



Old Town Common

Hawley Town Common



Harrison Parker's imagined reconstruction of the Hawley Town Common, 1991

Hawley, July 20, 1805:

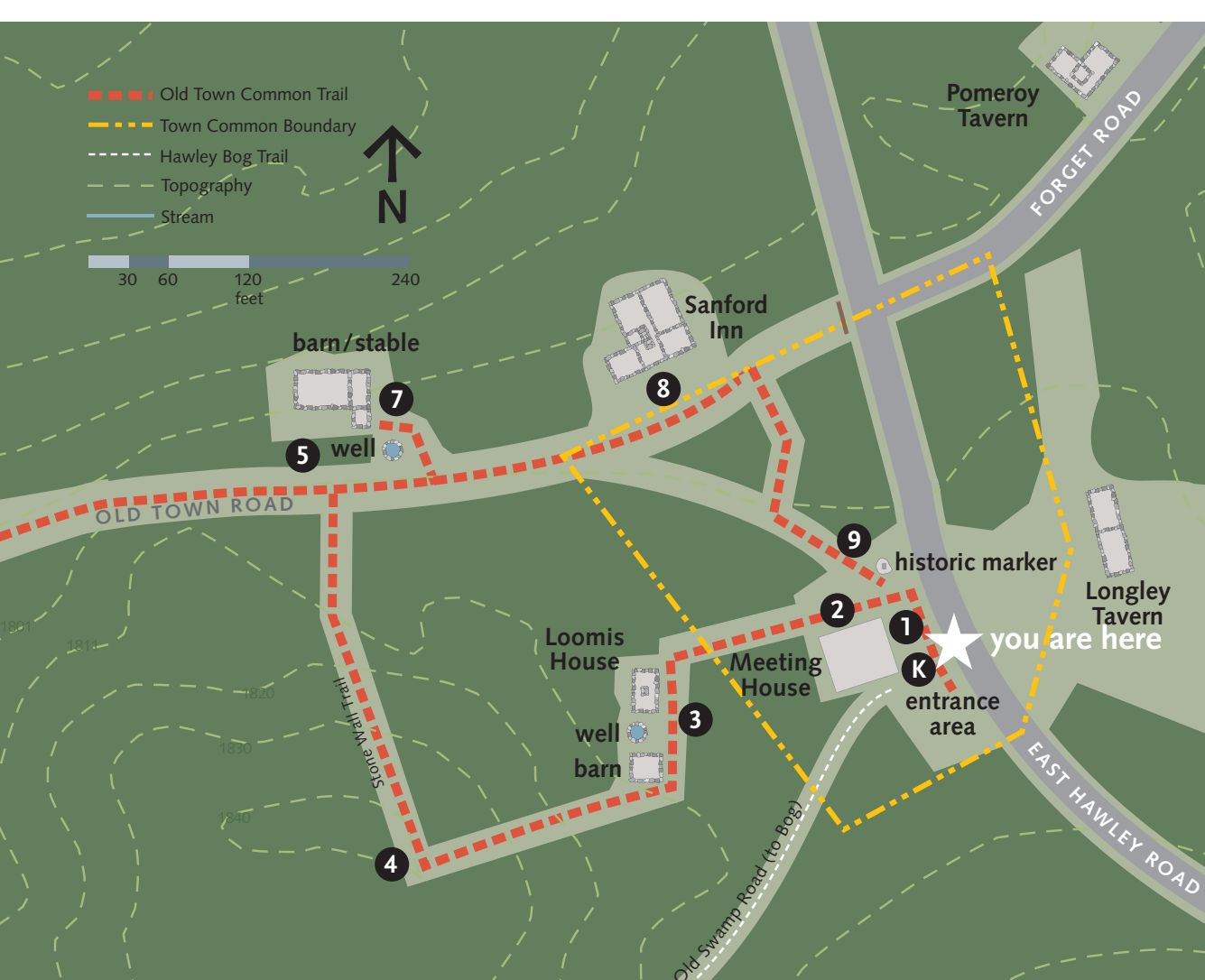
“The inhabitants of this town assembled on the fourth [of July] and united to commemorate the birth day of our National Independence. The procession, accompanied by a Band of Music, moved to the Meetinghouse, where Rev. Jonathan Grout, after prayer and singing, delivered a short, but pertinent Address. After a repast under a bowery on the common, they drank [seventeen] Toasts.”

Northampton Republican Spy,
August 6, 1805

Hawley built its first meetinghouse here on the town common. A blacksmith shop, a house, and two taverns stood close by. No engravings or photographs of these buildings have been found. Harrison Parker based his drawing of these structures on their stone foundations and a few historical records that survive. We invite you to use his drawing and the drawings on the other signs throughout the site as starting points for imagining the way the common may have looked.

Citizens came to the common to worship, conduct town business, shop, drink, and socialize. Cattle grazed on the common, a pound may have penned stray cattle, and the local militia may have trained here. The town still owns most of the common, originally about two acres in size.

Town commons or greens remain a distinctive feature of over three hundred New England cities and villages, but Hawley's common disappeared. Why did the residents of Hawley abandon it? See if you can answer this question as you find clues in the landscape and on the signs along the way.





Old Town Common

Hawley's First Meetinghouse (1797)

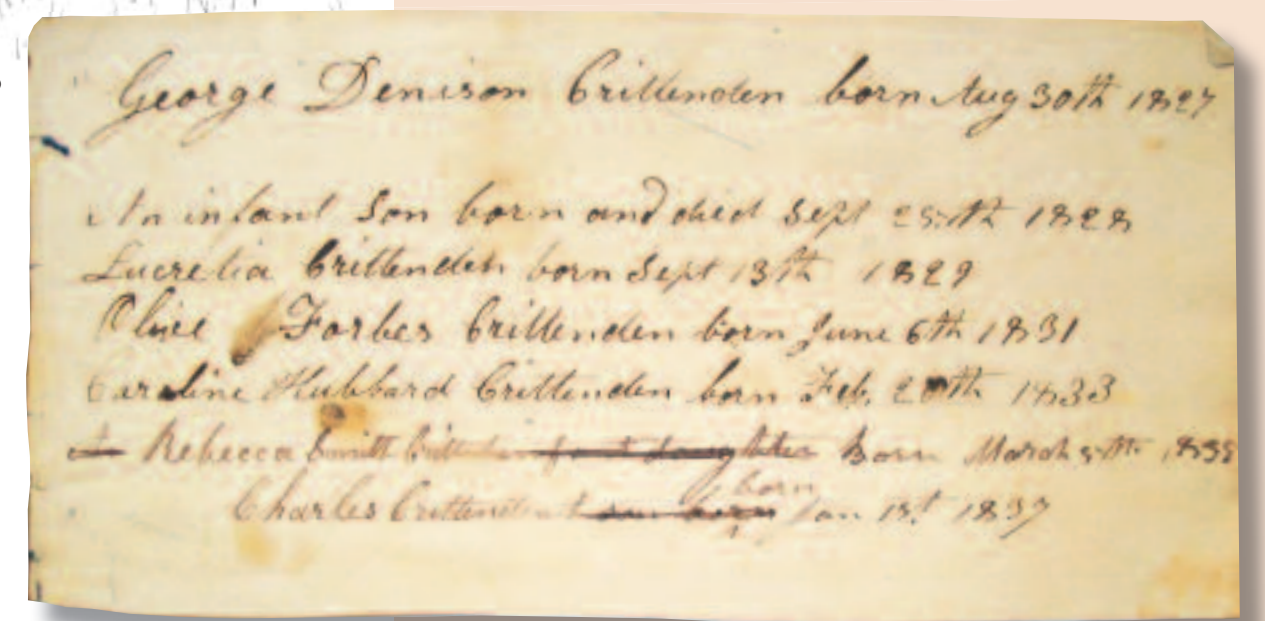
“Puritans deliberately avoided the word ‘church’ when speaking of the building in which they worshipped; for them, ‘church,’ ‘congregation,’ and ‘town’ were synonymous for the close-knit, smoothly functioning community they hoped to create.”

