

JOSEPH FRY FARM LANDSCAPE
2153 South County Trail Road (U.S. Route 2)
East Greenwich
Kent County
Rhode Island

HABS No. RI-399

HABS
RI
2-GREWIE,
8-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

National Park Service
Northeast Region
Philadelphia Support Office
U.S. Custom House
200 Chestnut Street
Philadelphia, P.A. 19106

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

JOSEPH FRY FARM LANDSCAPE

HABS No. RI-399

Location: 2153 South County Trail Road (U.S. Route 2),
East Greenwich, Kent County, Rhode Island

HABS
RI
2-GREENWICH
8-

USGS Crompton, RI Quadrangle (A and D) and USGS East Greenwich, RI Quadrangle (B and C), Universal Transverse Mercator Coordinates:

A: 19.292780.4612700
B: 19.292790.4612100
C: 19.291000.4612050
D: 19.291000.4612780
E: 19.291520.4613120
F: 19.292130.4613200
G: 19.292150.4612720

Present Owners: Dorothy and Marion Fry

Present Use: Residence and Farm

Significance: Fry's Hamlet Historic District is an important collection of three farmsteads, the Joseph Fry Farm, the Spencer-Fry Farm, and the Spencer-Bailey Farm. The buildings and lands which comprise the Joseph Fry Farm and the district document the settlement and development of the farm from the late seventeenth to the mid-twentieth century. The house, barns, and outbuildings illustrate the nature of rural vernacular design in an agricultural setting. Alterations to the buildings have been the result of changing social and economic conditions, and reflect the history of the farm. The fields, meadows, orchards, paths, and stone walls represent the patterns of land use that have characterized farming in East Greenwich and Rhode Island for over 200 years. The Joseph Fry Farm and Fry's Hamlet are an important cultural resource that preserve a wealth of information about agrarian life. Their importance is increased by the loss of similar elements of the town's and state's agricultural landscape to suburban development.

Note: The text below has been adapted from the Fry's Hamlet Historic District National Register of Historic Places Inventory-Nomination Form, Richard E. Greenwood, prepared for the Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission, 1985.

PART I JOSEPH FRY FARM - DESCRIPTIVE INFORMATION

Fry's Hamlet Historic District, located near the center of East Greenwich, contains three adjoining farmsteads which document the area's development as an agricultural community from the late seventeenth century to the mid-twentieth century, the Joseph Fry Farm, the Spencer-Fry Farm, and the Spencer-Bailey Farm. The district is located east and west of South County Trail (U.S. Route 2), south of its intersection with Middle Road, both of which were established in the colonial era. Fry's Hamlet is characterized by rolling terrain kept as pasture, cropland, woodland, and swamp, divided by a network of drylaid fieldstone walls. Fry's Brook flows northwest to southeast through the district, fed by small branch streams on its course to the Hunts River.

The Joseph Fry Farm is the largest of the three farms which comprise the district, occupying a 189-acre tract of land. The house is a two-and-a-half-story, frame Federal residence with a complex of barns, sheds, and outbuildings built to its rear over the past two hundred years. The house, completed in 1795, is attributed to Browning Nichols of East Greenwich. It replaced an earlier house that burned in 1793. At the front of the house is a yard planted with shade trees and ornamental shrubs and surrounded by a picket fence with granite posts. A dirt drive to the north leads to the cluster of farm buildings behind the house. The largest of the outbuildings are the two barns which stand with ends adjoining, the hay and cow barn to the south, and the horse barn to the north. Between the house and barns, there is a row of small outbuildings, from east to west: the summer house (moved to its present location c. 1950), former ice house, privy, carriage shed, smokehouse site, and milk room (c. 1940 with recent greenhouse addition). All of the buildings are single-story, gable-roof, frame buildings with rubblestone foundations. To the north of the drive, just north of the house, there are from east to west: the former summer kitchen and wash house (now a residence), the swill house and hog pen site, and the corn crib. To the south side of the house is a rose garden and vegetable garden that occupy the traditional site of the kitchen garden. A small pond dug ca. 1950 is located to the south of the gardens.

