

TREES MATTER I - The Anniversary Tree

West Newbury's trees and forests are important for our environment, our community, and our well-being. *"Trees are like the vacuums of our planet. Through their leaves and bark, they absorb harmful pollutants and release clean oxygen for us to breathe. In urban environments, trees absorb pollutant gases... and sweep up particles like dust and smoke."* [from OneTreePlanted.org]

In West Newbury, trees play additional and vitally important roles. Through their complex root systems, trees gather and store water, prevent erosion and flooding from cleared lands, and cleanse the groundwater for our water supplies. They also support and nurture wildlife, insect pollinators for our gardens, and provide a critical aesthetic component of our semi-rural community.

To celebrate trees and their value to our community, the Tree Committee of West Newbury, for the first time, is organizing a number of Arbor Day events on April 25th of this year. The events will be held at the G.A.R. Library and grounds on Route 113 and will include free handouts of tree seedlings to all attendees.

During the Tree Committee's preparation for this event, a special tree has been brought to our attention. The Anniversary Tree, a pin oak, is located on the Training Field and is just shy of 100 years old. It was planted to celebrate the 75th wedding anniversary of Mr. and Mrs. Henry Lay on April 20, 1923.



Photo of the pin oak planting ceremony in 1923 (kindly furnished by Bonnie Gibbons)

The Lay family has a rich heritage in West Newbury, and descendants still live in the original homestead. A carriage builder by trade, Henry Lay settled in West Newbury in 1845 and served as a selectman from 1878 to 1883. He also represented the district in the General Court in 1884. The historic oak tree planted in honor of Henry and his wife, Esther, is still thriving today in its original spot on the Training Field.



Photo of the pin oak today as it stands at 93 feet tall (courtesy of Fred Chanania)

Special thanks to descendant Bonnie Gibbons who provided the Tree Committee with an extensive history of the tree and the family legacy. We invite people to stop by to admire this remarkable tree, especially during the Arbor Day events on April 25th.

Last summer, the West Newbury Board of Selectmen approved the establishment of a Tree Committee, whose mission statement states that the Committee will:

- Assist in the identification, protection, and preservation of significant and remarkable trees in West Newbury;
- Provide education to the Town and residents of West Newbury on measures that will help to protect and preserve significant and remarkable trees in West Newbury;
- Provide information and assistance generally regarding the values, protection, and preservation of the trees and forests in West Newbury.

The Arbor Day events are the Committee's initial outreach to West Newbury residents in fulfillment of this mission. Please visit the Tree Committee website for more information about West Newbury and New England trees and the activities of the Committee. The Tree Committee welcomes stories and information about significant and remarkable trees in West Newbury. Stay tuned for further details and schedule for the Arbor Day event. Website URL: <https://www.wnewbury.org/tree-committee>