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Mott House: Mott Farm Title

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Mott Farm Title

This report concerns the land known as the Mott Farm, lying on the west side of West Main Road, south of Cory's Lane, in Portsmouth, Rhode Island.

Despite the vicissitudes of the title, evident from the chart, this land was never really divided until 1900, with one exception to be noted. The portion now owned by Byron and Harry Hall et. ux. has never been divided, except for an occasional portion deeded by a father to his son, who then reunited the parcels upon the father's death. It has generally been the case that where several heirs have held legal title, the farm itself has been in the possession of only one or two of them.

The bulk of the land was originally granted to Adam Mott, Sr., in 1639. The relevant page of the record book is torn, but the surviving portion of the minute reads "Adam Mote fower scoere and [--- acres?] Broeke next m^r William B[aulston?] . . . ward . . ." ¹ At this time, the town was granting lands on the condition that the grantees build on it within one year.

We know indirectly that Adam's father John Mott also had some land, through a fragment which notes a grant to someone

else of land "next John Motts vpon y^e former condition of bulding [sic]." ² He didn't use it long, for he soon became a town charge, and was bearded out with various townspeople. Perhaps the plot was included in Adam's grant, or Adam later took it over. No evidence exists for anything more than an unfounded conjecture. ³

In 1652, Adam granted 12 acres of his land to his son Adam, Jr. Earlier, in 1644, the town had issued an order "to accomodate [sic] Adam mett at the vpper end of his fathers lett." But a marginal notation added that "this order is repeld." ⁴ In the 1652 gift, Mott, Sr., accomodated his son himself, at the upper end of his lot. ⁵ Twenty more acres was granted by the town in 1656, for which Adam, Jr., paid in 1659 at a rate of 2s. per acre. ⁶ But no further references to the title to this plot can be found, subsequent references being only to the 12 acre holding. The size of the farm in later years (c. 130-140 acres) would seem to indicate that the 20 acre plot was absorbed as part of the total farm at some time, probably in the early history of the land.

At the elder Adam's death in 1661, he left "all my howsage and land at matapursetti lyinge in . . . portsmoth" to his wife Sarah. He stated that he had already given his son Jacob (I) ⁷ "the vpar Cornar of my farme," but that "if he be Contented to Cast in whot i gaue him," the Executors of the will were to divide the whole among Jacob I, Gershom, and Eleazar Mott, (three of his five sons), at Sarah's death. ⁸

Though there is no record of it, this presumably took place when Sarah died (n.d.). In addition, no further mention is made of Eleazar. The next document concerning this land is a lease from Gershom to Jacob I. It conveys, for the term of Gershom's life, his share of the farm, excepting "his [Gershom's] house orchard meadow Land and planting Land which contains about Four acres."⁹

But Gershom was dead within three months. He died intestate, but his share of the Adam Mott, Sr., estate went to his son Gershom, Jr., who promptly sold to Jacob I "all the right in the farm where Jacob lives" (about 92 acres), together with all its "buildings gardens orchards Fencings commons Liberties waies highwaies" and so forth.¹⁰

Jacob I died in 1711/2. He had given his son Jacob II "the southernmost half of my Farme" in 1705.¹¹ Consequently, he left the other half to his widow Jehannah for her life, after which it was to go to Jacob II. This presumably occurred, although there is no record of it.

Shortly after his father's demise, Jacob II acquired title to the estate of his aunt Mary Mott (d. 1710) from her heirs (daughters Sarah Tripp, Bethiah Abbett, Elizabeth Wing, Abigail Haviland and grandson William Lawton). These properties included the 12 acres which Adam Mott, Jr., received from his father and left to his widow Mary, and which was "new in the possession of Jacob [II] Mott by order of Mary Mott."¹²

Jacob II died in 1736/7 leaving his estate to Jacob III,

his son. He stipulated, however, that his three daughters Elizabeth, Mary and Joanna were to have "the use of my great lower room where I now dwell, the Southernmost bed room and the Perch Chamber the time they remain unmarried."¹³

In 1781, Jacob III died, and his farm was willed to Jacob IV. Again, provision was made for daughters Casandra and Elizabeth, including the reservation to them of "the use and Improvement of the Southmost part of my Dwelling house v^zt. the lower rooms & Chambers and the Northermost Chamber bed-room in the Northermost part of the house with a priveledge in the Kitchen & Seller to be kept in repair by my son Jacob Mett"¹⁴

