



Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation

Heritage Landscape Inventory Program

Rehoboth Reconnaissance Report

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

MASSACHUSETTS HERITAGE LANDSCAPE INVENTORY REHOBOTH RECONNAISSANCE REPORT

PLANNING ISSUES

Need. The proximity to Providence and Fall River means that Rehoboth is experiencing acute residential development pressures. Rt. 195 cuts through the bottom corner of the Town while Rt. 44 is an east-west route through the near geographic center of Rehoboth. Although the forested land area accounts for 60% of the total acreage, the residential development land area has doubled in the last thirty years, leading to a reduction in forested and agricultural land. The reduction in use of agricultural fields also results in additional vulnerability to loss of those open spaces to development.

Resources and Documentation. Rehoboth's Master Plan was completed and endorsed by the Planning Board in 2000. It was developed through its Master Plan Steering Committee and seven sub-committees. While there is scant information about historic resources, emphasis is given to open space, agricultural land and forests in an Open Space and Recreation section of the Plan. Historic resource documentation for 208 properties was prepared in the early 1980s. Although this was an extensive inventory at the time, there was less emphasis on landscapes. Rehoboth has also compiled a booklet on historic sites in town and installed historical markers at numerous sites. In 1983 the Town prepared a Multiple Resource Area nomination to the National Register of Historic Places. One district, Rehoboth Village, and thirty-four individual properties were listed at that time as part of the MRA. Since then the Carpenter House and Farm (part in Seekonk) was listed individually in 1993.

Planning Issues. Many of the points in the Goals Statement of the Master Plan are related to preservation of existing landscape character. Included in the Master Plan is a Land Use Guide Plan, the implementation of which now is a focus for the Planning Board.

SITE VISIT REPORT – August 1, 2001

The meeting was attended by the Local Project Coordinator and DEM Watershed Coordinator 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 Local Project Coordinator, in consultation with the Historical Commission and others, had previously submitted a preliminary list of 10 sites.

Redway Plain. This area was part of the Redway farm in Colonial times and was used as a training ground during the Revolutionary War. It has been farmed for over 300 years. Today it is a very visible open field near the corner of Route 44 and Bay State Road that is valued by the community for its historical associations and as open space. It was purchased by the town in 1993 and is managed by the Park Department, which leases it to a farmer. There have been numerous attempts to convert it to other uses. It is a significant and visible feature within the community and was not documented in the 1983 survey.

Village Cemetery. This large and visible cemetery near the village center spans three centuries. It is administered by the town's Cemetery Commission. There are 54 other burial grounds in town, including Burial Place Hill, which is renowned for having the longest known epitaph.

Palmer River Farm Complex. This large area in the southwest corner of town contains several working farms, the Palmer River, and Shad Factory Pond. I-195 lies immediately to the south and there is already industrial development moving into the area.

Bad Luck Pond/Anawan Club. This area was first dammed about 1730 and in the 19th century became the site of several mills. The dam gave way in 1859 (hence the name) causing serious flooding downstream. The present dam was built in the early 20th century by the Bristol County (RI) Water Authority to supply drinking water to portions of Rhode Island. Much of the land around the pond is owned by the Anawan Club, a private social club. The pond is visible along Reservoir Ave but there is no formal public access. It is the largest body of open water in town and is used for fishing and canoeing.

Stevens Corner. This area in the north section of town includes remnants of a village center, a farm stand and a very visible farm field. It is close to Attleboro and Taunton, both of which are considerably more urban. There is already modern infill, which is causing the area to lose its sense of identity.

Rehoboth Village. Rehoboth Village is a cohesive and well-preserved village center that is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. While there are no immediate threats, there are constant pressures for incremental change, particularly with regard to roadway improvements. The dam and millpond at the center of town need funds for capital improvements. Buildings have been well-documented but there are no formal protection mechanisms.

Perryville Dam. This restored dam and raceway is the site of several mills operating from the 17th century to the late 19th. It is a visible and scenic area that is owned and maintained by the town. A dam safety evaluation has recently been conducted.

Hornbine Baptist Church and School. Hornbine Baptist Church is one of the oldest congregations and buildings in Rehoboth. The congregation has now dwindled to a few families, so the long-term future of the church is uncertain. The school was built in 1845-46 as one of Rehoboth's 15 one-room schools. It is owned by the Hornbine School Association and operated as a museum. Both buildings are listed on the National Register.

Bliss Dairy Farm. This large farm in the northern section of town includes over 100 acres of visible farmland as well as several older houses.

Squannacook Swamp. This large wetland (over 500 acres) includes one of the few remaining significant stands of Atlantic White Cedar in southeastern Massachusetts and is habitat for several endangered species. Stone walls in the area indicate that it was farmed at one time. The Nature Conservancy has expressed interest in the site and it has been evaluated by the Massachusetts Natural Heritage Program.

Other Resources Discussed

The town did not prepare an expanded list of sites but the *Guide to Historic Sites in Rehoboth, Mass.* prepared by the town in 1995 includes 23 historic sites, many of which include landscapes.

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

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Preliminary List of Sites Recommended For Further Study

The following sites are recommended for intensive study:

- Redway Plain
- Village Cemetery
- Palmer River Farm Complex
- Bad Luck Pond
- Stevens Corner

This recommendation is based on site visits and discussion with Rehoboth's LPC who also is on member of the Park Commission.

2. Cemetery Documentation and Maintenance

The care and maintenance of 55 burial grounds / cemeteries can be a significant management challenge. Perhaps the Town would benefit from a training workshop with surrounding towns on burying ground maintenance. The DEM Historic Cemeteries Initiative book also contains useful information.

3. Village Preservation

The well preserved village center, which is listed on the National Register of Historic Places, may be ready for Local Historic District designation. Grass routes education about the significance of the local resources may lead to interest in this protective mechanism. The Historical Commission can ask for assistance from the MHC in generating support for an LHD.

10/17/01 - SPB
10/20/01 - GGS