

STONE WALL

43.51375 N, 72.1338 W

This stone wall was once part of a large enclosure walled in on three sides and bounded by Skinner Brook on the fourth. From this site the wall runs west to connect with a wall of flat stones on the far side of a small brook at the west side of the park, paralleling I-89. You will see it from the Yellow Trail. The wall turns again near the blue trail and runs back east to Skinner Brook. The area within the walls was the original North Grantham Fairground.

The stone wall was probably built in the 1800s to contain sheep. Look at this wall's structure. Walls that surrounded fields plowed for crops are usually constructed of two rows of large stones standing several feet apart. Each spring farmers would gather smaller stones that had been pushed to the surface by winter freezing and throw them into the space between the two walls. The result would be a wide wall with large stones on the outside and smaller ones in between. If the field were used to pasture sheep or to grow hay which was mowed, not plowed, the stone walls were usually constructed, like this one, of a single pile of large stones. The wall's structure, the steep slope of the land, and the sandy, infertile soil all suggest that this enclosure was originally an open meadow used to graze sheep.

In 1811, William Jarvis, the US Consul to Spain, brought Merino sheep to Vermont. The Merino bore more wool with a longer fiber than other domestic sheep and was better able to forage on the poor, rocky soils of New England. Within a few years, New Hampshire and Vermont were caught up in a sheep boom that saw 85% of the land cleared to make room for the enormous herds. To contain the sheep, farmers constructed rock walls one rock wide up to 4 feet tall. Shortly after the American Civil War ended, the market for wool collapsed in New Hampshire, sheep disappeared from the hillsides, and many of the farmers sold their land and moved west.

Barbed wire was later strung atop this wall. For safety, some of the the wire is now coiled against the tree. Be careful as you walk around the park. Barbed wire was once strung around the area, and some is still buried in the soil or hanging from trees.

Barbed wire came into widespread use after 1868. Single strand barbed wire, like this, was typically used to contain horses or cattle. The sharp points would prick the animals when they leaned against it keeping them away from the fence. In contrast, because the thick fleece of sheep protected them from the barbs, the fencing to contain sheep was typically a wire mesh. Because we have found single strand barbed wire at the southern end of Brookside Park, it was probably not part of the boundary of the North Grantham Fairground but was more likely strung to contain horses or cattle sometime between 1865, when the Civil War ended, and 1947, when the Fairground opened.