

# BUTTERICK NATURE TRAIL

## PARKING AND TRAIL LOCATION

There is adequate parking near the trailhead, located behind the Butterick Building, but expect fewer available parking spaces during regular business hours.

The Butterick Nature Trail is located on a 13+ acre town-owned parcel off Park Street. A wooden trailhead sign at the foot of a fieldstone and

cement stairway behind the Butterick Municipal Building marks the entrance to the trail and property.



## UNIQUE FEATURES

The *Butterick Nature Trail* winds through a delightful, undulating, forested landscape and includes a side trail to the well-preserved Town Pound. The trail forms a loop, where the return path is situated in a little valley, providing the visitor with the sense of leaving the busy world behind.

## LENGTH AND DIFFICULTY

The trail is slightly under 0.50 miles roundtrip, including a side trail to the Town Pound. The trail starts at the cement stairway, loops around and ends at the corner of the parking lot where tennis courts once were located. The trail is rated as *easy*.

## ALLOWED AND PROHIBITED TRAIL ACTIVITIES

Given the terrain and the steps, the *Butterick Nature Trail* is suitable for walking and nature observation. Dogs are allowed provided dog owners clean up after them.

## DESCRIPTION OF BUTTERICK NATURE TRAIL

**0.00 miles:** The trail starts at the bottom of the cement steps.

**0.06 miles:** Just before a stone wall, a side trail on the left leads to the Town Pound.

**0.10 miles:** The side trail arrives at the Town Pound

**0.14 miles:** Return to the main path by the same path. (Note: —not as shown on the map)

**0.20 miles:** Note the stretch of mossy rock outcroppings on the right side of the trail.

**0.26 miles:** The trail turns to the right and proceeds gently downhill.

**0.32 miles:** The trail turns gently to the right and enters into a little valley.

**0.39 miles:** Stone-lined hole in the ground, to the right of the trail. Purpose and origin unknown at time of writing.

**0.43 miles:** The trail continues on a short downhill into the paved area where the tennis courts once were located.

**0.47 miles:** The trail ends at the starting point.

## HISTORY OF THE TOWN PARCEL

This is a 13+ acre parcel of land belonging to the Town of Sterling. It is remarkable that the town owns such a substantial centrally located property. This parcel was donated to the town by Mary Ellen Butterick (1853–1941), who had come into money from her father, Ebenezer Butterick. He invented the tissue paper dress patterns, which revolutionized home sewing (Butterick Patterns). Mary Ellen first purchased land from the families that had built the Goodnow House, said to be the first house built in the center of town, dating to the early to mid-18th century, and the Waite House, dating from a little later.

Adjacent, the Baptist Church had been built on land purchased from the Brooks family in about 1843, but the church closed its doors in 1914 and joined with the Evangelical Church, whose building is still located on Main Street. In 1924, the Baptist church, which had been empty for 10 years, was purchased by Mary Ellen Butterick, and the building was razed. The remnants of the Goodnow and Waite houses were likewise demolished.

Around 1924, Mary Ellen deeded the combined 13+ acres of land to the town as a recreational park for the enjoyment of the people of Sterling. Some years later, she agreed that part of the land could be used to provide the space for a future school, with the stipulation that the rest of the land remain as green space. On top of the hill was a pond for skating in the winter (located about midway between the trail and





Meetinghouse Road, shortly after the top of the cement steps). For summer use, picnic areas and fireplace pits were popular. There were walking trails throughout the area which at the time was open meadow with few trees. It was a popular place to go on weekends. The original trail meandered from the cement steps up over the hill and to the back parking lot, formerly the location of the tennis courts.

The Butterick School was built as a federal Works Project Administration project in 1934 or 1935 to provide employment for Sterling men during the Great Depression. Part of the hill behind the school was removed to make a level area to site the school. Due to the excavation, the cement and field stone steps and retaining wall were built to provide public access as part of the school building project. Park Street did not really exist – it was just a cart path – and the Goodnow and Waite houses and Baptist Church were located in front of the Butterick Building, with the Baptist church closest to First Church in Sterling.

According to Sterling old-timers, now long gone, there was a fairly deep cave used by the Indians halfway up the hill, but if it exists it is probably now hidden behind the cement steps.

The Sterling Town Pound is formed by a square of solidly built stone walls. It was likely in use for well over 100 years, up to the time of WWI.

A town pound (or enclosure) was part of early colonial history. It was high-walled and lockable structure mainly used for holding stray sheep, pigs

and cattle until they were claimed by the owners, after payment of a fine or levy.

In Massachusetts, town pounds date back to 1635 and were in common use through the late 1800s. Early pounds were constructed of wood, but by 1740, due to extensive forest clearing, stone-walled pounds like the Sterling Town Pound began to replace wood pounds.

### FLORA AND FAUNA

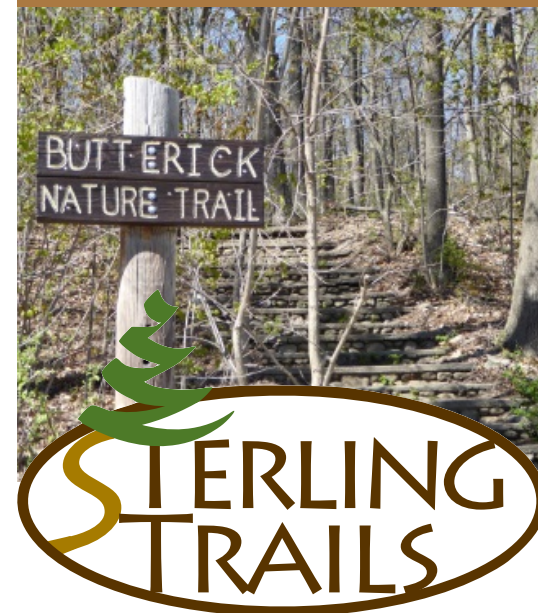
Today the entire property is completely forested and the pond has dried up and vanished. Few evergreens are found on this property – most trees are white and red oaks, hickories and maples. Ash trees are also present though they may succumb to the Ash Pine borer in future years. With an open understory, low bush blueberries, viburnums and spring wildflowers such as columbine and the diminutive Canada Mayflower grow. Near the Town Pound is evidence of the past can be seen in the form of ornamental daylilies, barberry and vinca. In spring, the property is ringing with the sounds of warblers, chickadees and wrens. The chattering of Chimney Swifts is a summertime serenade in Sterling Center. Stone walls and downed trees provide shelter for small mammals like chipmunks, snakes and squirrels. In winter look for fox, raccoon, or coyote tracks.

### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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**Open Space Implementation Committee (OSIC)** Sterling's OSIC was established in 2003 as a permanent town committee, to broaden awareness and enhance access to significant open space, cultural and recreational resources.