'First Town Meeting Site' sign and marker Crosby Lane 7/30/2004 & 9/4/2004 F Merriam

HISTORICAL COMMISSION

CHELMSFORD, MASS. 01824

2 April 1979

Mr. Robert Drinkwater
30 Fort Hill Terrace
North Hampton, Ma. 01060

Dear Mr. Drinkwater:

The Chelmsford Historical Commission is very pleased that you are interested in our project to locate the site of our first Town meeting and we will be most happy to meet with you during the Memorial Day weekend. Specific arrangements can be made at your convenience.

To clear up any misunderstanding, our project does not entail a church or meetinghouse, as such. The site we wish to locate is that of the house of one of the original selectmen of the Town, where the townspeople gathered to execute their first town warrant, after incorporation in 1655.

In light of the above, we will not be able to answer many of your specific questions; however, any documentary research required (if available), we would be happy to do. One of our members is very adept at research of deeds of property and is glad to be of assistance.

The area where the site is located was used as farm land, from shortly after the house was dismantled to recent times, so the ground cover would not be a problem. The property is completely clear of brush and trees.

If we may compile any information that can be useful during our meeting, please let us know in advance. We look forward to hearing from you and a successful conclusion to the project.

Sincerely yours,

John P. Richardson

John P. Richardson
Chairman

Robert Drinkwater
30 Fort Hill Terrace
Northampton, Mass.
01060

May 14, 1979

John P. Richardson, Chairman
Chelmsford Historical Commission
281 Mill Road
Chelmsford, Massachusetts

Dear Mr. Richardson,

Saturday, May 26 would seem to be the best day for me to come to Chelmsford. Early afternoon -- say, about 1:00 PM -- would probably be the best time. I'll phone you the morning of the 26th to confirm the time of our meeting. Between now and then, can you send directions to the place where you wish to meet ?

That the site you are interested in is, in fact, the site of a residence rather than the site of a meetinghouse, per se, changes the complexion of matters considerably. From past experience, I would expect the physical remains to be found at a meetinghouse site would consist of traces of the structure and little else. Possibly, some vestiges of the foundations, even the underpinning, might remain in place. Otherwise, the physical remains might consist of no more than the scraps of building materials left scattered about when the structure was dismantled. However, a considerably broader range of physical remains might be expected at the site of a residence. In addition to vestiges of the structure, one might expect to find some quantity of household artifacts, household refuse, though both the variety and the quantities of such material may vary considerably from site to site.

It seems very likely that at some point during a survey of the site of Chelmsford's 1st town meeting, some quantity of household artifacts, domestic refuse, will be recovered. I must admit that the analysis of household artifacts and domestic refuse is not one of my strong points. Although I've had a smattering of experience with 19th century material, I've had little direct experience with 18th century material and virtually no experience with 17th century material. If I were to survey the site of your first town meeting, I would not be able to do it without the assistance of someone trained to distinguish the full range of artifacts likely to be found at the site. In short, that someone -- whoever it might be -- would likely be quite capable of carrying out the survey without me. I'm not withdrawing my offer to assist you; I am suggesting that it could be to your advantage to search for someone possessing all of the skills which your project seems to demand. (Off-hand, I can think of two people -- Dr. David Starbuck at Boston University and Peter Thorbahn at the Public Archaeology Laboratory, Brown University -- who might be able to help you

HISTORICAL COMMISSION

CHELMSFORD, MASS. 01824

To: First Town
Meeting Site
Volunteers

6 June 1980

From: J. P. Richardson

Subject: Exploration Project
Information

The project will commence on Monday, June 23, 1980. It is anticipated that on-site work will last for at least 5 days. Work will start at 8:00 AM, with an 8 hour work day expected. On days that inclement weather makes the possibility of work uncertain, please contact Mrs. Jane Drury (256-7469) for information.

The project will be directed by Mr. Robert Drinkwater, who is a professional archaeologist. Mr. Drinkwater has requested that the number of workers on-site at one time be not less than two and not more than four. A work schedule will be implemented in order that as many volunteers as possible may participate in the project.

Volunteers are advised to wear clothing that will provide maximum coverage for protection from insect bites, poison ivy and sharp bushes, as there is a considerable amount of undergrowth scattered over the site.

Special tools will be provided at the site. Those who can are asked to bring pruning shears, or a hatchet, or a heavy garden rake for their own use, as these tools are in short supply.

The Chelmsford Historical Commission wishes to thank all those who have volunteered to help locate the first town meeting site. If you have any further questions, please contact John Richardson (256-0436).

DRAFT REPORT *

Archaeological Survey of the First Town Meeting Site

Chelmsford, Massachusetts

Sponsored by the Chelmsford Historical Commission

Robert W. Drinkwater, project archaeologist

July 1980

* Scanned to Word From Typewritten Text

Preface and Acknowledgements

As project archaeologist, I assume responsibility for the manner in which this investigation was conducted. As author of this report, I assume responsibility for the contents. However, I will not accept more than a share of the credit for what we have accomplished. The Chelmsford Historical Commission did a good deal more than simply sponsor and finance this project. Members of the Commission were active participants. It was thanks to their efforts that I was able to focus most of my attention on archaeological problems. Mr. John P. Richardson, chairman of the Commission, handled many of the local arrangements. He volunteered to help us clear the site of brush and brambles. Just about every day that we were in the field, he stopped by to see how we were progressing. Knowing that he would be stopping by to see how we were doing helped me maintain perspective on the progress of the investigation. Other members of the Commission also played an active role. Mr. Richard Lahue served as guide on our first visit to the site. Mrs. Jane Drury assumed responsibility for the crew schedule. Mrs. Drury did much of the background research and stopped by several times while the survey was in progress. Mrs. Martha (?) (Help -- I lost her name) visited the site a number of times and provided some details of the recent history of the area.

Other local residents shared their recollections. Mr. Ed Watt told us about Chicken coops which once stood just east of the great rock. The late Mr. Percy Greenwood provided information on a piggery which once stood to the east of the site. Mr. and Mrs. Greenwood allowed us to use their garage for overnight storage. Members of the Social Studies Department at Chelmsford High School also played a prominent role. Mrs. Sally Madison, Social Studies Coordinator, assumed the task of recruiting and screening volunteers for the field crew. Ms. Alice LaChance, a social studies teacher, served as a crewmember during the final days of the field investigation. Months before fieldwork began, I had some apprehensions about working with a volunteer crew of high school students. Fortunately, as June 23 approached I became pre-occupied with other matters -- the problems I imagined never materialized. Much of the credit for what we were able to accomplish belongs to the crewmembers:

Greg Bair	Ed Maybury
Karen Beaudoin	Mark Maybury
Kathy Curtin	Barbara Rothwell
Vic DeMarines	Andy Taylor
Laurie Gross	Jill Whitney
Linda Hannigan	Heidi Wiljanen
Mike Johanson	

Throughout the course of this investigation I have benefited from the contributions of colleagues and associates. John Wilson, though not a member of the survey team accompanied me on my first visit to the site, reviewed the survey proposal and stopped by to appraise the results of our efforts. Alan McArdle served as field assistant during the first week of the survey and John Belding served as field assistant during the second week. Ms. Meredith W. Belding did a preliminary analysis of the ceramics and bottle glass we recovered. Ellen Savulis provided information on red wares and pipe stems and offered perspective on 17th century domes- tic sites. Mitch Mulholland offered advice on how we might adapt his data recording system, ARDVARC, to a survey of an historic period site. Carol Piacentini entered data on computer punch cards. Joe Robinson and Lisa Anderson proofread the computer printout. Finally, I would like to join members of the Historical Commission in thanking the current property owners, Delta Realty Trust, for allowing us to conduct this investigation.

