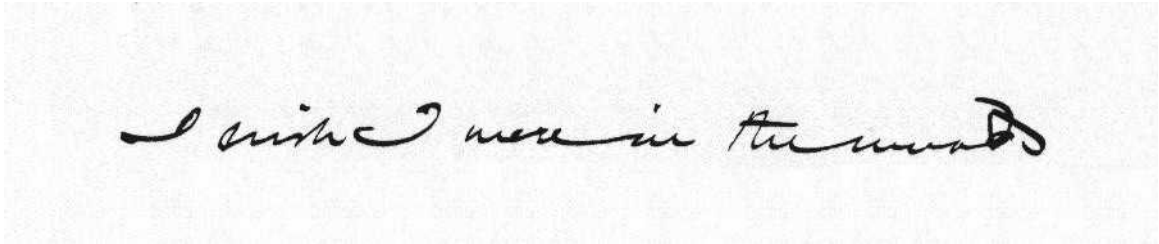


I WISH I WERE IN THE WOODS

The Historic Landscapes
of
Brooks Woodland Preserve
North Common Meadow
Swift River Reservation

Petersham, Massachusetts



I wish I were in the woods

a report prepared by
Electa Kane Tritsch, Oakfield Research



for
The Trustees of Reservations



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Cultural Resource Map of The Trustees Petersham Properties

FRONT COVER: title quotation taken from a note by James W. Brooks to his sister Martha, June 1, 1897.

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PREFACE

At the outset, a study of land use history in Petersham promised to be similar in form and findings to a recent study done for Trustees properties in Royalston: a place only two towns distant, with similar topographic features and settlement pattern. It soon became evident, however, that there were significant differences between the two towns, especially after the mid-nineteenth century. Some of the differences could be attributed to Petersham's lack of waterpower and consequent lack of industry and non-agricultural employment except around the small cluster of businesses at Nichewaug (Factory Village).

Much of the remaining difference is actually attributable to the dominant guiding hand of one man. James W. Brooks, between 1880 and his death in 1912, used his time, business savvy, determination, and wealth to impose a vision of land management on Petersham's difficult but beautiful landscape. He also had the force of character to pass that vision along to his friends, his heirs and, through them, to The Trustees of Reservations.

James Brooks is one of those rare characters whose life story tends to support the 'great man' theory of history but whose relative obscurity outside of Petersham regrettably illustrates the limitations of historical research. Brooks, asked to complete an alumni form for his alma mater Brown University, responded to the prompt: *Professional or Official Positions Held* by writing *none of any account*. He was known by most of his contemporaries as a real estate investor and a benevolent citizen. His real life's work, however, was the landscape he saved.

Thanks are due to many people for shedding light on this private man and on the small town that was his passion:

Larry Buell, Jim Baird, and Nancy Allen of the Petersham Historical Society

Paula Korstvedt and Jeanne Forand of the Petersham Memorial Library

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John Burk, Harvard Forest

Clif Read, DCR – Quabbin Reservoir

the Reader Services staff of the American Antiquarian Society

Among the many Trustees staff members without whose wide-ranging knowledge this report could not have been written, thanks to Chris Ward, intrepid tour guide, Dick O'Brien (he of the long memory) and Edie Dondero who patiently oversaw this report's preparation. A very special thanks to Ginny Slack, who made the essential but obscure connection between James W. Brooks and the Trustees of Public Reservations.

As always, Vin Antil's mapping resources and Lisa Vernegaard's guidance have been essential.

OVERVIEW OF LAND USE HISTORY

I The Lay of the Land

The town of Petersham Massachusetts sits on the western edge of the central highlands, bordered by New Salem and Athol to the northwest; Phillipston on the northeast; Barre and Hardwick on the southeast. All the remainder of its nominal south and west border – also the border where Worcester County meets Hampshire and Franklin – is buried under the waters of Quabbin Reservoir. From 1801 to 1938, most of the drowned land was not Petersham's, but rather the town of Dana, which had split off from the colonial six-mile-square settlement. Ironically, when Dana was unincorporated its area was returned to the mother town, but not control of its land, since all of Quabbin is under immediate jurisdiction of the Metropolitan District Commission.

Petersham is, according to the state government website, the third largest town in Massachusetts: 54.24 square miles land area plus another 14 square miles under water. It also ranks among the least populous, at a density of only 21 people per square mile. The figures are misleading since only 2% of Petersham's land area is developed. The town's 2004 Master Plan identifies the main locus of population around the ridgetop town center, extending outward along a number of radiating streets and then, sporadically, staking claim to old farmsteads and modern camps along gravel roads and long dirt driveways. The population includes 845 registered voters (72% of whom are independent).

As of 1938, the town also included 178 documented cellarholes, evidence of entire families who no longer contribute to the population census. A majority of the cellarholes, foundations, barnyards and ruins indicative of past land development are more or less hidden within the forested areas that comprise almost 90% of the present town landscape, including the 53% that is protected open space.¹

Human presence and absence notwithstanding, Petersham today would be a much different place had its land and its landscape been different.

Like its small-town neighbor Royalston to the north, Petersham is a town on the edge. Both towns sit along the north-south line of the greatest earth-moving event in local history: the creation of Pangaea, when the Laurentian and Gondwanan terranes collided 400 million years ago [Skehan 2001; 11 ff]. The Hardwick granite that underlies much of Petersham and the east side of Royalston apparently defines the western limit of Gondwana. In more recent geologic time, the Petersham area developed an advantage over the Royalston area: a broad protected valley watered by numerous fast-moving streams.

¹ Inclusion of the Harvard Forest in this category would bring the total to over 60%. The Petersham Open Space and Recreation Plan, however, emphasizes the fact that Harvard is apparently under no legal constraint to retain the Harvard Forest as conservation land. [Petersham 2004; 2-25]

Skehan describes the glacial process by which the Swift River portion of this landscape was formed.

[Glacial] Melting along the approximately twenty-mile-long margin of the ice sheet between Bassets Corner in Petersham ... and Quabbin Hill... produced enormous volumes of glacial meltwater. This water escaped via the south-flowing East Branch of the Swift River and incised a channel through substantial deposits of moraines, kame terraces, and outwash, all now inundated by Quabbin Reservoir. [Skehan 2001; 280]

Earlier geologists studying the valley where the Swift River's three branches meet had already concluded that it did not begin as a glacial lake, but was rather a sizable glacial outwash plain characterized by stratified sand and gravel. The river itself had carved out a number of ponds in the area, however, including Pottapaug Pond on the East Branch, which still exists today as a bay of Quabbin Reservoir. A number of other ponds including Connor's and Carter's Ponds, though altered in historic times by mill dams, were likely to have begun as natural smaller ponds or wetlands [Johnson and Mahlstedt 1984; 5].

A study of topographic contours along the East Branch suggests that during periods of glacial melting or even as recently as 5,000 years ago, during the Archaic Period of prehistory – a time of higher precipitation – additional areas along the streambed would have been inundated. Among the largest of these areas is the narrow valley below Brown's Pond in which the flooded stream would have spread eastward, filling Sackett's Harbor and joining Moccasin Brook on the *north* side of Burns Hill, rather than at the south end as it does today. The resulting enlarged wetland would extend down past what is now Connors Pond, through the wetlands of the Slab City Tract, possibly continuing south as far as the narrow defile where Glen Valley Road crosses the river south of Swift River Reservation.

A clear piece of field evidence for this enlarged stream flow is the geologic formation called the "Indian Grinding Stones" at the base of Burns Hill's northeast slope. Long thought to be the work of local Native Americans, the "Grinding Stones" have more recently been identified as a series of depressions in a massive, glacier-dumped, water-worn boulder.²

The uplands of Petersham are significantly less hospitable to floral and faunal occupation than the valleys bordering the town's many streams. Peter Whitney, the town's first historian and a local boy, tried to put a positive spin on its agricultural potential in 1793, commenting that *the prospects from the soil were very promising* to early settlers.

Whitney recorded that many large and excellent orchards as well as fields of all kinds of grains (but particularly of grass and pasturage) had been established, and he made particular note that the land was exceedingly favorable to the growth of fruit trees. [Yale 1995; 4]

² Thomas Mahlstedt and Eric Johnson, personal communications, Feb 2005. The Massachusetts Historical Commission archeological site files describe the feature as *natural depressions on the surface of boulders which lie within an outwash swale*.

A summary of the town's topography, however, paints a less optimistic view of the extent of Petersham's natural economic potential.

The natural topography of the upper Swift River Valley is typical of a glaciated valley, with a wide lowland of gentle relief [now Quabbin Reservoir] bordered by steeply sloping uplands which are generally oriented on a north/south axis. The valleys of the Middle and East Branches become narrower as they approach their headwaters to the north. Alluvial bottomlands and terraces flank the channels.... Outside of these areas the valleys are characterized by flat topped, steep sided kames and kame terraces and flat, low-lying outwash plains, both comprised mostly of sand and gravel. Upland relief generally follows the underlying bedrock contours, with maximum elevations ranging between 800 and 1,000 feet above sea level. Uplands are typically mantled with a layer of till, an unsorted mixture of clay, sand, gravel and boulders, through which bedrock occasionally outcrops. Upland drainage is accomplished by numerous small brooks, wetlands and small ponds. [Johnson & Mahlstedt 1985; 5]

The glacial till and steep slopes of Petersham's uplands would prove to be among the many reasons that this small highland town never experienced the economic expansion of other central Massachusetts agricultural communities such as the Brookfields. Petersham's narrow riverbeds and low stream rank were essential factors that prevented local industrial development such as took place in Athol or Ware. The Nipmuc people who occupied the region had worked this out long before English settlers came, apparently choosing to concentrate their settlement in the broad valley that underlies the Quabbin Reservoir. Yet ironically, the town's topographical shortcomings, together with its consequent failure to develop, were precisely the factors that made it a prime site for 20th century recreation and conservation. Petersham was saved, in part, because it failed.

II. Prehistory: ...no refreshing for man but the cold ground to sit on ...

Rivers ran through the broad valley, and the high hills were full of deer and other game. The Nipmuck Indians called the valley *Quaben* meaning ‘meeting of the waters.’ [Conuel 1981; 3]

Nichewaug in the Indian language meant “the place between.” This may have meant the place between rivers or brooks, as there were many bodies of water near the Indian encampment. [Sherman 1931; 3]

We travelled from Menamesit [on Ware River] about half a day or a little more and came to a desolate place in the wilderness where there were no wigwams or inhabitants before; we came about the middle of the afternoon to this place, cold and wet, and snowy, and hungry, and weary, and no refreshing for man but the cold ground to sit on and our poor Indian cheer. [Mary Rowlandson describing camp site in Petersham, 1676, quoted in Sherman 1931; 9]

Mary Rowlandson, during her captivity in King Phillip’s War, described a journey from Lancaster, west and north through Worcester County and into New Hampshire. She was traveling with a raiding party of Nipmuc³ Indians and their Wampanoag allies, through country that had been home territory to the Nipmucs’ ancestors for perhaps as long as 12,000 years.

This is not to say the area was densely populated during its prehistory. In fact, the scattered archeological and documentary evidence that exists for western Worcester County suggests quite the opposite. In the earliest recorded past, it was Nipmuc territory. No one knows when the Nipmuc began using that tribal name for themselves – a term apparently meaning “fresh water” or “pond” Indians – nor does there appear to be any exact definition of the territory they occupied. In prehistory, just as during the historic period, the hills of central Massachusetts were sparsely populated and may even have been occupied later than other, richer areas of New England.

Dennis Connole, trying to pin down the historic Nipmuc occupation area, met with only qualified success.

The bulk of the Nipmuck population was concentrated along the Quinebaug (Mohegan), Blackstone (Nipnet), Quaboag, and Nashua (Penacook) Rivers, leaving much of their domain virtually uninhabited. The Nipmucks were a semi-migratory people living “about a place,” moving frequently and usually occupying the most favorable location depending on their needs or the season

³ Note on spelling: the present tribal council identifies “Nipmuc” as the preferred spelling for the Nipmuc Nation; this report conforms to their decision.

of the year. The economy of the Nipmucks was primarily one of fishing and agriculture, the rivers providing them with an abundance of migrating fish in the spring and fall, and the valleys with rich bottom land for their corn. . . .

From the early records we learn that the “Nipmuck Country” was populated by small clans, not united under one chief sachem. . . . Having no names for themselves, they became known only by the region in which they resided. [Connole 1976; 14-15]

Connole did conclude that Nipmuc population primarily occupied river *valleys*, where natural resources were most diverse. Consequently, territorial borders between clans loosely coincided with watershed divides.

The land between the major river valleys . . . was of little use to the Indians and they considered it for the most part wasteland. There were great expanses of such wasteland between all the Nipmuck clans and also between neighboring nations [making] it unnecessary for precise lines of demarcation. [Connole; 16]

During his research, Connole made one fortuitous discovery: an Indian deed that focussed on the Petersham area. The “Schauhtecook (or Scauntecook) Deed” as it is called, was not drawn up until 1735, as much as sixty years after the English colonists had made concerted efforts to clear their (English) legal title to other lands they had occupied. 1735 was not late for this region’s history, however, Petersham not having been settled until 1733. The deed describes a tract of land whose west boundary centered on two marked trees located where the road from Sunderland to Lancaster (in Petersham: West Street and East Street) crosses Fever Brook *that runs between the middle and East Branch of Swift River*. The trees stood somewhere within what is now the Federated Womens’ Club State Forest. The Scauntecook land extended five miles north (into Athol) and south (north slope of Pottapaug Hill) of the trees, and twelve miles eastward to Wachusett Mountain, an important Nipmuc landmark which, Connole points out, is the divide between the Ware and Nashua River watersheds.

Half a mile south of the Scauntecook land boundary lie Pottapaug Hill, Pottapaug Pond, and the Swift River East Branch Valley, all of which contain archeological evidence of prehistoric occupation. Were the boundary descriptions off by a bit (Connole’s *unnecessary for precise lines of demarcation*)? Or did this transfer of rights from native to newcomer purposely exclude one of the only substantial areas of Petersham with a long prehistory of valuable resources and occupation? Interestingly, the only other significant site of prehistoric activity in town – Soapstone Hill – was also beyond the border of this tract, lying just west of the marked trees that defined it. It would appear that the local Nipmuc band deeded away the portion of their territory that meant least to them, reserving for their continued use the features and landscape they valued most.

During the 20th century, the dry land of Petersham has not been a focus for any substantial archeological field activity, but its location on the shore of Quabbin Reservoir has resulted in a number of interesting Quabbin-related finds, both before and during the reservoir’s construction, plus some state-mandated testing occurring more recently. The most useful body of local

prehistoric information derives from a large artifact collection assembled by William Ellsworth, a Petersham resident who, in the second half of the 20th century, explored, collected, and recorded evidence of prehistoric activity within a ten-mile radius of his home. A 1984 study of Mr. Ellsworth's collection by the state Historical Commission is one of the only information sources on life in the Swift River Valley before the 1700s. A brief timeline follows.⁴

11,000 – 9,000 Before Present (BP): Tundra-like environment; food resources associated with large migratory animals such as mammoths and mastodons. A few diagnostic points have been collected in the greater Quabbin - Ware River area indicating that there was a Native American presence here as well as in areas closer to the Atlantic seaboard.

9,000 – 2,500 BP (Archaic Period): Mixed conifer-hardwood forest; rivers approximate current locations; small Native American camps oriented toward seasonally abundant resources. Climatic cooling trend and more rainfall; more shrubs and 'edge' trees and less oak/hemlock. Substantial archeological evidence from this period including evidence of heavy woodworking (as in shaping of dugout canoes like the one found in Pottapaug Pond). Sites tend to be base camps for foraging populations. Activities include hunting, fishing with nets and weirs, collecting and processing of animal and plant materials, and tool production.

Significant amounts of lithic material from the Ellsworth and other collections indicate that the Swift River / Quabbin area was heavily used, especially during the Late Archaic (6,000 – 2,500 BP). This was also the period when steatite was first mined from Soapstone Hill, the soft rock being formed into bowls before ceramic manufacture began.

2,500 – 350 BP (BC 450 – AD 1600) (Woodland Period): Substantial archeological information indicating tendency to group site occupation (ie: a number of families, not whole 'town'), specialized camp sites, exploitation of riverine resources, as well as beginning of natural resource management (in modern terms) such as controlled burning and horticulture. Use of ceramics and bow & arrow. **1160 AD** earliest radiocarbon date for plant cultivars found in New England.

Ellsworth located at least five sites in the Quabbin vicinity containing Woodland points and tools, as well as ceramic shards.

Climate, flora and fauna can all be considered essentially modern [by Late Woodland Period] in New England. Pollen profiles indicate some evidence for progressive forest clearing [Thorbahn 1982] and by the time Europeans arrived in the area broad meadows existed in many areas and the underbrush was kept cleared out by regular burning. [Wood 1977:38, quoted in Luedtke; 302.]

1600 – 1750 AD (Contact Period): Native American groups made regular seasonal changes of residence, toward the coast or the larger inland rivers and lakes in summer and inland or upstream in winter; settlement size varied by season. There were active regional and long-

⁴ Much of the following contextual information is derived from Barbara Luedtke's summary tour-de-force, *The Camp at the Bend in the River* (1985) and contemporary work by Mahlstedt.

distance trade networks among Indians, as well as between Indian and Englishmen.

There is no mention of Contact Period artifacts in the Ellsworth collection, but the first written accounts date to this period, including Mary Rowlandson’s captivity narrative and the records of the Reverend John Eliot concerning his efforts to establish “praying Indian” towns throughout the Commonwealth.⁵ From Eliot we learn that the native population of the entire Worcester County region was estimated at only 1,150. From Rowlandson, among other things we learn of the area’s food resources:

The rivers and brooks were abounding in all kinds of fish: trout, perch, pike, pickerel and salmon. The woods and mountains were full of a variety of game: bears, wolves, catamount and deer.
The Indians boiled ground-nuts and parched corn for their provisions. Their chief and commonest food was ground-nuts, also chestnuts and acorns, harty-choaks and other weeds and roots, horses’ guts and ears, wild birds, bear, venison, beaver, tortoise, frogs, squirrels, dogs, skunks, rattlesnakes, and even the bark of trees. [quoted in Sherman; 9-10]

Rowlandson’s listing is an interesting mix of desirable (bear) and undesirable (catamount), wild plants and animals and domesticated ones including horse, dog, and the corn which, according to local folklore, was planted on Pottapaug Hill and perhaps in the intervale at the head of Connor’s Pond.⁶

There are also written indications, frustratingly vague, that the Nipmuc may have established a sizable village in the vicinity called “Nichewaug” in southwestern Petersham. An 1879 history of Worcester County lists over a dozen village sites throughout the county, including *at Nichewaug, on the Swift River in Petersham*, but gives no further information or source for the claim. [Horr 1879; 22]

⁵ Eliot established at least two towns in south central Massachusetts, but apparently felt that the native population farther north was either too dispersed or too inimical to be gathered into English-style villages.

⁶ The intervale planting field and Pottapaug corn are cited by Larry Buell as traditional knowledge; Pottapaug is substantiated by artifacts found in the vicinity.

III. 1733-1875: Settlement in a Market Economy

Historical Framework

The central Massachusetts historical record has been fortunate to benefit from the research and writing of a group of scholars based in Petersham on a 90-acre tract which is both a venerable woodland and a venerable institution: the Harvard Forest, established in 1908 as a center for research and education in forest biology, ecology and management. Research first published by Hugh Raup, Director of the Harvard Forest in the 1960s, and refined by his successor David Foster, has provided a solid framework for understanding the cultural ecology of the region. Specifically, Raup's and Foster's chronology of agricultural development and decline in central Massachusetts can serve as a gauge against which to measure the changes that took place in and around The Trustees' Petersham properties from the time of their first exploitation by white settlers to their recent evolution into conservation land.

