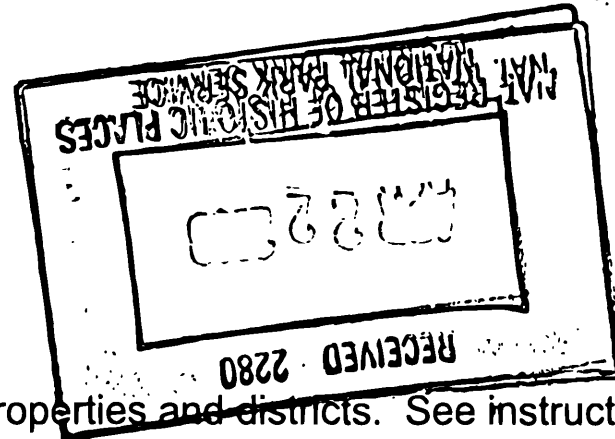


United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
REGISTRATION FORM



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

1. Name of Property

historic name BRIGGS, RICHARD, FARM

other names/site number \_\_\_\_\_

2. Location

street & number 830 SOUTH ROAD

not for publication \_\_\_\_\_

city or town EAST GREENWICH

vicinity \_\_\_\_\_

state RHODE ISLAND code RI county KENT code 003 zip code 02818

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this X nomination     request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property X meets     does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant     nationally     statewide X locally. (     See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Frederick Williamson  
Signature of certifying official/Title

9 April 03  
Date

State or Federal agency and bureau \_\_\_\_\_

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

Signature of commenting or other official \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

State or Federal agency and bureau \_\_\_\_\_

4. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby certify that this property is:

- entered in the National Register     See continuation sheet.
- determined eligible for the National Register     See continuation sheet.
- determined not eligible for the National Register
- removed from the National Register
- other (explain): \_\_\_\_\_

[Signature]  
Signature of the Keeper

6/6/03  
Date of Action

**SDI/NPS NRHP Registration Form**  
**RICHARD BRIGGS FARM, EAST GREENWICH, KENT CO., R.I.**

=====  
**5. Classification**  
=====

Ownership of Property (Check as many boxes as apply)

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

Category of Property (Check only one box)

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

Number of Resources within Property

Contributing	Noncontributing
<u>3</u>	<input type="checkbox"/> buildings
<u>2</u>	<input type="checkbox"/> sites
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> structures
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> objects
<u>5</u>	<u>0</u> Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

Name of related multiple property listing

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

N/A

=====  
**6. Function or Use**  
=====

Historic Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

Category/Subcategory:

DOMESTIC/single dwelling  
AGRICULTURE/SUBSISTENCE/  
Agricultural field, agricultural outbuilding  
FUNERARY/cemetery

Current Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

Category/Subcategory:

DOMESTIC/single dwelling  
AGRICULTURE/SUBSISTENCE/  
Agricultural field, agricultural outbuilding  
FUNERARY/cemetery

=====  
**7. Description**  
=====

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions)

COLONIAL/Postmedieval English

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation STONE/granite (field stone)

roof ASPHALT

walls WOOD/Clapboard, shingle

other BRICK, STONE (Chimneys)

WOOD (Trim)

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

SEE ATTACHED CONTINUATION SHEETS

**SDI/NPS NRHP Registration Form**  
**RICHARD BRIGGS FARM, EAST GREENWICH, KENT CO., R.I**

=====  
**8. Statement of Significance**  
=====

**Applicable National Register Criteria**

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

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

**Criteria Considerations**

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

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

**Areas of Significance** (Enter categories from instructions)

AGRICULTURE  
ARCHITECTURE  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Period of Significance**

1704-1950  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Significant Dates**

ca. 1735-1755  
ca. 1820-1860  
ca. 1930  
ca. 1950

**Significant Person**

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

**Cultural Affiliation**

**Architect/Builder**

BRIGGS, JOHN III

**Narrative Statement of Significance** (Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

SEE ATTACHED CONTINUATION SHEETS

=====  
**9. Major Bibliographical References**  
=====

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

SEE ATTACHED CONTINUATION SHEETS

**Previous documentation on file (NPS)**

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey  
# \_\_\_\_\_
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record  
# \_\_\_\_\_

**Primary Location of Additional Data**

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Name of repository:  
\_\_\_\_\_

SDI/NPS NRHP Registration Form  
RICHARD BRIGGS FARM, EAST GREENWICH, KENT CO., R.I.

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property Approx. 72 acres

UTM References (Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

Zone Easting Northing	Zone Easting Northing
1 _____	3 _____
2 _____	4 _____
<u>X</u> See continuation sheet.	

Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)  
Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

SEE ATTACHED  
CONTINUATION SHEETS

11. Form Prepared By

name/title KATHRYN J. CAVANAUGH, PRESERVATION CONSULTANT

organization \_\_\_\_\_ date NOVEMBER 25, 2002

street & number 197 SIXTH STREET telephone 401-273-4715

city or town PROVIDENCE state RI zip code 02906

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

- A USGS map (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
- A sketch map for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs

- Representative black and white photographs of the property.

Additional items (Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

Property Owner

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

name EAST GREENWICH MUNICIPAL LAND TRUST c/o WILLIAM SEQUINO, JR., TOWN MANAGER

street & number 125 MAIN STREET, P.O. BOX 111 telephone 401-886-8665

city or town EAST GREENWICH state RI zip code 02818-0111

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

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

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NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 7 Page 1

BRIGGS FARM, 830 SOUTH ROAD  
EAST GREENWICH, KENT CO., R.I.

=====

**ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION**

The Richard Briggs Farm at 830 South Road occupies about 72 acres of land on the south side of South Road in the very southern part of East Greenwich, abutting its border with the town of North Kingstown. Established ca. 1704 by Richard Briggs, the Briggs Farm reached its maximum size of 180 acres in 1850. Over 40% of that land area remains part of the farm today, most of it characterized by extensive fields and woodlands.<sup>1</sup> The Briggs Farm contains the following historic structures and sites: a dwelling house and bank barn, both ca. 1735-1755 (with 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century additions and alterations); an outbuilding, probably an ice house, ca. 1860; dry-laid stone walls built in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, standing in various locations in and around the farmstead; and a Briggs family burial ground dating to ca. 1715. These resources are generally well-preserved and maintained in fair to good condition (although the ice house is significantly deteriorated). The Briggs Farm, now protected as open space by a municipal land trust and still in limited agricultural use, retains sufficient integrity of both architecture and landscape to illustrate East Greenwich's early rural settlement and agrarian development from the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century to the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century.

Situated in eastern Kent County about 15 miles southwest of Providence, bounded by Warwick, West Warwick, Coventry, West Greenwich, Exeter, North Kingstown, and Narragansett Bay, the Town of East Greenwich occupies some 16 square miles and has about 13,000 residents. Downtown East Greenwich lies in the northeast corner of town, on Greenwich Cove; the remainder of the land south and west of the town center has traditionally been rural, crisscrossed by a grid of country roads. But like much of Kent County, East Greenwich has in recent years seen many of its formerly rural areas transformed with suburban residential and commercial developments. Only a handful of the extensive farms originally established in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries still survive, including the Briggs Farm.<sup>2</sup>

South Road lies perhaps half a mile north of the North Kingstown line: a hilly, winding, narrow, two-lane asphalt country road lined with old dry-laid stone walls. It runs for about 2.5 miles between South County Trail on the east (where the intersection is called Briggs Corner) and Shippee Road on the west; the Briggs Farm lies roughly half way between them on South Road. About 0.3 mile west of the Briggs Farm, Tillinghast Road meets South Road from the north; about 0.8 mile further west, Narrow Lane (which is partly in North Kingstown) meets South Road from the south. All of these rural roads date back to the colonial era (South Road may predate the founding of East Greenwich in 1677) and most of them are still lined with aged dry-laid stone walls. However, South County Trail was widened and designated as R.I. Route 2 in 1930; it and another state highway to its west, R.I. Route 4, now provide access from the Briggs Farm to

<sup>1</sup> The current total area of the Briggs Farm is some 86 acres, but about 14 of those acres lie in the Town of North Kingstown. Only the 72 acres in East Greenwich are included in this nomination.

<sup>2</sup> See also Tillinghast Road Historic District (NR, 1988) and Fry's Hamlet Historic District (NR, 1974).

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NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET

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BRIGGS FARM, 830 SOUTH ROAD  
EAST GREENWICH, KENT CO., R.I.

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downtown East Greenwich (about seven miles away, as the crow flies) and to other Rhode Island communities. A number of mid-to-late-20<sup>th</sup> century residences now stand on South Road, particularly east of the Briggs Farm and west of Tillinghast Road.

Historically, the Briggs Farm once extended for almost a mile along South Road, as far west as Narrow Lane, and stretched more than half a mile south into North Kingstown. Although now reduced in size, the farm still retains about 1,000 feet of frontage along South Road and a depth of about 2,100 feet to the North Kingstown line.

Landscape Features

In the vicinity of the farmhouse at the north end of the property, the land gently slopes down toward the northeast and east, and rises up a bit toward the southwest and west: the farm's outbuildings are set into the sides of small hills. Agricultural fields surround the house and outbuildings, creating a buffer of open space estimated at 10 acres. Another field of an estimated 5 acres lies perhaps 800 feet south (and out of view) of the house. The remainder of the property is heavily wooded with mostly deciduous trees. The southern branch of Scrabbletown Brook, which once ran through the farm property, now marks its southwest boundary line.

Dry-laid stone walls dating to the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries delineate the entire north property line along South Road, as well as the east and most of the west property lines; similar walls may be found in various locations within the farm interior. Most of these walls are approximately 4.5 feet tall.

Access into the farm is gained by a narrow gravel and dirt driveway running perpendicularly from South Road along the west side of the house. The driveway is lined with mature trees, shrubs, and stone walls, and features a pair of wrought iron gates near the house. Just inside the gates, west of the driveway, is a small grassy parking area with stone walls on its north and south sides; directly south of the parking area is a relatively small field lined with stone walls on its north, west and south. Another stone wall extends perpendicularly from the east property line, stopping a few feet short of the house's northeast corner. The driveway continues past the house until it becomes a dirt cart path, which then splits into two branches leading to the outbuildings and southern fields. Stone walls enclose a small pasture south of the bank barn (a wood rail fence with a modern metal gate runs along the north edge of the pasture), and also line the west side of the cart path that leads south of the barn. Additional stone walls (about 3 feet tall, shorter than most found on the farm) also surround the burial ground southwest of the barn. A wrought iron gate in the eastern wall of the burial ground, near its southeast corner, provides access into it.

