

# MHC Reconnaissance Survey Town Report

## MILLIS

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: Millis

### I. TOPOGRAPHY

Located on marshy riverine lowlands, outcroppings and glacial outwash features scattered through town, especially in northern and central sections. Sandy to gravelly soil with limited elevational change. Topography is dominated by meandering Charles River and extensive meadowy marsh lands adjacent. Large areas of interior swamp/bog as well. All drainage into Charles.

### II. POLITICAL BOUNDARIES

Part of Old Grant (1649) to Medfield from Dedham; section remains intact as northern town boundary. Referred to as "Boggastowe". Part of area incorporated as Town of Medway, 1713. Became East Precinct of Medway, 1749. Incorporated as Town of Millis, 1885.

### III. HISTORIC OVERVIEW

Suburban industrial town on fringe of metropolitan Boston with important location on Charles River valley to western interior. Crucial junction of native trails across river with several areas of site potential. Early axis of settlement by English during mid-17th Century with major garrison house on South End Pond and mill sites around Bogastow Brook. Difficulty of town center formation during 18th Century, although on main post road from Boston with several alledged late First Period houses. Primarily agricultural through early 19th Century with local clay pits and several Federal period brick houses. Mill village along Charles at Rockville with well-preserved set of mid-19th Century structures. Limited industrial growth with branch railroad from Boston through early 20th Century creates extended town center along highway interspersed with recent suburban developments. Millis history often combined with Medway during Colonial period.

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

#### A. Transportation Routes:

Important junction of routes across Charles River. Conjectured trails follow Northeast/Southwest grain along upland with primary route around Bogastow Brook from Sherborn as Ridge St. to Prospect Hill (Millis Center) and probably south along axis of Farm St. Alternate trail possibly followed high ground along river terrace around South End Pond and Black Swamp to Lake Winthrop (Holliston) along Orchard St. Principal East/West trail across Charles from Medfield conjectured as Dover-Union-Curve Sts. to Millis Center with branch loop around Charles as Dwight St. and possible trail to Rockville along Village-Pleasant Sts.

B. Settlement Pattern:

A few sites listed with possible period occupation. Preferred locations include well drained terraces and knolls overlooking Charles and adjacent meadows; especially near South End and other ponds as well as confluence points. Town histories do not provide much information.

C. Subsistence Pattern:

Seasonal fish runs in Charles as a major food resource. Marsh/meadow lands also provided ample opportunities for hunting and gathering. Good agricultural land available but in limited quantity.

D. Observation:

Despite high food gathering potential, probably an area for seasonal rather than long term settlement--too boggy. Period sites would probably be Nipmuck (inland, freshwater) related rather than coastal tribes.

V. FIRST SETTLEMENT PERIOD (1620-1675)

A. Transportation Routes:

Native trails remain as primary highways with improvement of East/West route across Charles from Medfield to Mendon as Village St. in 1670's and around Bogastow Brook as Orchard St. by mid-17th Century. Charles River bridges destroyed during King Philips War.

B. Population:

Small; a half dozen families by end of period.

C. Settlement:

Several grants of land on "Long Plain" (Main St.) 1659 but apparently no settlement. First settler, George Fairbanks, 1658. By end of period, half dozen farms on high ground along Bogastow Brook. Close ties with settlers in South Sherborn. A fortified 'stove house' built for communal protection on high ground west side of South End Pond.

D. Economic Base:

Subsistence agriculture, grazing cattle. Meadow lands important as source of hay. Mill built, 1662 north end of Bogastow Pond (Robert Hinsdell).

E. Observations:

An outlying district of Medfield, established to take advantage of meadow land along Charles.

VI. COLONIAL PERIOD (1676-1776)

A. Transportation Routes:

Highway network remains from 17th Century with main post road as Village St. from Medfield. Emergence of Medway (Millis) town center prompts radial highways, including Forest Rd. to Charles River and Exchange St. to Sherborn.

B. Population:

About 30 families at incorporation (1713). Census of 1765 listed 793 people in 138 families and 123 houses for town of Medway (Millis was original town center and eastern precinct).

