



## Assessment Criteria for Ceremonial Stone Landscape (CSL) Environments

*Written specific to Nashoba Valley CSLs in the Acton-Littleton-Boxborough-Harvard-Groton area.*

### A Friends of Pine Hawk Guide Sheet

by Daniel V. Boudillion © 2022

Contributing author Linda McElroy

Peer reviewed by Peter Waksman and James and Mary Gage \*

*\* Peter Waksman and Gage & Gage graciously peer-reviewed this paper. Elements of their comments, critiques, and suggestions were incorporated into the final version. This however does not mean that the paper reflects their views or is an endorsement by them.*

### Overview

The purpose of this Guide Sheet is to assist Friends of Pine Hawk in determining whether a site has potential to be a **Ceremonial Stone Landscape**. It lists a set of weighted criteria based on recognized stone features and the work of recognized experts.

Where the weight of assessment indicates a CSL environment, a recognized expert should be asked to verify the site.

### CSL: Ceremonial Stone Landscape

'Ceremonial Stone Landscape' (CSL) is a term formally introduced in 2007 by USET, the United Southern and Eastern Tribes, to describe areas of stone constructions thought to be of Native origin and built for ceremonial purposes. It is a Native originated term.

The Nashoba Valley area is considered by USET to be such an area, as defined in USET resolution 2003:022. ***Sacred Landscape within the Commonwealth of Massachusetts:***

"Within the Massachusetts towns of Acton, Carlisle, Concord, Lincoln, Littleton, Stow, Boxborough, and Westford there exists a sacred landscape..."

<https://www.usetinc.org/resources/resolutions/>

Field research has since shown that Groton and Harvard can be added to this list.

See Appendix B: ***CSL as defined by USET*** (below) for extracts from USET Resolution 2007:037 relevant to Ceremonial Stone Landscapes.

See attached both USET resolutions 2003:022 and 2007:037 for the entire text.

Note: the USET resolutions focus on pre-Contact sites extending back in their estimation thousands of years, and are silent on the possibility of historic-period CSLs. Evidence is

beginning to mount that there are historic-period CSL sites as well. An example of such can be found at the Anderson property.

## What Constitutes a CSL Site?

While there is a variety of site types and features in New England – which include styles and characteristics unique to different geographic areas – we can construct a composite picture of an archetypical Nashoba area CSL site.

Such a site would look something like this: have a variety of recognized stone structures; have groupings of constructions in a concentrated area; have construction groupings enclosed by non-linear stone rows; have a presence of water flowage; be situated on a hillside facing southerly to westerly over a body of water.

While all these features may not be found all at one time in one place, the more of these characteristics observed, the more likely the site can be assessed as a CSL. This type of assessment is called a *weighted assessment*.

The following are criteria that add weight when assessing a site to be a CSL.

## Weighted Assessment Factors (in order of weight)

### 1. Consensus of Feature Types

A CSL should be composed of features/stone construction types about which there is **consensus** among recognized experts in the field to be components of CSL landscapes. Such experts include but are not limited to: Doug Harris, James and Mary Gage, Tim Fohl, Peter Waksman, and Eva Gibavic.

Note 1: These are individuals who have shown ongoing interest in the Acton-Littleton-Boxborough-Harvard-Groton area, and with whom Friends of Pine Hawk has an ongoing rapport.

Note 2: Strong Bear Medicine of the Nashobah Praying Indians, Massachusetts Nation, is a stakeholder in Nashoba Valley CSLs, and should be included in walkabouts where possible and final assessments due to this being his people's ancestral land.

When in doubt, it is advisable to rely on the work of recognized experts. Where there is agreement among experts, Pine Hawk members have confidence in these areas in our assessments. Where there is lack of agreement, members should be cautious in what they propose.

### 2. Variety

There should be a **variety** of different construction styles and types, including but not limited to: stone piles; rocks piled on or against boulders; donation niches; stone chambers\*; unusually-shaped boulders; split boulders with stones inserted in the split; boulders propped up off the ground with smaller rocks; effigies; U-shaped 'prayer seats'; stone rows\*\*, both linear and non-linear; embrasures; enclosures; standing stones; rocking stones; and Manitou stones.

Note 1: See ***A Guide to New England Stone Structures*** by Mary and James Gage. It is recommended that Friends of Pine Hawk members doing field work carry a copy of this field guide. It is a catalog of recognized features, including detailed sketches of feature-types, and provides criteria for quick and easy differentiation between farming and ceremonial stone structures. This is an important distinction as the two cultures' structures often show up on the same sites.

