

# **Northborough History Hikes**

*Prepared by the Northborough Historical Society and Northborough Trails Committee  
for the Town's 250<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration, 2016*

Version 1, February 2016 (subject to revision)

This guide highlights historical features for 17 hikes along recreation trails in and near Northborough, Massachusetts. A map is included for each hike. Detailed maps for most of the trails or trail systems can be found at the Northborough Trails website (<http://www.northboroughtrails.org>). Parking areas are shown with a yellow arrow. Approximate addresses for parking areas, as determined from a map app, are also included in the description to help hikers navigate to trails. Hikers may opt to visit some trails in pairs or groups and place vehicles at endpoints. Each hike description includes a map with the trail or trails marked as a heavy blue line where needed to distinguish them from other trails, an approximate one-way distance, in miles, and a difficulty rating from 1 to 4, where a level 1 hike is mostly on flat ground with few slip-trip hazards, and a level 4 hike is steep and/or very rocky.

Hikers are encouraged to keep a log of their hikes using the form at the end of this document or one similar. Those who complete all 17 hikes can submit a copy of the log to the Northborough Trails Committee ([ntc01532@gmail.com](mailto:ntc01532@gmail.com)). The committee will, in turn, acknowledge individuals who complete the hikes on its website. Comments about trail conditions, personal recollections, other points of interest, and suggestions for improving this guide are welcome.

The photographs in this document were provided by members of the Trails Committee. Historical pictures are from the archives of the Northborough Historical Society. The Historical Society encourages walkers to take pictures along the trails and enter selected pictures in the Society's photograph contest scheduled for October 2016. Go to <http://northboroughhistoricalsociety.org> for the contest entry form.

Additional general information about Northborough's history is available in the following documents that are available through the Northborough Historical Society:

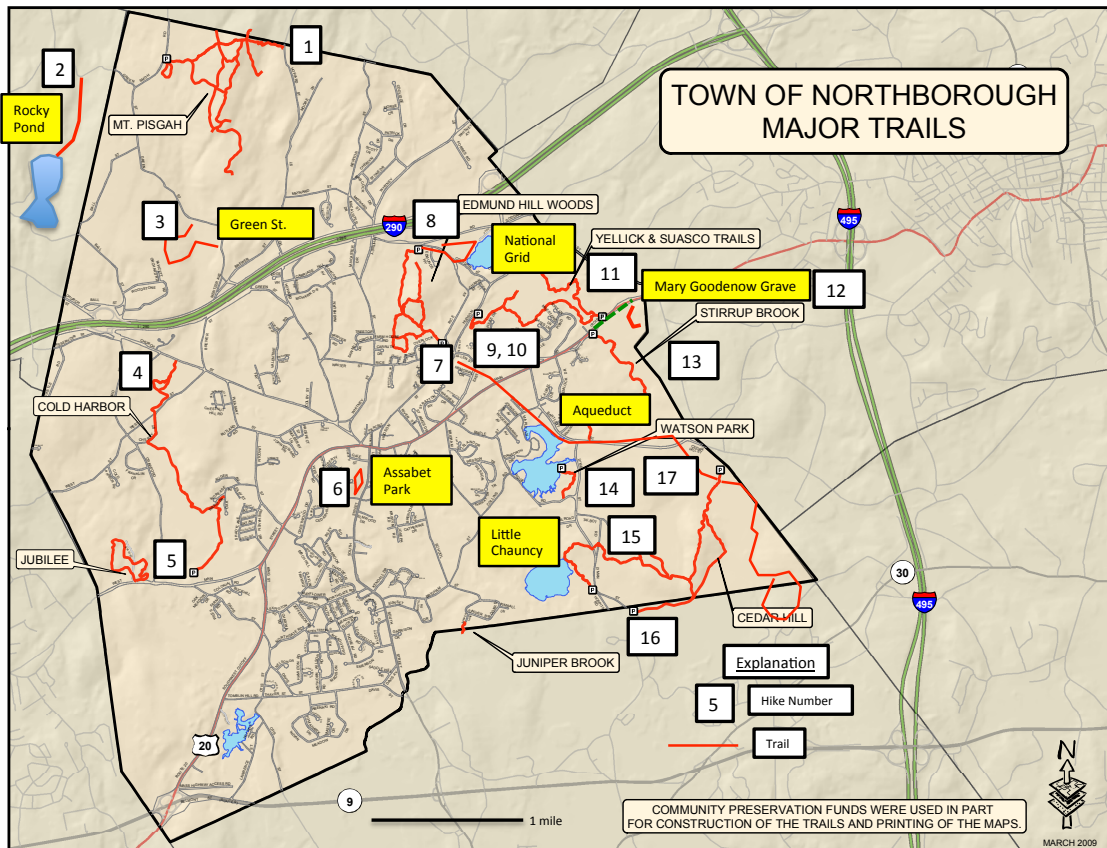
*Official Program, Two Hundredth Anniversary Town of Northborough, 1766-1966.*

*Northborough Historical Society, Images of America, Northborough, 2000*

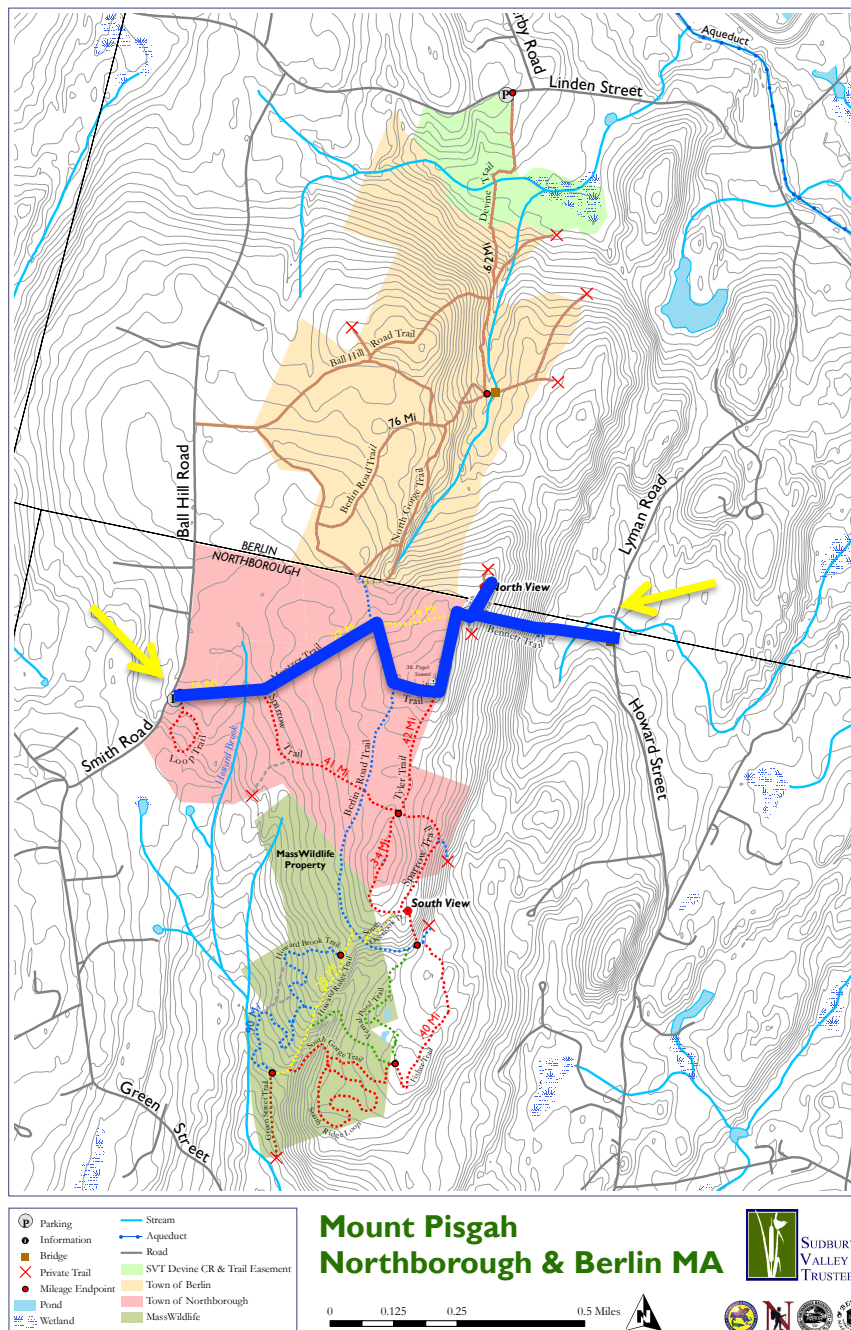
*Racine, Ellen, Northborough Through Time, 2015*

This guide was compiled and edited by Forest Lyford, Jean Langley, Nancy Kellner, and Normand Corbin.

This master map shows the locations of recreation trails in and near Northborough and hike numbers in this guide. A detailed map is included for each hike.



## Hike 1 (Mt. Pisgah): Howard St. to Smith Road along the Bennett, Tyler, Summit, Berlin Road and Mentzer Trails.



Distance: 1.3 mi.

Difficulty Level: 4

Parking: School bus turnaround at about 199 Lyman Rd., Berlin, (Howard St. in Northborough) near the Northborough/Berlin town line, and trailhead parking area at about 36 Smith Road.

Points of interest:

The Bennett Trail, the steepest in town, approximately follows a stone wall that originally marked the Northborough/Berlin boundary. The actual boundary was resurveyed in the early 1800's and shifted a few feet northward. A wide stone wall near the start of the trail marks the edge of a former cultivated field where stones were periodically removed and deposited in the wall. A northward path at the top of the hill takes you a short distance into Berlin to the North View, a rock ledge with a scenic view to the east. Boston skyscrapers can be seen from here on clear days (pictured here). Mt. Pisgah is on a ridge that can be traced northward to Newbury, MA, along a fault zone, which approximately marks the contact between two

tectonic plates that collided about 400 to 300 million years ago.



Backtracking from the rock ledge brings you to the intersection of the Tyler and Mentzer Trails. The Tyler Trail intersects the Summit Trail about 0.2 mi. to the south. Brass survey markers (pictured below) in rocks at three locations near the trail intersection mark the summit of Mt. Pisgah, the highest point in Northborough at an

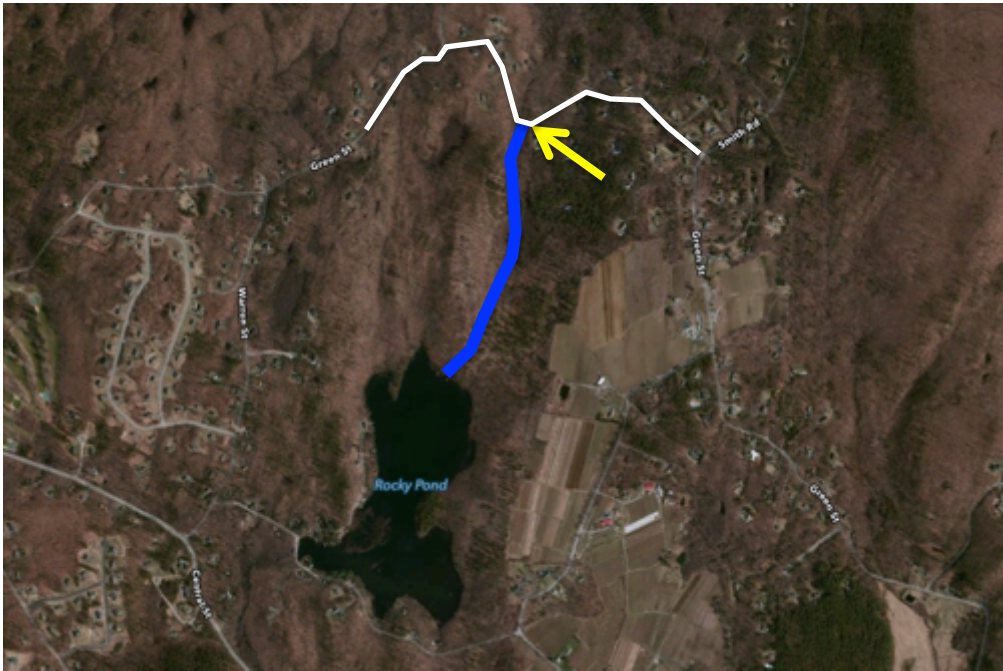
altitude of 715 feet. Hikers may take the challenge to find all three markers. The name, Mt. Pisgah, has a biblical origin (Deuteronomy 34:1), where Moses first viewed the “promised land” from present day Jordan.



The Summit Trail joins the Old Berlin Road, which, in turn, joins the Mentzer Trail to the north. The Mentzer trail passes a stone foundation for a former building of unknown origin, and a stone wall marks the edge of a formerly cultivated field, now a white pine woods. Former fields and pastures have been abandoned for at least 80 years.



## Hike 2 (Rocky Pond): Green St. to Rocky Pond along Rocky Pond Trail



Distance: 0.5 miles

Difficulty: 2

Parking: Wide shoulder at bend in road at about 450 Green Street, Boylston, near New England Forestry Foundation sign.

Points of Interest:



Pond (pictured from north end) to provide waterpower to several mills along Cold Harbor Brook.

The trail passes through property managed by the New England Forestry Foundation for sustainable forest products, wildlife preservation, and passive recreation. Much of the area was harvested for forest products in 2009. Near Rocky Pond, the trail passes by very large granite boulders that were transported from outcrops to the north by continental glaciers. During the early to mid 1800's mill owners in Northborough managed the flow of water from Rocky

The Rocky Pond Trail continues south to Rocky Pond Road, but that section is not included in this hike because of seasonally wet sections and poison ivy hazards. Adventurous hikers might want try that section of the trail.

## Hike 3 (Green Street Conservation Lands) Fresh Air Trail



Distance: Loop from parking area: 1.0 mi.

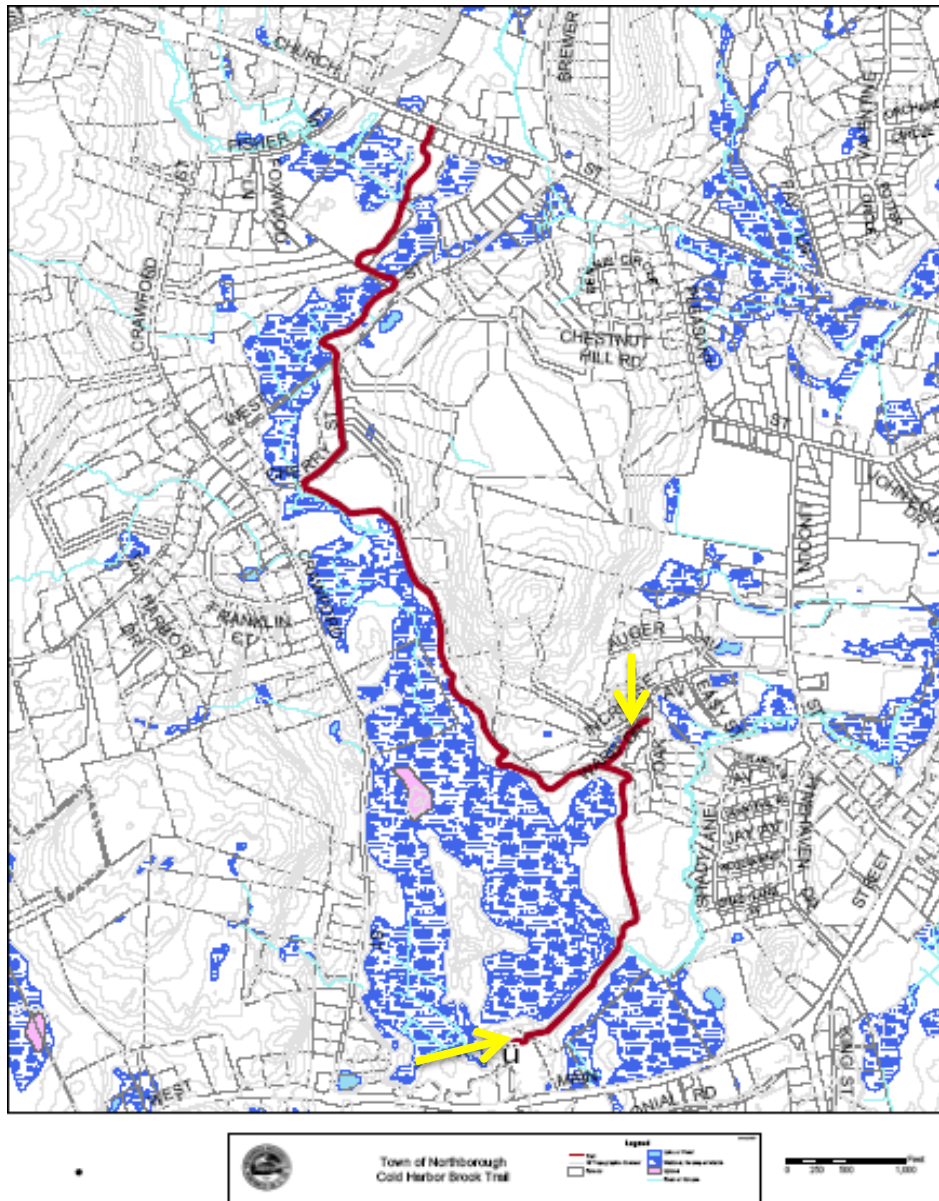
Difficulty: 3

Parking: Parking area at about 153 Green St.

Points of Interest:

This area was purchased from the Schunder Family and added to Northborough's conservation lands in 2010 using Community Preservation Act Funds. The field has been farmed for generations and still provides hay for a farmer in a nearby town. Howard Brook flows through the center of the field. The wooded hillside is traversed by several stone walls that bordered former upland pastures. The large pine trees here are about 100 years old as determined from tree rings. Former hillside fields have not been grazed for at least that long.

## Hike 4: Cold Harbor Trail



Distance: 2 mi.

Difficulty: 2

Parking: Parking options on this trail are at Carney Park at 386 West Main St. and along the shoulder at about 3 Increase Ward Drive. Unfortunately, parking options are limited at the Church Street end of the trail. The road shoulders on West Street and Fisher Street are options; the narrow shoulder along Church Street should be avoided because of heavy traffic.

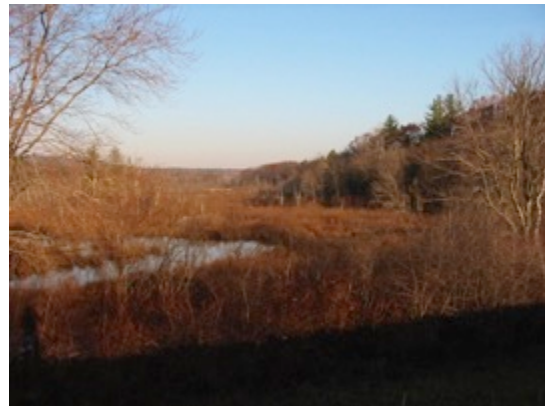


### Points of Interest:

Northborough's Rotary Club was largely responsible for constructing this trail, which currently is popular for dog walkers. The entrance to the parking area at Carney Park on West Main St. is near the Vincent F. Picard American Legion Post, founded in 1919. Vincent Picard was a World War I soldier from Northborough who was mortally wounded in the Argonne Forest of France.



Earthen dams at two locations along this trail were designed and constructed by the U.S. Soil Conservation Service and state agencies for flood control after floods in 1955 damaged towns along the Assabet River. These dams were completed in 1963.



The view from the earthen dam across the Cold Harbor meadow (pictured) is similar today to what early settlers might have seen. The open meadow provided rich forage for livestock and cleared land for crops until forests were cut to provide additional land for grazing and cultivation.

