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The Old Rhode Island Farm: History, Memory, and Interpretation at Bristol's Coggeshall Farm Museum

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THE OLD RHODE ISLAND FARM:
HISTORY, MEMORY, AND INTERPRETATION
AT BRISTOL'S COGGESHALL FARM MUSEUM

BY

MICHELLE M. JUST

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

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MASTER OF ARTS THESIS
OF
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ABSTRACT

While larger living history museums have been frequently studied by scholars, smaller museums, like Coggeshall Farm Museum in Bristol, Rhode Island receive far less attention. Utilizing historical and institutional records, historical monographs, and literature from the fields of museum studies and anthropology, this study examines authenticity in the museum setting using Coggeshall Farm Museum as a case study, suggesting that despite the museum's search for historical accuracy, the institution remains inauthentic to recorded history. It argues that the history and interpretation of Coggeshall Farm Museum was intimately intertwined and influenced by the historical perceptions, biases, and dynamics of the museum's leadership. The study identifies two important periods in the museum's history, the first from 1967-1984 and the second from 1984-2003. These periods were instrumental in shaping the museum's identity, yet they also suggest that the ability of the institution to thrive and to prosper depended upon a clearly defined mission, vision, and strong finances. The significant challenges faced by the institution clearly impacted the organization's ability to serve the public and to survive.

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This effort would not have been possible without the assistance of a number of individuals. I want to express my deepest gratitude to Dr. Rod Mather, who offered guidance throughout the thesis process and my graduate career. His sense of humor and approachability kept me centered through the stresses of graduate school. Dr. Catherine DeCesare's course on Colonial American history provided the background from which to begin my historical research. Her thoughtful revisions proved to be extremely helpful in crafting this document. Dr. Karl Aspelund brought a unique anthropological perspective to the committee and was always willing to provide feedback whenever necessary. Sitting in meetings while he discussed his textile design plans for deep-sea travel to the *Titanic* provided a welcome respite from my research. I must also thank Dr. Kris Bovy for serving as my defense chair, and for introducing me to archaeology in her coursework.

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In conclusion, I would like to dedicate this work to everyone who has touched or been touched by Coggeshall Farm Museum: from the many generations of tenant farmers who lived and worked there, to the many generations of farm and museum workers who strived to make their imprint there. We are all simply parts of an infinitely complex puzzle. Pick up the pieces; keep building.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Coggeshall is a living history center, put together with enthusiasm and love, but not enough sense of real direction, purpose and identity.¹

-Edward L. Hawes, Museum Assessor, 1989

Coggeshall Farm Museum, a living history museum² in Bristol, Rhode Island, purports to highlight the history of late eighteenth-century salt marsh tenant farmers.³ Though the land boasts a long history as a working farm, it was not until the 1960s that the Bristol Historical Society, in conjunction with Rhode Island Governor John H. Chafee, identified the site's potential as a historical institution, thus saving it from demolition and future development as part of the new Colt State Park. Plans for Coggeshall Farm Museum changed drastically in scope and interpretation in the years since initial planning began by the Bristol Historical Society in 1967. Initially incorporated as a museum in 1973 to interpret early colonial life and agriculture, Coggeshall Farm Museum underwent overwhelming institutional changes during the late 1980s and into the 1990s. Although later board and staff members continued to refine the museum mission and vision, the museum as it exists in 2018 reflects the

¹ Edward L. Hawes, Coggeshall Farm Museum, Inc. Museum Assessment Report, Executive Summary, December 1989, Coggeshall Farm Museum, hereafter cited as (CFM).

² Scott Magelssen defined living history museums as “institutions...that practice costumed interpretation within reconstructed or restored sites and that depict a particular time in history for educational purposes. These attractions are sites to which tourists travel in order to engage in what is advertised as a different temporal space, to interact with a simulation of a past time as part of an educational or recreational enterprise.” Scott Magelssen, *Living History Museums: Undoing History through Performance*, (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow, 2007), xxi.

³ “Our History and Mission,” Coggeshall Farm Museum, accessed January 29, 2018, <http://coggeshallfarm.org/about/our-history-and-mission>.

preferences of individuals and outside trends that were influential in shaping the museum in its first thirty years.

Despite attempts to present an accurate depiction of history to the public, as a living historical site, Coggeshall Farm Museum is a contemporary construction of the past. It is therefore a better reflection of the culture in which it was created than the historic past it hopes to recreate. Historical records illustrate that the museum's historic interpretation often disregarded or at least ignored the historical record to promote topics of particular interest to museum staff, the general public, and other concerned parties. This study examines authenticity in the museum setting using Coggeshall Farm Museum as a case study, but it also argues that the history and interpretation of Coggeshall Farm Museum was intimately intertwined and influenced by the historical perceptions, biases, and dynamics of the museum's leadership. The ability of the institution to thrive and to prosper depended upon a clearly defined mission, vision, and strong finances. The significant challenges faced by the institution clearly impacted the organization's ability to serve the public and to survive.

In the United States museums are recognized for being trustworthy sources for historical information. It is therefore crucial that scholars examine museums narratives and institutional histories to determine how inherent biases might be presented to the public.⁴ Museums, Coggeshall Farm Museum included, often boast of their historically accurate interpretation. Regardless of the research behind this interpretation, these institutions are curated by museum employees who must simultaneously serve their communities and appease the board.

⁴ "Museums: Did You Know?" American Alliance of Museums, <http://www.aam-us.org/docs/default-source/advocacy/infographic-2-pg-color.pdf?sfvrsn=4>, accessed May 02, 2017.

Uniquely situated within the museum field, living history museums have been historically preoccupied with authenticity and realism. Writing during the 1980s, folklorist Jay Anderson distinguished living history museums from other forms of living history, including recreational reenactment and experimental archaeology. In his seminal work *Time Machines: The World of Living History*, Anderson characterized the living history museum as an institution in which living history interpreters are “primarily interested in using simulation as a mode of interpreting the realities of life in the past more effectively.”⁵ While Anderson did not coin the term living history, he is often credited with introducing living history to scholarly exploration. Since his early publications, other historians and multidisciplinary scholars have investigated living history in its many facets, including notions of authenticity in the museum setting.⁶

As anthropologist Dimitrios Theodossopou noted in “Laying Claim to Authenticity: Five Anthropological Dilemmas,” there is no “unitary, fixed, and all-embracing anthropological definition of authenticity.”⁷ Anthropologist Richard Handler wrote extensively during the 1980s and 1990s on living history museums and authenticity. In an article co-authored with philosopher William Saxton, “Dyssimulation: Reflexivity, Narrative, and the Quest for Authenticity in ‘Living History,’” Handler and Saxton described how authenticity can be contextualized

⁵ Jay Anderson, *Time Machines: The World of Living History* (Nashville, TN: American Association for State and Local History, 1986), 12.

⁶ Anderson’s 1982 article “Living History: Simulating Everyday Life in Living Museums” published in the *American Quarterly*, Vol. 34, No. 3 was the precursor to Anderson’s monograph. Although Historian Michael Wallace published “Visiting the Past: History Museums in the United States” in *Radical History Review* in 1981, Anderson’s pioneering work continues to be cited in the study of living history.

⁷ Dimitrios Theodossopoulos, “Laying Claim to Authenticity: Five Anthropological Dilemmas,” *Anthropological Quarterly* 86, no. 2 (Spring 2013): 340, doi:10.1353/anq.2013.0032.

within the living history museum setting. In their article, the authors established a compound definition, which first defines authenticity as “isomorphism between a living-history activity or event, and the piece of the past it is meant to recreate,” or “perfect simulation.”⁸ Therefore, in the living history setting, reproducing the past with minute accuracy is one way of being authentic. Handler and Saxton defined authenticity in the museum, secondly, as a means of finding one’s authentic self. The authors found that living history practitioners draw on the storied lives of the past, hoping to “regain an authentic world, and to realize themselves in the process, through the simulation of historical world.”⁹ Though Handler and Saxton saw the authenticity issue in the museum as a postmodern phenomenon, they acknowledged that living historians “do not see living history as a genuine aspect of present-day culture.”¹⁰

In a later article, “After Authenticity at an American Heritage Site,” Handler and fellow anthropologist Eric Gable explained why living history museums are so concerned with upholding a level of authenticity, particularly in regards to historical accuracy. According to Gable and Handler,

When constructivist paradigms flourish, as they currently do at sites such as Colonial Williamsburg, they do so not in the service of a critique of the status quo but in defense (to borrow from Durkheim¹¹) of what come to be perceived as socially “necessary illusions.” While we draw our examples from research we carried out at Colonial Williamsburg from 1990 to 1993, the arguments are applicable to heritage sites in general and ultimately to the way constructivist paradigms are deflected or domesticated in the American vernacular in the “post- authentic” age.¹²

⁸ Richard Handler and William Saxton, “Dyssimulation: Reflexivity, Narrative, and the Quest for Authenticity in ‘Living History,’” *Cultural Anthropology* 3, no. 3 (1988): 242, doi:10.1525/can.1988.3.3.02a00020.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 243.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 243, 257.

¹¹ Émile Durkheim was a French sociologist.

¹² Eric Gable and Richard Handler, “After Authenticity at an American Heritage Site,” *American Anthropologist* 98, no. 3 (1996): 569, doi:10.1525/aa.1996.98.3.02a00100.

The authors argued that more often than not, museums attempted to promote an air of authenticity in order to appear more credible to the public, though most historians working in these environments accepted that history could not be presented objectively.¹³

Curators and consultants Susie Wilkening and Erica Donnis, claimed that “authenticity is perhaps the most critical attribute of a history museum.”¹⁴ Wilkening and Donnis queried visitors about the importance of authenticity in the museum and published the findings in their 2008 article, “Authenticity? It Means Everything.” They found that that authenticity held a number of different meanings for individuals. Fifty-eight percent of respondents associated authenticity with the historical accuracy of a site, meaning that the museum based its interpretation and built environment off of documented historic research and material culture.¹⁵ Despite this large number, the authors noted that “only a small percentage” concluded that modern anachronisms detracted from a site’s authenticity.¹⁶ Definitions of authenticity varied by age, with older adults placing more value on authenticity than younger adults, like mothers with children, who were more concerned with providing an engaging family experience than with the accuracy of every detail.¹⁷ Authenticity in the museum is indeed complicated, and while museums hope to exude an authentic appearance, Wilkening and Donnis cautioned museums from claiming to be authentic, stating that

[t]he public expects history-based museums to be authentic--it is inherent--but if you proclaim your authenticity, it immediately sends up a faux flag. It conveys the idea that,

¹³ Ibid., 576.

¹⁴ Susie Wilkening and Erica Donnis, "Authenticity? It Means Everything," *HISTORY NEWS* 63, no. 4 (Autumn 2008): 18.

¹⁵ Ibid., 19.

¹⁶ Ibid., 20.

¹⁷ Ibid., 20-21.

because you have to say it, perhaps there is a reason and you are not as authentic as they thought, casting doubt on your authenticity.”¹⁸

Although many visitors may appreciate museums that attempt to be historically authentic, these attempts are often in opposition to the authenticity of staff or other visitors who feel alienated or excluded. While individual museums create their own policies to construct a veil of authenticity, as a whole, the living historical community struggles to negotiate how it can present an authentic experience while also satisfying staff and visitors. In a somewhat heated discussion via the Association for Living Historical Farms and Agricultural Museums (ALHFAM) e-mail listserv in June 2018, museum professionals from varying institutions discussed policies regarding gender non-conforming individuals at their sites. Many professionals acknowledged that it should be up to the individual to choose to dress in costume according to the gender with which they identify, but others found this to be a modern issue best left out of the workplace. These individuals feared that if clothing did not match the biological sex of an interpreter, it could lead to visitor confusion regarding historic gender roles.¹⁹

Similarly, living history museums continue to have a tenuous relationship with race. As anthropologists Richard Handler and Eric Gable explained in *The New History in an Old Museum: Creating the Past at Colonial Williamsburg*, this was particularly true at Colonial Williamsburg, where they performed extensive fieldwork. Throughout the 1990s, the institution went to great lengths to revise its narrative to include stories of enslaved Africans, who were previously excluded from the museum’s account of history. Although Colonial Williamsburg remained preoccupied

¹⁸ Ibid., 22.

¹⁹ Katie Lange et al. to ALHFAM Mailing List, “[ALHFAM] Gender Identity and Period Clothing,” July 16, 2018-June 22, 2018.

with the accuracy of the material culture of the site, it also attempted to truthfully depict the lives of the black slaves who made up roughly half of Williamsburg's population.²⁰ However, Handler and Gable found that white interpreters often neglected to discuss miscegenation with audiences, mostly due to their discomfort with the topic. These interpreters often explained away their discomfort by citing a lack of historical documentation on the subject.²¹ Through defining authenticity as narrative backed by the written historical record, the interpreters severely limited the museum's knowledge of and interpretation of the past, as historically disadvantaged groups like enslaved Africans were unable to physically document their history in the same way as privileged white Virginians. Furthermore, potential black employees may feel there is no place in the museum for them, unless they wish to portray an enslaved individual. Black visitors may likewise feel out of place at a museum that traditionally glorified the country's white model citizens.

Beyond studies on authenticity, scholars have looked at living history from a multitude of other perspectives. Historian Michael G. Kammen chronicled living history's role in constructing a national memory during specific periods in American history in *Mystic Chords of Memory*.²² Others, like Scott Magelssen, examined the role of performance in living historical interpretation. His *Living History Museums: Undoing History through Performance* approaches the topic from a perspective in theatre history, theory, and dramatic literature.²³ Additional studies observed the ways

²⁰ Richard Handler and Eric Gable, *The New History in an Old Museum: Creating the Past at Colonial Williamsburg*, (Durham NC: Duke University Press, 2002), 76.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 84-89.

²² Michael G. Kammen, *The Mystic Chords of Memory: The Transformation of Tradition in American Culture*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1993).

²³ Magelssen.

in which history is actively constructed in the museum setting. In “Visiting the Past: History Museums in the United States,” historian Michael Wallace examined both Colonial Williamsburg and Greenfield Village, exploring the different historical themes or narratives that were constructed and promoted for public consumption and scrutinized how those narratives have changed over time.²⁴

Particular attention has been paid to Colonial Williamsburg and Greenfield Village. Multiple works on Colonial Williamsburg discuss the role of John D. Rockefeller, Jr. In “How Philanthropy Can Alter Our View of the Past: A Look at Colonial Williamsburg,” historian Anders Greenspan pointed to Rockefeller’s philanthropic contribution to Colonial Williamsburg, arguing that the creation of his museum shaped the public perception of history. James S. Miller similarly examined Williamsburg as a case study in historical tourism. In his study, he paralleled the creation of Williamsburg with movements in academia, particularly in anthropology, as ethnographers sought to document and preserve cultures threatened by industrialization and global capitalism.²⁵ Henry Ford’s museums faced scrutiny by Kerstin Barndt, a scholar of German languages and literature. Barndt found that Ford’s museums were emblematic of both nostalgia and the technological progress embodied in his economic practice of Fordism.²⁶

While no similar study has been replicated at Coggeshall Farm Museum, scholar Laura E. Abing’s insightful dissertation on Old Sturbridge Village provides a useful

²⁴ Michael Wallace, “Visiting the Past: History Museums in the United States,” *Radical History Review* 1981, no. 25.

²⁵ James S. Miller, “Mapping the Boosterist Imaginary: Colonial Williamsburg, Historical Tourism, and the Construction of Managerial Memory,” *The Public Historian* 28, no. 4 (2006): 52-55, doi:10.1525/tph.2006.28.4.51.

²⁶ Kerstin Barndt, “Fordist Nostalgia: History and Experience at the Henry Ford,” *Rethinking History* 11.3 (2007): 379-410.

framework for examining a living history museum. In her study, conducted in the 1990s, Abing analyzed the institution as a cultural artifact. Abing astutely noted,

...not only does the outdoor history museum teach about the history of a certain period it strives to represent; it can teach about the society that created and honed it. In this way, the museum can be considered as an archaeological treasure—a *cultural artifact*.²⁷

Her work illustrates the ways in which individuals, wider movements, and outside trends like social history, shaped Old Sturbridge Village as an institution. Abing's study does not uncover such inherently problematic narratives as those constructed by Ford or Rockefeller, yet her work on Old Sturbridge Village reveals that all museums are subjective cultural constructions. Understanding the institutional histories, serves to better distinguish the factual history from the motives of the museum founders or associated individuals. It is important that this information is available and transparent to the public, so that scholars and visitors understand when there is an inherent bias in the interpretative narratives constructed for consumption, as well as the museum's overall mission.

To disentangle the interpretive narrative from the factual history of Coggeshall Farm Museum, it is imperative to understand the wider history of Bristol, Poppasquash Neck, and the Coggeshall Farm Museum property. Chapters 2 and 3 provide background information on the history of Bristol and Coggeshall Farm Museum. Examining Coggeshall Farm Museum's institutional history, can determine what influences guided the museum's evolving interpretation and mission, essentially creating the institution as it exists today. Institutional archives point to two distinct periods in Coggeshall Farm Museum's early history, 1967-1984, and 1984-2003.

²⁷ Laura E. Abing, *Old Sturbridge Village: An Institutional History of a Cultural Artifact* (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Dissertation Services, 1998), xvii.

Instrumental to the formulation of the museum's identity, these periods demonstrate how a museum can change based on the impulses of board, staff, and outside forces. During these two periods, which exist with some overlap, major events and decisions shaped the construction of the museum's historical narrative.

Chapter 4 focuses on Coggeshall Farm's formative period, which was from roughly 1967 to 1984. During this time, the Bristol Historical Society first established the museum as the Old Rhode Island Farm at Colt State Park. The farm began as a nostalgic vision of Rhode Island's agrarian past. This interpretation was espoused by the members of the society in the late 1960s, and spearheaded by George L. Sisson, Jr. Sisson's vision soon outgrew that of the society, as members believed the farm was draining funds from more important historical projects. In the early 1970s, Coggeshall Farm Museum, Inc. became an independent 501(c)3 nonprofit organization. It came into its own during the heyday of living history, though it was always a step behind larger institutions like Old Sturbridge Village, a more established living history museum in Massachusetts.

By 1984, Coggeshall Farm Museum's initial vision, mission, and presentation were no longer relevant in the eyes of many of its board and staff members. In the following years, the museum sought to alter its identity in a major way, seeking external assistance in order to determine the best path forward. The second period (1984-2003), examined in Chapter 5, was one of considerable change, led by staff and board members who were influenced by outside organizations, including professional interest groups, other living history sites, and outside consultants. These organizations often stressed the need for an authentically represented past and the importance of the

“new” social history. The museum brought in a number of “experts,” including outside museum evaluator Edward L. Hawes through a grant funded assessment program. It was Hawes who remarked during his assessment of the institution in 1989, that, “Coggeshall is a living history center, put together with enthusiasm and love, but not enough sense of real direction, purpose and identity.”²⁸ Throughout the next decade, Coggeshall Farm Museum grew into its new identity, while staff explored new modes of living historical interpretation steeped in notions of historical authenticity. Continuity in the form of staff and board leadership allowed for the implementation and crystallization of this new identity into the early 2000s. Despite additional changes as the twenty-first century progressed, including continued efforts to professionalize, the decisions made during these two earlier periods laid the groundwork for the museum as it existed throughout the tenure of later board and staff.

Today, Coggeshall Farm Museum’s mission highlights important changes made in 1985 and beyond, namely the choice to focus on the 1790s. As of 2018, the museum’s mission is to

preserve this 1790s Rhode Island salt-marsh farm. We serve the local community and beyond as a living museum and vital educational resource through demonstration of daily farm activity and honest interpretation that reflects its historical, multicultural influence.²⁹

As of early 2018, Coggeshall Farm Museum continues to serve as an important partner in the East Bay community, offering educational programming to children throughout the state of Rhode Island, a variety of family-oriented events throughout the year, and

²⁸ Hawes.

²⁹ Linda Rhynard, et al., By-Laws, Committee Descriptions, and Policies of Coggeshall Farm Museum, October, 27, 2014 (CFM).

research opportunities for college students.³⁰ Although the museum's identity, purpose, and direction were purportedly established in the 1990s, the words of assessor Edward L. Hawes remain relevant. Love and enthusiasm cannot sustain an institution. Unfortunately, the tenuous nature of the museum field means that Coggeshall Farm Museum must compete against a variety of other institutions, non-profit and otherwise, for both the attention and financial support of benefactors. Coggeshall Farm Museum's relatively untouched institutional archives coupled with high staff turnover in recent years, has resulted in limited institutional memory.

This project relies heavily on the Coggeshall Farm Museum institutional archives in addition to other local archives, including the Bristol Historical and Preservation Society. It is hoped the project will benefit the museum by providing an overarching narrative of its own institutional history. Also, the project serves a pragmatic purpose. Many living history museums, including Coggeshall Farm Museum, struggle to show a profit. With visitation dwindling, museums are at an impasse: do they continue to hold on to strict notions of authenticity, or attempt to change in order to stay relevant with new audiences? It is important that the museum understands that the chosen interpretive angle reflects both the zeitgeist of an earlier time as well as the preferences of individuals who possessed power over the direction of the museum.

The final chapter of this thesis touches on Coggeshall Farm in more recent years, under new leadership. Coggeshall Farm Museum continues to hold onto the identity established in the period discussed in Chapter 5, despite flaws in accuracy and relevancy. In concluding, I argue that rather than remaining a static institution,

³⁰ The Narragansett Bay divides Rhode Island unofficially into the West Bay and East Bay regions. The East Bay consists of Bristol in addition other cities and towns such as Barrington, Little Compton, Middletown, Newport, Portsmouth, Tiverton, and Warren.

Coggeshall must continue to change in order to stay relevant to attract new generations of visitors, despite fears that these changes may impact the authentic nature of the site. Research indicates that as an institution, Coggeshall is not an authentic representation of the site's documented history. However, it is impossible for any living history museum to be a truly authentic simulation of the past. Taken as a whole, this study argues that Coggeshall Farm Museum reflects the broader movements in the museum field and field of history in general, in addition to the attitudes and choices of various individuals who held interest in the institution. Major changes throughout the years reflect the whims of individuals and wider themes in the museum field. While transformation in the late-twentieth century was crucial to creating the museum as it exists today, Coggeshall Farm Museum's leadership may find that it must look to change once again to retain relevancy in the twenty-first century.

CHAPTER 2

BRISTOL HISTORIOGRAPHY

While there is no comprehensive history of Coggeshall Farm, past researchers attempted to delineate the history of select parts of Poppasquash Neck, though never in great detail. Poppasquash Neck rarely appears in monographs on Rhode Island history. Historian Sydney V. James's *Colonial Rhode Island: A History* and Historian William G. McLoughlin's *Rhode Island: A History* explore Rhode Island on a broader scale, often emphasizing critical historical figures and events, such as Roger Williams and the founding of Providence Plantations. Both works are significant to providing historical context to the greater narrative of Rhode Island history.³¹ For smaller communities, less scholarly literature exists on daily life or events during the colonial period and beyond. Consequently, it is infinitely difficult to piece together the history of individual tracts of land, the people who owned, lived, and worked them, and how these locations figured into the wider community.³²

The majority of works available on the town are antiquarian in nature, with few scholarly texts being the exception. As authors expand on Bristol history, they continue to use a handful of antiquated works as foundational sources, creating new

³¹ Sydney V. James, *Colonial Rhode Island: A History* (New York: Scribner, 1975); William G. McLoughlin, *Rhode Island, A History* (New York: W.W. Norton; American Association for State and Local History, 1986).

³² In executing research for this project, contacts at various archives mentioned research previously performed on the property. Louis P. Cirillo, CMC of the Bristol Town Archives noted by e-mail that Alice B. Almy, of the Bristol Historical Society researched the property during her tenure as curator between 1936-1975. Cirillo believes it was Almy's research that helped to attribute the farm to the Coggeshall family. Unfortunately, there is no record of this research in the manuscript collections of Alice B. Almy at the Bristol Historical and Preservation Society.

literature without adding much to the historical narrative. Existing works repetitively feature similar topics and often focus on important historical figures and Bristol's role on a larger scale amidst events in colonial America and the founding of the nation. This presents potential issues for historians and scholars who hope to draw on secondary source literature in researching Bristol, or alternatively, in updating the history for a contemporary audience.

Scholarly references to Bristol's Poppasquash Neck, the location of Coggeshall Farm Museum remain even scarcer. Poppasquash Neck, a long-settled peninsula situated directly west of Bristol's downtown boasts a long and significant history, proven by its nomination to the National Register of Historic Places in 1980.³³ Despite this, few scholars focus on Poppasquash as a historical entity in its own right, and the broader lack of appropriate material on Bristol history reflects a wider issue with respect to scholarship on Rhode Island's heritage, which is similarly deficient.

Although commemorative and popular materials pertaining to Bristol are readily available, finding scholarly articles is challenging. A search of the Rhode Island Historical Society's scholarly journal, *Rhode Island History*, for articles published between 1942 and 2010 uncovered zero articles referencing Bristol directly.³⁴ A few articles in *Rhode Island History* mention Bristol briefly. This includes an essay on the evolution of historic preservation in Rhode Island by Antoinette Forrester Downing. Downing concluded in "Historic Preservation in Rhode Island," that preservation

³³ Elizabeth S. Warren, "Poppasquash Farms Historic District," National Register of Historic Places Inventory/Nomination Form (Providence: Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission, 1980).

