

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

## 1. Name of Property

historic name: Mathewson Farm

other name/site number: N/A

## 2. Location

street & number: 544 Greenville Avenue

not for publication: N/A

city/town: Johnston

vicinity: N/A

state: RI county: Providence code: 007 zip code: 02919

## 3. Classification

Ownership of Property: Private

Category of Property: Buildings

Number of Resources within Property:

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>2</u>	<u>0</u>	buildings
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	sites
<u>2</u>	<u>1</u>	structures
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	objects
<u>4</u>	<u>1</u>	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register: 0

Name of related multiple property listing: N/A

Property name Mathewson Farm, Johnston, Providence County, RI

4. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this X 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 X meets      does not meet the National Register Criteria.

     See continuation sheet.

Frederic C. Williamson  
Signature of certifying official

19 Dec 2000  
Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property      meets      does not meet the National Register criteria.

     See continuation sheet.

      
Signature of commenting or other official

      
Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

5. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

     entered in the National Register  
     See continuation sheet.

     determined eligible for the  
National Register

     See continuation sheet.

     determined not eligible for the  
National Register

     removed from the National Register

     other (explain):     

      
Signature of Keeper

      
Date  
of Action

6. Function or Use

Historic: DOMESTIC  
AGRICULTURE

Sub: single dwelling  
storage/animal facility/  
agricultural field

Current: DOMESTIC  
AGRICULTURE

Sub: single dwelling  
agricultural field

7. Description

Architectural Classification:

FEDERAL

Other Description:

Materials: foundation STONE roof ASPHALT  
walls WEATHERBORAD other

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

X See continuation sheet.

8. Statement of Significance

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties: locally

Applicable National Register Criteria: A, C

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions): D

Areas of Significance: Architecture, Agriculture

Period(s) of Significance: late 18<sup>th</sup> century-1950

Significant Dates: late 18<sup>th</sup> century; ca. 1913

Significant Person(s): N/A

Cultural Affiliation: N/A

Architect/Builder: farmhouse: unknown  
barn: William Henry Mathewson II  
dairy shed: William Henry Mathewson III

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.

X See continuation sheet.

Property name Mathewson Farm, Johnston, Providence County, RI

**9. Major Bibliographical References**

See continuation sheet.

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) 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 #

Primary Location of Additional Data:

- State historic preservation office
- Other state agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other -- Specify Repository: Elaine Mathewson Pereira, 181 Kenyon Ave., Wakefield, RI 02879

**10. Geographical Data**

Acres of Property: 16.75 acres

UTM References: Zone	Easting	Northing	Zone	Easting	Northing
A	<u>19</u>	<u>292110</u>	<u>4635610</u>	B	<u>19</u> <u>292240</u> <u>4635560</u>
C	<u>19</u>	<u>292050</u>	<u>4635250</u>	D	<u>19</u> <u>291940</u> <u>4635430</u>

See continuation sheet.

Verbal Boundary Description:  See continuation sheet.

Boundary Justification:  See continuation sheet.

**11. Form Prepared By**

Name/Title: Sarah Zurier, Special Projects

Organization: RI Historical Preservation & Heritage Commission Date: 3/2000

Street & Number: 150 Benefit Street Telephone: 401-222-4142

City or Town: Providence State: RI ZIP: 02903

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Description

Located in the rural village of Belknap in northern Johnston, the Mathewson Farm contains a farmhouse, barn, silo, henhouse, garage, mowed fields, orchard, cemetery, woodlands, walls, and fences, ranging in date from the late 18<sup>th</sup> to the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century. As a group, the collection of resources demonstrates the evolution of a small-to-mid-sized farm during seven generations of continuous use by a single family. The 16.75-acre property at 544 Greenville Avenue is situated on the south side of the road (also known as the Old Killingly Road or Route 5), west of the intersection with Carpenter Drive (formerly Pocasset Avenue). Portions of the farm's boundaries are marked by dry-laid fieldstone walls (to the north and west) and by remnants of post-and-rail fencing (to the east).

Facing north towards Greenville Avenue, the vernacular Federal farmhouse stands two-and-a-half stories high on a rubblestone and granite ashlar foundation. A brick walk extends from the front porch to Greenville Avenue, and three paths of large stones, laid around the turn of the century, lead from the back door to Carpenter Drive, the barn, and the barn driveway. According to local tradition, the farmhouse was built around 1740, and this date may be indicated by the asymmetrical plan and façade. On the other hand, the building's proportions, Federal-style details, and consistent construction suggest that it was erected in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century.

The side-gable building has a post-and-beam frame with a combination of hewn and sawn members and vertical plank walls. It is finished with clapboards (widely set on the rear elevation), plain corner posts, and a simple cornice with shallow returns. The asphalt-covered roof has a central brick chimney. Five bays wide and two bays deep, the farmhouse has a nearly symmetrical façade with a central front door. Photographs of the farmhouse from the 1890s depict an elaborate Federal-style door surround with a blind, half-circle fan topped by a dentilled triangular pediment and flanked by two flat-board, fluted pilasters. When the full-length, one-story front porch was installed in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the fan was truncated and the pediment either covered or removed. The screened porch is supported by six Doric columns.

Most of the windows have louvered blinds, and 2/2 double-hung sash—19<sup>th</sup> century replacements for the original sash. A few additional alterations were made to the fenestration on the south and east elevations. A small, one-story, shed-roof addition encloses the back (south) entrance. A ca.

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1890s photograph of the farmhouse reveals that there was a doorway on the east side of the house--this was later replaced with a window. A bulkhead door on the west side of the house provides access to the basement.

