

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
REGISTRATION FORM**

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name Smith-Gardiner-Norman Farm Historic District

other names/site number Paradise Farm, Norman Bird Sanctuary

2. Location

street & number 583 Third Beach Road not for publication

city or town Middletown vicinity

state Rhode Island code RI county Newport code 005 zip code 02842

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant nationally statewide locally. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official/Title Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official/Title Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:

<input type="checkbox"/> entered in the National Register <input type="checkbox"/> See continuation sheet	_____ Signature of the Keeper	_____ Date of Action
<input type="checkbox"/> determined eligible for the National Register <input type="checkbox"/> See continuation sheet.	_____ Signature of the Keeper	_____ Date of Action
<input type="checkbox"/> determined not eligible for the National Register <input type="checkbox"/> See continuation sheet.	_____ Signature of the Keeper	_____ Date of Action
<input type="checkbox"/> removed from the National Register. <input type="checkbox"/> See continuation sheet.	_____ Signature of the Keeper	_____ Date of Action
<input type="checkbox"/> other (explain)	_____ Signature of the Keeper	_____ Date of Action

Smith-Gardiner-Norman Farm Historic District
Name of Property

Newport, Rhode Island
County and State

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply.)

- private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

Category of Property

(Check only one box.)

- buildings
- district
- site
- structure
- object

Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include any previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
4	11	buildings
8	0	sites
1	1	structures
0		objects
13	12	total

Name of related multiple property listings

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

DOMESTIC/single dwelling

AGRICULTURE/storage/field/outbuilding/animal facility

AGRICULTURE/processing

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

LANDSCAPE/natural feature

EDUCATION/wildlife refuge

EDUCATION/museum

LANDSCAPE/wildlife refuge

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions.)

EARLY REPUBLIC/ Federal

LATE 19th AND 20th-C REVIVALS/Colonial Revival

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions.)

foundation stone, concrete

walls shingle, vertical plank

roof asphalt

other _____

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

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8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A** Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B** Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C** Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D** Property has yielded, or is likely to yield information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- A** owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B** removed from its original location.
- C** a birthplace or grave.
- D** a cemetery.
- E** a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F** a commemorative property.
- G** less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years

Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography

Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 36) has been requested
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey #
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record #

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions.)

AGRICULTURE

ARCHITECTURE

Period of Significance

ca 1750-1949

Significant Dates

ca 1750, 1915, 1949

Significant Person

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Clarke and Howe, architects (1915 alterations)

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10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 129 acres

UTM References

(Place additional references on a continuation sheet.)

1 Zone Easting Northing
2 Zone Easting Northing

3 Zone Easting Northing
4 Zone Easting Northing

See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Edward Connors

organization Edward Connors and Associates date May 2007

street & number 39 Dyer Avenue telephone 401 595-0699

city or town Riverside state RI zip code 02915

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

A USGS map (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A Sketch map for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs

Representative black and white photographs of the property.

Additional items

(check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of SHPO or FPO.)

name

street & number telephone

city or town state zip code

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and amend listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503

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Smith-Gardiner-Norman Farm Historic District

Middletown

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DESCRIPTION

General

The Smith-Gardiner-Norman Farm (also known as Paradise Farm) is a coastal farm in Middletown, Rhode Island, of about 130-acres¹ comprising a mid-18th-century farmhouse with later additions, a mid-19th-century barn, two modest scale agricultural outbuildings, two burial sites, a stone-lined sheep pen, stone-fenced pastures and fields, wooded areas, Hanging Rock (a well-known geological formation), and an abandoned bluestone quarry. It is bounded by Third Beach Road and Hanging Rock Road on the east, the rear lot lines of neighboring properties on the north and west, and Hanging Rock Road and Gardiner's Pond on the south.² As specified in the will of Mabel Norman Cerio, the last private owner of Smith-Gardiner-Norman Farm, much of the estate was given to the Norman Bird Sanctuary Trust for use as a bird sanctuary in 1949. Named in honor of Cerio's father and brother, the non-profit Norman Bird Sanctuary continues to serve as a wildlife refuge and education center today. At the time of Cerio's death, a 16-acre parcel comprising the farmhouse, outbuildings and agricultural fields along Third Beach Road remained in the hands of the Norman heirs. In the late 1990s, the Norman Bird Sanctuary purchased this parcel and reintegrated it into the sanctuary.

Four contributing buildings, eight contributing sites, one contributing structure, eleven non-contributing buildings, and one non-contributing structure are inventoried below.

Inventory

CONTRIBUTING RESOURCES

Contributing resources include those related to Smith-Gardiner-Norman Farm¹ from the construction of the farmhouse ca 1750 to the death of owner Mabel Norman Cerio in 1949. Farming was carried on by tenants from at least 1850 to 1900. Although tenancy likely continued into the 20th century, the Smith-Gardiner-Norman

¹ The term *Paradise* refers to a southern section of Middletown defined roughly by Paradise Avenue, Third Beach Road, Hanging Rock Road and Sachuest Beach. RIHPC in its 1979 preliminary survey of Middletown identified another property, 346 Paradise Avenue, as Paradise Farm. This 18th-century farmhouse was rebuilt in the Colonial Revival style in the late 19th century. The abovementioned Paradise Farm and the Smith-Gardiner-Norman Farm discussed in this nomination were both described as contributing resources within a proposed Paradise Rocks Historic District. No further action was taken on this district. The subject of this nomination was identified by RIHPC in 1979 as the "Allen-King-Norman Farm," referring to a succession of owners dating from Samuel Allen's acquisition of the property from the heirs of Benjamin Gardner in 1819, David King's acquisition in 1869, and George Norman's acquisition in 1898. Another neighboring National Register district was also proposed at that time, a Paradise Avenue Historic District. Items in the Mabel Norman Cerio collection at Newport Historical Society suggest that Mabel Norman chose *Paradise* as the name of her planned wildlife sanctuary in the mid-teens.

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Farm was best known as the summer residence of George H. and Abbie Kinsley Norman after Norman's acquisition of the property in 1898. The farmhouse and immediately neighboring fields were adapted for use as a main residence by daughter Mabel Cerio in 1915. Various fields were leased for commercial use until the 1990s. Non-contributing resources include those substantially altered, moved to the property, or built during the Norman Bird Sanctuary occupation (1950 to the present).

Contributing buildings:

Building 1

Farmhouse (ca 1750, ca 1782, 1915, contributing)

583 Third Beach Road

A mid-18th-century, 2 ½ -story, 5-bay, gable roofed farmhouse with a northeast ell dating to ca 1800 and a rear service wing dating to 1915-16. These three building campaigns formed a complex U-plan structure, the crook of which served as a garden and, later, a roofed sunroom for the Cerios. The main (1750) block faces south, looking out over two stone-lined fields to Sachuest Point and the ocean. The house has been vacant for about 25 years with varying degrees of interior damage and exposure to the elements.

The three-room central block, the oldest section of this farm house, was likely built by Isaac Smith (1698-1769) around 1750. Smith, who may have purchased the property ca 1714 from Samuel Baily and Elizabeth Wrightington, was a descendant of Edward Smith (d. ca 1675), who emigrated from England in 1642 and was one of the original settlers in the southeast coastal area of what is now Middletown. Through various estate divisions and land acquisitions the house and surrounding land remained in the family until it was sold at public auction in 1782 to settle the debts of Isaac, the last of the Smiths to occupy what was by that time a roughly 200-acre property. Benjamin Gardiner purchased the farmstead at that time and occupied it until his death in 1819.

A likely kitchen lean-to at the northeast corner of the original block was removed by Gardiner after 1782 and replaced by a roughly 18' gabled northeast kitchen ell with fireplace during the Gardiner occupation, when significant interior improvements were carried out including the Federal-era gougework molding of the first floor North Room (see Figure 1).

From 1819 to 1869 the farm was owned by Newport sail maker Samuel Allen and leased to a tenant farmer for some, if not all, of that period. George Gordon King, also of Newport, purchased the property from Allen's son (also named Samuel) in 1869 and also leased the land to a tenant farmer. George Norman, associated with the *Newport Daily News* and the Newport Water Works, among other ventures, purchased the farm in 1898, two years before his death in 1900. His heirs in turn sold the estate to the youngest daughter, Mabel, in 1908. Mabel

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Norman's modernization and remodeling of the farmhouse in the Colonial Revival were carried out in the two years before her marriage to Dr. George Cerio in 1917. Although the Cerios owned properties elsewhere, including significant holdings on the Isle of Capri in Italy (where Cerio's family originated), Smith-Gardiner-Norman Farm was the couple's summer residence from 1917 until Cerio's death in 1943.

Mabel Norman Cerio died in 1949. She had been a lifelong member of the Audubon Society and throughout her life had demonstrated a passionate interest in birds. Her will set aside \$135,000 for the establishment of the Norman Bird Sanctuary Trust, specifying that most of the acreage of Smith-Gardiner-Norman Farm be held in perpetuity "for the propagation, preservation, and protection of birds."²

There appears to have been little significant alteration of the Smith-era main block and the early 19th-century Gardiner improvements between 1820 and 1915, when Mabel Norman Cerio began a major campaign of Colonial Revival alteration, modernization, and construction of a service wing. These 1915 improvements resulted in the building as we see it today.

Exterior

This 2 ½-story, flank gable, center chimney house and its 19th- and 20th-century extensions rest on a mortared fieldstone foundation. A brick center chimney of the 1750 block provides fireplaces at both floor levels in each room of the three-room plan. A later internal chimney likely dating to the 1915 improvements provides a large fireplace in the dining area of the ca 1800 ell extended about 10' to the north in 1915. The house is sheathed in natural shingle. The roof of the main block and the northeast ell is surfaced with asphalt shingle.

The central front entry consists of a half porch surmounted by a shallow pitched near-flat roof supported by two octagonal columns and two matching pilasters. The columns rest on rough slate slabs set over a fieldstone foundation. A pair of three-paneled doors provide entry to a narrow hallway leading to two front rooms and a stairway to the second floor. These doors are flanked by simple sidelights of four vertical panes.

A hip roofed, enclosed east entry dating to 1915 opens to a dining room with a colonial revival fireplace. The west elevation is dominated by the glazed doors of the sunroom. This sunroom provides access to the rear hall of the house's main block. A rear entrance in the 1915 wing provides access to the kitchen.

The west elevation recess formed by the 1915 extension of the Gardiner-era kitchen and the service wing was designed by Clarke and Howe to serve as a loggia. Architectural sketches from this period indicate that this was

² Will of Mabel Norman Cerio, p. 3.

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originally an open area. At some point in the 20th century the loggia was roofed over with skylights and glazed with a series of 24-light wood frame doors and windows.

