

Past Ownership and Use of

the BROWN LANDS

by Amy Wales

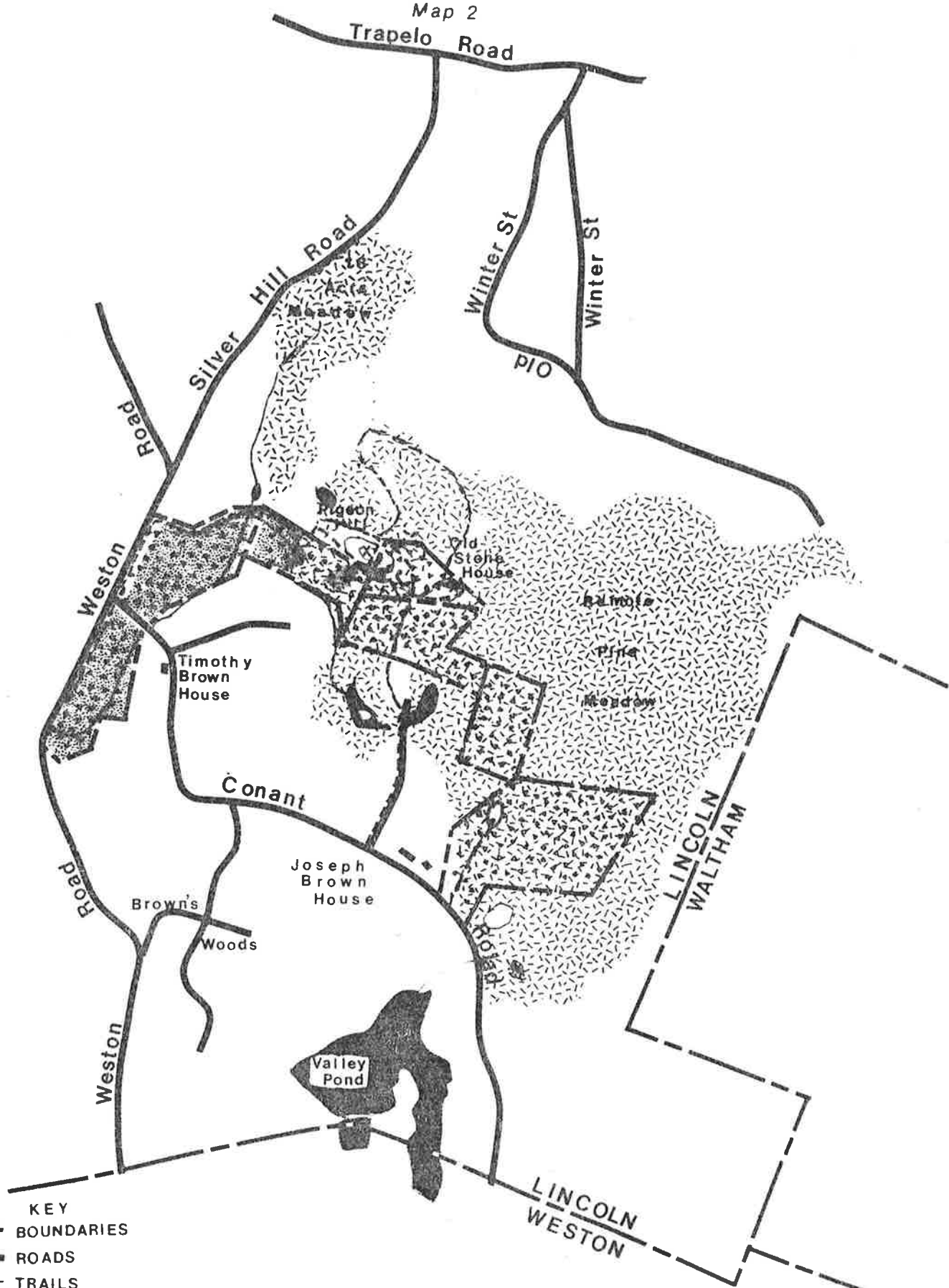
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Past Ownership and Use of the Brown Lands

Lincoln holds a wealth of history in its fields and woods, stonewalls, and ditches. Preservation of these historical landmarks can enhance enjoyment and interest in an area. With this in mind, the Lincoln Conservation Commission and the Lincoln Land Conservation Trust are compiling historical and scientific studies of their lands. As part of this comprehensive report, this paper is an account of the past ownership and use of an area in southeast Lincoln, for the purpose of this paper called the Brown Lands (see maps 1 and 2).

The eight parcels of conservation land studied include two fields, woodland, swamp, stonewalls, and ditches. Trails wind through the sixty-five acres, leading to an old stone house foundation, and running beside an old stone wall to the top of "Pigeon Hill"; reminders of past owners' effects on the land. Bounded northerly and easterly by swamp land (some in conservation restriction), westerly by Weston Road, and Conant Road, the area is secluded and quiet, and shows little of the changes through time.

