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# Historical Archaeology at Saybrook Point, Connecticut: Excavation and Interpretation at an Archaeological and Historical Park

## **Cover Page Footnote**

Many people and organizations contributed to the success of the Saybrook Point project. I would especially like to thank Ellsworth Grant, Barbara Maynard, Amy Felmley, Robert Gradie, the Old Saybrook Historical Society, numerous town officials, local residents and the students in three Connecticut College Field Archaeology courses.

## HISTORICAL ARCHAEOLOGY AT SAYBROOK POINT, CONNECTICUT: EXCAVATION AND INTERPRETATION AT AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL PARK

Harold D. Juli

*This paper discusses the discoveries resulting from a study of 350 years of occupation at Saybrook Point, in the town of Old Saybrook, Connecticut's earliest English coastal settlement (1635). Three seasons of archaeological research (1980–1982), along with documentary sources provided information for the construction of a detailed site history. Specifically, the paper focuses on the role of archaeology in understanding growth and change within the earliest area of settlement in a small Connecticut town, as well as the interpretation of these findings in the form of an archaeological and historical park, constructed within the excavation zone.*

*Cet article présente les résultats d'une étude portant sur les 350 ans d'occupation de Saybrook Point dans la ville de Old Saybrook, le plus ancien établissement côtier anglais du Connecticut (1635). La combinaison de recherches documentaires et de trois campagnes de fouilles archéologiques (1980–1982) a fourni des informations utiles à la construction d'une histoire détaillée du site. Nous examinerons ici, en particulier, le rôle joué par l'archéologie dans la compréhension de la croissance et du changement dans le secteur d'établissement le plus ancien d'une petite ville du Connecticut. L'interprétation de ces données par le biais d'un parc historique et archéologique aménagé dans le secteur de fouille sera également abordée.*

### Introduction

In 1980, an archaeological study was initiated in the town of Old Saybrook, at the 17th-century site of Connecticut's earliest English coastal settlement. This paper discusses the discoveries and public interpretation of 350 years of settlement at Saybrook Point. For over 300 years it has been known that the site's earliest structure was its first fort, constructed in 1635 by Lion Gardiner, an English soldier and architect with experience in European wars (Gates 1935). The fort occupied a position at the eastern section of Saybrook Point near the mouth of the Connecticut River (FIG. 1). Although this location was believed to be the traditional site, the exact position of the early fort had not been determined prior to the initiation of research. The archaeological program was begun in anticipation of the town's 350th anniversary (1985), with the goals of locating the site of the first fort, recovering evidence relating to the activities of the town's early English settlers, and studying changes in the local landscape as the town of Old Saybrook

evolved. The archaeological study was also conceived as the first stage in developing a commemorative park to be constructed within the excavation zone.

Interest in locating and reconstructing the original Saybrook fort had been expressed earlier when, at the request of local citizens, the Connecticut Park and Forest Commission sponsored a comprehensive design study for the development of the fort site (M. Fine and Associates 1966). At that time, archaeological work to increase the historical accuracy of site interpretation was recommended but not undertaken.

During July 1980, Connecticut College carried out preliminary site testing that developed into a project lasting three summers. The site was located on land owned by the State of Connecticut and subsequently transferred to the town of Old Saybrook. The testing was designed to explore the site and recover remains of the range of historic occupations and activities on a largely undeveloped 18-acre parcel (FIG. 2). In addition, it was hoped that architectural remains of the first 17th-century fort, its successor

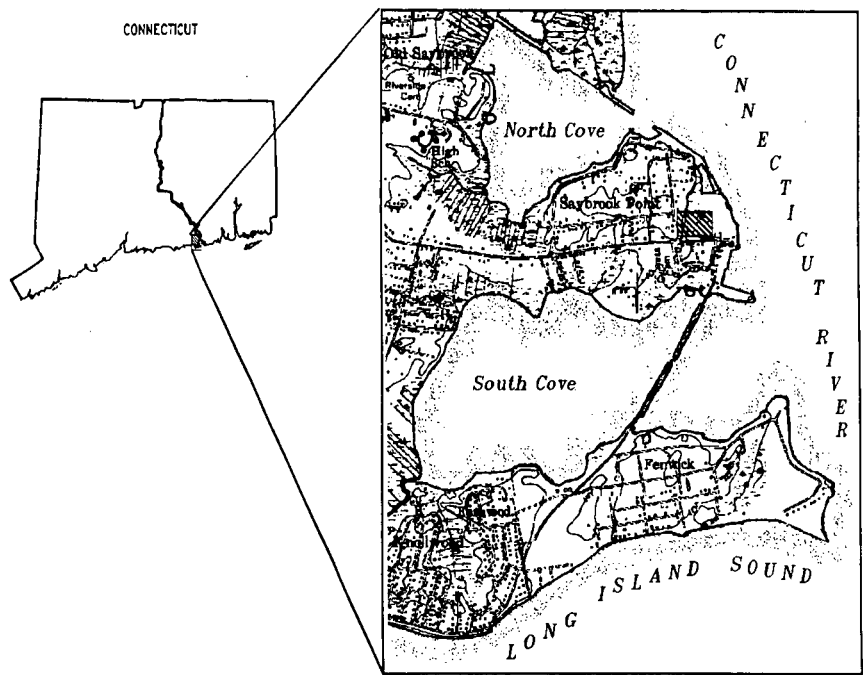


Figure 1. A map of Saybrook Point showing the location of the archaeological project in cross-hatching. (USGS Old Lyme Quadrangle 1:24,000 Series, 1970.)

