not rebuilt after explosion in 1893. Southwick's agricultural production was dominated by the tobacco growers. The period witnessed the development of packing warehouses. Some farmers built their own, but most sold to people who specialized in this operation. The warehouse was that built by Charles J. Gillett in 1872. Gillett was also the largest cigarmaker in town, employing a large number of men and women in the area of Gillett's Corner. By the 1880's and early 90's, however, the rising tide of imports from the island of Sumatra began to cut into wrapper sales of Broad-leaf and Havana; that this could occur was a result of a change in fashion, bringing a light wrapper for the outside of the cigar into vogue. Since the wrapper was the most lucrative part of the business, its loss was a severe blow. (Bicentennial, 88). For a time, stock raising seemed ready to supplant tobacco growing as the town's major farm activity.

In 1899-1900 experiments at the Connecticut Experiment Station at Windsor showed that the Sumatra plant could be successfully grown under shade, and in 1902 two Southwick growers, F.M. Arnold and Calvin S. Miller, were persuaded to grow Cuban tobacco under a cloth tent. By 1912 shade-grown tobacco was no longer experimental. (Bicentennial, 88-89).

E. Architecture:

Residential: For much of the period there was little construction in the town. Most of the structures built before 1900 were conservative sidehall or L plan story-and-a-half and two-story dwellings with late Italianate or very simple Queen Anne details. A few were only two bays wide with side entrances. After 1900, however, some residential construction began around the ponds in the eastern part of town. Most of this consisted of very simple hip or gable roof one-story cottages with modest Craftsman details such as shed dormers, rusticated concrete block foundations and exposed rafters and porch framing. The only other construction of note was the building of a large number of tobacco barns. These are all of frame construction, two stories tall with gable roofs and multiple vertical louvers for ventilation. An outstanding group of barns is located on South Longyard Road.

X. Early Modern Period (1915-1940)

A. Transportation Routes:

Improvement of local highways as regional autoroutes. Primary north-south highway as Routes 202-10 from Westfield to Connecticut with secondary east-west corridor as Route 56 from Agawam to Berkshires. Connecting highway original Route 190 from Congamond Lakes to Suffield CT (now Route 168) designated by 1935.

B. Population:

In 1925 Southwick's population(1,267) numbered only 12 persons more than the population of 1820. By 1940 it had reached 1,579.

C. Settlement Pattern:

Recreational development of North Pond(Congamond Lakes) from town center along Depot Street with civic and status residential area along Route 10 corridor. Secondary estate development at Hosmer Corners from Agawam with tobacco farming maintained along Great Brook valley and Vining Hill.

D. Economic Base:

Tobacco growing remained Southwick's principal economic activity. Shade-grown tobacco, which had proved successful by 1912, by 1925 accounted for 34 percent of the tobacco grown. Since the business required large amounts of capital, most of the shade tobacco was then, and still is, raised by large corporations. (Bicentennial, 89)

E. Architecture:

Residential: Most of the construction of the period probably occurred between 1919 and 1925 with modest one-and-one-half story cottages with gable or hip roofs and shed dormers built along Routes 10 and 202 and in scattered locations elsewhere in the town. More modest one-story summer cottages continued to be built around Congamond Lakes.

Institutional: Several major municipal buildings were built in the period including the Fire Department and Town Hall, a two-story brick Georgian Revival building on Depot Street and Consolidated School (1928) on Routes 10 and 202 at Southwick Village. The Consolidated School is notable as an early example of consolidation (in other words, the housing of all grades from elementary to high school, in one structure) and as an unusual example of Moderne construction in the region. It is a two-story concrete structure with streamlined detail and a cornice of shallow bas-relief ornament.

Commercial: Most of the town's commercial activity is focused along Routes 10 and 202. At least a few modest one-story frame commercial buildings (stores, farm stands, filling stations) survive from the period.

XI Survey Observations:

The only building inventoried in Southwick is the 1824 Congregational Church at Southwick Village. Survey work should document the town's Federal, Early, and Late Industrial resources(approximately 75 buildings), particularly farmsteads. Tobacco barns also should be documented, although individual inventory forms need not be completed for all of these. Also of note are the Methodist meetinghouse at Gillett Corner and the Consolidated School. Any remains of the Hampshire and Hampden Canal should be documented.

XII. Sources

Southwick, Massachusetts Bicentennial: 1770-1970 (Southwick, 1970).