All windows are wood frame and double hung. In the main block and early-19th-century ell these are 12/12 with a mix of 8/12 and 8/8 windows in the 1915 additions. A ca 1900 photo (see *Significance* section, Figure 1) shows simple window trim on the farmhouse façade. This trim was altered after 1915 with the addition of a plank cut to resemble a flat arch lintel.³ This flat arch motif was not consistently applied. All upper level windows and windows on both floors of the west elevation have a crown molding similar to that employed on the interior window trim.

Interior:

Main block. The 1750 block is arranged as a three room plan around a central chimney. A narrow hallway from the front entrance provides access to two front chambers and a stairwell to the second floor. Although some of the plastered ceilings have failed or have been removed for framing repair, some of the ceiling plaster and all wall plaster is intact. Posts are encased; floors are wide plank ranging in width from 12” to 24” and painted. Although the Colonial Revival alteration of the house appears to have left the dimensions of the main block’s **West Room** intact, the insertion of a small **Northeast Room** (bathroom) and a **Northwest Room** (study) likely dates to the early 20th century (see Figure 1).

Ground Floor:

Some ceiling plaster has been removed from the **East Room** ceiling of this comparatively simple room. Ceiling plaster is intact. Two raised, painted wooden panels are incorporated into the fireplace trim; there is no mantel. Built-in bookshelves date to 1915.

The **West Room** is paneled to a height about 36” from the floor. The interior fireplace wall is entirely paneled; there is no mantel. A closet dating to the 1915 renovation is found on the north wall. All ceiling plaster has been removed. Wall plaster is intact.

The **North Room** (described as a *hall* by Clarke and Howe) is the most ornate of three main rooms of the main block. Remodeled with Federal-era detailing during the Gardiner occupation, this room is surfaced with 36”-high raised paneling defined by an ornate 6” chair railing with diamond pattern gougework. The fireplace is trimmed with pilasters and raised panels. Ceiling and post encasement molding consists of matching gougework and dentils. All ceiling plaster has been removed. Two ca 1915 24-light French doors allow access to the loggia.

³ The exterior window trim on the west elevation does not employ this device; these windows have a molded cornice similar to the crown molding of the interior trim.

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It appears that the proportions of the Gardiner-era (1782-1820) **Kitchen Room** remained unaltered in the 1915 renovations. This simple room is dominated by a roughly 7' hearth with mantel and wrought hangers. This room (described as a "Dining" Room" in the 1915 sketch) included a chimney on the north (then exterior) wall. The existing east wall double doors and entryway appear to date to the early 20th century. A kitchen stairwell provides access to the second floor. A stairwell from the Kitchen Room leads to the second floor and doors on either side of the fireplace lead to the **Service Rooms**. All plaster, lath and utilities have been removed from these service rooms.

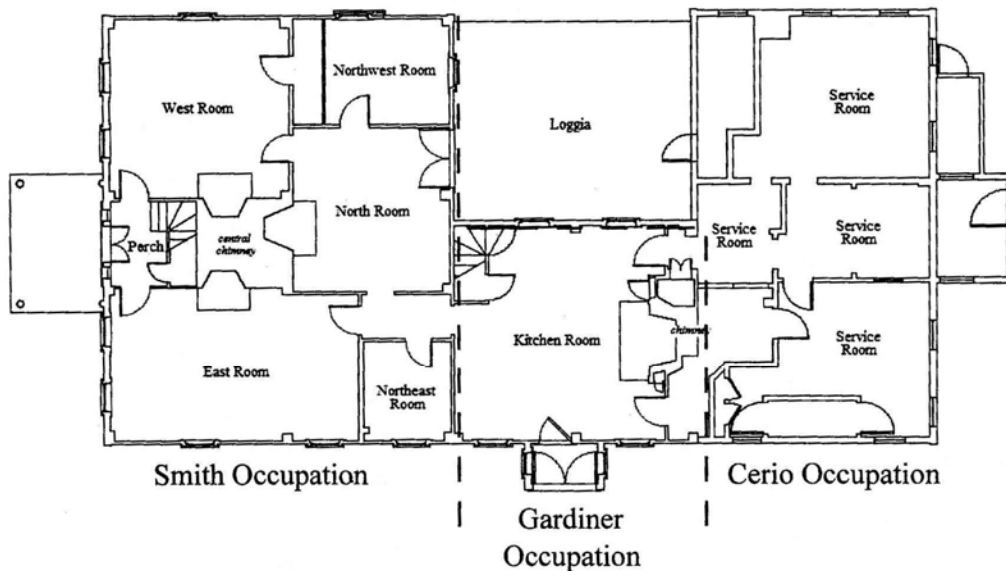


Figure 1
First Floor Existing Conditions
Foster Associates/Urban Design Group

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The second floor plan of the Main Block is similar to that of the first floor as configured in 1915. This includes three main chambers with fireplaces off the central chimney as well as smaller rooms flanking both sides of the North Chamber.

The second floor of the Gardiner-era ell and part of the main block underwent significant alteration in 1915. This included a "Bird Room" that spans a portion of the northeast corner of the main block and part of the Gardiner-era ell. Another 2nd floor room initially planned in 1915 to serve as a "Winter Bird Room" was built as a bathroom.

The space north of the Kitchen Room is a roughly 20' extension of the Gardiner-era kitchen comprising various service rooms designed by Clarke and Howe in 1915. Sketches from October of that year provided for Ms. Norman's comment indicate that this wing was intended to be only partially two-story. The main first floor kitchen space was intended to be a single-story gabled-roof ell off the planned extension of the Gardiner-era kitchen. It is unknown when the decision was made to add a flat-roofed story above the kitchen for use as additional service chambers.

Second Floor:

The plan of the main block reflects the layout of the first floor. East, West and North Chambers are arrayed around the central chimney. Smaller rooms, likely associated with the 1915 renovations, are found at either end of the North Chamber. Plaster has been removed from all ceilings. Although raised panels are incorporated into the fireplace trim, moldings are generally understated on this floor. A notable exception is the double cupboard (one is tin-lined) above the fireplace of the North Chamber and the 1915 built-in bookcases near the stairwell to the attic.

The second-floor space above the Kitchen Room and the Service Rooms is a group of ten relatively small chambers providing living space for the service staff. These rooms are in generally poor condition.

Attic:

The attic is divided into three chambers that may have served partially for living space and partially for storage. Plaster and lath have been removed from the ceilings, revealing strands of seaweed once used for insulation between rafters.

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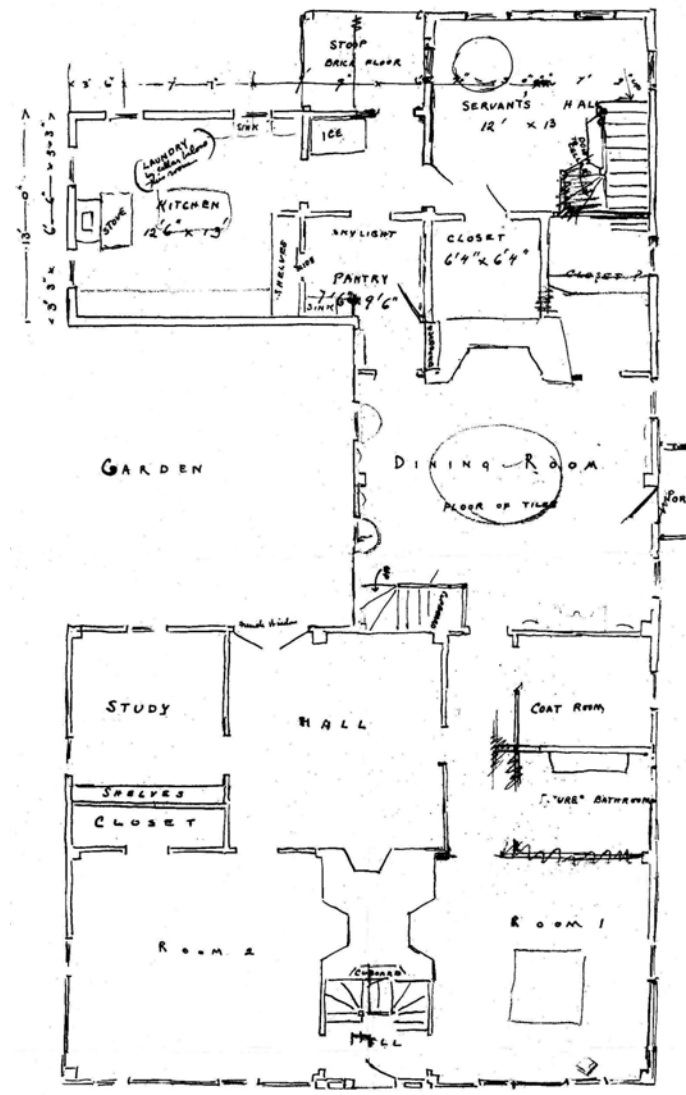


Figure 2

First Floor Plan as proposed by Clarke and Howe, October 1915
Mabel Norman Cerio Collection, Newport Historical Society

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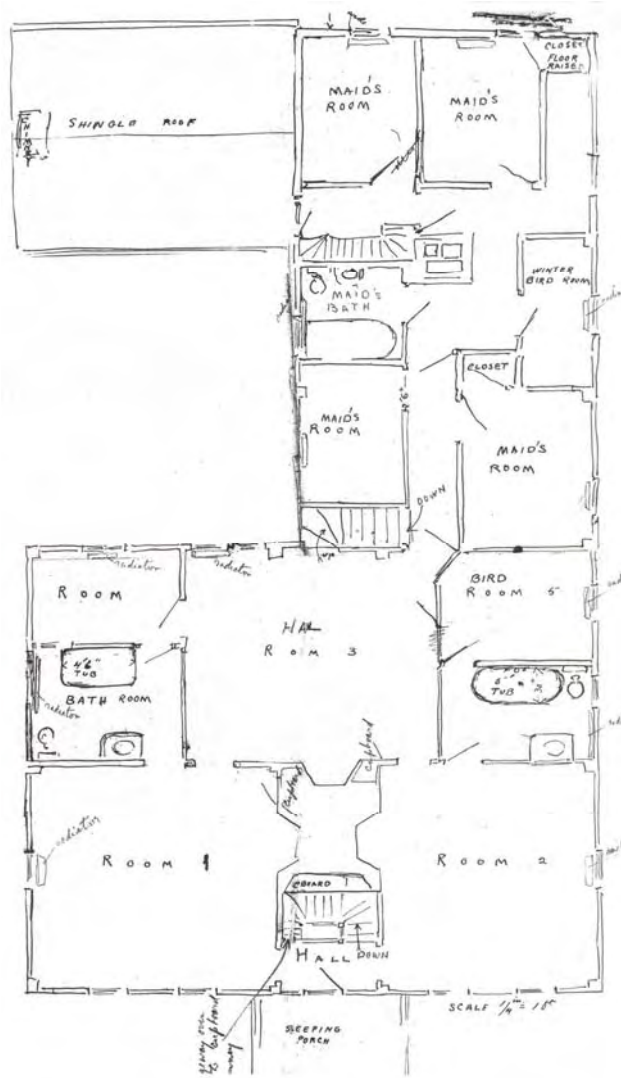


Figure 3

Second floor plan as proposed by Clarke and Howe, October 1915

Mabel Norman Cerio Collection, Newport Historical Society

Note intended "shingle roof" indicating single story main kitchen chamber.