The Beehive House is located to the south of the gardens and pond, on a separate parcel of land, and is not included in this documentation. The small house lot, which fronts on South County Trail, is surrounded by the Joseph Fry Farm to the north, west, and south, but is historically unrelated to the Fry Farm. The 1872 house was moved from its original location near Allen's Gristmill Pond to its current site in 1968. Historic maps indicate its parcel had been set aside for a school in the eighteenth century, of which no surface evidence has been found.

A simple, stone-walled, family cemetery is located to the northwest of the house. The plot contains graves that date back to 1795.

In addition to the buildings and structures, the Fry lands are rich in association with the Fry family's farming activities. Several of the fields are still used as cropland or pasture, and those that have become overgrown still retain their historic names. The fields, meadows, and orchards were enclosed by drylaid fieldstone walls of the type common to Rhode Island and New England. The Barn Meadow, Ten Acre Lot, and Five Acre Lot are still in use. The orchard is not actively tended but is largely intact and contains the ruins of the cider mill, destroyed by fire in 1978. The Goose Pasture, Sheep Pasture (also known as the Night Pasture), and North Meadow are becoming overgrown, though some

distinctive features remain. The opening in the wall of the Sheep Pasture that is wide enough to allow passage of sheep, but not cows, remains intact. Four granite-slab bridges crossing Fry's Brook survive on the farm.

The Fry farmhouse fronts on South County Trail, which runs through the district in a north-south direction, and was one of the first roads laid out in the initial division of East Greenwich lands. The original road was bordered by orchards and stone hitching posts where it passed by the Joseph Fry Farm. It remained a dirt road until the mid-twentieth century when it was widened to a four-lane highway in 1930. Most of the land taken for the project was from the west side, removing most of the trees from the Fry's Little Orchard.

Inventory of buildings, structures, sites, and land on the property:

Joseph Fry House (1794-1795): a two-and-a-half-story, five-bay, flank-gable-roof, clapboarded, frame Federal house with a two-story rear ell, internal chimney, and an attached one-story, vertical plank woodhouse.

Hay and Cow Barn (late eighteenth or early nineteenth century): a two-and-a-half-story, flank-gable-roof, timber-framed, English hay barn with a late nineteenth century cow barn addition built in the same style at the south end. The entire structure is wood shingled with a rubblestone foundation. The hay barn and the loft over the cow barn are used for storing hay.

Horse Barn (mid-nineteenth century): a one-and-a-half-story, timber-framed, flank-gable-roof barn with cedar shingles and a rubblestone foundation. The building is currently used as a garage, and a mid-twentieth century addition at the south end built on the site of an old milk house is used as a shop.

Summer House (c. 1950): built on the site of the former milk house.

Ice House (late nineteenth century): a single-story, end-gable-roof, wood shingled, frame building with rubblestone foundation, used as a tool shed.

Privy (late nineteenth century): a very small, end-gable-roof, wood shingled, frame outhouse built on the east end of the carriage shed.

Carriage Shed (mid- to late nineteenth century): a single-story, flank-gable-roof, frame building with a loft, with wood shingles and rubblestone foundation, used for storage.

Milk Room (c. 1940): built to replace the former milk house, and recently enlarged by the addition of a small greenhouse.

Summer Kitchen and Wash House (mid-nineteenth century): a single-story, flank-gable-roof, clapboarded building with an external gable-end chimney. Originally located to the rear of the Spencer-Fry House, it was moved to its present location c. 1950, when it was enlarged to be used as a residence.

Swill House and Hog Pen Site (mid-nineteenth century): the wash house (above) was moved to the site of the former swill house and hog pen. The swill house was a small frame building with rubblestone foundation where the hog swill was prepared. Both buildings were removed in the early twentieth century. No surface remains of the swill house and hog pen are evident.

Corn Crib (early nineteenth century): a small, single-story, end-gable-roof, hardwood frame building set on stone piers, with vertical plank siding and an asphalt shingle roof.

Kitchen Garden (eighteenth and nineteenth century): the land to the south of the Fry House has traditionally been the site of the kitchen garden, which is now occupied by a vegetable garden and rose garden.

Cemetery (late eighteenth century): a simple, rectangular, family burial ground enclosed by drylaid rubblestone walls. The oldest interment was made in 1795.

Goose Pasture (eighteenth and nineteenth century): a several-acre tract on a branch of Fry's Brook where the Fry's kept their geese flock. The pasture is now overgrown and wooded.

