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NEWS FROM THE NEW HAMPSHIRE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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PHOTOGRAPHS AVAILABLE

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The Mystery of the “Mystery Stone”

Concord, NH—One of the New Hampshire Historical Society’s most requested artifacts—the so-called “Mystery Stone”—is featured at a collection highlights talk with Director of Collections and Exhibitions Wesley Balla on Saturday, April 29, 2017, at 2 p.m., at the Society’s headquarters at 30 Park Street, Concord.

At just under 4 inches tall and 2.5 inches diameter, the stone has been a source of speculation and controversy since its discovery. Is it an ancient Indian artifact? A geological oddity? A clever hoax?

In 1872, construction workers digging post holes in Meredith near the shore of Lake Winnepesaukee unearthed a suspicious lump of clay. They gave their find to local collector of relics Seneca A. Ladd, who discovered an intriguing carved stone within the clay casing, which displayed several finely made images of a face, a teepee, and an ear of corn, along with strange geometric designs.

At the time of its discovery, the journal *American Naturalist* described it as “a remarkable Indian relic.” But by the next decade its provenance had become a source of debate among the international scientific community. Ever since, amateur and professional archaeologists have speculated about the Mystery Stone’s origins,



and the theories have been wide ranging and sometimes fantastical. Some think it could be of Celtic or Inuit origin. One letter-writer in the 1930s suggested it was a “thunderstone,” or a carved stone that literally fell from the sky. The arguments have centered around the type of stone, which is not normally seen in New Hampshire, and whether the carvings are manmade or machine made. The one thing that most Mystery Stone interpreters can agree on is that it is an “out-of-place artifact,” meaning it shouldn’t have been discovered where it was. There are no other reported findings of a stone like this in the United States.

Frances Ladd Coe of Center Harbor, the daughter of Seneca A. Ladd, donated the Mystery Stone to the New Hampshire Historical Society in 1927, where it has remained a source of fascination. The Society annually receives a considerable number of requests for information on the Mystery Stone. Balla’s talk will cover the back story behind the stone and the many theories for its origins and meaning. The stone itself will be on display.

Collection highlights talks are included in the price of admission to the Society, which is \$7 per person, with children 18 and under admitted for free. Society members are also admitted for free. The Society and its exhibitions are open Tuesday to Saturday, 9:30 a.m. to 5 p.m., at 30 Park Street, in Concord, NH.

Founded in 1823 the New Hampshire Historical Society is an independent, nonprofit organization dedicated to saving, preserving, and sharing New Hampshire history. Nowhere will you find a more extensive collection of objects and archives related to New Hampshire's history. The Society shares these vast collections through its research library, museum, website, publications, exhibitions, and youth and adult educational programs. The Society is not a state-funded agency. All of its programs and services are made possible by membership dues and contributions. For more information about the Society and the benefits of membership, visit www.nhhistory.org or call 603-228-6688.