

## **Daniel Ricketson Shanty Site, Brooklawn Park, New Bedford**

### **Project Description by:**

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Prior to the start of the archaeological project, the Ricketson Shanty foundation was not protected from possible inadvertent maintenance and/or landscaping impacts. The goal of the intensive (locational) archaeological survey was to locate and identify any significant archaeological deposits that were present within and around the Ricketson Shanty foundation. The intensive survey was also designed to collect basic information on the locations and densities of cultural deposits within the project area.

The archaeological excavations exposed and documented the intact stone footing that served as the base for the wooden shanty structure. The foundation is stable and remains intact with all four walls connected and in their original locations.

One of the main goals of the project was to make this important part of Brooklawn Park's history visible. The exposure of the shanty footing, as constructed for Ricketson and in its original location, provides an opportunity for New Bedford residents and park visitors to see and experience the actual place where the City's first history was written and where important literary figures were entertained. The addition of interpretive panels and potential historic photos of the shanty will allow visitors to experience the site on their own and will be a passive educational, cultural, and historical feature of the park.

Now that the excavations are essentially complete and the foundation stones have been individually and collectively mapped, the long-term preservation of the site can be accomplished by carefully backfilling the interior and exterior sections of the foundation walls, while leaving the upper course(s) of stone visible and exposed for visitors. The backfilling can be accomplished either with soil and/or with the small natural gravel excavated and screened by the archaeological team. Placing fill around the foundation stones will help to stabilize the walls and prevent accidental wall fall, but will still provide visitors with the visual experience of seeing the original footing.

## **Daniel Ricketson Shanty Site Overview**

### IDENTIFICATION

Daniel Ricketson's shanty stood at its original location at Brooklawn Park until the early 1980s. There are people now living who remember it. There are several aerial photographs showing its location. There are also several maps, plans, and surveys showing the same. There are over a dozen other photographs taken of the shanty with discernible location markers visible in the background and/or foreground.

Before the asphalt on the north and east sides of the site were removed, in May 2014, an indentation in the grade and discoloration of the grass, within the foundation, was clearly visible to the eye. There were also stones, 6 on the south wall and 3 on the north wall, partially protruding above the grass. Two lines of Belgian blocks framing the walkway to the site (first visible in a photo circa 1950) were also present until being disturbed by the roadway removable.

### EXCAVATION

On May 11, 2014 a one meter by one meter test pit was excavated at the estimated location of the east (front) wall of the shanty. This revealed a much more significant structure than was anticipated.

On June 6, 2014 the regular excavation of the site began. On this day what appears to be (supported by photographic evidence) one of the door handles of the shanty's Dutch door was found along the exterior of the south wall. Several fragmented clay smoking pipes have been found as well as a portion of a unique large ceramic pipe bowl. There is much support of the conversations held by Ricketson and his notable companions in the shanty being accompanied by smoking (free labor produced) tobacco. There have been many findings of ceramic sherds dating to mid-19th century, particularly in the northeast corner. There have also been a significant number of building materials found, such as nails and glass also dating to this era. Along the exterior west wall two whetstones were found. Ricketson's collection of jack-knives is also well documented. On November 15, 2014 the site was closed for winter; covering the stones with landscape fabric, packing straw tightly over that, covering with several large tarps and securing the tarps with a layer of soil and gravel where needed.

May 2, 2015 marked the re-opening of the site. Focus so far this year has been on the excavation of the interior of the foundation. There has been much less found on the interior. This may be due to the tightness of the floor boards of the shanty. Continued excavation is focusing on preparing for the long-term presentation and preservation of the site. One of the final steps of the excavation will be carefully backfilling the exterior and interior sections of the foundation walls, leaving the upper course of the stones visible, with soil and/or small gravel original to the site in order to keep the foundation stones stable and prevent accidental wall fall. A machine, guided by the archaeologist, could be used to expand the surrounding area and match the grade of the south east corner of the site.

## LONG TERM INTERPRETATION

To assist in the protection of the site, and to retain the loam added to the site after the digging of the test pit, a retaining wall will be constructed around the site. This wall will be made of pressure treated SYP; 4 x 4 posts and 1 x 6 planks. On the face of this wall will be constructed another wood layer, of western red cedar, designed to resemble the Gothic Revival board & batten style of Ricketson's shanty built in 1854.

