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Number 6

Forever Green Part I



The Madison green as it looked about 1820

One of the first things the early residents of East Guilford did was to set aside a piece of land "for public use". In 1826 when East Guilford became Madison, the green was about half its present width. Rather than the level, mown area we see today, it was sandy and damp. Cart paths criss-crossed it making a tangle of roadways. Cattle, pigs and geese wandered freely and there was a pond in front of the present church. Perhaps not a pleasant place to spend a Sabbath on a hot summer day!

Toward the latter part of the 18th century the green was dotted with a number of small buildings scattered about in front of the Church. These small houses were called Sabbath Day houses. The first meeting houses were unheated and drafty in winter and doubtless hot and uncomfortable in summer. Families often built small, one room buildings on the green to serve as warming places in winter and as a brief respite from the morning sermon while the noon meal was eaten.

In 1842 all the Sabbath Day houses were removed from the Green and all future building prohibited. In 1854 a group of men met to consider making improvements on the public square. After some discussion they could not agree on a plan and the whole business was dropped. The next year Rev Samuel Shepard, Harry Shaler, Reuben Shaler and Thomas Scranton got together and planted elm trees around the four sides of the square.

When this work was finished, Mr. Scranton and others formed a stock company of 20 shares at \$15.00 each to finance the grading and fencing of the green. Plans were drawn up and Baldwin Hart and Timothy Grave gave land to enlarge the green making it more like a square.

Change comes slowly in New England villages and the green was the site of a confrontation. After much arguing the various farmers living around the green agreed to give up their private paths across the center except for Thomas Scranton, John Grave and Joseph Dudley who wanted a road diagonally across the center for their own use. This would, of course, have stopped all improvements.

Eventually June 25, 1855 was chosen as the date that the work would begin. Abraham Scranton appeared with two yoke of oxen to begin the plowing and leveling process. When the team started up Joseph Dudley, the Town Clerk, stepped out and stopped the team, saying, "In the name of the law and the Town I forbid you to plow up the public square."

Mr. Scranton told the oxen to start up again. Mr. Dudley yelled, "Whoa." Mr. Scranton left the plow with some temper rising and said that if the team was stopped again there would be war, and somebody would get hurt. He started up again and there was no more trouble.

The expense for seeding, special work with teams, fencing, and planting trees totaled \$372.10.

Directions: Almost everybody knows where the green is. Just ask.