

Properties we preserve: Bedford Free Library ■ The Bedford Store ■ Court House
Historical Hall ■ Jackson House ■ Lounsbery Building ■ Post Office ■ School House
Two acres surrounding the Bedford Oak ■ Sutton Clock Tower

Bringing history to life

Welcome to Historic Bedford!

Recently you became one of many proud homeowners in the Town of Bedford. You are joining good company. In fact, the first Chief Justice of the United States Supreme Court and local resident, John Jay, wrote of Bedford in 1812 “perhaps no place can exhibit a larger proportion of orderly, industrious and well disposed citizens.”

Since that day in December of 1680, when twenty-two men walked inland from the shores of the Province of Connecticut with hope, ambition, courage, ingenuity, sacrifice and sweat to lay the strong foundation of our community, few have been able to resist the charms of Bedford. Many of our charms are derived from generation after generation of respectful citizens paying homage to our forebears; always mindful of our heritage, our foundation.

And it is one aspect of our strong foundation which we hope you find particularly charming - our beautiful, historic stone walls. To the uninitiated, our original stone walls may not seem orderly - but that is their beauty and their hallmark. Mainly built by farmers clearing their fields for tillage, Bedford's historic stone walls are not chiseled, they contain no mortar, rarely are they taller than three and a half feet, often their lines are not straight - yet they've endured hundreds of years!

If your property contains old stone walls, or if you plan to build a stone wall, we highly recommend further reading on the history behind Bedford's stone walls. *Sermons in Stone*, by local resident Susan Allport, is particularly fascinating and informative, as are the attached articles from the *Record-Review* and the *New York Times*.

We also welcome your interest and participation in the Bedford Historical Society. Enclosed is a membership card and return envelope. Please visit our website or stop by our office in the Bedford General Store on the Village Green for more information.

COMMUNITIES



Chris Maysard for The New York Times

An old stone wall on the John Jay Horrestead in Bedford, left, and right, a sharply chiseled new stone wall on Old Post Road in Bedford that critics say threatens the area's historic character.

Stone Walls of the Nouveau Riche and Famous

Seeing a Threat to Their Rural Character, Towns Like Lewisboro Want to Limit So-Called Greenwich Walls

By MARILYN SHAPIRO

IN northern Westchester, where traditional stone walls reflect the area's agricultural heritage, a different breed of wall has started to appear.

Sharply chiseled and assembled with mortar, these stone walls have slowly replaced the soft, rounded walls — pieced together like jigsaw puzzles without any mortar — that have run through the fields and along these country roads for centuries.

Nicknamed "Greenwich walls" after the Connecticut community where they sprang up, they have proliferated so rapidly several towns and historical societies fear they threaten the area's character.

To fight their spread, the towns of Lewisboro, North Salem and Philipstown are reviewing and rewriting zoning ordinances and expanding special character districts.

Lewisboro and North Salem have established special character districts to preserve the historic roads in the areas, and they plan to expand the districts. Residents living in these special districts must present their rebuilding plans to architectural review boards for approval.

Lewisboro maintains five special character districts, and as the town works on its master plan, Ed Delaney, president of the

town's architectural review board, said he hopes most residents will agree to expand the special districts to the main roads.

"If we are the guardians of the traditions that these farmers in our past left us, which is what I believe we are, we should try to maintain that look," Mr. Delaney said. "We just don't want the walls to be so plastic and so phony that they are in your face."

Since the beginning of the year, North Salem has used historic road designations to limit the newer walls along its dirt roads.

Sy Globerman, the North Salem town supervisor, said that revising the fence ordinances and road designations protects the "sightliness and beauty of the town and gives comfort to the neighbors that nothing unseemly will appear next to them."

"We don't want to be overly restrictive on people, but if we can't preserve the character and the beauty of the town, what do we wind up with?" he said.

The planning board of Philipstown is considering rules regulating stone walls as part of the master plan for the town, near the Putnam County line. But its purpose is more practical than aesthetic.

Over the years, as residents have built and rebuilt stone walls, William Mazzuca, Philipstown's supervisor, said: "We started having encroachment on our dirt roads. It made it difficult for snowplows. We were looking for a way to keep walls and fences

and posts away from the road."

Mr. Mazzuca said he wanted to encourage the building and repair of walls in a way that preserves the character of the community, but not at the risk of taking away an owner's property rights. He would like to see the stone walls become part of a permit process in the town's master plan, which is now under review.

"The planning board would try to steer people to preserve the character of the community," he said.

In Bedford, members of the local historical society have embarked on a campaign to educate homeowners about the beauty and history of the area's stone walls.

"We recognize and promote the fact that we haven't changed here," said Linda Demenocal, president of the Bedford Historical Society. "Walls that are not historic or appropriate change the landscape."

But some homeowners do not feel they have an option.

Stewart and Anne Reid of Katonah decided to replace their stack wall with a wet stone wall five years ago. They needed a higher fence because of their two young children and their dogs.

"We had a very practical and mundane reason for going with the wall: we were trying to keep the children and dogs in the yard," Mrs. Reid said.

She said they had looked into rebuilding

their existing wall, but with the added height, they had to use cement. "We found out that you can't do a dry stack, four-foot wall," she said.

The frenzy of stone wall building in the Northeast occurred between 1775 and 1825, said Susan Allport of Katonah, who wrote "Sermons in Stone, The Stone Walls of New England and New York."

Because of a lack of timber, the dry, utilitarian stone walls started to appear in this part of the country after the Revolutionary War. They replaced the wooden fences that were burned for fuel during the war.

The traits that mark the stone walls in this area are their durability, the use of indigenous fieldstone and the way in which they are constructed, Ms. Allport said.

By using small stones on the bottom of the walls, the structures are more able to absorb frost heave, a geological process that occurs in cold weather. Frost heave causes the earth to push up against the whole wall and moves the rock.

Capping the walls with large stones helps keep the walls in place during this occurrence and prevents freezing and thawing within the wall by keeping moisture out of the dry rock structure. It also stops animals like deer from kicking the stones off the wall as they jump over them.

John Benjamin of Garrison, a wall restorer for 30 years, said: "An old-timer told me,

'A good piece of stone masonry will look visually soft.' You are building something out of the most rigid material and you've done a good job if you make it look soft."

Because building a wall is labor-intensive, Mr. Benjamin said, builders use the cheapest labor possible, which usually means immigrants. Over the centuries, waves of Italian, Irish and Scottish immigrant laborers passed through the area building and repairing field walls. The evidence of their techniques and styles are still stand.

The "Greenwich walls" built now are "hard and straight," Mr. Benjamin said. They reflect the cultural influences of the Hispanic laborers who build them.

Their smooth, flat face, he added, does not hold up well through New England winters.

"Winter rains and very cold weather afterward, and then, 'kaboom,' these flat walls break apart," Mr. Benjamin said.

A wall with the potential to last 200 years, he said, will fall down in 10 to 20.

And the cost to rebuild and restore walls is not cheap. A dry rock wall, built with stone available on the property, can cost \$15 to \$18 per square foot, according to Joseph Scarsella, president of J. Scarsella Landscape Design and Development.

If the stone is brought in from a quarry, a dry or wet wall is \$25 to \$35 per square foot and higher, depending on the quality and type of the stone, Mr. Scarsella said.

Both Mr. Scarsella and Mr. Benjamin like to work with stone that is indigenous to the area. Mr. Benjamin concentrates on the restoration of existing stone walls, which can run \$70 a linear foot for the cleaning, marking and rebuilding of the structures. Mr. Scarsella designs walls and landscapes that are in keeping with the native plantings and stone wall structures.

Last June, Nancy Vincent and Shirley Bianco, members of the Bedford Historical Society, passed out fliers in Spanish and English encouraging homeowners and laborers to attend a free workshop, sponsored by the Mianus Gorge Preserve, on building walls. The workshop attracted 20 people, but no Hispanic laborers attended.

Ms. Allport suggests that homeowners take the time to drive around and see what style of walls interest them before they build. She also said it is important to take photographs of the walls they find attractive and show them to the contractors when the time comes to design the wall.

"It's an education process," she said. "I'm sure people must kick themselves once they find a style they like after they've spent all that money."

Building stone walls: a spiritual experience

By FRANK NARDOZZI

Building stone walls is like putting together a giant 3-D jigsaw puzzle. But with an infinite number of solutions, no two people will build a stone wall exactly the same way.

Irwin Zucker, a recreation director, is teaching an ongoing free workshop on the subject at the Mianus River Gorge Preserve.

Fifteen eager, attentive residents have discovered that Mr. Zucker believes stone wall building is a spiritual experience — one that can be both soothing and fulfilling in equal measure.

He says he took up the avocation in order to maintain his mental equilibrium when he was a psychiatric social worker in Stamford, Conn. He was taught how to build stone walls on retreat at

Findhorn, a "spiritual community" in Scotland. There he learned that everything in life can be experienced as a living thing — even stones, he said.

As he builds stone walls, he asks the stones where they want to go.

"There is a synergy that develops between the stones and the stone mason. If you put your whole heart and soul and mind into it in a relaxed and gentle way, you'll find the right stone automatically," he said.

As proof of stone masons' uplifting nature, Mr. Zucker cited a journalistic study by Studs Terkel called "Working," in which a survey of people revealed that the only one who was happy was the stone mason.

"Men working behind desks need to be outside doing some real work," Mr.

Zucker said. "The stone mason was the only one who worked alone, outside, in nature. And he was the only one who thought his work would last a hundred years."

Many stone walls in Bedford have been around that long. You can see them everywhere you go. And the Bedford Coalition would like to keep them here for at least another 100 years or more.

Stone walls are on the "A" list of things the coalition wants to save in town to preserve its rural character. They're in the same category as open green space and country dirt roads. To many, local residents, stone walls are part of what makes a Bedford "viewscope" scenic.

"Sermons in Stone"

Bedford resident Susan Allport wrote a book on the subject whose title is in keeping with Mr. Zucker's spiritual concept. It's called "Sermons in Stone."

She cites the history of stone walls, structures that apparently took up where colonial fences left off. The need for wooden fences goes all the way back to the original European settlers, who brought with them a mixed agronomy from the Old World, where they not only grew crops but also grazed cattle and sheep.

"Fences were designed to keep the cows out of the corn," Ms. Allport said. They were made out of wood from trees that were cleared from the fields, up until the northeast gradually became deforested — not surprising, since everything then was made of wood, from the earliest colonial homes to colonial furniture. And huge amounts of wood were consumed to keep the home hearth fires burning.

The American Revolution seems to be the dividing line between the building of wooden fences and the beginning of stone walls. Many homes were destroyed and wooden fences burned as fuel during the war. After the conflict, the process of clearing fields made use of its next most bountiful byproduct, fieldstones. Long the bane of every farmer's existence, fieldstones became a valuable natural resource.

New York and New England were never known for their rich farmland when compared to the corn belt of the Ohio River Valley or the breadbasket of the grain-covered Great Plains.

The farmers of New York and New England "tilled the thinly soiled ground with the main claim to fecundity was the abundant crop of rock that heaved to the surface each winter," writes Ms. All-

port in her book.

The freezing and thawing of ground-water works to heave up rocks from deep in the earth, and plowing accelerates this process, she says.

The rocks and stones of New York and New England are of a special variety. They are the hard granite and rounded stones that were picked up and carried or tumbled along by glaciers during the Ice Age. These stones don't split easily, but properly placed in a wall, they are resistant to all kinds of weathering.

Building stone walls

Wall builders have to know how to place the stones, however. "One over two and two over one" is the most famous axiom of stone wall builders.

One should never let a vertical seam develop that could later turn into a fault or a weakness later. "You want to get it so that each stone can take the weight of the stone on top of it without changing position," another stone mason confides in "Sermons in Stone."

"It's all held together by friction," Mr. Zucker said. Friction and weight.

Ms. Allport says that one of the basic principles is to put some of the largest, heaviest stones that span the width of the wall on top. "Capping stones," they're called, and they help hold a wall together. Small stones at the bottom help absorb the movement of the earth.

Another principle, not universally held by masons, is to taper the walls inward toward the top so that the weight of the stones falls in on itself.

And yet another trick of the trade is, according to Ms. Allport, "Once you pick up a stone, don't put it down again until you've found a place for it in the wall. If you do it means twice as much work."

Of course, if a person remains totally focused and involved with what he or she is doing, Mr. Zucker maintains that the builder's hands will reach for the stone of the perfect shape and dimension to fill every space. That's the "Zen" nature of stone wall building, in his experience.

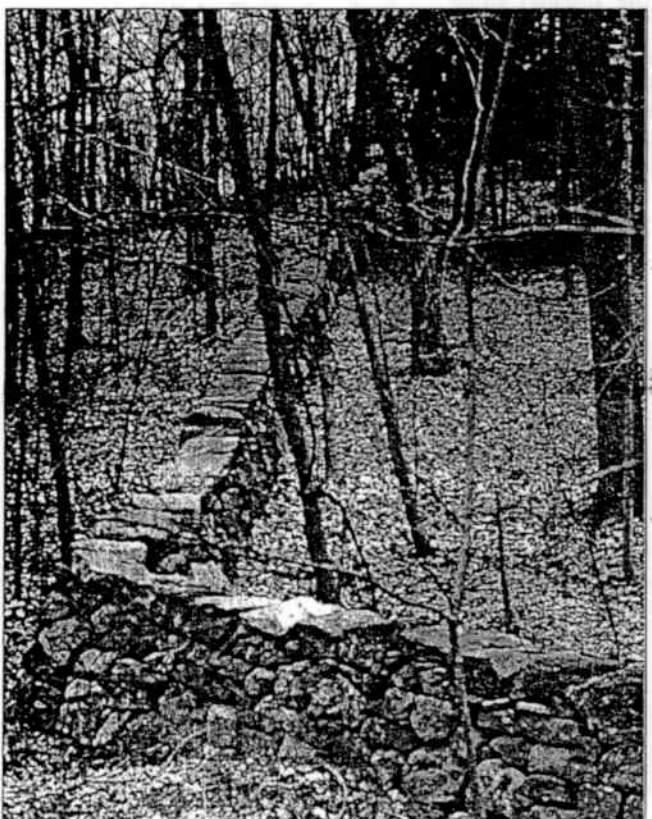
End of an era

Ms. Allport points out that it was easier for early Americans to clear eight one-acre fields than it was to clear one eight-acre field. After the clearing, farmers still had to do the planting, plowing and harvesting. So, small fields bounded by stone walls spread across the landscape like a patchwork quilt.

