

Peddlers find bustling market into early twentieth century

By June W. Kennedy

Jumping ahead to this century, one finds many yankee peddlers in town. People peddled produce and goods to earn their livelihood.

Edmund Whitney of Nabnasset has vivid memories of his father, Sydney, peddling fish from his cart during that decade:

"Father left Westford at 3 a.m. to go to the T-Wharf in Boston to pick up fish. He had a 'oss' and covered wagon. I went once, but slept all the way. I can still see the lanterns hanging each side of the wagon.

"He only went in the good weather. In the winter, fish was sent in barrels by freight. Father peddled the fish about town.

"Mr. Ingham sold meat from his butcher cart. You'd pick what you want and he'd cut it off — he had a butcher block. The butcher man went from house to house — there was ice amongst the meat.

"I remember the Bar Harbor Express (Maine to Boston) killed both the horse with wagon and him at the railroad.

"At one time I had 13 car boys — delivered Cold Spring Water in a wooden case to the wealthy people in Westford Center for 20 cents a bottle. I delivered to the Abbots and Camerons. It had to be water that came away from the spring, not from the spring.

The Cold Spring is located across from Depot Street. Its waters are said to possess precious minerals and were bottled and sold for a period."

Florian Woitowicz of Forge Village gives the following peddler descriptions:

"The Greek man from Lowell sold bolts of cloth. He took his scissors and cut off what you wanted. The Jewish rag man from Lowell collected iron, paper, rags and bottles (Jakey Bottles — Jamaican Ginger). He paid 1 cent for two of them. My brother earned a lot, so a lot must have been consumed!

"About once a year, an Indian from Groton came to town and sold medicines and herbs. I remember he carried a snake in a cage. He was also a horse trader."

Yes, the Yankee Peddler was still a common sight in Westford in the early days of the twentieth century. Several residents still picture the wagons laden with baskets and ladders for apple picking, pans, pails, kitchen goods and tea at 5 cents a pound.

The following June 1911 account from the *Westford Ward-*



ADVERTISING CARDS SUCH as the one for Dr. Seth Arnold's Cough Killer helped to sell the public on the wares of peddlers even into the twentieth century. (Courtesy of June Kennedy)

sman newsweekly glimpses an amusing facet of the peddling trade:

A vexations predicament

"During the heavy shower last week Thursday a junk peddler from Lowell overturned his wheel junk shop on the Lowell Road. The overturn was caused by a contra-minded cow tied to the rear of the wagon, who having spied a pasture with the bars down, made a dash for it, while the driver and horse were dashing towards Lowell in the dashing rain.

"The horse, driver, wagon and variety show aboard were dragged towards the pasture and in the mixup of opinions as to whether it was to Lowell or pasture they were going, the team came forth — ironware, tinware, pewterware, brassware, lead-

ware, ragware, live poultry without feathers and feathers without poultry.

"Several roosters started a crowing match, and two other started a fighting match. The shafts of the wagon were broken and the horse went to grass. With the thunder and lightning, dashing rain, crowing, fighting roosters and the ragtime music of the show, generally it was a better show in some respects than the Buffalo Bill upset the day before at Brookside [Nabnasset]."

Still later well into the 1920s, oldtimers tell of Bert Hildreth peddling fruits and vegetables in his wagon throughout the village; Mr. Webb, the fisherman from Lowell; Mr. Henry Wing, the meat man from Littleton; an

Peddlers

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other meat wagon operated by Hartwell & Homer; the Socorelis wagon with bananas, etc.; and of course, W. W. Johnson, the local ice man.

Local produce came to one's back door via horsedrawn vehicle too. Ben Prescott from Chamberlin Corner said:

"Everyday through the season, Mother and I would put three, four or five crates of stawberries onto the Democrat wagon — hitch up the old 'hoss' and go to Graniteville and Forge Village. I ran around to the houses; she tended hoss. We'd sell 'em three boxes for 25 cents just to get rid of them — 10 cents a quart usually."

"Children's haircuts were given by the traveling barber from Graniteville. He had a car and toured the village on Sunday," recalls Mildred Robinson.

And who doesn't remember the Raleigh man in his "early beach wagon" selling spices, vanilla, linaments and grandfather's aftershave favorite, Bayrum!

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

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