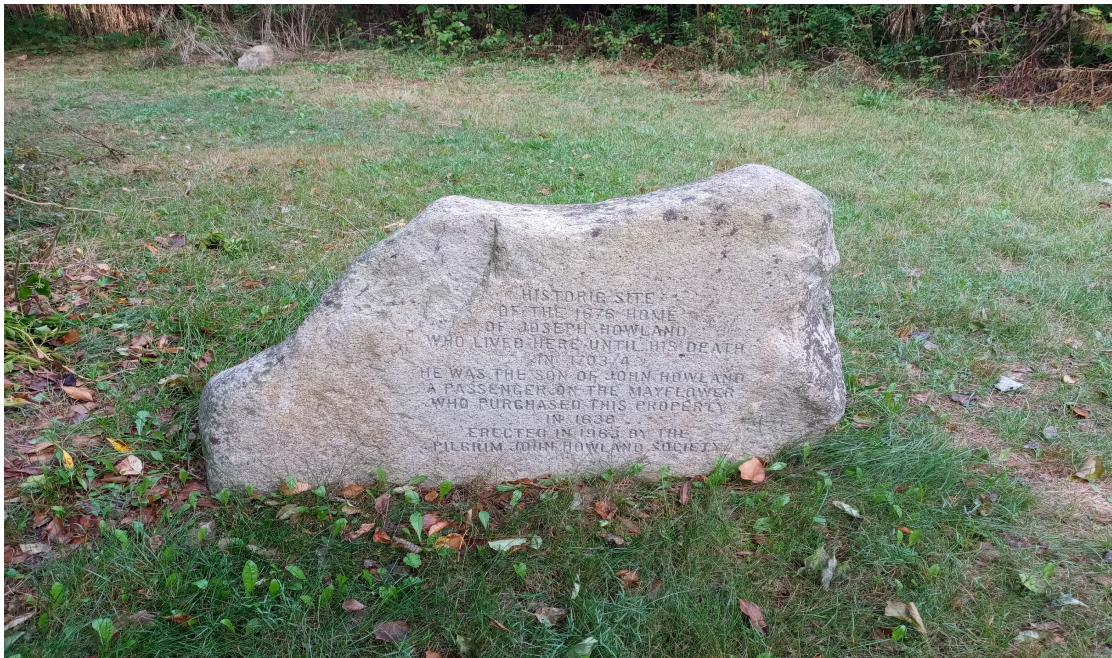




The 2020 Excavations
at the Joseph Howland (C-5) Homesite
Rocky Nook, Kingston, Ma



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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	1
Previous Excavations	1
2020 Excavations	2
Artifacts	2
Conclusions	3

Figures

Figure 1. Eldon Gay clearing brush 2020.....	4
Figure 2. Hypothesized location of Deetz excavation area (unnumbered outline) and location of Derek Wheeler's testing (numbered squares).....	5
Figure 3. Location of UMass GPR testing (colored block), Deetz and Wheeler testing, and 2020 work (red outlined area).....	6
Figure 4. 2020 excavation area location on Deetz/ Wheeler map.....	7
Figure 5. 2020 excavation area.....	8
Figure 6. 2020 excavation area photo (Wheeler unit visible as black plastic area on left side of photo).....	9
Figure 7. 2020 test pit profile.....	10
Figure 8. 2020 possible foundation outline (shown in red).....	11
Figure 9. Photo showing possible 2020 foundation outline (south wall to left of long measuring rod in center of picture).....	12
Figure 10. Possible 2020 building over laid on previous testing maps.....	13

Introduction

The 2020 excavations were more limited in scale than usual due to the impact of the Coronavirus. As a result, the excavations were carried out by only the author and Eldon Gay for two days, September 1 and 2, 2020 (Figure 1). The purpose of the excavations this year were to attempt to locate the hearth and/ or cellars associated with the Joseph Howland (C-05) homesite on the west side of Howland Lane.

