Kellogg

A Story of a Civic committee

In one of the earliest treasurer's books, of the Harpswell Garden Club is an entry dated July 13th, 1939. "Paid, Perley Hackett for Church Walk...$49.50". This apparently was the first civic project of the Harpswell Garden Club, and there are no more statements regarding civic progress until 1945 when the Civic Committee decided to do more in the way of twon improvements.

The first project under the new regime (NOT was another ~~xxkk~~ stone walk leading up to the memorial stone on the Town Commons. This stone, by the way, would not have been there had Annie Douglas, our vigorous Postmistress for many years, raised around $300 to have the stone placed where it is on the Common and the names of all the men on Harpswell Neck who served in World War II inscribed on the bronze plaque. In addition to having the walk built, the Civic Committee did some planting of evergreens around the stone and each year for 25 years have put in a planting to enhance the beauty of the stone. Some years we planted giant Emporer tulips and then when these faded, red geraniums. Again in memory of the men who served.

Our next venture was the digging of a well for the Fire Department. This was a hand dug well and is back of the present fire hall. It was hoped that we might have an artesian well near the Improvement Hall at the Center so that it would be available for our many dinners and socials, but vigorous apposition on the part of one member of the committee, who insisted that this would bring more undesireable ~~xx~~settlers to our Center made us decide to dig the well for the Fire Department.

In time for ~~xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx~~the celebration of one of our early Harpswell Days, the Committee was distressed at the shabby appearance of the Improvement Hall and spent $57 on painting the front of the building. At the time, the tables used on Harpswell Day had wooden ~~xxxxx~~ tressels on which to rest and which tore our guest's nylon ~~xxxxx~~ hose, so again the committee agreed to pay one half the cost of metal legs which amount to around $30, with the King's Daughters paying the other half.

In the corner of the old (unpainted) burying ground behind the Town House stood a tragic looking shabby building which housed the ancient hearse which was purchased by the ~~xxxx~~ public spirited towns people for $1,000 about 100 years before. The unsitly building which housed it was built from one huge Spruce tree which had been cut, hauled to Gatchell's Mill in Brunswick and planedinto boards. The committee decided that it did not belong in the corner of the burying ground, but should be moved to the town commons. George Allen moved the building for $40; John Allen purchased for a small amount some fine white clapboards, a new four sided roof was put on the building, the old doors replaced with heavyweight eliptical doors. Lawrence Merriman gave us a pair of strap hinges which his blacksmith grandfather had made and Mrs. David Sturgis gave us a matching pair. The old padlock was taken off the door and a snap lock was put on so that it might be easier access for anyone.

For twenty years a sign had hung on the old building "Lowe Bros. Paints" so when the restored building was ready for painting, we wrote to the head of Public Relations of Lowe Brothers and asked for five gallon of their best outside white paint. It came almost by return post and provided three paintings of the handsome new building.

Lee Macilvane, a member of the committee, was on Orr's Island and saw a fine surrey with a fringe on top for sale for $10. He brought it home ~~taxhmxmxxhtmx~~ behind his car and the Civic Committee gladly paid the $10 and became its owner. This was put in the Hearse House along with the ancient hearse.

The next bit of Civic Improvement was the ~~xmxmxmx~~ moving of a stepping stone which had been chucked into a corner of the common to get it out of the way. Perley Hackett, our Selectman, asked if we would have it moved back to the place where it belonged and mounted. For the sum of $7.00 it was done and now when you come to worship in the old Town House, which was the first church, you may alight from your horse on the stepping stone which was there over two hundred years ago.

Our next project was a tremendous effort. During the war years and after, the old burying ground, for which the Harpswell Center Improvement Ass'n was organized to care for, had not been cleared for years. When we asked people if they would help with the old burying grounds, some even asked where it was, since it had become a part of the forest. For months on end, a small group of volunteers cut down good size trees, pulled out stumps, cut bushes and grass until finally some semblence of order prevailed. Then the Civic Committee paid around $500 for a stone mason to dig up and reset in concrete a large number of the oldest slate stones in the ~~mxxrxxg~~ burying ground in hopes that they might last for another hundred years. We have, also, thru' the years, tried to have several cleanup parties during the summer months to keep the Burying Ground in as good condition as possible. It is an expensive, back-breaking, undertaking and a disgrace that many of our townspeople whose ancestors sleep there never come by to help physically nor to help financially with this tremendous undertaking.