³⁴ The Rhode Island Historical Society provides access to past issues of *Rhode Island History*. 1942-2010 represents the range of dates that are currently available.

efforts in Rhode Island largely corresponded with trends on the national level. Initially an antiquarian endeavor spearheaded by groups such as the Daughters of the American Revolution, the historical preservation movement gained greater momentum and authority as public programs like Rhode Island's Historical Preservation and Heritage Commission were developed to facilitate preservation. Specifically, Downing identified Coggeshall Farm Museum's existence in writing about the Green Acres Act of 1964 which led to the conservation of Colt State Park in Bristol.³⁵

Searches of wider databases such as America: History and Life unveiled similarly limited results, with one notable exception, a scholarly article by historian John Demos, an emeritus professor at Yale University. Published in the *William and Mary Quarterly*, Demos focused specifically on Bristol family life in "Families in Colonial Bristol, Rhode Island: An Exercise in Historical Demography." Demos approached the topic from the purview of social history, using the vital statistics and census records of Bristol's colonial residents to dispel myths regarding family life during the colonial period.³⁶

Other historians, including Jay Coughtry, Associate Professor of History at University of Nevada, Las Vegas, have written historical monographs on topics that included Bristol. Coughtry's well researched *The Notorious Triangle: Rhode Island and the African Slave Trade 1700-1807* features the town of Bristol as a location of great importance. After noticing a gap in the literature, Coughtry sought out and utilized a vast number of primary sources ranging from letterbooks, shipping and

³⁵ Antoinette Forrester Downing, "Historic Preservation in Rhode Island," *Rhode Island History* 35 (February 1976): 24, accessed February 14, 2018.
http://www.rihs.org/assets/files/publications/1976_Feb.pdf

³⁶ John Demos, "Families in Colonial Bristol, Rhode Island: An Exercise in Historical Demography," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 25, no. 1 (1968): 40-57, doi:10.2307/1920805.

memoranda books, and court records to point to the symbiotic relationship between Rhode Island and the slave trade during the eighteenth century. Meticulously cited, Coughtry's work is one of the best resources for researchers interested in the triangular trade, in which slaves, rum, and molasses were traded between West Africa, Rhode Island, and the Caribbean.³⁷

Though both Demos and Coughtry rely greatly on primary source evidence, they also cited historical monographs that are recurrent throughout literature on the town of Bristol. Demos depended almost strictly on demographic data, though in a footnote he mentioned Wilfred H. Munro stating that, "[t]here is no recent scholarly study of Bristol, but the main outlines of the story [of the town] can be found in George L. Howe, *Mount Hope; a New England Chronicle*."³⁸ Likewise, Coughtry cited numerous secondary sources including Munro, M.A. De Wolfe Howe, and George Howe. In his extensive bibliography in *Colonial Rhode Island: A History*, Sydney V. James noted that "Bristol has been fortunate" to have these secondary works available, which allow for some analysis of Bristol's historical development.³⁹ These works generally follow the format of other town histories, which according to James, often "imply that the town's importance lay in its meager offerings to national history."⁴⁰

Furthermore, while the available works on Bristol's history permeate the historical record, upon closer scrutiny they are of questionable quality. Wilfred Harold Munro's highly influential work *The History of Bristol, R.I: The Story of the Mount Hope Lands: From the Visit of the Northmen to the Present Time*, originally published

³⁷ Jay Coughtry, *The Notorious Triangle: Rhode Island and the African Slave Trade, 1700-1807* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1981), 21.

³⁸ Demos, 41.

³⁹ James, 402.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

in 1880, stands out as one of the earliest compendiums of Bristol history. A Bristol native, Munro was interested in Bristol not solely from an academic standpoint, but also from an intimately personal one. In his preface, Munro revealed his bias, as he noted that he “lovingly and reverently” wrote his monumental work of history, much like Livy documented the history of Rome.⁴¹ Munro’s work aimed to elevate Bristol to be worthy of standing among the history of great locales of importance like Rome and argues that Bristol’s history is integral to the wider development of the state of Rhode Island and the United States as a nation.⁴² His method therefore relied on ignoring mundane local history and instead ensured that, “local names and details [were] subordinate to the part the town has taken in the development of the state and nation” while making “extended mention only of those whose reputation has passed beyond its boundaries and has become a part of the history of the state.”⁴³ According to Munro, “[s]uch a method could not be employed in sketching the history of most American cities.”⁴⁴ He acknowledged that the work avoided discussing lesser known individuals in favor of those who had a greater impact on Bristol; individuals who propelled the town to greater fame. While Munro utilized some primary source evidence, including transcriptions of original sources directly or in an abbreviated form, his overt bias makes the reader wonder what may have been omitted to craft such a great narrative.

⁴¹ Wilfred Harold Munro, *The History of Bristol, R.I.: The Story of the Mount Hope Lands: From the Visit of the Northmen to the Present Time* (Providence: J. A. & R. A. Reid, 1881), 5-6.

⁴² The historian Livy, born during the first century BCE, wrote prolifically on Roman history. Livy left behind his highly influential *History of Rome*, one of the few surviving traditional historical narratives on Rome’s history. Later classicists and historians have criticized Livy, and Latin chroniclers more generally, for using their histories to elevate the significance of Rome, often at the potential expense of the historical record. See Kraus, C.S., and A.J. Woodman. "Latin Historians." *Greece & Rome* 44, no. 1 (1997): S1+. Literature Resource Center (accessed January 11, 2018).

⁴³ Munro, 3.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

Later historians imitated Munro's style, focusing on the larger legacy of Bristol, while providing limited information on locations like Poppasquash Neck and guiding their research on personal rather than professional interests. Author M. A. De Wolfe Howe shared Munro's staunch love for Bristol, yet his background was markedly different. De Wolfe Howe, a descendant of Bristol elite, and son of an Episcopal bishop, was a lauded biographer with a background in English literature.⁴⁵ His 1930 work, *Bristol Rhode Island: A Town Biography* draws heavily from Munro's earlier monograph yet focuses on two aspects of Bristol history that factored greatly into his own life: the DeWolf family and the Episcopalian church of Rhode Island. De Wolfe Howe's descentance figured prominently throughout, and he relied on his father's reminiscences as a main source for his publication.⁴⁶

Following in the footsteps of Munro and De Wolfe Howe, architect and Bristolian George Locke Howe championed Bristol's history and people throughout his highly nostalgic chronicle of the town's history. Howe's 1959 *Mount Hope: A New England Chronicle* often reads more like a novel than a historical work, and it positively stresses the pervasive uniqueness of Bristol. Often referencing the similarly biased *The History of Bristol R.I.*, Howe focused on the history of elite members of society, including Benjamin Church, Nathaniel Byfield, and the DeWolf and Colt families.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Patrick T. Conley, "Mark Antony DeWolfe Howe, Inducted 2015," Rhode Island Heritage Hall of Fame, 2015, accessed January 16, 2018,

http://www.riheritagehalloffame.org/inductees_detail.cfm?iid=760.

⁴⁶ M. A. De Wolfe Howe, *Bristol, Rhode Island: A Town Biography* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1930), 161-164.

⁴⁷ George Locke Howe was the nephew of M.A. De Wolfe Howe. George Locke Howe mentions his grandfather "Bishop Howe," referring to M.A. De Wolfe Howe's father, the Right Reverend Mark Antony DeWolfe Howe. George Locke Howe, *Mount Hope: A New England Chronicle* (New York: Viking Press, 1959), 11.

The established tradition of the antiquarian Bristol scholar continued into the twenty first century and included author Richard V. Simpson. Although not a historian, Simpson was one of Bristol's most prolific writers, publishing numerous books on Bristol history prior to his death in 2017. In *Bristol: Montaup to Poppasquash*, Simpson expanded beyond the historical narratives recalled by Munro and Howe to include the more recent events of the late twentieth century. Intended for popular audiences, *Bristol: Montaup to Poppasquash* lacks historical authority due to the absence of carefully documented background research and the inclusion of erroneous information.⁴⁸ Overall, Simpson's work is characteristic of an overwhelming absence of academic publications on Bristol's history in the twentieth and twenty first century.

While scholarly works on Bristol do exist, few discuss the Poppasquash area. The majority of authors mention the area only on brief occasions: with reference to the founding of Bristol, Bristol's important historical figures, or the Colt family and creation of Colt State Park. To understand the history of Poppasquash Neck, and more specifically, Coggeshall Farm Museum, one must look beyond published monographs and historical articles.

State and local preservation groups identified the region as a resource of architectural and historical importance. This was the reason Historic Preservation Planner Elizabeth S. Warren prepared a National Register of Historic Places Inventory Nomination Form for the Poppasquash Farms Historic District in 1980 on behalf of

⁴⁸ Simpson mistakenly reported that "Coggeshall Farm is maintained as a living museum by the Bristol Historical and Preservation Society" despite having separated from the Society and incorporating in 1973 as a separate institution, Richard V. Simpson, *Bristol: Montaup to Poppasquash*. Making of America Series. (Charleston, SC.: Arcadia Pub., 2002), 12.

the Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission. Her choice in language reflected her belief that the land and buildings surrounding Poppasquash Neck were worthy of preservation, as she stressed not only the value of its historic structures, but also its potential for further conservation of land and water resources.⁴⁹ (see Appendix 1: Poppasquash Historic District Map) Warren cited both secondary and primary sources, relying on probate records, deeds, and municipal records. Additionally, she utilized an unpublished work by David Baber and Eugene Coulter entitled “Papoose-Squaw, A Report on the Ownership of Coggeshall Farm.” Roger Williams College historic preservation students Baber and Coulter researched and submitted a report focusing on the land transfer history of Coggeshall Farm from Native American settlement through a lengthy and complicated court battle over Major William D’Wolf’s estate.⁵⁰ Baber and Coulter’s report was supported by extant records in the Bristol Historical and Preservation Society, the Coggeshall Farm Museum archives and Bristol’s Town Hall.⁵¹

Warren also co-authored *Historic and Architectural Resources of Bristol, Rhode Island* with Pamela A. Kennedy. The work report contained the results of a state survey of Rhode Island historic properties. Published in 1990, the report focused on Bristol’s history from a preservation perspective. As Warren’s nomination form focused on Poppasquash Farms Historic District specifically, the results of the surveys in *Historic and Architectural Resources of Bristol, Rhode Island* provide a more

⁴⁹ Warren, 1-4.

⁵⁰ David Baber and Eugene Coulter, “Papoose-Squaw, A Report on the Ownership of Coggeshall Farm” (unpublished manuscript, August 8, 1977), 13-18, Coggeshall Farm Museum Institutional Archives, Coggeshall Farm Museum, Bristol, Rhode Island, (CFM).

⁵¹ Notes compiled by Baber and Coulter in the possession of the Bristol Historical and Preservation Society point to careful investigation of the land using plat maps, genealogy records, deeds, and court records of the various land holders of the property. David Baber and Eugene Coulter Papers (unfiled), Bristol Historical and Preservation Society, Bristol, Rhode Island, hereafter cited as (BHPS).

general background on the region, including a short description and history of Coggeshall Farm Museum.⁵²

While more explicit than earlier monographs and essays, the details of Warren and Kennedy's history of the Coggeshall property are difficult to verify due to their reliance on Baber and Coulter's unpublished report and their incomplete archival citations. The only way to resolve this issue is to reexamine the original town documents and records to determine how Poppasquash Neck and Coggeshall Farm Museum fit into the wider narrative of Bristol history. Once established, a history of the property allows for an evaluation of museum interpretation.

⁵² Elizabeth S. Warren and Pamela A. Kennedy, *Historic and Architectural Resources of Bristol, Rhode Island* (Providence: Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission, 1990), 57.

CHAPTER 3

REASSEMBLING THE COGGESHALL FARM MUSEUM TIMELINE

In order to understand the context of Coggeshall Farm Museum's institutional and interpretive history, it is important to first consider the recorded history of the land itself. The historical record serves as a base from which a museum can craft interpretation. A museum's level of authenticity is often judged from this perspective, as noted by Handler and Gable. It is often inferred that the museum represents the past as described in written and material sources. Diverging from the known past and presenting it as historic truth can impact the public perception of that museum's credibility. Using a combination of primary sources and select secondary sources, Coggeshall's place in wider Bristol history will be contextualized here before assembling a timeline that delineates the site's known history. (see Appendix 2: Coggeshall Farm Museum Historic Timeline) The history of the land and its past ownership is complicated, as the property ownership transferred multiple times and changed in size and boundaries throughout its history.

The first inhabitants of Bristol were members of the Wampanoag people. Known then by the English as the Mount Hope Lands, Bristol was home to three Wampanoag villages.⁵³ However, by the time English settlers encroached on the land surrounding Bristol, foreign diseases brought by previous Europeans left the Wampanoag population numbers dwindling. The English quickly settled Providence Plantation,

⁵³ Munro, 29.

Portsmouth, Newport, and Warwick in the 1630s into the 1640s.⁵⁴ Soon after, colonists from Plymouth colony purchased parts of Bridgewater, Taunton, Rehoboth, and Swansea.⁵⁵ The English settlers and Wampanoag coexisted, though somewhat precariously, until the outbreak of King Philip's War in 1675. Mount Hope figured prominently as Philip, also known as Metacomet, was the sachem, or chief, of Mount Hope.⁵⁶ After the brutal, yearlong war, the defeated Wampanoag relinquished the Mount Hope Lands. Many of the remaining survivors were sold into slavery.⁵⁷ In 1680, King Charles II granted the land to Plymouth Colony.⁵⁸

The Grand Deed bestowed the land to a group of wealthy Boston merchants. Referring to the lands taken from the Wampanoag, the Grand Deed dated September 14, 1680, promised the "Lands sometime pertaining to the Indians, late inhabiting the Colony aforesaid by conquest" to the four proprietors: Nathaniel Byfield, Stephen Burton, Nathaniel Oliver, and John Walley.⁵⁹ The following 1690 Deed of Highways laid out the settlement pattern and early streets of Bristol.⁶⁰ Once the English gained the Mount Hope Lands, they agreed to divide it among the new settlers according to the Grand Articles of August 1680. The Grand Articles apportioned the land among the four proprietors and other settlers of less distinction and wealth. The land was divided based on the number of shares owned by each landowner.⁶¹

⁵⁴ James, 5-6, 13.

⁵⁵ Nathaniel Philbrick, *Mayflower: A Story of Courage, Community, and War* (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 2007), 207-214.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 208-211.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 345-346.

⁵⁸ Munro, 57.

⁵⁹ The 1680 Grand Deed, *Abstract of Land Records, 1680-1807, Bristol, RI*, 1, Bristol Town Archives, Bristol Town Hall, Bristol, Rhode Island, hereafter cited as (BTH).

⁶⁰ The 1690 Deed of Highway, *Abstract of Land Records, 1680-1807, Bristol, RI*, 7-15, (BTH).

⁶¹ Munro includes an abstract of the Grand Articles of August 1680, and the 1690 Deed of Highways in *The History of Bristol, R.I.: The Story of the Mount Hope Lands*.

Originally a part of Plymouth Colony, Bristol merged into the Province of Massachusetts Bay in 1692.⁶² The Bristol settlement rapidly attracted new citizens, including Captain Benjamin Church, best known for his involvement in King Philip's War and land ownership in Sakonnet, which became Little Compton, RI.⁶³ Early settlers likely dedicated their time to farming, and later, ship building and exporting goods that included horses, sheep, green onions, and pickled fish. The harbor was an important asset, as ships plied produce to other colonies.⁶⁴ Historian Carl Bridenbaugh noted in *Fat Mutton and Liberty of Conscience: Society in Rhode Island, 1636-1690* that the West Indies was a prime location to sell horses. In 1686, the *Bristol Merchant* took a shipment of horses to the Dutch colony of Surinam.⁶⁵

Throughout the eighteenth century, overseas trade expanded. Bristol engaged in the triangular slave trade, bolstered by the local production of rum from molasses.⁶⁶ Slavery became especially profitable after Rhode Island officially annexed Bristol as well as Warren, Tiverton, Little Compton, and Cumberland from Massachusetts in January 1746-7.⁶⁷ During the Revolutionary War, Bristol suffered economically, though less so than Newport. It emerged as a prominent seaport in the postwar period. The postwar maritime economy again included participation in the slave trade, led by Bristol's prominent DeWolf family. Bristol prospered due to maritime industry until the bankruptcy of George DeWolf in 1825, after which shipping slowly declined.⁶⁸

⁶² Munro, 119.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 80-86.

⁶⁴ James, 232, 258; Munro, 367.

⁶⁵ Carl Bridenbaugh, *Fat Mutton and Liberty of Conscience: Society in Rhode Island, 1636-1690* (Providence, RI: Brown University Press, 1974), 122-124.

⁶⁶ Coughtry, 21.

⁶⁷ James, 261; Munro, 160.

⁶⁸ Coughtry., 20-21, 236.

In the nineteenth century, the town's leaders sought other financial ventures, particularly in manufacturing. Augustus O. Bourn built the National Rubber Company factory in 1864, which became Bristol's principle industry. In 1888, Samuel Pomeroy Colt purchased the company, enlarging it to form the United States Rubber Company. Jobs in the rubber industry, historically important boat building industry, and textile manufacturing increasingly attracted new immigrants to Bristol. These immigrants, often of Portuguese, Italian, and Irish descent slowly changed the character of the town often to the resentment of the "Yankee yeomanry."⁶⁹ Scholar Andrew J. F. Morris wrote extensively on Colt's life, business, and political aspirations in *Restless Ambition: Samuel Pomeroy Colt and Turn-of-the-Century Rhode Island*. According to Morris, Colt's rubber company grew until the end of World War I, as it acquired smaller corporations. Colt left the company in 1918. In the years following, the company experienced steady decline due to foreign and domestic competition. Though World War II temporarily boosted production, afterwards manufacturing dwindled until rubber production ceased at the factory in 1957.⁷⁰ With the town's main industry eliminated, Bristol entered a period of suburbanization, attracting families from nearby urban areas like Providence.⁷¹ In the twenty-first century, Bristol remains a popular educational and tourist destination.⁷²

Coggeshall Farm Museum is located in an area known as Poppasquash Neck.

Bristolians utilized Poppasquash Neck as agricultural land throughout the location's

⁶⁹ Howe, 266-269, 280-281.

⁷⁰ Andrew J.F. Morris, *Restless Ambition: Samuel Pomeroy Colt and Turn-of-the-Century Rhode Island*, Master's Thesis, Brown University, 1991, 83-99, 211-215.

⁷¹ Warren and Kennedy, 19-33.

⁷² "Bristol at a Glance: Community Profile," Bristol, RI - Official Website, accessed July 02, 2018, <https://www.bristolri.us/569/Market-Data>. Bristol's top industries are Education and Health Services, Hospitality and Tourism, and Manufacturing, respectively.

known history. According to the Grand Articles of 1680, Poppasquash Neck was to hold a farm, mill, and ferry. The Grand Articles stated that a farm was to be laid

...out for the four first purchasers, and that each person shall pay a preportionable part according to his share in building upon, clearing, fencing & stocking staid Farm as those that run the major part of the purchase shall agree upon. Also that there shall be a Mill or Mille build and accommodations laid thereunto, and to set up a Ferry on the said Neck and lay out a farm there unto, and build an house thereupon and that the four first purchasers with such others as shall have deeds granted unto them as aforesaid, shall pay as shall arise or become made on the said Poppasquash Farm, Mill, or Mille, Mill Farm, Ferry & Ferry Farm, either in building, fencing, planting, stocking the same, or otherwise howsoever, under the penalty of forfeiting their whole interest & share in the same.⁷³

The agricultural nature of Poppasquash Neck changed with the progression of time. Warren and Kennedy cite Coggeshall Farm as an example of a small farmstead typical of the late nineteenth century, in which “farmers often lived in early houses, but the agricultural outbuildings which were necessary to the operations of their farms were relatively fragile and rarely maintained.”⁷⁴ While Bristol had many surviving houses, barns and outbuildings were typically replaced with newer models. Larger farms on Poppasquash were often the country homes of Bristol’s more elite, prosperous residents, including members of the DeWolf family. This trend continued through the end of the nineteenth century, as wealthy industrialists developed non-subsistence “gentlemens’ farms” complete with grand residences on the Neck.⁷⁵ Agriculture in Bristol declined in the twentieth century as Bristol suburbanized leaving little land for farming.⁷⁶ Today, the forty-eight acre tract leased by Coggeshall Farm Museum represents one of few farmsteads remaining in Bristol; a major departure from Bristol’s agricultural origins.

⁷³ The 1680 Grand Articles, *Abstract of Land Records, 1680-1807, Bristol, RI*, 18, (BTH).

⁷⁴ Warren and Kennedy, 23.

⁷⁵ The homes that occupy Poppasquash Neck continue to attract Bristol’s wealthiest residents. The residents on Poppasquash Road maintain a guarded entry gate to guarantee control over their prized real estate.

⁷⁶ Warren and Kennedy, 23-31.

Nathaniel Byfield: 1680-1723

The first major owner of the Poppasquash Neck property containing Coggeshall Farm was Nathaniel Byfield. Munro's biographical sketch of Byfield provided details about his life, albeit biased as he glorified Byfield in his work. Born in 1653 to a respectable family in England, Byfield arrived in Boston in 1674, where he worked as a merchant. Though he maintained a strong connection to Boston, he later settled in Bristol, building two residences: one on Poppasquash, and another on Bristol's more centrally located Byfield Street. Byfield undertook several prominent judicial roles, including Admiralty Judge, Judge of Court of Common Pleas for Bristol County, and Probate Judge for Bristol County.⁷⁷ Byfield held impressive wealth and status in the Bristol community. Although the original census records no longer exist, Demos cited a copy of the 1689 Bristol census published in 1880 in his article on Bristol demography and family life.⁷⁸ Byfield had a wife, two children, and eleven servants in his household in 1689, a large number of servants by seventeenth-century standards.⁷⁹ One servant, identified as "black" in the 1880 copy was likely Byfield's slave, Rose.⁸⁰

A 1684 deed delineated land apportioned to each of the Bristol proprietors.⁸¹ The entry noted that part of Byfield's original portion included, in addition to a lot in

Bristol proper

also eighty-six acre be ye same more or lesse being his share of Poppysquash Neck and is bounded westerly by ye salt water or bay northerly partly by ye land belonging to the

⁷⁷ Munro, 65-67.

⁷⁸ Demos, 46.

⁷⁹ "Census of Bristol in Plymouth Colony, now in Rhode Island, 1689," *New England Historical and Genealogical Register*, 34 (1880), 404-405.

⁸⁰ Warren and Kennedy, 11.

⁸¹ Book 1, Page 1 from February 20, 1684 in *Abstract of Land Records, 1680-1807, Bristol, RI*, 27, (BTH). A copy of the 1684 deed exists in Book 1, Page 1 of the Northern Bristol County Registry of Deeds, Taunton, Massachusetts, hereafter cited as (NBCRD).

Gorams partly by ye Marsh late belonging to John Saffin, easterly by ye land of John Walley easterly by ye harbour...⁸²

Byfield made many subsequent purchases of property on Poppasquash, as exhibited by additional deeds recorded in the *Abstract of Land Records, 1680-1807, Bristol, RI*. A copy of a map (see Appendix 3: *Plan of Town of Bristol: A True Copy Attest John H. Church, Town Clerk*. (William M. Perry), (BHPS)) in the collection of the Bristol Historical and Preservation Society illustrates boundary lines across early Bristol. The map shows holdings from 1682-1697, and it is likely that Byfield acquired what is currently the Coggeshall Farm Museum property with his initial eighty-six acres.⁸³

According to Warren, between 1680 and 1723 Byfield acquired almost all of Poppasquash, growing his holdings on Poppasquash to six hundred and sixty acres.⁸⁴ A 1903 Abstract of Title for Colt's Poppasquash holdings described Byfield's tract of land using 1903 landmarks. Byfield's land was bounded "South by the Town Bridge and the Herreshoff Farm; West by Narragansett Bay; North by the Asylum Farm; and East by the main road leading from Bristol to Warren."⁸⁵

Samuel Viall and Heirs: 1723-1794

In 1723, a decade before Byfield's death, the Poppasquash property transferred to Samuel Viall. Two deeds reference the property: one dated to December 21, 1723 and another dated to January 6, 1723. Byfield sold his Poppasquash holdings "containing by Estimation Six hundred and Sixty acres" in a deed recorded on December 23, 1723

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ *Plan of Town of Bristol: A True Copy Attest John H. Church, Town Clerk*. (William M. Perry), (BHPS).

⁸⁴ Warren, 1.

⁸⁵ "Abstract of Title: Land of William D'Wolf," Box 53, Folder 114, Group 78, Series XI, Colt Family Papers, Mss. Gr. 78, University of Rhode Island Library, hereafter cited as (URI).

to Viall, a “Yeoman,” for “Eleven Thousand and Five Hundred Pounds of Current money of New England.”⁸⁶ The land and boundaries were described in detailed as

being the Nortward Part or end of the farm or Neck called Pappasquash Neck whereon the said Co^{ll} Byfield now liveth: And is butted and bounded as followeth Northwesterly on Land belonging to Co^{ll} Nathaniel Paine Westwardly on the Bay or Salt water Eastwardly on the Country Road extending along said Roade. Southwardly to a stake in the ground and from said stake west six Degrees and an half North Seventeen Rods and four foot being about five foot to the Southward of the well and from the end of [indecipherable] whereon the windmill now stands and from there bounded Southward and Eastwardly round by Bristol harbour or Saltwater and so to Extend Southwardly on the whole Breadth of said Neck to an East and West Line across the said Neck there being a Stone patche into the ground on the East side of said Neck bounded Southwardly on said Line and Stone with an other Stone pitched into ye ground in said Line on the west side of said Neck or howsoever otherwise bounded or reputed to be bounded Together...⁸⁷

The December deed was followed by another deed dated January 6, 1723/4.

Recorded on May 16, 1724, this deed identified the previous purchase. Viall granted Byfield certain rights to the property, including “free Liberty of Improving the Tomb built by the Said Byfield in the Farm I lately bought of him.”⁸⁸ Most likely, the January transaction occurred after the initial transfer of Byfield’s 660 acres. The 1723 date may be due to the Julian calendar.⁸⁹

In discussing Nathaniel Byfield, Munro noted the nearby “remains of a tomb wherein lie buried those of his family who died during his residence in Bristol.”⁹⁰ It is unclear whether he was referring to the Byfield stone marker currently located on Coggeshall Farm Museum’s property. This may be the tomb mentioned in a deed

⁸⁶ Book 15, Page 154, (NBCRD).

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Book 15, Page 335, (NBCRD).

⁸⁹ Under the Julian calendar, the year was not changed until March 25.

