

# Westford recollections

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By JUNE W. KENNEDY

Elizabeth Carver McKay told the story of her great-grandfather, William Kittredge, who walked from Goffstown, N.H. with a stick over his shoulder, carrying his worldly possessions. When he'd saved enough money from his \$8.00 a month job at the Wright Farm in Brookside, he bought the home next to the Abbot Middle School known as the Old Homestead Orchards, cleared the land on the hillside, and planted apple trees from pomace or seed as he could not afford the stock. As the trees grew, he grafted them. Seven or eight years later when his first crop came in, he hauled apples to Faneuil Hall Market with a wagon and team of oxen. He could not afford horses. No doubt it was en route to Boston that he met and married Mary Tilton of Brighton. It was she who taught William Kittredge to read and write.

"There was one man who hauled his load into Boston with a pair of donkeys," recalls Ben Prescott. "That's not like the stories I generally hear about donkeys, but he had them pretty well trained."

On two or three occasions Otis Day accompanied his sixteen-year-old neighbor, Alson Kimball, on the journey to Boston. "I was only about a dozen, myself," he recalls. "We went through Carlisle. One night, about eight or nine o'clock, I remember we picked up a load in Bedford. It was getting on to midnight when we arrived in Lexington. We pulled up to rest and feed the horses for about a half hour or so. In back of the Railroad Station was an all-night bakery. Ali went in and bought a lemon pie. I had never seen a lemon pie before in my life. He put it in the wagon for the next day. Putting the

bridle on the horse, we headed into town. Under the wagon the lantern was hanging by a strap. Every time the team moved, the lantern swayed. From where I was sitting it looked like the horses legs were going sideways. There were very few street lights. We approached Somerville about four a.m. The smell of hogs was strong at Squire's slaughterhouse! Upon entering the market district we contacted the City Commission men where our goods were consigned. After putting the horses up in a stable on Cross Street where they could get feed, we breakfasted at Haymarket Square. Ali had told me about a place where you could get baked beans with ketchup. I'd never had ketchup before. Boy, was it good! After collecting 25 or 30 cents for cartage, we got the team and left. In the afternoon on the way home, we cut up the lemon pie and ate it. Boy, I thought that was pretty good."

Although it was customary for teamsters to arrive back in Westford in the late afternoon, May E. Day recorded in her diary on Tuesday, August 14, 1906: "Otis went to Boston tonight with Alson, and again on Thursday, August 15, 1906: Otis didn't get home till 11:15 p.m. Hadn't slept since he left home, (he) got up when we were half through breakfast." It must have been quite a trip for a young boy!

Not all teamster tales had happy endings. It was about noon on July 26, 1905, when Amos R. Leighton was returning from the Boston market with horse and team. The night before, he had loaded his wagon with local produce, mostly berries, and headed for the city, thirty miles

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away and a good nine hour drive. Some of the produce was his own; he operated a berry farm in conjunction with his homestead across from the town hall. Other produce on his wagon was from neighboring farmers.

Amos stopped at the half-way mark, East Lexington, for rest, lunch and to feed his horse. He made a fatal mistake when he removed the animal's bridle.

He made a fatal mistake. After slipping the feed bag over the animal's head, he sat in front of the beast to keep it quiet. Apparently a brisk breeze whipped the tarpaulin in the back of the wagon toward the animal. According to the Lexington Minute-man newspaper of that week, "The frightened animal started off on a run. Mr. Leighton grabbed at the harness and tried to check the horse's flight when, in some way, the reins got tangled up in the horse's feet and he fell down, rolling on top of the man. The animal struggled to his feet and in doing so, trampled on the prostrate man, who had probably been rendered unconscious by the fall." The account goes on to say that "The horse struck at the man in such a way that the right leg was broken and there was a terrible fracture at the base of the skull which had caused instant death." Leighton was only forty-years-old at the time.

"I used to go in alone," claimed George Perkins, "but then two of us went together in case the driver fell asleep. You got fined \$5.00 for falling asleep on a horse-drawn cart because the horse could walk into something or kill somebody. When we'd get into East Cambridge, the gangs would take a knife and rip the canvases. They'd take out a whole box of apples. One time I climbed up on top of the apples with a twenty-foot long birch stick. All of a sudden I seen five or six fellows comin' out. I waited till they got right to the back and I come down on their heads with that stick, you know. Boy, laid 'em right out cold on the street and we kept

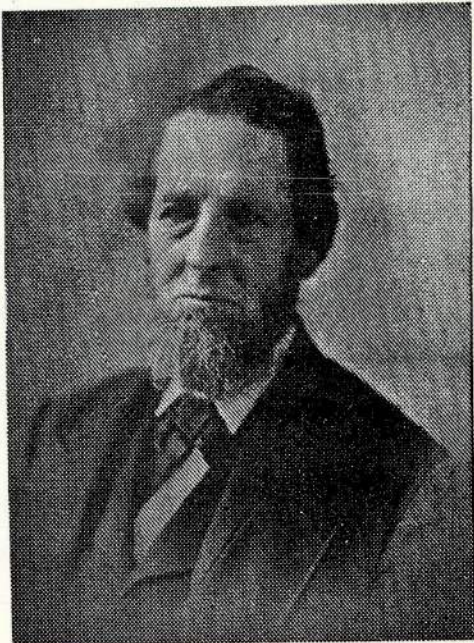
going. They didn't know what hit 'em.

