



Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation

Heritage Landscape Inventory Program

Wareham

Reconnaissance Report

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by
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MASSACHUSETTS HERITAGE LANDSCAPE INVENTORY WAREHAM RECONNAISSANCE REPORT

PLANNING ISSUES

Need. The primary industry besides tourism (which relies heavily on the rural open aspect of the community) has been the cranberry business which has experienced a substantial decline recently. The result has been unprecedented development plans for the 6,000 acre-Makepeace holdings that are in Wareham and Plymouth. The recent threat of 3,500 new dwelling units and 4 million square feet of commercial space on top of the annual summer population that doubles puts Wareham's open space and natural environment in a highly threatened state. Further, the town's proximity to Rt. 195 and Rt. 495 and its position as the last stop before the Cape Cod bridges increases its vulnerability. Permits for new development have been well over 100 for each of the last two years. The issues are complex and additional information about the heritage landscapes is needed immediately in order to plan for protection under the extreme threat of development. One of the most compelling arguments substantiating Wareham's need is that it has only 3% of its land under permanent protection which is the lowest in Southeast Massachusetts and possibly in the Commonwealth.

Resources and Documentation. Wareham's Open Space and Recreation Plan is dated 1997-2002. It contains a full inventory of unprotected open space that is privately held including all lands that are or were (at the time of writing the plan) temporarily protected by Chapter 61. An action plan that is part of the Open Space plan allocates specific tasks to town entities that are necessary to carry out the goals of the Open Space Plan will be updated in the near future. The historic resource inventory includes documentation of only 41 individual resources and two areas, one of which also has National Register documentation of the nine buildings at the Tremont Nail Factory. Another three areas are documented in Local Historic District study reports, one of which also is a National Register district; the Parker Mills Historic District with four properties. Most of the survey work was completed in the 1980s. Wareham has two properties that are individually listed on the National Register and two districts as noted above. It is important to note that those two districts are small with 9 resources in the Tremont Nail Factory District on Elm Street and 4 in the Parker Mills Historic District. However, there are three MGL Chapter 40C – Local Historic Districts accounting for protection of 26 properties in all. The MHC Wareham Reconnaissance Survey Report of 1981 establishes the basis for the local historic context.

Planning Issues. Planning issues and protection of community character in Wareham are focused on the looming regional destiny of the cranberry bogs and potential new zoning districts to guide development of these parcels that will have an enormous impact on Wareham. The Wareham Planning Board, Conservation Commission, Community Development, and private Wareham Land Trust all are working together to address these deep concerns. The Community Preservation Act will be on an October ballot.

SITE VISIT REPORT – September 26, 2001

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 sites/districts was compiled by the Local Project Coordinator in collaboration with the Historical Commission, Historical Society and Open Space Committee as well as other town officials and other interested citizens.

Agawam River Watershed. The Agawam River enters Wareham at the northeast corner of town then runs southwest to the town center where it empties into Buzzard's Bay. It is a wide river, opening out into numerous ponds along its length and is thought to be one of the largest areas of coastal plain ponds in the State and possibly in the United States. The Agawam Mill Pond, which is part of this system of ponds, is accessible via a State owned boat launch on the west side. Part of the Mill Pond was filled to carry Rt. 25 across. Much of the surrounding watershed is currently undeveloped or used for cranberry bogs. A large-scale 3,600-acre residential development is proposed in Wareham and the adjacent communities that would permanently alter the visual and hydrologic character of the watershed. The area has high potential for archeological resources but no survey has been done.

Wankinquoah River Watershed. The Wankinquoah River and its tributaries run more or less north/south through the center of Wareham, encompassing a number of ponds. The upstream areas include portions of a large and regionally significant Pine Barrens, as well as a number of cranberry bogs. Downstream is Parker Mills Pond. There is a Local Historic District and a National Register District called Parker Mills Historic District with four properties on Cranberry Highway at Mayflower Ridge Drive. Ocean Spray owns much of the land abutting the east side of the Pond. A 2,400-acre bio-reserve has been proposed for this area and there has been some effort in multi-town planning. Large-scale development is proposed here as well.

Weweantic River Watershed. This watershed in the northwest part of town has similar issues to the two described above but is generally more developed. The town's goal is to protect groundwater, to enhance fish and wildlife habitat, and to preserve selected areas for public access. Two key sites along the river, Horseshoe Pond and Tremont Dam, were also identified as separate sites (see below).

Ancient Indian Route. The ancient Indian route through the Weweantic watershed was also listed as a significant cultural resource, which has not been well documented and is threatened by development.

Horseshoe Pond. This U-shaped pond was created for industrial use in the 19th century. The dam and some foundations still remain. The area is a popular place for fishing. A portion of the adjacent land is owned by the Wildlands Trust and the town would like to preserve some public access. Development has already occurred near the pond and more is proposed.

Tremont Dam. Tremont dam, located on the Weweantic River, was built in 1845 to replace a previous dam that provided power to an early ironworks. Tremont Nail Company vacated the site in 1922. The dam was restored in 1976-77 based on the 1919 design and is considered an important part of Wareham's industrial history. There is a municipally owned parcel that is used as a camp on the downstream side of the dam. Preservation of the dam is an ongoing issue for the town, current owner of the dam. There also is a fish ladder at this dam.

