

Our Stone Walls

The ruins of our agricultural past  
The remains of our 18th, 19th and 20th century farms  
The majesty of our reservoir system & railroads  
Ours to cherish and preserve



See our References  
for a list of wonderful  
books on preserving,  
building and the secrets  
of stone walls.

Upcoming  
Event  
This November at the Library

Robert Thorson, author of many books on stone walls, see inside, and Professor of Geology at the University of Connecticut will be speaking about his *Stone Wall Initiative* on November 10 at The Ruth Keeler Memorial Library. This program is sponsored by North Salem Town Historian, the North Salem Historical Society and the Library.

“Knowing more about stone walls allows one to appreciate them---and the landscape they embellish---more keenly. With very little effort, you can also become a more discriminating admirer of stone walls. Initially, you will see walls where you might not have noticed them before. Later, you will see more conspicuous differences among walls and stones. Finally, you will discern subtle clues to a wall’s construction and its history, both natural and human.”

Robert Thorson, *Stone By Stone*

The Future of Our Stone Walls  
Depends on You

Will You Help?



Keeler Lane, April 2019

North Salem Historic Preservation Commission  
presents

SAVING THE STONE WALLS  
OF NORTH SALEM



Mills Road, March 2019

Have You Noticed the Stone Walls That Border Our Roads?

Are There Walls Surrounding Your Property?

Seven North Salem organizations are joining together to call your attention to the importance of maintaining and preserving

North Salem Stone Walls

- Together we are
- The North Salem Historic Preservation Commission
  - The North Salem Fish and Game Association
  - The North Salem Historic Preservation Commission
  - The North Salem Historical Society
  - The North Salem Improvement Society
  - The North Salem Lions Club
  - The Ruth Keeler Memorial Library
  - The North Salem Open Land Foundation



Most of these walls were created, stone-by-stone, as farmers cleared their land for raising crops, cattle and dairy cows. Under New York fence laws anyone’s unfenced land was ceded into fair grazing ground for anyone else’s cattle. By the mid-1850s many trees had been cut down and photos of that time show many fewer trees than now exist in North Salem. But, the stone walls are still here.... or, are they?



Keeler Lane, March 2019, looking west

Some walls have fallen down, to rubble. Some sections of walls are missing. Some of the stones have been taken away.

What You Can Do

**Know your wall.** Make sure you own the wall. Some walls are a property’s boundary. You may own the wall, or your neighbor might, or, the property line might be down the center of the wall. Only a survey will reveal the true owner; start by looking at your own.

**Attack invasives.** Vines and roots are some of the walls worst enemies. On your own stone walls: cut away trees and vines within or next to the wall. It is best not to pull them out, but cut them off where they appear. Pulling the vines out might dislodge stones and quickly help deteriorate the wall. Remove these cuttings to your compost pile. Poison Ivy may be abundant; root ends are toxic to the skin, even in winter, so wear gloves.

To keep them at bay spray the cut ends of vines, weeds and small trees with a solution of 1 quart white vinegar mixed with 1 cup of salt and 1 teaspoon dish detergent to help the solution adhere.

Large, dislodged stones might be better left alone until there’s a plan. Walking on or over walls could dislodge the stones; please avoid doing so for the wall’s sake and your own safety!

**Restore or repair if you wish.** Consider hiring a professional or consulting local experts and online videos.

There are several different styles of these old walls (rubble or “tossed” walls, dry-stacked flat-stone walls, lace walls, wet walls, for example). When restoring a wall, the original style should be re-created. Different types of rock were used. Flat stones in dry-stacked walls are mica schist, the flat angular fieldstone turned up by oxen-pulled plows. Rocks rounded by glacial action, water-tumbling and erosion are gneiss or granite. These are called “cob-bles.” Restored walls should use the same rock types and colors as the original walls.

There are other styles of stone walls: those created for large estates, for the boundary walls of the New York City Reservoir System and for the railroad. Restoring those styles of wall-making should also be honored if you are having a professional restore such a wall. Quarried marble and quartz were often used and some were “wet” walls (mortared). They were built by paid laborers in the late 19th century and 20th century. Eighty percent of the laborers on The Titicus Dam, built in the 1890s, were southern Italian immigrants, skilled in creating tight-fitting walls. The stone was quarried in North Salem, on the north side of Titicus Road.



Mills Road, March 2019

Help Create a Photo Exhibit

Please take pictures of your favorite walls, including before and after pictures if you removed plant material or opt to restore a wall. There will be a photo exhibit of your contributions in the library conference room before Robert Thorson’s talk in November. Email your photos to Gail Pantezzi, chair of the Historic Preservation Commission: pantezzi@optonline.net or deliver hard copies to Janice Will, HPC secretary, 270 Titicus Road. Please include date and location of all photos.



New wall on Mills Road made to match an old one, March 2019  
Text and photos compliments of Gail Pantezzi

REFERENCES

Allport, Susan, Sermons In Stone, The Stone Walls of New England and New York, W.W. Norton & Co., 1990

Fields, Curtis P., The Forgotten Art of Building A Stone Wall, Yankee, Inc. 1971 (this can be purchased on-line)

Snow, Dan, Listening to Stone, Artisan, 2008.

Thompson, Susan and Cynthia Curtis, Written In Stone, Part 1, North Salem Historical Society Bulletin, Volume 27, Fall 2001

Thorson, Robert M., Stone by Stone, The Magnificent History of New England’s Stone Walls, Walker & Co, 2002

Thorson, Robert M., Exploring Stone Walls: A Field Guide to New England’s Stone Walls, Walker & Co, 2005

Thorson, Kristine and Robert, Stone Wall Secrets, Tilbury House, 1998 for young readers

The Stone Wall Initiative at <https://stonewall.uconn.edu/>

The Stone Trust, a non-profit member organization in Dummerston, Vermont dedicated to teaching stone wall building, [thestonetrust.org](http://thestonetrust.org)

The Art of the Dry Stack Stone Wall – Insteading  
See the photos of incredible creations in stone. Are you inspired?  
<https://insteading.com/blog/dry-stack-stone-wall/>

Tuoti, Francis (former chair of HPC), owner of family built stone house on Elizabeth Drive. Available to consult, including tools

The Ruth Keeler Memorial Library