Archaeological Testing for the Hancock-Clarke Barn Restoration, Lexington, Massachusetts

Prepared for:
The Lexington History Museums

Lexington, MA

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Abstract

In preparation for the installation of below ground drainage systems north of the Hancock-Clarke House barn, the Fiske Center for Archaeological Research conducted shovel test pit excavations on May 28th, 2025 as part of SAP #4400: Hancock-Clarke Utilities Installation for Barn Restoration. The project impact area is about 40 m west of the 1737 Hancock-Clarke House. A total of 6 shovel test pits were planned and a 5 total were excavated, as previous monitoring of the mechanical excavation of a trench for the installation of a below ground electrical line provided an adequate view of the area surrounding the sixth planned test. The 5 completed shovel tests were excavated by a UMass Boston field school comprised of graduate and undergraduate UMass Boston students supervised by Dr. Christa Beranek and Graduate Student Christopher Fuchs. The excavations recovered a low-density assemblage of small and fragmentary cultural material including fragments of bricks, metal slag, nails, glass, and some earthenware ceramics. No Indigenous ceramics or lithic materials were recovered, and the excavations did not identify any subsurface archaeological features or significant concentrations of artifacts. All the shovel tests were excavated to subsoil, with closing depths ranging from 36 – 75 centimeters below surface level. The assemblage is representative of a landscape surrounding a historic structure which has been in varied use for centuries, but only in ways that have left a low-density artifact signature.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank Jesse Hilton, curator, Lester Savage, board member, and Anne Hancock, former director, of the Lexington History Museums for facilitating this project and the students in the UMass Boston summer archaeological field school for excavating the test pits. John Schoenfelder of UMass Boston took the GPS points used for the maps in this report, and Christopher Fuchs created the GIS maps.

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Background

The Hancock-Clarke House at 36 Hancock Street in Lexington is a 1737 house constructed for the family of Rev. John Hancock (Figs. 1 and 2) now owned by the Lexington Museum (formerly Lexington Historical Society) and managed as a historic site. The building is a National Historic Landmark and individually listed on the National Register (Snell 1971). It is within LEX.C (Hancock-Clarke local historic district) and LEX.H (Merriam Hill area), and individually designated as LEX.119 (structure), LEX-HA-18 (historical archaeological site), and 19-MD-1261 (Native archaeological site). During the 18th-century, it was home to Lexington's ministers and is noted as one of the sites connected to the start of the American Revolution on April 18th/19th, 1775. Samual Adams, John Hancock, and Rev. Jonas Clarke were all meeting there on the night of April 18th, 1775 and were warned of the approach of the British soldiers either by Paul Revere or local residents (accounts vary). Sarah and Elizabeth Clarke, the daughters of Rev. Clarke continued to live there in the first half of the 19th century and maintained and promoted the house's association with the start of the Revolution, beginning its commemoration and preservation as a historic site (Beranek 2011).

The building has a complicated history as a structure. The building, but not the land, was purchased by the Lexington Historical Society in 1896 and moved across the street to save it. At that time, the two adjoining cellars that had been under the structure (known later as 6-F1 and 6-F2) were filled. Once the Historical Society acquired the original land in 1963, they began to make preparations to return the house to its original site. These preparations included archaeological excavations.

Roland Robbins, an experienced though not academically-trained archaeologist, excavated at the Hancock-Clarke House site between 1964 and 1969. Most of Robbins' work took place in 1965 and 1966, with less intense periods of work in 1967 and 1969. He located a well and six cellar holes, each labeled with an alpha-numeric code. These cellars included the original foundations of the Hancock-Clark House (6-F1 and 6-F2) and four additional cellars of previously unknown buildings (Fig. 3). After his 1966 excavations, Robbins wrote a brief narrative report that described the progress of the excavations and the discovery of the various cellar holes. At the Hancock-Clarke House as elsewhere, Robbins' primary interest was the architectural features, not the artifacts that they contained, so his report did not analyze the artifact collection. It appears that each cellar hole was excavated as a single context, and the dirt from each cellar hole was screened for artifacts by local volunteers over the course of several months following the excavations. Over the next decade, Lexington Historical Society volunteers and archaeologists from other institutions conducted some work on the artifact collection.