Contents

Appendices

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Introduction

In June of 1630 the first wave of a great migration of English colonists reached the shores of Massachusetts Bay. Historians have estimated that by 1640 as many as 20,000 colonists had arrived. The first settlements were along the coast, but with the steady increase in population, settlers soon began to move inland. Concord, founded in 1635, was the first of several inland settlements to be established in the 1630's and 1640's. Woburn, 10 miles to the east, was founded soon afterward.

Chelmsford was an offspring or Concord and Woburn. In 1652 20 residents of Concord and Woburn petitioned the Massachusetts General Court for permission to view lands situated between the Concord and Merrimack rivers. They were in search of a site for a new settlement. Their petition was granted. The following year they sought and obtained a grant to a 6 by 6 mile tract on the south s1de of the Merr1mack. Before the year was out, the first settlers had arrived. On November 22, 1654 the founders of the new settlement held the first public meeting. This meeting marked the formation of local government in Chelmsford[1].

The meeting was held at William Fletcher's house. Over the course of the next 3 centuries, this house would become a symbol of the founding of Chelmsford. By the first quarter of the 19th century the house was no 1onger standing, but the s1te had become a local landmark (Allen, 1820:11). As 1ate as the 1840's traces of the house were still visible -- according to one source, the cellar of this house was not filled until 1847. However, from that time onward the actual location of the house faded from memory. Through crop cultivation and other agricultural activities, the site of the William Fletcher house became indistinguishable from the surrounding landscape.

The area remained in agricultural use well into the present century. Much of the area is still open field, a patch of rural landscape in a modern suburban environment, but a reminder of the not-too-distant past when Chelmsford was, primarily, an agricultural town. In the near future this patch of open space will probably be developed. For the site of the first town meeting to be preserved, it would be necessary to re-establish the actual location.

Although traces or the Fletcher house might not be visible at the surface, it was possible that vestiges of the house were to be found just below the surface. Archaeological survey might be a means of re-establishing the location. Thus, the Chelmsford Historical Commission sponsored this investigation.

Among current approaches to historical research, archaeology is the most labor-intensive, thus archaeological investigations can be quite expensive. For this survey to be feasible it was necessary to find means of minimizing costs. First, it was necessary to confine the investigation to as small an area as possible. On the basis of historical research conducted by members of the Historical Commission, we decided to confine our efforts to an area a little less than an acre in extent.

Next, it was necessary to limit the scope of the investigation. The primary objective was to locate physical remains of the William Fletcher house. In practical terms, this meant that we must: (1) locate physical remains of building and (2) attempt to establish whether the building was indeed the William Fletcher house. To accomplish this by the most efficient means possible, it was necessary that we first learn as much about the house as possible. As noted below, we were able to learn very little. Thus, it was

necessary to develop survey strategy from inferences and assumptions rather than from historical evidence.

Even after we had reduced the size of the area to be investigated and trimmed the scope of the investigation, the survey would be quite costly if we hired a field crew to do the work. One solution was to recruit a volunteer crew. Thanks to the efforts of the Historical Commission, the efforts of members of the Social Studies Department at Chelmsford High School, and particularly, thanks to the efforts of volunteer crewmembers, this proved to be an exemplary solution.

Derivation of Survey Strategy - Background Data

Location

From the outset we could assume that the site of the William Fletcher house lay within the bounds of an 8 acre lot; that it was to the south of Route 495, to the west of a shopping plaza and to the north and east of residential lots. From published sources, we were soon able to gain a closer approximation of where the house actually stood:

> ... a few rods to the east of the house now occupied by Mr. William Fletcher and his brother Capt. Josiah Fletcher (1.e., the Crosby house)
> (Allen, 1820:11)

> ... a few rods east of the house of the late Ephraim Crosby ...
> (Perham, 1890:242)

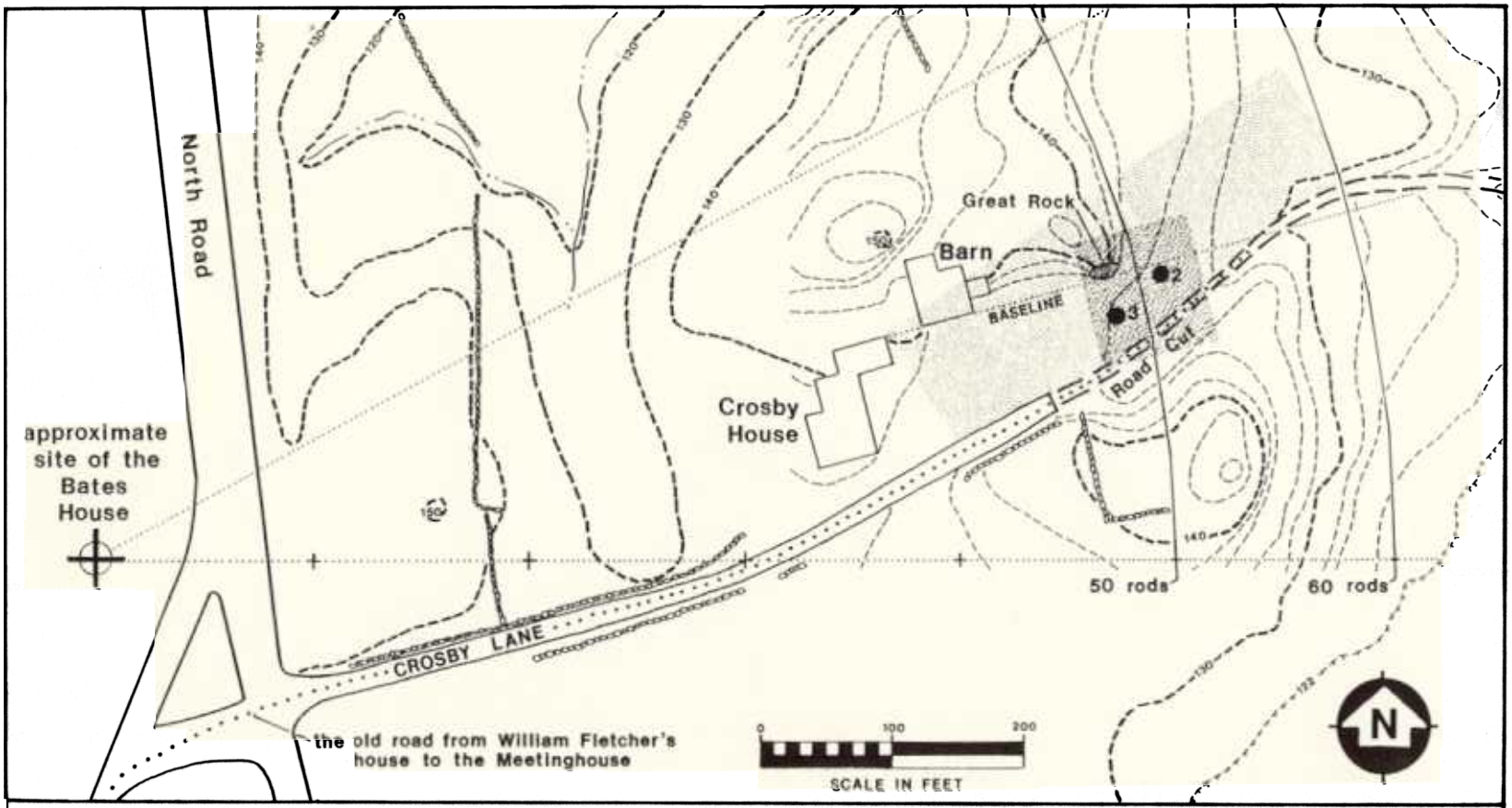
> ... a few rods northeast of what is now known as the Crosby house...
> (Perham, in Waters, 1917:12)

> ... about fifty or sixty rods east of the Bates house in What is now a field for cultivation and on the left (north) of a cart path (a continuation of Crosby Lane) leading eastward from the Crosby house...
> (Josiah R. Fletcher, in Waters, 1917:394-395)

Interpreted literally, these accounts could refer to 2, even 3 different locations (see Figure 1). However, all of the locations suggested were within area no more than an acre in extent, east or northeast of the Crosby house, and apparently north of the road or cart way.