Gravel Hole (early twentieth century): a natural gravel deposit excavated by the Frys for use around the farm. The gravel hole surrounds are now overgrown and wooded.

Sheep Wash Brook (eighteenth and nineteenth century): this branch of Fry's Brook was dammed every spring to create a pool in which the Fry's washed their sheep prior to shearing their fleece. The area is now overgrown and wooded.

North Meadow (eighteenth and nineteenth century): used alternately as cropland and pasture, it is now overgrown.

Maple Swamp Woodlot (eighteenth century): this 46½-acre lot containing equal parts of swamp and rocky upland was purchased by Thomas Fry in 1743. It was used as a woodlot, providing the farm families with lumber and firewood. It is essentially unchanged, though it has not been harvested in recent years.

Orchard (early twentieth century): this was the last of a series of orchards planted by the Frys. It was planted with apple trees that were sold as a cash crop. The trees still bear fruit, though the orchard is no longer actively tended. The orchard is now used as a cow pasture.

Cider Mill Foundations (ca. 1850): the crumbled rubblestone foundations located in the orchard are the remnants of a one-and-a half-story, gable-roof, wood shingle cider mill, burned in 1978.

Old Orchard (mid-nineteenth century): also known as the Cemetery orchard, this apple orchard preceded the larger one to the east (above) and was also used for cash crops. Many of the original trees remain, though are overgrown.

Little Orchard (nineteenth century): located to the north of the house, it was planted with a variety of fruit trees for domestic consumption. Most of the trees are gone, many taken down with the widening of South County Trail in the 1930s. The remainder of the orchard is grassed.

Sheep Pasture (eighteenth and nineteenth century): also known as the Night Pasture, this large field near the southwest corner of the farm was traditionally used for the sheep herd. While sheep farming ended on the Fry Farm in the late nineteenth century, the pasture continued to be used for cattle; it is now overgrown and wooded.

Barn Meadow (eighteenth and nineteenth century): also known as the Stable Meadow, this field to the south and west of the cow and hay barn provided a place for cows to gather and graze before being

herded to pasture or put in the barn. Two well-preserved board gates with stone posts enclose the meadow on the north and south sides of the barn. The meadow is still used for pasturing cattle and for a burn pile.

Well Lot (late nineteenth century): a well was dug at this site in the late nineteenth century. Water flowed by gravity to the second floor of the Fry House, supplying domestic needs. The well became contaminated from an adjacent dump created in the mid-twentieth century and has since been closed.

Ten Acre Lot (eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth century): the field is one of the most intensively used lots on the Fry Farm and is used for cropland. Traditionally cultivated with corn and potatoes, the lot is currently used as a hayfield.

Five Acre Lot (eighteenth and nineteenth century): traditionally used as cropland and pasture, the lot is now used as a hayfield.

Stone Bridges (eighteenth and nineteenth century): four simple stone bridges provide cartpaths across Fry's Brook on the farm. They are each formed by three rectangular granite slabs laid side-by-side over the brook.

PART II JOSEPH FRY FARM - HISTORICAL INFORMATION

The history of Fry's Hamlet begins with the initial settlement of East Greenwich in 1677 when the town's 48 proprietors began to divide the 5,000-acre tract which they had been granted for their service in King Philip's War. The proprietors, most of whom were from Aquidneck Island, initially laid out large tracts of farm land, approximately 100 acres each, on the fertile lands in the middle of the town. Most of the lands in the eastern half of Fry's Hamlet were located within the seventeenth farm, drawn by John Spencer, while the eighteenth farm, drawn by Thomas Fry included the western part of the hamlet. Spencer and Fry were both Newport residents, and maintained residences there. Joseph Spencer took up residence in East Greenwich, though not on his farm at Fry's Hamlet, and became a leading citizen, serving as town clerk for six years. He turned the farm over to his sons, Michael and Benjamin, who subsequently sold 65-acre parcels to their brothers, Robert and Benjamin. These farms are the present-day Spencer-Bailey and Spencer-Fry farms. Thomas Fry (1632-1704) lived only temporarily in East Greenwich, though he represented the town as a Deputy to the General Assembly from 1684 to 1690. In 1689 he deeded all his East Greenwich lands to this son Thomas Jr. (1666-1748).

