

The Worcester South Agricultural Society Exhibition Hall
362 Main Street
Sturbridge, MA



Prepared by Jennifer B. Doherty
For the Sturbridge Historical Commission
May, 2016

Table of Contents

Executive Summary	2
Exterior	3
Interior	8
The History of the Worcester South Agricultural Society Exhibition Hall	13
Title History	18
Maps	25
References	28

Executive Summary

This report was prepared in the spring of 2016 at the request of the Sturbridge Historical Commission after the current owners of the Worcester South Agricultural Society Exhibition Hall applied for a demolition permit for the building. The Sturbridge Historical Commission held a public hearing on the building's demolition on March 10, 2016, and voted to delay demolition for six months. This time allows the Commission to work with the owner to see if there is any way to save the building, either by incorporating the building into their future plans, selling the property to a new owner, moving the building, or dismantling it.

The Worcester South Agricultural Society Exhibition Hall is an important 19th century structure in Sturbridge. From the 1860s into the 1930s, the exhibition hall served as the center of the Sturbridge Fair and played host to numerous other events. While the exhibition hall has lost its fairgrounds setting as the area around the building has been subdivided and developed, the basement of the hall still serves as a restaurant, its original use. The hall has been modified to serve different needs since its days as an exhibition hall, but much of the building's historic character and features remain. The exhibition hall is a rare surviving example of an early fairgrounds exhibition hall, with few other similar buildings found in Massachusetts.

This report outlines the building's construction and subsequent changes, details its use as a fairgrounds exhibition hall, and presents a title history that traces the ownership of the building, including information on how the owners used the building. The report is based on documentary sources as well as a visit to the site in April of 2016.

Exterior

The Worcester South Agricultural Society Exhibition Hall is a rectangular three-story timber frame building. As a utilitarian building, the hall has no style or decorative elements. It sits on an elevated brick basement, is covered in vinyl clapboard siding, and has an asphalt shingle roof.

The hipped roof of the hall has a monitor that covers the main ridge. The monitor raises the ridgeline of the roof several feet, with a wall of windows around the sides providing additional light into the center of the building as well as extra ventilation. Before the widespread use of electricity, and to some degree after, monitors were a common feature on large, utilitarian buildings such as barns and factories as they brought light down into the middle of buildings that would otherwise be quite dark. The rear half of the building's roof was raised by an addition in the 1960s or 1970s, creating a third story over roughly half of the building.

Besides the roof addition, other additions have expanded the exhibition hall's volume and are largely related to the restaurant in the basement. At the rear of the building, the kitchen space has been expanded with two single-story flat-roofed additions, one wider than the other. While the addition on the right is flush with the west elevation of the building, the addition on the left extends slightly beyond the east elevation. Along the west elevation of the hall is a single-story shed-roofed addition that provides additional seating space for the restaurant. Also on the west elevation, towards the rear of the building, is a concrete block elevator tower rising the full height of the building.



Over the years, space has been added to the exhibition hall, primarily at the rear and on the roof.

On the main façade, the main entry is centered on the building at the basement level. A two-story portico with a gable roof covers the entry, with a pent roof across the main façade between the first and second stories. Towards the rear of the east elevation is a gabled enclosed entryway at the basement level that provides a secondary entrance for the restaurant from the parking lot.



The main façade and west elevation of the exhibition hall today. The Federal style door surround is an addition to the utilitarian building, and appears to have been taken from another building.

The building's fenestration has been altered since the exhibition hall was first constructed. Most notably the main entry has been moved to the basement, although it is still centered on the building. The entryway is highlighted by an incongruous Federal-style door surround. Five large multipane inoperable windows surround the main entry, one on either side and three above on the first floor. Similar large windows are found on the sides of the building at the first story and on the addition along the west elevation. The building's historic fenestration pattern has been maintained on the second floor of the main façade, with a pair of six-over-six sash windows centered on the building and framed on either side by an additional window. Inside the building the central pair of windows are covered by plastic, but a hole in the plastic revealed that they are likely original sash, with muntins typical of the mid-19th century. The placement of the windows on the side elevations at the second story has been maintained, although these windows are now a fixed six-pane sash. Because these windows are blocked from the interior, there is no access to these sash. However from the exterior they appear to be historic and may in fact be the building's original sash, just missing their lower, operable half.



Most of the windows are blocked from the interior and thus are not accessible. However from the exterior this sash, and others like it, appears to be original to the building.



Undated photograph of the exhibition hall courtesy of Robert Briere/Sturbridge Historical Society.

An undated historic photograph shows the exhibition hall as it likely looked when it was constructed. A rise of land led up to the front of the building, with a set of wooden stairs running across the width of the building. The main façade had three entry doors, a set of double doors in the center with a single door at either corner. The five-panel doors are typical of the mid-19th century. An entry door is also visible on the west elevation of the basement, at the front of the building; today this door is bricked in but the lintel is still visible. The hall had regularly-spaced six-over-six sash windows on all three levels. The monitor on the roof had what appear to be divided light fixed-sash windows, but it is difficult to tell from the photograph how many panes they had. A chimney is visible on the east elevation, towards the front of the building. There is no remaining evidence of this chimney. Based on the small size of the chimney and the date of the building, it would have served a stove, possibly only in the

restaurant part of the exhibition hall. The exhibition hall has little trim or ornamentation, with plain, narrow window surrounds and similar cornerboards; the cornice is difficult to make out, as it is in shadow.

Today the 1.7-acre parcel that the exhibition hall is sited on is paved for a parking lot. The building sits close to busy U.S. Route 20, on the north side of the street facing south. The area around the hall is largely dedicated to commercial enterprises serving tourists visiting nearby Old Sturbridge Village and coming off of Interstates 90 and 84, which cross nearby to the east of the exhibition hall. Immediately to the east is a Super 8 Motel, to the west is a McDonald's, and to the north is the Sturbridge Host Hotel & Conference Center. As noted above, the lot of the exhibition hall has been lowered around the building; originally a small rise of land led up to the main entry level, but this has been removed, exposing more of the basement in the front of the building and providing space for a main entry door there. The street that runs along the east property line of the hall is called Fairground Road, a reminder of the area's history.



This aerial image from the 1970s shows the fairgrounds after it had closed but before much of the major development in the area occurred, particularly the development of the Sturbridge Host Hotel & Conference Center. From STU.B, Massachusetts Historical Commission Area Form.

Interior

Inside, the basement level of the building serves as a restaurant with a kitchen at the rear. The restaurant has a pub atmosphere, with exposed wood and brick throughout. The upper floors of the hall are currently vacant. Stairs at the rear of the building provide access to the basement, first and second floors, with access to the third floor addition provided by a separate set of stairs.

In many places, particularly on the second floor, the hall's timber frame structure is visible. Timber framing is a traditional method of construction where large timbers, first hewn and later sawn, are pegged together with mortise and tenon joints. The complicated joinery required for a large timber frame building is visible throughout the exhibition hall, especially on the second floor. In addition, near the rear of the second floor, empty mortises can be seen where the building was altered to add the third story over the rear half of the building. These indicate that structural elements were removed, primarily diagonal braces. To make up for this, and to generally stabilize the building, the structure was reinforced with metal tie bars that extend across the building. By the time the hall was constructed, in the middle of the 19th century, timber framing was being supplanted by balloon framing for the construction of houses, but was still in use for large utilitarian buildings such as barns and early factories. The timbers used in the exhibition hall are smooth and painted today; most likely they would originally have been left unpainted. Painting and sanding over the years have removed signs of how the timbers were cut, although based on the building's mid-19th century construction date they were likely sawn and not hand-hewn.



The restaurant in the basement of the exhibition hall.

Structural investigation shows that the second floor of the hall was originally open down to the first floor, with a walkway around the edges of the building. Robert Briere, son of the last caretaker of the fairgrounds, confirmed this configuration. The filling-in of the second floor is visible when looking up at the framing of the second floor while standing on the first floor, particularly toward the front of the building. The second floor joists in the middle of the room, visible from the first floor, run in an east-west direction, while those towards the edge of the room run north-south. Correspondingly, the floorboards in the middle of the room run north-south while those at the edge of the room run east-west. The joists in the middle are hung with modern metal joist hangers, an indication of their more recent addition. The open second floor, the building's numerous windows, and the monitor on the roof would have provided plenty of light and air into the large building in a time before electricity and air conditioning.

Today many of the interior walls are covered in wood paneling typical of the later 20th century. The paneling covers access to the exhibition hall's numerous windows, although they are still in situ and visible on the hall's exterior. Several changes have been made to the once-open floorplan configuration of the hall. On the first floor, walls have been added to the middle of the room to enclose and separate this area from the rest of the space. Most recently the upper two floors served as an antique shop, and remnants of this use include glass-fronted cabinets along the walls of the second floor. The third level, an addition over half of the building, is open to the floor below at the front. It is constructed of curved wood piers with large expanses of glass. The main stairs at the rear of the building and the elevator do not continue up to this addition. Instead, a single flight of stairs runs from the second story up to the third floor next to a modern chair lift.



The added third level at the rear of the building is open to the space below.



While the basement retains its historic use as a restaurant, the upper floors of the hall have been modified and most recently served as an antique store.



This view of the ceiling shows how a floor has been added to the middle of the second floor. On the left and at the bottom are the original joists and floorboards of the second floor. On the right, new joists were added with modern metal joist hangers. Note that the new joists and floorboards run in a different direction than the old, distinguishing the work. See below for an illustrated diagram of the work.



Highlighted here in red is the evidence of the filled floor as seen in the southeast corner of the building. The lines show the north-south orientation of the joists at the left and bottom of the image that are the original floor framing. The joist in the upper right hand corner is a newer joist as indicated by its east-west orientation. The arrow indicates a metal joist hanger that was used to install the newer joists, an indication of their more recent addition to the building.

The History of the Worcester South Agricultural Society Exhibition Hall

As the country began to industrialize in the early 19th century, agricultural societies and agricultural fairs became much more common. They were a way for farmers to highlight their important role in American society, and helped to teach others about agriculture. “The agricultural societies became more democratic and brought a considerable and growing body of the most intelligent and progressive farmers into active relations with a nation-wide movement for the advancement of agriculture.”¹

Towns, cities, and counties throughout Massachusetts formed agricultural societies, and many of these held a yearly fair. By 1916, the Massachusetts State Board of Agriculture recorded 34 agricultural societies throughout the state, with six in Worcester County alone, including the Worcester South Agricultural Society.

Constructed in 1868-1869, the Worcester South Agricultural Society Exhibition Hall served as the main exhibition hall for the Sturbridge Fair for nearly eighty years. The Worcester South Agricultural Society (WSAS) was incorporated on May 2, 1855, although an agricultural society had existed in Sturbridge since the 1840s, with some sources claiming one existed as early as the 1790s. At its incorporation the WSAS included the towns of Sturbridge, Southbridge, Webster, Oxford, Charlton, Spencer, the Brookfields, Warren, Brimfield, and Holland.



The WSAS initially held their agricultural fairs on Sturbridge Common, with exhibitions on the second floor of Town Hall that was added by the WSAS in 1858. Image from the collection of the American Antiquarian Society.