\* *Stone chambers are a complex study unto themselves and require expertise beyond the scope of this paper. Suggested resource: <http://www.stonestructures.org/Chamber-Article.pdf>*

*\*\* The term 'stone row' is being used rather than 'stone wall' because stone walls are linked in culture to colonial construction. The term 'stone row' allows for other possible origins.*

**Variety regarding Stone Piles:** Variety is a powerful indicator and especially important in assessing stone piles. A group of stone piles, all of which have a similar design and similar size, is likely to be the result of field clearing activity. But it should be noted that there are verified CSL sites that are predominantly of one construction type. These are typically large-rock-pile sites where little else in the way of constructions is found – though there will still typically be other weight-criteria involved. In short, regarding stone piles, a group of piles with a range of designs and sizes is likely to be indigenous in origin.

### 3. Grouping

The various stone constructions should be found in concentrated settings, **grouped** together in an area often of an acre or more. (Some stone formation areas are more like clusters – a small group of constructions of limited variety in a small tightly-related zone, such as on a ridgeline. Such clusters are often outliers related to a larger or adjacent CSL area.)

### 4. Boundaries

Stone construction zones observed in the Nashoba area are often enclosed or partially enclosed within a **boundary** defined by a stone row or rows. These rows are often irregularly shaped, may have curving 'corners'. Typically, few if any stone structures will be found outside the enclosing rows.

With thousands of miles of historic farm stone walls in New England, differentiating indigenous stone walls ['rows'] from Euro-American farm walls is a challenging task even for the experts. Identification is further complicated in some cases by indigenous peoples having adopted Euro-American farming practices to blend in and avoid discrimination. (Contributed by Gage & Gage)

### 5. Presence of Water

CSL sites often include a small **flowage**, including springs and seasonal runoffs, frequently with CSL stonework in the flowage itself. CSL sites can also often be observed situated on the edge of a body of **water**.

### 6. Hillsides, Water, South to West

Concentrated groupings of stone structures are often found **on hillsides** adjacent to or overlooking **water** and facing in a **southerly to westerly direction**.

Note 1: The lack of a hillside or directional setting does not detract from the possibility of a site being a CSL, but where found, does add additional weight to the assessment.

Note 2: The presence of southerly or westerly orientations should trigger one's CSL radar. But such directionality is not a conclusive marker or a rule. Where present, such a characteristic is a significant pointer to a CSL, but absence of such in itself should not weigh against a site being a CSL. There are known verified CSL sites that face in other directions.

### Other Considerations

#### Stone Size

Stone size plays a role in assessing CSL constructions such as rock piles. If there is a significant quantity of stones under 4 to 6 inches, it is a strong indicator of Native origin. This is because colonial farmers typically did not remove stones under 6 inches from their fields. The exception is when a mechanical rock picking device – pulled behind a tractor – is used, which gathers up stones of a variety of sizes, which are typically dumped in a large jumble at the edge of the field. Hand-sized stones of under 6 inches, in rock piles and other constructions, are a strong indicator of Native origin and CSL environment. (Contributed by Gage & Gage.)

## **Isolated Structures**

The working rule in CSL assessment is supporting weight-elements and environmental context. Isolated, solitary structures are more difficult to assess when not in a CSL environment, and without supporting weight-elements. Unless the construction is an easily recognizable type, it should be held back from CSL identification until or unless further data become available to make the assessment.

## **Alignments**

While not as often present, alignments to celestial events may be found in a CSL environment. Such alignments are, however, outside the scope of this work. For a discussion of alignments, please see the Friends of Pine Hawk Guide Sheet: ***Assessment Criteria for Astro-Structures in CSL Environments***.

## **Earthworks**

Earthworks may also be present in a CSL environment but are another area outside the scope of this work. For earthworks in general, see ***Manitou***, 1989, Mavor & Dix.

## **Consensus & Provability**

For the purposes of Friends of Pine Hawk field assessments, we expect to base our proposals on the work of recognized experts in the CSL field. We are not looking to prove in and of ourselves that a site is a CSL, but to show that a site meets the consensus criteria of the recognized experts.

As such, our assessment criteria should adhere to the consensus criteria discussed in this paper and not include speculative and non-consensus 'proofs'.

Note: It is recommended that where a site is assessed as a possible CSL, that a recognized expert be called upon to validate the site. It is also recommended that a Native American of the tribe historically associated with the area be asked to visit the site. (In Acton/Littleton, this tribe is the Nashobah Praying Indians, Massachusetts Nation.)

## **Speculative Features**

Pine Hawk should avoid using speculative and non-consensus criteria in making its assessments. Members should also avoid, in making assessments, using stone features that may be the result of natural forces and not man-made construction. For example, many rows that have the appearance of undulation, due to variations of row height, are easily explained by stones having fallen down or having been knocked out over the years. This has happened, particularly during the last 100 years or so of reforestation, when no wall maintenance was undertaken.

Other speculative topics such as 'sky seats' and 'shadow casters' should be avoided until more data have been collected and independent research undertaken.

