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Down Memory Lane: Jan. 1, 1970

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Our last glimpse down Memory Lane recalled many of the annual traditions taking place in the summer of 1966, as seen in the microfilmed pages of The Chronicle on file at the Southworth Library. Much of that column dealt with familiar events that had been taking place around town for many years. This time, we'll take a look at the great changes that were taking place in Dartmouth as 1969 ended and 1970 got underway... as reported in the Jan. 1, 1970 edition of The Chronicle.

"Smith Mills to become a memory" and "Weather stalls mall" were the two headlines above the fold on the front page of that New Year's issue of the hometown weekly, which devoted a considerable amount of space to the wholesale changes taking place in the fabric of the community. The first story, about the Smith Mills neighborhood, chronicled all the buildings slated for demolition to make way for the widening of the roadways around the new shopping center proposed for the site of the former Paskamansett Links golf course at the corner of State Road and Faunce Corner Road.

The second article focused on all the commercial development taking place around town in the year just ended, with the building permits for the planned Dartmouth Shopping Mall representing \$5 million of the just over \$7 million in commercial/industrial growth taking place in 1969. The other new businesses noted in that area included New Bedford Dodge, McDonald's Restaurant, Friendly's Restaurant, and J.C. Best, to name a few.

By comparison, residential valuations were up \$1.1 million in 1968 (the 1969 figures were not yet complete), bringing \$102,332 in new tax revenue for the town. With 180 students added to the school system from all the new homes, it was estimated that school costs had risen by \$90,000 in 1968, giving the town a net profit of a little over \$12,000 from all that residential growth. It was estimated that the 1969 building permit numbers would indicate that new residential construction would be under \$1 million in value for the first time in 11 years.

With the mall development still in the future, the article dealt mostly with the new businesses that had already come to town in 1969 – or were expanding. Newcomers included Gull of Bristol, Inc., which "commenced the manufacture of a line of specialized fiberglass boats" on the site of "Hulabaloo... the old teen night club" at the intersection of Reed and Hixville Road. Twenty new employees had been hired, and the owners expected the workforce to double by the end of the year. United Parcel Service had set up a distribution depot on Cross Road, employing 30 people; and A.B. Dick Products, at 955 Reed Road, had expanded its staff to 17 people after one year of operations.

Elsewhere in North Dartmouth, Sears Furniture Manufacturing was planning to triple the floor space of its pine furniture factory to meet growing demand. The company's first major expansion was expected

to double the present workforce of 16 people when completed. Future commercial growth prospects north of Route I-195 were slim in the next few years, the reporter suggested, due to the lack of municipal water and sewer lines in that part of town.

The focus for 1970 was on the expected growth at the mall site, where 42 retail stores were planned. The Sears Roebuck Company, the Outlet Company, Gladdings, F.W. Woolworth's, Zayre's Department Store, Zales Jewelers and two "New Bedford banks" were the announced anchors of the massive new shopping center. It is interesting to note that Zales and Sears are the only two merchants who have survived after nearly five decades of time has passed.

The "Smith Mills to become a memory" sidebar was a nostalgic look at what the town would be losing to accommodate the roadwork needed to serve the new commercial developments on both sides of State Road. One of the photos accompanying the article came with the caption: "The empty building which formerly housed Smith Mills Hardware stands forlornly awaiting wrecking to make way for new Mobil station" at the corner of State Road and Old Westport Road.

Smith Mills Sporting Goods was planning to move to new and larger quarters at 19 Old Westport Road in the spring, when the construction to realign the intersection was scheduled to start. "The largest established business involved in the demolition for the road improvement is Armand's Variety Store," the article noted. "Mr. Armand Fauteux, owner of this store, has been in business since 1928" at that location, the report indicated. The building was the site of Nye's Pharmacy before Fauteux set up shop there, and briefly contained a pool room until 1931, when the post office took over that space. The post office was there for 35 years, until the "new" North Dartmouth post office on Tucker Road was built. Who recalls where that "new" postal facility was once located?

The article included a little ancient history as well – "For centuries, Smith Mills has been the most important village of North Dartmouth. As early as 1681 it was known for its industries which used power from the Paskamansett River. The saw mill was built in 1710 by Elishib Smith thus giving the area its names of Smith's Mills." Chronicle readers who enjoyed the news report on Dartmouth Historical & Arts Society president Bob Harding's recent illustrated lecture on the Smith Mills neighborhood learned much more about the changes that occurred there in the 1800s and 1900s... the videotape of that interesting talk is available on demand via the DCTV website for those who missed it.

Overall, the article was a little depressing, hinting at the end of the old "village" as it was, and the coming of a new, totally different commercial center for the north end of town. George Breault, the owner of the Pop's Luncheonette, told the writer that he could not find a suitable location nearby to relocate his popular eatery; barbershop owner Frank Costa aired the same opinion.

All of the town's villages were undergoing changes in those days. Most interesting, considering the vote at the recent annual town meeting in Dartmouth not to seek bids for the possible sale of the "old" Southworth Library on Elm Street, was a little news item concerning that historic building. The library, recently turned back to the town by the library trustees, had been quickly occupied by the DPW engineering department... on a temporary basis, until their new offices at the sewer treatment plant were ready for occupancy.

Grumbling about road construction near the mall, fears that the town is losing too many of its historic buildings, and continued commercial and industrial development... sounds like some familiar story lines

from today's headlines, 46 years after those stories appeared in the first Chronicle edition of 1970. How does that old saying go? The more things change, the more they stay the same.