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This article offers a modest contribution to the ongoing debate among archaeologists, Native American cultural authorities, and avocational researchers concerning the historical origins of the stone-heap sites commonly found in New England's forested hills. The author's recent review of historical periodicals, mainly newspapers and agricultural journals, yielded many previously unknown references to farmers constructing stone heaps by hand in working fields and pastures. Popular perceptions of this apparently widespread phenomenon varied. While stone heaping provided opportunities for both young and old family members to prove their worth, some ideologically progressive farmers expressed a strong distain for the practice. By the late 19th century, the region's abundant stone heaps discovered a new value as raw material for large road-building projects and came to symbolize a simpler way of life that had slipped away as the industrial age gained strength. These findings underscore the possibility that some proportion of the stone-heap sites that contemporary stakeholders identify as elements of ceremonial stone landscapes were created by 19th-century farmers for practical reasons.

Cet article offre une modeste contribution au débat en cours parmi les archéologues, les autorités culturelles autochtones et les chercheurs amateurs concernant les origines historiques des sites de tas de pierres que l'on trouve couramment dans les collines boisées de la Nouvelle-Angleterre. L'examen récent de l'auteur des périodiques historiques, principalement des journaux et des revues agricoles, a fourni de nombreuses références jusqu'alors inconnues à des agriculteurs construisant des tas de pierres à la main dans les champs et les pâturages. Les perceptions populaires de ce phénomène apparemment répandu variaient. Alors que le tas de pierres offrait aux membres de la famille, jeunes et moins jeunes, la possibilité de prouver leur valeur, certains agriculteurs idéologiquement progressistes ont exprimé un fort mépris pour cette pratique. À la fin du XIXe siècle, les abondants tas de pierres de la région ont été découvert comme une nouvelle valeur en tant que matière première pour les grands projets de construction de routes et sont devenus le symbole d'un mode de vie plus simple qui s'était éclipsé à mesure que l'ère industrielle gagnait en puissance. Les résultats soulignent la possibilité qu'une partie des sites de tas de pierres que les parties prenantes contemporaines identifient comme des éléments de paysages de pierre cérémoniels ont été créés par des agriculteurs du XIXe siècle pour des raisons pratiques.

Introduction

"When you have a farm, you have to move stones." This is what the owner of a small farm in Foster, Rhode Island, said regarding fieldstones he had heaped onto boulders in one of his pastures (FIG. 1A). I had seen his handiwork from the road and brought my camera and some questions that must have sounded trivial. But he was not trivial to me. He was the only living farmer I knew of who generated multiple, discrete stone heaps in functioning field and pasture lots. Fortunately, he was glad to show me a range of curiosities, including a quartz outcrop upon which he heaped fieldstones (FIG. 1B) that he periodically hauled away to fill holes and ruts. He also pointed to the base of a tree that he had encircled with fieldstones that he had no plans to relocate (FIG. 1C). But I was most intrigued when he led me to a woodlot to inspect several low-lying stone heaps centered on bedrock outcrops (FIG. 1D). Beneath veils of shadow and leaf litter, they looked ancient and mysterious. He said they were there when he bought the farm, having won it at auction after retiring from his non-agrarian career, and wondered who made them. In reply, I presumed they were left by previous farmers who also found stone moving unavoidable, though I am not sure he was convinced. Regardless, he planned to leave them for future generations to admire, which left me wondering what those admirers might think if his farm reverted from its