The tissue drawing from which this copy was made was wrinkled in storage.

The apparent misspellings of "Hall" and "Room 2" are due to a crease in the tissue.

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Building 2

Two car garage (early 20th century, contributing)

583 Third Beach Road

A two-bay concrete and wood frame garage set on an internal road likely dating to the early Norman-Cerio occupation. The east slope of this saltbox-roofed structure is shared with the east slope of the adjoining Carriage Shed (Building 3). The garage is 22' wide along the front and 21' deep. Two wooden, sliding, six-panel doors provide access to the building's interior. The east concrete wall of this garage is faced with drylaid fieldstone. Although this fieldstone provides a visually uninterrupted east wall for this building and the neighboring Carriage Shed, this surface is ornamental for this building (the fieldstone is structural for the Carriage Shed). The sole opening on the west wall is a fixed, rectangular, 12-light wood frame window. The upper gable end of the south elevation of this building (above the sliding doors) is shingled.

This building is currently used for storage.

Building 3

Carriage Shed (late 19 to early 20th-century, contributing)

583 Third Beach Road

Opening out into a barnyard defined by Buildings 10, 12, 13 and 14, this 45' x 20' wood frame, fieldstone and concrete shed is attached and structurally related to Building 2. A frame saltbox roof truss rests on a foundation of mixed materials: The north wall is a concrete kneewall surmounted by wood gable framing and surfaced in pine board and batten; the east wall is a combination of dry- and wetlaid fieldstone to the point of its attachment to Building 12; and the south wall is a concrete party wall shared with Building 12.

The north and west elevations are surfaced with pine board and batten. The west elevation provides three hinged wooden carriage doors. This building is currently used for storage. Among the storage are found some antique farm machinery and implements.

Building 4

Barn (ca 1860, contributing)

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A 60' x 30' New England type end gable hay barn⁴ of mortise-and-tenon construction. Oriented north to south on the property about 200' north of the farmhouse, this building served various agricultural uses for about a century and was adapted for use as administration offices and a natural history museum after 1950. It served that purpose until the completion of the current Administration Building in 2001.

Exterior: The barn rests on a mortared fieldstone foundation. Walls are sheathed in cedar shingle; its roof is surfaced with asphalt shingle. Original barn doors have been removed and replaced with smaller modern wood frame double doors located on both gable ends. A pre-1915 photo (see *Significance* section, Figure 1) shows this barn with sliding, gable end doors. There are two other modern entrances on the north elevation and a recent pressure-treated stairway and door to the upper level of the west elevation. As indicated on a 1945 insurance drawing, a silo was located about 10' away from the north gable end (see *Additional Information* section, Figure 3).

All windows are wood frame. North elevation windows are two sets of paired 8/12, double hung sash on the lower level flanking the central entrance. Upper level windows are two sets of paired 6/6. West elevation windows on both levels are predominantly paired 6/6. Two small 4-light windows on the lower level of the west elevation correspond to modern bathrooms built during the period when the barn was used as an administration building and museum. A series of twelve 4-light windows are spaced at regular intervals along the lower level of the east elevation. Although likely altered, this type of barn fenestration often corresponded with the historical placement of an equal number of interior stable partitions. Lower level windows on the south elevation are paired 6-light fixed sash flanking the entrance. Upper level windows are a group of five 9-light fixed sash.

Interior: Although altered for Norman Bird Sanctuary uses after 1950, the interior of this barn remains highly evocative of its earlier agricultural use. Although significant sections of the ground level mows are now enclosed with modern partitions and sliding glass doors, the hayloft and roof trusses remain open. Three heavy timber bents spaced at roughly 15' intervals along the 60' length of the building provide the main structure of the barn. Saw marks on these pegged framing elements, although subtle, are vertical rather than circular,

⁴ The complement of farm buildings and their respective locations as seen on the 1895 Everts and Richards Atlas and the 1907 Richards Atlas maps appears to indicate two sizable barns at Smith-Gardiner-Norman Farm. An early 20th-century photo from the Mabel Norman Cerio collection shows a barn with large sliding doors on the side, as opposed to the gable ends, of the building. This may well be a photo of a second barn demolished in the early 20th-century. Despite the odd placement of a north elevation silo shown on a 1944 insurance drawing, the plan of the existing barn would suggest sliding doors at the gable ends providing passage along the length of the threshing floor.

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indicating sash-sawing. The open hayloft provides continuous passage around the perimeter of the building.⁵ At the south end of the hayloft two matching wooden pivoted swinging hoists are incorporated into the southernmost bent. The roof is framed with a succession of simple rafters directly joined at the crest of the roof with no ridge board. On the ground level, the central threshing floor provides uninterrupted passage along the threshing floor from one end of the building to the other.

Contributing structure:

Stone walls (dates unknown, contributing)

583 Third Beach Road

As is common in historic New England farms, a network of fieldstone walls defines the vicinity of the farmhouse, the orchard, the family garden, sheep pen, agricultural fields, and part of the property bounds along Third Beach and Hanging Rock Roads. The network of walls extends throughout the Norman Bird Sanctuary property, probably marking former property lines, field boundaries, and animal pens long overtaken by woodlands. Typically measuring about 30" high and 20" in depth, these walls run for a cumulative length of approximately three miles. John R. Stilgoe has pointed out that circumstances "almost forced" colonists of the northeast to build stone walls as "...the ground lay strewn with small boulders New Englanders soon called 'fieldstones.' Plowing and harrowing proved impossible until the fieldstones were removed, and husbandmen fenced in their livestock with walls."⁶

Contributing sites:

Agricultural fields (dates unknown, contributing)

583 Third Beach Road

There are six distinct areas of stone-lined farm fields encompassing approximately forty acres of the property. It is not clear when this delineation of fields took place, though it may date to the the earliest period of the farm. Although no longer in cultivation, these fields are kept relatively clear of scrub growth and trees by Norman Bird Sanctuary. Two fields extend southerly from the façade of the farmhouse looking toward Sachuest Beach (comprising about 18 acres), two adjacent fields parallel to Third Beach Road (comprising

⁵ This continuous passage on the second level is likely a product of the Norman Bird Sanctuary's use of the building as a museum and administration building. While the floor system connecting the two haylofts at the south end of the barn is clearly of recent construction, that of the north end appears original to the barn.

⁶ See John Stilgoe, *The Common Landscape: 1580-1845*, (Yale University Press, 1982), p.190.

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about 10 acres), and a field south of Hanging Rock Road at its intersection with Third Beach Road (comprising about 15 acres).

Census data from 1860 and 1870 indicate a variety of agricultural uses by tenant farmers at the farm. Among these, the cultivation of hay and grain are significant, although rearing of livestock and production of milk (see *Significance* section) also figured prominently in the farm.

**Orchard (19th- and early 20th century, contributing)
583 Third Beach Road**

A 1.5-acre field in an area defined by two stone walls and a Norman Bird Sanctuary-era parking area is the site of an orchard associated with the 20th-century Norman-Cerio occupation and likely a smaller version of earlier fruit-bearing trees as well. Five fruit trees survive. This orchard is significantly smaller than that described in 1880 Federal Census records from the tenancy of Abram Brown. That census schedule listed a two-acre orchard with seventy fruit trees.⁷

**Family Garden (early 20th century, contributing)
583 Third Beach Road**

Mabel Norman's plan for a Colonial Revival farm estate included a family garden plot separate from the large agricultural fields that surrounded the house. This stone-lined roughly 1/3-acre garden survives in the space between Third Beach Road and the farmhouse. A wide painted wooden gate provides access to the garden which, although uncultivated, remains relatively clear of scrub growth. A line of coniferous trees within the garden effectively creates two tillable areas. The larger area is closer to the house, the smaller a strip parallel to Third Beach Road. A small Tool Shed (see Non-Contributing Buildings) abuts the garden's stone wall.

**Sheep Pen (19th century, contributing)
583 Third Beach Road**

About ¼ mile southwest of the farmhouse in a wooded area along Shady Glade Trail is a drylaid stone enclosure identified by Norman Bird Sanctuary as a former sheep pen.⁸ This irregularly-shaped enclosure measures roughly 50' in width by an indeterminate (perhaps 250') length and is now mostly overgrown.

⁷ The earlier census for 1870 did not list an orchard at the farm under the tenancy of Nathaniel Potter.

⁸ During the tenancy of Nathaniel Potter, the 1870 census reported 180 sheep at the farm producing annually 800 pounds of wool. Sheep husbandry here appears to have been in decline by 1880; a decade later Abram Brown (the succeeding tenant farmer) reported only 75 sheep yielding 382 pounds of wool.

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Nineteenth-century photographs taken at a location south of this pen and west of Hanging Rock showed thin forestation and sheep pens of similar construction. Intact walls measure about 48" in height.

Gardiner Family Burial Plot (ca 1786- ca 1872, contributing)

R.I. Historical Cemetery No. 27

583 Third Beach Road

A small, approximately 15' x 20' family burial plot associated with the family of Benjamin Gardiner, who purchased the farm in 1782. There are thirteen stones in the plot, the earliest of which (marked *E. G.*) is dated 1786; the latest readable stone dates to 1872. The Gardiner family continued to inter family members there for several decades after the farm passed to Samuel Allen in 1820, a year after Benjamin Gardner's death. Benjamin's stone is the most prominent in the plot. Set against two stone garden walls, a steel railing set in vertical slabs of slate (with no gate or stile) limits access to the plot.

Gravesite (date unknown, contributing)

583 Third Beach Road

In a wooded area roughly 1000' southwest of the farmhouse is Red Maple Pond, a small, manmade pond and wetland created in the 1990s by the damming of a brook that runs roughly north-south through the sanctuary. In the course of an archaeological investigation carried out in connection with creation of the pond, a gravesite was discovered southeast of the planned impoundment. Although there may be more stones buried under vegetation, this site at present reveals at least four simple, unmarked slate slabs.

