

# Behold! The local newspaper correspondent of days gone by

By Gordon B. Seavey

Seventy-five years ago, before the advent of radio and TV, Westford folks got their state and world news from the city dailies. The Boston Post, even though it had Democratic leanings, was more popular in this then Republican town than the Boston Herald. The other paper was the Lowell Courier-Citizen, forerunner of the Sun.

Scarcely any event that occurred in town received any press coverage in The Boston dailies, unless it was of an unusual nature, such as the time the Abbot Worsted Company had a payroll holdup at Forge Village.

One issue, though, of the Boston Globe carried a front page story of an event which rocked the town — with laughter.

On a bitter cold night, the usual poker game was in progress in the upper floor of the Center fire station, once the original home of Westford Academy and now the town museum. The cast iron stove with its long stove pipe was aglow with fire, there was hardly a sound other than the flipping of cards and the clinking of poker chips. The stakes were never high and talk was subdued.

Suddenly the side door burst open, three masked men, one holding a gun, appeared

"Off with your pants and put your money on the table," was the order. Scooping up the cash and the pants, the robbers fled. The owner of the pair of breeches left behind found his auto keys. Hastily dressing, he sought to give chase, alighting in the driver's seat of his Model A Ford with a burst of speed. Alas, the battery was dead! In more detail, the story made Page 1 of the Globe.

For Westford news, residents were obliged to depend upon the Lowell daily or the weekly Westford Wardsman, published in Ayer by George Turner, who like his father was an old-time newspaperman and printer. He paid his correspondents, which was very little, by the inch of printed matter. He figured the prestige of being a news writer weighed heavily in the writer's favor.

He published several newspapers for area towns, all of which were identical with the exception that the "flag" or the insignia at the top of Page 1, such as Westford Wardsman, was changed for each town, thus, his paper in Groton was called the Landmark.

Turner placed the stories, one after another, as they came in under the one heading for each community. The pattern hardly ever varied, although in the case of the fire that consumed my old homestead (see photo

in June Kennedy's Westford Recollections, Page 82) did rate a special head in 8-point bold face, "Fire."

Mrs. Leonard W. Wheeler, who lived in the Rev. Willard Hall home opposite the Roubenbush Center, was a long-time writer. Hilda Isles Bosworth, in a good position to gather news as she was the manager of the local telephone exchange, was another.

Some of the correspondents just liked to see their items in print — and George Turner set the copy on his linotype just as it was written.

One of these writers was Samuel Law Taylor of the Old Oaken Bucket farm at the corner of Lowell and Stoney Brook roads. Here's a sample from "A Vexatious Predicament."

"During the heavy shower last week (June - 1911), a junk peddler from Lowell overturned his wheel junk shop on the Lowell Road.

"The overturn was caused by a contraminded cow tied to the rear of the wagon, who having spied a pasture with the bars down made a dash for it, while the driver and horse were dashing toward Lowell in the dashing rain. The horse, driver, wagon and variety show aboard were dragged towards the pasture and in the mixup of opinions as to whether it was in Lowell of pasture they were going, the wagon came forth with ironware, tinware, pewterware, brassware, leadware, ragware, live poultry of all kinds — poultry without feathers and feathers without poultry — and several rooster started crowing match, and two others started a fighting match.

"The shafts of the wagon were broken and the horse went to grass. With the thunder and lightning, dashing rain, crowing, fighting roosters and the ragtime music of the show generally, it was a better show generally in some respects than the Buffalo Bill upset the day before at Brookside!"

Sam was referring to a train wreck when a Wild West show was derailed near Brookside Depot.

The Boston Globe had a story about the train wreck okay — but nevertheless missed a bigger story by a country correspondent.

Today, the Eagle and other good community newspapers are fully reporting all important town-wide events in true professional style, but still lack the subtle humor of a country reporter in their columns.

But then they don't have an opportunity to report a runaway wagon pulled by a horse and steered from the rear by a obstreperous cow.

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