WINCHESTER CELEBRATIONS

By Ellen Knight[1]

250th ANNIVERSARY - 1890

The celebration of Winchester's 250th Anniversary, reckoned from the building of the first house in 1640, occurred on the Fourth of July and was a splendid affair. For weeks preceding the Fourth, articles on the history of the town were published in *The Winchester Star*. A booklet with a 16-page "Historical Sketch of Winchester," as well as information about the celebration, was printed. Over thirty historical tablets were placed about the town to mark historic places such as the sites of the Converse, Belknap, William Johnson, and Richardson houses, Squaw Sachem's wigwam, the Black Horse Tavern, early mills, bridges, farms, and others.

The festivities began with a National Salute at 6:00 a.m., repeated at noon and sunset. At 9:30 a.m. the Morning Parade started along a route whose buildings had been decorated with streamers, flags, and bunting. The parade included officials, firemen, military, bands, floats and marchers–many in costume–and a variety of horse-drawn vehicles representing Winchester businesses.

At noon, a public meeting was held in Town Hall (built on land originally owned by first settler Edward Converse), presided over by the president of the Historical Society, Abijah Thompson. The main speaker was Samuel McCall, whom Winchester had just a few years before elected to the Massachusetts Legislature, who served in Congress, and later was to be governor of the state for three terms. McCall delivered an historical address which touched on the founders of both Winchester and the nation and addressed the topics of liberty and government. Concluding with comments on the natural beauties of the area, he said, "We can indulge in no better wish for her today than that her future may be as prosperous and uncheckered as her past. If this be granted she will indeed sit here beside her Mystik like a queen, and happy, happy will be the people who shall gather within her gates."

Residents garbed as Puritans

At one o'clock, participants crossed the street to the David N. Skillings estate where a mammoth tent was raised for a public dinner. After dinner speeches were given by Henry Cabot Lodge, Mayor Johnson of Woburn (whose speech dealt with the debated issue of which community was the parent of the other), and others. Music was furnished by the Woburn Brass Band. At 2:30 there was an entertainment at the Town Hall especially for children, and many people held open houses during the afternoon.

The day's activities ended with a grand display of fireworks on Bacon's Field, accompanied by music by the Woburn and Winchester brass bands. The various intriguingly named set pieces of the fireworks included the calliopticon, the bands of Orion, scroll wheel, meteoric showers, iriscope, passion flower, land wheel, and gyroscope. The display ended with a large shield on which "Winchester 1640-1890" stood out in brilliant relief. The entire day was, to judge by the newspaper accounts, a festive and ebullient occasion enjoyed not only town-wide but by a large number of visitors from neighboring towns.

WINCHESTER'S 50TH ANNIVERSARY - 1900

The 50th anniversary of the incorporation was reportedly quietly observed. In 1900 the Calumet Club had a reception and dinner at its clubhouse, to which many leading citizens of the town were invited. The speakers were Arthur E. Whitney, Rev. John W. Suter, and N. A. Richardson who was 30 years old when the town was incorporated.

IMPROVEMENT CELEBRATION - 1916

In 1916, Winchester held what *The Winchester Star* declared to be "the biggest celebration Winchester ever had," an Improvement Celebration. Over the course of a few years the town had invested in several capital improvements and, simply to draw attention to what it had achieved, townspeople celebrated.

Washington School (right) behind Leonard Field, parade starting point

On a fine day in September, a parade started at the Washington School next to the new Highlands Playground (later named Leonard Field), proceeded south using a new path crossing Judkins Pond (later named Shore Road),[2] passed Mill Pond with its two new bridges and new concrete parapet which encased the dilapidated old iron railings on the Mt. Vernon Street bridge (replaced in

2017), passed the new Fire and Police Station, went along the newly dredged river, and ended at Manchester Field where new play equipment had been installed.

Of course, there were speeches. That evening, there was a canoe parade which created a display of bobbing lights along the river, and fireworks rounded off the day.

