

## MHC RECONNAISSANCE SURVEY REPORT

Date: October 1981

Community: Rehoboth

### I. TOPOGRAPHY

Moderate rolling terrain with extensive swamplands. Drainage via Carpenter Brook/Palmer River in the west, Oak Swamp and Bad Luck Brooks in the central and eastern portion of the town. Soils generally sandy to gravelly.

### II. POLITICAL BOUNDARIES

Rehoboth was established as a town on June 4, 1645 (o.s.), it was originally known as Seacunck. Part was included in the new town of Wannamoisett (Swansea) in 1667. The North Purchase was granted in 1671 and was established as the town of Attleborough in 1694. The mile and a half of land ceded to Attleborough in 1710. Annexed part of Barrington in 1757. Part established as Seekonk in 1812.

### III. HISTORIC OVERVIEW

Rehoboth is an historic pastoral community in Bristol County. The original town of Rehoboth encompassed the present towns of Attleboro, North Attleborough, Seekonk and Rehoboth in Massachusetts and Cumberland Rumford and East Providence in Rhode Island. The original settlement of the town was located near the Seekonk River at the "Ring of the Green". As population grew and spread throughout the town the need for easily accessible meeting houses led to a slow attrition of territory. By 1812 when Seekonk was incorporated Rehoboth had lost not only its original town center and almost all potential for industrial development in the form of water power sites but also the site of Slater's Cotton Mill, the earliest in the U.S., now in Pawtucket. The town of Rehoboth retained agricultural land and the economic base during most of the 19th century was a result of this retention. The several small factory sites at Perryville and Palmer River provided an inadequate base for extensive industrial expansion. The lack of a well defined town center and the various churches in town created a number of insular neighborhoods with a particular church as nucleus. Having been cut off from the Providence River as a source of communication, Rehoboth was entirely dependent on its road system (the railroad was never introduced to Rehoboth). During the late 19th and early 20th centuries Rehoboth acted as a breadbasket supplying produce to its daughter towns. Although there has been some light industrialization and suburban infill, primarily post World War II, the town retains its pastoral character.

### IV. CONTACT PERIOD (1500 - 1620)

#### A. Transportation Routes:

A probable major native trail extended along the present route of Anawan Road. Several possible secondary paths branched off of the Anawan

route including a route which followed Summer, Elm and County Streets east into Dighton and a second which paralleled the majority of Chestnut, Brook and Mason Streets. A primary east-west trail may have existed along the present route of Tremont Street, possibly extending east to the Taunton River and the Seekonk River to the west, two major transportation routes and food sources.

B. Settlement Pattern:

There were no documented native Contact Period sites. A probable Contact Period village site was reported opposite the Steven's Corner cemetery, near the junction of two suspected major native routes (recorded artifacts included one copper projectile point). A possible period burial was reputed to have been situated on the north side of Davis Street approximately midway between Mason and First Streets. Additional native settlement was likely adjacent to the Anawan trail and Palmer River and the Anawan Rock, a convenient rockshelter, and Great Meadow Hill. The last was utilized as a refuge by Anawan (Pokanoket sub-chief under Philip) and his followers shortly after the death of King Philip. A large number of unidentified native sites clustered about Shad Factory Pond and north and south of the pond along the Palmer River are potential period sites. The pond area is a particularly promising site for native settlement since herring spawn annually at the head of the pond. The excellent agricultural land east of Manwhague Swamp probably encouraged native occupation of this area.

C. Subsistence Pattern:

There was good fishing along the lower portion of the Palmer River. Annual herring runs occurred on the river as far north as Shad Factory Pond. Agricultural land was limited due to the prevalence of marshland and hilly terrain throughout present Rehoboth. There were potential planting grounds adjacent to the southern portion of the Palmer River, the Davis Street burial site and the probable Contact Period village adjacent to the Steven's Corner cemetery.

