

Stolen weathervane returned to Westford

By GORDON B. SEAVEY

WESTFORD — Seven years ago, an unusual old friend mysteriously disappeared from atop the 80-foot bell tower of The Murray Printing Company.

It was a hand-made copper weathervane, light for its size, which had shown the direction of the winds for 70 years. One day there was nothing but a lone spike on the highest point of the Murray complex.

What happened?

It was during a brief period when antique vanes were disappearing from the countryside, principally from old barns. It seemed that helicopter pilots had taken a fancy to the horses, sheep, cows, deer, roosters, eagles and the usual arrows and swallowtail designs which were rather plentiful on big buildings.

That is, until some of these thieves were caught.

Localites assumed, therefore, that a helicopter had hovered over the merino ram which the Abbot Worsted Company, owners when the tower was erected in 1910, had specially made to crown their mill complex.

But not so. It was a daring human spider who had thrown a ladder over an eight-foot fence, somehow carried it to the roof and made the final ascent by ropes. Was it a movie stunt man?

SOLVING THE mysterious disappearance took a long time, so extended that most people had forgotten the incident.

It was solved by the good work of the Con-

necticut State Police. In checking out antique shops in that state, an investigator spotted the unusual and large piece.

The thief was soon caught and is still in jail, according to Murray president John A. Walantis. The latter jokingly said that the only way he knew how to get the sheep back on its lofty perch was to wait until the prisoner is released and then "make a deal with him."

The antique dealer had such a hefty price tag on the article that Walantis also is considering having a duplicate made in order to keep the original for display in the plant's lobby.

The symbol of the merino sheep, with the tightly curled horns of the ram, was very appropriate for the Abbots to use as a trademark, which they used liberally.

Abbot Worsted Company, founded in 1855, during its century of manufacturing yarns for a wide variety of uses, bought wool from all over the world. The firm also purchased camel hair, which is extremely soft and light.

But the principal product was knitting yarns which the firm supplied to other mills. This required a fine wool. And the Spanish Merino, raised in that country as far back as history records, was found to be the best variety.

WITH THE IMPROVEMENT of the breed, merino wool is now considered the best in the world. And Abbot's used the best.

Synthetic fibers killed the demand for this material and Abbot Worsted closed ITS mills in Forge Village, Graniteville, Brookside and Lowell, in 1956.



Lost sheep returns

Sun staff photo by Mike Pigeon

Stolen from The Murray Printing Company several years ago, this old copper weathervane swung with the wind from the top of a building erected in 1910. Shown

with the vane, which has been recovered, are, from left, President John A. Walantis and Gordon B. Seavey.