

OYSTER RIVER MASSACRE MARKER – Roundtable Discussion

Thursday, March 21, 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

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

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

ABSENT: Jill Edelmann (NHDOT, Cultural Resources Manager)

I. Welcome

Chair Larry Brickner-Wood opened the meeting at 4:00 p.m. and welcomed participants.

II. Recap of Meeting Two

Barbara Will expressed thanks to all for listening and engaging in the process. She noted historic accountability isn't easy and commended the group for spending six hours addressing 14 lines of text, weighing every word.

She said, "You're modeling how to do this kind of 'careful excavation of history,' which is also courageous because not everyone in the room agrees. You're showing that history matters and is at the core of a strong community."

Charlotte Bacon gave a brief recap of what was discussed at the first two meetings. She emphasized the group is serving in an advisory role to the state.

Today, they will consider four new versions of the text. The goal is to decide what they like about each version and see if they can be combined into a single marker. Ms. Bacon said they don't need to get every detail right, but to give the NH DOT the best possible version to work with.

She asked participants, "How do you want your community to be reflected in the text and tone of the marker?"

III. Discussion of Template – Appropriate Drafts of Plaque

Ms. Bacon invited those who had submitted draft texts to each read their own version to the group. She will take notes on-screen about what participants like/don't like about each draft.

[NOTE: Draft texts are available on the town website at Historic District Commission/Heritage Commission/ Current Projects Before the HDC/Oyster River Massacre Marker.]

Richard Belshaw (Durham Human Rights Commission) read his draft, prefacing it by saying some of the information is in brackets because he's not sure of word choice and/or dates.

Comments on Mr. Belshaw's draft:

Jennifer Becker said she likes that it incorporates many points from earlier versions and thinks it's very cohesive.

Janet Perkins-Howland remarked, "I love how it tells a story."

Denise Pouliot supports the idea of naming Indigenous people specifically. The New Hampshire Commission on Native American Affairs debated including tribal names in their draft but left them out because of space considerations. She would like to see them included.

Consensus was reached that it's important to include specific Indigenous tribal names on the marker.

Steve Eames then read the version that he and Janet Mackie drafted.

He believes the title, "Oyster River is Layd Waste" is attention-grabbing; and has power because it's taken from original documents.

Comments on Mr. Eames and Ms. Mackie's Draft:

Ms. Will raised the question about the specificity of number of people killed and captured; buildings burned, etc. that appears in Mr. Belshaw's draft but is not present in this one. Is it important? Ms. Mackie said historical records are not exact and it's uncertain how many people died.

Mr. Belshaw said using round numbers in the absence of accurate numbers is a flaw that can easily be corrected. He questioned the use of the chiefs' names Bomazeen and Madockawando. Is it crucial to have their names included?

Steve Eames said both chiefs are searchable on the internet and **Janet Mackie** added that Madockawando was on par with Passaconaway, in her opinion.

Anne Jennison agreed it's important to include their names as a matter of education. She said both Bomazeen and Madockawando were signers on several major peace treaties.

Jennifer Becker added that with limited space, leaving a "tangible breadcrumb for people to research further" is important.

Agreement was reached to include the names of the Wabanaki chiefs.

Ms. Will then asked if the person who sent the dispatch should be named and the consensus was that person's name isn't critical. The point is the village communicated with the government in Boston.

Carolyn Singer was then invited to read her draft for the plaque.

Comments on Ms. Singer's Draft:

Mr. Eames said his only issue is it's trying to do too much in a small sign. It's either about this raid and its consequences or it's about injustices done to all Indigenous people. It's too much for one sign without detracting from the story.

Richard Belshaw agreed and said the last sentence doesn't connect as well with the rest of it.

Ms. Will asked about the word choice: "stronghold vs. settlement?"

Ms. Mackie said Oyster River wasn't a stronghold because they weren't prepared for being attacked. Three garrisons were abandoned because they had no gun powder.

There was group wordsmithing over the use of the word, "town" or "village" and how to phrase the numbers affected by the attack.

Ms. Mackie said it's critically important to mention the peace treaty, since in her view that was the only reason for the attack. She pointed out the Wabanaki had no grievance against the inhabitants of Oyster River. Their sole purpose was to break the treaty.

Janet Perkins-Howland was then invited to read her version. She added a timeline for the back side of the marker, which she said needs editing. Her "side one" version includes the line, "Truth and reconciliation are ongoing."

Comments on Ms. Perkins-Howland Draft:

Several participants expressed enthusiasm for a timeline. **Jennifer Becker** said it's a good way to include a lot more information and give it context. It mirrors where Americans are going with their consumption of information: shorter bullets instead of bigger blocks of text. She thinks it will age well.

