

Massachusetts Cultural Resource Information System

Scanned Record Cover Page

Inventory No:	WSP.L
Historic Name:	Drift Road
Common Name:	
Address:	
City/Town:	Westport
Village/Neighborhood:	Westport Point; Head of Westport; Handy Four Corners; Snell Corner
Local No:	
Year Constructed:	
Architect(s):	
Architectural Style(s):	
Use(s):	Agricultural; Other Engineering; Other Road Related; Other Transportation
Significance:	Agriculture; Archaeology, Historic; Community Planning; Engineering; Politics Government; Transportation
Area(s):	
Designation(s):	
Building Materials(s):	



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Commonwealth of Massachusetts
Massachusetts Historical Commission
220 Morrissey Boulevard, Boston, Massachusetts 02125
www.sec.state.ma.us/mhc

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FORM H - PARKS
AND LANDSCAPES

Massachusetts Historical Commission
Massachusetts Archives Facility
220 Morrissey Boulevard
Boston, Massachusetts 02125

Assessor's number

multiple

USGS Quad

Westport

Area(s) Form No. Forms within

L 935



Town Westport

Place (neighborhood or village) HEAD OF WESTPORT, SMALL VILLAGE, HANDY FOR WATER, WESTPORT POINT

Address or Location Drift Road from head of Westport to Route 88

Name Drift Road

Ownership ☒ Public ☒ Private

Type of Landscape (check one)

- ☐ park ☐ farm land
☐ green/common ☐ mine/quarry
☐ garden ☐ training field
☐ boulevard/parkway
☒ other (specify) scenic road with farmland

Date or Period 18th c. through present

Source historic maps

Landscape Architect n/a

Location of plans n/a

Alterations/Intrusion (with dates) modern residential development

Condition Good

Acreage approx 7 miles long (1000 ac.)

Setting agricultural, rural

Recorded by Christine Longiaru for PAL

Organization DEM - Heritage Landscape Inventory

Date (month/day/year) September 2002

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VISUAL/DESIGN ASSESSMENT

This form was prepared as part of the Massachusetts Heritage Landscape Inventory Project undertaken by the Department of Environmental Management. The purpose of the project is to identify and document cultural landscapes significant to a community. It differs somewhat from a typical MHC inventory form in that it incorporates natural resource information as well as that pertaining to cultural resources and focuses primarily on landscapes rather than buildings. The Heritage Landscape Inventory project is organized by watershed and many of the landscapes identified are watershed based. This form addresses cultural landscape resources along Drift Road in Westport. Boundaries defined by land use history may overlap but do not necessarily conform to existing MHC survey areas. Ortho photographs, topographic maps, and narrative sources have been used to assist in development of the description.

Drift Road is a north-south thoroughfare in the center of Westport. Located in the uplands of the East Branch of the Westport River valley, the road roughly parallels the western shoreline of the river for approximately 7 miles. Drift Road follows a gently undulating course along the ridge overlooking the river, which is considered one of the two most scenic natural features in the town, along with Horseneck Beach (OSRP 1999:35). The Drift Road corridor was designated as a noteworthy and distinctive landscape in the Massachusetts Landscape Inventory (MADEM 1982).

Drift Road originally connected the Head of Westport (MHC Area B) with Westport Point (MHC Areas I and J; NR 1992). In the early 1960s, Route 88 was constructed directly to the west for motorists en route to Horseneck Beach State Reservation. The new road alleviated vehicular traffic on Drift Road, which helped to retain the road's historic agricultural setting. The construction of Route 88 also isolated a small stretch (approximately .34 miles) of the southern end of Drift Road, on the west side of Route 88. The feeling and associative qualities of this small portion of road are linked to the coastal village of Westport Point rather than the East Branch of the Westport River. Therefore, it is not included in the Drift Road landscape corridor.

Drift Road offers two different types of scenic settings. The northern segment of the road retains much of its riverine-agricultural landscape, and feels connected to the river. This stretch of the road features scenic farms of various scale and open river views. Buildings are set back from the road in wooded or open field settings on spacious lots. The adjacent land use includes croplands, pastures, orchards, and residential landscapes with small-scale, 1 and 2 story historic houses dating primarily from the 18th through early 20th centuries, often sheathed in natural shingles. In many places stonewalls and large trees line the road corridor edge close to the pavement, creating a sense of enclosure along the route, that opens to distant vistas eastward across the fields and river.

