

PORTER-PHELPS-HUNTINGTON HOUSE MUSEUM:
RESTORATION OF HISTORIC GROUNDS

A Masters Project Presented

by

Ruth Ann McNicholas

Submitted to the Graduate School
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in partial fulfillment of the
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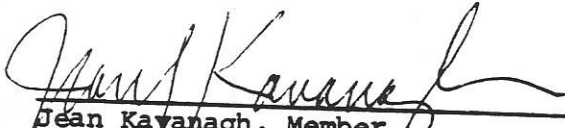
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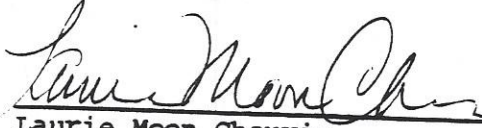
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My initial contact with the Porter-Phelps-Huntington House Museum began during the summer of 1983 when I was employed as a museum assistant/groundskeeper. At that time, I learned that the museum administration was very interested in restoring the grounds, but did not have the resources to carry out that goal. The experience of working at the museum afforded the opportunity to learn about the importance of maintaining the heritage and quality of historic landscapes and structures, and fostered a deep sense of concern for the estate; it was the direct source of inspiration for this masters project. Since becoming involved with the museum, a series of seemingly unrelated events has led up to this project being sponsored by a Yankee Internship, a program funded by Yankee Magazine and administered by the National Trust for Historic Preservation.

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Ruth A. McNicholas
Amherst
May 1985

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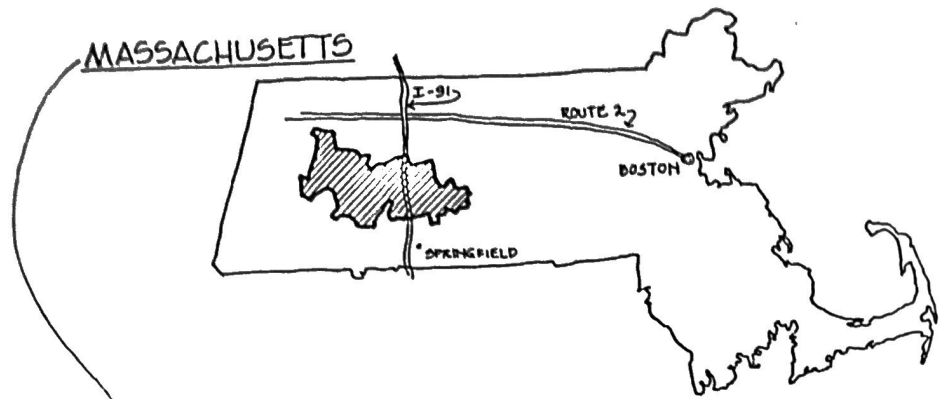
THE ROLE AND FUNCTION OF FORTY ACRES--PAST AND PRESENT

Introduction

The Porter-Phelps-Huntington House Museum, also known as Forty Acres, is located on Route 47, two miles north of Hadley, Massachusetts (Figure 1). Built by Captain Moses Porter in 1752, it was the first home established outside the confines and security of the stockaded town of Hadley. It remained the private farmstead of the Porters and their descendents until the early 1900s. In 1955, Dr. James Huntington turned the ancestral home into a museum, in order to preserve the historical and cultural integrity of the estate for future generations.

Over the years, the museum administration has received several grants from preservation agencies to defray the expense of maintaining the buildings. In particular, the Massachusetts Historical Commission and the Institute of Museum Services awarded the museum a \$35,000 grant in 1985 to repoint chimneys, reshingle roofs and rebuild sections of the cornbarn that had fallen into serious disrepair.

Unfortunately, maintaining the historical accuracy of the grounds and gardens has not received as much attention or emphasis. In past years, a number of different designs for the gardens have been proposed and drawn up, and while the grounds have not been restored to any particular style or period, a conscious effort has been made to use "old-fashioned" plants such as lilacs, daylilies, peonies, sweet mockorange and a variety of herbs and other flowers. It has long been the expressed desire of the museum administration to eventually restore the grounds to an appropriate



HAMPSHIRE COUNTY

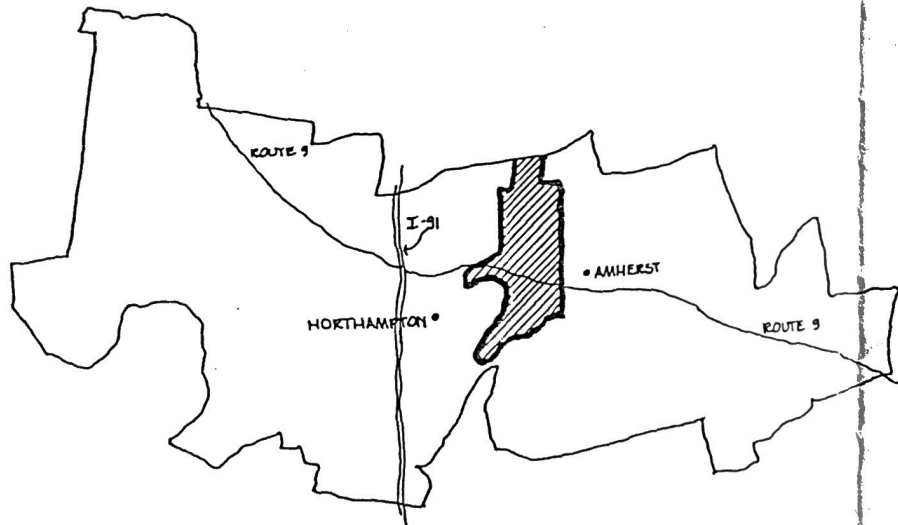
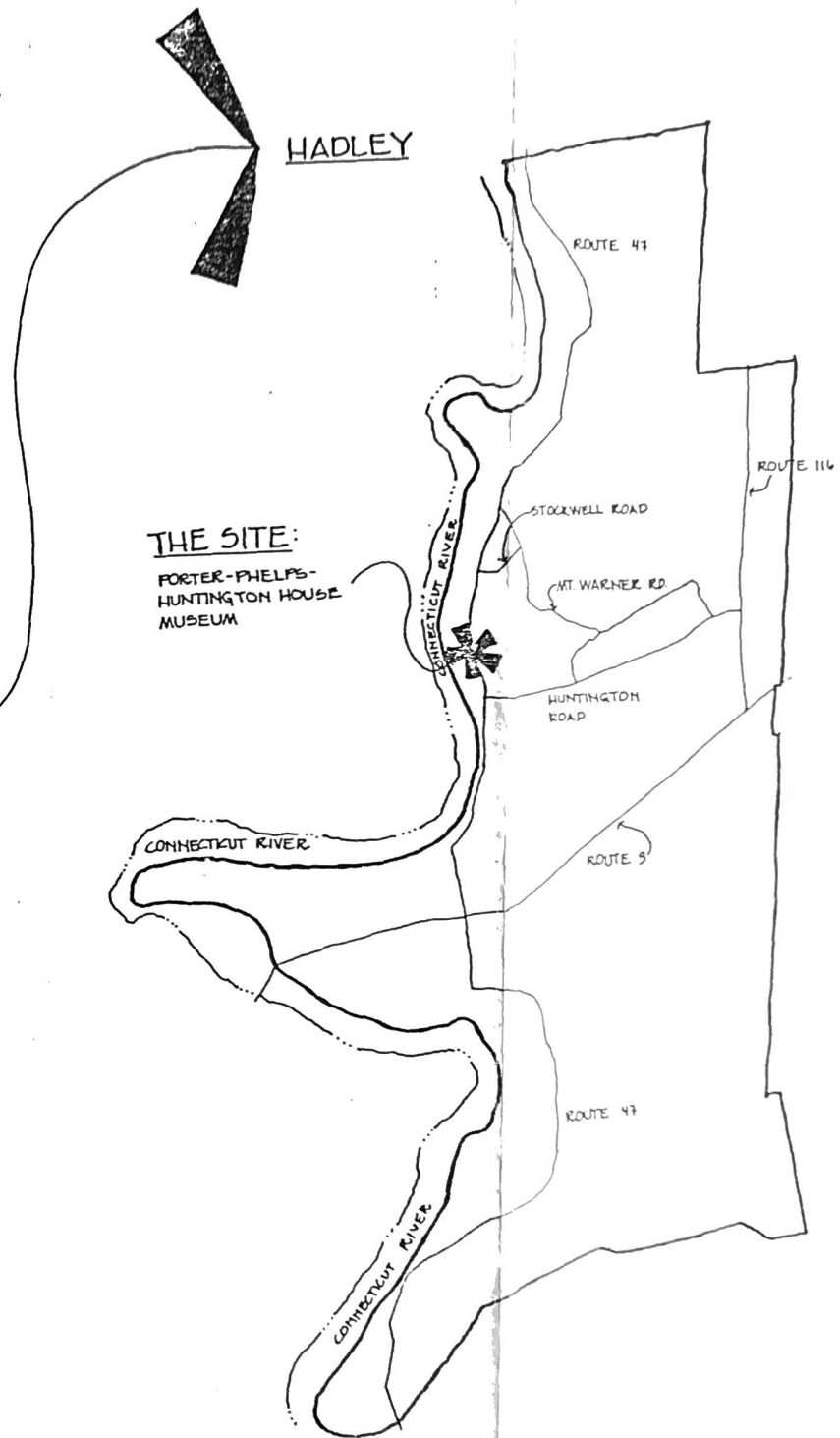


FIGURE 1 LOCATION MAP



HADLEY

THE SITE:
PORTER-PHELPS-
HUNTINGTON HOUSE
MUSEUM

aesthetic and contextual setting for the museum. This Masters project has been researched and produced in direct response to that desire. The purpose of the project is to be used as a vehicle for recreating the historical authenticity of the museum's immediate landscape.