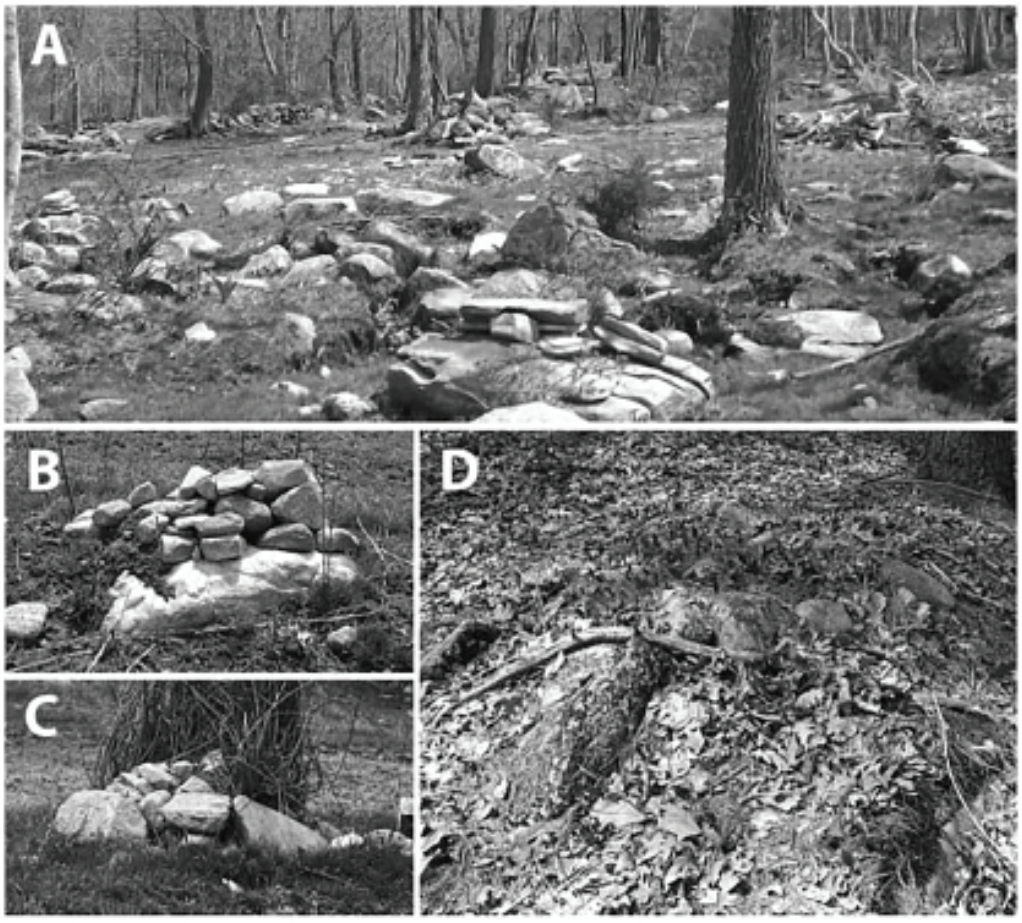

Figure 1. Stone heaps on a farm in Foster, Rhode Island, May 2015: (A) Modern fieldstone heaps on boulders in a pasture, (B) modern fieldstone heap on a shallow quartz outcrop in the middle of a planting field, (C) modern fieldstone heap around the base of a tree by the edge of the same planting field, and (D) one of several historical fieldstone heaps sited on shallow outcrops in a woodlot. (Photo by Timothy H. Ives, 2015.)

present state of development to forest. Would they understand that most of the stone heaps were unceremoniously created by an early 21st-century farmer with a flair for improvisation? If not, my incidental notes and photographs would stand as the best insurance against their unnecessary mystification.

The old stone-heap sites commonly found in New England's forested hills became objects of literary intrigue in the late 20th century when antiquarian researchers appear to have developed a peer consensus that most were indigenous ceremonial landscape architecture that only intuitively perceptive individuals willing to reject mainstream culture history could recognize (Ballard 1999; Mavor and Dix 1989; Muller 2003; Strohmeyer 1996; Waksman 1999). Credentialed archaeologists and historians took little notice of this emerging paradigm until after Native American cultural authorities endowed it with a new name and an ostensibly decolonial mission, effectively transforming it from "a hypothesis to be tested to an axiom to be defended" (Sowell 2012: 293). Today, like-minded tribal historic-preservation officers, antiquarians, and a few "cul-

turally sensitized" (in the sense used in United South and Eastern Tribes, Inc. [2014]) archaeologists are working to preserve and publicly recognize stone-heap sites as elements of "ceremonial stone landscapes" (United South and Eastern Tribes, Inc. 2007).

The identity politics that have come to surround ceremonial stone landscape claims often feature boldly oppositional postures toward unsupportive ideas (Ives 2018), such as the common and long-standing assumption among professional archaeologists that farmers created most of the stone features found in today's forests, including stone heaps, for practical reasons, e.g., Ives (2013), Jones (2015), Leveillee (2001), and Moeller (1987). According to one collaborative archaeologist, this assumption largely reflects the pursuit of "comfort in the practical, perhaps safer, interpretation of all such [stone] features as related to white farming practices," aimed at "purification" of land to clear it for development (Cipolla 2018: 59). Doug Harris, the Narragansett Indian Tribe's preservationist for ceremonial landscapes, contends that this assumption follows "the notion that savages could not have had a civilization that was sufficient to deal with the stars and with accounting for a celestial calendar" (Harris 2017). And an historian has suggested that "the very questioning of ceremonial landscape claims can be seen as retrenchment of anti-tribal ways of thinking and seeing" (DeLucia 2018: 280). I have not written this article to refute any of these statements and expect fellow archaeologists to afford them serious consideration. Rather, I have written this article because I *agree* with the ceremonial stone landscape paradigm's promoters and defenders that the preservation of our region's stone heritage is a worthy cause, and, I will add, worthy enough to be researched from many angles.

This original research article is the latest in my unofficial series on the topic of New England's stone heaps. My previous publications include a literature survey (Ives 2013), a relevant archaeological formation model (Ives 2015a), a critique of avocational theory (Ives 2015b), and a deconstruction of the identity politics surrounding interpretation and preservation (Ives 2018). This article's primary objective is to disseminate the results of an historical journal/newspaper search I conducted in 2018 that recovered numerous incidental accounts of 19th-century farmers constructing stone heaps, some of which were clearly built by hand in active fields and pastures. These findings suggest that it may be worth revisiting research by ceremonial stone landscape proponents James and Mary Gage, whose historical journal/newspaper search into historical agrarian field-clearing practices did not appear to identify similar accounts (M. Gage and J. Gage 2014), which seems in step with their previous proposition that only Native Americans "intentionally built *compact* and *carefully* constructed" (M. Gage and J. Gage 2011: 159) stone heaps, and that "a group of cairns indicates the presence of a Native American ceremonial site" (M. Gage and J. Gage 2011: 193).

