

# Recalling demise of 200-year old Forge landmark

## Building uses followed the changes in community through generations

By Gordon B. Seavey  
Eagle correspondent

If the demolition of the Prescott Tavern in Forge Village had been piece by piece, as it was built, perhaps the shock to the villagers wouldn't have been so great.

But to go to work one morning 15 years ago, glancing at the venerable landmark without due thought, and return at night to see an empty cellar hole and a pile of debris, that was too much for most, particularly among the so-called old timers.

Constructed two centuries ago with each joint fitted in mortise and tenon fashion, it must have taken many, many hours of tedious hand work. A bulldozer wiped this all out in a couple of hours.

There is no one alive today who can remember when the structure was used as a tavern. Luella Prescott Collins, at 90, recalled that when she was a little girl, it was a very "old" building.

### Last tavern keeper

It is said that Luther Prescott lived here and probably was the last keeper of the tavern. He was born in 1809, and after his death in 1895 the granite horse mounting block in front was removed to the West "burying ground" where it now sits as a grave marker for him and his family. Luther also doubled as station agent, postmaster, trial justice and also a state representative.

Daughter Olive Ann Prescott was preceptress at the Academy in 1859. The town has her to thank for putting in print (1896) a history of the town's greatest Revolutionary hero, Colonel John Robinson. He was her great, great grandfather.

Many facets of his interesting career would have been lost forever had not she penned the stories that came down through the family.

### Galloping horses

A son, Richard, who lived until 1935, is still remembered. He continued the Prescott place as a farm. People remember him, high on the front seat of the village fire wagon, whipping his pair of work horses to a galloping speed whenever the alarm sounded. Local fishermen looking for bait were able to buy shiners from "Richie" for two cents each.

His wife was often visited by the local children. Miss Annie McMurray, at 77, remembered hearing that the Prescotts once owned 800 acres in the vicinity of the village. This made the Prescotts no doubt the largest land owners in town.

She also recollected being shown an older ledger of the tavern with the records written in the common currency of the early days, the English pound, shilling and pence. There was once an ell to the tavern, complete with a two-story porch plus rocking chairs.

Another relative about the village was George Henry Prescott, a wool sorter in the mill, who dressed up his full beard with a flower between his lips.

In the early 1800s, "Forge Village" was in a very prosperous condition. It had a store, hotel, three iron forges, two blacksmith shops, two wool-carding machines, one clothier's mill, a grist mill and a wheelwright's shop, all located near the new worsted mill.

Half a century or more ago, life centered once again around the old "hotel" for it was now a business block. Here was the post office in



Photo courtesy Gordon B. Seavey

Now gone 13 years, Prescott Tavern in Forge Village once fed and housed weary travellers en route from southern New Hampshire to Boston or Salem. The 200-year old building later became a business block before being demolished in 1976.

the variety store operated by Harold F. "Pete" Connell, a barber shop and the widely known Hanley & Co., a yarn shop.

Katherine "Kate" Hanley was a friend to all and lived to a ripe 90; she died in 1965. She recalled as a little girl sitting on the stairs of the tavern waiting for the mail to be sorted. There were three mails a day then, arriving by train at the depot across the street.

The list of postmasters included

John and Abbie Splaine, Mary Nutting, Eva Pyne (onetime station agent at Pine Ridge), Burton Griffith and Josephine Connell, mother of the retired Westford postmaster. William Marcoullier operated the barber shop for many years, followed by Francis Daly.

### Influence of Abbot

Probably the best known person in the village was John C. Abbot, treasurer of the Abbot Worsted Company, operators of the big mills

making worsted yarns, powered by water from Forge Pond.

Business boomed during World War I and the company prospered. It was their idea to use these profits to create a model mill community. They tore down the mill tenements and built many multiple and single family homes.

The Abbots erected a recreation hall, where the Abbot band could perform, the Precious girls made music for the silent films, and the

mill workers could get a good meal in the cafeteria.

Mr. Abbot lived in an 18-room mansion opposite Westford Common. It was Victorian in style with a mansard roof and survived until 1942. It was complete with eight marble fireplaces, a billiard room on the third floor, two maids in the kitchen, a gardener and a coachman — yet "Jack" was "one of the boys" to all the villagers.

The company sponsored all sorts of athletic events but soccer and baseball were the most active. Special trains carried the team, the band and the rooters to such places as Providence, Quincy and New Hampshire to meet with opponents.

Forge Village was a happy, close-knit community where everyone knew everybody — and some, as usual, tried to know everybody's business.

But changes are inevitable. The mill is now a multi-million-dollar modern printing plant, producing the finest books. Workers come from a wide region. Of the grist mill (founded by Jonas Prescott in 1679) there are no remains and the same with the blacksmith and wheelwright shops.

The villagers bemoan the passing of another old friend, the village tavern. Here men would gather in stormy weather to play pitch with Pete near the pot-bellied stove in the store. Women would take Kate's advice as to just the right type and color of yarn to buy.

And men and boys were sure to get a hair cut every other week!

Gordon Seavey, a retired newspaper publisher, recalls when, as a boy camping on the south shore of Forge Pond, he would row over with friends to shop, visit and take the village's busy life, tying his boat at the dam, headwaters of Stony Brook. He is a native of Westford.