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REED'S HILL HISTORIC PROPERTIES SURVEY Marblehead, Essex County, Massachusetts

Final Report

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Abstract

The project conducted an intensive-level survey of historic resources within the Reed's Hill neighborhood in the Town of Marblehead. This project was a high priority in the Town's Historic Resource Survey Master Plan (2014) as the neighborhood is recognized as historically significant and increasingly vulnerable to redevelopment. The goal of the survey is to promote the preservation of these resources by raising public awareness of their significance through detailed and cogent narratives of their individual histories and their role as landmarks in the evolving physical and cultural character of their neighborhoods.

In addition, the local Marblehead Historical Commission (LHC) believes that a higher level of documentation will provide information useful in the evaluation of significance for preservation planning and the town's review of permit applications involving historic properties. The LHC has no direct jurisdiction in project review but hopes survey documentation will lead to informed decisions where significant historic resources are involved. This project recorded architectural, historical and photographic documentation for individual properties and areas on inventory forms provided by the Massachusetts Historical Commission (MHC). Individual properties and historic districts that appear eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places have been identified.

Methodology:

Survey Objectives. The objectives of the survey were to retrieve information relevant to historic properties, their owners and builders, organize it in narratives that are accessible and informative to a variety of users, and provide assessments of significance that contribute to local and state preservation planning.

Assessment of Previous Research. When Marblehead's Historic Resource Survey Master Plan was completed in 2014, very few historic properties outside of the existing historic districts in the town core had been documented, approximately five of which were located in the Reed's Hill neighborhood. A review of local repositories done for the plan revealed little source material pertaining to 19th- and 20th-century development of the town, particularly related to the shoe industry and Marblehead's resort era history. The documentation for the selected properties

essentially started from scratch. Local historians Samuel Roads, Jr. (1880s) and Sidney Perley (1910) published sources that contained information of the area's early land history and figures active in its 19th-century residential development.

Selection Criteria. A preliminary list of properties was compiled for Reed's Hill in the Survey Master Plan. The selections were based on an extant property's representation on atlas of Marblehead published in 1912. In addition, notable buildings erected after that date were identified through visual assessment in windshield surveys. In the initial phase of this survey project, properties were found to be concentrated in two distinct areas: one on Reed's Hill, where planned subdivisions were platted beginning in the 1850s and one on Pleasant Street, which had its own distinctive development history predating Reed's Hill and associated with land divisions on Rowland's Hill. A set of 52 individual properties were selected for documentation on 49 MHC Building Forms and another 168 selected as components of 3 MHC Area Forms on Reed's Hill.

Procedure. The survey followed the standard methodology set forth in the "Historic Properties Survey Manual" issued and updated by the Massachusetts Historical Commission. The process includes field inspection with on-site notational and photographic recording, archival research, association with architectural and historical contexts, and assessment of significance. Research focused on property owners identified in deeds using historic atlases, city directories, the census, vital records and genealogical sources searchable on Ancestry.com. Local archives and historical sources also were reviewed either in physical repositories or on the Internet. Biographical information on architects and builders were examined where possible using architectural records, newspaper accounts, obituaries and genealogical sources and indexes. The project was planned based on the town's Survey Master Plan (2014) and organized in four phases, the standard scope of work for MHC survey projects.

Products. The products are MHC Building and Area Forms with detailed property and building histories. The 217 properties inventoried are represented by 49 Building Forms and 3 Area Forms (28 buildings inventoried on B Forms are also components in one of the three A Forms.) Each form is illustrated with current and, when available, historic views of the property. (All digital photographs taken as part of the project will be conveyed to both MHC and LHC.) A table with property data on each individual building and area will be compiled in a spreadsheet format as an index to the survey and a basis for general analysis and mapping (attached). As part of the project scope, the Town Marblehead will produce a base map showing the locations of the surveyed properties using data provided in this table. A final report also will be prepared providing an overview of the project along with its findings and recommendations for future applications, and the consultants will make a public presentation of the project.