By examining these historical accounts, I also offer modest sociocultural insights into a marginally documented but geographically widespread rural phenomenon that is no longer indexed in the collective memory. First, a semantic note is warranted. Elsewhere I have termed individual stone heaps "cairns" and groups "cairnfields" (Ives 2015a). But seeing as these British borrowings appear in none of the accounts featured herein, I have decided to use the more historically germane term "stone heap." And for the purposes of this article, eastern New York State is considered an "honorary" part of New England, which is consistent with the approaches of stone-wall historians (Allport 1994; Thorson 2002, 2005).

The Rise and Fall of Hill Farms

To appreciate when and why stone heaping appears to have become widely practiced in New England's hills, a broad-brush overview of their agricultural history is

useful.[1] Colonists began establishing farmsteads in the region's interior hills following King Philip's War (1675–1676), which left their original, indigenous landlords politically subjugated. Endowed with considerable timber reserves for building construction, fencing, and fuel, colonial hill farms operated for decades with little reason to consider sustainability. They usually encompassed fewer than 100 ac., were economically self-sufficient, and produced few market products.

However, a generation of young farmers brought up during the post–Revolutionary War baby boom was determined to meet, if not exceed, its parents' success. In the opening years of the 19th century they largely finished transforming southern New England's interior into a rolling tapestry of farms that were generally modest in size, partly according to the tendency to divide landholdings among multiple descendants. Among them were many of the entrepreneurs who drove local industrial development. The small mills they built along tributaries gave rise to villages and hamlets, which, in turn, opened new markets for local agricultural produce and a keener orientation to macroeconomic trends. Unlike previous generations, this one would run headlong into sustainability issues, as wood, land, and fertile soil grew scarce.

Farming the progressively deforested hillsides invited soil degradation, particularly from 1810 to 1840, when wool production became a principal venture (Allport 1994; Bidwell 1921: 689; Wessels 1997). During this period, sheep flocks grew rapidly (Baker and Paterson 1988: 98; Bidwell and Falconer 1941: 406–407), as did the number of small wool-processing mills (Sturges 2014: 487), contributing to a so-called sheep fever or wool craze driven by commercial demands and market speculation (Bullion 1988: 88). This trend was most pronounced during the 1830s, a decade dubbed the "Golden Era of Sheep Raising" (Day 1954: 187). In 1853, a seasoned farmer recalled the economic rationale of those days, when one would profit better from converting "his old fields into sheep-pastures" than raising crops, which had higher labor costs (Brown 1853: 443). But the environmental costs of wool's easy, short-term profits were undeniable. As terrestrial ecologist Tom Wessels noted: "[A] large percentage of the exposed bedrock found in the region today owes its presence to past overgrazing by sheep" (Wessels 1997: 59). Uplands were left stonier every time their silty runoff choked streams and rivers. If environmental historian Brian Donahue is correct, many of the region's farmers "were skinning the land, and they knew it" (Donohue 2007: 19).

Yet even during this "Golden Era," the decline of hill-farm culture loomed on the horizon. By the 1830s, westward migration had become a topic of widespread concern, as reflected in the advice of a "Green Mountaineer" urging fellow Vermonters not to sell off their land "to your rich neighbors for sheep pastures" (Fessenden 1835: 128). But, soon enough, many of the region's progressively rundown hill farms would hardly be worth selling. After peaking in the early 1840s, the region's sheep population declined, as many farmers turned to dairying to satisfy expanding urban markets (J. Wilson 1990: 23–33).

As the mid-century passed, ruralists continued pursuing economic opportunities in cities, manufacturing towns, and the West, leaving, in the words of one agricultural historian, "less thrifty and less enterprising" family members behind (Turner 1919: 222–241). Consequently, the "long-established habits and traditions" of the self-sufficient hill farm were quietly falling out of practice (Bidwell 1921: 694). Bear in mind that, while New England's net agricultural productivity, if indexed to output per farm acre, did not

1. By necessity, this historical context addresses the region's interior lands in very generalizing terms, in accordance with the notion that "across central New England there has been great similarity in the regional pattern of land use in terms of the extent and timing of deforestation, major agricultural uses, and the history of farm abandonment and reforestation" (Foster 1992: 768). Of course, broad-brush overviews are poor substitutes for more accurate microhistories and may hold little relevance to coastal and riverine subregions that were extensively farmed prior to the American Revolution.

plummet until after 1900 (Bell 1989: 456), lowlands had been increasingly shouldering the balance for decades prior. The "old pastures," criticized in the *Hartford Homestead* as "painful evidences of the wretched system of husbandry that has prevailed among us for the last half century," littered the countryside by 1860 (*Country Gentleman* 1860: 379). The region's market-oriented farmers, especially those working marginal lands, could not compete with the bounty arriving by rail from the West. And though the Civil War temporarily revitalized local wool production, it chiefly benefited that dwindling echelon of sheep farmers in northern New England who bought out smaller farms to provision their large flocks (Cole 1926; H. Wilson 1935).

Following the war, state governments began grappling with a challenge that would carry on for generations: figuring out what to do with abandoned farmland (*Hartford Courant* 1898; *Maine Farmer* 1891; Vaughn 1929; F. Wilson 1892: 10). Of course, reforestation met pockets of resistance, such as where farmhouses were repurposed as weekend estates (*Boston Sunday Globe* 1898; *Critic: A Weekly Review of Literature and the Arts* 1893), where locals continued haying viable hillside fields regardless of who owned them, and where loggers worked. Nonetheless, as the 20th century progressed, state and nongovernmental institutions amassed abandoned farmland for conservation, under which their secondary forests became sociopolitically ordained as "natural" spaces.

