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Trying to Think Progressively About 19th-Century Farms

Mary C. Beaudry

Recent excavations at a 19th-century estate manager's farm at Milton, South Uist, in the Western Isles of Scotland, prompt comparison with New England farms of the same era. Of particular interest is the material signature of the move toward "progressive farming" manifested through the construction of model farms and the introduction of industrially-inspired farm management practices and technological innovations. Comparisons are drawn between the Hebridean case study, Milton Farm, and the Spencer-Peirce-Little Farm in Newbury, Massachusetts.

Des fouilles récentes sur la ferme d'un gérant de domaine à Milton, South Uist dans les îles de l'ouest de l'Écosse et datant du XIXe siècle suggèrent des comparaisons avec les fermes de la Nouvelle-Angleterre de la même époque. Le matériel typiquement associé au déplacement vers « l'agriculture progressive » manifesté à travers la construction de fermes modèles ainsi que l'introduction des pratiques de gestion agricole et d'innovations technologiques d'inspiration industrielle offre un intérêt particulier. Des comparaisons sont tirées entre l'étude de cas des îles Hébrides, la ferme Milton et la ferme de Spencer-Peirce-Little à Newbury au Massachusetts.

Introduction

My inspiration for this paper is simple and straightforward and involves two basic points. The first of these is that I was stunned by a sentiment expressed repeatedly by several participants at the 1997 CNEHA workshop on 19th-century farms—to wit, that long-lived farms present too confusing an archaeological record and that archaeologists can only hope to make sense of the archaeological record of farms occupied for a brief period (i.e., single-period occupation sites). My second point is that for some inexplicable reason, archaeologists keep developing research agendas for farm sites that seem to overlook agricultural practice—that is, farming!

Terry Klein et al.'s essay in this volume notes the research objectives targeted by the 1983 California University of Pennsylvania farm symposium did not mention farming at all but instead offered a hodge-podge of research issues borrowed from prehistoric and urban archaeology projects. In Terry Klein et al.'s distillation of the results of the 1997 CNEHA workshop the consideration of change over time emerges as a critical research issue in farmstead archaeology, yet agricultural practice still takes a back seat to research questions so fond to the heart of urban archaeologists.

I think that part of the problem has to do with the failure to consider farms as farms (see, e.g., essays in Orser 1990). What I mean is that too many of us seem to think that here is another domestic site from which we should extract some potsherds that we can subject to various analyses that might tell us about social status, supply-and-demand, and urban/rural differences. All those fields, pastures, and out-buildings are sort of out there but not really relevant—or are they? I say they are, and I say that we need to give a great deal of attention to research issues pertaining to farming.¹ In order to do this we need to expand the way we look at farms to the scale and scope of what is generally termed landscape archaeology (here I mean in the sense of long-term land use history, not garden archaeology; see Adams 1990; Fisher 2000). This implies employing the range of techniques developed by landscape archaeologists for wide-scale survey along with analysis of the full range of documents, especially historical maps and photographs. It also means that we need to ask research questions and employ analytical methods appropriate to understanding the nature of formation processes at agricultural sites.

¹ A recent collection of essays on the archaeology of 19th-century domestic sites in New York State (Hart and Fisher 2000) reveals that this sentiment is increasingly widespread; see especially the chapters by Huey, Peña, Fisher, Rafferty, Sopko, and Affleck in that volume.

Ways of Looking at and Thinking about Farms

There is both pattern and variation in farm types through time, and it cannot be assumed that widespread adoption of any given agricultural regime results in an absolute homogeneity of farms within a region. Research questions we should consider in seeking to delineate both patterns and variants should focus on the patterns of farm development; the variety of farm sizes, buildings, dates of construction, and arrangement of buildings; typicality in terms of the size, wealth, and resources of each farm; the incremental fashion in which most farms achieve their organization; the prevalence in the 19th century of a rearrangement of farm buildings; and the recurring patterns of spatial organization and activity usage. In other words, farms constitute feature systems, a concept adopted from Don Hardesty's 1988 study of mining communities in the American West that adds conceptual scope to Adams's characterization of a farm as "a system with many subsystems" (Adams 1990: 101). The feature system is a group of features and objects that is the product of a specific human activity or enterprise; it encompasses associated structural features that may be widely separated geographically as well as the routes of movement that connect them (Hardesty 1988: 9–11). A farm feature system—the farm or farmstead as a whole—consists of farm buildings, fences, walls, trackways and roads, components of drainage and irrigation as well as water storage facilities, areas for storing and processing crops, and so on—in addition to the domestic compound or homelot. To properly comprehend how elements of the farm feature system work together, the archaeologist must be alert to architectural issues such as the siting of buildings, ways of linking and connecting elements of the farm, changes to farm houses (e.g., working ells, stoves and chimneys, set kettles, improvements in water conveyance, etc.) (cf. Hubka 1984).

