

New town history for Westford

WE 8/2/79

By GORDON B. SEAVEY

WESTFORD — One hundred years ago, a group of substantial citizens formed an organization known as the Westford Town History Association. As its name implies, it was to publish a history of the community, something that had never been done before.

Now, a century later, a new history is being produced. Authored by June W. Kennedy, it will fill the gap the past century has overlooked.

As the Association's name implies, it was to publish a history of community, something that would mirror the authentic life of the town from Colonial, Revolutionary and Civil War days. And it was also to include the civil, educational and religious activities of the same period.

That date in 1879 was March 15. By April 4, Rev. Edwin R. Hodgman, retired minister of the Union Congregational Church, was asked to take on the arduous task of collecting great quantities of data and writing this first history.

The town was to put up the first cost of \$200 and the Association members the other \$200. Mrs. Kennedy's venture is a private one. Already,

word-of-mouth information has lined up orders for more than 150 copies and the edition will be limited to 1,000.

Hodgman took four years to complete his research and writing. The result is a carefully compiled history, including much statistical data covering the period from 1659 to 1883. The volume, which was reprinted for the Bicentennial, is invaluable to historians but rather tedious reading.

A New History

A century later, in time for the 250th anniversary observance of the founding of Westford, another history is soon to be released. In comparison, this new history will neither look like nor contain voluminous quotations from records lying in the dust.

Mrs. Kennedy's history will contain nearly two hundred choice photographs, some new, some old. A selected bibliography, maps and geographical data add to its value.

Conscientiously, the author has highlighted the unique quality of each of the separate villages, and grouped together, make the oneness of Westford.

It's like a journey down Westford roads into villages and areas of today and yesterday. Voices from the people add a personal touch, making the book warm, lively and authentic - and nicely reminiscent.

The author of this new history has been a Westford resident 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 Westford history started in 1965 when, as a member of the Westford Historical Society, she volunteered to present a slide-talk program of the district schools of the town.

Nothing came pre-packaged, she found out. She had to seek out aged schoolmarm, students, tales and photos until all the pieces fitted together.

Then, this taste of local history prompted her to write feature articles for the newspapers, a random series which appeared as "Westford Recollections," a title she now uses for her history.

By the time of the Bicentennial observance four years ago, Mrs. Kennedy became aware

that a period of over ninety years had elapsed without any compilation of the lifeblood of the town.

A Dream

She felt an update was in order. So it was. She elected to tape-record and personally interview fifty elderly and key townspeople. Their folksy 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 seemed to warrant a permanent sharing, she confessed.

In **Westford Recollections 1729-1979** Mrs. 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. She says, "What makes it so exciting is that it is not the colorfully embroidered picture of some other town. . . it's our town, Westford!"

The Author

June W. Kennedy has a love of people and her sparkling enthusiastic personality endears her to all. With her husband Charles, a Minuteman, and daughters Betsy 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 founders, the Underwoods. Joseph sold land for a training field long before the Revolution. It is now the town common.

In reading printer's proofs of 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 in its boundaries.

The reader will meet the local wagonmaker, the school teacher, the country doctor and the tavern keepers. He will travel this countryside of self-sustaining farms neatly framed by field-stone walls and enter the mills astir with the hum

continued on page 3

continued from page 1

of spinning, reeling and camaraderie. He'll pause along the lane to watch the smithy ply his trade and enter the 20th century with its modern contraptions and scientific discoveries.

It's All Westford

It was Mrs. 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 photographs old and new are to be found between the covers of *Recollections*.

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

This anniversary edition she says is all about people - people who made things happen. It speaks of pioneers, worship, education, wars,

celebrations, travel, storms, the workaday world and progress. It is very easy and enjoyable reading.

This new history will appear the first of September as a hard cover book sporting an attractive dust jacket. The general design has been enhanced by the expertise of a specialist associated with Little, Brown and Company, noted Boston book publishers.

It will be printed and bound locally by The Murray Printing Company, which has the well-earned reputation of producing the highest quality workmanship in its field.

Beginning August 1, 1979, townspeople may reserve a copy of **WESTFORD RECOLLECTIONS 1729-1979** by registering at the Book-tique, Westford's local bookstore located at 6 Carleton Place. Just stop by or call 632-2347.