

Spring's first signal appears on the 13th

By GORDON B. SEAVEY

(Gordon B. Seavey, a local historian and long-time newspaperman, writes occasionally on the area's history and traditions).

WESTFORD - Friday, March 13 may have been an unlucky day for some but for local fishermen who haunt Forge Pond to cast a line for large mouth bass or a slim pickerel, it was a bit of early luck - for that's the day the sheet of rotten ice broke up.

It was spring's signal that the time has come to launch the rowboat or canoe, or make a few castings off the mill dam.

For more than 20 years an ardent group of Forge Villagers have argued during the winter months as to when

the "official word" would come that the 212-acre pond was clear for spring fishing.

The word came at Friday noon, when Fire Chief George Rogers, who now makes his home on the eastern shore, passed the good news to Postmaster Robert Connell, scorekeeper for the past two decades. Verifying the fact was next door neighbor Mrs. Karl Dayley.

According to Connell, the thickness of the ice had been 30 inches until the spring thaw hit in February. This was a near record, due to the lack of an insulating snow cover, an early freeze-over two weeks before Christmas and a bitterly cold holiday season. Ice at Nabasset had reached 26 inches, which made for great skating and ice boating.

The average break-up time is in the first week of April, but for the past eight years it has come in March. A year ago, it was March 11 when the all-clear whistle was blown even though the ice coverage was only about four inches with a heavy snow cover.

Until the advent of the mechanical household refrigerator 60 years ago, the harvest of ice for commercial and home cooling was big business at Forge Pond. Scores of men and boys with horses worked around the clock to fill the six-story Gage Ice Company buildings on what is now the town beach. Ideal thickness then was 14 inches, not 30.