**Summary:** Pine Hawk members should avoid basing any assessments and conclusions on criteria on which doubt can easily be cast. When assessing sites, refer to the book (Gage & Gage), and the work of recognized experts.

## **Local Resources**

**Prayers in Stone Project** is a Native Sites research, preservation, and stewardship group in the Nashoba Valley area. The Project operates in collaboration with the Littleton Conservation Trust, with strong ties to Friends of Pine Hawk. (Several Prayers in Stone members are also on the Friends of Pine Hawk steering Committee.) It is an excellent local resource for assessing CSL environments.

**Mission Statement:** Preservation, Protection, and Education of Native Ceremonial Stone Landscapes (CSLs) in the historical tribal lands of Sagamore Tahattawan's Nashope.

**About:** The Prayers in Stone Project is a vision shared of Native Sagamores and CSL researchers here in Nashobah. It brings together the principle of Native leadership in Native cultural areas with CSL avocational research.

Contact Prayers in Stone via Friends of Pine Hawk.

## Appendix A

### Ceremonial vs. Non-Ceremonial

Notes by Peter Waksman contributed for this paper.

The question of what is ceremonial and what is not will always have 'gray' zones of uncertainty. Hence, it is worth looking at the question from the opposite point of view: how to prove a site is **non-ceremonial**?

For example, we may characterize some non-ceremonial features:

Field clearing piles have these characteristics:

- Random pile shapes
- Pile on pile
- Variable component rock size, largest below
- Nearby field can be identified, usually uphill from piles.

Certain types of stone wall are known to be European – **e.g.**, walls with capstones.

## Appendix B

### CSL as defined by USET: United Southern and Eastern Tribes

**'Ceremonial Stone Landscape' (CSL)** is the term used by USET, United Southern and Eastern Tribes, Inc., a nonprofit, intertribal organization of American Indians, for certain stonework sites in eastern North America. Elements often found at these sites include dry stone walls, rock piles (sometimes referred to as cairns), stone chambers, unusually-shaped boulders, split boulders with stones inserted in the split, and boulders propped up off the ground with smaller rocks. While neither the age of these sites nor the idea of their creation by indigenous peoples has been accepted generally, interest in the sites is increasing. This interest is generated in part by USET's Resolution 2007:037, entitled "***Sacred Ceremonial Stone Landscapes Found in the Ancestral Territories of United Southern and Eastern Tribes, Inc. Member Tribes***".

Sections of USET resolution 2007:037, ***Sacred Ceremonial Stone Landscapes***, describing these sites read as follows:

"within the ancestral territories of the USET Tribes there exist sacred ceremonial stone landscapes and their stone structures which are of particular cultural value to certain member Tribes"

"for thousands of years before the immigration of Europeans, the medicine people of the USET Tribal ancestors used these sacred landscapes to sustain the people's reliance on Mother Earth and the spirit energies of balance and harmony"

"whether these stone structures are massive or small structures, stacked, stone rows, or effigies, these prayers in stone are often mistaken by archaeologists and State Historic Preservation Officers (SHPOs) as the efforts of farmers clearing stones for agricultural or wall building purposes"

The resolution goes on to request that the federal government work to understand and preserve the stone landscapes.

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ceremonial\\_stone\\_landscape](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ceremonial_stone_landscape)

<https://www.usetinc.org/resources/resolutions/>



## UNITED SOUTH AND EASTERN TRIBES, INC.

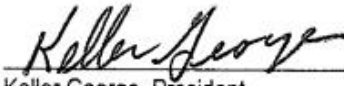
Resolution No. USET 2003:022

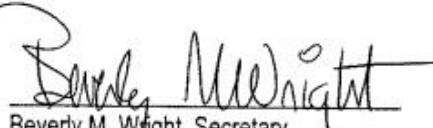
### SACRED LANDSCAPE WITHIN COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS

- WHEREAS,** United South and Eastern Tribes Incorporated (USET) is an intertribal organization comprised of twenty-four (24) federally recognized tribes; and
- WHEREAS,** the actions taken by the USET Board of Directors officially represent the intentions of each member tribe, as the Board of Directors comprises delegates from the member tribe's leadership; and
- WHEREAS,** within the Massachusetts towns of Acton, Carlyle, Concord, Lincoln, Littleton, Stowe, Boxborough, and Westford there exists a sacred landscape which is of particular cultural value to certain USET member tribes; and
- WHEREAS,** for thousands of years before the immigration of the Europeans, the *pau waus* or medicine people of today's New England region used this sacred landscape to sustain the peoples' reliance on Mother Earth and the spirit energies of balance and harmony; and
- WHEREAS,** the properties which comprise this sacred landscape are threatened by the encroachments of imminent development; and
- WHEREAS,** the USET Tribes wish to partner with the towns which have stewardship of these properties, in order to create historical preservation plans that will support the permanent protection of this sacred landscape; therefore, be it
- RESOLVED** that the USET Board of Directors support the efforts of it's member Tribes to partner with the pertinent towns and call upon the towns to join the Tribes in preservation of this unique and irreplaceable Indian resource.

