



# Amesbury & Salisbury Agricultural & Horticultural Society

by

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# Amesbury & Salisbury Agricultural & Horticultural Society

formed in 1856



Note on card states, "Oxen of J. P. Little (Woodsom) farm, shown at fair ca. 1900"

Post card courtesy of Amesbury Public Library History Dept.

# Amesbury & Salisbury Agricultural & Horticultural Society

Amesbury's location derives from 75 feet of drop in the Powow river, around Market Square, powering a history of industry and productivity. Easily forgotten is how much agricultural land surrounds Amesbury, along with farm animals and wildlife roaming through that land, its adjacent woods, and even into downtown. It has been easily forgotten that local agriculture once supported an active Amesbury fairgrounds and regional fall fair.

The Amesbury and Salisbury Agricultural & Horticultural Society was formed in 1856\*. The admission ticket shown below is from their first exhibition year of 1863, agriculture being sufficiently part of the social fabric that events were held during disruption of the Civil War. The agricultural society had for years a distinguished corresponding secretary in John Greenleaf Whittier, who grew up on a Haverhill farm.

The fairgrounds and exhibition building were apparently built in 1892, and are first seen on the 1894 Sanborn insurance map, on Market street opposite the E. S. Felch and Miller Brothers carriage complexes. Miller Brothers reportedly stored completed carriage work over at the fairgrounds during busy times. Fall fairs were held during late September, hosting displays of livestock, poultry, fruits, vegetables, flowers, art and "domestic manufacture". The Amesbury Dailey News reported that especially popular were plowing contests and the competition to pull a 5000 lb. sledge of rocks in classes of large horses, small horses, and oxen\*\*.

• *A Chronological Record of Principal Events in Amesbury, Massachusetts*, Emily B. Smith, Amesbury, 1901, pg. 24

\*\* Online archives of Amesbury Public Library

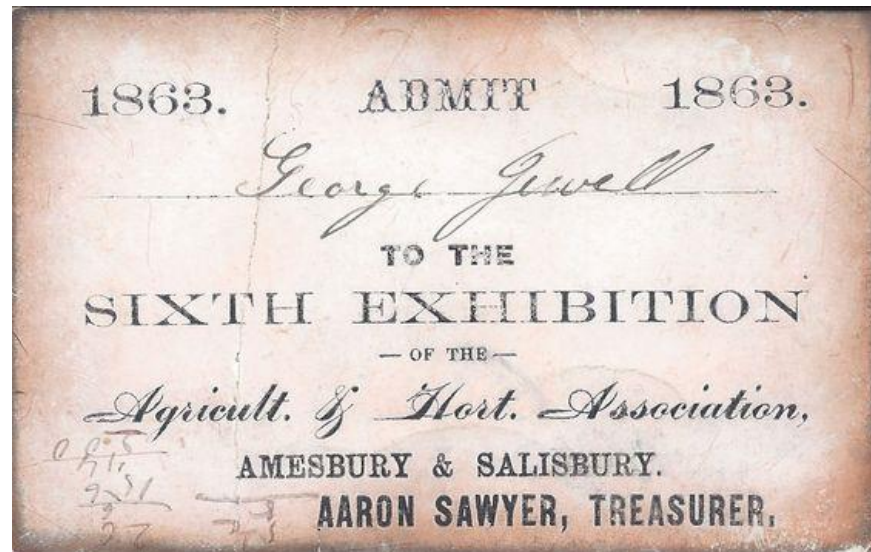
Western plains had been mass-producing grains, which were durable and transportable. Local agriculture thus concentrated on more perishable fresh fruits, produce, and livestock, which were readily absorbed by the many regional industrial centers, and yielded substantially higher dollar/acre value than did grain. Amesbury's fall fair served northern Essex County communities down through Rowley, enjoying large displays and attendance.

A 1908 news report counted 184 animals in the cattle shed, including oxen, cows, bulls and calves, sheep, plus, "Besides these are many horses, sheep, pigs, etc." There were also arrays of ducks, geese, fowl, as well as such home products as mats, rugs, quilts, jams and jellies, arts, and crafts. The 1897 fair featured a balloon ascension; Massachusetts Governor, Curtis Guild, spoke at the 1907 event. The fair operated profitably for years as a display and expression of a robust agrarian lifestyle.

Aside from agriculture, businesses showed products and home furnishings, such as sewing machines phonographs, and an electric range. Local industrial products were also displayed, including from the Amesbury Bent Glass Company (1907), Amesbury Thermometer Company (1907), and the Hartley Loop Weave Company (1908) (all interesting Amesbury industrial episodes).

