

The Venture Smith Homestead



Venture Smith Homestead
Haddam, Connecticut

Acknowledgments



Remains of Venture's wharf on the Salmon River, just east of the ruins of his home lot. Remains of notched wooden cribbing and stonework are still visible at low tide.

Front Cover:
"Spring on the Salmon River,"
an original painting by Maggie
Arnold, depicting Venture's
homestead on Haddam Neck.
The illustration is based on
recent archaeological findings
(M. Arnold © 2009).
Foreground: restored
artifacts found at the Venture
Smith site. (L-R): Ketland
percussion cap pistol, mouth
harp, and cast iron kettle.

We thank the following individuals for their help through the years on this most interesting project. Dr. David Poirier (former Staff Archaeologist of the State Historic Preservation Office) and Dr. Nicholas Bellantoni (Connecticut State Archaeologist) provided guidance and support throughout the archaeological investigations, and Dr. Poirier patiently reviewed earlier drafts of this publication. Daniel Forrest, current SHPO archaeologist, reviewed later versions of the manuscript. Archaeologists Mary Harper and Ross Harper (Public Archaeology Survey Team, Inc.), Dr. Warren Perry, Janet Woodruff and Gerald Sawyer (Central Connecticut State University), and historian Dr. Bruce Clouette (Public Archaeology Survey Team, Inc.) freely shared their expertise and unpublished research on the archaeology and history of the Connecticut Yankee property. Dr. Karl Stofko, East Haddam Municipal Historian, generously shared his unpublished biographical research on several of the former occupants of the historic archaeology sites discussed in this report and his discoveries of old news accounts concerning portions of the Connecticut Yankee property. Lisa Malloy, Executive Director of the Haddam Historical Society, and local residents Robert Johnson, Susan (Smith) Olsen, Peter Smith, Alison Guinness, Jim McCutcheon, Constance (Brooks) LaRosa, and the late Lillian Brooks kindly shared information on the local history and physical landscapes.

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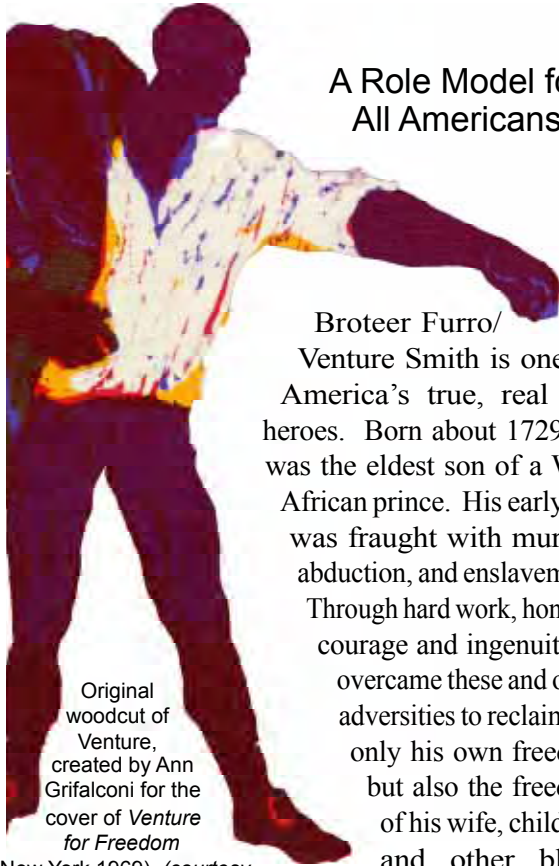
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Broteer Furro/Venture Smith: An International Persona



A Role Model for All Americans

Broteer Furro/Venture Smith is one of America's true, real life heroes. Born about 1729, he was the eldest son of a West African prince. His early life was fraught with murder, abduction, and enslavement. Through hard work, honesty, courage and ingenuity he overcame these and other adversities to reclaim not only his own freedom but also the freedom of his wife, children, and other black captives. He became a prosperous mariner-merchant-farmer, respected by his white neighbors and associates, to whom he was known by the name Venture Smith. Venture is not merely a black folk hero, but a role model for all Americans.

...Smith held himself up as the true revolutionary son – an African son at that. Pairing prosperity and frugality, diligence and self-control.....Smith embodied republican virtue as many whites had not,

at the same time distinguishing himself from those blacks who, he felt, frittered away their freedom on song, spirits, and silver buckles (Desrochers Jr. 1997:50).

Venture's Narrative

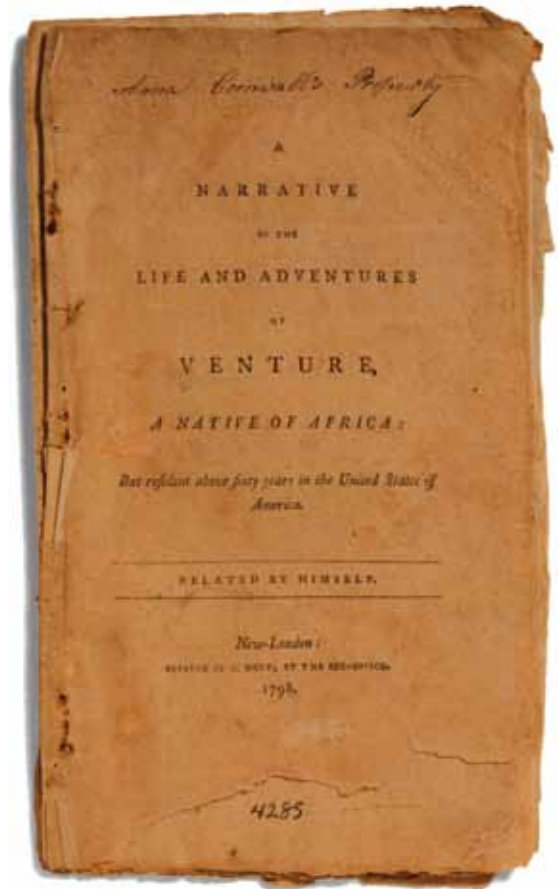
Venture dictated his autobiography to a white schoolteacher and the story was published in New London, Connecticut in 1798. Entitled *A Narrative of the Life & Adventures of Venture, a Native of Africa, but Resident above Sixty Years in the United States of America, related by himself*, it is one of the few slave narratives that discusses in some detail life in Africa as well as the life of an African captive in Colonial New England. Town histories in Connecticut and Rhode Island relate stories of his unusual physical strength and courage. He has been referred to as a "black Paul Bunyan." He was six feet two inches tall, weighed over 300 pounds, and measured six feet about the waist.

He could lift a tierce of molasses, or carry seven bushels of salt. ...once, between sunrise and sunset, he threw the trees and cut and laid up 16 cords of wood (Rev. Frederic Denison 1878:119).

Historical documents speak to his moral strength as well.

Venture is a negro remarkable for size, strength, industry, fidelity, and frugality, and well known in the state of Rhode Island, on Long Island, and in Stonington, East Haddam, and several other parts of this state.

*Descended from a royal race,
Benevolent and brave;
On Africa's savage plains, a PRINCE,
In this free land a SLAVE
(New London Bee 1798:3).*

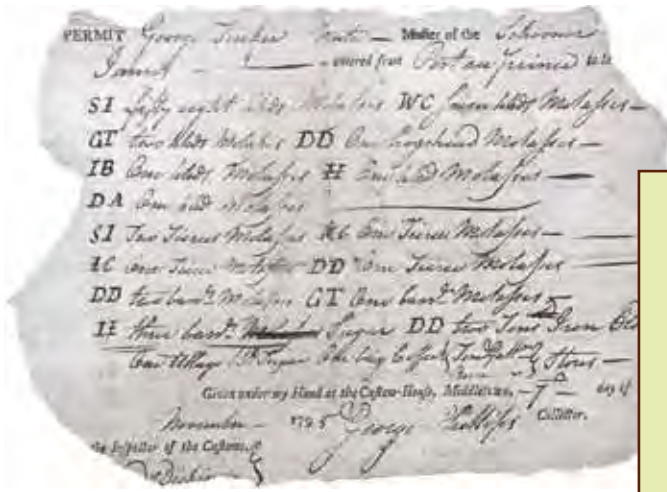


The front page of Venture Smith's *Narrative*, which was dictated to school teacher Elisha Niles (New London County Historical Society, New London, Connecticut).

The Life of Venture Smith

Venture's Legacy

For these reasons Venture Smith is the center of ongoing historical, archaeological, scientific, and genealogical studies across several continents. The Town of East Haddam, where he is buried, has proclaimed one Saturday of every September as Venture Smith Day. He has been honored in the poetry of Connecticut Poet Laureate Marilyn Nelson (2008). An art exhibit at the Florence Griswold Museum of Old Lyme featured 14 of these poems.



A portion from the manifest of a ship in the triangle trade, delivering molasses from Haiti to Middletown in 1795 (courtesy of the Connecticut River Museum).

In 2007 the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) produced a film on his life called *A Slave's Story*.

He is an American role model, exemplifying kindness, integrity, honesty and perseverance, as his contemporaries noted in a documented

"Certificate of character" which was dated and signed in Stonington in 1798 (Corriveau 2005:8).

The Life of Venture

Born into the Dukandarra tribe of "Guinea" (likely in the region now called western Mali), Broteer was the first-born child of Prince Saungm Furro and his first wife. This placed him first in line to succeed his father as leader of his people. Unfortunately, at the age of six and a half an enemy tribe attacked his village, killing his father and kidnapping the survivors, which included the child Broteer. They were bound and force-marched to the coast, where Broteer was imprisoned in a stone fort. About 1736, he was sold to Robinson Mumford¹, steward of a Rhode Island slave ship.

By the time I was thirty-six I had been sold three times. I had spun money out of sweat. I'd been cheated and beaten. I had paid an enormous sum for my freedom. And ten years farther on I've come out here to my garden at the first faint hint of light to inventory the riches I now hold.

