



# The Old Stone Wall

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Division of Historical Resources

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## MAJOR DEVELOPMENT POSSIBLE AT DANIEL WEBSTER FAMILY FARM

James L. Garvin, *State Architectural Historian*

The Daniel Webster Farm in Franklin is the focus of a proposal to place a large residential development on its land. Farmed since the 1740s, the property includes the Webster family home, which is a National Historic Landmark.

The Sisters of the Holy Cross, owners of the property since 1960, placed the farm on the market four years ago at a price of \$1.2 million, in an attempt to compensate for their dwindling membership and straitened financial condition. Several parties expressed tentative interest in the site, but none made a commitment to purchase the property.

Last fall, however, P. D. Associates of Auburn signed a purchase-and-sales agreement on the Webster Farm. The developers proposed to cluster 130 manufactured homes along 5,000 feet of frontage on the Merrimack River, to designate some acreage for continued farming, and to dispose of a group of historic buildings that include the Webster home.

The land is currently zoned for conservation. To place a "manufactured housing park" on the property



Daniel Webster Family Farm, West Franklin, NH  
..."this is the most beautiful place on earth." (Daniel Webster, 1848)  
(Photograph by Linda Ray Wilson)

would require a zoning variance. The Franklin Zoning Board of Adjustment held meetings in January and February, each lasting until midnight, to hear arguments for and against such a variance. The board met for a final deliberative session on March 2, and on March 3 voted to deny the request for a variance. P. D. Associates has, however, expressed a determination to proceed with the purchase. Franklin zoning rules would permit the construction of as many as 60 individual homes on the 140-acre property.

Few New Hampshire properties in private ownership possess deeper history or greater cultural, archaeological, and ecological value than the 140-acre Webster Farm. Its prime alluvial soils have been designated as some of the most productive farmland in the state. The natural fertility and extensive river exposure of the site guarantee that the land is rich in prehistoric archaeological resources. The property also includes the site of a fort built in 1745 to help defend the northern frontier against Indian attacks.

*(continued on page four)*

### HIGHLIGHTS

DANIEL WEBSTER FAMILY FARM .....	1
VIEW FROM THE SOLARIUM .....	2
CURATOR'S REPORT .....	2
MOOSE PLATE GRANT DEADLINE.....	2
SCRAP SUMMER FIELD SCHOOL .....	3
NATIONAL REGISTER LISTINGS .....	3
MOOSE PLATE LICENSES .....	3
NH FARM & FOREST EXPOSITION.....	4

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## View From The Solarium

Ah, Spring. As much as we love the beauty of our New England Winter, Spring is the season of possibility, the season that brings most of us back to life and gets our juices going for those big projects we have put on the list for the coming year.

Understanding all that, Spring is the season for conferences and workshops that whet our appetite and give us ideas and point us to useful resources. One such event is the **Old House and Barn Expo**, highlighted in the NHPA newsletter and not to be missed by any old house and barn owner or aficionado.

One of the largest conferences in New Hampshire, and invaluable to those who make decisions locally that affect land use, development, and the preservation of natural and historic resources, is the **Annual Spring Planning & Zoning Conference** organized by the State Office of Energy and Planning, now in its 12th year.

This year's conference will be held Saturday, April 9, at the Center of New Hampshire in Manchester and is open to planning and zoning board members and conservation, heritage and historic district commission members. To get a flavor of the Historic Preservation Planning sessions, check this:

**Getting Started.** There is a lot to do to launch a heritage or historic district commission successfully—research, public education and advocacy, warrant articles, ordinances, management practices. Wherever you are in the process, this panel will offer tips and answer your questions.

**Practical Communication Strategies for Commissioners.** Tired of being misunderstood (or ignored) by local residents, the media or even City Hall? Panelists offer advice for developing and implementing strategies that will help you share your messages effectively with all of these audiences.

