



Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation

## **Heritage Landscape Inventory Program**

# **Norton**

# **Reconnaissance Report**

Prepared for  
The Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation  
by  
Public Archaeology Lab, Inc.  
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## MASSACHUSETTS HERITAGE LANDSCAPE INVENTORY NORTON RECONNAISSANCE REPORT

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### PLANNING ISSUES

Need. The Norton request for participation in the Heritage Landscape Inventory Program states the critical need due to limited personnel and funds to document landscapes. Further, it points out that development pressures are a significant threat to cultural landscapes through over development as well as inappropriate land use proposals primarily due to transportation and access issues. Norton is only a few miles from Rt.95; Rt. 495 slices through the town; improved train service makes the Town more accessible. The EOEA build-out shows that approximately 10,000 acres are available for development. Clearly the remaining heritage landscapes are part of those potentially developable acres. Two significant institutions that influence Norton's development are Wheaton College and the Tweeter Center, formerly known as Great Woods.

Resources and Documentation. Besides the usual dedicated land use boards and commissions, Norton has a Land Acquisition Committee that is particularly interested in acquiring parcels that ultimately protect the water resources. The Chartley Garden Club assists in maintaining planned landscapes at town buildings. The Local Project Coordinator, who is the Conservation Agent is a participant in the Community Preservation Institute recently established through a partnership between EOEA and UMass. Historic resource documentation includes 284 survey forms most written in the 1980s. There are two districts – Norton Center Historic District and Old Bay Road - listed on the National Register of Historic Places as well as the Reverend Pitt Clarke House as an individual nomination. Four archaeological sites or areas received Determinations of Eligibility (DOE) in the late 1970s. Norton has one Local Historic District established in 1975 containing nearly 50 resources. This Norton Historic District is a partial overlay of the Center National Register District. The 1981 Norton Reconnaissance Survey Report establishes the basis for the local historic context. The Open Space and Recreation Plan was completed in 1999.

Planning Issues. Transportation is a key issue affecting heritage landscapes directly and indirectly. The amount of traffic that passes through Norton's Town Center is significantly higher than many areas due to the nearby Interstate highways and the events stadium at the Tweeter Center. Thus, the Town Center and Common are directly impacted. Development pressures due to accessibility are the indirect impact of transportation.

A number of heritage landscapes that are archaeological in nature are on private property meaning that their protection, including restoration and maintenance, is in the hands of private property owners and not accessible to the public. Thus the constituency seeking protection of such resources is limited.

The impact of traffic and development also affects the water resources in terms of development on or near the river or ponds as well as potential pollution and growth of invasive species. Any land use planning along the Three-Mile River, the Wading River and around Norton Reservoir driven by development and increased traffic may negatively impact these water bodies.

## SITE VISIT REPORT

The meeting was attended by the Local Project Coordinator and members of the Planning Board, Historical Society and Land Preservation Society, as well as PAL team members. The purpose of the meeting was to review the list of potential heritage landscapes compiled by the town and to conduct a windshield survey. A public meeting held on July 2 to identify potential heritage landscape sites was attended by 14 people including representatives of the Land Preservation Trust, Historical Society, Historical Commission, and private citizens. Following the July 18 meeting and site visit, the LPC and consultants revised the priorities based on additional observations and discussion at the site visit. The list below represents the revised priorities.

Town Common Area. The town common area, which includes the common and several adjacent buildings, lies at the crossroads of Routes 123 and 140, both of which lead to Route 495 interchanges. The common itself (24,000 square feet) is a pleasant triangular parcel that evokes an earlier period in Norton's history but current traffic already threatens to overwhelm this scenic space and proposed traffic improvements could virtually obliterate the common and the historic center of town. The area lies within the Norton Historic District (LHD 10/7/75) and the Norton Center Historic District (NRDIS 12/23/1977).

