

**Al Clark, local historian**

See also TC-00-12

After talking with CW's husband for a while longer, I left the shop and drove toward Barre, where I'd arranged to meet with Al Clark, a local historian who has made a study of the stone walls and other structures in that and surrounding towns (Hubbardston and Petersham). Mr. Clark met me on the common, in front of the local historical society building, and we drove off in his car to begin our tour. We stopped first at Mr. Clark's house, so he could run inside and get a map he'd made of a portion of the town which showed the location and position of stone walls and cellar holes.

I should note that Mr. Clark's maps also indicate the location of town boundary markers, as well as locations of wild flowers, and I think perhaps other features of the land as well. There is something interesting about the inclusion of wild flowers in a stone wall survey, in Mr. Clark's interest in them together with his interest in stone walls. Both stone walls and wild flowers are temporal, are permanent and transitory, subject to human perception. Both are tenuous, subject to the vagaries of incident and time and human activity, yet both persist, the wild flowers returning each year, the stones apparently staunch in their persistence.

We set off on a tour of the area, and Mr. Clark pointed out various stone structures and features on the landscape of Barre and the surrounding towns of Petersham and Hubbardston. He told me about the walls and cellar holes in what is now Quabbin reservation, suggesting that the walls inside the reserve are "refugiums," explaining that they are "refuges not only for animals, but for history." In both Quabbin and in parts of Barre and neighboring towns, land has been set aside either by the state environmental commission, the trustees, or the Audubon Society, and as a result, many stone walls that may have been vandalized or plundered for their stone have been protected and preserved. At the end of our tour we walked into the Audubon preserve to Osgood pond, which is the site of an old saw mill whose stone foundation is still in relatively good condition. I took photographs of these stones, and also of wildflowers that Mr. Clark pointed out to me (though the main feature of the botanical landscape, in addition to trees, was a variety of ferns).

Mr. Clark told me that you can estimate the age of a stone wall by the lichens that grow on it. He said that originally fences were made of wood, but as the local supply of that material was depleted as early settlements and communities grew, farmers switched to stone. This transition to stone occurred in this part of New England, he told me, around 1830. Initially, stone walls provided access to and from a new settlement under the Proprietor system, and functioned to attract settlers to the newly established place. As settlers arrived and began to clear the land and establish farms, they built roads to their farms, and each road was bordered on either side by a stone wall. Stone walls were also erected to protect farm crops against predatory wild animals. Al Clark said that a watershed in local history occurred when communities reconceived the function of walls, redefining them from barricades against wild animals to enclosures that prevent domesticated animals from wandering and causing mischief in other people's fields (or presumably in town centers, as towns took shape and grew). But the walls also served a symbolic purpose as well, Mr. Clark said. A "nice, tidy wall" communicated to others that the farmer was a tidy and upright farmer, a worthy member of the community.

Mr. Clark told me that "two men can do about ten feet of wall a day, to do it right." He said that it's

been estimated that it would take 15,000 men working for 243 years to build all the stone walls in New England and New York. "Osgood's Pond has some of the best walls in town," he added, "and Audubon owns it now." He said that Barre was established in 1728 or 1738 (depending on how the historical judgment is made), and "other than foundations and cellar holes, the first stone work in towns were town boundaries, sign posts." Mr. Clark said that when the Proprietors began to settle a town, "the first thing they did was burn trees, and put up as many fences as they could." The earliest fences were wicker fences, Mr. Clark told me, woven of willow branches, although fences could be made from whatever material was available locally. "They put the fences up as a declaration of property, and to keep animals out."

Barre has a particularly fine assemblage of stone work, which includes the Intake pump house and dam as well as a variety of farm walls, cellar holes, boundary markers, and general property walls which have been maintained by local stone masons in recent years. I may have already noted that I noticed the special nature of the walls around Barre the first time I drove through the place, and as a result of inquiries I made, identified Al Clark and Jim Dowd as people I should speak with. There is also an occasional wall builder named John Meilus, who I was unable to reach during this fieldwork trip, but hope to see later should the work in Worcester County continue into next year.

