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"That Charm of Remoteness": A Study of Landscape Stability in Little Compton, Rhode Island

Katharine M. Johnson
University of Massachusetts Boston

"THAT CHARM OF REMOTENESS": A STUDY OF LANDSCAPE STABILITY IN LITTLE COMPTON, RHODE ISLAND

A Thesis Presented

by

KATHARINE M. JOHNSON

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Approved as to style and content by:

_____

John Steinberg, Professor of Anthropology
Chairperson of Committee

_____

Stephen Mrozowski, Professor of Anthropology
Member

_____

James Garman, Professor of Archaeology
Salve Regina University
Member

_____

Stephen Silliman, Program Director
Historical Archaeology Program

_____

Stephen Mrozowski, Chairperson
Anthropology Department

ABSTRACT

"THAT CHARM OF REMOTENESS": A STUDY OF

LANDSCAPE STABILITY IN LITTLE COMPTON, RHODE ISLAND

August 2009

Katharine M. Johnson, B.A., University of Rhode Island
M.A., University of Massachusetts Boston

Directed by Professor John Steinberg

Little Compton, Rhode Island has long been considered a stable, isolated and rural location relative to surrounding towns and cities. A geophysical and archaeological examination in the front yards of the Wilbor house and Brownell farm was undertaken in order to gain a better understanding about how residents of the town maintained stable, rural lifeways during the period of industrialization and urbanization that characterized the rest of the state in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. The results from these examinations revealed that there was a distinct lack of features and landscaping changes in the archaeological record in the front yards of these two farmsteads. An examination of historical and genealogical documents coupled with the above data revealed that family structure played an important role in the everyday lives of residents in Little Compton, as it does in many agricultural communities. As many archaeologists have demonstrated in the past, changes in the household are often identifiable in the archaeological record. The current research in this essay demonstrates that the longevity of a single family on a

single site coupled with the fact that households changed very infrequently is a likely reason for the lack of landscaping changes present at both the Wilbor house and Brownell farm. Furthermore, this family continuity on the land is most likely part of larger trends in the town that have contributed to its stability over the past 300 years. These include: the initial settlement processes, maintenance of agricultural practices, stable population influx and outmigration, reification of rural idealism in the midst of an industrializing world, and modern conservation efforts.

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Finally, I'd like to thank my family for putting up with me while I stayed home on the computer for 10 hours at a time writing this up. Their support and encouragement truly permitted me to finish this.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

How did Little Compton, Rhode Island maintain its rural and agrarian landscape through the period of extreme change that accompanied the industrialization of Rhode Island in the 18th and 19th centuries? Throughout its history Little Compton has maintained a relatively steady trajectory in not only its population and land ownership, but also in its agricultural lifeways. These have all acted as contributing reasons for the preservation of the town's rural character through the intense periods of industrialization that other areas of the region and state felt in the late 18th and throughout the 19th century. During this time Rhode Island and southeastern Massachusetts were growing both in population and economy. Imports from numerous locations worldwide made their way through Newport and Bristol daily, while surrounding farmland provided agricultural products for the growing port towns (McLoughlin 1986: 58). By the middle of the 19th century, Fall River provided the large-scale milling for the region, and Providence experienced exponential population growth. In a time when industrial forces were radically transforming the landscape in other parts of Rhode Island and Massachusetts, Little Compton retained its agrarian landscape and way of life.

An increasing number of archaeologists are using landscape as a means to investigate this transitional period in history. Research frameworks involving landscape archaeology are now better suited to study settlement patterns, agricultural pursuits,

aesthetic and intentional landscaping activities, unintentional daily activities that influence the landscape, and a myriad of other ways in which individuals expressed themselves upon and through the landscape (Yamin & Metheny 1996). Landscape archaeology is well suited to study this movement from an agrarian to an industrial nation, since the transition left noticeable changes in the landscape in Rhode Island and southeastern Massachusetts. There is clear evidence in urban contexts for landscape changes at not only the domestic, but at the city and regional level. The transformation of rural areas to suburban and metropolitan no doubt reflects the landscape changes apparent in areas near cities at least at a regional level. There is also additional evidence in rural areas where small factories and mills were built; or where a family or individual may have decided to landscape a yard a certain way in terms of decorative plants, pathways, or other possibilities to reflect a more urban or suburban atmosphere (Yamin & Bridges 1996). Constant changes and small or large scale modifications to the landscape in this period pervade the archaeological record.

In his study of Harper's Ferry, Virginia, Paul Shackel traced the history of the armory town from a small agrarian community to an industrial center in the early 18th century. He found that although it started as a small agricultural community, its location and increase in population led to multiple changes in the landscape. Specifically he found that the landscape around the armory was intentionally landscaped with many gardens to maintain its pastoral look (Shackel 1996: 90). As the town grew in the early 19th century, it "struggled to resolve the conflicts found between the rural idyllic setting and the growth of industry" (Shackel 1996: 88). By 1830, he notes that the pastoral landscape that once had been a trademark of the town had vanished as industrial infrastructure now

helped shape the town's future (Shackel 1996: 98). His analysis of the archaeological deposits directly adjacent to the Master Armorer's house and the Armory Workers' houses showed that the landscaping changes were dynamic. He used an archaeobotanical analysis to discern that the use of formal vegetation declined near the Master Armorer's house by 1830 (Shackel 1996: 103). At the workers' house, there were multiple landscaping phases directly adjacent to the house, and "by the 1840s, the topography was about 1.5-2.0 feet higher than the 1820s landscape" (Shackel 1996: 104). By the 1850s many of the front yards were below street level and underwent multiple filling episodes to even the landscape (Shackel 1996: 105).

Changes in the landscape are not confined to fill episodes however. Modifications such as planting holes, post holes, garden beds, moved outbuildings, changes in midden location, drain locations or pathways are all changes that can alter the landscape at the house lot level, and more specifically in the front yard. In her work at the Spencer-Peirce-Little farm in Massachusetts, Mary Beaudry found that the east part of the front yard "…proved to be a very rich and complex area" with "…an impressive array of features" (Beaudry 1995:41). These included postholes, a walkway or wall made of stone, planting holes, and other features associated with the maintenance of the house. There were fill episodes in the front yard as well; one layer of fill was rich in artifacts and had come from the cleaning out of a privy on the property (Beaudry 1995:41).

Mark Groover's study of five different sites to assess households and landscape change showed that landscape change was common at many types of sites over extended periods of time (Groover 2004). The studies ranged from settlement pattern change at a plantation in South Carolina, to house lot change in Maryland and Tennessee. Common

modifications to the landscape included renovations to existing structures, moving outbuildings, or changes in activity areas. Karen Metheny, Judson Kratzer, Anne Yentsch and Conrad Goodwin's work in New Jersey exemplified that the use of geophysical survey coupled with archaeological excavation was useful, but not definitive, in identifying subsurface features and modifications to the landscape. They focused their efforts on experimenting with the best methods to understand landscape at Morven, a late 18th century domestic site in New Jersey that had been occupied for some time by wealthier members of society. They found that the stratigraphy was complex near the house in the front yard, and that the landscape had been constantly modified throughout its 230 year existence (Metheny et al. 1996:17). The archaeological evidence for these modifications included postholes, walkways, planting holes, cobbled surfaces surrounding the house, and garden beds. They found that largescale excavation was the most useful way of discerning what certain anomalies were, and that "…alterations to the landscape were accomplished primarily by filling, rather than by removal of soils" (Metheny et al. 1996:18). This in turn obscured the archaeological visibility of some of the garden sequences (Metheny et al. 1996:18).

As evidenced by the above case studies, landscaping changes occur frequently on many archaeological sites. Changes are present on both rural and urban sites and reflect the relationship that individuals and families had with the landscape and with one another. Despite the abundance of landscape change present in the archaeological record at other sites, recent archaeological survey and partial excavation at the Wilbor house and Brownell farm in Little Compton has shown that little in the way of landscape changes or modifications took place on their land adjacent to the main road. This is striking given

that stability is rare in the archaeological record on sites that have been occupied for an extensive period of time. J. Ritchie Garrison argues that families changed their house lots and outbuildings with the economy and changes within the family structure. He states, "This process was dynamic and powerful, for the yards around the dwellings directly mirrored farm families' daily lives, testified to some of their aspirations, and served as the complex stage on which family and community life took place" (Garrison 1991:115). How, then, does the lack of landscaping features on both of these sites exemplify the stability that Little Compton experienced throughout its existence?

I argue that the continuous occupation of these sites by lineal families and the subsequent longevity and overlap of households is the main factor influencing the lack of landscape features or changes in the landscape. In rural communities it is common to find farmsteads occupied for hundreds of years by successive members of the same lineal family (Brown 1987, Greven 1970, Groover 2003: 127). This is the case with both the Wilbor and Brownell families in Little Compton. Because both of these farms were inhabited for extended periods of time by the same families, often with two households overlapping one another, it is likely that a contributing factor to the stability of landscape in Little Compton is the continuity of family and population. In their studies of rural landscapes, both Mary Beaudry (1986) and Mark Groover (2003, 2004) have stated that landscape change at the house lot level often reflects changes within the household itself. Landscape continuity at the house lot level is also a product of household change to a degree. In his study at the Gibbs farmstead in Tennessee, Groover notes that "…residences occupied by lineal households, such as the Gibbs family, can…exhibit substantial landscape continuity" (Groover 2003: 127).

This landscape stability at the house lot level is no doubt a reflection of larger regional processes at work. For instance, the population pressure in Little Compton never reached an unmanageable level; as nearby towns grew, Little Compton maintained a relatively stable trajectory, even slightly declining in the late 19th century as out-migration increased. Heads of household who had enough money could purchase separate farms for their sons instead of adhering to the custom of splitting the homestead farm into separate smaller partitions. This splitting process *did* occur in Little Compton. However, in many generations, the heads of household for the Wilbor and Brownell families were able to purchase modest farms for at least one of their sons, or gave their homestead farm to one son, and money to the rest (see Brown 1987). This pattern is exemplified in maps of Little Compton where large adjacent areas of land are owned by single families separated by only one or two generations. While some farms were later sold to other families, many of the early settlements in Little Compton were willed lineally for hundreds of years.

In her work on the Spencer-Peirce-Little farm in Newburyport, Massachusetts, Beaudry describes a landscape that is almost identical to that of Little Compton: "…expansive open fields forestalling the encroachment of 20th-century suburbia convey an impression of the site's rural, agrarian past" (Beaudry 1995: 22). She goes on to say that this image

> …evokes a sense of permanency, of an unchanging landscape surviving nearly intact into the modern world. The illusion that the past lives in the present is strong and abiding, but it is an impression contradicted by the archaeological evidence. Increasingly, scholars have been led to conclude that change, variety, and instability are as characteristic of rural landscapes as they are of cities (Beaudry 1995: 22).

Through her work, Beaudry proved that the Spencer-Peirce-Little farm experienced many changes to its landscape, and was indeed characterized more by processes that were more dynamic than would have been thought for an area that conveyed such a feeling of stability. For example, she notes that there was "ample evidence of deliberate manipulation of the landscape" (Beaudry 1995: 29). This included formal gardens, drains, landscaping fills meant to cover construction debris, and other grading and filling episodes (Beaudry 1995: 29).

The archaeological excavations undertaken in Little Compton at the Wilbor house and Brownell Farm were not nearly as extensive as Beaudry's. However, if the available archaeological information is combined with the geophysical data, maps, and documentary evidence; and demographic information and land evidence, a picture emerges of an immediate landscape marked by relative stability over the past three-hundred years, and persisting up through the present. This relative stability in Little Compton is a product of the initial settlement processes, maintenance of agricultural practices, continuity of family on particular sites, stable population influx and outmigration, reification of rural idealism in the midst of an industrializing world, and modern conservation efforts. More extensive excavation at both sites could conceivably reveal a much different story; this essay concludes that Little Compton in fact has remained stable and rural since it was settled by its first English inhabitants.

Chapter Outline

Chapter 2 outlines the many theoretical approaches to landscape archaeology, the archaeology of farmsteads, and how stability in rural settings has been examined in the

past by archaeological, anthropological and ecological studies. Additionally it focuses on how family structure and household transitions have contributed to landscape change (Brown 1986, Groover 2004, Mrozowski 1984) and how this in turn has affected certain sites. This provides the theoretical framework for interpreting the historical and genealogical data presented in Chapter 3. Chapter 3 looks at the way Little Compton was settled and provides a brief history of the Wilbor and Brownell families as well as a history of their farmsteads and accompanying land evidence. A more detailed look at their land transactions and family history can be found in Appendix A. Two comparable sites in the region are also discussed in terms of their similarities in location and family structure. These are the Waite-Potter house in Westport, Massachusetts and Mott Farm in Portsmouth, Rhode Island (Brown 1987). Of the two only Mott Farm has been excavated currently, however further archaeological research in this region has great potential to provide comparative research frameworks for studying this area.

Chapter 4 then discusses the methods that were used to examine both of the farmsteads to understand the relative stability in Little Compton and how the individuals at these sites would have contributed toward it. These included extensive historical and genealogical research; oral history interviews; geophysical survey, and archaeological excavation. This interdisciplinary method proved useful in obtaining a more comprehensive understanding of both of the sites and their landscape histories.

The results of the data are then discussed in Chapter 5. Although the geophysical surveys and archaeological excavations determined that there was a distinct lack of features or landscaping changes present, the historical and genealogical data showed that the sites had a multifaceted history with an importance placed on family structure.

CHAPTER 2

LANDSCAPES, FARMSTEADS, AND STABILITY

2.1 Approaches to landscape studies in historical archaeology

William Kelso says that "…landscape is the context within which the site must be understood" (Kelso 1989: 49). In order to gain a proper, more comprehensive understanding of the Wilbor and Brownell farms one must take into account the stability of the entire region as well, for that is the landscape within which these two sites exist; a landscape of salt marshes, fields, meadows, woodlots, ponds, streams and sea. All of these aspects of landscape were used by the families who lived in Little Compton and made their living as farmers. Because they were farmers they would have employed a menagerie of these aspects of the landscape in their daily lives. They owned some property that was not adjacent to their own, but on the opposite side of town – perhaps for a wood lot, or for a small tract of land to pass near the beach to collect seaweed. Taking into account the every day activities of a farmer, one must then take into account the different environmental aspects of the landscape.

Studies in landscape archaeology are important in interpreting archaeological remains for farmsteads and rural sites for the above reasons. General landscape archaeology edited volumes have been published by Rebecca Yamin and Karen Metheny (1996) as well as William Kelso and Rachel Most (1990). Both emphasize the importance

of using landscape to understand archaeology and historical transitions and provide various chapters that range from formal gardens to rural, agrarian landscapes.

In 1987 a symposium at the Meeting of the Society for Historical Archaeology was dedicated to "The Archaeological Use of Landscape Treatment in Social, Economic and Ideological Analyses." The journal that followed in 1989 contained numerous articles that examined how landscape could be used as a research framework to become a part of archaeological interpretation. In her article in this journal, Patricia Rubertone argued that landscapes should not be regarded as simply a stage for human actions to be played out upon, but should instead be viewed as an "…active way in which we express ourselves and ideas as a people and as individuals" (Rubertone 1989: 53). This relationship between individual and landscape is a common thread in other landscape studies as well. Julian Thomas argues that landscape can be viewed "…as a territory which can be apprehended visually, and as a set of relationships between people and places which provide the context for every day conduct" (2001: 181).

John Jackson provides information on the development of landscapes in his book *Discovering the Vernacular Landscape* (1986). He discusses the importance of roads and political institutions in the development of rural towns and villages. Joseph Wood's *The New England Village,* as well as his other articles on settlement and community in rural landscapes (1991, 1982, 1986) provides a useful reference in understanding the development of rural social networks. The same is true of work done by James Duncan in his 1973 article "Landscape Taste as a Symbol of Group Identity: A Westchester County Village" as well as Nora Pat Small's analysis of architecture in her 1996 article "The Search for a New Rural Order: Farmhouses in Sutton, Massachusetts, 1790-1830". All of

these draw on interdisciplinary modes of analysis which are heavily influenced by landscape.

J. Ritchie Garrison's work *Landscape and Material Life in Franklin County, Massachusetts 1770-1860* speaks more specifically to the development of social relationships within rural farming communities. This work analyzes different types of landscapes and specifically addresses farmsteads, households and communities in rural Massachusetts and how they developed and changed over a period of almost one hundred years. His work, although in Western Massachusetts, is an all-encompassing study of farming life and the complex relationship that rural communities had with land, economy, and family.

William Cronon's book *Changes in the Land: Indians, Colonists, and the Ecology of New England* exemplifies the intricacies of "wilderness" versus "agricultural landscape" in the first chapter. Cronon discusses the differences between Wood's and Thoreau's descriptions of the Massachusetts landscape in 1633 and 1855 respectively, and how it was transformed over that period. Additionally Cronon discusses how the English agricultural landscape replaced the Native American landscape; and how this signified not only a cultural, but ecological revolution (2003: 6).

What all of these studies exemplify is that landscape archaeology is interdisciplinary. In order to begin to understand a landscape and the people who lived there, various resources must be utilized. These include, but are most certainly not limited to: anthropology, archaeology, environmental archaeology, cultural geography, primary document analysis, GIS, geophysical survey, oral history, architectural studies, paleoethnobotany, and material culture studies. All of these fields can contribute toward a

more comprehensive understanding of not only the landscape, but the relationship that individuals had with the landscape over a certain time period. In this way, landscape archaeology is well suited to study farmsteads. Most studies of farmsteads have in fact, been performed within this research framework (Groover 2008: 16).

2.2 Farmstead studies in historical archaeology

Over the past twenty years, historical archaeologists have come closer to creating a detailed research framework to address farmstead studies in archaeology. Many of these studies emphasize the importance of late nineteenth and early twentieth century farms; both of which remain the most neglected in archaeology due to their ubiquity and recent occupation periods. Earlier occupied farmsteads are favored and are studied more frequently, but it is still a relatively common practice to separate the actual dwelling house from the surrounding farmland and agricultural practices when making interpretations about the people who lived there. Farmsteads represent a way of life that has been prevalent in North America for centuries, and should be studied and understood as an important aspect of American history and culture.

In his most recent work, *The Archaeology of North American Farmsteads* (2008), Mark Groover provides an overview of the study of farmsteads in historical archaeology over the past thirty years. He discusses different types of research frameworks, gives examples of types of farmsteads, and suggests directions for the future research. He stresses the importance of establishing and developing a "regional level historic context" for farmsteads in certain areas, as well as a multi-scalar research approach involving "…global, national, regional, community, site, and household contexts" (Groover 2008:

128). A good example of this regional level research is Amy Friedlander's work in Warren County, New Jersey. To better understand a single family over time, Friedlander examined 511 probate inventories in the county, thereby providing a body of data that individual probates could be measured against in order to discern how one family may have fared relative to another in the town (Friedlander 1991).

Multiple workshops and special journal issues published by both the Council for Northeast Historical Archaeology (2001-2002) and Society for Historical Archaeology (1990) also emphasize the need for developing a context in which historical farmsteads can be studied within archaeology. In her work on the Spencer-Peirce-Little farm in Newbury, MA, Mary Beaudry stresses the need to frame research questions within the context of the farm complex rather than just the household itself (Beaudry 2002, 1995); the same is true of research by LouAnn De Cunzo in Delaware (De Cunzo 2002), and LouAnn Wurst and Patrick Heaton in the Finger Lakes region of New York state (Heaton 2003 Wurst 2007a, 2007b). Another study specific to developing methodologies for studying farmsteads is "The Historical Archaeology of Minnesota Farmsteads: Historic Context Study of Minnesota Farmsteads, 1820-1960". This volume was prepared for the Minnesota DOT, and while not in New England, provides useful ideas, general agricultural information, research frameworks, and economic information about farming that could be applied in later research to New England farmsteads as well.

Additional studies that compare and contrast urban and rural landscapes have been undertaken as well. An interesting comparison between the two was written by Leslie Stewart-Abernathy in his designation of "urban farmsteads" which stressed the similarities between the organization of urban house lots and rural farmsteads (Stewart-

Abernathy 1986). LouAnn Wurst states that instead of viewing urban and rural as completely different in their trajectories, they should be viewed as having a dialectical relationship. She goes on, "We will never understand rural life or farms if we continue to see them as separate, simple, passive, and past. Rejecting the dominant rural stereotype and reconnecting farms to larger socioeconomic transformations has the potential to radically transform the way that we as archaeologists approach farmsteads, as well as the resulting knowledge of rural life" (2007a: 7). William Adams has argued that farmsteads need to be studied within their geographical framework as well, (1990) while Amy Friedlander discusses the importance of regionalism in understanding the function and complex nature of farming and farmsteads (1990, 1991).

All of these studies show that farmsteads and rural areas were not slow, disconnected areas. The people who lived there were active participants in the wider world and altered their lives in ways that allowed them to accommodate and facilitate their participation in it. Farms are unique in that they both produce and consume and utilize various aspects of the surrounding landscape; they therefore should be studied in context with the landscapes and other farms on a regional level to gain a fuller understanding of their complexity.

2.3 Stability and landscape continuity in rural settings

Few general studies of this type have been published specific to historical archaeology. However, this topic has been addressed in anthropological journals, and journals about the environment, economic geography, and land conservation. The notion of stability itself is deeply rooted in the field of anthropology and settlement pattern

analysis. Studies regarding the stability of rural landscapes have been undertaken in multiple geographic areas. The idea of a stable agrarian hinterland at the outskirts of a developing urban center is not new by any stretch of the imagination; see for example, Robert McC. Adams' work in Mesopotamia and Mexico (1966), or Nicholas Dunning and Timothy Beach's chapter "Stability and Instability in Prehispanic Maya Landscapes" which discusses the landscape prior to Spanish arrival in Mexico in the 1500s (2002). Despite their geographic and temporal distances, the common theme underlying all of these anthropological and archaeological studies is that of a stable rural landscape.

A relevant case study to this thesis is Robert McC. Netting's study of the rural community of Törbel in Switzerland. Netting's study is anthropological rather than archaeological. His demographic research makes use of historical birth, death, and marriage records to reconstruct the population of this small village from the 18th, 19th, and 20th centuries. Netting shows that the town he studied was a "self-perpetuating village society in which households could provide themselves with a reasonably secure agricultural livelihood" (Netting 1981: 90). Netting also notes that the village reached a "homeostatic condition in which density-dependent mechanisms such as a high age at marriage, celibacy, and migration kept population growth within supportable limits" (Netting 1981: 90). Additionally, his research shows that the "probable longevity and stability of land use in Törbel are intimately related to the evident fit between environmental possibilities and a characteristic system of subsistence" (Netting 1981: 10). Although geographically distant from Rhode Island, this small village proves to be an interesting comparison with the farming community of Little Compton in that they

both had low population densities and secure agricultural livelihoods that persisted for hundreds of years thus allowing for stability in landscape.

A little closer to home, social historian Philip Greven (1970) performed a similar study of Andover, Massachusetts. In this comprehensive work, Greven traced four generations of the population of Andover and included specific demographic details including birth and death records, property transmission, tax lists, geographic mobility of children in landed families, and other demographic and economic aspects of the lives of the inhabitants of the town that would have influenced their landholdings and development of the community.

More recent environmental work in France has shown that farming activities are in fact closely associated with landscape stability and change. Two studies published in the *Journal for Environmental Management* have posited different reasons for landscape changes in Normandy, France. The first study assessed landscape changes over a twenty-five year period by analyzing change in land use, vegetation, and organization. Their results showed that the changes in landscape were the result of farming activities, and that "farms with a narrow range of production…are located on a narrow range of environmental conditions and are associated with stable landscapes, while (ii) farms with a broader range of production (i.e. polyculture) are distributed more widely throughout the landscape, and are mostly associated with the landscape changes" (Poudevigne and Alard 1996: 1).

