



Barrett's Mill Conservation Area Trail Guide



Barrett's Mill, ca. 1937.

(Ruth Wheeler's Houses in Concord File)

Courtesy Concord Free Public Library



Division of Natural Resources
141 Keyes Road
Concord, MA 01742
Tel: 978.318.3285
www.concordma.gov



Barrett's Mill Area

Named for the Barrett family grist and saw mills once located near where the parking lot is now on Barrett's Mill Road, the area includes an active farmstead, an archaeological site, the Col. James Barrett House of Revolutionary War fame, and an 18th century smallpox grave, all in open fields and hilly woodlands.

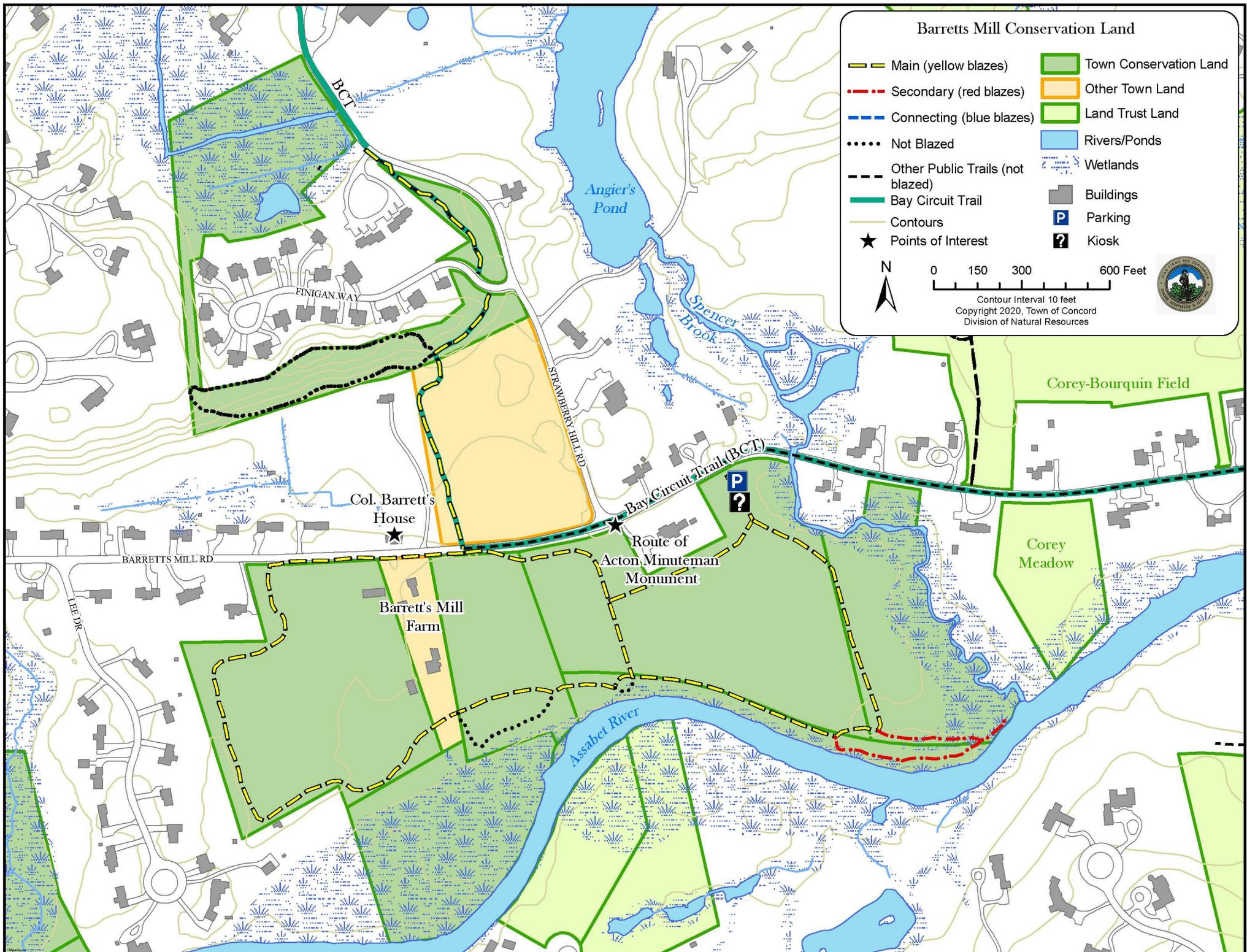
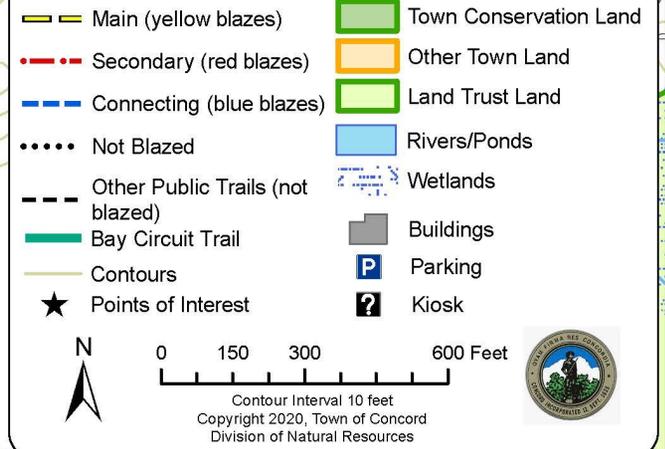
The history of the Barrett's Mill tract dates to the 1635 founding of Concord. William Spencer of Cambridge accompanied Simon Willard at the negotiations with the indigenous people to purchase the six miles square of Musketaquid that became the Concord settlement. Spencer became one of the first landowners, obtaining 400 acres north of the North River, now the Assabet River. Spencer Brook that is named for him served as the power source for a succession of mills from as early as 1678. The naming of Barrett's Mill Road dates to 1730, when two generations of the Barrett family had operated mills at the Spencer Brook site.

