

History



(Added as a New Chapter in 2005)

(This is information that was contained in the Town of Plaistow's 250th Anniversary Commemorative Book written for the anniversary celebration held in 1999. It was modified for purposes of being included in the MasterPlan as the History Chapter)

A Historical Survey

Geography

Plaistow is located in the southeastern part of Rockingham County in the state of New Hampshire. It is bordered on the north by Hampstead, northeast by Kingston, east by Newton, west by Atkinson, and south by Haverhill, Mass. Plaistow's area, which covers about nine square miles, lies at 42 degrees and 50 minutes north latitude and is nearly equidistant from Concord, N.H. to the north and Boston to the south. From the center of town, it is a 10-minute drive to I-495, 20 minutes to I-93, and 25 minutes to I-95. Route 125 passes through the western part of the town.

Plaistow is one of only two towns in the state that does not have a major pond or a lake within its boundaries. (The other town is Rollinsford). This is ironic since much of Plaistow was once submerged beneath an ancient lake, formed about 11,000 years ago by receding glaciers. Plaistow does however have an abundance of streams. They include Little River (Pollard Brook), Kelley Brook, Seaver Brook, Bryant Brook, Mankill Brook, Snow's Brook, as well as several streams that dry up during the summer.

Early History

Plaistow was originally part of Haverhill, its area having been part of the land purchased from the Pentucket Indians in 1642. This area, then known as "Haverhill District," was used as a pasture by residents of the town's North Parish during the first century of Haverhill's history. It remained largely unsettled until the threat of Indian attack abated in the 1720s and 1730s. Shortly thereafter, in 1741, King George II resolved a longstanding border dispute between the colony of Massachusetts and the heirs of New Hampshire's founder John Mason. Under this settlement, much of the disputed territory was given to New Hampshire. Thus, Haverhill's area was substantially reduced, as it lost what are now the towns of Plaistow, Atkinson, Hampstead, and part of Salem. Prior to this measure, residents in many border communities, including Plaistow, were taxed by both Massachusetts and New Hampshire.

Plaistow Becomes a Town

On February 28, 1749, during the administration of Royal Governor Benning Wentworth, "Haverhill District" was incorporated into two separate towns: Plaistow and Hampstead. Why the name Plaistow was chosen is not known. There is only one other town in the world that shares the name; it is located in Essex, England, on the outskirts of London. The word origin of the town's name is similarly murky. It may derive from the Middle English Pleystow or Plegstow, which meant "play place" and was where the maypole stood and holiday sports were played in medieval English villages. It is also possible that Hugh de Plaiz, who was a manorial lord in the Southeast of England, inspired the name.

Thirty days after the town's incorporation, Nicholas White, the town's first moderator, called Plaistow's first Town Meeting. The townsmen gathered inside the North Parish Meeting House, which is where Town Meetings were held until the first Town Hall was built in the 1831. In the 1700s, these meetings involved setting the minister's salary and electing annual officers, which included the moderator, three selectmen, a surveyor of highways, tithing men, and "hog reafs."

Roads and Taverns

Plaistow's roads linked the town to the wider world. The main road in town was the County Road, which ran from Newbury to Concord. Its route through Plaistow passed along what are now Newton Rd., Sweet Hill Rd., Hale Spring Rd., and Kingston Road. It then crossed an old section of Walton Rd. over Garwood Hill (along the present Old County Rd.) and continued into E. Hampstead.

An example of how these roads connected early residents to a greater network of interaction was their role in early postal service. Prior to 1830, men on horseback brought mail twice a week. Later, mail was delivered thrice weekly by stagecoach, which is why the County Road was also called Stage Road. Early post offices didn't have their own buildings but were often housed in stores. One example was the post office at White's store, which was located half way up Sweet Hill. Another store/post office stood at the intersection of Old County and Kelly Roads.

Roads were also integral to the region's economy, especially to the lumber industry. Many towns in the area have roads that were built so masts and lumber could be hauled overland to port. There were plans to have such a road that would have started in Concord and passed through Plaistow en route to the ocean. It was to have cut a swath 198 feet, or 12 rods wide as it passed through Chester and alongside Angle Pond as it made its way through E. Hampstead and Plaistow. Because of the relative scarcity of labor in the 1700s and the size of the undertaking, the plans were never realized.

Taverns were also important in the early history of the town. They were places where townsfolk could gather together outside of the meetinghouse and socialize. They were also places where travelers undertaking lengthy overland journeys could water their horses and obtain refreshments and lodgings. Two such establishments serviced folks traveling Stage Coach Road in Plaistow--the Peaslee Tavern on Sweet Hill Rd. and the Sawyer Tavern on Kingston Road. Several other taverns catered to travelers on Plaistow's other roads. Perhaps the best-known tavern in town was the Union House, located on Main Street opposite Westville Road. It had a dining room, space for lodgings, and stables. In 1796, George Washington took a meal and watered his horses here as he made his way from Exeter to Haverhill.

Order and Discipline

During the Colonial Period, the prevailing ideas of order were very different than those we know today. Crimes against order were punished severely and the discipline of offenders was often made into a public spectacle. Plaistow's whipping post was located across from the present site of the First Baptist Church. Infractions that called for public lashings in many New England towns included heresy, Sabbath violation, and a host of sexual transgressions. The last time that anyone was flogged in Plaistow was in 1770.

Despite this cult of order, towns had few enforcement officers. There was usually a constable who issued warrants and such, as well as a tithingman who enforced Sabbath requirements, i.e., attendance and wakefulness at religious meetings. The most effective weapon against disorder was the vigilant watchfulness that colonists exercised over their neighbors.

There were also other, less severe punishments for lesser infractions. Wayward livestock was a problem that was almost universal in the agricultural communities of Colonial and Early National New England's. In addition to being a general nuisance, horses, cows, bulls, oxen, and pigs were capable of causing significant property damage. In response to this problem, communities built town pounds in which animals were kept until their owners retrieved them for a fine. This fine paid the salary of the hog reeve, who was responsible for feeding and caring for straying livestock. Plaistow built its first pound in 1784 near the present site of the Town Hall and built another in 1855 on Kingston Road.

Plaistow in the Face of Change

When Plaistow was incorporated in 1749, it contained about 20 square miles and was home to about 60 to 70 families; by the 1760s, there were over 1,000 residents in Plaistow. In May 1766, a group of residents in the western part of town successfully petitioned the General Court to be incorporated as a separate town. This request was granted and in September 1767, the town of Atkinson was carved out of the original Plaistow grant. This turn of events left Plaistow with 576 people and 6,720 acres, while the 476 residents of the new town were granted 6,800 acres. Thus, by this one act of government, Plaistow lost over half of its land and nearly half of its population.

Natural increase was kept in check by the harsh realities of colonial life. As the region became more thickly settled, communicable diseases were more easily spread from family to family. In 1769, a plague of throat distemper wrought havoc among the town's children. Plaistow's population dropped below 500.

After the Revolution, Plaistow's population continued to decline. As land opened up to the north and west, many people from the state's southeastern corner established communities there. By 1810, Plaistow's population had fallen to 424.

Changes in Plaistow's Economy

Until the beginning of the twentieth century, farming sustained the town's economy. But the nineteenth century witnessed the beginning of a trend that would transform the way that residents went about providing for themselves.

During the eighteenth century and the first third of the nineteenth century, there were few alternatives to farming and animal husbandry. There was, however, a distinct need for "artizans" and "mechanicks" who ground corn, milled lumber, sewed together clothes, and forged iron implements. Also in the late eighteenth century, an emerging cottage industry began to develop whereby farmers could do piecework for a local merchant during their winter down time. This early industrial system was called "putting out." This source of supplementary income persisted through the Industrial Revolution and into the 1920s, though on a more limited basis.

Haverhill was emerging as an industrial center in the nineteenth century and its factories still provide employment for Plaistow folks, though no longer in shoemaking. Although Process Engineering and the former Keezer's Manufacturing Co. have provided some employment opportunities here in town, most people in Plaistow who work jobs to provide for their families work out of town, the culmination of a trend that began with the arrival of rail travel and progressed into the age of the automobile.

The things that people use and consume, as well as the ways that they go about getting them, have also changed substantially. During the first century after Plaistow was settled, the town's economy was primarily agricultural. The things people needed were often self-grown or self-made. But it was unlikely that anyone could produce everything that he needed. All the while, it was likely that he had a surplus of other goods. This surplus became the basis of the local barter economies that emerged throughout the colony. Transactions were made between neighbors in what was a face-to-face society. Given the kind of contact that trading partners had, debts were sometimes carried over for months or years at a time before a final reckoning was made. For goods that could not be produced in New England, colonists could go to stores whose proprietors were able to keep on hand stocks of coffee, sugar, manufactured goods, molasses, and rum.

During the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, store inventories became more substantial and varied. As fewer man-hours were dedicated to farming, there was a corresponding need for families to buy more and more of what they had previously produced at home. The grocery store emerged to meet this need. Still, a highly personal relationship existed between the proprietor and the customer. Thus, each store had its own dedicated clientele. Unlike today's self-service supermarkets, stores sent out clerks to customers' homes to take orders, which would be filled and delivered in the afternoon. Indeed, much more of a family's basic needs were met by home deliveries. Many products were sold by peddlers who went from house to house selling their wares, which included ice, coffee, and other sundries. There was an established etiquette that governed these transactions: if a housewife wanted to buy a specific item, she could place in a special window a card provided by the salesman. Also, deliveries of milk and ice further attest to a way of life that has passed.

But the transition from the way people shopped earlier this century to the highly impersonal relationships was not an abrupt one. Chain stores like the A&P and the First National were in Plaistow during the 1920s. Since these stores were owned by companies headquartered far from Plaistow, they were a departure from the prevailing model. But they were also very similar to independently owned stores in many ways. Most important were the equally personal relationships that store managers (who often stayed with the same franchise for decades) maintained with their clientele.

During the post World War II period, self-service supermarkets began to dominate the smaller grocers--both independent and chain-owned alike. Prior to the opening of Glen's (later Custeau's) at Hoyt City Plaza, Plaistow residents began shopping in Haverhill Supermarkets. Since the 1980s Plaistow has been the home of two Market Basket stores, a Purity Supreme, and a Shaw's, as well a variety of convenience stores.

A similar change has occurred in retail in general. Plaistow has changed profoundly as a result of the development of Route 125. Within the past quarter century, a solid strip of plazas and retail stores has popped up along the highway. Along with changing patterns of traffic, settlement, and increased demands for town services, the rise of Plaistow's retail economy continues to challenge the town's identity.

Plaistow and the Boston & Maine Railroad

One of the most important developments in Plaistow's economic history was the arrival of the railroad in the second quarter of the nineteenth century. Its impact was profound. Passing through the clay pits in what would eventually come to be called Westville, the Boston & Maine provided brick makers with a means of shipping their goods. In this way, the railroad served to nurture the growth of an industry that would come to define the town's industrial character. The combination of the railroad and the expansion of Plaistow brick making also had significant demographic consequences; the increase in employment opportunities was ample inducement to lure many French-Canadian immigrants to Plaistow, and the rail network that connected the town to Quebec provided them with a way to get here. The French-speaking Canadians who came to Plaistow in the decades following the Civil War represented the first substantial influx of people not of British stock to live here since the Indians. Though the descendants of these immigrants have become assimilated into the mainstream of the town's life, their ancestors were different in many important ways from the Anglo-Plaistowians they settled among; most notably was the linguistic difference, which made communications between the groups difficult. Religion was also a point of divergence, since French Canadian immigrants were Roman Catholics who found themselves in an almost universally Protestant community.

In 1836, the B & M railroad laid tracks from Haverhill to Plaistow, and in 1840, the line was extended to E. Kingston. In 1858, passenger service between Boston and Portland, Me. commenced. Around this time, the B&M built a depot in Plaistow; it was located on Main St., in the vicinity of where Process Engineering has its driveway. This building was later moved to the intersection of Maple Ave. and Main St., where it has since been a private residence. In 1869, a new depot appeared across the street from where the other had stood. The depot was where passengers waited for their trains, and where the station agent had his office. Plaistow's telegraph office was also in its depot.

Plaistow had three depots in the 1800s: one at Main St., one in Westville near the present Rte. 125 overpass, and one near the Atkinson border.

The railroad opened up many possibilities for a sedentary and isolated people. It made going from one place to another much easier. For the first time, it was feasible for someone to work several miles away from home. Thus it is to the mid-1800s that the modern commuter can trace his earliest ancestors. Passenger trains going between Boston and Portland used to stop in Plaistow four or five times daily. This service was used not only by workers; students going to Philips Academy, Sanborn Seminary, or UNH also took advantage of the stops the B&M made in Exeter, E. Kingston, and Durham.

It was also easier for people to relocate. This was done on a large scale by French Canadians who traveled south to find work in the textile mills of Manchester and Lowell, as well as factories in other communities including Lawrence, Exeter, and Haverhill. Plaistow's French Canadian immigrants flocked to Westville where the brick making industry flourished late in the nineteenth century.

