

The West Gouldsboro VIA Since 1913

by Robert Kelleter, VIA archivist

Care of the village has long been the aim of the West Gouldsboro VIA from the very first meeting, on May 14, 1913, at the store of Frank Noyes, now the Maine Kiln Works. The West Gouldsboro “village” was broadly defined from time to time as “starting at Peaked Hill to Route 1 and the Pond Road as far as the old Wilkinson Farm,” and south on Route 186 to the fire station. The story of the WGVIA is told in three hard-cover journals that contain the minutes of more than a century’s worth of meetings. One founding goal was “to make the streets attractive by trimming the borders, cutting grass, weeding, and to care for the village graveyard as well as roads leading thereto.” The Committee on Trees and Planting was to remove deadwood and underbrush and to plant trees, shrubs and vines and “to care for same.” Among the objectives of the Committee on Roads and Paths was “to lay out such paths and ways to different points of interest as may increase the attractiveness of the village.”

Then, getting down to brass tacks, there was the Social Committee. “It shall be the duty of this committee to arrange for, manage, and conduct all entertainments gotten up for the purpose of raising funds to be used for the benefit of this Association, and to arrange for and manage any other entertainments or social gatherings that the Society may from time to time decide upon.” Thus the VIA began with a strong social dimension in this early era, fortified in 1915 by the construction of a hall building for dining and entertainment, which continued in stages of partial completion during the 1920s into the 1930s. The building began falling into stages of disrepair as the Association became less active, especially during the war years of the 40s.

Pride in village identity took a new direction in the mid-1950s as the Association formally voted to take on the aging Fred Savage West Gouldsboro Library building, accepting the “assets, liabilities, memberships, names and good will of the Village Library Association for inclusion in the Village Improvement Association.” Soon after, the original VIA hall was razed and the library became the center of the group’s activities. Thereafter volunteers and group finances were mobilized through the 50s and 60s to sustain this famous building.

The WGVIA continued active from time to time throughout the 1960s and 70s in support of village identity. They voted to accept responsibility for the village green by the flagpole, they raised funds for a local scholarship fund, and petitioned to name the Route One Post Office, no longer as Ashville but Gouldsboro. Concern for the condition of the village center slowly began to increase in the early 2000s as a VIA group took an interest in the 1888 West Gouldsboro Union Church as well as the Library and village green. When a Maine DOT’s road plan in 2014 threatened to uproot the village green triangle, a big turnout of local villagers helped abort the project, and perhaps sparked the campaign that began in 2016 to renovate the village’s two architectural gems, the library and church.

At the June 4, 2017 meeting, plans were presented for a three-phase capital campaign to restore the side-by-side Union Church and West Gouldsboro Library. Over the next five years, the fund-raising drive and restoration project achieved a dazzling transformation of these renowned buildings. The library had some necessary renovations, and the underpinning of the church gained a new full foundation as well as a new roof. Then more recently the church, which over the years had been repainted white, was restored to the original colors of shades of browns and beige that make it stand out in partnership with the library. The WGVIA's campaign had transformed the village center into a welcoming panorama for the Schoodic Peninsula for those arriving via Route 186.