Upon encountering old farmstead ruins in the wooded hills, remember that "by far the greater part of the westward migrants" in early to mid-19th century America "were the sons and daughters of New England" (Thistlethwaite 1967: 100). The prairies and woodlands that they developed into farms along western frontiers were, of course, originally inhabited by any number of Native American tribal groups. But the young nation's Indian-removal policies ensured the availability of fresh land for yeoman farmers from the East who "exported" their land-clearing tradition (Pfaff 2000). Accordingly, it would be shortsighted to categorically regard the stone heaps, walls, and cellar holes as mere relics of an agricultural heyday. They are also silent testimonials to the mass displacement of western Native Americans in the name of manifest destiny.

Incidental Accounts of Stone Heaping

An early account of stone heaps sited on farmland is provided by Johnston Verplanck, a New York City resident who journaled throughout his month-long tour of upstate New York, a journey he took in 1822 to avoid the height of a yellow-fever epidemic. With satirical flair, Verplanck composed entertaining descriptions of countryside settings. For instance, when near Milford, he facetiously drew a cultural link between ancient Egyptians and local farmers:

> People in this part of the Country, must be of course, of Egyptian extraction, and by the way, stones are actually piled up in the fields in a pyramidical manner, which either proves the hypothesis, or clearly shows, that the Egyptians took the hint in the construction of their pyramids from our ancestors. (Verplanck 1968: 39–40)

He went on to marvel at the surplus of stone in this "Queer country," which "in many places looks as if it had rained stones instead of water" (Verplanck 1968: 40). Apparently, impounding fieldstones within "pyramids" was one way local farmers managed their surplus.

In 1910, a Maine resident recalled heaping stones when he was a young farmer. In regard to the latest winter weather, he wrote: "This, to some extent, duplicates the month of January 1876, when the snow went off and the writer picked up a field of stone heaps, since turned into pasture; but the stones are there yet to remind us of the fact" (*Oxford Democrat* 1910: 2). That farmers often left stone heaps in place, rather than carting or sledding them away, is evident in several of the accounts that follow.

The most detailed historical account of agricultural stone heaping known to the author appears in an 1895 issue of the *Providence Journal*, in an article about rural curiosities in Connecticut's northeasternmost town of Thompson:

> On the Josiah Dyke place, in this region, are a number of curious heaps of stones, piled up without mortar into pyramids so well and so solidly built that although built 60 years ago they are still in as good condition as ever, except where mischievous boys have torn them down. They were placed there over half a century ago by an uncle of the owners of the property. He was demented and spent his whole time in the fields, which are full of stones of all sizes, picking up the stones and placing them with great care in heaps which tapered slightly and reached a height of six feet or more. The work was so well done that it became a wonder of the countryside, and people came from far and near to look at the stone heaps. Now they remain in the fields, visible from the road, although their builder has long since passed away, and few of the farmers in the locality know their history. (*Providence Journal* 1895: 1)

A mere five sentences long, this passage is remarkably informative. First, it dates the construction of these particular stone heaps to the 1830s, at the height of the "sheep craze." The stone heaps were assembled from "stones of all sizes," suggesting that any fieldstone would have been suitable to include. Their maximum height generally corresponds to the practical limits of a typical adult's reach when standing. And, having been built with "great care" in "tapered" forms, the stones they contained were clearly intended to stay in place. Perhaps the most interesting implications are social. First, the fact that their builder is qualified as "demented" probably means that he suffered from progressive cognitive impairment, the price many pay for longevity. In regard to this account, stone-wall historian Robert Thorson (2018) qualifies the stone heaps as "a testament to dementia," acclaiming the therapeutic "value of stonework in happily passing the time as a form of engagement with the world, even when one's mind is slip sliding away." Thorson (2018) also notes that the "micro-history of this demented builder faded away in only six decades."

This account leaves one wondering why certain farmers would take such care in constructing stone heaps rather than simply tossing them in sprawling piles. There may be several practical benefits, none of which conflict. As proposed by science and natural-history author Susan Allport, farmers in New York and New England built stone heaps almost as well as their walls "so they wouldn't occupy more land than necessary or tumble down" (Allport 1994: 76). Her explanation is in step with an early 20th-century American agricultural handbook that states that fieldstones should be "compactly piled" to inhibit weed growth while occupying as little land as possible (Hays 1912: 39). And, previously, I proposed that the principal benefit of carefully stacking fieldstones from degrading pastures on the already unproductive surfaces of boulders was to increase the surface area available for vegetation (Ives 2015a). A Vermont farmer said as much in 1883, when he stated: "We pile all stones in the pasture, causing two spears of grass to grow where only one grew before" (Anderson 1882: 4). Interestingly, in his 1824 landscape painting of the seaport village of Blue Hill, Maine, Reverend Jonathan Fisher chose to include in the foreground a pasture in which fieldstones appear heaped on a bedrock outcrop (FIG. 2), out of the way of a nearby horse. Of course, cattle are less likely to break legs and horses less likely to throw shoes on terrain that is not littered with stones.

