

necessities for existence

in 1652 when some citizens from Concord and Woburn asked to examine a tract of land on the "other side of Concord River." As the early settlers came to Chelmsford, it was natural that some of them found a home in the western part of the new town. This was to be set aside seventy-years later as the Town of Westford.

Tadmuck Hill, near the geographical center of the 19,000 acres belonging to the new Westford, was chosen for the village green. It also has a commanding view in all directions. Here they already had built a meetinghouse. Probably the first person to erect a dwelling on the Hill was Arthur Crouch. The date was about 1680.

But the earliest settler in what is now Westford was probably Solomon Keyes. He had a grant of land in 1664 on the north side of Frances Hill, near Chamberlin's Corner, in the east part of the town. He was married to Frances Grant of his native town of Newbury in 1653. Do you see the connection of name of Frances Hill and that of his wife?

OLD MAP

A map of Westford dated 1730 shows the homes were widely scattered. The settlers had spread out, picking the choice lands for farming. There was plenty of acreage then. Availability of water was a necessary factor in locating a new homestead.

At the time of incorporation, only 78 men owned real estate. There were probably no more than one hundred families in the infant town.

So sparsely settled was the Center at the time, as indicated on this map, that not a single dwelling stood between the common and the parsonage. This was located somewhere opposite the Roudenbush School on Main Street.

THE CHURCH

The church and the community were a single unit. The early ecclesiastical history of Westford is described in great detail by Hodgman, who you will recall was a minister. By 1727, two years before incorporation, a committee "chose for a minister to settle with us" the Reverend Willard Hall.

A native of Medford where he was born in 1703, he was graduated from Harvard College in 1722. His wife was Abigail Cotton of Portsmouth, N.H. As common in those days, they had a large family: eleven children, four sons and seven daughters.

It is regrettable that there are no descriptions of any length of the physical appearances of these Colonists, nor sketches nor silhouettes. Hodgman did write that Hall "united the offices of pastor and physician, thus, in the condition of society at the time, greatly extending his influence and usefulness. He was a strenuous supporter of education for all."

As was usual in those days, Mr. Hall became the proprietor of a small farm, which apparently stretched from the meetinghouse down Main Street to the top of Depot Street hill. Hodgman reports that he was a good farmer and cultivated with great care and success.

With eleven children, a "sideline" was no doubt a necessity. When Mr. Hall answered the "call" he was a young man of 24. The inhabitants voted that his "salary" was to be eighty pounds for the first year and then to "rise forty shillings per year till it comes to an hundred pounds per year."

Some three years later, he seems to have complained of this condition as vague and unsatisfactory. The parish explained that what they meant by money was "silver" at sixteen shillings per ounce. "We shall hear more about Reverend Hall.

EARLY MEETINGHOUSE

The first meeting house had been started in 1724 but not completed for several years. It stood near the site of the



OLDEST LIVING DESCENDANT

... of early settlers in Westford is Mrs. Lucia Prescott Collins, who will be 88 on Dec. 2. Her forebears settled here in 1640. She lives in the homestead built in 1780 by her great-great-grandfather, Jonas Prescott, who fought at Bunker Hill. She is shown at the desk owned by him.

present First Church, the third meetinghouse.

The ministry of Mr. Hall extended for 48 years but there were some troublesome times during this period. For example, in 1739 he entered a complaint regarding his salary and had to appeal to the courts for redress. What exactly happened is not recorded but Hodgman writes "apparently it did not produce, as it evidently did not spring from, any exasperated or hostile feeling."

By 1774, the town voted "to be in some preparation for settling another minister with Mr. Hall." This was the first intimation of dissatisfaction with his services that appears either on account of the infirmities of age, or any other cause. He was then 71 years old.

NEW PREACHERS

Several ministers supplied the pulpit during this brief period and the townspeople were on the alert to select a new pastor. Hall apparently went along with the idea for he told the selectmen "to go to the College (i.e., Harvard, where most of the early ministers were trained) and hire some likely young man to come and preach for them."

Finally Rev. Joseph Thaxter of Hingham was found acceptable to the people for he preached in the town for more than a year on a trial basis. He received a call to settle, both from the church and the town, but he declined.

Along with the Minutemen of Westford, Thaxter was present at the fight at Concord Bridge and could have been considered as one of the first chaplains of the new Continental Army. On January 23, 1776, he was elected to that post and served in the regiment of which Westford's John Robinson was colonel.

A story goes that while in Westford, Thaxter bid good luck to a detachment of local soldiers, twelve in number, as they were about to start for Ticonderoga. One of them, Thomas Rogers, "refused to stand up when Mr. Thaxter spoke to them," and that of twelve, all returned but Rogers.

DISMISSAL

At Christmastime, 1774, the church had come to the decision that its pastor of nearly half a century must go. They offered a small pension and voted "that

ernment and the cause of civil liberty great uneasiness among the people.

As a matter of fact, Reverend Hall was a Tory!

Two others in town, a father and son, shared the same feelings toward English rule as did Mr. Hall, but pressure from fellow townsmen left the pastor all alone with his views. The town concurred with the church and voted on January 1, 1776, finally to dismiss him.

BURIED AMONG PATRIOTS

Reverend Hall lived three years after his discharge. By this time the townspeople had apparently forgiven him so that the "God of Peace may be with us."

