

Woodbury Buildings and Points of Interest

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Origins of the Town of Woodbury

Incorporated in 1659 with a land deed between the settlers and Paugusett tribe, Woodbury was first inhabited by people from Stratford, CT seeking to begin their own church and purchase land for the sons of Stratford who had limited land to expand upon. This was not accomplished immediately as the settlers returned to Stratford with the outbreak of King Phillip's War, which terrorized many parts of New England. In addition, the settlers later learned that it was not the Paugusetts, but instead the Pootatuck tribe which laid claim to the land. Consequently they spent the years from 1673 to 1706 repurchasing the land as many as three times from the Pootatucks. Although the area was first known as Pomperaug Plantation, so named for one of the sachems of the Pootatuck, it later became Woodbury, "dwelling place in the woods." The land had been favorable to the settlers with the combination of land already partially cleared for farming, since the Pootatucks were agrarian by nature, and large amounts of wood necessary for building a settlement.

Early industry in the area was mainly agriculture, although there were several craftsmen. One of the most important jobs to have in the settlement was that of a miller, necessary for both grinding large amounts of grain and later for sawing wood. The first grist mill was built along the banks of the Pomperaug River, which harnessed water power to operate the mill, in the center of the village by John Hurd, who had his home lot nearby. Other important craftsmen came with the growth of the settlement. These included clothiers, blacksmiths, tanners, saddlers, shoe-makers, coopers, joiners, iron workers, gunsmiths, silversmiths, merchants and several other artisans.

When the First Ecclesiastical Society of the Congregational Church was formed to encompass the settlement of Woodbury it also included what later became several surrounding towns. As the population grew, these areas began to ask the right to start their own parishes and be incorporated as separate towns. The first of these was Washington (renamed for George Washington), which had originally been known as Judea, and New Preston in 1779. In 1787 the societies of Bethlehem and Southbury (including South Britain and an area of Oxford) were incorporated as separate towns, and finally Roxbury in 1796. The Quassapaug section of Middlebury was also a part of the original settlement.

Woodbury remained primarily agricultural until the Industrial Revolution, at which point more industrialization began to enter the town, including several factories. Most specifically affected were the Pomperaug, Minortown and Hotchkissville sections of Woodbury which were developed specifically to accommodate the growing industrialization. This continued for some time until the lack of a direct railroad connection left Woodbury behind places such as Waterbury, which had railroad stations connecting them more easily to other cities and towns. Woodbury today, although still home to some agriculture and industry, is economically comprised of small businesses.

Boyd Building

Built in 1930 for the purpose of being the Woodbury Savings Bank, the Boyd Building was purchased by the Town of Woodbury on November 6, 1975 (Volume 115, Page 108) from the Woodbury Savings Bank. For some time prior to the purchase of the bank building, the town offices had become crowded as they were primarily located in the Shove Building, known at that time simply as the Town Office Building. Also, the purchase of a building already equipped with vaults adjacent to the already existing Town facilities, including the Fire Department and Library in addition to the office building later known as the Shove Building, was useful for storage of records and general safekeeping. It was decided that the building would be known as the “Boyd Building” in honor of Harmon Boyd, town treasurer for 40 years.

Curtis House

One of the oldest and longest continually operated Inns in the state, the Curtis House has a long tradition of being a regular resting area for weary travelers and local residents alike. It was originally lived in as a home. Another building, no longer standing, was built for Anthony Stoddard, minister of the First Ecclesiastical Society, upon his arrival in 1701. He deeded approximately one acre to the north of his "Mansion" to his son Eliakim in 1736. It is on this lot that the building, which was to become the Curtis House, was first constructed. Upon the death of Eliakim in 1749, the homestead was willed to his son, Israel, who was a minor at the time. As a result, the property was leased by Israel's guardian, who first used the home as an inn, beginning in 1754. It continued in this capacity as the property of Israel, then his widow and son Asa, until 1799 when it was purchased by William Moseley. Since that time the inn has continued to be open, always either as an Inn or a Tavern.

