

## 2. SITE HISTORY

---

This chapter provides an overview of the history of Heywood Meadow using images and text to document its appearance and physical evolution over time. It is organized into five major chronological periods.

### PRE-CONCORD AND SETTLEMENT PERIOD (1500 - 1655)

#### **Musketaquid: Native Americans in Concord's Mill Brook Area**

The land that is now Concord, Massachusetts was used by Native Americans for centuries before the English settlers arrived. Most of the area was covered with old growth forest, but there would also have been clearings, either natural or manmade. The area was known as Musketaquid or marsh grass river because of the extensive wet meadows along the Concord River and its tributaries. During the Late Woodland period (circa 1000 - 1600) native people migrated throughout the area and had seasonal hunting, fishing and farming camps near the mouth of the Mill Brook, a particularly fertile area.

Ecologist Richard Forman, author of "Concord's Mill Brook: Flowing Through Time," provides a compelling description of the pre-Concord appearance of Heywood Meadow, located a short distance up the Mill Brook from its junction with the Concord River.

*"Before Concord a clear curving brook here drained three square miles of forest land, and on its northeast side flowed along the base of the ridge. Just upstream the area was probably heterogeneous, with patches fluctuating over time from swamp to beaver pond, marsh, mudflat and meadow. Fish, including migrating alewives from the sea, were often abundant in pools formed by fallen trees and shaded by continuous cover. Late Archaic People more than 3000 years ago migrated through the area mainly in spring and autumn. They had a base camp upstream of Heywood Meadow for hunting and fishing and some years would have migrated there for months at a time."* (Forman, page 28)

When English explorers first visited Musketaquid in the early seventeenth century, they noted the extensive meadows, the network of Native American trails, and the small "planting grounds" in the area. Fish and game were abundant and the extensive river system provided a convenient transportation corridor, particularly in the spring when water was high. English colonists chose Musketaquid as a place to establish a settlement because of its plentiful natural resources and the presence of the friendly Algonquin tribe.

#### **English Settlement**

In 1635 the colonists created an inland settlement at Musketaquid, which they named Concord. The settlers received a land grant from the English king that included a six miles square area located about twelve miles northwest of Boston along the Concord and Assabet Rivers. The town center was established along the Mill Brook with houses clustered around the meetinghouse. In 1636 the settlers dammed the Mill Brook to provide power, creating a mill pond that extended upstream to Heywood Meadow. This was the first of many changes that altered the ecology of the brook.

The first land division included houselots of three to eight acres for each of about twelve families, while the rest of the town remained common land used for cultivation, hay and pasturage. Houses typically faced south and had their gardens and orchards clustered nearby with their woodlot on the adjacent hillside. Most of the early houselots were laid out along the north side of Bay Road (now Lexington Road) with houses facing south and along the south side of Watertown Road (now Walden Street). The fertile low lying area along the Mill Brook was used primarily for pasture as meadow grass were plentiful and water was readily available to the livestock.

One of the first settlers was Luke Potter, whose houselot included the land north of the Mill Brook known today as Heywood Meadow. Unlike most of the other early settlers, Potter chose to build his house on the south side of Lexington Road adjacent to the Mill Brook. Richard Rice, another early settler, also chose to build his house adjacent to the Mill Brook, rather than on the uphill side of Watertown Road. Forman describes the appearance of the area during this period.

*“This was Luke Potter’s lot, one of the original long narrow parallel lots extending from the brook northward up over the ridge to common grazing land beyond. A road and ford across the brook at this point connected the northern and southern parts of town. From the ford down to the milldam stretched the town’s mill pond. A muddy Bay Road at the base of the ridge connected Concord with Cambridge, Boston and indirectly, England. Some forest cover was removed for pastures. Work began on straightening the brook and draining adjacent wetlands to form ditches in which livestock sloshed around. The brook was straightened both upstream and downstream of today’s bridge.” (Forman, page 28)*

