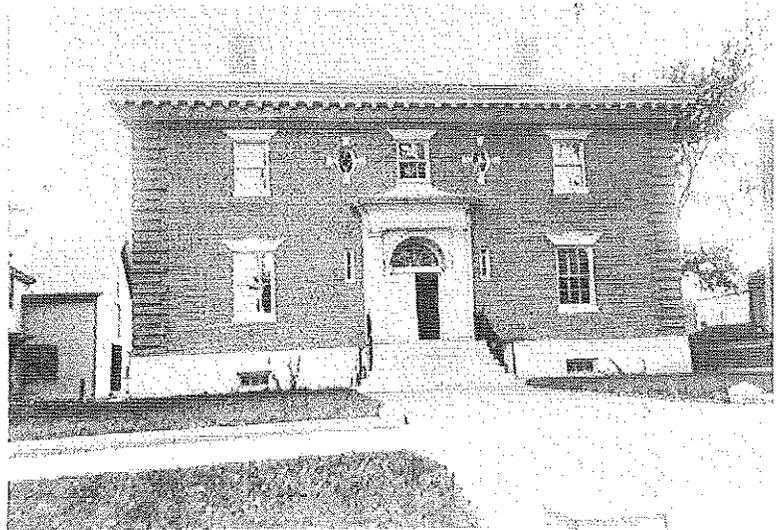


## Town Office Building 1892

10 Front Street

In 1890 the Rockingham County Commissioners determined they needed a larger building. They planned to sell the 1826 County Records building then in use at 47 Front Street. This lot later became the site of the Exeter Public Library built in 1894.<sup>1</sup> (This building currently houses the Exeter Historical Society.) The current Town Office Building was built in 1892 for the Rockingham County Probate and Deeds Office.

Following their plan, the county commissioners purchased the Henry C. Moses lot on Front Street for \$5,000. This lot was across Front Street from the Exeter Town Hall and County Court House. The architects chosen for the new records building were Fox and Gale of Boston, MA. Gale was Edward Jewell Gale, a former resident of Exeter, cousin of Blanche and Alice Jewell, Exeter teachers. The building was ready for use in 1892.<sup>11</sup>



County Probate and Deeds Office circa 1940  
Exeter Historical Society

Once the County Commissioners had a new, completed Probate and Deeds Office, they proceeded with a new Court House. In the early 1890's, Court proceedings were held on the second floor of the Town Hall. George G. Adams of Lawrence, MA was the chosen architect. The Court House was built between the Town Hall and the First Church where the Tenney house had been. This house was moved to 65 High Street, its ell was moved to River Street and the barn to 11 Linden Street. The new Court House was ready for public inspection January 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup>, 1895 and for Superior Court three days later.

Joan C. Pratt contrasts these two 1890s County buildings, built in very different architectural styles, as examples of "a common acceptance of a wide range of historical architectural forms in the Exeter area during the period 1888-1900". She wrote of the Town Office building and others much like it as "made of solid brick with little or very restrained ornamental detail". Local buildings of similar style to the



First Church and County Court House, Exeter, N.H.

Town Office Building include: The Exeter Banking Company (1893) on Water Street, the Masonic Building (1896) on Water Street and Soule and Peabody Halls built by Phillips Exeter Academy. The Court House represented a French Romanesque style made popular in the Boston area by Henry Hobson Richardson in the 1880s. Its characteristics were heavy stone masonry, rounded arch openings, low pitched roofs and generous overhanging eaves. The railroad station (1890-91) before modern modifications was another example of this style in Exeter.<sup>iii</sup>

An addition was added to the Rockingham County Probate and Deeds Office in 1927 to provide more space for work rooms in the offices.<sup>iv</sup> The building was colloquially known as the County Records Building. Attempts to find County records for details of the 1927 addition were not successful. One explanation for this was that many records were destroyed in a flooded basement at the Rockingham County complex, North Road, Brentwood, NH.

One local resident remembers visiting the County Records Building to find answers to questions while doing deed research on a piece of Exeter property. Register of Deeds at the time was John W. A. Green. His office was upstairs in the front corner on the Water Street end of the building, currently the Town Planner's office. He answered the questions without referring to any records because he remembered the history of the lot in question. Mr. Green was born in 1874 and was Register of Deeds from 1906 until his death in 1963. Edith Holland was appointed to succeed Mr. Green in May 1963 and continued until her retirement in 1985.<sup>v</sup>

Land owned by the Gulf Oil Company was leased to the town for \$1500 in 1947 for off-street parking. This land abutted the rear of the County Records Building. The land provided parking for town and county employees, business people and merchants. More land was leased in 1951 for fifty additional parking places.<sup>vi</sup>

County Commissioners in 1963 approved a new county building to have all county functions in one place. It was to be located on the Hampton Road near the Hampton Falls Road intersection.<sup>1</sup> Ground breaking ceremonies were held 19 October 19<sup>th</sup>, 1964.

After two town meetings in 1964 and 1965, Exeter voters agreed to buy the former County Records building to be used as a Town Office building. The Town Offices were transferred from the Town Hall to the newly acquired building in December 1966.

In 1967 Exeter Selectman sponsored two articles in the town warrant for the sale and purchase of land. One was article No. 19 for \$32,000 to sell the Town Library

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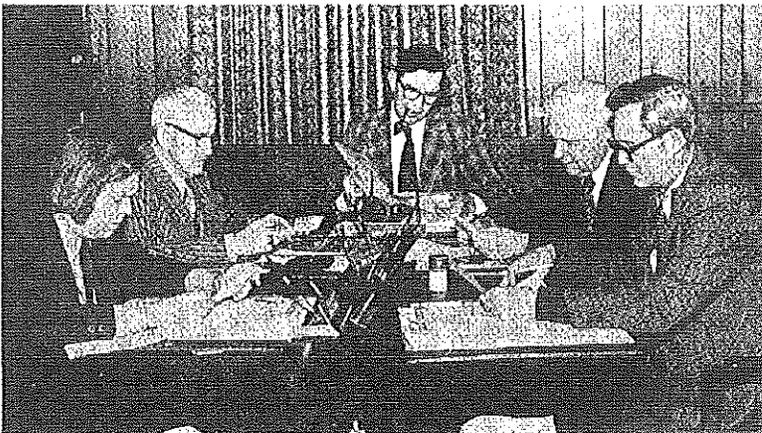
<sup>1</sup> This building is now a medical complex and the newest County Court House and associated offices are located at 10 Route 125, Brentwood, NH.

and land to Phillips Exeter Academy. It was tabled by voice vote. Article No. 20 was for \$32,000.00 to purchase land and buildings formerly occupied by the Superior Court House. This too, was tabled by a voice vote. The County Commissioners were contemplating two offers, from the First Congregational Church and the Town of Exeter. The property was eventually sold to the Exeter Banking Company.

The voters approved appropriations for upgrades to the Town Offices throughout the 1970's.



Town Offices Building general office room - 1966 Annual Reports of the Town of Exeter  
Shown – Treasurer, Town Clerk, Secretary-Receptionist, Tax Collector, and Office clerk  
1973 Annual Reports of the Town of Exeter



Selectmen's new office next to the Nowak Room (current IT office)  
1973 Annual Reports of the Town of Exeter



Shirley Sheehan in the new Tax Collector's Office  
1973 Annual Reports of the Town of Exeter

Town Clerk Evelyn Zarnowski at the office's public service window  
1973 Annual Reports of the Town of Exeter



Town Clerk's Office  
1973 Annual Reports of the Town of Exeter



Tax Assessor's Office  
1974 Annual Reports of the Town of Exeter



New mini-computer  
1974 Annual Reports of the Town of Exeter

Warrant article No. 19 in 1981 was a request by the Selectmen for \$51,000 to purchase an integrated telephone system for the town offices and departments. This passed with a vote of 289 yea to 93 no.

In 1982 Selectmen requested, in article No. 29, \$75,000 for sprinklers and storm windows for the Town Hall and improvements to the heating system of the Town office building. This passed in a voice vote.

