



Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation

## **Heritage Landscape Inventory Program**

# **Easton Reconnaissance Report**

Prepared for  
The Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation  
by  
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## MASSACHUSETTS HERITAGE LANDSCAPE INVENTORY EASTON RECONNAISSANCE REPORT

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### PLANNING ISSUES

Need. Easton is one of the only communities in the pilot study that retains a full range of landscape types, particularly designed landscapes. While the Town has been able to acquire some significant parcels, future development will be focused on sensitive areas. The results of Easton's Growth Management Study concur with the EOEA Build-Out Study anticipating a population increase from the current 23,000+ to over 37,000. The proximity to Rt. 24, half way between Rt. 128 and Rt 495 as well as the potential of the re-instatement of the commuter train through Easton substantiates the concern of the potential increase in population. The need for housing to accommodate this rate of growth clearly threatens agricultural land, estates, and the archaeological potential of many undeveloped areas.

Resources and Documentation. Easton has a cohesive and accomplished network of town officials and citizen boards working to preserve the character of the community. Easton's Open Space and Recreation Plan was prepared in 1996 by the Old Colony Planning Council. Section F of Chapter IV identifies scenic landscapes, and cultural, archaeological and historic areas including National Register properties. Recently the Town has been conducting a Growth Management Study and is beginning to implement planning strategies. The historic resource inventory includes documentation of 323 resources of which eleven are areas. Individual resources within those areas also are documented on individual building forms in many cases. Most of the survey work was completed in 19???. Presently a survey project is about to begin using Survey and Planning funding from the MHC to document the area of the town known as Eastonville. The MHC Easton Reconnaissance Survey Report of 1981 and the many district nominations establish the historic context for Easton's resources. There are many National Register listings including five districts and two individual nominations, both of which also are included in districts. One district, the H.H. Richardson Historic District of North Easton with six resources, also is a National Historic Landmark. One property, the Unity Church of North Easton, which is listed on the National Register as part of a district, is protected by a preservation restriction.

Planning Issues. Recently the Town has implemented new residential development standards in which open space must be identified on a plan for development and the emphasis is to be on sensitive areas that have cultural resources worthy of protection. Thus the identification of the Heritage Landscape Inventory project will guide the Planning Board in preserving such areas. The Town also is pursuing adoption of the Community Preservation Act to complement other programs to protect open space. The Planning Board, through the Growth Management Study, is addressing possible design standards for business development. Also there has been interest in increasing the authority of the Historical Commission which actively participates in various committees and boards established to preserve Easton's rich historic and cultural resources.

## **SITE VISIT REPORT – SEPTEMBER 25, 2001**

The purpose of the meeting was to review the list of potential heritage landscapes compiled by the town and to conduct a windshield survey. The list of sites/districts was compiled by the Local Project Coordinator in collaboration with the Historical Commission and other interested citizens. Easton was unique among the cities and towns in the pilot program for having a large number of designed landscapes, primarily 19<sup>th</sup> century estates and public spaces associated with the Ames family. The town also provided very thorough survey forms so only limited historical information is included here.

Queset Area. This area in North Easton includes several designed landscapes and historic structures in close proximity to each other. These include: Antrim Hammer Shop, Italian Garden, Queset and Unity Close (with garden possibly by Fletcher Steele). Some properties are privately owned while others are municipally owned. A proposed extension to the public library may impact the Italian garden, which is owned by the Town.

Elm Street Estates. Many of the estates in North Easton are still in private ownership while others have been transferred to public ownership (town hall) or to a non-profit organization (Sheep Meadow). Langwater, still owned by the Ames family, is one of the most significant estates, both for its Olmsted designed landscape and H.H. Richardson designed gatehouse. Spring Hill, initially the home of William Hadwen Ames, also remains in private ownership. Wayside, now the town hall, retains elements of its estate landscape but has lost some key features such as a large rose garden.

Old Colony Rail Corridor This former rail line runs north/south through Easton. It has been unused for over 40 years but is proposed for reactivation. Issues include the potential impacts of high speed trains running through the center of town and through the Little Cedar Swamp, where the rail line has all but disappeared and extensive work would be required to upgrade it. Of particular concern are species that cross the railroad bed to access the Hockomock Swamp, the largest swamp in Massachusetts.

Michelson's Farm. This former dairy farm in the southeastern section of town was established in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and remained active as Michelson's Cattle Auction through the 1980s until the large barn located at the corner of Rt. 138 and Rt. 106 burned. Upland areas of the former farm are slated for development but lowland areas offer a scenic landscape of open fields and swamp linked with the nearby Hockomock Swamp.