Excerpt from *Farm Garden* (Marilyn Nelson, 2008)

All of us were then put into the castle, and kept for market. On a certain time I and other prisoners were put on board a canoe, under our master, and rowed away to a vessel belonging to Rhode-Island, commanded by capt. Collingwood, and the mate Thomas Mumford.....I was bought on board by one Robertson Mumford, steward of said vessel, for



An engraving created from an eye-witness sketch by Francis B. Spilsbury showing West Africans bound for slavery, from *Account of a Voyage to the Western coast of Africa: performed by His Majesty's sloop Favourite, in the year 1805* (London 1807). (Image courtesy of Special Collections, University of Virginia Library.)

four gallons of rum, and a piece of calico, and called VENTURE, on account of his having purchased me with his own private venture. Thus I came by my name. All the slaves that were bought for that vessel's cargo, were two hundred and sixty (Smith 1798:13).

¹ In Venture's Narrative Mumford's Christian name is given as "Robertson," but genealogists agree that it was "Robinson," particularly since his mother's maiden name was Robinson (Karl Stofko, personal communication 2010).

The Life of Venture Smith

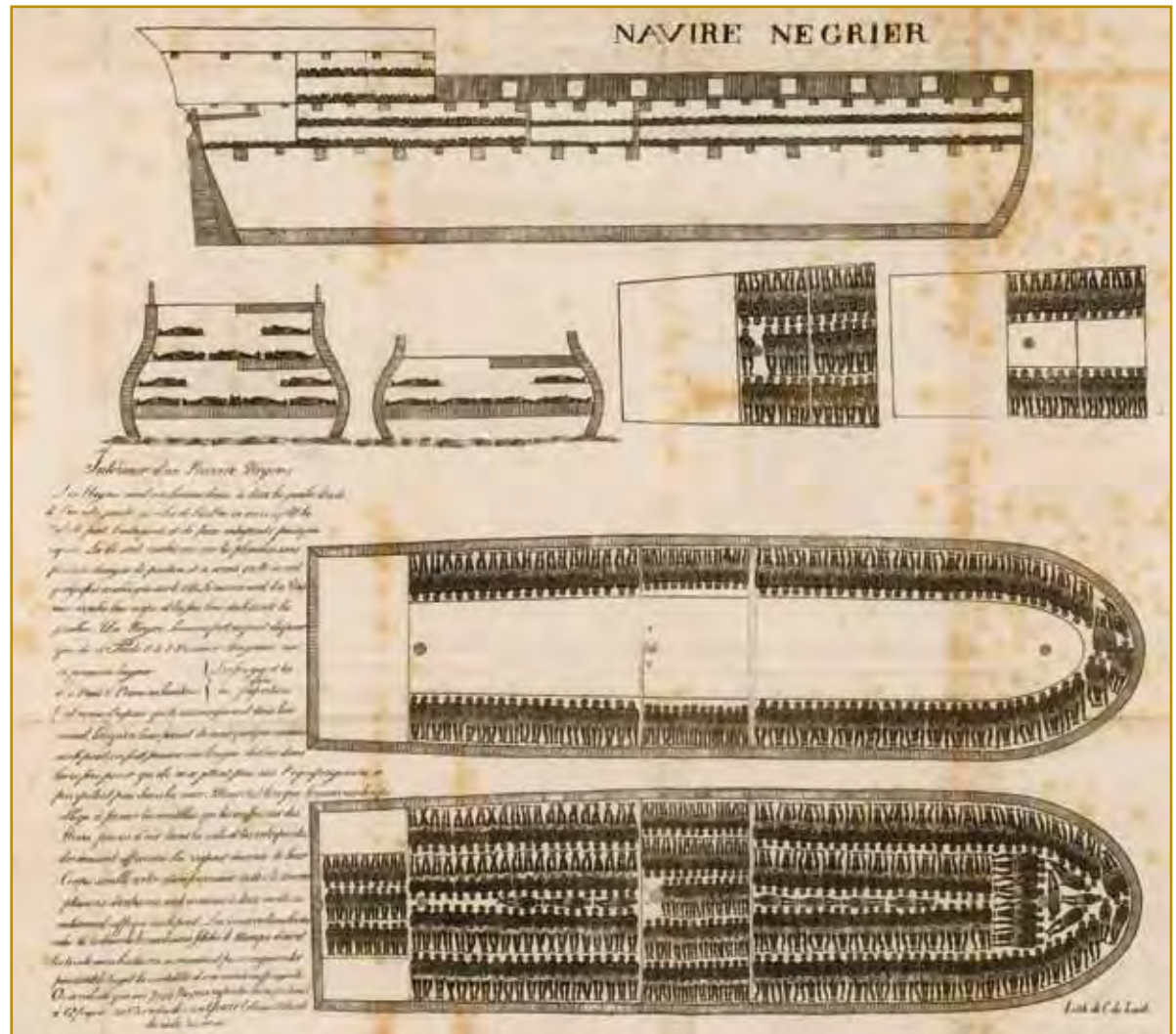
30 Years of Slavery

Sixty slaves died from smallpox on the way to Barbados, where all but four of the remaining slaves were sold to sugar planters as part of the infamous Triangle Trade of Molasses to Rum to Slaves. Upon returning to New England, Mumford took Venture to his sister's home in Newport, Rhode Island and then to the Mumford family estate on Fisher's Island, where he was enslaved for about 13 years. In 1751, Venture married Meg, another Mumford slave. In that same year Venture and several other Mumford captives fled from bondage but he later changed his mind and returned to the estate. As punishment, Venture was separated from his wife and sold to Thomas Stanton of Stonington Point, Connecticut in 1754. Sometime later, Stanton bought Meg and her infant daughter Hannah. Venture was resold or hired out several times. His final owner, Oliver Smith of Stonington, allowed Venture to work beyond his slave tasks so long as he received a hefty percentage of Venture's earnings. In 1765 – after 30 years in slavery – Venture reclaimed his freedom for 71 pounds and two shillings.

Accordingly I hired myself out at Fisher's Island, and earned twenty pounds; thirteen pounds six shillings of which my master drew for the privilege, and the remainder I paid him for my freedom (Smith 1798:24).

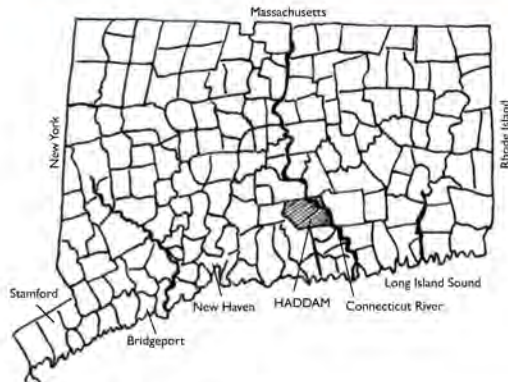
Venture the Free Man

Venture moved to Long Island, where he supported himself by farming, fishing, harvesting wood, river trafficking, and other activities. East Haddam Municipal Historian Dr. Karl Stofko suggests that Venture's expertise in these vocations likely derived from his slave duties as a youth.

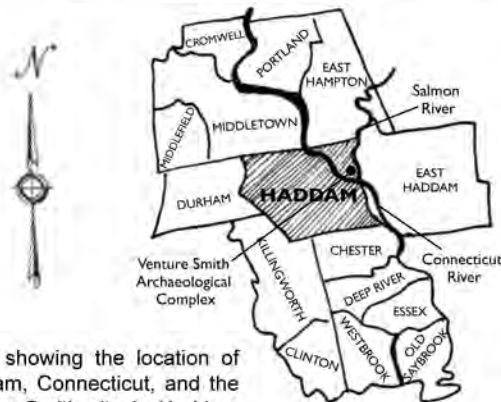


"Navire Negrier" (Slave Ship), an illustration from *Faits relatives a la traite des noirs* (Paris 1826) showing several views of a slaving vessel and a hand-written account of conditions on board. An eye-witness on an English slave ship bound for Jamaica in 1801 reported that "none of the slaves had any clothing allowed them, and they all slept on the bare boards"...they were "extended naked on the bare boards [of the ship's decks] fettered with irons" (Riland 1827: 56, 57). One reason given for removing the slave's clothing was to prevent suicides, as some apparently used their loincloths to hang themselves (Winsnes 1992: 176). Another reason was naked slaves were easier to keep clean and prevent epidemics from raging below deck (Lambert 1975a: 219-220; Handler 2006) (Image courtesy of The John Carter Brown Library at Brown University).

The Life of Venture Smith



Although Venture [in his Narrative] seemed to be bemoaning the fact that he had to work so hard as a young boy, the experience prepared him for all the hard work and long hours that he had to spend as a freeman to achieve prosperity.....Venture undoubtedly honed all of his fishing, sailing and boating skills while a slave to the Mumfords on Fishers Island (Stofko 2008:3-4).



Maps showing the location of Haddam, Connecticut, and the Venture Smith site in Haddam (Maggie Arnold, 2009).

Venture's Family

In 1769, at age 40, Venture purchased the freedom of his two sons Solomon I and Cuff² for 200 dollars each. In 1773, he purchased the freedom of his pregnant wife for 40 pounds; son Solomon II was subsequently born free (Solomon I having died at sea earlier). In 1775 Venture purchased the freedom of his daughter Hannah, sold his property on Long Island and bought 10 acres on Haddam Neck in Connecticut, the first of several land purchases there. Two years later, he purchased 70 acres abutting the Salmon River Cove and built his dwelling house. Venture also purchased the freedom of several black slaves and tried to help with their economic independence (e.g., he set one man up with comb-making equipment). His son Cuff enlisted as a private in the Continental Army in 1780 and served till 1784. Solomon II served in the War of 1812.

In 1798, Venture narrated his life story (he could neither read nor write) to Elisha Niles of Chatham, a Yale graduate and Revolutionary War veteran with a Calvinist, anti-slavery background. In his *Narrative*, he noted that he owned over 100 acres of farmland and three habitable houses. Until his death in 1805 at the age of 77, Venture and his family lived on Haddam Neck, supported by farming, fishing, lumbering, and river commerce.

