

Apple Blossom Festival

On Sunday, May 19, 1935, the first Apple Blossom Festival was held with Phyllis Wright of Westford crowned as Apple Blossom Queen. A description of the first festival began 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 wasy enough to attract hundreds to enjoy Westford's first festival. In addition, they had the Governor of the Commonwealth, Honorable James M. Curley, out to crown the Queen. The celebration was held at the Whitney Playground.



An old photo shows Westford at its prettiest...with an apple tree in bloom and a rambling fieldstone wall to frame the orchard. (From the WESTFORD RECOLLECTIONS Series)



Miss Phyllis Wright was crowned the first Apple Blossom Queen by the then Governor James Michael Curley. The year was 1935. Several towns participated when festivals were first held. (From the WESTFORD RECOLLECTIONS Series)

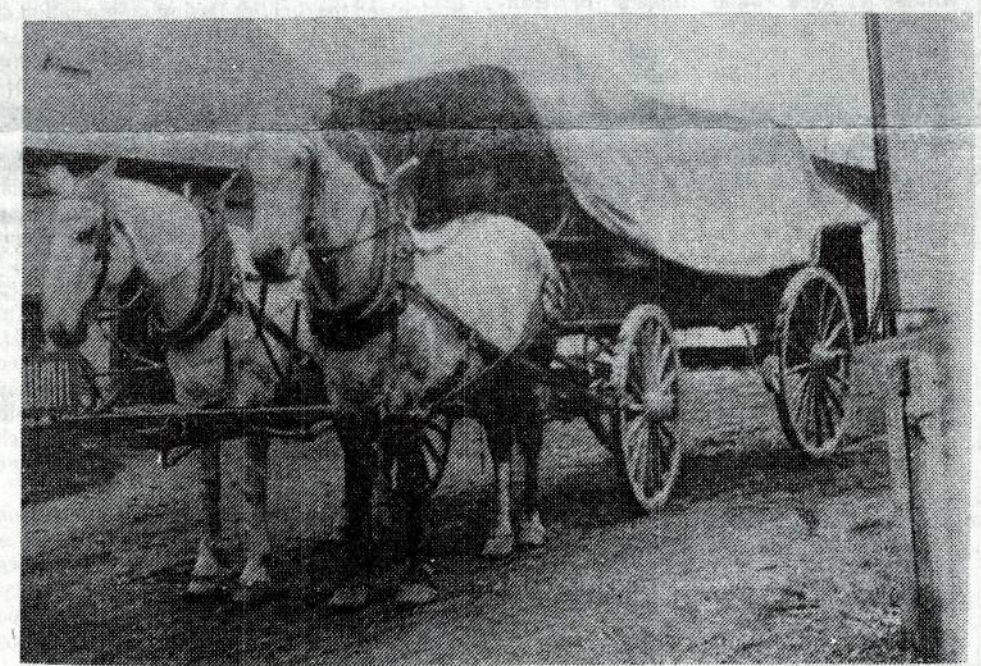
"Mother, who was a staunch Republican, was invited to entertain and house the Governor at the first Apple Blossom Festival," remembers Elizabeth Carver McKay. "We teased her a lot about that. However, Mother was the first one to say, that without a doubt, James Michael Curley was a charmer."

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 the surrounding towns. For many years the tradition was discontinued.

"The Nashoba fruit belt, consisting of some thirty-eight towns and villages in Worcester and Middlesex counties, has ample right to maintain the Apple Blossom Festival as an annual event since for nearly two hundred 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 six hundred thousand apple trees and another two hundred thousand cherry, peach, plum, and quince trees producing two million bushels of fruit each year. It, too, has four hundred 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." (Excerpt from the 1936 program.)

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



This canvas covered wagon load of apples is ready to be hauled into Faneuil Hall Market...and ready to do the hauling is this fine team of horses, Punch and Judy. Many small fruits and apples were brought from Westford to sell at the Boston markets. (A McKay photo from the WESTFORD RECOLLECTIONS Series)

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 60's, Westford shares in celebrating the beauty of its natural surroundings. May there always be cause to celebrate!

