

Durham Historic District Commission

ARTICLE XVII

DURHAM HISTORIC OVERLAY DISTRICT

175-90. Purpose.

This article establishes a Historic Overlay District (HOD) in the Town of Durham pursuant to RSA 673:4 and 674:45 through 674:50. *The purpose of the HOD is to preserve and promote the historic, cultural, educational, economic, and general welfare of the community by:*

Protecting and preserving structures, places, and properties that reflect elements of the cultural, social, economic, and political heritage of the town;

Promoting the preservation, restoration, rehabilitation, and adaptive reuse of structures and places of historical, architectural, and community value as well as vistas of significance within the HOD;

Protecting Historical Character

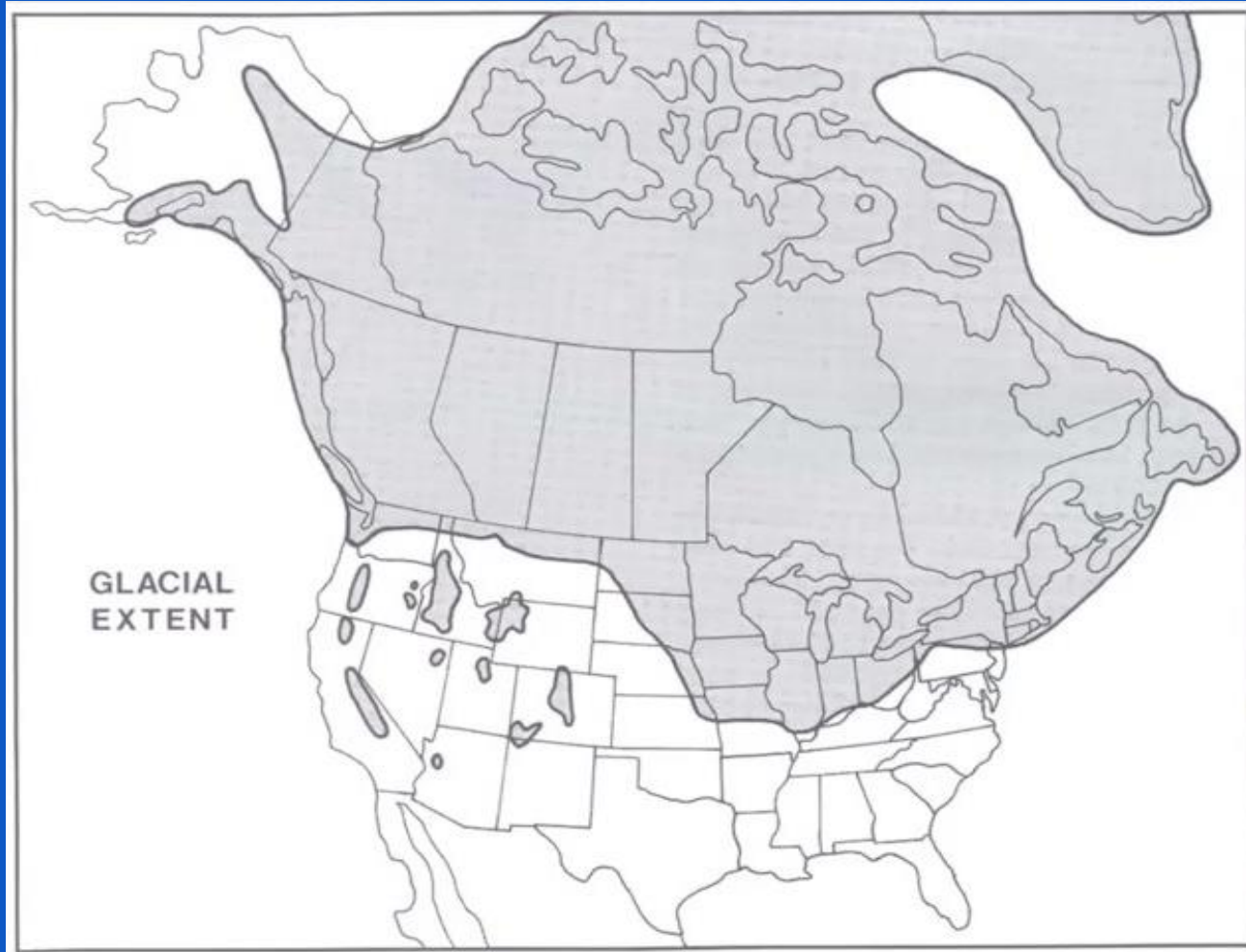


Stone walls are iconic markers of Durham's past.

Key to identifying and protecting stone walls is understanding their authenticity: the where, when and why they were created.

Recognize the beauty of what is present, the unique skill and craftsmanship it took to originally create them.

Three Factors Converging to Create Stone Walls



Glaciers

As glaciers formed, advanced, and retreated, their immense weight ripped up bedrock and soil. Incorporated into the glaciers, it was subsequently deposited as till.

Source: *Threads Through the Landscape: Stone Walls*, Webinar, Leigh Schoberth, Historic New England.

