



“Putting the Farm Back in Brook Farm”

August 31, 2023



This is a proposal by New Brook Farm, Inc. to reintroduce active agriculture to a portion of the Brook Farm Historic Site – to “put the farm back in Brook Farm.”

Brook Farm was the site of a famous Transcendentalist utopian community from 1841 to 1847. Although the community was short-lived, it was a seedbed for a broad range of intellectual and social reform movements in 19th-century America, including women’s rights, abolitionism, education, philosophy, literature, music, and religion, and was connected to wider Transcendentalist and reform movements of the era. The “Brook Farmers” sought to balance the manual labor of farming and small-scale industry with a communal life rich in intellectual and artistic pursuits. Participation in all aspects of the community was open on equal terms to all genders and backgrounds. Brook Farm was the site of a progressive school that became a model for primary and secondary education in America. Subsequent to the Brook Farm Commune period, the site importantly served as a poor farm for Roxbury, a Civil War training ground, and a Lutheran orphanage and social services center, before being acquired by the Commonwealth in 1988.

In recognition of its seminal role in the intellectual and social history of the United States, Brook Farm was designated a National Historic Landmark in 1965, and subsequently as a State and City of Boston Historic Landmark.

New Brook Farm (NBF) was incorporated in 2011 by a group of community members and was designated a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt organization in 2015. In the spirit of the original Brook Farmers, NBF’s mission is to activate and promote the Brook Farm Historic Site as a community and state-wide resource through a combined program of preservation, cultivation, education, and inspiration.

As described below, NBF seeks to protect archaeological and built resources and to continue our 12-year history of engaging the public with the history and natural environment of Brook Farm through multiple education and artistic programs and help to build a constituency for the site.

NBF has established a collaborative relationship with The Gardens Cemetery, which has been and will continue to be fundamental to the stewardship of the entire Brook Farm site. We recognize the importance to both The Gardens and to DCR of the physical appearance of Brook Farm and the first impression the entrance creates for cemetery and DCR visitors.

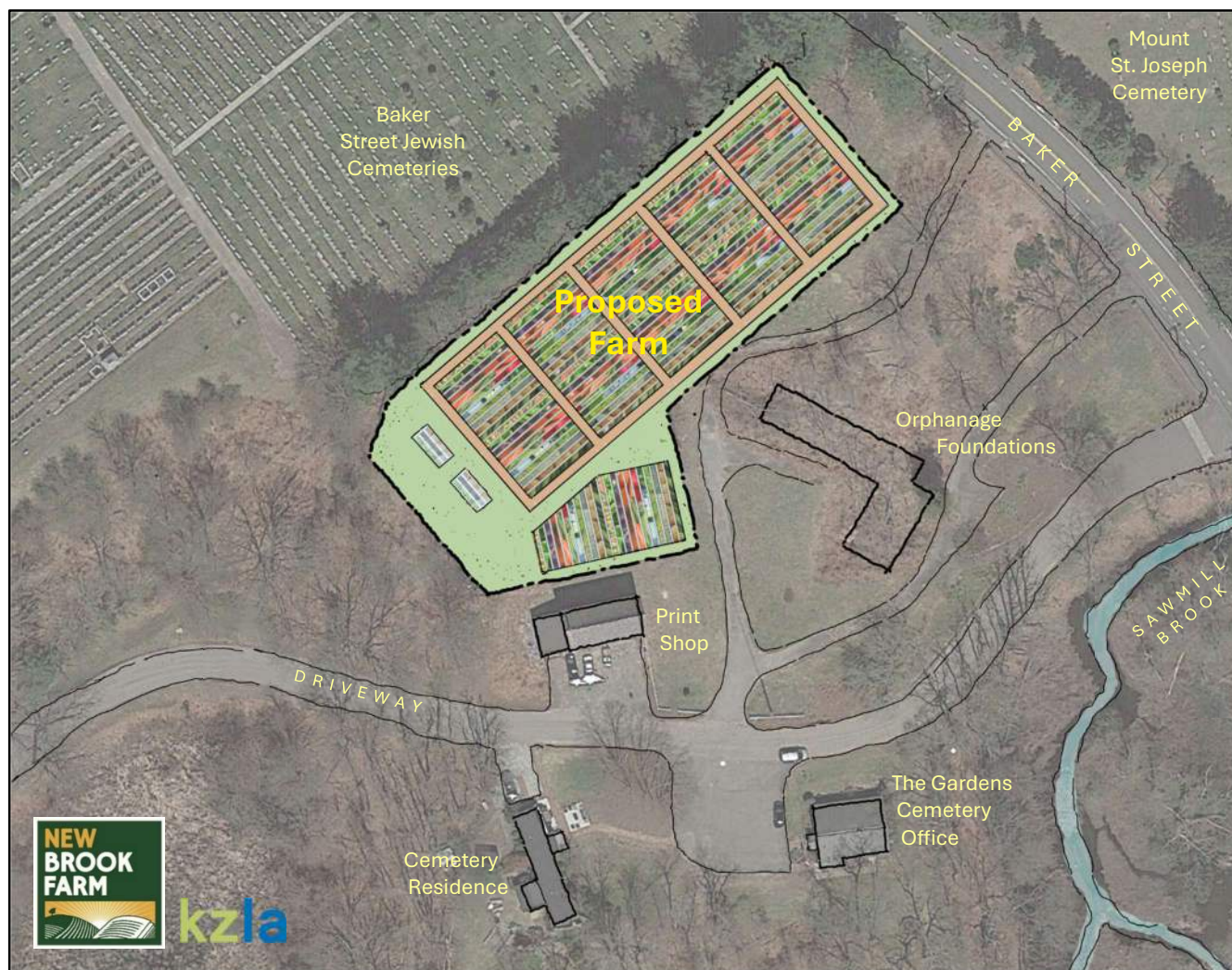
Building on the 2022 archaeological survey of the site using Community Preservation Act funds from NBF, we now propose to have a formal, physical presence on the site by establishing a small community farm. Doing so will allow NBF to protect valuable archaeological resources, attract volunteers and visitors to Brook Farm, provide sustainably grown food to help address food insecurity, interpret the agriculture heritage of the site, help to control invasive plants, and support and extend NBF educational programming.

