

History shows townspeople blessed with longevity

We are bombarded with TV shows and statistics reminding us that people today are living longer.

A feature of the Today TV show is the showing of persons from all parts of the country a century or more in age. Chants in newspaper and magazine articles explain the reasons why people do live longer and our senior citizens greatly outnumber those of generations of the past.

But in spite of the hardships and limited medical attention available to local folks many generations ago, it would be difficult to beat a record

set by one Miriam Keyes, second wife of Deacon Samuel Fletcher, who died March 1, 1869, at the age of nearly 103, lacking three days.

Sam lived on one of the town's most productive farms in the western part of the town abutting Beaver Brook. His father, Captain Sam who died in 1780, lived in the garri-son house on the property.

The farm has now been turned into a housing development off Harvard Road.

The deacon's first wife was Lucy Jones, who in contrast was only 30 years old when she died in 1784. Sam lasted a full 85 years, a good record in those days.

With slate markers designating each burial place in the old West Burying Ground on Concord Avenue, they rest among many of the early settlers, including Col. John Robinson, who farmed in the good soil of the West Precinct.

Many will remember Ruth Fisher,

the youngest of the Alvin Fisher family, who was the initial principal at the William E. Frost School when it opened in 1908. For her retirement she built a cottage at 16 Depot Street, not far from her birthplace. She was nearly 102 years old when she died in 1978.

And there was Wayland F. Balch, who died in 1937 at the age of 98, lacking three months.

Gordon B. Seavey