During his lifetime, Jacob IV made a grant of ± 10 acres somewhere in the northern part of his farm to his son Benjamin Mett.¹⁵ In his will (probated 1803), he left 5 acres in the southeast corner of the farm to his other son Joseph. His daughters Hannah, Mary and Joanna were to have "the use and improvement of half my land and buildings" for so long as they remained unmarried, and the remainder of the estate was to belong to Benjamin and Joseph jointly.¹⁶ Benjamin received his brother's share at Joseph's death in 1825.¹⁷

During this interval of joint ownership, the only portion of the land to leave Mett hands between 1639 and 1895 was said. Six acres and 29 rods "by admeasurement", bounded southerly on William Almy, northerly and westerly on the grantors, and easterly on the grantors ("and is on a line wall between the said granted premise and said Grantors' land which divides their

pastures") were sold in 1813 to Edward W. Lawton and George Engs, Newport merchants (Engs was also referred to as a shipmaster in another document), and Philip Anthony, "manufacturer." The deed also conveyed rights to a driftway to the public highway going "South of the Dwelling house of the said Benjamin Mott going by his barn in the way or lane he now uses."¹⁸ Lawton bought 1/16 share from Stephen Anthony (presumably an heir of Philip Anthony) in 1824¹⁹, and 1/4 share from George Engs in 1825²⁰, for \$125 and \$500, respectively. Neither of these deeds mentions anything other than the land. But in 1834, Lawton purchased 3/16 share from Stephen and Abraham Anthony for \$318.²¹ This and a sale of 1/2 interest by Lawton to William C. Cozzens in 1835²² both convey not only title to the land, but to "all the buildings thereon standing with all the Stock, Machinery, goods, chattels, tools, furniture therein" ²³

Edward Lawton's heir or successor Francis Lawton bought back Cozzens' share nine years later.²⁴ He sold the land in 1864 (no mention of buildings) to James B. Finch for \$1500,²⁵ and six weeks later, Finch sold it back to the Mott family at a \$250 loss.²⁶ On the next day, the purchaser Jacob (V) Mott sold the water rights on this property to the Old Colony and Newport Railroad, for its nearby depot.²⁷)

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Jacob V sold ten acres "with a dwelling house and other buildings" to his son John C. Mott in 1869.²⁸ John in turn sold it two years later to Edward Anthony,²⁹ from whom it passed to Benjamin S. Anthony (no record found). The latter held it until 1909, when he sold it to the U. S. Navy, under a court order which also condemned other portions of Mott Farm (see below).³⁰

At the death of Jacob V in 1886, the remainder of the farm was left to his sons John C. and Jacob VI.³¹ Apparently some dispute arose over this bequest, for a lawsuit was soon under way. The court ordered that an auction be held, with the brothers as bidders. Jacob won, and the entire estate was deeded to him in 1890 by Darius Baker, commissioner in Jacob Mott, Jr. v. John C. Mott.³² Five years later Jacob VI sold this 130 acre tract, for which he had paid \$12,000, to Benjamin Hall, Sr., for \$100!³³

Hall sold 40 acres to Grosvenor Calkins, trustee for the Washburn Wire Company, in 1900. Later in the same year, the Washburn Wire Company agreed to sell this recent acquisition, for which it had paid \$5000 (along with another Hall property for which it paid \$10,000) to the U. S. Navy for \$35,000. The sale was completed in 1903.³⁵

Benjamin Hall, Sr., died in 1901, leaving his undivided estate, including the remainder of Mott Farm, to his wife Helen M. Hall (Quinn), and to his children Benjamin, Jr., Herbert and Marion.³⁶ The widow was unhappy with the administrator,

Benjamin Hall, Jr., and petitioned to have her dower set off, which it was, in 1906. She received Mott Farm.³⁷ She sold certain rights and easements to the government under Law 2780 (see above) in 1909.³⁸

Helen M. Hall Quinn must have died sometime before 1917 (I found no record in Pertsmouth; she may have died in Fall River, Mass.). The land apparently passed to her son Benjamin Hall, Jr., who left it at his death in 1917 to his widow Mary C. Hall, to Marion and Herbert Hall (together), to Eliza V. Hall (Wilkey) and to George P. Hall.³⁹ Marion and Herbert Hall sold their (undivided) quarter share to George P. Hall in 1921.⁴⁰ Mary C. Hall sold her (undivided) quarter share to Eliza V. Hall (Wilkey) in 1930.⁴¹

