

MANSFIELD MEMORIES: When geese paraded through the streets

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At one time Mansfield had an unusual distinction: it was home to the largest goose farm in the world. Located on Winter Street in the Whiteville section of East Mansfield, the Austin Goose Farm was a local mainstay for 89 years.

In the 1860s a holiday goose was traditional. And Boston was a major market for the buying a bird. To that end George W. Austin decided to try his hand at raising geese. He connected with goose farmers on Prince Edward Island, began purchasing geese there and transporting them by rail to the freight yard in Mansfield. An annual Mansfield tradition began: the goose parade.

The long journey began in Canada, where the geese's wings were clipped and they were herded on to a train. On the five-day trip the geese were fed hay, raw potatoes and water. They were uncaged at the Mansfield freight yard on County Street, where they were allowed to regain their legs. From there 10 men carefully herded about 1,400 geese down Oakland, Maple and Winter streets, as a large crowd looked on. This spectacle could happen several times per season, as



upwards of 25,000 geese were known to be at the farm. Additional geese were trucked in from Westport, Massachusetts and Tiverton, Bristol, and Little Compton, Rhode Island.

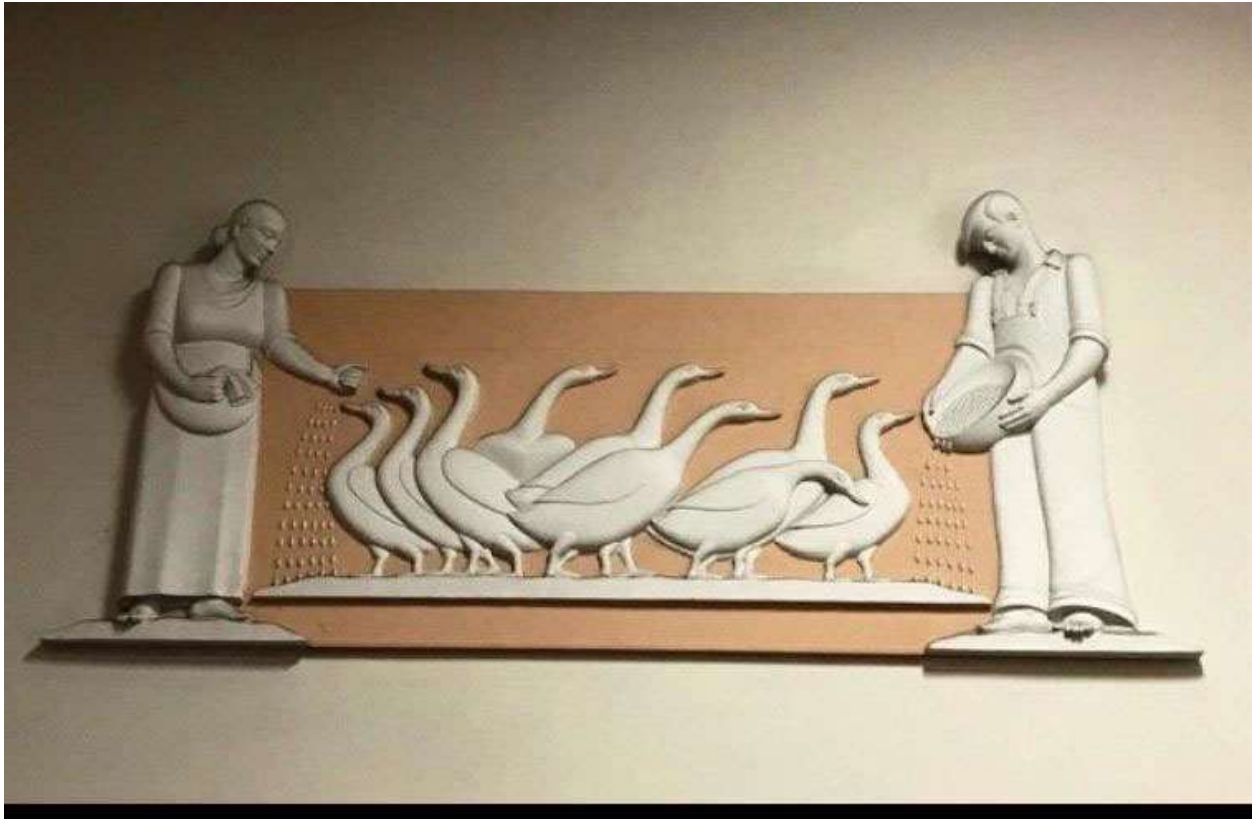
Sometimes the geese were paraded down an alternate route, by way of modern Route 106 to Franklin Street and on to the farm. No matter the route, herders had to contend with ponds, streams, and open fields, all attractive to the wandering birds. Once at the farm the geese enjoyed grassy fields and were fed grain, corn and water.

But ultimately it was a one-way trip. When they were sufficiently fattened the geese were slaughtered and prepared for market, sold mostly at Boston's Faneuil Hall. Goose feathers were also a profitable commodity. They were sold for the purpose of providing down for mattresses or quills for writing.

At its peak the Austin Goose Farm had about 23 employees. The unusual goose parade garnered national attention, attracting crews from the likes of Fox Films and Paramount, which featured the parade in movie newsreels shown nationwide.



Eventually the turkey would replace the goose as America's holiday bird of choice. The last goose parade through the streets of Mansfield took place in 1952. In 1954 the Austin Goose Farm closed for business.



Mansfield's connection to former Austin Goose farm can still be seen at the local post office, where a base relief by artist Joseph Colletti depicting the industry hangs above the entrance to the service lobby. It was created during the Great Depression.

Decades later the property would become a subdivision with street names that pay homage to history: Goose, Gander, Down and Fredric Lanes. Mansfield's connection to the farm can still be seen at the local post office, where a bas relief depicting the industry hangs above the entrance to the service lobby. It was created by artist Joseph Colletti under the auspices of the Fine Arts Division of the US Treasury during the Great Depression. Geese are also prominently featured on the mural at the Chauncy Street underpass.

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