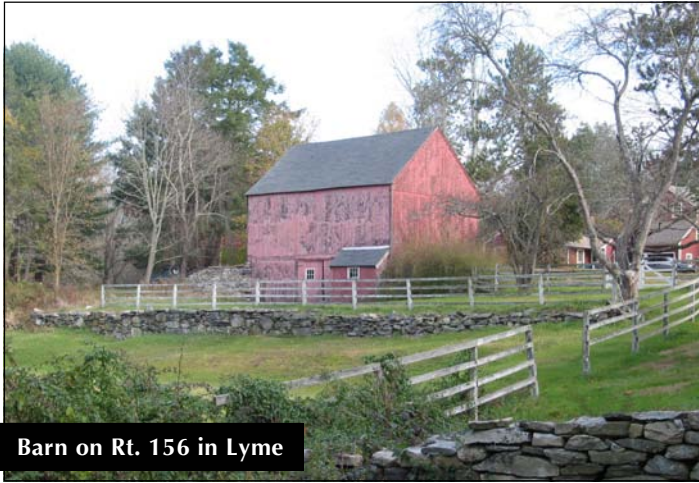


## Understanding Our Sense of Place: the Cultural Landscape of the Eightmile River Watershed



Barn on Rt. 156 in Lyme

J. Rozum (2002)

*(This is the second in a series of articles on the Outstanding Resource Values currently under study as part of the Wild & Scenic designation process)*

One of the most widely appreciated qualities of the Eightmile River Watershed is the special feeling of place it conveys to both residents and visitors. This emotional response to the Eightmile is one reason the public has taken such a keen interest in protecting the watershed. To better understand what it is that evokes such a strong sense of place, the Eightmile River Wild & Scenic Study Committee has undertaken an effort to document the cultural landscape features of the watershed.

Cultural landscapes are special places created by human interaction with the environment. They are comprised of the cultural and natural resources associated with historic events, activities, or persons, and serve to both define the current character of a community and reflect its past.

Quantifiable features of a cultural landscape include structures such as houses, churches, and public buildings as well as cemeteries, stone walls, views and vistas, vegetation and topography, and the distribution of transportation systems and land uses. Also considered is the spatial organization of features across the landscape, for example the location of hamlets such as the Eightmile's Millington Green or Hamburg.

To better understand how these types of features create the watershed's special sense of place the Study Committee retained researchers from the University of Massachusetts'

Department of Landscape Architecture and Regional Planning to assess the significance of the watershed as a cultural landscape

The cultural landscape assessment will include a narrative of human settlement and the history of landscape change from Native Americans to the present day. It will also describe the features and characteristics of three distinct cultural landscape areas—an agricultural area, a town center, and an industrial center. And finally, it will comprehensively analyze the integrity and significance of the Eightmile cultural landscape as an outstanding resource value.

To determine if the Eightmile cultural landscape truly is outstanding a number of issues will be considered. These include the number and type of archaeological sites and intact historic buildings, the watershed's artistic history, and the effect that limited transportation hubs (no large harbors, ports, or railway lines) has had on development patterns. A comparative analysis will also be conducted to determine the statewide significance of the watershed as a cultural landscape.

Studying the Eightmile's cultural landscape will provide a tangible understanding of the widespread appreciation for the watershed's sense of place. It will also help to generate community support for the preservation of distinct cultural landscape areas and will be a valuable resource for residents and town officials when making future land management decisions.

Findings of cultural landscape assessment will be presented by University of Massachusetts researchers at a public seminar scheduled for later this year.

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"...Cultural landscapes reveal aspects of an area's origins and development. Through their form, features, and the ways they were used, cultural landscapes reveal much about human's evolving relationship with the natural world. They provide scenic, economic, ecological, social, recreational and educational opportunities... The ongoing preservation of cultural landscapes yields an improved quality of life for all and a sense of place for future generations."

*The Cultural Landscape Foundation*

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L. Todd (2004)

Seeing history through the trees . . . Old Wall Street, off of Millington Green, was a major thoroughfare connecting the busy commercial center at Millington and its thriving mills in the 18th and 19th centuries

## Chairman's Corner

A Wild & Scenic Study Committee member recently noted that while all the towns in the Eightmile River watershed are interested in protecting their "rural character," there is difficulty in defining exactly what that means.

Aspects of the watershed that call to mind "rural character" typically are not the natural resource values the Study Committee is focusing on. Driving down Hopyard Road in East Haddam you don't feel inspired because the river has a good selection of benthic macroinvertebrates or a natural flow regime, you respond to the twists and turns in the road, the canopy of trees overhead, and the stonework along the way. These features, which are part and parcel of the Eightmile's cultural landscape, are tangible signs of our current and past relationship to the land.

Many decades ago the agrarian way of life ended in the Eightmile River watershed, as it did in most of Connecticut. At the end of this period landscapes across the state began reverting to more primal forest types before evolving into suburban and exurban communities. This evolution led to substantial changes in the look and feel of many places, with new structures, transportation patterns, and landscapes replacing the old.

Unfortunately, it is often the more subtle features that collectively create the landscapes we value. It is only when these overlooked features are gone that we understand how important they really were. Straightening and adding new roads, cutting down canopy trees, removing or altering stone walls or historic buildings, for example, are outcomes of land use and landscape changes that can eventually diminish the special character of a place.

We are fortunate that the Eightmile has not yet succumb to the pressure of urbanization. Our cultural landscape still reflects patterns of the agrarian lifestyle and earlier – you just have to look through the trees to see it. The Wild & Scenic Study Committee recognizes that it is the cultural landscape, which some might call "rural character," that many of us subconsciously relate to. Because of this, the Study Committee is working to document the Eightmile's rural character and ensure its continued appreciation and preservation.

Understanding and celebrating the cultural landscape of the watershed will inspire us all to continue stewarding the special place we call the Eightmile. I hope you will join the Study Committee and our research team to learn about the Eightmile River Watershed Cultural Landscape Assessment.

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## The Eightmile Wild & Scenic Study Committee

- Anthony Irving, Chair, Lyme Land Conservation Trust
- Randy Dill, Selectman & IWWC Chair, East Haddam
- William Koch, First Selectman, Town of Lyme
- Larry Reitz, First Selectman, Town of Salem
- John Rozum, P&Z Commission, East Haddam
- David Tiffany, Chair, P&Z Commission, Lyme
- Eric Belt, Inland Wetlands Commission, Salem
- Susan Merrow, East Haddam Land Trust
- David Bingham, President, Salem Land Trust
- Nathan Frohling, Lower CT River Program Director, The Nature Conservancy
- Linda Krause, Executive Director, CT River Estuary RPA
- Walter Smith, Natural Resource Conservation Service (USDA)
- Sally Snyder, Watersheds Coordinator, CT DEP

*With support from the National Park Service*  
Jamie Fosburgh, Rivers Program Manager  
Kevin Case, Study Project Manager

Study Committee Meetings are held in the Towns of East Haddam, Lyme, and Salem on a rotating basis on the 4th Monday of each month. Check the website for specific dates and schedules.

### For Information Contact

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Welcoming travelers to the watershed on Mt. Parnassus Road in East Haddam

J. Rozum (2004)