

Westford Wanderings

By Gordon B. Seavey

Call yourself an "Old Timer" if you remember when the town operated a large set of weighing scales, located in the Center at the rear of the Spanish-American War cannon. Local farmers drove onto the platform to ascertain the weight of a load of hay they were selling or buying.

The fee was a pittance for this service and the weigher usually was nearby. Even Mary P. Bunce, the dainty but efficient librarian across the street, was a certified weigher, augmenting her meager librarian's yearly salary of \$500 by the fees.

Coal, a most popular fuel in addition to wood, was shipped in coal cars direct from the mines to local railroad sidings at Westford, Graniteville and Pine Ridge. At the Depot the certified weighers were the J. Willard Fletchers; at Graniteville, Frank, Arthur, Fred, J. Austin and John Healy; and at Pine Ridge, Eva and Ella Pyne (associated with the railroad), along with Dick Wright, Sherm Fletcher and

Fred Hartford. Upon arrival of the coal cars, local dealers had to shovel the coal by hand from the cars into short chutes which carried the fuel to outside coal pits alongside the sidings. Theft at that time was very limited.

Academy Students, riding from Forge Village in the Red "barge", the first forerunner to the present yellow buses now operating, usually (but not always) anticipated a thrill as driver Jack Gray with a burst of speed hit the hump-back bridge over the Red Line tracks at the junction of Cold Spring and Forge Village Roads. The abandoned railroad bed can be still observed in many areas along its former unprofitable route. It was called the "Red Line" because its tracks were usually rusty from lack of usage. Jack, a most affable person, doubled as station agent along the Stony Brook line.

The trustees of the Academy voted 120 years ago to appropriate a sum "not exceeding \$100

for 'Philosophic Apparatus' to be expended under the direction of the preceptor. Present principal Joseph List reports that this equipment (whatever it was) is not now in use! This was the period when the Academy held three terms per year. Tuition was but five dollars per term. A student could attend for half a term but the fee was upped to \$2.75. Yearly cost to taxpayers today is about \$1,900 per student.

Town Beaches are enjoying their usual influx of bathers, supervised by Red Cross guards, but this was not always so. There were several choice spots at the town's various natural swimming ponds where the men and boys would slip into the cooling waters au naturel. Girls never dared to invade these sanctuaries.

At Forge Pond however there was a swimming spot called the Girls Beach, at the rear of the Cameron School, where properly costumed girls bathed separately. It was rumored, however, that on a moonlit night there was some skinny dipping here, too.