**Mock Historic District Commission Hearing.** Consider how your commission handles key issues as you attend this historic district commission hearing where commissioners will consider significance and integrity, preservation treatments, deferred

maintenance and financial hardship. The Moderator will ask for feedback and offer best practices along the way.

If you are in the trenches locally, working to protect and enhance your community's heritage, you don't want to miss this conference. Information can be obtained by calling OEP at 603-271-2155 or by going to <http://nh.gov/oepevents/springconference05.htm>.

James McConaha  
*Director, Division of Historical  
Resources, NH State Historic  
Preservation Officer*

## Curator's Report

The Joint Legislative Historical Committee is arranging for the State House portraits to be photographed in both digital and film formats, for upgrading the state web page entries and preparing for publication of the information in hard copy format. Simultaneously, research is focusing on the New Hampshire state militia, formed in 1792 and legislated out of existence in 1851. The records are voluminous, and are being transcribed as time permits.

Russell Bastedo  
*State Curator*



Gordon Jones explaining how he rescued his historic dairy barn—see Farm & Forest Exposition story on page four.  
(Photograph by Linda Ray Wilson)

## Applications for DHR Moose Plate Grants are due April 29, 2005

For more information, go to <http://www.nh.gov/nhdhr/moose.html>



(Photomontage by Richard A. Boisvert)

## NH SCRAP

(State Conservation and Rescue Archaeology Program)

**2005 Summer Field School  
June 28 – August 5, 2005**

Overlooking Amoskeag Falls, the 2005 field school will explore the 8,000 year history of the surviving portion of the famous Neville Site, a large multi-component Native American fishing station. Results of the field school will be used to guide future decisions on the use of the property.

Fieldwork will be supplemented with lectures by specialists in related fields. Completion of the field school will provide a solid introduction to field methodology equivalent to that employed in cultural resource evaluation and management projects. Field school sessions will begin June 28, July 12 and July 26.

The field school is co-sponsored by the NH Division of Historical Resources under the State Conservation and Rescue Archaeology Program (SCRAP), the Sargent Museum and Plymouth State University. All fieldwork and instruction will be directed by Dr. Richard A. Boisvert, NH State Archaeologist, and conforms to the standards for archaeology set by the National Park Service.

Both volunteers and students seeking undergraduate and graduate credit are welcome. All applicants must submit a registration form and a brief statement indicating why they wish to join the field school. For more information, see: <http://www.mv.com/ipusers/boisvert/nevillesite-website/index.html>. Registration must be received by June 6, 2005.

For more information about SCRAP, please visit our web site at <http://www.nhscrap.org>, or contact us by email at [preservation@nhdhr.state.nh.us](mailto:preservation@nhdhr.state.nh.us).

Richard A. Boisvert  
State Archaeologist

## Recent National Register Listings



**Suncook Village Commercial/Civic Historic District, Pembroke NH. Listed in March, 2005.** (Photograph by Maureen Taylor.)

The Suncook Village Commercial/Civic Historic District is located roughly in the center of Suncook, originally a mill village straddling the Suncook River in the towns of Pembroke and Allenstown along the Merrimack River. Its mills and brickyards supported the development of Suncook Village as a commercial center positioned between the state capitol, Concord, to the north and the manufacturing center of Manchester to the south.



The village continues to reflect the trends of community development during the Industrial Revolution with its concentration of commercial buildings along the main thoroughfares, the use of brick in building construction, and wider streets. This mixed use area is currently the focus of revitalization efforts under the impetus of Meet Me In Suncook, a local preservation group.



**Tucker Mountain Schoolhouse, Andover NH. Listed in March, 2005.** (Photograph by Edwin Hiller.)

The Tucker Mountain Schoolhouse was built in 1837 and remains essentially unchanged to this day. It is significant as a well-preserved example of an early 19th century rural school. It is the only one of the 13 schoolhouses that once served Andover to survive intact. The building was in use as a school for 55 years. Later it was a community center, the site of activities such as Sunday afternoon prayer meetings and evening candy-pulls.



