Carol Bercovitch

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Critical Response #1

Mary Beaudry began her site report of excavations of the Spencer-Peirce-Little Farm with an introduction justifying the need to excavate the site as a means to answer questions about the human-land relationship and historical agricultural practices. Beaudry is careful about her word choice and is careful to define ambiguous terms, like the usage of “context.” Beaudry follows the introduction with a detailed synopsis of the historical background of the farm: the owners and how they came to possess the land, tenant famers and what they cultivated, family members who occupied the house, notable visitors to the estate, and additions and alterations the house and land. The historical background, along with the illustrating timeline of owners, allows the reader to connect findings with a person and historical era. Beaudry divides her research and findings into sections by geographic unit. By dividing the information in this way Beaudry is able to go into great detail and link the findings to domestic or agricultural life. While I find individual sections of her report readable and easy to follow, I had difficulty forming a cohesive timeline for the site as a whole.

The Roger Williams Memorial Site of which Gibson wrote is a much larger piece of land with a more diverse history ranging from Native American origins, to early colonial settlement, to its present use as a memorial. Gibson’s report puts forth an argument for future excavations and study of the site, as opposed to Beaudry’s post-excavation analysis. Gibson divides her research into three main eras in the site’s history and in each section describes the land and its features as well as the inhabitants. In my opinion, the Gibson report was more organized and summarized the information in a way more digestible for the reader than the Beaudry piece. Additionally, Gibson’s report was written with the intent to alert the reader to the importance of the site and its uncertain future, an aim that necessitates a more concise report.

Both pieces begin with a history of land use and population to illuminate the importance of excavation on the respective sites, an approach we should use in our documentation of the John Brown House project. Beginning with a broad history of the site based on archival research is a useful way to introduce readers to the project. Following the historical background, we should outline our research methods and pose the questions we hope to answer in the report. Like Gibson, we could divide our data and findings chronologically, rather than by unit.

It is difficult at this point to decide how to present our research when we have so little data and or knowledge of each other’s sites. I hope in the upcoming weeks, as we uncover information and learn more about the John Brown House, a suitable presentation structure will begin to take form.