

# Forge Villager recounts 91 "precious" years

By GORDON B. SEAVEY

Publisher, Belmont Herald

**FORGE VILLAGE** — This past Thursday, a "precious" lady observed her 91st birthday.

She is Mrs. Annie Brown Precious who has lived in this Westford suburb ever since her parents brought her from Lancashire, England, at the age of nine. Since that day, she has been spreading cheer and kindness throughout the area.

Until recently an avid reader, she would sooner discuss local, state and national affairs than delve into the past. When questioned about the "old days," however, her clear memory promptly brought back old scenes, names and functions with clarity.

Like the date of June 11, 1899, for example.

This was the day that members of the Forge Village Century Club, a group of bicycle riders affiliated with the League of American Wheelman, took off from the Forge Village railroad station for a 100-mile ride to Webster and back. It was quite an event in those days, so important that a group of well wishers gathered at 5 a.m. to wish them well.

The solitary girl in this group was Annie Brown. Two other girls had planned to make the grueling and exciting trip, but backed out at the last minute. But not so with spunky Annie.

The local group, which included her brother Jack, her future husband and half a dozen others, completed the trip over the rough roads and were back home by 8 p.m. Annie admitted that her brother helped her somewhat by pushing her up some of the steeper hills. She still possesses an engraved medal to prove the authenticity of the trip.

She bemoaned the fact that she was not able to see the start of the Century Run taken by the Charles River Wheelmen three weeks ago, making the traditional 100-mile test of bicyclists' skill and stamina, from Littleton to Peterboro and return.

She also recalled the mill days of the past, when she went to work as a child at the Abbot Worsted Mills, her parents falsifying her age so that she could avoid the non-too-rigid child labor laws of the day. She listed the location of the old tenement buildings which housed the mill workers. They toiled twelve hours a day, six days a week, for about \$1 a day. She was a bobbin girl to start with.

There were no paid vacations, no coffee breaks, and if a worker reported late for work too often or who was absent without good cause, he was replaced with another job seeker.

At the age of 21 she was married to William Corney Precious, an overseer in the combing department, and after their first child was born, the family moved to the neat little home on Pleasant Street, adjacent to the Julian A. Cameron school. Here two more daughters were born.

Living next to this elementary

## The Sketchbook



**ANNIE PRECIOUS**

...looks back over 91 years

school gave Mrs. Precious an excellent outlet for her love of children. Generations of youngsters came to know this kindly, personable lady and considered her their special friend.

Little girls would pass through the well-kept flower garden in the rear of the Precious home, not to receive a scolding for trespassing, but for a flower pinned on a jumper or dress. The schoolboys learned at an early age that Mrs. Precious was an excellent cook, with a special flare for making cookies and cakes that would appease a youthful appetite.

The teachers, too, shared Mrs. Precious' thoughtfulness and generosity. Oftentimes, a run in a stocking a missing button or an open seam in a dress were quickly repaired by her skillful hands.

In addition to bringing up an active family, Mrs. Precious, who had received a meager education, was a top correspondent for the old Lowell Courier-Citizen, which was later absorbed by the Lowell Sun.

She was always active in the affairs of the Episcopal Mission church, St. Andrew's, just across the street, of which her husband was one of the founders. She enjoyed especially the ladies sewing circle.

Annie and Corney were busy with the many affairs in the Village. Although musical themselves, their three daughters were outstanding musicians. Father Precious was an organizer of the first Abbot Worsted Band, contrived around World War I, and was its treasurer for many years. He passed away in 1933.

Daughters Carolyn, Pamela and Mildred went to school next door and then to Westford Academy, where they were graduated with high honors. Two received degrees from Boston University and Pamela, the Conservatory of Music. She later was choir director and or-

ganist for her church, St. Mark's for forty years.

Although not one to dwell on the past, Mrs. Precious likes to talk about her daughters and the good times they had growing up with their counterparts. Many a songfest or a jazz session was had in the small parlor of their home. Classmates would gather, particularly in the winter evenings, for healthy, self-entertainment. Television had not been invented.

The oldest, Carolyn, would play piano, Pamela (Daisy) the trumpet, and Mildred, violin. All girls were accomplished pianists and organists.

As all grandmothers, and great-grandmothers especially, Mrs. Precious likes to talk about the offspring, but really not too much. Carolyn, now Mrs. Derwood A. Newman of Needham, was choir director and organist at Christ Church there for many years. Her husband retired after serving 17 years as school superintendent and the community honored him by lending his name to a new junior high school.

While a pig-tailed student at Westford Academy, Pamela played the organ Sundays at the First Parish Church. She is married to Peter F. Perry, former superintendent of Westford schools. They live just over the Westford line in Groton.

Mildred is the widow of Carl Haussler and makes her home in Cranston, R. I. Her mother refers to her as "My Mikie." Not a day goes by but what one of the family checks on "mother," who insists on living alone in the modest home which holds so many tender memories.

Her six grandchildren are spaced in many areas, as are many families of today. Richard Newman is a geologist with Mobil Oil and is now in Alaska with his family. He has a new daughter, Carolyn, and son Peter. Sandra Newman is married to Andrew Penz, a physicist with Ford Research Foundation and stationed in Detroit. Michael Perry is with a merchandise chain organization in Miami and has daughter Tina and John Michael, the youngest.

Now in rather fragile health, her spirits are high, perhaps higher than ever, to compensate for her failing eyesight. She had to give up her 1951 Chevy coupe two years ago because, in spite of her pride, did not wish to damage anyone on the highway. Up until that time, even the police admitted that Annie handled the wheel of that old GM product with the greatest of skill.

For one who was primarily self-taught and an avid reader, Mrs. Precious misses the many fine books that at one time was at her disposal. As a substitute, she finds the long-playing records, called "Talking Books," a great joy and inspiration.

Those who have come in contact with this lovely, gracious woman of the "old school" will never forget her. They must agree that the day Annie Brown arrived in Forge Village was a "precious" day for all!