Similarly, Poudevigne and Alard's work in another area of Normandy has shown similarities to what I argue are some of the influential factors in Little Compton's relative stability. In their article "Dynamics of rural landscapes and their main driving factors: A

case study in the Seine Valley, Normandy, France" they argue that the three factors responsible for changing the landscape are "Agricultural practices which lead to intensification of some areas and abandonment of others, urbanisation which modifies the structure and organisation of the landscape, and finally, as factor of stability comes the conservation policies which check these changes in certain zones" (Poudevigne et al. 1996: 1).

Some case studies in historical archaeology that have touched on the topic of stability in rural landscapes include Mary Beaudry's investigation of the Spencer-Peirce-Little farm in Newburyport, Massachusetts; LouAnn DeCunzo's studies in Delaware; LouAnn Wurst's work in the Finger Lakes region of New York; the Gibbs Farmstead in Tennessee by Mark Groover; and Amy Friedlander's work in New Jersey. The studies by Beaudry, DeCunzo and Wurst all have shown that rural areas are constantly changing, non-static landscapes that are often mistakenly depicted as stable, tranquil places (Beaudry 1995, DeCunzo 2002, Wurst 2007). Sally McMurray also argues that although 19th century farmhouses appear to be part of "a more stable and placid world than the one we inhabit today," rural areas were "highly dynamic," and rural families were progressive in the ways they dealt with an industrializing nation (McMurray 1988: 3). Wurst argues that the word rural by no means should insinuate simplicity, and that rural farms should not be stereotyped in such a way (Wurst 2007a). Beaudry notes that there are an increasing number of studies that recognize that although a landscape may appear intact, it most likely has been altered; and this is the case with the Spencer-Peirce-Little farm (1995). Groover and Friedlander, on the other hand, have provided studies that have

shown that landscapes can have periods of continuity or stability based on changes in household or population.

Family and Landscape Continuity

In her article discussing trends in both Northern and Southern farming communities, Amy Friedlander describes a household as "…the planter, his biological family, free employees and servants – e.g., tutor, governess, overseer – and the unfree labor…" (Friedlander 1990: 106). This definition is supported by U.S. Census records for Little Compton that include hired and not-hired help in the household count.

Mark Groover suggests that there can be a level of landscape continuity present at sites where there is also continuity in family and households. He suggests that farmsteads are unique in studying this process of continuity because they possess what he calls "time depth" (Groover 2008: 127). He notes that "time depth and household/cultural continuity are not usually encountered at the average domestic site. At many farmsteads, sons, daughters, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren inherited and worked the land at the family home place, often for a century or more" (Groover 2008: 127). This is the case in Little Compton. The Wilbor family owned and occupied their land from approximately 1690 to 1919; the Brownell family has owned and occupied their land from 1800 up through the present. This land had been owned and occupied by only two families before them, the Richmonds and the Churchs, since Little Compton was divided into lots during its English settlement in 1674. The fact that few families owned and occupied this land supports the notion of a continuity of landscape through a continuity of family.

Groover's own work on the Gibbs farmstead in Tennessee has proven that landscape continuity can be a product of continuity at the family and household level. In his article "Household Succession as a Catalyst of Landscape Change," he discusses the prevalence of the family life cycle in how the landscape is shaped and changed. Groover suggests that there is landscape change when a major change in household occurs at a site; for instance, a son or daughter taking control of a farm (Groover 2004: 27). The result is often that "it appears that landscape modifications often occurred during the beginning or end of a household cycle, coinciding with generational junctures. Consequently, the landscape history of a house lot will often consist of initial alteration episodes, followed by long periods of landscape stasis or continuity" (Groover 2004: 27). These changes, Groover notes, often manifest themselves as "shifts in midden location, maintenance decline, shifts in activity areas, and changes in outbuilding locations. Major architectural events at dwellings, consisting of dwelling expansion and renovation episodes, also correspond to household transitions" (Groover 2004: 39). Locally, both Stephen Mrozowski (1984) and Marley Brown (1987) recognized this pattern and developed methods in order to calculate and identify these shifts on both urban and rural sites, respectively. This is relevant to the case of both the Wilbor and Brownell families in that both of the sites were occupied by the same lineal family for centuries and by less than ten actual households in each case. As a result, based on Groover's discussion, the actual number of landscaping changes at both sites should be relatively small.

Amy Friedlander's work suggests that family structure played an integral role in the economic and organizational decisions made by heads of farming households. In her conclusions about the Hamlin farmstead in New Jersey, Friedlander briefly touches on

the issue of family continuity and landscape. She summarizes previous work by historian James Henretta, whose article on pre-industrial farms suggests that "northern farmers…subordinated the profit motive and production goals geared to the market to the values placed on the lineal family and its economic viability over time" (Friedlander 1991: 27). Because there was such an importance placed on family, marriages were delayed, and thus so was the creation of new households. It is possible that this was the case for some farmers in Little Compton, however many families were able to transport what surplus they had to small markets in nearby towns like Newport or Bristol for trade. Friedlander also notes other studies have shown that more value was placed on giving fewer sons economic independence rather than having many children who might be left economically weak, or even burdened by debt. As a result, "Farmers … purchased additional farms, preferably in the immediate vicinity of the home farm, to enable sons to achieve at least limited economic independence upon marriage" (Friedlander 1991: 27). This pattern can be seen in historic maps and land evidence in not only Little Compton, but also on a regional level in the farming towns of Middletown, Tiverton, Westport, and Dartmouth. The result of these purchases was a stronger and more productive family in general, for "With agricultural prosperity and family continuity predicated on access to productive land, farmers' economic and dynastic impulses were both satisfied through purchase of additional farms" (Friedlander 1991: 27). Friedlander also makes note that farm families often had a significantly different way of life than "other occupational groups" (Friedlander 1991: 28)

These case studies illustrate that understanding family structure at rural sites is integral to fully understand stability and change in the landscape. It is difficult to make

generalizations about individual actions, for one person could conceivably alter a landscape and domestic site more than three generations or households could. However the data presented does in fact show that in rural settings, landscape stability is often a result of the structure of the farm family and the fact that many successive generations of that same lineal family inhabited a single site. Both the Wilbor house and Brownell Farm are examples of sites where only one or two lineal families have occupied the landscape and thus it has changed relatively little over an extended period of time. If this pattern is true for other farmsteads in Little Compton, it is possible that it could be a contributing factor to the town's relative stability since the 17th century.

CHAPTER 3

HISTORY OF THE LANDSCAPE IN LITTLE COMPTON

3.1 Regional geography and history

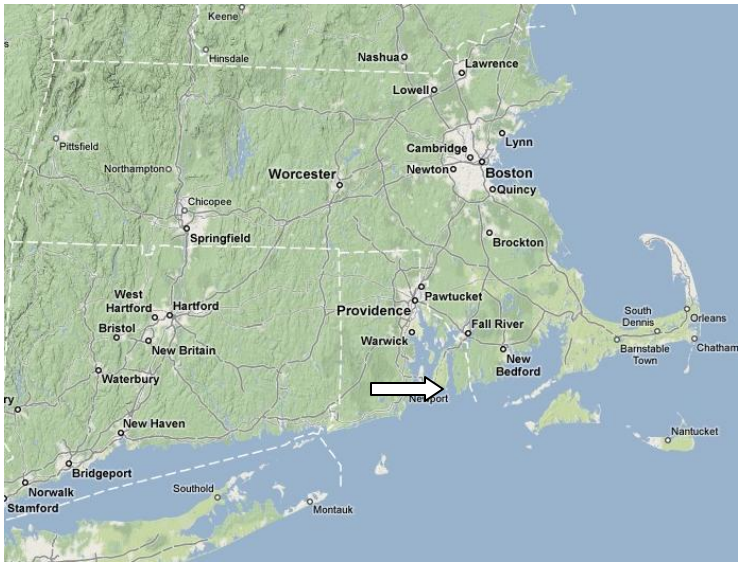


Figure 1: Map of Rhode Island (Google)

Little Compton is situated in the southeastern corner of Rhode Island between the Sakonnet River and the Massachusetts border. It is in a region containing the towns of Tiverton, also in Rhode Island; and Fall River, Westport, Dartmouth, and New Bedford – all in Massachusetts. The town itself is approximately 28.9 square miles, 20.9 of which are land and eight of which are water. There are no rivers, but there are a small number of brooks in the town which have "generated small amounts of power to run a few grist mills in previous centuries" (RIHPHC 1990: 1). The absence of rivers or moving water

additionally "has provided little opportunity for transportation or industrial use," and the town also lacks a natural harbor which "has discouraged intense maritime development" (RIHPHC 1990: 1).

The highest point in town is in the northeast corner, which is 190 feet above sea level. The landscape, however, is not very dynamic in that it is mostly small hills with the occasional swamp and woodland. Although there are no rivers, Little Compton is well suited for agriculture due to its moderate climate and also the fact that the soils are generally a rich, thick loam (Spangler 1973). Its geographic proximity to other, larger mercantile centers also allowed smaller subsistence farmers to transport their surplus goods to larger markets if they so desired (Wright 1878). In this way, Little Compton could actively participate in a global economy and maintain its relatively stable agricultural practices without being consumed by industrial development.

Little Compton was incorporated into the state of Rhode Island in 1747. It had been initially settled by English colonists in 1673 as part of the expansion of the Plymouth colony. Although it was not part of the actual colony of Rhode Island, Little Compton was in close proximity to other earlier settlements that had been established by those who considered themselves dissenters against the strict Puritan religion of Massachusetts Bay and Plymouth. These included Providence, settled in 1636; Portsmouth, settled in 1638; and Newport, settled in 1639 (Jeffreys 2008: 5). Additionally, Dartmouth was just to the east and had been inhabited by English colonists since approximately 1650 (McLoughlin 1986).

The early settlement of Rhode Island was indeed marked by religious dissent which caused an uneasy relationship between Rhode Island and the surrounding colonies,

particularly Massachusetts Bay. The state's charter of 1663 declared that Rhode Island would have the ability to continue its "lively experiment" and persevere with the religious diversity and political independence that had separated the colony from both Massachusetts and Plymouth (Jefferys 2008: 11, McLoughlin 1986: 38). Although Little Compton was initially part of the Plymouth colony, the political head of the colony was much further from the isolated town than the settlements around Narragansett Bay. In this way, Little Compton increasingly had more in common with Rhode Island settlements than it did with Plymouth. When Rhode Island sought to expand its boundaries in the mid-18th century, Little Compton, along with Tiverton, Bristol, Barrington and Warren were incorporated (McLoughin 1986: 57). By this period in Rhode Island history, the state had accrued tremendous wealth and economic independence, mostly as a result of the mercantile centers of Newport and Bristol; both of which played an integral role in the development of early colonial trade. Newport was particularly well-suited for this, especially since Aquidneck Island's soils were excellent for farming, and Newport was able to grow due to the "…prosperous seventeenth-century merchant-farmer social structure" (Jefferys 2008: 8). By 1710, the population of Newport alone is estimated to have been 2,800 -- more people than Little Compton would have until the 20th century (Jefferys 2008: 16).

Despite Little Compton's proximity to these larger towns and cities, it has always been considered isolated. However, there are historical accounts of small-scale ferrying throughout the area between Little Compton and Middletown, Tiverton and Portsmouth, and Portsmouth and Bristol (Taggart 1848: xxi, xxxiv, xxxvi, Tiverton Proprietor's Records: 14). Most of the 18th century gravestones at the Commons in Little Compton are

from Newport (James Garman, personal communication), and the presence of advertisements for houses and goods in Little Compton in the *Newport Mercury* (1797: 4) also attests to a close-knit regional relationship between the mercantile center of Newport and the agricultural community of Little Compton.

3.2 Purchase and settlement

On April 10, 1674, a group of men from Duxbury, Massachusetts, under charter from the Plymouth Colony, drew lots to settle on the colony's southwestern periphery. The land had been purchased a year earlier, on July 31, 1673, from the Wampanoag leader Awashonks by William Pabodie, Constant Southworth, and Nathaniel Thomas (Brownell 1970: 33). Their request for the charter was not haphazard, for the place they chose was within one day's travel of Newport, a burgeoning seaport that had been founded in 1639 under the leadership of William Coddington. To the east, prosperous farmland in what are now Dartmouth and Westport had been settled and farmed since 1652 by the English, and Portsmouth, a colony founded by religious dissenters from Boston, had been established and inhabited since 1638. The land these men sought was called Sakonnet at the time by its Native American inhabitants, the Wampanoags. (Wilbour 1967: xvi).

The petitioning process for a charter and for land was not easy. The 1670s were a difficult time in New England since many English settlers sought to augment their land holdings, thus straining the already tense relationships with the numerous Native American groups that already inhabited the landscape (Cronon 2003, RIHPHC 1990: 4). These tensions would eventually culminate in King Philip's War (e.g. Church 1716). The

petitioning process by this particular group in Duxbury had begun even earlier in 1661, when Awashonks, the female leader of the Sakonnets, "declined to negotiate the sale of the tribe's land" (RIHPHC 1990: 5). It was not until 1671 that the General Court granted permission to the original settlers to have "some force be raised" and undertake negotiations with the Sakonnets (Brownell 1970: 17, RIHPHC 1990: 5).

Contemporary accounts indicate that the land that became Little Compton was purchased from not only Awashonks, but other members of the Wampanoags in different areas of what would later become Little Compton. While these transactions did in fact create a legal contract to secure English ownership of the land, some of the transactions were questionable in regard to the amount of money paid for certain areas of land. Once the proprietors had secured a purchase, they underwent a lottery to divide the purchase into lots.

The land was acquired through a series of purchases between 1673 and 1693 (Little Compton Proprietor's Records [LCPR] 1673-1789: 13). Each lot was assigned a number, and was given to the proprietor who drew its number provided they paid their dues. The initial drawing was for lots that were one mile long and approximately 34 rods (561 feet, 170 meters) north-south. The area of these lots was consequently approximately 68 acres assuming the units of measurement were roughly the same (1 acre is 43,560 square feet). There were 32 of these lots, known as the Great Lots. They were located in the northwest corner of the town, and were arranged linearly north to south and cut through by the main thoroughfare at the time, known throughout Little Compton's history as West Road, Sakonnet Road, the Great Highway, or the Great West Road. At the time of purchase the road was eight rods *wide*, which is 132 feet and

approximately 40 meters (Blake 1888: 981). These 32 lots were instrumental in the settlement of Little Compton, not only because they were the first properties to be incorporated as part of the town, but because many of the families who farmed the land and lived there continued to do so well into the 20th century. The men who comprised the original group were given the largest parcels of land. In the following years additional purchases were made, however, those who participated in the original purchase had received the largest lots.

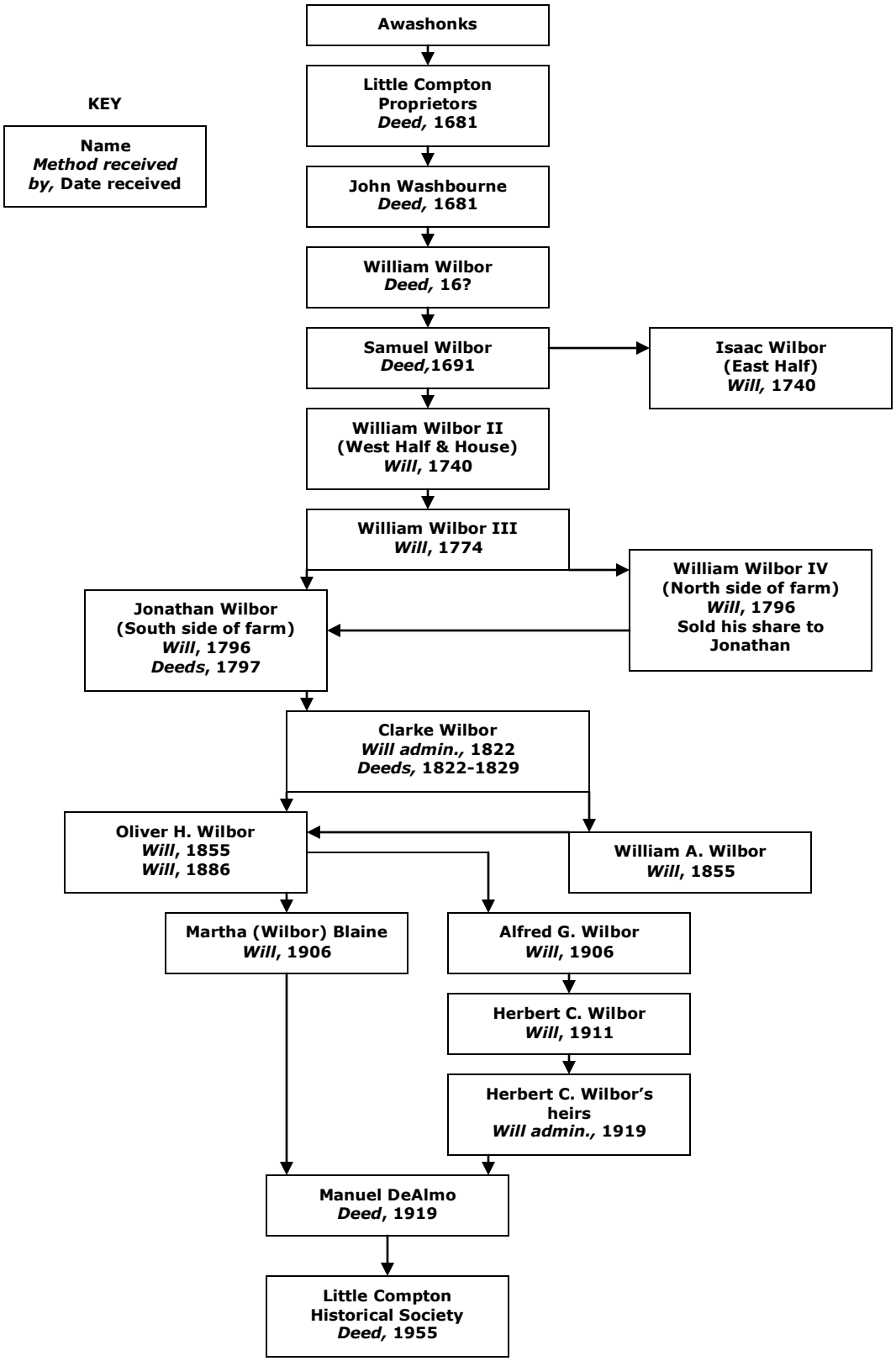
Multiple purchases were made and lotteries undertaken to divide up the lands at Sakonnet. Many of the men who participated in the lotteries sold and traded their lots in order to obtain adjacent land, and so the maps made of the original lots are difficult to interpret since someone may have owned that lot for a very short period of time. However, lots from the initial division of the town are constantly referred to in land transactions for many generations following the actual lotteries. With considerable effort these can be traced back to their original English owner. Understanding the settlement process of this town and the families who lived there is integral to giving the archaeological data a context. For instance, Ed Hood's chapter "Social Relations and the Cultural Landscape" provides insight into these settlement processes. He argues that the way in which the landscape was treated in New England allowed for a blurring of social lines that would not have happened in England, and that in this way colonists could "live outside of both the physical and social structure of English society" (Hood 1996:134). Additionally, the fact that the small, nucleated villages with open fields were so far removed from the heads of the colony could allow them to grow independently "with little direct manipulation by the colony" (Hood 1996:139). Many of the families who

settled in Little Compton came from either the Plymouth or Massachusetts Bay colonies, and had many kinship ties in the surrounding areas. Two of the families who established themselves early on in the history of this region were the Wilbor and Brownell families. A brief look at their family history and transference of land here will help elucidate how the continuity of family contributed to a continuity of landscape at each of the farmsteads. A more detailed history can be found in Appendix A of this thesis.

3.3 Wilbor and Brownell farmsteads

The continuity of family on the landscape in Little Compton is exemplified through both the Wilbor and Brownell families. The tightly knit relationship of the farm family coupled with the way that heads of household transmitted their land was a major factor in this. The following chain of title chart shows how the owners of the Wilbor house and farm received and transferred their land over the period of 1681 to 1955. The farm was kept mostly intact from the original purchase in 1681 and in at least two cases when it was split between two or more sons, one son would buy the land and farm from the others.

Figure 2: Property ownership of Wilbor farmstead and land



Samuel Wilbor inherited the land from his father William I, who had been living in Portsmouth, Rhode Island at the time. William I deeded Samuel land in 1691, and willed it to him when he died in 1710. Samuel's farm is known to have been at least 50 acres in 1691 but is believed to have been as big as 100 acres by the time he split it between his two sons William II and Isaac in 1740 when he died. By that time, the family living in Samuel's modest house would have been approximately 16 in number, including Samuel's wife and unmarried daughters and son, plus his married son William II and William's own wife and children.

William II inherited Samuel's dwelling house and the western half of the farm. He is said to have enlarged the house by knocking down the western wall and creating an addition on the western side. This will be further discussed in Chapter 5. By the time William II died in 1774 many families in the town had established their lands and farms. He did not have a problem dividing his land however, since by the time of his death, he had bought three separate farms nearby for his sons Samuel, Daniel, and Charles. He then left his own farm to his son William III. This not only promoted kinship and labor networks in a localized area, but allowed each farm to remain undivided and maintain close to its original size.

William III owned the property for 22 years and invested time and money in it by purchasing nearby meadows and woodlots. When he died in 1796 he gave much of that land to his son Joseph. He then split his own farm in half between his two sons Jonathan and William IV. Jonathan and William IV then created a line which divided the farm into northerly and southerly parts. This lasted only a year until 1797, when Jonathan purchased the northerly half of the house and most of the farmland from William IV.

Jonathan died *intestate* in 1822. Unlike all of the Wilbors before him, he left no will to dictate how his lands should be divided, and he had not deeded anything to any of his family members before his death. His estate was managed by his second to youngest son William. The probate court minutes do not detail how William divided his father's land, however later land deeds indicate that it was divided somehow amongst all of Jonathan's children, of which there were seven. It appears as though Jonathan's oldest son Clarke received most of the dwelling house along with the closest farmland, while Clarke's siblings received nearby farmland and money as compensation.

Clarke spent his whole life purchasing small parcels of land nearby the farm, some land from his own siblings. This testifies to the difficulties faced by families whose heads of household divided the land in equal shares when they died, thus leaving a small parcel of land that was not as useful by itself as it had been in conjunction with a larger farm. By the middle of the 19th century however, many people were leaving this small town setting for industrializing cities, or other farms in the expanding western boundary of the country. For example, Clarke's sister Huldah moved to Canastota, New York with her husband and sold Clarke her share of the dwelling house. It is likely that his other brothers and sisters may have left the town as well, or moved to another location nearby.

When Clarke died in 1855, he left most of his possessions to his wife Lurana, and divided his house in half between his two sons Oliver and William. At the time of their father's death, neither was married. Unlike the previous situation with the divided house, the brothers decided that they'd both live there. By 1857 Oliver had married and by 1860 so had William. It is likely that they built two kitchen ells on the northeast and northwest corners of the house during this time period. Neither had children, however, and this

made the property transmission process difficult. Throughout their lifetimes, the households consisted of William and his wife Susan on one side of the house, and Oliver, his wife Abby, his unmarried sister Deborah, and their mother Lurana on the other side. When William died in 1886, he gave his share of the property to Oliver. At the time of Oliver's death in 1906, the only other person other living in the house would have been his wife Abby. Since neither Oliver nor William had children, Oliver willed all of his real estate to his brother Alfred G. Wilbor, and his niece Martha H. Wilbor, the daughter of his brother George (LCP 14: 419-420). Alfred's will states that he was of New Bedford, so it is unlikely that he lived in Little Compton. Deborah passed away in 1903, still unmarried. Abby's death date is unknown; however she is not mentioned in any legal documents after Oliver's will of 1900. Alfred Wilbor's will gave his share of the farm to his son Herbert Clarke Wilbor.

