

Have you found a Town Pound around?

By **Gary Santaniello** Globe Correspondent, February 7, 2019, 12:22 p.m.



Remains of the Town Pound in Medfield. DAVID WEDEN

Colonial history confronts us every day in Massachusetts, from churches and cemeteries to meeting houses and monuments.

Though less ubiquitous, Town Pounds are another vestige of our pre-Independence, agricultural past.

The purpose of pounds was explained in Frank Smith's "A History of Dover, Massachusetts": "In the early settlement of the parish, cattle, swine, and sheep ran at large and were a constant annoyance. The selectmen took early action to abate this nuisance."

Town ordinances as early as the 1630s mandated these enclosures, and "pound keeper" was an official position. Typically, farmers paid fines to recover their wayward livestock, and in some cases, cattle of residents who didn't pay their land taxes were held there

until the account was settled.

Generally similar in size — roughly 30 feet by 30 feet — and height, these stone pens vary in construction method, often a function of when they were made. An old farmer's saying advised that stone pens be built "horse-high, bull-strong, and hog-tight," which is why the pounds that still exist are some of the finest examples of Colonial wall-building. The need for pounds diminished as farmers were able to build sturdier wooden pens, obviating the need for a common pound.

Former Town Pounds can be found throughout New England, particularly from southern New Hampshire through eastern Connecticut.

Over the years, many have been partially or totally rebuilt. In some cases, they've been disassembled and relocated.

Much can be deduced from close examination of pounds: their age, based on how extensively the stones are covered by lichens (which also indicates what sections have been rebuilt); their construction method, identified by the pattern and size of the stones (and by which stones were quarried, and not merely removed from cleared fields). These marks are especially evident on the granite pillars marking many pound entrances, where examples of the plug and feather method of quarrying and splitting stones is seen in the semi-cylindrical drilling holes running up and down the sides.

Here's a sampler of existing pounds in the area.

Medfield: The most distinctive feature of this pound has nothing to do with stone. Commanding the southeast corner is a towering oak tree, six feet in diameter, that according to an accompanying plaque was alive during the American Revolution period. On High Street (Route 27) opposite Homestead Drive, the pound, constructed in 1862, now sits below the road grade and is anchored in back by the oldest (and tallest) section of the wall, which is blanketed in lichens.

Westwood: Originally part of Dedham, the pound was part of Westwood's first land

grant when it incorporated in 1897. One of the earliest pounds in Massachusetts,

Westwood's was commissioned by Lieutenant Joseph Colburn at a cost of 40 schillings. It sits just west of the Route 128 overpass on High Street (Route 109) in what used to be a densely wooded area and features a medley of odd-shaped stones, large and small. The pound is on the town seal, depicted when a massive oak tree in its center could provide shade for the entire enclosure.

Sudbury: The town was founded in 1638 but its pound wasn't built until 1798. It shares a wall with the eastern end of the Revolutionary Cemetery and a parking lot with the Town Hall complex. Its distinctive feature is a massive "double wall" at its back end, the stones stacked in two rows leaning into each other for stability and durability. Such elaborate construction was characteristic of a town's relative prosperity.

Dover: The most incongruous setting for a pound may be here, between the parking lot for a Dunkin' Donuts and amid trees below the Dover Church, established in 1762. Until the pound was built in 1794, cattle and swine were allowed to roam in Dover. Refurbished in 1965, the pound was cleared of overgrowth four years ago.

Hopkinton: Located a half-mile west of the town center on the north side of busy West Main St. (Route 135) and marked by a prominent sign, the pound has a rare, circular shape, roughly 30 feet in diameter, and like the pound in Medfield, it now sits below the current road grade.

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