

## **The Park, Playstead\* and surrounding areas in Andover**

### **An Abridged Chronology**

**1850** Andover resident Benjamin Punchard donated \$50,000 to the town, which was used to create a free high school open to all residents (currently the location of the Andover town offices).

**1853** The Trustees of the Punchard Free School purchased 8.5 acres of cow pasture from the well-respected Joseph Richardson for \$2100.

**1856** The “Punchard Free School” opened. In 1868 a fire destroyed the original building and a new building was rebuilt and opened in 1871 (arson was suspected).

**1870** Town of Andover purchased the land from the Punchard Trustees where the school was located for \$6000.

**1899** Additional land was purchased from the Richardson Family to increase the size of land already owned by the town.

**1900** The west end of the Park was developed first with paths and gardens.

**1902** Punchard Free School name is officially changed to Punchard High School (because it is a public school). In 1915 the school expanded and built an addition.

**1904-05** Funding approved to build a central heating plant east of the schools.

**1905-06** The stone bridge was built over the exposed water feature, Rogers Brook.

**1906** Town of Andover raised funds to purchase the area now known as the Playstead, as an athletic facility for Punchard High School. At times in was not being used by Punchard, other townspeople were welcome to use it.

**1907** There was a small forest of Hemlocks and Pine trees that were planted to enhance the school grounds but had grown too large and blocked the view of the school from Punchard Street. It was recommended that 17 trees be cut down.

**1910** Town of Andover purchased additional land to increase the size of the land holdings.

**1913** The Bandstand was built (Town Meeting voted to spend \$1000 - \$500 for a bandstand and \$500 for entertainment). The base was built with the same fieldstone used for the bridge over Rogers Brook. Within the structure is a tool shed. Until **1941**, the Andover Brass Band played Sunday afternoons in the Park until it disbanded due to World War II.

On the east side of the bandstand was a small pond that Rogers Brook ran through. There was periodic flooding in the Park and surrounding area due to Rogers Brook.

**1914 – 1918** World War I.

**1929 – 1939** Great Depression and little or no funds were spent on improving the Park.

**1937-38** Playstead is improved with a football field, track and baseball diamonds (potentially using Works Progress Administration “WPA” funds).

**1932** A World War I Howitzer cannon is placed in the park by the Veterans of Foreign Wars. The German cannon was a trophy captured by American forces.

**1933** A Special Town Meeting appropriated money for the erection of a junior high school, a “common assembly hall” and a gymnasium. The assembly hall and gymnasium, with school related uses below, connected the existing Punchard High School (now the town offices) with the new junior high school (now the Center at Punchard, Celebrating Life’s Experiences/Senior Center and the School Administration Offices). The new school was named the Clara A. Putnam Junior High School, although it was commonly called “Andover junior high.” Clara Putnam was an Andover teacher, naturalist and bird expert. The new auditorium and gymnasium building were named the “Andover Memorial Building”.

**1933** The Playstead is included as part of the Memorial in an amendment at the Special Town Meeting.

**1936** Memorial Auditorium was completed.

**1936** Historic Rogers Brook Flood occurred.

**1939** In the Memorial Auditorium, a bronze tablet was installed called the War Memorial Tablet and was displayed in the foyer.

**1939- 1945** World War II.

**1948** The School Committee voted that the only plaques or memorials which have historical or education significance for children shall be considered for the placement in school buildings.

**1950** The Memorial Circle family housing complex was built. It was originally affordable housing for returning veterans, which eventually included Korean War veterans. There is a memorial containing the information on the Morton Street side of the complex.

**1950 – 1953** Korean War.

**1957** Chestnut Court is built.

**1950’s-1960’s** The Park area slowly aged into disrepair (overgrown gravel walkways, missing stairs on bandstand, stones were missing from the bridge that covered Roger’s Brook). Whittier Street was connected to Bartlet Street and people would park their cars near the Bandstand.

**1951+/-** First Andover Little League field built in the southwest corner of the Playstead.

The Playstead was where most people went to play (not the Park). Baseball and football were played in the Playstead. All outdoor high school athletic events were held in the Playstead.

**1952** Central Elementary School was built next to, not attached to, Punchard High School. The building was renovated and renamed the Doherty School in 1972. In 1982, it was renamed Doherty Junior High School. In 1988, It was renamed the current name of Doherty Middle School.

Also, located on Bartlet Street were the John Dove School (named for industrialist and philanthropist, originally known as the Center District School, in existence 1876-1952), the Stowe School (named for Harriet Beecher Stowe, originally known as the Central Grammar School and burned in 1981 (suspected arson), in existence 1888-1971 and demolished in 1982), and the Jackson School (named for the first minister of West Parish Church Reverend Samuel Jackson, was in existence 1910-1981 and demolished in 1982). **NOTE:** There is a much more comprehensive history on the evolution of the schools located on Bartlet Street. If more detail is sought, see list compiled by James Batchelder that can be found in the book *A Century of Change* by Eleanor

Richardson. Also, Julie Pike created an excellent presentation called the Lost Schools on Bartlett Street that outlines the history of the schools in the area.

As part of the educational cluster, there was a playground located just to the east of the Stowe School. The playground bordered the Playstead. It had swings, see-saws and large pipe structures for climbing. A playground existed in the area until 1980.

**1950+** Clowntown started in the area behind the Junior High School and moved to West Elementary for more room (see 1980+ for more information).

**1954** Hurricane Carol tumbled several large mature trees in the Park.

**1954 – 1975** Vietnam War.

**1957** Punchard High School is closed and replaced by “Andover High School” on Shawsheen Road (now West Middle School). The building once called Punchard High School is now the Andover Town Offices building.

**1960+** Recreation Department (now the Department of Community Services “DCS”) events were held in the park (such as Easter Egg Hunt, Peanut Carnival, etc.).

**1960 +/-** The Park was used every May and June by the Junior High School for an open house, concert, choral society and a student art show.

**1967** Grandview Terrace is built.

**1968** The Town of Andover engineered a culvert to bury the brook and end significant flooding of the area. Grass was planted on top of the concrete.

**1968** Clara A. Putnum Junior High (“Andover Junior High”) was officially renamed East Junior High. It is now the School Administration offices.

**1968** A new Andover High School is built next to the old site. The old site was converted to West Middle School. The Collins Center was built in 1982.

**1970** Organized Memorial Day events take place on the steps and in front the Memorial Auditorium. Fourth of July events take place in the Playstead.

**1971** Art in the Park began (currently held annually in September and organized by Andover Artist Guild).

**1972** Family music festival concerts began (currently held on Wednesday evenings annually July through August)

**1974** Crafts in the Park began (currently held annually in May, originally ran by American Field Service now organized by Christ Church, Andover).

**1980** Organized town sports were regularly scheduled in the Playstead.

**1980+** Clowntown relocated from West Elementary to the Playstead and finally relocated to the Park.

**1980+** Improvements were made to the Park. Park began to rekindle its original purpose of being a gathering place for townspeople.

**1980+** Preschool events – two mornings per month during July and August (Fire Engine Day, Monster Truck Day, Teddy Bear Picnic and Luau Day).

**1980** Playground associated with elementary schools is taken down.

**1982** Stowe Court is built by the Andover Housing Authority.

**1984** The Bandstand was refurbished (the stairs were gone, fieldstone foundation was damaged and it reeked of mold and other smells).

**1984** Town of Andover converted the Junior High and Punchard High School into Town Offices.

**1984** As part of the building renovation, the street that separated the school complex/town offices and the Park was discontinued and two parking lots were created (that exist today).

**1990+** Community Yard Sales are established (there are two per year, one on Earth Day and one in the fall).

**2004** World War II Monument\*\* (northeast corner of The Park) is dedicated.

**2006** Vietnam Monument (east side of The Park) is dedicated.

**2008** Korean Monument (southeast corner of The Park)

**2009** The Cannon (originally placed in the park in 1932) was restored and replaced back in the park.

**2010** Memorial Auditorium renovation was completed. The Gymnasium and Playstead were re-dedicated on Memorial Day.

**2010** Board of Selectmen approved flying larger flags donated by Veteran's families on the Bandstand during Patriotic events such as Memorial Day and the 4<sup>th</sup> of July.

**2011** Memorial Auditorium front entrance and step renovation was completed and Auditorium re-dedicated.

**2012** Cormier Youth Center location and funding approved at a Special Town Meeting. The building will be located behind Doherty Middle School adjacent to the Playstead.

**2012** Senior Center is officially renamed "The Center at Punchard, Celebrating Life's Experiences".

**2013** New Circulation and parking areas created adjacent to the Doherty Middle School. The Youth Center began construction.

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***\*The name "Playstead" is a local word and the first English language use occurred in an 1887 Boston Evening Traveler article that stated the children of Boston were lucky to be able to go to Franklin Park and play at the playstead.***

***\*\*Monuments are dedicated to the people who served their country in time of war, including those who were killed and wounded.***