

# WESTPORT RIVER WATERSHED ALLIANCE



Transforming the old Head Garage  
to the new **River Center**  
Head of Westport, Massachusetts

**October, 2019**

Commemorative Booklet

**PAGE**  
BUILDING CONSTRUCTION CO.



**WRWA River Center**

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community organizations is as important as  
the structures we build.**

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A photograph of a large, multi-story house with a gabled roof and a dormer. The house is surrounded by lush greenery and a pond in the foreground. The sky is blue with some clouds. The house has a mix of brick and stone exterior walls and many windows.

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In 2014, The Westport River Watershed Alliance purchased the historic “Head Garage” at the Head of Westport, Massachusetts, to renovate and restore the building and make it our new headquarters and learning center.

The renovations were completed in the fall of 2019. This booklet chronicles the construction project, with a brief history of the building dating back to the early 18th Century.

WRWA’s relocation to this site places the organization right in the “heart” of the Westport River Watershed, which encompasses one hundred square miles, and includes areas of the towns of Westport, Dartmouth, Fall River, Freetown, Tiverton and Little Compton.



This booklet was funded in part  
by a grant from  
The Westport Cultural Council



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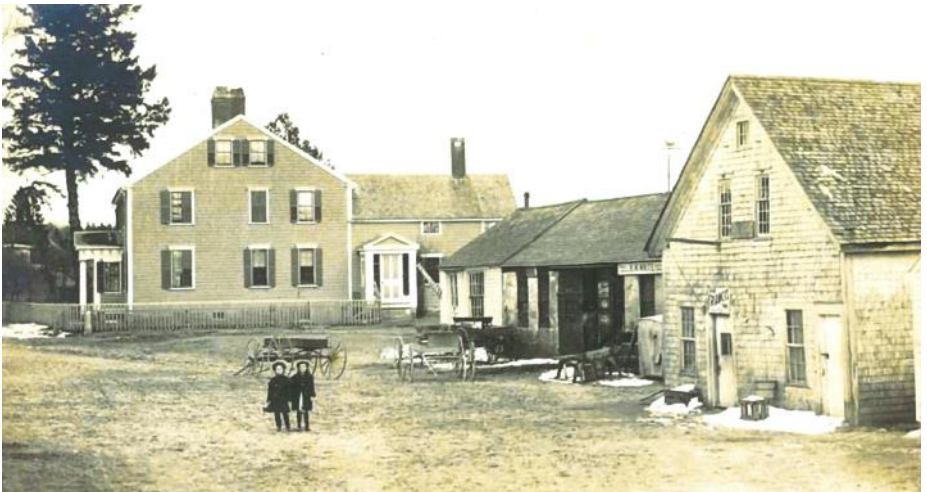


# HISTORY



This photo shows the buildings that were on this site in the 1800's. The building circled was a blacksmith shop, and you can see the granite foundation that exists today.

The Head of Westport was a busy district in town, with manufacturing businesses, residences and town offices. It was a center of commerce, with businesses related to the active whaling and fishing industries of the day.



*Our thanks to the Westport Historical Society for providing many of the old photos.*



The Head remained the town center until the middle of the 20th century, when the town offices and retail center moved to Central Village.

The old foundry building burned down in the 1890's, and was rebuilt around 1905 to its current footprint with the added 2nd story and attic.



Stock photo

The building served as one of the first Ford dealerships in the area. Cars were brought up a ramp to the second floor showroom and the first floor was the repair garage.

The building served many other uses over the decades of the 1900's, including a gas station and auto repair garage, a boat building shop, a small engine repair shop and a carpenter's woodworking shop.



The head area flooded during the hurricanes of 1938 and 1954. This photo also shows the tenement building that was behind the garage which was burned down by the Town in 1962. The River Center renovation raised the floor of the building almost two feet to make flooding in moderate events less likely and to prevent rain run-off from flowing through the building, as it had in recent years.