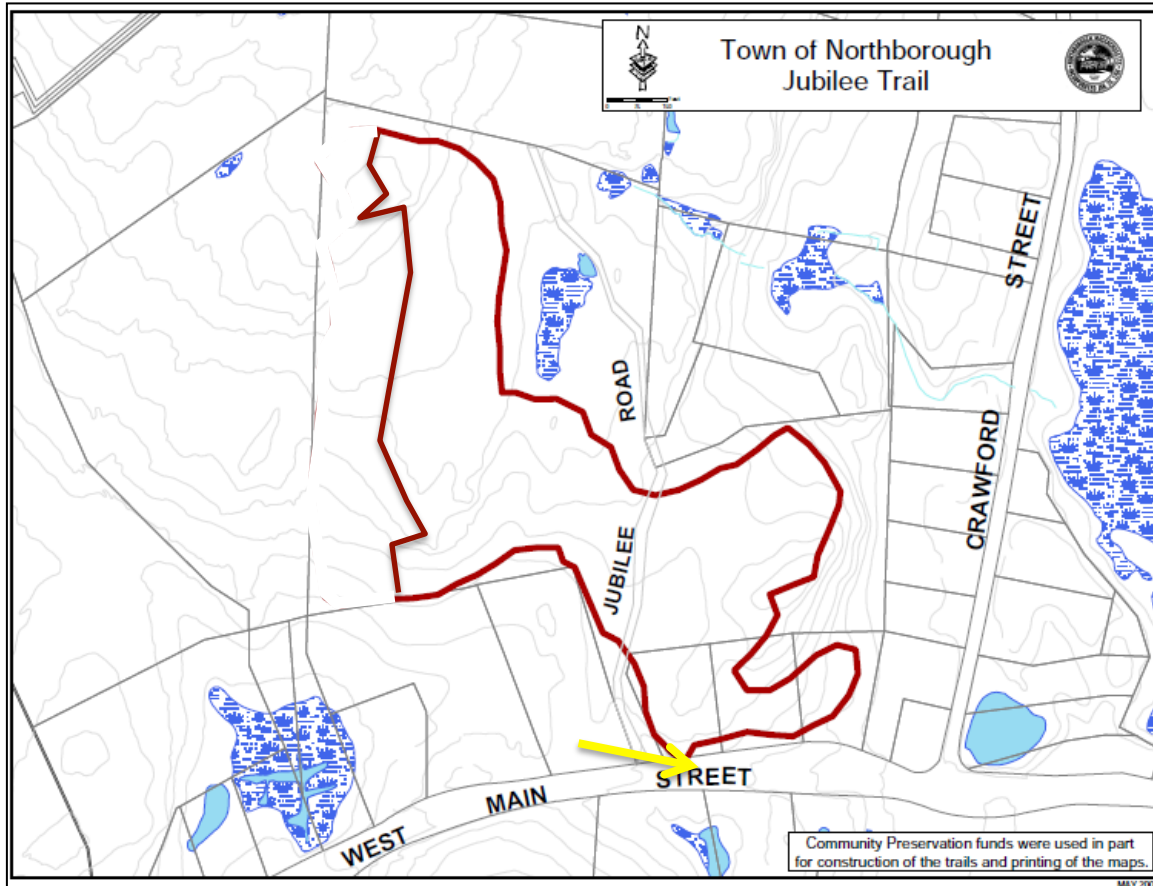


The former Elmer Valentine School for Boys, a boarding school that operated from 1837-1865, can be seen from an open field near Cherry St (pictured). The trail crosses a ditch that was once maintained to drain an otherwise wet meadow. This was an active dairy farm until the mid 1900's.

An attraction on the trail north of West St. is a floating bridge across Cold Harbor Brook, designed by Jack Hall, a former Trails Committee member. The young forest beyond the floating bridge was probably an open field until about 50 years ago. The scenic stone wall beyond the bridge was apparently maintained until recently and illustrates the height of many stone walls in the region at the time they were built. Most stone walls have been toppled by natural causes.



## Hike 5: Carlstrom II Forest, Jubilee Trail



Distance: 1.1 mile loop

Difficulty: 2

Parking: Wide shoulder at about 480 West Main St. near New England Forestry Foundation sign.

Points of Interest:

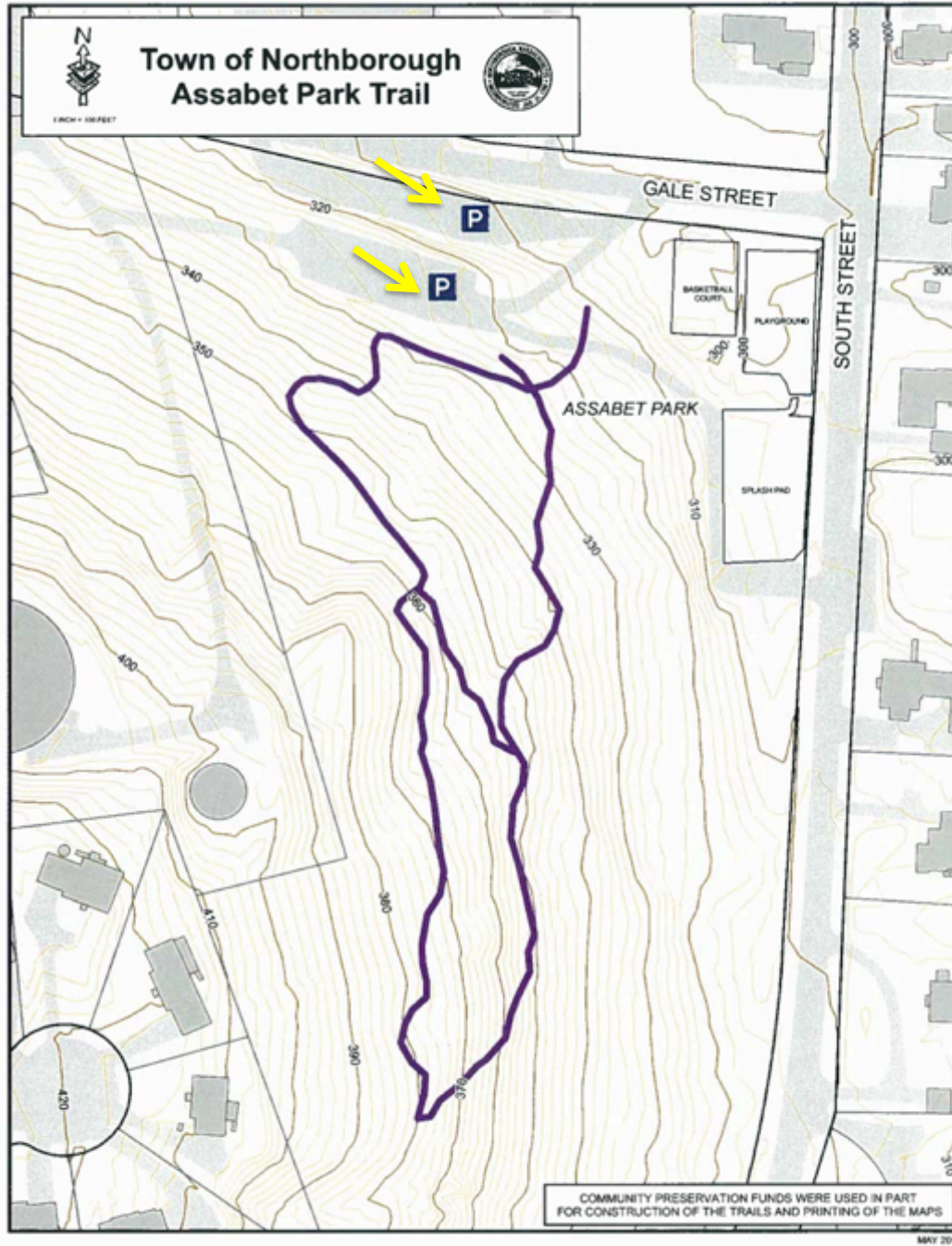
The New England Forestry Foundation, the owner of the Carlstrom II Forest, applies sustainable forestry practices and periodically harvests trees for fuel and timber to support its land-conservation activities. The last harvest was in 2004 and will be repeated every 20 to 30 years. The Jubilee Trail approximately follows the boundary of this 31-acre forested tract.

A stone wall on the southwest side of the property was probably built as a pasture fence and property boundary. Most of the area north of the stone wall, however, has probably been a woodlot since the town was settled. Numerous American Chestnut sprouts indicate the area was forested in the early 1900's when blight killed the chestnut trees throughout the eastern U.S. Chestnut shrubs continue to sprout from roots and grow until a fungus attacks and kills the stem.



The wetland area shown on the trail map several hundred feet southwest of the trail at the south end was the presumed site of an excavation for mastodon fossils in 1884 (pictured looking toward Ward Hill). Several teeth and bone fragments were found during the excavation. Some fragments are on display in the Northborough Historical Society museum.

## Hike 6: Assabet Park Trail



Distance: 0.5 mi.

Difficulty: 2

Parking: Assabet Park at about 11 Gale St.