Nineteenth-century probate records give evidence of slaves living at farm. An archaeological report produced by Public Archaeology Laboratory (Pawtucket, RI) in 1984 offered the following description and analysis of the small, overgrown cemetery:

One set of unmarked head and footstones is standing and three more broken stones can be seen nearby. The stones are small, around 30 cm in height, and made of roughly formed slate. Augering showed that the soil profile between the standing head and footstones may be disturbed. The profile is definitely different from profiles taken outside the area of the standing and fallen stones. Unmarked stones are not uncommon in small, family burial plots that can be found in the forests of southern New England. Quakers did not inscribe their gravestones, nor did "praying (i.e., Christianized) Indians" during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Yankee family plots also contain unmarked stones. These may have been for unbaptized children, victims of epidemics, or slaves either Black or Native American.⁹

⁹ See Alan Leveillee and Peter Thorbahn, *An Archaeological Assessment Survey of the Sakonnet River*, PAL Report 46:1 (1984).

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**Hanging Rock (contributing)
Hanging Rock Road**

A significant linear deposit of Coal-Age conglomerate and sandstone extends in a northerly direction for about .5 miles northerly from the south boundary of Smith-Gardiner-Norman Farm. The most visible part of this on the Norman Bird Sanctuary property is a southernmost outcropping called Hanging Rock. Over the years this well-known Rhode Island geological formation has been celebrated in painting and photography. Sometimes referred to as "Berkeley's Seat," Hanging Rock provided a haven for Bishop George Berkeley (1685-1753), the 18th-century Irish philosopher who resided a few miles away at Whitehall (now in Middletown) from 1729 to 1731.

See *Additional Information* section, Figure 2, for a graphic showing geological formations of the area and the nearby coast.

**Quarry (19th century, contributing)
583 Third Beach Road**

A pond roughly 20' wide and 100' long extending southerly along the Quarry Trail about 600' from the farmhouse is the site of a former slate quarry. Sources at Norman Bird Sanctuary make mention of the exploitation of this quarry for slate roofs for fine Newport residences. There is also anecdotal evidence that the Newport Water Works quarried stone here in association with the expansion of Gardiner's Pond around the turn of the 20th century.¹⁰

NON-CONTRIBUTING RESOURCES

Non-Contributing Buildings

**Building 5
Tool Shed (2001, non-contributing)**

¹⁰ A 1944 insurance map of the farm describes the site as a "quarry," the cartographic conventions showing its boundaries with dotted lines as opposed to the solid lines associated with water bodies. Although it is possible that the quarry was exploited commercially at some point during Mabel Cerio's residence, no evidence for this has surfaced as of the time of this writing. Although no quarry is identified in the 1895, 1907, or 1921 maps of the property, the large scale of these maps might have precluded the representation of a man-made feature of this relatively small size. The 1944 C.R. Lynch map, drawn at a scale of 1" = 66', allowed the representation of features the size of the quarry. The water level in the quarry varies significantly from season to season.

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Located on the footprint of an earlier tool shed, this small, gable roofed shed adjacent to the west wall of the Family Garden rests on a concrete foundation.

Building 6

New Caretaker's Cottage (Early 20th century, reconstructed 2005, non-contributing)

583 Third Beach Road

Located on the site of an earlier combined cottage and laundry, Norman Bird sanctuary reconstructed this roughly 40' x 25' building as a caretaker's house in 2005. Massed in three sections, the middle and largest block rests on a rubble foundation, the east and west wings rest on concrete. Significant alterations in the form of sheathing, windows, and entrances were carried out by Norman Bird sanctuary in 2005. The use of this building as a caretaker's cottage and laundry likely dates to the Norman-Cerio occupation.

Building 7

Studio (2001, non-contributing)

583 Third Beach Road

A gable-roofed, single-story structure occupying the site of an art studio adapted for Mabel Norman Cerio, this 50' x 35' building replaced what was likely a converted farm building of roughly the same dimensions. Although this building is reconstructed, Norman Bird Sanctuary reinstalled architectural elements from the previous studio, including an oak railing for the building's loft and the fireplace/chimney. The studio is now used for meeting and gallery space.

Building 8

Former Caretaker's Cottage (Early 20th century, non-contributing)

583 Third Beach Road

Attached to Buildings 3 and 5, this building once served as a Caretaker's Cottage. Having undergone major alterations, it now houses a bio-diesel system and bird sanctuary storage.

Building 9

Maintenance Shop (Late 19th- early 20th century, non-contributing)

583 Third Beach Road

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Contiguous with Buildings 3 and 4, this gable roofed building is dominated by two garage doors that open into a maintenance workshop for the bird sanctuary. Although this building was labeled as a “large garage” in a 1945 insurance survey, it appears to have been a workshop during the Norman-Cerio occupation. Parts of this building (most notably a partial wetlaid rubble foundation visible on the south elevation) appear to date to the 19th century. It has been altered significantly during the Norman Bird Sanctuary period.

Building 10

Education Shed (2004, non-contributing)

583 Third Beach Road

A complex, single-story structure, roughly 75' x 25', built on the site of two earlier sheds.¹¹ This building, with an overhanging roof, provides a sheltered corridor for access to classrooms and public bathrooms for the bird sanctuary. Called the “Ed Shed,” the building is sheathed in pine board and batten and rests on a concrete slab. Two shed dormers on the rear slope of the gabled roof offer a westerly view into the bird sanctuary. This building is attached to non-contributing Building 11.

Building 11

Garages (2004, non-contributing)

583 Third Beach Road

Two attached garages of modern construction abut the rear wall of the Education Shed (Building 10). These gable roofed, shingled buildings are used for storage by the bird sanctuary.

Building 12

Administration Building (2000, non-contributing)

583 Third Beach Road

An irregularly shaped, 80' x 30' overall, single-story building sheathed in stained board and batten. Steel-frame glazed doors open into a welcome center and gift shop for the bird sanctuary. The remainder of the building serves as office and administrative space.

Building 13

Paradise Beach Cabana (20th century, non-contributing)

¹¹ These two contiguous structures were labeled as Buildings 10 and 11 on the 1945 insurance map.

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A 12' x 15', gable-roofed cottage sheathed in natural shingle, this building was moved in 2006 to the rear of Building 12. One of eleven wood frame cottages built along Third Beach during the early 20th century. This Norman-Cerio property, called the "Third Beach Part of Paradise Farm" on a 1945 insurance drawing, is not included in this nomination. This building, which appears as one of the cabanas on the 1945 map, now rests on temporary footings. Information provided by Norman Bird Sanctuary suggests that the cabanas probably date to the period after the 1938 Hurricane.

Building 14

Chicken Coop (ca 1998, non-contributing)

583 Third Beach Road

Set adjacent to Building 13, a small, shed-roofed coop of recent construction. This building is not in use.

Building 15

Pump House (2001, non-contributing)

583 Third Beach Road

Located in the orchard, a small, shingled structure with a saltbox roof and bulkhead. This building houses a water pump.

Non-Contributing Structure

Water Tower (20th century, non-contributing)

583 Third Beach Road

A partial water tower about 25' in height (missing its wooden tank) sits along the east side of the barn. The main vertical members of the structure are built of 4" angle iron; angle braces are 2" angle iron. The four legs of the tower, resting on four 20" concrete pads, inscribe an area 9'-square. A central wood plank enclosure served as a shield for the pipes that carried water into and out of the tank. The date of construction is unknown, but the structure is designated as NC because it is very deteriorated.

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PHOTOGRAPHS

Smith-Gardiner-Norman Farm, 583 Old Beach Road
Middletown, Newport County, Rhode Island

Applies to all photos:

Photographer: Edward Connors

Date: October and November 2007

#1: Long view of Smith-Gardiner-Norman Farm; farmhouse at the center, maintenance shop at far left; tool shed at right; family garden at far right. Looking north.

#2: Farmhouse. Looking northeast.

#3: Fireplace wall, farmhouse, rear center room. Looking south

#4: Barn. Looking north.

#5: Maintenance shop at left; caretaker cottage at center; studio at right. Looking northwest.

#6: Administration building. Looking north.

#7: Garage and carriage shed. Looking east.

#8: Gate into family garden. Looking east.

#9: Gardiner family cemetery. Looking west.

#10: Marker in slave cemetery. Looking west.

#11: Stone wall, edge of south field. Looking west.

#12: Quarry. Looking south.

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SIGNIFICANCE

The Smith-Gardiner-Norman Farm Historic District, located in the town of Middletown on Aquidneck Island, is a well preserved example of Rhode Island's eighteenth- and nineteenth-century island farms, typical of its region in its form and in its history of use and ownership until the early twentieth century. In its buildings and land the historic farmstead possesses significance in the history of Middletown's settlement and agriculture. In its twentieth-century history the Smith-Gardiner-Norman Farm has significance as an example of an important pattern of development in the history of the island towns—the use of agricultural areas in island towns as country retreats for families of wealth. In both these periods, the Smith-Gardiner-Norman Farm Historic District meets Criterion A, as it documents some important aspects of the town's development. The 1915-17 transformation of the eighteenth-century farmhouse into a larger and more stylish house, a Colonial Revival composition by Clark and Howe, one of Rhode Island's leading architectural firms, has significance in the history of architecture as well. The Smith-Gardiner-Norman Farm Historic District thus meets Criterion C also as a good exemplar of the work of an important firm in the Colonial Revival style. The Smith-Gardiner-Norman Historic District *may* also meet Criterion D as it may yield evidence about the lifeways of coastal Native Americans as well as successive owners, tenants, and slaves.

Middletown, originally part of Newport which was set off as a separate town in 1731, was an agricultural hinterland for the city to its south throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In the nineteenth century Newport was a major seaport; in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries it was the nation's premier resort. Middletown and Portsmouth to the north of Newport, and Jamestown, another large island to its east, were the location of the farms which grew the dairy products, produce and livestock needed in Newport. Middletown has the state's best soils, rich loams, higher in natural fertility than other place in Rhode Island. By contrast with the state's mainland farms, which became marginal a century after settlement, these island farms were relatively prosperous operations, and, unlike the thin rocky soil of the Rhode Island hill towns, the island soils remained productive. Never really industrialized, the island towns of Jamestown, Portsmouth, and Middletown produced perishable fruits, vegetables, and meat which were sold in Newport. By 1850, for example, when many of the state's hill farms were struggling subsistence affairs, Middletown had 150 active farms. For the most part, these were general farms, producing a variety of garden crops, meat and eggs, butter and other dairy products.