His gravesite is the most prominent, on a knoll, in Fairview Cemetery. His stone, the only one of its kind, a flat slab of slate mounted, tablewise, on three supporting granite legs.

This is the inscription:

Erected in the memory of

THE REVEREND WILLARD HALL,
First Pastor of the Church of Christ
in Westford.

Died March 19, 1779

Aged 77 Years

and in the 52nd year of his

Ministry

While the pale carcass tho'tless lies

Among the silent graves,

Some heartily firmed shall drop his tear

On our dry bones and say,

These once were strong as mine appear,

and mine must be as they.

Thus shall our mouldering members

teach

What now our senses learn;

For dust and ashes loudest preach

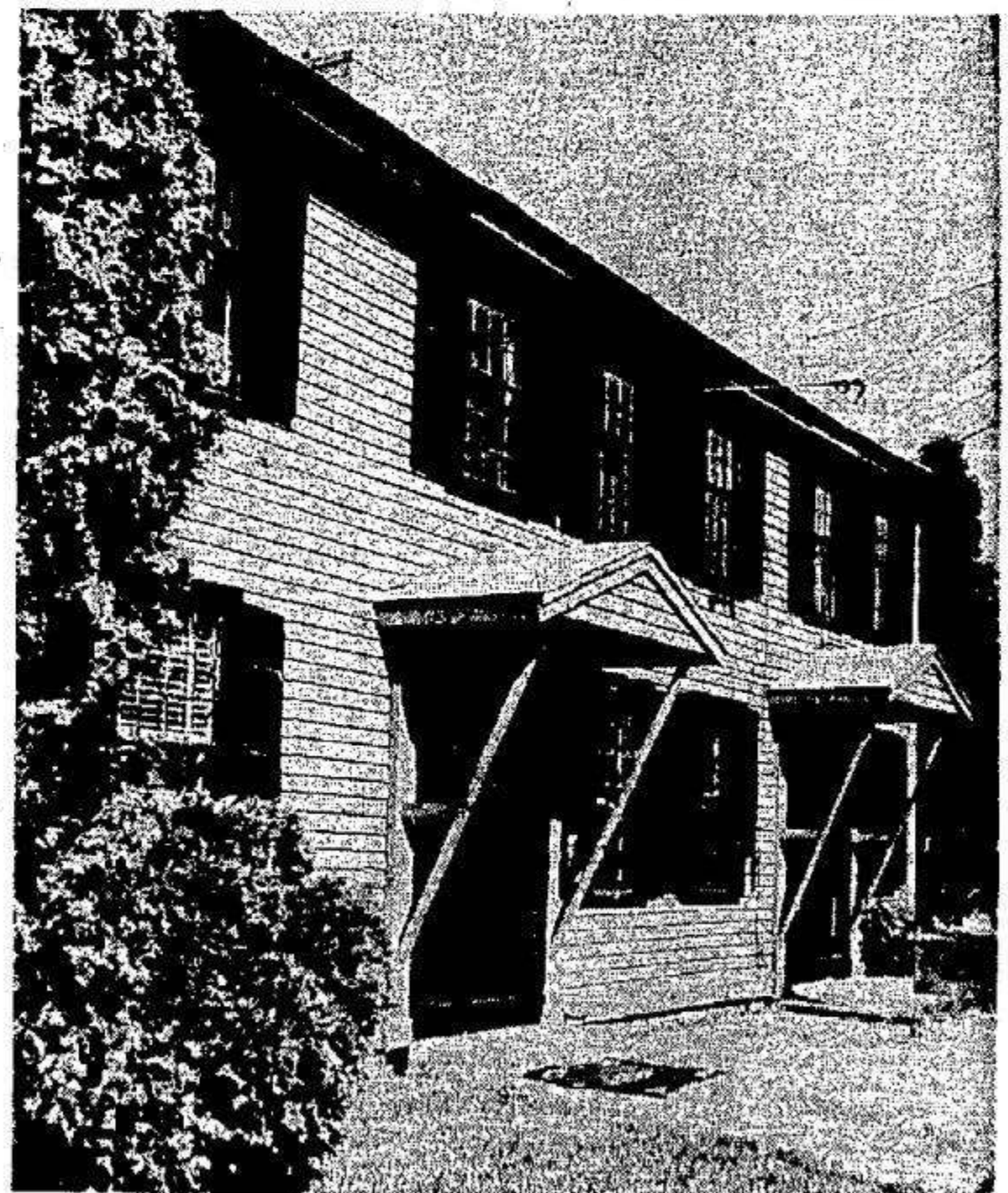
Man's infinite concern.

If one would vlow the cluster of slate gravestones surrounding the more elaborate one of Parson Hall, several with American flags renewed yearly by local

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all past offences subsisting between Pastor and Brethren be mutually forgiven ... that Unity, Love and Peace may prevail here."

Hall, at his advanced age, no doubt had "great bodily infirmities," but the rumblings of an impending Revolution among the Colonies caused the pastor, with his attitude toward the Colonial Gov-



OLD PRESCOTT TAVERN

... at Forge Village (the only community in the world by that name) housed and fed many a weary traveler en route from New Hampshire to Boston or Salem.

SUN Staff Photo by Pigeon