"The wagons had to be unloaded by 5 a.m. at these wholesale markets. You had to get your horses out before the traffic of the city opened. Within two years after Perley Wright introduced the motorized truck for transporting, the wagon and team became outdated," continues George Perkins, "I can remember when they first came in with trucks. They had governors on them - all they'd go was twenty m.p.h. You couldn't go any faster no matter how fast you wanted to go."

Allister MacDougall recalls, "About 1912 to 1914 the McIntosh apple came into existence. This was the craze or bonanza. . . the McIntosh apple would make your farm. Acres and acres of McIntosh were planted in town. Gradually the women and the children didn't seem to want to pick anymore, the heyday of an active berry industry was over. It might be interesting to know that the history of the spraying of apples really goes back to the coming of the McIntosh and the disappearing of small fruits in Westford."

Until 1910 or 12 no one bothered spraying his trees. The apples grown were the kind that could be grown without scab and seemed immune to insects; Red Astrachan in early summer; Gravenstein in fall, and the Baldwin in winter. Around 1900 it was the rare grower who sprayed at all, and still the old Baldwin was good enough to be packed and shipped by the hundreds of barrels from Westford to England. As late as 1930 good crops were produced by as little as three or four sprays. But the more one sprays, the more one has to spray, with the result that fifteen or eighteen are applied today, thus eliminating the family or small orchards. The McIntosh was susceptible to scab, codling moth and railroad worm.

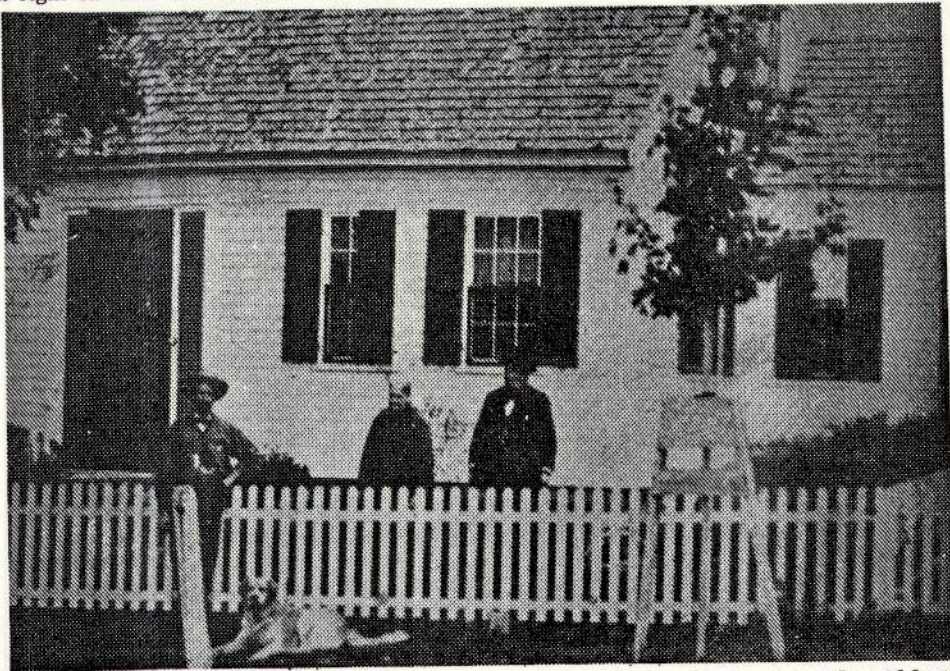
(This is article No. 30 in the continuing Westford Recollections - 250th Anniversary Series.



Amos Leighton was the victim of a teamster accident back in 1905. (From the WESTFORD RECOLLECTIONS Series)



"Within two years after Perley Wright introduced the motorized truck for transporting, the wagon and team became outdated," claimed George Perkins. Teh earliest trucks had governors on them and only went twenty miles an hour. (From the WESTFORD RECOLLECTIONS Series)



William Kittredge lived at the Old Homestead Orchards next to the Abbot Middle School. He hauled his fruit into Faneuil Market with a team of oxen. (A McKay photo from the WESTFORD RECOLLECTIONS Series)