While many farm families continued to live in eighteenth-century houses, by the middle of the nineteenth century, Middletown farms typically consisted of a house with later outbuildings nearby, surrounded by fields, usually 100-300 acres. The fields were usually delineated by field stone walls. Such farms have a typical form - more intensive agricultural uses (kitchen gardens, vegetable patches, and the like) tend to be located near the house and barn complex; less intensive uses (such as hay fields and orchards) are located outside the perimeter of the building complex; at the very edge of the farm typically one finds the woodlot, an area left uncultivated

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for harvesting fuel. Thus, the common form, seen here at the Smith-Gardiner-Norman Historic District, is a gradation of intensity in use across the landscape of the farm.

In the second half of the twentieth century Middletown's agriculture has altered radically. Working farms can be counted on one hand since the town is now largely suburbanized. Former farms now sprout suburban houses as the town has become integrated into the larger metropolitan centers. Even where farms still operate, they no longer function as truck farms for Newport but have been converted for the growing of nursery stock.

A parallel pattern to agriculture in the history of Middletown has been the longstanding appeal of its rural countryside as a retreat for Newport families. Even in the mid-eighteenth century, wealthy Newporters bought farms in Middletown, built houses there, and landscaped the nearby areas. The rural simplicity of the town continued to appeal to city dwellers well into the twentieth century. The town is dotted with fine houses built by summer visitors, as well as older farmhouses (like the farmhouse here nominated) which were renovated, refitted and enlarged into summer houses. Often such houses, both the new and old, were the product of architect's designs, and they evidence a care for the visually and aesthetically pleasing landscape, rather than the working farm. The vernacular houses which were once characteristic of Middletown were now joined by large residences of some pretension. The farm fields, now important to their owners as a setting for a fine house rather than for their productivity, were simply kept open by mowing or leased to local farmers for haying.

History

The picturesque south coast of Middletown, RI, has been known as *Paradise* since the 18th century. Anglo settlement of the area dates to the 17th century when a group of four colonists came into possession of a wide swath of oceanfront farmland in what was then part of Newport. Among these earliest settlers was one Edward Smith (1629- ca 1675), an Anabaptist who emigrated from England around 1642. Running afoul of Plymouth and Massachusetts Bay Colony Puritans, he came to Rhode Island in search of freedom of conscience. Smith and three others¹² acquired a large tract of land called in what is now south coastal Middletown. Although fragmentary, Newport colonial records indicate that the general outlines of what we now know as Smith-Gardiner-Norman Farm can be seen in a deed through which Edward Smith, likely the grandson of the original settler, purchased a coastal property called "Sachuest Farm" in 1714.¹³ The present farmhouse dates to sometime before 1755, as probate records from that year list "land and buildings." In March 1782, descendant

¹² Smith's partners in the land purchase were Obadiah Holmes, James Mann, and William Devel.

¹³ Newport Colony Land Evidence Book XVI: 24. Newport Historical Society. This deed transfers ownership of Sachuest Farm from Margaret Wrightington to Edward Smith. It should be noted that Newport colonial land evidence is fragmentary and there is some confusion as to the beginnings of the Smith family occupation of the farm. Michelle Styger cites a deed dated March 1, 1657, in which Obediah Holmes sold a portion of the original purchase to Edward Smith.

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Philip Smith appealed to the General Assembly for the right to sell the farm to pay off debt acquired by his brother Isaac, then occupant of the farm. At a public auction in March 1782, Benjamin Gardiner (1750-1819) of North Kingstown, offered the winning bid of 7780 Spanish milled dollars.

When Benjamin Gardiner acquired the Smith property, the farmhouse on the land included the main, gabled block (as seen today) and a likely lean-to kitchen at the northeast corner of the house. Gardiner, then in his early 30s, was embarking on a career in public service as well as farming when he purchased the farm. Over the years, until his death in 1819, he held municipal as well as state government offices. Pease and Niles, in their *Gazetteer of the States of Connecticut and Rhode Island* (1819), offer the following description of the agricultural economy of Middletown around the time of Gardiner's death:

The lands are mostly in a state of cultivation, the forests being very limited and sustaining a high price. The leading objects of husbandry are the dairy business and the raising of grain; of which barley and Indian corn are the principal. The raising of sheep, which formerly received much attention, has for some years been neglected. The soil and climate are favorable for fruit, and the orchards are extensive and valuable.¹⁴

Substantial physical evidence survives of the family's almost 50-year occupation of the farm. The Smith-era lean-to kitchen was expanded into a full gabled kitchen ell sometime after 1782. The rear hall of the first floor is notable for its elaborate, Federal-era molding, which includes the gougework chair rail and highly detailed ceiling molding. Gardiner also created a family burial plot (see *Description* section) that continued in use past the period of the family occupation according to an agreement in the transfer deed of 1820, when Benjamin's estate was sold by his children to Samuel Allen, a sail maker from Newport.

Agricultural tenancy at Smith-Gardiner-Norman Farm

Allen's purchase appears to mark the transition from an owner-worked and occupied farm to that of investment. Allen owned Smith-Gardiner-Norman Farm for about fifty-years (1820-1869). The tenant at the farm for at least 25 years of Allen's ownership was Nathaniel Potter (1810-1895) of Middletown. A \$1,100 annual lease executed between Allen and Potter in 1864 offers some insight into the business of farming at Paradise. The terms of the five-year lease, effective in the spring of 1865, required that Potter pay all taxes and that he

...shall not plough or break up more than ten acres of sward or meadow land in each year. That he shall at his own expense sow down all the old ground, not planted with potatoes with a significant quantity of good hay seed.

¹⁴ John Pease and John Niles. *A Gazetteer of the States of Connecticut and Rhode Island*. Hartford: Wm. S. March (1819), p. 359.

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That he shall pull up and root out from the oats and other grain all the chaddock weed and other foul stuff that is liable to grow up and seed among grain.¹⁵

The lease also mentions fruit trees and the right to harvest seaweed or “sea manure that may land on the beach” and “spread the same on said farm in a proper manner.”

In 1850 Potter worked 63 acres with a complement of livestock that included a horse, 9 milk cows, 4 oxen, and 7 swine. Agricultural production for that year included 250 bushels of Indian corn, 600 bushels of Irish potatoes, 200 bushels of barley, 35 tons of hay, 900 lbs. of butter, and 200 lbs. of cheese.

Town of Middletown tax records starting in 1866¹⁶ and 1870 Federal census records provide a more detailed picture of the extent of agricultural production at Paradise in the post Civil War years. In 1866 the farm comprised 236 acres, with a real estate value of \$18,000 and personal property valued at \$2500. Potter’s valuation remained relatively stable until the period from 1873 to 1875, when his personal valuation dropped to \$500 at the end of his tenancy.¹⁷ The surviving ca 1860 barn (see Building 4, *Description* section) likely dates to Nathaniel Potter’s occupation during Samuel Allen’s ownership.

In 1869 Allen sold the farm to George Gordon King of Newport. Potter’s tenancy continued during the King occupation until 1876. The 1870 Federal Census manuscript entry for the farm offers a highly detailed view of the workings of Smith-Gardiner-Norman Farm during the latter years of the Potter tenancy.

These records describe a 205-acre farm, with 25 acres unimproved. The following animals, collectively valued at \$4040, were maintained: 3 horses, 20 milk cows, 8 oxen, 1 cattle, 180 sheep, and 8 swine. Although no reference is made to milk production, the milk cows yielded almost 3,000 lbs. of butter in that year. Sheep husbandry yielded 800 lbs. of wool. Agricultural products included: 600 bushels of Indian corn, 40 bushels of oats, 300 bushels of barley, 500 bushels of Irish potatoes, and 100 tons of hay. The estimated total value of farm production at the farm in that year was \$6,207.¹⁸

Potter’s tenancy continued until 1875, six years into the ownership of George Gordon King. The following year, King arranged a new lease with Abram Brown of Middletown, who farmed here until 1894. The 1880 Federal

¹⁵ Lease agreement from Samuel Allen to Nathaniel Potter, November 15, 1864. On file, Norman Bird Sanctuary.

¹⁶ 1866 appears to be the first year that Middletown tax records appear in published form. At the time of this writing, earlier tax records have not been located.

¹⁷ The termination of the lease during this period may have been the result of the Panic of 1873, an economic depression that was felt with particular severity in the northeast.

¹⁸ Adjusted to 2007 dollars, that amount would equal about \$98,000 today.

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Census describes 125 tilled acres and 101 acres of permanent pastures and meadows, vineyards and orchards. Sixty mown acres yielded seventy tons of hay.

Brown maintained the following animals in 1880: 9 horses, 25 milk cows (yielding 11,000 gallons of milk), 10 oxen, 8 swine, and 100 chickens (yielding 400 dozen eggs). Seventy-five sheep yielded 382 lbs. of wool.¹⁹ The estimated total value of farm production in that year was \$4000. Agricultural products included: 200 bushels of barley, 250 bushels of oats, 250 bushels of potatoes, as well as the yield of 70 fruit trees.

Norman ownership

George H. Norman was born in Newport in 1827. At age fourteen he left school to take a position as a store clerk. Within a few years he had set off on his own selling shoes on Thames Street at Market Square. Apparently successful in this enterprise, at the age of nineteen he joined with others in establishing the *Newport Daily News* in 1846. Within three years he and partner William Cranston were co-owners of the newspaper. Norman also became the first secretary of the Newport Gas Light Company, incorporated in 1853 when Newport had a population of about 10,000. He went on to establish manufactured gasworks in West Point, NY, and Santiago, Cuba, and the Newport Water Works in 1876.²⁰ A self-made millionaire and direct descendant of Plymouth Colony Governor William Bradford, Norman, his wife Abbie, and their nine children had their principal residence at Belair in Newport, a property he purchased in 1867.

When the heirs of George Gordon King placed the farm on the market in 1898, it is likely that George Norman purchased the property as a Newport Water Works investment as well as a summer residence for his family. Shortly after acquiring the property, Norman expanded Gardiner's Pond, a natural fresh water body at the south of the property, by about 50 acres and incorporated it into the holdings of the water works. Although Middletown tax records make no note of tenant farming after the 1898 sale to Norman, it appears that various fields were leased for agricultural use throughout the 20th century, including the Norman Bird Sanctuary occupation from 1950 to the present.²¹

¹⁹ As regards sheep, the particulars of the census data reveal a complex investment: 75 sheep, 75 dropped, 700 purchased, 700 sold live, 3 killed by dogs, and 20 died of disease.

²⁰ Other local water works established by Norman included Middletown, CT; Newburyport, Franklin, New Bedford, Lowell, Beverly, Lynn, and Gloucester, MA; Manchester, NH; Bristol, Warren, and Jamestown, RI; Hoosac Falls, NY; Frankford, IN; Waukesaw, Green Bay, and Fort Howard, WI; and others. Source: Obituary of George H. Norman, *Newport Mercury* (10 February 1900).