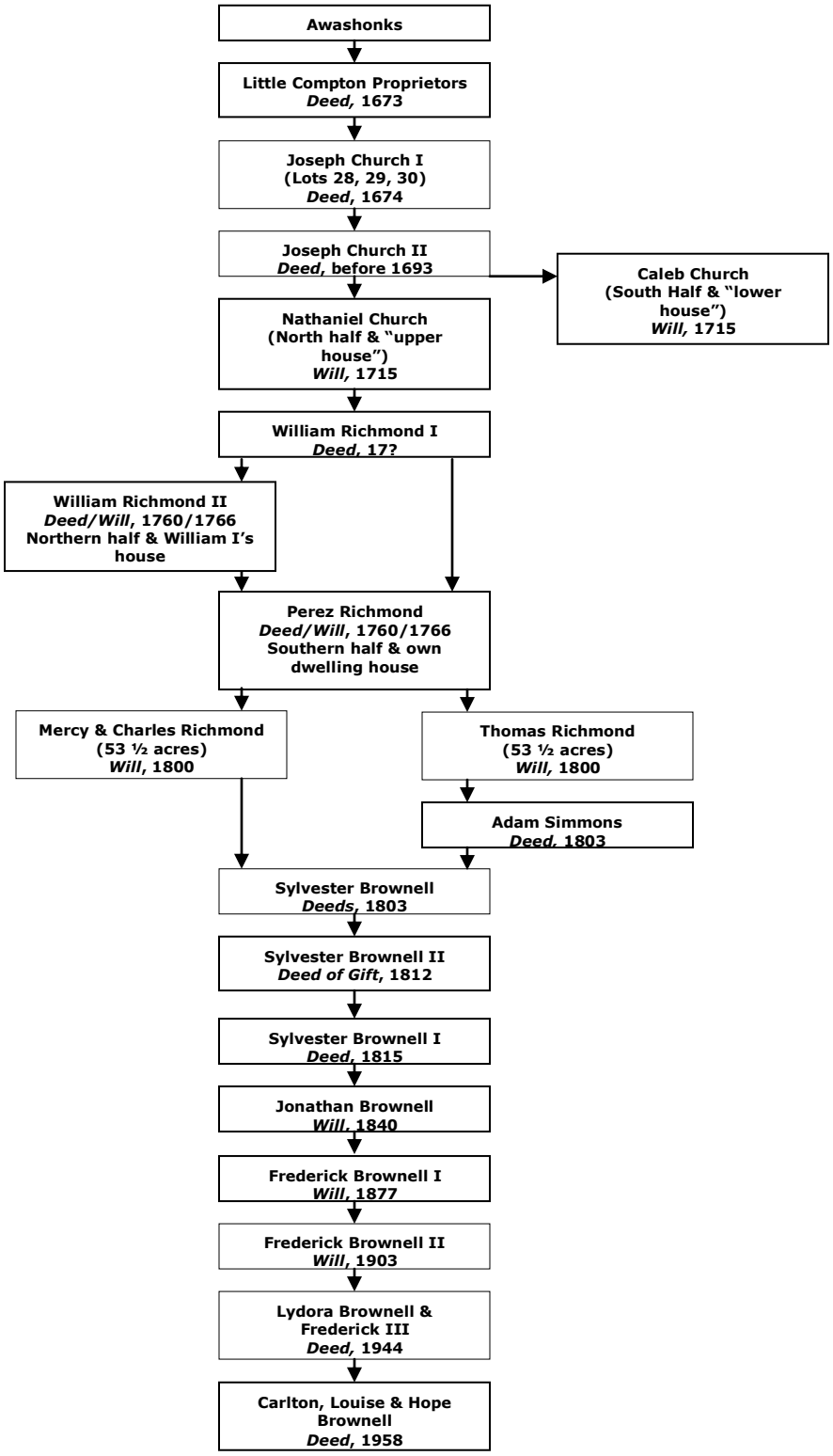
At this point it is unknown exactly who lived in the house. The property ownership is clear; however most of the owners are listed as being from New Bedford so it is unlikely that they lived or had an interest in the Wilbor house. Herbert died in 1919 *intestate*, and his will administration shows that it was his children along with his aunt Martha Blaine, that sold the farm to dairy farmer Manuel DeAlmo that same year.

The farm had remained in the family since 1681 and had remained remarkably intact. It is at this point in time that DeAlmo began renting the house itself out as apartments to various tenants, and used the surrounding land for grazing dairy cows. Through oral history and tax records it is hoped that a more comprehensive history of the house and people who lived there during this time period can be constructed.

What the above brief history shows is that the farm was willed from father to son throughout its history. This method of land transferal shows that the family expected to be living on the farm for an extended period of time. It also elucidates the correspondence between family and land in that if the farm remained undivided it is less likely to have experienced profound landscape and architectural changes than if it had been split amongst five different people. The series of deeds during the last 15 years of Wilbor ownership exemplify the problems of land transmission when a head of household had no children. These problems also were compounded by the fact that at that point in time farming was losing its popularity as a way of life and more people were living in industrializing cities like New Bedford.

The Brownell family was affected by this same trend at the close of the 19th century. The land that they had settled on in Little Compton in 1804 had originally been purchased from Awashonks by Joseph Church I, the brother of Benjamin Church who is famous for his role in King Philip's war. Joseph I's son Joseph II settled near his father, and at the time of his father's death, inherited three of the southernmost "Great Lots" which had been the first lots of land created in the English settlement of the town. Joseph II built at least two houses on these lots, and at his death in 1715 divided the property in half between his two sons Nathaniel and Caleb. Since Caleb was under the age of 21, Nathaniel was given a choice of house and land, and picked the "upper house" and northern part of the farm, while Caleb and his mother were given the southernmost parcel and "lower house."

Figure 3: Property ownership of Brownell farmstead and land



At some point before 1760 this part of the farm and house was purchased by William Richmond I. The Richmond family had been living on the farm just to the north of the Churchs since the town was settled by the English. The Richmonds were a wealthy family who had participated in trade through Newport and also possessed slaves. After purchasing Nathaniel Church's house and land, William I then sold it to his own son William II in 1760. William II then sold the land, on the same day, to his brother Perez who may have been living in nearby Westport at the time. Perez also purchased 40 acres of land from his father William I that day as well. All of this comprised the land that formerly belonged to Nathaniel Church, along with the dwelling house on the property. When William I died six years later in 1766, he further enforced the purchases by willing the northernmost part of his farm and his own dwelling house to William II, and the southernmost part of the farm to his son Perez.

Perez lived there until his death in 1800. He is said to have been killed unexpectedly when he fell from his horse. He did leave a will, however, and divided his property in half between his wife and son Charles, and his oldest son Thomas. Each half was 53 ½ acres. Thomas apparently did not want his share, and sold it to their easterly neighbor Adam Simmons in 1803. The same year, Perez's wife Mercy and son Charles sold their share to Sylvester Brownell. Sylvester also purchased Adam Simmons' share, and possessed the entirety of Perez's old farm -- a total of 107 acres. Charles appears to have been a mariner and so was likely uninterested in possessing land for farming.

Sylvester was listed in Perez's will as being one of the executors and "much esteemed friend" (LCP 3: 342). He was not only friends with Perez, but his father Jonathan had married Perez's sister Elizabeth, thus making Sylvester Perez's nephew.

Sylvester and his family were already well established in Westport and possessed a farm of almost 300 acres near Westport harbor. It is possible that by purchasing the Richmond's farm, he may have been investing money to provide a farm for one of his sons when they came of age. In 1811, his son Sylvester II was married and in 1812 Sylvester I gave him the farm in Little Compton. It appears as though Sylvester II lived there for three years before *selling* it back to his father and moving to Providence. Sylvester I then sold the farm to his son Jonathan. Jonathan lived there prior to Sylvester's death in 1840, and Sylvester most likely lived there with them towards the end of his life.

When Jonathan died in 1877 he conveyed the land to his son Frederick I. Before his death there were a series of transactions between the two, likely to ensure that the farm was passed to at least one of Jonathan's sons, of which Frederick was the youngest. At the time of Jonathan's death, census records indicate that the household itself was very small and it would have been difficult to run a very successful farm for anything other than subsistence. Frederick's brothers and sisters had gone away as far as Kentucky, and others moved to Providence. Thus the family faced the same problems as the Wilbors in that many children were giving up farming and moving to cities.

Carlton Brownell, Frederick I's grandson, noted that his grandfather gave up farming at this point in time, and built a small cottage on the property for a tenant farmer. Frederick I's son Frederick II inherited the farm via will, and at this point in time the family moved to Johnston, RI. The house itself was used as a summer house, and a tenant farmer worked the land from the small cottage that Frederick I had built. Frederick II was involved briefly with poultry farming however, at least prior to 1917. The land was

deeded to Frederick II's wife Lydora and his son Frederick III in 1944, some time before his death. They owned the land until 1958, when they in turn sold it to Carlton and his two sisters Hope and Louise.

The chain of title for Brownell farm is interesting in that it is not consistent with that of the Wilbor family. What the chain of title does show is that the land was often deeded to a son before the father died, and then given to the son completely via the will. Perhaps this shows that the farmer considered the land valuable and wanted to make sure it ended up with a particular son rather than be subjected to a probate court's ruling if the farmer died without a will.

3.4 Comparable sites in Rhode Island and southeastern Massachusetts

Rural sites in Rhode Island and Southeastern Massachusetts are plentiful; however, archaeological studies in this general region are somewhat scarce. It is likely that the ubiquity of these farms and historic homes makes them more of a scenic backdrop than an archaeological priority. The presence of these sites within town history and scenic photographs attests to this (see Devin and Simpson 1997). More recent historical studies in rural areas take into account certain families and their roles in this area throughout its settlement. For the sake of brevity, I will include two pertinent examples from the surrounding area to give a more comprehensive analysis and situate the Wilbor and Brownell farms within a broader context.

Mott Farm, Portsmouth, Rhode Island

In the summers of 1973 and 1974, Marley Brown at Brown University undertook excavations at the Mott Farm in Portsmouth, Rhode Island. The house itself was dismantled in December of 1973, and excavations in 1974 were able to elucidate the architectural history of the house. Brown's resulting Ph.D. dissertation discussed not only the Mott family's land holding, household structure, and material culture; but also their prominent position in the Portsmouth community as members of the Society of Friends, or Quakers.

Adam Mott Sr. first received land in 1638 from the original Portsmouth land division, and coincidently was a neighbor of Thomas Waite, who will be discussed below, and William Wilbor I, already mentioned. It is almost certain that the three men and their families knew each other. In his dissertation, Brown discussed the way in which Mott's farmstead was divided throughout its lifetime; and interestingly, with "unusually long tenure" it stayed relatively intact until it was sold out of the family in 1895 (Brown 1987: 12). Although I understand Brown's dissertation was limited to the Mott family, it is disappointing that he does not mention anything regarding the transitional years of land occupation from 1895-1973 after the land was sold out of the family.

Brown took an interdisciplinary approach in his study; utilizing oral history, settlement patterns, spatial development and community formation as some of his major research frameworks. He argued that the Mott's social standing increased over time and is reflected in modifications to the architecture of the house; and furthermore that their social standing was a result of their commitment to Quaker society. His archaeological analysis consisted of examining three features on the site, all of which were associated

with periods of architectural change in the house in the late 17th and early 18th centuries. He concluded that most of the architectural, and archaeologically detectable, events at the site, were the result of household transitions (Brown 1987: 191).

Brown also thoroughly discussed how multigenerational households and inheritance strategies allowed for family continuity on the farm. He emphasized the fact that the households were all multigenerational; often comprised of parents, a married son and his wife with their children, and probably one or two unmarried sisters (Brown 1987: 135). Brown cited historian James Henretta who notes that this household structure may arise from "… a value-system or 'mentalite' that stressed the importance of family continuity on the land" (Henretta 1978 in Brown 1987: 135). He additionally notes that this longevity on the farm may be due to the fact that the family was Quaker and that limiting family size in order to avoid land shortages for their descendents was a possibility (Brown 1987: 137). He provides additional insight in his discussion of inheritance practices. He notes that "By the second generation…the Mott's were protecting the farmstead from division by naming the eldest son after the father and providing him with the land, the other siblings receiving their shares in money" (Brown 1987: 142). This strategy would have allowed the family to maintain their land and strengthen family relationships (Brown 1987: 148). Brown goes on to examine their role within Quaker society, noting that the Mott family held positions at the meetings for decades and most likely played an integral role in the Quaker community on Aquidneck Island. He concludes that "The predominant, multi-generational household of the Motts is…the result of both demography and the customary practice of inheritance, combined

with strongly-felt ideals about the importance of family ties derived from their total commitment to Quakerism" (Brown 1987: 136).

Waite-Potter House, Westport, Massachusetts

This house was most likely built in the last quarter of the 17th century by the heirs of Thomas Waite, a Quaker who originally settled in Portsmouth, Rhode Island. He acquired land in at least Portsmouth and Dartmouth, but possibly owned land elsewhere in the area as well. The house itself was originally built as a stone ender. In 1728, Robert Kirby purchased the farmstead from Thomas's grandson Benjamin. Robert was a Quaker as well, and had married Rebecca Potter. Rebecca's sister was Mary Potter, the wife of Samuel Wilbor. Their children would have been first cousins. The Kirby family lived in the original house until the mid-18th century, when Robert's grandson David Kirby built an addition on the south to create a central chimney plan. Instead of expanding the original chimney and fireplace, the Kirby's built an entirely new brick fireplace and chimney adjacent to the old one. When Restcome Potter acquired the land in 1838, he built another house approximately 20 meters to the east and utilized the old house as an outbuilding (Muriel Bibeau, personal communication). A descendant of the Potter family continues to live in the newer house to present day. The early house was partially destroyed in both 1938 and 1954 by hurricanes leaving only the chimneys.

Westport, like Little Compton and Portsmouth, was settled through a series of lotteries, and had few of the same lineal families inhabiting the landscape. The result is similar on early maps that show large areas of land where single families have multiple farms. The Waite-Potter house specifically is similar to sites in Little Compton because it

was indeed a rural farmstead inhabited by only three lineal families throughout the course of its history. Westport's history, however, has facets that Little Compton's lacks. For instance, Westport had an excellent natural harbor that allowed for trade with larger cities and even facilitated whaling vessels. The town may have developed differently due to these environmental and industrial changes; however it still maintained a common agricultural, commercial, and kinship history with Little Compton. For instance, both Brownell and Wilbor families had relatives in Westport. The excavations at this particular site have the potential to elucidate more about a Westport farming family and could potentially reveal similar data to that found in Little Compton. Additionally, the questions that were raised by Marley Brown regarding the Mott farmstead and Quakerism could also be brought to bear on this farmstead.

CHAPTER 4

METHODS

In dealing with landscapes and farmsteads, an interdisciplinary approach is generally the most useful and in depth method (Adams 1990, Beaudry 1995, Brown 1987, Groover 2008, Garrison 1991, Mulholland 2000, Rubertone 1989). After an examination of documentary materials, the testing strategies at the Wilbor house and Brownell farm first called for an initial walkover, the implementation of a grid, then for geophysical survey, partial excavation, and the incorporation of the archaeological data into the Little Compton Historical Society's museum and museum tour. To more thoroughly understand the landscapes at both the Wilbor house and Brownell farm several survey methods were incorporated in the creation of an excavation plan.

4.1 Documentary research

As with most projects of this scope, the documentary research included the examination of maps, photographs, probate records, land evidence, newspapers, census records, architectural resources, plat maps, and town records.

The creation of boundaries between towns and states at different time periods proved to be an issue in researching these families and sites. For instance, Little Compton was incorporated as part of Rhode Island in 1747, but before that had been part of the

Plymouth Colony and also had shared an indeterminate eastern boundary with Dartmouth, Massachusetts. Dartmouth, in its own confusing series of events, was divided in 1787, the western part becoming Westport, Massachusetts and the eastern part retaining the name of Dartmouth. As a result, the documents needed for background research in this area are presently housed in many different facilities. Copies of the original land evidence for Little Compton prior to 1747 were obtained at the New Bedford Registry of Deeds, while probates for prior to 1747 were obtained at the Southern Bristol County Probate & Family Court in Fall River. Both land and probate records after 1747 are available in the Little Compton town hall. All land and probate records for Portsmouth, Rhode Island are available at the town hall except for probate books one and two which are at the Rhode Island State Archives. For research regarding Westport, Massachusetts, land evidence for before 1861 and probate records for before 1787 were obtained from the New Bedford Registry of Deeds and Southern Bristol County Probate & Family Court in Fall River respectively.

4.2 Oral history

Since Little Compton is such a small town, it was not difficult to collect oral histories or short stories and remembrances of past times. The main corpus of information came from Carlton C. Brownell, who has been residing on the Brownell Farm in Little Compton for almost 90 years. Additionally, an interview was conducted with Mary O'Neil, a resident of the Wilbor House as a young girl in 1946 and 1947.

Small, rural projects like these usually benefit from the memories of the town's inhabitants. For example, Marley Brown utilized this type of research in his

documentation of the Mott Farmhouse in Portsmouth, Rhode Island (Brown 1987). These oral histories about both the sites and houses are imperative in gaining a comprehensive understanding of the archaeology of rural farmsteads. Anne Yentsch's chapter in *Documentary Archaeology in the New World* deals with the discrepancies that arise since oral histories are often slightly different in regards to old houses, family histories, and landscapes (1988: 5). Although there is a very real probability for discrepancies in memories, dates, locations, or a myriad of other facts; oral histories can provide an invaluable resource in gaining knowledge about families, possible construction dates for houses, and landscape histories. In the case of the Brownell Farm and the Wilbor house in Little Compton, oral history has played just such a role in that it has helped create a more comprehensive understanding of both sites and their former (and current) inhabitants.

4.3 Geophysical survey

Geophysical surveys are becoming increasingly common with archaeological investigations (Kvamme 2008, 2003). Different methods can complement one another and allow for certain interpretations that may not have been possible with excavation alone. Furthermore, geophysical survey is useful in large areas, or when time and monetary restrictions do not allow for the excavation of an entire site. Kvamme argues that "Through wide-area surveys, archaeo-geophysics can offer a rich adjunct to regional or landscape archaeologies in addition to their utility as simple feature discovery tools" (Kvamme 2003: 454). Ground Penetrating Radar (GPR), an RM-15 resistance meter, and

an EM-31 MK2 conductivity meter were all used to complement and aid in archaeological excavation.

Ground Penetrating Radar

Geophysical survey involving three Ground Penetrating Radar (GPR) antennae took place in September and October of 2007 and in the spring of 2008. Talking extensively with the property owners was necessary to ascertain which areas had the potential to be least disturbed and thus more likely to yield better archaeological and geophysical information. Due to the small scope of the project, the front yard at the Wilbor house and the front and north yard at the Brownell farm were targeted as the best areas, as they were both the least likely to be disturbed. The rocky, root-filled and clayey soils of Little Compton made interpretation of the data difficult unfortunately. Further survey and archaeological documentation of anomalies can provide a better regional framework for understanding and reading GPR results in this area.

GPR uses disseminated microwaves to locate features below the surface based on their physical properties and how well they reflect the microwaves back to the antenna. Interpretation of GPR images can assess depth, orientation, size, and shape of buried objects (Appel, Wilhelm and Waldhör 1997; Olhoeft, 2000). The antenna records the amount of time taken for the microwaves to penetrate the ground and then return. This creates a radargram that resembles a profile and can be interpreted with varying success in the field. All of the data were processed at the University of Massachusetts, Boston by John Steinberg using GPR Slice, a program that uses what is referred to as time slice processing (Goodman et al. 2004). The following horizontal slices of data were created

using this program, and show the strong and weak subsurface reflectors. Rocks, roots, and clayey or compact soil provide strong reflectors; whereas dry or loose soils allow the waves to pass through and do not reflect them strongly.

At the Wilbor house, geophysical data was collected using 250 mHz, 500 mHz and 800 mHz ground penetrating radar antennae. For all the antennae, data was collected along east-west lines at half meter intervals. Lines were walked in the same direction each time, thus reducing the amount of line noise present in the data. The anomalies located by the GPR included upcast from the digging of the well, a strong reflective surface surrounding the house, and an area of low reflectivity just to the north of the driveway. This area near the driveway was also readily apparent in the resistivity results.

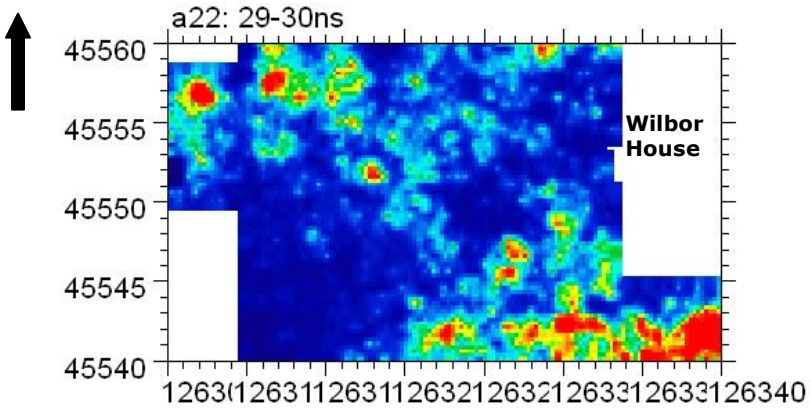


Figure 4: 500 mHz antenna GPR results of Wilbor house at 29 cmbs

At the Brownell house, geophysical data was collected with the 250 mHz and 500 mHz antennae in the north yard, and the 500 mHz antenna in the front and side yard. The front yard was an approximately 20 meter by 10 meter rectangle, with a 15 meter by 5 meter side yard. This area had a high degree of root disturbance, which is noticeable in

the GPR results. Here once again the data was collected at half meter intervals along a single line which was traversed in the same direction each time to avoid line noise.

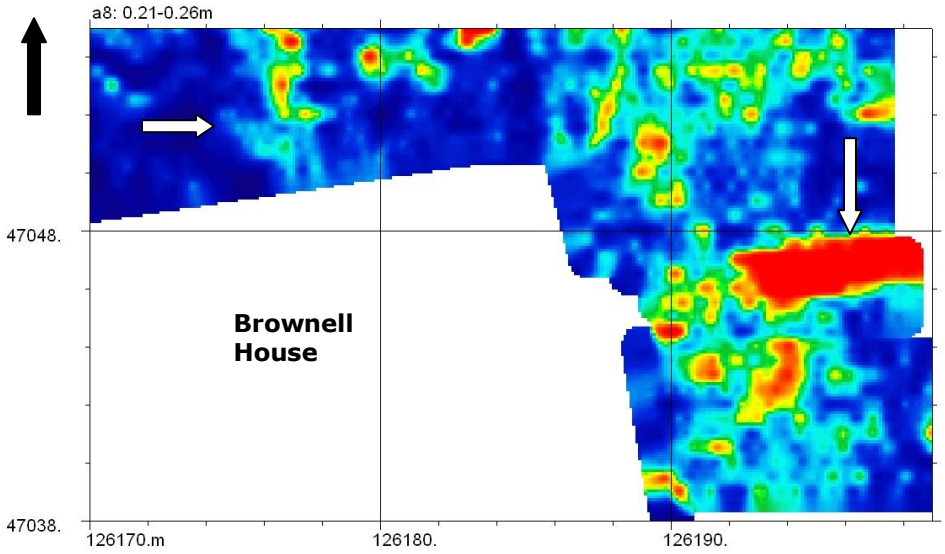


Figure 5: GPR results of Brownell house front yard at 21-26 cmbs

This slice is at approximately 21-26 cm below surface and shows the house (white area), a pipe running to the well to the north of the house, and quite a bit of root disturbance. It also shows what could be a path running from the front door to the main road, however this anomaly was not investigated further due to time constraints.

