



# Preliminary Study Report

**Proposed Local Historic District:**

Keene's Brook Historic District:

The Thomas Randall Sr. and Sarah Simmons Randall House

324 Keene Street

Duxbury, MA 02332

By: The Duxbury  
Local Historic District Commission  
December 2021

## **SUMMARY SHEET**

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## **IMPORTANT DATES**

The expected date of the Public Hearing for Duxbury is February 12, 2022  
The expected date of Town Meeting is March 12, 2022  
(There is currently one proposed property for the Keene's Brook Local Historic District.)

## **CONCLUSION**

The Duxbury Local Historic District Commission, acting as the study committee, recommends the establishment of the Keene's Brook Local Historic District.

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## Introduction

In Duxbury, MA, a small community with rich agricultural and ship-building history, along with many other activities related to agriculture and ship-building, a bylaw has been enacted to protect the homes and structures that make the town remarkable. The bylaw, created by the Local Historic District Commission (LHDC), is used to determine which structures are believed to have historical value, and subsequently place those structures under protection from demolitions and building alterations that would significantly change their character.

Duxbury structures under protection of the bylaw are part of a Local Historic District (LDH). Several Local Historic District homes exist in the town today, and many community members are considering designating their properties as well. Homes are added to the Local Historic District during the Annual Town Meeting, and there are currently two (2) proposed properties found as potential Local Historic District homes for the spring 2022 Town Meeting. In addition to the property at 324 Keene St., the Simmons Farm at 761 Temple Street is being considered for a LHD in a separate report by the Local Historic District Commission and the Simmons Farm Working Group.

The Local Historic District of Duxbury is crucial for protecting the historical structures that give the town its unique charm. Some community benefits of historic districts include:

- Preserving the character and aesthetic of Duxbury
- Protecting the rich history and beauty of Duxbury
- Fostering a sense of pride within the community
- Providing educational opportunities for generations to come
- Connecting Duxbury residents to the history of the town

In Duxbury, to date, eleven Local Historic Districts have been established:

<u>NAME of DISTRICT</u>	<u>YEAR EST.</u>
Bradford District	2011
Bay Road District	2016
Bay View Road District	2016
First Parish District	2011
King Caesar District	2018
Millbrook District	2016
Powder Point District	2016
Stetson Place District	2017
Surplus Street District	2017
Washington Street District	2018
Winsor District	2011

## Methodology

Keene's Brook runs north for about 1.6 miles on the western edge of Duxbury. Its meadowlands were in demand for the grazing of livestock beginning in the late 17<sup>th</sup> century. The brook was dammed to create Keene's millpond, which is the headwaters of the South River. The First Period miller's house, an exquisite and humble Cape, remains. The Town of Duxbury owns and has restored the foundation of a 19<sup>th</sup>-century sawmill, and the Ashdod Forest and other conservation land contains Keene's Brook. The forest has the c. 1665 Josiah Keene house's foundation, enormous stone walls and stone-fenced animal pens. It was on upland above the brook and meadowlands that Thomas Randall Sr. built his farmhouse and with his wife, Sarah Simmons Randall, raised their family of eight children.

The impetus for creating the Keene's Brook Historic District was the direct result of the enthusiasm for historic preservation and restoration by two residents of the proposed District, the homeowners of the Thomas Randall Sr. and Hannah Simmons Randall farmhouse. One of the owners is a fairly new member (an alternate) of the Local Historic District Commission. This Commission member researched the history of the house in order for the Duxbury Rural and Historical Society to approve a date board for it and she has made a list, included herein, of all the properties that would be appropriate for the long-term goal of a fuller Keene's Brook Historic District. Although this proposal is for the Randall-Simmons house alone, the Commission hopes it is only the beginning for a much larger Keene's Brook Historic District. The area is about a mile long and includes a First Period house, as well as Town of Duxbury property (a sawmill foundation), a 19<sup>th</sup>-century chapel, Duxbury's largest barn (c. 1870), and many other historic properties. Most of the historic structures, though not all, are listed in MACRIS.

## Justification of the Boundaries

The Thomas Randall Sr. and Hannah Simmons Randall house sits on a small portion of its original land, now Assigned Parcel ID numbers 012-065-002; 012-065-004. The Land Court Certificate Reference is LCC 464089.