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BRIGGS FARM, 830 SOUTH ROAD  
EAST GREENWICH, KENT CO., R.I.

Historically, a variety of trees stood on the Briggs Farm, some used as landmarks in delineating property lines, others used for building materials. Species mentioned in 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century deeds include gray oak, black oak, chestnut, pear, and peach. Chestnut timbers framed both the house and barn; an 1848 inventory of a carpenter shop belonging to one of Richard Briggs's great-grandsons mentions lumber of chestnut, ash, maple, oak, white oak, walnut and beech. Today, in addition to the mix of trees in the wooded areas of the property, several solitary specimen and ornamental trees stand in the fields south and west of the house, including black locust, ash, dogwood, and cherry.

Records indicate that in 1850, the Briggs Farm yielded both crops and dairy products, including corn, potatoes, hay, butter, and wool; livestock included horses, cattle, oxen, sheep, and pigs. In the more recent past (mid-20<sup>th</sup> century), a Christmas tree farm was cultivated here. Today, no animals are maintained on the farm, and most of the open fields are covered with grass. Recently, the 5-acre southernmost field has been leased to the Rhode Island Community Farm, which grows a variety of vegetable crops there.

At least two wells of unknown age survive on the property, one (now capped off) just south of the house adjacent to the present kitchen door, and the other, with a pump, just west of the largest of the ells north of the house.

A narrow poured concrete walkway extends west from the driveway to the entrance of the present kitchen.

Buildings

All three extant buildings (dwelling house, bank barn, and ice house) are sited at the northern end of the Briggs Farm near South Road. All are considered contributing structures for the purposes of this nomination.

The Dwelling House

The farmhouse, although visible from South Road, stands over 200 feet back from the roadway and faces away from it, overlooking the southern fields. (This orientation maximizes the impact of the sun's light and warmth, an important consideration in New England.) The house is an L-shaped complex of five attached structures: the 2-1/2 story original block, ca. 1735-1755; the 2-story west addition, ca. 1820-1850; and three one-story ells on the north side the west addition, built ca. 1845, ca. 1930, and ca. 1950.

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BRIGGS FARM, 830 SOUTH ROAD  
EAST GREENWICH, KENT CO., R.I.

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*Dwelling House: Original*

The original block of the house has traditionally been dated either ca. 1704 or ca. 1725, although both structural and documentary evidence indicate a more likely construction period of 1735-1755. Structurally, the most telling clues to the true age of the Briggs house are its frame, massing, and floor plan. The hand-hewn, heavy post-and-girt timber frame (clearly visible in both cellar and attic) is fastened together with wooden pegs; the rafters are numbered with Roman numeral "marriage marks" to help match custom-cut mortise and tenon joints together, as was common until about 1800. But houses built before 1725 typically started out with a linear, one-room-deep floor plan of one or two rooms flanking a massive chimney block; later additions to increase the height, width or depth of the house are usually discernible, particularly in the framing of the roof. No evidence of any such additions exists at the Briggs farmhouse, indicating that its boxy shape and 2-story, 2-room-deep floor plan surrounding the central chimney are original to the house, which places the construction period sometime between 1740-1760. Thus, although Richard Briggs established this farm in about 1704 (on land purchased by his father in 1672), the fact that he died in 1733 means that he could not have built this house. More likely his son, John Briggs III, constructed the house; what is known of his life and of this period in East Greenwich's history places the time frame for construction at about 1735-1755 (see Section 8).

The 2-1/2 story original house with side gable roof is a good example of a vernacular, mid-18<sup>th</sup> century farmhouse.<sup>3</sup> It stands on a slightly raised fieldstone foundation, which also forms the walls of the deep cellar. The house's exterior walls are covered in clapboards (although evidence of exterior wood shingles may be seen on the west gable end at the attic level, viewed from inside the attic of the west addition). The roof is covered with asphalt shingles. The brick center chimney straddles the ridge and features two simple brick bands, one at the cap and the other just below it. The fenestration pattern is five bays wide and three bays deep, with center entrances in both south (front) and east (side) elevations; the arrangement of doors and windows is slightly asymmetrical on all elevations. All exterior trim is very plain at the sills, corners, and eaves; the gable roof presents simply molded cornice returns. The window surrounds are likewise unpretentious, with simply molded caps. The south (main) entrance features simple pilasters on either side of the doorway, capped with a flat crown; the east (side) doorway has an unadorned surround and flat cap. A large granite block serves as a step up to each entrance door. Both doors were replaced sometime in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century: each has two square panels at the top of the door, a large glass light below that, followed by two square panels above two horizontal panels. The south door has a wood framed multi-light storm door. The east door is shielded not by a storm door, but by solid vertical board door with period thumb

<sup>3</sup> Note: neither Norman Isham nor Antoinette Downing mentioned the Briggs farmhouse in their books on early Rhode Island houses, likely because the house lacks any hallmarks of the academic Georgian style.



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BRIGGS FARM, 830 SOUTH ROAD  
EAST GREENWICH, KENT CO., R.I.

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latch and strap hinges on its exterior. Doors like this were common in early 18<sup>th</sup> century houses, but it is not clear whether this exterior door is original to this house.

All windows in the original house are wood. At the basement level, small horizontal multi-light fixed windows (not original) recessed into the stone foundation let light into the cellar: there are two each on the south, east and north elevations (the north basement windows have shallow concrete-lined areaways). All of the first floor windows are now 1/1 double hung sash, probably replaced in the late 19<sup>th</sup> or early 20<sup>th</sup> century. On the second floor, the south windows are all 8/12 double hung sash; the west, north and east elevations feature a mix of 8/12 and 6/9 double hung sash and 12-light casement windows; the smaller, narrower windows are all toward the back of the house. The two attic windows in the east and west gables are both 8/12. Most of these multi-light windows appear to be original; however it is known that the center window over the main entrance in the south elevation was removed and replaced with a door ca. 1935 when a two-story porch was added to the front of the house. The porch and second floor door were removed in the 1970s; the wall was repaired and a replacement window installed to match the other second floor windows. All windows have wooden 4-light storm windows attached to their surrounds.

Inside, the central chimney is fieldstone at the basement and first floor levels and brick from the second floor up to the cap. The chimney has three fireplaces on the first floor (on its west, north and east sides), and two fireplaces on the second floor (on its west and east sides). The chimney also has two small smoke rooms (for smoking meat) built into its north side, one on the first floor and one on the second. No evidence of fireplaces exists in either the cellar or attic, indicating that those levels were not used as living spaces.

The cellar is one large room, with a horizontal board partition wall inserted between the east side of the chimney and the east foundation wall; the chimney, which is 8 feet square at its base, takes up most of the space in the cellar. A wooden stairway, oriented north/south near the northwest corner of the basement, provides access to and from the upper floors. A second, poured concrete stairway at the northwest corner of the basement leads up to one of the north ells and was added ca. 1950.

The original four-room plan on both first and second floors consisted of two equal-sized rooms (about 16x13 feet) east and west of the chimney, a slightly larger room (about 18x12 feet) north of the chimney, and a smaller room (about 8x12 feet, with no heating source) in the northeast corner. All ceilings are about 7 feet tall. Sometime after about 1935, the original plan was modified on both floors. On the first floor, interior partition walls were removed to merge the east, northeast, and north rooms into one large L-shaped room: the locations of these partition walls can be gauged from changes in the flooring and from the presence of boxed corner posts in the outside walls. On the second floor, the original north bedroom was subdivided to permit

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BRIGGS FARM, 830 SOUTH ROAD  
EAST GREENWICH, KENT CO., R.I.

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installation of a bathroom: the partition wall directly butts up against the edge of the bathroom window, and what is now the north bedroom has a much plainer door surround than the other original second floor rooms. The house has two internal stairways, both of which appear to be original although the front (south) stairs have since been modified. The original front stairs butted up against the south side of the chimney, opposite the front door, accessed from a short narrow passage between the east and west rooms, a common configuration in the early to mid-18<sup>th</sup> century. Changes visible in the wood flooring south of the chimney, visible in basement and attic, suggest that the front stairway originally provided access to all levels of the house. A period staircase would have turned at least twice in its ascent from first to second floor; the present stairway turns only once, and now opens directly into the east room instead of into the front hall; its balusters and newel post are clearly not original. A second stairway runs from basement to attic in the northwest corner of the house; the stairs turn once rising from first to second floor, and once from second floor to attic. Each level of this stairway is enclosed with beaded vertical board walls; solid wood doors close off the basement and attic stairs.

The west room on the first floor contained the original kitchen: its stone fireplace is the largest of the three on this floor, about 4.5 feet wide by 4 feet tall by 2 feet deep, and has a brick-lined bake oven adjacent to it. The bracketed wooden mantel shelf, paneling over the mantel, and thin, plain wooden door to the bake oven are not original (historic photos ca. 1935 show a different design). The other first floor rooms would have functioned as living, work, storage, and perhaps even sleeping spaces. The fireplaces in the east and north sides of the chimney on the first floor are both small, about 3 feet wide by 32 inches tall by 14 inches deep. The north mantelpiece may date from the late 18<sup>th</sup> or early 19<sup>th</sup> century; to its right, a small, thin, plain wooden door with wrought iron hardware hides a smoke oven. The east mantelpiece is of the same vintage as that in the original kitchen (after 1935).

On the second floor, a hallway runs the entire length of the house from east to west, separating the two front bedrooms from the two back bedrooms, bathroom, and back stairs. In the middle of this hallway is a molded door casing and threshold, indicating the presence of a doorway here at one time. Only the two front bedrooms have (small) fireplaces; both mantelpieces are identical and probably date to the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Each of the front bedrooms also has two doors, one opening onto the front stair hall and the other opening into the back hall. When the 2-story west addition to the original house was constructed ca. 1820-1850, the northwest corner of the original west bedroom was modified to provide access from the back hallway to both the old west bedroom and the "new" west bedroom. Sometime after that, small closets were constructed in the northwest corners of both front bedrooms. At the back of the house, the northeast corner bedroom has no closet or fireplace. Next to that is the present north bedroom, which was subdivided from the original north bedroom; it also lacks either a closet or fireplace. West of the north bedroom is the bathroom, with modern fixtures. Opposite the bathroom door, across the back hall in the north wall of the chimney, is a small smoke room closed off by a solid

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BRIGGS FARM, 830 SOUTH ROAD  
EAST GREENWICH, KENT CO., R.I.

