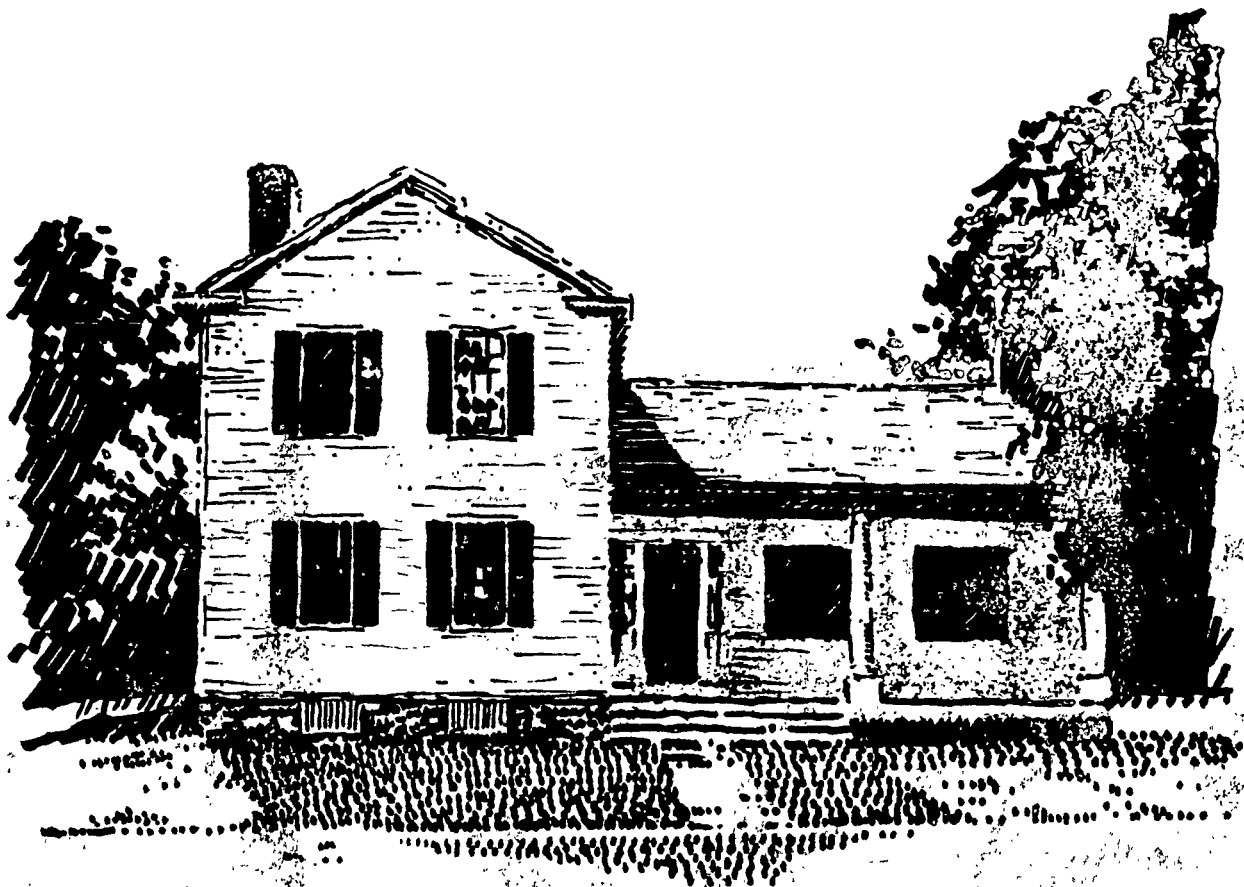


CRBIB #403124
WORI.028
488/133862

Historic Grounds Analysis

Elizabeth Cady Stanton Homestead
Women's Rights National Historical Park



United States Department of the Interior
North Atlantic Region
National Park Service
Office of Scientific Studies
OSS 87 - 1

An Analysis of the Historic Grounds
of the Elizabeth Cady Stanton Homestead,
Women's Rights National Historical Park,
Seneca Falls, New York

by

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October, 1986

Cooperative Park Studies Unit

University of Massachusetts

Completion Report: Contract No. CA1600-4-0005 #11

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Introduction

In 1985 we were contacted and asked to evaluate the potential for reconstructing the mid-19th century grounds of the Stanton House, a unit of Women's Rights National Historical Park in Seneca Falls, New York.

Elizabeth Cady Stanton lived in a home on Locust Hill in Seneca Falls ✓ between 1847 and 1862. It was during this period that she played a central role in the early development of the women's rights movement in the United States. The home was acquired by the National Park Service in 1979, but ✓ the original property owned by the Stantons had been subdivided into three parcels and portions of the original house had been removed. The house itself had been occupied by a number of tenants during the 117-year period ✓ following the Stantons' departure and the grounds had been individually landscaped by various owners of the three separate properties.

In this report we summarize the results of our attempts to learn about the character of the grounds at the time the Stantons' lived in Seneca Falls. Our studies included an analysis of written records from the Stanton era, evaluation of maps and photographs dating to the 50-year period following the Stanton occupancy, and interpretation of soil profile and pollen content of trenches dug across the back of the present property. Although it may never be possible to know the exact nature of the mid-nineteenth century grounds, we have proposed a representative layout based upon information available at this time.

