

Westford has long history in world of fruit production

By GORDON B. SEAVEY
WESTFORD — Primarily an agricultural town since first settled on Frances Hill in 1664 by Solomon Keyes from Newbury, Westford gradually became noted at the turn of the century in 1900 for its fine fruits. Its nearness to markets in Boston and Lowell provided an outlet for its perishable products.

The soil was suited ideally for apples too, and many fine orchards were scattered throughout the community. Now, there are only a few fruit growers left, mainly in apples and peaches, who are producing on a large scale.

Berries were a popular item, starting off with strawberries in June, raspberries coming into season around July 4, then blackberries following. Other products included plums, cherries, currants and peaches.

GROWING BERRIES took a lot of hand work and perishable fruits, particularly raspberries, had to be rushed to market. Some farmers, like the Old Homestead's William Kittredge, teamed their own fruit. Others took the fruit to a central location from whence individual teamsters were to cart the crates and boxes into the

Boston market for a small fee.

THE USUAL route was to Minot's Corner, then Powers Road to the Great Road in Littleton by Nagog Pond into Concord and with a feed and rest time usually in Lexington, the half-way mark. It was a few miles shorter to go through Carlisle but the hills were hard on the animals.

It always was a sight to remember as the loaded wagons pulled away from the loading platforms, with lanterns swinging in the rear. Unless the team was new, the horses soon learned every turn in the route.

Sometimes when there was an overflow of produce, a smaller wagon pulled by one horse was brought into service. Allister McDougall, now 86, remembers as a boy following the other teams at the rear of the procession proudly driving the single horse.

The drivers were good horsemen and took cautious care of their animals. Names well-remembered by old-times are Bill Wright, Buzz Miller and Johnny Greig. Horse-swapping or performance seemed to be their main topic of conversation.

WAGONS USED were heavy farm wagons with open box

bodies. The driver's seat had a canopy against sun and rain. Racks were placed over the sides, extending the width of

the body over the wheels. The most perishable fruits, like raspberries, always rode on top.

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