Anglo-Americans also found it easier to move within the region. The Currier family provides one such example. Having rented a boxcar, the Curriers loaded their possessions and their livestock and made the move from Eaton to Plaistow.

While the railroad allowed some to come into Plaistow, it also permitted those already here to leave and return with greater flexibility. It therefore became possible for a greater number of Plaistow residents to work out of town.

Rail travel also helped facilitate shipping; each day, four or five freight trains stopped in Plaistow. Coal and grain dealers used to receive shipments of full boxcars several times a year. Plaistow's First National used to get boxes of bread that were shipped express. Moreover, all mail was sent by train until truck and air transport supplanted rail shipping.

As automobile traffic began to increase, it became necessary to address the issue of how to deal with rail intersections. Overhead bridges were built on Kingston, Atkinson Depot, and Westville Roads. Earlier the B&M had installed gates at the tracks' Main St. intersection. Though they are now automatic, these gates were originally operated manually. Train attendants used to wait for trains in small buildings; when a locomotive came into sight they lowered the gates. Soon after World War II, electric gates were installed at the Main St. crossing.

Still accidents happened. After two bad accidents, Westville Rd. was reconfigured so that it avoided the crossing. Also around this time, the crossing at Witch Lane was closed.

In 1968, passenger service from Plaistow was discontinued. At present, Plaistow residents wishing to take the train must go to Haverhill or Bradford. A Park and Ride facility has just been built on Westville Rd., not too far from where it intersects with Rte. 125. Recently, the idea of a high-speed commuter train running from Portland to Boston has been bandied about. Preliminary plans include stops in Durham, Exeter, and Haverhill, but not in Plaistow.

Military History

The American Revolution

Plaistow has always sent its share of people and more to support the nation's military efforts. Before the colonies achieved nationhood, four men from town fought at the Battle of Bunker Hill in 1775. Simeon Pike was killed and his brother James was wounded during this important early battle. Plaistow sent more than 55 men before the War for Independence ended in 1783.

A monument boulder was placed in Pollard Park during the nation's bicentennial to honor Plaistow's Revolutionary veterans.

Militia Activity

Post-Revolutionary records of the state militia are scarce, but we believe that most of the Revolutionary veterans who were able, made up the rolls early on. A muster was held in town each year, where peddlers hawked their wares and children played games. Generally, musters became an

event like a fair or town celebration. Apparently fun was had by all except the militia members who frequently failed to show up and therefore had to pay a fine.

Antebellum Conflicts

There is no record of Plaistow men fighting in the War of 1812 nor in the Mexican War of 1846-1848. Neither Mr. Madison's war nor Mr. Polk's war enjoyed popular support in New England, which may account for Plaistow's complete non-participation.

The Civil War

In the War Between the States (1861-1865), 100 Plaistow men left to fight. At least 11 gave their lives and scores more returned disabled from wounds or disease.

Capt. Richard Welch raised Company K of the 5th N.H. Regiment, and Capt. Jesse George raised Company C of the 7th New Hampshire. Some of the "boys" who marched off with these companies were "fresh out of school," one observer wrote.

Plaistow had a Congressional Medal of Honor winner in 24-year-old Daniel G. George who was a naval seaman serving under the name of William Smith; why Mr. George served under a pseudonym is not known. The launch he was serving on destroyed the ironclad rebel ram Albermarle in a daring attack on October 27, 1864, thus opening up the Roanoke River for the Union forces. George was born in Plaistow and later lived in Salem and Hampstead.

During the Civil War, a draftee could hire a substitute or buy his way out by paying the town \$300. This was not considered dishonorable, but hiring substitutes was often a divisive practice. We know of at least one affluent citizen in town who did this, but there may have been several more.

The town recognized the service of its citizen-soldiers and the hardships their families endured. In 1861 it voted to pay \$1 per week to a wife whose husband had left for war and \$1 per week for each child. The total not to exceed \$12 per month. In 1863 it voted to pay \$300 to all men drafted.

A memorial to veterans of the war was dedicated on September 12, 1908 in a large patriotic ceremony. The monument was a 14-foot high granite base with an eight-foot bronze figure on top depicting a Union soldier with his rifle at his sides. Typical of monuments found throughout New England, it was a gift of a local benefactor. Donated by Arthur G. Pollard, the base of the statue bears the names of all the Plaistow Civil war veterans on its side. It was placed on the eastern side of Pollard Park encircled by concrete sidewalks and grass and trees-- all a gift of Pollard.



A memorial to veterans of the civil war was dedicated on September 12, 1908 and was donated by Arthur Pollard

World War I

The U.S. entered “The War to End All Wars” in 1917 when the conflict was three years old. Plaistow’s contingent consisted of patriotic volunteers who were supplemented by some draftees. Plaistow sent 49 men, of whom two lost their lives -- Samuel H. Clifton and Carl G. Davis. The Plaistow American Legion Post is named in honor of the latter.

The town appropriated money for the purchase and installation of a 10-ton granite monument with a bronze plaque listing the names of the 49 veterans. A huge town celebration with a parade and speeches was held on Armistice Day in 1922. The monument was unveiled by family members of the fallen soldiers and dedicated by town and state officials on the northwest corner of Pollard Park.

World War II

One hundred and seventy-seven of Plaistow’s men and women served in this global war, which the U.S. entered in 1941. Many local men volunteered, and there was a large conscription of men, too. This war was the first time that women are recognized as veterans. There were three from town.

Veterans who lost their lives in the war included Stanley Chadwick, Christ Bouchikos, Raymond Brown and Edward Hudson. Hudson, who died while a prisoner of war, was a Plaistow native but lived in Haverhill when he joined the service.

Edward McKenzie, a P.O.W. who languished in German prison camps for several years, survived the ordeal and returned to live in town for many years where his avocation was writing historical anecdotes for local newspapers. He has also written books about Plaistow’s venerable citizens and his return to Europe where he has met and come to terms with his former enemies.

The town erected a flag less than a year after entering the war that contained 81 stars by that time. The flag was suspended over Main Street. One end of its supporting cable was attached to the “Old Elm Tree” at the intersection of Elm and Main Streets. This flag remained there throughout the war.

In 1944 an honor roll was installed in the lobby of the Town Hall which remains there today. It contains a name block for each of Plaistow's 177 veterans.

Plans for a suitable memorial were several years in the making. In 1962 a portion of the playground at the rear of Pollard School was dedicated as war veteran's memorial park "to those who have helped preserve our freedoms" and a granite stone was inscribed and set. When the school system had to expand and use the land dedicated as the veterans' memorial park in 1988, the stone was reset in Pollard Park near the Civil War and the Revolutionary War monuments. In 1997 an appropriation by the town provided for the erection of a granite monument in the north corner of the park dedicated to those who served in World War II.



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The Korean War

The years 1950-1953 were the years the U.S. fought in South Korea to repel Communist forces from North Korea. Again men were conscripted for service to augment volunteers. Unfortunately no record is found of those who left from Plaistow.

The Vietnam War

From 1961 to 1973, the U.S. was supported South Vietnam's government in fighting Communist invaders from the north. Active ground combat started in March 1965. This was the longest period of conflict that the nation has known and was the last time a draft was necessary. We do not, however, have a complete list of Plaistow men and women who served in Vietnam.

The Persian Gulf War

Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm took place in 1990-1991 in the Persian Gulf when this nation drove the invading Iraqis from Kuwait. This was the first engagement of American forces in which women were used in combat. There is no record of servicemen or women from Plaistow, though we know that the town did send a few of its soldiers.

A local citizens' group, Operation Caring and Sharing, in a project spearheaded by Shelia Dorman and Mary Stauffer, has recently raised funds and erected three monuments commemorating the veterans of the Korean War, the Vietnam Conflict, and the Gulf War. It is located on Pollard Park's

western lawn. Nearby is a recently planted tree donated by Rick Paul that is dedicated to the memory of all the men and women from Timberlane who served in the Persian Gulf. There is also a monument placed in front of this tree that was sponsored by the Kidder family dedicated to all the men and women.

The town has records of Plaistow veterans until the Korean War. The Plaistow Historical Society is still interested in compiling a complete list for that war and all actions thereafter.



These three monuments were sponsored by Operation Caring and Sharing, a group of civic-minded residents.

Industrial Plaistow

While Plaistow and industry are hardly synonymous, the town has been the home of a variety of manufacturers who have produced goods ranging from grape tonic to cryogenic tanks.

Early Industry

Plaistow's early industry consisted of water-powered saw- and gristmills built along the principal streams in town, as well as a small class of artisans, called "mechanicks." Farming, mostly subsistence farming, was the principal means of obtaining a living in early days.

Lumber milling was probably the earliest industrial activity in town because clearing land required much logging. These fallen trees were used by carpenters and also provided firewood for homes and later industries like brick making. Sawmills were built in order to mill lumber for building.

The eighteenth-century Peaslee mill at East Meadow Brook, near Brandy Brow Hill, is the earliest mill that we know anything about. Settlers in the southeastern part of Plaistow (then still part of Haverhill) would have brought their logs to this Haverhill mill to be sawn. Over a century later, Plaistow lumber mills included the Peaslee Brothers mill and the Noyes (later Pollard) Mill, which were both on Pollard Brook. At the latter mill, there was also gristmill on the opposite end of the dam.

Grain was also milled at the Clark gristmill, which was located where Little River where it crosses into Haverhill. This mill is said to have been built in 1798; because of its historical significance, its machinery was given to the Ford Museum in the 1920s.

Brick and Shoe Making in the Nineteenth Century

The brick making industry, which started on a small scale around 1800, flourished in the decades following the Civil War. This industry emerged following the discovery of large clay deposits in what is now called Westville. At one time, 19 or 20 brick producers were located in Plaistow's western section. The largest manufacturer, the Carey brickyard, employed as many as 200 people. But this industry provided few employment opportunities for local laborers because of the availability of Canadian laborers, who came to New England in large numbers during the late nineteenth century. A few of Plaistow's French Canadian immigrants, folks with names like Fecteau and Gosselin eventually opened brickyards of their own.

By the turn of the century, Plaistow's supply of clay was virtually depleted, and no brickyard was still in operation in 1910. Few traces remain to remind us of this once vibrant industry. The machinery was sold for scrap during World War I, and many clay pits have filled in with water. Brick fragments and cast-asides still litter the ground, though kiln locations are betrayed by little more than an aberration in the contour of the landscape.

During the late 1800s and early 1900s, the shoe making industry also employed local labor, especially during the idle months of winter. It emerged as a cottage industry where a farmer could spend a few hours a day in his 10'x10' workshop making shoes. Often a farmer did piecework for a Haverhill merchant who provided him with unfinished "shoestock." Shoemaking was done on a larger scale in the factories of Haverhill and in the wood heel turning shops on E. Pine St., Main St., and Lasknit Avenue.

The railroad, which was extended from Boston to Dover in 1841, furnished employment for some, but its greater benefit was the sudden ease of transporting bricks, shoes, and eventually agricultural products. Prior to the arrival of the railroad, early brick makers transported their bricks by using teams of oxen or horses that hauled their cargo to Newburyport and surrounding towns. Thus, the railroad made a profound contribution to the development of Plaistow's brick making industry. It also made commuting to Haverhill's factories easier and faster. By the turn of the century, electric trolleys made the commute even more convenient.



*This House and Garage Were Built of Brick from Plaistow Brickyard
(27 Westville Road)*

Prehistoric Archaeology in Plaistow

Before Englishmen came to settle in modern day Plaistow, semi-nomadic Indians used the land for almost 8,000 years. Since the founding of the Plaistow Historical Society (PHS) in 1974, the discovery of these sites and the recovery and preservation of prehistoric artifacts has been one of its major objectives.

In 1989, local members of the New Hampshire Archaeological Society (NHAS) worked with the PHS to develop and implement an archaeological salvage project. The result of this collaboration was the documentation of two prehistoric Native American sites along the upper reaches of the Little River (Pollard Brook) watershed in Plaistow and Kingston, near the old town dump.

The project was directed by Patricia Hume, a state certified archaeologist, and Wesley Stinson, an archaeologist on the staff of the state's Department of Historic Resources. Paul Holmes, a member of PHS, assisted in mapping and supervising the sites, while many residents from Plaistow and surrounding communities helped with excavations. The dig also gave local schoolchildren an opportunity to visit a live site during guided tours.

The two sites were tested extensively. Several one-meter squares were excavated during a three-week period. Archaeologists recovered cultural material at levels as deep as two feet into the ground. Recovered artifacts numbered in the hundreds, in spite of trauma caused to the sites by landfill operations and a nearby gravel works. Lithic artifacts, i.e., stone implements, were found along both sides of the stream, suggesting an extended settlement pattern that stretched a good distance along the north bank. Many hearths were found here, too, and their number and size suggest that small groups stayed for short periods before moving on. The objects were dated by type and ranged from 1400 AD to 6000 BC. Thus, we know that it was a site that was used for many millennia. Also, since the most recent artifacts antedate European contact by nearly a century, it would seem that the site had long been abandoned by the time English settlers first arrived in Haverhill.