Raup's *The View from John Sanderson's Farm* and Foster's *Land-use history (1730-1990) and vegetation dynamics in central New England*,⁷ both written about the Harvard Forest property, provide an appropriate framework and some interesting comparison with this report's study of Brooks Woodland, North Common Meadow, and Swift River Reservations. The phases of human intervention and imposition on the local environment that they define are a useful starting point for an overview of historic land use in Petersham.

- Raup and Foster Phase I – the “primeval forest” that once occupied Petersham's lands:

The land surface of the town had nearly all been forested. ...the landscape may have been comprised of oak, chestnut and pine forests on the uplands, forests of beech, birch, maple and ash with hemlock in the valleys and lowlands, and swamps dominated by red maple or by spruce, larch, and black ash. Beech, sugar maple, chestnut and hemlock were more abundant in early forests than at present.⁸

What Raup and Foster describe is a zone of transitional forest, mixing northern oaks and chestnuts with more southerly hardwood types in less exposed areas. The near omnipresence of forest cover was due to moderate-to-poor soil conditions and the rockiness of much of the land in Petersham. In some small measure it was also due to low-intensity Indian land use, which was concentrated instead in more fertile and gentler river valleys to the east and west.

⁷ Hugh M. Raup, “The View from John Sanderson's Farm: A Perspective for the Use of the Land” in *Forest History*, Vol. 10, No. 1; April 1966. David R. Foster, “Land-use history (1730-1990) and vegetation dynamics in central New England, USA” in *Journal of Ecology*, No. 80, pp. 753-772; 1992. Foster's second article, “Land-use History and Forest Transformations in Central New England”, published a year later, is a textbook of changing woodland in the region.

⁸ Raup, p. 3 (first sentence); Foster 1993, p. 103 (rest of quote).

- Raup and Foster Phase II – 1730s – 1790s: Initial settlement of central Massachusetts. Agricultural activity during the settlement period was characterized by subsistence farming and slow change. Foster (1993) describes it as “low intensity agriculture.” He also isolates 1730-1750 as a period of significant land speculation “as absentee owners speculated on land grants and sold their lots to the first settlers.”⁹ By 1790, perhaps only 10% of the region’s land had been cleared.
- Raup and Foster Phase III – 1790-1850: A time of rapid change for the region, which Foster characterizes by “commercial agriculture and small industry.” The period was also marked by rapid expansion of a regional road network including “an intricate system of connecting and feeder roads within the town itself. Hardly an acre,” Raup comments, “was more than one quarter mile from a road.”¹⁰

Beginning in the 1790s with improved trade and credit at state and national levels, and encouraged by the industrial revolution that saw its first expression on the manageable small streams of southern New England, central Massachusetts witnessed a meteoric rise in agricultural land utilization, as farmers positioned themselves to profit from expanding local and regional markets. Estimates suggest that up to 90% of central New England was cleared during this short period, for the most intensive agricultural use in the region’s history. Most of what went on was mixed use farming, the landowner managing small herds of cattle or sheep along with fields planted to a variety of crops.

Petersham’s Beginnings

Modern historical writing tends to associate English – Indian hostilities in Massachusetts with either King Phillip’s War (1675-1676) or the French and Indian War of the mid-18th century (1754-1763). This view overlooks the continuous state of hostility that affected communities especially along the western and northern periphery of English settlement, near the borders of present-day New York, New Hampshire and Maine, but better conceived, perhaps, in terms of Native American spheres of influence. West and north of central Massachusetts, Nipmuc country ended and the territories of Mohawk and Abenaki began.

Those English settlements that were established within range of this amorphous border had their development impeded for decades after initial settlement, by the constant need for vigilance and mutual protection among the inhabitants. Andover, for example, although founded in 1646, remained a small, close-knit community within its six-mile-square borders for decades after settlement. This was due, at least in part, to frequent threats and two significant attacks by Pawtucket raiding parties in 1690 and 1696. Although outlying lands in this northern border town were privatized by the 1660s, significant population dispersal lagged until the early 1700s.

⁹ Foster (1993), p. 761.

¹⁰ Raup, p. 4.

The peace between England and France signed at the end of Queen Anne's War (1713), with the consequent withdrawal of most Native American survivors well to the north and west, meant that interior borderlands such as the highlands along the Connecticut River became safe areas for easterners to contemplate settling. There were still drawbacks to living in the central highlands. Not only were there few decent roads to connect settlers with population centers to either east or west, but the qualities that made land a good investment were in shorter supply as well. The terrain was more rocky, steeper sloped in many places, so a man's proprietary lot in a new town might have less workable acreage to it than the eastern lots in the old days. Land was, however, always a preferred investment. From the early 18th century onward, both seaboard entrepreneurs and the colony government took advantage of that fact. In the case of Royalston, for instance, a group of wealthy Boston acquaintances including John Hancock, Isaac Royall, Caleb Dana and John Chandler Jr.¹¹ purchased the entire tract of land from the government in 1752, for development as a settlement and – not coincidentally – for exploitation of its untouched timber.

In the case of Petersham, the situation was somewhat less obvious, and thirty years earlier. The colony government granted its six mile square parcel to 71 original proprietors in lieu of combat pay for their service during earlier Indian clashes. It took two petitions from the veterans to the General Court to get action. The second explains that they had already covered the reasons for their request,

setting forth the Hardship & Difficult marches they underwent as volunteers under the Comand of the Late Capte Lovell & Capte White after the Inden Enemy and Into their Countrey & praying ... that they may meet with Such Due Encouragement of their Paste Sarvis... as to have the Grant of a township of six miles square in the unappropriated Lands of Province.... [quoted in Woolsey 1929; 44]

That this was a land investment opportunity, and not an idealistic community development concept for the 71 petitioners is clear from a list compiled seventeen years later under the heading: *The number of Lotts Setled in a new Township called Nichewagg* [Col. Recs. v 115:753-755]. Of the 71 eager petitioners from 1733, only one was an actual 'planter.' The numbers are somewhat misleading, for it is clear from the list that a number of proprietary families were represented in the original settlement, probable by younger-generation members who settled the land as their inheritance.

Unlike Royalston, few influential names appear among Petersham's proprietors and settlers, but a number of family names were venerable in 17th century eastern towns including Concord and Sudbury: Wheeler, Farnsworth, Sanderson, Goddard, Stone, Robbins, Willard,¹² Brigham, Spooner, Sanger. All of these families by 1733 were feeling the land pressure caused by the system of partible inheritance: there were only so many times a family could divide even a large land grant among numerous children and still provide a living from the land for the younger generation.

¹¹ Chandler was son of John Chandler Esq., who was already developing a 463 acre grant in Petersham (see further discussion under Swift River Reservation).

¹² Samuel Willard Junior's progenitor, Simon Willard of Concord, was already reaching out to the wilderness in 1650, when he bought a license to trade for furs with the Indians in 1650.

The 1750 list includes 47 settlers' names but the clerk who compiled it writes apologetically at the end: *There are Divers others Settled...but the time being so short... that I am not able at present to give an exact account...but the number of famalies in Said Township are Sixty one.* Apparently the General Court felt this was a sufficient number to constitute a town, for the Township¹³ called *Nichewagg* was incorporated as the town of Petersham in 1754, at the end of the French and Indian Wars.

Sparse documentation often makes it difficult to reconstruct the first years' activity of a new settlement, or the directions in which it grew and developed. Over a twenty year period, sixty-one families arrived in the town, constructed houses that were probably small; many resembling the Spooner-Johnson house on East Street (Brooks Woodland Preserve): a story-and-a-half cape sited on the edge of arable land, facing south. An assortment of barns, outbuildings and pens would be added over the years, to form a farmstead of the sort represented by the Eames-Newton farm in Swift River Reservation (see appendix for photos).

Nearly every settler was a farmer, whatever other talents he may have brought with him. He and his family spent as much of their time as weather would allow, pushing back the forest from the areas of town best adapted to cultivation, and learning to use the land they had been granted to best advantage. In addition, he might shoe his neighbors' horses and oxen during the slow months of winter; he might run the town's gristmill when enough water ran in the brook to turn the wheel; or he might minister to the community's souls from the meetinghouse pulpit.

In 1771, a colony-wide tax valuation took place, each town being required to complete a detailed listing of taxpayers' real estate, livestock, mills, merchandise and agricultural production. The fact that Petersham and other central Massachusetts towns were so recently settled, meant that the valuation lists provided rare snapshots of early rural development and land use. Here is the Petersham snapshot.

Seventeen years after Petersham was incorporated, the town's population included 209 adult males of whom 73 owned no agricultural land although most paid the poll tax, indicating they were useful members of the small society and had not received special exemptions. A number of the males without land owned a few livestock, suggesting these men were sons who had not yet come into their inheritance.

A few of the unlanded men were exceptions, such as Gardiner Chandler, likely a son of John Chandler, with whom he lived. While the father was one of the largest landowners (and mill owners) in early Petersham, Gardiner owned a horse and a yoke of oxen with which he must have transported the £200 worth of *merchandise* listed beside his name. Gardiner Chandler may well have been acting as his father's "factor," – salesman and trader of country goods to seaboard markets.

A second unlanded group of eight men included Abraham Robinson and Moses MacClallan [*sic*] who both owned (or co-owned) mills,¹⁴ plus six other men, all of whom are listed together

¹³ technically, a "plantation"

¹⁴ While a mill technically sits on land, the quarter- to half-acre usually included in the mill yard may have been too

without any house or land. It is likely that these were mill workers, tanners, loggers paid by Robinson and MacClallan. They might have been given sleeping space in the mill buildings, or they may have boarded at nearby farms, for Petersham's 209 men lived in only 118 houses – an average of two adult males per household.

The town's 136 farmers (and seven slaves) had cleared, tilled, planted, fenced and otherwise improved 2478 acres of land in the first twenty years or so of the town's existence – nearly an acre per year. This figure is somewhat misleading, for the effort needed to improve, and to maintain, some types of farm land was substantially higher than for others. The average acreage per category tells more of the story:

- English upland and mowing (hayfields): average 7 acres
labor requirements: cut timber; clear underbrush; remove stumps; (plow); (seed)¹⁵; mow twice annually
- Pasture: average 6 acres
labor requirements: clear dense underbrush; remove poisonous plants; eventually fence and remove some/all trees; provide water source
- Tillage (planting fields): average 3.2 acres
labor requirements: cut timber; clear underbrush; remove stumps; remove stones; fence; plow; seed; cultivate 2-4 times per season; harvest.
- Fresh meadow (natural grass lands): average 2 acres – but almost half the farmers have no meadow land at all.
labor requirements: remove undesirable wetland species; ditch lowest areas to control flooding; mow twice annually.

A serious disadvantage for Petersham farmers was a shortage of fresh meadowland in the town. While statistics from eastern communities indicate that natural meadow was a prime component of colonial farm wealth,¹⁶ central highland settlers had to labor to provide fodder for the cattle and sheep that were already identified as one of the region's most valuable 'crops'.

Each year saw an increase of about half an acre of tillage on Petersham farms, and perhaps as much as an acre of hayfields. Even wealthy John Chandler claimed only four acres of planting fields. His real land wealth lay in 17 acres of pasture and, even more valuable in terms of effort required, 20 acres of fresh meadow.

small to tally. Alternatively, Robinson and MacClallan may have paid ground rent to someone like Chandler, thus owning only the mill building itself.

¹⁵ While it was certainly possible to simply encourage the growth of native grasses by clearing patches of land, the yield for this warm weather crop was only once a year, and lacking in some of the nutrients provided by strains of English fodder hay. Given the relatively large acreage of upland mowing, however, it is a good guess that Petersham farmers started with native grass species, only expanding their more labor-intensive English hay acreage as other land use needs were met.

¹⁶ An (admittedly extreme) example of this was the three Hog Island farms in Essex, where natural – salt – meadow acreage was five to nine times higher than planted hay fields, and the meadow constituted almost half of the farms' total acreage. On a more normative holding, nearly a quarter of Benjamin Stevens' farm in Andover was meadow. [see Tritsch reports for The Trustees for additional examples]

The 2478 acres that were valued as *improved land* in 1771 Petersham constituted approximately 9% of the town's area. One per cent of the 9% was land already open: the fresh meadow. Three of the 9% was pasture, an unknown portion of which was still open woodland or, as the detailed 19th century censuses would term it, *woods pasture*.

Agricultural Heyday

Raup's and Foster's distinction between a subsistence period and a commercial period of agricultural development in Petersham is really more a matter of degree than of distinct developmental phases. Petersham was still effectively a frontier town by the end of the Revolution, many settlers still functioning within the first or, at most, second generation of land use, development and inheritance. After its fervid patriotism and its peripheral role in Shays' Rebellion, what emerged as most significant in the new republic was Petersham's perfect positioning to take agricultural advantage of Massachusetts' rapid commercial and industrial expansion.

Petersham was not alone. In fact, almost all of Worcester County experienced an agricultural heyday between the 1780s and 1850s, not unlike the bull market of recent years in that it seemed to promise endless expansion and endless profit.¹⁷ Briefly, expanding population in post-Revolutionary seaboard towns presented market opportunities for inland farmers, especially in commodities such as beef, cheese and pork – all transportable by road to coastal cities where they could be retailed or sold to the coastal trade. By the 1830s, this marketing strategy shifted to accommodate competition from western farmers. More milk went into butter, rather than cheese production (less labor, more volume, but shorter shelf life), and more products went to new, inland industrial markets such as Worcester and Ware.

This solution was short-lived, as the Boston-Worcester railroad, completed in 1835, was followed by numerous branch lines in the next decades. Once again, western goods undercut local prices and once again, local farmers adapted their growing strategies. Butter and cheese were replaced by short-distance commodities including market garden produce, fresh milk, and fruit supplemented by bulk items, especially hay and beef.

This combination suited Petersham's agricultural situation well. As long as there were nearby markets, and sufficient farm labor, it was possible to intensively farm small areas that had the best soil and microenvironment as market gardens and orchards, while other areas could be allowed to partially revert, still useful as pasture for the cattle, or as hay fields. The areas of 'extensive' - rather than intensive – farming were particularly well adapted to Petersham's sandy, droughty uplands.

Changes in farm products were reflected in the progress of Petersham's land clearing. Over the sixty years following the 1771 census, the dramatic increase in land clearing described by Raup and Foster began in Petersham, but selectively.¹⁸ Expansion of tillage was slow: in 1771, 438

¹⁷ The following summary paragraphs are largely based on research by Andrew Baker and Holly Izard done under the auspices of Old Sturbridge Village.

¹⁸ Foster estimated that 50% of Petersham's land was cleared by 1800, up to 85% by 1850. Based on Woolsey's

acres were cleared for plowing; by 1831 the amount had slightly more than doubled, to 958 acres. By contrast, improved pasture and mowing land began to characterize the Petersham landscape: 1378 acres in 1771, with a tenfold increase to 13,667 acres by 1831. The later censuses, which recorded woodland as well as cleared, indicate that every acre added to pasture was subtracted from forested land. By 1831 Petersham claimed only 9,270 acres of woodland, or 38.8% of the town.

At mid-century another set of numbers painted a much more complex picture of Petersham, its people and the way they used the land. The 1850 federal census included separate schedules of manufacturing and agricultural activity in the town, as well as listing its inhabitants and their occupations.

The town was still overwhelmingly agricultural. The nine professional men who lived there – doctors, lawyers, ministers – lived in houses with varying amounts of land around them. So too, the handful of carriagemakers and perhaps the wheelwright. Seven blacksmiths needed small parcels on which to put their shops, and possibly also many of the 27 shoemakers. Asa Clark needed waterfront for his tannery; Oliver Clapp Jr. may have had a freestanding building for his pump manufactory. In all, 142 woodworkers, craftsmen, masons, laborers, palm-leaf hat makers and professional men lived in Petersham, out of a total male population of 738.¹⁹

Every other working adult male – 314 total – called themselves farmers, and the 158 farms they worked occupied 19,333 acres of Petersham’s land – likely very close to the town’s total acreage at the time, since Dana had split off from it in 1801. While the figures do not ‘speak for themselves,’ they are informative.

- total improved acreage: 14,246 A., or 74% of all farm land
- total unimproved acreage: 5,084 A., or 26%
- average acreage per farm: 122 acres of which 90 were improved (including woodland)
- Each farm averaged two adult males to work it.
- Most farmers owned a yoke of oxen plus a horse.

- 797 *milch cows*: every farmer had a handful but herds were small (5 average) although Joshua Sanderson had 32
- 714 *other cattle*: almost all had some (5 average); 19 at most, although a number of farmers had over a dozen
- 442 *goats and sheep* (mostly sheep) owned by half of the farmers – most owning only 1 or 2 but a few had flocks of 15-40 head.

[1929] figures, however, the percentages would appear to be significantly lower, totaling only 36% in 1801; his final figure, for 1831, totaled 61%.

¹⁹ There was a female population of 788, whose occupations were not noted, although it is safe to say that many of them may have braided palm leaf or stitched the hats that were finished at Jesse Rogers’ or Phinehas Burr’s establishments.

- Petersham had no market gardens
- a large part of a farm’s cultivated land went to growing corn and about 2/3 as many bushels of oats, plus large quantities of potatoes. Farmers chose to concentrate on either corn or potatoes, rather than growing equal amounts of both. A potato blight that had affected most of Worcester County during the past few years may have been a determinant factor in choosing one or the other.
- Every farmer produced *butter*, a total of 27,678 pounds, or 175 pounds average per farm.
- 80% of the farms also produced 127,288 pounds of *cheese*, a 972 pound average.
- A handful of farms had honey and/or beeswax for sale and most produced some form of *Home-made Manufactures*.²⁰ Despite the census-taker’s interest almost no one seemed to produce maple sugar (syrup was not offered as a category), and nearly a third of the farms had no (saleable) orchard produce.

How did Petersham compare with broader Worcester Country models during this “agricultural heyday”? And what kinds of living and landscape emerge from the statistics? There are a few obvious discrepancies between model and reality that set Petersham apart, especially from its neighbors to the south and east.

- While it is not possible to distinguish between managed (improved) woodland and other types of improved land, it is quite likely that nearly all of the *unimproved* land listed *was* still wooded: over 5,000 acres or at least 26% of the town’s area. This is certainly more than Foster’s 15% estimate and is only 13% less than had existed in 1831. The *rate* of deforestation was also declining, from 10% per decade in the first part of the century, to slightly over 5% at mid-century. These figures suggest that Petersham’s land improvement was limited, at least in part, by its topography and further, that logging had not yet taken hold in any major way.
- Petersham farmers were making the most, however, of the land they owned that was improvable, with three-quarters of each farm being managed in some way by the farmer and his farm hand. Eighty years earlier, the figure had been less than ten percent. This does not mean that every acre was in production in 1850, but it does suggest that there was not much more room for expansion or betterment on any given farm, except through painstaking improvement of the soil of those acres already in use.²¹

²⁰ Typically, the palm-leaf hats mentioned above, as well as shoes and boots. “Chair-painting” was also listed among the town’s industrial activities in the 1830s – likely a domestic or small-shop activity ancillary to the furniture production of nearby Templeton and Gardner. Cheese making, although classed as an agricultural activity, was also clearly a home manufacture for most Petersham farm families, and was another way in which women were engaged in the market economy.

²¹ The second half of the 19th century also saw a major change in the farm working population. While earlier farmers had been able to count on sons as unpaid field labor (in return for which they would eventually inherit the family spread), especially after the Civil War many of the younger generation began to seek out nonagricultural occupations or join the great migration westward. Farmers, faced with the necessity to both invest more capital in agricultural improvements and pay wage labor, often found the combination unmanageable. See Tritsch, *The Farm Adjoining Pontaug Hill* (Trustees, West Brookfield report) for the effect of this on one multi-generational farm.