Location and Access

Access with parking for about a dozen vehicles is located on Barrett's Mill Road just east of 363 Barrett's Mill Road. The sign "Barretts Mill Concord Conservation Land" identifies the location.

Dog Owners: At Barrett's Mill conservation land, keep dogs leashed at all times, away from private yards and buildings, and out of all cultivated fields. Dogs must be leashed or under effective control at Finigan Way. It is the duty of each person who owns, possesses, or controls a dog to remove and dispose of any feces left by his or her dog.

Barretts Mill Conservation Land



Points of Interest

Barrett's Mill

The history of mill operation at Spencer Brook began when Richard Temple built and began operating a corn mill and sawmill here in 1678. By the time of the Revolution, Deacon Thomas Barrett and his son Samuel were the proprietors of the mills, as well as of a gun shop that utilized the waterpower to drive machinery for making arms, some used in the Revolutionary War. Samuel Barrett's son Samuel continued the family milling tradition until his death when the mill was sold to Daniel Angier, for whom the large pond to the north was named (formerly known as Barrett's Mill Pond). It was said that at this time, Henry Thoreau obtained cedar cuttings at the mill for his lead pencil factory. Angier was followed in ownership by Newton Gross from 1877 to 1922 and later by John Forbes into the 1940s. When the roof fell in about 1898, the corn mill was abandoned and the remaining structure converted to a sawmill. Surprisingly, the sawmill remained in operation until about 1956, the only upgrades being conversion from a waterwheel to a more efficient water turbine, and from vertical saw blades to a circular saw.

Col. James Barrett House



Col. Barrett's House 1880s

When the British marched on Concord, April 19, 1775, their objective was to arrest Col. Barrett and search his house and property for stores of weapons and munitions that he kept as superintendent of stores for the Massachusetts Committee of Public Safety. Having received advanced warning, he was able to hide all but a few cannon carriages on his property, while he removed himself from the premises to command the provincials against the British troops remaining at the North Bridge, and later to harass the British Regulars as they retreated along the road back to Boston.

The Barrett house was built in 1705 by Benjamin Barrett, father of Col. James Barrett, and his brother Deacon Thomas Barrett, and a descendent of the Barrett family that had settled in Concord around 1640. As a farmhouse for the 200-acre Barrett Farm, it was originally a one-story, one-room house. The western end and a second story was added about 1720, followed in 1760 by a three-story wing on the west side. The entire structure was recently renovated by Save Our Heritage and is now restored as it would have appeared when it was home of Col. James Barrett, farmer, Revolutionary War patriot and key figure in the events of April 19, 1775. The house was purchased



Restored Col. Barrett's House

in 2012 by the National Park Service as an addition to the Minute Man National Historic Park. The Barrett Farm is listed in the National Register of Historic Places as one of the most important Revolutionary War landmarks.

