

"Then and now"  
Minute Man  
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# Westford

**M**any years ago, when the makers of Kleenex tissues wanted to commemorate accomplished women, they had to go no further than Westford.

The career and accomplishments of Westford's favorite daughter, Ellen Swallow, a, 1863 graduate of

Westford Academy, were printed on hundreds of thousands of Kleenex tissue boxes.

Kleenex's parent company, Kimberly-Clark Corp., said at the time that Swallow would be part of a series entitled "Women Who Changed America."

It's not difficult to understand why Swallow was chosen. She was the first female admitted to the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). Swallow was a leader in the field of home economics. She

also was a specialist in water analysis. And it all began with her father, Peter Swallow.

Peter Swallow wanted the best education possible for his precocious daughter.

The year was 1859 and there were strong rumblings of a civil war. The Swallows lived in Dunstable, a small community that could provide only the basics in education.

So he moved his family to a Victorian home near Westford Common.

The two-story building next to J.V. Fletcher Library, which was to be built later, was where Peter Swallow ran a country store. The store was demolished in 1964, 25 years after the house was destroyed by fire.

But Westford Academy was the beginning of a long and honored career for Swallow. She was a student in the Vassar Class of 1870 where she became "seriously" interested in science. After graduation, she enrolled at MIT and received a degree there in 1873.

"As time passed she focused her study on science and economics and how they affected domestic conditions. She helped organize what was to become the home economics department at Simmons College, and is considered the driving force behind home economics as a distinct field of study," according to a description on the tissue box.

Swallow herself wrote many articles and books on food materials.

She also was a consultant for Manufacturers Mutual Fire Insurance Company, and had "much to do with oils in reference to safety from spontaneous combustion explosion, etc."

Gordon B. Seavey  
Westford historian



Photo courtesy of Gordon B. Seavey

Built in 1870, Westford Town Hall was renovated in 1880. But the steeple was destroyed during the Hurricane of 1938.