Connecticut’s Agricultural Heritage

Historic Barns of Connecticut

Connecticut Trust For Historic Preservation

Funded by the State Historic Preservation Office
State of Connecticut Department of Economic and Community Development
Connecticut’s Agricultural Heritage
An Architectural and Historical Overview

Author
Janice P. Cunningham
Historic Preservation Services

Connecticut Trust for Historic Preservation
Historic Barns of Connecticut

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Executive Director
Helen Higgins

Project Director
Todd Levine

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* All photographs, unless otherwise noted, are courtesy of The Connecticut Trust for Historic Preservation’s Barn Survey.

Cover Photograph: Toplands Farm, Roxbury, Connecticut
There’s something romantic about Connecticut’s historic barns. I don’t know if it’s the colorful contrast of the red of the barn against the green of the cultural landscape that tickles our fancy or the simplicity of its ‘form follows function’ architecture that appeals to our Yankee sensibility, but whatever it is, people enjoy looking at barns. Certainly the general public has a deep affection for our barns; since the inception of Historic Barns of Connecticut in 2004, we have had support from more than 400 volunteers that have helped us document barns across the state. I’ve had the opportunity over the last 8 years to speak with owners of many of the more than 8,000 barns surveyed and to a man (or woman), they all love their barns.

The Historic Barns of Connecticut project has evolved, just as the design and use of barns over the decades has evolved. In 2004, the Connecticut Trust Board of Trustees recognized that Connecticut was losing its barns at an alarming rate. Knowing that the first step in preservation is documentation, the Trust received a grant from the Connecticut Humanities Council to hire architectural historian, Dr. James Sexton, to document one hundred of the state’s most visible barns and write a narrative of his findings. That document is still the backbone of our research. It taught us the different types, uses and construction techniques of Connecticut barns, types such as the English bank barn and the New England barn; different uses, such as the ground-level stable barn used for cattle and the tobacco shed; and construction techniques, such as scribe and square-rule construction.

Since the initial study, the project has grown. We surveyed 350 barns in 2005. In 2006 and 2007, we developed and launched www.connecticutbarns.org, a clearinghouse for all things barns, including an online public database of Connecticut barns. We also started our barns workshops, which became instrumental to garnering assistance from volunteers. These two-hour workshops taught regular folks how to perform windshield surveys (taking photographs of barns from the safety of their cars, thus the name) and learn about the history of barns in the state. As a result, volunteers found themselves coming together as a community to help preserve something they cared about. In 2008, we introduced the Barns Grant. Funded by the Connecticut General Assembly, the Barns Grant provided money for conditions assessments, feasibility studies and structural stabilization. They were available to anyone with an historic barn that met a set of basic criteria. In 2009, we were awarded a grant by the Connecticut Commission on Culture and Tourism to document and do preliminary research on 2,000 barns. In 2011, we were awarded a grant to write a State Register of Historic Places nomination for 200 of the most significant of these barns that were not already listed on the State Register.

The State Register of Historic Places is an official listing of properties and sites important to the historical development of Connecticut. It’s both an honorific designation and a tool to further
preservation. Designating a property as architecturally and historically significant can encourage preservation, promote awareness, and protect a sense of place and character of our communities. In addition, sites listed on the State Register can qualify for preservation programs that include tax credits and grants.

One of the challenges to listing a barn on the State Register is understanding how it fits into the larger context of the history of agriculture and agricultural buildings in Connecticut. The following report is intended to help by outlining the history of agriculture in the state and discussing the development of Connecticut barns as they were affected by changes in crops and farming techniques, in building technology and architectural tastes. Researched and written by Jan Cunningham, an historian with extensive background writing about Connecticut’s architecture, with the assistance of Elizabeth Warner, the report weaves the story of agriculture and barn building into the larger history of the state, providing a background for our initial 200 nominations and allowing for future nominations of barns to the State Register of Historic Places.

Even for those who do not plan to submit a State Register nomination, we at the Connecticut Trust believe that this report will stand on its own as an informative and engaging chapter in the history of Connecticut. We trust that many will read it and learn more about their state, and that they will love the barns around them even more, because they will know them better.

Todd Levine
Director of Historic Barns of Connecticut
April 2012
INTRODUCTION

During the Great Puritan Migration (1630 to 1642), more than 20,000 English settlers came to Massachusetts Bay, the largest migration of English-speaking people in modern recorded history. Farmers, merchants, adventurers, clerics, merchants, craftsmen, indentured servants, a microcosm of English society, all were seeking a fresh start in a new and often alien world. The people who left the Bay Colony to settle Connecticut were equally driven by Puritan values and a desire for commercial success, a conflict that was ultimately resolved in favor of the ambitious, entrepreneurial Connecticut Yankee. Never quite sure whether New England was a “Howling Wilderness” to be tamed, or a Garden of Eden to be exploited, the colonists set out to create the Biblical “city on a hill,” a metaphor for their mission in the New World that became tangible in the settlement of many Connecticut towns. Transplanting Old World customs and traditions, they recreated the rural world of the English yeoman, using land policies that reinforced the class structure of English society and preserved the social order. The extensive, often wasteful agrarian practices they employed, however, put them at odds with nature and the indigenous peoples whose ancestors had lived in the region for several hundred years.

Connecticut had one of the densest concentrations of American Indians in New England, with more than 27 tribes living there when the first Europeans arrived. All members of Eastern Algonkian language group and loosely allied in different clans headed by hereditary sachems, they all paid tribute to the Pequots, the dominant tribal nation in the region. Unlike the hunter-gatherers to the north, southern New England tribes were agriculturalists, who had long since practiced seasonal mobility to fully exploit the diversity of the Connecticut landscape. Better nourished than their northern neighbors, the southern American Indian population grew at a much faster rate, reaching a density that exceeded that of the north by nearly 80 percent by 1600 (Cronon: 1983). Moving with the seasons for planting and harvest, and to hunt and fish, they prudently stored dried foods and maize in pit barns to prepare for winter, the “starving time.” By employing selective burning to enhance or modify their environment – girdling trees to prepare land for planting or to clear the forest undergrowth for hunting – they created better habitats for deer, bear, and other wild game that provided them with meat, clothing, and shelter.

European and American Indian world views were so diametrically opposed, especially over the meaning of land ownership, that a culture clash was inevitable and ultimately irresolvable. The European presence destabilized the inter-tribal balance of power, a disruptive influence further exacerbated by English intrusion into the Dutch fur trade. The series of armed conflicts that ensued ended with King Phillip’s War in 1675, a major Indian uprising against European settlement in New England. With the indigenous people decimated by war and disease, it was only a matter of time before their lifeways were eradicated, leaving as their legacy the land… a precious gift… and literally hundreds of place names throughout the region.
And those that came were resolved to be Englishmen,
Gone to world's end, but English every one,
And they ate the white corn-kernels, parched in the sun
And they knew it not, but they'd not be English again.

Western Star
Stephen Vincent Benet
Historical Geographic Regions of Connecticut
PART I

THE CONNECTICUT COLONY 1635-1780

Settling on the Land

Connecticut has an extraordinarily diverse landscape. Shaped by ancient geologic forces over millions of years, and eroded and polished by the advance and retreat of continental glaciers, it consists of three major geographical regions: the Central Valley and the Western and Eastern Uplands. The uplands are further subdivided into the mountainous Northwest Highlands, which have the highest elevations in the state, and the Western and Eastern Coastal Slopes along Long Island Sound.

The settlement of the Connecticut Colony took place in several stages and lasted for more than a century. In 1636 several hundred Massachusetts Bay colonists moved on to found Windsor, Wethersfield, and Hartford, the first English towns in the Central Valley. Known collectively as the River Towns, they were the foundation of the Connecticut Colony. On the coast, three other independent colonies, New Haven, Saybrook, and New London, were established in the 1640s and joined the Connecticut Colony in 1662. King Philip's War effectively ended colonial expansion for nearly a decade. Between 1686 and 1734, colonists settled the rest of the Connecticut River Valley and pushed inland from the coast into the Eastern and Western Uplands. By the end of the colonial period, the borders of Connecticut were essentially complete. The northern border towns of Enfield, Suffield, Somers, and Woodstock, settled earlier as part of Massachusetts, became part of Connecticut, and the last remaining unsettled region, the Northwest Highlands, was occupied.

The progression of settlement was largely dictated by the regional differences in the quality and diversity of Connecticut's post-glacial landscapes. The first towns were planted in the fertile Central Valley, a region which had a major navigable river with direct access to the sea. The rich loamy soils of the river terraces formed from glacial sediments were virtually rock-free; the meadows along the river banks provided acres of prime grazing land.

The sheltered coastline and fine harbors of the coastal regions owe much to the final stages of the last Ice Age. Protected from Atlantic storms by Long Island, a terminal glacial moraine that serves as a barrier island, these harbors fostered the early development of a colonial maritime trade. The extensive salt marshes that still grace these coastal landscapes owe their continued existence to the many rivers that empty into Long Island Sound. Sediments deposited at river mouths carry nutrients to nourish coastal mudflats and salt marshes, prime habitats for shellfish and birds and a major source of cattle fodder. Some marshes were diked and drained to create colonial salt hay farms; one in Guilford is still visible from State Route 146.

Glaciation is responsible for the “streamlined” hills of the uplands, through the piling up of glacial drift around projecting bedrock. Although more stony than the rich loams of the Central Valley, glacial till soil was still quite productive; in fact, these streamlined hills often supported entire farming communities. Laid out with the meeting house and a town street lined with homelots at the summit, with cultivated fields radiating out and down the slopes, these new village settlements literally embodied the Puritan metaphor of the “city on a hill.” A remarkable number of Eastern Upland towns originated in this fashion, including Lebanon, Franklin, Brooklyn, Hampton, Hebron, and Columbia. In the Western Uplands, Warren and Newtown are two of the larger hilltop communities.

In the more rugged terrain of the Northwest Highlands, the last area to be settled in Connecticut, densely forested high plateaus rise steeply above deep valleys that lie in shadow during part of the
day. Much of the high country is underlaid with hard metamorphic bedrock, land only suitable for pasture, but the valley soils are very fertile, especially in the Marble Valley of the Housatonic River, a fine micro-climate well-suited for growing wheat and other grains. Although the highest mountains exceed 2300 feet, in the lower rolling terrain of the foothills, which is more geologically similar to the Uplands, Litchfield and Goshen are notable examples of other streamlined hill towns.

Colonial Society

The preservation of a stable society was a fundamental goal in Connecticut. Accomplished through an authoritarian religious and civil government, this goal was reinforced by an Old World patriarchal class structure. Both the Connecticut and New Haven colonies quickly established government structures that were codified in Hartford by the “Fundamental Orders” and in New Haven by the so-called “Cotton Code.” Old English habits of deference created another level of social control. Everyone knew where they stood in the social order and deferred to their betters. It was made explicit in the annual seating of the meetinghouse, in the ranking of each man’s estate on tax lists, and in land divisions, and even extended to unwritten but accepted codes for dress and funerary display for each class.

The settlers of Connecticut were a representative cross-section of English society. Although there were no members of the nobility, the immigrants included people of every other social and economic class. There was a greater proportion of wealthy, landed gentry and merchants in the Central Valley, a major factor in that region’s economic development. Yeomen, a respected English class just below the gentry, were the only settlers with agricultural experience. Few had actually owned land in England. Like the poorer husbandman, yeomen leased manor land through various types of tenure (Notestein: 1954). In fact, the possibility of owning land was the major reason why many yeomen, and other “middling” men, such as artisans and craftsman, emigrated to the New World. At the bottom of the ladder were mostly young laborers and servants who often indentured themselves to pay for their passage.

In this agrarian society, where land was the primary basis of wealth, land policies were designed to reinforce and maintain the status quo. Land was distributed in each town with a careful eye to social status, thus perpetuating the old English social order. Although virtually everyone received enough land for subsistence, the gentry received the largest grants, often a disproportionate share. Even though they comprised only ten percent of the population in the River Towns, the gentry eventually owned as much as 40 percent of the land there. By contrast, the poorer half of the population in those communities owned less than 20 percent. Given the exceptional amount of land granted to the merchants in New Haven, in some cases as much as 1000 acres, the ratio there was even more extreme.

These grants to the upper class were not simply in recognition of their superior status. From the very beginning, the gentry and the merchants expected to be compensated and indeed rewarded for

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1 The term “yeoman” did not always mean farmer. Like the honorific “Mister,” it could be a signifier of station or class.
their key roles in each town: they provided the political leadership and, through their social and kinship ties to Boston, New York, and England, promoted trade. Their capital founded the towns, built the mills and ships, and was the major financial support of the established Congregational church and educational institutions. They lived in a manner befitting their station, one that is at odds with the conventional wisdom regarding the plain style of the Puritans. Although little is known about the early houses of the gentry in New Haven, except that they were thought to be “extravagant,” contemporary accounts described homes built for two of Hartford’s leading men, both later governors of the colony (Cunningham: 1995).

