

History of ...

## Patton Park

In 1910, a major fire that began on Mill Street spread to the east, reaching the Main Street (now Bay Road) and Asbury Street area. It destroyed all the buildings at this intersection, including widow Hattie A. Pearson's house and barn, on the north corner of Main St. and Asbury St.<sup>1</sup>

About 20 years later, in 1931, the Myopia Hunt Club Schooling Field Trust acquired the vacant 14.2-acre Cilley property. It became a horse schooling field.<sup>2</sup>

During WWII, the local State Guard Unit used the property for training purposes. The area at the corner of Main and Asbury was used as a parking lot, when functions were held at the Community House, built in 1921. A pond on the property was used for ice skating and hockey, in the winters.<sup>3</sup>

In 1941, Robert B. Walsh, Standish Bradford and others were able to have the Myopia Hunt Club Schooling Field Trust sell 14.2 ac. of the former Cilley property to the town for developing a playground and recreation fields.<sup>3, 15</sup> Initially, the group had sought 25 ac.<sup>15</sup> They began their pursuit of the Cilley property in 1938.<sup>5</sup>

A plan for developing the 14.2 ac. included making a tennis court, a baseball diamond, a softball diamond, a playground and an ice skating rink. Two parking areas also were set aside, one by Main Street and one by Asbury Street.<sup>6</sup>

Prior to acquiring the former Cilley 14.2 ac., Hamilton only had the town beach at Chebacco Lake (1

ac.) and Manasseh Cutler Park on Main Street (2 ac.) for outdoor enjoyment or recreation.

### Lot done in 1940s

The town did not intend to develop the entire recreation field plan at once, but to do it in stages over several years. Preliminary work included leveling the area, removing tree stumps and enlarging the pond to provide more skating area.<sup>6</sup> For flooding the pond area, pipe was laid from a hydrant installed near the skating rink.<sup>16</sup>

Myopia Hunt Club allowed the town to take soil and gravel from its pit to fill low areas and the cellars from the Pearson house and barn destroyed by 1910 fire.<sup>16</sup>

In 1943, Community Service funded the building of a regulation hockey rink, including pipe-frame hockey goal cages, next to the pond. The Myopia Club donated sideboards. Benches were built at edge of the rink. Light poles were erected for floodlights, to allow skating after dark.<sup>16</sup>

Baseball and softball games began in the summer of 1945, following the town completing, that spring, final grading and seeding of a baseball field. Preliminary grading was done in 1944.<sup>16</sup> Plans were announced for erecting bleachers and a backstop

The town built, in 1945, a hydrant near the hockey rink and used a fire hose to flood the rink. During the winter, Ray Sanford, with the assistance of some boys, shoveled snow from the ice and stacked logs for the pond-side fire. At the end of winter, Sanford removed the sideboards and pipe goals for storage.<sup>16</sup>



**1962**, A. P. Gardner Post 194 American Legion gave the town a swimming pool.  
Photo, Hamilton Historical Society



**2017**, town built new Veterans Memorial Pool. Photo, Town of Hamilton

# Patton Park



**1955**, toilets built . Photo, J. Hauck, 2018



**About 1955**, Picnic area created. Photo, J. Hauck, 2018



**Service building** (*left*) and bathhouse (*right*) built 2017.  
Photo, J. Hauck, 2018



**Garage** built 1988. Photo, J. Hauck, 2018

In 1945, Mothers' Club members, men involved with baseball teams, and the Park Commissioners met to develop a plan for creating the new park.<sup>16</sup> They produced a long list of requirements:

- ✓ Seeding the entire park.
- ✓ Mowing and maintenance equipment
- ✓ A small building to house the mower, tools and supplies.
- ✓ Bumper fences for parking areas.
- ✓ Drinking fountains.
- ✓ Evergreen trees for a windbreak at the skating area.
- ✓ Full-time man to care for the park.
- ✓ Playground instructor.
- ✓ Backstop for baseball diamond.
- ✓ Bleachers for baseball field.
- ✓ Playground equipment.

