

Important Sites in Estabrook Woods

The locations of the sites described below can be found on the map at the end of this document

The Name Estabrook Woods

This is a variant of the name giving the area by Henry David Thoreau in 1853: "What shall this great wild tract over which we strolled be called?... Shall we call it the Easterbrooks (sic) Country? It would make a princely estate in Europe, yet it is owned by farmers, who live by the labor of their hands and do not esteem it much." It was called "Country" rather than "Woods" because more than half of it was cleared and used by the owners for pastures and berries. When the land began to reforest, locals and owners began to refer to it as "Estabrook Woods"

The Name "Estabrook" does not refer to the cellar hole along the Estabrook Trail. There was never any owner or resident named Estabrook there. However, Robert Estabrook and his son John owned considerable land to the west of the Trail near Bateman's Pond, including a homestead near the current Middlesex School Athletic Fields. That home was occupied by the Estabrooks from 1741 to around 1835. The last Estabrook in the woods was Rebecca Estabrook, Robert's daughter, who lived near Bateman's pond until around 1835. It is possible that Thoreau met her when he was young, although there is no record of such. That homestead was later named after Rebecca's husband, as the Paul Adams Place.

Mink Pond

This location is described in documents going back to the 1700s as "The Oak Meadow". But in 1948, Steadman Buttrick and his brother decided to try to make a pond here to attract ducks. They cleared the trees, created a dam, and opened a stream from the swamp in the adjacent Emerson property to help fill the pond. Thus was Mink Pond created. The pond did successfully attract ducks, so much so that Mr. Buttrick needed to put up "No Trespassing" signs to keep poachers out.

Today, a number of duck houses are maintained on the pond by Mass Fish and Wildlife, who have been monitoring the duck habitat here for almost 50 years. Some of the stumps from the trees cut by the Buttricks to create the pond can still be seen at low water.

The man-made dams have disintegrated over the years, but beavers are frequent residents and patch the dams to maintain the pond.

Hutchins Pond

This pond was made by excavating and damming of "Wigwam Brook", later known as "Saw Mill Brook", around 1890 by Charles Hutchins. It was created as an "ice pond", used for harvesting ice for farm produce (Walden Pond was also harvested for ice). It is located within the Town Land at Punkatasset.

In the mid 20th century, Hutchins Pond was a popular swimming hole for neighbors and friends of the Hutchins. However, after it was acquired by the Town it was becoming too well known and was

attracting swimmers from different towns and even nighttime swimmers, causing the town to ultimately close it to swimming, a change which also allowed the pond to become a quieter wildlife habitat.

Bigelow Barn

This was the old barn site for Mr Bigelow, who in the mid 1800s was the farmer of the land that later belonged to the Hutchins family. There is a massive stone cellar hole at this site which has now been completely encased in impenetrable vines and is therefore very difficult to find.

Batemans Pond

This pond on Middlesex School property is named after Thomas Bateman, one of the first Concord citizens to own property in this area in the late 1600's. Mr. Bateman actually lived on the other side of Estabrook Woods, on the Road to Blood's Farm, now known as Monument Street. Like many early Concord citizens, his landholdings were not near his residence. The high cliffs on the southeastern side of the pond provide a breathtaking view of the pond and the school.

Bateman's large property along Lowell Road was never developed and eventually became a cattle stockyard in the late 1800s. Around 1900 the land was chosen as a site for the new Middlesex School, which acquired considerably adjoining lands deep into the Estabrook Woods.

In 1999, Middlesex School placed a permanent conservation restriction on a major parcel of their land to the south and east of Bateman's Pond. This parcel adjoins the Concord Land Conservation Trust lands at Chamberlin Woods.

Lime Mines

According to descriptions passed to Thoreau, Peter Barrett, who lived at Barrett's Farm and owned adjoining land in the Estabrook Woods, obtained the rights and mined the lime around 1780. Peter Barrett was a tanner by trade, so his use of lime was presumably for tanning. At the mine site a number of seams of limestone (essentially marble) were extracted, creating approximately six large irregular holes in the ground.