Previous Excavations

Two programs of archaeological excavations are known to have occurred at the site, although illicit, but limited, pothunting occurred as well. Local residents and Howland descendants knew of the site prior to the start of Deetz's excavations in 1959. Deetz succeeded in locating the original chimney and two cellar holes associated with the house, but was unable to discern the footprint of the building itself (Figure 2) Deetz's work was followed a generation later by Derek Wheeler who focused his investigations, albeit accidentally, on the yard areas to the south and west of the house itself, providing us with an unprecedented glimpse into how Joseph organized that space around his house, while Deetz's work gave us a glimpse of the house itself.

Plimoth Plantation's excavations, under the direction of Dr. James Deetz, began their investigation at the site in July of 1959 and they continued through August of that year. This was the second site excavated by Deetz since starting work as the Plimoth Plantation staff archaeologist in 1958 (the first being the Bartlett Site on a golf course near Plimoth Plantation). The Joseph Howland site has the distinction for being the only Plymouth Colony site that Deetz actually created something of a site report when he produced a two page summary in August, 1959. The report gave an overview of what had been accomplished at the site in approximately a month's worth of digging. He further elaborated on his preliminary conclusions in two articles written for the Howland Quarterly in 1960. Deetz conducted further excavations in 1960 and found that the house had been built on the same site as an earlier Native camp. He reportedly recovered a bone awl and hammerstone beneath colonial material in the west cellar and found that one cellar was filled with compacted refuse while the other had complete or near complete artifacts. Returning in 1968, they focused work on the hearth area. At some point, excavators from Harvard, possible Deetz's graduate or undergraduate students, excavated at the site.

Derek Wheeler began work at the C-5 site in 2005 and spent the next eight years excavating for a week each year, for a total of 88 5 x 5' units being dug during that time. The field season each year consisted of clearing the underbrush from a square area measuring approximately 40 x 40' with 5' square units subsequently being laid out within that area. Topsoil was removed and a portion of each block was excavated to sterile subsoil. The strategy was to identify areas where artifact densities were low, which could represent the original area excavated by Deetz, with areas of higher artifact concentrations outside of the low density areas (representing previously unexcavated areas). Unfortunately, most probably due to Deetz's inconsistent screening of soils, artifacts were found virtually everywhere.

By combining the information recorded in the field notes and what was learned about the distributions and occurrences of modern artifacts when the collection was cataloged, I believe that many of the units that Wheeler excavated were located in areas where Deetz had previously dug (Figure 2). This figure shows where I think Deetz's excavations were in relation to Wheeler's. Wheeler felt he had concrete proof of Deetz's excavation area when he dug unit 147, where he excavated deeper than he had previously, and found 1960s Coke bottle glass resting on top of the intact subsoil. He also made note

throughout the years of the excavation about when he thought he was in backfilled areas. I think what was throwing him off was the probability that Deetz did not screen all the soil that he excavated; as a result, Wheeler encountered areas that had an abundance of artifactual material that may have just been poorly screened, or completely unscreened soils that Deetz had dug up. Artifacts may have been collected as they were found during excavation, but screening may have been minimal, at least some years.

UMass Boston conducted a Ground Penetrating Radar (GPR) survey of the property in 2014. The presence of areas of high resistance readings may show where the hearth and at least one of the cellar holes identified by Deetz were located (Figure 3). The area of highest resistance has a good probability of representing the hearth, while other areas of resistance to the northeast may represent one of the cellarholes and resistance to the west may be either foundation stones or stone dump piles from the excavation.

2020 Excavations

The 2020 excavation area measured 16.5 feet east to west by 15' wide north to south with a 4' long by 2' wide extension at the NW corner (Figures 4, 5, and 6). Excavations were carried out through the topsoil to the top of the subsoil, an average depth of 12 inches (30 cm) below surface. This topsoil was shoveled off and examined for artifacts, but very few were identified.

A test pit (labeled as Test Pit in Figure 5) measuring 17 inches (45 cm) square was excavated through what appeared to be the subsoil (Figure 7). It revealed a profile of a brown fill layer to 12" below surface. This layer contained brick and charcoal fragments as well as larger cobbles. This overlaid a 6" deep layer of similar soil that lacked the cobbles. These two layers, which I have identified as previous excavation fill and disturbed soil, overlaid the undisturbed B1 subsoil horizon.