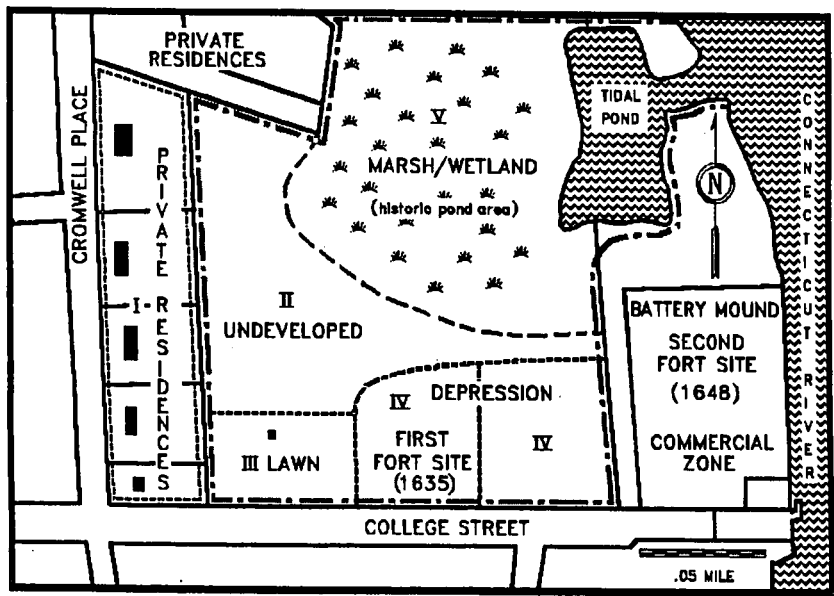


Figure 2. A map of site zones at Saybrook Point prior to excavation. (Drawing by H. Juli.)

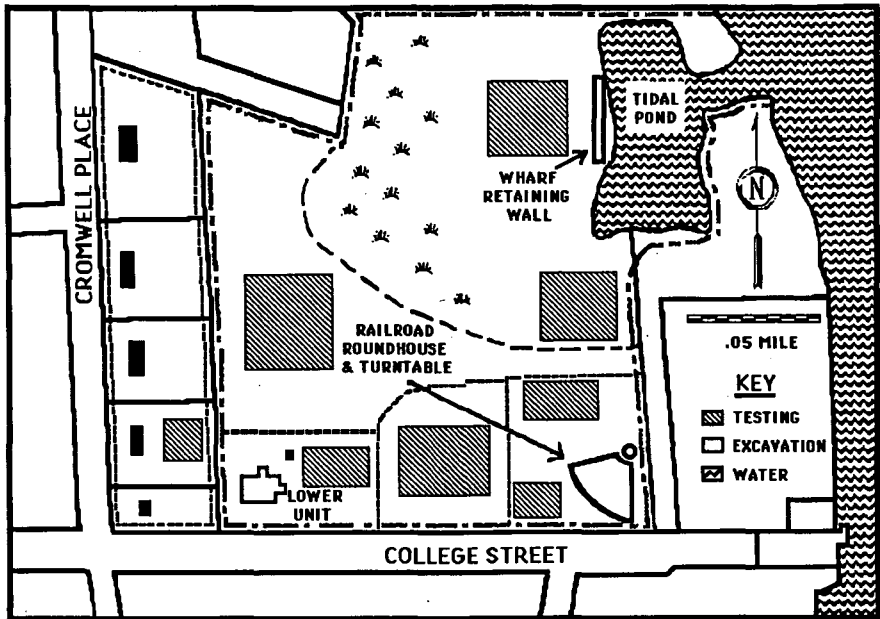


Figure 3. The location of archaeological testing and excavation units at Saybrook Point. (Drawing by H. Juli.)

in the mid-17th century, and the area's early settlement could be recovered, as well as information on the site's overall archaeological and exhibit potential. The field research revealed artifactual and architectural remains that were used along with documentary sources and oral tradition to provide the basis for the construction of a park interpreting the site's changing patterns of settlement and land use. The conceptual framework for the archaeological project was provided by a broad material perspective on the evolution of physical and historical change in a small Connecticut town. As used here, the phrase "material perspective" includes settlement, technological, economic, and ecological features that provide sources of information for historical interpretation and complement the traditional ecclesiastical, political, and ideational schools of American history (Novick 1988).

The eastern end of Saybrook Point between Cromwell Place and the Connecticut River is the site of the original Saybrook settlement established by Puritans in 1635 (Brainard 1961; Gates 1935; FIGS. 1-4). A significant portion of this parcel has remained open land since the 17th century, while the area along the river

bank has been the site of continuous development since the 1870s (M. Fine and Associates 1966). Residential building has also taken place along the parcel's western border adjacent to Cromwell Place. Before conducting archaeological work it was necessary to construct a history of the parcel to determine the extent of occupation, construction, and other modifications resulting from commercial activities, road building, etc. The methodology included archaeological survey and interviews and was supplemented by research in primary sources and other publications. Table 1 presents a chronology of settlement and development at Saybrook Point compiled using archival sources, interviews, and published literature. This research indicated that the landscape had undergone considerable modification, particularly during the last 100 years. These disturbances took the form of various construction activities, soil removal, and filling. Several areas within the site were determined to have the greatest research potential and were chosen for intensive archaeological treatment (FIG. 3). The results permitted an archaeological assessment of the site's history. This information was used to understand long-term patterns



Table 1. Chronology of settlement and development at Saybrook Point.

Year	Event/Site Condition	Source
1623	Dutch trading outpost of brief duration	Brainard 1961; Gates 1935
1635-1636	First permanent settlement, fort constructed	Brainard 1961; Gates 1935
1646	Lady Fenwick buried within 1st fort	Brainard 1961; Gates 1935
1648	First fort destroyed by fire	Brainard 1961; Gates 1935
1649	Second fort constructed on Battery Mound	Brainard 1961; Gates 1935
1649-1872	Open land at eastern boundary used as common	Dexter 1916; Gates 1932
1700-1800	House lots and common land	Oviatt 1916; Tinsley 1965
1790-1870	Wharf in northeast zone	Dexter 1916; OSHSR*
1871	Lady Fenwick tomb moved; 1st fort site removed as fill	OSHSPC <sup>†</sup>
1871	Battery Mound leveled	OSHSR
1871-1922	Construction and use of railroad yard	OSHSR; NH&HRR <sup>‡</sup> map (1918)
1913	Colonial Dames marker erected	OSHSPC
1922	Railroad service ends, buildings moved or dismantled	E. Heiney pers. comm. 1980; OSHSR
1930	Lion Gardiner statue erected	Statue with date
1930s	WPA landscape modification removes last evidence of 1st fort	E. Heiney pers. comm. 1980
1940s	Dock and Dine Restaurant constructed on site of Battery Mound.	
	Other recreational businesses established	Existing commercial zone
1980-1982	Archaeological excavations	Connecticut College project
1982-1987	Construction of Fort Saybrook Monument Park	Present-day land use