The interior largely follows the five-room plan, standard for houses of the 18th century, with minor modifications. The front door opens into a front hall, but the first flight of the front stairway was removed, probably in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Two rooms on each side of the house are connected by a widened passageway and finished with wide plank flooring and molded cornice trim. The two front (north) rooms have fireplaces, and the mantel in the northwest sitting room is framed by half-round, fluted pilasters, frieze, and molded shelf. The northeast room has wainscoting composed of horizontal planks topped by a narrow chair rail. The large cooking fireplace indicates that this room formerly served as the kitchen, and the curved back wall of the original beehive oven is visible from the former stairway. The original fireplace was updated with a cast-iron Franklin stove; a stovepipe connection remains above the mantel shelf.

An enclosed, three-quarter-turn staircase leads from the center back room to the second floor. On the west side is a small laundry room (south), a sewing room (southwest), and a bedroom (northwest). The bedroom has a mantel composed of shouldered architrave, frieze with flanking fluted pilasters, and molded shelf. The cornice has a repeating pattern of three gouged vertical lines. The east side of the second floor was formerly one large room finished with a similar cornice, which also includes a repeating star motif. The interior finishes, particularly the gouged cornices, are similar to those at the ca. 1790 Dame Farmhouse, which is part of the Brown Avenue Historic District (NR, 1973) two miles west of Mathewson Farm. By the early-to-mid 20<sup>th</sup> century, partition walls were inserted to create a front bedroom, rear bedroom, and bathroom. As a result of changes to the plan, both the first and second floors contain a combination of original flat, four-panel doors with narrow, molded door surrounds and newer doors with beveled panels and wide architrave trim.

The narrow flight of stairs to the attic is located in a front hall now converted to a closet between two front bedrooms. The highly finished nature of the stairway, the plastered walls and ceilings, and the oak flooring indicate that the three attic rooms served as sleeping quarters for family members, boarders, and possibly hotel guests. The stairway includes turned newel posts, squared balusters, molded handrail, and an unusual, curved, wood screen at the top of the stairs. The visible boxed roof rafters are pegged and display up-and-down saw marks.

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The stair to the cellar is located below the rear stairway. The walls of the unfinished cellar are coated with layers of whitewash. The central chimney rests on stone supports and steel I-beams—the latter were probably installed in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century to replace the original timbers. A storage closet is located in the southeast corner of the cellar, and there is a small niche in the west wall near the bulkhead door.

The wood-shingled barn complex, southwest of the farmhouse, is the result of several building campaigns. The northern section is a one-and-a-half-story barn, which was erected around 1913. Like the barn at nearby Dame Farm, the Mathewson barn is a relatively late example of timber-frame construction, and it is possible that Dames and the Mathewsons used the same builders. It is approached from Greenville Avenue by a gravel path that slopes up to the sliding front doors on the north gable end. Resting on rubblestone foundations, the barn has a gambrel roof covered with asphalt shingles and topped with a small louvered ventilator. A gable-roofed, one-and-a-half-story wing extends to the west of the barn; this feature was built no later than 1917, when it appears in the Richards Atlas. Together, the barn and west wing have doorways at cellar, main, and hayloft levels and 6/6 double-hung sash windows as well as single-light windows for the five horse stalls. The main floor contains the horse stalls as well as storage for farm equipment, horse tack, and feed; the west wing houses what was known as the "milk parlor" with spaces for storing milk, containers, and ice. A flight of stairs runs to the hayloft, which has openings to the north and south for loading and unloading hay.

The frame, one-story cow shed extension on the south of the main barn was erected in two sections to house the Mathewsons' herd of dairy cows. Family members recall that William Henry Mathewson III built the dairy barn in the 1920s or 1930s, with the assistance of local friends and relatives.

The northern section has a monitor roof and rubblestone foundations; the southern section has a gable roof and concrete foundations. The entire shed has five exterior doors and numerous windows along the long east and west walls. Inside, a total of forty-four cow stalls—equipped with pipe-metal stanchions and a continuous manure trough—flank the central walkway, which could be loaded with hay tossed down from the hayloft.

Three silos once stood on the west side of the barn complex. William Henry II erected the first in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century; his son William Henry III moved the second and third silos here from other farms. The only surviving silo is made of vertical, wood staves bound together by adjustable steel

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hoops. Used as an airtight container for feed, the silo has a circular footprint and a conical roof. Though the two other silos were demolished around 1990, their circular stone and concrete foundations remain.

The early-20<sup>th</sup> century henhouse is a one-story, shed-roofed, frame structure located east of the barn complex. The structure has concrete foundations, novelty siding, and exposed rafter ends. Eleven pairs of awning and hopper windows run along the east side.

Southwest of the barn complex is a rectangular, family burial ground enclosed by dry-laid fieldstone walls topped with massive stone slabs and entered through an iron gate on the west side. The 30 visible markers, including headstones and footstones, are arranged in four rows with the headstones facing southwest. They include slate stones with delicate renderings of urn-and-willow motifs and italic lettering (early-to-mid 19<sup>th</sup> century) as well as granite markers with deeply incised, capital letters (late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries). A few stones are signed by carvers, including "C [G?]. A. MUMFORD" (on a 1853 stone) and "STAN. . . & FARNUM" (on a 1885 stone). The earliest marker visible dates from 1812, and the most recent dates from 1915.