Crane Farm. The well-preserved Crane Farm (approx. 100 acres) in southeastern Norton is one of the few surviving farms in town and has been in the family since 1753. Some fields are used for growing nursery stock, otherwise the area is no longer actively farmed. There is a farmhouse, a circa 1850 barn with a 1926 dairy barn addition, a carriage shed, and a mid-20<sup>th</sup> century milk house. There is also a former carriage works associated with the farm, which is represented by the foundation of a blacksmith shop and a converted paint shop, and an unusually extensive collection of 19<sup>th</sup> century farm implements. Stonewalls in front of the house are of very high quality and the open fields evoke the past land use. The farm lies along the Three Mile River and may also have Native American campsites (Wheaton College has done some archeological work here). Norton third graders visit the farm regularly to learn about local history. The current owner has placed the farm in trust for her children but is reluctant to get involved in state programs like 61A.

Archeological Feature on Jasperson Property. This unusual stone structure is located along South Washington Street adjacent to the Jasperson residence. It is a semi-circular pen roughly 20-25 feet across, built of very large fieldstones with a cave-like structure approximately five feet by seven feet at the center rear. Within the enclosed area is a sloping rough stone floor and a low ledge at the west side. It does not appear typical of either Native American or colonial structures. One theory is that it was built by Basque sheepherders. Within the owner's memory it was used as a piggery. Mrs. Jasperson has extensive files on the structure including testing by previous researchers and is anxious to find a way to protect the feature. The site is located a short distance off a Route 495 exit. The adjacent property has already been developed, and a Stop and Shop is proposed across the street where there are additional stone features that may be associated with this structure. Road widening is another potential threat, given the increase in traffic that has already occurred and the potential for even more.

Old Taunton Copper Works. The old Taunton Copper Works was active circa 1830 – 1860s. There was reportedly a shingle mill at the same site. Remnants of the copper works, including foundations and stone-lined canal, are still visible and well preserved behind 170 Taunton Avenue which is located along the Wading River. Remnant parts of the copper works also exist

on the west side of Taunton Avenue on land owned by the Land Preservation Society but were not visited because the area was very overgrown. This appears to be an important industrial site which could either be investigated as part of the Wading River Corridor (see below) or independently. Owner is very interested in site and has old letters and a map. Major threat is that the walls are old and deteriorated.

Wading River Corridor. The Wading River originates in Mansfield and winds its way through the western portion of Norton before flowing into the Three Mile River. It has a long history of industrial use and many remnant industrial structures, including canals, foundations and millponds. Chartley Pond, Barrowsville Pond and Skinner Pond are the most visible sites. The issues are three-fold: to gain a better understanding of the nature and extent of the cultural resources along the river (which are likely to be numerous); to protect water quality and wildlife habitat; and to enhance visibility and appreciation of the river. The town would like to look at the river corridor as a whole.

Chartley Mill and Pond. This highly visible area, located along West Main Street (Route 123), includes the Chartley Mill, dam, canals and the millpond on the south side of the road. On the north side there is a tile silo associated with the mill at the entrance to the Salmonese Elementary School. The Chartley Iron Works was established here 1699 by Thomas and James Leonard. The current mill building, which dates to the 19<sup>th</sup> century (verify date), is presently rented to various tenants. Mill and pond could be considered as an NR district. A larger district might be difficult, as there are modern intrusions. The situation is stable as long as the mill continues in present use. The town owns and manages the pond, which extends into Attleboro. The pond flows into the Wading River, although it is not directly part of the river.

Rumford River Wet Meadow and Upland. The Rumford River wet meadow and upland lie east of the Rumford River along Route 123, a major route into town. The 16-acre meadow area on the north side of the road, although overgrown at present, is a highly visible remnant of the former rural character of the town in a rapidly urbanizing area. The former millpond on the south side of the road, feed store, farmhouses, and train station also contribute to the rural character of this area. The meadow area is owned by a realty company and is very vulnerable to development. The Land Preservation Society also owns some land in this area. The town of Mansfield owns the railroad right of way and station. There has been discussion about alternate uses, including a rails-to-trails project, but agreement has not been reached between the two towns.