\*OSHRSR = Old Saybrook Historical Society Records

†OSHSPC = Old Saybrook Historical Society Photo Collection

‡NH&HRR = New Haven & Hartford Railroad

earthen embankment and moat. A drawbridge crossed the moat at the fort's entrance on its western side. Cannon platforms were placed in each corner. At no time did it have more than four cannon (Brainard 1961). In 1980 when site testing began, the documents, photographic evidence, and oral tradition pointed to the fort's location along College Street in the property's southern section (FIG. 2). On the property's northern border today there is wetland/marsh which was the location of Gee's Pond, the fresh water source for the early settlers during the 17th century (Brainard 1961). The property also is the location of a statue of Lion Gardiner, erected in 1930 by his descendants. The statue is situated on a lawn facing College Street, west of the original fort site. In 1913 the Colonial Dames of America erected a small stone marker commemorating the fort site. When excavations were initiated the property's eastern boundary was a road connecting College Street with the parking lot of the Dock and Dine Restaurant. The restaurant was built on the site of Battery Mound, the location of Saybrook Point's second fort, constructed in 1647 after the original fort burned (Brainard 1961; Gates 1935). Battery Mound, along with any surviving remains of the second fort, was removed during railroad construction in 1870 (FIGS. 7, 8).

## Site Description

Along with the area's well known history, several features of the contemporary landscape suggested that the site had experienced many changes since the 17th century. These changes can best be described if the site is divided into five zones defined by topography, vegetation, and construction history (FIG. 2).

### Zone I

The area consisted of five houselots along Cromwell Place forming the western boundary of the site. Modifications to the land surface occurred during house construction and garden and swimming pool installation. Archaeological testing was conducted in this zone, producing fragmentary remains.

### Zone II

The area consisted of land with a gradual downward slope as one moves north from the parcel's high point (7 masl). Although the contours of Zone II appeared to be relatively undisturbed, archaeological testing produced fragmentary remains and no architecture.

### Zone III

The area is a lawn containing the Lion Gardiner Statue. The lawn rests on soil brought





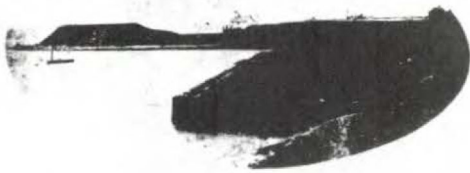


Figure 8. A ca. 1870 photograph (view to the south) showing the wharf, Saybrook Point, and Battery Mound. (Delamater, Hartford, CT.)

to the site in 1930 prior to the construction of the statue. The archaeological remains recovered from this area came from deep excavation units needed to reach the sub-surface historical features.

#### Zone IV

The area was a depression that appeared to have been created by construction activities. The preliminary research suggested that the original fort was located in this zone on a grade that was removed during railroad construction in the 19th century. The area contained sub-surface evidence of 19th-century railroading activities.

#### Zone V

The area is wetland/marsh overgrown with *Phragmites australis* and largely inaccessible. It is the location of Gee's Pond, the 17th-century source of fresh water.

The archaeological testing program at Saybrook Point was conducted using 1 m<sup>2</sup> units and a testing design employing simple random sampling with unequal proportions (Redman 1974). This technique is an appropriate procedure when a large heterogeneous area must be

explored systematically. The total area can be tested accurately with units representing a small proportion of the site, while limited areas with the possibility of yielding significant remains are sampled in greater detail. This procedure permitted assessment of the general archaeological potential of the site.<sup>4</sup>

## Archaeological Results

The initial excitement regarding the possibility of encountering preserved 17th-century deposits gave way to the sobering realization that no architectural remains of the 17th century had survived into the 20th. The site produced several unexpected discoveries, however, which provided the basis for continuing research and the construction of a commemorative park. These discoveries are discussed below.

#### Lawn at Lion Gardiner Statue

This excavation zone, located on the site's western border, yielded artifactual remains supporting the historically documented 17th- to 19th-century occupations at Saybrook Point. The lawn contained the 1930 statue of Lion Gardiner, thus the excavations in this zone were begun adjacent to the statue with test units located on the western edge of the lawn. Upon discovery of historical ceramics the units were expanded (FIG. 3). The resulting large unit was approximately 100 m<sup>2</sup> in area. Work here produced 17th-century pipe stems and 18th-century ceramics, along with assorted artifacts of the 19th century, including ceramics, glass, nails, and small metal objects. The excavated surface was 2 m below the present ground level and exhibited what may be termed small undulations, in a regular north-south pattern of long parallel lines running the entire width of the unit. The intervals were 60–90 cm, suggesting the pattern of small plow marks in a garden or agricultural field. This area is known to have been the location of 18th-century houses whose lots presumably contained domestic kitchen gardens (FIGS. 4, 5). Based on physical, chemical, and comparative morphological evidence, these

<sup>4</sup> Detailed descriptions of all phases of the archaeological testing are reported in Juli 1980, 1981, and 1987. The presentation here is brief, and summarizes only the major findings.

undulations are interpreted as surviving furrows resulting from 17th- to 19th-century garden plowing (Luce 1982; John Worrell, personal communication, 1982).<sup>5</sup> Historical research on the area's landscape changes corroborates this interpretation (M. Fine and Associates 1966; Dexter 1916).

### Nineteenth-Century Wharf

One of Old Saybrook's early 19th-century wharves is located in the site's northeastern zone adjacent to what is now a small tidal pond near the northernmost boundary of the 18-acre parcel (FIG. 3). Survey of the area's surface revealed small sections of exposed brownstone blocks along the west side of the pond associated with 19th-century artifacts at and just below the surface. Archaeological testing was initiated in this zone, the location of maritime commerce in the early 19th century. Maps indicate the presence of several docks adjacent to the north end of the pond, which was open to the river at that time. These docks were the property of local merchants who lived in the vicinity (Stiles 1793). In 1793 the site itself was the location of a dock owned by General Hart, a prominent Old Saybrook citizen (FIG. 5). Inspection of the area today reveals remains of cellar holes. Presumably these were buildings associated with maritime commercial activities. As is true for much of the site, this area was altered significantly by railroad construction beginning in the 1870s. In addition to documenting landscape changes, excavations in this area were undertaken to study the wharf architecture itself, with the initial goal of incorporating these remains as an element of the site's commemorative park. The recovered artifacts consisted mostly of late 19th-century ceramics, bottles, metal, and some faunal material. This assemblage probably represents domestic debris and food remains from adjacent

<sup>5</sup> To test the hypothesis that these exposed surface undulations were indeed plow marks, I consulted with a pedologist, Dr. Harvey Luce of the University of Connecticut. Bulk density analysis along with soil testing for pH, Ca, Mg, Na, P, and K indicated that this unit was a preserved old field. Dr. John Worrell (Old Sturbridge Village Research Department) also visited the site. He feels confident, based on morphological evidence and comparison with previously excavated preserved fields, that these features are indeed evidence of former agricultural activity in the form of plowing.