Appropriations for these items were to be spread over several years.

Further, the committee estimated the yearly cost of maintaining the park and other recreation facilities would average about \$3,000 per year.

In 1945, with WWII ending, the financial situation in Hamilton improved, thereby freeing up money for the park program.

In December 1945, Hamilton resident and WWII hero Gen. George S. Patton died in an automobile accident in Germany. The following year, Hamilton voters approved the naming of the new park in honor of Gen. Patton.

At the 1946 dedication, Mrs. Beatrice Patton recommended a Sherman be located on the General Patton Memorial Park.<sup>7</sup> The United States Army shipped a tank from the Letterkenny Ordnance Depot, Chambersburg, PA, to the commanding officer at Fort Devens. In the spring of 1947, trucks brought the tank, a Sherman medium tank complete with a 75-mm gun to the park. It weighed about 67,000 pounds. The town did not have to pay for the tank, but paid for its shipping from Fort Devens. The Army Corps of Engineers put a fresh coat of khaki green paint on the tank. Some years later, the hatch was welded shut.<sup>41</sup>

Mrs. Patton, in her comments, said the 33-ton tank would need a permanent foundation to keep it from sinking into the ground.<sup>7</sup> Forty-four years later, in 1990, A. P. Gardner Post 194 provided a concrete slab for the tank.<sup>26</sup>

Two markers, near the tank, honor the memory of the 83<sup>rd</sup> Division of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Army and the 4<sup>th</sup> Armored Div., which spearheaded Gen. Patton's attack against the Germans.

Prior to the Gen. Patton dedication, the town built a drinking fountain in the playground area.<sup>17</sup>

Soon after the dedication, Frederick Winthrop and Catherine Winthrop gave the park 3 tennis courts.<sup>17</sup>

The town built, in 1946, a tool house near the north side of the pond. In addition for use in storing park maintenance equipment, it was for use, during the winter, as a place for people to change their skates and to rest.<sup>41</sup>

In 1947, the town built a chain-link backstop on the baseball diamond.<sup>18</sup>

The following year, 1948, the town erected a flagpole near the tank and placed, in honor of Gen. Patton, a bronze plaque on a low granite base at the foot of the flag pole.<sup>17</sup>

Other projects completed in 1948 were; grading and surfacing of the parking space, grading and seeding of the playground area, erection of some playground equipment, installation of drinking fountains, planting trees to provide a windbreak for the skating rink, and installation of floodlights for the skating rink.<sup>17</sup>

### Several additions in 1950s

With their being more use of the lighted skating area in the evening, two street lights were erected, in 1950, in the parking lot beside Main Street.<sup>18</sup>

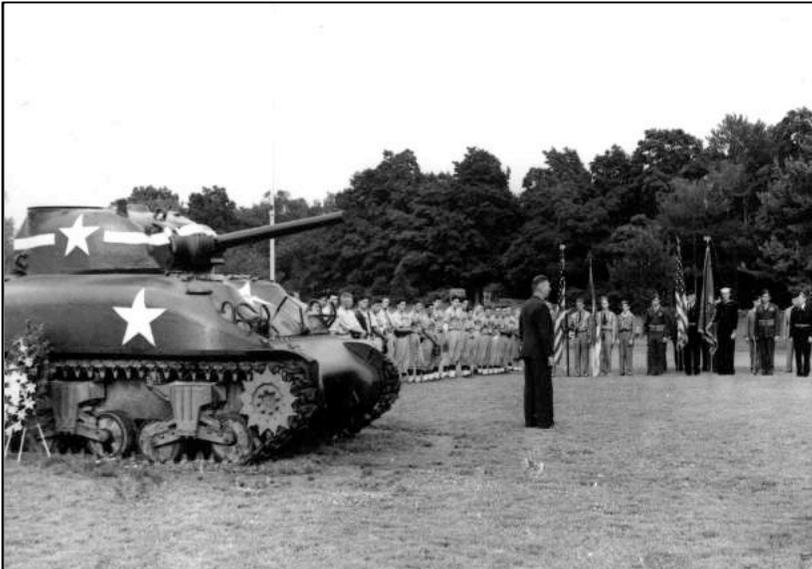
1951 was an active year at the park. The French Government gave the town two road markers commemorating the march of Gen. George S. Patton, Jr.'s Third Army from the beachhead at Normandy to the Germany border.<sup>18</sup> At the dedication ceremony, Mrs. Patton recommended a Sherman tank be located on the Patton Park.<sup>18</sup>