Squire George Wyllys, a manor lord in Warwickshire, was considered one of the wealthiest men in the New England colonies. A replica of his English manor house was erected in Hartford in 1636 by his estate steward and 20 servants sent by Wyllys from England. Supposedly John Haynes, a man of equal English rank, not to be outdone, built a house of similar size and pretension across the Little River a few years later. A further indicator of upper-class lifestyle is suggested by the experience of John Winthrop, Jr., who came to call on Connecticut Colony leaders in Hartford in 1645, only to find them in residence at their country places in Farmington.

The leading families of the River Towns often intermarried, developing extensive kinship ties that transcended town boundaries and even extended into the towns of the Connecticut River Valley in Massachusetts. By the eighteenth century this coalition of magistrates, merchants, and ministers, known as the “River Gods” in Massachusetts, became known as the “Standing Order” in Connecticut. Members of several generations of these families were repeatedly and routinely elected to positions in their towns; in colony-wide elections they provided most of the governors, lieutenant governors, governor’s assistants (the upper house), and other key officials.

**Colonial Agriculture**

The self-sufficient colonial farmers of Connecticut relied on a combination of English and Native-American agricultural practices. They quickly adopted the Indian custom of planting maize, beans, and squash in small hillocks fertilized with fish or seaweed. Although a number of European grain crops like wheat, barley, rye, and oats were introduced, Indian corn (maize) also proved to be an ideal field crop. Easily cultivated, this sturdy, disease-resistant grain was an all-purpose staple food for humans and animals; even the cornstalks could be used as fodder. Early settlers also laid out orchards for fruit trees and made cider, perry, and brandy. Hives of honey bees to pollinate the orchards were imported from England at an early date.

Space was reserved on each homelot for a few fruit trees, and perhaps a plot of Indian tobacco or flax. In the kitchen garden, the farmer’s wife raised several kinds of melon and table vegetables (peas, beans, leeks, cabbages, and asparagus) and root vegetables, (turnips, radishes, onions, potatoes, and carrots), often stored for winter use. Agricultural methods remained fairly primitive. Simple hand tools (flails, harrows, hoes, scythes, and sickles) were used throughout the colonial period. Hoe cultivation was easier in areas formerly occupied by Indian villages along the coast and in river valleys. Their old abandoned fields, especially along the second river terraces in the valleys, were more easily worked and much of the forest was already cleared.

Colonial farmers also raised cattle, swine, and sheep, although little was known about animal husbandry in this period. Although they provided meat, leather, and dairy products for domestic consumption, and the wool was carded, spun, and woven for clothing, farm animals were not sheltered in barns. Even in the coldest winter months, stock roamed freely, grazing on wild pastures and woodland (Wolcott: 1935; Lewis: 1985). In fact, early barns were only used for grain and hay.
storage, an old English custom. With so many free-ranging farm animals, fencing around cropland, common fields, and gardens was necessary. The labor and cost of building and maintaining miles of wood or stone fencing was shared, with each farmer required to give a number of hours of labor every year. Hogs became such a problem that some coastal towns moved their swine to islands in Long Island Sound. Some communities hired herdsmen to take all of the town's cattle to pasture every day, which eventually led to the custom of identifying earmarks to establish ownership.

Early industry was agrarian-based and primarily concerned with the processing of agricultural products. Most towns had necessary gristmills within a few years of settlement. Mill sites were plentiful especially on the major rivers and smaller tributaries and streams of the uplands. In some towns, millers were among original settlers. Others recruited millers with promises of land and compensation for grinding the “townes corne.” Brandy distilleries were common in the apple-growing regions. Tanneries were also needed to process hides and, eventually, fulling mills were built to finish hand-woven wool. Since there was a great demand for lumber for domestic building and later for export, the first man-powered pit saws were replaced as soon as possible by water-powered mills.

Central Valley Farming
Agricultural conditions were more favorable in the Central Valley. A mixed agricultural region, it was blessed by “great meadows” for pasturage and exceptional amounts of tillable land suitable for grain, especially in the great alluvial flood plains and river terraces of the Connecticut and Farmington Rivers. By the late 1600s, when subsistence farming still prevailed in most of the colony, Central Valley farmers were already producing a considerable surplus for trade. Travelers of the period often commented on the vast fields of grain in the Connecticut River Valley; one described the pattern of the cultivated landscape as “Hundreds of Acres of Wheat, Rye, Peas, Flax, Oats, Corn, & . . . . a beautiful Garden, variously yet elegantly laid out.” (Sweeney: 1985).

This passage perfectly describes the design of open-field farming, a traditional English land-use policy that was a common colonial practice in the Central Valley. Probably influenced by the manorial squires among them, settlers perpetuated an essentially medieval custom that turned out to be ideally suited to conditions in this part of the New World. Many, perhaps a majority, of the original settlers in the River Towns came from Essex, where open-field farming was still common practice. At the time of their emigration, enclosure had not yet reached this part of England. Although individuals still had their own homelot gardens and there were separately owned farms, with the open-field system, farmers cultivated large acreages in concert to maximize limited resources such as labor, draft animals, and farm tools. Where it occurred, agricultural bylaws were needed to regulate the practice; some town meetings were devoted to setting the time of the planting and harvest and agreeing on what crops to plant. While towns in the other regions discontinued the practice after the final divisions and allotments of land to proprietors, open-field farming persisted in the upper half of Central Valley region for the entire colonial period. One of the last remaining “commons” of this type in the state is located on the west bank of the Connecticut River at Rocky Hill. Under cultivation for more than 300 years and still owned by the town, today it is leased out for commercial agricultural purposes.

Other Central Valley practices included intensive farming methods and crop specialization at an early date. Contrary to what is usually believed about the wasteful land practices of the colonial period, the region's farmers limed and manured their fields by the mid-eighteenth century. They also did extensive draining and ditching to bring low-lying fields and marshland into production and were

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2 How many barns were actually built in this period is not really known, since prior to 1700, only a few barns were identified as such in probate records and deeds. It is likely that many farmers used haystacks or hayricks for storage.
among the first to use grain cradles to reduce spoilage. Their pastures were improved with imported English grasses (timothy and clover) to fatten cattle for market. Some towns began to be known for certain kinds of livestock or crops. By 1750 East Windsor was already specializing in horses, Wethersfield was noted for its onions, tobacco became a marketable specialty in several communities, and the first apple orchards were planted on higher ground along the borders of the region.

Building on the Land

When colonial farmers laid out the "grounde plan" of their barns, they were guided by Old World building traditions. Many were based on the country measures. One of the most common, the width of a barn bay, was derived from the span of a yoked four-ox team. Originally called a "perche," it is still in use today as the rod, the basic unit of land survey. Since dimensions were derived from such imprecise measures as "three barley cornes - round and dry - make an inch," (established in England by Royal decree), or from human proportions, colonial buildings laid out in even feet commonly vary by several inches.

English Barns

The oldest type of barn, the so-called "English barn," is still the most common form standing in Connecticut today. Utilizing the simple gabled form and rectangular plan of the Old World hay barn, it is also known as a “side-entry” or “eave-entry” barn because of the characteristic location of the wagon doors in an eave elevation, which was usually three bays long. In some of the earliest surviving English barns in Ledyard, Norwalk, and Newtown, a second set of doors on the opposite wall allowed wagons to be driven through the barn. A hinged pass-through or “weather” door may be located on one side of the main doorway, which in this period contained double-leaf doors, hung on wrought-iron strap hinges attached by clenched iron nails. Early English barns rarely had windows; the doors and chinks between the plank sheathing provided the only light and ventilation in the colonial period. The interior plan of the English barn reflects this tripartite division of the exterior walls: the center doors open into the wagon drive floor, which also was used for threshing and winnowing; and the side bays had tieups for a few cattle and bin storage for grain. Overhead bay lofts usually located in one end, had temporary flooring.

Framing Traditions

The heavy post-and-beam frame of the English barn remained the standard for barn construction in Connecticut until the late 1800s. Built of hand-hewn timbers joined without nails, its mortise-and-tenon joints were pegged together with wooden “treenails,” a term later corrupted to “trunnels.” The eave walls, which consisted of three timber-framed bays, were laid out and fastened together on the ground. Many hands were needed to raise these wall frames, which were dropped into pre-cut
mortises in the sills. Additional framing members included interior posts, tie beams, or girts, and angled wind braces or struts to prevent wracking. Because of the irregularities in the hand-hewn timbers and posts, “scribe rule” construction, the custom fitting of each joint, prevailed for more than a century. For ease of assembly, framing joints were inscribed with “marriage marks,” or Roman numerals keying the matched parts.

Other features of early English barns were low, dry-laid stone foundations or piers, and the absence of cellars. Dirt floors, often underlaid with flat stones, eventually gave way to wood plank floors. Barns were not painted until the early 1800s, when oil-based coatings were available. By then, at least the most publicly visible walls were painted red, still the most popular barn color in Connecticut, with a mixture of ferrous oxide pigment in a linseed oil base.

Some barn framing traditions had regional origins, most evident in the different roof systems associated with eastern and western Connecticut. Principal rafter-and-purlin systems, with vertical roof boards, some involving a ridge beam, were more common in the east, while common rafters, half-lapped at the ridge and sheathed with horizontal boards, prevailed in the west. Regional diffusion of these western building traditions followed the migration and settlement patterns of Connecticut families up through Massachusetts into western Vermont after the Revolution (Visser: 1997).

One of the more unusual innovations was the dropped girt. With this framing method, tie or collar beams were let into the posts some distance below the plate, as much as two feet, forming the bent into a rigid frame. This construction variant may have facilitated the transition to the later New England barn, a type that appeared in the early 1800s, in which a series of transverse bents are raised instead of the side wall frames. Although the dropped girt is not the norm in northern New England, the method was carried west by the Connecticut settlers of the Genesee Valley of upper New York State (Fink: 1987).

Many English barns were enlarged or otherwise reconfigured over time. A shed-roof leanto across the full width of the rear eave-side elevation, or a gable wall dormer over the wagon door bay, the more common changes, were combined in a barn in Deep River. The shed-roofed addition to the large English barn on Mile Creek Farm in Old Lyme gave this building a saltbox appearance. Leantos on both gable ends of the mid-nineteenth-century Webb barn in Wethersfield, however, may have been added during an early 1900s renovation (NHL, 1961). Some farmers extended their English barns in a linear fashion along the ridgeline, the case with one on the Cloverdale Farm in East Haddam. The facade of a cross-gable addition to a large extended barn on the Bristol Farm in Canton contains two sets of hinged, double doors, each pair is surmounted by a shallow pedimented trim board. In a restored

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3 Author’s Note: NHL stands for National Historic Landmark; the date indicates when the property was listed on the National Register of Historic Places. This annotation and “NR” for National Register and “SR” for State Register will be used in the rest of the document.
five-bay English barn in Easton, one of the two wall dormers has a hay door and both display ocular windows in the gable peaks.

Some of the early barns were attached to farmhouses in the 1800s. The more typical linear arrangement is identified by a popular, nineteenth-century children’s song, “Big house, little house, back house, barn,” but other buildings were connected in an L-plan around the farmyard. Both types are more common in northern New England, but a few are found in Connecticut towns, such as Granby, Stafford, Eastford, and Union, which are near the Massachusetts border.

Colonial Commerce and Trade

Starting about 1660, colony river ports became a great funnel that gathered up the agricultural surplus of the whole Connecticut River Valley. At this time, Hartford sat with Windsor at the head of navigation on the Connecticut River, and merchants in both towns prospered as middlemen in the colonial trading market. Hartford had the additional advantage of tapping the production of the Farmington Valley to the west, but both ports served as entrepots for all the towns to the north. Farmers in Hampshire County in Massachusetts shipped so much pork and grain that inter-colony roads were laid out in 1664 from Hadley to Windsor on both sides of the Connecticut River. In return, wagon loads of imported foreign goods were sent upriver. There was a brief lull in shipping until the upper valley recovered from the devastation of King Philip’s War and during the later Atlantic-wide depression that reduced the demand for the region’s grain. When crops failed in Massachusetts Bay in the 1690s, however, western Massachusetts grain was shipped through Connecticut river ports and relieved food shortages in Boston, further cementing trade relations with that port.

The region’s trading potential attracted experienced Old World merchants, especially from Scotland, bringing the Connecticut colony more firmly into the Atlantic economy. By the mid-seventeenth century, mixed cargoes of agricultural products, lumber, and furs were shipped to Boston to exchange for English goods, and at least one merchant ship went directly to England. Colony leaders and wealthy farmers, who often purchased shares in trading vessels that sailed from the river ports, also invested in ships in the coasting or Atlantic trade. Even Hartford’s first minister, the Reverend Thomas Hooker, owned a partial interest in the pinnace Entrance, which was berthed in the town’s river port.

