

Historic Highlight: 1747 The Powder House

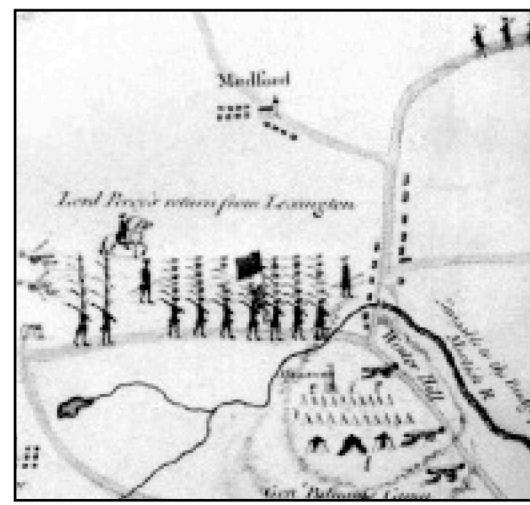
The Maillet family sold its stone windmill to the Province of Massachusetts in 1747. The windmill's rotating top and blades were removed and replaced with a wooden roof. The building—a durable structure built by the Maillets from local stone—was then used to store gunpowder for both the British Army and the colonial militias.

Gunpowder is a mixture of saltpeter (potassium nitrate), sulfur, and charcoal. It requires careful storage and frequent turning to remain usable. The stone mill, with its thick walls, was an ideal place to keep the gunpowder dry. Its prominent location on a hill was an added benefit for anyone guarding this crucial military supply.

Historic Highlight: 1774 General Gage and the Gunpowder

When local colonists, restless under British rule, began withdrawing gunpowder from the stone Powder House, General Gage of the British Army responded by making arrangements to obtain its key. However, at 4:00 a.m. on September 1, 1774 (the day on which he was to receive the key), General Gage launched an expedition up the Mystic River to the Powder House. There, he confiscated the 250 barrels of gunpowder that remained, and took it back to Castle Island (now Fort Independence) in Boston.

More than 2000 outraged provincials protested against Gage's actions, leading to the resignation of the Lieutenant Governor and several council members. The seizure is considered a pivotal event leading to the American Revolution.



Historic Highlight: Powder Magazine for Continental Army

The stone Powder House was the first Continental Army munitions depot (or "magazine"), and served American troops during the 1775-76 siege of Boston. It housed nearly the entire powder supply for the fledgling Army. The tower's strategic location, with commanding views of the surrounding area, was also convenient to General Washington's headquarters in Cambridge, making this an important area for troop encampments.

At one desperate time, the gunpowder supply dwindled to 38 kegs. The lack of powder was a widespread problem, eventually solved by the secret importation of munitions from France via the West Indies. The first supplies to arrive were most likely stored here in the stone tower.

An Overview of the Park

Welcome to Nathan Tufts (Powder House) Park, a site rich in national history and community significance. During the past few centuries, this area has supported early Native American settlements, farms, a quarry providing access to the underlying bedrock, and an unusual stone tower—the Old Powder House—that has served a variety of purposes. Built as a windmill, the tower was first used to grind grain into flour for the early European settlers. Later, it was an important storage facility for colonists, and played a central role in a key uprising against British rule. After the American Revolution, this land was then settled by the Tufts family and was used as a farm for many years, including the era in which Tufts University was founded.

We hope the highlights and timeline included in this brochure enhances your appreciation and enjoyment of this historic Park.

Walk through the Park, enjoy its pastoral beauty, and imagine how earlier inhabitants of Somerville lived and worked over many centuries.

For Visitors to the Park

Please help care for the park by adhering to the following rules:

- Place litter in receptacles
- No dogs in the park
- Alcoholic beverages, loitering and unauthorized vehicles prohibited
- Open dawn to dusk

Funding Sources

- Massachusetts Executive Office of Environmental Affairs, Department of Conservation and Recreation (formerly Department of Environmental Management) Historic Landscape Preservation Grant Program
- Community Development Grant

