

Sale of mansion relegates historic family to memory books

By Gordon B. Seavey

A landmark in Westford Center for nearly a century, the Abbot mansion at Main Street and Graniteville Road has been sold. The recent arrival of the new owners signalled the passing of a long era of Abbots in this town.

Along with memories, the only vestige of the Abbot name, prominent for eight generations, is the designation of a middle school at the Center and a street sign in Forge Village.

The new owners, however, hope to take a prominent part in the community. They are Zolton A. and Edith A. Phillips who, after living in North San Diego County, California, have decided that Westford, a typical New England town, is the best place in which to live for themselves and their five children.

Mr. Phillips is in a construction business which specializes in industrial warehouses, and now with the popular advent of mini warehouses or self-storage facilities for individuals, he has added this to his West Coast activities. This means he will be busy commuting across the country.

The Phillips have become familiar with New England having spent the past six summers in their Cape Cod residence in Harwichport.

Their children have selected Boston University, Lawrence Academy and Westford Academy for their education. Joseph Joe studies film production and Julie is taking pre-med courses in Boston. Jennifer is a junior and Janna a freshman at Groton. Zolton III is a sophomore at Westford Academy.

Sale of the property was handled by Anne Hockmeyer, veteran representative of Emerson Real Estate through their Westford office. The reported price was \$700,000.

The mansion has 20 rooms and was the dream of Abiel Jacob Abbot and his wife, the

former Mary Alice Mosely of Newburyport. It is a classical turn-of-the-century manor home for country living. Its 18 acres lie in the heart of his native town.

Construction started in 1890 and it was 13 months before he and his bride could move into the new home. Edward M., their first child, was born two years later; Camzu and John came later.

A visitor entering the Abbot home first would be impressed with the large hallway opening to a formal living room with sunporch beyond, or a den filled with mementos of the Abbots' travels or hunting and fishing trophies. Opposite is the formal dining room.

An elaborate staircase leads to the second floor and four master bedrooms. Seven other bedrooms are on the third floor. Carefully detailed fireplaces dominate the principal rooms. A billiard room and double-vaulted wine cellar, amply supplied by S. S. Pierce of Boston and usually kept well-secured, are located in the basement.

A well-groomed front lawn is contained by a fieldstone wall. From an impressive pillared verandah at the back of the house, one can look over formal gardens, manicured lawns and well-attended meadows to the southern foothills of the White Mountains in New Hampshire. A tennis court is tucked in a corner.

Fond of horses, the Abbots maintained a sizeable stable. Each horse had its own wide stall and a nameplate, such as Tadmuck Wonder. An assortment of wagons, coaches and sleighs were kept in the heated main part on varnished floors. With the coming of the Cadillac, a four-car garage was built.

The land was originally owned by an A. W. Cummings, whose home was moved to Boston Road to permit the location of the new residence. The house still stands,

opposite the old Center grammar school, now the drop-in center for the elderly. A small cottage was demolished but the brick-end Herrick house, one of the town's early homes, was saved to house families of the gardener and coachman. The huge dairy barn of hand-hewed timbers still stands.

Among the earliest families to settle Westford, John Abbot (born 1713) built his home at approximately the site where the post office now stands. The building still exists, but moved also to Boston Road.

All the Abbots were active in town affairs. They were well-educated and affluent. There were teachers, lawyers, a minister and later mill owners. The Abbot Worsted Mills started in Graniteville, expanded to Forge Village and Brookside, all villages of the town, and later to Lowell.

John Abbot, "Gentlemen," was an organizer and builder of the present meetinghouse (the third, 1794) whose 120 ft. steeple towers over the tree-lined common. All the Abbots were substantial supporters of the First Parish Church, "gathered" in 1734.

Twenty-eight Abbots attended the local Academy and 10 were either preceptors or teachers.

When Abiel's daughter Camzu was married in 1913, the event was reported on the front page of the *Lowell Sun* with headlines "72 point" in height. A special train carried distinguished guests, including two ex-governors, from Boston to the town's Brookside railroad station, where special electric cars brought them for the remainder of the trip to the venerable "white church" on Westford Common for the one o'clock ceremony. A luncheon for 250 followed at the home. The key to the wine cellar was turned frequently.

Always a strong supporter of the church of his fathers, Abiel had had the sanctuary redeco-



The Abiel J. Abbot House at the intersection of Graniteville Road and Main Street, completed in 1891, has been sold to a family from California.

(Photo courtesy of Gordon B. Seavey)

rated, the floor recarpeted, with new seat cushions in red to match the carpet.

Westford population 4,200 had never seen such a social event!

Upon the death of Abiel in 1921 the tower bell was tolled according to an old custom. His widow passed on 10 years later. Son Edward took over the mansion. It then received a face-lift, with new plumbing, heating and wiring. Plaques in the basement record the names of the original contractors as well as the subsequent ones.

Edward and his wife brought up a family of three: Edward Jr., lives in South Lyndeboro, N.H.; Natalie in Roanoke, Va.; and John died five years ago.

Edward Sr. like father Abiel,

was president of the Abbot Mill complex until his death 25 years ago. When his wife, Natalie Baron of Lowell, passed on last year at the age of 85, the Abbot line in Westford was terminated.

When the estate came on the real estate market, it was shown to at least 50 prospective buyers, most of whom were interested in the property for business reasons. Some thought it would be turned into an inn with bed and breakfast, or an executive retreat for conferences. Others thought it might be rearranged for condominiums, a nursing home or perhaps a rehabilitation center.

When it was announced that the Abbot mansion would con-

tinue as a family unit, many expressed a feeling of relief, perhaps if only for sentimental reasons.

Although hiding among mature landscape pieces, the Abbot home appeared very liveable, she said. Each room is well proportioned with sufficient window space for light and a spot to observe the magnificent views to the west and north.

A section of land lies at the end of Connell Drive with more a bit to the rear of the church. Mr. Phillips intends to divide this unused portion, about eight acres, of the estate into house lots for substantial homes.