

RICHARD WOODGER



JUNE 30, 2018

**A CELEBRATION OF RICHARD'S
45 YEARS OF SERVICE
TO THE TOWN OF GRANVILLE**

Richard Woodger exemplifies what it means to be a citizen and community leader. For 45 years he gave his time and talents to Granville, attending to the countless routine and extraordinary events that shape a town. Here are some highlights of the governmental life of Granville during Richard's years as a town official as excerpted from town reports by Kathy Martin. Behind many of the items on this list were shaped by Richard's initiative, encouragement, or counsel:

1983

- Richard Woodger (RW) takes over as chair of the Finance Committee and the committee suggests new, realistic policy on budgets, including competitive salaries for teachers and town employees, policies on the use of town buildings and self-insurance.
- The town purchases a police cruiser and a Ford tanker for the Fire Dept.

1984—The town budget hits the million dollar mark.

1986

- Granville begins to feel the effect of Proposition 2½. The annual report of the Finance Committee states:
- "The town must face a series of major problems, three of which quickly come to mind.
 - Population pressure on our school facilities.
 - Escalation of cost of garbage disposal.
 - Lack of adequate office facilities for town functions.
- "The above problems requires financial resources in excess of those that can be anticipated with the natural growth under proposition 2½."
- Finance recommends looking into the state's "circuit rider" program that would help the Town hire a full-time administrative assistant to seek grants and keep day-to-day operations running smoothly. "We feel that improved management would be achieved by an increased effort in requesting grant funding and awareness of what other Pioneer Valley towns are doing to reduce operating costs."

1987

- Selectboard, with RW's full support, explores hiring an administrative assistant under a state program.
- Population surges, town re-joins Pioneer Valley Planning Commission. Board arranges workshop with Land Planner Alexandra Dawson, including Tolland and Blandford.
- Board moves to activate Housing Authority that had been voted into existence in 1986.
- In April Board issues Board of Health Regulations and a guide, "How to Build a House in Granville." Perk rate set at 20, perk season set and now limited to March 15-May 15. In 1987, 38 perk tests performed, 18 passed. (Late 2000's, repair perk tests were frequent but for new construction only 5 or so a year).
- Town boards agrees and the Town votes to conserve South Lane orchard property as open space by purchasing it for \$400,000 and reselling it with conservation restrictions. Owner sues the town. (All ends well after a long legal crisis.)
- Town votes to hire a Town Administrative Assistant.
- Transfer Station costs soar, along with insurance, and legal costs causing budget shortfalls under 2 ½.
- Town receives \$150,000 in Small Town Road Assistance Program (STRAP) but state has its own fiscal problems so Granville has to fight for the money.
- \$3000 received for energy grant with another \$25,000 in follow-up money to actually do the recommended work. One item high on the list is a furnace as the Selectmen's office has no heat.

- Apple farms are hit by a hail storm that wiped out 80-100% of their crop. Board of Selectman worked hard to get Federal help but it fell through.
- Chicken BBQ held to raise money to paint the outside of Town Hall. Plans to address the inside next year.
- Carol Phelon once again gifts the town a free fireworks display.
- Assessor and Assessor records along with Treasurer and other Committee records are not stored at Town Hall nor are meetings conducted at Town Hall because of space issues. This must be addressed as soon as possible.

1988

- Richard Woodger leaves the Finance Board and joins Edwin A. Beckwith and John Briggs on the Selectboard.
- Kathy Martin is hired for the new position of full-time Town Administrative Assistant.
- South Lane property preservation project is completed. Judge rules in Town's favor and property is resold with restrictions. Today the property has a beautiful house and barn on South Lane and 100 acres are preserved.
- To address dump cost of \$75,000 a year Town forms a Solid Waste Cooperative with Tolland, Russell, Blandford, and Chester and starts a recycling program. First metal days are held so residents can recycle instead of putting everything in the trash.
- School Building Committee begins process to build an addition onto Village School after Regional School vote failed in previous year. RW is a member of committee.
- Received funding for setting up an Historical District.
- Town loses a big abatement case against Tenneco.
- Process begins to install cable TV in Granville.
- EMT service separates from Fire Department. Issue over payment of EMTs for their services resulted in all EMTs resigning, but eventually the dispute is settled.

1989

- Continental Cable is awarded cable contract for Granville, bringing in 44 channels.
- Cost of Solid waste disposal goes from \$75,000 to \$50,000 after the Town buys a truck and hauls waste along with increased recycling. Town joins the MRF...Materials Recycling Facility in Springfield and our Granville program is seen as a model program across the state.
- Town purchases its first computers, thanks to Gary Chacho and Silvio Tavernise. The Selectmen got first computer and started to computerize all other functions such as tax collecting, bookkeeping, assessing, etc. (The computers were surplus from a defunct insurance company that Gary had worked for and the screens had burned in shadow information that was always in the background so you had to ignore it when you typed.)

