

Zaccheus Wright: prominent Westford civic leader of Revolutionary times

By GORDON B. SEAVEY

WESTFORD — Two centuries ago, two names were most prominent in Westford affairs. One was an outstanding military man; the other, a hardworking town leader who no doubt was a good balance wheel during the upsetting times and conditions of the Revolution.

Colonel John Robinson, already a military man, was destined to be the highest ranking officer at the fight at Concord Bridge. He went on to bring honors to himself, his town and infant country as an outstanding military figure who campaigned throughout the war.

The second man did his stint in the militia but made himself so useful during this period and many years to come as a town official that his name has ended up in history equal to that of Robinson.

This man was born in Westford in 1738 on his parents' farm at Chamberlin's Corner. Had he been born nine years earlier, his birthplace would have been recorded in Chelmsford for when Westford (then spelled Wesford) was set aside from the mother town, in 1729, part of his homeland was divided by the new town line.

His parents, Ebenezer and Deliverance, named their sixth child Zaccheus Wright. He was to have 11 brothers and sisters.

By coincidence, the name Zaccheus was to be appropriate. His parents operated a large and productive farm and could have been considered wealthy in comparison with many neighbors. His Biblical name also denotes generosity.

FROM THE BIBLE, Luke tells that Jesus made his way into Jericho where he noticed Zaccheus in a tree where the latter had climbed for a better view of the entry of Christ. He was superintendent of taxes and "very rich."

After their meeting he said to the Lord, "Here and now, sir, I give half my possessions to charity. and if I have cheated anyone, I am ready to repay him four times over."

Much of this proved true with the Westford namesake during his lifetime of three score and ten, plus two more.

In searching old town records, Wright's name appears in so many important places that its omission is felt. He was "conspicuous in town affairs, holding nearly every position within the gift of his fellow citizens." He was a selectmen for many terms as well as town clerk and justice of the peace. He was certain to be named to all important committees, including one to raise money and troops during the Revolutionary War.

He was honored in 1773, at age 35, to be a member of the church in full communion, a high position. When the third meetighouse was dedicated in 1794, he gave the church the huge Bible that was used in the recent 250th an-

niversary service of the parish. It was printed by Isaiah Thomas, the colonial firebrand, in his Worcester printshop.

NO DOUBT ONE of the better educated persons in town, he was interested in politics and often was a delegate to political conventions.

In 1777, he went to the House of Representatives for a term. Ten years later, he went again and served seven more terms.

No doubt well educated for the times, he helped organize the social library in town and was the moderator for the first meeting in 1797. Five years earlier, he has sparked the organization and founding of what was to be Westford Academy. At the head of the list was his name, along with John Abbot and Abel Boynton, each of whom has subscribed thirty

pounds. He also promised 300 more pounds. The sum raised was 976 pounds, so Wright's participation was more than one-third of the total. He served as the Academy's first president for 16 years.

Wright's service in the Revolutionary army was notable. Although he did not participate in the entire war, he was a captain in the Sixth Middlesex Regiment in 1776. He later transferred to the Second and served with this unit for 62 days at White Plains. He returned home, as a colonel, to concentrate on the affairs of his community.

HE IS SAID to have been a man of uncommon size weighing perhaps 250 pounds, yet active and agile, constantly superintending his farm, and capable, when occasion called, of "chasing a flock of sheep as nimbly as the most lithe and youthful of his hired men."