

# ARCHAEOLOGY OF SAMPSON'S TAVERN



University of  
Massachusetts  
Amherst  
Archaeological Services



Massachusetts  
Historical  
Commission



U.S. Department of Transportation  
Federal Highway Administration

In the late 1980s, the Massachusetts Department of Transportation planned to realign portions of Routes 18 and 105 in Lakeville, Massachusetts. Prior to construction, archaeologists from the University of Massachusetts Archaeological Services discovered a foundation, cellar hole, and the surface remains of outbuildings in an area required for the highway relocation project. These architectural remains of outbuildings were once located in the vicinity of the park you see in front of you.

Town records and other historic documents revealed these remains to be the former site of Sampson's Tavern. The history of the Tavern Site spans close to two hundred years, beginning in the mid-1700s with construction of the original house and several small outbuildings. In the early days, the tavern operated under the names "Eagle Tavern" and "Forster Tavern." After the Sampson Family purchased the property in 1768, it was renamed "Sampson's Tavern" and was used as both a tavern and an inn. The tavern owners provided food, drink, and sleeping rooms for travellers. They also operated a mail service and a retail store for local residents. In later years, the property was locally known as a small resort, sportsman's tavern, and hotel. Finally, it became the summer retreat for a wealthy family from New Bedford. Historically, Sampson's Tavern has been associated with several famous people including Daniel Webster and Henry David Thoreau. After a catastrophic fire, the buildings were demolished in 1911.

Over time, the buildings at the Sampson's Tavern Site changed and expanded. Many building additions were constructed during the Sampson family occupancy. Porches were added to the main house in the mid 1800s, when the building served as a hotel. After purchasing the property as a summer residence in 1869, the Perry family expanded the barn and added several outbuildings. After the fire in 1911, and prior to the highway relocation project, the traces of these structures were buried or obscured by dense vegetation. Archaeological excavations identified building foundation walls, building floors, cisterns, stone terraces, and stone fences (called **features** by archaeologists) that were drawn, photographed and mapped. Artifacts in direct proximity to a feature helped to explain the feature's function and to date its construction and use. The archaeological study and recording of artifacts and features provided details about the history of the changes that occurred at the Sampson's Tavern Site through the centuries.



During the investigation of Sampson's Tavern, archaeologists created a site map to record testing locations and to study relationships between cultural features. After clearing the overgrown vegetation, archaeologists used surveying equipment to record each unit excavated during site testing.



Each feature is separately recorded. The feature in the photo (left) is part of the foundation and cellar hole of the main house. The length, width, and depth of the foundation was measured and drawn to scale on the site map. The map is used with historic documents to interpret the site. Many photographs were taken to record the features in detail. The photo to the left shows the depth of the cellar hole in relation to the archaeologists working nearby.



Archaeologists excavated many features at the Sampson's Tavern site. Some features were fully buried and discovered only during subsurface excavation. The cellar hole and foundation wall (above) are easily recognized, but other features appear as differences in soil color and texture. Note the difference in soil color between the walls and the floor of the excavation unit (above). Archaeologists record and interpret the soil variations they see at a site.



Photo of Sampson's Tavern in the 1890s. A large addition (right) was added to the main house (left) in 1835. The tavern could seat 100 people for meals, but had only 9 sleeping rooms.

An advertisement from the *New Bedford Mercury* newspaper dated 22 October 1830 announced the establishment of a regular mail stage between Boston and New Bedford. From the 1850s through the turn of the century, New Bedford was a wealthy merchant town. The spoils of the whaling trade made New Bedford one of the richest cities in the world. Sampson's Tavern, in Lakeville, was a regular dining stop for travellers of this stagecoach route.

