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Winter warmin' tips out of the past

By June Kennedy

That first bone-chilling cold snap a few weekends ago brought to mind some memories shared by Westford old-timers. Here are just a sampling of the ways they recollect keeping warm during the cold season the first quarter of the 20th century.

Ruth Johnson: "I remember my grand-

mother ironing a bed — putting flat or sad irons on the stove, and then ironing a bed before someone got into it so that it would be cozy. Soapstones were often wrapped in newspapers to warm the bed, too. I've heard of people putting salt in a bag and heating it to keep warm. Mostly sister and I would just cuddle up to each other and fall asleep."

Carl Hornbrook: "In winter we all froze. It was cold, but no colds usually. I slept on the

third floor on a tick and mattress. I'd dress downstairs and run like hell to the tick.

I remember passing by the Heywood home located on the triangular plot of land next to Westford Depot. The foundation was banked with sawdust, boughs, horse manure and leaves so as to keep out the cold."

Josephine Lamb: "Around the doors and the windows at the old farmhouse were what we called sausages. They were either knitted or of old material, the length of the sill. Filled with sand, they would cut off any drafts from the ill-fitting doors and windows, and from the north side of the house. And to this day I'm still using some of them in spite of combination windows. They really are effective!"

And no doubt these Westford old wives' tales were shared as families gathered around the dinner table next to the fiery stove:

- If a white pigeon lands on the chimney or rooftop, someone will die.
- Sew on Sunday and the Devil will get you by Friday.
- High beaver house, heavy snow; low beaver house, light snow.
- Going to be a rainy, mild winter if the squirrels are not busy. (Generally they shake the tar out of the bird feeders).
- A bird flies at your window, there'll be a death.
- Have pneumonia threes times, you'll die.
- Kids playing on the street, there's going to be a thunderstorm.

Keeping busy around the cookstove was yet another way to ward off the chill. The following is a favorite recipe from a resident of yesteryear:

Cracker Pudding — About 12 common crackers, 1 cup sugar, 1 tsp. salt, 1 cup raisins, 1 egg, 1 tsp. cinnamon, 3 pints milk. Bake in oven till firm. Stir once or twice.

Emma M. Day, 1871

June Kennedy is a Westford resident and author of "Westford Recollections", a series of vignettes and photos depicting the town's past.



IN THIS 1918 photo, young teen Gordon Seavey uses his prize-winning pig 'Soot' to travel along snow-packed Main Street in front of the town hall. The twosome may have proved wrong the adage 'as helpless as a hog on ice.'

(From "Westford Recollections" by June Kennedy)