Byron and Harry Hall acquired George P. Hall's undivided half interest in 1936,⁴² and Eliza V. Hall Wilkey's in 1945.⁴³

D.T. Upton
3/4/1973

NOTES

1. Town of Portsmouth to Adam Mott, Sr., Feb. 10, 1639, "Portsmouth Town Records, 1638-1700," [hereafter cited as PTR], Vol. 1, page 15 [hereafter cited in the form vol./p., e.g., 1/15]. Printed as Early Records of the Town of Portsmouth, ed. by the Librarian of the Rhode Island Historical Society (Providence: E. L. Freeman and Sons, 1901), p. 9. [Unless otherwise noted, all manuscript records are in the Office of the Town Clerk, Town Hall, Portsmouth, R. I.]
2. Town of Portsmouth to ---, October, 1639, PTR 1/12 (Early Recs., p. 5).
3. At this point, it may be useful to say something about the series of maps by Edward H. West, entitled "Original Land grants of Portsmouth, R. I." (1932, Mss., 12 pp., in RIHS). My experience with this title search leads me to believe that these maps are highly conjectural, and not to be relied on very heavily. It appears that he may generally be correct insofar as the general location of the grants is concerned. However, his attempt to show 150 years of "original grants" on one set of maps,

with no provision for indicating changes of ownership is unsatisfactory. In addition, he gives no indication of his sources. He appears to have looked through the records and applied some not very careful guesswork. His primary fault is that he seems to have assumed that the boundaries of the parcels of 1932 had never changed. This appears to be true, at least, in his delineation of the Mott Farm and its immediate neighbors.

4. Town Council meeting, May 27, 1644, PTR 1/31 (Early Recs., p. 28).
5. Adam Mott, Sr., to Adam Mott, Jr., Sept. 20, 1652, Portsmouth Land Evidences [LE], 1/58. The grant was, in length, 70 "Rood from the North Vpwards towards my Vper End, and a Rood from that to the Utmost End of my fearme Next to Ralph Coulands Lett, twenty six Rood to goe in bredth, seuenty seuen hey [? sic] and a Rood in bredth to the End of the Lett the whole Length, the bottom bounded one the North Sea, and the bredth from Ralph Coulands Lett twenty six Rood towards my howse, with a springe though it be out of the Line Next his howse for his Nessesaty^s."
6. Town of Portsmouth to Adam Mott, Jr., Dec. 10, 1656, LE 1/531. The description was (LE 1/52) that it was "bounded at the one End with part of the land of Adam mott Senyor and part of the land of Ichabod Shiffeld's beinge 57 Rood wide, being bounded with marked trees, and the other End buttinge vpon the highway to the mill, beinge bounded with marked trees."

7. The Jacobs will be numbered in order of appearance, for clarity.
8. Will of Adam Mott, Sr., dated April 2, 1661; probated Aug. 31, 1661, PTR, 1/318 (Early Recs., p. 357ff.).
9. Gershom Mott (lease) to Jacob (I) Mott, Jan. 12, 1697/8, LE 1/2.
10. Gershom Mott, Jr. to Jacob (I) Mott, Apr. 29, 1698, LE 1/412.
11. Jacob (I) Mott to Jacob (II) Mott, Jr., Aug. 28, 1705, LE 1/512. The deed says that the plot conveyed contains about 55 acres. If this is accurate, the farm would be +110 a., plus 12 a. still held by the heirs of Adam Mott, Jr. (see below). With later acquisitions and adjustments, this is approximately the size of the farm (130-140 a.) in 1895. Allowing for routine arithmetical mistakes, this suggests that the 20a. grant to Adam Mott, Jr., may have been absorbed into the family farm before 1705 (or see below).
12. William Lawton to Jacob (II) Mott, Sept. 7, 1712, LE 2/41; Benjamin and Abigail M. Haviland to Jacob (II) Mott, May 18, 1713, LE 2/61; Matthew and Elisabeth M. Wing to Jacob (II) Mott, July 31, 1713, LE 2/68; Sarah Tripp and Bethyah Abbitt to Jacob (II) Mott, Aug. 21, 1713, LE 2/76;