Below: Salmon River Cove, looking northwest toward the Venture Smith home lot & wharf.



By 1820, Cuff Smith and his family had moved to Colchester, where he was a basket maker. Solomon Smith and his family remained on the Smith farm, maintaining the orchards and vegetable fields until his death in 1843. Soon after, the white guardians of his minor children sold off the property to the neighboring Andrews and Brainerd families.

Strength of Character

Archival records paint a striking portrait of an African child torn from his country and robbed of his birthright of royal kingship. Smith's character and strength

² The name "Cuff" is "an Anglicization of Kofi, a traditional name for Ghanaian boys born on Fridays" (Zuckerman 2004).

allowed him to overcome a life of captivity and live successfully in an Anglo-dominated world of racism, class conflict and injustice and he helped others to do so as well.

Through the forcefulness of his personality, the power of his character and will, and the sheer strength and endurance of his body, Venture was able to prevail over the hardships of enslavement and to lift up on his shoulders – figuratively, and at least once, literally, his fellow enslaved Africans who were not so strong (Forbes 2006:8).

Venture Smith's life story is critically important to the study of slavery in New England, to African-American history and to American cultural heritage. Yet the documentary information is sparse concerning Venture's life as a free man, his daily activities, economic status, material possessions, and social relations. Such gaps in the historical record often can be complemented and supplemented by archaeological studies.

Yet, as every historian knows, the documentary record can be biased and selective based on the cultural and socio-economic group that recorded the information. In New England, socially disenfranchised populations like African Americans and Native Americans had their stories told by people who may very well have been biased toward the interests of their cultural, political or ethnic group. Just as important, sometimes the documentary evidence is simply wrong (Bellantoni and Poirier 2007).

Historical Perspectives

Well into the 20th Century, local and regional histories in Connecticut traditionally were written from the perspective of upper class, white, Anglo-American Protestant males. Lower classes, ethnic groups, and women are conspicuously absent or notably under-represented from their accounts. Also absent are discussions of contemporary economic and social behaviors, the routines of everyday life, because they were so common and well-known to the general populace. Clearly, this tradition of history-writing affected the documentation of Venture Smith's "autobiography." His *Narrative* was dictated to and published by socially privileged white males who likely edited Venture's story. Indeed, in the Preface to the *Narrative* one of these gentlemen wrote:

Many other interesting and curious passages of his life might have been inserted; but on account of the bulk to which they must necessarily have swelled this narrative, they were omitted (Smith 1798: iii).

The *Narrative* includes nothing about Venture's wife except her name Meg (aka Marget), and offers little insight on his recreational or spiritual activities, his material goods, his relationships with his neighbors or his children and their lives. The description of his life on Haddam Neck is sparse, mainly dealing with the injustices he suffered due to other men's

greed and irresponsibility. One sentence alludes to his "farm" and another to "produce." His use of boats in fishing and coastal trade is only briefly mentioned:

Since my residence at Haddam neck, I have owned of boats, canoes and sail vessels, not less than twenty. These I mostly employed in the fishing and trafficking business, and in these occupations I have been cheated out of considerable money by people whom I traded with taking advantage of my ignorance of numbers (Smith 1798:29).

History and Archaeology

Archaeological Perspectives

Archaeology can be an important research and educational approach for augmenting our knowledge of Connecticut's history and its diverse heritage. Because they study the material remains of past human activities, archaeologists have a unique perspective on the past that provides additional data sources to supplement, as well as test, interpretations based on the written record.

In 2001 American Cultural Specialists LLC began a multi-year archaeological study that included Venture Smith's home lot and farm. The excavations produced thousands of *artifacts*, *ecofacts*, and *cultural features* that flesh out the *Narrative's* rather limited description of Venture's life and that provide a more explicit window into the daily lives of the Smith family.

The archaeological finds confirm the vague references to farming and boats in Venture's Narrative and provide previously unknown information on his daily life, economic status, and moral standards (Lavin 2008:10).

Right: cast iron kettle when found in the cellar of one of the smaller houses at the Venture Smith site. The burial of the kettle within the center of the cellar is thought to be an example of "iconic representations of spiritual practices known both in Africa and among African descendant people in the U.S. and the Caribbean" (Woodruff et al. 2007:166).



Right: kettle being cleaned in lab. Staff in the Conservation Department at the Mashantucket Pequot Museum, under the direction of Douglas Currie, used X-rays to discover its original shape and details of the bail (hooped handle) hidden beneath corrosion.



Cast Iron Kettle

18th century cast iron kettle from the cellar of one of the small (son's) houses at the Venture Smith site (Restored by the Conservation Department at Mashantucket Pequot Museum and Research Center).

It was the main utensil in 18th and early 19th century kitchens, where cooking was done in a large open fireplace. Kettles were used for boiling water; cooking soups, gruels, and stews; and baking bread. Its composition and design increased cooking efficiency. Cast iron is strong, and can hold large quantities of food and withstand high temperatures without breaking. It evenly and quickly transfers heat to its contents. It is impermeable and will not absorb foodstuffs.

This kettle's three short legs allowed the cook to place it directly over the fire for quick hot boiling. She could also hang its iron bail, or handle, from a hook attached to an iron hinged crank that allowed her to raise or lower the kettle's height above the fire, giving her greater control of its cooking temperatures.



Haddam Neck and the Connecticut Yankee Project Area



Top: Connecticut Yankee property in 2007, view south showing Cove Meadow at the confluence of the Salmon and Connecticut rivers (*Connecticut Yankee, Haddam CT*).

Middle: Dibble Creek in 2008.

Bottom: Cove Meadow in 2008.



Dibble Creek

Dibble Creek winds its way through the east-central portion of the property, emptying into the Salmon River at the southern bounds. Small streams and wetlands (some seasonal) ultimately drain into the Connecticut River. A flat floodplain parallels the Connecticut River along the southern portions of the property. After acquiring the property, Connecticut Yankee cut a drainage canal through this area to form a second, smaller peninsula.

Cove Meadow

Cove Meadow was prized for its fertile soils and heavy growth of salt hay that were enriched annually by the river's spring freshets.

Another large meadow extends from the foot of the hills southward across from the Connecticut to Salmon River Cove, and terminates at the junction of the two rivers just above the Upper Landing of East Haddam. This tract is called the Cove Meadow, and most of it is excellent land. Several smaller meadows lie between the two mentioned [Cove Meadow and Great Meadow, at the northeastern end of Haddam Neck]. These meadows are divided into narrow and long lots of varying width, and generally front on the river (Bayles 1884: 394).

Venture's Home on Haddam Neck

Venture Smith's home lot and farm were located on the property of the Connecticut Yankee Atomic Power Company on the southern portion of Haddam Neck. The property is bounded on the south by the Connecticut River and on the east and north by the Salmon River. The majority of the Connecticut Yankee property is characterized by heavily wooded rugged ridges and steep, narrow valleys with numerous bedrock outcroppings of mainly gneiss, granitic gneiss, a dark gray granite, and a dark blue stone called Allen Vein after its discoverer, David Allen. The ridges run in a general north-south direction and are part of the Bolton Range. Soils are mostly acidic, thin, rocky uplands soil types with low agricultural potential. Two major exceptions include the agriculturally rich sandy silt-loams on the plateau (the Schmitt lot) overlooking the Venture Smith home lot, and Cove Meadow, which overlooks Dibble Creek near the Dudley/Ackley Farm site.

Haddam Neck and the Connecticut Yankee Project Area

Cove Meadow was used by local farmers for pasturage and hayfields from the early settlement of Haddam until 1957, when the land was purchased for use as a small private airfield. Today, Cove Meadow (consisting of what is now called the “Peninsula,” that stretch of land on the river or southwest side of the drainage canal, and the strip of floodplain on the canal’s northeast side) consists of open, scrub, meadows, and marshland with stands of mainly red maple but also some locust and birch. The slopes immediately adjacent to the Cove Meadow floodplains are dominated by oaks with mixed hardwoods (black birch, hickory, ash, maple, and beech). Farther north the major forest type is mixed hardwoods with hemlock.

An exception is the Schmitt lot, where the large flat open meadow overlooking the Cheney/Schmitt house and containing a few sporadic trees is circumscribed by a thick hemlock stand with hardwoods (oak, beech, birch, sugar maple, and hickory). A large stand of red cedar is located in the central portion of the property, between the upper Cove Road and Dibble Creek. Not far west of it is a large red maple/tupelo swamp that drains into a small pond at the intersection of Cove Road and Haul Road. The Connecticut Yankee property contains a number of additional seasonal swamps and vernal pools.

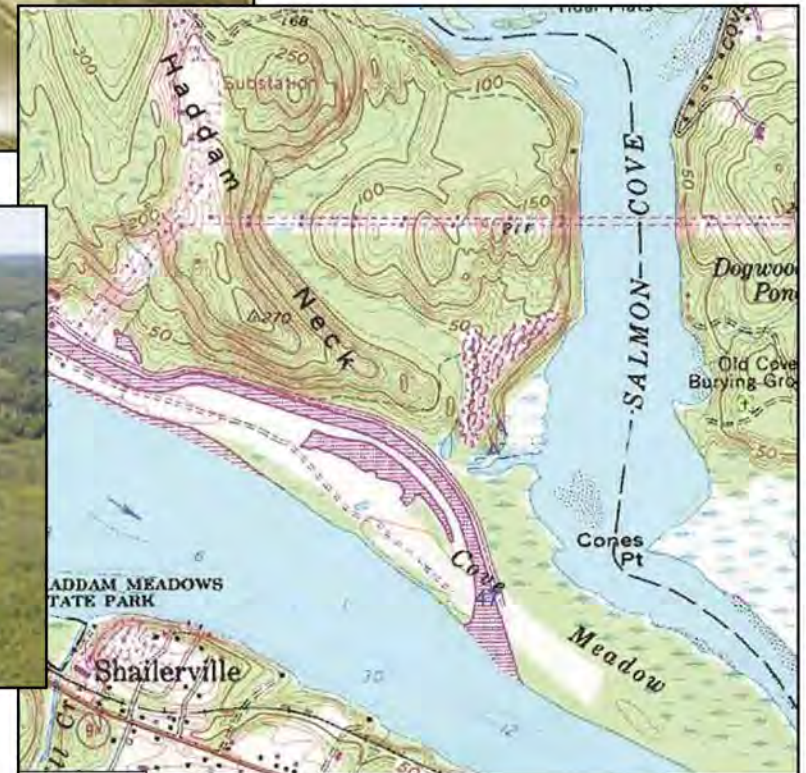


Left: *Aerial Survey of Connecticut, 1934 photograph, created by Fairchild Aerial Survey Co., showing lower Haddam Neck and Cove Meadow between the Connecticut and Salmon Rivers in 1934, prior to Connecticut Yankee ownership. Note the prevalence of meadowlands, used for dairy pasturage in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (CT State Library, State Archives, Hartford).*

Below, left: 2007 photo of lower Haddam Neck and Cove Meadow on the Salmon River (Connecticut Yankee, Haddam, CT).