Friends of Patton Park Playground, in 1951, launched a fundraising program to replace tire playground equipment, add new types of equipment, build benches and make the park more attractive by planting shrubs, bushes and trees.<sup>18</sup>

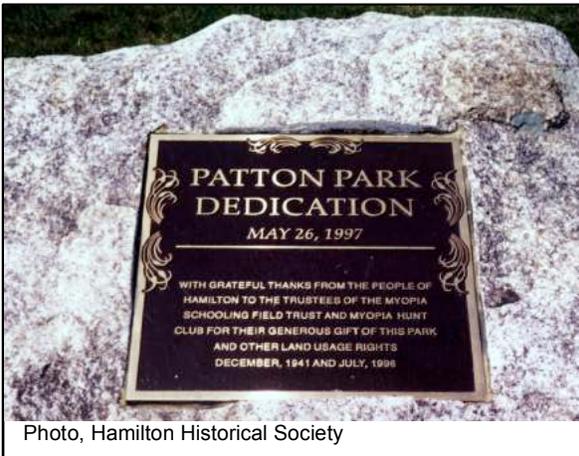
Not that they were not needed earlier, but it took nearly a decade for toilet facilities to be built at the park.<sup>42</sup> It was built, in 1955, on the west side of the park, between the small and large baseball diamonds. People had been using the toilet facilities in the Community House, across Asbury Street.

In the early 1950s, the Mother's Club began hosting an annual Patton Park picnic to conclude the summer park programs.<sup>42</sup> In years to come, the Mother's Club provided funds for many other park projects.

Also providing funds and services for parks programs was the Community Service began hosting special events at the park.



**1946 dedication** of tank on the General Patton Memorial Park.  
Photo, Hamilton Historical Society



Photo, Hamilton Historical Society



**1990, American Legion A. P, Gardner Post 194** provided a concrete slab for the 33-ton Sherman tank. Photo, J. Hauck, 2018

# Patton Park



**Markers, from 2 French towns,** honor 83<sup>rd</sup> Division of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Army and the 4<sup>th</sup> Armored Div., led by Gen. Patton's attack against the Germans. Photo, Arthur Crosbie, 1998



**1955 A civil war and a WWI cannon** were transferred to Patton Park from the Memorial Green and placed near the Bay Road entrance.  
Photo, Hamilton Historical Society

Highlighting the annual July 4<sup>th</sup> fair were a bonfire and fireworks, in the evening. The bonfire program, which began in the early 1950s, was the burning of a 10- to 15-ft. high pile of wood. Boy Scouts and the Sons of the American Legion piled the wood.<sup>9</sup>

In 1955, two old cannons were added to the park, near the Bay Road entrance. This came about when the triangular Memorial Green, next to the First Congregational Church at the intersection of Bay Road and Cutler Road, was reduced in size.<sup>24</sup> As a result, the old cannons on the Green had to be removed: a civil war and a WWI cannon were transferred to Patton Park.<sup>24</sup>

Another addition to the park, in 1956, was a bleacher alongside the baseball diamond.<sup>20</sup> The small softball diamond, in 1956, began to be used for Little League Baseball. A Hamilton-Wenham league began playing at the park.<sup>33</sup>

Unwanted additions at the park's pond were summer algae and weeds. Fertilizers, used to improve the park's grass, contain nitrogen and phosphorus. When these chemicals wash into the pond, they lower dissolved oxygen levels in the water. This results in algae blooms and weed growth.

