

[D R A F T]

OYSTER RIVER MASSACRE MARKER – Roundtable Discussion

Thursday, January 18, 2024

DURHAM TOWN HALL, COUNCIL CHAMBERS

4:00 p.m.

PARTICIPANTS PRESENT:

Larry Brickner-Wood (Chair of the HDC/HC – serving as meeting chair)
Charlotte Bacon (Montgomery Will) – Facilitator
Barbara Will (Montgomery Will) – Facilitator

Durham Historic District/Heritage Commission (HDC/HC):

Jennifer Becker
Carolyn Singer

Durham Human Rights Commission:

Richard Belshaw
Janet Perkins-Howland (Attending remotely via zoom)

Durham Historic Association:

Steve Eames
Janet Mackie

New Hampshire Division of Historical Resources (NHDHR):

Amy Dixon, Community Preservation Coordinator
Nadine Miller, Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer

New Hampshire Department of Transportation (NHDOT):

Sheila Charles, Cultural Resources Program Specialist/ Archeologist
Jill Edelmann, Cultural Resources Manager

New Hampshire Commission on Native American Affairs:

Anne Jennison, Chair (Attending remotely on zoom)

Indigenous New Hampshire Collaborative Collective and Cowasuck Band of the Pennacook Abenaki People:

Denise Pouliot, Head Female Speaker of the Penacook Abenaki People

ALSO PRESENT: Durham Town Planner Michael Behrendt

1 **I. Welcome**

2 Chair Larry Brickner-Wood opened the meeting at 4:00 p.m., welcomed everyone
3 and then turned the meeting over to Barbara Will of Montgomery Will.
4

5 **II. Introductions**

6 Ms. Will and her colleague Charlotte Bacon are here to facilitate the discussion
7 about the Oyster River marker. She’s a Dartmouth College Professor and Vice
8 Provost of Academic Affairs.
9

10 Ms. Bacon introduced herself as a former tenured English Professor at UNH. She’s
11 currently a novelist and Assistant Vice Provost for Research and Development at
12 Dartmouth College. Prior to that, she was Director of the Maine Wabanaki State
13 Child Welfare Truth and Reconciliation Commission – a human rights effort of
14 people who felt strongly children had been taken from reservations and lands and
15 put into foster care at disproportionate rates.

16 Ms. Bacon said the goal with the upcoming sessions is “to think about how we can
17 listen to one another in order to arrive at next steps.” This is a consultative process,
18 meant to inform those who will make the decision about the plaque. The group
19 should consider how to do this humanely, with compassion, kindness and as much
20 historical accuracy as possible.

21 Participants were then invited to introduce themselves and give a brief background.
22

23 **III. Overview of Meeting Goals – Charlotte Bacon and Barbara Will of
24 Montgomery Will**
25

26 Ms. Bacon outlined the goals for the next three meetings, which were developed in
27 discussion with Larry Brickner-Wood and Michael Behrendt:

- 28 • Develop consensus around language for new Oyster River Raid Marker.
- 29 • If not possible to develop new language in three meetings, then lay the
30 groundwork and process for continuing to develop consensus.
- 31 • Establish a framework and model for other similar conversations regarding the
32 Town’s history – for Durham or other communities;
- 33 • To be in conversation with each other; break down barriers;

- 34 • Create, build and shape grounds for respect, trust and empathy.

35 **IV. Ground Rules and Process**

36 Ms. Will said the group will follow facilitator rules to “step up and stand back,” i.e.,
37 everyone is encouraged to step up and say what they need to say and then stand back
38 and let others come forward. She encouraged speakers to leave space between
39 comments.

40 She noted the first meeting is to “aerate issues; be able to talk and hear each other;
41 understand differing perspectives.” The second session is to develop possible
42 solutions over what is heard today. The third session is to develop consensus around
43 language for the marker.

44 **V. Discussion**

45 Ms. Bacon then opened the discussion with some questions: Why are you here? What
46 do you hope to accomplish through these meetings? What do you hope is the
47 outcome?

48
49 **Nadine Miller (NH Division of Historical Resources)** said her agency partners with
50 the NH-DOT on the marker program. She read a drafted statement explaining the
51 origins of the program and the impetus for the recent review of markers, including
52 the following points:

- 53 • This review is part of a national movement to re-examine the interpretation of
54 history and to reckon with difficult histories.
55
56 • The state established a Historical Marker Advisory Committee in 2020 – with
57 cultural resources staff from several state agencies. The impetus for the Committee
58 was an executive order from the Governor seeking to establish more diversity,
59 equity and inclusion in NH.
60
61 • Committee members reviewed existing markers for lack of historical context, or
62 references that could be perceived as inappropriate and developed a plan to address
63 the identified markers.
64
65 • Markers were identified for the following reasons: someone is left out (due to
66 religion, race, class, political party); The marker represents a one-sided history; is
67 racially insensitive; uses derogatory language or lacks context.