⁹⁰ Munro, 66.

dated January 6, 1723.⁹¹ The tomb did not belong to Byfield, as he passed away in 1733 and was buried in Boston in the Granary Burying Ground.⁹²

After Viall's death on June 10, 1749, the records become rather unclear.⁹³ Viall willed ten acres of land to the First Congregational Church of Bristol. Viall's will divided the land on Poppasquash into three unequal parts, granting one each to Viall's daughter Susannah Richmond, his grandson Samuel Church, and his granddaughter Martha Church. Susannah Richmond received the southern half of his Poppasquash holdings, containing the Coggeshall Farm Museum plot. To his "Beloved Daughter Susanna Richmond" Viall bestowed

the one half part of all my housing and Lands (Except the said ten acres) for her use Benefit and Improvement during the Term of her natural life and at her Decease to Defend to & to be Divided among Her Children Lawfully Begotten or to be Begotten of her Body (or their Legall Representatives in case any of them shall Decease before her)...⁹⁴

The land seems to have stayed within the family, though it is unclear how it transferred among Richmond's heirs. Records indicate that Samuel Vial Peck, likely the namesake of Samuel Viall, definitively owned the land in 1799 when it was sold to Shearjashub Bourn.⁹⁵

Samuel Vial Peck: 1794-1799

Samuel Vial Peck, son of Mary (Richmond) Peck and Thomas Peck, owned land on Poppasquash neck between 1794 and 1799.⁹⁶ Viall purchased most of it from his brother Nathaniel between 1794 and 1796, though it is unclear how the land initially

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² The mystery of Byfield's tomb continued to pique the interest of Baber and Coulter, who reported on it in 1977.

⁹³ Probate Card for Samuel Viall Esq., (BTH).

⁹⁴ Will Book 1, Page 63, (BTH).

⁹⁵ Deed Book 6, Page 235, (BTH).

⁹⁶ Ira Peck, *A Genealogical History of the Descendants of Joseph Peck* (Boston: A. Mudge & Son, 1868), 144.

transferred to Nathaniel and Samuel. In one transfer, Samuel Vial, noted as a yeoman purchased a “Tract of Land Lying and being in Bristol aforesaid on the North Point of Poppasquash” from his brother Nathaniel.⁹⁷ Munro mentions Samuel V. Peck as one of the charter members of the Bristol Train of Artillery, an artillery unit of the militia, which activated on June 1794. Peck was elected Second Lieutenant, with a rank of Second Major. According to Munro, “the company was made independent of all regiments; when in active service it was to be under the command of the governor of the State only. Its members...were exempted from bearing arms, or doing military duty in the militia of the State.”⁹⁸

On March 15, 1796, Samuel Vial Peck sold a tract of land to Simeon Potter. Peck noted in the deed that the land was “the same land that the Samuel Vial Peck and My Brother Nathaniel Peck Inherited as heirs to our Great Grandfather Samuel Vial [unintelligible].”⁹⁹ This proved that the Peck brothers inherited the land through the Richmond female line. There is no evidence as to whether the great-grandchildren inherited their holdings directly from Richmond or her daughter, Mary Peck.

Records point to the establishment of the Coggeshall farmhouse sometime during the Viall, Richmond, or Peck ownership of the property. Based on extant deeds and architectural assessments it is unlikely that landowners established a farm at Coggeshall until at least the mid to late eighteenth century. Warren gives a date of circa 1750 for the establishment of farmhouse, though she provides no evidence to base this claim. She indicates that the farm “may have been started by Samuel

⁹⁷ Deed Book 4, Page 316, (BTH).

⁹⁸ Munro, 247.

⁹⁹ Deed Book 4, Page 315, (BTH).

Viall.”¹⁰⁰ On April 30, 1794, Nathaniel Peck sold 105 acres to Samuel Vial Peck. With the acreage he included “all the buildings” on the land, though this does not specify whether a dwelling house was located on the property.¹⁰¹

Shearjashub Bourn: 1799-1802

By March 8, 1799, record of the house and well are noted in a deed which transfers 102 acres from Samuel Vial Peck to Shearjashub Bourn. (see Appendix 4: Coggeshall Farm Museum Dwelling House) This 1799 deed mentions “a well being a few rods Northeasterly from the dwelling House.”¹⁰² Another deed written on March 8, 1799 notes “a stone wall from the aforesaid Cherry tree walk a round the aforesaid Bourns dwelling house.”¹⁰³ A later deed, written on September 24, 1799 again denotes the location of a dwelling house belonging to Bourn in discussing land boundaries “...leading from the cherry tree walk (so called) or way going toward the farm of Thomas Greene Esq. westerly by the dwelling house of said Shearj^a Bourne this the mill Swamp until it comes to the stone wall westward of said Swamp...”¹⁰⁴

A 1903 Abstract of Title drawn up for Samuel Pomeroy Colt contains a map similar to the one at the Bristol Town Hall Archives, in addition to land evidence records. According to the Abstract of Title, the March 8, 1799 deed transferred land including, Five lots F, Five lots E, One lot A, (the greater portion of this lot only) and One lot B. While the dwelling house is not described nor is it depicted in either map, its location would be within the vicinity of Parcel E.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁰ Warren, 6.

¹⁰¹ Deed Book 4, Page 316, (BTH).

¹⁰² Deed Book 6, Page 235, (BTH).

¹⁰³ Ibid., Page 237.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., Page 176.

¹⁰⁵ “Abstract of Title: Land of William D’Wolf,” Box 53, Folder 114, Group 78, Series XI, Colt Family Papers, Mss. Gr. 78, (URI).

Although the deeds provide no details on the physical features of the house, the dwelling house matches the location of the Coggeshall Museum Farmhouse, which sits nearby a swamp across the road from a freshwater well. According to Warren, the Mazzard Cherry Lane or Cherry tree walk references the “narrow, treelined section of Colt Drive [which] branches easterly...to Coggeshall Farm.”¹⁰⁶ An undated report by then Roger Williams College Professor of Historic Preservation Kevin Jordan explains the probability that the dwelling house dates to the mid-eighteenth century, despite omissions in the written record.¹⁰⁷ Jordan notes that

...it is apparent that the building is earlier in construction and is more than likely the home Samuel Viall built for his daughter [Susannah Viall] as a wedding present in 1749. The original single layer plank frame construction on the rear wall certainly confirms this mid century [sic] origin. The extraordinarily massive stone chimney foundation is also indicative of this pre-Revolutionary period. The plan of the original house, with three main rooms served by the central chimney and a small side room (called a “bourning” room after 19th century fashion) is also consistent with this mid-century date.¹⁰⁸

Based on this information, a dwelling house existed during Bourn’s tenure, if not earlier. The records available do not point to a definitive date for the structure.

Shearjashub Bourn, not to be confused with his father of the same name, was the brother of the more renowned Benjamin Bourn.¹⁰⁹ Munro cites the younger Shearjashub Bourn’s commercial firm, Bourn and Wardell, as one of the foremost shipping companies of the time.¹¹⁰ “Spoliation Claims” in *The Bristol Phoenix*, dated February 21, 1885 include just three of many vessels owned by Bourn, specifically the:

¹⁰⁶ Warren, 2.

¹⁰⁷ Kevin Jordan served as a member of Coggeshall Farm Museum’s executive board in the late 1970s while working at Roger Williams College as a professor of historic preservation.

¹⁰⁸ Kevin E. Jordan, Roger Williams College, Architectural Report for Coggeshall Farm House: Artifact and Historical Document, undated, (CFM).

¹⁰⁹ Munro, 104-105.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 368.

Sloop Ranger, 61 tons, registered September 14, 1796, owned by Shearjashub Bourn and Samuel Wardwell, both of Bristol.

Schooner Franklin, 67 tons, registered September 14, 1796, owned by Shearjashub Bourn, and Samuel Wardwell, of Bristol, and Eben Cole, of Warren.

Sloop Becca, 64 tons, registered May 25, 1797; and sloop Union, 62 tons, registered December 21, 1797, both owned by Shearjashub Bourn, and Samuel Wardwell, of Bristol.¹¹¹

Bourn and Wardell's partnership went beyond their shipping interests. In 1792 the team opened a rum distillery. According to Munro, "for nearly thirty-five years, two hundred gallons of rum were made each day. A ready market for its product was found on the coast of Africa."¹¹² Bourn was clearly involved in the slave trade, if only through the production and sale of rum on the African coast. Coughtry identifies Shearjashub Bourn as a slaver.¹¹³

William D'Wolf and Heirs: 1802-1895

William D'Wolf purchased Bourn's property in a deed dated December 8, 1802 which transferred approximately 102 acres from Shearjashub Bourn and his wife Rachel to D'Wolf.¹¹⁴ In a later deed dated 1804, Bourn inadvertently provided a brief timeline of the property confirming its transfer history. This document identified "a stonewall from the aforesaid cherry tree walk or round the aforesaid D'Wolfs dwelling house on said tract. hereby granted The above described premises being the same which Samuel Vial Peck of said Bristol conveyed to me."¹¹⁵ Martha Peck, wife of Samuel Vial Peck, mentioned what was likely the property in a separate sale of thirteen acres and thirty four rods to D'Wolf in 1805. Using the Coggeshall lot as a

¹¹¹ "Spoliation Claims," *The Bristol Phoenix*, February 21, 1885, 2, accessed March 12, 2018, <http://bristol.advantage-preservation.com/>.

¹¹² Munro, 246.

¹¹³ Coughtry, 46-47.

¹¹⁴ Deed Book 6, Page 237, (BTH).

¹¹⁵ Deed Book 8, Page 84, (BTH).

boundary, she noted “the corner of a tract of land sold by the said Samuel Vial Peck in his life time to Shearjashub Bourn now owned by the said William D’Wolf.”¹¹⁶

After purchasing the property from Bourne in 1802, the land would remain in the D’Wolf family for most of the century. The Honorable Major William D’Wolf, born on December 19, 1762 to Mark Anthony and Abigail D’Wolf, came of age during the American Revolution.¹¹⁷ D’Wolf followed in the footsteps of his father and brothers and entered the slave trade in 1789. Between then and 1807, he participated in twenty-one slaving voyages, eighteen of which were joint ventures with other partners.¹¹⁸ Participation in the triangular trade brought D’Wolf and his family great wealth, at the expense of the enslaved Africans he and his family trafficked across the Atlantic. D’Wolf owned Hey Bonnie Hall, or the DeWolf-Middleton estate on Poppasquash, built between 1803 and 1808.¹¹⁹ By 1823 William D’Wolf owned a total of 257 ¼ acres of land on Poppasquash through additional purchases, including one in 1803 from Samuel Viall Peck and Martha Peck.¹²⁰

After D’Wolf’s death on April 19, 1829, an intense legal battle ensued between D’Wolf’s children and grandchildren, both legitimate and illegitimate over D’Wolf’s holdings on Poppasquash and elsewhere in Bristol. Eventually the courts auctioned the majority D’Wolf’s lands, giving the proceeds to his heirs.¹²¹

¹¹⁶ Deed Book 7, Page 63, (BTH).

¹¹⁷ The name D’Wolf/DeWolf/DeWolfe is common throughout Bristol history. There are numerous ways of spelling it. Wherever possible, I have attempted to keep the name as it existed in the original source material.

¹¹⁸ Coughtry, 47-48.

¹¹⁹ “DeWolf-Middleton House, Poppasquash Road, Bristol, Bristol County, RI,” Library of Congress, accessed February 23, 2018, <https://www.loc.gov/resource/hhh.ri0342.photos/?sp=3>.

¹²⁰ Deed Book 6, Page 268, (BTH).

¹²¹ George B. Barrows, *Reports of Cases Argued and Determined in the Supreme Court of Rhode Island*, vol. 18 (Providence, RI: E. L. Freeman & Son, 1896), 810-818.

Evidence of the Coggeshalls residing at the farm is clear from the records of the *DeWolf v. Middleton* trial. In Exhibit C, Maria D. W. Rogers releases her interest in the property and grants “Chandler H. Coggeshall, of said Bristol...the privilege of cultivating said farm during the year 1886.”¹²² Receipts of rents and profits recorded in 1895 from the D’Wolf estate, part of it being the Poppasquash property, included one year’s rent from “C.H. Coggeshall & Bros.” on May 6, for \$200.00 and “standing grass” on November 14, for \$20.00. D’Wolf paid the Coggeshall brothers \$4.00 for repairs on May 6, 1895.¹²³

A notice in *The Bristol Phoenix* on August 16, 1895 announced the auction of D’Wolf’s real estate on September 4. Included in the auction was the

farm or tract of land mentioned in said bill of complaint, situated on PAPPASQUASH, so called, in said Bristol, formerly belonging to William DeWolf, containing about 144 (one hundred and forty-four) acres, with the dwelling house and other buildings and improvements thereon, and bounded as follows, viz: Easterly upon Bristol Harbor westerly upon Narragansett Bay, northerly in part on land of Mrs. S. A. Taylor, in part on and angling with land of the estate of Stephen Church, deceased, in part on the public waters known as “Mill Gut” in part on land of Charles Chase, and in small part at the northwesterly corner of land of Eliza Mauran, and southerly on and angling with land formerly of Mark Antony DeWolf. The said farm on Pappasquash above described will be sold in parcels as directly by the decree of sale (such parcels being shown upon the plat of the estate) and the sale will take place on the premises.¹²⁴

A plat map from October 1895 shows the land of Mark A. DeWolf and provides a visual reference corresponding to the parcels up for auction. (see Appendix 5: Land of Mark A. Dewolf) The map references the Van Wickle purchase of 1895 as Van

¹²² David Baber and Eugene Coulter Papers (unfiled), (BHPS), from *William F. DeWolf et al v. Annie E. Middleton et als 1893*, Appellate Division, Rhode Island Supreme Court. The Bristol Historical and Preservation Society holds a duplicate of the entire case file. Baber and Coulter copied the file, noting the originals were “in a very delicate state.”

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ “Commissioner’s Sale of Real Estate,” *The Bristol Phoenix*, August 16, 1895, 3, accessed March 12, 2018, <http://bristol.advantage-preservation.com/>.

Wickle's name was faintly recorded within his purchased lots.¹²⁵ The original auction announcement characterized the Poppasquash parcels as follows:

First. The Parcel consisting of the three lots marked "G" on the said plat, containing by estimation about 28 acres, with a frontage on Narragansett Bay of about 88 rods...Second. The parcel consisting of five lots marked "F" on said plat. This parcel has a frontage of about 45 rods on the Bay... This parcel contains about 35 acres. Third. The parcel consisting of the five lots marked "E" on said plat. This is farming and meadow land of good quality and a portion thereof bounds upon the waters of the Mill Pond. It contains by estimation about 45 acres. Fourth. Lot marked "C" on said plat, containing about five acres. Fifth. The lot marked "D" on said plat, containing about seven acres. Sixth. The lot marked "B" on said plat, containing about four acres. These are mostly choice farming lands and "B" and "D" front upon the public road which leads a way which gives entrance to all the above. Seventh. The lot marked "A" on said plat....¹²⁶

On September 6, 1895 *The Bristol Phoenix* published the results of the auction.

Annie Middleton purchased parcel A, while Ezra Dixon purchased parcel G. The remaining parcels, B, C, D, E, and F, which included the tract on which Coggeshall Farm sits went to Augustus Stout Van Wickle.¹²⁷

Augustus Stout Van Wickle and Bessie Pardee Van Wickle McKee: 1895-1903

Van Wickle of Hazelton, Pennsylvania made his fortune as a coal baron and bank president.¹²⁸ He and his wife Bessie Pardee Van Wickle McKee are better known for their 1894 purchase of Blithewold, now a historic mansion, garden, and arboretum in Bristol.¹²⁹ The couple summered at Blithewold until an unfortunate skeet shooting accident took Van Wickle's life in 1898. The Van Wickle Gates at Brown University, his alma mater, were built at his bequest in 1901.¹³⁰ After Van Wickle's death in 1898,

¹²⁵ "Land of Mark A. Dewolf," Plat Book 2, Page 2, (BTH).

¹²⁶ "Commissioner's Sale of Real Estate" *The Bristol Phoenix*, August 16, 1895, 3.

¹²⁷ "Big Auction Sale," *The Bristol Phoenix*, September 6, 1895, 2, accessed March 12, 2018, <http://bristol.advantage-preservation.com/>.

¹²⁸ Warren, 1-2.

¹²⁹ "Blithewold History," accessed February 23, 2018, <https://www.blithewold.org/about/blithewold-history/>.

¹³⁰ "Encyclopedia Brunoniana | Van Wickle Gates," accessed February 23, 2018, http://www.brown.edu/Administration/News_Bureau/Databases/Encyclopedia/search.php?serial=V0020.

his holdings passed to his wife, Bessie Pardee Van Wickle. She later remarried and sold the land to Samuel Pomeroy Colt under the name Bessie Pardee McKee in 1903.¹³¹

Samuel Pomeroy Colt and Heirs: 1903-1965

Industrialist Colonel Samuel Pomeroy Colt, the namesake of Colt State Park, held the Coggeshall Farm land until its sale to the state of Rhode Island in 1965. Colt's mother Theodora Goujard deWolf Colt was a descendant of the D'Wolf family and the widow of Christopher Colt, brother of Colt revolver inventor Samuel Colt. During the nineteenth century, many of the town's old, elite families lost their place of prominence due to the fall of the maritime economy. After a number of decades away, Theodora deWolf Colt returned to Bristol, moving into Linden Place.¹³² Her son, Samuel Pomeroy Colt went on to influence Bristol beyond his major investments in real estate. His business ventures brought industry and jobs to the town, particularly the Industrial National Bank and the National Rubber Company. Colt even delved into Rhode Island politics, though his run for senator in the first decade of the twentieth century ended unsuccessfully.¹³³

Colt acquired portions Poppasquash in piecemeal transactions. His eventual bequest to the state comprised of 466 acres for Colt State Park, which included his acquisition of North Point Farm.¹³⁴ As early as 1907, Colt was in the process of opening the land to the public. In a letter to Bristol's electors, Colt expressed his wish

¹³¹ "Release of Title," Group 78, Series XI, Box 53, Folder 114, Colt Family Papers, Mss. Gr. 78, (URI).

¹³² Howe, 256-257.

¹³³ Ibid., 256-272.

¹³⁴ "Title Search of North Point Farm," Box 53, Folder 114, Group 78, Series XI, Colt Family Papers, Mss. Gr. 78, (URI).

to open the newly macadamized road at Poppasquash Farm to the public asking for the town to “convey...its interest” in Asylum Road. Colt hoped to connect the two roads for public access.¹³⁵ His estate opened to the public in 1913 and continued to be used for agricultural purposes after his death in 1921.¹³⁶ Colt’s farm held his stone barn, the “casino,” and a variety of sculptures and statuary. A sign welcomed visitors, “COLT FARM PRIVATE PROPERTY PVBLIC WELCOME.”¹³⁷

After Colt’s death, his heirs contested ownership of the land, with some wanting to sell and develop the property, while others wished to preserve it as open space.¹³⁸ Eventually, Governor John H. Chafee intervened, authorizing the state to take the land using eminent domain.¹³⁹ Chafee introduced the Green Acres Land Acquisition Act of 1964 (§ 32-4-1) to the general assembly. After it passed, it preserved Colt’s farm, in addition to a number of other properties during the 1960s and 1970s as protected open space. The Green Acres Land Acquisition Act was significant to the historic preservation movement in Rhode Island. As a result of the state’s legal action, Colt State Park was conserved as a cultural and recreational area for the enjoyment of both Bristolians and Rhode Island residents.¹⁴⁰ The town clerk described the transfers,

¹³⁵ “Letter to the Electors of the Town of Bristol,” Box 53, Folder 114, Group 78, Series XI, Colt Family Papers, Mss. Gr. 78, (URI).

¹³⁶ Warren, 2.

¹³⁷ Howe, 282. Colt spent much of the last few decades of his life seeking political office. While he never achieved the political career he hoped for, Colt Farm allowed him to entertain prominent socialites and dignitaries from both the political arena and the business world. It is not clear why Colt opened his farm to the public, but according to Morris and Howe, Colt showed a genuine interest in the town’s residents during his lifetime.

¹³⁸ Warren, 2.

¹³⁹ “Rhode Island Remembers Sen Chafee,” *The Bristol Phoenix*, October 28, 1999, <http://bristol.advantage-preservation.com/>.

¹⁴⁰ “Ocean State Outdoors: Rhode Island’s Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan,” State of Rhode Island: Division of Statewide Planning, 2009, accessed June 02, 2018, <http://www.planning.ri.gov/planning-areas/land-use/outdoor-recreation.php>.

including the Coggeshall Farm Museum property, in the Green Acres no. 100 plat acquisition, recorded on August 3, 1965.¹⁴¹

The State of Rhode Island: 1965-Present

The Bristol Historical Society, later renamed the Bristol Historical and Preservation Society, acquired a lease to the property for the planned restoration of the dwelling house from the state of Rhode Island through the Department of Natural Resources. An Amendment of Lease¹⁴² dated to October 17, 1968 provided the society with rights to “certain parcels of land located at Colt State Park, Bristol, Rhode Island for a period of twenty (20) years from the 1st day of August, 1968 to and including the 31st day of July, 1988.”¹⁴³ The amendment added additional conditions, including a responsibility to approve any construction, improvements, or alterations to the premises with the Department of Natural Resources. It also removed liability from the lessor, the state of Rhode Island.¹⁴⁴

Records indicate that George L. Sisson, Jr., president of the Bristol Historical Society, planned to restore the dwelling house and operate “The Coggeshall Farm” as a small family farm prior to the industrial revolution.¹⁴⁵ The minutes from a June 25, 1973 board meeting record the possibility of divesting the farm from the society. Eventually a vote by the board ended in the separation of the two entities before the end of 1973. Secretary Carol W. Wardwell noted that “Mr. Sisson expressed his hope that the Farm could be incorporated as a museum...”¹⁴⁶

¹⁴¹ Deed Book 159, Page 87, (BTH).

¹⁴² According to the Amendment of Lease, an Indenture of Lease was entered on August 19, 1968.

¹⁴³ Amendment of Lease, 1968, (CFM).

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ George L. Sisson, Jr., “The Old Rhode Island Farm At Colt State Park,” undated brochure, (CFM).

¹⁴⁶ Carol W. Wardwell, Minutes from the Regular Meeting of the Bristol Historical and Preservation Society, June 25, 1973, (CFM).

On January 10, 1974 Coggeshall Farm Museum, Inc. held its first meeting of incorporators, with George L. Sisson, Jr. and Harold W. Demopoulos present.¹⁴⁷ Hereafter, the museum operated as an independent non-profit organization. Over the course of the next few years, the newly created Coggeshall Farm Museum board worked to transfer the lease to their organization. As of January 2018, Coggeshall Farm Museum, Inc. continues to lease from the state of Rhode Island, though they must abide by the regulations governing the state park.¹⁴⁸ Two fields abutting Poppasquash Road were added to the lease in 1978, completing the museum's forty-eight total acres.¹⁴⁹

The historical farm project, initially known as the Old Rhode Island Farm, quickly assumed the name of Coggeshall Farm Museum. Coggeshall Farm is somewhat of a misnomer. Warren states that “‘Coggeshall Farm’ refers to the tenant family who worked the land from the early 1830s. Records indicate that Chandler Coggeshall and his brothers lived at the farm in 1895 until its purchase in 1903 by Samuel Pomeroy Colt.”¹⁵⁰ Chandler Coggeshall was the most notable member of the Coggeshall family to reside in the dwelling house, as he was involved in the founding the Rhode Island College of Agricultural and Mechanical Arts, which eventually became the University of Rhode Island. In *The University of Rhode Island: A History of Land-Grant Education in Rhode Island* historian Herman F. Eschenbacher stated that Coggeshall was initially brought onto the Board of Managers at the school in

¹⁴⁷ First Meeting of Incorporators, Coggeshall Farm Museum, Inc., January 10, 1974, (CFM).

¹⁴⁸ “Our History and Mission,” Coggeshall Farm Museum, accessed January 29, 2018, <http://coggeshallfarm.org/about/our-history-and-mission>.

¹⁴⁹ Thom Thompson, Meeting of the Board of Trustees of Coggeshall Farm Museum, January 12, 1978, (CFM).

¹⁵⁰ Warren, 6.

1888 to help shape the new curriculum. Coggeshall was an agriculturalist member of the Bristol school committee.¹⁵¹ He also served in the Rhode Island State General Assembly from 1883-1889, and later as a senator from 1893-1897.¹⁵² Within the Board of Managers, Coggeshall was instrumental to the development of the college. He used his political position to press for financial appropriations from the Senate Finance Committee for the school's needed building projects during its formative years.¹⁵³

While Chandler Coggeshall was influencing the state's agricultural college and serving as a politician, he lived and worked the land a tenant farmer in Bristol. Colt's financial records provide proof that the Coggeshalls continued to reside in the farmhouse for at least a few years after Colt purchased the property. Colt received \$200.00 rent from Chandler H. Coggeshall on November 24, 1903, March 11, 1905, and May 31, 1906, after which financial records cease.¹⁵⁴ Documents, including a receipt of rent from "C.H. Coggeshall & Bros." used as evidence in the *DeWolf v. Middleton* trial place the family, likely including Chandler Coggeshall, as tenants around 1895.¹⁵⁵ Based on this conflicting information, the length of time in which the Coggeshall family lived at the farm remains in question. No concrete evidence places the Coggeshall family at the farm during the museum's target decade of interpretation,

¹⁵¹ Herman F. Eschenbacher, *The University of Rhode Island: A History of Land-Grant Education in Rhode Island* (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1967), 25.

¹⁵² *Representative Men and Old Families of Rhode Island: Genealogical Records and Historical Sketches of Prominent and Representative Citizens and of Many of the Old Families.* (Chicago: J.H. Beers & Co., 1908), 1828.

¹⁵³ Eschenbacher, 96-117.

¹⁵⁴ Income and Expenditures: Annual Summaries, Box 50, Folder 96, Group 78, Series XI, Colt Family Papers, Mss. Gr. 78, (URI).

¹⁵⁵ *William F. DeWolf et al v. Annie E. Middleton et als 1893.*

the 1790s.¹⁵⁶ While the Coggeshalls lived in the dwelling house in the late nineteenth century, Wilbur, the father of Chandler Coggeshall does not appear on the Bristol census record until 1840.¹⁵⁷ James Coggeshall, the father of Wilbur Coggeshall could possibly be the James cited in a 1790 census in Bristol, though his tenure in Bristol was short-lived.¹⁵⁸ Later census records indicate that James moved to nearby Warren.¹⁵⁹ By 1810, James Coggeshall appears on the Middletown, RI census. The 1830 census shows a James Coggeshall in Middletown, RI, along with an unusually large household including two adult males between 20 and 30 years old, and one between 30 and 40. If Wilbur was born in 1799 and married in 1833 he may be the eldest male listed within James Coggeshall's household. His appearance in the 1840 Bristol census after his 1833 marriage likely coincides with the establishment of his own household in Bristol.¹⁶⁰ Unless Wilbur Coggeshall first settled elsewhere in Bristol before moving to the Coggeshall Farm Museum dwelling house, 1833 represents the earliest date that the Coggeshall family may have lived on the property.