In contrast to the northern stretch of Drift Road above Hix Bridge, the southern section of Drift Road has a looser historic visual connection with the river. The southern portion of the road is lined with dense woods that obscure many of the earlier homes as well as the river. Additionally, the southern portion of the road is more developed with modern infill. However, new development along this stretch displays sensitivity to the existing building stock by reusing traditional vernacular forms and replicating stone walls.

The northern end of Drift Road begins at its intersection with County Street in the historic village of the Head of Westport (MHC Area B), formerly a cultural center comprised of several industrial sites, a schoolhouse, a town landing and historic residences. A village green divides the northern tip of Drift Road. The original section of road, above the green, features a row of eighteenth and nineteenth century residences that overlook

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the river and village center. At one time, the east side of this stretch consisted of a row of buildings. The road begins at the Y-intersection with Old County Road. North of Old County Road, Drift Road becomes Gifford Road, which extends north to Briggs Road.

Formerly the site of industrial activity, the Head of Westport now features a landscaped riverside park on the site of the town landing, which is located on the west bank of the river. Drift Road abuts the western edge of the park. From the road, the river's bank gently slopes eastward to the cut granite, stone lined river channel. Traveling south from County Street on Drift Road the view to the southern edge of the village is dominated by a square Italianate Villa, a reminder of the community's early industrial prosperity.

Drift Road generally follows the route of an early north-south Native American trail that provided access to the East Branch of the Westport River and Westport Harbor (MHC 1981:2). Beginning at the Head of Westport, Drift Road is level at an elevation of approximately 15 feet above mean sea level. The road gradually rises as it veers in a southwesterly direction away from the river. The northern segment of the road traverses uneven topography that ranges in elevation from 50 ft to 100 ft near the intersection with Charlotte White Road. Kirby's Corner is a small village located to the west of Drift Road on Charlotte White Road, which is now disconnected from Drift Road by the Route 88 right-of-way corridor. Continuing south, Drift Road wends through Snell Corner and Handy Four Corners, the location of Hix Bridge. Because of the constriction of the river at the Hix Bridge area, it has continuously served as a crossing point. From the bridge there are long, narrow vistas of the river to the north and south.

From Hix Bridge Road south, parcels of land between Drift Road and the river are not as deep, as the road is located closer to the western shoreline. As the road proceeds southward it follows the ridges of the steep banks of the river valley. The southern half of the road from Hix Bridge Road to Route 88 is a long unbroken segment that is only intersected by private roads leading to residences along the river. This section of road is lined by dense woods that form an uninterrupted canopy. At the southern end of the road, the horizontal alignment turns at an almost 90 degree angle to the west and then intersects with Route 88.

Currently, there are more than 100 previously inventoried resources on file at MHC for Drift Road (MHC 124-129, 132-142, 157-217, 673-676, 698-704, 826-837, 933). The Paul Cuffe[e] Farm at 1504 Drift Road (NR 1974) and the Cadman-White-Handy House, 202 Hixbridge Road, corner of Drift Road (NR 1992) are the only properties on Drift Road listed in the National Register of Historic Places. Historic resources along Drift Road typify the vernacular character of rural and agricultural southeastern New England. Long stretches of dry laid fieldstone walls enhance the scenic quality of the road. Numerous farm complexes span both sides of the road. Presently, dense forest obscures historic residences located near the river's edge. Drift Road also features eight historic cemeteries. The small roadside cemeteries are associated with the Drift Road's earliest settlers.

A majority of the residences along Drift Road near the Head of Westport and at Westport Point date from the first three quarters of the nineteenth century. With the demise of the whaling industry in the third quarter of the nineteenth century, Westport's economy focused on agriculture and fishing. This shift is well represented by the extant historic building stock of Drift Road and its associated rural agricultural features such as farmhouses, farm outbuildings, orchards and pastureland. Farms on Drift Road originally extended eastward, down the gradually sloping bank of the East Branch of the Westport River.

