

The forgotten history of Fives in the USA by Trevor Jones

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As long as there have been balls, people have been hitting them against walls. First with hands, then with bats, and later with racquets. For those who remain devoted to the hand, there are countless variations. Indeed, it seems that every corner of the world has its own version of a game where players smack balls against hard surfaces with their hands. Each variant brings with it changes in rules, equipment, court regulations, and who plays.

Here in the US, the game known as handball is most popular. Walk through any borough of New York City and you'll surely stumble upon a scrappy game of American handball. But tucked away in some remote corners of the country lay courts for a different handball-style game, one steeped in history, status, and intrigue. It is a game completely unknown to the vast majority of Americans. This is the sport of fives.

Fives is the anachronistic English version of handball, characterized by whacky courts, complicated rules, and prestigious pedigree. In other words, it's very British. There are three main variants that fall under the umbrella term of "fives": Eton, Winchester, and Rugby, each originating at their namesake school. Eton fives, despite the odd particulars of its courts, is the most commonly played around England, and arguably the world, with courts located in Switzerland, Nigeria, Brazil, India, Malaysia, Australia, and Mexico, with some other outposts scattered. Winchester fives, even by English standards, is played on a very small scale, with only a handful of courts found at elite institutions. (Its court falls somewhere in between the eccentric shape of an Eton fives court and the simpler layout of a Rugby fives court.)

Rugby fives falls somewhere in between the other two. It brings with it the same cultural associations as Eton and Winchester fives, yet is the simplest to play both by rules and

court dimensions. “It’s like playing squash with your hands,” says Neil Butterfield, a fives enthusiast and amateur historian from England.

It is unknown exactly when Rugby fives was first introduced to the United States as people have been playing it informally against brick walls and courtyard confines for as long as the game has existed. By 1860, however, we know people were playing some sort of handball-style game referred to as “fives” because, while waiting to see if he would win the bid for the 1860 Republican nomination for President, a man called Abraham Lincoln passed the time by playing fives against a brick wall in Springfield, IL. It’s important to keep in mind, though, that at that time, any handball-style game would have been colloquially referred to as “fives”.

In 1890, the first proper courts in the US were built by Endicott Peabody, founder of the Groton School in Groton, MA, who learned the game while he attended Cheltenham College in England. Having decided that fives would be a suitable game for boys coming to his new school, Peabody had a building housing eight courts added to the design of the school grounds, thus creating the first place to formally and properly play the sport of Rugby fives in the US. Boys at the school quickly became entranced by the game, and its popularity on campus skyrocketed; in no time, it was the most popular sport at the school. Soon thereafter, fives courts were built at Groton’s rival institution, St. Mark’s, and an iconic interscholastic rivalry was born.

However, it wasn’t just with schoolboys that the game enjoyed stateside popularity. Wealthy estate owners across the east coast began adding private courts to their properties. Then, nearly 50 years after it was incorporated as a rowing organization, the Union Boat Club in Boston added three courts to its clubhouse.

So, a century and a half after Rugby fives was introduced to the United States, how is it that this strange sport that was once so beloved has now been all but forgotten? To answer this question, I made it my mission to uncover the history of fives in America.

How to begin this journey, I was unsure. The only place I knew for sure I would get a warm reception -- or a response at all -- was the Union Boat Club (UBC). As a member of the Tennis and Racquet Club myself, I was able to get in touch with their squash pro who had formerly worked at the T&R. The pro put me in touch with Albert "Chip" Elfner, a UBC member for decades who prides himself in being the unofficial torchbearer of fives at the UBC. After corresponding via email for a few weeks, Chip took lengths to organize a "fives extravaganza" between many of the active-playing members (there were six), a fellow from Cambridge, England named James Pinder who was studying in Boston at the time (and quite a strong player), and myself in the corner, furiously scribbling notes.

