

Poor Farm Orchard/Dowse Orchard

(also Doon Farm Orchard)
End of Rockwood Street



Form	911
Town	Sherborn
Area	
USGS Quad	Medfield
Assessor's No.	10/5
Ownership	Private
Type Of Landscape	Orchard
Date or Period	1946
Source	Tax valuations
Alterations	
Condition	Good
Acreage	85 acres
Setting	Rural/agricultural
Recorded by	Sanford Johnson, 12/98
Photographs	Roll 11
Organization	Sherborn Historical Commission

VISUAL/DESIGN ASSESSMENT

The orchard at the northeast end of Rockwood Street, formerly called the "Poor Farm Orchard" in tax valuations, is part of an 85-acre parcel with 12 acres planted in apple trees. Two acres of the parcel are planted in Christmas trees, 3 acres of tillable land and approximately 30 acres of swampy land. Ground slopes to the northeast with Peter's Hill rising to 290 feet at the south edge of the orchard. Rockwood Street traverses the base of the hill and is separated from the orchard by a low stone wall. Land flattens at the end of the road where a break in the wall gives access to the orchard. A system of dirt roads, some of which are cut into hillsides, provides for circulation by vehicles among the trees.

Trees are planted in rows and are pruned to maintain the low height required by productive apple trees.

HISTORICAL NARRATIVE

Apple growing was the most common cash crop in many parts of the commonwealth from the period of first settlement. This was true in Sherborn as can be seen in the many orchards that continue to grow here. Most growers were subsistence farmers who processed the crop into cider and vinegar. Most orchards were between one and 5 acres, while the largest were around 20 acres. There were 22 cider mills in the town in 1798. This number probably rose throughout the 19th century. Some cider manufacturers achieved an industrial scale of production as at the former J. Holbrook and Sons Cider Mill at [51 Forest Street**](#), said to have been the world's largest refined cider mill in the late 1800s.

The farmer and cider manufacturer George F. Clement lived at [51 North Main Street**](#) with his family from ca. 1865 until ca. 1910. 1885 tax valuations indicate he owned a parcel called the "Hill Lot" comprising 12 acres. This may be an earlier name for the peach orchard which was located on the top of Peter's Hill. Valuations note that it was planted with a peach orchard, on top of Peter's Hill. Between 1895 and 1905, the Clements were taxed for ownership of what the tax valuations call the "Poor Farm Orchard", a 2 acre lot referring to the orchard at the west end of Rockwood Street. The town almshouse was located at the end of Rockwood Street from 1857-1893 and gave its name to this parcel of land. Mr. Clement owned a cider mill which was valued at \$150 in 1865. This amount gradually increased to \$3300 by 1895. At this time, the mill is mentioned in conjunction with machinery, possibly a steam engine as was used to grind apples at [102 Washington Street**](#).

Charles A. Dowse bought a parcel of land at the site of the town's former Poor Farm in 1946 from Arthur and Mary Doon. There were no fruit trees on the parcel at that time. The former Doon parcel, now called the Doon Farm, adjoined Mr. Clement's orchard to the east. Fruit trees continue to grow on both parcels of land. Mr. Dowse's father, Charles H. Dowse inherited his ancestral home at [100 North Main Street**](#) around 1895 and changed the family's economic focus from the manufacture of shoes to farming. He acquired the orchard around 1915 and increased its size from 2 acres to 12. In 1919, Mr. Dowse began selling fruit, grown behind 100 North Main, and vegetables on his front lawn. Later his grandson, Charles A. Dowse, Jr. built a stand for fruit sales. The fruit stand, orchard and house remain in the family's possession. A modern apple refrigeration and cider processing facility are located behind the roadside stand.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- 1856 Walling map; 1874 Beers map; 1889 Walker map; 1939 WPA map of Sherborn
- Resident directories, 1897, 1913, 1917
- Conversation with Betsy Johnson 12/98
- Town valuations, 1865-1945

Betty Dowse says Charles A. Dowse, Jr. planted the apple trees in 1947 & 48 after his father, C. Arthur Dowse, had bought the property in 1946.

Sketch Map:

