



Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation

Heritage Landscape Inventory Program

Stoughton

Reconnaissance Report

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

PLANNING ISSUES

Need. Stoughton is unique amongst the pilot communities for the Heritage Landscape Project for having three distinct types of land uses – an urban core, a suburban surrounding neighborhood, and an agricultural edge. Stoughton’s rate of growth and consumption of open space is significant when viewing the figures since 1985. Over 1000 acres of open space have been built upon and only 65 acres have become protected conservation land. This is in juxtaposition of the success of some foresighted individuals who were able to secure nearly 1000 acres of conservation land in the 1960s-70s. The pending connection to the MWRA system will significantly increase the threats of rapid development with easier access to marginal land. The location between Rt. 128 and Rt. 495 and just west of Rt. 24 as well as being the site of a commuter rail stop makes the Town accessible and ripe for additional residential growth. With the exception of a part-time Conservation Agent the Town relies on volunteer services to identify resources and recommend land use policy. Much has been assumed by one resident who wears many hats.

Resources and Documentation. Stoughton’s Open Space & Recreation Plan was approved in May 1999. The Community Master Plan was written in 1984, however information about undeveloped property was updated in the 1999 Open Space Plan. The historic resource inventory includes documentation of only 96 resources of which six are small discreet areas having resources that also are documented individually or that are a specific type of resource such as the Dry Pond area including the pond and surrounding landscape. Key volunteer groups that are in place include the Open Space Committee, Urban Forestry Committee and the 275th Anniversary Celebration Committee which is focusing on “old Stoughton”. Most of the survey work was completed in 1987-88. The MHC Stoughton Reconnaissance Survey Report of 1979, a small library publication titled Stoughton Houses – One Hundred Years 1726-1826, and the two National Register nominations for the Lucius Clapp Memorial Library (1992) and the Stoughton Railroad Station (1974) establish the historic context for Marion’s resources.

Planning Issues. Planning issues and protection of Stoughton’s community character presently are focused on protection of surrounding areas to the Bird Street Conservation Area and to Ames Pond including a red oak forest, part of which already has been clear cut. Other planning is focused on developing a more significant commercial base in the downtown urban core.

SITE VISIT REPORT – JULY 24, 2001

The meeting was attended by the Local Project Coordinator, members of the Historical Commission and Historical Society and the town Moderator as well as PAL team members. The purpose was to review the list of potential heritage landscapes compiled by the town and to conduct a windshield survey. At several previous meetings to identify heritage landscapes in Stoughton, a preliminary list of 25 sites had been compiled, which was later narrowed down to 10 sites.

Glen Echo Pond. The area at the northern edge of Stoughton occupied by Glen Echo Pond was initially part of the Ponkapoag Plantation. The pond was built in 1895 and the area was developed as a trolley park/recreation area (with inn, restaurant, merry-go-round, dance hall etc.) by a local department store. It was a favorite place for family outings during the early 20th century and played a prominent role in the life of the community. Recreation facilities are no longer extant and the area has largely been forgotten by many people because it is no longer accessible to the public. The site is also important for aquifer protection. The town has made attempts to purchase this site in the past.

Ames Pond. Ames Pond, located in the southern section of town, was initially constructed to provide waterpower to the Ames shovel shop in Easton. The town owns the water rights but abutters own land rights. This site is very visible in town and is used as the town's recreation area. This area is also critical because it is adjacent to the town's aquifer. Nearby development may impact water quality. Also, because the pond is relatively shallow, pond weeds are an increasing problem. The town has recently received a \$10,000 grant to study the weed problem. The extent of cultural resources is unknown.

Evergreen Cemetery. Evergreen Cemetery, established circa 1858, is a good example of a mid-19th century rural cemetery. It has rolling topography, winding roads, a pond, curbed lots, and diverse monumentation dating from the mid-1800s to the present. The cemetery, which is privately owned, is still active, with newer graves concentrated in a separate area. One of the most distinctive monuments is that the Marcus Porter whose death during the Civil War is commemorated by a stone facsimile of a tent. Other monuments are the work of noted stone cutter Myron Gilbert. Threats are not imminent but like all cemeteries, preservation of fragile resources remains a concern.

Cocoran Shoe Factory. This early 20th century industrial complex near the railroad station is a remnant of the early history of the town. The oldest building is a circa 1932 mill building, with several newer additions. The Cocoran Shoe Company shut down in the mid-1990s and is now in mixed use including artist's studios, storage, and a church but is under-utilized and thus is considered vulnerable to alteration or demolition. It may also be in the area potentially impacted by proposed railroad alterations.