After making my way through the twisting streets of Beacon Hill, I stumbled upon the discreet entrance of the Union Boat Club. The only thing distinguishing the UBC from the other buildings on the Hill is its royal blue door, but as soon as I entered, I was instantly transported into the world of private clubs that, for better or worse, have long acted as the backdrop for the movers and shakers of Boston. After ascending the carpeted staircase, passing the aptly-named 'fireplace room', and moving through the gym (an ancient leather UBC-monogrammed punching bag acts as the centerpiece), I was admitted into the changing room. An offshoot of the locker room, members of the all-male club -- clad only in a towel, if anything at all -- read the *Boston Globe* with a coffee or discuss the results of their latest squash match over a few beers, depending on what time of day it is. Having changed, I was escorted down one of the many back staircases and complicated corridor systems that crisscross the historic building. (Indeed, had I not had a guide, I surely would have been lost many times.) Then, all of a sudden, I saw it: the fives court.

Rugby fives has been played at the UBC since the tail-end of the nineteenth century when members were looking for a way to stay active once it got too cold to row the

Charles River, the club's primary sport. The first court was added in 1885 (it was portable and three-walled, stationed in the courtyard) saw significant popularity by the end of the 1890's, so the club decided to make a bigger investment in fives and added three permanent indoor courts. The game continued to entice a large portion of the membership during the wintertime over the next decade, with dozens of members playing. Many members -- part of an unofficial American aristocracy called the "Boston Brahmins" -- moved to Boston after graduating from the Groton School or St. Mark's (institutions that, at the time, were reserved for members of this class), so they were already predisposed to the game.

But by the early 20th century, squash -- which had been introduced to the US in the 1880's -- was gaining popularity as a wintertime pursuit. The Racquet Club of Philadelphia was the first to convert the five fives courts they had into squash courts. Looking to become a forerunner of the new game in Boston, the UBC followed suit; two of the fives courts were converted for squash use, but one was spared and remains intact to this day.

With it remains a small but ardent group that keeps the game alive; this is how fives has lived on at the UBC for the past 100 years. "Popularity is cyclical," said Chip Elfner, "Twenty years ago, the court would have players on it every night."

While popularity has ebbed since then, a contingent of competitors began playing more actively prior to the pandemic. However, like it did with so many things, COVID-19 put an abrupt halt to play as people moved out of the city and off the court. Now, as members have reemerged from their country hideouts, a group of players has picked the sport back up again. But the numbers are still not back to pre-pandemic levels. "We need more younger players," Chip yielded.

Here, the sport remains the ultimate gentleman's game. The rules of the sport -- no matter which variant you play or which country you play in -- always defer to decorum.

But at the UBC, the only place where fives is still actively played in the US, the rules are different than those in England. Like the UK, the serve in fives is more of a neutral kickoff than a one-sided advantage. The server technically allows the receiver three chances to return (thus starting the point), but most players here generally allow near-unlimited returns so the point can actually be played out (emphasis lies with the quality of the point, not the result of who wins it). Games are played to 21 points, and most of the time they are singles, though sometimes they can field enough players for a doubles match. The club uses standard gloves and balls ordered from the UK, however, they must hand-paint the balls black because the walls of the court are white (the opposite of the UK, where walls are black and balls are white).

The only other court known to exist in the Boston area is located at the A.D. Club at Harvard University. The A.D. Club is one of a handful of "final clubs" -- prestigious student organizations that have existed at Ivy League institutions for centuries -- which are notorious for their secrecy and exclusion. In keeping with that tradition, little is known about how or when a court was built at the A.D. Club, the history of the sport there, or whether this court even still exists. Members could not be reached for comment, but if they could, I doubt they would. Sitting at the bar one night at the T&R, I was talking to a fellow member and Harvard Alum (who was a member of the A.D. during his undergraduate days) about a story I was writing on the history of fives. He said to me, "Oh yeah, like the court at the UBC? We had one of those at the A.D. Club." That's about as far as I ever got for a confirmation.