The western part of the property consists of fields used to raise crops and hay. Although most agricultural production at Mathewson Farm came to a halt by 1950, the family continues to harvest hay from the fields. The consistent mowing has preserved the contours and openness of the cropland. A dry-laid fieldstone wall, probably built in the 18<sup>th</sup> or 19<sup>th</sup> century, separates the fields from Greenville Avenue and runs along much of the west border of the property. The pasture south of the barn, however, was not maintained. Over the past fifty years, trees and plants have transformed the pasture into woodland. Some remnants of the old, wood post-and-rail fencing that once enclosed the pasture are visible along Carpenter Drive. The orchard, also overgrown, is located on an elevated site in the southern part of the property.

A non-contributing, one-story, gable-roofed garage is located on Carpenter Road, south of the house. Erected around 1960, the frame structure is covered with novelty siding and topped with a cupola and weathervane. It has concrete foundations, windows with 6/6 double-hung sash, vent openings on the north and south ends, and four garage doors.

Historic sources document several other structures no longer extant on the Mathewson Farm. These features include an early barn (cited in a 1793

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deed), cooperage (present by 1795), drive-through wagon shed (built by 1879), blacksmith shop (built 19<sup>th</sup> century; razed 1910s), bull's house (present by mid-20<sup>th</sup> century) and several unidentified outbuildings. There is physical evidence of a well in back of the house and photographic evidence of another well in the front of the house (ca. 1890s). Archaeological investigation may yield further information about these features, but as yet no testing has been done.

Because the Mathewson Farm formerly extended north of Greenville Avenue and east of Carpenter Drive, several nearby buildings, past and present, deserve mention for their association with the farm. No longer extant buildings included a schoolhouse (built by 1795), barn and sheds (built by 1829), store (built by 1829; burned down in 1898), cider mill (built 19<sup>th</sup> century), garage (built in 1920s) and other unidentified structures. Surviving buildings include a one-story, gambrel-roofed farmhouse (595 Greenville Avenue, ca. 1710) historically occupied by Mathewson family members and the one-story, concrete-block-and-brick-veneer Mathewson Equipment Store (515 Greenville Avenue, ca. 1950). At the southeast corner of Carpenter Drive and Greenville Avenue stands an English Cottage-style house erected for William Henry III's family in the 1930s. These buildings are not included in this nomination, because they are under different ownership. Some of them may be eligible for nomination to the National Register after evaluation in the future.

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Photographs

Photographer: Sarah Zurier

Date: August 2000

Negative: Rhode Island Historical Preservation & Heritage Commission, 150  
Benefit St., Providence, RI

(The above information applies to all photographs)

Photo #1: North façade and east elevation of farmhouse with north and east elevations of garage, looking southwest.

Photo #2: Fireplace and door to kitchen, east parlor, farmhouse.

Photo #3: Fireplace, west parlor, farmhouse.

Photo #4: Detail of attic staircase and screen, farmhouse.

Photo #5: West elevation of barn complex, silo, and burial ground wall with garage in background, looking east.

Photo #6: East elevation and north façade of both barn complex and henhouse, looking southwest.

Photo #7: North façade and west elevation of barn complex, looking southeast.

Photo #8: Burial ground, looking north.

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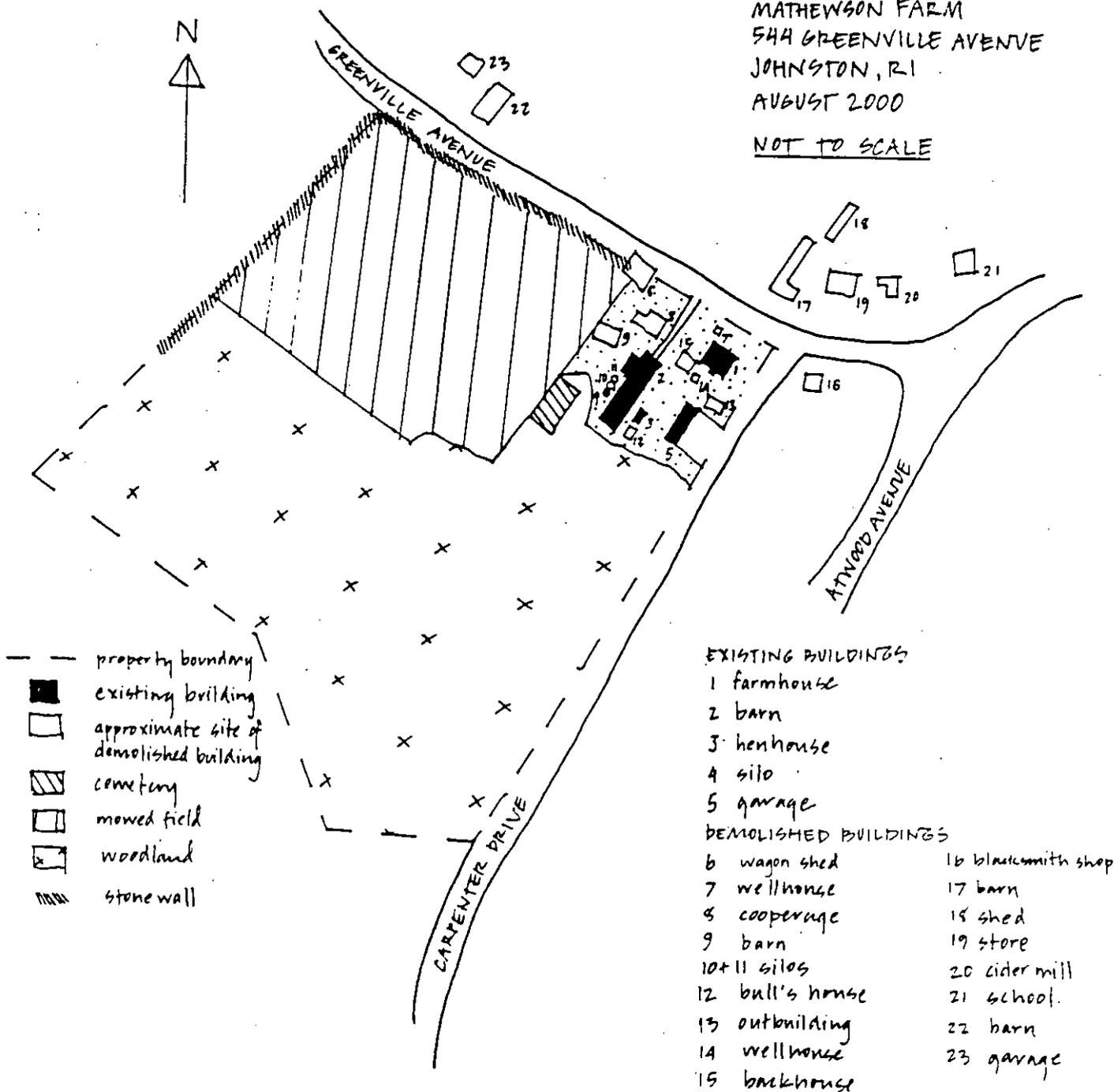
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SITE MAP