In 1974, the Historical Society moved the house back to its original site, constructing new concrete foundations for the structure (Fig. 4). In 2006 and 2007, the Historical Society hired a team to complete a historic structure report on the house in preparation for structural repairs (Rykerson Architecture and Grady 2007). In 2008 and 2009, the artifact collection from Robbins' excavation was re-located and temporarily transferred to the Fiske Center at UMass Boston where it was completely cataloged for the first time (Beranek and Kosack 2009). The collection contained almost 12,000 artifacts manufactured primarily between the 1720s and 1740s, dating to the Hancock period. This catalog and subsequent analysis in two MA theses (Stephens 2010; Kosack 2010) indicate that three cellars – 6-F3, 3-F1, and 2-F1 – were filled ca. 1750 and represent the locations of the earlier house on the property.

There is also a small barn standing on the property (Fig. 5), although it was not included in the Historic Structure analysis in 2007 and its construction date is not known. The barn structure appears to date to the later 19th century, based on its size, style, and construction methods, according to Museum staff. The colonial period barn was further north along Hancock Street (Fig. 6; Rykerson Architecture and Grady 2007: 51). The area where the barn now stands is identified as a "Locust Grove" in the reconstructed sketch of the early 19th-century property layout.

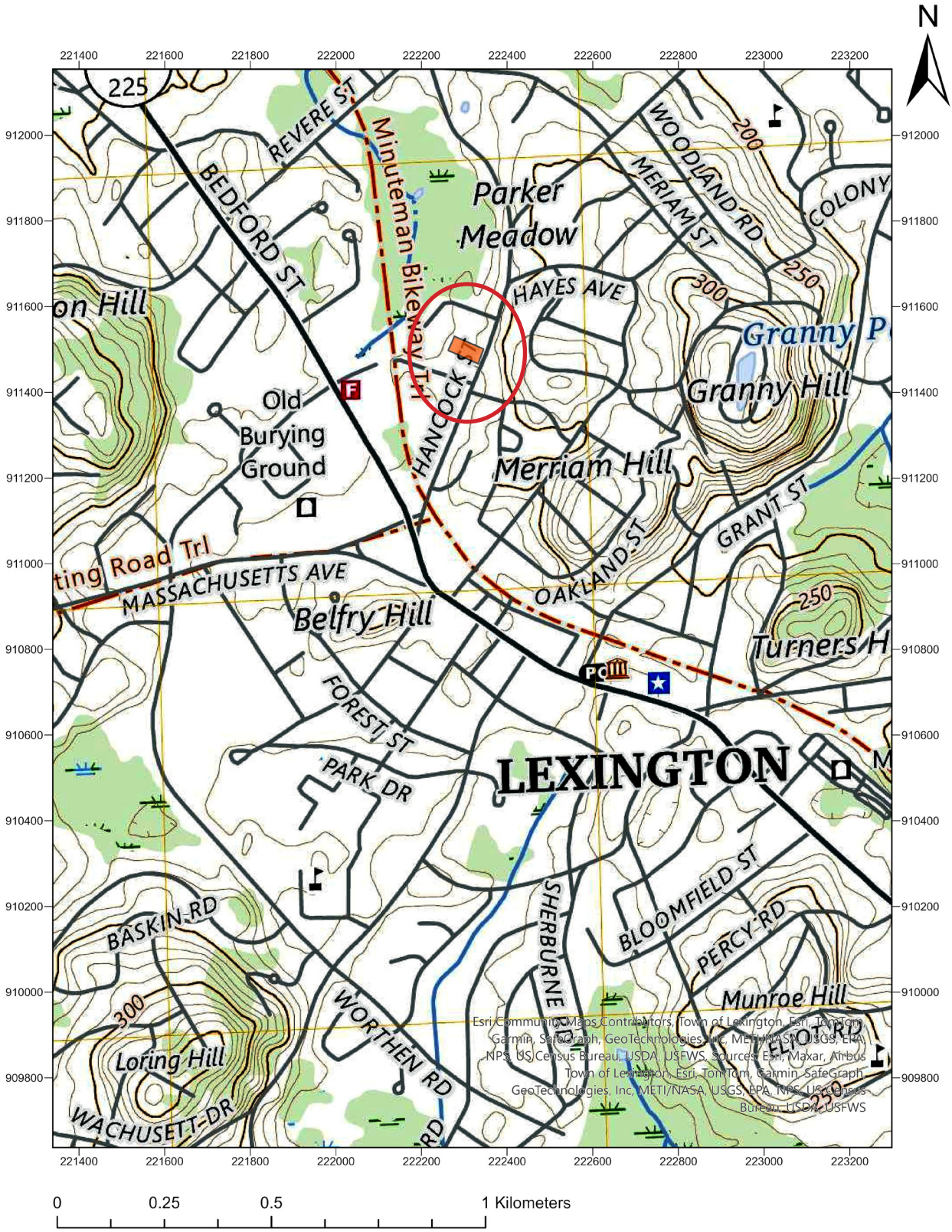

Figure 1. USGS map of Lexington, Massachusetts, indicating the location of the Hancock-Clarke property. Numbers in the margins are coordinates in the Massachusetts State Plane grid in meters. See also property detail in Figure 7.