It is also important to recognize that, as many scholars have noted, within farming culture there is a constant give-and-take between permanence and change, tradition and innovation. Thomas Hubka notes that farmers

enacted a strategy of permanence that involved reuse, rebuilding, remodeling, and incremental building, as well as whole-scale moving of buildings. He goes on to remark that "the characteristics of permanence and change in the [New England] farmer's attitude toward building construction were not in opposition but actually complemented each other. Together they produced a Yankee compromise between an unnostalgic, adding-on type of permanence, and a tinkering, tradition-bound type of change" (Hubka 1984: 141; see Stewart-Abernathy 1986, 1992 for an excellent archaeological exposition of the dynamic interplay between tradition and transformation at a late 19th-century farmstead in the Ozarks).

The literature of farms places great emphasis on decision making by farmers (cf. Visser 1997: 5), decisions not just about what crops to grow and how to grow them or, what animals to raise and how to raise them, but also about what buildings to build, move, tear down, how to arrange them, and so on.

Beginning in the late 18th century, many farmers were influenced by ideas about reform in farm practice (see Grettler 1990, 1992a, 1992b).² The effects of the Industrial Revolution on agriculture were experimentation and innovation, involving introduction of new construction technologies, advances in agricultural science, and a "Victorian design ethic" of applied decorative embellishments and a preference for the picturesque promulgated after 1850 through the widespread distribution of pattern books (Visser 1997: 7).

Here I present an admittedly fleeting glimpse at two projects on farm archaeology in which I am involved—one in eastern Massachusetts, the other in Scotland (FIG. 1)—as a way of trying to think about how to approach the archaeology of farms. I am especially interested in ways of reading the evidence of massive reorganization of farm layout and landscape resulting from innovations in farm management practices.

² Though the strategy of adopting alternative forms of commercial agriculture in response to crisis was employed as early as the 14th century in Europe (Thirsk 1997).

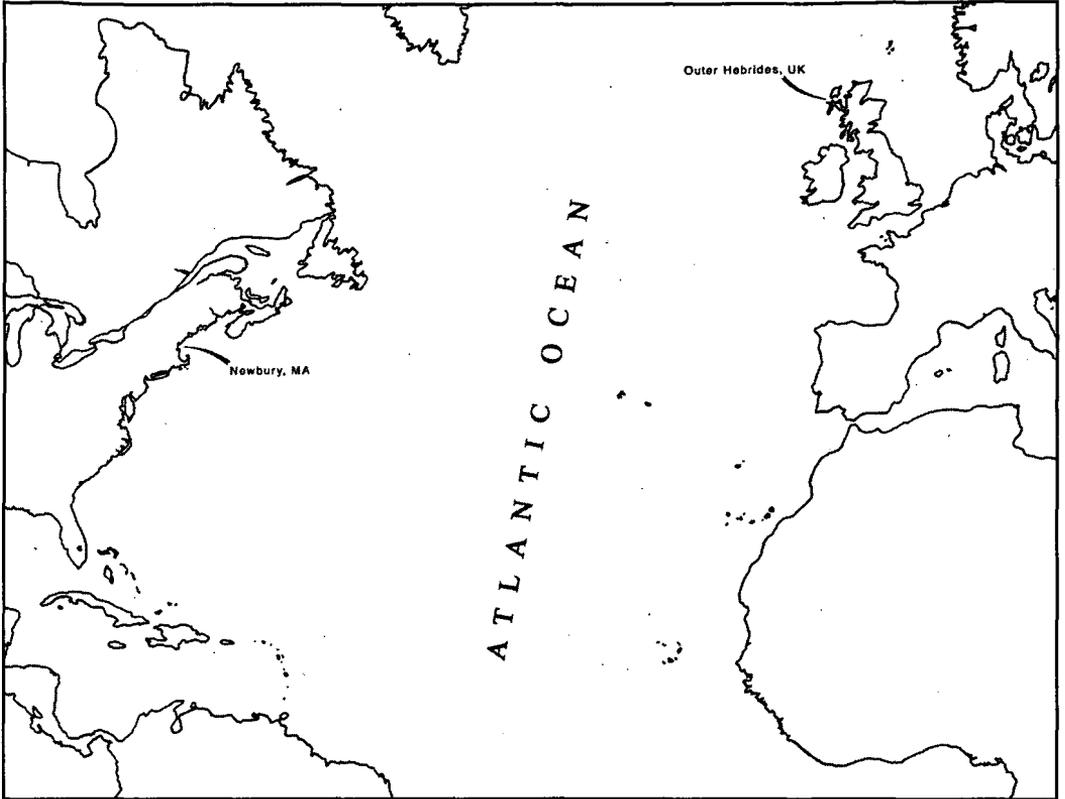
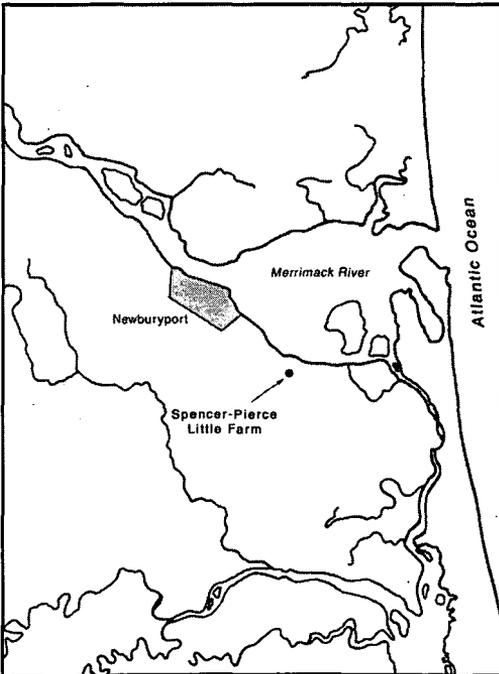