Various efforts to remove the weeds and halt further growth have been tried. In 1957, during dry season, the town scraped the bottom of the pond to insure a safer and better skating surface.<sup>22</sup>

Not all vegetation was under attack at the park. In 1958, Sarah G. Weis of Bay Rd. gave the park 3 willow trees. Planted on the north side of Weaver Pond, they were memory of her deceased husband, Alfred.<sup>45</sup> (Note: *The trees are gone, but a memorial stone remains near where they were planted, in what became a picnic area.* )

### Swimming pool opened 1962

A new sport came to the park in 1960. The Recreation Committee and the Highway Department installed a basketball court at the Asbury Street end of the park, near the tennis courts. With the Boston Celtics being the NBA champions, basketball was a very popular game.

A major addition came to the park in June 1962: a swimming pool, 75 by 35 ft., opened. It was a gift from the A. P. Gardner Post 194 American Legion. Open for 10 weeks, it provided free swimming and instruction for children, in the morning, and was open, to the public, in the afternoons and evenings, for a small cost. At year's end, the Recreation Board gave about \$1,600 to the town, which represented the total receipts from the pool.<sup>23</sup>

The new pool, was opened, despite not meeting the Massachusetts Department of Public Health

Standards for ancillary buildings. The Standards required public pools to provide: for each sex, adequate and separate dressing and sanitary facilities; showers with hot and cold water (*minimum number was one for each 40 bathers based on the maximum bather load*); for each sex, at least one water closet for each 40 bathers; a room equipped for the emergency care of sick or injured bathers; and adequate storage space for maintenance and cleaning equipment and pool supplies.

### Lights for basketball and tennis in 1970s

The 1970s started off strongly at Patton Park. Beginning in 1970, the park hired a physical education and recreation instructor, Charles Fogg. A full staff was added, including pool personnel. All but one of whom were veterans of the park program.<sup>27</sup>

A swim team began, that year, under the direction of Charles Mons.

Also in 1970, lights were added to the basketball court. A men's summer evening basketball league began: about 120 young men participated.<sup>27</sup>

The Hamilton Youth Commission, established in 1971, helped purchase sideboards and goals for the hockey rink.<sup>25</sup>

Evening and nighttime tennis matches became possible in 1972, when lights were erected at the tennis courts.<sup>28</sup>

A problem that began many years earlier was addressed in 1972. Groups of young people were gathering at the park, after dark, to drink beer and other alcoholic beverages. The town established a "no drinking alcoholic beverages" law for the park and the town beach at Chebacco Lake and a \$20 fine.<sup>28</sup> A sign was nailed high up on a park light pole.

Several new sports programs began in the 1970s. In 1972, a men's flag football league started.<sup>28</sup> The following year, 1973, a "midget football league" began.<sup>44</sup> Next, in 1975, a boys soccer program was introduced.<sup>45</sup>

The long struggle for having a bathhouse by the swimming pool came to fruition in 1974: the bathhouse provided toilet, shower, first-aid, and storage areas.<sup>29</sup>

Also that year, the Mothers' Group contributed a new merry-go-round.<sup>29</sup> Some years later, the equipment was removed for safety reasons. The same also happened with the seesaws. Federal safety guidelines for playgrounds were established in 1981.

The Patton Park swimming pool, in 1976, was sandblasted, painted and a pool cover installed. A new filter system was installed.<sup>39</sup>



**Hockey rink**, for many years, was built each winter beside Weaver Pond. Photo, Hamilton Historical Society



**1960 Basketball court** built. Lights were added in 1970. Photo, J. Hauck, 2016

# Patton Park



**1945 Tennis courts** were given to park by Frederick Winthrop and Catherine Winthrop. Lights were added in 1972. Photo, Google maps, 2017



