

# 325 Things to Know About Stow



*Hay was such an important crop in Stow that a wagon-size hay scale was maintained in front of town Hall from 1871 to 1930.*

## 28 Historic Things That Are No Longer Here

**1. In its 325 years, many social, business and infrastructure “things” have come and gone in Stow.** It’s worth mentioning again that for much of its history the town was a rural community overwhelmingly devoted to agriculture. The forests seen today had been largely cleared away to provide open farmland.

**2. There were more than 150 working farms identified in records of late 19th Century Stow.** From 1871 to 1930 the town maintained an immense scale in front of Town Hall so that farmers could weigh their wagonloads of hay and other produce. For many years, the Grange was a significant professional and social organization in Stow.

**3. Many private residences and other buildings from earlier times are gone because of fires – a constant risk** for wooden buildings during more than two centuries of open fireplaces, candles, wood stoves and oil lamps. Public structures reported as having burned down in historical references include the fourth version of the Stow Meeting House in 1847, the Rock Bottom Woolen Mill in 1852, the Methodist Church in Rock Bottom in 1852, the Brigham Shoe Factory at Rock Bottom in 1872, the Elmbrook Hotel in 1883, Conant’s Inn – Boyd’s Tavern in 1886, Early’s Inn on State Road around 1900, the Union School in 1908 and Hale High School – that had been built in 1909 on the Conant’s-Boyd’s lot – in 1963. The Stow Fire Station now occupies the site.

**4. Some, like the Rock Bottom Mill, the Methodist Church and Hale High were rebuilt on-site or replaced in new locations.** Others, like the Brigham Shoe Factory and the Elmbrook, simply went out of existence.

**5. Many other structures were simply pulled down at some point because of the deterioration of great age.** The Gardner Inn, the Blacksmith Shop, the Box Mill and the Pompositticut Hotel were prominent landmarks razed and replaced by more modern structures.

**6. Except for the Blacksmith Shop, which is now the parking area** for the Stow Florist at One Main Street.

**7. From Stow’s earliest years, there were saw, grist and cider mills throughout the town.** A long-gone saw mill on Elizabeth Brook, located at the present end of Bradley Lane as early as 1681, furnished lumber used to build much of the town in the early 1800s.

**8. Mills frequently changed purpose – supporting anything that water could power.** Brown’s Mill, a saw and gristmill on Delaney Pond through the 1800s became Zander’s Cider Mill in the early 20th Century. A mill on Heath Hen Meadow Brook became a tannery. Taylor’s Mill, in place on Elizabeth Brook by the 1730s, served variously as a saw mill, grist mill, tannery and box mill into the 20th Century – during World War I its boxes carried artillery harnesses manufactured in Concord to Tsarist Russia. Located across the brook from today’s Carver Hill Orchard, only its dam remains today.

**9. The Gleasondale area has seen a continuing mill presence on the Assabet River since the 18th Century**, when the first saw and grist mills were called Randall's Mills. These were replaced by the Rock Bottom Woolen Factory and Village in the early 1800s and then the Gleasondale Mills in the late 1800s.

**10. Mills also changed locations, one way or another.** Until at least a few years ago you could still see Zander's Cider Mill in operation – in Bolton, where its machinery was installed at Bolton Orchard. On the other hand, another of Stow's earliest mills – located in the town's northern reaches – probably became something else but we don't care! In fact, we decline to name it. It was on land that became part of Harvard in 1732.



*Wheeler's Mill stood on (and was powered by) Wheeler Pond) from the 1870 to the 1920s. It's now the site of the Butternut Golf Course clubhouse.*

**11. Most of Stow's Great Road taverns, inns and hotels are long-gone and replaced by modern landmarks.** One was Putnam's Publick Inn, located approximately where Randall Library now stands. An inn called Macomber Hall stood where St. Isidore's Church is located. The Pompositticut Hotel, an important horse-changing stop for stagecoaches, with a large livery stable, was located at the site of today's Faxon Farm development.