On the following pages, NBF responds directly to the information requests made by DCR.

1. Detailed Description of Proposed Activity: *Present a thorough and comprehensive description of the proposed activity, including the specific season, days and hours of operation, and years requested (maximum is 10 years). Please include the resources required and any infrastructure or equipment needed.*

- A. Site. NBF is proposing to utilize approximately one acre in the open field behind the Print Shop building and the Lutheran orphanage foundations (see Figure 1, Conceptual Site Plan). NBF proposes to install two fixed hoop houses at the southern end of the site, where there is limited soil above rock ledge. In addition, NBF will use the small DCR parking area adjacent to the Print Shop as parking for staff, volunteers, and guests. NBF also may seek to use the ground floor of the Print Shop for equipment storage.

Figure 1. *Conceptual Site Plan*.



- B. Archaeology, soil, and cultivation. NBF will ensure the safety of known and potential archaeological resources by adding approximately 18 inches of new soil over the existing grade where cultivation is to take place. This will include a layer of permeable landscape cloth, approximately two inches of sand or gravel, one foot of new loam, plus approximately four inches of compost-enriched loam (see Figure 2, Soil Profile). Compost and organic soil amendments will be added annually.

The farm will use a limited tilling approach to cultivation and all farm activity will occur in the layers of new soil added by NBF. Equipment used will be a walk-behind plow and hand tools. Rotary tilling will be limited to occasional shaping of planting beds at depths of no more than nine inches. Routine cultivation, including incorporation of soil amendments, will be performed with a rotary harrow that will stir the surface of the soil horizontally, but will not till the soil vertically. Installation of the hoop houses will ensure that there is no disturbance of historic soil layers.

This approach will ensure that the farm will not disturb any archaeological resources. The added soil, carefully controlled farm activities, and light-weight equipment will protect the existing soil layers and archaeological resources from disturbance, compaction, and the further expansion of invasive plants into the farm area. If at any future time DCR or another entity undertakes additional archaeological excavations, the sand layer and landscape cloth applied by NBF will provide a clear demarcation between the existing soil strata and those applied by NBF.