¹ True, pg. 24

The society initially held agricultural fairs on Sturbridge's town common. In 1858-1859, the WSAS worked with the town to add a second story to the Town Hall that served as exhibit space for the fairs.² Animals were kept on the common for the duration of the fair, with events held at nearby farms as well. However the fairs quickly outgrew this space; "[fairs] overran the front yards, back yards, down stairs and up stairs, and even the lady's chamber was not safe from intruders. The crowd surged into the stores and hotel ready to buy, beg, borrow or steal everything they could get their hand on."³ The society began to search for a new, larger location more suitable to the sizeable fairs.

In 1868 the WSAS purchased land to build their own exhibition hall and fairgrounds from Nelson Bennett and Thomas McCarty at the south edge of Cedar Pond, a half-mile northwest of the Sturbridge common (see below for maps). A building committee oversaw the construction of the exhibition hall, 40' by 90', two stories with a basement. It is unknown who built the hall; there was likely not an architect, as the construction method and simple design are typical of utilitarian buildings of the period such as barns and early factories. A contemporaneous description of the exhibition hall outlined its main features: "the arrangement of the agricultural hall is such that ample accommodation is had for offices for the president, secretary, treasurer, and committees of the society, with commodious kitchen and dining-room, in addition to the hall for lectures and exhibition."⁴ The hall and modifications to the grounds for fair purposes, such as the creation of a half-mile track, cost the society about \$13,000.

The new location for the exhibition hall, while away from the center of Sturbridge, was more convenient for visitors from surrounding towns. The hall was constructed on the north side of what was then a major road leading from Sturbridge to Brimfield. By the 1890s, an electric street railway connected Sturbridge and Southbridge, running along the street in front of the exhibition hall and bringing even more patrons to the fairs. Today this road is U. S. Route 20, a busy east-west route that runs through much of southern Worcester County.

² See Massachusetts Historical Commission inventory form STU.4 for more information about Sturbridge's Town Hall.

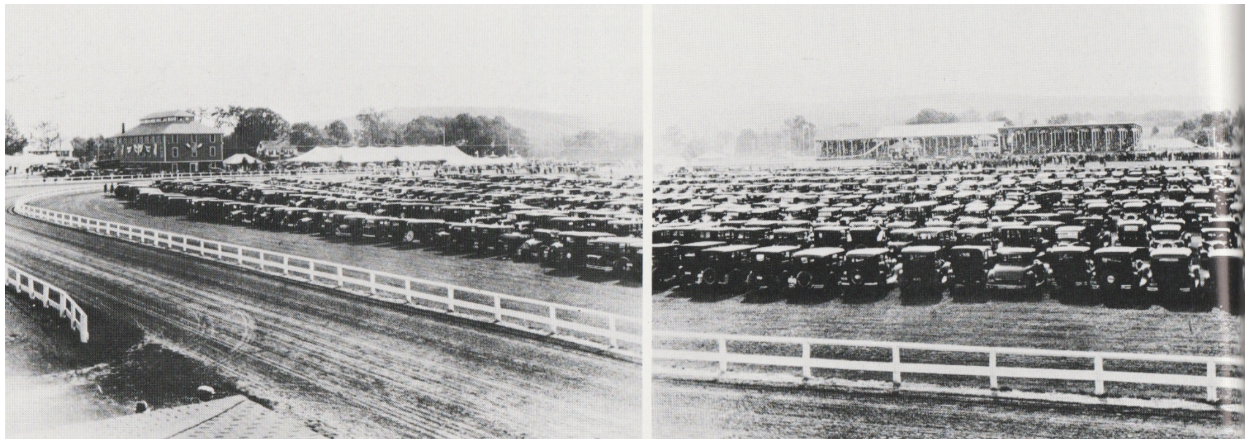
³ Corey, pg. 21

⁴ Ammidown, pg. 74



This undated image of the exhibition hall shows crowds entering the building through three first floor entrances on the main façade. From Burns' Sturbridge.

Well into the 20th century the fairgrounds continued to serve as the site of the Sturbridge Fair and as a location for horse racing meets, primarily harness racing, and later motorcycle races. The fair took place in September, with numerous agricultural exhibits and other unique events and attractions. During the 1930s the fair was hurt first by declining revenues during the Great Depression and then the 1938 hurricane, which caused significant damage to the fairgrounds. A portion of the grandstand blew down, and the fair organizers estimated a cost of \$12,000 to complete all necessary repairs to the grounds. In 1939 the fair was forced to close after 84 years and the grounds were sold to the Sturbridge Shore Acres Corporation. The company planned to subdivide the fairgrounds for house lots, as shown on a plan that was filed with the Worcester County Registry of Deeds in 1939 (see "Maps," page 25).



The Sturbridge Fair continued to be popular into the 1930s, as shown by these two frames of a four-frame panoramic view of the fairgrounds. The Exhibition Hall is to the left. The right-hand portion of the grandstand, with the flat roof, blew down in the 1938 hurricane.

While the area directly abutting Cedar Pond was subdivided, a major development never materialized. Instead the main fairgrounds area served during the middle of the 20th century as the Sturbridge Ride-In Theatre. This area was developed in the 1970s into the Sturbridge Sheraton Motor Inn, today the Sturbridge Host Hotel & Conference Center.

In the exhibition hall itself, the basement has continued its restaurant use, although it has been known by a series of different names. These include the Drum'er Boy Restaurant, Sturbridge House Restaurant, Dickens Tavern, Piccadilly Pub, and currently Bentley Pub II. The continued use of the exhibition hall as a restaurant is likely due to the building's location. With the development of Old Sturbridge Village to the west and the intersection of Interstates 90 and 84 to the east, the building is positioned to take advantage of tourist and traveler traffic. The upper floors of the building most recently served as an antiques shop, now closed with the floors left vacant.

