

The History of the Estabrook Trail

The Estabrook Trail extends from Estabrook Road through the Estabrook Woods to Carlisle and was made in parts over time dating back to 1720. Today, all the land on and along the trail is owned by private landowners.

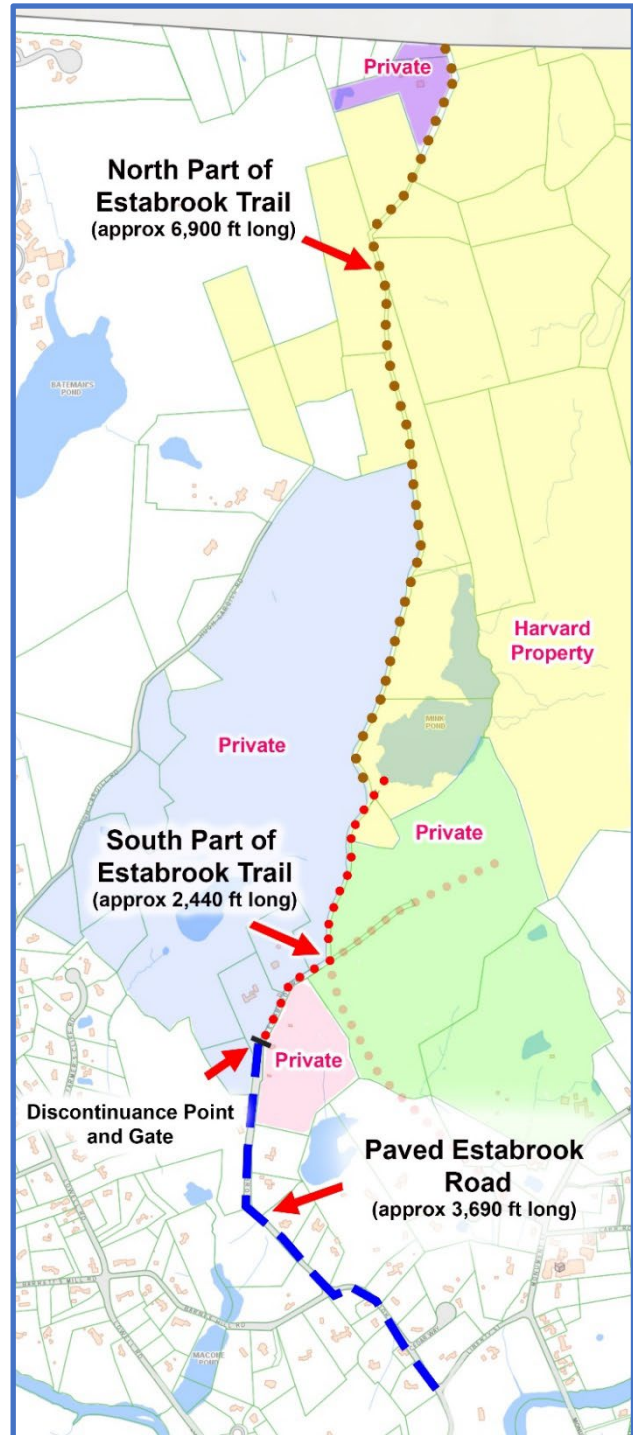
For a brief part of its history, the 43 year period from 1889 to 1932, the Trail was considered part of a longer road known then as Estabrook Road, which went from Liberty Street to the Carlisle Town line.

As shown on the map to the right, the Estabrook Trail extends through the woods for nearly two miles through the land of five private owners.

