

The Heritage Commission: Twenty Years of Helping the Lyndeborough Community

The Lyndeborough Heritage Commission has been an active part of the Lyndeborough community since the town voted it into existence at the annual town meeting in March 2004. And yet, few people know about the commission and all the great things that we have done over the last twenty years. Join with us in celebrating all our accomplishments that have made Lyndeborough a town that we can all be proud of.

This is a town commission, (pursuant to NH RSA 673:4-a and 674:44-a, for those keeping score at home) “for the proper recognition, use, and protection of resources, tangible or intangible, primarily man-made, that are valued for their historic, cultural, aesthetic, or community significance within their natural, built or cultural contexts.” We know, that’s pretty heavy wording, but the idea is that we are a town commission that is set up like the Conservation Commission. The idea was for the Conservation Commission to be in charge of preserving, defending, and raising awareness for natural environments in town while the Heritage Commission is in charge of preserving, defending, and raising awareness for historical and cultural sites in Lyndeborough.

The mission of the Heritage Commission has been to find and list all the town’s cultural and historic man-made artifacts. Examples of the built environments that we are interested in preserving and cataloguing include cellar holes and old foundations, mill sites, culverts and old roads, stone walls, and historical structures in town. We are an advisory commission, with its members appointed by the Select Board. Our job over the last twenty years has been to help build awareness of historical and cultural sites in the town, so that they can be preserved for future generations to appreciate and enjoy.

Before we get into all the many things that the Heritage Commission has accomplished over the last 20 years, it is necessary to make sure everyone understands what it is not. The Heritage Commission is a town commission and is a totally different entity than the Lyndeborough Historical Society. The Historical Society is a private, non-profit corporation that wants to preserve and catalog Lyndeborough’s history, but is not a public town-funded entity. The Heritage Commission also is different from the Historic District Commission, which has statutory authority over the Historic District in Lyndeborough Center. And it is not the Monuments Committee (both the original one that was in charge of the South Lyndeborough Common and the recent incarnation that is in charge of erecting a Revolutionary War monument in 2026). It also is unrelated to all the meetinghouse committees that the town has had over the years. Yes, that is a lot of committees, boards, and groups for a pretty small town—often with the same town residents on them—but the Heritage Commission is a separate public entity, under state laws, voted in by the citizens of Lyndeborough. Our goal is to help the town of Lyndeborough by preserving and advocating for its culture and heritage.

With the preliminaries out of the way, let us head down memory lane to highlight all the wonderful things that the Lyndeborough Heritage Commission has done over the last two decades:

Repairs and Preservation:

One of the first efforts that the Heritage Commission took on was to restore the Woodward Monument on Center Road (almost across from the entrance of Herrick Road.) This is a small obelisk granite marker, dedicated to Mrs. Christiana Woodward, who was killed on that spot in a carriage accident while delivering mail in 1852. (She is buried with her husband in the South Cemetery.) The monument was overgrown with brush, and the posts around it had been damaged over the years, including almost annually by snowplows. As the land with this monument was subdivided and sold, the Heritage Commission got involved, to ensure that the memorial stone would not be destroyed or forgotten. Through the efforts of the Heritage Commission, the monument site became property of the town, the posts were replaced, flowers were planted, and an explanatory sign was installed. The monument is once again a suitable memorial to a fallen Lyndeborough native.



Another early success for the Heritage Commission involved a possible Native American burial site in town. After the land around Badger Pond in the center was sold, the Commission advised the new owners of land at one end of the pond of the possibility that there was a Native American burial site. Bones at that site had been found in the past and had been recorded in the first town history. Because of the concern expressed by the Heritage Commission, the owner of the property agreed to a “no dig” arrangement for that area. Over the past twenty years, that site is a part of their property that is now no longer at risk of disturbing any possible human remains.

After receiving a tip from a resident, the Commission added the date of death to the gravestone for Wallace Dole. This resident of the town for most of his life had been a veteran of the Mexican Expeditionary Force in the years before the First World War. He died in 1974, but his date of death had never been added to his stone. The Commission felt that it was the duty of the town to make this right for a veteran who had given so much to his country.

Several years ago, members of the Heritage Commission went to the state archives in Concord to get copies of the Blister Rust maps produced by the state. These maps include many of the stone walls and foundations that were on private property and contain a great deal of information that various boards can utilize (such as the Planning Board and the Conservation Commission.) The originals of those maps had been lost over the years.