Figure 1. Map showing the general location of the two farm sites discussed in the text. Drawing by Stefan H. Claesson.



Spencer-Pierce-Little Farm, Newbury, Massachusetts

The Spencer-Pierce-Little Farm, in Newbury, Massachusetts, is a site at which I have directed excavations since 1986 (see Beaudry 1995; FIG. 2). Initially my research at this site was almost microscopically focused on areas of the homelot immediately abutting the extant late 17th-century stone farmhouse with later wooden additions (FIG. 3). Here I was able to combine my long-term research interest in the archaeology of historical households with the study of site formation processes and changing patterns of land use (Beaudry 1984, 1986).

The Spencer-Pierce-Little Farm has been occupied and farmed continuously since 1630, although the manor house that survives was

Figure 2 (left). The Merrimack River mouth area, showing the general location of the Spencer-Pierce-Little Farm as a shaded oval. (Drawing by Stefan H. Claesson.)



Figure 3 (left). SPL House illustration.

not constructed until ca. 1690 (for more detailed summaries of the history of the property, see Beaudry 1995; Grady 1992). For much of the 17th century the farm was used for commercial livestock raising and was worked by tenants (cf. Allen 1982: 82–116). The Peirce family owned the farm from the mid-1660s

Figure 4 (below). Titcomb 1812 plan of the layout of Spencer-Peirce-Little Farm.

