

# Woodlands 'tonic' turned ailing teen into long-lived local philanthropist

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WESTFORD — Dr. Benjamin Osgood, local practitioner of more than a century ago, deemed that a young daughter of Sherman D. and Augusta Fletcher was a bit peaked and needed to be outdoors much more to improve her health.

Osgood (no relation to the long line of Westford Osgoods) lived in the Center near the fire house and said he would continue to watch over the young lady.

This was done — and she lived to be 78.

The girl, a graduate of Westford Academy in 1859, was Emily Frances Fletcher. All her life, unfortunately, she wore the tab of "old maid." Like so many other young ladies of her period, the opportunities were few to mingle with persons of her own age, and she never married.

Miss Emily, however, left two legacies.

The first: during her long life in her native Westford, she was

intensely interested in the town, the First Parish Church and other community affairs. Her home was over the Wright & Fletcher store at the Center. During the winter, she heated a few rooms with coal stoves; the plumbing was old-fashioned. Her residence was located in the center of everything.

Her parents urged her to take the old doc's advice and to get out and roam the fields and woods. Here she became intimate with the birds, flowers and trees.

This interest in nature was developed as she grew older and stronger. She became an authority on local flora and fauna.

Miss Emily was especially fond of trees and worked for roadside plantings and natural beauty in public places.

## Another legacy

The second legacy was monetary. A gift of \$2,000 to the town (still more or less intact) was to

be used for lectures on natural history, travel and forestry. This was a sizable amount in 1923.

Over the years these lectures were popular. There was a great need for this type of education, especially when radio was in its infancy and television had not been introduced.

One of the best attended was a lecture by the eminent explorer, Dr. Bernard Hubbard, entitled "Oomiak Adventures in Artic Alaska." This was given in 1940 before schoolchildren in the afternoon and their elders in the evening.

Principal William C. Roudenbush of the Academy, a trustee of the fund, reported enthusiastic audiences of 500 and 300 respectively. The speaker's fee was \$250.

Miss Emily prepared most of the local species of birds and flowers for exhibit in glass cases, which were for many years in a separate room in the Fletcher Library. The exhibits deteriorated and the study cases are now used by the Westford Museum for other exhibits.

## Noted family

Miss Fletcher's brother was Sherman H. Fletcher, a partner in the local grocery business, and a "town father" in numerous ways. He was selectman for 25 years; postmaster for 20; Academy trustee for 42 years; manager of the Westford Water Co.; state legislator; active in Masonic circles and captain of Troop F, Spalding Light Cavalry for 11 years; also chairman of the library building committee.

The third member of the trio was Cornelia, married to George

T. Day, who lived almost next door. Mrs. Day also was active in town affairs. At the request of the Academy trustees, she compiled a general catalogue of the trustees, teachers and students from Aug. 6, 1792, to 1895. It was a monumental task for which she received no compensation and her assistant (at times) was paid 15 cents an hour.

Containing a biographical sketch of the teachers, the trustees and the students, this catalogue has provided a valuable historical record for a period of more than a century.

## Services appreciated

Westford lost three of its long-term, dedicated town servants in a single year — 1962.

They were Charles L. Hildreth who carried on his duties as town clerk for 51 years at his home; Charlotte Prescott Greig, who was town treasurer for 33 years, working first from her home and later as the only full-time employee at the Town Hall; and Albert A. "Bert" Hildreth, a cemetery commissioner for 18 years and custodian of the West Burying Ground.

It is to be noted that the cemetery commissioners last year, in deference to historical facts, approved the return to the original name of this old cemetery. It is the resting place of many Revolutionary and Civil War soldiers and their families, including that of Col. John Robinson, who led 130 local men and boys to Concord Bridge in 1775. In the interim, the name "Westlawn" has been used, for no other apparent reason than that it sounded good!