

# Old houses with some tall stories

## Bones, murder and a home split in two

Compiled by June W. Kennedy  
Staff Correspondent

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

"Beyond the Heywood house to ward Graniteville was a long stretch of road bare of houses, so I return to the Groce house. Opposite this, where now stands the house built some 50 or more years ago by Henry Reed, was a building very old, as I remember it. [The site of these two dwellings is the point at which Main Street and Graniteville Road merge.]

"I think the roof half way down had a break — what shall I call it? — it continued as a roof but also a wall through which were the windows of the second story. The age of this house I do not know, but from the style of architecture, it must have been one of the oldest in the town.

"It was occupied by a family named Byam, whether consisting of one member or six I cannot say; I remember seeing only one, and that a man of perhaps middle age, and it seems to me he lived the life of a recluse. [One room of this house housed the social library of the town at that time.]

### Move on down the road

"In 1875 part of this old homestead was moved down Main Street and is presently a section of the Everett Miller home. The corner beams are of gunstock styling, that is, they are larger at the top than at the bottom, patterned after the shipping vessels. One closet door in the house is made from one wide board. HL or Holy Lord hinges and an old latch may also be found.

"Part of the original section that had been moved to this site was again utilized by being made into a barn which was located in the back yard of the Miller home. When this building became tumbly, a family by the name of Sherman bought the lumber and turned it into a cider mill on Cold Spring Road. Consequently the original old Byam homestead may presently be found in part, at least, in a mill and in a dwelling.

"The front entrance was at the end of the house instead of at the side, and faced the Groce house. The feature of the place most prominent in my mind is the row of poplar trees casting their shadows . . .

"And by the way, the poplar tree seems to have been a favorite in Westford, for I remember several groups of them.

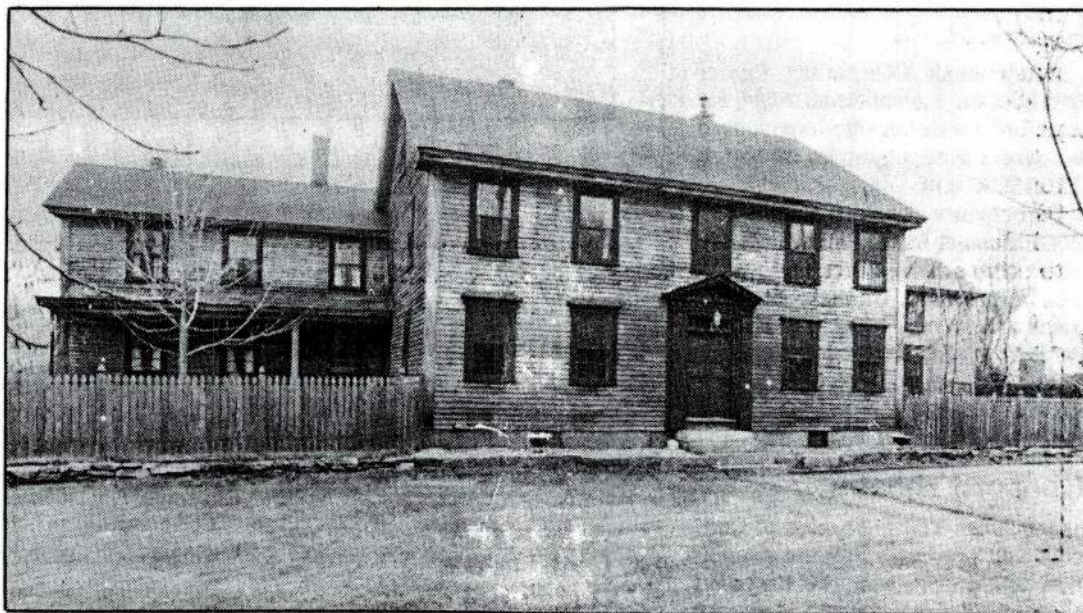
"The road from the Graniteville branch continued toward Forge Village. Beyond the Byam house stood a large three-story building. [This home is the one with the brick ends known as Abbot's Folly or the Hall House.] Was this not in early days the home of students of the Academy who came from other places? I think it was."

### Sensational murder

"But my earliest remembrances of it was as the home of the Southwick family. Mr. Southwick was a graduate physician. Educated at Harvard and at one time an instructor there, he was a friend of the two professors who one night had a violent quarrel which ended in murder. Mr. Southwick had been in their company shortly before the quarrel.

"This murder trial was one of the great sensational trials of the age, and for many years after, here was frequent mention of it. I knew nothing of it at the time, as it was before my day, but it is occasionally referred to even now.

"The family of the murderer left the country and went to the Azores; and years ago, when I was living in Troy, I was well acquainted with a



Middle photo courtesy June W. Kennedy, staff photos (top, bottom) by Jim Paiva

In photos, beginning at top, the former Byam House at 4 Main St. was once the first social library; Abbot's Folly, the former Southwick Home, was the scene of a sensational murder; the former Isaac Day Home at 16 Main St., was the setting for sumptuous meals.

## Nineteenth century houses with stories

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lady who lived in the family as governess, and every year, while in Troy, she received from members of the family, most exquisitely embroidered linens which she sold for them.

"For years, it was reported that the murderer was taken down from the gallows before death and was secretly taken out of the country, but the story was never proved.

"In visiting at the Southwick home in Boston years later, I saw a table which had been in the room the night of the murder, and the blood stains were still on it. All this is another digression.

"Mr. Southwick, in riding through the country, came through Westford and seeing the

large house was charmed with it, as he also was with the village and surrounding country. He bought the house and placed his wife and family of seven children there.

"A great interest to the children of the village — a ghostly interest — was the boxes of human bones Mr Southwick had brought and placed in orchard back of the house. These he had kept from his medical days. What became of them eventually, I do not know; they are doubtless buried somewhere. Were some to be found in after years, an interesting murder story might be invented.

"As we all know, one of these seven children became the wife of John W. Abbot, and for many years was a resident of the town

"Next to the Southwick house was the home of Mrs. Isaac Day

[presently the Chambers home], and what a hostess Mrs. Day was! At her company dinners, which she gave once a year to her friends, her table was loaded with every available luxury and, if one did not partake of each and every article, from turkey to cake and jelly, the grief of the hostess was evident.

"For years, she prepared and served the annual dinner for the trustees of the Academy, who came full force every June for the yearly examination of the students — and for Mrs. Day's dinner. To be an invited guest at that dinner was the greatest honor Westford could offer."

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