

### Informational Panel for the Old Road to Concord

From the Wheeler Farm site, the TTT leads south a short distance along a man-made causeway, closely paralleled by stone walls, to the Nashoba Brook, where a footbridge crosses the stream and connects to the TTT as it turns west. At this intersection are the remains of the northeasterly terminus of the Old Road to and from Concord. These remnants, on the southern bank of Nashoba Brook, provide evidence of a formerly busy way in steady use from the 1730s between Thomas Wheeler, Jr.'s, grist and sawmills and Concord Towne. The road ran directly to the present Pope Road, and today it can be followed from the Nashoba Brook terminus as far as the modern Triangle Farm, which borders on Pope Road, where evidence of the old road ends.

The surviving evidence of this early roadway lies mainly in the stone walls on either side of the roadbed—which is itself badly eroded—where it ascends the southerly bank of the brook to the top of a level ridge. However, on the upland portion, the roadbed is evident between the mainly intact stone walls that originally served to delineate the road. Just beyond the bridge, the roadbed narrows to a constant 10-meter width. The walls are of local rubble in two or three courses, depending on their size and shape.

The following entry appears in the Concord Town Records, Old Volume II—Folio 107, on February 20, 1733:

“At the desire of Thomas Wheeler, [Jr.,] the Selectmen did then lay out a way from said Wheeler’s mill to let him in to the Country Road... [This would] run over the Brook a few rods below his mill to the upland on the easterly [sic] side of the Brook till it comes to a white oak on the side of the hill.

“In return for the allowance of this road, Thomas Wheeler, Jr.: ...promised to make the causeway on the westerly [sic] side of the above said Brook, and also a good and sufficient Bridge over it at his own Cost and Charge.

“This public way was accepted on March 11, 1733 at a “General Town Meeting of the Notable Inhabitants of Concord.”

On February 20, 1734, the Concord Selectmen laid out a road to Thomas Wheeler’s gristmill and his nearby dwelling house, according to Concord Town Reports. This recorded road is interpreted in Phalen’s History of Acton to be the present Strawberry Hill Road. However, archaeological evidence established by the TTT 2008 Field School supports the belief that the road-remains at this location are, in fact, those of the road, referenced above, which led to and from the TTT’s Wheeler Farmstead and Mill sites.

Roads were the lifeblood of commerce and society in colonial America. They were designed by first conducting a land survey, and then petitioning the town in which the desired road would lie to grant a right of way. Typically, such roads were constructed by clearing a roadbed using oxen, then laying a sub-structure, followed by a dirt surface. Finally, the road was bounded with stone walls. Because this road was applied for before Acton was incorporated in 1735, Wheeler’s petition was addressed to the

Selectmen of Concord Towne, as it was then known, of which the Wheeler Farmstead and Mills were then a part.

These engineered roads were intended to open isolated areas to commerce and provide links to markets. All plans for such town roads showed dimensions for crews to use in the field. The surveyors would set out the marks for the right of way. In this case: ...four rods wide from the low land by the Brook till it come to the fourth mark...and from then on two rods wide....

“In the 18th century, to set a measurement, a chain with 100 links was used to measure a 4-rod distance (equal roughly to 66 feet, or 20 meters) between two posts.

The remains of the piers which supported the bridge built by Thomas Wheeler are visible under the modern footbridge. They are of rubble construction also and were ample to support the heavy load of oxen, cart, and corn—or other raw materials—which might have traveled to the mill daily, especially during the harvest season.

It appears that the original topography of the streambed here was quite flat and wide, and likely supported a wetlands, as is still the case both upstream of the mill pond and downstream of the stone-lined canal that can be seen from the footbridge. In order to bridge such a wide area, it was necessary to re-direct the waters from the wetlands into a channel narrow enough to span with a bridge. This was accomplished by building both the causeway mentioned above, and a significant stone-walled canal both upstream and downstream of the crossing. Thus, traffic could pass between the stream and the mills during a much longer span of the year than would otherwise have been possible. Spring runoff and high water conditions after heavy rains still cause the flood plain to fill with water, sometimes covering the top of the walls along the causeway.