²¹ Aerial photographs of the Smith-Gardiner-Norman Farm from 1939 and 1951 show distinct areas of what appears to be active cultivation. Source: RI Statewide Planning.

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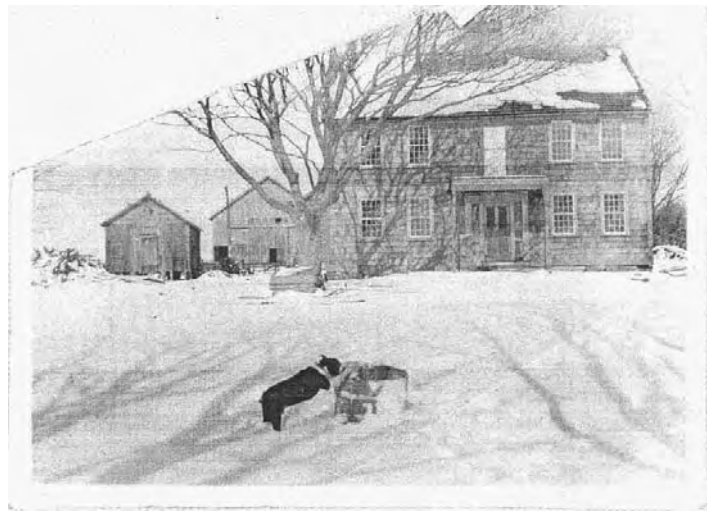


Figure 1

Farmhouse before 1915

Mabel Norman Cerio Collection, Newport Historical Society

Although biographical material on George Norman does not suggest any strong interest in nature, his youngest daughter Mabel (1875-1949) appears to have had a naturalist's inclination since childhood. On the death of George Norman in 1900, ownership of Smith-Gardiner-Norman Farm passed to his children. Mabel, unmarried and in her early thirties, purchased the property from her siblings in 1908, around the time of the death of her brother, George H. Norman, Jr. Correspondence and clippings in the Mabel Norman Cerio (MNC) collection at Newport Historical Society provide evidence that Mabel, a lifelong member of the Audubon Society, had expressed interest in the establishment of a nature preserve or bird sanctuary early in her sole ownership of the farm.²²

Among her many childhood privileges Mabel's artistic impulses were encouraged as well as her (and her mother's) interest in Italian culture. Although the historical record is unclear as to the extent and duration of their visits to Italy, Mabel and her mother Abbie appear to have spent considerable time there before the latter's death in 1915. While in Rome around this time, Mabel met George Cerio, an English-speaking Italian doctor whose family owned property on the Isle of Capri. The extensive Colonial Revival rehabilitation and modernization of the old farmhouse begun in the fall of 1915 would provide a summer residence for Mabel and Dr. Cerio.

²² See 1918 Boston-area newspaper clippings in the Mabel Norman Cerio collection: "Sanctuaries vital in conserving game birds," and "Peril of Bird Slaughter."

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Shortly after her mother's death, Mabel Norman contacted the Providence architectural firm of Clarke and Howe. Wallis Howe (1868-1960) graduated from MIT in 1890, working for a period in the office of noted Boston architect Edmund March Wheelwright.²³ Howe, a Bristolian by birth, returned to Providence in 1895, finding employment at the firm of Martin and Hall. He joined Prescott O. Clarke as a partner in the firm of Clarke and Howe in 1901. Two years later the firm won a design competition for the combined Providence Court House, Post Office and Custom House (Exchange Place, Providence, completed 1908). Howe enjoyed a long professional career, and is associated with a number of large-scale buildings throughout the state executed in a number of architectural styles. His design of Colonial Revival private residences was, however, particularly adept. Describing the Annie C. Barker House (1910-11), architectural historian Wm. Mackenzie Woodward notes that "Howe's sure touch with the Colonial Revival elevates this nicely balanced design above the merely competent examples that abound in a state much enamored of this style."²⁴

In mid-October of 1915, Wallis Howe submitted sketches (reproduced in the *Description* section) proposing a thorough rehabilitation and modernizing of the farmhouse.²⁵ This work included significant Colonial Revival remodeling in the main block and the Gardiner-era kitchen ell (both floors of which were extended a full bay to the north), as well as a new service wing set perpendicular to the Gardiner ell. Although this latter service wing, housing a modern kitchen, was originally planned to be a single story, it was built or altered to two stories early in the 20th century (see *Description* section, Figure 3). Middletown tax records before the work was begun list a 210-acre parcel valued at \$14,000 with buildings and improvements valued at \$3000. By fiscal year 1918-19, this valuation had more than doubled to \$30,000 for the land and \$8000 for buildings and improvements. The work was apparently carried out from 1915-1917. Mabel Norman and Dr. Cerio married in 1917 in Newport and took up residence at Smith-Gardiner-Norman Farm.

A comparison of two photographs in the Mabel Norman Cerio Collection at Newport Historical Society demonstrates several of Howe and Clarke's updates to the 1750 farmhouse. The pre-renovation photograph (Figure 1, taken before 1915) depicts the symmetrical, five-bay, center-chimney house clad in unpainted wood shingles. A closed opening (either a door or a window) is centered above the half porch that shelters the front door. The latter photograph (Figure 3) reveals some of the exterior changes. The shingles have been painted or replaced with wide, painted clapboards, and new louvered shutters flank each window. A new Chinese

²³ Wheelwright was Boston's City Architect 1891-1895.

²⁴ See Wm. Mackenzie Woodward, *PPS/AIARI Guide to Providence Architecture* (PPS, 2003), p. 279. In a discussion of Howe's design of St. Martin's Episcopal Church (1916-17, 1925, 1946,) Woodward describes Howe as "one of Rhode Island's greatest practitioners of [the Colonial Revival] style" (p. 281).

²⁵ The letter from Wallace Howe to Mabel Norman that included the sketches is reproduced in the *Additional Information* section.

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Chippendale railing tops the half porch, and there is a new or restored window centered above. Also, a skylight has been inserted in the roof, just west of the freshly painted or stuccoed chimney. This list of updates, along with other changes inside and out, mark Clarke and Howe's transformation of a colonial farmhouse into a Colonial Revival-style summer residence for an elite Newport family.

Mabel Norman, the Colonial Revival, and Smith-Gardiner-Norman Farm

Because of the gradual emergence and decline of architectural and stylistic revivals, it is impossible to precisely define the period of the American Colonial Revival. Historians, however, point to the 1876 Centennial Exhibition in Philadelphia as an important marker of a revived and widespread interest in the architecture as well as the useful and decorative arts of early America. Although there is no consensus as to the exact duration of the "Colonial" period when discussed in terms of its revival, a significant upsurge in interest in colonial America and the Federal period can be seen in the last decade of the 19th century and the first three decades of the 20th century. During these years the twin forces of urbanization and industrialization wrought changes in the texture of American life and landscape unimaginable just a few decades earlier. Among these transitions was the introduction of huge numbers of non English-speaking immigrants into American cities and the consequent discourse on "Americanization"—could these often Catholic or Jewish "hyphenated Americans" ever become truly American or did their allegiances lie outside of the established norms of American rural life? This national discourse had particular resonance among many descendants of old-line families, some of whom felt called upon to keep current the values and preserve the physical evidence of their forebears.

For these reasons the Colonial Revival can be seen not only as a reaffirmation of earlier rural values, of simpler notions of God and country, but also as a reaction rooted to varying degrees in a fear that the historical fabric of American life was being damaged irreparably by a constellation of forces brought into play by modern, urban society. It is worth noting that along with the harmless sentimentality of much of the Colonial Revival, a range of social movements from the benignly conservative to the violently reactionary emerged in this same period. Along that spectrum one can place the founding of the Colonial Dames and the Daughters of the American Revolution in the 1890s; the re-emergence of a new, invigorated and politically influential Ku Klux Klan in the 1910s; the Exclusionary Laws that effectively shut down Ellis Island in the early 1920s; and, at the cusp of the Great Depression, Henry Ford's obsessive interest in collecting and "re-creating" artifacts of the very world his automobile had forever changed.²⁶

Correspondence and clippings in the MNC Collection reveal Mabel Norman Cerio to be a woman of great privilege concerned with the progress and perils of the World War and involved in patriotic volunteer efforts at local hospitals. Surviving photographs of the post-1917 interior of the Smith-Gardiner-Norman Farm House

²⁶ Ford opened Greenfield Village and the Henry Ford Museum in 1929.

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show rooms festooned with patriotic bunting and furnished with colonial reproductions or antiques by a member of the National Society of Colonial Dames and Society of Mayflower Descendants.



Figure 2
Interior photo of Farmhouse, after 1917
MNC Collection, Newport Historical Society

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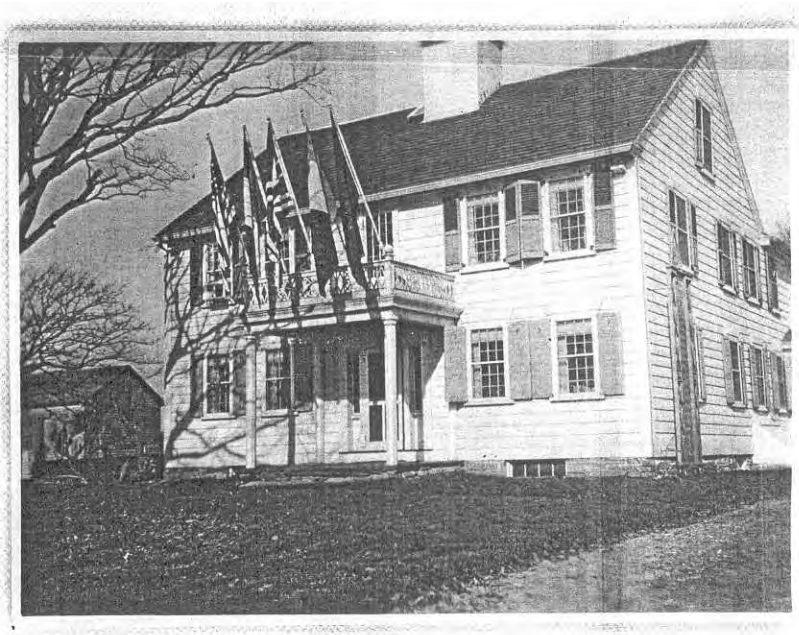


Figure 3

Northwest view to farmhouse showing ca 1915-17 alterations
MNC Collection, Newport Historical Society

Combining her Colonial Revival impulses with a love of bird life, Mabel Norman had expressed interest in the mechanics of establishing a bird sanctuary by late 1914.²⁷ Clarke and Howe's early sketches of the transformation of the property included both a "bird room" and a "winter bird room" in the first floor plan. This lifelong ornithological passion eventually took legal form in Mabel Norman Cerio's will, the central provision of which was

the establishment, continuance, upkeep, maintenance and development of [a] bird sanctuary on my farm known as "Paradise Farm"...for the propagation, preservation, and protection of birds, and where birds and bird life may be observed, studied, taught and enjoyed by lovers of nature and by the public generally so interested in a "spirit of humanity and mercy."²⁸

²⁷ See correspondence dated 9 November 1914 from Henry S. Thompson of Boston to Mabel Cerio. This letter is framed and on display in the Studio building at Norman Bird Sanctuary.