This project is divided into four parts. In the first section, the background of Forty Acres as a private residence and a public institution will be discussed. This phase will establish the historical elements and framework upon which future design proposals will be based. The second section will examine what remains today of the grounds and gardens. Existing site conditions and characteristics will be inventoried, and the ways in which the museum has responded to modern-day pressures and realities will be assessed. The third section will discuss proposals resulting from a synthesis of archival research and the current needs and goals of the museum administration. Finally, the fourth section will discuss critical concepts involved in the restoration of the museum grounds.

History of Hadley and Forty Acres

In order to better understand and appreciate the significance of this house, its families and landscape, it would be useful to look at the historical context within which the Porter-Phelps-Huntington House evolved. The information is based on general historical readings and research of archival material which is stored in the Frost Library at Amherst College.

When the first pioneers ventured out to settle in the New World in the early 17th century, they looked for fertile soil, a plentiful supply of fresh, clean water, a good source of building timber, and most importantly, natural, open meadows. River valleys were often followed because they

afforded several opportunities: they were surrounded by rich fields and meadows, and offered the potential for transportation and commerce.

Such were the conditions encountered in the Connecticut River Valley, and, in particular, in Hadley, Massachusetts. Established in 1659 along a broad bend in the river, Hadley was laid out in a manner reminiscent of an old English Village. In the center of the settlement was a broad strip of land, referred to as the village green, the domain of the town cows and geese. Encircling the green was the main street of Old Hadley. This street, later known as West Street, extended north and south from one river bank to the other across the "meadow peninsula," as the bend in the river was called (see Figure 2). Along this street, arranged on both sides, were 47 houselots. An east-west road, Middle Lane, divided the town into four quarters. In 1661, all houselots were fenced, and later, in 1675, a stockade was raised around the entire town for protection from Indian attacks.

The early settlers of Hadley discovered that their fertile land could readily produce a large variety of crops--hay, wheat, flax, rye, barley, tobacco, Indian and broom corn, potatoes, beans, peas, pumpkins, turnips, herbs and fruit trees. "Besides this fine interval (Hadley)...there are at least 2000 acres more of the same fertile and delightful grounds...Mt. Holyoke and Mt. Warner, yield an inexhaustible supply of wood, and an extensive plain...east of the town furnishes the inhabitants with copious supplies of grain, pasture, and rich crops of clover. Few places exhibit a more vigorous, enterprising, or improved husbandry...Indeed the farmers of Hadley, Hatfield, and Deerfield are superior to those of any other townships in this county."

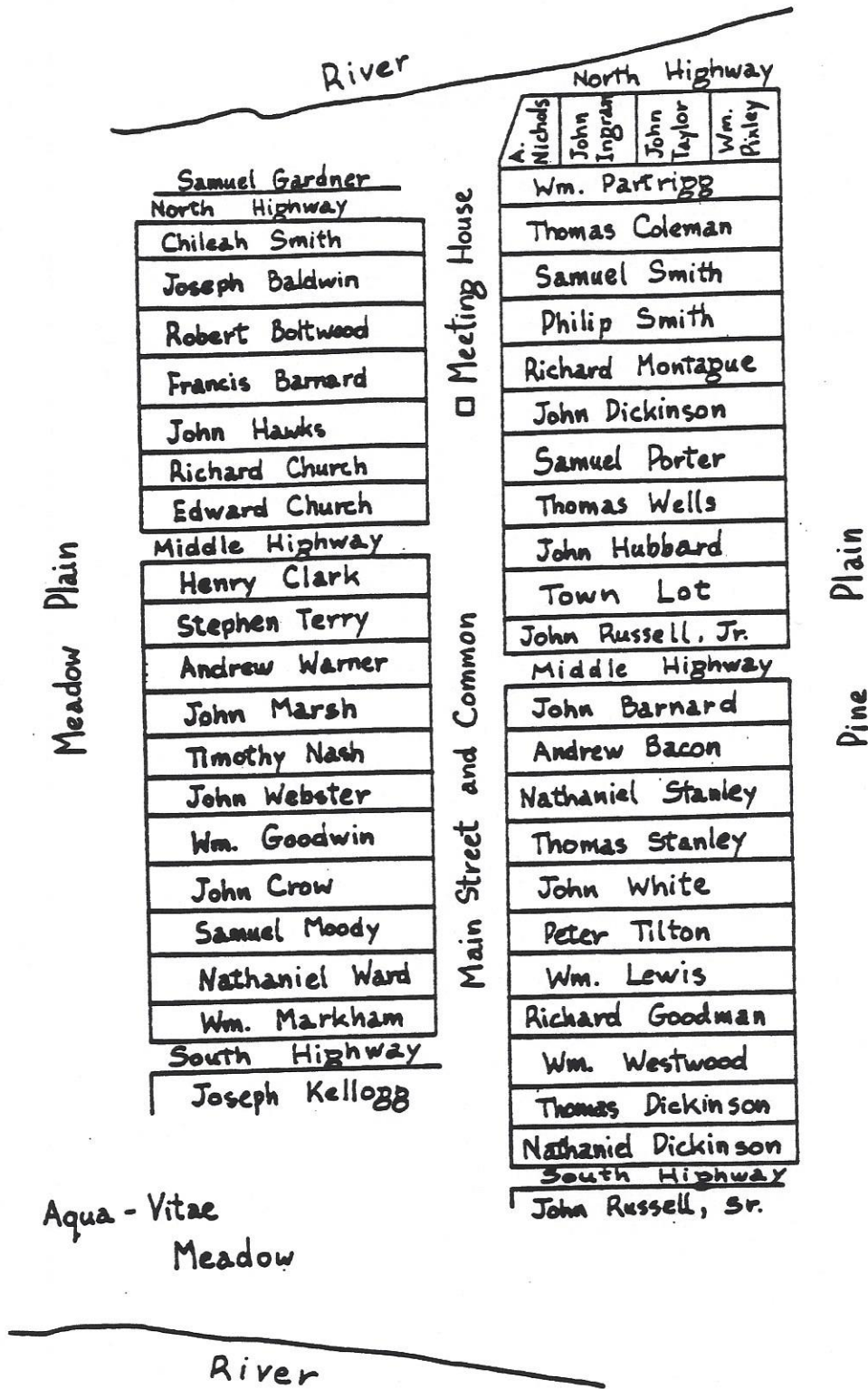


FIGURE 2 Map of Old Hadley (circa 1660)

In each of the homelots in town kitchen gardens were laid out. Some gardeners went beyond the subsistence level, experimenting with foreign seeds and flowers. "The inhabitants of this valley have always had gardens, and cultivated some common garden vegetables...Our foremothers had, as in England, medicinal herbs (i.e., rue, tansy, wormwood, sage, balm, hyssop, peppermint, catnip, coltsfoot, comfrey, elecampane, gill-go-over-the-ground) in the garden. Many families had small plots of flowers. Many in Old and New England imported garden seeds, deeming foreign seeds the best...."²

Space was quite limited within the bounds of the town. As there was not enough land to support the families, their livestock, and all the field crops on theouselots, four tracts of land outside the stockade were claimed by the town for tillage, pasture and woodlots. The four tracts were designated as follows: Forty Acre Meadow, north of the village; the Great Meadow, all land on the peninsula to the west and south of the homelots; Fort Meadow and Hockanum Meadow, further to the south of the village. These meadow lands were allotted to the homelot owners in town. Those who lived in the northern half of Hadley owned in common the Forty Acre Meadow and a portion of The Great Meadow. Fort Meadow was owned by those who lived in the southern part of the village. Hockanum Meadow and the remaining portion of The Great Meadow were later divided up among individual inhabitants.

