

The original Centre School No. 1 was once located on the side yard of the Lamson Tavern. Boston Road was then called School Street. The School was used until 1874 when Tadmuck No. 1 opened.

Westford Recollections

By June W. Kennedy
Reminiscences of Leonard Wheeler 1937

On the main street of Westford stands a two story house of a pattern common in our region, broadside to the road with the front door in the middle of that side with two windows each side thereof on the same story. Upstairs were formerly five windows till a porch chamber replaced the middle one, making a piazza to which the front door opened. The unusual feature of the house was brick ends extending upward as far as the eaves. A more unusual feature invisible yet real appeared after delving in records of the Registry of Deeds, confirmed by finding an old cellar wall underground near the east end of the house. Here was once the home of Rev. Willard Hall, the first minister of the gospel in the town. The only clue to the date of construction of the present house is the figure 1815 on the underside of one of the roof boards of the ell. Many timbers of the ell and some other lumber are plainly second hand and probably came from the house in which the Rev. Hall lived. The out buildings seem to be older than the house. The barn plainly is of two eras. Mr. Hall was too conservative to sympathize with his parish in the 1770's and so was virtually a prisoner on his farm for his loyalty to the king. He is said to have replied to a group of patriots "you may be right, but I am too old a man to change".

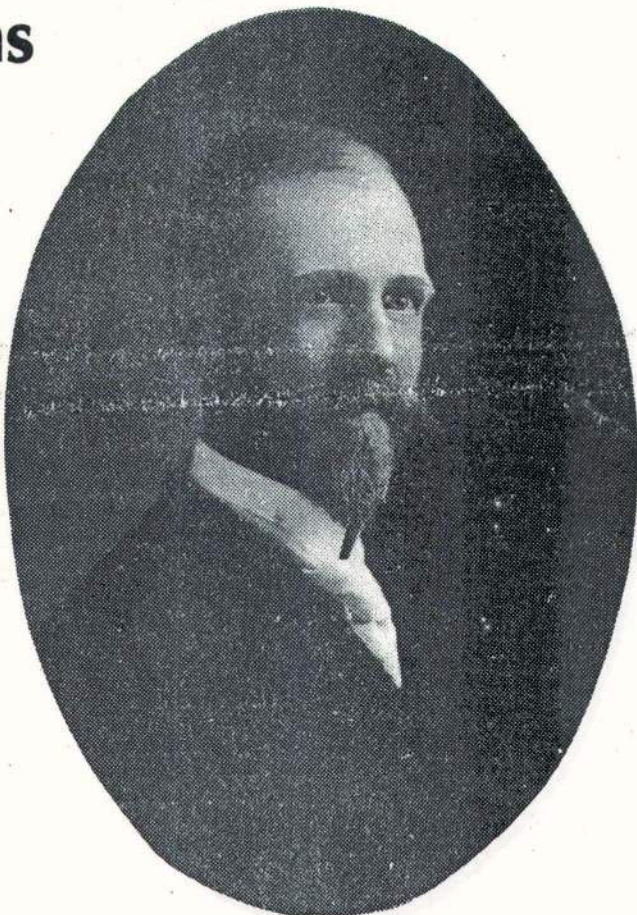
My father bought this place in 1850. He brought two brides into the house. I have done likewise. His father brought four brides into his house in North Acton. That was near the North Acton depot where he operated a small saw and grist mill beside his farm. Training day he was Lieutenant. Sunday he went three miles to the Centre and was Deacon in the Church. Phineas Wheelers' oldest son, Cyrus, continued his father's business till his death. Changing time made this mill like many others, obsolete. This mill dates from 1735. The second son, my father, was educated at Amherst College and Andover Theo. Sem. for the ministry and ordained as a Presbyterian under the "Plan of Union" which was an attempt at denominational cooperation before the times were ripe therefore and was sent to Michigan as a missionary when that state was frontier. That was in the year of "Tippecanoe and Tyler Too". Falling a victim to the "Tyler grip" which was a "flue" epidemic, his health was so undermined that he had to turn farmer on this hilltop. "For 18 months I had a sister. I was three years and 8 months old when she went away. Yet I remember the funeral, her sickness, neighbor boys coming to to look at her in her coffin. Also I remember her christening and two lesser incidents of her life. And I was so dumb the neighbors began to wonder if I would talk. Like the parrot who "sassed", the monkey and got his feathers all pulled, sometimes since I have "talked too much".

My schooling began in the building opp. the Congl. Ch. that now is Mrs. Stile's home.

