

## THE WILLIAM CULLEN BRYANT HOMESTEAD

Located on a hillside overlooking the Westfield River Valley, the Homestead is on the site of the original Cummington community founded in 1762. The Town Meetinghouse was constructed near what is now the five-corner intersection of the Homestead in 1782. Seven years later it was moved and a schoolhouse, which Bryant attended, was erected on the site. Cummington's center shifted to the valley and as the community grew, Bryant's father; Dr. Peter Bryant, served as physician and in the state legislature.

Cummington's population diminished after 1840, since many townspeople, like Bryant's family, abandoned their farms and moved westward. As Bryant observed "the soil is now exhausted; the fields...are turned into pastures...and the land which once sufficed for two farms now barely answers for one." Woodlands, a source of fuel and building materials, were also depleted.

In 1865, 30 years after the Homestead was sold out of the family, Bryant purchased his former boyhood home and used it as a summer retreat from late July through early September for the remainder of his life. Year-round the house was occupied by a series of caretakers and their families.

Bryant remained deeply committed to his childhood community and made a number of significant contributions to Cummington. He donated \$500 to build a new schoolhouse located near the Homestead. A larger gift was a library, complete with book collection and a librarian's residence. These two structures remain on the south intersection of Routes 9 and 112. To make access easier to the Library from the Homestead, Bryant paid for a road that later became part of Route 112. He also built a road to West Cummington from the Homestead that is still in use today.

**1. BARN** The original barn was built in 1801 by William Cullen Bryant's father, Dr. Peter Bryant. When the property was purchased by Welcome Tillson in 1835, the new owner built a new barn, possibly using materials from the original structure. Barn additions, including stables, were made in 1866 and 1875 by William Cullen Bryant. In 1880, his daughter, Julia, added a section to the north for apple storage. The last addition and restoration to this structure was made in the 1930s by his great grandson, Conrad Goddard. Since that time, the southwest section added by Bryant was removed.

**2. HEMLOCK HEDGE** Hemlock hedges were used around the house as natural fences. This hedge marked the end of the pasture and the edge of the road in front of the house.

**3. HISTORIC HOUSE** The original house was either built or remodeled by Ebenezer Snell, William Cullen Bryant's maternal grandfather, when he purchased the property in 1789. Dr. Peter Bryant added a two-room office in the front, and a kitchen and wood house in the rear in 1801. In 1842, Welcome Tillson removed the office addition. When Bryant re-purchased the family home in 1865, he converted it to a three-story summer residence by raising the first floor, expanding the house northward, and replacing his father's office on a smaller scale. His daughter, Julia, made additional external changes. Few changes have been made since then. The current historic house is painted in the colors that were used in 1870.

**4. CARETAKER'S COTTAGE** In 1931, Conrad Goddard built a caretaker's residence across from the red barn ending the caretaker's year-round residence in the main house. the Caretaker's Cottage is now used as staff housing for the Trustees of Reservations.

- 5. FIVE MAPLES** Sarah and Peter Bryant had seven children; five boys (Austin, William Cullen, Cyrus, Arthur, and John Howard) and two daughters (Sarah and Charity Louise). Five maples were planted by the family in the early 19th century to represent the five sons. These trees are now estimated to be nearly 200 years old. They are nearing the end of their natural life cycle and will soon have to be replaced.
- 6. PINE WINDBREAK** Bryant planted a pine windbreak behind the house in the 1860s to shield it from the winds coming across the pastureland. The original pines grew to such a height that they endangered the historic house during windstorms. They were replaced with the existing trees in the 1990s and now look much as the original trees did when Bryant first planted them.
- 7. MAPLE TREE ALLEE** The maple trees along the drive were planted by the Bryant's around the time the family planted the five maples honoring their sons. They, too, are nearing the end of their life cycle, since they are close to 200 years old.
- 8. POND** At the urging of his youngest brother, John Howard, Bryant built this pond in 1866 to serve as an ice source for the Homestead. Currently, the pond is used by the Cummington Fire Department as a water source.
- 9. BRYANT'S SCHOOL HOUSE** Site of Cummington's First Meetinghouse The Town Meetinghouse was constructed near what is now the five-corners intersection of the Homestead in 1782. Seven years later it was moved and a schoolhouse, which Bryant attended, was erected on the site.
- 10. RIVULET TRAIL** This trail traversing the site of the old growth forest runs close to the Rivulet Brook that provided water for the Homestead. The area served as inspiration for Bryant's poem, *The Rivulet*, 1824 "... As pure thy limpid waters run, As bright they sparkle to the sun; As fresh and thick the bending ranks Of herbs that line thy oozy banks..."
- 11. OLD-GROWTH FOREST** An old-growth forest (also referred to as an original, or primary growth, forest) is one that has not been significantly disturbed by human actions. It is an example of what a forest would become after thousands of years of evolution through the interactions of climate, plants, animals, and natural disturbances. Since humans evolved and began cultivating the earth, very few old-growth forests exist, especially in New England. This small area contains trees greater than 200 years of age, and provides a wonderful sample of undisturbed forests.
- 12. WHITE PINE STAND** This white pine stand contains trees close to or topping 150 ft. in height, which is a rarity in New England. This is especially unusual since the trees are relatively young at 120-170 years. Because of their height, this stand is considered to be one of the top ten white pine stands in the eastern United States.
- 13. ENTRANCE TO WOODS** The entrance to the Homestead woods inspired Bryant's poem, *Inscription for the Entrance to a Wood*, 1817 "...enter this wild wood and view the haunts of Nature. The calm shade Shall bring a kindred calm, and the sweet breeze That makes the green leaves dance, shall waft a balm to thy sweet heart...."