¹⁵⁶ "Our History and Mission," Coggeshall Farm Museum, accessed January 29, 2018, <http://coggeshallfarm.org/about/our-history-and-mission>.

¹⁵⁷ "United States Census, 1840," database with images, FamilySearch (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:XHYB-WPZ> : 18 August 2017), Wilbur Coggeshall, Bristol, Bristol, Rhode Island, United States; citing p. 50, NARA microfilm publication M704, (Washington D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, n.d.), roll 504; FHL microfilm 22,260.

¹⁵⁸ "United States Census, 1790," database with images, FamilySearch (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:XHKT-WRJ> : accessed 6 March 2018), James Coggeshall, Bristol, Bristol, Rhode Island, United States; citing p. 154, NARA microfilm publication M637, (Washington D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, n.d.), roll 10; FHL microfilm 568,150.

¹⁵⁹ "United States Census, 1800," database with images, FamilySearch (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:XH5R-M6Z> : accessed 14 March 2018), James Coggeshall, Warren, Bristol, Rhode Island, United States; citing p. 17, NARA microfilm publication M32, (Washington D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, n.d.), roll 45; FHL microfilm 218,680.

¹⁶⁰ *Representative Men and Old Families of Rhode Island: Genealogical Records and Historical Sketches of Prominent and Representative Citizens and of Many of the Old Families*, 1828.

The known history of Coggeshall Farm and Poppasquash Neck provides the museum with scant information on which to base its interpretation. This brief history of the land and owners of Coggeshall Farm benefits little from the published sources on Bristol history, as small historic sites like Coggeshall Farm held little importance to antiquarian authors. The history of the farm mirrors the historical record in at least one way. More historical records exist on prominent families or figures considered to be historically important, like Byfield, D'Wolf, and Colt, while very few records exist on the Coggeshall family and other tenants who lived and worked on the property throughout much of its history, up until the early 1960s.¹⁶¹ Property owners can be traced through deeds, but it is much more difficult to determine who was living and working on the property. In addition to compiling information on tenants of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, it is imperative that Coggeshall Farm Museum record the histories of living residents who resided onsite in the twentieth century, despite the museum's target date of the 1790s.¹⁶² Establishing a basic timeline of the actual history allows for further comparison to the museum's interpretative narrative. Whether this interpretation conformed to the historical record, or more likely conformed to the vision as espoused by antiquarians like Munro, is another question entirely.

¹⁶¹

¹⁶² It is not uncommon for past residents to return to the museum. Keith Luther visited the museum in July 2018 and spoke briefly with the author. Luther lived on the property as a teenager with his father Charles Luther Jr. and family from approximately 1951-1962. As one of the last tenant farmer families to reside on the property before it was seized by the state of Rhode Island, his experience was markedly different from that of a family in the 1790s. Luther provided valuable information about the house and his life as a tenant farmer during the mid-twentieth century. Arguably, his story is just as important than that of the anonymous tenant farmers of the 1790s.

CHAPTER 4

THE OLD RHODE ISLAND FARM: 1967-1984

Coggeshall Farm Museum, as an institution, emerged due to the efforts of the Bristol Historical Society, later the Bristol Historical and Preservation Society, and the society's farm committee. After only a few years, the museum had departed drastically from the founder's initial plans. During the museum's early years, from 1967-1984, the board attempted to establish a stable base from which it could build a successful living history museum. Members of the Bristol Historical Society quickly fought to save the Coggeshall dwelling house from destruction, however the board soon disagreed over the museum's intended direction. Throughout these years the museum suffered frequently due to financial challenges and conflicting personalities. After fragmenting into a new, independent organization, Coggeshall Farm Museum, Inc. attempted to define an identity for their new institution, which it continued to question until it underwent strategic planning after 1984.

Minutes from the October 30, 1967 meeting on the "Historical Farm Project" indicate that the Bristol Historical Society became involved in the Coggeshall Farm Museum property after Colt State Park officials announced that they planned to tear down the Coggeshall Farm dwelling house. The society's president, George Sisson spearheaded the endeavor, forming a farm committee, after the group expressed interest in taking responsibility for the farm. During the November meeting, members noted that "certification of the antiquity and authenticity" of both the Coggeshall

farmhouse and the nearby Church house had been sent to park officials, “with suggestion that both houses plus the Revolutionary Redoubt be used as a nucleus of a Sturbridge Village type of operation.”¹⁶³ The origin of the idea stemmed from Bristol Historical Society member Lieut. Col. Ruth M. Briggs, who sent the information to the park officials. In January 1968, Sisson “introduced Col. Briggs’ idea of making the old houses and Redoubt in Colt Park into an enterprise such as Sturbridge Village” at the board meeting.¹⁶⁴ Later that month at the general meeting, Lieut. Col. Briggs gave a report on the project. In May 1968, the board authorized the negotiation and future acquisition of the Coggeshall Farm and Church house.¹⁶⁵

Although Lieut. Col. Briggs first proposed the preservation project to the Bristol Historical Society, it was George L. Sisson, Jr. who received a majority of the credit. Sisson, a politically connected and civic minded individual, championed the creation of a historical farm on the premises and remained involved in the museum’s operations from the initial planning phases until his death in 2009. The State of Rhode Island expressed condolences for Sisson’s passing in a Senate resolution dated June, 30, 2009, giving some clues to his life. Sisson worked most of his life in the television industry. Before retiring in 1980, he established the first cable television system in Rhode Island. Beyond his involvement in the Bristol Historical Society, Sisson was Chairman of Save the Bay, the state Coastal Resources Management Council and the Governor’s Advisory Committee on Elderly Affairs. He lent his preservation efforts to the historic home and museum, Linden Place, and he was involved in the planning and

¹⁶³ Excerpts from Minutes Regarding the Historical Farm Project, 1967- 1971, (BHPS).

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

construction of the East Bay Bike Path.¹⁶⁶ In 2010, Coggeshall Farm Museum Treasurer Stephen Lake recognized the importance of the museum to Sisson, believing it was the project “most significant and dearest to him.”¹⁶⁷ Lake stated that “[t]he joy that George took in telling of his meeting with John Chafee to try and save the farm house that would eventually become Coggeshall Farm Museum served to underscore his passion for the farm and how one man’s vision can help create something meaningful and lasting.”¹⁶⁸ Sisson’s interests in both building and land preservation seemed well placed in the Old Farm project. Sisson continued to serve as honorary chairman of the board when he did not hold an official title. Sisson, in many ways, was the Ford or Rockefeller of Coggeshall Farm Museum. During the museum’s early years, at a time when he was heavily involved in the museum’s creation, Sisson steered the direction of the institution and provided valuable financial contributions. The board continued to rely on Sisson’s expertise and guidance even when he was not directly involved in the museum leadership.

As Coggeshall Farm Museum fashioned its identity, it looked to Old Sturbridge Village, a large and successful living historical village in Sturbridge, Massachusetts as a model. Throughout the 1960s and into the 1970s, Old Sturbridge Village saw both great growth and unanticipated challenges as it focused on the expansion of the Pliny Freeman Farm.¹⁶⁹ During this period of growth, Coggeshall Farm Museum hoped to emulate the larger, more successful institution. Scholar Laura Abing stated that

¹⁶⁶ 2009 – S 1045 LC02952 State of RI.

¹⁶⁷ Stephen Lake, “Marvelous: A Tribute to George Sisson,” *The Coggeshall Farmer*, May 5, 2010, (CFM). Lake currently serves as President of the Board of Directors, February 2018.

¹⁶⁸ Stephen Lake. Lake was referring to Rhode Island Governor John Chafee, who also served as senator. Chafee was instrumental to the founding of Colt State Park.

¹⁶⁹ Laura E. Abing, 179-205. The Pliny Freeman Farm consists of a farmhouse and barn from the Sturbridge area, which were relocated to the museum property. The farm was and continues to be interpreted as a period family farmstead.

“[i]nterest in the Village farm paralleled the national development of the living historical farm movement—a development in which the Village played a significant role.”¹⁷⁰ By 1976 the Freeman Farm at Old Sturbridge Village was considered one of the best historical farms in North America.¹⁷¹ Coggeshall had access to materials from Sturbridge, proven through brochures and booklets in the museum’s archives. One such document, titled “The Village and the Nation” dates to 1974-1975.

The Bristol Historical Society established Coggeshall Farm Museum partly in response to modernization while hoping to preserve a past that encompassed an entire century of agricultural history. Rather than digging deeply into the historical record, the initial founders hoped to present a rather antiquarian lifestyle that was vanishing rapidly in the modern era, albeit one colored by the lens of nostalgia. In many ways, Sisson’s goals mimicked those of museum founders and historians like Munro who came before him.

Sisson publically provided his rationale for creating the Bristol Historical Society’s living history venture in an August 1968 speech at the society’s annual dinner. Sisson delineated plans for the project, including his anticipated Old Rhode Island Farm. The society envisioned the project as a way to preserve Bristol physically and culturally amidst changes in the twentieth century.

In what was likely a rousing presentation recorded in writing for publication in the minutes of the society’s September 1968 monthly meeting, Sisson began by reminding the society of its purpose to preserve and conserve cultural heritage and natural resources. He conceded that history did not begin with the Mayflower nor end

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., 205.

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 214.

with the Potato Famine, and he acknowledged that history would be made by “groups who came to America from Ireland, Italy, Portugal and other countries and areas including Africa...”¹⁷² Sisson described Bristol as a “blessed” town, yet one that was unfortunately succumbing to the travails of the modern era. Of his chief concerns, the arrival of “thousands of additional citizens” seemed to be most pressing as he considered the world to be “expanding at the seams as more and more people arrive and more and more stay longer.”¹⁷³ While he may simply have been addressing the skyrocketing growth of Bristol due to an increase in number of citizens and tourists, the speech possessed a twinge of xenophobia. According to Sisson, the society needed to serve as “the Town’s most reliable watchdog,” ensuring “orderly development, proper and supervised growth.”¹⁷⁴

A June 27, 1969 *Bristol Phoenix* article, “Bristol Schools Face Rocketing Enrollment,” sheds light on the dilemma that Sisson hoped to address. Although the birth rate was down, the town’s overall population grew 7.9% from 1960 to 1965 due to an influx of Portuguese immigrants from the Azores. The article notes that this increase altered the distribution and density of the town’s residents, while also increasing the number of building permits needed to accommodate the growing population. The growth impacted schools, which then scrambled to find space for the new students.¹⁷⁵

Sisson’s mentality most resembles that of Ford and Rockefeller, who similarly used their museums to extol the past while promoting a prescribed type of progress. It

¹⁷² Minutes for the Bristol Historical Society Monthly Meeting, September 30, 1968, (BHPS).

¹⁷³ Ibid.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

¹⁷⁵ “Bristol Schools Face Rocketing Enrollment,” *The Bristol Phoenix*, June 27, 1969: 10, accessed July 3, 2018, <http://bristol.advantage-preservation.com/>.

was Henry Ford's interest in restoration and preservation that ignited the trend in living history museums. Ford's 1929 Greenfield Village was emblematic of a pattern that emerged in the 1920s and 1930s as museums were financed by so-called captains of industry (or robber barons) and their heirs. These men essentially promoted their perception of the past by heavily investing in it. In *Mystic Chords of Memory*, Historian Michael Kammen investigated a brief period of time roughly between 1924 and 1934, during which time individuals like Henry Francis du Pont used wealth from the family DuPont chemical fortune to install period rooms at his family home, Winterthur, in Delaware.¹⁷⁶ Their museums were part of a wider trend of social engineering through philanthropy, a notion also investigated by historian Michael Wallace.¹⁷⁷

Ford used his great fame and fortune to create a shrine that glorified the industrialist and entrepreneur, essentially a museum to his own legacy. He instilled in his visitors the belief that the past should be venerated, yet at the same time he stressed the role of industrial progress as a virtue of the American past and present. Visitors have frequented Greenfield Village since the 1930s, though it was not until the 1980s that scholarly research highlighted the role that Henry Ford's personal and professional beliefs had in shaping the narratives.

John D. Rockefeller Jr. approached the historic restoration of Colonial Williamsburg in a similar manner to Ford. Rather than showing the complexities of

¹⁷⁶ Michael G. Kammen, *The Mystic Chords of Memory: The Transformation of Tradition in American Culture*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1993) 347.

¹⁷⁷ Michael Wallace, "Visiting the Past: History Museums in the United States," *Radical History Review* 1981, no. 25, 64.

history, Rockefeller stressed the patriotic virtues of the city's colonial citizens.¹⁷⁸ Like Ford, Rockefeller's museum emphasized nostalgia for the past, and scientific and industrial progress for the future. Perhaps even more problematic was that historians regarded Rockefeller's interpretive narrative as a historical falsehood. According to historian Anders Greenspan, Rockefeller used his museum to carry on the Rockefeller family name, inspire patriotism and veneration of the past, and to instill virtues in the public to "create a country that would be more resilient to negative outside influences, such as Bolshevism."¹⁷⁹ While the narrative may have shifted over the decades, these museums were vehicles that shaped national values, driven by the museum founders, who for decades exerted control over the museum narrative.

The minutes from the September meeting of the Bristol Historical Society also include excerpts from Sisson's speech for the dedication of Colt State Park. After explaining the society's initial involvement in the project, and the early plan of for the "Historic Restoration Area," Sisson presented his disconsolate views on Rhode Island's vanishing history amidst suburbanization and urbanization:

Rhode island is steeped in history. There is literally not an acre of land in the entire state that does not have some historic significance. The sad part is that too much of historic Rhode Island has been:
'Bull dozed'
'Black topped'
or 'High rised'
A plaque inset in a sidewalk is generally the only marker... a great monument to 20th Century Progress and The American Dream!¹⁸⁰

It was clear that Sisson, and likely other members of the Bristol Historical Society felt that the past was worth saving and emphasizing. Sisson questioned the twentieth

¹⁷⁸ Kammen, 359-364.

¹⁷⁹ Anders Greenspan, "How Philanthropy Can Alter Our View of the Past: A Look at Colonial Williamsburg," *Voluntas* 5, no. 2 (1994): 193-195, doi:10.1007/bf02353985.

¹⁸⁰ Minutes for the Bristol Historical Society Monthly Meeting, September 30, 1968, (BHPS).

century definition of progress. As he suggested, true progress in Bristol required the assistance from vested watchdog groups like the society which could monitor the town's growth while prioritizing its historic identity. The Old Farm project gave Sisson and the Bristol Historical Society some power to shape Bristol's past as well as its future, especially in a time when the town's physical and cultural structure was changing due to new building projects and an influx of Portuguese immigrants.

The original plan for Colt State Park's Historic Restoration Area included not only the Old Farm, now known as Coggeshall Farm Museum, but also a number of other historic sites. Sisson explained that the planned project was to include the restoration of Revolutionary fortifications, and the possible restoration of the historic Church house. Also, Sisson discussed the planned Indian Village, which was meant to represent a Wampanoag settlement.¹⁸¹ In his speech, Sisson noted that the "1750 Farm House" would be the first restoration project, and the planned official opening was scheduled for the following year. Sisson envisioned the Old Farm as a reflection of the town's antiquarian Yankee roots, encompassing the farmhouse and a working farm, as a "fine and unique living monument to Old Rhode Island. One that will inspire our youth and interest Rhode Islanders and the citizens of the other forty-nine states."¹⁸²

At the October 1968 general meeting, Sisson noted that local historian Carlton C. Brownell, was rendering a farmyard (circa 1750-1850) for the site "to give an idea of what we might aim for."¹⁸³ By 1968, the executive committee, including Sisson,

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

¹⁸² Ibid.

¹⁸³ Excerpts from Minutes Regarding the Historical Farm Project, 1967- 1971, (BHPS). Carlton C. Brownell was a longtime educator and historian of Little Compton and Tiverton, RI. Brownell participated in the restoration of multiple structures through his work with local historical societies. "Carlton C. Brownell, Inducted 2017," Rhode Island Heritage Hall of Fame, 2017, accessed July 3, 2018, http://www.riheritagehalloffame.com/inductees_detail.cfm?crit=det&iid=804.

Robert C. Sanderson, C.J. Pearson, and Luther H. Blount had created a brochure for the Old Rhode Island Farm Museum. The brochure described the project objective, which was to further “the efforts of the Society to serve historical and educational purposes.”¹⁸⁴ Dated to 1968, the brochure features a sketch, not by Brownell, but by “jm,” illustrating the planned farmyard comprising numerous buildings and an orchard, and delineating space for grazing.¹⁸⁵ The sketch does not resemble the layout of the current museum grounds. (See Appendix 6: Old Rhode Island Farm Museum Brochure)

A letter dated February 3, 1969 from George L. Sisson, Jr. to John Rego, Director of the Natural Resources Department of Rhode Island alerted Rego that the Bristol Historical Society was ready to begin constructing the “Old Rhode Island Farm at Colt State Park.”¹⁸⁶ The letter provided clues as to the society’s planned structures and programming, and included the planned construction of a barn, the “Indian Village” and planned restoration of the presumed “old revolutionary fortifications.”¹⁸⁷

The original interpretive plan for the farm was strikingly different from the narrative told at Coggeshall Farm Museum today. (See Appendix 7: Old Rhode Island Farm Museum Brochure, Cover) The tagline reads “Old Rhode Island Family Farm at Colt State Park Will Preserve Our Farm Heritage” and the accompanying text goes on to lament the decline of farming in Rhode Island, which “prompted a number of prominent Rhode Islanders to join together in effort to restore, reconstruct and preserve forever, a pre-revolutionary family farm complete with farm buildings,

¹⁸⁴ Old Rhode Island Farm Museum Brochure, Undated, (BHPS).

¹⁸⁵ It was likely that the “jm” stood for Jack Macdonald. GLS, Jr (Sisson) noted on July 29, 1974 that Macdonald “designed the original Farm layout and lately the Gate.”

¹⁸⁶ George Sisson, Letter from Sisson to Rego, February 3, 1969, (CFM).

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

animals and crops.”¹⁸⁸ After acquiring the lease, the society planned to restore the dwelling house and build or move small farm structures to the site. It further explained that the farm will depict a small farm typical of 1750-1850, as the founders believed that they

were generally small, operated by one or two men, and self sufficient to a great extent. Much of the production was for the farm family. Members of an old Rhode Island family – the Coggeshalls – have lived in the dwelling and farmed the land since 1750. Chandler H. Coggeshall (1843-1926), one of the founders of the University of Rhode Island, farmed this land.¹⁸⁹

The “prominent Rhode Islanders” orchestrating the project named the farmhouse after the well-known Coggeshall family. As indicated in the previous chapter, this was despite that fact that the Coggeshall family never owned the land or dwelling house. At this time, plans for the farm were rather wide in scope, as the brochure noted that “[w]hen constructed, the Coggeshall Farm will represent a family farm typical of Rhode Island area 1750-1850.”¹⁹⁰ The museum’s target date, coupled with the focus on the Coggeshall family points to another discrepancy. As previously indicated through census records, it was highly unlikely that the Coggeshall family resided in the farmhouse during the majority of the 1750-1850 date range. Throughout this early period, the institutional vision teetered between representing a generic historical farm and touting the Coggeshall family name. A document from a 1976 membership drive erroneously describes a land transfer from James Coggeshall to the Colt Family.

According to the document, Coggeshall Farm Museum was a

...pre-revolutionary, living restoration project on thirty-five acres, which have been intact and cared for since 1750. Originally purchased from Plymouth Colony by Nathaniel Byfield, one of the founders of Bristol, it became a working farm when James

¹⁸⁸ Old Rhode Island Farm Museum Brochure, Undated (after 1968), (BHPS).

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

Coggeshall occupied the land. When the last Coggeshall remained unmarried, the acreage became the property of the Colt family...¹⁹¹

In April 1969, as the farm and society's goals began to drift in different directions, the society decided it was best to separate its finances from the farm by establishing a separate account and treasurer for the project.¹⁹² Henceforth, the project made great gains, mostly in site improvements, including the creation of fencing, and the donation of various structures. The museum received planned gifts of a barn, blacksmith shop, and crib from various individuals.¹⁹³ During the April meeting Sisson noted that "the Historical Society would administer the Farm until the job became too large," indicating that at the time, the society was solely responsible for the project.¹⁹⁴ In 1970 the board decided to hire resident farmers to perform work onsite.¹⁹⁵

By 1971, conflict arose between members of the Bristol Historical Society and the society's Farm Committee. The Committee, spearheaded by Sisson, questioned the society's dedication to the farm project amidst other commitments, including the historic Bristol County Jail. Tensions flared when the state of Rhode Island canceled the lease on the property due to a lack of progress on the project. Farm Committee member Leonard Chaset noted that more work needed to be completed on the barnyard, and the society neglected to establish an Indian Village as they had originally planned. It is apparent that there was also a lack of communication between the board and museum's first tenant farmers, Adam and Bonnie Tomash, a young couple associated with Roger Williams College. (See Appendix 8: The Tomashes at

¹⁹¹ Dorothy Rupp, 1976 Membership Drive, (CFM).

¹⁹² Excerpts from Minutes Regarding the Historical Farm Project, 1967- 1971, (BHPS).

¹⁹³ Ibid.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid.

Coggeshall Farm Museum) The Tomashes had not received a copy of their lease agreement outlining the details of their residency and work at Coggeshall Farm Museum. The tenant farmers also expressed concern that the board had not made an effort to see the progression of work on the farm.¹⁹⁶

Sisson had had enough with the society's approach to the farm venture, believing the society had a "complete neutral stand-off detached attitude" regarding the farm, "there being no financial contribution and no help at all" on the project.¹⁹⁷ The minutes repeatedly mention that improvements to the farm were not the responsibility of the Bristol Historical Society.¹⁹⁸ If the society refused to be more involved, then Sisson suggested that it might be worthwhile for an independent group to take over the project. Admittedly, he felt that the society would lose a valuable asset as "the Farm has more attraction to tourists than the jail," though he felt that "the Society cannot go along with an adopted-child attitude towards the Farm."¹⁹⁹

Based on the society's October 1971 meeting, members were, as Sisson suggested, disinterested in the project now that it included a functioning farm. A board member, identified as "Miss Young" remarked that the farmyard was never part of the society's initial plan to restore the house. Meanwhile, other board members suggested eliminating the "Indian Village replica" and giving that project to the Haffenreffer Museum.²⁰⁰ These decisions do seem to be in line with the mission and vision of the

¹⁹⁶ Ibid. The Tomashes served as tenants and farm caretakers between September 1970 until they left in October 1973.

¹⁹⁷ Helene L. Tessler, Minutes for the Board and Farm Committee Joint Meeting, October 17, 1971, (BHPS).

¹⁹⁸ Excerpts from Minutes Regarding the Historical Farm Project, 1967- 1971, (BHPS).

¹⁹⁹ Tessler, Minutes for the Board and Farm Committee Joint Meeting, October 17, 1971, (BHPS).

²⁰⁰ Ibid. While Coggeshall Farm Museum leadership proposed handing over the replica "Indian Village" project to the Haffenreffer Museum, no organization ever constructed a Native American village on the property.

society. From a financial perspective, facilitating a large-scale farming project drew funds from their core historic preservation projects, including the Jail.²⁰¹

During this early period in the institution's history, tensions arose due to conflicting interests. Members like Sisson, hoped to focus on the agricultural heritage of the site, while other board members were much more interested in the architectural history of the site and dwelling house. The farm-museum dichotomy continued to play a key role in institutional decisions throughout later periods, up into and including the present. Coggeshall is both a farm and a museum in name, but the board and staff often decide which aspect of the institution takes precedence. During this earlier period, farming and agricultural history were stressed in museum infrastructural projects and interpretation. In the following decades, board and staff tried to professionalize through introducing aspects more typical of a museum, such as attempting to build a collection.

The board still struggled with the museum's identity in 1975, as evident in a number of drafts which announced the museum's annual meeting. According to one draft, the purpose of the museum was "[t]he restoration and preservation of Coggeshall Farm as a living historical Museum."²⁰² Handwritten next to the word museum were the words "(Farm) museum connotation" which indicates that the board was still unsure of the type of institution they were running, as well as its mission and purpose.²⁰³ Two other drafts have the word museum crossed out, with the word

²⁰¹ Minutes for the Bristol Historical Society Monthly Meeting, November 29, 1971, (BHPS).

²⁰² Drafted Notice for the 1975 Annual Meeting, June 1975, (CFM).

²⁰³ Ibid.

“farm” handwritten next to it.²⁰⁴ As the administration changed, the pendulum swung from farm to museum, or museum to farm.

Museum and farm continued to splinter during the 1970s. At the society’s meeting on November 29, 1971, the board noted that members would be asked to vote on a change in the society’s name. The new name, Bristol Historical and Preservation Society, coincided with the town’s establishment of a historic district. As the society began to think of its future role in Bristol, work continued at the farm. There, under the guidance of Carleton Brownell, the creation of the barnyard took precedence over the restoration of the historic house interior.²⁰⁵ As winter approached, volunteers were asked to begin surface renovations on the farmhouse, such as stripping window casings of paint, spackling and painting walls, and staining and oiling woodwork.²⁰⁶ The few modifications did nothing to preserve the house’s structural integrity. As late as 1975, contractor Anthony Nunes reported to the board that the house was in “very bad repair” suggesting that they properly restore the house’s structural issues “rather than spend money on superficial renovations.”²⁰⁷

The final straw came after the Farm Committee hired new farm tenants to replace the Tomashes. At the June 1973 board meeting, society board member Helene Tessler expressed concern over her exclusion from the hiring process. Tessler stated that Mr. Wideman of the Farm Committee “was not agreeable, and objected to any more people becoming involved in the Farm Committee.”²⁰⁸ Col. Briggs, who initially

²⁰⁴ Ibid.

²⁰⁵ Excerpts from Minutes Regarding the Historical Farm Project, 1967- 1971, (BHPS).

²⁰⁶ Minutes for the Bristol Historical Society Monthly Meeting, November 29, 1971, (BHPS).

²⁰⁷ Minutes for the Coggeshall Farm Board Meeting, June 1975, (CFM).