- Petersham, despite later settlement and poorer soil than Worcester county towns to the south and east, by 1850 had nearly caught up with those towns in terms of general farming, apparently operating on a par with other communities. In West Brookfield, for instance, an average farm was 129 acres, of which 78% was improved land, as compared to Petersham’s 122 acres and 74% improved acreage.
- The Harvard Forest and Sturbridge models of mid-century farms engaged in mixed agriculture, with small herds of cattle and sheep plus a variety of crops, appropriately characterizes Petersham, although the shifting market specialization from beef to cheese; cheese to butter; butter to milk by mid-century is not obvious. On the contrary, Petersham was still solidly invested in cheese and, it would appear, beef production, based on the universal ownership of dairy and beef cattle. If there was a “specialization” apparent in the census figures, it was *Irish potatoes*, a normally forgiving crop that found a ready market in surrounding industrial towns.

The 1850 census highlights one other way in which Petersham differed from the Worcester County models: its steep-banked low-stream-rank rivers and brooks supported almost no substantive manufacturing except the mills that came and went down at Factory Village in the town’s southwest corner. Already in 1850, two of the town’s five “manufacturers” were using steam power rather than water power to run their machines. While one of these establishments – Phineas Burr’s hat box factory – would not have required much power to run its planing machine, C. Southworth and Company operated a substantial lumber mill whose modern circular saw cut 40,000 board feet per year. In Royalston, to the north, this type of operation continued to be wholly water-powered at least into the 1880s.²²

The total value of Petersham’s industrial goods in 1850²³ was \$16,166. By contrast, neighboring Hardwick, thanks to one sizable papermill (out of only three manufacturers total), could claim \$37,100 – double the industrial income as well as a larger number of non-agricultural jobs. Petersham’s economy was experiencing the 19th century industrial glass ceiling that limited growth in many central Massachusetts towns as well as elsewhere.

A combination of limited transportation, limited waterpower and limited industrial site availability made the town less attractive to potential industrial investors than other towns nearby. Athol had waterpower; Dana and Barre had water and adjacent land; westward lay the transportation corridor of the Connecticut River and its towns; eastward lay the populous and developed area surrounding Worcester. Petersham was no one’s first choice for industrial development.

Despite the depressing prognosis for Petersham’s industrial expansion, the town at mid-century was remembered as a lively community, where substantially more was produced, and traded, than the federal census would lead one to believe.²⁴ Much of the production was on a very small

²² Not that Royalston didn’t modernize: the old overshot wheels had largely been replaced by turbines in the later 19th century.

²³ in specialized craft establishments only – this excludes home manufactures, which did not add significantly to the town’s wealth, nor employ outside wage laborers

²⁴ Reminiscences of Charles K. Wilder concerning industries in 1855, reproduced in Coolidge, 158 ff.

scale, often done in a shop within a house. Significantly, most of the local craftsmen were not listed on the federal manufacturing schedule at all, including the six blacksmiths who considered themselves primarily farmers.

But change was in the wind. A state census twenty-five years later reflects shifts in Petersham's economic base – not earth-shaking yet, but reflective of more to come.

- 1850: 158 farms, average 122 acres
1875: 218 farms, average 95 acres
- The numbers of working oxen compared to horses had almost reversed in that time, the horse replacing the ox as favored draft animal.
- Although the number of milk cows remained essentially stable, their products had not. Cheese production was down 80%, while butter production had increased three-fold, a likely consequence of availability of fast transport to market centers. Butter also had the added benefit of requiring neither intensive preparation nor long-term storage.

For tax purposes, 88% of Petersham was still classed as agricultural property. There were signs of other activity: the town counted 301 families living in 289 houses, and its manufactured products were valued at \$32,000. Compared to the \$166,600 in agricultural goods, however, manufacturing income was little more than a pittance: 84% of Petersham's wealth was still tied to agriculture.

Much of this socioeconomic picture would change, quite rapidly, over the next quarter century. The pre-eminence of agriculture would give way to new forms of land use that were more profitable for a few, but less supportive of local population, and far less apt to “husband” the natural resources of Petersham.

IV. 1880-1912 Transformation of an Ailing Town

Framework

- Phase IV - 1850-1920 (Raup) or 1865-1935 (Foster): A period of agricultural decline and farm abandonment for central New England, which was unable to compete with the midwest.

New England farmers found themselves undercut in nearly every market by more cost-efficient midwestern production. Some New England areas turned to product specialization, but there was little the rocky soils of central Massachusetts farms could produce to compete, with the exception of upland hay, fresh milk, and one newly-discovered “crop”: wood products.

As New England agricultural production was declining, commercial logging operations in the region were coming to prominence. This was not coincidental. Raup estimates that as early as 1870, at least half of the farm land in central New England had been abandoned: perfect seedbeds and growing conditions for white pine, which self-seeded and quickly grew into large volunteer stands of marketable timber. If there was a coincidence at work, it was the invention of portable saw milling machinery. The saw mills could be transported on site where a full-grown stand of pine, clear cut, could be milled into easily movable and immediately marketable lengths. The process was efficient, economical, and presented one of few profitable uses for an abandoned agricultural landscape.

These often small-scale, timber harvesting operations became essential to the central New England economy for a forty or fifty year period, until reduced supplies of wood coincided with the advent of alternative building and packaging materials. The “timber harvest” era, the beginning of which Foster dates to the late 1880s, reached its peak around 1910, and petered off until the mid-1930s. It bought some central Massachusetts farm families more time on the land, while it gave others an opportunity to sell abandoned parcels they no longer wanted.

- Raup and Foster Phase V - 1865-present: Shift from agricultural to residential land utilization and growth of conservation movement.

The shift in dominant land use paralleled the rise of a new mindset concerning rural land, dating from the post-Civil War era and associated both with the Romantic Movement in the arts and the transcendental philosophy of writers such as Emerson and Thoreau. Rural land, viewed for centuries by Americans as something to subdue, conquer and exploit, began to be seen instead as picturesque, spiritually satisfying, and healthful. “Excursionists” and summer visitors sought fresh air, exercise, solitude or simplicity in areas than had formerly been considered primarily in terms of amount-of-work for amount-of-return.

As abandoned farm lands became available at low cost, “outside” families bought property for use as summer retreats. Alternatively, heirs of farmers transformed simple houses into vacation properties, like the William Cullen Bryant Homestead in Cummington, or they built sylvan lodges like Frank Carter at his Rock House property in West Brookfield.

Over the course of the century, most central Massachusetts rural land came to be valued as space on which houses could be sited, rather than as a group of natural resources to be exploited. Residential development became the highest use by which a property could be evaluated – and remains so today according to real estate assessors.

Ironically, the two economic shifts identified by Raup and Foster – growth of the timber industry and of residential development – both threatened the very pastoral aesthetic that had originally attracted tourists and new residents to rural areas. This, in turn, generated a response to the new development pressures. The nineteenth-century aesthetic mindset, fed by other influences, metamorphosed into what was sometimes perjoratively termed a “conservation mentality.” The establishment of organizations like The Trustees of Reservations, the Appalachian Mountain Club, the National Audubon Society and others during the decades surrounding the turn of the century was the corporate tip of a large iceberg composed of groups and individuals who, despite varied agendas, found common ground in a belief that the civilizing hand of man was not always beneficial to nature.

Protection and Development in Petersham

By 1875, the state census takers had acknowledged the market value of a class of goods not even enumerated twenty-five years earlier: forest products. More than half of the 2,893 cords of firewood in Petersham were split for market sale, along with 1,000 bushels of charcoal. The total value of lumber for sale and use was placed at \$8,600 – only Dana and Lunenburg producing more in Worcester County.

It is likely that at first, these relatively high lumber figures had as much to do with the amount of rocky, steep, unfertile land in Petersham – what earlier census-takers termed *unimprovable* land – as they did with farm fields left to go fallow. The agricultural data from 1875 do not seem to show any substantial reduction in farm activity from mid-century. Population statistics, however, indicate that Petersham had been losing population since the Civil War.

These two trends – population loss and forest product increase – saw a dramatic spike in the following years. In 1875 the town had 289 houses and 310 families. Five years later, housing stock was down to 276. The 1910 census reported 201 houses in town sheltering only 212 families. A graphic indication of this continuing trend is the “Key to Cellarholes” map, drawn in 1938²⁵ and reproduced in the appendix. Local historian Mabel Cook Coolidge pinpointed close to two hundred cellarholes around town, most of which she could identify as being occupied until near the end of the nineteenth century.

Hand in hand with population and housing loss, was a rapid increase in the purchase of Petersham lands by individuals and corporations whose interest was not in maintaining soil fertility but rather, in reaping a quick profit from forest hardwoods and old field pine stands. From 1875 to 1880, the value of wood products from Petersham’s saw mills increased a remarkable 70%. With scroll saws and turbines, using steam power and water power along the Swift River and three of Petersham’s brooks, eight saw mills cut two million board feet of lumber and 43 thousand shingles. All of their logs came from Petersham.

²⁵ although not published until 1948

There is no simple way of knowing how many thousand more board feet of timber were sawn in neighboring towns. It is more than likely, however, that a significant amount of the *profit* from those enterprises did not remain in Petersham. Only twenty-six adult males were employed by the eight saw mills and, given the low water power available to most of the enterprises, employment would not have been full time.

I wish I were in the woods

The developmental forces picked out by Raup and Foster transformed both Petersham's landscape and its society between the 1880s and the start of the first World War. They also inspired one of Petersham's most notable residents to take a hand in the transformation. The one person whose actions had the greatest impact on Petersham's land during the late 19th and 20th centuries was James W. Brooks.

Brooks had been born in Petersham in 1833, son of lawyer Aaron Brooks Jr. His father died when he was twelve and, although his family remained in Petersham, James began a routine that would carry through the rest of his working life: living away but vacationing in Petersham. He progressed from Leicester and Lawrence Academies through Brown University and Harvard Law School; served as American Vice Consul in Paris during the Civil War; engaged in some colorful entrepreneurial activities out west, and finally settled down to parlay a small manufacturing venture into the highly lucrative and powerful United Shoe Machinery Company. Brooks and his sister Martha shared a house in Cambridge a few doors from the family of their other sister Abby, wife of reformer and historian John Fiske.

In 1868 Brooks achieved his first hometown goal: he bought back the house he had grown up in, that his mother had sold ten years earlier. From that time on, despite a job that led him to travel widely and work long hours, he found his way back to Petersham for weekends and vacations. Martha preferred the country home to Cambridge and, over the years, came to spend a majority of her time in Petersham. The arrangement turned out to be serendipitous for both of them, as she managed both household affairs and real estate investments for James during his periods of travel.

In 1880, James Brooks' allegiance to his native town was documented on the Agricultural Schedule of the federal census. He is listed as owner of a 181-acre farm including:

- 36 acres tillage
- 30 acres permanent meadow or pasture
- 115 acres woodland and forest

Brooks' buildings (including, presumably, the family home on North Street) far exceeded the standard farm building valuation.²⁶ His livestock included five horses, four working oxen, and eight cattle. He had spent over \$200 building and repairing fences during the preceding year. The farm produced a notable yield of 50 bushels of corn grown on one acre, 165 bushels of potatoes from another acre. Brooks sold 150 bushels of apples picked from 75 trees in 2 acres of orchard, 350 gallons of milk, and some produce from a market garden located on the property.

²⁶ Regrettably, the census does not list individual buildings.

Yet for all these signs of traditional husbandry, two statistics point to Brooks as being something other than a small-town farmer. Although the elements of his farm operation would suggest a viable and well-tended property, the *estimated value of all farm production* was well below that of much less advantaged neighboring farms. Even more remarkably, given his sizable woodland and forest holdings, no wood was cut for sale on James Brooks' property.

Brooks' continued involvement with Petersham meant that he was directly affected by the changes taking place in the town. His response was to become an agent of change himself and, in the process, permanently alter Petersham's cultural landscape.

Change #1: Logging – the land as source of lumber

The 1875 census figures indicate logging becoming big business well before many of the 'abandoned field' white pine stands documented at Harvard Forest had had a chance to grow. But there was also a *second* generation of logging in Petersham, evidenced by large tracts of land purchased by the Diamond Match Company, the F. W. West Box Company, the New England Box Company and other firms, which used saplings and soft wood such as pine for the vast quantities of matchsticks and inexpensive packing crates that were their primary products.

James W. Brooks had strong opinions about both farm abandonment and timber harvesting, although he was not one to publish them widely. One of his few surviving statements on cultural change is found in a historical address on the occasion of Petersham's 150th anniversary. In 1904, Brooks looked back to the second half of the nineteenth century and offered this nostalgic view of the impact of change on his home town.

[M]any appeals to youthful intelligence, energy, and enterprise drew the young men from the hills and, throughout rural New England, slowly prepared the way for the deserted hearthstone and the abandoned farm, where now, too often, are seen only the open or brush-covered cellar, the bucketless well, the clump of lilacs, and, perhaps, the hectic flush of a clinging rose, to mark the places where the forefathers fought the savage and the soil. [Brooks 1904; 27]

Brooks' nostalgia for old-time farming and water-powered milling was mixed with disgust at the results of what was taking their place: the effect of timber harvesting on Petersham's landscape.

Ask the pulp and match companies where now are the pitch pine boards and the picturesque old up-and-down sawmills – the pulp companies that supply the great newspapers, a single issue of only one of which consumes the spruce of acres; the match companies that send by the millions our sapling pines, riddled into splinters, to light the pipes of Europe and, for aught we know, the camp-fires of Russia and Japan. The teeth of their screaming blades are everywhere tearing through the hearts of our trees and leaving, in their trail, sawdust and scattered branches to feed the forest fires that leave in

ashes, desecration, and desolation the sighing groves, God's first temples, in which the thrush has sung his praise. [p. 22]

Instead of logging, Brooks with a number of other Petersham natives favored promoting the town for its appealing residential qualities – Raup and Foster's second developmental trend.

Change #2: Tourism – land as scenery, a healthful environment, outdoor recreation

The town had had a tavern on the common welcoming visitors since the 18th century. It was a handy coaching stop on the major east-west route through the area. By the 1840s, eminent 19th century geologist Edward Hitchcock, a native of nearby Deerfield, was already emphasizing *the beauty of Petersham among the towns east of the Connecticut River, which have been built upon heights commanding wide horizons*. He went on to comment, *already the numerous summer visitors to the place attest the fact that this beauty and attractive scenery are being appreciated*. [quoted in Horr 1879, 214; no date given, may be ca. 1841]

But in 1847 the tavern, together with much of the town center, burned in a disastrous fire. The effect was to redefine Petersham center's architecture, if not its settlement pattern, transforming the center of town into a Greek Revival village. A larger, elegant hotel was constructed on the tavern site: the Nichewaugh House, which filled yearly with summer guests. About 1890, James and Martha Brooks took over the hotel, remodeling its facilities and promoting it among their Boston-based acquaintances.

In 1892 another fire ran through three houses and the Baptist Church on the east side of Petersham's common, across the street from the hotel. Brooks bought up all of the damaged properties, had the buildings leveled and cellarholes filled, and created a golf course for hotel guests and town inhabitants. The Nichewaugh was sold to a hotelier who managed the inn until an 1897 fire destroyed it, too. By that time, the inn was a catalyst for regional economic development, and the *Athol Transcript* summarized its significance while urging its speedy reconstruction.

The hotel has certainly been the means of drawing a great many moneyed people to Petersham during the summer season, resulting in the purchase of a number of 'deserted farms' and others as an advanced price, and the erection of many elaborate summer residences, thereby increasing the town valuation, and that is not all, the large number of summer boarders and families spending the season in town has furnished a ready market for farm produce, butter, eggs, milk and poultry. [Athol Transcript, December 1897]

Within three years, under the supervision of James W. Brooks, the Nichewaugh was rebuilt in the latest Shingle Style as a first-class summer resort, complete with golf links and unimpeded views of Petersham's rural landscape.

Brooks' frequent notes to his sister Martha make it clear that one appeal of Petersham as a vacation destination was its easy accessibility from points eastward. Even when he was still working full time, Brooks frequently caught a train from Boston to either Athol (morning) or Barre (afternoon) in order to spend a weekend in the country. His notes mention arrival of summer residents and transport of family and visitors – the only travel concern being arrangement for wagon transport from one or another station to the village.

Change #3: Summer places – rural land as contrast to urban lot

At the same time, Brooks and other residents were transforming their own and other families' homes into summer places – simple and low key in comparison with more elegant 'cottages' in the Berkshires and elsewhere, but still with interiors and landscaping a number of notches above what the properties had been in earlier times.

The transformation of Brooks' own house is a good example of the residential gentrification that went on in the town. The family's early 19th century village home was stripped of its rear ell and street-facing 'farmer's porch'.²⁷ Although a later photo does not show outbuildings, it is a good guess that the original barn, too, was replaced with one in a different location. Even the roadside stone wall was removed. In place of these appendages, a new ell parallel to the road was connected via a two-story jog to the main house. The large ell chimney suggests the kitchen may have been moved. Roof balustrades attempted to visually connect the house sections; a new, balustraded front entry porch defined the formal main entrance; clapboards were replaced by shingles in keeping with the Nichewaugh across the street; gothic-arched trim on the addition's veranda completed the stylistically confused street-side decoration of the Brooks' new country house.

What is not visible in the picture is the long view opened up behind the house by removal of its ells and barn. The tall connecting jog on the house, awkward and out of scale with the rest of the building, appears to have been a viewing platform from which, at roof height, Brooks could contemplate the rolling rural landscape he had created.

James Brooks and his sister Martha had transformed a respectable but year-round practical farmstead into a fresh-air summer house, where cross ventilation and expansive views were more significant than easy access to the barn on cold nights. An 1898 atlas map (see Appendix) shows the Brooks summer place unencumbered by barn of any sort, although their father's tiny law office is a prominent streetside feature. Even a later picture, taken from a different angle, shows no sign of outbuildings to interrupt the sweep of North Common Meadow.

Elsewhere in town other urban families were performing similar transformations on nondescript farm properties. Frequently, as was James Brooks' case, the renovator was a younger scion of an old Petersham family who, having established himself in a respectable urban profession, had the surplus cash to invest in transforming the family farm into an idyllic reflection of what it might have been. In other cases, as vacation homes were sought by urban professionals without local ties, James Brooks stepped in wearing a local-realtor-cum-developer hat, talking up the town to his Boston-area acquaintances and putting them in touch with local owners looking to sell.

²⁷ Before and after photos are included in the appendix.

Over the course of forty-four years but concentrated in the period from 1890 to 1910, Brooks bought nearly seventy separate parcels of land in Petersham. The purchases were not haphazard. Many small parcels were lots surrounding the town common, beginning with his own family home, then spreading to include the Nichewaug Inn, the library and historical society sites and numerous private homes and businesses. Some of these he maintained or upgraded and resold; others were demolished or moved. A sketch of his later life elaborates on the extent of the village landscape transformation engineered by Brooks.

He tore down old useless buildings and removed others that obstructed fine views, removed many unsightly walls, dug drains and did much grading, was instrumental in having the common graded so it could be mowed by a machine; remodeled many houses he bought and fitted them up for city summer residents. In all these activities he employed his townsmen to do all they were capable of doing. [Wilder 1915;111]

The other focus of Brooks' land-buying was the newly forested acreage surrounding abandoned farms. In this case, the geographic parameters of his purchases seem to have begun haphazardly, as tracts of forty to upwards of a hundred acres came on the market in different parts of town. In later years his buying was more focussed, concentrating on the watershed lands surrounding the East Branch of the Swift River.

It could be argued that the forest purchases were more of a personal investment for James Brooks than his village development buys. During a fifteen or twenty year period he accumulated hundreds of acres of land, often with worn-out soil or extremely rough topography, apparently without a clear plan – at least initially – for the parcels' eventual disposition. What was clear was that his purchases were designed to protect Petersham's woodlands, particularly along the Swift River.

