

SCENIC ROADS RESEARCH, STRAWBERRY HILL ROAD

OVERVIEW

A road of exceptional historical significance, Strawberry Hill Road was laid out by the Selectmen ca. 1735.

At 1.6 miles in length, the road wanders northwest from Barrett's Mill Road and continues into Acton, where Strawberry Hill, at 333 feet the third highest hill in Acton, is located. Along its way north, the road meanders by the Concord Rod and Gun Club (established 1926) and the Nashoba Brooks School (founded 1928). Further along, the road passes east of Annursnac Hill, at 365 feet the highest elevation in Concord (19 feet higher than Fairhaven Hill), which was used by early indigenous peoples. According to research by Ray Angelo, the hill's name dates from early colonial times and derives from an Algonquian word meaning "lookout place."

The 118-acre Annursnac Conservation Land lies about 300 feet beyond the Strawberry Hill Road's intersection with College Road. It contains an old wagon road, early stonewalls for retaining cows, building foundations, as well as the remains of military structures related to World War II. The tract was purchased from Harvard University in 1970.

Further along can be found the acreage of the Upper Spencer Brook Valley, a terrain of woods, streams, open fields, and a dramatic ravine. Owned and managed by the Concord Land Conservation Trust, the reserve can be accessed from a trailhead south of Bateman's Ridge Road.

Once primarily farmland, as evidenced by old stone walls in various states of repair that line much of the road, Strawberry Hill Road is today bordered by a mixture of farmhouses and suburban homes though still retaining its rural character.

Its topography includes a mixture of steep hillocks, gorges, boulders, and brooks, with woodlands, swamplands, and wetlands; the road sharply twists and turns to accommodate these natural features.



From Strawberry Hill in Acton Towards Annursnac and Fair Haven, image by Herbert Wendell Gleason, November 28, 1903, II1903.35. CFPL



Entrance, Annursnac Concord Conservation Land. January, 2022

INITIAL LAYOUT AND NAMING

Charles Walcott describes in detail the initial layout of Strawberry Hill Road ca. 1735. A three-rod wide pathway (three rods was approximately 48 feet) enabled carts and horses to travel north to Acton without passing in front of James Barrett's barn:

“Strawberry Hill Road (Thos. Barrett's Road)

In 1735 the town laid out an 'open-way' three rods wide through land of Thomas Barrett 'nigh where the Bridle way now is.' It began on the north side of the Barrett's Mill Road at the point three rods westerly of Thomas Barrett's dwelling-house and ran northward, as now, by several marks to a marked tree 'by the open way nigh the spruce gutter.'

'James Barrett promised to make said way fit for Carting and passing with horses, in Lieu of the open way west of his barn.' Thus it appears that the way for which this was substituted was what is known to us as the College Road west of the house now owned by Danl. W. Sheehan (the Worcester place).”

Walcott MS, p. 27a

According to Walcott, the road was initially called “Temple Road,” evidently referencing the Temple family, substantial landowners who lived on the road at the time it was laid out ca. 1735. The Temple name appears on the road on the Hales (1830), Walling (1852), and Gleason (1906) maps. Thoreau notes in his journal a visit to the Temple farm in 1859 (see below).

Walcott further observes that the Selectman “recently” named it Strawberry Hill Road:

“Temple Road. The road recently named 'Strawberry Hill Road' was laid out by the Selectmen in 1735....”

Walcott MS, p. 46

Thus, given the date span of Walcott's notes (1880s-90s), the current name of the road likely dates to ca. 1880.

MAPS

Strawberry Hill Road appears on the following maps:

Plan of the Town of Concord, Mass. In the County of Middlesex, Surveyed by John G. Hales, Pubd by Lemuel Shattuck – Boston, 1830

The road appears on the map but is unnamed.

The map cites the following residences: Miss Temple, S. Conant, J. Smith, and J. H. Wheeler. School #5 on the corner with Barretts Mill Road.

