

# Historical Highlights by Wes Herwig

## FROM PARADE GROUND TO PLAYGROUND

In as much as the Community Relations Committee has begun preliminary work on plans to revitalize the Randolph Center Playground, a review of history of this piece of ground might be interesting.

At the time of the town's founding, a three-acre piece was set aside at Randolph Center to be the town common and "parade ground." The town meeting house, shared with the Congregational Church for more than 40 years, was built on this site in 1791, and later a school house and a town hall were erected there.

The area behind the church saw use as the drill field for the local militia company. In the early days of Randolph the men of the town gathered for one or two days of intensive military instruction and training each year. The date was usually around June 1st, and the occasion became known as "Spring Training."

The event took on the air of a holiday, with whole families coming to observe the drill and visit their neighbors. A grand picnic was usually part of the day, and rumor has it that there was "copious consumption of rum and hard cider."

Concluding the long day was a review of the troops by the commander, usually a local farmer or businessman who held a commission as a result of service in the Revolution or in the War of 1812. The Randolph company was designated the "Floodwood" volunteers.

There was a gun house at one end of the common, and here were stacked the rifles and bayonets. The men of Floodwood also had a brass field piece, which was housed there. Years later, after the company was disbanded, the cannon was mounted in front of the old Normal School. It remained an object of curiosity until it was sent off to do it's bit in World War II--in the scrap drive.

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In an earlier story I told how the piece of ground at Randolph Center soon to be upgraded as a playground, had once served as a training ground for the town militia.

As time went on, and the militia disbanded, village youngsters found the area a good place to play. In fact, about 1900 the Town Selectmen dedicated the common to the use of a baseball grounds for the young men of the community.

In 1910 however, the Orange County Telephone Co. ignorant of this fact, extended its lines and set a pole smack-dab in the center of the field and strung its lines across the site. Mad as young hornets, the boys were stirred by this infringement of their rights and made loud and vocal complaint to Selectman Allen.

Allen in turn made due complaint to the president of the company, a Mr. Kennedy, and to Ed Kent, a local director. But time passed and there was no action in the matter. Then one morning about two weeks later, the phones on that segment of the lines went dead. A check by the lineman revealed that the wires across the ball field had been cut.

Kent immediately called Stanley Wilson, State's Attorney. to investigate this sabotage of the public utility. He and Kent spent a few days interviewing boys living within a radius of of five miles. Finally they brought Joseph Bean and Allen McMurphy before Judge J.L. Hubbard, justice of the peace, on a charge of cutting the wires.

N.L. Boyden, a wise and skilled Randolph Center attorney offered to defend the boys. Boyden declared-and-proved that the charge against the pair could not be sustained "by the requisite measure of the truth," and they were discharged. Two days later the problem pole was removed from the playing field.