

From: Marjorie Smith <Marjorie.Smith@leg.state.nh.us>

Date: December 10, 2023 at 1:49:56 PM EST

To: sarah.i.stewrt@dncr.nh.gov

Cc: Todd Selig <tselig@ci.durham.nh.us>

Subject: Oyster River Massacre historic marker

Dear Commissioner,

Having represented Durham in the NH House since 1996, I have had relatively few situations in which I acted as an intermediary between the town and state government, always trying to find compromises while respecting the different roles of town and state.

I now find myself in a very different situation in which there are more than two principals (and principles) at play, and it is an uncomfortable role that causes me to write to you today.

In addition to representing Durham in the legislature, I am a long-term officer of the Durham Historic Association, and it is while wearing both hats that I have decided to pursue this matter with you today. I have copied Town Administrator Todd Selig on this email.

Here are the facts as I know them, understanding that others might have other views. I have tried to review DHR statutes and rules, and have had some difficulty matching departmental actions with legislative and administrative requirements.

DHR and the NHNAA historic marker review committee, without any discussion with the town or the Durham Historic Association (DHA) that had responsibility for the sign being placed, removed the marker. DHA inquired as to what the department found wrong -- historically inaccurate - with the original text on the marker.

DHA sent a draft text to DHR, and NHCNAA followed with their own draft text.

DHR directed DHA to research the historic event and to provide the department with source material to support a new version of the test.

On March 7, 2023, after extensive, documented research, DHA sent the detailed research and the draft text to the department. More than nine months have passed and DHR has not responded to the submission. I understand that the material was extensive and would take a commitment of time to review, but surely nine months is long enough. The sources were contemporaneous accounts of the British and the French representing the opposing sides in the war.

It is acknowledged that the indigenous people who were involved in the conflict were associated with the British and, absent, independent written records from the indigenous participants, we relied on their allies' accounts, many of which were supported by French documents.

While the Durham planning director notes that 'DHR has worked with several interested parties...', there has been no communication from the DHR or NDCNAA with the Durham Historic Association.

At the same time, Durham has been involved with NHDHR on another matter, removal of an historic dam. The dam was constructed hundreds of years after the Oyster River Massacre, and has no historical or geographic relationship to the earlier events. Nonetheless, Nadine Miller and Amy Dixon proposed the two events be conflated for purposes of current actions to be taken to memorialize the removal of the dam.

I regret that I have not had an opportunity to meet you or to work with you, but I can only imagine that you would not be holding the position you now occupy if you did not believe in the importance of historical accuracy. It is not, and must never be, our role to rewrite history. It is to document historical events to the best of our knowledge, to remain true to that accuracy, and to learn from that which has gone before.

To deny that history condemns us to relive it.

There is now a proposal to develop a consensus of interested parties, and NHDHR and NHDOT will be participating . In addition to the marker, the meetings will include efforts to explore "how the community might address broader related issues more effectively".

Perhaps I am wrong, but I fear that consensus might be based on an effort to not offend any particular group. That would unavoidably require a denial of history. In the past month we have been told by history deniers that slavery was good 'for the slaves because they were taught skills'. I cannot imagine that NHDHR would support such an effort to deny the reality of the injustice that was done, or to be blind to the importance of making sure we acknowledge those injustices so that we do not repeat them.

As a state representative, and as an officer of the Durham Historic Association that exists to educate the public about that which has gone before, I am having trouble understanding the decisions - or lack thereof- of the state department charged with protecting the integrity of our history.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Respectfully,

Marjorie Smith, Representative