But pastures were not the only spaces where farmers heaped stones. For example, an 1848 account on improvements to a Massachusetts farm notes "an old orchard which had been in grass a long time, the soil thin, and the field covered with stone heaps" (*Vermont Phoenix* 1848: 1). And hayfields are implicated in an 1844 newspaper story about Silas Wright, the U.S. Senator from New York

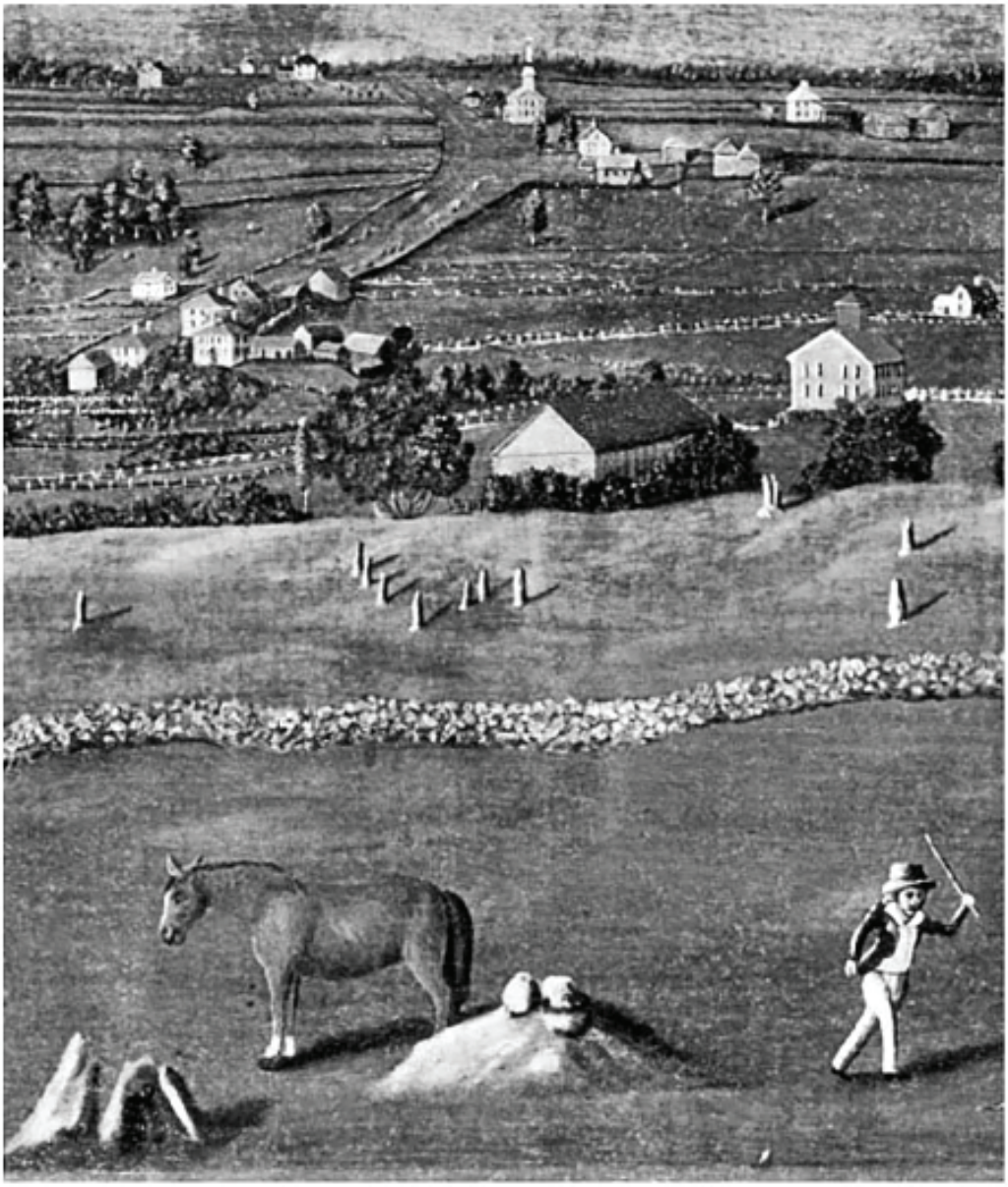

Figure 2. Detail of A Morning View of Blue Hill Village, oil on canvas, by Jonathan Fisher (1768–1847), 1824. (Courtesy of the Farnsworth Art Museum, Rockland, Maine.)

who would soon serve his state as governor. When Martin Van Buren visited Senator Wright at his small farm near Ogdensburg, New York, he found the future governor "in a linsey Woolsey dress, piling stones into heaps to save the scythe of the mowers" (*New York Herald* 1844: 2). And stone heaping probably occurred in vegetable fields as well, as suggested by two of the subsequently discussed accounts (*Boston Journal* 1903; *Providence Journal* 1888).