- 68 • Durham’s marker #50 was one of the few high priority markers designated for
69 retirement or revision and the only one removed in 2021 where the community
70 expressed interest in revising the text.
71
- 72 • The purpose of the marker program is to educate the public about NH’s history. It’s
73 grounded in scholarship and interpretation, which can change over time as new
74 information is uncovered or cultural shifts occur.
75
- 76 • The Advisory Committee researched what other states are doing. The American
77 Association of State and Local History has an excellent website and they’re hosting
78 a virtual symposium in March titled, “Doing History in Polarizing Times.”
79

80 **Jill Edelman (DOT/Cultural Resources Manager)** said in the 1950s, there were no
81 cultural resources staff members. She’s here to work with the Division of Historical
82 Resources and others on the best possible outcome.

83 **Anne Jennison (NH Commission on Native American Affairs)** noted that the
84 Commission on Native American Affairs was invited to participate in the Historical
85 Marker Advisory Committee. She added it’s heartening to see people come together here
86 to listen to one another.

87 **Carolyn Singer (Durham Historic District/Heritage Commission)** said she’s heard
88 remarks that this could serve as a model; however, in her view, there seem to be
89 inconsistencies in the process. The state hasn’t provided any guidelines for how the
90 revision of markers should be undertaken.

91 **Janet Mackie (Durham Historic Association/DHA)** said the Oyster River marker was
92 sponsored by the DHA in 1965 and revised around 1992. The Association recognizes it
93 needs to be updated, but inquiries to the state about their specific objections have been
94 unanswered. DHA volunteers have conducted a great deal of research recently to include
95 translation of French records, adding to the original research using English records.
96 They submitted draft language to the state in March 2023, but have not heard back.

97 **Steve Eames (Durham Historic Association)** said the time period on the marker is his
98 area of research. He envisions a small road sign that invites people to do further research
99 on their own.

100 **Richard Belshaw (Durham Human Rights Commission)** previously introduced
101 himself as a pastor at a Portsmouth church that shares responsibility for a slave burial
102 ground. He noted it’s difficult to accurately portray war, atrocities and suffering.
103 Recently, his church used ground-penetrating radar on the burial site and discovered
104 more bodies than originally believed. He asked how to portray history accurately and
105 fairly with 300 years of hindsight.

106 **Sheila Charles (NH-DOT/Cultural Resources)** said, “We’ve all been struggling with
107 how we can improve our markers.” Thus far there haven’t been a lot of guidelines,
108 which is why the group began meeting. There’s a lot of work to be done, which has to be
109 balanced with other DOT work demands.

110 **Janet Perkins-Howland (Durham Human Rights Commission)** said this marker has a
111 big impact, even though it’s small. Words do matter.

112 **Denise Pouliot (Member of the Cowasuck Band and Indigenous New Hampshire
113 Collaborative Collective)** said her presence here is to be sure the indigenous history of
114 the past is included in the signs. The signs have been constructed from a Colonial
115 perspective. She added that she participated in the Advisory Panel.

116 **Carolyn Singer** quoted briefly from the NH Historical marker policy stating that
117 verification of facts is necessary. Part of this process, she said, is coming to agreement
118 over what happened [in 1694]. While the Durham Historic Association has provided
119 sources for their draft language, she hasn’t seen any of the state’s sources. She requested
120 that sources be provided for both sides. **Mr. Belshaw** echoed this request and asked if
121 the information could be shared before the next meeting.

122 **Ms. Bacon** reflected on how long it might take to pull something like that together and if
123 there’s enough time and human power. While it’s an admirable goal, she said it’s also
124 very labor intensive. She suggested documentation could be sought if needed to justify a
125 different direction for the language on the sign. She said, “I think what you’re asking for
126 is hard for people to do.”

127 **Ms. Singer** noted new language has already been suggested and there should be
128 documents made available to back up that narrative.

129 **Nadine Miller** replied the state will share their narratives. Responding to Ms. Mackie’s
130 earlier point that Durham Historic Association never heard back from the state after
131 submitting draft language, she said there was a formal response sent.

132 The DHR proposed to set aside revision of the Oyster River marker until it could be
133 considered simultaneously with mitigation for removal of the Oyster River Dam – but
134 that suggestion was unpopular with the town so it was tabled. That’s one reason this
135 meeting is now taking place. She added DHR wants to hear what the town is interested
136 in doing. There might be new tools available and possibly oral histories could be brought
137 into the process.

138 **Ms. Will** reflected that while wording for the sign is ultimately the decision of the state,
139 they are looking to the town to understand how to talk about this event and its context.
140 She added, “If we do this well, this is a model for how to do this kind of work.”

141 **Janet Mackie** said typically if text needs to be revised it would fall to the original
142 sponsor of the sign, which in this case was the Durham Historic Association. She
143 explained the town appointed DHA to take the lead and negotiate new wording with the
144 state. She's shocked to learn the DHR response was to fold consideration of the marker in
145 with a federally-required 106 Dam mitigation project and added that DHA never got
146 feedback about the new sources they provided or the new proposed language.

147 **Durham Town Planner Michael Behrendt** said while the group could spend a lot of
148 time deliberating what happened in the early review process, he doesn't think that's the
149 best use of their time. In his view, everybody operated in good faith. He encouraged the
150 group to focus on working toward a solution.

151 **Ms. Bacon** acknowledged a certain amount of frustration expressed by both sides – from
152 Durham and the state. She encouraged participants to think about this with a clean slate
153 and emphasized the town has now been entrusted to take part in a consultative process.
154 She said there may be other ways besides a marker to commemorate what happened.

155 **Janet Perkins-Howland** asked what is the purpose of the marker. She wonders if there
156 are opportunities to turn it into something educational that celebrates history.

157 **Nadine Miller** replied the purpose is to educate the public about NH's history. The
158 marker program isn't designed to "elevate a story to a higher level." She suggested there
159 may be other ways to expand the story -- possibly with an exhibit at the Historic
160 Association or through a partnership with UNH.

161 **Mr. Behrendt** commented that this was a painful event for the community and he thinks
162 there's a need to recognize it.

163 **Richard Belshaw** said one of the purposes of the signs is to make something real to the
164 reader. They're standing on the ground where this particular history happened, which can
165 be very powerful. He believes we're remembering this because it's significant in the
166 identification of who we are as Americans. How do these markers speak to the soul of
167 who we are?

168
169 **Ms. Bacon** reflected on this last point and said the goal is to honor not to blame. She
170 encouraged the group to look at replacement signs in Maine. They've made a concerted
171 effort over the last decade to replace signage that was discriminatory, particularly toward
172 the Abenaki people. Maine produced a lot of programming and also did research on how
173 Nazi Germany recognized traumatic events.

174
175 **Ms. Will** said the Germans have a phrase: "We don't use adjectives when we talk about
176 the past." She noted Durham's plaque has the word "devastating" and raised a question

177 about the use of the word. She asked Denise Pouliot about the importance of the
178 continuity of memories.

179 **Ms. Pouliot** replied that as a tribe they seek to rectify some of the one-sided stories that
180 are being shared, by including some of the indigenous narratives that came down through
181 oral tradition.

182 She then turned back to a comment from Janet Mackie, who had shared earlier that the
183 Durham Historic Association never saw the proposed language for the sign from the
184 Department of Historical Resources (DHR).

185 Ms. Pouliot offered to read the text to the group. After brief discussion with Ms. Bacon
186 about this, she proceeded to read the original text and then the version as modified by the
187 DHR. **[The language is available on the town website: [ci.durham.nh.us/ Historic](http://ci.durham.nh.us/Historic)
188 [District/Heritage Commission/ Current Projects Before the HDC/ Oyster River](http://ci.durham.nh.us/Historic)
189 [Massacre Marker.](http://ci.durham.nh.us/Historic)]**

190 As Chair of the NH Commission on Native American Affairs, **Anne Jennison** clarified
191 that there is no Commission version of the text. They did not propose a new draft, but
192 they did see what DHR brought forward.

193 **Ms. Will** said the hope is that participants will do some homework for meeting #2. At
194 that time, perhaps the different versions can be discussed. She asked where people feel
195 they need more information to be able to talk about the plaques.

196 **Richard Belshaw** said he has a copy of the *History of Durham* and has seen what is on
197 Wikipedia. He's looking to learn more about what scholars think and to look at basic
198 facts.

199 **Steve Eames** said the group needs to arrive at a consensus about what happened at the
200 event in order to come up with language for the sign. Rather than restricting themselves
201 to the proposed language, the group needs to think about or accept other possibilities
202 about what happened.

203 **Ms. Singer** reiterated her earlier request for sources to be provided. She said narratives
204 have been put forward, but there has to be something behind them.