MATHEWSON FARM  
544 GREENVILLE AVENUE  
JOHNSTON, RI  
AUGUST 2000

NOT TO SCALE



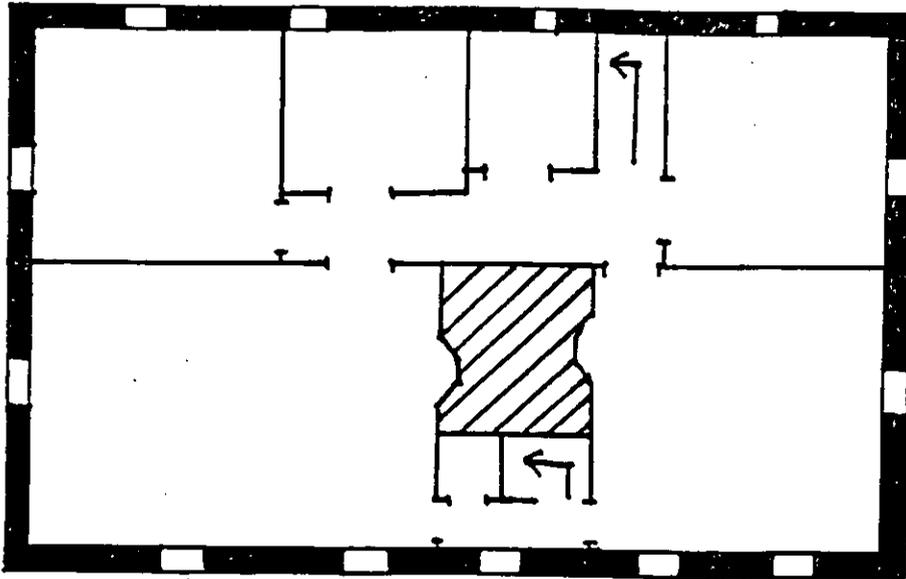
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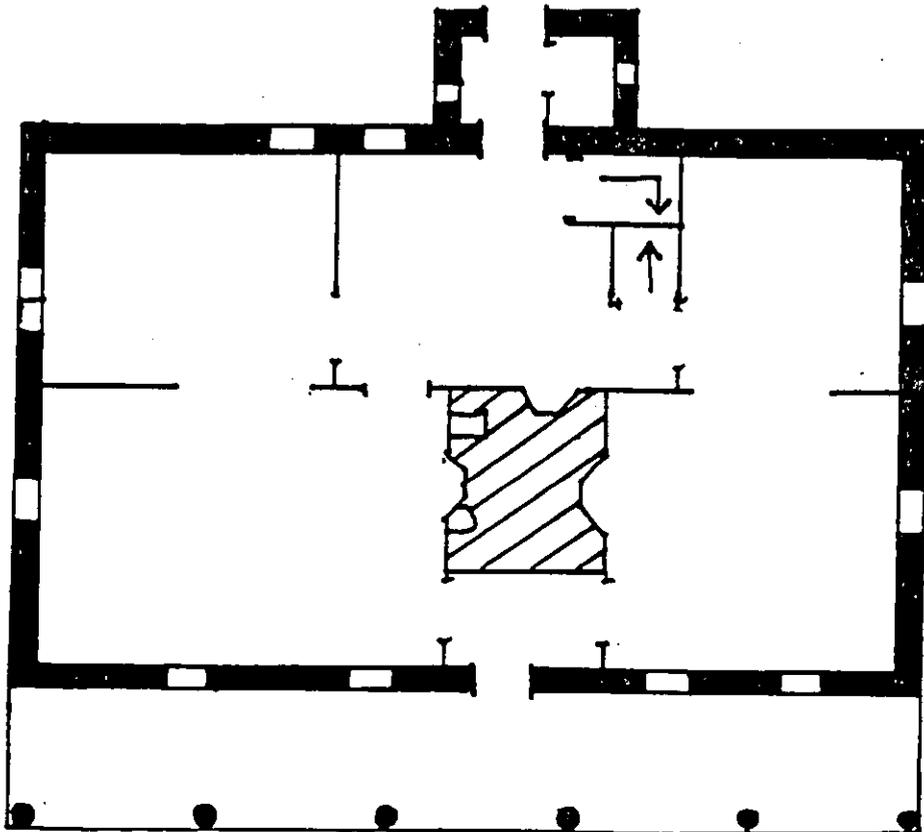
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SECOND FLOOR PLAN  
NOT TO SCALE