Geological Formations



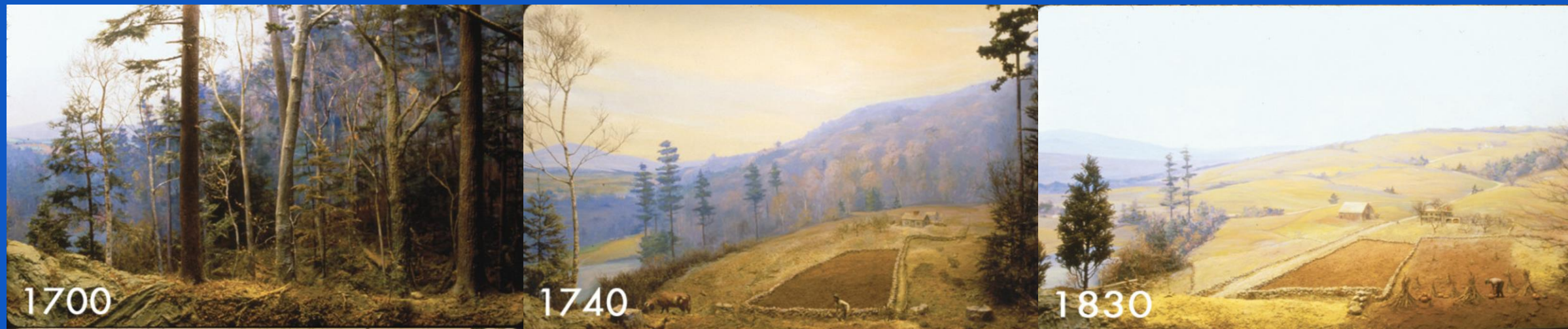
Geological formations tend to affect types of stones found in a specific location.

The mid-west tends to have limestone that is soft and can be more easily crushed into small particles.

While in New England we have hard irregular bedrock with granite stones strong enough to resist the crushing weight of glaciers.

Source: *Threads Through the Landscape: Stone Walls, Webinar*, Leigh Schoberth, *Historic New England*; and <https://geologictimepics.com/> 1979 US Geological Survey

Deforestation (which can lead to soil erosion)



- Trees help land retain water and top soil; without forests soil is eroded and washed away.
- The erosion of top soil exposes the subsoil to colder temperatures, resulting in a deeper freeze of groundwater that accelerates frost heaves.
- The upward swelling of the soil during freezing conditions (caused by the increasing presence of ice) pushes stones upward.

Source: *Threads Through the Landscape: Stone Walls, Webinar, Leigh Schoberth, Historic New England.*

Reforestation



By the mid-to-late 19th century, New England was 60 - 80% deforested. But, by the end of the century industrialization and large-scale farming caused thousands of small farms to be abandoned and reforestation began.

Source: <https://harvardforest.fas.harvard.edu/diorama-series/landscape-history-central-new-england>

Purpose of Stone Walls



Why: Primarily to define boundaries and contain animals. Also “disposal piles.”

Who: The stone walls in the Durham Historic District were built by land owners, farmers, indentured servants, or enslaved people.

When: Most were built between 1750 and 1864, with construction of stone walls for agricultural uses ending at the end of the 19th century.

The Town Pound was built on exposed bedrock in 1808 and replaced an earlier structure built in 1709.

Historic Stone Walls are Functional: Land Use, Farming Practices, Village Life



Historic Stone Walls Mark Land Boundaries, Confine Animals to a Pasture



Authenticity and Historical Character

Historic Districts throughout the United States are guided by the Secretary of the Interior Preservation Standards which state:

The historical character of a property will be retained and preserved. *The removal of distinctive materials or alternation of features, spaces, and spatial relationships that characterize a property will be avoided.*

Each property will be recognized as a physical record of its time, place, and use. *Changes that create a false sense of historical development, such as adding conjectural features or elements from other historic properties, will not be undertaken.*

To Maintain Historical Character

The creation of unauthentic or conjectural stone walls in the Historic District undermines and changes its historical character.

Emphasize the beauty of what is present, rather than detracting from the Historic District through the addition of features reflecting modern style or taste

“It’s *Actually* Made of Historical Stuff”

“This district isn’t special just because it *looks* like it’s made of historic stuff. It’s special because it’s *actually* made of historic stuff. Anybody can make a neighborhood out of Hardie-board houses but only our forbearers can provide us with an authentic historic neighborhood.

When we allow for authentic details to be replaced, the district’s character gets nicked-and-dimed over time, and we slowly transform our real history into something less authentic and less meaningful.”

Appropriate to the Historic District

Stonewall construction utilizing local materials, and reflecting the characteristics of function, use, time period, and the people who created them is most appropriate in the historic district.

Some elements that are inappropriate include:

- Circular stonewalls in areas where rectangular stonewalls were commonly constructed.
- Building techniques “imported” from regions where different and distinct construction techniques were used.
- Utilization of stones that would be not found locally.
- Modern “estate gates” in rural, agricultural areas where 18th and 19th century buildings are predominant.

Stone Walls Not Appropriate to the Historic District



Stone Walls Making Gray Rectangles

“And although we may regret the darkening day, the beauty of late autumn is real and serious. With the leaves down, granite emerges from the hills, and everywhere we see again the hill’s true shape and the stonewalls that the ancestors built—to enclose their animals and to clear their fields of rocks—making gray rectangles on the gray hillsides.

From *Seasons at Eagle Pond*, a collection of essays written by Donald Hall, from his family farmhouse on New Hampshire’s Grafton Turnpike, and published in 1987 by Houghton Mifflin.