The Indians who used these sites lived in nomadic hunter-gatherer societies and subsisted on fish from Little River and game that wandered the region's vast wilderness. They camped at certain locations for short periods to repair stone tools and to prepare the meat and skins from hunted animals. They brought with them certain kinds of preferred stones for tools from coastal and western Massachusetts. The objects from this excavation are on display at the historical society, which is open Tuesday afternoons. In 1999, the NHAS is scheduled to publish a full site report prepared by Patricia Hume and Paul Holmes.

About 30 years ago, another campsite was excavated further down stream. It was discovered by Paul H. Holmes, who was 12 years old at the time. In recognition of his discovery, Mr. Holmes was made a junior member of the NHAS. This site was excavated in 1970 by NHAS members under the direction of Paul E. Holmes and Edward McKenzie. Local Explorer scouts made the initial excavations, while later work was performed by anthropology students from Northern Essex Community College.

This site was quite small. It's likely that two or three family groups used it while on hunting and gathering forays from their base camp, which was probably at Pentucket (the location of present-day Haverhill). This site was visited for thousands of years. Its most outstanding feature was a large stoned-up hearth area that was continuously expanded upon by hunting groups through the millennia. Numerous charcoal samples found at varying depths were recently dated. Recovered from a depth of 90cm, the earliest sample dates back over 4,500 years. This artifact was a small, completely carbonized log that was found atop an oval-shaped roasting pit filled with black dirt and charcoal flakes. Further excavation showed that the pit extended to a depth of 110cm. A second sample was taken from 42cm and is between 3,800 and 3,900 years old. The analyses of these samples represent the first scientific datings made of objects excavated from prehistoric sites in Plaistow.

The Evolution of Domestic Architecture

History is concerned with change over time. The following article seeks to demonstrate how and why Plaistow's houses have changed since settlers first arrived here in the early 1700's.

Colonial Styles

Even though Plaistow was not incorporated until 1749, homesteaders were living here for perhaps a half-century before that. The ca. 1704 Hurd House was built during this period. With its hipped roof and exposed interior timber framing, this distinctive structure has marked the intersection of Sweet Hill and Pollard Roads for nearly three centuries. In addition to its significance as the oldest surviving building in Plaistow, the Hurd House is also significant because it was the home of the poet Harry Hurd, who is best known for his 1946 opus, *Yankee Boundaries*.

The Hurd House is one of Plaistow's few examples of First Period architecture. Homes in this style were built between 1620 and 1725 and were structurally and stylistically adapted from English medieval antecedents.

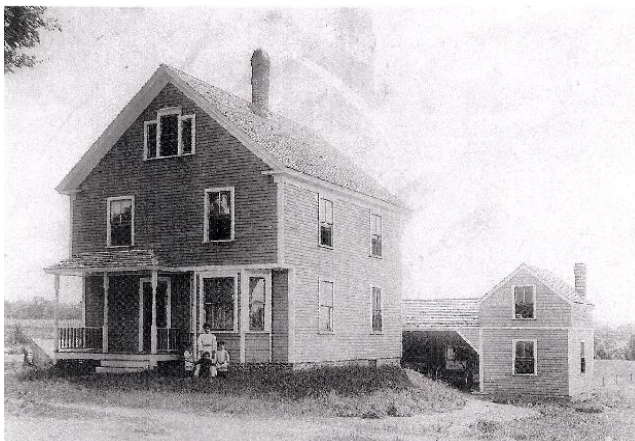
As New Hampshire grew during the eighteenth century, the colony became more prosperous and its tastes more refined. This development found its architectural expression in the Georgian style (ca. 1725-1780). Marked by its rigid symmetry and opulent decorative features, Georgian architecture was inspired by the Classical design principles of ancient Rome; it therefore marked a significant departure from colonial architecture's Gothic roots. Because of the wealth and prominence that these houses were intended to convey, most of the best examples of the Georgian style were found in New England's port towns. Plaistow, being an agricultural community, had few, if any, inhabitants who could afford the grand mansions that appeared in Boston, Salem, and Portsmouth. Georgian decorative elements, proliferated by pattern books available to country builders, nonetheless began to influence colonial architecture. One such example of this influence is the Union House, a former tavern where George Washington is believed to have taken a meal in 1796. The Union House retains its exquisite Georgian-era door trim, whose modallioned pediment and fluted pilasters wonderfully ornament the house's front entry.

Early National and Antebellum Styles

Following the Revolution, Americans eschewed the “corrupt ostentation” of the Old World in favor of a “virtuous republican simplicity.” This sentiment found expression in the more delicate Federal style, which was current in New England from around 1780 to 1820. Though still emphasizing symmetry, these buildings were more restrained in their trim. Like Georgian-style houses, this style achieved its most eloquent expression in seaport mansions. Nonetheless, some features came to influence farmhouses in communities like Plaistow. Candlelight Farm, on Forest St., built in the mid-1790s, is a fine example of this influence, with its unbroken external planes, shallow fireboxes, and spare moldings.

Where the Georgian and Federal styles followed Roman models, the Greek Revival style (ca. 1820-1850) period adhered to the orders and proportions developed in ancient Arcadia. Grand houses were built to resemble Greek temples. Country builders could create the same effect by turning a house’s gable end to face the street, adding corner pilasters, and boxing in the gable with a triangular raking cornice. There are several Greek Revivals in Plaistow; perhaps the finest example in town is the Gates on Elm St., across from the Town Hall’s southern elevation.

Around mid-century, when locally manufactured brick became available, timber-framed brick houses began to appear in Plaistow. Today there are seven pre-Depression brick houses in town, and five of them were built during the mid-nineteenth century. Stylistically these houses were very similar to the Federal-period mansions built in commercial communities a half-century earlier. One example is the ca. 1855 Peaslee House, which is also known as the Solomon Osgood House. Now owned by the Community Bank & Trust Co., it was known as the Homestead Inn in the late 1800s and Maple Leaf Farm in the early 1900s. With its hipped roof, central front door, and unbroken exterior planes, this property recalls the style of the Federal Period. (Although there is no surviving documentation to support this claim, a source familiar with the property believes that Plaistow-made brick was used in its construction. If this is so, then this farmhouse represents a fusion of Plaistow’s agricultural and industrial traditions.)



The Tavitian Homestead – 86 Main Street (1906)



The Tavitian Homestead – 86 Main Street (Today)

The Late Nineteenth Century

Common to the Georgian, Federal, Greek Revival, and “neo-Federal” brick styles was their appeal to the intellect and reason. During the Victorian Age (ca. 1837-1901), architectural styles appealed more to the imagination and the passions, thereby shunning the ordered regularity of the preceding

century. This was especially true of the eclectic Queen Anne style, which was popular during the final quarter of the nineteenth century. Homes built in this style blended Classical, Renaissance, and medieval forms into a style all its own. Where Greek Revival houses were rationally proportioned, Queen Anne houses were organic and emphasized domestic comfort. The facades of these houses used elements culled from a variety of traditions and featured bay windows, odd rooflines, turrets and other features. Many Queen Anne's survive in Plaistow; one of the best examples can be seen on Palmer Ave., across from the Sweet Hill Kindergarten.

By this point, the way that houses were built had changed a great deal. Structures like the ca. 1704 Hurd House and the ca. 1855 Osgood-Peaslee House both have frames of hewn posts and beams pinned together at mortise-and-tenon joints. But in the mid-1800s, the balloon frame had made its appearance. Much simpler and less expensive, balloon frames substituted closely spaced studs and nailed joints for the massive pegged members used in earlier homes. Thus, architecture in the mid-nineteenth century was affected by a combination of stylistic and technological changes.

Pre-Depression Styles

During the first three decades of this century, the increased mobility of the American public allowed people to live further away from where they worked. One result of this development was an upsurge in demand for affordable family housing within a convenient traveling distance from a city.

One style that was popular in the early 1900s was the bungalow, which took its name from a Hindustani word meaning "belonging to Bengal." Inspired by the structures that the Indian government provided for weary travelers using major roads, the bungalow appeared in America in the 1880s. By 1900, magazines had popularized the style. Because of the simplicity of its design, a bungalow could be built around 1900 for as little as \$1,000. Given their relative newness and their rustic charm, many bungalows survive in Plaistow.

Another popular and inexpensive style of house was the "farm" house. These houses were remarkably standardized. A "farm" house's most basic features included its boxy form, a porch, one-over-one double-hung sash windows, a hipped roof, and a projecting hipped dormer. Structurally, they consisted of four rooms on the first and second floors: hence the nickname "four squared" for what was one of the most frequently employed pre-War styles, of which dozens survive in Plaistow.



Plaistow Master Plan



History

A Farm House on Main Street “Then and Now”

Post-War Styles

By the 1930s, economic pressures meant that few new houses were built. But after World War II, America embarked upon an era of unprecedented prosperity. This affluence was accompanied by a severe housing shortage. Thus the 1950s and 1960s witnessed another building boom. Since labor, land, and materials had become increasingly expensive, house designs changed to meet these restrictions, as well as the changing demands and realities of American families. There emerged a new emphasis on efficient, functional, and informal “one-story living.” In interior design, there was a move toward the multifunctional living/dining room. Fitting this description was a style of house that came to embody the American Dream for thousands: the ranch house. Inspired by the Spanish rancho of the Southwest, this design was introduced by California architects in the 1930s and soon became a mainstay of suburbs across America. (A variation on this style is the “hi-ranch,” or split-level house. Also very popular, it’s basically a ranch house with a lower level that can be improved as additional space is needed.)

Even with all of these stylistic transformations, traditional forms have proven very persistent. Still widely employed are the Colonial-style house, the Williamsburg house, and the Cape. Actually, a kind of hybrid has emerged, where traditional forms are reconciled with twentieth-century ideas about interior design. Today’s cushier developments, which draw people attracted to cul-de-sac living, are filled with houses bearing traditional-looking exteriors, but whose interiors are more akin to the ranch than to colonial models.

Harry Elmore Hurd and Plaistow’s Oldest House

“It is probably a good thing that some persons in this progressive world retain a nostalgic feeling for country ways and bygone days,” reckoned Plaistow poet Harry Elmore Hurd in an article that appeared in a 1942 *New England Homestead* article. Hurd was a Haverhill businessman and man of letters who had an especial fondness for country living and New England history.

Though his name is rarely muttered in the same breath as Robert Frost and John Greenleaf Whittier, Hurd was a literary figure of note in the 1940s. As of 1941, he had contributed to more than 200 publications, which included *The New York Times*, *The New York Sun*, *Yankee*, *Scribners*, and *The Saturday Evening Post*. His poetry, by that year, had been included in 51 anthologies and his name was listed in *Who’s Who* among North American Authors, *Who’s Who* in American Poetry, and *Principal Poets of the World*. Volumes of his poetry have been published by Notre Dame University Press, the John Day Company, and other publishing houses. In February 1941, his poem “Signs at the Crossroads” was awarded the gold medal during the National Poetry Day competition at the New York World’s Fair. Some of this town’s older residents may well remember some of the ways that he shared his talents with his neighbors -- notably his Memorial Day orations.

Hurd was a renaissance man whose dual nature allowed him to succeed in business and hobnob among the literati. He was relatively affluent and could have afforded to live pretty much anywhere. But Hurd was drawn to Plaistow’s idyllic countryside, although he admitted that he

“would be the first to concede the livableness of modern architecture and the comfort of chromium pipe and leather furniture.” Nonetheless he wanted for him and his wife a home “hallowed by long generations of humble life.”

To be sure, Plaistow’s oldest house possesses an abundance of folklore. Built around 1704 as a farmhouse, it has been the home of Mike and Jeanne Lampros since 1969. Local tradition also holds that the house was a wayside tavern where thirsty teamsters could stop for a spot of rum in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

In the late 1800s, the house fell into disrepair as a series of tenants allowed the structure to fall prey to the ravages of time. In 1910, according to a former Haverhill minister, the property almost became a “national shrine for gypsies.” According to legend, a daughter of the Downer family had married into the Stanley “tribe” of gypsies living in nearby Brandy Brow. The former Miss Downer later became “queen of the tribe” at a Chicago meeting of gypsies. Energized by her new status, she attempted to headquarter a national gypsy organization at the homestead. Her ambition was thwarted, however, by the opposition of her fellow townspeople. According to another legend, the Stanley tribe took in people with contagious diseases. Having been turned away by the hospital, it is possible that these consumptive and dyspeptic folks went to the house so the gypsies could minister to their illnesses. Because of insufficient research, it is difficult to separate fact from fancy although it is likely that these stories have some basis in fact.