Of tremendous interest to us also has been the restoration of the old Town House which was built in 1757-58 and is the oldest meeting house in the state of Maine. Through the years the Garden Club has contributed generously to the restoration which has, for the most part, been done by the Harpswell Bi-Centenniel committee whose name was changed later to The Harpswell Historical Restoration Committee, Since people were confused when they discovered that the Harpswell Bi-Centenniel had been celebrated in 1958.

At North Harpswell, there stood another tragic, dilapitated building that had been closed for years and falling down. It was the Union Church, built by the Universalists in 1841 at which time there were only 11 members in the Society. They found they were not able to support it and opened the ranks to non-Universalists and renamed it Union Church. During the lean years when many parishoners moved out

the little church was closed and the little building fell into greater and greater disrepaid. The Civic Committee talked often of the building and its fate. One day during discussion, Mrs. L. L. Toole, a member, said " I'm sick of hearing of this place, lets either do something or keep still". That was the sparkplug that precipitated action. We drove up to the building for which the key had long been lost and crawled in through a window to view a most tragic spectical. The steel ceiling had rusted and was hanging in layers, the right side of the building was devoid of plaster, the carpets on the floor were watersoaked and rotten. There were 79 panes of glass broken and altogether it presented a most heartrending sight. The lovely pine paneled doors had all been removed from the pews, the organ had been taken out of the building as had the beautiful chandelier, fortunately for safe keeping, and how the Civic Committee had the courage to think they could save the place is still a miracle. It had been rumored that William Barnes, who lived next store, had some claim on the building so we decided to go and call upon him. He was in his boat building shop behind the church, the door was open and we all filed in. We asked Mr. Barnes "Does that building belong to you"? "No", he said. "Do you want that Building for a boat building shop"? "No," he said. "Would you mind if we fixed it up?" Again, "No". So with his blessing, we sallied forth. Under Universalist law, a church building belongs to the pew holders. We found there were some eight or nine of these still living so we called upon them to see if they would mind if we would restore the building. They all agreed we could do it and the work began. We hired Stanley Merriman to remove the debris, seven truckloads of it. We found the lovely doors stacked in the front of the ~~xxxxx~~ church to raise the floor for the organ and some of them were in the baleony. The beautiful chandalier had been taken down by John Allen to save it and was safe in his barn, but minus six of the lamps which had apparently been taken for souveniers. A reporter friend of John's took a ~~xxxxx~~ picture of him which appeared in the Portland paper. He was holding one of the lamps and the caption read "His life would be much brighter if he could have six more lamps like these." A man in Kesar Falls read the article and said "By golly, I know where there are six of those lamps in the old masonic tmeple. They saved them when they put in electricity and I know where they are". So he wrote the committee saying that for $5 each, we could have the six lamps. A neightbor brought them by car from Kesar Falls and now the chandalier was complete with its twelve lights. The six lamps were paid for by contribution from the committee.

The work of restoration began being the replacement of 79 panes of glass. Once this was done and the rain kept out, the building began to take on a new atmosphere. To prevent further deterioration, Leon and Edmund Ricker, who had gone to the church as children, reshigled the roof for a very nominal sum. The big job was plastering the interior and putting in a new ceiling. The contractor, Mr. Rollins of Topsham, did this work for us and did it a most attractive and finished way. We did not have the money for this big job, but one member of the committee put up some securities and borrowed the money so that the work might go forward. Then came the painting of the interior as well as the outside, reputtying the windows and making the place look as closely as possible as it was in 1841 when it was built.

by carpenters trained in the best English tradition and we are quite sure it was inspired by a Sir Christopher Wren blueprint since the RAF Memorial Church in London, St. Clement Danes, is very reminiscent of this little church. Architectually, it is certainly one of the finest buildings in the part of Maine.