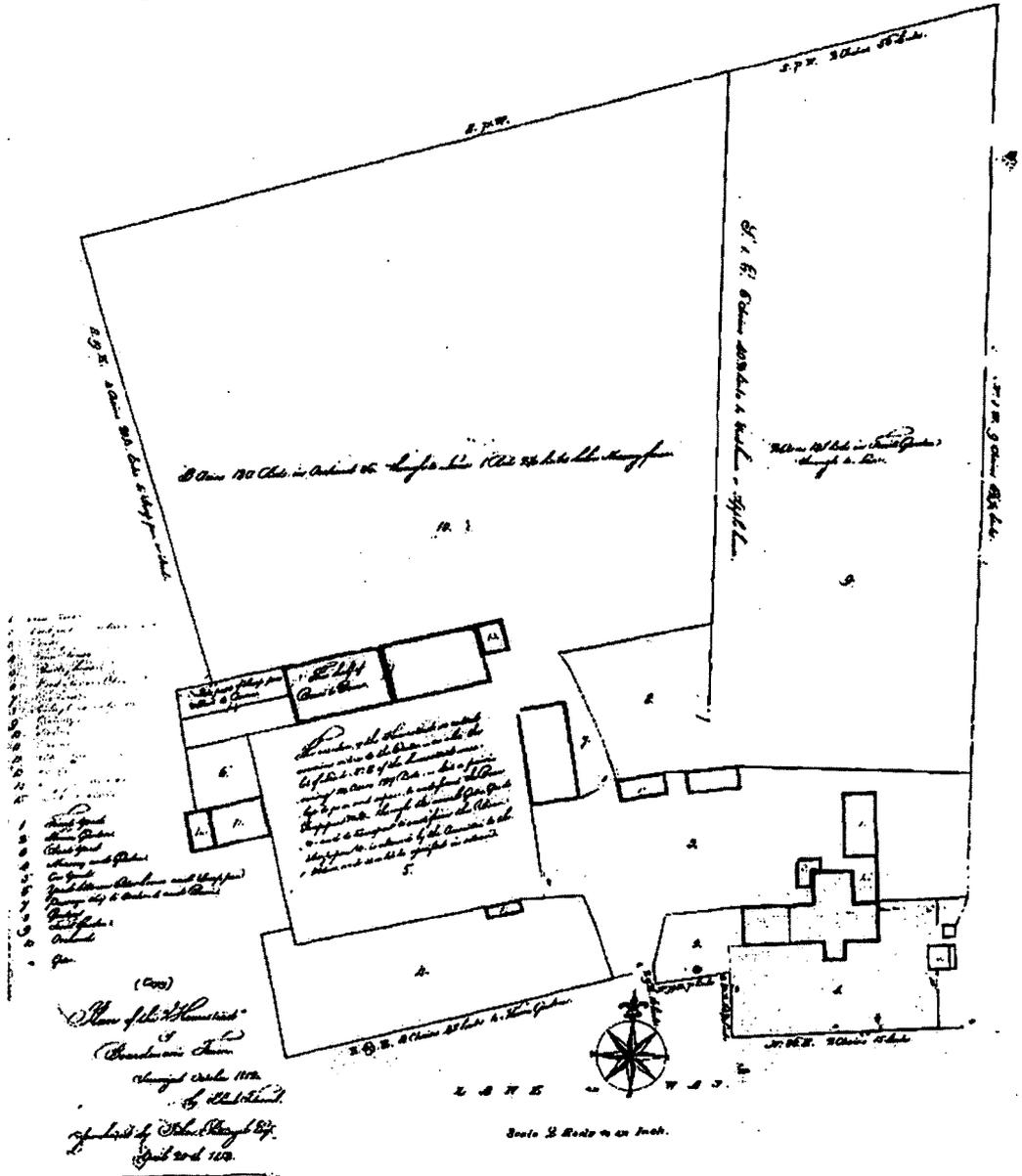




Figure 5. An 1870s stereograph view of Edward Henry Little's range of cart sheds along the northern boundary of the farm yard; these replaced the Apple House and Wood House (old) depicted on the 1812 Titcomb plan. Photograph by Reed of Newburyport, ca. 1870. Courtesy of the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities.

until 1778, and generations of Peirces throughout the 18th century practiced a mixed form of agriculture; there is no indication of any dramatic efforts at innovation or experimentation (probably because it was not necessary, so long as the farm was profitable). After 1778, however, the farm became the country seat for a succession of wealthy merchants, at least some of whom were interested in agricultural reform. Nathaniel Tracy, who purchased the farm in 1778 and took up full-time residence there after 1786, was a member of the Massachusetts Society for the Promotion of Agriculture (Pendleton 1990). Membership in the MSPA was more a sign of recognized status and shared political persuasion among Boston's powerful mercantile elite than it was an indication of active agricultural and horticultural pursuits however (Thornton 1989), so it is unclear whether Tracy made any efforts at agricultural experimentation and reform during his tenure at the farm. (He retired there in reduced circumstances and hence may have had neither the funds nor the heart to follow progressive agriculture; see Beaudry 1998a). Tracy's successor, Offin Boardman, was also a merchant who craved a country seat and tried his hand at farming; he purchased the farm in 1795 and lived there from 1797 to 1811. He seems to have been very active in reorganizing the farm layout and in constructing new outbuildings; when his widow sold the property after his death, a plan of the farm was drawn up. This 1812

plan is the earliest document providing details of the layout of the property (FIG. 4). The accumulating evidence of multiple seasons of excavations suggests that much of what we see on this plan can be attributed to Boardman (Beaudry 1996, 1998a).

From 1811 to 1850 the farm had absentee owners and was operated by tenants; archaeological evidence hints that during these years few improvements were made to the farm infrastructure and that barns and outbuildings slowly deteriorated through neglect (Mascia 1994). It was not until after 1850, when long-term tenant Edward Henry Little was able to purchase the farm, that changes were again made. Little waited until he had paid off his mortgage to undertake a sweeping reorganization of the farmyard, tearing down dilapidated service buildings, building a new range of carriage sheds (FIG. 5) and elaborate fencing, refurbishing old barns, planting new trees along the drive leading into the farm and against the fences enclosing the homelot, and so on.

The changes to the farmyard went hand-in-hand with renovations to the house. The scullery was torn down and a new kitchen installed, complete with set kettle, bake oven, and sink to which water could be pumped from a newly constructed cistern. By the mid-1870s even the living room had been redecorated in the latest fashion. The changes Edward Henry Little undertook have been discussed in publications by Sara Mascia³ (Mascia 1994, 1996), and subsequent field seasons continue to amplify our understanding of the extent and nature of Little's implementation of the principles of farm reform (e.g., Beaudry 1996, 1998b; Beaudry and White 1996; Wheeler 1999).

