

# MHC Reconnaissance Survey Town Report

## MEDWAY

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: Medway

## I. TOPOGRAPHY

Located on riverine terraces and adjacent uplands. Scattered outcroppings throughout town, especially in western section; terrain shaped by glacial outwash processes. Sandy to gravelly soil. No upland ponds but numerous area of bog/swamp between elevations. Drainage is all into Charles.

## II. POLITICAL BOUNDARIES

Part of New Grant, Town of Medfield, 1659. Remnant of New Grant line intact as west boundary. Incorporated as part of town of Medway, 1713. Became west precinct of Medway, 1749. With incorporation of east precinct as Millis (1885), west precinct became Medway.

## III. HISTORIC OVERVIEW

Industrial town on fringe of suburban Boston set along Charles River and boundary of interior highlands. Native settlement along river with site potential on Chicken Brook. Early corridor of English settlement to western interior during 17th century, with surviving grid of Medway New Grant highways. Development of Charles River mill site by early 18th century and formation of town center at West Medway by mid-18th century with some surviving period houses. Industrial development of cotton textiles at Charles River mills by early 19th century from Rhode Island and emergence of two villages at Medway and West Medway with Boston rail link during mid-19th century containing wide range of Federal and Greek Revival buildings. Continued economic expansion through early 20th century although demise of craft industries, such as straw bonnets. Gradual absorption into Boston metropolitan fabric during mid-20th century.

## IV. CONTACT PERIOD

### A. Transportation Routes:

Upland valley of Charles River with links to interior highlands. Main E/W route along river conjectured as axis of Village Street through Medway and West Medway with possible branches NW along Hopping Brook as West and Fischer Streets. Cross trail linking Lake Winthrop (Holliston) with Populatic Pond (Franklin) apparently followed N/S axis of Chicken Brook around wetlands with ford at "Indian Stepping Stones" (location unknown).

### B. Settlement Pattern:

No reported period sites. Potential locations include well drained terraces and knolls overlooking Charles, especially at Confluence points, and along Chicken Brook. (Several unspecified sites reported along Chicken Brook).

### C. Subsistence Pattern:

Still within range of seasonal fish runs (Populatic Pond apparently

was a terminus). Hunting and gathering possible in both dry uplands and bog areas.

D. Observations:

Difficult to access given the lack of information. Some sites are probable given extensive settlement on Winthrop Lake (Holliston). Period site would be Nipmuck (inland, freshwater people).

V. FIRST SETTLEMENT PERIOD (1620-1675)

A. Transportation Routes:

Native trails remain as basic network with main E/W post road from Medfield to Mendon as Village Street in 1670's. Grid of N/S highways from New Grant allotments (1660) survive as Summer, Winthrop and Holliston Streets with E/W grain in local roads such as Lovering Street.

B. Population:

Apparently no colonial inhabitants.

C. Settlement:

No permanent settlement.

D. Economic Base:

Area not utilized, except possibly for lumber.

E. Observations:

Although known and to some extent surveyed, the area was too far from existing settlements and too exposed to have permanent colonial inhabitants.

VI. COLONIAL PERIOD (1676-1776)

A. Transportation Routes:

Highways in place from 17th century with main E/W post road as Village Street. West Medway meetinghouse in 1750's creates local radial highway network.

B. Population:

About 15 families in New Grant area at time of incorporation (1715). Census of 1765 listed 793 inhabitants in 138 families and 123 houses (majority of these were in what is now Millis).

C. Settlement:

Scattered settlement after King Philip's War along Post Road (Village Street) and on high ground either side of Chicken Brook. Two focal points of development: Medway -- established around mills; West Medway -- site of west precinct meetinghouse, 1750 (at head of Winthrop Street) and

Evergreen cemetery. Only limited village development in both locations.

D. Economic Base:

Primarily agriculture and grazing. Milling for local consumption -- Nathaniel Whiting, gristmill, 1711; one or two other unspecified mills by end of period. Timothy Clark's tavern on Post Road, after 1711.

E. Architecture:

Residential: Few houses were built during this period; of those that have remained long enough to be recorded, most are vernacular examples of the central-chimney two-storey type of house; several central chimney and twin-chimney Cape Cod cottages exist, although these may post-date 1775.