Route of the Acton Minutemen

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.

Barrett's Mill Farm

This fertile land has been farmed since prehistoric times as evidenced by numerous ancient stone artifacts Thoreau found on this site.



This active farm is now operated by Barrett's Mill Farm under lease from the Town of Concord, having been farmed since 1905 by the McGrath family. The farmstead includes 19 acres of tillable land, a beautifully renovated two-family residence, a greenhouse, farm stand, and barn. The farm both sells from the farm stand and runs a Community Supported Agriculture operation. An adjacent Town parcel is also under a license agreement with a local farmer.

Archaeological Dig Site

A small piece of land beside the Barrett's Mill Farm stand is the site of an archaeological dig by Brandeis University faculty and students. Starting only from oral histories, the goal of the team is to uncover evidence of sleeping quarters for freed slaves after the Civil War and later German prisoners of WWII bused in from Fort Devens. If artifacts are found, it will indicate that the groups once labored on the Barrett's Mill land. The project is funded by a \$10,000 grant of historic preservation funds from the town.

James Chandler Grave Site

At the edge of the woods beyond the open field behind the Col. James Barrett house lies a single grave surrounded by a low

stonewall enclosure. A classic slate tombstone engraved at the top with a winged angel marks the gravesite of James



James Chandler Gravesite

Chandler, who died in 1792 at the age of 79. Because he died of smallpox, he could not be transported from his home on Barrett's Mill Road to a cemetery in Concord center, and was laid to rest in this solitary grave. In April 1775, he was among those Concord residents hiding militia supplies in their homes, keeping barrels of gun powder safe from confiscation by the British.

Note: Be respectful of this historic treasure that has remained preserved in its wooded setting for more than 200 years. View but do not touch the tombstone.

Reformatory Branch Railroad

A raised bank along the Assabet River behind the Barrett's Mill Farm field is a remnant of the Middlesex Central Railroad dating to 1879 that once serviced the Concord Reformatory from Bedford Depot through Concord Center. Abandoned in 1927, rotted ties can still be found along the red trail that tracks along the rail bed with pleasant views of the Assabet River. *For more information, see the Reformatory Branch Trail Guide.*

Bay Circuit Trail (BCT)

On its more than 200-mile track through 37 towns from Newburyport to Duxbury, the Bay Circuit Trail passes through the eastern edge of Barrett's Mill Conservation Area. It enters from the north, where it parallels Strawberry Hill Road in woodland, emerges

into an open field, then turns east along Barrett's Mill Road. Though the BCT was originally proposed in 1929 as an "outer Emerald Necklace" greenbelt arcing west around Greater Boston, development only began in 1990. It is a work in progress even today, with this section recently relocated to its present track off of nearby roads.

Suggested Walks

Barrett's Mill Farm Field Loop

A farm road behind the parking area follows the perimeter of an agricultural field, returning along the Barrett's Mill Road sidewalk to the parking lot. A mix of vegetable plantings can be seen in the field, none as obvious as the rows of asparagus and strawberries, important crops since the early 1900s. Walking time for the entire loop is 35 minutes. A shorter loop returning through the center of the field can be completed in 15 minutes. **Note: Be respectful of the private residences in use by the farmers. Stay on marked trails only.**

Col. Barrett House and Finigan Way Trail

From the parking lot turn left (west) along the Barrett's Mill Road sidewalk to the far edge of an agricultural field across the road. Cross Barrett's Mill Road onto a yellow-blazed trail that soon joins a farm road. The road turns right at the back of the field to a cut through the hedgerow on the left, where the trail continues into the woods to a junction with an unblazed trail that loops to the left. The James Chandler gravesite can be found a short distance down the trail to the left.

Reverse direction back to Barrett's Mill Road. Here, a side trip along the road to the right (west) takes you to the historic Col. James Barrett House, the Barrett's Mill Farm stand and a small archaeology dig site (in season). The starting point at the parking lot is a short walk back (east) on the sidewalk. Walking Time: 45 to 60 minutes.