

Disease, drought led to water system

By Gordon B. Seavey

Staff Correspondent

Standing like a guardian of all its surveys is the tall, slender standpipe atop Prospect Hill. Since its initial installation in 1909, it has been an integral part of Westford's water system.

Recently the old gal received a thorough polish job at the cost of about \$35,000. Blasting off the old paint, outside and in, and repainting the surfaces was the major project. The four steel supports at the base which keep the 90-foot structure afloat were replaced. During this procedure, the other three water tanks in the system took over and kept the community supplied as usual.

Known as Standpipe #1, it is located on a drumlin (a rounded hill formed by glacial action 15,000 years ago), named Prospect Hill, 465 feet above sea level and 65 feet higher than the geodetic

marker on the granite steps at the Fletcher Library. Thus, it is the highest point in town.

It was of necessity, not convenience, that the water system evolved 85 years ago. A series of dry summers had forced many to seek new sources of water, and for the farmers raising animals with a prodigious thirst the lack of a dependable water source was a calamity.

And then there had been numerous outbreaks of typhoid traced to contaminated wells. Foul water at the well in front of the grammar school (now the Tad-muck Senior Center) on Boston Road was an example.

The annual town meeting in 1905 appointed a committee of 11 of the most outstanding men in town (all men, of course) to study the advisability of a public water system.

A year later, they reported back

a comprehensive system was needed that would increase the value of property. They said health conditions, mainly in schools, was a paramount issue and that lack of a water system had discouraged people from moving into Westford.

On the first try, voters turned down the idea. The estimated cost was \$52,713.55.

It was then that the private Westford Water Company was formed in 1907 with the assist of Abbot Worsted Company and C.G. Sargent. Total cost of construction by Jan. 1, 1910, was \$80,900.

Much later, the non-profit company sold the system to the town which, over the years, has greatly expanded its lines.

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