



History of **300 at Main**

Costin's curios

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Jack E. Hauck



Photo J. Hauck, 2011

300 at Main

On Wenham's books, 300 at Main is carried as 268 Main St. Donald Costin, who owns the 2-acre property, renamed the site 300 at Main. "300 at Main," he said, "sounds much better as a business address than 268 Main."

"At first, I chose 300 Main, but the town assessor said that address did not fit into the master plan, and I could not use the address. So, the name was changed to 300 at Main."²

Do not get confused by the sign across the street that indicates Wenham is just ahead ... 300 at Main is in Wenham. The town line runs diagonally through the driveway leading into the property.

The first buildings on this property were erected, in 1947, by Albert W. Dodge. This was the headquarters and garage for his arborist company, Dodge Associates.¹

Dodge bought the vacant property from William Welch of Salem.¹ Previously, the land was part of the large Pingree estate, which stretched all the way to Larch Row, and on the other side of Main Street it reached to about 201 Main St.

To store his trucks and equipment, Dodge built a large cinder-block building. Alongside the building there was an office building, a drive-through opening, then three adjacent, open-front storage sheds, and a garage with an over-head door, all covered by a single roof.¹



Dodge Associates buildings, 1948. Originally, the office was in the cinder-block building, but later moved to the section at the right. Photo, Al Dodge

Dodge Associates' principals were Al Dodge and his father Wes Dodge. In 1956, Wes Dodge died. The business continued for another 12 years.¹

In 1968, Dodge sold the business, including the buildings, property and equipment to Carpenter Costin, an arborist company that had begun in 1946, and was located in Swamscott, MA.²

Donald Costin became the sole owner of the Dodge property, in 1980. His former partner, Bill Carpenter, continued to operate the tree service business, in Swamscott. The Wenham branch closed in 1985.²

Costin then began a major revision of the property. Over the years, he transformed the site into a small shopping and business center.

On the former Dodge property, there was an old Jenny gas station building. Shortly after Dodge bought the property, he acquired the building, which was at where today Mike's Auto Repair stands at 17 Bay Rd., Hamilton. He moved it over to the front of his site. Later, it was moved back off the street to the front of the storage sheds. (*Today, this would be in front of the end shop.*)¹

In 1982, Costin moved the old Jenny building back out to Main Street and converted it into a small, two-floor shop. The front bay window is where the station's garage door had been.²

Over the years, the shop has been many different businesses. The first was the Enon secretarial services. Others were: antiques, woodworking, and gifts. In 2006, it became the Locksmyth barber shop.²



Bay window is where the Jenny station garage door had been. Photo J. Hauck, 2011.

In 1984, the cinder-block building was redesigned to be an antique and florist shop. Costin owned the antique business. Don Robinson, a former salesman for Dodge Associates, ran the florist business, called Henderson's Florist. It lasted until 1995. ² Robinson has continued with Costin throughout the years.



Hamilton Athletic Club.
Photo J. Hauck, 2012

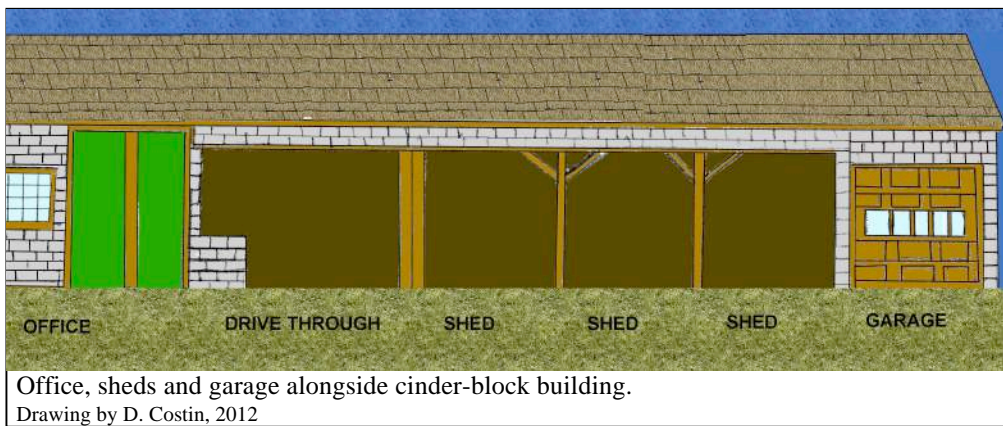
Next, Costin remodeled the building to become the Hamilton Athletic Club, run by Rich Marshall. He moved his business from Hamilton. ²

The former Dodge office, next to the cinder-block building, as well as the three open sheds and a garage, were completely rebuilt. A second floor was added above the sheds and garage.