The Town's 4th of July parade used to pass through the Head of Westport. This photo was taken in 1947 and shows a boat going up the ramp to the second floor. The ramp led to a large sliding door on the side of the building. The old door was saved and restored by Board President Tom Schmitt, and is now a fixture on the second floor.



For many years, from the 1960's through the 1980's, the Head Garage served as a gas station and auto repair shop.



During the late 1980's through 1990's, the garage had a retail business selling and repairing garden equipment.



In the 1970's, there was a playground and basketball court located behind the building on the Town Landing.



The building fell into disrepair in the early 2010's and was put up for sale. The WRWA purchased the building in 2014.



# SPECIAL THANKS TO OUR MAJOR SUPPORTERS



WRWA received a major grant from the Massachusetts Cultural Facilities Fund for this project, which required a 1:1 match. This was completed in 2017.

Westport  
Community Preservation  
Committee Grant

WRWA received a grant from the Westport Community Preservation Committee for this project.



Our thanks to Bay Coast Bank  
for their generous support

# THE VISION

The old Head Garage had fallen into a state of disrepair over the years, while the rest of the Head neighborhood was enjoying a revival. Two successful businesses - the Osprey Kayak Shop and the Head Country Store - were prospering, and the historic homes had been beautifully restored and maintained.



The Head Garage before renovation.

The last neighborhood property to be improved was the garage. When the building went up for sale, board members Tom Schmitt and Charley Appleton speculated on whether this would be a good home for WRWA. Their vision was appreciated by many within the organization, and the process of purchasing the building and planning its renovation began.

The process was long, involving countless meetings with Town boards and committees for permits and permissions; for while WRWA owns the building, the land on which it sits is owned by the Town of Westport. The fundraising goals were set, and long-time WRWA leader Gay Gillespie set off on an ambitious goal to fund the project. Four years later, under the leadership of Executive Director Deborah Weaver, the River Center is a reality.

The renovation design maintains the footprint and outer dimensions of the historic structure, built around 1905. Dormers were added to allow full use of the third level, which was previously an attic. The old stone work was preserved, with matching stone inserted to accommodate new windows and doors.



Photo: A cold day in late December! The first day of construction, with board president Tom Schmitt, Executive Director Deborah Weaver, Development Director Gay Gillespie, and Board Vice-President and Project Manager Charley Appleton.

# THE PROJECT



Members of Town boards and committees meet with WRWA and Lt. Governor Polito to announce the Seaport Economic Council grant to the Town of Westport for improvements to the Landing.

In 2017, the Town applied for and received funding from the Seaport Economic Council of Massachusetts to support the costs to improve the Head Town Landing, create parking, improve storm water management, and beautify the area. This work was completed in October, 2019.



Early funders: Westport Community Preservation Funds provided a preservation grant in late 2016 to support exterior restoration. The granite stone work on the River Center dates back to the 1700's when the building was a blacksmith's shop.

The Massachusetts Cultural Facilities Fund provided a large grant in 2017.



Our renovation of the Head Garage with Page Building Construction Company began late in December, 2018. The architectural designs and interior plans were by DSK Architects and Planners.

Masons went to work first, repairing the block walls on the first floor, removing old windows and doors, and strengthening and resizing the openings for new windows and doors.



Meanwhile, the old hydraulic lift had to be removed from the floor. The old concrete slab was removed and the old concrete taken away. This revealed the river stone that was underneath. Clean gravel was added to level and stabilize the ground.

Engineers determined that the existing foundation was insufficient to support the new upper structure, so helical coils were installed for new footings for the elevator, and upright steel supports to carry the additional weight of the renovated upper floors. These hollow steel screws were turned into the ground to a depth of 10+ feet and filled with concrete to give stability and support to the steel reinforced concrete footings which were placed later.



During the very cold weather December through February 2019, new window and door openings were fitted with wooden frames and plastic to keep out the wind and cold as much as possible as contractors prepared to place a new, thick concrete floor and install the vertical steel beams for building support.



