

New Hampshire's Town Pounds: Not Gone But Often Forgotten

By BEA LEWIS

Union Leader Correspondent

WOLFEBORO — Almost everyone may remember driving down a country lane or perhaps even a highway and coming upon enclosure of rock or, if lucky, of large cedar logs and wondering what it was.

A weathered sign may have explained that the now toppling walls were once the town pound.

In a recent meeting of the Wolfeboro Historical Society however new light was shed on the subject of town pounds and poundkeepers by a Wakefield resident Mrs. Elizabeth Banks MacRury. She has written a book on the subject entitled *Town Pounds of New England*. One of the oldest pounds in New Hampshire was built in 1774 and rests in the author's home of Wakefield.

Almost every town in New England had at least one town pound and most had more than one. Many are still standing even today.

Because of the important part that livestock played during these times a pound usually was constructed on the town common in the center of town to serve as a temporary enclosure for stray animals.

The central areas of the town were usually common land to be used by all and animals were let loose to graze on

the common at certain times of the year. As new areas of the town developed and became more spread out, a new town pound was requested — sometimes before another minister was requested.

Pounds were built in an assortment of styles and any two are rarely the same, some are square, ranging from 20 by 20 feet to 40 by 40 feet. Some are rectangular — 10 by 30 feet or 20 by 40 feet. An occasional round pound can be found.

Generally they were from 8 to 10 feet high and usually two feet below ground so enterprising animals could not once more gain their freedom by burrowing out.

The cost to construct a pound ranged from \$20 to \$60 and usually one man was hired by contract to complete the work. If he worked alone he usually received the grand sum of seven cents an hour, if he used his own oxen he received 12 cents an hour.

The Farmington pound built in 1802 cost the town \$20, and can still be seen today. In early town meeting records it can be seen that everyone had to help maintain the pound and they were given a notice on what day the pound was to be cleared and fined if they did not appear.

Probably the oldest pound rests in



WOLFEBORO'S TOWN POUND covered in a mantle of snow.

(Photo by Bea Lewis)

Durham and this was restored by a seventh grade class. Built in 1705, it was rather expensive, costing \$94.50.

The town pound and its keeper was an early town department and the poundkeeper was an elected official.

Many towns had a poundkeeper as late as the 1900's, but only one poundkeeper remains in New Hampshire.

Concord's poundkeeper apparently still is listed with all other officials but he has no duties and no pay.