

One of Stow's many historical "gems" is its Town Hall, a center of community life since 1848. This painting by Frank Augustus Curtis depicts it as it appeared around 1882.

Introduction – The Story of Stow

The shorthand description for *Stow* **Things might be:** A town's transition from a frontier settlement of 37 pioneers in 1686 to a farming community with 150 farms and 600 cows in 1870 (and 1,000 cows in 1900) to a gentrified suburb with 16 alpacas in 2008.

There have been many remarkable elements in Stow's history – Minutemen who fought at Concord in 1775; one of the country's first woolen mills, established at Rock Bottom around 1813; the rise of Lake Boon as a summer resort for city folk from Boston at the beginning of the 20th Century.

Stow's development as a golfing mecca included one of the country's first courses for African Americans, opened in 1923. World War II saw creation of the 3,000-acre ammunition depot on the town's eastern side that has become the Assabet River National Wildlife Refuge.

"Gems" of Stow's modern persona include its orchards, golf courses, farms, schools – and its 6,669 men, women and children.

Minute Man Air Field was opened in 1969 and today, in addition, Stow is home to two private airfields, one supporting ultralight aircraft enthusiasts, the other a superb collection of historic airplanes.

At the same time, Stow's story has paralleled that of many New England communities. The farmers who worked the land in the 17th and 18th Centuries created a landscape so changed it would be hard for us to recognize – overwhelmingly of cleared farmland and pastures, not the regrown forests that we see about us today.





On Box Mill Road, members of today's Stow Minuteman Company prepare to take part in the 2008 SpringFest parade.

As railroads, canals and the shifting frontier opened western territories, competition forced Stow's agriculturists to adapt. Hay and milk proved to be profitable products in the 19th Century. In the mid-20th Century, poultry became significant.

As the 20th Century began, some farmers took the route of developing apple orchards. But the economic/agricultural cycle was repeated – competition from more cost-effective enterprises to the west forced adaptation. In the later-20th Century, Stow's apple growers moved into a new niche, combining recreation and agriculture – “pick-your-own” orchards. Some found the land more valuable than the business. In a pattern often repeated among farms and orchards in Stow, Fruit Acres, Stow's largest orchard in the mid-20th Century, became the Birch Hill residential area in the late 20th Century.

Industry seems a strange word to associate with Stow, but our rural community has had a significant mill presence. For some 100 years, the Gleasondale mills had thriving textile operations. Maynard,

which began life as the Assabet Mills sections of Stow and Sudbury, boasted the nation's largest woolen operation in the late 19th Century. While textile production continued through World War II, today the mill structures in Gleasondale and particularly in Maynard remain as office parks.

Stow Things, as a book, is an outgrowth of “325 Things to Know About Stow,” a newspaper series that ran in the *Stow Independent* in 2008 and 2009.

The series of 30 articles was written on behalf of the Ancient Documents Committee as a means of increasing awareness of our community's history, playing off the 325th anniversary of its incorporation as a township on May 16th, 1683.

The goal was to address the prominent elements that make up our community's fabric of shared experience – not simply with general recaps of history but with a focus on the growth of each of those elements, from Minutemen to Meeting Houses to town government.

Generously, the Stow Historical Society committed to publishing the collected “325” series as this book, renamed *Stow Things*.



Despite Stow's history as a community tied to cattle and dairy, photos of cows – or any other livestock or crops, for that matter – are virtually non-existent in town archives. Perhaps cows were such a bedrock of life that taking pictures of them was too obvious. This beautiful bovine was living on White Pond Road in 2009.

In its heyday as a summer resort in the first half of the 20th Century, Lake Boone supported a village of cottages, social clubs, hotels and businesses, as well as a flotilla of steamboats, motorboats and human-powered craft. More than 100 Lake Boone post-cards, like this one, have been identified.



As newspaper articles, “325 Things” took the form of numbered lists within each topic, as in “25 Open Space Things” or “20 Animal Farm Things.” As individual features spread over 18 months, the format worked. As a book, with all the topics presented one after another, it seemed tedious and unnecessary.