The Eighteenth Century brought changes to the area now known as Lincoln. Once the "Easterly part of Concord and the Northerly part of Weston and Westerly part of Lexington"¹, Lincoln was incorporated in 1754. Though often difficult and unpopular, the formation of new precincts and towns in those days was not unusual. The large areas of six square



- KEY**
- BOUNDARIES
 - ROADS
 - - - TRAILS
 - ~ ~ ~ STREAMS
 - OPEN WATER
 - ▨ SWAMP
 - ▩ FIELDS
 - ▧ CONSERVATION LANDS

one inch:
one thousand feet

THE BROWN LANDS

miles granted to towns such as Concord were in anticipation of this need for development of new towns.²

Frequently, as was the case for Lincoln, the reason for this development was the distance to the meeting house. Lincoln area residents complained of the distance to their various meeting houses, as Weston residents had done forty-two years earlier.

That your Petitioners labour under great difficulties and inconveniences by reason of their distance from their respective places of publick Worshop in said towns;... they have been obliged for many years past to promote and maintain the preaching of the word of God amongst them in a private House... We humbly pray this honorably Court will be pleased to take their case into your wise and serious Consideration, and make them a precinct,³

The result being that in 1746 Lincoln became a precinct, a major step toward its incorporation as a town eight years later.

The area of land studied in this paper changed townships twice in the 1700's. Originally the westerly part of Watertown, it was included in the formation of Weston in 1712, and later in Lincoln in 1754. One resident, Benjamin Brown, who was a prominent land owner in this area, was also active in the formation of the two latter towns.

Born in Watertown in 1687, he settled in West Watertown in a house still standing in Lincoln today (presently the Kassner house on Conant Road). It is unclear whether he or his ancestors homesteaded the area or he bought it himself, but by 1702 (the date of the earliest deed), he had settled in the house with his wife Anna Garfield.⁴

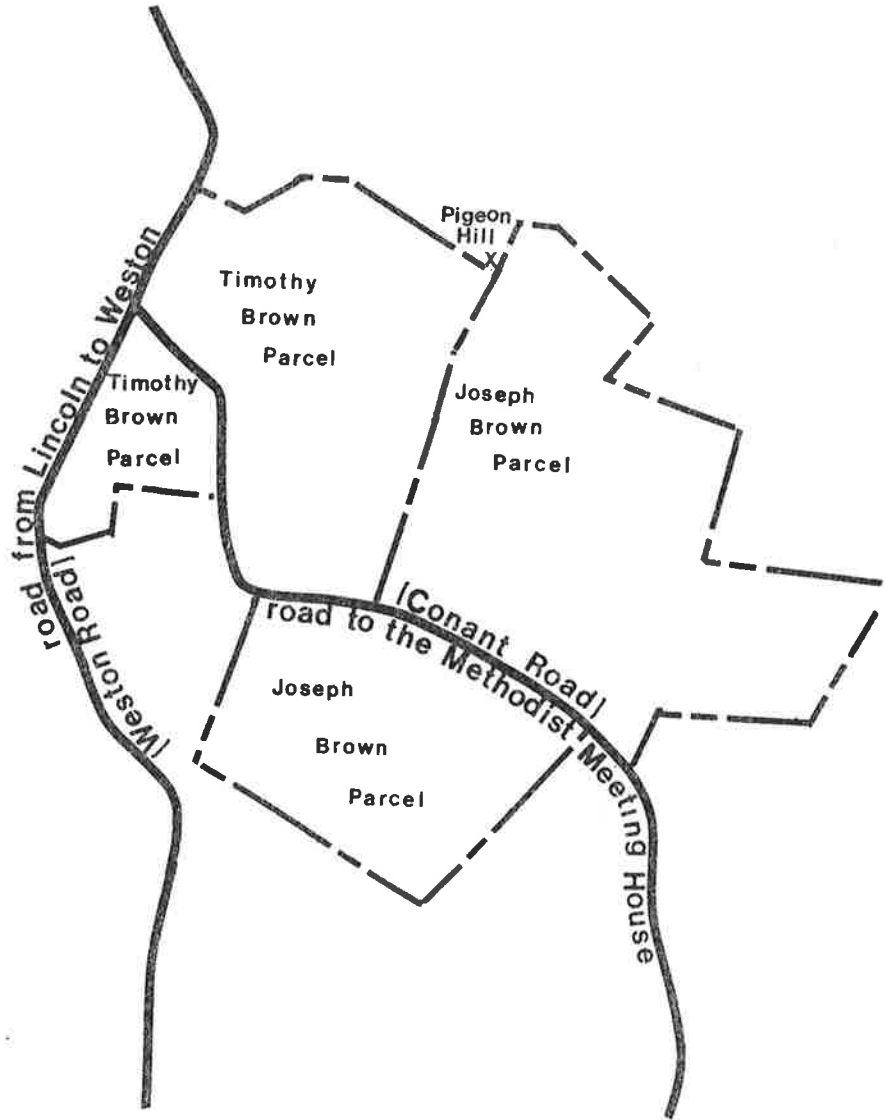
A prominent and respected citizen in each of the three

towns he and his farm were included in, he was a leader in the formation of Weston as a precinct and a town. Active in Weston town affairs, "Mr. Benjamin Brown of Weston seems to have been the principal manager of the township,"⁵ as Deacon, Selectman, Clerk, Moderator, and Assessor. He was founder of the church in the precinct later incorporated as Lincoln, first Moderator of the precinct, and active for twenty years working toward the incorporation of Lincoln as a Town. Unfortunately, he died in 1753, a year before Lincoln was finally incorporated.

As well as active in town affairs, he was a wealthy man. During his life, specifically between 1711 and 1746, he acquired a great deal of land surrounding his original property; totaling approximately 500 acres. His total holdings lay east of Weston Road, including most of the Remote Pine Meadow, the Eighteen Acre Meadow, Brown's Wood, and land in between.⁶ Although he sold some parcels before his death, most of this land was divided between his three sons: Benjamin, Joseph, and Timothy.

Before his death, Deacon Brown deeded portions of his farm to his two eldest sons. To his eldest, Benjamin, he gave the easterly portion including most of the Remote Pine Meadow, and land to the south of Conant Road, now part of Valley Pond. A few years later, to Joseph he deeded the Corey estate bought in 1746, including a house (presently the Horwitz house on Conant Road), a barn and 60 acres of land.⁷

Upon his death, after giving a few personal belongings to his other children and the Brown's Wood portion of the estate



*Approximate boundaries of parcels leaving
Brown Ownership in 1881*

to Joseph, his youngest son Timothy inherited "...all the Residue and Remainder of my Estate..."⁸ An inventory of the Deacon's estate after his death shows this remainder to include: sixty acres of land; a house and barn; wearing apparel; household items; stored produce such as "seven barrels of Sider, Meet in Seller, Grain of all Sorts, 60 bushels, Beans and Peas, Butter and Cheese, Hay in the Barn"; farm equipment included "Cart and wheels, Plow, Shovel and hoes, one ox sled & yoke, one ax, and carpenter tools"; and livestock including "Two oxen, 4 cows, one Horse, and 3 hogs".⁹

The Browns were farmers; Deacon Brown and his sons and heirs continued to farm their portions until 1881. The farms were comprised of a combination of orchard, English mowing land, meadow, pasture, tillage, and woodlot; and included animals such as horses, oxen, cows, swine, hogs, and sheep. As the farms passed from heir to heir, little seems to have changed, except perhaps livestock and number of acres farmed at a given time. Only accounts of the Timothy and Joseph Brown lands are included in this account because all the conservation land studied lies within their farms (see map 3).

Joseph Brown died in 1788, passing the farm to his son Ephraim who died in 1813 and left the farm to his son Ephraim. Parker Mudge Brown inherited the farm in 1864, upon the latter Ephraim's death. Parker M. Brown died in 1881, and the same year his widow Mary L. Brown and his daughter Abbie J. Stearns

sold the farm.

It was common to give the widow a portion of the farm for use during her lifetime, and the Browns were no exception. Tax Valuation¹⁰ records for 1834 show that Ephraim Brown shared the house equally with his widowed mother Elizabeth, and owned two thirds of the barn, the other third reserved for Elizabeth. His land included eight acres tillage, nine acres meadow, 14 acres pasture, eight acres woodlot, and 19 acres unimproved land: totaling 58 acres. His mother had a total of 31 acres including five acres tillage, nine acres meadow, nine acres pasture, and eight acres woodlot.

In 1860, after Elizabeth's death, Ephraim's holdings included a house, barn, two other buildings, three and one-half acres tillage, two acres orchard, ten acres English mowing, eight acres meadow, 12 acres pasture, 30 acres woodlot, and $34\frac{1}{2}$ acres unimproved land: a total of 100 acres. His son Parker M. Brown owned a carriage, and the livestock including a horse, 6 cows, and two swine. In 1881, after his father's death, Parker M. Brown's holdings had dwindled to a house, a barn, woodshed, carriage house, carriage, 100 acres of land, a horse, and seven cows.

West of this land, the Timothy Brown Farm passed from son to son during this period as well. Timothy died in 1768, and his son Timothy continued to farm the land until his death in 1796, when Cyrus Brown inherited the farm. He farmed it until

1875 when he died and it passed to his daughter Hannah Lee Brown, wife of George A. Brown (no relation to these Browns except by marriage).

An inventory of the estate of Timothy Brown after his death¹¹ in 1768 shows that Cyrus Brown inherited from his father the following: "The Dwelling House, The Mill House, The Barn, 90 acres of Land, Also Half an acre of Land adjoining to bever pond," household goods including, among other items, a spinning wheel; farm products such as "English Hay 3 tuns, meadow hay 6 tuns, Stalks and Hulks, 13 Bushels of rie, Indian Corn 45 bushels, 7 bushels of Barley," and eleven barrels of cider; farm tools including "Cart & wheels, one Iron Bar, Three hay forks, one Dung fork, one hay hook, one harrow, two Sikles" livestock included "one pair of Oxen, One pair of Stears, one white faced Cow, one red Cow, a red heifer, one Black Cow with white face, one red mare, Six Sheep, the Best Hog, the Sow, one Brindled Heifer."

According to Tax Valuation records for 1834, 66 years later, Cyrus Brown's holdings included a house, barn, two other buildings (probably a woodshed and carriage house), 18 acres of tillage, 14 acres meadow, 40 acres pasture, 20 acres woodlot and nine acres of unimproved lands. In 1860 the farm had expanded to include a house, barn four other buildings, a carriage, six acres tillage, 13 acres English mowing, 17 acres meadow, 30 acres pasture, one acre orchard, 30 acres woodlot, and 23 acres unimproved land, totalling 120 acres. Livestock included a horse, oxen, several cows, and two swine. Records for 1881,

the last year of Brown ownership, show Cyrus Brown heir's holdings to include a house, barn, woodshed, and a homestead farm of 120 acres. After Cyrus Brown's death no livestock existed and the farm seems to have been abandoned. In 1881 Cyrus Brown's daughter and her husband faulted on their mortgage and lost the farm to Asa L. Laurence.

During the period of Brown ownership the landscape probably remained the same, though there were a few changes within the farms. Apple orchards and English mowing land were introduced during this period. Cider replaced beer as the favorite drink, and English mowing hay supplemented meadow or lowland hay. English mowing hay is upland hay or the hay we know today. The seed originally came from England.¹²

Descriptions of the Brown properties at this time are included in Appendices A and B; see also map 3.

The year 1881 marks a dramatic change for the two parcels. Not only did they leave Brown ownership, but farming ended for at least several years as well. The land farmed by Joseph Brown and his heirs for over 100 years never returned to farming. Gardner and Eliza R. Moore bought the Joseph Brown farm from Mary L. Brown and Abbie J. Stearns, and held the property until 1887 when Charlotte S. Dennis bought it. In 1907 she faulted on her mortgage and within the course of a single day the property passed through Myron P. Lewis and Gilner Clapp (probably both mortgagees) to Charles S. Plummer. Two years

later, he deeded the estate to his wife, Mary Augusta Plummer, through Lafayette R. Chamberlin, a mortgagee. She sold it a year later to Merrill Hunt in 1910 (see ownership tree, pages 12 & 13)

Merrill Hunt and his wife, deeded the estate by her husband in 1914, were the first owners to change the physical characteristic of the land greatly. In the 1920's Merrill Hunt and his son built a cabin back in the woods, where a stone foundation still stands today. Besides this, the area was left largely untouched until the 1950's when development began. Blueberry bushes grew up behind the house where cattle had once grazed and crops had been harvested, creating one of the best blueberry patches in Lincoln. An old road passed through the area to Winter Street until oaks and pines grew over, narrowing it to only a path and shading out the blueberries.¹³

The Hunts divided their property, selling a few house lots, before selling the house and 24 acres of land to Henry Edgell in 1955. A year later Thomas C. and Mary M. Hall bought most of the rest of the land. In the late 1950's, Dr. Hall, with an abutter on Weston Road, intended to develop all their land between Conant Road and Weston Road. Paul Brooks, another abutter on Weston Road and a member of the Planning Board and Conservation Commission, met with Dr. Hall to work out a compromise. Dr. Hall wanted only to finish his house, so he agreed to sell a few house lots, and the developer was permitted to build a gravel road a short way into the area to the house.¹⁴

In 1960, 6.57 acres were given to the Lincoln Land Conservation Trust by Dr. and Mrs. Hall; another 4.67 acres were purchased by Mr. and Mrs. Brooks, and then deeded to the Trust; a third piece of 9.11 acres was bought by the town through its Stabilization Fund for \$5,500 at the annual town meeting.¹⁵

Henry Edgell sold the house and acreage to Donald H. Warren in 1965, who a year later sold the house to Murray Horwitz. At the same time 19 acres of swampland were purchased by the town for \$20,000. The town was reimbursed 25% by the state government and 50% from Federal sources for this purchase.¹⁶

The Timothy Brown farm changed owners frequently between 1881 and 1886, when George W. Browning acquired the abandoned farm. Hannah Lee Brown and her husband, George A. Brown failed to pay their mortgage payments, and in 1881 the property was transferred in the period of a day from the Browns through the mortgagee Asa L. Laurence to Herbert R. Gale. Herbert R. Gale deeded the property to Ida M. H. Gale (relation unknown) in 1886, and she sold to George W. Browning the following year. Mr. Browning and his heirs continued to farm most portions of the property until the 1960's (see ownership tree pages 12 & 13)

George W. Browning deeded the farm to his son George U. Browning in 1908. He passed it to Sarah J. Browning in 1915, who held it until 1919 when her son, also George U. Browning, acquired the same property, still largely unchanged throughout this time. In an interview with historian Elizabeth A. Little,

Mrs. Browning, George's wife, described the farm as containing corn, hay, rye, vegetables, daffodils, a sheep pasture , and a blueberry pasture. They sold the winter rye to people who make mats for bed coverings in winter.¹⁷ Also included in their farm was a windmill by the barn, across the street from the house, and a pinegrove bordering the Joseph Brown farm land.¹⁸

In 1955 George U. Browning sold to the town two fields bordering Weston Road totaling 19.1 acres for \$66,850. Again the Town was reimbursed 25% from State sources and 50% from Federal sources. These fields are still hayed today by Codman Community Farms, and a post rail ring exists for 4-H Horse Club Members and friends. A year later, Louise M. Butts bought another piece of the Browning land adjoining the fields, and deeded 2.36 acres to the Town Conservation Commission in 1968. . Paul Brooks bought 3.1 acres adjoining the Butts land from George U. Browning in 1961, and that same year deeded it to the Town Conservation Commission.¹⁹

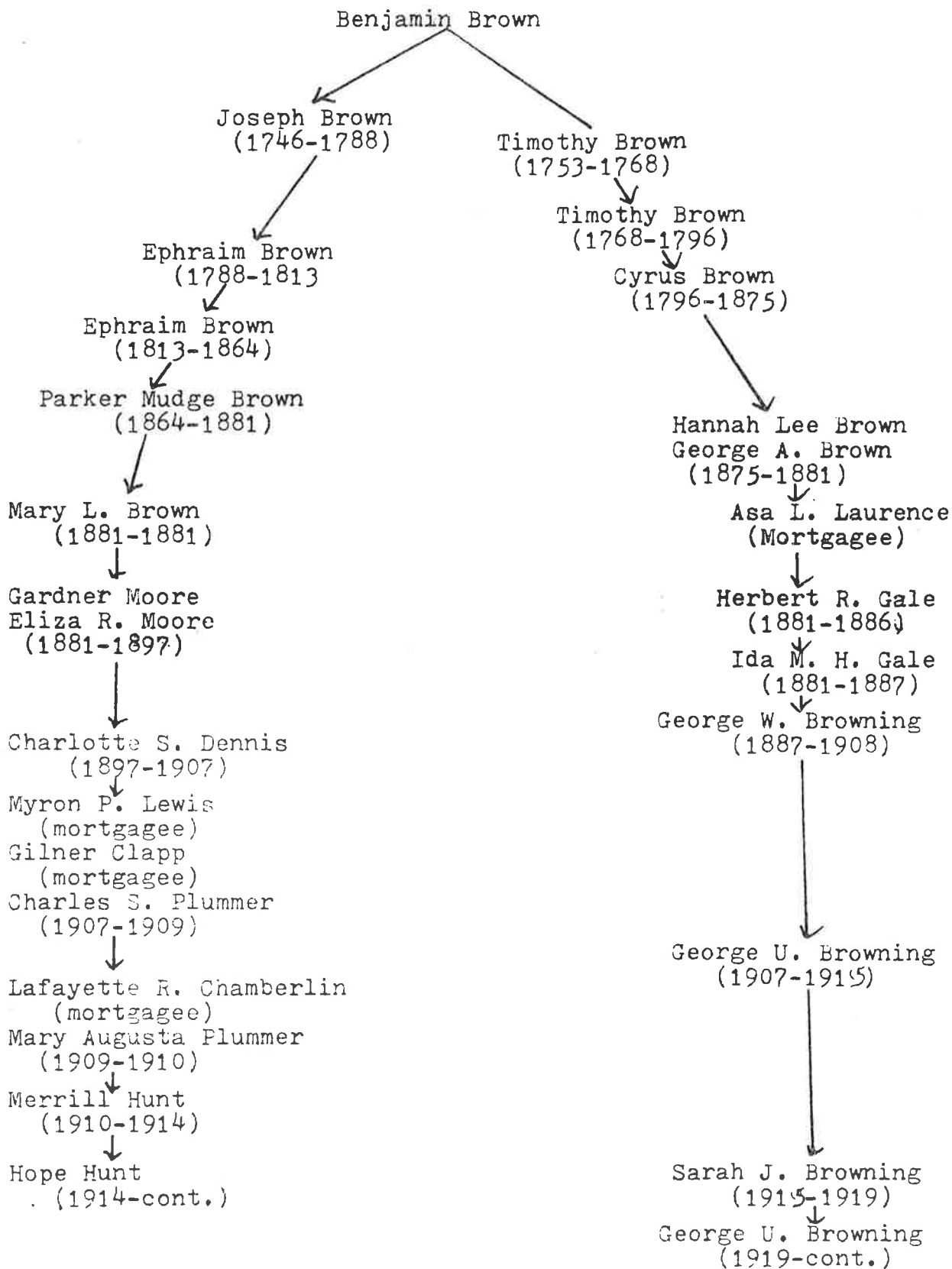
Historical events played a role in shaping the destiny of the Brown Lands. While farmed by the Browns one imagines the life and landscape changed little, as farming was evident everywhere. With the introduction of English hay and orchards, as well as other crops, the Browns managed to continue farming after the completion of the Erie Canal in 1825, and the Fitchburg railroad in 1844, when many Lincoln farms were abandoned.

