

Tewksbury residents honor their own Tom Sawyer

By CATHERINE CLABBY
Sun Correspondent

TEWKSBURY — In 1956, after nearly a half century of service to the town, dairy farmer Thomas Sawyer was recruited by Tewksbury residents to run for a seat on the newly created Planning Board.

As former resident Ernest "Curly" Carey recalls, once Sawyer agreed to run, his victory pretty much was sealed.

"He didn't have to put up a sign or take out an ad," Carey said. "He always gravitated to these things because he was the type of guy who could get things done."

Saturday, more than 100 friends and relatives gathered in the Masonic Temple on Victor Street to celebrate Sawyer's 90th birthday. Honored with commendations from state and local officials at the party, and presented with a town medal, Sawyer was thanked for his service that began in a decade when census takers counted only 3,750 residents in Tewksbury, now home to more than 24,000.

"I made a lot of accomplishments in the town, if I say so myself," said Sawyer, who due to throat surgery more than a decade ago must struggle to speak, but shows a high level of enthusiasm and a sharp wit.

"I loved the town and the people in it," said Sawyer, who now lives with a daughter in Wilmington. "I wanted to make a difference."

And that he did. From 1915 to 1930 Sawyer transported school children in the then-predominantly agricultural community to and from the Foster and Shawsheen schools on horse-drawn wagons and sleighs.

The list of accomplishments that followed is lengthy, including a stint as road commissioner from 1934 to 1950, when he coordinated the first paving of the town's roads; a seven-year tenure as fire marshal; and terms as inspector of meats, inspector

of animals, fence viewer and dog officer.

He also assisted in the construction of the Congregational Church and the town's original high school.

Asked to list what he considers his most significant contributions to the town, Sawyer points to two things. The first was gaining enough votes in 1927 to fund the installation of electricity in the east portion of Tewksbury. The second was saving the town \$15,000 in the installation of a nine-foot-wide culvert under River Road.

Sawyer, who left school in seventh grade, describes himself as educated in experience. At 17 he was married and rented a farm he eventually purchased, the Mill-

stone on Maple Street, which originally was owned by the family of his wife, the late Alice Burt Sawyer.

There he raised, imported and traded in dairy cattle, producing milk for the local state hospital and for sale to town residents.

More than a business, the farm was a social center for the people who worked for him and the families who lived nearby, particularly the Careys, a family of 15 children.

"He actually enjoyed these things," recalled one of those children, now Acting Town Treasurer Warren Carey, who with Sawyer's three daughters and his own siblings helped to organize the party.



Selectman Jay Kelly presents a proclamation to Thomas Sawyer.