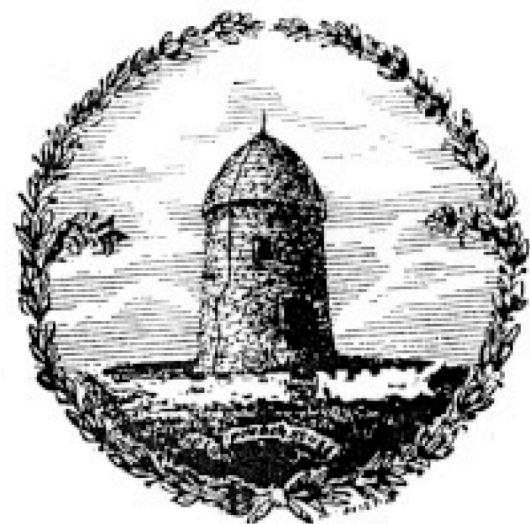
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- Somerville Museum - Evelyn Battinelli, Director
- Somerville Library - Dora St. Martin, Head Of Reference and Staff

References

- "Old Powder House, Somerville Massachusetts Historic Structure Report" by McGinley Hart & Associates, March 1999.
- "Nathan Tufts Cultural Landscape Report And Master Plan" by Payette Associates Inc., November 2000.
- Beyond The Neck: The Architecture And Development Of Somerville, Mass. Updated Edition, 1990 by Landscape Research for the City of Somerville.
- Historic Leaves, Somerville, MA, Somerville Historical Society.
- The Pilgrims and Plymouth Colony: 1620 copyright Duane A. Cline 2002 <http://rootsweb.com>

We hope that you and your family and friends enjoy Nathan Tufts Park!



A VISITOR'S GUIDE TO Nathan Tufts Park known locally as Powder House Park

SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS

ESTABLISHED 1892

with

historic highlights and a timeline
to enhance your visit to the park

A HISTORY OF THE PARK THROUGH TIME



Pre-1700s: Massachuset Indian Settlement

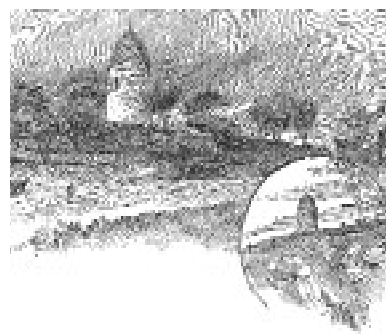
The native people living in this area—the Massachuset Indians—were drawn here by the abundance of alewife, a small herring-like fish still found in the Mystic River today. Natural outcroppings of stone could provide materials for their tools and arrowheads, and the elevation of the land made it easier to defend. William Wood's map of New England from 1634 shows a fortified dwelling here. At that time, the Massachusetts numbered about 3,000, but a series of plagues reduced their numbers to about 500 by 1670. Today, their descendents can be found in the Wampanoag and Pequot nations.

The symbol of the turtle represents the creation myths of many Native Americans, who viewed the American Continent as held on the back of a great turtle. **Here, the head of the turtle in the park faces points to the North, and its body is divided into quadrants which indicate the other points of the compass*

1704-1747: Windmill

Jean Maillet, a French Huguenot refugee, bought Two Penny Brook Quarry from Jonathan Foskett in 1704. A shipwright and prominent citizen, Maillet was about 60 years old when he and his two sons built a windmill here. The tower is roughly 15 feet in diameter and 30 feet high. It was unusual in the Boston area because it was built of stone, and only its top revolved to face the wind (other common windmill designs required the entire mill to revolve). Originally, the tower had three interior levels, with heavy timber floors, and a fireplace and chimney.

According to legend, a virtuous young woman (disguised as a man) took refuge one night in the mill's loft bedroom. She was saved when her pursuer, a man with dishonorable intentions, became entangled in the mill's machinery and perished. **The millstone in the park near the Powder House is a replica of the stone that might have been in Maillet's mill.*



The Tufts Family and Powder House Farm

In 1818, the Commonwealth began storing its gunpowder elsewhere, and sold this land and its buildings to Peter Tufts, a farmer. His sons and descendents became grain merchants, brick manufacturers, and developers. The family residence—described in 1861 as a three-story house and tavern—was eventually destroyed by fire. Several members of the Tufts family are buried in Somerville's Milk Row Cemetery.

Nathan Tufts Jr., for whom this park is named, was born in 1818. He became a successful local merchant after founding Nathan Tufts & Sons ("Dealers in Grain, Meal, Hay, and Straw") in 1841. He was also the chief engineer of the Somerville Fire Department after it was organized in 1849. In 1887, he died at the age of 69.

