

Oscar Spalding, man of sterling qualities

By Gordon B. Seavey

He was a good friend to his family, his neighbors and to the town of Westford.

A native son, Oscar Richard Spalding lived a very useful life in the home in which he was born and in which he died at 1 Leland Road, Westford Center.

When he passed on in 1941 at the age of 74, folks who knew him well felt that an era had passed — and it had.

Oscar Spalding was a busy man, what with his lumbering interests and a sizeable fruit farm. He still found time to serve his community in many ways and was a wise counselor and sincere public servant. Public servant.

His record would be hard to match. Twenty years as a select man, 12 years on the finance board, 30 years on the Whitney Playground Committee (he gave some of its land) and in addition, he was a longtime director of the Westford Water Company.

Mr. Spalding was an uncommonly large man, but not fat. His clothes were tailor-made and he invariably wore a bow tie. No one actually knew how much he weighed, but it was always mentioned that when he was born, he was so tiny the family exhibited him on a pillow.

Not so in later life — in my own younger years I used to think that the raccoon coat he wore in winter would also be large enough to cover Westford Common. When sitting on a wagon or in a car, Spalding's side would always dip dangerously low.

The youngsters who sledged down Richardson Hill (Main Street, from Frost School to the

bottom of the hill) late in the afternoon could always count on Oscar Spalding stopping his horse and pung, and letting them attach their sleds to the pung for a free hoist up the hill.

A graduate of Westford Academy in 1880, he later became a trustee for 20 years. His father and uncle were partners in a wholesale lumber business so it was natural for him to follow in their footsteps.

There was much undeveloped land in this region 50 years ago. Most of it was heavily timbered in either white pine or hardwoods. Usually not suitable for crops, the forest land produced no income until harvested. In most cases, Spalding would have to purchase the acreage in order to make a cutting, because its owners would probably have no further use for it in their lifetimes.

White pine was the valuable crop. Logging crews would come in with teams of sturdy horses, husky woodsmen with axes and cross-cut saws would fell the trees.

Cordwood was stacked near a roadway to season. Pine logs were snagged to a portable saw mill run by wood-fired boilers. Here they were sliced into boards and joists.

Pasture pine

Wherever harvested, Spalding insisted the cutters leave a sturdy "pasture pine," one to an acre, to re-seed the land. It could be said that Oscar Spalding was the town's first land conservationist.

True to his love for the woods, one of the legacies left to his fellow townspeople are the Spalding Town Forests, plots of land

totaling 122 acres. Given in 1935, most of the acreage is near the 4-H Fairgrounds on South Chelmsford Road. Most valuable, however, are about eight acres abutting Forge Village, Cold Spring and Pine Ridge Roads.

He received on behalf of the town the Civil War monument at the head of the Common when it was presented by Edwin D. Metcalf in 1910.

Other lands he acquired included Millstone Hill, Nashoba Woodlands at Forge Pond, Bunge's Pond, Mystery Spring off Tadmuck Road — and a very special piece of land near the center of Carlisle used for athletics and picnics, appreciatively named Spalding Park.

Following World War I, his business interests apparently prospered, and he acquired a pair of Studebakers with solid steel wheels — one a fancy sedan for his wife, Fanny, which included a vase for flowers, and a touring car for himself which

was always driven by a chauffeur. He always drove his own horses, however. He also built a special garage for the cars. Forge Pond.

Spalding was one of the first summer residents of Forge Pond and was often observed sitting on a stump at dusk, meditating.

His athletic prowess was limited to archery, at which he was considered an expert — practicing regularly in his 50-foot-long barn and at his summer cottage at Forge Pond.

Those who had a passing acquaintance of the man thought him quiet and serious. He was a kindly, friendly individual whose laugh was a giant chuckle.

Although he had no children of his own, he readily enjoyed talking with young people and more often, kidding with them. He would often say in a humorous manner, "I don't see no light ahead."