



New Hampshire Historical Highway Marker Program Policy

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INTRODUCTION

Since 1958, the State of New Hampshire has been marking sites of historical importance through the New Hampshire Historical Highway Marker Program. The Program is jointly administered by the New Hampshire Division of Historical Resources (DHR) and the New Hampshire Department of Transportation (DOT). The DHR has coordinated the review and approval of marker applications since the Division's creation in 1974. The DHR and DOT are authorized by R.S.A. 227 C:4, X and R.S.A. 236: 40-44. The DHR shall have the function, including but not limited to, "Considering proposals to erect highway historical markers under RSA 236:41. No such marker shall be put in place without division and Commissioner approval. The division may make cooperative agreements with towns and historical organizations to place historic markers under RSA 236:44." Additionally, "The commissioner of transportation may erect historic markers or signs within the right-of-way of any class I, II, or III highway. He shall put up a marker upon the petition of 20 or more state citizens. Up to 10 historic markers may be erected in one year. No marker shall be put up which would interfere with reasonable use of the highway."

The New Hampshire Historical Highway Marker Program is grounded in scholarship and interpretation, both of which it is recognized can change over time. New information may be discovered, adding context or proving previous interpretations to be inaccurate; cultural shifts occur, meaning once-accepted references or interpretation may become outdated. These changes may periodically require review and revision of existing markers. For these reasons, this policy addresses not only the erection of new markers, but also revisions and the possible permanent retirement of markers.

DHR's purpose in erecting markers is to educate the public about New Hampshire's history, not to honor, memorialize, or commemorate persons, events, or places. Because Historical Highway Markers are not honorific in nature, they do not serve the same purpose as monuments, statues, memorial plaques, or war memorials.

HISTORICAL HIGHWAY MARKER POLICY

Any municipality, agency, organization, or individual may propose a marker to commemorate significant New Hampshire places, persons, or events. In approving a marker, the DHR in consultation with the Commissioner, takes into consideration the distribution of markers by geographical regions, chronological periods, and historical themes. Preference is given to placing markers at locations that are not already adequately marked.

The DHR will evaluate nominations for an Historical Highway Marker and shall obtain final approval from the Commissioner pursuant to RSA 227-C according to the following criteria:

- The nomination is clear and organized and includes thorough documentation (with selected copies/scans and bibliographies from reliable primary and secondary sources) and verification of the facts claimed.
- The person, place, event, organization, or innovation to be marked had a significant impact on its times and has demonstrated historical significance. The significance of the subject, particularly for continuing events and organizations, must be historically established rather than of contemporary interest alone. Marker subjects less than fifty years in the past may require special justification. DHR recognizes that continuing scholarship may help validate the subject's impact on its times or its significance from a more recent historical perspective.
- The subject to be marked has a substantial connection to New Hampshire.
- An Historical Highway Marker cannot be approved for a living person. Subjects must have been deceased for a minimum of five (5) years. The significance of an individual's accomplishments must have had a measurable impact on history and sufficient time has elapsed to evaluate that impact based on credible documentation.
- People, places, events, and innovations already marked with existing monuments or markers may receive less favorable consideration for an Historical Highway Marker.
- Nominated subjects reviewed and not recommended by the DHR or disapproved by the Commissioner three times in succession are not eligible for consideration for a period of three years.
- Places listed in the National Register of Historic Places and/or recognized as National Historic Landmarks may be considered for an Historical Highway Marker. These places will not be automatically recommended by the DHR for designation because the approval criteria for those designations are different. Nominations for these places are subject to all these criteria.
- Places of worship and cemeteries/burial places generally will not be approved

unless the nomination demonstrates that the subject has demonstrated historical significance.

The role of the State Historical Resources Council (SHRC):

- The SHRC shall act in an advisory role for the Historical Highway Marker Program.
- The SHRC will assist with reviewing new applications for markers following the established criteria. They will also assist with reviewing requests for considering revisions and retirement of markers.

HISTORICAL HIGHWAY MARKER RETIREMENT POLICY

The New Hampshire Historical Highway Marker Program began in 1958. Given the program's age, it is unsurprising that some markers are ready to be "retired." Many, for instance, are too severely damaged or deteriorated to be repaired.

Markers may be retired if they:

1. Contain errors of fact that can be documented with reliable sources
2. Are so damaged, deteriorated, illegible, unstable, or unsafe that the cost of repair would approach the cost of a new marker
3. Require refurbishment and have very brief texts, and lack historical context, such that their educational value is severely limited. Such markers, generally erected during the early years of the program do not meet the modern standards of the program.

DHR reserves the right to update and replace markers regardless of their physical condition in cases where, after a detailed evaluation based on primary and reliable secondary sources, DHR staff in consultation with the SHRC, determine that the existing text is inadequate and merits rewriting. Such action is dependent on the availability of funding for a replacement marker.

DHR will try to locate and notify the original sponsor of any marker that is retired.

Please note that the topics covered by these markers are not being retired. DHR will seek to purchase replacement markers when the agency has funding available for this purpose, but it is more likely the case that DHR will need to secure a sponsor to fund a new replacement marker with a revised and updated text.

Forgoing the expensive renovation of old, deteriorated markers in favor of new replacement signs allows DHR to bring the marker program into the 21st century, rather than remaining beholden to the way topics were previously covered.

Requests for revision, removal, or retirement:

- Any resident of the State of New Hampshire can request the review of an existing marker for revision or retirement.
- Revisions that correct errors of spelling, grammar, or fact (e.g., dates) may be managed by DHR staff.
- Markers proposed for revisions beyond the correction of errors shall identify elements that include, but are not limited to, existing inaccuracies, lack of historical context, or references that could be seen as inappropriate, and provide proposed direction to changes in content. For markers approved for revision, DHR staff will consult experts, sponsors, the SHRC, and members of the relevant communities to develop revised marker text in accordance with the recommendations.
- If a property owner on which an Historical Highway Marker is located requests its removal, DOT staff may remove it and reinstall it at another location.
- If the DHR staff recommends the retirement of an Historical Highway Marker that decision will be discussed and recorded at an SHRC meeting in the official minutes of the meeting with appropriate documentation of the reason for retirement.
- Upon DHR staff recommendation of retirement, the Commissioner shall determine whether a Historical Marker shall be removed and shall work in coordination with the Department of Transportation to have the Marker removed and retired.

ADOPTION OR LONG-TERM LOAN OF RETIRED MARKER POLICY

Many older markers are now regarded as important artifacts and, in some cases, as community landmarks. Some residents have grown quite attached to markers within their localities.

For this reason, DHR will offer retired markers to local museums, historical societies, or other entities that have the capacity to display and interpret them. DHR will make the markers available through a long-term loan or by way of a conditional donation.

If your organization, museum, or historical society is interested in obtaining a retired marker, please fill out and apply using the form available on the DHR's website.