A deed to a half-acre lot, dated May 19, 1842, provided one other possible clue to the location of the house. Although we did not know the precise location of this lot, we did know that it was near the house of Josiah Fletcher (i.e., the Crosby house). In the description of the lot boundaries was a reference to an old cellar hole, north of a road and south of a great rock (see Figure 2). Since according to Josiah R. Fletcher, the cellar of the William Fletcher house was not filled until 1847, it was possible that the cellar mentioned in the deed was the cellar of the house were the first town meeting was held.

On the north side of the road, 12-13 rods east-north-east of the Crosby house, and 48-49 rods east-northeast of the Bates house, we found a rock which seemed to qualify as a great rock. Since this rock was situated more or less in the middle of the area suggested by other sources, it seemed worthwhile to begin our investigation there.

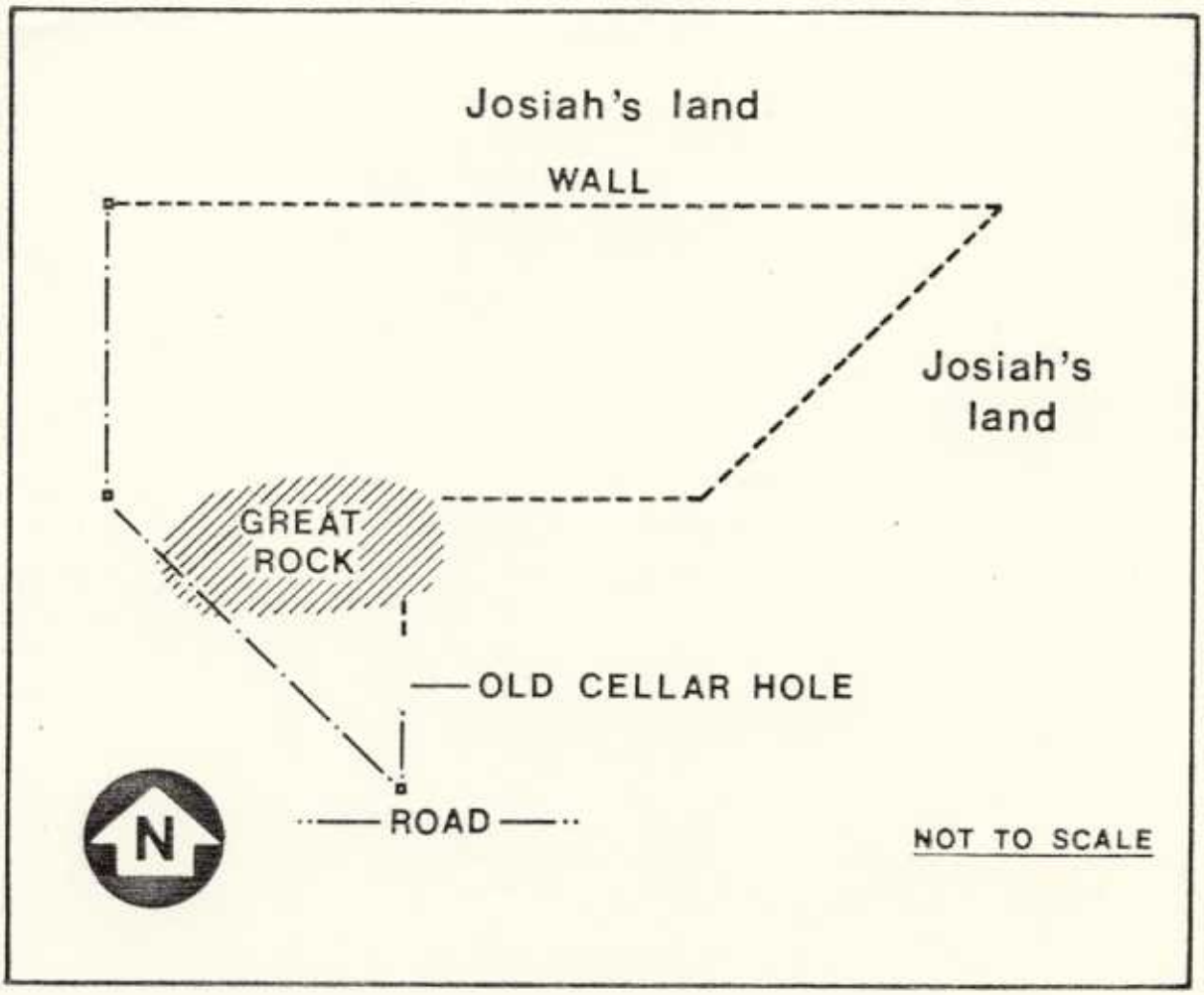


Overview of the Study Area

according to published accounts, the house stood within this area

area tested

Figure 1



William Fletcher to Josiah Fletcher, May 19, 1842

. . . lot of land situate in said Chelmsford and near the house of said Josiah containing ½ acre (more or less) and bounded beginning at the southwest corner of the wall near the road at a stake and stones; thence northwesterly at a stake and stones, north of the great rock; thence northwardly to a stake and stones, by the wall on land of Josiah Fletcher; thence eastwardly on the wall on land of said Josiah to the corner of the wall; thence southwestwardly on the wall on land of said Josiah to the corner of the wall; thence westwardly on the wall to the great rock (before named); thence southwardly on said rock, and wall and old cellar hole to the bounds first mentioned.

(South Middlesex County Deeds, 415:569)

Diagram of the half-acre lot

Figure 2

Site Chronology

The William Fletcher house was built in 1653 or 1654. It was the first of at least 3 Fletcher houses to be built on the north side of Crosby Lane[2]. We were unable to determine how long the original house remained standing, though from Allen's (1820:11) account we may infer that by about 1820 it was no longer standing.

According to Josiah R. Fletcher, the cellar of this house was filled in 1847, thus at least 27 years elapsed between the time the superstructure was dismantled and the time the cellar was filled. Sometime after 1847 the site was adapted to crop cultivation. After we had begun fieldwork we learned that from time to time the area had been used as a dump and that in the not too distant past chicken coops had stood to the east or the great rock.

Physical Characteristics

According to tradition, the William Fletcher house was the first framed house to be built in Chelmsford (Perham, 1890:242). We were able to learn nothing more about the superstructure. Since it was a framed house we can presume that it had some sort of masonry foundation. It is possible that the cellar, noted by Josiah R. Fletcher, was an original feature[3]. We did not know the dimensions of the house or the cellar. We assumed the cellar, even if it were not a full cellar, would have measured no less than 10 feet on it shortest side. The results of Cummings' (1979) study of 17th century house construction in the Boston area lend some support to this assumption[4].

