

MANSFIELD MEMORIES: ‘Beauty and Strength:’ Town Hall at Park Row

By Kevin McNatt and Andrew Todesco | Mansfield@wickedlocal.com

Nov 20, 2019

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

When the town hall/police station at 50 West St. opened in 1974 it was assumed the building would serve Mansfield’s needs for decades to come. But the townspeople didn’t foresee the population boom that was on their doorstep.

Mansfield’s citizenry more than doubled in the ensuing 25 years. In little more than a decade the office space at 50 West St. was so jammed some town departments had to relocate to the former Paine School on Chauncy Street. The police department also lacked an adequate facility to serve the growing town. To solve the problems of its present and future, Mansfield looked to its past: the former Mansfield High School at 6 Park Row.



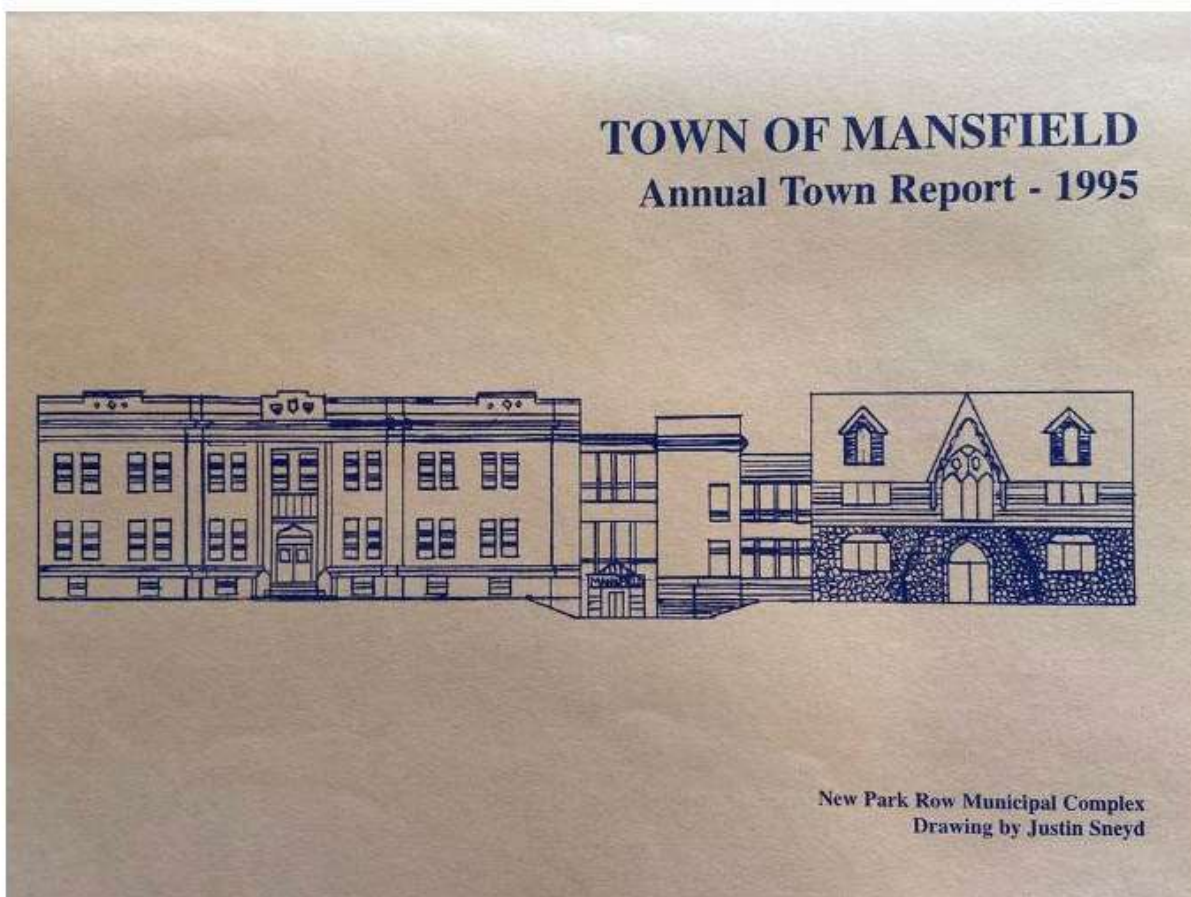
Mansfield High School graduated its first class in 1878. In the early years classes were conducted at the old Number Four School House on North Main Street, the meetinghouse on Union Street, and the town hall. By 1892 MHS took over two rooms at the new Central School on Villa Street. This arrangement was considered less than ideal as they shared the facility with younger grades. By the 1900s just three rooms and a laboratory were set aside for the high school which had a student population greater than 100.

A lengthy and well-attended Town Meeting rejected a new high school in May 1910. Some voters balked at the price and preferred to see the ancient Number Four Schoolhouse rehabbed as a new high school. But the following year voters approved a plan to purchase a piece of land on Park Row and erect a high school. On March 6, 1911 the Town Meeting voted to appropriate \$40,000 for the project by a vote of 227-8.

The cornerstone was laid at the new MHS on July 4, 1911. A series of speakers touted the importance of the project for the town. The cornerstone was filled with newspapers, town reports, voter lists, town directories, and many other artifacts meant to commemorate life in Mansfield in 1911. Construction progressed rapidly and came in slightly over budget at a total cost of \$42,525.54. Edward I. Wilson of Boston was chosen as architect. J.H. Davidson of Dorchester was the general contractor. W.C. Fuller of Mansfield provided heating, ventilation and plumbing.

The new building was occupied by Mansfield High on Monday, April 1, 1912.

“The exterior appearance needs no words of mine to declare its beauty and strength,” wrote Superintendent of Schools Edward P. Fitts.



The former Park Row Elementary School sat vacant for a few years but soon returned to service as a town hall. Architects Strekalovsky & Hoit designed a connector between the new town hall and Memorial Hall.

Over the next 43 years MHS students graduated with fond memories of their alma mater overlooking the South Common. But in time MHS outgrew the building. A new Mansfield High (now Qualters Middle School) opened in 1954. The old building now became the Park Row Elementary School until its closure 1992.

The venerable old building sat vacant for a few years but would soon return to service as a town hall. Architects Strekalovsky & Hoit designed a connector between the new town hall and Memorial Hall. The connector allowed both buildings access to an elevator. Consigli Construction was the contractor for the rehab.

Most considered the project an effective reuse of an aging but attractive building. And all town offices were once again located under one roof.

“It’s one-stop shopping,” said Town Manager Bill Williams.

An open house and ribbon cutting was held on February 15, 1997 to commemorate the new town hall. Now more than 100 years after its construction, 6 Park Row continues to serve the people of Mansfield.

Kevin McNatt and Andrew Todesco are members of the Mansfield Historical Society. They can be reached at mansfieldhistoricalsociety@yahoo.com. Follow the society on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter.