

Mainstone Farm – A Brief History

The history of Mainstone Farm harks back to pre-colonial days when Cuttings farmed much of the surrounding land. But the real interest today lies in the 150 year old run of the same family farming and improving the land, creating an early 20th century country estate that became the primary residence of the Hamlen family.

In 1872 William Powell Perkins, known to his family as “Uncle Powell,” purchased Mainstone Farm for \$10,000 from John Cushing of Belmont – rightful owner at that time. The Farm comprised about 200 rocky acres of land, a house and barns. At the time Perkins, who was a 66 year old bachelor, lived in Brookline having sold the family house on Mt. Vernon Street. Soon after purchasing the Wayland farm he installed a caretaker in the house on the hill to run his farm with four Guernsey cows and one bull. The Guernsey cows and bull purchased for Mainstone were the first Guernsey herd in Massachusetts and were the beginning of about 80 years of dairy farming at Mainstone.

The Great Boston Fire of 1872 changed Perkins world – the Brookline estate was sold and he moved to Wayland year-round. After much urging he convinced his head gardener to come with him to Wayland. George Washington Hancock and family lived at the bottom of the hill while Perkins moved into the “Mansion” house at the top.

In 1874 Perkins enlarged the house on the hill with a third story in the Second Empire style



popular at that time. The Hancocks lived in the main house during the winter and for the summer months moved down the hill to the Farmhouse (69 Old Connecticut Path) that had been built in 1828 by Micah Maynard Rutter, Jr. In 1880 Uncle Powell had also purchased the Micah Maynard Rutter House (1808, 68 Old Connecticut Path) and converted it into a two-family for the daughters and sons-in-law of the gardener, Mr. Hancock.

One of the better known family stories is that when he first came to his Wayland farm, Perkins could walk from the top of the hill to Old Connecticut Path stepping from stone to stone and never touching the ground. Perkins soon engaged workers to begin clearing the pasture land of stones that were reused to build the many stone walls on the large 200+ acre farm. In the remaking of the farm, Hancock created the long tree-lined driveway to the top and planted maple trees along the Old Connecticut Path boundary as well as creating terraced gardens on



both sides of the main house. A small pear and peach orchard was planted west of the main house and apple trees lined the slope between the driveway and the Farmhouse on Rice Road.

Perkins had five Loring nieces and nephews who visited the farm in the summers. After their mother and father died in 1871 and 1874, respectively, they continued to come to Mainstone. Only one, Gertrude Loring, married and had children. She and her husband Nathaniel Perez Hamlen began the line of the family who today are the proprietors of Mainstone Farm.

During the summer Uncle Powell was in residence with young nieces and nephews (and of course staff who ran the house and cared for the children), who came to enjoy the clear air and country life. The Hamlens and other cousins routinely came to Mainstone Farm on Sundays in the summer throughout the 1880s until Uncle Powell's death in 1891. The "wagonette" ride to Wayland was about two hours from Brookline. They would arrive and climb the long driveway passing the house around to the south entry. Here the children would quickly run into the dining room for a piece of gingerbread or cookies and then they all would go for a walk. They would head out westerly into the woods along a path that led to the "bars" where the pasture gates led into cow pastures and berry picking areas.



Part of the land was known as the "Cathedral" woods for the tall pines and another area for its chestnut trees – both gone from the chestnut blight and to the saw mills. Cows, horses, and kittens in the large barn east of the house (where later a pool and tennis courts were installed) captured the attention of the children. And squealing pigs lived under the barn. Throughout the years Perkins continued to buy up adjacent land and expanded his farm to about 250 acres.

At his death in 1891, William Powell Perkins left land on the north side of Old Connecticut Path as well as the Micah Maynard Rutter House and a barn to George W. Hancock. The rest of the farm was left in Trust with the income to be divided among the children and grandchildren of Uncle Powell's deceased sister Miriam who had married Mr. Loring. The only descendants were the children of the Loring's daughter, Gertrude, and her husband Nathaniel Perez Hamlen.

In about 1903 one of the Hamlen daughters with the approval of her father brought forth the idea of building a cottage overlooking Rice Road. This became the first Hamlen House at Mainstone Farm. By 1911 two of the Hamlen girls had married as had Paul Hamlen and at that time the cottage was turned over to him and his growing family. In the next year the old



barn was moved down the hill near the Farmhouse and gardens were installed in its place at the top of the hill. Paul's first wife, Dorothy Devens died at a young age and he was remarried to Dorothy Draper (Gannett).



Over the next fifty years Mrs. Hamlen shaped the farm into a country estate with carriage trails lined with mountain laurel and rhododendrons and terraced gardens around the main house. She also was responsible for building the cottage (ca. 1930) with a squash court on the site of the old Dump on the south side of the hill opposite the Main House and the commodious Colonial Revival house for her Gannett children at the end of the driveway west of the Main House. At the

same time the Guernsey herd, known for its rich buttery cream, grew to 150 milking cows and Mainstone became a reputable dairy farm supplying milk locally and to a dairy in Weston well into the second half of the 20th century. The end of the dairy business came with a catastrophic fire of the main cow barn in 1962.

Paul Hamlen died in 1939 but his widow remained at the farm for another 30 years. Paul's son by his first wife, Nathaniel, had taken over the farm but his early death in 1967 left the farm to his sons, Devens H. and James Hamlen. Their step-grandmother (Mrs. Dorothy Draper Hamlen) died in 1970 after which Devens was the main proprietor. Even after the disastrous fire of the cow barn the family continued to hay and had some cows. In the 1970s Arabian horses were fancied by Mrs. Evelyn Hamlen, widow



of Nathaniel (d. 1967). And during that time the farmer at Watertown Dairy, Hyman Schick, leased fields to grow sweet corn. In about 1980 the Hamlens switched to beef cattle, primarily the Belted Galloways. Ever since they have been the signature livestock of the farm enjoyed by all passing along Rice Road and Old Connecticut Path.

A tradition of preserving land has been promoted by generations of the Hamlen family. By 1957 Nathaniel Hamlen was a member of Sudbury Valley Trustees Board of Directors

in its infancy. In 1960 Dorothy Hamlen donated 17 acres of land along Rice Road in memory of

her husband, Paul Hamlen, to SVT and at the same time the Mainstone Trust donated another contiguous 26 acres. Additional acres were added by others to become the reservation known as Hamlen Woods. Later in the 1970s the town adopted a form of cluster development allowing for condominiums to be built on Mainstone Farm land in exchange for preservation of acres of open space that were donated to SVT or to the town, preserving them as open space in perpetuity.