Soils and Surficial Geology

Within the study area soils have developed from stratified drift -- sorted sand and gravel deposited by glacial melt-water[5]. On our first visit to the site, in 1979, we made a prelim1nary assessment of local soils. In open areas surrounding the area we were about to investigate we had found 6-12 inches of topsoil above clean, sorted sand -- a plow zone in direct contact with glaciofluvia1 sediment.

Assumptions and Strategy

Given the above, what kinds of physical evidence might we expect to find and how might we expect to find it? Since the William Fletcher house was built and occupied in the mid-17th century, we might expect to find mid-17th century artifacts in the immediate vicinity of the house[6]. We did not know how long the house was actually occupied. Duration of occupation would have direct bearing upon the quantity, distribution and time range of the artifacts we might presume to be associated with the house. We had inferred that the house was no longer standing by 1820, thus we could at least assume that artifacts which dated from c. 1820 onward were not associated with this house.

Since we found no evidence to suggest other wise, we assumed that the superstructure was dismantled -- that it had not burned down and that it had not been abandoned and left to decay. If so, any re-usable building materials may have been salvaged for use elsewhere. If this was indeed the case, we would expect to find few vestiges of the superstructure in the archaeological record.

We could presume that the cellar had remained open for at least a quarter-century after the superstructure was removed {1.e., from some time prior to 1820, until 1847). During that time, the cellar walls could have collapsed or stone could have been removed for use elsewhere. Even if still more or less intact, the cellar walls could have been pushed into the cellar at the time it was tilled. And even if the walls were left more or less intact when the cellar was filled, at least the uppermost courses of masonry could have been cast

askew in the process of crop cultivation. In view of these possibilities, it appeared that we might have a better chance of detecting the cellar fill than the cellar walls.

Since the area had been under cultivation, we expected that artifacts associated with the William Fletcher house would occur in a plow zone, together with items of more recent origin. We expected that the cellar fill and whatever remained of the cellar walls would lie below the plow zone. In the cellar fill we would expect to find artifacts dating from the time the house was dismantled through the time the cellar was filled.

From what we had already learned about local soils and subsequent site use, it appeared that we might be able to locate the cellar fill with a soil corer. Even if we failed to locate the cellar by this means, we would gain a clearer sense or local soil conditions. If we did soil cores at 10-foot intervals, we could minimize the risk that we had failed to detect the cellar fill purely by chance. In the event that we failed to detect the cellar fill in soil cores, we proposed to dig test pits at 30-foot intervals. By sampling at 30-foot intervals we might fail to locate the cellar purely by chance. If and when we found evidence suggesting that we had found the site of a structure, we would begin limited test excavation to attempt to determine whether the structure might be the house where the first town meeting was held.

Summary and Discussion of Results

In the process of attempting to locate 1 structure, the William Fletcher house, we found traces of at least 2 and perhaps, as many as 5 structures. However, we found very little evidence that the area we investigated was occupied prior to the late 18th or early 19th century. We recovered only 1 item -- a piece of kaolin tobacco pipe stem -- certain to be of 17th century origin. In the table that follows, we have noted the quantity and distribution of other categories of cultural material. Caution: the quantities of items recovered from each area were to some extent a function of the number, size and depths of the test pits we dug in each area. The actual distributions of nails, window glass, brick, ceramics, bottle glass and faunal remains are plotted on Figures 8-17.

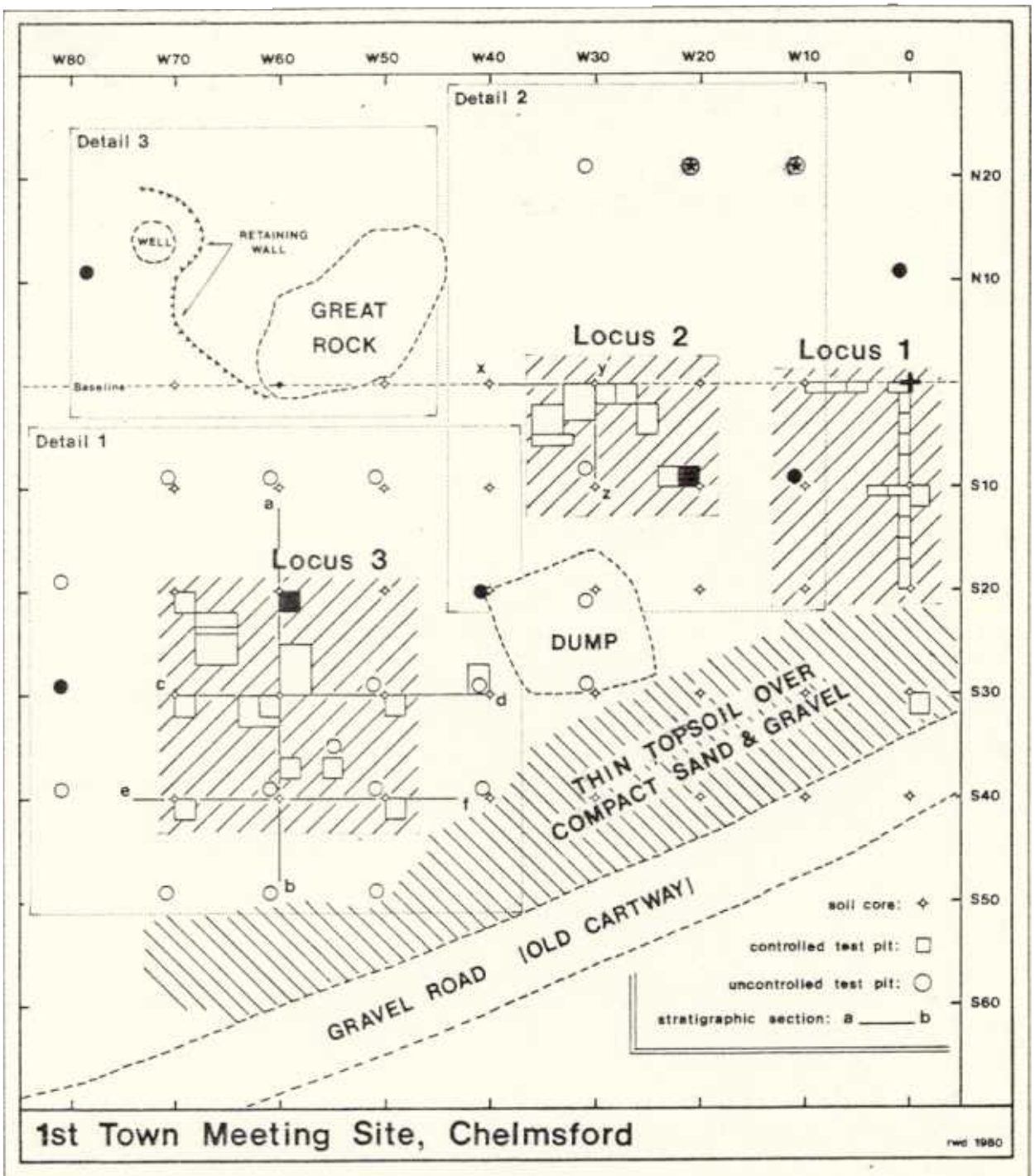
The machine-cut nails, wire-drawn nails, plate glass, white ware, all of the bottle glass and presumably, coal, post-date the original Fletcher house. Machine-cut nails, cream-colored ware and some of the white ware and other ceramics would have been in use between the time the house was dismantled and the time the cellar was tilled. Hand-wrought nails and red ware were in use from before the time the house was built through the time that we know the house was no longer standing. Thus, the hand-wrought nails and red ware we recovered need not have been associated with the original Fletcher house.