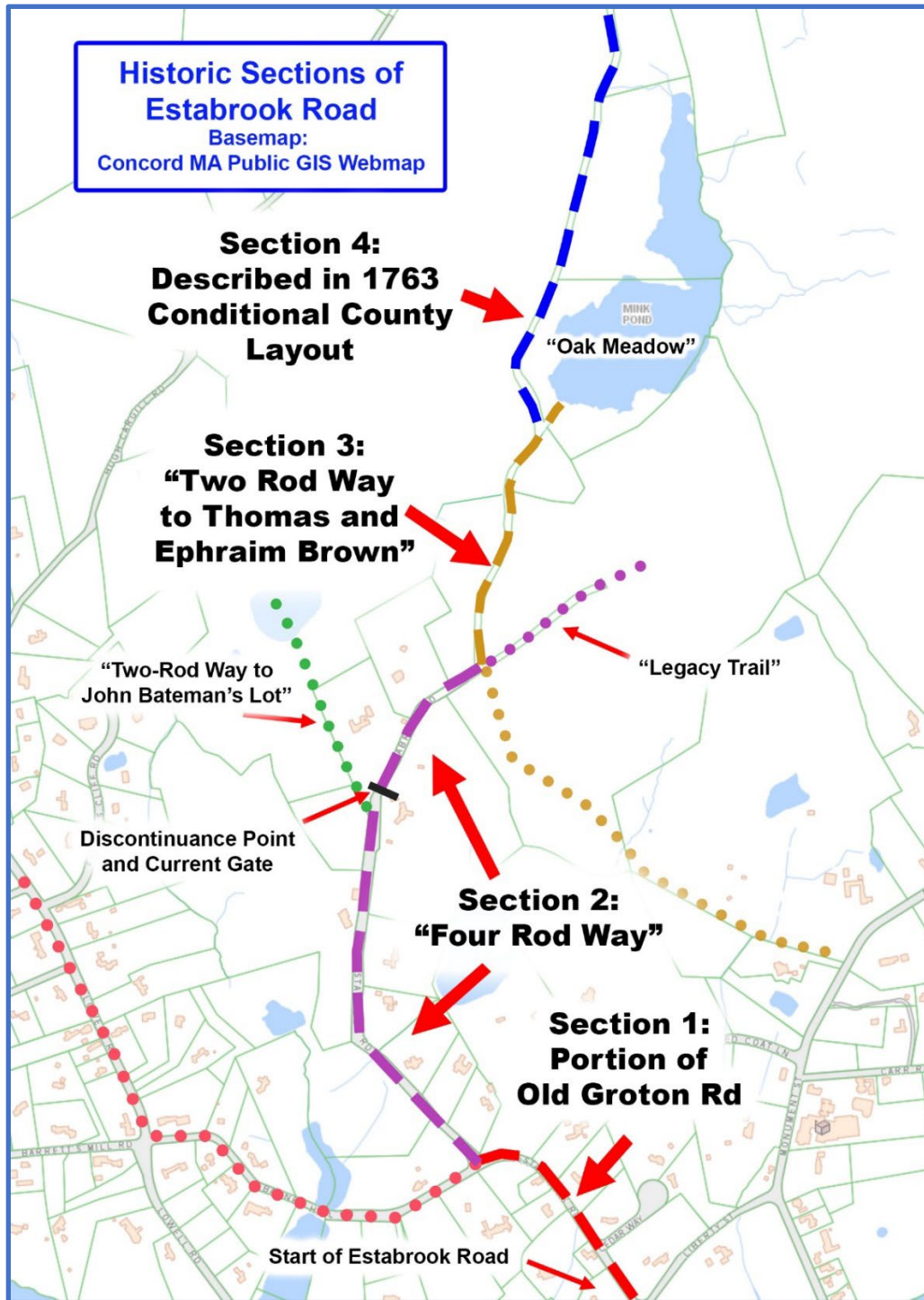
The history of the Trail is entangled with the History of the remainder of Estabrook Road. The first and southernmost portion of Estabrook Road, from Liberty Street to Barnes Hill Road, was created in 1699 as part of a main County Road from Concord to Groton, known as Groton Road. Estabrook Trail did not yet exist. Groton Road was a heavily travelled road which during the 1800s was a stagecoach route from Concord Center to Keene, New Hampshire. It is noted as Section 1 on the map on the next page.

The portions of Estabrook Road extending northward from Barnes Hill Road were created during the 1700s, as a dead-end road which was later extended over time, until it finally connected to roads leading to Carlisle center by 1769. The story of Estabrook Trail begins with the grants of land to private owners at the Second Division of Concord in 1655.