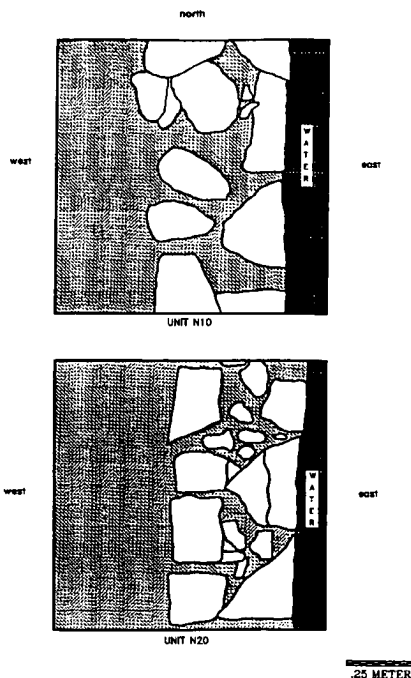


Figure 9. Wharf excavation units N10 and N20 showing the upper courses of brownstone construction. (A. Felmley.)

houses, deposited after the wharf was abandoned ca. 1870.

The archaeology revealed that the wharf was built in parallel rows both of roughly shaped as well as dressed brownstone blocks of several sizes (FIGS. 8, 9). At least one dozen courses were originally present. The wharf was built about 1820 when quarrying began at the brownstone cliffs north of Old Saybrook in Portland, Connecticut. Other 19th-century maritime structures have not survived in this area, but depressions between the wharf and an adjacent small cliff, as well as several cellar holes in the vicinity, indicate their location. Use of the wharf ended in 1870 when the Connecticut Valley Railroad constructed a track bed to its east, blocking boat entry to the wharf and creating the tidal pond that remains a feature of the landscape.

The comparative archaeological literature on wharf excavation documents two 18th- and 19th-century forms in New England. The earliest was a timber wharf developed during

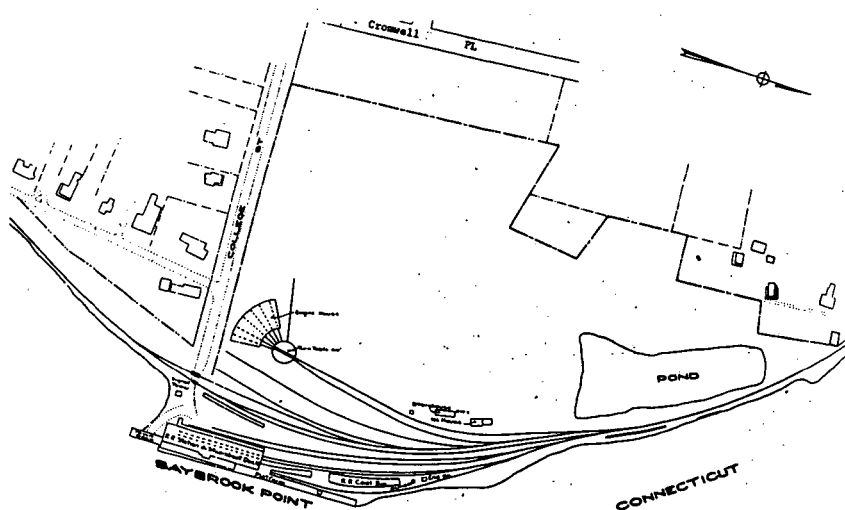


Figure 10. A map of the railroad complex at Saybrook Point in 1918 showing the roundhouse, turntable, station, and other facilities. (Courtesy New Haven and Hartford Railroad, Hartford, CT.)

the 18th century, followed by one of undressed and dressed stone construction (the form at Saybrook Point), built during the early 19th century on coastal New England sites (Small 1941). Examples similar to the form at Saybrook Point have been excavated at Derby Wharf in Salem, Massachusetts (Wilson and Moran 1980), and at New London, Connecticut (Artemel, Heintzelman, and Orlup 1984). The Old Saybrook brownstone wharf was constructed as three sides of a rectangle, at least 12 courses deep, serving as a massive retaining wall (FIG. 8). Presumably ships tied up alongside for loading and unloading. The historical record attests to a lively maritime trade in this area during the first three-quarters of the 19th century (Harwood 1932; Van Dusen 1961).

#### Late Nineteenth-Century Railroad Roundhouse and Turntable

Informant interviews and documentary evidence indicated that the site had also been the location of a railroad yard built by the Connecticut Valley Railroad during the fourth quarter of the 19th century. Maps of Saybrook Point during this period depict extensive trans-

portation facilities, including a combination steamboat dock and railroad station, rail yard with roundhouse and turntable, switching tower, coal bins, and other facilities of a support and maintenance railroad complex (FIG. 10). Comparison of historical and modern maps of Saybrook Point indicated that these buildings had all been replaced in the early to middle 20th century by restaurants, other seasonal recreational facilities, and parking lots. The historical information suggested that remains of the roundhouse and turntable might have survived and if so were located within the state-owned undeveloped property, presenting the possibility of archaeological recovery. Excavation of the engine house began with a trench 35 m long running east-west. This trench revealed the engine house back wall footing and several internal track footings. A second trench 10 m to the south revealed more of the internal footings and the back wall. Using this information and dimensions taken from a 1918 railroad map (FIG. 10), units were positioned to locate the four corners of the building. Two of the six bays within the structure were excavated in their entirety.

