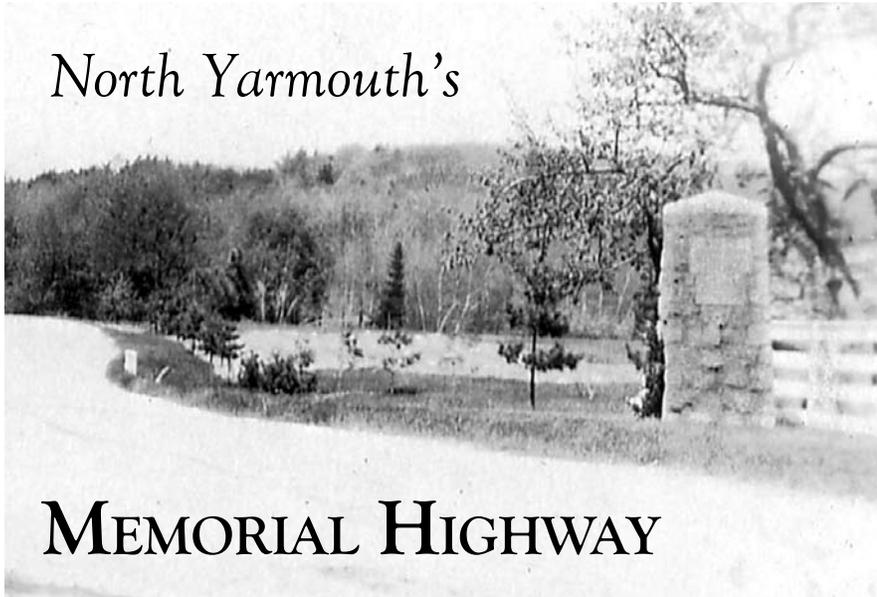


North Yarmouth's



MEMORIAL HIGHWAY

by Linc Merrill

Most people who drive through North Yarmouth will at some point pass between the stone monuments that mark a 2½ mile section of Memorial Highway (Route 9). The monuments are familiar landmarks; most directions given to “out of towners” will reference the North Yarmouth monuments. But most present-day travelers don’t know the full story of the Highway and its classic, distinctive monuments.

Back in 1920, North Yarmouth’s Town Meeting was held on Monday night, March 8; the location was the Town House on Route 9. Article 22 that evening asked the inhabitants of North Yarmouth “To see if the town will vote to have an Honor Roll prepared for the men from this town who served in the Military or Naval Service of the War of ’61 to ’65.” This war, of course, was the Civil War. By 1920 many towns had already erected monuments to their servicemen (for example, the soldier statue in Gray center), but North Yarmouth had not.

But the committee decided against a traditional monument. Ansel Dunn, a North Yarmouth selectman at that time and a committee member, remembered the committee’s decision in a newspaper article in September 1922 (Dunn was being interviewed on the occasion of his election to the Maine House of Representatives). He stated that a highway was built instead of a monument because a monument would have to be built in either Walnut Hill or East North Yarmouth while the highway could go to both.

This comment was particularly revealing. It points out the split that existed in North Yarmouth between the people who lived in two parts of town: those on the west side of the Royal River—the more elite residents of Walnut Hill village; and those on the east side of the river—the ones who listed their

address as East North Yarmouth and who often felt treated as second class citizens. Mr. Dunn was from Dunns Depot in East North Yarmouth (North Road at Route 9) and was probably very sensitive to the way his neighbors would feel if the town erected a monument in Walnut Hill. No doubt he was influential in the decision to name the road between the two villages “Memorial Highway” and erect monuments at both ends.

Though the recommendation of the committee is not recorded, the resulting activities indicate what the members wanted done. Between the 1921 and the 1922 Annual Town Meetings, \$1,973 was received from 114 contributions ranging in size from \$1 to \$100. In addition, two days of labor were pledged to help improve the road between the two villages into a highway that included trees, lawns, and fences. Meanwhile, Garley & Small was commissioned to build the monuments at a cost of \$550. The Lewiston Monumental Works provided the caps and tablets for \$575.