1990

- State in such bad fiscal state that Granville withheld funding for library, police and dispatch. Courts forced Governor to release funds and town was able to fund eventually the police, dispatch and library. Because of way state funds libraries, when we did not fund our library, we could not use any other community's library.
- Edwin Beckwith left the Selectboard after 21 years. Mary Ann Fernandez took his place, becoming our first female Selectboard member.
- Punch card system for non-recycled waste initiated at the dump.

1991

- Began removal underground tanks on Town property.
- Long Range Planning Committee is appointed, chaired by Coralie Stevenson. Held a weekend series of 2020 workshops projecting Granville's future.
- Cable hook-ups finished, recycling going well.
- This was the year that School Choice was instituted by the Commonwealth. The first year Granville lost 8 students to Westfield.

many roads are County Roads, and no one is sure who owns them. Eventually our state legislators move to turn formerly county roads into Granville roads. This takes several years because the state is weary of setting a precedent.

- A committee of John Briggs, MaryAnn Fernandez, Bill Toomey, Edwin Beckwith and Herb Hiers look into adequacy of police services. Committee recommends hiring first full time police chief. Curtis McKenzie is hired in April, 2006. When he leaves, the Town hires Jose Rivera as his replacement. Rivera serves until Scott Flebotte takes over.
- Whole Town celebrates 250th. Bob Beckwith chairs the committee. Town holds a huge parade, a play, fire works, a dance, and a booklet. The Mayor and a couple of Council members from Granville, Ohio, share the time with us.
- Town purchases police cars, a new ambulance, trucks, plows, graders, sanders and etc. We have lots of snow some years and none others. We have floods and other natural disasters. Ruth Boucher as Dispatcher for over 30 years has handled it all. She retires in 2007.
- The Town plans to tear it down the Dietz/Carr house on South Lane but Historical Commission says no. So the Town carves out a lot with the house on it and bid its out so that someone could buy and preserve it on site to certain historical standards. No one bids, so eventually the house is torn down (some said in the dead of night) by the DPW.
- Granville native Lt. Travis Fuller dies in Iraq in 2005.
- The 250th Committee pulls together again and several of citizen travel to Granville, Ohio, to share in their celebration of their 200th Anniversary.
- Granville develops its first and only Town Flag. The flag has cows, ice cream for the Scoop, and apple orchards plus the Town Seal. Many of Granville residents travel to Boston to see it officially hung in the Hall of Flags.
- The Village School debt is paid off and the Town no longer has any long-term debt!
- Town passes Right to Farm Bylaw and a Floodplain Bylaw.
- Town passes Community Preservation Act. Under CPA the Town made extensive renovations/restorations and improvements to all town buildings especially the Old Meeting House and Library. Used money to install roofs, heating systems, paint inside and outside, work on marble portico at library. Old Meeting House floors, etc.
- Regionalization explored in 2009 as the school population was declining while costs are exploding.
- In 2010, 70 percent of Town budget goes to the school. School has 140 students but was built to hold 240. Enrollment trends show that in a year or two enrollments will be below 100. Southwick/Tolland is in a building project and they are willing to consider regionalization as a way to increase their state reimbursement ratio. Eventually Regionalization is voted and takes place with school year 2012-13.
- Grange Hall is torn down and removed, in hopes that someday the Town might be able to turn library into a Historical Room and build a new library. (\$16,000 cost to do that is donated by local resident who wishes to remain unknown.)

2013-2017

- Town purchases Ripley Road house, tears it down and closes Ripley Bridge.
- Town funds first full-time EMT/Administrative Assistant.
- Town establishes stipend system for firemen and EMTs. Full-time EMT covers Monday-Friday, 8 to 4 and volunteer EMTs rest of time.
- Walkway on Green is built.
- Town preserves 719 acres of land along with New England Forestry Foundation off Route 57, 29 acres town owns on Wendy's Road and 695 acres owned by Bill Hull. Able to preserve without any cost to the Town.
- The Town accepts the Green Community Act, opening up funding and opportunities to reduce the cost of energy in town facilities.

2018

- Richard Woodger steps down from the Selectboard.

Saga of Citizens' Park, One Example

The way one incident in Richard Woodger's 45-year-long service to the Town unfolded might serve to illustrate his idea of what it means to be a citizen.

When "Ma" Stacker died in the mid-1990s, most people agreed that the Town should purchase her property with its run-down buildings in order to extend the already existing town green. Twice the town voted to make the purchase, but failed to authorize the funds. It was during one of the many periods of austerity budgets. In November 1995 Richard told his Selectboard colleagues that he and family members had decided they would buy the Staker property and donate it to the town. The donors were Richard, Cheryl Stewart, Thomas Woodger, Thurza Stillman, Charles Woodger, Roxanne Blaze, William Woodger, Daniel Woodger and Deborah Woodger. They would gift the land in memory of Richard's father and family patriarch, George E. Woodger, a former Granville Selectman.

