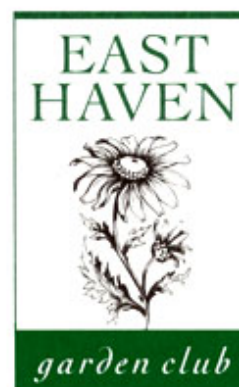


East Haven

*"I am the heat of your hearth,
the shade screening you from the sun;
I am the beam that holds your house,
the board of your table,
I am the handle of your hoe,
the door of your homestead,
the wood of your cradle,
and the shell of your coffin.*

*I am the gift of God
and the friend of Man."*

~Unknown



The Town Green is a defining characteristic of East Haven. Nestled between a stretch of business and residences and the marsh on the edge of the Farm River, it has served a variety of purposes and undergone many incarnations in its 350 year history. Throughout this diverse history, it has remained an important landmark to East Haven residents.

The **Town Green Preservation Project** is an effort by the East Haven Garden Club to raise public awareness of the historic and environmental importance of the Green and provide funds for its beautification. This brochure, which includes a **Self-Guided Walking Tour Map** is your guide to discovering this lovely public commons.

Early history

Prior to the arrival of European settlers in the 1630s, East Haven was occupied by the Quinnipiac Indians. Stands of pine trees established the town border, some which may have been used for masts for East Haven's thriving ship building business (1728 to mid 1800s). The Quinnipiacs grew crops and utilized the Farm River's resources of fish and oysters.

In 1638, English settlers purchased this land from Momaugin, chief of the Quinnipiacs, which was then held in trust. Settlers ventured to the east side of the river and began to establish farms on land granted them from this trust. Although no record of boundaries exists, it is believed that the Commons was established circa 1670, and its original size would have dwarfed today's Green.

East Haven was a farming town, and the Green used as common pasture for livestock. As such, it had to be centrally located so a few settlers could tend their stock while watching for Indians. In what is today the Old Cemetery [1], there existed a natural amphitheater and spring used by the Indians. Remnants of this formation, commonly known as the "Indian Bowl" [2] are visible to this day. In 1683, Rev. Jacob Hemingway, East Haven's first minister, put aside part of his land and specified the spring be left clear so animals could water. In 1707, the Cemetery was established, further diminishing the size of the Commons. In 1720 the status of the Green as town property was strengthened by a town vote stating "*the Green shall not be disposed of except it be for some public use, that it may be beneficial to the whole of the proprietors.*"¹

Historical highlights

The Revolutionary War was an exciting time in East Haven's history. In 1778, General Lafayette and his troops camped on the Green. One year later, the British invaded East Haven, with citizens gathering on the Green to repel the troops if called upon. In 1797, another portion of the Green was set aside for the Cemetery. In 1799, the "Yellow Schoolhouse" [3] was built and Sycamore trees were planted nearby. The bright foliage of the Sycamore may account for its colorful nickname. These were replaced with Elms after the Schoolhouse burned down in 1862.

In 1824, General Lafayette returned to commemorate his earlier visit and the town erected a liberty pole in his honor. It was then that residents began to, "*give prominence and protection to the public square.*"² The East Haven Green went virtually unnoticed for the next twenty years.

¹ Hughes, Sarah E. *History of East Haven*. The Tuttle, Morehouse and Taylor Press, New Haven. 1908. p.176.

² Hughes, p. 181.

After the Civil War, the Green was plowed, graded and fences installed. Evidence of ashes from blacksmith shops dating back as early as 1662 was uncovered in the northeast corner [4]. The Green was self-sufficient, with proceeds from the sale of hay grass used to fund its maintenance. East Haven's Volunteer Fire Department was established in 1892, and for many years its fire tank was kept on a corner of the Green.

Early uses and advocacy

Today the Green is graced by nearly 100 trees, but before the turn of the century it was open space. In the 1890s, trolley lines extended to East Haven and Lake Saltonstall, and these lines were run across the Green. The East Haven Women's Club initiated the Green's first true restoration and renewal plan. On Arbor Day of 1902, a "Constitutional Oak" donated by Senator Orville Platt was planted [5]. The following year, the Women's Club solicited and planted nearly 100 trees, some donated by schoolchildren. A variety of species were planted, and Elms from that community effort remain today.

