

# Prescotts forge a place in Westford history

By Gordon B. Seavey

In the early days of Westford, Groton resident Jonas Prescott was considered as one of "our own" because he established a "corn" mill, later expanded to a saw mill, at the outlet of Forge Pond 300 years ago.

This was the beginning of the industrialization of Stony Brook Valley, using for water power a sizeable stream of that name which left Forge and ended in the Merrimack River at North Chelmsford.

With his sons, Jonas II, and Ebenezer, Prescott later set up forges using this water power. A low grade of bog iron was found nearby in Groton which fed the forges. Appropriately, the area soon took on the name of Forge Village.

His sons married and built homes near their work. Jonas II fathered nine children, his brother, eight. This was the beginning of the prominent Prescott family in Westford. Today, there is only a handful of descendants.

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## Westford Wanderings

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The Prescotts of this branch became large landowners as their numbers grew. At one time, it was believed they owned several hundred acres in the northwest part of the town around Forge Pond, some of which was in Littleton.

One old deed describes the purchase of land from an Indian with his signature mark, "to have and to hold as long as trees shall grow and water flows."

An interesting sidelight is that Prescotts owned sufficient land to accommodate three railroads. Near the Arch Bridge and St. Catherine's church, the Acton & Nashua (Red Line) crossed both the Boston & Maine Railroad and the electric car line which ran from Lowell to Ayer, all on Prescott lands.

Jonas Senior was most active in Groton, although he was born in Lancaster in 1648. He watched over a garrison house on James Brook on the Old Ayer Road. A garrison house was one large enough to take in neighbors when an emergency arose or which would house a garrison of soldiers if needed. If the walls were lined with brick, that was more for insulation than for protection from the Indians. A stockade around the house

was to protect and keep within safe limits the inhabitants and the animals.

Jonas became a selectman about the time he built his little mill at Forge and in 1791 became Groton's 10th town clerk. Researchers report from original records that his handwriting was plain enough but his spelling "simply abominable."

Here's a sample.

"groton dasamber 21 1691 at a genaral town meting lagaly warn & the town being genaraly matt togeth(er) did then voat that thay would invite som meet parson to prach gods word to them with as much speed as as may be"

Jonas couldn't get by the third grade if spelling were a criterion. Nevertheless, we

must give the old gentlemen who lived to be 75 credit for many, many other accomplishments.

He worked hard as a wheel-wright, a forgerman, and a blacksmith — and he prospered. He was highly respected and was an integral force in both Groton and Westford.

His descendants spread throughout the area. Most notable was his grandson, Colonel William Prescott who commanded the forces at Bunker Hill and served with distinction throughout the Revolution. The colonel's grandson was William Hickling Prescott, Harvard University's famed historian of the southwest and South American countries. A city in Arizona takes the name of Prescott from this scholar with Westford ties.