The wall will be 16 inches tall at its highest point, the northwest corner. There will be a 4 foot perimeter between the wall and the shanty foundation stones. This area will be planted with grass in order to flow into the surrounding park grass. The southeast corner of the retaining wall will be open and grade will gradually slope into the site in order to invite the public in. There will be an 8 inch plank flat along the top of the retaining wall to allow for the public to sit and enjoy the shanty space and continue the legacy of the site as a place for gathering and conversation.

The rectangular interior area of the shanty foundation stones would be planted with a low ground cover selected from Daniel Ricketson's journals. When possible the planting strategy will be based on Ricketson's own planting strategy as well as being informed by strategies suggested by Andrew Jackson Downing.

An interpretive wayside panel will be placed adjacent to the opening in the southeast corner, approximately 15 feet away. This is also the vantage point of the historic photo, depicting Ricketson standing in the doorway of the shanty, which will be featured on the panel. The text of the panel will give a brief description of who Daniel Ricketson was and convey the historical significance of his shanty. There will also be text directing the interested viewer to seek more information at the Wilks Branch Public Library, 550 feet to the south, where objects from the archaeological excavation will be on permanent display as well as a copy of the project report from the excavation.

The Annual Daniel Ricketson Festival, held in mid-May to correspond with the spring bird migration, will continue to center around the shanty site. The festival is a multi-day celebration of the unique history provided by Daniel Ricketson's legacy. It is free and open to the public with engaging activities for children and academic lectures for the local historian.

This interpretative plan for the site will allow for and invite additional educational programs to interact with the site as well as enable the day-to-day park user to become familiar with the unique history of the site.

## **Daniel Ricketson Shanty Site Archaeological Excavation Timeline**

4/25/12 Board of Park Commissioners approval to find archaeologist

11/8/13 email correspondence begins with archaeologist Holly Herbster

11/16/13 first site visit with Holly Herbster

12/11/13 Board of Park Commissioners approves archaeological excavation

1/28/14 New Bedford Free Public Library agrees to be repository for findings

5/8/14 unexpected removal of asphalt north and east of shanty site

5/11/14 test pit excavated with Holly Herbster, reveals significant stone structure

5/29/14 permit issued from Massachusetts Historical Commission

5/17/14 First Annual Daniel Ricketson Festival, free educational program for public

6/19/14 discovery that foot of loam was dumped on site

7/6/14 first day of full scale archaeological excavation

11/15/14 close site for winter

5/2/15 re-open site

5/16/15 Second Annual Daniel Ricketson Festival, presentation of findings, active dig

## **Daniel Ricketson Shanty Site History** **by Carl Simmons**

Daniel Ricketson (1813-1898) of New Bedford was a poet, historian, abolitionist and reformer. From 1854 to 1875 Ricketson lived with his family three and a half miles north of the center of New Bedford on the 53 acre farm they named "Brooklawn".