By the turn of the century Brooks was becoming cognizant of the fact that land protection was not a one-man issue, even for a man as determined and wealthy as he.²⁸ This led him to explore a number of strategies to preserve landscapes and landscape features that did not require personal ownership of the tracts involved. His creative solutions began in 1902, when he saved a highly visible swath of Petersham woodland. Local reporting of the event does a good job of conveying both Brooks' philosophy and his determination.

The drive from Barre to Petersham, always a pleasant one, has been greatly improved by the watchful forethought and care of one of Petersham's most public-spirited and enterprising citizens, James W. Brooks, Esq., whose holdings of real estate exceed, by hundreds of acres, those of any other

²⁸ It is possible, but undocumented, that another consideration came into play as well. Although Brooks had been following in the benevolent tradition of the landed elite, clearing riding paths and making his personal woodlands accessible to the public he was not, himself, a long-standing member of the landed gentry. He may have been more comfortable devising ways in which his acquired land could be more permanently accessible to the public, while still protected from extreme economic exploitation. Old friend John Bigelow's nagging may also have come into play. Bigelow had apparently been urging Brooks for some time to 'let the world know' how much he had to offer in terms of intellectual capacity and ability.

citizen of that town; from the old mill at Pirateville [Connor's Pond], his possessions extend in an almost unbroken line for a long distance north of the center of Petersham.... A few years ago the beautiful piece of timber known as the Petersham woods was sold, and the axe and saw were about to be laid at the roots of those fine old shade trees that lined both sides of the highway leading from the Barre line to Petersham. Mr. Brooks foresaw the result, and bought a strip of land ... each side of the highway, together with the timber, thus preserving for the public one of the most beautiful drives in the country. [Athol Transcript, March 1905]

Brooks' 1902 deed of conveyance corrects some misrepresentation in the article. The parcel concerned was only *ten feet* wide, not two rods as the article went on to suggest, and Brooks was actually buying *timber rights* only, not the land itself [WD 1749:103]. Still, what Brooks negotiated was a creative solution – a precursor to today's conservation restrictions. He would employ this technique again in his later transfer of the Blanchard property to Charles Choate.

Brooks' creative solutions were not conceived in a vacuum. In 1897 he had become an early board member of the Trustees of Public Reservations. His involvement with this new and revolutionary land conservation organization was not surprising. At least five Brooks relatives were listed among the Trustees' life members; long-standing Cambridge neighbor Charles Eliot Jr. was its founder and secretary, while many of Brooks' Union Club acquaintances were undoubtedly among the close-knit network of organizational supporters.

Eliot's admiration for rural landscapes was well known, and he expressed his opinions on them in numerous publications including the following 1895 report to the Boston Parks Commission. His thoughts were undoubtedly echoed in numerous Board meetings that Brooks attended.

The Adirondacks, the White Mountains, and the Maine woods supply for many persons who can afford to travel to them the needed antidote to city life. The nearer, more thoroughly humanized, and yet unsophisticated landscape of rural townships affords annual refreshment to thousands of others. For the recreation of those who must remain in town, why is it not possible to purchase an attractive and acceptable rural area, comprising woods, fields, streams and ponds, and preserve it forever in that charming condition which is the product of the natural partnership of man and nature? No gravel paths are half so charming as the turfed wood-roads of New England farms, no shrubbery so pleasing as those which nature rears along the farmer's walls, no pools so lovely as those which, fringed with natural growths, fill and drain away according to the season and the supply of rain. [Eliot 1902; 543]

While Eliot's remarks may have been directed toward acquiring land close to Boston, the sentiments he expressed might as easily have been Brooks' own. Less eloquent than Eliot, Brooks scribbled an 1897 margin note to his sister: *I wish I were in the woods.*

From 1897 until his death in 1912, Brooks attended the Trustees' annual meetings, read its reports and heard its philosophy of protecting open space for public enjoyment and respite. Brooks was also well aware of the neophyte organization's financial dilemma: it was not in a position to accept gifts of land without endowment to cover the costs – often substantial – of maintaining the donated property.

Due to the thoroughness of Standing Committee reports, it is possible to understand how James Brooks put the information he gathered, and the connections he made, to use in furthering his own land protection goals. The reports are quoted here at length, as they tell the story.

At the last annual meeting [1905] a member of the Board of Trustees requested the appointment of a committee to visit him and examine certain tracts of woodland belonging to him, with respect to their availability as a public reservation. The committee appointed for this purpose were entertained by him in June, and passed a large part of two days in an inspection of these lands.²⁹ They comprise some 2,000 acres of woodland of a most varied and interesting character, and nearly encompass the village of the town in which they are situated. They are not alone of interest in themselves as woods, but are an essential part of the scenery and picturesque charm of one of the most beautiful of the New England hill towns. It is to be hoped and it seems probable that the generous and far-seeing intention of the owner will be in some way realized, and it will be a public service performed if this Board shall have been able to assist in bringing about such a result. [Trustees 16th Annual Report, 1906; 16]

The discreet omission of Brooks' name from the report may be an indication that a potential 'realization' of his intention was already in the works, as the following year's report proved true.

There has been no addition to the lands held by the Trustees this year, but the result of an investigation referred to in the last report is of much interest. Through the efforts of Mr. James W. Brooks, extended through a period of many years, a large portion of the woodlands surrounding the hill town of Petersham, in Worcester County, have not only been preserved, but a very considerable area purchased by him from time to time has been steadily improved in quality and appearance. It is also due to the same gentlemen as a citizen, and for a time as tree warden, that the roadside trees have to such an extent been saved from destruction. The result has been to give this New England village a peculiar charm, which is well known to every one who is familiar with it. Your committee, who visited it in June, 1906, to consider what steps could be taken to ensure the preservation of at least some part of these beautiful woods, was met with several apparent obstacles, the most obvious one being the necessity which would arise at once of securing a sufficient fund to provide an adequate income for the maintenance of any considerable tract. Out of these investigations, however, a plan developed

²⁹ One can imagine that Brooks put them up at the Nichewaug, and that inspections were balanced by golf matches and good fare at Brooks' house and the inn.

which, while it precluded the Trustees from acquiring some portion of these most attractive woods, will result not only in their preservation, but will also provide for their care and careful development. Through the generosity of Mr. John S. Ames of North Easton,³⁰ with the cooperation of Mr. Brooks and others, 2,000 acres of this woodland, to be known as the Harvard Forest, is about to be conveyed to the President and Fellows of Harvard College, and will be placed in charge of the Division of Forestry of the newly established Graduate School of Applied Science. To his gift of \$55,000 for purchase of land, Mr. Ames has added \$5,000 towards equipment, and several residents of Petersham have also aided the project by gifts of land....Professor Fisher, after a careful investigation, has expressed the opinion that these woods are the best suited of any in New England for the purposes to which they are to be put.³¹ Inasmuch as this use is perfectly compatible with the public enjoyment, under proper restrictions, of the forest, your committee feels that the outcome of their visit to Petersham has been most fortunate. [17th Annual Report, 1907; 17-17]

The Trustees' practice of partnering with other organizations in the interest of expanded land conservation is clearly not a recent phenomenon.

Similarly, what Brooks did with the \$55,000 he received for his woodlands echoes another land protection practice more familiar in recent years. It is clear that disposition of 2,000 acres relieved Brooks of management concerns for a vast tract of woodland. Payment for the property, even at cut rate prices, provided him with capital to continue his private land purchases.

That same year, Brooks made another connection that forwarded his plans. *It was he who interested the Choate and Hall families in Petersham and with them formed the Petersham Associates.*³² [John Fiske letter, Jan. 5, 1974; Trustees files] In 1907, presumably with his new-found money, Brooks purchased the historic 173 acre Blanchard farm that lay due west of Connor's Pond.³³ He then convinced Charles Choate Jr. to buy the Blanchard farm. Five years later in 1912, apparently Brooks and Choate together convinced John Hall, Choate's Boston law partner, to buy a 55 acre parcel of land off Quaker Drive.³⁴

The Brooks-to-Choate transfer included a reservation reminiscent of Brooks' ten foot timber purchase from 1902.

Grantor [Brooks] reserves for himself and his assigns of adjacent land the right to prevent the cutting of trees upon that part of said farm which lies

³⁰ another Trustees board member

³¹ An appendix to the report includes Harvard's original description of Harvard Forest. Its purposes were to provide on-site training in timber management as well as study. The woods consisted of 9/10ths pine plus chestnut and oak. *It so happens*, the description continues, *that stands of varying ages, from the small sapling to the mature tree, are almost equally represented on separate areas, so that an approach to a continuous yield can be secured in a short time.* [17th Annual Report; 27]

³² The Petersham Associates were formed in 1912. The terms of the association have not yet been located.

³³ Its buildings are at the end of Choate Lane.

³⁴ on today's Hall Road. The property now includes over 600 acres of contiguous land.

between said river and a line parallel with and fifty feet westerly of the westerly side of said old river road crossing as aforesaid the part of said farm which borders on said river. [WD 1870:289]

The *old river road* mentioned in the deed parallels the west bank of the Swift River between The Trustees' Slab City and Nichewaug Tracts, over land currently owned by Charles Ames. Brooks protected the river bank and its immediate drainage, as well as the scenic and fishing values of the waterway, by controlling timber removal from a swath at least fifty feet wide along the river.

John Hall's purchase was one third of the Charles Brewer farm (originally settled by William Barron about 1760), which had made the news two years earlier. Hall bought 55 acres of land from Philip Gale. Hall's conservation of much of the land was not, presumably, what Gale had envisioned when he had purchased the old Charles Brewer farm on Quaker Drive two years earlier. A 1910 news article lays out the expected alternative.

PETERSHAM – Thirty thousand dollars is a pretty good price for a 150 acre farm, especially if the buildings on it are in poor condition ... but that is the price paid for the Charles Brewer farm in Petersham last week, for the biggest part of it is covered with some of the best old growth standing pine in New England.³⁵

It wasn't many years ago that one tenth of that amount would have been considered a mighty good price for the farm, for with so much of it in woodland there wasn't much left for tillage and a scanty living was all that could be taken out of the farm, but Mr. Brewer was one of those who believed that there was good money in growing timber, better than from growing corn and potatoes, and he not only let his trees grow but he did all he could to help them grow and develop, by cutting out all the worthless small growth and keeping the big trees trimmed. [Athol Transcript May 24, 1910]

The article does not indicate the fate of those 'old growth' pines – whether Gale harvested them during his two year ownership or whether they were all or partially intact at the time of Hall's 1912 purchase. Given James Brooks' involvement in the transfer, however, and his overall woodland preservation design, it is likely that Hall was encouraged to buy this particular property specifically in order to save the *best old growth standing pine in New England*.

The net effect of James Brooks' encouraging his two friends to buy summer homes in Petersham was to add over two hundred acres of protected land to the significant acreage still owned by Brooks himself or by Harvard Forest, greatly expanding the scenic and watershed protection of the Swift River and its Rutland Brook tributary.³⁶ At the same time, Brooks was building a conservation-minded constituency within his home town.

³⁵ The context suggests that 'old growth' signifies full-grown, rather than ancient.

³⁶ A look at The Trustees reservation map makes this immediately apparent. Brooks' action protected all the land now included in Brooks Woodland and the Harvard Forest, as well as the parcels east of Choate Lane and south of Hall Road. Only the east side of Connors Pond remained unprotected.

In 1912 James W. Brooks died, *while sitting in a chair* at the Nichewaug, as the local news told. In his obituaries and in publications over the next two decades, he was remembered as the man who invested in his home town, encouraged its economy, and built up its civic infrastructure. Reporters wrote of his *quiet, unassuming ways, courteous dignity, and scholarly attainments* [Transcript 1905 article]. *It would seem superfluous*, wrote his nephew,

to dwell upon Mr. Brooks' loyalty and devotion to his native hill-town. Those who knew the old town, and who knew him, have an ever-present memorial before them of his love for and interest in the present and future welfare of the town. [Fiske in Wilder 1915; 111]

It was not until later years, and the involvement of a second family generation, that the magnitude of Brooks' environmental legacy became apparent. The story continues with the histories that follow, of The Trustees' three Petersham reservations.

V. 20th century postscript: natural footnotes

In Petersham as a whole, the two twentieth century events with the most impact on the town's landscape were not cultural at all. The infamous hurricane that devastated New England in 1938 wiped out much of the old growth forest in Petersham, transforming the mature woodlands that surrounded abandoned farmsteads into oversized timber heaps, and later, following region-wide clearing and logging efforts, into scarred and deforested wastelands. It was estimated that more than 30 million feet of lumber was blown down in Petersham alone [Coolidge; 285], and clean-up extended over a two year period. Both Harvard Pond and Connor's Pond were used in the timber salvage efforts, with tree trunks being hauled to the ponds and stored wet for months to prevent disintegration before they could be sawn and shipped out. As a result of this one storm, almost all the woodland growth now standing in Petersham postdates 1938, with the exception of small sheltered areas on northwest slopes. Bridges through town, including those on Quaker Drive, Glen Road, and in Nichewaug, were washed away in a four-day downpour that preceded the damaging winds.

The second 20th century cataclysmic event to affect Petersham's landscape was the Worcester tornado of 1953. The tornado funnel is thought to have built over Quabbin Reservoir, then swept eastward, touching down in Petersham, Barre and Rutland before causing widespread damage in Worcester [J. Burk pers. comm.]. Petersham's losses were light compared to the hurricane damage two decades earlier, but a swath of trees was knocked over, three or four houses damaged beyond repair, and half of the dam at Connor's Pond – already in poor condition – was completely destroyed along with the trees and shrubs along the north bank. For the first time in over two centuries the pond reverted to swamp land, not to be reconstructed until 1969.

Despite natural setbacks and disasters, the land protection effort begun by James Brooks in the 19th century came to fruition in the twentieth. Apart from his transfer of 2000 acres of woodland to Harvard College, Brooks left most of his land to his sister Martha. After Martha's death in 1924 the property was inherited by great-niece and -nephew Margaret G. Fiske and John Fiske. In 1964 the woodland portions of the property were preserved, initially as the James W. Brooks Wildlife Sanctuary. A decade later Brooks' village improvement efforts received similar protection, when twenty-two acres of Brooks family land became The Trustees of Reservations 61st reservation.

THE PROPERTIES

VI. Reserving the Land for...: Brooks Woodland Preserve

Among the [permanently protected] holdings are properties originally purchased by James Brooks and deeded by his heirs, John and Rosalie Fiske and John Fiske Jr., to The Trustees of Reservations in 1974. At that time, the Fiskes provided the Trustees with the 360 acres known as the James W. Brooks Wildlife Sanctuary, but changed the sanctuary's name to the James W. Brooks Woodland Preserve, to better reflect the Sanctuary's historic orientation and the enlarged concept for its future (TTOR files, ca 1974). The ...Preserve has subsequently grown, and today includes approximately 600 acres of rolling woodlands, rivers, streams and beaver ponds, wetlands, open meadows, and scenic vistas.³⁷ [Yale 1995;7]

Background

The *woodlands, open meadows, scenic vistas and wetlands* were the working landscapes of three farms, a homestead and timbering operations during the nineteenth century, and a preferred venue for pleasure outings by the early twentieth century. Of the farms – all of which are described in the cultural resources inventory of this report – only the Dudley Farm off Quaker Drive survived for more than a hundred years, but each of the archeological sites that remain in Brooks Woodland offers interesting evidence for the evolution of rural land use in central Massachusetts.

Surprisingly, the *historic orientation* cited as a major element in the Fiske family's vision for the woodlands did not apply to human history at all, but rather the history of the forest growth itself. Rosalie Fiske mentioned to Yale researchers that she did not consider any of the cellarholes on the property of particular worth and apparently, although John Fiske devoted long hours to tree work and bridge repairs, he did not spend time working at the old farmsteads. In all fairness, few of the farm ruins of the Brooks Wildlife Sanctuary were striking enough to evoke nostalgia or famous enough to be defended, even by adherents of the neophyte disciplines of historic preservation and historical archeology. Furthermore, by taking this approach the Fiskes were only following in James Brooks' footsteps. During the latter part of his life Brooks made it abundantly clear that to his mind, most manmade structures were wholly expendable in the service of either practical or aesthetic ends.³⁸

³⁷ Since the Yale report, another 65 acres, the Gansen parcel, has been added to the Preserve, bringing its total acreage to approximately 665 acres.

³⁸ Brooks was a practical man, and the thousands of acres he bought included numerous buildings in all states of repair. Some of the more appealing ones, or those in better condition, were either moved to more accessible

By the time the Fiske family offered the land to The Trustees in 1975, even the farm fields were woodland, their only recent improvements being widening and maintenance of numerous trails and fire roads through the property that had first been improved by James Brooks at the turn of the century. The *open fields* mentioned in the Yale report were later restorations accomplished under Trustees management.

The 58th Reservation

The 366 acres of land that came to The Trustees was not deeded lightly. The property, originally preserved in 1964 by Brooks' heirs as the James W. Brooks Wildlife Sanctuary, included James Brooks' bequest to his family of 98 acres, plus at least five other parcels acquired by family members after his death. The Sanctuary land came with a modest endowment.

It also came with a land use restriction imposed by the heirs, which summarized both their own values and their vision of the 'best and highest use' for the woodlands they had inherited. John Fiske's, Rosalie Fiske's, and John Fiske Jr.'s goal is spelled out in their deed of gift [WD 5662:137; 1975].

To re-create and preserve in perpetuity the granted premises and any further areas which the Grantee shall add thereto³⁹ as a natural forest typifying the landscape of central New England as it existed at the time of the early settlers, to serve as a laboratory for research and education, to constitute a living museum for the education and edification of the present and future generations, and a refuge and sanctuary for all living things, including human beings who wish to observe and study and find refreshment of the spirit in unspoiled surroundings, on which the Grantee may maintain trails and roads and engage in non-commercial forestry operations, construct dams and impoundments and erect structures, which shall be as inconspicuous as possible, for the feeding and shelter of wild creatures.

The vision of recreating *a natural forest...as it existed at the time of the early settlers* echoed ongoing research at Harvard Forest and that organization's mid-century conclusion, voiced by director Hugh Raup in his articles. Raup concluded that all of man's cultural impositions and changes on the land were of only fleeting significance and that, given enough time without further human disturbance, the landscape would revert to its 'primeval' state.⁴⁰

At the same time, Harvard Forest was working under a policy of controlled experimentation and

locations or fixed up for summer residents. Brooks did not hesitate, however, to tear down or bulldoze others that were damaged. The former solution reduced the number of out-of-the-way shelters accessible to vagrants and other undesirables (see Brooks letters), while the latter opened up the scenic vistas that visitors sought in Petersham.

³⁹ This clause has important ramifications for management planning on the whole Brooks Woodland Preserve. By 2004, The Trustees were qualifying their acceptance of another gift of land from the Fiskes, to limit the organization's commitment to attempt to *recreate a natural forest*.

⁴⁰ David Foster's more recent work indicates a longer-term – possibly permanent – impact than Raup had predicted. Thus the concept of 'recreating' becomes muddied, and is currently considered to be close to impossible.

management on its own land. As the Fiskes contemplated donation of the Brooks Wildlife Sanctuary to The Trustees, they viewed their parcel as a natural – an unmanipulated – foil to Harvard’s lands, an equally important *laboratory for research and education* that would complement the extremely controlled research being done beyond its borders. Herbert Pratt, president of the Massachusetts Forest and Park Association, visited the Fiskes in early 1974, and commented on their approach.

At first, I was apprehensive that your family do not plan to practice any sustained yield forestry methods, but I think your explanation is reasonable that your land will be used to contrast these methods of land utilization (now practiced by Harvard Forest) so following generations can see exactly the merits of both – I think this philosophy is not au courant at the moment, but who knows, maybe both points of view will be something to be proud about in the years ahead. [March 1974 Pratt to Fiske letter; Trustees files]

In 1975, the 366 acres of land that constituted the James W. Brooks Woodland Preserve became The Trustees’ 58th reservation. Subsequent donations of land by Fiske family members, including ones in 1978, 1980 and 2004, raised the total acreage to 600, with an additional 65 acre parcel acquired from the Gansens in 2005.