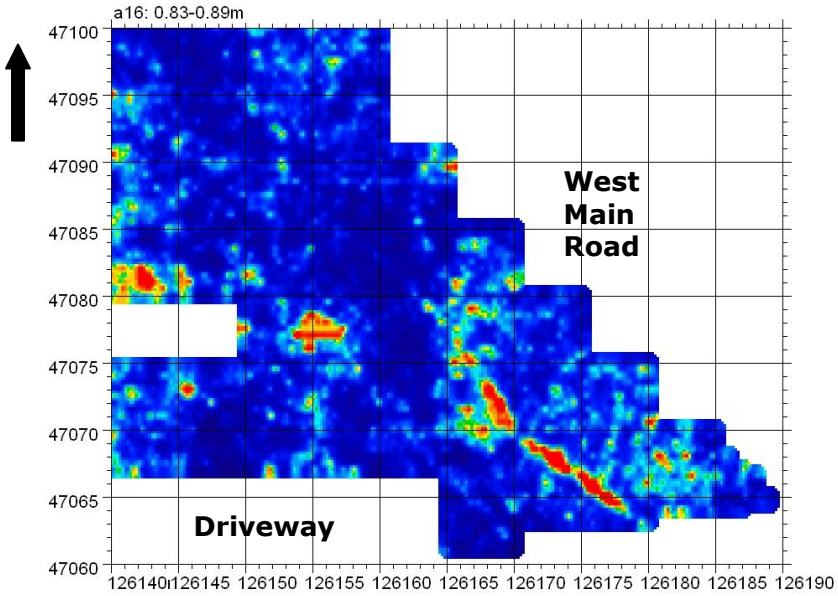


Figure 6: 500 mHz antenna GPR results of north yard at 83-89cmbs

The north yard at Brownell Farm proved interesting as well. A large straight (approximately 20m long) anomaly appeared at approximately 83cm below surface and continued to approximately 1 meter. There was additionally a strong reflector beginning at 1 meter and ending at approximately 2 meters that might represent the compact nature of the soils in this area; however it is possible that it could be the bottom of the cellar of the original house on the property. This will be further discussed in Chapter 5. Another anomaly was discovered at approximately 30 cm below surface, and might have been the footings for one of the corn cribs on the property based on location in photographs.

In general, using the 250 mHz antenna, we were able to discern anomalies to a depth of approximately 6m, with the 500 mHz antenna up to approximately 4m, and with the 800 mHz up to approximately 2m below ground surface (John Steinberg, personal communication). For our purposes the 800 mHz and 500 mHz antennae seemed to be the

more useful since they were able to return clearer images of anomalies closer to the surface where ideally they could be partially or fully excavated.

Resistivity

A survey with an RM-15 resistance meter system was undertaken at the Wilbor house and Brownell Farm by James Garman of Salve Regina University. Data was obtained in the front yards of both of the houses. The area at the Wilbor house was a 15m by 20m area, with a sample interval of 50 cm along north-south lines every meter. We were limited to our grid, and so no data points were taken directly adjacent to the house. The area at the Brownell house was approximately 20 meters north-south and 10 meters east-west. The data was processed in the lab at Salve Regina University in Newport, Rhode Island.

Figure 7: Wilbor house front yard resistivity 15x20m grid

This image shows the well (black circle) and the surrounding soil deposit, as well a relatively uniform area of low resistivity in the southwest corner of the grid. This area

was also present in the GPR results. It is possible that this area may have been a garden at some point, however further archaeological testing is needed to ascertain the actual reason for the low resistance in this area.

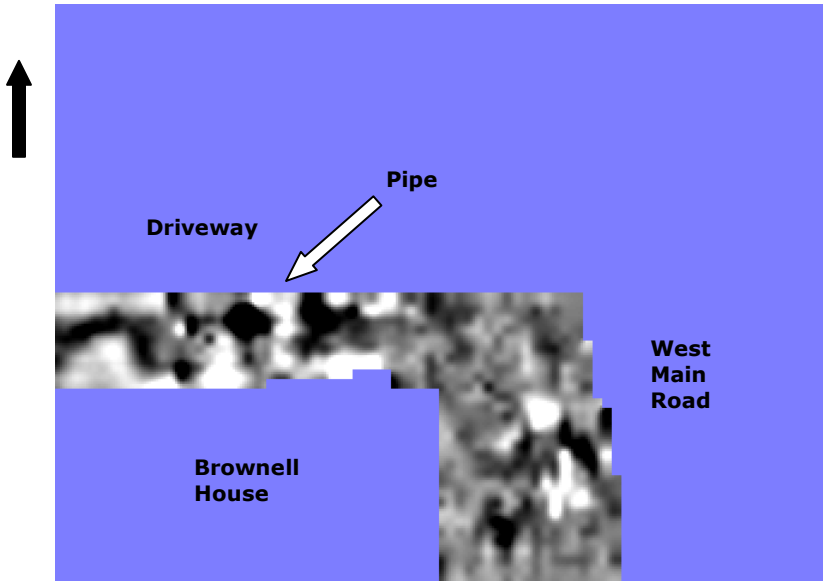


Figure 8: Brownell house front yard resistivity

This image shows the front and side yards adjacent to the house at Brownell Farm. The front area was highly disturbed by roots, but appears to be moderately resistant to soil in the majority of areas, while being highly resistant in very few. The side yard appears to encompass both high and low resistance, perhaps owing to the fact that the soil on this part of the house is less well drained than the surrounding areas. There is also a pipe running from this north part of the house to the well (as indicated in the GPR) which may be a factor in the high and low resistance in this area.

EM-31

The EM-31 MK2 is able to map subsurface features that correlate with changes in conductivity (i.e. metal). The device sends out an electromagnetic signal that measures

this conductivity without having to directly contacting the ground surface itself. Because many surfaces can be highly resistant to electromagnetic measurements – such as asphalt, sand or gravel– this is useful in that it can measure conductivity up to 6 meters below the surface without the need to directly connect with the surface (Steinberg 2003).

The EM-31 was used before excavations in September 2007. Because there was a known buried metal pipe at the Wilbor house, we did not use this method because its high conductivity would have distorted any possible data readings. This method was also used in the north yard at Brownell Farm where it was unknown whether there was a pipe or not.

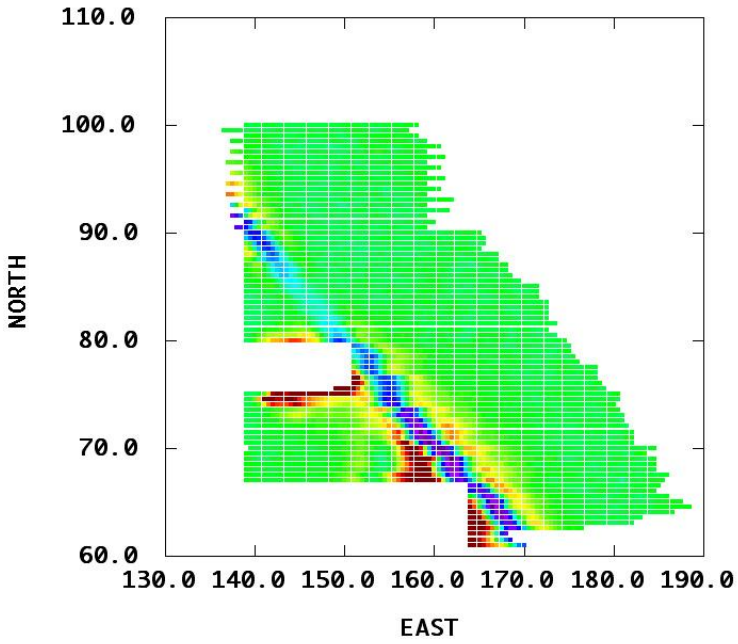


Figure 9: EM-31 data showing metal pipe running from well to house

However, unfortunately, there was. The above figure demonstrates the amount of distortion that a high conductivity anomaly such as a metal pipe can cause in the recorded data. Because of the pipe, the EM-31 was unable to discern any other conductive anomalies in the north yard at Brownell Farm.

The geophysical techniques described here, in addition to maps and old photographs provided the information necessary to create an informed excavation plan that had a high potential to increase the likelihood of excavating important features that could be used to more clearly understand the landscape at both sites. Coupled with the new data from the resistivity survey, further analysis of the geophysical data has the potential to greatly contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the landscape at both the Wilbor house and Brownell Farm.

4.4 Excavations

After the data from the ground penetrating radar was processed, a preliminary excavation strategy was created for the placement of shovel test pits across the front yard at the Wilbor house, and north yard at Brownell Farm. This strategy took into account not only the anomalies located by the GPR, but also the fact that a random sample should be taken and that the project had almost no funding. In order to compensate for all of the above factors, seven 50 cm by 50 cm shovel test pits were placed throughout the front yard at the Wilbor house, with the addition of a 1m by 1m unit that was dug the following spring.

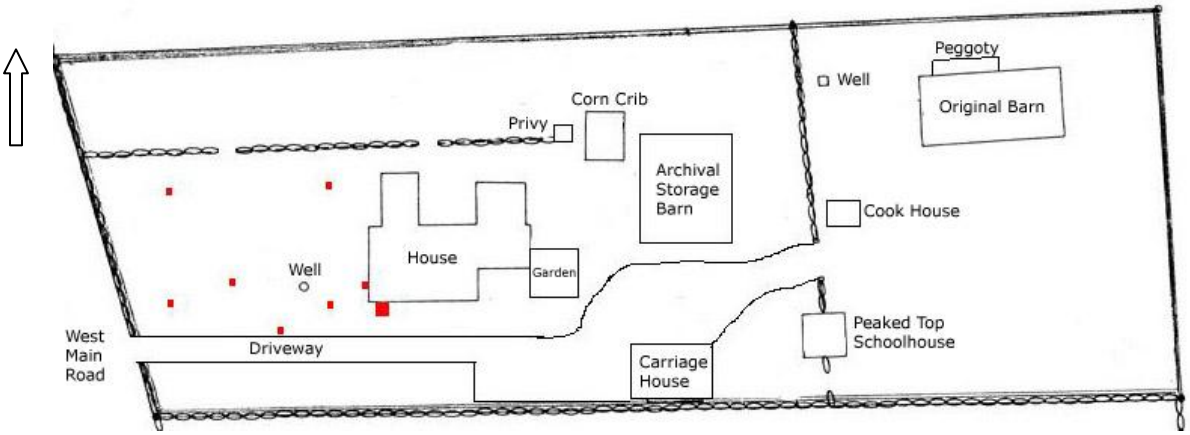


Figure 10: Map of property showing STPs and EU (Modified from Fields 2006)

The anomalies in the north yard at Brownell Farm were significantly deeper than at the Wilbor House (approximately 1.5 meters) and to compensate for this depth, 1m by 1m excavation units were dug. Additionally, Carlton Brownell noted that the earlier house that would have been taken down by his ancestor Sylvester had been in the vicinity and so we tried to compensate for the fact that a cellar hole might be located nearby. Four 1m by 1m units were placed near the deep anomaly and four STPs were dug at random intervals in the yard; and one was placed near the well, for a total of five STPs.

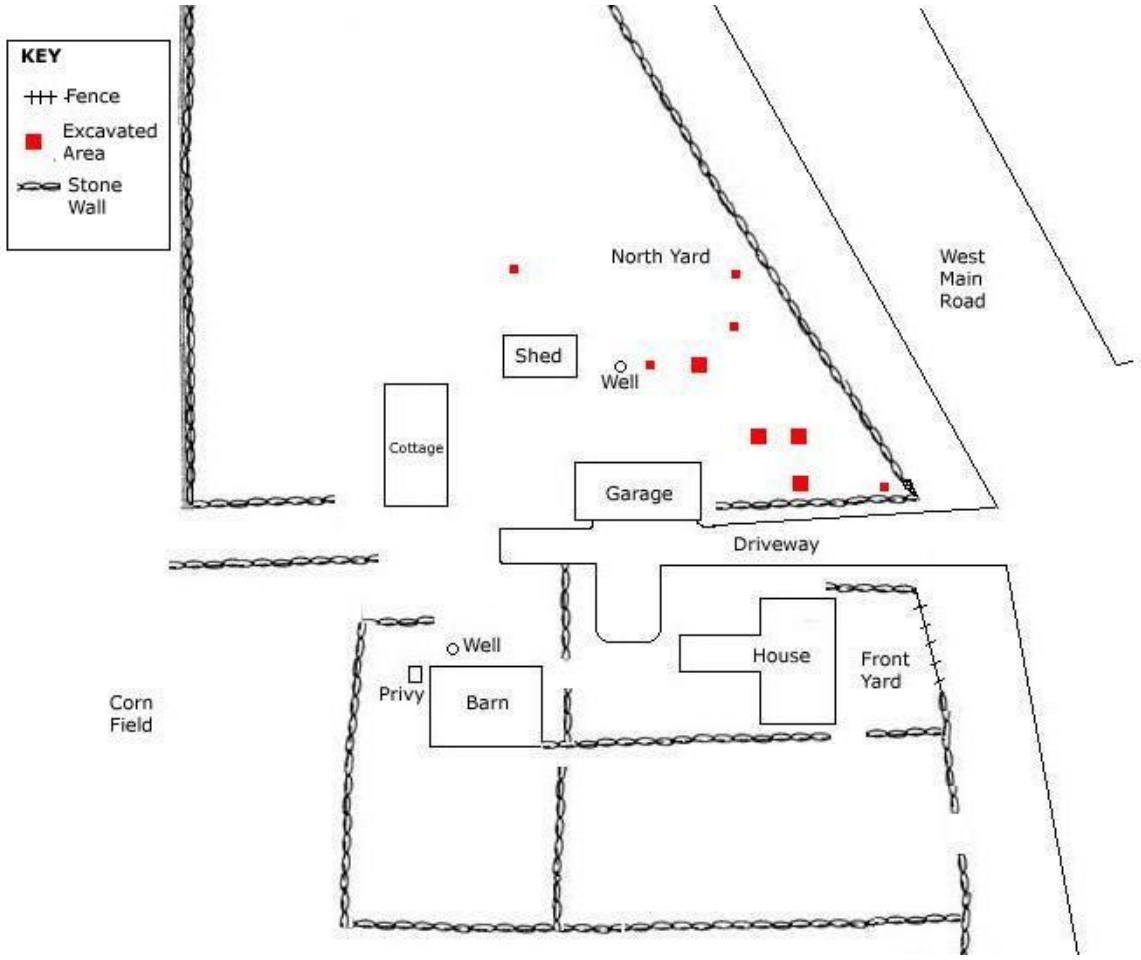


Figure 11: Map of Brownell property showing STPs and EUs

Soils in Little Compton differ from those commonly found in other parts of Rhode Island and Massachusetts. Both dwelling houses at the Wilbor and Brownell farms are situated in areas predominated by the Newport silt loam type, with slopes of three to eight per cent (Spangler 1973: 26). This soil is typically moderately to well drained, and is well suited for farming. "Typically the surface layer is a very dark brown silt loam 8 inches thick. The subsoil is an olive or olive brown silt loam 16 inches thick. The substratum is olive gray channery silt loam to a depth of 60 inches or more" (Spangler 1973: 26). In terms of Munsell coloration, the A horizon is often a 10YR 2/2 very dark brown; the B1 horizon is 2.5Y 4/4 olive brown; the B2 horizon is 5Y 4/3 olive; and the C

horizon is 5Y 4/2 olive gray (Spangler 1973: 70). Slate and shale inclusions are also well dispersed throughout these soils, and increase with depth. The stratigraphy at both of the sites adhered to this soil description; the soils were very clayey with great quantities of slate and shale. At approximately 1m, soils were very dark, 2.5Y 2.5/1 black in some cases at Brownell farm. This also appears to be natural stratigraphy; as is evidenced by eroding cliffs along the east coast of the Sakonnet River, and documented stratigraphy in Spangler (1973). This black subsoil, appearing at approximately 28-48 inches below surface, is "extremely firm in place and firm when broken apart…" (Spangler 1973: 5). This is consistent with the depths at which it was found at Brownell farm. This type of dark subsoil was not present at the Wilbor house. Much of the farmland that both families would have owned is predominantly composed of Stissing silt loam with areas of Pittsdown silt loam. Stissing silt loam is somewhat less productive for farming than the Newport or Pittsdown series because of its relatively poor drainage, evidenced by the gray and dark subsoil (Wright and Sautter 1988: 37). The Pittsdown and Newport series are both Class I in the agricultural Land Capability Classification; indicating their value for agricultural pursuits (1988: 37).

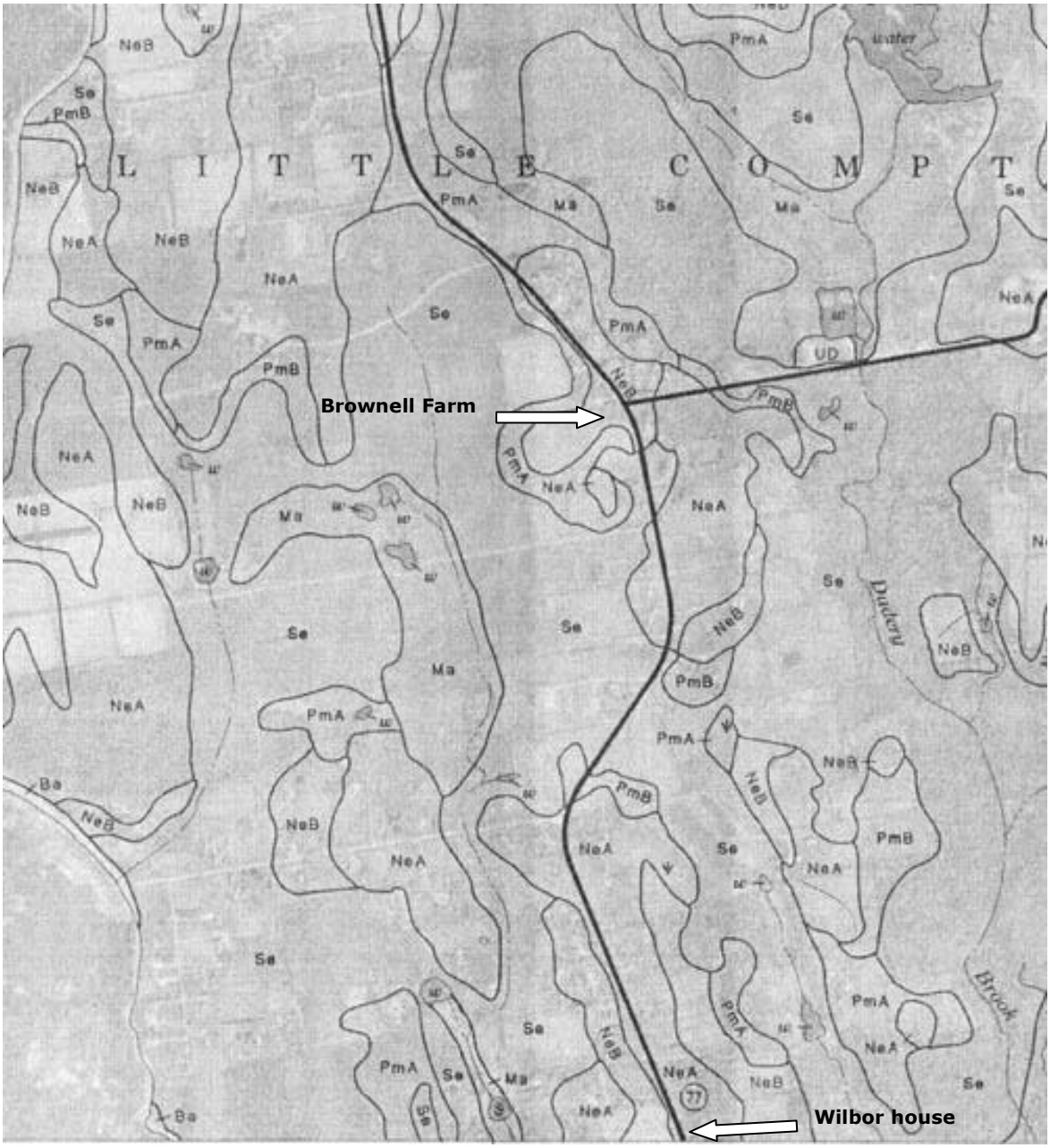


Figure 12: Soil survey of West Main Rd. (Spangler 1973)

CHAPTER 5

RESULTS OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATIONS

5.1 Wilbor house

The primary scope of the excavations for this thesis was to ascertain what landscaping changes had been undertaken in the front yard of the house adjacent to the road, and try to identify anomalies that had been located by the GPR. Forty-seven contexts and two discernable major depositional events were recorded at this site. The B horizon was recorded consistently between 45 and 50 cm below ground surface except directly adjacent to the house itself where there was evidence of a builder's trench. Soils ranged from 2.5Y 3/2 very dark greyish brown topsoil, to 5Y 4/2 olive grey subsoil at approximately 60 cm below ground surface.

A total of 897 artifacts were recovered from the seven STPs and one EU at the Wilbor house. Most of the artifacts recovered from this site were architectural materials. These were comprised of 30% brick, 11% glass (93 of the 100 shards comprising this figure were window glass), 16% nails, and 12% mortar. The majority of these artifacts came from excavation areas within ten meters of the house. The STPs on the west side of the yard away from the house had extremely low artifact densities. Although slate constitutes only 1% of this chart, it should be noted that approximately 75% of the entire EU dug at the Wilbor farmstead was comprised of slate and other stone building debris

that was most likely a demolition layer when the stone chimney of the original 17th century structure was destroyed.

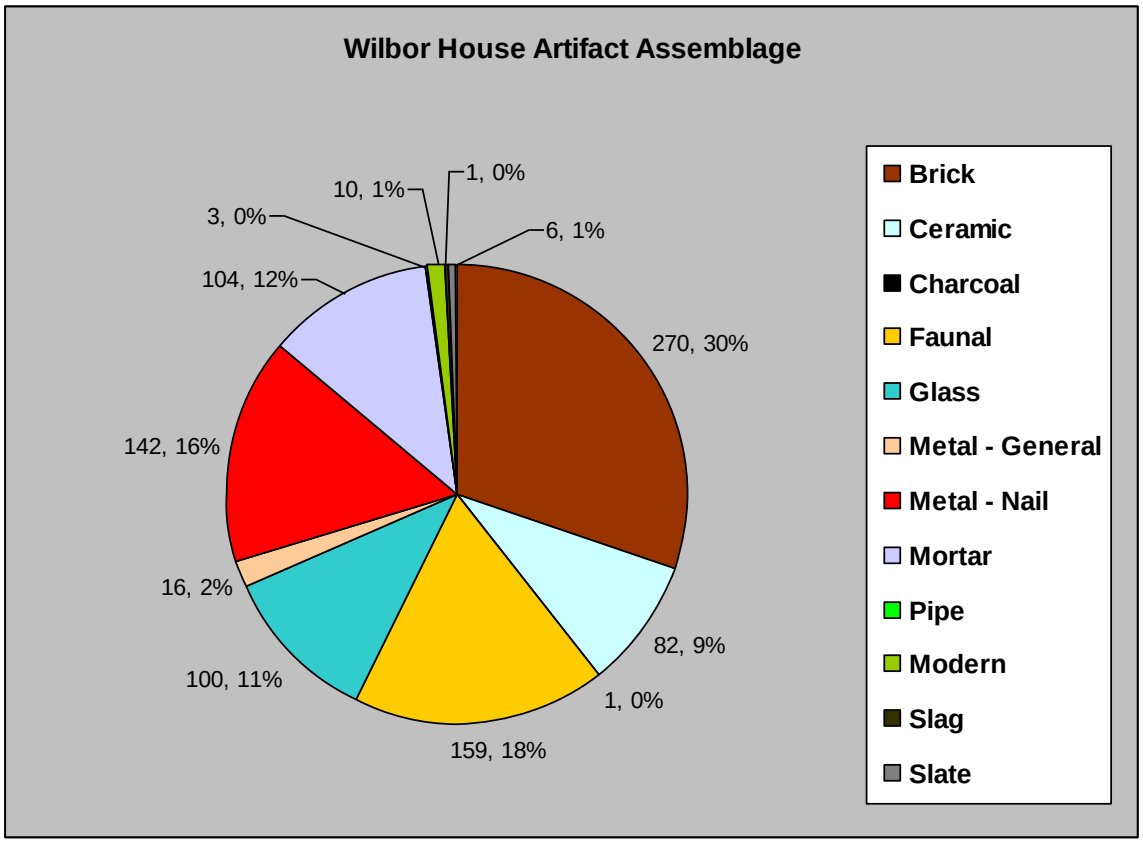


Figure 13: Catalogued artifact percentages

Most recovered artifacts were very small or fragmentary. There is no historical evidence that the houselot itself was ever plowed. Several sheep and cow bones were recovered, including some with butchering marks. Additionally, STP 1 near the road had a large amount of calcined bone and some burned ceramics.