In any town, there will always be a few citizens who figure most prominently in the town's development, and who are listed among the town's "movers and shakers." One such important figure of Hadley in the 18th century was Samuel Porter, the son of one of the town's early founders.

Porter lived in the northern part of town, and was thus part owner of Forty Acre Meadow. He became a well-to-do, successful merchant and the second most extensive fur trader in Hampshire County. His wealth enabled him, and after his death, his sons, to buy shares of the meadow from the other common owners. Before the middle of the 18th century, the Porter family owned almost the entire meadow.

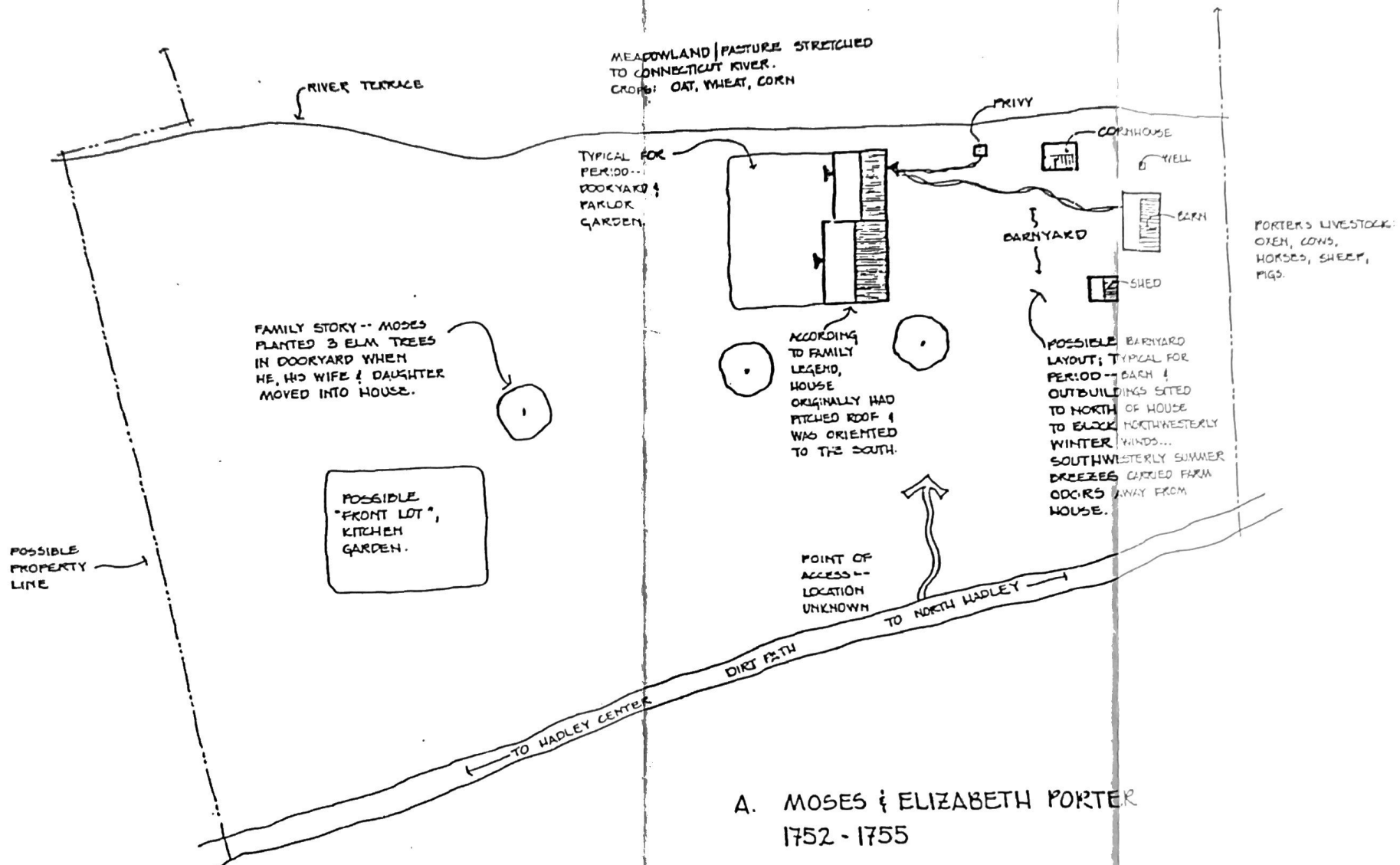
In 1752, Samuel's son, Moses Porter, and Moses' wife and daughter decided to move out of the cramped quarters in the stockaded town and build a home on their share of Forty Acre Meadow—a parcel of approximately 500 acres located two miles north of town. Moses had very little time to enjoy his new home, for in 1755, three years after the house was built, he was killed in a battle during the French and Indian War.

Few family letters or records have survived since Moses and Elizabeth Porters' time to document the appearance of the farm. The "Inventory of Moses Porter Estate," dated March 8, 1756, does give some insight into the condition of the place, known then, as it is now, as Forty Acres. The farm, including the house, barn and associated outbuildings, was a relatively prosperous one, producing oat, wheat and corn. The rich meadow lands stretched from the house down to the banks of the Connecticut River. Moses owned two slaves, a yoke of oxen, several cows, horses, sheep and pigs, and 1/7 of a sawmill in North Hadley. The colonial-style house was a large, comfortable, two-story dwelling with a pitched roof, and, according to family stories passed down through the generations, was oriented to the south towards town. Family stories also relate that when Moses, his wife and daughter moved into their home, they planted three elms in the dooryard south of the house to mark the occasion. A conceptual reconstruction of

the Porter estate is shown in Figure 3A. Although there is no archival evidence to substantiate the arrangement of the various barnyard buildings, it is reasonable to assume that Porter would have followed the traditional pattern of siting the barn and outbuildings to the north of the dwelling. In the winter, the house would be buffered from the cold northwesterly winds; in the summer, the prevailing southwesterly breezes would carry the farm odors away from the house.³

After Porter's death, his wife and daughter, Elizabeth, remained on the estate. They had the farm managed by a neighbor until Elizabeth's marriage, in 1770, to Charles Phelps, a prosperous Northampton lawyer trained in engineering and architecture. Although archival material pertaining to the place during Moses Porter's life is practically nonexistent, much more information is available about the period when Charles and Elizabeth Phelps lived at the farm. Elizabeth kept a diary from 1763 until 1817 in which she wrote about many of the events occurring at the farm and in Hadley. It is somewhat frustrating, although it does make for interesting reading, that she seemed more fascinated with recording what sermons the ministers preached, noting who came for tea, and remarking about the health of neighbors than in describing the changes taking place on the farm. Nevertheless, by studying her diary and reading letters written by her and Charles, a fairly clear image of what their homestead was like emerges.

From the time he began managing the farm in 1770, until his death in 1814, Phelps brought many transformations to Forty Acres. A kitchen ell was added onto the house, and more buildings were raised, including the carriage house, woodshed, cornbarn, cider mill house and tan house. The