Historical Documentation

Nancy Gordon

The property at the time the Stantons owned it consisted of a nearly square corner parcel with Washington Street to the west and Seneca Street to the north. The property consisted of lots 18, 19 and 20 in the original subdivision of the acreage into lots. } original boundaries

Documentation as to the actual dimensions of the property varies. The dimensions of the original lot in the subdivision plan are 290.5' along Washington Street, 285' and along Seneca Street (see Figure 1). A map prepared in connection with an auction sale of lots adjoining the Stanton property to be held in June of 1853 gives the dimensions of the Stanton property as 4 chains along the Washington Street boundary, and 4 chains 23 links along the Seneca Street boundary, that is, 264' by 279' (see Figure 2). Approximately four years after the Stantons left Seneca Falls the property was subdivided, leaving the house on a lot with a frontage of 90' along Washington Street, the lot extending easterly 230.5'.

In her autobiography, Elizabeth Cady Stanton describes the condition of the house and grounds, at the time the Stantons took over the property, as one of neglect: "The house we were to occupy had been closed for some years and needed many repairs, and the grounds comprising five [sic] acres, were overgrown with weeds." She therefore at once set "gardeners at work". It would appear that the initial renovation of the grounds largely satisfied her desires, because by 1851, four years after the Stantons had ✓

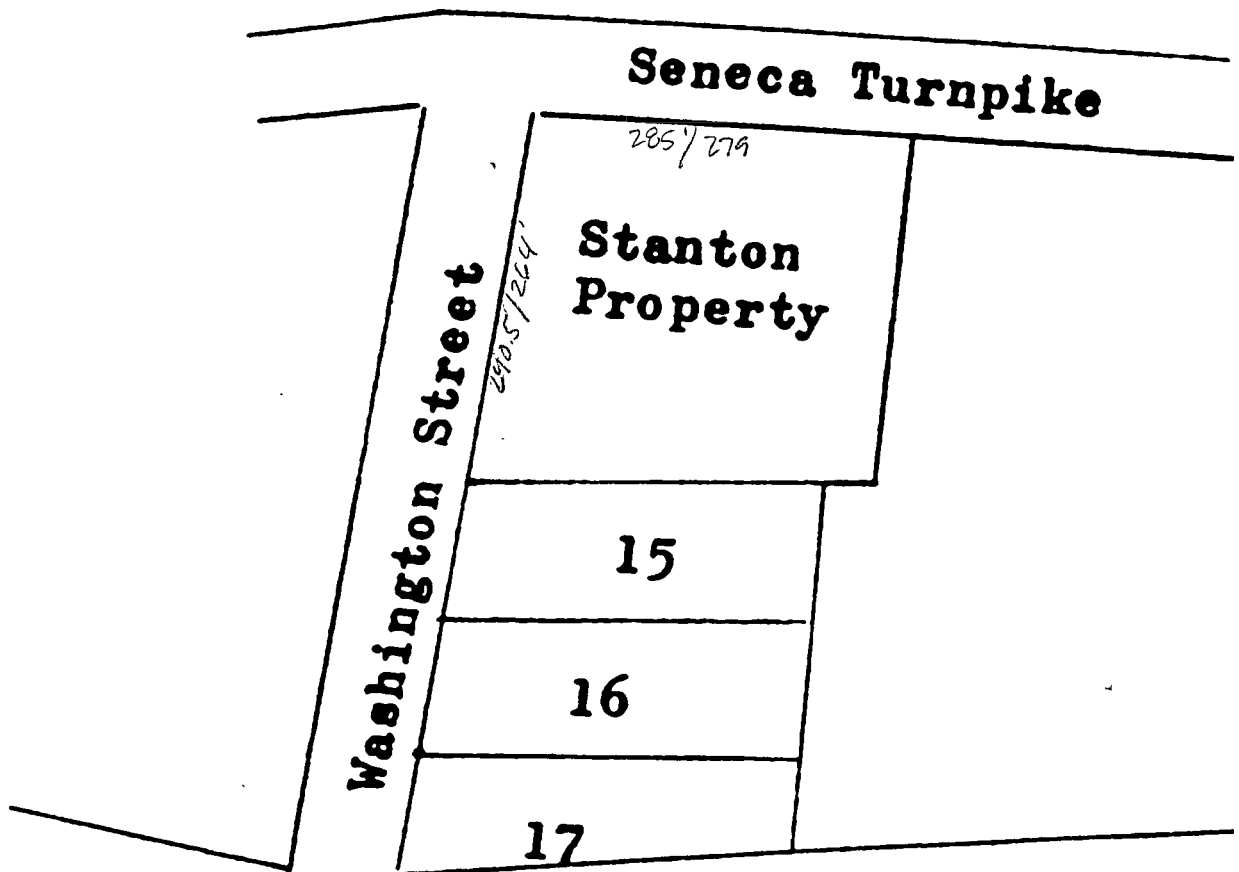


Figure 1. 1853 map showing location of Stanton property relative to adjacent lots, Washington Street and the Seneca Turnpike¹.

¹ Auction Sale of 42 Acres of Land in Lots Situated in the Village of Seneca Falls, New York. Sale to commence on 21st Day of June 1853 at 10 o'clock a.m. D. Boardman, Auctioneer. Barony & Major, New York. Map in the Collection of the Seneca Falls Historical Society.