(Centre School #1-Prescotts-Reminiscences of Leonard Wheeler 1937) Here Miss Rebecca Luce, daughter of Rev. Luce first pastor of the Union Congl. Chr. was teacher. I remember at least one holiday that we had because Town Meeting was in session in the upper story of the building. A new Town House soon effaced that kind of holiday. A later teacher was a girl from Lowell whose education in rural matters proved incomplete when horse chestnuts, mostly from the four trees in front of my home, fell out of over filled pockets and shirt fronts of the boys. She confiscated all she could empty out and put them into the old fashioned box stove. The resulting racket repaid the boys for the loss of the chestnuts. A crack in the stove was attributed to the explosions. Ralph Adams Cram the architect was one of our school mates. He and Albert Prescott were chums rather apart from the rest of the school. "Crams" father was pastor of the U. Ch. here.

It was in those days that our Town House was built in the middle of the garden plot of the Dr. Osgood heirs who resented the seizure of the land, seized as they refused to sell. A little tact would have shown that the Town House would just as well have set a bit to either side. Dr. Osgood had long before been the old fashioned medical man in the days of 25¢ office call and when a cant hook pulled teeth by twisting. There was an invalid daughter whom I never saw till years later when she became of better health. She was a woman of refinement and appreciative in studious and literary lines. A half brother Benjamin tilled the farm. He was a familiar figure, as thru the summertime he drove his cow past home daily to pasture opposite our land. That pasture was a rough stony wet meadow, but now a fine park. Every frontage was fenced in those days. "Ben" didn't hurry his cows and so they got considerable pasturage by the roadside. After these two were gone another brother, John, from Wisconsin, if I remember rightly, was in evidence while settling the estate.

The desks of the old school house were of two wide pine planks. They were wide enough for two children each, who were expected not to whisper to each other. At either end of the room was a row of single desks. The fall term of 1874 opened in the new school house which is now the Cavalry Assn. Bldg. (Tadmuck Club House)... to one side of the village with the idea of consolidating the Minot Corner district with No. 1, a scheme that did not take effect for many years. While I was attending here Noah Prescott built the house opposite now belonging to Perry Shupe. (1872)...now Dr. Drake's in 1975. Noah worked a quarry on Oak Hill in the extreme north of the town. How many times have I seen his father drive past in the morning toward that quarry in a little Concord wagon by a little sorrel horse whose nose was unusually well ahead of him. Shortly after came Noah in a covered buggy. Noah also quarried boulders wherever



Leonard Wheeler was the little "fella" whose horse chestnuts added to the explosion in the old fashioned box stove at the Center School. He was for many years the Tax Collector for Westford and the founder of the Grange.

they were in the woods.

Before my recollection my father had wheat ground at the mill (at the depot) making his own flour. This mill stood between the brook and the railroad. Just across the brook was the saw mill. When I was a small boy here was an up and down saw which at each stroke ate about a half inch into a log. This speed allowed the crew to play cards during the saw's trip. Changing to a circular saw stopped the card playing. In the end of the building was the cider mill. A locomotive crew once left their engine (they had no train) on the track while they visited the cider mill, visiting till they heard the whistle of a train. They raced for their engine, got there in time and made a record run to the Lowell round house.

George W. Heywood and Henry Burbeck made the firm of Heywood and Burbeck... for many years. Not far from the Depot in those days Martin Wright kept a "W. I. Goods" store. Few today would un-

derstand that sign. It meant groceries. W.I. are initials of West Indies. Sugar, molasses, syrup, etc. came from the W.I. and rum came from molasses.

A bit down the brook was the swimming hole where boys went in with nothing on but a smile. Bolder ones sometimes indulged in the deeper water just above the dam. Parts of overalls were worn there as they dove from the dam and from the bridge.

Danile Falls lived in the Depot in those days and besides his duties at the depot carried the mail to our village.

Charles Wadden succeeded him and in addition cobbled shoes. Later, he lived in the Martin Wright house (now Gordon Dunn, home on Depot St.) His grandson Austin Fletcher now lives there (now in the stores) Waiting for the morning train came to make the depot as new place as were the grocery stores...

(To be continued)



This colonial brick end house located across from the YWCA in Westford Center was the home of Leonard Wheeler whose memoirs we recollect. Mr. and Mrs. L. Grey Perry are the present owners.



Miss Rebecca Luce, daughter of Rev. Luce of the Congregational Church, at one time was a teacher in the original Centre School No. 1.

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