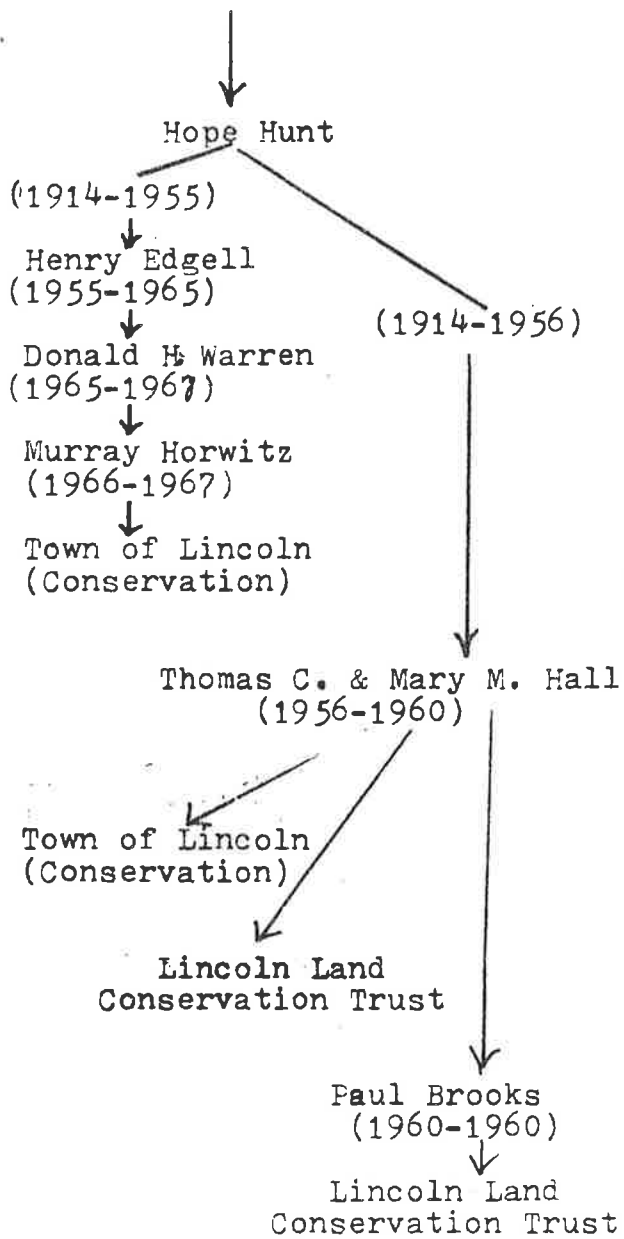
Development pressures in the 1950's and 1960's influenced the shape of the land as well. Although houses now dominate

much of the area, a substantial portion of the land has been preserved for perpetuity. Lincoln is fortunate to have residents who are concerned with preserving Lincoln's natural and historical landmarks. With the cooperation of residents, land owners, and various agencies such as the Conservation Commission and the Lincoln Land Conservation Trust, substantial portions of Lincoln's landscape are left natural, for all to enjoy.

