

Concord Scenic Roads Barrett's Mill Road

The Barretts [sic] have occupied so much of this road for so many generations that it was known as and called the Barrett Road. They gave the region such a high character that it was a loss when the last of them went away.

Annotation by Adam Tolman to J. S. Keyes's *Houses in Concord in 1885*, typed manuscript kept in Concord Public Library, Special Collections, p. 228

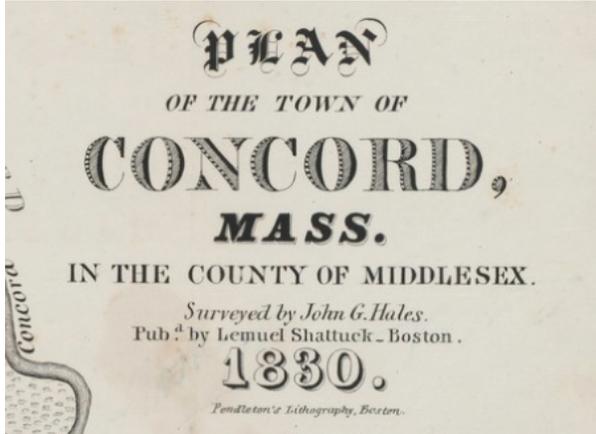


Barrett's Mill Road stretches for 1.8 miles, east to west, between Hildreth's Corner where it meets Lowell Road, and the Concord Route 2 Rotary, where the Northeastern Correctional Center occupies land all around the traffic circle. At the Lowell Road intersection, the road continues eastward, but its name changes to Barnes Hill Road. Towards its western end, the road bends sharply southward at the College Road junction. This road roughly parallels a curving section of the Assabet River; Spencer Brook, which played a crucial role in its history, intersects with it, and then flows down to meet the river.

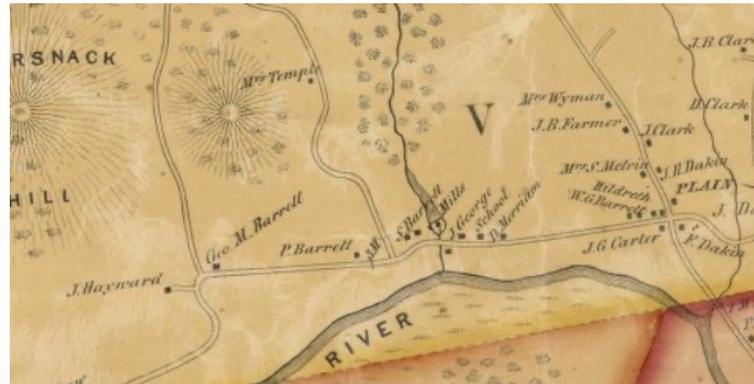
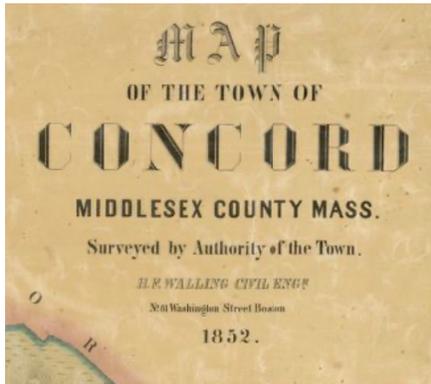


One of Concord's oldest byways, the road was probably first laid out in the mid-seventeenth century when the town was newly established. It was the focus of a hand drawn map made by Benjamin Brown in 1754 documenting those who owned property on both sides of its path - a rare survivor (shown and further discussed below). These included members of

the prominent Barrett family, and the Barrett mill that eventually gave the road its name. Descendants of the Barrett family continued to live along this road into the nineteenth century, as can be seen on Hales's 1830 *Plan of the Town of Concord*. The properties of more Barrett's are marked on the 1852 *Map of the Town of Concord* by Wallings, 1852, and again on the *Map of Concord, Showing Localities by Thoreau in his Journals* that was compiled by Herbert W. Gleason in 1906.



