

Legacy of Oscar R. Spalding

By Gordon B. Seavey

He was a good friend: to his family, his neighbors and to the town of Westford.

A native son, Oscar Richardson Spalding lived a very useful life in the home in which he was born, and in which he died, at 1 Leland Road, Westford Center.

When he passed on in 1941 at the age of 74, folks who knew him well felt that an era had passed — and it had.

Oscar Spalding was a busy man, what with his lumbering interests and at the same time operating a sizeable dairy and fruit farm. He still found time to serve his community in many ways, and was a wise counselor and sincere public servant.

His record would be hard to match: 20 years as a Selectman, 12 years on the Finance Board, 30 years on the Whitney Playground Committee (he gave some of its land); and, in addition, he was a longtime director of the Westford Water Company.

Mr. Spalding was an uncommonly large man, but not fat. His clothes were tailor-made and he invariably wore a bow tie. No one actually knew how much he weighed, but it was always mentioned that when he was born he was so tiny the family exhibited him on a pillow.

Not so in later life — in my own younger years I used to think that the raccoon coat he wore in winter would also be large enough to cover Westford Common. When sitting on a wagon or in a car, Spalding's side would always dip dangerously low.

The youngsters who sledded down Richardson Hill in Westford Center late in the afternoon could always count on Oscar Spalding stopping his horse and pung, and letting them attach their sleds to the pung for a free hoist up the hill.

Lumbering conservationist

A graduate of Westford Academy in 1880, he later became a trustee for 20 years. His father and uncle were partners in a wholesale lumber business, so it was natural for him to follow in their footsteps.

There was much open land in this region 50 years ago. Most of it was heavily timbered in either white pine or hardwoods. Usually not suitable for crops, the



A successful lumberman, Oscar Spalding nevertheless insisted that cutters leave a sturdy "pasture pine", one to an acre, to re-seed the land. True to his love for the woods, he left his fellow townspeople the Spalding Town Forests, plots of land totalling 122 acres. Spalding is pictured above, probably near the turn of the century, at his summer cottage on Forge Pond.

(Courtesy Gordon Seavey)

forest land produced no income until harvested. In most cases, Spalding would have to purchase the acreage in order to make a cutting, as its owners would probably have no further use for it in their lifetimes.

White pine was the valuable crop. Logging crews would come in with teams of sturdy horses; husky woodsmen with axes and cross-cut saws would fell the trees.

Cordwood was stacked near a roadway to season. Pine logs were snagged to a portable saw mill run by wood-fired boilers. Here they were sliced into boards and joists.

Wherever harvested, Spalding insisted that the cutters leave a sturdy "pasture pine", one to an acre, to re-seed the land. It could be said that Oscar Spalding was the town's first land conservationist.

Legacy to town

True to his love for the

woods, one of the legacies left to his fellow townspeople are the Spalding Town Forests, plots of land totalling 122 acres. Given in 1935, most of the acreage is near the 4-H Fairgrounds on South Chelmsford Road.

Most valuable, however, are about eight acres abutting Forge Village, Cold Spring and Pine Ridge roads forming a triangle.

Other lands he acquired included Millstone Hill, Nashoba Woodlands at Forge Pond, Burge's Pond, Mystery Spring off Tadmuck Road — and a very special piece of land near the center of Carlisle, used for athletics and picnics, appreciatively named Spalding Park.

Following World War I, his business interests apparently prospered, and he acquired two Studebakers with solid steel wheels — one a fancy sedan for his wife, Fanny, which included a vase for flowers; and a touring car for himself, which was always driven by a chauffeur. Both vehicles had two mounted spare tires, which was the custom in those days. He also built a special garage for the cars.

Spalding was married to the former Frances (Fanny) Prescott, of another old Westford family. She was active in most of the social affairs in town, including the Tadmuck Club. They had no children.

At the turn of the century, the couple erected a summer cottage on a point in Forge Pond. He was often observed, sitting on a sturdy stump in late evening watching the sun disappear into the woods across the lake.

His athletic prowess was limited to archery, at which he was considered an expert, practicing regularly in his 50-foot long barn and at his summer cottage at Forge Pond.

Those who had a passing acquaintance of the man thought him quiet and serious. He was a kindly, friendly individual whose laugh was a giant chuckle.

Although he had no children of his own, he readily enjoyed talking with them, and more often, kidding with them. He would often say, in a humorous manner, "I don't see no light ahead."

This is an expression that could be used today.

(Gordon Seavey is a native of Westford and lives on Depot Street. He was former publisher of the Belmont Citizen.)