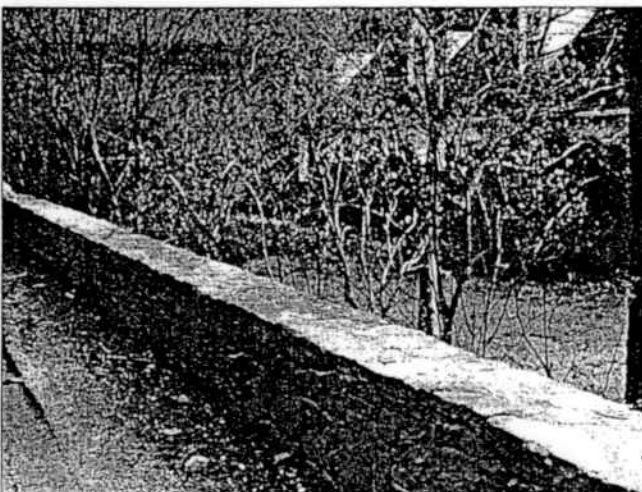
It is interesting to note that stone walls eventually spurred the end of agriculture as a mainstay in the northeast. Horse-



Round stone wall on Upper Hook Road



Reservoir stone wall



Chiseled stone wall on Upper Hook Road

Preserving stone walls, preserving Bedford

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powered machinery like the McCormick reaper was made for the large scale farming of the midwest. Stone walls made use of these fast, but often cumbersome machines impossible. In most stone-walled fields, it was difficult to turn around with anything larger than an ox-drawn plow.

Unable to make their small fields profitable, many northeastern farmers caught "western fever" and left their rocky plots for more fertile ground out west.

Basic groups

There are at least eight basic groups of stone wall types. There are single walls and double walls (two stones thick). There are tapered walls and vertical walls. There are faced walls, with at least one flat side, or double-faced walls. There are capped walls and there are walls with or without foundations.

But the oldest stone walls were always "dry walls," with no cement or mortar in them. And the stones were always how the builder found them — carefully selected, but never honed or chiseled. After all, what farmer had time to chisel stone walls?

A great advantage of the original, dry walls was that they moved and settled with the frosts. If water ever gets into a wet wall and freezes, it will crack and fall apart. As a result, wet

walls are much harder to repair.

Stone walls lost

Many stone walls were lost in the 1920's and 1930's when roads were paved and widened. Many of the walls were crushed and turned into macadam. Many others were turned into fieldstone fireplaces or used for house foundations.

The latest cause for their disappearance is the theft of stones to build other walls. The building of a stone wall today, if one has to start with importing fieldstones, can be well over \$100 a running foot.

While the imported stones are often pretty, you can tell right away that they're not indigenous. The contrast they make with natural stone outcroppings gives them away immediately.

"Chiseled and mortared stone walls in front of a home or along the roadside are to impress the neighbors," Ms. Allport said. "And indigenous stone is much more handsome."

Saving stone walls

Nancy Vincent, one of Bedford's leading proponents of saving stone walls, says that people should be educated to understand the beauty and historic nature of the original stone walls.

"The newer stone walls, so square and so formal, belong in Greenwich, not Bedford," she said. "Bedford was an agricultural community. We should

take stock of what we've inherited and try to preserve it."

Mr. Zucker agreed, saying, "Greenwich walls are mansion walls. They're meant to keep people out. They're taller so you can't see over them, and there's no oddball meandering quality. They're not hospitable."

Shirley Bianco, a member of the Bedford Coalition, said recently, "Many people make mistakes, take down their stone walls or chisel them. Or they'll replace them with a privacy wall without regard to the history that was behind them."

Ms. Allport suggests that educational materials, like pamphlets and videos, be made available at every real estate office in town so that people could learn about the history of the walls and the heritage that is Bedford.

Asked if she would favor laws to prevent the destruction of the old stone walls, Ms. Vincent said, "I would prefer not to go that route. I think that people should appreciate the beauty of the old stone walls and preserve them on their own volition."

She and Ms. Bianco liked Ms. Allport's ideas about making educational materials available and favored legislation only as a last resort.

So far, the Bedford Coalition has yet to take a stand on what should be done to preserve stone walls, landscape features worth saving and a large part of Bedford's intrinsic personality.