**Interior of Tucker Mountain Schoolhouse, Andover NH.** (Photograph by Edwin Hiller.)

After a period of disuse, ownership reverted to the heirs of William Tucker, the original owner of the land. In 1972, two of Tucker's great-granddaughters deeded it to Frank and Madelyn Baker who cared for the schoolhouse and later donated it to the Andover Historical Society in 2004.

Christine Fonda Rankie  
National Register and  
Tax Incentives Coordinator



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## Daniel Webster Family Farm (continued from page one)



View west toward the Orphans' Home buildings; the Webster Home is the white dwelling at center left.  
(Photograph by Linda Ray Wilson)

Ebenezer Webster bought the farm in 1799. When the elder Webster died in 1806, the property passed to his sons Ezekiel (1780-1829) and Daniel (1782-1852). Upon Ezekiel's premature death, Daniel purchased full title to the farm.

Daniel Webster was a towering figure in American politics and statesmanship during the first half of the nineteenth century, attaining fame as one of the greatest legal scholars and orators of his period. Webster used the property as a retreat, a model stock farm, and a meeting place until his death in 1852. In 1848, he wrote to his son, Fletcher, "this is the most beautiful place on this earth."

The Webster Farm holds some of the strongest connections with Daniel Webster of any property in the United States. In recognition of its significance, the National Park Service listed the Webster family home as a National Historic Landmark in 1974.

In 1871, philanthropists established the New Hampshire Orphans' Home on the Webster Farm to care for the fatherless and homeless children left by the Civil War. The in-

stitution was one of the first American orphanages to be located in a healthful rural environment, away from the grime and congestion of cities. At first housed in the Webster dwelling, the institution eventually expanded to include nearly a dozen other buildings, most of which remain on the property.

At the center of the farm is Webster Place Cemetery, which holds the graves of several of the Webster family, including Ebenezer, and those of many local residents and a number of orphans who lived and died on the property.

In keeping with preservation practice at the time, the National Park Service designated only the eighteenth-century Webster home as a National Historic Landmark in 1974. Preservationists have since gained a deeper understanding of the significance of the setting of cultural properties. The National Park Service's northeast regional office recently wrote that "our office believes that there are grounds for considering an amendment to the original National Historic Landmark nomination that would include the property in question within the delineated boundaries. The apparent high level of integrity existing on the property that formerly served as the Webster Farm strongly suggests that this [land] should be considered as part of the NHL."

James L. Garvin  
State Architectural Historian



Steve Taylor, Commissioner of the NH Department of Agriculture, Markets, and Food, visiting with Gabrielle DiPerri, NHPA, at the barn exhibit. (Photograph by Linda Ray Wilson)

## NH Farm & Forest Exposition



Welcoming visitors at the barn preservation exhibit. (L to R) Gabrielle DiPerri, NHPA, Debbi Gagne, NHDHR, Jim Deely, Sanborn Mills Farm, Elizabeth Muzzey, NHDHR. (Photograph by Linda Ray Wilson)

The annual **NH Farm & Forest Exposition** returned to the Center of NH in Manchester on February 4-5, 2005. Through the generosity of the Expo's Board of Directors, the Historic Agricultural Structures Advisory Committee (better known as the "Barn Committee"), the NH Preservation Alliance, and the NH Division of Historical Resources shared a high-visibility exhibit at the entrance to the trade show.

The three partners presented a workshop on barn preservation as part of an all-day series sponsored by the NH Coalition for Sustaining Agriculture. John Porter of UNH Cooperative Extension and dairy farmer Gordon Jones of Chichester showed how the Jones family rehabilitated their historic 19th century dairy barn for continued dairy use, under budget and at substantially less cost than building a new replacement barn. They saved a local landmark without ever missing a milking or changing their herd management practices.

At the trade show exhibit, NHPA and DHR staff welcomed old friends and made new ones, while distributing information and providing technical assistance for farm and barn preservation, and for all other aspects of historic preservation in New Hampshire as well.

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