

MHC Reconnaissance Survey Town Report

ASHLAND

Report Date: 1980

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: February 1980

Community: Ashland

I. TOPOGRAPHY

Located on rugged upland terrain. Prominent elevations scattered throughout town and dominant in western section -- bedrock reshaped by glacial scouring and outwash activities. Generally a gravelly soil. All drainage into Sudbury. Several streams drain highlands. Large areas of swamp and bog especially in eastern and northern sections.

II. POLITICAL BOUNDARIES

Incorporated as Town of Ashland, 1846. Formed from parts of Framingham (1700), Holliston (1724) and Hopkinton (1715).

III. HISTORIC OVERVIEW

Industrial community on periphery of Boston western corridor. Native settlement along Sudbury River valley with mid-17th Indian Praying Town at Mangunco Hill. Restricted Colonial settlement with some surviving 18th century houses on outlying roads. Primary development with Boston railroad in mid-19th century at water power sites along valley. Town center retains Federal and Greek Revival buildings with general character of Victorian industrial housing. Economic growth arrested by Boston water system reservoirs on Sudbury River in late 19th century, although early 20th century factories remain intact. Suburban development from Framingham penetrated highland areas during mid-20th century along Colonial roads.

IV. CONTACT PERIOD (1500-1620)

A. Transportation Routes:

Located along valley of Sudbury River in central highlands with axis of main trails to SW interior. Primary route is documented as Connecticut Path from South Framingham and Sherborne, apparently followed E-W axis of Fruit-Prospect-Chestnut Streets to "ford" over. Cold Spring Brook (marker site) and SW along Union-Frankland Streets around Mangunco Hill with branch S to Hopkinton as Olive Street. Conjectured loop around Washakum Pond possibly as Cedar Street. Western trail to Marlborough probable as Oregon Street.

B. Settlement Pattern:

No documented sites reported. While not an area highly attractive for period occupation, sites are possible on well-drained terraces and knolls overlooking Sudbury River, especially at falls and major confluence points.

C. Subsistence Pattern:

Fishing potential in Sudbury, hunting and gathering in riverine lowlands and adjacent hills.

D. Observations:

Occupation pattern in upper Sudbury is not well understood. Limited occupation potential given lack of ponds. Existing sites would be inland (Wipmuck) rather than coastal tribes. Proximity to Connecticut Path makes small, temporary sites probable.

V. FIRST SETTLEMENT PERIOD (1620-1675)

A. Transportation Routes:

Native trails remain as primary highways, especially Connecticut Path from Sherborn over Cold Spring to Nipmuk Praying Town at Magunco Hill.

B. Population:

All inhabitants were members of native "Praying Town." Gookin noted 55 residents (11 families) in 1674.

C. Settlement:

Magunkaguog, last of the original seven Praying Indian Towns established by John Eliot. Began 1659, located on land between Sudbury River and Cold Spring, east of Magunco Hill. Modelled after parent community at Natick. (See Temple, 1887, pp. 61-63 for more detail).

D. Economic Base:

Subsistence agriculture using European methods, grazing, some lumbering.

E. Observations:

Part of the attempt to acculturate natives to European standards. A small community, an offshoot of Natick, which never really succeeded. Some land grants made to colonists during period, but no known settlement took place.

VI. COLONIAL PERIOD (1676-1776)

A. Transportation Routes:

Main post road from Framingham shifted along Sudbury River to falls (Ashland Center) as Fountain-Union Streets (Route 135). Alternate routes to Framingham Center as Myrtle Street and branch to Indian Brook mill site as Winter-Cordaville Streets. Secondary routes to Hopkinton along Cold Spring and Long Hill as Chestnut, Cedar and Jennings Streets with road over Magunco Hill as High Street by mid-18th century.

B. Population:

All natives removed for internment during King Philip's War. A few returned afterwards. Gradual colonial settlement after 1700. An estimate of two dozen families by end of period.

C. Settlement:

Apparently some vestigial settlement on Praying Town site. Indian title to lands extinguished during first decades of 18th century. Scattered colonial farms along Connecticut Path and Sudbury River. No village center.

D. Economic Base:

Agriculture and grazing. Lumbering for local use. A grist and saw-mill on Sudbury River after 1707, a second grist mill and forge after 1745.

