

Kingston Historic District Chronicles – The Plains & Bandstand

February is often hailed as "Civic Service" month. Towns are preparing their annual reports and gearing up for town meetings - deliberative sessions and then the March elections. It serves as a good time to look at the town of Kingston, its unique characteristics, and its civic organizations and their missions. From the Historic District Commission's perspective, we are very proud of our rich heritage and our ties to our colonial past.

Many early American settlements mapped out their towns with a common that served many purposes. Ours was done in 1700, on a very large scale, 20 rods wide and a half mile long. It was made up by a divided Main Street, one of the few of its kind in New Hampshire. Our town common is more widely known as "The Plains". The militia men could assemble and practice there. Townspeople were allowed to have animals graze on this common ground. Back then, the house lots were grouped around the Plains, first and foremost, for protection from the Indians. (We might want to give thanks to them first, as it was the Indians who cleared the land and used the plots for farming before the arrival of our earliest settlers.) Fortunately, the Kingston Plains remains totally intact as our forefathers envisioned it, today serving the community in different ways - craft fairs, sports team practice places, picnicking, dog walking, cross country skiing, snowmobiling, animal training and horseback riding, recreational play, and seasonal celebrations.

Did you know that the bandstand in the middle of our Plains is thought to be the oldest of its kind in all of New Hampshire? From 1875-1885, the Kingston Brass Band held concerts...local musicians who trumped their horns included Dr. Thomas Reynolds, John and Everett Webster, Edgar Nichols (of the Nichols Library family), Clarence Cilley, Walter S. Clark (of the present day Clark Oil) and Walter Merrick. At the town meeting in 1954, a motion requesting \$100 to repair the structure was defeated, replaced with a motion to burn it down!! Outraged citizens, spearheaded by Mr. and Mrs. Rodney Wilson, (descendants of the famed Josiah Bartlett) organized the Village Improvement Society whose primary purpose was to save this treasured landmark. Two years later, under the guidance of President Edward Clark, this group presented the selectman with a petition and "necessary donated funds" and the bandstand was saved. At the completion of this project, their focus was to continue to make improvements to the village and soon they became the Kingston Improvement and Historical Society, Inc. Influenced by their success, the town voted in 1972 to form the present day Kingston Historic District Commission whose mission is to "preserve the historical and architectural heritage of the Town of Kingston", still functioning today.

Remember: HDC is "manufacturing" date plates and encouraging citizens to place one on their homes. A sample is available at the Selectman's Office. Take a peek and pick up a form to order yours for a donation of \$5. The HDC is still looking for alternate members. If interested, contact chair Virginia Morse 642-5059. Meetings are the

second Tuesday of each month at the Town Hall and citizens are always encouraged to attend. By now, we hope you have seen a copy of the Kingston Walking Tour which traces all the homes along our treasured town common, known as The Plains. These are available at the Library or the Town Hall.