Little is known about the early appearance of the Fry and Spencer lands. They were located in the area where the earliest settlements were made, and it is probable the families established pioneer homesteads on their lands. Relatively little appears in the historical record about the Spencer brothers, but Thomas Fry, Jr. became a leading town citizen. He served 26 terms in the General Assembly between 1696 and 1732, including 11 years as Speaker of the House of Deputies and five as Clerk of the Assembly. He was Deputy Governor of the colony from 1727 to 1729.

In 1700 the proprietors of East Greenwich laid out 50 quarter-acre house lots on the hill rising from Greenwich Cove, forming the beginnings of the town's center. This area developed in the first half of the eighteenth century, spurred on by the growth of maritime trade in Narragansett Bay. Thomas Fry, Jr., a glazier by trade, was one of the town's earliest merchants. He erected a wharf and warehouse on the cove by 1730, and his will of 1748 refers to the goods in his shop, apothecary wares, a stillyard, and a ship under construction "a ship 'abuilding'", in addition to farmlands, slaves, and a cider

mill. He occupied a house in the town center, and turned the homestead farm over to his oldest son, Thomas III.

Thomas Fry III (1691-1782) continued to farm the homestead farm and fill a number of public offices. He served three terms as a Deputy and two terms as a Chief Justice of the Inferior Court of Kent County, and was an officer in the French and Indian Wars. His son, Joseph (1736-1823), inherited his father's farm, and built the present-day Joseph Fry house after the existing farmhouse burned in 1793. The house reflected the prosperity of the Fry Farm and was considerably larger than the dwellings of the early settlers. Joseph spent the majority of his time farming and also served as a Justice of the Peace after the war. It appears that Joseph put an end to slave holding on the farm, and by 1782, there were no longer any slaves in the household. Additional labor needs on the farm were thereafter met by hired help.

In 1798-1799, Joseph's son, Thomas IV (1765-1831), expanded the family's holdings by purchasing the former Walter Spencer farm across the road from his father's farm. Thomas IV was energetic and industrious, and worked hard to keep the farm prosperous. He was very interested in improving farming practices and was one of the early members of the Rhode Island Society for the Encouragement of Domestic Industry, founded in 1820, which encouraged both agricultural and mechanical production. By the early nineteenth century, the limits of agricultural expansion in East Greenwich had been met. The farmers in Fry's Hamlet were fortunate in having naturally fertile and hydrated lands, but their future prosperity depended upon the careful husbanding of resources and the use of new techniques for fertilizing and soil improvements.

Upon the death of Thomas IV, he deeded his homestead to his son, Thomas G. Fry (1810-1892), and his father's farm (Joseph Fry Farm) to another son, Joseph II (1805-1890). A third son, Nicholas, had a farm nearby. The prevalence of the Frys in the area led to the common name of Fry's Corner or Fry's Four Corners for the intersection of Middle Road and South County Trail.

Joseph Fry II and Thomas G. Fry V devoted their lives to the same agricultural pursuits that had characterized life on their father's farm. The Providence and Stonington Railroad, built in 1837, appeared during their lifetimes and made it possible to send milk directly to market in Providence. The railroad was also a stimulus to the growth of the town center, but the farmlands to the west did not experience great changes beyond a slight decline in the amount of cultivated land. Both men left their farms to their children. William G. Fry (1848-1894) inherited the Joseph Fry Farm, and Lydia Fry who married William A. Vaughn (1848-1927) inherited the Spencer-Fry Farm.

By the late nineteenth century, farming in Fry's Hamlet was increasingly focused on dairy farming and apple orchards. William Fry, who inherited the farm in 1890, was the last to raise sheep there. His son Louis (1892-1967) took over the farm in the twentieth century, at which time the majority of the cultivated land on the three farms was devoted to raising hay and corn to feed the dairy herds. The orchards produced apples, cider, and vinegar. A number of small crops were harvested, including potatoes, oats, wheat, and flint corn used to make the traditional Rhode Island johnnycakes. The farm wives raised chickens and had weekly egg tours through the mill towns in the surrounding Pawtuxet Valley. Farming in Fry's Hamlet became more specialized in the twentieth century, with less activities taxing the farmers' energies. As generations of farmers before them, the residents of Fry's Hamlet worked cooperatively, sharing labor and resources, such as cutting ice, filling ice houses, and harvesting crops. Mechanized farming was introduced to the hamlet by Louis Fry, who purchased a pair of cleat-track tractors c. 1930.