Washington Street

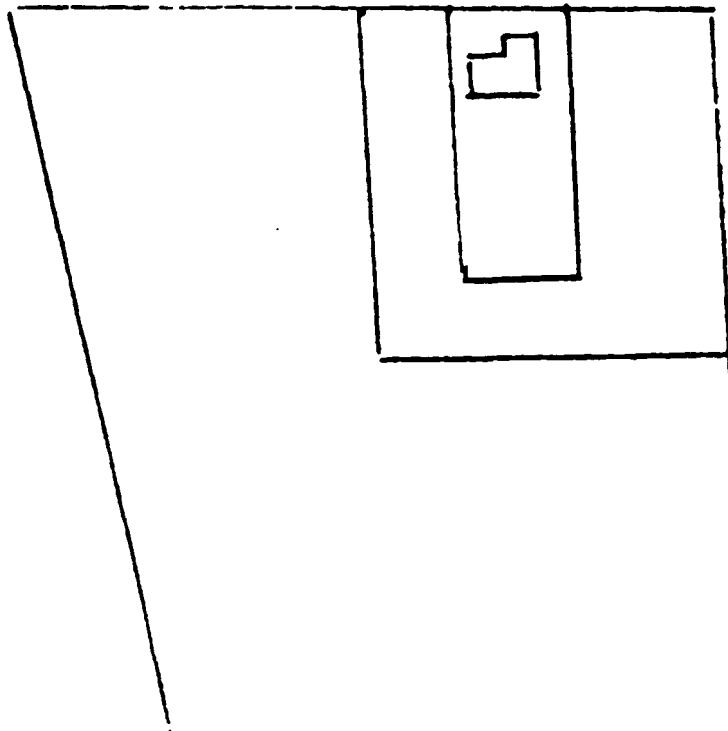


Figure 2. 1866 subdivision of the original property showing the present location of home and current property boundaries².

²Pearson, Barbara, Architectural Conservator. "The Stanton House: Preliminary Historic Structure Report." Illustration No. 6: 1866 property lines compared with the Stanton 2-acre holdings.

moved in, she could write to her sons at boarding school that the "house and grounds [are] in order."³

The grounds, as developed by the Stantons, were described by visitors and relatives as "fairly extensive", and comprised four elements: lawns, a playground for the Stanton youngsters, fruit trees, and vegetable gardens. The lawns presumably comprised everything not occupied by the playground, the fruit trees and the vegetable gardens; the task is therefore to locate these three elements.

The playground was set up by Elizabeth Cady Stanton to keep her numerous progeny from roaming the neighborhood and constituting a nuisance to the neighbors (which they apparently did from time to time: she clearly believed in a "progressive" system of upbringing allowing her children to "do their own thing" with a minimum of constraint or restriction, a policy which occasionally entailed soothing outraged neighbors who had been plagued by her free-roaming - and occasionally rock-throwing - children). The playground was complemented by similar exercise equipment located in the barn so that it would be available when rain made the yard equipment less appealing. Logic would dictate setting up such a playyard in reasonable proximity to the house, so that a measure of supervision for the younger children could be provided by someone otherwise occupied in housework. The most likely site for it would be immediately behind the kitchen wing of the house. It may be possible to substantiate the location of the playground through evidence of soil compaction.⁴

Playground
site

³ Ibid., pp. 3, 5. Guntzel, Corinne and Wellman, Judith. "Guide: Elizabeth Cady Stanton in Seneca Falls: A Compilation of Her papers." June 1, 1982.

⁴ Weber, Sandra S. "Special History Study: Women's Rights National Park, Seneca Falls, New York." National Park Service, 1984. pp. 62, 77.

There is ample evidence that the grounds contained a significant number of fruit trees. In early May of 1849, Henry Stanton wrote to his wife's cousin Gerrit: "My apology for not sooner answering your letter is, that law and gardening have engrossed all my time during the past month. I have gone somewhat largely into planting and grafting fruit trees, setting out plants of various sorts, etc." The fruit trees appear to have been primarily apple and cherry trees. In 1853, Elizabeth Cady Stanton wrote to her cousin Elizabeth Smith Miller: "of course I may burst my boiler screaming to boys to come out of the cherry trees..." In 1857, Henry wrote to his wife asking her to have Mr. Long attend to, among other things, the apple trees. An article by Elizabeth Cady Stanton in The Lily, entitled "The Distillery," refers to the local pigs having been presented with Stanton apples, including "sweet apples" and "greenings."⁵

The probable location of this orchard is at the back of the lot. An artist's depiction of the village of Seneca Falls in 1873, eleven years after the Stantons had left the town, shows the back of the lot with several rows of trees across it running from south to north (Figure 3). It would make logical sense to locate the fruit trees at a greater distance from the house than either the playground or the vegetable garden. They would constitute to some extent a barrier between the house and the adjoining property to the east, and the need to go into them from the house

Orchard

⁵Henry B. Stanton to Gerrit, Seneca, May 2, 1849. Elizabeth Cady Stanton to Elizabeth Smith Miller, Seneca Falls, June 20, 1853. Guntzel, op. cit., quoting Henry B. Stanton to Elizabeth Cady Stanton, 28 January 1857. Ibid., quoting Henry B. Stanton to Elizabeth Cady Stanton, 16 August 1861. The Lily, article noted by Corinne Guntzel. Henry B. Stanton to Elizabeth Cady Stanton, January 28, 1859. Stanton, Theodore and Blatch, Harriot Stanton. Elizabeth Cady Stanton. New York, Arno and The New York Times, 1969.

