

York River Study Committee / ORV Subcommittee Meeting
Topic: Cultural and Historic Resources
Thursday, August 24, 2017, 12:30-2:30 p.m.
York Public Library Community Room

Meeting Notes

Attendees:

York River Study Committee members: Karen Arsenault, Stefan Claesson, Jean Demetracopoulos, Paul Dest, Cindy Donnell, Jennifer Hunter, Jack Murphy, and Chuck Ott

Presenters: Gemma Hudgell, Stephen Scharoun, Steven Mallory, Scott Stevens, Tad Baker, Suzanne Peterson, and Dick Lord

Other participants: Georgia Bennett, David Chase, Priscilla Cookson, Richard Cunningham, John Demos, Jody Fernald, Mary Ann Krebs, Wendy Pirsig, Jean Rae, Paula Sewall, Dexter Spiller, Virginia Spiller, Lew Stowe, and Connie Weeks, plus four others

➤ **Welcome/introduction – Jennifer Hunter**

Jennifer welcomed meeting participants. The York River Study Committee has organized a series of meetings on specific topics to gather and share information to help characterize watershed resources and develop management plan actions and recommendations. Experts, project managers, and others interested in topics are invited to provide input and share ideas, information, and concerns at these meetings. Participants introduced themselves.

➤ **Progress and (draft) watershed management goals – Stefan Claesson**

Presentation: <http://www.yorkrivermaine.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/Aug-24-Historical-Cultural-ORV-Meeting-Stefan.pdf>

Stefan noted that there are about 2,000 shell midden sites along Maine's coast and used the example of midden sites to underscore the sense of urgency with current loss of historic resources to changing climate conditions. With loss of such sites we are losing the chance to document and understand resources and history. The pH of midden sites is different than normal soils, so offers a good opportunity for preservation; however, excavation and now more severe erosion from climate change factors is threatening midden sites.

Stefan summarized the cultural and historic resource features and noted that two stand out for the York River watershed: archaeology and architectural history. Those are largely the focus of today's meeting. He shared some draft management goals and actions, and asked participants for comments.

➤ **Preliminary findings from archaeological survey – Gemma Hudgell, Northeast Archaeology Research Center (Stephen Scharoun also present to discuss findings)**

Presentation: <http://www.yorkrivermaine.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/August-24-NE-ARC-Presentation-redacted.pdf>

Gemma's presentation included a summary of the surveys and findings. NE ARC's background research included researching all known sites in York County for context. Pre-contact survey research looked at features such as level land, proximity to water, and well-drained soils. Historic survey research looked at old photos, maps, and resources documented by historic societies. From the research, they identified about 20 areas with pre-contact (Native American) sensitivity and 5 sites for post-contact history sensitivity. A field inspection survey occurred on a subset of the sensitive areas where permission was obtained and as time allowed. For

Native American sensitive sites, a four-day survey was planned. Nine of 23 sensitive areas were sampled with a total of 80 test pits using dozens of volunteers from the communities. Results included finding 48 Native American artifacts, 6 newly identified Native American sites – the oldest dating back to as much as 5,000 years ago, 414 Euroamerican artifacts, and 6 historic sites for listing in the Maine register. The historic research and walk-over surveys confirmed the presence of significant historic resources for the Punkintown area, likely of “outstandingly remarkable value” and meeting National Register criteria. The Native American findings at 6 of 9 sites sampled was remarkably high, and indicates there is a very high potential for further resource identification in the watershed area.

Questions, comments and additional discussion:

- People noted the problem of looting and taking of artifacts from known areas, including Punkintown, and sought guidance on options on how to protect resources
 - Citizen stewards can be the best protectors of resources.
 - MHPC has protections in place if listed on the state or national register, but site must be posted, which can bring more attention to resources.
 - The Town of Eliot owns some of the land for the Punkintown area so there may be an opportunity to work closer with MHPC on outreach and protective measures.
- Will additional survey work be done? The funds available for the study have been used and there are no immediate plans for additional archaeological surveys, but several people noted that there is much additional survey work that could be done. The York River Study had limited funds, so it chose a survey area where little had been documented to date. Ideally the full watershed would be surveyed.

