

## Westford Recollections

### Landmark Sullivan Home

A few months ago there appeared in the Westford Eagle a splendid story by Jane Hinckley on the Landmark Sullivan Home the property of which was purchased by the town as a site for a proposed new police station and fire station. The story told of the colonial home as it was occupied by Dr. Benjamin Osgood from the early eighteen hundreds to his death in 1863 and remarked that

if it could be brought to its original architecture it would be a handsome home of historic significance to Westford. The picture of the original home as featured in this column a few weeks after Mrs. Hinckley's article appeared, certainly

verified her sentiments. However, as the home now stands, it is a perfect example of how in the name of progress and burying the old, whether it be furniture or houses, the value and true beauty is lost.

Back about 1900 the new owner felt that the old central

chimney colonial house as cherished and loved by the Dr. Osgood family should be modernized, beautified and brought up to date. The house was raised from its original foundation, the rooms on the first floor remodeled with ceilings about 10 feet high, the central chimney removed with all the fireplaces, paneling, wainscoting, doors, stairways, hardware, all removed so that nothing remained of the old but the corner timbers. All that speaks for the old is found in the attic where the old roof boards remain. It is hard to conceive of a more complete facelifting job than was done to the charming old Osgood home. Sometimes in a renovation job of this kind some of the wide old boards, the doors or some of the hardware is delegated to the barn, or outbuilding for repairs, but in this case all disappeared. The frame of the barn with its hand-hewn timbers still stands, but no treasures from the old house but one thing remains and this is the reason for this story.

Edward Sullivan, the landowner was asked if there wasn't something left, somewhere out in the barn or shed like a hinge or a latch or a door that went back to the colonial days. He said no, not a thing, and then he remembered that on the front of the barn on right front corner, there was a small door with, he thought, two old hinges, and that is all he could recall.

Sure enough, facing the common, as it had for 150 years or more, where every passer-by could see it, was an old barn door, used probably in the early days for the cattle, oxen or even the saddle horses to come out into the barnyard. The old strap hinges, the handmade latch, even handmade nails for the crosspiece on the door were there. The pins for the hinges must have been driven into green oak timbers and when the timbers dried they were there to stay and serve the life of the door. All an example of sturdy construction that would last for 100 or 200 years.

But this is not the end of the story. The door had been boarded up on the inside by two wide boards and a room made to hold shavings or sawdust to bed down the cattle. When the outside door was taken off its hinges, the first time it had been opened for probably 70 years, it revealed the only remaining evidence of the Osgood home as it was in colonial days, the old front door. About 8 inches had been cut off the bottom through the paneling so it would fit into the barn door opening, and thus one hinge was gone, but otherwise the old panelled door, the green paint, the hole in the middle for the brass or iron knocker, the outline of the scroll where the fine old latch was located told the sad story of what had happened when the home was modernized and

beautified in 1900. A short faint hope was held that the knocker might have been transferred to the new front door, but no, a bell with a turn button had been put in its place. Who knows, but probably the latch, strap hinge and the knocker were dumped out back in anticipation of the new. The only reason the door, or what was left of it was saved, is that it made a quick way to close the old barn door, to make a room to store bedding for the cattle. The two wide boards that were visible in the sawdust room were the batton boards on the back of the panel door to make it sturdy.

Thus ends the tale that tells the story of why colonial houses that retain their old features, or antiques

that have been modernized are so valuable and are hard to find today. Also the reason why Westford no longer can be graced by the restored old house of kindly Dr. Osgood and that all that remains to tell of the past is a barn door with hardware and nails made by the village blacksmith and the remains of a front door that served its last days as part of the room to hold bedding for the cattle.