Louis Fry and William Bailey's son, Francis were the principal farmers in the mid-twentieth century. Louis purchased the Spencer-Fry Farm, and leased it to tenant farmers for a while. During World War II, he adapted the house for use as apartments for officers at the North Kingstown Navy Base, while the farmlands remained in use for potatoes, wheat, and corn.

Today, Fry's Hamlet is still agricultural in nature, with pastures and fields on all three farms supporting the Bailey's herd of dairy cattle. The lands in the northern and western parts of the Joseph Fry Farm are becoming overgrown while the southern lands are in active agricultural use, supporting livestock grazing and crops. The Joseph Fry Farm buildings are no longer in active use, except for the hay barn. The buildings, however, still preserve the character of a nineteenth century farmyard. In addition, the farmlands, divided by stone walls and paths constitute an important survival of the agricultural landscape of East Greenwich.

PART III PROJECT INFORMATION

The Public Archaeology Laboratory, Inc. (PAL, Inc.) was retained by Treadwell & Rollo Inc., on behalf of The Stanley Works and its subsidiary Stanley-Bostitch, Inc. of East Greenwich, Rhode Island to prepare Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) documentation for the Joseph Fry Farm Landscape. The Stanley Works is proposing to install a groundwater collection and treatment system on their property and on an adjoining portion of the Joseph Fry Farm which is located within the Fry's Hamlet National Register Historic District. The project requires permitting by the New England Division of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (NED). The NED and the Rhode Island State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) have consulted and concluded the proposed undertaking will affect the historic district. A Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) outlining stipulations that will minimize or mitigate any project related impacts to the historic district has been drafted between NED and the SHPO. One of the stipulations of the MOA is that the portion of the district that will be affected by the project be recorded to HABS standards. Other mitigation includes archaeological survey of affected lands, reconstruction of historic stone walls, and restoration of the historic landscape.

This report was compiled in February 1994 by the PAL, Inc. project team including Maureen A. Cavanaugh, Preservation Planner, and Virginia H. Adams, Senior Architectural Historian. The large format archival photography was completed in April 1994 by Robert Brewster of Warren Jagger Photography, Inc., Providence, Rhode Island.

SOURCES

A. Bibliography

Greenwood, Richard E.

1985 Fry's Hamlet Historic District National Register of Historic Places Inventory-Nomination Form.
Prepared for the Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission, Providence, RI.

Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission

1974 East Greenwich, Rhode Island Statewide Preservation Report K-EG-1. Providence, RI.

B. Maps and Surveys

Beers, D.G., J.H. Goodhue, and H.B. Parsell

1870 Atlas of the State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations. Plate 77. D.G. Beers & Co., Philadelphia, PA.

East Greenwich Preservation Society

1977 1716 Lot Map of East Greenwich. Prepared by the Founders Club of the East Greenwich Tercentenary Commission, East Greenwich, RI.

