

Friends of Museum have eye on dispatcher's cottage

By Gordon B. Seavey

Ever since a group of dedicated people planned to renovate the original 1794 Westford Academy building into a historical museum, the Friends of the Museum have had an eye on the little cottage which occupies the other half of a small lot on Boston Road.

Built more than a century ago, and within a few feet from the sidewalk, the home is located just in front and to the side of the colonial style museum.

When driving up Boston Road, the house blocks the view

of the museum — which originally was a schoolhouse, then later remodeled for use as the Central Fire Station.

Last week's announcement that the fire department dispatcher will no longer operate from the house brought renewed attention to the little cottage.

Some museum supporters would like to demolish the front part of the house, leaving a one-story ell in the rear. This ell would then be moved to the property's rear lot line and remodeled into a "necessary house", a replica of the one that

stood at the rear of the Academy when it was located at the head of the Common.

The "necessary house" got its name from the fact that it housed two privies — one for the girls, the other for the boys. The major portion, however, was for storing firewood for the hungry stoves on each of the two floors. This area could still be used for storage.

Other museum members are not convinced tearing down the old house is the route to go. They opt instead to use the house for much-needed storage space. The possibility of sharing

some of this space with crowded Town Hall offices is one also being given thought.

Needed for display

Whatever the final solution, Friends of the Museum agree that extra space is needed for housing some of its choice larger items, such as the Abbot elaborate sleigh, now resting in a nearby barn. So many items have come from old Westford attics and barns that, according to curator Connie English, the museum finds it difficult to properly exhibit many objects of historical interest.

There are more than 50 objects of historical significance to the town clustered about the Common. The museum is on the fringe of this grouping, rather

hidden because it is on its present resting place after being moved from the head of the Common about 1910, at the far rear of the small lot.

The museum shares a septic system with the former dispatcher's house, an arrangement that could cause problems at a later date, according to museum friend Lloyd Blanchard.

Fire Horn

Like most country communities, Westford's fire fighting system grew by stages.

At first, fires were announced by ringing a bell on the Common. Later, the meeting house's tower bell sounded. Although this could be heard from a greater distance, it was not so very far.

Things speeded up when the telephone came to town — first

at Westford Depot and later to the home of Mrs. Phonsie Isles, across from the Town Hall, in 1912.

The telephone system evolved to the point that when the first call of fire came over the lines, it was relayed immediately to Fire Chief Alonza H. Sutherland's home at 6 Boston Road, adjacent to the present dispatcher's home. It was also wired to Clarence Hildreth, who was then living in the cottage. In the meantime, Mrs. Isles, or any phone operator at the time, would call out the other volunteer firemen.

The audible alarm was a horn mounted in the cupola of the fire station next door, operated by a compressed air tank in the basement. (The Paul Revere bell already had been removed from the cupola and now is on display at the third Academy building on Patten Road.)