FARMHOUSE, MATHEWSON FA  
544 GREENVILLE AVENUE  
JOHNSTON, RI  
AUGUST 2000



FIRST FLOOR PLAN  
NOT TO SCALE

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Significance

The Mathewson Farm is significant to the architectural and agricultural history of Johnston and Rhode Island as a well-preserved, intact example of a family farm. The farmstead has endured over the course of two centuries as much of Rhode Island's rural landscape has given way to urban, industrial, and suburban development. Built in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, the farmhouse is a fine example of a vernacular, five-room-plan, rural dwelling displaying the symmetry and details of the Federal style. Even more rare is the barn complex, a late example of timber-frame construction erected during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century; its original configuration and most of its fixtures remain intact. The silo and henhouse are valuable examples of specialized agricultural buildings that contributed to the farm's lasting viability. Taken together, features such as the walls, fences, pasture, paths, orchard, and mowed fields provide the authentic setting for the collection of buildings. The property also includes a family burial ground. Thousands of similar farms have disappeared from the landscape in Johnston and throughout Rhode Island, as their buildings are highly altered or demolished, their acreage carved into house lots, and their land consumed by sprawl. Despite these trends, the Mathewson Farm survives as testament and record of Johnston's agricultural history.

Historical Background

The agricultural community that developed by the intersection of the Old Killingly Road and Atwood Avenue was known as Belknap, after a prominent local family. It is centered on the intersection of Atwood and Greenville Avenues. The latter road largely follows a trail used by Native Americans at the time European settlers arrived in the area. Because colonists used the route to travel to Killingly, Connecticut, they called it the "Killingly Road." By the early 1700s, Euro-American settlers had established several scattered farmsteads along the route. Despite its small size, the village of Belknap was an early institutional center for the young town of Johnston. Benjamin Belknap's house (which stood northwest of the Mathewson Farm) was the site of Johnston's first town meeting in 1759. Within a few decades, a new meetinghouse and school were erected nearby.

Several branches of the Mathewson family had settled in Johnston by the end of the eighteenth century. The first Mathewson to arrive in Rhode Island had emigrated from England to Plymouth. James Mathewson then relocated to Providence, where he purchased land in 1658. Upon his death in 1682, James's heirs inherited his property, which included land beyond the "Seven Mile Line," now the western border of Johnston. Well into the early 20<sup>th</sup>

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century, Johnston was a sparsely settled agricultural community, criss-crossed with stone walls and dotted with family farms.

A great-grandson of James, William Mathewson (d. 1796) bought several Johnston properties, beginning in 1769. His purchases included a property on the north side of Killingly Road with the small cottage still standing today (595 Greenville Avenue). One of his last acquisitions, made in 1793, was a farm located south of Killingly Road. For the sum of £120 paid to Rufus Sprague, William received "a certain lot of land with a Dwelling House thereon standing, also a Small Barn containing about by Estimation 16 acres," as well as a share in the Shadrach Farm.

The style and construction of the present farmhouse indicate that it is probably the "dwelling house" mentioned in the 1793 deed. Shifting currency systems and unclear boundary determinations make it difficult to use the 18<sup>th</sup>-century deeds to arrive at a precise construction date. In 1779, Sprague paid Andrew Aldrich \$2600 for a share in the Shadrach Farm and an 8-acre property with dwelling house on the south side of Killingly Road. This dwelling house may or may not be the same one mentioned in a 1766 deed documenting that Aldrich paid Richard Eddy £90 for a six-and-a-half-acre parcel on the south side of Killingly Road. Local tradition holds that the farmhouse was erected around 1740, a date posted over the front door by the Johnston Historical Society; however, no documentation of this early date has been found. The physical evidence suggests that a late 18<sup>th</sup>-century date is more likely.

William Mathewson identified himself as a cooper, and he was operating both a cooperage and a store on the property by 1795. North of the road stood the one-story farmhouse (where he lived) and a school building, which was erected on the Mathewson property between 1790 and 1794. In his 1795 will (proved in 1796), William directed his estate to be divided among his immediate family. His second wife and nine of his children were awarded the property north of the road, the cooperage, the store, furniture, clothing, one cow, and other items. His eldest son Philip was given title to the property south of the road, with the dwelling house bought from Sprague.

Born in Johnston, Philip Mathewson (1772-1853) married Mary Winsor, and they had four children. Philip purchased the remainder of his father's estate between the 1810s and 1830s and made his home at the farm. According to the local muster roll, Philip served in the Johnston Rangers, a militia unit, and was appointed captain by 1808. Receipts and ledger books list a variety of goods for sale at the store, including coffee,

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candles, rum, brandy, and molasses. Philip also sold cords of wood and finished boards—perhaps harvested from trees on his land. Because the local schoolhouse stood on the Mathewson property, Philip was responsible for collecting tuition money from parents and for paying the teacher's salary. For at least the first three decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Mathewsons were issuing receipts marked "for your sons Tuition" and "for schooling your boy."

An 1829 policy held by Philip with the Providence Mutual Fire Insurance Company provides some information about five of the buildings on the property. For \$800, it insured a house "built of wood of 40 feet by 24 feet dimensions, two stories high in front and rear and occupied for a dwelling house." For \$500 it insures another structure "on the opposite side of the road built of wood of 36 by 24 dimensions, two stories high in front and rear and occupied for a country store." And for \$200 it insures the barn and two sheds "all built of wood," with the barn measuring 22' x 24' and two stories high and two adjacent one-and-a-half-story sheds measuring 14' x 36' and 17' x 40'.