**NEW ARRANGEMENT.**  
THE *Boston and New-Bedford Mail Stage*, will leave *Doolittle's City Tavern*, Boston, on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays, at half past Seven o'clock, A. M. pass through Quincy, Weymouth, Abington, East and South Bridgewater, dine at Sampson's, in Middleborough, at half-past one, P. M. and arrive in New-Bedford, at 8 o'clock, P. M. Returning by the same route, will leave T. Cole's Coffee House, New-Bedford, on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays, at 8 o'clock, A. M. dine at Whitman's, East Bridgewater, at 1 o'clock, P. M. and arrive in Boston, by 8 o'clock, P. M.  
Books kept at Doolittle's City Tavern, Boston, and T. Cole's Coffee House, New-Bedford. Fare Three Dollars.  
PROVIDENCE MAIL will leave New-Bedford, same days as above, via Taunton. Fare \$2.00.  
LOUIS DOOLITTLE, Boston.  
WHITMAN, MITCHELL & ORR, E. Bridgewater.  
SMITH & SAMPSON, New-Bedford.  
[18--16] Proprietor

A collection of coins were recovered during archaeological excavations at Sampson's Tavern. American 3 cent pieces, American quarter dollars, Spanish "real" coins and a Spanish Milled Dollar (Piece of Eight) were collected and identified. An Act of Congress dated February 9, 1793 decreed that foreign gold and silver coins were to be considered legal tender in the United States until the passage of the Coinage Act of 1857 when the practice was abolished.



While excavating Sampson's Tavern, archaeologists noted Native American cultural features and artifacts. Some 5,300 stone artifacts were collected, including approximately 100 projectile points. The majority of the points were manufactured during the Middle Archaic (8,000-6,000 BP), Late Archaic (6,000-3,000 BP), and Early Woodland (3,000-2,000 BP) periods. Late Woodland (1,000-400 BP) artifacts (projectile points and Native ceramic) were also identified, but in smaller numbers than older artifact types. Food storage pits, fire hearths, and post molds were also recorded, suggesting that Native peoples set up small camps among the cluster of freshwater ponds in Lakeville.

Over time, people tend to live in certain favorable locations, places that offer easy access to ample food resources and transportation routes. Native Americans constructed fish weirs along the many rivers and tributaries running around and between the ponds. They also established a regional network of trails to move between good hunting, fishing, and planting areas. One early road stretched from Assawompsett Pond south to the ocean shore, where Natives harvested abundant shellfish. Later, European settlers chose to live in the same locations as Native peoples and the original footpaths transformed into the roads and highways still in use today.

## ARCHAEOLOGICAL FEATURES



**Well**  
Near the addition is a stone-lined well. It is constructed of large, flat stones bonded together by cement mortar. The well is oval shaped and quite deep. Because of safety concerns, the well was not excavated during the archaeological study.



**Bottle Dump**  
A bottle dump between the well and the north wall of the addition exemplifies a nineteenth century trash pit. This bottle dump contained both pharmaceutical and liquor bottles. The bottles were manufactured between 1875-1900, when the main house was a summer residence.