Warrant article No. 26 in 1987, sponsored by the Selectmen, requested \$10,000 to construct handicap access to the Town Hall and Town Office. This passed with a voice vote.

Various town office renovations at \$34,500 were requested by the Selectman in article No. 10 in 1988. The request passed by ballot vote. Also In 1988 Selectmen made a request in article No. 14 that asked for a bond issue to renovate the Town Clerk's office space. That failed by ballot vote.

Selectman sponsored article No. 31 in 2000 for \$90,000 to replace the Town Office slate roof and install a snow belt. This article passed by ballot vote.

A request was made by Selectmen in article No. 19 in 2001 for \$400,000 to renovate the Town Offices. The ballot vote failed because a 3/5 vote was not reached.

In 2003 a request was made in article No. 29 by selectmen for \$50,000 to address space needs and design renovations to the Town Office Building. This failed by ballot vote.

Selectmen sponsored a request in article No.35, in 2004 for \$25,000 for a detailed study of building options for new town offices. This article failed by ballot vote.

In 2005, a request by selectmen, article No. 18 of \$100,000 for a detailed study for the use of Town Offices passed by ballot vote.

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<sup>i</sup> Ibid. Merrill, Exeter, New Hampshire, 1988. Page xxviii

<sup>ii</sup> Ibid. Merrill, Exeter, New Hampshire, 1988, Page 16

<sup>iii</sup> Ibid. Merrill, Exeter, New Hampshire, 1988, Pages 444-445

<sup>iv</sup> Ibid. Merrill, Exeter, New Hampshire, 1988, Page 158

<sup>v</sup> Ibid. Merrill, Exeter, New Hampshire, 1988, Page 279, 281

<sup>vi</sup> Ibid. Merrill, Exeter, New Hampshire, 1988, Page 222

## APPENDIX

Rockingham County Deed, Book 1837, pp. 60 and 61.

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Annual Reports of the Town of Exeter 1964, 1965, 1972, 1973, 1975

No Revenue Stamps Required.

1837 060

Know all men by these presents

14923  
Ser 21 10 41 AM '66

THAT, the County of Rockingham, a Municipal Corporation in the  
County, State of  
New Hampshire, for consideration paid, grant to the Town of Exeter, a Municipal Corporation,  
Rockingham County, State of  
New Hampshire, with WARRANTY COVENANTS,

A certain piece or parcel of land with the buildings thereon, situate in said  
Exeter, on the southeasterly side of Front Street, being more particularly bounded  
and described as follows:

Beginning on said Front Street at the northwesterly corner of land of Perley  
Gardner, thence running N 47 1/2° E, 75 feet on Front Street to a point at land of the  
Heirs of Otis H. Sleeper; thence turning and running S 39 3/4° E, by and along said  
land of Otis H. Sleeper Heirs, a distance of 7 rods and 19 links to land of the Mobil  
Oil Company; thence turning and running S 31 3/4° W by and along said land of Mobil  
Oil Company, a distance of 9 feet; thence turning and running S 32 1/2° E by and along  
said land of Mobil Oil Company, a distance of 6 rods and 12 links to land of the Town  
of Exeter; thence turning and running S 36° W by and along land of the Town of Exeter,  
a distance of 3 rods and 12 links to land of said Perley Gardner; thence turning and  
running N 39 1/2° W by and along said land of Perley Gardner, 14 rods and 23 links to  
said Front Street at the point of beginning.

Together with a right-of-way for all purposes over 5 feet in width of the land  
adjoining a part of the northerly side of the premises above described, and extending  
from said Front Street, 7 rods and 19 links to land of the Mobil Oil Company, and said  
5 feet together with 5 feet of land in width on a part of the northerly side of the  
land hereby conveyed, extending from said Street 7 rods and 19 links to land of said  
Mobil Oil Company are to constitute an open passageway 10 feet in width for the use  
of said Grantee, its successors and assigns, and the owner of the premises next ad-  
joining on the north, his or their heirs and assigns, forever, and a passageway for  
all purposes 5 feet in width on a part of the northerly side of the premises hereby  
conveyed, and extending from said Street, 7 rods and 19 links to land of Mobil Oil  
Company are hereby granted to the owners of the adjoining premises on the north and  
to his or their heirs and assigns forever.

Being the same premises conveyed to the County of Rockingham by Henry C. Moses,  
by Deed dated July 26, 1890, recorded in Rockingham County Registry of Deeds, Book  
522, Page 361.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, said County of Rockingham has caused these presents to be signed and  
sealed by its County Commissioners, duly authorized,

this 21<sup>ST</sup> day of SEPTEMBER, 1966

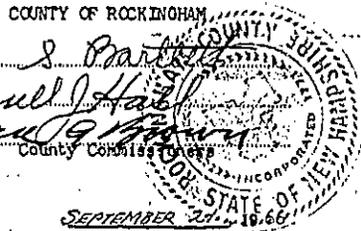
Witness:

Alvin E. Taylor  
(Witness to all three)

By W. S. Bartlett

By Russell J. Hall

By [Signature]



The State of New Hampshire

Rockingham,

Then personally appeared the above named County of Rockingham, by its County Commissioners,  
Ira A. Brown, William S. Bartlett, Sr. and Russell J. Hall,  
and acknowledged the foregoing instrument to be its and their voluntary act and deed, before me

Alvin E. Taylor  
Justice of the Peace.

1837 061

Excerpts from the minutes of the Rockingham County Delegation Meetings of Feb. 28th and March 25th, 1966.

County Home,  
Brentwood, N. H.  
Delegation Meeting  
Feb. 28, 1966.  
10:30 A.M.

" The membership having been properly notified, a meeting of the Rockingham DElegation was held on Feb. 28th. -----The roll call was read by the Clerk. -----The Clerk declared a quorum was present.

-----The next subject under consideration was the sale of the County Buildings. Mr. Osborne made the motion that the County Commissioners be authorized to sell the Records Building to the Town of Exeter for \$50,000. Mr. Kimball of Derry seconded the motion and the voice vote was affirmative.

Rockingham County Home  
Brentwood, N. H.  
Delegation Meeting  
March 25, 1966.

On March 14 -----notice was sent to the whole delegation of a meeting to be held at 11:00 A.M. The notice of this meeting and its purpose was printed as a paid notice in the Portsmouth Herald on Tuesday March 15, 1966.-----The Clerk called the roll. Those answering the call were: (46 names listed).

-----Mr. Osborne made the motion -----Resolved that the County Delegation hereby ratifies, approves and confirms all votes passed and actions taken at the delegation meeting of February 28, 1966, as recorded in the minutes of the Clerk of the Delegation, which are hereby approved, to the same extent as if the same were the votes and actions of this meeting. Further resolved that the County Commissioners are authorized to execute, seal and deliver all deeds and other written instruments necessary and proper to carry out the foregoing votes and actions. This motion was seconded by Mr. Keefe.

-----The Clerk called the roll-----Forty one voted for the motion as made by Mr. Osborne and four voted against it. The presiding vice-chairman declared that the actions taken by the Delegation at the meeting on Feb. 28 were ratified, approved and confirmed and that the County Commissioners were authorized to execute, seal and deliver all deeds and other written instruments necessary and to carry out the votes and actions taken at that meeting."



Copy  
of which I have hereunto set my hand and affixed the seal of  
Rockingham County this seventeenth day of May, 1966.