Several other fairgrounds and their buildings have been documented as part of historic resources inventory work in Massachusetts. A search of the Massachusetts Historical Commission's Massachusetts Cultural Resource Information System returns several fairgrounds throughout the state that are still active and that retain some of their early fair buildings. Fairgrounds have been documented in Charlemont, Greenfield, Hardwick, Heath, Middlefield, and Topsfield, with the Middlefield fairgrounds retaining an exhibition hall similar in date and construction to the subject building.

The Middlefield Agricultural Hall (MIF.33), constructed in 1859, is a two-and-a-half story end-gable building, identical in shape to the WSAS exhibition hall although smaller in size and with several other differences. The Middlefield agricultural hall has a fieldstone foundation, is covered in wood clapboards and board-and-batten siding, and has a tin roof, in contrast to the brick foundation and the hipped roof with monitor of the WSAS exhibition hall. Like the WSAS exhibition hall, the Middlefield Agricultural Hall is a utilitarian building with little trim or ornament. The Middlefield agricultural hall is the only documented extant fairgrounds building that most closely resembles the WSAS exhibition hall. While other fairgrounds retain late 19th and early 20th century buildings, they are often animal barns or exhibition halls in a different form. It is likely that other buildings similar to the WSAS and Middlefield exhibition halls did exist, but they were torn down as fairs ended and fairgrounds developed, or as they aged and new fairgrounds buildings were constructed.



The Middlefield Agricultural Hall, taken in 1998 at part of the MIF.B documentation of Middlefield Center.

Title History

The ownership history of the Worcester South Agricultural Society (WSAS) Exhibition Hall is complicated, especially in the later 20th century. Below is a chain of title tracing the parcel of land that the exhibition hall currently stands on. This is not a full title history of the fairgrounds, as the exhibition hall lot was separated from the larger fairgrounds in the middle of the 20th century. Note that WCRD stands for Worcester County Registry of Deeds. The first date given is the date the deed was signed, the second date is when it was recorded. If only one date is given, the deed was signed and recorded on the same day. Several of the older deeds use rods in addition to acres as a measurement; one square rod is equal to 0.00625 acres.

1868

January 28/ February 13. WCRD Book 762, Page 154: Nelson Bennett to Worcester South Agricultural Society. Warranty deed for \$1100.

March 21/September 9. WCRD Book 773, Page 335: Thomas McCarty to Worcester South Agricultural Society. Warranty deed for \$521.

September 5/September 9. WCRD Book 773, Page 334: Thomas McCarty to Worcester South Agricultural Society. Warranty deed for \$235.25.

In early 1868 the WSAS began to purchase land south of Cedar Pond for their new exhibition hall and fairgrounds. First, for the sum of \$1100, they purchased 22 acres from Sturbridge resident Nelson Bennett. References to the channel of Cedar Pond along the western border of the purchased property indicate that Bennett's piece of land formed the western portion of the fairgrounds.

In the fall of the same year, the WSAS purchased several parcels from Sturbridge resident Thomas McCarty to the east of the Bennett land. First, for \$521, the WSAS purchased six acres and 33 square rods (0.21 acres). Next, for \$235.25, the society purchased two parcels, one 29 square rods (0.18 acres) and the second four acres and 21 square rods (0.13 acres). Later deeds indicate that the fair acquired more land in the area, but these purchases were not located.

1927

May 12/24. WCRD Book 2437, Page 269: Worcester South Agricultural Society to Walter C. Chace, Trustee. Mortgage deed for \$10,000.

1928

December 28, 1927/January 24. WCRD Book 2459, Page 61: Foreclosure deed, Worcester South Agricultural Society to Walter C. Chace, Trustee.

January 3/24. WCRD Book 2459, Page 61: Walter C. Chace, Trustee, to Thomas Ashworth. Auction deed for \$5,000.

March 30/31. WCRD Book 2463, Page 366: Thomas Ashworth to Sturbridge Agricultural Association, Inc. Warranty deed for consideration paid (no amount given).

The fair ran into troubles in the 1920s. A 1927 mortgage for \$10,000 was foreclosed on, handing the now-55 acre property to Walter C. Chace. While Chace is identified as a trustee in the mortgage deed, it is not clear what he is a trustee of; no bank or other organization is identified. Chace foreclosed on the property only seven months after the WSAS took out the mortgage. On December 28, 1927, at 11 am, Chace auctioned the property off for \$5,000 to Thomas Ashworth of Charlton; Ashworth is listed as the WSAS treasurer in the mortgage deeds. In March of 1928, Ashworth sold the property to the Sturbridge Agricultural Association, Inc. The non-profit organization was incorporated on February 27, 1928. It is unclear why the former Worcester South Agricultural Society did not purchase the property, and instead a new organization was created to manage the fairgrounds.

1939

April 1/5. WCRD Book 2742, Page 59: Sturbridge Agricultural Association, Inc. to Sturbridge Shore Acres Corporation. Quitclaim deed for consideration paid.

The final blow for the fairgrounds came literally, when the 1938 hurricane blew down a section of the grandstand and the fairgrounds suffered an estimated \$12,000 in damage. The fairgrounds were sold the following spring to the Sturbridge Shore Acres Corporation. No information was found about Sturbridge Shore Acres Corporation; in the deed they are listed as having an

office in Southbridge. The company did file a subdivision plan with the Worcester County Registry of Deeds the same year it purchased the land (see "Maps," below, for the plan). While the bulk of the fairgrounds were left intact, several lots were subdivided at the edge of the property along the shore of Cedar Pond. In November 1939, the organization entered into a 20-year lease agreement with Outdoor Enterprises, Inc. to lease the bulk of the fairgrounds for an outdoor ride-in theater (WCRD Book 2759, Page 544). The fairgrounds were used as a theater during much of the mid-20th century, later leased to the Dolly Drive-In Theatre and the Sturbridge Drive-In.

