

Presentation outline offered by the Natick Heritage Preservation Group
January 8, 2025

We are asking the Select Board to act under the authority and directive of the Fall 2017 Town meeting Article 28 (*attached) to take possession of the house at 79 South Street in South Natick (Assessors Map 77 Lot 7) and a small footprint of land that it sits on, to allow for its immediate stabilization. We are requesting that the Town then assign this property to a newly formed Natick Heritage Corp., a soon to be approved 501 (c)(3), as that Article allows. These are the facts that have led us to make this request:

Some History of Where We Are & How We Got Here

1. For the past nearly 10 years, there have been multiple official Town committees formed with the task of investigating, reporting and negotiating with Mass Audubon (MA) around finding a solution to save the Thomas Sawin house, est 1690, from destruction.
2. These committees have resulted in numerous meetings, reports, discussions and further investigations, resulting in numerous proposals to MA, all of which have been sensitive to the concerns of MA regarding noise, lighting, parking, water and electrical supply, the wildlife, visitation, disruption and costs.
3. In the spirit of cooperation and in relationship building, which the house represents, several proposals were offered and intended to honor their rights as owners, including the non-disruption of their business or to their visitors, their self-proclaimed “business mission” and other concerns that they have expressed during that time. No proposal was ever made that would impose a cost or liability risk burden onto MA in any project.
4. During the past 10 years there has been little to no movement or signs of willingness on the part of MA to participate in any arrangement that would yield a satisfactory result of saving Natick’s 1st and oldest 17th century Colonial house, and maybe the only home in New England that has housed a veteran of the King Phillips War, The French & Indian War and the American Revolution from the same family. A symbol of friendship, faith and trust between Native people in the person of Sarah Awassamug and Thomas Sawin, the house has also been at the center of Natick’s earliest Abolitionist activity with Moses Sawin being shunned from his Church for his outspoken views and activities.
5. In August of 2024, after showing no signs of reconciliation, MA applied for a demolition permit that was delayed for 6 months by the Natick Historic Commission, citing the House’s rich and significant historic and cultural value to the Town. MA was again asked to negotiate in good faith with the Town to find a solution, which they have steadfastly refused to do.
6. At this writing, there are over 1100 online petition signatures of concerned people who have expressed a desire to see the house saved. <https://www.change.org/p/save-the-sawin-house>.
7. With the house in danger of being demolished within the next 5 weeks, it is apparent that MA has no intentions of entering into any kind of agreement that would yield a satisfactory result for the Town and for all who wish to see the house preserved as it is, where it is, amid the sacred trees, waterways, fields, paths and mill sites.

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8. The Natick praying Indian community, represented by Chief Caring Hands until her recent death was a steadfast advocate for protecting this “Sacred Place” as she called it. She spoke publicly about the need to save this home and of her gratitude, that this land has been protected for so long and that the home, the ancient trees, waterways and mills took care of her people and their friends the Sawin family.

The Proposal

9. Therefore, unless MA immediately withdraws its demolition permit and enters into such an agreement of their own authority, we are asking the Selectboard to intervene, as authorized at Fall Town Meeting in 2017 in Articles 28, (*see attached) to take possession of the house at 79 South Street in South Natick (Assessors Map 77 Lot 7) and a small footprint of land that it sits on, to allow its immediate stabilization.
10. We are requesting that the Town then assign this property to a newly formed Natick Heritage Corp., a soon to be approved 501 (c)(3), consisting of several prominent, experienced and respected local citizens, historians and business professionals who will be charged with the responsibility of fund raising, preserving and managing the homestead in a manner that is respectful to Mass Audubon and that meets the needs and desires of the Town to protect this important historical and cultural landmark. Precedent for an action like this is reflected in the history of the Natick Organic Farm in 1974 which proved a successful venture for the community. Framingham is also considering a similar action in its community as well.
11. The plan is to simply preserve and protect the structure where it currently stands, neither increasing or altering its footprint, thereby not infringing upon MA’s desire for a peaceful wildlife sanctuary for its visitors. It is our further intention to develop a narrative history of the house and its residents linked to the various events and the personalities who shaped them that defined Natick’s role in the American experience throughout the centuries. It will be closed to the public similar to the Wilson Shoe Shop.
12. This scenario presents the Town and MA with an efficient, no risk and no cost solution, one that respects the “mission” conflict of the current owner, yet allows a committed and capable group of citizens, the opportunity to insure that there becomes a long term solution to protecting Natick’s Colonial birthplace and symbol of the relationship that Natick has had with its Native people, People of Color and its Veterans. The property described has no developmental value to its current owner or any other party as it is restricted by deed.
13. This has become the only viable solution at this late date, with demolition certain to occur within the next few weeks otherwise, to salvage the homestead that symbolizes friendship and service, promises made and honored, commitments to each other, our Town and to our Nation between our Native & Colonial forefathers and foremothers. This house must continue to stand as a memorial to the relationship between Native Sarah Awassamug and our Colonial grandparents. We must work together, and quickly to save this important historical and cultural landmark or we will lose it forever.