

Westford wanderings

By GORDON B. SEAVEY

Half a century ago, a serious drought in this area brought near disaster to farmers locally. Lack of rainfall not only caused valuable crops to wither "on the vine," but shortage of water in wells caused a more serious problem. Although the central areas of Westford were serviced by the privately-owned Westford Water Company, outlying districts depended mostly on dug wells.

There were still several large dairy farms left and if anyone who ever pumped by hand water from a well to fill the oversize stomachs of thirsty cattle will never forget this tedious task. When these wells went dry, farmers had to team water from the neighbors who might be in a better liquid position.

And there was the good side of things, too. Nabnasset Pond still held water for it was reported that one angler caught a black bass which weighed in at 7 pounds and measured twenty inches.

Farming in the Stony Brook Valley where crops always grew well. Guy DeCatur and Fisher Buckshorn raised 100 bushels of choice Green Mountain potatoes which sold for \$2 per bushel, double the price of the previous year's crop. Good hardwood was selling for \$12 a cord.

Priceless Document

This was the year that one of Westford's most valuable documents was found in a local attic and turned over to the Fletcher Library for safe-keeping. It was the Solemn League and Covenant signed by 207 Westford men (women were seen and not heard at the time this document was signed on July 4, 1774) protesting the closing of Boston Harbor and declaring a boycott on British goods.

Wayland Balch (he lived to be 98) and Hiram Dane were recognized as the two remaining veterans of the Civil War.

This was the time that Leo Connell, who later became postmaster, was treated with a hot seat. The Mack truck which he was driving for Wright Trucking caught fire beneath him unfortunately in the most prominent place in town -- in front of the Town Hall.

And that year there was another fire in almost the identical spot but of a different variety. The Walker homestead (where the Fire Station now stands) had a chimney fire, but with the fire station then being nearby around the corner on Boston Road, the stalwart men soon extinguished both blazes.

"Nab" is Recognized

Samueal Law Taylor, a town character living on the Old Oaken Bucket farm on

Lowell Road, being facile with the pen as a correspondent for the local newspaper, the Westford Wardsman, had to admit that the name of Brookside was being faded out in favor of calling that part of Westford, Nabnasset. The only name of that kind of the world, he acclaimed.

Ralph Adams Cram, noted architect, was busy making plans for remodeling the state house. He was the son of Rev. William A. Cram, who served as pastor for four years of the First Parish Church commencing in 1872.

Westford grew mountains of apples fifty years ago and farmers would feed the culls to the animals for feed as well as moisture to replace the dwindling supply of water. This also drew rats. With the help of the Extension Service, a special drive was put on to eliminate the pests.

On a cold winter's night, the barn of Walter Blanchard caught fire. There was always little hope of ever saving one of these large structures, usually filled with hay in the winter. A popular farmer and milk distributor around town, the loss was a great blow to the community. Thirty cows, two horses and two dogs died in the conflagration. Some insurance, but not enough as usual!

A young motorcyclist was stopped and warned by Chief John Sullivan for "roaring down Main Street at 42 miles per hour." That reckless driver is now a prominent Westford businessman who long ago disposed of the motorcycle. Incidentally, John was a one-man police force. In those days, drugs, beer, and vandalism and littering were almost unknown acts.

Bob Perkins remembers that his father, Joseph, walked from his home on Carlisle Road to Millstone Hill, probably a round-trip distance of 12 miles, but he had long legs and a rapid stride. He cut cordwood for the Blodgett brothers for \$1 per day.

And speaking of the Blodgetts, it was said that when they installed a forced water system to the barn for the animals, even though the water pipes ran beneath the kitchen floor, the lady of the house still had to use the old pump at the kitchen sink. That saved electricity.

And how about the "good, old days?" One thing, you could purchase, a Chevrolet roadster for \$495, delivered to your door without an excise tax to pay but with a full tank of gasoline.