JOHN STILGOE, “Town Common and Village Green” (1982)



TRINA SEARS STERNSTEIN, 2010

In 1793, Hawley hired Rev. Jonathan Grout (1763–1835) as its first minister and in 1797 built a meetinghouse on this site. A barn-like building with large windows and square pews, it measured 40 by 50 feet and had no belfry or steeple. In 1811 the town voted to paint it orange, a color that faded to a “dingy yellow” by the 1830s.



“George Denison Crittenden born Aug 30th 1827 / An infant son born and died Sept 25th 1828 / Lucretia Crittenden born Sept 13th 1829 / Olive Forbes Crittenden born June 6th 1831 / Caroline Hubbard Crittenden born Feb 20th 1833 / Rebecca Smith Crittenden born March 5th [?] 1835 / Charles Crittenden born Jan 1st 1837”

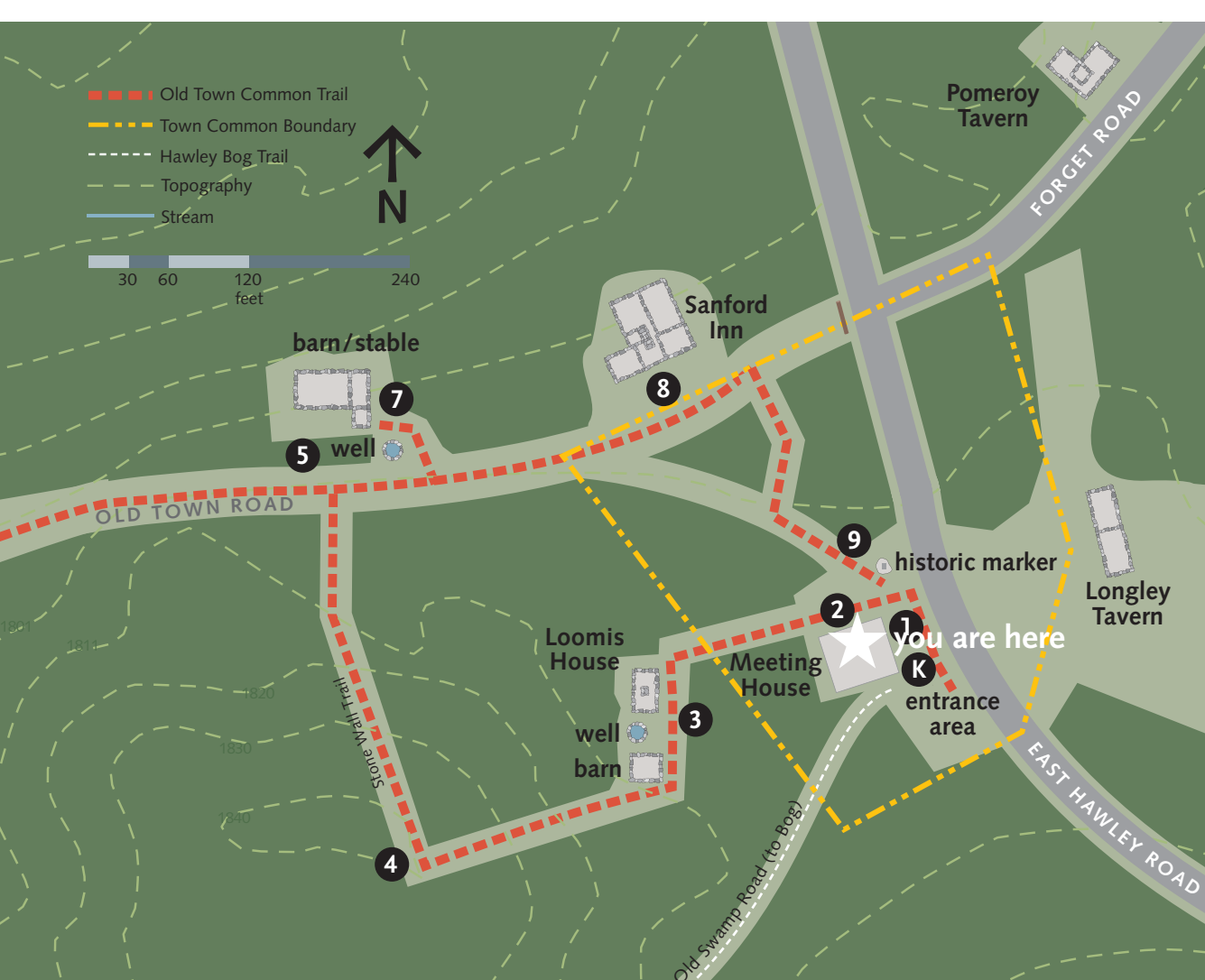
From the first Hawley Meetinghouse registry

The meetinghouse served both as a place of worship and a venue for town meetings. In 1825 church members in West Hawley formed the Second Congregational Society of Hawley and built their own meetinghouse on Forge Hill Road, more than two miles west of the town common.

The Eleventh Amendment to the Massachusetts Constitution, which separated church and state, went into effect in 1833. Massachusetts now required separate buildings for worship and the conduct of town business. Hawley only fully complied in 1848–49 when it built a town house on Middle Road a mile and a half west of the common. Now independent of the town, the First Congregational Society reused much of the material it took from the old meetinghouse in the construction of a new meetinghouse on East Hawley Road, a mile and a quarter south of the common, where it still stands.

Why do you suppose there is no cellar hole at the site of the meetinghouse?

You just passed a low wall. What purpose do you suppose it served?