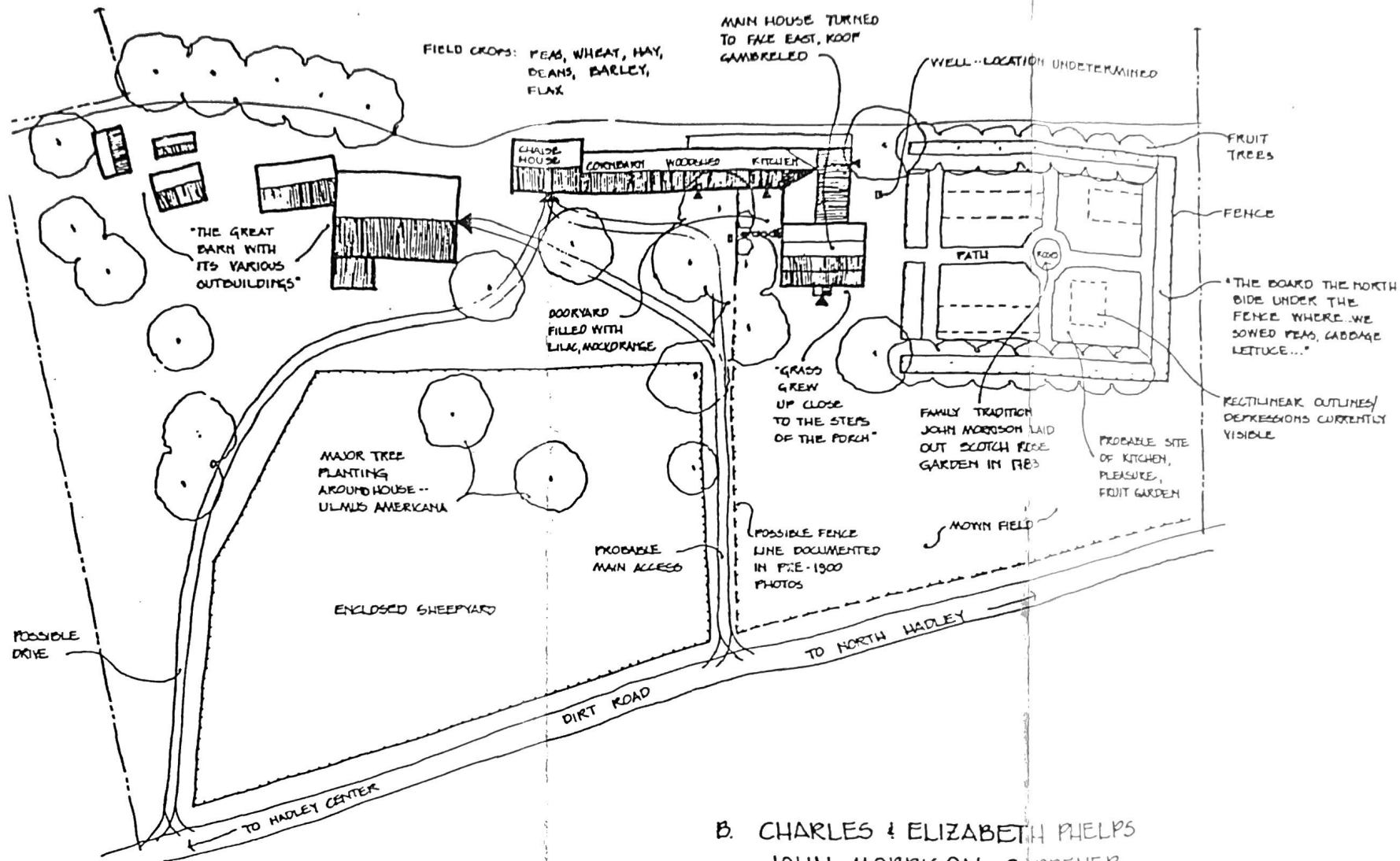


A. MOSES & ELIZABETH PORTER
1752 - 1755

FIGURE 3A Reconstruction Plan of Moses Porter Estate

reconstruction of the Phelps estate (Figure 3B) illustrates that Phelps chose to build some of those structures to the south of the house. This layout would seem to contradict the typical arrangement of a Colonial farm in New England. However, if it is assumed that Moses built his barn to the north of the house, the only place left for Phelps to add any structures would have been to the south, since the land behind the house to the west sloped down to the meadowland. In 1782, the old barn built by Porter was torn down and replaced with "the great barn," also located to the south of the dwelling with the other utilitarian buildings. In an attempt to modernize the house and make it more elegant, as befitted his position as a prominent community leader, Phelps added an Adamesque front facade, built on a back veranda (an architectural oddity at the time in New England), raised and gambreled the pitched roof, and made numerous renovations to the interior. According to family stories, but not clearly documented by archival material, Phelps raised up the main part of the house in 1782 and turned it so that the side which had faced south now faced east toward the road. Since 1799, the house has undergone no major structural change, looking today much as it did during Charles Phelps' time.

These years from 1770 to 1814 also represent the period when the grounds and gardens were in their prime. The size of the estate was enlarged to nearly 1000 acres, and the farm boundaries were extended to include nearly all of Mt. Warner, a heavily wooded promontory in North Hadley. A valuation made in 1770 noted the Phelps farm as the second largest estate in Hadley. ⁴ Under Phelps' guidance, Forty Acres prospered. According to the returns of the Assessors to the General Court of Hadley in 1771, the farm ranked among the highest producers of grain and hay in the



B. CHARLES & ELIZABETH PHELPS
 JOHN MORRISON, GARDENER
 1770 - 1817

FIGURE 3B Reconstruction Plan of Charles Phelps Estate

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village. An account of the estate in 1777 listed Indian corn, wheat, hay, peas, beans, barley and flax as the principal field crops grown on the farm. From 1790 until at least 1801 Phelps had the dubious honor of being required to pay the heaviest taxes in Hadley. Reverend Timothy Dwight, past president of Yale College, traveling through New England in 1810 wrote: "Among the interesting objects in this neighborhood (the town of Hadley), the farm of Charles Phelps, Esq., about two miles north of this town, deserves notice of the traveller. This estate lies on the eastern bank of the Connecticut River; and contains about 600 acres; of which about one hundred and fifty are interval (the low, flat land along the river)... The interval is universally meadow, and of the best quality. The remainder of the farm is remarkably well fitted for every kind of produce...and yields an inexhaustible supply of timber and fuel...In a word, this estate is the most desirable possession, of the same kind, and extent, within my knowledge."⁶

The Phelps estate was noted not only for its highly fertile and productive farmland, but for the decorative and ornamental gardens around the house as well. Although most families had domestic gardens, few, if any, had private gardeners as the Phelps family did. "Charles Phelps of Hadley had fine fruit and flower garden fifty and sixty years ago (around 1800-1810), having a Scotch gardener."⁷ Elizabeth Phelps briefly mentions the gardener in an entry in her diary on March 23, 1777: "Thursday one of the Highlanders (John Morrison) sent by Coll'll Porter to Live here."⁸ An excerpt from a letter written in 1882 by one of the Phelps' grandsons offers a more complete picture of the gardener. "Another of these characters more or less identified with the earlier history of the estate,"⁹

was a Scotchman by the name of Morrison...He was the gardener. This was his especial and almost exclusive business in the summer season, and from what I heard of him I think he must have been bred to the employment. I doubt if at that time there was a farmer in the three river counties who kept a professional gardener, that is, one whose exclusive business was ornamental gardening... He cultivated the sensitive plant, very rare in those days...." ¹⁰ From this it can be inferred that the gardens at the Phelps farm had more than a purely functional, subsistence purpose, and existed as well for the family's pleasure and enjoyment. Letters written by Charles Phelps to his son, Charles Porter Phelps, in Boston provide clues suggesting that the gardener was encouraged to experiment with seeds not directly available locally. On March 4, 1791, Phelps wrote: "John has his hotbed at work-- and his cucumbers planted--you must get 1/2 ounce early Dutch cabbage seed--and 1/2 ounce early York cabbage seed and send home...." Later, on April 7, 1791, Phelps asked for "...1/2 lb Turnip raddish, 1/2 lb Salmon raddish--and one ounce of beets seeds and lb worth ¹¹ Sweet margerum, and a pint Winsor beans."

The gardens were likewise filled with flowers, as a letter written on April 3, 1798 by Phelps' daughter, also named Elizabeth, to her brother in Boston testifies: "Mr. Morrison...wishes once more to request you to purchase some flower and kitchen garden seeds--of which I send enclosed a list." Regrettably, that list no longer exists. Among the flowers listed in family letters as having been grown in "John's garden" are unidentified varieties of tulips, white narcissus and daffodils.

Since John Morrison's duties were primarily to tend the gardens, it is reasonable to believe that during this period the basic rectilinear layout

of the garden was established and followed throughout the rest of the gardens' history. Later generations might have altered the gardens' form to some extent, but more than likely it would have been far easier to keep working the same general pattern rather than to change the layout with a new design. It is evident, from an entry in Elizabeth Phelps' diary dated April 2, 1786, that the garden was enclosed: "Everyone in the family tarried at home—a very great storm of snow and high winds—the Drifts are even with the top of the Garden fence the Ground was well settled...." In another letter written by Charles Phelps on April 30, 1802, vague references to the garden layout is made: "The garden is not touched yet excepting the board the north side under the fence, where last Sat we sowed peas, cabbage, lettuce...." The meaning of this description becomes more clear if one thinks of a typical Colonial garden layout surrounded by a fence and divided in halves or quarters by paths. The "board" could refer to boards used to raise the garden beds, or could be interpreted as a planted border.

A more thorough description of the homestead is given in 1861 by a great-granddaughter of Phelps. "The south entrance had its flagged walk, and small gate opening into a large space where carriages drove up. The front door, with its big brass knocker, was seldom used; the grass grew close up to the steps of the white porch...The house was placed some rods back from the highway on a little knoll. An orchard and garden were laid out on the north, and shade trees planted in front. Between the great barn with its various outbuildings, and the dwelling, was left a wide grassy space which has been for generations shaded by magnificent elms. Between that and the street a large sheep-yard was inclosed (sic). Green meadows

stretched to the river, and pasture and woodland abounded in the opposite
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direction."

