

# Fletcher's love of town led to library donation

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*This is the second part of a biography on J.V. Fletcher, who donated \$10,000 for the building of a library in Westford?*

**D**uring all his productive years in Belmont, J.V. Fletcher still had a love for Westford. At age 60, he purchased his old homestead and birthplace, the Cold Spring Farm, a place his family spent the summer from July 4th to Labor Day, and where he returned each weekend from Belmont. His children and grandchildren (and even great grandchild) used to drive down the sandy Cold Spring Road to the Littleton station to meet him. The mist on the meadows and the "part-singing" as they drove home remain a memorable picture in the eyes and minds of his great granddaughter, the late Marian Winnek.

Twenty-one members could live in the house. There was also a cook, a second maid and someone to drive the horses, plus the farmer's ell beyond the woodshed. Picture on this 200-acre farm cows and sheep grazing, berry patches, cornfields, even a rough nine-hole golf course. And there was a lovely pine grove extending down Cold Spring Road where annually under the pine trees, the family had an elaborate dinner on trestle tables with the best linen and china. It was in this grove not far from Stony Brook that an octagonal oriental-type building housed the continually bubbling spring of water. Cold spring water was actually bottled and sold for a short time.

Fletcher was definitely a "gentleman farmer." Actually, he knew nothing much about farming. J.V. too often bought the latest farm equipment, which then was only



Cold Spring Farm was home to J.V. Fletcher, who donated \$10,000 almost a century ago to build a town library.

left out to rust all winter. While the farm ran at an excessive loss, it was self-sustaining, producing eggs, pork, lamb, vegetables and berries. But the four-year-old Western beef came out from Faneuil Hall Market on the train each weekend in J.V.'s own hand.

The sometimes six-course dinners at this homestead were quite sumptuous. Sunday morning breakfast consisted of a half orange eaten with a spoon, scrambled eggs, baked beans and toasted brown bread, deep-fried fish cakes, applesauce 365 days a year and coffee with thick cream, skimmed from a 12-inch pan in blobs too heavy to pour.

A typical Thanksgiving menu

consisted of soup - consomme, fish baked in a scallop shell, turkey, three or four vegetables (hubbard squash and creamed onions), pan-roasted potatoes, biscuits, pies — mince, squash with brandy and rose water, laced cranberry pie, nuts and raisins, fruit — apples and pears he raised himself, all served on the lovely Royal Worcester dinner set which had been taken from the china cupboard and washed for the occasion.

Fletcher taught all the children very young to drive and harness horses. There was a row boat on the river from which one could catch horn-pout on Stony Brook (provided one ducked under the

railroad ties and avoided the black water snakes overhead). A large ice house stood by the barn.

Fletcher read his Bible every morning. Then, being a very early riser, he assisted others in awakening by moving all the big rocking chairs around on the piazza, making considerable noise, snapping the window shades to the top, and swatting flies with a newspaper. He loved a good time, and his great granddaughter recalled a gala party when the whole house was alive to the sound of banjo, mandolin and guitar. Japanese lanterns were strung along the piazza and picket-fenced garden.

In the 1890s, the Fletchers



In her mid-80s at the time of this photo, the late Marian Winneck, great granddaughter of J.V. Fletcher, shares her memories of summers with him at Cold Spring Farm in Westford.

owned a nine-passenger "mountain wagon" which made one annual trip to Long Sought For Pond for a picnic and swim, and to the Groton Inn where mince pie in midsummer was the lure.

Mrs. Fletcher did not care as much for the farm as her husband did. She would have preferred the nice cool seashore - but he loved the farm. One winter in Belmont, Fletcher inveigled a granddaughter to go on a long sleigh ride with him - and they ended up in Westford at a country funeral.

J.V. was a meticulous man. One year he had the Cold Spring homestead completely redecorated, adding charm with painted floors and antique furniture. The outside was then painted yellow-ochre, at the suggestion of his grandson Henry. But within a

week, after his return to Belmont for the winter, he received a telegraph message with the news that his Westford home had burned to the ground. Rumors were that it was set to cover the theft of the plumbing (which consisted of a tin-plated copper tub and marble basin). It must have been a shock to this elderly man, but by the next summer Fletcher had a new house built over the same foundation, not a saltbox this time, but the large building that exists today. The great barn did not burn in the fire, but was torn down in the mid-1960s.

Fletcher was sentimental. He had wooden handled button hooks made from a tremendous elm, located five feet from the house, which had been killed by the fire.

When it was evident that a public library building was needed, it is not surprising that at the annual Town Meeting in March, 1895, Fletcher, who had the means and loved his native town, made his generous offer of \$10,000 for a new library.

*Material for this article came from "Juniper Hill" by Marian F. Winneck and other stories related to her, "Faneuil Hall and Market" by Abram English Brown and "Souvenir of Dedication of J.V. Fletcher Library" — June 4, 1896.*

*From the Westford Recollection Series by June W. Kennedy. This is the fourth in a series of historical articles in honor of The Centennial Gala of the J. V. Fletcher Library, slated for June 1 on the Town Common at 7 p.m. Three hundred guests will enjoy hors d'oeuvres and banjo music under a 50' x 100' tent. Tickets are \$50 per person and may be reserved by sending a check to the library, payable to the Friends of Fletcher Library. Tickets are also available at the main desk of the library.*

*\* Also personal interview with June Kennedy*