It appears that the fairs may have continued up until around World War I. The fairgrounds seems to have disappeared during the 1920s, and the site is vacant on the 1930 Sanborn map. Around 1912, the buildings were used briefly by Thomas Miller to produce metal automobile bodies, after which he took up with R. Briggs on Friend Street.

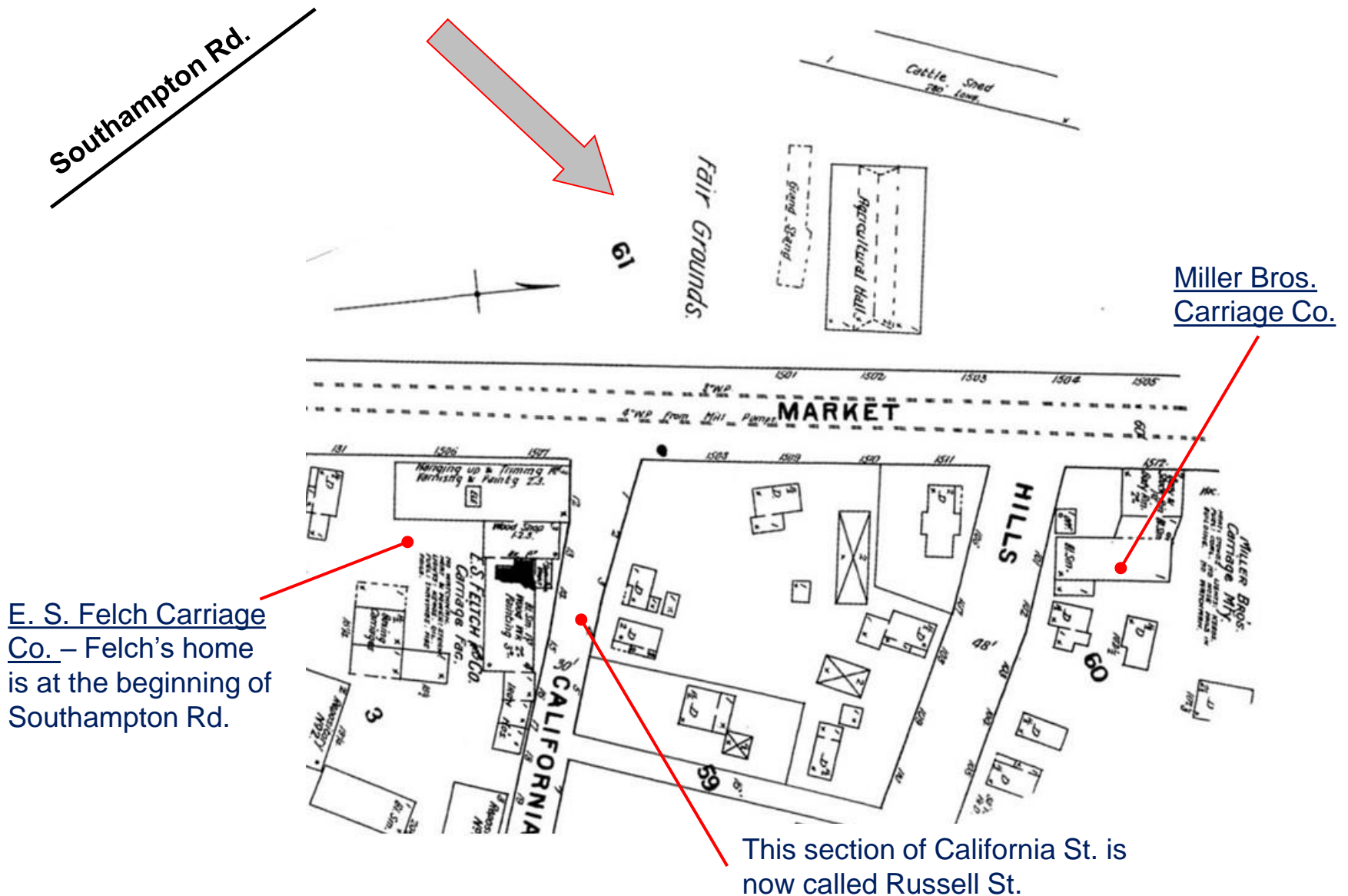
The lifestyle represented by the fair was gradually diminishing. Increasingly rapid, and eventually refrigerated, transportation was undercutting local produce and livestock markets, and smaller farms became less commercially viable. The generations who could remember such events are gone, and this segment of Amesbury life only came to light through researching period maps and newspaper articles.