Edna B. Weeks Clerk  
Rockingham County Delegation

## **EXETER HIGH SCHOOL – PARKS AND RECREATION BUILDING**

Court Street

This Court Street School, built in 1848 as a High School, was a coeducational school until Robinson Female Seminary was built in 1867. The first high school graduation was in 1851. In 1908 the school curriculum changed from three years to four years so the first four year class (six members) graduated in June 1909. An addition to the school was approved by voters 1888.<sup>i</sup>

Charles H. Bell, writing about Exeter schools in 1888, said "High school was established, in district No. 1, to which pupils from the other districts were admissible, and the grammar and primary schools were kept distinct. A handsome house for the High school was erected near the old town-house on Court Street."<sup>ii</sup>

The fiftieth anniversary of Exeter High School was celebrated 30 June 1898. It began with a parade which started at the school (current Parks and Recreation building) and proceeded to the Town Hall where a banquet was held. The Town Hall was decorated with blue and white streamers and flags. An orchestra played during the afternoon and later for the evening reception and dance.<sup>iii</sup>

The need for a new high school was discussed in the 1910 school meeting but no decision was reached. However by the next spring there were so many high school students that the grammar school students were moved next door to the old town hall.

At the March 1911 school meeting it was voted to exchange the Spring Street school property for Phillips Exeter Academy playing fields on Linden Street. This would provide the land for building a new high school. (Some of the land on Spring Street was retained for possible expansion of the Public Library).

Ralph Adams Cram, an 1880 graduate of Exeter High School, was chosen as architect for the new school. At the same time he was to be architect for the Davis Library at Phillips Exeter Academy. Dedication of the new high school was held September 9<sup>th</sup> 1912.

At the 1912 school meeting it was voted to convert the former high school building into a four room school for third, fourth, fifth, and sixth grade students. (The first and second grades were taken from the [old] town hall to be divided between the School Street and Hall Place schools.<sup>iv</sup>

Voters approved a warrant article in the March 1959 town meeting authorizing the use of the Court Street school for a Community Center and provided \$500 for necessary renovations. It became the community project of the Junior Women's Club and won a \$300 first prize in the 1958-60 Community Achievement Contest sponsored by the New Hampshire Federation of Women's Clubs and the Sears Roebuck Foundation. The center was ready for an open house celebration in November 1959.

A high school teacher, Robert Knowles, was appointed supervisor of the youth program for Saturday mornings and Christmas vacation. The Center was used by a variety of groups including: the American Red Cross, the Visiting Nurse Association, a 4-H Boys club, three Girl Scout troops, and several other organizations that held meetings there. A large first floor room was furnished with comfortable chairs, a record player, games, and a TV set. The room was used by senior citizens in the morning and high school students after 3:00 P.M.<sup>v</sup>

In 1980, warrant article number 19, sponsored by the Selectmen petitioned \$90,000 for constructing an addition to the Exeter Recreation Building. The article failed to pass on a voice vote.

A 1984 warrant article, number 38, sponsored by the Selectmen requested \$20,000 for expansion of the Recreation Center for added Senior Activities. The article passed on a voice vote. However, this appears to be the last use of the old high school by the Senior Citizens because a year later, 1985, Exeter selectmen sponsored two warrant articles which passed on voice votes to renovate, furnish and equip the Senior Citizen's Center at the Old Fire Station.

Selectmen sponsored warrant article No. 15 in 1988 for a bond issue to renovate the Recreation Center on Court Street. It failed to pass by ballot vote.

In 1999 Selectmen sponsored warrant article No. 23 to renovate the Parks and Recreation Building. This passed on a ballot vote.

Warrant article No. 29, sponsored by the Selectmen in 2002 for \$25,000.00 to rebuild the handicap ramp at the Recreation Center passed on a ballot vote.

In 2005, Selectmen sponsored warrant article requesting \$28,000 to repair the roof of the Parks and Recreation Building. A ballot vote passed this request.

<sup>i</sup> Op Cit. Merrill; *Exeter, New Hampshire*, page 349-351

<sup>ii</sup> Op cit. Bell; *History of Exeter, New Hampshire*, page 290

<sup>iii</sup> Op Cit. Merrill; *Exeter, New Hampshire*, page 45-46

<sup>iv</sup> Op Cit. Merrill; *Exeter, New Hampshire*, page 352

<sup>v</sup> Op Cit. Merrill; *Exeter, New Hampshire*, page 262

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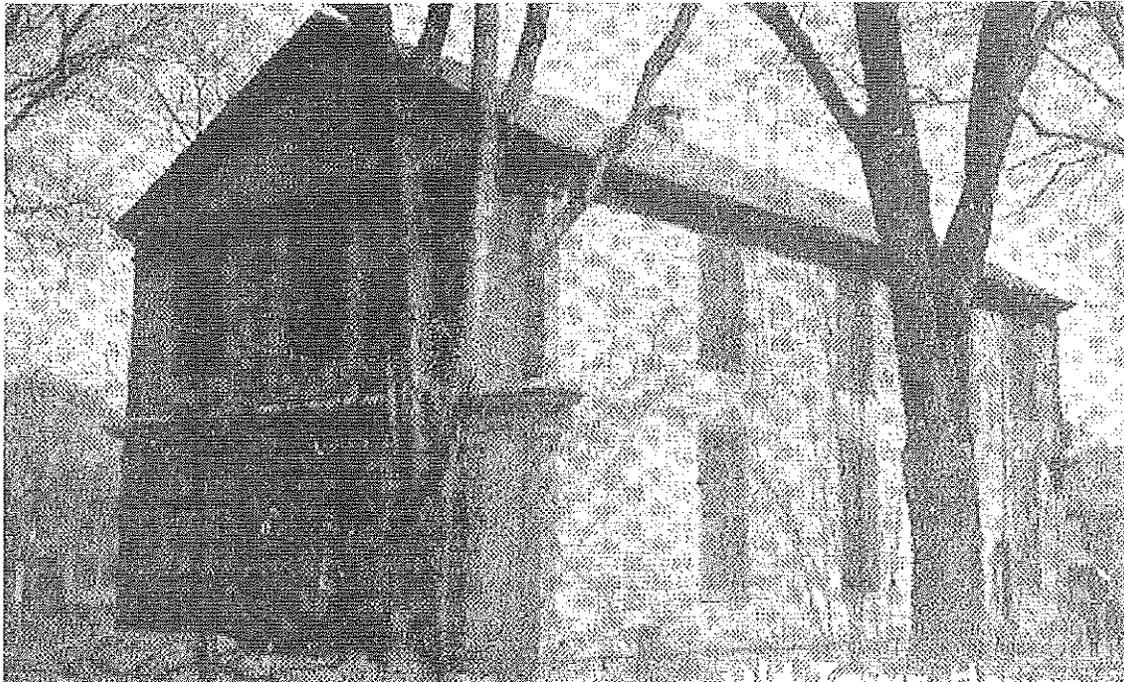
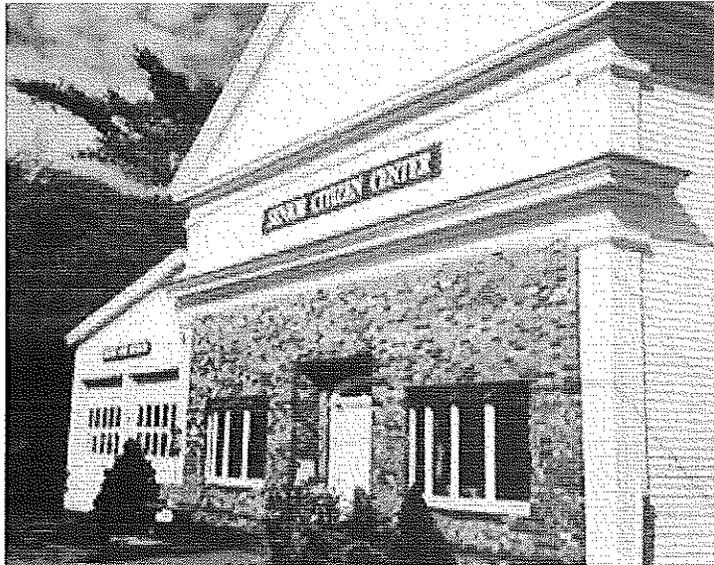
Peter Randall, Publisher, Portsmouth, NH

History of the Warrant Articles of the Town of Exeter, NH

## Senior Center 1841

Court Street

The Senior Center building has had a very colorful history. It was built on Court Street as a town hall replacing an earlier courthouse-town house that was destroyed by fire in 1841<sup>1</sup>. It has been a gathering place for senior citizen events, a meeting place for human service and other organizations and has housed the Exeter site for Rockingham County Meals on Wheels since 1985.



