

Recalling Allister MacDougall

By June W. Kennedy
Eagle Correspondent

Allister F. MacDougall, 1891-1989: "A people who cares nothing for its past has no present and deserves no future." That is a fitting proverb for Allister E. MacDougall who spent his lifetime searching, researching, collecting and sharing Westford's history. Indeed he was the connecting link in the vast chain of events which have shaped our New England town since Rev. Hodgman's town history was printed in 1883.

Great pride he took in telling of his father's emigration from Scotland where grandfather was a shepherd. (One notes Allister frequently sported his plaid tartan tie and, when occasion permitted, his classic kilt). And too, he delighted in telling of his maternal Hosmer grandparents loading all their worldly goods into an ox cart and leaving their small, rough farm in Greenfield, N.H., to settle in the Forge Village section of Westford.

The marriage of their daughter, Harriet Lee Hosmer to Alexander MacDougall brought into this world on July 18, 1891, one who so indelibly left his mark in this town, Allister F. MacDougall. Until his death on June 22, 1989, he resided in the home on Boston Road purchased by his father in 1903.

Mr. MacDougall attended the Tad-muck School in the Center in the days when there were seven grades in the building with two large rooms, one on each floor. In 1909 he was one of four graduates from Westford Academy.

Believing that anyone who wanted to go to college could, he spent the summer of 1909 putting in an 11½-hour day tending the lawns and gardens of the Abbot family. Attending Mass. Agricultural College in Amherst, he pursued his educational goal. Living in a hen house with a one burner oil stove, he cooked his own meals for 1½ of those years.

After graduation in 1913, Mr. MacDougall became an instructor at the college and travelled all over Massachusetts, hitting back towns off the railroad. As a travelling instructor, he brought the latest in agriculture to the farmers and has been credited with laying the groundwork for implementation of the County Extension Services.

Into the 80s, he continued as Alumni president, always celebrating his reunion from college. As a 76-year alumnus, he was the last

surviving member of that class of 1913.

In 1915 Mr. MacDougall wed Edna Comins from Hadley, Massachusetts. Their early married life was spent in Northampton, Massachusetts, where three of their four children were born.

Returning to Westford, Allister served 32 years as the Middlesex County Extension Service Director. From 1925-1950 this county was one of the leading agricultural counties in the U.S. His national association in county work with contacts throughout the world was one of his most rewarding experiences.

But the rewarding experience to the town of Westford was the return of Mr. MacDougall — the Americana — the one whose life bridged the broad span of years and who relished recollecting about days gone by. Often engaged as a lecturer, his topics ranged from Early Farm Tools to Sheila Young's Lettie Lane & Betty Bonnet Paper Family Series. (In 1972 he was made an honorary member of the Lettie Lane Paper Doll Club of Huntington Beach, California).

He shared many reminiscences via the *Westford Eagle*, authored *Yesterdays of Westford Academy* and prepared several pamphlets and booklets on Westford's history.

When the missing receipts to the construction of the original Westford Academy turned up in an attic in Harvard in 1967, he was the person sought out. It meant writing *More Yesterdays of Westford*, but he enjoyed it.

Since 1935, Mr. MacDougall had served on the Board of Trustees of Westford Academy, of which he was president eight years. Even as an elder Granger, he managed to win prizes and awards for his farm produce. He claimed he brought his whole orchard out from Lowell on the local trolley — of course they were seedlings, but it's hard to believe now. Baldwins and Roxbury Russets were favorites of his.

In 1973, he had the honor of planting a Baldwin apple tree at the official ground planting of the preservation of Old Sturbridge Village. He wished to see the revival of apple trees planted in everyone's backyard and suggested the idea to individual families in commemoration of the milestone of the town's 250th Anniversary back in 1979.

An active member of the Westford Historical Society, Allister served a term as Chairman of the Westford Bicentennial Committee and was instrumental in initiating many last-



Photo courtesy June W. Kennedy

Octogenarian Allister MacDougall outfitted as a Minuteman for the town's 250th Anniversary.

ing contributions which will add to the enjoyment and education of future generations. In part, these include: original Westford Academy restoration for Town Museum, the new flag pole and granite benches on Westford Common, the marker of the Westford Knight on Depot Street, the World War II Memorial on the library lawn, the Minot's Corner stone and plaque in honor of Captain Jonathan Minot who led Westford Minutemen to Concord Bridge in 1775 (now missing), the replacing of the granite front step back to the original Academy site, and the naming of the present Westford Academy library after one of the original subscribers, Zaccheus Wright.

As a member of the Westford Colonial Minutemen, it was with pride and patriotism that this then-octogenarian marched in local parades and participated in the Bicentennial parades in Concord. As a Minuteman he officiated at the Minot's Corner dedication, exercises at the Old Pioneer Burying Ground in Parkerville, raising the new flagpole on Westford Common and lecturing to schoolchildren and adults on the history of Westford. He looked forward to the 250th Anniversary of Westford.

Much devoted work has gone into preserving our Westford history. This lifetime hobby was shared with

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his partner of 73 years. Edna MacDougall, a fine artist and photographer, captured in color the rural character of our historic New England village. She, too, shared her time and talent, and, as an "artist in residence" presented numerous programs. Their combined hobbies made the MacDougalls an extremely busy and most entertaining couple. Indeed, their generosity and interest

inspired my "Westford Recollections" writings.

Allister MacDougall died the day I left for the United Kingdom. To me, it seems important to publicly pay tribute to this town historian and what better occasion than the 260th Anniversary of Westford — Sept. 23, 1989.

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