The design itself appears to have been executed by noted Portland architect John Calvin Stevens, based on a bill from Stevens for \$125 found in the town records for work on the project. There is also a bill for \$25 for design work from Portland mason Ormond A. Della Torre but, since the Stevens bill is dated later than the Della Torre bill and is for more money, my assumption is that the Della Torre plan was not

Carolyn Nickels Carpenter in front of one of the monuments, probably mid to late 1940s, judging from the size of the pine trees just visible behind the monument to the left. (photo collected from Don Smith). The view at the top of the page is certainly after 1924, again judging from the size of the row of pines (detail from a postcard collected from Norma Fountain Grover).



satisfactory. Plans also seem to have shifted regarding the wording of the monument's tablets, since the lettering does not designate Civil War veterans specifically.

After spending money for fence and labor, it was noted at the 1922 Annual Town Meeting that a balance of \$543.02 remained unexpended. The committee had done a satisfactory job overseeing the construction, and was given an official name: The Committee of the North Yarmouth Memorial Highway. The members were Edward Hayes and Henry Sweetser of Walnut Hill, and Ansel Dunn of East North Yarmouth. Their responsibility became the improvement and maintenance of the Memorial Highway.

Committee reports made at annual Town Meetings from 1923 through 1944 help us understand how the Highway was developed. In 1924, brush was cut along the Highway and the committee began to spend money on planting trees along the entire length of the road. The tree planting would go on for several years, as the goal was to provide passersby with shade along the entire distance. Money was even used to pay people to water the young trees in dry times.

These plantings are particularly important considering that horses were still in common use throughout the North Yarmouth farming community. Most open land was in cultivated field, and there was not much shade for horse and wagon to be found along the roads during hot summer days. Organized plantings would certainly make the Highway a unique, picturesque and welcome place to drive. The attentive motorist today can spot remnants of these early plantings: look for tall, mature pine trees. They are now 80 years old!

Flags and flagpoles were set out and can be seen in early photos of the monuments. Wooden railings were placed at key

locations, apparently at some areas where the land beside the road dropped off. Bills were paid for paint for the fences and flagpoles, flags, culverts, fertilizer, and labor to mow the grass. Charles B. Porter replaced Edward Hayes on the committee in 1930 and Philip Knight took the place of Ansel Dunn in 1943 after Dunn passed away.

In 1944 during World War II, the Committee appears to have ended its work and disbanded. But a new effort began in 1946 to recognize North Yarmouth's newest veterans. Money remaining from the Memorial Highway Fund was eyed for a new memorial, and an organization called the North Yarmouth Memorial Park was formed in 1949 to build a park. A site at the corner of Parsonage Road and Memorial Highway was identified and, in 1950, Henry Sweetser of the original Committee sold the land for the current park to this group for \$650. It took many dedicated people working for more than a decade to plan the new memorial. A large stone monument was placed, and the park opened in 1963. (The memorial was re-dedicated in 1999— see the Fall, 2004 Gazette).

Wording on this monument mirrors that of the original 1921 tablets, thus tying the new to the old and reinforcing the original aim of the Memorial Highway: To remember the sacrifices of our veterans.



A close up view of one of the stone tablets. The lettering is a beautiful example of an Arts and Crafts typeface, with its telltale low-waisted "A," and distinctive "H" and "R."

The Maine Department of Transportation furnished the Gazette with this rendering of the new northern intersection of Routes 9 and 115; construction starting in early summer, 2005. The plan calls for both memorial monuments to be surrounded by new green space. In 2004, MDOT met with several groups of residents in North Yarmouth to gather comments and suggestions; NYHS recommended that the Memorial Highway monuments remain in place, which the MDOT's plan accomodates.

The "stones" of Stone's Grove restaurant in North Yarmouth's center refer to the granite memorial markers, according to Gail and Robin Mayson, owners of the restaurant for the past 14 years.