The old Town House, Court Street

A town meeting held the sixth of April, 1841 appropriated \$3,500 to build a new Town Hall with county court rooms. The building was of wood construction with some evidence that the court rooms were on the second floor. The Town meeting of 1853 had two articles seeking to erect a new town building and to see what amount of money would be raised for it. The older and more conservative voters felt the Court Street building was sufficient and was only 12 years old. A new structure, with land purchase, was estimated at an "exorbitant" \$30,000. A committee made some very colorful findings about the old Court House.

Reported in the Exeter News-Letter in April 1853, it was deemed "inconvenient for public purposes in its internal arrangements, deficient in both room and rooms." The building was also found to have severe structural deficiencies in its foundation and framing and there was no way it could be improved. In 1855, for \$20,000, the town building functions were replaced, only 14 years after it was built, in a new building, the present brick Town Hall.

In 1888, the Court Street building, sometimes referred to as the "old town hall", "was occupied by the Town Library, the Natural History Society, the Grand Army of the Republic, etc."<sup>iii</sup>

Next door, the Court Street High School (current Parks and Recreation Building) enrolled both grammar school and high school students. In the spring of 1911, however, there were so many high school students in attendance that there wasn't room for the grammar school students. The youngsters were moved to the old town hall.<sup>iii</sup> In 1919, at the March Town Meeting, voters appropriated \$500 to repair "the old town hall building" on Court Street (current Senior Citizen Center.)<sup>iv</sup>

The town warrant item number 15 in 1927 was a petition of John Templeton and seventeen others to see if the town of Exeter would vote to repair the old Town Hall on Court Street now used as the hook and ladder house and appropriate money for the same. Nancy Merrill described the result of this petition: "An appropriation of \$5,000.00 was raised to repair and renovate the old town hall on Court Street as a fire station. The old partitions were removed, and a new stairway was built at the rear of the building. Three garage doors were installed across the front, and a concrete floor was laid, making roomy quarters suitable for the hook and ladder truck and Hose Companies 2 and 3.

The second floor, supported by trusses, was used for a dining room and social hall. The massive timbers that were removed were as sound as when they were originally fitted more than eighty years before; much of the material removed during the renovation was stored at the dump for later use elsewhere."<sup>v</sup>



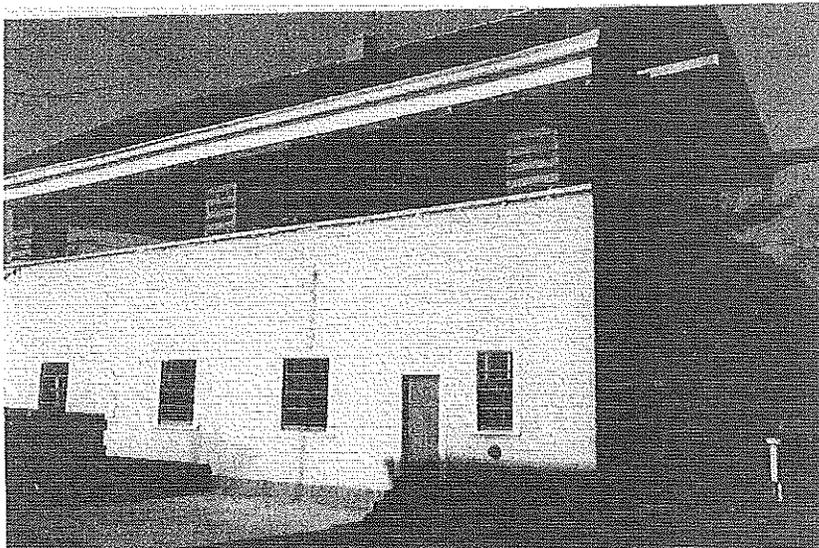
Old Town House, circa 1927, is renovated to house the Fire Department



Exeter Fire Department Fire Chief Toland and Deputy Chief Dupré  
1973 Report of the Town of Exeter

In 1985 two warrant articles were sponsored by the Selectmen expend funds for the Fire Department building on Court Street. Article 21 asked to see if the town would expend \$20,000 from the Senior Citizens Capitol Reserve Fund for renovation of the Old Fire Station on Court Street. . The "renovations" included the removal of the second floor. This action can still raise disgruntled comments from long time residents.

Article number 27 petitioned to spend \$4,500 to furnish and equip the Senior Citizen's Center at the Old Fire Station. This petition also passed on a voice vote.



Second floor for renovations of Senior Citizen Center 1985  
1985 Report of the Town of Exeter

<sup>i</sup> Op Cit. Merrill, *Exeter, New Hampshire*, page xxviii

<sup>ii</sup> Bell, Charles H., *History of Exeter, New Hampshire*, 1888. page 108

<sup>iii</sup> Op Cit. Merrill, *Exeter, New Hampshire*, page 351

<sup>iv</sup> Ibid. Merrill, *Exeter, New Hampshire* page 126

<sup>v</sup> Ibid. Merrill, *Exeter, New Hampshire*, page 157

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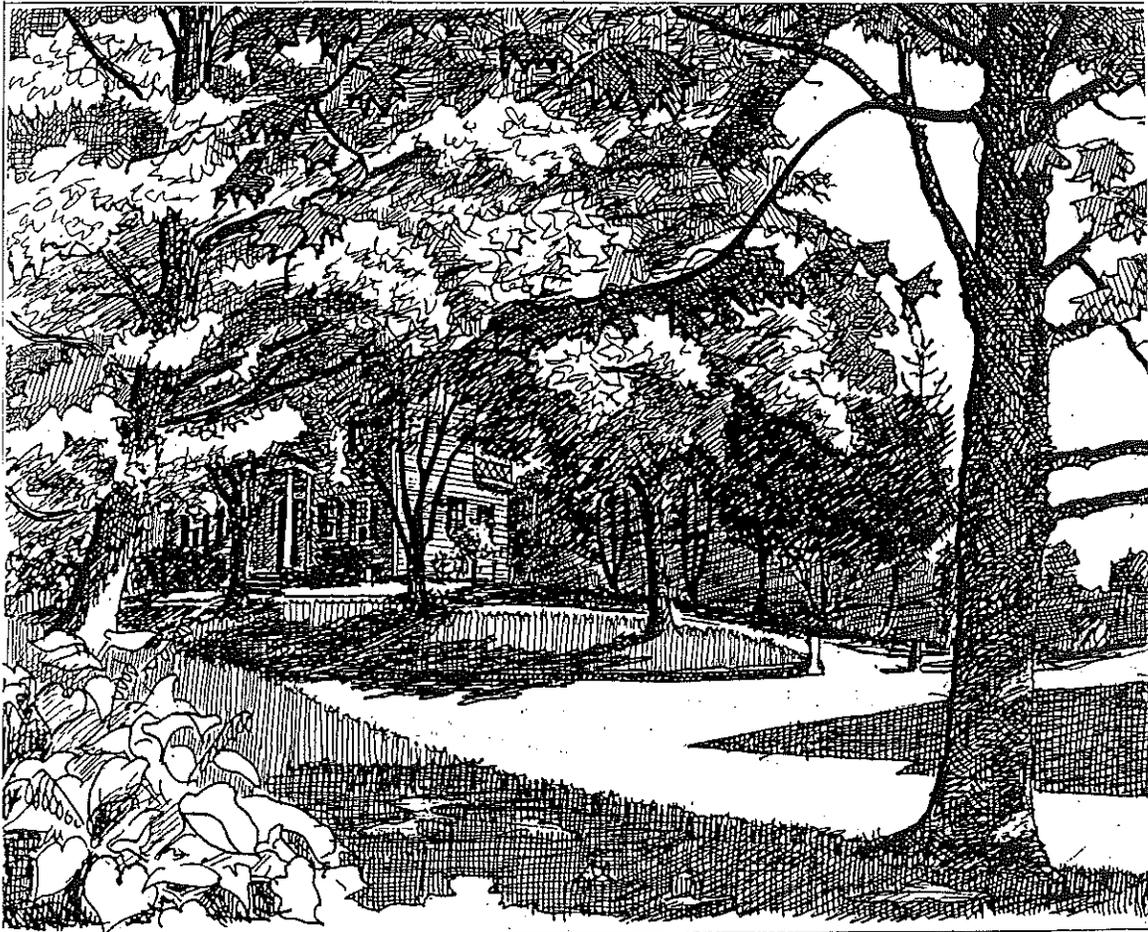
## Town House Common