Right: topographical map showing lower Haddam Neck and Cove Meadow.



Haddam Neck and the Connecticut Yankee Project Area



Plentiful Wildlife

The area abounds in wildlife including white-tailed deer, turkey, fox, coyote, beaver, raccoon, opossum, muskrat, woodchuck, cottontail rabbit, squirrels, and a variety of snake, turtle, frog, and bird species including waterfowl, hawks and bald eagles. Archaeological studies have demonstrated that moose and bear were also available in pre-contact times. Bears and wolves were numerous during colonial times. Fish species frequenting the adjacent rivers and drainage canal include: Atlantic menhaden, brown bullhead, white catfish, Channel catfish, carp, yellow perch, banded killifish, mummichog, Johnny darter, white sucker, creek chub, hogchoker, northern pike, bluefish, black crappie, fallfish, three-spine stickleback, and a variety of species of shiners, sunfish, bass and pickerel. *Anadromous* and *catadromous* species



A deer on the edge of terrace above the Salmon River.

such as blueback herring, alewife, shad, smelt, Atlantic salmon, sturgeon, white perch, sea lamprey, and American eel appear in large numbers during their spawning seasons. The importance of fishing to the economy for Native Americans is evident from the recovery of sturgeon, salmon, shad, alewives, catfish, pickerel, pike, and trout remains from nearby archaeology sites. Writing in 1819, local historian David Field noted that the Connecticut River and its tributary streams provided bountiful harvests of these fish.



Swans in the Salmon River.

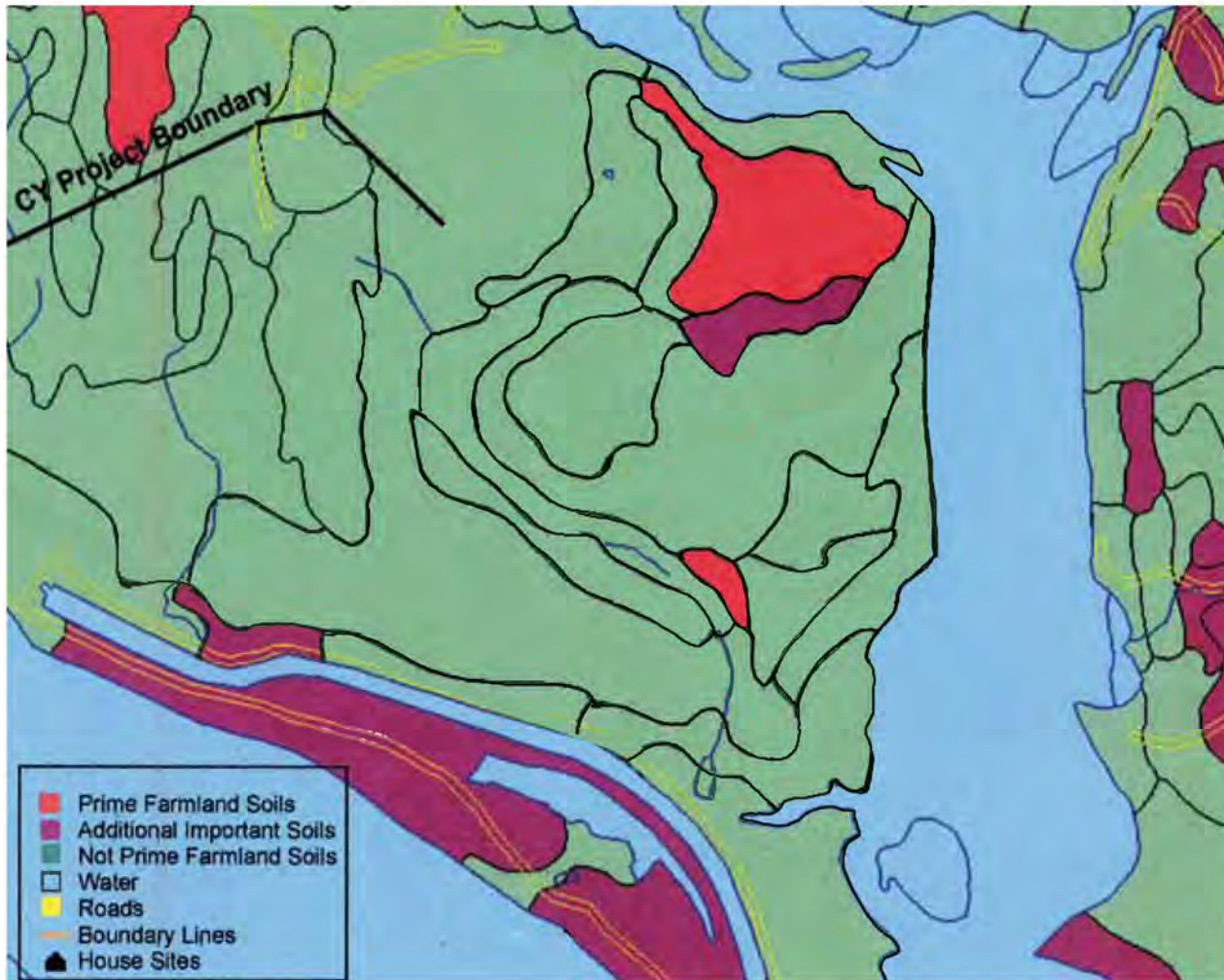
In sum, the Connecticut Yankee property historically contained a broad mix of land forms, water sources, vegetation types, and wildlife that supplied life-sustaining resources for its human inhabitants. The natural variability provided compelling ecological incentives for the successful little eighteenth and nineteenth century Anglo- and African-American community that flourished there.



Another example of the varied wildlife at Haddam Neck.

The woodland property owned by the Connecticut Yankee Atomic Power Company on Haddam Neck is significant in regards to both its history as well as in its importance ecologically. The wide spectrum of physiographic features supports a diverse array of wildlife habitat and forest cover types. From the bedrock hilltops overlooking the confluence of the Connecticut and Salmon Rivers to the floodplain woodlands, wetlands and meadows, this relatively small slice of Connecticut is a unique representation of most of the major ecosystem components found throughout the state. Replete with valuable geological and interesting hydrological features, the land has clearly supported the needs of migratory and indigenous fauna down through the ages. Given these same features in addition to the timber resources, the land has provided food, shelter and a means of economy for native people as well as those settlers who first ventured onto this peninsula for subsistence centuries ago (Irving and Childs 2001:3).

Settlement of Haddam Neck



Map showing concentrations of farmland soils on Haddam Neck.

First European Settlers

The first European settlement of Haddam Neck is thought to have begun around 1710 to 1712, when a number of second-generation descendents of the

original proprietors of Haddam crossed the river and built homesteads along with some colonists from Saybrook, Lyme and Middle Haddam.

These early settlers included

- William Brainerd, the son of Daniel Brainerd -- the first settler in Haddam, William's wife Sarah Bidwell, and their children
- James Brainerd Jr. and his wife Anne
- Jabez Brooks Esq., and perhaps his father Deacon Thomas Brooks, son of original proprietor Thomas Brooks
- Dr. Joshua and Deacon Gideon Arnold, their sisters, and possibly their father John
- Caleb Cone, grandson of Haddam proprietor Daniel Cone
- Thomas Selden, his wife Sarah, and their children from Lyme
- Robert Chapman from East Haddam
- Sylvester Dudley
- William Markham, Gideon Goff Jr. and possibly his father Gideon Sr. and perhaps Deacon Ebenezer Smith, all from Middle Haddam
- and two families named Stocking, probably John and Nathan, respectively.

The majority of these settlers, and their children after them, built homes on the Upper Neck (i.e. northern and western portions of Haddam Neck) where the most fertile agricultural soils were located. Farming was the major economic pursuit. Haddam Neck remained a charming rural agricultural village into the 20th Century. The area did not receive electricity until 1924. In 1968, there was still a dairy farm on Quarry Hill Road, owned by John L. Kruger II, who sold milk to a firm in New Haven.

Settlement of Haddam Neck

At the time of the First World War the young men responded willingly to the call of their country. Like the popular song of that time "How Ya Gonna Keep 'em Down on the Farm," the youth went to the big cities for employment. The biggest means of support for the local people was small scale farming and catering to the 'outsiders,' selling them milk, cream, eggs, homemade butter, vegetables, and fruits from their gardens. The Haddam Neckers also exchanged their farm products for their groceries (Brooks 1972:47).

Haddam Neck's Resources

Haddam Neck contained other attractive resources, such as extensive hay meadows along the Connecticut River and lower Salmon River Cove for pasturing cattle; small streams with enough fall to power early industries; commercially valuable rock sources; natural harbors for shipbuilding and river trade; commercially valuable timber; and areas suitable for fisheries. Several homesteaders chose to build on the Lower Neck, in order to exploit the timber and riverine resources. They included Thomas Selden and his younger son Captain Joseph Selden followed by several Brainerds; Venture and Solomon Smith; Stephen and Daniel Russell; Sylvester Dudley and John Ackley; and Timothy and Wells Andrews. To allow each family a share in all resources, Haddam Neck was originally divided into long narrow lots running from the river into the uplands.