**12. Conant's Inn/Boyd's Tavern was an immense building near the present site of the Stow Fire Station.** Mr. Conant built it around 1830; Mr. Boyd was a business associate whose name eventually got attached to it. Mr. Conant's first name was Bailey; Mr. Boyd's first name is suspiciously uncertain.

**13. At first, Conant's Inn housed the Stow post office, but ladies of the town objected** to having to pass its barroom to collect their mail. Postal operations were moved to the general store across Great Road in 1834, where they stayed for the next 128 years.

**14. With a stable that held a hundred horses, Boyd's Tavern was also a major horse-changing stop for stagecoaches traveling to and from Boston.** While the tavern burned down in 1886, the stable didn't. It's now a private residence – for people, not horses.

**15. The Gardner Inn, a prominent lodging and dining establishment in Stow,** was located near the site of today's Beef & Ale Restaurant. Built in 1723 as the manse for the Rev. John Gardner, it was being operated as an inn by the mid-1780s.

**16. The Marquis de Lafayette, hero of the American Revolution,** stopped off at the Gardner Inn on his way to an overnight stay in Bolton during his 1824 Grand Tour of the United States.

**17. He liked the water they drew for him from their well.**

**18. By 1878 the Gardner Inn had been torn down and replaced with the four-story Elmbrook Hotel.** With a circular drive that brought carriages right to its front door, it was a scene of elegant dances. For the five years it lasted.

**19. It was destroyed by fire in 1883 and never rebuilt.**

**20. Not all Stow taverns and inns were along Great Road. Early's Tavern was located on State Road across from the site of the present Fire Fighters' Academy.** It had a reputation as a place for drinking, gambling and cock fighting. It burned down around 1900.



*During Lake Boon's heyday as a resort for Boston folks during the early 20th Century, the Princess ferried people as many as 50 passengers at a time.*

**21. And Stow actually had other things besides taverns and mills.** In colonial times, a small brick powder-house stood on Pilot Grove Hill. Its time in history came in 1775, when military supplies were hidden there from the British army advancing toward Concord. Its end came in 1849, when it was taken down to make way for an expanded Hill-side Cemetery.

**22. Retail, leather and tailoring businesses were operated in the Lower Village.** The Blacksmith Shop, taken down in 1908, long stood at the corner of Great Road and Library Hill Road. A brickyard was located at the junction of Gleasondale and Sudbury Roads, supplying materials for a number of buildings in Stow

and Bolton. A shop selling building nails was set up by the Rev. Jonathan Newell, Stow's clergyman from 1774 to 1830, after he invented a machine to manufacture them.

**23. "Half-Mile Trees" were a feature of the road between Stow and Rock Bottom.** They were a series of elm trees spaced every half mile along the route, planted in the mid-1800s. Another was planted at the Upper Common during the Bicentennial observances in 1883. All subsequently have disappeared due to Dutch elm disease.

**24. Before refrigeration became a fact of life in the 1930s, ice houses and ice-cutting businesses were common features of Stow life.** Blocks of ice were routinely harvested each winter from sources like Lake Boon, White Pond, Wheeler Pond and Flagg Hill Pond. Farmers supplemented their incomes during the long winter months by cutting and hauling blocks of ice. Businessmen maintained ice houses on Lake Boon, White Pond Road and other locations, delivering ice to private residences on routes throughout the town, much like milk men.

**25. Another historic thing that's no longer here: The Milk Man.**

**26. Stow not only had train stations (in Gleasondale and at Whitman's Crossing near Lake Boon),** between 1910 and 1914 it had a 50-seat passenger launch called *The Princess* that took summer cottage owners across the lake to the Whitman's Crossing Station each morning for the train commute into Boston. The boat trip cost 25 cents.

**27. It picked them up in the evening, too. Another 25 cents.**

**28. In the 20th Century, a Stow landmark of sorts was the "Gas Ball" at the intersection of Gleasondale and Boon Road.** A metal sphere the size of a small house, it was built by the Marlborough-Hudson Gas Company as a recharging station to boost gas pressure for Stow and Maynard customers. Erected in the 1930s, it was dismantled in the 1960s.