The dates of operation are not recorded, but in 1794 the town reported to the commonwealth that no mines were operating in Concord.

Lime mining and burning is a round-the-clock operation which required operators to live on-site. Immediately to the north of the lime mines and on the same lot is an old cellar hole from the same time period. This location never shows on any deeds or other records as a homestead, and was most likely an accessory building to the lime mining operation.

Although not visible from the Estabrook Trail, these open pit mines are easy to find and can still be explored today.

Lime Kiln

To make limestone useful for mortar or tanning it must be chemically converted to a different form, called quicklime, by heat. This requires a lime kiln. When quicklime is extracted from Limestone by heating, it can be combined with sand and water to make mortar for masonry. The wet mortar absorbs CO₂ from the air and the lime converts back to limestone, adhering brick or stones together. Alternatively, lime can be used to separate hair from hides in leathermaking.

Located just south of the lime mines, on the east side of the Estabrook Trail, is the site of an old lime kiln. The kiln was loaded with crushed limestone and wood and fired. A typical "burn" of a lime kiln was days in length, requiring round-the-clock supervision.

Lime burning requires significant quantities of wood. Peter Barrett, the reported operator of the lime operation, owned considerable lands immediately to the northeast of the kiln which could provide the needed fuel.

The Cellar Hole on the Trail

This cellar hole near the center of the Estabrook Woods remains clearly visible on the west side of the Estabrook Trail. Archeology shows it was from the late 1700s. This cellar hole never shows on any deed record, map, or Town record and is almost certainly a temporary accessory building for the lime mines, which operated at the same time and are located adjacent on the same land parcel.

The first mention of this cellar hole is in 1835 where Ellery Channing describes it as an empty old cellar hole.

There is a legend that this was the home of Thomas Estabrook, who lived around 1700. However, the records show Mr. Estabrook never lived in this location and actually lived off Strawberry Hill Road. However, Mr. Estabrook's grandson Robert Estabrook did live in the woods at a home beside Bateman's Pond, which stood from around 1740 to 1850.

33 Rockpiles

This enigmatic site consists of a number of irregularly spaced rock piles in the former orchard just south of the cellar hole on the Trail. This area was known to be used as an orchard in the mid 1800s, and also described as a pasture at the same time. In clearing a pasture, rocks were often placed around trees to protect them. Today, the trees have long passed away, and only the circular rock piles remain.

Upper Saw Mill Site

At this small mill site it is said that wood was sawed for use in making pencils, manufactured by the Thoreau family, although there is no record of it operating that late in time. Saw mills of this type were simple affairs, requiring only a dam impoundment and a water sluiceway. A so-called "undershoot wheel" with blades on it was suspended in a frame above the sluiceway, and the running water would hit the blades and rotate the wheel. This rotary motion was converted to a reciprocating motion and

drove a frame-saw for cutting logs into boards. Such saw mills were often set up temporarily at a forest to be cut, as it was easier to move the cut boards out of the woods rather than whole logs.

According to deed records, this saw mill operated from the mid 1700s onward. Saw mills of this type were typically constructed on open wooden frames without any masonry structures. Only the impoundment and sluiceway remain visible in the woods today.

In the late 1830's, Henry David Thoreau developed the graphite blend used in the family's pencils, to prevent smearing. This turned out to be the key to the quality of their pencils and the success of the business, which became one of America's leading pencil makers. Henry later returned to managing the pencil business in 1859.

A larger and longer-lasting saw mill was erected on this same brook at Monument Street. Monument Street still crosses this lower saw mill dam today. The impoundment is still there but does not fill because the brook is free to run through an open culvert at the base of the saw-mill dam today.