The land, generally meadow and upland, was originally surveyed into comparatively narrow and long lots off from 80 to 160 rods long, and early described as the 1st, 2d, 3d, etc. tier of lots. The best land is meadow and intervale near the Connecticut River; although much good land is found on and among the hills (Bayles 1884:394).

Mills and Manufactories

Small-scale mills were constructed soon after town settlement. Haddam and Haddam Neck contained a number of small streams with sufficient fall to provide power for various small mills, a colonial necessity. Most of New England's colonial settlers were self-sufficient farmers. They grew and processed virtually all the foodstuffs their family consumed. Farming and other subsistence work was extremely labor intensive. Grinding grain



Above: late 19th- or early 20th-century photo of a Haddam Neck paper mill on Pine Brook. The firm name, House and Company Paper Mill (also at times U. House and Company, and later F.A. House Paper Mill) is noted on the 1859 Walling Map of Haddam Neck (see page 7) on Pine Brook (Haddam Historical Society, Haddam, Connecticut).

Left: the stonework for the dam at the millpond that supplied water power for several Haddam Neck millworks, particularly the paper mill on Pine Brook above. The paper mill was one of a series of mills in that building, including an earlier cotton mill and an *oakum* factory.

and felling trees to produce boards and shingles took up valuable time that could be put to use in improving one's farmstead or in starting a family-based *cottage industry*. Early mills allowed the colonists to save that time. Sawmills that processed timber and gristmills that processed agricultural products were a top priority because they were essential to the success of a settlement. Lumber was also in demand by local shipbuilders and coopers, who supplied the barrels and other containers for shipping fish and other mercantile goods.

Early Industry and Commerce

Later, several tanneries, cider mills and a bark mill were also built on the Neck. A saltpeter works was in operation during the War of 1812. Pine Brook, a tributary to Salmon River in the northeastern part of Haddam Neck, was the site of several early saw mills, including an early 19th century sword and scythe factory that later was used as an *oakum* mill and a cotton mill, and a mid-19th century paper mill. Another mid-19th century Haddam Neck industry was a basket making factory that gave Basket Shop Road its name.



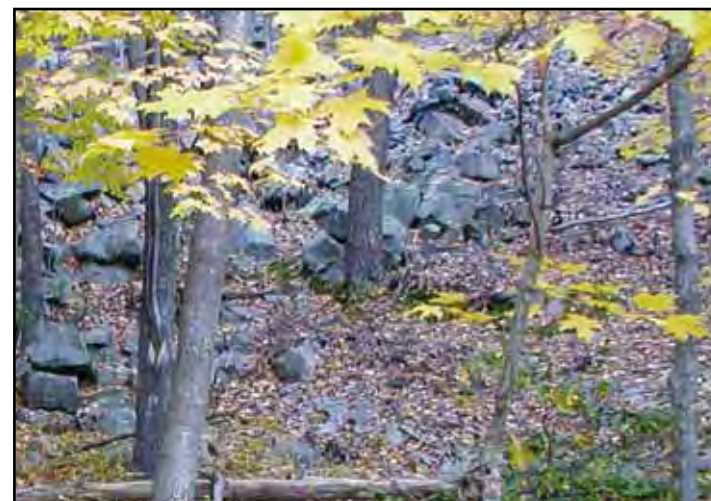
Above: the 19th-century basket making shop at Haddam Neck (*Haddam Historical Society, Haddam, CT*).

Right: a 19th-century quarry at Haddam Neck (*Haddam Historical Society, Haddam, CT*).



Other families also worked quarries on Haddam Neck. Shayler's (Shailor, Shailer) Quarry, which opened ca. 1808, was located a half mile south of the Brainerd Quarry on Quarry Hill. The main rock products were granite, trap rock, mica, and *feldspar*, but a variety of minerals and semiprecious stones were mined, such as sulfur, iron pyrite, thulite, beryl, chrysoberyl, tourmaline, kyanite, lepidolite, columbite, epidote, molybdenite, spinel, zircon, rose and smoky quartz, garnet, copper, silver, gold, and Haddamite, a mineral first identified in Haddam and named after the Town. Evidence of stone quarrying is visible throughout the upland portions of the Connecticut Yankee property wherever rock outcrops are present. Wood roads, rock cuts, spoilage piles, and talus slopes created by these operations are still apparent. The quarries employed up to 80-90 men, including Venture Smith's sons Solomon and Cuff. Probate inventories and archaeological excavations that yielded quarrying tools suggest that local farmers and fishermen worked at the quarries during the off-seasons to earn extra cash income.

Below: one of the many piles of quarry tailings (rejected stone) discovered in the Brainerd quarries.




Stone Quarries

Rock quarrying was a major industry in Haddam Neck well into the 20th century. Granite was quarried on Quarry Hill, located on Connecticut Yankee property, by at least the mid-1700s by Josiah Brainerd Sr. and his sons Josiah Jr. and Ezra. They

were succeeded by later family members, some of whom constructed wharves on the Connecticut River adjacent to their houses where granite blocks were carted and shipped to neighboring towns and to various ports in the coastal trade from Boston as far south as Petersburg, Virginia. New York City was the primary shipping destination, however. The stone was used mainly for curbing and paving, but also as step-stones, fireplaces and decorative facing for urban buildings. The Brainerds were also reportedly the first in the United States to quarry *feldspar*.

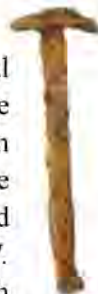
Early Industry and Commerce

Shipping, Shipyards, and Fishing



Several Haddam Neck men were seamen. There was a brisk trade in quarry materials, timber and wood products such as posts, staves, heads and hoops for barrels, kegs, and hogsheads, mainly shipped to New York but also locally along the Connecticut River and along the Atlantic coast from Boston to Virginia. Haddam Neck mariners sailed even farther south, participating in the West Indies Triangle trade as well. After *feldspar* began to be mined ca. 1845, markets broadened to include England. In 1883, Salmon River was dredged so that larger steamboats could ascend; at the time, a smaller steamboat was making regular runs from Scoville's Landing to Middletown. Prior to its dredging, sloops and scows were able to ascend the river only to Leesville. Rock Landing was a regular stop for commercial riverboats, including the *Hartford* and the *Middletown* as late as 1931.

Shipbuilding activities occurred at several sites along the Connecticut River during the early 19th century. Most were located north of the Connecticut Yankee property with one exception: In 1848, sea captains Edgar and Caleb Smith built the schooner *Thomas H. Seymour* near the old Selden house, which was located on the Peninsula west of the Stephen and Daniel Russell home lot.



Fishing was an important industry by at least the 1780s, which had “rendered fish-places objects of consequence” (Field 1819:10). In 1817, 146 barrels of shad were salted in Haddam. In 1819, local fishing generated over \$22,000, a great deal of money at that time. In the late 18th and early 19th centuries, at least eight *fish places* were located on or near the Connecticut Yankee property. Early in the settlement of Haddam Neck, salmon and sturgeon were taken, but these soon became scarce, probably from over fishing and the damming of rivers to harness water for industrial needs. Shad and alewives, commercially caught with nets, continue to be taken from the river today. A share in a fishery, or *fish place*, “was a valuable asset and was conveyed from father to son” (Brooks 1972:43-44).

The Haddam Land Records document that several 18th and early 19th century wharves and *fish places* were located on Connecticut Yankee lands. Venture Smith owned a wharf and at least part of the fishing place called the “Sand Bank”. He also owned a *fish place* on Cook Island in the Salmon River just north of his home lot. Wharves were located at the mouth of Dibble Creek and on the Connecticut River side of the present Peninsula (Cove Meadow). At least four *fish places* were located on the Peninsula including the Shaylor fish place, the Dumpling fish place adjacent to the Daniel Russell House, and two Selden family fish places. Additionally, archaeological investigations discovered another dock or wharf on the Salmon River about midway between Venture Smith’s wharf and the Dibble Creek wharf.

Above and right: hand-made clinch nails used in small boats (clinker and carvel types) from the Venture Smith site.

The Connecticut Yankee Atomic Power Co. Archaeological Project



20th-century photo of shad nets in Haddam (*Haddam Historical Society, Haddam, Connecticut*).

The two main roads crossing Haddam Neck are Haddam Neck Road, which extends west/southwest between East Haddam and Portland (present Route 151) to the Connecticut River at the commercial center of Rock Landing and Quarry Hill Road, which leads off Haddam Neck Road southward across the ridge line. Quarry Hill Road connected with a no-longer-extant Colonial roadway that led through the southern portion of Haddam Neck and which for the most part paralleled the Salmon River and passed directly across Venture Smith's home



20th-century photo of shad fishing on the Connecticut River in Haddam (*Haddam Historical Society, Haddam, Connecticut*).

lot, after which it forked off. One track continued along the Salmon River while the second turned inland and then to the Dibble Creek wharf near the mouth of Salmon River. This historic roadway probably continued along the Connecticut River until it joined with present Injun Hollow Road, where cartways led to the quarries and the Brainerd wharves (the landscape has significantly changed in this area because of construction and subsequent development of the Connecticut Yankee Atomic Power Co. facilities in the 1960s). It was the only road on the lower Neck and the main artery of its little community, linking residences to one another and to the local areas of commerce and industry.

Connecticut Yankee

The Connecticut Yankee plant on Haddam Neck was one of the earliest constructed nuclear power plants in the Northeast. It was the world leader in nuclear generation from 1980 to 1984. In 1996, the Connecticut Yankee Board of Directors voted to permanently close and decommission the power plant. After two years of planning and preparation, actual *decommissioning* began in 1998 and was completed in 2007.