The Curtis House has held many names over the years including; "Woodbury Hotel," "Woodbury Inn," "Foot's Tavern," "Kelley and Foot's Hotel," and "Kelley's Hotel and Livery." It has also been a stop off for many travelers, including stage coaches, which would stop and change teams, lodge overnight, or just find a meal. The original building consisted of two stories and an attic. Levi Curtis, the proprietor, and then owner of the inn for 25 years, had the roof raised in 1900, adding a third floor. Until then, the second story had been a ballroom, complete with arched ceiling and fireplaces at either end. In 1916 the Curtis House was threatened with destruction by a roof fire. Prompt action on the part of the Fire Department, which was finally using automobiles to get hose carts to the scene of fires, saved the building. Other than this most obvious change, other slight alterations have been made over the years, including modernizations such as plumbing and electricity, but the main use of the Curtis House has remained the same.

District No. 2 Schoolhouse

Located below King Solomon's Lodge on Main Street South in Woodbury, this one room schoolhouse was one of several once used in Woodbury. The District No. 2 Schoolhouse was built in 1867 and used continually until 1900 when Mitchell Elementary School was opened. It was then the property of King Solomon's Lodge, but was then donated to the Old Woodbury Historical Society in 1977. Although it is one of several remaining one room schoolhouses in Woodbury, it is the only which has been restored and is open to the public. Renovations were completed in 1984, allowing the building to become home to several original Woodbury school desks (originally located in other buildings) as well as several other pieces which recreate the atmosphere of a late 19th Century schoolhouse. The schoolhouse is open to the public one Sunday each month during the summer as well as for special events, including visits from area classes.

Hurd House

Located in the Hollow, the oldest portion of the Hurd House was built in 1680, making it Litchfield County's oldest structure on its original foundation. This building was the home of John Hurd, who was hired to be Woodbury's miller. The home then passed first to his son Benjamin and next to his grandson, Nathan, in 1779. In reality the building is two complete structures, the original portion being the northern half of the structure and the southern half being another complete home built on a separate site, which were joined together in approximately 1715. The property was initially granted to John Hurd in return for being the town miller. It is speculated that he had at least a grist mill, used for the extremely important role of grinding the grain for the townspeople, and most likely a saw mill, a short distance away along the Pomperaug River.

After the Hurd family, the house was purchased by Jehiel and William Preston, then passed on to Nathan Preston. The property was owned in 1836 by Herman Stoddard, at which time the first mention was made in Town records of a shop being located on the premises. Michael Skelly purchased the property from Julia Allen in 1860 and, in addition to occupying the house, operated a blacksmith shop on the property. The house passed to his son, Leo, in 1912, at which point modernizations to the house were begun. This modernization included tearing out the central chimney, installing modern windows, and other various renovations to the interior.

The Hurd House was acquired by the Old Woodbury Historical Society in 1967, and it was at this point that the age of the house was discovered. During renovation original summer beams, pine sheathing, and posts were discovered. Most evidence of modernization was removed, returning the house to a state similar to what its appearance may have been in the early nineteenth century. This included the reconstruction of a chimney from evidence in the floor boards. The Hurd House is still operated as a museum by the Old Woodbury Historical Society and is opened on Sunday afternoons during the summer from 2-4 p.m., as well as on special occasions, including Thanksgiving morning, Woodbury's townwide Christmas Festival and Mitchell School Fourth Grade Day.

Glebe House

Built in the mid-1700s, this building was home to John Marshall, Woodbury's first Episcopal minister, in the latter portion of the 1700s and is most well known as the birthplace of the American Episcopal Church. It is called the Glebe not because of the family that lived there, but instead because a glebe was the farm lot used by a minister or member of the clergy, as Rev. Marshall was. A group of Episcopal clergy met at the Glebe House on March 25, 1783 and elected Samuel Seabury as the Church's first bishop. The building itself was sold by the church to raise money for the completion of St. Paul's Church in the late 1780's, at which point the Marshall family moved to a house in the center of Town. Since its sale, the house has been home to many, including a hatter, silver-smith, and at one point even itinerant farmers who worked the land which is now the Hollow. In the 1920s the house, as well as the property on which it stands, was purchased by the Episcopal Diocese of Connecticut with the idea that it would be used as a home for retired Episcopal clergy. It stood unused, however, and was at the point of being torn down with only a plaque to mark its existence. It was renovated instead and opened as a museum. It was at this point that the cottage was added as a home for the museum caretaker.

