

Westford Recollections

by June W. Kennedy

Ornamental Tree Association excerpts from 1876 address By Rev. Edwin R. Hodgman

In 1871, the Ornamental Tree Association was formed in Westford. At the 1876 centennial address here in town, Rev. Edwin R. Hodgman spoke with pride upon the Association's planting of 100-150 trees in the Center for future generations to enjoy. They were mostly of the sugar maple variety. (Indeed it is time for this generation in 1979 to follow suit with more maples, fruit trees, etc.)

Rev. Hodgman heartily suggested that "sidewalks from the Centre to Westford be laid in behalf of the ladies who must contend with armloads of packages, long skirts and mud." Actually, it was in March of 1912 that the town finally voted to raise and appropriate \$300; \$100 to be expended in each of the three villages of Graniteville, Forge Village and Westford Centre for the construction and grading of sidewalks.

In light of the removal of many old buildings, broken fences, etc., the speaker successfully recommended that the Association be called the Village Improvement Society. Fortunately, his next proposal was not carried out: "I think that in this centennial year we ought to redeem that beautiful plot of ground with its fringe of trees from the disgrace and vulgarity of being called common, as if it were only a place for dog fights or cat concerts. Let us call it a park and give it the name of some worthy and public-spirited citizen." To this writer, the very name Common connotes ownership by everyman—and rightfully so!

In his address of 1876, Rev. Hodgman called upon the spirit of 1976. His projections, while prophetic for his time, seem almost amusing in view of the many technological, social and cultural changes of the past 100 years. However, tune in!

"We presume, Sir, you can report to us the erection of one or more fine summer hotels, somewhere on the west end of Main Street, of course, to which the elite of Boston, New York and Graniteville resort to spend the warm season. O, yes; and the principal streets are all paved and lighted with gas, the real article, and none of your gasoline or paraffine. And starting from the post office, a solid brick edifice, three stories high, standing opposite the residence of Allan Cameron, 3rd -- (now Stony Brook Office of Emerson Real Estate) -- two lines of horse-cars of the most approved pattern run every fifteen minutes to stations on the Stony Brook and on the Nashua & Acton Railroads.

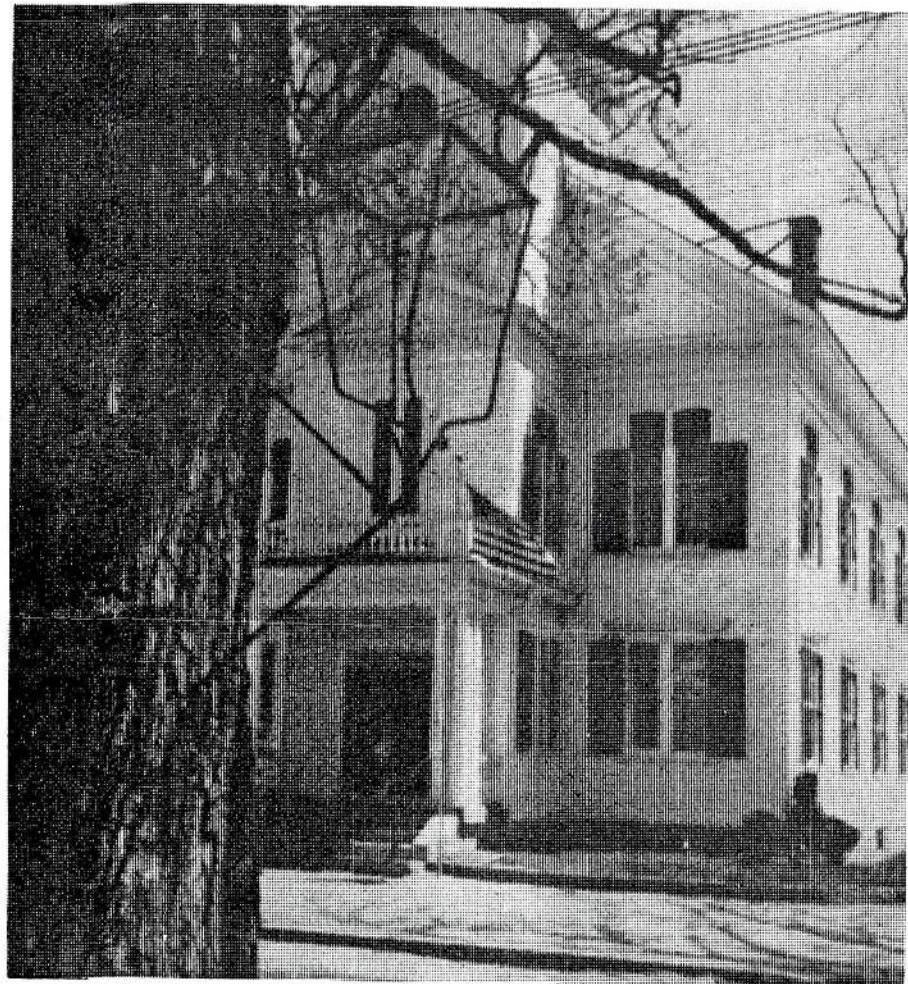
"I suppose you can tell us of the monument in Abbot Park -- (Westford Common) -- to the memory of Lieut. Col. Robinson. Yes, it is a just and fitting tribute to a brave soldier and a true patriot. It is now moss-covered and weather-

stained." (In reality, 200 Westford citizens came back from the 1875 Concord celebration all inspired to erect a commemorative monument to Col. John Robinson and the Westford patriots. On May 22, 1875, the town of Westford defeated the proposal 78-51. It was almost a hundred years later in 1968, that a plaque was placed on Westford Common to honor Col. John Robinson and Westford's Revolutionary soldiers. It was placed there by the Westford Colonial Minutemen in anticipation of the Bicentennial.

Rev. Hodgman continues, "The people of Westford have done wonders within the century in the line of education. They have never voted less than three thousand dollars a year for schools. Every one of these has a printing press of its own, and the pupils are taught to compose types as well as essays, and a daily paper is issued, giving a synopsis of the day's work. Journalism is a distinct study, and so are drawing, painting and sculpture. A well-equipped and elegant building for the Westford Academy was erected near the middle of the century -- (the second Westford Academy building, now Roudenbush Community Center, was actually built in 1897) -- east of Abbot Park, with ample grounds and all needful appurtenances. It is truly an ornament to the town. It occupies a lot running from street to street, and horse-cars pass it in front and rear." Fade out spirit of '76! . . . And now, as a challenging exercise, wouldn't someone care to pen his or her projections of living conditions in Westford for the year 2,029 -- the date of the 300th town anniversary!

This is article No. 41 in the continuing WESTFORD RECOLLECTIONS - 250th Series.

A limited hard cover edition of WESTFORD RECOLLECTIONS 1729-1979, featuring highlights from this column, may be reserved by calling or visiting "Book-tique" (692-2347) at 6 Carlisle Place in Westford. We are sorry to announce a slight delay in the publication of WESTFORD RECOLLECTIONS 1729-1979. Please check September 27 "Westford Eagle" for release date. On Saturday, September 22, from 9 a.m. until the parade arrives, June Kennedy will take orders for her book on the lawn of the First Parish Meetinghouse.



This lamp frame was on a tree across from the Town Hall. Before the days of electric lights, the Village Improvement Society provided willing homeowners with wrought iron, glass-sided lanterns. Individuals furnished the kerosene oil, kept the glass clean, and lit the lamp each evening for three to four hours. The town, of course, closed down by 10 o'clock in those days. (From WESTFORD RECOLLECTIONS 1729-1979 by June W. Kennedy)