Stone Walls of New York and New England

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If walls could talk: 
Stone walls of New York and New England

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“… rural farmstead walls have become cultural icons to the origin of America as a nation, as well as a reminder of the slower, simpler life before the modern era.”

Prof. Robert M. Thorson, University of Connecticut, Storrs, CT
‘Charley Smith and His Barn’ by Francis Colburn

“... the consummate Vermont farmer: serious, proud, strong, and hard at work ... the artist glorifies Smith, recognizing his hard work and the important role of the farmer in Vermont’s history and economy.”

The Bennington Museum
‘Family Group’
by Francis Colburn

“The Vermont hill farmers lived a hardscrabble life, struggling against poor agricultural conditions including rocky, nutrient poor soil and often harsh weather ... Colburn has painted them with great dignity and compassion.”

The Bennington Museum
Temperature and CO₂ concentration in the atmosphere over the past 400,000 years (from the Vostok ice core)

CO₂ concentration, ppmv

Year before present (present = 1950)

Temperature change from present, °C

Year before present (present = 1950)

Zig-zag fence
(http://www.potsdampublicmuseum.org/)

Stump wall
(http://enclosuretakerefuge.files.wordpress.com/2012/08/4a08059v.jpg)
Stump pullers
Men building a stone wall
using a team of oxen and a rock sled
Changes in New England hill towns: 1790 - 1930

**1790 - 1830**
- Increasing number of farms
- Merino sheep arrive in 1810
- Local commerce
- Poor roads

**1830 - 1870**
- Migration to West + cities
- Sheep mania in 1840
- Railroads in 1846
- Western grain to New England
- Wood for railroads
- Poor roads

**1870 - 1900**
- Migration to West + cities
- Sheep farming declines
- Railroad branch-lines
- Increased dairy farming
- Western grain, cheese, butter
- Railroads change to coal

**1900 - 1930**
- Migration to West + cities
- Milk, eggs, apples, potatoes
- Growing tourism
- Publicity bureaus
- More cows than people
- Improved roads

**Subsistence**

**Commercial**
Acres of improved land
(New England and New York)

Van Rensselaer Map #4 (1938) showing 1790 property boundaries in northern Rensselaer Cty.
Surveyor’s Chain

1 link = 7.92 inches
1 link = 0.66 ft
1 chain = 100 links
1 chain = 66 feet
20 chains = 1320 feet
20 chains = 0.25 mile
80 chains = 1 mile

Surveyor’s chain used to establish horizontal distances along compass sight lines.

One link equals .66 ft. or 7.92 inches
One chain equals 66 ft. or 100 links
1760 theodolite of Colonel Franz Pfister, who died at the Battle of Bennington. (The Bennington Museum)
Westerly view of stonewall along ~1790 boundary between lands of Andreas Haynerman and Coonradt Ham (~42°46.90′ N, ~73°36.45′ W)
Northerly view of stonewall (quarried quartzite) at 1790 triple junction among James Cleveland, Jacob Brust Jr, and Jacob Brust lands

42°47.210′N, 73°35.548′W
(12 April 2014)
Portion of land survey for Mr. Frederick Hayner (111 acres) on Monday, June 17, 1799

milk brook in the last line of the
finally surveyed for Thomas Miller and at the
most Northern Point of the Farm surveyed for
John Badget and runs thence -
1. S 40° E 17.56 to a chestnut stake & stones then
2. S 35° E 40, to a marked white oak tree
3. N 16° E 34.10 to a marked white oak tree then
4. N 47° E 12.70 to a marked white oak tree & stones
5. N 03° W 39.30 to a chestnut stake & stones then
6. S 13° W 14.50 to a stake then
7. Close the corner and the
Survey completed on Monday, June 17, 1799
Survey completed on Monday, June 17, 1799
~1800 survey-lines for 3 parcels of land along Smith Hill Road
(Total = 124.5 acres)
~1800 survey-lines for 3 parcels of land along Smith Hill Road
(Total = 124.5 acres)
$\delta = 13.4^\circ \text{ W in 2015 at } 42.8^\circ \text{N, 73.6}^\circ \text{W}$
Measurements of magnetic declination in 1750-1799

Visible imaging and LiDAR

Lots #50-52 were ~160 rods in length.

1st Division = lots with numbers

2nd Division = lots with Roman numerals

Orientations of lots relative to magnetic North in 1728-30.
Magnetic Declination (1590 - 2015)
(IGRF 11 model: http://www.ngdc.noaa.gov/geomag-web)
Stone wall in Grafton Lakes State Park, New York on land leased to Thomas West on March 29, 1793
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Campaign speech by Senator Daniel Webster occurred along Kelly Stand Road in Stratton, VT on July 7-8, 1840 (Tuesday-Wednesday) in support of William Henry Harrison for President (Whigs party)
Star trails around North Star (Polaris) as viewed from Indonesia
Reasons for leaving New England farms (1906 survey)

**Financial**
- Farming does not pay
- Farmer cannot control prices for produce
- Farming requires too much capital

**Physical**
- Too much hard work
- Hours are too long
- Farming is drudgery

**Social and Intellectual**
- More opportunity for advancement elsewhere
- Farming is physical labor only
- Life is monotonous
- Farmers are often held in low esteem by others

Additional reading


Area near intersection of Smith Hill Road, Hill Road, and Sweetmilk Creek Road showing stone walls associated with Jacob F. and Henry F. Hayner lands
Lanna (Lany) Ann (Bulson) Hayner
Born: October 25, 1818
Died: August 9, 1847 following births and deaths of twin boys,
Andrew (July 31, 1847) and Abram (August 2, 1847).
This Indenture made this Twenty-Ninth Day of June in the year of our Lord One thousand Seven hundred and Eighty Seven. Between Stephen Van Rensselaer Esquire Lord and Proprietor of the Manor of Rensselaerwyck and Margaret his Wife of the one part and Lodowych Snyder of the East District of the Manor of Rensselaerwyck in the County of Albany. Warrant of the other part WITNESSTH that the said Stephen Van Rensselaer and Margaret his Wife in Consideration of the Sum of Two hundred and Ninety Six Pounds lawful Money of the State of New York to them in hand paid by the said Lodowych Snyder at and before the sealing and delivery of these Presents the Receipt whereof they do hereby acknowledge and thereof of every part and parcel thereof do acquit release and discharge him the said Lodowych Snyder his Heirs and Assigns forever by these Presents HAVe Granted bargained sold aliened remised released and confirmed and by these Presents DO Grant bargain sell aliened remise release and confirm unto the said Lodowych Snyder in his actual possession now being and to his Heirs and Assigns forever All that certain Farm Piece or Parcel of Land situate lying and being in a Place called Tiele Town on the East Side of Hudsons River in the Manor of Rensselaerwyck lying west of a White Elm on the West Side of a Brook called Tomlanick Twenty five Links distant from the Edge