

A description of Hammond Pond woods from...

King's Handbook of Newton

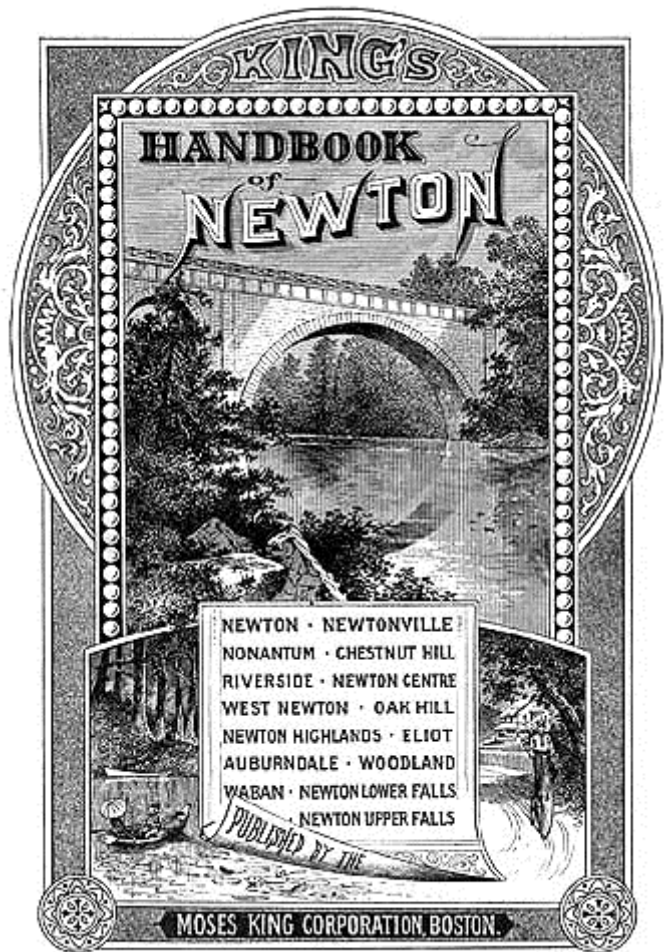
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The Hammond's-Pond Woods are one of the most interesting and beautiful forests in New England, rich in every variety of ferns and lichens and abounding in rare plants and brilliant flowers. Rank and luxuriant lowland glades alternate with rocky hills and everywhere the beauty of the trees arches over the scene. There is a delightful path a mile and a half long leading south from Beacon Street, nearly opposite the Bishop estate, and traversing the entire forest; and the same path may be found more readily where it crosses the railway, perhaps half a mile west of Chestnut-Hill station.

Another (and still easier) mode of entrance is by an ancient and abandoned wood road which turns to the north from Boylston Street, a few rods west of the Hammond's Pond ice houses. Amid this rich and picturesque woodland the Newton Natural-History Society, the Appalachian Mountain Club, and other lovers of nature have enjoyed their field days in the blue and fleecy days of summer. On one side is a broad and solemn amphitheatre, defended by walls of shattered cliffs and crags, carpeted with fragrant besoms, and studded with vast and stately hemlocks whose murmurous branches make a perpetual twilight beneath. Elsewhere there are walls of conglomerate rock, as tall and straight as castle-bastions, crowning the hill-tops, and menaced by storming-parties of trees, whose green banners have been planted in the crevices far up their mighty steeps. On the crest of one silent ridge is a marvellous rock formation, where cliffs a score of feet high surround three sides of a little grassy court, open on the fourth side to the long

perspective of the forest, and entered by a narrow pass hardly a yard wide, and many feet long, leading between huge upright ledges. Through this portal, embroidered with delicate ferns and live-green mosses and gray lichens, the woodland wanderer enters the rock-walled chamber, fit audience hall for Titania herself. Strolling down the grassy paths--remnants of long forgotten farm roads--one sees gorgeous orange and canary colored fungi, delicate sprays of sassafras clambering above the shattered rocks, luxuriant ivies mantling the glacier-scarred ledges with living green, and magnificent ferns, now waving in broad sweeps of tropical luxuriance, and then nestling down among the boulders in tiny sprays of the



most exquisite grace and delicacy of outline. So broad and sequestered and unfrequented is this lovely forest that no sounds of prosaic human life invade its cloisters, and nothing disturbs the saunterer's reflections but the low songs of the birds, or the scampering of an occasional gray squirrel over the dry leaves. Instead of spending some hundreds of thousands of dollars for public parks, as the Newtonians occasionally try to compass, it would be wiser to publish, at the city's expense, a few little tracts setting forth the glories of her forests and hills, and telling how to find and recognize them

In old times this forest was known as the "Slate Rock Woods," after the great pile of slate now visible near the railroad between Newton Centre and Chestnut Hill. It was also called "Coonville," on account of the game abounding in the vicinity. Otis Pettee writes: "Washington Street in Boston, in colonial times, extended out over the Neck to Roxbury and thence by a circuitous route to Brookline--then known as 'Punch Bowl'--and when the Worcester turnpike was built, it was simply an extension of old Washington Street. After Tremont Street was opened to Roxbury, that part of Washington Street towards and beyond Brookline lost its identity, and has since taken another name [Boylston Street]. I well remember, when driving to Boston in my younger days, meeting hunters and trappers with their guns and hounds, on their way to these woods for game."

Deep in the woods between Judge Lowell's house and the little German hamlet of Thompsonville, is Hammond's Pond, a lonely lakelet of twenty acres, where in old times the farmers' lads used to catch eels and pout, with occasionally a lively two pound pickerel. The natural outlet of the pond flowed through the rivulet which traverses the western part of Brookline, and thence along Bald-Pate Meadow and down into the Charles River. But about forty years ago an artificial channel was made from the westerly shore, by which the overflow of the lakelet descends into Smelt Brook, and so wanders off into the Charles, by Waltham. The pond has for more than two centuries borne the name of Thomas Hammond, one of the three wealthiest pioneers (the others having been John and Edward Jackson) of the twenty original settlers of Newton. He came here in 1650, from Hingham, where he had settled in 1637, and where his four children were born and baptized. The clan of Hammond is now a numerous and widely disseminated one in Eastern Massachusetts.

Another of the pioneers of this fair land was Vincent Druce, who in 1650 bought a great expanse of woods with Thomas Hammond, and held them in common with him until 1664, when they divided them, the line running over the great hill. It was his son John who was mortally wounded while Prentice's cavalry fought against King Philip at Swansey. Vincent's great-granddaughter Nancy was still alive as late as the year 1853. Vincent Druce built the mansion since known as the Crafts house, on the Denny place, about the year 1695, and in its modernized and newly-painted form it looks like some comfortable old village-inn strayed away into these lovely rural uplands. Before King Philip's War this locality also became the home of Thomas Greenwood, the weaver, and town clerk, who gave a son and a grandson to Harvard College and the ministry.

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