

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This executive summary and attachments provide a brief overview of the historic structures on Swan Island, and give general guidelines for prioritized repairs. Please refer to the attached Schedule of Repairs (Appendix A), and Individual Building Condition Checklists (Appendix B). For your convenience, we have provided a digital copy of this material, including copies of all photographs taken during the May 18, 2011 site visit.

No Cost Opinions have been prepared as part of this project. This Structural Assessment is to be used solely to obtain grant funding and to prioritize use of available monies for future design fees, owner's soft costs, and construction costs. This preliminary structural assessment is a *first step* toward a larger preservation strategy that includes Existing Conditions Documentation, Schematic Design, Design Development, Construction Documents, Specifications, and Construction Administration. Resurgence Engineering & Preservation, Inc. cannot be responsible for consequences arising from construction work or funding gaps that occur before complete plans and specifications are produced. Recommendations listed in this report are not detailed enough to be used as Construction Documents.

As is often the case with building preservation projects, many factors need to be considered. Planning issues, economic justification, site safety, usage patterns, and environmental issues all factor into the final decision about the best way to preserve the property in question. Some preservation items, although not immediately necessary to restore, repair, or replace deficiencies, may need to be addressed earlier to avoid repeating or complicating future work.

For the purposes of this report we have grouped the buildings by property, generally from north to south along Swan Island as follows: Tubbs Reed, Priest Blen, Boat House, Gardiner Dumaresque, Robinson Powell, and Lily Wade. Please note that we have not included the Maxwell Tarr Garage or the Landing Shed as our limited time on the island did not allow for us to assess these buildings.

The Tubbs-Reed house is an early 19th-century Federal house located at the north end of the island. Visible from both sides of the Kennebec, as well as from the Route 197 bridge, it is possibly the iconic image of human habitation on Swan Island.

The Priest-Blen house is located several hundred yards south of the Tubbs-Reed house. It is one of three remaining building complexes on the island that represent rural 19th and 20th century life, complete with outbuildings related to agriculture and island life. Currently occupied by IF&W staff during summer months, the Priest-Blen house is the only habitable house on the island, in terms of modern utilities and plumbing. Its outbuildings, including a Machine Shop and sheds, are in varying states of decay, but tell an important story of agrarian island life.

On the west side of the Kennebec River, the boathouse is stationed immediately below the island campground. It is a functional building with working electricity, and is used to hold educational programs on island.

Overlooking the boathouse, the Gardiner Dumaresque house is the oldest remaining building on the island. Its proximity to the campground and Boathouse makes it an attractive candidate for future preservation efforts and adaptive use as a functional building on the island.

Just south of the Gardiner-Dumaresque house, the Robinson-Powell complex is perhaps the most stylistically cohesive group of buildings on the island. The two barns, woodshed, and well house tell the story of a thoughtful development at the site. Its proximity to the campground and boathouse also makes the property an attractive candidate for preservation.

Further south, the Lily-Wade site, including a house, barn, carriage house, and corn crib, looks over the western branch of the Kennebec several hundred yards inland. This site is the most isolated of the properties that we observed. From a wildlife management standpoint, the Lily-Wade buildings are the only buildings that appear to harbor an active population of bats.

Many of these buildings are in significant structural distress. It is important to note that rebuilding nearly completely failed structures in conformance with contemporary codes will cost more than simply rebuilding the existing buildings "as is". While contemporary codes for agrarian outbuildings are less restrictive than those for occupied buildings, please understand that rebuilding even some of the agrarian buildings may require them to have more substantial structures.

While individual examples of different types of buildings may exist at the different sites, it may be necessary to prioritize preservation on a site-per site basis. For instance, although the Lily-Wade complex has the only remaining example of a timber-framed barn structure, and the only active bat population, the remaining structures at that site may be in poor enough condition that the entire site (minus the corn crib) may need to be documented and removed if funds cannot be made available to preserve the buildings.

