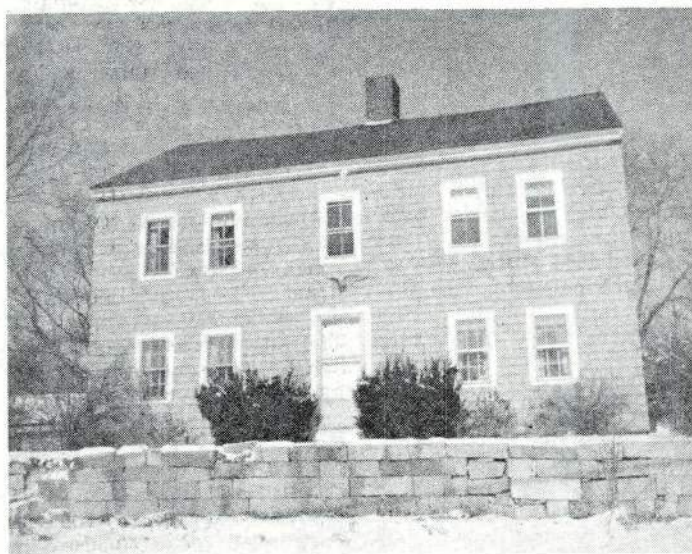


Prospect Hill located on Hildreth Street, formerly Pleasant Street.



Home of "Crazy Amos", now owned by Mr. and Mrs. David L. Conkey.



Hickory Acres, circa 1689 the homestead of Mrs. J. K. Collins.



Westford's oldest dwelling, "Salt-Box Farm" bears the date 1658. Col. and Mrs. Charles L. Collins are present owners.



Home of Mrs. Charles L. Hildreth, Town Clerk. This homestead was moved from Hildreth St. down over the hill by oxen. Miss Ruth Tuttle once related that one evening while the house was en route to its Boston Road location all the neighborhood gang ran in and out of it having a grand time. Re-location on Boston Road was formerly on the site of the Town Pound.



The original section of this residence was moved from across the street. Miss Hamlin's "Reminiscences" would indicate that it was the home of one of Westford's "Free Soilers". Currently it is owned by Dr. and Mrs. Richard E. Saulnier.



The home of Mr. and Mrs. Herbert E. Farrier, originally Dr. Drinkwater's office on Main St., was moved way in back of Kate Hamlin's home (Lamson's Tavern) to serve as a home for the hired man.

Westford Recollections

by Mrs. Charles S. Kennedy
Reminiscences of
Kate S. Hamlin
1847 - 1937
Part VII

"Beyond the wheelwright's shop rose what seemed almost a mountain -- the loved Prospect Hill. How we enjoyed the walk over the double stone wall to the foot of the hill, and then the climb to the top, from which we had an unbroken view in all directions to the horizon. Before I left Westford the trees had grown to such height that the view was less satisfactory, but still inspiring and beautiful. -- (I have even been told that on a clear day the ships in Boston Harbor could be seen from Prospect Hill.)

After one of those wonderful ice storms which leaves every tree, bush and twig encased in crystals, I went with friends early one morning to the top of Prospect Hill. Hardly had we arrived when the sun broke through a mist and, in an instant, the whole vista around us, in every direction to the horizon, sparkled with millions of diamonds, and the rays of the sun, penetrating them, produced all the colors of the rainbow. Never since, have I seen so brilliant a world.

A half mile beyond the wall leading to the hill, stands, on a slight elevation from the road, an old house which, apparently, never knew the existence of paint and was black with age. -- (Present owners of this homestead are Mr. and Mrs. David Conkey.) The door stands open so without rapping, I enter and am met by a witchlike old woman, bent almost double, showing a few strands of grey hair flying at will about her head. She knows me and seems glad to see me. I am hoping to see her son, Amos, but he does not appear; evidently he is sober, and then he is far from sociable. I make my call short, for there is little to attract me.

But Amos, what of him? Amos is one of the degenerates from good New England stock. A man who, when sober, remains at home whittling out bows and arrows and all sorts of

household wooden implements. He is one of the last really skillful Yankee whittlers. But let Amos fill himself with hard cider, or all the Jamaica rum he can hold, and lo! Amos is no longer the solitary and quiet one, he becomes the life of the town; and some morning I hear unmelodious singing, and down the road, past the site of the old wheelwright's shop, and under the big elm, comes Amos, a gun over his shoulder, his hands filled with the whittled articles he has so long worked on, his little yellow dog trotting beside, or behind, him. "Happy" is no word to express his feelings. He is not drunk, as another would have been, with cider and rum; he is joyously crazy and is known, not only in his own, but in the surrounding towns, as "Crazy Amos." He sings and dances, plays with the boys, promises to make all sorts of toys, bows and arrows, doll furniture -- any and everything asked for. For a few days, or possibly weeks, he is good-natured, kind and fond of playing jokes.

At a time when the Millerites were looking forward to the end of the world, and had their robes ready, one midnight, Amos went through the village blowing vigorously on a large tin fish-horn. A family, living in the house at the rear of our garden, belonged to the sect, and their robes were ready. The wife, being awakened by the sound of the horn, thought the hour had come. She aroused her husband. The husband listened a moment, and, being less gullible than his wife, said, "Lie down, you fool, when Gabriel comes he won't come blowing no fish-horn."

