

To the HDC, DHA, et. al.,


For another point of reference as we consider language for the Oyster River Raid sign, here is the poster (photographed in two parts here) that was installed in the Durham Post Office several years ago for the purpose of providing context for the 1959 murals in the post office, specifically the "Cruel Adversity" mural. It is interesting that that specific mural is not shown on this poster. See the very bottom paragraph in particular. I do not know who prepared this poster.

Pages from the Past, 1959
Bernard F. Chapman (1908–1993)

In 1959, the Woman's Club of Durham donated a 16-panel mural to the Durham Post Office, titled "Pages from the Past." The mural offers glimpses of the town's history as imagined by artist Bernard Chapman, a 1930 graduate of the University of New Hampshire.

On the adjacent wall, from left to right:
The first three panels of the mural depict the area's natural resources and its first English settlers, who arrived in 1623. The next panel, "Cruel Adversity" shows a Native American poised to attack a garrison. Settlers constructed fortified wooden structures, called garrisons or blockhouses, for use as protection during attacks by both the French and the Indians.

The next three panels of the mural show logging, a lumber mill, and the importance of the church to the town's early social life. The first meeting house was built on the south bank of the Oyster River in 1655.




The final panel on this wall, "Patriotic Valor," depicts a surprise raid by the colonists on the British Fort William and Mary near Portsmouth in 1774. The colonists confiscated the fort's gunpowder and arms and secreted them upriver to Durham, for later use in the Revolutionary War.

On the opposite wall, from left to right:
The first two panels on the opposite wall reflect the importance of early transportation routes to the town. "Gracious Hospitality" shows a stagecoach stop in Durham along the Boston–Dover route, which was established in 1792. "Technical Skill" shows the Piscataqua Bridge, which connected Durham with Newington. The half-mile long bridge was an engineering marvel when built in 1794.

The next two panels highlight the importance of education and communication to the town. The town's first public school was built in 1797. In 1795, Benjamin Thompson was appointed Durham's first Postmaster. "Native Ingenuity" shows a gondalow (or gondola), a type of flat-bottomed boat developed by settlers to haul cargo by river. ("Native" in the title of this panel refers to local settlers, not Native Americans.) "Relentless Progress," the following panel, heralds the arrival of the railroad, which revolutionized travel in the mid-19th century.

The final two panels of the mural highlight the continuing importance of religion and education to the town. "Steadfast Faith" depicts the Community Church of Durham, built in 1848. "Advancing Horizon" shows Thompson Hall, built in 1893 on land donated by Benjamin Thompson, Jr. It later became part of the University of New Hampshire.



Durham's Native American History in Perspective

Native Americans lived in present-day New Hampshire for countless generations before the arrival of Europeans. They called themselves the Wabanaki, or "people of the dawnland."

The Wabanaki were not a single tribe, but were many groups with similar customs who spoke dialects of the Algonquian language. In the warm part of the year, they lived in villages along rivers and lakes where they farmed and fished. In the winter, they broke into smaller family groups and traveled to hunt for food.

English settlers arrived in the region in the 1620s, soon after a series of deadly epidemics had devastated the native population. Initially, the settlers and surviving Wabanaki lived in relative peace and shared and traded resources. But as the colonists' settlements expanded, disputes over land use and ownership multiplied. Social, economic, political, and religious differences led to confusing confrontations. Profound cultural and language barriers impeded understanding. Escalating tensions erupted into sporadic warfare, characterized by a complex web of shifting alliances among colonists, Indians, and Indian leaders. It involved not just the Wabanaki and the English, but also their traditional rivals, the Iroquois and the French. From the start of King Philip's War in 1675, to the defeat of New France in 1760, periods of relative peace were punctuated by bloody skirmishes and surprise attacks.

These were difficult and cruel times, with atrocities committed by all sides. In 1676, Major Richard Waldron of Dover invited the local Wabanaki tribes to a peace conference. Hundreds answered his call — he double-crossed them. About 200 Indians were apprehended and sent to Boston; some were killed, while others were shipped to the Caribbean in slavery. Waldron's deadly deceit fueled the cycle of attack and reprisal. In 1694, around 250 Wabanaki warriors, aided by the French, attacked the colonial settlements near present-day Durham, killing or capturing about 100 people and setting fire to homes and crops. It was the most devastating Indian/French raid in New Hampshire.

Further reading:

Colin G. Calloway, editor, *Dawnland Encounters: Indians and Europeans in Northern New England*. Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1991.

Kenneth M. Morrison, *The Embattled Northeast: The Elusive Ideal of Alliance in Abenaki-Euroamerican Relations*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1984.

Alden T. Vaughan, editor, *New England Encounters: Indians and Euroamericans Ca. 1600-1850*. Boston, MA: Northeastern University Press, 1999.



The U.S. Postal Service has celebrated Native American history and culture on postage stamps since 1895. For further information, see the exhibit of the Smithsonian's National Postal Museum, "The American Indian in Stamps: Profiles in Leadership, Accomplishment and Cultural Celebration" at oprogram.edu. For a list of stamps issued, see "American Indian Subjects on United States Postage Stamps" at about.usps.com.

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