C. Settlement:

All settlement destroyed during King Philip's War except for 'stone house'. Gradually rebuilt afterwards, especially along Post Rd. (Village St.) and in the "Long Plain" and Bogastow Brook areas. Meeting house built, 1714 in compromise location, Prospect Hill (Bare Hill). Because of topography, no village center developed around meeting house. Scattered farms predominated during 18th Century. Three areas of more concentrated settlement: Bogastow Pond and Brook; Rockville (both developed around mills); Long Plain--nascent village center east of meeting-house. First school built in this area, 1737.

D. Economic Base:

Primarily agriculture and grazing. Potatoes introduced, 1733. Active milling in two areas: Bogastow Pond--(both at inlet and outlet) grist and sawmills after 1690; Rockville--grist and sawmills after 1680. Some brickmaking along Bogastow creek during mid-18th Century. Richardson's Tavern on Post Road, after 1720.

E. Architecture:

residential: Nearly exclusive local use of central-chimney two-storey house type with no other types apparent; a large number of these houses have locally attributed dates of 1676-1700, most of which seem to be too early in their attributions; at least one house (ca. 1750-75) exists (Rockville) with shallow overhangs at the second storey and gables, of a type commonly associated with Connecticut.

institutional: First meetinghouse built 1713-14; second meetinghouse built 1749; first "noon" house built 1726; first schoolhouse built 1737.

commercial: One or two taverns present after 1710.

industrial: Grist and saw mills.

F. Observations:

A prosperous agricultural community, topography a major factor in settlement and development (lack of village center and eventual division of town). Like Wayland/Sudbury, Millis is the original settlement area of Medway.

VII. FEDERAL PERIOD (1775-1830)

A. Transportation Routes:

Colonial road system intact from 18th Century. Main East/West river crossing adjusted with turnpike (1809) from Medfield as Main St. (Rt. 109) and linking roads from Rockville mills to town center as Acorn-Himelfarb and Plain Sts.

B. Population:

Small increases likely to have occurred during period; however, most of the increases reported for Medway during this period probably occurred within the boundaries of Modern Medway; no known foreign born population; no new religious societies.

C. Settlement Location:

Small mill village developed at Rockville ca. 1818-25; scattered new buildings in northern part of town.

D. Economic Base:

Two cotton mills established on pre-existing mill sites-- at Lower Bogastowe (1805, reputedly "seventh cotton factory in New England") and Rockville (ca. 1818). Latter site believed to have employed first lace loom in America and its inventor John Bestwick. Bell foundry begun ca. 1816 by apprentice from Revere's Boston Works, George Holbrook, who also learned clock-making of Revere. Six brickyards in operation--one, 1775-1900.

E. Architecture:

residential: It is probable that vernacular types of the preceding period remain popular to ca. 1800-1810, after which they were replaced by the Federalist style; at least ½ dozen high style, brick Federalist houses and cottages exist in the northern half of the town near the site of former brickyards; Federalist architecture at Rockville ranges from one high-style cottage with Gothic details (ca. 1820-25) to double workers' houses with endwall chimneys (ca. 1818-25). Scattered elsewhere in the town are two-storey, hip-roofed houses, examples of which have varied plans;

institutional: New meetinghouse built 1815 (Federalist style); six school districts formed for entire town (Medway) of which approximately 3 or 4 would be within the bounds of modern Millis, one brick schoolhouse built 1823.

commercial: Small-development around Turnpike (?)--2 innkeepers and 4 retailers listed for entire town in 1807.

industrial: Scythe and edge tool shop at Rockville (1780); cotton mill and machine shop at Rockville (1818); bell foundry (1816), appearances not recorded.

VIII. EARLY INDUSTRIAL PERIOD (1830-1870)

A. Transportation Routes:

Highways remain from early 19th Century with East/West railroad from Medfield to Medway through Millis Center (1863). Branch railroad from Norfolk to Rockville in 1850's shortly abandoned with original stone abutments across Charles River (power lines) intact.

B. Population:

Small increase (if any); small foreign-born population; Congregational mission formed at Rockville (1849).

C. Settlement Location:

Small expansion of Rockville; small expansion of Millis Center (then known as East Medway).

D. Economic Base:

Establishment of both organ and organ pipe factories along Main St. Canning begun in 1863 also on Main St. Paper mill erected in Baltimore area of Rockville ca. 1850 by G. Campbell, also operating paper mill in Norfolk. Rockville mill producing waterproof building paper. Bleachery and dyeworks established at very end of period near abundant springs.