Dating from ca. 1725, the Town Poor Farm at 830 Drift Road (MHC 181) best exemplifies the rural agricultural character of the area. From the road, there are scenic vistas of the farm's rambling, gently rolling

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45-acre pastureland and the river. The farmhouse stands prominently on a sharp curve of Drift Road. Its associated outbuildings are also clustered close to the roadside. The main building is of post-and-beam construction, which typifies the regional construction type of the period. A dirt farm path connects the farm complex to the river. One of the most notable character defining features of the farm is its high quality masonry work, which is prevalent throughout the property in the form of stone foundations, stone walls and stone corrals. The network of stone corrals evokes a labyrinthine outline on the landscape as it conforms to the undulating topography of the farm's expansive meadow. Though no longer an active farm, the Town Farm's rich grazing land is still utilized by local farmers.

Overall, Drift Road is distinctive as a linear rural roadway corridor landscape where topographical and natural features are combined with historic agricultural elements and buildings to create an especially scenic heritage landscape in the town of Westport.

HISTORICAL NARRATIVE

In the seventeenth century and the first three quarters of the eighteenth century, Westport was part of "Old" Dartmouth, a large parcel of land purchased by Plymouth Colony proprietors from the Native American Wampanoag Indians in the 1650s. Early settlers were attracted to the water power at the Head of Westport. In 1787, Westport, Fairhaven, and New Bedford separated from Dartmouth as independent towns. At that time, Westport had three villages: the Head of Westport, Central Village and Westport Point.

The geographic location of the Head of Westport on what was the Main Road or Rhode Island Way (currently Old County Road) provided access to markets in Rhode Island to the west, and to Plymouth and Cape Cod to the east. Originally a Native American path, Old County Road is one of the most important roads in the development of the town. Additionally, the Head of Westport also offered convenient access to the river for additional trade markets. The first mills at the Head of Westport produced sawn wood and ground grain. The area possessed virgin stands of inland oak and pine, but unlike other local mill settlements, the Head of Westport had sufficient waterpower to cut wood and the water access to ship it out. Lawton's saw mill operated for almost two centuries.

The earliest commercial products produced in the village were cord wood and sawn wood. After the construction of the Westport Cotton Manufacturing Company in the nineteenth century, the Head of Westport became an established mill village known as Westport Mills, with increased development in the surrounding area and on Drift Road. Scows were built to convey wood product to Westport Point, a sheltered harbor formed by the confluence of the East and West Branch estuaries of the Westport River. The Point area attracted seafarers from the mid 1700s. In the early nineteenth century fisherman of Westport Point shifted from cod fishing to whaling and the village became a satellite of the New Bedford whaling industry. Shipyards were located at Westport Point and at the Head of Westport. Whaling was the principal industry in Westport until 1875, when petroleum was discovered. After the cotton manufacturing shifted to New Bedford and Fall River, the Head of Westport became a commercial business center.

In addition to its many farmsteads, Drift Road featured an almshouse, Town Poor Farm, which was also known as the Westport Infirmary. The almshouse operated for more than a century. The earliest record of admittance to the infirmary dates to 1837. A 1841 list recorded three women who remained on the list through 1878, the year when the first of the three women died. In 1898, the third woman still appeared on the list. The almshouse cared for a number of children ranging in age from three weeks to the early teens.

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Children were often accompanied by their mother or both parents. Families generally stayed from six months to up to a year. The number of individuals housed at the almshouse averaged around 30 with 60 to 100 persons receiving partial support each year outside of the almshouse. In the late nineteenth century, Westport had a high number of individuals relying on the almshouse. By the early twentieth century, the number of persons at the poor house dwindled.

For the duration of its 115 years, the Westport Infirmary operated under some 15 keepers or superintendents. In its early years, the almshouse served a number of purposes including as a penal institution. The almshouse also doubled as an inn with records of travelers beginning in 1866. In the 1870s nearly 500 travelers were admitted for a night's lodging. Almost one hundred of the travelers reported residence in England, Ireland, Scotland and Germany. Individuals were listed by name, residence, height, complexion, color of hair and eyes. The almshouse also lodged transients in what was known as the "tramp house," a room in the wagon shed with barred windows and a heavy oak door. As payment for the night's stay, transients were expected to work the next morning. In May 1956 one inmate remained, and the Board of Public Welfare voted to close the infirmary as of August 31, 1956 (Annual Report, Board of Public Welfare, 1956, 1957). The property has remained in town ownership to the present day.