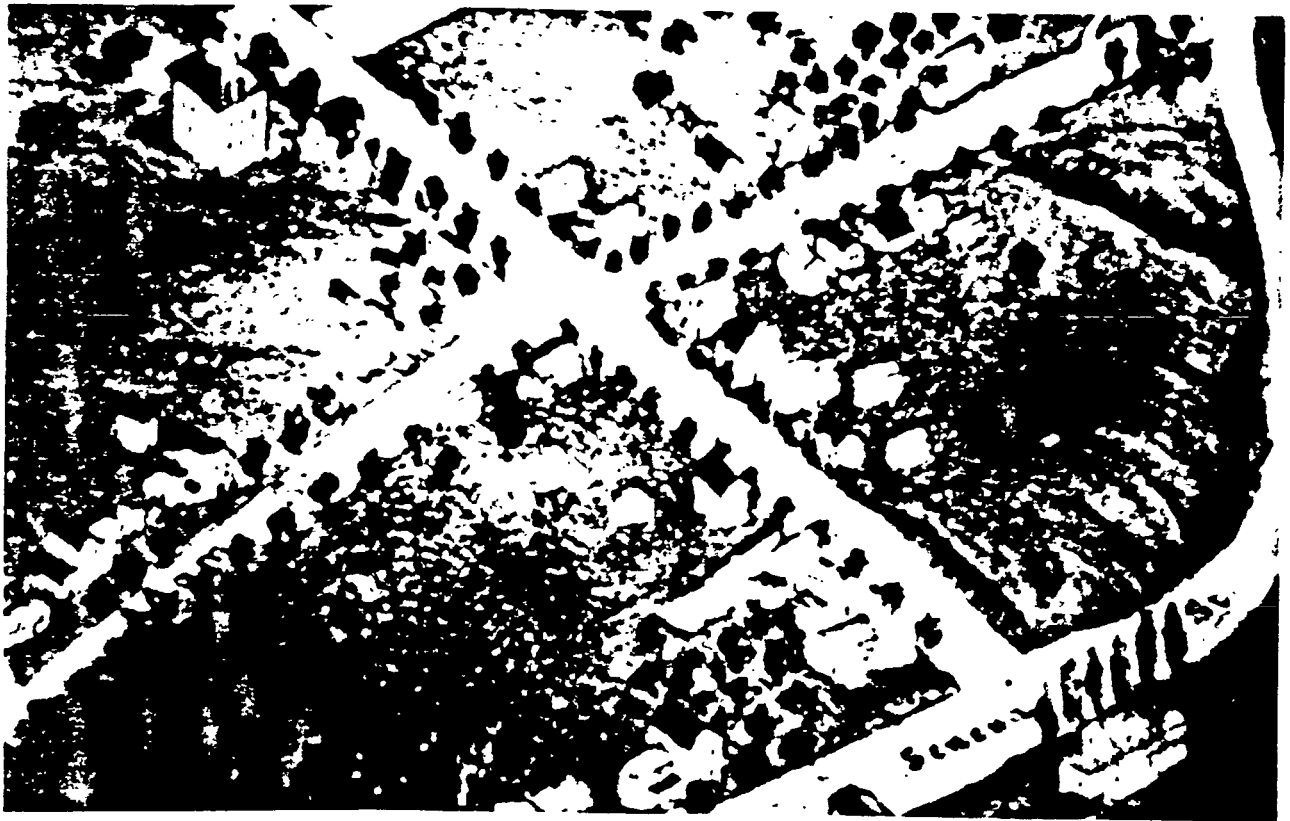


Figure 3. Bird's eye view of Seneca Falls in 1873 (map by Endicott and Co., Printers). Original property boundaries are indicated by dark lines.

at frequent intervals would not be as great as in the case of either the playyard or the vegetable garden.⁶

Elizabeth depicts herself as being a conscientious Victorian housewife, and she therefore spent a considerable amount of time and effort each year canning the produce the family was able to harvest from Henry's enthusiasm for fruit trees and gardening. In 1853 and 1860 letters contain references to major efforts to preserve the harvest: "After you left me, if I may go back so far, I plunged at once into preserving, in which dispensation I continued until my little closet and every available bowl and tumbler in the house were filled. Any time during that season a man might have been seen wending his way hither with bundles of sugar. The spoons and tables, the knobs of the doors, the children's bibs, the servants hands, and even your blessed Johnson were all more or less sticky. But oh! how glorious the result! Not the most brilliant of Caesar's achievements could surpass this campaign. Such jellies, such quinces - a magnificent array of fruits standing in solemn silence, each waiting a summons to appear before the first distinguished guest that may present himself"... In 1860 she writes to Martha Wright that her "hands [are]...stained...with cherries, raspberries and currants," but this must be literary hyperbole, for the date of the letter is 2 June, and none of these fruits would be ripe at that time.⁷ Elizabeth wrote H. B. Stanton, Jr. and Daniel Cady Stanton during the fall of 1851 to ask "Have you plenty of grapes at the Welds? I think of sending some to you..." In a September 27, 1860 letter to H. B. Stanton, Jr., and G. S. Stanton, Susan B. Anthony

⁶Bird's Eye View of Seneca Falls, New York. Endicott & Co., Printers, 57 Beekman Street, New York, 1973.