Sarah Tripp and Bethyah Abbitt to Jacob (II) Mott and William Coggeshall, Aug. 21, 1713, LE 2/77 (This may have been the land on what is now called Coggeshall Point. It is hard to tell. I believe it was, and that the ^{was divided} plot in the deed William Coggeshall "of Portsmouth in the County of Newport in the Colony of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations in New England Esq^r" to Jacob (III) Mott, Feb. 18, 1739, LE 4/250). Also conveyed to Jacob (II) Mott in this series of deeds from the heirs of Mary Mott were a 12 a. grant Mary received from the Town of Portsmouth in 1693/4 (LE 1/541) and the ±17 a. which Mary Mott "lately lived on." This was described as being bounded on the south by William Coggeshall, on the west by Coggeshall and Jacob (II) Mott, on the north by Mott, a highway, and undivided land, and on the east by undivided land and a highway. This, again, may have been the elusive 1656 grant to Adam Mott, Jr.

In addition, Jacob (II) Mott received 12 a., at 2s per acre, from the town in the final division of all the undivided lands in 1713/4. The only reference to its location was to a plat made for the dividers by John Mumford in 1714, which I was unable to locate (LE 2/642).

13. Will of Jacob (II) Mott, dated Mar. 5, 1729/30, probated March 1736/7, Portsmouth Town Council [and Probate] Records [hereafter, TC] 3/182. Joanna Mott lived there until her

death in 1758. She left a will (dated 7/11/1758, probated 8/14/1758; TC 5/155) which listed and bequeathed all her personal property. A summary of this will is appended.

14. Will of Jacob (III) Mott, dated 11/10/1768, pr. 1781, TC 7/15, 17-19. An interesting sidelight is a note in PTR 1/280 (Early Recs., p. 342) dated 1764, recording the ear mark used by Jacob III, said mark "being the Antiant Ear Mark of the Farm & family of the Mott's . "
15. Jacob (IV) Mott to Benjamin Mott, 12/30/1789, LE 7/356. The land was bounded southerly on Jacob (IV) Mott, beginning at "the Southeast corner of my young Orchard a Straight line to the Road or Highway, Northerly on land belonging to Matthew Slocum, Westerly partly on meadowland and partly on my aforesaid young Orchard belonging to me."
16. Will of Jacob (IV) Mott, dated 11/20/1794, pr. 3/14/1803, TC 8/145, 147. Joseph's portion was described as being in the southeast corner of the farm, containing +5 a., and bounded on the east by the highway, the south by Benjamin Mott, the west and north by Jacob (IV) Mott "the north side on an old ditch and another adjacent to the south end of my south orchard and is fenced in with a stone wall." Benjamin also added to his tract a piece bought from Daniel Lawton, yeoman, being "a certain Messuage or Dwelling house and Tract or parcel of Land" of +10½ a.

It was bounded on the north by Jacob (IV) Mott, the east on the West Main Road, south on land "late the Property of Job Almy", and the west on Jacob (IV) Mott. (Daniel Lawton to Benjamin Mott, 10/17/1793, LE 7/470.

17. Will of Joseph Mott, dated 11/24/1824, pr. 3/1825, TC 10/38-39. He specified that all the real estate he had inherited from Jacob IV should go to Benjamin, and after Benjamin to Benjamin's son Jacob V.
18. Joseph and Benjamin Mott, yeomen, to Edward W. Lawton, George Engs, and Philip Anthony, 10/15/1813, LE 9/560.
19. Stephen Anthony to Edward W. Lawton, 1/4/1824, LE 11/38.
20. George Engs to Edward W. Lawton, 12/20/1825, LE 11/8.
21. Stephen and Abraham Anthony to Edward W. Lawton, 12/30/1834, LE 11/455.
22. Edward W. Lawton to William C. Cozzens, 1/20/1835, LE 12/155.
23. Ibid.
24. William C. Cozzens to Edward F. and Francis W. Lawton, 2/21/1846, LE 13/84; William C. Cozzens to Francis W. Lawton, 2/14/1846, LE 13/85.
25. Francis Lawton to James B. Finch, 2/2/1864, LE 14/463.
26. James B. Finch to Jacob (V) Mott, 3/14/1864, LE 14/464.