Court and Bow Streets

### Seacoast Sketchbook

Herald Sunday, October 27, 1996-

by Bob Nilson

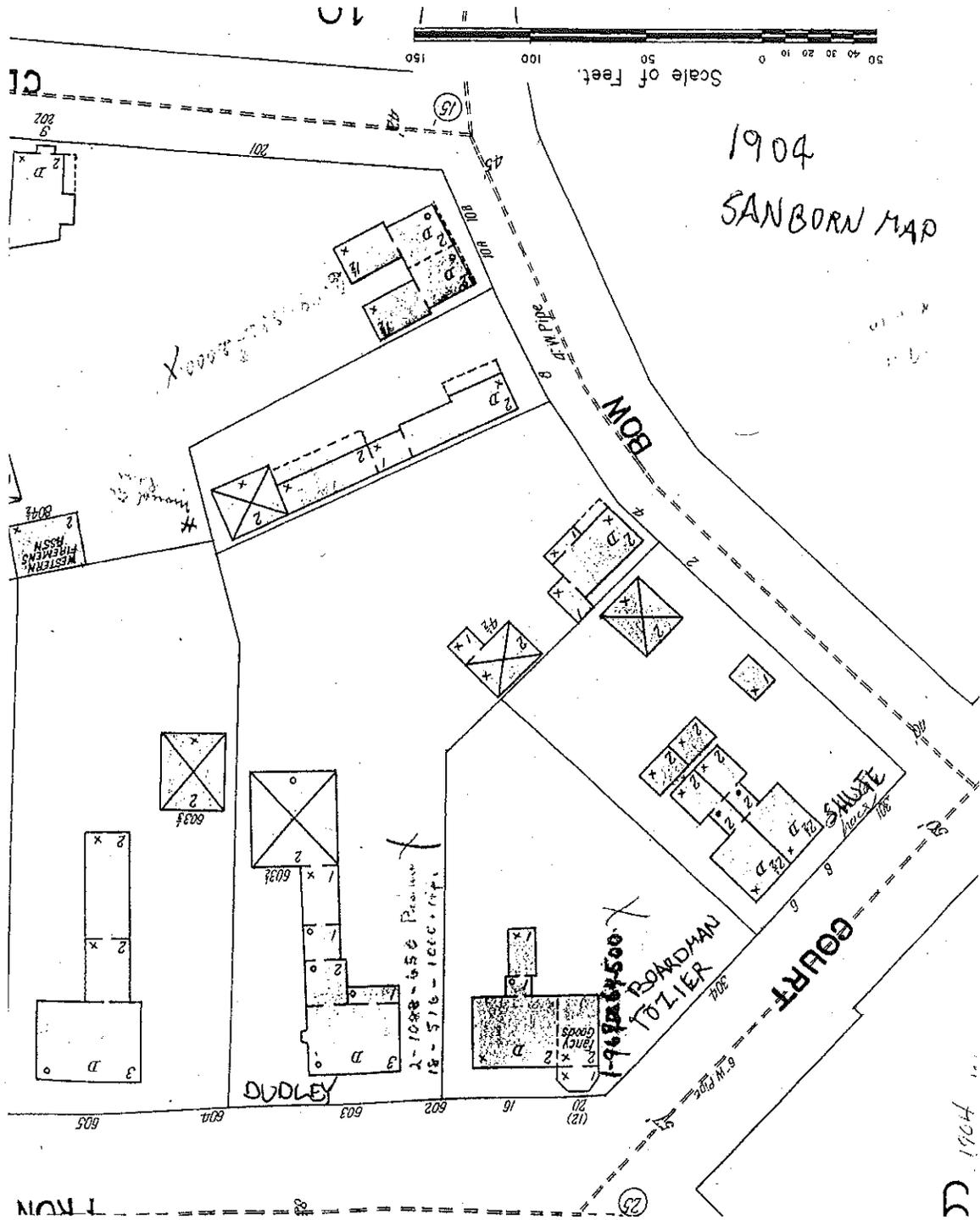


In 1970, plans to remove this historic house (once the home of Sarah Orne Jewett's grandparents) were abandoned soon after 100 town residents formed a human chain in front of the house to protest. This year, the adjacent historic patch of greensward was saved by citizen fundraisers and will become the only public green space in the center of the town. The location is historic, for on Jan. 5, 1776, in the Town House on this site, the provincial Congress established an independent state government, the first of the 13 colonies. The town was New Hampshire's first state capital.

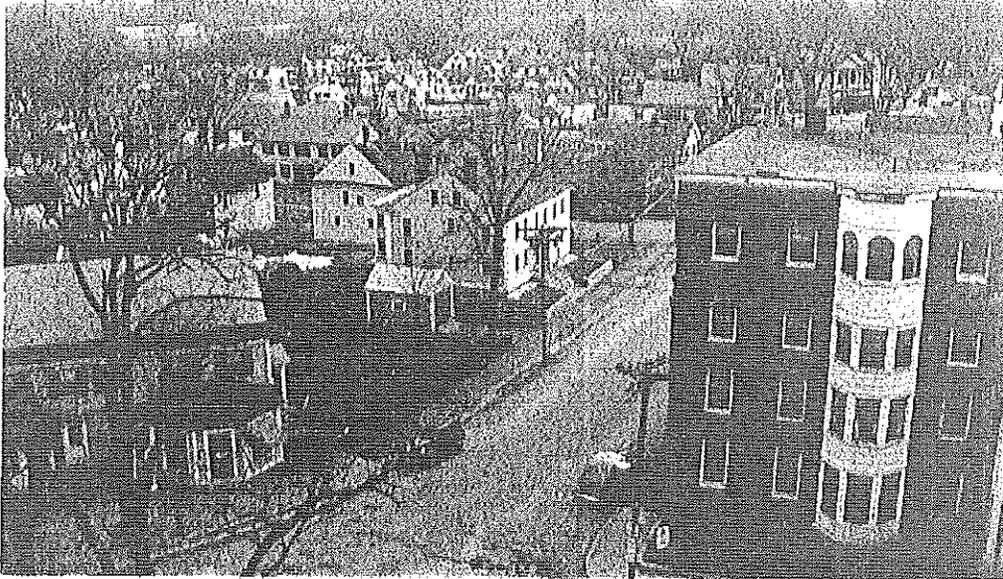
Original site of Exeter Town House and State house when Exeter was the State Capitol during revolutionary war.

Site of Judge Shute home on Court street.

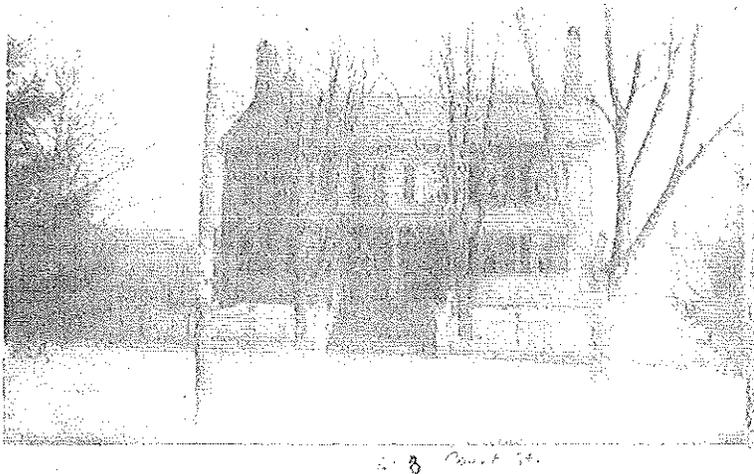
Site of Boardman (also known as Tozier) house and Cozy Corner shop on front Street.



