

## **Wheeler Homestead Panel - NEARA**

Shown in the photo is the foundation of the 1720s dwelling house built by Thomas Wheeler, Jr., of Concord Towne to the southeast. The large flat stone in front of this foundation marks the entrance to the house, which rested on the original cellar. The masonry was restored in 2008. During that process, under nearly a foot of debris, a floor composed of large flat stone slabs neatly fitted together, was discovered. Such a paved cellar was extremely unusual for the period and may have been used to support storage of farm products.

Archaeological evidence from the TTT 2008 Field School suggests that the foundation was renovated c. 1830, at which time stone from local quarries was introduced, the paving stones were set, and granite sills were added. The frame house was moved in the 19th century and demolished in the 20th, leaving the stone foundation largely intact. The modern staircase replicates one that likely filled the recess built into the west wall.

Extending from the west wall is a low-walled surface enclosure. No records have been found to show whether a wooden structure, or of what type, was supported by this foundation. However, its close proximity to the well at the foot of the large sugar maple suggests that a kitchen shed/creamery was located here. The well, deep and still containing water, provided potable water to the settlement. The well cover was cut from one piece of granite from the North Acton Quarry.

Attached to this first enclosure is a second, with three sides, which may have supplied culinary and medicinal herbs, as was common during this era.

The double-walled stone droving corridor to the west was used to move cattle (most likely oxen) between pens and pasture. An opening toward the corridor's end on its northerly side was likely fitted with a gate into the pasture area. The corridor's southerly wall continues along the edge of the brook for some distance.

According to early Town Records of Acton, after the farmstead's establishment, the track within the droving corridor became Main Street, connecting it with the settlement further downstream, established a generation earlier by a Capt. Thomas Wheeler, also of Concord and a relative of Thomas'. This track overlaid a trail used during even earlier times by Native Americans, who harvested fish and other resources from the brook and its rich marshlands. Later, when additional homesteads and barns were built in the area, Main Street was moved north to where it is located today as Rt. 27.

The farmstead, with its associated droving corridor and cattle pens, would have supported the construction, and later the operation, of the mills on the contiguous site. Along the droving corridor, towards the brook, two stone walls, each perpendicular to the corridor, lead towards the flood plain. They form a three-sided enclosure now equipped with a handicapped accessible picnic table and a bench which looks out on a wide vista across wetlands towards the brook.

At one corner of this enclosure, there is a carefully laid-up, flat-sided stone wall that joins the droving corridor at a wide angle. This wall is the butt end of a loading ramp, a structure often seen throughout the rural areas of New England. Such ramps were used to haul up wagons loaded with hay, or other supplies, to the upper stories, or lofts, of barns. The presence of this ramp suggests that a two-story barn rested adjacent to the end of the ramp. The area within the enclosure was likely where various activities associated with the loading, storage, and offloading of fodder for animals and other supplies was carried out.

Historical documents indicate that there were eventually built several barns and outbuildings associated with this farmstead. However, the only extant remains of possible barns have been incorporated into a retaining wall along the driveway of the nearest house on the west side of Wheeler Lane.

From the front of the homestead, a stone-dust path leads east towards the mill complex, where the remains of raceways, sluices, gates, and building foundations are located.

### **Wheeler Homestead – Panel**

Before you is the foundation of an early 1730s dwelling house built by Thomas Wheeler, Jr. if Concord Towne to the southeast. The purpose of the settlement that developed here was the operation of two mills – one a grist and the other a sawmill – on this upper portion of the Nashoba Brook, just below a pre-existing dam. The dam, shown on an early map as the ‘Blood Dam’ and located just above the mill complex, was earlier owned by the Blood family of Thomas Wheeler’s maternal grandmother.

Thomas Wheeler, Jr. had the mill complex fully operational by 1732. The location is most suitable for mills. Here, the natural topography of the streambed, with its gently up-sloping wooded banks, favored the construction of a canal along the northerly stream bank, configured to supply water to the downstream sluices and gates, with a height of fall sufficient to power two mills.

The large flat stone in front of this foundation marks the entrance to the dwelling house which rested on this original cellar. This masonry was restored in 2008. During that process, under nearly a foot of debris, a floor, composed of large, flat stone slabs neatly fitted together, was discovered. Such a paved cellar was extremely unusual for the period, and may have been used for storage of farm products.

Archaeological evidence from the TTT 2008 Field School suggests that the foundation was renovated c. 1830, at which time stone from local quarries was introduced, the paving stones were set, and granite sills were added. The frame house was moved in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and demolished in the 20<sup>th</sup>, leaving the stone foundation largely intact. The staircase replicated one that likely filled the recess built into the west wall.

Extending from the west wall is a low-walled surface enclosure. No records have been found to show whether a wooden structure, or of what type, was supported by this foundation,

However, its close proximity to the well at the foot of the large sugar maple suggests that a kitchen shed/creamery was located here. The well, deep and still containing water, provided potable water to the settlement. The well cover was cut from one piece of granite from the North Acton Quarry.

Attached to this first enclosure is a second, with three sides, which may have supplied culinary and medicinal herbs, as was common during this era.

The double-walled stone droving corridor to the west was used to move cattle between pens and pasture. An opening toward its end on its northerly side was likely fitted with a gate into the pasture area. The corridor's southerly wall continues along the edge of the Brook for some distance.

According to early Town Records of Acton, after the farmstead's establishment, the track within the droving corridor became the 'Main Street' connecting it with a settlement further downstream. It overlaid a trail used from even earlier time by Native Americans who harvested fish and other resources from the Brook and its rich marshlands. Later, when additional homesteads and barns were built in the area, 'Main Street' was moved north to where it is located today.

The farmstead, with its associated droving corridor and cattle pens, would have supported the construction, and later the operation, of the mills. All of the extensive stonework you see around you was built by the labor of men with oxen were used to move raw materials and products to and from the mills.

As you wander along the droving corridor, you will see to your left – towards the Brook – two stone walls, each perpendicular to the corridor, that lead towards the flood plain. They form a three-sided enclosure now equipped with a handicapped accessible picnic table and a bench which looks out on a wide vista across wetlands towards the Brook.

At one corner of this enclosure, look for a carefully laid-up, flat-sided stone wall that joins the droving corridor at a wide angle. This wall is the butt end of a loading ramp, a structure often seen throughout the rural areas of New England. Such ramps were used to haul wagons loaded with hay, or other supplies, to the upper stories, or lofts, of barns. The presence of this ramp suggests that a two-story barn rested adjacent to the end of the ramp. The area within the enclosure was likely the place where various activities associated with the loading, storage, and offloading of fodder for animals and other supplies was carried out.

Historical documents indicate that there were eventually built several barns and outbuildings associated with this farmstead. However, the only extant remains of possible barns have been incorporated into a retaining wall along the driveway of the nearest house on the west side of Wheeler Lane.

Retracing the pathway back towards the front of the homestead, you will find a stone-dust path leading east towards the mill complex, where the remains of raceways, sluices, gates, and other building foundations are located.