With the death of Charles Phelps in 1814, and John Morrison in early 1815, it is apparent, from letters written by Elizabeth Phelps to her daughter that the state of the gardens declined. "...Our garden looks like a forsaken place, Charles Hitchcock has dug the long bed south of the north fence and peas are coming up—radishes and pepper and lettuce (sic) all on that bed the rest...looks like a desert but a great variety of pretty flowers which if there was anybody to dig the ground and arrange them properly would appear well upon one half and the other devoted to other purposes...Beets onions, here are very few, mustard small, through neglect...."

Elizabeth Phelps died in 1817, at which time the family estate passed on to her daughter, Elizabeth, and her daughter's husband, the Reverend Dan Huntington. The Porter-Phelps-Huntington House, as it became known, was still a fairly prosperous farm, producing many of the same crops Phelps raised—rye, broom corn, wheat, oats, apples and plums (see Figure 3C). Turning again to family correspondence, one can conjure up an impression of the place. Letters written in 1825 by the Reverend and Elizabeth to their son describe the farm as follows: "The men are now, before breakfast, mowing the hollow near the house. Yesterday they cut grass hollow next the broom corn; up as far as the first Elm...The barn is full of rye and oats...Between two others it is nearly full of best hay. Your corn across the way, taking it together is about as handsome a piece, as I ever saw. Broom corn looks well. The bees have not swarmed since you left in J...Your father (the Reverend) has been very busy in building a new fence

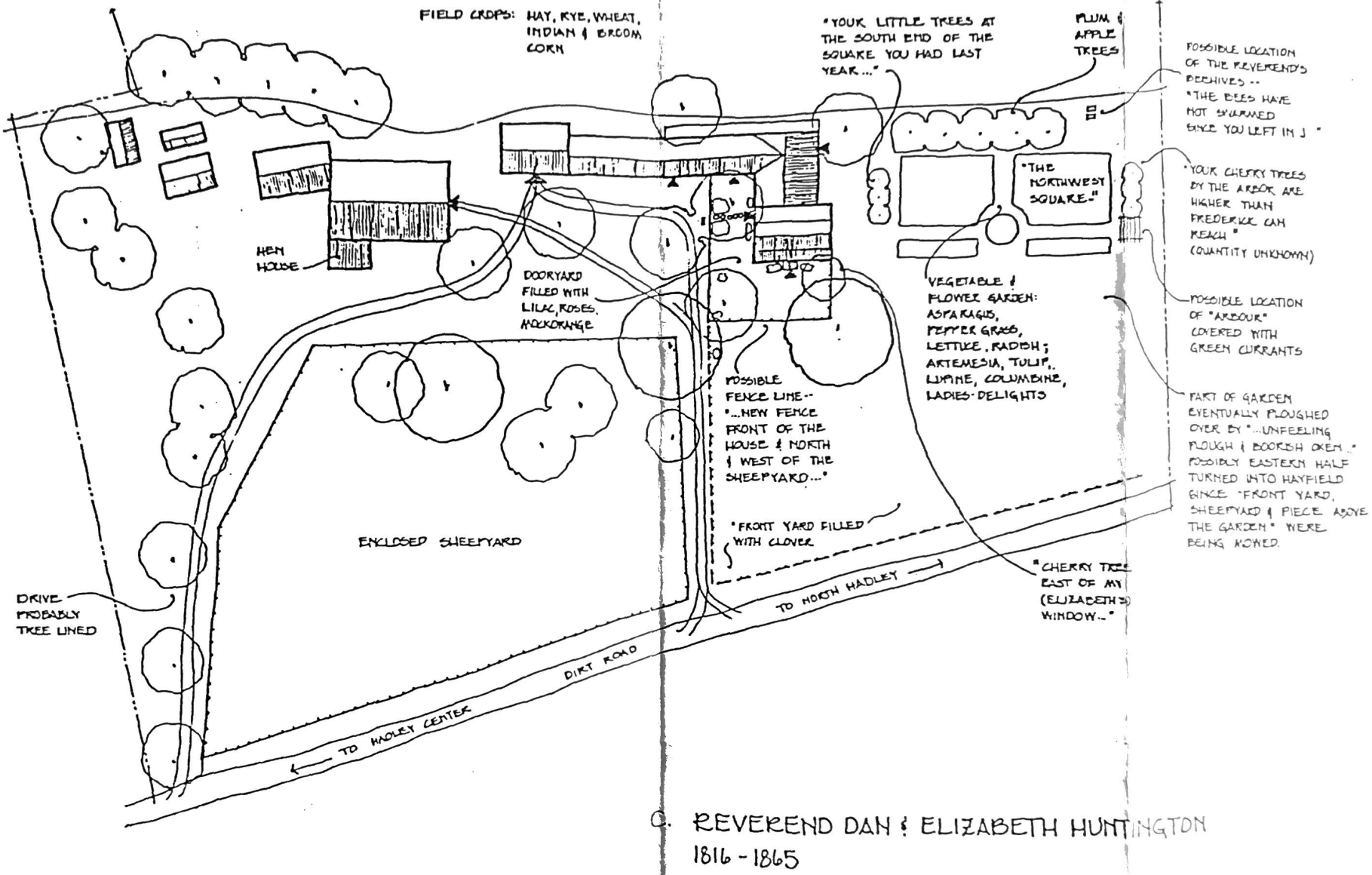


FIGURE 3C Reconstruction Plan of Reverend Huntington Estate

front of the house and north and west of the sheepyard—it is not yet done..." Another letter written by the Reverend illustrates his rather poetic appreciation of the homestead and nature. "The roses, the seringas (sic) and the honeysuckle stand around the doors and windows, in all their fragrance, and the house at night is filled with the odour. The garden with its appropriate fruits and flowers, standing in regular order, shows us not only what we are by and by to expect, but begins already to afford us its choice delights, in the asparagus...pepper grass, lettuce and radish—not forgetting the green currants, hanging in luxuriant clusters...The yards in front and the meadows back of the house, are completely overspread and adorned with clover...."

The Huntington daughters were also very interested in floriculture and made rather careful note of the activity in the gardens in letters to family members. "After sundown we went out into the garden, and looked at your little garden, and saw that six of your ladies-delights (Johnny Jump-ups) were in blossom...Mrs. Smith sent us three roots of the flowering almond...I have just been out in the garden and seen that yours and my artemisias are two inches high your lupines grow beautifully. The tulips and columbines are in bloom. Your little trees at the south end of the square that you had last year are quite high—one of them is about two feet high, the rest all grow very well. Your cherry trees by the arbor are higher than Frederick can reach." Another reference to the arbor is found later in a letter written in the late 1800s by one of the Reverend's granddaughter. "But I did like to run over from my grandfather's to see my cousins Maria and Walter...They lived only a little way (to the north of the Porter-Phelps-Huntington house beyond the garden, and we reached their

house through a grape-covered arbor, which was an agreeable gate-way in its season."

One letter in particular, written in 1828, suggests that the garden design was similar to that which was laid out by the Phelps' gardener. "Mr. Woods has been digging the garden today coming again tomorrow and expects to finish the northwest square."

The last major period when the homestead was used as a private residence began after the Reverend's death in 1865 and ended in the early 1900s. The estate passed to the Reverend's son, Bishop Frederick Dan Huntington, and his wife, Hannah, and later to their children. Throughout the late 1800s and into the early 1900s, Forty Acres was managed as an active, working farm, but was used only as a summer home by the Huntingtons. Before 1880, the Bishop built a small cottage near the the barn for the couple who took care of the farm (see Figure 3D). That cottage was destroyed in a fire in 1929. "All during the '90s (1890s)...it was an active farm...The Bishop loved to rake hay in the fields and prided himself on his beautiful Jersey cows which filled the barn or grazed in the pasture across the street. There were several houses...and...a flock of hens...." ¹³

In an autobiography written in 1936 by one of the Bishop's daughters can be found numerous references to the "old place." "Finally we passed the buttonwood tree...clean-limbed maples along either side of the road, and the white picket-fence of Forty Acres. Our House, our big gate opening wide, our elms stretching their canopies far over the roofs and lawns, our south door flung wide open...we sprang from the wagons and rushed under the lilac trees...Then came father's study in which we so often watched him working, his north window open toward the garden, where