⁷Elizabeth Cady Stanton to Martha Wright, June 2, 1860. Elizabeth Cady Stanton to Elizabeth Smith Miller, Seneca Falls, Sept. 30, 1853.

writes of a reception at which Elizabeth served "pears and melons." We can only guess that these had been grown on the property.

*Other
Vegetation*

The material on preserving indicates that the grounds must have contained, among other possible shrubs, raspberry bushes, currant bushes, grape vines, and probably quince bushes. A look at the artist's drawing of 1873 (Figure 3) suggests that these may have been located on the north side of the house, on the bank overlooking Seneca Street.

The remaining item to be located is the vegetable garden. Having excluded the back of the lot as containing the apple and cherry trees, and the north side as probably containing the raspberry and current bushes, with the possible addition of quince, the only remaining location for the vegetable garden is behind the playyard and in front of the orchard. This makes logical sense on several grounds. Even if the barn shown in the photograph of ca. 1910 (Plate 3 - p. 14) is not the same barn as existed at the time the Stantons lived there, the drawing of 1873 makes clear that a string of structures extended from the south side of the house in an easterly direction towards the back of the lot. Because the kitchen was located in the no longer extant wing at the back of the present south projection, this would be the logical side of the property for the location of the barn, so that deliveries to the kitchen door could be made directly. Moreover, a barn located on the other side of the property would have had to contend with the sharp drop-off of the land on that side resulting in a sloping entrance drive, whether it was approached from Washington Street or from Seneca Street. If, therefore, the south side of the property was partly or wholly occupied by a barn and other outbuildings, the logical - and indeed only possible - location for the vegetable garden would be behind the playyard and in front of the orchard. Logic would suggest that

*Vegetable
Garden*

it would run from south to north, commencing on the north side of the somewhat dilapidated garage now on the site.

There is relatively little written evidence as to the produce grown in the garden. In 1856 Henry wrote to his wife, noting that he had asked Mr. Fuller to "hoe strawberries" and inquired whether the squash was in. This letter is dated October 19, so he must refer to harvesting the squash. On September 1, in 1859, Elizabeth wrote to her cousin that she "...made 13 squash pies..." In a January 18, 1857 letter to Elizabeth Cady Stanton, H. B. Stanton asked "do the potatoes freeze?" What else the garden may have contained we can only conjecture. In 1851 prizes were awarded at the New York State Fair for the following vegetables: celery, cauliflower, turnips, carrots, beets, parsnips, onions, cabbage, tomatoes, egg plants, sweet potatoes, lima beans, parsley, squashes, pumpkins, corn, and table potatoes. It is very likely that many, if not all, of these were contained in the Stantons' vegetable garden.⁸

Shortly after the Stantons moved to Seneca Falls, Elizabeth complained in a postscript to a letter of her husband's to Gerrit Smith: "I have all kinds of trees and shrubs but no flowers." She therefore asked for flower seeds and cuttings, expressing a particular interest in pinks and daffodils. A year later, in 1850, she wrote to her cousin Elizabeth Smith Miller: "Have you any flower seeds for a body, especially mignonette? I as yet have never succeeded in raising that flower." Mignonette (Reseda spp.) is an annual and must be grown from seed, but daffodils are perennial. Pinks constitute a large category and include greenhouse carnations but

⁸Guntzel, op. cit., quoting Elizabeth Cady Stanton to Elizabeth Smith Miller, 1 September 1859. New York State Agricultural Society. Transactions. XI, 1851. Albany, Charles van Benthuyssen. p. 99. Guntzel, op. cit., quoting Henry B. Stanton to Elizabeth Cady Stanton, October 19, 1956.

also a species commonly called Sweet William, that although technically perennial is functionally biennial.⁹

The Stantons' daughter, Harriot Stanton Blatch, described the yard as containing shade trees, evergreens and gardens. The shade trees may have been locust trees. Elizabeth sometimes referred to her house on "Locust Hill," in that name recognizing the numerous locust trees that still grow in the vicinity. Henry Stanton refers in a letter to his wife, written in 1861, to the fruit and evergreen trees in the yard.¹⁰

The earliest photograph of the house, probably taken in the 1890's, shows three Norway spruce trees in the front yard (Plate 1). These could have been the "evergreens" referred to by Henry Stanton in 1861; they appear to be 30-40 years old, and the Norway spruce was a popular landscape tree in the 19th century. The 1890's photograph of the house also shows several maple trees, but these do not appear old enough to have been there at the time the Stantons occupied the house. A more likely probability is that locust trees were scattered around the yard, thus justifying Elizabeth's name for the place as "Locust Hill." The horse chestnut that presently occupies the southwest corner of the yard (Plate 2) is more than 100 years old according to ring counts by W. A. Patterson. The tree may well have been planted by the Stantons. This tree is not in view in the 1890's photo, but its crown is evident in a 1910 photo (Plate 3). The Norway spruce directly in front of the front porch had been removed by 1910. The Anthony letter of September 27, 1860 describes Elizabeth as

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Guntzel, op. cit., quoting address of Harriot Stanton Blatch to the National Women's Party Anniversary Celebration, July 20, 1923. Henry B. Stanton to Elizabeth Cady Stanton, 16 August 1861. Guntzel, op. cit., citing Stanton, E. C. Eighty Years and More, p. 194.