By the early 1900s, the house’s sturdy timber framing groaned beneath the weight of two centuries of neglect. Around 1912, a certain Dr. Bailey sold the property to a man named Davis who began shoring up the building’s fragile structural elements. In the 1940s, Hurd attempted to restore the house by removing more recent architectural features; he scraped paint from massive hand-hewn beams, installed old-fashioned paneling, and decorated his interiors with antiques.

Many of Hurd’s acquaintances looked askance at his move to this antediluvian dwelling. As the poet noted, they began to “look upon [my wife and I] as pleasantly demented.” Hurd recalled how one friend asked, “Aren’t you afraid to live so far from town -- as though the RFD box by the side of the road were the outpost of civilization.”

Though removed from the mainstream of modern life, Hurd felt a part of a different kind of community. “We are near enough to the farm below us to make us conscious of our membership in the fellowship of life,” he observed.

Hurd compared his situation to Thoreau’s at Walden Pond where the Concord hermit could trudge to the post office and catch up on local gossip and national events.

Like Thoreau a century before him, Hurd reckoned that “the world is at our elbow.”

Born in rural Goshen, N.H., Hurd was a country boy who felt out of his element in New York, Boston, and even Haverhill. Away from the city lights that concealed as much as they illuminated, Hurd’s imagination was free to play among the constellations that gathered nightly in Plaistow’s skies. “Last night,” he recounted, “the planets swung along the Zodiac like airplane beacons.” On another occasion, Hurd was spellbound by what he saw in the sky: “There was a star-bright night... when ribboned splendor unrolled zenithward, upshooting from a broader band of horizon light,

more beautifully simple than those more spectacular curtained rainbows characteristic of clear cold winter evenings.”

It seemed that every aspect of rural life excited his poetic sensibility. Hurd loved his flowerbeds where he doted for hours over his cherished bulbs and where he was often visited by muses assuming the most unlikely forms. “One day, while puttering in our garden, “ Hurd wrote in 1942, “I heard the unmistakable dot-dash of the Morse code. Dropping my spade, I attempted to decipher the message before I discovered that the telegrapher was a huge gold and black wasp who was excavating a hole near the entrance of my toolhouse.” Hurd also found inspiration in the abundance of birds, butterflies, and other critters that kept him company. “How can a man be lonely so long as he rubs elbows with wonder?” Hurd asked.

During his years in Plaistow, Hurd would frequently recall an encounter he’d had with a friend from New York. Worn down by the pace of urban life, this friend was contemplating a similar move to the country. He was taken with Plaistow’s charming rural vistas and told Hurd, “It’s everything to be able to look out and not just up between the walls of skyscrapers.” Hurd concurred, for with “the world at his elbow,” he was able to “hear the harmony of the stars.”

Farming and Plaistow’s Agricultural Heritage

Plaistow was originally an agricultural community settled by Haverhill yeomen in the early 1700s. At the time of the Civil War, many descendants of these first settlers were still farming the same land that their ancestors had tilled a century and a half earlier. But by this time, in the 1860s, the expansion of rail shipping enabled farmers working the more fertile lands to the west to compete with local growers. New England’s thin, rocky soil meant hard work and low yields. The rise of industry, the professions, and educational opportunities increasingly lured the sons of Plaistow’s sturdy yeomen away from their ancestral fields. Furthermore, better transportation was making it easier for New Englanders to move to larger and more productive lands in America’s newly opened regions.

All the while, boxcar produce and the stores whose shelves were stocked with western grain meant that more and more of Plaistow’s basic needs could be fulfilled by a trip to the local grocer. Improvements in refrigeration and the rise of the Midwestern meat packing industry combined to make raising livestock less profitable.

Nevertheless, into the 1930s and forties, a significant number of people here still kept a few chickens and pigs penned up in their backyards. Some of Plaistow’s older residents still recall having raised livestock and gardens to supplement their families’ diets. The shortages resulting from rationing during World War II made this practice more widespread and nearly every family planted a victory garden. After the war, fewer people needed to raise any of their food. Still, many youths at mid-century could still make money by assisting local truck gardeners who needed help with tilling and harvesting. In short, farming in Plaistow didn’t end all at once; rather, it gradually took a backseat to other ways of making a living.

Today, farming is one of the smallest facets of Plaistow’s economy. This notwithstanding, the town’s agricultural heritage is still alive at two farms located in outlying areas of Plaistow.

The Cox Farm, located a short distance from Newton on Crane Crossing Rd., consists of 54 acres and has been in the Cox family since mid-century. Claude Cox, an airplane pilot, purchased the farm in 1954 from Adam Maslowski in the 1950s and farmed during his free time. Now retired, Mr. Cox has been phasing out farming and has not worked his land for 20 years. Mr. Cox's son Charles, who owns a farm in Lee, still harvests hay from the farm's abundant meadows. In 2004, the Town of Plaistow obtained an easement for the land with the exception of the house and 5 acres.

The property boasts many interesting buildings and features. The distinctive farmstead was built around 1770 as a saltbox-style house whose lean-to was cut off around the time of World War I. Much of the house's exterior trim appears to have been installed during the second quarter of the nineteenth century when the Greek Revival style was in vogue.

Across the street from the farmstead is a root cellar that is visible from the road. When, how, and by whom it was built remain a mystery. Nearby is a site whence the stones were probably quarried. But legend has it that the stone and earth structure was built a millennium ago by Viking colonists around 1,000 A.D. Recently, officials from America's Stonehenge examined the root cellar; they took a sample from the site and carbon dated it. The results of the dating gave credence to the opinion that the structure antedates the arrival of English settlers in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. But there is still considerable doubt as to whether this is a Viking relic. For all we know, the root cellar may have been built by a local farmer for cold storage. Indeed, it's possible that some long-dead Plaistow resident is looking down from heaven and having a good chuckle about all this.

Over in the eastern part of Plaistow on Newton Rd. is Goudreault's Farm, which is run by Richard and Lucine Goudreault. The farm consists of 36 acres that have been farmed continuously since the 1760s. Through much of the 1800s, this farm was tilled by the ancestors of Gage Day, and in the 1940s-when it was owned by the Daniels family-it was known as Holiday Farm. The Goudreault family has owned the farm since 1962.

Since they came to the property 37 years ago, Richard and Lucine Goudreault have used the land in a variety of ways. When the Goudreaults began farming they maintained a dairy herd of 80 Holsteins; since 1982 the Goudreaults have been out of the dairy business.

In the early eighties the family made the transition from dairy farming to greenhousing. Recently, a twelfth greenhouse was built to accommodate this increasingly important part of the farm's income. The Goudreaults sell a wide variety of potted plants and flowers that range from marigolds and geraniums in the summer to poinsettias at Christmas time. Available year round are many kinds of lilies and snapdragons.

Electricity Comes to Plaistow

With instant illumination now being a simple matter of a flick of a switch, it's difficult to imagine a time when Plaistow wasn't on the grid. The fact is that the empowerment of Plaistow was the result of the effort of several dedicated local men.

A group of Plaistow citizens, including J. William Peaslee, Joseph S. Hills, and Dr. E.A. Landman, founded the Plaistow Electric Company in 1911 and operated it for the next 14 years. The new

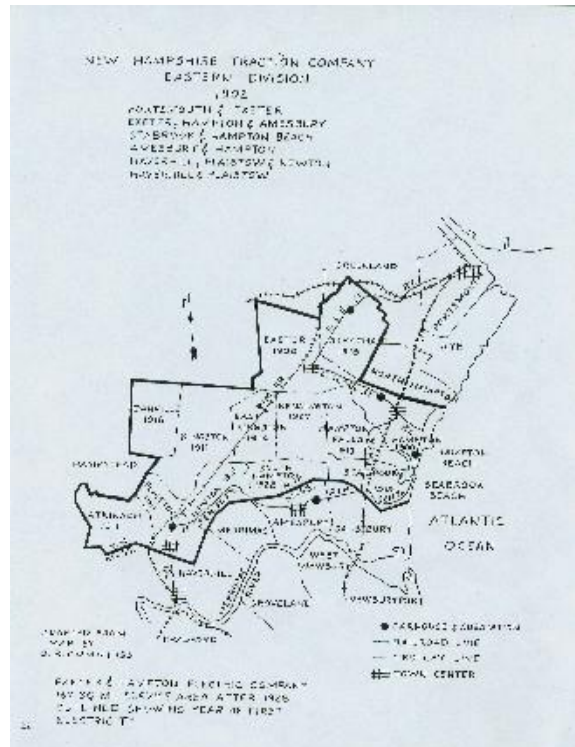
company was able to offer residential service and street lighting by stringing wires on poles set along the main streets of Plaistow and Atkinson, allowing AC power to flow from the electric system in Haverhill. Although there was some use of the street railway system's poles--set in 1903--the trolleys used direct current and not AC, which was required for domestic use.

During this early period, the company owners themselves handled maintenance, billing, and collecting. One of them, Dr. Landman, had experimented with an electric generator driven by the flow of water in Pollard Brook, near his home on Main Street. Around 1922 he acquired a "Snow Cat"--a converted Ford with caterpillar treads on back and skis up front. He used this for making emergency house calls, both electrical and medical.

In 1925, the company sold its capital stock to the Exeter and Hampton Electric Company, and the two companies merged. Since the distance from Exeter--15 to 20 miles--was too far for the company to provide adequate service, the company transferred line foreman Clarence "Ammy" Amazeen to be its representative in Plaistow. Ammy became Plaistow's lineman, streetlight patroller, troubleshooter, meter reader, and bill collector. One who remembers that era may recall one's mother waiting for Ammy to emerge from the cellar with his meter reading. Early rates were based on the number of rooms lighted by a customer. A month's bill usually didn't exceed two dollars back then. Ammy, who began working with Exeter & Hampton in 1916, retired in 1958.

In the 1930s, the town's demand for electricity increased. Businesses like the Old Hampshire Bottling Works (1931) and the Plaistow Bowling Alleys (1936) were wired up, although pin boys continued to set up pins until much later.

The Great Flood of '36 resulted in a three-day loss of electric service from Haverhill. The following year, a separate line was built from Hampton to Kingston to reduce to voltage necessary to light greater Plaistow. Fifteen years later, Plaistow required its own cross-country high voltage feeder line to a substation on Witch Lane.



Electric Streetcars

Although little evidence remains of Plaistow's electric street car system, "Take the trolley" was the catch phrase in the spring of 1902 whenever travel was necessary or pleasure was desired. Plaistow residents could now more conveniently go shopping in Haverhill, spend a day at the beach, or picnic at Canobie Lake on Sunday afternoons.

A committee met on November 16, 1893 to discuss the matter, but it wasn't until February 1, 1895 that the "Friends of the Electric Road" met again at the Town Hall to begin planning in earnest.

Plans were agreed upon in the spring of 1901. That same year, the Haverhill, Plaistow, and Newton Street Railway Company bought a two-acre lot facing Elm St., at the present site of the John FitzGerald Safety Complex. In July, the first load of bricks arrived and construction of the "car barns" commenced. Soon thereafter, over eight miles of track were lain at the pavement level of the roadbed.

On North Ave. in Haverhill, opposite the huge Gas Co. storage tank, one can see the gas line easement, which was the old trolley line; from there, it headed west to Main St., Haverhill near the I-495 bridge. The approach to North Ave. was known as Frye's Corner. The route continued along the east side of North Ave. and on to Main St., Plaistow. At Elm St., it turned inside the Big Elm, continuing past the bandstand and a wait station, where patrons could await the trolley during bad weather.

The line continued along the east side of Elm St. to the car barns, which was where the trolleys were stored in high bays for cleaning and maintenance. Kids in the neighborhood were not allowed

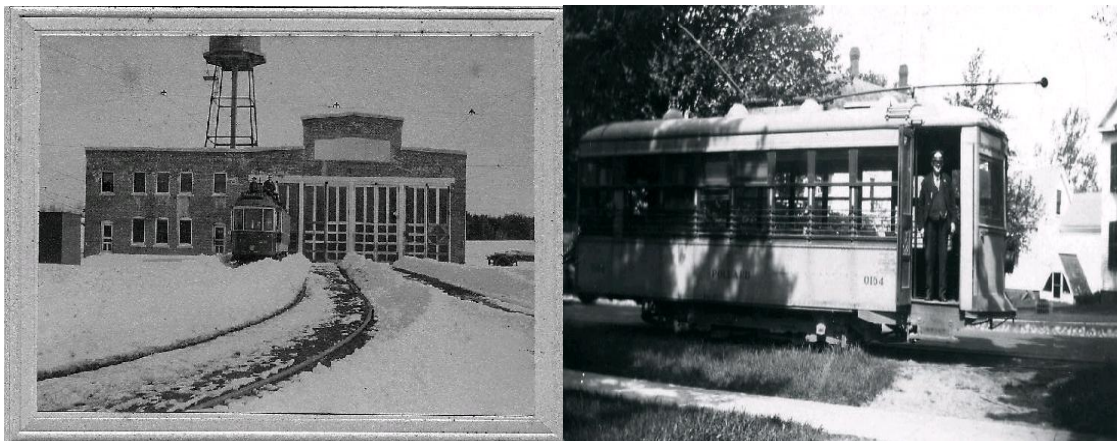
inside the barns; they were, however, appeased by workers who sometimes gave them out-dated advertisement posters, which were used to decorate their clubhouse walls.