October 27/November 2. WCRD Book 2759, Page 242: Sturbridge Shore Acres Corporation to Morris Goldfine. Mortgage deed for \$17,000.

Several months after their purchase of the property, Sturbridge Shore Acres mortgaged it for \$17,000 to Morris Goldfine.

1940-1941

November 12/December 4. WCRD Book 2802, Page 409: Morris Goldfine foreclosure affidavit.

November 12/December 4. WCRD Book 2802, Page 408: Morris Goldfine to Anna Weiner.

November 30/December 4. WCRD Book 2802, Page 409: Anna Weiner to Parkway Amusement Co. Quitclaim deed for consideration paid.

November 30/December 4. WCRD Book 2802, Page 410: Parkway Amusement Co. to Morris Goldfine. Mortgage deed for \$14,000.

1941, August 4/23. WCRD Book 2827, Page 421: Morris Goldfine to Anna Weiner. Auction deed for \$3,000.

The property went through several transitions in 1940 and 1941. Morris Goldfine foreclosed on the property for the unpaid mortgage; he then sold it to Anna Weiner of Malden. Weiner sold it to Parkway Amusement Co., who took out a mortgage from Goldfine for \$14,000. In 1941 this mortgage was defaulted and Goldfine foreclosed on the property, again selling it to Weiner.

Morris Goldfine (d. Nov. 9, 1953) was the owner of Goldfine Real Estate in Boston. A resident of Newton, he was a founder of Congregation Kehillath Israel in Brookline. The 1960 Malden directory lists Anne Weiner as the secretary at Goldfine Real Estate.⁵

1946-1947

March 26/27. WCRD Book 2991, Page 261: Anna Weiner to Joseph R. Seremet, Emery A. Lavalley, and Archie J. Gagnon. Quitclaim deed for consideration paid.

June 27/January 13, 1947. WCRD Book 3037, Page 497: Joseph R. Seremet and Emery A. Lavalley to Cedar Lake Enterprises, Inc. Warranty deed for consideration paid.

After holding the property through World War II, Anna Weiner sold it to Joseph R. Seremet, Emery A. Lavalley, and Archie J. Gagnon. The first two men then sold their share to Cedar Lake Enterprises, Inc., of which Gagnon was the treasurer. Brothers Archie J. and John Gagnon operated Arland Tool and Manufacturing, Inc. out of the basement, and the Fair Club, a bar and nightclub, on the first floor.

1952

June 17/September 9. WCRD Book 3447, Page 86: Cedar Lake Enterprises, Inc. to Norman R. Brodeur and Dorothy R. Brodeur. Warranty deed for consideration paid.

For the first half of the 20th century, the exhibition hall stood on the same parcel of land as the rest of the fairgrounds. However in 1952, Cedar Lake Enterprises, Inc. split off the exhibition hall onto its own parcel. The bounds for this parcel mention that the northerly line of the parcel runs “parallel to the northerly line of the Fair Club building as it now stands,” and mentions a right-of-way to the east, today’s Fairgrounds Road. The Brodeurs lived in Sturbridge, and the 1952 Sturbridge directory lists Brodeur as a salesman.

⁵ Deeds give Ms. Weiner’s name as Anna, while directories consistently use Anne.

1962

February 20/April 3. WCRD Book 4270, Page 224: Norman R. Brodeur and Dorothy R. Brodeur to O. Normand Mercure and Esther A. Mercure. Warranty deed for consideration paid.

O. Normand and Esther A. Mercure acquired the property in 1962. O. Normand Mercure (Nov. 17, 1918 – Feb. 8, 2014) was born in Southbridge, the son of Ovide and Emma (Belanger) Mercure. The Mercure family, including O. Normand and his brothers, managed Ovide's Restaurant, located on Route 15 near the Connecticut border, where Interstate 84 is today. Mercure served as a Sturbridge Selectman for six years. O. Normand and Esther A. Mercure owned the Drum'er Boy Restaurant, Village Drummer Restaurant, and the Sturbridge House Restaurant. The 1965 Southbridge directory lists the Drum'er Boy Restaurant on Main Street in Sturbridge, with no number, suggesting it may have operated in the exhibition hall. The Sturbridge House Restaurant was the exhibition hall, as confirmed by a later owner's obituary.

1960s to the Present

Beginning in the 1960s, the exhibition hall rapidly changed hands, transitioning through owners, companies, and mortgages quickly. The building continued to operate as a restaurant, although like its owners, the name constantly changed. At this time the property was recombined with the larger fairgrounds property, which was used as a drive-in theater (although in deeds, the exhibition hall is listed as its own parcel, generally as Tract I).

1967, April 18/May 19. WCRD Book 4755, Page 60: O. Normand Mercure and Esther A. Mercure to Galileo, Inc.

1968, May 8. WCRD Book 4848, Page 70: Galileo, Inc. to O. Normand Mercure and Esther A. Mercure. Mortgage deed for \$114,070.56.

1970, October 26/29. WCRD Book 5071, Page 285: Foreclosure deed.

1970, October 26/29. WCRD Book 5071, Page 287: Affidavit of sale to O. Normand Mercure and Esther A. Mercure for \$6,120.

In 1967 the Mercures sold the Exhibition Hall property to Galileo, Inc., granting the company a mortgage the following year for \$114,070.56. However Galileo defaulted on the mortgage and the Mercures foreclosed in 1970, selling the property back to themselves for \$6,120.

1972, October 30/November 9. WCRD Book 5280, Page 435: O. Normand Mercure to Patrick L. and Dorothy L. Blomberg. Warranty deed for \$30,362 (one-half interest in property).

