

Thomas Small's Farm

"We shudder at the thought of living here...
Some of it is not worth writing a deed for."

Henry David Thoreau

After two centuries of European settlement the Truro plain had little resemblance with the forests which the Pilgrims found. Logging, farming, sheep raising, and the general needs of the settlement were a greater drain than the soil could provide. By 1850 the area was barren. Still, agricultural use was expanding, and in the 1860's Thomas Small began his 200-acre farm.

An observant person does not build without considering winters that are long and harsh – and Thomas Small was no exception. So, as the Wampanoag did, he selected this kettle for its protection from the wind, and here built his house and out-buildings.

A REMINDER: Artifact hunting is prohibited within Cape Cod National Seashore.



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For sixty years Thomas and his son, Warren, worked this earth. Cows were raised, heavily supplemented by saltmarsh hay, and corn and asparagus were grown, but the land's day of yielding a living was ending. And upon Warren Small's death in 1922, the farm was abandoned. Once a part of the Cape landscape, the structures were eventually burned.

Few remnants survive of the buildings which once stood here, yet there are more lasting marks. The dooryard favorites – grape, lilac, bounding bet, plum, and apple – all these were once a cultivated part of the farm. They are unkempt and untamed now, blending with the returning woods, but they endure – as reminders of how the land was used, and of a way of life that has passed from the Cape Cod scene.

Remain on designated trails to reduce exposure to disease-carrying insects, poison ivy, and other risks. Observe trail conditions while walking, and be aware of tree roots, stumps, and other naturally-occurring hazards.



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Small's Swamp Trail



A Kettle Forms

Even as they retreat, glaciers are shapers of the land. Their great loads of sand and gravel, boulders and rock powder are carried forth in muddy meltwater by the millions of tons, and piled layer upon layer. Thus it was that the forearm of Cape Cod from Orleans to North Truro was created, principally from the great ice lobe which lay a mile or two to the east about 15,000 years ago.

Here, as happened elsewhere on the Cape, a great block of ice was separated from the melting glacier, then gradually surrounded or covered with outwash deposits. As the ice block melted, the debris settled into the cavity left by melting ice, and the kettle was given its final form.

Only in the past 2,000 years or so did the Cape's fresh water layer intersect this kettle. Water-loving plants were able to grow on the moist kettle floor, and several feet of peat slowly accumulated. Swamp azalea and highbush blueberry are abundant now, but should the water level drop, or the soil dry as it builds up, the "swamp" will quickly progress to a stand of red maple and tupelo – and ultimately become a beech forest.



Layers of History

Like chapters in a book, the artifacts found within a seven and a half inch layer of swampy earth at Small's Swamp reveal a history of Native American presence that dates back more than 7,000 years. These indigenous people were at first, hunters, gatherers, and fishers, then later began to also plant crops.

Planting was done according to moon phases and other indicators, such as when the white oak leaves were the size of a mouse's ear. Each tribal family unit or "clan" planted gardens during the spring and summer. The forest where gardens were to be planted was cleared by fire. The soil was then prepared with a variety of fertilizers including small fish and seaweed. The crops of maize, pumpkins, beans, and squash were considered female plants and were tended by the women only. Tobacco was considered a male plant, which only men planted and tended in secret areas, known only to the individual. Crop rotation was practiced as to not fully deplete the soil. It was understood that the earth would need time to nourish itself after raising such important plant life, much like the time between a woman's motherhood years and becoming a grandmother.

These indigenous people preserved grain, vegetables, fish, and meats for winter use. Their tools and technology evolved through time, as did all people of the world. Industries such as weaving baskets and mats for the wetu (house), making pottery, and tanning hides for clothing were primarily done by the women. The men wove rope and tote lines, built the frame-works for the wetus, and made fishing and hunting equipment.



Village life had many other tasks and arts that were done by men, children, elders, and women.

The tribal government was headed by a single spokesperson called a "sachem" that took his or her advice from a selected group of "sagamores." The clan mothers selected all leaders, and ruled over plots of land and their extended family unit. Each village was a represented member of the Wampanoag Nation led by a massasoit. Upon the arrival of Europeans in 1615, the Wampanoag massasoit was named Ousameesaquin (Yellow Feather). The Wampanoag Nation was composed of sixty-seven tribes throughout southern New England and the eastern part of Rhode Island. Today, there are only three Wampanoag tribes still present on the Cape and Islands: Mashpee on Cape Cod, Aquinnah (Gay Head) on Martha's Vineyard, and the Herring Pond tribe in the town of Bourne. Many thousands of Wampanoag people perished from diseases brought by the Europeans.
