

signed on July 4, 1774

16 Reads, 13 Wrights, 11 Hildreths, nine Spaldings, eight Prescotts, six Proctors and Duttons, and four Keyes.

Some signatures showed the hand to be infirm, others apparently barely able to write — but all had that patriotic fervor that had been building over the years.

Three signatures were noticeably absent. One was that of Rev. Willard Hall, the town's first minister, who at that time was well advanced in years and who remained a Tory to his death. The others were Daniel Raymond and his son, Daniel, Jr. Because of their leanings, three had been requested to "deliver up" their arms and were forbidden to "go out of town with out a pass from the Committee of Correspondence."

In the intervening years between the signing of the covenant and the Declaration of Independence, much happened of a warlike nature in Westford. Lt. Colonel John Robinson was in the vanguard of 130 Westford Minutemen who went to Concord on April 19, 1775. The highest ranking officer, he marched along with Major John Buttrick of Concord and Captain Isaac Davis of Acton at the head of the column of Minutemen to meet the British for the first time at the North Bridge.

SHORTLY afterwards, many from Westford participated in the battle of Bunker Hill where men of all ranks showed their bravery. Robinson, a tall man of commanding presence, stood in the front, "in shape and gesture proudly eminent, exposed to instant death, yet doing his duty . . . showing himself the efficient officer and strong-hearted man."

Caesar Bason, a black and perhaps the servant of James Burn, in the battle found his powder was nearly gone. Putting in his last charge, he exclaimed, "Now, Caesar, give 'em one more." He fired and was himself shot, falling back into the trench.

Westford men were among the Colonial troops who had seized Ticanderoga and Crown Point. They served in the Siege of Boston, the Nantasket Campaign, on Dorchester Hill and later guarded Boston.

Named on June 14, 1776, were Dr. Asaph Fletcher, Captain Amos Fletcher and Ensign Nathaniel Boynton as a committee to advise their representative to the Massachusetts General Assembly that "should the Honorable Congress for the safety of the colonies, declare them independent of Great Britain, they, the said inhabitants, will solemnly engage with their lives and fortunes to support them in the measure."

To back up this, they voted that the "Town store of powder be three hundred weight; to purchase Ball and flints answerable to the powder. Also, to purchase fifteen guns to be added to our store with Cartridge Boxes."

Although the war by this time had moved away from this state, every man, woman and child was involved, each doing his part to sustain the effort for independence.

It was most difficult to make a living on the rock-strewn farms and with many of the men away in service, there were many added and strenuous tasks for the women.

EDWIN R. HODGMEN, in his valuable and carefully documented *History of Westford*, printed in 1883, sums up the attitudes of the citizenry and their patriotism. "Promptly did these men obey the call to defend their country and bravely did they meet the shock of arms . . . It will be seen by what follows that the patriotism of the town did not falter during the long and bloody contest that ensued; but her citizens and her soldiers were true to the American flag, even to the end."

Nothing in the records indicate exactly what transpired in town when news came from Philadelphia that on July 4, 1776, the thirteen states became one united group. The official news could have been received perhaps within five days but probably longer.

No doubt there was some rejoicing that this country was united for the first



Preserved for 200 years

Viewing a covenant signed by 207 Westford men on July 4, 1774, protesting the closing of Boston Harbor, are Minutemen Charles S. Kennedy and Mrs. Bettie Hook, head of the history department at Westford Academy. The ancient document is in trust with the J.V. Fletcher Library.

time against a common cause, but invariably there must have been much fear and great concern for the years ahead.

Ideas contained in the Declaration were not new, but its simple beauty must have stirred the hearts of all: With so many Westford men serving in the long war, naturally those at home must have hung on every word from the battle front.

By order of the Council, the Declaration was to be read to all congregations "as soon as Divine service is ended in the afternoon of the first Lord's Day after they shall have received it," and that its contents be recorded in the town's record "to remain as a perpetual Memorial thereof." Zaccheus Wright, being town clerk at the time, so recorded same.

It is now a hundred years later and we turn to the records for information as to how Westford folk observed the centennial of the founding of the country. Many flocked to Philadelphia and its exposition.

BY OFFICIAL vote, the town accepted invitations from Lexington and Concord to participate in their celebrations on April 19, 1875.

In a resolve, it said in part: "Impressed with the importance of the event which occurred 100 years ago, initiating the War of the Revolution with all its glorious results, and remembering the zeal and alacrity with which our grandfathers rushed to the scene of action . . . with scarce an hour's notice, and faced unflinchingly the British bayonets, we

hereby pledge ourselves, as descendants of those immortal men, to honor their memory and endorse their heroic efforts.

It was further resolved, "That it is the duty of the citizens of Westford to erect a monument to the memory of Colonel John Robinson and other Revolutionary soldiers of Westford."

To bolster this vote, George T. Day, Luther Prescott, William Reed, Alvaa T. Fisher, George W. Heywood, Sherman D. Fletcher, Joseph Henry Read, George

Hutchins, Isaac P. Woods and Nathan S. Hamlin were formed into a committee to ask the General Court for permission to raise money by tax for the purpose of erecting this monument.

At a town meeting a month later, on May 22, it was proposed "to raise a sum of money, not exceeding \$2,000, to be expended in the erection of a monument on the common to commemorate the services of Col. John Robinson and others who bravely participated in the fight at the old North Bridge in Concord and at Bunker Hill."

THE MOVEMENT was defeated by a vote of 78 to 51.

All was in vain. The belated attempt to honor perhaps one of the greatest military heroes Westford will ever produce was badly beaten. But the town had just erected a marble slab in the new town hall, built in 1870, as

a memorial to the men of Westford who lost their lives in the Civil War.

More recently there have been serious and fruitful attempts to record Robinson's name forever in Westford history. The typical Colonial homestead on Robinson Road in which his six children were born was destroyed by fire in 1937 but the spot is indicated by an engraved stone, the horse-mounting block which came from his daughter Huldah's home. A new elementary school at the end of the street named for him carries his name.

In the ancient West cemetery on Concord Road, not far from his home, is the final resting place of the old soldier. It is amply marked with a large slate monument of the period. Alongside are the graves of three daughters, Mehitable, 8, Betty, 5, and Sally, 2, who died in 1775 presumably of smallpox within a period of eight days.

In 1775, the population of Westford was about 1,175. Some 250 Westford men served in the Revolutionary War. This is just about one person in four.

Based on today's estimated population of 14,000, this percentage would mean that 3,500 persons from this community would answer, in emergency, the call to arms.

The Cover

Westford Minutemen gather to honor the memory of Colonel John Robinson, one of the town's leaders in the War for Independence. Colorphoto by Gordon B. Seavey of Forge Village.

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