

Apple Blossoms, springtime tradition

BY GORDON B. SEAVEY

WESTFORD — The first peach blossom has opened here and in another week the apple trees, too, will be in full bloom.

This is a normal event which has occurred in New England each spring ever since John Endecott one of the first of the early governors of the Massachusetts Bay Colony brought apple seeds and trees to the New World, probably around 1629.

The glacial soil and the climate particularly in the areas of Middlesex and Worcester counties, seem to favor the growing of apples. They can be grown farther north than any other kind of fruit tree as the tree blooms in early May when the flowers or young fruit are not likely to be harmed by frost. Fruit farming in Westford and neighboring towns became a way of life more than a century ago. Peaches, pears and particularly apples became a valuable source of income as well as supplying fruit, cider and vinegar for the farm kitchen.

Nature started her own blossom festival by displaying pink edged white flowers 350 years ago. Westford officially took notice of the springtime parade of sweetly scented blossoms 45 years ago when it inaugurated its first Apple Blossom Festival. Other apple growing communities were to follow quickly.

A group of Westford growers, headed by

Mr. and Mrs. Arthur W. Perrins of the Old Homestead Orchards, organized the first local blossom festival in 1935.

The growers' purpose was two-fold. It was to announce the birth of a new season and their orchards were ready to put on an unmatched spectacle of blossoms which they wished to share with others. The other reason was to promote the sales of apples in other parts of the world.

A Queen to Govern

And of course there had to be an apple blossom queen.

Pretty Phyllis Wright, a student at Westford Academy, was the queen selected to reign during the town's first festival. She was crowned by Governor James M. Curley amidst ten acres of apple trees in the rear of the First Parish Meetinghouse.

The next year Mary Elizabeth Perrins received this honor and in 1937 it was Portia Prescott. All were daughters of well known Westford apple growers.

Mariboro was invited to participate in the 1939 program with Betty Rice as queen, and Groton joined the next year. The idea spread from Hampton, N.H. through parts of Worcester and Middlesex counties to Southboro.

The most elaborate event came with the 1949 Nashoba Apple Blossom Festival when

some 45 communities opened their orchards to visitors.

The center of festivities was in Leominster, birthplace of the legendary figure in American history Johnny Appleseed who had died a century earlier.

A character his real name was John Chapman. He was a strange mixture of plant nurseryman, herb doctor, minor military hero and religious enthusiast. He spent his life spreading and planting apple trees from New England to the Ohio River in the early 1800's.

Community Queens

One queen was chosen in each participating community for the Nashoba Festival and they held reign throughout the week of festivities. They visited with Governor Paul A. Dever at the State House. At Leominster they participated in block dancing in the streets, witnessed a doll carriage and bicycle parade and attended a prom.

On the final day there was a free showing in two theatres of a newly released movie "Melody Time" featuring Johnny Appleseed, plus a grand parade complete with floats, bands and marchers, with each queen receiving special honors.



REPRESENTING WESTFORD as Queen for the 1949 Nashoba Apple Blossom Festival was Patricia Burne. She is now Mrs. Philip S. Webber of Littleton.

Coronation Ball

The day closed with a pageant and the coronation of Queen Nashoba X. She was Jacqueline Ewing of Littleton, a secretary in Cambridge and the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. W. Henry Ewing. She received her crown from Lt. Gov. C. F. Jeff Sullivan.

Eileen Walsh of Groton and Dorothy Gosler of Leominster were alternates. Joseph Kelly, director of the New England farm and food radio program, was a judge.

While reigning the queens were dressed alike in pink and green with white shoes with low heels, but for the final ball they wore gowns of their own choosing.

Other contestants were: Ann Lorraine Ballard, Acton; Elsie Heikkila, Ashby; Janis Worth, Ayer; June Stone, Berlin; Janet Steele, Boxboro; Joan Duggan, Clinton; Doris Cormier, Fitchburg; and Peggy Brush of Harvard.

Also, Janet Linnenkemper, Lancaster; Peggy Foster, Lunenburg; Helen Ryan, North Brookfield; Carol Tobey, Sherbourne; Ruth Gould, Sterling; Arlene Larsen, Stow; and Patricia Burne, Westford.

Harvard will have its annual celebration this Saturday. Westford will follow a week later with a parade and other events on May 17. A program now sponsored by Kiwanis.