D. Observations:

The widespread rugged uplands and marshlands and absence of large freshwater ponds probably discouraged extensive native settlement in the Rehoboth area. Existing native settlement was probably heaviest in the lower portion of the Palmer River, particularly from the Shad Factory Pond south towards Swansea. There is a high probability of surviving archaeological remains of Contact Period occupation in this area since later development has been minimal. The Davis Street and Steven's Corner cemetery sites are also archaeologically promising for the same reason. The Rehoboth native population was probably closely tied to the Pokanokets (Wampanoags) because of their proximity to the former natives' central settlement (Mt. Hope, Rhode Island).

## V. FIRST SETTLEMENT PERIOD (1620 - 1675)

### A. Transportation Routes:

Readily available data dealing with the pre-1675 colonial transportation network was sparse. The existing transportation system was probably limited since the majority of the pre-war colonial settlement occurred along the Seekonk River in present Pawtucket, Rumford and East Providence, Rhode Island. The pre-war settlers (Southern portion of Palmer River) undoubtedly made use of the existing native trails. These probably included the Broad Street/River Street/Carpenter Street, Summer/Elm Street and Mason Street paths. The first two routes likely functioned as primary roads to the center of Old Rehoboth, Dighton and Taunton. The third would have provided the Palmer River settlers with access to the pre-war settlements and marine resources in present Swansea, Barrington and Warren (Rhode Island). A pre-1675 access route to the Shad Factory Pond area and Summer/Elm Street path may have extended along the Reed, Water, Lake and French Streets trail.

### B. Population:

There were no available figures for the native or white population. The first settlers originally resided in present East Providence and Rumford, Rhode Island (original focal point of Old Rehoboth).

### C. Settlement Pattern:

Minimal documentation of native settlement locations. The surviving post-epidemic natives probably maintained their Contact Period settlement patterns, with the exception of the Shad Factory Pond/lower Palmer River area (colonial settlement area).

The first white settlement is said to have taken place in c. 1652 in response to the expanding population along the Seekonk River. Scattered homes were established along the southern portion of the Palmer River with the Shad Factory Pond serving as the settlement's focal point. The Palmer River settlement lacked civic/religious facilities. These were sought in present Rumford, Rhode Island.

### D. Economic Base:

The native subsistence patterns were probably retained although Anglo-Indian trade assumed an increasingly important role in the native economy. It was highly probable trade occurred between the natives and the Palmer River settlers.

Agriculture formed the basis of the Palmer River settlement's economy. Farmland was available near Shad Factory Pond and the southern portion of the Palmer River. Subsistence and commercial fishing were probably in the lower portion of the Palmer River. Area settlers probably hunted and lumbered in Rehoboth's extensive woodlands. The community's limited demographic development during this period was likely a key factor in the settlement's minimal industrial base. The only reported mill operation was a grist and saw mill complex erected in c. 1662 on the upper end of Shad Factory Pond near Water Street (N.A. 1968: 19).

E. Observations:

Existing secondary sources virtually ignore the native community during the First Settlement Period. The Palmer River settlement was situated on the eastern frontier of Old Rehoboth. The settlement's virtual lack of commercial, industrial and civic/religious facilities were primary reasons for its strong ties to the original center of Old Rehoboth. There is an excellent probability of extant archaeological remains of the pre-1675 settlement because of minimal commercial and residential development in the proximity of Shad Factory Pond and the southern portion of the Palmer River.

VI. COLONIAL PERIOD (1675 - 1775)

A. Transportation Routes:

A series of new roads extended off of the eastern portion of Tremont Street and Anawan/Plain Street as post-war settlement expanded out to the north, south and east of the original settlement node at Palmer River. The first of these routes may have been Rocky Hill Road (c. 1680?) which would have provided the Rocky Hill settlers access to Seekonk and the Anawan/Plain Street Road via Carpenter Road. The eastern portion of Fairview Avenue (laid out c. 1720) probably was constructed as an industrial access route handling traffic to Anawan Road/Plain Street and Dighton. A route following the eastern portion of Brook Street, a segment of Plain Street and Cedar Street, may have been laid out in response to the development of the Oak Swamp neighborhood. The Hornbine Road is probably contemporary with the establishment of the Hornbine neighborhood.