In 1845, Philip sold the farm to his only surviving son Paris. The property consisted of "a certain lot or tract of land with all the buildings and improvements thereon. . .being the homestead estate where I now live and containing about fourteen acres" on the south side of Killingly Road as well as "land I own on the north side of the Killingly road with the store, sheds, barns and other buildings and improvements thereon, nearly opposite the above. . .containing about nine acres." Philip continued to reside at the farmhouse until his death in 1853.

Born at the family farm, Paris Mathewson (1804-1875) married Phebe Tripp Olney in 1822, and they had twelve children. Though he moved away after his wedding, Paris returned to the farm with Phebe after his father's death. The 1850 U.S. Census gives a detailed reckoning of the farm's resources. The assistant marshal counted 16 improved and 20 unimproved acres as well as \$1900 worth of animals, including horses, cows, oxen, pigs, chickens, and turkeys. The farm was producing Indian corn, "Irish" (not sweet) potatoes, hay, butter, and orchard fruits. The census furnishes an informative context for the Mathewson Farm. In 1850, 81.1% of Rhode Island's total area was held in its 5385 farms—whether in cultivated croplands, buildings, roads, or unimproved woodlots and forests. The average farm had an area of 102.9 acres and was worth \$3547, indicating that the 36-acre, \$3000 Mathewson Farm was small but successful. The diversity of crops and livestock indicate that a viable farm could not rely on a single crop but had to provide various products both for sustenance

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and for sale.

Paris maintained the general store, selling farm products such as corn, hay, and Indian meal as well as other wares such as shovels, boots, denim, spices, apples, soap, snuff, candy, mustard, scythes, rakes, cheese, and pork. In 1853 he put the store up for sale or lease, but did not find a suitable buyer. In a public notice, Paris described the establishment as "consisting of a good variety of West India and Dry Goods, hardware, boots and shoes, and a variety of other articles usually kept in a country store." The business was "well-known for its good character, and has now an increase of trade and good custom, a desirable stand for one who has a taste for the grocery business."

In addition to farming and teamstering, Paris was active in other commercial and political enterprises. He imported horses from Canada and Vermont to sell in Johnston. As a contractor, Paris built several houses, a cotton mill, highways, bridges, railroads, depots, and the first telegraph line into the city of Providence. Prominent in town affairs, he was a known Dorrite during the Dorr War (1840-42) and served as president of Johnston's town council, member of the General Assembly, tax collector, and justice of the peace.

In 1855 Paris sold several Johnston properties to his eldest son William Henry Mathewson for \$3150. These included the family farm, with its parcels to the south and north of Old Killingly Road. Both Paris and his son William Henry appeared in the Johnston tax records from 1860 to 1875, and the farmstead was listed as including 50 acres. The 1865 and 1875 state censuses recorded that the household included a female Irish servant and several male boarders. Although many families took in boarders to work on the farm, the Mathewsons were also operating a "hotel" at the farmhouse, as documented in an 1870 atlas. The expansion of the turnpike and road system during the first decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century encouraged highway travel and the growth of supporting enterprises, such as roadside taverns and hotels. Several of Johnston's farmers and homeowners made their houses into convenient stopping-places for food, drink, and rest. The "P. Mathewson Hotel" was one of several local establishments, including the Cornell-Randall-Bailey Roadhouse on Hartford Avenue, Knight's Hotel (later H. Greene's Hotel) on Plainfield Pike, and the Daniel Angell House on Dean Avenue. Other sources that document the farmhouse's hotel years are receipts for large quantities of gin, rum, brandy, and other spirits (though liquor was also sold at the store) and the finished quality of the attic rooms.

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The 1886 will of Paris's wife Phebe documented many of the furnishings present at the old farmhouse. Furniture included a chest of drawers, tables, chairs, stuffed chairs, bedsteads, chests, sofa, and a secretary desk. There were gilt vases, good silver, a clock, books, and various bedding materials, in addition to everyday kitchenware and \$1220 in cash. The substantial amount, variety, and quality of the furniture indicate that the Mathewson farmhouse was well appointed.

Born in Johnston, William Henry Mathewson I (1823-1887) married Mary Foster Westcott in 1867, and they lived in the one-story farmhouse on the north side of the road. Unlike his more versatile father, William Henry I was first and foremost a farmer. The 1880 U.S. Census documented that the Mathewson Farm included 37 improved and 13 unimproved acres and had a total value of \$7000. The census taker found horses, cows, pigs, chickens, and turkeys. The farm was producing eggs, Indian corn, beans, "Irish potatoes," and apples. In 1879, the Orient Insurance Company of Woonsocket issued a policy for a "frame waggon shed" which stood west of the farmhouse.

Meanwhile, William Henry I continued to operate the country store. Receipts and old ledger books describe the range of items for sale. There was farm produce such as eggs, beans, potatoes, wood, hay, flour, vinegar, and cider, and there were retail goods such as tea, whiskey, gin, beer, kerosene, and crockery. An inventory of William Henry I's estate recorded many of the goods, materials, and animals present on the farm in 1888. The cooperage and cider mill were in active use, because there was one ciderpress, two grinders, one engine and boiler, 650 cider barrels and corks, and 8100 gallons of cider vinegar. Johnston was a prime producer of orchard fruits and of cider vinegar, as documented in Bayles's *History of Providence County*. Other equipment in the inventory included wagons, wheelcarts, plows, a cultivator, mowing machine, manure spreader, hay cutters, harnesses, and "sundry farming tools." The animals included seven horses (four with names—Pela, Chip, Dick, and Jerry), three cows, and 25 hens. The estate was valued at \$2925.14. The goods were dispersed at private sale and probably went to the Mathewsons' only child, who inherited the farm, although a will has not been found.