1970 Historic District Commission established



1939 view of Court and Bow Streets shows Boardman and Shute houses



Shute house 6-8 Bow Street

1971 Rockingham National Bank tears down Tosier house, corner of Front and Court Streets. Town wide interest and action in preservation, for and against, is raised by threat of Dudley House demolition and Mobil Gas Corp. plans for demolition of Sleeper House. (Sleeper House land and building purchased by the Exeter Historical Society).



**Tozier house demolition 1971**

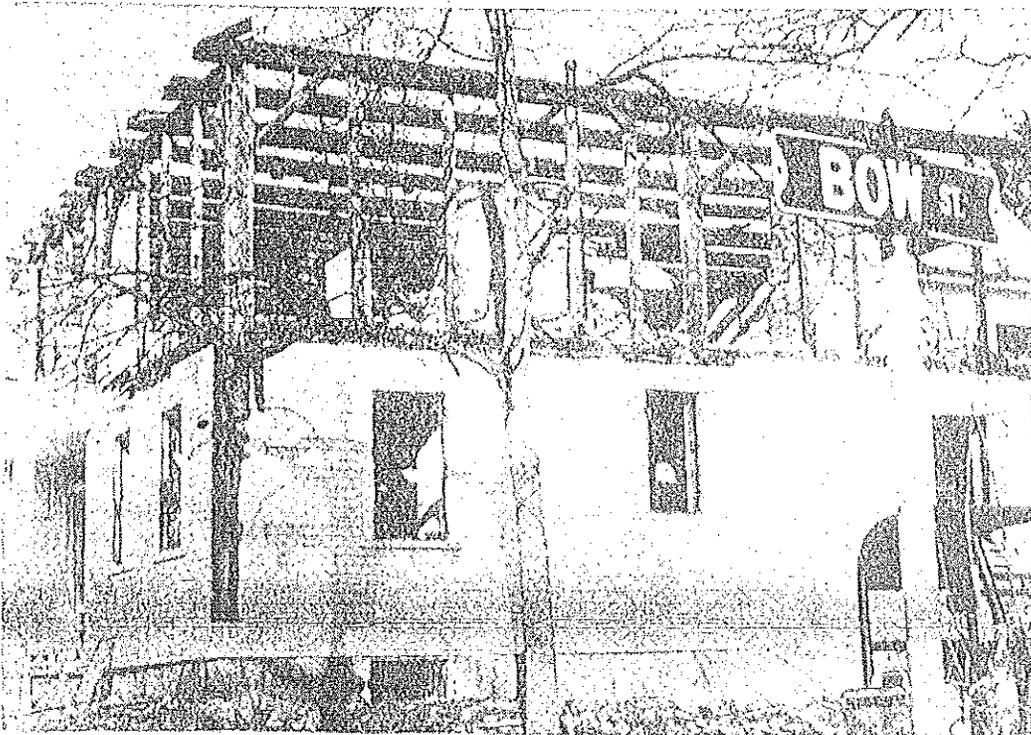
1971 Human chain protests around Dudley House.

1971 Rockingham National Bank rescinds Dudley house demolition plan.

1972 Rockingham National Bank tears down Judge Shute home, corner of Bow and Court Streets.

DARTMOUTH NEWS-LETTER

DEC, 21 1972



**Shute house demolition 1972**

1972 Front Street Historic District established.



**Town House Common as seen in 1975**

1976 Indian Head Bank (formerly known as Rockingham National) sells the two lots at corner of Front and Court Streets.

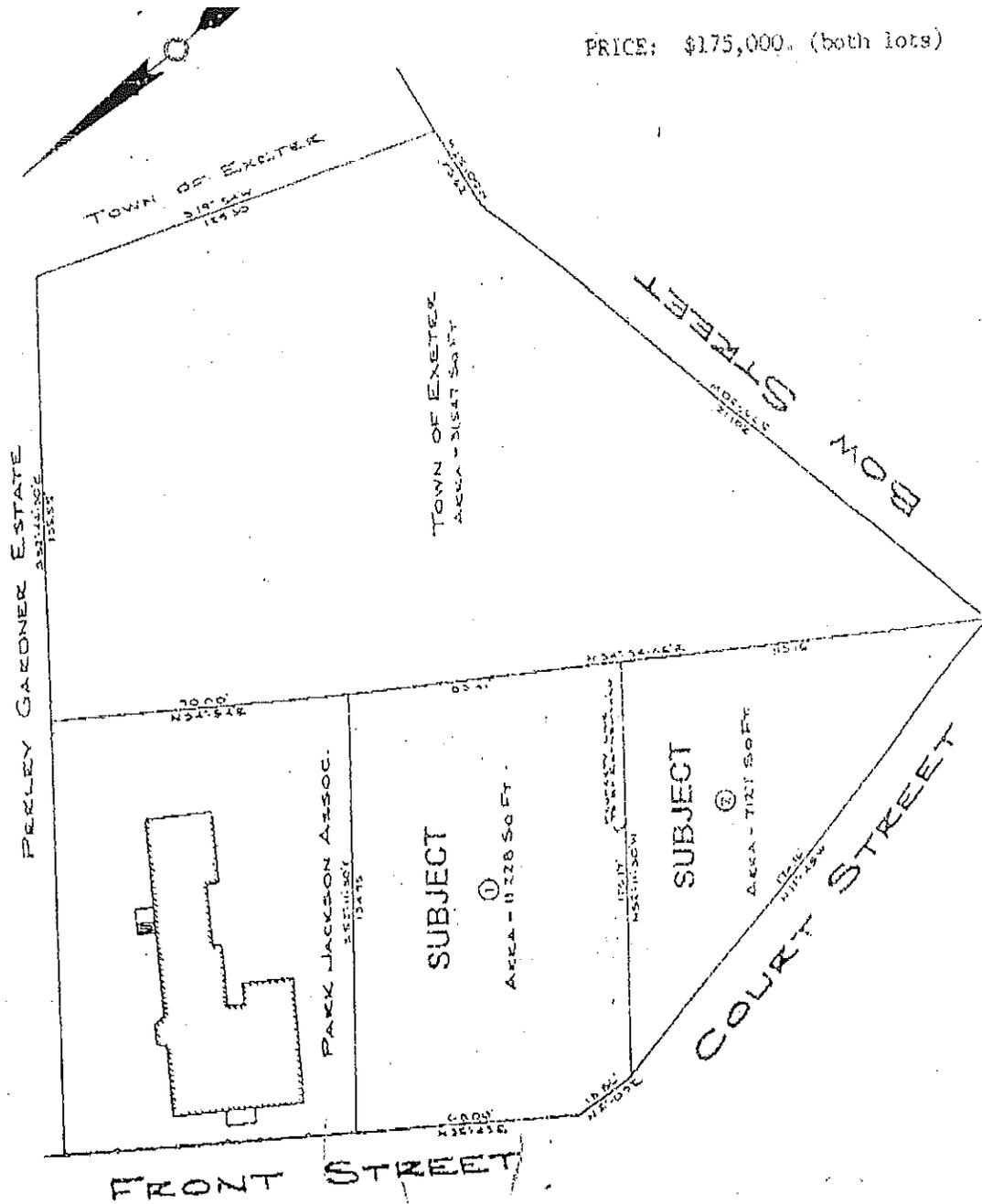
1979 Town develops Bow Street parking lot.

March 1979 Warrant

Article 38: To see if the Town will raise and appropriate the sum of Twenty Thousand (\$20,000) Dollars for the purpose of developing as a parking lot and mini-park the 31,817 square feet of land presently owned by the Town of Exeter at the corner of Bow and Court Streets.

Article passed by voice vote.

