

THE LOCKE FARM, A UNIQUE PROPERTY

By Ellen Knight¹

What makes the Wright-Locke Farm unique in Winchester is that it has survived as a working farm down to the 21st century. While many historic farmhouses survive in Winchester, the Asa Locke farmhouse is part of a complex of farm buildings and part of an historic landscape. With some buildings dating back to the 19th century and retaining the configuration of the 19th-century farm, the Wright-Locke Farm survives as the last remnant of Winchester's vanishing roots.



*Anonymous painting of the Locke Farm
Courtesy of the Winchester Historical Society*

WRIGHT FARM

In the 17th century, the hill where the farm is located was part of Woburn, one of Winchester's parent towns. Here Thomas Wright, great-grandson of Deacon John Wright, one of the first settlers and selectmen of Woburn, lived during Colonial and Revolutionary times at the intersection of Ridge and High streets.



Among his children was a son Philemon, born in 1760. Little is known of his early life, except that at ages 16 and 17 he served in two regiments during the Revolutionary War. He himself recorded that he lived in Massachusetts "until I was thirty-six years of age, in the occupation of farming and grazing."² In 1789, Thomas sold the Ridge Street farm to Philemon. Thomas died in 1795. By this time, Philemon had married Abigail Wyman, and they already had five of their nine (or more) children.

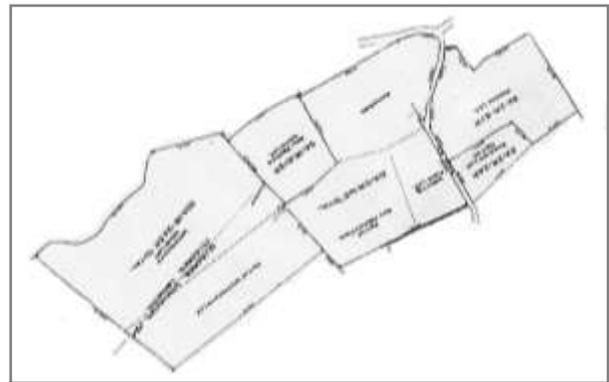
After three trips to scout out locations in Canada, in 1800, Wright and several members of his extended family departed by sleigh in a company of 63 people. Wright founded the town of Wrightstown, later incorporated as Hull, experienced many adventures, engaged in various business ventures, and was the first representative of the county of Ottawa in the Lower Canada assembly. But, since he sold his farm on Ridge Street in 1800, Wright's later history no longer included the Wright-Locke Farm.

LOCKE FARM

Josiah Locke purchased the Wright farm in 1800, and four years later sold it to his son Asa. The farm remained in the possession of the Locke family until the mid-20th century.



The size of the farm has changed over time. In 1900, George Locke owned about 100 acres. Below is a 1900 plot plan of his farm, printed upside down for comparison to the outline drawn on a section of the 1906 map of Winchester. The smaller outline marks the boundary of the farm as of the time the Town bought the last remaining 20 acres of the farm.



The surviving 20-acre farm contains the heart of the farm, the homestead lot, plus those natural features that are essentials for a farm – water, tillable land, woods, and pasture. While the size of the farm has decreased, the surviving complex of buildings document agricultural life and how Winchester's first residents interacted with their environment and related to the landscape.

The Lockes built the existing farm buildings. Asa Locke built the house at 78 Ridge Street. Dated to 1828, this house was built in the Georgian style in a square, symmetrical shape. The house and barns were built close to the road. A wagon track intersected with the road and passed by the house and barns and crossed the land.





Bill Ryerson photo

The squash barn, to the left in the photograph, was constructed about 1915 and replaced an earlier structure. It was designed for the storage of Blue Hubbard Squash. This barn has proved to be an exceptional historic structure due to its degree of specialization and rarity in this region.

Among the other buildings are an ice house, pump house by the pond, and a well house on high ground. All of the architectural elements document how the farm functioned through the centuries.

FARM SAVED

The Wright-Locke Farm has been on the National Register of Historic Places since 1983. In 2006, Preservation Massachusetts listed it as one of the Ten Most Endangered Historic Resources. In 2007, the Town of Winchester bought the property to prevent its being fully developed and to preserve public enjoyment of the property. In 2008, Town Meeting named the Town portion as the Wright-Locke Farm.



While the Town developed a plan to sell part of the farm to recoup the purchase price, that plan left the farm buildings and the arable land in Town ownership. Although a bid for the purchase of the land for development was accepted, the project fell through. In 2015 the Wright-Locke Farm Trust purchased those acres.

¹ This article is drawn from the author's *Wright-Locke Farm: A History in Pictures*. Winchester Archival Center, 2008.

² "An Account of the First Settlement of the Township of Hull," delivered to the Committee of the House of Assembly appointed to consider settlement of crown lands in Lower Canada, Dec. 16, 1820.