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wooden door. In the northwest corner of the second floor are the back stairs, leading down to the main floor and up to the attic. Two small, narrow closets are built against the west wall, finished with beaded board siding and matching doors.

Most of the original (or at least historic) interior materials and features survive on both first and second floors: plaster walls and ceilings, exposed corner posts encased in beaded boxes, wide plank floors. Original molded wood door and window casings, and four-panel wood doors with wrought iron thumb latches and H-L hinges, are prevalent in most rooms. Some rooms have simple picture rails, peg rails, chair rails, or wainscotting; some of these details may be later alterations but all apparently were present by ca. 1935.

The attic level has no interior finishes, another indication that it was not used as living space. The exposed roof framing includes rafters, tie beams, and ridgepole; framing members are numbered and pegged as noted above. A small hatch in the west wall provides access to the attic of the west addition.

*Dwelling House: The West Addition*

Sometime between 1820-1850, when the farm was owned by John Briggs III's son Joseph Briggs and grandson son David Briggs, a 2-story addition was constructed west of the original house, with a very similar character: side gable roof clad in asphalt shingles, clapboard walls, wood windows and doors, and simple decorative details. The major feature that helps to date this addition is the chimney, located just north of the ridge: it is of modest size, perhaps four feet square, and has no evidence of fireplaces. By the 1830s, freestanding cast iron stoves had become an efficient and affordable heat source, negating the need for fireplaces; evidence of stovepipe connections to this chimney can be found on both floors.

The west addition is three bays wide and one bay deep, set back slightly from the main façade of the original house. In the south elevation is a doorway in the left bay at the ground floor level, sheltered by a very simple porch (altered since the 1930s: lattice sides replaced with 2x4 supports) which serves as the primary entrance into the house today; the door itself is a wood and glass unit with wood and glass storm door (date unknown). Throughout this addition, the first floor windows are multi-light casements (paired on the south elevation, single on the west), while the second floor windows are 6/6 wood double hung sash. All windows are covered by the same wood framed 4-light storm windows found on the original house.

The west addition has two rooms, a kitchen on the first floor and a bedroom upstairs, connected by a small enclosed stairway in the southwest corner, with a door opening into a short enclosed hallway extending north from the exterior door. Just north of the hallway is the chimney flue (clad in beaded boards and brick veneer in the kitchen, covered with plaster in the bedroom).

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BRIGGS FARM, 830 SOUTH ROAD  
EAST GREENWICH, KENT CO., R.I.

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The kitchen interior was remodeled in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and has beaded board cabinets on its east, north and west walls; a soapstone sink stands under the west window. The stovepipe connection is in the east wall of the chimney flue. The stairway turns twice as it ascends to the second floor, ending in a small hallway with a railing along the landing. The bedroom has two closets: a large one built behind its northwest corner, with built-in drawers and a window; and a second smaller one inserted into the southwest corner of the room. The larger closet may be original. Next to (south of) the large closet is the chimney flue, with the location of a stovepipe connection clearly discernible in the plaster that now covers it. This room has plaster walls and hardwood floors (with narrower boards than in the original house), and is devoid of any interior trim other than simple baseboards and window and door surrounds. The bedroom also has a door in its east wall that leads into the original portion of the house.

The west addition has no basement, only a crawl space beneath it; its small attic (not tall enough for an adult to stand up in) is unfinished.

*Dwelling House: The North Ells*

Three ells constructed north of the west addition give the present farmhouse its L-shaped configuration. All three ells are either one or 1-1/2 stories tall, also constructed of wood and sheathed in clapboards, with wood windows and doors. These seem to have been intended as work and/or storage spaces; they appear to have been constructed separately. In this nomination they are referred to as North Ell #1, #2, and #3, in order proceeding northward away from the house.

North Ell #1, one story tall, measures perhaps 6 feet by 20 feet (the short side faces west). This ell was likely constructed ca. 1930: tax records indicate a slight increase in the assessed value of buildings and improvements between 1930-1934, when the farm was owned by John Howard, and this ell may be seen in historic photos dated ca. 1935.<sup>4</sup> It is sited north of and parallel to the west addition and perpendicular to the original house, tucked into the corner where the original house and the west addition come together. Its slightly sloping roof is covered with asphalt shingles. The exterior walls are mostly taken up by windows (a pair of 6/6 wood double hung sash in both the west and north elevations), and otherwise clad in what may be exterior plywood. One of the windows in the north face is missing, the opening protected only by an aluminum storm window; the other three storm windows are the same wood-frame, 4-light units found elsewhere on the house. On its interior, North Ell #1 contains a small powder room in its east end, and a larger room now used as a home office. The interior finishes appear to date from the early to mid 20<sup>th</sup> century. A former exterior window in the north wall of the west addition now provides views from this ell into the present kitchen; a doorway in the same north

<sup>4</sup> Other exterior alterations ca. 1935 included a porch on the south elevation (removed in the 1970s); see historic photos on file at RIHP&HC.

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wall provides access between this ell and the rest of the house. An door (beaded board with thumb latch) in the north wall of this ell, that looks like it was once an exterior door, now gives access to North Ell #2.

North Ell #2, also one story tall, with a very shallow gable roof clad in asphalt shingles, stands perpendicular to North Ell #1 and covers the remainder of the west elevation of the original house. This structure measures approximately 15 feet by 20 feet (the long side faces west). Tax records indicate another increase (over \$3,000) in assessed value of buildings and improvements in 1952-1954, when William and Hazle Parmenter owned the farm; some of this increase may apply to this construction. The exterior walls of this ell are almost entirely occupied by windows and doors: on the west elevation, the fenestration pattern is window, window, window, door, window; while on the west elevation, the pattern is window, door, window. All windows are wood framed 6/6 double hung sash with the same wood storm windows found elsewhere on the house. Both doors are wood-framed, multi-light glass units. The interior of this ell is two steps down from North Ell #1, has modern finishes, and is presently used for storage. A concrete stairway in the southeast corner of this ell leads down into the basement of the original house. An interior doorway in the north wall has a step up leading to North Ell #3.

North Ell #3 may be the oldest of the three ells. It is also the largest, standing 1-1/2 stories tall, and measuring perhaps 20 feet wide by 40 feet long. This ell contains a chimney flue for a wood-burning or coal-burning stove and a "two-holer" privy, indicating that it may predate the late 19<sup>th</sup> century introduction of both central heating and indoor plumbing. Many farmers built heated workshops to provide a place to work during inclement weather, or to earn outside income for services such as blacksmithing or carpentry. The inventory of David Briggs (grandson of the builder of the original house), who owned the farm from 1832-1848, mentions large amounts of lumber stored in a carpenter shop. Since David Briggs died in 1848, it seems reasonable to conclude that North Ell #3 was constructed ca. 1845.<sup>5</sup> Its side gable roof is oriented north-south; the brick chimney is set close to the ridge roughly in the middle of the building. As would be necessary for a workshop, the building is well lit, with five horizontal three-light windows on its west elevation and three more on the east. The west elevation also contains two solid wood doors, one an older, vertical plank door with metal thumb latch and strap hinges; the other a more modern unit with a doorknob. (The fenestration pattern on the west elevation reads window, door, 3 windows, door, window.) All windows and doors are framed with simple surrounds. At the north end of this ell, on its east side, stands a little enclosed lean-to with no doors or windows. This structure is presently used as a workshop; the roof framing is visible within the interior.

<sup>5</sup> E.G. Probate Records, Book 7, Page 611, inventory dated June 27, 1848; as noted in Adamson, p. 31.

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The Outbuildings

The bank barn and ice house are sited about 275-350 feet southwest of the farmhouse, reached by a dirt cart path.

*The Bank Barn*

A bank barn is built into a hillside; typically the barn is two stories tall, and the change in grade is a full story, so that the barn may be entered at grade on both levels. Stone walls support the uphill section but leave an open area underneath it: this design facilitates cleaning, as manure may be shoveled through a trapdoor in the barn floor to drop to the ground below, where it may conveniently be stored out of the weather for reuse as fertilizer. The L-shaped Briggs Farm bank barn exactly fits this description, with one section downhill and another uphill and perpendicular to it. However, while bank barns came into vogue in New England by the 1820s-1830s, the barn at the Briggs Farm appears to be much earlier than that, and may even be contemporary with the original house (1735-1755). Both sections of this bank barn have the same hand-hewn, heavy timbered, wood-pegged, post-and-girt framing with "marriage marked" mortise-and-tenon joints as seen in the original house. The marriage marks signify the "scribe rule" technique of fitting timbers together: a technique used until the advent of standardized framing in the early 1800s. Precise dating of barns is difficult, but whether this bank barn was built in the mid- or late 18<sup>th</sup> century (and whether both sections were built simultaneously or separately), it is one of the oldest surviving barns in East Greenwich. The bank barn has been modified several times, with two major additions: an ell and a lean-to, both built in the mid to late 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The downhill section of the bank barn is 2-1/2 stories tall with an asphalt-shingled side gable roof oriented east-west. The first floor walls are mortared fieldstone, while the second floor walls are wood shingles (originally they probably would have been vertical board sheathing). The main entrance, a sliding barn door, is at grade in the north elevation; a few rows of wall shingles above the door project out slightly to shelter the door track. ("Eave-front" barn doors were common until the 1830s, when "gable-front" doors became more popular; by the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, the sliding door on a covered track had replaced the earlier hinged barn door.) Above the main door in the north elevation is a wooden hayloft door. A small horizontal wood-framed window has been cut into the stone wall on first floor of the east elevation. Four small square single-light windows (opening into animal stalls) may be found on the first floor of the south elevation, and a wood double-hung sash window is cut into the second floor of the south elevation, near where the downhill and uphill sections of the barn meet. Inside the downhill section, at its east end, part of the flooring between the upper and lower stories has been removed (mortise pockets are visible). The west end of the downhill section has several animal

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stalls on its first floor; a steep wooden stairway leads up to a hay loft on the second floor. A door in the west wall of the second floor leads into the uphill section of the barn (one step up).