Figure 2. A current view of the Hancock-Clarke House (above left). The front door is on the south face on the building. Photograph by the Lexington Museum. The barn (above right) is located west of the house, seen here with the electircal trench; view to the west.

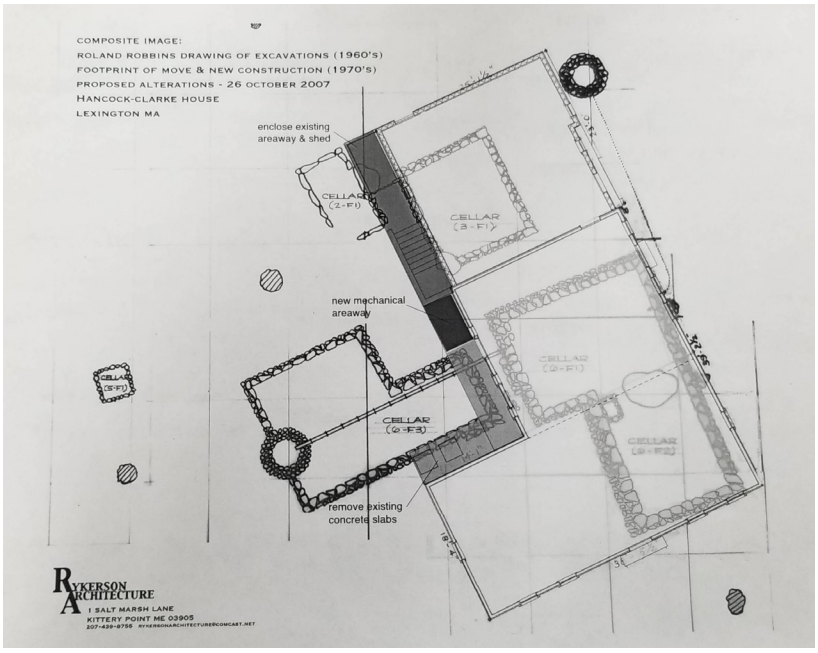

Figure 3a. Map of the cellars Roland Robbins excavated with the footprint of the current house overlaid (by Rykerson Architecture and Grady 2007).

Property History

Indigenous Site Potential

Few Native sites have been identified in the residential and commercial section of Lexington. The Hancock-Clarke property has been listed as 19-MD-1261 on the basis of lithics found during Robbins excavation, and two other sites (19-MD-253 and 19-MD-254) sit between half a mile and a mile away. These two sites were identified by collectors or avocational archaeologists: 19-MD-254 also designated LXGT-7 and 19-MD-253 also designated LXGT-4. 19-MD-253 is a Middle Woodland site with an inventory including 1

Figure 3b. Photograph from the Robbins excavation facing east towards Hancock St. Cellar 6-F3 is in the foreground.

Figure 4. New cellars for the building constructed in 1974.

felsite flake, 2 pieces of Native ceramics, and 1 piece of burned granite, all of which is in the private collection of Carroll Williams in Lexington. 19-MD-254 is a Middle to Late Archaic campsite, with an inventory of 1 Neville Point, 1 Otter Creek Point, and 1 Brewerton Eared Notched Point, all of which is in a private collection.

This lack of sites in the immediate area probably relates to the low number of excavations that have looked for Native sites within the residential and commercial areas of Lexington, because National Park Service and National Wildlife Refuge lands west and northwest, beginning 1.5 miles away, contain numerous identified sites, especially along the Concord River (5 miles from the Hancock-Clarke House) (see for example (Herbster 2005; Ritchie et al. 1990; Beranek, Sheehan, and Zeitlin 2019). Previous surveys have identified the Concord, Sudbury, Assabet, and Shawsheen river drainages of one of the core areas of Indigenous settlement in Massachusetts in all periods, with many sites having components from the Middle Archaic period through the 17th century. Therefore, although regionally, the area broadly has a very high potential for Indigenous sites from all periods, the specific, local use of this part of Lexington is not well known, nor do we currently have a sense of how well preserved a site on the rear portion of this property might be. Any site close to the house would probably have been substantially affected by historic use, previous archaeology, and new cellar construction.

