

Colonists concentrated on

By GORDON B. SEAVEY

WESTFORD — In the coming months, America will unfold its observance of the founding of the country — the 200th anniversary. Committees in various Middlesex towns and cities quietly have been making plans for this Bicentennial observance.

The plans are taking various forms. They could be plays, pageants, re-enactment of military skirmishes and battles. They could be the rehabilitation of ancient landmarks, the restoration of pre-Revolutionary buildings.

As many of the seeds for this founding were sown right in this area, let's roll back time at least a couple of centuries. We must dig into old records and visit old cemeteries, and read old histories.

This is where we catch an inkling of what country living was like prior to the American Revolution.

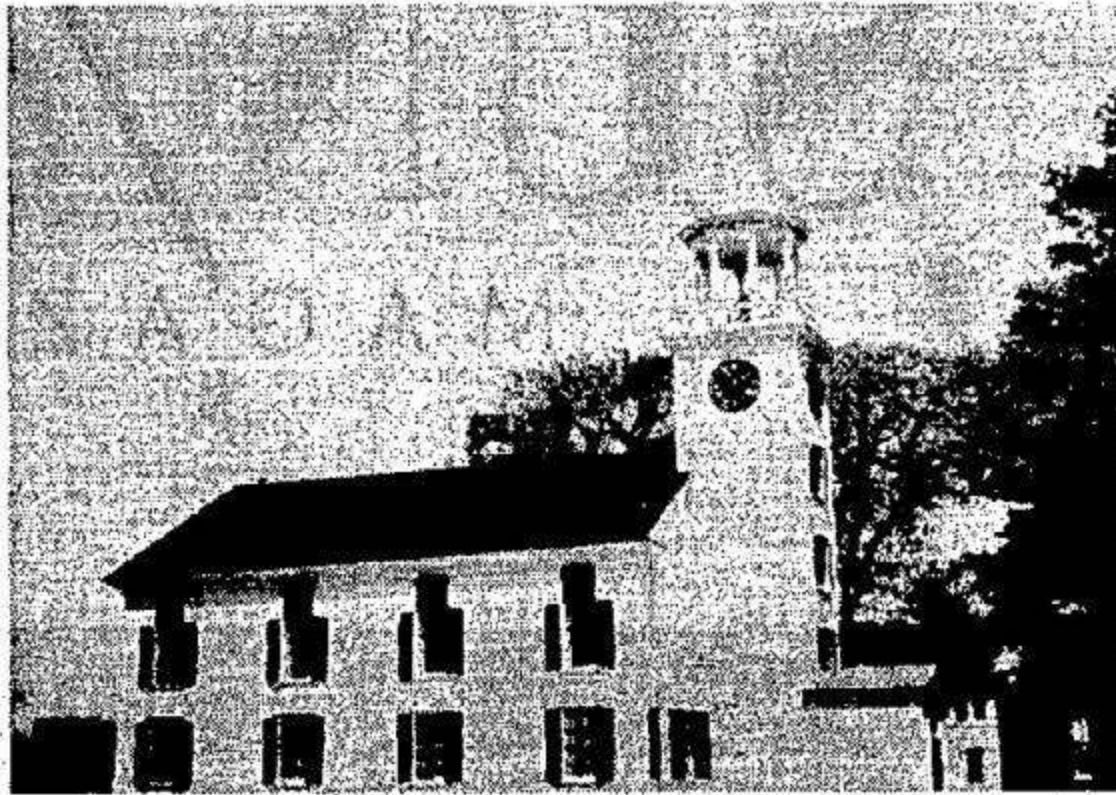
FIRST CONCERN

THE IMMEDIATE needs of the new settlers were to provide necessities of human existence ... food, clothing and shelter. Their chief concern, at least in most of Middlesex County, was to till the soil. It was no easy task, with crude tools, to cut down the forests, dig out or plant among the stumps, remove the small boulders, fence in and prepare the ground for planting.

Their homes were for protection, their food plain, their garments home-spun on handlooms and sewed at home. Cattle, horses, swine and sheep were a must, and they grazed where they could. Home-owners erected picket fences around their front yards to keep these animals out, not in! A pair or two of oxen were needed to haul loads in crude

Cover

A Tory sleeps among Westford's Revolutionary heroes. In the autumn quiet of an old cemetery lies the body of Rev. Willard Hall, the town's only Tory. Nearby are the graves of officers and Minutemen of the Revolution, whose differences have long been settled. Colorphoto by Gordon Seavey.