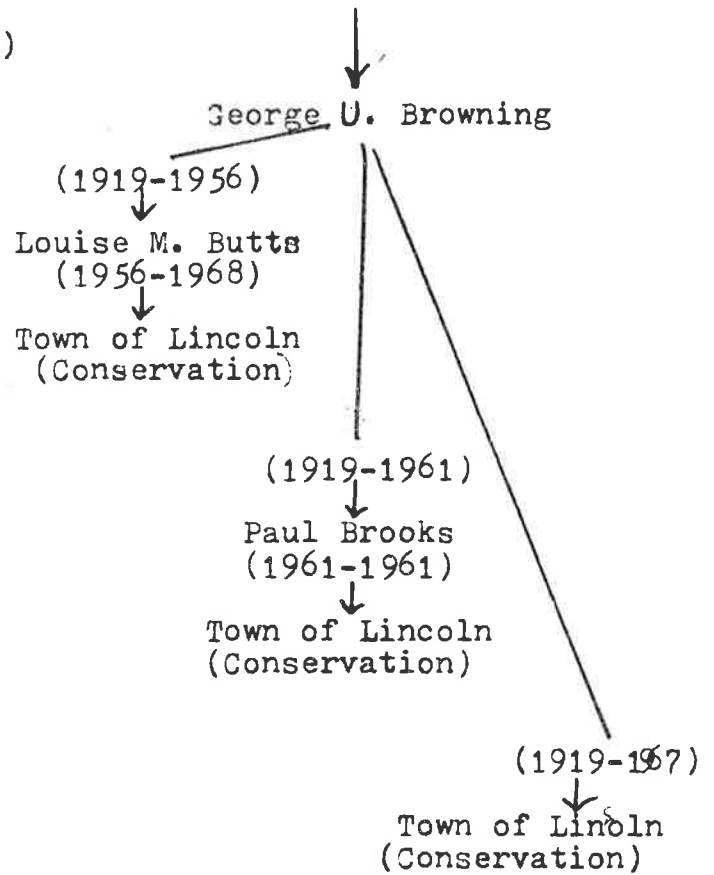
Thoreau once wrote "the inhabitants of Lincoln yield sooner than usual to the influence of the rising generation, and are a mixture of rather simple but clever with a well-informed and trust-worthy people"²⁰. Let's hope Lincoln can keep these characteristics, and use foresight when influencing the future character of the town.

Ownership Tree





(13)



Appendix A*

A certain parcel of land with the buildings thereon situated in Lincoln in said county bounded and described as follows beginning on a town road at a ditch and land of George Hoar and running northerly on land of said Hoar to a corner, then turning and running easterly by a ditch and land of George Hoar to land of Stewart thence turning and running northerly and easterly by land of said Stewart to land of Charles Whitney thence northerly by said Whitney's land, thence westerly by a ditch fence and stone wall and on land of Mary Stearns to a corner thence northerly by land of said Stearns to land formerly of William Colburn, thence westerly by land of said Colburn by a ditch to a corner thence northerly by a ditch and said Colburn's land to a large rock in a corner thence westerly by said Colburn's land as the wall and fence now runs and by a ditch and land formerly of Cyrus Brown to a corner of a wall thence southerly by land of said Cyrus Brown to a corner at a ditch, thence southerly by a ditch and land of said Cyrus Brown to an angle, thence turning and running southerly by said Cyrus Brown's land to a town road, thence easterly by said way about two rods then crossing said way and running southerly and easterly by a wall and land of William Brown to a corner of a wall and land of said William Brown to a corner by a driveway, thence easterly by other land of the grantors to a corner of a wall thence westerly by land of George Hoar to the town way, thence easterly by said way to the point of beginning.

* from Middlesex County Courthouse Registry of Deeds, Bk.1587, pg.590

Appendix B *

Beginning at the northwesterly corner of the granted premise at a wall on the road leading from Lincoln to Weston at land set off to Hammond T. Fletcher and others and running So $56\frac{1}{4}^{\circ}$ E 19 rods, thence So 82° E 5 rods and 17 links thence N $71\frac{1}{4}^{\circ}$ E $16\frac{1}{4}$ rods along the wall and wooden fence to the end of the wall thence along said wall So 77° E $7\frac{1}{5}$ rods. So 66° E $4\frac{3}{4}$ rods and So 42° E 16 rods to the end of wall then in a straight line So 60° E 33 rods to a stake and stones on Pigeon Hill so called at the easterly side of the Farm thence running southwesterly 8 rods thence a little more Southwesterly 9 rods thence southeasterly 8 rods thence southerly 45 rods, thence southwesterly $9\frac{1}{2}$ rods to land set off to Abbie E. Bean and another, thence N $68\frac{1}{2}^{\circ}$ W 36 rods thence n 20° E $10\frac{1}{2}$ rods S $88\frac{1}{2}^{\circ}$ W 32 rods to the road leading to the Methodist meeting House, thence southerly of the East side of said road $2\frac{1}{4}$ rods thence crossing said road and running N $73\frac{1}{2}^{\circ}$ W 32 rods and 16 links So 20° W 11 rods 15 links. So 50° W 9 rods and 11 links, W $8\frac{1}{2}$ rods and N 31° W $9\frac{1}{2}$ rods to the road running from Lincoln to Weston, thence northerly on said road to the place of Beginning. Containing $54\frac{3}{4}$ acres of land more or less, and being the middle portion of the farm of the late Cyrus Brown.