E. Architecture:

Residential: Central chimney two-storey houses appear to have been the major building type of the period, followed by a smaller number of central-chimney Cape Cod cottages and, perhaps, half-houses; there is little evidence of any high-style Georgian houses having been built although the site of a three-terrace garden (1752) on the Old Bay Path (Pond Street? -- HABS) suggest that some ambitious Georgian houses may have been built.

Institutional: No known buildings.

Commercial: No known buildings (taverns?).

Industrial: No known buildings.

F. Observations:

An outlying area between Framingham and Sherborn. Despite location on Connecticut Path, no substantial development prior to Revolution. Major event was transition of native Praying Town to a rural colonial district.

VII. FEDERAL PERIOD (1775-1830)

A. Transportation Routes:

Colonial highways remain in place. Hartford Turnpike from South Framingham cuts SW as Union Street (Route 135) with abandoned portion over Regis College hill. Network of local streets in Ashland Center along Sudbury River as High, Cherry, etc.

B. Population:

No separate statistics available; however, as late as 1818 the town's center is believed to have contained only one mill, one row-house and three other houses, suggesting that little population increase occurred before the mid or late 1820s; Congregational Society formed 1828.

C. Settlement Location:

Scattered farmsteads in vicinity of Main and Myrtle Streets.

D. Economic Base:

Cotton factory by 1815 near center of village. Paper mills developed toward end of period. Probably cottage industry in shoemaking.

E. Architecture:

Residential: Probably little built during this period with the exception of a worker's row house at the town center and, possibly, some simply detailed double houses; highest style likely to be found on scattered farmhouses of which the majority appear to be rear wall-chimney types with pitched and, more rarely, hip roofs; Federalist trim generally restricted to doorway trim.

Institutional: One-storey brick schoolhouse at town center (ca. 1820?), no churches.

Commercial: No known building; general stores, etc., opened ca. 1825-30, located in sections of houses.

Industrial: Wood-frame mills built by 1818, largest reputed to have been four stories high; all built on water privileges.

VIII. EARLY INDUSTRIAL PERIOD (1830-1870)

A. Transportation Routes:

Highways remain from early 19th century. Boston and Worcester railroad along Sudbury River through Ashland Center in 1834 with branch railroad to Hopkinton-Milford (1872) around Mugunco Hill, now abandoned.

B. Population:

Probable rapid growth throughout period, particularly in 1830s and 1840s; Irish population present by ca. 1850-55; Baptist Society formed 1841, Catholic service conducted after 1858, Methodist Episcopal Society organized 1866-1868.

C. Settlement Location:

Major development at town center along Pleasant, Main and Union Streets, and on side streets created by residential subdivisions; scattered building along Fountain Street north of Concord Street.

D. Economic Base:

Ashland's industrial growth was greatest in this period particularly in Civil War years and immediately after. Charles Alden developed a nationwide energy monopoly winning sole right to import stone from Smyrna. A large grain business, sash and blind factory, and growth in the number

of boot and shoe factories added to the town's employment in manufacturing: spurred by the appearance of the railroad main line in 1834. But what caused the strongest economic boom was the construction and imminent operation of the Hugh Dwight Printing Co. 1868-70 on the site of the early cotton factory. New stores opened; houses were built -- all in anticipation of prosperity. Before the Dwight buildings were finished, the condemnation of Sudbury River waters for Boston's water supply brought this boom to a sudden halt. Houses became vacant, and real estate values plummeted. The town never regained its former prosperity and the large number of buildings surviving from the late 1850s without subsequent residential development is testimony to this economic tragedy.

E. Architecture:

Residential: Wide range of house types present including a relatively large number of late Federalist/Greek Revival style, center-entrance brick houses (ca. 1835-40) with simple details; also present are wood-frame double houses and side-hall cottages in Greek Revival style (ca. 1846 -- Pleasant Street) with unusual trim suggestive of a single builder drawing from several different pattern book sources. Apparent workers' housing included houses with low-pitched roofs (1868-70) and Second Empire double cottages (1868-73). Side-hall houses and cottages of various styles in the vicinity of Main and Union Streets were, apparently, built independently of manufacturing companies. One or two high-style houses may have been built along East Union Street -- no record of any remains -- few of town's economic leaders were natives or became permanent residents.