205 **Anne Jennison** gave some historical context for the event. She said what happened in
206 Durham to the Colonists was a tragic, violent incident during one war. Current
207 scholarship places the incident within the context of King Williams War but also places it
208 in a much larger context of well over 100 years of war. "It amounts to the English here
209 and French to the north fighting to take over and invade the land of the indigenous people
210 by incredibly violent means."

211 Ms. Jennison continued that what happened at Oyster River was important to the people
212 who were impacted by the loss of life and property, but overall was a blip. It occurred on
213 unceded land in the midst of more than five wars. The French and Indian War was the
214 ultimate battle. This was one moment in 100 or more years of those kinds of moments.
215 The English took certain actions to reduce the Abenaki population, which, of course,
216 made the Abenaki people incredibly angry. She added that history is written by the
217 winners, which is why we have French and English documents that don't reflect the
218 Abenaki experience.

219 **Ms. Will** asked if Ms. Jennison could provide sources for this information so it can be
220 posted on the town website before the next meeting.

221 **Jennifer Becker (HDC/HC)** remarked this uncovers an interesting aspect of the process.
222 While the original event was an "us vs. them vs. them" event, there's now an opportunity
223 to let go of the "us vs. them" viewpoint. This history belongs to all of us, not just New
224 Hampshire.

225 **Janet Perkins-Howland** agreed with what Anne Jennison said about context. She's
226 deeply worried that a marker like this can cause more harm than good and she re-stated
227 her earlier question: What's the original purpose of the marker?

228 **Ms. Will** posed a question to the group: Is putting back the plaque a done deal?

229 **Nadine Miller** said plaques were typically the only way to talk about history in the
230 1950s. Since the establishment of the National Register of Historic Places, however,
231 there's an opportunity to talk about historic sites in a more thorough way. DHR is open-
232 minded about the outcome of this discussion. The plaque doesn't need to go back. If it
233 does, however, the state wants a more inclusive approach. She said DHR doesn't initiate
234 markers; it's typically done by sponsors. They look to communities to let them know
235 what's important.

236 **Ms. Will** asked if anybody would like to consider what would happen if the sign didn't
237 go back.

238 **Steve Eames** replied he would like to encourage the sign from a selfish early American
239 historian perspective. He added there's a general lack of knowledge among everyday
240 Americans about what happened in the 150 years between the pilgrims' landing and the
241 American Revolution. Most people don't know about King Williams War or 17th century
242 indigenous culture. He thinks the sign should be worded so people are encouraged to
243 want to learn more.

244 **Amy Dixon** commented that the National Preservation Act was passed in 1966, which
245 required mitigation for certain projects. While the markers initially were an "easy out" for

246 NH DOT to achieve mitigation, she said the department is now more likely to use
247 interpretive panels, much like what you'd see on a walking trail or bike path. Graphics
248 and QR codes can be used, compared to snippets on small markers. She's not advocating
249 for or against markers, but said there are a lot of ways to tell history and do mitigation.

250 **Denise Pouliot** said she wants to caution people about having too much signage in one
251 location. The dam removal project might involve installation of a kiosk and now there's
252 talk of adding a sign. She said it would be nice to go to the park and actually see the park
253 and not just an array of signage. People should keep in mind how they want the site to
254 look at the end of all of this.

255 **Ms. Will** asked if **Ms. Pouliot** is saying the plaque doesn't need to be there and Ms.
256 Pouliot replied they've proposed virtual reality, which could be in the form of an app.
257 She said her group is trying to push the town into the next generation of technology, so
258 that residents and visitors can "feel and experience" [history] at the same time.

259 **Ms. Bacon** asked if there are other suggestions to replace the plaque.

260 **Janet Perkins-Howland** noted the town has an amazing number of resources, including
261 the library, the museum and UNH. There are so many possibilities for education.

262

263 **VI. Summary of Discussion and Plan for Meeting #2**

264

265 **Ms. Will** remarked that when she's undertaken this work with other communities, people
266 get excited about alternative ways of honoring their past. It could be art exhibits or a
267 lecture series. A plaque seems to be a fairly limited way of grasping Durham's history.

268

269 She suggested this might be a natural stopping point in the discussion. The group has
270 aired thoughts about the process and shared some gaps in knowledge. There's some
271 homework for participants before the next meeting: to look at the original language of the
272 plaque and the proposed revisions, including the sources provided by the Durham
273 Historic Association. She noted there's an excellent book by Colin Calloway and also
274 oral history sources.

275 **VII. Adjournment**

276 With no further discussion, Chair Larry Brickner-Wood adjourned the meeting at
277 5:42 p.m.

278

279 Respectfully submitted,
280 Lucie Bryar, Minute Taker
281 Durham Heritage Commission