

17 years after the Civil War, Westford began memorializing dead

By GORDON B. SEAVEY
WESTFORD — As veterans' groups, civic and religious leaders prepare to remember

the dead of various wars this Memorial Day, it is as 17 years after the conclusion of the Civil War that townspeople

gathered in churches, public buildings and at cemeteries to honor the dead of the "War of the Rebellion," a term then in common use.

Thirty-five Westford men lost their lives in this war between the North and the South, and the women of the community were liberal in the assistance they gave to the sick and wounded. And all citizens cherished the memory of their dead, whose names now appear in black, cut into cold marble, on tablets in the town hall. During the conflict, southern women took up the practice of decorating the graves of soldiers of both sides. In 1868, May 30 was set aside by the Grand Army of the Republic to decorate the graves of Union soldiers.

First formal recognition of the day in Westford came in 1882 when a detachment from Post 115, G.A.R., came from Groton on May 30 to join local veterans in decorating the graves of comrades. In the evening, the Graniteville Cornet Band played at services in the town hall. An address was given by Rev. F. Hodgman, town historian, describing the town's participation in the war, and "Hooker's Battle Above the Clouds" was read with "fine effect." To end the "fitting observance" of the day, a Captain Palmer described the objects and the organization of the G.A.R., of which the American Legion is its counterpart.

Seven years previously, the townspeople gathered to propose the erection of a monument on the common to commemorate the services of Col. John Robinson and others who participated in the fight at the Old North Bridge in Concord and at Bunker Hill in the Revolutionary War. At the town meeting on May 22, 1875, the sum requested was \$2,000, but the article was defeated 78 to 51. Only within the last few years such a recognition been made, which consists of a simple boulder with a bronze tablet placed at the head of the common.

A PROUD SON, whose dad was to be the first from Westford among the 172 men to answer the call of President Abraham Lincoln for volunteers to "fight for the preservation of the Union," was to present the town with its first war memorial.

This gift was to honor Lt. William Metcalf of the 16th Massachusetts Regiment, Company C, and all the volunteers to the cause. The donor was his son, Edwin, who had graduated from Westford Academy in 1859 and stayed home to run the little Metcalf farm near Minot's Corner, on Route 110, and to care for his

mother while the father was away at war.

Edwin C. Metcalf grew to be a distinguished Massachusetts citizen, and later a successful businessman in Auburn, New York. He was elected a state representative from Springfield, then a senator from Hampden County. He was mayor of that city and later assistant quartermaster general for Governor John D. Robinson.

The day came when Edwin was called back to Westford, the town of his birth, to bury his father. To his surprise, he was met at the railroad station by a delegation of old Civil War Veterans.

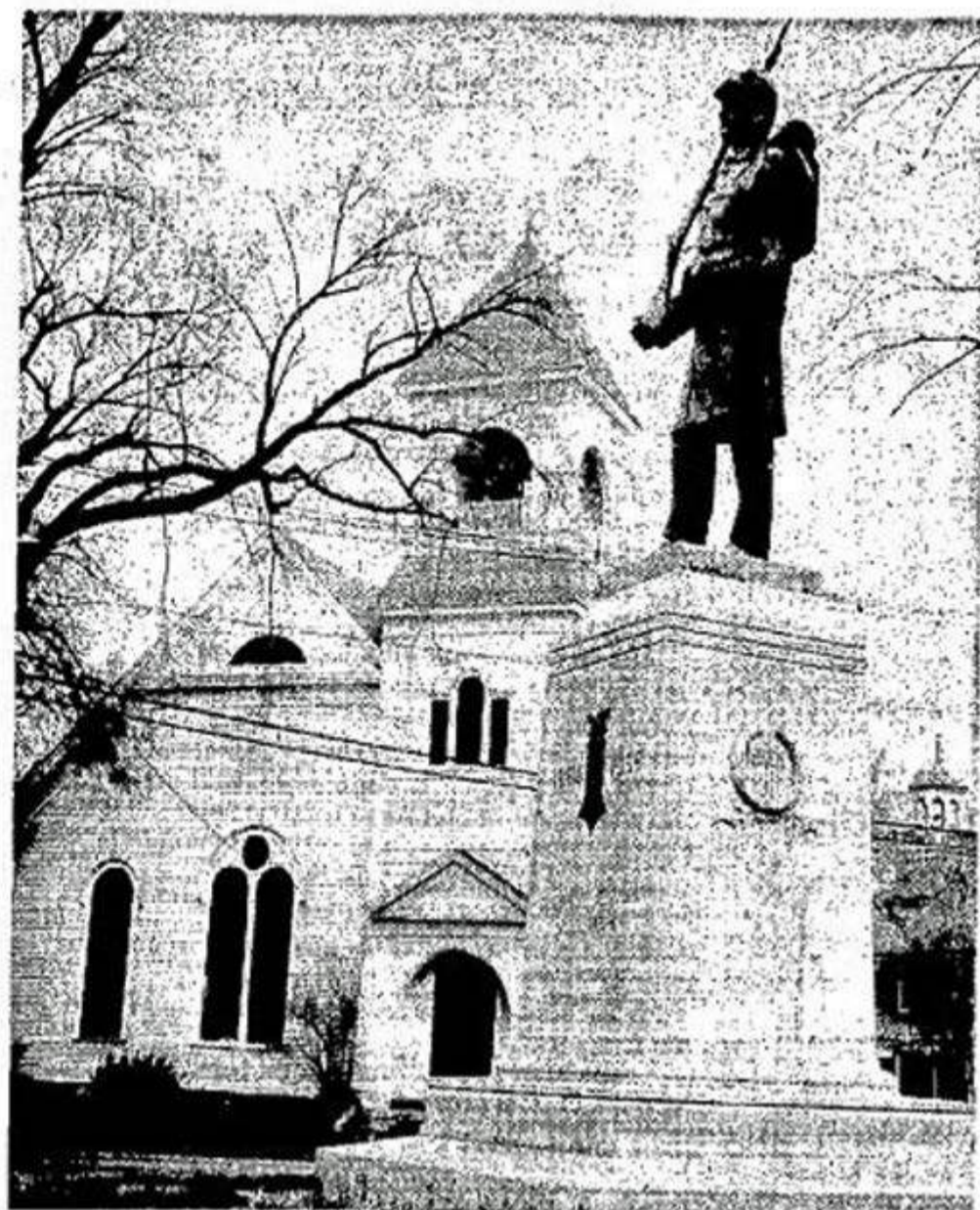
"They were strangers to me, they came without solicitation and they came without any previous knowledge on my part," he later stated, "but I was so much pleased and so much touched at the spirit of devotion and loyalty of those who had stood shoulder to shoulder, during the Civil War, that I then and there resolved that I would do something in Westford to the memory of these veterans."

In due time, the small triangle of land bounded by Boston Road, Lincoln and Hildreth Streets, was carefully graded and surrounded by a rounded granite curbing.



The last

A tall, distinguished appearing man with a white flowing beard, Wayland F. Balch was Westford's last of the "long, thin blue line" when he died in 1937. A commanding figure in his blue Civil War uniform with campaign hat, he lived to be 96 years old and always took part in Memorial Day ceremonies. He is shown with his daughter, May, who was a local artist of note.



Civil War Memorial

Civil War soldier in full regalia has looked across Westford Common for over six decades. A tribute to the town's volunteers to the War of the Rebellion, it was erected in 1910. Building at left is

the former Congregational Church. To the right of the dignified monument may be seen the original Westford Academy building, built in 1792, and now the home of the Central Fire Station.