### CERTIFICATION

This resolution was duly passed at the USET Annual Board Meeting and EXPO, at which a quorum was present, in Uncasville, CT, Thursday, October 31, 2002.

  
Keller George, President  
United South and Eastern Tribes, Inc.

  
Beverly M. Wright, Secretary  
United South and Eastern Tribes, Inc.



## UNITED SOUTH AND EASTERN TRIBES, INC.

---

USET Resolution No. 2007:037

### SACRED CEREMONIAL STONE LANDSCAPES FOUND IN THE ANCESTRAL TERRITORIES OF UNITED SOUTH AND EASTERN TRIBES, INC. MEMBER TRIBES

- WHEREAS, United South and Eastern Tribes, Incorporated (USET) is an intertribal organization comprised of twenty-four (24) federally recognized Tribes; and
- WHEREAS, the actions taken by the USET Board of Directors officially represent the intentions of each member Tribe, as the Board of Directors comprises delegates from the member Tribes' leadership; and
- WHEREAS, within the ancestral territories of the USET Tribes there exists sacred ceremonial stone landscapes and their stone structures which are of particular cultural value to certain USET member Tribes; and
- WHEREAS, for thousands of years before the immigration of Europeans, the medicine people of the USET Tribal ancestors used these sacred landscapes to sustain the people's reliance on Mother Earth and the spirit energies of balance and harmony; and
- WHEREAS, during and following the Colonial oppression of Southern and Eastern Tribes, many cultural and ceremonial practices, including ceremonial use of stones and stone landscapes, were suppressed; and
- WHEREAS, the properties which comprise these sacred landscapes are threatened by the encroachments of imminent development; and
- WHEREAS, whether these stone structures are massive or small structures, stacked, stone rows or effigies, these prayers in stone are often mistaken by archaeologists and State Historic Preservation Offices (SHPOs) as the efforts of farmers clearing stones for agricultural or wall building purposes; and
- WHEREAS, archaeologists and SHPOs, categorically thereafter, dismiss these structures as non-Indian and insignificant, permitting them to be the subjects of the sacrilege of archaeological dissection and later destruction during development projects; and
- WHEREAS, Federal laws exist, including, but not limited to, Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) as amended with 36 CFR Part 800, the American Indian Religious Freedom Act, Executive Order 13007, and all other related laws, rules, regulations and executive orders that support the rights of Tribal Nations, but have yet to proactively influence protection of sacred ceremonial stone landscape sites; and
- WHEREAS, many sacred ceremonial stone landscapes are on lands controlled by or are within projects which are advised, funded or permitted by government departments and agencies such as the Department of the Interior, Department of the Army, Department of Agriculture, National Park Service, U.S. Forest Service, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, Army Corp of Engineers, Federal Aviation Administration, Federal Communications Commission, National Oceanic & Atmospheric Administration, the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, and the National Register of Historic Places; and
- WHEREAS, claiming them as products of farm clearing, professional archaeologists and the SHPOs annually pass judgment on the significance and potential protection of these sacred ceremonial stone landscapes and their structures within USET ancestral territories; therefore, be it



USET Resolution No. 2007:037

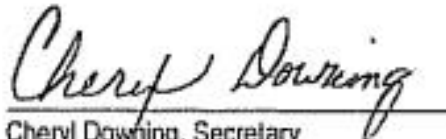
- RESOLVED** the USET Board of Directors requests that all relevant government departments and agencies actively and formally facilitate consultation with the federally recognized Indian Tribes of the region regarding the sacred ceremonial stone landscapes; and, be it further
- RESOLVED** the USET Board of Directors recommends that the Federal departments and agencies facilitate regional workshops between Tribes, State Historic Preservation Offices, archaeologists and Federal Departments and Agencies to facilitate a better comprehension of these concerns and a correction in these dismissive and destructive local policies; and, be it further
- RESOLVED** the USET Board of Directors requests a draft Federal Government enforcement policy for the protection of the National Historic Preservation Act under Executive Order 13007; and, be it further
- RESOLVED** the Federal Government will provide the member Tribes of United South and Eastern Tribes, Inc. with assistance, when requested, for the protection of historical sites and sacred landscapes within their ancestral territories.

CERTIFICATION

This resolution was duly passed at the USET Impact Week Meeting, at which a quorum was present, in Arlington, VA, on Thursday, February 15, 2007.



Brian Patterson, President  
United South and Eastern Tribes, Inc.



Cheryl Downing, Secretary  
United South and Eastern Tribes, Inc.