In contrast to the clandestineness of the A.D. Club, members of the Union Boat Club who love fives have a strong desire to spread the word of the game. Chip and other enthusiasts went out of their way to make me feel welcome at the club and even let me play a few games in the rotation. Some shared their knowledge of the sport while others told tales about the club, doing their best to keep interest in fives alive. And keeping fives in the US alive these days is not a given.

Trying to keep the game alive is the major theme at the next destination on my pilgrimage: the Groton School.

It was 9°F when -- after driving through the snow-covered farmland of Central Massachusetts, and passing by Lawrence Academy (the *other* centuries-old prestigious boarding school in the tiny, Rockwellian town of Groton) -- I came upon the Groton School. Instantly, I was amazed at how prominently the fives building sits on campus. At Groton, fives is part of the very fiber of the school.

The Groton School was founded in 1884 by the Reverend Endicott Peabody, a member of one of those Boston Brahmin families I had mentioned earlier. Peabody had been educated at an elite “public school” in England where the idea of “muscular Christianity” was impressed on him. Taking this message to heart and wanting to spread the ideal in his home country, he created his own school where he could “shape boys into me” and impart on them the idea of service above self.

Sparing no expense, Peabody tapped the legendary landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted to design Groton’s grounds (perhaps you’ve heard of Central Park? yes, that was Olmsted) who set out the buildings in a spherical layout known as “the circle”. The fives building, housing the first known Rugby fives courts ever built outside of the UK, sits prominently in the center of “the circle” and was added in 1890, only six years after the school was laid out. The addition of fives courts was critical to Peabody’s commitment to physical development which, in keeping with his belief in “muscular Christianity”, he viewed as paramount in the development of his boys.

When touring the rural campus, one has almost no choice but to walk into the fives building. It’s composed of brick and is comparatively small to the adjacent edifices (only one story tall), but it is flanked by classical Grecian columns, conveying a sense of

importance. It sits adjacent to the imposing gothic chapel on its right and looks out across "the circle" to the "Schoolroom Building", where classes are held Monday through Saturday. The building's central location, attractive design, and the sheer number of courts inside, prove just how ingrained the sport is in the very DNA of the Groton School.

I set foot into the building to find, simply put, lots of stuff. Of the eight courts -- four smaller singles courts and four wider doubles courts (something unheard of in England where only one size of court exists; the Groton courts are salmon red while British courts are black) -- four have been used by the arts department for storage and projects for many years now. The other half, where regular play occurred up through the start of the pandemic, have been overtaken by a plethora of departments to stash undesirable miscellany. An anticlimactic state to come across these legendary grounds.

When fives was introduced at Groton, winter sports that we now think of as ubiquitous in America -- ice hockey, basketball, or swimming -- had not yet taken hold, so the archaic Anglo-activity of fives became the default winter pursuit. The game captured the minds and bodies of the boys at the school and quickly became a source of competitive pride. For more than half a century, the game continued to enjoy popularity (not just with the students, but with the staff as well) thanks to a variety of competitions. There was an annual intra-scholastic fives schoolwide Championship Tournament that got much of the student body engaged. There was even the occasional staff vs. student fixture. But the popularity of the game was most buoyed by the school's dominance in the "North American School Championship" against rival, St. Mark's School. This was the annual match that Groton played in against St. Mark's, which was the focal point of the institutions' then-nascent archrivalry. However, when Groton's emphasis shifted to playing 'major' sports in the 1960's, cracks in the popularity of fives started to show.

By the time the institution finally went co-educational in 1975, fives was officially demoted from a recognized winter sport to simply an intramural, meaning that it didn't

count as an official interscholastic varsity sport on the same level as, say, basketball. This decision led to students and faculty, now burdened with obligations for other sports and clubs that took precedence, to lose interest in the once-popular pastime. For the next few decades, interest continued to decrease to the point that, by the 1990's, there was almost no fives activity at Groton outside of the annual match with St. Mark's. This drought continued through the beginning of the pandemic which, oddly, acted as something of a catalyst for a revival of interest in the sport.