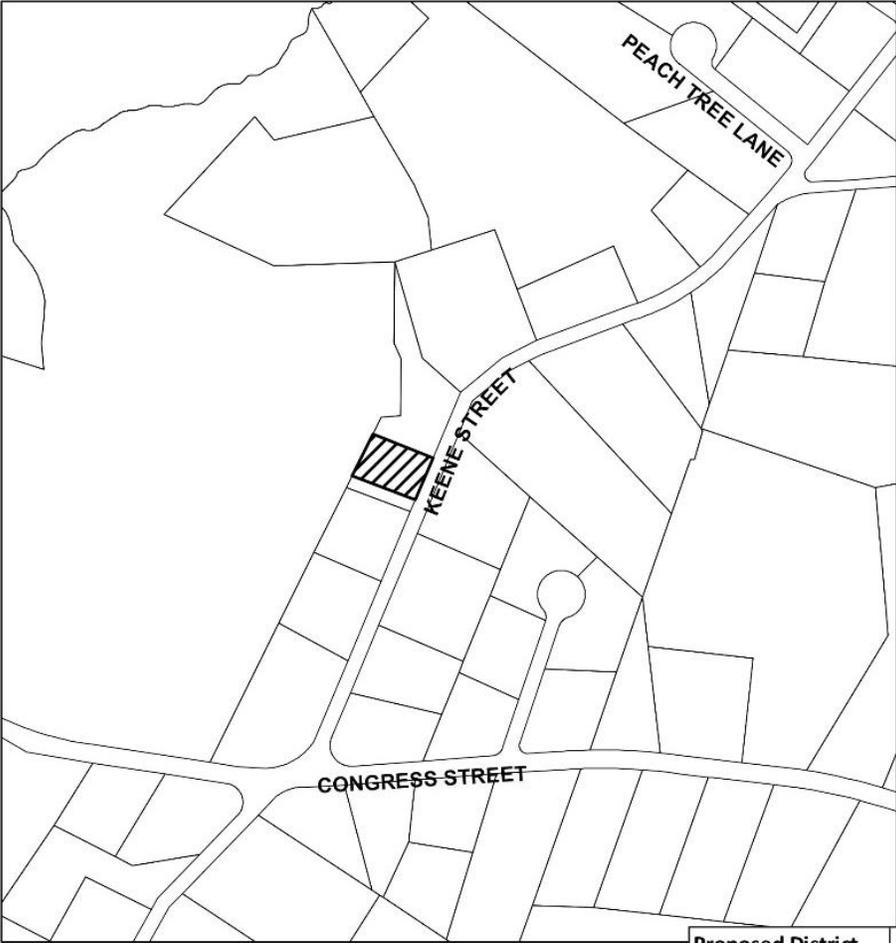
Today the property extends 160 feet along the northwest side of Keene Street. The Ford map of 1833 shows the Randall farm with its cleared land, surrounded

by forest. Today the homestead is backed by the Ashdod Forest and other conservation land, which contains Keene's Brook.

On an 1871 deed, the homestead was described as being on the north side of the road on land consisting of that between the High Street School House and the Ashdod Meeting House. In extent, that would be approximately 1.1 miles long.

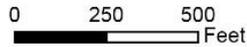
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Map



**Legend**  
 Proposed Keene's Brook LHD

**PROPOSED KEENE'S BROOK  
 LOCAL HISTORIC DISTRICT -  
 ANNUAL TOWN MEETING 2022**



Proposed District	Address	Parcel ID	Owner
Keene's Brook LHD	324 Keene Street	012-065-002	Walker Kendall Trust

Property Index

STREET ADDRESS	CURRENT OWNERS	INVENTORY	DATE OF CONSTRUCTION	HISTORIC NAME OF PROPERTY	ARCHITECTURAL STYLE
324 Keene St.	Evelyn Walker & Norman Kendall	No	c.1781	Thomas Randall Sr. & Sarah Simmons Randall	Cape

## Significance

Long before Duxbury's shipbuilding era, as well as during that period and afterwards, Duxbury's mainstay was small-scale agriculture, consisting of family farms, then later, the larger chicken and turkey farms, and the even larger cranberry farms. It was these small farms that provided the food, including salted beef, that was carried aboard the famous ships. Rural workers also supplied labor for the lumber, charcoal, and other needed supplies for shipbuilding and sailing. Later on, shoemaking, caretaking of summer homes, working in the summer hotels, and working to build roads, etc., were the jobs for people without wealth beyond the value of their modest homes. James Randall (age 52), for example, was listed in the 1855 Census as "farmer" and his son Francis (age 18) was listed as "shoemaker." Ten years later, however, they were listed as "horse jockey" and "jockey" respectively. Without significant education and before it was possible to commute far, simple yet proud living was the norm on this western side of town. Even into the 1950's, not everyone in Duxbury had central heating or indoor bathroom plumbing. It is important to recognize the enduring quality of these smaller homesteads.

The simple Randall-Simmons farmhouse is an example of that kind of endurance. Located in the area of Duxbury known as Ashdod, its small size with additions through the years helps to remind us of Duxbury's social, cultural, and economic history. Ashdod began to be settled by Europeans around 1680. Meadowlands near Keene's Brook were in demand for grazing livestock. Miles of ancient stone walls, many of which are now hidden in conservation land, show the enormous job it was to clear forests to create homes and create fields for crops. The role of women and that of early 20<sup>th</sup>-century Cape Verdean immigrants can also be viewed in the history of this particular home.