By the mid-1700s, a variety of products were shipped from New London, New Haven, and Fairfield, Connecticut’s major coastal trading ports. Grains of all types, especially corn and wheat, tobacco, lumber, horses, and cattle were sent to the West Indies and exchanged for molasses, rum, sugar, and fruit. Most colonial merchants traded directly with the island planters; few participated in the associated “triangle trade,” which included the cross-Atlantic slave trade. The strong Indian tobacco originally cultivated in the Central Valley, mainly for domestic use, gave way to a finer, milder leaf
imported from the West Indies; when planted in Connecticut, this variety became a major export commodity in Suffield, Windsor, and Glastonbury. Accounts from Windsor show the brig *Olive* carried 12,000 pounds to Barbados in 1749. By then most Connecticut Valley towns had appointed Packers of Tobacco, essentially officials who inspected leaf grown for export. Middletown became the colonial center for the horse trade in this period; horses were shipped to the Caribbean on the open decks of special boats known as “horse jockies.” Connecticut flaxseed was much in demand in Europe and usually transshipped from New York. Imported goods from England were picked up in New York, Boston, or in the Southern colonies. Duties were collected for the Crown when returning vessels cleared customs at New London or New Haven, but smaller ships, 80 tons or less, often sailed up the Connecticut River and cleared at Middletown. By the 1770s, as trade duties imposed by Parliament became more onerous and coercive, anti-British sentiment drove the colonies closer to war. Overseas commerce virtually ended after the American Revolution began in 1775 and did not recover until the 1790s.

**PART II**

**AGRICULTURAL ECONOMY 1780-1850**

**Revolution and Recovery**

The American Revolution was a great hardship for the people of Connecticut and it proved to be socially disruptive and divisive as well. Connecticut was known as the “Provisions State,” but supplying the Continental Army, the militia, and near the end of the war, the French allied forces, was accomplished at great cost to the civilian population. With most able-bodied men in active service, especially in militia companies, people at home were hard-pressed to plant and harvest crops to supply the troops and also feed themselves. Many lost heart as the war dragged on and regional differences in the level of commitment and the degree of vulnerability became more apparent. Much of the burden rested on inland towns that were selected by the War Office for quartering troops or for commissaries (supply depots). With the British controlling Long Island and blockading the Sound, the coast and towns along the border with New York State were the most vulnerable. In addition to suffering almost continual raids from Long Island by paramilitary groups of Tories, these areas were under constant threat of armed invasion. Many residents moved inland after the full-scale British attacks burned town centers in Fairfield and Norwalk in 1779. Two years later, the invasion of New London destroyed all shipping in the port and left the town in ruins.

Peace in 1783 did not bring an immediate end to hard times. New England was particularly hard hit with an enormous war debt, with almost $4 million as Connecticut’s share (Van Dusen: 1961). Commerce and trade were unregulated; the new states operated independently, imposing crippling interstate tariffs that delayed the revival of the agricultural economy. Although conditions began to improve when the new nation settled its war debts and stabilized the federal economy, soaring inflation and depreciated currency depressed the value of farm products.

Some wealthy merchants and farmers had prospered during the war, but the average farmer was worse off than before. Continued inequities in the tax structure, based on the potential productivity of land and farm animals, overtaxed the farmer and favored the merchant and stockholder. Even though Connecticut was spared a farmers’ tax rebellion like the one in Massachusetts, there was widespread resentment of the merchant class, the backbone of the political Standing Order.

Soils were depleted from wartime over-production. All the available land within the state had been claimed; land prices were inflated. The frontier beckoned with its promise of unlimited and cheaper land. As farmers’ sons and daughters left Connecticut in ever-increasing numbers, they were joined by many of state’s insolvent debtors in an exodus that continued well into the nineteenth century.
Although the Federalist leadership at first welcomed this trend because it siphoned off many of the poor and disaffected, by 1800 even the most partisan recognized that emigration was creating a labor shortage that was crippling the state’s agrarian economy.

Hartford, New Haven, New London, Middletown, and Norwich, the leading population centers, were incorporated as cities in 1784 and resumed their central role in commerce. The merchant trade soon recovered and even surpassed its colonial record. State and federal banking systems were established and the insurance industry was founded. Commerce, now more clearly differentiated between retail and wholesale, reached an all-time high in the 1790s, and by 1792 Connecticut accounted for two-thirds of all the livestock shipped from the United States (Lewis: 1985). That same year the first toll roads were built along the coast, the start of a state-wide turnpike system that provided farmers and merchants with better market access.

The disruption of maritime trade during the lead-up to the second war with England, the War of 1812, set a new direction for Connecticut. With foreign commerce at a standstill, Connecticut’s agrarian-based mercantile economy, of necessity, turned to manufacturing to replace imported goods. Often supported by accumulated merchant capital, in the 1820s it set the stage for the rapid industrial development of the pre-Civil War period with almost half of the male population of the state engaged in industry by 1850.

Expansion of Maritime Commerce

Farm prices, which had consistently risen since 1790, fell in the general depression that followed the peace treaty with England in 1814. The bottom fell out of the fledging wool business when the British dumped woolens on the American market. Even nature conspired and contributed to the general gloomy state of agriculture. A major hurricane ruined the harvest in 1815, and in 1816, known as the “year there was no summer,” killing frosts destroyed crops and sheep. Many farmers were wiped out; thousands more abandoned their farms for a new life in the Genesee Valley in upstate New York and the Western Reserve in Ohio.

One measure of the recovery of the agricultural economy after the War of 1812 was the rapid expansion of maritime commerce. According to the Connecticut Gazetteer, published in 1819, the major ports of Fairfield, Norfolk, Stratford, Saybrook, and New London had already resumed direct trade with the sugar plantations of the Caribbean. At least 16 town-owned vessels sailed out of Norwalk and Stratford bound for southern cities. Wagonloads of farm goods were sold in New Haven markets, the entrepot for its back-country, or shipped from there to New York. Several ports maintained a regular packet service with New York; in New London, for instance, the first steamboats to ply the Sound carried goods and passengers to the city. The fishing industry was also centered in New London, which had a large fleet of fishing smacks. Many grew rich in the shad fisheries located there and in Lyme and Saybrook. Guilford’s oyster farmers had 30 small boats for tending and harvesting their oyster beds, the start of today’s shell fishing industry in Long Island Sound. Merchants situated in inland towns also participated in the maritime trade. Some served as middlemen, collecting farm goods for export through major port cities; others invested in sloops and other small ships that plied the coast. Killingworth merchants had eight trading vessels engaged in the New York market. Much further inland, eight Thompson investors jointly owned a ship for trade with Savannah, Georgia, that was berthed in Providence, Rhode Island, also the home port of a brisk mercantile trade run by Jonathan Trumbull of Lebanon.

Nearly every Connecticut port was involved in supplying the New York and New Haven markets with great quantities of cordwood. Guilford was a major supplier to New York City, as were Chatham and Haddam on the Connecticut River. Oxford and other western towns shipped cordwood and dressed lumber to New Haven. Middlebury was just one of many towns that
supplied West Indies plantations with barrel staves and other wood products. David D. Field, a contemporary observer in Middletown, expressed concern that forests in Middlesex County were being depleted at an alarming rate (Fields: 1822). In fact, given the scale of wood consumption for urban and rural domestic use, the production of charcoal for the iron industry, and tanbark for the leather industry, Connecticut lost much of its forest cover by mid-century.

Maple sugar, another forest crop, was mainly processed for domestic consumption in the colonial period. The average highlands farmer might tap as many as 1000 trees in his woodlot to make this kind of sugar. Highly desirable as a sweetener, it was the preferred substitute for costly cane sugar, which was imported from the West Indies. When Caribbean trade was cut off during the Revolution, maple sugar became a valuable commodity. Goshen and Norfolk were leading producers in that period; the latter town averaged about 15,000 pounds of sugar annually during the war years. At the time maple sugar was made by boiling down tree sap in large pots over open fires in the woods. Incremental improvements in processing included larger evaporating pans supported by arched masonry structures, essentially outdoor fireplaces with fireboxes. When sugar production moved inside in the 1800s, similar structures were built inside sugar houses. Typically, these one-story gabled buildings were equipped with a cooking hearth vented by a chimney, or just through a hole in roof, a basic design that has changed very little over time. Active sugar houses identified in this survey are located in Guilford, Hamden, and Woodbury. Today, although a niche market for maple syrup exists in the state, with 69,000 trees producing about 11,000 gallons a year, the industry as a whole is located in northern New England and Canada.

Agricultural Reform

A broadly based organizational and institutional agricultural reform movement, which introduced educational programs for aspiring young farmers and the general public, was well underway by 1800. The leaders of the movement, General David Humphreys (1752-1818), Jeremiah Wadsworth (1743-1804), and John T. Norton (1795-1864), were gentlemen farmers with large experimental crop and breeding farms. Humphreys is best known for breeding Spanish Merino sheep on his farm in Derby and taking the lead in the production of woolen cloth manufacturing in the state. Wadsworth, Commissary General during the Revolution and an independent supplier to the French forces, was the wealthiest man in the state. Elected to Congress in 1787, he became a heavy investor in the state’s infrastructure and banking system; his specialty was disease-resistant grain crops. Norton, who made his fortune in the hardware and railroad business in Albany, New York, returned to Farmington to develop a model breeding farm. His sons also made several contributions to the reform movement. John P. Norton, who studied at Yale College and Edinburgh, Scotland, went on to become the first Yale professor of agricultural chemistry. His laboratory was the forerunner of the Sheffield School of Applied Chemistry, later known as the Sheffield Scientific School. His younger brother, Edward, was instrumental in the revival of dairy farming in Farmington after the Civil War.

4 Maple sugar production peaked again during the Civil War, when trade with the Southern states was cut off.

5 Deeply involved in the abolitionist movement in the 1840s, Norton was one of the three townsmen who took on the responsibility of housing the African crew of the Amistad in Farmington and arranging their return to their homeland. His residence there was a station on the Underground Railroad.
Organizations and publications dedicated to disseminating new ideas to the average farmer began in New Haven with the county agricultural society, founded there in 1803. The Hartford County Agricultural Society was formed the following year, and a state society was in place by 1852. Farmers gathered together to study agriculture trends and methods in Middletown and West Cornwall, and a Farmers Institute was established in Preston. The Pomological Society of New Haven, which reflected the ongoing cultivation of new varietal tree fruits in Connecticut, was the first of many specialized agricultural interest groups in the state. Farmers subscribed to the Albany Ploughman or The New England Farmer, forums for an exchange of views on current agricultural practices and technological advances in barn design.

The need for a formal agricultural education was recognized in the 1820s. The first agricultural school in the nation was located in Maine in 1823. The following year, Josiah Holbrook started his school in Derby, Connecticut. The more successful Cream Hill Agricultural School (NR, 1976) was founded in 1845 by Dr. Samuel Gold and Theodore S. Gold (father and son) on the family’s 200-acre farm in West Cornwall. With a curriculum that combined classical and scientific education with intensive practicums in all aspects of farming, it provided a well-rounded education to 272 aspiring young farmers from the then existing American states and four foreign countries. After the school closed in 1869, Theodore S. Gold served for many years on the State Board of Agriculture and was instrumental in the founding of Connecticut Agricultural School at Storrs.

Agricultural field days and fairs were another way to promote agricultural development. One of the oldest English rural traditions to survive in Connecticut, they began in Hartford in 1643. Their important commercial role was formally recognized in a 1763 memorial to the General Assembly, in which Jonathan Trumbull, a leading eighteenth-century merchant and Connecticut’s Revolutionary governor, put his stamp of approval on the custom, noting “That fairs and markets are held Beneficial and Servicable (sic) to facilitate the transactions of business. . . .” (Milne: 1986). By the 1800s these events were often sponsored by county historical societies. Such was the case with the first annual field day held in Hartford in 1818. Much later in the century, local Grange chapters were responsible for fairs in Woodbridge and other towns in the Western Uplands. As was the custom at all these events, new types of farm equipment and machinery were on display and often offered for sale. Prizes were awarded for produce, stock, and handiwork, and to the winners in the draft animal contests. Similar categories are still judged at annual fairs in towns such as Durham, Berlin, Barkhamsted, and Woodstock, all of which have permanent fairgrounds. A barn reconstructed at the Woodstock fair site is now an agricultural museum. Another long-lived annual gathering is the joint fair sponsored by the Cultural and Mechanics Arts Society, founded in 1838 by farmers in Somers, Ellington and Enfield. East Windsor joined in 1961 and today, an annual four-town fair is rotated among the member towns of the renamed Union Agricultural Society.

