

HISTORY  
of the  
THE TRAINING FIELD  
WEST NEWBURY  
Massachusetts

written by

Mrs. Ronald S. Gibbons

and read at the

WEST NEWBURY GARDEN CLUB

on

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## THE TRAINING FIELD, WEST NEWBURY, MASSACHUSETTS

"If one looks into the history of New England towns and cities, one will find in almost every case some central plot of land that by usage becomes the heart of the town, or like the hub of a wheel which one can use as a marker in finding one's way about - like Boston Common and the breathing places of other cities.

"In the history of Old Newbury the lower and upper greens were called in their old spelling "Graying Greens" (meaning grazing). After all these years it would be difficult to name our field "Training Green", which seems better as it is the wish of the people to improve and make more beautiful this ancient public square."

These words are quoted from an article by Leonard Smith written in 1919. Since I have borrowed much material from him, I wish to give a few facts about him. He was born in 1844 on the Dole Place on the river below Prospect Street. He was active in town affairs, serving as tax collector and town treasurer for ten years. After moving to Haverhill in 1930 he became curator of "The Buttonwoods", Haverhill's Historical Society, holding that position for twenty-seven years. He wrote a series of historical articles on West Newbury for The Haverhill Gazette and we are most grateful for his keen observation and accurate details.

in 1731 Joshua Bailey exchanged lands with the Town, giving the whole front of his farm for a "training field" of 150 square rods and a section 2 rods wide and 133 rods long for a part of Bailey's Lane. This was when the town was taking formal possession of the highways in the western part of the town.

Here two companies of men were trained during the Revolution. It was also used during the War of 1812, the Civil War, and in World War II I saw my husband and other men of the town drilling on the same field in a State Guard unit.

It is stated that stocks were once erected at the upper end and one of the town's earliest post offices was near here. Mr. Nichols was postmaster in Civil War days. Later a bandstand was built in the same general area. This first bandstand was replaced by a new one built by the W.P.A. and free W.P.A. concerts were given. I recall this bandstand very well and wish it were still there to be used on Memorial Day.

The first mail stage coach ran from Haverhill to Newburyport in 1803. The horse trolley cars started in June 1886. The car barns were on Bailey's Lane near the home of George Hull - in fact, Mr. Hull's house was built partly from the lumber from the car barns. Eugene H. Drake who lived across the street was a driver. The only circus ever to come to this town was held on

Mr. Drake's field behind the present library. This was in 1890. A Tally-ho owned and used by Mr. Eugene Drake at one time stood in front of Wolf Tavern in Newburyport.

There were two stores in this vicinity; one, called "The Cob", stood on the upper side of Town Hall; the other was a Penny Shop in the upper ell of no. 476 Main Street. This was very convenient for the pupils of West Newbury's first high school which was just beyond. This school house was later moved to Stewart Street and is now the Girroir home.

In 1882 the town voted \$2000 for the digging of two wells, one in the square and one on the Training Field. "As good an investment of it's money as the town could possibly make". So said one town father at the time. This well and pump still produce abundant good water. During dry spells countless autos stop and jugs and milk cans are filled here. The first pump in the square was enclosed in a wooden case. I wish that the present pump might be so inclosed as it probably was originally.

An excellent color photograph of the pump and Training Field appeared in 1955 on the cover of the Rockwell Water Journal, a company dealing with water and sewage systems. Their caption was "West Newbury - one of New England's oldest and prettiest towns". This same picture appeared on one of Tiffany and Company's Christmas cards. I am happy to have one.

Bailey's Lane itself is interesting. It could have been named for the many Bailey's who lived there - yet it could have <sup>been</sup> Bayley's Lane originally for there has long been a marker just beyond the Drake home stating this was the birthplace of Jacob Bayley, born in 1726, probably son of Joshua - who gave the Training Field. He took part in the French and Indian War and afterwards established a settlement "at the Oxbow of the Connecticut River which he named Newbury", as his birthplace was still a part of that town. This lane originally went clear to the river, but due to many landslides it was closed to the public in 1868.