Converse and Waterfield bridges

MASSACHUSETTS BAY TERCENTENARY - 1930

While steeped in the Great Depression, Winchester joined in the state celebration of the 300th anniversary of the Massachusetts Bay Colony. On Columbus Day, an interfaith service at Town Hall opened the ceremonies. Next day, the high school played Arlington, with a halftime featuring a concert by the 10th Cavalry Band and an air show by a squadron of Army planes. That afternoon there was a parade followed in the evening by a concert and an illuminated parade of canoeists on the Aberjona River.

Winchester's special guests, the mayor and mayoress of Winchester, England, arrived the next day and received a special reception. (Although the town was not named for the British one, many reasoned that Col. Winchester's family had probably taken its name for the town, so there was indeed a connection.) The town maintained cordial contact with Mayor Collis through the time of his death.

During this celebration, the state erected five signs at historic sites, including The Symmes Farm, The Squaw Sachem's Reservation, Increase Nowell's Farm, John Harvard's Land, and Site of First House, the last two of which survive.

WINCHESTER'S 100TH ANNIVERSARY - 1950

In Winchester's centennial year, the Board of Selectmen proclaimed April 23-30 as Centennial Week. (See the Proclamation below.) Downtown buildings were decorated, and there were posters, souvenir buttons, store-front historical displays, school pageants, an art exhibit, and a great parade on Saturday, April 29. On April 30, a choral festival was held at Town Hall.

"In spite of the driving rain and cold," the committee reported, "the Parade on Saturday was magnificent and memorable, taking one hour and a half to pass a given point." The police chief estimated that about 70,000 people were on the streets watching (in a town with a population of about 16,000). The route was 4 miles long. Almost 40 floats were entered. Marchers included the governor, state senator and representative, county commissioner, officials from the town, military bands and companies, high school band, members of local organizations, police and fire personnel, fire apparatus, and more.

Among the floats, that of Washington crossing the Delaware won the blue ribbon.
The Women's Republican Club's elephant took a tumble but was righted again.
Below: floats of the Historical Society, En Ka Society, VFW, and Winchester Hospital.

Some rode, and many marched – Fourth Degree Knights, Black Horse Hose Co., Boy Scouts, bands, military outfits, and many more.

WINCHESTER'S 125TH ANNIVERSARY - 1975

In honor of Winchester's 125th anniversary and in commemoration of the nation's Bicentennial, Town Meeting authorized a History Committee to oversee the reprinting of Henry S. Chapman's *History of Winchester* with a companion second volume. The first boxed sets, issued as an "anniversary edition," were presented to the Board of Selectmen on Dec. 7, 1975. Town Meeting also approved funding for a Bicentennial Bike Path.

The year 1975 was also significant for the Historical Society due to the creation of a new Archival Center, using two rooms in the basement of the Sanborn House. Though not the first or last headquarters for Winchester's historical collections, it was another reason for the Society to celebrate that year.

For the nation's 200th anniversary, which coincided with the town's 125th anniversary, the Historical Society commissioned a Bicentennial Medallion. Historical Society President Fran VerPlanck, Medallion Committee chairman Marcia Wood, and Archivist Ed Galvin presented bicentennial medallions to Selectman Larry Smith, in company with engraver George Pacetti, in June 1975.

WINCHESTER'S 350TH ANNIVERSARY - 1988

Winchester again celebrated a major anniversary of the area's settlement in 1988. Unlike the 250th, this time the anniversary was reckoned from the year 1638, the year that the Book of Possessions recorded the first land grants and a date which is included in the Town Seal, along with the year of incorporation, 1850. Saturday, Sept. 24, was Homecoming Day, whose main feature was an Olde New England Towne Faire on the Common, including demonstrations of a variety of crafts, pony rides, a cider press, and entertainment, all followed by a ham and bean supper at the Fire House and dancing. A Grand Parade followed on Sunday.

