

## The Walpole Town Forest Status 1975

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The intention of this report is to define the status of the town forest with regards to its present boundaries, its origin and history, and its vulnerability to future development.

...[This report contains] a map of the town forest published for its 50th anniversary exercises in 1966. It is basically similar to a map in the assessor's office which shows the town forest to consist of four lots constituting 178.2 acres. These lots are listed below with the appropriate registry of deeds reference. The first two lots constitute the town forest land on the north side of Washington Street, while the last two are the lands south, and east of Washington Street, known as the South Walpole town forest.

Lot No.....	Size.....	Reference
1345.....	51.1 Acres.....	1347-107
F401.....	26.1.....	None
303.....	65.3.....	None
305.....	35.7.....	2066-207 / 2271-638
.....	Total 178.2	

The idea for a town forest originated with Charles S. Bird Jr. who was inspired by the communal forests he had observed in Germany. At his urging, George Plimpton donated lot 1345 which formed the basis of the town forest. ..

On April 12, 1916, in article 16 of the town warrants, the town voted to "raise and appropriate the sum of \$1000 of which the sum of \$500 shall be used by the park commissioners for the development of the town forest according to plans prepared."

The town forest dedication ceremony scheduled for April 28, 1916, was postponed due to inclement weather but was held the following week on May 5. As was widely reported in the newspapers of the time (1, 2, 3), the ceremony was attended by the future president, then Lieut. Gov. Calvin Coolidge, who planted a white pine to commemorate the occasion. 800 School children also made plantings as part of a reforestation project. (See the...[Walpole Times](#) report...)

On July 17, 1916, Mr. Plimpton remitted the deed for lot 1345 to Mr. Stowell, Chairman of the board of selectmen...In the deed, he inserted a clause that would allow his gift of land to be used for purposes other than a town forest. From the wording of the letter, I conclude that there must have been other communications to him requesting that his gift be "open-ended" with regard to the use of the land. This clause has been used as a basis to insist that we "legally" have no town forest and to justify the diversion of the land for some other purpose.

Mr. Bird's original goal (5) for the town forest was to expand it along the Neponset river to an eventual size of 600-1000 acres. With this amount of forest land, he felt the town could develop

significant revenues from its timber resources. An article appearing in the [American City Magazine](#) of August 1916...alludes to such plans. However, the advent of World War I prevented the fruition of this goal and inhibited the development of the forest.

There seems to have been very little activity regarding the expansion of the town forest until 1939. In the town warrants dated December 11, 1939, the town voted \$570 for the purchase of 35.7 acres from I. West for use as a "watershed". This acreage presumably would be lot 305. However, a research of the deed references indicates confusion between lots 303 and 305. Reference 2066-207 is a record of a transfer of lot 303, (65 acres) between two private parties. The other reference, 2271-638 is the transfer of lot 305 (35.7 acres) to the town. According to these records, town acquisition of lot 303 is questionable.

Somehow this land which was acquired to protect the school meadow brook watershed, was incorporated into the town forest.

As for the remaining lot F401, I could find no record as to the source of its acquisition.

#### Recommendations

I believe that it would be wise to transfer underdeveloped portions of the town forest land to the care and custody of the conservation commission. Some portions of the forest are obviously needed for watershed protection and as such are properly protected from exploitation. However, much acreage is endangered by future expansions of town schools, garages, or for some other municipal purpose.

I urge the commission to sponsor an article in which the town could dedicate this land for the purpose of conservation.

#### References

1. Boston Globe, May 6, 1916.
2. Boston Post, May 6, 1916.
3. The Boston Journal, May 6, 1916.
4. Walpole Times, May, 1916.
5. Interview with Charles S. Bird, Jr., January 26, 1975.

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