Everts and Richards

1895 New Topographical Atlas of Surveys: Southern Rhode Island. Plates 166-167. Philadelphia, PA.

United States Geological Survey

1955 Crompton, Rhode Island Quadrangle. Photorevised 1970. Washington, D.C.

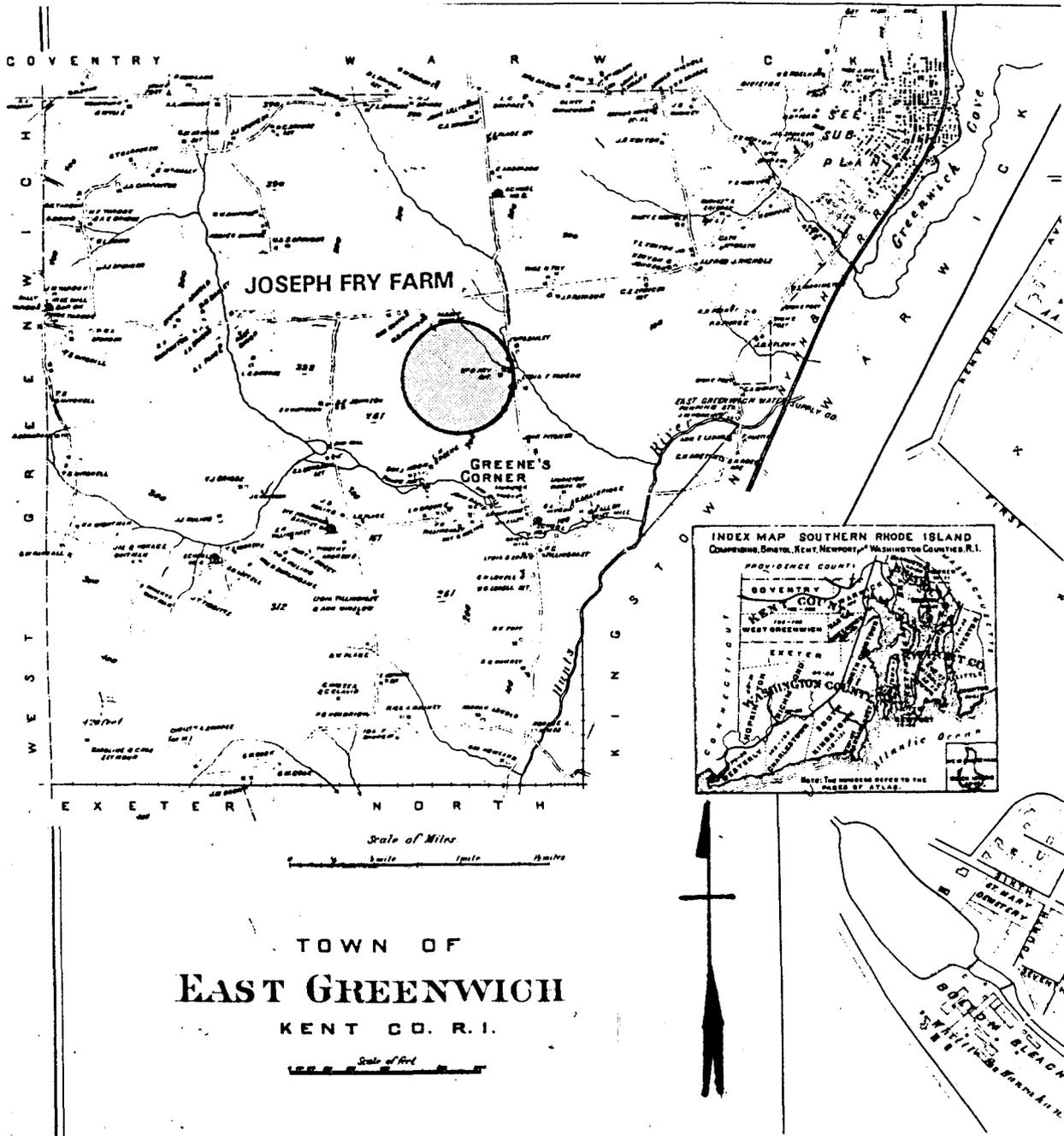
1957 East Greenwich, Rhode Island Quadrangle. Photorevised 1975. Washington, D.C.

USGS Location Map
Fry's Hamlet Historic District
East Greenwich, Kent County, Rhode Island
Scale 1:24000