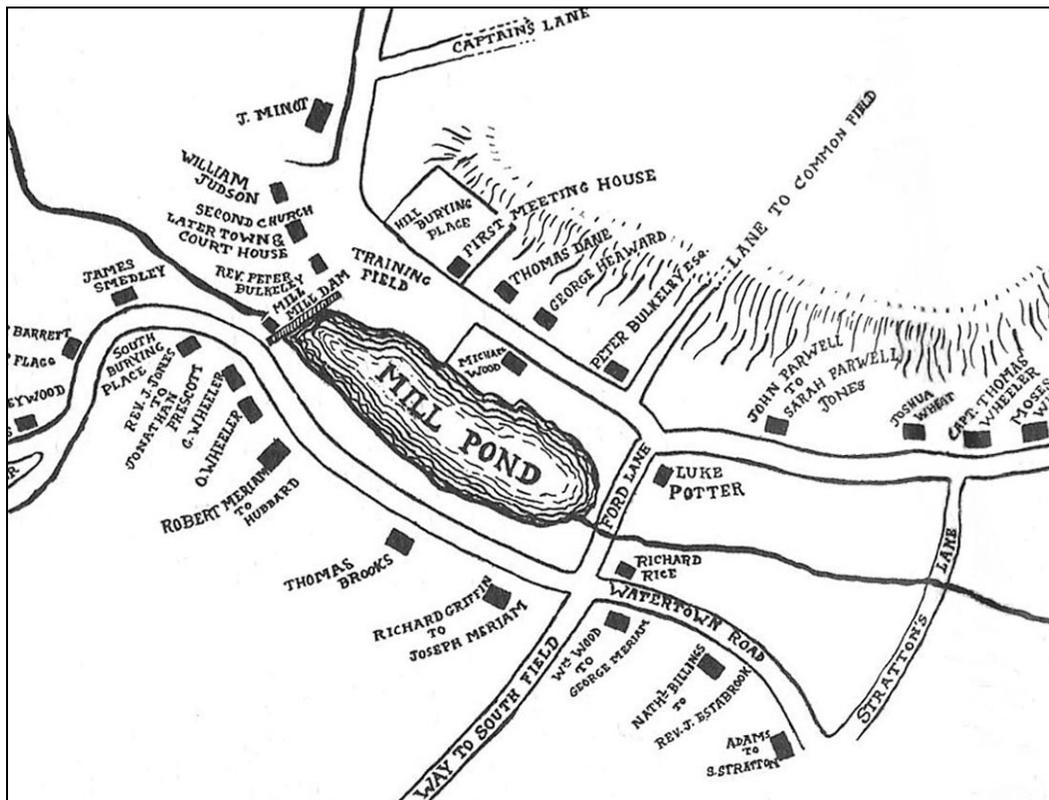


Figure 1. This detail of a plan by Ruth Wheeler shows Concord center during the seventeenth century. Heywood Meadow extends roughly along the north side of the Mill Brook from the right of the Mill Pond to Stratton's Lane (which no longer exists). Ford Lane is the present Heywood Street. (Reproduced from Wheeler, *Climate for Freedom*.)

## **FOREST TO FARMLAND PERIOD (1655 - 1828)**

### **Second Division to Revolutionary War**

The period from 1655 to 1775 marked an extended period of growth for Concord as a town and the evolution of the landscape from predominantly forest to mostly open fields. The common theme throughout this period was agriculture, which occupied most of the community and shaped land use patterns.

The population grew rapidly during Concord's early years, with newer houses built out from the town center along the major roads. The second land division in 1655 converted much of the common land surrounding the village to large farms, altering the settlement pattern from a compact village cluster to a more dispersed pattern of scattered farms. A meetinghouse was built next to the mill pond in 1673 and rebuilt in 1712. Other features of the community during its early years included a burial ground, an animal pound, a mill and training fields. The north/south route across the Mill Brook west of Luke Potter's house (now known as Heywood Street) was established as a ford early on and served as an important part of the town's circulation system. A major change in circulation occurred in 1742 when a road (now Main Street) was constructed across the milldam.