The lands north of the Concord River were granted to various Concord residents at the Second Division of Concord. Most of these were grants of specific parcels of land to specific persons. However, one parcel known as “The Twenty-Score” was a 400-acre section of the south of the Estabrook Woods granted as undivided equal shares to 20 landowners. The Twenty-Score comprised lands extending from what is now Lowell Road to the east to an area east the end of paved Estabrook Road and also extended



south to Barnes Hill Road. While the exact bounds of the Twenty-Score are not precisely known, it contained land that would eventually include Estabrook Road from Barnes Hill Road north for 2/3 of a mile, including part of the Estabrook Trail. The portions of Estabrook Road and the Trail that were within the Twenty Score are depicted in the map below as sections 2 and 3.



The owners of the Twenty-Score divided their land three times between 1697 and 1730. In 1697 they laid out 20 parcels of 13 3/4 acres each and distributed those parcels among themselves. The portions distributed in the First Division of the Twenty Score were primarily in the west of the Twenty Score

between what are now Estabrook Road and Lowell Road, as shown on the map below. While the approximate bounds of the Twenty-Score are known, the lots were traded, sold, and reconfigured by later landowners without clear records so it is not possible to determine any of the original lot bounds with accuracy.

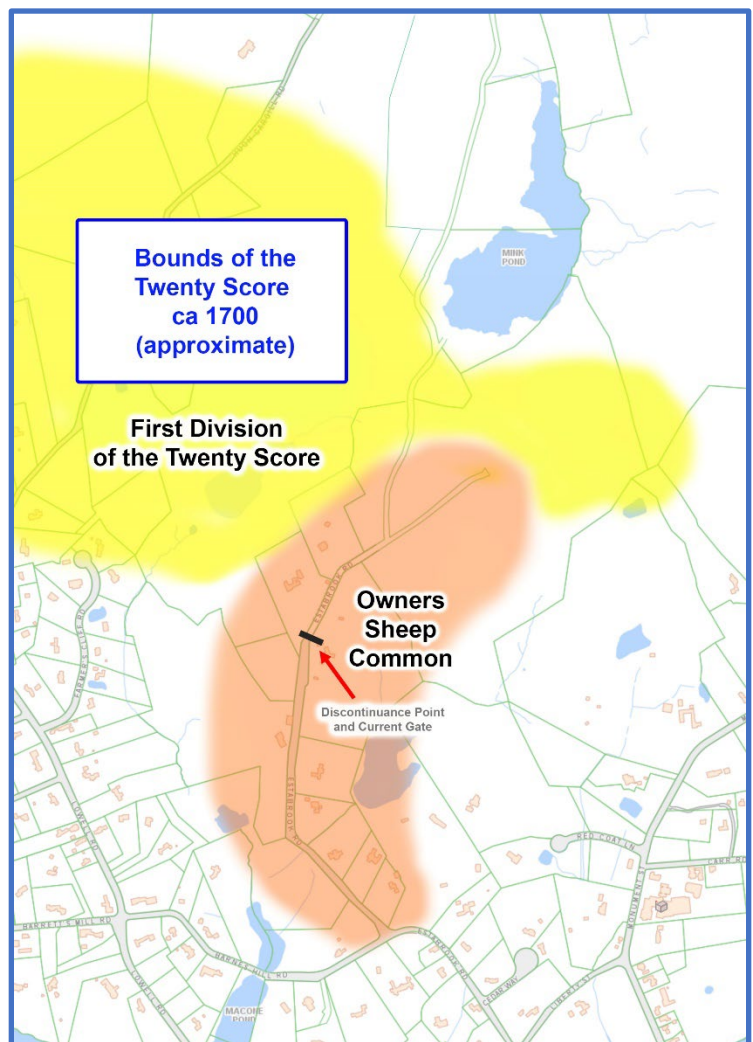
In 1697 at their First Division of the Twenty-Score the owners laid out two roads from Lowell Road into the Woods from the west. At that division they also laid out a road from Punkatasset from “the road to spruce swamp” that existed there, leading from the east into the Woods.

The share owners of the Twenty-Score reserved the remainder of the land as a “sheep common” for their common use. The sheep common consisted of about 100 acres surrounding the southern entrance to the Estabrook Trail and extending to Barnes Hill Road. While the Sheep Common was almost certainly accessed from Groton Road at the south, it was an open area with no road. This situation around 1700 is shown on the map below.