As part of the federal regulatory review process, the *Connecticut State Historic Preservation Office* required a comprehensive historic and archaeological survey of the Connecticut Yankee property in order to professionally identify and evaluate archaeological resources for their potential eligibility for the *National Register of Historic Places* and to develop and implement



Connecticut Yankee in 2003, before major plant structures were demolished (*Connecticut Yankee, Haddam, Connecticut*).

appropriate management alternatives ranging from data recovery studies to *in situ* preservation. Connecticut Yankee retained American Cultural Specialists LLC, who conducted a seven-year study of the 582 acre property. Investigations included documentary research, field walkovers, and systematic testing and excavation. Laboratory analyses included *artifact* identifications, analyses of plant and animal remains recovered from sites, stone sourcing analysis, and radiocarbon dating. Thirty Native American and Colonial archaeological sites were discovered. Fifteen of these newly located archaeological resources possess historic and archaeological significance and are eligible for the *National Register of Historic Places* including, most notably, the Venture Smith archaeology site.

The Venture Smith Homestead

Venture's Property

This extensive and very significant archaeological complex is located along Salmon River Cove on the northeastern portion of the Connecticut Yankee property. It is partly overlapped by the Dudley/Andrews archaeological complex because sometime between 1797 and 1802 Sylvester Dudley built a house, located just north of Venture Smith's homestead, which he subsequently sold to Timothy Andrews in 1813.³ Andrews' son Wells eventually purchased the acreage that contained the former Smith home lot after the death of Solomon Smith. Although he built a new house south of the Smith home and never lived in the Smith house, there is archaeological evidence that the Andrews family disposed of trash and refuse on the former Smith home lot.

Archaeological excavations revealed Venture's main residence and some eight or nine associated structures, clustered on a hillside not far from the river's edge. Located higher up the hillside on a large flat plateau were his barn(s) and farm fields (*see front cover illustration*). This side-slope hillside location for Venture's farmstead is in marked contrast to the home lots of his Anglo-American neighbors, yet it had a number of advantages: It is sheltered from winter winds, has a natural harbor area and a spring offering potable water, is adjacent to some of the most fertile agricultural soil on Haddam Neck, and is situated near a deeper section of the river that was accessible to larger boats.

³ Dudley's first house was never identified archaeologically. Domestic artifacts and stone work scattered on the flat plateau west of Beaver Point suggest that its remains had been destroyed by late 20th century bulldozing activities by the owner of the Schmitt house.

The Venture Smith Homestead

Architectural Evidence

Buildings were identified by their specific structure, dimensions, and contents. These included a large center-chimney house situated in the center of the home lot, which appears to be Venture's homestead. Because of the change in grade, this structure was probably a story and a half style house, as one room was located on the second floor – Venture's office, which opened onto the main colonial road that coursed through his property. Two smaller structures with partial cellar holes, which are located upslope from his main residence, are interpreted as Venture's two other houses. Surrounding Venture's house is archaeological evidence for a forge/blacksmith shop, a large rectangular warehouse, and two or three smaller outbuildings that may also have functioned as warehouses. A short pathway that was once closed off by a *barway* leads to the partially submerged remains of a timber wharf. North of this wharf and the blacksmith shop is a large (49-61 feet long by 26 feet wide) hand-excavated rectangular depression that appears to have historically functioned as a *boat pull in*.

The two small houses appear to have been strategically located with unobstructed views of the entire home and work compound, the wharf, barns, and farm fields. The 1800 census showed that Venture's sons

Cuff and Solomon were living close to him, probably each family residing in one of the two "guard" houses. Solomon later lived in the main house for forty years after his father's death in 1805. All three houses and the large warehouse fronted directly on the old colonial road that ran through the Lower Neck, while a still visible fork in this road led to the boat pull in.

The Venture Smith Homestead

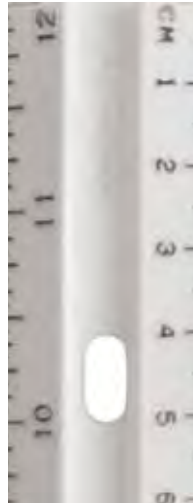
Architectural and Household Objects

The archaeological investigations recovered over 49,000 historic *artifacts* at the Venture Smith site. The greater majority represent architectural-related materials that provide information about the construction techniques for Venture's houses and warehouses, such as brick fragments, window glass shards, nails, spikes, and door hardware.

Other *artifacts* help to interpret the day-to-day domestic activities of the Smith family. Large numbers of tableware *sherds* in a variety of vessel shapes and decorative styles; metal objects such as tools, flatware, horse and ox shoes, cast iron stove fragments, boat hardware, a *lead seal*, a *lead token*, and bottle and drinking glass fragments were discovered.



Handmade boat caulking iron used in small boats from the Venture Smith site.³ The artifact reflects Venture's maritime activities, which provided the cash income to free and sustain his family and help win the respect of his white neighbors. Restored by the Conservation Department, Mashantucket Pequot Museum and Research Center.



A mouth harp, recovered during testing across the Schmitt field.

Of particular interest are the diverse tools that were unearthed, including a hand-forged chisel, a large nail or wedge set, an iron nail set, a scythe blade, a draw knife, a triangular file blade, a wedge, a wood plane blade, a screw drill, several screw drivers, a handmade caulking iron and multiple wrenches. Collectively, these implements indicate various wood working, farming, quarrying and boat repair activities undertaken by Venture and suggest a high degree of self-reliance and versatility.

Right: eighteenth century iron padlock, before restoration, found in one of Venture's warehouses -- one of Venture's strategies to prevent being robbed, as he was on a number of occasions during his earlier years according to his *Narrative*. Far right: padlock, restored by the Conservation Department, Mashantucket Pequot Museum and Research Center.

Food Remains

Over 900 *faunal* fragments were recovered, which offer insight on Smith family meals and diet. Although most of the bones were too small for specific identification, many represented small and large mammals. These include pig, cow, deer, turkey, and birds. A 1790 court document indicates that Venture owned at least one yoke of oxen, steers, sheep, pigs, and a cow. Shell fragments have been identified as quahog, soft shell clam, mussel, and oyster. The *faunal* collection clearly demonstrates that the Smith family relied on both their domesticated farm animals as well as terrestrial and marine wildlife to meet their daily needs for the dinner table.



Above: one of the more delicate artifacts found, a utensil handle of incised bone. Restored by the Conservation Department, Mashantucket Pequot Museum and Research Center.



³ Identified by William Peterson, senior curator, and Quentin Snediker, director of the shipyard, at Mystic Seaport.

The Venture Smith Homestead

18th- and early 19th - century remains of Smith family clothing. Many buttons were recovered at the site. Right: metal button with a flower design. Below, L-R: one bone button and three metal buttons.



Clothing

Also recovered were a number of clothing-related *artifacts*, including several buttons, buckles, shoe eyelet, hook/eye, safety pin, and corset hardware. Additionally, coins, firearm-related *artifacts* (gun flints and a percussion cap pocket pistol), a mouth harp, and tobacco pipe were discovered. Virtually all of the tobacco pipe fragments post-date Venture Smith's occupation of the property. Likewise, the absence of liquor bottles suggests that Venture abstained from smoking and hard drinking, which supports the archival statements concerning his strong moral character. No jewelry, children's toys, or fancy glassware were recovered, supporting Venture's self-reported claim of being frugal.

Frugal Living

Despite his economic success, there is no overt display of material wealth in Venture's archaeological remains. The only indication of a comfortable middle class status, other than the overall size and success of his farm and mariner-related activities as

noted in contemporary accounts, is the survival of some *sherds* of expensive imported tableware, including Chinese porcelain and hand-painted polychrome creamware. The family's prudent, unpretentious lifestyle is further evident in their family burial plot. Smith family graves are located within the First Church Cemetery in East Haddam, and they were respectfully and professionally examined in 2006 as an integral research component of the Broter Venture Smith DNA Recovery Project. The archaeological studies were undertaken at the specific request of Venture's living descendants, who are eager to learn more about their ancestors. Archaeologists from Central Connecticut State University and the Office of State Archaeology at the University of Connecticut (Storrs) discovered that the wood coffins of Venture, his wife Margret and son Solomon were simple and unadorned, but well-constructed with expensive screws and hinged at the top for viewing the deceased.



Hand-painted polychrome creamware and Chinese porcelain from the Venture Smith site. Top (L-R): Chinese Porcelain; Creamware; hand-painted Creamware. Bottom: Annularware with cable motif, probably Pearlware; Annularware.

Percussion Cap Pistol



Excavated just outside the main house, this early 19th century pistol with the name "Ketland" engraved on its brass barrel was another Smith strategy to protect the family goods and prevent being robbed. This small pocket pistol was less than five inches long. Its barrel measures only two and a quarter inches. The pistol was made to fit conveniently in a man's vest pocket, concealed from view.

The Ketlands of Birmingham, England were a family of gunsmiths who specialized in the American trade. They manufactured guns from about the 1740s until 1831. The metal percussion cap was invented sometime during the second decade of the 19th century. It was a small metal cup about the size of a pencil eraser. Its closed end held a shock-sensitive, highly explosive material such as fulminate of mercury. Its open end fit over a hollow metal "nipple", located near the gun's hammer that was attached to a tube leading into the barrel. When the trigger was pulled the hammer struck the cap and ignited the explosive material, which sent fire into the nipple, lit the gunpowder in the barrel, and propelled the shot.

The percussion cap pistol was an improvement over the earlier flintlock. It was easier to load, and its ignition system was weather resistant and more dependable. It did not cause the gun to misfire in wet weather like the flintlocks often did.

The Venture Smith Homestead

Venture's Cultural Identity

Documentary and archaeological evidence demonstrate that Venture Smith was a willing and capable participant in the local and regional market economy to support his family, friends, and fellow blacks. However, there appears to be no evidence that he had social or ideological ties to the dominant colonial society. His distribution of wealth, the African origin of his son Cuff's name, and archaeological evidence that hints at African spiritual practices suggest the opposite. In particular, Venture explicitly referred to members of the black community as his "own countrymen" and to himself as an "African." In his description of his mistreatment by Captain Elisha Hart of Saybrook, it is clear that he does not consider himself a member of the greater American community.

