

Gone are the young poets of yesteryear

By Gordon B. Seavey

Where are the Westford poets of yesteryear we ask in particular the young people who were inspired half a century ago by a young teacher of one of the town's grade schools to express their thoughts in rhymes and jingles.

They were among the more than a score of fledgling writers attending the William F. Frost Elementary School at the Center.

The year was 1931.

They were the children from all grades who answered the challenge of their enthusiastic principal Albert F. Trask.

As a special treat for their interest the compositions were published in a thin hard cover volume optimistically entitled "Poets of Tomorrow: An Anthology of Juvenile Prose." For experience the Waltham Vocational School printed it without charge.

This volume was dedicated to Trask's favorite poet, New England's Robert Frost, in relation to William F. In appreciation, Frost sent a note to Westford saying, "My best wishes to the boys and girls of the Frost School at their play at writing from one who began to play at writing as a Frost boy at school."

Other contemporary authors such as Dorothy Canfield Fisher, Edward Arlington Robinson, Louis Untermeyer and Edgar Guest joined with words of encouragement.

Trask in his introduction wrote that the object of the book was to bring out the dormant creative instinct of the child, arousing his latent impulses of imagination in the material things associated with his everyday environment.

He continued, "Creative effort takes living beauty and sets it

apart from the bizarre. It makes the student conscious of the fact that life is swarming with beauty, adventure and wonder for everybody."

What has Father Time done with those poets of yesteryear and do they still dabble in poetry? Some live next door, others are scattered.

Complimentary Remembrances

Rita Edwards, then a busy youngster in the 8th grade, made her mark in a single stanza with a one word title, "Spring." It goes like this:

Spring is here. O' Spring is here.
Fluttering around are the robins dear.
Little brooks are beginning to flow.
All the snow and ice must go.
The sky has now a nice bright hue.
And the grass is green and wet with dew.

Now the wife of a classmate, Rita Miller lives within sight of the school. She filled Trask's position at the Frost School with 43 years of dedicated teaching.

She says, "Trask was a man of vision, a teacher far ahead of his times."

Doris Peterson, Grade 7, put a local touch in her poem, "Over the Hills and Far Away," as she mentions dreaming beneath a Westford apple tree.

Over the hills and far away
A little boy steals from his morning play
And under the blossoming apple tree
He lies and dreams of the things to be.

Now Mrs. Thunberg she divides her time as a compassion-

ate nurse at the Westford Nursing Home and winters in Florida.

David Scott, also a first grader, pencilled out a stanza to fit his size — and ability.

Little Boy Blue
Come blow your horn
Spring is here,
Winter is gone.

One will note two lines are not original but surely at Trask's urging, Dave struggled with two others he could call his very own.

Child's Woe

Edward Leonard had a more practical theme, begrudging his life as student in the second grade. He called his little quatrain, "A Boy's Life."

I'm just a little boy
But I'd rather be a fox
Than have to go to school
Or fill up Ma's wood box.

Barbara Hildreth, Grade 7, whose dad and mother were both educators, penned an anecdote about her brother's pet hen.

Bobby's Little Brown Hen
has a humorous appeal when she saves the punch line for the last. Bobby had a little hen.
Her feathers silky brown,
And every day within her pen
She on her nest sat down.
She cackled and she cackled
Which was her way to say
She'd laid an egg, and so had tackled
Her duty for the day!

Although she now lives in Chelmsford and is Mrs. George Parkhurst, Barbara keeps her interest in Westford history, which dates back ten generations or more. She is a Simmons College corporator.

Of course there are others, teachers also who contributed

their young talent. Arthur Betencourt and Gordon Whitney combined their talent in "The Eagle." There was Mary Eliza Beth Perrins, later an Apple Blossom Queen and now living in Oregon, Virginia Zanchi, Priscilla Greig, Billy Prescott, Dave Crocker—and a dozen more. All are scattered.

Becomes Theatrical

Principal Trask gave up his teaching, married and founded the Nabbassett Summer Theatre on that lake. A man of vision, he had moved on to greater things. With his wife, Agnes, they established in 1936, the Priscilla Beach Theatre at Plymouth for the development of young theatrical talent. As early as 1940, he sent plays and casts on a circuit of other New England summer theatres.

Now calling himself A. Franklin Trask, he later managed the Brattle Theater in Harvard Square where they produced 200 plays.

Financial success came, too. Four years ago his gift of \$600,000 enabled the Andover Newton Theological School to have a much needed library building.

Mrs. Miller, among many others, remembers him well. She said, "Mr. Trask made the greatest mark on us of any teacher whom I remember. He was a fabulous instructor and when he read drama, short stories or poems to us, we were enthralled."

Maybe "Poets of Tomorrow" would not top the Best Seller List (although it was reprinted) but its publication was such an inspiration to many. Thanks to Albert Franklin Trask.