Around 1720, the owners of the Twenty Score undertook a second division of their land, reducing the size of the sheep common to 20 acres, and distributing the remainder of their land among themselves as twenty lots of 3 ¼ acre each.

When they undertook this Second Division, they created a subdivision road through it to access their subdivided lots. This was a private, dead-end road created by the owners for their own use. It is recorded in multiple deeds as the *“four-rod way which was laid out by the proprietors of said twenty-score at their second division.”* The owners named it “the four-rod way,” four rods equaling 64ft, being extra wide for herding sheep.

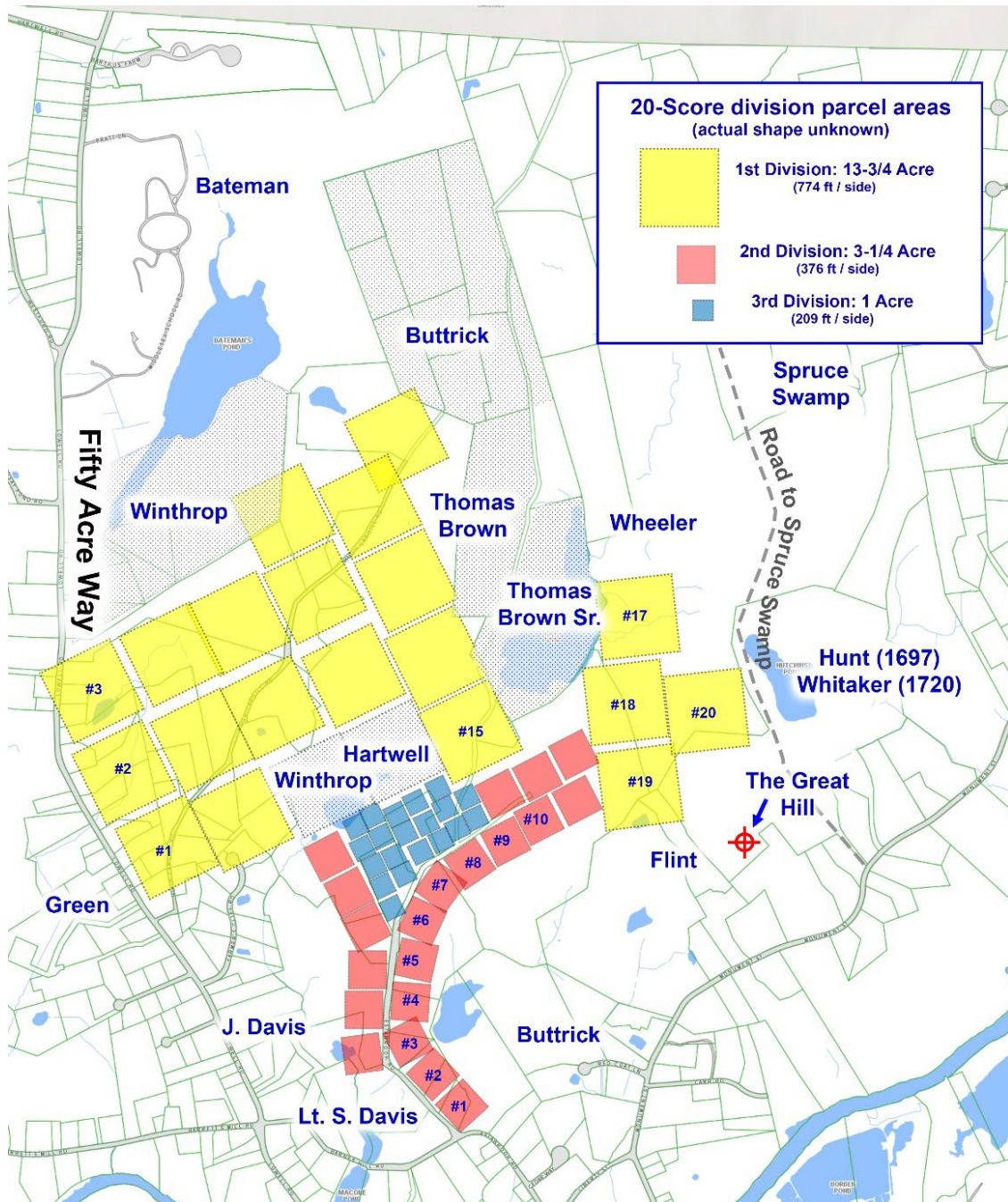
During the 1720s to 1750, these owners recorded transactions in the registry of deeds, which have enough information to reconstruct the locations of many of the lots of the Second Division of the Twenty Score. Using the information in these deeds, it is possible to create a map of the locations of many of the lots of the Second Division of the Twenty Score. This map is shown below:



to the north and west of the lots shown, including owners Jones and Flagg, were lands from the First Division of the Twenty Score.

In 1730, the owners divided their final 20 acres into 20 parcels of one acre each and distributed those parcels among themselves; 16 of the owners at that time chose to convey their contiguous one-acre parcels to Jonathan Harris, who became the first known resident of the area.

Putting all of this evidence together, it is possible to approximately place all three of the divisions of the Twenty-Score on a modern map, as shown below:



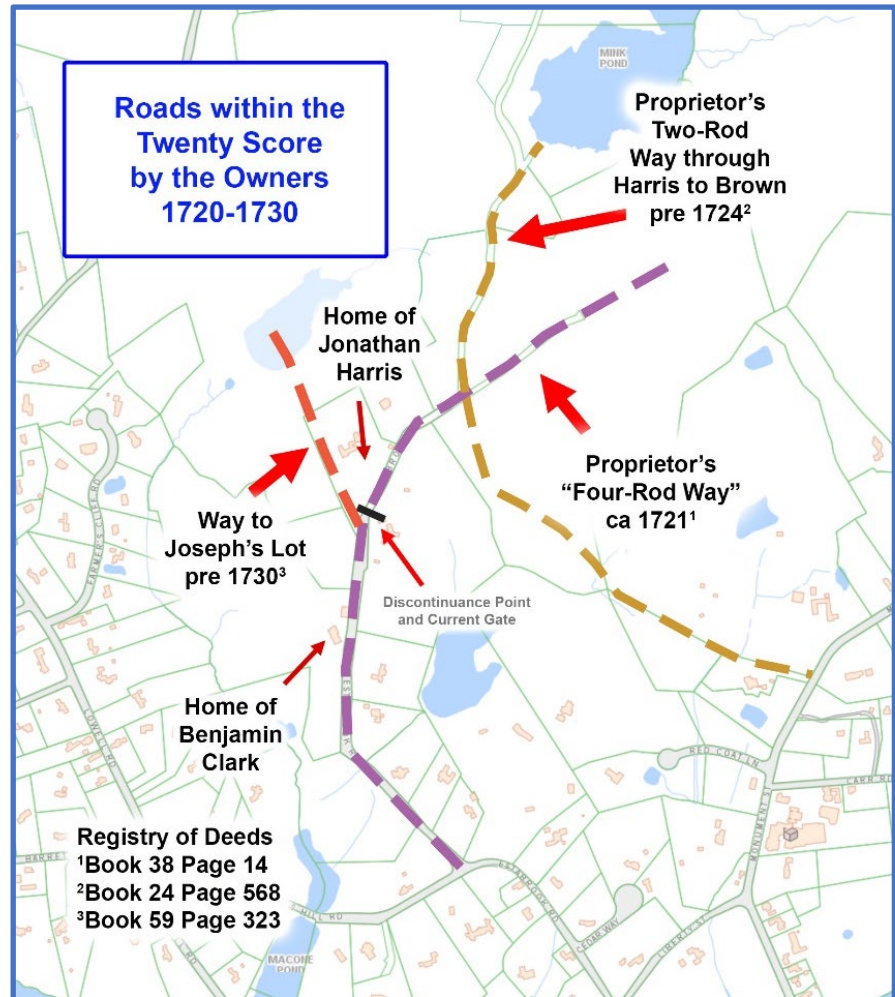
Mr. Harris, who acquired most of the land of the Third Division of the Twenty Score in 1730, lived at the location currently known as 393 Estabrook, near the beginning of the Estabrook Trail. Soon after Mr. Harris, Benjamin Clark made his home at what is now 299 Estabrook; Mr. Clark's home still stands today.