Born in Johnston, William Henry Mathewson II (1867-1939) married Nellie Viola Burchard in 1888, and they had two children. They lived in the more cosmopolitan community of Manton, where William Henry II operated a hack, livery, and boarding stable on 39 Manton Avenue. After the Mathewsons moved to the farmhouse in the late 1890s, Nellie oversaw substantial improvements to the house. In addition to building a front porch, she was

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probably responsible for interior alterations on the first and second floors. An 1897 article in the *Evening Telegram* reported that the Mathewsons hosted a country dance "in the unoccupied lower floor of their farmhouse on the Old Killingly road."

Two photographs of the farm from the 1890s portray at least nine frame structures on the property. An unidentified outbuilding, the farmhouse, a wellhouse, another outbuilding, the one-story cooperage, and the one-story, gable-roof, drive-through wagon shed stood (from east to west) on the south side of Old Killingly Road. Across the street (from east to west) stood a two-and-a-half-story, side-gabled store, a gable-roof structure (probably the barn), and a one-and-a-half story cider house. Family members recall that the large store building included a second-floor hall that was used for dances and shows; the store was destroyed by fire in 1898. A one-story, side-gabled blacksmith's shop stood east of the farmhouse in a small triangular parcel where Pocasset Avenue intersected with Greenville Avenue. The Mathewsons hired blacksmiths to work at the shop until it was demolished around 1916.

The 1895 Everts and Richards atlas depicts only four buildings on the farm: two to the north and two to the south of Old Killingly Road. It also located several nearby farms belonging to other branches of the Mathewson family. According to family tradition, William Henry II erected the present gambrel-roofed barn in 1913; it was present, complete with west wing, in the 1917 Richard atlas. The same source located two other buildings (probably for livestock) south and west of the barn and a third unidentified structure behind the farmhouse.

In the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, new regulations, technology, and distribution systems transformed the milk industry. Dairying became New England's primary agricultural enterprise, and the Mathewson Farm kept pace. The family equipped the new barn with rooms for storing milk containers and ice. Around the turn of the century, William Henry II hired workers to deliver milk via horse and wagon to local homes. In 1917 the farm began to supply milk to the Hood Company in Providence, and this arrangement persisted through the mid-1940s. As specialized dairy farmers, the Mathewsons decided to invest in new resources and reconsidered how to use their property effectively. They built the cow shed to house 44 cows, erected three feed silos, and installed a generator for cooling milk. They reconsidered land use as well, probably planting additional corn and other feed products for the herd, and expanding pasture over former cropland and wood lot. In addition to his work as a dairy farmer (recognized by his appointment to the board of the Local Dairymen's Co-operative Association),

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William Henry II also served as drove a school bus, served as a tax assessor, and dealt in real estate.

William and Nellie's only son began working at the farm full-time in 1931. William Henry Mathewson III (1900-1987) was born in Providence and married Ruth Muriel Sisson in 1931. They erected the English Cottage-style house across Carpenter Drive from the farmhouse. In addition to dairy farming, William Henry III raised vegetables, mostly corn and tomatoes, and transported them to Providence to sell at the Weybosset Pure Food Markets in the 1930s and 1940s. A small garden produced peas, beans, currants, and other fruits and vegetables. When wartime austerity raised the prices of Midwestern beef, William Henry III visited beef farms in Indiana and brought a small herd of cattle back to his Johnston farm. In a 1943 article about beef farming in Rhode Island, a bemused *Providence Journal* reporter described him as "a rugged individual who can throw a steer with the best cowboy of the movies."

By the late 1940s, William Henry III ceased the dairying operation, although the farm continued to produce a yearly crop of hay. He focused his attentions on the Mathewson Farm Equipment store, which opened at 429 George Waterman Road in Johnston in the mid-to-late 1940s. The store sold tractors and other farm equipment manufactured by Ford, Dearborn, Wayside, and other companies. In the early 1950s, the business moved to a new building at 515 Greenville Avenue. Gibson Mathewson, son of William III and his second wife Ethel, operated the store (now vacant) until 2000.

Although the farming operations are almost entirely inactive, the Mathewsons continue to harvest hay from the fields west of the barn, mow the lawns, tend the family burying ground, and maintain the buildings on the farm. No longer recognizable as pasture or orchard, the overgrown acres south of the barn are returning to their original, wooded condition. Meanwhile, housing subdivisions have been created on old farmland on nearby Pine Hill Avenue and Golini Drive. The Mathewson Farm represents an important survival of Johnston's agricultural landscape as it evolved from the late 18<sup>th</sup> to the late 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Criteria Consideration D

The Mathewson Farm includes a family burial ground, which would ordinarily not be considered a contributing element of the farm. In the case of eighteenth-century Rhode Island farms, however, the burial ground should be considered as contributing. The practice of burial on the family farm was a common one in Rhode Island and is characteristic of the state's

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historic agricultural properties; lacking an established church, Rhode Island towns did not have a central church with adjacent cemetery for burials, and families typically buried their dead at home.

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Peg Mathewson, Johnston  
Louis McGowan, Johnston  
Elaine Mathewson Pereira, Wakefield

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Geographical Data

Verbal Boundary Description:

Johnston Assessor's Plat 52, lot 1.

