

# Estabrook Woods at the time of the Revolution

## The Revolution and Estabrook Woods

The North Bridge is located just a short distance south of Estabrook Woods. While there were no battles fought in the Estabrook Woods, it is one of the few nearby areas that has been undeveloped since the time of the revolution. We also know that some of the patriots that fought on April 19<sup>th</sup> came from the north, and must have passed either through the Estabrook Woods or along the edges of the Estabrook Woods.

There are no known first-hand accounts known of the militias that came to the North Bridge from the north on April 19, 1775. There are also no muster rolls specific to the battle at the bridge. There are no documented casualties of minute-men from the Carlisle district of Concord. There is no information as to whether the patriots from the north who came to the battle of April 19<sup>th</sup> were at the bridge for the first shots, or whether they were only engaged in the battles of the British retreat. Nevertheless, historians have pieced together stories and evidence from various sources and have a plausible narrative for how the northern militias came to the battle.

## Status of Carlisle at the time of the revolution

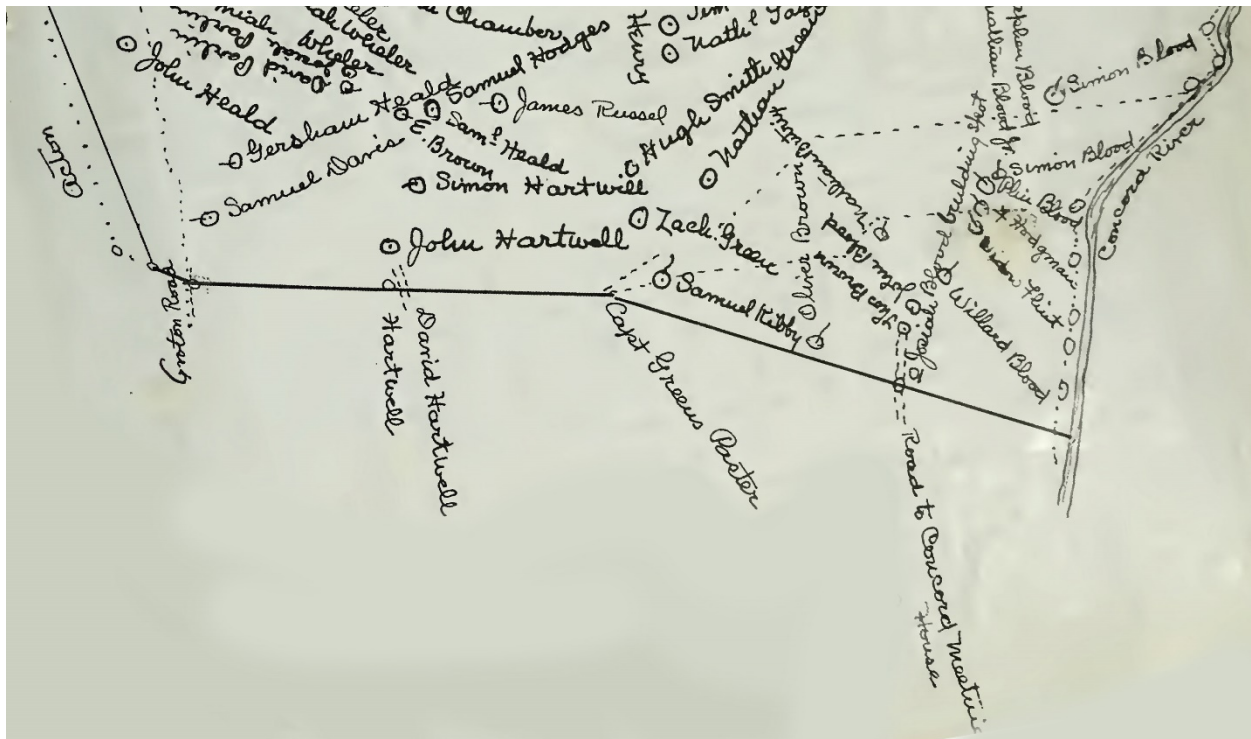
At the time of the revolution, Carlisle was not a separate town, and did not become a town until 1805. What is now Carlisle incorporates land that, at the time of the revolution, belonged to the towns of Acton, Billerica, Chelmsford, and Concord. While today we consider the Estabrook Woods to be partially in Concord and partially in Carlisle, at the time of the revolution these woods were all in Concord. However, the northern part of Concord was referred to as "The Carlisle district" of Concord.