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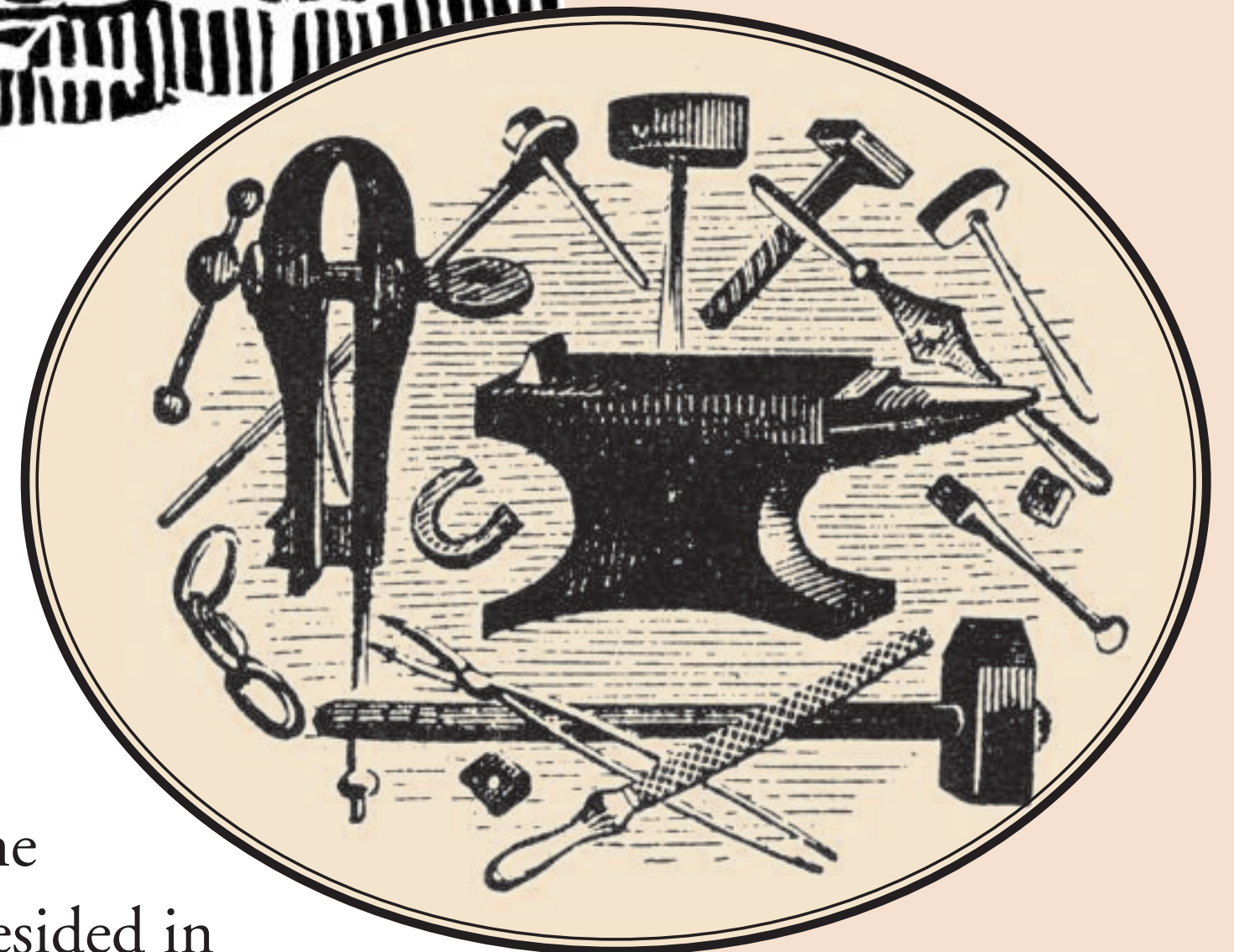
Asher Loomis Site (1800)



TRINA SEARS STERNSTEIN, 2010

“At a little distance from that end [of the meetinghouse], separated from it by a narrow carriageway, was a neat little cottage, with out-buildings, garden, and orchard. It was so near the church that, when the windows were open, the occupant might hear the preacher without leaving the house.”

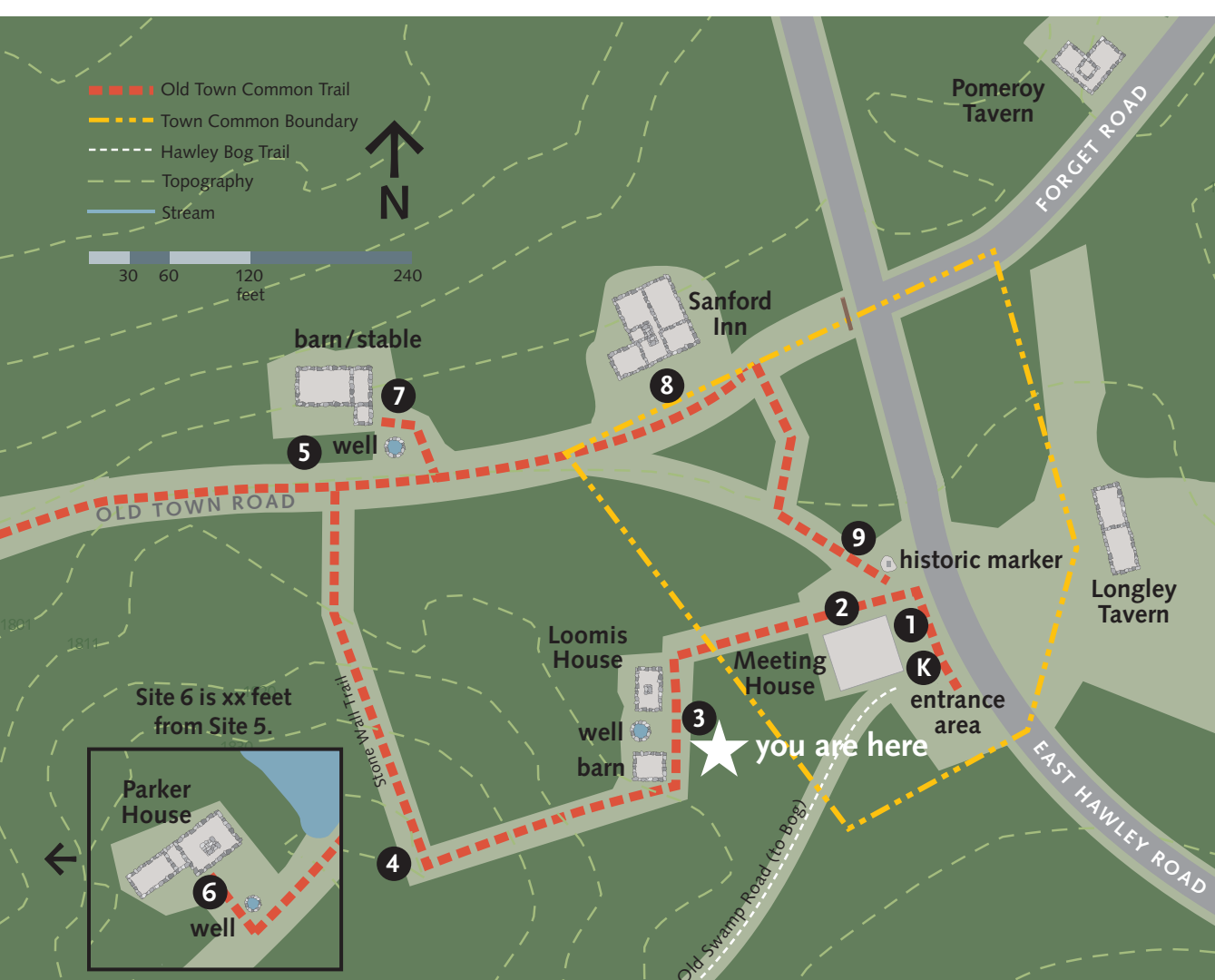
REV. RUFUS TAYLOR [Martha's son], *Cottage Piety* (1869)



A one-story house, built by Asher Loomis in 1800, probably in the common cape style of the period, stood on this site. Loomis, a blacksmith, lived here from 1800 to 1817 and operated a blacksmith shop somewhere nearby. The shop eventually moved to the southern edge of the common, perhaps to a spot under what is now East Hawley Road. Dr. Charles Knowlton, a physician and controversial author of one of the first guides to family planning published in America, resided in

the house from 1824 to 1835. Martha Taylor, a pious woman who wished to reside close to the meetinghouse and whose four sons all became ministers, lived in it from 1837 to 1857.

Why would a blacksmith shop have been an essential feature of the villages that formed around New England town commons?





Old Town Common

New England Stone Walls



Height of Cultivation for Farm Crops, 1830s. A typical New England landscape crisscrossed by stone walls.