Portions of the fronts of the shops were slightly extended, similar to what was done at the front of the athletic club building. Above the extended sections, skylights were inserted. Costin had wanted to have dormers on the front, but the Historic Commission said that they would not fit into the historic look of Main Street. ²

The office initially, 1985, became Simone Duval's interior decorating shop. Next, 1995, for about 3 years, it was Marybeth's beauty salon. When the salon moved over to Railroad Avenue, in Hamilton, Don Robinson opened a gift shop, called Spaniels by Hendersons. ²

Outside the gift shop, there is a large bronze plaque, on which is Lincoln's Gettysburg address. Costin also had planned to hang a bronze plaque with the Bill of Rights. He acquired both from the Claire Boothe Luce house in the Bass Rocks area of Gloucester. The plaques were cast at the Gorham Foundry in Providence, RI. Unfortunately, the Bill of Rights plaque was stolen before it could be hung. ²



Office, sheds and garage alongside cinder-block building.
Drawing by D. Costin, 2012



At street level, there are five shops. On second floor, there are four more businesses. Photo J. Hauck, 2012

Where the drive-through driveway had been, Costin built a tower. Above the tower, he placed a cupola, from a school in Centerville.²

The tower provides an entrance to the second floor, where there are six rooms. Various businesses have rented them. The first was Craigston Construction.²

On the front of the tower, above the entrance door, there is a "Haddem Hall" sign. You may wonder where the sign came from. It is not the name of a dormitory at a college. Rather, it is the brand name of a former line of wood stains produced by Cabot. Above the sign is a scallop shell relief. It is just another item Costin acquired a demolished building.²

In 1991, Costin had the tower clock specially made by Harmon Hunt of Hamilton, who had worked at Chelsea Clock for many years. The clock has E. Howard movements and is electrically driven, not weight driven. The clock's components were gathered over many years by Hunt. Hunt made all four clock faces.^{2,3}



Tower clock added in 1991. Photo J. Hauck, 2010

The weathervane was acquired in 1984 at an auction in Newburyport. The banner emblem is a Gothic design.²

The shed that was next to the drive-through was rebuilt to be a shop. Initially, it was Mrs. Haywood's wedding dress shop. When she retired, the shop became a bakery. Next, the shop was split into two shops, the bakery on one side and an ice cream parlor on the other side.²

Since coming to Wenham, back in 1968, Don Costin had been going to a Beverly Brigham's ice cream shop. The shop closed in the early 1990s. Costin decided to open his own ice cream parlor. For the ice cream he brought in Columbo ice cream. For a name he chose Henderson's Café.²

The name comes from a tree business (*Henderson and Herndon Tree Service*) that Carpenter and Costin had acquired, in 1971. You can see the old Henderson and Herndon sign outside the Henderson gift shop that is next door.²

Why Henderson and not Herndon? Henderson was the long-time owner.

If you want to learn about Wenham as it "use to be," you might go to Henderson's, about 8 a.m., on a week day. A group of locals will be sitting around a table, having coffee. They are a friendly group. Just say hi, and ask your question. Be ready for many different answers, and some very funny stories.²

Both Wenham and Hamilton people frequent Henderson's, as do people who have moved away and occasionally come back to see old friends.



Morning coffee at Hendersons. Left to right: Bob Blanchard, Don Costin, Richie Bertone, Frank Eldridge and Al Dodge. Photo J. Hauck, 2011.



Henderson's café, opened in 1990, offers both breakfast and lunch. Photo J. Hauck 2011



Tree company is gone, but the name remains. Photo J. Hauck 2011



Shops to left of Henderson's Cafe.
Photo J. Hauck, 2012



Entrances and windows at back of shops.
Photo J. Hauck, 2012



Annex behind old Jenny station was built in 1985. Photo J. Hauck, 2012

There often are two rocking chairs at the front of Henderson's. On one is the word Wenham and Hamilton is on the other.

The next two sheds and garage were made into attached shops. Over the years, the shops have been rented by various small businesses, including a kitchen design store, a dress store, a candy store, a brassware store, and a tailor shop.²

At the back of the building, there are windows on both the ground level and a dormer that stretches across the length of the building. There also is an entrance at the end that leads to the second floor.

In 1985, Costin built, behind the Jenney building, a two-story annex. Various businesses have occupied the building, including home improvement, web design, tailor, building contractor, and an art gallery.²

Special attention was paid, in the building of the site, to have it fit into the historic character of these very old New England towns.

Neatly tucked away at the town line of Wenham and Hamilton, the 300 at Main shops are a throwback to the days of independently-owned stores and businesses, where you dealt directly with the owners.

The quaint, small shops offer a variety of goods and services for those who want to leisurely shop and enjoy

the charm of the area.

