

Lure of 1849 gold rush hit Westford

By Gordon B. Seavey

The discovery of gold in California in 1849, as any Academy student will tell you, brought adventurers — men and women — from all over the world to seek quick riches.

And there were those from Westford, too. One could trek across the country to get his land of promise. Two Westford young men chose to travel by boat to Panama and then hike across the Isthmus to the Pacific, but they never made it.

Like most men of the day, Nathan P. Prescott, age 35, thought he saw a "golden opportunity" for himself and must have considered all possibilities of how to reach the western shore the most practical, and safe, way.

He chose the long route around South America by sail. He went, he found out, and he returned to live to a good age of 75 to be buried in West Burying Ground, in Westford soil. Wiser, maybe?

Nate tells of his sailing experiences in a four-page handwritten "log" he kept, later found in the attic of his old homestead at 181 Main Street, with descriptions of weather (mostly foul or calm); the two negro cooks and kinky hair in the soup; fellow passengers — seven men, three ladies and five children in the first class cabin (and eight men in the second); and his catching two sharks.

Although he had been a member of the Class of 1837 at Westford Academy, his spelling showed that he was not at the top of his class. One item: "For amusements we have two hours in the evening of fiddleing and dancing and comick singing, etc."

Nate does not tell us the name of the ship nor that of the captain (which he rated as a first rate "navagator," but they sailed from Boston on the night of Novem-

ber 7th (1850) with fair wind, then the second night "we had ruff weather."

They came to anchor in San Francisco Bay on the night of 147 days after he had left his wife and family, which included year-old Ebenezer.

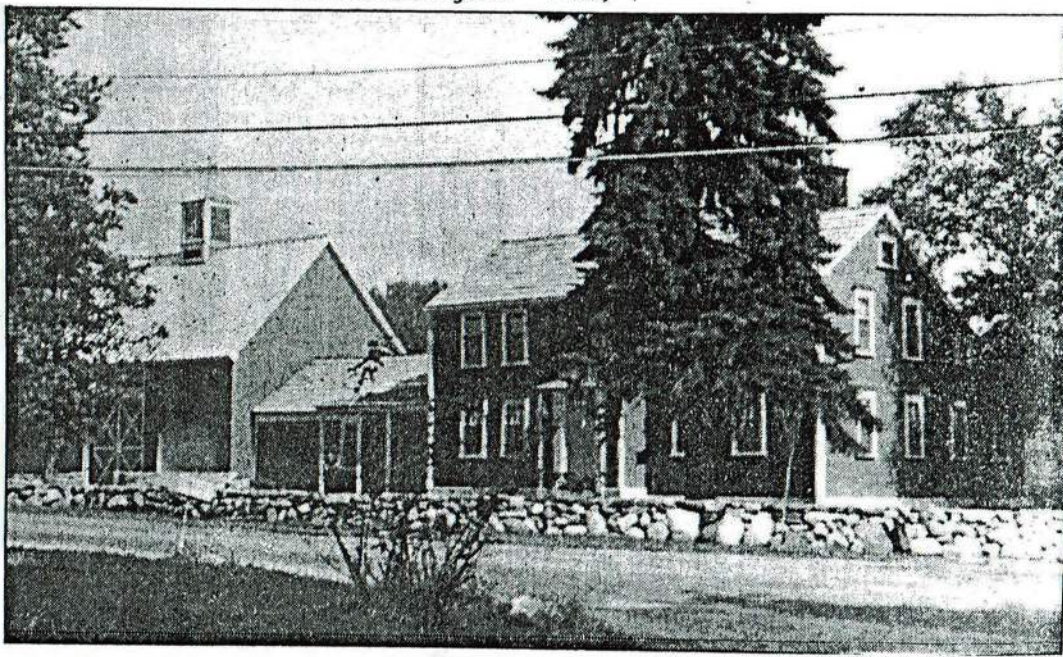
William Prescott, of 2 Main Street, recalls from family recollections that his great-great-grandfather really went for the experience and not for gold prospecting. Having a blacksmith shop in Westford across the street, he was proficient in blacksmithing and could make tools and other equipment for the miners.

The Prescott homestead, at the junc-

tion of Main Street and Chamberlin Road, was built in 1752 and is located in what was used as rich farming areas on Frances Hill, first settled and farmed in the 1650s.

This old landmark, which in late years became run-down, has been restored by the St. Hilaire family, formerly of Lowell. The shaky barn was replaced with a new one and the rear roof line of the residence was extended to enlarge the building into a salt box design.

(Gordon Seavey, a native of Westford who lives on Depot Street, is the retired publisher-owner of the Belmont Citizen.)



The Prescott Homestead at Chamberlin Corner, built in 1752, recently has undergone an extensive face-lift by the St. Hilaire family. The rear has been extended to create a salt box, and the ell and barn have been rebuilt.

(Photo courtesy of Gordon B. Seavey)