

MHC Reconnaissance Survey Town Report

HALIFAX

Report Date: 1981

Associated Regional Report: Southeast Massachusetts

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: July, 1981

Community: Halifax

I. TOPOGRAPHY

Coastal lowland. Minimal topographic relief except in northeastern portion of the town. Sandy to gravelly soils. Extensive system of swamp in northern portion of town around Burrage and Monponsett Ponds. Winnetuxet River runs through southern portion of town, part of the Taunton River system.

II. POLITICAL BOUNDARIES

Incorporated July 4, 1734 from parts of Middleborough, Pembroke and Plympton Annexed part of Bridgewater 1824, part of Plympton in 1831. Ceded part to East Bridgewater in 1857. Bounds established between Halifax and Plympton in 1863.

III. HISTORIC OVERVIEW

Halifax is a pastoral community located in the geographic center of Plymouth County. Halifax, with its minimal topographic relief, possesses a comparatively large proportion of farm and cranberry bog land. There are suspected native sites at White's Island, Halifax Meadows and in South Halifax with Monponsett Pond a definite focal point of native seasonal occupation. The first European settlement was agricultural although there was an early industrial nucleus centered around the 1728 mill site at Furnace and Elm Streets. Although there were discernable settlement nodes by the end of the 18th century the settlement patterns were primarily linear. By the first half of the 19th century the industrial complex at Furnace and Elm had developed into the major economic focus of the town-a status which was at least until the 1840's. The destruction of this complex by fire in 1848 and the construction of the Old Colony and Fall River Railroad in 1845 in the northeastern portion of town mark the decline of the town as a viable industrial community. While the railroad prompted summer development at Monponsett Pond and provided some employment (the old Colony Hot Houses on Plymouth Street) the earlier impetus was lost and by the end of the 19th century the town had shifted back to an agricultural base with scattered summer development. Throughout the 20th century the town managed to retain this agricultural focus. During the mid-part of the 20th century there was conversion of summer dwellings to year round use. Halifax has been relatively isolated all through its settlement history; the lack of a coherent interior road network combined with topography and the placement of the railroad allowed the town to escape some of the problems of congestion and overdevelopment experienced by its more accessible neighbors.

IV. CONTACT PERIOD (1500-1620)

A. Transportation Routes:

Intermediate corridor between Monponsett (Pembroke) Pond and Winnetuxet River. No trails documented. Primary east/west route presumed as Plymouth St. (Route 106) around Monponsett Pond with branches likely as Elm, Holmes and Thompson Sts. Likely trails also connected to Hemlock, Howard and Whites Islands around Monponsett Pond with possible survival at Hemlock Island. Secondary trail routes likely to Winnetuxet River from Halifax Center with probable candidates as River and South Sts.

B. Settlement Pattern:

No reported contact period sites. Six unidentified native sites (two locations based on oral testimony), all adjacent to freshwater ponds or streams. Three clustered about Monponsett Pond, two further south close proximity to Palmer Mill Brook. Extensive native material throughout White Island centered in Monponsett Pond, possible contact period occupation; reputedly visited by Wamsutta (Massasoit's eldest son) when captured by English in 1666. Site locations gave natives excellent access to potential planting grounds, hunting, fishing and collection areas.

C. Subsistence Pattern:

Probable seasonal fishing, hunting, collecting, and agriculture. Monponsett Pond and immediate vicinity likely focal point of native population. Extensive source of freshwater fish, fowl, etc., potential planting grounds located on western shore, marsh and woodlands surrounding pond provide wild game, floral material (e.g., cedar, marsh grass) - building materials. Remaining ponds, streams and Winnetuxet River additional sources of resources sought by natives. Possible planting grounds at junction of South and Hayward Sts. - presently under cultivation, recovery of projectile points etc. Probably travelled to Kingston coast during late spring and summer months - food, European-Indian trade.

