

Westford wanderings: Fire and water

By GORDON B. SEAVEY
Sun Correspondent

WESTFORD — The initial water reservoir or standpipe for Westford's water system is atop Prospect Hill. It stands tall 90 feet and if one were to climb to the top he would be 545 feet above sea level with a commanding view of the Boston skyline to the south.

To the west lies a whole range of mountains from the Wachusett near Fitchburg to the Uncanoonus outside of Manchester, N.H. It is said on a clear day the White Mountains are in view.

Built by a Boston contractor in 1907, it consists of seven sections, each 15 feet high, plus a final 8-foot piece to top it off. Its capacity is 172,000 gallons, holding what old-timers would say, "the second best water in Massachusetts."

At the time, George T. Day owned the land and gave the private water company just formed a long-term lease. The stockholders were prominent local citizens who operated the system on a break-even policy.

The system covered only the center and the villages at first, where the concentration of homes occurred. Those fortunate to be "on line" paid only \$2 per year, per faucet. All the others continued to use dug wells, as artesian wells were unheard of.

Alonzo H. "Lon" Sutherland, the superintendent, always was available to help out when one's system froze and pipes and joints burst.

The original pump with its huge flywheel and piston is too large for the town museum! It still remains in the old "pump

house" in the rear of the water department's new building on Forge Village Road.

With the increase in population and expansion of industry, a new two-million reservoir at tree-top height was built on Sparks Hill (Hildreth Hills) last year. Cost: \$500,000.

Historical notes

Civil war vet — Wayland P. Balch was the last Westford veteran of the Civil War to pass on. A tall, thin man and erect, he made a commanding appearance especially at Memorial Day parades. His death occurred in 1937 at the age of 98, lacking three months.

☆
Fire — A grand old Colonial homestead of J. Varnum Fletcher, donor of the library in his name, burned in 1897 at the bend of Depot Street where Cold Spring Roads enters. It was valued at \$6,000. His new home, of vastly different design, was

erected on the same spot. The giant barn was saved from the conflagration as it was located away from the house and across the street. The weathervane from the barn (a cow with a couple of bullet holes, plus several dents from BB guns) is in the town museum.

☆
Record term — Ben Drew retired as town moderator in 1968 after serving 23 years. He surpassed the record of Herbert E. Fletcher (the quarryman) who died in 1928 by three years.

☆
Ice is gone — Fishermen like to keep tabs on when the ice cover of Forge Pond leaves in the spring. Fire Chief George Rogers, who lives on the east side of the lake, says it went out by morning on April 4, quite late after having such a mild winter. Earliest the ice has left in the past 25 years was March 7; latest April 13.