Before the revolution, in 1754, the inhabitants of what is now Carlisle tried to create a new town from land partially of Acton, Billerica, and Concord, a process which required a successful petition to the district court. Although their petition was approved, the town meeting of the fledgling town could not agree on a number of issues, including where to locate the Town meeting house, a requirement under the terms of their incorporation. So after only three years of independence, Carlisle was annexed back as part of Concord. In 1780, Carlisle was again founded as a district, larger and to the north of the first district, and it was only later, in 1805, that Carlisle became a Town.

At the time of the revolution, there were dozens of families living in what would later become Carlisle, but only two living in the area of the Estabrook Woods. One of these was Samuel Kibbe, who lived near the current Carlisle town line, and the other was Robert Estabrook who lived just behind what is now Middlesex School. Neither of these families had any known role in the revolution.

## Geography of the area in 1775

To understand the geography of the area, we can refer to old maps and history texts. The first map of the district that later became the Town of Carlisle that is from 1779, and a transcription of it is shown below:



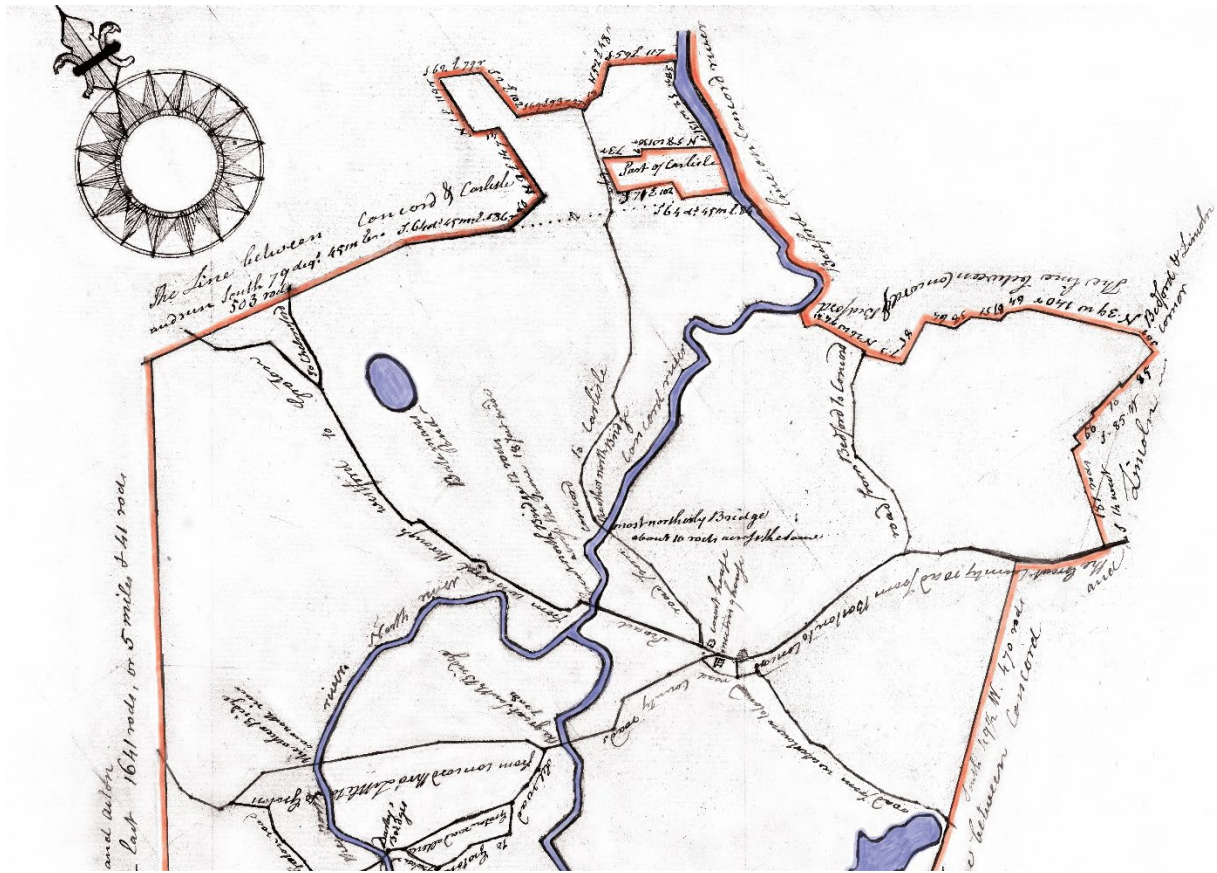
This map identifies only three roads to Concord, which are “Groton Road”, an unnamed road near the Hartwell farms, and “The Road to Concord Meeting House”. These roads all still exist and are today known in Concord as “Westford Road”, “Lowell Road”, and “Monument Street”. On the original of this map from which the transcription was created, you can also see what is now “two-rod road” passing the home of Oliver Barron which is incorrectly transcribed on the above map as “Oliver Brown.”

