



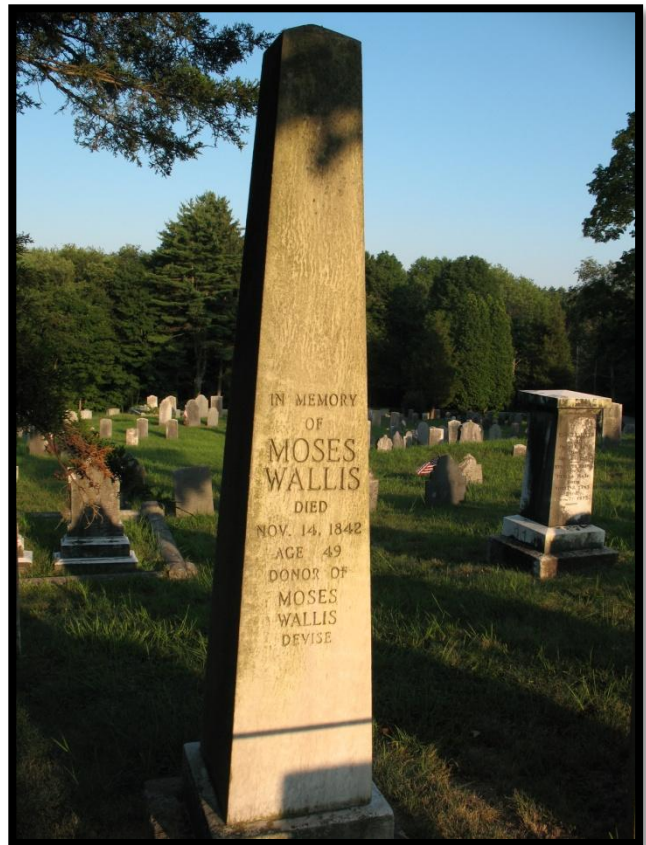
A History of the
Moses Wallis Devise
1841 - 2009

A History of the Moses Wallis Devise

By William R. Carrick and Martha Johnson Aney

Moses Wallis, a lifelong resident of Douglas, was born in 1793 and died on November 14, 1842. The Wallis family goes back to the founding of Douglas in 1746. His grandfather, Benjamin Wallis, was one of the earliest settlers and served as a Selectman for 18 years, and his father, Benjamin Wallis Jr., was the Town treasurer in the 1790's.

To put in perspective how long ago he lived, some of the notable events occurring during his lifetime began with his birth during George Washington's second term as President. In 1804, when he was 11, the infamous duel between Alexander Hamilton and Aaron Burr took place across the Hudson River from New York City, and resulted in the death of Hamilton. Wallis was 19 at the time of the War of 1812, and was 35 when the Blackstone Canal between Worcester and Providence was constructed in 1828. He died 20 years before the Civil War and 27 years before the completion of the transcontinental railroad. In 1840, the population of Douglas was 1,618, and 10 years later, in 1850, the city of Los Angeles, with a population of 1,610, had not quite caught up. While Douglas has grown to 8,000 in 2009, Los Angeles is now over 3 million.



*Moses Wallis Tombstone
Douglas Center Cemetery*

Moses Wallis established the Devise in his will that was written in 1841. The term “devise” was common then, but it is seldom used today, and it means the act of giving real property by will. After making bequests to relatives and friends, he included the following provision in his

will “I give and devise unto the inhabitants of said town of Douglas and their successors all the rest, residue and remainder of my Real Estate.” Once the bequest was accepted by the inhabitants it was provided that an Agent with responsibility for the Devise be “selected for that purpose by the legal voters of said town.” This same method of an Agent managing the Devise is still in effect today. The property, in the form of land, was “for the sole exclusive use and purpose of raising a fund to be applied to and for the express use and purposes hereinafter named and none other whatsoever.” The land was to be sold “at public Auction or private sale, in lots or otherwise, as said inhabitants may determine would be most for the benefit of said Town.” The sales were to be completed within two years after the will was probated, but it took considerably longer. The Devise specified that these funds were to be used for loans to residents of Douglas, secured by titles to real estate of three times the value of the sums loaned. The loans “were to be ascertained and determined by three disinterested freeholders of said Town”. It is not known how long this joint responsibility continued.