The Mercures divorced, and O. Normand Mercure sold his portion of the property. Esther A. Mercure retained her portion.

1974, November 25. WCRD Book 5627, Page 280: Esther A. (Mercure) Beall and Patrick L. and Dorothy L. Blomberg to Sturbridge Victualers, Inc. Warranty deed for \$254,000.

1976, September 30/November 29. WCRD Book 6077, Page 142: Jack L. Wolfson, bankruptcy trustee, to Monument Federal Savings and Loan.

Sturbridge Victualers, Inc. was incorporated in 1974 and dissolved in 1983. No names are listed in the Secretary of State's Corporations Database, but the address given is the junction of Routes 20 and 131, near the exhibition hall. The company went bankrupt and the property was sold to a bank, likely as repayment for a mortgage.

1977, September 27/October 5. WCRD Book 6306, Page 372: First Federal Savings and Loan Association of Lowell to Dickens Tavern, Inc.

Monument Federal Savings and Loan, the purchaser of Sturbridge Victualers, Inc.'s property, merged with First Federal Savings and Loan Association of Lowell in 1977.

1985, October 22/24. WCRD Book 9011, Page 242: Dickens Tavern, Inc. to K and R Holding Company. Quitclaim deed for consideration paid.

K and R Holding Company was operated by Ken and Richard Boland. The brothers were also the owners of Dickens Tavern, Inc. Richard Boland's obituary notes that they purchased the Sturbridge House Restaurant in 1974, and changed its name to Dickens Tavern and later Yesterdays Restaurant. The 1974 date of acquisition suggests they may have been the owners of Sturbridge Victualers, Inc. as well. The Bolands were also the developers of the Sturbridge Sheraton Motor Inn, today the Sturbridge Host Hotel & Conference Center, directly to the north of the exhibition hall property.

1985, October 22/24. WCRD Book 9011, Page 250: K and R Holding Company to Wedgestone Realty Investors Trust. Mortgage deed for \$770,000.

The more recent owners of the exhibition hall have been corporations largely based outside of Sturbridge.

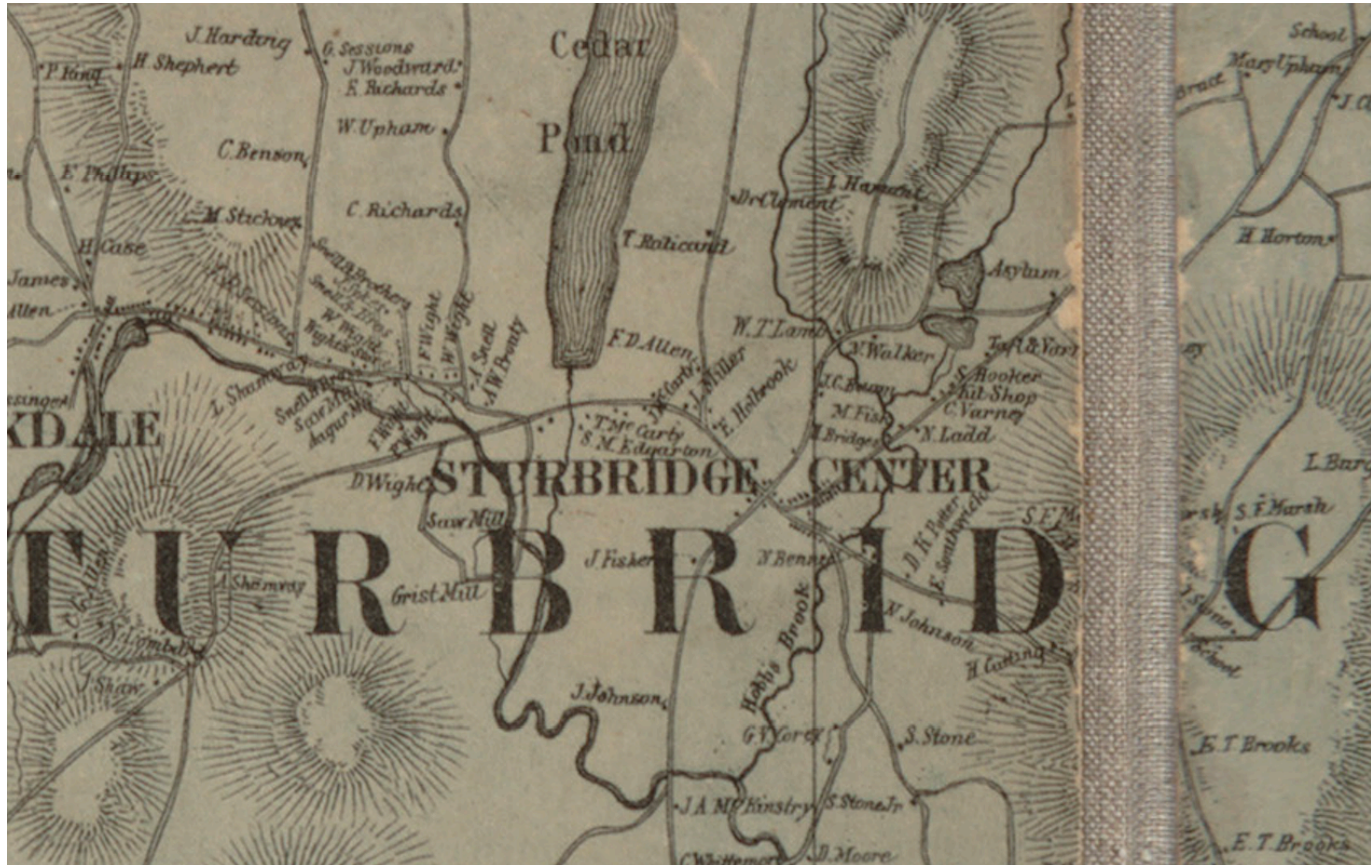
1991, January 29/February 22. WCRD Book 13253, Page 98: Wedgestone Financial f/k/a Wedgestone Realty Investors Trust to WF II Acquisition Corporation. Foreclosure deed.