Lucius Howard Farm. This farm, also in the southeastern section of town known as Eastondale, was established in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and remains in agricultural use. It is valued for its open fields, stone walls and mature trees. It is one of the largest parcels of buildable land still in private hands in Easton and has been the subject of a 150 lot subdivision. The owner of the Farm also holds the Simpson Spring Water company on an adjacent parcel.

Clover Valley Farm. This farm, located in the southwestern section of Easton, was the site of a large dairy farm for many years. It is currently used for raising horses and is the last farm in operation in Easton. The five-bay, center-chimney farm house remains as does the large dairy barn, many open fields and numerous stone walls. Some of the farm is low and swampy, with abundant wildlife.

Little Cedar Swamp. Little Cedar Swamp lies just north of Foundry Street in the southeastern section of Easton. It is cut off from the main part of Hockomock Swamp by a glacial sand deposit. Cedar was harvested from the area in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Since 1910 it has been a cranberry bog. The long-distance view from the adjacent Pine Grove Cemetery is unique in Easton.

Queset River. The Queset River, which runs through Easton from Stoughton to West Bridgewater, was intensively used in the 19<sup>th</sup> century for various water-powered industries. A number of man-made ponds associated with the former industrial use remain. The river also runs through several of the North Easton estates where the ponds form ornamental landscape features.

Stonehill College. Stonehill College in the eastern portion of Easton includes several areas of potential heritage landscape interest. The area surrounding Donahue Hall includes features associated with the former Ames estate including the former Colonial Revival mansion, built in 1904, and Alumni Hall which was once the estate's indoor tennis courts and pool. The Clock Farm across Route 139 contains several former agricultural buildings. There are also remnants of a millstone quarry, and sites with Native American associations located in the eastern section of the campus near the large parking lot.

Industrial Park Pond. This man-made pond south of Belmont Street near the West Bridgewater border is valued primarily as wildlife habitat.

Other Resources Discussed. Easton has published a historic map showing the location of 27 historic sites in town, including many listed above. The map is available free at town hall.

Wheaton Farm. Although the Farm is protected and in Town ownership the concern is that it is under utilized. The Friends of Wheaton Farm are grappling with issues of preservation of the barn.

Elm Street. From the eastern town border through to North Main Street, this picturesque route has many scenic views that are noteworthy.

The *Master List of Projects of the Olmsted Firm in Massachusetts* includes numerous Olmsted firm projects in Easton, both public and private.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### 1. Preliminary List of Sites Recommended For Further Study

The following sites are recommended for intensive study:

- Queset Area – focus on Italian garden which is most threatened?
- Elm Street Estates – focus on Langwater
- Lucius Howard Farm – document extant features – unless part of Eastondale survey which is the subject of a Survey and Planning Grant just underway.
- Little Cedar Swamp

This recommendation is based on site visits and follow-up discussion with Easton's Assistant Town Manager.

### 2. Survey and potential National Register nominations

There are parts of the Stonehill College campus that the College could benefit from recognizing and enhancing. Much of the campus appears to have been built within the last 20-30 years. However, there clearly are historic resources on the campus that are worthy of recognition. A comprehensive survey of the campus would provide planning information for the college as well as educational information for the community. A comprehensive survey may identify individual resources that are eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. In turn, such designation may be used to educate, raise awareness and increase visibility of the College, as well as provide grant opportunities for historic preservation activities on those properties that may be listed.

### 3. Scenic Roads Designation

Many roads in Easton may benefit from Scenic Roads designation under the State Enabling Legislation, Chapter 40-15C, the Scenic Roads Act. Although many roads may be old and the town may be unsure about the limits of the right-of-ways of these roads, it is important for the Town to know its responsibility in terms of maintenance of trees along roads. The Scenic Roads Act would require the town to consider the scenic qualities when removing or relocating stone walls and demolishing trees. Elm Street is particularly scenic and should be recognized as such by a Scenic Roads designation.

### 4. Survey work in progress

Presently the Old Colony Rail Corridor is part of an inventory project that is a necessary step for the consideration of re-establishing the railroad line. It is part of the MEPA process that the Old Colony Railroad must undertake. PAL is conducting the survey of historic resources and it is their responsibility to identify all historic resources that may be affected by the re-opening of the railroad. The Cedar Swamp which is adjacent to a section of the railroad should be part of an intensive environmental survey that also must take place.

Easton has received a Survey and Planning Grant to survey that part of Easton known as Eastondale. This project is just recently underway and the extent of survey may not yet be known. Therefore, it will be necessary to confer with the consultants working on this project to determine whether the Lucius Howard Farm is within the scope of that project.