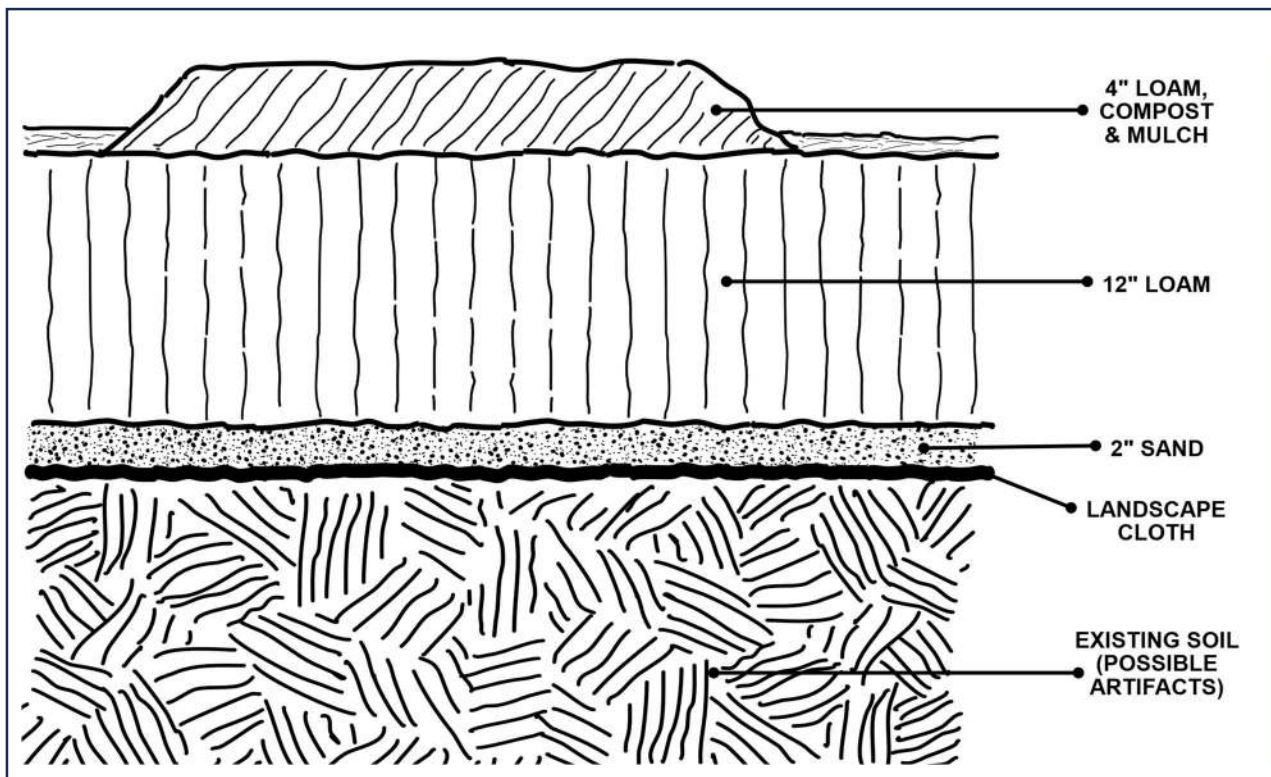


Figure 2. *Soil Profile.*

- C. Farm operations. This proposal is to create a single community *farm*, managed by professional staff, including a farm manager and one or more temporary or part-time farm assistants, supplemented by volunteers and trainees. It will *not* be a community garden program with individual plots available for rental. We believe that this approach will provide greater control over farming activities, ensuring the protection of archaeological resources and the aesthetic qualities of the site, as well as a connection to the cooperative, communal purpose that animated the original Brook Farmers.

All aspects of the farm operation will use sustainable, organic methods. Given the limited size, it will be farmed intensively, with succession cropping throughout the growing season. The farm will produce a mix of standard vegetables familiar to farmers' market customers and Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) members as well as ethnic and specialty crops, and possibly cutting flowers. Given the limited area available for farming, space-consuming crops such as corn, squash, pumpkin, or potatoes will be avoided. Small plantings of crops grown in the Brook Farm era (flint corn, potatoes, root crops) may be included for purposes of historical interpretation. No crops will be planted with root systems that will extend below the soil layers added by NBF.

