

Westford's Frances Hill where it began

BY GORDON B. SEAVEY

WESTFORD — With the harvesting of apples, Westford's most lucrative agricultural crop, now under way, the Bicentennial Committee remembers that Frances Hill, where two big apple orchards are located, is "where it all began in Westford." That is where the newcomers first settled.

Solomon Keyes from Newbury in 1664 had a grant of land on the north side of Frances Hill, and "there he fixed his home, having married a Frances Grant." That's how the hill probably got its name, from her, although at times it has been spelled "Francis."

This all makes the Keyes family the first permanent settlers in Westford and there were sure a lot who followed!

And now the Drew and Anderson apple orchards spill over onto what probably was some of the Keyes land three centuries ago. Incidentally, one of the best views in town is from Frances Hill overlooking Stony Brook valley and the foothills of New Hampshire to the west.

AND SPEAKING of correct spelling, Nabnasset for many years sported two "t's," for what reason isn't clear. A century ago, the common spelling was "Nubanussuck." And now the area, most populous in town, is usually referred to as just a quick "Nab!"

Land was plentiful in those days and the inhabitants held their homesteads by actual appropriation from Nature.

Boundaries were loosely marked and even when Westford was incorporated in 1729, the act

"engrost" on Sept. 23 started with this description: Beginning at the South East Corner at a Heap of Stones, being the bounds between Chelmsford and the said Town of Westford (note spelling), thence running north to a chestnut tree marked and stones about it, so running on a straight line north to a tree marked at Coll Tyng's Farm," etc. It wasn't until 1744 that the town clerks began spelling Westford with a "t."

NO ONE TODAY mispronounces Westford, but many an old-timer still pronounces the neighboring town as "Chernpsford."

Although there have been several attempts to alter the boundaries of Westford, the only one that stuck was in 1730 when a triangular piece, the base of which was on the eastern shore of Forge Pond and the sharp point at Millstone Hill. This gave Westford 104 acres of the 212-acre pond, nearly dividing it equally with Littleton.