

Westford Recollections

44
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By JUNE W. KENNEDY

"Westford Recollections 1729-1979" is now available at the "Book-tique" at 6 Carlisle Place. Customers are requested to pick up their pre-ordered copies as soon as possible. A few copies of this limited edition remain for sale.

Westford firemen lose pants and \$96 to four gunmen

One of Victims Who Resisted
Holdup at Town Fire Station, Hit With Gun
Butt—pants and \$30 Recovered
(SPECIAL TO THE SUN) 1939

WESTFORD, Dec. 9—Nearly all of the trousers and a wallet containing \$30, part of the "haul" taken by four gunmen who held up a group of 14 Westford firemen and their guests during a card game at the Center fire station early today, were recovered along the road near Carlisle depot by state police, but no trace was found of the bandits. Their loot totalled \$96.

State police have launched a statewide search for the quartet and, according to Chief John F. Sullivan of the local force, it is believed that the gunmen came from greater-Boston.

It was at 12:15 a.m. that the four bandits forced their way into the recreation room of the fire station and brandishing revolvers ordered the 14 players to put up their hands. One of the men resisted and was clipped with the butt of a gun, but escaped serious injury.

The next order was "Take off your pants!" and as the 14 firemen and their guests complied, the bandits grabbed the clothing and backed out of the room.

Robert Bell of this town drove up to the fire station just as the bandits made their get-away in a black sedan and he immediately notified Chief Sullivan, who in turn had an alarm turned in to the state police as well as to police men in nearby cities and towns. However, the Westford bandits eluded the police net.

Early this morning state police found most of the clothing scattered about the road in Carlisle depot and in the pocket of one pair of trousers found a wallet containing \$30 which the bandits had overlooked." Mildred Robinson:

It was exciting for the wives of the husbands involved. But it was hard for us to believe! To think they were just playing cards and having a good time as they always did and something like this could happen. It was a pretty chilly night to walk home in your B.V.D.'s. Fortunately most of them had their long johns on.

They never played there again. After that it was cribbage at Knowlton's store. With closing time at 9:00 p.m., it was early home.

This is article No. 44 in the continuing WESTFORD RECOLLECTIONS - 250th Anniversary Series.

Gunmen Strip 20 Firemen to Undies, Flee with \$200

By GORDON B. SEAVEY

WESTFORD — Caution: The heading on this story was written 50 years ago, but the story still remains clear, with many a chuckle, to numerous old timers in town.

It was the coldest night of the new season 'way back in 1930 when the usual gang of card players lighted the wood stove on the upper floor of the Center fire station for their weekly Friday night poker game.

The stove, with its long smoke stack, soon heated the large open upper floor of the building which for nearly a century housed students of Westford Academy. This evening session, however, was not to be devoted to Latin, Greek and logic, but to more mundane things such as the skills of card playing -- and its risks and opportunities.

The date was December 8 and the function offered an opportunity to fatten the family pocketbook for the upcoming Christmas season.

The affair turned out to be a dead loss to some twenty townspeople as you shall read from the story below which appeared in the Boston Globe (front page, no less!) the next day.

Shorts Story

The headline was as above, the details follow:

"Stripped to their underwear shorts by six gunmen after they had been held up and robbed of \$200 while participating in their weekly social and card game, 20 members of the Westford Volunteer Fire Department were left stranded on the second floor of their clubroom shortly after midnight this morning.

"Hardly daring to venture into the chilly morning air, the gallant men, who had stood in readiness all through the early part of the night for any emergency, waited several minutes before a 'volunteer' finally came forth to spread the alarm.

"Police Chief John F. Sullivan was eventually reached and, after given details of the holdup, made preparations for the removal of the men to their homes.

"Flourishing pistols and with handkerchiefs over their faces, six young men entered the hall with orders for every one to stand still and obey orders.

" 'Off with your clothes, all of you,' was the first demand.

"One by one the victims shed their apparel until all were standing in their shorts.

"While two of the holdup men gathered up the discarded clothing, the remaining four kept them with their hands raised.

Lost Car Keys

"All of the clothing was taken to the holdup men's machine and taken away in their flight.

"State and local police were notified and joined in the search for the sextet who were reported to have fled in the direction of Lowell and Boston. Wallets taken from the men were found strewn along the highway by pursuing police."

If the staid *Globe* considered this a "juicy" story, good enough for their front page, the townspeople found it even more spicy. Immediate checking as to "who was where" on that harsh night produced more alibis than Westford had collected for generations. To this date, no Westford man has admitted to being within three miles of the fire station that Friday night. If the police had been able to catch any or all of the holdup men, it was doubted if the officers could produce any witnesses.

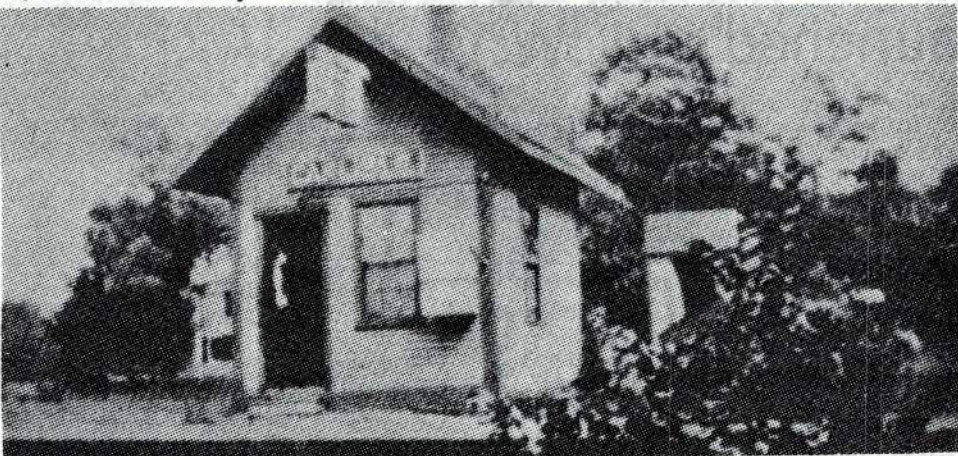
A heartbreaking scene occurred towards the end of the evening, it was reliably reported long after the incident. After the holdup men issued a stern warning, as they left, that no one move, one brave fireman finally located his pants and the keys to his car.

Rushing out in the bitter night, he headed for his Model A to spread the alarm or, courageous man as he was, to chase the culprits. Turning the ignition key and stepping on the starter, he found that his battery was dead.

And so was his bank account!



The Westford Center Fire Station where, in 1939, Westford Firemen lost their pants and \$96 to four gunmen. (Photo from "Westford Recollections 1729-1979" by June W. Kennedy)



State police found the firemen's pants and \$30 down near the Carlisle Depot the morning after the robbery at the Westford Center Fire Station back in 1939. (Photo from the WESTFORD RECOLLECTIONS 250th Anniversary Series by June W. Kennedy)