

Benjamin Drew, apple grower, former Moderator, dies at 79

By Gordon B. Seavey

Memorial services were held Sunday in the chapel at Dartmouth College for Benjamin W. Drew, a noted horticulturist and Westford town moderator for 26 years. He died the previous Wednesday at the age of 79 at his home in Vershire, Vermont, following a visit to Westford the same day. Two days earlier, he had been seen walking his former orchard land, picking peaches.

A member of one of Westford's oldest families, Mr. Drew was nationally and internationally known for his expertise in growing apples. He was a past president of the National Apple Institute.

He and his wife Sally had moved to Vermont in 1973, but many here will remember them and their five children living in a Colonial gem, the J. Henry Read farm on lower Main Street. The Drews were particularly active in the Couples Club affiliated with the First Parish

Church, United, where his parents and grandparents worshipped. His aunt, A. Mabel Drew, was responsible for electrifying the clock in the edifice's steeple.

At 70 Boston Road, a Drew homestead was built by Mr. Drew's grandfather in 1865. It is now the real estate Westford office of DeWolfe. This is of typical Victorian style main house with an ell, to which is attached a small barn for the family horse, buggy and hayloft.

Farming as a business

A graduate of Dartmouth, where he was president of the Class of 1932, and majoring in economics, Mr. Drew knew that he could mix economics with modern farming. His father, George A. Drew, an early graduate of Mass. Agricultural College (1897), already owned the Read property which had been in the ownership of that family since early Colonial days and was a grant from the King of England.

The young college graduate rolled

up his sleeves upon graduation and learned about horticulture from his dad. Thirteen years later he took over the management of the property which had been converted from dairying to growing apples and pears.

The Drews put all their efforts into expanding the farming lands, taking over the Osgood farm next door. Step by step, from a retail stand beneath a tree, two roadside stands were constructed as retail outlets for their other products, which by this time included peaches, berries, grapes, plums and other farm fruits.

Farmers in Westford long had brought their apples to the Read farm for grinding and pressing into fresh cider. Mr. Drew threw out the antiquated equipment and designed and installed a new mill, using stainless steel, plastic pipe lines, sterilization and refrigeration