WINCHESTER'S 150TH ANNIVERSARY - 2000

In 2000, the Winchester Historical Society took the lead celebrating the town's 150th anniversary. Under an unexpectedly fair sky, reminiscent of the joyful, bright, and cheerful spring day when the people of the new town of Winchester first celebrated the incorporation of their town, the town celebrated its 150th anniversary with gifts, including a new town flag and historic sign, time capsule, walking tour, and anniversary cake.

After some prelude music by the Beacon Brass Quintet, Town Moderator John Sullivan opened the ceremonies with some remarks about the causes behind the incorporation, including the creation of the new church, political differences between South Woburn and Woburn, and, of course, differences of opinion about the spending of town money.

Sandy Rodgers of the Design Review Committee presented the new official town flag to Selectman Priscilla McPhee. Showing off the town seal on the flag, Rodgers explained that the blue center represented the water and the green ring the fields of the area once designated Waterfield. Firefighters then raised the flag on the pole outside Town Hall, accompanied by the quintet which punctuated each presentation with music.

Edward O'Connell then spoke with much humor about the time capsule and summarized his thoughts on putting together the contents. The capsule was accepted by Selectman Karl Fryzel. With the help of Town Manager Brian Sullivan and Selectman Charles Nurnberger, it was lowered into its resting place in front of the Honor Roll to await its uncovering fifty years hence.

A framed copy of the sesquicentennial poster, showing windows of Winchester, was presented by Elston Miles, a volunteer for the 150th Anniversary Committee, to Selectman James A. Johnson.

Frederick Lyman of the Winchester Historical Commission told the story of his finding an early map of Winchester after moving into the house built by Nathan B. Johnson, the first chairman of the Board of Selectmen. Although restoration work on the map had not been completed, Lyman formally presented it to Selectman Charles Nurnberger along with a photograph of the map in its original condition. The map was later hung in the Public Library.

The final gift, a sign depicting scenes of historic Winchester produced by the Winchester Historical Society, also was not yet finished. However, copies of its two sides, one showing the 1854 map of Winchester and the other a map of the downtown area, both surrounded by historic views, were on display. Carol Keller, president of the Historical Society, presented the sign to the town manager. The actual sign was subsequently installed along the path between the building and river.

A group of over 100 people then took part in a walking tour sponsored by the Historical Society. The tour began under the "Purchase of Land from the Indians" mural in the library. With discussion of how the community changed over time, the tour proceeded to the downtown area, noting the Selectman Johnson House, site of the Converse House, Lyceum Hall, Brown & Stanton Building and other sites along the way. In front of the First Congregational Church the story of the incorporation was told. The tour ended at Town Hall with the story of the naming of the town after Col. William P. Winchester.

Inside Town Hall, a display of Winchester artworks was hung on the walls of the Winchester Room where two high school students, Peter Feigenbaum and Josh Blaine performed their skit, "Winchester: A Town, A Train, A Turning Point," a state winner for National History Day.

Col. Winchester's punch bowl

Col. Winchester's elaborate silver punch-bowl, formerly kept on his yacht and presented to the town by the Colonel's son Thomas in 1900, was brought out for the occasion and participants, including one family of descendants of the Colonel's, enjoyed punch and anniversary cake.

As an added feature, several historical documents and art works were on display, including the Act of Incorporation, the Town Seal, a set of paintings by Charles Pressey, a 1941 pictorial map of Winchester by Ernest Dudley Chase plus some of his drawings, a watercolor of Mill Pond, drawings for the town history by W. H. W. Bicknell, a portrait of Nathaniel Richardson by Edward Brackett (one of the characters

in the skit), an etching of a blacksmith shop by Shogher Baghdoyan, plus two anonymous views of the Locke and Richardson farms.

Town of Winchester
A
Proclamation
for its
HUNDREDTH ANNIVERSARY

On April 30, 1850, the Governor of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts approved Chapter 255 of the Acts of 1850, which formally incorporated the Town of Winchester.