²⁰⁸ Minutes for the Bristol Historical and Preservation Society Board Meeting, June 1973, (CFM).

proposed the living history museum project made a motion to divest the Bristol Historical and Preservation Society of the farm.²⁰⁹

At the society's regular meeting just five days later, the membership voted on the divestment. Prior to the vote, Tessler outlined "several of the difficulties encountered by the society in its relationship with the Farm Committee."²¹⁰ Sisson responded to Tessler's accusations that

the lack of communication between the Society and the Farm Committee was unintentional and probably due to 'free-wheeling' personalities on the [Farm] Committee; they do not function well as a subservient committee. [He] expressed the hope that if a parting was to be effected, that it be a happy one, with no ill feeling on either side.²¹¹

The discord within the board was too extensive to overcome. In 1973, Coggeshall Farm Museum separated from the Bristol Historical and Preservation Society, creating a new 501(c)3 nonprofit organization. A Duplicate Articles of Association as a Non-Business Corporation document stated that the corporation's purpose was to represent an "Early American Farm of the 1700's" which would operate as a "working farm and living museum." In addition to promoting the study of ecological awareness, the farm took part in animal husbandry and crop raising. The purpose vaguely references to museum-related activities in citing the need for "restoration, reproduction, renovation and creation of the farm and museum."²¹²

Coggeshall Farm Museum met as a separate organization on March 4, 1974 under President George Sisson. By July, the museum had a newly formed Board of Trustees,

²⁰⁹ Ibid.

²¹⁰ Ibid.

²¹¹ Ibid. Although Sisson does not mention specific members of the Society or Farm Committee, it is clear that he is referring to members of the Farm Committee, as it was subordinate to the Bristol Historical Society.

²¹² Duplicate Articles of Association as a Non-Business Corporation, Exhibit B, 1973, (BHPS).

which surprisingly included Bristol Historical and Preservation Society member Helene Tessler. Sisson described each member's strengths in great detail:

In Harold Demopoulos we have one of the original movers in the formation of the Farm, a man who has given the project many hours of his talented legal and organizational ability. In Jim Macdonald we have the Farm's most generous contributor and supporter. In Peter Church a good practical supporter. In Letitia Carter and Jim Munger the guiding, day to day innovators, directors and managers, whose inspiration and drive are known to all in Helen[sic] Tessler the organization ability with the deep commitment to historical preservation together with a showmanship flair that has and will prove extremely beneficial to Coggeshall; in Dot Rupp the quiet dedication and thoroughness that will keep the Farm and its records exact and intact; in Sybil Chaset Lessebaum we have the experience of decades of successful civic, floral and social work with many valuable contacts.²¹³

The group planned to have the farm open by July 1, 1974. (See Appendix 9: Coggeshall Farm Museum Brochures) Recorded minutes provide some idea of the planned scope of the farm. They hoped to raise chickens, ducks, geese, goats, cows and horses. With regards to crops, Weideman expressed the need for a tractor for plowing and baling hay, which would be grown in addition to alfalfa, "indian corn," squash, pumpkins, and herbs.²¹⁴ At this time, there was no concern expressed regarding the anachronism of the tractor on an eighteenth century farm. In 1975, the Committee on Farm Operation and Research reported on the status of the grounds and machinery. In addition to mentioning the tractor, the museum was in the process of investing in a modern sprayer for its new apple orchard, and it utilized inauthentic "woven wire fencing" to contain its livestock.²¹⁵

In March, Letitia Carter, a director on the farm's newly formed Planning Committee wrote to George F. MacDonald, Jr. of the Rhode Island Bicentennial Commission requesting funds. Carter expressed her hope that the museum would

²¹³ Sisson, Notes of GLS, Jr. July 29, 1974, (CFM).

²¹⁴ Minutes for the Meeting of the Coggeshall Farm Museum, March 1974, (CFM).

²¹⁵ Minutes for the Committee on Farm Operation and Research Report for the Annual Meeting, June 1974, (CFM).

complete a number of goals before the 1976 Bicentennial, one of which being a colonial orchard. In discussing the purposes of the project, Carter wrote that they planned “[t]o present to the public an authentically restored settlement of the period...” which implied that the Committee was thinking much larger than the farmstead at the time.²¹⁶ This seemed to be confirmed by a request in July 1974 for the “loan of three houses” from Steve Tyson.²¹⁷ No other historic houses were ever erected on the property during the museum’s history.

The board began preparations earlier in the year for its first annual Harvest Fair.²¹⁸ Plans from a July 17, 1974 Fair meeting summarize the featured activities, which included a Saturday night, sit-down community supper, a contra dance, and 4-H exhibits.²¹⁹ In addition to the Harvest Fair, the board planned to hold a Blessing of the Animals event at the Farm.²²⁰ Sisson explained the reasoning behind the Blessing in a separate set of notes from the meeting, describing a similar event in recent years that attracted almost 125 animals. Beyond events alone, Sisson and the other members were concerned with investigating the feasibility of carriage and hay rides through Colt State Park.²²¹ The museum planned for educational events as well, including, in January of the following year, a course on weaving and loom building.²²²

While the museum planned its first major festival, among other events and activities, and built up infrastructure, it struggled internally. The museum relied on boarded livestock as a valuable source of income. However, a number of animals were

²¹⁶ Letitia Carter, Letter to Mr. George F. MacDonald, Jr., April 15, 1974, (CFM).

²¹⁷ Dorothy B. Rupp, Minutes for Coggeshall Farm Museum Board Meeting, July 1974, (CFM).

²¹⁸ Minutes for the Coggeshall Farm Museum Board Meeting. April 1974, (CFM).

Harvest Fair continues to be the museum’s largest annual event.

²¹⁹ Rupp, Minutes for the Coggeshall Farm October Fair Meeting, July 1974, (CFM).

²²⁰ Ibid.

²²¹ Sisson, Notes of GLS, Jr. July 29, 1974, (CFM).

²²² Rupp, Minutes for the Coggeshall Farm Museum Board Meeting, October 1974, (CFM).

damaging farm property and their owners neglected to pay their accounts.²²³ It was also difficult for the museum to find reliable tenants to live and work on the farm. Several left for reasons that included a lack of hospitable living and working environment.²²⁴ In her resignation letter dated to January 9, 1975, Martha Bishop reported that, “since we have been here, we have had many more displeasurable [sic] experiences than pleasurable and this is mainly why we are leaving.”²²⁵ Furthermore, the farm struggled financially. In September 1974, the secretary, noted that, “while bills keep coming in, there is no money in the treasury to pay them, a cause fro[sic] great concern.”²²⁶ By November 1974, the museum had \$2,671.48 in assets, yet faced an \$8,000 barn improvement project, which it delayed due to cost.²²⁷

Amidst increasing struggles, board member Letitia Carter proposed an internal structural change designed to professionalize the museum.²²⁸ On January 9, 1975, Carter refined her idea further and proposed that the board restructure into three independent committees in order to streamline research and operation of the farm museum. Carter wanted to establish a historical research and restoration committee, a farm operation and research committee, and a public contact and education committee. Each committee was to be chaired by an interested board member.

²²³ Ibid., September 16, 1974, (CFM). The November 7, 1974 board meeting minutes indicate that that month, the board moved to raise fees for boarded horses to \$35 from an unspecified amount.

²²⁴ Rupp, Coggeshall Farm Board Meeting, May 1975, (CFM). Throughout 1974 and 1975, the board and various tenants discussed the possibility of insulating the second story of the Farmhouse to create more hospitable climate conditions for the tenants, who were forced to live upstairs when the museum was open to the public. In May of 1975 it was suggested that the Farmhouse might be restored as a museum, not as a dwelling house for the tenants, with “some other arrangement” put in place for the resident farmer. Construction on a resident farmhouse was not completed until 1993.

²²⁵ Martha Bishop, Resignation Letter, January 9, 1975, (CFM).

²²⁶ Rupp, Minutes for the Coggeshall Farm Museum Board Meeting, September 5, 1974, (CFM).

²²⁷ Harold W. Demopoulos, Report of Treasurer, November 7, 1974, (CFM).

²²⁸ Bishop, Minutes for the Coggeshall Farm Museum Board Meeting, December 5, 1974, (CFM).

According to Carter the historical research and restoration committee was responsible for researching the period and area's history. Members of the committee oversaw the restoration and maintenance of the site's buildings, mainly the farmhouse, and collection of objects. The farm operation and research committee was responsible for farm implements and machinery, fields, fencing, gardens, the 4-H program. The final committee, the public contact and education committee, was tasked with public relations and programming.²²⁹ By the annual meeting in June, the board established respective committees. Tessler headed the historical and restoration committee, Carter headed the public contact and relations committee, and Jim Munger led the farm operation and research committee, all under Sisson's tutelage as president.²³⁰ In July of 1975, Letitia Carter took over Sisson's position as board president, though Sisson still stayed on the board as chairman.²³¹

Although the board established committees for research and restoration, improvements on the farm in the coming year came from an unexpected source after the museum was transformed into the set of a feature film. Many of the documents saved from 1975 relate to Tapper Production's film, "Bound for Freedom." The production company approached the board in January of 1975, hoping to film a feature film on location with some stipulations. Although the museum was to receive payment, the production company required a number of physical changes. Most importantly, David A. Tapper specified that the interior of the Coggeshall farmhouse, and any furnishings be "appropriate to the pre-revolutionary war period." Tapper

²²⁹ Carter, Reorganization Plan for Coggeshall Farm Museum Committees, January 9, 1975, (CFM).

²³⁰ Rupp, Minutes for the Coggeshall Farm Museum Annual Meeting, June 30, 1975, (CFM).

²³¹ Rupp, Minutes for the Coggeshall Farm Museum Board Meeting, July 1975, (CFM).

specified that “[i]t is understood that any additional construction that we will require will be designed to increase authenticity and will only be done with your approval.”²³²

In addition to removing the barbwire and chicken wire fencing, a bulletin board, and storm windows, the Tappers insisted that “[a]nything with a new or unfinished [at the farm entrance] be treated with kreosote for an aged look.”²³³ Demands from Tapper Production illustrate how little the museum considered historical accuracy at the museum before filming. Unfortunately, relations with the filmmakers went sour as both the museum and Tapper Productions failed to agree on the final bill and the production company damaged the farmhouse floors. The museum eventually received \$1,732.62 from Tapper Productions, but the production company neglected to pay the museum \$1,200 for filming days. The museum could not press the matter further, however, as they never received a signed contract from Tapper Productions.²³⁴

With some minor renovations already underway, the Coggeshall Farm Museum board decided that it was time to begin thinking about a major restoration of the Farmhouse.²³⁵ Unfortunately, funding prevented the museum leadership from beginning any immediate building projects. The museum ended 1975 with \$2,184.73 in total assets.²³⁶ While board members began the year with successful fundraisers, including private dinners and a viewing of the film “Bound for Freedom,” the \$1,822.53 netted profit quickly went towards museum expenses. After paying towards

²³² “Bound for Freedom” Letter, Reviewed at Coggeshall Farm Museum Board Meeting, January 1975, (CFM).

²³³ Rupp, Minutes for the Coggeshall Farm Museum Board Special Meeting, January 30, 1975, (CFM).

²³⁴ Rupp, Minutes for the Coggeshall Farm Museum Board Meeting, May 1975, (CFM).

²³⁵ Ibid., June 1975, (CFM).

²³⁶ Rupp, Coggeshall Farm Museum Treasurer’s Report, January 1975, (CFM).

the balance of their bank loan, the museum was in great need of a new septic tank and tractor tires.²³⁷

Money was also required to furnish the often overlooked farmhouse. Helene Tessler, chairman of the newly created House Committee drafted a memorandum for board members on January 8, 1976 in which she pushed for greater attention to the Coggeshall Farm dwelling house. Tessler wrote that “The Farmhouse is billed in our brochures and publicity as an integral part of the Muszeum[sic]. However, over the last 8 years it has had little attention” beyond minor work done by the tenants and filmmakers.²³⁸ Tessler stated that “the farmyard, the animals and the outdoor demonstrations[sic] are interesting to many, but so is the house itself.”²³⁹ By stressing the function of the site as a museum rather than a farm, Tessler ignited the ongoing tension between the farm and museum functions of the site. Tessler hoped to authentically furnish the house, particularly the 1750s Colonial kitchen to facilitate programming like cooking demonstrations, which were popular in the past and at other sites. The museum relied on loaned furniture from a Mrs. Farnsworth, though it owned a trestle table, “Comback[sic]” rocking chair, and a drop-leaf table.²⁴⁰

Beyond planning demonstrations in the house, work began on site-wide educational programming. In September 1975, educator Eleanor Berry approached the board to propose beginning a program at the museum for school children.²⁴¹ By

²³⁷ Rupp, Minutes for the Coggeshall Farm Museum Board Meeting, February 1976, (CFM).

²³⁸ Tessler, “Items Needed for the House,” List, January 8, 1976, (CFM).

²³⁹ Ibid.

²⁴⁰ Ibid.

²⁴¹ Rupp, Minutes for the Coggeshall Farm Museum Board Meeting, September 1975, (CFM). It is unclear who Eleanor Berry was and what her credentials were to lead the program. It does not seem like she was a member of the board at this time, but she later gained the title of Education Director.

November, Berry reported that 222 students had visited the farm from area schools at the price of 25 cents per student. She foresaw the success of the program, stating that,

The educational program thus far has been great fun, a challenge and visionary as to what could be done in addition to what we have done. We've got a great place here, and the public is beginning to appreciate this. Many will want to come and perhaps take an active interest because of the enthusiasm of their children who have visited from school.²⁴²

In 1977, the farm hosted thirty-three groups from primary and secondary schools and community centers. Benefitting from the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act (CETA), the museum also hired young people to complete tasks onsite, which "helped each teacher, parent, and child get a closer feeling of what it was like to live on a farm in the 18th century."²⁴³ The CETA workers initially performed maintenance onsite, but were later trained as costumed docents.²⁴⁴

Beyond the creation of committees, Letitia Carter professionalized the museum in other ways. One such way was the creation of the museum's planning board. During the museum's first planning board meeting on January 15, 1976, the group discussed financial operations, including the possibility of growing crops to support the museum financially. They also investigated future research initiatives and historic costuming for staff.²⁴⁵ Letitia Carter's influential tenure as president of the board of trustees ended when she resigned from her position in June of 1976. Jim Munger served as her replacement.²⁴⁶ In July, the board discussed the possibility of hiring a part-time museum director. Although all members present at the monthly meeting were in favor

²⁴² Eleanor Berry, Coggeshall Farm Education Report, November 1975, (CFM).

²⁴³ Coggeshall Farm Education Report, 1977, (CFM). Passed in 1973, the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act was a federal job training program that employed students and unemployed workers. It was phased out and replaced with the Job Training Partnership Act in 1984. "Records of the Employment and Training Administration [ETA]," National Archives and Records Administration, accessed July 11, 2018, <https://www.archives.gov/research/guide-fed-records/groups/369.html>.

²⁴⁴ Notes from the Coggeshall Farm Annual Membership Meeting, June 7, 1977, (CFM).

²⁴⁵ Carter, Minutes for the Coggeshall Planning Board Meeting, January 15, 1976, (CFM).

²⁴⁶ Rupp, Minutes for the Coggeshall Farm Museum Board Meeting, June 1976, (CFM).

of the idea, it was later the source of great contention, which is indicative of the farm-museum dichotomy.²⁴⁷ While a \$1,000 salary for the director was initially suggested, Helene Tessler later “expressed the opinion that \$1,000 dollars was not enough to pay for a director. She thought that the salary should be closer to \$4,000.00.”²⁴⁸

Coggeshall Farm Museum leadership made further attempts to professionalize through stressing the institution’s function as a museum. On August 4, 1976, Dorothy Rupp created a report entitled “Goals for Coggeshall Farm Museum.” Rupp motioned to build an annex onto the historic farmhouse. Though the board lacked a way to pay for a new building project, Rupp’s vision resonated with her peers, as well as with future board and staff members. Unless the museum created a workspace and living quarters for the staff, the farmhouse could not operate as a fully functional museum. Rupp’s characterization of the museum and board’s role was also highly telling. She again questioned the institution’s function as a farm versus museum, and she pointed to the importance of its educational potential:

Several recent events have caused me to think that as a board We should review the aims of Coggeshall Farm Museum Inc. As the name clearly states, We are a museum. Yet it often seems that some of us loose[sic] sight of this fact. The only time We really function as a museum is during the two brief months in the summer when We are open to the public. This is a very vital time for Coggeshall Farm, not only because of the needed revenue collected; but because only then can We perform our role of a living, active museum.²⁴⁹

According to Rupp, one of the pitfalls was a lack of “personal effort and energy” on the part of board members who leave it to the director to “carry such an awesome burden” in creating and facilitating summer programming.²⁵⁰

²⁴⁷ Mary Lytle, Minutes for the Coggeshall Farm Museum Board Meeting, July 1976, (CFM).

²⁴⁸ Minutes for the Coggeshall Farm Museum Board Meeting August 4, 1976 (CFM).

²⁴⁹ Rupp, “Goals for Coggeshall,” August 4, 1976, (CFM).

²⁵⁰ Ibid.

By October, the board had found a prospective candidate for the underfunded director and resident farmer position. Already upset from the previous meetings in which the board ignored her advice to offer a higher salary to the director, long embattled member Helene Tessler resigned from her post as vice president. She noted that “the board should have discussed the matter before having a prospective director come to the board.”²⁵¹ Talks continued regarding the salary of the director. Although the board had previously refused to stray from the \$1,000 figure, the prospective candidate, Bob Major claimed, as Tessler had suggested, that “he could not afford to take the job for less than[sic] \$4,000.00 a year.”²⁵² The board eventually settled on a starting salary of \$2,000 for six months.²⁵³ In November, the board discussed the particulars of Tessler’s resignation. Board president Jim Munger, argued that in August, Tessler was more than involved in the process and the trustees asked Tessler to reconsider her resignation.²⁵⁴ By December, the board had received no response and regretfully accepted her decision.²⁵⁵ In a separate letter, Tessler addressed the board’s mismanagement beyond that incident alone, accusing president James Munger of working with Sisson to exclude Tessler from major decisions.²⁵⁶

Infighting among board members had occurred since the museum’s founding and greatly impacted the stability of the organization. Sisson emerged victorious, in that he was singlehandedly remembered as the institution’s founder.²⁵⁷ Sission was truly

²⁵¹ Lytle, Minutes for the Coggeshall Farm Museum Board Meeting, October 20, 1976, (CFM).

²⁵² Ibid.

²⁵³ Ibid.

²⁵⁴ Ibid., November 16, 1976, (CFM).

²⁵⁵ Ibid., December 1, 1976, (CFM).

²⁵⁶ Tessler, Letter to James Munger, October 20, 1976, (BHPS).

²⁵⁷ Examining documents from both Coggeshall Farm Museum and the Bristol Historical and Preservation Society allow for this reading of Sisson. The majority of documents written by Tessler

instrumental to the founding of the museum, however the information available, particularly his dealings with Tessler, suggest that Sisson was often an aggressor who alienated board members and staff. His constant looming presence continued to shape the museum, especially in its early years. While the board continued to work through issues of personality, others began to address its longstanding authenticity problem.

Although Coggeshall Farm Museum fully re-envisioned itself in the 1980s, it was during the mid-1970s that the board took preliminary steps to refine the museum's identity. Members of the board and the new director, Bob Major, pushed for a new sense of historical accuracy. In his report to the board in April 1977, Major reminded the members that they should "try to keep all projects as authentic as possible." Yet at the same meeting, the board continued to discuss planning for that year's Blessing of the Animals.²⁵⁸

During this period, Coggeshall Farm Museum also sought outside assistance from a neighboring institution, Roger Williams College.²⁵⁹ In March 1977, Director Bob Major reached out to Professor Kevin Jordan of the college's historical preservation program "to let him know what is going on at the farm."²⁶⁰ This prompted an enduring relationship between the two institutions, especially after Jordan began offering preservation coursework using Coggeshall Farm Museum as a case study.²⁶¹ Jordan also collaborated with the museum on various grant proposals. An April 19, 1977 project proposal and partnership between Coggeshall Farm and Roger Williams

regarding board relations, including her letter to James Munger, only exist at the BHPS archives. The CFM documents largely paint Sisson in a positive light, with some exceptions.

²⁵⁸ Lytle, Minutes for the Coggeshall Farm Museum Board Meeting, April 4, 1977, (CFM).

²⁵⁹ Roger Williams College became Roger Williams University in 1992.

²⁶⁰ Lytle, Minutes for the Coggeshall Farm Museum Board Meeting, March 7, 1977, (CFM).

²⁶¹ Ibid., April 4, 1977, (CFM).

College provided some information as to how the museum envisioned itself going forward. The collaborative project hoped to bolster research at the museum and introduce increased interpretation. The proposal identified the prevalence of farms during the American Revolutionary period and the resurgence of contemporary interest in historical farmsteads in the 1970s. It cautions that “a reader or visitor senses the significance of these farming descriptions only if they are interpreted well.”²⁶² According to the project proposal, the museum needed to, “display authentic clothing, animals, crops and methods used during the 1750-1800 period,” in addition to “field and barn activities that depict this period.”²⁶³

The student collaborators argued that accuracy was paramount to the success of the museum, a first for the institution. In their words, “[t]he problem is achieving historical accuracy. When people are told that they are looking at a typical 1750 farm, the farms should be as much like an[sic] 1750 farm as possible.”²⁶⁴ This was the first time that the museum responded to with the “new” social history, which stemmed from academia in the 1960s and 1970s and later became a prominent force in living history museum interpretation.

Commonly blanketed as the history of everyday life and ordinary people, the study of social history emphasized subjects previously ignored in academia and in the museum. Women, African Americans, the poor, and workers became the focus of historic research, which became more inclusive, diverse, and asked new research

²⁶² “Our Farm Heritage,” Project Proposal, Roger Williams College and Coggeshall Farm Museum Inc., April 19, 1976, (CFM). Although the proposal was dated April 19, 1976, it is much more likely that this was produced in 1977, when the museum and college began their partnership. Minutes from 1977 board meetings reference applying for grants in March and April 1977. The minutes note the Rhode Island Council for the Humanities and Rhode Island Foundation, specifically.

²⁶³ Ibid.

²⁶⁴ Ibid.

questions. Rather than glorifying the American past by focusing on great men and great deeds, the movement coincided with the Vietnam War and the Civil Rights revolution in the United States. Beginning in the 1960s and 1970s, museums like Plimoth Plantation, Colonial Williamsburg, and Old Sturbridge Village revised their historical narratives to coincide with this new trend, and conflict became an appropriate topic.²⁶⁵ The proposal largely echoed this academic trend as it suggested that the museum, “[i]n general demonstrate the human condition of the colonists during the period of 1750-1800.”²⁶⁶

Another grant from March 1977, further illustrates the influence that social history had on Coggeshall Farm Museum. According to a Rhode Island Council for the Humanities grant application from March 17, 1977, “Roots of Independence” was an educational series that relied on outside consultants, lecturers, and the research of Roger Williams College students. The outside participants included historian Carl Bridenbaugh and Director of Farm Activities Darwin Kelsey of Old Sturbridge Village. The project’s goal was to “[p]rovide an opportunity for the citizens of Rhode Island to become more aware of their past heritage of independent thought, to become more knowledgeable of their agricultural history, in order that they might make more intelligent decisions when choosing[sic] future lifestyles.”²⁶⁷ As part of the proposal, the project had to connect to public policy issues. The project was co-authored by President James I. Munger and Director Bob Major of Coggeshall Farm Museum, and Professors Kevin Jordan and Richard Potter of Roger Williams College. The authors

²⁶⁵ Magelssen, 70-71.

²⁶⁶ “Our Farm Heritage,” Project Proposal, Roger Williams College and Coggeshall Farm Museum Inc., April 19, 1976, (CFM).

²⁶⁷ “Roots of Independence,” Project Proposal, Roger Williams College and Coggeshall Farm Museum Inc., March 17, 1976, (CFM).

used the concept of freedom to connect the past to the present, noting the independence gained through land ownership in the Jeffersonian era. They contrasted this freedom with their perceived lack of individual freedom known in the mid-twentieth century.²⁶⁸ Yet another project from the time, titled “Project Soybean” planned to examine the possible uses of the soybean plant as a consumable food and as manure, pasturage, and hay.²⁶⁹ Based on the museum’s finances, it appears that the institution only received minimal funding from grants through 1978. The board was awarded a \$2,500 Rhode Island Foundation grant to establish a course on the care of livestock.²⁷⁰

By the June 1977 Annual meeting, the museum had moved forward with its historical programming. Costumes were made for docents, but more importantly, Roger Williams College increased its presence at the institution. Now a board member, Professor Kevin Jordan continued to bring courses on historic restoration and preservation to the farm. Students conducted research and helped maintain farm structures. Jordan became an important advocate for the restoration of the farmhouse.²⁷¹ He was later appointed chair of the historical research committee.²⁷² The museum had a number of successful agriculturally based programs as well, including a series on backyard farming, organic gardening and canning.²⁷³

In addition to adopting costumes and researching farm structures, the board reconsidered its approach to livestock. Although Coggeshall Farm Museum kept and

²⁶⁸ Ibid.

²⁶⁹ “Project Soybean,” Project Proposal, Undated, (CFM).

²⁷⁰ Thom Thompson, Minutes for the Coggeshall Farm Museum Board Meeting, January 12, 1978, (CFM).

²⁷¹ Notes from the Coggeshall Farm Annual Membership Meeting, June 7, 1977, (CFM).

²⁷² Thompson, Minutes for the Coggeshall Farm Museum Board Meeting, June 29, 1977, (CFM).