For *Stow Things*, I’ve eliminated the numbered format, working to present more of a narrative. Each chapter follows the same threads as its equivalent article and is hopefully as readable.

Because of space limitations, some material had to be left out of many newspaper articles. For this version, they’ve been added back in.

The order of topics has been rearranged somewhat to make a more lucid “story”

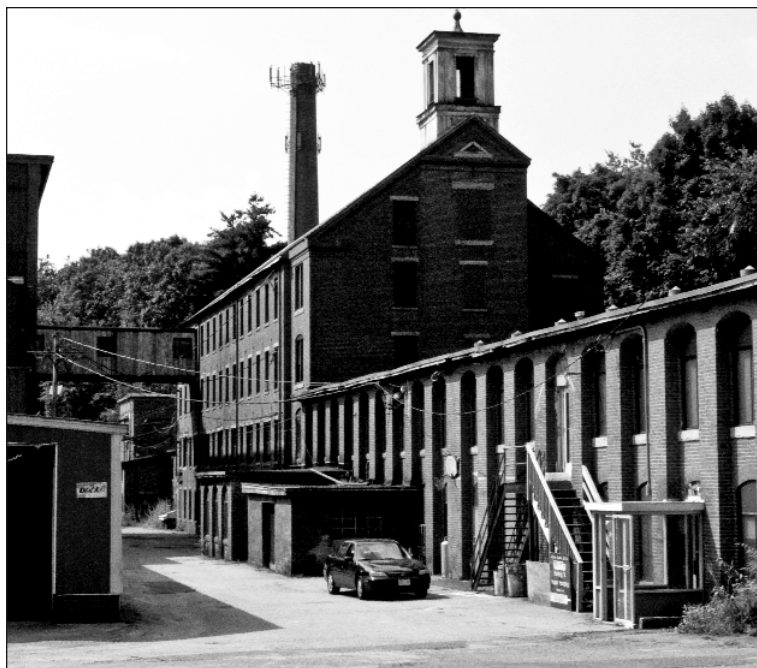
from start to finish. And I’ve added new chapters on landscape, on business and on a few things that just didn’t fit in anywhere – like the Hurricane of 1938.

Often, topics overlapped – although each had a different focus, the forces underlying “Farm,” “Animal Farm,” “Orchard” and “Landscape Things,” for example, tended to lead to or impact the others. In a series of articles published over a lengthy period, repetition didn’t especially matter and, in fact, was necessary.

In the concentrated format of a book, repetitions are more obvious. On the other hand, the information is often germane to each segment in question. I’ve deleted much repetition but, in the interest of comprehensiveness, I’ve sometimes left repetitive references in from topic to topic.

Lest you think life was dull in 1903 Stow, they definitely knew how to joyride. This trolley is rounding Clark’s Corner – the intersection of Great Road and Gleasondale Road.





Its textile days long past, the Gleasondale Mill today serves as the Gleasondale Industrial Park, a home for an assortment of small businesses.

Acknowledgements

First of all, Cyndy Bremer's and Nancy Arsenault's support in running the "325 Things to Know About Stow" columns in the *Stow Independent* has been superb and they deserve gigantic applause (actually, they deserve even greater applause for publishing a terrific newspaper that is a first-class, and essential, community resource).

Beyond this, the "Things" project has received timely assistance from many Stow stalwarts committed to keeping the history of our community alive and relevant – especially Barbara Sipler and Karen Gray, who served as advisors, commenters and fact-checkers.

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to photograph, immediately drove me to his fields in his pickup so I could shoot them in their native habitat.

Non-Stowite John O'Keefe of the Harvard University Research Forest proved to be an informative resource for understanding the changing landscape, and the Harvard Forest's Fisher Museum generously granted permission to use several images from their diorama on forest change through the centuries.

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**Ralph N. Fuller
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Committee**