As the village grew and more of the land was converted to agricultural use, the Mill Brook became polluted. Forman describes Heywood Meadow during this period,

*“Upstream trees were progressively axed for fuel and pastureland, such as the Town Meadow on Mill Brook south of Meriam's Corner, and also for hayfields and cultivation. Peak flows of water in spring and after heavy rains increased, and hence large floods came more often. Sediment washed into the muddy brook, and then was largely scoured out in floods. Logs, pools and fish decreased. Most nearby houses of the era persisted to the present, including the stylish 1719 saltbox at 105 Lexington Rd. and the 1788 house, tavern, and store at 92 Walden St.”* (Forman, page 28)

Luke Potter's houselot was divided among various members of his family before his death in 1697. Much of it, including the original farmhouse, went to his son Judah, who was killed when the house burned in 1731. John Brown, Judah's son-in-law, acquired the land immediately north of the old homestead in 1719 and built the house at 105 Lexington Road known today as the Beaton-Heywood house, which followed the traditional settlement pattern of houses on the north side of the road. When John Beaton bought the house in 1739 he also acquired the pastureland between Lexington Road and the Mill Brook east of Heywood Street that included the site of the former Potter house and a barn located nearby (Lot A). In 1747 Beaton acquired more land from the Potter family, including the area on the west side of Heywood Street (Lots 1, 2 and 3) which was designated as “plowland and meadow.”

### **Revolutionary War and Federal Period**

The April 19, 1775 battle between the British redcoats, colonial militia and the Massachusetts minutemen is one of the best documented events in American history. Much of the land on which the battle occurred is now part of Minute Man National Historical Park, which has been gradually restoring the historic battle route. Heywood Meadow lies directly adjacent to Lexington Road, also known as the Battle Road, and was witness to the arrival of the British on their way to the North Bridge and to their departure, hastened by the minutemen and colonial militia who traveled along Revolutionary Ridge shooting from cover of the trees.

Historian Ruth Wheeler in *Concord: Climate for Freedom* reports that young Dr. Abel Prescott, a Concord resident who had sounded the alarm to Sudbury and Framingham,

*“ . . . returned at noon along Walden Street to see the British starting their retreat along the Bay Road. A shot was fired from the millbrook meadow and he was wounded. He took refuge in the widow Heywood’s house where his wound was treated but in his weakened condition he fell a prey to dysentery and died in August.” (Wheeler, page 115)*



*Figure 2. This painting by Ralph Earle documents Concord center on April 19, 1775. Lexington Road, with troops of British redcoats marching along it, is near the center of the picture. The meetinghouse is at the far left with the Mill Pond behind it. (Reproduced from Wheeler, *Climate for Freedom*, the original is at the Concord Museum)*

Concord continued to grow in the post-war period but access to Boston remained difficult as the roads were still relatively poor. Most Concord residents continued to farm, growing what they needed for their own family and perhaps some to trade in town. One major change in the physical appearance of the center of town was the draining of the Mill Pond in 1828.

The Beaton property, including Heywood Meadow and the house at 105 Lexington Road opposite Heywood Street, passed through the Prescott and Fay families in the latter part of the eighteenth century. Jonathan Fay owned the property at the time of his death in 1811. There were probably several barns and small outbuildings on the east side of the meadow at that time, as shown on a map by Edward Jarvis for the 1820-1830 period (see Figure 3). Anne Forbes also reports that by 1810 shoemaker William Bowers had built a house, barn and shoe shop on the section of the meadow east of Heywood Street that is known today as Lot A (letter dated July 15, 1998). Jonathan Fay left his property to his children. (Note: see Figure 11 on page 15 for location of Lot A.)

