

# Early generic papers acted as recorders of small town news

By Gordon B. Seavey

Until the *Westford Eagle* came into being, the townsfolk got their hometown news from the Low ell Courier Citizen and Fred W. Hartford, genial grocery clerk (and later state representative when the towns in a gentlemen's agreement rotated the seat) at

## Commentary

Wright & Fletcher's store at the common.

The other paper which catered to surrounding towns was published in Ayer by the Turner family for many years. Typical of small town publishers in early days was to own a series of newspapers, all of which contain the same news but the heading was changed for each community.

As the old flatbed, hand-fed presses were grinding out the weekly edition, periodically it would be stopped so the pressman could change the heading, or "flag" to cover the subscription list pertaining to each community.

Thus, the Westford edition was called the *Westford Wardsman*; Ayer, the *Public Spirit*, and, for the neighboring town, the *Groton Landmark*.

Westford news was always carried on page two and was placed under a small heading, simply "Westford". Social items were car-

ried simply as one paragraph at a time.

However, if something big like a fire, town meeting or death of a prominent person occurred, a one-line heading the same type but in bold face, started off the story.

When I was a boy, Mrs. Leonard Wheeler was the local correspondent, and from old faded copies it would seem that she really had to scratch for news.

For example, here's an item around 1910 concerning the ill's of my older brother. Under the general heading, in small but bold type, "About Town", appeared this sensational event for perpetuity: "Little Morton Seavey had his tonsils removed Monday at Lowell General Hospital. The sturdy little 'Major' was soon up and about, doing just fine."

In 1916, the sale of one of the town's oldest and largest apple and fruit farms, the Old Homestead on Depot Street, by William R. Carver to an Englishman by the name of G. Henry Cadman, caused editor Turner to affix this little heading: "Real Estate Change".

Imagine an Englishman knowing anything about growing apples was the general comment.

I saw the earliest copy put out by George Turner, Vol. 1, No. 1, dated May 13, 1869, Groton Junction (now Ayer). This advertisement caught my eye as it showed what was manufactured by the Forge Village Horse

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Nail Co. using water power from Forge Pond. The copy read: "Hammered Horse, Ox and Mule Nails, made wholly by hammers from the best Norway iron."

Gordon B. Seavey, a native of Westford, was publisher of the Belmont Citizen for over 30 years. He was well-acquainted with the Turner family.