Nathan's uncle, Charles Tufts (born in 1781), was a substantial landowner who donated 20 acres to the Universalist Church in order to establish a college. Tufts College—now Tufts University—was founded near Powder House Farm in 1852. **The sheep sculpture represents just one of the farm animals that lived on this land years ago.*



1892-1894: Nathan Tufts Park

In 1892, the Tufts family gave this land to the City of Somerville, to be made into a park. The City Engineer, Horace Eaton, planned and built walkways and a carriage way, using crushed stone obtained from the property. The building was repaired and its foundation strengthened. Stone arches were rebuilt, and iron grates were installed in door and window openings for added security.

New trees and shrubs were supplied and planted by James Bowditch, a Boston forester. Bowditch assisted Eaton with the landscaping plans, which incorporated the natural scenery. **If you look up the hill from the carriage way boulder, you will see the trees that marked the edges of the original carriage way.*

1972: The City's New Seal

In celebration of its 100th birthday, the City of Somerville (whose seal had previously depicted General Washington) created a new city seal, featuring the oldest stone building in Massachusetts: the Powder House.



Nathan Tufts Park Today

In addition to the repair and restoration work on the Powder House and Field House, the City won a Historic Landscape Preservation Grant from the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Management to develop a Cultural Landscape Report and Master Plan for the park in 2000. As a result, the City completed an extensive restoration to enhance the naturalistic intent of the original Park design. Lawn replaced asphalt paving. Historic benches and a cast iron bus shelter were added. New trees replaced missing oaks on the old carriage way and pathways were improved for greater accessibility. Replicas of historic objects mark former uses of the site. Designed as a teaching tool for local history, they are meant to spark further investigation into Somerville's rich cultural heritage.



Two Penny Brook Quarry

By the early 1700s, a quarry had been established on this land to take advantage of the pervasive bedrock found here (blue or brownish rock, known as Cambridge Mudstone or Somerville Slate) as well as the 500' wide outcropping of diabase (a hard volcanic stone). This vein of diabase continues for 3 miles into the Middlesex Fells area of Medford. Stone quarried here was used for local foundations, fence posts, and gravestones. **The tools near the quarry site are replicas of tools that would have been used at the time.*

1747: Powder House

In 1747, the Maillet family sold the stone mill to the Province of Massachusetts for use as a gunpowder storage facility (please see Historic Highlights for details).



1774: General Gage and the Gunpowder

The gunpowder facility was raided in 1774, provoking an outraged response from the colonists (please see Historic Highlights for details).

Powder Magazine for Continental Army

The Powder House was a critical Continental Army munitions depot during the 1775-76 siege of Boston (please see Historic Highlights for details). **The Minuteman hat near the Powder House is a full-scale replica of the hat worn by Continental Army soldiers.*

Powder House Pickles

In the 1870s, a pickle and condiment manufacturer named George Emerson began making pickles nearby, housing his business in a large shed that he moved to the property from another location in Somerville. The powder house itself—with its two-foot thick stone walls—was well-insulated and made a perfect place for storing Emerson's "Old Powder House Brand" pickles. **The pickle relish jars in the park are located near the site of Emerson's shed*



1872: The City of Somerville

Originally part of Charlestown, the community now known as Somerville voted in 1842 to establish its own municipality with a population of just over 1,000 people. As local stone was quarried and local pastures with glacial clay deposits were turned into brickyards, the rural community became increasingly industrial. Somerville incorporated in 1872 as a City with a population of roughly 15,000. Within thirty years, Somerville had more than 60,000 residents!



1935-1936: The Field House

The Field House was constructed using stones from the demolished Highland Railroad Station on Lexington Avenue. Sponsored by the Federal Relief Administration as a WPA (Work Project Administration) Project, it bears testimony to F. D. Roosevelt's efforts to create jobs during the Great Depression. It has served many purposes over the years, including as an office for the Draft Board, then for the Traffic and Parking Department, and most recently as a Youth Program center. The building underwent significant repairs and restoration work both inside and outside during 2001-2002, and is now available for public use by petition.

1975: National Register of Historic Places

The Nathan Tufts Park—including the Old Powder House and the Field House—was accepted for listing on the National Register of Historic Places in 1975. A decade later, it was designated as a local historic district by the City of Somerville, and is now under the auspices of the Historic Preservation Commission.

The Old Powder House Today

Shortly after an accidental fire damaged the Old Powder House in 1998, the city was awarded a grant from the Massachusetts Historical Commission to prepare a Historic Structure Report. This Report guided the City's extensive work both on the interior and exterior of the Powder House—the Park's most historically significant feature—between 2000-2001. The building's roof, door, and metalwork were repaired. Stonework was repointed, and the original wooden rafters were replaced or restored. Asphalt paving was replaced with stone dust.