Institutional: Seven school districts formed in 1846, five new one-room schoolhouses built ca. 1846-50; grading of school classes introduced for Centre District only in 1858; attendance declined in district schools after 1856 leading to gradual consolidation of schools; wood-frame Italianate style town hall built with four school rooms at first storey (1855). Churches: Second storey chapel added to existing ca. 1820 schoolhouse in 1832; temple-front meetinghouse built 1835 and, reportedly, modelled after church in Westborough; chapel built 1845 and replaced by wood-frame church in 1850, Methodist church built 1861.

Commercial: Commercial structures of period primarily domestic in scale and design; prominent use of brick construction, transitional Federalist/Greek Revival style designs for hotel (1834) and at least one two-storey store (1845); two-storey wood-frame free-standing blocks (Second Empire and Italianate styles) built ca. 1868-73. Railroad station built 1834-5, replaced 1850 by one-storey Italianate style structure.

Industrial: Major complex of seven Second Empire style granite factories begun 1868-1870, only four completed; brick and wood-frame factories stand on six water power sites in 1868-1872, all but two complexes eliminated in 1872-73 by land takings for Boston Water Works; subsequent factories developed around steam power.

IX. LATE INDUSTRIAL PERIOD (1870-1915)

A. Transportation Routes:

Road and railroads in place from mid-19th century. Street railway routes from Framingham in 1890s through Ashland Center along Waverly-Union Streets (Route 135) and traverse route from Framingham to Holliston along Pond Street. Steel truss bridges over mainline railroad at Howe and High Streets from late 19th century.

B. Population:

No real permanent growth of population throughout period, fluctuations in population size ranged from a low of 1,525 in 1900 to a high of 2,633 in 1885, but generally returning to 2,000-2,200 range; gradual decline in size of foreign-born population after 1885; Universalist Society formed 1871, disbanded 1873; Catholic parish formed 1874.

C. Settlement Locations:

Small number of workers' cottages built on Pleasant Street, otherwise little observable change in built-up area.

D. Economic Base:

The town's recovery from the economic blow presented by the City of Boston was slow. The Lombard Governor Co. moved into the Dwight complex toward the end of the period. Several mills continued to operate unaffected by the seizure downstream including the Chattanooga Woolen mills. Shoe factories probably took up much of the slack.

E. Architecture:

Residential: Little new construction after collapse of speculative building in 1872-73; one small cluster of gambrel roofed workers' cottages (ca. 1900); several modest Queen Anne style houses scattered around town center and in outlying areas; also a small number of Arts and Crafts style bungalows with cobblestone masonry (ca. 1910-1925).

Institutional: First (and only) firehouse built 1871; first four-room schoolhouse built 1871 at Centre, second Centre Schoolhouse built 1889; three district schools either closed or replaced by 1890; Classical Revival style library pre-1909. Churches: Chapel added to 1835 meetinghouse in 1870; wood-frame church begun 1874 completed 1883; expansion of Boston water works along Sudbury River/M.D.C.

Commercial: Little new building after ca. 1873; two major buildings of period were astylistic brick block (ca. 1888) and granite railroad station (ca. 1888) both at town center.

Industrial: Astylistic, utilitarian mills of brick mill construction built in several locations along railroad bed near center; reinforced concrete construction introduced in at least one complex (Union and Chestnut Streets) ca. 1910-20.

X. EARLY MODERN PERIOD (1915-1940)

A. Transportation Routes:

Street railway abandoned in 1920s, with auto highways in 1930s as Route 135 through Ashland Court (Waverly-Union Streets) and Route 126 (Pond Street) to Holliston. Concrete bridges over Sudbury River 1924.

B. Population:

Continued fluctuations although with gradual upward trend toward 2,400 range.

C. Settlement Locations:

No new areas opened for development.

D. Economic Base:

Two new industries emerged in this period -- a dye manufacturer (New England Aniline Works) and a pioneer in the manufacture of electric clocks, Warren Telechron Company.

E. Architecture:

Residential: Little new construction; Arts and Crafts bungalows probably formed largest group of new houses, most elaborate examples built of cobble masonry.

Institutional: New schoolhouse construction of brick with standard multiple-room floorplan(s).

Commercial: Small number of one-storey store fronts built at town center.

Industrial: Small expansion of mills at Union and Chestnut Streets, otherwise little construction.

XI. SOURCES

Temple, Josiah, History of Framingham (1887).