²⁸ Will of Mabel Norman Cerio, proved in the Newport Probate Court 1 December 1949. On file, Norman Bird Sanctuary.

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Mabel Norman Cerio held the property in her own name for about twenty years of the marriage. In the late 1930s she transferred ownership to "George Cerio and wife." Dr. Cerio died in 1943. Mabel, who traveled extensively between the U.S. and the Isle of Capri, died in New York en route to Italy in November of 1949. Described in her *New York Times* obituary²⁹ as a "noted hostess," no mention was made of a legacy that would provide a great benefit to Rhode Islanders for generations to come.

Recent History

The Norman Bird Sanctuary, established with a trust fund of \$135,000 and named after George H. Norman and his son, George H. Norman, Jr., began operation in 1950. Over the years the non-profit organization has expanded its land holdings through acquisitions and easements to about 300 acres. The mid 19th-century barn (Building 4) was adapted for use as an administration building and museum, serving that purpose until a new administration building and welcome center was built in 2000-2001. The sanctuary comprises some seven miles of nature trails. This National Register of Historic Places nomination has been prepared as part of an effort by Norman Bird Sanctuary to restore the farmhouse and adapt it for use as a retreat center in a remarkable setting of intact historical farmland and surrounding forest.

Criteria Considerations

The list of contributing sites includes two sites that would ordinarily not be contributing. The Gardiner Family Burial Plot is designated contributing because it documents a peculiarly Rhode Island mortuary practice—the burial of family members on the family farm rather in a churchyard or cemetery. Without an established church, Rhode Islanders followed the practice of home burial well into the nineteenth century and it is characteristic of Rhode Island farms to find a burial plot in the corner of a field. The unidentified gravesites described in Section 7 are also contributing. While not yet well identified or studied, these four graves appear to be part of another burial plot; they may contain the remains of children, black slaves, Native Americans, or victims of an epidemic. The graves are marked by plain slate slabs and may be the subject of further study.

²⁹ "Mrs. George Cerio, noted hostess." *New York Times* 12 November 1949: 15.

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

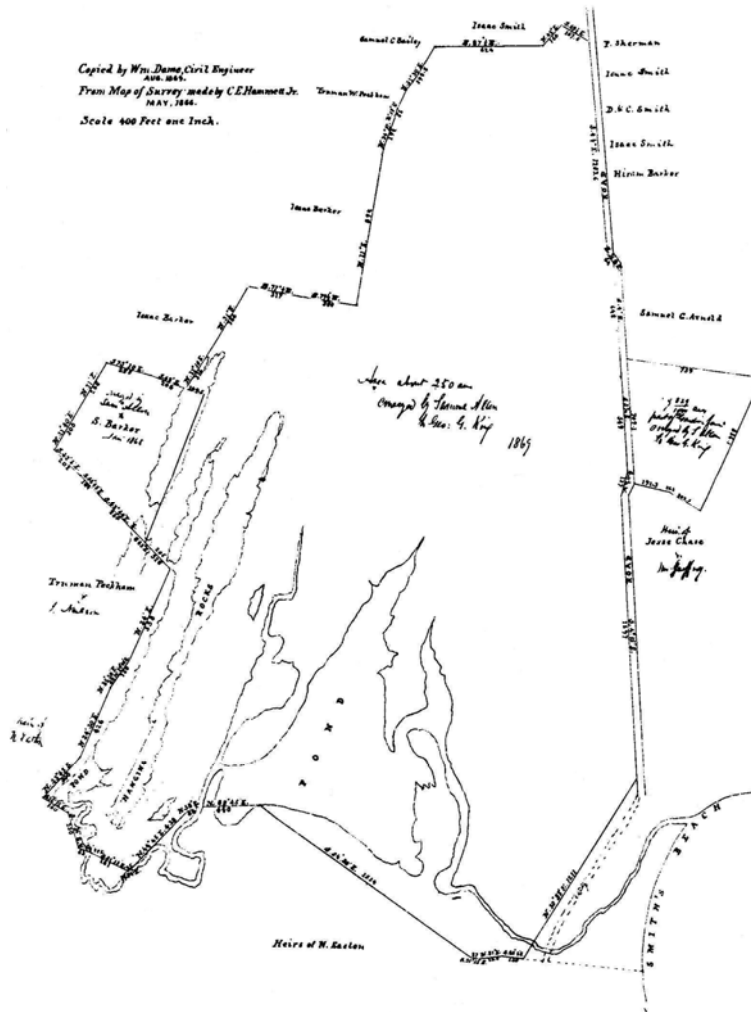


Figure 1
Plat with deed of Smith-Gardiner-Norman Farm
Samuel Allen to George G. King
August 23, 1869

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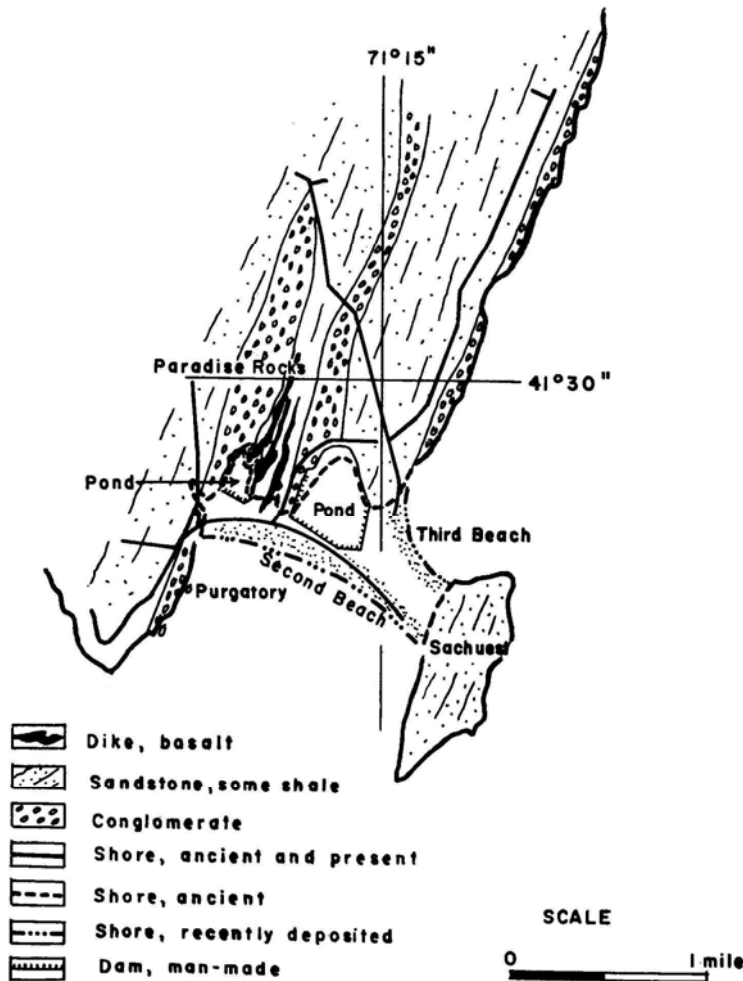


Figure 25. Map of Purgatory vicinity

Figure 2
Map of Purgatory Vicinity
From Alonzo Quinn, *Rhode Island Geology for the Non-Geologist* (1976)

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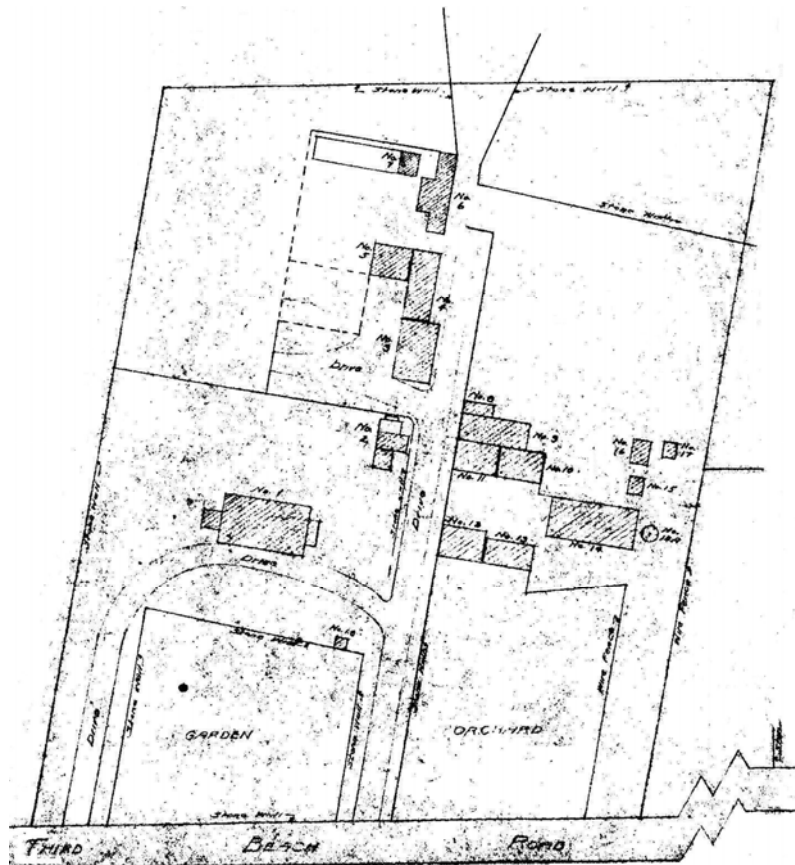


Figure 3

Detail from *Plan of Paradise Farm*
C.E. Lynch, CE (December 1945)

- | | |
|------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. Main House | 10. Shed |
| 2. Cottage and Laundry | 11. Carpenter Shop |
| 3. Studio | 12. Two Car Garage |
| 4. Caretaker's Cottage | 13. Carriage Shed |
| 5. Large Garage | 14. Large Barn |
| 6. Storage Building | 14a. Silo |
| 7. Hen House | 15-17. Chicken Houses |
| 8. Garage | 18. Tool House |
| 9. Garage | |

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CLARKE & HOWE
ARCHITECTS,
No. 1304 TURKS HEAD BUILDING

PRESCOTT O. CLARKE,
WALLIS E. HOWE,
ASSOCIATES OF THE AMERICAN
INSTITUTE OF ARCHITECTS

PROVIDENCE, R. I. Oct. 15, 1915.