Groton Road had been laid out by the County in 1699 as the main road to the northwest. Lowell Road branched to the north from Groton Road near what is now Middlesex School was laid out in 1727 as the road to Chelmsford. Monument Street was laid out in 1735 as “The Road to Blood’s Farms” and served the farms along the River, which included a number of members of the Blood family as shown on the map. Two-rod road had been laid out in 1745.

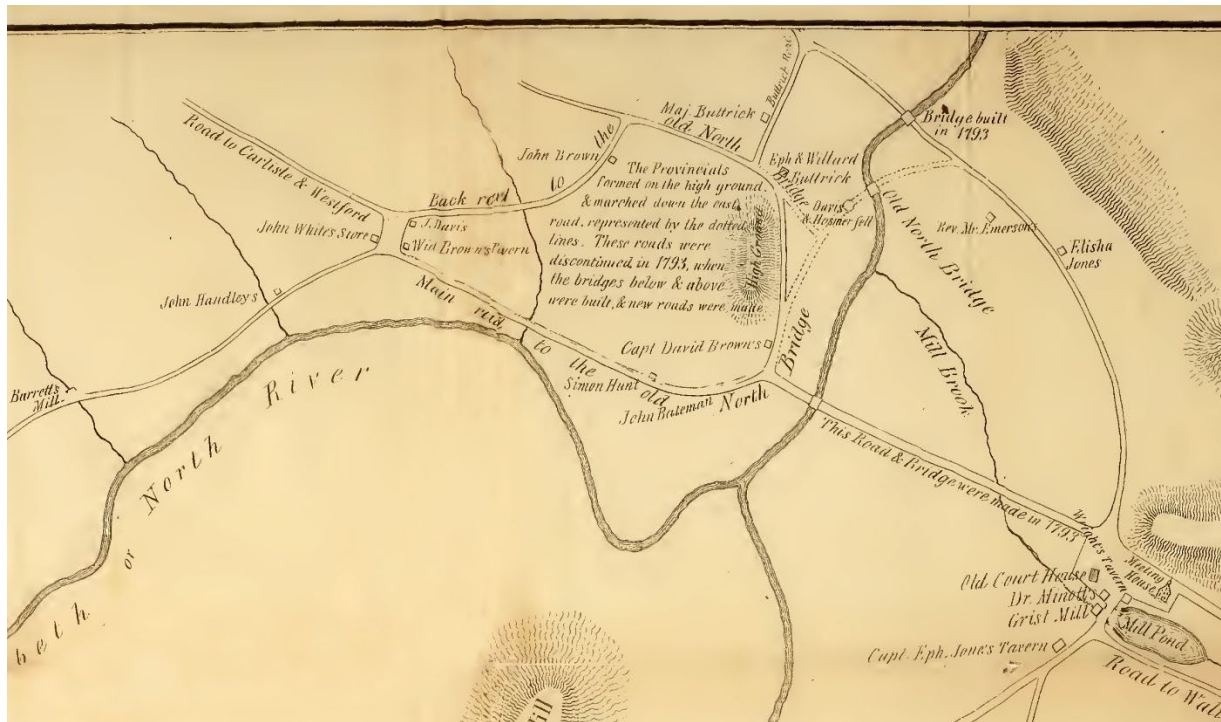
The next map known is the 1794 map of Concord that shows the roads to Carlisle (map on next page). This map shows three roads into Carlisle, which are “Through Westford to Groton”, “To Chelmsford”, and “Road from Concord to Carlisle”. These are the same roads shown on the previous Carlisle map,

and all still exist and are today known in Concord as “Westford Road”, “Lowell Road”, and “Monument Street”.

By 1794, we can see that there are two bridges leading north over the Concord River, one at Lowell Road and one at Monument Street. However, at the time of the revolution 18 years earlier neither of those bridges existed yet, and both Lowell Road and Monument Street connected to the Old North Bridge via what is now known Liberty Street. Therefore, at the time of the Revolution, both the Roads now known as Monument Street and Lowell Road converged to the North Bridge, and were populated with residents.