In 1841 the town voted to build a Town House on land offered by Samuel Sewell Chase. Before this date town meetings were held in the various churches or meeting houses. It had a gallery at the rear which was sealed up for an armory before the Civil War.

Quoting from Leonard Smith in 1919 - "How well I remember annual Town Meeting - an all day affair, no street cars made it easy to come or return. A recess was voted from noon till 1:00 o'clock. People in the neighborhood invited friends and relatives to a sumptuous dinner.

"Mr. and Mrs. Abbott Follansbee, living next to the hall, always entertained Thomas Thurlow, Thomas Ordway, Moses Poor and myself. Stephen Emery Noyes, Sewell Chase, George Carr and Joseph Gordon were among others who opened their homes to a long list of friends."

Does this suggest a precedent for us?

The Farmers' Club was organized in 1856. It was a most active group who set up Farmers' Fairs which were held on the Training Field and in the Town Hall for nearly 50 years. The programs for their meetings list speakers whose names are familiar to us to-day. I have pictures which show crowds of people on the Training Field, women wearing Paisley shawls and men wearing high silk hats. Fringed surreys were also in evidence. One picture shows children in the foreground, among them is Edwin Adams, nine years old at the time, which dates the picture as 1872.

Quoting from Leonard Smith - "The Town Hall was filled with needlework and displays of fruit, flowers and other objects of interest, the pens for the cattle, poultry, etc., were arranged on the grounds that surround the hall. On the Training Field a great tent was placed in which the dinner was served; there were no plates unturned, for the dinner was the great affair of the day. Former residents were sure to take tickets.

"After dinner the speaker's stand drew the crowd, for there were always out-of-town speakers. The day ended with an exchange of greetings between friends, one carriage after another leaving the grounds, until every-day quiet settled over the Training Field."

In 1919 Leonard Smith wrote "While attending the celebration of the one hundredth anniversary of West Newbury, on the ancient square, my thoughts travelled back to the people who years ago lived in the houses that surround it."

We will start with the home of Samuel Sewall Chase at the corner of Bailey's Lane. "There was a man; an observer of human nature, a kindly man, an honest man, but a character non-the-less." He owned considerable property between Bridge and Prospect streets, and built many of the storey and a half houses there. He also cut a new road across his property, now Steed Avenue. His wife objected strenuously to the new road and vowed she would never use it. To outwit her, Sewall Chase stated in his will that at his funeral the hearse must go up Main Street, down Prospect Street, through Steed Avenue to the Bridge Street Cemetary - ~~Which~~ it did!

He also stipulated in the will that Judge Perry Sargent of Amesbury should ride on the hearse wearing a high silk hat. Unfortunately the funeral was on an extreme cold spell and the Judge froze both ears in carrying out his friend's request.

"The next house," Mr. Smith continues, "belonged to Abner Bailey, in my boyhood to Nelson Bailey - contractor and builder" (built after 1872).

I might add that when I came here in 1940 Bill Hudson lived in this house. He was a colorful police officer and a zealous guardian of the Training Field.

"The brick cottage was originally the blacksmith shop of Daniel Bailey (502 Main Street) but for many years the residence of Matthew Greenleaf who was one of the town butchers. He lived on Bailey's Lane until fire destroyed his home. Then he secured the old blacksmith shop and changed it into a residence.

"The Daniel Bailey home is a fine specimen of colonial architecture. Originally there was a fine front door with bullseye glasses in the upper panels, also a wonderful brass knocker. Some antique collector offered the owners a modern door in exchange for the original, and the deal was closed. The knocker was worth several doors."

Being unaware of this interesting bit of history, in 1949 Walter Grout, then owner of this house, replaced the "new" door and also the entire doorway with a fine specimen taken from the Pierce House, 43 Manning Street, Meeting House Hill, in Strawberry Banke, Portsmouth, N.H. The doorway is pictured on the original house in the book "Architectural Heritage of the Piscataqua" by John Mead Howells.