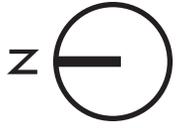
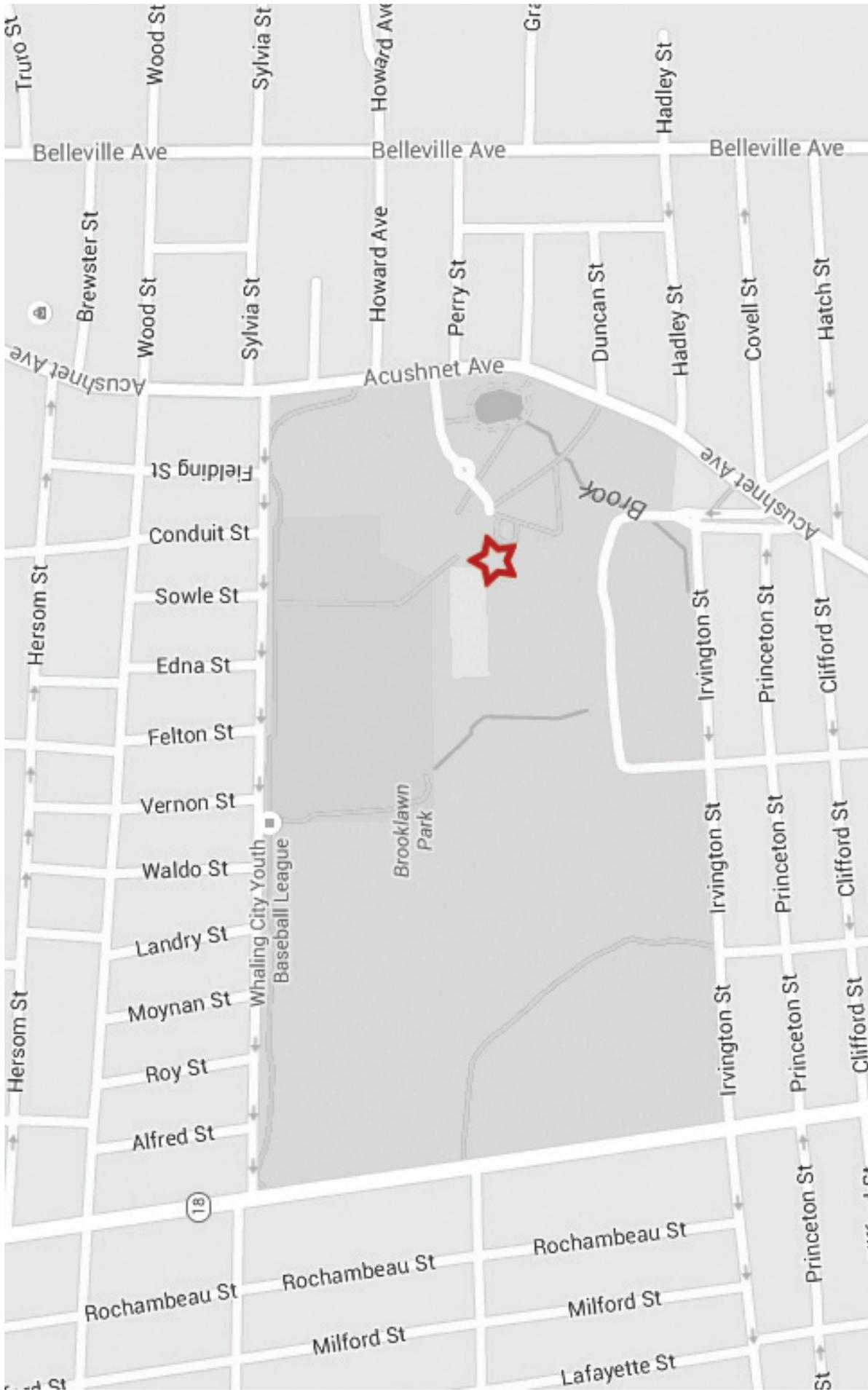
The house at Brooklawn, which Ricketson rebuilt before moving his family in, was a large, fourteen room, two-story dwelling that perched about five-hundred feet from the present Acushnet Avenue on a crest of the sloping lawns. About 100 feet to the southwest of the house Ricketson built a rustic one room, 12 x 14 foot cabin he called his "shanty". A serpentine vergeboard, in the Gothic Revival style championed by his friend and pioneering landscape architect Andrew Jackson Downing, adorned the front facade. The southern exterior wall was well-covered with virginia creeper and grape vines. The interior was decorated with simple old-fashioned furniture that had been in the Ricketson family for generations. There were often a lot of books scattered about. Small slips of paper with "quotations celebrating retirement, country life, simplicity, humanity, sincerity, etc., etc." covered the west and northwest walls. A small wood burning stove provided warmth. The drawers of the desks were filled with fruit, jack-knives, pencil sketches and smoking pipes. An aeolian harp fixed in a window bellowed out a soft ominous tone accentuating the breeze. Birds made their nests above the windows outside.

In his shanty Ricketson wrote the newspaper articles that he would compile and publish as the first written history of New Bedford, *The History of New Bedford, Bristol County, Massachusetts* (1858). Much of the poetry published in his collections *The Autumn Sheaf* (1869) and the *The Factory Bell* (1873) was written in his shanty as well. Ricketson was also a frequent contributor of editorials to the local newspapers; voicing his views on anti-slavery, animal rights, religion, nature and historic preservation. The shanty would also serve as the place where he and his visitors would converse about "high themes" late into the night.

