



CLOSEUP OF THE soldier atop the Metcalf Civil War Memorial at Town Common reveals the attention to detail, even in the bayonet projecting from his rifle. (From the files of Gordon Seavey)

Boyhood memories inspire war memorial

By Gordon B. Seavey
Eagle contributor

When Edward D. Metcalf arrived at Westford Depot from upper New York state in June 1900, on the sad mission to bury his father, an 80-year-old Civil War veteran, he was met by a contingent of local veterans to escort him to the meeting house on Tad-muck Hill.

Metcalf never forgot this thoughtful gesture. Nor had he forgotten his boyhood days at Westford Academy and on the Metcalf farm in the Parkerville section.

When he returned to his thriving business in Auburn, N.Y., this kind deed was uppermost in his mind many times.

He recalled that his dad, William Metcalf, when President Lincoln called for volunteers for the Grand Army of the Republic, gathered a group of his classmates and other

young men of the villages to assemble at the Academy building to sign up for a three-year tour of duty.

Somewhat skilled in military affairs, William Metcalf was the first to enlist, with many following as a patriotic duty. Frankly, many thought the war could not last long. Nevertheless they pledged their lives to the preservation of the Union. Metcalf was made a lieutenant, the only man among the local soldiers to rate a commission.

The young officer was assigned to the 16th Mass. Infantry on August 1, 1861 and first sent to a camp near Baltimore, then Fortress Monroe.

William Metcalf performed with great skill all during the long four years of the war and returned to Westford where he continued to farm until his death on June 18, 1900.

Civil War monument

Westford had erected a two-section, 80-foot wooden flagpole in honor of its Civil War veterans in the center of the common, surrounded by a bandstand. It was a common practice in small New England towns that a monument seemed to be appropriate. Colonel Edward Metcalf believed in this and the result is a fullsize bronze figure of an infantryman atop a three-section granite base of finest quality.

The location chosen is a triangle at the head of the common where Lincoln, Boston and Hildreth streets meet. The plot is enclosed in a curved curbing.

The dedication on Memorial Day, 1910, brought out one of the largest crowds Westford had seen. Governor John D. Long, a one-time principal of the Academy, was

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orator of the day. Charles S. Hamlin, former assistant secretary of the U.S. Treasury was another speaker, as was the donor, Colonel Metcalf, an ex-quartermaster general of the Commonwealth.

The Nashua Military Band, always a local favorite, was in full regalia and a quartette from Boston was present for patriotic singing. D.L. Page of Lowell catered beneath a giant tent to exactly 501 persons, according to old records.

As for the local prominent people taking part, Sherman H. Fletcher — "Mr. Selectman" — was general chairman and Oscar R. Spalding received the gift for the community.

Deed at library

In the vaults of the library is the deed to the monument of bronze and granite. It reads in part, "This monument is given in commemoration of those soldiers of which my father was one, who knew no glory but their country's good, who voluntarily left their homes and families and went forth

from Westford to participate in the great struggle which solved the momentous question whether this nation should united, stand, or divided, fall."

Memorial Day was always seriously observed in Westford. Old timers can remember families meeting at cemeteries, planting flowers, usually lilacs in Mason jars filled with water, on family gravesites. Their horses were tethered at the fences or walls which outlined the town's four burial lands while friends and relatives would gather in groups or rest in the gazebo in Westview Cemetery, not far from where Lt. William Metcalf and his wife, Nancy Elizabeth Crook, are interred.

Colonel Metcalf did not forget his mother, either. The tasteful three-section Tiffany-type stained-glass window of St. Elizabeth and child in the First Parish Church sanctuary is in memory of his mother.

Gordon Seavey, former newspaperman and a native of Westford, although only five years old in 1910, probably was among the onlookers at the dedication.