

Scholarship fund traces to tragic death

By Gordon B. Seavey

Today the automobile is the cause of many deaths of young people. Back in 1857, riding the front end of a locomotive was the cause of the death of one of the town's promising young men, Julian Abbot, son of Mr and Mrs John William Pitt Abbot.

As the result of this disaster, his parents designated a sizeable sum of money for a memorial in young Julian's memory, a fund to provide school books and materials for needy Academy students

The need for these particular items is no longer necessary as this item is provided in the school budget. Now, by note of the trustees, the proceeds from Julian's fund is among the annual scholarships.

The accident is described in a faded clipping from the "Lowell Daily Journal & Courier"

passed along by H. Arnold Wilder, the town's well-known railroad buff:

"As the 9 a.m. train neared Billerica Mills yesterday, the train hit a hand-car with tools on it Mr Julian Abbot of Westford, who was riding on the engine with the engineer, had one of his legs mangled when the locomotive was thrown violently off the tracks into a stone wall.

"Abbot died this morning. No passengers were injured The cars were thrown from the tracks and dragged several rods. Cause carelessness of the two men on the hand car.

"Said Abbot was not employed on the engines, therefore no blame was attached to the Boston & Lowell Railroad Co "

Why was Julian riding on the front of a locomotive, a privilege most youngsters of that day would envy? His father was president of the Stony Brook Railroad Co. is the answer, suggests Wilder.

The accident happened on the last day of the year. Abbot was only 20 years old. And what a sad holiday season for Lawyer Abbot and his family.

Rough times happen to the rich as to the poor. John Fletcher Abbot, who lived with his parents in an 18-room mansion overlooking the common, died of influenza a few days after his eighteenth birthday, on Dec 13, 1916. It was at the height of the epidemic which mowed down people of all ages during World War I.

He was called Fletcher (his mother's family name), was a good sport and "one of the boys" like his father, Jack, who mingled with the townspeople and employees of the Abbot Worsted Company. Old timers remember fondly the father and son who were so closely knit.

Gordon Seavey is a Westford native and retired newspaper publisher