The uphill section of the bank barn is also 2-1/2 stories tall with an asphalt-shingled side gable roof, but oriented north-south (perpendicular to the downhill section). Its north, west and east elevations are all covered with wood shingles; vertical board sheathing covers most of the south elevation, up into the sill of a window on the second floor. The main entrance, a sliding barn door, is at grade in the west elevation; a few rows of wall shingles above it project out slightly to shelter the door track. A second, hinged wooden door (also slightly sheltered by a few rows of shingles) is cut into the west elevation near the south end of the barn. The west elevation also features three wood-framed windows on its first floor level, each four lights with upper panes larger than lower panes. The south elevation has two wood-framed windows in it: a 6/6 double hung sash on the second floor, centered under the gable, and a 1/1 window on the first floor near the east side. The east elevation has six horizontal wood-framed windows at the first floor level. Inside the uphill section is evidence that the barn was added onto twice, both times at its southern end: exterior wall sheathing is clearly visible on the south sides of what are now two interior partition walls within the barn. The first floor level contains several animal stalls, and some small rooms partitioned off with half-height wood walls. The second floor is a hayloft. This barn is presently used for storage.

Neither of these barns is large enough to have housed significant numbers of livestock. An agricultural inventory of 1850 lists a total of 26 animals on the Briggs Farm, including two horses, half a dozen cattle and oxen, about a dozen sheep, and half a dozen pigs.

The bank barn has two additions. The first is a 2-story ell built perpendicular to the south face of the downhill section, set back slightly from its east elevation. Designed to be compatible with the original structure, the ell has an asphalt-shingled side gable roof and wood wall shingles, as found on the original barn. The addition has a sliding wooden barn door in its east elevation and two double-hung sash windows in its west elevation. The ell's south elevation is its most distinctive, with three wood-framed multi-light Gothic-style windows (obviously from another building not related to the Briggs Farm) on the first floor, and a wooden hayloft door above. Donald and Teresa Boesch built this addition after they purchased the farm in 1954; the ell was then and is presently used for storage. The second addition to the bank barn is an open lean-to shed for farm vehicles, attached to the north elevation of the uphill section of the barn, built by Michael Boesch within the past two decades. The lean-to has a slanted roof and vertical board siding. Neither the south ell nor the north lean-to detracts from the overall architectural significance of the bank barn. Indeed, "the siting of the various sections of the barn complex,

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adjacent to each other but at different levels, and with roofs set parallel or perpendicular to each other, is extraordinarily picturesque.”<sup>6</sup>

As noted above, an pasture lies south of the barn complex, enclosed on three sides by stone walls. The wood rail fence with metal gate is a modern installation.

*The Ice House*

Northwest of the barn complex, near the present tree line and adjacent to a huge boulder, is a small ice house built into a steep hillside. The shaded location and hillside siting of this structure would make it ideal for cold storage. The use of ice for refrigeration came into practice in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, so this ice house may have been built by Paul Hendricks, who purchased the Briggs Farm in 1853 and lived here for the next 34 years.

The ice house has stone walls capped by a wood-framed, asphalt-shingled, end gable roof; the sides of the gables are wood clapboards. A wooden Dutch door is situated in the south gable end of the building, while a small wooden hatch door is in the north gable end. This building is presently unused; its roof is significantly deteriorated, allowing the weather to penetrate into the interior of the structure. The interior is entirely unfinished.

The Burial Ground

Just north of the ice house is the Briggs family cemetery, approximately 1/8 of an acre in size and enclosed on all four sides by a short dry-laid stone wall; a very deteriorated wrought iron gate is attached to an opening near the southeast corner of the wall. A lone tree stands inside the burial ground, and a number of sizeable rocks may be found near the northeastern corner. This burial ground contains 86 grave markers, both headstones and footstones; time and weather have taken a heavy toll, leaving many stones broken and most inscriptions illegible.

What appear to be the two oldest grave markers in the cemetery are located near its northeast corner: a simple stone inscribed “R.B. 1733” likely marks the grave of Richard Briggs, who founded this farm and died that year. Nearby is a stone faintly marked “S.B. 1681,” which appears to mark the grave of Richard’s first wife, Susannah, who was born in 1681 (died ca. 1715). Near the south end of the burial ground is a cluster of markers indicating the resting places of David Briggs (great-grandson of Richard, died 1848), his wife Elizabeth, and two of their children, Caroline (died 1828, age two) and Thomas (died 1833, age five). Each of these headstones has an accompanying footstone marked with the deceased’s initials. Another nearby stone indicates the grave of Henry Johnson, son of Phebe (Briggs) and Levi Johnson,

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<sup>6</sup> Lynch, p. 5.



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who drowned in 1830 at age seven. Phebe Briggs was a sister of David Briggs. The cemetery is included as a contributing element of the district for its historic significance, for its ability to document 18<sup>th</sup>- and 19<sup>th</sup>-century funerary practices on a Rhode Island farm, and for its contribution to the visual ensemble of farm structures.

Despite a number of alterations to the original farmhouse and the barn complex, and a reduction in size of the original acreage, the Briggs Farm still possesses enough integrity of both architecture and landscape, particularly integrity in the relationships of structures within the landscape, to merit listing on the National Register.

PHOTOGRAPHS

Photographer: Kathryn J. Cavanaugh

Date: November 2002

Negative: RI Historical Preservation & Heritage Commission

Photo #1 (of 11): View of west and south (primary) elevations, looking northeast.

Photo #2 (of 11): Farmhouse: south elevation, looking northeast (west addition at left, original house at right).

Photo #3 (of 11): Farmhouse: original kitchen (1<sup>st</sup> floor, west room) fireplace in west side of chimney looking east.

Photo #4 (of 11): 1<sup>st</sup> floor, north room fireplace in north side of chimney looking southwest.

Photo #5 (of 11): Front stairs, south side of chimney, 1<sup>st</sup>-floor opening into east room (modified from original configuration) looking southwest.

Photo #6 (of 11): East and north elevations, looking southwest. Foreground: downhill section; middle left: south ell; background: uphill section and lean-to.

Photo #7 (of 11): South and east elevations looking northwest. Uphill section at left; south ell at right; downhill section in background.

Photo #8 (of 11): Bank barn, uphill section, south/west elevations looking northeast (south ell of downhill section in background).

Photo #9 (of 11): Uphill section and lean-to, west elevation looking east.

Photo #10 (of 11): South and east elevations, looking northwest.

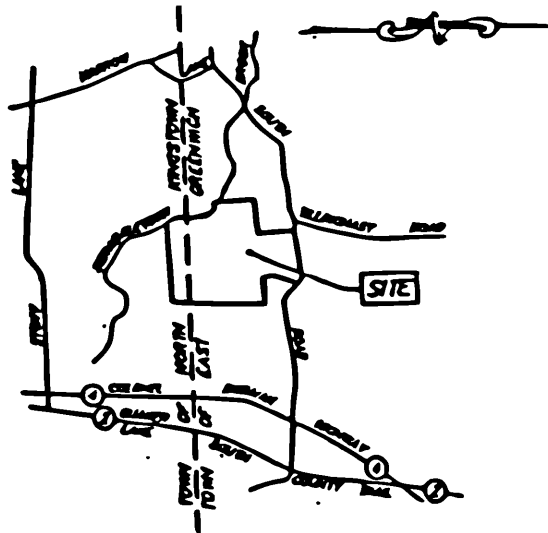
Photo #11 of 11: Burial ground, with bank barn in background, looking east.

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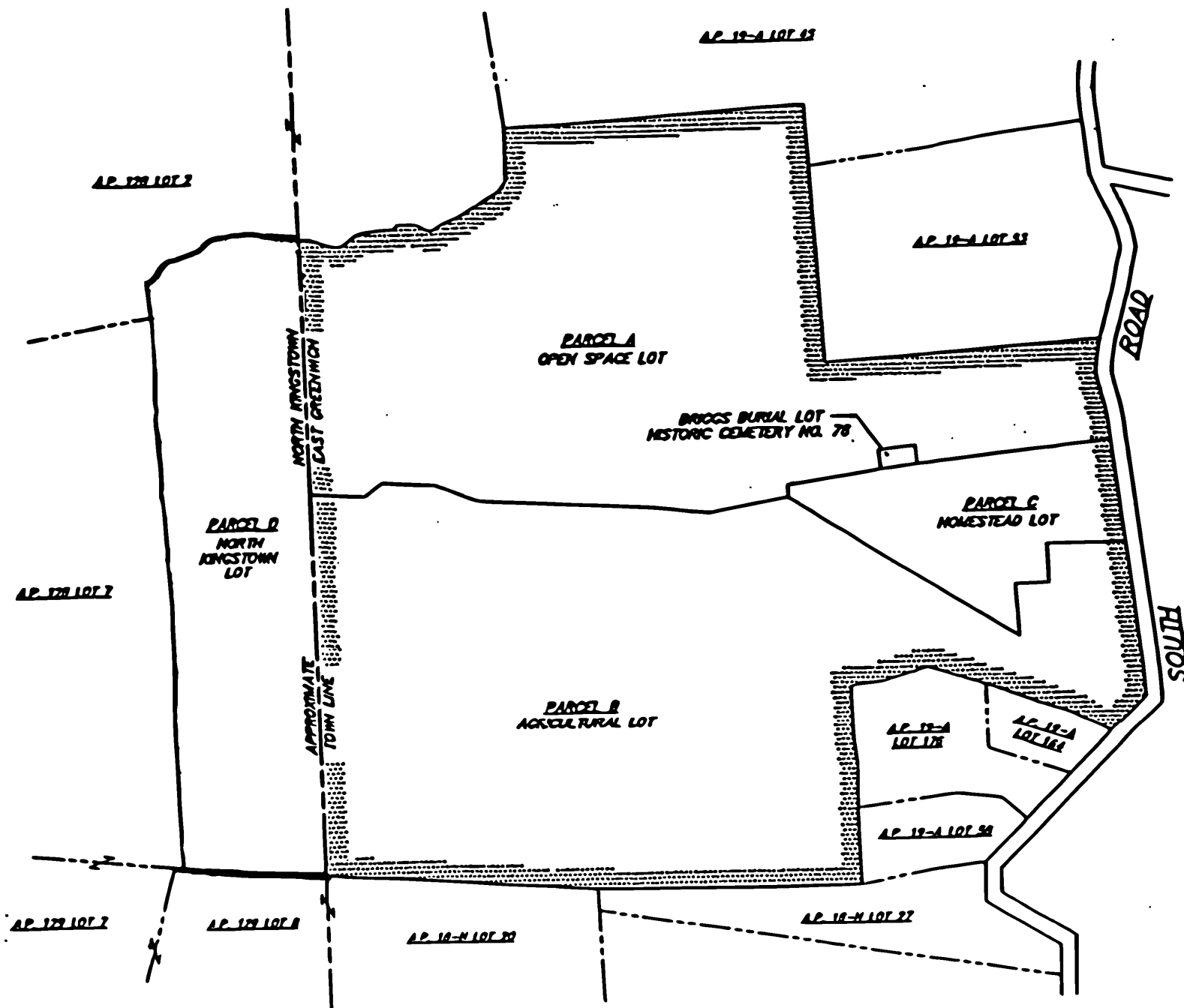
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LOCATION PLAN

