

# Landmark changes hands

By Gordon B. Seavey

A local landmark, known for generations as the "Old Homestead Farm," has changed ownership.

Located at 21 Depot Street, at a crest of Tadmuck Hill, the property commands a wide-angle view northward to the foothills in New Hampshire. It was here that Westford's first Apple Blossom Festival was launched.

Purchasers of the historic homestead are James and Shirley Gifford, formerly of Chelmsford.

For the past decade, the property was occupied by Mr. and Mrs. Richard H. Hubbell and family, who have moved to the A.G. Pollard mansion in Lowell.

The Old Homestead was one of the first of the apple orchards in town, which previously had been known for its small fruits and berries. Although not the larger of apple orchards, it did contain nearly 30 acres on land with ideal growing conditions for apple culture—good soil, sufficient moisture and high elevation to protect blossoms from early spring frosts.

William Kittredge owned the farm in 1860, which passed on to his son, William L. Kittredge.

The original house, estimated to be two centuries old, was enlarged when another house was attached. A combination barn and carriage shed still remain but the great main barn has been demolished.

Most of the farm's land was put into apples in the late 1800's when William L. Kittredge opened many acres of farm and forest lands for growing what was to be his main crop, Westford apples. Only a few trees remain, sadly neglected.

Farming was carried on here later by George H. Cadman during World War I. In 1927, he sold to William C. Harrington and W. Arthur Perrins, soldier buddies.

Under the management of the duo, the "Old Homestead" brand of apples and by-products became popular, and the

Perrins are credited with inaugurating the annual apple blossom festival.

The custom continues with parades and the crowning of an apple blossom queen early each May. Kiwanis now sponsors the event which had been the idea of numerous apple growers in the area.

William Woods, at one time manager of the Old Homestead, later became a partner in Colley-Woods, a Boston fruit and vegetable commission outfit in the Faneuil Hall area. He lived in the Dr. Osgood colonial house next to the Town Hall, now the site of the fire station.

The concern's old sign is preserved under the center dome of the Quincy Hall Market in Boston.

All farming ceased at the Old Homestead when the town purchased more than 20 acres as a site for a new six-year school. The price was \$30,000 which many thought at the time as "astronomical."

The new school opened in the fall of 1955, still under the name of Westford Academy.

The fourth Academy building, to compensate for the growth of the community, was built on Patton Road in 1973 as a four-year high school. It's former home was kept in use as the Abbot Middle School, a companion to the Norman E. Day Middle School between Forge Village and Graniteville.

The new owners of the Old Homestead already have taken an interest in community affairs. James Gifford is a principal software engineer with Wang and originally came from Albany, N.Y.

His wife, Shirley, a native of Omaha, since coming east has been interested in local history and has written two historical books geared toward youngsters.

Their children are Olivia, who just turned nine and is a student at Frost School, and Matthew, 5, in kindergarten at Cameron.

*[Gordon Seavey, a native of Westford, was publisher-owner of the Belmont Citizen for 35 years. He is active in the affairs of Westford Museum.]*