Left, title on the *Plan of the Town of Concord, Mass. In the County of Middlesex, Surveyed by John G. Hales, Pubd by Lemuel Shattuck, Boston, 1830*; right, detail of the map showing Barrett's Mill Road.



Left, title on the *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*; right, detail of the map showing Barrett's Mill Road.

17th Century Origins of Barrett's Mill Road

Located in an archaeologically rich area of Concord, the land that Barrett's Mill Road passes through was in use for thousands of years by indigenous people long before Europeans first settled here. Pathways in this outlying agricultural region were laid out by the earliest English landowners to link their properties with others. They also needed a route to reach the center of Concord where their meeting house was located, which was a fair distance away and necessitated a river crossing. Some of these routes may have followed preexisting Native American trails.

When Simon Willard (b. 1605 – d. 1676), a fur trader who emigrated from Horsmonden in Kent, England in 1634, finalized the negotiation of the purchase of Musketaquid from its indigenous owners in 1635, the Cambridge magistrate William Spencer (b. 1601 – d. 1640) was with him.¹ Though he never moved to Concord, Spencer was granted 400 acres north of what was then called the North River (later renamed the Assabet) at its founding. Spencer Brook, which is crossed by Barrett’s Mill Road, and Spencer Brook Road located further north, are named after him. Nineteenth century lawyer and historian Charles Hosmer Walcott provides a description of Willard’s rationale for choosing Musketaquid -subsequently renamed Concord - for the new “plantation.” The land north of the “devious windings” of the river may refer to the area under discussion here:

“Willard, who had previously traded with the Indians in this neighborhood, knew what the country was, and so laid out his bounds as to include six valuable mill sites, seven natural ponds, more than nine miles of river, and a large number of streams. The meadows traversed by the sluggish rivers that ran by devious windings to the northward, were bordered by tracts of upland that had been burned over and brought under rude cultivation by the natives, and afforded a large area of cleared land that was attractive to the English settlers.”²

In 1654 Spencer’s land was sold to Richard Temple (b. about 1623 – d. 1689), another English emigrant who was then living in Charlestown.³ Temple moved his family to Concord, and either acquired or built a mill that was powered by Spencer Brook. A clue to the origins of Barrett’s Mill Road can be found in transcriptions of lost early town records that were made by another 19th century historian and antiquarian, David Pulsiver, in the 1830’s. One, dated October 26, 1666, describes the First and Second Division land holdings of Temple and others, including acreage bounded by the North River and near Spencer Brook. Exactly when a mill was first built next to the brook is unclear, but the passage quoted below is evidence that one was in existence somewhere in this vicinity by 1666. Existing “highways” are referenced, notably “the highway that goes to the sawmill.”⁴ Walcott copied Pulsiver’s transcriptions in his unpublished manuscript *Notes on properties, land, and roads in Concord, Massachusetts*. In his description of the early history of Barrett’s Mill Road, he suggests that it was in existence by 1666:

“The first mention of the road which we now call by this name occurs in the description of Richard Temple’s land in 1666. Temple owned upwards of four hundred acres bounding on the North River & traversed from north to south

¹Spencer, who emigrated in 1631, first lived in Cambridge after he arrived in the Massachusetts Bay Colony. For an early account of his role in the purchase of Musketaquid, see Charles Hosmer Walcott, *Concord in the Colonial Period, Being a History of the Town of Concord, Massachusetts, From the Earliest Settlement to the Overthrow of the Andros Government, 1635- 1689*, Boston, 1884, p. 14.

² Ibid., p. 17.

³ Ibid., p. 15

⁴ David Pulsiver, (transcriber), *Records of the Town of Concord: Ancient Records Relating to Land Divisions, Highways, and Bridges*, Vol. 1 (1655 – 1784), 1830’s, pp. 176-185, and especially p. 184.