Cemetery of First Settlers. This site is located on Old Bay Road, one of the oldest roads in the Commonwealth. The entire length of Bay Road in Norton is listed on the National Register (NRDIS 11/8/1974). There are two adjacent cemeteries at the corner of Bay Road and Toad Island Road. The Cemetery of the First Settlers, which lies to the north of Toad Island Road, is a small (7,806 square feet) colonial era burying ground with approximately 30 burial markers, primarily slate, arranged in irregular rows, and one mound tomb. There are remnants of a low fieldstone wall along Bay Road, scattered trees and grass. The burying ground appears to be in stable condition but lies in a residential neighborhood and is unenclosed. A larger (1.36 acre) 19<sup>th</sup> century cemetery (name unknown, no sign) lies south of Toad Island Road. It is enclosed on all sides by a fieldstone wall, which is heavily mortared along Bay Road. There are approximately 200 gravestones displaying a wide range of 19<sup>th</sup> century styles and motifs, as well as some 20<sup>th</sup> century gravestones. They are arranged in formal rows, with all gravestones facing west towards Winnecunnit Pond. There are scattered trees, a few ornamental plantings and remnants of a perimeter road. The Lincoln Cemetery (not visited) is located a short distance to the southeast on private property. It appears to be about 4,000 square feet. There are approximately a dozen

burial grounds and cemeteries in Norton, ranging from small family plots to active municipal cemeteries.

Norton Reservoir. Norton Reservoir is a man-made pond (circa 1870) of approximately 520 acres. It was originally the site of a sawmill and a shingle mill. There is an early 20<sup>th</sup> century resort village on the east side and commercial development along the west side, including a large new tournament golf course. The Tweeter Center (Great Woods Center) lies immediately to the northwest in Mansfield. The Reservoir (which does not provide water supply) is a relatively shallow pond managed by the Conservation Commission. Major management issues are the need for more public access, including boat access, and water quality issues, such as invasive species, sedimentation and impacts of adjacent development. Cultural resources (mill sites) are likely to be concentrated at east edge of the pond near the outlet to the Rumford River. There are also reports of submerged stone walls, etc. under the water. A major dredging project is proposed.

Sawmill/Bridge Red Mill Road. This is a small scenic area in northeast section of town on former main road to Easton (extension of Newcomb Street), and the site of early 19<sup>th</sup> century industrial complex with grist mill, saw mill, Newcomb factory and cotton batting mill. Remnant dams remain, millpond largely drained. Land Preservation Society owns much of the land around but some is owned by Daggett-Crandall-Newcomb Nursing Home. There is a serious threat of development if they sell. The area is now gated to prevent dumping. We did not visit because of difficult access and time constraints.

### **Other Resources Discussed**

Other resources discussed at the July 2 meeting included Wheaton College (which is a large presence near the center of town), scenic roads, and private residences. Wheaton declined to be included, other sites were rejected because they were not considered to be among the top ten. Parks were not discussed at all, possibly because they are not considered threatened and possibly because there are few older parks in town. The following sites were included on the town's preliminary list but were not discussed at the follow-up meeting with consultants. They are not in priority order.

- Dwellings along North Worcester Street
- Unitarian Church
- 258 Plain Street
- Hemlock/Cedar Swamp
- Lincoln Woods
- Mass Highway Land
- Meadowbrook Pond
- Cross Street/Eureka
- Rumford River/Pine Street
- Barrows Street Mills
- Hallsmith Sysco
- East North Post Office
- Bay Road – first house in Norton (W. Witherell)
- Bay Road
- Sawmill Curve/495 & 123
- Sawmill/Taunton Ave – Woodward Street

*The Master List of Projects of the Olmsted Firm in Massachusetts* does not indicate any Olmsted firm projects in Norton.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

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

The following sites are recommended for intensive study:

- Town Common Area
- Crane Farm
- Archeological Feature on Jasperson Property
- Old Taunton Copper Works
- Wading River Corridor

This recommendation is based on site visits and discussion with Norton representatives of the Historical Society, the Land Preservation Society and the Conservation Agent.

### **2. Preservation Restriction for Archaeological Resource**

Once the Jasperson property's archaeological resource has been identified, the property owner may consider applying a preservation restriction on this part of the parcel. Such a restriction would be recorded with the property deed and would protect this small area from destruction in perpetuity. Using M.G.L. Chapter 184, the archaeology would be described and a restriction of the use of that area would be either purchased by or donated to an entity such as the Norton Historical Society or the Land Preservation Society. This restriction would run with the deed of the property and subsequent owners would be subject to observing the terms. Any of the above mentioned organizations or the Historical Commission should encourage and assist the owner with this protection mechanism. Guidance on the process may be obtained from the MHC.

8/31/01