27. Jacob (V) Mott to Old Colony and Newport Railroad, 3/15/1864, LE 14/465.
28. Jacob (V) Mott to John C. Mott, 10/9/1869, LE 15/378. This may have been the Lawton "message" (LE / ; see above).
29. John C. Mott to W Edward Anthony, 3/4/1871, LE 15/477.
30. Benjamin S. Anthony to U. S. Navy, 10/2/1909, LE 26/386, in accordance with condemnation proceedings in U. S. Circuit Court, Rhode Island District, Law No. 2780 (U.S. v. Certain Lands in Portsmouth, R. I., initiated 9/18/1905).
31. Will of Jacob (V) Mott, dated 1/13/1873, pr. 5/15/1886, P7/352-54.
32. Darius Baker, commr., to Jacob (VI) Mott, Jr., 1/11/1890, LE 19/426. The auction was held 12/18/1889.
33. Jacob (VI) Mott to Benjamin Hall, 11/9/1895, LE 20/328.
34. Benjamin Hall, Sr., to Grosvener Calkins, 2/28/1900, LE 21/322-23.
35. Authorization to sell by Board of Directors, Washburn Wire Co., 10/19/1900, recorded in LE 22/117; Calkins declaration of trusteeship, 11/2/1900, LE 22/121; agreement to sell, Calkins to U.S.Navy, 11/2/1900, LE 22/121-23; deed, Grosvener Calkins to U.S.Navy, 3/21/1903, LE 24/1278. The other Hall property is conveyed by Benjamin, Benjamin, Jr., Herbert F., Mary C. and George T. Hall to Grosvener Calkins, 2/28/1900, LE 21/324-25.

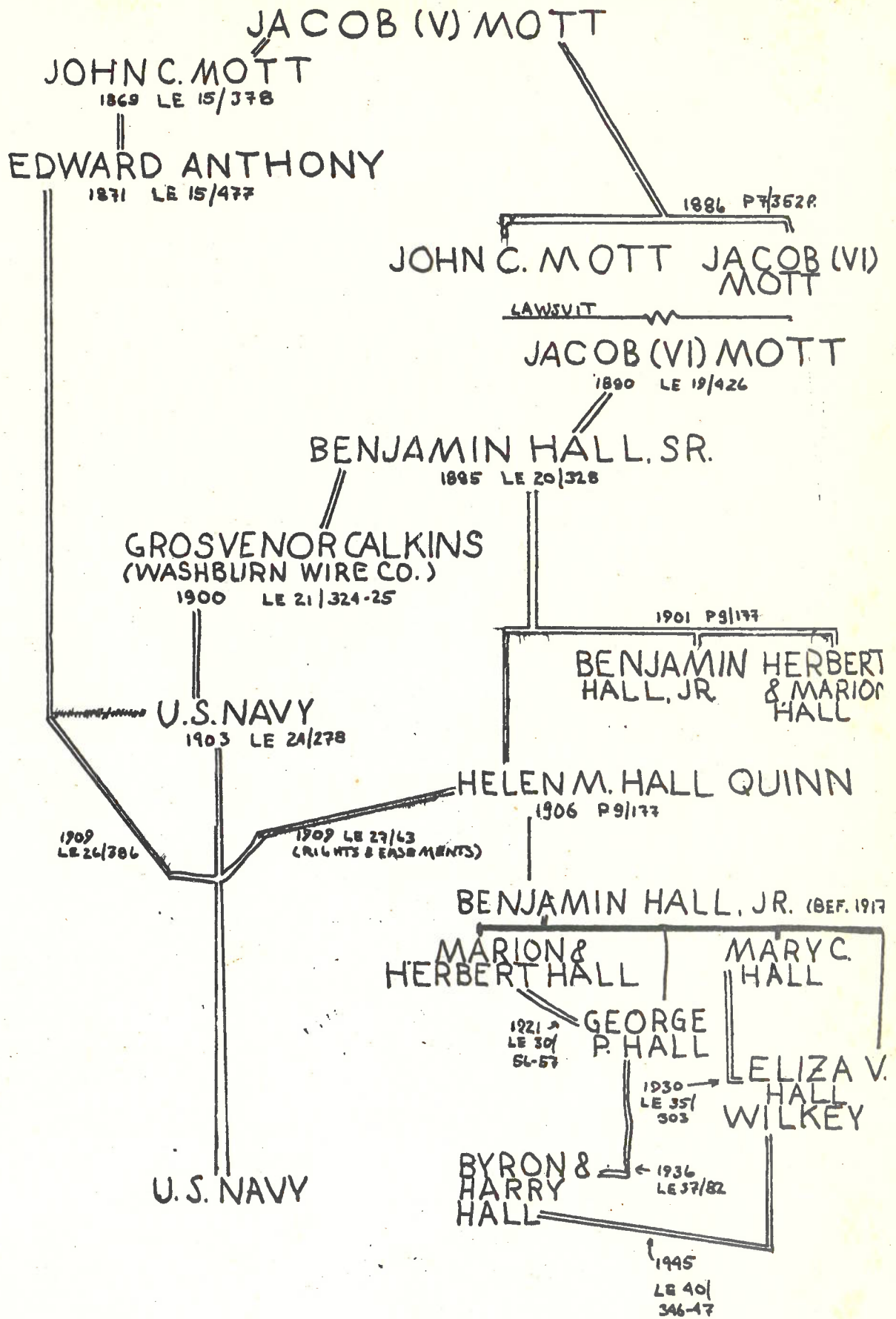
36. Estate of Benjamin Hall, Sr., pr. 8/5/1901, P9/177.
37. Petition for division of real estate, 11/13/1905; decree for division of real estate, 4/9/1906; dower award, 8/13/1906 (all documents are in the file of the Benjamin Hall, Sr., estate). The dower award (8/13/1906) lists the acreage as 68 acres, an obvious transposition from the 86 acres of the previous document (4/9/1906). The larger figure itself is apparently the result of guesswork, for a survey of the farm made in the division of the Benjamin Hall, Jr., estate, done in 1927, gives the acreage at its present figure (100.65 plus 1.56 acres), with no purchases or sales between 1906 and 1927.
38. Helen M. Hall Quinn to U. S. Government, 12/9/1909, LE 27/63.
39. There is a file for the Benjamin Hall, Jr., estate, but most of the documents seem to be missing. He, too, may have died in Fall River.
40. Marion and Herbert Hall to George P. Hall, 1/21/1921, LE 30/56-57.
41. Mary C. Hall to Eliza V. Hall, 5/24/1930, LE 35/303.
42. George P. Hall to Byron and Harry Hall, 6/13/1936, LE 37/82.
43. Duncan M. Wilkey and Eliza V. Hall Wilkey to Byron and Harry Hall, 10/27/1945, LE 40/346-47.

