

My Home Town

Just outside historic Concord Center lies a four-square-mile area known as the Estabrook Woods.⁵ Harvard University is the dominant landholder, with approximately 670 acres administered by its Museum of Comparative Zoology (MCZ). The Middlesex School, an elite private high school with approximately 300 acres, is the second largest landholder.⁶ Harvard has a reputation for doing whatever is best for Harvard with its properties, so the town was pleasantly surprised in 1994 when the university offered to preserve its land in perpetuity, providing that 400 adjacent acres could be similarly protected in order to guarantee the continued integrity of the MCZ land as an ecological research area. Led by the Concord Land Conservation Trust (CLCT) a campaign to meet Harvard's challenge began. The Middlesex School promised to donate fifty acres on completion of its long-range development plan.

Middlesex had formally begun its expansion planning in 1990. A shift to coeducational status in the 1970s had strained the capacity of its athletic fields. In addition, given escalating housing costs in the surrounding area, the school wished to add to its existing stock of faculty housing. Over the course of the next few years the school voluntarily held two public meetings in cooperation with the town's Natural Resources Commission, four meetings in cooperation with the town's Planning Board, and four ad hoc meetings with interested members of the community. During this period the opposition began to form. The CLCT receded from view, taking no formal part in what followed. The opposition was led by a relatively new group, the Thoreau Country Conservation Alliance, which had supported a major recent campaign by Don Henley to preserve the Walden Woods.⁷ Substantively, the opposition reflected preservationist concerns—Thoreau and Emerson had written about the woods—as well as the obvious environmentalist sentiments.

5. The following case is based on my reading of the files held in the offices of the Concord Natural Resources Commission, the reports of the controversy contained in various issues of the *Concord Journal*, and conversations with representatives of the town, the school, and involved citizens. Because Concord is a small town and the controversy was recent and painful for many of those involved (several interviewees made references to unpleasant encounters in grocery stores), I do not cite those interviewed by name.

6. The 1992 movie *School Ties* was filmed on the Middlesex grounds.

7. Don Henley is the lead singer for the Eagles, a California rock group (known, e.g., for the song "Hotel California"). He nationalized the campaign to preserve land around Walden Pond.