Clearing of what was interpreted as old backfill soil (identified as such due to the brick charcoal fragments and relative lack of artifacts), revealed some concentrations of cobbles that appeared to form the outline of a building. This possible building outline measured approximately 9' (2.75m) east to west by 12' m (3.75 m) north to south (Figures 8 and 9). This possible building does not seem to be on the same alignment as the cellar holes and hearth that had been previously identified, but it is not known how Deetz oriented his original grid (Figure 10). The orientation I have shown is just speculation on my part based on what would make sense. It can be seen that the 2020 excavations should have overlapped with Deetz's work, but again, just like during Wheeler's work at the site, no definitive trace of the hearth or cellar holes was found.

Artifacts

Few artifacts were recovered with the total being eight (8) pieces. These consisted of the following:

- one complete hand wrought nail 2.2 inches long
- one hand wrought nail head and shank fragment
- one piece of quahog shell body
- one redware fragment with no glaze
- one redware fragment with brown glaze
- one wine bottle body fragment, dark olive in color

- one large mammal longbone midsection fragment
- one dark gray rhyolite flake fragment with platform .78" wide

Conclusion

Further work should be done to clear the brush to the west of the area tested in 2020. It is believed by the author and Eldon Gay that the cellar holes and hearth lay just north and west of where we excavated in 2020. It is important to finally locate the site of these features as it will allow us to tie together all the previous work into one cohesive whole. It will allow for an investigation of the siting of the original homesite within the landscape and help us to better understand why Joseph built his house here and whether his house replaced an earlier John Howland era structure at the site.