**14. SUGAR BUSH** for over 200 years, the maple trees in this area were tapped to provide maple syrup. In her diaries, Sarah Snell Bryant comments repeatedly about the "boys [William Cullen and his brothers] the sugar trees. The trees are still being tapped, and the syrup is available for purchase at the Homestead.

**15. SITE OF SUGAR HOUSE** The Sugar House was used to boil the sap into maple syrup and existed until the late 20th century. It fell into disrepair and was dismantled by the Trustees of Reservations.

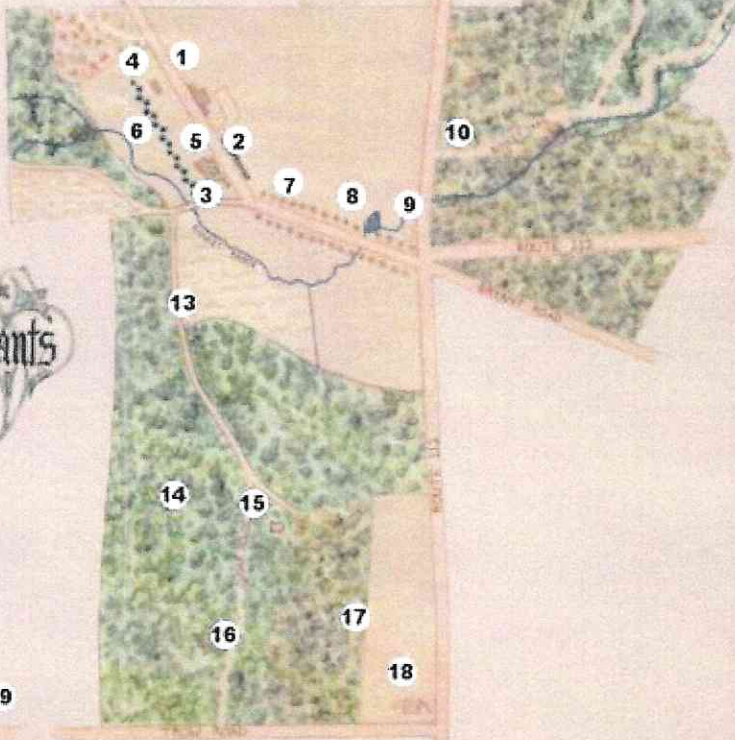
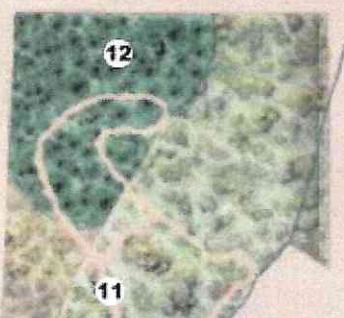
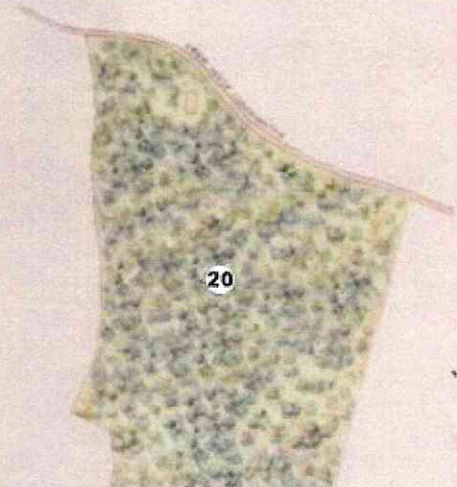
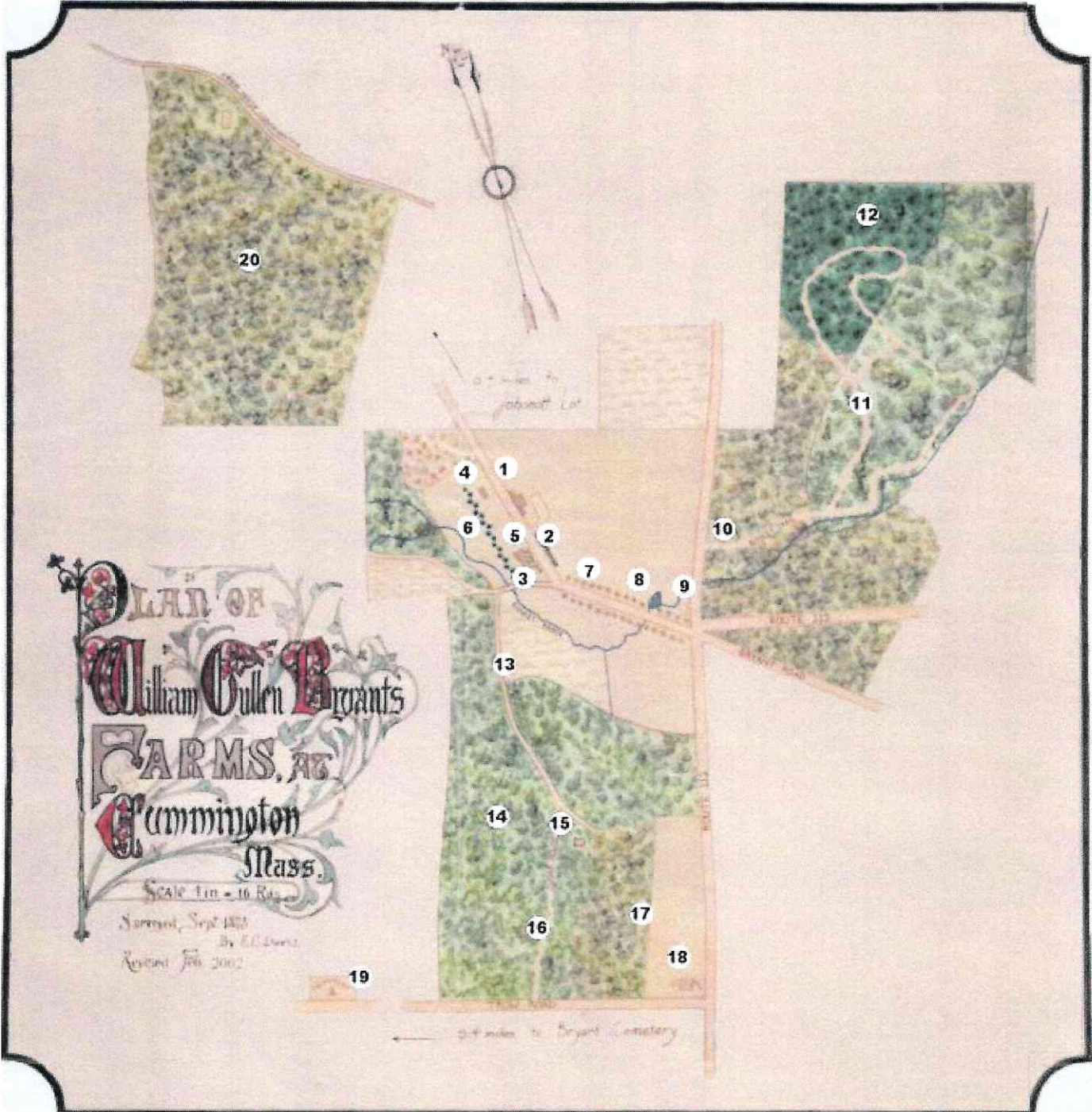
**16. SUGAR HOUSE TRAIL** This trail leads through the sugar bush and past the Sugar House site.