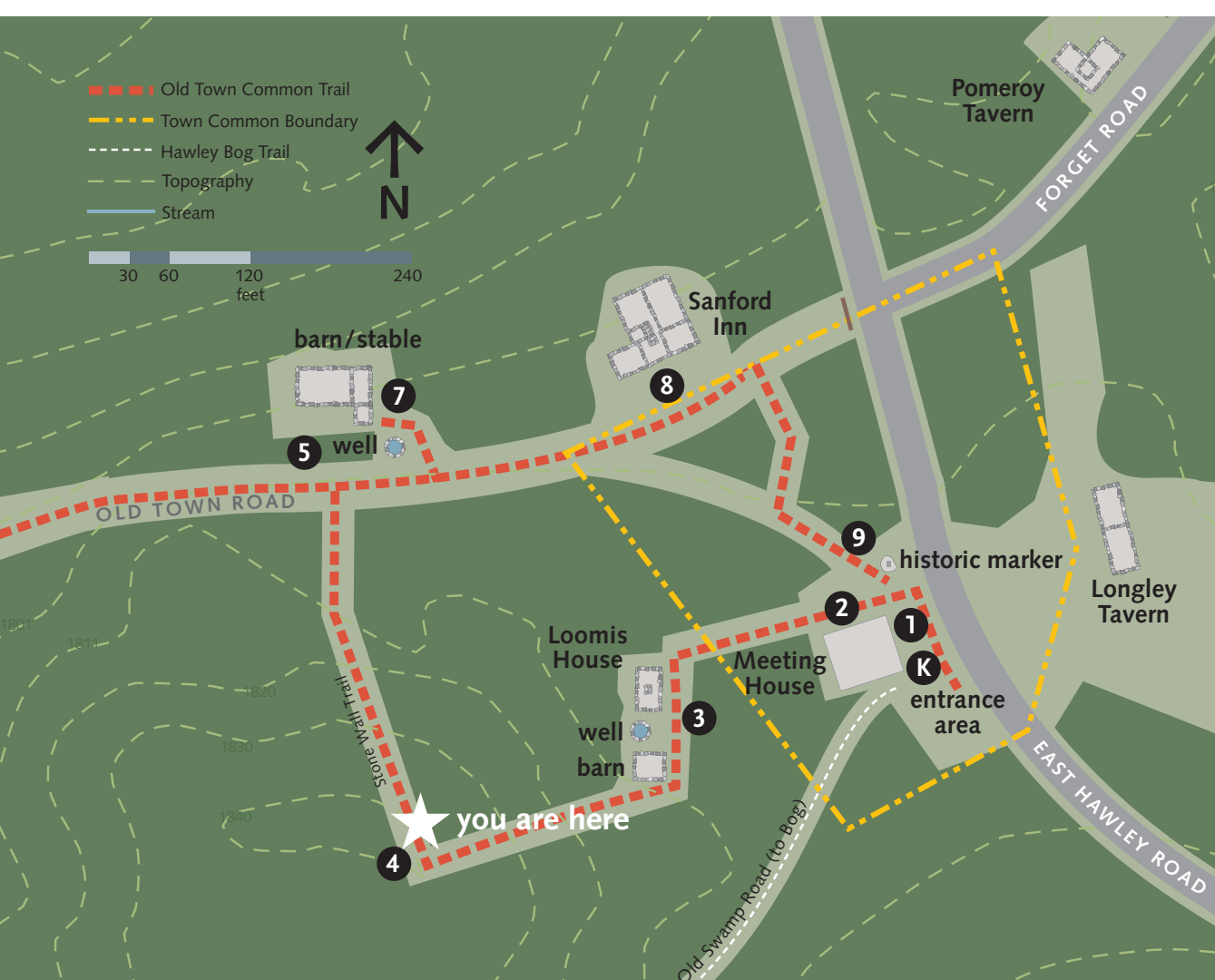
HARVARD FOREST DIORAMAS, FISHER MUSEUM, HARVARD FOREST, PETERSHAM, MASSACHUSETTS / INSET ILLUSTRATION: AMERICAN ANTIQUARIAN SOCIETY

According to one estimate, approximately 240,000 miles of stone walls once crisscrossed the New England landscape. Pioneer farmers began to build these walls when they cleared and started to cultivate the land, but they added most of the stones as deforestation permitted annual frost heaving to lift stones buried in the earth toward the surface. Often farmers skidded the stones to the edge of the field with a wooden sled pulled by oxen. Originally places to deposit unwanted stones, the walls also marked property lines and functioned as fences, usually only after the addition of a wooden rail at the top. As industrialization and the opening of better agricultural land in the West drained population from New England farming communities, fields and pasture returned to forest. Many of the walls still remain.

“Most of the stone that found its way into walls was a delayed and inadvertent consequence of deforestation.”

ROBERT M. THORSON, *Stone by Stone* (2002)

Do (1) the trees along this wall and on each side of it, (2) the presence or absence of stones, and (3) the contours of the landscape offer any clues about how farmers may have used the land in the past? When do you think it was last clear?





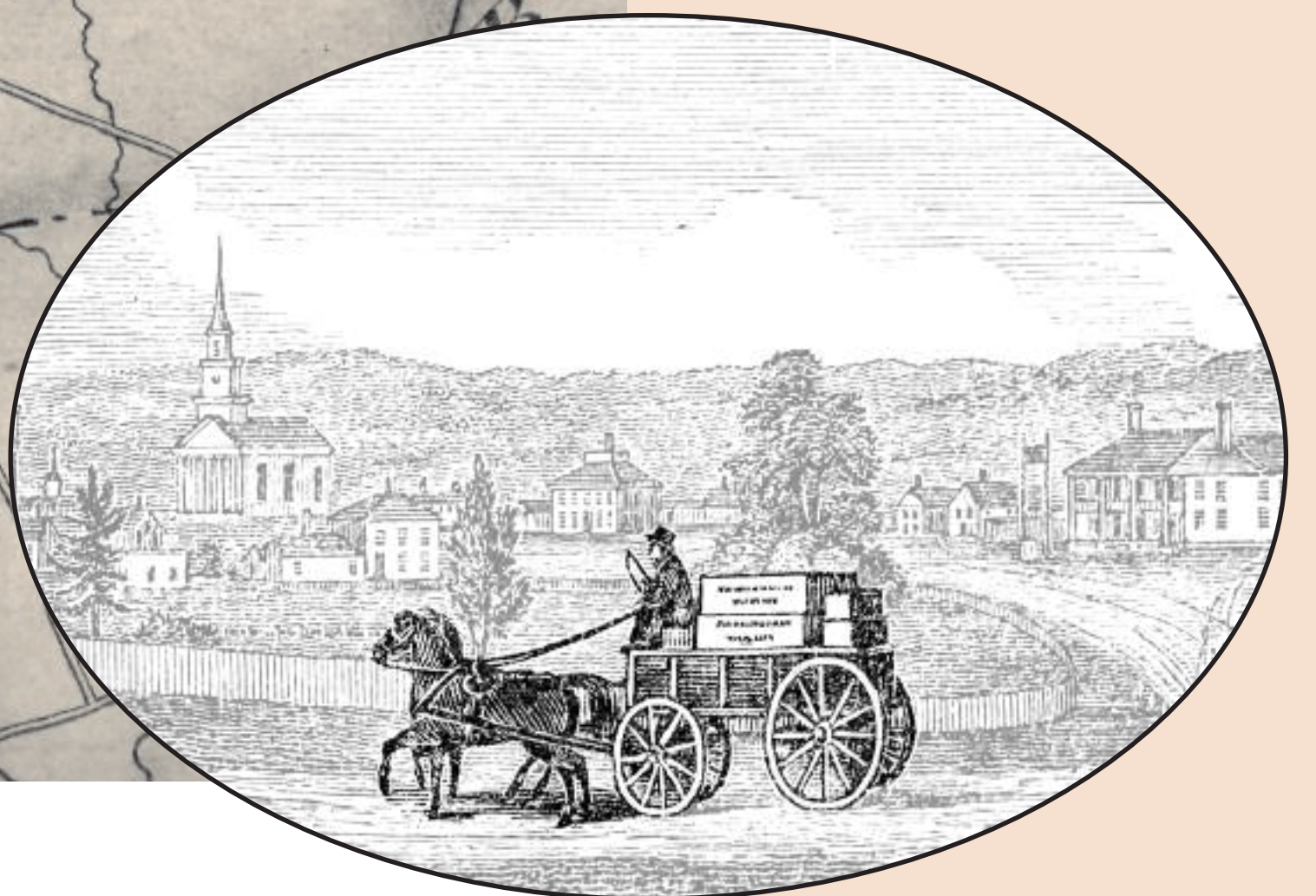
Old Town Common

Abandoned Extension of First County Road



West Hawley Meetinghouse (1825)

