

# New Families Arrive: Old Family Names Disappear

By Gordon B. Seavey

WESTFORD — With the release of the latest official census figures, this community shows a gain during the past five years of 2,257 persons, a substantial increase of over twenty percent.

At the first Westford count, made in 1776, and known as the Colonial census, the entire population of this country town was 1,193. By 1800, the town had increased by only 74; in 1875 the state census gave 1,933. In 99 years, the population growth was less than 40%.

The federal census of 1880 showed 477 families, with 4.5 persons to a family, making a total of 2,148.

The earliest settlers were truly pioneers and as most of them lacked special training in skills, they were farmers. What they raised on their rock-strewn farms was mostly for themselves as cash markets were not near at hand.

In those days, with poor roads, it was a long, hard trip to Boston or Salem with farm products, firewood or fruits

from the land. <sup>13 NOV 1975</sup> Families were necessarily large because there was always work to be done, from sun-up to sun-down, six days a week. Children from the age of about ten worked alongside their parents, either in the fields, the barns or the home. Sunday was a long day of family worship in the meeting house on the common.

## Move Early

It was not strange, therefore, that many early families sought "greener pastures." Shortly after the town's incorporation in 1729, Solomon Keyes (Captain Solomon of the Pequawket affair!) with his two sons, Solomon and David, moved sixty miles west to settle in Warren. It is believed that the sons had been born in the old Westford homestead. The Keyes family is presumed to be the town's first settlers.

Reuben Kidder, Joseph Kidder, John Chandler, and Andrew Spalding of Westford were among the grantees in 1750 of the town of New Ipswich in New Hampshire. The first-

named was considered "for the first twenty years the father of the town."

The spirit of pioneering was imbedded in ever so many. John Chandler stayed for twenty years before again moving, this time to Temple. Andrew Spalding had by 1768 moved to the sea-faring town of Camden, Maine.

## Bear Hunter

William Read, a noted bear hunter and a colonel in the militia, gave his name to Read's Ferry on the Merrimack River in N.H. Captain Leonard Proctor gave his name to Proctorsville, Vermont, and it is said that the towns of Cavendish, Ludlow and Mount Holly in that state were settled and organized chiefly by men from Westford.

And Stephen Hall, a son of the first minister, left for Portland, Maine. These are only a few whose roots were formed in Westford but who answered the challenge to move on.

Other natives, James Spalding (born in 1748) and his wife, Hannah Barron, settled on

the north side of Watatic Mountain (which can be seen from many parts of Westford) in Ashburnham. The story goes that when the alarm of the Concord fight was given, the father headed immediately for the scene of action. His wife and son Jonathan spent the afternoon of that April 19 on top of their mountain where they saw the smoke of the burning buildings, and "distinctly heard the report of the British cannon!"

Captain Timothy Underwood, who led one of three companies of Minutemen from Westford to the fight at Concord bridge, took his four sons, and presumably the womenfolk in the family, to Putney, Vermont.

The records show that Westford men contributed much to other towns in this Commonwealth, especially to those whose incorporation took place at a more recent date. Harrison Reed, who lived near the Littleton line, was an early settler in Florida and became its governor in 1876.

## Descendants Remain

There are still many descendants of old Westford families who continue to be familiar faces around town. To name a few: Prescotts, Hildreths, Fletchers, Wrights, and several others.

Living in the homestead built by Eben Prescott in 1752 at Chamberlain's Corner are two direct descendants, Clyde and Lucinda Prescott. Cindy, now 87, is from tough old Yankee stock for it was only two years ago that she decided to quit making custom draperies. Her brother, 83, keeps the family farm producing vegetables and fruit and is active every day. Prominent at all important Grange meetings within miles around, the brother-sister team keep a very active social life.

Many others could be named, whose ancestry stems back a couple of centuries in local history.

At one time the Read family was most prominent. Esdras Read, who came from Woburn, acquired land in Westford in

1654, but did not build. Grandson Thomas in 1685 bought acreage lying on Tadmuck and Stony Brooks and by 1740 had built a house overlooking Little Tadmuck Meadow which he transferred to his son, Joseph. The farm was to be occupied by Reads for 140 years and is still remembered by old-timers as the "Read Farm," later owned by George A. Drew and now by his son, Ben.

Located on Main Street, near Chamberlain's Corner, the old home, painted typically farm red, has a commanding view over the valley where the first settlers found ample grass and water for their livestock, i.e., Little Tadmuck and Tadmuck Meadows. These are shown on a map dated 1730.

The land is ideally suited for

fruits, particularly apples, but Ben Drew has come to the point in life where after forty years he wishes to relinquish the property and retire permanently to Vermont, as did other Westford men generations ago.

For many years town moderator, Mr. Drew returns to Westford once a week from his new home in Vershire to discuss business matters with his farm manager and to visit with old friends. He says, "With none in my family expressing an interest, I have placed the property on the market."

In addition to the old homestead, which includes the great open fireplace in the kitchen and stencilled hall walls, there is a retail stand, out

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OCCUPIED FOR 140 YEARS by one family, the Reads, the Drew Farm in Westford is up for sale. House was built around 1740. (photo submitted by G.B. Seavey)

fruit Westford growers have been noted for over the generations.

When the farm is disposed of, it will be that the name "Drew" will be added to the list of Westford folk who no longer make this northern Middlesex community their home. Such names are: Butterfield, Chandler, Foster, Boynton, Parker, Spalding, Heald, Underwood, and Burge.

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buildings and a cold storage plant. A thriving retail stand goes with the 105-acre farm, of which some 65 acres are producing the fine quality of

The old names of strictly Anglo-Saxon derivation have faded away. Many new names, of various ethnic origin, have been added. The mix is good for any community.