

Rain not a newcomer to Apple Blossom days

By George Adams Parkhurst

Acres upon acres of apple orchards resplendent in their pink and white blossoms, pretty girls in pastel organdy, carefully choreographed pageantry, festive balls, participation by the governor of the Commonwealth, thousands of visitors from far and near — all these ingredients deftly blended by the general committee and tenderly nurtured by public-spirited members of the community resulted in four of Westford's first Apple Blossom Festivals.

Sunday, May 19, 1935, was a clear day with a light cool breeze that wafted the scent of bursting apple blossom buds from the nearby orchards. The large crowd of spectators began arriving long before the scheduled hour to witness the coronation of Miss Phyllis Wright (now Mrs. Mansfield Brandigan) as Apple Blossom Queen before a large audience.

Rev. John Day, pastor of the Unitarian Church was general chairman and introduced the guest speaker, Governor James Michael Curley. The governor briefly extolled the beauty and virtues of Westford and then asked that the queen come forward.

Miss Wright proceeded to the dias accompanied by her 10 ladies-in-waiting and pages. The regal crown was borne by Arthur T. Greenslade Jr. on a white silken pillow. The queen's long train was carried by Miss Marjorie Chandler and Miss Glenna Feeney while the flower girls spread apple blossom petals in her path.

The governor placed the crown on the head of Miss Wright and then had to repeat the crowning at the request of the newspaper photographers who asked for an "instant replay" in order to get the pictures they wanted. At the conclusion of the coronation,

"The Pageant of Apple Blossom Time" was presented in song and dance by 200 school children from all of Westford's schools.

Funds to cover the expenses of the festival had been raised through many projects. One of these was the presentation of the comedy, "Meet the Wife," at the Town Hall on May 1 under the direction of A. Franklin Trask, director of the professional Lake Shore Theatre at Nabnasset. The Festival Queen's attendants were selected by a vote of the members of the audience at the play. They were Pauline Shugrue (Chiarello), Doris Peterson (Thunberg), Barbara Hildreth (Parkhurst), Lena Tousingnant, Rena Gagnon, Jacqueline Spinner, Alice Canton, Mary Lamie, Muriel Cutler, and Eileen McGlinchey (Guiffrida).

The first Westford Apple Blossom Festival was declared an unqualified success and plans were started immediately for a similar event in 1936.

Everything was in readiness for the second festival on Saturday, May 16, 1936 — everything, that is, but the weather which was most uncooperative. It was a cold, blossomless day following drenching rains so an additional presentation of the pageant was scheduled for the following week. However, the crowning of the queen, Miss Mary Elizabeth Perrins (now Mrs. Richard Wright), in a return performance by Governor James Michael Curley, was carried out in spite of the fact that it was reported to be "the coldest May 16 in Westford's history."

A reported 2500 people gathered on the Whitney Playground for the program which opened with a short concert by the Abbot Worsted Band and the appearance of "Miss Cradle Flower," a full blooded Pueblo Indian, who first gave a tribal

prayer in English and then sang one of her native songs in the tribal language.

The regal procession was led by the Indian girl, followed by the flower girls and the queen and her attendants, whose light summer costumes were hardly appropriate for the low temperature and biting north wind. The maids of honor were Gladys Knowlton (Dalton), Portia Nathalie Prescott, Majorie Spinner, and Virginia Heathcote, while the attendants to the queen were representatives of the surrounding towns.

After a brief speech, Governor Curley placed a silver crown on the head of Miss Perrins. The festival pageant followed. In the evening, a colorful ball was held in the Westford Town Hall, featuring old-fashioned dances. Also, there was a display of locally grown fruit.

The perversity of New England weather was again manifested on Sunday, May 24, when the pageant was repeated. Apparently the temperature had changed from too cold to being rather warm as the newspaper reported that "A large crowd attended and enjoyed the entertainment even though the day was fairly warm." In addition to the pageant, the Abbot Worsted Band gave a concert and the State Commissioner of Agriculture and a quest orchardist spoke on apple growing in the Nashoba Valley.

On May 16, 1937, Miss Portia Nathalie Prescott became Queen Nashoba III in a ceremony on the grounds of the Frost School before a crowd estimated at 5000. Tiny Nancy Hurley, youngest daughter of Governor Charles F. Hurley, had to be lifted up by the Governor's representative, Adjutant General Brig. Gen. Charles H. Cole, in order to place the crown on the queen's head. Lowell's Mayor Dewey Archambault briefly addressed the gathering and Gen. Cole brought the greetings of the Governor who was unable to attend.

The coronation procession was lead by Metosanya "Clear Sky," a direct descendant of Massasoit, the famous chief of the Wampanoag Indian tribe. Behind her, in their beautiful and colorful gowns, came the flower girls fol-

lowed by Queen Nashoba III, then the train bearers, the maids of honor and the queen's attendants.

A colorful pageant entitled, "Springtime Dance Festival" was presented following the coronation.

The queen and her attendants had been introduced to the public the night before when they held court at the Annual Apple Blossom Festival Ball at the Town Hall.

The fourth Nashoba Apple Blossom Festival opened with the crowning of Miss Betty Priest of Gleasondale as Queen Nashoba IV in a corner of the Old Homestead Orchards on Depot Street, operated by W. Arthur Perrins. Mr. Perrins was the key organizer of all four festivals, serving as general chairman of three of them.

The queen's arrival provided a colorful and impressive scene. She was brought to the platform in an ancient cart loaned by Henry Ford's Wayside Inn and drawn by two white oxen. Miss Priest was accompanied by her train bearers, Barbara Minard and Norma Grundy and crown bearer Richard Fox. Then came the queen's maids of honor, Misses Rowena Curley (May), Dorothy Fecteau (Davis), Barbara Hildreth (Parkhurst) and Priscilla Prescott, followed by her attendants from surrounding towns. American Legion Post 159 provided a color guard. As in the previous year, the crown was placed by little Nancy Hurley, the Governor's daughter with an assist by Adj. Gen. Cole.

After the coronation, Queen Betty was presented with a birthday cake, that being her twentieth birthday. Gen. Cole cut the cake with his sword.

During the following week, thousands of visitors enjoyed the spectacular sight of apple blossoms in the orchards along the official tour routes through the Nashoba Valley. The celebration came to a close on Saturday night with the queen's ball at the Town Hall.

This year's Golden Anniversary Apple Blossom Festival and parade commemorated the first such celebration that really "put Westford on the map" 50 years ago.