#### Points of Interest:

A granite monument near the trailhead was placed in 2004 in memory of children that died young. The trail passes by a former dug well or developed spring that no longer yields water. Tanks that supply water to the town's water system can be seen from the trail. The smallest and oldest of the two was constructed before 1943 when public water was supplied from a reservoir on Reservoir Road near the Shrewsbury town line. The

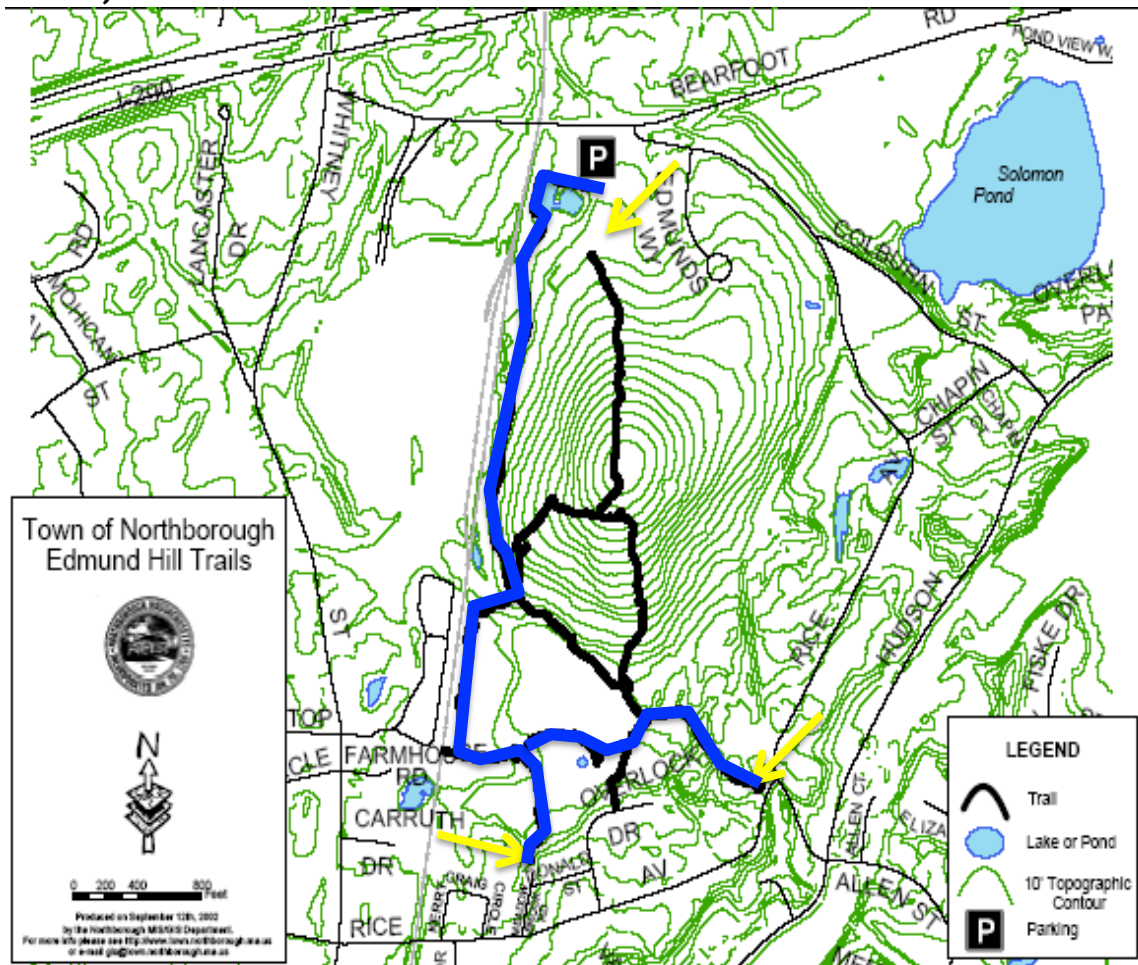
larger tank was constructed in the mid 1970s. The town reservoir was abandoned as a water supply in the 1950's, supplanted by water from town wells and the Massachusetts Water Resources Authority (MWRA). A view from Mount Assabet around 1900 was across an open field that is now forested.

Mount Assabet was formerly named Liquor Hill, but the name was changed in 1836 under public pressure. The town celebrated the renaming with a picnic. Here is a verse from a poem by Lucy Allen, wife of the town pastor Joseph Allen, written to commemorate the occasion.

*Mount Assabet with smile we greet  
Now Liquor Hill no more  
That odious name no more we claim  
Though long that name it bore  
Then welcome playmates one and all  
O hasten to this pleasant hill  
Our feast partake of fruits and cake  
Enjoy it all who will.*



## Hike 7: Edmund Woods: Meadowbrook Trail; Proctor Trail; Goldfinch Trail.



Distance: 1.2 mi.

Difficulty: 2

Parking: 111 Rice Avenue; 10 Meadowbrook Rd.; Senior Center at 119 Colburn St.

Points of Interest:

Edwin Proctor donated much of the land in the Edmund Woods Conservation Area to the town in 1967. Mr. Proctor, a former school teacher, historian, and town leader, stipulated that the property “be used.” Land was added to the conservation area after voters authorized the purchase of the former Northborough Fish and Game Club in 2002.

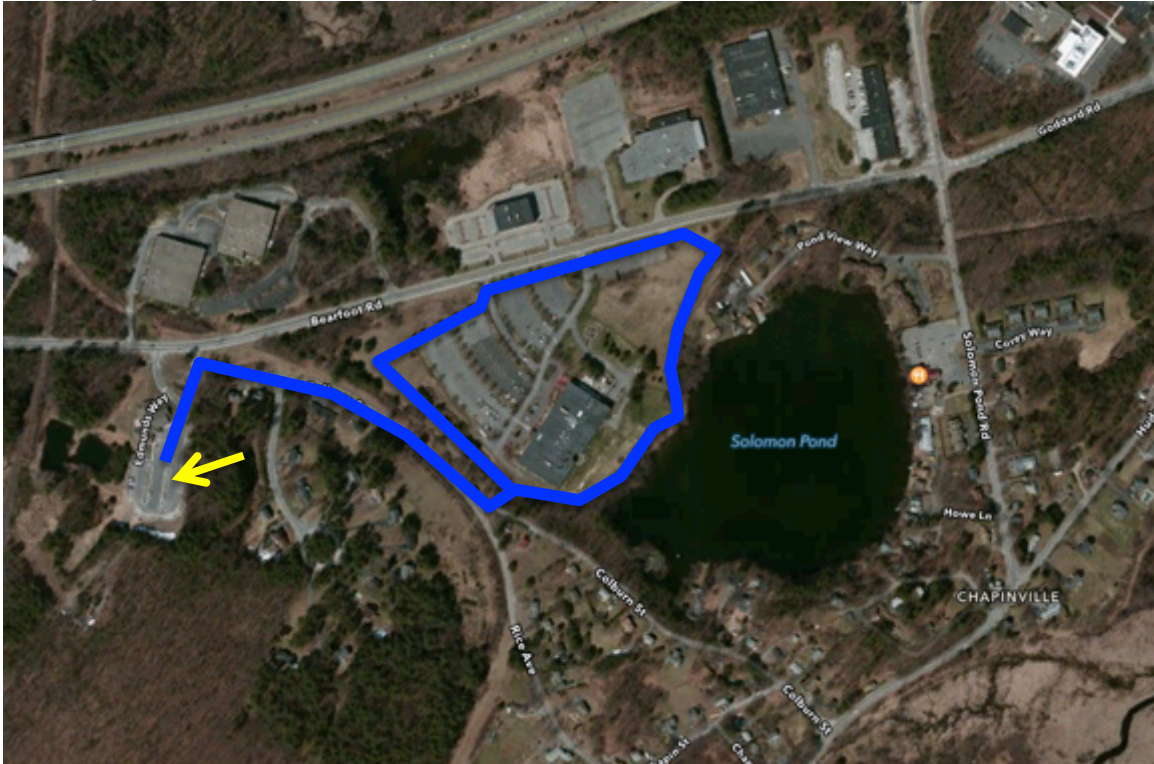
The White Pine forest on a flat area along the Proctor Trail probably grew on a former plowed field after abandonment at least 100 years ago. The railroad line nearby was extended northward from Northborough Center in 1866. The original name “Agricultural Branch Railroad” has changed several times and is now operated by CSX.

The Goldfinch Trail follows a stone wall near the base of Edmund Hill, a drumlin formed under glacial ice during one or more ice ages. Near the former Northborough Fish and Game Club the trail crosses a former skeet-shooting range.



In 2010, the area was cleared and several inches of soil were excavated to remove lead and arsenic contamination downrange on the firing range. The Fish and Game Club was very active in the middle decades of the twentieth century. The Northborough Senior Center (2010) can be viewed across scenic ponds formerly stocked for fishing by the Fish and Game Club.

## Hike 8: National Grid (Start from Senior Center parking area).



Distance: 1.3 miles (from Senior Center and back)

Difficulty: 2

Parking: Senior Center at 119 Colburn Rd.



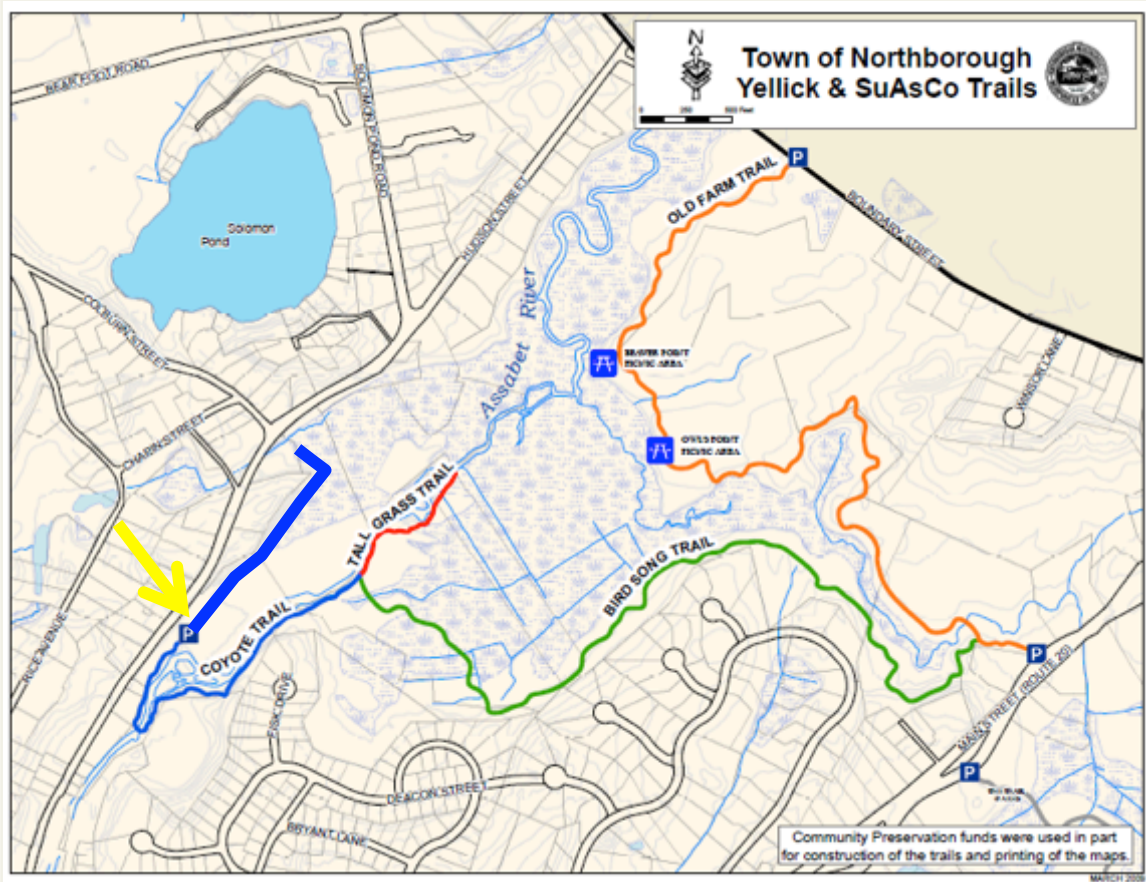
### Points of Interest:

The trail passes close to Solomon Pond where we can look across to a former popular swimming area on the other side (pictured around 1930). The pond was a source of ice for local distribution and for railroad refrigerated cars until the mid 1900s.

The National Grid complex is on the former Herman Sparrow, Sr. and Herman Sparrow, Jr. farm. The Warren family farmed this land through several generations in the 1700s and 1800s. Farming was discontinued in the 1960s while Interstate 290 was being constructed when some farmland was taken by eminent domain. A stone foundation at the top of the hill on the farm site is largely overgrown with trees and shrubs and barely visible today.



## Hike 9: Yellick/SuAsCo area; Chapin Canal



Distance: 0.25 mi.

Difficulty: 2

Parking: Yellick Conservation Area parking lot at about 260 Hudson St.

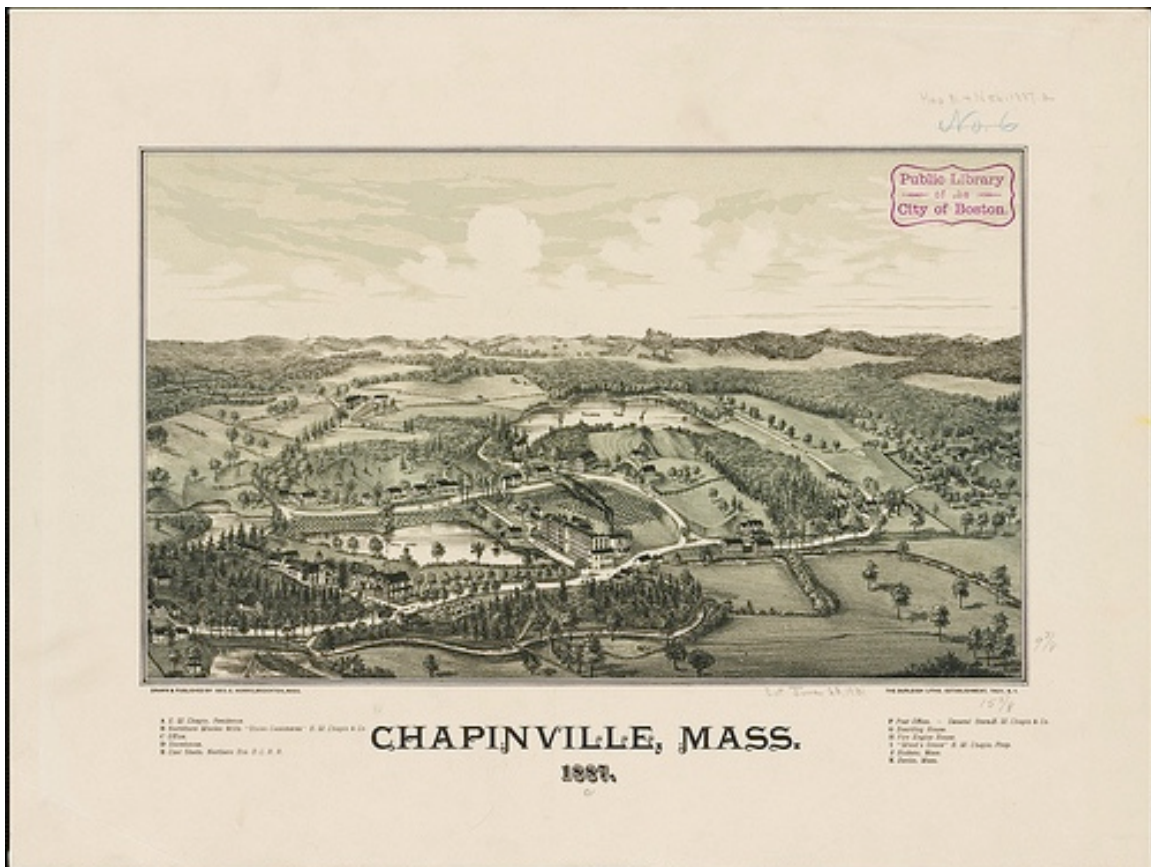
Points of Interest:

The Assabet River supplied power to a number of mills near the center of town, at Woodside upstream, and in this area of Hudson St. once called Chapinville. A rapids on the Assabet River marks the site where a low dam diverted water into the Chapin Canal, although the original dam was washed away years ago. The canal initially supplied water for power to the Amory Barnard Corn and Flour Mill on the east side of Hudson Street and was later extended to the Isaac Davis (1832) Grist Mill and subsequent cotton mills on the west side of Hudson Street. The Chapin Cotton Mill, later the Whitaker Mill, was active until it was partially destroyed by fire in 1918. An 1887 sketch of the Chapinville area is shown below.

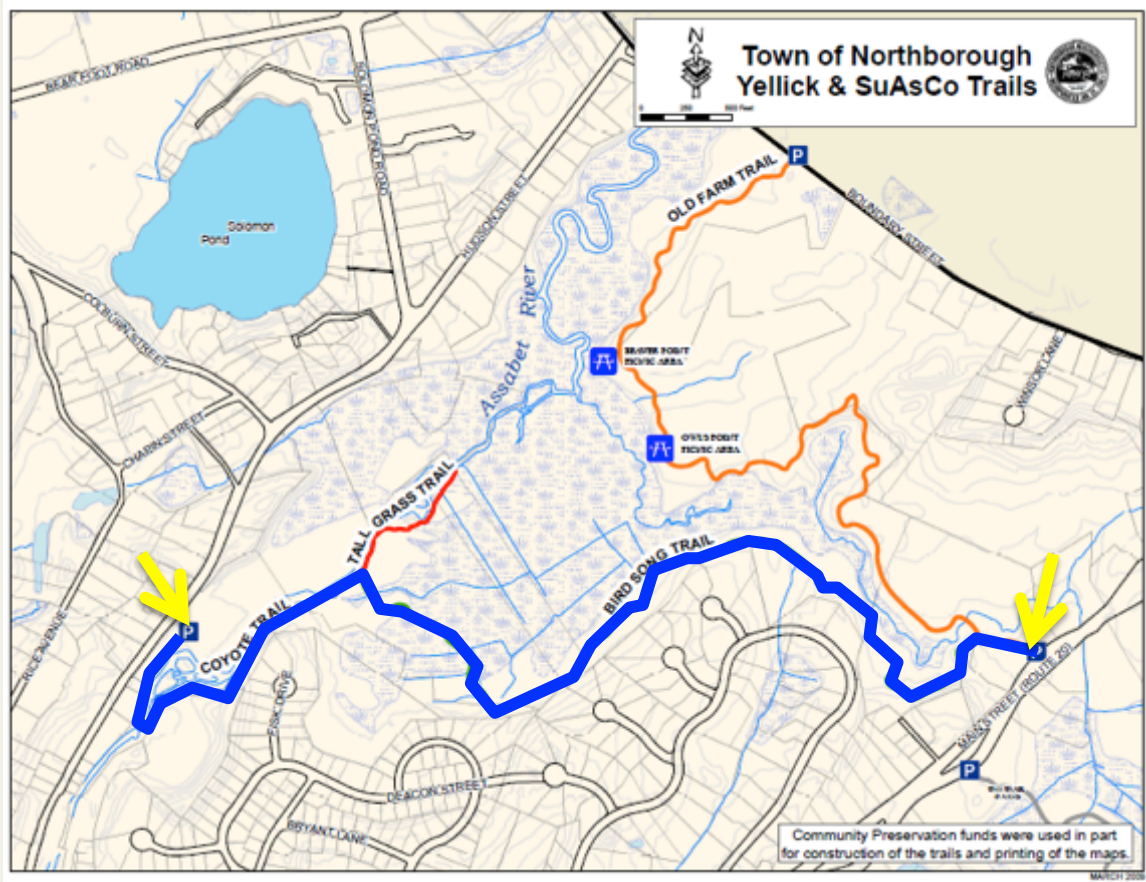




The path along the Chapin Canal (technically a mill headrace) and a kiosk at the head of the Chapin Canal that explains the historic significance of this site were constructed as part of an Eagle Scout project in 2011. The canal and associated rock works are still clearly visible along the path.



## Hike 10: Yellick/SuAsCo area; Coyote and Bird Song Trails



Distance: 1.5 mi.

Difficulty: 2

Parking: Yellick Conservation Area Parking lot at about 260 Hudson St.; Paved turnoff on Rt. 20 at about 431 Main St. near Jehovah's Witness Church (Please don't park in church parking lot).