SCALE: 1"=2000'



Site plan 1

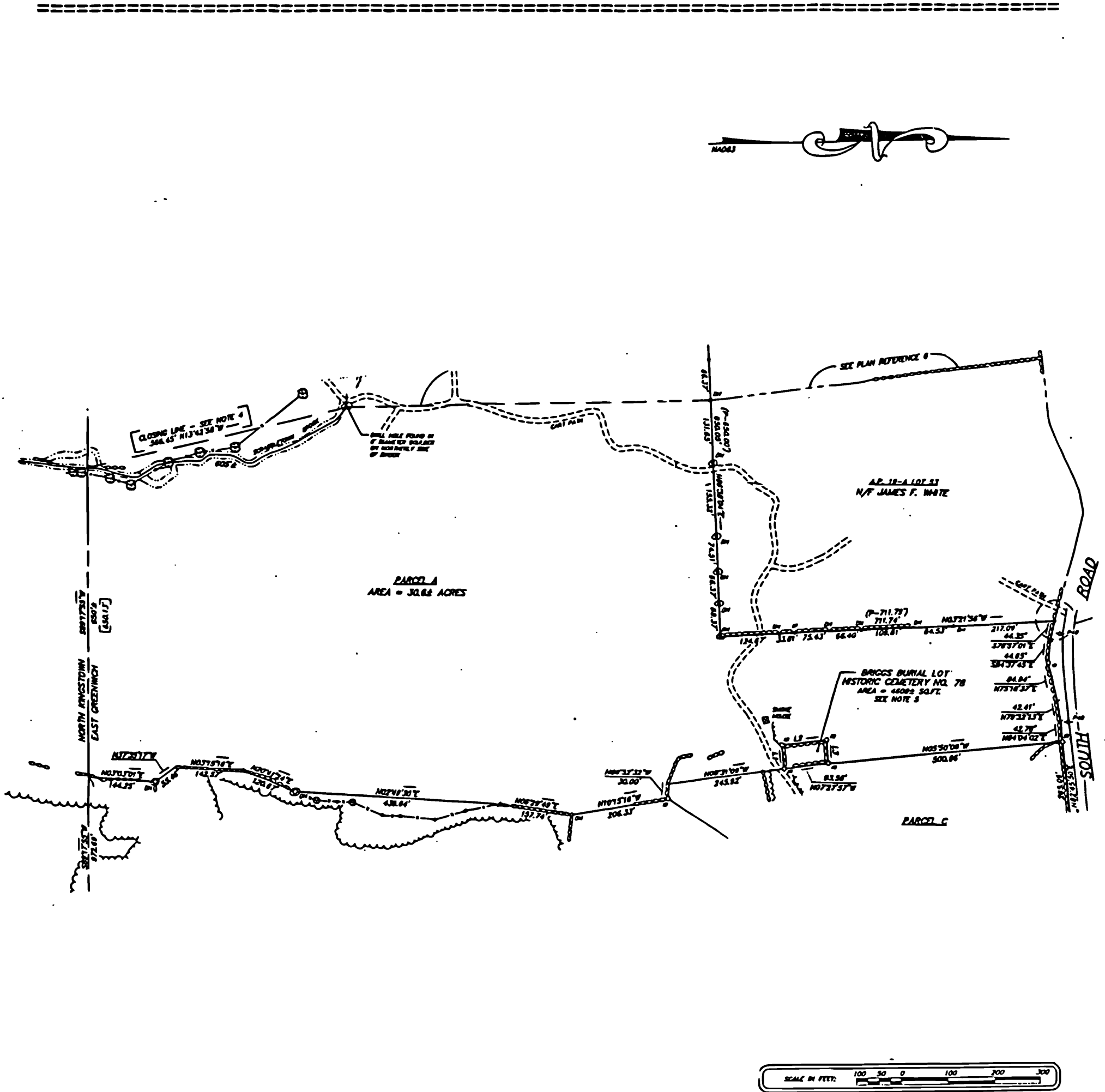


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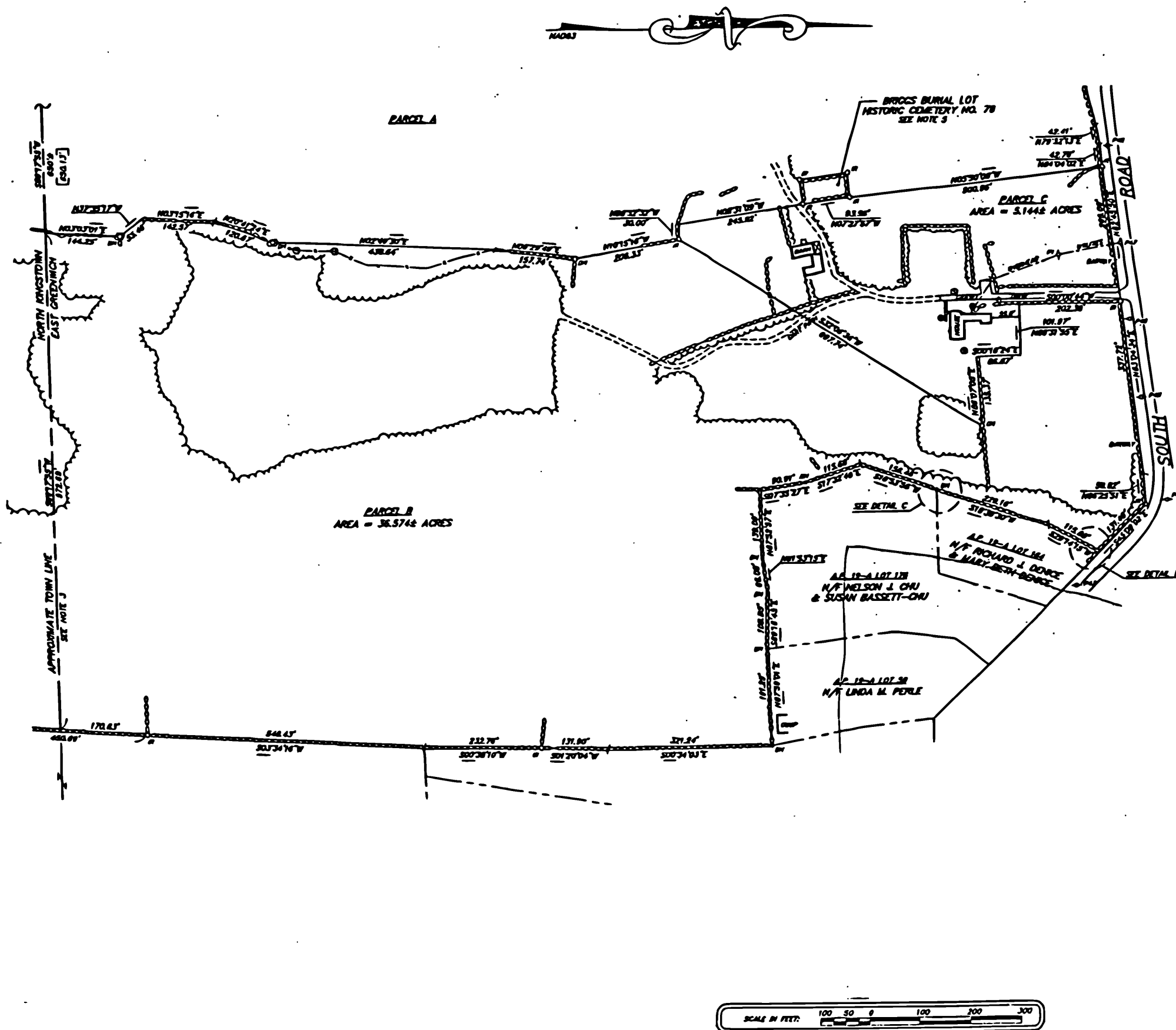
Site plan 2