1993, August 5/12. WCRD Book 15458, Page 30: WF II Acquisition Corporation to 362 Main Street, Inc. Quitclaim deed for \$800,000.

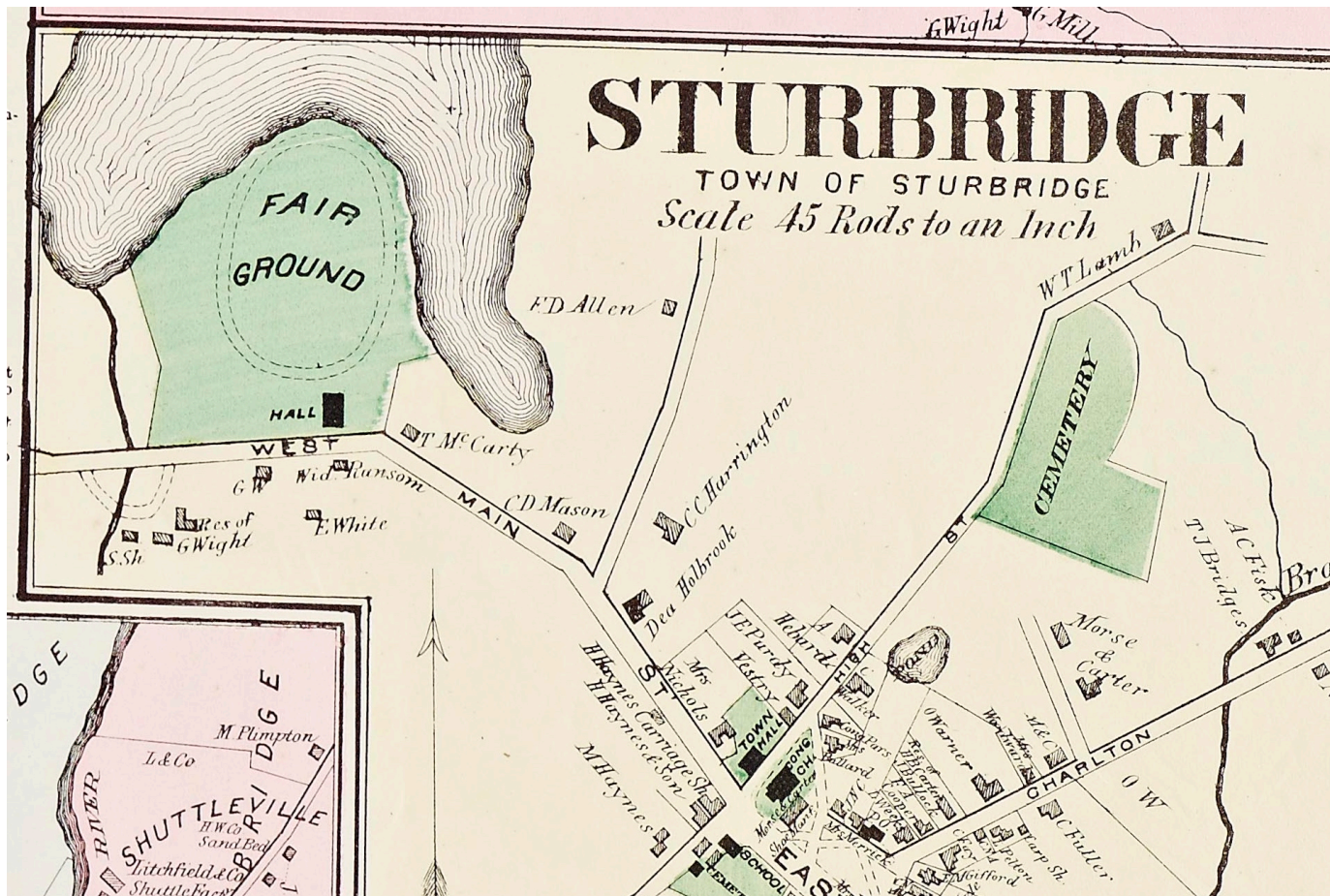
2008, December 30/31. WCRD Book 43638, Page 70: Riverdale Street, Inc. to WCM Enterprises, LLC. Quitclaim deed for less than \$100.

Riverdale Street Inc., merged with 362 Main Street, Inc., at an unknown date. WCM Enterprises, LLC, is the current owner of the building.