The Coyote Trail starts at the parking area on Hudson St. and crosses the Assabet River upstream. A rapids on the Assabet River marks the site where water was diverted into the Chapin Canal, although the original dam was washed away years ago.

The Goodrich Brickyard operated in this general area east of Hudson St. from the 1830s to late 1800s. The brick house seen across the field was reportedly constructed as a demonstration project for marketing bricks. The actual location of clay beds and kilns is not known, but many bricks of various shapes and sizes in the riverbed indicate that brick-manufacturing activities were nearby.

A footbridge across the Assabet River was constructed by Trails Committee members in 2005. The stone abutments indicate the presence of a former bridge at this location.





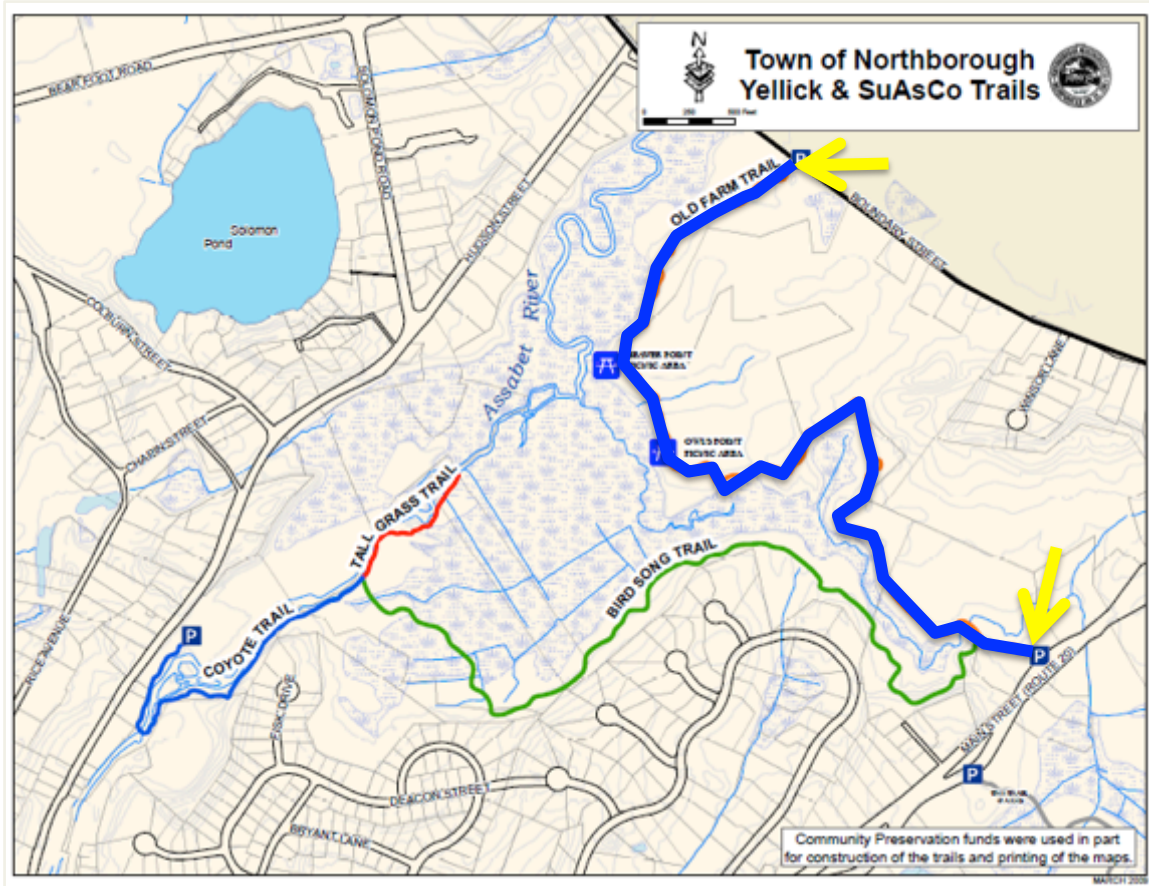
The Coyote Trail was named to acknowledge the courage of Arthur Cole and his grandson when attacked by a rabid coyote in 2005. Arthur Cole, founder and former Chairman of the Trails Committee, is seen here in 2013 at the location where he and his grandson were attacked. The grandson, age 6, ran for help as Arthur held the coyote down. Arthur sustained numerous lacerations and was vaccinated for rabies.

The Tall Grass Trail extends beyond the Coyote Trail into a grassy meadow. This area was formerly rich farmland and now retains floodwater behind Tyler Dam (1965) located a short distance downstream in Marlborough.



The Bird Song Trail crosses a wetland meadow once referred to as Great Meadow. This was part of a cow common in the 1700's that included other nearby wetland meadows and later served as rich farmland for hay and other crops. The straight blue lines on the trails map mark former ditches constructed to drain this otherwise marshy area. Ditches (pictured) are still apparent along the trail in an area that is now a red-maple swamp.

## Hike 11: Old Farm Trail



Distance: 1.1 mi.

Difficulty: 1

Parking: Paved turnoff on Rt. 20 at about 431 Main St. near Jehovah's Witness Church (Please don't park in church parking lot); parking area at about 130 Boundary St.

Points of Interest:



The Old Farm Trail crosses land that was farmed, first by several generations of Bartletts starting in the early 1700's and later by the Haitsma family, starting in the early 1900's. The property is currently owned by the town. Berberian Farms leases some of the property and continues the farming tradition by growing produce for local consumption (Glen Berberian is shown on a cultivator tractor in 2009).





Walkers and picnickers can enjoy views across the Stirrup Brook and Assabet River meadowlands (Great Meadow) from two picnic benches along the trail. The woods are a graveyard for a few cars and trucks from the 1950's.

An historical marker across Route 20 from the trailhead at the south end marks the site of the Garrison House attacked by Indians in 1707.



## Hike 12: Mary Goodnow Gravesite Trail



Distance: 0.3 mi.

Difficulty: 1

Parking: Spaces reserved at Pheasant Hill Condominiums at 484 Main St. at the trailhead sign.

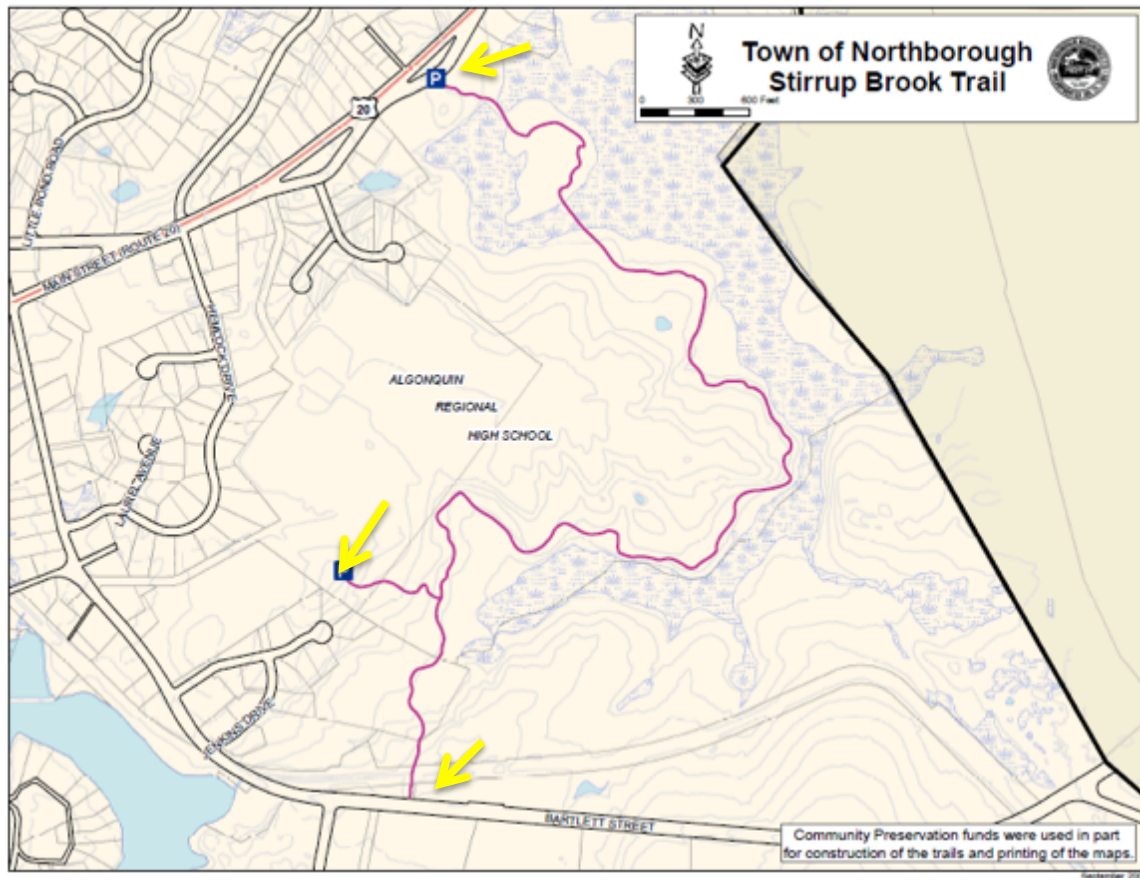


### Points of Interest:

The Mary Goodnow Trail, although not part of Northborough's trail network, is available for use by the public. The Pheasant Hill Condominium Community provides parking and maintains the trail. Mary Goodnow was buried where she was killed during an Indian attack in 1707. The stone marker at the gravesite was placed here by the town in 1889.



## Hike 13: Stirrup Brook Trail



Distance: 1.6 mi.

Difficulty: 2

Parking: Parking area at about 400 Main St. (Rt. 20) on south side; upper parking lot, first right turn off of drive to Algonquin Regional High School from Bartlett St.; trailhead across from 170 Bartlett St.