Institutional: Became west precinct of Medway, 1748, first meeting-house built 1749.

Commercial: No known building.

Industrial: Grist and saw mills(?).

F. Observations:

A rural, agricultural area gradually settled during period. Difficult to get information since most existing sources focus on Millis (the part of Medway where most period development took place).

VII. FEDERAL PERIOD (1775-1830)

A. Transportation Routes:

Colonial road system remains from 18th century with main E/W route as Hartford turnpike (1809) through town center as Main Street (Route 109). Development of mills in Medway forms local pattern of cross links as Oakland Street.

B. Population:

Increases throughout period, became more rapid after ca. 1805-10; no known foreign-born population; Baptist Society formed 1819, Universalist Society formed 1823.

C. Settlement Location:

Widespread building of farmhouses and cottages; village developed at Main and Milford Streets (West Medfield) and at Medway (Factory Village).

D. Economic Base:

Cotton mill established 1807 at Sanford Mill site by employee of Samuel Slater. Mill was said to have trained textile men for Lowell,

Manchester and elsewhere (Hurd, p. 552). Textile continued to be produced at site for well over a century. Two cottage industries, boots and shoes, and straw braid and bonnet-making, both took their start in this period.

E. Architecture:

Residential: Varied house plans present throughout period including central, twin, and rear-wall chimney plans with pitched or hip roofs, particularly popular was a type of house with a center entrance facade surmounted by a 1½ storey high gable, the same general arrangement also appears on cottages, both in the two villages and in outlying farmsteads; a relatively large number of high-style late Georgian/Federalist doorways and some mouldings exist in both villages. Modest central chimney cottages and some wood-frame row houses (boarding houses?) were built at Medway Village; near West Medway, on the Charles River, some two-family workers' houses (resembling those at Rockville in Millis) were built, ca. 1810-25.

Institutional: Federalist style second Congregational meetinghouse built at West Medway, 1814; Federalist style Baptist meetinghouse built at Medway, 1823; six school districts established for the whole of Medway (including Millis) in 1805, of these, probably three were in modern Medway; first schoolhouse at Medway (Factory Village) built 1816; second storey added to West Precinct (Congregational) Parish House for use as a Masonic Hall (1818).

Commercial: First tavern and store at West Medway built 1814; one store built at Medway Village by 1812; both structures undescribed.

Industrial: Widespread mill building along Charles River -- mostly wooden-frame mills; first cotton mill built at Medway Village (1806), additional cotton mills built 1812, 1813 (West Medway), 1815 (West Medway) -- undescribed. Manufacture of shoes (after 1828) probably led to the construction of some small workshops.

VIII. EARLY INDUSTRIAL PERIOD (1830-1870)

A. Transportation Routes:

Roads remain from early 19th century. Branch railroad along Charles to Medway mills (1853) shortly abandoned in 1860s with roadbed intact (power lines). Local E/W railroad from Millis-Milford (1861) through West Medway with stone arch bridge at Village Street (now abandoned).

B. Population:

Rapid growth to ca. 1855 and after 1865; foreign-born population made up mostly of Irish immigrants; third Congregational Society formed 1832, disbanded 1836; Evangelical Congregational Society at Medway Village, 1838; Catholic Parish organized at Medway Village, 1860; Methodist Episcopal Society organized, 1857 at Medway Village; Protestant Episcopal Parish organized 1865 at Medway Village(?).

C. Settlement Location:

Concentrated growth at Medway Village onto side streets north of the Village; growth along Main Street and Highland Street at West Medway.

D. Economic Base:

Shoe and straw bonnet industries grew rapidly in this period, particularly in West Medway. The value of straw goods produced in 1865 was nearly four times the value in 1837. 1830 saw the introduction of imported straw braid into bonnet making, and the first factory was built in 1840.

E. Architecture:

Residential: High-style temple-front Greek Revival style houses Italianate villas and a small number of Second Empire style houses built at Medway Village (Village and Holliston Streets) and at West Medway (Village and Main Streets). The center-entrance type of house with a 1½ storey facade gable which was popular in the preceding period remained popular for Greek Revival style houses and cottages with and without porticos. More modest houses included many side-hall Greek Revival style houses (Medway Village), center-entrance Greek Revival style houses with gabled end walls (West Medway), a relatively small number of side hall Greek Revival style cottages (West Medway-Highland Street) and cottages of varied plans with pattern-book decorative details (Village Street-Medway Village). Many bracketed, side-hall plan cottages (Italianate, Victorian Gothic and Second Empire style) built on side streets at both Villages (ca. 1855-75).