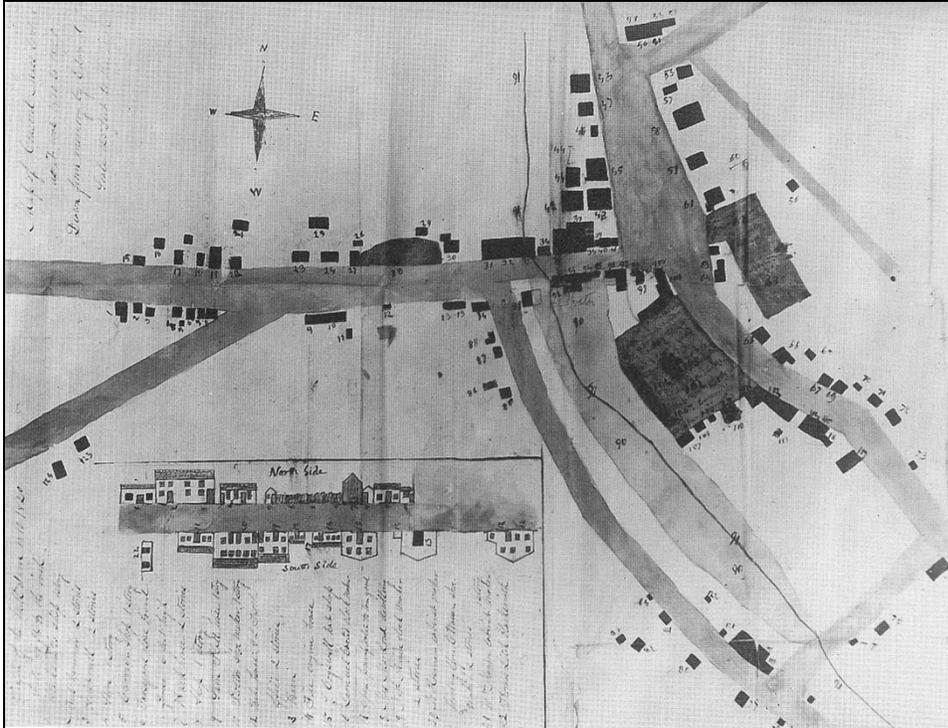


Figure 3. This detailed drawing by Edward Jarvis shows Concord center in the 1820s. Heywood Street is at the lower right corner, with several small sheds along its south side. (From Jarvis, *Traditions & Reminiscences of Concord, Massachusetts, 1779-1878*. This plan has been rotated to correspond with the orientation of other maps.)

## LITERARY AND RAILROAD PERIOD (1828 - 1915)

### Economic and Social Transition

As roads improved, travel between Boston and Concord became easier and Concord farmers began producing crops for sale in the city. Arrival of the railroad in 1844 made access to Boston even easier and brought many new residents to Concord. Some came as visitors, drawn by the fresh air and charm of the village, and later bought summer residences or even moved to the community permanently. Among those drawn to Concord were many of the nineteenth century's most prominent writers, social reformers and intellectuals. Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau and the Alcotts were among the writers who drew their inspiration from the community and its pastoral landscape. Thoreau wrote in 1855:

*"I walk along the Mill Brook below Emerson's, look into it for some life . . . Perhaps what most moves us in winter is some reminiscences of far-off summer. How we leap by the side of open brooks! What beauty in the running brooks! What life! What society! The cold is merely superficial; it is the summer still at the core, far, far within."*  
 (Henry David Thoreau, *Journal, January 12, 1855*, quoted in *Heywood Meadow brochure*)

Despite the changing economy, physical changes were gradual. New houses were added slowly as the community grew. Those living in the village no longer needed large barns and numerous outbuildings as they were producing food primarily to supplement what they could buy in town or from those who continued large-scale farming.

Jonathan Fay's daughter Lucy married Dr. Abiel Heywood in 1822. He gradually bought the holdings of the other Fay children, eventually acquiring extensive land that included the former Beaton house, as well as land south of Lexington Road (Lots 1, 2 and 3 and most of Lot A as shown of Figure 11 on page 15) and over the ridge to Bedford Street. Some time after 1864 he bought the portion of Lot A owned by the Bowers family and subsequently tore down the buildings located on it. Forman, in his description of this period wrote,

*"Despite a few structures that were built and removed, the meadow basically remained a meadow, orchard, or garden. A vegetable cellar was dug into the bank of the brook even in the 20<sup>th</sup> C. The upstream drainage basin was mostly deforested, and the muddy brook flowing through the farmland alternated between a fickle trickle and a massive flood. On Walden St. 19<sup>th</sup> C houses were added between older homes."* (Forman, page 28)