D. Observations:

High probability native sites, particularly vicinity Burrage and Monponsett Ponds - extensive natural resources necessary for subsistence, shelter and transportation. Probably inland sites utilized during late fall, winter and early spring. Abandoned by majority of population during warmer spring and summer months for coast. Possible local affiliation with Mattakeeset's concentrated around Pembroke Ponds (Oldham, Furnace, Great Sandy Bottom, Little Sandy Bottom, Stetson Ponds and Silver Lake. Regional affiliation unclear - approximate boundary Massachusetts/Wampanoag territory. Local history claims Chicktaubut (chief sachem of Massachusetts in early 17c.) resided as far south as Titicut, Massasoit as far north as Monponset Pond (Hanson Historic Society, 1959: N.P.).

V. FIRST SETTLEMENT PERIOD (1620-1675)

A. Transportation Routes:

Native trails improved as regional highways with main east/west road as Plymouth Street (Route 106).

B. Population:

No figures for native population, probably small, primary focus of native population to northeast - Pembroke Ponds. No figure for white residents although doubtful more than handful of scattered families. Majority of English settlement postdates King Philip's War.

C. Settlement Pattern:

Native population probably concentrated around Burrage and Monponsett Ponds due to concentration of diversified resource base (i.e., freshwater ponds, streams, marsh and woodlands). Minimal white impact on location of native settlements due to low number and dispersed nature of white homesteads. However, some limitations in Monponsett Pond and Winnetuxet River areas - sale to English settlers primarily for grazing land. Scattered English settlement, primarily close to Middleboro/Halifax line - close to Middleboro fort (s). Soule family settlement Plymouth St. - Halifax/Plympton line. John Thompson probably first settler (1637) - Thompson St. near Thompson/Summit St. junction.

D. Economic Base:

Continued seasonal fishing, hunting, collecting and agriculture. However, English purchase and settlement on area's native lands had some impact on extent of seasonal rounds. Most pronounced on coast (Kingston, Duxbury) where English settlement heaviest. Probably increased involvement in Anglo-Indian trade - source of foodstuffs, weaponry, clothing etc. Farming, fishing (freshwater), lumbering probably primary occupations of settlers. Extensive sources of freshwater and timber. Numerous streams suggest presence of mill operation(s).

E. Observations:

Semi-autonomous native population, Massachusetts or Wampanoag affiliation. Halifax not established until 1734, English settlers "frontier", residents of Middleboro and Plymouth, far from communities' primary settlement areas. But, dependent on settlements for religious, civic, defensive facilities, traveled to Middleboro, Plymouth for town meetings, religious services, sought refuge in Middleboro and Plymouth forts during King Philip's War.

VI. COLONIAL PERIOD (1675-1775)

A. Transportation Routes:

Location of meeting house at Halifax center by mid-18th century created radial network from Plymouth St. axis. Period roads include South, River and Franklin Sts. from meeting house to Winnetuxet River and Monponsett St (Route 58) with loop surviving at Palmer Mill Brook. Connecting highways to Pembroke Ponds appear as Holmes and Oak Sts. around Peterson Swamp.

B. Population:

Dwindling small native population. Some Christianized expanding white population, particularly in 18th century - end of Indian "threat". 1765-556 residents, 1776-672 residents. Small black population.

C. Settlement Pattern:

Displacement of native population due to growing white community. Some work and live in English homes as slaves or servants. Unclear if discreet native community existed. Abandonment English homes during King Philip's War for Middleboro, Plymouth forts. John Thompson's home burnt. Primary English settlement node junction Plymouth/South Sts. First meetinghouse erected here in c. 1733. Enlarged in 1752 to accomodate growing population.

D. Economic Base:

Natives increasingly seek English occupations - domestic servants, whalers, military. Continuation of farming, fishing, lumbering as primary English economic pursuits. Extensive wood and marshlands sources of white and pitch pine, cedar, oak sought for shop and house construction. Development of mill complex immediately south of Stump Pond - 1st mill built c. 1728, Sturtevant family. Winnetuxet River likely site of several 18th century sawmills, 4 on river in 1795 (1795 Halifax Map). Also site of small-scale mid 18th century shipbuilding. Probable bog iron industry due to large area of freshwater ponds and marshland - shipment of wood products, bog iron, farm goods by water to Plymouth, Duxbury, etc.