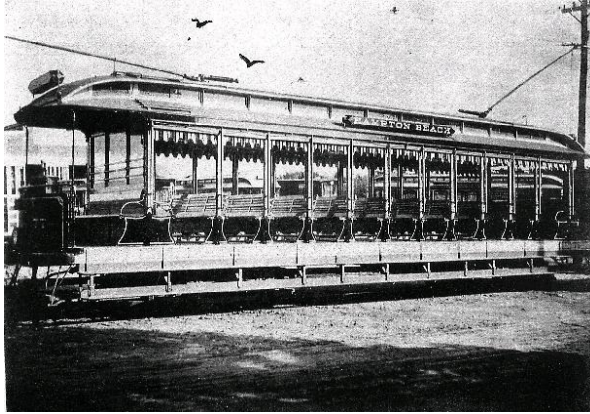
Past the car barns, the trolley line rounded the corner on the west side of Palmer Ave. and continued toward Highland Sq.--the intersection of Palmer Ave., Sweet Hill Rd., Smith Corner Rd., and Hale Spring Rd., now known as Dow's Corner. (There was another wait station in the center of this intersection).

From Highland Square the tracks continued on the right side of Smith Corner Rd., veering slightly to the right at Farrington Ave. From this point, the tracks paralleled Smith Corner Rd. and passed through woodlands and meadows. House construction in 1997 has obliterated any trace of the trolley line that passed through the neighborhood. (Today, a passing trolley would sheer off the front landing of 15 Smith Corner Road). Trolleys emerged from the woods in Newton Center, where they crossed present-day Rte. 108 and continued toward Merrimac en route to Salisbury and Hampton.

Trolleys ran hourly between Haverhill and Plaistow, except during peak hours when they ran on the half hour to accommodate Haverhill workers, Saturday shoppers, and holiday revelers. Trolley fare was 20 cents from Highland Sq. to downtown Haverhill.

The last day that trolleys ran in Plaistow was Sept. 2, 1930. This did not, however, mark the end of public transportation in Plaistow. Bus service supplanted street cars as a result of its lower price. It cost half as much to take the bus from Highland Sq. to downtown Haverhill. Economic hardship caused by the Great Depression was a further inducement to abandon the costlier trolley, which is now relegated to the reminiscences of local old timers and the pages of commemorative books.





Public Buildings & Spaces

The Town Hall & Pollard Park

The first Town Hall was built in 1831 on the Common (later Pollard Park) where the present building stands. Local tradition tells us that it was built with bricks produced in Plaistow by Jacob Davis, a local manufacturer. For 64 years it was the site of the annual Town Meeting, dances, social gatherings, and was used as a temporary place of worship. This was truly the town's most public space.

A larger Town Hall was erected in 1895 on the same site. In 1904, Arthur G. Pollard had the landscape around the Town Hall graded and he paid for the planting of trees and shrubs. In his honor, the village green was named Pollard Park, and its vicinity was dubbed Pollard Square.

In addition to the town offices, this building housed at different times the police station and the library, and the Plaistow Cooperative Bank. There also was a kitchen and a dining room on the ground floor's north side and an auditorium with a stage and balcony upstairs, which was the site of many theatrical performances. In the 1930s young people used to play basketball here as well. The Town Hall basement contained a jail where "tramps" were held overnight.

After the library moved into a building of its own in 1977, room was made for the selectmen, the assessor, the tax collector, building inspectors, and the town clerk. Prior to this, the town clerk worked out of her or his house. Though the police, too, have moved out of the Town Hall (1986), it is where Judge Peter Hurd still presides over the Plaistow District Court, and where the clerk of the court has her office.

Being the most public space in town, the Town Hall and surrounding Pollard Park are where many monuments to Plaistow's fighting men have been erected. Statues and markers commemorate the town's veterans of the Revolution, Civil War, the two World Wars, the Korean War, the Vietnam War, and the Gulf War. Following VJ Day, a roster listing the names of Plaistow's World War II veterans was posted in the lobby.

To commemorate the Town Hall's 100th birthday, Plaistow joined together in celebration in 1995. The highlight of the day's festivities was the removal of a cornerstone containing a time capsule

filled with coins, documents, and ephemera. The cornerstone now houses another time capsule, which will be opened in 2095.



June 14, 1929 Inside the Town Hall in Preparation for Pollard School Graduation

The Post Office

Prior to 1826, when the U.S. Post Office Dept. established the first post office in Plaistow, men on horseback delivered mail twice weekly to local stores. Even after 1826, Plaistow's post office had no building of its own and continued to be run out of a store for over a century.

Prior to 1932, the appointees affiliated with the dominant political party filled the office of town postmaster. If that party was turned out at election time, a postmaster was apt to lose his office to a political ally of the winning candidate. As a result of this situation, the location of the post office tended to change, too. That as it was, the post office was usually located on Main St. by the railroad tracks; this was necessary because mail was delivered by trains that had mail cars in which mail was sorted by town. Trains also dropped off mail at the Westville Depot. After trains stopped running mail, deliveries were made by trucks.

In 1935, the U.S. Post Office elevated Plaistow's office to second class status, requiring that the town maintain a larger building. This became easier since postmasters became permanent employees and not subject to changing political fortunes. Continued growth resulted in the promotion of Plaistow's post office to first class in 1961, partly the result of the lobbying of C. D. Keezer--a local industrialist and bulk mailer. That same year saw the construction of the former post office at the corner of Main St. and Pollard Road. Within a generation Plaistow outgrew this building and its post office has moved yet again. The present post office opened in 1988.

Westville had its own post office for nearly a century. Established in 1880, Westville's first post office was run out of its depot, as well as general stores in the vicinity. As this section of town grew, its post office required a building of its own; one was built in 1948 and maintained until 1977, when the Westville and Plaistow post offices were consolidated.

The John FitzGerald Safety Complex

Prior to the construction of this building, the town's Fire Department was located in the present Historical Society building, and the Police Department operated out of the Town Hall. Since 1986 both departments have been housed in the safety complex. The police occupy the building's left

section, and the Fire Department works out of the right. It also houses the Emergency Management office.

Plaistow acquired the land that would be the site of the building in the late 1970s. This was at one time the location of the trolley car barn, which was sold in 1930 to Leonard Wing who used it as a garage for the City Oil Transportation Co. After World War II, Lagasse Amusement Company. bought the building and used it to store carnival equipment. When the town acquired the property, it demolished the existing structure to make room for the safety complex, which was named in honor of then fire chief, John D. FitzGerald, who had also served Plaistow as postmaster.

Earl L. Smith Recreational Field

The Town Meeting of 1972 approved money to purchase two acres of land at the end of Ingalls Terrace. This site was selected to meet Plaistow's recreational needs because it is centrally located and is close to Pollard School. In 1974, money was approved to begin building a park.

Earl Smith, a local civil engineer, volunteered to draw up plans for the park and was instrumental in obtaining a grant from the Bureau of Outdoors for the project, as well as other funds from the state. In 1986, the park--which now contains tennis and basketball courts, swings, slides, horseshoe pits, and a baseball diamond--was dedicated in honor of Mr. Smith. During the summer, the recreation department uses this facility for a summer program for local youngsters.

Schools

Little is known about Plaistow's schools prior to the mid-nineteenth century. We do know that the town's first school was built in 1737 on what is now Kingston Road. It was open for only two terms, it's closing the result of the schoolmaster's death from throat distemper.

We also know about the District One schoolhouse, which was located beside the old Town Hall on the commons in the 1800s. Children used to play in adjoining wetlands; there was a double-door privy, which serviced both the Town Hall and the schoolhouse. In the mid-1890s, students at this school began attending class at the newly constructed Pollard School.

In the period 1847-1875, there were four schools in town. In addition to the school previously mentioned, they were located at Kelley Corner in the town's north section, on Newton Rd., and on Danville Rd. near the Peaslee Brothers' Mill. Each schoolhouse contained one room that housed all eight grades, which were taught by a single instructor. In the nineteenth century, the school year consisted of two terms: an eleven-week winter term and a twelve-week summer term. Breaks in children's schooling coincided with planting and harvest. By 1901, students were spending an additional 13 weeks in school, with an additional term during the spring, raising the total number of weeks to thirty-six. Kids now spend about 38 weeks out of the year in school.

For those of the conviction that nineteenth century children were more studious than their modern counterparts, the following data culled from the superintendent's "General Remarks" of 1875 may prove surprising. Superintendent Reuben Peaslee lamented, "Of the 195 scholars in town, the average daily attendance is a small portion of over 26. This is a sorrowful exhibit of the interest taken by our people in the education of their children." Peaslee reckoned that in lieu of receiving

proper instruction, Plaistow's youngsters were "running at large in the streets and fields, hanging about depots and other places of resort, or annoying the community with their noise or petty mischief."

When they were in class, these kids learned from instructors whose responsibilities were not too different than those of today's teachers. In addition to keeping schoolhouses in "apple pie order," teachers were required to keep the interior a steady 68 degrees, though it was often the responsibility of students' parents to provide fuel for the woodstove. Teachers were also responsible for monitoring their student's health and posture, as well as their behavior.

In 1896, Plaistow erected a new two-story building on land donated by Arthur G. Pollard. One teacher at this school taught children in grades one, two, and three, while three other teachers taught students in grades four through eight. There were four other schools in 1901, each having only one teacher per term. These schools operated until 1911 when the present four-room structure was built on the site of the original Pollard School. The town closed all of the other schools and consolidated their students, though the Westville School was soon reopened to serve kids in grades one through four in that part of town. The Westville School burned in 1939.

Increased enrollment resulted in the construction of a four-room addition to the Pollard School in 1918. Another addition would not be effected until 1953. Shortly after this first addition was made, Mr. Pollard recruited the staff of the Boston Braves to lay out the ball field in what was one of the finest playgrounds in the state.

In 1930, the year that Plaistow first administered the Stanford Achievement Test, students attended school five times a week; the school day was six hours long. Records from the following year show that enrollment was 235 students. Expenditures for that year totaled \$14,840, at a cost of about \$63 per pupil. By 1960, there were 476 students at Pollard School, and 131 of Plaistow's youngsters were attending out-of-town high schools and trade schools; two years later, 175 students were getting their secondary education elsewhere, usually Sanborn or Haverhill.

It was at this time that Plaistow and neighboring towns began considering a district high school system. After rejecting a proposal that Sanborn Seminary serve as the nucleus of a regional high school, the towns of Plaistow, Atkinson, Sandown, and Danville banded together to establish the Timberlane Regional School District. In April 1965 the Timberlane District held its first annual meeting where voters approved the construction of a new high school, which would serve about 700 students in grades seven through twelve.

School funding posed a problem for Plaistow property owners. The local tax rate soared to meet increased costs; this problem was made worse by the fact that Plaistow received a negligible amount of state and federal aid. Relief did come in the form of 1965's Elementary and Secondary Education Act, which helped keep the fledgling district on an even keel.

In September 1966, the Timberlane Regional Junior-Senior High School opened. It was a cutting-edge facility in the mid-sixties. The school was the first in New Hampshire to employ an experimental time structure called modular scheduling; imported from the West Coast, modular scheduling was intended to give students greater flexibility in planning the time they spent in class.

Shortly thereafter, this system was dropped in favor of a more conventional way of dividing up the school day.

The high school was progressive in other ways. In cooperation with Dartmouth College and UNH, Timberlane was also on the frontline in its attempt to allow students to become computer savvy. Timberlane also instituted a more interdisciplinary approach to teaching. The high school was a success; it was among the top-rated schools in the state and attracted 2,000 visitors in its first three years.

The seventies was a tumultuous time for Timberlane. In 1974 a teachers' strike rocked the district. Though it is technically still unresolved a quarter century later, classes eventually recommenced without an agreement between the Timberlane Teachers' Association and the administration.

During the early 1970s, enrollment soared. Growing at a rate of 10% a year, enrollment was outstripping the 6 to 8% rate at which Plaistow's tax base was broadening. To cope, Timberlane instituted double sessions to accommodate its burgeoning student population. The high school still housed grades seven through 12; plans for a separate junior high school were not approved until 1972, and the school didn't open until 1975.

Pollard, which had been added onto in the mid-sixties, was again strapped for space. It was in the early 1970s that the portable classrooms were built on the school's grounds.

Twenty-five years ago, there were 643 students at Pollard School and 1,475 kids at Timberlane Junior-Senior High School (all towns combined). In 1998 there were 668 students in elementary school, while Plaistow contributed 299 students to the middle school and 348 to the high school. Plaistow's 1,315 students account for over one third (34.9%) of the district's total enrollment.