Conversely, the Robinson Powell complex and the Gardiner-Dumaresque house present an exciting preservation opportunity due to their proximity to the campground and Boathouse, as well as the proximity to the Kennebec River. The Tubbs-Reed house, with its prominent location on the north end of Swan Island, could be an excellent candidate for immediate stabilization until longer-term preservation funds become available.

Of immediate concern is the Priest Blen property and more specifically the Priest Blen House. The Priest Blen house is currently occupied by IF&W staff during the summer months and requires immediate attention in order to ensure the safety of the occupants. We recommend that you remove the ell and secure the attached shed structures immediately adjacent to the Priest Blen House. The structure of the ell has failed beyond repair. Prior to demolition we recommend that you obtain additional detailed documentation if the buildings should be reconstructed in the future. The remaining portion of the House should be stabilized and weatherproofed at the area of demolition. It is also critical to relocate the electrical service into the Priest Blen House, since the ell is in such poor condition. Employee and public safety are compelling reasons to make these immediate repairs.



- (A) Exterior View of Rear Ell at Priest Blen, showing electrical entrance
- (R) Rotted Entrance at unsafe Priest Blen ell; with many protruding, rusted nailheads



- Unsafe Ell at Back of Priest Blen House, which is occupied by IF&W Staff
- (L) View from Kitchen; Electrical Panel should be relocated into Main House immediately
- (R) Rotted floor in ell behind Priest Blen Kitchen

For all of the structures on the island, we have several suggestions for immediate action regarding structural stability concerns, occupant safety and maintenance. First of all, steps should be taken to fully secure all buildings. This includes sealing the buildings from animal entry. Porcupines, specifically, are responsible for surprisingly significant structural damage in many of the buildings including the Gardiner Dumaesque House, the Robinson Powell House and the Lily Wade House. We recommend further discussion with IF&W biologist Kendall Marden to consider porcupine eradication options or solutions that match with the philosophy of the IF&W at this wildlife preserve.



Structural Damage at Porcupine Entry into Gardiner-Dumaesque House



Porcupine Damage on Gardiner-Dumaesque Second-Floor Railing

We suggest that tree and brush removal along the perimeter of the buildings be taken care of as soon as possible. As we understand it, IF&W staff are already overseeing some of this work. Tree and brush removal includes all trees and large branches in close proximity to the buildings. We recommend full consideration of the historic significance of individual plantings prior to their removal. There is already evidence of fallen limbs causing roof failure and regular landscaping is a simple preventative measure. Additionally, we recommend establishing a regular maintenance program. This would include monthly walkthroughs of each building to determine newly compromised areas or cause for concern. We recommend full consideration of the historic significance of individual plantings prior to their removal.

To further establish public awareness of and respect for these buildings, we recommend placing inexpensive, informative signage at the properties to forbid entry, to inform visitors of the historical significance, and to tell the story of a past era of significance on Swan Island.

A final item of specific concern, though not part of the inspection, is the condition of the well covering near the Picnic Shelter and Boat House. Relatively small stones and metal plates cover part of the opening, and they could be moved aside, allowing an unsuspecting person or larger animal to fall into the well.



Haphazardly-placed stones and steel plate covering well near picnic shelter

Given the structural condition of these existing buildings, it is critical to develop a long-range plan for their stabilization and rehabilitation. Planning should be performed in parallel with some of the highest-priority building stabilization suggestions. Because federal funds received in the purchase of Swan Island can only be used toward the direct mission of the Maine Inland Fisheries and Wildlife Department, it appears that the only structures that can be repaired with IF&W funds are the Priest-Blen House and the Boathouse, because they directly relate to the IF&W mission on Swan Island.

It will be important to find other funding sources for building stabilization and rehabilitation of the remaining important 19th and 20th century agrarian structures.

If further study and inventory of these buildings is not undertaken soon, it may be too late to safely document them, and nature may decide which buildings should be preserved, and which structures will fade into memory.