It is for his luminary literary friends that Ricketson is largely remembered today. Many of them were the central figures in the Transcendentalist movement centered in Concord, Massachusetts; Henry David Thoreau, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Amos Bronson Alcott and Ellery Channing. Thoreau, author of "Walden; or Life in the Woods" and pioneer of today's ecological consciousness, first visited Brooklawn on Christmas Day, 1854. Thoreau would visit Ricketson at Brooklawn nearly every year thereafter until his death, from tuberculosis, in 1862. During a two week visit in April of 1857 Thoreau, writing in his journal, provides us with the most detailed description of the shanty that we have. The two friends would converse around the shanty stove about the intense uncertainties of Civil War-era America and the timeless concerns of poets and philosophers after having spent the day exploring the surrounding woods and waterways.

George William Curtis, editor of "Harper's Weekly Magazine", was so taken by Ricketson and his shanty that he made him a reoccurring character in his "Editor's Easy Chair" column; naming him "Member for Woods and Forests" and "Brother Woodchuck" of the Sassafras Club.

Ricketson's Brooklawn parcel, joined with an abutting parcel to the north was purchased by the City of New Bedford and became Brooklawn Park in 1892. The knowledge of the historical significance of the shanty waxed and wained for nearly a century. In September of 1970 a hard fought preservation battle, which began in 1962, was lost and the Ricketson House was torn down. Ricketson's shanty, however, miraculously survived until the early 1980s when it was disassembled and removed to the city yard, most likely out of fear of vandalism. After the shanty's removal the site at Brooklawn Park at which it stood avoided any significant disturbance.