By the early 1990s, yet more space was necessary and additional space was presently made. This part of the school, which was opened to students in September of 1997, contains 12 classrooms, another gym, and allowed the library to double its space. The following data demonstrate the dramatic physical growth that Pollard has undergone: in 1911, Pollard contained four rooms that accommodated eight grades. In 1999, the school educates children from preschool to grade five. It consists of 29 classrooms, six rooms for special subject programs, two guidance offices, two gymnasias, a library, an art room, and a music room.

Also in the early 1990s, the elementary school's parent-teacher organization, POPS (Parents of Pollard School), rejoined the state PTA, from which it had seceded in the mid-seventies. Since then, the school's parent volunteers have garnered many blue ribbons from the state in recognition of their efforts.

Children's Sports and Recreation in the 1930s

To each game there was a season. This was because so many of the things that kids did for fun during the thirties were done outdoors. At different times of the year, there was always a variety of games and sports to play.

Each spring heralded a new season of adventure. The thinning ice on Bartlett's Pond lured Plaistow's bravest souls for the year's first swim. Each spring presented the perennial challenge of beating the previous year's date for the season's first swim. If anyone was reluctant to dive in, the threat of having to run the gauntlet and a year's worth of good-natured ribbing usually helped him overcome any disinclination.

Birch tree swinging time was in early spring, before the leaves came out. Local striplings, like the narrator of the famous Robert Frost poem, would set out into the woods and shimmy up to the tops of these trees and swing back and forth. The swaying birch would gather momentum and swing in widening arcs; just at the point when it seemed that the tree would snap, it lowered its passenger gently to the ground. Of course, the taller the tree, the wilder the ride, so boys hoping to show off in front of their buddies always sought out the loftiest stands.

For the older kids there were organized sports, especially baseball. The luckier teams had sponsors like the YMCA, the Liberty Grange, or the Knights of Pythias, all of which furnished players with uniforms and equipment. Landman's field, located behind 148 Main Street, was originally a hayfield that local baseballers groomed and mowed. They also erected bleachers that could accommodate about 30 spectators.

Competition between local communities' teams was fierce, and folks used to walk great distances to catch Friday evening and Saturday afternoon games. (Those who missed a game could get the score the following day from a bulletin board posted at John Duston's market.)

After each game, a line usually formed at the town pump, which was just over the tracks on North Main Street, near the present site of Process Engineering. Spectators could gossip there while they waited for a refreshing dipper of cold water.

If a match wasn't scheduled at Landman's, enough boys were usually hanging around to start up a spontaneous game. They divided into teams by electing captains who in turn chose their teams from among the gang. (The captains determined who picked first by going hand-over-hand up the handle of a baseball bat. Today a coin flip usually determines who chooses first, but during the Depression kids were often without a coin to toss.)

Although baseball was the team sport of choice during the summer, local kids -- like kids everywhere -- spent many of their summer days at a favorite swimming or fishing hole. Pollard Brook, also known as Little River, was where youngsters went swimming. This was an activity that girls and boys did separately -- each group had its own spot. Fishing, a pastime largely for boys, was also popular. The best spot in Plaistow was the Fire Pond, which is located behind the present Historical Society building. The pond's stock was replenished annually so it was always full of trout.

Summer was also a time for festivals, celebrations, and the carnival. The Fourth of July was always celebrated with special vigor; until the 1950s the town's young men would set ablaze huge piles of railroad ties, pallets, tires, and barrels for the traditional bonfire. These fires were lit in a field where Process Engineering now stands. Adding to the season's festivities were the myriad carnivals that local organizations sponsored. To Plaistow's youngsters, the carnival meant games of chance,

rides, and cotton candy bellyaches. To all this were added the year-round plays and burnt cork antics of minstrel singers at the Town Hall auditorium.

After the fall harvest, hay fields were the sites of many games. One example of a game that was popular among boys and girls was “Pizer,” a bat-and-ball game very similar to baseball. When players were without a proper volleyball or bat, children would make balls with socks stuffed into a stocking cap, while bats could be whittled out of pine boughs.

Local boys displayed a similar ingenuity in carving six-shooters out of pine slabs and in making their own bows and arrows. With their imaginations on fire with the adventures of Buck Jones and Tom Mix, local tykes transformed the meadows and pastures of Plaistow into the open ranges and the cattle towns of the Old West. Every day after school, these would-be cowboys drove the Sioux and Apache back into the wilderness and still managed to make it home for supper each evening.

Autumn also meant that Concord grapes were ripe for the picking. In those days virtually every family had a grape arbor in its backyard. In addition to being quick snacks, a season’s bounty could also sweeten a year’s worth of toast and muffins if a portion of the harvest was preserved as jelly.

Hickory nuts were another seasonal treat. Each year, after having hung temptingly from out-of-reach branches, these nuts would ripen and plummet to the ground. Once there they became easy prey for foraging squirrels and snack-hungry children. After gathering them by the fistful, kids would smash these nuts open with stones and partake of the plump, fleshy meat inside.

Hockey, skiing, sledding, skating, and basketball were all popular wintertime diversions. Youngsters shot hoops upstairs in the Town Hall, where the Plaistow District Court has since taken the place of the town’s basketball court. One backboard was attached to a pole at the edge of the auditorium stage; the other was fastened to a balcony rail. Huge nets hung from the rafters and stretched down over the windows to protect them from errant shots and wayward rebounds. The court’s dimensions were by no means regulation, but it served its purpose. Casual players and organized teams used the court. For 10 cents, folks could watch a Saturday night game from the balcony.

Kids used to skate on pretty much any frozen surface that was large enough. The same was true with hockey, which was also popular. But the ultimate in wintertime fun was sleighing. There was a palpable kind of anticipation that accompanied every snow storm since it meant that a fresh layer was going to await sledders at their favorite spot. By far the most popular sledding spot in town was, until very recently, Sweet Hill.

One sport that was popular year round was bowling, though this was mainly for adults. In the thirties Leonard “Pop” Wing operated an alley on Main St., on the north side of the railroad tracks. This alley had been built in the early twenties by Dr. E.A. Landman who had an abiding enthusiasm for the game. Many of Plaistow’s older male residents still remember getting their first jobs there. Pin boys, usually aged between 12 and 14, made a nickel for each string they set up. On a good night, a pin boy could make 50 or 60 cents, which was good money for a kid during the Depression. But the job was not without its hazards. Plaistow was the home of many excellent bowlers (including later World Champions Arthur Doyon and Gary Carrington) who could really deliver the ball with oomph. Flying pins and ricocheting bowling balls conspired to test any pin boy’s reflexes.

As a result of the perilous nature of the work, the job held a special allure for Plaistow's rougher and more daring adolescents. That notwithstanding, many parents wanted to keep their boys out of harm's way and forbade them to become pin boys.

To be sure, the Depression years were hard times. But there were good times, too.

Religion

Plaistow has been home to a variety of religious de-nominations. Beginning as a settlement peopled by the heirs of the Radical Reformation, Plaistow eventually would embrace Baptists and Roman Catholics, while the original Congregational parish dissolved after two centuries.

The North Parish Church

The town of Haverhill, Mass. set off a separate precinct in the north part of town in 1728. We suppose that the townspeople never imagined that most of this area would become part of the Province of New Hampshire within a few years since a new Congregational meetinghouse was erected in this north precinct by 1730; in November of that year, about 60 members of the First Parish Church requested dismissal for the purpose of "uniting in a church state in the north precinct." Their dismissal was granted along with a 10-pound allowance for hiring a minister.

In December 1730, the Rev. James Cushing of Newbury, Mass. was ordained as pastor there, and the parishioners shortly thereafter petitioned the proprietors of Haverhill for a grant of land for a parsonage and received 29 acres. In 1731 a parsonage was built and in 1734 a burying ground was laid out. The Haverhill Town Meeting of 1732 voted that profits from the parsonage farm be used to maintain the North Parish Meetinghouse.

In 1741 the province boundary line dispute between Massachusetts and New Hampshire was settled by the King's decree. The eight years prior to Plaistow's incorporation was a time of great discontent. The meetinghouse was mostly in New Hampshire now, while the parsonage was south of the line. Some, if not most, of the parsonage farmlands were now in New Hampshire, but the town of Haverhill tried to govern these, which added to the discontent.

There are contradictory accounts of how membership was distributed through Haverhill and its upstart neighbor to the north. One source notes that there were about 400 polls, or males over 16, in the parish remaining south of the line, and about 200 north of it in what are now Plaistow, Atkinson, and parts of Hampstead and Salem. Another source tells that nearly the opposite is true: that approximately two-thirds of the North Parish Church members now lived in New Hampshire. Yet another account tells us that the attendance at the North Parish Meetinghouse was about equally divided between Massachusetts and New Hampshire residents until a new parish called the North Parish Society of Haverhill was formed on the other side of the state line. At this time, the truth is obscured by a lack of research into the parish's early history.

The second minister of the church, the Rev. Gyles Merrill, purchased the parsonage in 1771. How or why he did this is not explained, but the parsonage was the home of Merrill descendants for at least four generations.

Thirteen church members requested and received dismissal to form their own church in Atkinson in 1772. This was, after all, the principal reason the petitioners for the Atkinson set-off gave in 1766 when they separated from Plaistow.

The North Parish had no settled minister from 1806 to 1826 and suffered a decline during this period. Despite there being no regular preacher behind the pulpit, the congregation managed to raise a parsonage in 1818. The vigor of the church's members was evident in the way that they quickly repaired and remodeled the meetinghouse after an 1820 fire.

The years around 1827 saw an active religious revival in New England--a second Great Awakening. Out of this movement emerged in 1831 the Temperance Society of Plaistow & Vicinity, which was formed at the home of Jesse Clement (where the Haverhill Legion Farm is today). The society's membership was composed chiefly of the North Parish members who worked for about 10 years to plug up Plaistow's kegs.

The old North Parish Meetinghouse was torn down in 1837, and a new one was built just a few feet north of the old one so that it no longer straddled the state line. During most of the nineteenth century the church's membership came from both the Haverhill North Parish and all of Plaistow. Two of the active leaders at this time were the Kelley brothers of Plaistow Center; one was the town doctor and the other was the town lawyer.

A new North Parish Society came into existence at mid-century and in 1879 built a new North Parish Community Church in Haverhill, opposite the Smiley School. This was the final division of the old North Parish of Haverhill and the North Parish Congregational Society of Plaistow. Causes of this separation stretched back to 1741 when the Massachusetts boundary was redrawn; persistent political and doctrinal differences surely contributed, too.

At some time in the 1800s a chapel was built across from the church on the Haverhill side of the line (where a Pizza Hut restaurant is now located). This building later became a Grange hall.

The North Parish was incorporated as the Plaistow-North Haverhill Evangelical Congregational Society in 1905. In 1929 it finally formed a federation with the North Parish Church Society, the group that had divided from it 50 years before. Both church groups became the North Parish Community Church, an interdenominational congregation. Services were held alternately in each church building for some time.

1953 was the end of the ecclesiastical use of that parcel of land set-off in 1728 when it was sold to the family of Herbert J. Lynch, the head of a Haverhill appliance retail firm. It later became the home of a chiropractic clinic. The building now houses a firm that specializes in mortgages.

The First Baptist Church

Baptists applied to be relieved of paying "rates" to the stated church (the Congregational Church) in Haverhill in 1770. They were granted this request in 1774 and they soon established the First Baptist Church of Haverhill; in 1817, the Second Baptist Church opened in the eastern part of town. This eastern part of Haverhill had provided Plaistow with its first settlers in the 1700s who traveled up the old County Road from Rocks Village and shared a common religious sensibility with their

Plaistow descendants who traveled to Haverhill for Sunday meetings. It is understandable, therefore, that Plaistow's First Regular Baptist Society was formed by seventeen members of the Rocks Village-based Second Baptist Church who requested dismission in 1836. This group first met in the old Plaistow Town Hall until 1839 when the Pollards and the Cheney's donated land on Main St. for a new church building. Pews were sold and the building was erected within the year.

The church's membership had grown to 100 by 1852 and had to be enlarged. New pews were added and sold to new members. (Parishioners owned their pews in early times and even into the twentieth century. The prices varied according to the location, though it's unclear whether higher prices obtained a seat closer to or further from the preacher.)

In 1849, the church's first organ was installed. This is significant because it was a departure from earlier church practices of using only a bass viol for accompaniment. This or similar instruments were thought to be the only desirable sources of music in church other than the voices of the choir.

A parsonage was obtained in 1863 when a house across from the Town Hall on Main St. was given for that use. It is still in use today.

The original church belfry contained a small bell from early years, but it was not considered melodic. In 1894, the church replaced it with a gift from Arthur G. Pollard, which is still in use today. The bell not only summoned Sunday churchgoers in early years but also served as the call to put out fires. Other building improvements were made in 1894, and again in 1905.