²⁷³ Deborah H. Waring, Minutes for the Coggeshall Farm Museum Board Meeting, November 9, 1978, (CFM).

displayed livestock from its early years, it was not until 1977 that the board considered the historical accuracy of the livestock. The committee on crop and animal management sent a preliminary report to the Board of Trustees suggesting that as “an educationally-oriented Museum, those agricultural activities on the farm must be historically accurate.”²⁷⁴ The committee acknowledged that the museum was not able to accurately depict all aspects of farm life. They provided one example, regarding the purchase of store-bought feed for the farm’s livestock. A director’s report from the same year, also mentions the farm’s use of modern fertilizer and an electric fence.²⁷⁵ To help with overhauling the animal program, the committee recommended a maximum number of animals for the farm and the associated costs of caring for each animal. They identified an incomplete list of historically accurate livestock breeds suggesting that they should be utilized by the farm, farm resident, and 4-H groups, “where determinable and feasible.”²⁷⁶ In his final report for the livestock committee in March of the following year, board and committee member Thom Thompson indicated that the board did not act on his initiatives.²⁷⁷

Even as the museum pressed forward, board and staff remained plagued by issues of identity. The museum’s newest director, Judith M. McLeran, began work in May 1979. In her January 10, 1980 Director’s Report, McLeran noted that “a great deal of the summer was spent trying to find out what the Farm’s purpose is, who the people are who can be helpful to the Farm, the direction in which the Farm should be moving,

²⁷⁴ Thompson, Preliminary Report for the Committee on Crop and Animal Management, November 2, 1977, (CFM).

²⁷⁵ Bob Major, Coggeshall Farm Director’s Report, November 11-December 8 1977, (CFM).

²⁷⁶ Thompson, Preliminary Report for the Committee on Crop and Animal Management, November 2, 1977, (CFM).

²⁷⁷ Thompson, Final Report for the Committee on Crop and Animal Management, March 9, 1978, (CFM).

and just what [her] responsibilities were.”²⁷⁸ McLeran identified a number of issues which impacted her job performance, namely the lack of a workshop or activity center, an office space, and inconsistent volunteers.²⁷⁹

The museum was increasingly attracting new individuals to the board who continued to professionalize the museum. After deciding to develop a long range plan for the museum, the board appointed Kevin Jordan as the chairman of the newly formed planning committee.²⁸⁰ The leadership looked outward for assistance. Dorothy Rupp suggested joining the American Association for State and Local History, the first of a number of national associations that the museum joined for guidance and respect in the wider museum community.

Despite these developments, Coggeshall Farm Museum still lacked a clear mission and vision for the future. It struggled to create a concrete identity. Thom Thompson recommended in March of 1979 that museum brochures describe the institution as an example of a post-revolutionary farmstead “rather than pinpointing a specific date.”²⁸¹ More importantly, the board struggled to build a physical site that would allow them to become a fully functioning living history museum. Records show that during these early years, the board hoped to raise money for infrastructural projects through various means. In August 1978, the board began planning for the following year’s financial drive. Reports for the May 1979 Coggeshall Farm Finance Drive indicate that the board hoped to raise a total of \$100,000 for the farmhouse and outbuilding restoration, and the construction of a new residence and barn. Board

²⁷⁸ Judith M. McLeran, Director’s Report, January 10, 1980, (CFM).

²⁷⁹ Ibid.

²⁸⁰ Thompson, Minutes for the Coggeshall Farm Museum Board Meeting, March 9, 1978, (CFM).

²⁸¹ Waring, Minutes for the Coggeshall Farm Museum Board Meeting, March 8, 1979, (CFM).

leadership identified three sources of revenue: businesses and large gifts, foundations and grants, and small gifts.²⁸² Although the museum continued to boast a profit from its annual Harvest Fair, earning a \$5,590 net profit in 1978, the board needed to look to other sources for funding as well.²⁸³

The board members put forth great effort into planning the May 1979 Finance Drive, based on the document which details the board's approach to getting money from each of the three sources. By June their fundraising efforts stagnated. The July meeting minutes reported that the June finance meeting was "very disappointing" as only one board overseer had donated.²⁸⁴ Overall, the drive was not entirely successful. In October of 1979, the board still sought \$7,000 of the \$10,000 needed for a new barn, and the institution attempted to cut costs by using Roger Williams College students for labor.²⁸⁵ Although barn construction finally began in February of 1982, the museum continued to struggle financially. As noted in a newsletter to museum members, the barn was to be completed "hopefully, funding permitting" in the following year.²⁸⁶ That August, it was apparent that the museum was in financial trouble, despite ongoing building projects as Museum Director Ross Fullam noted that he was "holding off paying bills to use money for the Fair."²⁸⁷

Although Coggeshall Farm Museum had been making small strides in increasing the museum's physical presence, the institution continued to struggle internally, beyond financial issues. At the height of discussion over the barn project Bob Major,

²⁸² Coggeshall Farm Finance Drive, May 1979, (CFM).

²⁸³ Waring, Minutes for the Coggeshall Farm Museum Board Meeting, December 6, 1978, (CFM).

²⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, July 19, 1979, (CFM).

²⁸⁵ Waring, Minutes for the Coggeshall Farm Museum Board Meeting, October 10, 1979, (CFM).

²⁸⁶ "The Coggeshall Farmer" Newsletter of Coggeshall Farm Museum, Volume III, Spring/Summer 1982, (CFM).

²⁸⁷ Waring, Minutes for the Coggeshall Farm Museum Board Meeting, August 19, 1982, (CFM).

the museum's director and resident farmer vacated his position after two years. After Major's departure, his position was divided between two individuals.²⁸⁸ The two women who entered Major's previous roles vied for the power of the directorship. Major feared that Paula Horrigan, the new resident farmer was "not keeping within the framework of an 18th C farm..."²⁸⁹ Making matters worse, previous board member MacDonald and Sisson threatened to sue the farm if they erected the new barn.²⁹⁰

During the early 1980s, Coggeshall Farm worked to expand its school group tours and historic programming, while continuing to improve the physical site. It simultaneously sought outside funding to ease budgetary constraints. In March 1980, the board applied to a \$35,000 grant through the Institute of Museum Services, though the museum was turned down due to "lack of membership and long range goals."²⁹¹

Work continued on the physical site, albeit slowly due to lack of funds. By June 1981, the museum made some progress on exterior farmhouse renovations.²⁹² In addition to building a new pig pen, in 1983, the museum explored other grants, including one to support a resident blacksmith, and a \$4,800 Preservation Commission grant to fund roof repairs.²⁹³ In November 1982, Board Treasurer Edward Wakem reported that the museum held \$644.76 in its checking account.²⁹⁴ Museum Director

²⁸⁸ Rupp, Minutes for the Coggeshall Farm Museum Board Meeting, May 23, 1978, (CFM).

²⁸⁹ Minutes for the Special Board of Director's Meeting, August 23, 1979, (CFM).

²⁹⁰ Waring, Minutes for the Coggeshall Farm Museum Board Meeting, November 8, 1979, (CFM). It is unclear exactly why MacDonald and Sisson threatened to sue the museum. Minutes from the board meeting state that, "in his lengthy letter [MacDonald] says the sills are OK and he voices complaints about the residents. He also speaks of our idea for a new barn. Judy spoke to George Sisson and Jim about this new barn and they said they'd sue us if we tried to put it up..."

²⁹¹ Ibid., March 11, 1980, (CFM); Ibid., April 15, 1980, (CFM).

²⁹² Waring, Minutes for the Annual Meeting, June 2, 1981, (CFM).

²⁹³ Ibid. October 27, 1983, (CFM); Phillip Szenher, Minutes for the Coggeshall Farm Museum Board Meeting, November 21, 1983, (CFM); Phillip Szenher, Minutes for the Coggeshall Farm Museum Board Meeting, June 28, 1983, (CFM).

²⁹⁴ Phillip Szenher, Minutes for the Coggeshall Farm Museum Board Meeting, November 8, 1982, (CFM).

Ross Fullam's financial status statement for June 1983 painted a more dire picture. While the museum held \$424.13 in its checking and savings (including in its building fund), it owed \$1,037.52. Of the museum's unpaid financial obligations, \$962.52 was Ross Fullam's back-pay for the directorship position.²⁹⁵

By early 1984, the board worked to update its marketing materials for the museum, to produce a new Coggeshall Farm brochure. Members of the board committed to fund the project with personal contributions of at least \$15.²⁹⁶ The museum leadership also took a new direction for the 1984 Harvest Fair, departing from a more traditional agricultural fair, and instead planning for "the inclusion of costumed interpreters, banners, Indians, soldiers, and an enlarged raffle."²⁹⁷ Most importantly, the board thought seriously about their commitment to fundraising. The May 1984 board meeting included a presentation by Mel Topf, a successful fundraiser and faculty member at Roger Williams College. Topf suggested that the board needed a more robust fundraising team to raise revenue and public awareness of Coggeshall Farm Museum. In order to do so, Topf advised that the institution must attract a board member who was influential within the community.²⁹⁸

Helene Tessler, who served on the board during the museum's earliest years, drafted a letter in 1979 which summarized Coggeshall Farm Museum's plight as it entered the early 1980s, amidst constant financial and internal turmoil:

Coggeshall Farm Museum is at a crossroads: weekend attendance is falling off; memberships are not increasing as they should; volunteers are almost minimal; maintenance is touch and go. We have reached the point where we are merely treading

²⁹⁵ Ibid., June 28, 1983, (CFM). This was not a singular occurrence. At the June 17, 1985 meeting, Treasurer Edward Wakem noted that the museum owed Director Rick Sullivan four months of back salary.

²⁹⁶ Ibid., January 11, 1984, (CFM); Ibid., March 28, 1984, (CFM).

²⁹⁷ Ibid., March 28, 1984, (CFM).

²⁹⁸ Ibid., May 22, 1984, (CFM).

water. It is time to sit down, consider our goals and set priorities for attaining those goals.²⁹⁹

Tessler credited earlier members, like Letitia Carter, who introduced educational programming at the farm, but proposed that it was finally time to think seriously about the site's historic dwelling house as a true museum and educational center. Tessler reflected on went on to write that, “[w]e advertise ourselves as Coggeshall Farm Museum – a misnomer... The barnyard is visible all year round. The first two rooms of the house are not, and it's probably just as well, since they are static, dead and of slight interest to the visitor.”³⁰⁰ Invoking the earlier words of Sisson, Tessler stated that “the rooms have been treated like the proverbial stepchild with little attention paid to presenting what we do have in a meaningful way. The usual visitor response is, ‘Is this all there is?’”³⁰¹ Luckily for Tessler, in just a few years Coggeshall Farm Museum transformed from a farmstead vaguely representing the Colonial period to a museum in the midst of true professional change.

²⁹⁹ Tessler, “Where Do We Go From Here?” February 7, 1979, (CFM).

³⁰⁰ Ibid.

³⁰¹ Ibid.

CHAPTER 5

COGGESHALL FARM MUSEUM: 1984-2003

As Coggeshall Farm Museum entered the 1980s, it was no longer led only by the vision of influential founders and board members like George Sisson. Increasingly, the board and staff made decisions with the assistance of outsiders, including professional or academic advisors, and professional interest groups. This was not an entirely new phenomenon, as Coggeshall Farm Museum looked to Old Sturbridge Village for guidance throughout the 1970s. As early as 1968, Col. Briggs, and perhaps other members of the society were aware of Old Sturbridge Village's major successes and hoped to use Sturbridge as a model.³⁰²

Planning for Coggeshall Farm Museum began amidst the start of the living history farm movement, which began in 1965 after a national system of such farms was proposed by John Schlebecker.³⁰³ In 1967, Schlebecker emerged as a champion of early living history farms in America. His publication *The Past in Action: Living Historical Farms* served as a call to action to jumpstart this national process.³⁰⁴ In 1972, the professional interest group, *Association of Living Historical Farms and Agricultural Museums* (ALHFAM) officially developed out of the historical farm movement.³⁰⁵

³⁰² Excerpts from Minutes Regarding the Historical Farm Project, 1967- 1971, (BHPS).

³⁰³ Abing, 206.

³⁰⁴ Ibid., 208.

³⁰⁵ Ibid., 209.

The Bristol Historical Society and Farm Committee potentially had access to Schlebecker's 1967 proposal, which used Old Sturbridge Village as a positive case study and stressed the potential popularity of living historical farms.³⁰⁶ Pamphlets and letters for ALHFAM conferences and meetings in the Coggeshall Farm Museum institutional archives illustrated that museum leadership looked at Sturbridge and ALHFAM for guidance. Perhaps inclusion in ALHFAM, a professional organization, influenced the museum in one or more ways, to the extent that it coincided with the creation of professional committees in 1975. In a letter attached to the March 1975 board meeting minutes, Vice President Letitia Carter expressed interest in attending a June seminar at Old Sturbridge Village, after she received an invitation from the American Association for State and Local History.³⁰⁷ The letter described the seminar topic as "Living Historical Farms as Museums" a subject that mirrored the work of Schlebecker. In 1980, the museum hosted a visit for Schlebecker, Wayne Rasmussen of the USDA, and Darwin Kelsey of Old Sturbridge Village, who hoped to increase local support for the museum.³⁰⁸

While the board toyed with outside guidance and support in previous decades, it was not until the mid-1980s that Coggeshall Farm Museum sought serious assistance from outsiders. During this period, Coggeshall Farm Museum continued to face significant challenges as the institution struggled to define itself while simultaneously operating in a field that was changing amidst declining interest. Old Sturbridge Village was well established and boasted record visitation during the years that Coggeshall

³⁰⁶ John T. Schlebecker, *The Past in Action: Living Historical Farms* (Washington, D.C.: Living Historical Farms Project, Smithsonian Institution, 1967), 3-4, 39.

³⁰⁷ Carter, Letter of Interest, associated with the March 1975 Board Meeting, March 1975, (CFM).

³⁰⁸ Waring, Minutes for the Coggeshall Farm Museum Board Meeting, February 12, 1980, (CFM).

Farm was in its infancy. Sturbridge was extremely successful in the 1960s, but record visitation broke during the economic crisis of the mid-1970s, lowering museum attendance rates nationwide. After visitation peaked in 1972, it then declined through the rest of the decade, with the exception of 1976 due to the celebration of the nation's Bicentennial. This decline caused economic hardship, which only intensified between 1978 and 1989.³⁰⁹ Lack of visitation certainly created problems for Old Sturbridge Village, but Coggeshall Farm Museum's similar financial struggle during this period was compounded by a lack of clear identity.

Since its early years under the Bristol Historical Society, the museum's leaders fought over the institution's intended purpose, however, during the 1980s and into the 1990s museum board, staff, and outside consultants established Coggeshall Farm Museum's identity, refined its parameters of historical authenticity, and narrowed its historical timeframe. Based on historical research, the 1790s does not reflect an important moment of the site's particular history. However inconsequential, the new interpretive time frame, informed by social history, transformed Coggeshall's identity into the twenty-first century. These major decisions heightened tensions among board and staff.

At the October 24, 1984 board of directors meeting, President Laurie Kiely raised the question of Coggeshall Farm Museum's identity. Once again, members were asked to define what the museum was at the time, noting a "need to establish what our purpose is, what our main concern is."³¹⁰ A discussion followed in which members attempted to provide some semblance of a definition. Answers were broad, and

³⁰⁹ Abing, 228-252.

³¹⁰ Laurie Kiely, Minutes for the Coggeshall Farm Museum Board Meeting, October 24, 1984, (CFM).

included for example “a living history farm” and “a place for kids to learn how people lived and farmed in 1750-1800.”³¹¹

The board questioned the museum’s current interpretive time frame, which was defined by the date of the Coggeshall dwelling house. Members noted that the target period was too wide, yet it was feared that a shorter time frame was too limiting in terms of what they now began to call “pure authenticity.”³¹² As the institution lacked the staff and funds to run the farm without modern conveniences, they noted that “the actual running of the farm under 18th century methods was too time consuming and took away from the time that could be spent demonstrating the methods used.”³¹³

Although the board tabled discussion on the museum’s purpose for a later date, a number of immediate goals were set, including the repair and maintenance of the physical site, and an increase in board membership and general membership. Focusing on long-range planning was a significant step for the museum. The board understood that solidifying the museum’s mission and vision were crucial to the financial wellbeing of the museum, as they astutely noted that “to present our program to possible donors, it needs to be spelled out and well defined.”³¹⁴ From an educational and interpretive standpoint, the board planned to increase accessibility of historical information to board and staff, promote a monthly event, and expand the educational program throughout the year by bringing it directly to schools.³¹⁵ In November of 1985, the board applied for a grant to produce a slide show for elementary school

³¹¹ Ibid.

³¹² Ibid.

³¹³ Ibid.

³¹⁴ Ibid.

³¹⁵ Ibid.

children and supplementary handouts for local schools.³¹⁶ By May 5, 1986, the museum's cooling house had been restored, and the board, with the help of George Sisson, sought funds for the restoration of the farmhouse roof.³¹⁷ After receiving a grant from the Rhode Island Foundation, the museum produced the slideshow, which was completed in 1987.³¹⁸

The museum also amended its animal policy after 4-H members approached the board, asking to bring in Highland cattle. The previous policy determined that all farm livestock must be authentic to the farm's target historic period. Mirroring the board's earlier thoughts on "pure authenticity," the new policy stated that

Coggeshall Farm tries, whenever possible, to utilize historically authentic working methods, architecture, livestock, and plants at Coggeshall Farm. However, it is sometimes necessary to substitute more modern working methods, architecture, livestock, and plants because of the Farm's limited staff size and because of limited finances.³¹⁹

Little more than a year later, the board convened again to discuss their goal of "using authentic livestock."³²⁰ While the members continued to plan for long and short term infrastructure projects, it was clear that more time was necessary for long-range planning. Based on the data from the 1985-1986 annual treasurer's report, funds remained low, with the museum's checking and savings balances closing at \$1,320.25 and \$1,659.39 respectively.³²¹

Earlier leaders acknowledged that historical accuracy and budget shortfalls tended to exist in opposition, however, a major shift was in motion by the end of the 1980s,

³¹⁶ Phillip Szenher, Minutes for the Coggeshall Farm Museum Board Meeting, November 6, 1985, (CFM).

³¹⁷ Ibid., May 5, 1986, (CFM).

³¹⁸ Ibid., June 7, 1987, (CFM).

³¹⁹ Ibid., November 6, 1985, (CFM).

³²⁰ Ibid., December 8, 1985, (CFM).

³²¹ Edward Wakem, Treasurer's Report, 1986 Annual Membership Meeting, June 3, 1986, (CFM).

when the museum board realized the institution was in need of a new direction. The museum dedicated itself to historical authenticity, under the purview of Board President Laura Kiely and then Resident Director Eric Johnson. In her 1987 annual report, Kiely stated that she “felt the Farm was on the upswing” and was going forth that year “at full sail.”³²² She credited Johnson with “bring[ing] the Museum up to its full potential as a historically accurate demonstration of life on a small tenant farm.”³²³

Eric Johnson’s year-end report for 1987 illustrated that he took his new role quite seriously and he dedicated much time and energy to increasing the historical accuracy of the site. He and Coggeshall Farm Museum’s leadership continued to draw heavily from neighboring Old Sturbridge Village, and in February, they took an observational trip to the more senior institution. In April, Johnson, along with another staff member returned to Sturbridge to research plants, livestock, and historic costuming. Their trip culminated in the transfer of historic Dung Hill Fowl from Old Sturbridge Village shortly thereafter. While working onsite Johnson prioritized tasks that replicated eighteenth-century farm life for utilitarian, rather than purely demonstrative purposes. In February, he used the oxen for “real work” to collect sap to process into maple sugar and in March he began work on a buck saw.³²⁴

At the July 16, 1987 board meeting, Johnson proposed to the board that he wanted to make Coggeshall Farm more like an authentic eighteenth-century farm, first by replacing current animals with historic breed sheep and cows, and then by appropriating funds for the purchase of antique or reproduction tools.³²⁵

³²² Kiely, 1987 Annual Membership Meeting Report, June 2, 1987, (CFM).

³²³ Ibid.

³²⁴ Eric Johnson, Year End Report, December 31, 1987, (CFM).

³²⁵ Carol Constantine, Minutes for the Coggeshall Farm Museum Board Meeting, July 16, 1987, (CFM).

While Johnson strived for historicity, the board was still unsure. In a 1987 long range planning meeting, board members attempted to answer major questions regarding the future of the institution, including what time period the museum should represent, authenticity, and audience.³²⁶ Laurie Kiely presided over the meeting, which she opened by asking participants what they envisioned the farm to be. The diverse responses illustrated the fact that members of the board and staff participants did not share a single vision. According to the meeting notes, “[t]he general consensus was that CFM continue to represent life on a family farm, located near an important seaport, between 1750-1850.”³²⁷ The meeting established both short and long-term goals for the museum, which focused on repairing and replacing structures with more authentic buildings and locating sources for funding.³²⁸ As 1987 progressed, the board worked towards gaining increased funding from DEM, increasing public relations, and creating “authentic costumes.”³²⁹

At the March 31, 1988 board meeting, Eric Johnson notified the board of Kevin Jordan’s plan to apply for a long-term planning grant. Johnson noted the farm had to “evaluate where we are and where we are going,” and ask the question that continued to plague the institution: “are we a farm, a museum or both?”³³⁰ Johnson expanded on the grant application in his 1988 annual report at the annual membership meeting. He believed that the grant had the potential to give Coggeshall Farm Museum the “necessary starter information on how to run an effective living history museum.”³³¹

³²⁶ Minutes for the Long Range Planning Meeting, January 31, 1987, (CFM).

³²⁷ Ibid.

³²⁸ Ibid.

³²⁹ Phillip Szenher, Minutes for the Coggeshall Farm Museum Board Meeting, April 2, 1987, (CFM).

³³⁰ Minutes for the Coggeshall Farm Museum Board Meeting, March 21, 1988, (CFM).

³³¹ Johnson, Resident Director’s Report, June 14, 1988, (CFM).

Johnson further addressed the museum's continued efforts to professionalize the site, noting the expansion of the museum's educational program, volunteers skilled in historic skills and trades, the creation of an educational library, and the acquisition of reproduction artifacts. Johnson mentioned the increased presence of heritage breed animals onsite, and future plans for "farm sheds using authentic materials and methods."³³² In June, the museum received good news regarding a state grant. Although Coggeshall's Farm Museum's board and staff had received this source of aid regularly in previous years, the \$15,000 award for 1988 clearly surprised Secretary Carol Constantine, who recorded it with two exclamation points in her meeting minutes.³³³

On July 11, 1988, the Coggeshall Farm Museum educational committee met to debate the interpretive time period at the museum. They again determined that the target date needed to be narrowed. In this case, the committee, composed of Eric Johnson, Carolyn Mills, Carl Becker, Nancy Szenher, Athena Western, and Betty Holden believed it best to focus on a ten to twenty-year period, with the possibility of "stagnate exhibits" that focused outside of their suggested dates of 1780-1800. At a future meeting, the group planned to discuss their costume policy, which would dictate the style and material worn by interpreters onsite. They also planned to establish an inventory for educational collections.³³⁴ The creation of a costume policy and collections inventory signaled a step towards professionalization.

The institution as a whole began to follow Johnson's lead. At the June 14, 1988 annual meeting, the museum voted to join two professional organizations, the

³³² Ibid.

³³³ Constantine, Minutes for the Coggeshall Farm Museum Board Meeting, June 30, 1988, (CFM).

³³⁴ Athena Western, Minutes for the Education Committee Meeting, July 11, 1988, (CFM).

ALHFAM and the American Minor Breed Association.³³⁵ By the end of June, Johnson attended a conference held by ALHFAM.³³⁶ Interest in professional conferences continued throughout the 1990s. By 1994, board and staff members had attended a number of conferences and increased contacts at institutions including ALHFAM, Plymouth Plantation, Old Sturbridge Village, and Colonial Williamsburg.³³⁷

While it seemed that the museum was making progress in defining itself as an institution, it was simultaneously experiencing internal turmoil. George Sisson, one of Coggeshall Farm Museum's founders, had taken a less prominent role for a number of years. In 1987 and 1988 he emerged as a major player, when he became the President of the Board. Sisson's overbearing leadership style conflicted with the vision that Resident Director Eric Johnson had for the site. Documents from the 1989 annual membership meeting illustrate the divide between the board president and resident director. Although Sisson was not there in person, he drafted a document that detailed his many grievances about the farm. One of his harshest critiques was directed at Johnson, which regarded the state of the area behind the farm's pole barn. Sisson also suggested holding a volunteer appreciation day, writing, "MEANWHILE can't it be established policy for Staff & Board to thank helpers, fellow board members. What does it cost to be friendly, cordial and a little outgoing in expressing appreciation???"³³⁸

³³⁵ Phillip Szenher, Minutes for the Annual Membership Meeting, June 14, 1988, (CFM). The American Minor Breed Association, now known as the The Livestock Conservancy, is a nonprofit that focuses on the preservation of rare or heritage breed livestock.

³³⁶ Constantine, Minutes for the Coggeshall Farm Museum Board Meeting, June 30, 1988, (CFM).

³³⁷ Nan Szenher, Minutes for the Coggeshall Farm Museum Board Meeting, March 1, 1995, (CFM).

³³⁸ Sisson, Notes for the Annual Membership Meeting, June 20, 1989, (CFM).

Johnson was more concerned about the museum's identity. In a final plea at the 1989 annual membership meeting, Johnson "called for common agenda—a stated purpose that is commonly shared and clearly understood by all involved."³³⁹ Johnson argued that the museum was in need of "serious planning and developing" and asked for "realistic workloads developed through coordination and planning."³⁴⁰ Johnson claimed that the museum needed an "identity—a mission."³⁴¹

He went on to say that,

Already the Museum has saved a 'corner of the over-developed area's rural past.' In looking to the future...the museum's focus should be on education with "modern" farm operations supporting this effort. [Johnson] suggest[ed] that part of the farm hold to a tight time frame (1790) and that it be tied into its surrounding area by very clearly defined modern farm space and operation.³⁴²

Although Coggeshall Farm Museum's identity came to reflect part of Johnson's vision, Johnson was not at the helm. Johnson had one unlikely champion. In December 1989, Coggeshall Farm Museum participated in the American Association of Museum's³⁴³ Museum Assessment Program. As part of the assessment, a professional consultant evaluated Coggeshall Farm Museum in order to provide direction for the future. The results of this assessment seemed to motivate the museum leadership to change its identity, both in terms of scope and in interpretation. Moving forward, the museum attempted to present itself more accurately in a historical sense. It also disregarded earlier attempts to focus on a period as broadly defined as 1750-1800.

³³⁹ Betty S. Holden, Minutes for the Annual Membership Meeting, June 20, 1989, CFM.

³⁴⁰ Constantine, Minutes for the Coggeshall Farm Museum Board Meeting, June 30, 1988, (CFM).

³⁴¹ Ibid.

³⁴² Ibid.

³⁴³ The American Alliance of Museums changed its name in 2012 from the American Association of Museums.