Plate 1. Photograph of the Stanton Home (prior to 1901).



Plate 2. Front of the Stanton Home, November, 1985.



Plate 3. The Stanton Home ca. 1910. Note that the Norway spruce in front of the home and evident in Plate 1 have been removed. Foliage in the upper right corner may be from the horse chestnut shown in Plate 2.

welcoming a group of admirers while standing "on the circle around between the two front gates." Neither the mound nor the gates are evident in the later photographs.

In recreating the yard as it was in the time when the Stantons lived there, allowing for the fact that significant portions of the yard are not available for the recreation as they now are separate lots with their own dwellings on them, the most promising course seems to be to approach the recreation as a symbolic one (see Figure 4). It should include evergreen trees, and Norway spruce would be the preferred species, as well as deciduous trees, preferably black locusts. It should include swings and a teeter totter and perhaps a jungle gym, all made of wood, because that is what such play equipment would have been made of, in those days. An area can be allotted to the growing of vegetables, depending on the availability of gardening labor, but the gardens do not need to be as extensive as they were in the Stantons' time to suggest the character of the landscape. At suitable points, pinks and daffodils can be planted. Finally, at the rear, cherry and apple trees could be planted, including among the latter some Rhode Island Greenings. The circumstances of different property ownership prohibit an exact recreation, but such plantings as these would reproduce the visual effect of the yard at the time the Stantons lived there. Figure 4 shows how the grounds might be recreated in the context of the current and historic buildings and lot dimensions.

