

One woman's retrospection of a Forge Village long past

Compiled by June W. Kennedy
Eagle correspondent

The following is an excerpt from a paper on Forge Village read by the late Alice Collins for the Westford Historical Society Jan. 27, 1986:

Upon the resettlement of the town of Groton after its destruction by the Indians in 1676 Jonas Prescott, a large landholder in Groton, built mills for grinding corn and sawing boards at "Stoney Brook" where it flows out of Forge Pond. The land and rights had been bought from Andrew, the Indian, for 20 shillings.

Before 1730, when it became part of Westford, he had prospered and greatly enlarged his mills by building forges for the manufacture of iron from the ore brought from Groton. He built forges in 1710.

They made forks and other necessary utensils. I have iron candle sticks and an old peel used for taking bread and pies from the brick oven.

The business was carried on until 1865, about 160 years, by Jonas Prescott and descendants. That year the Forge Village Horse Nail Company was formed and took over the franchise of the Forge Company. They put in machinery for making nails.

This business flourished for a time; young men came from Lowell and surrounding towns to work there. Capital increased to \$100,000 in 1868.

Woolen mills

In Graniteville, Abbot and Sargent had started a worsted mill but Sargent soon sold his interest to Allan Cameron who took his place. After a disastrous fire, they built the large stone mill in Graniteville and manufactured carpet yarns.

In 1879 Abbot & Company bought buildings and water power of the Horse Nail Factory in Forge Village and began manufacturing carpet yarns. Abbot & Company prospered selling these yarns to carpet manufacturers.

But as World War I came, more important things took the demand away from carpets. Something had to be done, so the machinery was changed over to making knitting yarns. Prosperity came, and as an attraction for more workers, the company built street after street of new houses.

Over the years our little farming

HAND-BOOK OF ITS BUSINESS. 185

THE ABBOT

Worsted Company,

Having located themselves

IN GRANITEVILLE, MASS.,

Are prepared to Manufacture

CREWELS,

CROCHETS, TASSELS,

COACH LACE,

AND

Fine Worsted Yarn

GENERALLY.

Manufactory and Post-office Address,

Graniteville, Mass.

Courtesy of June W. Kennedy

A flowery nineteenth century advertisement for the Abbot Worsted Company announces the firm's location in Graniteville and its intention to produce finery.

village had changed! In the last decade of the 19th century the French had come from Canada, the next 15 years saw many English people come. With the growing demand for workers with World War I coming on the Polish and the Russians arrived.

Now, as you know, the business has become Murray Printing and the yarn business is gone.

Buildings of the past

Let's go back and look at some of

the old houses of Forge Village. Starting at Beaver Brook bridge, we learn that there was once a hospital there for small-pox patients; people went there also to be vaccinated.

Following toward the village, we find at the corner of the road to Westford Center [now Patten Road] a house had been there — the last owner being Charles Miner who was a soldier in the Civil War. It was burned.

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One woman's retrospect of early Forge Village

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Next where Marion Rogers lived was the Gurney house as I remember it, but I find it called the Patch and Kent house in history.

After the Gurney house we came to Grace Lawrence's and a weathered half-finished house started by her father, David P. Lawrence, just before he died. She would never have it completed or allow anyone in it. About 30 years ago she sold and went to Chelmsford. It was completed and lived in.

The brick end house where Dr. Cowles had lived was the George Wright house. He had married Mary Ann Prescott who was born in my house and was a great aunt to me.

Nearly opposite, at the top of the hill, is the Sprague house which had been built and occupied by Eben Prescott who had three wives and a large family.

On the road opposite the mill was a long house used by mill help which I have been told was the Goodhue place.

On the hill back of where Hanley Store now is was the Prescott Garrison House, so called because it was built with a brick wall between woodwork and was the defense for women and children from the Indians at night.

This house was occupied by four generations of the name of Ebenezer Prescott, the last being an uncle of Luther, a descendant of Col. John Robinson. He married Olive Prescott born in my house and my great aunt. Their daughter was Olive Ann Prescott, a teacher, great gr. gr. daughter of Col. John Robinson.

The old horse block on Richard Prescott's grave in our West Cemetery was moved from the site of the Garrison House which had been burned in 1876. Olive Ann also lies there.

The house where Hanley's Yarn Store is [razed in 1976, now a market] was owned by Luther Prescott; he had a post office and store at the east end. This has been torn down and other parts are gone. It had been a tavern and had a big dance hall upstairs. Luther Prescott's son,

Richard, sold it to the Abbot Worsted Company.

Going toward Groton was the George Henry Prescott house. He had been in the Civil War and his right arm was injured.

At the extreme west end of the village was the largest set of buildings for some miles around, built and occupied by Jonas Prescott who first built mills at Stoney Brook. He had a farm and inn.

His great grandson Oliver Prescott lived there. He had 12 children: four sons and eight daughters. During his lifetime, which must have been in Revolutionary times, Ann Lee(s) had founded a society of Shakers in Harvard. His wife and five daughters left home and joined them.

The first school house was beyond my house [corner of Pine Street & Forge Village Road] down near the Poor House [Town Farm]. In 1851 we find that they began using the little brick one on the corner of Pine and Pleasant streets. My father went there; his cousins Grace Lawrence and Olive Ann Prescott, also Hannah Prescott Wyeth, were among his teachers.

When I was a child I went to the Forge School of two rooms — now eight rooms and called the Cameron School. In those days an older boy would go down to the spring at the bottom of the hill by Stony Brook and get a pail of water. It was set down near the teacher's desk, with a tin dipper in it. Children vied with each other to "pass the dipper." Each child drank in turn, then

it was returned to the pail. No water was wasted!

All the houses around there went to this spring for water.

We had our own big well with house over it and an "old oaken bucket." Wonderful!

Seventy years ago there were three stores: a store of dry goods, notions, candy, etc. of Hannah Wyeth's. She had just built it — I believe it is called Spinner's now. Ernest Mountain had one where the meat market is now, and Abby and John Splain had the post office and a small store.

Ice, trains

Due to the railroad giving transportation for ice, large ice houses were built by Hittenger of Boston and used for storing and shipping ice to John P. Squire's. In the 1880s they employed nearly 200 men and 50 horses. Nearly 100,000 tons of ice was cut. Later it was owned and operated by Daniel Gage of Lowell. This business gave several weeks' work to local farmers and Lowell men in the winter when it was needed most.

Trains for passengers ran between Ayer and Lowell morning, noon and night, and Bixbee's train between Ayer and Salem, down in the morning, back at night. Usually there were many passengers waiting near the red-hot "potbellied" stove in the winter. Then in 1906 the Lowell & Fitchburg Electric cars came, and for years we had the luxury of transportation every hour.

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