Colonial and Post-Colonial History

In the colonial period, Reverend John Hancock purchased 25 acres of land along Hancock St in 1699, with no buildings mentioned, though one had been constructed by 1701. He deeded an expanded 50-acre parcel to his son Ebenezer,

Figure 5. South and north facades of the barn currently standing, located west of the house. Photography by the Lexington Museum.

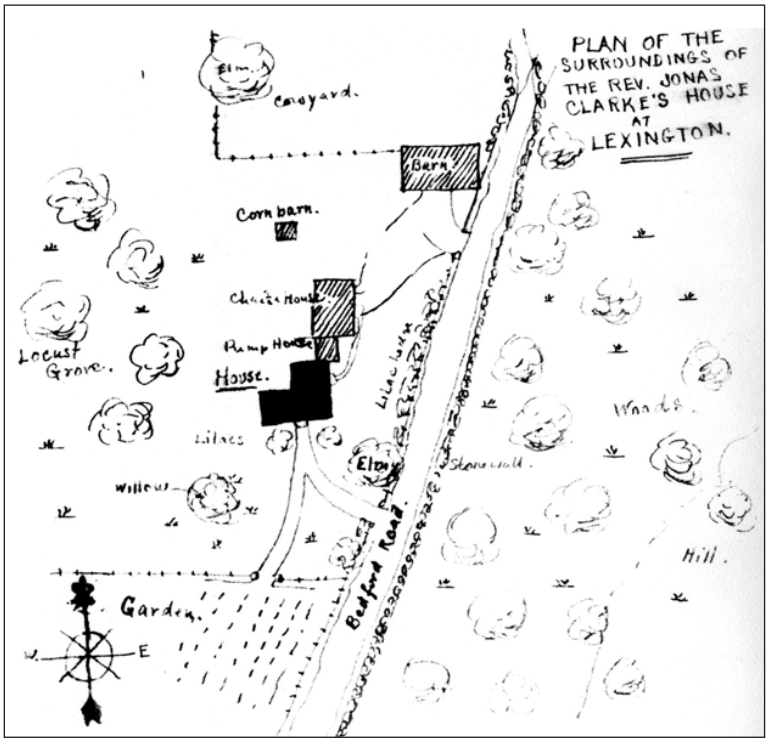

Figure 6. Reconstructed plan drawn by Donal Millar in 1917 of the Hancock-Clarke property ca. 1823 based on the property description in Rev. Clarke's probate inventory and other documents. Reproduced in Rykerson Architecture and Grady 2007: 51.

who predeceased him. The house and land were then acquired by another of John Hancock's sons, Thomas, though John continued to live in the building. The property remained in the Hancock family until John Hancock's widow's death in 1760 (Rykerson Architecture and Grady 2007: 5-7). In 1760, the house was sold to Lexington's next minister, Rev. Jonas Clarke, and his daughters Sarah and Elizabeth continued to live there until the 1840s. It had a sequence of other owners

Figure 7. West side of the Hancock-Clarke House and ells. The electrical conduit starts at a point near the juncture of the yellow painted and brown unpainted portions of the ell.

before being acquired by the Lexington Historical Society in 1896. It was then moved across the street, and then finally back to its original location in 1974. A more extensive account of the site history can be found in Rykerson Architecture and Grady (2007: 15-22).

Construction Impacts

The Lexington Museum plans to replace an existing buried electrical line between the west side of the house and the northeast corner of the barn with a buried conduit in a trench 2 ft wide and 2 ft deep (0.6 m). This line will run 133 ft (40.5 m) from the west side of the Hancock-Clarke house ell to the northeast corner of the barn and follows the path of an existing electrical line (Fig. 7, 9). West of the house, this path crosses Roland Robbins' excavation area over cellar 6-F3 then extends into area that would have been outside the early 18th-century house footprint.

A second component of the project involves the installation of a drainage systems north of the barn. This drainage system consists of two buried drain pipes, one coming off of each of the north corners of the building, running north to buried StormTech collection chambers. The affected area is two 35 ft (10.7 m) transects from the building corner, with the largest impact at the north end where the 8 ft x 2 ft (2.5 x 0.6 m) chambers will be installed. The rest of the area north of the barn will be capped with additional fill to raise the ground level; there are no other projected below-grade impacts. The location of this project relative to the barn was confirmed during a site visit/walk over, in addition to the sketch provided by the LHS to the MHC.