VII. The Culture of Nature: North Common Meadow

North Common Meadow, a 25 acre parcel of open land, became The Trustees’ 61st reservation in 1975, the same year Brooks Woodland was acquired. Previously the property of John Fiske Jr. and Rosalie Fiske Johnson, it had briefly belonged to a Worcester lawyer but was purchased by the Trustees with funding from the Aimee Mott Butler Trust for Charity [WD 5700:26; 6429:121].

Background

The property lies just north of the Petersham town center, its most noticeable feature being the small clapboard building constructed about 1825 as a law office for Aaron Brooks. The law office had originally stood next to Aaron Brooks’ dwelling house, which was significantly altered by James W. Brooks after he bought back his father’s house in 1868. While the house was torn down in 1935, the law office remained, a small Greek Revival building that probably resembled many other craft shops and offices around the village.

James Brooks constructed the small back room addition that still survives, as a wood-working shop for the rustic furniture he built. A turn-of-the-century description elaborates.

Mr. Brooks retained his father's office building just as it was except for certain interior changes which he made with his own hands, such as the installation of oddly carved furniture which he constructed out of curiously gnarled wood and peculiarly shaped knots, which he collected and put into final shape in the little shed which he used as a workshop at the back of the old office building.⁴¹ [Wilder 1915; 192]

A historic building survey form on file at the Massachusetts Historical Commission adds the following detail: *the interior was shingled with wooden shingles on the wall.* [MHC – Petersham, #26]

Wilder's *Petersham Sketches* also describes the creation – again at the hand of James Brooks – of North Common Meadow in the form it has today.

After the Baptist church and the residences of Capt. Mudge, George Foster and George Marsh were burned in 1892, Mr. Brooks bought the sites and graded the ground, leaving an open space and a fine unobstructed view from the [Nichewaug] “Inn.” He tore down old useless buildings and removed others that obstructed fine views, removed many unsightly walls, dug drains and did much grading....He provided extensive golf links in connection with his Inn, for the entertainment of the summer patrons and visitors. [Wilder; 111-112]

North Common Meadow, an integral part of the center village viewscape, was never intended to be returned to its ‘primeval’ state, as were Brooks woodlands. This was a consciously cultural landscape where the tenets of high Victorian culture redefined what was valuable enough to save among the features and artifacts left by previous generations.

The 61st Reservation

In later years The Trustees engaged in a certain amount of discreet redefinition as well. Only two years after the property's purchase, they recorded an agreement with a local farmer who had, the previous year, grown silage corn on part of the property. After 1977, only hay was to be grown there, and The Trustees designated other areas as preferably given over to wildflowers, with a haying schedule dictated by blooming dates.

While the twenty-two acres that comprises most of the Meadow was acquired by The Trustees in 1975 (Sargisson to TTOR WD 5700:26), two and a quarter acres of land abutting North Street – and the historic law office - remained in private hands. A 1977 letter in The Trustees files describes what followed, and outlines the further redefinition of this highly visible site.

At last there is news about the Brooks Law Office in Petersham. An anonymous donor has offered to give the land on which it now stands to The Trustees of Reservations as an addition to the open field adjoining the

⁴¹ This description explains the incongruous presence of rustic furnishings in a carefully restored Greek Revival building.

Historical Society known as the North Common Pasture⁴² already owned by the Trustees.

This generous gift is made on the condition that the Brooks Law Office be moved from its present location, where it is rather awkwardly placed and in the middle of what will be a handsome view from the street. You will remember that Duane Sargisson moved the Law Office back from the street several years ago when he expected to use it as his own law office. The anonymous donor is willing to provide space for the Law Office near the street in the northwest corner of the property, a site that will be as close as possible to the original location. This offer is on the further condition that funds be raised to...put the building in sound structural condition.

Our best estimate is that this can all be done... for \$5,000. This will include both the move itself and a new foundation, a new chimney, necessary carpentry, a tight new roof with cedar shingles and painting. [1977 letter to Mrs. Tom Arnold; Trustees files]

The funding, the move and the preservation work took place under the oversight of Arthur H. Brooks Jr, a Cambridge architect. Today Aaron Brooks' office – enlarged, moved, and re-moved – again sits at streetside, artfully shifted to enhance the view created almost a century earlier to please another generation of summer visitors. In 2000, a plan for general management of the reservation was prepared by The Trustees.

VIII. What Goes Around Comes Around: Swift River Reservation and the Swift River Valley Trust

Background

While the Swift River Reservation includes most of the cultural resources documented on Trustees' Petersham properties, all of those survive only as archeological sites. They are described and evaluated in the cultural resource inventory that follows. The large number of sites documented for the Slab City Tract is an indication of intense human activity in the area by the Swift River rapids that were dammed to form Connor's Pond. The pond itself, a natural swampy area, gives indication of Native American use prior to English settlement, and it was at this fall that the new town's first mills were built, possibly as early as the 1730s. By 1795, when town selectman Jeremiah Robinson prepared a map of Petersham's significant features, a carefully drawn mill, complete with weathervane, is indicated on the west shore of the pond.

⁴² Note the more plebeian name for the property, later changed to "Meadow".

Predictably, the presence of waterpower, mills and roads attracted other activity, until a small cluster of buildings surrounded the dam, over which ran the Worcester to Brattleboro stage road. The Connor's Pond community, however, never developed into a village as did the area downstream at Clark's Pond where mills, craft shops and workers' housing together created the 19th century factory village of Nichewaug. Nevertheless, when James Brooks reminisced about his mid-century childhood, he referred to the area as *the pretty valley known in my boyhood as "Slab City."* [Brooks 1904; 18]

Instead, Connor's (or Williams' or Brooks') Pond was a location where manufacturing and farming buildings stood side by side – like the Eames-Newton farm and Lucius Spooner's scythe manufactory, or the saw mill and Pat Connor's farm. The juxtaposition of agricultural and industrial elements on the landscape was indicative of the interweaving of the two occupations in the lives of most 19th century rural inhabitants. There were few farmers who were not also part-time craftsmen; nor were there many successful manufacturers whose products were not associated somehow with the farming community. As a result, the remains of these buildings and dams, field enclosures and sluiceways – the cultural resources of 21st century Slab City – combine as a rare artifact of 19th century rural life.

In contrast to Slab City, the Nichewaug Tract, although only a short distance west, is composed of very different terrain. A generally steep, extremely rocky landscape precluded use of most of the area for agriculture, with the exception of small sections that served as pasture land for the neighboring Clark and Blanchard farms. Lack of farm clearing meant that extensive stretches of woodland were allowed to reach full growth size before determined loggers cut the timber. Even in the recent past, Larry Buell remembers the felling of a giant 1,000 board foot tree east of Ross Hill Road.

The presence of a road as early as 1830 cutting through this severe landscape suggests that this was the most direct route southward before the construction of Route 122. With the road likely came early logging operations and construction of a solitary farm (the Carruth house – see inventory) whose extensive stonework belies the short term of its operation. At the base of the hill, downstream from a water-retaining marsh, the remains of a mid-19th century saw mill suggest that woodsmen may have turned west from the base of Ross Hill, following the river to the mill. By the 20th century, the Carruth house had been moved. The sawmill survived probably through the First World War, while the bridge at the end of Ross Hill (Carruth) Road was washed out in the '38 hurricane, and never rebuilt.

Protection of both Nichewaug and Slab City Tracts once again traces back to James Brooks. In 1907, part of the 1800 acres Brooks arranged to convey to Harvard College⁴³ was *Tract number three, called "Slab City."* Brooks held back a handful of small parcels from Tract #3, including *about forty-one acres and one hundred and six rods of land situated on the westerly side of Barre Road opposite the southerly end of Brooks Pond* [WD 1881:328]. This parcel now constitutes the Slab City Tract of Swift River Reservation. There is no indication of Brooks' reasons for carving out the old mill-and-farm lots from the Harvard sale or, in fact, whether this was by his choice or Harvard's.

⁴³ The deed was not actually written and filed until 1908, but it is clear from the Trustees' 1907 annual report that the transfer was already in the works (see discussion under land use history).

In 1907 Brooks also purchased the 139 acre Blanchard homestead farm east of Nichewaug Road. Within the year, Brooks had turned the Blanchard land over to Charles F. Choate Jr. who, with his wife, acquired sizable adjacent holdings (including much of the Nichewaug Tract) between 1911 and 1915. Thirty years later Josephine Choate Spencer, one of their heirs, sold her part of the estate to Henry and Catherine Wood of New York City who, twenty years later, conveyed their property to the Worcester Natural History Society.

Swift River Valley Trust

By mid-century, the organizations whose holdings surrounded Connor's Pond reached a similar conclusion to that of James Brooks fifty years earlier: some things are best not done alone. In 1967 the Worcester Natural History Society, the Massachusetts Audubon Society (whose Rutland Brook Sanctuary extended eastward from the pond), Harvard University (with forest lands west of the pond), and the Brooks Wildlife Sanctuary (extending north from the pond's two feeder brooks) formed the Swift River Valley Trust. The Trust's main focus was management of Connor's Pond – or what was left of it, since the dam had been completely destroyed during the passage of the 1953 Worcester tornado through Petersham. The Trust proposed to pool resources (financial and political) in order *to restore Connor's Pond and maintain it as a permanent Wild Area* [Trustees files].

The dam was rebuilt during the summer of 1968; with landscaping of the surrounding shoreline accomplished in 1969. Since that time the Trust has continued to cooperatively maintain dam and adjacent land, allowing fishing in designated areas and restricting vehicle access to only the southeastern shoreline of the pond. An interesting footnote to the process: although the Trust owns the entire shoreline of the Pond, its title specifically does not include the small island – quaintly named Mystic Isle in an old photograph – located toward the pond's northern end.⁴⁴

The Worcester Natural History Society, strapped for money in early '80s, considered logging or developing their land for income, but a contemporary description in a letter from Harvard Forest economist Ernest Gould to Trustees' Director Gordon Abbott, suggests they would have been hard pressed to do so.

The piece that lies south of the river [Davis Tract], adjoining the north side of Glen Valley Road, drops too steeply to the river for development, except at one place opposite the gravel pit. The northeasterly area [Slab City Tract] is very hilly and rough except for the wetland along the river and one old farm site [Eames-Newton house] on the private lane. The main body of the land [Nichewaug Tract] includes steep cliffs and granite outcrops, and is hilly and steep especially at the north end where it butts a short stretch of public road [Nichewaug Rd/Choate Lane]. Terrain makes all three tracts difficult to develop. [Gould to Abbott letter 1980; Trustees files]

⁴⁴ Brooks' deed to Harvard College states: *excepting herefrom the large island in Brooks or Williams Pond which is owned by other parties.* [WD 1881:328]

The 68th Reservation

In 1983 the Worcester Natural History Society sold 361 acres to The Trustees of Reservations [WD 7871:304], to form the core of Swift River Reservation. An additional 78 acres were purchased on the east side of the river in 1985 from Dr. David Davis. Petersham resident Bob Clark recently commented that the ‘specialness’ of the Nichewaug and Davis Tracts was due in large part to the presence of huge forest trees lining the river banks – not likely to be true old growth but, due to perfect growing conditions, large enough to feel like old growth. The presence of these trees harks back to the conservation restriction first applied by James Brooks to the Blanchard-Choate property. In the deed from the Society to The Trustees, the hands-off corridor along the river was widened significantly.

Worcester [Natural History Society] may conduct [educational and research] programs on the conveyed premises, it being always understood that any such program shall not disturb the wilderness habitat of the property located in a corridor bounded 600 feet on either side of the Swift River. [WD 7871:304]

As with other Trustees reservations, an initial management plan that included both Slab City and Nichewaug was prepared in 1984, based on five goals and objectives for the property:

- preserve scenic and historic qualities
- maintain diversified wildlife habitat
- maintain vistas from Nichewaug Road old field
- provide for passive public use
- protect water quality of Swift River

The presence of old fields was emphasized on both tracts, with the recommendation that they *should be managed to prevent them from returning to a forested condition* [management strategy, Long Hill files]. At Nichewaug, this applied specifically to the hilltop pasture, now the reservation’s main entrance, which provided *a splendid view* as well as habitat diversity. This field was recleared to provide visitor access to the property along a open walking path that contrasted with the heavily wooded slopes below.

At Slab City the situation was complicated both by the shrubby growth that had begun to reclaim the open spaces and by the diverse topography.

Again, numerous old field tree and shrub species are present. The management emphasis here should be visual diversity and wildlife habitat. A feature unique to this site is significant old field frontage on a sizable wetland.⁴⁵ ...Brush should be cleared along the stonewall bordering the road....Trees should be cleared away from [the Eames-Newton foundation] to protect the stone walls as well as to make it more visible....Throughout this area tree species should be selectively removed and the entire area mowed each fall....

⁴⁵ Central Region Director Dick O’Brien recalls that a small portion of the wetland margin was still being hayed when he began work on the reservation in 1984.

The visual guide used in reclaiming the Slab City fields was a Petersham Historical Society photograph titled *View from Choate Ledges*, which is reproduced in the appendix to this report. This area, including the home fields of the Eames-Newton farm, the degraded terrace that once held Micajah Reed's house, and the old county roadway from Barre were cleared over a five year period. Recent management activity has focused on improvement of the tract's original parking area, plus the recommended annual field mowing.

The 1984 management plan touched only briefly on the subject of forest management. *No action is recommended initially....An overall forest policy for the reservation must be decided upon.* Since that time, forest management guidelines for the entire organization have been formulated (1999). A complete management plan for Swift River Reservation is scheduled to be completed in 2010.

IX. Cultural Resources of The Trustees' Petersham Properties

With the exception of one small building and a dam, it is stone walls, foundations, wood roads, re-cut forest and re-cleared fields that characterize the *cultural landscape* of The Trustees' Petersham reservations. Excerpts from a National Park Service publication [Birnbaum 1994] elucidate this term.

- a cultural landscape is a geographic area, including both cultural and natural resources,... associated with a historic event, activity, or person or exhibiting other cultural or aesthetic values.

Within this broad category, the Petersham reservations are classed as *historic vernacular landscapes*:

- a landscape that evolved through use by the people whose activities or occupancy shaped that landscape....the landscape reflects the physical, biological, and cultural character of those everyday lives. Function plays a significant role in vernacular landscapes.... Examples include rural villages, industrial complexes, and agricultural landscapes.

North Common Meadow is a rural village segment; Brooks Woodland Reserve and the Nichewaug Tract of Swift River Reservation are made up of a number of distinct agricultural landscapes; while the Slab City Tract combines industrial, commercial and agricultural features. The National Park Service has spelled out the planning process recommended for cultural landscapes in detail, and that process is being followed for the Petersham properties. The process includes:

- historical research
- resource inventory and documentation of existing conditions
- evaluation of integrity and significance

Subsequently, a preservation approach, a management plan and a maintenance strategy are worked out, with arrangements for keeping a record of treatment and future research recommendations. These planning elements will be included in a Trustees' master plan for each of the properties. What follows is a listing of the historic and prehistoric landscapes, sites and features identified in the three reservations, with documentation and observations on the sites' chronologies, their historic use(s) and their significance.

CULTURAL RESOURCE INVENTORY

KEY to Inventory Notes

B = building

HA = historic archeological site

HL = historic landscape

HLF = historic landscape feature

M + date = map reference; see appendix for selected historic maps.

date only = drawn from documentary evidence

cellarhole # refers to Coolidge chapter on Petersham cellarholes

TTOR # refers to trail markers shown on The Trustees Petersham properties map

bracketed entry refers to source listed in bibliography

Cultural Resource numbers correlate with Petersham Cultural Resources map (see Appendix).

NORTH COMMON MEADOW

1. Aaron Brooks Law Office (B)
 - c. 1830: built by lawyer Aaron Brooks Jr. [Historic District Report]
 - M1857: does not show law office but does show Brooks house (*Mrs. M. A. Brooks*)
 - M1898: *J. A. Brooks* outline of law office at street side, north of house
 - 1974: John Fiske Jr. and Rosalie F. Johnson to Duane Sargisson [WD 5429:183] Sargisson moved law office away from road but did not use the building. [Trustees files]
 - 1973-1978: Sargisson to The Trustees: *land with the building thereon...near the 'Common'...* [WD 6429:121] and 22+ acres of North Common Meadow [WD 5700:26]
 - 1979: Building returned to vicinity of original site; new foundation and interior/exterior restoration under supervision of architect Arthur H. Brooks Jr. of Cambridge.
 - c. 1995: new roof

2. Brooks Mansion (HA) – cellarhole #9
 - 1832: built by Aaron Brooks Jr. [Coolidge]
 - 1865: sold by widow to Henry Miner [Coolidge]
 - Jan 1, 1868: bought by James W. Brooks, son of Aaron Jr. *land...with dwelling house and other buildings...four acres more or less...Said premises being the homestead of the late Aaron Brooks Jr. in his lifetime.*[WD 759:105] Brooks was living in New York City at the time.
 - n.d.: extensively remodeled; home of J.W. Brooks and sister Martha Brooks [Coolidge]
 - 1935: building razed [Coolidge]. This took place during its ownership by Rosemary Fiske, Brooks' niece and heir

3. North Common Meadow (HL)
 - M1857: number of buildings shown along east side of North Street and north side of East Street
 - 1892: 'East Side Fire' destroys several buildings [PeteHistSoc newsletter]; *Mr. Brooks bought the sites and graded the ground, leaving an open space....He tore down old useless buildings and removed others that obstructed fine views, removed many unsightly walls, dug drains and did much grading* [Wilder 1915]
 - M1898: few buildings; most owned by J. W. Brooks

4. Swamp – 10 acres, bottom of North Common Meadow (possible HL)
 - TTOR press release states this was “a storage pond in colonial times”

BROOKS WOODLAND PRESERVE –ROARING BROOK TRACT

5. Spooner-Johnson Farm (HA) – cellarhole #50
 - (1750): Daniel Spooner is living on Jacob Cory’s proprietary grant [1750 list]
 - 1759: Daniel Spooner deeds 60 acres to son Ruggles [Coolidge]
 - 1771: Spooner is on 1771 tax list but does not own a house. 26 acres were improved land, including 15 acre pasture on which he grazed 50 sheep (a large number in comparison with other residents). By 1790 he did have his own household that included another adult male and two females.
 - 1787: Spooner mortgages land to Benjamin Green, who forecloses in 1802 [WD 103:332]. No mention of buildings.
 - 1816: Robert Goddard Jr. buys property – 100 acres [WD 201:216] Deed does not mention house or other building
 - ca. 1820? house constructed by Goddard.
 - 1849: Robert sells to son? Josiah Goddard *my homestead farm...about one half mile easterly of the centre...100 acres* on north and south sides of the road [WD 450:146]
 - 1855: property transfer to J. Ballard Goddard
 - M1857: *J. B. [illegible]*
 - 1870: David Johnson of Dana buys property from Goddard [WD 833:453]
 - 1898: James W. Brooks buys from H.H. Ramsdell – a Johnson heir?[WD 1577:203]
 - 1932: house taken down; rebuilt for Mr. and Mrs. Robert Douthit on south side of West St. [Coolidge]; PHS photo caption says this takes place in 1931, during its ownership by Rosemary Fiske, Brooks’ niece and heir.

Field survey: house with ell, barn and another outbuildings’ foundations are in very good condition although front doorstep has been removed and a number of large boulders have been dumped into the south end of the barn foundation. This building and yard complex is an excellent example of an agrarian landscape, shaped and expanded over time. It is easily accessible and has surprising elements like the tall stone pillars that are today free standing, but originally served as supports for the barn’s second floor. The brookside stone wall and other stonework are good examples of adapting standard farmstead elements to an uneven natural landscape in order that the more level, upland parcels across the street could be dedicated to agriculture.