Agricultural Practices

Mixed farming gradually gave way to large-scale monoculture during the first half of the nineteenth century. Crop specialization was often associated with a particular region or town; some crops and animals were grown or raised almost exclusively for export; new and more efficient barn types were introduced and older barns were remodeled. Connecticut farmers also participated in the Merino sheep and mulberry tree “manias” of this period with mixed success. Although Connecticut's sons and daughters were still leaving home at an unprecedented rate, many family farms survived and prospered.
Much-needed improvements in agricultural methods were introduced in this period. Soils were improved with natural fertilizers, such as gypsum, seaweed, bone meal, plaster of Paris (lime), and stable manure. Seaweed was often combined with pig manure to improve the light, sandy soils of the coastal slope. Whitefish, a type of herring that returned to Long Island Sound every June, was seined in huge numbers to spread on fields before plowing. Even inland farmers used as many as 10,000 fish per acre, producing record yields of rye and other grains. The residues from distilleries and mills, once discarded, were now used for animal feed.

Farmers also improved yields by crop rotation and purchased new seed for corn, onions, and other staples on a regular basis. At least ten seed farms in the state supplied commercial seed companies, which included Comstock, Ferre & Company in Wethersfield, said to be the oldest continuously operating business of this kind in the nation (NR, 1970). The first packaged seeds in the state came from the Shaker village at Enfield (NR, 1979). Although generally recognized today for their distinctive architecture and furniture, the Shakers were actually a self-sufficient farming community with more than 2000 acres of improved land. Even though they were much admired locally for their fine horses and cattle, like all New England Shaker communities, the sale of herbs and seeds was their major source of income. By mid-century the Enfield Shakers were shipping 14,000 pounds of herbs throughout the United States and to many foreign countries (Bridge: 1977).

Although better hand tools, like the scythe and axe, were manufactured, the latter in Collinsville (Canton), Connecticut, farming remained labor intensive. Riding plows began to replace walking plows in this period, but they were still equipped with wooden mould boards until the 1840s, when iron plows came into general use. Even though there was a much greater reliance on draft horses for plowing, oxen were still favored for heavy work, such as field clearing. Ox-drawn sleds and single-axle oxcarts were a common sight in the fields and roads of the state for many more years.

New types of farm machinery that relied on horsepower, such as the mechanical seed drill for planting and the hay rake, were not adopted on most Connecticut farms until after the Civil War, but farmers began to find important uses for horses much sooner, including horse treadmills for threshing grain. Outdoor animal treadmills were not new; in fact, they were a fixture on many colonial farms. In this period, however, the treadmill was set up inside the barn right on the threshing floor. Some modification of standard barn framing became necessary. To make room for this process, collar beams were doubled up. The additional cross member, called a “swing beam,” which eliminated the need for any intermediate support posts, is original construction in some period barns.

More drastic structural changes were needed to accommodate a new horse-powered system for loading hay into the mow. Widely advertised in the 1840s, it consisted of a hay fork, or grappling hook, a horse-powered, block-and-tackle for lifting baled or loose hay up from wagons, and a track, or cable to carry the hay through the building to the mow. Barn framing was reconfigured to make more room in the movement or storage of hay. In some barns, the entire middle section of collar beams was removed. The latter approach could require the addition of iron tie-rods to hold the building together. Despite these problems, the hay fork saved so much time and back-breaking labor that it persisted in Connecticut well into the 1900s.
New Barn Types

New England Barn

The New England barn, also known as the gable front or Yankee barn, was a new type developed in this period. Wagon doors were in a gable-end and the main drive floor ran parallel to the ridge.

Since the framing system consisted of a series of transverse bents, additional bays could easily be added to increase the length of the building. Despite this design improvement, the New England barn did not replace the earlier English type. Instead, the two types coexisted, along with a hybrid that combines features of both types.

While post-and-beam framing was used for both barn types, the scribe rule method, the custom-fitting of joints, was replaced by a more efficient technique, called “square rule.” Although major timbers continued to be hand hewn for some time, with most lumber sawn to standard uniform dimensions, joints were squared off (hence the name) and cut to the same size, becoming interchangeable parts (Carley: 2010). It is fitting that this technique was used in a building associated with the man who developed the concept for industry: the circa 1816 Eli Whitney Armory Barn in Hamden, one of the earliest documented examples of this new framing method in the state (NR, 1974). Notable architectural elements of this New England barn include a tripartite window in the gable pediment and arched molding over the three facade doorways.

As farmers learned more about animal husbandry, they began to add windows to their barns for light and ventilation. The first windows were multiple-paned transoms over wagon doors and small sash windows in gable peaks. A rare type of hinged transom cover found on several barns in Columbia is a local vernacular feature. Double-hung wooden windows, some recycled house sash, were first used in the 1840s. Steel-framed windows, with fixed or awning sash, and glass block panels first appeared in the 1920s.

Wooden cupolas, installed on the ridge of barn roofs for ventilation by the 1850s, often had louvers, brackets, and other decorative trim. Monitor roofs along the ridge, with windows on both sides, were another way to bring more natural light into the barn. Prefabricated, galvanized steel ventilators, which were not available until the early twentieth century, usually incorporated mechanical flues, which started at its lowest level.

Sliding barn doors began to replace older, cumbersome hinged wagon doors in his period. Fitted out with iron wheels to roll along overhead metal or wood tracks, sliding doors were usually installed inside the barn in new construction, but replacement doors of this type have exterior tracks. Some barn doors have a shallow, boxed hood directly overhead to keep off snow and ice.
Bank Barns

Bank barns, essentially two-level structures built into a slope, provided a basement for the collection and storage of manure during the winter or shelter for livestock. Both New England and English barns were “banked” and had earth or stone ramps to access the barn doors on the main level. The lower levels of early bank barns were not fully enclosed. Some had stone piers and open bays, like the New England bank barn associated with the Daniel Lord House in Litchfield. If the terrain permitted, other English bank barns, like those on the Neumann dairy farm in Burlington, or the Curtiss farm in Litchfield, were often sited with the eave entry doors to the main drive floor right next to the roadway. Some basements of these barns were converted to cow or horse stables, as indicated by the presence of small square stall windows in the foundation walls. Like a number of later nineteenth-century examples, the Valley Falls bank barn on a designated Local Historic Property in Vernon has a gambrel roof and a louvered cupola (LHP, 2000).

In tiered barn complexes, a fairly rare type in Connecticut, several barns are joined together at different levels, with a high drive ramp on the top floor, the arrangement of a fine representative example in Cornwall. Like the ramped bank barn, they were designed to facilitate the unloading of hay wagons directly into the mow.

Farm Products

Fairfield, Enfield, and Milford were the leading early nineteenth-century producers of flax, a very profitable, multi-purpose cash crop, much in demand for its seed and oil. As early as 1807, Fairfield farmers devoted 3000 acres to this crop and exported 20,000 bushels of seed; Milford, not far behind, shipped 100,000 pounds of flax stalks and 4000 bushels of seed. Much of the seed was shipped to England and Ireland and used to replenish old flax fields with vigorous American varieties. Although some raw flax was sold to linen weavers in the New Haven area, and later to textile mills in New Bedford, Massachusetts, much of the crop was carted off to the many oil mills in the state. By 1810 there were 24 mills operating in Connecticut, all grinding seed to make linseed oil, a basic ingredient for exterior paint coatings. Frugal Yankee farmers often used the oil cake residue to fatten cattle or hogs for market, and some even painted their weathered old barns and houses for the first time.

Onions were the principal export crop in Westport, Greenfield Hill in Fairfield, and Wethersfield. In Westport alone, more than 75 farmers produced onions for the New York market. Wethersfield, famous for its onions since the early 1700s, now supplied three quarters of the...
Southern market. Although growers world-wide used ventilated sheds to dry this crop (similar to those used for tobacco), in Connecticut, onions were dried in the fields, braided or woven into ropes, an old English custom, and stored in any handy outbuilding. The only dedicated onion storage barn identified in the 2011 Historic Barns of Connecticut survey was one built about 1830 on a farm in Weston (NR, 1991). Some onion farmers and growers of other root vegetables, such as parsnips and potatoes, routinely sold their crops to ships’ chandlers who provisioned the whaling and sealing vessels and commercial fishing fleets that sailed from New London, Stonington, and Mystic.

Connecticut’s apple orchards were well established by the mid 1700s and by the early 1800s, at least 20 varieties were growing in the Central Valley’s “apple belt,” which ran from Farmington south to New Haven. On smaller farms much of the crop was dried or distilled for home consumption, but dried apples often were included in ships’ provisions. In Woodbury, a major fruit town in the western hills, the value of its orchards was derived primarily from the profitable production and sale of cider and apple jack (brandy). When the temperance movement gained ground in this period, however, sales of brandy declined and apple production slumped, not to be revived until much later in the century.

Connecticut’s own “Johnny Appleseed,” David Church of Newington, was one of the many young men who emigrated to upstate New York to seek his fortune. Unlike his more famous counterpart, however, instead of giving away seeds, Church collected bushels of seed to raise apple tree saplings for sale. By his own estimate, in 1810 he had 100,000 trees growing in 80 “nurseries,” which he sold for about 12 cents each. (Russell: 161).

Cheese, another important regional commodity in this period, was marketed in the southern states and peddled locally from “cheese wagons.” Connecticut cheese was introduced in the American South by Alex Norton of Litchfield, who shipped cheese in hogsheads and later in specially designed boxes. Within a decade, a cheese factory in neighboring Goshen was marketing 270,000 pounds a year. By 1820 the town’s output had nearly doubled and was valued at $38,000. Soon celebrated as the “cheese capital of the nation,” Goshen became the center of an expanding regional wholesale export business that extended well into the Berkshires of Massachusetts and south into the Western Uplands of Connecticut, where Woodbridge became a major butter supplier to the New Haven market in the 1830s. Cheese and butter were also major commodities in the Eastern Uplands, with the richest and most productive dairy farms located in Windham County. Among them were Preston and Brooklyn; the latter town claimed to be the biggest producer of cheese (and pork) for any town of its size.

Once the sole responsibility of the farm wife, cheese processing was carried out in curing sheds expressly built for this purpose on farms, or in village centers, as they were in Roxbury, and usually run by local men. Factory-scale operations in the highland towns employed young women as “dairy maids.” None of those buildings have been located or identified, but a later cheese factory in Colebrook has survived. Built to English specifications in 1874, it stands a testament to the longevity of Connecticut’s cheese industry.
Home industries in this period, often farm-related, provided additional income to farmers and their wives. Their increasing economic importance is confirmed in the 1850 agricultural census, which reported that the total value of handmade goods exceeded $190,000, of which two-thirds was produced in Central Valley towns. Broom corn was a specialty crop raised primarily for broom making in Wethersfield and Wallingford; in the latter town, brooms were profitably “sent abroad.” After about 1810, women began making “Connecticut long nines,” hand-rolled cigars, a major winter occupation in many Central Valley homes. One of the more unusual cottage industries was located in Stafford, where women fashioned straw braiding for hats. Much in demand in foreign markets, this craft generated $10,000 a year. Women also excelled in the delicate task of unwinding raw silk cocoons and spinning silk thread in the early years of Connecticut’s silk industry.

Connecticut led the nation in the cultivation of *morus multicaulis*, a new species of mulberry tree. Leaves from this tree provided food for domestic silk worms raised in special sheds called “silk houses.” This new crop was first introduced in 1794 in Northford, near New Haven. By 1825 tons of leaves valued at $25,000 were produced in Mansfield, the first town in the state with a silk mill. When bounties were offered for silk production in Connecticut, Massachusetts, Maine, and Vermont, “mulberry mania” spread throughout New England. City dwellers grew trees in their backyards; one Connecticut farmer raised trees in Cuba. The Cheney brothers of Manchester, who later became major manufacturers of silk textiles, established mulberry tree nurseries before they even built their first silk mill in 1838, leasing land for this purpose in New Jersey and Ohio. Wholesale nurseries made small fortunes when sapling prices rose from $4 to $500 per 100 until blight and frost destroyed most of the trees in the state in 1846.

By the 1840s some traditional crops were no longer economically viable because of Western competition. With access to cheaper land and transportation, the farmers in the Mid-West, America’s new grain belt, could sell their crops in eastern markets at much lower cost. Some Connecticut acreage was turned over to grazing, but hay, a major commodity in a horse-drawn society, was harvested for sale to urban stables and raised on dairy farms for fodder. Rye, a popular grain crop much in demand in the distilling business, had a resurgence after disease-resistant strains were developed, principally on Wadsworth’s model farm. Some apple brandy was still produced, but in Hartford County alone, most of the 500 distilleries were making gin from rye mash. One of the largest and long-lived operations was the Gowdy Distillery in the Melrose Historic District in East Windsor, which eventually included a steam-powered brick boiler house, a warehouse, an office, and an overseer’s dwelling (NR, 2009). Yeast, a by-product of the distilling process, was shipped by rail from Melrose to the Fleishmann Company in New York in ice-cooled boxes.