LOCUS MAP, DANIEL RICKETSON SHANTY SITE, BROOKLAWN PARK, NEW BEDFORD, MA

# Daniel Ricketson shanty site 9/27/2015



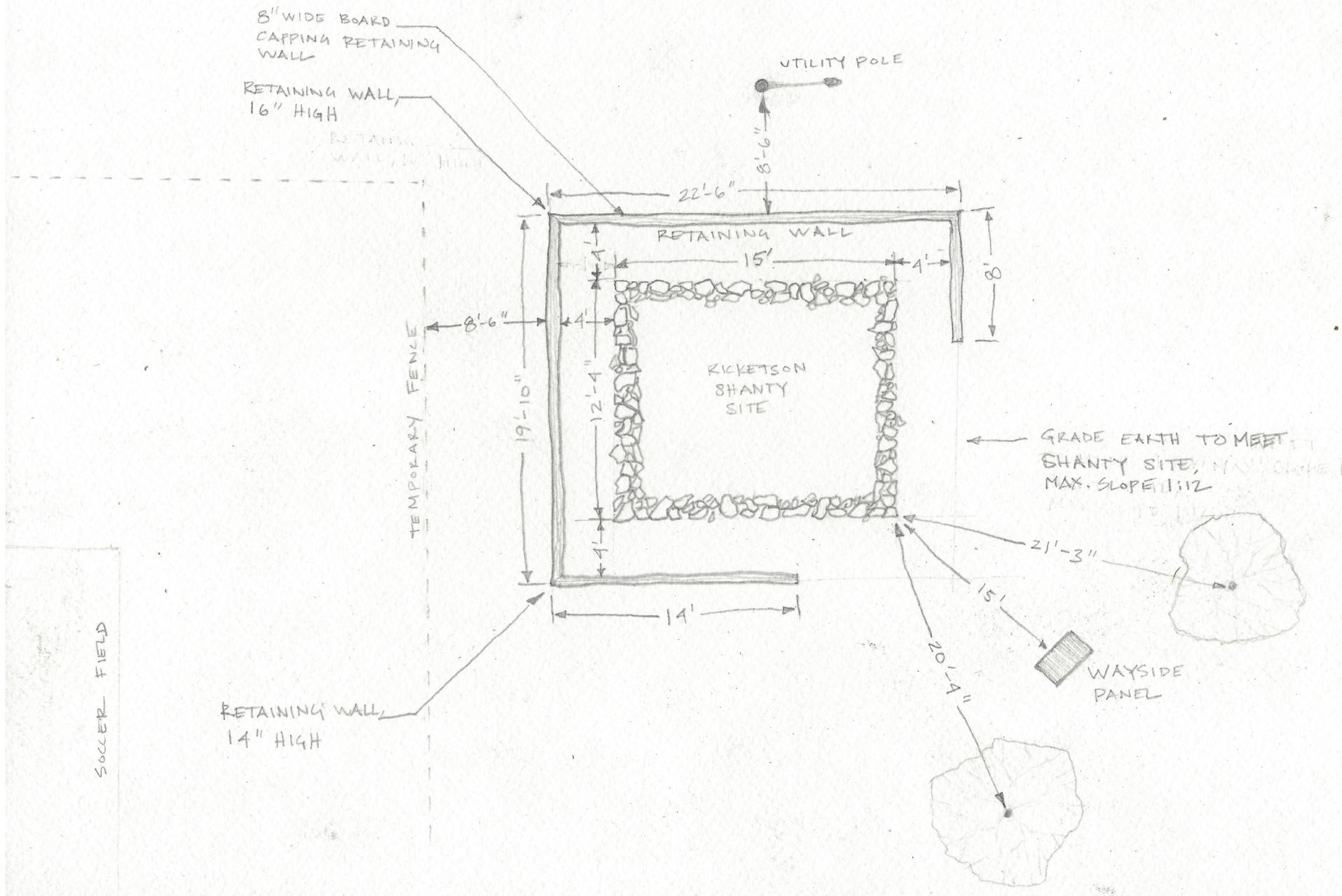


## WILKS BRANCH LIBRARY DISPLAY CASE

This case, which currently houses the bust of Daniel Ricketson carved by his son Walton and an original copy of Ricketson's "History", will be used to permanently display distinctive objects found during the archaeological excavation.



PLAN  
1/8" = 1'-0"



SITE PLAN  
1/16" = 1'-0"



SKATE PARK



RICKETSON  
MEMORIAL



UTILITY POLE



TEMPORARY FENCE

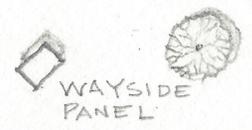


SOCCER FIELD

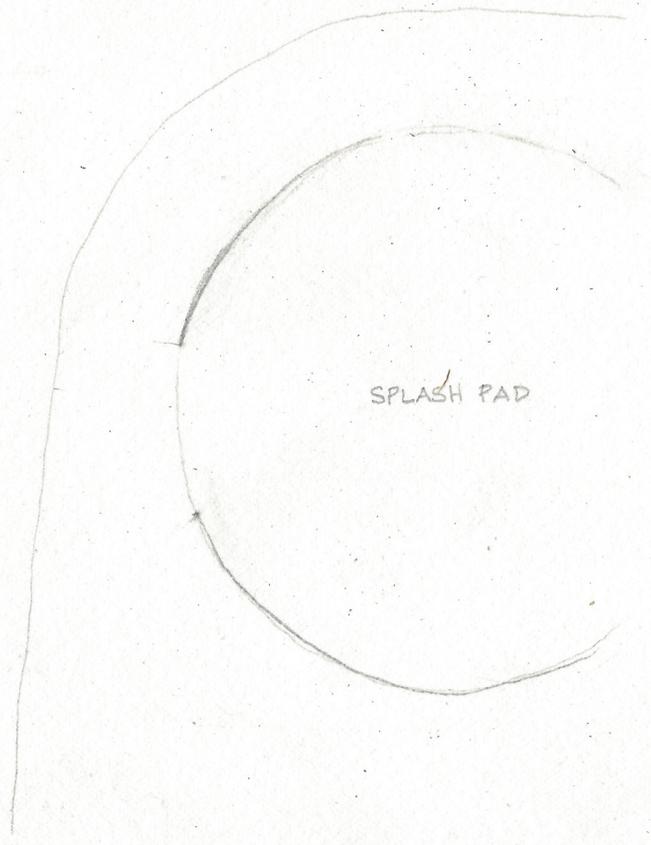
RICKETSON  
SHANTY  
SITE



WAYSIDE  
PANEL



SPLASH PAD



WAYSIDE  
HISTORIC  
INFORMATION  
PANEL



1862 Bierstadt Bros. carte-de-visite, NBFPL



October 1964 NB Garden Club, Spinner negative



circa 1870 T.E.M. White photo of shanty with Ricketson in doorway, Whaling Museum glass negative