“During COVID-19, when the school became an ‘island’ with no one leaving campus, we were looking for activities for students to do on campus. There was a rebirth of Fives,” said Andy Anderson, Associate Head of School and Head Rowing Coach at Groton. In addition to his many other duties, Anderson has overseen what remains of the fives program. “I was one of the faculty members who led a group of nine girls who played three times a week. The girls had fun, it’s a great sport.”

Unfortunately though, the resurgence in fives did not last long. In early 2022, with the return of regular interscholastic sports, interest in fives, simply put, took a nosedive. “It is sad, but things do change,” Anderson said.

Bikes, books, and barrels now pile up inside, forgotten about by their owners, preventing fives from being played; it’s not known how soon before the detritus will be cleared, if ever. Aside from the debris, though, the courts are in remarkable condition, with the vermillion veneer still vibrant, and no cracks or crevices on any of the smooth surfaces. Lining the corridors are hand-painted plaques that list the annual intra-scholastic champion; as far back as 1890 for the boys and to 1977 for the girls (unsurprisingly, many of the winners’ surnames also appear on the list of players at the UBC). Despite just how recently many students on campus played, and notwithstanding the prolific legacy of fives at the school, what happens next for the game at Groton is anyone’s guess.

“It gets harder and harder to convince people that we should maintain a building that doesn't get much, if any, use,” Anderson said. Over the years, there have been numerous proposals for renovation or even total demolition of the fives building, but none have yet come to pass. “Every time, fives has managed to hang on,” said John Conner, Dean of Faculty and Head Boys Squash Coach, who has worked at the school for 43 years. Today, 133 years after building the first Rugby fives courts in the US, a new master plan is being drawn up, and the fate of the fives building -- whose real estate at the heart of campus is highly coveted -- is uncertain.

Against all odds, fives at Groton hangs on, at least for now. As for how much longer, though, it's impossible to say. “I hope fives stays at Groton,” Conner reiterates.

While fives sticks around at Groton, albeit on life support, the destiny of the sport at the school's archrival institution, St. Mark's School, has not been as lucky. Although St. Mark's no longer has courts on their campus, fives was played there for over a century.

The school, which dates to 1865, first built courts on their campus in 1899, christening them with an inaugural match against the Harvard University squad (unsurprisingly, St. Mark's lost badly). Despite the defeat, the love of the game was fostered at the school, and fives became a popular sport amongst the faculty and student body through the first third of the 20th century. As the rivalry between St. Mark's and Groton developed, fives matches became raucous, whole-campus events, with students who were not playing passionately cheering (and sometimes jeering). But the winter fives match took on outsized significance for another reason, too. With interscholastic athletics still in their infancy in the United States, the winner of the fives match -- between the only two schools in the country with courts -- could claim to be national champions.

Despite the continued St. Mark's vs. Groton grudge match, the importance placed on fives at the Southborough, MA school had begun to wane by the middle of the 20th century, undoubtedly due in part to St. Mark's continued losses to their nemesis. After years of continued defeats at the hands of Groton, interest in the sport had reached an all-time low by the 1970's. "Fives became primarily a social activity for the faculty," said Rick Umiker, a math teacher and cross country coach at St. Mark's who arrived at the school in 1976. "It didn't really catch on as a student game until later." But around the time Umiker arrived at St. Mark's, there would be a savior coming for fives amongst the student body: girls.

With a nationwide push to transform traditionally all-boys institutions to co-educational, female students started to appear around campus in the 1970's and many quickly took an interest in fives. Females playing the sport was unique to St. Mark's as Groton still had almost no female players, the Union Boat Club was (and is) men-only, and women playing the game in England was practically unheard of at the time. This uptick in female fives brought with it a revitalization of the boys club, who were finally able to earn some success over Groton. By the early 1980's, both boys and girls competed in regular matches against their rival, as well as hosted a popular intramural tournament that got more students at the institution playing.

