

## A Survey of History at Adams Woods

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September 7, 2013

Adams Woods is a hundred acre parcel of woodland at the center of a conservation land use success story. It is bordered on the north by Walden Pond State Reservation, on the south by the Sudbury River's Fairhaven Bay, on the east by the old Baker Farm, and on the west by Concord's Wright Woods. Altogether, the region encompasses more than a thousand acres largely dedicated for conservation. Yet Adams Woods was not always conservation land with hiking trails. There is a rich and varied history here.

The early settlers of Concord pastured their livestock in several places, amongst them the wild lands in the southern corner of their town. In the 1600's, cattle driven from central Concord to the south found good pasture at Pleasant Meadow, an area northeast of Fair Haven that would later be known as part of Lincoln's Baker Farm. The road to Pleasant Meadow is still traced today and it passes through Adams Woods.

Farmer Amos Baker lived on that road in the 1700's. He owned a bayonet acquired by his father in the French and Indian War, a conflict that began the same year Lincoln was founded. He would use that implement at the Old North Bridge, along with many other men from his family. Acre for acre, no part of Lincoln sent more men to fight the British regulars on April 19, 1775 than did the families living near Baker farm and Pleasant Meadow. New England's "martial spirit," as the first President Adams noted it, was present in this part of Lincoln.

That spirit eventually yielded to a more contemplative time, the era of Emerson, Alcott, Hawthorne, and Thoreau. These thinkers walked among Adams Woods in the 1800's. Thoreau was particularly inspired by the nature of the place and Baker Farm was the setting of a chapter in his book *Walden*.

When the Fitchburg Railroad came through in 1843, separating Walden Pond from Adams Woods, it drew Thoreau's study. He wrote of the Irish immigrants who came to blast rock and lay track. At least a few of these laborers presumably spoke well of the area because within a generation many Irish families—Boyce, Lennon, Dougherty—came to settle in Lincoln, making notable contributions of their own to life in our Town.

In 1861, steam locomotives passing Adams Woods would return soldiers of the Fifth Massachusetts Regiment to their homes here after the Union defeat at Bull Run. A year later, it was likely the same trains that carried to Concord paroled prisoners of war captured at Bull Run.

After the Civil War, the New England economy thrived and so did railroad commerce. At Walden, that commerce included tourism. The family of railroad man Charles Heywood owned beachfront property at Walden Pond and he led the creation of a water park on its shores in 1866. Dubbed "Lake Walden," it had bath houses, boat houses, swings and see-saws, a dance hall, and its own train station. Joined by a ropewalk footbridge over the railroad, Lake Walden sprawled southward to include a racetrack and fairgrounds in Adams Woods. It is safe to assume that this tourist attraction would have expanded further had Emerson not seen fit to buy land that bounded the site shortly before Heywood launched the project. In its heyday, over a thousand people would come daily to enjoy the amenities at Lake Walden.

This mode of commercial development of the land at Walden put a premium on some of the revitalizing virtues of the natural landscape. Not so the granite quarries that drove Charles Francis Adams, Jr. from his long-time family residence in Quincy, Massachusetts. C.F. Adams, grandson and great-grandson to presidents, was seeking respite toward the end of a rigorous career and turned to Lincoln for a new home.

Boston millionaire William A. Burnham had purchased the Baker farm in 1888 and built a large mansion there overlooking Fairhaven Bay. However, the stock market panic of 1893 soon diminished Burnham's fortunes and provided the occasion for C.F. Adams to purchase the estate from Burnham.

C.F. Adams invested his energies in developing the old Baker farm and tending the woodland nearby. Among the mule paths and hill roads that had earlier served logging, and then tilling, C.F. planted trees. He also drew a small community of workers and their families to what is now Red Rail Farm. Among the hands were his Irish teamster Dan Ryan and his foreman James Baker, the last of the Baker family to live there.

After WW II, with the farm now in the hands of C.F.'s grandson J. Quincy Adams, a new opportunity took shape. A back to nature movement burgeoned and there was a resurgence of interest in Walden. Transcendentalists made pilgrimages to Walden, where the lost site of Thoreau's cabin had been discovered in 1945. Though the train station at Lake Walden was no more, automobiles had arrived and new throngs of visitors now loomed on the horizon.

In the face of development pressures, the core of Adams Woods was established for public use beginning in 1977. It was made possible by generous gifts from the Adams family, not the least of which was Quincy Adams' long time service on the Conservation Commission and his dedication to open space planning. According to another fellow commissioner, linking this natural space at Adams Woods to the trails at Minute Man National Historical Park "was part of a comprehensive plan that integrated the present with the past" in Lincoln.

The history of Adams Woods spans war and peace, agriculture and commerce, philosophy and conservancy. Whether we survey its historians or its terrain, this forest holds many lessons for the best of our culture. Walking through these woods is no doubt the best way to benefit from them.

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Weather permitting, the author will lead a hike through Adams Woods on October 6, 2013. Go to [www.lincolnhistoricalsociety.org](http://www.lincolnhistoricalsociety.org) for event details.

For further reading:

*Concord Climate for Freedom*, Ruth Wheeler, 1967

*Embattled Farmers*, Richard C. Wiggin, 2013

*The Great Meadow*, Brian Donahue, 2004

*Walden Pond*, W. Barksdale Maynard, 2004