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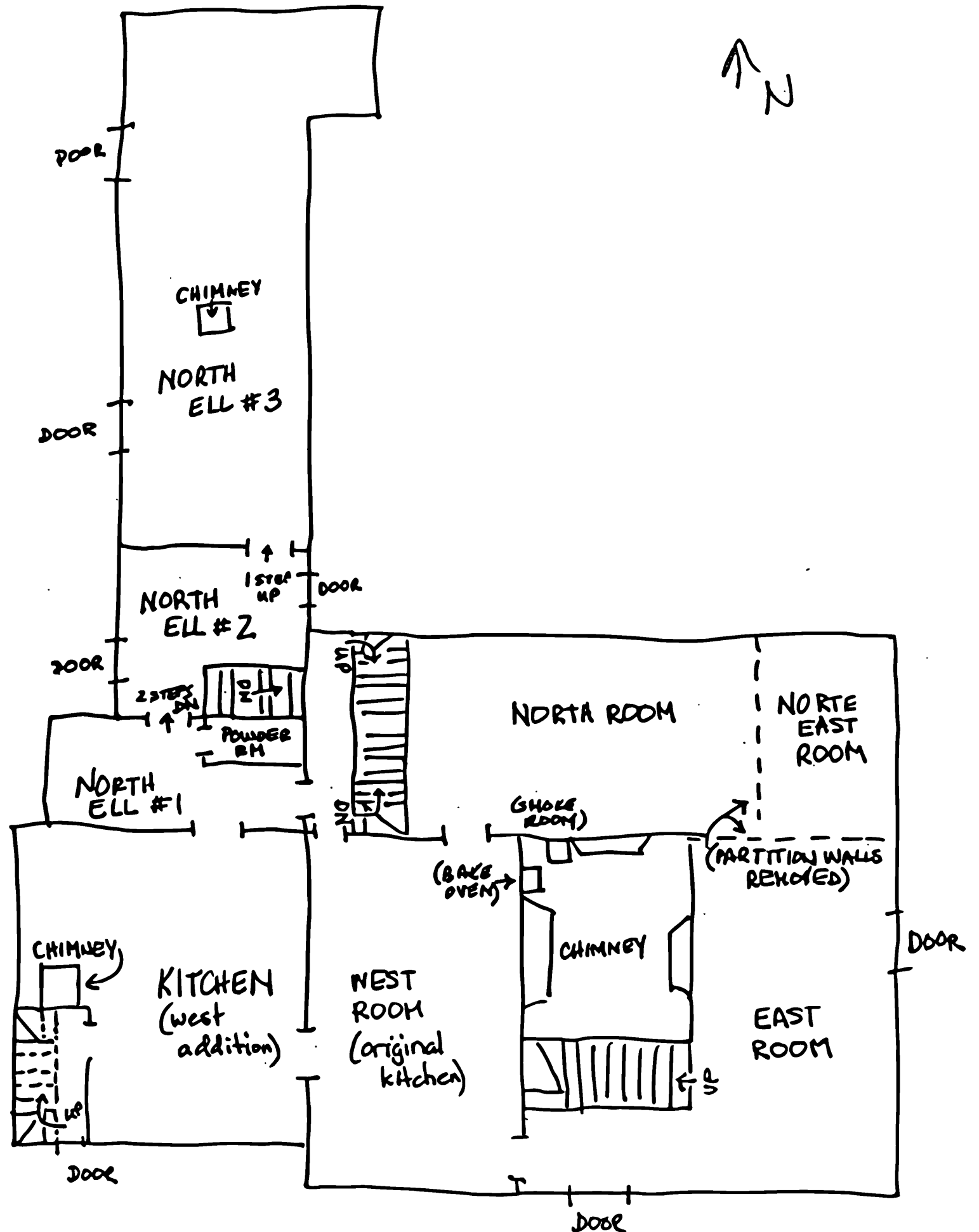
Site plan 3

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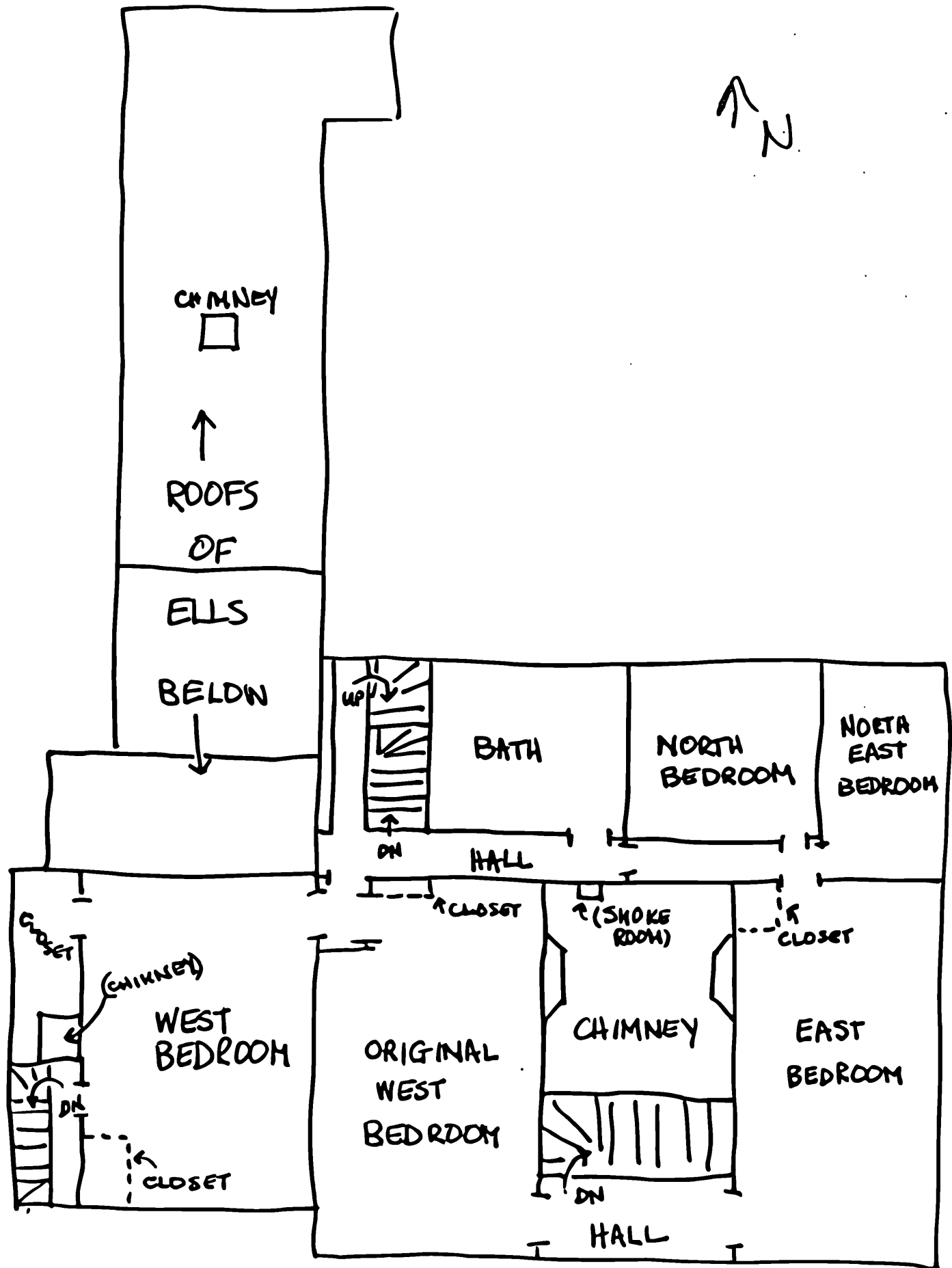
First-floor plan  
(not to scale)

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Second-floor plan  
(not to scale)

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**STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE**

The Richard Briggs Farm achieves significance as a rare surviving example in East Greenwich of an 18<sup>th</sup> century farmstead within a historic agrarian landscape.<sup>1</sup> Established between 1700-1707 by Richard Briggs, partly on lands that his father John Briggs had purchased as early as 1672, the farm was worked by three successive generations of Briggs descendants. Evidence suggests that Richard Briggs's son John Briggs III built the present farmhouse and bank barn sometime between 1735-1755; both are good and relatively well preserved examples (notwithstanding several additions and alterations) of 18<sup>th</sup> century rural vernacular architecture. The barn is particularly extraordinary because very few like it still stand in East Greenwich, or indeed in all Rhode Island. The farmstead also contains numerous dry-laid stone walls, a family burial ground, an ice-house, and extensive open fields and woodlands totaling approximately 72 acres.<sup>2</sup> The true significance of the Briggs Farm lies not in any individual structure, but in the collective relationships of these historic structures to each other and to the historic landscape around them.

When Englishman John Briggs (?-1708) settled in what is now North Kingstown in 1672, five years before East Greenwich was founded, all of the southern half of the Colony of Rhode Island was known as "the Narragansett Country" and largely uninhabited by white settlers. Almost nothing is known of John Briggs's life prior to his arrival in Rhode Island, but he apparently had sufficient financial reserves to make two substantial real estate investments in 1672: with five partners, he acquired a large tract of land encompassing all of present-day East Greenwich lying west of the Post Road, known as the "Fones Purchase," and he also bought 57 acres of land just south of the Fones Purchase from Richard Smith (whose father in 1640 had established one of the first trading posts in the Narragansett Country). The 57 acres, which became part of "King's Town" in 1674, were "bounded on the east by 500 acres not yet laid out as it is in the Northward Purchase [i.e., the Fones Purchase], on the west bounded by the common, on the north with the highway [likely South Road], on the south by land of Samuel Waight..."<sup>3</sup> John Briggs apparently remained a resident of North Kingstown for the rest of his life: nine of his ten children were born there, and he died there in 1708. A Quaker, John Briggs hosted in his own home the first gathering of the Narragansett or Kingstown (later Greenwich) Monthly Meeting of the Society of Friends (founded in 1699); he also served as the first clerk of the monthly meeting, a position he held for the rest of his life.

Shortly after King Philip's War (1675-76) ended, in 1677, the Rhode Island General Assembly established the Township of East Greenwich on 5,000 acres of land (coincidentally overlapping

<sup>1</sup> See also Fry's Hamlet Historic District (NR, 1985), and Tillinghast Road Historic District (NR, 1987).

<sup>2</sup> Fourteen additional acres of the Briggs Farm property lie in adjacent North Kingstown, but are not included in this nomination.

<sup>3</sup> Arnold, p. 156.

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most of the Fones Purchase).<sup>4</sup> This land was to be divided equally among fifty proprietors as a reward for their services during the war. Through the town charter, the General Assembly directed the pattern of early settlement in East Greenwich: five hundred acres divided into fifty 10-acre house lots, "as commodious as may be for a town," laid out in a concentrated area near Greenwich Bay; and the remaining 4,500 acres parceled out equally as fifty 90-acre farm lots or "great divisions." (Each proprietor received one house lot and one farm lot.) The charter also directed the proprietors to "lay out convenient highways from the bay up into the country throughout the whole township:" the resulting grid system of country roads remains evident today.<sup>5</sup>

John Briggs was not one of the original proprietors of East Greenwich (as a Quaker, he would not have fought during the war), and the lands he had acquired in 1672 lay well outside the "First Division." But by 1688/9 the town had acquired another 10,000 acres, the "Second Division," including what remained of the original Fones Purchase. By then a small community of French Huguenots had settled in the southwestern part of the Second Division. Those English settlers claiming lands in the Second Division for themselves considered the Huguenots to be squatters, and treated them accordingly; most Huguenots left East Greenwich before 1700, but the name "Frenchtown" survives to this day.

