



Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation

Heritage Landscape Inventory Program

Dighton

Reconnaissance Report

Prepared for
The Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation
by
Public Archaeology Lab, Inc.
December 2001

MASSACHUSETTS HERITAGE LANDSCAPE INVENTORY DIGHTON RECONNAISSANCE REPORT 2001

PLANNING ISSUES

Need. Dighton has no Town Planner or Conservation Agent, hence land use proposals are handled by volunteers. Growing development pressures come from Dighton's proximity to Providence in particular and also Fall River and Taunton. Presently the Planning Board has seven subdivision applications before the Board which is only the beginning of the potential threat to the 10,000 acres plus of undeveloped land.

Resources and Documentation. The Town's only professional staff to the Planning Board and Conservation Commission is a consultant who works ten hours a week for the Planning Board Sub-Committee, which is updating the Open Space and Recreation Plan. Discussions of a "master community plan" are underway. Historic resource documentation includes 252 survey forms completed in the 1980s. Of those 252 forms there are 44 burial ground forms. Two National Register districts are located at the Taunton River: Corman Shipyard Historic District and the Dighton Wharves Historic District. One DOE has been made for a small Bridge Village Historic District at the Berkley/Dighton Bridge. One MHC staff Eligibility Opinion requesting additional information is included in the files for North Dighton Village. The MHC Dighton Reconnaissance Survey Report of 1981 establishes the basis for the local historic context

Planning Issues. Planning issues and protection of community character in Dighton presently are the focus of the Planning Board, which is working on the development of planning guidelines. This initiative has been prompted by the rapid increase in development as witnessed by the seven subdivision applications.

Land use patterns in Dighton are interesting to note. The town is divided into squares by the road system with three main north-south routes, four or five east-west routes, and almost no other roads carving up the landscape. The Taunton River acts as a buffer on the east side and is traversed only by a one-lane bridge which has protected the community from major traffic patterns through the community.

Planning and land use issues fall into three categories: river corridor, agricultural landscapes west of the river (particularly along Elm and Smith Streets, both inland north-south routes), and the industrial landscape in North Dighton.

Agricultural landscapes which are a dominant part of the community character are for the most part no longer working farms although there is at least one dairy farm that encompasses many acres of land and the Bristol County Agricultural School which maintains a working farm. The viability of these farms and the protection of much of the landscape of former farms is a significant issue for the protection of the community's character. Land use planning as well as financial programs are high on the list of preservation technology for this type of resource.

Properties along the Taunton River such as a large boat yard, and the Three Mile River such as the under-used Harodite Finishing Company (in Taunton) and the reused Mt. Hope Finishing Company, are important resources for which there is interest in encouraging preservation of the sites and the industries.

The Watershed team leader is in the process of trying to form a Lower Taunton River Corridor, from Fall River up to the Forge River, a distance of approximately 20 miles.

SITE VISIT REPORT - July 25, 2001

The site visit, which was attended by the Local Project Coordinator and a member of the Ad Hoc Open Space Committee as well as PAL team members, involved review of the list of potential heritage landscapes compiled by the town and a windshield survey. Members of the open space committee had previously identified eight potential heritage landscapes in Dighton, which were distributed over the town's three major areas: the Taunton River; Elm Street/Old Path; and North Dighton. Each of these large areas had one or more landscapes within it. Several additional landscapes were also discussed.

LOWER TAUNTON RIVER

Lower Taunton River The Taunton River forms the eastern boundary of Dighton and is central to the town's identity. The river corridor as a whole could be considered the town's most significant landscape and many of the resources identified as potential heritage landscapes lie within this area.

Berkley-Dighton Bridge This one lane bridge serves as a major access point to Dighton from Route 24, which lies to the east. It is both an artifact of historical merit and a character-defining feature of the town. It also serves as defacto growth control in that it makes the town relatively inaccessible and forces truck traffic to find an alternate route into town.

Dighton's Waterfront/Broad Cove The Dighton Wharves Historic District (NRDIS 7/17/97) is a compact residential area in South Dighton that encompasses 2298–2328 Pleasant Street, including the house of Captain Thomas Coram. The nearby Coram Shipyard Historic District (NRDIS 1/05/98) also includes three properties along Water Street.

Broad Cove Broad Cove is a natural cove on the Dighton/Somerset border adjacent to the Dighton waterfront. It is a highly visible and ecologically valuable area that may have archeological resources associated with either Native American use or with its more recent history as part of Dighton Rock Park, an early 20th century trolley park. It is also a popular local fishing area and functions as a town gathering place. Dighton Rock Dairy Farm extends across the northern edge of the cove. There is an adjacent railroad right-of-way and a rails-to-trail project has been proposed.

ELM STREET/OLD BRISTOL PATH

Dighton Rock Dairy Farm This former dairy farm includes house, barn, and 150 acres of varied landscape in a narrow strip running east/west from Pleasant Street to Hunters Hill. It also includes the second highest point in Dighton and spectacular views of Broad Cove and the Taunton River. The present owner is interested in exploring preservation options.

