

# Town's crime wave is small stuff

This is the fifth story in a series on Hampshire County crimes.

By LISA FREIMAN

WORTHINGTON — Maybe they were poorer record-keepers than their hill town neighbors, or maybe they were just more wholesome people, but the generations that lived here through the 19th and early 20th centuries reported very little in the way of crime.

Worthington history books carry few words about anything

the account, lectured the boys so sternly that they “looked on life in a different manner” and proceeded to become upstanding citizens.

“They saw themselves in disgrace,” according to Clark.

Modern-day historians cannot account for the shortage of spicy crimes in early town history. Certainly Worthington has always been a refuge from cities, and a place where people live closer to the land, but in that it is no different from other hilltowns, said historian Lois Ashe Brown.

“It’s a good question,” said Brown, who confirmed that there are no recorded crimes here from the 1800s and early 1900s.

Brown said things haven’t changed that much since then. While crime has increased as it has everywhere, none of it is on the scale of murder or arson, and none of it is the sort of crime that receives public attention.

Much of it, she said, is domestic violence that residents are only aware of if they own police scanners.

“We don’t see that in the newspaper,” she said.

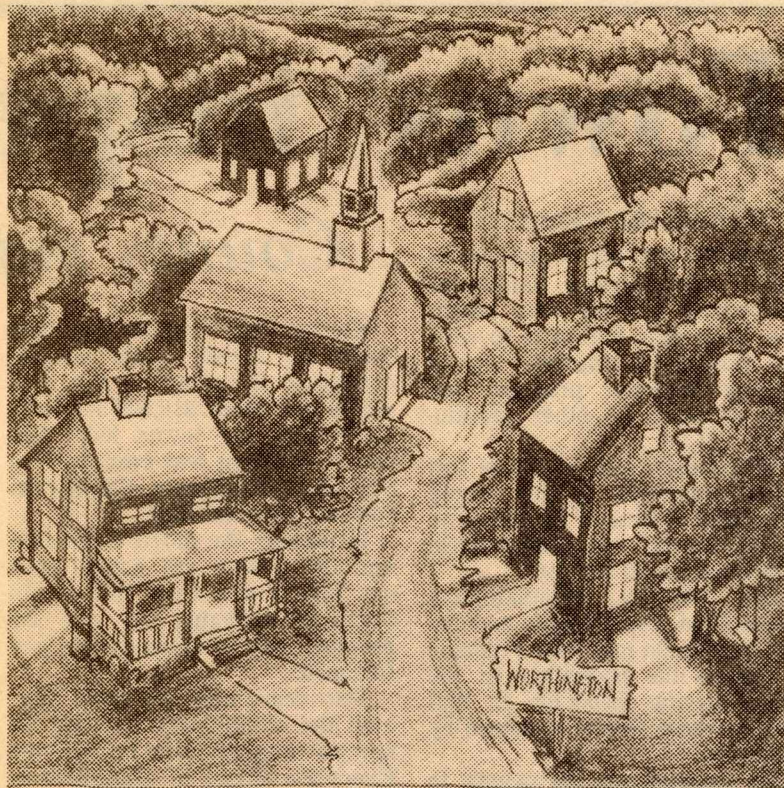
Helen Magargal, niece of former town historian Elsie Bartlett, suggested that crimes were handled differently long ago.

“They talked to kids instead of calling the police,” she said.

Magargal can’t think of any crime stories. But she has a few funny ones.

Her father, for example, helped elect the town prostitute to the School Committee.

When he became eligible to



**CRIME TAKES A HOLIDAY** — There is very little regarding historic crimes in the town of Worthington; in fact, there were no recorded crimes there in the 1800s and early 1900s.

vote in the late 1800s, he and a group of friends thought it would be a great prank to vote for the woman.

She won, but not surprisingly, declined to take office.

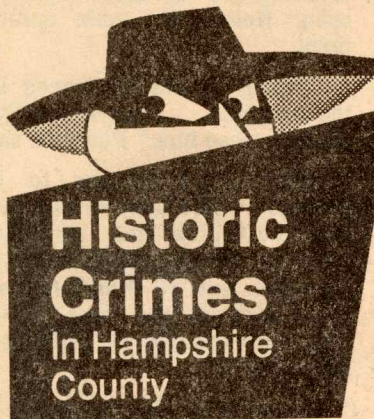
Perhaps the greatest dishonor in the town’s history fell on the Rev. Josiah Spaulding, as described in “A History of the Town of Worthington” by James C. Rice. Although charges of immorality and delinquency of duty were never “sustained” against him, according to the account, he was dismissed as

reverend in 1794, after many public meetings and tremendous town controversy.

This account and another are silent on what led to charges against the Yale-educated minister, but he was cleared by an Ecclesiastical Council and later settled in Buckland, where he lived out his life.

If an acquitted minister is the best that Worthington can do for disgrace, that’s just fine with Magargal.

“That’s us — clean living and nothing else,” she said.



that even looked faintly like a crime. So peaceful a place was it, in fact, that when a group of boys decided to harass three elderly people in 1860, it was big news.

The boys, from Worthington Corners, singled out a Mr. Burton and his two elderly sisters, according to an account in “Papers on the History of Worthington” written by Edward J. Clark. They threw stones, pounded on the door of the Chesterfield Road home and frightened the three until neighbors had the boys arrested.

Squire Brewster, according to