Steve Eames pointed out a couple of factual issues with the timeline. He emphasized there were two wars going on, which is one of the reasons the attack happened. The second Anglo-Abenaki War began in 1688 and

continued to 1699. The proposed timeline shows the dates of King Williams War.

Ms. Bacon said the timeline is anchored in the fact that Abenaki were on this land 12,800 years ago and finishes with Durham being the first NH community to recognize Indigenous Peoples Day. Her one concern with ending the timeline with Indigenous People's Day is that it might imply the town is finished with its work.

Mr. Eames suggested moving "Truth and Reconciliation is ongoing" to the timeline instead of the narrative and there was general agreement over the idea.

Ms. Mackie reiterated that the Peace Treaty needs to be added to the timeline. Discussion continued over the wording on the timeline and then Mr. Eames said he had prepared a different version of the timeline that might help clarify some of the issues. He distributed copies to the group.

He pointed out the Treaty of 1693 brought a pause/peace to the Anglo-Abenaki War, but it didn't bring peace to the French-English War and that's why the French did what they did.

There was discussion about the line – "**1732 - Town of Durham incorporated**" (on Janet-Perkins-Howland draft timeline). Should it be included? What's the relevance to the raid? After brief discussion, it was decided to leave it in.

Getting back to the topic of how to include the two wars and the breaking of the treaty, Ms. Bacon asked what critical factor emerged from the wars that led to settlers being killed? Mr. Eames replied the timeline isn't designed to stand alone. It's meant to work with the narrative on the other side – which he believes addresses those questions.

Ms. Will said in the interest of time, the specific wording on the timeline can't be finalized today. She strongly encouraged the state to take into account the notes from this roundtable discussion.

Ms. Pouliot commented that it's inaccurate to say the Wabanaki "broke the treaty." She said the attack was in response to Europeans continuing with land encroachment after they'd signed the treaty. "We didn't actually break the treaty; this raid was in response to the treaty being broken."

Ms. Mackie asked for proof of this and **Ms. Pouliot** said evidence for the stealing of land is in the English records.

Mr. Eames added that Madockawando wanted to keep the peace but the French used taxes and the consensus system to break him down. They did not want the Wabanaki to be at peace. He said there's little proof the Wabanaki knew what the word "treaty" meant, in terms of how we think of it as a legal document today.

He noted the French gave the Wabanaki gunpowder and muskets, while the English only offered to teach them how to read. The French were successful at getting the Wabanaki to "break the treaty" because they understood the consensus system better than the English.

With ten minutes remaining for this part of the discussion, Ms. Will asked if anyone wanted to support one of the four versions presented today.

General consensus was expressed for the draft from Steve Eames and Janet Mackie, titled: "Oyster River is Layd Waste." There was consensus to include a timeline on the other side of the marker to give it context, using Janet Perkins-Howland modified draft as a starting point.

There was discussion over the use of the word "encroachment," but it was decided it could be used as an educational opportunity.

Ms. Pouliot again said she has issue with the wording, "the French had convinced them to break the 1693 treaty," proposed on the timeline.

Ms. Singer said historian and author Colin Calloway talks a lot about the concept of treaties and questions whether there was understanding of treaties [among the Wabanaki].

Ms. Mackie added the French thought it was a legitimate treaty and Ms. Bacon said if the concern is noted, it will be helpful to the state.

Mr. Belshaw said through the Human Rights Commission lens, this has been a positive experience. He believes the state has good fodder to work with.

IV. Discussion of Placement of Plaque – Pros and Cons

Ms. Will asked about where the old plaque was and why that location had been chosen. Participants offered that it's a visible spot in town. It was clarified the raid didn't take place on that spot, but rather up and down the Oyster River all the way to Little Bay.

When asked how locations are generally chosen, **Sheila Charles** replied there are many different reasons for choosing a location. In this case, she thinks near the Oyster River makes sense. It has to be in a state right-of-way.

Ms. Will asked why this type of sign would be placed in a “gateway to the town.” Is that what people want others to see coming into town?

Town Administrator **Todd Selig** came forward to address the question about the location for the marker. He believes it was originally in a different location but isn't sure why it was moved. He thinks there are a lot of good reasons for it to be in that spot:

- It's near a major highway, which ensures more people see it.
- It's also near a sidewalk that leads to downtown.
- That location really was the original heart and center of Durham.
- This event occurred up and down the river, so one location isn't better than another.

He added the proposed location isn't the first marker you see coming into Durham, there are welcome markers at different spots from all directions.

Janet Perkins-Howland said she's hoping this marker will be in conjunction with several other things the town can do in that area. She talked about a garrison home and a trail and said, “the possibilities are endless.”

Carolyn Singer asked if the town could have the opportunity to review the final text before the state sends it to the foundry.

