

Westford men came when duty called

By GORDON B. SEAVEY

WESTFORD — Men of Westford always were ready to answer a call to arms.

This is shown through the records that 250 local men and boys left Westford to fight in the Revolutionary War. Next to Lexington, this was the greatest number from Middlesex County.

It was an incredible count, especially as half of the town's population of 1175 at that time was under 15 years of age, and women accounted for more than half the balance.

Westford men served in numerous other conflicts, as the town history and the memorial on the common will attest. The names of Civil War dead are engraved on marble tablets in the town hall.

During World War I, local men were organized into a military standby unit, part of the Massachusetts State Guard or militia. These part-time soldiers were volunteers, too old for the regular army or ones who could not qualify for, nor meet the rigid physical exams of, the draft.

THE LOCAL company drilled on the common and at the Whitney Playground, the streets and, in poor weather, in the town hall. It was a big day when uniforms arrived from the state quartermaster.

A popular attorney, lanky Edward "Pete" Fisher, was the ranking officer as captain. Lieutenants were Charles Robinson, a carpenter, and Herbert V. Hildreth, a quarry owner. George Wilson was adjutant.

Master sergeant was Julian A. Cameron, treasurer of Abbot Worsted; other sergeants included Town Clerk Charles L. Hildreth and Edward M. Abbot.

The Westford group, along with other companies, participated in summer encampments for a week in Framingham. They slept in tents and had Fire Chief Alonzo H. Sutherland as "master" cook.

THE STATE GUARD had been established by then Governor Calvin Coolidge (later to become President) as a supplementary military unit during World War II and was not disbanded until the early 1920s.

A big emergency came when the Boston Police Department went on strike September 9, 1919, a first of its kind in the country. The Boston police, roughly three-quarters of the force, were protesting the suspension of 19 patrolmen for union activity.

Coolidge said at the time: "There is no right to strike against the public safety by anybody, anywhere, anytime." This remark made him a national hero and started Coolidge on the road to the White House.

Without police, rowdies roamed the Boston streets, smashing windows and looting, until volunteers and state militia restored order.

A new force of 1,100 recruits and 400 police who did not strike took over the city on December 20, relieving the emergency units from this unusual duty.

THE WESTFORD MEN were billeted in the South Army, many finding sleeping on hard Army canvas cots or the floor a new experience — one not to be forgotten easily. They were glad to return to Westford and their jobs, as well as to their families and softer beds. The unit was attached to Station 2.

A large photograph loaned by Mrs. Arthur L. Healy, shows 75 Westford men in uniform in front of the old armory, most of whom identifiable.

Included in the group were Edward Hanley, George Burke, Joseph McDonald, William "Bill" Wright, Alec Fisher, Frank Lowther, Harwood "Dick" Wright, Robert Prescott, Arthur G. Walker, Clyde Prescott, Bertram Sutherland, Clifford Johnson, Harry Hartford, Alfred and Alonzo Sutherland.

Also, Harold W. Hildreth, Fred Healy, John Howard, Asa Roby, Principal William C. Roudenbush of the Academy, Edmund Delahaye, James May, Julian Cameron, Charles L. Hildreth, Fred L. Fletcher, Alfred W. Hartford, Charles Dudevair, and George Marinel.

Other, presumably part of the Westford contingent were James Kelly, Issac Hall, Joseph LeClerc, John Feeney, Alfred Couture, John Greene, James Payne, Clarence Dane, John Hall, Eldon Turner and Leonard W. Wheeler.

