

New history celebrates Westford's first 250

(Editor's note: Gordon B. Seavey has a strong interest in the past and writes frequently on the history of Westford and other area towns).

By GORDON B. SEAVEY

WESTFORD — With the town observing the 250th year of its incorporation this month, a Westford woman found it a most opportune time to write and publish a new history of the community, covering a span of nearly three centuries.

She is June Kennedy, of 31 Lowell Rd.

Her book fills the long gap in history since Edwin R. Hodgman authored a voluminous history of the town, through 1883.

Sight unseen, nearly 700 orders have been placed; the edition is limited to 1,000 copies.

Kennedy's history contains nearly 200 choice photos, some new, some old. A selected bibliography, several maps and geographical data add to its value.

The author has been a resident of Westford for 21 years. She grew up in Lexington where she says "historic pride becomes ingrained in the soul at an early age."

HER INTEREST in local history started in 1965 when, as a member of the Westford Historical Society, she volunteered to present a slide-talk show program of early district grade schools.

By the time of the Bicentennial observance three years ago, she became aware that a period of more than 90 years had elapsed without any compilation of the lifeblood of the town.

She felt an update was in order.

June Kennedy elected to tape-record and personally interview 50 elderly and key townspeople. Their turn-of-the-century yarns made "old Westford" come alive for her. Acquaintance with family diaries, additional photos and documents were dividends of that venture, and it seemed to warrant a permanent sharing, she says.

In her "Westford Recollections, 1729-1979," Kennedy has drawn upon her historic collection to present a 128-page photo documentary. This compilation, sprinkled with records and oral history, catches a glimpse of this rural community through the years.

June Kennedy has a love of people, and her sparkling enthusiasm and charm endear her to

all. With her husband, a Minuteman, and daughters Betsey and Martha, she maintains an active interest in the community, the local First Parish meetinghouse, and in her ancestral 1696 Manning Manse homestead in nearby North Billerica.

SHE WAS THRILLED to discover that her husband is directly related to the pioneering Westford founders, the Underwoods. Joseph Underwood sold land for 20 pounds for a training field long before the Revolution. It is now the pretty town common, admired by all.

In reading this new history, one has the feeling of living the gracious life of old. One climbs the granite-based hills of Westford, views the showy apple orchards for which the town is famous, and paddles along the many streams and ponds within its boundaries.

The reader will meet the local wagonmaker, school teacher, the country doctors and the tavern-keepers. He will travel the countryside of self-sustaining farms, neatly framed with fieldstone walls; he will enter the mills astir with the hum of spinning — and camaraderie.

It was June Kennedy's idea to make this book something rich in Westford Americana. The choicest segments of her many interviews, newspaper features and her vast collection of pictures are to be found between the covers of "Recollections."

While its pages exude reverence, backbone, patriotism and the like, there appears between its covers, time and again, a generous application of her personality and humor.

THIS ANNIVERSARY edition, which has been printed by The Murray Printing Company, is all about people. — people who made things happen. "It speaks of pioneers, worship, education, wars, celebrations, travel, storms, the work-a-day world — and progress," she says. It is very easy and very enjoyable reading.

The general design has been enhanced by the expertise of a specialist associated with Little, Brown and Co., the noted Boston book publishers.

The cloth cover, in cranberry red (cranberries grew in old Westford meadows), has an embossed sketch in gold leaf of the old meetinghouse, an integral part of early Westford history.