I will add a 1940 note. Mr. and Mrs. John King lived in the Bailey house then. Mr. King, a retired postman, once was a stage coach driver in Idaho and Nevada. He had a pair of homemade skis given him by a Swede in the west - the first skis seen in this vicinity. Mr. King will be gratefully remembered for his labors, for on his own initiative he mowed the Training Field for the first time and continued to mow it for nearly twenty years, using a hand mower at first.

Mrs. King had a vivid encounter with a ghost. She kept a lighted lamp by her bed since she was caring for an invalid mother. She was awakened one night by the appearance of a woman, small and slight, attired in an old fashioned nightgown tied <sup>under</sup> ~~under~~ her chin. Reaching for the lamp she demanded it in a very decided manner. Mrs. King was a positive person also and grabbing the handle of the lamp, she refused. After an exchange of firm words on both sides, the ghost disappeared. Mrs. King described her visitor most clearly to a neighbor who exclaimed, "Why that is the very picture of Harriet Bailey (daughter of Daniel) who lived here all her life."

Mr. Smith continues "Next to the Bailey house is the home

of J. Milton Follansbee now occupied by his son Walter Follansbee." This is the house we bought in 1939 from Walter Follansbee's widow. I regret to say we never had a ghost, though the houses on either side of us did.

One newly-wed couple who came here to live happened to arrive on an evening when men were drilling on the Training Field. The group set out to serenade the couple, came up under the front windows and fired - breaking several panes of glass. One man shot downward and shot his toe!

In our yard is one of West Newbury's many home shoe shops - it's bench still in it's original position. When we visited Henry Ford's museum at Dearborn, Michigan, we were surprised to see a small comb shop whose tools were labeled "Bought from the comb shop of Walter Follansby - Training Field, West Newbury." We now have a copy of a deed of our property to John Follansbee from Alfred Pillsbury - comb maker 1840.

The house at the lower end of the Training Field was occupied in 1940 by "The Adams Boys" - Ed, the younger was 77. He was the first boy to graduate, in 1883, from West Newbury's first high school. He delivered the Valedictory wearing a pair of white gloves for the occasion. He was the source of endless stories of this vicinity. His father was one of the town butchers, and Ed showed us a linen smock his father wore when delivering meat.

The Adams and Follansby houses were undoubtedly built by the same carpenter as countless interior details are identical.

Across the street are the only three houses shown on the 1729 map. The first was built by John Chase, reportedly in 1699, and remained in the family for over a century till it became the property of Zebulon Gordon. One of the Gordons was a butcher also - so that we have three situated around the Training Field.

The next house was the residence of Daniel Chase in 1729. The front room shows evidence of having been a shop of some kind.

Leonard Smith says of the next house, "The Follansbee<sup>house</sup> is one of the oldest of the group and with the farm that belongs with it, was held by the Follansbee family through several generations." The 1729 map lists it as belonging to John Carr.

There were several establishments where four wheeled vehicles were made in the western part of the town, but the man who did the largest business was Enoch Bailey. His shop was located at the east end of the Training Field. Mr. Bailey lived next to the shop (510 Main Street). He employed twenty or more men. Records show Henry Lay joined him in 1844. (More about Mr. Lay

later). Eventually Mr. Bailey moved his business to Boston, and his shop was made into a residence where Leonard Burrill now lives (384 Main Street).

Next, Nichols and Thomas began a carriage business in the same area, then came Lashon and Shoules, and last, Moses Merrill took over the premises. He made a special style of light wagon of his own design. He also built a gypsy wagon for "Madam Stanley, Queen of the Stanley Tribe of Gypsies". Several of her descendants still live in Salisbury, Mass.