E. Architecture:

Residential: Although Halifax was settled as early as 1669, very little architecture remains in Halifax from the Colonial period. Only one central-chimney two-story house is known, on Elm street near the Hanson border; although that house is a full five-bays in width, it seems probable that most of Halifax's Colonial period residential architecture was more modest in plan. At least one four-bay two-story house stands on Thompson Street, but the most common house type on Halifax was probably the story-and-a-half cottage. Because the story-and-a-half "Cape" cottage is Halifax's predominant house type, it is difficult to determine how many cottages date from the 18th century. Most cottages have central chimneys but are otherwise unembellished; it seems likely that the simpler cottages are those dating from the Colonial period, but this has not been documented. Concentrations of story-and-a-half, center-chimney cottages stand on Plymouth and Thompson Streets; almost all of these are full five-bay, hall/parlor plan cottages, although several half-plan cottages are known. One of the most significant cottages in Halifax is a center-chimney "Cape" on River Street with three pedimented roof dormers of an unusual configuration; the dormers have splayed side walls angling out from the roof to very narrow windows. The unusual way in which the dormers are handled suggests an early date for the cottage.

Institutional: The first meetinghouse, about which no information is recorded, was built in 1733.

F. Observations:

Halifax subsidiary of Plymouth and Middleboro - export trade of local goods major facet of local economy, fringe settlement with minimal economic development - rural backwater community. However, limited written sources made it difficult to clearly define community character, development.

VII. FEDERAL PERIOD (1775-1830)

A. Transportation Routes:

Regional roads remain from 18th century with period improvements as connecting links around Winnetuxet River, including Cross/Hayward, Wood and Pratt Sts.

B. Population:

Population showed a very slight increase to 1820, then experienced a slight decline. Some evidence of a Baptist Meeting House in South Halifax during this period (1821).

C. Settlement (1775-1830)

Major node of settlement at Old Plymouth Road, Elm and Furnace Streets. Additional nodes near Town Hall, on River Street and in South Halifax. Some infill between nodes. Small node developed on Crooker Place.

D. Economic Base:

Large quantities of Halifax's staple product, lumber, continued to be sent both south through the Taunton River system and east to Jones River and North River shipyards. In 1794 there were five sawmills in operation. However, by 1815 West Halifax in the area of Furnace Street had become an important industrial area. By that date two iron furnaces and a cotton factory had been erected by individuals and in circumstances that remain obscure. Key to Halifax's unexpected industrial growth, however, was the erection in 1822 of a large woolen mill by the Old Colony Manufacturing Co., incorporated the previous year by Thomas Hobart, Daniel and Theodore Mitchell, Caleb Leonard, and John Golding. Golding had built successful woolen machinery for Hurd's mill in Lowell before being attracted to Halifax. He does not seem to have stayed long, however, for by 1823 he had moved on to Dedham, followed in subsequent years by an apparently substantial number of Halifax mill workers. Nevertheless, by 1832 the factory (then Hobart, Mitchell & Co.) was producing over \$36,000 worth of satin annually.

Boot and shoe manufacture probably also begun in this period, though there are no figures 1837 when 46 people are recorded producing over \$27,000 worth annually.

Halifax was also the site in 1795 of an early effort to construct a canal between Buzzards Bay and Massachusetts Bay by connecting the Taunton and North Rivers through the ponds of Pembroke and Halifax. Apparently some work was undertaken at this time (Baker, 157).

E. Architecture:

Residential: Story-and-a-half cottages remained the most common house type of the period with center-chimney examples continuing to be used well into the period and indicating the town's conservatism and modest economic base. By the end of the period, however, interior end chimney plans were in regular use; most cottages are full, five-bay facade, two-room plan examples, with only a few half-plan examples known. A greater number of more substantial two-story houses were built during the Federal period, however, than in any other period. These include at least one rear wall chimney house, a form unusual in the area. Most of the other two-story houses constructed are hip-roofed end-chimney houses, a few with the steeply-pitched roofs popular in the 1790's in the region. At least a few Federal houses retain well-detailed entrance treatment with fan and sidelights.