Clayton Brown, a long-time member of the commission, volunteered to rebuild the gate for the town pound and add new hardware. He installed the new gate in 2010. Along with the Highway Department and volunteers cleaning out the pound, the addition of the new gate has improved the appearance of the pound and the historic district in Lyndeborough Center. Over the last 15 years, many people have gotten “selfies” of themselves in the pound as well as having the high stone walls of the pound in the background. This area has become a place to enjoy the view and the ambiance once again, thanks in part to Clayton Brown and the Heritage Commission.



Led by Jessie Salisbury, the hand-painted backdrop in the Center Hall was fixed by Curtains Without Borders, a non-profit group in 2015. This invaluable curtain now has been protected and can be unfurled (carefully!) for all to see. With the floor of the stage being refinished (after the ugly and broken linoleum was removed), the back walls painted white, and the floor to the side of the stage being fixed by the Highway Department, the stage area of the Town Hall has now become a much more beautiful area. The town hall can more readily be rented out for functions, now that the hall has been renovated (though the “saloon doors” that are meant to discourage people from climbing the stairs have officially been rejected by the Heritage Commission. Those doors, and the stairs in the anteroom that were removed when the police department was in that room should both be replaced.)

Historic Preservation:

In 2013, the Heritage Commission wrote up a letter, to be placed in all applications for logging, that every attempt should be made to avoid harming any cellar holes, culverts, and other structures when logging. A similar letter is included in all demolition applications, starting in 2016, for the owner to be aware that historic structures should be carefully considered as vital components and physical manifestations of the town’s history and culture. As part of our efforts to record historic structures, the Heritage Commission has taken photographs of old houses in town, before they have been demolished. While this does not save the buildings, it at least has allowed for there to be a visual record of these structures.

The Heritage Commission helped the Town Clerk in securing a grant to preserve many of the town records. Lyndeborough is lucky in that it still has most of its old town records, which are very important for research. This preservation—as well as being able to retain the records in the town’s possession—is invaluable for the town. We can see this with an example: members of the Commission have easily been able to find in the town records in possession of the Town Clerk evidence of a road closure to avoid any controversy or confusion—or lawsuits or legal fees. Having both these documents preserved and accessible as well as knowledgeable Heritage Commission members to find and interpret these documents has potentially saved the town a good deal of money over the last twenty years.

One accomplishment of the Heritage Commission was getting the Historic District Commission to exist, since we wanted an official commission that had statutory power (rather than be an advisory board) over the historical district in the center. Similarly, the Heritage Commission was instrumental in helping to get the overgrown town common in South Lyndeborough made into a memorial park, with the return of two war monuments and the Civil War navy cannon, dedicated to the memory of Alonzo Hartshorn, the town’s second death in the war. The Commission not only erected a sign for the common (see list of signs) but also put up a sign to indicate the foundation of the 1911 railroad depot and protected the area with a fence. Members have been beautifying the common for the last fifteen years. In addition, members helped to install a granite stone between the monuments in the common and had two bronze plaques engraved in 2017, honoring veterans of Vietnam and all conflicts since then.



Educational Outreach:

Members of the Heritage Commission have volunteered since 2017 to show fourth graders from the Florence Rideout School local history during their annual local history field trip. As part of an all-day tour of the historical sites in the two towns, children from Lyndeborough and Wilton have been exposed to the history of both the public buildings and the pound at Lyndeborough Center and Citizens' Hall, as well as Walter Holland, in full uniform, showing them the Lafayette Artillery's cannon. These children have remembered their field trip as one of the highlights of their year, especially the cannon.



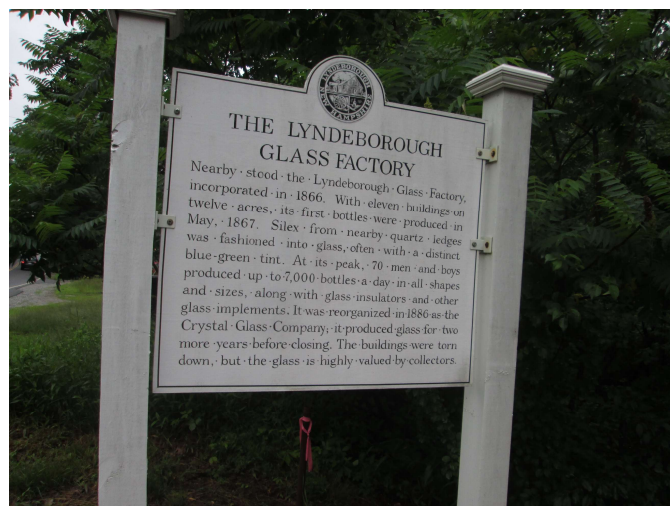
In conjunction with the Wilton Heritage Commission, in 2021 the Lyndeborough Heritage Commission hired a professional videographer to create a 45-minute documentary on Wilton and Lyndeborough called "A Shared History—Wilton and

Lyndeborough.” Members of the Commission were recorded reading brief histories of the Pinnacle Hotel, Clark Pottery, Lyndeborough Glass Company, the Lafayette Artillery Company, Lyndeborough Center, and South Lyndeborough. This video, which can be seen on youtube.com, had its premiere at the Wilton Town Hall Theatre, and has been a favorite of the fourth graders doing local history. The combination of the fourth-grade field trip and the video have enhanced Lyndeborough’s image in the minds of its children and helped to make our town a place to be proud of.

