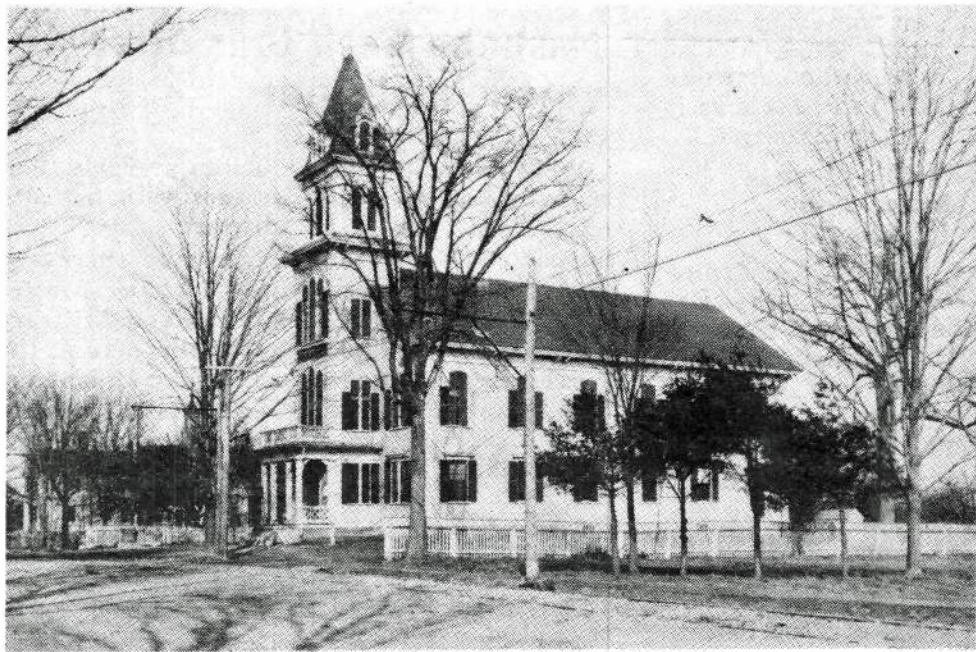


WESTFORD

We Welcome Your News Of The Town



WSFD-WESTFORD TOWN HALL, as it appeared in 1910 with its white picket fence where horse and wagons were tied. Lower floor for town meetings and a couple of offices. Upper floor held a maple dance floor and stage for theatricals. Note the poles carrying power to the street car line from the Center to Brookside, then change for North Chelmsford. The car line, not a financial success, was opened in 1907 and abandoned in 1920. (Photo courtesy G.B. Seavey)

Memories: A salute to former town officials

by Gordon B. Seavey

WSFD—As a native son of Westford, I approve of the benefit from the town meeting principle of government for the small community.

I have admired many of the men and women who were either elected or appointed to serve their fellow townspeople, many without or perhaps with token remuneration. It saddens me at times that many of these public spirited people are soon forgotten for their past services.

Old timers in particular will remember many "town servers" of the past and the accomplishments made by

them. Here are just a few:

Ben Drew, well known orchardist and a member of an old Westford family who had taken part in the community over the years, served with humor, dignity and knowledge as town moderator for 26 years. He passed on earlier this month at the age of 79. Preceding him as moderator was Senator Herbert E. Fletcher who banged the gavel in the same post for 23 years. Everyone called him Senator after he served in that elective post in the State House for a term.

Dr. Cyril Blaney was a character. While practicing medicine (one of two doctors in town) he had no problem being elected a selectman. Although often controversial, for

five terms he held that office, along with being on the Board of Health for 31 years. Doc Blaney loved all sports and were he alive today would be a very good customer for the Mass. lottery. Hilda Isles Bosworth, chief operator at the local telephone exchange, always knew where to find Doc, in emergency, at one of several of his card playing spots.

Oscar R. Spalding, an oversized, jolly person whose business was lumbering, was selectman for a score of years. For many years there was the team of Oscar, Frank L. Furbush and Sherm Fletcher.

Charles L. Hildreth, a law clerk in a Lowell legal office, perhaps made the longevity list as a town official. He served as

town clerk for past a half century until his death in 1966. A popular person was Bert A. Hildreth, cemetery commissioner for 18 years. Many today remember riding with him in the horse-drawn "barge" or later in a grey and blue school bus.

He was captain

Sherman Heywood Fletcher was "Mr. Westford" during the early years of this century from his post at the Center's Wright & Fletcher store where one would gather in early evenings after the late afternoon mail arrived. He was selectman for 25 years and postmaster (in Republican years only) for 18 years.

Called "Sherm" by everyone, he received his title "Captain" through his long association with Troop F, Spalding Light Cavalry Association. Its headquarters were at the abandoned Center grade school on Boston Road, taken over later by the Tadmuck Club and now a senior citizens' hangout. He was a figure greatly missed when he died in 1928, age 81.

William E. Frost, for whom the Center school is named, was principal of Westford Academy, died at his school desk, ending a career in 1904 of 32 years. He was succeeded by William C. Roudenbush, a dedicated and well-respected understanding teacher, who retired after 25 years. He lived a kindly, moderate life, which lasted until he was 97.

The reader probably has noted that not one woman has been mentioned as having held a town post. Women's lib was still in the dark ages around World War I time. For example, not a single office was held by a

woman in 1916, although I could name a dozen or so of ladies who were most capable. Sometimes a woman would be elected to a post on the library or school committees.

There were strong women teachers, but as far as they reached an authoritative position was perhaps principal of a four-room elementary school.

It is true that Alice Howard served as a trustee among men as trustees of the J.V. Fletcher Library, with May E. Day as the librarian at a meagre salary. Veronica Meagher was public health nurse but that was only natural.

Even the lowly post of clerks as polling booths were all men, a system which now has been reversed.

Woman town treasurer

The post of town treasurer became vacant in 1925 and Mrs. Perley E. Wright became the first woman in that position. The position became available again in 1929, the beginning of the Great Depression. It was then Charlotte Prescott Greig, a quiet dedicated woman, stepped forward. It was not her first town job as she served as acting town accountant during World War I.

Mrs. Greig worked alone in the cavernous town hall and her compensation was \$500, cut 10% later by the Depression.

Mrs. Greig kept the post for 33 years, often carrying material home to process at nights or weekends.

Duties of the treasurer-tax collector then were pretty much as they are: Collect funds owed the town, keep financial records and oversee trust funds, review employee time slips and prepared payroll checks.

She also arranged temporary loans with banks. It was well known among the financial institutions that she would "fight to get the last dollar" for the town.

During the long term of service, the salary had been upped to \$3,380 per annum, even though some 1 1/2 million dollars were passing through her hands.

Mrs. Greig's background was rather unique. A graduate of Westford Academy in 1886, she attended Colby College. Her first job was to become the sole teacher in tiny Sandown, N.H. schools. At the start of each term, the school shifted to a different location as students came from long distances and these moves equalized travelling long distances.

One year of teaching in a rural school was enough for strong-willed Charlotte. She returned to Westford to attend Lowell Commercial Col-

lege, studying bookkeeping, shorthand and typing for two years. Thus she was well-trained for the demanding job of town treasurer for over three decades. She died New Year's Day in 1968 at age 81.

[Gordon Seavey is a native Westford and lives on D. He was well acquainted with people of whom

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