Institutional: Five school districts existing during the period, but no schoolhouses are known to survive. A Baptist meetinghouse was constructed at South Halifax before 1830, along with a Universalist meetinghouse on Plymouth Street; neither one still stands.

VIII. EARLY INDUSTRIAL (1830-1870)

A. Transportation Routes:

Road network remained in place from early 19th century. Mainline of Old Colony railroad to Plymouth located around Monponsett Pond and Peterson Swamp (1845).

B. Population:

Population peaked in 1837, declined in 1840 then peaked again in 1850. Slow decline from 1850 to end of period.

C. Settlement:

Decline of node at Furnace and Elm with destruction of industrial complex in 1848. New residential development at Monponsett stimulated by construction of bridge from White's Island. Decline of settlement at South Halifax.

D. Economic Base:

After 1837 there is no further statistical record of the furnaces or cotton mill in West Halifax, but woolen manufacture continued to expand. By 1845, the year the Old Colony Railroad arrived in Halifax (complete with a Nursery), there were two woolen mills employing 70 men and women --- a tenth of the town's population -- with an annual product of \$87,000. The fire which destroyed the mills in July of 1848 was called "the greatest misfortune that ever befell the town" (Plymouth Co. Directory, 1867), but the fact that the mills were not rebuilt, coupled with the location of the railroad at the other end of town suggests that the prosperity of the manufacture may have been doomed in any case.

Boot and shoe production, probably allied with the economic success of the mills, also peaked in 1845 with an annual production value of \$34,368. In later years, farming and dairying picked up some of the slack left by the departure of the mills. By 1864, 117 farms were noted.

E. Architecture:

Residential: Halifax remained relatively prosperous through the 1840's and a good number of sidehall and center-entrance Greek Revival cottages, some of them well-detailed and substantial examples, were constructed across the town. Comparatively little residential construction appears to have occurred after 1850 as very few buildings with Italianate detailing are known. Those buildings which appear to date from the late 1840's and '50s are basically Greek Revival sidehall or center-entrance cottages with the slightly deeper eaves and more robust and curvilinear moldings of the Italianate style; these are relatively few in number. No ambitious residential construction (i.e., two-story houses) is known for the period.

Institutional: The most significant institutional building of the period is the First Parish meetinghouse (c. 1845), a very well-preserved Greek Revival/Italianate design, two-stories tall with a two-stage steeple and spire. The meetinghouse is unusual in that it must have been constructed just before the town's apparent decline after 1850; the meetinghouse is, in fact, one of the immediate region's most stylish. The only other institutional building known is a one-story Greek Revival/Italianate school-house (c. 1845) on Elm Street.

IX. LATE INDUSTRIAL PERIOD (1870-1915)

A. Transportation Routes:

Rail and road system intact from Bridge to Whites Island (1859) as Monponsett St. (Route 58) mid-19th century. No trolley routes through area.

B. Population:

Population declined slowly and steadily to the turn of the century, then began a slight increase to end of period. First substantial evidence of foreign born population (227 in 1915) with colonies of Portugese and Canadians.

C. Settlement

Increased summer development at Monponsett Pond with establishment of Monponsett Station. Small colony of summer homes on Paradise Lane. Attempt at residential development of small node at Halifax Station.

D. Economic Base:

Despite the presence of Lyons shoe factory on Plymouth St., town mostly given to agricultural pursuits. The Old Colony Railroad hot houses burned to the ground in 1890, though they were succeeded 15 years later by the Halifax Garden Co., a hot house concern organized by A.C. Burrage. Burrage was perhaps better known for the industrial community of Burrage which he developed immediately to the north in Hanson, though he also began the A.C. Burrage Cranberry Co. There is some conflict between the Halifax and Hanson histories, but Burrage appears to have been draining the swamp land for the simultaneous purposes of harvesting peat to fuel his Hanson factories and raising cranberries. Much of Burrage's work came to a halt with his financial collapse about 1907.

