Did You Know That...?

Explorations into Walpole People, Places & History with Ray Boas

...it appears Walpole

built four Town Pounds, but in two different locations, and possibly a fifth in a third spot? New England's Town Pounds originate from England and Europe. The word 'Pound' dates from the 15th Century, coming from 'impound', or 'to shut up in a pen or pound'. Here, in the 18th and early 19th Centuries, animals, particularly cows and pigs, were not fenced in but allowed to roam and graze on the central "Common" lands of a town. But, should animals wander and destroy property or crops, they were taken to the Pound.

The New Hampshire legislature, in July 1828, passed several bills governing the operations of Town Pounds. Even earlier, an elected Town official was the Pound Keeper, or Pounder. His duties were to confine errant animals in the pound where they remained until claimed by the owner, who had to pay a fee for its release. A system of markings was established, with those identifying marks registered with the Town Clerks. Town meeting and other records show a mark could have been "a hole through the right ear," or "a slit in the left ear," or even "a cut off tail."

In Walpole, it was voted in 1765 that "every man was to give one day's work to build a Pound." The location was not documented, but most likely was at the top of the current Old North Main Street where the Meeting House was being constructed. Benjamin Bellows was planning at the time for the village to be centered here. But, as population moved south, a new Pound was built at the south end of Main Street on Col. John Bellows land adjoining James Bundy, Jr.'s blacksmith shop, which was located on the south side of what is now South Street. Two years later it appears another pound 40 ft. by 40 ft. and 6 ft. high of stone, was built here by Manoah Drury.
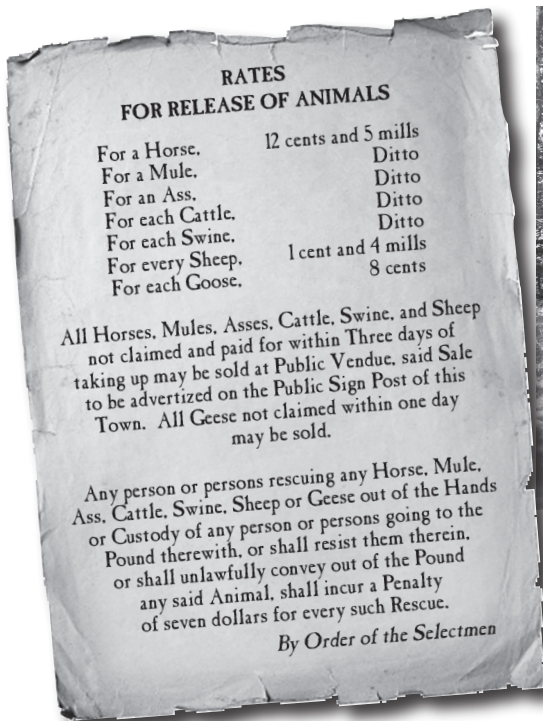
With the population beginning to settle to the top of Prospect Hill, it was voted in 1784 to build a Pound on Maj. Benjamin Bellows land near the corner of Antipas Harrington's land there. A new Meeting House soon was built here, and a Common laid out. In 1793, it was voted to "to remove old Pound and build new on westerly corner of common 40 feet 40 feet x 10 feet high." Again, this was at

Marlborough, NH, Town Pound

RATES
FOR RELEASE OF ANIMALS

For a Horse,   12 cents and 5 mills
For a Mule,   Ditto
For an Ass,   Ditto
For each Cattle,   Ditto
For each Swine,   Ditto
For every Sheep,   1 cent and 4 mills
For each Goose,   8 cents

All Horses, Mules, Asses, Cattle, Swine, and Sheep not claimed and paid for within Three days of taking up may be sold at Public Vendue, said Sale to be advertized on the Public Sign Post of this Town. All Geese not claimed within one day may be sold.

Any person or persons rescuing any Horse, Mule, Ass, Cattle, Swine, Sheep or Geese out of the Hands or Custody of any person or persons going to the Pound therewith, or shall resist them therein, or shall unlawfully convey out of the Pound any said Animal, shall incur a Penalty of seven dollars for every such Rescue.

By Order of the Selectmen

Facsimile of mid-1800s Pound poster

Alstead Town Pound located on Route 12A

the top of Prospect Hill, Walpole's current Common not being laid out until the 1830s. When the Hooper Institute School was built in the 1920s, stones from the Pound were used in its foundation.

Usually built of stone, Pounds were built in an assortment of styles. Some were square, some rectangular, and even round Pounds have been seen. Generally they were 8 to 10 feet high and two feet below ground so animals could not dig their way out. There is a Pound nearby in Marlow, and of interest is the Pound just south of Alstead Center on Route 12A, built in 1797, according to the Alstead town history, but its sign reads 1767.Tthe early Alstead government first centered here on the farm of Timothy Delano. For a real treat, pack your picnic basket and blanket, and head to the original, now abandoned, Marlborough, New Hampshire, Town Center (1776). This was the site of the Meeting House on the 3rd NH Turnpike, now Frost Hill Road. The Pound, built here in 1783, was restored along with this entire area in 2005, resulting in this peaceful location. When driving through old New England towns and you spot a tall stone enclosure, now you will know what it was.

CHESHIRE KIDS by Erik Doescher