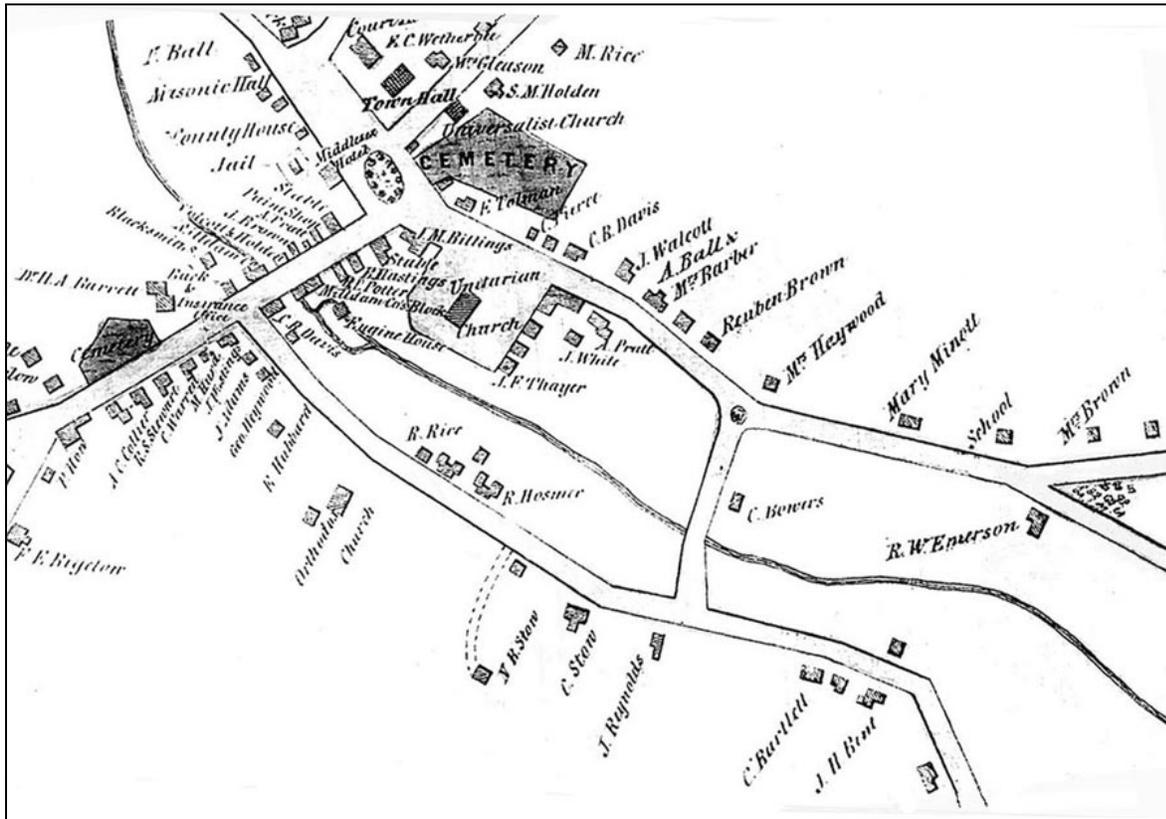
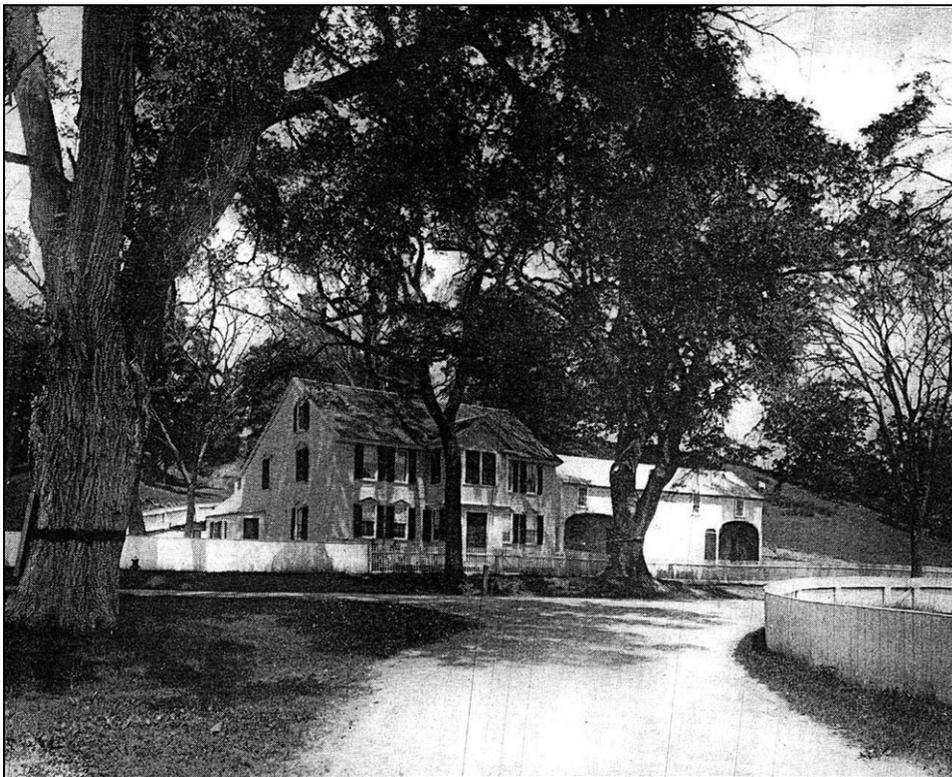


