

New Hampshire Division of Historical Resources
1/18/2024

The New Hampshire Historical Highway Marker Program was created by the NH Legislature in 1955 with the first four markers installed in 1958. Upon the creation of the Division of Historical Resources in 1974, our office began cooperatively managing the program with the Department of Transportation. In the 66 years the program has been in existence it has grown to include 288 markers that have been installed in all corners of the state. The program has always been popular but has increased significantly since the publication of Michael Bruno's *Cruising New Hampshire History*, a guide to the roadside markers in 2018.

The growing popularity of the program, along with statewide and national initiatives to re-examine the interpretation of and reckoning with difficult histories and the emphasis on diversity, equity, and inclusion as a programmatic consideration across disciplines, led to the creation of the Historical Highway Marker Advisory Committee. The committee convened in 2020 with cultural resources staff from several state agencies. Over the course of a year, the committee members reviewed existing markers for lack of historical context or references that could be perceived as inappropriate and developed a plan in coordination with stakeholders to address the identified markers. Markers were identified for the following reasons, generally: someone is left out (i.e., religion, race, class, political party), represents a one-sided history, is racially insensitive, uses insulting or derogatory language, or lacks context. Ultimately, three markers were chosen for retirement for a variety of reasons, they are: Marker #36 in Bow (Andrew Jackson's Visit), #55 in Rumney (Baker River), and #85 in Raymond (Nottingham Chartered in 1722). Durham's marker #50 was noted as a high priority for retirement or revision and the only marker removed in 2021 where the community expressed interest in revising the text. To date, only one other marker has gone through a vetted revision process, which is Marker #78 in Rye (Odiorne's Point).

The purpose of the program is to educate the public about New Hampshire's history. The program is grounded in scholarship and interpretation, both of which can change over time. New information may be discovered, adding historic context or proving previous interpretations to be inaccurate; cultural shifts occur, meaning once-accepted references or interpretation become outdated. The DHR is committed to inclusive history with an emphasis on critical engagement with the past and the incorporation of new evidence and diverse perspectives. Using a range of sources and methods helps to incorporate new evidence and perspectives that lead to updated understandings of what happened historically. The study of history requires critical thinking beyond "just the facts" and evaluating many different perspectives. Markers are a powerful tool for teaching, acknowledging, and reconciling our history.

Resources:

Reframing History – AASLH

<https://aaslh.org/reframing-history/>

"Doing History in Polarized Times" [A virtual 2-day symposium, Feb. 8-9;]

<https://aaslh.org/annualconference/doing-history-summit/>