By 1914, seven cranberry growers listed in town directory, and poultry farmers, numbering ten, had already replaced dairy farmers.

E. Architecture:

Residential: Most of the residential construction of the period appears to have taken place after 1890 and consists primarily of modest Queen Anne sidehall cottages and houses; most of these have almost none of the usual late 19th-century decorative elements (turned, jig-sawn woodwork, patterned shingles, gable stick work, etc.) and are in their simplicity closely related to the plainly-detailed cottages of the Federal and early Greek Revival styles period. Some two-story hip-roofed workers' houses with very simple square plans were constructed c. 1910 on Holmes Street. Only two more substantial Queen Anne/Colonial Revival cottages with shingled dormers and gambrel roofs are known. Also during the period, modest summer cottages began to be built at Monponsett Pond. Most of these are hip or gable-roofed one-story structures with Craftsman-style shingled porched or modest Colonial Revival detailing.

Institutional: Several substantial institutional buildings were constructed at the town center after the turn of the century; these are the Town Hall (1907), a two-story frame Colonial Revival building with a monumental portico and a two-story hip-roofed Colonial Revival school (1906).

Commercial: At least one commercial structure of the period survives on Plymouth Street at the town center, a two-story Queen Anne style structure, built c. 1880.

X. EARLY MODERN PERIOD (1915-1940)

A. Transportation:

Local roads improved as regional auto highways with primary east/west corridor as Route 106 (Plymouth St.) and north/south connector as Route 58 (Monponsett St.).

B. Population:

Population begins a slow yet steady increase. Total at end of period (1940) peaks for entire settlement period. Foreign born population declines to 139 in 1930. Our Lady of the Lake Catholic church constructed in Monponsett 1934. Post World War II population increased four fold by 1975 (4684).

C. Settlement: (1915-1940)

Little development during this period, residential, commercial or industrial. Some post World War II development in southern portion of the town. Conversion of summer cottages to year round use.

D. Economic Base:

No new industrial development identified. Residential complexion of town increasingly determined by advancing motor traffic. By 1928 summer non residents outnumber residents by 437 to 197. Poultry and cranberries remain chief agricultural pursuits.

E. Architecture:

Hip and gable-roofed cottages of a very modest character were built in the 1920s, especially around Monponsett Pond. The most significant MHC Reconnaissance Survey Town Report: Halifax

institutional structure of the period is the Our Lady of the Lake Church on Monponsett Street, a story-and-a-half Mission Revival church with high-quality molded concrete and tile detailing. At least a few simple, one-story roadside stands and modest vernacular commercial buildings along the main roads probably date from the 1920s and '30s.

XI. SURVEY OBSERVATIONS

Halifax has no survey. It seems likely that some early Colonial architecture survives in the town; future survey efforts should document surviving Colonial resources. The period from 1790-1850 should also be carefully documented as the most active and diverse construction period in the town's history.

Industrial:

The Brockton Water Works on Silver Lake and the Lyons shoe factory on Old Plymouth Street (now a residence) appear to be the only remaining industrial structures standing. However, the Furnace Street area near the corner with Plymouth Street is a particularly sensitive area from the point of view of industrial archeology. A complete survey of mill sites should include the stone foundations there.

Development Pressures:

Expansion of commercial activity around junction of Routes 106 and 58 possess a threat to remaining historic fabric with continued suburban development around Monponsett Pond (Route 36 and 58). Large scale agricultural improvements evident around Winnetuxet bottomland.

XII. SOURCES

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[Davis, Samuel], "Notes on Halifax," Massachusetts Historical Society Collections 2 ser., 4 (1816), pp. 279-283.

Hurd, Duane H., ed., "History of Halifax," in his History of Plymouth County, Massachusetts (Phila., 1884), pp. 1130-1133.