

Before supermarket shopping, Westford had home delivery

By June W. Kennedy

Long before the advent of the supermarket, small general stores saw to the needs of Westford residents. Shopping at locations throughout the town, customers could purchase necessities and niceties alike, or arrange for home delivery.

In interviews conducted in the 1970s, oldtimers carried nostalgic recollections of these stores. The man responsible for reviving a once-abandoned store next to the J.V. Fletcher Library on Main Street, retired shopkeeper Ben Prescott, said, "It was in 1933 that I left the so-called J.M. Fletcher Store and rented from Mr. Seavey the old abandoned store next to the library. Several store owners had come and gone over the years. For a while it housed a shoe-fix and barber shop. I carried the E.E. Gray chain with me."

Elizabeth Bosworth Field recalled: "When I was just a girl, I went over to Ben's store wearing my brushed wool lavender dress. I remember standing against the pot-bellied stove, hanging on one foot, then the other, delighting in being told how pretty I looked. However, I learned a lesson in vanity, for I soon discovered that I'd burned a hole in the back of my pretty new dress."

Meanwhile, it was in 1933 that Austin Fletcher bought the J.M. Fletcher property and set up the Red and White Store. It operated until 1958.

Austin recalled that it was during the Depression under Roosevelt's Administration that the W.P.A. put in the sidewalk curbing. The store piazza then had to be removed, for the sidewalk ran underneath it.

In addition to the line of groceries, there was a soda fountain complete with tables and wire-back chairs. Ice cream was sold in bulk and also by the dish, sandwiches were available. Wright True King was the biggest customer.

Several other stores dotted the Westford countryside at the century's turn; some dated well into the 20th century. Old Bill Blodgett's Store in Granville evoked fond memories for Dick Hall as he recalled the much-coveted Daisy Air Rifles and BB guns in the display window — or maybe that lead pencil or piece of licorice candy



Photo courtesy June W. Kennedy

The Seavey family property housed a procession of businesses before Ben Prescott rented the frame building for his E.E. Gray chain store in 1933. The building once located next to the J.V. Fletcher Library on Main Street is long gone, a victim of fire.

Blodgett came out once a week, recalled Alice Collins. "He'd talk over the happenings in town with Mother or Dad. Always, he'd carry his pencil, paper and books. Mother would tell what she wanted "and how much is it?" He'd deliver in the afternoon.

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days. That was one thing that was good. Mother had soft and easy times when it came to marketing. Now I have to take the horse — I mean car — and go to Donelan's, buy stuff and bring it back," she said.

"It was like heaven to walk into Mary Haley's Dry & Fancy Goods,"

said Vivian Smith. "You could buy ten things for 10¢ — chickens, lead soldiers, animals."

Parker's Market over the line in South Chelmsford had peanut butter weighed and rolled in wax paper. "You took it home just like meat," recalled Ruth Johnson.

Many frequented Spinner's Store in Forge Village. At one point it sported the only gas pump in town, plus small notions, tobacco, ice-cream — a good spot to share the village news.

Joe LeClair's holds still more tales for scores of Forge Villagers. Hanley's at the Old Forge Tavern offered cloth, yarn, notions and lots of candy for a penny.

When just a lad of 15, Allister MacDougall used to pump his bicycle from Westford center down to Chamberlain's Store in Forge arriving at 6:30 a.m., in time to sweep out before the 7 a.m. opening time. The store closed at 8 p.m., but not 'til 10 p.m. on Saturday. This job paid \$6.50 a week.

"Customers on the delivery route were friendly people," he recalled. "The Blodgetts, who lived on the corner of Dunstable and Tenney roads, offered a New England boiled dinner every Thursday. It was 25¢ and boy was it good!"

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