

Stetson Adams Memorial Woodland History and Description

History

Both the family names Stetson and Adams appear in the early history of East Leverett and can be found on the attached historic maps.

It is difficult to trace the history this 13-acre woodland back through the early multiple-tract deeds in East Leverett. However, it is clearly described in 1945 (Book 882, page 38 and 39) and can then be followed forward in time as it passes through the generations from Winford and Elizabeth Adams to their son Stetson Adams in 1949 (book 844, page 97) and then to his son Steven Adams in 1994 (book 2864, page 97). Steven remembers visiting the property with his father and brothers when they came to town from Tyringham to visit their grandmother and to work in the woods. Stetson, who was a forester, owned additional, larger properties on the west side of Shutesbury Road which required more time and effort. The 13-acre woodland was mostly used for firewood while commercial logging was practice on the more fertile properties.

In 2008, Steven Adams sold the 13-acre forest to The Leverett Conservation Commission, using funding from the Community Preservation Act. The town passed the warrant article Saturday, April 26, 2008. The deed was recorded February 19, 2009 (Book 5625 page 244). Steven asked that the land be named in honor of his father, the Stetson Adams Memorial Woodland.

The property is accessible only by trail. In 1888 the Franklin County Commissioners, at the request of the town of Leverett, discontinued the center section of Rat Hollow Road (from the present Old Mountain Road on the east to Old Brushy Mountain Road on the west. This southern section of Brushy Mountain Road had already been discontinued by the town.) See Appendix 5 for documents and map. The present legal access to the property is through the Gordon King Life Estate which borders the Adams property on the west. A trail from Rat Hollow through the King property to the Stetson Adams CR is being planned.

It is also possible to walk from Shutesbury Road east on Rat Hollow Road, turned north on the trail on the old discontinued Brushy Mountain Road. Both roads appear on old maps (attached). Those maps also trace the gradual decline on the settlement along Rat Hollow Road.

The Leveret map in the *1830 Town Plans of Massachusetts* shows both Rat Hollow and Brushy Mountain roads (but does not include location of dwellings). In the early days, the Lancaster Cart-way connected with both Broad Hill Road and Rat Hollow Road. However, as East Leverett grew into an industrial center (mills all along Roaring Brook), Rat Hollow's importance diminished. In 1806 there was a school building, but by 1832 school was held in a private home (with 18-20 scholars). The school then moved west to Number Six Road. (information from *A History of Leverett Massachusetts 1774-1974*)

The Leverett map, page 34, in the 1858 H.F.Walling, *Franklin County Maps*, shows Rat Hollow with one house with other houses only on the upper, functioning, section of Brushy Mountain Road.

The Leverett, map, page 59, in the 1871 F.W.Beers, *Franklin County Maps*, shows two houses on Rat Hollow, but the road has been downgraded.

The 1895 *USGS Belchertown Quadrangle* shows Rat Hollow as a trail with some structures. The northern section of Brushy Mountain is still shown as a road.

While the 19th century maps do not provide accurate information on the use of the land as forest, pasture, or farming, photographs of hills throughout this area and field-grown pines on the property indicate that the Adams land and all that surrounding it were used as pasture (primarily sheep) in the mid 19th century. Gordon Adams remembers a stone wall with a Virginia rail fence on the top of it just southwest of the Adams property. There are still remnants of the stones for a Virginia rail fence along the northern border.

Description

Because the Rattlesnake Gutter Trust will be monitoring this CR regularly, it is important that all boundaries are marked clearly.

The eastern boundary is the easiest: west side of Brushy Mountain Road. There is also a pin on the west side of the road, mentioned in deed at the NE corner and a pin for the land on the east side Brushy Mountain Road at the SE corner (pin is on the east side of the road).

The northern boundary has been well marked by the northern neighbor (W.L.Cowls, Inc.) with red paint and blazes.

The southern boundary as been well marked with red paint and blazes by the southern neighbor (Joseph and Gordon Downey).