Figure 4. Detail of 1852 map showing Concord center. The Mill Pond is gone, the Bowers house is located east of Heywood Street and R.W. Emerson's house lies just to the east of the meadow. (Concord Free Public Library)



*Figure 5. This view was taken around 1900 just east of Heywood Meadow near where the present police station is located. It illustrates the openness of the landscape and the quality of the meadow at that time. The Emerson house is visible in the background at the left side of the photo. (Concord Free Public Library)*



*Figure 6. This view of the Beaton Heywood house was taken from Heywood Street circa 1880 by Alfred Hosmer. Note board fence at right. (Concord Free Public Library)*

## EARLY AUTOMOBILE PERIOD (1915 - 1947)

The pastoral quality of the Concord landscape that existed during the late nineteenth century began to change in the early twentieth century with the arrival of the automobile. By World War II there was little active farming, although some residents maintained gardens for personal use. During this time Heywood Meadow continued to be owned by descendants of the Heywood family, reflecting a remarkable period of more than 300 years of ownership by one family.



*Figure 7. This 1935 aerial view shows the predominance of open meadow, the openness of the brook channel and the street trees along Heywood Street and Lexington Road. There is tilled land at the northwest and northeast corners of the meadow and a small orchard east of Heywood Street. (Natural Resources Commission)*



*Figure 8. This view of Heywood Meadow looking east from Heywood Street was taken in 1942. The Emerson house is visible at the left and there is a barn at the far right where the police station now stands. (Concord Free Public Library)*

## **PUBLIC USE AND STEWARDSHIP PERIOD (1947 - PRESENT)**

Once Heywood Meadow was no longer used for agriculture, it was perceived as vacant land. During the latter part of the twentieth century, the meadow was subject to multiple proposals for development, which generated considerable debate within the community and helped to clarify the significance of Heywood Meadow to the town.

The first proposal for a new use came in 1947 when town meeting voted to acquire the northeastern portion of the meadow (Lot A) as the site for a new police and fire station. In 1955 the town rejected that earlier proposal and voted instead to erect the building at the corner of Walden and Heywood Streets. This site was rejected in 1958. The present police and fire building was ultimately erected further south along Walden Street where there was more room to accommodate it. The decision not to build on Heywood Meadow was made largely out of concern for the Mill Brook, in recognition of the importance of the brook and its associated wetlands for flood storage. By 1949 the town had already begun acquiring land along the Mill Brook valley as a flood control measure. This program of land acquisition and stream conservation has continued to the present day.

