

# MHC Reconnaissance Survey Town Report

## RANDOLPH

Report Date: 1979

**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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I. TOPOGRAPHY

Located on irregular, glacially shaped uplands. Rocky soil with numerous outcrops. Several areas of wetland including two large ponds - Ponkapoag and Great Pond. Drainage is predominantly to NE via Monatiquot River to Massachusetts Bay. Cochato River is the other major waterway flowing N to meet the Monatiquot in Braintree. No extensive areas of upland plain, however, numerous bogs and swamps.

II. POLITICAL BOUNDARIES

Primary original boundaries include Old Colony line (1640) to south, Dorchester Grant Line (1636) to west. Prior to 1640 known as Cochato. claim by Braintree in 1640 though most was Boston Common land. Becomes part of Braintree south precinct 1708. Becomes Braintree new south, or third, precinct in 1727. Incorporated as town of Randolph in 1793. SW section ceded to Avon 1888.

III. HISTORIC OVERVIEW

On inner fringe of Massachusetts Bay, along local axis of routes south of Neponset to interior shore, developed slowly in 18th century as local center, with limited industrial expansion in 19th. Modest period architecture of developmental areas. Recently modest suburban expansion from Boston. Town center disrupted by recent growth, good Federal style along Route 28 intact.

IV. CONTACT PERIOD (1500-1620)

A. Transportation Routes:

No documented native trails. However, it appears possible that South Main and North Street - the "old beaten path", (Randolph 175th, 1968) was a regional N/S trail from the Monatiquot River (Mass Bay) to Taunton-Bridgewater. It is also conjectured that Main Street (Route 28) follows an old trail to the Blue Hills and Neponset with original location around Old Canton and Grove Sts over the Norroway River. Thus, the two trails would meet in Randolph Ctr branching north to Blue Hills and Braintree (Monatquoit).

B. Settlement Pattern:

No documented sites of the late Woodland or contact periods are known. One area of possible contact period occupation on west side of Cochato.

C. Subsistence Pattern:

Hunting and trapping were primary activities.

D. Observations:

An area with little or no native occupation during late Woodland and Contact Period. Used by coastal tribes for hunting and trapping. Nevertheless, well drained and sheltered areas around Ponkapoag and Great Pond should be viewed as possible locations for winter refuge sites. Note retention of many native place names.

V. FIRST SETTLEMENT PERIOD (1620-1675)

A. Transportation Routes:

N/S axis from Massachusetts Bay to Taunton and Bridgewater. "Old Country Road" South Main and North Sts in use as Taunton road by 1650's (Hurd, 1880), probably on site of native trail. Secondary branch to Blue Hills and Neponset from Randolph Ctr. possibly Main St. (Route 28) with original location on Old Canton and Grove Sts. around Norroway R. (also possible trail).

B. Population: No data.

C. Settlement:

No documented settlement during period.

D. Economic Base:

No documented activity, although local wood and possibly bog iron may have been used for the Braintree Iron Works.

E. Architecture: None.

F. Observations:

Little or no European settlement during period. Probably for same reasons little native occupation occurred: poor to fair potential for agriculture, difficult access to coast, raw materials more easily available elsewhere.

VI. COLONIAL PERIOD (1626-1776)

A. Transportation Routes:

Essential north/south axis from 17th century supplemented by secondary east/west system. Connection to Canton in 1720's Canton-Oak Sts. to Braintree, and South St (1760's) to Abington. Other roads of period possibly include Grove/West and Liberty around Tower Hill.

B. Population:

Apparently little settlement prior to 1700. 1712-1727 is period of major growth, mainly people from Braintree.

C. Settlement:

Scattered farmsteads along N/S road (Main and North streets) by early 18th century. Focus for settlement was high ground between Bear Swamp and Cochato. First meeting house built in 1728, also a school about the same time. Known as the West Village.

D. Economic Base:

Farming and grazing were summer occupations. Main crops - barley, rye, corn and beans. Potatoes introduced in 1718. Winter occupations were hunting, trapping and lumbering. Included both cedar for shingles, lath and clapboard and "ship-timber". A few 18th century mills. a forge about 1715 (John Franch) on Cochato - later a gristmill; other general references to sawmills. Generally little milling due to low water volume. Most milling products for local use. Late 18th century silica polishing compound dug from bogs and sold to metal and glass industries (Alden, article #34). By middle of the 18th century shoe making was a major town industry with tanneries at both north and south ends of the village. By the 1770's,

the handicraft stage was well advanced, in which custom work was done for specific customers, often out of kitchen ells or special shops called "ten-footers", (roughly 10 feet square).