It should come as little surprise that stone heaping was also often relegated to children. Such work would not demand much, if any, supervision, nor would it require draft animals or heavy equipment. For example, a report published in 1820 mentions a group of Vermont children who "seven years ago last spring ... were at work together, heaping stones in a field" (*Freeman's Journal* 1820: 2). Among them was a boy specified to be "about ten years old." And among the many "Hints to Farmers" published in an 1834 issue of the *Genesee Farmer*, a Rochester, New York, publication, was advice on how to keep children busy. It specified: "Let them pick up stones about your farm, and pile them in heaps, to make a wall, repair the roads, or at least be out of the way of your scythe, hoe, or ploughshare" (Tucker 1834: 150). The notion of children heaping stones was sufficiently relatable to serve as a literary trope, as evidenced in the short story titled "The Orphan and the Fairy: A Story For Children," which appeared in an 1856 issue of a Vermont newspaper. It opens with the protagonist, "little Melody," being sent off "early one Monday morning in Spring" to "a distant field to pile stones" (*Green-Mountain Freeman* 1856: 1). The expectation that children would perform such work may have been strongly reinforced in some families. An extreme example is reported by a New York farmer and politician in his 1836 article titled "Industry. An Address to the Young": "A certain father who was deeply convinced of the importance of forming his sons to habits of industry, used to set them to pulling down heaps of stone, and then putting them back again. He has been known to employ them many a day alternate removing and replacing of stones" (Buel 1836: 1). Whether or not these exercises instilled the desired "habits of industry" was not reported, though the author warned that they risked "disgusting the young."

And stone heaping, presumably a monotonous and demanding exercise, was not easily forgotten by the experienced. This is evident in an 1886 political commentary on President Grover Cleveland's nomination of N. D. Bates as U.S. marshal for Connecticut. Praised for his "shrewd Yankee head," Mr. Bates was touted as long-accustomed to hard work, having "had to hoe corn and wear his fingers to the bone picking up stones in the pasture lots when he was a boy in the hills of Preston City," Connecticut (*New York Sun* 1886: 3). And childhood memories of stone heaping are colorfully related in an 1873 account from a Vermont newspaper:

> How well I remember, writes an ex-farmer, those warm, relaxing spring days on the old farm, when I was just large enough "to pick up stones." What tedious, dull, back-aching, hand-rasping, boy-disheartening days those were! But I do not remember what force it gave us boys when we were told in the morning, "Boys, pick up a dozen good, large heaps of stone and then go a fishing for the rest of the day!" (*Putnam County Courier* 1873: 1)

Progressive Criticism

Throughout the 19th century, consolidation, mechanization, and specialization came to signify progress across all industries, including agriculture. Accordingly, traditional labor practices of small family farms would gradually become stigmatized as inefficient, outmoded, and perhaps even shameful. As one agricultural historian observed, "the ideal of the yeoman" in the popular imagination gave way to "the emerging image of the rube" (Bell 1989: 464). As one might expect, farmers who left stone heaps strewn about their fields in plain view triggered certain progressive-minded critics. The editor of the *Farmer's Monthly Visitor* exhibited such a slant in 1839 when he insisted that "not a solitary stone pile is found encumbering the fields" of a certain "praiseworthy" farm in Canterbury, New Hampshire (*Farmer's Monthly Visitor* 1839: 43). And an 1872 *Vermont Farmer* article titled "Removing Stones from Tillage Land" bluntly insisted that "progressive farmers" do not

leave "small heaps scattered over" their fields (*Vermont Farmer* 1872: 1). If stone heaping carried any practical value on working farms, which, presumably, it did, progressive critics appear to have filtered such information out of their public discourse.

Some critics simply argued that stone heaping was inefficient, such as an 1855 commentator in the Vermont-based *Burlington Free Press* who insisted that stone picked from fields should be thrown directly "into a cart" because "the labor of constructing stone heaps, is labor thrown away" (*Burlington Free Press* 1855: 1). Farming advice published in 1874 in another Vermont periodical, the *Orleans County Monitor*, specifies that mowing around stone heaps that "lay in the field year after year" is "poor economy" (*Orleans County Monitor* 1874: 4). The Maine Board of Agriculture similarly commented in 1860 that "it is surprising that some farmers will clear their fields of stone and put them into heaps, or piles, which are constantly an interference in cultivation" (Maine Board of Agriculture 1860: 197).

Other critics seemed to condemn the personal character of farmers who generated stone heaps. For example, an 1842 commentary in an agricultural journal argues that any farmers "who mean to act up to the intelligence of the age" are obligated to remove all such obstructions from their fields (Adams 1842: 177). A patronizing article titled "A Few Hints for the Farmer," as featured in an 1849 edition of a Vermont newspaper, insists that "stones should never be accumulated in heaps in the fields" because it is "a slovenly practice" (White 1849: 4). This sentiment is echoed in an 1864 edition of another Vermont newspaper by a commentator who did not "like to see the rocks picked up and left in heaps" (*Vermont Transcript* 1865: 4). He condemned such practice as "a shiftless and thriftless way" that "spoils a good deal of good land, and makes bad work in the mowing."

By the close of the 19th century, hill farmers were seen by many as backward-facing reminders of an agricultural heyday that had clearly passed. This sentiment flavors a 1903 article published by a correspondent for the *Boston Journal*. Regarding the discovery of gold deposits in Bridgewater, Vermont, he wrote:

> Some of the people of this section are going wild over the reported discovery of gold here. Farmers who have piled up stones for years and years from their potato fields are now standing over some of these same stone piles with clubs whenever anyone appears who looks like a geologist. (*Boston Journal* 1903: 10)

The image of club-wielding farmers defending their stone heaps from an invasion of gold prospectors is amusing, but probably not realistic and certainly not flattering. From such an angle, stone heaps would seem to stand in passive defiance against some progressive gaze.