**Stock Farming**

For a relatively brief time, cattle farmers also prospered in conjunction with the distillery business. Herds of beef cattle were routinely fattened on “still swill,” the grain residue from the distilleries, and driven to the slaughterhouses of Hartford and New Haven. So close was the connection between production of gin and beef that there was a noticeable drop in cattle production after federal revenue taxes were imposed on alcohol shortly after the Civil War. Although the taxes were certainly a factor, the Eastern cattle business was already doomed. In this state, it was largely replaced by dairying and poultry farming after Chicago became a regional railroad hub and a national center of the meat trade, with major stockyards there by 1865.

Tanneries, an off-shoot of the cattle business, supplied leather to saddlers and shoemakers, the latter an important cottage industry in this period. New Canaan, a major regional shoemaking center, produced 60,000 pairs annually; more than 40 shoemakers in Durham had their own local tannery and some went to upper New York State to purchase herds of cattle for this purpose.
Sheep farming became a major specialty after 1810, when David Humphreys introduced new breeding stock into the state. Upon his retirement as ambassador to Spain, Humphreys accepted the delivery of about 100 Spanish Merino sheep, a breed highly prized for its long fleece. There was considerable interest in Humphreys' breeding experiments because of the great demand for raw wool in Connecticut's fledgling woolen industry. The price of breeding stock rose to astronomical levels within a few years as “Merino mania” spread throughout the state. Since the price of merino wool was double that of domestic clip, farmers were eager to buy breeding stock and even Merino yearlings, especially after it was discovered that cross breeding with native sheep produced two shearings a year.

By 1813 wool was touted as the “cotton of the North.” The size of flocks in major sheep centers such as Newtown and Litchfield reached nearly 7000 by 1820. Although it is estimated that there were 250,000 sheep raised in the state in 1840, when tariff protection for imported woolen textiles ended in 1846, raw wool prices fell sharply. Whole flocks were sold off to the butcher. Sheep farming collapsed in the late 1840s, but revived during the Civil War as demand developed for wool to replace cotton and meet military needs. Large-scale sheep farming was generally phased out in Connecticut by 1900, although it continued to flourish in Vermont.

With wool becoming a more valuable commodity, sheep were progressively better housed. In the colonial period, when sheep were raised for domestic use, they spent most of the year in pastures. By the early 1800s they were sheltered in lean-to sheds attached to barns, with access to fenced paddocks or stone-walled grazing yards. Historic sheep farms with this arrangement are located in Ashford, Union, and Litchfield. After the Civil War, flocks were housed in special sheep folds or barns, usually 40’ x 60.’ By the late nineteenth century, sheep barn floors contained low pens to separate individual flock members, but each animal had access to the outside.

**PART III**

**CONSOLIDATION AND DECLINE 1850 - 1930**

By the late nineteenth century, farming in Connecticut became increasingly specialized and more commercial, a period of consolidation and contraction marked by the introduction of new farm management and tenure systems. With less land in production statewide, agriculture became more intensive and productive, a process accompanied by improvements in the design of agricultural outbuildings. Farmers’ organizations proliferated; more state and federal agencies were created to promote agriculture and to support and inform farmers. Major demographic changes that affected the farming economy included the unprecedented growth of industrial cities, the substantial decline in the rural population, and immigration from Europe.

A number of historians have written about the decline of Connecticut agriculture in this period. New England farms in general were characterized as marginally self-sufficient at best in scholarly works and popular history. In a study of this regional pattern, however, Michael Bell, Connecticut’s historical geographer, determined that the timing and extent of the decline had been misrepresented (1989). Farming did in fact decline, but not until after 1920, and more importantly, productivity remained high in New England well into the twentieth century, especially in Connecticut.
Despite the social disruption and acute farm labor shortage engendered by the Civil War, the number of Connecticut farms steadily increased from 22,445 in 1850 to 30,598 by 1880, and average farm size remained fairly high, at about 99 acres. In the following decade, however, the number of farms decreased and hovered around 26,000 for the next 30 years. Even though the amount of farmland expressed as a proportion of the total area of the state (3.1+ million acres) remained fairly constant at 75 percent through 1910, it dropped dramatically to only 42 percent by 1920. Census definitions of “improved” farmland varied from decade to decade but in general it appears that this decline in farm acreage was accompanied by an even greater reduction in the amount of actively farmed land after World War I.

Although less land was in production statewide, the market value of farm products per acre remained high in the three southern New England states, with Connecticut ranked third in the country, followed by Massachusetts and Rhode Island, fourth and fifth respectively. In 1889 the value of produce per acre in New England of $5.39 exceeded the national average of $3.95. Connecticut, at $7.96, twice the national average, ranked second in the region, a productivity level maintained until the 1980s.

The consolidation of the farm economy was accompanied by underlying trends in tenure and farm management. From a high of 3467 tenant farms reported in 1900, about ten percent of the total, this form of tenure declined to less than half that number by 1930. Farms leased to tenants for cash predominated, but a surprising number were rented by sharecroppers. Previously, the only known example of this old English custom occurred in Stonington in the early 1800s. As recorded by the Reverend Timothy Dwight, in his four-volume opus, Travels through New England and New York, it appears that Stonington was a way station for Rhode Islanders on the move, who worked as tenant farmers only long enough to earn money to buy a farm elsewhere (Vol. III, 1822).

With the increasing complexity of modern agriculture, as well as the increased scale of some types of farming, more owner operators turned to skilled, college-educated managers. From 769 farms run by managers in 1900, the number continued to rise up through 1920, when more than 1000 farms had manager operators. Fairfield County, the statewide leader in this category, accounted for one third of the total. Managers often were employed to run the dairy and breeding farms on country estates on Connecticut’s Gold Coast, wryly described in the 1910 census as “practically places of residence of wealthy persons . . .”

**Rural Demographics**

Dramatic demographic changes accompanied the contraction of Connecticut’s agricultural economy. Between 1850 and 1910, as the state population increased from 370,000 to nearly 1.2 million, the total rural population dropped dramatically to 115,000. Largely due to massive foreign immigration in this period, urban populations continue to grow, with major industrial cities such as Hartford and New Haven exceeding 160,000 by 1930, a seven-fold increase. By then, however, only three percent of Connecticut’s population lived in rural areas.

The disproportionate displacement of the population is evident in the rural demographics of the period. The farm population as a whole was aging, with the average male farmer in his late 60s. Other important contributing demographic trends, such as the decline in the size of families and the fact that fewer people married as the century progressed, are found in vital records and family genealogies. As a result, many farms were sold or abandoned when old family lines died out and left no heirs. Although a considerable number were reclaimed and renewed as productive farms by European immigrants, abandoned farmland often returned to scrub or forest. In addition, thousands of acres were acquired by the state and power companies for watersheds and forest preservation programs, or impounded for municipal reservoirs.
Population statistics between 1860 and 1930 varied from region to region. As expected, in areas with more marginal soils along Connecticut's colonial frontier, losses were more acute. In many towns in the Northwest Highlands, for example, losses exceeded 50 percent, and Hartland and Warren never fully recovered from the devastating declines of 70 to 80 percent. Considerable land acquired for public use in this region even included the village center in Barkhamsted, which was flooded out for a reservoir in the late 1930s by the Hartford Metropolitan District Commission. Less severe, but still significant population losses, occurred in the Uplands, particularly in inland towns in which agriculture was the primary or sole basis of the local economy. Among them were Bethlehem, Brookfield, and Middlebury in the western hills and a central tier of eastern towns from Union south to Canterbury and Scotland. By contrast, in the more stable rural Central Valley, especially near or within greater metropolitan areas, out-migration equaled or slightly outpaced natural increase, at least through 1900. On the coast and its immediate hinterland, the region least affected, the population of satellite communities actually grew in tandem with New London, New Haven, Bridgeport, and Norwalk.

Many fully-equipped farms were sold to newcomers – "lock, stock and barrel" sales, in the vernacular of the day. Others were bought by neighbors to add acreage to existing farms or to lease to tenant farmers. In Kent, which was heavily dependent upon hired labor, farms were purchased to acquire more housing for workers. In 1870 there were 158 farm workers in town, more than half of total number of farmers listed in the census that year. A few workers' houses were built, but land records indicate that owners of two of the larger established farms acquired at least 18 abandoned farms and used the existing dwellings to house their workers. Similar transactions occurred in regions less devastated by population losses. For example, in Montville in the Eastern Uplands, the majority of the 79 farm workers were tenants in existing farmhouses bought expressly for that purpose when the original owners left town.

### Legislative Action and Grassroots Organizations

The Morrill Act of 1862 ushered in the land-grant college movement, which created the first state universities in the Midwest, followed by New England and other regions of the country. For 30 years Yale was designated Connecticut's land-grant college, until the Connecticut Grange led the farmers of the state in an ultimately successful challenge of this designation. Part of a national rural organization for both men and women, the Grange sponsored numerous local chapters and continued to be a powerful force in state politics. In 1893 land grant funds were transferred to the state agricultural school at Storrs, which became the nucleus of the twentieth-century state university. Other important agricultural developments in this period were the establishment of the Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station in 1875, the first in the country, the founding of the Connecticut Agriculture Board the following year, and the establishment of the Federal Farm Credit Bureau in 1917.

The experiment station was founded by Professor W. O. Atwater, a pioneer in the field of agricultural chemistry, who led the crusade to secure legislative approval and funding. Initial experimentation was carried out at Judd Hall at Wesleyan University (where a laboratory was later named in Atwater's honor). Two years later, the station was relocated to Sheffield Scientific School.
at Yale. In 1882 a permanent home was found in New Haven on Prospect Hill (NHL, 1964), where
the six-acre facility is still located, along with facilities in Hamden at Lockwood Farm in Windsor. In
1887 Congress passed the Hatch Act, which provided federal funding; Connecticut’s $15,000 annual
appropriation was divided between the New Haven facility and a new station located at Storrs.

The importance of the experiment station cannot be overstated. Because of its ground-breaking
research in the science of agriculture, Connecticut’s agrarian tradition was sustained throughout the
industrial period, allowing a small rural population to meet its own needs and also supply the region’s
 burgeoning urban population. The station directly benefited farmers in the tobacco, dairying, and
poultry industries, Connecticut’s most sustainable agricultural sectors, and also assisted in the
development of pomiculture and floriculture. Experiments in tobacco cultivation was a major
program for decades. Through its agricultural bulletins, the station promoted the consumption of
whole milk by children and infants, a successful outreach to dairy farmers as well as the general
public. Prior to that time, cream was saved for butter, but skim milk was used for animal feed, or
discarded. Modern egg and poultry farms evolved from the first demonstration of chicken houses
at the station in 1918.

Grassroots activism defined the post-Civil War period. Private associations and cooperatives
addressed the needs and interests of farmers in every sector of the economy. Wealthy stockmen
organized clubs to promote new breeds and improve the quality of New England’s dairy herds. The
first state orchardist society was located in Connecticut in 1871. The Vegetable Growers of
America, an organization still active in the 1960s, evolved from the Boston Market Gardeners
Association formed in this period. Florists banded together in 1881, and Connecticut’s seed growers
organized a trade association in Hartford in 1892.

Immigrant Farmers

Large-scale European immigration after 1850, which reached its peak before World War I, had a
substantial positive impact upon the farm economy. While the vast majority of newcomers settled
in cities, by 1920 immigrants owned or leased at least one-third of Connecticut’s 22,635 farms.
Although they came here from more than 16 countries and spoke many different languages, these
pioneer farmers had much in common. Few were prepared to buy a farm when they arrived. In
fact, many immigrants worked for years in factories or found other types of employment before
they bought or leased a farm, and many, perhaps a majority, had never farmed before. Essentially
reprising the history of the first settlers, they took over abandoned or failing farms all over
Connecticut. Faced with the task of reclaiming old pastures and fields or unimproved land while
learning how to farm, many immigrant families struggled to make a living as subsistence farmers.
Some continued to be general farmers, with small surpluses for sale; others moved on into the
income-producing sectors, specializing in eggs, poultry, dairying, or market gardening, and a few
became tobacco farmers.

Immigrant farmers found their way to Connecticut by various means, some with the help of ethnic
mutual benefit and aid societies. In the 1890s, farmers in smaller Jewish communities in Ellington
and Vernon received mortgage loans from a foundation established by Baron de Hirsch, a wealthy
German philanthropist. Members of the larger, more densely settled Jewish farm communities that

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6 The prior farming experience of Eastern European Jews and Italians, the two major rural immigrant populations in
Connecticut, is known. Extensive research has long confirmed that Jewish immigrants were not farmers; in fact Jewish
aid organizations were founded with the goal of restoring the ancient Jewish connection to the land. An occupational
census of Italian immigrants in 1912 shows that barely half were farmers in their native country. No similar census of
other ethnic groups has been located.
developed in the Eastern Uplands, particularly in Colchester and Montville, received mortgage assistance from the successor organization, the New York-based Jewish Agricultural and Industrial Aid Society (JAIAS). A number of Swedish immigrants settled in Woodstock, a community that began quite by chance when three Swedes were hired right off the boat in 1870 to work on the Bowen cranberry farm there. Farm jobs advertised in Polish and Bohemian newspapers drew many other immigrants to Tolland County, which had the highest concentration of Poles, Hungarians, and Slovaks in the state; many of their descendants still live in Ashford. Maygars, an ethnic Hungarian people, were assisted by the Hungarian Home and Free Employment Office, also in New York. Often classified as Bohemians in federal census reports, they were one of the few groups who were financially prepared to buy farms when they first arrived.