Historically, agriculture was the town's main employment whereas the Head of Westport enjoyed a diverse commercial and industrial livelihood. In 1871 there were 616 farmers listed out of a total of 918 workers. A large number of Westport's farms in the early twentieth century were productive market-gardening. Westport also developed as a major dairy center. Dairying is still prevalent in the town today because of the well-drained, moist grazing lands. Currently, the town provides half of the milk for Bristol County. The continuation of the dairy industry is vital to the maintenance of Westport's rural character (OSEP 1999:10). Other industries in the town include poultry raising and fishing.

Beginning in the late nineteenth century, the town experienced an influx of summer resort population. Summer homes and cottages were constructed along the town's generous seacoast. By ca. 1900, the villages of Westport Harbor, East Beach, and Westport Point were becoming popular summer resorts. Horseneck Beach State Reservation established in 1956 became one of the most popular beaches in southeastern Massachusetts.

During the twentieth century, there was limited industry and scattered residential development in the town. The construction of Route 88 in the early 1960s (although planned as early as 1957) provided greater access to Westport Point and absorbed traffic that would otherwise use Drift Road. Despite continuing development, the farms on Drift Road have continued to survive. At the present time, two properties on Drift Road have short term protection under Chapter 61 and approximately 28 under Chapter 61A agricultural preservation restrictions, totaling several hundred acres (OSRP 1999:133-168). One important historic property on Drift Road, the Town Poor Farm, narrowly escaped demolition in 1978. The town opted not to sell the 18th century complex, and the Poor Farm was converted into a rental property.

There is ongoing community concern about overall development pressure in the town. Major threats to Drift Road include the demands for residential subdivisions and Form A lots. On Drift Road there is currently active residential construction. Large areas along the road are being cleared for new homes, thus impacting the scenic quality of the landscape. Continued development of Drift Road, and its adjacent parcels, will also increase vehicular traffic.

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- Wertz, Richard and Virginia Adams with Betsy Friedberg. *National Register of Historic Places Inventory - Nomination Form, Westport Point Historic District, Westport, MA, 1992*.

Maps

- 1871 *Westport*. Anonymous.
- 1895 *Westport*. Anonymous.
- *Town of Westport Assessor's Plans*. Various surveys and dates.

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NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES CRITERIA STATEMENT

Sections of Drift Road including individual resources along this scenic road are potentially eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places at the local level Criteria A and C. Segments of Drift Road, particularly in the northern portion, are well preserved rural agricultural landscape demonstrating the agrarian past of the Town strung along a linear road corridor. Farmsteads that line Drift Road range from the eighteenth century Cape Cod house to the late nineteenth century farmhouse with a variety of farm-related buildings and landscape features. Important land use patterns, partially shaped by the natural topography, are revealed in a study of this linear agricultural and transportation landscape. Additional historical research will be required to determine boundaries and complete the nomination.