* from Middlesex County Courthouse, Registry of Deeds, Bk.1581 pg102

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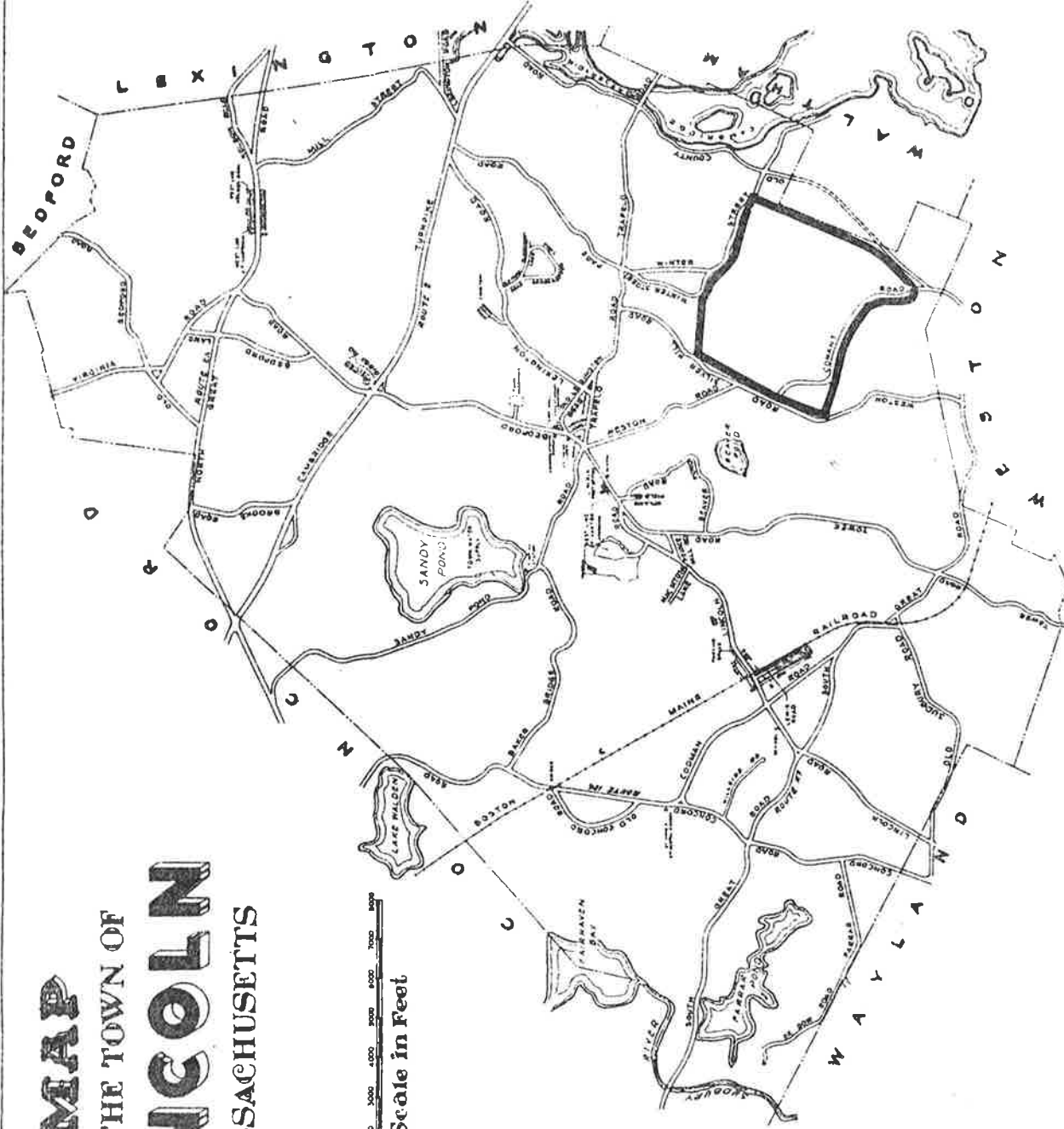
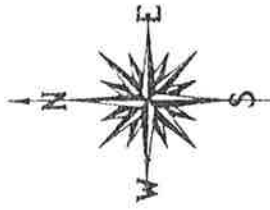
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pg. 7

MAP
OF THE TOWN OF
LINCOLN
MASSACHUSETTS

0 1000 2000 3000 4000 5000 6000 7000
Scale in Feet



MAP 1
Map of Lincoln with the "Brown Lands" outlined