

# Danforth History

Danforth Brook begins as Mill Brook in wetlands in the southeast corner of Bolton and runs through Hudson into Bruce's Pond, formerly known as Horseshoe Pond, under Main Street, and out to the Assabet River.

## **Geological history**

"The brook flows through a portion of the Nashoba Rock Formation, a huge mass of metamorphic rocks over 5,000 feet thick extending northwest across east-central Massachusetts. The rocks in the area of Danforth Falls are of the "ground moraine" variety comprising underlying bedrock and unsorted, angular rock fragments ranging in size from minute particles to large boulders. The waterfall itself travels over a bedrock lip in Danforth Brook and enters a glacially-eroded pool created during the Permo-Carboniferous ice age approximately 350 million years ago.

Most of the rocks in the Danforth area are results of Permo-Carboniferous glacial deposits in the vicinity of West Pond, Bolton, during the Carboniferous Period of the Paleozoic Era. the Carboniferous Period lasted nearly 70 million years. Soil in the Danforth area cover underlying bedrock and is neither thick nor mature. Post-glacial downcutting of bedrock exceeds 10 feet in some spots of the Danforth territory."\*

## **Early settlements around Danforth Brook**

The 1986 "Assabet Riverway Plan" speculates that the Nipmucks settled the well-drained terraces and knolls overlooking the Assabet. However there have been no archeological finds in Hudson to prove this theory. Bolton just to the northwest of Hudson was home to the Wampanoag tribe.

## **The 1800's onward**

In 1866 the Honorable Charles Hudson offered the town \$500 to start a public library and the town was named in his honor. In 1868 a 2-mile square parcel was annexed from Bolton for \$10,000. This tract included the area known as Danforth Falls named after Octa Danforth who lived on the property's Lincoln Street side prior to Hudson's incorporation in 1866. While the Assabet was used as a vehicle for industry and disposal since the first European settlements, the tributaries - like Danforth Brook - were generally unpolluted according to the 1986 Assabet Riverway Plan.

## **Danforth Falls area**

Most of the area around Danforth Brook remained farmland until it was developed residentially. However, the land around the Falls has long been of special interest.

If you walk to the Falls, you can still see cleared land that was once a railroad bed for the Hudson and Lancaster Railroad, built in the 1870's. It ran from the corner of Main and Broad Street in Hudson and shared a passenger station with the Marlborough Branch railroad. It crossed the Mill Pond (Bruce Pond) from North to South by Larkin Lumber and it is rumored that at extreme low water levels some traces can still be seen. At Bolton center it crossed into Lancaster by the Clinton Town Line. The cost to build the railroad was \$250,000 and the Board of Director's meetings of this company were so rancorous that people emerged with black eyes. Construction of the line was delayed and by the time it was completed the Massachusetts Central had opened and made the branch redundant. It never had a revenue run and by 1900 had been sold for scrap.

In 1968 a 52 acre parcel of land south of Danforth Falls was purchased by the town of Hudson at the cost of \$1,000 an acre with 50% of the cost being funded by the

Massachusetts Self Help Program. This land included 45 acres of forest, 5 grassy acres and 2 acres covered by water. The lower portion of Danforth Brook and a pool beneath the waterfall were open for fishing. The Falls, themselves, however, were not included in this purchase and remained the property of Dorothy Mayo.

Mrs. Mayo and her husband Howard, Bolton residents, purchased the land surrounding the falls area and another 28 acres north into Bolton in 1938. Howard Mayo was a hydraulic specialist in New England for the Allis-Chalmers Co. and used Danforth Brook and the Falls as an experimental site for miniature-scale water wheels. A full-scale, newly assembled bucket-type model, first tested by Mayo in the Danforth area, was installed at a Sturbridge Village fulling mill shortly after Mr. Mayo's death in 1970. His intent, according to his widow, was to install an overshot wooden water wheel on the Bolton waterway. The Mayo family owned the Falls and the land immediately surrounding it until 2001.

In 1972 a tree planting day and clean up of the conservation area was scheduled. 250 trees were planted in the Danforth Falls area and local scout troops collected 10 dump truck loads of trash and filled almost 500 plastic bags. In 1977 the area was closed to motor vehicles because of late night rowdiness and conflicts between cross-country skiers and snowmobilers. The cross country ski trails that once existed in this area have been obscured. The land continued to be vandalized and used as a dumping ground. In 1989 a major clean up led by Conservation Commissioner Paul Byrne and conservationist Martin Moran removed enough trash (including furniture) to fill a 20 cubic yard dumpster. They built a gate to keep cars out of the property and created a small parking lot at the entrance.

The land surrounding the Falls, and the Falls, were purchased in 2001 by the town for a price of \$100,000, 50% of which was contributed by private donations, \$12,500 from the Hudson Savings Bank, \$25,000 by Zamer, Inc. and the remaining \$12,500 by an anonymous donor. This land is administered by the Conservation Commission.

## **References**

This article was taken from the OARS website: <https://www.oars3rivers.org>.

Information about the Danforth area was taken from articles in the Hudson Daily Sun, much of it from an article written by David Fox and published November 21, 1974. Note that the geological information is a direct quote from his article. Information about the Lancaster Railroad was provided by Duncan Power of the Assabet River Rail Trail.