This work revealed the granite footings of a large, six-bay, one-quarter wedge-shaped

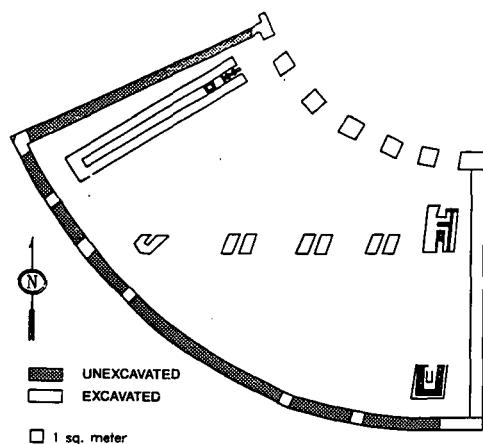


Figure 11. The railroad roundhouse excavation units showing the structure's outline and the excavation of Bays 1 and 6. (A. Felmley.)

railroad engine roundhouse (FIGS. 11–15). A local resident indicated that the building was dismantled brick by brick in 1922 when Saybrook Point ended its era as a railroad support facility. Passenger service had ended around 1915 (Ethel Heiney, personal communication, 1982). At the building's entrance, seven square footings or piers, 3 m apart, were revealed. These served as foundations for support columns and doors (FIG. 11). Each bay was constructed on a base of two granite footings 25 m long, set approximately 1 m apart. These supported the railroad track in each bay, which sat on low brick foundations built on the granite footings. The bays also contained ceramic pipes used as conduits for venting the engines' excess water and bins for disposal of coal ash. Structural remains of the turntable, which enabled an engine to be directed to the desired bay, were located 20 m north of the engine roundhouse entrance footings (FIG. 13). Excavations revealed a circular cement feature that is the outer wall, as well as the turntable's cement base. Artifactual remains were relatively scarce in the turntable, consisting mostly of coal ash and brick spalls, although some iron objects, including several railroad spikes, were recovered.

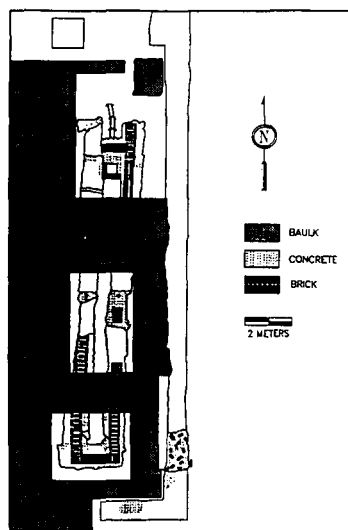


Figure 12. The roundhouse excavation units in Bay 1 showing the footings, brickwork, and pipe. (A. Felmley.)

### Archaeological Summary

The archaeological work included testing in all areas of the 18-acre site. It was determined that remains of the 17th-century settlement had not survived because of construction beginning with the railroad's use of the area in the early 1870s. Using maps, photographs, and informants, it was also determined that subsequent site alterations had occurred in the 1930s as part of Works Project Administration construction. All material remains of the original fort, some of which may have survived until the 1930s, were destroyed when heavy equipment was used to remove fill for an automobile causeway across South Cove, connecting Saybrook Point to the Borough of Fenwick. Most recently, modern house construction and commercial developments have continued what can only be described as an intensive and ongoing pattern of site modifications.

The site also yielded an excavated section of a sub-surface preserved house garden in the unit adjacent to the Lion Gardiner statue on College Street, an excavated section of the early 19th-century wharf at the parcel's northern border, and remains of the late 19th-century railroad engine roundhouse and turntable in the site's southeastern section. Work in these areas

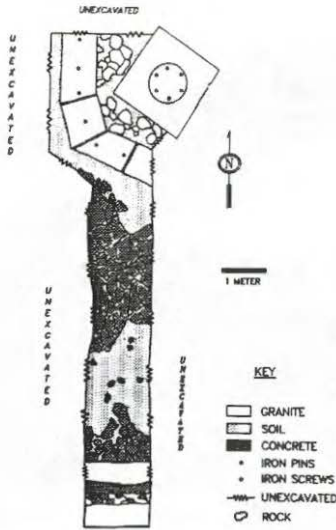


Figure 13. The turntable excavation units showing the granite turntable base. (A. Felmley.)



Figure 14. A ca. 1920 view (facing north) showing the rear wall of the Saybrook Point engine roundhouse. (Photograph courtesy Ethel Heiney.)

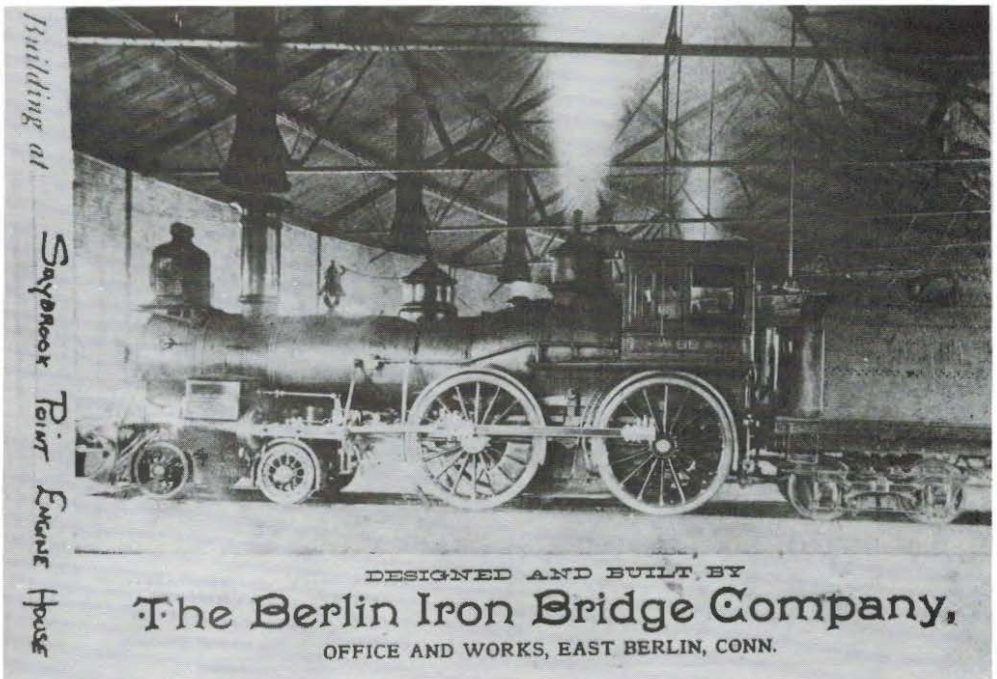


Figure 15. A view of the interior of the railroad roundhouse at Saybrook Point ca. 1920 showing the details of the interior roof, wall construction, and venting pipes. (Photograph courtesy Berlin Iron Bridge Company, East Berlin, CT.)