In 1638, farm lands, comprising what is now Winchester, were granted to certain citizens of Charlestown. Thereafter this area, while locally known as Waterfield, and sometimes as South Woburn, because a part of Woburn, Medford and West Cambridg (later known as Arlington).

At the times of its incorporation in 1850, Winchester, named for Colonel William P. Winchester , was a quiet little villiage with approximately two hundred and fifty voters and a town valuation of $400,000. In 1851 at the Town Meeting, report was made as to municipal expenditures for the year totaling $4,116.63. In addition to this amount, $4,000 was appropriated in 1850 for the erection of four new school buildings. The construction of the Boston and Lowell Railroad through the Town in 1835 resulted in the ultimate abandonment of the old Middlesex Canal in 1846. Neither in 1850 nor 1851 did the Town appropriate any money for its roads and highways. The Town did, however, in 1851 purchase a hand tub fire engine to be manned by volunteers. The police department consisted of two constables elected at the Town Meeting.

From these simple and humble beginnings, the Town has through the years enjoyed a steady growth in population and community prosperity and has advanced to its present position of dignity and importance. Its inhabitants have faithfully served their country in the Civil War, Spanish War and in the two World Wars. Its population is in excess of seventeen thousand. It has a valuation of nearly $38,000,000 and yearly municipal expenditures of nearly $1,750,000. What advances have been made in its municipal growth, its schools, water system and reservoirs, roads and highways, police and fire departments, parks and playgrounds. Wiile primartly a residential town, yet it has fits industries, its stores, offices and banks. It is a town of homes with men and women filled with a strong community spirit.

Winchester to-day is what it is because of the unselfish, wholehearted devotion that its men and women have been willing through the years of its life to give to it. It will continue to advance and render ever increasing service to its inhabitants only so long as that willingness to give freely of their time, energy and money and their desire to serve the community continue. While the roll of honorable community service to Winchester is long and distinguished, yet there is room on the scroll as it unrolls for even greater service by those who shall follow: While we look back on the past hundred years with pride, we also look forward with eager anticipation to the greater achievements yet to come in the years ahead.

NOW THEREFORE we, the Board of Selectmen of this Town of Winchester, do hereby proclaim that the period beginning April 23, 1950 and ending April 30, 1950, shall be known as CENTENNIAL WEEK. We urge our fellow townsmen to join with our churches, our schools, our clubs, our fraternal and social organizations to celebrate the week in a manner fitted to commemorate the success that Winchester has enjoyed as a municipality and in a manner fitted to spur every one of us who lives herein to a nobler sense of civic dignity, of civic righteousness and of civic friendliness.

As we celebrate this occasion, may we not forget to pause and express our thanks to Almighty God, the Father of us all, for the many blessings which He has bestowed on our community through the last hundred years and upon us, for His ceaseless care and in permitting us to live in this community, and may we all join in a prayer for peace, good will and universal brotherhood in years to come.

Given under our hand and seal this seventeenth day of April ,1950.

BOARD OF SELECTMEN
VINCENT FARNSWORTH, JR.
NICHOLAS H. FITZGERALD
HARRISON F. LYMAN, JR.
HARRY E. CHEFALO

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[2] The new street was first referred to as “the road across the pond.” The pond was Judkins Pond which at that time extended to the north covering what is now Skillings Road (east of the railroad) and the site of the high school. Due to complaints about the long walk to get around the pond when going north to “the Plains” from the Center and to the tragedies which occurred when people took the short route by walking along the railroad tracks, the town built a new road, extending Railroad Avenue north to Spruce Street, and called it Shore Road. (The section north of the current pond disappeared again when the high school was built.)

It so happened that an extension of the Metropolitan Sewer was being dug and the contractor was dumping excavated material next to the tracks. With this free material plus the use of “ashes and other refuse material” (as described in the Board of Health’s annual report), Town Meeting approved this low-cost project and the new path was created. It was later developed into Shore Road, which extended from the center up to Nelson Street until the current high school was built.