*by 'Mr. Spencer's brooke' (named for Wm Spencer the first owner of the land) and from east to west by the road under consideration....This road extended westward as it now....runs until it....joined the road laid out in 1666 from the North River bridge (at Derby's) over the brook near Patrick O'Keefe's to Town's new Grant by way of the Nashoba valley. This junction was effected originally somewhere near the brook, but at a point further to the eastward a road ran off more to the southward giving access to the sawmill at Warner's factory, and called in 1666 'the highway that goes to the saw-mill.'"*⁵

At the Second Division of town land activated between 1653 and 1655, Concord was divided into three sections – the East, South, and North Quarters. All of Temple's land, which today incorporates the vicinity of Barrett's Mill Road and beyond, was in the North Quarter. The occupants in that district were "to make & maintaine all the heighwayes from the training place to the great Rivre with the bridg, and all that is to be done the north sid thereof."⁶

In 1671 Temple built a new house that still stands, one of the earliest extant houses in Concord, and the oldest on Barrett's Mill Road.⁷ Shortly before he died Richard arranged to distribute his holdings amongst his children. On December 22, 1688, he deeded his son Isaac one hundred acres, which included "his new mansion or dwelling place...barn, outhousing, gardens, yards and fencing bounded south by the highway and west by Spencer's brook". Isaac also inherited an "eighth part in the saw mill near his house."⁸ The "highway" referred to in the deed is undoubtedly an early configuration of what is now called Barrett's Mill Road.



Richard Temple House, 222 Barrett's Mill Road

⁵Walcott, *Notes on properties, land, and roads in Concord, Massachusetts*, compiled between 1875-1897, p. 27; this manuscript is in the Concord Free Public Library, Special Collections.

⁶Walcott, 1884, p. 75.

⁷*Historic Resources Masterplan of Concord, Massachusetts*, Concord Historical Commission, 1995, updated 2001, p. 28: "the house must have played a role in the early development of the area north of the Assabet River near Spencer Brook. The exterior is one of Concord's best examples of a large, 2-room-deep, 2 ½-story center-chimney house of the mid-18th c. One of the oldest houses in Concord."

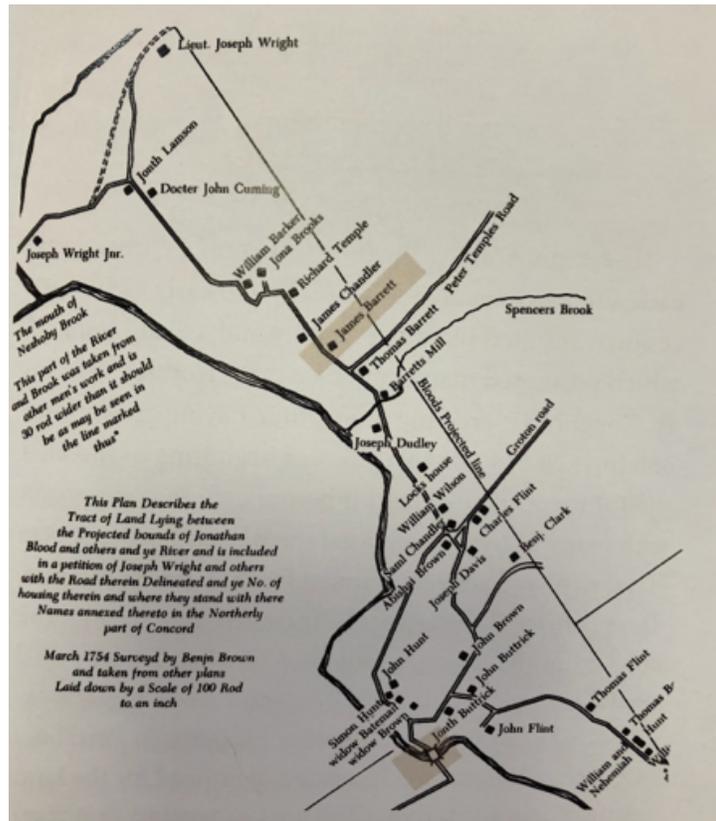
⁸ This information was found on several genealogical websites devoted to Richard Temple that cites documents held in the Register of Deeds in East Cambridge, Massachusetts - I have not examined the deeds in person. Because he was to inherit the house, Isaac was to look after his parents for the remainder of their lives and to pay their funeral expenses when they died. This is confusing though, since Joanna Shipley Temple, Richard's wife, had died earlier that year, on February 24, 1688. Richard Temple died soon the deed was made, on March 15, 1689.