We did find indirect evidence that 1 of the structures we located might be the original Fletcher house. At locus 3, approximately 20-50 feet south of the great rock, 12-13 rods east-northeast of the Crosby house and 48-49 rods east-northeast of the Bates house, we found what might be the cellar hole mentioned in the 1842 deed. Below the surface of a mound of earth and rocks, we found the soil to be of a more or less distinctive color and texture. On the east side of the mound, 7-19 inches below the surface, we found a pile of rocks which might be vestiges of stone masonry. On the north side of the mound we found large, flat rocks at the edge of the till. During the final hours of the field investigation, we intercepted a feature which could be a builder's trench.

On Figure 4 we have projected the limits of the fill. The projection is based upon test pit profiles and soil core data presented in Figure 5. We assumed that wherever we found orange-brown or light brown sandy soil below the top-soil, we were beyond the limits of the cellar and that wherever we found medium brown and light-orange brown sandy soil below the topsoil, we were within the limits of the cellar. The limits projected on Figure 4 may exceed the actual limits of the cellar.

Our argument that this feature may be the cellar of the original Fletcher house is based solely upon the date ranges of the artifacts we recovered from the fill. Here, as elsewhere, tilled topsoil contained relatively early artifacts (e.g., hand-wrought nails, red ware) along with items of relatively recent "origin {e.g., clear bottle glass, wire-drawn nails). However, in the medium brown sandy soil below the topsoil all but 1 of the artifacts were of late 18th or 19th century origin. All of the artifacts we recovered from the light orange-brown sandy soil were of late 18^{th} or 19^{th} century origin. Virtually all of the artifacts recovered from below the topsoil would have been in use at the time that the cellar of the Fletcher house was filled. Unfortunately, the only evidence of 17th century occupation, "the pipe-stem" fragment, turned up nearly 60 feet to the east -- hardly within the immediate vicinity of this feature.

At locus 2, 20-30 feet west of the great rock, 14-15 rods east-northeast of the Crosby house and about 51 rods east-northeast of the Bates house, we found 2 dry-laid stone walls (see Figure 6) .It appeared that both walls were foundation walls. We did not attempt to establish whether both walls were part of the same foundation. On "the south side of the southernmost wall we found a