The renaissance of fives at St. Mark's also sparked a trip to England for students, faculty, and alumni at the invitation of the Rugby Fives Association (RFA), the sport's governing body in the UK. Until that point, the RFA had no idea that the sport they stewarded in Britain was even played in the US. It was also eye-opening for the US players: "We weren't playing the game correctly," said Umiker. As it turns out, the St. Mark's crew had been playing by rules that were decidedly Americanized. Additionally, US courts were totally different dimensions than the UK courts, and the surfaces were much bouncier. All of this contributed to a culture shock for the St. Mark's group. In spite of the losses, this UK tour inspired St. Mark's art teacher, John Carey -- a 6'5" former professional football player -- to form the United States Rugby Fives Association

(USRFA) in hopes of more formal organization of fives within the US and facilitated communication internationally.

Unfortunately though, the increased interest in fives proved to be short-lived. Ensuing decades saw a decline of fives activity within the student body and the dissolution of the USRFA. Then, in 2006, the building housing the courts was converted into a blackbox theater, officially drawing the curtain on the annual North American School Championship, and concluding the over-100 year history of fives at St. Mark's. "It was something I missed desperately when it faded away," said Umiker. "I knew people really well in ways you only can by being on court with them."

In 2020, after 44 years of teaching, Umiker -- the last bellwether of fives at the school -- retired, taking with him the living legacy of the sport at the institution. Today, fives at St. Mark's lives on only through mentions in the school's history books.

While some places like St. Mark's have demolished their courts but preserved their history of fives, other venues have done the opposite, by maintaining courts but preserving little else. One such destination has reached legendary status in the world of fives, many debating whether it even exists. This is the story of the fabled 'Maine court'.

The Maine fives court is located on Kezar Lake in Lovell, ME, as part of a compound called Westways. After years of buying up parcels of land around Lovell, Westways was built in 1926 as a company retreat by the Diamond Match Company (one of three Westways retreats built by Diamond, the others are in Morristown, New Jersey and Ojai, California). The company was experiencing an influx in cash thanks to a new innovation by William Armstrong Fairburn, an inventor and businessman hailing from England, who had worked with chemists at Diamond to invent a new, less dangerous way to light

matches, leading Diamond's stake in the market to skyrocket, and Fairburn labeled as a genius.

With this newfound wealth, Diamond, under the direction of the famously quirky Fairburn, constructed its Westways retreats sparing no expense. The retreats were designed as places for company employees to boost morale, so sports facilities were important parts of the campuses. In Maine, the campus included an indoor bowling alley, a softball field, docks for sailing, an equestrian center, and -- owing to Fairburn's British roots -- a fives court. When employees would come to Lake Kezar, fives matches were just one part of an experience designed for exercise, competition, and morale-boosting.

After decades of ownership by the Diamond Match Company, Westways was converted to an Inn in the 1970's. The Inn operated for around two decades, and once it closed in the 1990's, the property was bought by unknown private owners, where it remains today. Today, as it did a century ago, Lake Kezar maintains a reputation for its privacy and exclusivity, with wealthy owners keeping summer houses there (such as legendary Mainer, Stephen King). While the new owners completed extensive renovations on the property, leading most of the other sports facilities on the property to be torn down or converted, the fives building, by some miracle, remains intact.

Through three hours of freezing rain, sleet, and eventually snow, I drove from my home on the North Shore of Boston, up the desolate back roads of New Hampshire, finally crossing into Maine, just to witness this mythical location with my own eyes. Mark Tripp, longtime caretaker of the Westways compound, graciously guided me down the iced-over dirt roads as my sedan struggled to keep pace with his pickup truck. A couple turns in the road (including one that I was certain would steer me right into the lake) and I saw it: the mythical Maine fives court did exist.

