

150-year-old town flagpole falls victim to rot, vandals

By GORDON B. SEAVEY

WESTFORD — What took 150 years to grow, many hours of hand labor to fashion into an unusual but patriotic article, which stood proudly for 114 years in the heart of Westford Common, and then came tumbling down in the matter of five minutes?

Maybe you've guessed it because it has been a topic of conversation for over a year and necessitated an appropriation of \$2,000 at the annual town meeting.

It was a venerable white pine tree which as a flagpole flew "Old Glory" for more than a century for all passersby to see.

BUT IT HAD seen its day. Aged with rot at the base and its top section broken a year ago by vandals pulling on the halyards, it became necessary to replace the entire structure. In preparation for a new pole, which will come in a single 60-foot section, workmen Monday in the matter of minutes "sawed down the old pine tree." It fell to the north in a proud, graceful manner, its rotten cradle at the mid-section scarcely penetrating the well-manicured grass on the common.

There she lay, later to be cut in sections and preserved by the historical society. The butt, encased in cement, had to be drilled out. The lower section was 50 feet tall, the upper, 30, before vandalism.

The original tree had been donated by Abijah

Fletcher from his Cold Spring Farm in 1861 and Cyrus Hamlin, a local carpenter, turned it by hand (no doubt right on the common) into a two-piece flagpole. With the help of townspeople, guided by Samuel Fletcher, a Graniteville quarryman, the pole was raised in time for its dedication on May 18, 1861, when at "2 p.m. the stars and stripes were run up amid the cheers and hurrahs of a large collection of men, women and children from all parts of the town who had assembled to witness the patriotic scene."

TODAY THERE ARE at least a couple of white pines growing in town which no doubt would match Abijah's in height and thickness. One is on the shore of Burge's Pond, the other in Nashoba Woodlands. They reach at least 85 feet toward the sky.

