



Accepting rare documents

Ellen Rainville, left, librarian in charge of preserving old

records at the J.V. Fletcher Library in Westford, accepts donation of 1729 and 1794

documents from Mr. and Mrs. Allister F. MacDougall.

Two historic documents given to Westford library

By GORDON B. SEAVEY

WESTFORD — Two historical documents of considerable importance were added to the town's slowly growing collection of old official papers when Mr. and Mrs. Allister F. MacDougall presented them to the J.V. Fletcher Library.

One is the warrant calling for a town meeting in March, 1729, the year Westford was incorporated; and the other a contract for the purchase of a pew in the meetinghouse, dated November 13, 1794.

The warrant begins with the usual introduction of the time: "Middlesex SS, George the second by the grace of God of Great Britton, France and Irland, King Defender of the faith"

It calls for the "freholders and other inhabitants qualified according to law to vote in town affairs and meet at the Meetinghouse in Westford on the first Monday in March" at ten.

The men were to "chuse" and elect selectmen, a town clerk, constables and other officers. The highways came under scrutiny as money had to be raised for repairs and that "every man have the liberty to work out his rate."

ALWAYS A standard problem that disturbed the citizens, similar to leash laws for dogs today, was to "see if they will shut up swine or let them go at large."

The warrant was signed by Joshua Fletcher as town clerk. In the handwriting of Constable Joseph Fletcher, whose prowess was not spelling, at the end appears: "by vertu of the with in retten warrent i have warned the free holders & the other in habittance to apear at time & Place."

THE BILL of sale for the pews in the new meetinghouse is nicely printed with spaces left to be filled in for the buyer. The townspeople in 1794 were erecting a third edifice, replacing the second which had been destroyed by fire.

To finance the project, John Abbot, described as

"Gentleman," and Moses Thomas, "Housewright," were the agents. They were to sell at "Publick Vendue" the various pews to the highest bidders.

The document presented by the MacDougalls shows that Josiah Boynton, Jr. was the highest bidder for his choice, a wall pew No. 54, for \$23. With his deed came the certification that "neither the said Inhabitants, nor any Person, or Persons, whatsoever, shall Molest him, the said Josiah, his Heirs and Assigns, forever, in the quiet use and enjoyment of the fame...."

Abbot and Thomas affixed their signatures to the paper, which was witnessed by Zaccheus Wright and John Raymond.

MacDougall, who has been delving in local history for many years, has located and preserved scores of priceless documents and artifacts which could have been lost forever. He also has done considerable writing, relying on his keen memory as well as gleaned information from old records and documents.

THE TWO documents just turned over to the library are being imbedded between plastic sheets for permanency under the direction of Ellen Rainville at the J.V. Fletcher Library.

MacDougall, who observes his 88th birthday today, maintains a private museum in a recently constructed building at the Boston Road residence. The building contains a wide assortment of articles which he has collected over the years, from double-runner sleds to old farm and early home pieces.

He instigated the preservation of the Paul Revere bell now at the Academy, being used as a flower urn in Littleton when he located it; made available the lot at the head of the common which was the original site of the academy, and spearheaded the preservation of the old academy building for a town museum.

MacDougall also promoted the World War II memorial on the library lawn and the replacement of the 1861 wooden flagpole on the common, destroyed by vandals in 1975, with a new pole.