



Photo courtesy **Gordon B. Seavey**

Garrison houses such as this one on Lowell Road (built 1741) at one time were havens for several families to gather should Indian attacks occur.

Long after serving its purpose a sole garrison house remains

By **Gordon B. Seavey**

Early settlers in Westford were faced with many farming hard ships: a wilderness of trees, with few meadows and brooks and ponds. To find land for planting, it meant cutting down the woods with primitive tools and planting among the stumps — a lot of hand work — and with large, hungry families, they had to farm long hours, back-breaking work.

Then, too, there was always the possibility of marauding indians, and memories of the Indian uprising in nearby Groton in the mid-1660s was still on their minds.

The memory of King Philip's War was not forgotten. Should any signs of Indians in the area rise, the country folk needed a place to congregate for self-protection.

Hodgman, in his *History of Westford*, describes garrison houses as sizeable homes built of brick or wood with bricks or stout oak planks between the studs. Sometimes the upper floor projected over the lower floor, and sometimes the windows had sliding wooden shutters.

There were several of these homes in town for this purpose. One on Frances Hill, near the earliest home, that of Solomon Keyes, another at Brookside, and

the one in the western part of the town on land now being turned into modern homes was owned by Samuel Fletcher. It was torn down in 1814, long before land developers came along.

Hodgman tells us that the only garrison house in his time was occupied by Eli Tower, shortly after the Civil War.

Just who was Eli Tower?

Delving into Hodgman's again, Eli had married into the well-known and numerous Fletcher family, and was a very good farmer and townsman.

He was living on a 92-acre farm with a nice, sturdy house and with a generous barn set far enough away so as not to be the object of a house fire. Very practical.

His land was about the best in town, being in the fertile Stony Brook Valley with few boulders and rocks, and the soil itself was good so-called Merrimac Valley sandy loam. The place is now owned by the Adams family, located at 46 Lowell Road.

The house was apparently built by Albert Fletcher in 1741 and at one time stretched from Lowell Road to Shipleigh Swamp, which on the old maps shows to be near Route 40. Some acreage!

The Fletchers lived here until the early 1990s.

To quote Hodgman about garrison houses, he wrote: "When night came on and the deep

gloom of the forest settled down upon them, the women and children hastened to these houses, and in them they often heard the yell of the savage startling the night air."

I had asked the late Harvey Adams if he had ever heard the ghosts of these Indians at night and his answer was, "Never!"

And probably no one else ever did, as there were never many if any Tadmuck Indians on the landscape. Hodgman only mentions two: Andrew the Indian who fished at the outlet of Forge Pond, and another Indian, an elderly starving one who appeared at the door of a kindly farmer who kept and fed him for a few days until he died — and sent a bill to the town for this deed.

There is a garrison house open to the public which is practically on the Westford/Chelmsford line, just off Route 110. This is a real "oldie" and well-worth visiting.

Constructed in 1690, it has been carefully restored by the Old Chelmsford Garrison House Association. The house and the spacious barn are a museum and during the season many special activities are carried on here.

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