By 1730, the owners had laid out additional roads on their land. They laid out a road which is now the driveway of 393 Estabrook and was at one time known as "the way to Joseph's Meadow" or "Mount Lane." They laid out a section of road from the four-corner intersection on the Estabrook Trail to the north toward what is now Mink Pond. And they laid out a way southwest toward the lands of Flint and Hunt on Monument Street. These roads can be seen on the map at the right. All of these roads were private ways laid out by the owners for their own use within the Twenty Score.

The "four-rod way" extending from Barnes Hill Road north into the woods, which was created around 1720, had a side branch which led north to the area known as "Oak Meadow" which was owned by the Brown family. See the above map. This spur,

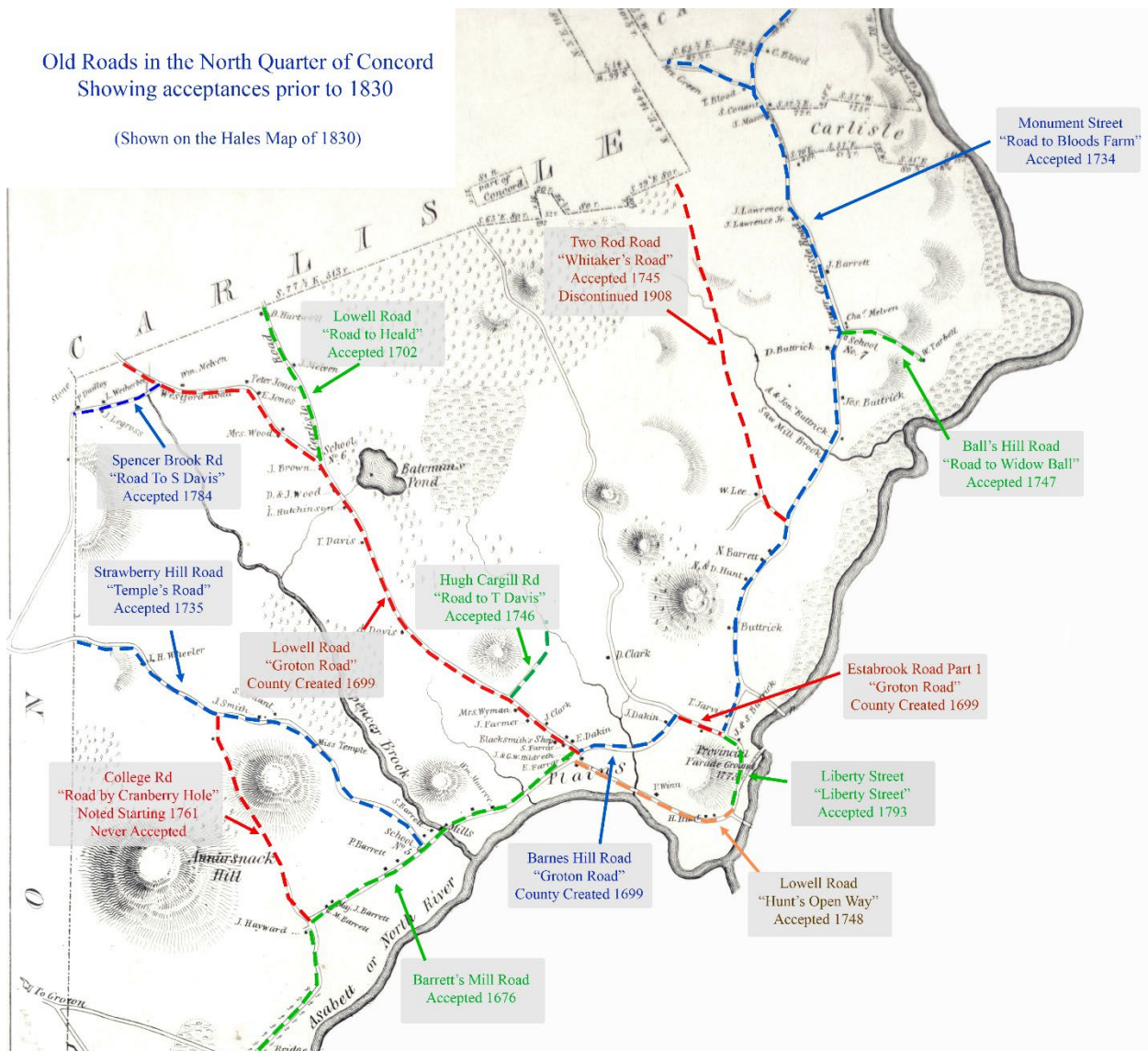
known as "the way through Harris to Brown" was a dead end leading into what is today known as "Mink Pond." Later, that spur, combined with the four-rod way, became known as the southern part of Estabrook Trail. Until after the middle of the 1700s, the road that we now know as the southern part of Estabrook Trail was a dead-end road, serving the lots that owners had received during the time of the Twenty Score.