While from the outset the research design for the Spencer-Peirce-Little Project set out dual levels for investigation of the homelot vs. the overall farm, almost all of the fieldwork we undertook focused on the immediate environs of the farm house (Beaudry 1995, 1997). Only after the evidence of many successive field

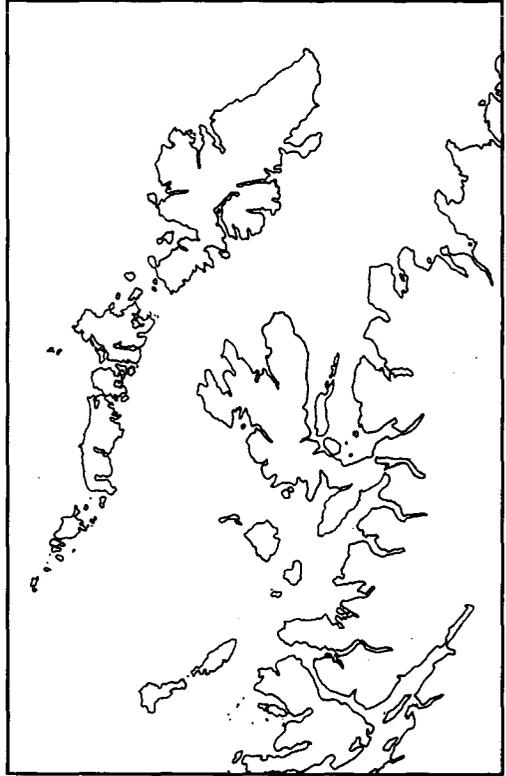
³ Mascia was the first to perceive the potential for using archaeological data as one line of evidence for examining the material manifestations of Little's transition from tenant to farmer, and her work was instrumental in broadening the scope of the research from the level of household to farm.

seasons accumulated was it possible to address certain questions about how farm practice was reflected archaeologically, and this in large measure was because Little's reform of the farm was so exhaustive that it encompassed, insofar as we can tell, every element of the farm feature system, including the house and homelot (Mascia 1994, 1996).

Our attempts to examine changing field boundaries and land-use practices at the farm employed systematic walkover and surface collection in the plowed fields at the farm (described in detail in Beaudry 1992; 1995: 42); those in hay or left fallow we have surveyed using various geophysical prospecting techniques. The geophysical surveys were often conducted as student projects or field practicums for the Remote Sensing in Archaeology class offered regularly at Boston University, so the results have been variable, and reports on the results are often lacking. Over the years, however, I have worked closely with at least half a dozen remote sensing experts, testing the efficacy of different types of instruments (e.g., resistivity, magnetometry, ground-penetrating radar) under a range of conditions (i.e., wet vs. dry soil and almost everything in between), and learning through trial and error about what the interval between readings should be. My own experience as a non-expert has been reinforced by the observations of those who are experts: the most productive sampling grid for locating features within known sites has consistently proved to be one that allows for readings to be taken at 50-cm intervals (Kenneth K. Kvamme, personal communication, 1998). This may not be the most efficient remote sensing technique for finding previously unidentified sites within a region or large area, but it is the most informative way of conducting a non-intrusive survey of the internal organization of known sites, especially house lots, gardens, and so forth.

In only one area of the farm have we conducted extensive shovel testing as a follow-up to geophysical survey; this was a large field just north of the homelot, labeled on figure 4 as "Fruit Garden." A portion of this area was to be developed as a septic drain field serving the visitors' center in the renovated Carriage Shed. Our survey of the "Fruit Garden" began

Figure 6. The west coast of Scotland showing South Uist and the Western Isles. Drawing by Stefan H. Claesson.



with several passes of the ground-penetrating radar unit, but its antenna proved to be taking readings at too great a depth to be of use to us (although we did get a nice profile of the bedrock). The survey with the proton magnetometer, readings taken at 50-60 cm intervals, was more informative. What we expected to find were anomalies that could be identified as planting holes from fruit trees and post holes denoting fence lines. Results of the magnetometer survey failed to reveal any of either feature type; rather, we observed a series of strong linear anomalies along the north and east edges of the survey area that, upon testing, proved to be in one case the base of a stone wall, and, in other cases, odd-seeming

⁴ Flora MacDonald is revered as a great Scottish folk heroine for the role she played in helping Bonnie Prince Charlie (Prince Charles Edward Stuart, claimant to the throne of England) escape from English forces pursuing him after he and his supporters were defeated at the Battle of Culloden in 1746 (Mitchison 1982: 341-342; Symonds 1997).

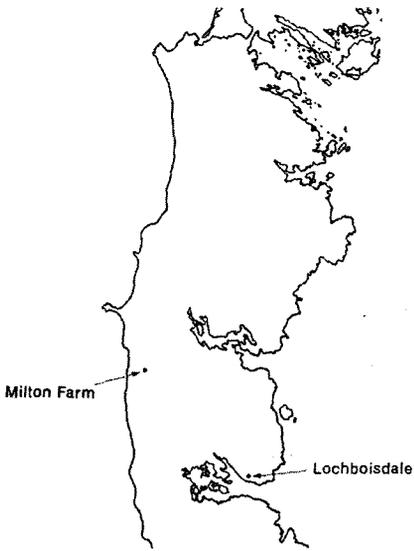


Figure 7. South Uist Map

stone platforms capped with clay. Two similar features had been found previously to the south, closer to the fence along the north boundary of the home lot, but finding multiple examples of these features brought us no closer to identifying them. Subsequently, a systematic shovel-test-pit survey of the entire field (at 7-m intervals) revealed no additional features in the former "Fruit Garden." In the end it was possible for construction of the septic leaching field to avoid the stone platform features (Beaudry 1997). We do not understand why what we assumed was once an orchard should have left no archaeological trace, but the combination of exploratory techniques we employed (along with monitoring during construction) gives us a high level of confidence that there were no features here of importance that we failed to detect.