Archaeological Potential of the Project Areas

Effect of Robbins' Excavations and House Relocation

Robbins' excavations and moving the house back to its original location in 1974 had significant effects on the archaeological deposits on the property in the area where the house had been located. Robbins excavations, which were partly carried out mechanically, removed all the fill from the cellars and exposed the foundations, but not much area outside the stone foundations. When the house was moved back to the site, a new concrete foundation was poured; that would have necessitated the removal of the stone foundations that made up Features 6-F1, 6-F2, and 3-F1. The foundations for cellars 6-F3 and 2-F1 may still be present. The electrical line crosses cellar 6-F3, but since that area was completely excavated to the cellar floor by Robbins, the trench will not encounter any intact deposits within the feature footprint.

A photograph taken while the house was being moved in 1974 (Fig. 4) shows disturbed soil and a sharp drop in the ground surface at the right edge of the image (the west side of the property). The lighter soil surrounding the concrete foundation

may be ejecta from the new cellar that was spread around the property, capping the prior ground surface and burying the remaining foundations more deeply. That interpretation would make the drop-off seen at the right of the image the edge of the cellar ejecta, dropping to the original ground surface. An alternate hypothesis is that soil was taken from the west edge of the property to level the area closer to the street in preparation for the move of the house, meaning the drop off represents an area of disturbance where soil was removed. Given this, it is hard to predict how intact the soils near the barn will be. However, it is probably the least disturbed section of the property, in an archaeological sense.

The barn has been in the current location since at least the 1930s, when it appears in an aerial photograph, but may have been moved from elsewhere. The 18th and early 19th -century Hancock and Clarke period barn was apparently further north along Hancock Street (then Bedford Road). The areas where the barn now stands was described as a "locust grove" in the early 19th century (see Fig. 6). This area has the potential to contain archaeological signatures of activities that took place in the yard during the 18th or early 19th centuries, the main periods of significance for the house, though given the distance from the house (40 m), trash deposits are likely to be low density, unless there is a filled feature in the impact area. There is also potential that the area contains deposits contemporary with the barn structure; although the date of the structure is not known, it likely relates to the later 19th century, the last period when the property served as a residence.

The area near the barn has the potential to contain deposits relating to earlier Indigenous use of the property. Robbins' excavation and screening methods did not provide an accurate picture of the potential for Native features on the site, since soil from within and around the cellar foundations was removed mechanically, piled near-by and screened later by volunteers. Under these conditions, lithic flakes or Native pottery may not have been recognized and recovered. Depending on how this part of the property was used in the colonial and post-colonial periods, there may be intact layers relating to older Indigenous use of the area.

Research Questions

Our research questions for this project are:

1) Are there any intact features such as trash pits or building foundations from any period that remain in the area of the buried electrical line between the house and barn? Close to the house, none are expected because of Robbins' excavations, but beyond that point, it is possible that features relating to the 18th or 19th century use of the property, or to earlier indigenous use, might be preserved.

2) Did construction impacts from the 1974 cellar construction extend as far as the barn? What is the stratigraphy of the area north of the barn, and does it contain any intact or significant features or strata from any time period?

2025 Fieldwork

Monitoring was conducted during the mechanical excavation of the electrical trench. No apparently significant or intact deposits were identified or documented. The trench was mapped with a portable GPS instrument and a digital map of the trench was created in ArcGIS Pro (Fig. 8). A representative section of the trench's stratigraphy measuring 2m (6ft) which is beyond the boundaries of the Robbins excavation area was documented with a photograph and profile drawing to provide information about the stratigraphy of this section of the property.

A total of 6 shovel test pits were proposed on 2 transects, with STPs at 1, 5, and 10 m from the barn. The shovel test pit 1 m north of the barn on the eastern transect was not excavated, as the electrical line trench monitoring provided an adequate view of the area surrounding this test. The 5 completed shovel tests (Table 1) were excavated in the low-lying property just north of the barn to assess the possible presence of intact soil deposits which may have related to early Indigenous and Colonial use of the property. Excavations were conducted stratigraphically with the different cultural and natural levels separated by graduate and undergraduate students. Units were excavated by hand with trowels and shovels, with soils being screened through 1/4 inch hardware cloth and placed into labeled bags. All the shovel tests were excavated to subsoil, with closing depths ranging

Figure 8. Aerial photograph of the Hancock-Clarke House and property with the shovel test pits and electrical line displayed. Coordinates in the margins are the Massachusetts State Plane grid in meters.