There were very few ceramics or diagnostic artifacts recovered from the excavations at this site, and so dating fill layers was somewhat difficult. There was a distinct lack of landscaping features or fill episodes at this site in the front yard. The top layer across the entire front yard varied from 2.5Y 4/2 to 10YR 4/2 but was generally a

dark greyish brown silty loam extending to a depth of approximately 20-25 cm below ground surface. Closer to the west and south exterior walls of the house however, it extended only to 10 cm below ground surface. Although it contained older ceramics, such as pearlware or blue shell edged creamware, it also contained modern rubber, red plastic, and wire nails, and is most likely soil taken from another area of the site and redeposited. It was most likely deposited at some time during the tenancy period of the house or during its restoration in the 1950s.

At approximately 20 cmbs near the house is a layer of angular cobbles, cut slate, brick, and mortar. This layer was found in STPs 2, 3 and 7, and comprised most of EU 1. The cobbles in STP 2 differed from the 100% slate found in STP 3, 7 and EU 1. It seems likely that they are part of the same layer; however it is possible they are a drainage feature of some kind, or the bed for a road or driveway. At this time it does not appear that they are an intentionally placed cobbled surface.

Figure 14: Architectural materials from the Wilbor house

It is likely that this layer is associated with the destruction of the stone end of the house, and construction of the mid-18th century addition to create a central chimney plan. This layer had the highest artifact density in the three STPs, but yielded only redware in

terms of ceramics. There were only cut stones, mortar, and brick in the 1x1 in this layer unfortunately. It appears as though the stone end of the house was knocked down, and in lieu of a cellar, the addition of the house was then built upon the pile of rubble. This would have been excellent for drainage, especially since the floor of the 17th century cellar on the east side of the house is now below the water table in winter. From land evidence and probate records it is evident that this portion of the house was constructed at least by 1796, but most likely prior to that date due to the large size of the household. It was hoped that the excavations would yield datable artifacts to confirm the construction date of the addition, but this was not successful.

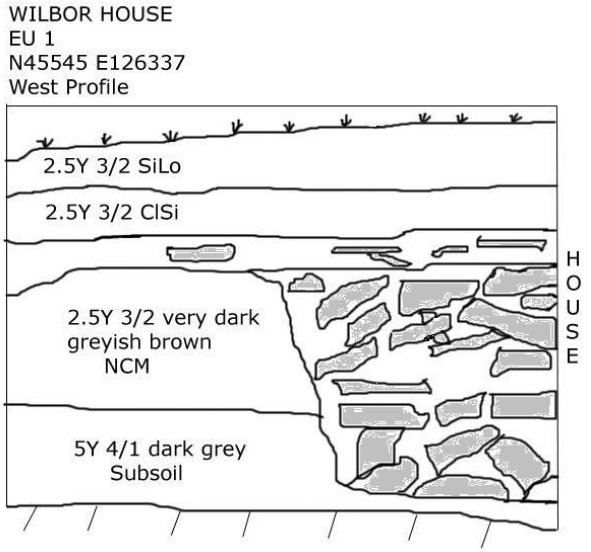


Figure 15: EU 1 west profile showing builder's trench

Figure 16: Photo of EU 1 facing north at 53 cmbs

In addition to the layer of debris, there were two other strata that appeared unique and not part of fill specific to one area of the yard. STP 2, which had revealed the layer of cobbles and debris, also exhibited evidence of redeposited soil from the digging of the well.

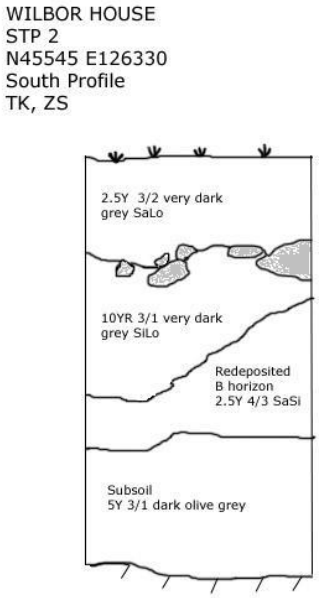


Figure 17: STP 2 south profile

Figure 18: STPs 2 and 3 at 20-25 cmbs (TK & FS)

Figure 19: STP 7 at 25 cmbs (KJ)

Since this well is the original 17th century well from the property, if this strata is interpreted properly, it shows that very little in the way of landscaping changes occurred in that area between the house and well between 1690 and the present. The only

discernable event, other than the well upcast, in the archaeological record in this STP is the layer of cobbles and construction debris most likely associated with the building of the west addition.

Architectural considerations

The house went through several building phases. There is no documentary evidence for when the original was built, however architectural details and land evidence suggest that Samuel Wilbor built it after or sometime just before his father sold him land in Little Compton in 1691. Consistent with local building practices, Samuel built a Rhode Island stone ender, with the stone end on the west side facing the road. During Samuel's lifetime a small addition to the north part of the house is said to have existed as a porch (Fields and Adams 2006). According to Abby H. Wilbor, the last Wilbor to live in the house, "There was a small porch on the east with one window of diamond panes of glass. Very old, moved off when the new porch was added" (Brownell 1970: 287).

It is unknown when this "new" porch was added. By 1796, and most likely well before, the stone end had been knocked down and the chimney redone to accommodate for an addition to the west and north part of the house. It is possible that much of the north existed already as part of an impermanent lean-to structure common in late 17th century houses. The resulting plan of the house prior to its later additions in 1860 looked very similar to its regional counterparts representative of the center chimney type – especially the mid-17th century John Alden house in Duxbury, MA (Mulholland 2000: 239).

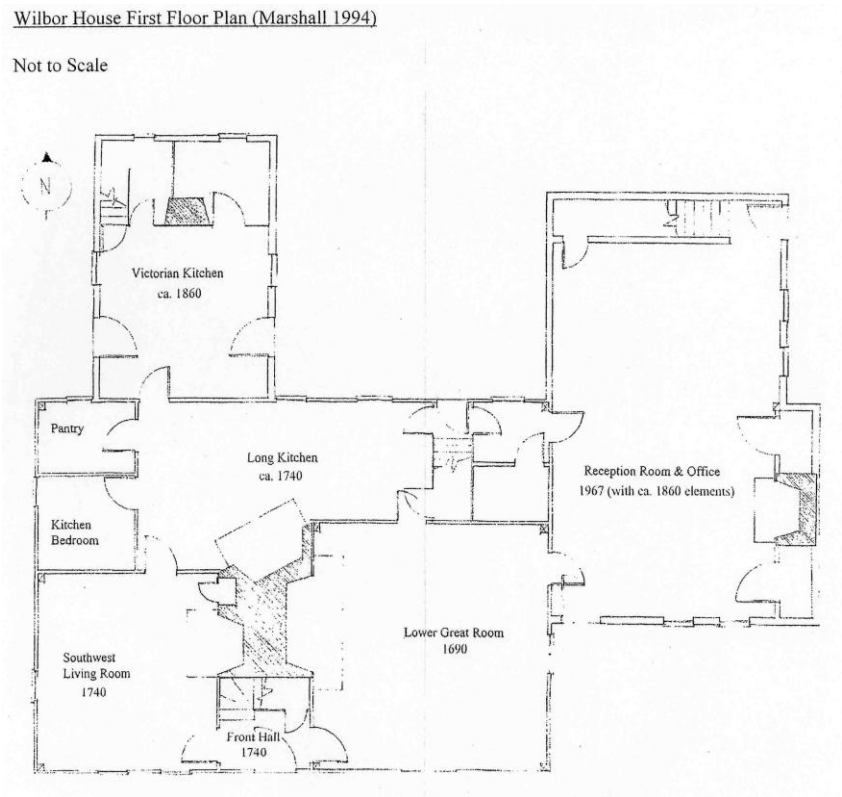


Figure 20: First floor plan of the Wilbor house (Fields 2006)

It is known that at least by 1860, two kitchen ells had been built onto the original house; one on the northwest corner, the other on the northeast.

5.2 Brownell farm

The scope of these excavations was similar to those at the Wilbor house. This site was incorporated into the excavation plan as part of a comparative analysis. Primary goals were to examine landscaping changes in the north yard and to analyze these changes in an effort to compare GPR anomalies and actual archaeological materials. To create a more comprehensive survey, the front yard of the house was surveyed with GPR and the resistance meter after archaeological excavations had been completed in the north yard. This will aid in creating a more informed excavation plan in the future, and can be

compared with the results from the north yard excavations. The north yard was chosen because it had not been plowed in the past (Carlton Brownell, personal communication), it was near the supposed original well on the property, and had the potential to find what Carlton described as being the cellar of the original house on the property, which would have dated from at least the early 18th century or late 17th according to probate and land evidence.

A total of forty-seven contexts and at least one depositional event were identified at this site. There was consistently no cultural material below 30 cm in all of the excavated areas except three; and even then their artifact density decreased drastically at that level. Subsoil was reached at approximately 60 cmbs consistently, however in the excavated areas on the southern part of the north yard, subsoil was much deeper and continued to almost 2 meters in EU 1. Soils ranged in color from a 10YR 3/1 and 2.5Y 3/1 very dark grey silty loam topsoil to subsoil that was 5Y 3/1 dark olive grey, and 2.5Y 2.5/1 black and very compact in at least EU 1 and STP 2 on the southern edge of the yard.

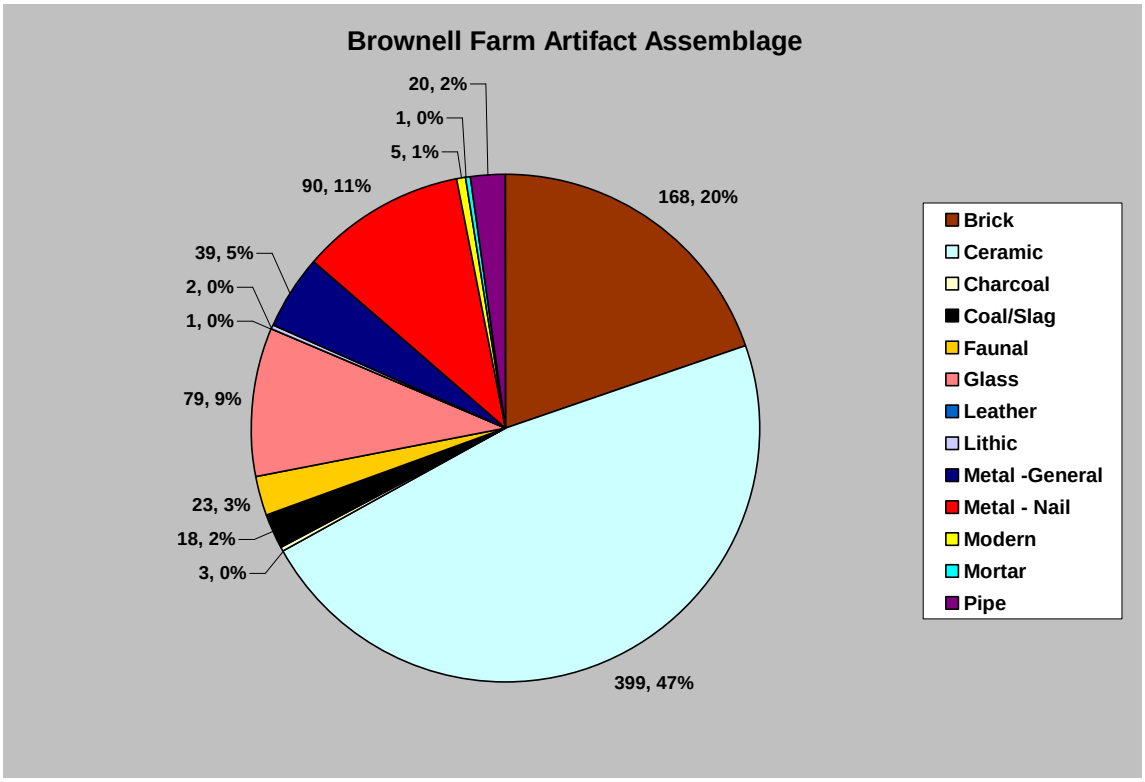


Figure 21: Brownell house catalogued artifact percentages

A total of 848 artifacts were recovered from this site. Interestingly, almost half of them were ceramics (n=399, 47%). There were also a majority of architectural materials including 20% brick, although the pieces were very fragmentary; 9% glass, half window and half vessel; and 11% nails, many of which were cut. Very few faunal remains were recovered from this site.

Many of the ceramics recovered from the north yard dated from the mid- to late 18th century, and early 19th century. There were few pieces of whiteware on site, and six pieces of yelloware. The rest were creamware and pearlware, along with sherds of Staffordshire, white saltglazed stoneware, Rhenish stoneware, brown/white slipped redware, and a probable sherd of Rouen/faïence. Most of the ceramics were redware, both glazed and unglazed.

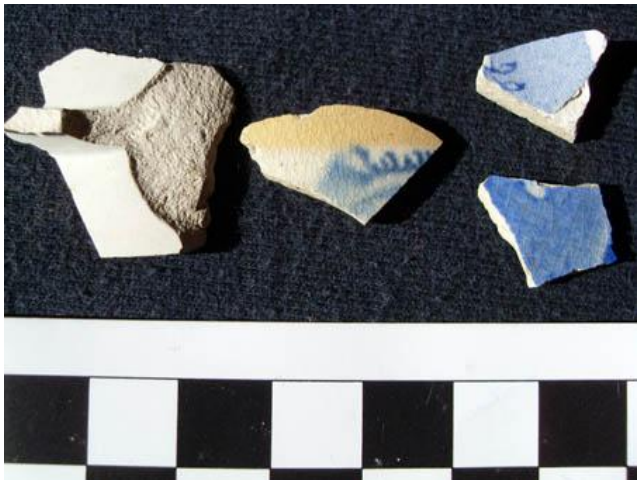


Figure 22: Ceramics from STP 3, 0-20

The large number of datable ceramics on this site allowed for TPQ dating as well as crossmends for what appears to be one contiguous layer. Both STP 5 in its 0-10 and 10-20 levels contained olive/apple green glazed redware sherds that crossmended; and EU 3 had the same type of vessel in its 20-30 level. Redware with the same type of green glaze was found in Newport in a context from the 1760s (James Garman, personal communication). STP 5 was placed approximately 5 meters from the well, and was one meter to the north and 5 meters to the west of EU 3.

Figure 23: Redware vessel from Brownell house

The sherd on the left is from EU 3, the sherds on the right are from STP 5. Although the sherds from STP 5 and EU 3 do not crossmend, they are most likely from the same vessel. This would indicate that some type of landscaping event affected this entire area. Additional ceramics that may be from the same vessel, or same set, include handpainted polychrome pearlware sherds which appear to be from either vessels associated with tea-taking, or at least some sort of fine dining ware. These were recovered from (L-R) 20-30 cmbs in EU 4, 10-20 cmbs in STP 5, and 20-30 cmbs in STP 2.

Figure 24: Handpainted polychrome pearlware

Carlton Brownell notes that no large scale landscaping activities, other than the removal of an earlier house, had ever taken place in the north yard (Carlton Brownell, personal communication). Based on this information and the fact that most of the ceramics pre-date 1830, it is possible that this layer could represent a landscaping fill after the removal of the old house to even the landscape. It is unknown exactly when this event may have transpired, although family oral tradition maintains that the barn on the site was built in 1804 and would have incorporated materials from the older house on the property. This does not necessarily mean that the old house was completely destroyed and the cellar filled in at this time, it may have been on the property for a longer period of time afterwards. The chain of title indicates that the property was deeded by Sylvester Brownell to his two sons Sylvester Jr. and Jonathan, between 1812 and 1840, and they may have made other changes to the property as well throughout this time period.

Below this stratum there were no cultural materials recovered in all but three of the units, and their artifact count significantly decreased to one or two artifacts at most. It is unclear whether this soil is natural stratigraphy or a clean fill that was laid down to cover the area after the removal of the earlier house. Since the area is rural, and the farm was comprised of at least a hundred acres, a fill sans artifacts and resembling the color, texture, and compaction of the surrounding natural stratigraphy would not be out of the question as part of the landscaping at this site.

Architectural considerations

According to family oral tradition, the existing house was constructed on a brick-faced foundation after the barn to the west was built in c. 1804. This house is said to have

been built by Sylvester Brownell, who lived in Westport on a successful 300 acre farm at the time. He demolished an earlier house on the property that was most likely built prior to 1715 by Joseph Church II or Perez Richmond, used some elements to build his barn, and took the kitchen from it and incorporated it as the kitchen in his own house. This is evident today by a sloping roofline in the east-west elevation of the house. There have in fact been three different kitchens as part of the house (Carlton Brownell, personal communication).

Outbuildings were moved often on the Brownell farmstead. There were large numbers of small chicken coops dotting the premises at one point in time, and though they are most likely ephemeral and not readily visible in the archaeology, it is important to note. Additionally there were at least three different corn cribs; one of which is the basic part of Carlton's nephew's house today (Carlton Brownell, personal communication). It was not uncommon for farm outbuildings to be later incorporated or used as domestic structures when their original use had passed.

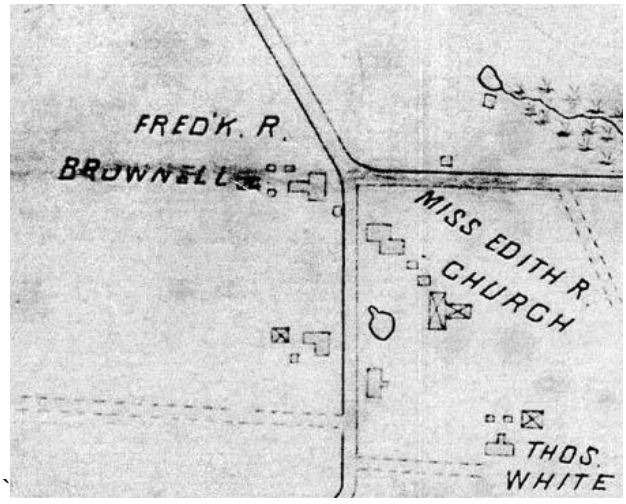


Figure 25: 1895 Sanborn map showing location of Brownell outbuildings

This Sanborn map shows the location of the outbuildings at Brownell farm as of 1895. They are all in the same position as they are today including the barn, cottage, and garage. There is one small square that may be a privy that has since been moved.

5.3 Discussion and recommendations for further archaeological investigation

The data presented above show that there were in fact changes in the landscape at both of the sites. The results show that landscaping changes happened at the domestic level infrequently and most likely reflected a continuity of family on the landscape and slow transitions in household over time. Although one person could have changed the landscape more than five generations, the results of one household modifying the landscape every fifty years or more promoted a relatively stable and agrarian landscape that would not have been possible had household and familial change occurred more frequently and with a larger, less kinship oriented population as in an urban context.

The data recovered from the Wilbor house is consistent with what Beaudry (1986) summarizes about David Starbuck's excavations in Massachusetts at 17th century sites. She notes that the sites he excavated had been inhabited up to the present with many architectural modifications, yet he found little archaeologically relating to the 17th century itself (Beaudry 1986: 42). She notes that "he [Starbuck] concludes that 17th century archaeology is likely to be most rewarding at sites not occupied during subsequent centuries" (Starbuck 1980 in Beaudry 1986: 42).

This is also true of Mitchell Mulholland's research at the Alden house in Duxbury, Massachusetts. His research goal was to distinguish when a 1627 structure had been destroyed and when the family had moved to the newer structure, which had then

been inhabited up until just recently. Mulholland summarized archaeological excavations undertaken by Roland Wells Robbins in the 1960s to find and document this earlier structure. Robbins found a wealth of 17th century materials at the 1627 structure that had been abandoned. However, Mulholland's excavations around the second structure, dating to 1653, uncovered almost no 17th century material but large amounts of 18th and 19th century material (Mulholland 2000: 242).

These two studies show that it is difficult to recover early material from houses that have been occupied for continuous periods of time. This is a negative prospect for Little Compton, where so many of its historic homes have been inhabited for centuries. Groover (2004) was able to distinguish households throughout extended periods of time in his studies, and Marley Brown (1987) and Faith Harrington (1989) were able to recover early materials from their sites in both Portsmouth, RI and Portsmouth, Maine respectively. This is a promising prospect, especially since Little Compton is less threatened by development pressures than surrounding areas and has been isolated in the past.

This past isolation arguably makes Little Compton a prime candidate for further archaeological research since it can most likely be assumed that: 1) a large quantity of the town's archaeological resources have remained intact due to its lack of development; and 2) these resources will help contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of agriculture, farming, and life in general in Southeastern New England – a study area that has been neglected by archaeological studies.

There have been very few reasons for large scale cultural resource projects in Little Compton – there are no large department stores, no shopping malls, and very few

subdivisions have been built. However new houses are built often and the town has expressed concern in this development (this will be discussed in Chapter 6). The town is rural and isolated enough where an interest in it archaeologically is easily overshadowed by the historically mercantile or industrial centers of Newport, Bristol, Providence, New Bedford or Fall River. However despite the lack of archaeological interest until recently, and despite its isolation, Little Compton can contribute toward a fuller understanding of a way of life maintained by the majority of the population for the past three-hundred years in Southeastern New England, and it is my hope that the research and analysis performed in Little Compton can contribute to the growing body of information about rural farming communities in the Northeast.

CHAPTER 6

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

What this limited archaeological investigation has shown is that both the Wilbor and Brownell families were quite conservative in their landscaping activities in regard to their land adjacent to the main road. This is most likely a product of the longevity and continuous occupation of the land by the same family, and the fact that households changed very infrequently. This family continuity is tied in with larger trends in the town that lend to its stability: the initial settlement processes and creation of "landed elite," maintenance of agricultural practices and lifeways, stable population influx and outmigration, reification of rural idealism in the midst of an industrializing world, and modern conservation efforts.

The word "stability" in this case should not be taken to mean that the town itself never changed. The landscape changed as individuals gave up farming, moved away, or built new structures. What is interesting about Little Compton is that this agrarian way of life, and its accompanying landscape, have all managed to survive into the 21st century relatively intact compared with surrounding towns which once shared the same qualities. And although the landscape changed, it changed less often and on a smaller scale than the surrounding areas in Rhode Island and Massachusetts. This survival of the agrarian and

rural landscape into the modern world is what exemplifies the stability and adaptation of this town over the past 300 years.

Settlement Process

Little Compton was settled by the English through a series of lotteries. After an area of land had been purchased, it was divided into several lots of a decided acreage. During some lotteries there were fewer men then there were lots. In a case like this one man may have ended up with Lot 1 and Lot 32, for example. As a result, he would most likely try to purchase Lot 2 or Lot 31 from whoever owned them in order to have two adjacent lots of land. This process took place in Little Compton often. The original lots were large (approximately 100 acres) and the original proprietors often had large amounts of land. The result is that the men who were the original proprietors of Little Compton began with the most land and were then able to distribute the land amongst their families.

This began to create what has been called the "landed elite" (Beranek 2004: 10). In her study of the Tyng family in Dunstable, Massachusetts, Christa Beranek discusses the way in which the Tyng family, as part of the rural elite, associated themselves with the urban merchants of Boston during the 18th century. She notes that the family could not compete in absolute wealth with urban merchants, and negotiated their social standing through marriage and other social connections (2004: 5). More importantly, however, their wealth was based primarily on their large landholdings and their agricultural production (2004: 5). For instance, Beranek notes that two members of the family were able to produce 100 and 150 bushels of grain respectively, which was much more than Dunstable's 50 bushel average (2004: 5).

