

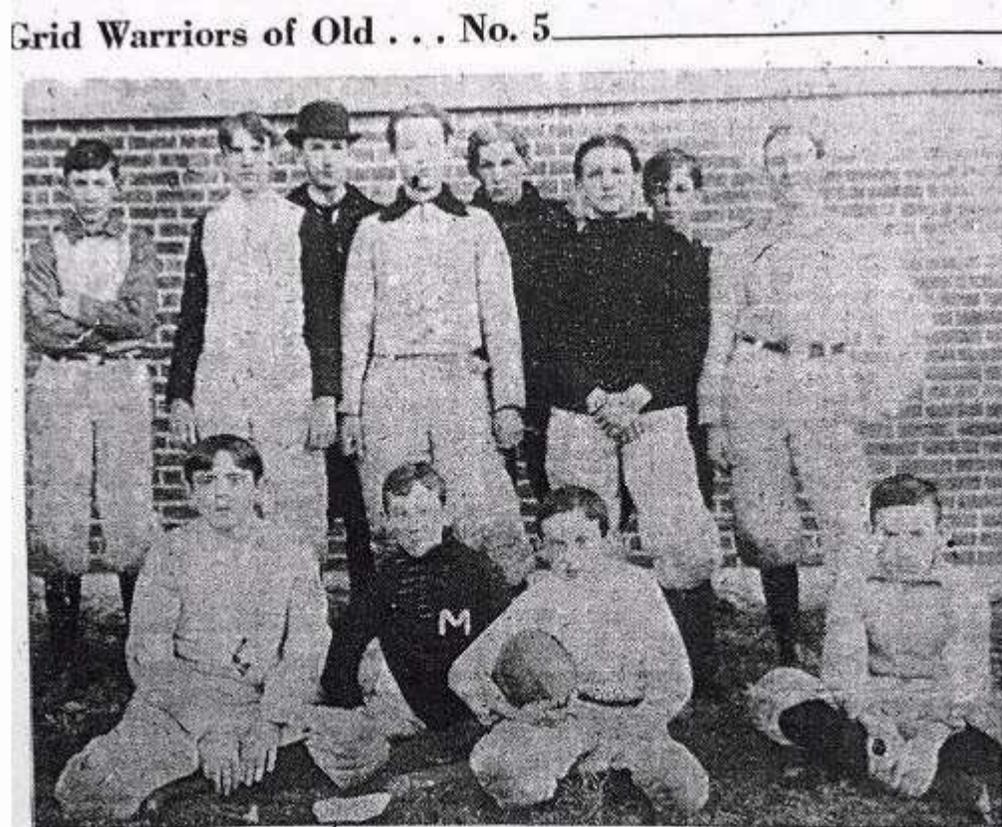
MANSFIELD MEMORIES: 'Plenty of Guts:' Mansfield versus Foxborough on the Gridiron

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

Nov 25, 2019

For many in these parts, Thanksgiving means family, food and Mansfield-Foxborough high school football.

The rivalry dates back to the 1800s and was not always played on Thanksgiving. The squads faced off sporadically in the early years. The first time they played was in 1895, an indication of how deep the football tradition runs between the two towns.



Mansfield and Foxborough high schools first played each other in November 1895. They actually played twice. On Saturday, Nov. 9, Mansfield High defeated Foxborough High 28-4 in their first ever matchup. MHS beat FHS again on Nov. 16 by a score of 20-0. In 1953, The News published this photo of the 1895 MHS football team. The copy seen here is from an old newspaper.

MHS and FHS actually played twice in November 1895. On Saturday, Nov. 9, Mansfield High defeated Foxborough High 28-4 in their first ever matchup. (The

scoring system was a little different at that time). MHS beat FHS again on Nov. 16 by a score of 20-0.

Russell Wheeler played for the 1895 MHS team. In 1953 he offered his recollection of the season to the Mansfield News. Wheeler said the high school team only had 11 players, no coach, no helmets, no face guards and were responsible for buying their own gear.

“A fellow had to have plenty of guts, then, to play football,” he said.

In 1953, the News published a photo of the 1895 MHS football team. The copy accompanying this article is from an old newspaper. If anyone could help us locate an original copy the Mansfield Historical Society would be most grateful.

There was also a matchup between a Foxborough town team and a Mansfield town team on Thanksgiving Day, Thursday, Nov. 28, 1895. Foxborough won that matchup by a score of 14-4. Town teams were not high school teams. They were comprised of interested players who were usually a little older.

The year 1919 was a watershed for Mansfield football. That year MHS football became a permanent part of the school’s athletic program and has been played continuously ever since. Mansfield capped off that season with a Thanksgiving Day tilt at Needham.

From 1921 to 1924, Mansfield High found a new Thanksgiving rival in Taunton High School. The rivalry only lasted four seasons and was discontinued because of the size differential between the two schools. “The school authorities thought it advisable to discontinue the annual Thanksgiving game with Taunton,” according to the MHS yearbook. “The difference in size does not give us an equal chance year in and year out.”

Over the next several seasons MHS played either Foxborough or North Easton (now Oliver Ames) on Thanksgiving Day. From 1933 to 1946 the Mansfield-Taunton Turkey Day tradition was rekindled. In 1947 the Mansfield-Foxborough rivalry returned and has been played continuously to the present day.

Whether on Thanksgiving or not, Mansfield and Foxborough began their matchup in 1895 and have played continuously since 1925 (except 1933-38 at the height of the Great Depression). There are several traditional rivalries in Massachusetts that date back to the 19th century. While not the oldest, the Mansfield-Foxborough matchup is among the older rivalries. It is a great tradition and a source of pride for each town. The contest hit new heights in 2018 when Foxborough stopped an MHS two-point conversion attempt in triple overtime to beat Mansfield 35-33 in an all-time thriller at Fenway Park.

Kevin McNatt and Andrew Todesco are members of the Mansfield Historical Society.