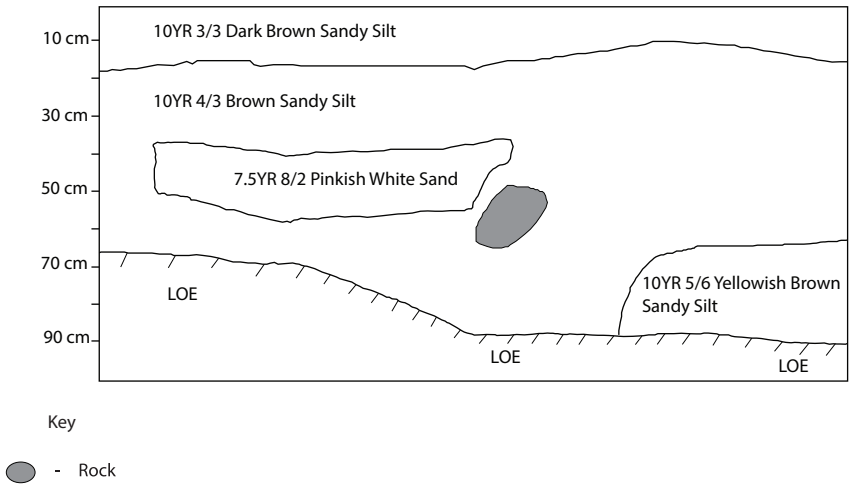

Figure 9. Profile of a 2 meter section of the south wall of the electrical trench showing the general stratigraphy of the Hancock-Clarke House property, with the notable inclusion of the pinkish white sand likely resulting from the Robbins excavations or the earlier electrical trench. The strata at the western end of the trench represent the basic topsoil and B horizon seen in many of the test pits.

Table 1. STP locations in the Massachusetts State Plane grid in meters. All STPs were 50 x 50 cm.

Unit	Easting	Northing	Reference corner	Elevation (masl)
2501	222283.76	911506.34	SW	67.99
2502	222284.92	911509.07	SW	67.848
2503	222286.71	911513.76	SW	67.9
2504	222294.08	911510.93	SW	68.288
2505	222292.29	911506.18	SW	68.229

from 36 – 75 centimeters below surface level. The assemblage recovered was a low-density assemblage of small and fragmentary cultural material, including fragments of bricks, metal slag, nails, glass, and some earthenware ceramics.

No Indigenous ceramics or lithic materials were recovered, and the excavations did not identify any subsurface archaeological features or significant concentrations of artifacts. All aspects of the test excavation followed established professional practices, and all of the test units were recorded appropriately with photos, plans, and profile drawings. Following excavation, all units were refilled with the excavated soil.

Laboratory Work and Reporting

Laboratory work was conducted at UMass Boston by Christopher Fuchs. All artifacts were washed, identified, and catalogued. Ceramics were compared to the Fiske Center Type Collection to determine their ware type. GPS points taken during field work were input into ArcGIS Pro to create digital maps of the location of all shovel pits.

Results

We placed a total of 5 shovel test pits on Massachusetts State Plane grid coordinates in the low-lying lawn north of the barn (Table 1). The locations of the shovel test pits on the property are displayed on an aerial map along with the previously excavated electrical trench and the property boundary of the house (Figure 8). The test pits were relatively consistent in the deposition of the topsoil level, with some variation in color, and a silty-sand texture extending to an average depth of about 15 cm below surface level. The second level was generally less consistent, with it ranging in depth from 20 – 30 cm below surface level before either subsoil or an additional level was encountered. Included here is a representative profile of the electrical trench, with Munsell colors generally consistent with the levels excavated in the shovel test pits (Figure 9). Two of the shovel test pit

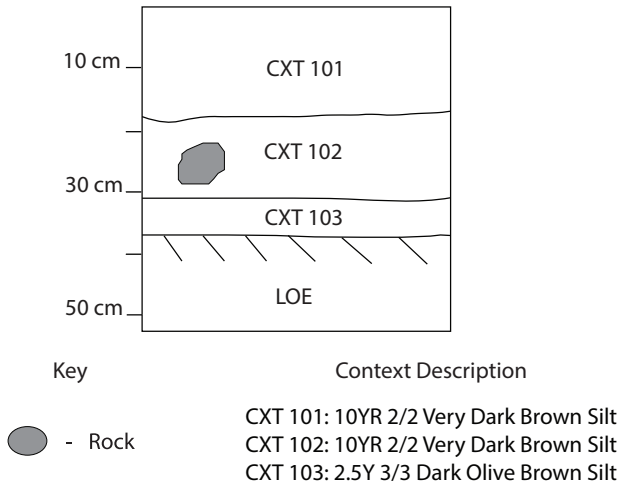

Figure 10. South profile of STP2503, representative of the western transect.