The Randall family occupied this house for about 150 years, according to the documentary evidence of Federal and State census records, Town of Duxbury reports, maps, deeds and probate documents. The first were Thomas Randall Sr. (d. 1836) and Sarah Simmons Randall (1766-1864), daughter of Levi (a blacksmith) and Lydia Simmons whose home was nearby, according to the 1790 Census. Two of their grandsons served in the Union Army in the Battles of Port Hudson and Bisland, both returning home safely in 1863. One of these soldiers, Francis Randall, continued to farm and live in this house with his daughter until his death

in 1924. The Federal Agriculture report, dated June 5, 1880, described the farm as consisting of fourteen acres, eight improved and six unimproved. The land, fences and buildings were worth \$700, implements and machinery \$20, livestock worth \$200. The livestock consisted of one milk cow, that produced 25 pounds of butter each year, four horses, two swine, twenty poultry and eight "other." Francis had no paid farmhands. When his daughter, Florence, was a child, she was visited by a physician who was paid \$8.75 by the town in the category of "Support of Poor outside of almshouse." She was the last Randall owner and a Town report shows she worked in the neighborhood's one-room schoolhouse, where she was paid \$10 for cleaning.

Women played a significant role in keeping the Randall farm as solvent as possible, not only through their unrecorded but no doubt significant farm and household labor, but in their financial contributions which are recorded in deeds. For example, in 1836 Sarah Randall, widowed, sells a right of way to her unmarried daughter Aksah for \$100. Later, Susan Augusta Watson paid off Francis' mortgage of \$400 shortly before their marriage. After their marriage, she purchased some adjoining land for \$55. In 1924 their daughter Florence filed two affidavits indicating she was the sole heir of her mother who had purchased the homestead and land.

In 1924 Florence sold the farm to Antonio and Jennie Santos of Duxbury. According to the 1920 census, they were Portuguese speaking immigrants from Cape Verde. Antonio is listed as a "mason laborer" and "white", with all other family members listed as "negro." The Census described them as living on a farm, owning a radio set, and having five children. Antonio helped to build Duxbury's roads for the Highway Department and most likely constructed the unique fieldstone driveway, which for nearly one hundred years has endured and enhanced the rural setting of the Randall-Simmons house.

To capture winter sunshine the Thomas Randall Sr. house faces south as do many early New England homes. Keene Street now passes by at the east gable end of the house, so the earliest section was very likely built before Keene Street was constructed. According to Ruth Wentworth, Keene Street started as a path to the grist mill. At first glance, the house may appear to have been built in the 1840's because close to the road there is an addition from that time period. The exposed timber framing, however, reveals it was clearly built in three sections over a

period of some years (followed by an appropriate barn-like addition in 2009). It may have started as a one-room hall house with a loft above or it may have started as a half Cape. The major clue that it was not built all at once is the huge mortise and tenon beam that once was the eastern end of the house, but after the 19th-century addition, the beam is twelve feet from the eastern end. Despite the exterior appearance, it was not built as a center entrance, center chimney, center hall Cape. The earliest parts of the house were built on wedge-split granite foundation. The mid-19<sup>th</sup>-century addition was built on mortared fieldstone.

As described in Sarah Sloan Evans, *Ashdod: The Other Side of Duxbury*, two members of this branch of the Randall family lived nearby: Thomas Jr. (1786-1882), who married Mary "Polly" Wells, lived on Congress Street at what became known as Green Gates Farm. Their son, Robert T. Randall (1825-1907), built the adjoining property on Keene Street. Various Randalls are listed in Town reports, not only for various statistics, but also for their service to the Town as employees and also as veterans.

### Randall-Simmons House Timeline

Circa 1781 The probable date of the construction of the dwelling house. Thomas, the first child of Thomas Randall (d. 1836) and Sarah Simmons Randall (1766-1864), was born in 1783 and died in infancy. Thomas Sr. and Sarah may have married around 1782.

1790 Federal Census: Thos. Randall household: 1 white male over 16, 2 under 16 and 1 female. The ages match the inhabitants: Sarah Simmons Randall (1766-1864), another child named Thomas Randall Jr. (1786-1884) and Washburn (1789-1799).

The Census shows that Sarah's father, Levi Simmons, lives nearby.

