

Survey Excavation in the Granite Room of the Suffolk Resolves House, May 19, 2012

Excavators: Steve Kluskens and Vanessa Sullivan¹

Objective: To determine if a pre-20th century occupation floor remained.

Conclusion: No occupation floor predating the 20th century remains. The floor appears to have been excavated down to bedrock by William Morris Hunt II and his crew in 1950.

Area: 20" x 4' -- 1/8th of the entire surface -- spanning the width of the room, starting 2' from the southwest end, and extending 20" northeast. This area was chosen because it was far from the obviously disturbed northeast end, where a concrete footing penetrates the floor, yet did not risk undermining the foundation of the southwest wall.

Method:

Prior to the excavation date, Kluskens cleared the entire surface area of loose 19th- and 20th-century artifacts. Hand trowels were used for digging. All visible artifacts were removed and stored by stratigraphic level. All earth removed during the excavation was bagged in quart volumes, but not screened.

Stratigraphy² and Artifacts:

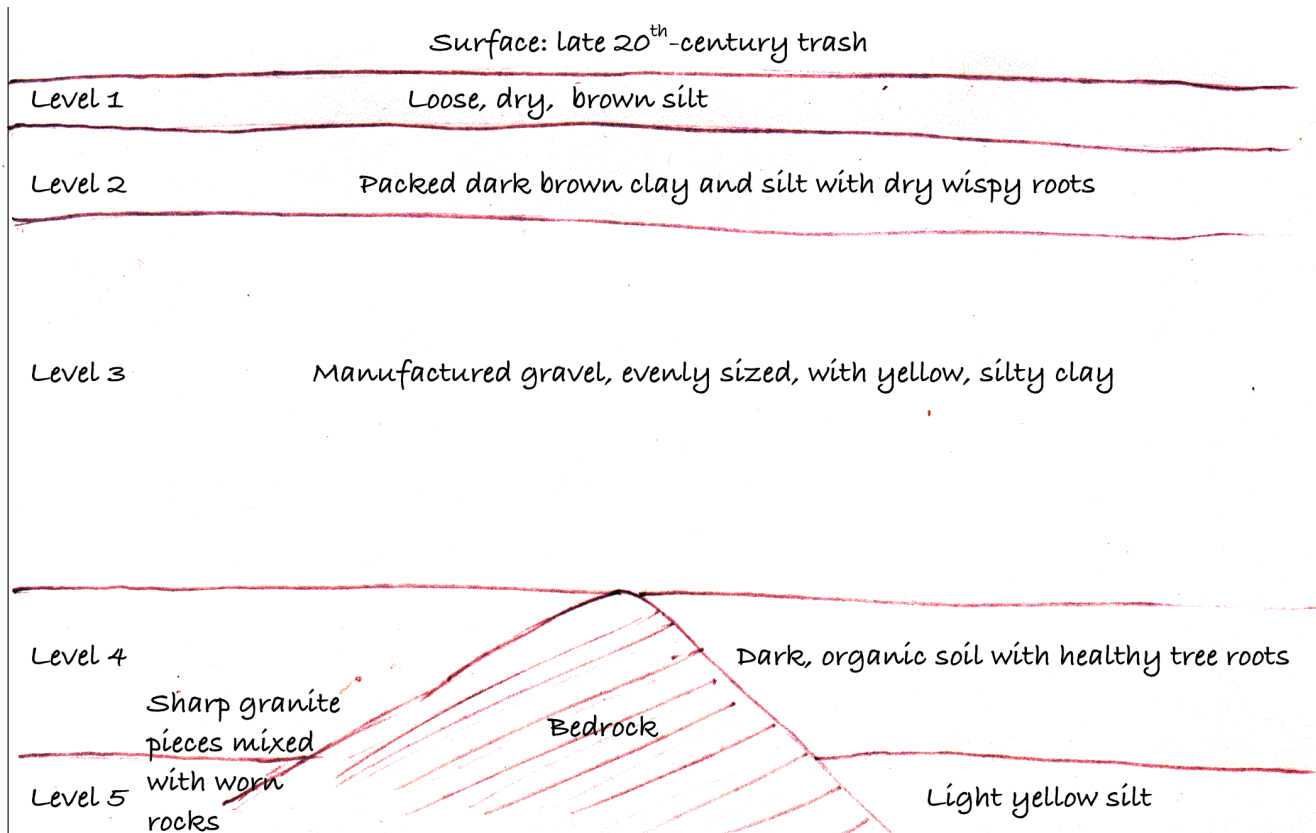
Surface: The surface of the floor in the beginning of 2012 was covered with late 20th century trash such as mini-blinds, remnants of black plastic garbage bags, boards, and a half-decayed wood bench cut with powertools but nailed with square-profile nails. These items were bagged for trash by Kluskens. Water entry along the walls was evident, especially at the southwest end, where rivulets had formed in the loose top sediment.

