

Rye Center History from North to South – Public & Historic Buildings and Land

Note: This brief summary cannot begin to describe all the meetings, votes and often contentious discussions over the issues raised here; see timeline and town reports and other town documents to get the full story.

1. Grange Park – created by Washington Rd and the beginning of Wallis Rd., this was the site of the first central school in 1840 and when it was abandoned in 1893, it was used by the Grange, hence the name of the park. The Grange, a 19th c. agricultural organization for unifying and supporting farmers, later moved their meetings to town hall when the old school was removed and the park created.

2. Rye Junior High School, 501 Washington Rd., 1934, opened as Rye Consolidated School (1-8), replacing the Wedgwood school (1893) which burned in 1932; three additions in 1949, 1966, 1997 each of which was not without opposition; school became a junior high (6-8) in 1956 with the opening of Rye Elementary school off Sagamore Rd. In the fall of 2019 it will become a middle school when 5th grade is added.

3. Parsons Park, 1980, (between 520 and 540 Washington Rd.)

The Parsons Park Corporation, a grassroots effort consisting of 151 families, formed in order to purchase 50 acres of field and forest belonging to Esther Parsons (520 Wash. Rd.) to prevent it from being developed. Esther cooperated with the effort and waited until \$50,000 had been raised from the families for the down payment on the property. After three years of votes the town finally bought the approx. 50 acres of field and forest for public use and a committee was created to oversee it. The plaque on the boulder in corner near Washington Rd., is not seen by many. It commemorates the 151 families whose efforts saved the land for open space use.

The land was threatened by selectmen's development proposals in the 1980's, but both were rejected by the town. Rye Recreation also wanted to develop part of it in the early 90's, but in 1993 the land was permanently protected through an easement by the Rockingham County Land Trust.

The field has been well used for a wide variety of community events in the last 40 years and the walking trails in the woods are very well used.

4. Fire/Police Station, 555 Washington Rd, 2006; passed by only 12 votes in 2004, this was a controversial proposal due to its size and issues with construction and cost overruns; there was little opportunity for public input and no Civic League existed at the time to create a forum for discussion; its large size was intended for use beyond fire and police; parking lot to the south is for public parking; the building is under used and the town was told that the space above the fire apparatus could be used for town office space, but that has not been acted upon; the large meeting room in the basement needs to be used more by the public so security concerns about public access to this room must be resolved.

5. Parsonage Apartments, 575 Washington Rd., 1810; parsonage for Congregational church until 1830, then privately owned and used as an inn and later apartments until town bought and operated them later in 20th century; in this century the Housing Partnership (affordable housing org.) took over management of the apartments, but is not renewing its contract and its fate must be decided soon; also includes separate, concrete block apt.

6. Rye Town Museum, 10 Old Parish Rd., c.1930; – built as antique shop 1930, part of Parsonage apts. in mid-century and in 1997 moved 400', renovated and opened as museum in 2002 by the Rye Historical Society, a non-profit organization. This is a town building on town land and RHS has a century lease on the building dating from 2003. IF RHS dissolves, the building reverts back to the town.

7. Rye Public Library, 581 Washington Rd., 1911, three additions including '97 with new parking lot and this largest expansion was not without some controversy. Rye could have had a library via a bequest in the 1880's, but it ended up in court and the money was lost; Mary Tuck Rand gave the land and money for it in 1910.

8. Rye Congregational Church, 580 Washington Rd., 1961, the 4th church on the hill since 1726; large expansion of the parish hall (built 1958) and large parking lot were completed in 1986. In the 1990's the church proposed a major expansion due to the large congregation as well as selling a piece of church land for a large retirement home –both proposals were rejected by the Planning Board. The congregation split in 2000 and many left for a new church in Greenland.

9. Town land - parking lot to south of church and all the land up to the front steps of the church is owned by the town; the latter area was the training ground for the militia in earlier times.

10. War Monument, erected in 1919; missing Revolutionary War and post WWII names of those who served. Because it is surrounded by roads on all sides, pedestrian crosswalk is needed to safely access the monument for public viewing.

11. Town Hall, 10 Central Rd. (built as Methodist Episcopal Church in 1839), converted from church to town hall in 1873; auditorium used for large variety of meetings, public events and entertainment until 1986 when 2nd floor converted to town government office space; downstairs office space added in 1960's and 70's; deferred maintenance due to eight years of warrant articles to expand or tear down building until 2018 when it was painted; several engineering studies have confirmed that the building is sound, but needs maintenance beyond painting; in 2019 town voted by a 75% majority to save and renovate the building.

12. Trolley Battery Barn, (opposite cemetery) c. 1899, later used as Dept. of Pub. Works after 1927 until 1977, teen center, police station, and currently for storage including Rye Senior Serve vehicle; this is an irregular lot and the building has issues - what is its future?

13. Central Cemetery, off Central Rd. – first laid out in 1893 with several expansions over time; includes town green with flag pole along Central Rd. for Memorial Day services and other events; those not disinterred in the 1890's still remain in over 60 family graveyards in town that are documented by the Rye Historical Society and located in the town museum. The cemetery was threatened with a proposal to build a police station on town land adjacent to the cemetery just east of town hall, defeated by one vote in 1989.

Historic public and private buildings – five from 1700's, eleven from 1800's, three from 1901-1940; the rest in the center were built after WWII

Historic District Commission – established 1966, one of the first in the state; district stretches from the war monument to Grange Park (Wallis & Wash.) 500' on either side of Washington Rd. See 2018 HDC inventory document

Note: The Rye Civic League (1968-1993 and 2009 to present) has provided residents with monthly newsletters about town government and town issues as well as public forums dealing with the workings of town government and issues facing the town.