As of the Second Division, the town's southern boundary extended to about a half mile south of South Road, bringing some (the exact amount is unknown) of John Briggs's existing holdings in King's Town into East Greenwich. No evidence has been found that John Briggs ever lived in East Greenwich, but at least two of his sons settled in Frenchtown: Daniel Briggs on Tillinghast Road, and Richard Briggs on South Road, about half a mile southeast of his brother's farm.<sup>6</sup>

Richard Briggs (1675-1733), a Quaker farmer like his father, married twice: in 1700 to Susannah Spencer (1681-ca. 1715), with whom he had eight children, and in about 1725 to Experience Tarbox (dates unknown), who gave him four more children. Shortly after his first marriage, in 1704, he received from his father a gift of 102 acres of land in East Greenwich, including "that land whereon said Richard's dwelling house stands," 12 acres of land "that Richard hath improved" south and west of the house, and a 90-acre lot known as Lot #23 in the Second Division.<sup>7</sup> The 12 acres must have been part of John's original 57 acres purchased in

<sup>4</sup> The conflict over land ownership between the Fones partners and the colonial government was finally resolved in 1678.

<sup>5</sup> Charter quoted in McPartland, pp. 15-16.

<sup>6</sup> Daniel Briggs bought Lot #16 in the Second Division in 1702; his farm is part of the Tillinghast Road Historic District (NR, 1987).

<sup>7</sup> E.G. Deed Book 2, page 265. John Briggs was granted Lot #23 in 1692 (DB 1/29). No numbered plat map exists showing exactly where Lot #23 in the Second Division was located, but it was never part of the current Briggs Farm property: it abutted the southeast corner of land belonging to John Heath, whose



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1672, later incorporated within the East Greenwich town limits; presumably Richard built himself a house and started farming this portion of his father's land at about the time of his first marriage. Richard subsequently traded Lot #23 for 90 acres of town-owned land between a highway and the south line of the township, adjoining his own 12 acres and dwelling house.<sup>8</sup> Thus, by 1707 Richard Briggs owned 102 acres of land on the south side of South Road, abutting his father's property in North Kingstown. No record exists of Richard purchasing additional property in East Greenwich or North Kingstown, but presumably he inherited more land from his father's estate. By 1716, Richard's farmstead had expanded to some 144 acres, extending for almost a mile along the south side of South Road, from Narrow Lane on the west to about 0.3 mile east of Tillinghast Road.<sup>9</sup>

Rhode Island was still largely an agricultural colony in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century, and its best farmlands were located in coastal areas like East Greenwich, where the soil was fertile and well watered, and proximity to the sea provided ready access to trade routes. East Greenwich's economic base relied on the produce of the land, sea, and forests: meat, cheeses, crops, fish and lumber, all shipped via Greenwich Bay to markets in Newport, Providence, and beyond.

Several secondary sources claim (without citing any specific documentation) that Richard Briggs built the existing farmhouse either ca. 1704 or ca. 1725. While Richard's 1704 deed does mention a dwelling house, no structural evidence has been found to suggest that any portion of the present farmhouse is that early; in fact, its structural elements testify to its construction in the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, an inventory of Richard's possessions taken after his death in 1733 names only "the kitching, the little room, the bedroom, the little bedroom, and the first and second sellar[sic]" in his house.<sup>11</sup> This would seem to indicate that Richard and his large family lived in a two-story, two-room-plan house typical of the late First Period. (Undoubtedly the children slept several to a bed.) Therefore, the present farmhouse was probably not built by Richard Briggs at all, but rather by his son John Briggs III, sometime after Richard's death in

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name appears well north of South Road on the earliest surviving plat map of East Greenwich, dated 1716.

<sup>8</sup> E.G. Deed Book 2, Page 58.

<sup>9</sup> The figure of 144 acres comes from a reproduction of the 1716 plat map of East Greenwich, created by the East Greenwich Tercentenary Committee in 1977. From this map it appears that all 144 acres lay in East Greenwich, therefore Richard must have inherited at least an additional 42 acres in East Greenwich from his father, or perhaps another family member (recall he had nine siblings), sometime between 1707-1716. According to Parsons, p. 4, many early records in North Kingstown were either damaged or destroyed by fire, including John Briggs's 1708 will. No attempt was made to investigate North Kingstown probate records to ascertain how much land Richard Briggs may have inherited from a family member there.

<sup>10</sup> McAlester, p. 78. See section 7 for a more detailed discussion of architectural features.

<sup>11</sup> E.G. Probate Records, Vol. 1, pp. 138-139 (will on pp. 137-137).

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1733. It is not known where Richard's earlier house may have stood, but archeological evidence of it may exist somewhere on the present farm property.

Richard Briggs apparently rests in the very northwest corner of the family burial ground on his farm, his grave marked by a simple stone carved "R.B. 1733." (Quakers, when they marked graves at all, used only plain fieldstones, not dressed headstones; sometimes the stones had no names inscribed on them.<sup>12</sup>) Nearby, another stone labeled "S.B. 1681" may mark the grave of Richard's first wife, Susannah, who was born in 1681. (According to Briggs family genealogies, none of Richard's immediate family died in 1681, and none of his children had yet been born, so his wife Susannah is the only "S.B." who fits the time frame.) Most of the markers in this burial ground are broken and significantly weathered; none reveals the resting place of Richard's second wife, Experience, nor of any of his twelve children, but probably at least some of them are buried here as well. One of Richard's great-grandsons, David Briggs (died 1848), is also buried here along with his wife, two of his children, and a nephew. Such family burial grounds were very common on East Greenwich farms: an extensive published survey in 1991 identified 75 cemeteries in East Greenwich, dozens of them in the Frenchtown area alone (although somehow that survey missed this one at the Briggs Farm).

Richard Briggs's primary heir was his third son, John Briggs III (1708/9-1798), who in 1733 inherited the bulk of the homestead farm.<sup>13</sup> Richard's will further provided that his wife Experience should have the use of the east room in his dwelling house. Presumably the twenty-four-year-old, unmarried John III continued to reside for a time in the small house that his father had built ca. 1704, along with his stepmother and her four young children. But in 1735 John III married Jemima Tarbox (the sister of his stepmother), and within eleven years they produced five children. It is highly unlikely that by 1744, Richard Briggs's old two-story, two-room-plan house could still have accommodated two families consisting of three adults and nine children. And the overcrowding soon grew even worse: by 1752, John's stepmother and first wife had died, but only some of those children had grown up and gotten married when John himself took a second wife, the widow Susannah Spencer of North Kingstown, who had seven children of her own. Thus, as of 1752 John Briggs III's household consisted of three to five adults and five minor children, plus however many of the Spencer children may have come to live with their

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<sup>12</sup> McPartland, p. 143.

<sup>13</sup> The exact amount of John's inheritance is not specified in Richard's will but presumably it included lands in both East Greenwich and North Kingstown. Richard had previously (in 1726/7) given some property of unspecified amount to his son Richard III at the corner of South Road and Narrow Lane; and we know from Richard's will that his son Francis was already living somewhere on the North Kingstown side of the farm when in 1733 he inherited about 10 more acres adjacent to his own house. North Kingstown land evidence and probate records for John III's siblings (or cousins) were not researched.

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mother.<sup>14</sup> Moreover, within the next five years John and Susannah had two more children of their own.

As noted above and in Section 7, architectural evidence indicates that the present farmhouse was built sometime in the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century, while John Briggs III owned the farm. The details of John III's family life strongly suggest that he built the original portion of the present farmhouse sometime between 1735, the date of his first marriage, and 1755, three years after his second marriage. (In 1755 a severe depression hit Rhode Island's economy, halting all new construction in East Greenwich for the next decade.<sup>15</sup>) As befits a country farmhouse, the original portion of the present dwelling is very simple and unpretentious both inside and out, exhibiting none of the classically-inspired Georgian detailing that came into vogue in mid-18<sup>th</sup> century Rhode Island, first in Newport and later in Providence. Homeowners in urban areas in this period had better access to published architectural pattern books and to design professionals, and tended to have enough disposable income to spend on ornamentation like a fanlight and pediment over the front door, a modillioned cornice, and fancy carved paneling in the main rooms. But country folk like John Briggs III, a farmer supporting two families, land rich but likely cash poor, would probably not be overly concerned with the latest architectural styles; besides, to some Quakers, such decoration would have seemed immodest, prideful, and extravagant.<sup>16</sup> The bank barn also appears to date from the mid- to late 18<sup>th</sup> century, during John Briggs's ownership of the farm: although vernacular barns are among the hardest buildings to date with any precision, its frame is so similar to that of the house that it is certainly among the oldest surviving barns in East Greenwich (see Section 7).

Between 1759 and 1851, various portions of the Briggs Farm changed hands within the family either through deeds or inheritance, and presumably some of the extant dry-laid stone walls date from this period, erected to mark new boundaries. (The property descriptions in these deeds used trees, rocks, stone walls, and fences to mark boundary lines, which makes it difficult today to pinpoint the precise location of each piece of land as it changed hands.) John Briggs III transferred over 93 acres of farmland in East Greenwich to his children before dying in 1798. (Sons Richard III and John IV appear to have built houses on the lands given to them in 1759 and 1768, respectively; these houses do not appear to have survived, and where they may have stood is unknown, but archeological evidence may possibly be found on the present farm property.) Youngest son Joseph Briggs (1757-1851) was John III's principal heir, and by 1820 came into possession not only of his own inheritance but also of some of the property previously

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<sup>14</sup> In addition to John and Susannah, three of his stepsiblings were in their twenties but as yet unmarried in 1752.

<sup>15</sup> Gibbs, p. 9.

<sup>16</sup> John III's religious affiliation was likely Quaker, following the family tradition; the faith passed down at least for another generation, as John's youngest son, Deacon John Briggs, moved to upstate New York with other East Greenwich Quakers in 1815; see Parsons, preface.

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given to his brothers.<sup>17</sup> Like his father before him, Joseph also transferred some lands to his children. Of particular interest is a transaction dated 1832, in which David Briggs purchased 50 acres fronting on South Road, including a dwelling house, barn and other buildings, and on the same day leased the same property back to his father Joseph Briggs, rent-free, for the remainder of his life. This deed apparently refers to the present house and barns, and is the first to specifically mention barns on the farm property.<sup>18</sup>

Either Joseph Briggs or his son David added the 2-story addition west of the original farmhouse, sometime between 1820 and 1850, and also ca. 1845 constructed the northernmost of the three ells (North Ell #3) now connected to the main house. In both buildings, the original chimney flue is quite narrow, suitable for use with a wood-burning or coal-burning stove; that method of heating and cooking was widely available after about 1830. David Briggs apparently used North Ell #3 as a carpenter's shop.<sup>19</sup> Such workshops were often found on 19<sup>th</sup> century farms, used for making and repairing furnishings, tools, and equipment, and sometimes also for earning income through various home industries; they were typically 1-1/2 stories with a gabled roof, easily accessible doorway, windows all around, and a chimney for venting a stove.<sup>20</sup> This structure fits that description exactly, and is in fact still used as a workshop.