Concrete supports for the elevator and steel beams to carry the weight of the upper floors were placed, while masons continued to work on repairing the block walls on the first floor. Granite stones matching the old foundation were used to resize the front opening.

The old historic granite foundations wall were cleaned and re-pointed, funded primarily by a grant from the Westport Community Preservation Committee.



The reinforced concrete footings for elevator were set on the helical coils. The elevator installation was required for the building to meet the codes for the Americans With Disabilities Act.

The leaching field for the septic system was excavated, and the concrete septic tanks installed behind the building. Although the building has environmentally safe composting toilets, state regulations required us to put in a Title 5 system. Our waste water will be gray water from the kitchen, bathroom and utility sinks.



Excavators dug and installed drains designed to direct roof run-off to a system that slows its pathway to the River. With no functioning gutters or downspouts, for years the building shed water that ran freely into the River, causing erosion and large puddles.



The demolition team removed all the sheetrock and insulation from the first floor ceiling, then they stripped all the old cedar shingles, removed the old windows and frames, and the asphalt roof shingles.



Carbon-fiber material, stronger than steel, was secured to the corners of the first floor foundation walls in crisscross pattern for guaranteed stability. Later, the foundation walls were insulated and framed.



During demolition, workers found this old photograph of an unknown woman, within the walls of the second floor. The photo appears to have been taken around 1900.



Demolition workers tore off the roof and attic level. Much of the old yellow pine and spruce was salvaged by WRWA Board Vice President Charley Appleton for later use as wainscoting and work surfaces in the finished building.



The yellow pine flooring and spruce joists were of high quality and are hard to find any more. Saving it and reusing it in the new building adds historical character and beauty.



With the roof removed, steel workers lowered five steel upright supports and a new beam to carry the weight of the third floor and new roof. Two of the beams were for the elevator, which was installed for handicap access to the upper floors.

The upright beams connect to a transverse steel girder that provides central support for the third floor. LVL beams connect to the outer walls, and are much stronger than conventional 2x12's. LVL's are made from laminated hardwood and can carry heavy loads.





In March, carpenters began working to rebuild the upper structure. This was the most labor-intensive part of the rebuilding project.

Carpenters installed all the LVL beams for the third floor, then laid down plywood flooring.



The ground floor was filled with 18 inches of gravel to raise the grade, in preparation for the concrete floor being placed. Electrical conduits and plumbing were buried beneath. Eighty yards of fill were added.



The gables were constructed up on the third floor, and then lifted into place. Dormer walls were constructed and the new roof ridge beam was hoisted into position.





Carpenters applied 3/4 inch plywood sheathing to the entire upper structure while roofers shingled the roof.



Two-inch foam insulation panels were added to the second and third floor exterior. This combined with the blown-in foam insulation will give the building a very high “R-value” keeping it warm in winter and cool in summer.

The new River Center is a very energy efficient building and will be outfitted with solar panels in the coming months.



The floor level of the new building is nearly 24” higher than the old site. With the new floor in place, carpenters will frame the walls of the first floor.





New windows and doors were installed in May.



Afterwards, yellow plastic mesh was attached to exterior sheathing to provide air flow beneath the new cedar shingles. This process helps the shingles stay dry and last longer.

The windows and doors are a double pane heat retaining design.

Interior framing, blocking and strapping were installed in preparation for electric, plumbing and HVAC. The first floor had blue board drywall installed and later was covered with a coat of plaster.

Second and third floors have drywall construction.





With the interior fully framed, contractors brought in the staircases which were built off site by Horner Millwork.

The stairs are made of red oak, and the stairwells are fully enclosed to meet fire code standards.

Project superintendent Bruce Churbuck and DSK architect Damon May monitoring the construction plans and details. The facilities committee met weekly for a year to address issues during the construction.



