

The Daniels Farmstead retains its rural agricultural setting and is reflective of a farm that has evolved over two centuries leaving an intact farmstead. The property is the best example of a well-preserved farm complex in Blackstone and one of the best in the Blackstone Valley with its ca.1750/ca. 1830 farmhouse, several period outbuildings, and surrounding farm landscape. The complex retains architectural and historical integrity and is significant for a period beginning about 1750 when the first small house, now the ell, is estimated to have been built, throughout which time the farm had been in continuous use. The property retains integrity of location, setting, design, materials, workmanship, association, and feeling. The Daniels Farmstead is significant at the local level.

Originally part of the 1667 Mendon grant to Moses Payne, Peter Bracket and others of Braintree, Blackstone was known as the South Parish or South Precinct of Mendon from 1766 when a second meeting house was established at Chestnut Hill (now Millville). The South Parish was part of Mendon politically until Blackstone's separate incorporation in 1845. And in 1917 Millville separated from Blackstone leaving the town with its present ten and one-half square miles more or less.

From the early to mid 1700's, centers with their own character evolved in Mendon's South Parish at Chestnut Hill (now Millville), at East Blackstone along the Mendon Road (now Elm Street) and at Blackstone Village on the Blackstone River. Transportation routes followed water courses and were cause for the location of the early settlement along Elm Street, the link between Providence and Worcester, and along Main Street in Blackstone Village parallel to the Blackstone River. In 1791 Mendon was divided into school districts with seven in the South Parish. In the same decade the Quakers established a meetinghouse at East Blackstone reinforcing the framework for this self-sufficient village center.

The fine sandy loam of the upland hills and the watercourses throughout Blackstone account for the successful agricultural economy of the early eighteenth century. This led to the need for forges and gristmills, hence the beginning of the industrial development, which was primary to the evolution of the town of Blackstone, Massachusetts. In North and East Blackstone there were early eighteenth century farms with rich soils for pasture land and by the end of the 1700s there were approximately 80 substantial farms listed in Mendon's South Parish of which five had saw, grist, or gulling mills.

From 1809 early cotton mills sprang up in four locations on East Blackstone's Mill River and Quick Stream and in several locations in Blackstone Village. Those in Blackstone Village grew at a faster rate in part due to the water source and amount of power generated and in part due to the transportation routes of the nineteenth century including the Blackstone Canal of 1828 to 1848 and the railroads from 1847.

While the villages evolved into industrial centers, the upland farms of Mendon's South Parish, which became Blackstone in 1845, carried on the agricultural tradition of the community. The Daniels Farmstead has a rich history beginning in 1685 when Abraham Staples moved to this

farm in the southern part of Mendon. Staples had been among the first settlers in Mendon in 1667 and had fled in 1675 during the King Philip War. He returned to his farm in Mendon in

1678, rebuilt the family home, and in 1685 moved with his wife to the larger farm (now known as the Southwick-Daniels Farm) in the southern part of town leaving the original farm to the care of some of his sons. Both farms remained in the family throughout the eighteenth century.

In 1793 Nahor Staples, a fourth generation direct descendant of Abraham Staples, sold the southern most farm to Seth Southwick (1768-1835). Staples had just purchased his half brother's, Abraham Staples IV, farm that was the family's original land in the northern part of Mendon. In 1794 Seth Southwick married Nahor and Prudence Staple's daughter, Lucinda. Thus Staples descendants remained connected to this farm into the nineteenth century. Lucinda met an untimely death in 1798 after the birth of two daughters, Ruth (1794-1812) and Elvira (b.1796) and a son, Seth (b. 1798). In 1801 Seth Southwick married Alpha Waldon of Bellingham and together they had six children of which only three daughters lived to adulthood.

The farm that Southwick purchased is described in the 1798 Federal Tax Census as a farm with one barn, one cornhouse, and a one-story dwellinghouse with seven windows. The house, no doubt, was today's side ell. Within the present structure is what appears to have been an outside attached shed on the north façade, thus, the late eighteenth house included today's kitchen, pantry, and dining room with garret space above and the shed across the north façade with sink, set kettles and woodshed, and interior buttery over the woodshed part of this now interior shed.