Figure 1. Eldon Gay clearing brush 2020

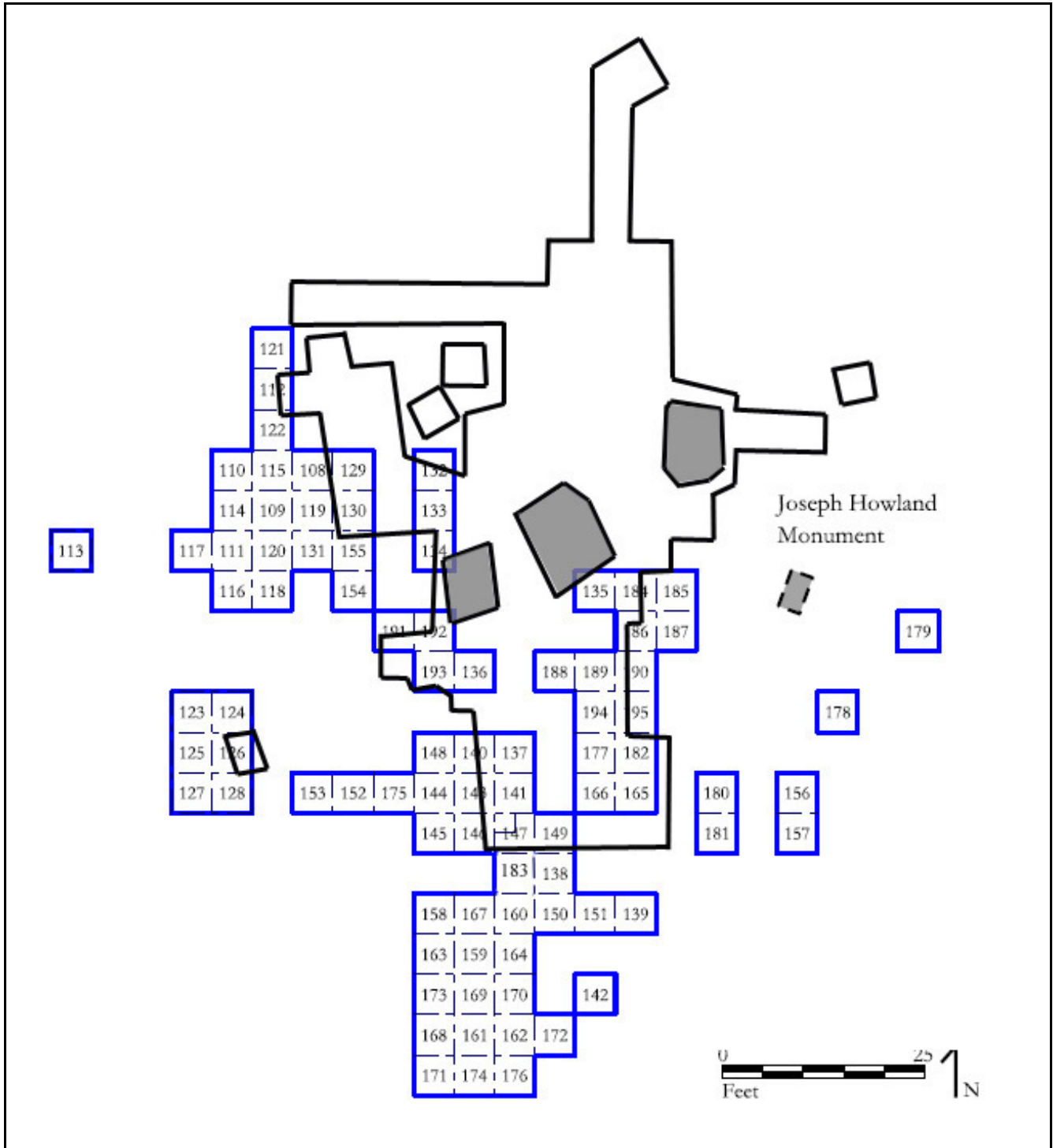


Figure 2. Hypothesized location of Deetz excavation area (unnumbered outline) and location of Derek Wheeler's testing (numbered squares)