SALES OF LAND LEFT TO THE DEVISE		
<u>Year</u>	<u>Purchaser</u>	<u>Amount</u>
1843	Elbridge G. Wallace	\$215.00
1844	Elbridge G. Wallace	600.00
1844	Elbridge G. Wallace	150.00
1844	Waldo Wallis	942.50
1845	Oliver Adams	2,900.00
1845	Waldo Wallis	600.00
1848	Elbridge G. Wallace	215.00
1853	Rufus Wallis	2,300.00
1855	Rufus Wallis	1,800.00
1859	David White	175.90
1859	Lucius Simpson	524.70
1859	McDonald Whipple	535.00
1860	Noah Taft	49.00
1873	Isaac Tucker	<u>201.00</u>
		\$11,208.10

Moses Wallis had exceptionally long range plans. The Devise required that the fund be kept intact for 60 years until 1904, with the interest on the loans accumulating during this period. The earliest date that the value of the Devise can be determined is 1877 when it was \$11,350. This is a very poor investment result, considering the proceeds that were available from the sales of the land. This began in 1843 and was largely completed by 1859 for a total of \$11,208. The proceeds were partially available for investment up to 1859, and fully available from 1859 to 1877. The increase in the value of the fund for the 34 year

period was a nominal \$142. In comparison the increase in the value of the Devise for the period from 1877 to 1878 was \$403. Although the annual reports of the Devise have not been located for these years, it is assumed that the investments were restricted to mortgage loans. Therefore, the most likely explanation for the failure of the Devise to show any growth during this period was the necessity of writing a number of the loans off as worthless. In defense of those with responsibility for managing the loans, it cannot have been a simple task.

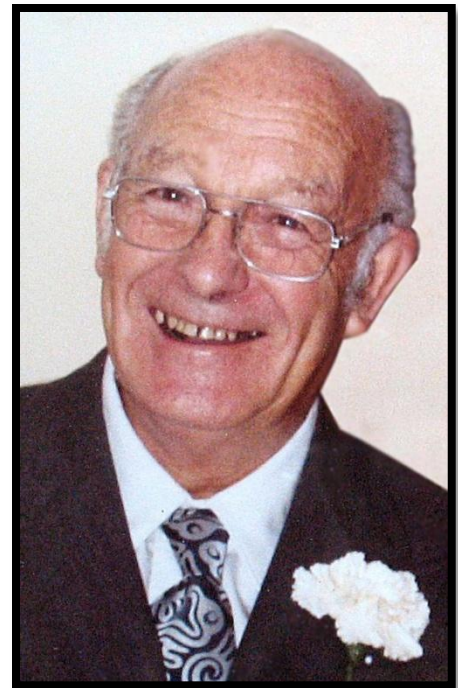
After 1877, the investments results were improved, and at the end of the 60 year period in 1904 the value of the Devise had increased to \$27,502 which was to be kept as a permanent fund. It was provided that the fund *“shall be so forever thereafter kept on interest to be paid annually, the said annual interest after the expiration of said term shall first be applied to the building of a good and durable town hall, with galleries upon three sides of it, with a good clock and bell attached to it, and sufficiently large to accommodate said inhabitants in the transaction of town business, with the letters M W inscribed in gilt in some conspicuous place.”*

Since to this day only the earnings of the permanent fund can be used, there had not been enough time in the years after 1904 for any substantial accumulation of earnings. In order to overcome this restriction in the Devise, the Town successfully petitioned the Probate Court in 1905 and 1907 to obtain access to the permanent fund. However, for undetermined reasons the town took no action.

In 1921 the need for a Town Hall was again recognized, and by then the interest earnings had accumulated to \$27,000 in addition to the permanent fund. This amount, along with \$25,000 contributed by the Town, enabled the hall to be built for \$52,000.

On July 4, 1922 the granite cornerstone was laid by fifteen year old William “Bill” Wallis, the latest descendant of the Wallis family, who became a leading citizen of Douglas. Within the cornerstone are the contract for the Town Hall, a copy of the Old Home Week celebration program, a copy of the Worcester Telegram and a large number of coins from a local collection.

