

Angelica P. sinks roots here

By GORDON B. SEAVEY
Sun Correspondent

WESTFORD - Angelica, apparently missing for many, many years in this town, has been rediscovered. She is healthy, has grown tall, and seems to thrive since her roots are once again firmly established in familiar territory.

Her full name is Angelica Purpurea. She is not a person, but rather a very uncommon herb in these parts, these days.

She was recognized by John F. Gagnon last May while taking one of his nature tours in the southwestern area of Westford, not far from Nashoba Hill. He has kept a close watch over Angelica ever since.

Angelica is either two or three years old and is growing alongside three similar companions; in this "settlement" there are about 30 smaller, year-old plants. The herb is biennial.

The Westford habitat is swampy and the soil mud and peat. Growing also in the area are many sensitive ferns and maple trees. These receive some direct morning sun and filtered light the remainder of the day.

For an herb, Angelica is no slouch. Her top blossom, white, reached 8 feet, 7 inches. Her seeds are brown and one-quarter of an inch long. For reproduction, they must be planted immediately. They matured a few days ago, so Gagnon rushed a batch of his find to the Garden in the Woods, home of the New England Wildflower Society, in Framingham.

Surprised to learn of Gagnon's find, chief propagator William Drumbach hastily interred the seeds for close observation.

Under his father's tutelage, Gagnon has been interested in nature from the time he learned the difference "between a violet and a dandelion."

Many local folks will attest to his keen knowledge of plants and trees from accompanying him on various nature walks throughout the town. Many have been sponsored by the Roudenbush Community Center. Most popular tours are to Kissacook Hill in the western part of town, and Mystery Spring, near the housing for the elderly on Tadnuck Road.

Angelica is native to Europe and Asia where it was considered a preventive against evil spirits and witchcraft. It is of pre-Christian origin and herbalists recommend "to bite and chew a root of Angelica against the plague."

In this country, it was mentioned as being in a garden

in Yonkers as early as 1653. Seeds were offered for sale in an advertisement in the Boston Evening Post in 1771. It was used medicinally as a stimulant or tonic and given as an infusion.

Oil distilled from the root, leaves, and seeds is an ingredient in making perfumes and liqueurs. The leaves could be used as a salad and the stems were at one time a popular vegetable, blanched similar to celery. In England, the roots were preserved and the stems candied.