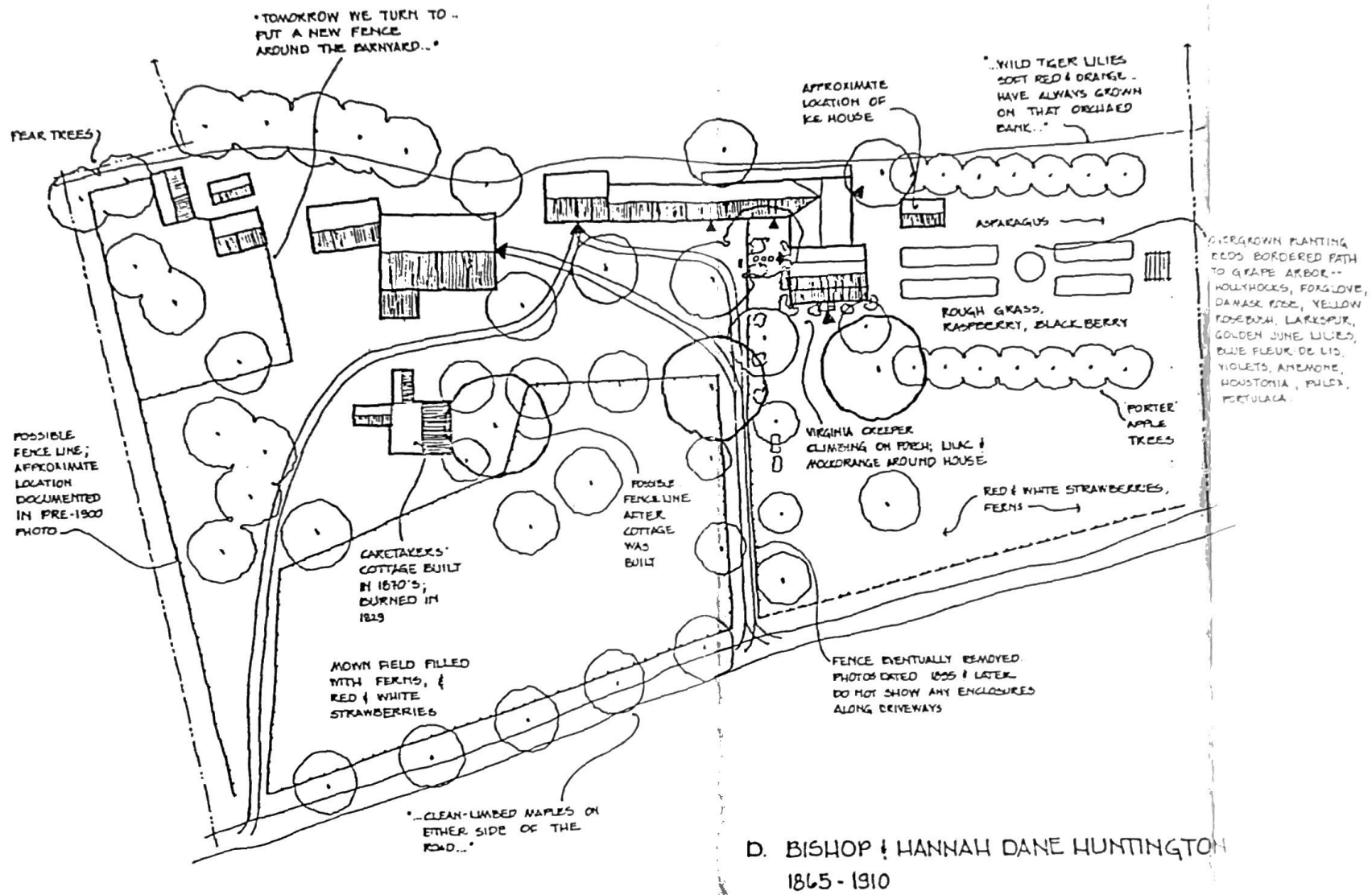
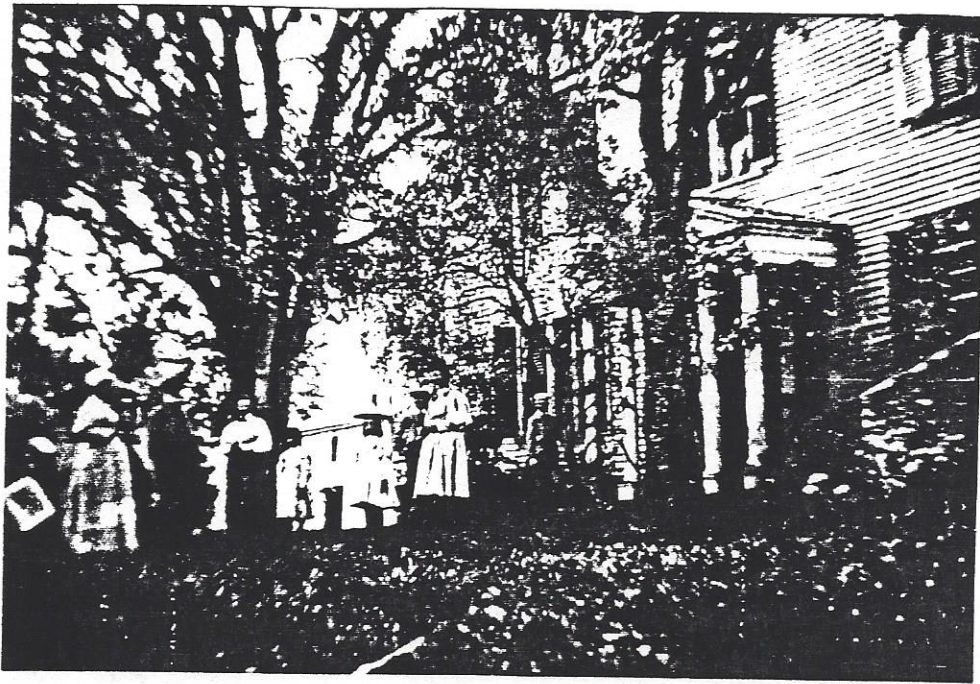


FIGURE 3D Reconstruction Plan of Bishop Huntington Estate

two rows of brilliant hollyhocks bordered the path to the grape arbor.¹⁴ Mixed in among the hollyhocks were also damask roses, a yellow rosebush "which poured its largesse of blossoms across the path," larkspur, blue fleur-de-lis, foxgloves and golden June lilies; "There was not too much order or clipping of those beds."¹⁵

From the late 1800s, and on into the 1900s, written descriptions of Forty Acres are further enhanced by photographs. Old apple trees stood in the front yard, trees planted perhaps during Reverend Huntington's day, if not earlier, and many huge, stately elm trees, also dating back to at least the Reverend's period, graced the homestead (see photographs 1-3). Plantings of lilacs and sweet mockorange around the house were controlled and sparse, framing and setting off the detail of the architecture, which, in many places, is quite intricate (see photographs 4-5). The turf in the farmyard between the barn and the house was "kept soft by the croppings of cows and sheep, allowed to linger and nibble on their way to and from pasture"¹⁶ (see photographs 6-7).

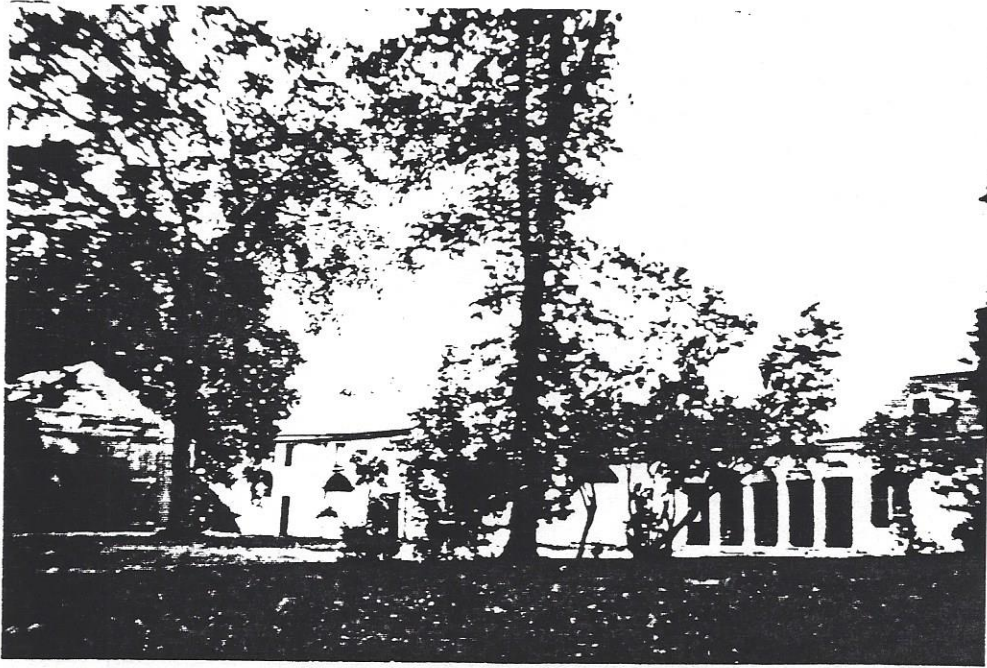
The Bishop's grandson, Dr. James Huntington, lived at Forty Acres from the 1920s until the mid-40s. During this period, the carriage house was remodeled into an apartment for Dr. Huntington (see photograph 8). In 1932, Huntington built a garage, which is still standing and used for storage on the southern border of the estate. A major event that kept the town talking for years was the moving of Charles Phelps' old "great barn" to the center of Hadley; the barn has been used ever since as the Hadley Farm Museum. On the site of the barn's foundation, a big, stone-walled depression, the Sunken Garden was made, a popular garden style in the 1930s (see photograph 9). When the barn was removed, the associated outbuildings were