What we have learned over the years at SPL is that we need to operate at different scales in our investigations of the farm as a whole as opposed to our teaspoonful approach to the immediate homelot, and that we would have profited by coordinating the household-level investigations of the homelot at a much earlier point in the research. This comes as no real surprise, but it has had a profound effect on how I approached a 19th-century farm in Scotland.

Milton Farm, South Uist, Outer Hebrides, Scotland

In 1998 I directed a Boston University field school in collaboration with Sheffield University's Flora MacDonald Project on South Uist, in the Outer Hebrides of Scotland (FIG. 6). The Flora MacDonald Project, directed by James Symonds, is examining the township of Milton, birthplace of Flora MacDonald⁴ (Symonds 1997, 1999a, 1999b, 2000a, 2000b). The broad goals of the project are to investigate the development of Highland folk culture, material life, and landscapes during the rise and breakup of the clan system and to assess the effects of the Highland Clearances upon both those who stayed in the Hebrides and those who emigrated, willingly or otherwise, to North America. For this reason Symonds's research is closely coordinated with its Canadian counterpart, the Highland Settlers Project, being conducted by the University College of Cape Breton and the Nova Scotia Highland Village Society (Symonds 1997: 307).

My role in the project's 1998 field season involved overseeing the investigation of part of Milton Farm (Beaudry 1999, 2000; Beaudry and Symonds 1999), an estate manager's farm established in the early 19th century through consolidation of parcels of land formerly worked by farm families (sub-tenants) who were forcibly evicted during the Clearances (Symonds 1999a: 111) (FIGS. 7, 8). Milton is one of several large farms created to facilitate the shift to sheep farming (Badcock 1997: 8); the three farms recorded thus far—Milton, Askemish, and Bornish—bear striking similarities that are indicative of attempts to impose a rationalized and systematized approach to farming rooted in capitalism, eschewing traditional agrarian values (Badcock 1997: 17).

Under the clan system, the territory on which Milton Farm was established as a "tack", or large landholding assigned by the clan chief to a kinsman; the tacksman in turn sublet to tenants:

The essential feature of that system was that it depended on land being laid out to ensure the continued existence of the clan as a socially unified and militarily effec-



Figure 8. Milton House, front elevation. Photograph by Mary C. Beaudry. Camera faces southwest.

tive organisation, considerations of agricultural efficiency being of decidedly secondary importance. Most of a clan's territorial possessions were consequently held by tacksmen, an essentially military caste for whom courage and prowess in war were the ultimate virtues. Tacksmen were generally kinsmen of the chief to whom they paid only a nominal rent for their farms—on the understanding that their principal role was to provide him with skilled soldiers rather than with cash. Inordinately conscious of their status as the *daoine uaisle* or gentlemen of the clan, most tacksmen did not deign to soil their hands with the day to day tasks of farming, a role assigned to the subtenants to whom the tacksmen sublet the greater po[r]tion of their farms or to the cottars and mailers who, as the subtenants of the subtenants, constituted the lower orders of the clan. (Hunter 1976: 9)

⁵ The so-called blackhouse was a traditional housing form erected and owned by tenants, with "walls of double thickness, built of clay-mortared stone or drystone and turf, with thatched roofs" (Fenton 1995: 24). There is considerable debate about the origins of the term *blackhouse* (*tigh dubh* in Gaelic); they were never called this before the introduction in the 1850s of new buildings of a mainland type (*ibid.*). "The Hebridean black-house with its double walls and central fireplace is an example of the short type of long-house, rarely longer than required to hold house and byre end to end" (Fenton 1999: 199, 201). Rural historian Alexander Fenton (1995: 25–26) notes that there is considerable variation among blackhouses and that they changed over time; the most characteristic features of this house type, however, were double-wall construction, elongated subrectangular plan, thatched roof, single entryway, byre at one end, and lack of chimney or windows.