Boundary Justification:

Most or all of the 16.75-acre nominated property has been associated with the Mathewson Farm since 1793, when William Mathewson purchased "a certain Lot of land with a Dwelling house thereon standing, also a small Barn containing about by Estimation 16 acres" on the south side of what is now Greenville Avenue. The size of the farm grew to at least 50 acres but has been reduced to its present dimensions by property sales and transfers.



Mathewson Farm  
Providence County, Johnston, R.I.  
Photo #1 of 8



Mathewson Farm  
Providence County, Johnston R.I.  
Photo # 2 of 8



Matthewson Farm,  
Providence County, Johnston, RI  
Photo # 3 of 8



Matheewson Farm  
Providence County, Johnston, RI  
Photo # 4 of 8



Mathewson Farm  
Providence County, Johnston, RI  
Photo # 5 of 8



Mathewson Farm,  
Providence County, Johnston, RI  
Photo # 6 of 8



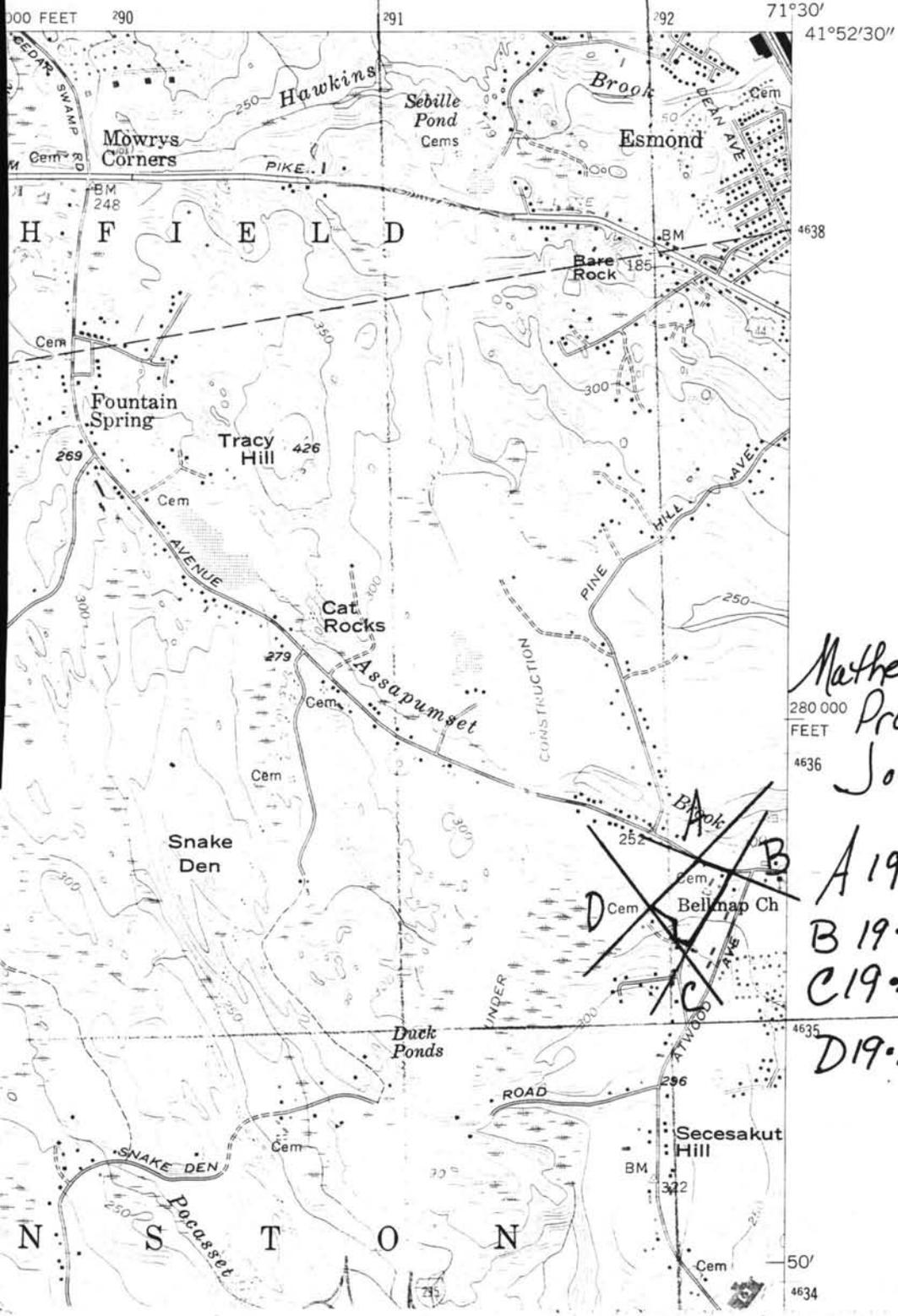
Mathewson Farm  
Providence County, Johnston, RI  
Photo #7 of 8



Mathewson Farm  
Providence County, Johnston, R.I.  
Photo # 8 of 8

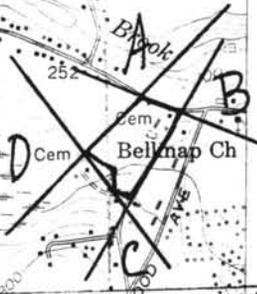
NORTH SCITUATE QUADRANGLE  
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 7.5 MINUTE SERIES (TOPOGRAPHIC)

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 (PAWTUCKET)



*Mathewson Farm  
 Providence County  
 Johnston, RI*

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- C 19-292050-4635260*
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