In 1960 the town acquired the northeastern portion of Heywood Meadow known as Lot A by eminent domain. Around the same time a reproduction gun house was erected at the eastern end of Lot A to house the equipment of the Concord Independent Battery. Lots 1, 2 and 3 on the western side of Heywood Street remained in private ownership and sometime between 1948 and 1960 Edith Sellors, the owner, erected a garage on Parcel 3. In addition, a small visitor information center previously located in the town center was relocated to the westernmost side of Lot A in 1967 or 68, initially as a temporary measure.

In the early 1960s, Concord was becoming aware of the need to document and protect its historic resources. This was prompted in part by increased development, which was putting pressure on the town center, and also by creation of Minute Man National Historical Park in 1959. In 1961 Concord created several historic districts and a Historic District Commission. Part of the purpose of the historic districts was to establish an appropriate setting for and protection of historic buildings, places and districts. Heywood Meadow was included in the American Mile Historic District, primarily as a setting for and protection of the adjacent houses along Lexington Road.

Another major controversy over use of Heywood Meadow began in 1968 when Middlesex County proposed to build a courthouse there. The town was unified in its opposition to this proposal. The Board of Selectmen argued,

*“The British Regulars marched past this land to suppress the Patriots and they struggled east past this land in their retreat after the battle at the Bridge. Ralph Waldo Emerson and the Alcotts were neighbors; they walked on this land and wrote about it. Henry David Thoreau passed it almost daily in his trips to and from Town to Walden Pond and his farm. A vital ingredient in Concord’s modern day life is this interest and devotion to past happenings that has allowed Concord to retain, for the whole nation to observe and appreciate, the area as it existed at the time of the happenings.”* (1968 letter from Board of Selectmen to County Commissioners about possible taking of Heywood Meadow, as quoted in Heywood Meadow Timeline, Appendix 9)

The Natural Resources Commission in a 1969 letter to the County Commissioners wrote,

*“The most important single project undertaken by the Concord Natural Resources Commission . . . has been the ‘Millbrook Valley’ project. A broad, low lying meadow and marshland of several hundred acres lies to the east of the Town and is drained by the ‘Millbrook.’ To preserve this watershed and prevent flooding, the Town, with financial help from the Commonwealth and from [the Department of Housing and Urban Development] through a grant for Open Space Acquisition has acquired some 130 acres along the Millbrook, upstream from Heywood Street. The Heywood St. site proposed for the Courthouse is a vital part of the flood control aspect of this project. To improve and pave this last safety valve for floodwater . . . would in our opinion be a most ill-advised undertaking . . . In this case the ‘Heywood Meadow’ has been left open for several excellent reasons (historical, parkland, scenic, and flood control) and as such, is playing an important role in maintaining the physical balance of this community.” (1969 letter from John Bordman of the Natural Resources Commission to County Commissioners in anticipation of land being taken for a county courthouse, Heywood Meadow Timeline, Appendix 10)*

Despite these objections, in 1969 the County Commissioners took the eastern portion of Heywood Meadow (Lot A) by eminent domain to build a courthouse. Concord's Town Meeting voted unanimously to protest the county's taking and to transfer control of the meadow to the Natural Resources Commission for conservation purposes.

*“We do this because of our deep-seated conviction that this Town land should be kept in its natural state, being not only an integral part of our Historic District but also a vital part of our Mill Brook Valley which the town desires to preserve under the control of our National Resources Commission.” (1969 Town Meeting vote, Heywood Meadow Timeline, Appendix 11)*

Ultimately the courthouse was built on Walden Street a short distance south of Heywood Meadow. While the debate had pointed out the vulnerability of the meadow and catalyzed support for its protection, there was still no consensus about the future of the meadow.

Concord's Monument Square/Lexington Road Historic District, which includes Heywood Meadow, was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1977. Like many early National Register nominations, this one was brief by today's standards and focused primarily on buildings. The gun house, mistakenly identified as a circa 1900 building, was listed as a contributing resource. Heywood Meadow was not specifically identified by name in the nomination.