The reconfiguration of the bridges to the north was later documented in the Josiah Adams map made in 1835, which shows both the original and later configuration:



In 1775, we know that there were two roads through the Estabrook Woods, both visible today, which are Estabrook Trail, and Two-rod Road. Two-rod road was established by the Town Meeting in 1745, beginning at Punkatasset Hill in Concord and running through the Estabrook Woods to Carlisle, where the remaining section of it is now known as Stearns Street. This road was once a primary road from Billerica to Concord. According to historian Ruth Wilkins, this road was “the only road in the area then leading to the Concord Bridge. Much of the road has since been abandoned but the portion still in use includes Stearns Street...”. The section of this road in the Estabrook Woods was discontinued in 1908 and is now a trail.

The extension of Estabrook Road which is now known as the Estabrook Trail was present in 1775 but never appears in any maps. The southern part of the Trail was created as a private way by the owners around 1720. The Town of Concord later considered extending the road north in 1763, *but voted it down* at the Town Meeting. The county then attempted to establish the northern part, ordering it to be a public road under conditions that were never met or followed through. The Estabrook Trail does not show on a map until 1830, when the state ordered the creation of a map showing both public and private ways. The first discussion of the use of this road in Concord Town records is in 1877 where it is said to have been used for logging. In the Town records of 1891 it describes Estabrook Trail as “little better than ruts through a piece of woodland”. What is known is that there is a cellar hole along the Trail, which was abandoned around 1810, that appears to have been used briefly in association with a short-lived lime mining operation by Concord resident Peter Barrett.

There were also other cart paths and trails in the Estabrook Woods at that time; according to historian Steve Ells, the Estabrook Woods was a web of paths with names as vague as “ye way which goeth into the woods”.

Taking this information together, we can create an accurate map of the area in 1775:



Map of the Estabrook Area at the time of the Revolution, with current names of roads shown

(Primary roads in black, unofficial/future roads in grey)

## The Revolutionary Tavern

One of the most important buildings in the Carlisle district at the time of the revolution was the so called "Revolutionary Tavern", which was a meeting place for the local militia. According to Wilkins:

*"During the Revolutionary War the house was used both as a family home and a public inn, being situated on the main road from Billerica to Concord (Carlisle then not being even a district), the only road at that time leading to Concord Bridge, the only bridge over the river. Most of this road, including the so-called two rod road, has since been abandoned but the portion still used includes Stearns Street and passes the short lane leading to this building."*

This tavern has long since been taken down, but there are some photographs of it in the Carlisle Town archives, including the following photograph:



## The Carlisle Meeting House

The meeting house issue has significance in relation to the Estabrook Woods because it is said that one of the proposed locations for the Carlisle meeting house in 1754 was near an area known as Poplar Hill and near the location the previous home of one of the Estabrooks. Some have assumed this meant the meeting house was proposed to be in Estabrook Woods. However, by 1754 the town was home to the third generation of the descendants of the early settler Thomas Estabrook, and there were multiple Estabrook homesteads located in the Carlisle district in the north of Concord. According to Wilkins, Poplar hill is now known as "Bellows Hill", and in fact according to Lapham there was an Estabrook homestead on the road in Carlisle now known as Bellows Hill Road. The first Carlisle district was smaller and extended further south into Concord, so the center would have been near Bellows Hill. The evidence suggests that the first proposed meeting house site for Carlisle was on Bellows Hill, north of Estabrook Woods (see the previous Map of the Estabrook Area for location of Bellows Hill).

Immediately after Carlisle was annexed back to Concord, in 1758, a Mr Timothy Wilkins gave the Town a plot of land at what is now the center of Carlisle, as a location for a meeting house. A small meeting house of 30 x 40 feet was constructed there, near where the current Unitarian Church stands. This original meeting house was the meeting house at the time of the revolution, where the patriots from the north were said to gather on the eve of the battle at the North Bridge. This meeting house was destroyed by lightning in 1810.

## The day of April 19

On the day of April 19<sup>th</sup>, tradition says that between 16 and 21 men from the area we now call Carlisle marched through the Carlisle district to the battle. Of these, the majority were from Billerica, with a few each from Acton, Chelmsford, and the North District of Concord. These men are said to have gathered at the First Parish meeting house in Carlisle at around 7:30 am and Marched to the bridge, arriving at the Buttrick Hillside above the bridge at around 9:30. The arriving men from Concord and Acton joined their own units, and the remaining men were assigned to the Acton unit.

There is some confusion regarding the path the minute men took that day. Since the majority of the contingent was from Billerica, the obvious path for them was to take the Billerica-Concord Road. At the time of the revolution, the main road from Billerica to Concord was the road passing the Revolutionary Tavern, which ultimately connected to what is now Monument Street. What is now Monument Street, did not cross the river as it does today, but instead terminated at the north side of the north bridge. See the previous map. Following this path would have taken the minute men to the battle at the bridge past the Revolutionary Tavern via what is now Monument Street, and would have been their most direct route.