Parking is not a problem, for there is ample space close to, if not in front of the shops.

When the weather permits, shoppers can sit and relax at canvas-covered patio tables.

There is one other building of special note at 300 at Main. It cannot be seen from Main Street.

One of the structures Costin acquired, when he and his partner bought Dodge Associates, was formerly a railroad-freight storage building. Dodge bought the freight house and a small piece of property from railroad, in 1961.¹

The 75 ft. x 20 ft. storage shed was behind the Dodge cinder-block garage. At first, Dodge rented part of the building to Burt Flynn for his Village Mower repair business. Another part was rented for storing antique organ parts.¹

After Costin acquired the Dodge property, he had the storage building moved slightly away from the rail tracks. It was placed on a deep, basement foundation behind the cinder-block building. Costin then began turning it into his home. At the time, he lived on the corner of Essex St. and Cambridge St., Salem.²

As shown at upper left, the shed was in poor condition. It is hard to believe how Costin transformed it. Who says you can't turn a sow's ear into a silk purse.

Now, you may ask, what about the close proximity of his house to the railroad tracks and the train noise?

When asked about the noise, Costin said, "I hardly ever hear the trains."

To build his future home, Costin completely gutted the former freight-storage building. Then, he began buying exterior elements from old buildings in many parts of New England, and also Europe and Great Britain.



Railroad freight storage building, 1989.
Photo D. Costin.



Placing shed on basement foundation,
1990. Photo D. Costin



Front of the Costin house.
Photo J. Hauck, 2011



West side of Costin house has an 1845 entrance he bought at a wrecking yard, and an 1860 railing he bought from an antique dealer. Photo J. Hauck, 2011



Back of Costin House features 6 arched windows from an 1820 house in London England. Photo J. Hauck, 2011



Garden at front of 300 Main St.
Photo J. Hauck, 2012

The front-door entrance came from the Mosely house, Newburyport, on the Merrimac River. The stairway came from Goddard family mansion, in Lynn, MA.²

Getting to see the west side of the house is a little bit difficult. Behind the athletic club building, there is a narrow walkway off of the driveway that leads to the front of the house.

The eastside of the house, shown at right, has many decorative arched-windows. The six windows came from an 1820-house, in London, England, as did the clay chimney pots. The building has four more arched windows. Costin bought the domed-steeple at a Rockport auction.²

When all the exterior accouterments were in place, the building was encased with red kiln-bricks.

Costin calls it his home, but it is much more a storage house for his vast collection of antique items, memorabilia, and just plain old stuff.

Scattered about the property, including the garden alongside Main Street, are many antique landscape items that Costin has acquired over the years. Alongside his house, there is a marble fountain, originally from a French palace, that later was at an estate in Manchester By the Sea.²

While not part of the structures at 300 Main, passer-bys are likely to see an old fire engine in the front parking lot. Behind the shops, Costing has a few more fire engines.

Costin's interest in fire engines goes back to when he was 8 years old, and living in Lynn. The town's fire chief gave the young boy rides in his

fire-chief's car, when he visited various fire houses.²

In 1952, Costin was received his first fire truck: Ladder Truck 26, from Boston. In 2009, Costin sold a fire truck, which he shipped to Holland. Soon after, he bought another fire truck and has since acquired nine more fire trucks from Beverly, Salem Willows and Lynn. His favorites are the Pierce Arrow and the Ahrens-Fox.

As a boy, Don Costin lived for many years with his grandfather, John P. Morrissey, in Lynn. On Lynn common, there is a marble monument dedicated to John P. Morrissey (*the superintendent of parks and playgrounds for nearly 50 years.*)²

Since coming to Wenham in 1968, Costin has held many different town offices, including: Selectman (1992-1995), Board of Health (2012), and Wenham's representative for the MBTA for nearly 20 years.

Well, that does it. We're at the end of the Wenham Historic district.

For our trek along Main Street, we've walked about two miles, we've looked at over 200 structures, and perhaps, we've learned a few new things about old Main Street.

Many things have changed over the last few centuries. However, Main Street Wenham still epitomizes old New England.

I'll close with the final verse of the poem, "Main Street," by Joyce Kilmer:

*God be thanked for the Milky Way
that runs across the sky,
That's the path that my feet would tread,
whenever I have to die.
Some folks call it a Silver Sword,
and some a Pearly Crown,
But the only thing I think it is,
is Main Street, Heaventown.*

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References

- 01 - Al Dodge
- 02 - Don Costin
- 03 - New Clock tick tocks atop Wenham tower, Hamilton-Wenham Chronicle, Jan. 24, 1990.



Lynnfield 1981 fire engine #206.
Photo J. Hauck, 2011