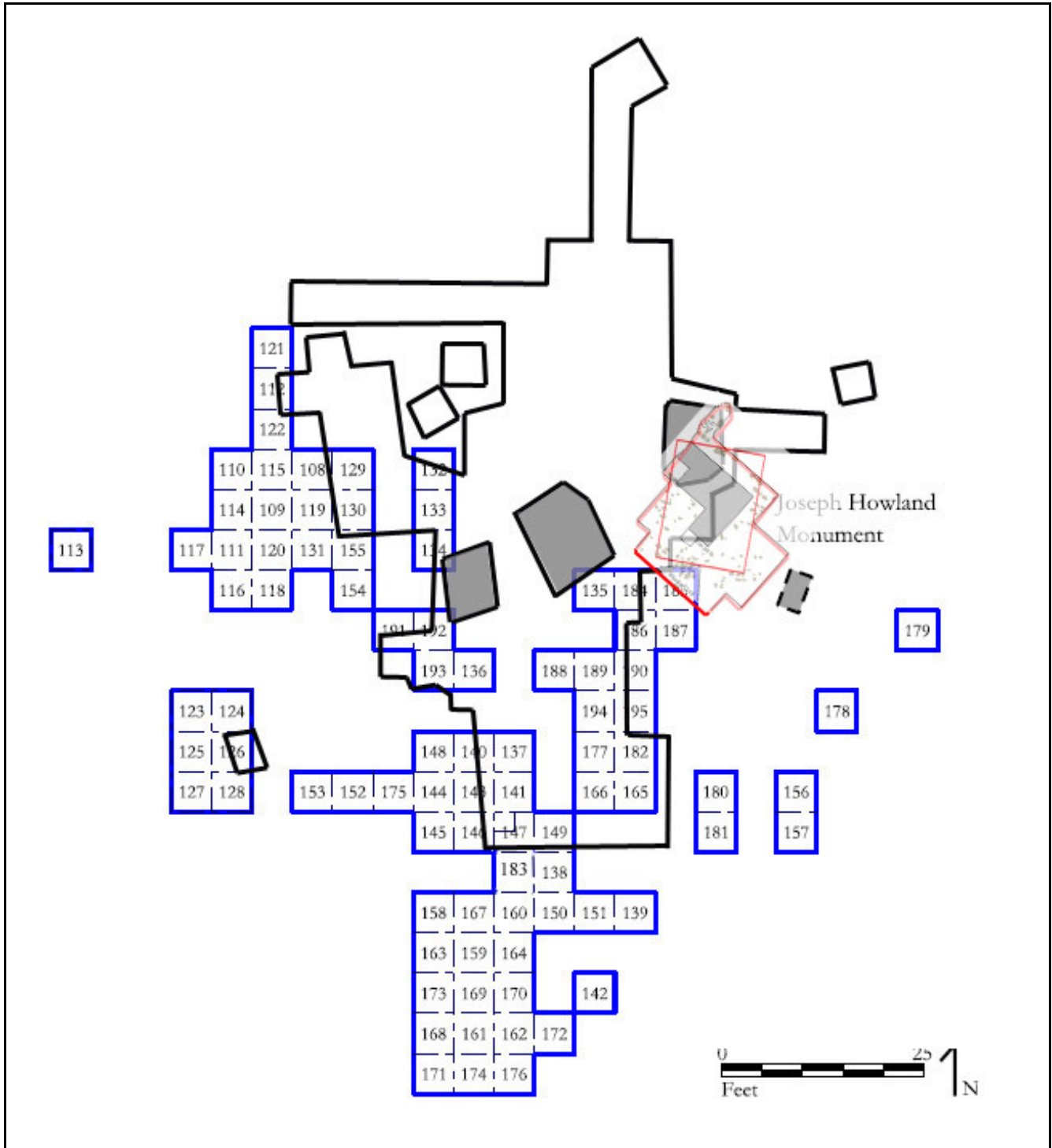


Figure 4. 2020 excavation area location on Deetz/ Wheeler map

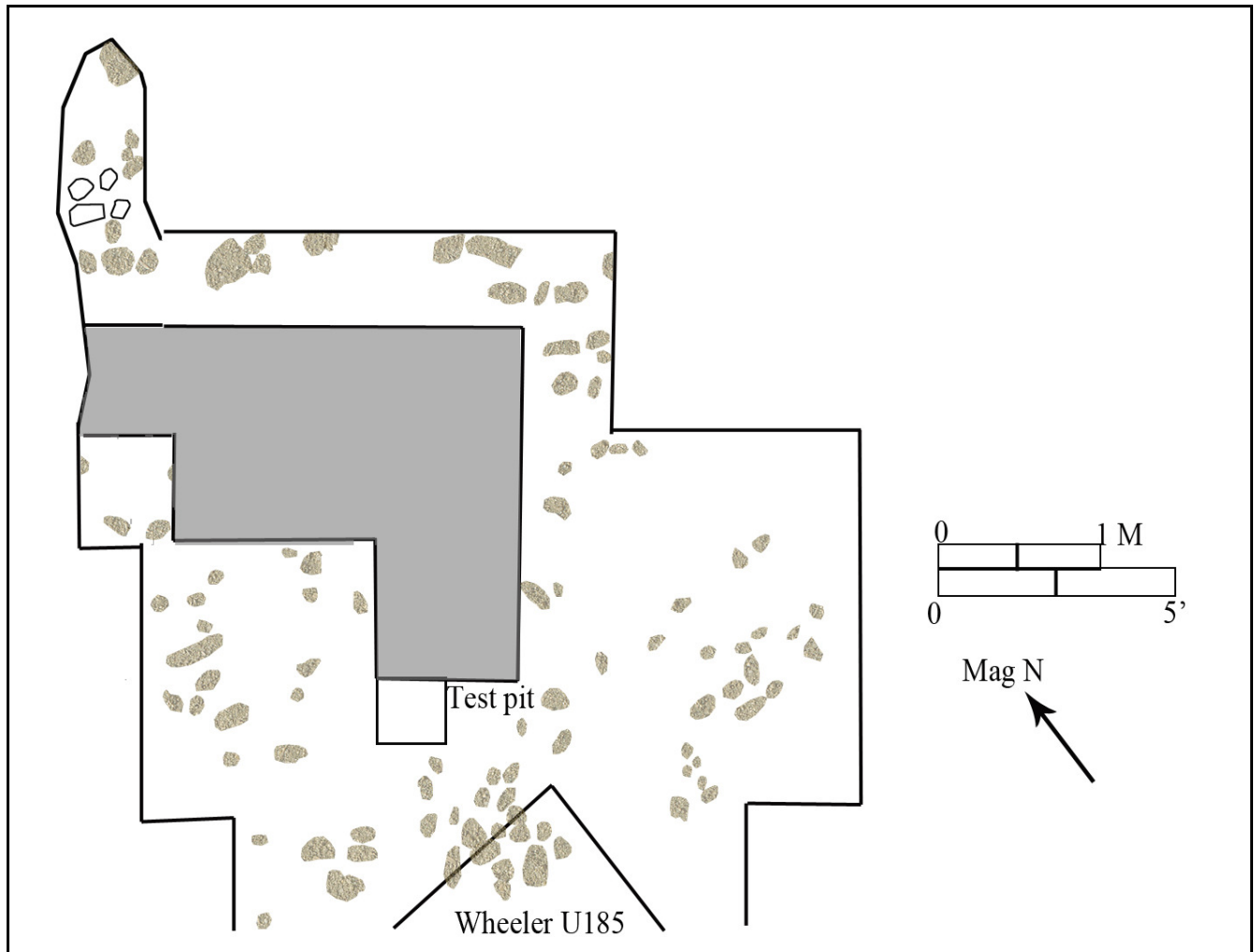


Figure 5. 2020 excavation area



Figure 6. 2020 excavation area photo (Wheeler unit visible as black plastic area on left side of photo)