The ceremony was an impressive occasion which included a ten inning ball game, a parade, a field day and a pageant. One of the sporting events at the ceremony was a 100 yard dash for boys aged 10 to 12. Finishing in third place at the age of only five, was Edward “Buff” Therrien, who served in the Town Government for many years and was a highly respected member of the community. Lieutenant Governor Fuller was honored at a luncheon



Bill Wallis



Edward "Buff" Therrien

across the street at the Elmwood Club, and was introduced as the guest speaker before an audience of 2,000 by Walter Schuster, Chairman of the Building Committee.

The Town Hall was dedicated on February 24th, 1923, and was considered one of the finest buildings of its kind in the vicinity. This account of the dedication ceremony is from an article in the Worcester Telegram. The inspection of the building was from 1 to 4 p.m. and not only the citizens of Douglas, but also many guests availed themselves of the privilege. Music was furnished in the afternoon and evening by an Uxbridge orchestra, and from 4-5:50 there was a free moving picture show for children.

The evening program began at 8 o'clock. Rev. Vernon H. Deming offered prayer and the speaker was Lieut. Gov. Alvin T. Fuller. The ushers were William A. Howard, Baylis G. Aldrich, William Dunleavy, Kenneth McMahon, Moses Deblois, Arthur J. Page and John Frost.

The key was presented to Edwin F. Chapin, the architect, by William F. Germain, the contractor, and Mr. Chapin in turn presented it to Walter Schuster, Chairman of the Selectmen. Mr. Schuster made these remarks:

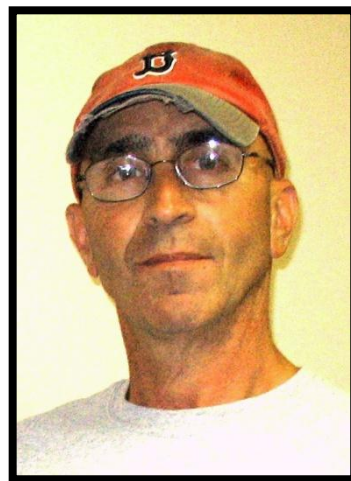


Walter E. Schuster

"To the citizens and guests of Douglas in behalf of the Selectmen, I am unable to express the pleasure it gives to me to receive the key to our new town hall. On this occasion we should pay our deepest gratitude and honor the memory of Moses Wallis, our benefactor, who by his regard for the welfare of the citizens of Douglas, framed this wonderful will and devise. We have watched the amount steadily increase but not until today have we realized the meaning of the value. The result of which has been the erection of this new and beautiful town hall. Whenever we look at the initials M.W., which are

over the stage, let us again honor his memory by using this building with the utmost respect. This building does not belong to one person. It was given to every one who is an inhabitant of the town of Douglas. Let us care for it as we would our own property.”

On the corridor wall of the vestibule was a bronze tablet inscribed: “This building has been erected from a fund left to the town of Douglas by the will of Moses Wallis, dated 1841, to be maintained forever as a town hall for the citizens of Douglas.” Also on the wall was the trowel inscribed “Used by William Joseph Wallis to lay the cornerstone, July 4, 1922”. The trowel and the original tablet were assumed to have been lost until they were discovered by Douglas resident Rick Colonero. The trowel is now at the Douglas Historical Society and the restored tablet has been placed at the left of the entrance to the building.



Rick Colonero

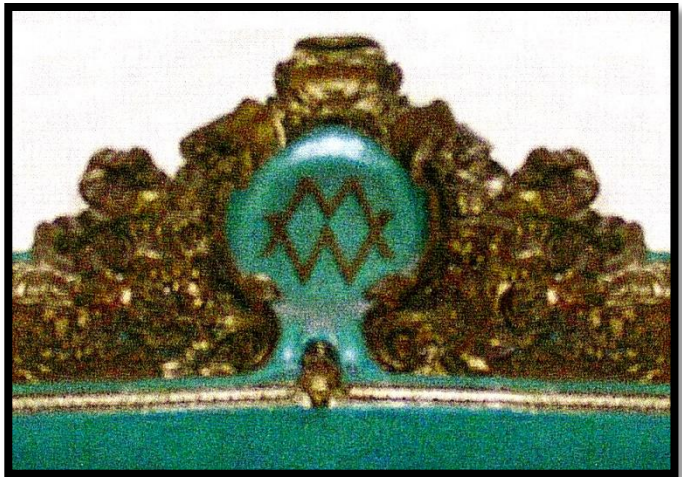
The following description of the building was provided by the architect:

“The new town hall building of classic design, has a frontage of 56 feet and is 85 feet 6 inches deep, two stories high for the office part, the hall part at that being 41 by 69 feet, one story high. The walls are built of Connecticut brick lined with eight inches of interlocking fire proof tile, the general building frame of steel. The building throughout is finished in North Carolina pine with selected birch floors. In the basement is a banquet hall 42 by 63 feet, with connecting kitchen 24 feet square, all equipped with dish cupboards, serving shelves, large sized slate pantry sink, also hot water heater and up-to-date electric stoves. In the basement, also, are located the fireproof heating and ventilating rooms, men and ladies toilets also a social room 15 by 10 feet. The hall has a modern system of heating and ventilation. The main front entrance vestibule to first floor has marble steps, Norton tile floor with marble wainscot, also paneled walls and ceiling. The main corridor eight feet wide extends parallel with the front of the building and from which one may enter the selectmen’s room 16 by 20 feet, to the right : the town’s clerk’s office 12 by

15 feet and ticket and checking room 8 by 10 feet. Large doors open from the main corridor to the main hall and an open staircase connects to the basement and gallery above. The selectmen's room is equipped with a large fire-proof vault. The main level on this floor is 12 by 85 feet and 21 feet high, with curved ceiling, and seats 525 people. A large spacious stage with fire proof curtain and latest style equipment for electric lighting is provided. Four dressing rooms are connected to the stage. Rooms are also provided opening from the hall which the chairs may be stored when the hall is used for dancing. On the second floor front is the gallery with seating capacity for 140 and three good sized office rooms also staircase halls at either end and stairs to the attic in which is located two-machine, modern fireproof moving picture booth."

The building was used as a Town Hall until 1990 when additional space was needed for Town offices and they were moved to the former Douglas Memorial High School building. The Town Hall building now houses the Post Office and the Senior Center.

The extent that the Devise has achieved the objectives of Moses Wallis is an important part of its history. His principal goal of building a Town Hall was accomplished, although not entirely to specifications, since it did not include a clock and bell, and the gallery was not on three sides. The initials M. W. were placed in a conspicuous location over the stage in the hall but were blocked from public view when the building was converted to the Post Office.



Moses Wallis' Initials Over the Stage

The Devise further provided that after completion of the Town Hall the annual earnings of the permanent fund *“as shall be necessary to keep said hall, clock and bell in repair shall be expended for that purpose”*. This was met successfully during the first two decades, and from 1922 until 1942 the earnings from the Devise paid to the Town averaged over \$1,000 a year. These were worthwhile amounts when as late as 1942 the total Town budget was less than

\$150,000. The current earnings of \$1,107 are now of virtually no value to the Town now that it's budget is over \$20 million

The Devise has doubled in value from \$27,502.43 in 1922 to \$54,000 today in 2009. However, this has been nowhere near enough to offset inflation, which would require a fund today of about \$700,000. A principle reason for this lack of real growth is that the investments have been primarily in fixed income securities, which have provided little protection against the effects of inflation. In addition, the extent to which the income has been paid to the Town has restricted the opportunities for accrual of earnings. This is not intended as a criticism of the Agents of the Devise who, almost without exception, have been well intentioned people. They followed what was widely considered to be a sound investment approach, which it proved to be in the early years, and they had no crystal ball to anticipate the effects of future inflation.



Betty Ann Therrien

It is very fortunate that the Devise is currently administered by an outstanding Agent, Betty Ann Therrien, who as a senior banking officer brings a high level of skill and experience to the Devise. Given the present volatile and uncertain investment climate, the funds at this time are judged to be invested appropriately. Agent Therrien was instrumental in discovering and dealing with a serious embezzlement of Devise funds by the previous Agent. This case was successfully tried in November of 2005 in Worcester Superior Court resulting in an order to pay restitution to the Devise in the amount of \$16,303.39 for embezzled funds, as well as restitution of lost interest on those funds in the amount of \$5,530.60, for a total of \$21,833.99.