The farm will be used extensively during the growing season, from March through November. Hours will vary, but may range from early morning to dusk. NBF may use the site during the off-season by installing a limited number of temporary hoop houses in the fields to extend the growing season. In addition, the fixed hoop houses will be used during the off-season for starting seedlings and conducting educational activities.

- D. Education. A key aspect of NBF has been and will continue to be educational and artistic activities linked to the Brook Farm site. Past and proposed programming are described in more detail in Section 3, below.
- E. Term. NBF is seeking a term of ten years, and requests an option to extend for an additional ten years. This long term will be required given the initial investment in soil and equipment and the time necessary to build up ongoing soil fertility in an organic farming system.

2. *Alignment with DCR's Mission:* *DCR's mission is to protect, promote, and enhance our common wealth of natural, cultural, and recreational resources for the well-being of all. Clearly state how the proposed activity aligns with this mission.*

- A. "Protect." Given the site's status as a National Historic Landmark, NBF has always sought to protect the archaeological resources of Brook Farm. NBF advocated for and secured the initial funding for DCR's 2022 archaeological survey of the site with a grant from the City of Boston Community Preservation Act, including funding from NBF itself. This grant was subsequently matched with DCR funds. NBF also has consistently advocated for, and stands ready to assist in, the removal of invasive plants that have overrun the most archaeologically sensitive area of the site.

With respect to the proposed community farm, NBF will protect Brook Farm in two ways: (i) NBF will protect archaeological resources by covering existing soils with additional soil, as described in detail in Section 1, above; and (ii) NBF will protect the site, including the archaeological resources, from further expansion of invasive trees and shrubs into the area used for farming.

- B. "Promote." For more than ten years, NBF has promoted Brook Farm through a wide range of educational activities at the site, in the local community, and around the Greater Boston area, as described in detail in Section 3, below. Programming has addressed the history, natural environment, and artistic inspiration of the site. As a result, NBF has drawn 20 to 50 guests to the site several times a year, plus larger crowds for off-site events, exposing a much wider audience to Brook Farm. At each of these events, attendees have repeatedly said, "I've lived here for years and never knew this was here."

NBF intends to continue these programs and to expand them to include on-site training and education in horticulture and farming. We anticipate that these additional educational programming and volunteer activities, rooted in actual cultivation at the site, will draw an even larger audience to enjoy and embrace the history and nature of Brook Farm and to create a broader constituency for investment in the site.

- C. "Enhance." By returning a small portion of the site to active agricultural use, NBF will enhance the asset by both interpreting the site's agricultural and intellectual history and by creating a contemporary community resource with benefits that extend beyond the site itself. In addition, the farm will preserve a small remnant of the landscape of Brook Farm, which was cultivated, open farmland, mixed with woods for the last 300 years (see cover, painting of Brook Farm by Josiah Wolcott, 1845). The best way to preserve this historic landscape is to actively farm it, as has been done elsewhere, most notably by the National Park Service along the Battle Road in Minuteman National Park.

3. Public Benefit: *Describe how the proposed activity will benefit the public (ex., providing recreational opportunities, educational programs, community engagement, stewardship, or other public-oriented services.) Explain how the activity will benefit the community and how it will enhance the overall experience for park visitors.*

NBF exists to benefit the public. NBF was created to produce fresh, sustainably grown vegetables, address local food insecurity, and provide a wide range of educational and artistic programs.

Even without a permanent presence at the site, NBF has run more than 40 events over the past 12 years, providing educational opportunities to the public. These have included: (i) frequent guided walks focusing on the history and nature of Brook Farm; (ii) lectures, seminars, webinars, and dramatic readings by historians, archaeologists, authors, and volunteers; (iii) exhibits of artifacts, maps, and documents; and (iv) participatory arts programs. In its programming, NBF has partnered with the Boston Women's Heritage Trail; Mass Audubon; Mass Humanities; the City of Boston Archaeologist; The Gardens Cemetery; Theodore Parker Church in West Roxbury; Brookline Bank; the West Roxbury Historical Society; and the Jamaica Plain, Roslindale, and West Roxbury branches of the Boston Public Library. A partial list of these events is included as Addendum 1.