Hawley Town Common



Freight wagon, Brimfield, Massachusetts

JOHN WARNER BARBER HISTORICAL COLLECTIONS (1840). SPECIAL COLLECTIONS, W.E.B. DU BOIS LIBRARY, UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS, AMHERST

Hawley's town common stood at a strategic crossroads that connected it both to the outside world and to the various districts within the town. The road on which you stand is an extension of Hawley's first county road, begun in 1771 and connecting Hawley to Buckland. The old county road ran east to west along the route of what is now Forget Road and in front of the Sanford Tavern to your right. About one hundred yards to your left, the road divides. Residents of West Hawley traveling to the town common for worship, town business, or other purposes would have traveled up the steep Potash Hill Road (right fork); those from King Corner would have traveled the road past Hunt's Pond.



Why do you suppose the east/west roads in Hawley were abandoned and the north/south roads prevailed?



STATE LIBRARY OF MASSACHUSETTS SPECIAL COLLECTIONS DEPARTMENT



Old Town Common

Parker Homestead (ca. 1776)



TRINA SEARS STERNSTEIN, 2010

“The house was back several hundred yards from the road, in the middle of a sweeping hedge of high trees that swing around the spot in a huge amphitheater. The brick in the chimney is all hand made, and the base of the chimney is 12 feet square, and in the old days had three fireplaces on the first floor and two on the second floor, reaching up to the top of the house in mammoth massiveness. Near the house are the remains of an old raceway, evidence of the presence, years ago, of an old grist mill. From the top of the hill near this spot may be seen both Greylock and Mt. Tom as the elevation is about 2200 feet.”

Unknown reporter, *North Adams Evening Transcript*, September 17, 1910



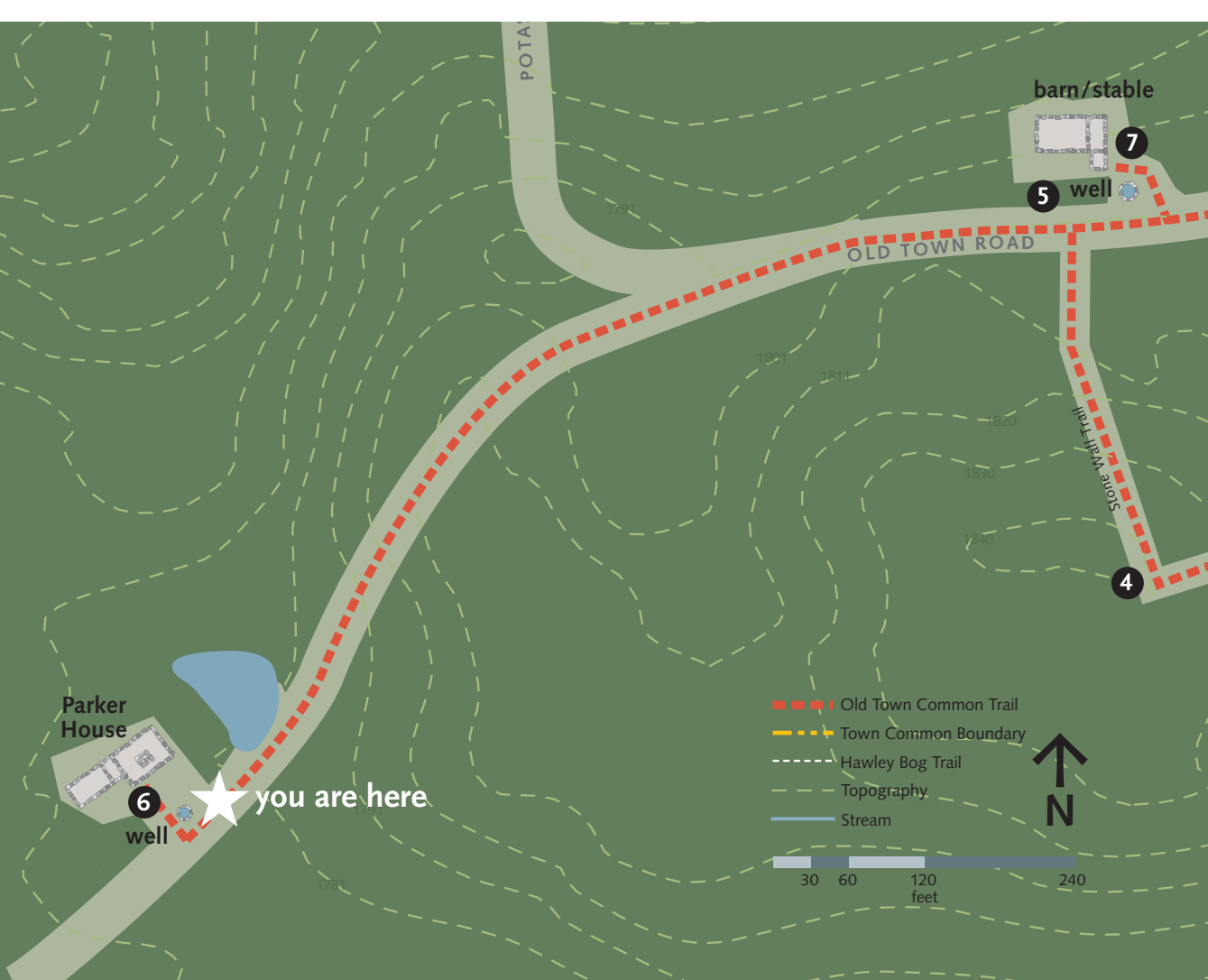
AMERICAN ANTIQUARIAN SOCIETY

Built by Abraham Parker, one of the early settlers and leaders of Hawley, the house that once stood on this site was occupied by four generations of Parkers from the late 18th century to 1891. Church services and town meetings took place in the Parker home in 1792 and 1793, just after the incorporation of the town and before a barn provided temporary space for these purposes while the town debated the site for the meetinghouse.

The drawings of structures on this and the other signs are based on the ruins that remain and knowledge of the typical building styles of the period. Do you agree with these interpretations?

What purpose did the square stone structure in the middle of the cellar hole serve?