Richmond Hill Richmond Hill, located along Elm Street (also known as Old Bristol Path), is the highest point in Dighton, characterized by huge outcroppings of conglomerate rock known as puddingstone. It is named for Colonel Sylvester Richmond who lived here in the 1700s and has been farmed since then. It is in private ownership and a subdivision is proposed.

Council Oak Field This area was traditionally a meeting ground for surrounding sub-tribes of the Wampanoag tribe and was the site where European settlers purchased the land that became Dighton from King Phillip in 1663. The huge oak on the site, which is estimated to be 500 years old, was struck by lightning and is now dying. Adjacent cornfields were used by Native Americans and later by white

settlers. With the loss of the oak, this ethnographic landscape is important primarily for its strong associative value. The site is landlocked and privately owned. There is a development proposed nearby.

NORTH DIGHTON INDUSTRIAL LANDSCAPE

Mount Hope Finishing Company The Mount Hope Finishing Company was established by Joseph Milliken in 1901 and remained active until 1951 when a strike forced the company to relocate to North Carolina. The area is a well-preserved early 20th century industrial village with mill buildings, housing, and parks that appear to have been planned as a unit and retain a high level of integrity.

Harodite Finishing Company Dam At a wide part of the river with dam and falls is the Harodite Finishing Company, located across the river in Taunton. Part of the dam and falls is in Dighton and the relationship of the two finishing companies (Harodite and Mount Hope) is visual as well as historical.

OTHER RESOURCES DISCUSSED

Additional resources were not discussed in detail, but the following were mentioned:

Briggs Residence (ca. 1776)- Former house of “Stout” George Briggs across from Town Hall, neglected residential property with stone walls that are being dismantled;

Historical Society Building - visible, somewhat protected by nature of ownership;

Former Town Poor Farms - now private residences;

Reed’s Farm – Active farm with farmstand, not on list of ten because it is in APR and not considered threatened;

Broderick Dairy Farm – 200+ acres of very visible land. One of the few remaining active farms in town;

Horton Street -Williams Street Area - This area feels like a scenic town center with cemetery, church, and pond;

Cemeteries – There are over 40 cemeteries in town. Some are land locked and not well documented so they might be impacted by development. Boy Scouts have done some clean up and inventory.

Stone Walls – Drylaid stonewalls throughout the town were identified as a category of threatened resource, as many are being sold and removed from the Dighton area.

There is no town common in Dighton although the waterfront near Broad Cove functions as a center of the community. The *Master List of Projects of the Olmsted Firm in Massachusetts* does not indicate any Olmsted firm projects in Dighton.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Preliminary List of Sites Recommended For Further Study

The following sites are recommended for intensive study:

- Lower Taunton River:
 - Dighton Waterfront/Broad Cove (expanded waterfront area that includes the two historic districts and Broad Cove)
 - Berkley-Dighton Bridge
- Dighton Rock Dairy Farm
- Council Oak Field

This recommendation is based on site visits and discussion with Dighton's consultant to the Planning Board and a member of the Ad Hoc Open Space Committee.

2. Survey and National Register for North Dighton

Two mills on the Taunton River, the Harodite Finishing Company in Taunton and the Mt. Hope Finishing Company (rehabilitated for office use) frame the North Dighton neighborhood that includes early twentieth century housing for all levels of the factory workers. The street layout with triangular grass pieces at the intersections is important as are the arrangements of housing and the factories. Much of the area has been documented and once there was a request for NR eligibility. The contained neighborhood would be an excellent topic for further research.

An important National Register nomination to pursue is that of the one-lane bridge between Berkley and Dighton. This resource is an important feature visually and functionally and all efforts to preserve it should be taken with some immediacy. Listing on the National Register will require architectural review in accordance with Section 106 for a federal undertaking and MGL Chapter 254 for a state undertaking. Furthermore National Register status (which brings automatic listing on the State Register of Historic Places) may put the bridge in line for funding mechanisms that could lead to its preservation. Further survey work of the immediate region including the Bridgewater Agricultural School on the Dighton side of the bridge may lead to a conclusion that a district nomination is more appropriate.

3. Cemetery Documentation and Maintenance

There are over 40 small burial grounds scattered throughout Dighton. 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.

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1981 *Town Reconnaissance Survey Report: Dighton*. On file, Massachusetts Historical Commission, Boston, MA.

Walker, George H.

1831 *A Plan of Dighton*.

Webber, Margo, with Betsy Friedberg

1997 *National Register of Historic Places Inventory - Nomination Form, Coram Shipyard Historic District, Dighton, MA*.

1997 *National Register of Historic Places Inventory - Nomination Form, Dighton Wharves Historic District, Dighton, MA*.

Attachments

Table: Heritage Landscape Inventory Reconnaissance Survey – Dighton

Map: Landscapes Identified by Community - Dighton

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10/12/01; revised 12/20/01