The carpet on the pulpit, on the aisles and in front of the church is a one hundred year old ingrain carpet which was given to us by the Universalist Church in Brunswick when they grew elegant and discarded it. Once the church was warm and rainproof, the organ mysteriously reappeared and it was hoisted into the balcony where it belonged as it had been in 1841, since in those days music was always played in the balcony, and the congregation upon standing, was asked by the precher to turn and face the music, from which this well-known term was derived. Numerous lovely gifts have been given to the Union Church. Harry Overend, a British craftsman, completely restored the battered bookcase and put new walnut doors on the base. The two mahogany chairs at the entrance and the mahogany table were the gifts of Mr. & Mrs. Robert Barnes; the very handsome Empire table in front of the pulpit was a gift of Mrs. Russell Coffin; the pair of beautiful wrought iron candleabra were a gift of Mrs. Beckwith in memory of her husband, Mr. Frederick Harland Beckwith, a well-known architect. The very ornate Empire sofa behind the pulpit was a gift of Mrs. Davies in memory of her husband, Lt. Herbert Davies. The Adams Bible on the pulpit was a gift of Mrs. David Saurgis and belonged in the famous Massachusetts Adams family. The two collection boxes were made from the ancient boxes still in use in the First Parish Church of Portland, one handle was found in Union Church which belonged to the original collection boxes.

The church has been used now for around 15 years for Vesper Services. Three are held each summer with enthusiastic worhsippers coming from many parts of the state. Dr. Robert Cummins, who has been interested in this project since the beginning, has been in charge of securing speakers for the Sunday services these many years. Mr. John M. Dunlap, Jr., a member of our committee, has rendered a youman service in providing us with splendid musical programs.

Again, for years, in the center of our town was a shabby abandoned looking plot of land of two acres which belonged to the old Allen family. John Allen has been amember of the Civic Committee since its beginning and time and again I had said to him I want you to keep closely in touch with your cousins who own that lot and if they are ever willing to sell it, the Civic Committee will buy it. Finally the day came when John reported to us that his cousin had decided to sell. How much, we asked. Well, he said, the first price was $850 but I said that was too much so he dropped to $750, but I still said no. Then when he mentioned $650, I said we would buy at that price. So the two acre lot came into the hands of the Civic Committee, and we decided to make an arboretum. We have spent a great deal of time, money and strength on the two acre lot. We keep it mowed and in an attractive condition and it has certainly added tremendously to the looks of Harpswell Center. At a meeting in the fall 1970, it was decided to be called the Anne Frances Hodgkins Park in recognition

of her twenty five years as chairman of the Civic Committee.

When the new W. Harpswell Elementary School was built, the Civic Committee offered to landscape the grounds. Sears, Roebuck and Co. gave us the original hundred as "seed money" and we contributed the rest of the funds for the landscaping. There are several large yews that have grown nicely, some flowering crab, maple and birch trees, a very handsome Japanese Plum tree and numerous winged euonymous and spirea. The lawn has never been decently finished and it was hoped that this year we might do a better job of making the place more attractive.

Another outreach of our Civic Committee is the Memorial Garden at the Brunswick Naval Air Station. It was instigated by the chairman and she and Jeanne Gilliam did the ordering of the trees and shrubs and supervised the planting.

A second outreach of the Civic Committee is the lovely rose garden on the grounds of the parish church in Harpswell, England, which was started in 1200 AD. When the chairman was in Harpswell in 1969, she planted the rose garden on her birthday as a gift from the Harpswell Garden Club. The Civic Committee also gave the parish church a beautiful wrought iron flower stand, such as is used in all lovely cathedrals and churches in England. This was a most welcomed gift and adds to the attractiveness of the ancient church.

In order to be of service in other parts of our town, when the handsome Harpswell Island school was built, the Civic Committee bought nearly one hundred dollars ~~worth~~ worth of plants to fill the inside windown boxes.

This year, 1970, the civic Committee gave the Sebasgodegan Garden Club $50 as a contribution towards the restoration of the Cundy's Harbor church.

Each year for many long years we have contributed $50 to $100 for garden therapy at Togus and according to recent reports, one of 15 clubs in the state who support this valuable work.

The money from all these various and sundry civic projects has been raised in the following ways:

For 25 yrs. we havehad an annual art show - one of the oldest in the state - and in the last 15 years a one or two man show or a seven man show to raise additional funds. The Annual Harpswell Day, it will have its 25th birthday in 1971 has brought in generous amounts of money The three Vesper Services at the Union Church usually nets $300, the Union Church has been used for weddings and funerals and our friends have been most generous in paying for our services. Our membership as a whole has been unfailingly generous in giving their support to any project the Civic Committee has undertaken and we cannot thank them too greatly for the wonderful way in which they have held up our hands these many years. Altogether the Civic Committee has earned around $35,000 in the 25 years of its vigonous existence.

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