**17. REMNANT APPLE ORCHARD** Bryant used the Homestead lands to plant many pear and apple orchards, directing his caretakers to plant specific varieties. His mother and brothers established a very successful nursery in Princeton, IL, and the entire family was involved in apple and pear production. This part of the property contains a small remnant of one of many orchards present on the property during Bryant's time.

**18. SCHOOLHOUSE SITE** In 1872 Bryant donated \$500 to build a schoolhouse located near the Homestead on the corner of Trow Road and Route 112. The schoolhouse building was moved and is currently on another property near the Homestead.

**19. BRYANT CEMETERY** Bryant's maternal grandparents, Ebenezer Snell and Sarah Packard Snell, as well as his father, Peter Bryant, are buried in This early Cummington cemetery. Bryant and his wife, Frances, were buried at his Long Island estate, Cedarmere.

**20. JOHONOTT LOT** This section of the property was purchased by Ebenezer Snell in 1773. There is a cellar hole and two gravesites that inspired Bryant's poem, *The Two Graves*, 1826 "Tis a bleak wild hill, but green and bright In the summer warmth and the mid-day light;... And fresh from the west is the free wind's breath; There is nothing here that speaks of death. ...Yet there are graves in this lonely spot Two humble graves, - but I meet them not. I have seen them, - eighteen years are past Since I found their place in the brambles last..."



← 2 1/2 miles to Bryant Cemetery