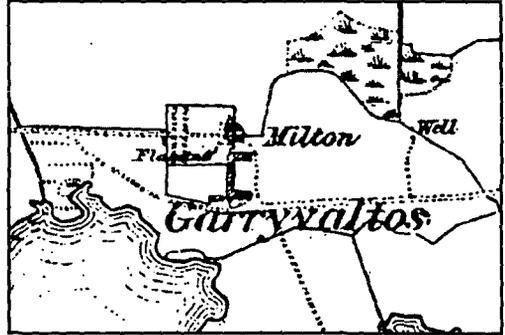


Figure 9. Detail of the 1881 Ordnance Survey Map of South Uist showing the area of Milton farm. North is to the top.



Figure 10. Excavations in progress in Milton front garden, 1998. Ninian Stein and Sandra Buerger record a field drain; the garden wall can be seen in the background. Photograph by Mary C. Beaudry, camera faces north.

By the late 18th century, however, the profit motive overrode traditional values in kin-based relations, and military might was no longer of prime importance to the clan chiefs. The old system based on the "bonds of kinship and mutual obligation on which the clan was based effectively precluded the introduction of impersonal money relationships" (*ibid.*) and

hence prevented chiefs from profiting from cash rents or from full exploitation of the agricultural potential of the land. This was overcome through “reforms” that swept away the old system and opened up the tacks for rent to the “men who were willing and able to work [the land] efficiently and to pay a realistic money rent for the privilege of so doing” (Hunter 1976: 9–10). Tacksmen naturally objected to these changes, and many migrated to North America; the new scheme of things, based on large, efficiently-run estate farms often let to Lowland Scots or other incomers, slowly diminished the role played by the subtenants, eventually rendering people who traditionally had worked the land no more than “an element in a calculation of profit and loss” (Hunter 1976: 14).

Because Milton was always a tack, therefore, records pertaining to its operation were not kept by the estate managers for the clan chiefs or subsequent owners of the island; to date, no private papers of lessees who occupied and ran Milton Farm have come to hand (cf. Beaudry 2001). For this reason, it is not clear when Milton House was built; but it seems likely that the extant (albeit ruinous) three-story dwelling was erected ca. 1830 (Badcock 1997).

Creating farms like Milton required extensive landscape modification, especially ditching and draining the peaty blacklands and constructing miles of stone walls. The farm house at Milton (FIG 8) was enormous compared to the traditional blackhouses⁵ that hunkered into the landscape; it intruded vertically upon the landscape in much the same way the farm’s stone fences intruded across older field systems and earlier boundaries (Badcock 1997: 26; Lund and Warren 1997). Apart from the sheer bulk and verticality of Milton House itself, Milton Farm is remarkable for its extensive range of well-built barns and for its enclosed front garden (Badcock 1997: 10, 17–23), all of which still stand, albeit in highly variable states of repair.

In 1998 I directed test excavations within the walled front garden at Milton Farm (FIGS. 9, 10). Here we sought to determine what specific alterations to the landscape were made to prepare for the construction of the farm and the shift to large-scale sheep farming (Hunter 1976: 40). We were interested in the purpose of the walled garden. Anna Badcock, a member of the Flora MacDonald Project team, comments that “the walls are a stamp of authority, a physical and cognitive barrier and a hallmark of survey and measurement” (Badcock 1997: 26). The walls were also intended to convey a sense of permanence. So certainly the vast walled garden served an ideological purpose, but Uist residents have canily subverted the messages of authority and power Milton’s front garden intended to convey. They have done this by passing down in local lore the story that the estate manager who first came to live at Milton Farm built the walled garden as an enclosure for an orchard, not knowing that trees, especially delicate fruit trees, cannot withstand the harsh climate and relentless winds that buffet the island. The orchard scheme, it is told, quickly failed, a testimony not to mastery over nature but something quite the opposite. Hence the incomers are shown as foolish and ignorant, lacking local knowledge. It is a story still told with relish and a certain sense of satisfaction by contemporary Uist crofters. We wondered whether there was any truth in it.

From at least the 18th century, walled gardens were an almost universal element of English country estates of any size, and it is typical that kitchen gardens were so enclosed (Gray 1998: 114). The main purpose of such walls was for protection from predators and inclement weather, especially wind and frost. What is more, walls “maximize warmth by absorbing heat which is subsequently released overnight” (Gray 1998: 115).⁶ Both the spaces within the walls and the walls themselves can accommodate plants and fruit trees (i.e., in orchards or as “wall fruit”; Gray 1998: 116). Kitchen gardens at country estates in the Scottish Highlands are known from as early as the 1730s (Robertson 1998: 137) and had become a common feature of Highland gentlemen’s estates by the time Samuel Johnson toured the Highlands in 1773. He wrote that

⁶ Though it should be noted that some gardeners credited brick with better warmth-reflecting properties than stone (Robertson 1998: 133). The garden walls at Milton Farm are built of dry-laid stone.

