

# One of town's oldest buildings, Hildreth home, changes owners

By Gordon B. Seavey

**WESTFORD** The pre-Revolutionary War Hildreth homestead, one of the town's very oldest buildings has changed ownership. It had been in the family for nine generations.

Believed to have been built in 1687, prior to the date that Westford broke away from its mother town of Chelmsford, it is not quite the oldest structure. Nevertheless, it is certainly very special in that it has been owned continuously by descendants of Richard Hildreth born in England and settled here in 1643.

Breaking the thread of ownership for the first time is Barbara Hildreth Parkhurst of Chelmsford whose father Arthur was

born in the old home. Purchasers are Major and Mrs. Graham Campbell. He has been with the Air Force for fifteen years and currently is stationed at Hanscom Field in Bedford.

The house has undergone little change over the nearly three centuries it stood on, where else, but Hildreth Street - now numbered 58 in the "modern" style.

The property includes 150 acres of meadow and upland fields, good for dairy farming and producing apples. With the exception of two acres surrounding the homestead, the balance of the lands were sold more recently for a cluster-zoned housing development.

The unpretentious dwelling faces away from Hildreth Street and sets well back. It has been suggested that the original road passed in front, but this is not indicated on a 1730 map.

There are four rooms in line on the ground floor and another four above, all around a central chimney. Evidence shows that a wagon shed tacked on to the easterly end was remodeled into a kitchen and utility room, with a floor added above. Otherwise, there have been few changes over the centuries.

## Modernized

For heat, there are working fireplaces in six of the rooms. Several years ago a small fireplace in what was probably the original kitchen was uncovered, exposing a large complete one with an iron crane for hanging kettles over the open fire. There is also a double beehive oven.

Walls on this room are of a native white pine, possibly sawed at Jonas Prescott's mill at the outlet of nearby Forge Pond. These boards are milled to a ship-lap pattern and some are 23 inches wide. This original kitchen, with an attractive mantle and cupboards surrounding the wide fireplace no doubt was the center of family life. The bricks could well have been made on

the property.

A partial cellar, mostly used to store vegetables in the winter and keep milk cool in the summer, was common in early days. The Hildreth house however, has a full cellar under the main part, partial under the addition.

The old home over the years became rather run down. In 1957 Arthur installed central heating and inside plumbing. Until then, the usual "necessary house" was a two-hole privy located in the corner of an outbuilding. Recently the weather-worn clapboards were replaced with shingles and walls and attics insulated.

A narrow stairway with two landings winds up to the second floor. A very narrow witch's staircase with bottom tread missing to entrap evil spirits, comes from the attic down along side the chimney. Heavy corner timbers show prominently in each room.

## Raw Countryside

Coming to Westford when it was a wilderness, the Hildreths chose probably this section of the area because of its rolling meadowland, brook and small pond, important for farming. Their fields covered part of Sparks and Burns Hills, the latter strewn with boulders left by the great glacier 15,000 years ago.

In the early days, settlers strung their nets atop Burns Hill to snare passenger pigeons which were so abundant that flocks darkened the skies as they flew over. This was for food and also to sell in the seacoast cities. Historian Allister F. MacDougall has a rack used to roast these small birds over an open fire.

On Sparks, there is a two-acre lot walled in by stones, believed to have been part of an old homestead. When the Water Department, seeking three years ago a location for an additional reser-