

MHC Reconnaissance Survey Town Report

STOUGHTON

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.



MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION

William Francis Galvin, Secretary of the Commonwealth

Chair, Massachusetts Historical Commission

220 Morrissey Blvd.

Boston, MA 02125

www.sec.state.ma.us/mhc

mhc@sec.state.ma.us / 617-727-8470

MHC RECONNAISSANCE SURVEY REPORT

Date: December 1979

Community: Stoughton

I. TOPOGRAPHY

Located on rugged land terrain. Some rocky, but tillable areas in central portion. A water shed area draining in three directions: northwest to Neponset; northeast to MonatiQuot; and south towards Brockton. A few ponds, large areas of bog and swamp in lowland sections.

II. POLITICAL BOUNDARIES

Part of Dorchester New Grant (1636). Became part of South Precinct of Dorchester, 1715. Incorporated as town of Stoughton, 1726, which was later divided into three parishes: First (now Canton), Second (now Sharon), and third (now Stoughton). With separate incorporation of Sharon, 1783, and Canton, 1797, Third Parish becomes present town of Stoughton. South Boundary Old Colony Line.

III. HISTORIC OVERVIEW

Boston suburban industrial center. Fringe location set on axis of north/south regional routes from Boston. Little evidence of development until 18th century with industrial growth from turnpikes and railroads in local craft industries in 19th century with shoes and paper products. Proto-urban forms in Stoughton Center with business blocks and tenements with few outstanding period examples.

IV. CONTACT PERIOD (1500 - 1620)

A. Transportation Routes:

Fringe location on axis of regional North/South native trails from Neponset to Narragansett. Documented trail along Sharon boundary as Bay St to Taunton River, with conjectured trail from Great Bear Swamp to Punkapoag (Canton) along Page St. No interior trails likely.

B. Settlement Pattern:

No documented sites reported.

C. Subsistence Pattern:

Possible inland hunting and trapping.

D. Observations:

With the possible exception of winter refuge sites near ponds in West Stoughton, not the kind of area used by Late Woodland natives; too far inland. Probably a "buffer" area between population centers to north and south.

V. FIRST SETTLEMENT PERIOD (1620 - 1675)

A. Transportation Routes:

Native trail system expanded as regional highways. Most importantly Bay Rd as Taunton post road in mid-17th century.

B. Population:

Apparently none.

C. Settlement:

Apparently none.

D. Economic Base:

None.

E. Observations:

Too far inland; no resources important enough to promote settlement.

VI. COLONIAL PERIOD (1676 - 1776)

A. Transportation Routes:

With settlement of Stoughton Ctr in mid-18th century radial highways laid out linking to surrounding towns. Primary north/south axis to Canton as Pearl, Summer and Cedar Sts with secondary links to Randolph and Easton as Plain, Pleasant School and Lincoln Sts.

B. Population:

Apparently none before 1716. Gradual growth after 1730. Census of 1765 includes much larger area than modern Stoughton, population of modern Stoughton probably small before Revolution.

C. Settlement:

Scattered settlement occurred in early 18th century along major routes (Bay, West, Pearl, Summer and Cedar Streets) and at the current town center. First settler, Issac Stearns, 1716, from Lexington. First road laid out, 1733. By 1743, sufficient number of people to form a separate parish. First Meeting House built 1744. Scattered farms predominate, village center begins to develop after 1750. First school, 1763.

D. Economic Base:

Summer agriculture and grazing; winter lumbering. Except at West Stoughton, the town was largely devoid of water power sites. By the middle of the 18th century, shoemaking was a major town industry and by the end of the period 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."

E. Architecture:

Little appears to remain from the Colonial Period; that which does remain is most likely to consist of central chimney Cape Cod cottages

and a smaller number of central chimney two-storey houses, such as those surveyed (MHC) along Central Street. No other building types are known to remain with the possible exception of currently unidentified barns.

F. Observations:

Not much information available. A small scattered town limited in growth by lack of good soil and resources plus inaccessibility.