The southern part of Estabrook Trail was never made a public way, but many other roads in Concord were laid out by the Town as public ways; damages were paid to landowners, and roads were accepted by the selectmen or the Town Meeting. Concord kept clear records of the public ways it created from around 1650 on. In fact, the records of all the roads in the North of Concord have been located; Estabrook Road is unique that it was never a Town Way. An 1830 map of the north of Concord has been annotated to show the record origins of the early roads:



Old Roads in the North Quarter of Concord
Showing acceptances prior to 1830

(Shown on the Hales Map of 1830)



The map shows that all of the roads in the north of Concord can be found in the Town records, *except* Estabrook Road.

The southern portion of Estabrook Trail served as a private dead end road reaching woodlots during the early 1700s. However, by 1763 some landowners had built homes or owned land in what is now Carlisle and were located between the main roads of Lowell Road and Monument Street, without a good way to reach either road without going around swamps. They petitioned the Town of Concord to make a road for them, leading south through Estabrook Woods to the Concord Meetinghouse. At the same time, many residents of the Carlisle area were petitioning for Carlisle to be set off as a new Town with its own meeting house. The residents of Concord were aware that Carlisle planned to be set off as a separate town, which would make the proposed road moot, and in 1763 the Concord Town meeting rejected the request of the residents of the north for the additional road.

While the Town declined to create a road for the petitioners, an obscure 1736 law allowed for petitioners to appeal a Town's rejection of a private way to the County. The County appointed three men from

other Towns as a committee to locate the proposed way as a **private way** for the use of the petitioners. The committee first located the private way from some homes south of what is now Carlisle Center via what is today known as portions of School Street and Baldwin Hill Road and then roughly along the Estabrook Trail. However, the road connected to a then-existing road which is now Hugh Cargill Road.

The committee subsequently amended that location and instead laid out an alternate way south ending at Mink Pond where it could connect to the existing private ways within the Twenty Score. This northern 1763 section of the Trail is shown on the illustration shown previously on page 2. The private way was laid out on the condition that the owners along the way all give of their lands for the way, a technique now obsolete but then known as “dedication” where an owner can grant a way through their lands subject to conditions that the owner specifies. However, in this case, unlike other roads in Concord that were dedicated, there is no record of any of the many owners dedicating their lands -- or specifying what purpose, or who, the way could be used for. In fact, the Town Meeting specifically requested the records if such dedication were to occur, and no such records were ever presented to the Town Meeting. The required conditions ordered by the County were never met, so the road was never officially completed.

The conditions required to establish the way were never met; but that fact immediately became irrelevant, for at the same time as the proposed way was laid out, a new meeting house was established at what is now the center of Carlisle-- and the original petitioners for the road to the south no longer needed it. The petitioners only used the approximately one-mile section of the way within Carlisle, which allowed them to go *north* toward their meeting house. That section is still used today and is named Bellows Hill Road and School Street. The Estabrook Trail going *south* below the southernmost Carlisle home became unused immediately upon its creation. This explains why the Estabrook Trail is missing from all the early maps including the maps of 1779, 1794, 1801, and 1820, and why it was not maintained.

In summary, what is currently considered Estabrook Trail actually consists of three different sections of road with different histories; starting from the south, the Trail consists of a private “four-rod way” made by the owners in 1720, a two-rod “Way to Brown” laid out by the owners some time prior to 1730, and finally a two-rod private way laid out by the County in 1763 on conditions that were never met.