**1946 Baseball diamond** built. Photo, Hamilton Historical Society



**2016 bleacher stand** built, followed in 2017 by dugouts. Photo, J. Hauck, 2018

## Recreation and service building 1986

There were numerous summer programs in the 1980s. Seven baseball and softball programs. Little League. Baseball. Senior League Baseball. Girl's softball. Women's softball. <sup>30</sup> In 1983, a Physical Fitness Trail was created. <sup>31</sup>

Nearly 20 years after first being discussed in 1968, the town built, in 1986, a combination recreation and service building near the pool. The new building had a warming room, with a pot-belly stove, to provide shelter and comfort for the skaters. The town's Building Inspector and a carpenter, Frankie DeCoster, built the facility, <sup>32</sup>

Helping the park the park's financial needs were the local Boy Scouts. A paper recycling program at Patton Park, in 1989, absorbed some of the financial burden. About 250 tons of paper per year was recycled through this program. <sup>46</sup>

## Bandstand added in 1994

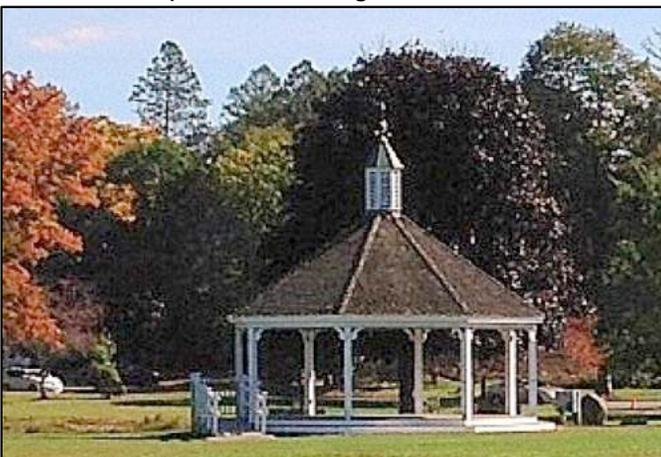
After a couple of years discussing the building of a concession stand, one was erected near the swimming pool, in 1993. It did not offer cooked food, such as hotdogs and hamburgers. <sup>7</sup>

The following year, 1994, in preparation for many programs to be held at Patton Park during the Hamilton's bicentennial celebrations, the town built a bandstand. The first concert was on Jul. 4<sup>th</sup>.

In keeping with the town's historic architecture, the stand had a white cupola, an quill weathervane, white railing, and cedar shingles. A time capsule was buried below the bandstand, which was built using donations of money and components. <sup>8</sup>

As part of its efforts to provide recreation opportunities for senior citizens, the Parks Department, in 1995, built horseshoe pits and a storage shed.

A dozen pits, 48-ft. long and 6 ft. wide were laid



**1994 Bandstand built.** The first concert was on Jul. 4<sup>th</sup>. Handicap access, left, was added later. Photo, J. Hauck, 2017

out on an area behind the third-base side of the baseball field. Each pit has blue-clay-filled boxes at both ends and a macadam lane between the boxes. In 2018, the horseshoe pits were refurbished by a Boy Scout as part of his Eagle Scout service project.

Thomas Henley of Hamilton formed the Hamilton Horseshoe Club in 1947. The Club, which began playing at Patton Park in 1960s, has handicapped, 40-pitch matches on summer evenings, starting at 6:30 p.m.

## Weeds persist in Weaver's Pond

Ridding Weaver Pond of its weeds was done several times during the 2000s. The pond was dredged and when the weeds returned chemicals were tried. Weed regrowth followed each effort. In 2004, a floating aeration fountain was tried. <sup>12</sup>

The pond drew its name from Carl Weaver, a long-term town employee, who cleared snow from the pond's ice and watched over a fire, where skaters warmed themselves.

The bicentennial bandstand, in 2007, began to be the site of musical concerts on Sunday evenings, funded by the Hamilton-Wenham Cultural Council. <sup>35</sup>

The town dedicated, in 2008, the Big League Baseball Field in memory of Richard A. Vitale. For many years, he was involved with Hamilton young people, as the Recreation Director and a member of the Youth Commission.