**Tobacco Industry**

The Connecticut River Valley was known as “Tobacco Valley” in the late nineteenth century, a title justly deserved, at least through World War II. Tens of thousands attended tobacco festivals held annually in Hartford, underscoring the important historic commercial value of the single largest crop in the region. Although tobacco was also cultivated in Tolland County and in the Housatonic Valley (New Milford, for example had eight packing firms as early as 1882 and exported leaf to Germany and Holland), census compilations show Hartford County as the industry leader with 85 percent of the total yield of the state. From 1.1 million pounds grown there in 1850, production doubled by 1920, making this region the top-growing county nationwide. Better grades of field-grown tobacco were developed in this period, including a finer Havana leaf for cigar wrappers.

Cigar manufacturers in Hartford and New Haven bought most of the Cuban leaf until the 1880s, when they began importing a new, lighter-colored leaf from Sumatra. Disturbed by the loss of this lucrative part of their market, farmers organized the Connecticut Valley Tobacco Growers Association, which successfully lobbied Congress for protective tariffs on all imported leaf. The Agricultural Experiment Station also helped state farmers survive this foreign competition by developing a method to grow finer cigar leaf under cloth tents, which revolutionized tobacco production. By the 1920s, however, with overproduction by
the tobacco syndicates then controlling the industry, a number of independent tobacco growers turned to dairying, market gardening, nursery stock, or the cultivation of potatoes.

When tobacco became a commercial enterprise, additional sources of labor had to be found and dedicated buildings were constructed for processing. Entire families of Irish and Polish immigrants were recruited to work in the fields and drying sheds; boys as young as ten were employed in the cloth tents to strip the maturing leaves (O’Gorman: 2002). Some older boys, who had worked in the fields, progressed to working shares, and a few succeeded in owning tobacco land. By the twentieth century, however, although small growers still relied almost exclusively on local students on summer vacations, much of the labor force consisted of both European immigrants and southern black college students; the latter group came North to work each summer under the auspices of the Urban League in New York, which was directed by Adam Clayton Powell, a former minister in New Haven (father of Adam Clayton Powell, Jr.). During the farm labor shortage in World War II, the League advertised for workers throughout the South and negotiated labor contracts with growers.

**Tobacco Sheds**

The tobacco barn, or shed as it is called in the Connecticut River Valley, is one of the most distinctive of the single-crop barns. Long, low windowless buildings with pitched gabled roofs and doors at either end, they are usually sited in parallel rows alongside tobacco fields. Derived initially from the design of the New England barn, a tobacco shed has a fixed wood-framed skeleton consisting of a series of transverse bents set on piers of stone or concrete, connected by girts and diagonal braces. These bents, which are repeated at intervals of 15 feet to reach the desired length, as much as 300 feet, also provide a framework for the rails used to hang tobacco during the “damping” process, which lasts from two to four weeks. Tobacco leaf is then sorted and shipped to warehouses for the final curing. The width of these sheds varies with the number of longitudinal, drive-through aisles (up to three), all wide enough to accommodate wagons.

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7 Powell, Jr., a U.S. Congressman and civil rights activist, worked in the tobacco fields in Suffield in the 1940s.
Several systems are used to regulate air flow and allow harvested tobacco to cure at the appropriate rate. The most common are moveable vents on the long elevations, which consist of vertical slats, either hinged at the top or sides. Hinged horizontal boards that open like awnings are usually located along the bottom of the walls. Additional ventilation may be provided by a series of small roof ventilators at the ridgeline, continuous ridge vents, or through rectangular, shuttered openings in the gable peaks.

Dairy Farming

By the 1880s, dairying and production of hay and other fodder for dairy herds were the principal agricultural activities in three major regions: the Northwest Highlands, and the Western and Eastern Uplands. Typical late nineteenth-century dairy farms supported 10 to 25 milking cows, as well as young stock and heifers, perhaps 50 to 100 animals in all. Among the major changes to the dairy industry in this period were centralized processing and delivery systems and profit-sharing farmers’ cooperatives. New approaches to animal husbandry saw improvement in the design and layout of cattle barns and the storage of silage, in mechanical systems for loading hay, and the introduction of milking machines (both gasoline-powered and electric).

The rapid growth of commercial dairying after 1850 was astounding. For example, in 1855 Danbury farmers shipped 2500 gallons of milk to New York City. Just 15 years later, the total output had risen to 30,000 gallons per month, and it continued to rise. Daily trains carrying bulk milk moved by rail to Bridgeport, Hartford, and Waterbury, particularly after refrigerated railroad cars were introduced in the 1880s. More distant urban markets in neighboring states also were served as the Boston and New York milk sheds expanded into northeastern and southwestern Connecticut. Although most small dairy farms continue to sell their milk locally in stores or to customers on regular delivery routes, larger mechanized farms with milking machines generally supplied city wholesalers. By the 1920s dairy farmers were at the mercy of urban dealers and formed trade cooperatives to get better prices. The first was the 1917 New England Milk Producers, which was soon followed by a state association.

Dairy Barns

The modern dairy barns that began to appear on Connecticut farms after 1900 were based on the ground-level stable, a new barn type. Scientifically engineered and designed to meet the needs of the modern dairy farmer, the new stables were well-lighted and ventilated to suppress bacteria and reduce the spread of bovine disease. Notable interior features included a poured concrete floor with manure gutters, raised feeding troughs, and steel cow stanchions, as at Elm Spring Farm in Beacon.
Falls. Although three different roof types were used for these dairy barns, all were framed to maintain a large, unobstructed volume above the plate. The double-pitched gambrel, the most common type, might have trusses or rafters; the others often used prefabricated rafters, shaped to the roof curve. Some of the first wooden laminated rafters support the roof of a Gothic-style barn in Chaplin. All of these roofing systems provided a large, unobstructed space for storing hay and the still-popular hay fork mechanisms.

At Intervale, a model dairy farm in New Hartford, the T-shaped, gambrel-roofed barn complex, is flanked by tall, twin clay-tile silos. The facade of the main barn displays a projecting roof hood over the large hay door, elements typically associated with mechanical loading systems. Similar hoods are found on a pair of gambrel barns that share an interior common wall at the Wawecus Farm Dairy in Bozrah and on the stable with a Dutch gambrel roof on Arcadia Farm in Norfolk.
Some of these new dairy barns were custom-built, but an unknown number were constructed from plans or prefabricated building kits from Sears Roebuck or Montgomery Ward, the major mail-order companies of the day, perhaps better known as suppliers of prefabricated houses. A few farmers built ground-level stables but retained the traditional gabled roof, the form of the dairy barn on the Wisneske Farm in Norwich. A ground-level stable was created in Killingworth by raising an existing barn onto new, high foundation walls.

By the 1970s dairy farmers sheltered, fed, and milked large herds in one-story pole barns, with shallow-pitched roofs supported by steel trusses. The sides of these long, low buildings might be left open or enclosed. The free-stall pole barns at the award-winning Graywall Farm in Lebanon house up to 400 cows and almost 300 calves and heifers, mainly Holsteins. At Cushman Farms in Franklin, the free-stall barn with a rotary milking parlor serves 600 cows. Both farms are members of The Farmers Cow, a Connecticut marketing cooperative for milk and eggs.

**Ancillary Buildings**

Other new types of agricultural buildings were associated with the development of the dairy industry. Among the first was a separate facility for milk storage and processing, which was mandated by state law to prevent the spread of bovine tuberculosis. The first milk houses were small, air-tight buildings of wood (later concrete block) attached to the main barn. Some farmers built their milk houses close to the road to facilitate loading milk cans onto wagons and trucks, and later for pumping milk into refrigerated steel bulk tanks. Connecticut farmers, especially along the coast, installed windmills to pump water from wells or springs to keep milk cans cool or to irrigate fields; historic windmill towers still stand in Stonington and Harwinton. Other outbuildings, such as spring houses and icehouses, were also part of larger dairy farms. By the turn of the century, agricultural water
systems were manufactured in Connecticut by S.B. Church Company of Seymour. A water tower constructed by this firm still stands on a historic gentleman's farm in Litchfield.

By the 1880s separate silos for the storage of cattle fodder replaced the earlier interior silos found inside barns, like the one in Shelton, or in storage pits under barn floors. Only a few of the first free-standing silos have survived. Square, wooden structures, like one still standing on the Merrick Farm in Willington, were soon supplanted by round silos with wooden staves held together by adjustable steel hoops. A pair of these stave silos, the most common type from about 1890 until the 1930s, are located at the Hine Farm in New Milford (NR, 2004). Of the three round silos at Anguilla Brook Farm in Stonington, two are sheathed with wood shingles, and have skylights in their pyramidal roofs; the third has cobblestone masonry walls.

Concrete silos, made of stacked interlocking concrete rings or blocks, appeared in the early 1900s. By 1920 a combined form using steel hoops and concrete construction, which did not require adjustments after completion like the wood stave type, was produced in factories using a patented design. Mortared tile silos were designed for grain storage. A glass-coated vitrified steel silo, marketed under the brand name Harvestore after 1945, became a fixture on Connecticut’s commercial farms in the post-war period.

**Creameries**

Centrally located milk processing plants, known as “creameries” were active all over the state from about 1870 to 1920. Most were regional farmers’ cooperatives organized to process butter and cheese for market, although a few actually sold cream. Since much of the success of these ventures depended upon access to regional railroad networks, many creameries were located right at the depot. The first stage of the process took place on participating farms, where cream separated from whole milk was collected on a daily basis. Until mechanical cream separators were invented, whole milk was set out to cool, letting the cream rise to the top to be skimmed off manually. Butter fat percentages were monitored to maintain quality.

Some of the more successful creameries were located in Ellington, East Granby, Farmington, Somers, Montville, and Lebanon. For instance, the 1870 Farmington Creamery, said to be the first one in the state, had 750 farmer members by 1889 and profits of $390,000. That building is gone, but the 1884 creamery in nearby Unionville survives, having served as a residence since 1898. Butter
and cheese made at the 1892 creamery in Montville (NR pending), which was owned by the Jewish farm community there, was sold at regular market days in New London and Norwich. The Lebanon creamery, organized by the Manning family in 1884, was incorporated with 54 farmer stockholders in 1887. Cream collected locally and from farms in neighboring Bozrah, Sprague, and Franklin, was used primarily to make their prize-winning butter, which was awarded a gold medal at the Chicago World’s Fair in 1893. In 1902 the state dairy commission reported that the Lebanon creamery was the largest in the state, with 1.3 million pounds of processed cream and payments to 75 farmers of $60,000 (Milne: 1986).

**Cattle Breeding**

The interest in scientific cattle breeding was a boon to Connecticut’s dairy industry. Although often practiced as a gentlemen’s hobby, it directly benefitted dairymen who upgraded their herds and increased productivity by purchasing purebred heifers or the services of prize bulls. Farmington played a major role in the creation of the first national stock breeding organizations (Bickford: 1990). Stockmen from all over the Northeast met there in 1868 to found the American Jersey Cattle Club, probably at the invitation of John T. Norton, the first American to import Jerseys from England. The American Guernsey Cattle Club, which was organized in New York in 1877, actually evolved from a group of gentleman farmers in Farmington, headed by Edward Norton, who were the first breeders to import a herd of these exceptional milk producers from the Channel Islands. Theodate Pope Riddle, an early female architect and the designer of Hill-Stead, her farm estate in Farmington, was a member of the club. A prize Guernsey on her farm at Hill-Stead produced 19,000 pounds of milk in one year, a world record at the time. Remaining farm buildings (c. 1901) at Hill-Stead include a gambrel-roofed hay barn of her own design and a gabled horse barn (NHL, 1991). Other breeding farms in the state raised purebred Jerseys in Litchfield and Herefords in Hebron. “Native” Devon stock was improved by selective breeding in Eastford on the second largest farm devoted to this breed in New England. Barns built there in 1899 include a cow barn for an imported prize herd of cattle and a 100-foot hay barn with a 10,000-bale capacity. By the 1930s, when artificial insemination was common practice, Ayrshires from Avon’s Wood Ford farm were shipped to South America (McKie: 1988). Dairymen who bred their own cattle included Amos Bridge, the owner of Bridges’ Sons in Enfield, which raised a prize-winning herd of registered Holsteins by 1910. Although many prize herds infected with bovine tuberculosis were destroyed after state tuberculin testing became mandatory, Bridge was one of many dairymen who reconstituted herds with disease-free cows and resumed milk production in this period.