## TC-00-15-FN

I drove to Winchendon this morning hoping to observe as Larry Day built iron work for a job he's currently working on, but when I arrived, having arranged to seem him, the shop was locked, and a young woman who was in the gym/weight lifting room that is set up next door to the shop told me that Larry was in Dorchester that morning, and wouldn't return until this afternoon. Trying to fill in, I made some phone calls, trying to reach, among others, Jeffrey Bronnes, the brass founder in Royalston, but had no luck in reaching anyone. I drove to Royalston to try once more to find the brass founder's home and shop, but was unable to do so. While driving in that area, I saw a red fox, and later, a wild turkey. The fox was the first of three foxes I saw today, all running across the road at high speed, arcing toward cover on the other side.

**Corn Woman** I drove to the old industrial park in town, and found Corn Woman inside the shop operated by Intertribal Woods People, though Paula-A-Bear, a leader of the group, wasn't there and would not return for some time. I had the opportunity to speak with Corn Woman, and to look around at the crafts on display and for sale in the shop. And a bit later, after Corn Woman's husband arrived, to talk with him about recent developments in Winchendon, and about hunting and animal populations in the area. First I should note that the shop has several categories of objects inside. First, there is a large group of material made by Paula-A-Bear: etched glass, engraved and painted wood, paintings on stretched canvas, bushy heads (a head and face made of grasses with long trailing pieces that create an almost sunburst effect), a variety of dolls, drums in various sizes, some of which have painted or decorated heads, and jewelry. Second, there is work by other artisans. Third, there are materials being assembled for display in a museum that is planned for the site; all of these are Indian artifacts, some donated by tribal peoples from other parts of the country. And fourth, there are stuffed and mounted animals (I remember a bear cub and a young coyote), which Corn Woman told me are road kill that people bring to the site because they know the group can make use of them. Corn Woman said that they use the animal skins, and that the mounted specimens are used for teaching, and of course also for display.

I told Corn Woman that I'd been to Royalston and seen a red fox, and she answered that Indians believe that animal sightings are propitious, and communicative. The fox, I think she told me, suggests cover and hiding, while the turkey symbolizes giving. She said that the latter has been an important part of Native cultures here, and that sometimes people will give their possessions away as a means of unburdening themselves and undertaking life anew. I continued to look around the shop, considering whether I should go and get my camera. I decided not to, thinking I would return once more to speak with Paula, but also thinking that I might drive into New Hampshire tomorrow (Saturday) and attend part of the pow-wow that was scheduled there, in the Swansee/Keene area. The Winchendon group would be participating in that event, and would have its crafts on display there. I could take photographs at that time, and see them in that context of presentation and display.

As we were talking, Corn Woman's husband arrived, and we began to talk as Corn Woman continued her work in the shop. The husband (I seem not to have written his name in my notebook,

and have forgotten it at the moment) told me that he's been in town since 1984 (I think this is so; I wasn't taking notes), and has seen many changes since then. I asked how so, and he answered that development has begun encroaching there, and that many new houses have been built and occupied since the 1980s. CW's husband gave some numbers which indicate a rise in population of the town by about 40%, from 8000 or so in the mid-80s to about 14,000 today (he recited numbers which again, I remember only vaguely, though I think those I have cited here are roughly accurate). This helped me to understand a sign I saw set on a lawn in town, on Lincoln Street just off Grove Street, in fact, which stated something like "Land Developers Have Ruined Our Nice Town," or something to that effect. This sign, and the conversation with CW's husband, were the first tangible evidence I've had for a trend which I'd heard about -- that the central portion of the state was being colonized by newcomers, and that it was a time of distress and change for local communities and their long time members.

CW's husband told me something which I've heard in many other places, that as a hunter he has noticed the change because land that had once been open, either as farmland or as putatively "public" land, has now been subdivided, developed, and posted with "no trespassing" signs. And while the wild turkey population had been on the rise for a number of years, development has hurt that population more recently, and destroyed a breeding ground in the area of a local hill. CW's husband thinks that overall, regionally, turkeys are doing well, and the Winchendon population has simply shifted to other nearby locales, and helped to increase the numbers in such places as Royalston. With all of these developments in mind, it will be important to trace the effects of change on local communities and on local cultural activity, especially land based activities such as hunting. It will also be interesting to see how artisan activity is affected: how established forms respond, and what new forms emerge as newcomers settle the area, as land and resource accessibility are altered, and as local consciousness develops in response to and in the context of local and regional change.