Historical Outreach:

One important endeavor by the Heritage Commission has been to make the public more aware of Lyndeborough’s history and culture. To that end, starting in 2019, the commission has erected multiple historical marker signs in town:

1. The South Lyndeborough sign on the common has a short history of the village on one side and a short history of the two railroad stations and Baptist Church on the other side. This sign has flowers planted below it. These flower gardens, along with the monuments and the brick circle and planter around the flagpole, have been maintained by volunteers, most of whom are on the Heritage Commission. The costs of the annual flowers have not been paid by the town over the last decade, because the benefactors believe in honoring past citizens and veterans through beautifying the common.
2. Between the church and town hall in Lyndeborough Center, the Heritage Commission erected a sign that describes the history of the center. The Commission also had two signs made that were affixed to the town hall in the center—one for the three bicentennial trees that stand next to the town hall, and the other for the history of the Pinnacle Grange No. 18, which met at the town hall for over 90 years.
3. On Forest Road, on the corner of Glass Factory Road, the commission erected a sign for the Glass Factory, perhaps Lyndeborough’s biggest claim to fame. Scott and Stephanie Roper built a stone wall for a flower garden around that sign, and Stephanie has been keeping the flowers planted and the area trimmed to be presentable for passing motorists to admire for the past seven years.



4. On the corner of Sharp Road and the 2nd N.H. (Francestown) Turnpike is a historical sign for the Clark Pottery, founded by Revolutionary War soldier, Peter Clark. Mark Chamberlain and Stephanie Roper built a stone wall for a flower garden around that sign. Stephanie has kept flowers in the summer and occasionally has been trimming that area as well.

5. On Old Temple Road, the commission installed a historic sign for the two stone arch bridges, which were built in 1873 and bypassed by a new bridge in 2000. The Highway Department cleared out scrub and brush from the area in 2023 for a more presentable public area. The Heritage Commission is working to ensure that the bridges have sound engineering and commissioned an engineering study. These stone double stone arch bridges are unique and should be preserved.



6. Another sign was installed off Brandy Brook Road, describing the history of the first silix quarry for the Lyndeborough Glass Company and the Hadley Brothers furniture and toy factory.

7. Along with the larger (24" by 36") signs, the commission installed several smaller signs. Besides the two on the center hall for the bicentennial trees and the Grange and the one for the Woodward monument on Center Road, we installed one for the Soldiers Monument in the South Yard Cemetery, the railroad depot in the South Lyndeborough common (see below), and the grave of Dr. Bartlett, who contracted smallpox after saving others from the disease.

8. Over several years, the Heritage Commission erected signs for each of the town's eight town-owned cemeteries. These were placed on or near the gates of the North Cemetery, Whittemore Cemetery, Center Cemetery, Perham Corner, Johnson's Corner, Dolliver, South Yard, and the one on Forest Road. In addition, as mentioned, the grave of Dr. Bartlett has a sign that the Heritage Commission produced.

The Heritage Commission sold signs for old houses (those built before 1910) for several years and has restarted this program.

The Heritage Commission also had “Welcome to Lyndeborough” signs installed at the Greenfield and Wilton entrances to town along Forest Road, on Center Road at the Milford line, and along the 2nd N.H. (Francestown) Turnpike running in both directions. The first three were installed in 2021, with the North Lyndeborough signs added in 2023. These signs help to promote the town.



In addition to the signs, Jessie Salisbury, on behalf of the Heritage Commission, wrote a picture history of the railroad in Lyndeborough in 2012. Scott Roper wrote “An Architectural and Cultural Inventory of the Town Hall” on behalf of the Historic District Commission, though it was important for the Heritage Commission as well.

And, of course, the most recent History of Lyndeborough was co-written by two members of the Heritage Commission. This town history has received very good comments and had helped to support the Heritage Commission’s effort at outreach about Lyndeborough’s culture and history.