REPRESENTATION OF THE STANTON PROPERTY ca. 1860

Original Stanton Lot: _____

1866 Subdivision: - - - - -

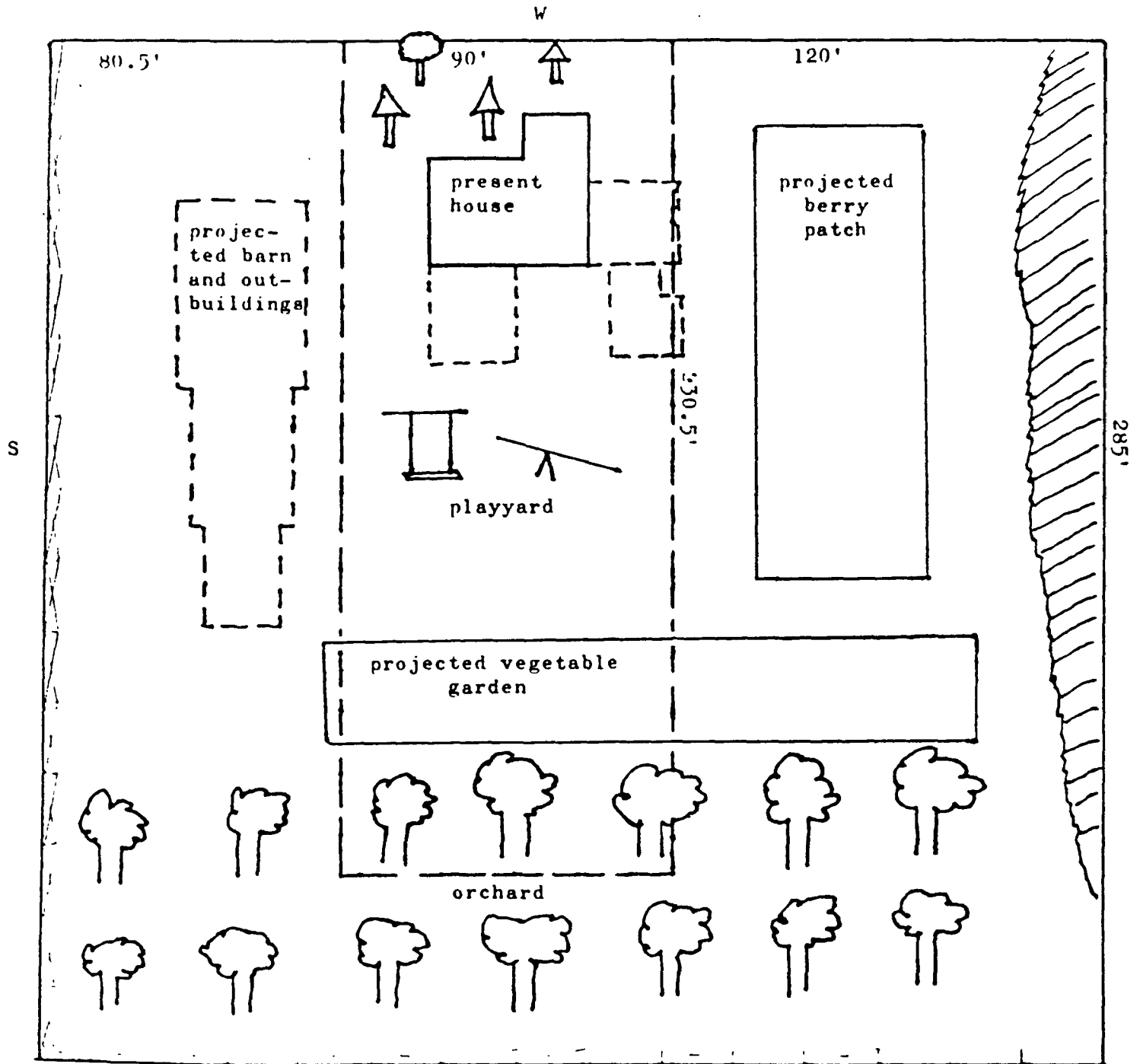


Figure 4. Projected landscaping of the Stanton lot based upon review of historical accounts and assumptions about the logical layout of grounds.

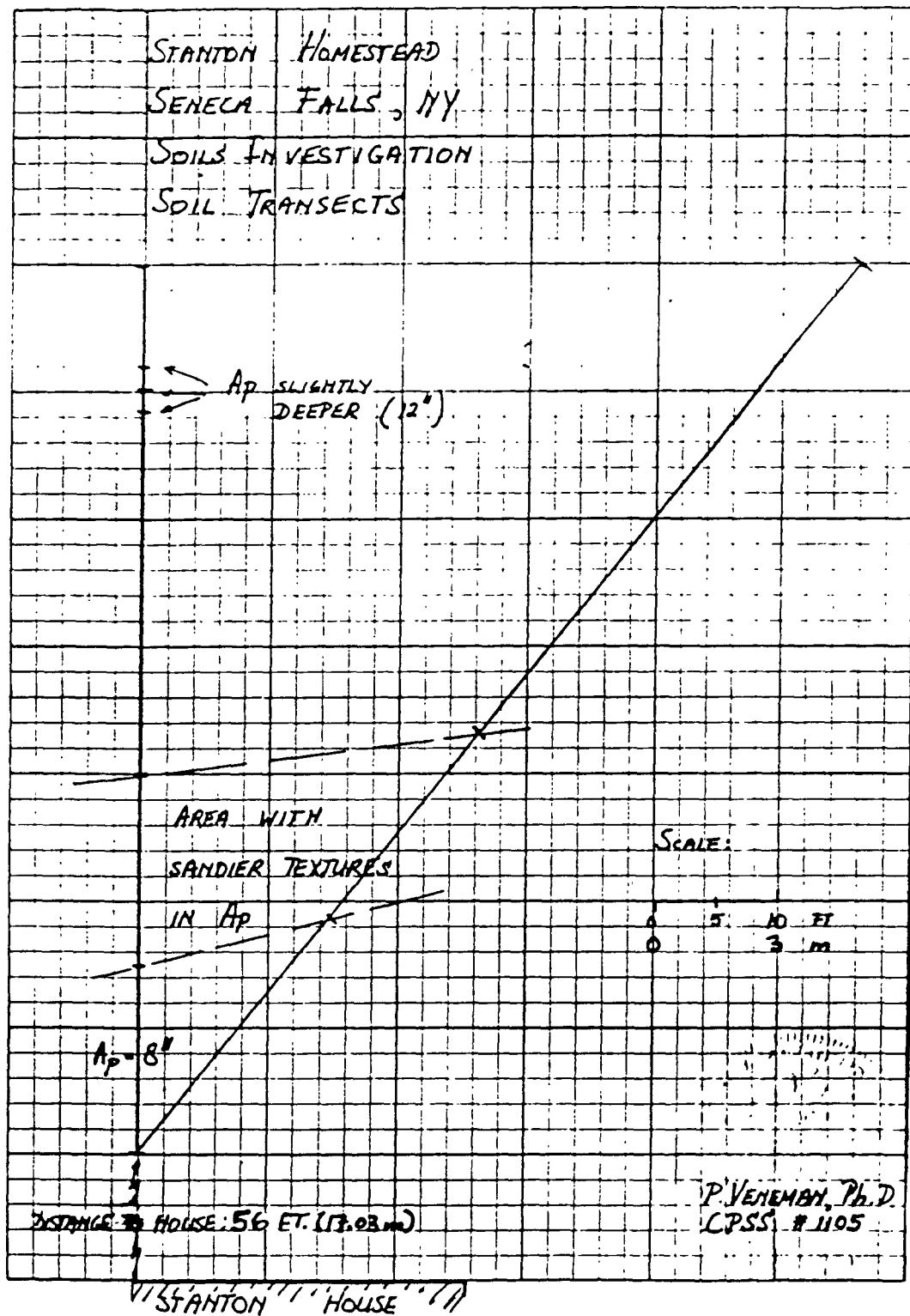
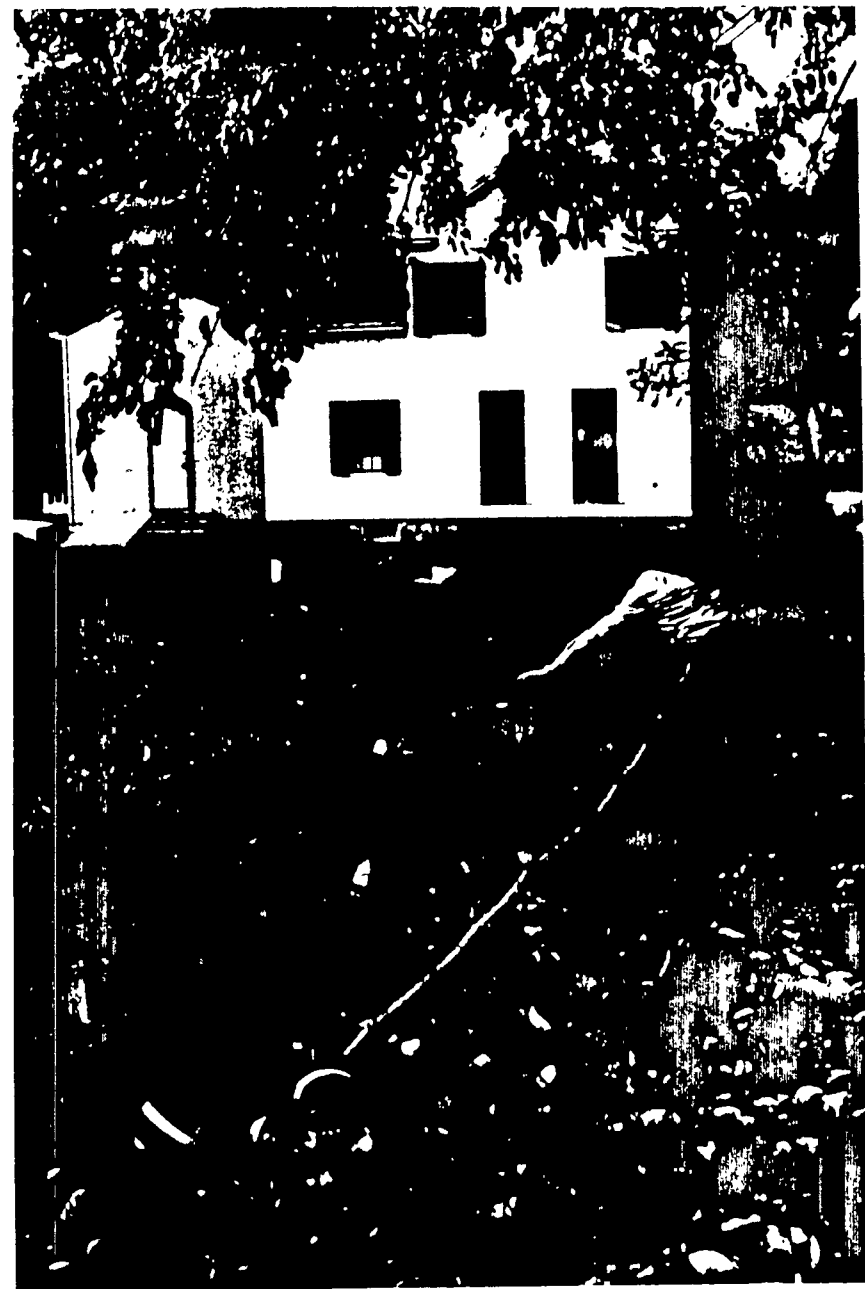