**Poultry Industry**

The developing poultry industry also generated new building types and technological improvements. Early Connecticut farmers allowed chickens free range, providing them access to the cellar of the
barn only during bad weather. Over the course of the nineteenth century, as poultry farming became more popular, especially in Eastern Connecticut, most farmers had small coops for laying hens. On commercial egg farms, wooden coops with broad gables or shed roofs usually featured large windows on the south sides and tiered nesting boxes inside. Wood stoves, and later electric heaters, were installed to keep the newborn chicks warm. Over the course of the nineteenth century, hen houses became more specialized with small doors at floor level, ventilator stacks, and detachable interior features that could be reconfigured.

**Barns and Coops**

Larger poultry farms required more substantial structures for chicks and brooder hens. Many farmers converted existing buildings into chicken barns by dividing the interior into levels and adding windows to the side elevations. On Tranquility Farm in Middlebury, for example, the large brooder house was once a dairy barn (NR, 1982). One of the more unusual coops was located in a former sawmill in Litchfield. A gambrel-roofed chicken coop in Southington is a more unusual example of this kind of remodeling. Literally thousands of birds were housed in new poultry barns, like the coop at the Fairfield Egg Farm, a commercial operation in Litchfield, or one in Sprague that features a large ventilation tower. Two- and three- and sometimes four-story barns were built with walls of windows, covered in wire mesh, along the south side. Many more modern facilities, virtual chicken factories, have grain elevators, electric lamp heaters, piped hot water systems, and automated feed and water distribution systems. Modern coops of this type are relatively common in Eastern Connecticut, the center of the state’s poultry industry today.

**Market Gardening**

The scale of market gardening kept pace with the urban population explosion. By the turn of the century, it accounted for one-fifth of Connecticut’s farm income. A number of immigrant farmers were part of this booming agricultural sector, which generated as much as $1000 per acre, a value yield higher than any other type of commercial agriculture. Italian-American entrepreneurs included the Cecarelli brothers of North Branford who ran a 275-acre truck farm and supplied New Haven and New York markets. In Woodbridge the Perottis and Piros owned or leased land for cultivation in the “flats,” the level valley of the West River. Like many of the other growers here, they lived in a suburban neighborhood nearby developed by the Perottis. The Christiansen family, who introduced market gardening in Windsor in 1896, were followed by several Germans in business there in the 1920s. Produce from their sizable farms was sent to markets in Hartford. John Carini, who came to this country to work on the railroads, eventually owned 1500 acres in Glastonbury devoted to vegetables, berries, and tree fruits. In eastern Connecticut, Andrew Grabarek, a Polish-American, was a market gardener and dairy farmer in Preston; the farm is still run by his descendants. Adolf Holmberg, who emigrated from Sweden, grew vegetables in Ledyard for the New London market, and his sons later developed the land for orchards.

Vegetables were grown in open fields or under glass in this period. Although both methods often required heavy manuring and irrigation, each had advantages. For example, field growers could use
“intercropping” to maximize their yields. With this method, the quicker growing leafy vegetables were planted alongside slower root crops, such as carrots, parsnips, or beets. Greenhouse growers found that the ability to grow produce year-round more than offset the expense of building and maintaining these steam-heated structures. The usual crops under glass in this period were lettuce during the winter; tomatoes in the fall; and both tomatoes and cucumbers in the spring. Although the sale of fresh produce was the major source of income, many growers also supplied the food processing industry. For example, much of the tomato crop in the Eastern Coastal Slope was sent directly to canneries in Guilford for processing. In the Central Valley, cucumber and onion growers often contracted to supply pickle factories in the region.

Fruits and Flowers

Some of the oldest orchards in the state are still found in the Central Valley. Among them are Lyman Orchards in Middlefield, Rogers Orchards (NR, 1988) and Lewis Farms in Southington, Root Brothers in Farmington, and Hale Brothers’ in Glastonbury. All were started as family-run businesses in the nineteenth century; several are operated by their descendants today. Like other agricultural sectors, pomiculture became a science in this period. Orchard owners experimented with new varieties of apples, some produced by grafting. Early growers simply adapted existing barns for storing apples. Later dedicated apple barns offered temperature and humidity control, as well as oxygen-reduction mechanisms to regulate ripening, making apples a marketable commodity year-round. The apple barn at Lewis Farms in Southington, an exceptionally large, one-story brick masonry structure, is one of many examples of this type (54’ x 192’; NR, 1989). The new storage methods soon revived the moribund apple industry in the hill towns; by 1896, for example, the nearly defunct Palmer and Rogers orchards in Lebanon were shipping carloads to Providence. Packing facilities or retail stores were often attached to apple barns, and sometimes an addition was designated for making apple cider. One of the oldest extant examples of a cider press is found in a cider mill in Guilford.

Lyman’s was the first orchard in the state to experiment with a hardy variety of peaches, another crop suited to less productive uplands, but the Roots and Hales became the largest growers. The latter family owned 2000 acres in Connecticut and 1000 acres in Georgia, all devoted to peaches. John H. Hale, who served as representative to the General Assembly from Glastonbury, was one of the first trustees of the state agricultural college. Luigi Piro, another former railroad worker from Italy, first hired to work in his orchards, became Hale’s partner in 1906. Since Glastonbury lacked rail service, the Hales reached local and national markets by shipping their produce to the city on specially designed freight cars of the Hartford Street Railway. This unique shipping method also was used locally by other farmers and factory owners to supplement freight service on the Connecticut River. By 1896 there were 1.5 million peach trees in Connecticut, with the total crop valued at $2 million in 1910.

The floriculture business flourished in the Connecticut Valley in the early twentieth century. Both plants and flowers were shipped from Windsor, beginning in 1910. Some farmers there specialized in one type of flower, such as the cultivation of gladioli on the Clark farm in the 1920s. Bulbs were shipped internationally and flowers sold in the New York flower market, the East Coast center of
the wholesale trade. The first floriculture under shade cloth was introduced by John E. Luddy of Windsor, who first experimented by recycling the cheesecloth used for shade tobacco, and later founded a company for its distribution. He also developed special cloths that provided insect protection and shade for field-grown flowers. One of the earliest and largest floral nurseries in New England was established in Cromwell by A.N. Pierson, an immigrant from Sweden. Expanding from the single greenhouse he built in 1872, Pierson's Cromwell Gardens had ten acres under glass by 1900. With 25 greenhouses just for roses, Cromwell became known as the rose capital of the world.

**Greenhouses**

By the late 1800s, steel-and-glass greenhouses were used by most market gardeners, florists, and plant nurseries in Connecticut. Unlike the rather primitive earlier system, wood-framed, raised beds covered with glass sash, the new structures had pitched gable or shed roofs, cast-iron sills, and brick or poured concrete foundations. The Pinchbeck greenhouses (c. 1929-1936) in Guilford are representative of the gabled, open-span type (NR, 1976). Vertical wooden bars often provided additional support for the glazed roofs. By the turn of the century, factory-built greenhouses had operable roofs for ventilation with mechanisms to raise and lower the top row of glass panes, as seen on the large c. 1940 greenhouse at the Southbury Training School (NR, 1992). Today, “hoop houses,” which have metal arches covered with plastic sheeting, have largely replaced the glass structures.

**Farm-Related Outbuildings**

**Wagon Sheds and Carriage Barns**

As agriculture became increasingly mechanized during the nineteenth century, farmers needed more space for their horse-drawn vehicles and machinery. Wagon sheds, long one-story buildings with shed or gable roofs, have a series of open bays on the eave side. They can be either free-standing, like the one at Morse Cottage in Branford (NR, 1988), or attached to the main barn, as it is on the Mitchell Farm in Lyme. Carriage barns, which are characterized by large hinged doors, few windows, and close proximity to the main house, often incorporated stables for driving horses. While most were simple utilitarian buildings, some displayed quite stylish cupolas in the 1870s, which often were detailed in the Italianate bracketed style.

These more elaborate barns, often called “carriage houses” and associated with the gentlemen’s farms and country estates of the early 1900s, were usually embellished in the same architectural style as the main dwelling. Once automobiles came into common use, some carriage houses were used as
garages and included chauffeur’s quarters. Several more significant examples are part of National Register or National Historic Landmark properties. They include the Italianate-style carriage house associated with the c. 1878 William J. Clark House in Branford (designed by architect Henry Austin; NR: 1972) and the 1898 Queen Anne/Colonial Revival-style Hotchkiss-Fyler carriage house in Torrington, which features Palladian fenestration on several elevations (NR, 1987). National Historic Landmark properties include the 1846 Gothic Revival carriage barn at Roseland, also known as the Henry C. Bowen Estate, a farm estate in Woodstock (NHL, 1992); and the 1874 Mark Twain Carriage House, which complements the eclectic Picturesque Gothic style of his house in Hartford (NHL, 1962).

Shops and Mills

Large farm complexes often included specialized buildings for carpentry, smithing, and machine work or shops for cottage industries, the latter usually one-story, gabled, wood buildings with a chimney for venting a wood or coal stove. Most shops had wooden floors and were elevated off the ground, although a blacksmith shop might have a dirt floor, as well as a door wide enough to allow horses inside for shoeing. Historic maps are dotted with “bss,” the universal abbreviation for this once common type of shop. The well-preserved Bakerville blacksmith shop in New Hartford is still equipped with its forge and animal cradle (NR pending). The extensive use of wrought-iron hardware on a blacksmith shop in North Haven, which was built in 1901, is a reminder that smiths were also metal fabricators. Some smithing was also carried on in Barlett’s Carriage Shop in Eastford, a two-story banked building with an attached wagon shed, in which horse-drawn riding vehicles were built and repaired. The original wagon hoist can be found in a Guilford wagon repair shop, a rare building type. In the early 1900s, boats were built, repaired, and stored in three separate early twentieth-century shops, also in Guilford.

Less common farm structures included icehouses, which by the later 1800s were built of brick or stone, instead of wood. Pond ice,
which was cut in winter and stored in these semi-subterranean buildings, was insulated with sawdust. Larger commercial buildings of this kind often were erected in town centers by the ice industry that flourished between 1850 and 1930. Smokehouses, small stone or brick buildings used to cure meats, mostly ham and beef, were some distance away from farm buildings due to the risk of fire. Cattle farms often had a purpose-built slaughter house, as well as a separate bull barn, and a general farmer in Woodstock installed a slaughter wheel in his main barn.

Farm-related, commercial mills in this period were located near a source of waterpower. Among the few that have survived in the state are the Brookfield Grist Mill on the Still River, now a craft center, and the c. 1850 Gillette’s Gristmill on the Nepaug River in New Hartford (NR, 1977). The Rossiter Sawmill and Shingle Factory in Guilford dates from the same era.

**Storage Barns**

Special storage buildings were constructed for different field crops. Feed corn was dried on the cob in cribs. These small structures, which have slanting sides and overhanging eaves, often had inverted tin plates placed on the support posts to keep out vermin. Potatoes were originally stored in the house, usually in basement root cellars, but dedicated potato barns were fairly common by the mid 1800s. Since these semi-subterranean wooden structures were built into a hill to maintain a dark, frost-free environment, only the gable roof, the top of the side walls, and the one gable end with a large entry door was visible. By the 1920s, most potato barns were made of metal or concrete but one exceptional above-ground brick masonry barn with insulated walls was erected for commercial storage in East Windsor. In the unusual two-story, gambrel-roofed Thrall Barn, built in the 1945 across the river in Windsor, potatoes were stored below grade in the insulated lower level. There was drive-in access to the floor above that housed the farm tractor and other equipment. Mushrooms are another crop that requires controlled temperatures and darkness. A small tile
masonry barn built in 1920 on the Auer Farm in Bloomfield (SR, 2007), originally served as mushroom barn, a very rare building type in Connecticut. Special features include a monitor roof with louvers for ventilation and a small tile chimney stack at one corner.

PART IV
AGRICULTURAL RENEWAL

In the last 30 years an active and effective coalition of farmers, conservation and preservation organizations, and numerous state and federal agencies have come together to preserve, promote and protect Connecticut’s agricultural heritage. It has been an uphill struggle, and a successful outcome was in doubt until quite recently. As the following comparative analysis of the most recent agriculture census data shows, there was a dramatic turnaround in the last 20 years, both in land use and economic benefit. The broad-based recovery included not only the stabilization of the sustainable core industries, tobacco, dairy, and poultry, and the expansion of wholesale and direct-market systems for farm produce, but the development of agritourism and new legislative initiatives for farmland protection and conservation.