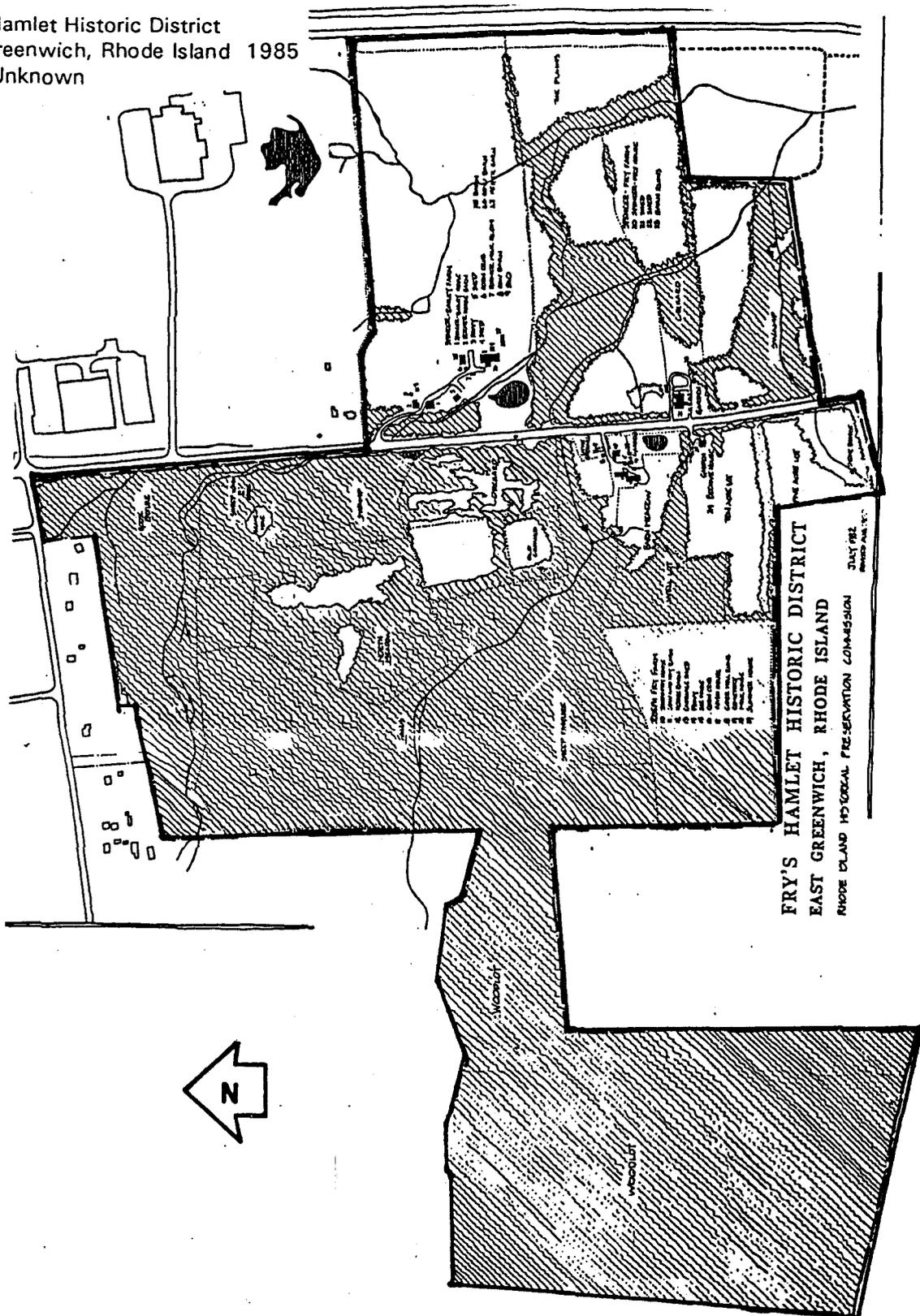


JOSEPH FRY FARM LANDSCAPE
HABS No. RI-399 (Page 10)