THE MEETINGHOUSE

... was the church and the town hall in Colonial days. This is the First Parish on Westford Common.

homemade carts in the summer, on sleds in the winter.

Much time and tax money went to building and maintaining the gravel roads which criss-crossed the land from farm house to farm house, and often these were lined on both sides with stone walls. These walls made good fences and also were a way of getting rid of the rocks.

The more important roads ran from town to town, and particularly toward the trading ports of Boston and Salem. Many of these roads remain in their original location. Today, some are identified with Massachusetts route numbers!

PROGRESS SLOW

THINGS MOVED slowly as these were the years of establishing a new country. Communication was slow and difficult. People moved about mostly on horseback or walking. There was little reading material and post riders carried communications at uncertain intervals.

The city folk were interested in their way of life: Shipping, manufacturing, merchandising. The contry folk worked

long hours growing vegetables, wheat, rye, barley and corn. They had orchards of apples, pears and peaches. A profitable income came from cutting the virgin forests, mostly white pine, and sawing the timber into lumber in neighborhood, water-powered saw mills. Much of this was shipped to England. And from the city the country people got manufactured goods, sugar, molasses and rum in return. But they made their own hard cider.

Rum was common. It was part of the festivities surrounding the erection of a barn, a house and even a new meetinghouse on the village green. In times of deaths, births and weddings it was served freely. It might be called an all-occasion drink.

The Sabbath began at three o'clock on Saturday afternoon and lasted until sundown on Sunday. The official state church in Massachusetts was Congregational and the early meeting house served not only as a church but a gathering place for public and town meetings.

LONG SUNDAYS

SUNDAY SERVICES required a full day's attendance. Footwarmers were the only heat (unless the preacher had a fiery sermon) in the rather plain buildings. During the noontime break, many would gather at a nearby tavern for lunch, the women and children in one room, the men in another. This was the big social hour of the week. The men

would sneak a drink or two of rum, probably heated over the fireplace in cold weather.

It has been reported from Carlisle when the Rev. Paul Litchfield was seen one day to approach a home on a pastoral visit, the mistress of the house found the "cupboard bare of rum." As the parson entered by the front, a small boy scooted out the back door to the tavern to fetch a pitcher of rum. This was dutifully served before the visit ended. It is also reported that the pastor found it necessary to limit his daily pastoral calls.

A GOOD EXAMPLE

TO PIN-POINT pre-revolutionary life, we would turn to a single community as a proper example. Therefore, we will make it Westford, which received its charter half a century before the fateful events of April 19, 1775. Here are the reasons:

First, as a native son, I have lived with generations of descendants of the early settlers, most of whom still show with pride their strong independence and traits of their forebears. They are hard working, thrifty, generous and solid. Their family names indicate that they came from sturdy English stock. To mention a few: Prescott, Hildreth, Wright, Abbot, Keyes, Fletcher and Spalding.

ANTIQUES

SECONDLY, I have seen around various homes and particularly in attics many articles of historic value which lend themselves to describing life here two centuries ago.

A good example is a maple desk proudly shown by Mrs. Luella Prescott Collins, 88, of Forge Village. It came down through the family from her great-great grandfather, Jonas Pescott, who distinguished himself at Bunker Hill.