The ministers from 1912 to 1951 included the Reverends Chellis Smith, Asa Morrison, Ernest McKenzie, George Fish, Homer Carr, and Byron Waterman.

After 1912 a new, more liberal church began to emerge. Previously, the devout attended services nearly all day on Sunday. Typically, these services included two-hour sermons, one-hour prayers, confessions of Christian experience, and discipline that was "meted out to backsliders from the righteous path." Some of these customs lasted well into the first quarter of the twentieth century, but gradually the liberal bent led the church to be more inclusive of those who were invited to take communion and become members. It appears that these changes attracted a more youthful participation. The church school grew along with other youth groups. The Christian Endeavor Society attracted an active participation, and the church sponsored a daily Bible school during summer vacations.

Shortly after World War II, the Rev. John R. Wood was ordained. By 1956 he led the congregation in adding on a new Christian education building that was later named the Arthur T. Colcord Memorial Hall. This was a project built by the parishioners themselves with very little contracted work.

Soon after, a new electronic organ was installed, a new carillon was given, the sanctuary was remodeled and adjoining property was purchased for parking enlargement. The church hired a youth minister and created another building addition to accommodate new offices and meeting rooms. Following this, the kitchen was remodeled and an access ramp was constructed.

Reverend Wood resigned in 1968, and following the temporary pastorate of the Reverend Dr. Duane Windemiller, the Reverend Henry Mook was ordained in 1969. During his ministry, which lasted until 1975, a new organ was installed, new hymnals were purchased, and the exterior of the building was covered with new siding. In 1975, the church also hired a director of Christian education who also became director of a new nursery school.

After the resignation of the Rev. Mook in 1975, the Rev. Windemiller became a supply pastor once again. He served until the appointment of the Rev. Robert Aspinwall in 1976.

During the Rev. Aspinwall's tenure, a pre-school and a kindergarten were established. Residential property beside the church was repurchased (it had belonged to the church previously) and the church sanctuary was remodeled. The Rev. Aspinwall's skill in woodworking is prominently displayed in the chancel furniture, which he built for the church.

Rev. Aspinwall retired in 1995. After several temporary ministers, Plaistow's Baptists invited the Rev. Louis Drew to become their pastor in 1997. Though Pastor Drew has been in the parish only two years, he has generated excitement, which has increased participation in this church of 275 members.

Holy Angels Church

The final quarter of the nineteenth century saw Plaistow's brickmaking industry burgeon and generated plentiful employment opportunities that attracted hundreds of French Canadian men, who in many cases later brought their families. These Quebecois were almost entirely Roman Catholic, but there was no church in town for them, so they had to travel to either Haverhill or Exeter to attend mass. Nearly all of these French Canadians lived in the western part of town and their language and religious differences tended to cloister them. This section of town was first called Plaistow Brickyards and later Westville.

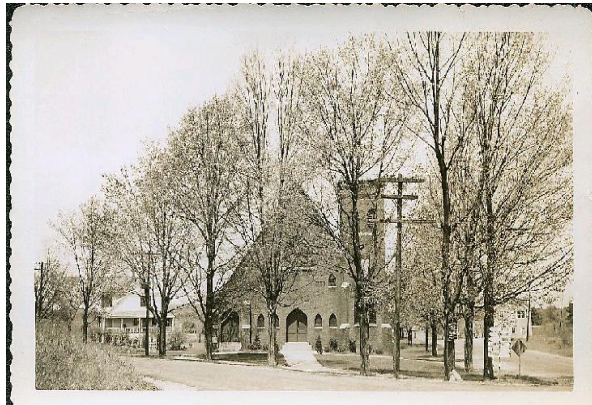
The French immigrant population peaked as brick making reached its zenith in the late 1800s. This led to the establishment of the Holy Angels Parish in 1892 by the Most Reverend D. M. Bradley, Bishop of Manchester. The Manchester Diocese appointed the Rev. D. Alexander Sullivan as the parish's first pastor.

Holy Angels' first services were held in the Town Hall. Father Sullivan acquired a site for a church in early 1893 at the intersection of the East and Plaistow Roads, where a Getty station now stands. A lovely building rendered in the English Gothic style with locally manufactured bricks was erected and dedicated in 1894. It had a seating capacity of 250 and served the towns of Plaistow, Atkinson, Newton, Danville, Hampstead, Kingston, East Kingston, Newfields, Sandown, and South Hampton. In addition to its own parish, Holy Angels' clergy also served the Sacred Heart Church of Newfields until 1947.

Land for a Holy Angels cemetery was purchased and laid out off the East Road in 1899. A residence for a rectory was acquired on East Rd. in 1904. As church membership grew, it became apparent that the building's design did not lend itself to enlargement. There was also not enough land to develop necessary parking or to accommodate a convent and an improved rectory.

Reverend Richard O. Boner came to the parish in 1963, and, through his efforts, the Diocese purchased land on Atkinson Depot Rd. in 1964, which permitted the construction of a church, rectory and convent in 1965. Eight years later a parish center with a gymnasium and meeting rooms was built.

The architecture of the church was a striking example of Tudor modernism, a style that may have been selected to help the older parishioners to overcome their sadness at the demolition of the beautiful Gothic structure. The effect was not entirely achieved.



*Holy Angels Church at the Corner
of East Road and Route 125*



The Corner of East Road and Route 125 Today

The parish ceased to serve Newton, Kingston, East Kingston, and South Hampton in 1967 when a new parish was formed. The new church, Mary Mother of the Church, was built in Newton. In 1979, the St. Anne Church was established as a parish in Hampstead to serve Sandown and Danville, as well as Hampstead. Today Holy Angels Parish serves the spiritual needs of some 1,700 families of Atkinson and Plaistow.

Fraternal, Charitable, and Patriotic Organizations

The social lives of Plaistow residents past and present have been greatly enhanced by the myriad organizations that have allowed folks to come together in a spirit of community and common interest. Most of these organizations have also directed their energies into channels that have allowed them to improve the lives of others in town and elsewhere.

The Village Improvement Society

Formed in April 1890 by 22 ladies of the village, this organization's goal was to improve the town's appearance. They raised money to plant shrubs and ornamental trees. The society paid for the construction of concrete sidewalks from the railroad crossing to the Town Hall; it also paid for removing snow from these sidewalks. By 1898, membership rose to 133. The society once raised nearly \$800 in a single year. The group became inactive in 1930.

The Junior Order of United American Mechanics (JrOUAM)

Chartered in 1888, JrOUAM's Goodwill Council attracted many local young laborers by offering health and life insurance to its members. This was a very patriotic organization that saw to it that Plaistow's schools had American flags and Bibles. The Plaistow chapter also helped this national organization sponsor an orphanage in Ohio. The lodge disbanded in the 1980s.

Liberty Grange

Also known as the Patrons of Husbandry, the Grange was chartered in 1908 and was one of the town's most important organizations when Plaistow's economy was based on farming. Members exchanged ideas on how to raise crops and livestock. Though its remaining membership remained very active, their charter was surrendered in the 1980s due to the decline of farming in Plaistow. Some former members have joined other Granges in the area.

Trinity Lodge Knights of Pythias

Lodge # 16 was instituted in June 1895. In the early 1920s, Trinity Lodge was one of the most active lodges in the state, and many members advanced to become officers of the New Hampshire Grand Lodge. It sponsored carnivals, whist parties, plays, and dances. These events were opportunities for townsfolk to gather and socialize and they also provided the K of P with a reliable source of funds.

Soon after its organization, the lodge bought Castle Hall, now known as the Crown Building. This provided the Knights with a meeting place as well a source of revenue since it could rent out unused floor space to local grocers. The ground floor was at times the home of the post office, as well as a grocery store. The second story contained a meeting hall and anterooms, while the top floor contained a kitchen and banquet hall. The building was sold in the mid-1960s.

Trinity Temple, Pythian Sisters

Trinity Temple #17 was organized in December 1921 as the ladies auxiliary to the K of P. Because the Sisters and the Knights prefer to remain as inconspicuous as possible, they have not received the public recognition that usually attends the kind of charitable work they do.

The Deodorized Order of the Skunk

This unique social-service organization, whose members were called Stinkers, was started on a whim by Plaistow businessman Carter Diamond Keezer in 1949. By the 1960s, it was an international organization with a reported 300,000 members.

Although annual membership dues were only one dollar, the Order did generate income that was donated to assist polio victims.

Intriguing symbols of the fraternity were the deodorized skunks that some members kept as household pets. Keezer's daughter, D. Joan Keezer, later CEO of Keezer Manufacturing Co., tells of once having twin skunks as pets; though they proved to be great pets for their owner, the skunks intimidated most household visitors.

Publishing a monthly newsletter and attending the other responsibilities that go along with heading up such a large organization became too great a burden for C. D. Keezer, who was also responsible

for running the Keezer Manufacturing Company. He sold his interest in the Stinkers in the 1960s; this, however, signaled the Order's death knell, and its membership soon dwindled. By the end of the decade, the organization was defunct.

Girl Scouts

The Girl Scouts have helped shape the moral and civic sensibilities of Plaistow girls for many decades. In the 1930s, the girls held their meetings in the upstairs of the old firehouse before moving to the Town Hall in the sixties. Today they meet at the First Baptist Church. Their presence has long become a fixture of Plaistow's Memorial Day parades.

Boy Scouts

Since the 1920s, the Boy Scouts have helped mold Plaistow's boys into responsible members of society. Throughout the years, many boys have attained the rank of Eagle Scout and have completed projects that have improved Plaistow in good stead. These projects have seen scouts erecting street signs, numbering houses, educating youngsters in bicycle safety, mapping the town cemetery, and compiling information about the town's elderly to assist medics in the event of an emergency.

The Plaistow Historical Society

Since 1974, this organization's goal has been to promote an awareness of Plaistow's history and to preserve its heritage. In addition to sponsoring programming focusing on state and local history, the society also functions as a resource for those who wish to learn more about the town. For its first five years, the society held meetings in a small room in the Town Hall before moving to its present location at the old firehouse, incidentally the site of one of Plaistow's earliest schools. This building now houses a large collection of documents, objects, and ephemera that chronicle Plaistow's past. Plaistow residents and businesses donated many of these resources, which the Society has drawn on for the completion of this book. Society members are also using archival photos in an upcoming pictorial history, which will be published by Arcadia Press.

The Fish and Game Club

Located at the end of May Ray Ave., this club was founded in 1935 by Wallace Card. Its original purpose was to increase the stock of trout in local brooks and to provide a gathering place for local sportsmen. Since its inception about 65 years ago, this organization's range of activity has broadened to include the sponsorship of fishing derbies, hunter education, and dances. The Fish and Game Club also provides an archery range for local quiver and bow enthusiasts. A brand new pistol range was completed earlier this year and a team is being organized. The club is located on 38 acres in the eastern part of town and has 220 members.

Carl G. Davis Post #34 American Legion

Organized under the leadership of Albert "Vic" Geary in 1931 as the Carl G. Davis Post 34, Plaistow's local chapter of the American Legion soon took over responsibility for the town's Memorial Day ceremonies. This local bulwark of patriotism was named in honor of a Plaistow

resident who was killed in combat during World War I. Eighteen veterans constituted the Legion's original membership. Construction of the Legion's N. Main St. meeting hall was completed in 1936, on land donated by Carl Kenniston. Building supplies and labor were provided by the Legion's membership, and interior decorations were provided by the Ladies' Auxiliary.

During World War II, the post's members rallied under Vic Geary's leadership to establish the town's civil defense unit. It soon earned a reputation for efficiency and became the model for units in surrounding communities. Mr. Geary was also the Chief Observer for the Plaistow district of the Air Force's aircraft warning system.

In the late fifties and early sixties, veterans of World War II and the Korean Conflict swelled the Legion's ranks and made an addition to the original building necessary. In 1962, under the leadership of Commander George Nott, the Legion effected this improvement. The upstairs has served as the site for Legion functions as well as a temporary meeting place for local groups and fraternal organizations.

Post 34 has sought to promote patriotism among Plaistow's citizens in many ways. It has provided American flags for local schools, the Boy Scouts, Pollard Park, War Memorial Park, and the Town Hall courtroom. Other flags have flown over the Capitol in Washington D.C., while many others have been draped over the caskets of deceased comrades. Post 34 also dedicated the World War II memorial, which was funded entirely by donations, on Memorial Day, 1997.

Since 1932, the Legion's Auxiliary has assisted Post 34 in accomplishing its goals. Now 106 members strong, Unit #34 sponsors fundraisers and has worked with children and the community; also its members volunteer at the Manchester V.A. Hospital. Both the Post and Unit #34 also act as mutual aid societies that assist local veterans and their families during times of need.