The Spooner-Johnson farm would be a worthwhile study pairing with the Dudley Farm described below.

6. Water impoundment, Roaring Brook (HA)

just north of East Street on Roaring Brook. Heavily built curved stone walling may have been part of dam or retaining wall for pond associated with fulling mill or tannery. A rectangular depression on the downstream side of the wall may be remnants of a building foundation [field survey]. No deed documentation yet found. No cartographic evidence.

Worth further documentary investigation.

BROOKS WOODLAND PRESERVE – SWIFT RIVER TRACT

7. Stone slab bridge (HLF)
across Roaring Brook south of TTOR marker #25
8. East Street field (HL)
top of rise east of Browns Pond: the tossed stone wall that surrounds it is evidence of the field's historic use as tillage
9. Roadway (HL) – TTOR #40-42
running south from Brown's Pond to S. Dudley-Bigelow farm
 - c. 1793: Moses Marsh builds house *at the end of the road running south from Brown's Bridge* [Coolidge] but 1814 tax list states *no road* to this house.
 - M1857: no house or road indicated
 - M1898: road (see below)
 - (n.d.): J. W. Brooks buys property; improves road as one of the *many driveways through his forest lands* mentioned by Wilder [1915]
 - M1938: nothing indicated

Field survey: a varied and easily accessible historic landscape which also has numerous interesting natural features including parallel Swift River, beaver activity, glacial (moraine?) with unusual geological features (cf: large quartz boulders). Culturally, the roadway gives views of recent logging activity and evidence of earlier logging; its stone slab bridge was built to bear the weight of heavy logging equipment; flanking but non-contiguous stone walls define pasture areas, and the route itself (although now extended southward) was constructed for access to one back-country farmstead.

10. Marsh-Dudley House (HA) – cellarhole #47
 - c. 1793: Moses Marsh builds house *at the end of the road running south from Brown's Bridge* [Coolidge]. A 1793 deed for mills at Brown's Pond lists Marsh as *of Grafton*; by 1794 he is *of Petersham*. Marsh was a blacksmith, and seems to have been involved with the grist mill at Brown's Pond – whether as owner or miller is unknown.
 - 1811: Simon Dudley purchases from Marsh 80 ½ acres, *all the land or farm and buildings on which I now live*. [WD 180:477]
 - 1814: *Dudley, Simon: I dwelling, I barn, I mile southeast of meetinghouse on no road...* [1814 tax list in Coolidge, p. 145]
 - M1857: no house or road indicated
 - mid-1800s: PHS photo caption identifies this as *Charles F. Dudley buildings*.
 - M1898: “J.R. & D.F. Bigelow” on west side at end of road: L-shaped house; barn
 - (n.d.): J. W. Brooks buys property
 - 1900: taken down [Coolidge]
 - M1938: nothing indicated

Field survey: although the remains of the Marsh-Dudley farm are difficult to decipher, the farm is significant as being among the earliest cultural resources on Trustees Petersham land. The siting of farm buildings is a particularly interesting example of historic land use choices and considerations, with the house situated on the edge of wetlands but surrounded by workable upland fields. Access from East Street was direct and relatively level, while fresh meadow was located a short distance north of the farm at ‘Sackett’s Harbor’ on the Swift River – an open area that shows evidence of past ditching for drainage (and consequent encouragement of meadow grass growth).

A note on the “Indian Grinding Stones”: This interesting geological feature is a result of water action on a massive, now split, boulder downslope from the Marsh-Dudley house in the Moccasin Brook watershed. It is not immediately apparent whether the water action took place prior to or after the boulder’s glacial deposition on site. The only indication of its having been used for grinding of corn, acorns or other foodstuffs by Native Americans is persistent local folklore.

11A-B. Cornell House and Barn (HA) – cellarholes

- PHS photo caption says *Dr. Lemuel Hodges 1850*
- M1857: “N. Hodgkins”
- 1864-66: David Paige buys four tracts
- 1871: Paige to Mrs. Matilda Connell (*sic*), Elizabeth, John & Charles Connell, all of Petersham, 33 acres *land known as ‘Sackets Harbor’* [WD 851:440] - no house mentioned
 - reserving therefrom all the pine trees now standing on said premises, together with the privilege of removing the same at any time within two years from the date hereof.*
- M1898: “John E. Cornell” – house; barn
A PHS photo, possibly from the same period, also shows house and small barn or outbuilding
- 1910: Cornells (*aka Connell*) mortgage property to James W. Brooks [WD 1937:543]; he later acquires title to it.
- M1938: nothing indicated
- 1940s: still standing, but abandoned and derelict [Bob Clark pers. comm]

BROOKS WOODLAND PRESERVE – CONNORS POND TRACT

12A-D. Dudley Farm (HA; HL)

- 1794: begin with 104 acres owned by Jonathan Pierce (Petersham yeoman) who sells the *tract of land* to Nathan Chase, a Sutton yeoman for £360. [WD 122:556]

12A-B. 1794-1795: 1st house and barn probably built by Nathan Chase [Coolidge cellarhole #70]

- 1795: 104 acres sold ‘with buildings’ to Elias Chase (Paris, Cumberland Co. yeoman) - still for £360. This suggests Elias may be son/relative who helped build in exchange for discount price. [WD 124:543]
- 1800: Chase to Francis Dudley (Sutton yeoman) for \$1383.33. Presumably the Chases and Dudleys knew each other from Sutton. [WD 140:129] In following years Francis Dudley compiles a farm around this 104 acre core, totaling approximately 150 acres.
- 1800: he buys 2 ½ acres ‘meadow’ plus 5 acres ‘land’ on north side of Rutland Brook from Jonas Wheeler. [WD 141;79]
- 1801: he buys 2 acres ‘land’ and *the whole of Stone’s upper orchard so called* – probably less than five acres, but with fruit trees that may have been already producing – from Jesse Stone whose land abuts his. [WD 171:111]
- 1814: *Dudley, Francis: 100 acres, dwelling and barn...3 miles southeast of meeting-house.* [1814 tax list in Coolidge, p. 145]
- 1815: Francis and Joseph Dudley buy 30 acres ‘pasture’ from Joseph Brown, (‘Clothier’ and son of Col. Joseph Brown who runs the mills at Brown’s Pond) whose land may have included a fulling mill on Moccasin Brook.
- Francis Dudley, age 77, died 1825

12C. c. 1825?: 2nd house built by Joseph Dudley (Francis’ son)

It was located 100 feet south of father’s house on same piece of property [Coolidge cellarhole #71]. Extended household included Francis’s widow Elizabeth (d. 1836), Joseph’s wife Nancy Bigelow from Barre (int. 1814) and Joseph’s brother and sister, Samuel and Elizabeth who both died in November of 1848.

- M1857: “F Dudley”

12D. c. 1840-1857: Saw Mill

According to Sherman [1931], Reuben Stone’s house was moved from his site (see below) to Moccasin Brook and used as a mill. This was apparently done by Joseph Dudley before 1857 because:

- M1857: “Saw Mill” N side of Quaker Road at Moccasin Brook on what is now Harvard Forest land
- 1881: deed, Charles Chandler to James Burns clarifies the fact that the *old Joseph Dudley Farm* includes, in its southeast corner, twelve acres of land on which is the *old Dudley saw mill yard... includ[ing] the old mill yard, mill site and saw mill.*[WD 1098:129]
- M1898: none indicated
- M1914: L. S. Benjamin & Co. saw mill

This site is likely on Harvard Forest land where Swift River crosses under Quaker Drive; field survey inconclusive as to location.

- (n.d.): Simeon Dudley sells whole Dudley Farm to Lucius J. Chamberlain (who owned abutting farm to west) mid-19th century [ref: WD 867:52]; in 1873 Chamberlain mortgages to Charles Chandler who forecloses.
- 1879: Chandler to James Burns *a certain farm containing 176 acres more or less* [WD 1060:564] Burns is a local land speculator, who owns a number of properties in the area.
- 1881: Burns to James W. Brooks (residing in Cambridge): same property [WD 1098:130]

- M1898: “Jas Burns”: cruciform house, L-shaped barn
- 1908: deed refers to road *passing the house of said Burns*
By this time the whole area surrounding the Dudley/Burns farm is owned by the F.M. West Box Company and the Diamond Match Company [WD1881:328].
- 1911: Brooks expands his holdings to the opposite side of Quaker Drive by purchasing 161 acres *by J. Burns* from Diamond Match Company [WD 1957:571]
- 1933: burned [PHS photo caption]
- M1938: cellarhole indicated

Caption for PHS photo of 2nd house, circa 1933, says: *built by Joseph Dudley about 1825, perhaps 100 feet south of the house occupied by his father Francis Dudley who came from Sutton 1800; James Burns about 1875; Charles Hanting; Diamond Match Co.; Burned July 4, 1933. Paneling removed c. 1930 by Josephine Choate and added to Choate farm house.* (see Blanchard House)

Field survey: The Dudley Farm is among the most interesting Trustees cultural landscapes due to a number of factors. The proximity and easy identification of two houses, a large barn, barn yard, pasture lot, orchard remnant, farm tracks and public roadway present a rare landscape survival. The two houses, built by family members for similar purposes – but a generation apart – reflect changing tastes and preferences. The Dudley family’s isolation from Petersham center, and their later involvement with saw milling, offer examples of the ways in which second- and later generation settlers made do with less desirable land parcels and adapted their agricultural economy to changing market demands – in this case, by adding lumbering as a new way to generate income and offset the reduced farm productivity caused by soil depletion.

13. “Grandfather Pine” (HLF)

Located near TTOR #51. A massive and old multi-trunk white pine on a steep hillside west of Moccasin Brook. The tree has been the scene of weddings and other gatherings, according to L. Buell. The Trustees’ central Region file includes a photograph of John and Rosalie Fiske with friends sitting under the tree.

14. Reuben Stone House (HA) – cellarhole #72

- 1768: built by Reuben Stone [Coolidge] Stone was born in Rutland, son of Reuben and Mary, in 1747; his death date has not been found. He married Grace Munro (Petersham) in 1768. [Vital Records]
- In 1771 Reuben Stone was living in Petersham with two other adult males (plus an unknown number of females) in his household. He farmed 3 acres of tillage, 11 acres of pasture, 5 acres of upland mowing fields and an unusually high 8 acres of meadow. At an average ½ acre tillage cleared per year, Stone might have owned his own farm since 1765. [1771 tax valuation]
- 1790: Reuben Stone and 2 females were a household; Jesse Stone, probably Reuben’s son, and 5 females also formed a (separate) household [federal census]
- 1801: Jesse Stone [Sherman]
- n.d.: Robert Cutler [Sherman]
- n.d.: Woodman Wheeler [Coolidge]
- 1840: Joab Blanchard [Sherman]. Before 1857, Blanchard had moved to his father’s

much larger farm west of Connors' Pond (see below).

- c. 1850: house moved to Moccasin Brook and used as mill (Sherman, in 1931, refers to *very large ash tree* growing out of the Stone cellarhole that she dates to c. 1830-1850)
 - M1857: "Saw Mill" N side of Quaker Road at Moccasin Brook on what is now Harvard Forest land; L. S. Benjamin & Co. saw mill on 1914 map (See Dudley Farm above)
- M1857: no house, no road indicated
- M1898: no house, no road indicated
- 1911: the land that James W Brooks bought from Diamond Match Company – 161 acres *by J. Burns* [WD 1957:571] – probably included the Stone house site.

Field survey: Reuben Stone's cellarhole sits at the top of a rise near TTOR marker #64. It is nearly invisible from the trail, but was sited to provide long views on all sides, including down a gentle slope to the head of Connors' Pond. The foundation is in deteriorated condition, some of it having been destroyed by the large pine tree that is still disintegrating around it. Limited field survey did not expose any sign of barn, yard fencing (walling) or well.

15. Road by Reuben Stone house (HL)

TTOR #63-69 to terminus of roadway east of Connor's Pond. Coolidge [p. 72] refers to *the discontinued Road from the Quaker Road to the east side of Connor's Mill Pond*. It is indicated on the 1938 WPA map as a public road but earlier Petersham maps (1855, 1857; 1898) do not indicate it. This present-day trail has likely been used as a wood road since Reuben Stone settled in the vicinity, and was probably improved and maintained by J. W. Brooks' heir John Fiske.

CONNORS POND

Not part of a Trustees reservation but adjacent to both Brooks Woodland and Swift River, Connors Pond is managed by the Swift River Valley Trust, a consortium of the pond's adjacent landowners including The Trustees, Massachusetts Audubon Society and the Harvard Forest.

16. Connors Pond (HL)

Named for Patrick Connor, whose house is still standing on top of rise east of pond, and whose farm land included extensive acreage east of the pond. Ironically, Connor did not apparently have any connection with the mills for which the pond was created.

The pond is located in a natural valley at the confluence of Rutland Brook and the East Branch of the Swift River. Archeological testing suggests the valley was frequented by Native Americans before its use by English settlers. Before 1777, a mill was located at the cataract where present Loring Hill Road meets Rte 122/32, but there is no clear evidence that a dammed mill pond had been created to power it.⁴⁶ The river was definitely dammed and the pond created by the 1790s (see mills below)

- 1908: *Brooks Pond, formerly Williams Pond* [reference in James W. Brooks deed]
- 1938: dam and roadway partially washed out by 1938 hurricane; subsequently rebuilt and Rte. 122/32 recontoured.
- 1953: dam destroyed by Worcester tornado (see photo in appendix)
- 1969: rebuilt as cooperative project of Swift River Valley Trust.

SWIFT RIVER RESERVATION – SLAB CITY TRACT**17. Connors Pond Mills (HA)**

- mid-18th century: gristmill owned? by Jonathan Prescott; saw mill owned? by Joseph Whitcomb and Daniel Houghton [ref: Sherman p. 57]; land owned by John Chandler Esq.
- M1777: *tract of land belonging to John Chandler Esq.* shows *mills* where *County road* crosses over [Swift] *River*. No indication of mill pond. Abutting property owners on west side, in vicinity of Connors Pond, are Luke Lincoln and Simon [illeg]. Chandler owns a sizable tract east of the river, and also the area that would become the Dudley Farm and probably the Cornell property – a total of 463 acres. Chandler, a Tory, had his property confiscated in 1777. Some of it, at least, was probably sold to Col. Joseph Brown (already owner of the mills at Brown's Pond) at that time.
- M1795 "Mill" w of dam
- 1814: Col. Brown dies; mills sold at auction to James Carruth (a neighboring farm owner) who sells them to Micajah Reed
- June 1815: Reed to Lucius Spooner – half interest in grist mill and saw mill (see abstract of deed WD 201:402)
- Dec. 1815: Joseph Brown's heirs (including Frederick) sell other half of grist and saw mills plus a 128 acre farm with house and barn to Micajah Reed WD 198:497 (see deed abstracts in appendix). See cultural resource #20 for farm property
- by 1815: Lucius Spooner is running a waterpowered *blacksmith business*, possibly in the old saw mill.

⁴⁶ A mill pond is certainly likely, but the 1777 Chandler property map (see appendix) does not indicate one.

- M1830: icons for saw & grist mills
- M1857: “Grist Mill” w of road; “Saw Mill” e of road
 - according to Sherman [1931; 57], Reed and his heirs *owned and ran the mills almost 100 years*
- 1894: heirs of James W. Jenkins to James W. Brooks – *the farm at one time occupied by the late Avira Williams, the old mill and pond near it....* [WD1455:54]
- M1898: “J. W. Brooks” with four buildings– which should be the Eames-Newton house, the Reed house and barn, and – possibly – a mill?
- M1938: no indication of mill buildings

Field survey: evidence of the mills and their associated water features has been largely obliterated through repeated engineering projects associated with Route 122/32 and the Connor’s Pond dam. Route 122 was originally constructed in 1914 as a state road from Barre to Petersham. It was reconstructed, and some of its route reconfigured, in 1940. See Spooner, below, for discussion of west side remains. On the east side of the dam a small segment of stone walling is probably part of another mill foundation. At midstream, below the dam, an “island” of higher ground and boulder rubble shows evidence of having been used either as a support for Loring Hill Road’s earlier crossing location over the river, or as another wall of the east side mill building.

Slab City Tract - cellarholes #81-84

In 1908 James W. Brooks conveyed approximately 2000 acres of land to Harvard College including Tract 3 *called ‘Slab City’...expressly excepting 41 acres 106 rods* – which is the present Trustees’ Slab City Tract of Swift River Reservation [WD1881:328]

- 18.** Lucius Spooner House? (HA) – cellarhole #81
- n.d.: *On the Barre Road, west of the mill pond was the home of Lucius Spooner, manufacturer of hay forks* [Coolidge]
 - 1815: Spooner bought mill privilege and built turning mill for ax and scythe handles
 - M1857: “[B] & S. Williams” – on street
 - M1898: “J.W.Brooks” - house on street (which is still standing) plus barn/mill parallel to road

Is Coolidge wrong calling this a house cellarhole? There is a small house still standing in the same general location, but it appears to be vaguely Greek Revival – perhaps a replacement for Spooner’s, after he moved to Barre in 1844 [Buell] Field survey was inconclusive, since the area immediately surrounding The Trustees’ Slab City parking lot, where Coolidge’s ‘cellarhole’ would have been, has been completely rearranged over the past 80 years, due to road widening, realignment and elevation, and the apparent use of sand and gravel from what is now Trustees’ property for that purpose. An impressive mound of boulders and rock adjacent to the highway may include foundation stones of both Spooner’s house and manufactory, but this cannot be definitively determined.

Coolidge quotes Charles Wilder concerning manufactures in 1855 [p. 160]: *[Spooner] built a trip-hammer and led off in the manufacture of hay forks that were so light, and well*

designed that it was a pleasure for the hay maker to use them. Information on the exact extent and nature of Spooner's manufacturing is confusing, but the following is likely. Spooner added wood lathes to the saw mill already in operation, to shape tool handles; in the same or an adjacent structure, he erected a triphammer to shape the blades (scythes) and tines (hay forks) which would be mounted on the turned handles. All the water-powered operations could draw from the same Connor's Pond headrace.

19. Micajah Reed House (HA) – cellarhole #82

- before 1790: house occupied by Frederick Brown [Coolidge] *on the south side of the old stage road near the bridge.* This was part of Brown's father's property, that was sold when his father died in 1814.
 - 1790: *Fredrick K Brown* household including 1 boy, 3 females [federal census]
 - 1814 tax list: *Frederick Brown: 130 acres, dwelling, barn, half a saw mill, half a grist mill, and a wood house, 2 ½ miles from meeting-house on south road to Barre.*
- 1814: sold to Micajah Reed (possibly Frederick Brown's brother-in-law – he married a Ruthe Brown) [WD 198:560]
- M1857: building indicated
- M1898: no building
- 1931: Sherman writes *There is no cellarhole on the site of his homestead, only a sand bank that has been filled in and a few old fruit trees.*

Field survey: apple trees still grow along southern edge of level terrace on south side of the old road. Dick O'Brien, Central Region Director, reports that when Fiskes owned the property they allowed sand and gravel to be removed from it for road construction. The site was graded and planted to grass in the mid-1980s.

One small piece of artifactual evidence remains on the site. Piled alongside the stone wall that forms the northern edge of the terrace are four or five long rectangular blocks of cut granite, comparable in shape and size to the finish course of the Eames-Newton foundation. It is likely that these blocks were originally laid as the top course of the Reed house, and set aside for reuse when the remainder of the building was destroyed.