It is probable that Little Compton, with its proximity to Newport, had similar families. Many of the men who settled first in Little Compton created lasting legacies for their families on the land and ensured their names would be part of the town's history. Preliminary analysis of documents, specifically probate and genealogical, show that the Brownell, Richmond, and Church families were closely tied to Newport and Bristol, and possessed the means and social standing to be part of what has been termed the "rural elite" (Beranek 2004). Further work in Little Compton regarding this issue could be very beneficial in providing comparative sites for regional analysis.

The fact that so large a parcel of land would have been given to one man contributes to landscape continuity. The large acreages of land would have been used for pasture, tilling, or a myriad of other farming activities. This aerial view of the Brownell Farm and its surrounding land today shows the remnants of what are most likely the original north and south boundaries of the Great Lots, laid out in 1674.

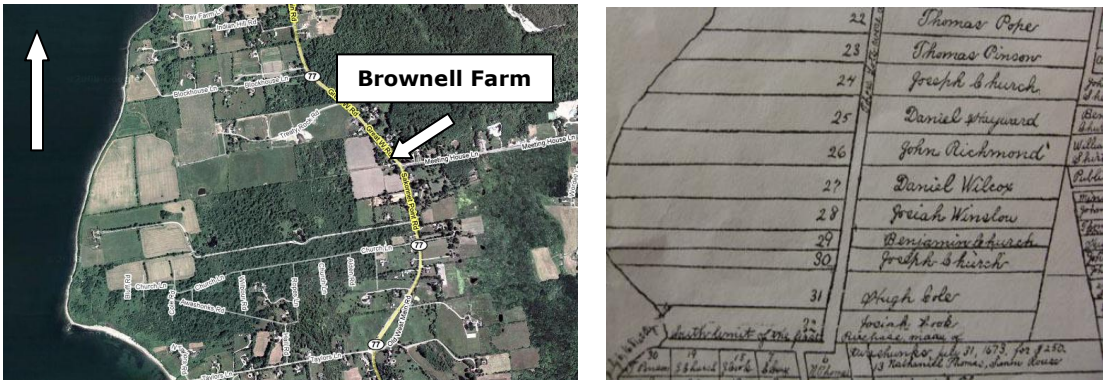


Figure 26: Modern aerial photo showing Great Lot boundaries (Google)

There was, no doubt, an interest in families that had occupied the same land for extended periods of time. By the mid-19th century, this was apparent. In 1886 Sarah Soule Wilbour noted that the fact that the Wilbor house had, and would continue to remain in the Wilbor name pleased her very much. As cited in Brown (1987), in reference to the Mott Farm in

Portsmouth, in 1853 Edward Peterson noted that, "Amidst the changes which have occurred in Newport, many of which are of a most pitiful character, there are, nevertheless, some estates, which have remained in the families from the early settlement of the Island, and some prior to the American Revolution" (Edward Peterson 1853: 149 in Brown 1987: 100). The mindset that Peterson appears to have is quite similar to Sarah Soule Wilbour's as she wrote her journal entry in 1886 regarding the fact that the Wilbor House had stayed in the family for seven generations. This mindset was expressed by many of older generations in the mid-19th century as a reaction to the increase in immigration and in industrialization that the area began to feel -- that is, as the area began to experience change. Here it appears as though there may be a conscious effort beginning to avert change and maintain some sort of connection to the agrarian past at the cost of social prejudice toward immigrants. Jane Nylander discusses these concepts of rural idealism in the late 19th century in her book *Our Own Snug Fireside: Images of the New England Home 1760-1860*. In it she examines early lifeways in New England and how some became idealized as part of the rural nostalgia that came to be in the late 19th century.

Agricultural Landscape and Family Continuity

Since it was settled Little Compton has been an agricultural community. The landscape of today no doubt is much different than the one the town began with in the 17th century. As it grew into an agricultural community, trees would have been cleared, stone walls laid, houses built, and fields planted. Today it is a landscape of fields bounded by stone walls, orchards, and winding roads. Farming has been abandoned by

many, and second growth forests abound on the landscape. According to the Rhode Island Soil Survey, over 81% of the land in the state was classified as farmland in 1860. But by 1974 it had been reduced to only 9%. This resulted from growing population and industry that "…put demands on the use of land for residential, industrial, highway, recreational and other non-farm purposes" (Wright & Sautter 1988: 7).

This does not mean that these families did not landscape their yards, or change their properties; for there is evidence that they did. However, the longevity of families or singular households living in one place limited the frequency in which these changes would have occurred (Groover 2004). Additionally, population pressure in relation to land availability was low, and families had the ability to occupy multiple farmsteads in a single area thus preserving the agrarian landscape through a continuity of family (e.g. Netting 1980). The fact that families then would have settled the surrounding areas as well created a geographic kinship network that was not only important in providing farm labor and support, but also in creating social networks that lasted for centuries.

In describing her work, LouAnn Wurst says that "Our data also shows that successful farming entailed more then simply what crop was produced, and involved issues of land, labor, and family structure" (2007a: 13) and that "In general we have found that the farm families that had the shortest occupations or were most transient tended to be those lacking any larger family networks in the area." (2007a: 13). Her work from the Finger Lakes region of New York illustrates the same situation as Little Compton – that rural agricultural communities were dependent on not only family structure, but on families who had settled the land early on in the community's history.

As the community grew, the division of land within families often produced small, segmented farms by the third and fourth generations of an original settlement family (Greven 1970: 125). Philip Greven makes note of this in his study of colonial Andover, Massachusetts. Greven notes that only five men in the town had estates worth more than £1,000, while most of them were under £200 (1970: 127). The way land was transmitted from father to son was dependent on a variety of economic and social factors in Andover.

In Little Compton land was also divided into smaller parcels by fathers. However they were not limited by demographic factors since constant outmigration and the lack of population growth allowed for large amounts of land for very few families. In this way, fathers who had enough money could purchase nearby farms for their sons, thus allowing for early economic independence and the creation of family kinship networks to aid in farm labor and support. Greven notes that there is an increase in the second and third generations of landholders of deeding their land to their son well before their deaths. This could either be by deed of gift or by deed of sale (Greven 1970: 131). This method is prevalent in both the Richmond and Brownell families, however the Wilbor family appears to have continued to utilize wills as a means to transfer their property from generation to generation. This may be reflective of their economic or social standing in the town, however further research into all these families is needed to determine why they utilized different methods of land transmission.

Population

The population in Little Compton has maintained relative stability throughout the town's existence. Even as of the 2000 census, the town had 3,593 residents and a population density of 172.1 people per square mile. Little Compton began with relatively similar population figures to its surrounding towns of Portsmouth and Newport in the last quarter of the 17th century. However, over time it is evident that these figures changed drastically. Some early population figures for the towns were not available. As a result the graphs begin in 1748 when population figures become more readily available. The below graph is a combination of both federal and state census records from 1748 through 2000. The figures from before 1790 are military censuses.

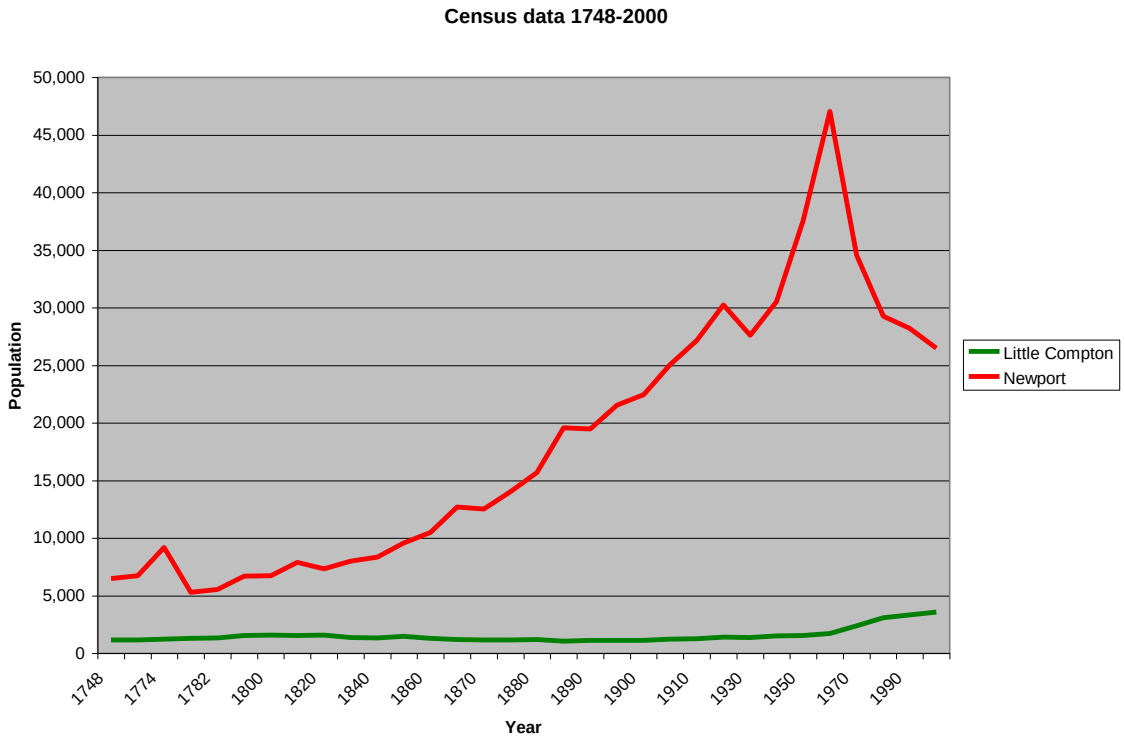


Figure 27: Graph with census data for Newport and Little Compton

This graph shows that by 1748 Newport was already a sizeable town (it had more people than Little Compton has even today). There was a drop in population of about 4,000 people during the Revolutionary War due to the British occupation of Newport. It took almost 70 years for Newport to regain the same number of inhabitants. During this period of growth for Newport, Little Compton fluctuated very little. From 1776 to 1820, Little Compton gained roughly 250 people, while Newport gained 2,000. These figures are even more striking when taking into account that Newport's approximate land area is 7.9 square miles, while Little Compton's is 20.9 square miles. By 1820, Little Compton would have had 73 people per square mile versus Newport's 1,000 people per square mile. The difference is quite striking and illustrates the difference between mercantile center and agricultural community.

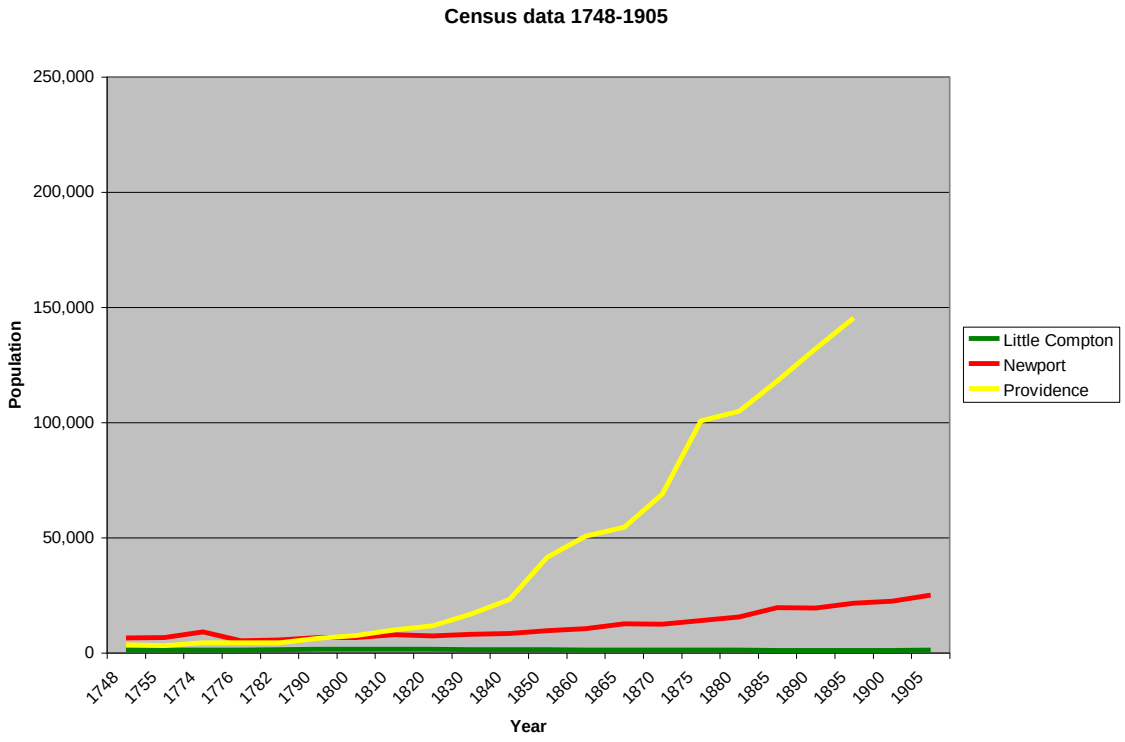


Figure 28: Graph with census data

This figure, illustrating the rapid growth of Providence in contrast to both Newport and Little Compton, provides some insight into the demographic pressures that would have existed in Rhode Island. Providence's population was significantly smaller than Newport's until 1800, when it surpassed Newport and began its growth. This is not surprising given that Providence had a natural harbor, railroads, and had become a connection between Boston and New York. Three rivers converged there and textile mills thrived (McLoughlin 1986: 125). Providence's population increased *1,004* per cent between 1820 and 1860, and by 1860 the city had a population density of 7,560 people per square mile (McLoughlin 1986: 125). Little Compton, on the other hand, had a population density of 62 people per square mile, and actually began a small decline during this time period. In this way, Little Compton exhibited what Netting calls "…population growth within supportable limits" (1981: 90). The town in fact did grow, but by very little each year. What made Little Compton unique and stable, at least in terms of demography, was that the amount of land in relation to the number of inhabitants allowed for subsistence farming or commercial farming to almost all landholders.

Outmigration was a primary factor for the slow growth in the population of Little Compton. It was not until the late 19th century that the influx of Portuguese immigrants vastly changed the demography of the town itself. The 1840, 1850, and 1860 censuses show that there were increasing numbers of immigrants from both Ireland and the West Indies during the mid-19th century. The censuses also indicate that these immigrants were employed mainly as farm laborers and domestic servants. The fluctuation between out-migration and immigration played a vital role in Little Compton's stable population. In the first half of the 19th century, many children born into farming families would leave

the farm for the city. This is indicated at least for the case of the Brownell and Wilbor families by genealogical records (e.g. Wilbour 1967), probate records, and deeds.

In her work, Amy Friedlander summarizes the work of Hal Barron. Barron studied a farming community in Vermont and noted that their farming techniques allowed for "…preserving the family farm across generations. Selective outmigration resulted in a resident population with extensive economic and social ties to the local community, and 'those who stayed behind experienced few dramatic changes over the course of their lifetimes'" (Barron 1984: 79 in Friedlander 1990: 103). Friedlander also gives other examples of what she calls "the importance of selective outmigration in maintaining an equilibrium between land and population" (Friedlander 1990: 103). This dialectical relationship, or equilibrium, between population and land, is undoubtedly present in Little Compton.

Little Compton and Industrialization

> "There was a feeling of isolation, of being left behind by a dynamic society; young people moved away to make a new life elsewhere, without plans to return; widows old maids, and childless couples were a large part of the population; institutions continued without growth, or declined" [Brownell 1970: 112]

These words epitomize Little Compton during the late 19th century. The effects of industry in other parts of the state irrevocably affected its agrarian and community-driven way of life. Industrialization came to Rhode Island in 1790 with the development of the textile mill by Samuel Slater and Moses Brown (McLoughlin 1986: xiv). This period, 1790-1860, was characterized by mills, railroads, immigration and the creation of new types of industry in Rhode Island. With an increase in industry, however, came a decrease in the mercantile trade and agricultural life that Rhode Island had been built

upon. McLoughlin notes that this decline can be seen by looking at the "import duties collected on foreign shipping." In 1804, $400,000 was collected on foreign shipping in Providence, compared with $36,000 in 1860 (McLoughlin 1986: 121-122). This is a dramatic reflection of the interests in an industrial livelihood that prevailed amongst Rhode Islanders in the 19th century. Additionally, it should be noted that "by 1860, less than 3 percent of the total work force was engaged in maritime trade, while more than 50 percent was engaged in manufacturing. Agricultural employment occupied about only 10 percent" (McLoughlin 1986: 124). While ports were still important in the domestic transportation of goods, new methods of transportation such as railroads and canals were becoming popular. The first railroad from Boston came to Providence in 1835, and had reached Fall River and Bristol by 1855 (McLoughlin 1986: 125). In *A History of the State of Rhode Island* the authors mention that the railroad from Providence allowed for "… a renewed activity and an increased growth to the village of Bristol" and additionally that "In summer a line of beautiful steamers runs between Fall River, Bristol, and New York, affording a pleasant and covenient route for the summer tourist or the commercial traveller [sic], between those two great business centers, New York and Boston (1878: 68).

It is this widespread industrialization of Rhode Island that makes Little Compton so unique in its stability. McLoughlin notes that in this time period:

> "Seaports like Newport, Bristol, Warren, Wickford, and Westerly faded into quaint backwater towns, while inland farming communities sprouted enormous wooden and brick factory complexes along their rivers. Crowded smoky cities in the northern half of the state became the center of enterprise, prosperity, and power, while Aquidneck, South County, and the eastern shore – except at Fall River – stagnated" (McLoughlin 1986: 122).

This is true of Little Compton as well. In *A History of the State of Rhode Island* from 1878, the author says that that the slow increase in population can be attributed to the lack of development in terms of mechanization and industry. He says:

> "It is a notable fact all over the State, that in those towns purely devoted to the pursuit of agriculture, they have been slow in their increase of population, and, as is often they case, they have materially diminished. The disposition of the young to leave the farm and immigrate to the busy centres of trade, has had a tendency to materially lessen the growth of the rural districts, while the cities and villages have been largely augmented." (169)

Although further regional research would augment this argument in the case of Little Compton, birth and death records from later generations indicate that children were leaving the family farm and moving out of Little Compton during this time period. See, for example, Clarke Wilbor's sister Huldah, who moved to Pompey, New York in Onandoga County with her husband John Gifford before 1829. Or Sylvester Brownell's children who moved to Providence, RI and Hartford, CT during roughly the same time period.

According to the census in 1850 in Little Compton, the most popular occupations were farmers (182) and laborers (156). The third highest ranked occupation was sailor (27). In 1860 the figure changed little, with 191 farmers and 91 farm laborers. In 1860 however an interesting distinction between *farm laborers* and *laborers* is made, and an additional category for *servant* is added. This new division of labor is noteworthy and interesting given the influx of immigrants that came to Little Compton from Portugal and Ireland in the last half of the 19th century. These new labor categories and designations additionally tie in with the attitude that older generations of English settlers adopted when immigration and industry incited change in what had formerly been an agriculture and mercantile based nation.

In a changing industrial world, Little Compton continued to act as a rural agricultural community. Geographically and environmentally it did not possess the qualities that would have been needed for successful industrial or mercantile ventures. This includes large and numerous rivers, or a naturally deep harbor (RIHPHC 1990: 1). It did, however, maintain an agricultural way of life, a way of life that waned in the state as manufacturing and industry became a primary livelihood. It is most likely this resistance to industry and maintenance of agricultural practices that allowed Little Compton residents to remain isolated and rural as many other towns in Rhode Island felt the effects of industry.

Little Compton's Rural Landscape

> "…an idyllic picture, complete with rolling topography, a quiltwork pattern of stone-wall bounded farms and woodland, complemented by marshes, saltwater ponds, barrier beaches, a rocky promontory at Sakonnet Point, old farm complexes, comfortable summer houses, winding roads, and tree-lined villages of Adamsville and the Commons. All these elements combine to produce a townscape the most sublime in Rhode Island…" (RIHPHC 1990: 2-3).

> "In point of beauty of location and enchanting scenery the insular portion of [Newport] county is one of the most attractive spots to be found on the face of the earth" (Bayles 1888: 2).

Throughout its existence, Little Compton has been generally described as a tranquil and scenic area replete with both farms and fields. Romantic descriptions of a rural paradise abound in 19th century literature, and as the above quote shows, even today. While these later writings attempt to capture the timeless nature of Little Compton, earlier aesthetic descriptions of the land and the town are scarce and deal moreso with political boundaries and negotiating social relationships. The poetic works, however, describe an unchanging and quiet landscape that has somehow managed to escape unscathed from the far-reaching effects of industry. For instance – there was never a

railroad in Little Compton, and like only four other towns in the state its inhabitants had to transport their material goods and themselves by other means (RIHPHC 1990: 2).

A writer for Albert J. Wright's *History of the State of Rhode Island* in 1878 noted that the town was both "…pleasantly diversified with gently sloping declivities and vales…" and "…presents many attractions for lovers of rural scenery" (Wright 1878: 167-168). While these romantic musings say little about the actual inhabitants of the town, their livelihoods, or involvement in regional trade, their inclusion as part of the town's three-page description speak volumes instead about the impact of Little Compton's rural and scenic nature. They demonstrate that by 1878, the town's reputation was that of a rural landscape devoid of "modern" technologies, and geographically inclined to romantic naturalist descriptions. In the book *Poems* by Cynthia Taggart, a letter included as part of her biography states:

> "Wearied with the noise and bustle of Rhode Island election, we determined to make our escape from Newport, to the quiet scenes, in the midst of which we had passed together many happy and tranquil hours. We intended to cross from the Island to the town of Little Compton; but as might have been anticipated, the ferryman was enjoying the Election holyday at Newport" (Taggart 1848: xxi).

Here we see Little Compton being used as an escape from the busy city of Newport. A further testament to this idea of Little Compton as a rural escape, and especially as its further development into a summer community lies in the creation of both Warren's point and Sakonnet point – both begun and maintained to this day as summer retreats.

Figure 29: Summer homes at Warren's Point (LCHS)

The idea of escaping to the quiet landscape of Little Compton was not limited to just a few individuals. Sarah Helen Whitman's summary of her visit to the town encapsulated its rural character: "To journey by steamboat and stage from Providence to Little Compton takes more time than it does to go by railroad to New York. Yet these very difficulties lend to the locality that charm of remoteness from the thronged thoroughfares of travel" (Brownell 1970: 252).

Sydney Burleigh (1853-1931), one of Little Compton's more notable residents, painted countless scenes of farming activities and landscapes in Little Compton. His prominence in local art circles would have ensured that these images were widely circulated and critiqued as well. After visiting Europe with his wife Sarah in 1878, Burleigh came back to Rhode Island a believer in the "…anti-machine, pro-native-artisan Arts and Crafts Movement" which sought to challenge progress and modernity (Lisle 2006: 10). Little Compton's rural scenery coincidently presented the perfect opportunity to paint a landscape that was not touched by railroads or industry.

Other painters, such as Worthington Whittredge came to the seacoast to paint during this time period as well. See, for example, his work "Old Road to the Sea" painted c. 1883.

Figure 30: "Old Road to the Sea" (LCHS)

The ideologies surrounding rural and agricultural landscapes are profound in that they not only influence the development of towns but also influence the social relationships and interactions of the residents of that town. These conceptions of rural-ness and family continuity that developed in the 19th century greatly influenced the course of Little Compton's history. Farming as an occupation waned towards the beginning of the 20th century, and Little Compton became more popular as a summer retreat and scenic area – a reputation it maintains to this day. It is probable that the perceptions of Little Compton as a rural, isolated retreat are a contributing factor that allowed the town to retain its agrarian nature during the period of industrialization that so characterized the rest of Rhode Island in the 19th century. These perceptions also initiated efforts in the mid-20th century to conserve the agrarian landscape that has become so characteristic of the town itself.