Miss Mabel Norman,
Newport, R. I.

My dear Miss Norman:

I am sending you some sketch plans of the house showing the first and second floor arrangement and am waiting on the elevations until I hear if the plans are in the main satisfactory.

The arrangement of the service wing is about in accordance with our talk of yesterday and it seems to me works out in a very satisfactory way. I have taken the liberty of suggesting a re-arrangement of the main house although the dimensions are approximate as I did not measure that part of the house yesterday, not expecting to make any suggestions in that regard.

It seemed to me with the marvelous view to the west and southwest it would be a pity to put a toilet room at that end of the house and so I have made a suggestion of putting it at the east end and a staircase of fairly generous proportions from the first up to the second floor, leaving a large living-room 27 ft. long having north windows looking out on the little garden and a French door in place of the window on the west which would lead out to what I have called by the rather grandiloquent name of loggia, but which would really be a piazza with perhaps arched openings at the sides and ends like a good many of the old New England out-buildings and which seems to me would make a very delightful feature of the house, overlooking the garden on one side and the wonderful view on the other. I do not know just what your ideas were about the rooms which I have called drawing-room and library. The latter might be used as a spare bedroom on occasions in place of the old back room which you spoke of as using for that purpose.

Up-stairs by a re-arrangement of the partitions of the north wing and the carrying out of that wing over the kitchen, I get four servants' bedrooms and a servants' bath, all reached from the corridor and the extension of that corridor into the main house makes practically all the bedrooms accessible. I should leave the present staircase in any event as it affords you a more or less private access to your own room. The roof of the loggia affords a sleeping porch leading out of the bathroom, and it might be better to reverse the bathroom and the dressing-room, making the sleeping porch lead off that. I do not know whether you are contemplating a roof over the sleeping porch, but rather gathered from Mr. Powell's suggestion of a hanging porch that you did not expect a roof and the house would certainly look very much better without it. Of course, you will see that the additional staircase might be omitted and the space used as a coat room on the first floor and a large linen and clothes closet on the second and the rest of the plan could be as drawn. I hope that this suggestion of changes in the main house will not

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CLARKE & HOWE
ARCHITECTS,
No. 1304 TURKS HEAD BUILDING

PRESCOTT O. CLARKE,
WALLIS E. HOWE,
ASSOCIATES OF THE AMERICAN
INSTITUTE OF ARCHITECTS

PROVIDENCE, R. I. Oct. 15, 1915.

-2-

disarrange any of your fixed decisions about the plan, and of course the wing can be arranged as I have drawn it and the main house left as you had planned.

I am enclosing a picture postal of an old doorway at Deerfield, Mass., which with the exception of the garlands in the frieze I think would be very suitable. It gives you the side lights which I think you would like and it seems to me a flat cornice and square door are better for this house than the semi-circular light over the door would be on account of the lowness of the ceiling.

I am sending the original drawings instead of prints as they are much more legible and when you have made your suggestions about them, I should like to have them and the postal back. If you would like me to come to Newport and explain the plans further at any time, I shall be very glad to do so, and if these preliminary plans are satisfactory, I will make the elevations and working drawings so that Mr. Coggeshall can go right ahead on the work.

I had a very nice time yesterday and your sister-in-law was most hospitable and kind after I had left your farm.

Very sincerely yours,

WEH/MW

Wallis E. Howe

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Geographical Data

BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

The boundaries of Smith-Gardiner-Norman Farm are contiguous with those of Middletown Tax Assessor's Plate No. 126, Lots 65 and 215 and Plate 130, Lot 63.

BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION

These boundaries, comprising about 130 acres, define land historically associated with the occupation of Smith-Gardiner-Norman Farm from the mid-18th century to 1949.



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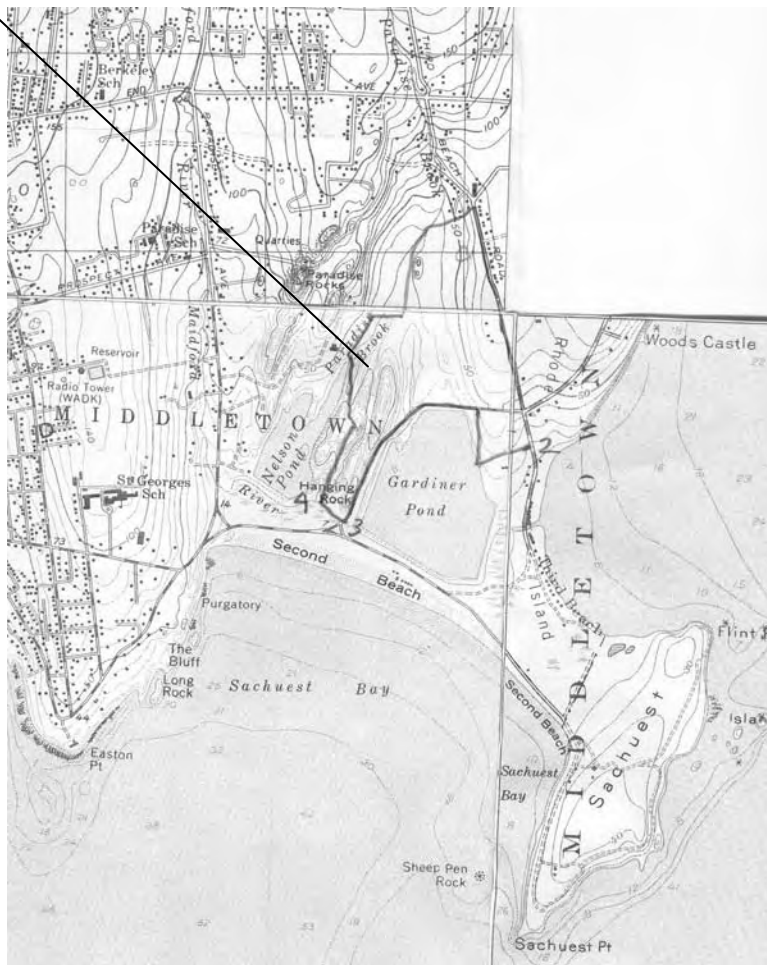
Smith-Gardiner-Norman Farm

583 Third Beach Road

Middletown, RI

Map below is compiled from Newport, Prudence Island, and Sakonnet Point, RI, Quadrangles

Original Scale: 1: 24,000



¹ Although the entire property of the Norman Bird Sanctuary is about 300 acres, the boundaries of this nomination address the land most closely associated with the farm from the mid-18th to the mid-20th century.

² See composite plat map for precise boundaries. A farm field south of Hanging Rock Road is also included within the boundaries of Paradise Farm.

























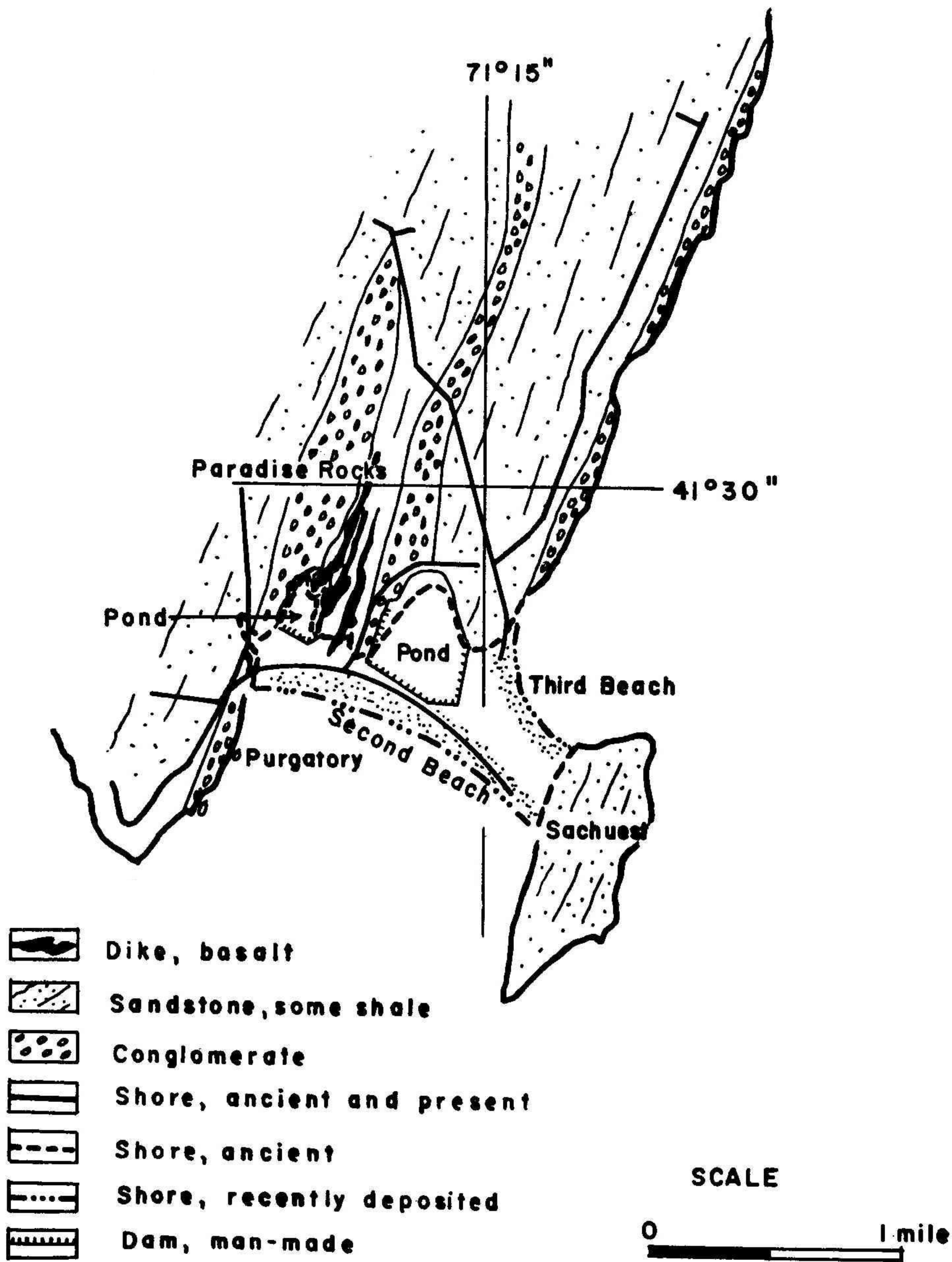


Figure 25. Map of Purgatory vicinity