The property is also known for being the home of the only American garden in existence designed by Gertrude Jekyll, a well-known English gardener. She was commissioned to plan the garden by a member of the Seabury Society for the Preservation of the Glebe House Board, which operates the museum. The garden was planned in the Colonial Revival style which was very popular at the time. Jekyll, however, was used to planning much more extensive gardens and had never actually been to the Glebe House, resulting in slight adjustments necessary to the plan. The Gertrude Jekyll garden was not installed as a part of the Glebe House Museum until the 1980s. The Glebe House Museum is open to the public from spring to fall Wednesday through Sunday from 1-4 p.m. for tours along with special events, and the Gertrude Jekyll Garden is open from dawn to dusk year round.

The Hollow

Now owned by the Town of Woodbury and maintained by the Park and Recreation Department, this local park was once the site of fields used by farmers. Comprised of approximately 70 acres running adjacent to the Pomperaug River, the location was perfect for this use. Along the river once sat the town mill, owned by John Hurd and operated by water power from the Pomperaug River beginning in the late 1600s. Along the southern edge of the Hollow stands a hill known as Castle Rock, according to legend the fortress used by the Pootatuck tribe which resided in this area before settlement by English colonists from Stratford, CT. Flat, cleared land with rich soil made the area very useful to the settlers who came in the late 17th century. It was used in this capacity through the earlier portion of the 20th century, being utilized at one point as farmland for itinerant farmers who would sometimes stay in what is now the Glebe House Museum.

In the early 1980s plans for development of the Hollow as a recreation area began. What was once fertile farmland is now a park utilized for many varied activities. A picnic area complete with barbeque pits, tables and a pavilion which can be rented for special occasions borders a children's playground, basketball court and volleyball court. The park also includes several sports fields which are used by local soccer, baseball or softball teams. A river walk can also be enjoyed by visitors to the park. It runs approximately a quarter of a mile along the river and is not only used as a walking area, but also includes clearings and benches useful for breaks or picnics. During the summer months Hollow Pond, a man-made swimming area, has been used in the past for swimming lessons offered by Parks & Recreation as well as a public recreational swimming area. Other activities in the Hollow include the Waterbury Symphony Picnic & Pops concert, Labor Day fireworks, outdoor family movie nights, outdoor concerts and several other activities.

Hotchkissville Fire House

Formerly one of the many schoolhouses located in the Town of Woodbury, it was decided in late 1927 that this building would be used as the new home of the Hotchkissville Fire Department. The fire company had formerly been located at one of the old mills in “the Ville”, as the area is affectionately known. The original plan when the school was closed and the new highways (Routes 47 and 132) were being constructed was to turn the building into a community center and town assembly hall. An agreement was made with the Hotchkissville Fire Department that they would be allowed to use the facility so long as the building was kept in good repair by the company and be available if needed for any community functions.

Unfortunately, the building had stood vacant since the closing of the school and had fallen into disrepair. Structurally the building was sound, but it was in need of new paint and repair to the roof. The community rallied with the fire department to provide funds for materials and volunteer help for repairs. Once this was completed, the Hotchkissville Fire Department moved in and has occupied the building since. There have been some changes to the structure over the years, but for the most part, the Hotchkissville Fire House has remained the same as when first occupied by the fire department over seventy years ago.

King Solomons Lodge No. 7

This building is thought to be the oldest Masonic Temple in continuous use at least in the state of Connecticut, if not the Middle Atlantic States. The first charter was granted by the Provincial Grand Lodge in Boston on July 17, 1765, and then another charter when the Grand Lodge of Connecticut was formed on October 6, 1790. Prior to the building's construction, however, members of the Lodge met in various homes as well as in Kelley Tavern, which is today known at the Curtis House Inn. Land for the Lodge building itself was not purchased until July 21, 1838 for the sum of \$15 from Ashbel Moody. The rock on which the Lodge now stands was once the place from which Woodbury settlers were called for meeting by a drummer during the earliest days of the colony. Construction of the "Lodge Room" was voted upon on August 29, 1838 and was not to exceed the sum of \$700, \$350 of which had to be raised by subscription before the building could be contracted.

Materials used in the construction of the Lodge had to be brought across Ashbel Moody's property (which supposedly caused significant problems with his anti-Mason son-in-law Levi Douglass), then hauled over the rock face from street level. The front section of the Temple was erected in 1839. In June of the same year a committee was formed to build a set of steps, with iron support rods imbedded in the rock, leading from the street to the Temple. In 1866 the Temple was enlarged, which it was later determined crossed the property line of Levi Douglass. The enlargement itself cost a total of \$782.41 with an additional \$15 to purchase the encroached property from Levi Douglass. The building was enlarged with the addition of the East section and kitchen in 1954 and again with the addition of a banquet hall in 1975.