Others developed an affinity for the very same objects, however, affording them a certain dignity. By the late 19th century, the societal turbulence of the industrial age had pressurized a nostalgic undercurrent through popular culture, wherein which stone heaps became material reminders of a simpler time, be it real or imagined, when families worked together day in and day out.

Growing Shade and Fading Memories

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, stone heaps were still familiar elements of New England scenery (FIG. 3) and still widely recognized as the handiwork of rural farmers, though often from prior generations. For instance, a New Hampshire property owner wrote in the *Rural New-Yorker* that his estate includes "a woodlot of about a hundred acres" with a "well-built cellar hole, while around through the woods are the eternal little stone piles that meant hard work and clear mowing" (*Rural New-Yorker* 1918: 192). He recognized these stone features collectively as the remains of an abandoned farmstead and valued them as objects for introspection. Claiming that "no

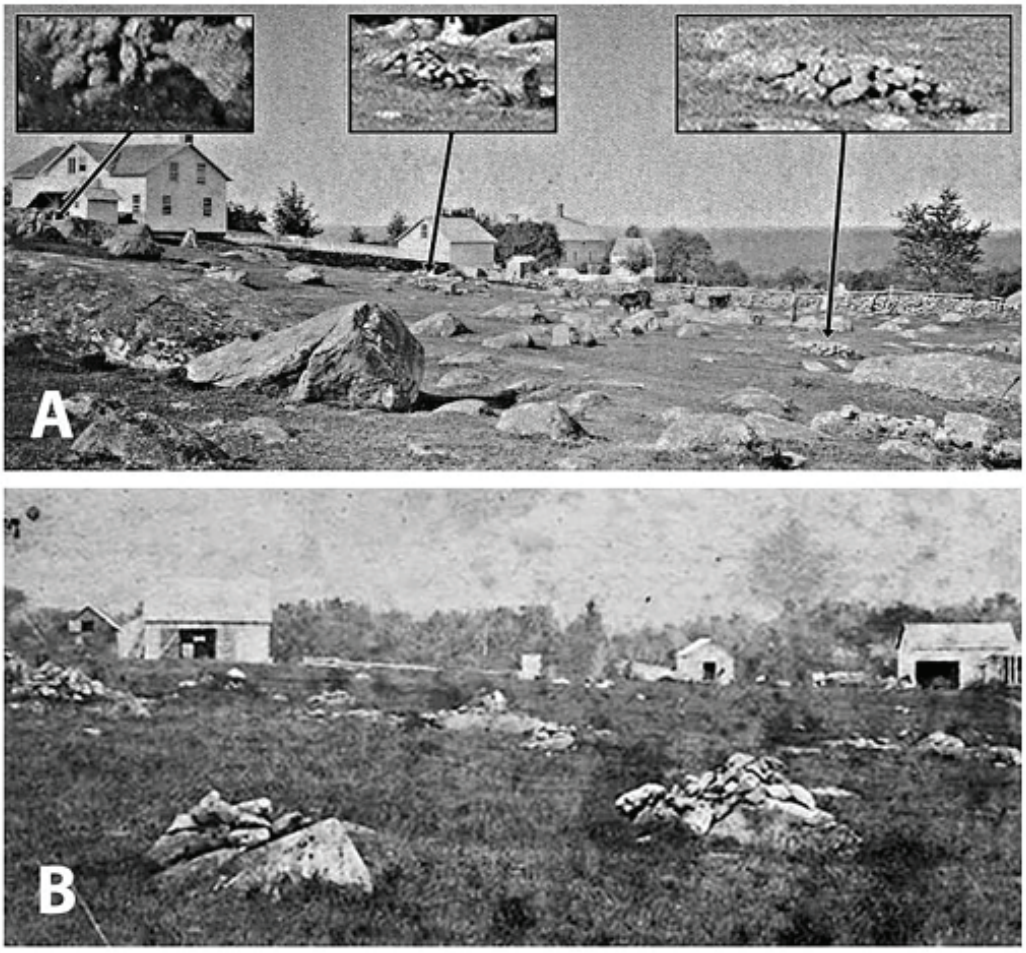

Figure 3. (A) A ca. 1900 photograph of Woodvale Farm, now part of the University of Rhode Island's Alton Jones Campus, in West Greenwich, Rhode Island. The pasture shown here contained fieldstone heaps, three of which are magnified for detail. Though these stone heaps were removed decades ago, the pasture is still grazed by cattle and appears much the same today (Photo courtesy of the University of Rhode Island), and (B) detail from a ca. 1870 stereoscope view of a farmstead in Lincoln, Vermont, showing stone heaps scattered throughout what appears to be a pasture. (Photo courtesy of the University of Vermont, Consulting Archaeology Program.)

one around here knows how old it is," he reported that, "when I feel blue on a Sunday, I go up there and sit down and smoke my pipe and wonder if the 35-cent dollar drove them out" (*Rural New Yorker 1918*: 192). Another New Hampshire property owner similarly reported owning a reserve of pine timber in what once constituted an "old field" (Pattee 1886: 4). He noted the visibility of "rock heaps among the pines" and an "old cellar hole ... over which a numerous family of boys and girls were born."