Map of the Town of Concord, Middlesex County Mass., Surveyed by Authority of the Town. H[enry]. F. Walling, Civil Engr, No. 81 Washington Street Boston, 1852

The road appears on the map but is unnamed.

The map cites the following residences: Mrs. Temple, G. Brooks, J. A. Smith, W. Robbins, and J.H. Wheeler.

Part of Concord, Copyright 1889 by Geo. H. Walker & Co., Boston, from Atlas of Middlesex County, Massachusetts

The road appears on the map but is unnamed.

The map cites on the road the following residences; J. A. Smith.

Map of Concord, Showing Localities by Thoreau in his Journals, Compiled by Herbert W. Gleason, 1906

The road appears on the map but is unnamed.

The map cites on the road the following residences: Mrs. Temple, G. Brooks, and J.A. Smith.

HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE

Route of the Acton Minutemen

Strawberry Hill Road played an active role in the events of April 19, 1775. According to tradition, the Acton militia marched down the road to reach the North Bridge on that historic morning. While no documentation has been found to verify this march, it is likely that it occurred, as it is the logical route from Acton to the bridge.

As described by the Barrett's Mill Conservation Area trail Map (2021): "A stone monument beside Barrett's Mill Road at the end of Strawberry Hill Road is one of many that mark the route taken by the Acton Minutemen on their march to join the fight at the North Bridge on April 19, 1775. In the early morning hours that fateful day, an alarm

came to Captain Isaac Davis, leader of the Acton Minute Company. General Thomas Gage was leading British troops to Concord to secure weapons and ammunition he believed were being stockpiled for a military campaign. In response, Captain Davis assembled the Acton Minute Company for the seven-mile march to Concord, passing by this point along the way. The Acton contingent would lead the fight that turned the tide of battle at the bridge, but at the cost of Davis's life. Captain Isaac Davis was the first commissioned officer to die in the service of the new Republic-to-be and would be the inspiration for Daniel Chester French's bronze statue of the Minute Man that resides at the North Bridge.



Stone marker denoting the march route of the Acton Minutemen. Located at the junction of Barrett's Mill Road and Strawberry Hill Road. January 2022

Thoreau and Strawberry Hill Road

Thoreau was familiar with the road and described in his journals naturalistic observations resulting from several local visits.

He recorded a trip to see to George Brooks (1824-1905) on June 8, 1855: "G. Brooks told me on June 1st that a few evenings before he saw as many as a thousand chimney swallows pour down into Goodnow's chimney."

Vol. 7, p. 411

On March 21, 1856, he noted: "George Brooks, of the North Quarter, tells me that he went a-fishing at Nagog Pond on the 18th and found the ice from thirty to thirty seven inches thick (te greater part, or all but about a foot, snow ice, the snow having blown on the ice there. He mred it with a rule and a hooked stick. (But at Walden, where I measured, , there was no drifting of the snow). It may have been no thicker at Nagog on an average." Further, "He says that both the gray squirrel and the red eat pine seed, but not in company. The former have been quite common about his house the past winter, and his neighbor caught two in his yard."

Vol. 10, p. 16

In a journal entry of September 15, 1859, Thoreau records visiting the Temple farm located along it: "I find that Temple raises his own tobacco. The great leaves were spread over the bottom and sides of a hay rigging in his barn, by the open door, to dry. He smokes them. He says that the season is rather short for it here, but I saw some still growing and in bloom abundantly. What kind is it? 'Cuby, they call it.' He smokes it and thinks it is better than any he can buy..."

Vol. 12, pp. 328-329

This is likely the farm of Peter Temple, described by Keyes as "old Peter Temple, a character in Concord lived and died."

Keyes, p. 126

On September 22, Thoreau further comments on the local growing of tobacco following a visit to the cellar of the Hunt farm: "I learn that it was formerly cultivated in Concord, but Temple, who has raised it for two years past a mile and a quarter west of tis, thinks he is the only one who has cultivated any in C. of late years."