In 2009, citing the need to update Patton Park's Summer Park program, to reflect the changing needs to the community, the Recreation Department began offering an outdoor movie night. The first movie, Shrek, was shown in July. <sup>37</sup> None of the swamp creatures came out from the weed-filled Weaver pond to watch the movie.



**Ridding the pond of weeds** was done several times in 2000s.. Weed regrowth followed each effort. Photo, J. Hauck, 2014



2013 Friends of Patton Park raised more than \$240,000 to buy and install the new equipment . Photo, J. Hauck, 2017



Photo, Community Preservation Commission

# Patton Park



Photo, Community Preservation Commission



Photo, Community Preservation Commission



2010 Mother's Club had a split rail fence erected along Bay Road. The attractive addition also restricts children from running onto the road. Photo, J. Hauck, 2018



**Patton Park, 2018** – 1) Parking lot; 2) Basketball; 3) Tennis; 4) Playground; 5) Little League; 6) Bandstand; 7) Tank; 8) Football; 9) Toilets; 10) Baseball; 11) Garage; 12) Picnic; 13) Pool; 14) Parking; and 15) Horseshoes.  
 Photo, Google maps, 2017

The field, located between the two baseball fields, is 70 yards long and 30 yards wide. Scoring is the same as tackle football, but without field goals.

In 2013, a two-year campaign for a new Patton Park playground was successful. On Aug. 29, the new playground opened with a grand celebration. The Friends of Patton Park raised more than \$240,000 to buy and install the new equipment, which includes swings, slides, monkey bars and a zip line.

Fireworks on July 4<sup>th</sup> returned to Patton Park in 2015. This was the first time since being halted following 1959.<sup>22</sup>

2016 marked the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Little League Baseball at Patton Park.<sup>33</sup> Four years earlier, 2012, a temporary home run fence, was erected.<sup>47</sup>

**New playground in 2013, pool in 2017**

The Mother's Club, in 2010, had a split rail fence erected along Bay Road. Besides being an attractive addition, it also restricts children from running from the playground area onto the road.<sup>36</sup>

Night baseball came to Patton Park in 2011.

In 2013, Hamilton fielded, at Patton Park, a New England Flag Football League team.<sup>38</sup> Instead of tackling, the defensive team pulls a flag from the waist of the ball carrier. Contact is not allowed between players. In the New England League, teams have 5 active players, up to 13 years old. There are both girls and boys leagues.

Two bleacher stands were built by the baseball field in 2016. Funds from Hamilton's CPA paid for the stands.<sup>33</sup>

Further improvements to the baseball diamond came in 2017. Private donations paid for building dugouts on both sides of the diamond.<sup>34</sup>

The highlight of 2017 was the opening, on June 10, of a new Veterans Memorial Pool. It was open daily until August 27. Recreation Director Sean Timmons reported: 264 memberships sold; 1,115 drop-ins throughout the season; 6,351 visits to the pool; and \$88,629.10 revenue. It was built for about \$2 million.<sup>34</sup>

Features of the new pool include: 75-ft. length and 42-ft. width 6-land main pool; 40-ft. long, 22-ft. wide recreational pool; a shallow, stepped entry; bath-house with showers and toilets; services building with a filter room, concession stand, offices and lifeguard room; and outdoor showers.

In 2018, a new form of football began at Patton Park: flex football. Unlike flag football, flex football allows blocking and a some other aspects of tackle football, but head contact is illegal. Flex football players wear soft-shell helmets and shoulder pads.

Patton Park's many attractions combine to make the park a place for townspeople to connect in having fun, a place to expand the very important asset to Hamilton's value, social capital. Interaction of young and old, town areas and social groups is essential to a town's functioning for the good of all.



**Horseshoe pits**, a dozen, built in 1995, are on the north side of the park. Photo, Hamilton Horseshoe Club

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*Jack Hauck, October 2018*