

A Brief History of Sweetwilliam Farm
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Sweetwilliam Farm's history reflects Upton's cultural and agricultural heritage. In the late 18th and early 19th centuries Upton consisted primarily of dispersed farms. In the later part of the 19th century, Upton's economy diversified from predominately agricultural into a mix of agriculture, primarily butter, cheese, milk and meat, wood products, and the manufacture of shoes and straw hats. It was common for the farmers of this era to supplement their dairy and meat income with the sale of lumber from their woodlots and for their sons and daughters to work in the shoe and straw-hat industries. It was also common for the farm to be kept in the family. Farms started to disappear in the late 19th and early 20th century and those that survived into the 20th century were largely dairy farms. Sweetwilliam Farm's history follows this pattern.

Sweetwilliam Farm's origin dates back to 1739 when Nathaniel Whitney of Westborough, Eli Whitney's grandfather, acquired 100 acres in Upton from one of the early Sutton proprietors. In 1750 and 1754 he gave this land to his two sons, Ephraim and Oliver, respectively. Ephraim's portion of the land was the beginning of what became Sweetwilliam Farm. Ephraim acquired more land and split it between his two sons, Ephraim Jr. and Amos. The three 18th-century homes clustered together on North Street are the original Whitney homes. The farm stayed in the Whitney family until 1890 through two more generations, Ephraim Junior's son, Moses, and Moses' son-in-law, Seth Chapin. During the time the Whitney family farmed the land, they used it primarily to raise milk cows, with some of the land in pasture, some in hay and some in Indian corn, Irish potatoes and other grains. They also had a woodlot, an orchard, one horse, two oxen, chickens, and probably had a kitchen garden. The size of the farm, about 100 acres, and its use were typical for the era.

The Whitneys were active in town affairs. Among other town positions held by them, Ephraim Senior and Junior served as Selectmen in 13 of the 46 years between 1754 and 1800. Ephraim Junior served in the Revolutionary War. Ephraim Senior was Town Clerk when Upton voted unanimously to approve the confederation of the thirteen United States of America.

In 1890, Seth Chapin's widow, Rowena (Whitney) Chapin sold the farm to James Colbert, an Irish immigrant, who owned a similar farm located between Warren Street and Lake Wildwood. James later sold the farm to his son, David. Judging from the length of time the Colbert's held the farm, they may have bought it for investment purposes (David went on to sell real estate in Rochester, NY.) In 1893, the Colbert family sold it to William Prowse, a farmer from Prince Edward Island. In 1898, William sold it to his son, Cornelius, after offering it for sale through an

auction conducted on May 4th, 1898 (the advertisement for the auction offers a vivid description of the farm at that time.) Cornelius, who was not a farmer, lost it to foreclosure in 1904 to Lewis Allen, who sold it to Joseph Poirier, an immigrant from French Canada, in 1911. The places of origin for the three immigrants that bought the land between 1890 and 1911, Ireland, English Canada and French Canada, were common for immigrants to Upton. The Poirier family sold it to the current owner in 1994. As was common for Upton farms in the 20th century, it was used to raise milk cows and grow hay for much of the time between 1890 and 1994.