Wicket's Island. This 4.61-acre island is located in the middle of Onset Bay near the village of Onset. There is a long history of use dating back to at least 1694 and reports that the island was used as an Indian burial ground. It is currently in private ownership and has a history of problems with vandalism, including a fire that destroyed the house previously located on the island in the 1980s. The out-of-state owners have not rebuilt and the island is again for sale.

Greer Lumber. This industrial complex on Main Street in the Narrows Historic District includes five large wood frame buildings. The Granary portion of the complex was constructed ca 1820-1840 as storage for grain and lumber and was later used as a lumberyard. It currently houses a marine restoration company. An MHC staff eligibility opinion for National Register listing determined this building to be eligible as part of a district. The buildings are in a highly visible location on the Wareham River and enjoy the protection of local historic district designation.

Captain John Kendrick House. This 1/4- acre residential property on Main Street includes a late 18th century gambrel roof Cape and adjacent grounds currently owned by the Wareham Historical Society. It is located in the Narrows Historic District (LHD 06/02/1986) but is not listed on the National Register.

On-I-Set Wigwam. This small wooden tower on Crescent Place in Onset was built in 1894 in the shape of a wigwam to recognize the spirits of the Indians who had previously occupied the land. The Spiritualist Church has held meetings there ever since. The Wigwam is under a preservation restriction established in 1995 but is not listed on the National Register, however there is an MHC staff eligibility opinion from 1994 that is favorable. It is surrounded by small residences that encircle an oval shaped green space. These modest cottages were originally associated with the Spiritualist community and are now private residences.

Fearing Tavern. The Fearing Tavern located on Elm Street is a Georgian style house, the main portion of which was built by tavern keeper Benjamin Fearing in 1765. The property remained in the Fearing family for over 200 years. The 1/2-acre property is currently owned by the Wareham Historical Society. It abuts the Center Park Historic District (LHD 03/19/1971) but is not listed on the National Register.

Tobey Homestead. The Second Empire mid-nineteenth century Tobey Homestead on Main Street was the home of an important benefactor to the town. Some repair work has been done after a major fire but the current owner, Tobey Hospital, has also threatened to demolish the building. The building is listed on the National Register (NRIND 06/05/1986) and is included within the Narrows Historic District (LHD 06/02/1986).

Cranberry Commons. The former Ocean Spray headquarters on Cranberry Highway (Route 6) was built in the 1940s to provide operational facilities and also to serve as advertising outreach for tourists enroute to Cape Cod. The old commuter rail line runs behind the west side of the buildings. It is a heavy timber industrial complex comprised of multiple structures characteristic of the region. It has suffered from neglect since the relocation of Ocean Spray in the late 1970s or early 1980s, however professionals have determined that the buildings are structurally sound. The adjacent marshes provide a scenic setting.

The Master List of Projects of the Olmsted Firm in Massachusetts does not include Olmsted firm projects in Wareham.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Preliminary List of Sites Recommended For Further Study

The following sites are recommended for intensive study:

- Wankinquoah Watershed
- Horseshoe Pond
- Tremont Dam
- Cranberry Commons

This recommendation is based on site visits and discussion with Wareham's Local Project Coordinator, Town Planner, Conservation Administrator and members of the Open Space Committee.

2. Survey and Potential National Register Nomination

The small neighborhood surrounding an oval green at Crescent Place on which the On-I-Set Wigwam is located would benefit from survey documentation and potential consideration for National Register listing. The contained neighborhood would be an excellent topic for a Survey and Planning Grant to complete survey and a National Register Nomination. The MHC may want to consider the area for a directed study project. There is a Preservation Restriction on the Wigwam that was applied in 1995 and appears to be in perpetuity. In 1994 the Wigwam was determined eligible for listing in the National Register by MHC staff.

The Fearing Tavern, owned by the Wareham Historical Society, may be eligible for the National Register individually. It is contiguous to the Tremont Nail Factory District, but probably not part of the same development pattern.

3. Local Historic District Awareness Program

Three of the properties included in the Wareham list of Heritage Landscapes are included in the Narrows Historic District – the Greer Lumber Yard, the Captain John Kenrick House, and the Toby Homestead. In fact these properties are partially protected by the Local Historic District By-Law adopted in Wareham in 1971 in accordance with Chapter 40-C. Perhaps it would be helpful for the Historic District Commission and the Historical Society to partner to prepare an evening program explaining Local Historic Districting to residents and also to organize and guide a walking tour pointing out the key defining features of the district. The MHC Local Government Coordinator can be of assistance in developing such a program.

4. Preserving Scale of the Neighborhood

A key feature of the Crescent Place neighborhood is the size and scale particularly in relation to the oval green and the Wigwam. Most dwellings are small and maintain consistent setbacks from the road. The Wigwam is on the largest lot and is the key feature of the immediate neighborhood. The predominately one and one-half story cottages do not overwhelm this unique historic place maker. The preservation of the scale of the elements in this small neighborhood, critical to the historic preservation of the resources, may be accomplished through zoning or through a design review overlay district, or a neighborhood conservation district that would limit binding review to demolition and the dimensions of additions and new construction.