

Growing Up in Wenham in WWII Recollections of a Bygone Era

By Bob Hicks

Time Out

With the 375th Anniversary Parade and Field Day a week or so away I'm taking time out from this ongoing series on "Growing Up in Wenham in World War II" to encourage you to join us on September 8th at this Grand Finale of our celebration of Wenham's 375th Anniversary. We have been celebrating our 375th Anniversary all year with programs and events for all ages leading up to the big extravaganza on Saturday, September 8.

The day will kick off at 10am with a parade leaving Buker School, heading for Porter to Arbor, around the Town Hall, along Main Street (Route 1A) to finish at Pingree Park. Once at the Park, our Community Day will be off and running with children's games, music for all ages, community group displays and food trucks.

The Committee has been hard at work planning and we hope you will join us. Whether you watch the parade, stop by the park, or purchase merchandise your support is greatly appreciated.

As this series of essays has been my part in this 375th Anniversary Celebration, I thought I would devote this one to taking a look back to the 1943 Tercentenary (300th) Celebration (in which I participated as an 8th grade student at the Center School) to report on how the town chose to celebrate that 300th year and to the intervening 325th in 1968 and the 350th in 1993. The archives of bygone

town reports at Town Hall provide annual historic overviews of what happened in town in any given year so there I went.

As 1943 was in the midst of World War II and celebrations of all sorts were thus subdued in scale and scope, the town chose to focus on the dedication of the Honor Role of Wenham citizens serving in the War (then located on the Town Hall lawn). Appropriate speeches were made by several leading citizens, special church services took place, luncheon and tea were served by the Village Improvement Society, and various local exhibits were displayed at the Claflin Richards House and Barn, the Library, Fire House and Legion Hall. In my earlier essay, "School Days Part 5 - Wrap Up" I reproduced the Beverly Times report on the part the entire Center School student body of close to 150 played in celebrating the occasion with an outdoor pageant created by school principal Bessie Buker.

The Commemorative Address by James Duncan Phillips was printed in its entirety in a special opening section of the 1943 Town Report on special glossy coated paper.

Moving on 25 years to 1968 I could not find a single reference to celebrat-

ing the town's 325th Anniversary in that year's Town Report until I got to the School Reports in which the students of the Bessie Buker School were praised for their "rewrite" of the 1943 pageant for 1968 entitled, "The Light". That Miss Buker's now 25 years gone by creation was chosen for students in the school bearing her name to recreate says something about the enduring quality of that effort.

Well, maybe the passage of only 25 years did not generate enough enthusiasm for a celebration in 1968, but after 50 years in 1993 a year-long celebration was staged starting in January with year-long monthly historic walks to significant historic points throughout the town.

But the main effort was on two parades, an "enhanced" Memorial Day Parade and a special "Tersemicentenary" parade on September 18, a bit late for the actual date of Wenham's incorporation on September 7, 1643 (our 2018 celebration is only a day late to get onto a weekend). The "enhancement" of the traditional Memorial Day Parade involved the inclusion of re-enactors of the Revolutionary and Civil Wars and a unit of the Massachusetts State Guard representing veterans of the 20th century, while the special parade involved more of the community. It set off from the common (where a special display of Colonial crafts had been setup) following the dedication of a British oak tree donated to the town by a British couple who were the parade's official marshals. The Selectmen's Report spoke proudly of how the parade, as it passed down Main Street under the blue banner of that year's Celebration "represented all of the best to be found in Wenham."

The parade was followed by a clam-bake featuring an 8'x12' cake and dancing. A Souvenir Program was promised to be published later in the fall when whatever available funds for its production had been determined. I don't know if it happened and if so, does a copy (or copies) exist but some research in the library archives or those of the Wenham Museum (where all the archives of the former Wenham Historical Association are stored) may turn one up, a project for the oncoming winter perhaps?

In the light of the above revelations, we feel that our 375th Anniversary Celebration of the incorporation of our town will measure up for future review by interested persons. We just have to be sure that someone does write it up!

Color Squad of the Lt. Norman Prince Post No. 183 of the American Legion and Legion Auxiliary arriving for dedication of the Honor Role.