VII. FEDERAL PERIOD (1776 - 1830)

A. Transportation Routes:

Colonial highways remained as local system. Turnpikes extended from Boston south in early 19th century. Primary route from Canton to Stoughton as Washington St (1806) - Route 138, with secondary route from Randolph as Turnpike St (part Route 27).

B. Population:

Steady growth occurred after 1800; only 6 foreign-born present in 1830; Methodist and Universalist congregations existed by 1798 - 1805.

C. Settlement:

Major focus at Stoughton Center; small clusters at West Stoughton, North Stoughton and junction of Central and Pearl Streets (Belcher's Corner); southern half of town sparsely populated.

D. Economics:

The industrial development of Stoughton was effectively divided between West Stoughton, with its 19th-century industrial axis along Steep Hill Brook, and the villages of Stoughton and East Stoughton which developed the boot and shoe industry quite independent of water power. West Stoughton, oriented toward Canton, developed the mill sites of Steep Hill Brook early in the 19th century for small textile mills. The French & Ward worsted mill, now a carpet remnant outlet, though it dates to the latter half of the century, is located on one of these earlier 19th-century sites. For the remainder of the town, particularly in the villages of Stoughton and East Stoughton (now Avon), the period was one of expansion. By the early 19th century central shops were "putting out" various phases of the shoemaking process and then 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."

E. Architecture:

Small number of buildings extant from the period; houses consist of central chimney Cape Cod cottages, and a smaller number of two-storey houses; west of town center, around Morton Street, is a scattering of ca. 1820-40 housing which may have been built for workers.

F. Industrial:

At least one building with a monitor roof (ca. 1820 - 1840) remains, converted to a hotel (Washington Street); at West Stoughton, at least one house remains with a possible association to the early establishment of mills there. Elsewhere, it is unlikely that industrial buildings remain, with the exception of "ten-footer" workshops converted to other uses.

G. Commercial:

None currently known or apparent.

H. Institutional:

Main public buildings of the period later replaced.

VIII. EARLY INDUSTRIAL PERIOD (1830 - 1870)

A. Transportation Routes:

Highway-turnpike system remained from early 19th century. Railroad links to main N/S Boston corridor as Stoughton Branch to Canton (1845) with secondary connection to Randolph in 1860s - now abandoned routes.

B. Population:

Population tripled during this period; large Irish population introduced 1840 - 1855, remained stable in size until ca. 1885.

C. Settlement:

Concentrated mainly on shoe-making villages of Stoughton Center and E. Stoughton (now Avon); minor development at North Stoughton, Belcher's Corner and West Stoughton. Within Stoughton Center side streets laid out south of Canton Street, between Canton Street and Route 138 (Washington St.) and south of Pleasant Street.

D. Economy:

The period witnessed the greatest expansion of the boot and shoe industry. Rapid growth between 1845 and Civil War, after which industry declined; at its 1865 peak boot and shoe making employed 1,168 out of an industrial labor force of 1,298 and produced \$1,264,107 worth of goods out of a total of \$1,478,757 for the town.

Early specialization included J. G. Phinney's manufacture of counters beginning in 1845 (still standing), probably the earliest such specialization in the industry.

E. Architecture:

Domestic: Few, if any, architect-designed, high style houses; major house type was 1 ½ storey cottage with gabled facade and narrower width than similar houses in neighboring towns, cottage of this type bear

Greek Revival, Italianate and astylistic jig-saw decoration; principal locations for this cottage type are northwest of the Town Hall (Washington & Canton Streets), south of the town center (Washington St and Park Ave), at Lincoln & Pleasant Streets and in the town's secondary villages. More ambitious houses of the period include some side-hall Greek Revival style houses, some well-preserved center-entrance and "T" plan Italianate houses; in general, more ambitious houses were built near the town center on Pleasant Street, Park Avenue and on side streets south of Pleasant Street.