Richard's sister, Roxanne Blaze, wrote about their father, "George Woodger did things for the town that today would be impossible. Not because the feats themselves



are impossible but because times have changed. I remember stories about his 'borrowing' farmhands from my brother's dairy farm during a snowstorm to clean the catch basins. This was done, not because he'd get paid for it (he didn't), but because it needed doing and he could get it done. Doing the job this way saved the town money. That was the essence of my dad. If it

needed doing, and he could figure out how to do it without paying someone else, he'd get it done. He instilled that ethic in his kids."

In 45 years, there were countless instances when George's son, Richard, himself did just that kind of thing—jumped into the fray with his own uncompensated time and resources in order to "get it done." The donation of the Stacker property provides an example of a creative variation on this theme.

Just as at the time when appeared the golden opportunity for the Town to obtain the Stacker property would be lost, Richard introduced a unique way to "get it done." He told the Selectmen that the donation he and his family were making would come with a stipulation that public funds could not be used convert the rotting houses and barn into a park and extended green.

Richard and his family could not have known in advance what excitement and community spirit would unfold from the idea of requiring that Citizens Park, as it came to be called, be a community, non-governmental project. It was a brilliant idea. It illustrated Richard's understanding that although a government is technically "of the people," in fact government is an abstraction to most of us. Often lost in the expectation that government is there to take care of essential community services is the fact that the government is us. The "people" aspect of "we the people" falls into the background. The Citizen's Park project brought the "we" back into the foreground of community. It fit with Richard's New England hilltown ethic of the balancing limited government with volunteer citizen involvement. It allowed citizens to discover the rewards of service to the community, and it was a living demonstration of how community grows out of that service.

How the Park Was Built

Excerpted from the Oct. 23, 1999 Park Dedication Brochure

In November 1995 Granville Selectman received an offer from a private party to purchase the Stacker property and donate it to the town for a park on the condition that public funds not be used to remove the by-now dilapidated two houses and a partially collapsed barn, grade the land, and make the conversion to a park. A committee of private citizens formed to see if there was enough volunteer interest in the town to do the considerable work required to raise the money and carry out the work for making a park.

On January 22, 1996 the committee held an open meeting to see if citizens would donate to the cause and would support the removal of the buildings. The response at the meeting was overwhelmingly enthusiastic, though not without opposition from some who wanted to try to preserve the houses. This proved not to be feasible and February 12, 1996, the town voted 101-11 to accept the gift of the anonymous donor and fulfill the terms to clear the land for a citizens' park. Within a short period, the committee collected over \$6,000 in monetary donations for the project as well as numerous pledges to provide labor, equipment and materials.

In due time, the descendants and relatives of the late George Woodger, a longtime member of Granville's Select Board, revealed themselves as the anonymous donors of the land.

In the spring of 1996, the ad hoc committee took bids for removing the houses. One resident salvaged parts of both houses for use elsewhere and the rest of the material was carted away using the collected funds and donated trucking and demolition equipment.



Members of the committee held a tag sale of items donated by citizens and salvaged from the two houses. By the end of that summer the debris was removed from the area.

The next year was taken up with a searching discussion of what the park should look like. Options were put before the town at a meeting in the fall of 1996.

Finally the committee concluded that the best solution was to retain the walls and sunken garden look of the area but to make the drops considerably shallower. This idea was approved by town residents at a meeting in March 1997.

The next year was devoted to drawing up a detailed landscape

design. In the fall of 1997 wall builders began to remove the old wall, fill and grade the area and start the new wall. This work picked up again and pressed ahead vigorously in the summer of 1998. Painstakingly, the walls went up following the new design. The wall building team began to sense a kind of magic going on as citizens appeared out of the blue throughout the summer to volunteer equipment and time. You could never tell who might show up on the site to move rocks.

By the end of the summer and into the fall, Village School students were building the gravel path and teams were agonizing over the work of using a backhoe to turn large boulders into rock sculptures for the gardens, sitting areas and centerpiece. Grass seed was sown after the October Harvest Fair. In the spring of 1999 the garden club went to work putting in many of the plantings. The park was already in full use.



Part of the 1998 wall building team

Celebration of Richard Woodger's Service to Granville

June 30, 2018, Granville Green

4pm...Words and Proclamations

5pm...BBQ Potluck with cake and ice cream

6pm...Music by The Restless Mountain Bluegrass Band

Many thanks to all who helped make the day a special one. Thank you to those whose spoke, those who brought a dish to share, the Gran-Val Scoop for the ice cream and Hilltown Pork for the BBQ, the Granville Historical Society and Granville Recreation Committee. Special thanks to John Briggs, Robert Beckwith, Linda Blakesley and Kathy Martin for their organizing skills.