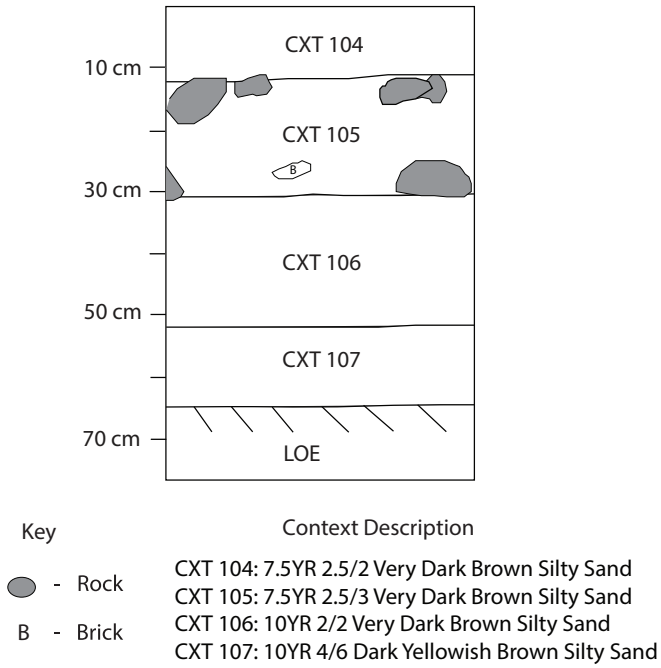

Figure 11. North profile of STP2504 on the eastern transect.

profiles are also included to represent the generally comparable soils and excavation depths of the investigations (Figure 10, Figure 11). The artifact collection is summarized in Table 2.

The remaining levels of the shovel tests were more variable, and following is a brief discussion of each.

STP 2501 was excavated to a total of three levels, with an upper level, Context 111, characterized by heavy roots and very dark brown soils. Notably, the first level contained modern, wire nails, and as excavations progressed into the second level, older, square headed nails were recovered from Context 112. Excavations were concluded when subsoil with only 1 glass object in the initial centimeters was encountered as the third level, Context 113, and excavated further with no additional cultural materials before being terminated.

STP 2502 contained mostly redware in the first level, Context 108, and contained significant root disturbance, as it was excavated near a large tree. The second level, Context 109, contained only a small number of cultural materials, and the unit was terminated at subsoil in the next level, Context 110. This unit was much more shallow compared to the others, and seemed to have much less deposition in total than those around it, both of cultural materials and general surface soil.

STP 2503 contained a higher concentration of brick fragments than the surrounding units, of which a representative sample was kept and the rest discarded. The upper level, Context 101, contained a number of cobbles, fist sized or larger, and had a high content of large rocks overall. The second level, Context 102, contained a single piece of yellow ware ceramic, and no other cultural materials. Context 103, the third and final level of the unit, was dominated by a rock larger than the open portion of the unit, and the unit was terminated as further excavation was not feasible and no further cultural materials were recovered.

STP 2504 contained the most discrete levels of all the shovel test pits. The initial level, Context 104, contained a small cluster of fist sized rocks which were carefully excavated, but were determined not to be part of an intact feature or surface and were subsequently removed. The cobbles continued into the second level, Context 105, which contained multiple bricks with edges and corners, in contrast to the small fragments which had been recovered from this and other units up to this point. This level also contained a cluster of large bricks, the largest of which were recovered and returned to the Fiske Center laboratory. The third level, Context 106, was interpreted in the field as

Table 2. Overview of the artifact collection.

STP	Context	Level	Bone	Ceramics	Glass	Nails	Other Materials	Total artifacts
2501	111	1	0	1	10	2	6	19
2501	112	2	0	3	3	3	8	17
2501	113	3	0	0	1	0	0	1
2502	108	1	0	18	5	0	8	31
2502	109	2	0	1	0	0	1	2
2503	101	1	1	1	5	0	18	25
2503	102	2	0	0	2	0	0	2
2504	104	1	0	0	4	0	5	9
2504	105	2	0	1	3	1	8	13
2504	106	3	0	3	1	1	5	10
2505	114	1	0	11	16	3	37	67
2505	115	2	0	4	0	3	14	21
2505	116	3	0	0	0	0	1	1
Total by class			**1**	**43**	**50**	**13**	**111**	

a buried ground surface or "A" horizon, representing an episode of filling in the area to some goal, likely a landscaping event related to the use of the back yard north of the barn. The fourth and final level, Context 107, was consistent with other subsoil appearances across the excavations, and as it contained no cultural materials, was the level at which this unit was terminated.

STP 2505 contained some metal slag, more than any other unit excavated, as well as some refined earthenware ceramics in its first level, Context 114. Additionally, the unit was far more compact than the others, likely related to the high metal waste contents and the deposition of that and other materials in this location. The compaction persisted and increased at further depths, and the second level, Context 115, was the deepest excavated level of all the excavations conducted, continuing to a depth of 56 cm. This unit contained cultural materials at the greatest depth, and the third and final level, Context 116, was terminated at a depth of 75 cm.