B. Population:

There were no native population figures. Those for the white population were restricted to the 18th century. By 1765, Rehoboth had one of the largest populations (3690 residents) in the southeastern Massachusetts study unit. This figure increased 13.6% to 4191 residents in 1776.

C. Settlement Pattern:

The only reference to post-1675 native settlement was the encampment established by Anawan and his followers at Anawan Rock.

The limited data suggest the Rehoboth area suffered considerable damage during King Philip's War (N.A. 1968: 15-16, Tilton 1918: 71). It is unclear whether the community was abandoned during the fighting. The earliest reported post-war settlement occurred in the vicinity of Rocky Hill prior to 1680 (Tilton 1918: 90). The pre-1675 Palmer River settlement area continued as a focal point of colonial settlement. It was established as a precinct of Rehoboth in 1715. The precinct meetinghouse was erected on the site of the Palmer River cemetery (immediately north of Lake Street) in c. 1715. A smaller settlement node (Great Meadow neighborhood) was established by the first decade of the 18th century in

the vicinity of the junction of Palmer River and Fairview Avenue, an area of considerable early 18th century industrial development. A community of Sixth Principle Baptists developed at the intersection of Brook, Pleasant and Chestnut Streets by the early 1730s. The neighborhood church was situated within the triangle created by these streets (moved from its original location on Burial Place Hill in c. 1732). Settlement roughly contemporary with that in the Oak Swamp neighborhood centered around a Sixth Principle Baptist church in North Rehoboth on Tremont Street a short distance east of the route's junction with Anawan Street. This church was established in 1740 as a result of a split within the Oak Swamp church. Thirty members of the Second Baptist church of Swansea settled in southeastern Rehoboth along Horbine Road in the early 1750s. The Hornbine church (Sixth Principle Baptist) was erected in c. 1753 on the corner of Horbine Road and Baker Street. The First Christian church was organized by Jacob Hix in 1773. Its meetinghouse was probably located within an area enclosed by Plain Street and two unimproved roads extending south and east off of Gorham and Brook Streets, respectively. A town meetinghouse was built in c. 1773 east of the "Village cemetery" (probably junction of Anawan Road and County Street) probably in response to the population shift east of Palmer River (original primary settlement node).

#### D. Economic Base:

There was no documentation of the post-war native economy. Agriculture remained the foundation of colonial Rehoboth's economy. The focal point of the settlement's post-1675 commercial/industrial development was an area west of Great Meadow Hill on the Palmer River. An iron furnace or forge dating as early as c. 1704 was erected several hundred yards north of the Palmer River/Fairview Avenue intersection. This operation was followed by an iron forge and trip-hammer established by Ebenezer Peck in c. 1722, a short distance below the river and Fairview Avenue junction (operated until the early 19th century). The forge was supplied with refined iron carted in from Bristol, Rhode Island (N.A. 1968: 21, 67). A sawmill was built slightly upstream in c. 1747. An additional sawmill appearing on the 1795 town map on the Palmer River near the northern end of Great Meadow Hill may pre-date 1775. Several possible pre-1775 commercial/industrial facilities were situated in the Rehoboth village area. The Goff Inn was constructed in c. 1714 on the present site of the Goff Memorial Hall (Bay State Road). This inn handled stages traveling to Taunton, Providence and Newport. A possible pre-1775 sawmill and gristmill complex was established by Abraham and Eleazer Bliss on the East Branch of the Palmer River in Rehoboth village. A possible period sawmill was built by Cromwell on Bad Luck Brook immediately before it crosses County Road. As many as three industrial operations may have been built on the southernmost portion of the Palmer River and Rocky Run prior to 1775. Operation of a tannery located at the junction of the river and County Street may pre-date 1775. A brickyard was established in c. 1767 a short distance west of the Rocky Run and Palmer River intersection (operated until early 19th century). A gristmill appearing on the 1795 town map east of the Rocky Run and Mason Street junction may pre-date 1775.