An uncle of mine, Charles Lord of Salisbury, told me this story. After his father died in the Civil War, his mother had him bound out or apprenticed to Moses Merrill who was to teach him the business in exchange for clothing, schooling and board. He became so unhappy that one night he ran away, hiding behind a stone wall at the top of Pipestave Hill when he recognized the peculiar rattles and squeaks of Mr. Merrill's wagon on his trail. His mother never returned him to West Newbury, but Mr. Lord continued to be a carriage painter for many years.

He also stated that Mr. Merrill rented the house at 510 Main Street, but declaring that it was haunted, he moved elsewhere. His factory burned in 1872, and he rebuilt on the corner of Bridge Street.

On the site of the present library stood the Nichols House, the only three storey house in West Newbury. John and Joshua Brewster bought the land from the Bailey family early in the 19th Century and started the house. Only two ells were completed and lived in by the brothers. John was engaged in smuggling goods across the Canadian border during the war of 1812. He was driven over the border by U. S. Custom officials where he died in 1820.

The house was completed by Captain Daniel Pillsbury who was the father-in-law of Mr. Nichols. Nichols and Thomas carried on a successful carriage business where Enoch Bailey had begun it. After the business moved to Boston, Charles Clay ran an hotel in the Nichols House. The Adams family lived here for a while before moving to their home next to the carriage shop in 1876. The name of the hotel was later changed to Albion from which we get the name of Albion Lane. Unfortunately the Albion Hotel had an unsavory reputation and was raided many times for liquor. The Emery sisters bought the property in order to demolish the building. They then gave the land for the new library in 1937. The library opened in 1939, a West Newbury native, Russell Peirce, was the architect.

On Saturday, August 23, 1919, West Newbury began a three day Centennial Celebration including a welcome to World War I veterans. Saturday's activities were a Band Concert, a parade with floats and an historical address given by George Emery Noyes. Mr. Noyes

had kept a journal for many years and it contained valuable facts in the town's history. (A copy of his address is in the library.)

The greatest undertaking of the three days was an historical pageant written by Mrs. Hazel Albertson with a cast of three hundred participating. This took place Saturday afternoon near the Dole Place.

Sunday at the Training Field there was a Memorial Service and unveiling of the World War I Memorial Tablet containing the names of eighty men who had enrolled from West Newbury. A community Chorus sang under the direction of John Peirce. A bronze medal bearing a seal of the town was presented to each veteran.

On Monday there was another parade, this in honor of the soldiers and sailors - another band, and a chorus of one hundred and fifty voices. The day ended with a banquet for the men and a dance. An exhibition of historical objects was on display for the three days in Memorial Hall - now Legion Hall.

The boulder bearing the Memorial Tablet was given by Wilfred Zink. It came from the hill behind his home at 124 Main Street. A flag and flag pole were given by the Rev. Glen Tilley Morse. at the same time.

Proceeds from the pageant plus some donations covered the costs of the celebration.

An interesting side light concerns a former resident of the town, Fred Carr (476 Main Street), who invented the Carr Fastener. His contribution was to send the Carr Band - one of the finest around, to take part in the festivities. The Grange fed members of the band who declared that never had they been fed so well.

The second memorial stone, dedicated to the men of World War II and the Korean War, was erected by the town in 1953, though the names of those in the Korean conflict were not inscribed until 1960. This stone replaced an earlier wooden marker.

Now we turn our attention to the planting that has taken place on the Training Field. George Emery Noyes gives us the names of the donors of the elm trees and adds the fact that these men performed the labor of setting them out. This honor roll consists of the following names:

Paul Bailey  
Samuel Sewell Chase  
John Follansbee  
Stephen and Stephen E. Noyes  
Charles Palmer  
Daniel Bailey

Daniel England  
Luther Chase  
John M. Follansbee  
" " " "  
Joseph Z. Gordon

The trees were planted in this order beginning at Bailey's Lane, the first eight in 1842, the last three since 1892.

