

Meet your neighbor

June Kennedy

By VIRGINIA KIMBALL

A fat, pot-bellied stove fed by square cut logs stands in the middle of a small Vermont one-room school house made with hand-hewn lumber and hand-crafted wainscoting around doors and windows. The school marm rings the brass bell on a post in the front schoolyard...such are the images that June Kennedy treasures and enjoys, and has cherished since she was a young girl. "Maybe it's because I grew up in Lexington, Massachusetts, where everyone is very conscious of our traditions and history. I belonged to Girl Scouts and used to march as a drummer in the April 19 Sunrise Parade every year. That kind of activity develops a sense of patriotism and appreciation for the past." With this interest in history June Kennedy has amassed a wealth of information on local reminiscences and historical lore.

Many times a life, in recollection, appears to be interlocked in circles and cycles. June sees a theme and coincidence in hers. In 1965 she and her husband Charlie joined the Westford Historical Society. The first project June found herself assigned to was preparing a program on one-room school houses. "Of course, I thought the information would be pre-packaged for me at the library. But I was wrong. We formed a committee and went in search to locate and research them." With Miss Tuttle, a schoolmarm who had taught at School #6 (now the Toy's farmhouse) and at Frost School, and Mr. John Sanders, "we went on a tour of the town and found ten of these one-room schools. I interviewed school marms and pupils to prepare the program for the Historical Society. After that I was on a panel of the J.V. Fletcher Library, when I interviewed Miss Marion Winnek, the great-granddaughter of Mr. J.V. Fletcher. For that project we read Town Reports, did interviews, and collected photographs."

At the opening of the Robinson School in 1970, a slide show at the Open House was presented, including historical Westford schools. Mr. Mel Michaels, the first editor of the WESTFORD EAGLE was there and became interested in including historical articles in the newspaper. June was invited to write the articles and began her series on Westford Recollections which ran for five years. She credits Mr. Allister MacDougall for encouraging her and providing resource material for many of her articles. June's "Recollections", then, ranged from the early 1700's, including the town's incorporation in 1729, through the bicentennial year of 1976. These articles have been mounted in a portfolio of 45 plates and reproduced on microfilm to be used with a reader - all for the use of students and history buffs. "There has been no extensive history compiled on the town since 1883" when Reverend Edwin Hodgman's *History of Westford, Massachusetts* was published. In addition, June has an extensive slide collection of historical pictures and a file of taped interviews with over fifty local personalities (some being born in the 1880's). "Everything I have is to share - this wonderful history of our town." Through the help of Dick Hall, a duplicate collection of turn-of-the-century slides was prepared, many of which have been shared with the League of Women Voters of Westford for their forthcoming tape-slide show, "Westford: A Sense of Community, 1900-1979."

June's technique of collecting "Recollections" was initiated through her interest in the growing



June W. Kennedy

popularity of "oral history." She showed me the first four volumes of Anchor Doubleday's *Foxfire Books*. These are a collection of articles and interviews with local people in the mountains of the South, compiled by High School students in a unique program started to enrich and motivate young pupils while tracking down and preserving fast disappearing customs, folklore, and the ways of life of former years. To explain the "oral history," June refers to her friend Audrey Manning Northway's similar student publication *Spile* (the name of a tap placed in a maple tree to collect sap). "It is a way - this technique - of tapping the life blood of the community, of getting down to the roots through the living stream." June adds that one of the best anthologies of oral history is *I Wish I Could Buy My Son A Wild Raccoon*. After teaching a couple of courses on Westford History for the Free University Program, once existent at the Fletcher Library, June decided it would be worthwhile to begin a project in oral history, to compile a history for sharing with the people in her community. It is the results of her efforts, her community. It is the results of her efforts, the fruit of extensive interviews of key figures, establishing a slide file of over 500 historical photographs, accumulating factual data and memorabilia, recording information from diaries and other attic treasures that she is now prepared to share to write a series of "Westford Recollections Series - for the 250th Anniversary". This week the first of her ten month series appears, and the articles will continue until the Anniversary celebration on September 23, 1979. They form an historical observance in recognition of this event. These will be articles well worth clipping and saving for savoring and instructing ourselves on the heritage of our own New England town. "They must have been happy days, the reminiscences are very happy. It all gives me a feeling I know the old Westford and I want to see others in Westford enjoy it, too."

June Kennedy is recognized by friends and acquaintances in the community for her friendliness, open strengths, and courageous determination. She has lived a life of hope and sharing despite a serious bout with polio at the age of 19. In an interesting way, circles of meaning surface in June's life. Following her freshman year at the University of Massachusetts, June had worked as a counsellor at Camp Hidden Valley, a Fresh Air Fund Camp

sponsored by the Herald Tribune in Georgetown, Connecticut. "This camp consisted of children who were white; black and Puerto Rican from Harlem, New York and half of them were handicapped." The following fall she contracted Polio. The next summer she returned to Camp Hidden Valley, in her wheelchair, "to practice what was preached to the children. It was hard, at times, now that the roles had reversed. The first year I was a camp counselor urging them all to be brave and try new things. Then there I was, in their shoes." June's determination brought her back to that camp for three summers, as Arts and Crafts Counselor. "The idea of integrating handicapped into happy day to day living was new in those days." Ironically, in giving strength to the handicapped children, June herself developed a vision of her own life - the ability to set goals and interests for herself that resulted in establishing a solid marriage, a happy family, and a productive interest in history.

It was during her stay in the hospital that June's friendship developed with the young man, Charles Spaulding Kennedy, who was to become her husband. Later, due to the provision of facilities for the handicapped at Atlantic Union College in Lancaster, Massachusetts, June continued her education until 1958 when she married and moved to her present home in Westford.

June says she is "not aware of being handicapped. I live just like other people." Indeed she does! She actively participates in the First Parish Church United, where she has taught Sunday School and is Chairman of the Worship Committee with a special interest in creative worship.

In keeping with her continuing interest in history, June serves on the Board of Directors of the Manning Manse Association that maintains the 1696 Family House in North Billerica, one of the oldest homes in the area. In her desire to share with others she has been visited by groups of Girl Scouts and Brownies, Bluebirds, and Pioneer Girls. Just to "treat herself this year" June took a course in crewel, this Fall. The next skill she wants to learn is spinning. "I have wool my brother gave me, already waiting on the distaff of my little spinning wheel."

June's husband, Charlie, is a member of the Westford Minutemen and during the Bicentennial years visited many schools in town, speaking on early American tools and furniture, and explaining the colonial dress and customs. He is a proficient woodworking craftsman, building and restoring antiques. Presently he works for Optical Research Company in Acton. Charlie designed and "added his own Early American touches to the family home." June and Charlie's two daughters are Betsy, a freshman at the Rhode Island School of Design studying architecture, and Martha, a Westford Academy freshman who is most interested in the jazz and dance bands. Cricket and Gretchen are two small black Cocker, loving pets of the family for many years.

Musing on her intense interest in Westford, June reflects on a revelation she recently discovered about her own family, again an evidence of converging cycles in her life. June's daughters learned that their 6th generation grandmother, Anne Spaulding, on their father's side (buried in Westford) was the daughter of Joseph Underwood who sold "½ acre more or less round the meeting house" for 20 pounds to be used as a training field which became the Westford Town Common in 1748. "I believe my daughters are really daughters of the town. They both marched in the Bicentennial parade and have developed their own love of the past. I guess I'm kind of old fashioned in my thinking. But I do love the people here in Westford, in our town! I've often wondered why I felt such a compulsion to do this history of Westford. Now I know - I'm a part of it."