Industrial: Mostly shoe factories (wooden-frame); few likely to remain.

Commercial: No recorded or apparent buildings extant.

Institutional: School houses (few, if any, in current use) and churches, most notably a wood-frame Italianatic style church on Pleasant Street (MHC Survey).

IX. LATE INDUSTRIAL PERIOD (1870 - 1915)

A. Transportation Routes:

Road and railroad system remained from mid-19th century. Street railway lines extended from Brockton and Boston to Stoughton Ctr in 1890s along Pleasant, Prospect, Central and Washington Streets.

B. Population:

Steady growth after 1880 with especially rapid growth between 1880 - 1890 (4,875 for Stoughton including Avon in 1880 versus 6,236 for the two towns in 1890); rapid increase in foreign-born from 700 in 1880 for Avon and Stoughton combined to 1,699 for Stoughton, alone, in 1915; Irish formed largest immigrant group until 1905-1915 when Lithuanians and Russians became the largest two immigrant groups.

C. Settlement:

Major concentration of Stoughton Center; residential neighborhoods expand southward along School Street, between Park Avenue and Washington Streets, onto side streets, north and south of Pleasant Street, and into at least one subdivision between Park Avenue and Prospect Street.

D. Economic:

Economic growth during period of 1885-1905, despite separation of Avon in 1888, the actual cash value of goods produced increased between 1885 and 1895, as did the average number of industrial employees; newspaper published during this period; by 1905, 44 businesses dealing in retail and wholesale goods.

The shoe industry from the start was supported by ancillary industries producing tools, lasts, counters, shoe rubber and the like. Rubber companies in particular appeared in Stoughton by the 1880s when the Mystic Rubber Company occupied wood frame buildings now owned by Corcoran Shoe.

Like neighboring towns, Stoughton acquired a water supply system in the 1890s. The Stoughton Water Works pumping station, built in 1892 to designs of Fergus McKain, is one of Stoughton's few engineering works.

E. Architecture:

Residential: Large numbers of 1 ½ story cottages and modest side-hall plan houses in various styles located throughout town center; slight social segregation apparent in construction more substantial houses on hill south of Pleasant Street and near the north end of Park Avenue; extant examples include center-entrance and side-hall houses with Victorian Gothic and Queen Anne style trim; in addition, several apparent architect-designed Queen Anne style houses stand in the vicinity of Pleasant Street.

Industrial: Construction of brick mill buildings (utilitarian) at West Stoughton; other utilitarian mill buildings along railroad tracks at Stoughton Center.

Commercial: Major commercial buildings consist of one Victorian Gothic style brick block and several 2-story, frame blocks, originally built with Queen Anne details around the square at Stoughton Center; also a Romanesque Revival trainstation at Stoughton Center.

Institutional: Construction of major public buildings designed by out-of-town architects: Victorial Gothic Town Hall (1879), Public Library, Water Works Pumping Station (1892), and school buildings.

X. EARLY MODERN PERIOD (1915 - 1940)

A. Transportation Routes:

Street railway and part of railroad system abandoned in 1920s. Autohighway routes extended from Boston south to Brockton along former turnpike - Washington St as Route 138, with secondary improvement of Colonial roads as Routes 27, 123 and 37 in 1930s.

B. Population:

Growth steady 1915-1945 except for especially rapid growth between 1920-25 and after 1945.

C. Settlement:

Most new building (1915-1945) occurred around existing centers; subsequent development has occurred on subdivisions scattered throughout the town, particularly in the northern portion of Stoughton.

D. Economic:

Few shoe companies in town survived this period, though a number of companies specialized in rubber shoe products. Joseph F. Corcoran, in former buildings of the Mystic Rubber Co., is one of the few shoe companies now in Stoughton.

E. Architecture:

Little of particular note during period; usual range of modest house types and styles; some commercial strip development north of Stoughton Center on Route 138 after 1931. Institutional buildings consist mainly of public schools and some church rebuilding.

XI. SOURCES:

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