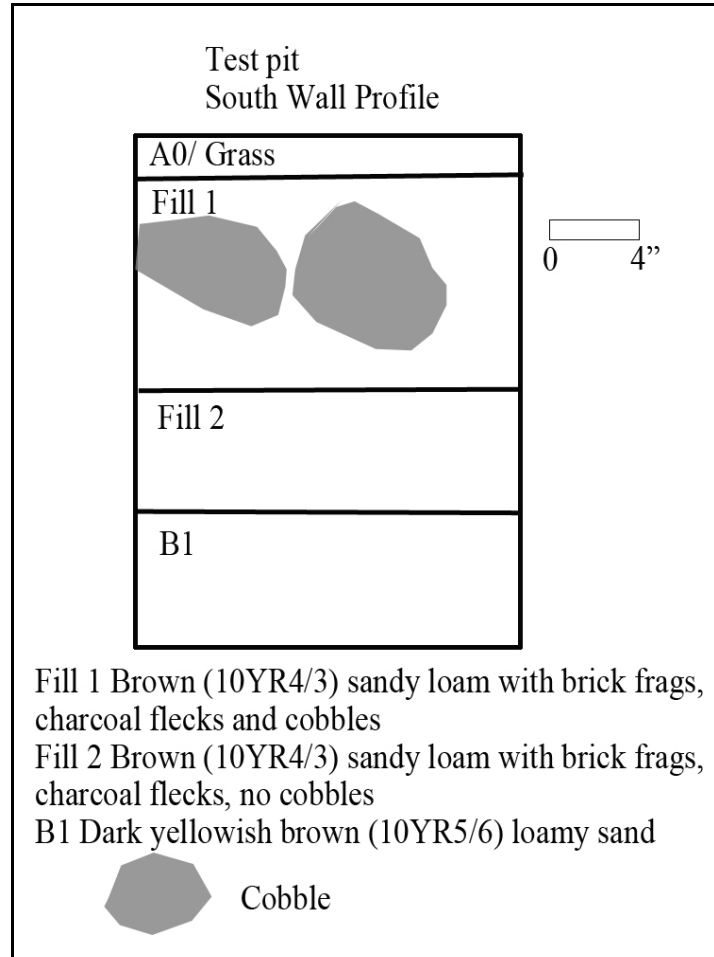


Figure 7. 2020 test pit profile

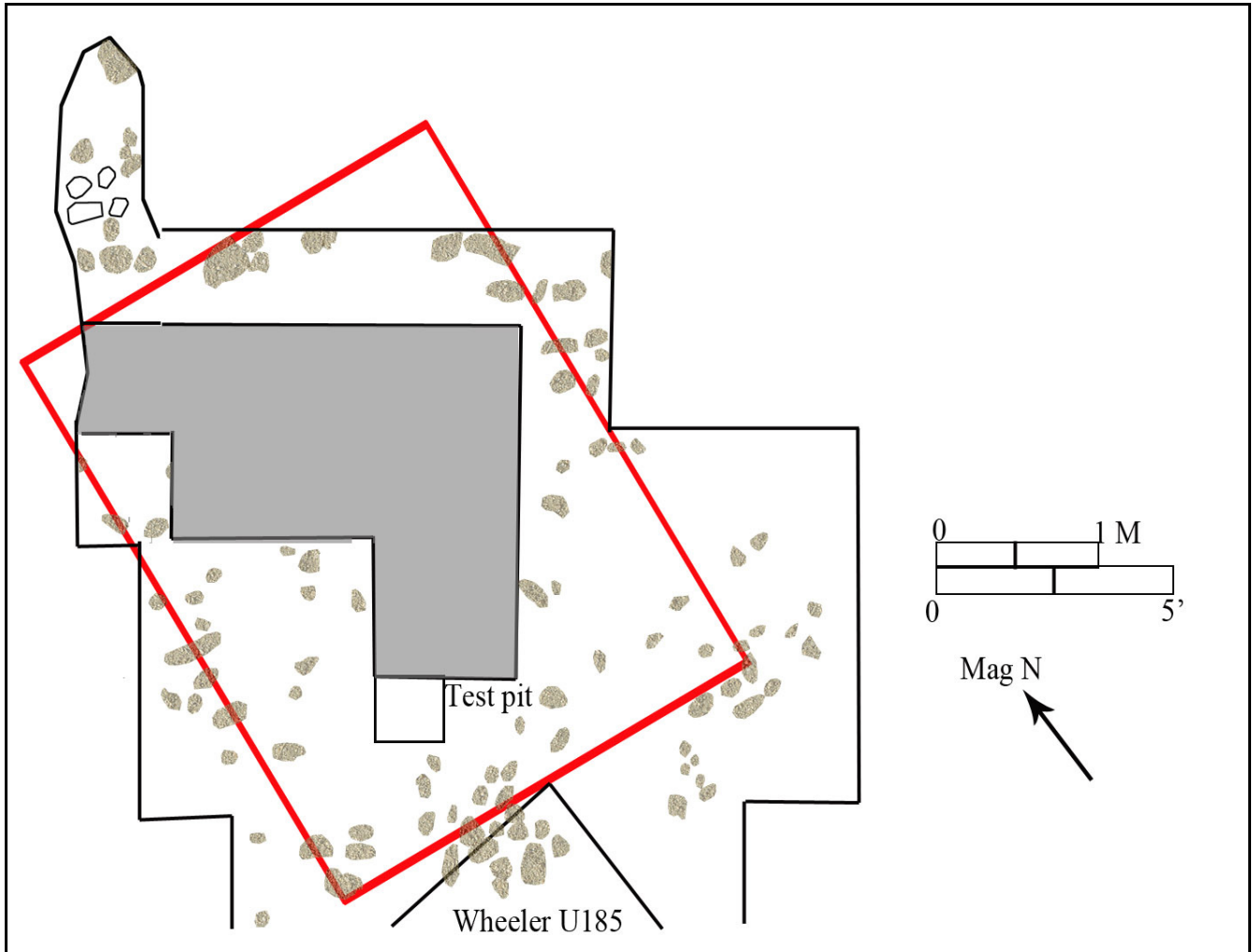


Figure 8. 2020 possible foundation outline (shown in red)



Figure 9. Photo showing possible 2020 foundation outline (south wall to left of long measuring rod in center of picture)

