

# Guide for Landowners

## *Lyme Historians Cellar Hole Survey*



Owning land in Lyme is much more than simply claiming title to a piece of ground. A landowner becomes part of the long and often intriguing history of that piece of land. That history can include human occupation and management of the land. The traces left on the land tell a story that future owners may want to hear. Here are some suggestions for owners of land who may have cellar holes, stone walls or other early structures, regarding . . .

Your rights as a landowner

The historic assets on your land

Caring for an historic site on your land

Planning a timber harvest near an historic site

### Your rights

You, as owner of the land, have the right to treat these historic features as you wish. There are no regulations to stop you from filling the cellar hole, bulldozing the barn foundation, or selling the stone wall to a landscaper from Connecticut (unless it marks your property line). You do not have to allow others on your property to look at these features, unless your land is conserved or in current use and you also have specifically allowed the public to use your land for recreation.

### Historic assets on your land

Many Lyme properties include stone walls. While we may take them for granted because they are such a familiar sight, the approximately 100,000 miles of stone walls in central New England, built within a period of about 60 years, may represent one of the largest construction projects in human history. The effort it must have taken to build these walls, using only animal muscle, a strong back, and good instincts for the laws of physics, commands our respect. Your land may be bounded by an abandoned town road and the walls defining it. Stone walls marking property boundaries may not be removed because they serve a legal purpose. RSA 472:6 limits the removal or alteration of boundary markers including stone walls.

You might also find foundations of houses, barns, outbuildings, sugar houses, and water wells. You could discover stone gate posts or corner markers, cemeteries, the remains of mill dams, foundations, and machinery, remnants of horse-drawn farming equipment, pottery shards, cooking equipment, nails, glass, horseshoes, or other ironware. You might even find trees, shrubs, or persistent perennial flowers still growing where a homeowner planted them many years ago. Imagining the labor involved in creating a life in such a setting without the conveniences of today makes us appreciate such places even more.

### Caring for an historic site on your land

The best protection for cellar holes, stone walls, and other historic resources is to avoid disturbing them. Some cellar holes have been filled in with soil to keep wandering livestock from injury. If you are pasturing livestock near a cellar hole, fence off the area instead. Other cellar holes have become a dumping place for slash and brush from logging jobs, which can make the cellar hole a trap for animals who fall in and cannot escape, and makes it dangerous and difficult for people to study the cellar hole. Avoid using a cellar hole as a refuse pit for trash.

### Planning a timber harvest near an historic site

If you intend to log near a cellar hole or other historic feature, plan ahead with your logger or forester to conduct the job in a way that protects the site. Search your property carefully to find and map the cellar hole and the other evidence of life there: outbuildings, well, refuse pit, animal pounds, landscape plantings, stone walls, or grave sites. Designate a special management area that includes these features *and a protective buffer* around them that reflects a good balance between your timber sale needs and the value you place on your property's historic features. Since it is your land, and your decision, select contractors who are sensitive to your needs and interests.

Here are some suggestions to discuss with your forester and logging contractor:

- ◆ Make your concerns and objectives for your property's historic features part of your overall land management plan.
- ◆ Have a written contract that clearly spells out historic site protection measures before any logging or other vegetation alteration begins.
- ◆ Decide if you want to designate "do not disturb" buffer zones around cellar holes and other sites. Flag and map the site and the protective buffer around it.
- ◆ Show the contractor and the crew the locations of all historic features within cutting areas. Review protection measures with all who will work on the site before harvesting begins. Damage to stone walls, cellar holes, and other historic sites is rarely malicious or intentional; most often it is accidental and occurs when operators do not know the site locations or their value.
- ◆ Flag plantings, trees, or groups of trees that are part of the homestead (such as paired maples planted as dooryard trees), to protect them during harvesting or road building.
- ◆ Decide with your forester and contractor whether special equipment or directional felling are needed to work near the site. Decide if a restricted log length is needed to protect certain areas, or just reserve the right to restrict log lengths.
- ◆ If a tree must be removed even though it is close to an historic feature, consider using fabric mats to cover the feature (such as a rock-lined well) and/or using small equipment or horses to winch logs away from the site to minimize disturbance.
- ◆ Place landings, yards, skid trails, and access roads away from historic features, and use pre-existing skid trails and woods roads whenever possible. If possible, conduct skidding operations when the ground is frozen and covered with snow.
- ◆ Avoid burning or piling slash near historic features.
- ◆ If stone walls must be crossed, use existing openings where possible. Limit the number of crossings, and cut out only the minimum width needed. Store the removed stone next to the wall so it can be replaced later. Avoid skidding over a stone-faced culvert, or use a deck to cover it, if necessary.

### For more information, read:

*Stonewalls & Cellarholes: A Guide for Landowners on Historic Features and Landscapes in Vermont's Forests*. Vermont Department of Forests, Parks & Recreation, Waterbury, VT 1994.