Agent Therrien has wisely decided that the earnings of the Devise should be reserved for special circumstances when these funds can make a significant contribution to worthwhile projects. This decision made it possible in 2009 to install a clock and bell in the tower of the former Town Hall, and is commemorated in a new tablet to the right of the entrance to the building. This fulfills a significant requirement of the Moses Wallis Devise and recognizes and honors the generosity of Moses Wallis



THIS BUILDING HAS BEEN ERECTED
FROM A FUND LEFT TO THE TOWN
OF DOUGLAS BY THE WILL OF
MOSES WALLIS
DATED 1841, TO BE MAINTAINED
FOREVER AS A TOWN HALL FOR THE
CITIZENS OF DOUGLAS

1923

THIS BUILDING WAS DEDICATED
IN 1923, AND SERVED AS THE
DOUGLAS TOWN HALL UNTIL 1990.
A CLOCK AND BELL WERE INSTALLED
IN THE TOWER IN 2009. THIS WAS
DONE TO FULFILL A REQUIREMENT
IN THE MOSES WALLIS DEVISE, AND
TO RECOGNIZE AND HONOR THE
GENEROSITY OF MOSES WALLIS.

2009

THE MOSES WALLIS DEVISE

(From the original will of Moses Wallis dated November 16, 1841)

I give and devise unto the Inhabitants of said town of Douglas and their successors all the rest, residue and remainder of my Real Estate, to hold to them, their successors and assigns forever, for the sole exclusive use and purpose of raising a fund to be applied to and for the express uses and purposes hereinafter named and none other whatsoever, and said Estate to be managed and disposed of, as well as said fund, in the manner I hereby order and direct, as follows, to wit:

I hereby order and direct the said inhabitants and their successors (provided they accept of this devise to them in six months after the approval of this my said Will by the Probate Court of said County), by their agent or attorney selected for that purpose, by the legal voters of said Town, in Town meeting legally called for that purpose, to enter and upon all of said Real Estate devised to said inhabitants, and the same to sell at Public Auction or private sale, in lots or otherwise, as said Inhabitants may determine would be most for the benefit of said Town, and good and sufficient Deed or Deeds thereof to make, execute and deliver to the purchaser or purchasers, and so to do, finish and complete within two years after the Probate of this my said will, and the proceeds of said sale of all said Real Estate devised to said Inhabitants and their successors, shall be received by said agent or attorney, or other person duly authorized (by said Inhabitants or their successors for that purpose), and under good and sufficient bonds to said Inhabitants, and approved by the Selectmen for the time being of said Town, and said proceeds so received I order and direct to be put out and secured on interest on good and sufficient title or titles to Real Estate of three times the value of the amount of the sum loaned, said value of said Real Estate mortgaged to secure the sum or sums loaned, to be ascertained and determined by three disinterested freeholders of said Town (having no other interest in the loaning of said sum or sums, or the giving of the title or titles to secure the payment of the sums loaned, than that in common with said Inhabitants under this devise), to be selected for that purpose by the said Inhabitants and their successors at a legal meeting called for that purpose in either the months of March, April or November in each and every year, so long as there shall be any of said proceeds of said sale or sums growing out of the same from the interest thereof to be loaned, and also as often as it will be necessary to change the security from the foreclosing of the mortgage or mortgages, and selling said mortgaged estates, to the end that said sum or

sums shall be on interest for the benefit of said Town, according to the intent and meaning of this devise, and that on one person shall receive by loan as aforesaid a larger sum than five hundred dollars out of said proceeds or the interest which may thereon accrue during the time the said proceeds shall be kept out for the benefit of said town. And the said proceeds, so loaned, put out and secured on interest, I hereby direct shall be so kept on interest, to be paid annually and loaned out on the security aforesaid annually, for the term of sixty years from the time of sale aforesaid, after deduction from said interest annually, as the same are incurred, the amount of the reasonable charges for taking the charge and care of said fund, of such person or persons as said Town may select for that purpose, including the fee of the appraisers of the Estate mortgaged. I order and direct that at the expiration of said term of sixty years the said proceeds of said Real Estate, with all the interest and compound interest which may have been collected and secured on interest as aforesaid (after deducting as aforesaid said charges and fee), shall be so forever thereafter kept on interest to be paid annually, the said annual interest after the expiration of said term shall first be applied to the building of a good and durable town Hall, with galleries upon three sides of it, with a good clock and bell attached to it, and sufficiently large to accommodate said Inhabitants in the transaction of town business, and with the letters M. W. encribed in gilt in some conspicuous place upon the wall at the head of said hall, the whole expense whereof not to exceed twelve thousand dollars, which hall shall at all times be open and free for all Lectures, discourses and discussions upon the subject of polities and religion, not interfering with said Inhabitants in the transaction of any town business.