Community Service:

The Heritage Commission helped to clean out the upstairs of the Center Hall in 2008. This had been the dining hall for town meetings, back when Rosie Howe prepared the ham supper and everyone could fit in the upstairs of the town hall (though those of us with claustrophobia seriously question fitting that many people up there, even then!) the Heritage Commission also participated in a regional open house for local and town history. Several years after cleaning out the upstairs, members volunteered to clean up behind the stage and in the front anteroom. Many of the old deacon benches and chairs from the upstairs are now property of the Lyndeborough Historical Society, and are located in a resident’s barn. (Thanks for that!)

The bell that had been located in the Center Schoolhouse for a century was donated to the town in 2016. Commission alternate member Wally Holt made a cradle for the bell and a brass plaque was engraved, so that the bell could be displayed upstairs in Citizens' Hall. Visitors love looking at and ringing the school bell and are often surprised at how loud the bell ring is.

Resident Chris Schoen crafted four beautiful wooden display cases for the Heritage Commission that have been installed in the upstairs hall in Citizens' Hall. The Heritage Commission has set up displays of Lyndeborough history in those cases, as well as the display case in the meeting room in the first floor of Citizens' Hall. These display cases have helped to teach the important history of the town to residents and visitors alike. We would like to again thank Chris for creating such beautiful showpieces to highlight Lyndeborough history!

The Heritage Commission has been part of Community Day from its start, supporting its goal to bring the community together for a day in August to celebrate Lyndeborough and its people. In 2023, the Heritage Commission coordinated with the Lyndeborough Historical Society to co-sponsor a new and revitalized Community Day.

The Heritage Commission ensures that alterations to and upkeep of Citizens' Hall, which is on the National Register of Historic Places, conform to the Secretary of the Interior's standards. Use of the second floor and the town's ability to attain some federal and state grants relating to Citizens' Hall depend on our adherence to these standards. The Commission also works in collaboration with the Historic District Commission in an attempt to ensure that repairs to Center Hall and the Town Common conform to the Secretary of the Interior's standards. Because the hall and historic district in the center are listed on the National Register of Historic Places, the town's ability to qualify for some federal and state grants relating to Lyndeborough Center depend on our adherence to these standards.

Significant Projects and Awards:

A project that took a long time to complete was creating a map showing old cellar holes, old roads and trails, old culverts, where some of the town's many sawmills, grist mills and cider mills were located, and the locations of many other structures. Many old timers were involved in this project, including Helen Van Ham and Clayton Brown. This original hand-marked map has recently been digitized.

Another project that took a long time and a lot of effort was the Old House catalog. This included getting photos and brief histories of all the houses that were listed in the original town history that were still around a century later, roughly 125 houses. Besides using the town histories, deed information and other written sources, we were able to interview several old timers (including Clayton and Polly Brown and Bud and Peggy McEntee, in a wonderful discussion of their memories.) Any new information on or photos of any of these houses has been added to the original information, allowing the town's administrators and anyone to learn a great deal about all the houses in town that existed prior to 1910.

On the subject of oral history, the Heritage Commission also has been collecting stories by old timers through informal interviews. Several residents who have since passed away sat with the members of the commission to tell their stories of what Lyndeborough had been like in the old days. These included Lucy Schmidt, Charlie Proctor, Guy Reynolds, Elizabeth Raymond, Louise Joslin, Jessie Salisbury, Clayton and Polly Brown, Bud and Peggy McEntee, Walter and Martha Riendeau, and Helen Van Ham.

As for awards, the Heritage Commission received an award from the International Society for Landscape, Place, and Material Culture in October, 2024. This award, the Historic Preservation Citation of Merit, was for the commission's efforts to preserve and protect historical structures and promote the town and its history over the years. Receiving an international award is a significant achievement for a town the size of Lyndeborough, and the Heritage Commission and the town should be proud of this feat.



Conclusion

Over the years, the Heritage Commission has exemplified community service by promoting the town, its culture, and its heritage. Our many accomplishments have received positive press coverage, including dozens of articles in the *Milford Cabinet*, *Nashua Telegraph*, and *Monadnock Ledger*. These are available when people look up the town online, giving Lyndeborough a positive image (rather than the image the town used to have of arsonists, bank robbers, and places murdered bodies were buried.) The frequent upbeat press coverage has not only improved Lyndeborough's reputation but has also helped to make Lyndeborough an attractive town for visitors and prospective residents, potentially increasing property values (which even historical curmudgeons should appreciate.) Few other committees, boards, or commissions in town have made as many positive noteworthy contributions. We are proud of the achievements that the commission has realized over the past twenty years and feel that the Heritage Commission has made many positive impacts on the town of Lyndeborough.