Level 1: About an inch of loose, brown silt densely littered with 19th- and early 20th-century artifacts. This date range was determined by a daguerrotype case fragment with the manufacturer's label still readable, and an ink stamp of the Milton Historical Society (founded 1904). A number of ambrotypes were found, too, one with the subject's added rouge still perfectly intact. Door hardware seemed the dominant category, but the collection was diverse. The largest artifacts included a rusted remnant of a wide head of an hoe- or adze-like implement and a rusted bayonet with what appears to be a 20th-century hose-clamp wrapped around its base. Remains of cardboard boxes were plentiful, often penetrated by thin, wispy roots coming up from Level 2. A few small, late 20th-century artifacts were found, such as fragments of plastic-insulated electrical wiring (the room was first wired for electricity in the early 1950's) and a red plastic LEGO brick. These may have been co-deposited with the older artifacts and/or penetrated from the surface.



¹ Steve Kluskens, Milton Historical Society curator, excavated in the European Paleolithic from 1986 through 1992, lastly as assistant director at the Spanish cave of El Juyo. Vanessa Sullivan is an active North American archaeologist with EBI Consulting.

² Sediment descriptions are strictly tactile and visual, not verified in any fashion.



Level 2: 1.5-2 inches of densely packed, dark brown clay and silt, riddled with thin roots. No artifacts.

Level 3: 6 inches of dense, evenly sorted gravel, probably of modern manufacture, with large rocks and a few brick fragments mixed in. The matrix is a yellow silty clay. Artifacts were scarce and small: nails or screws rusted beyond identification, fragments of tarpaper-asphalt shingles, aluminum foil, and near the top of the layer a glazed, ceramic fragment, painted yellow with tiny white and blue flowers. Near the bottom of the level a piece of glass labeled in red was found (*in situ* at right), roughly 2 by 3 inches, subsequently identified as part of a milk bottle from the White Brothers Dairy, founded 1913.

Level 4: About 3 inches of organic soil horizon penetrated with healthy tree



roots up to a half-inch in diameter. Artifacts were small and scarce, comprising rusted nails of square cross-section, bits of tarpaper-asphalt shingles, and one rim-fragment of a large terra-cotta pot. The photo below shows the base of this level.



Level 5: Varying in depth due to the protruding bedrock, this layer comprised broken pieces of granite mixed with smooth rocks varying in size, in a thin matrix of yellow silt. No artifacts.

Summary:

Only one occupation floor was in evidence, Level 2, dated by its artifacts to the use of the room as storage by the Ayers (owners of the house from its arrival in 1950, until 1963) or the Milton Historical Society (subsequent owner). Hannah Ayer was also president of the Society at one time. In the 1950's, the outside walkway above the room was flagstone, and given that the restoration architect William Morris Hunt II opened the room to the parlor and ran electricity into the room for lighting (invoice in MHS files), it's likely he made sure rain did not drain into it as it does now. When the walkway was replaced with brick, though, the current drainage probably began, making it seem a most unreasonable space for storing artifacts in cardboard boxes. With the death of the Ayers and/or changes in Milton Historical Society officers and caretakers, aided by the placement of furniture over the trap-door entrance (see black and white photos of the parlor after renovation), the room's contents were forgotten. In 2011, it was simply known among the society's board as "the crawlspace."

Level 3 is a gravel layer probably added by Hunt to make the room visitable. Since the room's doorway opens at the level of the house's unfinished basement, Hunt's efforts to connect it instead to

the parlor, via a stairway and trap door cut into the 18th-century floor, indicate the room was intended for public viewing. The addition of electrical lighting in an antique or replica fixture corroborates this. The milk bottle fragment, combined with asphalt shingles (on the house when it came to the site and after renovation) provides crucial dating. Hunt believed at least a century of vegetation covered the room in 1950, so the post-1913 milk bottle likely did not arrive before 1950. The bottle fragment is pictured below on eighth-inch graph paper, with a similarly labeled bottle at right, for sale online.



Level 4's origin is more difficult to determine, since the *in situ* formation of a thick organic soil horizon is unlikely at the far end of a narrow, granite-covered room below grade. However, the asphalt shingles throughout the strata and Hunt's assertion of the century-long burial of the room combine to place the deposition of Level 4 after the construction of the room. The excavators surmise that Hunt's crew underlay their gravel floor with the soil they had at hand: the organic horizon above and around the ceiling of the room.

The loose and rocky composition of Level 5 mark it as a bedrock interface, while its sterility and surface below the jutting bedrock make it an unlikely occupation floor. The Ayers and Hunt had an active interest in the history of the site; upon discovery of the room they probably excavated its floor to see what could be learned. Records of their findings are not known to the historical society.

Finally, a small excavation in the northern corner of the room was made to search for quarry marks at the bottom of a nearly 4-foot square slab of smoothed granite. No marks were found, and the sediment there was mostly sterile sand from the foundation of the nearby concrete footing. The quarry marks in the ceiling slabs suggest the ceiling of the room, at least, was built no earlier than 1803 (see *The Art of Splitting Stone: Early Rock Quarrying Methods in Pre-industrial New England 1630-1825*, by Mary Gage. Amesbury, MA: Powwow River Books, 2005).

