

Friends of Westford Museum

New group boosts museum

By Gordon B. Seavey

Prospects for a town museum advanced this week when a representative group of historically minded citizens elected Mrs Robert Shaw of 15 Darwbridge Road as their leader.

Friends of Westford Museum, a newly formed organization to give support to the Historical Society, is composed of delegates from local groups plus individuals.

Its purpose is to remove from limbo the plan to convert one of the town's oldest historic edifices into a museum which will depict life in the community over a span of 250 years.

The plan was advanced nearly a decade ago by Allister F MacDougall, a native son and an ardent collector and rescuer of local memorabilia. Lack of coordination and funds and some real hard luck had greatly slowed the process.

Today with Beth Shaw described as a whirlwind of energy and ideas at the helm, hopes seem bright for at least an informal opening of the museum in the fall.

Locale will be in the original Westford Academy building constructed in Colonial Georgian style in 1794 and said to be one of the oldest secondary school wooden structures in the country. It now stands at the rear of the parish hall of the First Church, not far from the original site at the head of the town common.

After lying idle for a couple of decades, it was converted into the Central Fire Station and used for 57 years until the present one was constructed in 1974 next to the town hall.

Recently the Historical Commission, authorized but not funded by town, has been over-seeing. In part the remodelling of the building to its original condition as near as records indicate. Money some substantial gifts, have come in for this program from many corners.

Almost as soon as the work was nearly completed on the building and the project about to begin for assembling artifacts for exhibit, lightning struck the copper cupola and ripped through the old and new parts of the building down to the boiler room. This was last May.

No insurance

As the town carries \$10,000 deductible fire insurance on its buildings, the damage to the electrical emergency lighting, alarm and heating systems was not recoverable. Repairs are expected to top \$8,000 and will deplete the treasury.

A contract to rectify this calamity in part will be let this week to a local electrician. The specifications include a dependable lightning arrester.

Already the Friends of the Museum is circulating the sale of hand blown glass bottles of colonial design for the benefit of the project. A new ceramic tile a fit companion piece to the successful tiles produced for the Bicen-tennial and the town's 250th celebrations are now being crafted on the Cape. They also will go on sale within a fortnight.

Other members

Dr David Watson is vice chairman of the civic group and Kristin M Szyvlian, the secretary. The latter is an American

history major at the University of Lowell and is to be the initial curator of the fledgling museum.

Dr Watson and John A. Crisafulli, assistant superintendent of schools, will represent Rotary. Mrs Frances Cooper is delegate from Friends of Library and the Garden Club.

Mrs June W Kennedy, author of Westford Recollections, 1729-1979, is another member along with Mrs Richard S Emmet, Jr, an area history buff.

The president of the Historical Society, Alex Belida, is taking an active part along with the treasurer Mrs Eva DeForge and member Mrs. Frank Strauss.

Mrs Edward Schneider is representing the Junior Women's Club and it is expected that additional members from other groups will take active parts.

Mrs Virginia Kimball, editor of the Westford Eagle, is also a member of the panel as well as Gordon B Seavey, retired journalist, feature history writer and native son.

More ideas

Mr MacDougall has agreed to participate in the initial planning of the museum, having had considerable experience in the founding of the well known Farmer's Museum in Hadley.

He plans to go into, in detail, the colorful past history of the ancient building, to comment on its various alterations and to issue helpful advice to the committee regarding the operation of a museum as projected.

A revised budget for the Westford Museum is in preparation and an intensive town wide spring drive for funds is to commence shortly according to Chairman Shaw.