

Center site of substantial homes

Names became household words in 20th century

By June W. Kennedy
Staff Correspondent

This is the ninth in a series of recollections about Westford by Kate Hamlin (1847-1937), recorded late in her life from her home in California:

"A little way beyond the Day house, a road branched off toward Littleton; and not far from this were the homes of Rufus Patten and a Mr. Flagg.

"From this point, I turn back and follow the opposite side of the road, and the first house is a large white one, standing considerably back from the highway and occupied by one of the large family of Hildreths. [At that time, the names of Hildreth, Wright and Fletcher were the most numerous in the town.]

"At the entrance to the yard and directly on the street was a small building utilized as a shoe shop. Many times I went there either to be measured for a new pair of shoes or to have an old pair mended. [The Hildreth home mentioned above was razed a few years ago. The lovely Stanley Smith home was built on the same location.]

"The next house on this side of the road was opened and occupied by a Prescott. (I wonder if I am right in giving him the name of Charles Henry.) I think he was a man of some wealth, for those days, and an educated man. [This is the Charles Prescott home, for the past 70 years known as "Mille Fleurs".] Later the home came into the possession of the Edward Prescotts."

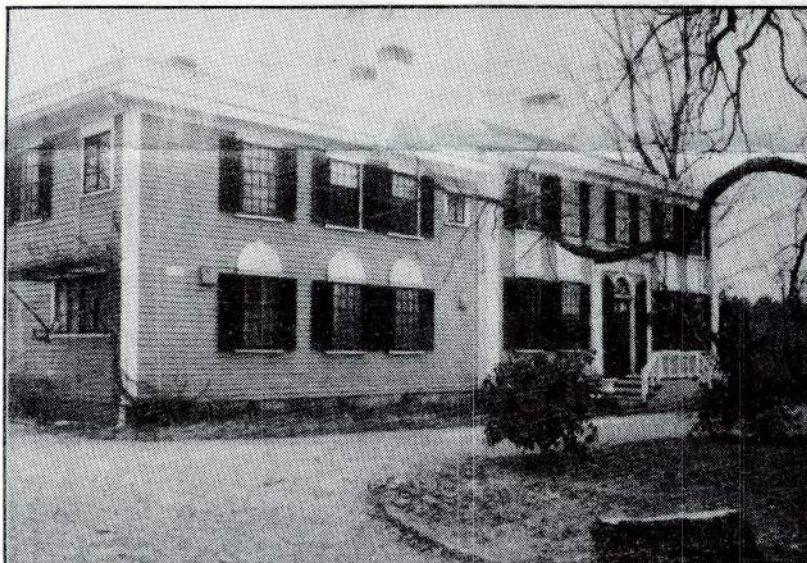
Home of former Rev. Luce

"A few rods to the east was the home of the Rev. Leonard Luce. Mr. Luce for some reason, was no longer the pastor of the Orthodox Church; children were taught a certain reverence for him, and, if they met him on the street, were supposed to make their best bow or curtsy.

"The family consisted, beside Mr. and Mrs. Luce, of three daughters and a nephew, Alfred Ellery Luce. The boy, evidently was not happy there, for one morning, everyone was in a state of excitement because Alfred Ellery was missing. In the night he had "run away." What his later career was I never knew, but have an idea he went to sea, as so many boys at that time did.

"Besides Mr. Luce's duties as a clergyman, he devoted much time to the raising of doves and cultivation of flowers. His dove cote was of great interest to the children, and his garden the wonder and delight of all; for it was almost the only one where flowers, other than hollyhocks and old-maid pinks, were to be seen.

"Crossing a small orchard I saw



Photos courtesy June W. Kennedy

Imposing structures on Main Street that have become well-known to residents include (top) the former J.W.P. Abbot home, now the Westford Nursing Home, and (bottom) the former Charles Prescott home, known for the past 70 years as "Mille Fleurs".

an old house, the home of Samuel Fletcher, which later was razed [razed to the tune of \$28 and what an architectural classic it was!] and the present house, where now live his two great-granddaughters was built. [The two great-granddaughters mentioned were the Misses Julia and Gertrude Fletcher who lived in the home until the '60s as maiden sisters. Captain Sherman H. Fletcher was their father.]

"A few rods beyond stood the house of J.W.P. Abbot, which, after the removal of the Abbots, was occupied for many years by the Alan Cameron family. [We recognize this building as the Westford Nursing Home. Both barn and house comprise the structure.]

"Across the garden from this house stood, almost on the footpath in front, a very old house, the home of Esquire Abbot, the father of J.W.P. Abbot. [This home was located in back of the former Westford Center Post Office and beside the Nursing Home.]

"I remember hearing one morning that Esquire Abbot had died. He was a man greatly respected and who, in those days, was considered very wealthy."

Miss Blood, a shut-in

"For many years his housekeeper had been Miss Rachael Blood, and to her he left a life interest in the home in which she lived for many years. She was rather an interesting

character who attracted many to her apartment. She spent most of her time in one room, in which was an old four poster bedstead. The fireplace was surrounded by tiles with blue and yellow figures on them.

"Many times I visited her, and I can close my eyes and see everything in the room. The wallpaper was a great attraction to me, showing a variety of landscape pictures, a fashion in wall papers now returning. She must have been very old, for she was almost blind for many years and seldom went out. Yet, like many stay-at-homes, she managed to know most of the gossip and affairs of the village.

"After her death, the house was torn down and, later, the modern home of John W. Abbot was built in the adjoining orchard. [This newer dwelling no longer stands. The barn was located across the street adjacent to First Parish Church.]

"From this point there is a division in the road; one branch leading past the Academy building [Westford Academy, the present Town Museum, was originally housed across the street], and on toward Littleton; the other following the side of the Common and continuing towards Boston and intervening towns."

New replaces old

"The house beyond the Academy

was another of those old buildings, not unlike that of Samuel Fletcher and a few others to be seen in various parts of the town. I may have been four or five years old when this house, where my uncle Nathan lived, was torn down, and the present house built. [This is the first house on Hildreth Street.]

"I have a distinct memory of the confusion of the destruction of the old and of the building of the new. At that time, the old cheerful fireplaces were being replaced by stoves; but when this house was built Mrs. Hamlin, my "Aunt Harriet", insisted on having one fireplace — not for cheer and comfort — but that she might be able to roast her Thanksgiving turkey in a tin kitchen before an open fire. This, in her estimation, was the only way in which a turkey should be roasted.

"So, in her bedroom a fireplace was built. As far as I know, a fire was never lighted there except on Thanksgiving morning. In how many ways today do we return to the customs of long ago! In hotel and restaurant kitchens one can see, on roads before the flames of gas or of electricity, turkeys, chickens and other varieties of meat sizzling and browning.

"Keeping on the same side of the street, a short distance away, stood, and I hope still stands, one of the finest and most beautiful of the famous New England elms. How I should like once more to see them! Under it was always a large, round block of granite which, lying there for many years, had sunk into the ground so that the upper side was the only reminder that once the shop of a wheelwright was near.

"And, again I make a detour. A few years before I came to California, I was visiting in a town in Illinois, and I met, most pleasantly, the family of a Mr. Parlin. Mr. Parlin was at that time a man advanced in years. He told me that when young he had lived in Westford and had worked in the wheelwright's shop alluded to.

"He remembered with pleasure his life in the little village and asked me of many people whom he had known. He spoke particularly of my grandmother and of her kindness to him. In the western town he had put his mechanical knowledge to practical use and had invented, and patented, several agricultural machines which had made him a very wealthy man."

June W. Kennedy is a Westford resident and author of "Westford Recollections", a series of historical vignettes and photos.