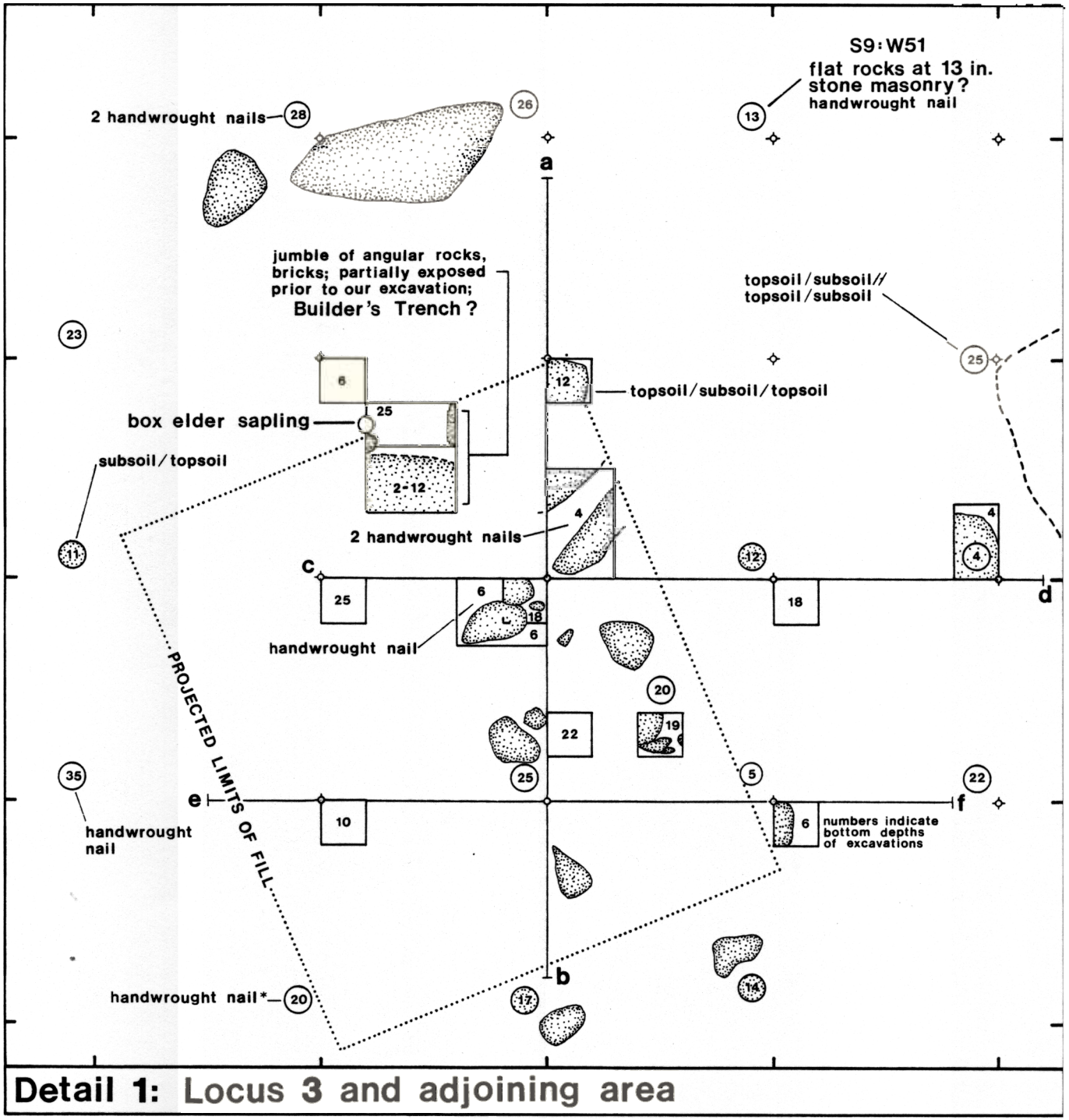
Generalized Site Plan: Details follow

■ ● test pits where a buried topsoil occurred

⊛ plow zone in contact with glacial meltwater deposits

\+ SITE DATUM

Figure 3



Detail 1: Locus 3 and adjoining area

Figure 4

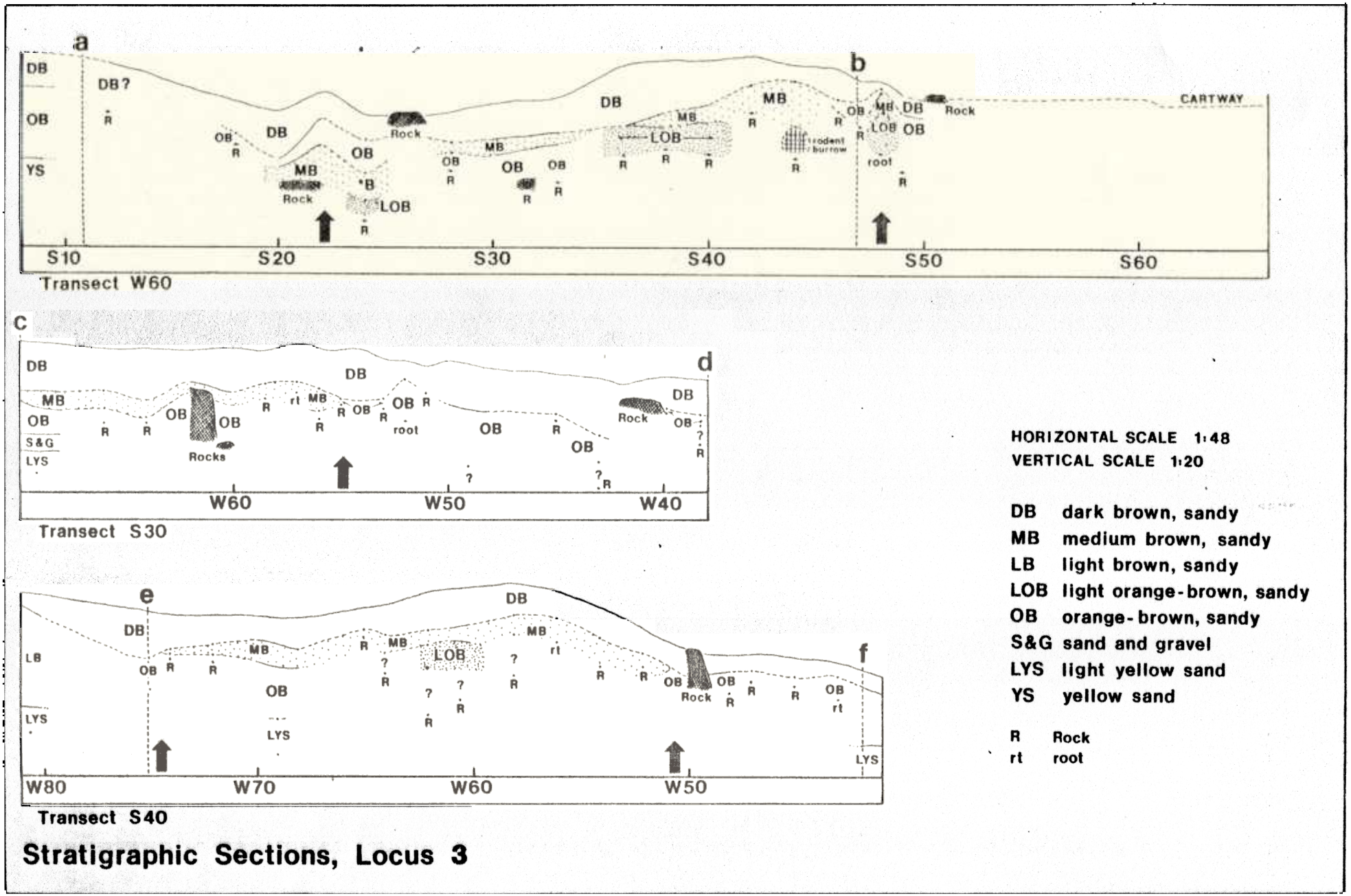

a
b
DB
DB?
OB
YS
Rock
MB
LOB
rodent burrow
root
CARTWAY
S10
S20
S30
S40
S50
S60
Transect W60
c
d
S&G
LYS
Rocks
W60
W50
W40
Transect S30
e
f
LB
W80
W70
Transect S40
HORIZONTAL SCALE 1:48
VERTICAL SCALE 1:20
DB dark brown, sandy
MB medium brown, sandy
LB light brown, sandy
LOB light orange-brown, sandy
OB orange-brown, sandy
S&G sand and gravel
LYS light yellow sand
YS yellow sand
R Rock
rt root
Stratigraphic Sections, Locus 3

Figure 5

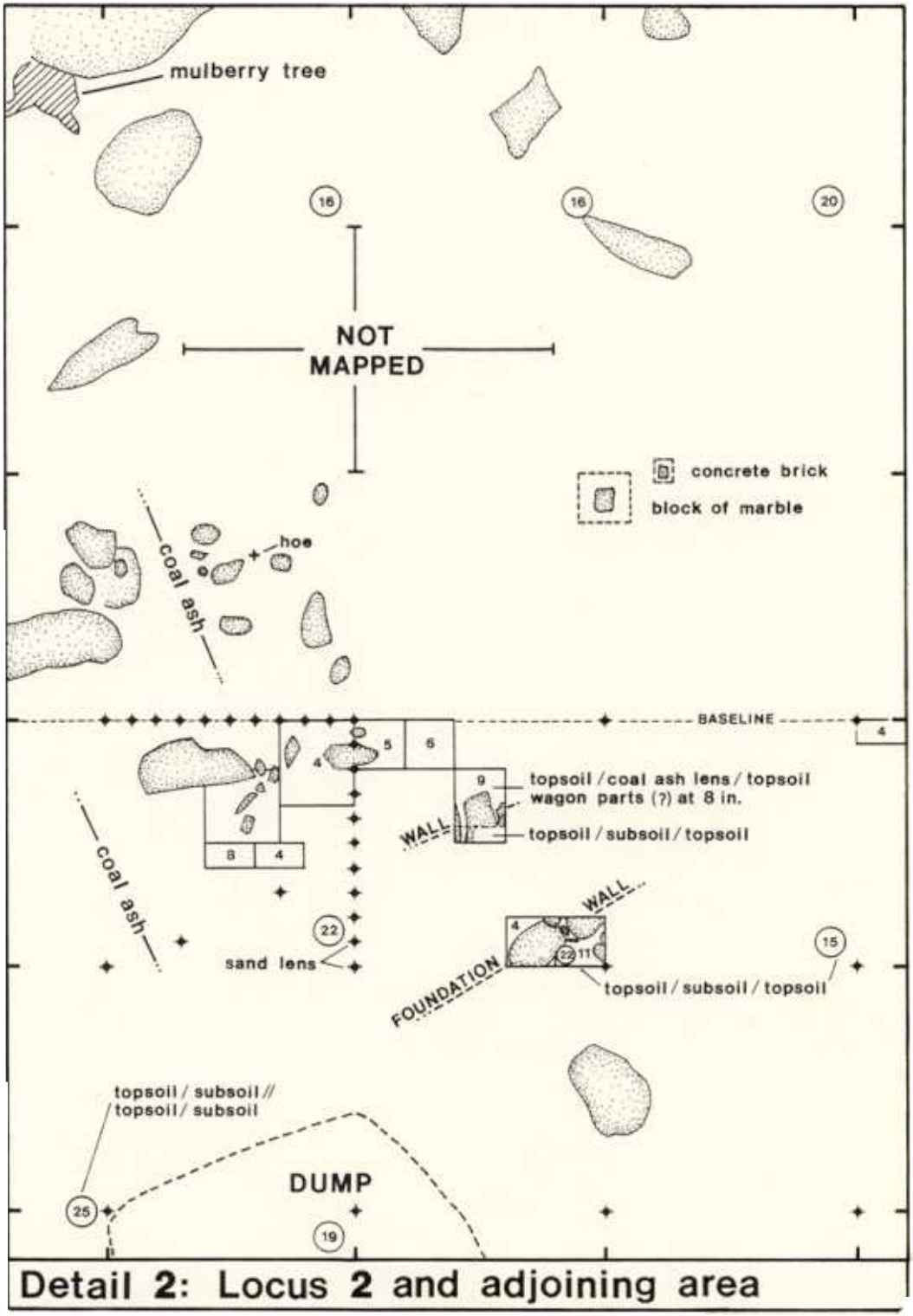

mulberry tree
16
16
20
NOT MAPPED
concrete brick
block of marble
hoe
coal ash
BASELINE
4
5
6
9
topsoil / coal ash lens / topsoil
wagon parts (?) at 8 in.
WALL
topsoil / subsoil / topsoil
8
4
coal ash
22
sand lens
WALL
4
22
11
15
FOUNDATION
topsoil / subsoil / topsoil
topsoil / subsoil //
topsoil / subsoil
DUMP
25
19
Detail 2: Locus 2 and adjoining area

Figure 6

buried topsoil below the top of the wall. In this buried topsoil we found artifacts post-dating the time that the cellar of the Fletcher house was filled. South of the midline of the other wall we also round buried topsoil below the top of the wall. Within this buried topsoil we found a wire staple -- another item of late 19th or 20th century origin. Thus, it appeared that both walls might be of relatively recent origin. According to local resident, Mr. Ed Watt, there had been chicken coops in this area in the not too distant past.