Since 1930 the amount of land in Connecticut devoted to farming steadily decreased, dropping from 1.5 million acres to half that amount by 1970, a trend that reached a low of 330,000 acres in 1990. The number of actual working farms in the same period declined from about 17,000 to about 3,400. At its nadir, agriculture accounted for less than one percent of the state’s economy and fewer than 13,000 jobs were farm related.

Since then, however, the agricultural industry has resumed its rightful place as a major contributor to the state’s economy. Officially recognized in 2002 by the Department of Economic and Community Development (DECD) as an integral part of its cluster-based economic initiative, agriculture is the eighth industrial sector to be identified and selected since this state program began in 1998. In 2007, the last year data is available, 357,153 acres of Connecticut farmland produced an estimated $442.7 million in profits. Agricultural businesses, including almost 5000 active farms (up 45 percent from 1990), employed 19,200 workers, which at the time, equaled the total number of construction jobs in the state.

County farming statistics from 2002 to 2007 show gains across the board, with an average increase of 17 percent in the number of farms in just five years. Litchfield and New Haven showed an astonishing increase of 58 percent in revenues. Although Fairfield only added eight more farms in this period, the average farm size there grew from 48 to 128 acres, and it led the state in the rate of its increase in total farm acreage. The top revenue producers in 2007 were Hartford County ($133.6 million) and New Haven County ($90.2 million), with sales of crops exceeding livestock by a considerable margin.

Historic traditional farm industries still dominate the field. Tobacco remains the state’s largest export crop, with 70 farms producing 40 million pounds of broad and shade leaf a year, valued at $30 million. Most of the 2400 acres devoted to this crop are in Hartford County, which is ranked first among all the tobacco growing counties in the nation.6 Sixty-five percent of the in-state demand for fluid milk is met by the dairying industry. Comprised of 152 farms utilizing approximately half of the state’s pasture, crop- and hay-land, Connecticut produces 45 million

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gallons of fluid milk annually. More than 240 poultry farms are operating in the state; one firm in eastern Connecticut is the largest egg producer in the Northeast, with gross sales of $90 million. The nursery and greenhouse businesses, which now number more than 3000, one of the fastest growing sectors of the farm economy, gross $1.1 billion annually and employ 48,000 persons.

Smaller but growing farm businesses include the equine industry and aquaculture. Many historic farms were purchased or leased by horse breeders, or for equestrian purposes, especially in the uplands. A remarkable farm in Salem was adapted as a horse retirement home. Today, with 550 related equine businesses generating $39 million annually, Connecticut has nine horses per square mile, the highest density in New England. Aquaculture is a relatively new industry in the state. Although shellfish have been harvested here for centuries, Connecticut is now a major supplier of farm-raised oysters and clams, with the 2006 crop of 475 million pounds valued at $20 million. With 70,000 dedicated acres in Long Island Sound, the state has the largest saltwater farm acreage in the Northeast, the second largest in United States.

**Farm Stands and Tourism**

Much of the agricultural revival can be attributed to the direct sales market, the fastest growing sector of the farm economy, and the interrelated agritourism business. Farmers and farm-related businesses have benefited from Connecticut’s ideal location on the New York to Boston corridor, with its 30 million potential consumers and tourists. They have responded to the current demand for locally grown and organic produce with more than 50 farm stands and at least 100 pick-your-own sites for fruit, berries, vegetables, and seasonal goods, like pumpkins and Christmas trees. These direct marketing initiatives are supported by Farm Viability Grants, a program of the Community Investment Act (CIA) of 2005. Many sales outlets that display the “Connecticut Grown” logo, an assurance of quality backed by the state’s Department of Agriculture, are also funded by CIA. A number are located at one of the 37 certified organic farms in the state (as of 2011). On-site farm sales also include nursery plants and flowers, wineries, often with tasting shops, and stores selling prepared organic foods or ice cream and other dairy products. There also is a growing niche market in sales to restaurant chefs and caterers, who plan their locavore menus around the seasonal
availability of local produce and farm-raised beef, poultry, and fish. The “Connecticut Farm Map,” a guide that locates more than 200 farms that welcome visitors, also identifies the type of farm products available for sale at each location. At least a dozen of these farm destinations are included in Connecticut Getaways, a program created by the Connecticut Commission on Culture and Tourism, now in the Department of Economic and Community Development. Farmers markets are another profitable direct sale outlet. For instance, in New Haven alone, five “Cityseed” markets generated sales of $1,000,300 in 2011. Annual gross sales of $16 million are typical at the Regional Market in Hartford.

Saving the Land

The Connecticut Preservation Farmland Program (CPFP), which began in 1978, is the major publicly-funded land conservation program in the state. Administered by the Connecticut Department of Agriculture, the program relies on the use of agricultural conservation easements to preserve and protect farm acreage. This type of easement is a legal mechanism whereby landowners sell and/or donate development rights to all or part of their farm acreage, but retain ownership and use of the property. Designed to protect the land in perpetuity from non-agricultural development, easements can be sold to the state or a municipality, or donated to a private land trust. The ultimate goal of the protection of one million acres of the state’s farmland, development rights to 37,000 acres have been purchased to date. Greywall Farms, an active dairy farm in Lebanon, is just one of the 265 farms in the state to be protected under this program. In 2010, the General Assembly assured the program’s continuance by authorizing $10 million per year in funding through 2013. Cost-share assistance to this program may be provided by the federal Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program (FRPP).

Local municipal governments and land trusts also play a role in farmland conservation. As reported in 2008, the last year data was available, together they own 136,000 acres of open space, some of which is farmland. Twenty-seven towns have participated in municipally-funded conservation projects. Since 2004, several communities have allocated as much as $4 million in designated funding and others have budgeting about $200,000, on average, for purchasing easements on 1700 acres, in partnership with public agencies or private trusts. Many of 125 land trusts and conservation organizations in the state participate by accepting easements and also by leveraging available funds to acquire development rights. Among them are the Connecticut Farmland Trust (CFT), the only private statewide organization of this type, which holds development rights to 20

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9 As reported by Working Lands Alliance (WLA), a membership-based advocacy organization, other legislative highlights in 2011 included H.5472, a bill that explicitly authorized municipalities to establish local or regional agricultural commissions and requires that agriculture be considered in local planning and conservation.
farms, a total of 1766 acres, and the Simsbury Land Trust (SLT), which has acquired rights to five of the seven remaining farms in town. SLT’s most recent effort, the purchases of the rights to the two largest farms in Simsbury for $5 million, involved raising funds from private donors ($1 million) and the rest from federal, state, and town sources.

With the rising cost of agricultural real estate in Connecticut (now over $12,000 per acre) an increasing number of commercial farming operations today take place on leased private or public land, estimated at 38 percent of all farmland in the state in 2010. Access to affordable productive land is limited. It may be purchased by a town and leased to establish new farms or to expand the acreage of existing farms, as with Deerfield Farm, which leased 60 acres with a dairy barn from the Town of Durham in 2004. Today a self-sustaining dairy operation with 45 cows, the farm grows all of its hay and maintains a dairy store, which sells bottled milk, yogurt, and cheese made on site. For Wallingford, leasing publicly-owned farm property was an opportunity to conduct experimental trials to improve soil conditions and prevent erosion on the rented parcels, currently 19 percent of the town’s total farm acreage. The towns of Suffield, Glastonbury, and Lebanon also lease land under varying terms.

Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) is another use for leased farmland. Although all of the 65 CSA farms in the state are primarily involved in food production for subscriber members, or for local sale, most of these organizations have educational programs for children and young adults, and provide opportunities for public service. A number also donate food to schools and food pantries. Several of the larger, more established CSAs, which are located on the Ambler Farm in Wilton, the Hilltop Farm in Suffield, and the Holcomb Farm, a former tobacco farm in Granby, also have a historic preservation component. Their long-term leases with the respective towns include provisions for the maintenance and/or restoration of the historic farmhouses and barns.
Preserving Barns

“Historic Barns of Connecticut” is only statewide program committed to the preservation of the historic agricultural built environment. Sponsored and developed by the Connecticut Trust for Historic Preservation (CTHP), with the support of the State Historic Preservation Office, it has focused attention on this neglected area of historic architecture with a statewide survey of more than 8000 barns, a matching grant program for barns, and technical assistance to barn owners. Hundreds of volunteers, paid staff, and consultants carried out the barn survey, which has yielded a wealth of information about Connecticut’s agricultural history and buildings. Public funding for the grant program is provided under the state’s Community Investment Act. In the eight years that this program has been in existence, grants amounting to more than $300,000 awarded to non-profit and municipal barn owners, and private owners leveraged $1.5 million in matching funds. Largely due to these programs, Connecticut’s barns have come “out of the closet” for inspection and analysis of their modes of constructions and specialized functions, and a systematic assessment of their architectural and historical significance. Many of these enduring symbols of Connecticut’s agrarian past will be placed on the Connecticut State Register of Historic Places, in a long delayed but well-deserved recognition of their significance.

PART V

CONCLUSION

Summary

Connecticut’s 350-year agricultural heritage laid out in these pages has explored and identified the often cyclical nature of the broader themes and underlying cultural patterns that defined our agrarian society. From colonial settlement to the present day, the over-arching historical theme was the cultural meaning of land…how the use of land shaped and defined the past and how today’s well-established public and private initiatives to protect the land and the historic built environment will preserve this heritage for future generations.

Connecticut’s historic barns are highly significant resources, a collective illustration of the evolutionary transition from a colonial agrarian society to the modern urbanized industrial state. As an architectural embodiment of Connecticut’s agricultural history, barns reflect the changes in type and use of agricultural buildings over time in response to improvements in agricultural practices and technology and the demands of the marketplace.

As Connecticut agriculture moved from the exploitation of the land to an acceptance of the necessity to protect and conserve this vital resource, traditional and often wasteful farming practices gave way to more specialized and scientific methods. By the last quarter of the nineteenth century, although farming was no longer the “great business of the nation” envisioned by the founders, agriculture was more efficient and productive, as reflected in the dairy and poultry industries, which by the early 1900s generated the most technologically advanced changes in barn construction.
In these pages we have celebrated Connecticut farmers in all of their various historical roles, a saga that began with the English immigrant settlers whose Old World land policies, building traditions, and agricultural practices became imbedded in Connecticut’s colonial culture. The entrepreneurial Yankee farmers, who emerged in the post-Revolutionary market economy, often experimented with new crops or specialized in exportable commodities for the maritime trade. Several established new markets for Connecticut farm products in the Deep South. Members of succeeding generations who left their family farms for new lives on the frontier often carried on the building traditions of their ancestors. In fact, so many traditional English barns were built by these migrants that they were simply identified as “Connecticut barns.”

Although few in number, new European immigrants, dispossessed by war and prejudice, found refuge on abandoned Yankee farms and passed them down to their descendants, a cultural transformation and revival of the rural countryside that is considered to be one of the great stories of modern Connecticut. Together with the new breed of college-educated, professional farmers, they helped reverse the agricultural decline of the 1900s and made farming in Connecticut more productive than ever before.

In today’s post-modern electronic world, the “return to the land” movement was a significant factor in the renewal of the state’s agricultural economy. Fostered in part by a greater interest in nutrition and health, this popular movement has encouraged the expansion of community based agriculture, and the proliferation of farmstands and farmers markets selling locally grown and organic produce. The movement brought together public and private organizations and agencies to promote new land policies and programs that help preserve farmland and agricultural buildings, making farming in Connecticut more affordable and productive. The success of these efforts is demonstrated in the many photographs on these pages. It is hoped that these vistas, often only glimpsed by passing motorists on the interstates, will foster a renewed awareness and appreciation for Connecticut’s historic farmsteads and the beauty and diversity of its cultivated landscapes.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We had a tremendous amount of support for Historic Barns of Connecticut; without it, the project would not have happened. First, and most important, were more than 400 volunteers – from various non-profit organizations (including our own), municipalities, and local historical societies – who performed windshield surveys that allowed us to document more than 8,000 barns in the state over a seven-year period. This effort laid the groundwork for the selection of barn sites included in this thematic nomination. In addition to volunteers, we’ve had great support from our state legislators, who have funded our barns grants, participated in our barn-related media events and who have been a resource for the development of the program. Of course, acknowledgments would not be complete without the most important participants in this project, the owners of the 200 barns we researched and wrote about. While the barns staff and consultants have fallen in love with our Connecticut barns, the owners have always loved them and their love, along with hard work and dedication, is often what keeps these structures standing.

I would like to acknowledge the staff and board members at the Connecticut Trust for Historic Preservation, for their conceptual input on the direction of the report, text editing, and overall support of the project.

Enough can’t be said about our barn context statement consultants, Jan Cunningham and Liz Warner. Jan and Liz brought everything together in a manner that’s not only informational but enjoyable to read. Their expertise in Connecticut agricultural history, their skills at research and writing, and their overall professionalism raised the standards of the project.

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