The western border between this town-owned property and the Gordon King Life Estate, which is also town-owned, has been more difficult to find. There is a corner pin at the SW set just to the west of the western woods road. That pin is mentioned in both the Gordon King deed to the west and the Downy deed to the south. On October 11, 2010, a representative of RGT (Mary Alice Wilson) and the owner, the Leverett Conservation Commission (Joshua Surette) walk the line, painting red blazes. (Painting actually done by Jayde Surette, age 9.) During the walk we found at least two metal tags on trees which were probably an much earlier marking of the line. The NW corner does not have an iron pin. It is marked by red blazes.

Photographs of the four corners and other features are included in this baseline report. GPS points are given on the boundary map and in the excel file.

Often boundary lines between properties are relatively easily defined by differences in land use: pasture/forest, forest cutting practices, stone walls and/or barbed wire embedded in trees. There is remarkably little difference between the forest in the 13-acre property and that of the neighbors. When asked about this, Gordon King suggested that he, Stetson Adams, and the Jones family (Cows) forester used pretty much the same approach to this dry hillside. They cut mostly firewood – although Gordon supplemented a commercial harvest on his lower, more fertile woodlot with some harvesting of his property. Steven Adams remembers that the gypsy moth outbreak in the 70s devastated this area and that dead oaks were harvested at that time. While no boundary stone walls or barbed wire have been found, there is the remnants of a Virginia rail fence (flat stones set regularly at a slight diagonal) along the northern line.

In addition to being a lovely upland forest, this property extends the protected land on Brushy Mountain. One property (34 acres) of the Gordon King Life Estate is just to west. Somewhat further to the east is the 16-acre Mosher Conservation Area (owned by Rattlesnake Gutter Trust) and the 117-acre David Smith Conservation Restrictions (held by Rattlesnake Gutter Trust). The 40-acre Roaring Brook Conservation Area (town-owned) is just south of the Smith CRs on the south side of Shutesbury Road. As the map of nearby protected areas demonstrates, there is also extensive protected areas downhill along Doolittle Brook in East Leverett owned both by the town and the Rattlesnake Gutter Trust. (See Baseline, section 2 for maps.)

The property is on the south side of Brushy Mountain with a north-south ridge running approximately down the middle. The east side drains to Mountain Brook and the west side to an unnamed, seasonal stream. Both streams flow into Doolittle Brook and groundwater from this area flows down towards the homes (and wells) along Shutesbury Road and the Doolittle Brook wetlands beyond.

One of the most impressive features of the property is the rocks. As one walks west (uphill) along the northern edge of the property, there are a series of impressive foliated metamorphic ledges, Once across the ridge, and going downhill, there are more rock ledges. There are also a number of stone configurations that should be considered in a survey of Native American cultural sites.

While there is no view in the summer, Steven Adams has said there will be a view in the winter from the northern/upper end of the ridge toward the south – to the University of Massachusetts and the Holyoke Range.

The forest is mixed hardwood with some pine and hemlock. There is some laurel in the southwestern section and scattered chestnut oak. The forest is generally open, with only low-bush blueberry and huckleberry in most areas. Ground covers is mostly hay-scented