It is notable that this house was later owned by William Munroe (b. 1778 – d. 1861), another prominent Concordian who moved to Barrett’s Mill Road in 1825 with his wife Patty and their six children, relocating his entrepreneurial pencil-making business here.⁹

Barrett's Mill Road in the 18th Century: the 1754 Benjamin Brown Survey, and the Colonel James Barrett Farmhouse

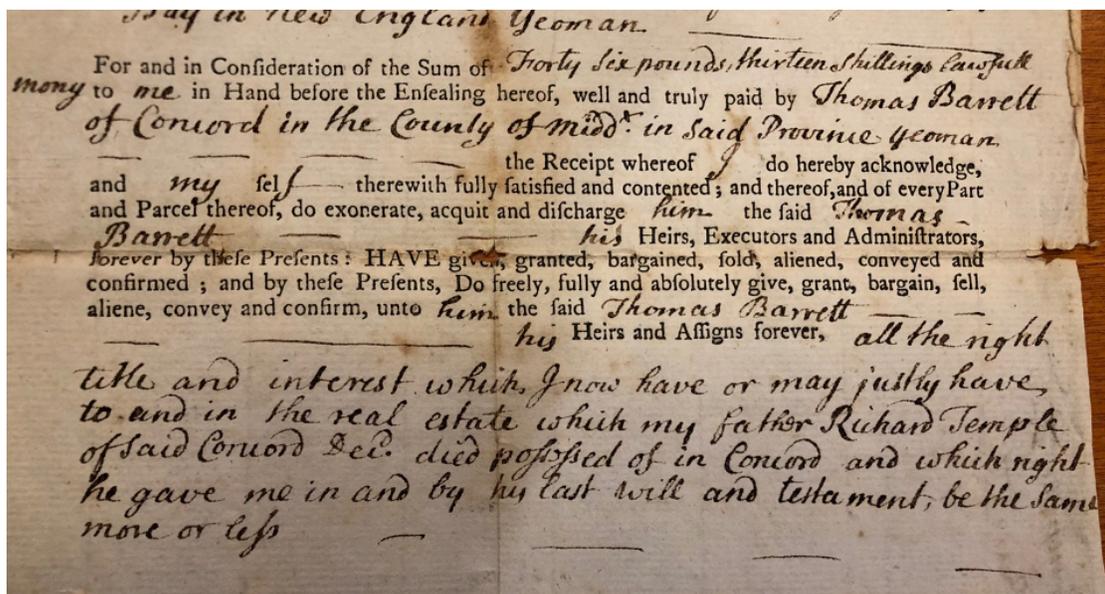


Left: North Part of Concord, (or "District of Carlisle"), hand drawn map by Benjamin Brown, 1754; Massachusetts State Archives. Right: detail showing Spencer Brook and the surrounding properties along the road



Modern rendering of the hand drawn 1754 Benjamin Brown map

⁹ Robert A. Gross, *The Transcendentalists and Their World*, New York, 2021, pp. 131-2.



Deed in Concord Public Library, Special Collections, in the Barrett Family Papers

Colonel James Barrett, Thomas's brother, lived just a short distance further down the road. Interestingly, their two properties were separated by "Peter Temples Road" (drawn on the 1754 map), which no longer exists. James Chandler (b. 1714 - d. 1792) and his family were the next neighbors on the south side of the street. Because he died of smallpox his body could not be taken to the town burying ground for burial near his deceased wives. Though the Chandler house no longer exists, his tombstone can still be visited behind the James Barrett house, accessible from Barrett's Mill Road. The next property labelled on the map, on the north side of the road, belonged to Richard Temple, probably the grandson of the elder Richard Temple discussed above.¹¹