“their gardens afford them no great variety, but they always have some vegetables on the table. Potatoes at least are never wanting, which, though they have not known them long, are now one of the principal parts of their food” (Johnson 1798: 94, quoted in Robertson 1998: 137). By 1790 gardens were present at every level of society in Scotland (Robertson 1998: 140). Since Milton was a “model” farm (Badcock 1997: 17), it would perhaps be surprising if the farm layout did not include a walled garden for growing fruit and “garden stuff” (Southey 1929: 76, quoted in Robertson 1998: 140).

Our efforts in the walled garden at Milton Farm began with a close-interval (i.e., readings made every 50 cm) resistivity survey. We plotted the readings and placed test units where significant anomalies seemed to occur. In the end we excavated four large trenches, and in each we recovered landscaping evidence of one sort or another. At the time that we conducted the testing, it had not occurred to us that we should consider the areas immediately within the walls as places we should investigate for evidence of “wall fruit”—indeed, we were drawn more to the center of the enclosed area than to its perimeter. It is now clear that, if we were truly serious about proving or disproving the oral tradition that the walled garden was constructed to enclose a fruit garden or orchard, we should have placed some test units just inside the walls.

As it was we uncovered evidence of a carefully constructed cobble trackway or drive bisecting the front garden, running west from the gate opening towards the house at the east. Before it reached the house, however, the track halted at another, narrower gate that opened onto a fenced terrace or apron lying in front of the entry to the house. We encountered a wall foundation running along the south edge of the drive and infer that a corresponding wall bounded the drive to the north. It is not clear how far above grade these walls would have extended. In two of the trenches we found drains; one was a French drain running east-west, the other was a well-constructed field drain, also running east-west. Thrown into the ditch excavated for the French drain were bricks, segments of lead flashing, fragments of roof slates, potsherds, and animal bones along

with stones—the remains of an earlier farmhouse and midden. The second drain, which we exposed near the “bottom” of the garden (the garden slopes east to west, with its lowest elevation to the west), had a side drain channeling water out of the garden, to the north. A careful re-examination of the resistivity plot after we had encountered the two drain segments led me to posit that there may be east-west drains at approximately 7-m intervals throughout the entire garden area.

We did not encounter any definite planting holes in our test units, but after excavation we noted in the profile of one trench a large, relatively shallow, bowl-shaped pit. There is a remote possibility this was a planting hole, but since it was not recorded in plan or noted as a separate feature during excavation it is difficult to draw any conclusions about it.

Our first field season at Milton Farm sought to recover and record data about the nature and organization of the farm and landscape modifications undertaken as part of its creation. We employed geophysical prospecting, an EDM survey of the topography and features of the landscape, and limited but carefully targeted test excavations. The overall results of our efforts offer little insight into the veracity of the legend of the failed orchard, but they do reveal that the landscape was drastically altered to make way for Milton Farm and its sheep-raising venture. The amount of labor devoted to ditching and draining the land must have been prodigious; tons of stone were quarried to construct the house, outbuildings, terrace, and boundary walls; and hundreds of cartloads of cobbles had to be hauled up from the beach to construct the cartway. There can be little doubt that the laborers who undertook these massive changes were displaced crofters forced to refashion their former holdings into an unfamiliar landscape from which they were, eventually, completely alienated.

Conclusion

An archaeology of farms needs to be geared towards what farming and farms were about, and should not be based on the transplantation of research questions from other subject areas of historical archaeology. We need to think of research questions and to

employ methods appropriate to this type of site. How best can we evoke through archaeology the working farm—the daily, seasonal, and yearly rhythms of agricultural work? What can we learn about the structure of the farm family and perhaps of its multiple income strategies? How can we link the individual farm to the farm neighborhood? An archaeology geared to the level of the household is not adequate for comprehending farms as farms; rather, what is required is a landscape archaeology approach that examines the farm feature system as an integrated whole. Ideally, archaeology done at the level of the household intersects with and enriches the results of the broader scale of work done at the level of the farm as a whole.

Nineteenth-century farmsteads are important because of what they can tell us about 19th-century farms. All the bits and pieces we excavate, the detritus of people's lives, is not important except that it contributes to our understanding of the people who lived at farms; often, however, it is the large areas away from the domestic compound (and all its concomitant "goodies") that have the most to say about farming. To tell the story of farmer's lives, we must focus on farms and farm work. Here I have shamelessly paraphrased David J. Grettler's comments on an earlier draft of this article, for which I thank him. Grettler (personal communication, 1999) also points out that our notions of "core" and "periphery" may need to be reversed when it comes to farm sites: "It may be that the peripheries of farmyards and farm fields hold the best clues to farming and farm life. The core—and all its domestic artifacts—is still important, but not the only place to tell the story of farmers and farm life."

To move towards an archaeology of farms and farming, we must stop thinking in terms of potsherds and think in terms of landscapes, and to think not just of individual features but of entire feature systems. And we cannot afford to privilege single-component sites over what was truly the more typical farm site—a farm was, and is, really, always a dynamic work-in-progress. And so should be our thinking about the archaeology of farms.

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