

Historical Information on Town Pounds

From the Newmarket Historical Society

(www.newmarketnhhistoricalsociety.org)

NEW ENGLAND TOWN POUNDS

Town pounds have their origin in England and Europe. Towns built a pen in central areas to hold stray animals that got loose from one household so that they couldn't damage the crops of other members of the community. These structures usually consisted of four low walls either of fieldstone or of rough-cut granite. In order to reclaim the pig or cow in question, the owner would have to pay compensation for whatever damage the animal had done to neighbors' gardens.

In July 1828, the New Hampshire Legislature passed a series of bills detailing the operations of Town Pounds. The bills spell out the duties of the Pound Keeper and detail the required forms pertaining to the notification to the owners of impounded animal, the appraisals and dispositions thereof. Included are a set of fees the Pound Keeper can charge for the service and swearing to of forms by Town Officials and Justices of the Peace. These can be found online at Google Books by searching "*The New-Hampshire Town Officer*".

From Stone Structures of Northeast United States

(www.stonestructures.org)

Brief introduction to Town Pounds

Town pounds according to *Sermons in Stone* by Susan Allport and *Town Pounds of New England* by Elizabeth Banks MacRury were a part of early colonial history. In Massachusetts pounds date back to 1635. Early pounds were constructed of wood fencing. Wood-fenced pounds often had to be rebuilt. Stone-walled pounds began to replace wood pounds around 1740. By 1800 stone was the favored building material. Pounds were built to hold animals who had become a problem or that were illegally wandering around loose. Town pounds were in common use from the mid 1600's to the late 1800's.

The town pounds that have survived represent a number of different time periods and building techniques. Many of the pounds have been restored in 20th century. The restoration work in most cases involved resetting fallen stones from the pounds walls. The bottom sections of these walls tend to be the most reliable sections of the pound to find original construction work and techniques.

A few pounds have stone lintels carved with the date of construction. Chester and Auburn, New Hampshire towns each had roman numerals used for date. Roman numerals contrast with numbers used on milestones in Chester. It would be interesting to know if this is a wide spread trend.

Durham Town Pound – It is located at the corner of Route 108 and Durham Point Road. The present structure was built on exposed bedrock in 1808 and replaced an earlier structure built in 1709. It is constructed of quarried granite surface ledge. Three blocks around the gate have round quarry holes (5/8" diameter, spaced 4-5" apart), the byproduct of the plug & feather method (commercial version). A number of blocks have trapezoid shaped hand cut flat wedge quarry holes. A splitting method similar in concept to the plug & feather but using flat metal wedges instead of half-rounds metal pieces. Not all of the blocks have quarry marks on them. The pound was built using some type of lifting apparatus as evidenced by the presence of "dog-holes" (5/8" dia. round hole, about 1/2 inch deep). A single dog hole was drilled on each side of the block, a metal hook inserted into the hole and a chain run between the hooks. As the chain was hoisted upward, it pulled the hooks tightly together allowing the block to be lifted. Several blocks have more than one dog-hole per side, indicating the workman misjudged the proper balance point for lifting the block with the first set of holes. Dog holes are found on blocks on the bottom, middle, and top sections of wall. The pound is 25 x 40 feet in size.