These primitive paintings depict Westford life in the early 1800's

By Gordon B. Seavey

he overall interest in collecting artifacts of early town life for Westford s new museum has brought to light at least two interesting primitive paintings.

One is a scene of the original Westford Academy building and its surroundings, done in watercolor The artist is apparently an unknown student. The second also is a watercolor, a landscape depicting the setting of one of the very oldest homes in town, the Hildreth farmhouse built prior to

Life and customs in the early 19th century, according to the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston. were portrayed by numerous pictures of everyday life, done by a prolific group of amateurs who painted in both watercolor and pastels for pleasure.

These artists were gentlemen dilettantes, women with newfound leisure and especially seminary schoolgirls. We must assume Academy girls were the local artists of these prints.

The Academy scene is made from the upper end of the Common and depicts the 1794 edifice as the central theme. The building is enclosed with a post-and-

rall fence

At the left is a small residence and a grouping of outbuildings. in the foreground is an assortment of people, one lady with a parasol and men in top hats. Three cows graze leisurely and for humor the young artist shows a hog, with raised bristles on its back (plus curiy tail) being pestered by a dog.

The size of this primitive is 12 by 18 inches, and the artist found it necessary to piece the paper at the top with a two-inch strip to accommodate the size destred To hide the seam, an extra heavy cloud formation in blue is imposed

The building itself is in a shade of pink, with a bright red door and brown roof Here is where the artist used her poetic license, for the previous color of the structure as determined by the trustees was a shade or two of green deeper than Chelmsford meeting house.

The combined woodshed and "necessary house is dark brown. The elaborate weather vane, which now has been lost

has a touch of gold The bell in the belfry was not painted in, leaving space for the artist to depict a fellow student peering over the Common More fellow students are gathered at

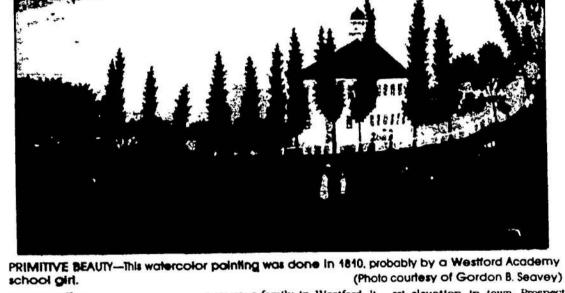
one of the rails.

A gaily decorated coach, in red, at the right is being drawn by a tandem of prancing horses with a rider astride the rear animal The artist has painted the street in green. Today, we know the color is black, but at that time, dirt color

It is not known whether the frame is original It appears to be very old it has brushed on gold leaf with a black border; the back mounting board is rough sawed pine

A label, only 2 x 2 inches, is pasted on the back and is scarcely discernable. It reads. 'C.D. & E.J Vopp. Dealers in Chrome Lithographs, steel engravings, photographs and picture frames made to order in the best manner Cor Main and Water Sts., Nashua, N H '

This primitive was hidden for years in the attic of the late Mrs. Alice M. Wells. The previous owner of her home, Dr Walter J Sleeper, probably acquired it during the brief period he lived in this house, at the head of Gran iteville Road He was known to have collected many items of historical value during the period he was a practicing physician and surgeon in town. He was only 48 when he died in 1908 following a



lingering illness.

Hildreth Homestead

Present owner of this sketch is Ben W Drew to whom it has particular significance inasmuch as several of his foregears at tended the Academy His father George A. Drew, was a member of the Class of 1984 and a trus-

tee for ten years. The Hildreth sketch is owned by Barbara Hildreth Parkhurst. tenth generation of this old and numerous family in Westford It is about the same size as the Academy scene but is more of a landscape

Main theme is the Joseph Hil dreth house, in red with white trim, tucked in among several outbuildings and barns. In the near distance is the Levi Hildreth house, known better today by old-timers as the Sid Wright home. The rolling meadows in the background lead up the high

est elevation in town Prospect Hill at 465 feet which then was trecless

There is no signature on this painting, but Mrs Parkhurst says it was done by one of eight daughters of Abijah Hildreth prior to 1860

in looking at the two paintings it would be difficult to ascertain which of these girls had the artis

tic ability