Street Index of Inventoried Properties

See attached spreadsheet

National Register Contexts for Evaluation

The properties documented represent a range of historic domestic architecture characterizing the residential development of the Reed's Hill Neighborhood during the last half of the 19th century when Marblehead's shoe industry attracted scores of families to the town from Ireland, Canada and other New England areas. Shoe manufacturers, house builders and other entrepreneurs bought land on the hill, formerly in agricultural, ropemaking and fishing-related uses, created subdivisions and erected "cottage dwellings" for the newcomers. Particularly notable here are Joseph R. Bassett and

William Fabens, who planned their first housing development for shoeworkers on Linden Street, before platting a much larger subdivision in the Shipyard to address the housing shortage, and Thomas, Joseph and Thomas J. Bowden, house builders who developed the core section of the hill.

The neighborhood's origin is linked to the completion of the Marblehead spur of the Eastern Railroad completed in the 1830s, which led to the construction of shoe factories, large and small around the depot and the extension of Pleasant Street from Franklin Street to Washington Street. Of course, this portion of the neighborhood would be destroyed by fire on two separate occasions in 1877 and 1888 and rebuilt both times. The section of Pleasant Street west of Washington Street, which was known as Washington prior to the extension of Pleasant, contains many properties predating the residential development of Reed's Hill in the mid-19th-century, which are associated with the partitioning of common land on Rowland's Hill in the 1700s. This area was known as Newtown as it represented the expansion of the town beyond its traditional borders and into this undeveloped area along the roads leading west to Salem and Lynn, that is Washington and Prospect streets, which skirted Rowland's Hill. Due to its initial ambiguousness, the area comprising Newtown overlaps the Reed's Hill and Shipyard neighborhoods as delineated in the master plan, and it has been surveyed in three separate survey projects: Rowland and Prospect streets in Shipyard Part 1; Washington Street in Shipyard Part 2 and Pleasant Street in Reed's Hill. In each case, portions of Newtown have been found as eligible for the National Register as part of a historic district with indistinct boundaries. In this final phase, a clearer definition of Newtown has emerged, although an Area Form has yet to be created for it.

Over the past century the Reed's Hill neighborhood, as well as Newtown, have experienced losses and alterations to original urban fabric, but overall it has maintained a remarkably high level of historic integrity without the benefit of the preservation controls placed on the old town center. Currently, the neighborhood is in the midst of another wave of renovation as owners of the small-scale historic dwellings are bringing them up to 21st-century living standards. Most of the work has been sympathetic to the neighborhood's historic character, but with ever-increasing real estate values comes concerns for its long-term preservation.

Contexts for evaluation for these properties include the following.

- *Architecture.* Generally, the examples of 18th- and 19th-century domestic architecture have significance as distinctive examples of types, periods and methods of construction in the local context. All of them conform to small urban lots with narrow frontages that were an extension of the urban plan established in the old town, although here platted in a more orderly manner. The earliest buildings are consistent with models prevalent in the older town center; in particular, story-and-a-half and two-story, single-pile center-hall-plan houses with their narrow gable or gambrel ends facing the street. A distinguishing feature of these shallow center-hall plans was the placement of chimneys on the back walls.

In the 1850s a new "cottage dwelling" type was introduced as a more systematic plan of development was implemented by shoe manufacturers and entrepreneurs to create housing for shoe workers. These dwellings were generally a story-and-a-half, single-pile center-hall houses with facades facing the street or to one side. Better dwellings had a full second story. In addition, end houses were an option, an updated version of the 18th-century side-passage house. The neighborhood also contains examples of duplexes (although many of the

conventional single-family types accommodated multiple families) and other uncategorical houses, as well as later 19th-century and 20th-century types added over time.

Any of the few historic outbuildings that survive are significant architectural features of the properties on which they are located and any potential historic districts. In particular, shoe shops—ten-footers, attached wings, large shops and small factories—are rare and important resources and contributing features where they are extant.

The post-fire rebuilding of Pleasant Street introduced advanced commercial buildings into the neighborhood, while also adapting existing houses for commercial and mixed uses. The redevelopment of the railroad yards and the depot site has resulted in commercial and residential buildings of little distinction.

Nearly all the houses surviving from this 19th-century period are recognizable in form and design despite of superficial alterations. Only a few are intact or distinguished enough to be individually eligible for the National Register under the architecture context. However, as a whole, they are authentic and significant enough to contribute to a historic district likely to emerge from this survey. There are a few houses on Pleasant Street built in the last half of the 18th century; most are muddled by alterations but they important architectural relics and neighborhood landmarks.

- *Community Planning & Development.* The Town created lots on the recompense land on Rowland's Hill in 1726 thus beginning the gradual development of Newtown. Soon after Marblehead fishermen began building houses on the hill, along Washington Street and extending out what is now Pleasant Street leading out of town. Even at this early date, there had been some expansion of the old town into the area of the hay scales at the northeasterly end of Rowland Street and the poor house at the other. Reed's Hill was used as pasture land, rope walks and fish flakes. It was on the edge of the Middle Division of common land where the town's farms were concentrated. A tannery, glue factory and brick yard were functioning in the low area between the hills where the railroad would later enter the town.

The arrival of the railroad and the shoe manufacturers transformed the neighborhood. The shoe manufacturers acquired and platted the entire open area on the southerly slope of Reed's Hill to provide housing, some for rent but most for sale, for their growing numbers of employees. These plans, the standardized houses built there, and the community that developed from it is historically significant in this context. This area of significance will be a contributing factor in the eligibility of a historic district.

- *Ethnic Heritage.* The residential development of Reed's Hill occurred before the great influx of Irish immigrants into Marblehead to work in the shoe industry. The Shipyard District was where most of them settled, but as time went on they took over homes on Reed's and Rowland's hills. The role Irish immigrants played in the industrial history of Massachusetts, not just the shoe industry in Marblehead, Lynn, Salem and the region, is significant and will be a contributing theme in the eligibility of the historic district. Immigrants from Canada, particularly Nova Scotia comprise an important group as well. And the building trade attracted a significant number of carpenters from Maine and New Hampshire.

- **Industry.** The major shoe factories were located in the Reed's Hill neighborhood, and there were shoe shops on domestic properties scattered throughout the area where shoes were initially manufactured by individual cordwainers, families, and small unrelated collectives. Until large, mechanized factories appeared after the Civil War, shoe manufacturers relied on a network of shoemakers and small shoe factories to make their products. While the last major fire in 1888 essentially left the shoe industry in ruins, a number of shoe shops and small factories survive in the neighborhood and are significant components of their properties and the historic landscape of the town.
- **Maritime History.** Underneath all the mid-19th-century residential development brought on by the shoe industry are the remnants of the maritime associations which had been the life-blood of the town. Shipyards no longer exist, nor do the wharves, ropewalks drying racks for nets, and fish flakes, but a number of houses have historical associations with fishermen and ropemakers (many who later became shoemakers) particularly in the older Newtown section. Prospect Street went from being the location of the hay scales to an enclave of ropemakers (Ropemakers' Court), and Bessom Street took its name from Bessom's ropewalk, which was there before 1850.

National Register Recommendations

Most of the properties and areas inventoried in this survey have been recommended for listing on the National Register as contributing features of potential historic districts in the Reed's Hill neighborhood. Boundaries are essentially set for areas on Reed's Hill, Village Street and the Marblehead Land Company tract on Jersey and Guernsey streets. The boundaries for an area in Newtown has yet to be determined. Thirteen properties have been recommended as also being individually eligible for the National Register. These properties are so indicated on the survey table.

Further Recommendations

- Complete analysis of potential Newtown Historic District and determine boundaries
- With community support prepare a National Register Nomination for the Reed's Hill, Village Street and Marblehead Land Company Tract historic districts
- Follow other recommendations prioritized in Survey Master Plan

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Historic Maps

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Map of Marblehead, Massachusetts, State of Massachusetts, 1795.

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REPOSITORIES OF SURVEY MATERIALS

The products of this survey will be made available to the public at the Marblehead Historical Commission, Abbot Hall, 188 Washington St., Marblehead, open to the public from 9:00 AM - 12:00 Pm, Mon-Fri or by appointment. They will also be repositied at the Massachusetts Historical Commission, 220 Morrissey Blvd., Boston MA 02125 and in the Massachusetts Cultural Resource Information System, <http://mhc-macris.net/>.