Points of Interest:



The Stirrup Brook Trail parallels Stirrup Brook near the Algonquin Regional High School buildings and athletic fields. Algonquin was completed in 1959 and has been expanded twice since then. Clay under the Stirrup Brook Meadow near the north end of the trail was mined for the manufacture of bricks, starting in the 1830's. This shrub and grassy area (pictured) marks the approximate location of the Howe brickyard and associated kilns.

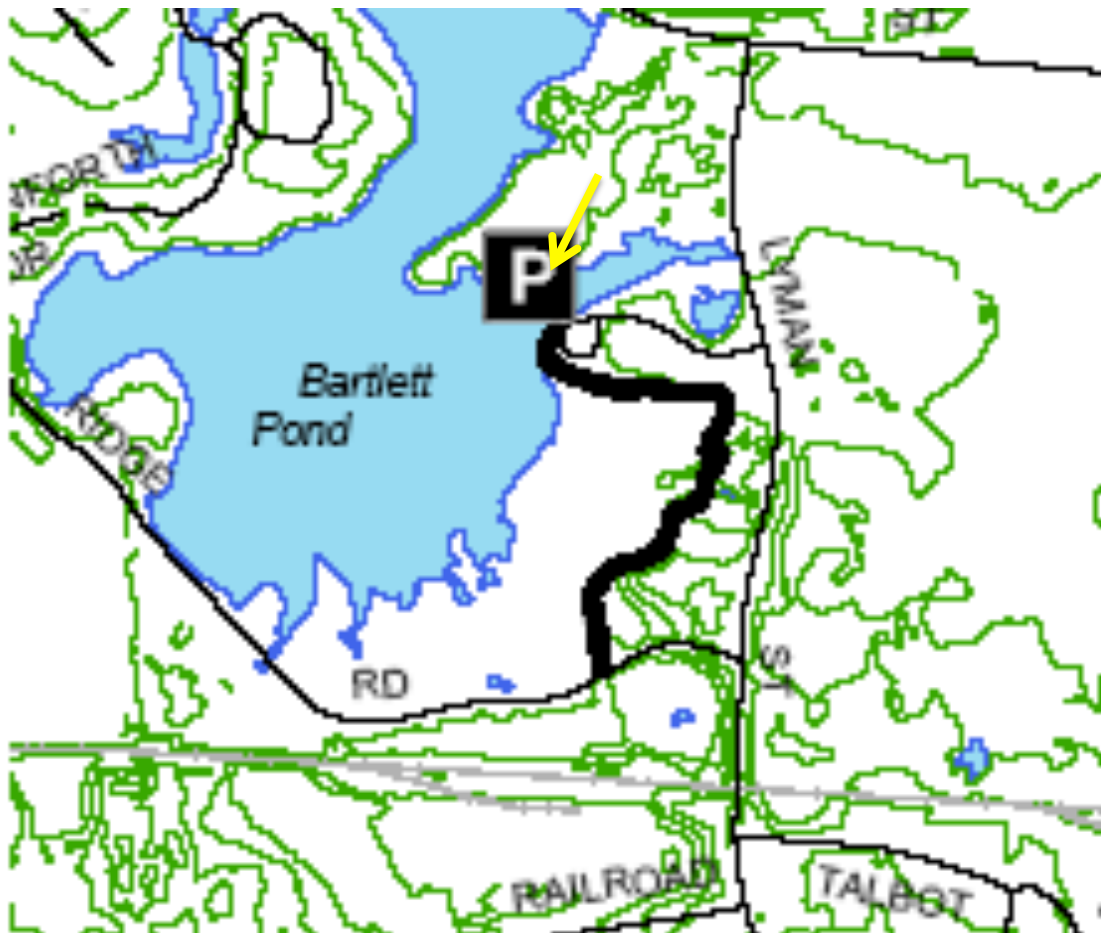




Brick fragments at a depth of about 4 to 6 inches reaffirm the location of the brickyard.

The Stirrup Brook Trail near the south end crosses Stirrup Brook on a bridge near the site of the former Joel Bartlett Gristmill (1840s). The trail near the south parking area crosses the Wachusett Aqueduct, completed around 1900.

## Hike 14: Watson Park Trail



Distance: 0.3

Difficulty: 1

Parking: Watson Park at about 54 Lyman St.

Points of Interest:

Bartlett Pond is a shallow man-made pond used initially as a millpond for a sawmill and gristmill on Stirrup Brook and later as a water supply for the Daniel Wesson



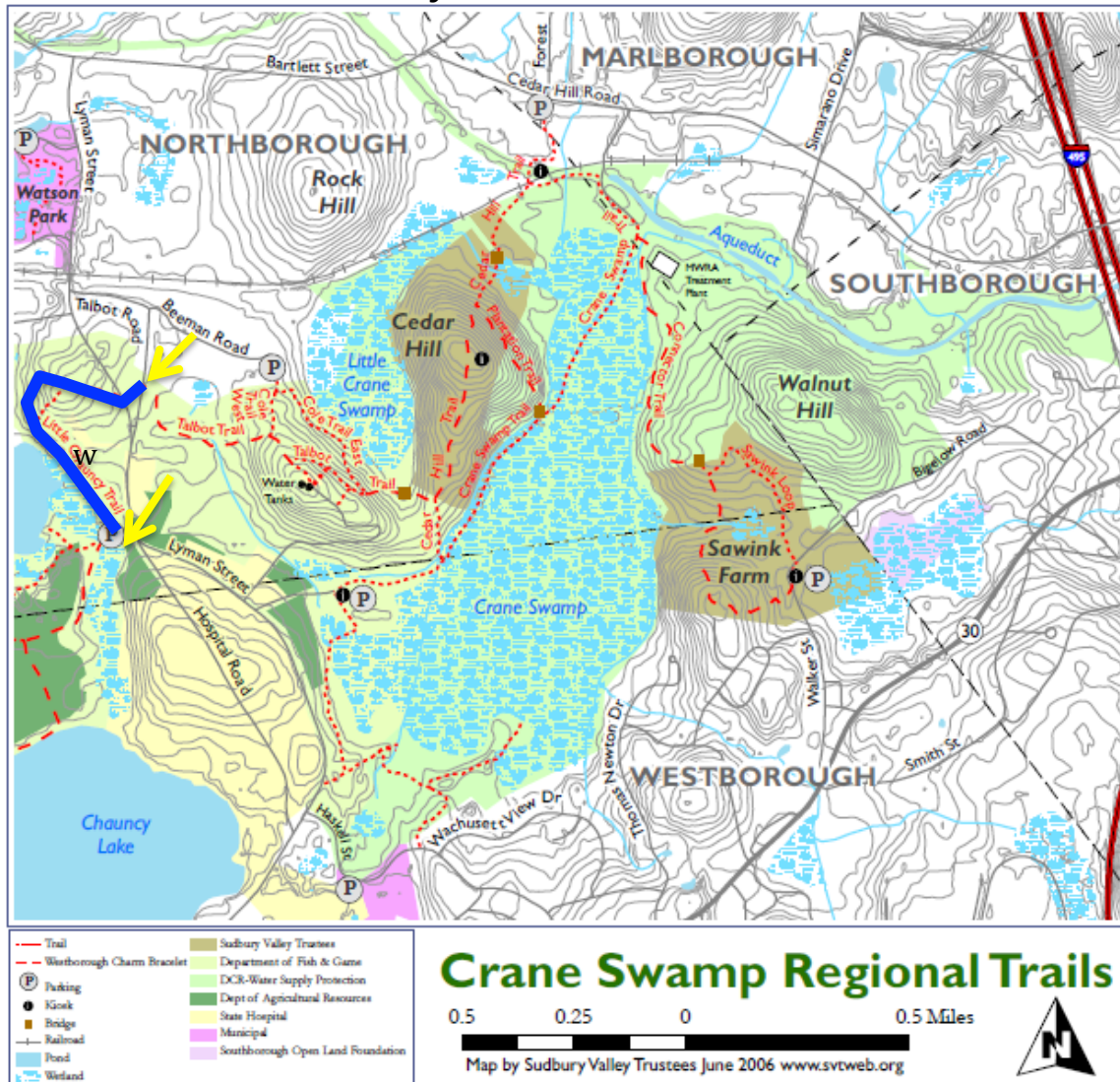
mansion, commonly known as White Cliffs. It has served as a popular fishing hole for decades.

The park was named for Dr. Wilfred Watson, a highly respected medical doctor in town during the 1940's and 50's before he died young at 47 in 1959. He was instrumental in preserving Bartlett Pond and establishing the park.

The Watson Park Trail passes the Lyman Street well, which was installed in 1964 as part of the town's water-supply system. The well is currently (2016) inactive.

Nearby environmental monitoring wells are a reminder of the irresponsible disposal of waste chemicals that commonly took place in the U.S. after World War II and before promulgation of strict State and Federal environmental regulations in the 1970's and 80's. The Lyman Street well was off line for several years because of contamination of groundwater by chemicals.

## Hike 15: Little Chauncy Trail



Distance: 0.6 mi.

Difficulty: 2

Parking: Road shoulder at about 66 Talbot Road; Fisherman's access parking area at about 218 Lyman St.