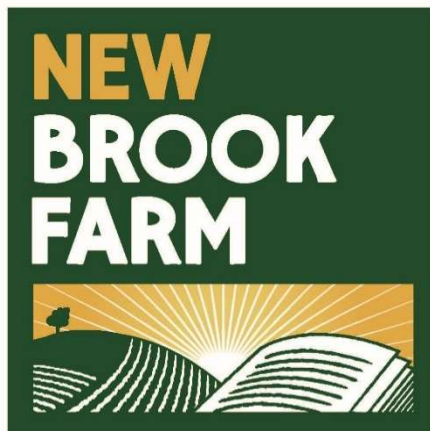
After establishing a community farm, NBF will add new agricultural programs while continuing the current level of programming. These new programs will include: training for young, future farmers; opportunities for volunteer farm work under professional supervision; and workshops on horticulture and home gardening.

The food grown by NBF will represent a further public benefit. Like most community farms, NBF will market the produce in various ways. NBF will seek to distribute fresh produce to food-insecure populations through established low- or no-cost food providers. In addition, NBF will market produce through a local farmers' market and/or a CSA farm shares program to sustain farming operations, programming, and building awareness for Brook Farm.

- 4. Fee or In-Kind Services:** *Provide a detailed breakdown of the proposed fee structure or a comprehensive description of in-kind services to be offered in exchange for the use of DCR parkland. For a proposed fee, please provide some basis or reasons for the proposed amount. Include whether the proposed fee is a one-time payment or periodic payments (ex. monthly, yearly).*

NBF will pay a nominal rent of one dollar per annum for the use of the site. NBF will not make a profit from the use of the site, and expects that the farm will require ongoing grant funding to sustain its various agricultural and educational activities. Any fees or income received by NBF will be directed to operating the farm and associated programming.

In operating the farm, however, NBF will provide DCR with significant in-kind services, including the benefits described in detail in Sections 2 and 3, above.



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ADDENDUM 1

New Brook Farm

Educational Programming, 2011 to 2023

2023

“Greeting the Summer Solstice at New Brook Farm,” guided nature walk with Mass Audubon naturalist and NBF members, May 2023.

“Winter Nature Walk at Brook Farm,” guided nature walk with Mass Audubon naturalist and NBF members, January 2023.

2022

“Utopia Revisited: Bringing Brook Farm into the Future through Past,” presentation of past and recent archaeological findings at the site by members of the DCR and PAL team that performed the 2022 archaeological survey, November 2022.

“Fall Birding at New Brook Farm,” guided nature walk with Mass Audubon naturalist and NBF members, September 2022.

“Focus on Brook Farm VII,” program inviting photographers, artists, and members of the public to submit images of the natural and man-made environment of Brook Farm, on-line exhibit, April 2022.

“For the Birds,” Spring birding walk with Mass Audubon naturalist and NBF members, March 2022.

“A Winter Walk on the Wild Side,” guided nature walk with Mass Audubon naturalist and NBF members, February 2022.

2021

“Nature and History Come Alive at Brook Farm,” guided walk by Mass Audubon naturalist and NBF members, October 2021.

“Focus on Brook Farm VI,” program inviting photographers, artists, and members of the public to submit images of the natural and man-made environment of Brook Farm, on-line exhibit, April 2021.

“Conflagration: How the Transcendentalists Sparked the American Struggle for Racial, Gender, and Social Justice,” webinar by John Buehrens, based on his book of the same name, March 2021.

2020

“Focus on Brook Farm V,” program inviting photographers, artists, and members of the public to submit images of the natural and man-made environment of Brook Farm, in on-line exhibit, April 2020.

2019

“Walking and Talking with Thoreau,” historic reenactment at Brook Farm by historian and actor Richard Smith.

“Shaping the Social Contract,” special performance of The Women of Brook Farm, with dramatic readings of diaries, letters, and books by women who lived at Brook Farm, featuring professional and volunteer actors, followed by guided discussion led by historian and writer Marilyn Richardson examining the interconnections of gender equality, abolitionism, and women’s suffrage in the 19th century and connections to contemporary American society, supported by Mass Humanities grant, in partnership with the Boston Women’s History Trail, Roslindale Branch, Boston Public Library, March 2019.

