

MANSFIELD MEMORIES -Jackson, Robinson schools built on former Mansfield Town Farm

February 10, 2021

Kevin McNatt and Andrew Todesco

This is the second in a two-part series on Mansfield's Town Farm.



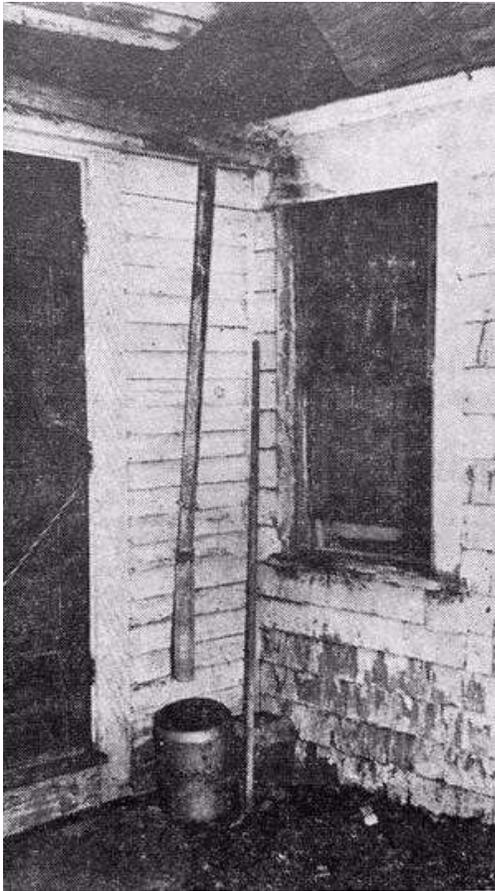
The Mansfield Town Farm, located at the corner of East and Ware streets, was a place for the poor, aged and sick.

The town farm cared for the poor, aged and sick of Mansfield. Located at the corner of East and Ware streets, it was usually run by a married couple. The husband was responsible for the farm. The wife ran the household. Most other towns had a similar setup.

Electric lights and a new heating system were installed in 1913. The following year there was a bill before the state legislature to create a county poor farm. At Town Meeting Mansfield voters voiced their opposition to the plan. Most considered it their duty to take care of their own citizens. William G. Davis said, “Let us take care of our poor while they live and when they die give them a decent burial.”

In 1914 the town farm had 28 pigs, nine cows and three horses. About seven acres were cultivated with fields of potatoes, corn and garden vegetables presenting “a splendid appearance.” In most years the farm also produced many acres of hay.

In the increasingly modern world of the 1940s, residents began to question the necessity and practicality of the town farm. Town Meeting authorized its sale in 1947, but no immediate action was taken. In the early 1950s the town was leasing the old farmhouse to a private citizen to run as a home for seniors. By 1953 the house was in such poor condition that the town lost its license to operate.



By 1947, the Mansfield Town Farm was in such poor condition. Exposed wiring on the ceilings of the farmhouse was a fire hazard. There were no fire alarms or fire escapes. The hallways were too narrow. The water from the shower head was steaming hot and came out at full force. *Courtesy/Mansfield Historical Society*

Exposed wiring on the ceilings of the farmhouse was a fire hazard. There were no fire alarms or fire escapes. The hallways were too narrow. The water from the shower head was steaming hot and came out at full force. Cold water came out of the faucets at a trickle. The paint was peeling. There were broken windows and missing screens. The roof leaked and was missing shingles. When one shingle was replaced it caused two more to fall off. It was time to sell the old poor house.

After a year of debate the house and barn were sold to Mr. and Mrs. Louis Troesch of Norton. While the farmhouse still stands at 2 Ware Street, the barn and other buildings just to its right were torn down and replaced by homes.

There were proposals to sell the remaining farmland for a housing development. Town leaders realized the value of such a large tract of land in the center of town.

“In my opinion it would be wiser to reserve the area of approximately 20 acres on the south side of East Street,” said Superintendent of Schools Gerald Anderson.

Editors at the Mansfield News agreed. In a 1954 editorial titled “Why Sell Now?” they noted the land’s proximity to Memorial Park, the new high school (now Qualters Middle School) and the town dump (now Mansfield Green recycling center).



This sketch shows the Mansfield Town Farm in 1896.

“Is it far-fetched to imagine that the general locality — where the town now owns so much contiguous land — may become the site of a civic center, new town hall, an elementary school, or any other structure which serves the community?” they asked. “Many projects are the simpler of achievement if there’s plenty of land available.”

That foresight paid off. Ten years later the Everett W. Robinson Elementary school opened on land that was once part of the town farm. In the early 1990s the Jordan Jackson School was also built on former farm property. For many years the land closer to East and Ware streets was used as two little league baseball fields. Those have since been replaced by high school softball and baseball fields.