

New England wall tradition still firmly rooted

STONE WALLS-FROM PAGE 7 ■

the early days was virgin woodlands and after selected fields were cleared, stone walls were erected. It was common for experienced gangs to go around doing just this.

If they built the meeting house with a keg of rum brandy, no doubt these roaming workers, doing heavy hand work, got the same treatment. Fall and spring were good periods for this work, as farmers, often helped by neighbors, were less occupied with other projects.

Barbed wire

If stone walls around a pasture were not sufficiently high to contain animals, farmers would criss-cross poles over the wall or drive stakes aside it onto which barbed wire was stapled.

The noted naturalist, Edwin Way Teale, wrote: "At one time there were more than 100,000 miles of stone walls in New England. Year by year these elongated monuments to the labors of earlier men had been shrinking...with increased building activity."

During the 1800s as quarries large and small were opened, there was always available a considerable amount of irregular stone blocks or pieces that could not be used for building purposes. They cluttered the quarry so they were salvaged to make retaining walls. A good stone mason could make ornamental walls in front of homes which often were finished by topping off with elongated slabs.

Examples of this work, for both ornamental and practical use, may be seen on Hildreth Street in the Center and along North Main in Graniteville, the

section of town once called Granite City.

Conservation areas

Westford could use more natural recreation areas to offset our dwindling woodlands. Nevertheless, thoughtful landowners in times past have donated or sold for a very modest sum several worthwhile areas especially designed for those who wish to observe a bit of nature when the spirit moves.

Mystery Spring, where water pours from a crevice in a granite outcropping, is easy to reach. It is off Tadmuck Road on the north side of Route 495.

For those who like to skate, there is little Grassy Pond, whose shallow waters freeze early in the season. It has a little island in the middle for a hand-warming fire. This pond covers only seven acres of the entire parcel of 62 acres, one that the town, assisted with a state matching grant, purchased in 1971, and is good for exploring.

The great Stone Arch Bridge/Russell Bird Sanctuary is located behind the Westford Water Department headquarters on Forge Village Road. Part of this land is a gift in 1970 of the Russell family, and the remarkable Granite Arch Bridge used by the abandoned Red Line railroad spans Stony Brook for 60 feet.

Another out-of-doors recreational spot is the White Birch Nature Trail starting in the rear of Norman E. Day School. This winds around by the water tower on Kissacook Hill.

Two massive boulders, called the barn and the house, lie atop the ground in the woods just north of Wyman's Beach at Long Sought for Pond. The larger, the barn, at breast high measures

124 feet in circumference. It is 24 feet high. At 155 pounds to the cubic foot of granite, guess its weight!

Nature at its best

Gem of all could be the rolling woodlands around Burge Pond, now owned by East Boston Camps, reached by a good road at the railroad crossing on Depot Street. This dainty spectacle-shaped pond with its 22 acres of clean water and a sandy beach, once was used by the Johnson Ice Company where each winter they harvested ice.

Will Johnson was a smallish man with a glass eye which never moved. Young kids were fascinated staring at him. But on his daily routes about town in the summer with ice destined for

wooden ice chests in local pantries, the kids followed, keeping an eye not on the iceman with his rubber blanket but looking for any slivers of Burge Pond ice that might be lingering on the tailgate of his horse-drawn wagon.

While this ice cart was rumbling over the dusty streets in the summer, eager boys would be heading for a cool dip, sans bathing suits, at the ice house beach. Old timers will never forget those summer frolics.

Gordon Seavey is a Westford native, one who learned to love nature growing up on a small farm in the Center.