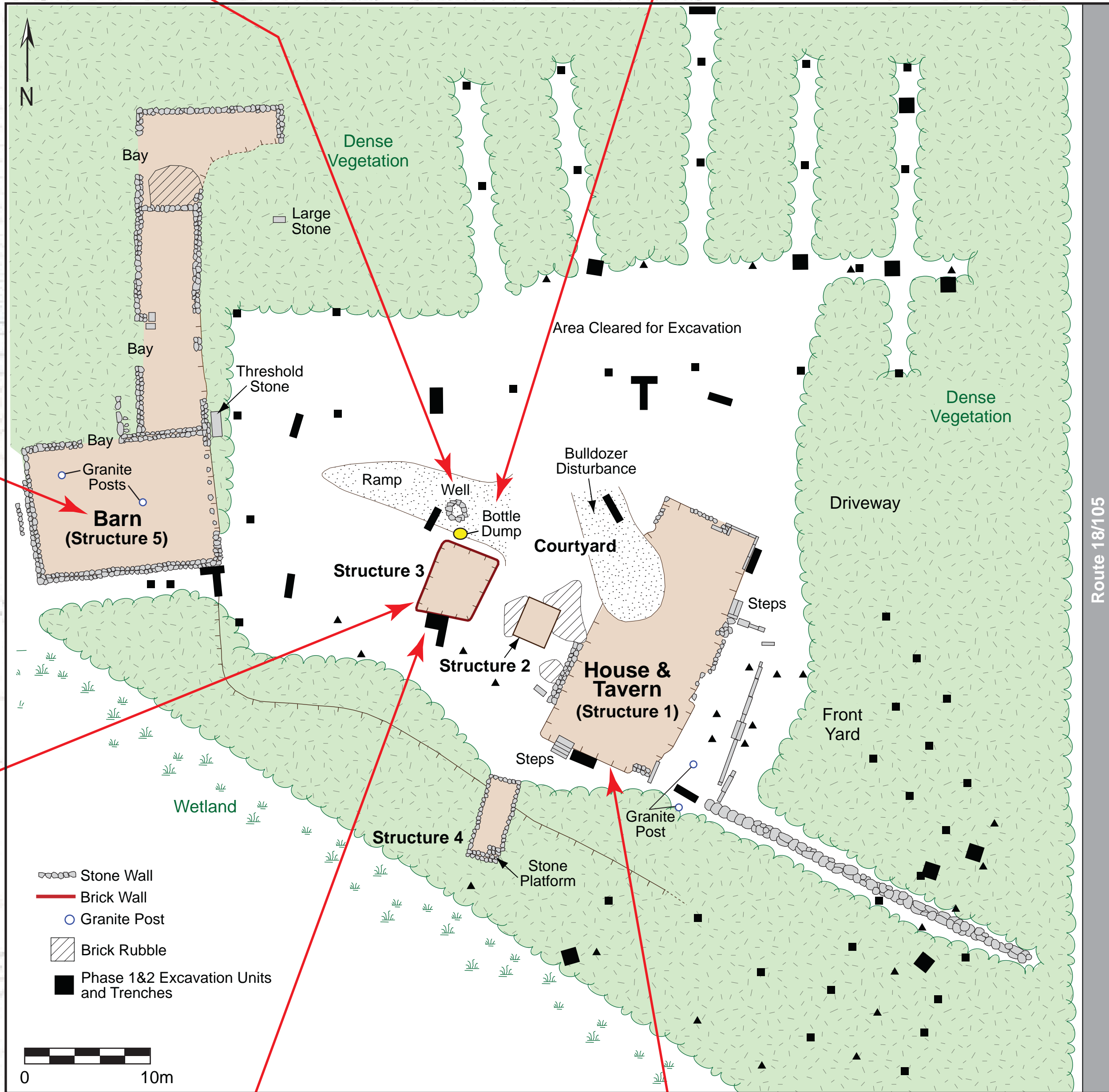
**Barn**  
The upright, granite piers seen in the photo (right) supported the floor of a large barn. The southern portion of the barn complex was associated to the tavern. Historic documents describe a 30 stall barn on the property, enough room to shelter the horses of many inn guests and travelers.



**Laundry**  
This long, linear feature inside the addition is likely where laundry was washed. The plaster-lined basin and adjacent round, grooved stone was specifically designed to direct the flow of wastewater from the basin to outside of the building.