Vol. 12, 340 note

IMPORTANT ARCHITECTURAL FEATURES

299 Strawberry Hill Road: Keefe/Macone Farm House, ca. 1876

Significant as one of the most well preserved houses of its type on the northwest part of Concord. A typical 2 ½ story “gable end” side-hall-plan farmhouse of the 1870s, with a profusion of vernacular Italianate detail.

Historic Resources Master Plan of Concord, Massachusetts, 2001

“Quarter of a mile south and on the west side of the road was another old house, where a Wheeler lived I think and where John Keefe and Irishman has within ten years built a good modern two story house and a barn. He has the common failing of his nation a love of whiskey, and his family are the worse for it.”

Keyes, p. 127

“John Thomas Keefe. Thomas Keefe and his wife died some years ago. This place was bought 25 or more years ago by Alexander Macone, an Italian gardener. Mr. Macone though small in stature has proved a giant for work and has with the help of his sons made a garden of the place.”

Tolman p. 127

Keefe/Macone Farm House, January, 2021



498 Strawberry Hill Road: Joseph Smith House, early 19th c.

Joseph A. Smith (1818-1903), a progressive farmer, considerably expanded the farm's products and is credited with having built one of the first of two windmills in town, which he used for pumping water for his farm. Excellent example of the type of large farmhouse in Concord's outlying farm districts in the early 19th century. Some evidence suggests an older structure within.

Historic Resources Master Plan of Concord, Massachusetts, 2001

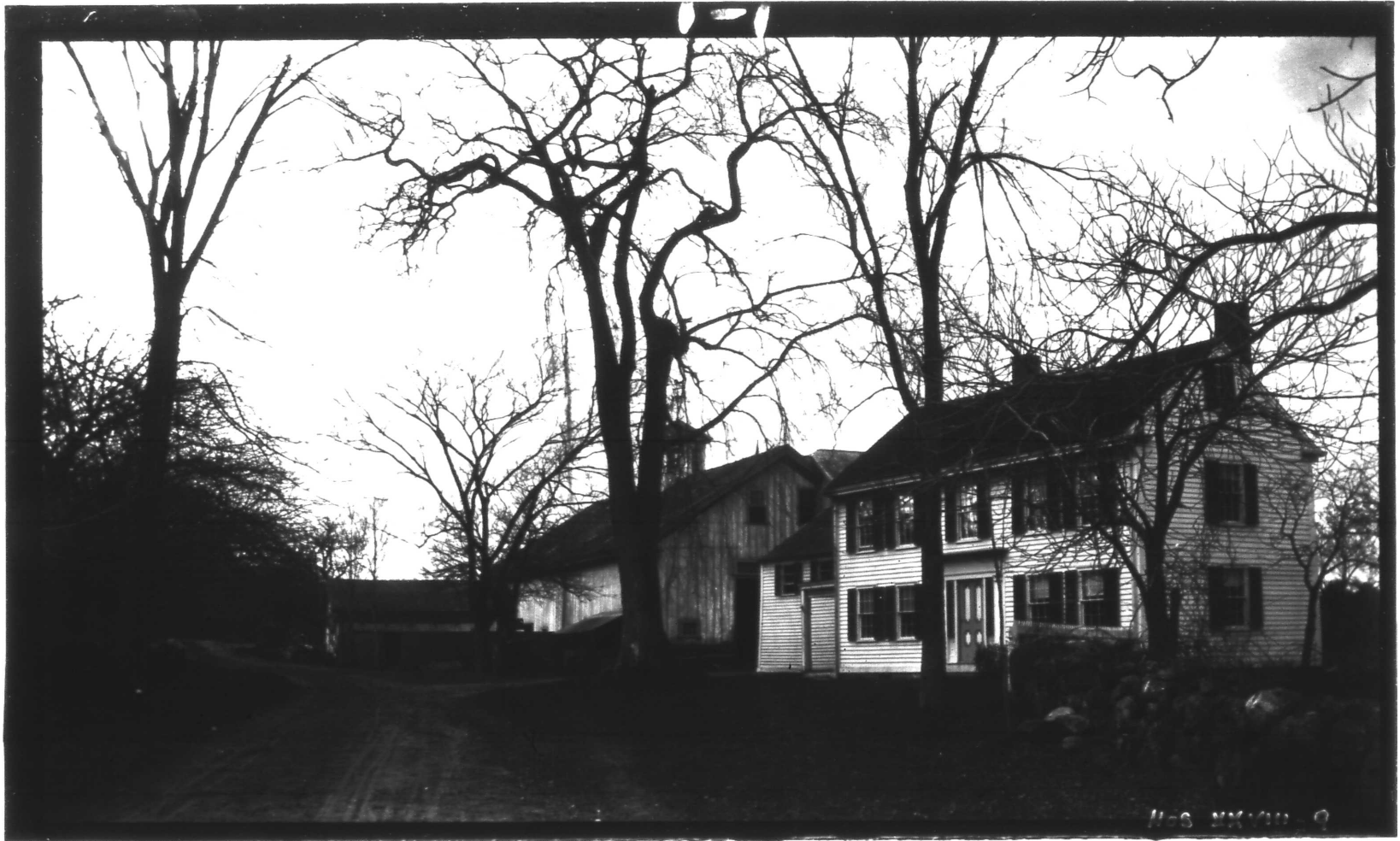
"Next to this [Dugan property] south 50 rods or more is the home of Joseph A. Smith, and of his father before him who may have built the house. He was a very large strong robust man, who died suddenly of croup while the sons were very small boys. J. A. helped carry on the farm, married a daughter of Nathan Brooks his next door neighbor over the Acton line, and has lived here improving the farm, building a new barn &c & successful. Nathan B., his oldest son, after the life on J. B. Farmer place, has gone to California and J. A. Smith and his wife have gone there this winter to see him leaving the youngest son Erastus to keep house as he is quite lame, and interested in housekeeping."

