

The story of Westford Common

By Gordon B Seavey

When a dissident group of the early settlers in the West Precinct of old Chelmsford deemed it advisable to break away from the mother town to the east they chose a most sightly spot to locate their new meetinghouse the center of communal activity

This was two-and a half centuries ago

Atop Tadmuck Hill named by the Indians, and 400 feet above sea level the first meetinghouse was built which quickly became the center of social and political, as well as religious, life

The venerable white clapboarded church is still a focal point located as it is almost in the geographical center of the town of thirty square miles in area its graceful, slender 120 foot steeple towers over the ancient trees which line the triangle Common in the foreground

The Common was used for grazing animals and also a training ground for the local militia where they drilled long before the American Revolution In later years band concerts walks in a summer's evening, fairs and outdoor gatherings occurred as they do today

Now surrounding the Common are the 1870 Town Hall the 1954 central Police and Fire Stations the 1878 Union Church Building the 1910 Civil War Memorial the 1895 J V Fletcher Library and four epic and span residences, all combining to make a pleasing mixture of architectural and period styles

Three decades ago three commercial enterprises all country stores plus a post office operated at one time or another within sight of the Common Today one

can still purchase stamps at Westford Center but no groceries!

The Town Hall was usually closed during the day as town officials conducted necessary business from their homes Town meetings, an all-day process were held on Saturdays Dinners were served from a most inadequate kitchen on the lower level

On certain evenings there were social gatherings, dinners and Friday night dances. The upstairs dance floor was of maple with a certain springiness which earned the reputation of being one of the best around If the dancing party proved a success, a collection was taken up to pay the orchestra (and the janitor) for an extra hour after midnight

Sponsors of the dances were young people's groups, Academy graduation and firemen's balls committees, Brigham & Poole's Orchestra from Boston was booked for the most important functions Horses were stabled in the basement in the winter tied to the rail fence surrounding the building in better weather

Lively Country Stores

But the real action in the Center six days a week was in the country store At brief times there were three operating, but the potential business from the area made only two practical A building next to the library off and on held a grocery or a barber shop or an ice cream parlor This was demolished in 1964

J M Fletcher and later his son Herbert, operated a store on Lincoln St facing the Common It is now an insurance office They were Democrats and held the post office franchise when there was a Democrat in the White House

A narrow path ran diagonally across the Common to Wright & Fletcher's and in the days of Republican power dispensed the mail with a G O P touch!

Wright & Fletcher was the larger of the stores and operated for 130 years until competition from modern supermarkets located in tarmac shopping areas forced it to close thirteen years ago. An attractive florist-gift shop now occupies the front portion of the old store building. The balance of the edifice consists of five small but most comfortable apartments.

With a jumble of assorted merchandise plus lack of hard merchandising knowledge Wright & Fletcher's always seemed to present a picture of confusion Thus it warranted its meaning of a country store

Traveling salesmen regularly appeared to take orders for merchandise representing wholesale houses known as drummers Many would linger to chat with the amiable proprietors Sperm Fletcher and Dick Wright and clerk Fred Hartford

Many supplies came from Holbrook Marshall Company of Nashua which used a picture of Mt Monadnock (seen from Westford) on many of the labels on their merchandise

Butter and cheese came from Charles H Stone in Boston A picture of a contented Jersey cow on a bright blue and yellow butter carton was their trademark Imperial butter came in one pound scored slabs with an intriguing bas-relief symbol such as a sheaf of wheat or a bee hive on top of each of four sections Sperm always sampled the cheese before he purchased it during his biweekly trips to Stone's

Railroad Shipments

Merchandise was brought in by team from the railroad stations at Westford Depot or Pine Ridge, packed in wooden boxes and gunnysacks The cardboard cartons we see today were non-existent The empty boxes were tossed, helter skelter from a back porch into a fenced area in the rear These were freely given away, first come basis. A sturdy box often became a small boy's cart if the proper wheels were available

Chase & Sanborn coffee was the popular local brew in those days. Packed 48 tin cans in a stout wooden box, the case was in as much demand as was the coffee.

During World War I, there was
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