Gradually however, Amos changes, becomes cross, is impatient with the children, takes pleasure in frightening some lonely family, and is finally taken to a lock-up or jail, where he is kept until he is once more sober. Perhaps a year or more will pass before he is seen again. In his prison confinement, he is not treated as a criminal -- he has really done nothing to deserve punishment -- he is retained simply as a precautionary measure, lest in his crazy condition he might do some harm.

Years ago, more freedom was given to the mildly insane than is the custom now.

I remember a harmless man who wandered through numerous towns -- I think his home was in Pepperell. The story regarding him was that in his youth he had experienced an unhappy love affair, the result of which was an unsettled mind. On his occasional visits to Westford he was adorned with ribbons and artificial flowers of all colors. He was kind and friendly and was specially attracted to my sister. Whether she reminded him of his lost love, I do not know. Perhaps she did.

Later -- and many in the village now living must remember him -- came "Crazy David." Poor man! Gently and kind, yet, more or less, suspicious of people. He always carried a tin pail, in which he made his tea, for he would not accept any already made.

Courteously, he would ask the lady of the house, "Please,

Marm, will you give me a little tea, and let me boil some water on your stove?" He would ask for nothing else, but would gratefully accept a piece of pie, or slice of bread and butter, if offered him. His home was in Billerica, and, wandering about as he did, was a grief to his family; but if restrained, he was most restless and unhappy.

It may be of interest to dwell for a moment, on the care of those unfortunates who were mentally unbalanced, but not dangerously insane. As asylums for that class were not the well-managed institutions of the present day, the mildly insane, often unhappy in their homes, were placed as boarders in some pleasant family, where they often appeared perfectly normal. A relative of Ralph Waldo Emerson, an aunt, I believe, was thus a boarder in the home of my father's cousin. Dr. Cyrus Hamlin, when he was a boy in school. Dr. Hamlin told me of her kind and loving influence in the family, and of the help she gave the children in their studies. He remembered her with sincere affection.

We have come a long way from the home of "Crazy Amos." From there we cross the road and turn toward the village. The first house is that of Sylvester Hildreth. -- (Presently the home of Mrs. J. K. Collins, it is known as "Hickory Acres.") Ten, or eleven sons and daughters were in the family, although, at the time I knew the place, only three remained.

The house of Boynton Read was the next one toward the village. -- (presently owned by Col. and Mrs. Charles L. Collins.) As this house was at the end of a lane, or private road, in the ignorance of childhood, I thought I had reached the end of the world. -- (This lane originally connected to Boston Road. The house dates back to 1658 and is believed to be the oldest house in Westford. It has remained untouched, retaining its early features.)

Leaving the Read home the road leads up a gentle incline, until we come to a house -- again, an old one -- on the site of one later built in 1902 by Charles L. Hildreth as a home for his mother and sister. -- (The later house referred to is the home of Mr. and Mrs. Alan Eckel.) The earlier home located on that site was moved around the year 1900 and relocated on Boston Road and given to the lawyer, Charles L. Hildreth, by his uncle who bore the same name. We know it as the home of the town clerk, Mrs. Charles L. Hildreth. In updating and researching this article of Miss Hamlin's I find that the Symmes map of 1853 and the Atlas of 1875 verify the fact that she states that there were three houses only between the Salt Box and Lamson's Tavern at the head of Hildreth Street. There were no houses on the opposite side of the street. The first house heading back toward the center was the Charles L. Hildreth Farm as before mentioned and I continue with the story. The mother lived to celebrate her hundred birthday, and it being one Sunday when a band concert was being given on the Common, the musicians were asked to go to her home and play some of the old hymns and songs. They gladly went and, as they played, the old lady sat at her open window in her black silk dress and white cape, and smilingly hummed the airs to the accompaniment of the band. She did not live to celebrate another birthday.

The house next to this, known as the "house with the brick ends," was occupied by Mr. George L. Burt, with his wife and three children, two of whom were twins. -- (Although no one with whom I have spoken recalls having heard of a home with brick ends in this vicinity, I would like to think that Miss Hamlin, who lived for so many years in such close proximity -- the Edward Lamson Tavern, was correct in her "Reminiscences.") I have been told by Mrs. Arthur Hildreth that this home, the middle of the group of three, was moved across the street to be renovated. She remarked also that there was so little left of it that practically a whole new home was built around it. She, herself lived in this home for many years. It is now the home of Dr. and Mrs. Richard E. Saulnier. According to maps the house must have been moved sometime after 1886 and before the year 1900. Also according to the Atlas of 1875 the house was owned by A. L. Davis. Whether Mr. Burt owned the home or merely occupied it as mentioned remains unknown. However, I return to Miss Hamlin's book to relate the story this "house with the brick ends" has to tell. Mr. Burt was a man of character, and one of the small band of "Free Soilers" in the town, all of whom were anti-slavery men. Of the activities of these "Free Soilers" I knew nothing, except what I was told later. While Westford was not one of the "underground stations" of Slavery days, it was in touch with Lowell which was one of the stations. At that time, the anti-slavery men were interested in assisting all runaway slaves on their way to Canada.