Unquestionably, the most important historic site on Barrett's Mill Road is the farmhouse that belonged to Colonel James Barrett (b. 1710 – d. 1779). Built by his father Benjamin in 1705, it was one of the principal targets of the British troops on April 19th, 1775, who marched from Boston to Concord because they knew the local militia were stockpiling large supplies of artillery and ammunition throughout the town, including at the Barrett's farm. They hoped to destroy these munitions and arrest the Colonel himself but failed on both counts. Though soldiers searched the house, the supplies had been successfully hidden in a nearby field. James Barrett alluded capture since he was with his troops that day. Supplies were also hidden nearby at James Chandler's house, but they, too, remained undetected.¹² Besides Colonel Barrett, his wife, two sons and daughter, their household also included a 14-year-old enslaved boy named Phillip who would join the Continental Army in 1779 and eventually gain his

¹¹ This Richard may have been the son of Abraham Temple (b. 1652 - d. 1738), who was born in 1674 and died in 1756.

¹² See the biography of James Chandler on the Minute Man National Historical Park website.

freedom.¹³ In 2012, after a careful restoration, the property was incorporated into the Minute Man National Historical Park.



Photographs of the Colonel James Barrett Farmhouse. On the left is the restored house as it appears today. The barn that once stood beside it collapsed long ago, and the old stone walls that lined both sides of the unpaved road that can be seen in the old photograph on the right are also no longer extant. (Old photograph reproduced courtesy of the Concord Library, Special Collections)

At the base of Strawberry Hill Road where it meets Barrett's Mill Road, a granite monument pays tribute to the line of march made by the Acton minute men on their way towards the North Bridge in the early morning hours of April 19, 1775. In addition to this marker, several 18th century houses can also be seen along Barrett's Mill Road. These include the Abishai Brown House (also known as Widow Brown's Tavern), dated 1719-1750. Here British soldiers stopped for refreshment on their way back to the town center¹⁴ At 612 Barrett's Mill Road is the unusual "long eight-bay Barrett double barrel house of ca. 1758, built for two families.¹⁵



Acton Minute Men Monument



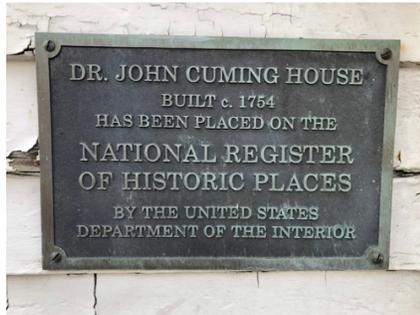
Abishai Brown House/Tavern, 71 Barrett's Mill Road

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ *Historic Resources Masterplan*, p. 27. This house was originally located closer to Lowell Road but has been moved.

¹⁵ Forbes, 1995, p. 14.

On the 1754 map shown above, John Cuming's house is documented at the western end of Barrett's Mill Road (its address is now listed as 998 Elm Street and Barrett's Mill Road at the Reformatory Circle). Dr. John Cuming (b. 1728 - d. 1788) was a well-to-do, multi-faceted 18th century Concord citizen who served the town in many capacities. He was a friend of the Rev. William Emerson, and a farming neighbor of Colonel James Barrett. Also a leading physician, he treated wounded British soldiers on April 19th, 1775 (the John Cuming Building at Emerson Hospital is named after him). He also enslaved Brister Freeman, as well as a man known only as "Jem". Now owned by the state and used by the prison, this historic house is in poor condition on the exterior and in need of sympathetic restoration. Though it is listed on the National Register of Historic Places, it is largely forgotten.



Left, Doctor John Cuming's house drawn on Benjamin Brown's 1754 map; center, the plaque on the house; current photograph of the unrestored Cuming's house.

