

Growing Up in Wenham in WWII Recollections of a Bygone Era

By Bob Hicks

What Manner of Town is This Wenham? – Part 1

Six years after we came to Wenham, in the midst of WWII Wenham celebrated its 300th (Tercentenary) Anniversary. At that time (1943), a book, *Notes on Wenham History*, was published by the Wenham Historical Association, compiled by its president, Adeline P. Cole. Her closing remarks addressed her vision of the town's future, in part stating:

"The lush meadows and heavily wooded acres of the seventeenth century are gone. Our land hungry pioneers had a look at the future in their regulations to preserve the timber, the herbage of the meadows and good pasturage. Their descendants of succeeding centuries have been opportunists, overlooking land values in terms of productivity. They have created a residential town, a place to establish a home to which to return after the day's work is over, a place to bring up their children, a town of homes."

This remarkable woman labored long and hard for some 60 years from the beginning of the 20th century to bring the town up to meet her vision, in part through her work with the Wenham Village Improvement Society, implicit in which name was the recognition that the town needed some improving.

Well, I doubt if my parents realized all this in March of 1937 when we settled into what was to be our small farm on Burley Street. They were far too busy getting to work to begin realizing their own dream, while at age seven, I had no overall vision of the town. What I quickly discovered about our part of town was that there wasn't anyone here, well potential playmates at least. In Middleton we had been surrounded with neighbors a block from the town center and school.

Now in West Wenham, with only a dozen or so school age kids spread out over several miles of Maple and Burley Streets and Topsfield Road, it soon became apparent that I'd be pretty much on my own for playtime. Out here my "roaming" leash pretty much kept me on Burley Street for the next couple of years until I got my first bicycle at age nine when I was allowed to go as far as (but no farther) Topsfield Road in search of childhood companionship, fun and games.

It was the daily trip to the Center School aboard Sid Prince's school bus that introduced me to another part of town, the "village" where most of the townspeople (and their kids) lived. But I could not

join in the after school action there as at the school day's end it was right out the school door and onto the school bus for me, back to my remote home.

At the time I did not know what my parents' thought of the town, they had moved here for the available small farm property and not because of any advertised real estate attractions. Shortly after we settled here, Dad left his job at Richardson's in Middleton to take a job driving a milk truck for nearby Wethersfield Farm in the Putnamville section of Danvers. This was a "gentleman's farm" owned by Dudley Rogers, whose customers for his "Golden Guernsey" milk included many of his fellow landed gentry in Wenham and Hamilton. Dad's milk route took him into many of these estates in Wenham for a first hand look at another aspect of the town. Occasionally I went along with him and got my first look at how the "rich people" lived.

It did become apparent that the town was roughly divided into three distinct areas from west to east. Where we lived in West Wenham was thinly populated with small farmers, several large estates and a scattering of small homes on small lots that had been set off from some of the farms' frontages. Heading east from here, Wenham Center was reached (after passing by the side street to Idlewood Lake, another story for later), centered on the First Church, the Town Hall, the Fire Station and Trowt's store. Here the majority of the population lived in small homes on a network of small streets, that "residential town" that Mrs. Cole envisioned.

Continuing east off Main Street onto Larch Row, as soon as the railroad tracks were crossed, the population density declined abruptly as the land opened out in a number of large estates and the dense woodlands surrounding the Salem/Beverly Water Boards' Longham Reservoir and thence on east on Grapevine Road to Beverly Farms. It certainly was a different landscape from ours with all its sweeping open land with large mansions tucked away from the road at the ends of long tree shaded drives. How these large estates came into being over here in East Wenham is explained in *The North Shore*, Gloucester author Joe Garland's affectionate history of America's

most civilized resort (it's a great read, the library no doubt has it).

In my next installment, "What Manner of Town is This? – Part 2, I'll go into more detail about how the town was run in 1937 on a total tax take of just \$70,192, with the budget buster, then as now, the school system taking \$27,000 of it. Also I might have something on the town's "demographics" (did they even use this word then?)

To learn more about Adeline P. Cole:

Google hwlbrary.com

Click on Research at top of page

Click on Reference Info

Scroll down to Local History

Click on link in Jack Hauck's local history book, *Treasures of Wenham History*

Scroll down to 05 Adeline P. Cole

CAUTION: Your attention might be drawn to others of the 33 essays listed, if so plan to be there a while, it's all fascinating stuff.

Treasures of Wenham History

In June of 2013 Jack Hauck, a retired journalist, gave his local writings to the town of Wenham, the Hamilton-Wenham Library and the Wenham Museum, in thanks for the help these organizations provided in accessing historical documents. *Treasures of Wenham History* exists as a set of digital documents consisting of 33 chapters, amounting to over 900 pages. Here's his intro on his Adeline P. Cole chapter:

Adeline P. Cole

We often read about the forefathers of our society. These were the men from an earlier time who made major contributions to the development of a town, state or country. There are many such men, who are seen as the forefathers of Wenham. Well, I want to tell you about a foremother, who contributed a whole lot to what Wenham is today. You will not find, in Wenham, any stone bearing a plaque with her name (something that should be corrected). There is but a brief section in a town history book that covers her life. A building, Cole in Enon Village, bears her family name. Although her name may not be prominent in Wenham's history, her many great works are all about us. What was her name? Adeline Philbrick Cole, (08/07/1865-01/05/1959)