E. Architecture

1. Little early and mid 18th century architecture evident; likely examples seem restricted to center-chimney and twin-chimney Capes with center-entrance facades, also a small number of two story timber-frame houses, no apparent high-style buildings.

2. Unlikely that any institutional buildings remain; also unlikely that any specialized commercial buildings existed during this period; some small mills existed, none is known to remain.

F. Observations:

A small, rural farming community. Settled late by eastern Massachusetts standards and slow to develop.

VII. FEDERAL PERIOD (1775-1830)

A. Transportation Routes:

Colonial roads as primary network. Blue Hills Turnpike from Boston to Randolph 1805 on Main Street (Route 28), follows axis of original trail-highway to Blue Hills. (Wood, 1919). Main axis of Blue Hill Turnpike to west-over Tower Hill as Taunton Tpk. now High Street. Original roadbed intact, most obviously near Route 128.

B. Population:

Number of inhabitants doubles between 1800-1830 (including Holbrook), no immigrant population; religious diversity begins with formation of Baptist Church (1819).

C. Settlement Location:

Meeting house at Randolph Ctr remained focus of settlement in early 19th century. Secondary center emerged along turnpike (Rt. 28) between Liberty and Oak Sts. as highway-tavern shop. Center develops along Taunton Tpk (High St.) at Tower Hill

D. Economic Base:

Agriculture on limited uplands. Available mill expanded from Colonial period on Cochato River (Holbrook line) and near Town Ctr. on Glover's Brook and Norroway Pond, both of limited power. "The Town", one gazetteer noted in 1847, "was quite destitute of water power." In contrast, for the boot and shoe industry, the period was one of great expansion. By the 1790's Randolph boots were being sold in Boston. By 1807 a central shop on Main Street was "putting out" various phases of the shoemaking process and men selling the product both locally and in Boston. In the years up to the Panic of 1837, the central shop developed rapidly, with increasing specialization by the domestic shoemakers still working out of "ten-footers." Although no other industrial structures are known to survive from this period, the kitchen ells and several small "ten-footers" may exist.

E. Architecture:

Domestic architecture varied; early part of period 1775-1800 includes a sizeable number of central chimney Capes with center entrance and  $\frac{1}{2}$  Facades; also 2 story central chimney houses, some with high hip roofs and late-Georgian decorative details at entry and cornice. 1800-1840; some Capes with end-wall

chimneys; also 2 story hip roofed Federalists in particular along Main Street; at least 2 Federalists with monitor on hip roofs. No obvious commercial or industrial architecture extant, although some shoe shops undoubtedly, remain, adapted to other uses; institutional buildings are few, the major one being a greatly altered meetinghouse of 1825 (North Street).

E. Observations:

The expansion of the local shoe-making economy in the early 19th century was aided in part by turnpikes from Boston; building was focused on Randolph Center and along the axis of Route 28 (Main Street); however, development of the Town Center in the early 20th century has virtually eliminated the evidence of this period at Randolph Center, leaving only an important area north of the center, near Liberty and Oak Streets.

VIII. EARLY INDUSTRIAL (1830-1870)

A. Transportation Routes:

Railroad expansion along N/S axis from Boston to Fall River/Taunton. Fall River line along Cochato River in 1846 with secondary branch to Randolph Ctr. along Glovers Brook in 1866. Lines join in S. Braintree at Old Colony depot. (Harlow, 1946).

B. Population:

150% increase in population between 1830 and 1860; Irish immigrants present by 1844 when Catholic Church formed, number of Irish reaches a peak of 1,298 in 1855 and declines throughout the rest of the century.

C. Settlement Location:

Randolph Ctr. continues as focus for town; secondary grid of residential street around RR depot at West St. and in triangle formed by Main and North Streets. Additional development along old turnpike at Main Street and West Street, with a small, wealthy residential district on S. Main Street at town center.

D. Economic Base:

The period witnessed the greatest expansion of the boot and shoe industry, particularly after 1848 when a large part of the town boot trade went to California, Australia and Texas. The Civil War also brought U.S. Army orders to Randolph. The size and immediacy of these large orders with big profits pushed boot industrial organization to the limit of production which by the Civil War had developed a factory, albeit handmade, production in large 2 and 3 story frame structures.