Modern Conservation Efforts: Keeping Little Compton Little

Over the past thirty years there has been a concerted effort by many individuals living in Little Compton to preserve its agrarian and rural landscape. Development in the

town has been slow, but it has increased nevertheless. In 1970, a 2-acre residential lot size zoning law was enacted "to preserve the town's rural character" (RIHPHC 1990: 34). Its isolation and agricultural landscape has made it appealing to summer residents as well as retired individuals, however the pressures of modern development that it did not feel in the past are growing today. The town itself maintains what both Beaudry (1995, 1996) and Rubertone (1989) have referred to as the feeling that the past exists within the present, and residents of the town have expressed concern at the idea that suburban developments may disrupt the town's historical and agricultural heritage.

Conservation efforts have been undertaken since the 1970s by groups such as the Sakonnet Preservation Association (1972) and the Little Compton Agricultural Conservancy Trust (1986), as well as other government groups like the Department of Environmental Management, the Nature Conservancy, and the Town of Little Compton itself (Anderson 2000: 1, Sheila Mackintosh, personal communication). Together, the Agricultural Trust along with private landowners has managed to secure 1,764.27 acres of land and counting (Agricultural Trust 2009). The Agricultural Trust was created by voters at the 1986 Financial Town Meeting, and accrues some of its funds through a 2% transfer tax levied on all real estate sales between $150,000 and $225,000, and 4% for over $225,000.

An additional pamphlet distributed by a private group elucidates the concern of many individual citizens that development pressures will result in the loss of the historical and agricultural landscape that has been created and maintained in Little Compton. The booklet lists suggestions in creating a home and property that adheres to the rural character present in Little Compton. Suggestions include where the house is

sited, how it is scaled, the building materials of the driveway, using native vegetation, preserving stone walls, the use of sectioned glass or cedar side shingles, as well as tips for land use such as protecting wetlands, times at which to mow fields and also protecting historic properties (Handbook 2009).

Consider the following quote from a travel website:

> The rolling estates, lovely homes, farmlands, woods, and gentle western shoreline make Little Compton one of the Ocean State's prettiest areas, although the community lacks for restaurants and accommodations and is thus best approached as an afternoon excursion from Portsmouth, Newport, or Bristol. Little Compton and Tiverton were part of Massachusetts until 1747—to this day, residents here often have more roots in Massachusetts than in Rhode Island. "Keep Little Compton little" is a popular sentiment, but considering the town's remoteness and its steep land prices, there may not be all that much to worry about. [www.fodors.com]

Conclusion

While the conclusions in this paper are subject to change upon more extensive archaeological investigation, it is my hope that the questions and research raised and presented within can help to establish a research framework and base that will be useful to others interested in pursuing rural farmstead archaeology in this region. There is a distinct lack of research historically and archaeologically in this region most likely due to the fact that most development is private and not subject to the archaeological testing mandated by federally funded projects.

This lack of development is a testament to the stability of the town in the past and persisting up to the present. Although development has increased considerably in past years, the increase in land value and development pressure is no doubt a reflection of the New England townscape that Little Compton has come to represent. The creation of this now idealized townscape (Beaudry 1996, Rubertone 1989) was a process that spanned

over three-hundred years of history and was influenced by the settlement process, agricultural lifeways and the continuity of family, demography, the notion of rural idealism during an industrializing world, and the efforts of modern conservation groups. In this way Little Compton and its colonial agricultural roots surely stood the test of time as a stable niche in a dynamic world, and has indeed become the New England village that Patricia Rubertone remarks as being "a bond between the past and the present" (1989: 53).

APPENDIX A

DETAILED FAMILY HISTORY

Wilbor Family and Farmstead

The Wilbor family in the United States can be traced back to Samuel Wildbore, who is said to have arrived in Boston in 1633 with his wife Ann, and sons Samuel Jr., Joseph, William, Shadrach, and daughter Sarah (Wilbur 1871: 4). Samuel's will of 1656 left his lands on Aquidneck to his son Samuel Jr.; however did not make provisions for William, who is supposed to have been his son (Wilbur 1871: 5). Samuel is listed on the original charter for Portsmouth along with Anne Hutchinson's husband, Edward, and is said to have been banished from the Massachusetts Bay Colony as of 1638 (Wilbur 1871: 4). He is noted as being a Quaker; and William and his descendents were Quakers until about 1850 when there is evidence they were attending the Congregational church (Brownell 1970: 298, Little Compton Probate [LCP] 1854-1876, 11: 214). William's first recorded land transaction in Portsmouth is from 1654, when he bought land of Samuel Jr. When William died, he gave his land in Little Compton to four of his sons: John, William, Joseph, and Samuel (Wilbour 1967: 707). William appears to have also had a significant amount of land in what is now Swansea, Massachusetts which he deeded to his youngest son Benjamin in 1705 (Portsmouth Land Evidence 1: 503) His probate

inventory reveals that he had 436 pounds, 12 shillings and 08 pence at the time of his death (Wilbor and Wilbour 1933: 26).

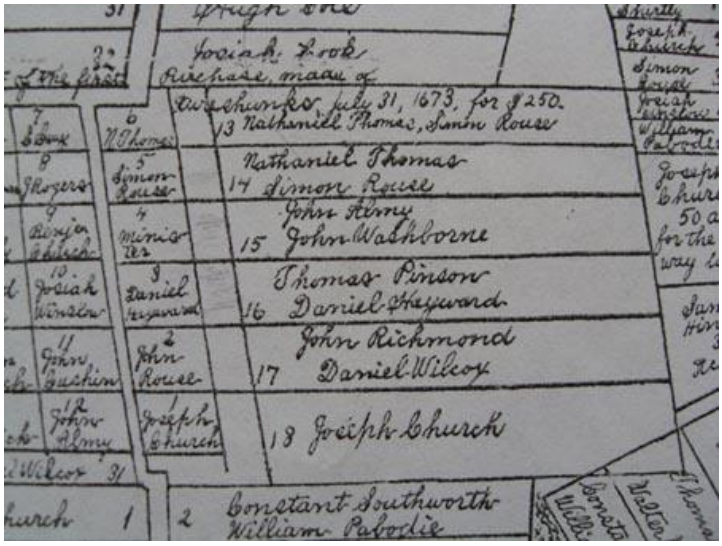


Figure 31: Proprietor's Map, showing Lot 15. (Otis Wilbour, 1933)

Samuel (1664-1740) was the youngest of the four, and though he was born in Portsmouth, he relocated to Little Compton with his wife Mary Potter after they were married in 1689. They in turn had 11 children, all of whom lived to adulthood. Although he received land in his father's will of 1710, Samuel had also been deeded land by his father William in 1691. This land was half of a 50 acre lot known as lot 15, and owned by John Washborne (Wilbor and Wilbour 1933: 25)

According to tradition, Samuel is responsible for building the present structure on the property. Although there is no documented evidence for the date of its construction, he must have been living on the land and have built the house by 1690, for that is when his first child was born. This house is said to have been a stone-ender, a type of architecture common in Rhode Island in the late seventeenth century. When he died, he split up his property amongst his sons, and left material items to his daughters. He gave

his first son Samuel "…his Now Dweling house and all my Lands that Lyeth to the Eastward of Colebrook Line in Little Compton in the County of Bristol" (Southern Bristol County Probate [SBCP] 1737-40, 9: 428). Samuel left his own house and the west half of his farm to his second oldest son William. His will specifically states: "… my Now Dweling house and the West half of my Land where my house now standeth to him his heirs and assigns forever…" (SBCP 1737-40, 9: 428). He gave the east half to his son Isaac: "the one half of my Homestead on the East End thereof to him his heirs and assigns forever, and one half of that Life Land that I bought of the heirs of Mr Ward" (SBCP 1737-40, 9: 428). Samuel's will additionally set aside a four rod by four rod plot of land for a family burying ground on the south side of his farmstead, where it still is today.

Samuel willed his own dwelling house to his son William (1695-1774). Since the estimated date for the west ell of the Wilbor house is 1740, William is therefore the most likely candidate for this addition when he inherited the farm from his father Samuel. It is possible that it was built while Samuel was still alive, however. Examination of the genealogical evidence shows that the household size increased dramatically over a short period of time. By 1717 William had married Esther Burgess, and by Samuel's death in 1740, William and Esther had eleven of their own children. Including William's unmarried sisters, the size of the household would have been at least sixteen people.

William is described as a "doctor of physic" (Wilbour 1967: 716). There is not much in his probate inventory to substantiate this, and it further reveals that his personal estate at the time of his death was relatively modest in comparison with other probates of the time period. His total worth in personal estate was 439 pounds, 15 shillings and 10 ¼

pence (LCP 2: 281). However, this total is misleading since over his lifetime William had enough money to purchase three entire farms, with surrounding lands, for his own sons Samuel, Daniel, and Charles. Although I was unable to locate the land evidence for the purchase, before 1747 William purchased a farm and surrounding land from Joseph and William Pabodie for his son Samuel. In 1756 for the sum of £11,000, William was able to purchase a 120 acre farm just to the north of his own, complete with "…Dwelling House, Buildings, Improvements, ways, waters…" (Little Compton Land Evidence [LCLE] 1: 285), with an additional "Priviledge for my three sons Namely Samuel, William & Charles & there heirs to pass & repass a Cross sd farm or Lands to the sea or shore to fetch of sea weed as they shall have need" (Little Compton Town Council and Probate 1764-1781, 2: 278). This farm was given to Daniel in William's will. In 1762, William purchased 60 acres of land for a total of £14,000 that he then gave to his son Charles (LCLE 1: 447). At the time of William's death, all of his sons were already living on the farms that he had purchased for them. Furthermore, all of the farms were near his and were bounded by West Main Road. He also seems to have purchased farms and farmland in the general vicinity of his own, up and down West Main Road. This pattern adheres to what Friedlander discusses as at least some limited economic independence for sons after leaving the family farm (Friedlander 1991: 27). In this way family members were geographically close and could provide labor for one another. It is possible that the stability model applied by Groover to a single site could be applied to a larger area comprised of multiple farms if a single lineal family occupied a large area of the town for extended periods of time.

In addition to the farms that he gave to his other sons, William gave his own farm to his son William (1727-1796). He is often referred to as William Jr. or William 2nd in town records; however in this paper he will be referred to as William III since the town records do not take into account the first William who lived in Portsmouth. William III married his second cousin Hannah Wilbor, and they had ten children between 1749 and 1770 (Wilbour 1967: 722). Through his land transactions it is evident that William III had much invested in his farm. In the year following his inheritance, William III spent 148 pounds and 200 silver dollars purchasing farmland and wood lots in close proximity to his own farm; all bounded by West Main Road (LCLE 2:293, 301, 302).

In his will of 1796, he left most of that land to his own son Joseph, an act that further contributes to the pattern of fathers purchasing nearby farms for their sons (Little Compton Probate 1781-1802, 3: 338-341). Additionally, he left his own farmstead to his two sons William IV (1760-1843) and Jonathan (1762-1822), to "be Equally Divided between them in the Following Manner: William to have the north side & Jonathan the South side of my sd homestead farm" (LCP 1781-1802, 3: 338-341). Their father's will was proved October 4, 1796. In March of the following year, Jonathan and William agreed to split their shares of the land and house as follows:

> "…made a division of the above sd Farm lying and being in Little Compton do Covenant and agree with Each other and their Heirs & assigns that the division line shall be as Followeth, -- Beginning Exactly at the middle of the Door Yard by the highway and Running a straight course to the middle of the West End of the Dwelling House. From thence to the middle of the East End of sd. House from thence to the North East Corner of the Shop, from thence to the North-west Corner of the Barn as the wall now stands. From thence to the North West Corner of the Barn

> Meadow Including one halfe of the Barn. – From thence to the North-East Corner of sd. Barn meadow as the wall wall now stands. From thence to a heap of stones Five rods to the Southward of the Lower meadow Barn from thence to the Northwest Corner of sd. Lower meadow as the wall now stands. From thence to the North East corner of sd. Meadow from thence to the Southeast Corner of sd. Meadow both as the wall now stands.From thence to the North East corner of the pasture called the Coe Pasture. From thence Southerly Exactly one Third part of the way across the Lot of Land purchased of Elihu Woodworth as the wall now stands from thence to a Snagg-Wood Tree at the East End of sd. Lot marked for a bound mark and Division Tree being thereof Easterly and Last Bound of sd. Division Line." (LCLE 4: 6).

This is the most in depth description of the Wilbor property from that time period. It shows that by 1796 the west addition had in fact been built and that a "Shop" was present in the north east corner of the original part of the house. In April 1797, Jonathan purchased the east half of the house from William, including the shop, for 200 dollars (LCLE 4:35), and in December 1797 purchased 20 acres of farmland from William for $680 (LCLE 4: 36).

Jonathan had seven children; a daughter by his first wife Esther Woodworth (b. 1759), and three daughters and three sons between 1789 and 1804 by his second wife Priscilla Wilbor (1774-1838). His inventory, recorded May 23rd, 1822, showed that he had $902.36 at his death (LCP 5: 70(2)-72(2)). Jonathan did not leave a will. Relying on land evidence, however, it appears as though the administrator divided his property amongst his children.

Clarke Wilbor (1796-1855) was Jonathan's oldest son and is likely to have received a large portion of both Jonathan's house and land. Through land evidence, it

appears as though Clarke had to purchase portions of the house and land from his siblings. In 1817 he married Lurana Taylor (1800-1860), and they had nine children between 1818 and 1840. Clarke's land transactions throughout his lifetime exemplify the problems of land division amongst siblings. He spent quite some time and money acquiring pasture, meadow, and wood lots near the house in what appears to be an effort to maintain his farm. This is most likely because the acreage he gained from his father Jonathan was not sufficient for any one person to maintain a working and successful farm. In 1826, four years after Jonathan's death, Clarke purchased a parcel of land for 15 dollars from his sister Huldah and her husband John Gifford who were living in Canastota, New York at the time and are noted as being 'Mechanics' on the deed. He received "the west half of the Dwelling-House standing near the above described premises, and late the property of the said J. Wilbour deceased. To have and to hold…" (LCLE 8:76). From Huldah and John Gifford in 1829, Clarke purchased a one and a quarter acre woodlot that appears to have been Huldah's share as declared by Jonathan's will (LCLE 8: 203).

Clarke is said to have used the upper room in the original part of the house as a school room during the mid-19th century. Currently, there is a bill on display in the room from Clarke asking for $2.20 for 100 hours of tuition. The 1850 census lists Clarke's occupation as a farmer, however. The census also shows that as of 1850, Clarke's household consisted of ten individuals, him, his wife, and eight of their children. His oldest son Thomas is not listed. The value of his real estate is listed at $4,300.

Clarke died in 1855. His will provides a description of the land he had amassed during his lifetime. Additionally it provides details about the architecture of the house

itself which is valuable especially for its reconstruction as a museum. For instance, as his second item, he left to his wife Lurana "…the Use and Improvement of the East Half of the Lower Story of my Dwelling-House, the East Porch, and South-West Chamber, my Waggon-House, South Garden, and One Third of the Door-Yard – Three cords of Wood yearly, delivered in the Door-Yard, and prepared for the Fire, and Eighty Dollars ($80) in Cash yearly" (LCP 11: 69). As his eleventh item, he says:

> "To William my Wind-Mill and appurtenances, with the Yard on which it stands, on condition of his Paying for Oliver Dollars ($100) also the Clock which was formerly my Uncle Williams' likewise that Part of my Homestead Farm comprising the following Lots,__ South Orchard__, __Orchard-Meadows, __Long Pasture__ East and West Lower Meadows, and the Brook_Pasture, excepting that Portion of it lying North of the East Lower Meadows, and West of the Wall commenced by Ezra Brownell, and also a Privilege to Pass, and Re-Pass with a Team at pleasure out of the Orchard Meadows into the South West Corner of the Little Pasture, and along the Crossway-Path to the Bar-Way entering the West-Lower Meadows. - -
>
> To Oliver, that part of my Homestead Farm comprising the North Orchard, North Meadows, Little Pasture, Wards' Plain Meadows, and that part of the Brook Pasture, excepted out of the gift for William" [LCP 1854-1876, 11: 69].

In addition to his two sons, Clarke also made provisions for his unmarried daughter Deborah to live in the house and use the South West chamber, and get water from the well, as long as she remained single. Just from reading Clarke's will it is apparent that he had many different types of real estate, including a Wind Mill, two orchards, gardens, meadows and pasture. He additionally mentioned a Door-Yard, which was also made reference to in the earlier land division by Clarke's father, Jonathan, and his uncle William. These land descriptions within probates are valuable in that they elucidate how

family land holdings and their divisions changed over time. An inventory was not taken of Clarke's property; however in February 1856 his two sons William A. and Oliver H. submitted to the probate court that the estimated value of his personal property was $3500 (LCP 11: 74).

William Andrew Wilbor (1827-1886) and Oliver Hazard Wilbor (1830-1906) were the executors of Clarke's will, and they inherited his homestead farm. Instead of one brother purchasing half from the other, they decided to both live there. Neither was married at the time of their father's death, however by May 1857 William had married Susan B. Simmons and by December 1860 Oliver had married Abby H. Manchester (Wilbour 1967: 714). Although they were living in the same house, the 1860 census for the family lists Oliver and William as living in different dwelling houses and being different households. This is good evidence that they were responsible for the addition of the two kitchen ells and the split that is supposed to have occurred at the Wilbor house in the 1860s. The census lists William A. and Susan B. as residing in a separate dwelling and household from Oliver, their sister Deborah, and their mother Lurana. It is likely this is so because by 1860 William and Susan would have been married three years already. William's occupation is listed as "farmer" with his real estate valued at $5,000, and personal estate valued at $700. There is one more individual listed in the 1860 census in addition to the five already mentioned. Frederic Brownell, a 15 year old 'laborer' from Massachusetts who had attended school within the last year. Since William and Oliver both had no children, it is likely that the family needed help with all of the daily activities associated with the farm. It was not uncommon for families to send their younger children to other farms where members of an extended family lived in order to learn

certain trades or to aid in every day activities (Carlton Brownell, personal communication). It is probable that Frederic was a nephew or cousin.

Lurana died in 1861. An inventory of her personal estate shows that she was in possession of a parlor stove, books, a clock, three stuffed chairs, a looking glass, a refrigerator, a "white tea and dining set" as well as "Britannia ware" and a myriad of other items (LCP 11: 214-215). In addition to these, there is also mention of a North Bedroom in the house as well as a "Milkroom." Lurana also possessed "One third of pew No. 1 in the Congregational Meeting house" (LCP 11: 214). Her estate was valued at $916.35.

Oliver was married a year earlier in December of 1860. The census of 1870 indicates that they all lived in the same dwelling house, and that William and Susan were one household, while Oliver, Abby, and the single sister Deborah were the other. William's occupation was listed as "farmer and miller" while Susan's was "keeping house." Oliver was listed as just a farmer, and his wife Abby was listed as "keeping house" as well. Deborah Wilbor was listed as being a seamstress. William's real estate was $2,200 at the time, with $1,000 in personal estate, while Oliver's real estate was $2,200 with $800 in personal estate. These figures are quite modest in comparison with some farmers in Little Compton at the time. For instance, in 1870 David Sisson's real estate was valued at $82,000 with $52,000 in personal estate. It is interesting that William's occupation is listed as miller; it is likely that he may have used the wind mill his father gave to him.

Figure 32: Wilbor house in c1876, unknown occasion. (LCHS)

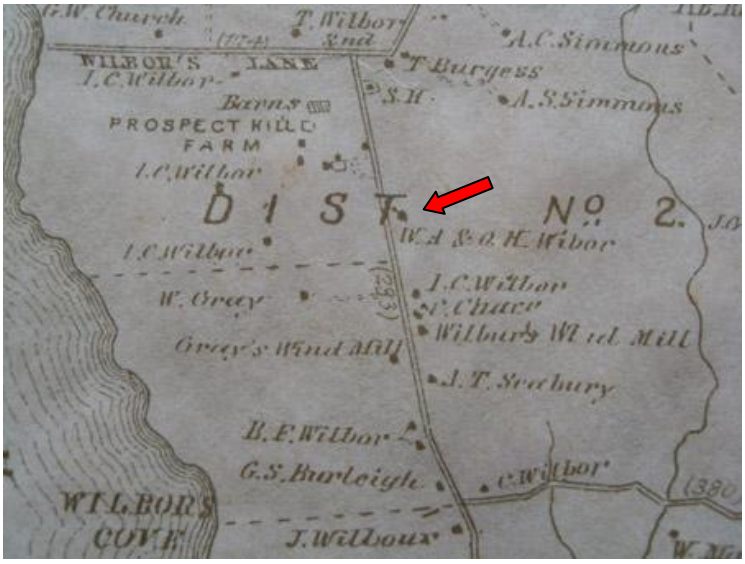


Figure 33: 1871 D.G. Beers Atlas map showing Wilbor house

In 1886, William died. Sarah Soule Wilbour, a relative, kept a journal and mentioned the event in it:

> "Sat May 22 1886: Our neighbour William A Wilbour died this morning, he has been afflicted some time with dropsy, his wife died three years ago, they never had any children, he was in his sixtieth year, his Grand father Jonathan Wilbour his father Clark, his brother Thomas and sister Louisa and sister Mary all died about same age" [Mackintosh 1993: 136]

Sarah additionally mentioned the arrangements for William's funeral:

> "Wed May 26, 1886: William Wilbour buried today. Theodore D Wood was the Undertaker and gave very good satisfaction I am glad to know there is a prospect of the old Wilbour home the land that has been handed down from one generation to another for two hundred years, and where seven generations of William Wilbour's descendant lie buried will remain in the name"
> [Mackintosh 1993: 136]

Sarah's comments additionally show that there was a consciousness regarding the history and family importance of the Wilbor House even in 1886.

William's death record reveals that his actual cause of death was "Bright's disease" (Little Compton Vital Records [LCVR] 5: 289). This is now commonly known as nephritis, a kidney disease which his sister Deborah later died from as well. In William's will, he left all of his real estate as well as "all my stock, farming tools, carriages & farm products on hand at the time of my decease" to his brother Oliver, and at Oliver's decease, his real estate to his other two brothers Alexander C. and Alfred G. Wilbor (LCP 12: 632). His inventory reveals that his side of the house had a Sitting Room, Parlor, Kitchen Closet, porch chamber, bedroom, upper bedroom, and a bedroom in the attic (LCP 12: 362). His inventory total was $3,365.03, the two most valuable items being a "long clock" and a stove, both valued at $20.00. The majority of his money was deposited in Savings Banks in New Bedford and Fall River (LCP 12: 642).

In 1906, Oliver died. He had written and signed his will in 1900 and had made Abby his executrix. Since neither he nor William had children, he willed all of his real estate to his brother Alfred G. Wilbor, and his niece Martha H. Wilbor, the daughter of his brother George (LCP 14: 419-420). Since Alfred's will of 1903 states that he was of New Bedford, it is likely that he lived there while Deborah and Oliver's wife Abby lived in Little Compton. Deborah passed away in 1903, still unmarried. Abby's death date is

unknown; however she is not mentioned in any legal documents after Oliver's will of 1900. Alfred Wilbor's will gave "…my share of the Clarke Wilbor farm in Little Compton R.I. that has already been given me by William A. Wilbor and what may come to me hereafter" to his son Herbert Clarke Wilbor (LCP 18: 577-578). Alfred died on February 20, 1911 in New Bedford (Wilbour 1967: 755).

Figure 34: Gravestones of Clarke, Lurana T., William A., and Deborah

It is unknown who actually lived in the house at this point in time. It appears that Alfred's family lived in New Bedford as did Martha and her husband Walter Blaine. The last actual person who would have lived in the house itself was Abby H. Wilbor, Oliver's widow. Herbert, however, owned the house and land until 1919 along with his cousin Martha. It is possible that Abby lived there during this time period since her death date is not known, and is not recorded in Little Compton. There is no mention of her in the 1915 census, however, or anyone in the family in a 1923-4 street directory. Manuel Fagundes and his wife Jessie, however, are mentioned in the directory; and a wall plaque in the upstairs of the Wilbor house mentions that they at one time lived in an upstairs room there.