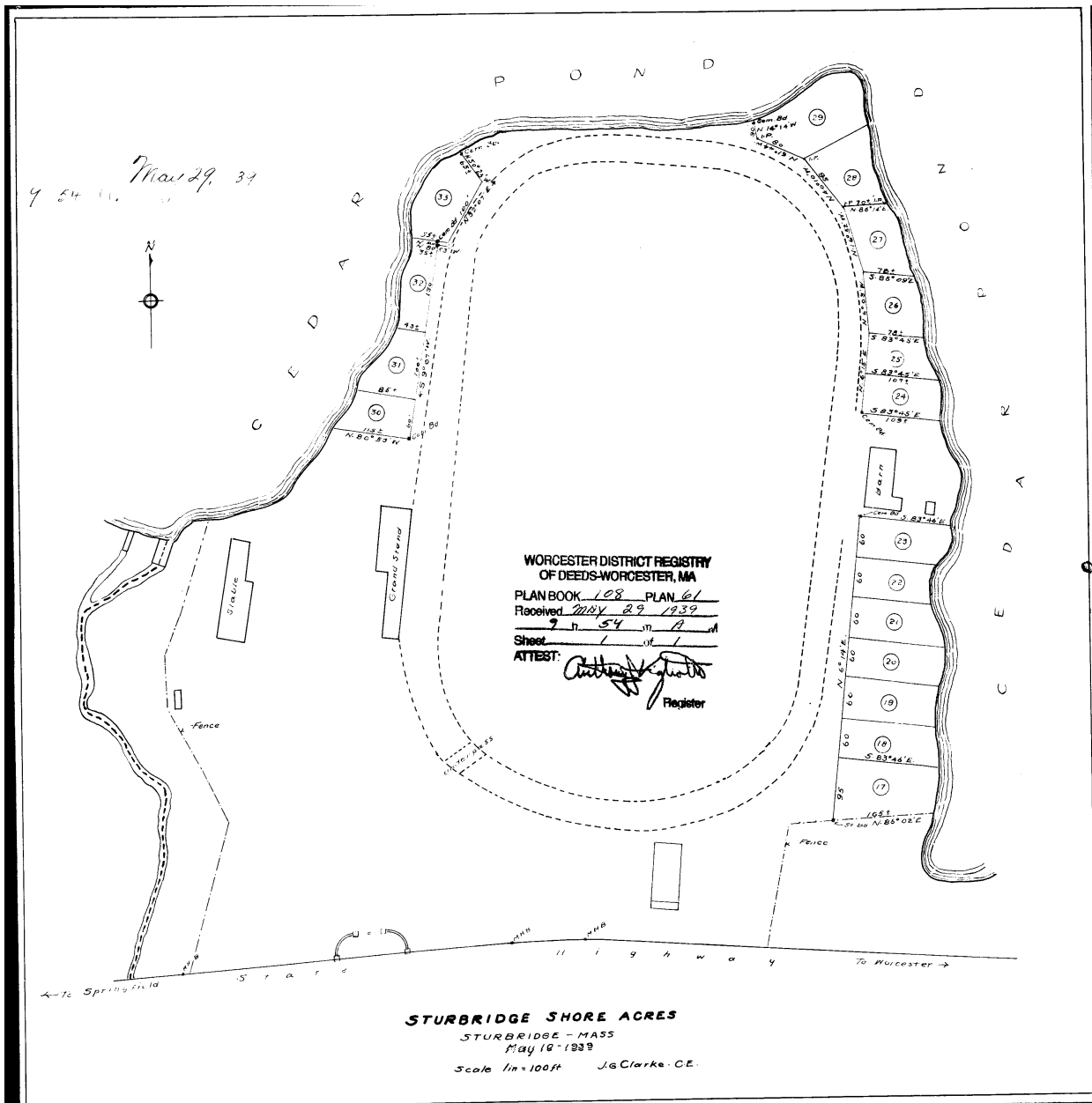
Maps



This detail of an 1857 map of Worcester County shows that just before the Worcester South Agricultural Society purchased its new fairgrounds, the area was not inhabited. The land at the south end of Cedar Pond was likely used for haying or grazing.



By 1870, the date of this Worcester County atlas detail, the fairgrounds had been laid out to the south of Cedar Pond, with the hall and the half-mile racetrack shown to the northwest of Sturbridge Center.



This plan to subdivide the Worcester South Agricultural Society Fairgrounds was filed with the Worcester County Registry of Deeds in 1939. However Sturbridge Shore Acres did not get very far on their plans to turn the fairgrounds into housing lots, and the fairgrounds remained largely vacant into the 1970s.

References

Maps

1857 Henry F. Walling, *Map of Worcester County, Massachusetts*

1870 F. W. Beers & Co., *Atlas of Worcester County, Massachusetts*

1892 O. H. Bailey, *Sturbridge and Fiskdale* [Bird's Eye View]

1898 L. J. Richards & Co., *New Topographical Atlas of the County of Worcester, Massachusetts*

Published Sources

Ammidown, Holmes. *Historical Collections*, Volume 2. New York, NY: Author, 1874.

Burns, Brian. *Sturbridge: A Pictorial History*. Norfolk, VA: The Donning Company, Publishers, 1988.

Corey, Charles V. "Worcester South Agricultural Society," *Quinabaug Historical Society Leaflet*, Vol. 3, No. 2. November 26, 1906.

"Esther A. Beall, 85," *Worcester Telegram & Gazette*. 2 December 1998.

History of Worcester County, Massachusetts, Volume 2. Boston, MA: C. F. Jewett and Company, 1879.

"Morris Goldfine," *Daily Boston Globe*. 10 November 1953.

"O. Normand Mercure," *Worcester Telegram & Gazette*. 10 February 2014.

"Richard M. Boland," Obituary, http://www.thelandmark.com/news/2012-05-24/Obituaries/Richard_M_Boland.html

"Sturbridge Fair Grounds Are Sold," *Worcester Telegram & Gazette*. 5 April 1939.

True, Alfred Charles. *A History of Agricultural Education in the United States, 1785-1925*. Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1929.

Unpublished Sources

Massachusetts Historical Commission Reconnaissance Report for Sturbridge, 1984.

MIF.B – Middlefield Center Historic District, Massachusetts Historical Commission Area Inventory Form.

Parsons, Bonnie and Betsy Friedberg. "Middlefield Center HD," National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form. August, 2012.

Sixty-Third Annual Report of the Massachusetts State Board of Agriculture. Boston, MA: Wright & Potter Printing Co., 1916.

STU.77 – South Worcester Agricultural Society Hall, Massachusetts Historical Commission Building Inventory Form.

STU.B – Sturbridge Fairgrounds Area, Massachusetts Historical Commission Area Inventory Form.
Worcester County Registry of Deeds Plan Book 108, Plan 61