

Old town pump a focal point for Westford 70 years ago

By GORDON B. SEAVEY

WESTFORD -- Long before the Westford Water Company commenced serving concentrated areas of town in 1909, the focal point for the thirsty traveller, and in particular horses and cattle, was the town pump. Located on Main Street in front of the town hall, it was a dug well which never failed.

Its construction was sturdy and its total cost was \$301.26. The pump was of cast iron, boxed in with wood. One stepped up on a platform built of long-lasting chestnut planking to work the handle. Water spilled here would drop back into the cool waters below.

A tin cup was usually somewhere nearby, but if misplaced, a person could catch a fair amount of water by holding cupped hands beneath the spout.

The trough to catch the water for the animals was a masterpiece of granite. Cut from a single piece of granite, it measured 28 cubic feet (48 x 28 x 30 inches) and the top was hollowed to make a trough perhaps a foot deep. A drain plug in one side allowed for occasional cleaning. Weighing about two tons, it was no target for vandalism.

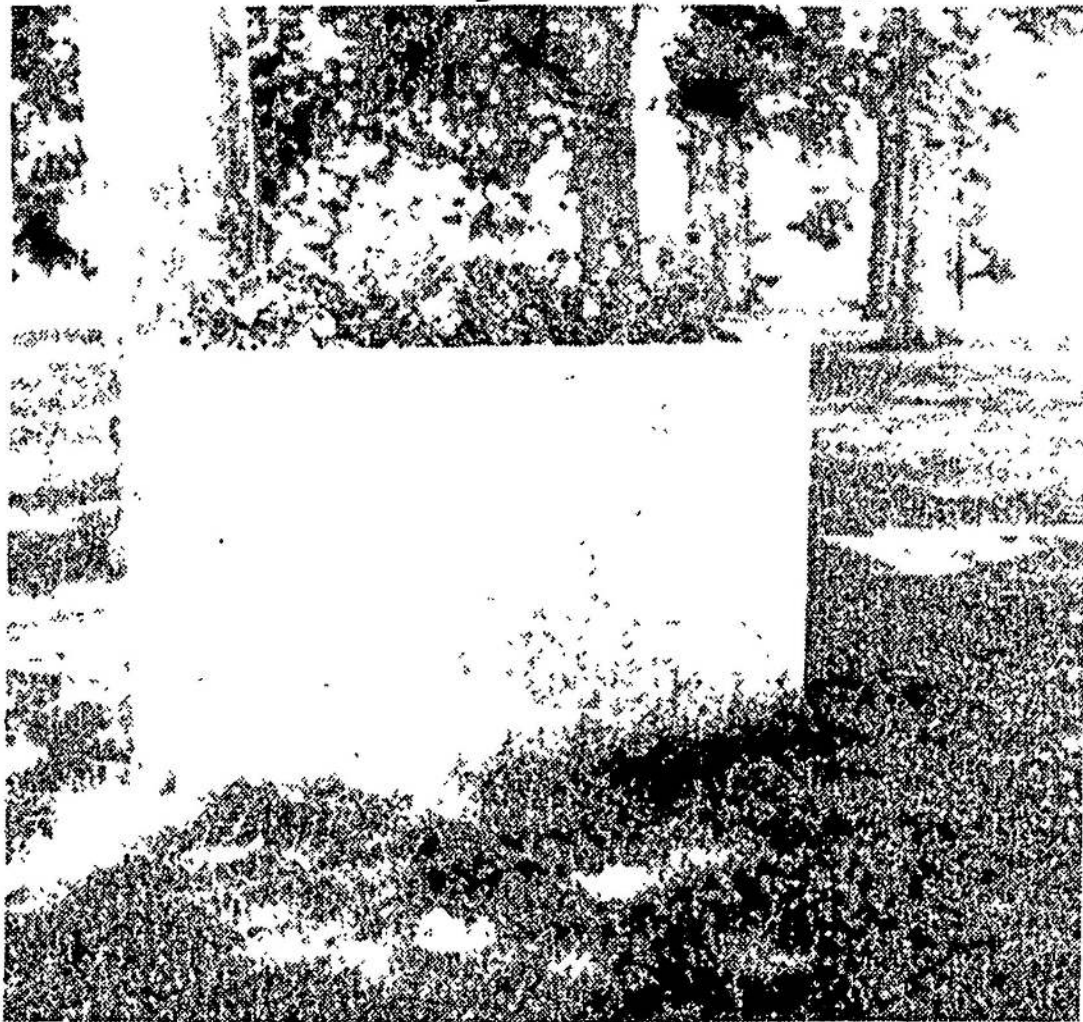
The date 1883 is cut into the face of the block to indicate the year of installation. William Read Sr. quarried it from his nearby Graniteville quarry for the sum of \$50.

WESTFORD CENTER was called the "hilltop town" with its altitude 400 feet above seas level. Nevertheless, below a few feet of hard pan and ledge, there is always clear, cool water to be found.

Today, even the homes on the highest elevations have sump pumps in the basements to take care of surplus water, especially in the springtime. Who says water won't run uphill?

It took a special meeting the previous August (1882) to put in the well. The selectmen reported that Dennis McCarthy was awarded the contract to dig the well at \$3.50 per foot for "earth work" and \$7 per foot for ledge. After digging 18 feet, "a strong spring was struck, which flooded the well so that it became necessary to pump almost continually to enable the men to work."

The cost of pumping as the men went lower amounted to about 20 percent of the total cost. Things must have taken on a festive air during the operation because some of the town's best known citizens helped pump the excess water, cut and lay up the well



RELIC OF THE PAST

... two-ton granite watering trough in Westford

lining, build the platform and watch George T. Day's oxen at work.

SOMETIMES it was sort of a gathering place for some of the young fry as small boys would chase sissies and little girls with a cupful of water. The horses quickly learned of this new, special place where they could refresh themselves. As they neared

told stone trough, their pace would quicken.

Abandoned for years, the trough part was moved near the apex of the common a decade ago by Thomas Curley, then in charge of the town's green. Today, where horses' noses snorted in the water is a planting of flowers.

Another water trough, this of cast iron, is located at the opposite end of the Common. This was a gift from the West-

ford Grange and operated on town water. In addition to the bowl for animals, it had a bubbler for humans which emptied into a smaller bowl below for dogs. Put in place in 1913, just when the automobile was replacing the horse for transportation, it must have been pretty smart salesman to convince the Grange members that the town needed another water trough.