An 1887 entry in Sarah Soule Wilbour's journal states that "…George Chase and Mary Sylvia were married and set up housekeeping in the old Wilbour house…"

(Mackintosh 1993: 177). An entry from August 31, 1888 reveals that "…The evening part [of a party] was at the Wilbor house, which is kept as a hotel this summer" (Mackintosh 1993: 312). These entries reveal that it is possible that the house was being partially rented by people who were not related to the Wilbor family at all at this point in time. It is quite conceivable that Oliver and Abby might have rented much of the house to tenants while they lived there as well.

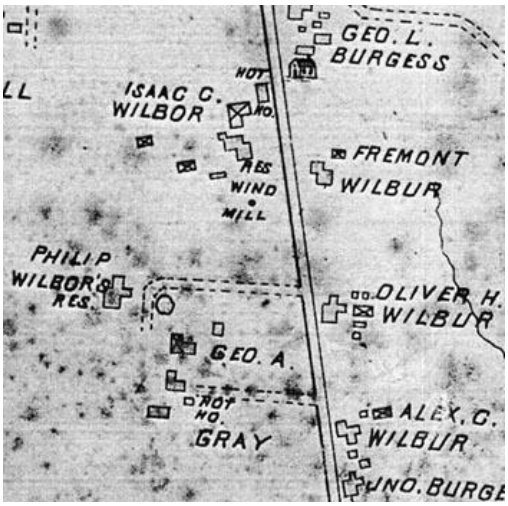


Figure 35: 1895 Sanborn Map (Brownell Library)

In 1919, Herbert died intestate. According to law, his estate was divided amongst his children. Specifically, it was Martha H. Blaine who owned ¼ of the estate, and Lulu K. Wilbor (Herbert's widow), Walter C. Wilbor, Alfred P. Wilbor, and James Parkinson on behalf of his wife Marjorie who owned ¾. They sold the entire estate, two parcels of land worth $1,000, to Manuel DeAlmo, a dairy farmer living in Little Compton at the time. The first lot was approximately sixty acres and contained the house itself. The second lot was situated slightly more to the south and contained approximately 20 acres (LCLE 22: 407-408).

DeAlmo was not so much interested in the house as he was in the surrounding land. He raised dairy cows, and utilized the existing barn and outbuildings. The only major landscaping change to the property he made was the removal of the 19th century barn from just east of the house to its present location, where DeAlmo dug a cellar and built an addition (Fields and Adams 2006). He rented rooms and parts of the house to various tenants, and multiple partitions were put up to divide the larger rooms of the original house (Carlton Brownell, personal communication). Portions of the house were rented to families, couples, or single tenants.

The O'Neils were one such family. An interview was conducted with Mary O'Neil on March 10, 2009. She lived there with her family in the west half of the house in 1946 and 1947 when she was nine years old. Her family was comprised of her mother, father and seven children including herself. They had previously lived in Seekonk, Massachusetts, and moved to Little Compton "during the war." She noted that moving to Little Compton "was like moving to another planet" because it was so rural (Mary O'Neil, personal communication). After the war, the O'Neil family moved to the Wilbor house. At the time the house was divided in half and a married couple, Mary and Tom Flores, were living on the eastern side. Ms. O'Neil remembered that her father fixed things a lot, and kept a composting pit to the north side of the west kitchen ell just over the stone wall. In addition he also had a vegetable garden there. Even in 1946 there was no plumbing in the house, and the O'Neil and Flores families both used the privy located to the north of the east kitchen ell, approximately where it is today. Mary's father James did have plumbing put in at the kitchen sink – cold water. They had a cast iron kitchen stove, but heat was scarce throughout the house. Mary remembered that her grandmother

used to heat bricks in the fireplace, which they would then take upstairs with them and wrap in blankets to keep themselves warm at night. In 1947 her grandmother moved in, and it was at this point the family decided to move due to lack of space.

Mary and her family were some of the last people to live in the Wilbor house. In 1955 Dorothy Brayton gave a donation to the Historical Society, and it was they who purchased the house and surrounding land from Manuel DeAlmo the same year. They received two parcels of land which were much smaller than those that DeAlmo had bought; however that land included the house and adjacent outbuildings. DeAlmo additionally made note that the Historical Society could use his well to obtain water until they got their own. This indicates that there most likely was no running water at the Wilbor house at the time. Restoration began that year under direction of Carlton Brownell. Further details of the restoration of the house will be discussed in Chapter 5.

The history of the occupation in the house during the beginning of the 20th century is difficult to reconstruct. Censuses and directories are useful, but no addresses are given as they would have been in urban environments and it is difficult to pinpoint the occupant of the house unless their name is known or the names of their neighbors are known. This is an area where oral history can help complement historical research and hopefully allow for a more comprehensive understanding of the tenancy period of the Wilbor house.

Brownell family and farmstead

The Richmond, Church, and Brownell families all have extensive histories dating back to the first English settlement of this region in the 17th century. The Richmond family in Little Compton can be traced back to Edward Richmond (ca. 1632-1696). He lived in Newport before Little Compton, and he became one of the proprietors of Little Compton. He obtained large tracts of land through the initial lottery drawings, and settled on two of the Great Lots, lots 26 and 27, to the west of West Main Road and north of present-day Meeting House Lane. The farm there today is still operated by his descendents.

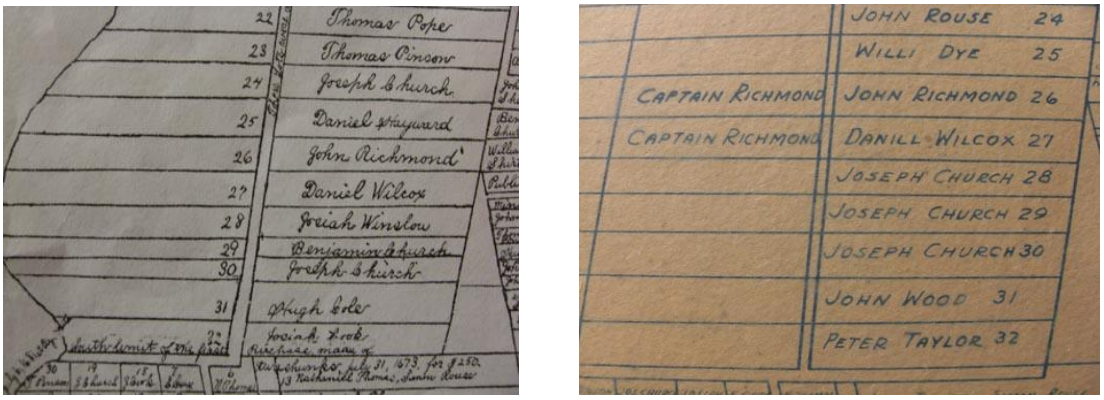


Figure 36: Proprietor's Maps, Otis Wilbour and Leo Grenier, 1933

Joseph Church I (1638-1711) was another proprietor for Little Compton along with his famous brother Benjamin Church. He settled in Little Compton on three of the Great Lots, numbered 28, 29, and 30. He received lot 28 from Governor Josiah Winslow, and 29 from his brother Benjamin. These purchases are depicted on maps by Leo Grenier, supposedly copied from a 1705 map; and Otis Wilbour, who copied and modified Grenier's to reflect the original English ownership of the land. Both were made in 1933. (Grenier 1933, Wilbor 1933, Wilbour 1967: 167). This would have totaled almost 200 acres of land, in addition to the smaller lots he was granted in other lotteries of later date.

Joseph I had ten children with his wife Mary Tucker. At the time of his death in 1711, his will reveals that he lived on a "small farm of thirty five acres" next to land owned by his oldest son Joseph II. He also makes note that the farm he lived on should be sold at his death (Wilbour 1967: 167).

In March of 1711 Joseph II was 48 years old and no doubt living on his own farm. Evidence that attests to this is present in the Propietor's Records. In 1693 the proprietors voted to build a highway "…to goe from the great highway of ten rods broad betweene the lands of Joseph Church Jun and Edward Richmond Junr…three shillings a rod for as many rods as the highway is in length that we may have an open way or Common highway to the meeting hous [sic]" (Little Compton Proprietor's Records 2: 13). This is the present day Meeting House Lane. Joseph II had ten children with his wife Grace Shaw, two of whom were sons named Nathaniel (b. 1693) and Caleb (b. 1701). When Joseph died in 1715, he split his farm in the following manner:

> "To wife Grace Church either of ye lower rooms in ye Lower house or one of ye Lower rooms in ye upper house by ye highway which she pleaseth…. To my loving son Nathaniel Church one half of all my Land that I now have in three great lotts from ye sea to ye great highway, with one of the houses and one of ye barns thereon & ye other half of all Lying as above I give & bequeath to my son Caleb Church with my other house & barn ye sd land to be equally divided between them when my sone Caleb shall come to ye years of one and twenty. From ye sea to ye great highway only my sone Nathaniel to have his choice of houses and barns…" [SBCP 3: 249]

Nathaniel Church then sold his portion of the farm to William Richmond I (1694-1770), the grandson of proprietor Edward Richmond. William was living on his grandfather's homestead farm just to the north of Church at the time. William was a Colonel, was well known in Newport and Little Compton, and played an active role in the military during the Revolutionary War (Wilbour 1967: 518). He is well known for freeing one of his slaves, Primus Collins, before the Revolution. He gave Primus land just south of his own

farm, and just north of the Church's farm. Primus additionally purchased land from both Nathaniel and Caleb Church (LCLE 7: 439, 9: 187).

On March 17th 1760, Perez Richmond (1728-1800), William's son, bought a 40 acre lot from his father for £3,300 current money of the colony. In the deed, William denotes that it "is all the Remainder of the farm I bought of Nathaniel Church (Excepting what I have given and sold by deed to my son William Richmond junr)…" (LCLE 1: 380). The same day, Perez bought this remainder from his brother William II for £1,200 current money of the colony. The deed states:

> "…a certain parcel of Land Lying and being in Little Compton aforesaid containing by estimation Eleven Acres together with the house & other Buildings standing thereon sd Land is bounded Easterly by ye great highway Southerly by the Land of Caleb Churches Westerly & Northerly by the Land of William Richmond Esqr. To have and to hold…" (LCLE 1:381).

It is interesting that Perez would have to purchase land from his father and brother, especially since the Richmonds had large areas of real estate, personal property, and even slaves.

Perez was active in the Little Compton community. He was judge of the probate court, president of the town council, and was a Minute Man in 1775. When his father William died, he gave Perez "the other half part of all ye Remaining part of sd farm I now Live on Being ye south side of sd farm together with ye other half of the Collomer Land aforesaid" (LCP 2: 160). He gave to Perez's brother William the northern part of the farm along with his dwelling house. "Collomer" refers to one of the original proprietors of Little Compton who owned land adjacent to the Richmond's.

Perez is said to have been killed when he fell from his horse in November 1800 (Wilbour 1967: 520). In his will he divided his real estate in half; half to his wife Mercy

and son Charles, and half to his son Thomas. He made his "much Esteemed Friend" Sylvester Brownell and brother William executors of his will (LCP 3: 432). In March 1803 Thomas sold his half to his south-easterly neighbor Adam Simmons, who then sold it to Sylvester Brownell in the same year for $3,925. The best description of the property comes from this 1803 deed. It reads:

> "…two Certain Tracts or Parcels of Land lying and being in Little Compton aforesaid the one is that Tract or Parcel of undevided Land which I bought of Thomas Richmond containing by estimation Fifty Three Acres & an half, be the same more or less, and it is one Equal half of the Homestead Farm Lately belonging to Mr. Peris Richmond Deceased and was Given to him the said Thomas Richmond in his Last Will and Testament, with on Equal half of all the Buildings thereon standing and said Farm and undevided Land is Bounded as followeth, Southern on the Land formerly belonging to Caleb Church Deceased, Westerly on the sea or Salt Water, Northerly Partly on Land of Col. William Richmond and partly on Land now in the Possession of me the said Adam Simmons and Easterly on the Great Highway so called; The other tract or Parcel of Land is also in said Little Compton and Lyeth on the North of said undevided Land with a Dwelling House thereon standing, and Contains by estimation seventeen Acres be the same more or less, and is Bounded Southerly on said undevided Land or Farm, Westerly on Land of said William Richmond, Northerly partly on Land of said William Richmond and partly on Land of Primus Collins so called and from the East End of the Wall that standeth on the North of said Lot, the Line is to run streight to the Middle of the Well and [goo?] a croase the Middle of said Well and then a streight course two Rods to the North of said Dwelling House to the Highway, and said Land is Bounded Partly on said Great Highway. To Have and to Hold all the above Described Lands and Premises with all the Buildings as above Described, and Ways, Waters, Walls, Fencing Powers and Priviledges…" [LCLE 5: 72]

In April 1803, Mercy and Charles sold their share of fifty-three and a half acres to Sylvester as well for the sum of $2,700. The land is bounded as follows:

> "Southerly on Land formerly belonging to Caleb Church Deceased Westerly on the sea or Salt Water, Northerly Partly on Land of Col. William Richmond and Partly on Land of said Silvester Brownell which be bought of Adam Simmons and Easterly on the great Highway so called. To Have and to hold all that Equal half of said undivided Lands with one Equal half of all Buildings thereon standing as also the ways, Waters, Orchards, Walls, Fencings, Priviledges and Commodities to the same belonging or in any way appertaining…" [LCLE 5: 75]

In October of that year, Charles, who is listed as "Mariner" on the deed, was shipwrecked and died (Wilbour 1967: 521).

In the earlier deed from 1766 between William II and Perez it appears as though a house and barn were on the land already. Both had most likely been built by Joseph Church II prior to 1715 since they are mentioned in his will as well. The above descriptions from 1803 mention orchards, walls, fences, and also a well in addition to the house. There is a stone-lined well on the property currently, which is said to have been from the original house (Carlton Brownell, personal communication). There may be possible traces of the original house in the geophysical survey undertaken on this property which will be discussed later in Chapter 4.

Based on genealogical records, the Brownell and Richmond families appear to have known each other well before the land sales. Perez's sister Elizabeth was married to Jonathan Brownell – Sylvester's father. Therefore, Perez would have been Sylvester's uncle. When Sylvester Brownell (1757-1840) purchased these 107 acres in 1803, he is said to have torn down the older house on the property which was most likely built by either Joseph Church II or Perez Richmond. He used some of the wood to build the present-day barn in approximately 1804, and took the kitchen from the old house and incorporated it into the new house he built (Carlton Brownell, personal communication). This new house was located just south of the older one, directly at the head of Meeting House Lane and is there today. In 1804 Sylvester became a deacon at the United Congregational Church in Little Compton, and this may be a possible reason for his purchase of the house and land from Perez Richmond (Blake 1888: 1033). Sylvester was living in Westport at the time, and had significant land holdings there as well. He was living on the farm that had been partially willed to him by his father Jonathan in 1776.

Jonathan I (1719-1776) was married to Elizabeth Richmond, the daughter of William Richmond I, and died at home in Westport from wounds he had received at the Battle of Bunker Hill. Sylvester enlisted when he was eighteen and fought alongside his father, attaining the rank of Major. Jonathan was a Lieutenant. The family was active in the community in both Westport and Little Compton and was relatively wealthy. Jonathan's will of 1776 indicates that he had a "Negro man Toby" and pews in meeting houses in both Little Compton and Freetown (SBCP 24: 198). His inventory lists multiple personal adornment items including a hat, hat box and wig, coats, jackets, breeches, and gloves. Additionally it notes that he had 2 guns, a looking glass, tobacco, cheese and cider presses; as well as a cider mill, a Clock worth 15 pounds (this Clock is passed down throughout the Brownell family and is still in possession of Carlton Brownell today), two guns, 48 bushels of corn and barley, 8 bushels of oats, 33 pounds of meat, 30 gallons of molasses and "a little sugar," and cider and cheese (SBCP 24: 202).

By 1792, a list of polls and real and personal estates in Westport shows that Sylvester, spelled Silvester, was above the age of 21 at that time and possessed a dwelling house, a barn, twelve acres of tillage land including tilled orchard land, 23 bushels of oats, 100 bushels of Indian Corn, 60 bushels of barley, 60 acres of mowing English and Upland including orchard mowed land, and 30 tons of hay (Document at the Westport Historical Society). Sylvester had just been married to Mercy Church in 1778 and had seven children at the time this act was passed in 1792. His progeny would grow to eleven by 1800 (Wilbour 1967: 103).

Sylvester had many land transactions while he lived in Little Compton. He purchased numerous wood lots and meadows from his neighbors. In one transaction from

1812, he gave 58 acres of his land in Little Compton to his son Sylvester Jr. The bounds are almost identical to his earlier purchase in 1803, however do not make mention of a dwelling house – just "buildings" (LCLE 6: 171). Since Sylvester Jr. was married in September 1811 it is possible the land was given to him as a wedding gift, however he sold it back to his father in 1814 for $4,000 with his brother Jonathan and sister-in-law Eliza as witnesses (LCLE 6: 418). It is unclear whether Sylvester Jr. lived in the house on the property at this time, or if Sylvester Sr. did, but the deed from 1814 lists Sylvester Sr. as being "of Westport" and Sylvester Jr. as being "of Little Compton." In the census of 1810 for Little Compton, there is no mention of Sylvester or any of his sons. By 1820 Jonathan is listed as living there with seven people in the household: two males aged 10-26, one male aged older than 45, one female aged 10-16, two females aged 26-45, and one female aged older than 45. There were three people listed as being engaged in agriculture. Jonathan would have been approximately 28 at the time of the census, and his wife Elizabeth would have been approximately 24. It is probable that the two older people living there were Sylvester and his wife Mercy. Both Primus Collins and Caleb Church are listed next, and they were neighbors, so it is most certainly the correct Jonathan Brownell. A Sylvester Brownell appears as the head of household on the 1830 census with three males; one aged 10-15, one aged 15-20, and one aged 70-80, and four females; one aged 20-30, two aged 30-40, and one aged 70-80. By 1840 Jonathan is listed as the head of household with his wife Elizabeth and eleven people, three of whom were engaged in agriculture. There was one older woman living with the family who was between the ages of 90 and 100.

It is probable that Sylvester Sr. lived there by at least 1820. As a resident of Little Compton he was influential in town matters. One specific event involved the Methodists' arrival to Little Compton from Newport. Although the Brownell family was Congregationalist, Sylvester apparently sympathized with the cause of Lemuel Sisson. Sisson at first began having religious meetings in his home, but soon there were too many people. Sylvester then sold Lemuel the lot just south of his own home, and it was there that the Methodists built their first meeting house. It was later moved from the spot and relocated as an ell on one of the houses on the Commons (Carlton Brownell, personal communication, LCLE 8: 67).

When Sylvester died in 1840, he left the farm to his fifth youngest son, Jonathan. Sylvester's older sons had moved to Hartford, Connecticut and Providence, Rhode Island (Wilbour 1967: 103). In his will Sylvester left his farm in Westport to his four oldest sons Thomas, Sylvester, Pardon and Richmond; and to his six daughters Ruth, Mercy, Prudence, Lydia, Elizabeth, and Mary (LCP 8: 187). He divided the farm into eight shares, giving each son half a share and each daughter a whole share. They in turn sold it to Gideon Peckham of Middletown in 1853 through a series of deeds (New Bedford Registry of Deeds [NBRD] 25: 48). In the deeds it was noted as being called "the Acoaxet farm" and totaling approximately 300 acres with sea-weed, hay, and manure privileges.

The farm in Little Compton that Jonathan inherited in 1840 was approximately 100 acres. Throughout his lifetime, Sylvester had also accrued land elsewhere in town. In his will he had given his two single daughters, Elizabeth and Mary, use of some of the rooms in the house and had instructed Jonathan to bring them milk in the winter and

summer as well. They most likely lived there in addition to Jonathan and his wife. By 1840, Jonathan and his wife Eliza had had all of their seven children and were most likely living in the house as well. The census of 1850 records the following individuals: Jonathan, Eliza, Maria, Charlotte D, Frederic R, and Mary (Jonathan's sister; the rest were his children) – all Brownells. It additionally shows that two other people named James and Ann O'Harra, aged 14 and 18 respectively, were living in the same household. Ann was listed as being mulatto, and James had been to school within the last year. They most likely lived there as either farm hands or domestic servants.

The following census in 1860 shows that Jonathan and Eliza were still living there and that Jonathan was a farmer with $6,000 in real and $1,500 in personal estate. Only their son Frederic remained, and at this time he was 22 years old. There are also two additional people listed in this census as well: John Blacklock, a 14 year old boy from Massachusetts who had been to school within the year; and Hannah O'Brien, a 28 year old from Ireland. Although her occupation is left blank, there are 35 other people from Ireland in the census and most of them are listed as being servants

The 1870 census shows that Jonathan was a retired farmer and that Eliza had passed away. He was now 78 and had $1,600 in real and $2,000 in personal estate. His son Frederic R. had taken over the farm and had $5,000 in real and $3,000 in personal estate. Frederic had married Annie D. Coggeshalle in 1866 and they had five children together, two of which they had by 1870. The census lists Jonathan, Frederic, Annie and their sons Frank H., and Maria L, who was one year old at the time. It also lists a Maria L. Brownell who was 53 at the time, she was Frederic's sister. Additionally it lists two others: an 18 year old mulatto named simply Joseph, whose parents were both of foreign

birth and who could not read or write; and a 33 year old woman named Catherine Auld who was from Rhode Island and whose occupation was "Domestic."

By 1877 Jonathan had died. Although his will was not recorded, the record of his account and value of his estate were available. Jonathan had $2,112.98, most of which was in savings banks in Fall River. His account was recorded by his son Frederic and shows that he spent $110.00 on a gravestone and was also paying taxes to the town of Westport at the time of his death (LCP 11: 108, 205).

Frederic (1837-1903) took over the farm at this point in time. In most historical accounts his name is spelled Frederick, however in the census and other deeds it is spelled Frederic. To avoid confusion in this paper I will continue using the latter. By 1876 he and his wife Annie had five children; Francis, Maria, Frederick R. Jr., Annie, and Charlotte. Frederic was the town clerk in Little Compton for most of his life and gave up farming (Carlton Brownell, personal communication). It was at this point that he built a small cottage to the northwest of his own house so that a tenant farmer could work the land instead. He additionally moved a large corn crib that had been on the property south down the road, most likely to incorporate into a new house being built.

Figure 37: Brownell house c.1870s with corn crib (Fred Bridge)

Figure 38: Brownell house c1900 without corn crib (LCHS)

Frederic's son Frederick (1872-c1950) inherited the farm from his father. He married Lydora Sisson in 1904 and had seven children, one of whom was Carlton. Carlton was born in 1917 and lives in the house today. He spoke with me about his father on March 13, 2009. After Carlton was born, the family relocated to Johnston, Rhode Island for some years and lived there while Frederick worked in Providence. During this time a tenant farmer lived at their farm in Little Compton, and they would use it as a summer house. Prior to 1917 however, it appears as though Frederick was still farming. The 1915

census lists him and his wife Lydora along with son Frederick III and daughters Hope T. and Louise B. Additionally it lists Lidora R. Sisson (mother-in-law) and Annie Fontaine, an 18 year old female from the Azores whose occupation was listed as maid, and Frank Lewis, a 20 year old male from the Azores whose occupation was listed as hired man.

Figure 39: Brownell house c1920 (Carlton Brownell)

Carlton says that his father ran a poultry and dairy farm once they moved back to Little Compton. He had several corn cribs; the first was too small and converted into a one car garage, and others were moved in order to make houses (Carlton Brownell, personal communication). Carlton lives on the property currently and maintains all of the present buildings which include the house, barn, garage, privy (no longer working), small cottage, and a storage building he salvaged when a house in Tiverton was being demolished.

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