PHOTOGRAPH 1: Looking southwest across elm-shaded front yard of Forty Acres; photograph taken in 1895



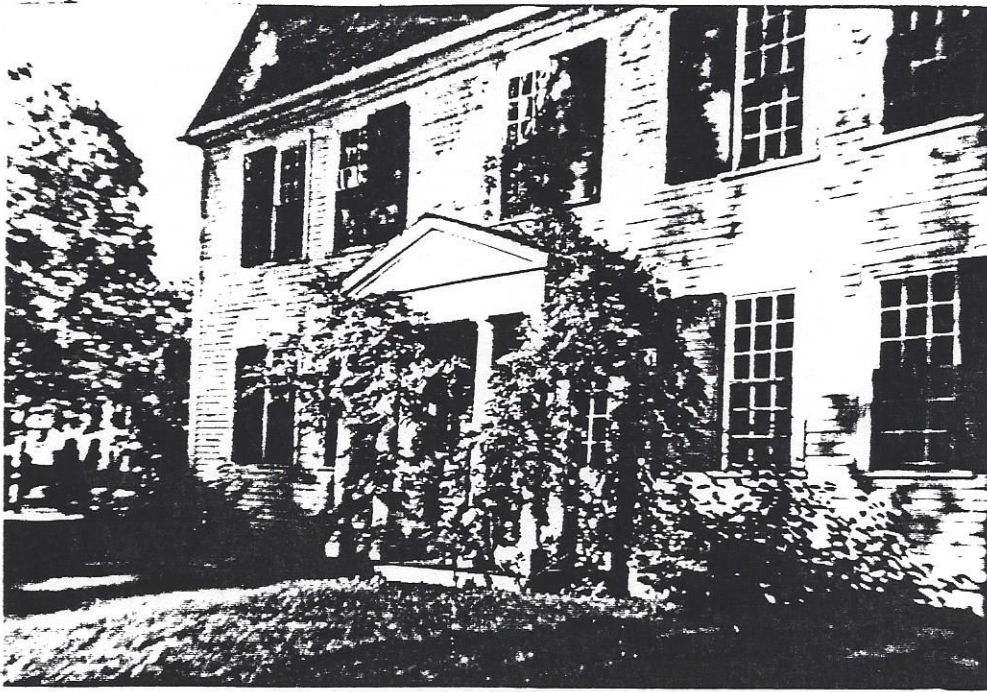
PHOTOGRAPH 2: Looking southeast across sheepyard; caretakers' cottage in background behind line of elm trees; photograph undated, probably pre-1920



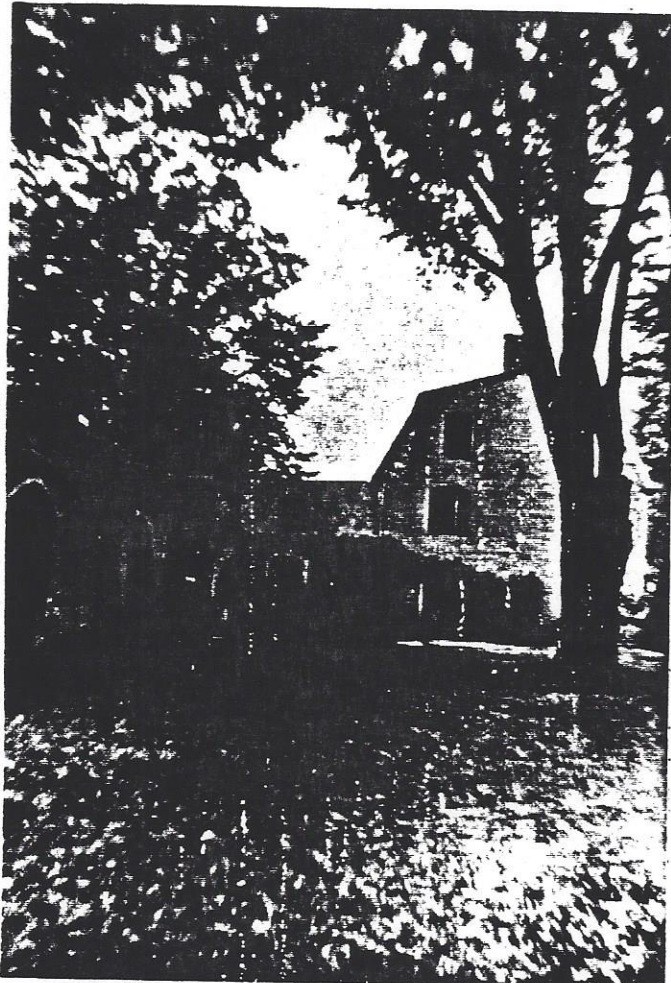
PHOTOGRAPH 3: Closely-cropped lawn in Carriage Yard, shaded by magnificent elms; undated, probably pre-1920



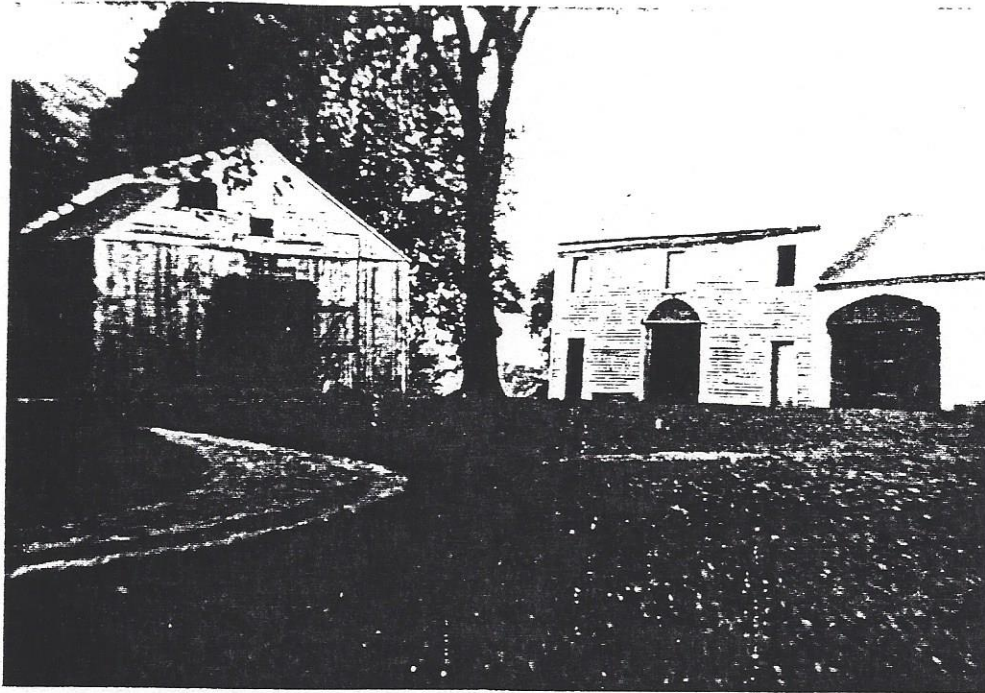
PHOTOGRAPH 4: Looking west towards front yard; photograph dated 1872