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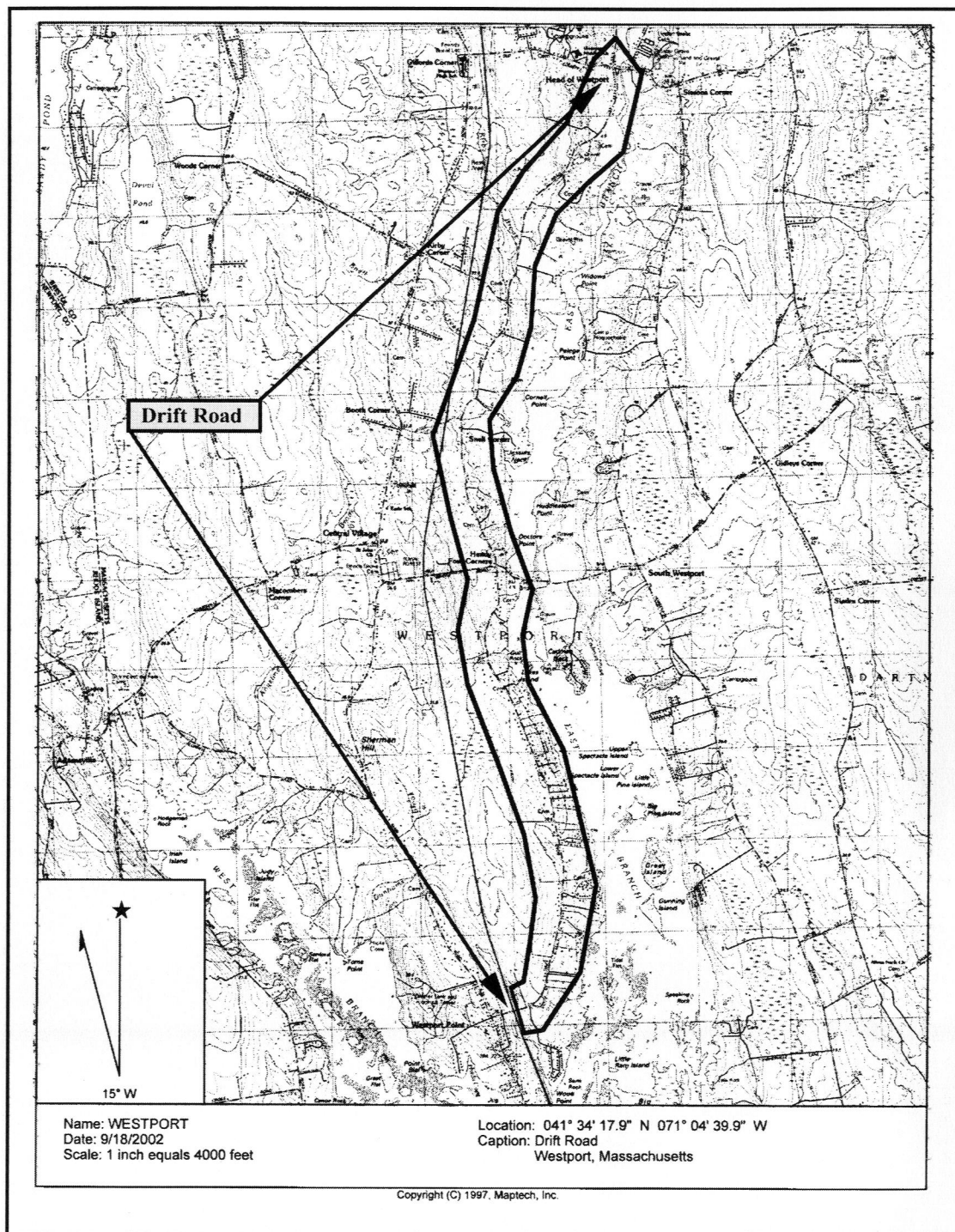
LOCATION MAP

Figure 1. USGS Map

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PHOTOGRAPHS

1. Drift Road, Silas Kirby Burial Ground (form cover)
2. Allen Cemetery, Drift Road
3. Town Poor Farm, 830 Drift Road, facing east.
4. Town Poor Farm, 830 Drift Road, facing east.
5. Town Poor Farm, 830 Drift Road, facing northeast.
6. Town Poor Farm, 830 Drift Road, facing southeast
7. Farm on Drift Road