Similar accounts exist from southern New England. For example, one appears in a report published by a botanical club in an 1884 issue of the *Providence Journal.* In regard to the area of North Smithfield, Rhode Island, known as the "Blunders," they wrote: "[A]n interesting thing about the pine woods is that a little more than thirty years ago the ground was a level, cultivated field," which is betrayed by "occa-

sional stone heaps as thrown together in days long gone by" (*Providence Journal* 1884: 8). If their context is accurate, those stone heaps occupied a local landscape that was open and farmed during the mid-19th century. Today, the forest floor at the Blunders is still dotted with stone heaps, perhaps the same as those noted in 1884 (FIG. 4).

In 1888, the editor of the same newspaper published a letter submitted by an anonymous "Rhode Island Farmer" who contended that the state's extensive, abandoned farmlands should be brought back into production (*Providence Journal* 1888: 8). He characterized much of these lands as covered with "stone piles" that "stand moss-grown and covered with briars, among oak trees that have the growth of a life-time, when men on the verge of 80 years hoed corn and potatoes in their boyhood." If his context is accurate, that boyhood work took place during the second to third decades of the 1800s.

The value of stone heaps as familiar rural imagery is evident in a short story written for the *New York Weekly* and reprinted in the *Waterbury Evening Democrat*, a Connecticut newspaper, in 1891. With the title: "To the City. And the Sad Home-Coming of a Wayward Boy," most readers were probably not surprised to find that it was a parable on the moral and spiritual decay of young adults who forsake the wholesome life of a hometown farmer to pursue greater fortunes in the city. When the story's headstrong "New England boy" left "his good home" for the city, the narrator laments: "Farewell to the broad rough uplands, with familiar stone heaps dotted over" (Harker 1891: 3). The boy tragically returned the following year in a casket, after "the city ground him up and spit him out."

The percentage of New England's fieldstones that were quite literally ground up and spit out for roadbuilding projects in the late 19th and early 20th centuries may never be known. As reported by an upstate New York writer in 1902, farmers were "demanding pay" for the "stone heaps that dot their fields" in response to the "scarcity of free stone near where the crushed stone is being used" (*Ogdensburg Advance and St. Lawrence Weekly Democrat* 1902: 5). Some predicted that this infrastructure boom would effectively eliminate stone heaps from the countryside. At the turn of the 20th century, a Vermonter predicted that "[a] generation hence there will doubtless be but comparatively few stone walls or piles of stones scattered about the fields to be seen. They will either be in drains or used for permanent roadmaking" (*Barre Evening Telegram* 1900: 2). This is precisely what a writer had

Figure 4. Typical examples of the stone heaps that remain scattered throughout the area known as the "Blunders," in North Smithfield, Rhode Island. (Photos courtesy of the Rhode Island Historical Preservation and Heritage Commission, 2012.)

encouraged farmers to do in an 1892 issue of a newspaper based in Brewster, New York, a town located roughly 2 mi. west of the Connecticut border:

> There are in all directions in this town piles of stones on various farms, which the owners, at their own expense, would gladly draw to the road, providing the stone, when crushed, was used upon the roads in their vicinity. It is remarkable that the farmers do not move in this matter. (*Brewster Standard* 1892: 3)

Fortunately, for those who admire historical stonework today, early road-building projects did not provide land owners with enough incentive to categorically eliminate stone-heap sites. Modern observers have reported them from every New England state and New York State.

Conclusions

Future research may recover additional accounts of 19th-century farmers heaping stones, offering a clearer view into the topic. But, meanwhile, if it is agreed that the accounts reviewed here causally relate to the relatively abundant stone-heap sites in New England's rugged forests, a great mystery has not been resolved. Rather, a once ordinary strain of knowledge that dropped from collective memory has been reintroduced. Yet there is multivocality worth remembering here from a cultural historical perspective, understanding that agrarian stone heaps have held different meanings for different people over time. They embodied the pragmatism of hill farmers who endeavored to keep their most stone-riddled fields productive, affording both young and old family members opportunities to prove their worth. They were framed as objects of disdain by at least a few progressive farmers who defined their ideological vision against that of outmoded Others. And they became objects of quiet reflection for certain industrial-age folk who pined for a simpler and more satisfying way of life.

Recognizing the turbulence and mutability of collective memory across industrialized Western nations of the 20th century––e.g., Anderson (1983), Halbwachs (1992), Hobsbawm and Ranger (1992), and Ricoeur (2006)—I find it curious that some archaeologists seem reluctant to discuss the possibility that contemporary stakeholders are *reinterpreting* 19th-century agrarian stone-heap sites as ceremonial landscape architecture in early 21st-century New England, e.g., Harris and Robinson (2015) and Hoffman (2015). Archaeological studies of specific stone-heap sites from across the region have been collectively pointing to 19th-century agrarian origins for several years now—e.g., Fletcher et al. (2016), Hasho (2012), Jones (2015), G. Walwer (2015), and G. Walwer and D. Walwer (2018)—which is in step with the historical information just reviewed. Of course, none of this information "closes the book" on the broader debate regarding the origins and cultural significance(s) of New England's stone-heap sites. But I think a point has been reached where this information should be granted a full and open entry into that debate.

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