E. Architecture:

residential: Greek Revival style represented by a small number of side hall and center-entrance cottages (particularly at Rockville) and a smaller number of side-hall houses at Millis Center. Italianate style was represented by several high-style villa/country estates north and west of Millis Center and by a small number of more modest side-hall houses (ca. 1860-75) at Millis Center and Rockville. Little or no Second Empire style architecture was built.

institutional: Fourth Congregational Meetinghouse built 1849-50, Italianate Style (although this appearance may date from 1860's alterations); former Third Meetinghouse moved to Rockville and converted to Congregational Chapel (1849); at least one schoolhouse built 1849.

commercial: No recorded development.

industrial: Organ factory established, 1837.

IX. LATE INDUSTRIAL PERIOD (1870-1915)

A. Transportation Routes:

Rail and road system intact with street railway from Medfield-Dedham to Medway-Milford in 1900 along Main-Pleasant Village Sts.

B. Population:

Increased throughout period, particularly after Steel Edgeworks built at Millis Center (1889); rapid growth of foreign-born population after 1895; Irish were largest group until 1905-1915 after which Russians became the largest foreign born group; no new religious societies.

C. Settlement Location:

Mainly at Millis Center in the vicinity of Main, Union, Exchange and Plain Streets; minor cottage development along Charles River, off Dwight Street, and along Village Street west of Rockville.

D. Economic Base:

Incorporation of town in 1885 sparked minor economic boom as local business leaders led by Lansing Millis attracted Steel Edge Stamping and Retinning Co. and Herman Shoe Co. to central locations near railroad. Inventor Michael Collins (famous for "echolins") operated box factory at Lower Bogastowe site; Rockville cotton factory leased to American Felt.

E. Architecture:

residential: Little high-style from period, restricted mainly to individual examples of late Italianate, Queen Anne and Colonial Revival along Exchange Street, north of Center; bulk of new building at Millis Center consisted of astylistic cottages until ca. 1900 and simple bungalows (ca. 1910) some of which may have been built as company housing. New construction in resort (?) areas consisted of simple bungalows, cabins and two storey houses with Bungalow style decorative details--no highstyle.

institutional: Victorian Gothic style chapel at Rockville, built 1877. In division of town (1885) Millis was granted one engine house, an almshouse and three schoolhouses; Queen Anne style Railroad Depot/Town Hall built by private donation, 1886.

commercial: 2-storey wood-frame Italianate style block with stores and public hall built at center, 1876; little other development.

industrial: one-storey wood-frame shoe factory (1891); one-storey brick and stone mill complex developed (1889); four-storey wood-frame factory (ca. 1900); mills at Rockville burned, 1884.

X. EARLY MODERN PERIOD (1915-1940)

A. Transportation Routes:

Street railway and railroad West of Millis Center abandoned by mid-20th Century. Auto highway routes by 1930's on main East/West road Rt. 109 (Main St.) and secondary North/South road Rt. 115 from Sherborn to Rockville through Millis center.

B. Population:

Growth during most of period.

C. Settlement Location:

Same as preceding period.

D. Economic Base:

Most of the 19th Century industrial activity was replaced in this period by three major employers--Herman Shoe, Safe pack Mills (1917, from Brockton) both of which received substantial government contracts during WW I, and Clicquot Club Ginger Ale (now Cott)--all three near Millis center.

E. Architecture:

residential: Continued construction of bungalows and simple two-storey houses with bungalow style details; little or no high-style construction, with possible exception of several Colonial/Federalist Revival style houses in north part of town (ca. 1920-40), some restoration of Federalist period houses as weekend/country estates seems to have occurred.

institutional: Little new construction with probable exception of multiple-room school house(s).

commercial: strip development of one-storey wood-frame and concrete-block structure along Main St. (Route 109) at town center.

industrial: Utilitarian design, concrete and wood-frame construction enlarged mills at town center.

XI. SOURCES:

Jameson, E. O. The History of Medway, Massachusetts (1880)

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

Millis, Mass. Fiftieth Anniversary of the Incorporation of the Town of Millis, Massachusetts (1935)