After completion of interior framing, electricians installed electrical, data, and communication wiring. All of the lighting is LED (light emitting diodes), that use far less electricity than incandescent and compact fluorescent.

In the near future, solar panels will be installed on the south dormer. The energy generated should provide over 90% of the building's needs when averaged out over the solar year.



Heating/cooling vents were installed along with light fixtures and plumbing,

The forced air system is very efficient, with programmable thermostats.

The exterior was finished with cedar shingles, in keeping with the historic appearance of the building and the local neighborhood.



Foam insulation blown into walls and roof, supplemental to the 2" foam boards on the exterior. This will result in reduced energy use for heating and cooling year-round.

With the exterior mainly completed, workers continued finishing the interior. The framing was complete, and with insulation, electrical, plumbing and heating roughed-in, it was time to close up the walls.



The drywall and blue board were installed, and water and gas lines were hooked up.



Carpenters installed interior trim boards and plasterers filled the gaps in the drywall with joint compound. Drywall was also installed in the stair wells and in the elevator shaft to prepare for installation of stairs and elevator. The ceiling height required some workers to use stilts to reach the ceiling.



The exterior was fully shingled in early June.



Charley Appleton delivered the finished wainscoting boards, reclaimed from the old attic. Workers began installing the elevator mechanisms and plumbers installed the sinks and composting toilets.





The restoration was nearing completion in August, as workers added the finishing touches. The old yellow pine floors were sanded and finished, walls and trim were given their final coats of paint, and the sign was installed.



Job superintendent Bruce Churbuck installs the new building sign, carved and donated by Nick Jansen.



First floor walls were tiled, and the concrete floor was painted with a grey undercoat.



Work desks are constructed from the spruce boards from the old upper joists and rafters by Charley Appleton.

The elevator was fine-tuned and adjusted, the computers and phones were connected, and WRWA moved into the new building in late September, 2019.



Local artist Barbara Healy painted a large map of the Westport River Watershed on the first floor. It shows the full extent of the watershed, including parts of Freetown, Dartmouth, Fall River, Little Compton, Tiverton and most of the Town of Westport.

Painters then sealed the image with a clear coating.



# How will WRWA make use of this new River Center?

The new WRWA headquarters is situated right in the heart of the Westport River Watershed, on the shore of the upper East Branch of the Westport River. This new central location helps the organization promote its mission to protect the town's most valuable resource.

The first floor "public space" features aquariums with local species, and a special Seahorse tank.

There will be various audio visual attractions throughout the year, as well as information and illustrations about the watershed and opportunities and challenges that we are addressing.

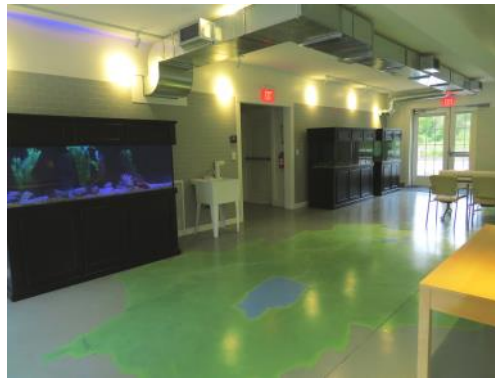
Our environmental educators will be setting up a beautiful new microscope for examining sea life, as well as visual aids to view the watershed and the effects of rising sea levels on our shoreline. We foresee many new opportunities for public programs.

Additionally, the new space makes the staff's working space much more comfortable and efficient. We are all so grateful for this beautiful new office.

Please subscribe to our monthly River News publication to find out what is going on at our new River Center. Email [outreach@wrwa.com](mailto:outreach@wrwa.com) to sign up.