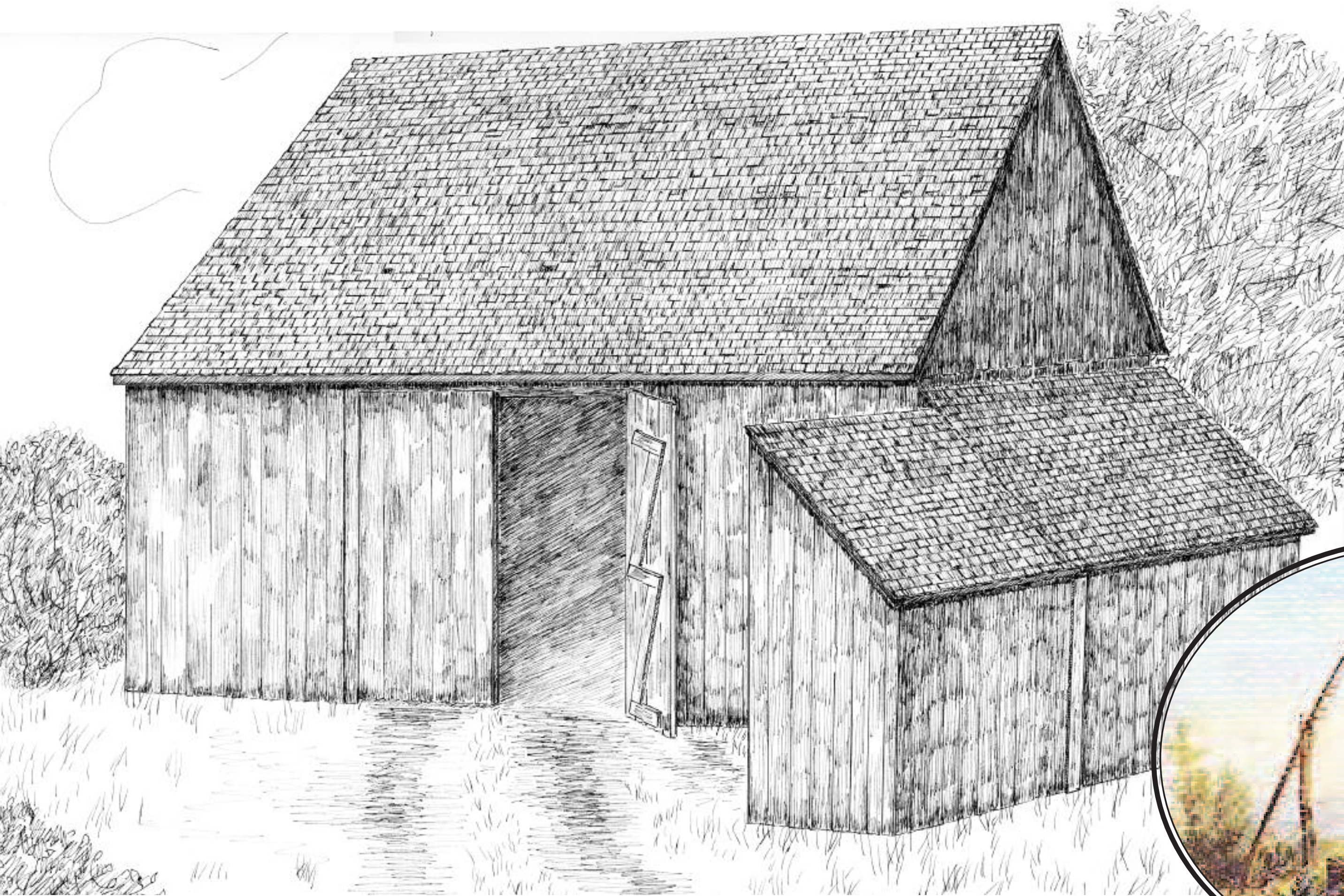
Compare this cellar hole to the cellar hole of the Loomis house. What does the size of the cellar hole tell you about the owners of this house?



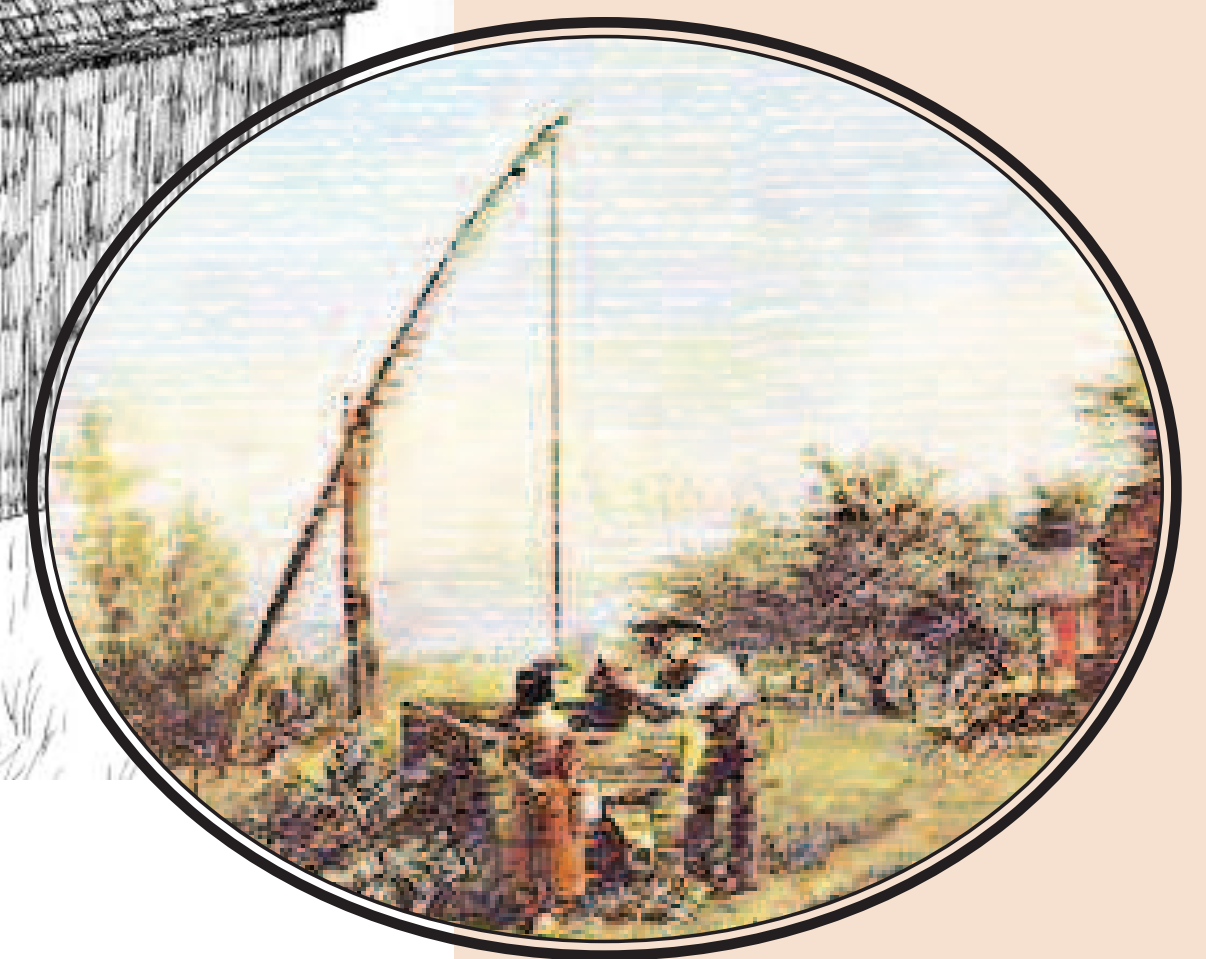


Old Town Common

Sanford Barn and Stable (ca. 1798)