By 1837 the boot and shoe industry had grown to provide nearly all the town's industrial employment, virtually no other industries were present as former mill sites were abandoned for sites closer to the railroad; shoe factories and shops along main roads in Randolph Center, industrial fringe on Glover Road includes Alms House. Some commerce at Randolph Center marked by the formation of a banks (1836 and 1851) and the publication of a local newspaper after 1857.

E. Architecture:

Domestic: Some simple two-story Greek Revival and Italianate houses, but side-hall cottages form dominate house type, particularly frequent use of Facade gables with chimneys passing through peaks, largest concentrations around upper Union Street, North Street and Main Street around Liberty Street; also along Allen and Liberty Streets.

Institutional: Relatively few believed to remain except for temple-front Town

Hall (1842); possible district school houses.

Commercial: Former commercial center at Main, North and Union Streets; nearly obliterated by modern demolition, few probable remains.

Industrial: Scattered small-scale wood-framed factories, mostly demolished, none known to survive intact.

IX. LATE INDUSTRIAL (1870-1915)

A. Transportation Routes:

Suburban street railway expansion in early 1900's along Main N/S linking to Braintree, Boston (Milton) Brockton and Stoughton on Main, S. Main, Liberty, North and West Streets. Only briefly important as transport link.

B. Population:

Drop in population between 1870 and 1875 reflects separation of Randolph and Holbrook; population in slight decline 1875-1900; slow rise 1900-1915; immigrant population remains largely stable throughout period.

C. Settlement Location:

Randolph Ctr. continues as focus of settlement for area with axis of expansion along Main Street to railroad; little building occurred, restricted mainly to construction on empty lots and the replacement of some earlier houses.

D. Economic Base:

Growth of economy up to 1885 followed by a sharp decline in the 1890's and a partial recovery by 1905; boots and shoes remain major local products. Limited expansion of local industries, into multi-storied factories on fringes of town center. A number of smaller shoe shops may survive as residences; two shoe factories (31 West Street and 19 Highland Ave.) date to this period.

E. Architecture:

Domestic: Little new building carried out - some Italianate, Second Empire, Victorian Gothic and Queen Anne along Main Street, north of Center, generally restricted to more ambitious houses; relatively few cottages.

Institutional: Some school buildings; two note worthy architect-designed churches on Main Street (1890's).

Commercial: Little building activity; heavy modern demolition in former commercial district.

Industrial: Little building - see Economic Base above.

F. Summary Observations:

Economic stagnation of industrial craft economy promoted limited expansion of town center and tentative linkages by street railway to surrounding industrial centers.

X. MODERN (1915-1940)

A. Transportation Routes:

Abandonment of street railway net in 1920's and paving of colonial highway net in 1930's. Primary N/S axis from Boston (Milton) to Brockton along turnpike - Main Street at Route 28 as autohighway.

B. Population:

Growth has been nearly continuous since 1920 with particularly large increases in population occurring between 1950 (9,982) and 1975 (29,206), largely suburban commuter in character.

C. Settlement Location:

Suburban expansion from Boston located in subdivisions in North Randolph along Route 28 in 1920's and more recently around Oak and North Streets with commercial auto development in 1930's (Rt. 28 Main St.).

D. Economic Base:

Industrial decline of local industries, expansion of autohighway commercial development in 1930's along Route 28 from Boston. The development of rubber in the manufacture of rubber soles, boots, and cloth introduces several companies peripheral to the shoe industry into generally older factories.

Effectively isolated from easy access to materials and markets available to large centers like Lynn and Brockton, Randolph's shoe industry collapses.

E. Architecture:

Domestic: Limited mainly to modest single family houses in styles ranging from bungalows to ranch; some slightly more substantial examples of early twentieth century styles exist around South Main Street near Randolph center.

Public: School buildings, fire station and other town related buildings.

Commercial: Located at former center of Randolph - some Colonial Revival brick buildings (1920's-40's), one story store fronts and strip development; highway related commercial development near Main Street and Route 128.

Industrial: Little building activity. Original freight depot survives.

F. Summary:

Town became economically stagnant during this period, until autoroutes near Blue Hills and expansion of Boston bring about widespread suburban development

XI. SOURCES

Alden, Ebenezer History of Randolph (1857-58).

Arnold, Marion S. A Brief History of Braintree (1940).

Beal, John V. Randolph's Centennial Celebration (1897)

Hazard, Blanche Organization of the Boot and Shoe Industry in Massachusetts Before 1875 (1921). (Excellent on industry in general, and in particular on Randolph (and Holbrook). Essential to an understanding of the town's industrial life.)