The town's 1985 Open Space and Long Range Plan identified Lots 1, 2 and 3 on the west side of Heywood Street as a priority for public acquisition. The plan cited the need for protection of open space in the town center, the desirability of important scenic vistas, and the value of acquiring land contiguous to existing open space. However, in 1985 the town voted not to accept a gift of Lots 1 and 2 because the gift was contingent on the town building a visitor center on the site. Reasons cited for not wanting a visitor center there included loss of open space, traffic danger, cutting of large trees and negative impact on the area. Ultimately the town voted to purchase Lots 1 and 2 with a combination of public and private funds that had been raised for the purpose. Both lots were designated as conservation land. Lot 3 was not available at the time.

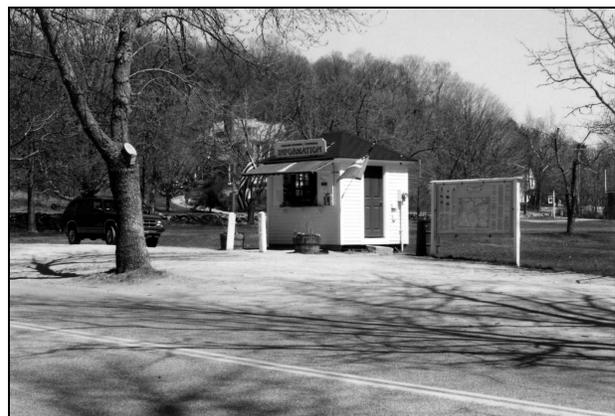
In December 1994 the Concord Business Partnership, Concord Chamber of Commerce and Concord Selectmen signed a memorandum of understanding to purchase Lot 3, the last privately held piece of

Heywood Meadow, and to build an expanded visitor center on it. There was strong opposition to this proposal and a month later the “Friends of Heywood Meadow '95” was formed to ensure that Lot 3 be used solely for conservation and to encourage another resolution of the visitor center issue. In 1996 the Mill Brook Valley Group was formed to promote activities related to preserving and protecting the Mill Brook. The dialogue about whether a visitor center should be located on Heywood Meadow continued for several years, with heated debate on both sides of the issue.

The issue received state-wide publicity in 1998 when Heywood Meadow was named one of the state’s ten most endangered historic resources by Historic Massachusetts Inc. Ultimately the new visitor center was sited on Main Street and in 2000 Lot 3, the last unprotected Heywood Meadow parcel on the north side of the Mill Brook, was designated conservation land, ending the debate about development of the meadow.

In August 2000 the Natural Resources Commission appointed a Heywood Meadow Stewardship Committee to establish a plan for the meadow and to assist with long-term preservation. In 2002 and 2003 the town submitted grant applications to the Department of Environmental Management (renamed Department of Conservation and Recreation in July 2003) for a proposed Heywood Meadow landscape preservation project. The goal was to ensure long-term protection of the site and its many layers of history reflecting the evolving physical development and cultural values of the town. The proposed work included: preparation of a landscape preservation plan and a preservation maintenance plan, as well as stabilization of an existing stone wall. Another key goal of the plan was to support the Stewardship Committee’s fund raising efforts for implementation of the plan and to assist the town with budget and maintenance planning.

While funding was not received, the grant application process helped to articulate goals for treatment of the Heywood Meadow landscape and to identify key tasks. Activities to date include: removal of the garage and visitor center; elimination of the parking area along Heywood Street; accommodation of two local clapper stones; planting of antique species of apple trees; selective removal of invasive vegetation; and experiments with different mowing regimes to create low-maintenance grass with a meadow-like appearance. The Landscape Preservation Plan, begun in 2004, represents another important step in articulating a vision for the future of Heywood Meadow. The town has recently rebuilt the Heywood Street bridge.



*Figures 9 and 10. Since 2000 the garage on Lot 3 (left) and the Visitor Center on Lot A (right) have been removed, as first steps in the rehabilitation of Heywood Meadow.*