Denise Pouliot offered a broader view for the timeline. She envisions a more comprehensive town history on the huge fence running along the river. Everything should be taken into consideration for the site, including what will be done as part of the 106 mitigation for removal of the dam.

Amy Dixon said the consulting parties will meet next week about the 106 mitigation and discuss a broader plan for the site. There's no set idea for what those signs could be.

V. Possible Next Steps for Town in Light of This Process

Ms. Bacon invited participants to share some suggestions for how Durham can move forward beyond the marker. What are ideas for activities and experiences people could share?

Janet Perkins-Howland asked if she could share some ideas she developed. In terms of “truth and reconciliation,” she proposed the town of Durham set aside one-half of one percent of its operating budget (an estimated \$75K) toward “truth and reconciliation.” How it should be spent is a separate conversation among many groups, including the Historic District Commission, Land Stewardship Committee, the Conservation Commission, Human Rights Commission and others.

She proposed focus groups to discuss historic walking tours, Indigenous People’s Day, exhibits, etc. and asked, “How do we continue to educate visitors and residents about the history?” She would like to see businesses involved and proposed a program called “Pints of History” at Tideline [Public House].

Ms. Bacon noted Janet’s bold proposal to have the town fund the programs, but added there may be grant monies available for many of the activities she suggested.

Jennifer Becker proposed the town create a website with digitized historic resources, to make it more accessible. Ms. Bacon said NEH grants and Library of Congress grants exist for that purpose.

Ms. Will asked if there should be an annual event that commemorates the Oyster River Raid.

Janet Mackie said the Durham Historic Association is considering having a program about Madockawando and other Indigenous people, not only those involved in the massacre.

Ms. Becker suggested audio recordings, modeled on what the WPA did with formerly enslaved people, as something to consider.

Steve Eames asked state participants what the process is for the sign going forward. **Mr. Behrendt** stepped in and said he would like to propose everyone on the roundtable from Durham have a few more meetings. He thinks they could come up with language that is more finalized before sending it to the state.

Ms. Bacon said it would be respectful for the state to send the text to the group before it goes to the foundry. She’s more interested in the next step beyond the sign and encouraged residents to debate about their vision for the town.

Mr. Belshaw said in all of this he has seen great value in speaking up, being open and listening. He sees Durham as a welcoming place where people can speak to each other.

Carolyn Singer directed a comment to town leaders. She said the Wagon Hill farm site incorporates all of the town's history, including indigenous settlement. A new barn there hasn't yet been finalized for programming. Right now it's sitting vacant and being used by Public Works, but she would like to see it become operational for programming.

Ms. Will commented on the opportunity for the town to incorporate its broader history, apart from the terrible event of the massacre, at a site like Wagon Hill. Rethinking the town's history around a site (like Wagon Hill) makes sense.

Ms. Singer added the opportunity also exists at Wagon Hill for a changing exhibit gallery space.

Larry Brickner-Wood asked Sheila, Nadine and Amy (from the state) if they have enough information from today's notes to move forward and **Amy Dixon** replied that she believes they do. They'll send draft text for final review by the group.

Sheila Charles responded further to Steve Eames' earlier question about the process going forward to have a new sign installed. She said after meeting with the traffic department this week, they learned there's no definitive budget for state plaques. Timing is dependent on maintenance of existing signs.

A priority list will be set-up (statewide) which tells them which signs are in poor condition and unsafe. Durham's new sign will be put in the database. There's no promise it will be three months from now.

She then offered a few general tips for any signs going forward, based on observations around the state:

- Include more mention of women and different ethnicities.
- Include black history, since Durham has a story to tell.
- Think about branding signs so they are recognizable as being part of this specific community.

Janet Mackie said the DHR website showed in 2021 the cost for one of these signs was \$2,500. She asked DHR about the current price.

Amy Dixon said she doesn't have an exact price but thinks it's still in that ballpark. Ms. Mackie said her understanding is the state can pay for the sign or the community can find a sponsor to cover costs and this was confirmed.

Wrapping up the roundtable discussions, Ms. Bacon thanked everyone for the time together, on behalf of herself and Ms. Will. She thanked Larry Brickner-Wood and Michael Behrendt for inviting them to facilitate the conversations. She also thanked Todd Selig for supporting the process and expressed huge thanks to the state for their willingness to consult with the community.

She thanked all participants who came together to find a way to move forward. She said it's important to get the words right. She said "thank you" in English, Wabanaki and French. Since the town seems committed to ongoing truth and reconciliation, she and Ms. Will are confident Durham has a vision to move forward.

VII. Adjournment

With no further discussion, Chair Larry Brickner-Wood adjourned the meeting at 5:54 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Lucie Bryar, Minute Taker

Durham Heritage Commission

These minutes were not approved by the Roundtable members.