

Old timers said this was no "hick town," even fifty years ago

By Gordon B. Seavey

Half a century ago, the *Boston Post* (long defunct) ran a series by Henry Gillen on the quality of life in communities such as Westford which some might term as "hick villages."

True, the population was about 3,000, the town was 30 miles northwest of Boston with public transportation adequate but slow. Few had autos and life perhaps to many seemed dull. We were really in the "sticks."

Westford had eight railroad stations, a town home for old folks, a busy library, small country stores in three of its villages. Some of the school buildings were rather new, built sturdier enough to continue to be in use to this day.

Gillen tackled for his first interview probably one of the proudest of all local boosters. He located him behind the grocery counter of the Wright & Fletcher store at the Center. He was Sherman H. Fletcher, known to most folks as "Captain," a title bestowed upon him for his interest in the local unit of the Massachusetts Volunteer Militia. Another title was "Sherm."

"Say, we think we're some pumpkins here in this town," Sherm was quoted by the writer. Without taking off his long khaki duster which he invariably wore while in his store, Captain Fletcher hurried the visitor to the nearby Common for a look around.

"Why, we have everything a good town should have, and then some. Take our Fletcher Library: a good library on the first floor, art gallery and natural history rooms on the second. All the gift of a local boy, J. Varnum Fletcher, who made it very good in the provision business in Faneuil Hall Market — where the granite columns for the building were hewn in Westford.

"See that flag pole on the Common? That was put there in 1861 and made out of two pine trees grown right in town. It's never been hit by lightning.

"We lost men in every war. Why, Col. John Robinson, who fought at Bunker Hill, beat it to Concord the minute that first shot was fired at Lexington. Joel Abot started fighting the War of 1812

and was with Admiral Perry in 1853 when he opened the doors to Japan. Yes, sir, we lost men in every war."

The two then went to the Forge Village section of town to meet with Burton D. Griffith, Spanish War vet and local postmaster. Burt's boasting was confined to the town's drinking water, which at that was claimed to be the "second best" in the state. Apparently North Andover had assumed top honors.

"We don't have to boast about our pure water like other folks. Just look up the records at the State House...or have a drink yourself. Seriously, in summer this water is so cool we have to heat it to be able to drink it! Otherwise it would give us a chill."

Griffith concluded, "this is the greatest town in all respects I ever run across. Do you know that no one commits suicide here they like it so well?" And as a parting shot, Burt added, "We do have a town home...don't call it a poorhouse, or you'll get shot. It is a nice, comfortable, restful home (now offices for the School Department) for our dear old folks

where they can sit on the veranda rocking themselves and do not have to do a stitch of work."

It was genial John A. (Jack) Healy in Graniteville who next passed his judgment on the values of Westford and who called attention to the eight railroad stations, now long gone. "The cattle here are extremely healthy," said Mr. Healy, who combined the position of cattle inspector with his coal, wood, livery and undertaking trade. "It's the air, the grass and the way they are taken care of," he proudly asserted.

Rev. Alfred O'Brien, pastor of the Methodist Church was next to speak. Born in New York City he praised Westford so much as a good community in which to live he suggested that he wasn't going to leave it for a vacation that summer. When he came to the church to serve as its pastor, he noted how neat the homes were. "I expected to find some of the Reuben types...but the folks had a lot of common sense and a sound philosophy of life.

Before the newsman left, he became well versed
□ OLD TIMERS, Page 9