Getting to this point was not an easy process, though. The only information I could find was an outdated website which advertised rentals on the property. The site, which has not been monitored in years, listed an email that was now defunct. I turned to some contacts in the fives community in Boston and the UK, but none of them had any knowledge of who owned the court, or whether it was even still there. In a last-ditch effort, I reached out to Stan Tupaj, the owner of a local real estate company called Kezar Realty, whose email I found online. Miraculously, Tupaj not only knew of Tripp, but was able to give me his phone number as well. I went back-and-forth for a month with Tripp, playing phone-tag via his landline as his cell phone usually remains off and his email is, to put it mildly, unmonitored. Finally, we set up a date for me to come up.

Thanks to this roundabout process, I found myself being led up the icy stone steps by Tripp and into the court. The premises are in pristine condition, despite being 100 years old, with the ivory shingling remaining immaculate. Once inside, the court envelops nearly the entirety of the space. Painted brick red in the style of Groton, it is illuminated by a pitched skylight which floods in abundant natural light, even on this decidedly gloomy morning. The court is smaller than the Union Boat Club's court, but matches the dimensions of Groton's singles courts (about 5/8 the size of their doubles courts). Also like Groton, there is no back wall to play off of, just a four-foot-tall wooden barrier that lets players onto the court through a saloon door. Like the exterior, the interior is in remarkable shape, and it is unknown when the last match took place. In fact, very little about fives at Westways is known at all. Perhaps this should not be surprising given its legacy.

The history of the Maine retreat is sparse and filled with rumors. According to the Lovell Historical Society, a former manager of Westways claimed that employees were "forbidden to reveal anything about the enclave, to do so meant immediate termination." Thanks to this atmosphere, very few records of Westways exist, and those who knew firsthand about life there are mostly dead. This secrecy was by design. In 1944, *Time Magazine* published an article that described William Fairburn, "like a Central American

dictator". He valued privacy at whatever cost, and wanted Westways to act as a retreat and productivity-booster for employees only; interaction with the outside world was tantamount to treason.

In line with the history (or lack thereof) of Maine's Westways, there were very few signs of life upon my call. There was, however, a placard affixed to the door signifying that this backwoods building is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. A search of the National Park Service records show that the fives court was officially listed -- reference number 16000676 -- on October 5, 2017, but no one is really sure how it got there. Another dead end. During my visit, the only sign that living people have actually been here any time in the past century is a fading note written in pencil by the last visitor, Neil Butterfield.

Neil Butterfield from Bristol, England, is a fives player and something of an amateur archivist. In 2016, he completed his second tour of the known fives courts in the US (his first being 30 years prior) and wrote an article about it for the Rugby Fives Association. It was Butterfield's article that prompted me to start my own quest, so who better to talk to than the man who had trodden the path before me?

Talking via Zoom, it became clear that Butterfield is well versed in rumors. Rumors pervade the insular world of fives, with tales of private courts existing in New York, San Francisco, and even Toronto. It was a rumor that led him to discover the Maine court, being the first person from the fives community in decades to see it firsthand. While evidence to support the other claims has yet to present itself, fives enthusiasts like Butterfield are always hopeful to discover a new court in some half-dilapidated estate, the Maine court being a perfect example.

Such rumors prompted me to do a little digging myself, specifically in relation to scuttlebutt surrounding a supposed “New Jersey court”. Knowing the Diamond Match Company built a Westways retreat in Morristown, I figured it wouldn’t be too much of a stretch to reason that, if they put a fives court on the compound in Maine, perhaps they put one on the New Jersey campus, too. Online records show that the Westways retreat in Morristown is significantly smaller than the Maine estate, however, the two campuses appear to be stylistically similar. New Jersey Westways was sold as a private residence as recently as May, 2021, and appears to have been in private hands for some time now. While there are no written records of a fives court there that I could locate, real estate photos show a carriage house near the back of the property that looks exactly the same as the building housing the fives court in Maine. Could it be that the illusory New Jersey court does (or did) exist? For those wondering how so much stock can be put into rumors within the fives community, this is your answer.

