

# Tewksbury Town Hall:

## A Memorial to World War I and National Role

The story of the beginnings of our current Town Hall starts on Sunday morning, October 13, 1918, when the Tewksbury Congregational Church and the Town Hall next door, both burned down in a devastating fire.



Town Hall

Tewksbury Congregational Church

Pre- 1918 fire, East Street locations of former Town Hall and current location of rebuilt Tewksbury Congregational Church



Tewksbury Town Hall 2024  
1009 Main Street

In February of 1919, Town Meeting was held in Pickering Hall at the Foster School in Town Center. It was voted that a committee of seven would find a site for a future new town hall.

It was also voted that a committee investigate records of the World War and dedicate a memorial to those persons of the town who have been in service during this War.

The Enoch Foster home in the Town Center was chosen as the new site and it was voted in March 1919 to build the new town hall and appropriate \$1000 for a War Memorial therein. Design, building and construction was completed in May 1920. A Dedication ceremony for the new Town Hall took place on May 19, 1920.

The World War Memorial Tablets, hanging in the lobby of the Town Hall, listing the town's service members were dedicated at the Welcome Home ceremony on May 31, 1920.



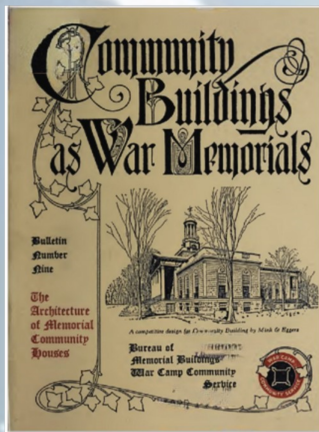
Enoch Foster homestead , current location of Town Hall with carriage house (future Fire Station) on the left and Brown's Tavern to the right. (current TD Bank)





All of this was occurring at the end and after World War I, with the War ending in November 1918.

War Camp Community Services had been formed by the Playground and Recreation Association of America in 1917. They were a national organization committed to boosting morale and welfare of the war troops across the nation. They would set up near training areas so that soldiers on leave from training would have social and recreational opportunities. The Services also held community dances and dinners for citizens and soldiers to promote friendships. Other activities included forming citizen and soldier sport leagues, opening swimming pools and organizing patriotic song rallies.



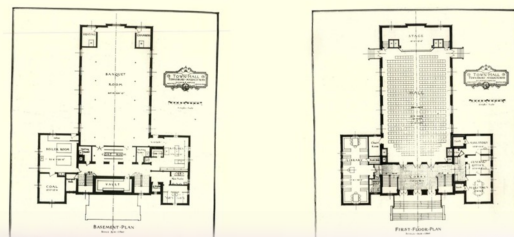
In 1919, the War Camp Community Services merged with the National Committee on Memorial Buildings to assist with the nation-wide movement of constructing community buildings as War Memorials. This new committee was comprised of 100 men and women from all around the Country to advise the War Camp Community Services in the production of 12 Volumes of Bulletins, entitled; *Community Buildings as War Memorials*, containing expert opinion and knowledge about the design, use and layout of these Community Buildings.

Tewksbury's new Town Hall, designed by Architects, Kilham and Hopkins of Boston MA, was one of several Community Buildings, from around the Country, featured in these 1919 War Camp Bulletins.

The building's exterior sketch and floor plans of the basement and first floor were included, as well as a narrative about the use of the rooms.



MEMORIAL TOWN HALL, TEWKESBURY, MASS.  
Kilham & Hopkins, Architects.



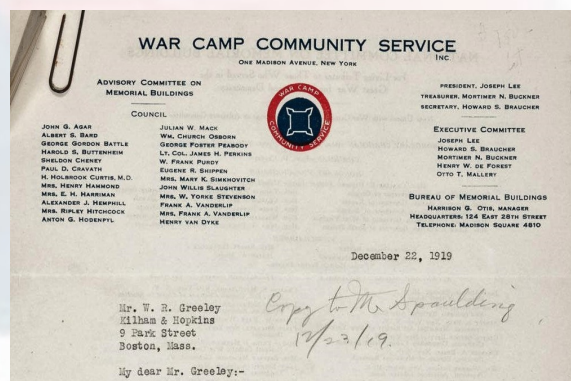
During this same time, The Architectural Record Magazine of December 1919 presented a lengthy article entitled, *War Memorials and Community Houses for Towns and Small Cities*. The design of Tewksbury's Town Hall was featured, with sketches of the exterior and floor plans by Kilham and Hopkins Architects. The narrative also covered several community houses from around the U.S. in a similar way.

Tewksbury's Town Hall layout was described as having a lobby with central circulation to the large assembly room, holding up to 600 people, a library and reading room to the left and town offices to the right. In the basement was a large banquet hall and kitchen, with a lift to the first floor for serving food there as well. There was a need for indoor meeting places for social interaction, entertainment and dining in these types of buildings.

Another document in this collection is a copy of a letter to the architect of the Town Hall, W.H. Greeley of Kilham and Hopkins, Boston MA, dated December 22, 1919 from War Camp Community Services, New York.

The letter expressed to Mr. Greeley that the Tewksbury Town Hall exterior drawings and floor plans in the Bulletins had received wide-spread appeal. They have been used in magazines, and newspapers from around the country are requesting copies (electros) to be used by their towns when making decisions about their new community buildings.

It is noted in hand writing on the letter that it was copied to Mr. Spaulding, 12-23-19. (Benjamin Spaulding was the Chairman of the Tewksbury Town Hall Building Committee 1919.)



“One of the contributing reasons for the unreserved endorsement of the community house is the fact that latent possibilities have been largely developed by and through conditions arising from the War. ... a building was required which would serve all the purposes of a club for soldiers during their hours of recreation. ... The challenge for the architect is bringing the two qualities of the building, informality and commemorative character, together. Each Community House’s success depends on the function it performs and the unique needs of each town. The Community House will serve as a center for meeting for civic, educational and recreational activities. It may also serve as a town hall, where public hearings are held and municipal authority would be headquartered.”

“The idea of raising living memorials to the men who have died for a great ideal, memorials whose function it will be to keep alive that ideal and, holding it aloft, pass it on to generations to come, makes an appeal to all who feel that the causes of this war should never be forgotten. ... no other purpose would be more eminently served by a memorial community building than the encouragement of the meeting of the minds of all classes, united by the bonds of common interest, created by a highly developed community spirit.”

Cornelius, Charles O., *War Memorials and Community Houses for Towns and Small Cities*, The Architectural Record, December 1919, pages 535 - 555.

There are copies of the recently found documents mentioned in this article, for public review, in two large prints at Tewksbury Town Hall, across from the World War Memorial tablets, near the lobby.

It is heartening to realize Tewksbury’s role in both memorializing the causes and sacrifices made during World War I and continuing to uphold those hard fought for ideals, represented by the day-to-day activities within the physical building that is our Town Hall.

Respectfully,  
Nancy L. Reed  
Tewksbury Town Historian 2024  
Tewksbury Historical Society