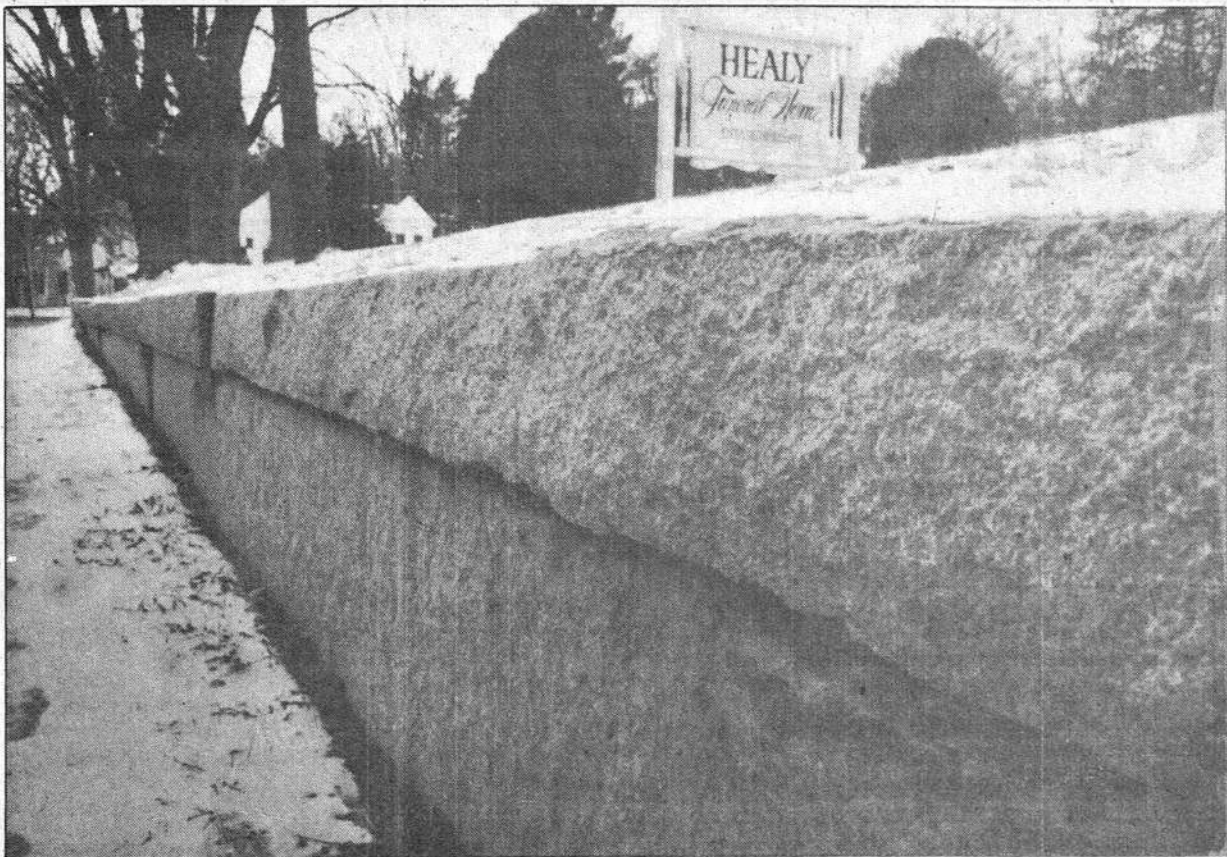


Still solid as a stone wall



Staff photo by **Marc Holland**

A retaining wall made of granite slabs at the Healy Funeral Home in Graniteville is one example of stone work that crisscrosses the town, including rugged, irregular rock barriers along fields and in woods.

Enduring trademark crisscrosses 30 square miles

By **Gordon B. Seavey**

It's mid-winter, not much snow on the ground and the leaves are off the trees. It is a good time to scout through the woods and view some things of nature unnoticed possibly during the growing season.

Take a hike with the kids and maybe you will encounter a pair of downy woodpeckers, nervously attacking the bark of an oak tree, or watch chickadees flitting among the brush, or two or three acrobatic young grey squirrels (reds are scarce) circling the bole of an ash tree. Look for an unusually large rotted stump. It is probably the remains of a grand tree, the chestnut, now decimated by a fungus.

And surely you will hear a crow swooping overhead with an occasional "caw", and perhaps a "murder" of them searching for food in an already harvested corn field.

I like to study those old stone

walls that our forebears built so long ago. These were to mark a boundary of a file or a dividing point between his land and that of his neighbor.

Driving along our by-ways, we see them running endlessly lining the street, with a diversion here and there for the lane to an old Colonial home.

It is an art (and heavy work) to build an everlasting stone wall. No mortar holds together these odd shaped, various sized hunks, usually of granite. A cubic foot of granite weighs 155 pounds.

Materials available

There was always plenty of material lying around as farmers early noticed that Westford is cursed with an oversupply of stones, rocks, boulders and ledge. A common brag, which is really not the correct description, was that farming here was done between the rocks. Our local soil is loaded with gravel, boulders and clay but overidden with Merrimack sandy loam in fortunate low lying areas.

Best land for corn, potatoes and vegetables is along Stony Brook and Beaver Brook valleys and in the plains of Parker Village. Soon farmers learned to become fruit growers and planted apple and pear trees on higher locations to avoid early frosting of the spring blossoms.

Here they planted around the large rocks and boulders on Frances and Tadmuck hills and other higher locations. This gave Westford the reputation of growing fine fruit, including blackberries.

To clear the fields of unwanted stones, they were rolled or bared onto wooden drags, pulled by oxen or horses to the edge of a field or wherever convenient.

To build a substantial stone wall, a trench of at least two feet must be dug to provide a stable footing above the frost line. Then, smaller stones were selected to fit obvious spots, and jostled to lie firmly.

Practically all of Westford in