

A natural Apple Blossom history

By June W. Kennedy

It was on Sunday, May 19, 1935, that the first Apple Blossom Festival was held with Phyllis Wright of Westford crowned as Apple Blossom Queen. In describing the first festival, the program started with a poem:

"An old New England Orchard is a pleasant place to be,

"An old New England Orchard in the Spring.

"The trees are giant nosegays, the merry breeze is sweet,

"With birds and bees and happiness a-swing."

It continued: "Many old New England Orchards will be a fairyland of bloom. Trees will display their gorgeous great pink bouquets for all who care to see. A wonderful fragrance will fill the air and come floating on the breeze to passers-by who will draw in deep breaths of this intoxicating perfume.

"The busy hum of the bees will be heard as they fly their way to and from the blossoms carrying the fertile pollen and burying themselves deep in the heart of the lovely pink and white petals. Sharp eyes may catch the flash of a bluebird's wing as it sweeps a juicy morsel to carry home to the nest of hungry little ones..."

This was enough to attract hundreds to enjoy Westford's first festival. In addition, the governor of the commonwealth, Honorable James M. Curley,

came out from Boston to crown the queen. The celebration was held at the Whitney Playground on Main Street.

"Mother, who was a staunch Republican, was invited to entertain and house the Governor at the first Apple Blossom Festival," remembered Elizabeth Carver McKay.

"We teased her a lot about that. However, Mother was the first one to say, that without a doubt, James Michael Curley was a charmer."

Arthur Perrins Jr. and William Wright of Westford were the festival originators. The towns of Acton, Ayer, Chelmsford, Concord, Groton, Harvard, Hudson, Lincoln, Littleton, Stow and Westford were eligible to select a contestant for Apple Blossom Queen.

The program of events from the 1936 celebration reflects a gala event with town-wide support. Included in activities were band concerts given by the Abbot Worsted Company, the Governor's address, the Nashoba Apple Blossom Queen's Ball, an old-fashioned dance, the Royal Procession and the Pageant.

Heading the procession was the Spirit of Nashoba, a young Taos Indian girl followed by Flower Girls, the Queen, Train Bearers, the Crown Bearer and Maids of Honor. Attendants to the Queen were representatives from surrounding towns — "Miss Ayer", "Miss Concord", etc.

An elaborate Dance Festival highlighted the Pageant. Costumes were designed by townspeople, and once again the Abbot Worsted Band furnished the music. Eventually the festivals were held in some of the surrounding towns. For many years the tradition was not carried on.

The 1936 festival program dramatically stated: "The Nashoba fruit belt, consisting of some 38 towns and villages in Worcester and Middlesex counties, has ample right to maintain the apple blossom festival as an annual event since for nearly 200 years it has been a small but important fruit growing locality. The industry is as valuable as the display is beautiful.

"Middlesex County alone has 600,000 apple trees and another 200,000 cherry, peach, plum and quince trees producing two million bushels of fruit each year. It, too, has 400 acres of small fruits; blackberries, cranberries, currants, gooseberries, raspberries and strawberries which supply the market with over a million quarts yearly.

"Worcester County produces approximately the same amount of fruit, and so the Nashoba fruit belt, less than one twentieth of the state's area in size, produces two-thirds of Massachusetts' fruit."

Experts in apple culture testify that certain apple varieties thrive best in localities nearest



Photos courtesy June W. Kennedy

The first Apple Blossom Festival program (above, left) featured a picture of Phyllis Wright, who reigned as queen in 1935. By 1949, the festival program (above, right) reflected a change in emphasis of the annual spring affair, with a court of beauties drawn from surrounding apple-growing towns: (seated) Jacqueline Ewing, Littleton; Patricia Burne, Westford; (standing) Janet Steele, Boxborough; Peggy Brusck, Harvard; Elsie Heikkila, Ashby; Lorraine Ballard, Acton; Eileen Walsh, Groton.

the northern limit in which they can be grown. This rule gives Nashoba a commanding advantage for the Macintosh, which is produced in a narrow strip of land running northwest from Massachusetts Bay. The climatic

conditions, the glaciated soil, the rolling hills, giving both air and soil drainage make this an ideal apple district.

With the revival of the Apple Blossom Festival in the late 60s, Westford this year once again

shares in celebrating the beauty of its natural surroundings.

June W. Kennedy is a Westford resident and author of "Westford Recollections", a series of historical vignettes and photos.