

# Early days of Westford's postal service filled with memories of special delivery

By June W. Kennedy

**T**hrough the inspiration of a Pomona Grange lecture, the first mail route in Westford was established in 1904 with Frank C. Wright as carrier. Mileage, necessary to establish the route, was measured on a tandem bicycle. The circumference of the wheel was determined and a string tied to the spoke. Someone counted revolutions!

R.F.D. No. 2 for the north end of town was established in 1905 with Westford Grange Brother Samuel H. Balch as carrier.

Without television, radio, CD's and other means of entertainment and communication, surely the arrival of the mail carrier highlighted the day for the Westford folk of yesteryear. Imagine the thrill of the holiday season when delicate cards of greeting arrived from family and friends.

There are always a few tales unique to every job or occupation. Some Westford residents shared their tales unique to every job or occupation. Some Westford residents shared their tales with me during the bicentennial years:

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LOOKING NOTHING LIKE the familiar mail carrier's jeep, this horse drawn vehicle driven by Westford Grange Brother Samuel H. Balch carried mail to R.F.D. No. 2 in the north end of town beginning in 1905. One can only wonder about the effect of harsh winter weather on rural mail delivery in its early days.

(Courtesy June Kennedy's "Westford Recollections")

## Memories of special deliveries

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**George Goucher:** "Back in the 20's and 30's when the town was small, there was allowance for some personal touches along the mail route. Oftentimes when I had elderly people on my run, I would dash in with the paper and mail. One time, I remember, a man was sick in bed so I went out in his barn to fetch some wood for his stove. I noticed the cellar door was open when I returned, so I inquired, 'Is the Mrs. all right?'"

"'Yep,' he replied, 'Just downstairs getting some preserves.' She could have had an accident you know."

"Another time, just up the hill from Whitney's garage on Main Street, an old lady handed me a bouquet tied in string [wildflowers from her garden]. She asked, 'Would you take this up to so and so?' I did, but really wasn't supposed to take anything that didn't have postage on it. I recall one day J.M. Fletcher over at the P.O. handed me the 'awfulest' smelling pouch to which I responded, 'Do I have to take this with me all day on the route?'"

"'Yes,' he replied, 'up to Long-Sought-For [Pond]. Turned out it was hornpout sent from Maine to a brother or cousin in order to prove its length. Phew!'"

**Austin Fletcher:** "My grandfather, Charles Whidden, was the station agent back around 1910 or 11. He'd carry the mail up the hill from the Depot to Westford Center and then carry more back down to the train. He drove a 3-seated wagon and could carry as many as five or six passengers from the train to the center. The P.O. at the depot was called Cold Spring. One day as Grandfather pulled into the depot, a man who had just missed the train asked where the next stop was. Grandfather kindly told him and when he came back out of the station discovered the man had taken off with his horse and wagon. But the old mail horse was smart. When his kidnapper left him, he just headed for home and barn. That's where Grandfather found him!"

"I remember when Mr. Frank Bannister down on Lowell Road would go for the mail. He'd ride horseback uptown and bring the

mail down to the train. That was back in the teens."

**Norman Nesmith:** "'Going back prior to the time of Rural Free Delivery, mail for the Parkerville residents came from the P.O. or Nashoba which was located at the Carlisle station or depot [at the intersection of routes 225 and 27] on the Framingham and Lowell Railroad. Mrs. Jones, Nashoba, Mass., was the proper address for the area. When just a boy, my father, Harry Nesmith of Parkerville, daily hitched his team of horses to a wagon or sled and picked up the milk from the immediate area and took it to the depot for delivery into Boston."

"Not only did he collect the milk, but he also picked up empty cans from the preceding day, plus the mail which he delivered himself. With news from the outside, his arrival must have been the highlight of many a villager's day — an era gone by!"

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



LONG BEFORE THE big marketing effort of modern greeting card companies, it was considered a kindness to send wishes for a healthy, happy new year, as evidenced by the verse in this turn-of-the-century card.

(Courtesy June Kennedy's "Westford Recollections")