Figure 16. The 1965 design concept for the Saybrook Fort Park. (Frank Tinsley, Saybrook Point Monument Park Association.)

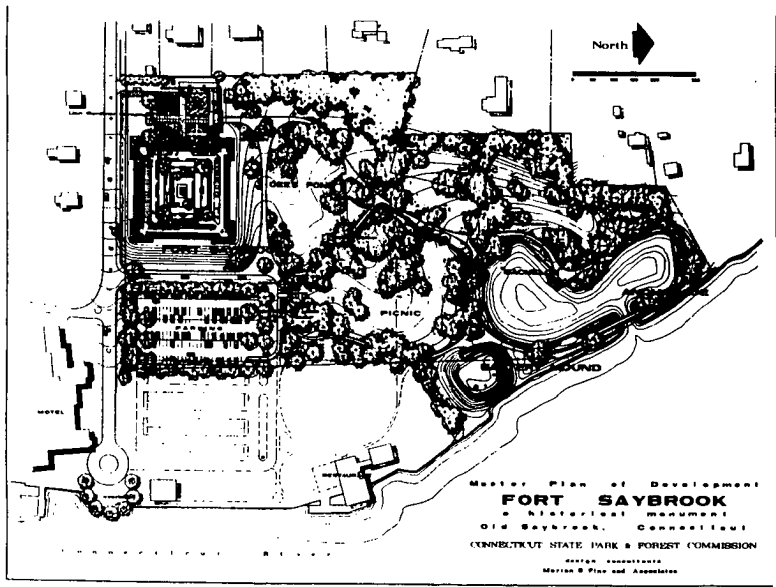


Figure 17. The 1966 master plan of development for the Fort Saybrook Park. (M. Fine and Associates; Connecticut State Park and Forest Commission.)

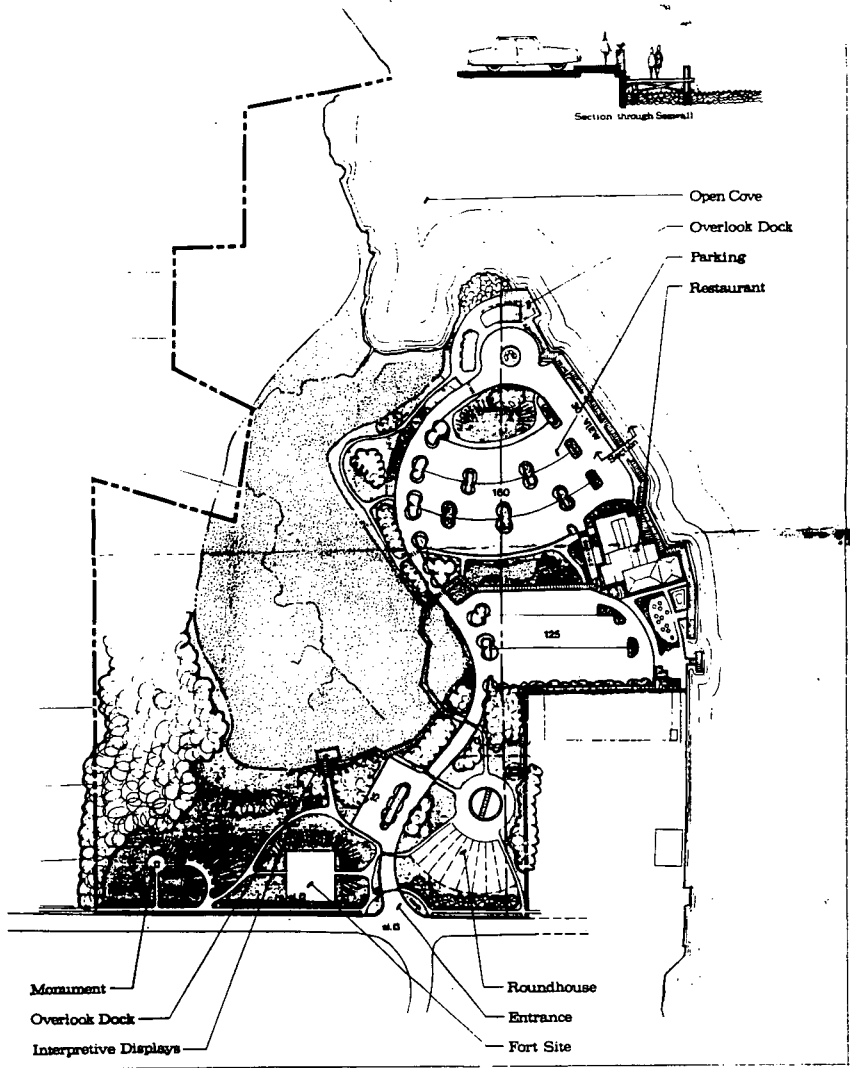


Figure 18. The 1982 design concept for the Fort Saybrook Monument Park. (W. H. Steward, Landscape Architect, Granby, CT.)

produced the foundations of the wharf itself, the footings, and bays of the roundhouse and the below-ground turntable architecture. The archaeological phase of the project brought to light artifactual and architectural material supporting and supplementing much historical evidence on the complex settlement history of Saybrook Point.

## The Fort Saybrook Monument Park

Recently, historical archaeologists, as well as historians, museum specialists, and planners have witnessed a growing interest in issues associated with the public interpretation of American history at archaeological sites. Several living history museums and park forms

have been developed, including major New England institutions such as Old Sturbridge Village, Plimoth Plantation, and Strawberry Banke, as well as smaller single-site historical archaeological parks such as Fort Loudoun, Tennessee (Kwas 1986; Mainfort 1986; Kuttruff 1990). The 1980s also saw historical archaeologists participating in important discussions on the uses of the past in public education, as well as a dialogue on the economic, political, ideological, and social forces that underlie programs of park and site interpretation (Gathercole and Lowenthal 1990; Leone 1981; Leone and Potter 1988; Trigger 1986).

At Saybrook Point the second phase of the project involved the planning and construction of an interpretive park that was to include archaeological information and architectural features. In this instance residents, business interests, and local officials supervised the planning, fundraising, and construction phases, with the participation of the project archaeologist, a designer, and landscape architect.

