

# Time transforms names, as it does everything else

By Gordon B. Seavey

I have a particular affinity toward the Abbot Middle School, perhaps because it's the best looking, in my opinion, of all the public buildings in Westford ... and I live across the street from this appropriately Colonial style school house.

And I enjoy watching the young people as they pour out of classes.

The school's honor roll published recently caught my eye. A long list naming the outstanding students started with Rebecca (a good Biblical name) Shaw and Ji-Eun Shu for highest honors. The latter will have to explain the connotation of her name to me sometime.

And then the list goes on to such first names as Jodi, Krista (or is it Kristin or Kristen?), Heather, Ryan (is it a boy or girl?), and so on.

First names are given to newborns usually by their parents after much thought. Is the final decision made to honor a rich uncle, or a favorite aunt, or something that has been carried in the family for several generations? Or is it pleasing to the ear?

A recent report in U.S. News gives the 20 most popular names of babies back in 1970. In popularity for girls, the list starts with Michelle, then Jennifer, Kimberly, Lisa, Tracy, Kelly (whether Irish or not) Nicole, Angela, Pamela and Christine.

As for the most popular first names for boys born 17 years ago, the list reads: Michael, Robert, David, James, John, Jeffrey, Steven, Christopher, Brian and Mark.

And as for 1986, the list indicates that baby girls received almost a new variety of first names, such as Ashley, Amanda, Lindsay and Brittany. For boys, there were few changes in the distribution of names.

Not so in past

First names in Revolutionary days would seem very odd to all of us today, such as Zaccheus Wright, founder of Westford Academy and the first library system. Others were Abel, Oliver, Levi, Josiah and Joshua, also Nehemiah and Obadiah.

**Mabel Prescott for more than a decade served as a faithful telephone operator when the exchange was ... in the home of Phonsie Isles.**

Cesar Bason was distinguished as the black boy killed at Bunker Hill.

Today there are many senior citizens who carry first names that are rarely considered for newborn babies today.

Just to name a few: Mabel Prescott for more than a decade served as a faithful telephone operator when the exchange was across from the Town Hall in the home of Phonsie Isles.

Carroll Rollins, always active in farming, still lives on Depot Street. His wife, Elva, through her interest in the Academy Alumni as secretary, helped the organization thrive for many years.

No new babe gets the name of Austin these days ... but we all know and appreciate our kindly senior citizen who, at the age of 80 plus, is in charge of the "town" flag which he raises to fly from the flagstaff in the center of our picture post card town Common. He is Austin Fletcher, son of Willard. And he's not on the town payroll.

**Really unusual firsts**

The name given to the daughter of Abiel Abbot, president of the outstanding industry in town, the Abbot Worsted Company, always was an enigma to many. It was Caruzu Abbot. She now lives on the West Coast, and the Abbot name has left Westford.

Then there was the Scandinavian name of Oscar, given to a Yankee — as if ever there was one — Oscar Spalding. His pert wife, Frances Prescott Spalding, preferred that "close friends" call her Fanny. Would any young lady care to carry that moniker today?

And there's Ruth (a good Biblical name) Sargent Johnson

who lives at Chamberlin Corner; nearby is Adeline Parfitt Ellasen.

At the Strawberry Festival on the Common last year, Marjorie Millis Duran of Carlisle reminded me that her given name was chosen because it belonged to my 90-year-old sister, Marjorie — and that it sounded so good.

Mattie Crocker was one of my splendid teachers at the Frost School, and so was Martha Grant, who later married a local farmer, Charlie Blodgett, who lived on Millstone Hill.

Letitia Ward was principal of the Cameron School, and Izzie (that's one for the records) Parker at Sargent. Myrtle Fletcher taught the first four grades at the school house still standing in the Parker Village section of town. The next four grades came by "barge" to the Frost School.

My name, Gordon, also isn't heard much anymore. I'm not sure where my parents found the name, although I know for sure it wasn't Gordon's gin as they were tee-totalers. I suppose they just liked the sound of it. My middle name, Bailey, also not common, was for a family friend.

Perhaps the most appropriate name for any mother, of all times, is on a slate marker in Fairview Cemetery. It reads in part, "Experience Parker, Mother of Sixteen"; she died in 1817, age 65. That name really meant something!

(Gordon Seavey is a native of Westford and former publisher of the Belmont CITIZEN.)