# Amesbury & Salisbury Agricultural & Horticultural Society - 1894

Market St. location of agricultural fairgrounds, just past Southampton Rd.

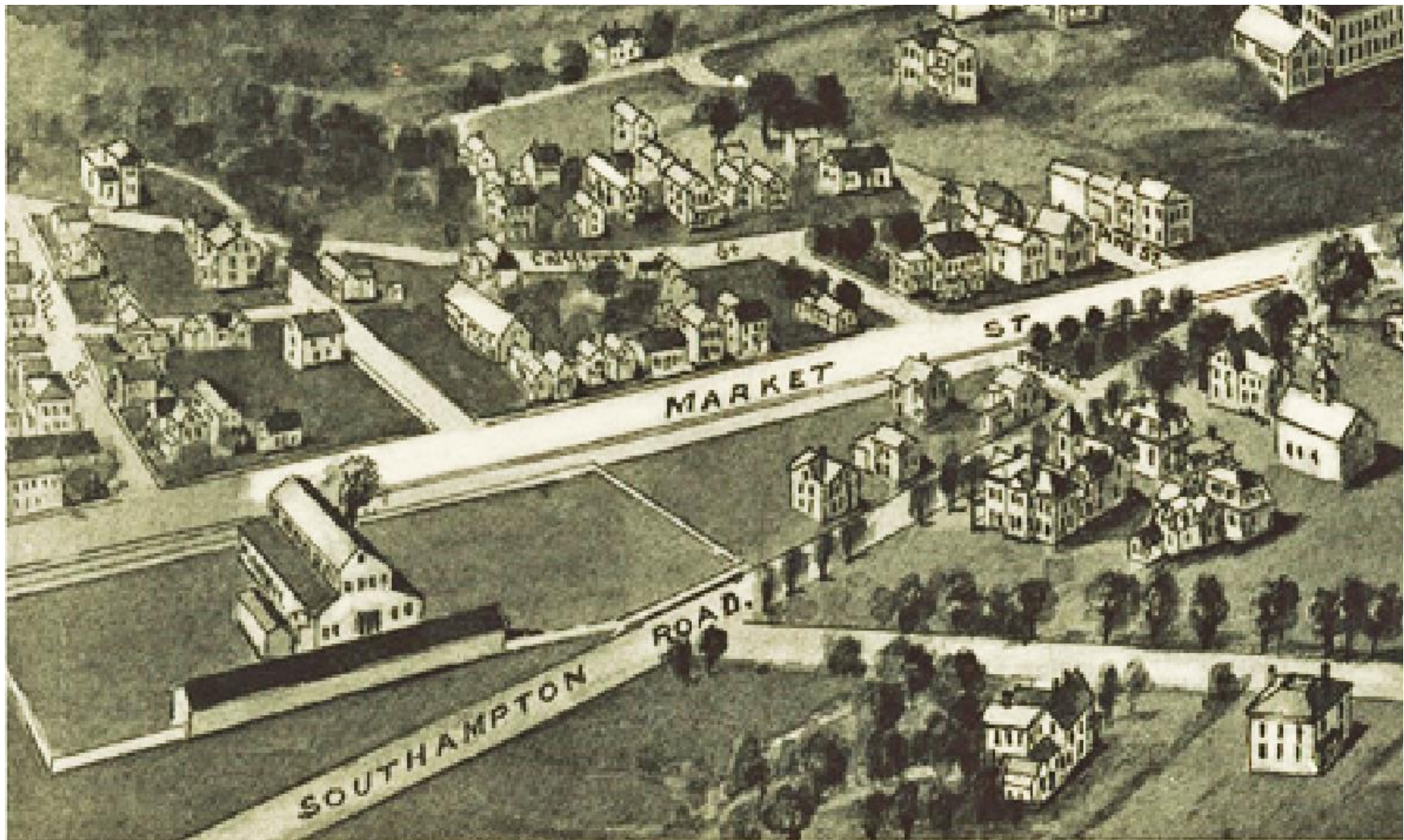
1894 Sanborn Map, sht. 11



E. S. Felch Carriage Co. – Felch’s home is at the beginning of Southampton Rd.

# Agricultural Fairgrounds – 1914 Aerial Map

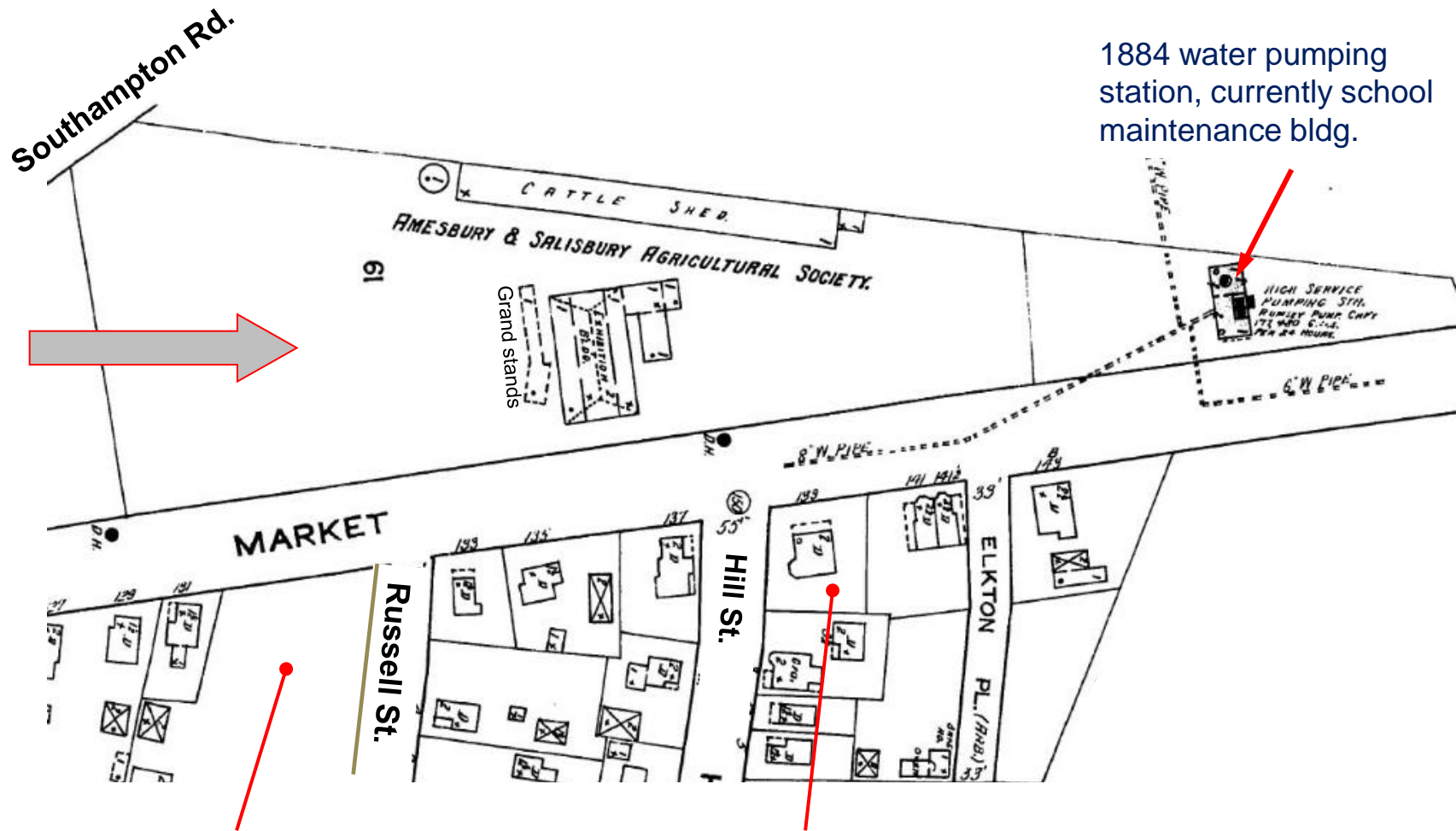
Looking east across Southampton Road and Market Street. This view of the large barn and adjacent tree match the photo on front page, with the long cattle shed in back, as seen on Sanborn maps.



# Amesbury & Salisbury Agricultural & Horticultural Society - 1918

Market St. location of agricultural fairgrounds, just past Southampton Rd.

1918 Sanborn Map, sht. 13



1884 water pumping station, currently school maintenance bldg.

Formerly E. S. Felch Carriage Co.

Formerly Miller Bros. Carriage Co.