In 1829 Seth and Alpha Southwick's daughter, Rachel, married Absalom Daniels of Bellingham. Record indicate that the farm was taken over by Rachel and Absalom because in 1835 when Seth Southwick died, his will left one-third of the farm to his wife Alpha and two-thirds to his heirs, which included five children (and the respective husbands of Southwick's daughters), all of whom sold their share to Rachel (their sister of half-sister) and Absalom Daniels in the same year. The Southwick probate talks of a homestead farm and 146 acres with buildings, five cows and one bull, one horse, three pigs, seven tons of hay, straw, corn, rye, white beans and other crops. Thus, the nature of the use of the farm by Southwick is known.

The one-third share left to Alpha, widow of Seth Southwick, indicates that the house had been enlarged beyond what is now the side ell prior to Southwick's death. The probate record specifically identifies how the property was to be divided and indicates that Alpha, whose dower included one-third of everything, would live at the farm with Rachel and Absalom Daniels. Alpha's share included "one-half of the front entryway below and above with two rooms below and two in the chambers adjoining the westerly end of said house and the garret above and the cellar below with a privilege at all time to pass to and from the cellar, chamber and garret and also privilege to pass to and from the oven to bake, reserving to the heirs a privilege in common with said Alpha to pass at all time to and from the garret and chamber." Alpha also received the old pear tree, one-third of each of the woodhouse, the hog house, and the cornhouse, privileges to pass to and from these structures and use of the well. (Probate Court, Worcester County).

In 1839 Alpha Southwick conveyed her dower to her son-in-law, Absalom Daniels. In 1850 the farm passed to Hiram Daniels (1831- 1875), son of Absalom and Rachel Daniels who married Elizabeth Thayer in 1866. Daniels' wife was the daughter of Caleb and Hannah Thayer thus descending from the first settlers of Mendon. Hiram Daniels changed the focus of the farm from crops to raising cows. He built a large mid-nineteenth century barn, probably attached to a smaller earlier barn, which appears to have been rebuilt by Daniels when he constructed the cider mill. Also Hiram Daniels built the cider mill for the small apple orchard, which he had on the property and which would become a mainstay of the farming for a period of time in the early 1900s. In the 1860s Hiram Daniels had Daniel Simmons do some granite work at the farm including chiseling the water trough. Simmons was well known in Blackstone for construction of the Saranac Dam in 1856 and Roaring Dam (also called Rolling Dam) in 1886. He also dug many local wells and probably was responsible for the second well at the Farm and possibly built the cistern in the late 1860s.

Until 1872 when Hiram Daniels petitioned to have the road in front of his farm constructed south to join Mendon Street, which stopped at Lincoln Street, access to the farm was the Mendon Road north to Mendon Center or south only to Union Street which diverged to the west and led to the Chestnut Hill Meetinghouse and Millville. Thus the Southwicks and Daniels had little daily contact with Blackstone Village and East Blackstone Village. Most of those who lived here are buried at Chestnut Hill Meetinghouse. Hiram Daniels died just a year after his son's, Hiram Thayer Daniels, birth, leaving his widow with two young children to manage the farm. Mrs. Daniels maintained some cows and the apple orchard, which was greatly expanded by her son and heir, Hiram T. Daniels (1874-1949). Oral tradition states that Mrs. Daniels firmly directed farm activities and attended to details herself such as measuring the wood.

During Hiram T. Daniels proprietorship of the farm from the late 1800s, the rear section of the barn was constructed for his heifers, the cider mill was improved with a second press for the thriving apple orchard cultivated by Hiram T. and to accommodate other local farmers even those from Woonsocket, Rhode Island who brought apples for vinegar and cider production. Hiram T. Daniels also was responsible for building the stonewalls using oxen and dynamite to dig up all the rocks to make fertile fields.

Hiram T. Daniels married Carrie Mabel Stearns in 1896 and had six children. Their son, Adin Thayer Daniels, better known as "Charlie", maintained a working farm in perfect condition until his death in 1993. In the mid 1900's Charlie Daniels raised peaches and hayed the fertile fields. He also worked the cider mill with two presses powered by a steam engine and a large outside cistern until 1950. Vinegar and cider were processed and sold at the farm until the mid-twentieth century. Some years ago the steam engine, which powered the cider presses, was sold to Hopedale Mill, yet the cider mill retains its works representing an important building type and function.

In 1993, Charlie died leaving the farm to his eldest sister Doris Daniels King. Mrs. King has strived diligently to ensure continued preservation of the farm. In 2003 Doris turned over decision making to her niece Justine Southwick Brewer co-founder and past president of the Daniels Farmstead Foundation.



Mark Reil is the current president of the Daniels Farmstead Foundation, Inc., a non-profit preservation organization. Information source (U.S. Department of Interior, National Parks Service National Registry of Historic Places)