While the New Jersey court currently resides in the realm of rumors, waiting for a new Butterfield to unearth its story, there is a court that — despite living in the world of fiction for a while — has been confirmed by Butterfield to exist in the realm of reality: the “Connecticut court”.

The Connecticut court was a fives court built on the estate of Ted Childs, a renowned conservationist and philanthropist, in Norfolk, CT. Childs, who was a fanatic for the Olympic sport of curling, learned fives as a student at Groton, and later commissioned a range of different sports facilities on his property. Naturally, a fives court was one of them. The curling facility would go on to become an actual sports club, still in operation to this day, called the Norfolk Curling Club; but the fives court stayed closer to Childs’ heart, with the building remaining private on his property. There was a tournament held at the Connecticut court in 1984 called the Connecticut Open, which hosted competitors from England, St. Mark’s, and Groton, and was won by a St. Mark’s music teacher named Jerry Bellows.

But with the termination of the tournament and the death of Childs, the legacy of the Connecticut court was nearly forgotten about, save for a couple of fives fanatics with sharp memories like Butterfield who carry on its memory. As of 2023, there is no information whether the Connecticut court still exists or who owns the estate after the death of Childs. Like the Maine court once did, the Connecticut court and the New Jersey Court are working their way into fives lore where they will certainly take on a new life outside of reality. As with the Maine court, rumors will spawn some zealot to rediscover these courts and tell their stories, if they even remain.

Thanks to a small group of ardent supporters, the legacy of fives in the US -- both through rumor and reality -- has hung on. The last 100-or-so years have seen the stateside popularity of fives dramatically increase, then all but vanish. In that time, numerous courts have come, but more have gone. At the locations where fives is still played in the US, the legacy of the sport is carrying on strong. Of course, strong is a relative term; in the world of fives, 'strong' roughly equates to 'alive'. Indeed, in the corners of the country where courts do exist, fives remains alive. In 2023, that's no small feat.

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See next pages for photos

Photos:



Erik Vigsnes, (unofficial) North American champion, prepares to hit the ball against Bill Motley at the Union Boat Club in Boston.



Members at the Union Boat Club watch and converse as a singles match takes place. Chip Elfner is on the far right of the bench, wearing a white headband.



The fives ladder at the UBC which, at the time of photographing, had not been updated since pre-COVID. Many of the names on this ladder were Groton and St. Mark's alumni.



The fives building at the Groton School sits prominently at the center of campus. Most students walk by with no idea what a fives court even is, or that there are eight of them inside.



A look inside. This is the side of the building that courts were being played on through the pandemic.



