

Forge Pond, Known by Other Names, Still Sparkles

By Gordon B Seavey

Edwin R Hodgman, a Westford clergyman, wrote a thoroughly researched and detailed history of the old colonial town, starting with the year 1659 and completing it in 1883. In speaking of Forge Pond as "the rallying point of the tribes," he writes "It's to be regretted that the Indian name of this pond has not been preserved."

A little research shows this pond has been known by at least three names and whatever the Nashoba Indians or other local tribes who fished and hunted in the area, might have called it.

Early settlers named it "Stoney Brook Pond" (inasmuch as it was the headwaters of Stoney (now spelled Stony) Brook of which Historian Hodgman writes "The pretty little stream that runs from Forge Pond to the Merrimack River (entering below North Chelmsford) is worthy of a more poetic name, albeit it is a benefactor to the people."

Pond In Three Towns

The town line divides Forge Pond almost equally between Westford and Littleton, with 104 acres in Westford. On the western bank, where the railroad line disappears into the woods and near a modern A—house recently constructed, is a stone bound which marks where Groton joins with Littleton and Westford.

This was not always so. In the very early days the town line cut across the eastern end of the lake, leaving but a few acres in Westford.

Old records show that a group of early settlers in what was then part of Groton and is now Forge Village, being nearer to church in Westford, the old First Parish, than to the one in Groton, petitioned the General Court for a change in town bounds.

One reads thus "Province of the Massachusetts Bay In the House of Representatives, Sept. 10, 1730 - A Petition of Jonas Prescott, Ebenezer Prescott, Abner Kent and Ebenezer Townsend, Inhabitants of the Town of Groton, Praying that they and their Estates contained in the following Boundaries, viz. Beginning at the North West Corner of Stoney Brook Pond, from thence extending to the North West Corner of Westford, Commonly called Tyng's Corner, and bounded southerly by said Pond, may be set off to the Town of Westford for their greater convenience in attending the publick Worship."

"Read and Ordered with the Petition within named with their Estates, according to the bounds re-cited, be and hereby are to all intents and purposes set off from the Town of Groton and annexed to the Town of Westford. True extracts from

I love to watch the rooster crow,

He's like so many men I know
Who brag and bluster, rant and shout

And beat their manly breasts,
without

The first damn thing to crow
about.

John Kendrick Bangs

the Records of the Genl Court Attest, John Avery D Sect

Tyng's corner is at the junction of three towns Westford, Groton and Dunstable, where the Millstone Hill project is now located.

Brook's Course Changed

To most people Stony Brook is a lazy little stream, meandering through the valley of the same name. As it takes water from Keyes, Long-Sought-For and Nabnasset (early spelling was "Nubanussuck") Ponds, plus numerous other tributaries along the way, it is an important natural factor in the drainage of the valley.

The normal altitude of Forge Pond is 212 feet and Stony Brook has a drop of only 50 feet as it winds through miles of marsh, meadows and woodlands to reach the old mill dam at Brookside.

The main outlet of Forge Pond was at one time before the dam was built at the Village through the old cranberry bogs off Concord Rd (Route 225) near the location of the new Westford Water Company wells. It gurgled through Boutwell's meadow just west of St Mark's Episcopal Church, entering the present Stony Brook near the Sargent Foundry.

The gullies worn centuries ago by the flowing waters can still be seen, particularly at the junction of Patten and Cold Spring Rds. In fact, one of four new split level homes built in 1965 on Patten Rd., is right over the old brook bed, raised of course from its former level.