Other than the homes of Harris and Clark located on Estabrook Road below the Trail entrance, the only early building on the Trail was in around 1790. According to Thoreau, a local man named Peter Barrett obtained rights from the owners to attempt to mine lime and burn it in a kiln along the way. Such an operation requires 24/7 attendance and is likely the origin of the cellar hole at the site just north of the lime mines and on the same lot. Harvard archeology from the cellar hole confirms this date.

There are apocryphal stories that the old cellar hole belonged to a Thomas Estabrook, but this is incorrect. Thomas Estabrook lived in the 1600s at what is now Strawberry Hill Road and never owned land in the Estabrook Woods. His grandson Robert Estabrook did live at the edge of Estabrook Woods behind Middlesex School and his daughter lived there until around 1840; this is the likely source of the naming of the woods by Thoreau.

The first map showing the Estabrook Trail is a map of 1830, a map which was required by statute to show both public and private ways. The Estabrook Trail, as a private way, was obviously included on that map. There are no records of *any* kind of use of the Trail prior to 1800. The first record of anyone ever mentioning the condition or use of the way was in 1838, when the Town described the way as “*This road has little travel excepting that which is caused by the owners of land near it. Nothing has been done to keep it in repair for many years.*”. By 1845, Ellery Channing described the Trail as “*the deserted road*” and wrote a

poem about it called *"The lonely road."* From 1853 to 1859, Thoreau described the Trail as *"uninhabited,"* also *"the road is...not accepted by the town and the traveling world,"* and further that the road was *"undiscoverable to the uninitiated."* By 1891, the Town described the Trail as *"little better than ruts through a piece of woodland"*. There is only a single record of the Town ever taking any action on the Trail, when in 1877 the Town graded the way because it had become heavily damaged by *"Teaming of wood"* resulting from the harvesting of wood by the landowners. Through the 1800s, towns commonly graded private roads if the owners permitted public use.

In the entirety of the Trail's existence before it was discontinued in 1932, there are only records of four people using the trail, all for recreation, and three were friends of the owners (including Thoreau). There is no record of the road ever used for travel or residential use. There is no record that it was ever used for travel by horse, cart, or a car. The apocryphal story that the minutemen used the Trail on April 19th 1775 is incorrect, as the historic record shows they came down Lowell Rd. The first traffic census of Concord was done in 1916 and no traffic was recorded on Estabrook Road or the Trail.

The southern part of Estabrook Trail is a private way made by the owners for their own use, and was never a public way. The northern part of the Trail was laid out by the County in 1763 but the conditions for its acceptance were never met and the road became abandoned. Throughout its history, the Trail was used as a logging road by the owners. By 1932, owners along the way became concerned that the area being used by "picnickers" that they claimed were a fire hazard, and petitioned the Town to close the road to the public. Both the Town and the owners had no records of the road and were uncertain of its origin. There was no way to determine that the Trail was not a road, as the Town records were not indexed and organized until the mid 1930s. The Town Road Commissioners agreed with the owner's request to close the road to the public, and to effect this petitioned the State to formally discontinue the road and post it to "warn the public against entering". At the public hearing, the records show that not a single person spoke against the closure. This petition was granted and the owners closed and gated the way. All Town records record it as discontinued and never a public road. Other roads in Concord and in Towns throughout the commonwealth were also discontinued using the same procedure - and all of these roads are closed to the public or built-over.

The record indicates there has been a gate at the southern entrance to the Trail since the 1860s. Since that time it has taken many forms, including as a bar-gate, a chain-link fence, a chain gate, and today a wooden gate.

The southern part of the Trail was improved around 1940 when the Buttrick Family cleared and dammed the Oak Meadow to create Mink Pond. It was improved again in the 1990s as part of field work and logging by owners.

After the discontinuance of 1932, the Trail was off-limits to visitors for many years. Harvard acquired about one-third of the Estabrook Woods in 1966 from some of the owners, including the northern part of Estabrook Trail. Recently, owners have permitted public use of the Estabrook Trail, and Harvard has allowed use of some of its side-trails.