

Ship-Yard Park.

One afternoon in the late summer of 1917--Mrs. Francis Gardner Curtis and I happened to meet on Water Street, and we discussed the rumor current in the town that the water front property with the stone wharf was to be bought from the Estate of the late Judge Lemuel LeBaron Holmes and to be used for coal pockets. This seemed to us most unfortunate from all angles as we had felt for a long time that it would be possible to develop a park there that would be both attractive and useful to present as well as future towns people. It would also make a fine approach from the water and would be an asset to visitors landing from the summer yachts. As we walked about the site in question it was discouraging--the place was used for a dump and the yards and land back of the shops made a sorry sight--it was hard to envisage a future park and a band stand too and a pleasant place to sit and watch the bay. On the street front, east of Purrington Hall--there was a wide and deep pit where the old hotel, "County House", had stood. It had burned down many years before but the foundations had never been filled as the owner thought he could get more if he sold it as the new owner could build on the old foundations. The Improvement Association had tried to get permission to fill it and even it off but in vain--there it was and on that particular day an old bed spring lay against the street side where no one could miss seeing it. In the summer of 1907--there was a great celebration to mark fifty years since the town had been set off from Rochester, and an elaborate arch was built just in front of the pit. Mrs. Bacon was greatly distressed that people returning for an Old Home Week celebration should have to see that disgraceful pit. So she had a lot of cedars cut in her woods and had a screen set up between the side-walk and the pit and we hoped the returning guests would not see what lay behind. It was war time but our talk that afternoon decided us to call a meeting at Mrs. Curtis's house the next week at 8:30 in the evening. In spite of War the property might be bought and we would lose our chance. I do not remember now whether we telephoned people or wrote out some kind of a statement telling the reason for the meeting but we had a good response. Among those who came were Miss Charlotte and Miss Lucy Parsons--Mr. and Mrs. Lewis Stackpole, Jr. and Miss Stackpole--Mr. Gilbert Hinsdale--Mr. Lewis Bolles--Sally Battelle--Cecil Barnes--Mr. L. LeB. Dexter--Mr. Charles Mendell--Mr. Dennis Mahoney, Dr. Blaine, Abner Harlow, Mrs. Madden from the Bay View Hotel--Now Holiday House--ourselves and in all about thirty people. At first the discussion was rather rambling--some people thought a park was not needed--that as the town already owned a piece of the property, they should buy the Holmes property now for sale and use the land and wharf to rent for various business purposes and so gain an income for the town and lower taxes. Others thought that while a

park would be a very nice luxury--that it would not be used--that people were too busy to sit and look at the sea and there was some hesitation also about undertaking the plan in war time--probably better to wait. On the whole the reaction was favorable if it could be done at a minimum of expense and covering several years anyway. Mr. Bolles was rather discouraging as he drew graphic pictures of upkeep after the purchase was made--we would be responsible for grass cutting--much needed filling and grading and then there was the stone wharf falling apart as stone dropped into the water. He advocated a cement sea wall like the one he had built on his adjoining property but Mrs. Curtis watched him through her lorgnon and finally said in a pause--"But Mr. Bolles we do not want a Galveston break-water like yours--we want the land to slope naturally down to the bay". She urged a slow project to cover at least several years and that the best start was to raise money to save the Holmes property and so be sure that was saved from future coal yards. Finally it was voted that Mrs. Curtis should be the chairman of a committee consisting of Miss Stackpole--Mr. Hinsdale--Mr. Charles Mendell--and Mr. L. LeB. Dexter as Treasurer. My husband was greatly interested in having a park as he felt always that the town should have more water front for the enjoyment of the residents but he had to be away in Washington so much at this war time--that he felt he should not be a member of this committee.

The Holmes property consisted of a strip running down from Water Street west of the drug-store, and on it a wooden building had been built to house the little Post-Office after it moved out of the present Village Shop. On the lot back of Romeo's store was a picturesque old shingled building once the Ship Yard Shop rather out of repair--back of this the land ran to the water and included the short stone wharf. It was owned by Mrs. Thomas Washington of Washington, D. C.--the adopted daughter of Judge Holmes of Main Street. The sum of \$6000 was raised for the purchase of this property. It was quite amazing the way people responded once there was a planning committee. Mrs. F. E. Bacon and her daughter Mrs. Lothrop--Mrs. de Koven--Mrs. Arthur W. Blake--the Parsons and Stackpoles--Mrs. Curtis and others subscribed generously and Mr. Dexter in charge of the legal affairs soon was able to effect the purchase. The town owned the Leonard Hammond piece down by the water--it also had been a Ship-Yard and they allowed us to include this as a part of the park and Mrs. James Hammond suggested that we call it "Ship-Yard Park". Between the so-called park and Mr. Bolles' property there was a strip with an old stable down on the water and a smaller building nearer the street. Some years later Mrs. A. L. Barrows bought this property and made the old buildings into an attractive tea-house and Gift Shop and the smaller building was used as a bake shop. She built a wide piazza on the water end and in fact developed a lovely place. It was tragic that the whole plant was washed out by the

5. 500.00
Paid to Mrs.
Washington

7. 4/06. 25

Free
property

After paying legal & other
expenses - \$425. 42
was left for a maintenance fund.

hurricane of 1938--a total loss to her.