Museum Assessment Program assessor Edward L. Hawes’s scathing 1989 review of the museum is somewhat surprising. Hawes wrote that:

Coggeshall Farm Museum is at a crossroads. It can halt and remain an amateur living history center, interpreting the “colonial period” in general terms with its confusing collection of buildings: one historic, one a period construction, and the others non-historic. Coggeshall could move forward to become a living history center of distinction following standards of the living history and broader museum movements. Going down this road a ways with modest improvements in its facilities, it can preserve and interpret aspects of late 18th century farm and household life, and its larger context.³⁴⁴

Hawes suggested in his review that the museum adopt the interpretive narrative of a “coastal Rhode Island tenant farm” of the 1790s, a subject not presented at any other museum.³⁴⁵ When Hawes visited in 1989 he called attention to the museum’s lack of historical accuracy and its overburdened staff., Hawes suggested bluntly that the museum focus on the 1790s, bringing in the “larger social and environmental context” while directly distinguishing between the museums historically accurate and inaccurate buildings using signage.³⁴⁶ Hawes offered advice on how to refine the museum’s interpretive direction, particularly its generalized narrative of colonial life, but his critique extended to superfluous programing like the museum’s annual blessing of the animals, which he saw as a historical inaccuracy.³⁴⁷

Hawes suggested that the board strategically plan to restore the farmhouse to date to the 1790s. He advised that the board move the resident farmers to a new residence. He also suggested relocating buildings that did not fit an authentic 1790s farmstead. Although the Coggeshalls did not live at the farm during the 1790s, Hawes felt that interpreting the nineteenth century was too drastic a departure for the museum.

³⁴⁴ Hawes, Coggeshall Farm Museum, Inc. Museum Assessment Report, Executive Summary, December 1989, (CFM).

³⁴⁵ Ibid.

³⁴⁶ Ibid.

³⁴⁷ Ibid.

Focusing on the 1790s, Hawes pushed for a narrative that was more local in scope, though he believed that these changes could transform the museum into one of regional or even national importance. Hawes stated that the tenant farm narrative might allow the museum to “develop an appeal to wider audiences who will see Coggeshall as more than just another ‘colonial’ site for the prosperous who want to have their roots and lifestyle justified.”³⁴⁸ His views were a total reversal of those espoused by Sisson in his 1968 speech. Rather than building an institution to protect Bristol’s heritage amidst changes brought on by the modern era using the whims of society members as a guide, Hawes suggested a new audience. According to Hawes, “[f]arming and household life discussed in the context of social class and distant markets may well appeal to more recent immigrants because of the similarities of condition and problems.”³⁴⁹

Unfortunately, Hawes’s assessment came too late for Johnson, who never witnessed the major changes implemented after his exit. “Captain” Henry Wolfender entered his position soon after, yet his tumultuous resignation left Sisson and other members scrambling. Wolfender’s colorful resignation letter began as follows: “[w]ith all the politics that is being played on this farm I do not wish to be involved. As of midnight Sept. 1, 1990, I resign. All the back biting, hind end kissing, and everything else going on is not to my ilk.”³⁵⁰ Despite Wolfender’s questionable character, his letter suggests that the museum continued to struggle with internal issues. After Wolfender’s exit, the board planned to meet with the next farm manager in advance

³⁴⁸ Ibid.

³⁴⁹ Ibid.

³⁵⁰ Henry Wolfender, Resignation Letter, September 1, 1990, (CFM).

“thus avoiding problems.”³⁵¹ The board hired a Farm Manager, Walter Katkevitch, and his wife Donna Katkevitch as acting director.³⁵² Under the Katkevitches, the staff focused on increasing its heritage breed livestock, while proceeding on the renovation of the Coggeshall dwelling house, as suggested by Hawes. Work also began on the construction of a separate house for the farm manager.³⁵³ Walter Katkevitch hoped to continue the work outlined by Hawes and Johnson. In a written report to the board, Walter Katkevitch discussed his

efforts to present the Farm as an accurate re-creation of a 1790’s coastal farm. He spoke of his research into marsh haying and boat reproduction. Pursuing knowledge, through research, is the most important task of the staff because the activities of the Museum should reflect that knowledge. It is also vital to create an atmosphere which supports the research efforts of a dedicated staff. Finally, the Museum should adopt a world-class attitude to become a world-class institution.³⁵⁴

He likewise maintained relationships with other living history museums and organizations, attending an interpreter’s conference at Farmer’s Museum in Cooperstown³⁵⁵ In his October 1992 farm museum manager’s report, Walter Katkevitch noted that Coggeshall Farm Museum was invited to participate in Old Sturbridge Village’s Agricultural Fair, he saw this as “evidence that we are recognized as part of the living history community.”³⁵⁶

In addition to a Farm Manager and Director, the museum had two part-time staff members, Luis Mendes and Dave Ellis. Yet, the museum continued to face uncertainties due in large measure to the volatile economy and a lack of understanding between the board and staff. Communication remained a problem. In November,

³⁵¹ Nan Szenher, Minutes for the Coggeshall Farm Museum Board Meeting, September 10, 1990, (CFM).

³⁵² Ibid.

³⁵³ Ibid., October 3, 1990, (CFM).

³⁵⁴ Nan Szenher, Minutes for the Annual Member’s Meeting, June 4, 1991, (CFM).

³⁵⁵ Nan Szenher, Minutes for the Coggeshall Farm Museum Board Meeting, April, 1, 1992, (CFM).

³⁵⁶ Ibid., October 2, 1992, (CFM).

Walter Katkevitch asked for a single board liaison to simplify the chain of command.³⁵⁷ Making matters worse, it was clear that the museum would face a budget shortfall in the following year, estimated at over \$10,000.³⁵⁸ At the 1991 Annual Membership meeting, George L. Sisson, who still remained an important figure at the museum, reported that, “[t]he financial situation of Coggeshall Farm has never been worse. One of our key funding-revenue streams on an annual basis has, this year for the first time in eight years totally dried up as a result of the State’s budget crisis,” noting the absence of an annual \$5,500.00 state grant.³⁵⁹

There was a glimmer of hope in 1990, when Rhode Island voters passed a Historic Preservation Bond Issue to fund the renovation of the farmhouse. An internal document “Questions about organization that may arise,” explains that renovations never occurred in 1990, “...due to a technical error in the wording of the bond bill, the bonds could not be sold. In 1992 the bill was resubmitted to the voters, and this time it did not pass.”³⁶⁰

Work continued to increase historical authenticity. Records indicate that in 1991, the staff turned to primary historical sources for historic documentation. Luis Mendes presented excerpts from late-eighteenth-century advertisements for lost and saleable livestock to the board, as well as a transcription of the 1795 lease for the farm at Point Pleasant.³⁶¹ According to Walter Katkevitch, Mendes’ research suggested that the museum’s current Devon breeds were less authentic than other potential breeds.³⁶² The

³⁵⁷ Ibid., November 7, 1990, (CFM).

³⁵⁸ Ibid., December 6, 1990, (CFM).

³⁵⁹ Sisson, Chairman’s Report to Coggeshall Farm Membership, June 4, 1991, (CFM).

³⁶⁰ “Questions about organization that may arise,” internal document, c.1994, (CFM).

³⁶¹ Luis Mendes, Preliminary Research on Late 18th Century Livestock, January 1991, (CFM).

³⁶² Nan Szenher, Minutes for the Coggeshall Farm Museum Board Meeting, January 10, 1991, (CFM).

staff also became more interested in growing more historic vegetables like “Portuguese White and red onions which could have been grown in 1790.”³⁶³ As the 1990s progressed, staff began building their own historic reproduction tools, including a flax break, which allowed them to demonstrate flax processing to the public.³⁶⁴

While Hawes had helped to solidify the museum’s identity, ongoing conflict on the board, coupled with financial difficulties led the museum to seek further outside assistance. As part of a Rhode Island Foundation Grant, the museum received funding to hire a management consultant for the museum along with \$12,500 for a director’s salary. The consultant planned to “define the [director’s] position, develop a management plan, and advise on fundraising.”³⁶⁵ By June, the board hired consultant Simone Joyaux of Public Works Associates for the position.³⁶⁶ Joyaux’s board survey indicated that staff and board members were unclear about their job descriptions. Evidently, there was also “[f]riction and anxiety...between board members and some board members and staff.”³⁶⁷ In her role as advisor, she revised job descriptions and aided in the creation of various committees, including those focused on research and program development.³⁶⁸

At the February 5, 1992 board meeting, members reviewed a drafted statement of purpose, with Joyaux’s assistance. By this point, Coggeshall Farm Museum’s period of interpretation had narrowed considerably, and as such, its “programs, exhibits, and farm work demonstrate the life on a late 18th century salt marsh farm and its

³⁶³ Ibid., April, 3, 1991, (CFM).

³⁶⁴ Ibid., August 5, 1992, (CFM).

³⁶⁵ Ibid., April, 3, 1991, (CFM).

³⁶⁶ Ibid., June 26, 1991, (CFM).

³⁶⁷ Ibid., October 3, 1991, (CFM).

³⁶⁸ Ibid., December 4, 1991, (CFM).

community.”³⁶⁹ The document suggested that the board hesitated to set the 1790s as the target date. Throughout the statement of purpose, a black space stood in for the “9” in 1790.³⁷⁰ The document stressed the importance of the 1790s as an era of change, and one crucial to understanding “our heritage” though the author does not identify the target audience.

The statement of purpose also solidified Coggeshall’s commitment to historical authenticity through interpretive techniques, research and documentation, and programming.³⁷¹ Following the statement of purpose was supporting information which explained why Coggeshall narrowed its interpretive scope. According to the document, “The 1790’s was an exciting decade in our history. While the lifestyles, economic and personal values were essentially late colonial, the new republic was on the threshold of profound sociological, economic and technological changes while it was in the middle of organizing and adjusting its government and translating a vision of its self [sic] into a new self identity.”³⁷² It further explained that narrowing down to a single decade was for practical reasons. Following the lead of Old Sturbridge Village, a “recognized world class museum, which is a leader and resource in the area of living history museums,” Coggeshall narrowed its period of interpretation to perform more focused historical research and accurate interpretation.³⁷³ New programs included “All Manner of Good Work,” a two day event that featured demonstrations by historic tradespersons in book bindery, stone masonry, and rope

³⁶⁹ Coggeshall Farm Museum Drafted Policies, January 1992, (CFM).

³⁷⁰ Ibid.

³⁷¹ Ibid.

³⁷² Ibid.

³⁷³ Ibid.

making, among other trades and crafts.³⁷⁴ Included in Coggeshall Farm Museum's new guidelines were animal and agriculture policies which stressed that breeds and plant types should be similar to those raised on farms in the 1790s whenever possible.³⁷⁵

The board, led by President Stephen DeLeo, and the museum staff, headed by Executive Director Donna Katkevitch and Farm Museum Manager Walter Katkevitch were dedicated to transforming Coggeshall Farm into a museum comparable to larger well-known living history institutions. In 1993, they implemented new programming that featured eighteenth-century activities, and accepted an important donation of historic tools from collector Tim Bornstein. Walter Katkevitch remarked at the annual member's meeting, that Coggeshall Farm was now "a serious, professional, important living history museum' which could become 'a small but significant jewel in the American cultural treasure."³⁷⁶ The staff and board continued to juggle transformative changes with budgetary issues. Walter Katkevitch reported that staff were not provided with enough hours to complete work.³⁷⁷ Treasurer Susan Hibbitt noted that it was impossible for the museum to be financially independent on programming alone. Most significantly, the museum no longer received a grant which had funded the director's salary. Without proper fundraising, the museum was likely to be in a "precarious position" by September 1994.³⁷⁸ After a mediocre return for the museum's annual harvest fair, Hibbitt reported in December on the abysmal state of the

³⁷⁴ Jane Joyce, Minutes for the Coggeshall Farm Museum Board Meeting, May 3, 1995, (CFM).

³⁷⁵ Coggeshall Farm Museum Drafted Policies, January 1992, (CFM).

³⁷⁶ Nan Szenher, Minutes for the Coggeshall Farm Museum Annual Meeting, June 29, 1993, (CFM). DeLeo, an attorney, assumed the position in August 1992.

³⁷⁷ Nan Szenher, Minutes for the Coggeshall Farm Museum Board Meeting, May 4, 1994, (CFM).

³⁷⁸ Susan Hibbitt, Coggeshall Farm Museum Treasurer's Report, June 1, 1994, (CFM).

museum's finances. While she commended the staff for their efforts to generate revenue and minimize expenses, she chastised the board for shirking its responsibility to fundraise.³⁷⁹

Despite these financial setbacks, the board completed the construction of the new farmer's residence, freeing up the historic farmhouse for further interpretive programming and restoration.³⁸⁰ The museum saw some financial successes in 1995 due to a bolstered school tour and summer camp program, coupled with increased fundraising efforts by board members who focused their efforts on soliciting Poppasquash neighbors and increasing grant writing.³⁸¹ At the 1996 annual meeting, Donna Katkevitch presented her plans for the museum's future, addressing the

need to move forward with a deciveness[sic] and responsibility to insure our future growth as a Museum-to operate effectively, to increase financial resources and renew our efforts as ambassadors for the museum and to play a more aggressive role in fundraising. We all believe in preserving the past for the future, lets increase the number of those that share our beliefs in preservation and education and continue in our aggressive pursuit of excellence in all areas of Museum management, operation, and presentation.³⁸²

Unfortunately, this period of growth was followed by warnings from the treasurer, as the board again neglected their fundraising responsibilities. In April 1996, both Treasurer Hibbett and Director Donna Katkevitch reported that museum finances were strained. Inclement weather decreased the number of visitors and with that revenue. Katkevitch warned that these programs were not meant to raise funds but instead to "support the mission of the museum."³⁸³

To supplement the budget, the museum sought funding for both operating costs and large scale improvement projects. They were successfully awarded a \$37,000

³⁷⁹ Ibid., November 30, 1994, (CFM).

³⁸⁰ Nan Szenher, Minutes for the Coggeshall Farm Museum Board Meeting, January 25, 1995, (CFM).

³⁸¹ Joyce, Minutes for the Coggeshall Farm Museum Board Meeting, September 6, 1995, (CFM).

³⁸² Donna Katkevitch, Speech at the 1996 Annual Meeting, January 31, 1996, (CFM).

³⁸³ Joyce, Minutes for the Coggeshall Farm Museum Board Meeting, April 10, 1996, (CFM).

grant from the Champlin Foundation for farmhouse restoration. According to Walter Katkevitch, the grant was a milestone for the museum as a living historical site, as it would physically open up the site to for tours, demonstrations, and events. The purpose of Coggeshall Farm Museum, “now enhanced by the availability of the farmhouse—is to demonstrate ‘living history’ and to ‘bring a higher magnitude of awareness’ about the late 18th-century period in local history to visitors, scholars, and others interested in this era.”³⁸⁴ Concurrently, Donna Katkevitch worked to improve the museum’s educational programming while Walter Katkevitch assisted with the farmhouse restoration.³⁸⁵

Throughout 1998, the museum focused on amplifying its research endeavors, creating a strategic plan for interpretation with the assistance of board members, staff, and two outside sources: Tom Kelleher of Old Sturbridge Village and Professor Joanne Pope Melish of Brown University.³⁸⁶ The museum took an even more important step in 1999, when the board and staff took a retreat at the Bristol Yacht Club, after which they produced a concrete document which established guidelines regarding the history, personnel, and policies of the site.³⁸⁷

Donna Katkevitch stayed on as Executive Director until she resigned, effective January 31, 2001. Her timing coincided with the completion of the farmhouse restoration. Simultaneously, Farm Manager Walter Katkevitch was appointed the role

³⁸⁴ Joyce, Minutes for the Coggeshall Farm Museum Annual Meeting, January 29, 1997, (CFM).

³⁸⁵ Minutes for the Coggeshall Farm Museum Board Meeting, November 5, 1997, (CFM).

³⁸⁶ Ibid., February 11, 1998, (CFM). Dr. Joanne Pope Melish was teaching at Brown University when she collaborated with Coggeshall Farm Museum. After receiving a PhD in American Civilization from Brown, she published *Disowning Slavery: Gradual Emancipation and "Race" in New England, 1780-1860*.

³⁸⁷ Donna Katkevitch, Notes for the Coggeshall Farm Museum Annual Meeting, January 7, 2000, (CFM); Board of Trustees Orientation Retreat Agenda, April 6, 1999, (CFM).

of executive director. He faced a continuing budget deficit crisis.³⁸⁸ Although a competent farm manager, Katkevitch's inadequacies as a bookkeeper among other traits led to his removal from the position of manager and director within two years.³⁸⁹ By early 2003, the Katkevitches had been replaced by a new executive director, Bob Sherman, and farm manager and former employee David Ellis.³⁹⁰

With the exit of the Katkevitches, the museum lost much needed stability and continuity in its staffing. Work continued among the board to push the museum forward, however. By May 2003, the institution created a draft of Coggeshall Farm Museum's Action Plan. The Action Plan underscored the importance of the Coggeshall Farm Museum farmhouse, the institution's educational and interpretive commitment, and fundraising obligations. The plan mentioned the need for a visitor's center and parking area—a goal which never materialized. However, the initial plan laid the foundation for the museum's future interpretive programming, pushing for a “strong interpretive plan for the Museum's day to day activities” as well as informative workshops.³⁹¹ As the museum progressed, daily programming and the proposed “House Dinner” lecture series became a mainstay of the Coggeshall Farm Museum interpretive portfolio.³⁹² Though no longer called “House Dinners,” the museum continues to offer hearth cooking workshops. During these educational workshops, visitors work with costumed interpreters to prepare and enjoy a meal using

³⁸⁸ Anne Kellerman, Minutes for the Coggeshall Farm Museum Board Meeting, January 13, 2001, (CFM).

³⁸⁹ Joyce, E-mail Correspondence to Board Members: “CFM Director/Farm Manager Evaluation + Executive Session,” May 14, 2002, (CFM).

³⁹⁰ Kellerman, Minutes for the Coggeshall Farm Museum Board Meeting, March 1, 2003, (CFM).

³⁹¹ Draft of Coggeshall Farm Museum's Action Plan, May 2003, (CFM).

³⁹² Ibid.

heirloom ingredients and historic recipes. Arguably, this type of programming represents the perfect union of farm and museum.

With the museum's identity established, board and staff increasingly focused on creating a more authentic experience onsite as the 2000s progressed. Anthropologists Richard Handler and Eric Gable found that at institutions like Colonial Williamsburg, administrators often utilized authenticity to support the museum's credibility.³⁹³ While a turn towards a more historically accurate or authentically represented site and interpretation accompanied Coggeshall Farm Museum's professionalization in the 1980s through the 1990s, increasing the museum's educational potential, it also had unintended consequences in later years. After 2003, Coggeshall Farm Museum committed itself to an accurate, authentic portrayal of the past. As future administrations took the reins, authenticity was not only an established standard, but sometimes a barrier to inclusion. In 2004 under David Ellis's tenure as Farm Manager, volunteers were forced to "establish a period commitment" by first doing hand sewing, even if they simply wished to volunteer in the garden.³⁹⁴ In a later undated document, likely authored by former Director of Historic Interpretation (DHI) Justin Squizzero, it is suggested that "[w]earing parts of costume with modern clothes, for instance, damages the credibility of the costume collection."³⁹⁵ The document goes on to instruct employees that, "[w]hen modern clothing is required for health reasons

³⁹³ Eric Gable and Richard Handler, "After Authenticity at an American Heritage Site," 576.

³⁹⁴ Minutes for the Coggeshall Farm Museum Board Meeting, May 10, 2004, (CFM). Harkening back to Handler and Saxton's definitions of authenticity in the living history museum, David Ellis is a prime example of a living historian who explored the past in order to define his authentic self. He joined the farm after spending a number of years with the Old Order Amish. It seems that the museum allowed Ellis to fulfill the simpler lifestyle he desired. Though no longer employed at the museum, Ellis continues to correspond through letters, wears historic clothing, and rejects some modern technology like cellular phones.

³⁹⁵ Unknown Author (possibly Justin Squizzero), Costume Guidelines, Unknown Date, (CFM).

(insoles, for example) these must be reviewed by the DHI, and used with discretion.”³⁹⁶

In recent years, board and staff have accommodated some more anachronistic details, as they increasingly loosen guidelines on authenticity on a smaller scale, without largely impacting credibility. Changes include allowing staff and volunteers to wear sturdier modern clothing and accessories at their discretion, including footwear and glasses and increasing signage throughout the site. Throughout 2016-2018, Coggeshall Farm Museum staff was encouraged to wear sturdier, modern footwear during inclement weather, especially in winter, even when dressed in historic costume. The museum also updated and implemented new interpretive and interactive displays, including a children’s dress-up area in the historic farmhouse. The farmhouse, which remains a focal point for the museum, can now serve visitors looking for the more traditional living history experience, or those who are looking for an activity inspired, but not bound by, authenticity as commonly defined in the museum field.

³⁹⁶ Ibid.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

The dream of authenticity is a present-day myth. We cannot recreate, reconstruct, or recapture the past. We can only tell stories about the past in present day language, based on our present-day concerns and the knowledge (built, to be sure, out of documents and evidence) we construct today.³⁹⁷

-Richard Handler & Eric Gable, *Creating the Past at Colonial Williamsburg*

The entire history of Coggeshall Farm Museum could not possibly be captured in such a brief work. What is contained in the previous chapters tells the story of a museum in a state of formation and change. Beginning in the late 1960s, Coggeshall Farm Museum board and staff struggled to create an identity for the institution. They slowly transformed it from a rather generic and nostalgic farmstead to a professional museum inspired by trends in social history. Coggeshall's founders, particularly George Sisson, hoped to preserve the farmstead, and perhaps more importantly, the quaint town of Bristol, as it faced an influx of immigrants and building projects. In many ways, Sisson mimicked earlier Bristolian authors like Wilfred Harold Munro who similarly decried the unrestricted changes occurring in Bristol. Though not without conflict, power was wrested from the earlier administration and over time, individuals with new agendas took over. During much of the period explored in Chapter 5, the board and staff were consumed with a quest for authenticity, which coincided with the popularity of social history.

Despite their quest for authenticity, a living history environment can never truly be authentic, as it will always be based on and filtered through the mentalities of

³⁹⁷ Richard Handler & Eric Gable, *Creating the Past at Colonial Williamsburg*, 223.

contemporary actors. While the history presented at the site in 2018 focuses on 1790s salt marsh tenant farmers, this was not always the case. The museum initially presented an antiquarian influenced, generic pastoral history. As evident in this paper, board and staff at Coggeshall Farm Museum made a number of choices that altered the history articulated at the site, eventually focusing on the 1790s. Based on the recorded history of the site, however, the 1790s were arguably a period of minor importance with regards to Bristol history and the history of the site. Narrowing the period of interpretation certainly allowed for the incorporation of social history, forcing staff to focus on the intricacies of everyday life in the 1790s, but this method of interpretation also meant that the museum has neglected to record and present other histories of the property that are just as significant.

The 1790s were rather inconsequential in many ways. While the house was mentioned in the 1799 deed, there is no information available about the farm's residents, and there is little material available on the farm's owner. Had the museum chosen to focus on 1802, just a few years later, it would have opened wider opportunities to discuss broader issues such as the triangular trade in greater detail and perhaps partner with other Bristol institutions. Coggeshall could have pursued its connection with owner William D'Wolf, while still maintaining the tenant farm narrative.³⁹⁸

Furthermore, the fact that the Coggeshall family did not reside in the farmhouse until a number of decades later has damaged the museum's credibility, as it is commonly assumed that the Coggeshalls owned or lived in the house during the

³⁹⁸ Although the museum attempts to connect the 1790s and wider Bristol history to the triangular trade, the narrative is disjointed from the narrative of the anonymous tenant farmer residents.

depicted time period. While the museum's founders acknowledged the importance of Chandler H. Coggeshall, they neglected to include his narrative in museum interpretation. Today, the museum continues to ignore a very important part of the site's history: the turn of the twentieth century. Not only is there evidence that Coggeshall lived and worked the land as a tenant farmer during this period, but during this time, Samuel Pomeroy Colt purchased the Coggeshall property and much of what later became Colt State Park. Arguably, this period is extremely important to Bristol and Rhode Island state history, yet it also a period that portrays the tenant farmer lifestyle.

Authenticity may be important, but as explained in Chapter 1, it is a complicated term, holding many different definitions within anthropology and even within the field of living history. Although living historians are commonly interested in upholding historical authenticity, visitors may attend museums to experience authenticity in other ways. As noted in Wilkening and Donnis's article, when pressed to describe inauthenticity in the museum, only a fraction of visitors decried the existence of anachronisms. Living history museums may be unique, in that they primarily exist to simulate the past, but they cannot rely wholly on historical authenticity as a driving force. At Coggeshall Farm Museum, a large majority of the museum's visitors are children from schools and camps, and children who visit with their families. It is no wonder that of all the programs, the school tour program which was discussed in Chapter 3, continues to be a driving force within the museum.

Perhaps it is up to Coggeshall Farm Museum, and living history museums in general, to look not only to the past, but also to the present and future for guidance. A

preoccupation with authenticity still guides many museum decisions. Many non-living history museums are changing, incorporating new technologies and modes of entertainment into their educational models. The blurred line of education and entertainment has led to the creation of the buzzword, edutainment. While some continue to decry the influx of culture into popular media, and amusement into education, institutions are looking outside the museum for guidance on creating successful programming. The social history model that inspired the turn to authenticity may no longer be relevant to today's visiting public. While some might fret over such a compromise, living history is essentially a series of compromises. Museums negotiate which stories to tell and which audiences to appease. Coggeshall Farm Museum can attempt to be authentic in its presentation of history, with regards to historical accuracy, but it should also acknowledge its role as an *interpreter* of history.