The findings of these excavations are consistent with a landscape which has been in constant, varied use for centuries, but only in ways that have left a low-density artifact signature. The variation in the stratigraphy of the test pits in the barn area mostly reflects filling deposits that were added to the eastern (upslope) test pits, possibly during the excavations in the 1960s or the work on the property to relocate the house in the 1970s. The shovel test pits did not identify any significant subsurface architectural or cultural features, and the materials recovered were minimal and fragmentary. Due to these factors, no further excavations north of the barn were conducted, and no further mitigation efforts in advance of the installation of subsurface drainage are recommended.

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Appendix A: Artifact Catalog

Ceramics Catalog

Unit	Context	Count	Ceramic Ware	Ware Type	Portion
2501	111	1	Earthenware, coarse	Redware	Body
2501	112	1	Earthenware, coarse	Redware	Body
2501	112	1	Porcelain	Indeterminate porcelain	Body
2501	112	1	Earthenware, refined	Pearlware	Body
2502	108	18	Earthenware, coarse	Redware	Body
2502	109	1	Earthenware, coarse	Redware	Body
2503	101	1	Earthenware, refined	Yellow Ware	Body
2504	105	1	Earthenware, coarse	Tin Glazed	Body
2504	106	3	Earthenware, coarse	Redware	Body
2505	114	10	Earthenware, coarse	Redware	Body
2505	114	1	Earthenware, coarse	Tin Glazed	Body
2505	115	4	Earthenware, coarse	Redware	Body

Glass Catalog

Unit	Context	Count	Object
2501	111	2	bottle
2501	111	4	curved, undetermined
2501	111	4	flat, undetermined
2501	112	2	bottle
2501	112	1	curved, undetermined
2502	108	1	curved, undetermined
2502	108	1	curved, undetermined
2502	108	1	curved, undetermined
2502	108	1	curved, undetermined
2502	108	1	curved, undetermined
2503	101	1	curved, undetermined
2503	101	2	flat, undetermined
2503	101	1	flat, undetermined
2503	101	1	flat, undetermined
2503	102	1	curved, undetermined
2503	102	1	curved, undetermined
2504	104	3	curved, undetermined
2504	104	1	flat, undetermined
2504	105	1	flat, undetermined
2504	105	2	flat, undetermined
2504	106	1	flat, undetermined
2505	114	3	curved, undetermined
2505	114	8	curved, undetermined
2505	114	3	flat, undetermined
2505	114	2	curved, undetermined

Nails Catalog

Unit	Context	Count	Object
2501	111	2	Nails
2501	111	3	Nails
2501	112	3	Nails
2504	105	1	Nails
2504	106	1	Nails
2505	114	2	Nails
2505	114	1	Nails
2505	114	3	Nails

Faunal Catalog

Unit	Context	Count	Class	Comments
2503	101	1	Bone	Unanalyzed Bone

Other Material Catalog

Unit	Context	Count	Class	Subclass	Comments
2501	111	3	Fuel and furnace	charcoal	
2501	111	3	Fuel and furnace	coal	
2501	112	1	Lithic, other	non-architechtural stone	possible flake
2501	112	5	Fuel and furnace	charcoal	
2501	112	2	Fuel and furnace	coal	
2502	108	8	Fuel and furnace	charcoal	
2502	109	1	Fuel and furnace	coal	
2503	101	1	Architechtural	mortar	
2503	101	1	Lithic, other	non-architechtural stone	possible flake
2503	101	7	Architechtural	brick	
2503	101	9	Fuel and furnace	coal	
2504	104	2	Fuel and furnace	coal	
2504	104	3	Architechtural	brick	
2504	105	1	Fuel and furnace	charcoal	
2504	105	1	Fuel and furnace	slag	
2504	105	1	Small Finds	propeller	
2504	105	4	Architechtural	brick	
2504	106	2	Fuel and furnace	charcoal	
2504	106	2	Fuel and furnace	slag	
2504	106	1	Architechtural	brick	
2505	114	3	Architechtural	brick	
2505	114	24	Fuel and furnace	slag	
2505	114	8	Fuel and furnace	charcoal	
2505	114	2	Lithic, other	mica	
2505	115	2	Fuel and furnace	slag	
2505	115	1	Architechtural	brick	
2505	115	11	Fuel and furnace	coal	
2505	115	1	Fuel and furnace	charcoal	