During the next twenty years about \$2500 was raised and spent on filling--on having benches made like those in the Fall River park with cement setting--on grass cutting and having a fence built between the park and the lane to the town wharf with a gate in it so that motors could enter there and drive around and out at the other end of the park. The filling was discouraging as the old Ship-Yards had accumulated great piles of wood chips from their years of sawing and cutting and this became a very spongy bottom and all the dumping seemed to sink as fast as it was put in. Mr. Charles Mendell was indefatigable in watching the filling and in managing to secure the excavations from any new building and having them brought in as gifts to the park.

The following fall--that is 1919--Mr. Mendell telephoned me one day to ask if I could come down that afternoon at five as he and Mrs. Mendell had something to talk over. It proved to be a most marvelous gift for the park. She and Mrs. Mendell's mother--Mrs. Purrington--owned the Purrington building on Water Street just opposite the Bay View Hotel. It was erected prior to 1857 and was a large wooden building with three shops. On the top floor there was Purrington Hall which had been used for many years for meetings and parties but which had been closed as unsafe. One shop was a grocery--and the one on the west end was a barber shop and the other changed hands very often. Mr. and Mrs. Mendell said that they would give the land on which the building stood to the park. That they would have it pulled down and use the material if we would fill the foundation. This was the greatest help to the project as it meant that the park would be no longer hidden back of the various buildings but would have a wide open space from the street to the water. I hurried home to telephone the good news to Mrs. Curtis and others and especially to Mrs. Madden at the Bay View as she had waged a war for years on the gathering of men who sat on the shop steps in the evenings talking and disturbing the slumbers of her front room guests. Indeed the hotel was known as "The Barber View".

The park became popular immediately and soon the band stand was erected towards the west end--the town and everyone contributed to it and it had a top like a cupola. This was also carried off in the hurricane with the shingle building back of it. Mr. Stoessel's concerts became a great feature in the summers and so many people came from other towns to listen to the famous "Stoessel concerts", we had to have more benches and more lights and the Improvement Association donated caps and white coats to the members of the band. It was pleasant to see many people take their mail and papers from the Post-Office which was now across the street--and sit comfortably on a bench enjoying the peace and quiet of the

scene. Usually too there were children playing there safely from automobiles on the streets. There was a bit of shade by several of the benches as we had saved several trees that had stood in the waste land and Mrs. Curtis had had a fine group of shrubs planted back of the drug-store.

After the first large gifts to secure the property--the committee adopted the plan of having interested people donate a certain sum annually for upkeep. At first the town had taxed us about \$60 a year but as it was a park for the benefit of the town--Mr. Dexter arranged to have this abated.

The Whaler "Wanderer" had been built in this park in the Holmes ship-yard in 1878--the last one built in Mattapoisett. In a terrific storm on August 26th, 1924--she was wrecked off Cuttyhunk having sailed the previous afternoon from Fairhaven--the Chaplain offering prayers for her safety. This proved to be her last voyage in a different way from what had been planned. The Improvement Association heard that the ship was to be sold off in pieces and so I telephoned the Coast Guard and they said they had a mast for sale--it was the Mizzen mast. The committee thought it would be very fitting to have the mast as a flag-pole on the very place in which she had been built. It cost \$250 to tow it over and buy it but the Association Executive Committee voted to do this. It could not be towed over that fall so it was the summer of 1925--that it returned to its birthplace and Mr. Hinsdale and Mr. Bolles superintended the tapering of the mast as it was too stumpy for a flag-pole. It was set in cement on what had been until recently Holmes property. Including the bronze tablet and flag the total cost amounted to just over one thousand dollars. A special fund was raised to add to what the Association had given to buy it and bring it here.

The Improvement Association always contributed annually to the fund for the upkeep of the park and often gave special gifts. A Bubble fountain seemed to be much needed and the Association voted to give one. It stood on a large square of concrete about where the old pit had been. It was a very nice looking concrete fountain and was very popular especially on band concerts nights and during the many Fairs and other entertainments held there--including several pageants. But unfortunately by the second summer it was completely wrecked--the pipes stuffed with paper and ^{the} large pieces of the concrete knocked off so it was taken away and experiment not tried again. At one time the Park Committee suggested the Association should take it over and carry it along as part of their work but nothing came of this. The two committees were always separate but worked in co-operation. Mr. Bolles was a most interested neighbor and often had some special work done at his own expense like having

scene. Usually too there were children playing there safely from automobiles on the streets. There was a bit of shade by several of the benches as we had saved several trees that had stood in the waste land and Mrs. Curtis had had a fine group of shrubs planted back of the drug-store.