20A-B. Eames-Newton Farm aka Williams Farm (HA; HL)

- 1790: Abraham Robinson (Petersham yeoman) sells to Peter Eames (Framingham yeoman) 43 acres on west side of Swift River, adjacent to *the Mill farm* [WD 110:333]
- by 1793: Eames builds house (a 1793 deed calls him 'of Petersham')
- 1811 Eames adds 6 acres land east of his prop.; purchasing from Frederick Brown who describes it as being *at the south end of my intervale* [WD 193:459]
- n.d.: Eames sells to Lewis Macnear (or McNear forecloses on a mortgage?)
- 1819: Macnear to Josiah Newton – *a certain farm being the same farm on which one Peter Eames lately lived* [WD 215:413]
- 1854: Warren Newton to Daniel Bacon, John Pierce and Harrison Bacon (all of Barre)
- [gap] At some point during this time Avira Williams' family (see below) lived in this house.
- 1897: Walter S. Chapin to Walter A. Williams: *land with the buildings thereon...known as the Warren Newton farm.* WD 1560:204

- M1898: *J.W. Brooks* in vicinity of buildings but see below
- 1900: Walter A. Williams (South Gardner) to James W. Brooks (Petersham)
- 1931: Sherman writes: *There is an old barn still standing but the house was torn down by Jim Brooks and the lovely old wood and panelling carted away.* [p. 65-66]
- M1838: icon for vacant dairy farm

Sherman p. 65: *The Newton Place had four fireplaces and two great cauldrons used for washing; in the hall was an old fashioned built-in cupboard....Under the threshold of the Newton Place a little baby girl is buried.*

Field survey: What remains at the site is more interesting when viewed as a farm complex than as the remains of a single building. Numerous historic landscape elements remain, including the foundation of the house (the doorstep is no longer in place, reducing the likelihood that the infant's body is still buried there); the main barn and tightly walled foreyard; suggestions of other outbuildings, and the wall-lined county road that frames the northern and western edge of the complex (see plan in appendix).

Twentieth century management of the abandoned farm has had some impact on the landscape, including removal of sand from a now-level area downslope from the barn (see similar impact at Micajah Reed site). More recently, Trustees' staff have re-cleared the immediate farmstead area and currently maintain it as open fields, restoring the landscape to a condition that resembles a late 19th century photograph in the collection of the Petersham Historical Society (see appendix).

21. Avira Williams House (HA) - cellarhole #84

- 1825: built by 'Avery' Williams [Coolidge, p. 73] *on the north side of the old stage road between Eames and Reed*
- M1857: *T. Osgood* – located at east end of roadway?
- M1898: *J.W.Brooks* – barn, two houses
- M1938: vacant dairy farm indicated

Sherman [1931; 59]: house was large with dance floor upstairs; *a large red farmhouse...only house in the countryside which had a front porch....All that is left is a hitching post and two great elm trees...at the entrance to the old drive.*

Field survey: Sherman's verbal description is more than can be seen on the ground. No elm trees remain, nor anything that is likely to have been a hitching post (but see below). The most plausible location for this house is on a rise, now wooded, north of the Trustees' trail, half way between the Micajah Reed terrace and the Eames-Newton farm. There is a sizable gravel pit in that location, and educated guesswork suggests the pit may originally have been accessed by digging directly into the Williams cellarhole.

22. Standing stone (HLF)

Cut granite post with circular drill hole through it near top, located on north side of Trustees' trail by parking lot. This may be what Sherman described as a *hitching post* but its height and distance from the roadway or any building indicate it is not in its original

location. Alternatively, the stone could be one of the Reed foundation stones set upright by a later land owner – the other stones are lying directly across the way, although none of them has a similar drill hole.

23. Road through Slab City complex (HL)

This is the old Worcester to Brattleboro stage road that came over Loring Hill from Barre; across the dam at Connor’s Pond; turned north at Eames-Newton house connecting with present Russell Road. Later spurs headed west to (now) Choate Lane and south along the Swift River to Carruth Road. [Coolidge, Sherman et al] Substantial stone walls line the north and west branches of the way, while the south branch still exists in part as trails between TTOR #74-80 and #94-93b.

RESOURCES BETWEEN SLAB CITY AND NICHEWAUG TRACTS (private land)

24. 2nd District 12 Schoolhouse (HA)

- 1856: Avira Williams sells land from his farm to town of Petersham for schoolhouse
- M1898: “SCHOOL” s of Connors Pond, W side Rte 32
- 1908: James Brooks’ deed of land to Harvard College definitely confirms location of *the School House site* as abutting the southeast corner of the Slab City Tract. [WD 1881:328]

An 1855 map shows an earlier *School No. 12* farther east (cellarhole #78) and Coolidge says the district was discontinued in 1894; the schoolhouse was moved sometime after that “and built in to Frank Hathaway’s new barn.”[p. 217]

Field Survey: site is cleared and a solid foundation is visible immediately adjacent to roadway on west side of Rte 122/32. A large stone set in the center of the foundation is inscribed SCHOOL DISTRICT No. 12. See appendix for photos.

25. Blanchard-Choate Farm (HB, HL)

- 1816: Luke Lincoln to Abiathar Blanchard [Sherman; 67]
- M 1857: *J. Blanchard* [= Joab]
- M1898: *Sarah Blanchard*
- 1907: Blanchard to James Brooks *the farm with the buildings thereon which formerly belonged to my father Joab Blanchard* – 173 acres in 3 tracts [WD 1848:433]
- 1907: James Brooks to Charles F. Choate Jr. 151 acres [WD 1870:289]
- 1940s: property transferred to Ames family from Josephine Choate Spencer

Field survey: This site is located on piece of road no longer extant, that ran between Choate Lane and the Williams cellarhole. The J. Blanchard location was apparently misrepresented by the 1857 mapmaker, who located it halfway between Choate and Williams. Not on Trustees property (owned by Charlie Ames) but integral to Slab City story. The Choate and Ames families have maintained the historic character of this early farmstead, including buildings, open fields, stone walls, farm pond and windrows. It is an exceptional example of a rural agrarian landscape.

NICHEWAUG TRACT

- 26.** Apple orchard (HLF)
located toward top of Nichewaug Hill by Trustees' parking lot on Nichewaug Road. Yale report [1995] indicates that the orchard existed at the time of the 1938 hurricane but was afterwards abandoned. Field survey: a handful of old apple trees still exist, together with volunteer scions in unmowed edges of this open field. It may have been associated with the Carter property west of Trustees land or perhaps with the Blanchard farm.
- 27.** Carruth Road; aka Ross Hill Road, Carter Pond Road (HL)
Steep dirt road, discontinued, extending north to south through the Nichewaug Tract of Swift River Reservation. Not shown on the 1795 map of town (which may not be comprehensive) but does show on the 1830 map, crossing over Swift River to what is now Carter Pond Road. See appendix maps and plans.
- 28.** Bridge abutments (HLF)
At Carruth Road crossing of Swift River. Coolidge [275] describes an old wood road following Swift River *from the bridge on the Barre Road [at Connor's Pond] to Butler's Bridge on the Glen Drive*. Not clear whether these abutments are 'Butler's Bridge', but the bridge apparently washed out in the 1938 hurricane and was not reconstructed.
- 29.** J. Carruth House (HA) – cellarhole #106
- 1814: Jonas Carruth Jr. owns *66 acres, dwelling 40 by 18 feet, two stories, with back kitchen, 1 barn, bounded north by Samuel Dudley*. [tax list in Coolidge 1948; 144]
 - M1857: (almost illegible) "R. Clark"?
 - M1898: "D.F. Bigelow"; L-shaped house; no barn
 - c. 1900: taken down [Coolidge]
 - M1938: nothing indicated

According to Coolidge [p. 74], *A quarter mile from the Glen Road, on the west side of the Carruth Road [Ross Hill Rd] stood the Carruth house owned by Jonas Carruth, also owned by Samuel Hinds, William A. Smith, Enoch Babcock and Warren Bigelow. It was taken down and rebuilt on the south side of Oliver Street by Daniel Bigelow in about 1900.*

Field survey: Fieldstone foundation exists in fair to good condition. Extensive walled enclosures and probable foundation of large barn support the notion of this being a 19th century farm that may have focussed on livestock production, hay and timbering (see sawmill below). If, as Larry Buell indicates, the house on the south side of Oliver Street now owned by his brother is this building, it is a small 1 ½ story structure placed gable end to the road in Greek Revival style. Siding and fenestration has been altered, making accurate dating difficult. Measurement of the building should corroborate the 40 x 18 foot dimensions cited in the tax list.

30. Saw mill site (HA)
- M1857: “Saw Mill” at small pond just after crook in Swift River west of Carruth Road
 - M1914?: “J.W. Wilder S. Mill” shows pond below confluence of Silver Brook and Swift River; mill at outlet of pond.

No field survey done. Bob Clark affirms presence of dam and foundation remnants.

Sites of record, not located

Peter Gore House foundation

- ‘Peter Gore’s foundation’ located, according to Rosalie Fiske, south of her property [Yale 1995; 76]

Peter Gore is locally famous for his distinct role in Petersham’s Revolutionary history. The Reverend Mr. Whitney, a Tory, was banned by his congregation from preaching in 1775, but he refused to accept dismissal. Horr [1879; 207] writes: *by vote of the town Peter Gore, a half-breed Indian was stationed at the meetinghouse door with a musket to keep the Tory preacher from entering.* Gore does not appear on the 1771 tax valuation, but is listed on the 1790 census, in a household with two other non-white *free Persons*.

- Lincoln House – cellarhole #102
 - c. 1780: Luke Lincoln
 - M1857: nothing indicated

Coolidge: *Half-way between the Hardwick Road and the Carruth Road [Ross Hill Rd] and northeast of the John Carter place was located the home of Luke Lincoln during the Revolutionary War.*

No evidence found during field survey.
- Alfred Carruth House –cellarhole #80

Located northeast side of Connor’s Pond – now Massachusetts Audubon Rutland Brook Sanctuary

 - n.d.: owned by Alfred Carruth [Coolidge]
 - 1860s: occupied by Rathbone family [Coolidge]
 - 1931: Sherman refers to the site as the *Rathbone or Martin Place, now a camp owned by Mr. Charles Allen.*

No indication on 1855, 1898, 1914 maps. The location approximates that of the Rutland Brook Sanctuary superintendent’s house. No field survey done.

AREAS OF TRUSTEES RESERVATIONS WITH MODERATE TO HIGH PREHISTORIC SITE POTENTIAL

Little formal archeological research has been conducted in Petersham except in the vicinity of the Quabbin reservoir, but the finds of amateur investigators make it clear that the area supported at least occasional occupation by Native Americans over a long period of prehistory. One drawback of amateur investigations, however, is their tendency to lack specific locational information: areas that may have been camp sites or specialized resource procurement sites can only be vaguely identified.

Consequently, only a few probable prehistoric resource areas within The Trustees properties can be identified. Identification is accomplished through a combination of artifact collecting recollections such as was provided by William Ellsworth (see Section II) and location of a cluster of landscape features that have been identified by scholars⁴⁷ as correlates of Native American occupation. The correlates vary somewhat by prehistoric period, but generally include the following predictive criteria:

- access to drinking water (springs)
- presence of well-drained or excessively drained soil
- level / near-level slope for campsite
- proximity to marshland providing varied foodstuffs and brushy plants
- proximity and ease of access to falls or rapids (especially for spring fish run)
- proximity to transport routes (rivers and overland trails)
- local availability of raw materials for stone tools (granodiorites, quartzites, steatite)
- appropriateness of site to seasonal weather/climatic conditions

The likelihood of Native American occupation of a particular area increases with the range and richness of locally-available natural resources. For instance, little evidence of Indian occupation except a few short-term hunting camps is found in Royalston, a craggy town with low stream rank, very stony soil, and long winters. At the other end of the spectrum, it is difficult to identify an area of Ipswich - a fertile river delta - that was *not* used or occupied by Native Americans over a long time span.⁴⁸ Petersham's topography and environment, with the exception of the river valley that is now Quabbin Reservoir, is much closer to its northern neighbor Royalston, than to any coastal plain community, suggesting that few locations ever served as long-term or large-scale prehistoric camp sites, although there is sufficient artifactual evidence to confirm at least occasional occupation and land use.

Based on all these considerations, the following locations should be considered as having moderate to high potential for the presence of prehistoric cultural resources, and management of the areas should be planned with appropriate caution.

[Specific identified locations have been removed from this report in order to protect prehistoric resources.]

⁴⁷ including Public Archaeology Laboratory staff and Dr. Barbara Luedtke. See Tritsch (1996) for summary.

⁴⁸ See Tritsch, *Borderlands* (2004) and *Groundswell* (2001), reports to The Trustees.

X. Mnemonics: Cultural Resource Management at The Trustees Petersham Properties

mnemonic (sing.): A device, such as a rhyme, used to aid memory.

mnemonics (plur.): A system to develop or improve the memory.

[American Heritage College Dictionary, 1993]

Framework

When Hugh Raup wrote about human and forest history in 1966, he argued that man needed to manage the forest in Petersham, towards the end of maximizing its economic usefulness. The Harvard Forest could come closest to supporting itself, Raup continued, by being carefully planted to species that were currently profitable and whose cultivation and harvesting would result in income to balance the human labor involved.

Raup also argued, however, that people's 'destinies' changed over time, and the 'players' changed the land – or changed their relationship with the land -- to suit themselves. Most significantly for the present discussion, he posited that the effects of the changes were as fleeting as the needs. Neither the history of man nor the future of the land, he concluded, was permanently transformed by the interaction.

Thirty years later, David Foster used new research at the Forest to contradict Raup's conclusion. Drawing on evidence from pollen analysis of forest species, comparing hundreds of years of pollen samples prior to agricultural development with samples since the eighteenth century, Foster proved that humans actually had significantly changed the land. Two hundred fifty years of human interference had permanently changed the woodlot's vegetation.

It is clear during pre-settlement times that the stand was dynamic over periods of hundreds of years in response to natural disturbance, especially fire. The post-disturbance vegetational sequence was dependent on the pool of available species...[but] in all cases the species assemblage reverted largely to that which was present before the disturbance. Settlement activities generated a similar initial response.... However, the repeated cutting of the stand and the broad-scale deforestation of the landscape created conditions that produced a unique vegetation [that is] developing along a trajectory that is distinct from any that has occurred in the past. [Foster 1993; 108-109]

If Foster is right, then Petersham's landscape has been permanently changed due to the persistent interference of a few humans within the past three centuries. This points to the landscape itself as being a cultural resource on a grand scale. It is ironic then, that the single most traumatic event to affect Petersham in the 20th century was not human at all in origin: the 1938 hurricane, that destroyed three quarters of the standing timber – the forest habitat – in the town. Nevertheless, the preconditions for that devastation were manmade, especially the preponderance of shallow rooted, same-age white pines that had colonized the abandoned fields that once covered three quarters of the town. The preconditions – clearing and abandonment – were obviously both manmade.

That being said, it still does not answer a question that recurs among land managers and visitors alike: what's so valuable about a bunch of disintegrating ruins in the middle of the woods? The cellarholes, wall lines and wood roads have no connection with anyone either rich or famous. They are not outstanding by virtue of antiquity or architectural design. One cannot even look here for inspiring stories of successful agricultural land use.⁴⁹

Basically, the cultural resources dotted across the Petersham landscape are most valuable for the same reason as the natural resources of its woodlands: they have survived. A 1985 survey of central Massachusetts conducted by the state Historical Commission points out that this was extraordinary even twenty years ago.

Perhaps the least systematically studied and recorded structures in the study unit are those related to agriculture: barns, sheds, cribs, enclosures, fences and stone walls, and field arrangements. Although still present throughout the study unit, these structures and their landscapes are in all probability the fastest disappearing resource in the region. Destroyed almost as rapidly are the archaeological remains of 17th, 18th, and 19th century farms. These are particularly significant as they provide information on farm organization without the subsequent physical alterations brought on by changing agricultural practices when in continual use. [MHC 1985; 285-286]

Having survived, the Petersham sites provide visitors with an increasingly rare view of the physical framework of a lifestyle so far removed from contemporary society and its infrastructure that it is barely conceivable.

Cellarholes and stone walls, field patterns and road networks are *mnemonics* – enduring reminders of countless traditional and innovative ways man has tried to control, manipulate, or simply adjust to the environment in which he needs to survive. These physical remains provide a point of entry for history students and casual visitors alike into Petersham's human and environmental history. Their rarity requires protective management, and their educational value recommends interpretive enhancement.

⁴⁹ Perhaps ironically, some of the biggest agricultural 'success stories' are those farms still being operated or maintained today, that have survived by virtue of better situation, better soil, and higher capitalization than the homesteads and farmlands that characterize The Trustees' properties.

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- Federal Records Center, Waltham MA (federal census data for Massachusetts, 1790-1930, including some 19th century agricultural and industrial schedules)

- Harvard Forest Archives (maps, photographs, and administrative files)
- Massachusetts Historical Commission, Boston MA (files and reports on Petersham historic and prehistoric sites)
- Petersham Historical Society (photograph and records collections)
- Petersham Memorial Library (town reports and local history materials)
- The Trustees of Reservations (reservation maps and plans; regional and organizational administrative files)
- Worcester County Registry of Deeds (land transfer records)

CONNOR'S POND DEEDS

DEED ABSTRACT: Brown to Reed 1815

Half of [Connors] "Pond Lot" and farm
WD 198:497

Grantors: Frederick F. Brown (Yeoman), William Brown (Yeoman), Andrew Brown (Yeoman)
all of Petersham
for \$2,100

Grantee: Micajah Reed (Gentleman) of Petersham

Description: a certain farm situated in the south part of Petersham containing 146 acres
with a dwelling house, a barn, half a grist mill and half a saw mill

Parcel 1: 111 acres w/ house on south side of County Road leading from Petersham to
Barre by Harding Clarks bounded:

N: by sd. road

E: land lately belonging to Estate of Col. Joseph Brown deceased

S: land of John Negus

W: land of Caleb Lincoln and Peter Eames

Parcel 2: piece containing 17 acres with barn on north side of rd, opposite house,
beginning at elm tree near the mills, running:

N 40deg. E 40 rods to st & st

N 69 deg W 40 rods to st & st

N 61 deg W 50 rods to the County road

then on E and N line of sd. road to beginning

Parcel 3: lot containing 18 acres with the half gristmill and half saw mill - one half of
the pond lot including the pond – bounded

W: by Parcel 2 & land of heirs of Samuel [Paris]

N and E: land lately estate of Col. Joseph Brown

qualifier: encumbered by mortgage held by James Ripley since 1814 – to be paid by Reed.

written: 12/8/1815

entered: 12/11/1815

*Reed pays off the Ripley loan and receives full title to the property [WD 208:632] – but
remember he had already sold 1/2 interest in the mills to Lucius Spooner.*

Deed: Reed to Spooner 1815
Half of saw and grist mills [Connor's Pond]
WD 201:402

Know all men by these presents that I Micajah Reed of Petersham...
Clothier for and in consideration of five hundred dollars paid by Lucius Spooner
of Petersham...Blacksmith...
do hereby give, grant sell and convey...one half of a corn mill
and one half of a saw mill situated in the southerly part of Petersham on the County
road leading by Frederick F. Browns to Barre together with one half of the tools or
implements belonging to said mills and one hald of all the lands yards and water
privileges as the same were used and occupied when owned and [?] by Joseph
Brown Esq. late of Petersham deceased and which were sold at Vendue to
James Carruth Junr. and by him deeded to me.

....

