



METHODS TO ESTABLISH OR ESTIMATE THE AGE OF A STONEWALL  
Smithfield Conservation Commission    September 2007  
Some information taken from Exploring Stone Walls, by Robert M.Thorson  
(RT)

Deed may contain reference to the wall as a boundary marker, indicating when it was built.

Chain-of-title search may find the original owner/builder and the decade it was built.

Construction dates for homes or cellars were often inscribed in stones used as part of the construction—sometimes inconspicuously.

Diaries, invoices, and personal testimony from an elder can establish the wall's age.

Association with the property of a historic structure such as the Smith-Appleby House, The Price House, or the Brown Orchard will indicate age.

Contiguity with a historic cemetery, with dates on the markers will give an approximate age for the wall.

A wall divided perpendicularly by a road, extending on each side of the road, was built before the road's construction date.

“Anything built into a wall indicates construction age.” (RT)

A wall that is literally “uprooted” by a century -old tree was built next to that tree when the tree was young.

“Lichen coverage of stones increases with the age of the stone—a very old wall, 100+ years old, will be mostly covered with a continuous coat of dry lichen.” (RT)

A mixture of stone sizes ranging from average to too large to be moved indicate a wall as old as the largest stones.

Rust, discoloration, and crumbling will increase with the age of the wall.

Occasionally the very top of large, buried stones can be detected at the base of an old wall, indicating that there may be another foot or so of wall beneath what is now ground level.