After the first large gifts to secure the property--the committee adopted the plan of having interested people donate a certain sum annually for upkeep. At first the town had taxed us about \$60 a year but as it was a park for the benefit of the town--Mr. Dexter arranged to have this abated.

The Whaler "Wanderer" had been built in this park in the Holmes ship-yard in 1878--the last one built in Mattapoissett. In a terrific storm on August 26th, 1924--she was wrecked off Cuttyhunk having sailed the previous afternoon from Fairhaven--the Chaplain offering prayers for her safety. This proved to be her last voyage in a different way from what had been planned. The Improvement Association heard that the ship was to be sold off in pieces and so I telephoned the Coast Guard and they said they had a mast for sale--it was the Mizzen mast. The committee thought it would be very fitting to have the mast as a flag-pole on the very place in which she had been built. It cost \$250 to tow it over and buy it but the Association Executive Committee voted to do this. It could not be towed over that fall so it was the summer of 1925--that it returned to its birthplace and Mr. Hinsdale and Mr. Bolles superintended the tapering of the mast as it was too stumpy for a flag-pole. It was set in cement on what had been until recently Holmes property. Including the bronze tablet and flag the total cost amounted to just over one thousand dollars. A special fund was raised to add to what the Association had given to buy it and bring it here.

The Improvement Association always contributed annually to the fund for the upkeep of the park and often gave special gifts. A Bubble fountain seemed to be much needed and the Association voted to give one. It stood on a large square of concrete about where the old pit had been. It was a very nice looking concrete fountain and was very popular especially on band concerts nights and during the many Fairs and other entertainments held there--including several pageants. But unfortunately by the second summer it was completely wrecked--the pipes stuffed with paper and ^{the} large pieces of the concrete knocked off so it was taken away and experiment not tried again. At one time the Park Committee suggested the Association should take it over and carry it along as part of their work but nothing came of this. The two committees were always separate but worked in co-operation. Mr. Bolles was a most interested neighbor and often had some special work done at his own expense like having

the flag-pole painted.

We are all very grateful to Mr. Lewis Bolles who left the sum of \$30,000 to the town for the park. Half this sum was for the purchase of more land and so the piece belonging to Mrs. Barrows--originally the Thomas Luce property-- was added to the park. The income from the rest of the Bolles gift is for the maintenance of the park. This gift enabled the park to develop as it should have done years earlier had the committee had the means. And so our committee dissolved having cared for the property for almost thirty years and the town took charge of what had never cost the taxpayers one cent. We had a last meeting to wind up our affairs and we were glad to feel the future was safe and that it was what we had hoped in 1918--a great asset to the town.

Recalls Early Benefactors Of Shipyard Park, Mattapoisett

To the Editor of The Standard-Times:

Article 67 in the warrant for the annual Mattapoisett town meeting relates to a memorial for Lewis R. Bolles to be set up in Shipyard Park. For the benefit of newer voters I think perhaps I ought to make this statement. I am not writing to object to the proposed action, nor to discredit it in any way. If suitably worded it would be very proper to give recognition for Mr. Bolles' gift. It would, however, be very improper to create an impression that the town was indebted to him for the park. His gift was made after the park had already been given to the town.

Mattapoisett has a most valuable shore front. Sometime it might be worthwhile to show appreciation of the fact that the ownership of three wharves is entirely due to the initiative and effort of Lemuel LeBaron Holmes.

A memorial to those to whom the town is mostly indebted for its ownership, without cost, of Shipyard Park would not primarily include the name of Lewis R. Bolles. I was clerk and treasurer of the trustees and know fully all their doings. Lewis was a trustee, but except as he became much interested in the Wanderer's mast, he was not active and did not for years attend meetings of the trustees. Others carried on the project. Mention especially should be made of Charles S. Mendell, who actively managed the property each year with devoted care and attention.

If there was to be recognition

of the one person without whose efforts the town would never have had its park, it would be the woman who, with Mrs. Charles S. Hamlin and Miss Alice Stackpole, conceived the idea, started action, held all meetings at her house, and each year personally solicited and gathered in all the money to maintain the park and who eventually turned it over as a free gift to the town. That woman was Mary W. B. Curtis.

LEMUEL LEBARON DEXTER

*Written by
Mrs Charles S. Hamlin
October 1950.*