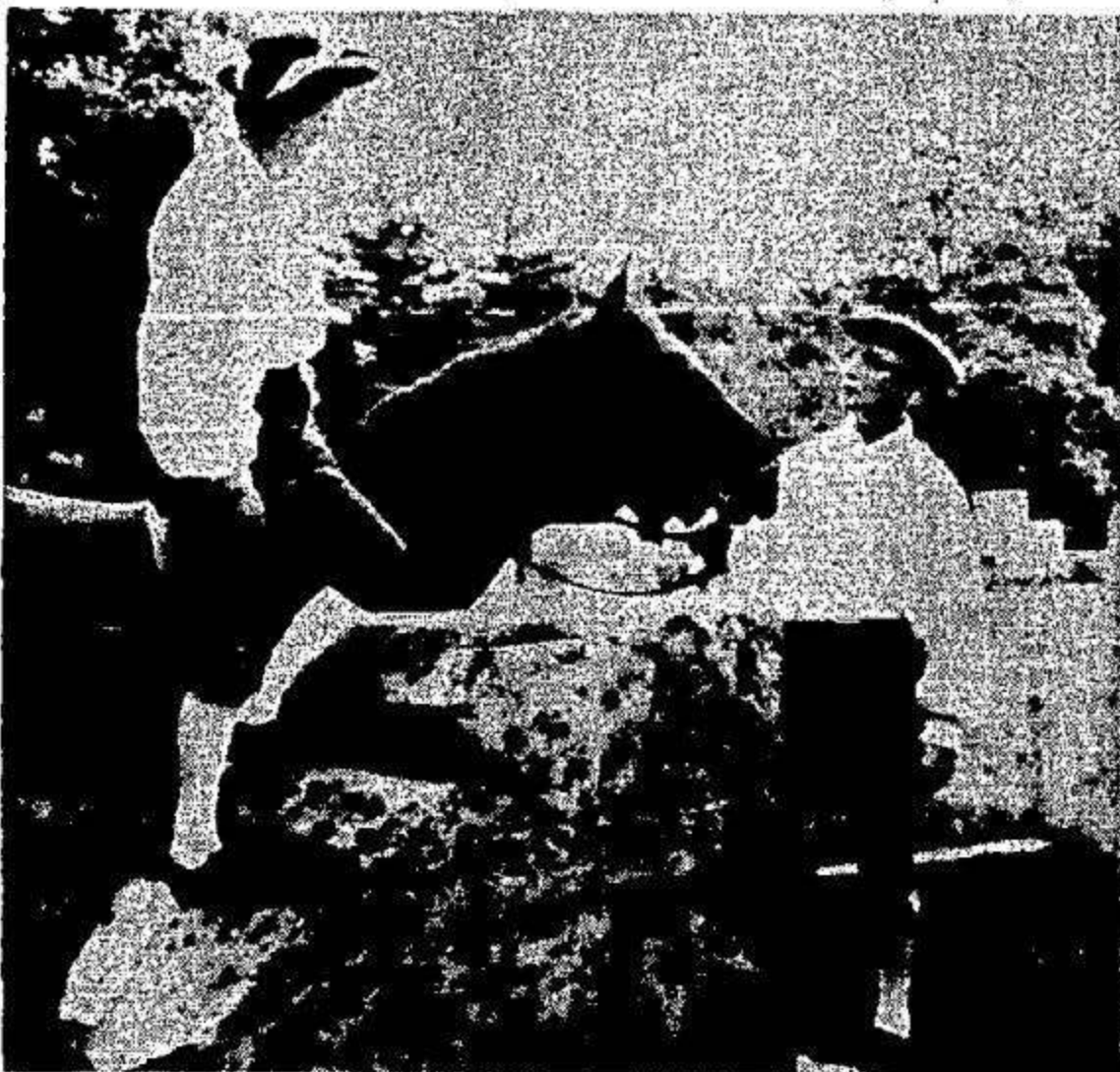
Thirdly, many old Westford records have been saved. The important ones have been faithfully copied in an outstanding and valuable town history. Its author was the pastor of the Congregational Church, the Rev. Edwin R. Hodgman, and a wise choice.

It was sponsored by a small group which called themselves the Westford Town History Association in 1879; its purpose to publish an authentic local history.

The community project called for 600 copies to sell for \$2. It was finally published in 1883. But the author's pay of \$400 for this monumental task was meager.

THE BEGINNINGS

Westford was set aside from the mother town of Chelmsford in 1729 ... but the beginnings of Chelmsford came



READY TO MOUNT HER STEED

... from old horse mounting block is Avis Day, with H. Arnold Wilder looking on. This Colonial landmark stood for years in front of Prescott Tavern in Forge Village. It now indicates the Luther Prescott lot in West Cemetery. Dressed in Colonial costumes, the "models" come from old Westford families.



SUN Staff Photo by Pigeon

DAM AT FORGE VILLAGE

... the beginning of Stony Brook, was where Andrew the Indian had his fish weir. The rushing waters have powered much industry over the succeeding generations.