On April 20, 1923 Mr. and Mrs. Henry D. Lay observed their 75th wedding anniversary. The whole town helped to celebrate the event and a memorial tree, a pin oak, was set out. This tree is outside the Training Field Road, seemingly on our lawn, but the field is a rectangle not semicircular. This spot was chosen because Mr. Lay had worked for many years in Enoch Bailey's carriage shop very near here - beginning in 1844. Mr. Lay had been a selectman of the town and a representative to the General Court.

My interest in this tree increased when Joanne Lay, great grand daughter of Henry Lay, married our son John Gibbons.

About 1950 the old planting around the boulder memorial stone was removed as it had grown to ungainly heights. It was replaced by a simple hedge of yews on either side of the stone and rounded beds of Euonymus in front of the hedges.

At this time Mr. and Mrs. Walter Grout volunteered to prune and care for the planting and this work has been continued up to the present time.

In 1966 the old Euonymus was replaced by a planting of Andorra Junipers, a gift of Cherry Hill Nurseries. This was a Garden Club project.

In the Fall of 1968 a companion planting of yew hedges and Andorra Junipers was made around the new monument dedicated to the Veterans of World War II and the Korean War. The planting and labor were the generous gift of Cherry Hill Nurseries and this, also, was a Garden Club project.

In the Fall of 1967 some of the householders around the Training Field conceived the idea of a community Christmas Tree to be installed on the Field. This site was considered the most appropriate because it was the geographical center of the Town of West Newbury, was flanked by the Town Hall and the Public Library, and afforded the best opportunity to be seen by all who used the highway. A canvas of all the businesses in town and some householders elicited enough funds to pay for the erection of a splendid 30-foot tree by the Lagasse Amusement Company and trimmed with several hundred white lights. A special dispensation

by the Massachusetts Electric Company allowed the Town to procure current via an overhead wire from one of the Company poles. The lighted tree was enthusiastically received and highly praised.

In the Fall of 1968 the West Newbury Garden Club adopted as one of it's projects the beautification of the Training Field which included, among other things, the planting of a living Christmas Tree. The Club donated \$100 towards this end and this was added to a small savings account left over from the 1967 community canvas. Other funds are being supplied by the Town. A permanent electrical supply was installed, with the blessing of the Massachusetts Electric Company. Stanley Bill contributed the labor involved in laying the wire and excavating for the trees, and Cherry Hill Nurseries donated a splendid Douglas Fir. Lights were bought and householders trimmed the tree. Once again, at Christmas time it was hailed with delight, and the community has the additional satisfaction of knowing that it's Christmas Tree is a permanent tradition for the Town of West Newbury.

On October 8, 1968, at the home of Mrs. Walter T. Grout on the Training Field, a meeting was held to study the situation of the elm trees on the Training Field. One by one these majestic trees are being destroyed by the ravages of the Dutch elm disease and we felt the need of doing something about replacements.

We were most fortunate to have the services of Mr. Charles S. Hood, Chief, Insect Pest Control of the Massachusetts Department of Natural Resources and two members of his staff. Also attending the meeting were Mr. Stanley Bill, Town Tree Warden, Mr. Roger Coggeshall of Cherry Hill Nurseries, and three residents of the Training Field area, Mrs. Ronald S. Gibbons, Mrs. Gordon Hall, and Mrs. Grout. Mr. Albert Elwell, Selectman, was unable to attend due to other commitments.

After much discussion, it was thought advisable to make a planting of Sugar Maple trees on the inside of the Training Field Road and permission was granted by the Board of Selectmen to proceed as quickly as possible with the planting because of approaching frosts. Owing to a possible widening of Main Street at some future time as well as the damage done to trees on the main streets by salt and chemicals used on the roads during the winters, it was considered wise not to plant the trees along the Main Street side of the Training Field.

On December 12, 1968 Mr. Bill and his men planted seven Sugar Maples, twelve feet in height, and we hope future generations will cherish them and care for them.

Thus we have our Training Field from its beginning to the present, from an unknown hay field to a landscaped green. May future generations cherish it and care for it.

Typed by Evelyn C. Grout