“Shaping the Social Contract,” special performance of The Women of Brook Farm, followed by guided discussion led by Tufts University Professor Kerri Greenridge, supported by Mass Humanities grant, in partnership with the Boston Women’s History Trail, Cambridge Public Library, February 2019.

“Focus on Brook Farm IV,” program inviting photographers, artists, and members of the public to submit images of the natural and man-made environment of Brook Farm, exhibit at Brookline Bank and awards dinner, February to March 2019.

2018

“From Brook Farm to *Glory*: A Life of Robert Gould Shaw,” lecture by historian Richard Smith at Theodore Parker Church, December 2018.

“The Birds and the Bees at Brook Farm,” guided nature walk by PhD student at Tufts University and NBF members, August 2018.

“Birding at Brook Farm,” nature walk led by expert birder and NBF members, May 2018.

“Focus on Brook Farm III,” program inviting photographers, artists, and members of the public to submit images of the natural and man-made environment of Brook Farm, exhibit at Brookline Bank and awards dinner, March 2018.

2017

“The Women of Brook Farm,” dramatic readings of diaries, letters, and books by women who lived at Brook Farm, featuring professional and volunteer actors, in partnership with the Boston Women’s History Trail Jamaica Plain Branch, Boston Public Library, November 2017.

“Focus on Brook Farm II,” program inviting photographers, artists, and members of the public to submit images of the natural and man-made environment of Brook Farm, exhibit at Brookline Bank and awards dinner, February to March 2017.

2016

“Brook Farm 175,” month-long series of events celebrating the 175th anniversary of the founding of the original Brook Farm community in 1841, October to November 2016.

“Walk if Off,” non-guided walk the day after Thanksgiving, November 2016.

“Brook Farm Then and Now,” reception and month-long exhibition of artifacts, maps, and photos at the West Roxbury Branch, Boston Public Library, October 2016.

“The Women of Brook Farm,” dramatic readings of diaries, letters, and books by women who lived at Brook Farm, featuring professional and volunteer actors, in partnership with the Boston Women’s History Trail, Theodore Parker Church, West Roxbury, October 2017.

“Focus on Brook Farm: Photography and Artists’ Outing,” guided photography walk led by professional photographer Christoph Gervais, October 2016.

“Walk Through History: Brook Farm and Pulpit Rock,” guided walk discussing history of Brook Farm site led by NBF Board member Jessica Mink and other NBF members, October 2016.

“Focus on Brook Farm I,” program inviting photographers, artists, and members of the public to submit images of the natural and man-made environment of Brook Farm, exhibit at Brookline Bank and awards dinner, February to March 2016.

2015

“The Women of Brook Farm,” dramatic readings of diaries, letters, and books by women who lived at Brook Farm, featuring professional and volunteer actors, in partnership with the Boston Women’s History Trail, at Brook Farm, October 2015.

“Focus on Brook Farm: Photography Outing,” photography walk led by professional photographer Christoph Gervais, September 2016.

2014

“Guided Walk of Historic Brook Farm,” guided historical walk led by NBF members, November 2014.

“Guided Walk of Historic Brook Farm,” guided historical walk led by Peter Drummey of the Massachusetts Historical Society, June 2014.

“Hawthorne, Brook Farm, and the Blithedale Romance,” book discussion by Prof. Samuel Coale, April 2014.

“Transcendentalists in our Midst,” lecture by Prof. Dean Grodzins, West Roxbury Branch, Boston Public Library, January 2014.

2013

“Brook Farm Exhibit at the City Archaeology Lab,” presentation by Boston City Archaeologist Joe Bagley of artifacts exhibited at the the City Archaeology Lab, West Roxbury, May 2013.

“Roger Swain Presents: Growing Backyard Vegetables,” lecture by horticulturalist and television gardening host Roger Swain, Theodore Parker Church, April 2013.

2012

“Guided Walking Tour of Historic Brook Farm,” led by West Roxbury Historical Society President Bob Murphy, September 2012.

“Brook Farm and *New Brook Farm*,” lecture by NBF President Bill Tuttle, Spring House, West Roxbury, May 2012.