### The Process

For at least the previous 15 years, prior to the initiation of archaeological work, there had been considerable local interest in the commemoration of Saybrook Point's historical heritage through the construction of a park. The primary orientation of the initial plan was a focus on the 17th-century Puritan occupation. The 1965 plan recommended the construction of a park on the 18-acre parcel, the main exhibit of which would be a full-scale reconstruction of the original 1635 fort (FIG. 16). The 1965 design concept was developed largely by Frank Tinsley, a local historian and artist. This reconstruction was considered historically inaccurate as it proposed a much grander version of the fort than seemed appropriate given the structure's description in the primary sources (Ellsworth Grant, personal communication, 1980). This design concept was only slightly modified in a subsequent state study in 1966 (FIG. 17). In addition to the reconstructed fort, several other elements were recommended for site development, including a modest reconstruction of the second fort (1647) on open land adjacent to its original site at Battery Mound along the Connecticut River, and the re-creation, through dredging, of Gee's Pond, the

early source of fresh water. Also included were a colonial herb garden near the Gardiner Statue and parking facilities. Largely because of the historical inaccuracy of both fort reconstruction proposals, as well as vociferous local concerns about increases in tourism and congestion, the 1960s park plan was never implemented.

Beginning in 1980 there was renewed interest in commemorating the town's history as its 350th anniversary approached in 1985. Officials commissioned the archaeological study discussed here, and park planning began upon the conclusion of the field archaeology phase. Early in the process it became clear that there was a shared desire to interpret not only the 17th-century fort era, but to use the area's 350 years of settlement to best advantage by including exhibits that documented the site's complex economic, transportation, and commercial developments. As planning progressed two interpretive themes emerged: the history of landscape changes; and the area's major historical events. These themes provided a wide range of information for potential exhibits within several park areas, while also achieving a necessary political compromise among those planners and residents favoring one historical era over another. In the end the broad-based temporal, historical, and functional approach embodied in these themes was adopted.

A second issue in interpretation centered on the size and scale of the park. Again there was citizen, government, and business consensus that the park should not become a profit-oriented business attraction by incorporating tours, participatory exhibits, or concessions. It was agreed that it should be a passive archaeological, historical, and natural landscape park, in which the interested visitor might quietly learn of the area's past within pleasing and tasteful surroundings. Today, a mix of land-use types occurs adjacent to the park site, including businesses such as restaurants and a miniature golf course, as well as extremely well-preserved homes in a National Register Historic District. This meant that the park's design was important to several special-interest groups. The passive park concept was a widely acceptable form for site interpretation because it appealed to all interest groups. Local officials saw the park's development as enhancing an important town property and contributing to beautification and historic



commemoration. Owners of the adjacent businesses, which are largely summer oriented, felt that the park would be a handsome complement to the area's ambience, thus encouraging visitation and benefiting business. The local residents viewed the park quite positively with regard to its historical associations and saw it as an aesthetically appealing buffer zone between their properties and the commercial zone. The diversity, then, of the site's natural and cultural elements enabled the various local interests to reach a compromise on the scale, size, and nature of the park's final form.

After these fundamental issues of scale, form, and function were agreed upon, planning for the exhibits began. Based on archaeological and documentary research, several exhibit elements were adopted within a chronological framework focusing on the site's 17th-, 18th-, and 19th-century occupations.

The 17th-century fort site was the initial exhibit focus. Although the archaeological work had determined that remains of the original fort no longer existed, there was a strong desire to interpret the earliest physical manifestation of the town's history. This interest was reinforced by the presence adjacent to the original fort site of the Lion Gardiner statue, which was incorporated in the park as an exhibit element.

The 18th-century settlement was not well represented archaeologically, but a lawn area suggesting an agricultural common and an adjacent area incorporating natural wetlands/marsh, both of which were features of the 18th-century landscape, presented possibilities for exhibits as survivals of historical landscape features and locations for informational plaques.

The 19th century was represented by two areas with the potential for exhibits: the commercial wharf along the site's northern zone; and one section of the late 19th-century railroad complex, including archaeologically exposed footings and bays of an engine roundhouse and turntable located near the site's southeastern boundary. The site's 20th-century era (post-1920s when the railroad yard was dismantled) was not directly represented within the park. Adjacent recreational, maritime, residential, and small business uses comprise the area today.

Park and exhibit costs were funded through

contributions, the Town of Old Saybrook budget, grants from regional philanthropic foundations, and fundraising events. The project was designed in two phases for both construction and funding. Phase I was opened in 1986 and phase II in 1987. In addition to the exhibits, the park includes parking, a lighted walkway, rest rooms, and naturalistic walking trails around the site's wetland/marsh area (FIG. 18).

## The Exhibits

Saybrook Point has indeed undergone a varied set of settlement changes reflecting the area's growth and development. Archaeological and natural features sufficiently interesting to highlight these events were supplemented by a variety of interpretive devices, including newly constructed exhibits, landscaping, and plaques to create a small park that includes information on several historical eras, within an overall atmosphere that is low-key, ecologically diverse, and aesthetically appealing (FIGS. 19-23).

The 17th-century exhibit centers around a landscaped area east of the lawn, on the original site of the 1635 fort (FIGS. 20, 21). The original grade was recreated through filling. This exhibit identifies the early fort's dimensions and position as derived from a drawing and early descriptions. It was considered too expensive as well as inappropriate with respect to park size to reconstruct the fort in full scale, but a wooden palisade wall about one meter in height was constructed to outline the fort's shape and position as determined through historical research. Within the fort exhibit area there are narrative plaques describing the site's 17th-century history and its importance to the founding of Old Saybrook and the State of Connecticut. Within the palisade there are four interpretive plaques, while the park has a total of fifteen. Also discussed are early exploration, trade, Native American contacts, early land transactions, and the park project itself. The fort's western entry is connected to the adjacent lawn and statue area by a bridge whose walls are constructed of granite slabs (FIG. 20). Early accounts indicate that a drawbridge was used at the entrance to the original fort (Brainard 1961).

The 18th century is interpreted through an undeveloped area exhibiting wetland/marsh



Figure 19. A view (facing west) of a section of the fort exhibit, the lawn, and the Lion Gardiner statue in the Fort Saybrook Monument Park. (Photograph by H. Juli, 1990.)