However, there is another different version of the march that day. In 1879 historian Samuel Drake, in his "History of Middlesex County" writes that a descendant of one of the original marchers relayed a story told him by his grandfather about the march. This same story is described in the original handwritten notes of historian Martha Wilkins:

The Big Alarm by Paul Revere and Dr. Prescott.  
Trask's History of Middlesex County.

"Reuben Brown and Deacon Parkman, well mounted, were sent to alarm adjacent towns. The old Carlisle Lieutenant used to tell his grandson, now living (1879) that the people of the neighborhood were summoned by Timothy Wilkins with his drum and James Kent with his horn; and that under an old Indian fighter, James Russell, they marched twenty-one strong to Hildreth's Corner where they met Captain Davis and the Acton men, and accompanied them to the bridge. A little after sunrise, two hundred men had come together. Three quarters of them were from Concord."

In the above paragraph "the old Carlisle Lieutenant" was Lt. Samuel Heald, and "his grandson" was Major Benjamin Franklin Heald.

In this version the marchers proceeded to Hildreth's Corner, where they met the Acton men coming from the west, before proceeding to the bridge.

Hildreth's corner is the intersection of what is now Lowell Road and Barrett's Mill Road. To go to that location from the location of the Carlisle meeting house by the fastest way, the minute men would have proceeded down Lowell Road, which was a main road from the Carlisle district to Concord. After meeting with the Acton men at Hildreth's corner, the assembled group proceeded to the North Bridge, either by Lowell Road or by what is now called Barnes Hill Road.

There is yet a third variant of the march of the minute men from the north. In Ruth Wilkin's 1976 book "The History of Carlisle", she describes the march as down Estabrook Road:

The only information we have pertaining directly to Carlisle's receiving the alarm, is the account related in 1879 by Major Benjamin Franklin Heald who had been told by his grandfather, Lt. Samuel Heald, about Carlisle's response to the alarm. He said that Reuben Brown and Deacon Parkman had spread the news, and that the Minutemen were called together by the drum of Timothy Wilkins (Jr.) and the horn of James Kemp, to gather in front of the Meetinghouse. Then under an old Indian fighter, James Russell, they marched twenty-one strong over Estabrook Road to Concord.



However, a comparison with the previous handwritten notes shows the text of the 1976 book appears to be taken from the Drake History, and that original Drake text says the group was marching to Hildreth's corner, and makes no mention of Estabrook Road. The distance from the Carlisle meeting house to Hildreth's Corner is 4.43 miles via Lowell Road, but is a longer distance of 4.70 miles via Estabrook Road, which was not a main road. It seems unlikely that the men would choose a longer uninhabited route through the woods (Estabrook Road) instead of the main road with residences along it where they might pick up additional men and supplies (Lowell Road). If in fact the minute men were marching down Estabrook Road to Hildreth's corner, then at the terminus of Estabrook Road they would have been within sight of the bridge, and then needed to proceed to walk in the opposite direction, *away from the bridge*, to reach Hildreth's corner, and then later retrace their steps to return towards the bridge. This can be seen by inspecting the previous map. This is inconsistent with the narrative, *and would have required the contingent to walk 3/4 mile out of their way*.

Carlisle Town records describe three minutemen as joining the march after it was underway. These men were David Hartwell, Simeon Barrett, and John Heald. All of these families lived along Lowell Road, so their joining the march would only be possible if the march followed the Lowell Road route.

By the time the 1976 history was written, today's Carlisle Minute Men reenactors had been marching down Estabrook Road for a number of years, so the story in the 1976 book may have been adjusted to be more consistent with the apocryphal narrative.

According to tradition, these men fought at Mirriam's corner, and sustained no casualties that day.

## The Carlisle Minute Men Today

In 1967 the Selectmen of Carlisle issued a proclamation for the town to form its own Minuteman Company, in light of the service that men from the Carlisle district provided during the war. On April 19, 1968, the Carlisle Minutemen made their first commemorative march to the North Bridge, walking from the center of Carlisle, through residential streets, and down the Estabrook Trail.

The choice of the re-enactors to use the Estabrook Trail was an obvious choice since this is the only way to walk from Carlisle to Concord without proceeding down a heavily travelled paved road. The Estabrook Trail, with no pavement, utilities, or residences allows the marchers to experience a landscape similar to that of the original minutemen over 200 years ago.

The choice of the re-enactors to use Estabrook Road began a trend to celebrate Estabrook Road as the path of the march on April 19, 1775, where that route has become accepted as town lore.