PRICE: \$175,000. (both lots)



1995 Discussions on Town purchase of what is left of old Shute and Tozier lots.

Town of Exeter

ITEM #6

10/23

Select  
Agenda

Date: October 18, 1995  
Memo To: George Olson, Town Manager  
From: Peter Dow, Town Planner *PD*  
RE: Possible Town Purchase of Sehnaoui Lots, Corner of Court St. and Front St.

You requested that I prepare a memo which discusses the possible advantages and disadvantages of the Town of Exeter working with the Trust for Public Lands (TPL) and private contributors to acquire the two vacant lots (see attached map) for public park purposes at the above location. The two parcels combined equal 18,355 s.f. of area and are currently assessed as two buildable lots in the C-1 Zoning District with a combined value of \$144,900 (see attached assessment cards). The parcels had been assessed jointly as high as \$240,000 in 1988.

I have had several discussions with Charles Levesque who works with TPL for the purpose of facilitating open space preservation and the creation of public parks. Mr. Levesque has met with the Exeter Conservation Commission and the Board of Selectmen to discuss a proposal to have the Town work in partnership with private fundraising efforts to purchase the land as a park site. The following listing of possible advantages and disadvantages of pursuing the proposal is an attempt to help the Board of Selectmen evaluate the proposal:

ADVANTAGES

- \* The site abuts existing Town land which is used for public parking and limited recreational use consisting of a few tables and benches. Purchase of the new land would allow some additional parking spaces to be created in the range of 10 to 20 spaces while retaining and adding to the existing landscaping for expanded park use.
- \* Given the density of development downtown, it is unlikely that any nearby vacant land would be available for the Town to purchase if this site is sold and developed.
- \* If the Town controlled this land, any future realignment or improvements to Court St. or Front St. for traffic flow would be easier to achieve. Conversely, if the land is developed whether as a consolidated parcel or separately, the limited need for setbacks for development in the C-1 Zoning District may make the widening of the right-of-way difficult in the future.
- \* Proximity of the site to other Town buildings including the Town Hall, Town Office Building, Public Safety Complex, Senior Citizen Center, and Recreation Building would be difficult to duplicate elsewhere.
- \* The site has historical significance relating to the Exeter Town House when Exeter served as the provincial capital of New Hampshire and the revived interest in Amos Tuck and the beginnings of the Republican Party.
- \* TPL's expertise in negotiating the purchase of the property and assisting in a substantial private fundraising effort would help reduce the cost of the site.

George Olson, Town Manager  
October 18, 1995  
Page 2

DISADVANTAGES

\* If the eventual purchase price could be negotiated in the vicinity of \$150,000 (I believe the asking price is \$175,000), then the Town may be asked to raise approximately \$60,000 to \$75,000 at the March, 1996 Town Meeting. That amount of appropriation would have about a \$0.10 to \$0.13 impact on the tax rate.

\* If the property became Town-owned, then tax revenues would decline based upon the current tax assessment and tax rate by \$4,248. If the value of the property increased by \$300,000 due to commercial and/or residential development, then the total amount of lost tax revenue could be over \$13,000 per year.

\* Expenditures to develop some additional parking spaces and park amenities as well as maintenance costs would increase the financial impact on the Town. I would expect, however, that if private contributors are raising 50% or more of the acquisition cost, there may be possible gifts for memorial improvements to the park and some additional landscaping.

\* If a park is created on the site, one might argue that a missed opportunity would occur for an architectural asset to be built. Even though the site is in the Front Street Historic District, the Exeter Historic District Commission needs the cooperation of a talented designer to achieve that result.

Others may think of additional reasons why the site should or should not be purchased, but I hope my comments help the discussion.

:PAD

iom\10-18-95.gno

1996 Town buys property \$70,000 for Town House Common park.  
March 12, 1996 Warrant. Article passed by voice vote.

Article 37: On petition of Joanna Pellerin and others, to see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of \$70,000 towards the purchase of the Elie Sehnaoui property on the corner of Front and Court Streets (Tax Map 9-10, Lot 15, 10.02 and 010). This money to be used toward the purchase of the property by the Town of Exeter provided that the remainder of the purchase price be raised by private subscription not later than December 31, 1996, with the condition that the property remain recreational open space for the enjoyment of the residents of Exeter. (The Board of Selectmen does not recommend this appropriation.)

# Exeter Town House Common

35 Main Street, Exeter, NH 03833 / (603) 772-2407

Jack Heath  
*Chairman*

David Weber  
*Treasurer*

Carol Aten

Ken Bailey

Robert Bates

Gail Bates

Ed Chase

Peter Dow

Jim Griswold

Patricia Heath

Edith Holland

Jody Juckem

Bruce Keough

Jane Keough

Ted Klemarczyk

Nancy Merrill

Brian McCaffrey

Herb Moyer

Isobel Parke

Joanna Pellerin

Florence Ruffner

Jeff Salisbury

Don Schultz

Evelyn Zarnowski

Dear Friend of Exeter,

Exeter has the once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to preserve the last piece of green space in the heart of Exeter.

## The Importance of This Site to Exeter

- ♦ This is the most historic site in Exeter. In our original Town House, the state of New Hampshire declared its independence -- the first of the thirteen colonies to do so.
- ♦ Exeter has no public green space in the center of town. This enterprise complements the work on the waterfront to make Exeter a destination center.
- ♦ The area will provide all of us with an attractive place for community activities.
- ♦ Keeping this area as an open space minimizes the congestion for our police and fire engines needing to respond to emergencies.

## Our Goal

The town and the Exeter Conservation Commission voted \$75,000 toward the purchase of the land. To secure the property and provide an endowment fund, we need to raise \$90,000 through private donations by August 15, 1996.

We ask you for your generous support. Your gift, made through the Rockingham Land Trust, is tax deductible.

Enthusiastically,

### **HOW DID THIS PROJECT BEGIN?**

This past February fifty one registered voters signed a citizens petition for the town warrant. The warrant article asked the town to raise \$70,000 to help buy the property on the understanding that the remainder of the purchase would come from private gifts and that it would remain open space. In March the voters at Exeter town meeting passed this article with a clear majority. The Exeter Conservation Commission has also voted \$5,000 towards the purchase.

### **WHAT IS THE HISTORY OF THIS PIECE OF LAND?**

On this site stood the first Town House, the heart of Exeter in the 17th and 18th century. During the Revolution Exeter became New Hampshire's state capitol; in this Town House New Hampshire declared its independence, the first of the thirteen colonies to do so.

In the nineteenth century the land had a mixture of commercial buildings and private dwellings. In the 1950's these included the Cozy Corner ice-cream parlor and Mr. Fortier's barber shop, housed in the Boardman House. In 1971 Rockingham Bank and Trust (now Fleet Bank) bought the property and removed the building. In 1979 Mr. Sehnaiou bought the property. After development attempts, he put it up for sale.

### **HOW LARGE IS THIS PIECE OF LAND?**

The area is almost half an acre (.42). It abuts the smaller green area on Court and Bow Street already owned by the town.

### **HOW WILL IT BE USED AND MAINTAINED?**

The Common will be used for sitting, strolling, picnics, and a place for community events. Exeter already has several playgrounds.

The fund raising goal of \$90,000 includes \$10,000 for a maintenance trust fund. When the purchase is complete the land will be owned by the town; Exeter Parks and Recreation will be responsible for its upkeep.