➤ **Preliminary findings from architectural history survey – Steven Mallory, Groundroot Preservation Group (Scott Stevens also present to discuss findings)**

Presentation: <http://www.yorkrivermaine.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/Aug-24-Presentation-and-Illustrations-GPG.pdf>

Steven gave an overview of the process they used to conduct the architectural history survey and their findings. They identified and evaluated above-ground structures including houses, barns, and schools. They did not include features such as walls, cemeteries and dams. The survey area was a small sampling but is related to the larger watershed area. There was a higher concentration of resources in the areas of Brixham Road, Birch Hill Road, and Frost Hill. The Punkintown area has no surviving structures, only foundations and stone walls and is now all forested. Overall, they found 25 remaining historic structures that largely do not have a strong relationship to the river, with a few exceptions. Most of the historic structures are more related to agriculture and a movement of development inland.

A 1665 map shows development in the survey area and greater watershed area. Later maps (1780) show shipbuilding and other historic resources around “the Partings” area but maps from 1856 and 1872 do not show buildings there. Steven highlighted and described specific structures that were identified. They spanned various times and styles of development, including an 1860 Yankee barn, the Col. John Frost house and garrison, the 1790 Coopers Farm cape that once housed a ship carpenter, 1787 John Knowlton house, 1826 federal-style Major John Bartlett house, Third Hill/Bartlett family farm in use from mid-18th to mid-19th century that would have included some waterfront mills and shows agricultural expansion, 1880 Rogers farm, and the old School #3, along with several others.

Questions, comments and additional discussion:

- Development threats, largely subdivisions, erode much of the context for the existing historic structures.

- Upper reaches of the rivers and tributaries have been surveyed and various tide mills have been documented. These are very notable structures.
- Many York River area historic resources are National Register eligible, but are not on the list, due in part to the cost of documentation.
- The whole river system and watershed area should be analyzed as thoroughly as possible.
- 25 new structures were added into the State's CARMA database.
- It's estimated that about 5% or less of the structures in the survey area are historic resources.

➤ **York River history and significance – Emerson “Tad” Baker**

Tad gave an overview presentation about the history, archaeology and significance of the York River. He indicated Native Americans settled in York County about 12,000 years ago. Native Americans would have used the York River and its tributaries for transportation. Europeans settled in York in around 1630 or 1631, close to and along the river, using it for transport. Settlement throughout the 1600s largely continued along the river and its tributaries. By the 1630s there was much mill activity in the Cider Hill/Dolly Gordon area. In the 1660s the village area grew including the meeting house and jail. There were likely over 200 sites in the 17th century, most of which were wiped out in the 1691 Indian raid. The river was still a major focus for settlement in the 1700s and York prospered due to its harbor. Many of these early structures still exist due to their proximity to the river – existing building and development set-backs help protect many sites. Over 200 historical archaeological sites in York are in the MHPC register.

Tad shared some of the many notable studies and sites that have been documented. Henry Mercer documented numerous shell middens – most, if not all, have since been destroyed. Bob Bradley searched for the St. George's 1635 Anglican chapel, the earliest known of its kind. There were excavations for the 1641 Henry Donnell site near Stage Neck. The Sayward Wheeler House dates back to 1718 and there are many more notable sites in the Harbor area: Elizabeth Perkins House, Sewall bridge, Hancock Wharf, the Meetinghouse, etc. Point Christian (Thomas Gorges) is credited as the site where organized government in Maine began.