[signed] June 15, 1815

entered June 12, 1816

DEED: Reed to Spooner 1817
land with blacksmith shop [Connors Pond
WD 216:13

Grantor: Micajah Reed – Petersham – Gentleman
for \$500

Grantee: Lucius Spooner – Petersham – Blacksmith

lot of land in the Southeast part of the town ... containing half an acre ...with a blacksmith Shop
theron and bounded beginning at the SE corner
then S 68 ½ deg.E ,8 rods20 links to stones
then N 6 ½ deg.E 9 rods 7 links to a large stone
then N 57 deg. W 5 rods 2 links
then S 55 deg. W 11 rods 20 links

and Lucius may have the privilege of drawing water for the use of his blacksmith business when
the water is so high in the pond as to bring the water into his floom as it now stands two feet
deep upon the consideration of the said Lucius shall keep in repair one fourth part of [Rock] and
gravel dam and the said Micajah is not to draw the water below the above mentioned height for
any other business than the use of the grist mill

writ: Dec 5, 1817

entered: Feb. 16, 1819

*Note that there is no mention of the sawmill from earlier deeds. Does Spooner's 'blacksmith
business' include the sawmill? - a likely possibility since he had to have turning machinery to
make the handles for the scythes that made him locally famous.*

*What is clear is that there were at least two separate mill buildings at/by the dam (not clear from
the 1830 map).*

Brooks Correspondence

The following excerpts and abstracts were taken from a collection of Brooks Family Papers at the American Antiquarian Society. The papers, a gift of John Fiske Jr. & Rosalie F. Johnson in 1992, consist of three boxes of family correspondence. Boxes #2 and #3, consulted for this project, contain letters and notes almost entirely from James W. Brooks to his sister, Martha W. Brooks, written between 1864 and James' death in 1912. Only the references that might shed light on Petersham events, James' character and thinking, or Brooks real estate dealings, have been included. James often wrote from his office—"Office of the McKay and Bigelow Heeling Machine Association"—located, in 1877, at 40 Pearl St. and, by 1880, at No. 108 Summer St. in Boston. Later the firm became the McKay Metallic Fastening Association. Martha lived either at their 4 Berkeley St. house in Cambridge or in Petersham, where the Brookses had post office box No. 1.

Items in italics are editorial comments.

October 1877, James Willson Brooks to Martha Willson Brooks

"I shall go up Saturday I suppose. You can meet me with two or less horses as you please."

- James takes the train to Athol in the morning or Barre in the afternoon. He frequently tells Martha what wagons and labor are needed to meet him depending on what or whom he is bringing with him. "Jack" seems to be their hired man

April 27, 1885, from "Office", JWB to MWB

"P. S. Ansel Stowell died Saturday and is to be congratulated. I suppose I own the old Lewis Whitney farm (which is a profound secret). The O'Flint would doubtless fill a quarto with her red paint and new piazza and the Carruth repairs and [] which I am too busy."

1886 in James accompanies his sister Abby and her ailing daughter Maud to Paris, while Martha apparently tends the younger Fiske children in Cambridge.

1886, Paris, JWB to MWB in Cambridge

"Maud's principal anxiety is that Herbert shall not go to that gutter or do anything dangerous or careless or anything else. So I think it is safe to say whatever he is doing tell him to stop at once and never do it again."

April 19, 1886, Paris, JWB to MWB in Petersham

"I am glad to think of Mrs. Chauncey in the Carruth house."

- James may be referring to the house on Carruth Road, now part of the Nichewaung tract of Swift River Reserve, although there was another Carruth house near the common (see 1898 map).

April 23, 1886, Paris, JWB to MWB in Petersham

(Much discussion about Maud's condition.)

"The season is becoming favorable and I trust you are reaping its advantages. Ah! the

May flowers and the new Petersham and the pine and kine and swine.”

April 26, 1886, Paris, JWB to MWB in Petersham

“What about Hubberd & Miss Lincoln and Lottie Flint and her sister & everybody else in Petersham, the only place of any account, after all?”

May 3, 1886, Paris, JWB to MWB in Petersham

“I think I told you had written Mudge about Louisa W.’s [Williams] house. If you can do anything with him you can, if necessary, take a deed and give him a check for the place, provided you deem it necessary in far to protect it from any of the order of Goths and Vandals...”

November 12, 1886, New York bound for England on business, JWB to MWB in Petersham

“I should like to pick some partridge berries & laurel leaves but it looks as tho I shall have to go for them in a sleigh.”

Over the years, James receives assorted letters from John Bigelow, past editor of the New York Evening Post, American Consul in Paris during the Civil War, an old friend who lives in Gramercy Park, New York City. Bigelow served as New York Secretary of State, and was instrumental in building the New York Public Library. He frequently asked James for financial advice.

1889, John Bigelow to JWB

“I am disposed to look with favor on any investments you recommend...”

March 13, 1890, Bigelow to JWB

“I have made a note of your kind invitation to the ‘Nichewaug’ if that is spelled correctly.... I shall hail any opportunity which may cause our orbits to intersect.

Yrs vy sincerely,
John Bigelow”

At home, Martha is James’ silent partner—when he’s away he informs her about sales, stocks, bills to be dealt with.

1890, Bremen, JWB to MWB in Petersham

“... it seems a little mean to set you to building hotels but it will be a comfort to have the work go on without me.”

April 25, 1890, JWB to MWB

“I am glad of your progress & interest in things at Petersham & glad to escape the care of it all since it seems to afford you pleasure.”

Late March-April, 1890, JWB to MWB

James slipped onboard ship, legs ended up one on each side of iron post, with—as he described—“significant discomfort in a most sensitive area.” Finally at beginning of April, a letter to Martha from James’ doctor reports that James had a perineal rupture and

had been unable to pass water. Operation successful, but James spent six weeks recovering in London.

May 6, 1890, JWB to MWB in Petersham

James writes that it's just hard for him to think decisively. Apparently Martha proposed selling 4 Berkeley & living full time in Petersham. James argues both sides.

"I am glad you have got on so well at Petersham & I hope you will have got your library dedicated before I get back. I shall certainly let you keep the tavern [the Nichewaug Inn] but shall be glad to be able to resume charge of the check-book if I have anything left to draw upon...."

1891, James drops Martha a note from the Union Club in Boston.

January 15, 1892, Asheville, N.C., William Simes to JWB

"We hope to reach Petersham about the 1st of May—I intend to add a few rooms to my house under plans from Ned Willson.

[postscript]: I enclose the Library Deed signed."

January 9, 1893, Boston, JWB to MWB in Petersham

"I hope you have finally got Lizzie & Maggie in double harness so that the load pulls easier and, poor old Pete! I trust he is on his legs again."

- *Pete was dead by the end of the month.*

January 31, 1893, Boston, JWB to MWB in Petersham

"Carrie Parsons... had wondered where, in Petersham, she could lodge, for a little, while taking a look at the old Chandler house before the Bennetts lay vandal hands upon it...."

Delivering mayflowers to friends is a tradition. James refers to missing the opportunity when he is away.

May 1, 1893, young nephew Harold to JWB

"Dear Uncle James:

I remember that you brought me in a handful of the first May-flowers last year, I send a few which I picked yesterday. I could not find many that were out—and these are rather small—except a few.

Affectionately,
Harold."

8/8/1893, Bigelow to JWB

"Petersham is now I suppose in all its glory. Long may it wave; your flashing ax as well."

The ax is a theme that James mentioned more frequently as years go by.

2/23/1893, Chicago, JWB to MWB in Petersham

"I hope I shall reach Petersham in condition for any good axe and weather that you may

have in readiness for use.”

1/25/1894, Boston, JWB to MWB

(chat...) “...as you are in daily receipt of bulletins from my private Secretary, I need add no particulars of my daily movements.”

1/29/1894, Boston, JWB to MWB

“As I am paying Tad \$50.00 per month to write to you, I need add no more...”

2/28/1894, Boston, JWB to MWB

There is some problem with “Gafney” who has apparently written an article for the local paper “and had his reply and now puts himself in the wrong again—the time to meet him is at town meeting [on] his official record as selectman.”

3/8/1894, James referred to this as “the Goddard-Gafney ire.”

Apparently there is some question about the dining quality at Nichewaug.

5/24/1894, JWB to MWB

“I spoke to Kelton about his table & cook & he appeared well. [People have spoken well of the food.] I often think if people who find fault had to be in Kelton’s place, they might think there was another side to the picture.”

7/6/1894, Union Club, JWB to MWB

“... expect to [come to Petersham] tomorrow, probably receiving the deed of the Pond farm, at Gardner, on my way.”

Also refers to a lawyer “with whom I first came in contact in connection with the purchase of the Nichewaug.”

8/16/1894

“... Ralph dined with me at the club last evng. and seems to be sharing every desire to become a white man.”

- Ralph apparently was a black man, a friend of or hired by James. He was not allowed in the dining car on the train to Petersham so James accompanied him in saloon car.

9/6/1894

“I have a new axe for you & shall expect corresponding advantage from your efforts at dead limbs of pines.”

9/24/1894

“I concluded...to offer to take the pond property myself and so wrote to Mrs. S[haw]. It is pretty clear to me that I had better have, for the present, the ownership and control.”

- This may refer to the Connor’s Pond property, since James bought the Micajah Reed parcel in 1894. He also bought the Asa Pond farm that year however, and may have omitted the capital “P” in Asa Pond’s name.

10/5/1894, Boston, Quincy Shaw to JWB

“Dear Mr. Brooks,

Am obliged by yours of the 2nd covering check to my order for \$2700.00 in connection with the Petersham lands.

Shall be very glad on coming home next spring to see at Petersham what has given so much pleasure to Mrs. Shaw & many others—shall appreciate it all the more after much seeing of the “Park System” hereabout.* —

Yours Truly

Quincy A. Shaw”

James forwards the note to Martha with the additional note:

“If we can see Mr. S another year, perhaps all interests will be better served than if Mrs. had been left to go on keeping things in the dark—”

- *An earlier note, 9/6/1894, had referred to someone accompanying him “for professional service on that dam thing of Sister Shaw’s.” Is this the Connor’s Pond dam or a euphemistic swear?*

- *Although the land purchase machinations behind this group of letters are not clear, Shaw’s reference to the ‘Park System’ is. He refers to Boston’s Emerald Necklace, designed by Frederick Law Olmsted. The Muddy River section of that meandering park was still being landscaped, while the Fenway had just been constructed and planted. It is likely that Shaw is comparing this with the work James Brooks was doing in Petersham, acquiring a protective ‘beltway’ along the Swift River, and improving trails, wood roads and their verges for the pleasure of riders and pedestrians.*

Enclosed in a 12/6/1894 note from James is a letter from Frances Lincoln (referred to in a 4/26/1886 letter as Miss Lincoln), an acquaintance who lives in Winchester and was apparently looking for a summer place in Petersham.

December, 1894, Frances Lincoln to JWB

“My Dear Mr. Brooks

You will not have me for a neighbor in Petersham at present if ever. In the first place I can’t have the land I want.... You have no idea how much I wanted Mr. Higginson’s land. And I didn’t know myself, so much that I am afraid I shall not be satisfied with anything else. Although I do think the Peckham farm would make the prettier place.”

During the winter of 1895, apparently Martha is into playing cards. The notes seems to be sent every couple of weeks—clearly James is still making significant stays in Boston (he doesn’t say Cambridge). He may be staying at the Union Club. He occasionally uses Union Club stationery, but more often plain paper.

4/24/1895, Boston, JWB to MWB

“...I don’t think it was necessary to have John sleep at the house though I should like to have someone there. It is not pleasant to think uninvited guests are liable to partake of

*

unproffered hospitality and it really troubles me to have you up there alone so much. You have seemed to enjoy it always and the loss of one pie you may not mind. Still it may give you a different feeling although we have so well [known] that any felon who desired could drop in after bedtime, if so disposed. I will get things better bolted so that the dogs can wake us up, at any noise required for getting in, and we will see what to do. I wonder where the Dr.'s big dog was while the roast pork was departing....

Just as I had put the preceding sheet into our letter box, your note of this morning came in and I am glad they are stirring – I wish the sneaks may be caught. I have often thought how easy it would be for two or three men to go though the village without serious opposition from Mrs. Bryant, Mrs. Hodges, Mrs. Fox, Mrs. Carruth, Sisters Home and Spooner, the Ensigns and things, to say nothing of Flora Willis and Mrs. Sippitt.

It's a rum world, with the moth and rust to corrupt and the thieves to break through and steal — still there are good chaps to be had and a great variety of squirt-guns for the ablutions of plants and dog's backs and there are rubber boots for over-juicy fields and the Summer boarder is not without his attractiveness, which might be enhanced by a habit of coming in winter and staying all the year round.

Things occasionally disturb but, as you say, we never know what we want, and even ashes may be angels in disguise and there the ashes remain so undisturbed, when once under the grass down there by Mrs. Geo. Ayres portal to heaven & Mr. Geo. Cook's shelter for his biped – encore une fois
affectionately, J. B.”

4/25/1895

“Next week some pleasant women from Prov., whom Ned sent to me to inquire about Petersham, will go with me house hunting. I hope they may find an attractive place.”

Nothing from the end of May until the beginning of October. Could he be in Petersham for the summer?

10/17/1895, (JWB goes to Washington, D.C.)

“I am sorry you have no thing to wear for, properly clothed & in your right mind, I think you might get some pleasure from the trip.... Personally I prefer an axe up behind Ave Williams' old shanty by the pond but I am running too much in ruts and a Sunday away... may not, in the long run, prove unhealthy.”

James is referring to the Eames-Newton farm, Connor's Pond

11/12/1895

“I have mailed you today Abby's paper on Woman's Suffrage. ...I wish I were chopping and burning with (Tommy) Barnes.”

11/13/1895

“Woman's Suffrage is bound to come—the question is one of time.”

James makes on-going cracks about suffrage.

12/16/1895, Martha has a cold which he blames on her going bareheaded

“No level head would perpetrate such an exposure—I am satisfied women should not vote.”

In 1895 there are two references to the city as “Gotham”.

12/13/1895

“I wish I could be at the old hearth-stone instead of at Gotham.”

4/14/1896

“...Lincoln says they seem to have ransacked his house but to have taken little or nothing.”

There are only five or six letters from January to June 1896.

5/15/1896

“...I wish I were sweating as a hard-boiled egg, in the woods, instead of here at my desk...”

1896, their nephew’s wife Ethel has a baby daughter: Miss Margaret Fiske (who would inherit the Brooks house and assorted other Petersham parcels).

2/3/1897

“I feel as though I would like to sit upon the Equator for a month or until melted snows let me into the woods with an axe.”

February, 1897, James takes a trip to Jekyll Island [GA?]. There are no letters; why?

6/1/1897

“I found, on my desk, on arrival last evng., a line from Robert Collyer speaking highly of young Douthit.* I think we are making no mistake in calling him.”

Written in the margin: “I wish I were in the woods.”

Nothing from August 1898 until February 1899.

February 1899, terrible accident to Mr. Waugh in Petersham; James hires a well-recommended Boston surgeon and assistant, and sends them out to Petersham. Waugh seems to get better.

- *Victorian workman’s comp. for construction foremen apparently.*

5/9/1899, a note from relative Robert Willson regarding coming to Petersham to visit.

“[If there is no place at your house] of course he could go to the Petersham house.”

James’ note on note: “...[wish I were at the equator or North Pole] until the Nichewaug kitchen and the golflinks are in action.”

- *The Petersham House was the rival hotel down the road from the Nichewaug, which was still*

* R. C. Douthit, minister of Petersham’s Unitarian Church.

under construction.

5/24/1899

“Brandeis resigns claim to hotel rooms but I think he will take the [James or Joseph] Stone house, which I have agreed to have ready for him by July 1. ...Let Waugh do anything he can to hurry work (including hiring men for longer hours).”

- *Reference to the New Nichewaugh Inn: a June 1899 note refers to shopping for furnishing.*

Nothing from July 1899 until April 1900.

4/10/1900

“Dear Martha: I don’t want the Gibbs house unless it can be of use for Harold or unless it could be had for a song. As an investment presently, the price is high and I am not hankering for the ‘first chance.’”

3/17/1904, Petersham, JWB to MWB who is visiting a friend in Brookline

“Dear Martha: I have just had a dinner party. Mr. and Mrs. Fiske*, the three Misses Fiske and Mr. John Fiske. It is high jinks for the mice when the cat is away.”

Another letter to Martha, off visiting the Fiske house at 90 Brattle St., Cambridge, is headed:

Volunteer’s Town,

Near Pequoige

June 23/04

11/22/1904

“Four little Fiskes tumbled over me last eveng at 114 where I tead [took tea].”

7/3/1905, letter from John Bigelow to whom JWB had just sent a copy of his Petersham 150th anniversary address

“Again I say to myself—‘What a pity this man did not take man did not take my advice when he retired from business and devote himself to the service of the public?’ Your story of Petersham was very interesting to me & very cleverly told....

Now that you have discovered that you are capable of doing something well besides certifying invoices & heeling boots you will have no excuse any longer for sitting there in Petersham, as the French say, ‘Frying in your own grease.’ [If I could] I would go over to Petersham expressly to wake you up—shake you—inflame you—and make you let the world know what you have all your life been trying to conceal from it.”

1905, James offers to build a school for the town and provide the site. Donations come from Francis A. Brooks & Chas A. Forbes. The school included: four rooms on the 1st floor, and an assembly room on the 2nd floor. Stone, Carpenter & Wilson, Providence, RI, were the architects. \$14,213 dollars for a “stone school” for “elementary and high school”.

- *per May 31, 1905 building contract and agreement with selectmen.*

3/19/1907

* Mr. and Mrs. Fiske are their sister Abby and her husband John.

“I am longing for my soft shirt and ragged trousers and axe and bluebirds and song sparrows.”

1/10/1908, Petersham, JMB to MWB in Brookline

“Fisher is coming up Sunday.... He and Waugh are to diagnose Adonai Shomo on Monday.”

- *The Adonai Shomo was a communistic community in Petersham, in existence from 1861-1897. James is likely referring to the buildings and physical property which he may have considered purchasing.*

10/20/[1908?], from John Bigelow

“I send you a copy of yesterday’s New York Evening Post... article about you and your Forestry School.... I write now only to express the hope that you have retained sufficient of your real estate in Petersham to profit by the advance in the price of it which must inevitably result.”

2/23/1910

“Currier is well (he is a boy-relative living in Petersham house)... some great coasting— They could get onto the dble runner by the pump and go south by the apple trees and then down by the red barn over the next field beyond the pond on to the cow pasture and again to the left around out of [it] right among the trees. Everybody, including Mrs. Dickman, took a turn.”

1/9/1911, Union Club in Boston, JWB to MWB in Petersham

“Here, but wish I had remained on the old hill—for the telephone informs me that I am to be seated tomorrow next to Roosevelt and expected to say something—What on earth can I say?”

- *May be a Harvard dinner—James being honored for forest donation.*

- *Nothing from February 1911 until January 1912*

1/12/1912, Union Club in Boston, JWB to MWB in Petersham

“Too long on the planet for winters in this climate.”

MAPS AND PLANS OF HISTORIC PETERSHAM AND TRUSTEES PROPERTIES

- (c. 1650): *Contact and Plantation Period Core Areas*
(Massachusetts Historical Commission reconstruction)
- 1777: *Plan of a Tract of Land... Belonging to John Chandler Esq.*
(Worcester Deeds 77:217)
- 1795: *A Plan of the Town of Petersham...* Jeremiah Robinson, surveyor
(Massachusetts State Archives)
- 18th Century: *Worcester County - Town Incorporation Dates*
(based on Massachusetts Historical Commission map)
- 1830: *A Plan of Petersham...* (partial)
(Massachusetts State Archives)
- 1857: *Petersham Center*
(from Walling, *Atlas of Worcester County*. Boston: Wm. E. Baker & Co.)
- 1898: *Petersham Center* (partial)
(from 1898 *Atlas of Worcester County*)
- 1914: *Petersham* (partial)
(from 1914 Worcester County Atlas)
- 1938: (WPA series; Massachusetts State Archives)
Petersham (partial)
Petersham, Soils (partial)
Petersham, Buildings and Roads (partial)
Petersham, Land Use (partial)
- 1948: *Key to the Chapter on Cellarholes*
(from Coolidge, *History of Petersham*)
- 2005: Sketch Maps of Selected Trustees Archeological Sites and Areas
Spooner-Johnson Farm Site
Dudley Farm Site
Eames-Newton Farm Area
(E. K. Tritsch)