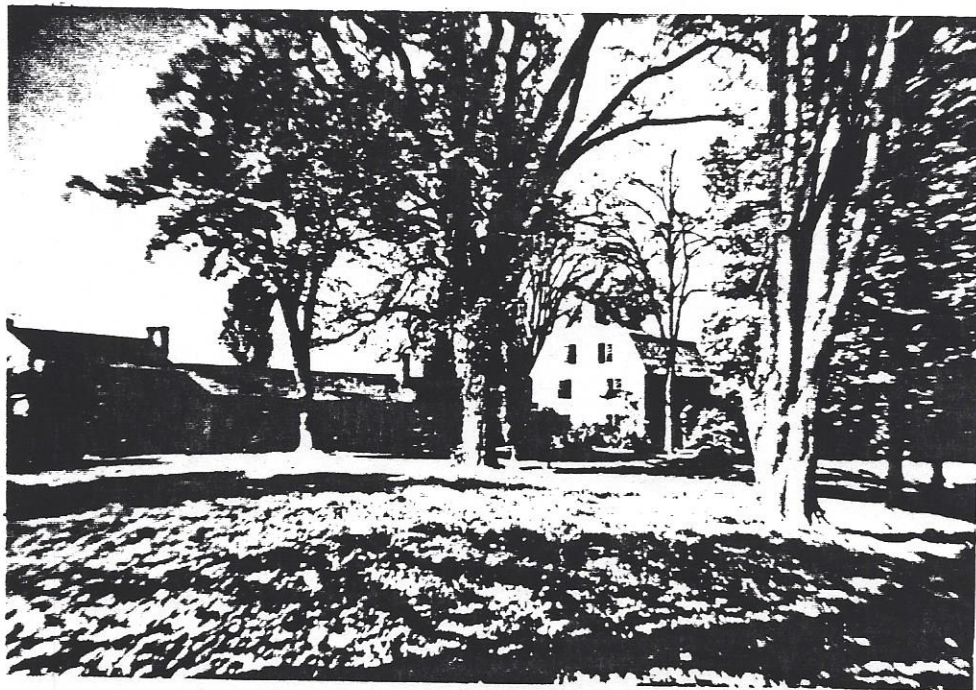
PHOTOGRAPH 5: Photograph taken in early 1940s showing simple, sparse planting around front porch



PHOTOGRAPH 6: Looking north across closely-cropped Carriage Yard towards south end of house; photograph undated, probably early 1900s



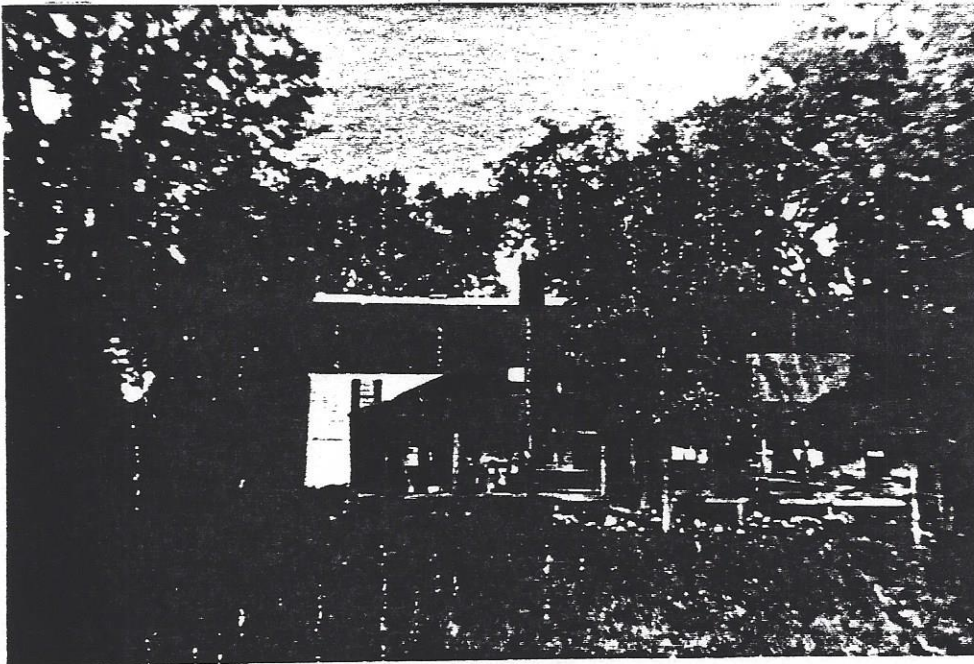
PHOTOGRAPH 7: Looking southwest across Carriage Yard towards barn (on left), and carriage house (in center); undated, probably early 1900s



PHOTOGRAPH 8: Looking northwest across manicured front field towards Forty Acres. Note remodeled carriage house to left of photograph; 1940s



PHOTOGRAPH 9: Looking north toward terraced Sunken Garden, foundation of Phelps' "great barn;" photograph taken in early 1940s



PHOTOGRAPH 10: Looking east towards back veranda, showing original contours of land and design of structure

torn down, and the ground was graded smooth to make the lawns surrounding
the sunken garden. ¹⁷ While it is now in deep shade from surrounding trees,
in its early years, the Sunken Garden was a fairly sunny spot. Studying old
photographs and consulting with family members who remember what the garden
looked like in the '30s, a tentative list of the original plant materials
can be drawn up: phlox, roses, peonies, white and yellow iris, miniature
and Japanese iris, lily-of-the-valley, bachelor button, baby's breath,
sweet william, nasturtium, coral bells, daffodils, bleeding heart, tulips
and ferns. Two added attractions in this garden are the old millstone
planted and spilling over with *Euonymus fortunei radicans*, and the pond,
originally the bottom of the silo, planted with white water lilies and, for
a few years, housing carp in the summer. *Thuja occidentalis*, *Juniperus*
virginiana, *Tsuga canadensis*, and *Hedera helix* were planted around the top
of the stone wall.

The land directly behind the house sloped down from the north to the
south, and the veranda was nestled into the slope (see photograph 10). The
northernmost end was set on the higher ground, and the largest portion of
the veranda rested on a series of wood and stone supports. In March 1936,
the Connecticut River overflowed its banks and flooded the Porter-Phelps-
Huntington House, causing considerable damage to the back veranda. Soon
after this, and just in time for the 1938 hurricane, a solid wall was built
under the southern half of the veranda. A stone-walled terrace was con-
structed at the north end of the veranda to retain the slope.

By the 1950s, the effort of maintaining the home became too demanding
on the remaining Porter-Phelps-Huntington descendants. In 1955, the estate
was turned over to the Porter-Phelps-Huntington Foundation, Inc., a

private, non-profit organization, to be managed as a museum. It is unique in the area since rather than being an historic site restored to a particular period, such as Old Sturbridge Village or Old Deerfield, all the furnishings belonged to, and were used by, the Porters and their families.

The Museum Today

As a museum, Forty Acres still displays the quiet elegance it had as a private home, and is situated on approximately 20 acres of the original estate, the rest having been divided up among individual family members or leased out as farmland to help support the museum. Just as the house has taken on a new function, so have the gardens. Originally existing for the family's private use and pleasure, the museum grounds are now the domain of the general public, and as such must adapt to different activities while still retaining an historical link with the museum. Although not part of the historical collection per se, the gardens are an integral part of the museum experience and serve as a setting for passive recreation, where the visitor plays the part of observer. The Porter-Phelps-Huntington Foundation owns the site and provides for its upkeep. Museum members are actively concerned about the condition of the grounds, and several in the past have volunteered their time, energy and enthusiasm to the gardens. The members are divided into two "camps" on the issue of grounds upkeep and the resulting ambience. Some members are in favor of a carefully manicured lawn and a totally unobscured view of the museum from the road, while others prefer a more casual, slightly overgrown, "lived-in" look, one that offers only glimpses of the museum from the road. It is the goal of the museum administrators to take neither of these arbitrary approaches, but

rather, to recreate the historical accuracy of the grounds, based on documented archival information.

Restoration of the grounds and gardens at the Porter-Phelps-Huntington House would benefit the museum in a number of ways. It would heighten the educational aspect of the museum, provide a suitable historical context in which museum-related activities could take place and visitors encouraged to participate, and would emphasize the museum's image as a unique historic site.

The goal of this Master's project is to propose design solutions for the immediate landscape of the Porter-Phelps-Huntington House museum that would:

- 1) provide documentation on restoring the grounds and gardens based on archival and library research;
- 2) help the museum administration determine the desired ambience for the grounds that would be satisfactory to all members, as well as provide a suitable milieu for an historic building;
- 3) accommodate the present-day activities taking place on museum grounds and determine if any uses should be modified in any manner to be made more environmentally compatible with the landscape;
- 4) provide the proper contextual "fit" between the museum grounds and the surrounding farmlands; and
- 5) respect the museum administration's need for low-maintenance, modest-budget gardens.

Fundamental to this project is an issue common to all historic preservation/restoration works undertaken: When the historical significance of the site spans several centuries—in the case of the Porter-

Phelps-Huntington House Museum, two centuries--what period is selected as being the style to which the grounds should be restored, or even more basically, should there be only one? A thorough archival study has been conducted in order to ascertain what was written about the gardens and what actually did exist on site. The project also included library research into what could or should have been the style of garden design practiced during the most important periods of the house.

Now that the historical context of the Porter-Phelps-Huntington House Museum has been defined and described, it is necessary to look at the present-day conditions of the museum and determine what remains of its historical legacy. In this way, it will be possible to decide upon a course of action the museum administration will need to take in order to achieve its goal of recreating the historic grounds.