"You Will Know Them By Their Fruits"

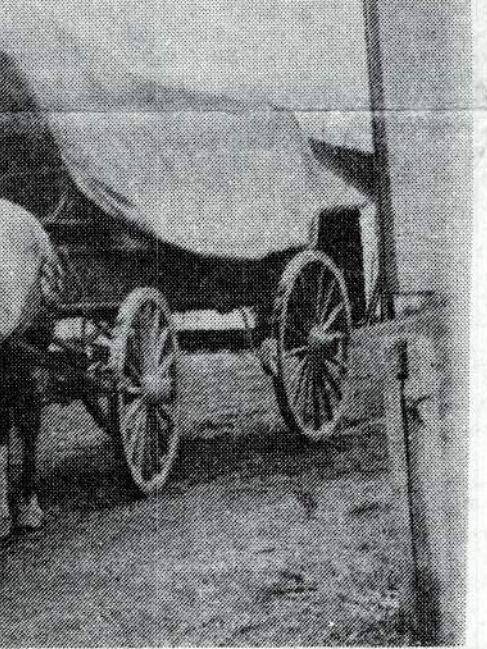
"The true aroma of any fruit comes from the life of it - life drawn from the sunshine, the showers, the air and the soil of its own locality." Westford has always been known as a fruit town, not only for its many orchards, but for its acres and acres of small fruits, raspberries, blackberries and strawberries, even grapes and currants. It was called the Blackberry Town of

Massachusetts, with often as many as 400 bushels or crates of blackberries a day going over the road by horse and wagon to the Boston Market.

It was a good source of income for the mothers and the children - especially for the children; they could buy new clothes when they went back to school in the fall. Many folks recalled having picked berries from the day school let out till it opened.

Allister MacDougall recalls: "In picking berries our biggest hope was to pick 100 boxes a day. If we could pick a 100 boxes at 2 cents a quart that meant \$2.00 for our day's work. It was a big day when we could do that. Usually it was much less. Blackberries and strawberries were picked by the quart; raspberries by the pint. If you got up to seventy-five boxes of raspberries at 2 cents a box, you did well."

From the accounts of May E. Day, it appears that a little competition in the number of boxes filled lessened the monotony of the picking! "Monday, August 13, 1906 - Got up about 5. Had a plate of beans and a cucumber. Mamma hurried me off. She started about 5 min. before I did, but I got there before she commenced picking. I picked 25. Mamma 25. Mrs. S. 19. Once Mamma was a box ahead of me. Gained on Mrs. S. Wednesday, July 25, 1906 - Mamma and I went up to Mr. Wheeler's. Each picked 16 boxes. Commenced 10 minutes to 8 - got done by 12 and ate our dinner too. Monday, August 6, 1906 - Hot. Picked 62 boxes of berries. Went 10 minutes of six. Mamma picked 57. Mrs. S. 54." Both the berries and the native apples were packed into crates. Usually these were brought to the platform of the store that was next to the library. Several men in town made a business of hauling the produce from Westford into Faneuil Hall Market. A farmer could bring one or several crates of fruit to this platform for delivery to the Commission Houses in Boston. Each load would



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carry from 150 - 200 bushels. A canvas covered the load.

Some nights there would be three or four two-horse loads. At 4:30 or 5:00 in the afternoon, the teamsters would begin filling the wagons. They'd try to be on their way by 6:00, arriving in Boston anywhere from 2:00 a.m. to 5:00 a.m. in morning. There were two common routes. The longer, though more level of the two passed through the edge of Littleton, to Acton, Concord,

Lincoln, Brighton and on to the Market. The other route was through the hills of Carlisle to Bedford, Lexington, Arlington, Cambridge and on to Boston. Because there were three hills between Carlisle and Bedford, making it a hard pull for the teams, this route was more popular for the trip home when only empty crates were carted. The teamsters arrived back in Westford about 4:00 p.m. the next afternoon and would sleep that night at home. The following day they'd head for Boston again.

This is Article No. 28 in the continuing WESTFORD RECOLLECTIONS - 250th Anniversary Series.