Figure 5. Layout of soil trenches east of the Stanton Home with notes on prominent soil features.



a.)



b.)

Plate 4. Trenches exposing soil profiles in back (east) of the Stanton Home; a) northwest to southeast trench, b) west to east trench.

trenches.

The soil in the Ap layer contained small pieces of pottery and china. This material was distributed throughout the layer and did not seem confined to any one location. In my opinion, no definite conclusions about the horticultural practices during the Stantons' time can be drawn on the basis of our trench work.

During the first visit to the Stanton residence I observed the presence of two small ridges in the back of the property. During the second visit the distance between the ridges was determined to be about 27 feet (8.1 m). The depth of the Ap layer below these ridges was determined to be about 1 - 2 inches (3 - 5 cm) more than in the surrounding soils. Judging from the distance between the ridges and the depth of the Ap layer, I believe that these may represent the location of former fruit trees. The back of the property may have been a good location for the orchard, especially since the trees were probably of the standard type root stock. Whether or not these trees dated to the Stanton era cannot be determined with certainty. No detailed observations of these profiles were made because there were no trenches dug in this area. Trenching would be required to determine whether or not trees had been grown here. Testing for accumulated lead arsenate could help determine if trees originated during the Stanton period. This pesticide was first used during the early 1900's, and trees later than that period probably were treated with this material. Lead is very insoluble and should remain in the soil profile. Large accumulations of lead thus would indicate a later time period, while the absence of lead may indicate an origin earlier than 1900. Lead analysis would be most useful in determining whether or not trees planted by the Stantons had been removed by the early 1900's, because trees that

removed by the early 1900's, because trees that remained into the early 20th century might still have been treated with the pesticide.

In conclusion, I feel that the soil profiles in the area immediately in the back of the Stanton residence were disturbed, most likely during later periods of occupancy. No evidence was found in the trenched area of any particular horticultural activities. The area in the back of the lot shows evidence of the presence of fruit trees, although further investigations are needed to confirm this.

Pollen analysis
follows -
I didn't include it.