### **WHAT IS THE ROLE OF THE ROCKINGHAM LAND TRUST?**

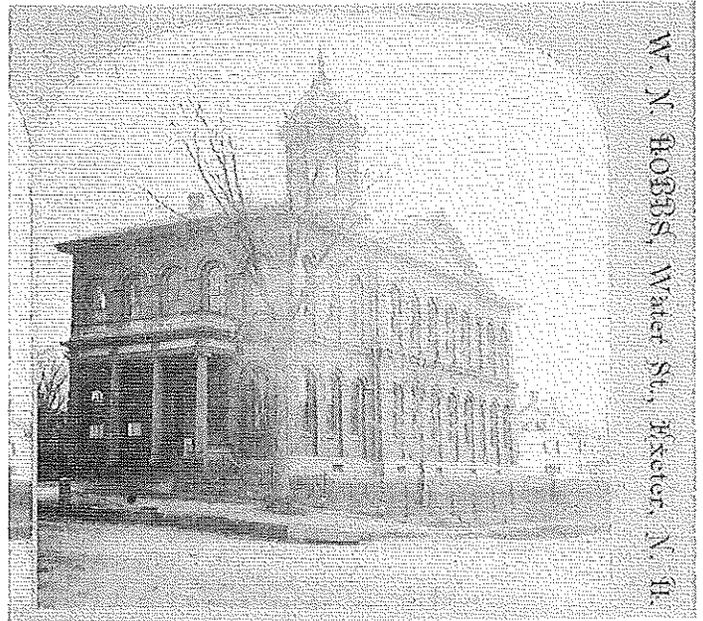
The Trust negotiated and signed the purchase and sale agreement. As a non-profit organization it can accept tax deductible gifts. It will hold donations in an escrow account until the closing date.

Sources: Exeter Town warrants, Annual Reports of the Town of Exeter, Exeter News-Letter 1970, 1971, 1975, 1996.

## TOWN HALL 1855

"The Exeter Town Hall is one of the most significant town halls, and one of the most significant mid-nineteenth century buildings in New Hampshire. It was designed by Arthur D. Gilman (1821-1882, Gilman & Dwight) of Boston, a leading architectural theorist and writer of the mid-nineteenth century. The building represents not only Gilman's personal architectural expression and practice, but also the most sophisticated approach to the design of a public building known in New England in the mid-1800s."

--James Garvin, NH State Architectural Historian



The Town Hall was built in 1855 as both a meeting place for the town and a courthouse for Rockingham County. The town authorized a \$30,000 appropriation for its construction. In 1911, the balcony was added to the in the main hall.

A storm on October 30<sup>th</sup>, 1917 damaged and tilted the statue of Justice on the Town Hall. It had to be taken down for repair for the first time since its placement in 1855. It was taken down by carpenter George C. Brown who repaired it with seasoned pine. It was replaced the following March and secured with four iron rods connected to an iron belt around the waist of the statue. The rods were fastened to the platform below the statue. Mr. Brown reported the state to be seven feet, two inches tall and weighed 500 pounds<sup>i</sup>.

The year 1919 saw quite a bit of activity for the then 64 year old building. At Town Meeting in March, residents voted to appropriate \$10,000 for remodeling the upper floor of the town hall for use of the servicemen. In addition, voters also approved the appointment of a committee of five to report later on a suitable war memorial.<sup>ii</sup> That committee later recommended Daniel Chester French be engaged to make a suitable War Memorial and \$20,000 be appropriated to design and erect it. The Memorial was planned to be placed at the side of the Town Hall and would include the names of the Exeter veterans who had served in the Great War. Daniel Chester French instead chose to place it at the intersection of Linden and Front Streets in what is now known as Gale Park. The memorial depicts Mother Town sending her Soldier Son off to war.<sup>iii</sup> The first public dance after the war was held March 21<sup>st</sup>, 1919 at the Town Hall. Returning servicemen were given free admission and music was provided by a jazz orchestra from Boston. On June 26<sup>th</sup> a Patriotic Day celebration was organized by a committee to honor returning veterans. There were many activities that day and culminated in an evening ball in the Town Hall with

Cohen's orchestra. At a special town meeting in September, 1919, it was decided to let the veterans use the old court room (second floor) in the Town Hall free of charge. The American Legion held a ball on November 10<sup>th</sup> to raise funds to fix up its meeting rooms in the Town Hall. The Legion had been given \$700 left over from the Patriotic Day celebrations, but those funds were inadequate.<sup>iv</sup>

In 1930 Ernest G. Templeton, District Court Judge pointed out the need for a new police station, courtroom, and cells. At that town meeting a committee was appointed to expend not more than \$500 on plans and report at the 1931 Town Meeting. The eventual proposal for a new police station included space for the town offices and public rest rooms recommending that the basement of the town hall be renovated to accommodate these quarters at a cost not to exceed \$25,000. This construction would necessitate removing the embankment on the Water Street side of the building to provide an entrance off the street at the basement level. James A. Tufts, Jr., George P. Kimball, Henry C. Burrows, Paul A. Bretschneider, C. Charles Hayes, and Ralph E. Meras were chosen as a committee to supervise this work. (Merrill 1988:170).

Judge Shute pointed out that the building was designed by architect, Arthur Gilman, to fit the natural slope of the terrain. He added that without the embankment, the proportions of the building would be changed. The steamer house at 37 Water Street was suggested as an alternate site. Frank G. Peavey presented a drawing to show what could be done with that building. There was very strong feeling against the proposed town hall alteration and a special town meeting was held March 31<sup>st</sup>, 1931 to rescind the plans. By a vote of 891 to 825 it was decided not to rescind the earlier decision. The renovation was completed by the end of the year. (Merrill p. 170).

At the 1941 town meeting it was voted to arrange offices for the selectmen, the treasurer, the tax collector and the town clerk in that part of the Town Hall area formerly used by just the selectmen and the treasurer. Seven hundred dollars was marked for the conversion.

1958 Hall Brothers of Kittery, ME was hired to rebuild the statue of Justice.  
Boxing?

1965 Sale of County Courthouse offers from Cong Church (\$20,000) and Town (\$50,000)

Merrill Lecture Series

A two year tug of war had been going on between Kevin King, the Chevrolet-Oldsmobile dealer and the Exeter Banking Company over the purchase of the 1893 County courthouse. It was finally resolved in January 1969 when the county commissioners sold it to the bank. The building was taken down in 1969 to make room for the bank's drive-up facility which opened November 9, 1971. This made

the Town Hall surrounded completely by asphalt with Water and Front Street on two sides and parking lots on the other two. The courthouse bell was removed to the lawn of the new county building [on Hampton Road]. (Merrill 1988:296).

1973 Front Street entered into the National Register of Historic Places (approved by town meeting in 1971)

1975 Plans for a Town Hall Common including moving Swasey Pavilion (bandstand) closer to the Town Hall to improve traffic flow was voted down.

1976 NH American Revolution Bicentennial Commission grant awarded for \$5,000 for architectural preservation plans and support to repairs to Town Hall.

1979 New Hampshire Division of Historical Resources had a term preservation easement on the building from 1979 to 1999. During that period, NHDHR inspected the exterior of the building fairly regularly (watching the trim slowly turn from sandstone brown to white), but had little involvement with proposed interior repairs. NHDHR became fairly closely involved with cupola repairs in 1999, just as the easement was expiring. Because the easement expired before the cupola work was completed, NHDHR was not invited to participate in the final stages of the work.

1989 Historically-accurate, restored, brownstone-colored trim repainted white.

1991 "Lady Justice" damaged by "Hurricane Bob" and quite rotted, was taken down and replaced in 1992 with a mahogany replica, by sculptor Land Warren. The original is on display at the Exeter Historical Society.

1999 Voters approved \$500,000 in renovations to the Town Hall.

2000 Flames damage roof of Town Hall after faulty wiring in the flood lights that shine on the statue.

2001 NHDHR talked and corresponded with Jane Bentley regarding the proposed installation of an elevator.

2005 Handicapped accessible bathroom installed in the art gallery on the second floor, and the building's windows were replaced with insulated glass.

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<sup>i</sup> Merrill, Nancy Carnegie and the History Committee, Exeter Historical Society, Exeter, New Hampshire, 1988. Page 122

<sup>ii</sup> Ibid. Merrill, Exeter, New Hampshire, 1988. Page 126

<sup>iii</sup> Ibid. Merrill, Exeter, New Hampshire, 1988. Page 139

<sup>iv</sup> Ibid. Merrill, Exeter, New Hampshire, 1988. Page 126