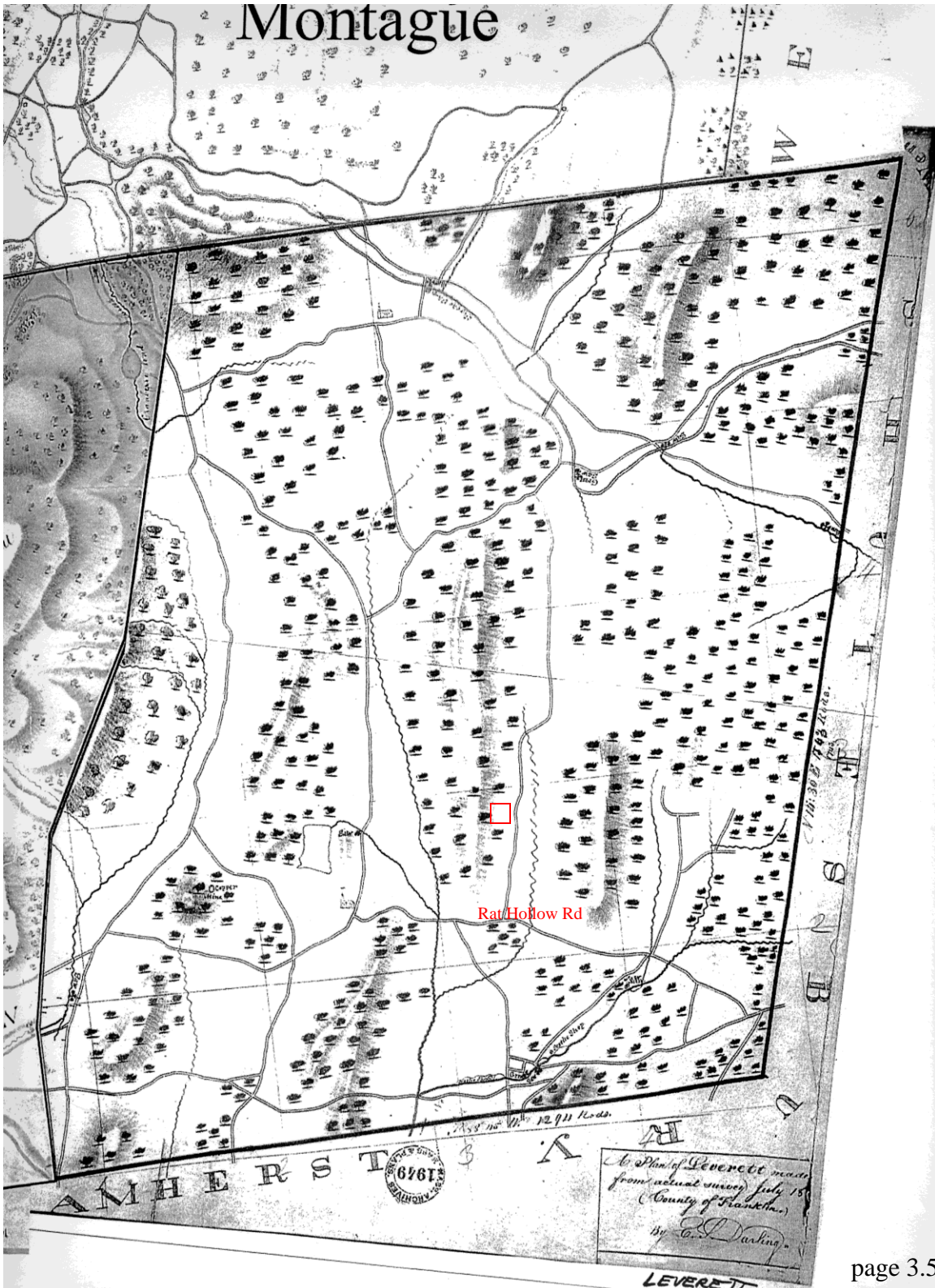
fern. Since the survey work was done in a very dry late summer, it was impossible to guess what spring ephemerals might be present; there is some rattlesnake plantain. In 2010, Michael Berry, Forester with Bay State Forestry Services, prepared a Forest

Management Plan for the Gordon King Life Estate (assessors map 8, lot 2) and the Stetson Adams Memorial Woodland (map 8, lot 3). His map of the stands and description of vegetation appear in Appendix A. The Stetson Adams land is almost all in Stand 3.

Birds observed in late August/early September included chickadees, downy woodpecker, Eastern Wood Pewee, a Pileated Woodpecker still apparently defending territory, and a Barred Owl – heard after the pileated had called repeatedly during an early-evening walk. More careful surveys need to be done in the spring and during breeding season. Deer scat was common, but the summer was so dry that there was no opportunity to search for footprints of other animals. It was so dry that leaves crunched underfoot in the first week of September.

Leverett from Town Plans, Massachusetts, 1830

Source www.old-maps.com. Information on interpreting this series: Harvard Forest. 2002. 1830 Map Project, Harvard Forest Archives, Petersham, MA.



H. F. Walling, Map of Franklin County 1858, page 34
from www.old-map.com

