

# Westford's early history reveals a rich blend of many people

By Gordon B. Seavey

Old records of Westford show its first settlers were of Anglo-Saxon stock, carrying such names as Keyes Prescott Chamberlain, Hildreth Wright and such

Mostly farmers, they found in the rounded Westford hills and its much meadows ideal grazing ground for their cattle and sheep. Besides the meat, the animals provided materials for clothing and leather for shoes and harnesses. Grains fed the tillers of the soil and the poultry skim milk went to the pigs.

With no other religious denomination represented it could be said that each and every one of these Puritans could claim to be full fledged WASPs - white Anglo-Saxon and Protestant.

First leader of the group, and probably most educated, was Rev Willard Hall. A graduate of Harvard College, as a young man was chosen in 1727 to take 'Pastoral Care' of the community which was a split-off of the old mother town of Chelmsford. He was considered a very knowledgeable agriculturalist. During his

nearly fifty years in the pulpit, he kept the flock together until the drums of the Revolution began to beat.

Zaccheus Wright, principal benefactor of the Academy was a tanner. Jonas Prescott and his several sons, millers and forgerman Fletcher was a surveyor. John Abbot a gentleman and Moses Thomas, a housewright (carpenter).

But among these stalwart Yankees appear the names of persons of a different color. They were blacks and listed as servants in the wealthier families, but possibly were slaves.

This subject is mentioned here because an old, faded clipping taken from a local attic shows there must have been considerable compassion for the well being of these minorities, wherever they may have lived.

Under an obituary notice is this death: In Medford, Rhoda Townsend, a woman of color, aged 25, the cause of her death is truly lamentable: It was occasioned by her clothes taking fire by the explosion of a cracker thrown at her on the first election

day."

Among the first mentioning of blacks in Westford, Rev Hall baptised on Nov 24, 1751 Sarah Tony and daughter Frances and the record goes on to say that Sarah was perhaps a servant in the family of Enoch Cleaveland. He lived near an old small mill site in Providence Meadow.

This area lies between Boston and Providence Roads, in the vicinity of the newer Crown and Drawbridge Roads. This area is no longer easily recognizable as most of the 'meadow' is now in home sites.

A small brook drains this region, joins Tadmuck Brook in the rear of Fairview Cemetery and ending in Stony Brook near Stony Brook Road.

Old timers, as boys, remember plugging the leaks in the little dam in the meadow so they could skate in early winter - or play in the waterfall with their home-made mill wheels. There was a little spot of land in the middle of this small pond called Tony's Island, which could be explored only by crossing on the ice.

## A Black Hero

A black man, who went down in history, was Caesar Bason, probably the servant of a James Burn. An anecdote was told of him. In the battle (of Bunker Hill) he found his powder was nearly gone and putting in his last charge, he exclaimed, 'Now Caesar give em one more! He

fired and was himself shot and fell back into the trench.

As for Indians in town, An drew who fished at the outlet of Forge is first identified. For a red coat and a gun he 'sold' his rights for the earliest mill on Stony Brook. Other old records show that the town took care of a red skin upon his death: "Pay to Leonard Parker one pound, ten shillings for nursing and taking care of the Indian, James Symonds, when he was sick at sd Parker's house, and the trouble of sd Indian's funeral when dead.

The site of his grave is not known. Not much respect for the Indians seems to have been in order. At their death they were not interred in the regular 'burying grounds,' but in isolated spots. The Indian population was extremely limited.

Information handed down through generations show there is at least one small Indian burial ground nearby. It is just off Beaver Brook Road in a far corner of a wooded area at the Littleton Westford line.

## Indian Burials

For the casual observer, there are no markers, no indications that there ever were burials here.

Westford now has three early public burying grounds. Fairview became first with the interment of Abram Wright who died in 1702. A small, rough boulder marks the spot. The West or Westlawn 'yard' is on Concord Ave and Hillside (or North) at Depot and Nutting Roads. Three formerly private cemeteries have been taken over by the town. Wright on Groton Road, established 1836, Keyes on Jonas Road and Parkerville at Carlisle and Old Lowell Roads.