Between 1750-1850, East Greenwich's economy evolved from being based solely on agriculture to a mix of farming, maritime trade, and manufacturing. By 1765, all available farmland in East Greenwich had come under active cultivation, limiting further agricultural expansion. The port of East Greenwich, created in 1770, prompted a population boom and created more markets for farm and forest products. But shipping was sharply curtailed by the trade embargoes that precipitated the War of 1812, and manufacturing concerns, first introduced in 1790, grew to dominate the East Greenwich economy after 1820.<sup>21</sup> (An 1819 gazetteer of Rhode Island and Connecticut admired East Greenwich's "considerably fertile [soil], affording good grazing, Indian corn, barley and potatoes..." but also reported that "although there is no want of industry, the agricultural interests of [Kent] county are not very flourishing. There is an apparent want of enterprise in this department of industry, and of a spirit of agricultural improvements."<sup>22</sup>) Nonetheless, the advent of the railroads in 1837 again made external markets readily available to East Greenwich farmers, and the Frenchtown area farms prospered well into the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century.

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<sup>17</sup> E.G. Deed Book 8, Pages 34, 39, and 424; DB 10/144; DB 11/216, 524, 531 and 541; DB 12/250 and 450; and DB 13/179.

<sup>18</sup> E.G. Deed Book 13, pages 411 and 413.

<sup>19</sup> Adamson, p. 31.

<sup>20</sup> Visser, pp. 152-154.

<sup>21</sup> Gibbs, pp. 9-15.

<sup>22</sup> Pease, pp. 367-369.

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The 1850 agricultural census of East Greenwich lists James A. Briggs (son of David, died 1848) as the owner of 130 acres of improved land, and 50 acres of unimproved land, with a total cash value of \$2,000. That year, the Briggs Farm produced 40 bushels of Indian corn, 200 bushels of Irish potatoes, 10 tons of hay, 100 lbs. of butter, and 30 lbs. of wool; the livestock included 2 horses, 3 milch cows, 2 working oxen, 1 other cattle, 13 sheep, and 6 swine. James Briggs (1795-1897) probably acquired his 180 acres (some of which was in North Kingstown) by both inheritance and purchase; in 1850 the Briggs Farm was about 35 acres bigger than it had been in 1716.

The 1850 census tally of 180 acres belonging to James Briggs is consistent with the sale by various Briggs heirs, three years later, of two adjoining 80-90 acre farms lying partly in East Greenwich and partly in North Kingstown to Paul G. Hendricks.<sup>23</sup> The 90-acre farm was known as the Thomas Nichols Farm, south of South Road and west of South County Trail; the 80-acre farm was the Briggs Farm. The 1853 deed excluded the family burial ground from the sale, and required an easement for a right-of-way to the burial ground from South Road; those conditions have persisted with the chain of title ever since.

Paul Hendricks and his family occupied the Briggs Farm house for 34 years; the 1865 census of Rhode Island lists his occupation as farmer, and his name appears next to the house on the 1870 atlas of East Greenwich. The Hendricks may be responsible for the construction of the ice house, ca. 1860, built into a hillside near the bank barn and burial ground. Use of ice for refrigeration became popular in New England by the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century; ice-houses can be recognized by their location in shaded areas, thick insulated walls (sometimes built into a bank of earth), and few windows. Ice houses continued to be used for cold storage until electrical refrigeration was introduced during 1930s and 1940s.<sup>24</sup>

After the Civil War East Greenwich began to be advertised as a suburban area of Providence, within easy commuting distance by train. According to the 1865 and 1875 censuses, East Greenwich had the smallest number of farms of any town in Kent County, and overall farm production declined for crops. However, both butter and milk production increased in East Greenwich during that same period, and dairy farming continued to flourish for several decades to come. The bank barn on the Briggs Farm has almost a dozen stalls for cattle, but the level of agricultural output on the farm is unknown in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Paul Hendricks sold the property (now approximately 90 acres) to William Church in 1887, and he transferred title to his wife Ida F. Church in 1892. Mrs. Church's name appears next to the Briggs Farm house (and two outbuildings) on the 1895 atlas of East Greenwich; no other buildings stand on the property, which may indicate that farming continued on a limited basis under the Churchs' stewardship.

<sup>23</sup> E.G. Deed Book 15, pages 464 and 465.

<sup>24</sup> Visser, pp. 113-115.

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By the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, state law mandated separate sanitary storage rooms for milk, away from areas where cows were milked or stabled; freestanding milk houses, typically small wood-frame, gable-roof, shingle-clad structures, were common on family-run dairy farms.<sup>25</sup> Historic photos (ca. 1935) now in possession of the Boesch family show exactly such a structure standing east of the bank barn, and one photo is labeled "the old milk house." This structure is no longer extant, but possibly was built by the Churches prior to 1907.

Active agricultural production on the Briggs Farm seems to have ceased in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Mrs. Church sold the farm to a Lillian White of Pawtucket in 1907; she and her husband lived on the property by 1911-12, but he was employed by an insurance company in Providence, and therefore probably farmed on a very limited basis, if at all. Mrs. White sold the farm to a John Howard of Providence in 1924. Town directories are not available for the period of his ownership, so his occupation is unknown. However, he did make some alterations to the farmhouse: the assessed value of buildings and improvements on the farm increased \$1,000 between 1922-1934. One of these improvements was a front porch (removed in the 1970s; photos ca. 1935 in the Boesch family collection). Another may have been the 1-story ell attached to the north side of the west addition to the farmhouse (North Ell #1); its original function is unknown, but it is now used as a home office.

Loretta and Velna Shepard of New York purchased the Briggs Farm in 1935, and the following year sold off about 4 acres in the northeast corner of the farm, reducing the size of the property to about 86 acres. The next owners, William and Hazle Parmenter, bought the farm in 1946 and kept it for eight years. Mr. Parmenter was a lawyer with an office in Providence, so it is unlikely that he engaged in any active farming. The assessed value of buildings and improvements jumped over \$3,000 in 1952, which probably reflects the construction of the 1-story ell (North Ell #2) linking North Ells #1 and #3. The original function of North Ell #2 is also unknown, but it is currently used for storage.

The Parmenters sold the Briggs Farm to Donald and Teresa Boesch of Baltimore in 1954; the Boesches moved to East Greenwich and kept the property until 2001. They maintained some limited agricultural production in corn, hay, and a Christmas tree farm, and also kept some sheep and cows on the property. Mrs. Boesch, who ran an antiques business on the farm for a number of years, had an addition built on the south side of the bank barn in about 1965. Tax assessments from the late 1960s to the early 1980s reflect a substantial increase in property values; but since no significant additional new construction is known to have occurred on the farm during this period, that increase must be attributed to another cause.

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<sup>25</sup> Visser, pp. 115-117.

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Across Rhode Island, the number of active farms declined between 1880-1960, while their average size grew larger: mechanization and technological advances made larger farms more efficient and therefore more profitable, while a drop in price for some farm products such as milk forced many smaller farmers out of business. Meanwhile, the value of farm real estate more than doubled between 1880 and 1950, reflecting its prospective market value for suburban residential, commercial or industrial development, as opposed to its value if retained as farmland. By 1960, Rhode Island farms were assessed at \$70 per every \$100 in market value: the highest assessment to sales ratio in the United States. The pressure on land values was highest in rural areas just outside of urban centers – like East Greenwich.<sup>26</sup> In the past fifty years most East Greenwich farms have disappeared, displaced by modern suburban development, but remarkably, the Briggs Farm survived.

In 2001, the East Greenwich Municipal Land Trust purchased the Briggs Farm from the Boesch family. The purchase included about 72 acres in East Greenwich and 14 acres in North Kingstown, along with all extant historic structures. (The North Kingstown acres are not included in this nomination.) The town intends to maintain the property as open space, and has leased some acreage to a community farm operation.

The Briggs farm today contains about 70% of the land area land first acquired by Richard Briggs in 1704-1707, nearly three centuries ago. Not all of those original 102 acres are still part of the farm: its area has grown and then diminished over time, and a number of alterations have occurred to the original mid-18<sup>th</sup> century buildings. But enough of the Briggs Farm remains to ensure that the historic structures and landscape together still clearly illustrate the pattern of agricultural land use and development in rural East Greenwich from the late 17<sup>th</sup> to the early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. That this historical pattern has changed dramatically with the spread of suburban development in recent times makes the Briggs Farm all the more notable for its integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling and association. The Richard Briggs Farm plainly merits listing on the National Register under Criteria A and C.

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<sup>26</sup> Griffiths, pp. 20-26

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*Personal Communications*

Mrs. Thaire Adamson, East Greenwich Preservation Society

Justin Boesch, resident caretaker, Briggs Farm

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**GEOGRAPHICAL DATA**

UTM REFERENCES

USGS MAP FOR THE SLOCUM QUADRANGLE, RHODE ISLAND

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|----------------------|----------------------|
| 1. 19 290900 4609320 | 2. 19 291100 4609340 |
| 3. 19 291020 4609100 | 4. 19 291200 4609100 |
| 5. 19 291200 4608700 | 6. 19 290650 4608700 |
| 7. 19 290240 4609100 | 8. 19 290890 4609100 |

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION AND BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION

The boundaries of the nominated property are consistent with those of the Town of East Greenwich Assessor's Plat 19-A, Lot 46, and further consistent with the boundaries of Parcels A, B, and C (constituting all of Plat 19-A, Lot 46) as shown on the attached plan (sheets 1, 2, and 3) entitled "Boundary Survey Plan, Briggs Farm," prepared for the Town of East Greenwich, by Scituate Surveys, Inc., dated September 28, 2001, revised May 2, 2002.

These boundaries encompass all the land area within the town of East Greenwich, including the farmhouse, outbuildings, burial ground, stone walls, fields, and woodlands, that belonged to the Briggs Farm when it was sold out of the Briggs family in 1853 (less approximately 4 acres sold from the property in 1936). The boundaries describe approximately 72 acres purchased by the East Greenwich Municipal Land Trust in 2001.

Note that approximately 14 additional acres of the Briggs Farm lying within the bounds of the Town of North Kingstown (Parcel D on the attached survey map), also purchased by the East Greenwich Municipal Land Trust in 2001, are not part of this nomination.