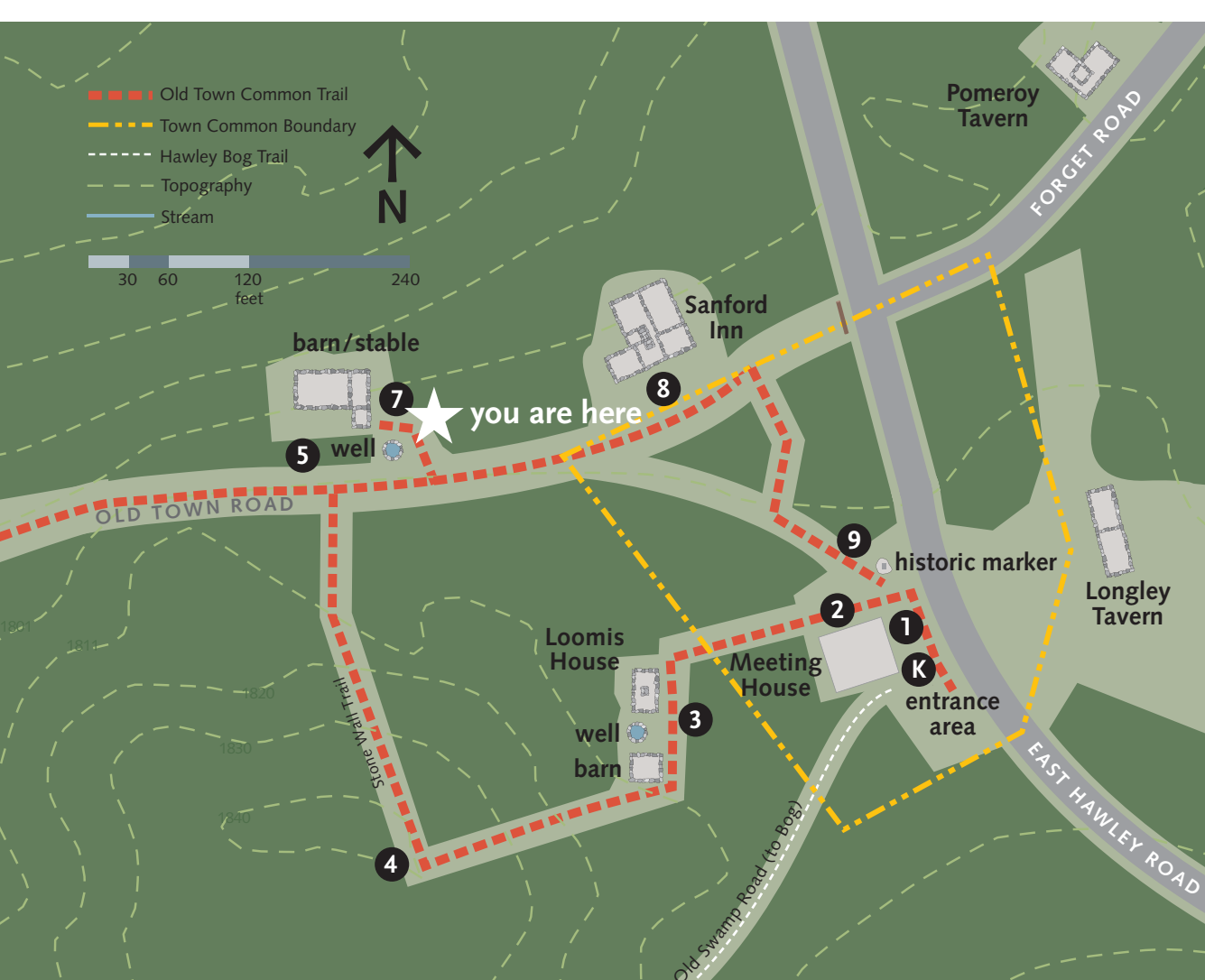
TRINA SEARS STERNSTEIN, 2010



The stonework to your right marks the site of the barn and stable associated with the Sanford Tavern. Artemis Loomis, probably a relative of Asher Loomis and also a blacksmith, may have built his blacksmith shop and coal shed at or near this site before he sold the property to William Sanford in 1798.

What indicates that this foundation supported a barn and stable rather than a house?

What services might this stable have provided to stagecoaches or riders passing through town?



To your left you will find a well, one of three found on this tour – all shallow and all in good condition.

What does the shallowness of the well tell you about the geology of the area?

Why do you think the wells remain in such good condition after 200 years of harsh Hawley weather?





Old Town Common

Sanford Tavern (ca. 1798)



TRINA SEARS STERNSTEIN, 2010 / INSET ILLUSTRATION: AMERICAN ANTIQUARIAN SOCIETY

“[The Sanford Tavern], a large, pretentious building of two stories and a long ell running out towards the west, ... had never been adorned with paint, but the elaborate carvings and exterior ornaments gave evidence that it had once been a place in which the owner felt not a little pride....”

P.F. COOLEY, “Reminiscences of a Former Resident,” in William Giles Atkins’s *History of the Town of Hawley* (1887)

“Voted to adjourn to Mr. Sanford’s bar-room forthwith.”

Town record, Special Town Meeting, Hawley, October 30, 1815

“[Colonel Edmund Longley, a prominent leader in the town,] was very regular and temperate in his habits. In former days when every one used ardent spirit, he used it moderately, for those times. When the temperance reformation commenced, however, his mind was open to conviction, and he signed the pledge, though he was then more than four score years old.”

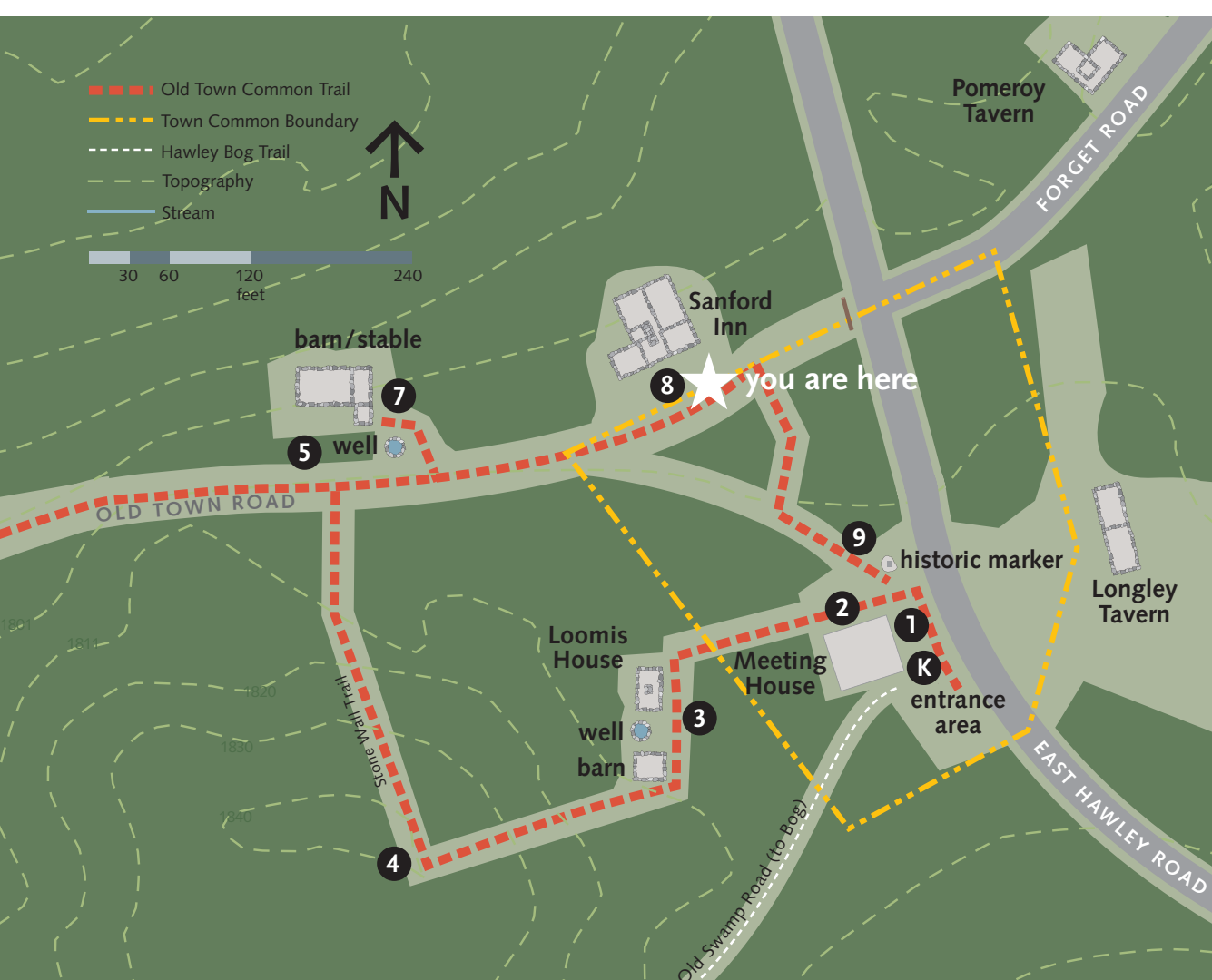
Greenfield Gazette & Courier, January 3, 1843

The Sanford Tavern and the Longley Tavern (the next site on the tour) accommodated travelers and served as venues for male socializing outside the home. Both taverns housed stores. Town meetings sometimes adjourned to Sanford’s tavern and Sanford sometimes tried lawsuits in his “commodious hall.”