Institutional: Temple-front Greek Revival style meetinghouse built at Medway Village 1838 (Evangelical Congregational); Baptist Church built at Medway 1852 (temple front?); Methodist Church built 1859. Firehouse built 1869 (Medway Village -- Peach Street); two-storey Italianate style high school house built 1851; grammar school built 1860 (High Street -- West Medway); other school houses probably built in town's four districts.

Commercial: No apparent row buildings; one and two-storey wood-frame blocks with gabled facades built at Medway Village (Village Street) and along Main Street at West Medway; both Greek Revival and Italianate styles; Greek Revival style hotel built at Medway Village.

Industrial: No new large-scale complexes developed.

IX. LATE INDUSTRIAL PERIOD (1870-1915)

A. Transportation Routes:

Rail and road system remain from 19th century with E/W trolley routes through Medway and West Medway along Village and Main Streets (1900) with roadbed to West Street intact.

B. Population:

Peak of population achieved in 1875, slight decline thereafter; de-

cline between 1880-1885 reflected separation of Millis from Medway; after 1885 population fluctuated in 2,650-2,900 range; foreign-born population declined in number after 1875, until 1905-1915 when an influx of Russian immigrants caused Russian immigrants to become the town's largest immigrant group, in place of the Irish. (It is possible that those classified in the census as Russian were actually Swedish.)

C. Settlement Location:

Rapid growth along side streets at West Medway in the late 1860s and early 1870s; elsewhere, little change.

D. Economic Base:

Sanford woolen mill replaced Federal-period cotton factory. Supplementing shoe industry, New England Awl and Needle Co. built factory on Awl Street in West Medway which continued in operation into the 1950s. Value of straw goods produced in 1874 was nearly \$200,000. Canning also appears in this period, as in both Millis and Franklin.

E. Architecture:

Residential: Little or no high-style built during this period; new construction consisted mainly of side-hall plan cottages, Second Empire and Victorian Gothic styles, very little Queen Anne or Colonial Revival style; some scattered bungalows built near end of period.

Institutional: Brick, Renaissance Revival style town hall built (ca. 1890-1900); new schoolhouse at West Medway (1892); high school enlarged (1875). Victorian Gothic Stone church built at Medway Village (1874); Victorian Gothic style Catholic church (1876), other churches remodelled.

Commercial: Blocks of the same basic type as preceding period continued to be built in late Italianate style; major wood-frame Second Empire style block/public hall built by local subscription, 1870-71.

Industrial: Brick factories built on existing mill sites, largely astylistic. At least one two-storey stone mill building with a low-pitched roof built (ca. 1870-85) on Walker Street; temple-front Greek style building converted (?) to straw works before 1887.

X. EARLY MODERN PERIOD (1915-1940)

A. Transportation Routes:

Steam and electric rail routes abandoned by mid-20th century with E/W auto highway route along Main Street as Route 109 in 1930s.

B. Population:

Slight increase between 1915 and 1925, otherwise essentially stable throughout period.

C. Settlement Location:

Little new construction, no discernable trend.

D. Economic Base:

Probably consolidation of industrial economy with disappearance of straw bonnets and decline in shoe shops. United Awl and Needle opened new factory on Main Street, but all textile mill sites except Sanford Street closed.

E. Architecture:

Residential: No high-style apparent; bungalows and small numbers of modest Colonial Revival style houses appear to have been most widely built types of houses.

Institutional: Some school building likely, although not recorded in historical sources.

Commercial: Some one-storey wood frame and concrete buildings along Main Street, West Medway; otherwise, little.

Industrial: Little or no expansion.

XI. SOURCES

Jameson, E. O., The History of Medway, Massachusetts (1886).

Mason, Orion T., Handbook of Medway History (1913).

Donovan, Francis D., The New Grant, A History of Medway (1976).  
(Would probably have been very useful but could not be located.)