The early Lodge had a close relationship with St. Paul's Episcopal Church. Several Lodge members were also members of the church, and the altar which now resides in the Lodge Room was purchased from St. Paul's in 1855. Other articles in the Lodge have come from varied backgrounds. The chairs in the East of the Lodge Room are loaned from North Congregational Church and the horns at each corner of the altar, presented by Stephen Atwood, were from the first two Merino rams imported by the owner from Spain. Also, the carpet hanging on the West wall was purchased around 1870 from SN & HW Foster Carpet Warehouse in New Haven and was recognized by the designer, a Lodge member, as being one of three of the particular design made by Cheney Brothers.

Oreanaug Park

A combination of several pieces of land put together over the course of several years by Susan Shove with the help of William Cothren, Oreanaug Park is now an area of over 60 acres for passive recreation. It was Mrs. Shove's hope that the park, land which had been passed from one generation of the Minor family to the next and began as only eleven acres, would be second to none in the State for natural beauty. Woodbury resident and historian William Cothren wrote the following of Oreanaug in his History of Ancient Woodbury (1859):

“Oreanaug is the Indian name of the beautiful trap rock cliffs, which bound the village on the east. The front cliff has been recently purchased and improved by the writer as a mountain park. Oak, maple, hickory, chestnut and cedar trees are scattered over the mountain-top, and in the beautiful ravine beyond, while the crest is covered by a beautiful grove of pine trees, in the midst of which a tower thirty feet in height, has been erected, from which views of six surrounding towns may be obtained. It has been named the Oreanaug Park. Here one can always catch a delightful breeze, and enjoy a beautiful panoramic view of the village, valley and meandering river below, which the whispering pines above his head soothe the perturbed, wearied and overworked mind. The beautiful evergreens suggest thoughts of peace, and the beatitude of the eternal rest on high.”

The tower which is referred to by Cothren was a stone tower constructed in what is now the park and is no longer standing. The land was officially presented by Mrs. Shove to the Town for use as a park in 1892. Today several hiking trails wind through the hilly park as well as a rock climbing area for experienced climbers. The park can be accessed from two locations, both leading to the hiking trails and an observation tower from which up to six surrounding towns can be seen. The first access area can be found adjoining the Town Office Building complex through a meadow. The second off of Park Road passes Webb's Pond (formerly known as Silver Lake) and leads through two pillars, also the idea of Mrs. Shove, each consisting of stones from every state in the Union, to the main trail. A secondary trail off of the main trail leads to Bethel Rock, the first meeting place of the Woodbury settlers upon their arrival in the late 1600s. Oreanaug Park is now owned by the Town of Woodbury and is open from dawn to dusk year round. For more information concerning rules and regulations the Parks and Recreation department can be contacted.

Oreanaug Observation Tower

This prominent lookout point was commissioned to be built in the late 1890s by Mrs. Susan Shove. With generous help of subscriptions from several other townspeople as well as former residents, the total amount of \$1,064 was raised by 1900 to pay for its construction. It resides approximately 260 feet above Main Street and 520 feet above sea level. According to the blueprints for the tower, it stands at a height of 67' 4" from its base to the eaves of the roof. A flag staff was to be placed atop at a height of 13', which would make the total height 80' 4" from base to tip. The flag pole was replaced instead by a weather vane. The tower was constructed when there was relatively little growth in Oreanaug Park to block the panoramic view, yet more than one hundred years later when there is significant growth, the tower can be seen from almost any point throughout the Town.

Public Works Garage

This building, located at what was commonly known as the Town Yard on White Deer Rocks Road, is unique in its construction in that it was designed to be a building onto which new pieces could be added as time progressed. A program was begun in 1963 to construct a building which could house the Highway Department equipment. Two original bays were completed in 1963 and were designated to be added to “when funds were available.” During this time John A. Peterson had just resigned as Road Foreman, a position which was passed on to James L. Parmelee. It was written in the 1965 Town Annual Report that in the previous year’s time an additional five new garage bays had been added to the already existing garage, when long time Road Foreman and future Director of Public Works P. Edward Lizauskas took over the department. A salt-sand shed was added in 1977 and the construction of a building in which to hang sanders for safer and more efficient loading onto trucks was begun. To date the Public Works Garage consists of the garage building itself, which ten bays for equipment as well as an office (one of the original bays), a pole barn in which additional equipment is stored, the salt-sand shed and the overhang where sanders are stored.