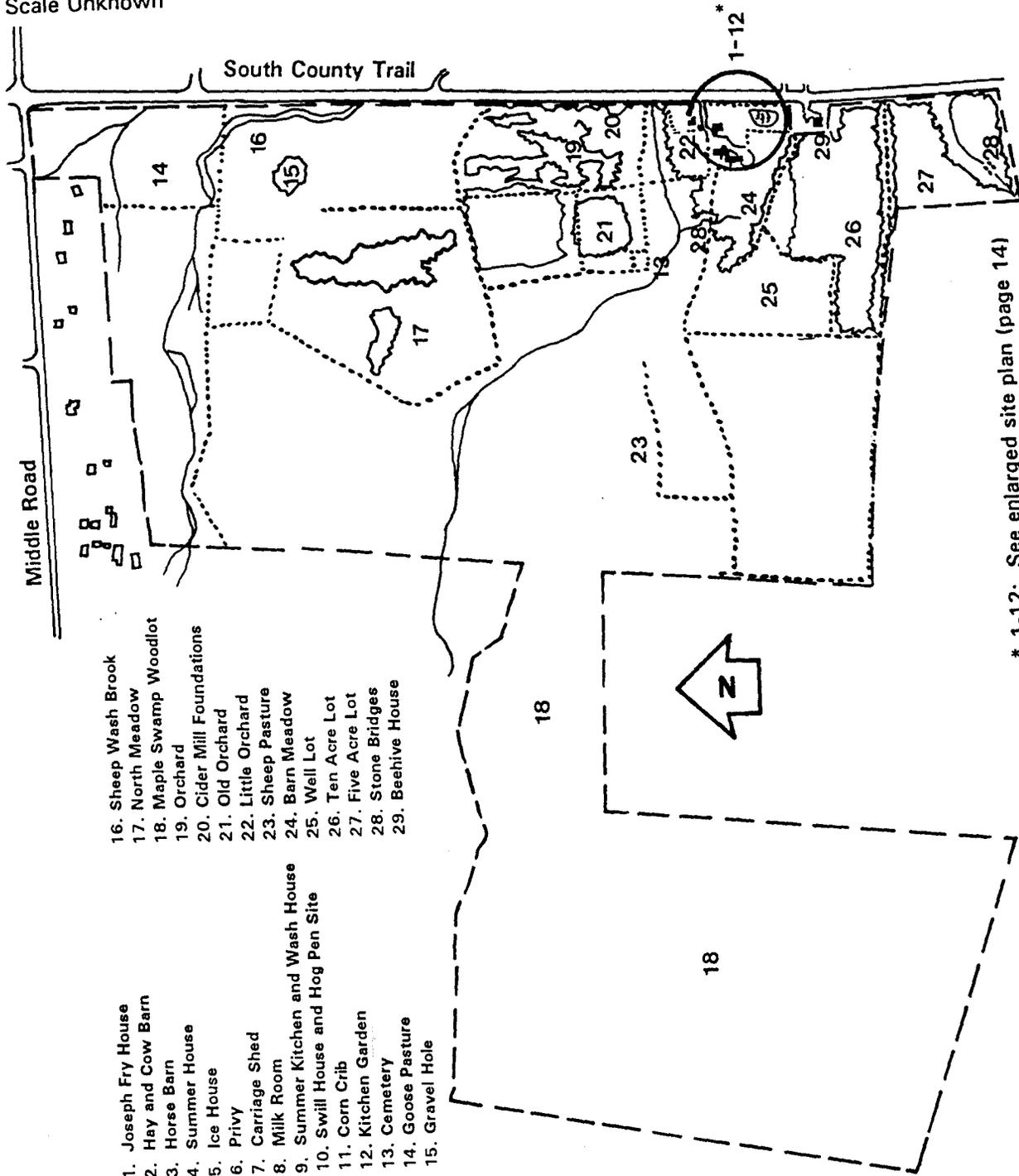
Portion of a Map of
East Greenwich, Rhode Island
D.G. Beers & Co. 1870
Scale Unknown



Fry's Hamlet Historic District
East Greenwich, Rhode Island 1985
Scale Unknown



Joseph Fry Farm
Portion of a Map of Fry's
Hamlet Historic District
East Greenwich, Rhode Island 1985
Scale Unknown



- 1. Joseph Fry House
- 2. Hay and Cow Barn
- 3. Horse Barn
- 4. Summer House
- 5. Ice House
- 6. Privy
- 7. Carriage Shed
- 8. Milk Room
- 9. Summer Kitchen and Wash House
- 10. Swill House and Hog Pen Site
- 11. Corn Crib
- 12. Kitchen Garden
- 13. Cemetery
- 14. Goose Pasture
- 15. Gravel Hole
- 16. Sheep Wash Brook
- 17. North Meadow
- 18. Maple Swamp Woodlot
- 19. Orchard
- 20. Cider Mill Foundations
- 21. Old Orchard
- 22. Little Orchard
- 23. Sheep Pasture
- 24. Barn Meadow
- 25. Well Lot
- 26. Ten Acre Lot
- 27. Five Acre Lot
- 28. Stone Bridges
- 29. Beehive House

* 1-12: See enlarged site plan (page 14)

Joseph Fry Farm
Site Plan
East Greenwich, Rhode Island 1994
Scale Unknown

