



Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation

Heritage Landscape Inventory Program

Bridgewater

Reconnaissance Report

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

PLANNING ISSUES

Need. Bridgewater's application to the Heritage Landscape Inventory Program states that while most surrounding communities are seeing unprecedented growth in residential development which consumes farm land, Bridgewater also is experiencing institutional and commercial growth. Home to two large State institutions, Bridgewater State College with an enrollment of 10,000 students and the MCI of Bridgewater, the community's commercial development has tried to stay abreast of the additions at the institutions. The largest increase in residential development is the new senior (55 years and up) community of 350 units. Traffic volumes are up particularly during the school year when a large percentage of the 10,000 college students are commuting to classes. Public services including schools, as well as water, waste water disposal and safety also are stretched.

Resources and Documentation. The recently established Community Development Office (1997) is coordinating long range planning for the community. Several parcels of open space have been acquired with Self-Help Grants (DEM) the applications for which were prepared by the CDO. The recent acquisition of the Stanley Iron Works will lead to preservation of an important and large archaeological and industrial site. MPPF grant also was received for the ca. 1882 Memorial Building restoration. The Town is in the process of developing a master plan and updating the open space plan. Historic resources are featured in both documents. Historic resource documentation includes 364 survey forms most written in 1984. A large Bridgewater Center Local Historic District recognizes and protects 96 resources at the center of town. There are no listings on the National Register of Historic Places, only a Determination of Eligibility for the Double P Site.

Planning Issues. While the Town is awaiting publication of the Master Plan and the updated Open Space Plan it also has sought to address traffic issues with a town-wide traffic study by VHB. Privately held farms were not addressed in the heritage landscape list in part because of the private ownership issue and the lack of communication at this time with owners; however the town has some concerns about the future of some small farms particularly those close to town that may be appropriate for clustered development of senior housing. Other planning issues are related to leases of State-owned land to local farmers for which the town hopes that there will be conservation restrictions when no longer used for farming.

SITE VISIT REPORT – SEPTEMBER 19, 2001

The site visit was attended by the Local Project Coordinator and the Building Inspector, 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. The list of seven sites was compiled by the Local Project Coordinator in collaboration with the Selectmen, the Historical Commission and the Natural Resources Trust of Bridgewater. Unlike many communities, Bridgewater chose to focus primarily on town-owned land rather than private property. Sites are listed more or less in priority order.

Stanley Ironworks. The town's highest priority is the site of the former Stanley Ironworks located off High Street along the Town River. Iron making began on this site in 1707 and continued in various forms until 1988, ending nearly 300 years of iron and steel production. In 1996 the town acquired the property and developed a portion of it as a DPW yard. The island portion of the property remains overgrown and undeveloped with many archeological remains on it. The town hopes to turn this area into an archeological park. A National Register Nomination has been submitted to the Massachusetts Historical Commission. The one remaining foundry building (ca.1820) is in imminent danger of roof failure. The town's highest priority is to remove the current roof and stabilize the stone walls. Efforts are also underway to clear vegetation on the island and to develop a funding strategy for the park.

Stiles and Hart Conservation Land. This area along Broad Street (Route 18) was the site of the former Bridgewater Agricultural Society Fairgrounds (ca 1840s – 1881). It was used for clay extraction during the early 20th century. The topography of the former flood plain was altered by the extensive excavations, leaving an irregular surface with three small ponds. The approximately 70-acre site along the Town River downstream from the Stanley Ironworks was acquired by the town as conservation land in the late 1990s. The town is currently making plans to provide access and to develop the area for passive recreation.

VFW Building. The rectangular one-story brick building on Pleasant Street at Swift Avenue used today by the VFW was constructed in the early 20th century as a power generating station. It has revival details with the high ashlar water table, paired six-over-six windows topped by splayed brick lintels, a dentil line at the cornice and copper roof. It is not ideal for public use, as the main floor is 6' above grade, making universal access difficult. The site is also less than an acre in size with limited space for parking. However this property is strategically located between a school and an inactive farm and within walking distance of the downtown area. While reuse of this building presents many challenges, it might play a part in larger plans for the area.

Prattown School. This former one-room school is located in a residential neighborhood a short distance off Plymouth Street in the eastern section of town. The 1855 Greek Revival building rests on a roughly one-acre site with the grassy front lawn used for parking. There is also a small playground onsite although it does not appear to be heavily used. The building retains its original five-bay gable front façade. The enclosed centered entrance porch and tin roof of a type found throughout Bridgewater appear to be ca. 1930s additions. A kitchen and restrooms have been added on the south side so the building can be used by community groups. It does not meet ADA standards but could easily be adapted. The building's custodian is reportedly knowledgeable about the history of the building.

Flagg Street School. The Flagg Street School, located at the corner of Flagg Street and Summer Street, is similar in construction to the Prattown School. The Greek Revival gable front schoolhouse rests on a stone foundation and has wood clapboard siding. It also has a tin roof similar to the Prattown School and other dwellings in town. The former schoolhouse presently is used by the Bridgewater Soccer Association. It is located on a small lot at a busy crossroads, giving a very different feel to the site.

Sturtevant Pond. The town recently received a donation of Sturtevant Pond, located on South Street at the southern edge of town. The property consists of roughly 3 acres of land and a 3-4 acre pond. The area was develop as a mill site early in the 18th century and operated as a business until the 1920s. It was later used as a YMCA youth camp through the 1940s. It is a small visible site with good access located close to the road. The town hopes to add a small parking area and to improve the site for passive use.

Camp Titicut. Camp Titicut, located along the Taunton River in the southern edge of town, also has a long history. In the early 1800s it was the site of a shipyard and then fell into agricultural use from roughly the 1820s to the 1930s when it was developed as a girls' camp. The camp closed in the 1950s and the town purchased the property in the 1960s. Some archeological investigations done in the 1950s revealed Indian graves and campsites (report is in Bridgewater Public Library). All buildings, including several small cabins, a mess hall , and a camp counsellors' building were removed in the 1960s and 1970s. The present site is roughly 17 – 20 acres with frontage along the Taunton River. There are dirt tracks leading into the site which has no facilities. The property is used occasionally by canoers and for camping by special permit, but generally remains gated because it is remote and difficult to supervise.

Other Resources Discussed.

While Bridgewater's list of potential heritage landscape sites focused on town-owned properties in need of improvements, the town also has a well-preserved common and numerous cemeteries, many of which are owned by the town. Carver Pond is another prominent town-owned property that was not included because its issues are being addressed through other means. Major state institutions in town include Bridgewater State College, Massachusetts Correctional Institution at Bridgewater, and the Hockomock Swamp Wildlife Management Area, which collectively occupy a large portion of the town. There are also a number of farms in town, some of which remain in agricultural use while others are no longer actively farmed.

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

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Preliminary List of Sites Recommended For Further Study

The following sites are recommended for intensive study:

- Stanley Ironworks – technical assistance rather than survey?
- Stiles and Hart Conservation Land
- Prattown School and Flagg Street School – look at together
- Sturtevant Pond
- Camp Titicut

This recommendation is based on site visits and discussion with Bridgewater's Director of Planning, Chairman of the Historical Commission who also is the Building Inspector and Director of Public Works.

2. Grants to assist with Stanley Ironworks

The Town has a vision for the future use of the Stanley Ironworks as a park with scenic settings and informative signage. The assistance of DEM's Historic Landscape Preservation Grant program to develop a Master Plan will launch the preservation of this important resource. If this grant is received and a phased development plan is achieved the Town should consider alternating applications to the DEM program with applications to the Massachusetts Preservation Projects Fund (MPPF) administered by the MHC.

10/7/01