

Families aid Westlawn beautification

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Sun Correspondent

WESTFORD -- Recognizing the need for an uplifting of the general appearance of one of the town's oldest "burying grounds," members of two prominent Westford families have contributed to a special fund to beautify Westlawn Cemetery.

Work was completed for the season when the first snowstorm hit. The project consisted of the planting of more than 60 trees, flowering trees and shrubs. The new additions are expected to take hold this winter and be ready for rapid spring growth.

Originally called the West Burying Ground, the area consists of a triangular plot of nearly two acres. It lies between Concord Avenue (Route 225) and Country Road. Country Road, formerly called Cemetery Road, lies along the bed of the old Acton & Nashua Railroad.

Advised by Charles Laughton of Laughton's Garden Center, native trees and shrubs were selected that would be compatible to those used in Colonial days, when the cemetery was laid out. Thirty white pines were set alongside the wire fence on Concord Avenue, a barren boundary of the cemetery. Giant pines already border Cemetery Road. The stock was grown in Laughton's Westford nursery.

Other species planted included lilac, forsythia and juniper, as well as American arborvitae. The

custom of flying the U.S. flag was reactivated. Noted as good farm land, the Cemetery Commissioners expect the plantings will soon go a long way toward beautifying the grounds, for too long more or less neglected.

"The West Burying Ground contains graves of many of the town's earliest settlers, mainly farmers who found the area was fairly free from boulders and heavy gravel, and the sandy soil was conducive to growing grass and white pine timber.

These forebearers are buried either in tombs or regular burial with slate headstones. Such familiar names as Prescott, Patten, Procter, Robinson, Carver, Hildreth, Day and Parker are carved in stone.

Here is the family lot of Colonel John Robinson, Westford's Revolutionary hero who led 130 minutemen to Concord on April 19 and later distinguished himself at Bunker Hill and throughout the war.

Those purchasing as memorial gifts the nursery stock are the Precious and Day families.

Cornelius Precious and Annie Brown came to this country in the late 1800's from England to work in the Forge Village mill. He was a supervisor for the Abbot Worsted Company, she a bobbin girl. Their subsequent marriage produced three talented daughters, today all remembered in town. They were graduates of the Academy.

The older, Caroline, is now Mrs. Daniel Newman of Chatham; Pamela (Daisy), now Mrs. Peter

Perry, the wife of a former superintendent of Westford Schools and now making their home in Harwich; and Mildred (Mrs. Carl Haussler) of Cranston, R. I., whose husband is buried in Westlawn.

Representing the Day family is Mrs. Eleanor Colburn Fletcher, active in the Golden Agers. Her forebearers were Isaac Day, who came from Ipswich and married a local girl, Lucy Dutton, in 1796. The days in the past were very prominent in Westlawn.

"Mrs. Newman recalls for the family that when girls were in the house next door to the Cameron School, their teachers would parade the students, class by class in double file, to Westlawn for Memorial Day exercises.

"En route," she reports, "we were allowed to break ranks in order to pick some roadside flowers to add to our offerings. I recall my favorite was the pale blue crow's foot violet."

Under the direction of their teachers, Principal Letitia V. Ward, Mary A. Garvey, Abbie M. Blaisdell, and Eva C. Pyne, the youngsters would sing such Civil War reminders as "Tenting Tonight" and the "Blue & the Gray."

The cemetery commissioners recommend that more plantings be made here if funds become available. They wish to place old-fashioned white wooden gates at both entrances where previous ones were removed or vandalized. According to Clayton Dearth, chairman of the department, additional memorial gifts would be welcomed.

Superintendent Wilfred J. Toussaint reports that practically all lots have been disposed of. Those spaces remaining in Westlawn are being reserved for relatives of those already buried in the cemetery, whose earliest graves goes back to the pre-Revolutionary days and the founding of the town in 1729.