1794 Map does not show Keene Street. According to Wentworth and others, there was only a cart path to Keene's Mill.

1810 Federal Census: Thomas Randall Sr. family consists of ten members.

1833 Ford map identifies the dwelling house as belonging to "T. Randall."

1836 Deed at DRHS records that Sarah Randall, widow, sells for \$100 to "Aksah Randall singlewoman" a right of way "title and interest and have in2 the Homestead Farm of my late husband Thomas Randall late of Duxbury Deceased May 1836." Aksah, also known as Achsah, born in 1797, was Thomas and Sarah's oldest daughter.

1847 Addition to east side of the house. Newspapers found in the walls are dated 1846 and 1847.

1850 Federal Census: James Randall, 47, occupation listed as "none"; Deborah, 47, William 20, laborer, Laura A. 16, Jason, 14, and Francis J., 11. Sarah, age 85, is living alone elsewhere.

1855 Massachusetts State Census: James Randall, 52, "farmer"; Deborah, 52, Laura A., 21, Francis, 18, "shoemaker."

1857 H.F. Walling map of Plymouth County identifies the house as belonging to "J. Randall."

1860 Census: James Randall age 56, "farmer", Deborah, 57, and Francis age 21, "farm laborer."

1864 The Duxbury Town Report lists Deborah Randall as the taxpayer with James due only for poll tax. The real estate is valued at \$325.

1865 Massachusetts State Census: James Randall, age 63, "horse jockey"; Deborah, 63, "housekeeping"; Francis J., 27, "jockey."

1871 Susan A. Watson pays off the mortgage before marrying Francis. The homestead is described as being on the north side of the road on land consisting of that between the High Street School House and the Ashdod Meeting House.

1879 G.H. Walker atlas of Plymouth County identifies the property as belonging to "F. Randall."

1880 Federal Agriculture report provides details of Francis Randall's farm.

1880 Birth of the last Randall owner: Hannah Florence Randall, June 18th.

1901 Duxbury Town Report shows the house is valued at \$350, the stable \$100, and 6 acres for \$150. Four parcels of Peterson land are also included under Francis' name as "guardian."

1903 L.J. Richards atlas of Plymouth County identifies the property as belonging to "F.J. Randall."

1915 City directory: "Francis J. Randall, h [head of household] Keene WD [West Duxbury]"

1923-1924 The homestead is not identified on the Henry A. Fish map nor listed in his index. As pointed out in the revised edition of *Duxbury Ancient & Modern*, Fish excluded several other early homes, including the Alden House.

1924 Francis Randall dies intestate. His only child, Florence Randall Morris, is appointed executrix by Plymouth County Court.

1924 Florence, after filing two affidavits that she was the sole heir of her mother who had purchased the homestead and land, she sells to Antonio and Jennie Santos of Duxbury. According to the 1923 Census, the Santos are Portuguese-speaking immigrants, from "Cape de Verde Island", Antonio having arrived in 1907. Antonio is listed as a mason laborer and "white" with all other members of the family listed as "negro." The Census describes the family as living on a farm, owning a radio set, and having five children. Tony is most likely responsible for the construction of our unusual fieldstone driveway.

1936 The Santos lose their home in a bank foreclosure auction to Francis H. and Alberta E. Arnold of Rockland for \$335. With their long list of properties, the Arnolds appear to be real estate investors. The deed is dated July 18, 1936.

1937 The Arnolds file a petition in Land Court to have the property described and registered. The completed plan, drawn by Civil Engineer Dana M. Pratt, was drawn February 24, 1937, and filed May 21, 1937. It shows the house, stable (further

southwest than the present garage), and a cart path right of way to the north that runs east to west. The Land Court Decree is dated August 11, 1937. Certificate no. 6044, Registration Book 30, p. 45.

1937 The Arnolds sell the homestead to John W. and Mae L. Kilgour of Springfield. "A certain parcel of land with the buildings thereon ... These are the same premises delineated on Certificate of Title No. 6044 issued by the Court of Land Registration in case #16468."

1947 The Kilgours sell the homestead with diminished acreage to Roland W. and Dorothy E. Johnson of Pembroke (Certificate of Title 6045, Registration Book 30, p. 45)

"With the buildings thereon ... All of said boundaries are determined by the Court to be located as shown on plan #16468A, drawn by Dana M. Pratt, Civil Engineer, February 24, 1937." The deed is dated July 24, 1947.

1952 The Johnsons sell the homestead to Wilfred and Mildred Burns (Registration Book 90, p. 27, Certificate no. 18027)

2000 Robert E. Burns, trustee of the Keene Realty Trust, sells the homestead to Evelyn A. Walker, formerly of Duxbury. The homestead is now part of the Walker Kendall Trust.

### Options and Recommendations for the Bylaw

In establishing this Local Historic District, there are no recommendations for the bylaw and it will fall under the existing bylaw.

Continue to next page.

Current Photos



Southeast



East



West



South w/Rear Addition



Southeast – close-up of house



North

## Selected Bibliography

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