The Carl G. Davis Post #34 American Legion

The Knights of Columbus

The Knights of Columbus is a fraternal order of Roman Catholic laymen. Founded in 1882 in Connecticut to promote charity, patriotism, fraternity, and unity among Catholic immigrants, it also provided insurance to its members. There are now more than 10,000 local councils. Membership is open to all men aged 18 and older who are practicing Roman Catholics.

The Plaistow-Atkinson St. Jude Council #6617 will celebrate its 25th anniversary this year. It was formed with 30 charter members in September 1974 to serve the Holy Angels Parish, which then consisted of Plaistow, Hampstead and Atkinson. Currently, there are 140 members of Holy Angels'

council. Although membership is limited to men, the Knights encourage family participation in all its activities.

St. Jude Council #6617 holds several fundraising projects throughout the year to help people in the community in need. Its annual Tootsie Roll Drive for the individually challenged is the most successful of any Council in New Hampshire. All funds raised by the Council are distributed to the church, parishioners' families, and the community; parish youngsters have always been close to the hearts of Holy Angels' K of C.

Westville: A Pictorial Survey

The Hotel Maplewood, ca. 1930--1935

Built as a private home around 1920 by Edson Peaslee, this structure included lumber from 48 states. The first to operate this building as a hotel was Margaret O. Allison, when the establishment was known as the Birch Tree Inn. Pat McCarthy bought the building in 1929 and began offering hospitality to locals until 1947, when he sold it to Mr. and Mrs. William Brennan of Boston. The Brennans' operated the hotel for only a few years; in the early 1950s Ernest Olenio bought the property and continued to serve food and drink. After prohibition, the hotel was the only "wet" establishment in an otherwise dry town; this notwithstanding, the establishment remained reputable and was widely praised for its cuisine. The property was converted into apartments in the 1970s.

Caillouette's Icehouse, ca. 1920

Levi Caillouette used to harvest large-cut blocks of ice from the pond bearing his name. Many local men and boys found seasonal employment here where they sawed foot-thick blocks and floated them to a staging area; at this point a team of horses could drag the harvest to the icehouse. Sawdust, perhaps from the nearby Peaslee Mill, preserved the ice into the summer months. Mr. Caillouette delivered preserved ice to his customers in the community, charging 25 cents for a large piece that would last four or five days.

The Old Peaslee Mill

Located near the Plaistow Family Bank where Little River was dammed up, this water-powered mill advertised lumber, plank and ship stock, and fine sawing in an 1871 circular. Owned and operated by Daniel, Edson, and Frank Peaslee, the mill was later taken over by Edson's son, William. According to local tradition, the business probably folded during the late 1920s.

Fecteau's Store

This establishment was located at the rail crossing and doubled as Westville's post office. Theodore Fecteau set up shop here around 1900 and operated a general store until he sold it to Mike Guard, whose brother John ran the post office. This ca 1920s photograph shows Mike Guard, second from the left.



A Pastoral Scene

Although Westville was Plaistow's most industrialized section, it too was still very rural until quite recently. Many of its residents were farmers who had much in common with folks in other parts of Plaistow. Red Rowell is shown in this early 1930s photo at the wheel of his homemade tractor, which he and Eddie Yawnitz made from an old truck. It also had attachable blades that could be used for mowing and cutting wood.



Westville Depot

James Newall George, a railroad executive who lived in the center of town, arranged the construction of the depot shown here. He also coined the name “Westville” for Plaistow’s western village. Standing to the immediate left of the lamp post in this ca. 1920s photo is the station’s agent Daniel J. Kelleher, who assumed the post following the accidental death of his brother and predecessor, Gerry.

Anecdotes, Legends, and Tall Tales

Two and a half centuries is plenty of time for a town to generate an abundance of folklore. The following are just a few examples of some of Plaistow’s local color.

Interesting Place Names and Local Landmarks

Brandy Brow: At an elevation of 286 ft., the towns of Plaistow, Newton, Haverhill, and Merrimac meet at the summit of Brandy Brow Hill. According to legend, many generations ago, a lone Indian had swallowed down a bottle of brandy on a cold winter night and sought the shelter of a hollow tree trunk. He was found later, frozen to death in that hollow, where he still clutched his empty bottle. There are of course, few, if any, reliable sources to substantiate this legend. Two local historians have posited other possible sources for the name. George S. Chase believed that the brow took its name after someone accidentally broke a bottle of brandy up there; another Haverhill historian, Benjamin Mirick, said that the hill was probably named for the reddish, brandy-colored stones of the hill.

Mankill Brook: The name of this little stream that runs between Harriman and Pollard Roads hearkens back to Plaistow’s early history when the threat of Indian raids was a very real part of everyday life. Not far from the brook lived a man named Harriman, who was killed by Indians who had concealed themselves on the stream bank among the alders. That night, Mrs. Harriman anxiously looked upon her husband’s corpse; the fear of remaining Indians stayed her footsteps. Mrs. Harriman continued to look out in horror until the morning’s light showed her that the raiding party had withdrawn.

Sweet Hill: “Lord” Timothy Dexter was one of this region’s most colorful eccentrics. He was born in Malden, Mass. and moved to Newburyport after the Revolution. There he made a fortune by accepting devalued Continental currency, which bills were redeemed at face value after everyone else had given up on them. After finding himself suddenly among the wealthiest men in Newburyport, Dexter’s serendipity persisted. In those days, the Clipper City was overrun with cats. Dexter put a bounty on cats and loaded them onto one of his ships. No one knew his motives until the ship returned empty from a rodent-infested island in the Caribbean Sea.

Another venture that Dexter sank capital into was trucking molasses overland from Newburyport to Concord. While passing through Plaistow, one of the barrels of molasses began to leak, leaving a sugary trail over what has hitherto been known as Sweet Hill. A variant of this story holds that one or more barrels became unfastened and broke upon hitting the ground, leaving a big sticky mess.

The Plaistow Elm: According to legend, Samuel Cheney and a couple of friends went fishing one day in 1791 and each brought back an elm sapling. The fates of the other two saplings are not known, but Mr. Cheney's tree, planted near his home at the juncture of Main and Elm Streets, continued to grow and became one of Plaistow's best-known landmarks. It also inspired Plaistow poet Daniel Smythe's poem "The Big Elm Tree." Sadly, Plaistow's beloved elm succumbed to the dreaded Dutch elm disease a few decades ago. It was removed shortly after the town celebrated its 225th anniversary. Shortly after it was cut down, Hilda Johnson scooted her wheelbarrow over from her nearby house. She piled up her wheelbarrow with payload of woodchips from the elm and spread them in her flower garden. Local folks reckoned that Mrs. Johnson's flowerbed was one of the finest in town; one wonders how much of her horticultural prowess can be attributed to the Big Elm's wonderwork. A cross section of the tree is preserved and can still be seen at the Plaistow Historical Society.

Mount Misery: Plaistow's highest point (elev. 384 ft.) is located out in the woods off N. Main St., not too far from the Hampstead border. During the nineteenth century, a man from W. Newbury bought the land in the mountain's vicinity and began farming. This sad soul couldn't have practiced poorer judgment in selecting a site for his farmstead. The soil there is thin and rocky and the terrain is quite rugged, making planting and ploughing difficult. A short time later, he gave up. It is believed that this unfortunate farmer was the first to refer to the roof of Plaistow as "Mount Misery."

Strange Scenes from a Border Town

During the latter part of the nineteenth century, and the earlier part of this century, Plaistow and several surrounding towns were dry. This made social drinking very difficult and outright illegal. One clandestine dram shop, called the Elm House, was located on the Haverhill-Plaistow border: half of the structure was in Haverhill and half was in Plaistow. In the event that the Plaistow police would pay a call, Elm House patrons would scoot their hooch into the part of the house that was over the border and out of the cops' jurisdiction. It was during one of these raids that someone is said to have quipped, "The police in Plaistow are all inoculated, so they couldn't catch anybody."

Prior to being rebuilt entirely in 1837, the North Parish Meetinghouse straddled the Plaistow-Haverhill border and served Congregationalists living in both communities. Those wishing to be married in New Hampshire were wed in the Plaistow part of the meetinghouse, while parishioners from Haverhill took their vows in the opposite part of the building. In 1837, the meetinghouse was rebuilt a little farther north so that all of it was in Plaistow.

Deeds-Daring, Delightful, and Dubious

James C. Merrill, a relative of Isaac the famous Haverhill diarist, remembered his mother-in-law recounting that shortly after George Washington's 1796 visit, the area suffered its first outbreak of influenza. Long after that, those suffering from the flu were said to have come down with "Washington's cold."

Auto manufacturer Henry Ford passed through Plaistow and Atkinson while he was antique collecting back east during the teens and twenties. In 1915, Mr. Ford paid a visit to Gage Day, a Plaistow carpenter and musician who was the last in his family to operate Holiday Farm (now Geaudrault's farm). Mr. Ford acquired for his collection a carriage that had been in the Day family for some time, as well as an ancient stone mortar used by Indians on Ayers Hill.

Ten years later, Mr. Ford paid a visit to the old Clark Homestead over on the Atkinson border. He had taken quite a shine to a mill building that had stood on the bank of Clark's Brook since its construction in 1798. It had originally been a woolen mill that had been converted into a gristmill, which featured some very old machinery, perhaps the oldest in the state. Fascinated by the two-story structure, the deep-pocketed industrialist offered to buy Clark's Mill. But Mrs. Albert C. Barrows, the property's owner, refused to part with it. In the words of one of her contemporaries, Mrs. Barrows "demonstrat[ed] genuine love for the old mill of her ancestors, and her many antiques could not be lured away from their natural surroundings by Ford's millions." Later, Mrs. Barrows made a gift of the structure so it might be preserved. The following year, in 1926 Mr. Ford's agents returned to dismantle the mill and brought it to his collection in Sudbury's Wayside Inn.

In 1938, Plaistow firemen responded to a blaze at George Roberts's house on Walton Road. Spectators who had gathered to witness the blaze were critical of how the fire was being fought and began taunting the firemen. The situation became violent when a fight broke out between the spectators and firefighters. It was at this point that Fire Chief John A. Palmer ordered that the fire hose be turned away from the conflagration and upon the tumultuous crowd. The police came to break up the ensuing melee, but not until all of the spectators had been "damped down and the house destroyed," as one newspaper account noted. The episode created quite a bit of notoriety for Plaistow; the Boston Globe even ran an editorial cartoon lampooning the event. In the ensuing pandemonium, the town's selectmen and police department gave Chief Palmer's handling of the crowd their official support by giving him votes of confidence.

The bell in the tower of the First Baptist Church was uncharacteristically silent on the Sunday after Halloween in 1933. Someone had stolen the clapper.

A careful investigation by church officials into this Halloween prank failed to turn up any information so they were forced to announce that if the clapper was returned there would not only be no prosecution but in fact a reward would be paid.

Two weeks passed before Deacon Steele received in the mail a map, which indicated that the missing clapper could be found in nearby Seaver Brook. After a search of several hours, the clapper was located under a footbridge and restored to its proper location.

No record was ever made of the reward being claimed. Legend has the perpetrator as the son of one of Plaistow's most prominent businessmen.

Plaistow Recipients of the Boston Post Cane

In 1909, Boston Post editor Edwin A. Grozier launched a promotional campaign that was to last 90 years and long outlive the defunct Boston daily for several decades. Each community within the

paper's circulation was given a gold-tipped ebony cane that was to be given to its oldest male citizen. These walking sticks were modeled on seventeenth-century canes that were symbols of virtue and leadership. In a sense, therefore, the presentation of these canes was a continuation of the region's abiding respect for the elderly who, in colonial times, were regarded as vessels of Godly wisdom.

Grozier sent out 700 letters to selectmen in Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Maine, and Rhode Island to instruct them on how the canes were to be distributed. Each town was asked to entrust its cane to its oldest male resident who would hold it until his demise, at which point the cane was awarded to the next oldest. Sometime along the way women became eligible to carry the cane.

Lost to us are the identities of Plaistow's earliest recipients, though a 1930 Haverhill Gazette article tells us that Warrenzo Seaver of Main St. held it in the late twenties.

For many years, Plaistow's cane was lost. It did, however, turn up in time for the town's 225th anniversary celebration, and master of ceremonies Clifford Cook carried it during the parade. The town has since made a replica of its cane. The copy has been presented to six different recipients who have carried the cane since 1975, while the original is now a part of the Plaistow Historical Society's collection.

The following citizens have carried the cane since its rediscovery:

1975: Mrs. Emma Johnston, Railroad (now Blossom) Ave., aged 94 at time of presentation.
1981: Mrs. Ottilie Smith, Maple Ave., aged 92 at time of presentation.
1984: Mrs. Bernice Davis, Main St., aged 93 at time of presentation.
1988: Mr. John N. O'Jack Maddox, aged 96 at time of presentation.
1991: Mr. Anthony Pappadopoulos, aged 98 at time of presentation.
1995: Mrs. Dorothy Bennett Nabers, aged 98 at time of presentation.
1998: Mr. Charles Wheeler Sr., aged 100 at time of presentation.