And after said annual interest shall have paid and discharged the expense of the building of said hall, so much of said interest thereafter accruing as shall be necessary to keep said hall, clock and bell in repair, shall be expended for that purpose so long as said building shall stand (and in the case said hall should be destroyed by fire or otherwise, it is my desire that it be rebuilt out of said annual interest thereafter accruing), and in case there shall be any surplus left of said annual interest, after discharging the expense of building said hall and keeping the same in repair as aforesaid, it is my will that the same shall first be applied for the support of the Paupers of said town, and in case after supporting said Paupers there shall still a surplus remain unexpended, the same shall be applied to the Public Highways of said Town of Douglas, and so forever after the building of said hall, subject only, in the destruction of the first aforesaid hall, of rebuilding as aforesaid, and the expense of taking the care and charge of said

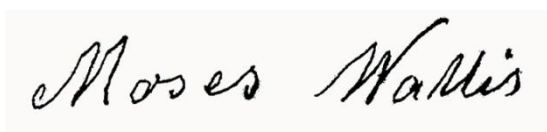
fund, as herein before named, said hall to be located in the most central and convenient place to accommodate said Inhabitants.

And in case said Inhabitants shall, for the space of six months after the approval of this my last will by the Probate Court as aforesaid, neglect or refuse to accept of this devise to them, and do not accept of the same, by a vote taken in Town meeting (to that effect) and called for that purpose, then this devise to them shall become null and void. Then, in that case, I give and devise the same Real Estate I herein before devised to said Inhabitants unto Elbridge G. Wallace, to hold for and during the term of his natural life. It is my will that said Inhabitants take the profit and income of the Estate devised to them, from my decease until sold as aforesaid, in case they accept of said devise, and not otherwise.

I give and devise unto the male children of my brothers, Peter, Benjamin and Joseph, all the rest, residue and remainder of all the Real Estate above devised to said Elbridge (in case said Inhabitants do not accept of the devise to them as aforesaid), to be equally divided between them, except Dexter Wallis and Mason Wallis, sons of my brother Joseph, who it is my will shall take nothing by this devise. And I hereby nominate, constitute and appoint my brother, Benjamin Wallis, sole Executor of this my last will and testament.

In witness whereof I, Moses Wallis, have hereunto set my hand and seal, and publish and declare this to be my last will and testament, this sixteenth day of November in A.D. 1841.

Moses Wallis (L.S.)

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Moses Wallis". The signature is written in dark ink on a light-colored background.

Signed, sealed, published and declared by the said Moses Wallis, as his last will and testament, in the presence of us who, in his presence and at his request, have hereunto set our names as witnesses.

Amos Humes

Elijah Biglow

Warren Humes

Attest, Chas. G. Prentiss, Reg.

CREDITS

1. The Board of Selectmen: Michael Hughes, Chair, John Bombara, Vice Chair, Paula Brouillette, Michael Cohen, and Scott Mederios, for their endorsement of this project.
2. The Simon Fairfield Public Library. It maintains an organized collection of the Annual Town Reports, which include the reports of the Moses Wallis Devise.
3. The Town Clerk's Office. Christine Furno, Town Clerk, has been most helpful, and has provided essential information.
4. The Worcester Public Library
5. The Worcester County Assessors Office
6. Douglas Historical Society. Marylynn Dube, President, made available the early records of the First Congregational Church.
7. *History of the Town of Douglas*, by William A. Emerson, 1878. It provides the text of the Moses Wallis Will containing the Devise.
8. *The History of the Moses Wallis Devise*, by Anthony H. Coppola, 1987. It has a newspaper account of the cornerstone ceremony.
9. Lee Dominey and Russell Aney assisted with the layout and photography.

The writers, William R. Carrick and Martha Johnson Aney, are natives of Douglas, and their families have lived here for several generations. Walter E. Schuster was Bill Carrick's and Lee Dominey's grandfather.