KEY TO CHART

==== : DIRECTLY DOCUMENTED CONVEYANCE

—— : INDIRECTLY DOCUMENTED
CONVEYANCE

----- : CONJECTURAL



d. b. up to

MOTT / FARM TITLE

PORTSMOUTH TOWN FREEHOLD

(JOHN MOTT?)

ADAM MOTT, SR. 1639 (PTR 1/15)

ADAM MOTT, JR. 1652 (LE 1/58)

1656
(LE 1/52)

MARY MOTT

before 1661

SARAH MOTT 1661 (PTR 1/318)

SARAH TRIPP BETHIAH ABBOTT
ELIZABETH WING
ABIGAIL HAVILAND
WILLIAM LAWTON

JACOB (I) MOTT
GERSHOM MOTT
ELIAZAR MOTT

GERSHOM MOTT, JR. 1698

1713 (LE 2/76)
1713 (LE 2/68)
1712 (LE 2/61)
1712 (LE 2/41)

1698
(LE 1/112)

1705
(LE 1/512)

JACOB (II) MOTT
JOHANAH MOTT 1711/2 (TC 2/224)

JACOB (III) MOTT 1736/7 (TC 3/182)

JACOB (IV) MOTT 1781 (TC 7/15)

BENJAMIN MOTT 1789 (LE 7/356)

JOSEPH MOTT 1805 (TC 8/145)
JOSEPH + BENJAMIN MOTT

1813 (LE 9/560)
EDWARD LAWTON C. ENGS P. ANTHONY NY

BENJAMIN MOTT 1825 (TC 10/38)

1825 (LE 11/6)
1824 (LE 11/28)
STEPHEN ABRAHAM ANTHONY

1834 (LE 11/455)

WILLIAM C. COZZENS 1835 (LE 12/155)
FRANCIS LAWTON 1846 13/85

1838 (P 2/23)

HANNAH MOTT
ELIZABETH WADSWORTH ANNA MOTT

EMMA ANDEM
JOHN L. WADSWORTH
ALFRED C. WADSWORTH
ELIZA C. BUEBRINGTON
1847 (LE 13/130)
1854 (LE 14/7)

1846 (LE 15/140)

1844 (LE 15/139)

1847 (LE 15/14)

1864 (LE 14/463)

JAMES B. FINCH 1864 (LE 14/463)