Heavy drinking probably occurred at Hawley’s taverns until the temperance movement put an end to it. In 1831, a religious revival brought new members into the East Hawley church, many of whom took a pledge of abstinence from alcohol. From that year onward neither the Sanford nor the Longley tavern applied for a liquor license.

Profitable in its early years, the Sanford Tavern fell on hard times after Sanford’s death in 1831, and his son lost it in a lawsuit in 1843. By 1858, it no longer appeared on town maps.

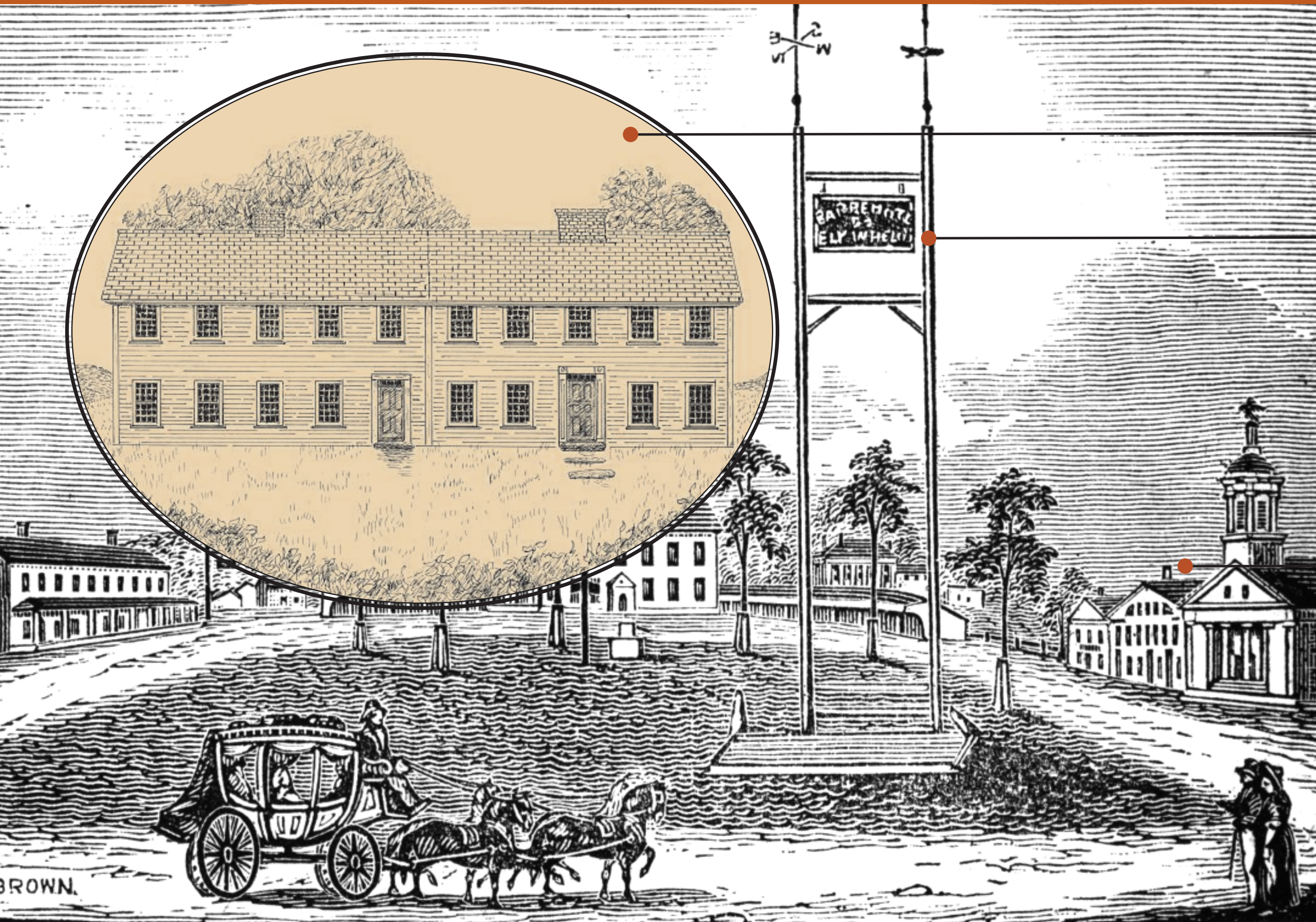
Look at the footprint of the building formed by the foundation. Why did the artist depict the tavern with two ells? How many chimneys do you think the building had? Where were they? Can you find the entrance to the cellar? What might the innkeeper have stored in the cellar? Would this account for its size?





Old Town Common

Longley Tavern (1802)



The Longley Tavern as it may have looked.

Sometimes the signs outside of New England taverns were quite elaborate, like this one.

Given the mode of transportation that delivered mail and passengers to the taverns, what do you think accounts for the height of these signs?

This 1840 engraving of Barre, Massachusetts, depicts the typical features of a rural Massachusetts town common: tavern, tavern signs, meeting-house, and carriage sheds.

JOHN WARNER BARBER HISTORICAL COLLECTIONS (1840). SPECIAL COLLECTIONS DEPARTMENT, W.E.B. DU BOIS LIBRARY, UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS, AMHERST / INSET ILLUSTRATION: TRINA SEARS STERNSTEIN, 2010

The cottage you see across the road sits on the central foundation of the Longley Tavern, which also housed a store and served as Hawley's first post office. Carrying the mail was an important function of stagecoaches during this period. The Longley and nearby Sanford Tavern served food and liquor and provided lodging to a small number of guests (probably fewer than twelve in each tavern). The innkeeper lived with his family in the building.

Colonel Edmund Longley and his son Thomas established the tavern in 1802, with Thomas as innkeeper. Several other members of the family operated it over the following years. In 1848, Calvin Longley moved the business to a site opposite the new meetinghouse and near the junctions of Buckland and Ashfield roads with East Hawley Road. In this new location the tavern could take advantage of the traffic on the nearby Boston to Albany stagecoach route that ran along Ashfield Road and through South Hawley beginning in 1826.

U.S. mail route in 1820:

"From Greenfield, by Shelburne, Buckland, Hawley, Plainfield, Savoy, Cheshire, Adams, Williamstown, Adams, Charlemont, Heath, Colerain, and Leyden, to Greenfield, once a week, 108... miles. Leave Greenfield every Tuesday at 8 a m and arrive at Williamstown on Wednesday by noon. Leave Williamstown on Wednesday 2 p m and arrive at Greenfield on Thursday by 6 p m."

Boston Gazette, September 14, 1820