Libby Farm. The Libby Farm (also known as the Lucius Clark farm and later occupied by inventory Carl Libby) is one of the few remaining large agricultural properties in town although it is not actively farmed. It includes a house (19th century?), barn (used as inventor's shop), and 70 + acres of farmland and is an unusually scenic property. It is next to the Bird conservation land and is considered a key conservation parcel. This property is a high priority for town acquisition, with negotiations ongoing through the Trust for Public Land. The owner is reportedly interested in selling. Issues include the need for understanding of cultural as well as natural resources and the need for prompt action to avert potential development.

Stoughton Railroad Station. The railroad station is a focal feature within the town and is listed on the National Register. Between 1975 and 1988, \$800,000 was raised for restoration and major repairs were completed. The station is owned by the MBTA and occupied by the town but there is no system in place for regular maintenance, so the biggest threat is neglect. This building is included in an ongoing study being conducted in anticipation of potential improvements/alterations to the railroad corridor.

Swan Tavern. This former tavern, located at the intersection of Turnpike Street and Central Street, was built between 1807-1811 as a tollhouse. In the intervening years it has seen many uses, including restaurant and inn, and is presently used as a private school. It is a small but scenic area located in a highly visible area that is rapidly changing.

Indian Oven. This glacial erratic located at the end of Old Maple Street is a natural feature that has strong cultural associations. While it is only a few feet off the road it is largely invisible during summer months because the area is overgrown. Its cultural significance derives from its association with Native American history when it was reportedly used to send smoke signals because it functions as a natural chimney. The property is owned by the Rottenberg Center, an educational facility to the northeast. The biggest threat is lack of awareness. Many people in town do not know of the site and even fewer have visited it, even though it is readily accessible.

Poor Farm Burial Ground. The town Poor Farm opened in 1825 and closed in 1941. It is now a private residence. The small burying ground (22' x 45') associated with the Poor Farm contains three burial markers. The Historical Society is doing research on who else might be buried here. This small area needs recognition and minor maintenance, much of which could be accomplished by volunteers.

Pearl Street Cemetery. Pearl Street Cemetery, which is owned by the town, was established in 1737, and was active through the 19th century. There are reportedly 700 stones. Among those buried here are many of the town's early residents, including 52 Revolutionary War soldiers. The Historical Society is in the process of researching and inventorying the stones. The biggest threats are the condition of the stones and development immediately adjacent to the cemetery.

Dry Pond Cemetery. Dry Pond Cemetery, located at the corner of Plain Street and Bay Road, is privately owned by the Dry Pond Cemetery Association. It is the second oldest cemetery in town and is still active. There are 14 Revolutionary War veterans buried here. The cemetery, which is in two sections (old and new), is enclosed by a granite block wall. Grave stones range from early slates to elaborate 19th century monuments. Some of the older monuments are by noted carver Myron Gilbert.

Other Resources Discussed

The following properties were also included in the town's early discussions about potential heritage landscapes but were not initially considered among the top ten candidates.

Capen Reynolds Farm. Includes one of the few remaining barns in town.

Bay Road. Old Indian road, scenic.

Belcher District/House. Victorian house with tea room. Potential historic district?

McNamara Farm. One of the last operating farms in Stoughton, recently purchased by town.

Ponkapoag Reservation. Southeast corner of reservation (22 acres) is in Stoughton and is marked by a granite monument (off end of Ruth Road).

Stoughton Water Works. 1892 building on small site, threatened by changed use.

Elisha Capen Jr. House. Also called Old Meeting House. Residential property across from Swan Tavern.

West School House (Kimball School). Owned by Community Development Corporation.

Stoughton Town Hall. Primarily building rather than landscape.

Gilbert's Quarry. Conservation land, part of Bird property, provided stones for railroad station.

Bud Street Convention. This site is considered protected.

Faxon Park. Some historical work has been done, owned by town, is considered protected.

Hansen's Woodland. 61A property, 10+ acres of woodland at high point in town, potential open space but also vulnerable to development.

Page Street. Designated scenic way.

C.W. Walsh Preserve. Private, managed by trust, will revert to Bird Conservation Land, considered protected

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

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Preliminary List of Sites Recommended For Further Study

The following sites are recommended for intensive study:

- Glen Echo Pond
- Bay Road – if there is sufficient integrity to warrant survey
- Pearl Street and Dry Pond Cemeterys
- Libby Farm
- Capen Reynolds Farm

This recommendation is based on site visits and discussion with Stoughton's Planning Administrator.

2. National Register Nominations

Eligibility opinion requests were considered by MHC staff for the Stoughton Water Works and the Capen-Reynolds Farm, both of which appear eligible and require additional information. Thus survey work and development of the National Register Nomination application are recommended for these two important and unique resources.

3. Cemetery Documentation and Maintenance

Each has its own level of repair and maintenance needs. An overall plan of burial ground preservation would help to guide the future of these rich sites. Guidance in how to care for those properties may be obtained by joining with neighboring communities facing similar issues to engage a burial ground consultant to conduct a training workshop on preservation of burial grounds. The DEM Historic Cemeteries Initiative book also contains useful information.

10/14/01