Figure 20. A view (facing east) of the granite walls and walkway leading to the fort exhibit in the Fort Saybrook Monument Park. (Photograph by H. Juli, 1990.)



Figure 21. A group of interpretive plaques in the Fort Saybrook Monument Park. (Photograph by H. Juli, 1990.)



Figure 22. View (facing west) of a section of the railroad roundhouse exhibit in the Fort Saybrook Monument Park. (Photograph by H. Juli, 1990.)

ecology north of the fort and the lawn adjacent to the Gardiner statue. These areas suggest the site's rural nature during this period. Walking trails have been created around the wetland/marsh, and views of the area containing the 19th-century commercial wharf on the parcel's northern boundary are possible from these trails.

Nineteenth-century site activities are interpreted in the archaeological exhibit of the railroad engine roundhouse and turntable. Well preserved stone footings of a six-bay roundhouse with preserved engine cleaning ducts and water channels are visible, as are the turntable walls and base (FIG. 22). These elements have been included in an exhibit that recreates the roundhouse and turntable shape and scale at ground level. Plaques explaining local railroading history accompany this exhibit. The site's 20th-century commercial and maritime activities are discussed through the use of informational plaques rather than formal exhibits.

The park's interpretation of archaeology and history relies on several exhibits and natural features that present the landscape changes and physical diversity reflecting the complex developments at the site. The dominant features include the passive park concept, the historical plaques and statue, the interpretation of fort location and size using a bridge and small ground level palisade design, the railroad roundhouse and turntable exhibit using preserved architectural remains to highlight the building's scale and function, and the natural landscape of marsh/wetland and trails.

One important element of the approach used to impart information to the visitor is the presence of 17 plaques incorporating descriptions of events and individuals important in the history of the site. The plaques have been designed as permanent markers, most near ground level, with the informational surface set at a 45° angle. The plaques are distributed across the site, usually in clusters as appropriate for each exhibit (FIG. 21). The majority of plaques (9) focus on the site's 17th-century beginnings (see, e.g., FIG. 23), while four interpret various events during the 18th to 20th centuries. The remainder include information on the region's geography, Native Americans, the recent era of Connecticut River ferry traffic, and the role of the river pilots. When combined as a group, the plaques impart much information and also

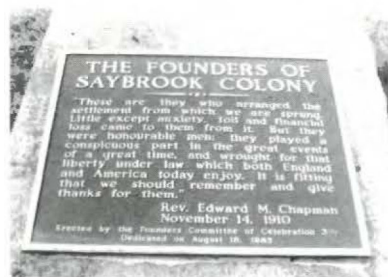


Figure 23. An interpretive plaque in the Fort Saybrook Monument Park. (Photograph by H. Juli, 1993.)

suggest the nature of the area's historical development from the 17th to the 20th centuries.

Two archaeological discoveries were not incorporated in the final design. One of these was the excavated section of a preserved agricultural field or house garden, revealed at a depth of 2 m below the present ground surface, under the lawn adjacent to the statue. Careful excavation revealed undulations thought to be the remains of plow marks indicating agricultural activity during the 18th century. The area remained largely rural during this period because of a shift in the pattern of local settlement. The center of the town's commercial activities was developing to the west, away from the early forts, in an area that later emerged as Old Saybrook's modern business district. Thus, until the construction of the railroad complex beginning in 1870, the original fort settlement area remained largely undeveloped. The excavated garden section was preserved as a consequence of the site's first episode of road paving in the early 20th century, when extensive fill was used to raise land surfaces adjacent to the newly paved road bed, thus burying and preserving the older plowed

surface. During park construction the excavated garden section was, of necessity, covered and seeded, as leaving it open would have encouraged deterioration and created an issue of public safety. Although it was an interesting archaeological feature, its exhibit potential was minimal because of upkeep costs and safety considerations.

The second archaeological discovery not directly used in the park was the excavated section of a brownstone wharf surviving from the site's 19th-century maritime activities. Several factors prevented direct visitor access in this area, including the proximity of private land and the issue of neighbor privacy, as well as the zone's intermittent tidal inundation. The tidal problem could have been overcome through the construction of an elevated walkway and small observation platform. Had such a plan been adopted, plaques and maps might have been used to interpret an important era in the commercial history of Saybrook Point. The problem of neighbor privacy and access, however, was an issue of concern to many residents, as several individuals had serious and quite legitimate concerns about public encroachment. In the end, the wharf was not directly part of the park design. A compromise was reached in which the visitor is able to view the wharf area in the distance from trails surrounding the wetland/marsh area.

## Conclusion

Like other exhibits of its kind, the Fort Saybrook Monument Park is a combination of much effort including documentary and archaeological studies, planning, construction, and perhaps most notable from the public's perception, presents a particular version of the past for education and appreciation. The initial project focus was research on the archaeology of a 17th-century settlement. As the site's complex history emerged, there was a necessary shift to the study of subsequent eras, which was appropriate given the nature of the surviving resources. These data were uncovered and interpreted, and they established the base for the project's next stage, the creation and construction of the commemorative park. Today, scholars and planners are aware that there are no value-free design concepts or interpretive programs. All educational endeavors embody

theories and offer interpretations, whether or not they are explicitly stated or even implicitly understood.

In the planning process the critical decision was to focus interpretation on the site's complex history, specifically a combination of the most important events spanning a period of 350 years. The planners used relevant archaeological findings such as architectural features to interpret the evolution of the settlement, the landscape, and the patterns of local history. In the minds of the planners, this site had an important story to tell, with certain facts and events having more prominence than others. Paralleling this point of view there were, of course, a set of practical considerations, such as funding, zoning, and traffic flow, to name only several, that had to be addressed and that often were crucial elements in determining the park's final form. As long-time residents with strong attachments to the community, the planners promoted a traditional, event-focused form of presentation. Through this approach a park was created in which the visitor comes away enriched by and comfortable with the area's past. At Saybrook Point, then, site history is presented in a manner that purposefully transmits the desires of planners and citizenry, but it should be noted that the park also reflects a modern and somewhat idealized perception of the area's historical and archaeological heritage. Finally, the park interprets the past in two forms: through the visitor's brief encounter with aspects of the 17th to 19th-century settlement, maritime, and railroading events known to have occurred in this locale; and through the educational, aesthetic, and recreational philosophy of the 20th-century historical and archaeological park. As such, the park speaks to the past as well as the present in its form and meaning.

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