Thoreau's Hut Site

After Henry David Thoreau spent his two years at Walden Pond, he gave his house there to Ralph Waldo Emerson's gardener, who tried unsuccessfully to relocate it and ultimately gave it to James Clark, who, along with his brother Daniel, moved the house in 1849 from Walden Pond to a site on the Clark family property on the Estabrook Trail. The house fell to disrepair and ultimately collapsed, according to Ellery Channing, in 1868. Later, when the Emerson family acquired the Clark property, around 1920 they constructed a small brick house on the site of Thoreau's home. The brick house served a variety of functions, but was best known as "The Hospital" by the Emersons, as it was often used to isolate children with communicable diseases in order to reduce contagion within families and schools. Emerson's "Hospital" still stands there today along the south end of the Estabrook Trail. Thoreau's home actually spent most of its life in Estabrook Woods, and Thoreau speaks of walking by it there in his journals.

Ski Hill

On the north side of Punkatasset hill is a steep open area known as the ski hill, which has also been used on and off for sledding over the past decades.

Ski Jump

On the east side of Bateman's Pond, there is a steep embankment that was the landing base of a ski jump. The ski jump was held up by a frame that was built at the top of this embankment; some of the concrete footings for the ski jump can still be seen there today. Scattered in the leaves are also artifacts of some kind of powered ski lift, like a rope-tow.

Kibbe Place

The Kibbe home was just to the north of the Carlisle line and about 1/3 mile east of Estabrook Road, where remnants of his cellar remain today. Kibbe was a housewright with a small farm and a family. Kibby and some of his other neighbors to the north came to Concord via the nearby "Road by Green's" which is now called "the Carlisle Trail / East Hubbard Trail," leading south to Punkatasset. The Kibbe family did not choose to join Carlisle in 1780 when it broke off from Concord, but chose instead to remain residents of Concord. The Kibbe land remained an island of Concord within Carlisle until 1903. An old cellar hole and well remain on the land.

Indian Rock

This remarkable rock stands alone on the surface of the forest near where the old Hugh Cargill Road trail intersects the Estabrook Trail, just east of the lime mines. It is said that Native Americans built lean-tos against the side of the rock and camped there, and that a local Native American may have lived there into the mid 1800s. Presumably the thermal mass of the rock provided some shelter from cold nights.

Yellow Birch Cellar Hole

This old cellar hole can still be found today in one of the most remote and obscure parts of Estabrook Woods. The site is located at a considerable distance from any visible trail. Large yellow birch trees still surround the site.

Thoreau writes that a Mr. Flint was building a home there, but that his wife did not want to move there, and the site was abandoned before it was completed. In 1757, Mr. Flint sold the land with the cellar but kept the unfinished house frame, ultimately living near the north end of Monument Street.

Cornel Rock

A rock outcropping that Thoreau names and describes in his journals: "At the cleft rock by the hill just west of this swamp, - call it Cornel rock - I found apparently *Aspidium cristatum*. That is an interesting spot. There is the handsomest and most perfect *Cornus circinata* there that I know, now apparently its fruit in prime, hardly light-blue but delicate bluish-white. It is the richest-looking of the cornels, with its large round leaf and showy cymes; a slender bush seven or eight feet high. There is quite a collection of rare plants there..." This area is closed to the public.

Farmer's Cliff

A steep rock cliff in the woods, named after the Farmer family that lived nearby. In the 1800s the area was clear cut and there was a commanding view to the south and east from this cliff, but today the forest has grown up much higher than the cliff. One of the members of the Farmer family was said to have been attempting to dig a hole to China near the base of the cliff.

Paul Adams Place

This old homestead near the Middlesex School playing fields belonged to Robert Estabrook in the mid 1700s, who passed it to his daughter Rebecca who married Hugh Cargill. Mr. Cargill died shortly thereafter and Rebecca married Paul Adams; they kept a small farm at this location. The remaining stonework has almost completely vanished into the woods. Rebecca Estabrook was the last known Estabrook to live in the woods, and the most likely inspiration for the name of the woods.

Map Follows on next page