Keyes, p. 125

"Jos. A. Smith died in 1903 and Mrs. Smith in 1906. Erastus moved to town taking the tenement in the Emmott, Vandervere, Keyes block where he lived until his death in 1913. The farm was left to a caretaker...."

Tolman, p. 125

Joseph A. Smith house and barn in winter, image by Alfred W. Hosmer, ca. 1890-1900, #111.159, CFPL



Joseph Smith House, image by Alfred W. Hosmer, ca. 1890-1900, #111.158, CFPL



Joseph Smith's hayfield, image by Alfred W. Hosmer, ca. 1890-1900, #1.10, CFPL





498 Strawberry Hill Road, January 2022

606 Strawberry Hill Road: David Mason Barn (1893)

One of the most magnificent examples in Concord of a large “New England” barn at the end of the 19th century, this remains in almost completely intact condition. Façade and main wagon door in the gable end, flanked by a one-story cross-gabled ell on either side. All doors of vertical-board, rolling type, central wagon door with multi-light transom and molded lintel above it. Decoration concentrated in upper section of roof, and large decorative belvedere. A nearby farmhouse of 1890s proportions stood nearby until 1985.

Historic Resources Master Plan of Concord, Massachusetts, 2001

“The house next the line on the east side of the road was the house of Warren Robbins for many years and since his death by his widow.”

Keyes, p. 124

“Now of David Mason”

Tolman, p. 124

David Mason Barn, 1893. January 2022



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MAPS:

Plan of the Town of Concord, Mass. In the County of Middlesex, Surveyed by John G. Hales, Pubd by Lemuel Shattuck – Boston, 1830

Map of the Town of Concord, Middlesex County Mass., Surveyed by Authority of the Town. H[enry]. F. Walling, Civil Engr, No. 81 Washington Street Boston, 1852

Part of Concord, Copyright 1889 by Geo. H. Walker & Co., Boston, from Atlas of Middlesex County, Massachusetts

Map of Concord, Showing Localities by Thoreau in his Journals, Compiled by Herbert W. Gleason, 1906



From Annursnac Toward Village, image by Herbert Wendell Gleason, July 30, 1900, II.1900.56, CFPL