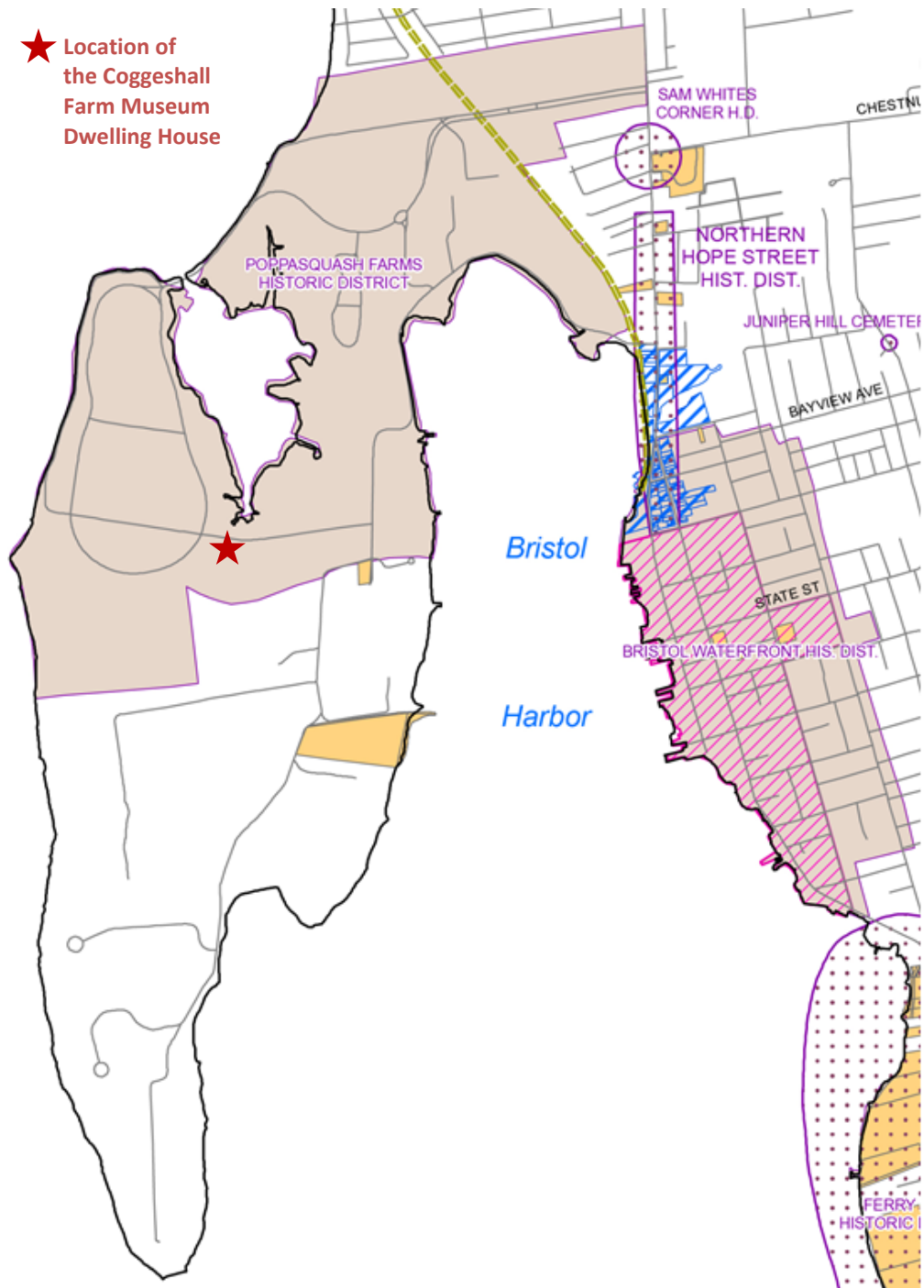
Museums teach future generations about the past, often citing the now popular philosophy originated by George Santayana, that "those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it." While Coggeshall Farm Museum stresses learning from the past in its interpretation, as an institution, it has neglected to learn from past mistakes. As the museum works through its authenticity issue, future board and staff must look to the past for further guidance. Change is necessary. Coggeshall, as an institution attracted a number of influential board members and employees throughout its history as an institution, yet tension and conflict among these groups prevented forward growth. In particular, the lack of fundraising commitment from the board and the instability of staff led to shortfalls during both periods of institutional history. As the museum faces an uncertain future, it is quite possible that board and staff will need

to reinvent Coggeshall Farm Museum once again. Perhaps it is time for Coggeshall Farm Museum to revisit its past and consider that historically, transformation was always at the core of the museum.

APPENDICES

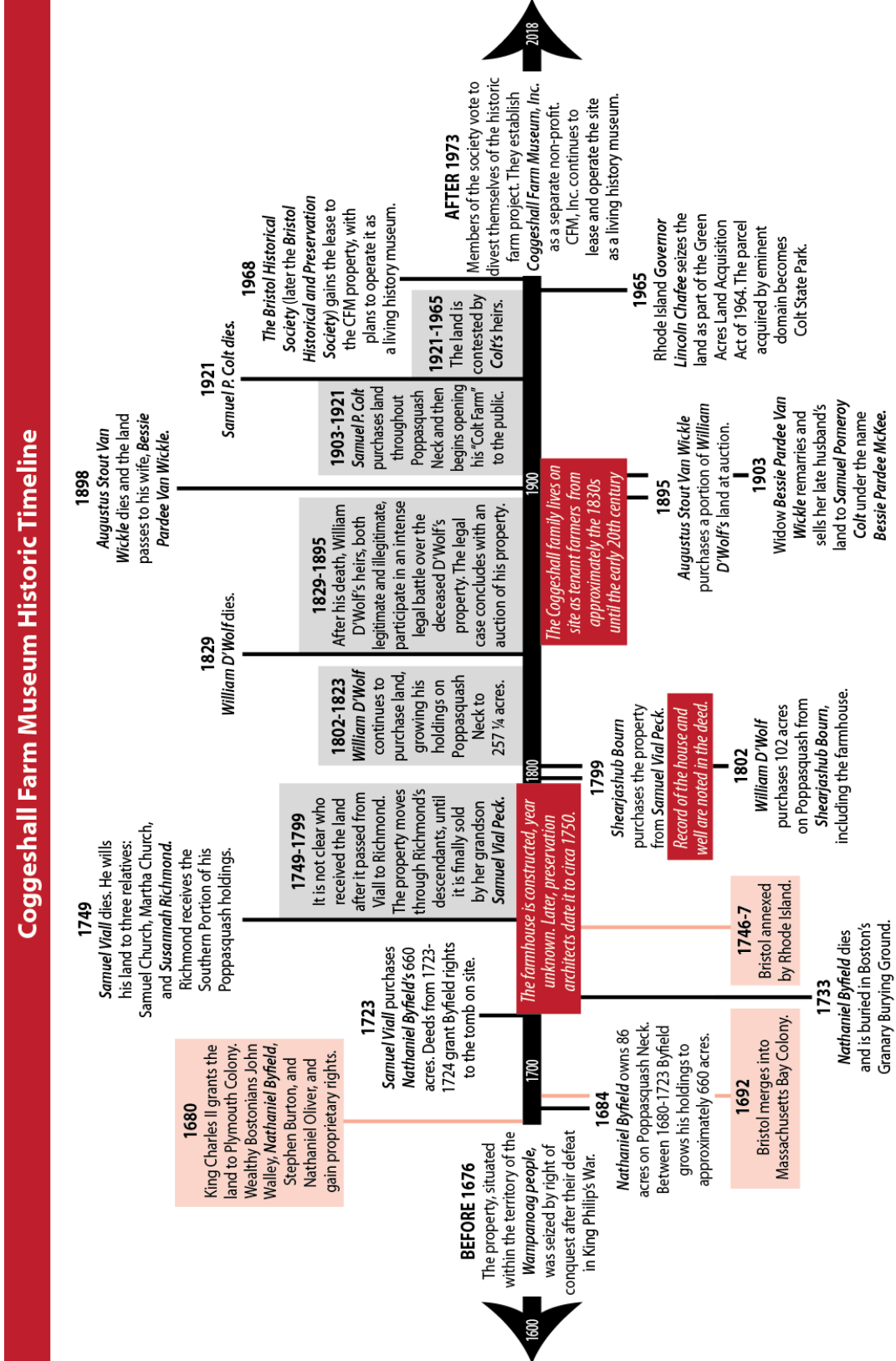
APPENDIX 1:

Map of Bristol Highlighting Poppasquash Farms Historic District (edited by author to show location of Coggeshall Farm Museum), Detail of Base Map from “Bristol Comprehensive Plan 2009 Historical Districts, Buildings and Properties,” accessed June 27, 2018, <https://www.bristolri.us/320/Community-Maps>.



APPENDIX 2:

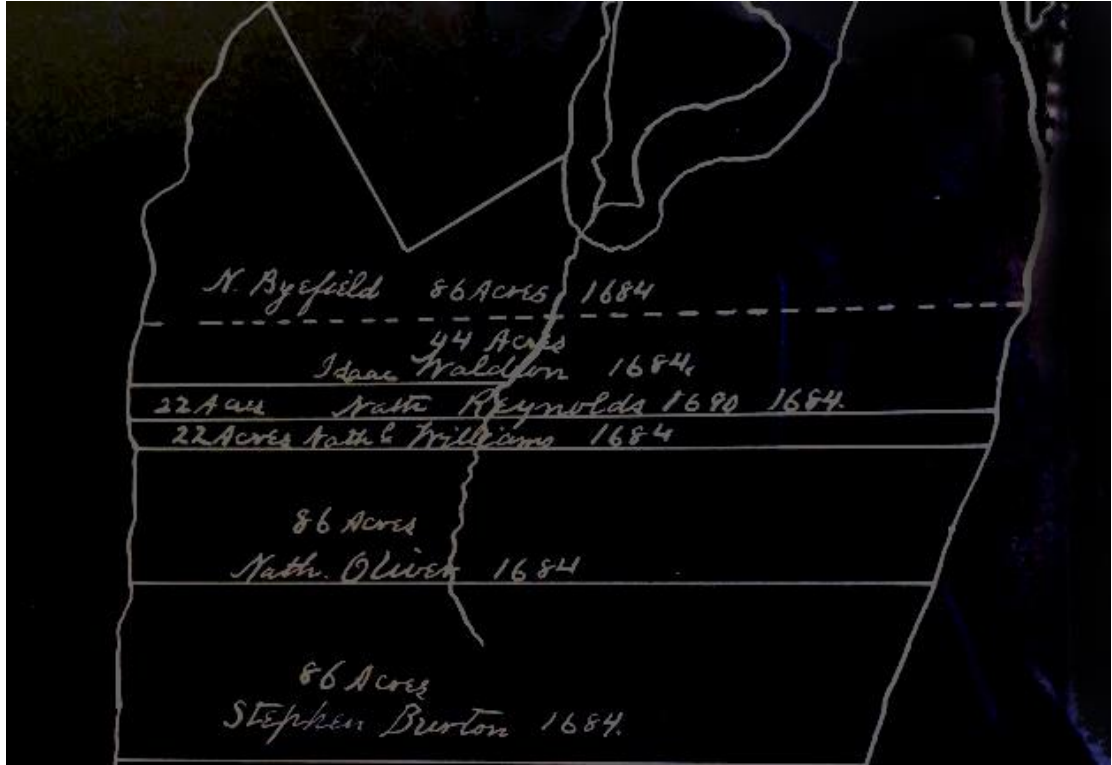
Coggeshall Farm Museum Historic Timeline, created by author.



Coggeshall Farm Museum Historic Timeline

APPENDIX 3:

Plan of Town of Bristol: A True Copy Attest John H. Church, Town Clerk, (William M. Perry), Bristol Historical and Preservation Society (edited for clarity by author).



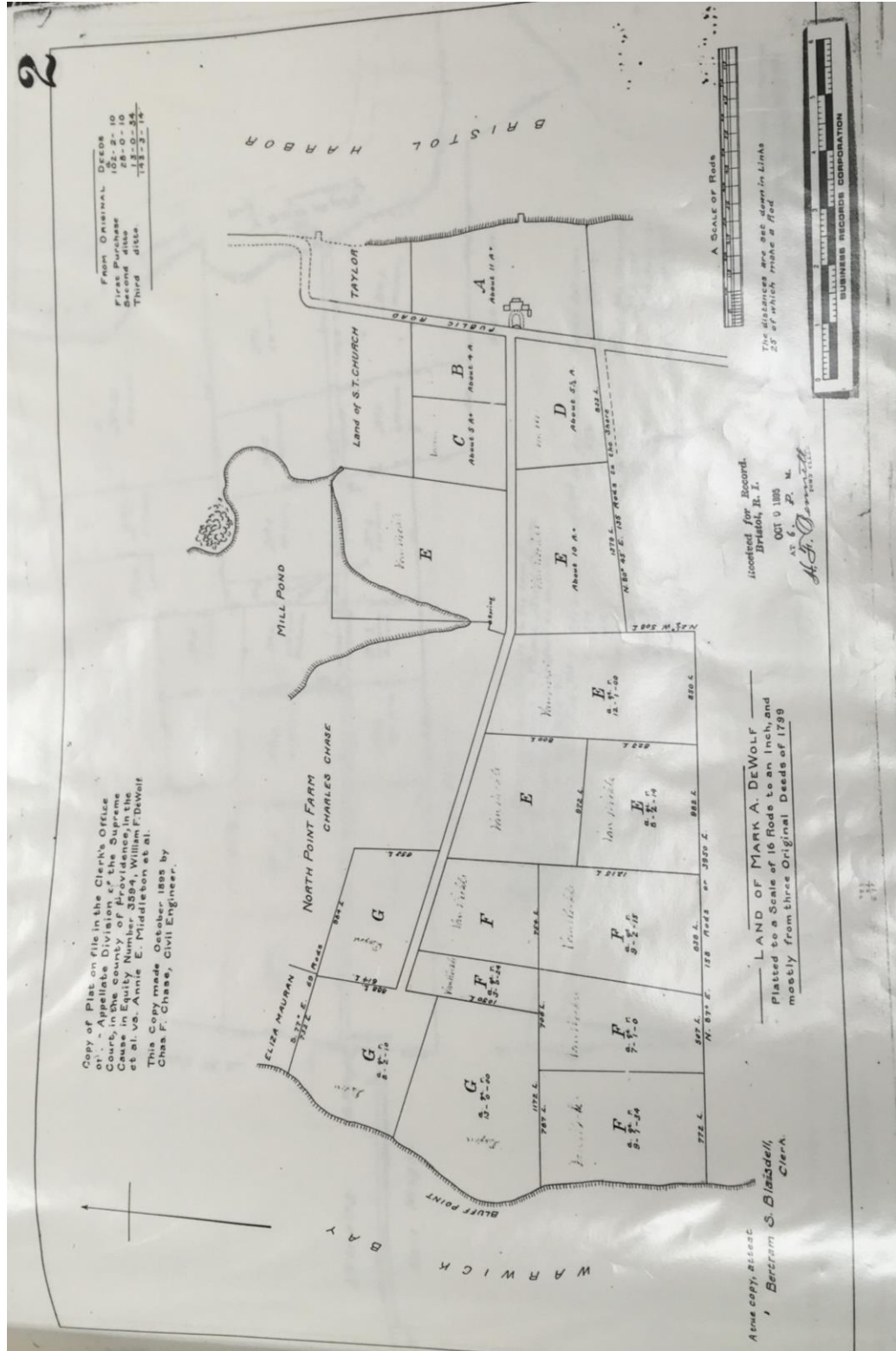
APPENDIX 4:

Coggeshall Dwelling House, digital image, Coggeshall Farm Museum, accessed June 27, 2018, <http://coggeshallfarm.org/assets/gallery/7/147.jpg>.



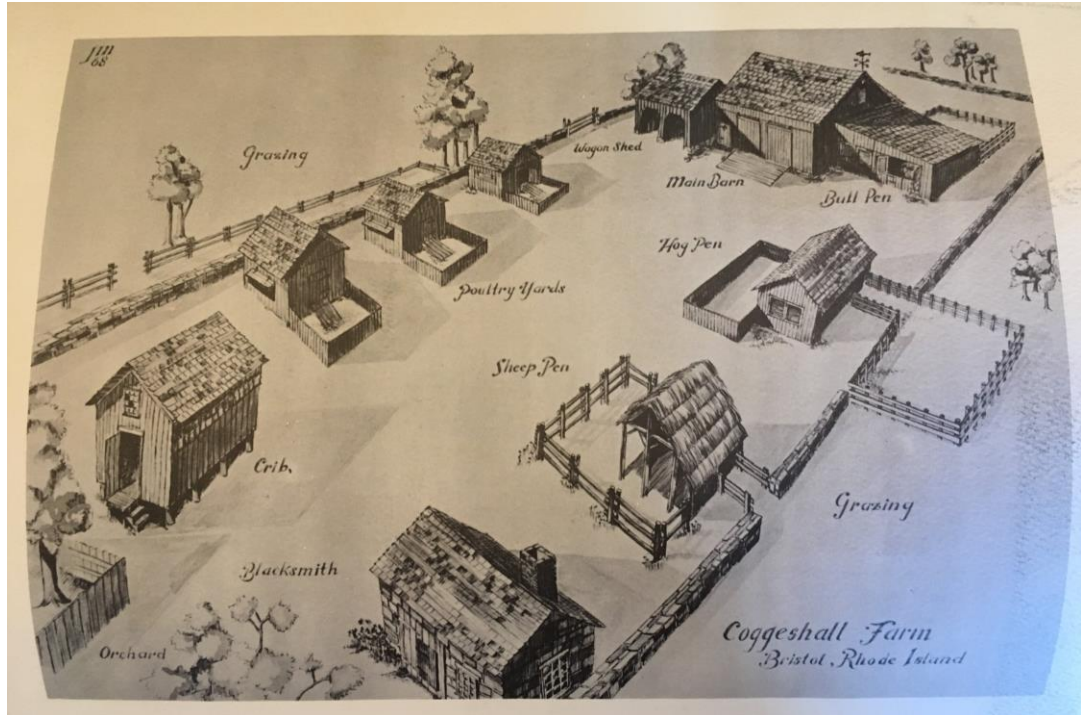
APPENDIX 5:

“Land of Mark A. Dewolf,” Plat Book 2, Page 2, Bristol Town Hall.



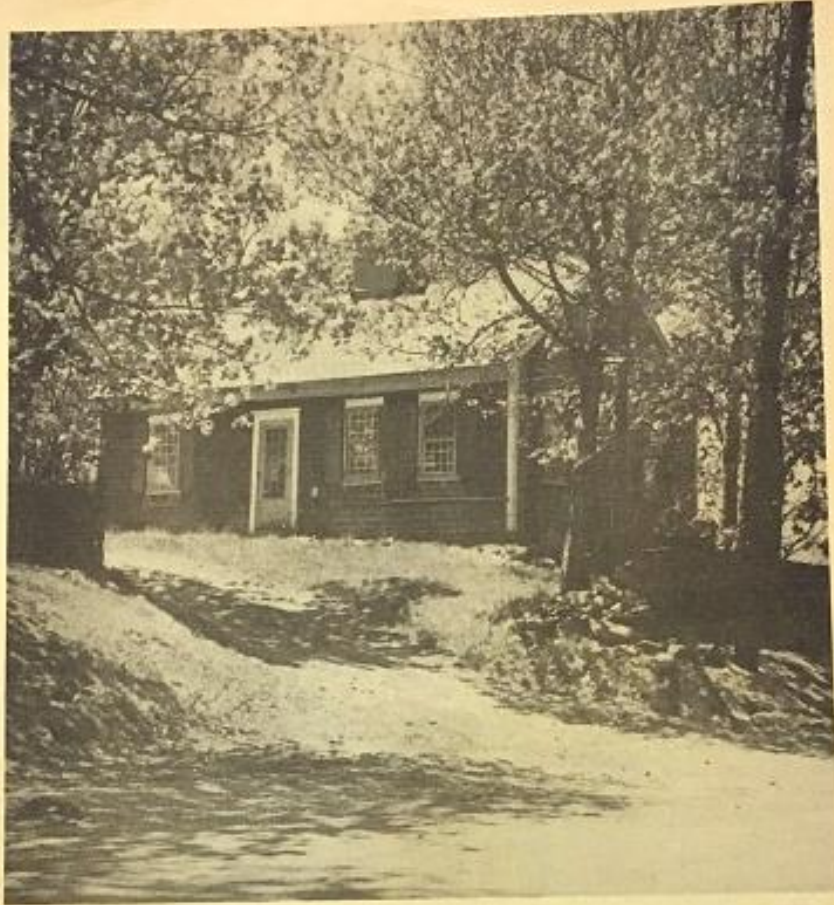
APPENDIX 6:

Old Rhode Island Farm Museum Brochure, Undated (after 1968), Bristol Historical and Preservation Society.



APPENDIX 7:

Old Rhode Island Farm Museum Brochure, Cover, Undated (after 1968), Bristol Historical and Preservation Society.



*Old Rhode Island Family Farm
at Colt State Park
Will Preserve our Farm Heritage*

The sharp decline of farms in recent years has prompted a number of prominent Rhode Islanders to join together in an effort

to restore, reconstruct and preserve forever a pre-revolutionary family farm complete with farm buildings, animals and crops.

APPENDIX 8:

The Tomashes at Coggeshall Farm Museum, Mary Migliore, "18th Century Bristol Farm Being Reborn," *The Providence Sunday Journal*, October 25, 1970.

18th century Bristol farm being reborn

STORY BY MARY MIGLIORE
 PICTURES BY RICHARD BENJAMIN

THE NEWEST dream at the 150-year-old Coggeshall Farm on Colt State Park in Bristol says the owners would have done it repeatedly had it given the new food more time for the building, they would be a fortnight to see the house, and drink water from a nearby spring.

Adam Tomash plans to do it all and work hard to get the place. Mr. Tomash and his wife Bonnie moved into the gray shingled farmhouse in early September. He will stay his job as a chemistry instructor at Roger Williams College, while he and his wife become housewives on the farm, which has been listed for sale by the Bristol Historical Society.

John L. Papp, vice director of natural resources, said the remains of the farm are a small portion of Colt State Park which the state took over five years ago.

The old house is on an old dirt lane where the Coggeshall town and farm's excellent average lighting of 2700 Chandler H. Englewood, born there in 1841, was one of the founders of the University of Rhode Island and raised the land for most of his life.

The owners plan to open the farm to the public in the summer of 1972 and in building a food store that will be open every day for the summer season. The house will be typical of an 18th century Rhode Island farmhouse, with four chimneys, a central chimney, and a vegetable garden. There will be no electricity or such modern conveniences as refrigeration, plumbing, heating, and air conditioning.

It will have to provide some food during the Tomashes' living in conjunction with the land and the farm. Mr. Tomash says the farm has had a continuous number of visitors since the 18th century.

"I don't know if this would be a good idea, somebody should want to help. I think people want to go back to the past and to the good old simple things," Mr. Tomash said.

He admits he would be glad to get back to the farm, but he has a paper about the project. He will stay in the office. There are no plans to build the farm and he was already glad to have been able to see the farm, garden or outside.

"I don't see any reason to go back to colonial society. Some people think that and around the 18th century if you're not a farmer or a scientist and you might as well be a lawyer, politician or a doctor. We have a more, a different, culture, and what we consider 'modern,'" he said.

He doesn't think colonial living is necessary and he said the only way to go back to the 18th century is to live in the past. The house is in the past, the furniture and in a large way even the way was originally the kitchen. A small room added about 1800 and one added in the 18th century.

The house has a lot of old furniture and a "good room" used by farmers in the 18th century and one more of the house and a "living room" just off the porch which served as a breakfast room and a dining room. The entire remains of a farm added by a porch added by later day owners.

When the farm is open to the public, the people will see the house and the 18th-century will be furnished at a small amount with. Each room is furnished with the 18th-century, it being a contrast to the story in the restoration work.

Living Room: A small room, in the dining room, the house is the best room. The house is the best room. The house is the best room. The house is the best room.

Bedroom: A small room, in the dining room, the house is the best room. The house is the best room. The house is the best room.

Kitchen: A small room, in the dining room, the house is the best room. The house is the best room. The house is the best room.

Bathroom: A small room, in the dining room, the house is the best room. The house is the best room. The house is the best room.



PROUDLY DECIDED for his role as farmer, Adam Tomash stands with his wife before the 18th century house on the former Coggeshall farm. Bristol, local historical society hopes to reconstruct place as a typical early 18th century farm.

By next summer the single woman to have a vegetable and flower garden and a goat for milk. Mr. Tomash plans to get back, never close to a room, make people and their wandering.

The couple met at the University of New Hampshire — she started out in agriculture and she was working in teaching. He worked in chemistry and she took on art and crafts. They're both in Bristol, Rhode Island.

"This job as a teacher is really perfect for us," he said. "It takes a lot of time to meet our students on one day. This is an opportunity for us to see it as we live a better way into the last year."

Are they home? "No really. Our friends and all the work for me in the 18th century of the world. I just to be interested for now. I don't read newspapers and magazines. I think we are now that you could pick up a paper every six months and find out what was happening. It's there in a world, but it's hard and demanding," he said.

"The schedule didn't have time to read papers," he added.



ALREADY PLUNGING into domestic chores is Mary Tomash who will be playing leading role in restoration of a bygone way of life for Rhode Island women.



STILL GETTING SETTLED. Modern farm table is new part of furnishings. Note the 12 over 12 colonial-style windows that give abundance of light.

APPENDIX 9:

Coggeshall Farm Museum Brochures, 1974, Coggeshall Farm Museum.

Coggeshall Farm
MUSEUM, INC

A PRE-REVOLUTIONARY
LIVING RESTORATION PROJECT

1974

OPEN JUNE 24
WEEKENDS AND HOLIDAYS
1 P.M. to 5 P.M.
CLOSES LABOR DAY

\$1.00 Adults
50c Children under 12
(Must be accompanied by an adult)

Coggeshall Farm Museum, Inc. membership
is \$10.00; admission is free to members

Coggeshall Farm
MUSEUM, INC

Welcome to Coggeshall Farm. These thirty-five acres have been intact and cared for since 1750. This land and the surrounding Poppasquash neck was originally bought from Plymouth Colony by Nathaniel Byfield, founder of Bristol; but not until James Coggeshall was deeded the acreage was it a working farm. When the last Coggeshall remained unmarried, it was sold to the Colts who used it as a tenant farm until Mr. Colt presented his estate to Rhode Island for a park in 1968.

Coggeshall Farm was cared for by the Bristol Historical Society until its separate incorporation in 1973 by Coggeshall Farm Museum, Inc.

Coggeshall Farm Restoration Project has been open to the public as a museum for some years now, but this is the first year under "new management" and it is exciting. It is still a museum and restoration project, but with the help of many Rhode Islanders, it is picking up the continuum it has carried from the past and living again.

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