**And, we are now located right on the River!**



# We are grateful to all the donors who have supported the River Center

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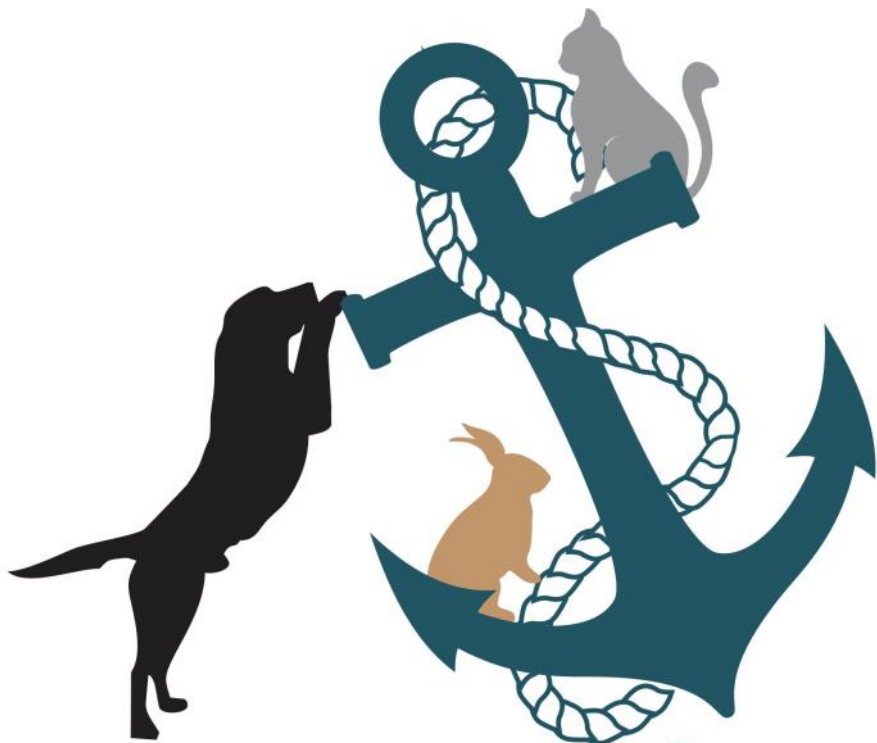
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WRWA recommends these companies who provided excellent service and products.



## Westport River Watershed Alliance UPCOMING EVENTS & PROGRAMS 2020

Saturday, February 22 • **Winter Art Show Opens**

Saturday, February 29 • **Brushes & Brews**

Saturday, March 7 • **Winter Art Show Reception** at Dedee  
Shattuck Gallery

Sunday, March 22 • **WRWA Annual Meeting**

Wednesday, April 22 • **Electronics Recycling** at Westport Town Hall

Saturday, May 16 • **Annual Beach Clean-Up** • Town Beach

Saturday, June 6 • **RIVER DAY** • Free Riverfront Festival at  
Head of Westport Town Landing

Saturday, June 13 • **Oyster Festival** at Westport Sea Farms

Saturday, July 11 • **Summer Concert** at Westport Rivers Vineyard

Saturday, August 8 • **Annual Summer Gala**

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**TO BE ANNOUNCED:** Weekend events & programs at the RIVER CENTER in 2020.

### Registration is Open for WRWA's Summer Coastal Ecology Program

The Westport River Watershed Alliance is again offering a variety of fun, hands-on summer science program for kids ages 3-16.

Visit the web page or contact Shelli Costa at [wep@wrwa.com](mailto:wep@wrwa.com).

Scholarships available, including the Gay Gillespie Summer Scholarship. Space is Limited.



For more information visit [www.westportwatershed.org](http://www.westportwatershed.org)  
or call 508-636-3016

For monthly updates on WRWA events and programs, subscribe to our free **RIVER NEWS** publication. Email: [outreach@wrwa.com](mailto:outreach@wrwa.com).



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## **OUR VISION**

**A healthy watershed  
where people, wildlife  
and the River thrive**

## **OUR MISSION**

**Working together to protect and  
preserve the Westport River Watershed  
now and for future generations**

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