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PHOTOGRAPHS



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PHOTOGRAPHS



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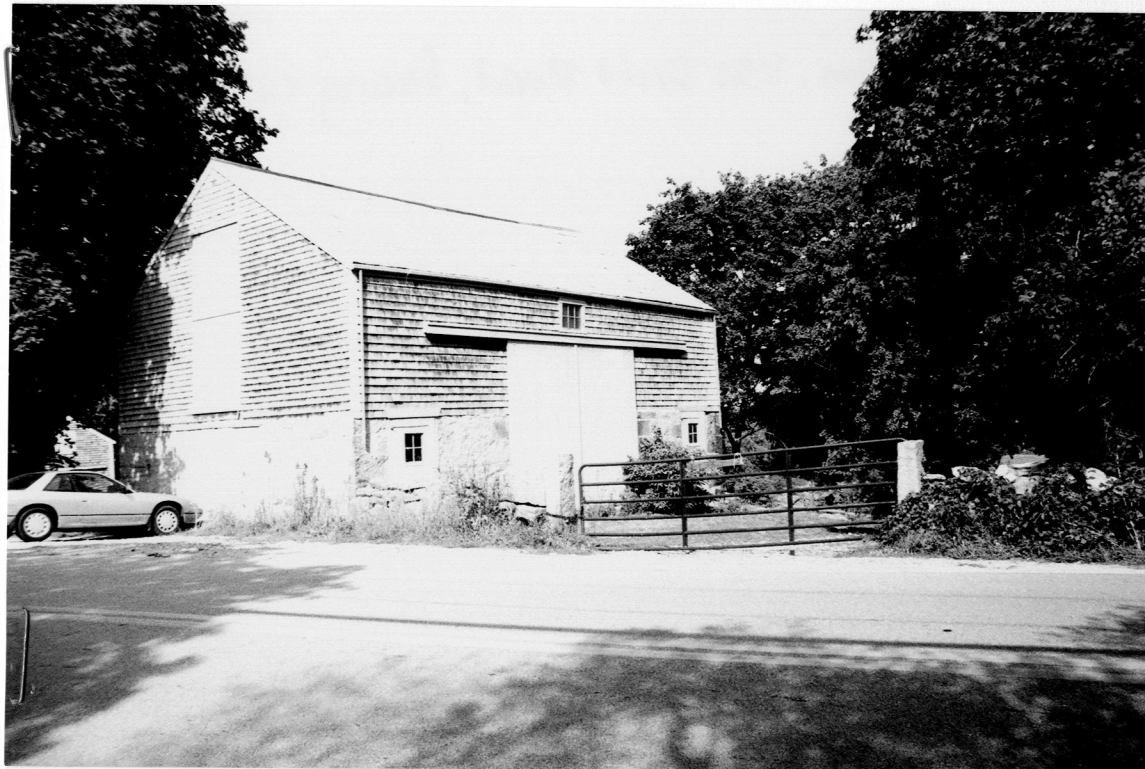
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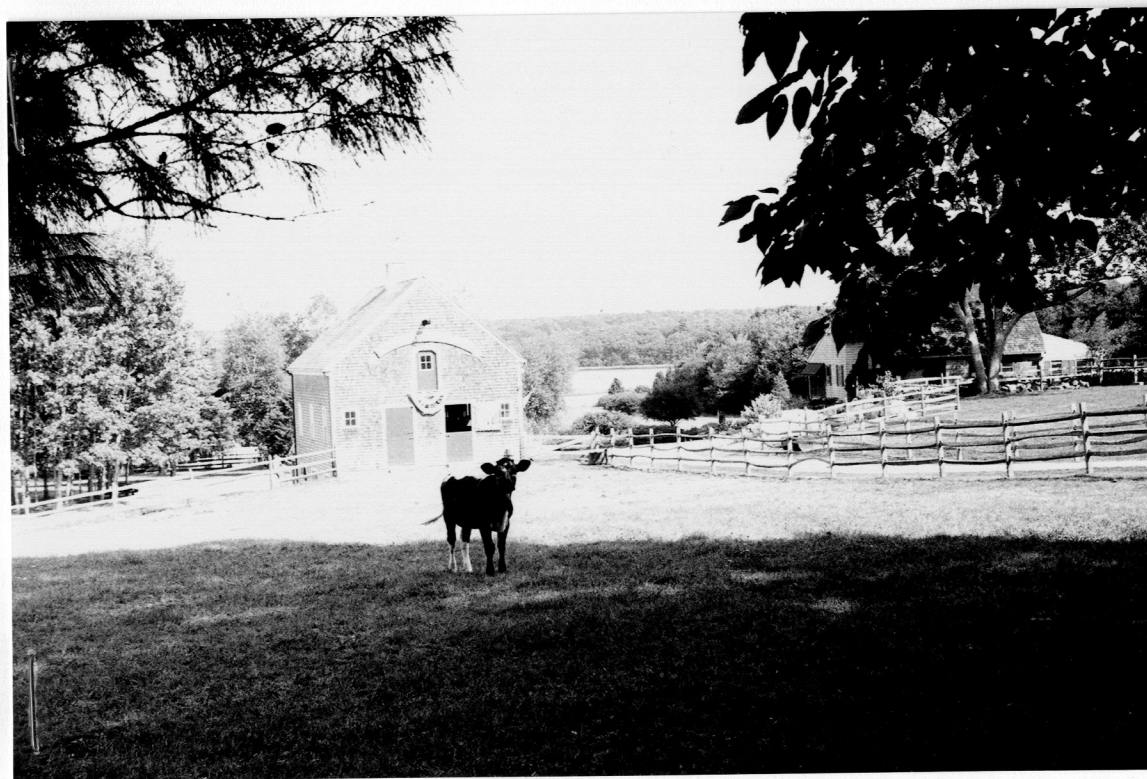
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PHOTOGRAPHS

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