The Women's Club solicited new trees from each incoming governor of Connecticut. The most notable occurred on Arbor Day, 1908. A Turkey Oak was planted at President Roosevelt's direction. This tree, known as the "Roosevelt Oak," commemorated General Lafayette's visit [6]. In 1909, two memorial specimens—"great-grand daughters" of Connecticut's Charter Oak—were planted. Yale University's President donated a tree in memory of Rev. Hemingway, one of the first students at Yale. After 1910, the tradition of planting trees slowly ended. At that time, there were about 150 trees on the Green. Throughout the teens and twenties, the Green was the site of many musical festivals and celebrations, a tradition which continues today with East Haven's Summer Concert Series and annual Fall Festival.

In 1911, the Memorial Cannon that anchors the Green was erected [7]. In 1919, a monument honoring townspeople killed during World War I was placed on the northwest corner [8] and was joined in 1945 by a monument honoring those who had died in the World War II [9] and in 1985, a Vietnam War Memorial was erected [10]. By 1965, many original trees had died, including the Roosevelt Oak, whose stump was transformed in 1973 by a local woodcarver. This carving of President Theodore Roosevelt remained on the Green through the late 1980s. A stone plaque erected in 1996 by the East Haven Historical Society commemorates Lafayette's visits to East Haven [11].

Today the Green is populated by a variety of different species, including Elm, Beech, Dogwood, Chestnut, Oak, Cherry, Mulberry, and Spruce; but Maples dominate. One Beech tree of note, the 'Lover's Tree' occupies a special place in the northeast corner, and a beloved place in the hearts of many local couples [12].

*With a history as
abundant as the
East Haven Green's,
this public space
deserves our
community's attention
and stewardship.*

Today's initiative

EAST HAVEN GARDEN CLUB TOWN GREEN PRESERVATION PROJECT

Since the 1980s, there has been growing concern in the community about the state of the Green, which was compounded by storm damage in 1985. A survey of the Green was last conducted in 1987. This land, so rich in history and tradition as a public commons, is in need of sustained care. With initial funding from the Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection through the "America the Beautiful" Grant Program, the Garden Club has undertaken this volunteer project to provide for the Green's tree restoration and maintenance. Early goals were to identify and tag all of the trees on the Green, and prioritize restoration efforts. This **Self-Guided Walking Tour Map** is a result of that careful inventory.

With unwavering support from the East Haven Public Service Department and under the expert guidance of a certified arborist, steps have begun to restore trees most in need of care—and remove those that are irreversibly damaged. As with any renewal effort, there is more that must be done. In a swiftly developing world, preservation of green space is increasingly important. With a history as abundant as the East Haven Green's, this public space deserves our community's attention and stewardship.

HOW YOU CAN HELP

The East Haven Garden Club, a non-profit community group, has undertaken a fundraising initiative to preserve, restore and beautify our Town Green. For more information on this or other Garden Club beautification initiatives, please write:

East Haven Garden Club, P.O. Box 120010, East Haven, CT 06512

PLEDGE CARD

To make your tax-deductible donation, please indicate your preferred level of support, enclose your check payable to *The East Haven Garden Club*, and kindly mail to the address above.

- | | | | |
|--------------------------------------|--------|--|----------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> OAK LEVEL | \$500. | <input type="checkbox"/> SPRUCE LEVEL | \$ 25. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> ELM LEVEL | \$100. | <input type="checkbox"/> STEWARD LEVEL | \$ 10. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> MAPLE LEVEL | \$ 50. | <input type="checkbox"/> OTHER | \$ _____ |

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Adapted from: *History of East Haven Town Green*, compiled by Raisa Rexer, Yale University, 2002

Historical Reference: *East Haven Historical Society*, Cliff Nitchke, Town Historian.