Possible evidence of African spirituality? Quartz crystal and tourmaline crystals, some possibly located near doorways and window openings. Although tourmaline occurs naturally on Haddam Neck, the nearest known source for such large size crystals is Mount Tom (Alison Guinness, personal communication).



Possible lead baling seal, which suggests Venture was shipping and selling cloth, bolts of which were usually bound with wire that was secured by a metal stamp to prevent someone from snipping off portions prior to sale. Haddam Neck had no stores before the 1790s, and so goods were sold on the wharf.



But Captain Hart was a white gentleman, and I a poor African, therefore it was all right, and good enough for the black dog (Smith 1798:28).

Moreover, Venture's virtues mirror his description of his father Saungm Furro as "a kind and merciful prince" and his statements that his African upbringing was the source for his personal character and strength. All of this suggests that his homestead was indeed not that of a typical Connecticut Yankee, but rather the extended-family compound of a West African Prince who due to historical events found himself stranded in a foreign country where he managed to achieve

economic success without compromising his cultural identity.

As the son of a prince, Broteer saw his nobility of birth as a call to nobility of spirit.....an African prince saw himself not as the endpoint of a stream of wealth, but as the distribution point; he was accountable for the welfare of those who created the wealth that he controlled...Broteer accumulated money through his strength and resources, and used this to the benefit of others, denying himself luxuries and frivolities (Woodruff et al.2007:165).

The 18th and 19th Century Haddam Neck Community

Networking for Economic Survival

Among nations, alliances are a major survival strategy. This is also true on the individual and community level, particularly in early America where there was no welfare or other government institutions to provide for a person or his family when disaster struck. Haddam Neck men often formed economic partnerships to secure the financial success of their business ventures in fishing, quarrying, lumbering, and shipping. This was particularly true for Venture Smith, who had been cheated often in his earlier business dealings. In his later transactions, Venture partnered with respected local white men whose social and political positions would have deterred others from attempting to dupe or swindle the partnership.

Quarried granite blocks are loaded for shipping in Haddam Neck. The resources and river access made quarrying an important industry (Haddam Historical Society, Haddam, CT).



A chain ring with attachment, part of a collection of multipurpose hardware found at the site that may be boat-related.

Venture seems to have, at least for business, an extensive and impressive social network of local and regional elites. The family name most often appearing on his deeds was Brainerd, the next most common Chapman. Some of the names had public visibility including Ezra Brainerd, Haddam's State Representative, and Samuel Huntington, Congressman and signer of the Declaration of Independence (Gradie 2007:98).



An iron hook, part of a collection of multipurpose hardware found at the site that may be boat-related.

Land as Collateral

On August 29, 1787, Venture leased his land on Cook Island to William Ackley for a joint fishing enterprise. The lease was part of a partnership between Venture and Ackley that included building a fish house on the Island. Both men agreed to pay half the cost of the building and half the expense for the equipment needed to catch and prepare fish for marketing. For their efforts each man received half the profits. The partnership lasted for 17 years. Other investors included Ezra and Frederic Brainerd, Stephen Knowlton, and Timothy Chapman.

Venture was involved in a series of land transactions over a number of years with Amos White and James Green. White ran a tavern and a cooper's shop in East Haddam, and managed Humphrey Lyon's mercantile store. Green was a merchant, gun manufacturer, postmaster, and elected official. The same lands were exchanged back and forth, suggesting that Venture was employing his less used properties, located at the edges of his farm, as collateral in exchange for capital to back his various business enterprises such as river trafficking. His "bankers" were White and Green (Gradie 2007:98).



British half-penny found at the Venture Smith site (restored by the Mashantucket Pequot Museum and Research Center).

The 18th and 19th Century Haddam Neck Community

Social Networking

Social networking was another survival strategy. The documents are silent regarding Venture's social life on Haddam Neck (although he surely had connections with the thriving black communities in Haddam and East Haddam and in various Connecticut, New York, and Rhode Island coastal towns through his dealings with other black mariners). This does not appear to have been the case regarding his white neighbors. Haddam genealogies, vital statistics, and town land records indicate his neighbors were often socially connected in several ways, particularly through marriage. As an early Haddam resident noted:

The families of the Brainerds, the Smiths & the Shailers constitute probably not less than a third of the whole number of the inhabitants of the town.....To omit fishing in the spring would be an alarming innovation – and to intermarry beyond the limits of the town would be a most unpardonable dereliction of duty (Levi H. Clark, 1808: 171).

The colonial residents of Haddam Neck took this admonition to heart. For example, Sylvester Dudley was married to a Brainerd; his mother-in-law was an Ackley and his daughter Anna married John Ackley. The Smiths (a sea-faring white family unrelated to Venture) were connected to the Shailors, Niles, and Russells through marriage, and the Russells were also related to the Arnolds. The Andrews family was related by marriage to the Brainerd and Cone families. The Brainerds were connected by

marriage to most of the Neck families, particularly the Brooks, the Smiths, and the Shailors.

Many families on the Lower Neck attended the prominent First Congregational Church in East Haddam -- including the two free black men Peter and Whacket who bought land from Venture south of his home lot. Although there is no record of Venture Smith attending Church services, he and his closest family members are buried in the First Church cemetery in a prominent location next to the meeting house. Interestingly, the guardians of Solomon Smith's minor children after his death were Isaac Ackley and Edward R. Clark. All of the families and industries on the Lower Neck were linked by the old colonial roadway that still exists today.



Venture Smith died Sept. 19, 1805 and is buried in the First Church Cemetery in East Haddam, an honor usually reserved for church members. Every September, the First Church Society commemorates him with presentations and a wreath on his grave (photo courtesy of Dr. Karl Stofko, East Haddam Municipal Historian, and President of the First Church Cemetery Association).

Neighboring Homesteads

A number of the families mentioned above once lived and worked on the present Connecticut Yankee property. Archaeological surveys discovered the locations of several residences and related structures. Archival sources facilitated their identification. In the order of nearest neighbor to Venture and Solomon, they include the Wells Andrews Home Lot; Whacket Freeman Home Lot; Peter (Freeman?) Home Lot; Dudley/Ackley Farmstead 2; Stephen/Daniel Russell Homestead; Sylvester/Hezekiah Brainerd Homestead and the Brainerd Quarry. One unidentified homestead (Site #61-116) was excavated just southeast of the Russell Homestead site. The Whacket and Peter homesteads represent free black rural homesteads and provide a rare opportunity to compare the material cultural remains of three contemporary African American households.

Whacket Freeman Home Lot

In 1778 Venture Smith sold a 12-acre strip of land to Peter and Whacket, two free black men from East Haddam. The men later divided this parcel, Whacket taking the south portion and Peter the northern part. It ran from Salmon River Cove into the forested uplands, giving the men access to both riverine and woodland resources. Most of it was rocky upland on poor soils. Obviously, the men were attempting to emulate the success of Venture Smith in lumbering and fishing. Their relatively short-term occupations of the property suggest that they were unable to do so. Whacket remained on the property until 1780, when he sold it to Amos White, who sold it back to

Venture and Solomon Smith's Family Neighbors

Venture in 1787. Peter stayed nine years longer, selling the property back to Venture Smith in 1789.

Archaeological excavations on an upland ridgeline located a small domestic site near a small spring. The nails and ceramics indicate a late 18th century occupation. Stone foundations or piers were absent, although window glass fragments were recovered, suggesting that a small, windowed, ephemeral structure had once stood there. The sparse quantity of *artifacts* and the fragile domestic footprint correspond with Whacket's short occupation of the property.

Peter (Freeman?) Home Lot

Excavations on a small terrace overlooking Salmon River Cove recovered twice as many *artifacts* as at the Whacket site as well as some stacked stonework, suggesting the foundation or pier of a building. The domestic *artifacts* and their dates of manufacture confirm that it was a late 18th century house. Except for the stacked stonework in one area, the house footprint is just as fragile as the one at the Whacket site, suggesting that it too was small and simple in construction. At both sites, the tableware consisted of inexpensive, locally made ceramics. These characteristics suggest occupation by persons of lower socio-economic status. Below the house, stonework in the bank of the river show where a dock or wharf once stood.

Whacket Freeman home lot ceramic fragments.

Top row, L-R: yellow glazed redware (2); black glazed redware (2=American Jackfield). Bottom row, L-R, all redware: bowl fragment; dark glazed interior; dark brown glaze; light brown glaze.



Kaolin pipe fragments from the Peter (Freeman) home lot. Top row, L to R: pipe bowl fragments; 2nd and 3rd exhibit dentate stamp decoration. Bottom two rows: pipe stems, some with bowl fragment attached. Bottom row, heel of bowl has maker's markings ("S" and raised dot); shape, decoration and trademark but also the relative size of their bores. Those shown have a date range of 1730-1790, within the African American occupation of the site.

Peter (Freeman) home lot ceramic fragments. Top, L-R: Whieldon ware (2); plain cream ware (2). 2nd row: Redware (American Jackfield with black glaze). 3rd row, L-R: Redware jar fragment; redware with mottled glaze; below it - redware with brown glaze.



Both the home lots and associated dock are significant archaeological sites because they are rare examples of 18th century free black rural homesteads. The archaeological data can provide insight into the material culture and economic endeavors of two families representing that group of marginalized peoples in the lower Connecticut River Valley. Additionally, both men were contemporaries of Venture Smith, and comparison of all three households demonstrates a degree of social and economic diversity within the local 18th century black community. Future research has the potential to impart information on the archaeological identification of ethnicity.

Significance of the Venture Smith Homestead Archaeology Site

The Venture Smith Homestead archaeological site is extremely significant for several reasons. Venture Smith was a remarkable individual of national and international historic importance. He was an African boy who was abducted into slavery and endured the notorious middle passage on a New England slave ship. His long fight for freedom and rise to American middle-class prosperity is an extraordinary story of courage and perseverance. Venture Smith symbolizes many values revered in American culture – honesty, hard work, thrift, sharing, cooperation, benevolence, and individual freedom. His homestead survives as an 18th-19th century rural black archaeological site with amazing scientific integrity, a rare find in southern New England. The property was largely untouched after the demise of Venture's son Solomon, used only for sporadic refuse dumping by its subsequent owners. *Cultural features* and subsurface archaeological remains are virtually undisturbed, even perishable objects of metal and bone were recovered. The archaeological investigation of Venture Smith's homestead supplements and supports the story of Venture with information that could not be found in the documentary sources.

Much of the Venture Smith site has yet to be professionally examined. The site harbors the potential to address a variety of ethnic and class issues and the capacity to provide additional archaeological information on the Smith family economy, mariner-related activities, organization of the social landscape, possibly even their spiritual and political connections.

The Venture Smith site is a strong candidate for the *National Register of Historic Places* because it is associated with the life of a person significant in our past and has yielded information important in history. Specifically, the site contains the material remains of Venture Smith, whose life story is critically important to African American history and to America's cultural heritage. The remarkable historic and cultural importance and the scientific archaeological integrity of the Venture Smith site warrant its further consideration as a National Historic Landmark.

The stories of Connecticut's heritage most at risk are those about the people who truly made America what it is today, but whose stories were until recently rarely found in local history books -- slaves, servants, immigrant laborers, women, Native Americans, and other non-Anglo-American social groups often referred to as "marginal" or "disenfranchised." To preserve their and other Connecticut stories, archaeological resources like the Venture Smith site must be protected from disturbance and destruction through public education, designation as State Archaeological Preserves, and the enactment of town regulations for identifying and protecting historical and archaeological resources.

...for a Serial World Heritage Site that would relate globally the history of the Atlantic slave trade and abolitionism..... The proposal would link several sites across around the Atlantic through the life stories of three key figures – William Wilberforce (the Parliamentary leader of British Abolitionism), Venture Smith (an enslaved African who freed himself), and Harriet Beecher Stowe (the author of Uncle Tom's Cabin).
John Prescott, Deputy Prime Minister of Great Britain, 2006

The Haddam Neck site is rich with historic and archeological significance. Coupled with Harriet Beecher Stowe's birthplace in Torrington, Connecticut, it is a tribute to the triumph of the human spirit in the face of overwhelming adversity

Senator Christopher Dodd, United States Senate

Venture's descendants clustered around his gravestone in the East Haddam First Congregational Church cemetery on Venture Smith Day in September 2002. (photo courtesy of Dr. Karl Stofko, East Haddam Municipal Historian, and President of the First Church Cemetery Association).



Glossary

Anadromous Fish

Fish that inhabit salt water but return to freshwater to spawn.

Artifact

An object made or modified by humans such as nails, buttons, ceramic dishware, marbles, coins, and dolls.

Barway

A passageway into a field or enclosure, closed by placing removable rectangular boards or bars horizontally between two posts.

Boat Pull-in

An area into which boats were hauled for repair work, similar to a boat slip but without a cover above it.

Catadromous Fish

Fish that inhabit freshwater but spawn in salt water.

Cord

A unit measure for firewood; one cord is four feet wide, four feet high and eight feet long, equaling 128 cubic feet.

Cottage Industries

Light industrial work conducted within the home or homestead grounds.

Cultural feature

A non-portable artifact, such as a stone foundation, well, dock, or refuse pit.

Decommissioning

Decontamination and dismantlement of existing facilities and cleanup of any contaminated soils.

Ecofact

A natural object used by humans, such as animal bones and plant remains that are the remains of cooking, consumption, and other activities.

Ecoregion

A geographically defined area characterized by a distinctive set of flora, fauna, soils, and landforms.

Faunal

Fragment of a clay or ceramic container.

Feldspar

A common mineral found in igneous rocks that is used in the manufacture of glass and ceramics.

Fishery/Fish house/Fish place

An area where fish are processed and fishing equipment is cleaned and stored, usually in a building or shack.

Lead Seal

Lead seals of various shapes and sizes are associated with trade; they were clamped over drawstrings or wires to secure bales of textiles or bags of general merchandise prior to shipping.

Lead Tokens

Tokens vary in size and are often decorated on one or both sides; they have been frequently found near wharves, which led Ivor Noel Hume (1970:173) to suggest that “they signified units of merchandise carried or loaded” on a vessel.

Oakum

Fibers of hemp or jute prepared with pine tar that were used to caulk, or fill, the joints of wooden vessels to waterproof them and make the vessel seaworthy.

Pre-Contact

That period of time that preceded the coming of Euro-American explorers and traders to North America.

National Register of Historic Places

A listing of standing historic architectural structures and archaeological sites that the federal government deems

significant because they are unaltered/undisturbed and meet one of more of the following criteria: associated with events that made a significant contribution to broad patterns of American history; are associated with the lives of important persons; exhibit attributes of a specific type, period, or method of construction or is the work of a master, or possess high artistic values; or provided or may be likely to provide important information on American history/prehistory (Poirier 1987:7).

Sherd

Fragment of a clay or ceramic container.

State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO)

The regulatory agency responsible for ensuring that federal archeology regulations are followed within the state. SHPO is mandated to coordinate cultural resource review and preservation activities between the state and the federal government as stipulated in 36 CFR 60, The National Register of Historic Places, in Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, and in the Federal Advisory Council on Historic Preservation’s Regulations 36 CFR 800 (Protection of Historic and Cultural Properties).

Tierce

An old English unit of wine casks. Before 1824 it held about 159 liters, which equals about 42 gallons.



Parts of a cart found near the Venture Smith site.

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State Archaeological Preserves

State Archaeological Preserves were established by the Connecticut Legislature as a mechanism to protect significant archaeological sites. The designation process began in 2000. Archaeological sites that are listed on the National Register of Historic Places and/or the State Register of Historic Places qualify for designation as a Preserve, whether or not the land is private or public property. The National Register is the official Federal list of districts, sites buildings, structures, and objects significant in American history, architecture, archaeology, engineering, and culture worthy of preservation. These contribute to an understanding of the historical and cultural foundations of the Nation. Similarly, the State Register of Historic Places is a census of historic and archaeological resources that are integral to the development of Connecticut's distinctive character.

The Connecticut Commission on Culture and Tourism is empowered to designate archaeological sites as Preserves (C.G.S. Section 10-384). The Commission, in coordination with the Office of State Archaeology and, when appropriate, the Native American Heritage Advisory Council, works with property owners to nominate significant archaeological sites as Archaeological Preserves. The Commission is also charged with maintaining the master listing of all Archaeological Preserves.

Preserves recognize both the educational and cultural value, as well as the fragile nature, of archaeological resources. Many of Connecticut's Preserves are on private land and fall under the protection of property owner rights. In addition, Connecticut law provides that, regardless of whether a Preserve is on private or public land, no person shall "excavate, damage, or

otherwise alter or deface the archaeological integrity or sacred importance" of a Preserve. Connecticut General Statutes Section 10-390 provides significant

penalties for vandalism and the unlawful collecting of archaeological remains from State Archaeological Preserves.

Connecticut State Archaeological Preserves

(as of September 2009)

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1. Putnam Memorial State Park, Redding and Bethel | 16. Governor Samuel Huntington Homestead, Scotland |
| 2. Axle Shop-Spring Factory Archaeological Site, Hamden | 17. Cady-Copp House Archaeological Site, Putnam |
| 3. Kent Iron Furnace, Kent | 18. World War II "Hellcat" Sites, Preston |
| 4. Newgate Prison and Copper Mine, East Granby | 19. Henry Whitfield State Museum, Guilford |
| 5. Fifth Camp of Rochambeau's Infantry, Bolton | 20. Dividend Brook Industrial Archaeological District, Rocky Hill |
| 6. Fort Wooster Park, New Haven | 21. Fort Griswold State Park, Groton |
| 7. Fourth Camp of Rochambeau's Army, Windham | 22. Ebenezer Story Homestead and Tavern, Preston |
| 8. Small Pox Hospital Rock, Farmington | 23. Fort Stamford, Stamford |
| 9. New London Engine House & Turntable, New London | 24. New England Hebrew Farmers of the Emanuel Society Synagogue and Creamery Archaeological Site, Montville |
| 10. Quinebaug River Prehistoric Archaeological District, Canterbury | 25. Prudence Crandall House Museum, Canterbury |
| 11. Aunt Polly, East Haddam | 26. Le Beau Fishing Camp & Weir, Killingly |
| 12. Cornfield Point Light Ship LV51, Old Saybrook | 27. The Lighthouse Site, Barkhamsted |
| 13. Bridgeport Wood Finishing Company, New Milford | 28. Civilian Conservation Corps Camp Filley, Haddam |
| 14. John Brown Birthplace, Torrington | 29. Pine Island, Groton |
| 15. Air Line Railroad, Colchester and East Hampton | 30. Ash Creek Corduroy Road, Fairfield |



Left: detail of an original woodcut by Ann Grifalconi for *Venture for Freedom* by Ruby Zagoren (New York, 1969), "Venture whirling Meg around as he sang 'I'm free, I'm free!'" (Image courtesy of Ann Grifalconi © 1969.)

Excerpt from a 2008 Proclamation by Officials of the Town of East Haddam

WHEREAS, Venture Smith represents "the concept of freedom so cherished in the American Mind;" and,

WHEREAS East Haddam is proud to be the final resting place of Venture Smith and proud of the connection with African-American history that this symbolizes; and,

WHEREAS, 200 years after the death of Venture Smith, the East Haddam Community is still proud of his accomplishments and he continues to serve as a role model;

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, that the Town of East Haddam proclaims Saturday the 6th day of September as Venture Smith Day and urges all her citizens to learn from and be inspired by his story.

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