

Westford Wanderings

BY GORDON B. SEAVEY

Now that Hallowe'en has passed, we can talk about our local cemeteries without being ghoulish. If any person passing Fairview Cemetery in the eastern part of town on Sunday night saw or heard anything unusual emanating from the grey charcoal slate grava markers, or the white marble ones or the more later edition of granite, it surely must have been a hallucination.

But gravestones can really talk, though, particularly those of the 18th century which stand in eerie rows to mark the resting places of our ancestors. Some contain potty poetry, sometimes humorous, in addition to the age of the deceased and date of death. In the case of a woman, she was often referred to as the "relic" of so-and-son, if she had been married.

Besides meaning "a corpse", it was also used as an object venerated by the faithful because of its association with something saintly.

Mrs. Experience Parker was just such a person for on her well-preserved and excellently wrought cold slate there is a reference that she was a tender and loving mother of sixteen children!

Captain Jabez Keep (a name long missing in Westford) married for the second time Experience Lawrence of Littleton in 1740. Their seventh child was born in 1752 and carried the mother's name. How well she was named, therefore, for she was the one later to give birth to the 18 children mentioned above. She certainly must have had plenty of experience in raising a

family, for even in those times, the average family size was six.

This woman married at the age of 17 Hosea Hildreth and they had their first child the following year, in 1770, named Nathaniel. Then came Peda (Experience was also her name), Rhoda, Hosea and Ruth. The father died in 1776 and his widow then married Ebenezer Parker. The mother then was only 25.

Then came John, Ebenezer, Sarah, Rebecca, Jabez, Mary, Dorothy, Salome, Loammi and finally Eri who arrived in 1797. They picked most of the names from the Bible, but an "eerie" one appeared here and there. Did you count them all? My records missed one.

Most of these people in the 16-member family "removed" to Vermont, so unless one wishes to check with records in Cavendish or Plymouth, my story ends here.