

Westford's First Industrialist, Jonas Prescott, a Tenacious Lover

By GORDON B. SEAVEY

WESTFORD - The town's industrial "revolution" began just three centuries ago in the remote southeast corner of Old Groton, now Westford.

It was a complete change from the wilderness of land, inhabited by a few Indians, to the harnessing of the swiftly flowing waters from Forge Pond into Stony Brook.

The change was quite significant. Unfortunately, it displaced Andrew the

Indian from his favorite fishing spot where he had his "warre" (weir) at the pond's outlet. It destroyed what was said to have been a favorite rallying place for the local Indians.

It all started on June 15, 1680, when Groton, on a training day, granted to Jonas Prescott, that he should take up a piece of land at Stony Brook, in reference to the setting up of a (corn) mill there and that he is to take it up on the right hand of the Bay path adjoining to



TWO OF WESTFORD'S FINEST OLD COLONIAL HOMES are found in Forge Village. Upper photo is two-family home (unusual at that time) built by Captain Jonas Prescott in 1700's at Pine, corner Town Farm Road. It is owned by Luella Prescott Collins. Bottom photo is residence at 10 Pleasant Street, of clapboard and brick, built by Ebenezer Prescott in early 1700's. It was formerly used as a hospital/clinic by Abbot Worsted Company. (G. B. Seavey photos)



REMAINS OF THE PRESCOTT FORGE are shown in this photo, made 80 years ago, shortly before being razed. They used water power from Forge Pond as the stream entered Stony Brook. Bog iron was procured from Groton to make cast iron utensils.

the pond

This was the beginning of a line of mill sites of all sorts along the course of Stony Brook which drops 64 feet in its 3 1/2 mile journey to the West Chelmsford town line.

Groton purchased the land from Andrew for 20 shillings and Prescott was to "make use of so much and no more of the water as may sufficiently serve for the said mill."

A triangle of land of which this was a part was turned over to Westford a year later after the town was set apart from Chelmsford in 1729. This was at the request of Jonas, Jr., his brother Ebenezer Prescott and Abner Kent and Ebenezer Townsend, for they wished to be nearer to the meetinghouse at Westford Center.

The Prescotts for at least four generations controlled the water rights at the headquarters of the brook.

The location of course is now known as Forge Village, the only community by that name in the world! The Bay path is Route 225, the ancient road which wound from Southern New Hampshire to Boston and Salem.

English Stock

Jonas was a blacksmith as was his father John who had arrived from England in Boston in 1640 to stop briefly in Watertown before settling finally in Lancaster. Here Jonas was born in 1648. He

"Jonas," writes Historian Butler of Groton, "was not to be baffled by grates and locks. He took opportunities, when the cold wind blew, and the pelting storm raged, when no listener could overhear the whisperings of true lovers, to place himself beneath her grated windows."

Discovered by her parents, Jonas was given the heave-ho and Mary sent to Sterling to be "under the care of some watchful and faithful guardian."

Jonas, later in his wanderings, came into the area and "made his usual inquiry of some young men he saw if they had any pretty girls in their neighborhood." He was invited to a "quilting" party that very day, "and whom should he there find but his adored Mary Loker."

Nodding Acquaintance?

Craftily they kept their previous socializing a secret. Again found out the parents sent Mary packing back to Sudbury. "She was then sternly told that she must reject the blacksmith and receive the addresses of the lawyer."

"She resolutely replied, 'I would never marry to any one but Jonas Prescott. Butler's description sounds like an old time movie script as Papa cried, "Then you shall never have a farthing of our property." And she apparently never did."

They were married, nevertheless, in 1672 without the Loker blessing and dowry. Setting up housekeeping, "the tradition positively asserts that her only

implement for boiling was a two-quart kettle, and her wash-tub the shell of a large pumpkin."

Butler concludes the legend, "From this happy pair (they had twelve children) sprung doctors, warriors, civilians, statesmen...with other numerous descendants, of whom Mary lived to see one hundred and seventy five." She died in 1735 and her persistent lover in 1723, at the age of 75.

Their son, also named Jonas, married in 1699 and built a home in Forge Village probably near the old Prescott tavern which was demolished only four years ago. He added forges to the grist and saw mills started by his father.

And his son, a third Jonas, expanded these and was well-recognized as an outstanding forgemaster. He is probably the Captain Prescott who built a home at the corner of Pine and Town Farm Roads.

Like many other prolific earlier families, few of the descendants remain in town today. For the Prescotts, there are Luella Prescott Collins, in a nursing home; Mable M. Prescott at 32 Boston Road; and Helen Greig Ennis on Main Street.

moved to Groton where he became a large land owner and a highly respected citizen. He became a noted wheelwright as well as farmer.

As a protection against the Indians, garrison houses were established in 1691. A lieutenant in the militia, Jonas was in charge of 30 men at a garrison located next to James Brook on Old Ayer Road from Groton.

As a young man, Jonas had his eye on a Sudbury belle for a bride, but the girl's parents showed no desire of having a blacksmith for a son-in-law. Albert that his was a preferred and important profession, the parents had hoped to match their daughter, Mary Loker, with a man with a more prestigious profession.

John Loker was wealthy and it was said that he and his wife were "some what aristocratic in their feelings and notions." Mary was their idol and only daughter.

Early Romance

According to a romantic story which came down through the Prescott family, when the Lokers learned that Jonas had a strong attachment toward their fair Mary, they forbade Jonas attention to her.

The Lokers barred the windows of her room. When they thought there was any chance of the lovers meeting, they locked unhappy Mary in the house.