Lumbering and mill sites grew further upriver, along New Mill Creek (now Cider Hill) and Old Mill Creek (now Dolly Gordon). York is a site of the beginning of tidal mill dams and tidal saw mills in New England, with dams on Old Mill Creek dating to 1634 and 1705. Smelt Brook was a site of a ship building yard and has a historic tidal saw mill. The Scotland sites, including the 1707 McIntire House have gained international attention because of the resettling of about 100 Scottish prisoners of war, who were shipped to New England including York, following the 1650 Battle of Dunbar. These POWs were the few Scottish survivors from thousands that were imprisoned after the battle.

Despite all that's known there remains incredible archaeological potential, especially at upriver sites where subdivision has been minimal. There are opportunities to work cooperatively – with the town, land trust, historical societies and landowners – to protect sites.

Questions, comments and additional discussion:

- Evidence of ditching and diking for saltmarsh hay exists along the length of the river. Marsh lots were common and very valuable early on.

➤ **Lamprey River Partnership Wild and Scenic River designation – Suzanne Petersen and Dick Lord**

Suzanne gave a quick overview of the Lamprey River designation as a Partnership Wild and Scenic River and what it's meant for river protection. The Lamprey River designation is based on the river's values for river herring, historic resources, pristine ecology, and water quality. Thirty-four historic resources are included in

the Lamprey River assessment, on which designation was based. One historic resource initially identified was the Wiswall Dam site. It was not fully documented and inventoried at the time of the designation. Following designation, the site has had more thorough assessments done and it's been expanded to include a mill district. The Lamprey River group celebrated its 20th year as a designated Partnership Wild and Scenic River in 2016. They have a 20-year report highlighting all they've accomplished as part of the program.

Dick provided some additional background on the Lamprey River Partnership Wild and Scenic designation. He indicated the Lamprey started off as a State designated river through the NH Department of Environmental Services, which is a different program than the federal Wild and Scenic designation. The New Hampshire State program designation includes the length of the river through 14 towns and that program created a local advisory committee for the river. The Partnership Wild and Scenic River (PWSR) designation includes only the four most downstream communities on that section of the river. However they didn't want to have a separate advisory committee, so the advisory committees for the state program and the PWSR program were combined. The Lamprey has been a PWSR for over 20 years. He indicated initially when they were considering PWSR designation there was some concern expressed over the potential for federal taking of land, but they've demonstrated that's not the case for this program. The Partnership WSR program is a different model, one that began right around the time the Lamprey was designated. It works for rivers that flow through private lands, not federal lands.

The PWSR program funds have helped them implement many projects on the Lamprey River to protect important resources, including historic resources. The PWSR money has been about \$80K-\$90K per year, and it has helped the program leverage additional funds – about \$3 for every dollar from the National Park Service. They've been very successful in applying for other grant funds. The PWSR designation qualifies them for other funding opportunities within the National Park Service. In addition, it's helped them leverage partners to apply for grants and work on projects.

Questions, comments and additional discussion:

- How does the Lamprey River Advisory Committee address the conflict between historic dam preservation and habitat conservation?
 - Dick Lord noted in their case, as a NH State designated river, the LRAC can comment on river projects and the NH Department of Environmental Services must consider their comments. The same program does not exist in Maine.
 - With regard to the federal PWSR program, there is the Section 7 review, but that only applies to federally funded or federally permitted projects that are in the river. In those cases, the local advisory committee, through NPS, can identify potential impacts of a project on the resources that were identified in the management plan. Make sure to write the management plan to protect what the local community wants to protect.
 - There is not always a conflict between natural resource protection goals and historic resource protection goals around dams. In some cases, dams have been removed with important structures and signage remaining to protect historic values; in others, dams have remained because overall they are providing habitat values, especially when fish passage is included.
 - An important aspect of the PWSR designation, in situations such as competing uses or competing demands, is that the designation and the existence of the local advisory committee and process has served as an “enabler” to facilitate more robust community discussions around the issues.
- Suzanne shared some outreach materials, including Wiswall Dam project overview materials that match signage recently developed, and the draft 20th anniversary report for the Lamprey River PWSR. These and other documents are (or will be when final) on the program website: lampreyriver.org