North of the great rock, just east of the well, we found vestiges of a dry-laid stone retaining wall, stone steps (?) and possibly, a building foundation (see Figure 7). It seemed unlikely that a house would have stood so close to the great rock. At S9:W51, 10 feet south of the great rock, we found 1 of the 7 hand-wrought nails we recovered as well as possible vestiges of stone masonry (see Figure 4). We did not have time to investigate these features.

During the initial phase of the field investigation we began to realize, much to our dismay, that we had under-estimated the scope and intensity of recent site use. As the survey progressed, we found further indications of relatively recent landscape alteration. Most notable were a road cut and the buried topsoils. Curiously, in all but 1 instance, buried topsoil occurred only within a narrow area, extending from S30:W80, northeastward, toward N10:W0 (see Figure 3). One possible explanation is that the buried topsoil marks the extent of some sort of linear feature - perhaps, a natural feature (e.g., a break in slope) or perhaps a man-made feature (an old roadbed?). At the moment, we will not speculate further. As expected, we found relatively early as well as relatively recent artifacts in the topsoil. However, only at the northern edge of the study area, east of the great rock, did we find a well-defined plow zone in direct contact with natural sediment. Elsewhere, we found the soil to be considerably deeper. In relatively undisturbed areas, we found an orange-brown subsoil between the topsoil and natural sediments. In some areas we found artifacts in the subsoil. Notably, the 1 item certain to be of 17th century origin occurred in the subsoi1[7].

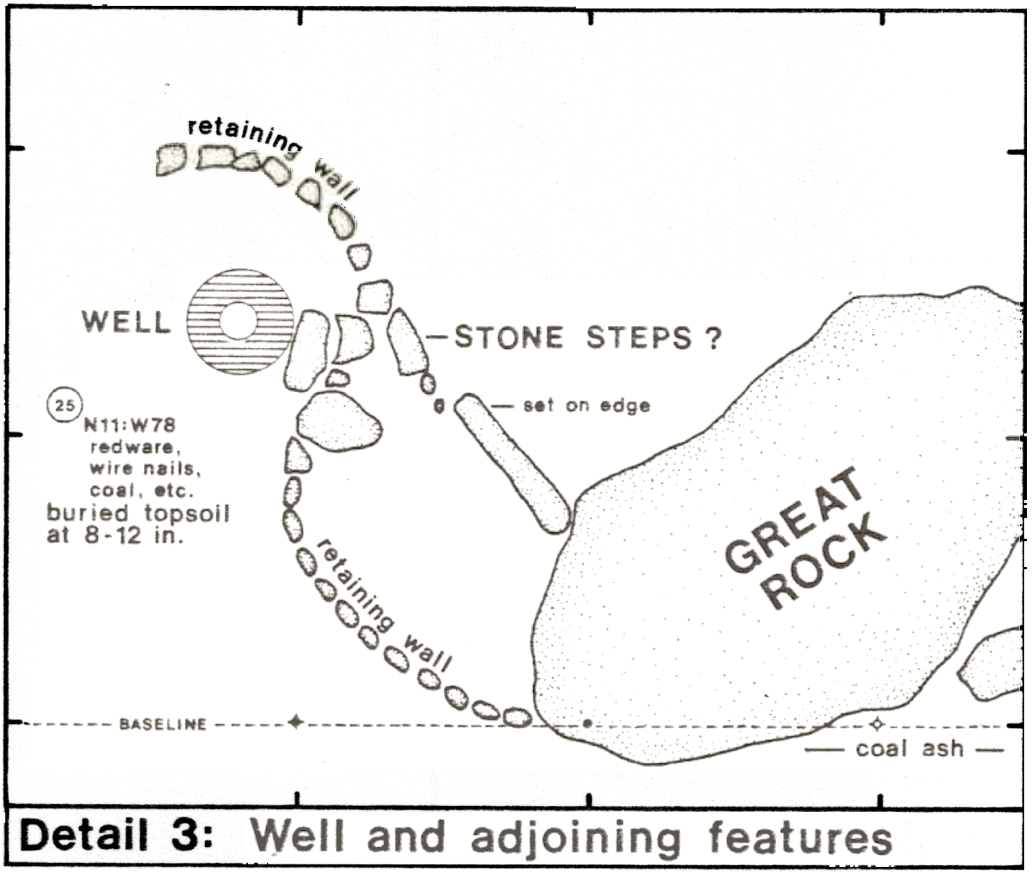

retaining wall
WELL
STONE STEPS ?
set on edge
25
N11:W78
redware,
wire nails,
coal, etc.
buried topsoil
at 8-12 in.
retaining wall
GREAT ROCK
BASELINE
coal ash
Detail 3: Well and adjoining features

Figure 7

1 Western portion of the study area, viewed from the hillside south of the cart way; April 12, 1980. On the left is the barn northeast of the Crosby house. The pile of sand and gravel to the right (east) of the barn is the site of a chicken coop which until late 1979 or early 1980 was attached to the barn. On the far right is the rock we believe to be the great rock. The figure in the middle distance is John P. Richardson.

2 Eastern portion of the study area viewed from the hillside south of the cart way; April 12, 1980. In the foreground, more or less parallel to the lower edge of the photograph, is the cart way which extends eastward from the end of Crosby Lane. The large tree on the right is the elm tree shown in many of the photographs to follow. This elm tree and the southeast corner of the barn were the landmarks used to lay the survey baseline. At the left, in the middle distance, is the great rock. Between the great rock and the mulberry tree to the right of it, we noted what looked like an old cart way.

3 Clearing brush; June 23, 1980. The area pictured is southeast of the great rock, near the dump shown on Fig. 3. On the left is John P. Richardson. On the right is Alan McArdle, field assistant during Week 1.

4 Clearing brush; June 23, 1980. This is another view from the south side of the cart way. The tree in the right foreground is the big elm tree shown in slide 2. Pictured, from left to right are John P. Richardson, Alan McArdle, and under the tree, Kathy Curtin, Mike Johanson and Vic DeMarines.

5 Field crew; June 23, 1980. Seated, Alan McArdle; Standing, from left to right, Kathy Curtin, Andy Taylor, Vic DeMarines and Mike Johanson.

6 Field Crew, June 25 1980. From left to right, Alan McArdle, Barbara Rothwell, Karen Beaudoin, Laurie Gross and Heidi Wiljanen; behind them is the great rock.

7 Locus 2, work in progress; June 25, 1980. Pictured from left to right are Alan McArdle, Heidi Wiljanen and Laurie Gross. They are mapping near S0 W30. In the background are the great rock and the Crosby house.

