

MANSFIELD MEMORIES: “A Dream Come True”: The Town Hall on West Street

By Kevin McNatt and Andrew Todesco

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MANSFIELD: This is the third in a four-part series on the town halls of Mansfield.

The fire that destroyed the old town hall on Dec. 20, 1970 was a devastating loss for the Town of Mansfield. In the fire’s aftermath, the most pressing issue was where to conduct town business. Within days most of the town offices were moved to the “Vose Building” (known historically as the Wheeler Building) at 127 North Main St. The police department had already moved to temporary quarters at the new Mansfield High School, where they would remain until 1974.

A committee was formed to investigate options for a new town hall. An early proposal called for closing the end of Union Street (at West Street) and taking a portion of the South Common for a new building. This was met with widespread opposition. The committee eventually settled on a piece of land at 50 West Street along the Rumford River.



The town hall/police station at 50 West Street was dedicated on June 2, 1974. It replaced the town hall destroyed by a fire in December 1970.

In the 1800s, the lot had been the site of Packard's saw mill. By the mid-20th century that structure had become dilapidated and was razed. By the early 1970s, there was an old town barn on the back of the property, and a small branch of the United National Bank nearer to West Street. The town purchased the land in April 1973.



Board of Selectmen expresses Town's appreciation of the New Town Hall/Police Station on June 12, 1974. Left to right: front: Clifford Turner, Antonino Caponigro, Joan Secher, Douglas Titus, Geraldine Abbott. rear: Herbert Levine, Frank Colella, Robert Saquet.

The town hall/police station at 50 West St. was dedicated on June 2, 1974. In 1997, town offices moved to the former Park Row School and 50 West Street became a dedicated police station. The Mansfield Police Department remained at 50 West Street until the new public safety building was opened in August 2019.

The Town Hall/Police Station Building Committee consisted of Antonino Caponigro, Jr., Geraldine Abbott, Clifford Turner, Alfred Turinese and Robert Saquet. The committee advanced the idea of a three-section building. In front would be space for town offices to be open during normal business hours. The middle section would feature offices for town executives and meeting space for boards and committees. In the back would be a 24-hour police station. Architect Harold Washburn of Washburn & Luther Associates of Attleboro brought their vision to life. Construction was performed by A.P. Whittaker and Sons of Randolph.

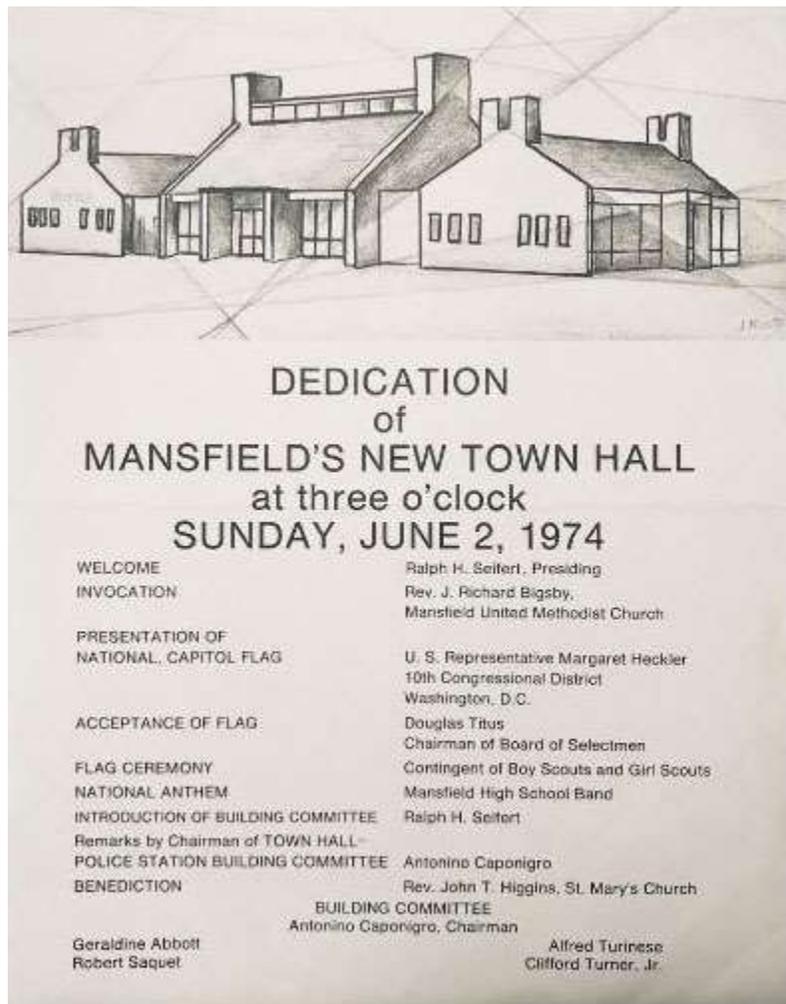
The new town hall/police station was dedicated on June 2, 1974. The Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts raised a flag presented by US Representative Margaret Heckler, who was in attendance. The Hornet Band played the National Anthem. Chairman of the Board of Selectmen Douglas Titus congratulated all for a job well done, saying the building's blend of contemporary and classic architecture was a "dream come true." An open house followed.

Two years later the Jaycees of Mansfield added a finishing touch, constructing a cradle and base for the bell that had hung in the old town hall for 87 years. It was set into place at a dedication ceremony on Saturday, Sept. 11, 1976. The bell was located on the lawn at 50 West Street for 20 years until it was moved to the front of the current town hall at 6 Park Row.

Mansfield saw an incredible population explosion in the 1980s and '90s, and 50 West Street soon became too small for the town's needs. By the mid-90s a plan was in place to convert the former Park Row School to a new town hall. This would allow 50 West Street to become a dedicated police station. While 50 West Street was being remodeled the police were forced to double-up with the fire department for about six months beginning in July 1997. The two departments crammed into the Central Fire Station on North Main Street.

"It's tight, but in some ways it's kind of cozy," said Police Chief Arthur O'Neill optimistically.

The Mansfield Police Department remained at 50 West Street until the new public safety building was opened in August 2019. At this time 50 West St. is closed, its fate yet to be determined.



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