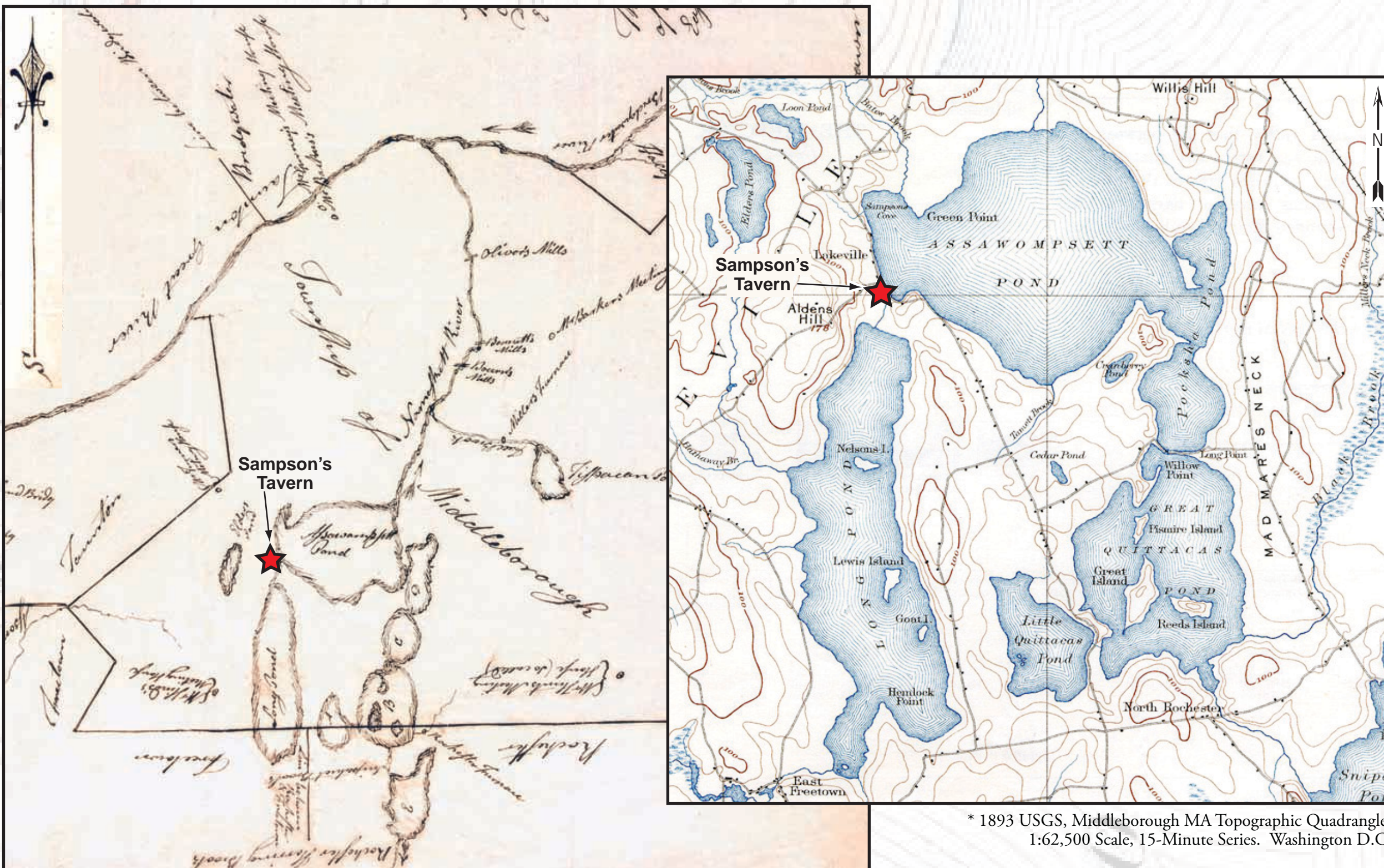
**House Addition**  
An addition constructed ca. 1870 was used as a kitchen and utility area. It was uncovered during excavation. Associated features found outside the addition include a drain (or cistern), a well, and a stone walkway. Features such as a hearth base and plaster-lined basin were discovered inside the addition.



\*Artifact images, site photographs, and site maps courtesy of University of Massachusetts Archaeological Services.



**House**  
Stone foundation walls visible on the surface show the outline of the main structure. The original cellar hole was visible, as were the additions to the tavern that enlarged the structure. Differences in building materials and methods demarcate the various construction periods.



\*1793 Map of Middleborough, Nehemiah Bennett

\* 1893 USGS, Middleborough MA Topographic Quadrangle, 1:62,500 Scale, 15-Minute Series, Washington D.C.

\* Background map: 1941 USGS, Assawompsett MA Topographic Quadrangle, 1:31,680 Scale, 7.5-Minute Series, Washington D.C.