8 Locus 2, work in progress; June 26,1980. The crew at the left -- Vic DeMarines (stooping), Mike Johanson (seated) and Alan McArdle -- are working at S5 W34. The crew at the right -- Jill Whitney {seated) and Linda Hannigan -- are working at S0 W33. Both crews were trying to determine whether a line of rocks protruding through the surface might be part of a foundation wall. In the background are the great rock and the barn, shown in previous slides.

9 Locus 2, Test Pit S8 W24 upon completion of excavation; July 1, 1980. The large rock in the foreground and the smaller rocks beyond appeared to be part of a dry-laid wall. On the right {south) side of the wall we noted a buried topsoil 10-12 inches from the surface.

10 Locus 2, Test Pit S2 W26 upon completion of excavation; July 1 1980. The rock in the middle and smaller rocks adjoining it may be vestiges of dry-laid stonework, perhaps, a foundation wall. In the lower left corner you can see a patch of orange-brown subsoil. Along the left (south) side of the pit, this overlay another topsoil layer. On the right are what we presumed to be wagon parts, or perhaps, parts of farm machinery. These were left in place.

11 Locus 1 and Locus 2, viewed from the south; July 3,1980. The plastic bags on the right mark the location of shallow test trenches dug June 24. Locus 2 is in the middle distance, to the right of the great rock.

12 Locus 3, work in progress; July 2, 1980. Pictured are John Belding, field assistant during Week 2, and Barbara Rothwell. They are measuring the surface elevation of one of the soil cores used to prepare Stratigraphic sections.

13 Locus 3, work in progress; July 2, 1980. This photograph shows Andy Taylor at work at S22 W68, one of two adjoining test pits dug to expose the jumble of bricks and rocks shown in slide 14. In the background, among the trees, is Ms. Alice LaChance.

14 Locus 3, S22 W68 and S24 W68; July 3, 1980. These test pits were dug in the hope that rocks and bricks, already partially exposed when we arrived, might prove to be vestiges of a building foundation. In the near half of the pit (S22 W68) is a jumble of rocks and bricks. Beyond in S24 W68, are one or more large, flat rocks. Excavation of S22 W68 was still in progress when this photograph was taken.

15 Locus 3, work in progress; July 3, 1980. In the foreground, Jill Whitney is recording artifacts from S22 W68 on an ARDVARC field data form. In the background, John Belding is drawing a profile of a test pit wall. The test pit in the lower right corner is S20 W60.

Quantity and Distribution of Selected Categories of Cultural Material

Category	Locus 1	Locus 2	Locus 3	Other Areas
Building Materials				
Nails:	9 (12%)	16 (22%)	25 (34%)	15 (20%)
handwrought	-	-	3	4 (+1*)
machine-cut	3	3	15	4
wire-drawn	5	10	3	6
not identified	2	3	4	1
Window Glass:	6	-	7	3
plate glass	-	-	-	3
not plate glass	6	-	7	-
Brick:				
bricks	-	-	3	-
brick fragments	4	2	39	13
Mortar:	-	present	present	present
Wall Plaster:	-	present	present	present
Household Refuse				
Ceramics:	7 (9%)	5 (7%)	47 (64%)	15 (20%)
redware**	4	3	26	9
cream-colored ware	-	-	7	2
whiteware	-	-	11	4
other ceramics	3	2	3	
Bottle Glass:	13	?	15	5
Faunal Remains:				
bone	3	10	15	6
mollusk shell	-	present	present	present
Coal, Cinders:	present	present	present	present

* probably a horseshoe nail

** unglazed redwares which might be pieces of modern flower pots have been excluded

Concluding Remarks

During this 9-day field investigation we were able to test approximately 30% of the area we had originally proposed to investigate, and approximately 15% of the area within which, according published sources, we might expect to find remains of the William Fletcher house. No doubt, we might have obtained different results 1f we had applied our efforts to a larger area. However, we elected to focus our attention on the area around the great rock. Within most of that area we tested at sufficiently close intervals that it seems unlikely that we could have failed to detect the remains of a structure purely by chance.

Thus far, our attempts to locate the site of the first town meeting have achieved results comparable to those of most attempts to locate 17th century structures. For example, Deetz (1974:15) has noted that in the Plymouth area, 10 of 11 attempts to locate remains of 17th century houses yielded: "...a muddled maze of disturbed stones, brick bats and partially preserved cellars". In most instances, very few 17th century artifacts were recovered.
More recently, a team of archaeologists from Boston University investigated areas adjoining 3 17th century houses: the Robert Pierce house in Dorchester, built c. 1650; the Cooper-Frost-Austin house in Cambridge, built c. 1689; the Peter Tufts house in Medford, built c. 1680 (see Starbuck, 1980). Even though these 3 properties were continuously occupied from as early as mid-17th century, on-ward, very few 17th century artifacts were recovered; relatively few early 18th century artifacts were recovered. The results of our investigation suggest that someone smoking a clay pipe passed through the area sometime between 1620 and 1680. Beyond this, the results lend weak support to our assumption that the cellar mentioned in the 1842 deed could be the cellar of the house where the first town meeting was held. The next logical step might be to test this assumption through historical research.

Notes

[1] Through the years this meeting has come to be known as the first town meeting. Although it was the first public meeting, technically speaking, it was not the first town meeting -- the town of Chelmsford was not incorporated until May 29, 1655 (Perham, 1890:243). For additional details concerning the early history of Chelmsford, see: Allen (1820), Hill (1880), Perham (1890) and/or Waters (1917).

[2] Until about 1900, direct descendants of William Fletcher retained title to some portion of the original family holdings including the site of the original Fletcher homestead {Fletcher, 1871; Perham, 1890:242; Waters, 1917:394). We have not yet determined how the property passed from 1 generation to the next. In Appendix 1, we have traced one line of descendants. As a result we were able to determine that inventories of the estates of 2 descendants pertained to other Fletcher houses -- not to the house where the first town meeting was held.

[3] Deetz (1974,1977:94-95) has suggested that the archaeological remains of the earliest houses in Plymouth Colony have been difficult to detect because many of these houses were built without cellars. He has found examples of 2 such construction techniques. However, Cummings (1979:29) has suggested that most of the earliest houses or Massachusetts Bay Colony were built with cellars under them: "...fully one half of the houses in the inventories between 1630 and 1660 include cellars, While among the structures themselves there is scarcely a survivor from the 17th century without an underground cellar".

[4] Presumably, a half cellar would have extended the full length of the short side (width) of the house and half the length of the long side. Of the 44 houses built in the Boston area between 1637 and 1706, for which both length and width are known, all but 2 were 15-20 feet in Width. One was only 12 feet in width, the other, 27 feet. There was considerable variability in the length of these houses: 30 (68%) were at least 20 feet in length; 14 (32%) were less than 20 feet in length, but of these only 2 were less than 16 feet in length. See Cummings, 1979:212-215).

[5] Information on surficial geology was provided by Dr. Joseph Hartshorn, Professor of Geology, University of Massachusetts, Amherst.

[6] On most of the 17th and early 18th century sites which archaeologists have investigated, household refuse (e.g., ceramics food remains) occur in a thin scatter around the house. Archaeologists have begun to refer to this phenomenon as sheet refuse (e.g., see Kenyon, in Starbuck 1980:391).

[7] The soil layers or "strata" which we have described are the result of the interplay of natural soil formation processes and human activity. They are transient phenomena. For convenience, we have treated them as discrete entities. However, in many instances the depths at which items were recovered may be more meaningful than "stratigraphic" context.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