Points of Interest:

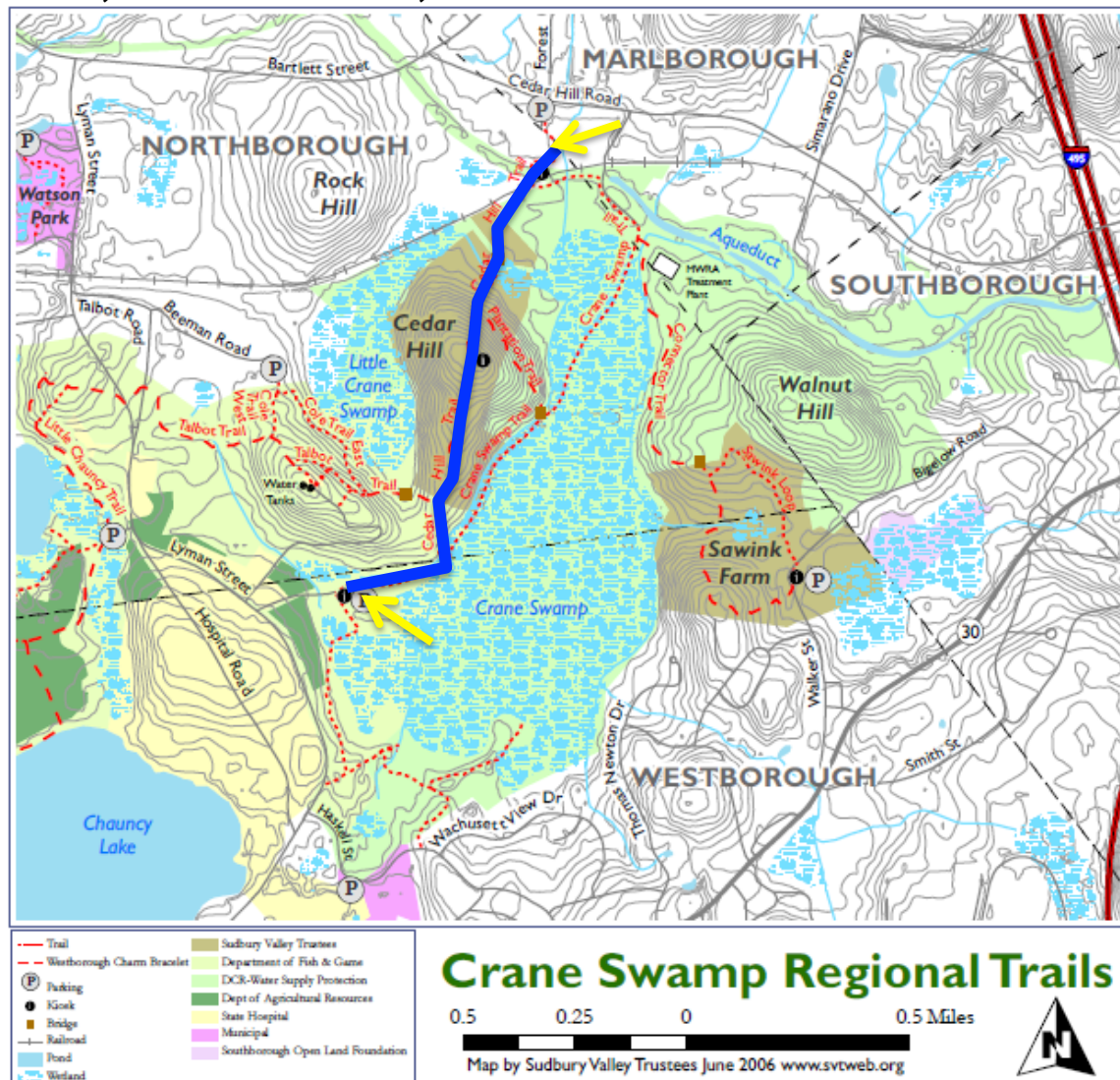
An extensive network of trails can be accessed at several locations. We will walk the Little Chauncy Trail from Talbot Road to Fisherman's access near Little Chauncy Pond. A tunnel under Lyman Street originally provided a pathway for livestock between pastures and now provides a safe crossing for hikers.



Pig barns, which were part of the State Hospital complex, could be seen from the trail until they were torn down in 2011. A model airplane park was recently constructed near the trail in this area.



## Hike 16: Crane Swamp/Cedar Hill Area: Crane Swamp Trail; Cedar Hill Trail;



Distance: 1.2 mi.

Difficulty: 3

Parking: Parking area at trailhead near 285 Lyman St. at Westborough State Hospital; behind building at 360 Cedar Hill St., Marlborough, across from intersection of Forest St.



Points of Interest:

A decrepit brick building with a date of 1931 over the doorway was a former pump house. Water was presumably pumped from a pipeline connected to the Wachusett Aqueduct to water tanks on a nearby hill.

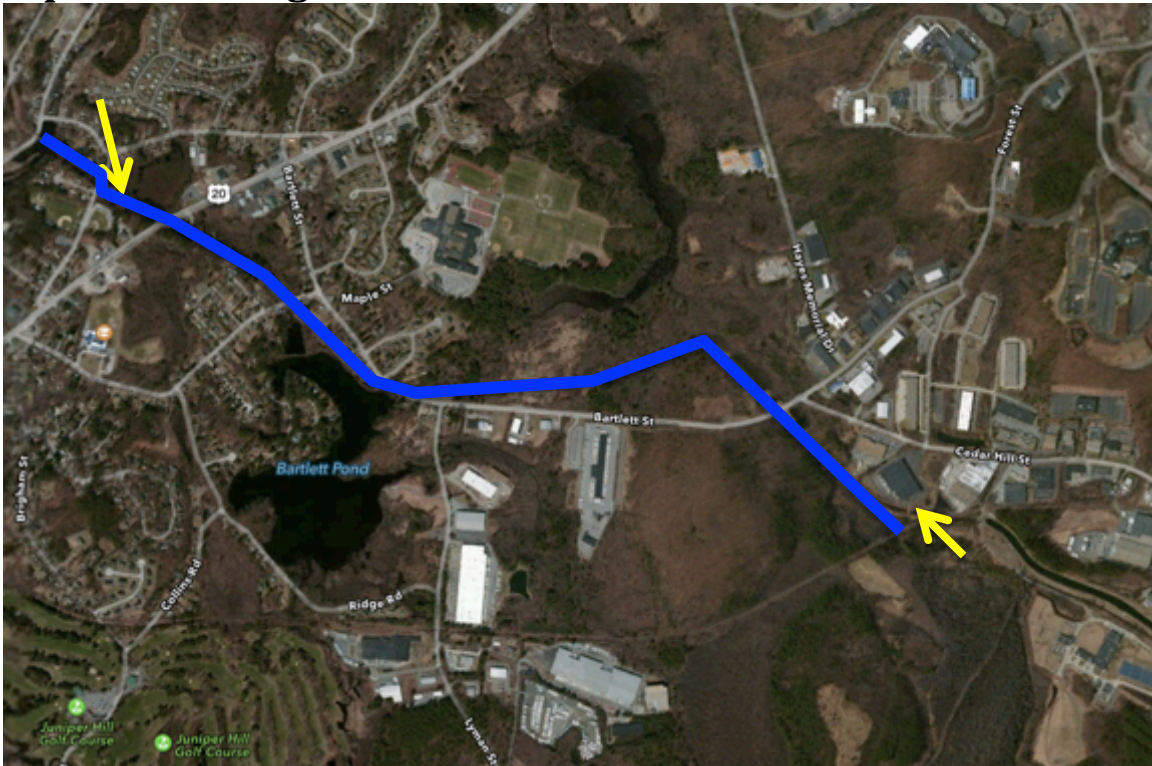
The Cedar Hill Trail from the Crane Swamp Trail passes through open fields that were cleared in 2005 by the Sudbury Valley Trustees for wildlife habitat enhancement.



A kiosk at the top of Cedar Hill provides a description of habitat enhancement activities by Sudbury Valley Trustees.



## Hike 17: Wachusett Aqueduct from Cedar Hill Trail to Aqueduct Bridge on Hudson St.



Distance: 2 mi.

Difficulty: 1

Parking: Behind building at 360 Cedar Hill St.; Memorial Park near 66 East Main St.

Points of Interest:

This hike is from the near the start of the Cedar Hill Trail along the top of the covered Wachusett Aqueduct to the aqueduct bridge over the Assabet River on Hudson St.

The aqueduct along this walk is a covered, brick-lined conduit that once transported water from the Wachusett Reservoir in Clinton to the Boston area. It was built near the turn of the last century but has been inactive since 2005. Water transport to the John J. Carroll Water Treatment Plant, located a short distance to the east near the Northborough town line in Marlborough, is currently through the Cosgrove tunnel built in 1965. The tunnel approximately parallels the Wachusett Aqueduct. The Massachusetts Water Resources Authority (MWRA) is opening the aqueduct in stages for recreational use. It will continue to serve as a backup conduit for water transport.



When this picture was taken in 1887 near the intersection of Bartlett St. and Lyman St., the Wesson pump house could be seen from the aqueduct then under construction. Water was pumped from Stirrup Brook by water power to an underground cistern near Wesson Terrace. From there the water flowed by gravity to the Wesson Estate (White Cliffs).

Near the intersection of Bartlett Street and the aqueduct, an important Native American trail once connected the Nipmuck Indian villages in current day Marlborough and current day Grafton.

The trail passes over Route 20 (signed since 1927), the major east-west highway in central Massachusetts until the Massachusetts Turnpike was constructed in the 1950's. Rt. 20 spans the continent from Boston to the Oregon coast. This section of Rt. 20 replaced a stretch along East Main St. when the road was straightened in the 1930s. The original bridge over the aqueduct had a date of 1931 on one end pillar. The bridge was replaced during 2014-15.

The aqueduct passes under East Main St. near the police station and Memorial Park. East Main St. here has a long history dating from colonial times. It has been variously named the Old Post Road, the King's Highway, the Stage Road, the Great Road, the New Connecticut Road, and the Western Toll Road. A granite mile stone about one half mile to the east is one of only a few surviving markers along the Old Post Road, dating from the mid 1700s.



This hike ends near the aqueduct bridge over the Assabet River, a town landmark. The bridge was completed in 1897 to transport water across the Assabet River. An inverted siphon placed under the river in 1946 supplanted the leaky bridge crossing. Currently the aqueduct bridge is not accessible for walkers because of safety concerns. The picture shown here was taken around 1900 from the east side shortly after the aqueduct was built. Edmund Hill is in the background.

### Hiking Log for:

Hike number	Date completed	Observations and comments
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