The economic and industrial import of the corn, grist and sawmills that were in operation for nearly three centuries along its path effected the naming of Barrett's Mill Road. Following Thomas and Samuel Barrett, their grandson and son Samuel Barrett took over the family business, possibly followed by Rufus Barrett. In 1866 the mill passed out of the Barrett family when it was sold to Daniel Angier. Newton Gross bought the mill in 1882 at the time of his marriage to Mary Emma Davis - Newton was the son of Mrs. Daniel Angier from a previous marriage. He owned the mill until 1925, but apparently stopped milling grain in 1915. John E. Forbes was the next mill owner. There was a working sawmill along Barrett's Mill Road as late as 1956, but now only the ruins remain.¹⁶



¹⁶A newspaper article from 1938, and several other clippings about the mills are in the Concord Public Library, Special Collections.



Old photographs of the mills on Barrett's Mill Road, courtesy of the Concord Public Library, Special Collections. Recent photographs were taken by the author.

Barrett's Mill Road in the 19th Century: Industry, Retail Shops, and Hildreth's Corner

An elegant, Federal Style brick house was built by local architect Reuben Duren for Jonathan Hildreth at the east end of Barrett's Mill Road about 1783 -90. A popular shop located on the property was run by the Hildreth family until it burned down in 1909. Other retail businesses, including Munroe's pencil factory and the Concord Ice Company, were in operation nearby. In the nineteenth century "Hildreth's Corner" developed into an active town village with its own identity.¹⁷ Located on Barrett's Mill Road near the intersection of Lowell Road, School # 5 which served this northern district was also referred to as the "Barrett School".¹⁸



8 Barrett's Mill Road

¹⁷See Renee Garrelick, *Concord in the Days of Strawberries and Streetcars*, Concord, 1985, pp. 38-9, for anecdotes told by residents about this area of town.

¹⁸The school was called by that name in the *Annual Report of the School Committee of the Town of Concord for the Year Ending April 1, 1854*, Concord, Silas B. Wilde, Printer, 1854, p. 3.

9. Next east is a comparatively modern house owned and occupied this forty years by Joseph P. George the carpenter and his son. The shop stands opposite the house in an encroachment upon the highway, that seems to be a fashion on that road.

10. Next to this is a School house built in [left blank] but no longer used except for the amusements of the District, who have great fun therein. The prison part of this District is too far away and the children are brought to town or some on the railroad.

Annotation by Adam Tolman to J. S. Keyes's *Houses in Concord in 1885*, typed manuscript kept in Concord Public Library, Special Collections, pp. 132-133

Agriculture on Barrett's Mill Road

Today both old and new houses line Barrett's Mill Road, but stone walls, fields, pastures, and woodland are also prominent scenic features that contribute to its rural character. Most of the land along the road was originally used for agricultural purposes, and notably, some fields have been continuously farmed since the earliest European settlers occupied it and probably even earlier. Barrett's Farm, no longer run by that family but still retaining their name, continues to provide fresh vegetables for the community sold at their small farm stand. The Corey-Bourquin Field managed by Concord Land Conservation Trust for hay production, the Barrett's Mill Conservation Land, and a portion of the Bay Circuit Trail honor the local history of land use. These fields and trails will be preserved in perpetuity.



Barrett's Mill Road – How it (Officially) Got its Name

In the 1890 annual Town Report, the Road Commission noted: "In accordance with a vote of the town at the last annual meeting all the streets formerly named by the town have been properly marked with street signs, eighty-five having been put up during the last year. There seems to be a general desire that the names of some streets should be changed."¹⁹ This is followed by a list of the recommended name changes, including: "from Estabrook to Hildreth's Corner, Barnes Hill Road; from Hildreth's Corner to the Reformatory, Barrett's Mill Road..." The recommendations of the Road Commissioners were favorably accepted by vote of

¹⁹ *Annual Report of the Town Officers of Concord Massachusetts, For the Year Ending March 1, 1890*, p. 74.

Article 3 at Town Meeting held on April 22, 1889. And that is how Barrett's Mill Road officially got its name.

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Maps

North Part of Concord, (or "District of Carlisle"), hand drawn survey by Benjamin Brown, 1754; Massachusetts State Archives; facsimile in the Concord Public Library, Special Collections

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

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Compiled by Nancy Fresella-Lee, April 8, 2022
New photographs from January 2022