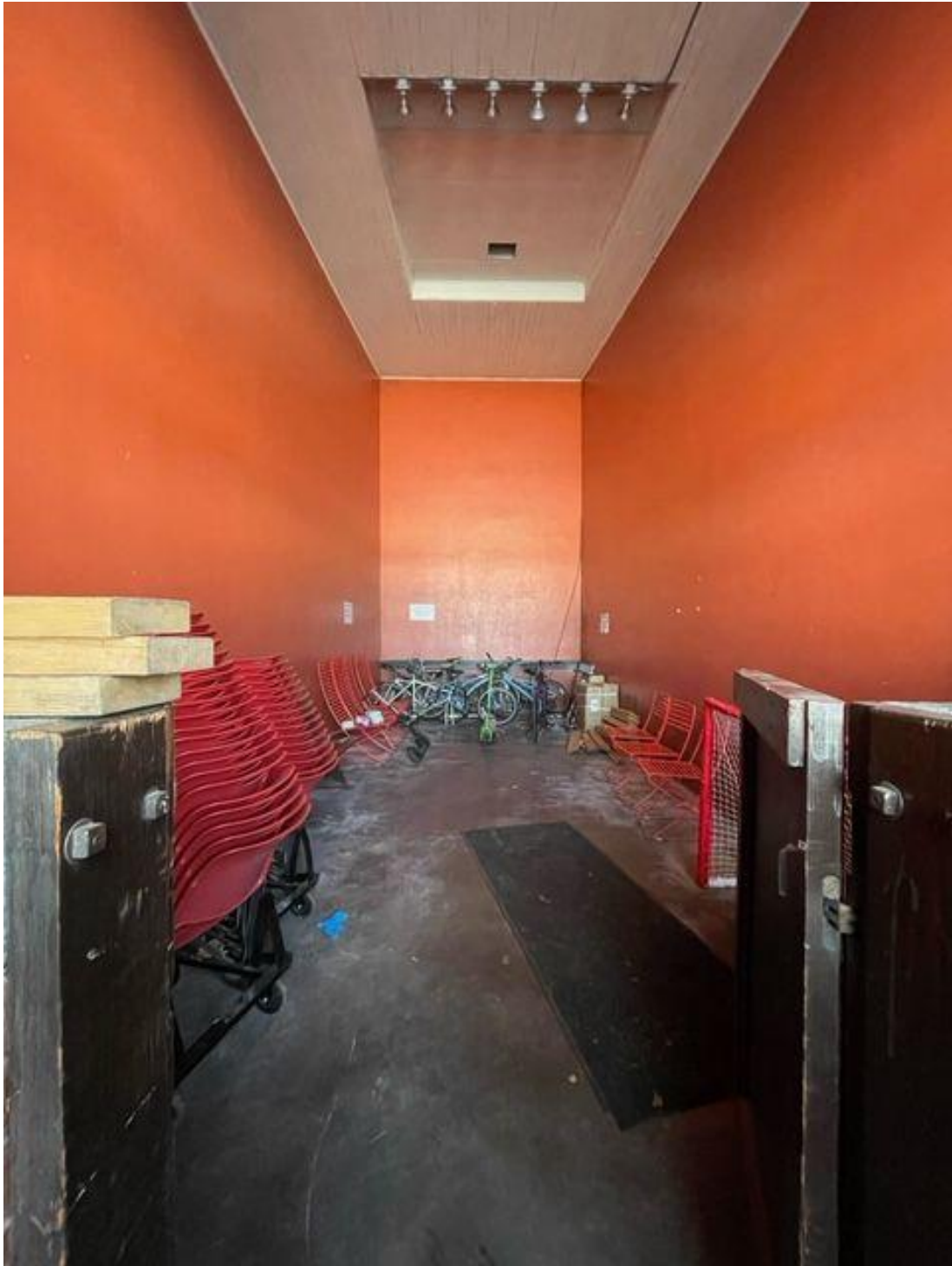
The courts are now being used exclusively for storage. Plaques line the walls testifying to school champions of days past.



Some of the previous school champions. All but forgotten the fives building, seen mostly by janitors and the grounds crew these days.



The saloon door style entrance to the courts. There is no back wall to play off of.



Courts are no longer being used for their original intent.



Despite the recent shift in purpose, the facade remains in incredible condition.



During the pandemic, Andy Anderson led a group of up to ten girls (depending on the day) in playing fives thrice weekly. It was a great way to get some socializing and athletics in during the pandemic, when both were hard to come by. But when regular interscholastic sports resumed, interest in fives quickly ended.



Nestled deep in the woods of Maine, the fives building at Lake Kezar in Lovell, Maine. The exterior and interior of the building is in great condition. The building was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 2017.



It is not known when the last match was played on this court, but aside from dust buildup, it is in wonderful shape. The skylight above sheds lots of light down.



Mark Tripp, caretaker of the Westways estate since it was an Inn in the 1970's, stands at the fives court.



St. Mark's teacher Rick Umiker, right, sent me this photo of him playing fives at St. Mark's sometime in the 1980's or early 90's.