**MAY 16**  
**BROOKLAWN PARK**  
 NEW BEDFORD  
 10AM - 3PM FREE & FAMILY FRIENDLY

presentation of the findings of the archaeological dig at the  
**RICKETSON SHANTY SITE**

talks by local historians on  
**BROOKLAWN AS A FARM &  
 A SHANTY HISTORY**

guided nature walks on the  
**DANIEL RICKETSON NATURE TRAIL**

photographic presentation on the  
**BUGS OF BROOKLAWN**

walking tour & children's activities  
 music, visual & performance art

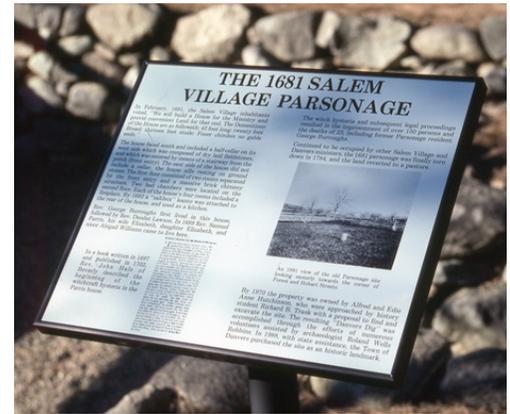
parking in the old wading pool lot  
 in the case of rain events will be  
 held in the community center

ALSO: 7pm MAY 14  
 NB Free Public Library  
 exhibition opening & talk  
 Leave Me to My Thoughts  
 and Books: Recollecting the  
 Forgotten Daniel Ricketson  
 Book Collection



1862 Bierstah Bros. Daniel Ricketson carte-de-visite courtesy of the New Bedford Free Public Library

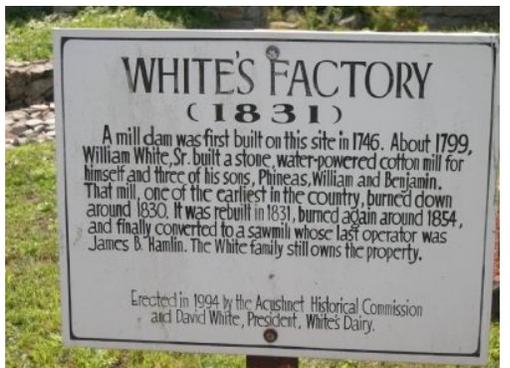
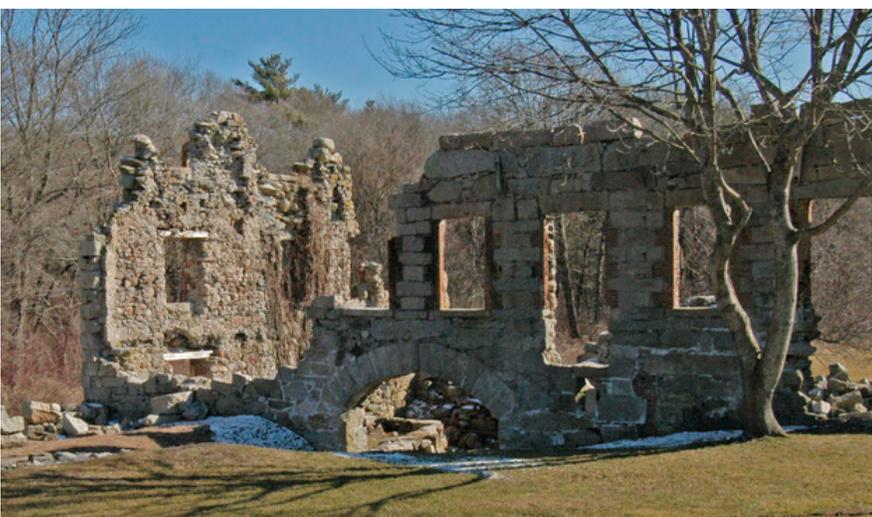
# PRECEDENT



1681 Salem Village Parsonage archaeological site, owned and managed by Town of Danvers, MA



Russell Garrison archaeological site, owned and managed by Town of Dartmouth, MA



White's Factory, owned and managed by Fairhaven Acushnet Land Preservation Trust