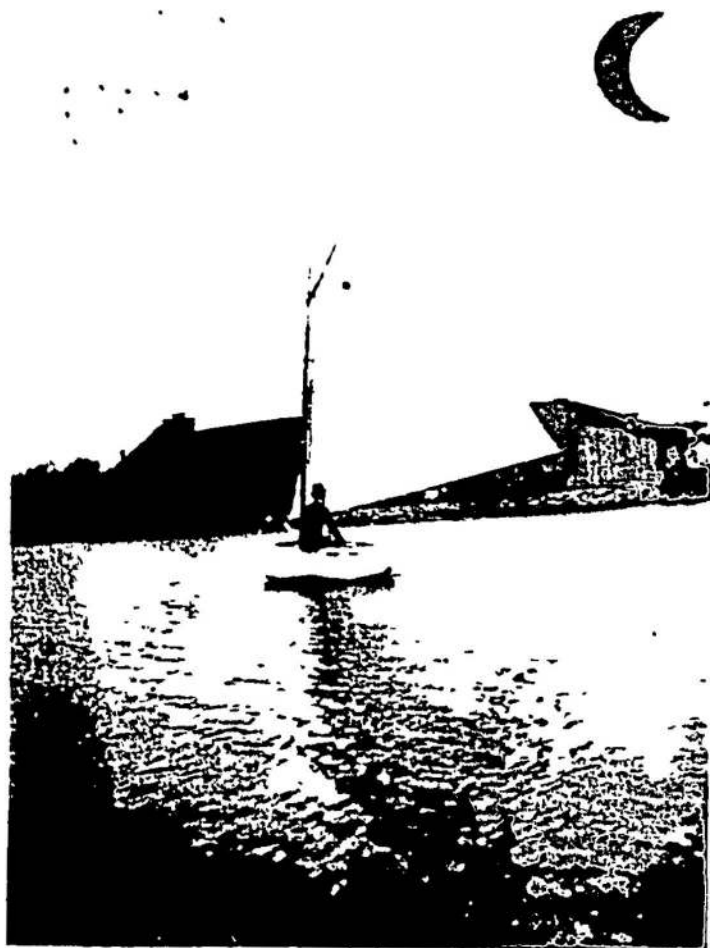
Summer Cottages Built

Hannah Prescott Parsons, a direct descendant of the original settlers from Groton and a school teacher in Forge Village, inherited a sizeable piece of land on the southeasterly shore of Forge Pond. She engaged Fred Symmes, a well-known local surveyor, to lay out shore-front lots for summer cottages. A plan filed in 1902 shows that there were 18 lots in all, with an average frontage of 100 feet and a depth of 175. Entrance to the lots were through a private woods road, now called Green Needles Rd.

An early deed concerning this property mentions that it was bounded by part of what was formerly known as "Stoney Brook Pond."

Others began to sell off cottage lots but as a fancier name than Forge Pond was thought necessary, no doubt some real estate salesman concocted the Indian sounding name of "Lake Matawanakee." Records do not reveal that there ever was a tribe nor an Indian of that name. The history of Littleton tells that Forge Pond was one of the boundary lines of the Nashoba Indians.

People who have long been associated with Forge Pond have never come to an agreement on what the word "Matawanakee" means, where it came from nor how it is to be spelled. Some have said there was an Indian tribe by that name. Others thought it meant "sparkling blue waters." George W. Goode, an early property owner and an ardent fisherman, insisted until his death in 1940 that it meant "Good fishing here." Modern fishermen might question that one!



SAILING ON FORGE POND, CIRCA 1921 — Sailing is fast becoming a revived sport on Forge Pond, although not by skippers in bowler hats as this old photograph, taken in the early 1920's, shows.

The late John P. Brown of Forge Village is sailing the Nona towards the old Daniel L. Gage ice houses in the background. The boat was brought to the lake by Edward M. Abbot, a noted sportsman all his life and later president of the Abbot Worsted Company.

The ice houses, which were last filled in 1930, were burned to the ground in mid-August 1932, the fire was believed to have been set. The huge wooden buildings with inclined "runs" to bring up freshly cut ice from the lake were located on what is now the bathing beach constructed by the Westford Jaycees, at the point where the waters of Forge Pond begin their journey to the sea via Stony Brook. It was on this same location, prior to the construction of the ice houses, that picnickers a century ago knew as Excelsior Grove.

A summer visitor for over fifty years said she always thought it meant "Everybody Welcome!" This is probably the interpretation put on the name by an over enthusiastic (but long gone) land salesman Allister F. MacDougall, active in the Westford Historical Society, thinks that the name "Matawanakee" was just someone's wild dream.

Forge Pond is crescent-shaped, about 1 1/2 miles long and half a mile at its widest part. A dictionary interprets "lake" as being a sizeable body of inland water, either fresh or salt, and a "pond" is a body of water smaller than a lake.

What's your interpretation? We suppose if you were a waterbug, you might call it a lake, or if a water skier, a pond!

Name Dying Out

The name Matawanakee almost died out when it was revived by the developers of some 20 acres of land on the western shores of the pond right after World War II.

If we continue to call this small inland body of water

"Forge Pond," it could be possibly the only Forge Pond in the world. Historically, the name is assumed to come from early forges which used its water power, or the colonial settlement which started Forge Village. There is only one community by that name listed in Hammond's World Atlas, and it is Forge Village, Massachusetts.

Historian Hodgman reports "Prior to 1730, Jonas Prescott had greatly enlarged and improved the works on Stony Brook by erecting forges for manufacturing iron from the ore (found in nearby areas) as well as other purposes." It is difficult to fix the precise date of the building of the forges, but it was perhaps as early as 1710.

Therefore the name Forge Pond is a good solid one. It fits like a glove. And, too, the U.S. cartographers and other noted map makers have never used the name Matawanakee but always Forge Pond. A map of the Town of Westford dated 1730 shows only the name Forge Pond.