Shove Building

This building, originally known simply as the Town Office Building, was constructed as a residence by Dr. Harmon W. Shove in 1867. The home was purchased by the Town in 1952 from the Estate of Edward S. Boyd along with a parcel of approximately 20 acres of land. Alterations to the building were necessary to convert it into office space, including the installation of a vault. At that time all offices were consolidated into the building, with the exception of the Tax Collector’s Office. The office was renovated in 1977, forcing many of the Town offices to move several times within the course of the year to accommodate the alterations. At this time, after solicitation of requests for a building name from townspeople, it was decided that the building would be named in honor of Dr. Shove.

Town Clerks Vault

Located on Main Street South near the corner of Routes 6 and 47, the former Town Clerks vault was built in 1888. At a Town Meeting on January 2, 1888 it was voted to erect a fire-proof building and vault to be used as a Town Clerks room and place to house Town records. It was specified, however, that it could not exceed the cost of \$1075. The vault was built on land owned by Charles R. Hurd located adjacent to his store, provided at the time that the Town could arrange a lease of the land free of cost. The land was granted in a deed dated July 2, 1888 with the stipulation that the Town must erect the building within one year. Another stipulation stated that the Town must maintain the building with the specific use of storage of Town Records. For a time the vault was also used to house a medical supply loan closet operated by the Woodbury Community Nurse Association. With the purchase of the former Woodbury Savings and Loan building (later to be known as the Boyd Building) at 275 Main Street South and the movement of the Clerks’ office, the building became an area in which to store records belonging to the Old Woodbury Historical Society.

Town Hall

Known to many as the Old Town Hall, this building located on the corner of Main Street South and Mountain Road was first proposed at a Town Meeting on October 6, 1845. A committee consisting of Daniel Curtis, Anthony C. Strong and Treat Camp was appointed to investigate the possible construction and report back at a later date. The committee made an agreement with Enos Benham to construct the building on his property, providing that his home be moved, therefore making the property line 5 feet north of the northerly side of his home. At another Town Meeting on February 11, 1846 it was decided to pay the committee a sum of \$750 towards the building of a Town Hall. Enos Benham was paid \$200 for his land. A contract was signed on October 2, 1846, leasing the land to the Town of Woodbury for 999 years with a stipulation that the south room on the second floor of the building be set aside for the First Ecclesiastical Society. This room was later used as a library. A Special Town Meeting held on April 21, 1923 voted to set aside the sum of \$9,000 for improvements and repairs to Town Hall. This involved the addition of a stage and the upstairs room were torn out to be replaced with a balcony. Whereas the building was once used for all civic and social gatherings as well as office facilities, it is now used mainly for smaller gatherings and Town functions.

Woodbury Public Library

Formerly the Parker Academy, a local schooling facility for higher learning beyond the one room schoolhouse, this building was sold to the Town of Woodbury in 1902 by Edward and Helen Boyd for the cost of one dollar. It was specified by them to be used as a “free Public Library” available to the citizens of Woodbury. The third floor room was to be reserved for free and full use the St. Paul’s Episcopal Church, located across Main Street from the building, as a parish room. It could be used for this purpose until such time as the Town deemed it necessary to use the room for library functions, or until the structure was replaced. A stipulation exists in the deed, however, stating that if at any time the building was not used for the time span of two successive years as a free and public library, ownership would revert to the grantors or their heirs forever. With time, due to the growing number of library patrons and increased circulation, it was decided that the facility needed to be expanded. In the late 1970s the Town and Library Commission began plans for an addition. During this time in 1979 the library’s many volumes remained somewhat available to the public at a facility in Middle Quarter. Approximately one half, however, numbering nearly 8,000 volumes were stored in private homes around Woodbury on long-term loan. The new and improved Woodbury Public Library was opened again in September of 1980. With the increase in space, the Library was able to become a cultural center offering many more volumes, higher circulation, and programs such as movies and lectures. These programs continue in the lower level of the old Parker Academy portion of the building in a room now known as the Gallery. Services have continued to increase over the years as demand has grown, allowing patrons to now add computer use to the list of offerings as well as a Library Book Cellar, located next to the Woodbury Police Station and operated by the Friends of the Woodbury Library, which sells used books that have been donated.