



A panoramic view

This split-section drawing by Betsey Kennedy shows condensed version of the 180-degree panoramic view of the

hills and mountains of southern New Hampshire as seen from Tadmuck Hill in Westford center, approximately 25

to 35 miles to the south. On a clear day, the White Mountains can be seen.

On a clear day in Westford you can see the N.H. mountains

By GORDON B. SEAVEY

(Editor's Note: Gordon B. Seavey is a noted local historian and retired newspaperman who periodically writes on subjects of historic interest in the area.)

WESTFORD - It was 10 years after petitioning the Massachusetts General Court that the early settlers in the western part of Chelmsford had their desires for a new community granted.

That was the start of Westford, split off from the mother town.

Reason for the request was mostly geographical. The scattered families were spread over a 30-mile area. They found it inconvenient, if not difficult because of the distance, to walk or sometimes ride horseback, to reach the center of activity, the meetinghouse in Chelmsford.

The Court in 1724 granted this West precinct permission to become a separate religious society. Five years later, the Court granted this same precinct a separate "township" by the name of "Westford," so changed to Westford.

The Court also ordered Chelmsford to pay 100 pounds to the "West parish for their proportionable expense in building the meeting-house."

Now on the road to independence, it was quickly voted that Ensign Chamberlin be paid "for nine days attendance on the surveyor in surveying the town and setting the meeting-house spot."

The "spot" selected turned out to be Tadmuck Hill, just about the center of the 30 square miles released by its friendly neighbor. The chosen place, now the site of its third meeting-house, is the same location (but not foundation) of the original edifice.

From several vantage points, the mountains of southern New Hampshire toward the north and west are visible.

June W. Kennedy, in her recent history, writes: "For over 100 years the town and church were one....Traditionally, this historic meeting place was the center of religious, political and social life, giving birth to a town with a grand list of accomplishments worthy to be treasured and shared."

The families who chose to live nearest to the meeting-house were mostly farmers. They carried old Westford names such as Craft, Underwood, Heald, Boynton, Blodgett, Hildreth and Reed. Rev. Willard Hall, a knowledgeable farmer and teacher, lived opposite the Roodenbush Community Center. Land between his home and the meeting-house was vacant.

In the late 1800s, Leonard W. Wheeler became the owner of the Hall property. A "gentleman farmer," he had an apple orchard, berry patches, pasture land for his animals, and fields where hay was cut for winter feed.

The Wheelers were friendly people and encouraged visitors to view the hills of New Hampshire from their

fields. When there was crust on the snow, youngsters found good sledding.

Part of his 28 acres sloped down into a little valley where there was a sprightly brook lined with lots of wildflowers. Giant pines made good picnic grounds or places for children to mould Indian villages out of the pine duff. The lady's slipper and Jack-in-the-Pulpit grew in profusion.

Hodgman in his history of 1883 writes about the "Central Village": The main street is shaded with elms and maples (some of the latter, still alive, show their age) and the ample sidewalks tempt to evening promenades amid the perfumes of June or the golden sheen of October.

"For those who know, there is a lane (now Wheeler Lane) that leads to 'Paradise,' where green mosses deck the border of the spring and birds' sing love on every spray."

Prospect Hill, the highest elevation in town, was always a favorite observation point for family outings. Facing the west, Mt. Wachusett in Princeton, and Mt. Watatic in Ashburnham are the first high spots to be seen.

Mt. Monadnock rises 3,165 feet in Jaffrey, New Hampshire, and is 38 miles from Westford. New Ipswich, early-settled by Westford folk, has Barrett and Kidder Mountains. Continuing along the horizon, swinging from west to north, are Temple, Pack Monadnock, Lyndeborough, Joe English and Kearsage Mountains.

Almost due north are the twin peaks, the Uncanoonucs in Goffstown, across the Merrimack River from Manchester.

A sight not seen until recent years included the man-made objects atop Millstone Hill, which make up the Haystack Observatory built in 1964 by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) near the junction of Westford, Orono and Tyngsboro. The giant white "golf ball" and saucer-like discs are readily seen from many areas. This complex is located due north of Forge Pond.

Alas, today there are few good viewing points of these hills and mountains. The farmlands and orchards have once again been claimed by nature. Tall coniferous and hardwoods block the scenes.

Prospect Hill, much of which is now town-owned land given by the late Marian Winneck for a low-key nature preserve, is a tangle of brush and trees, all sadly under-used. To obtain a satisfying view of the mountains, but not recommended, is a climb to the top of the 90-foot water tower to avoid the obstructions.