

## Smithy, wheelwright once fascinated youth

By June Kennedy

**I**n interviews some 15 years ago, long-time residents spoke of their memories of the local black smith. He was a true jack of all trades for this community.

Ben Prescott recalled: "Our farm at Chamberlin's Corner was across from the old Blacksmith and Wheelwright Shops and I spent plenty of time in both of 'em. The wheelwright evidently had rheumatism or somethin'. He couldn't stand up straight, but he really did a day's work makin' farm wagons and carriages and all such things as that.

"Many a time when I was young, he would call me over to help put lumber through the planers or the saws. I was always glad to do it. He had a son about my age and the two of us were really pals. We all went to school together at the Stony Brook School.

"The Blacksmith Shop was run by a man named F.E. Miller, but he moved out of that shop when I was quite young. Two or three different people ran that blacksmith while I was there at the farm.

"The wheelwright and the blacksmith sort of worked in conjunction. They made a whole wagon from scratch. The only part I know they bought was the hubs to the wheel and the spokes; they were made in Framingham.

"He would send his order in, I suppose, and they would send the stuff by freight to South

Chelmsford. We would sometimes go down and help them pick it up — his son and myself. And they really put them things together. I can remember when it was time to put the steel rims on the wheels. They would build a big bonfire between the two shops and heat the tire till it would expand. Then with tools they had, they could pry it right onto the wooden wheel. When it would cool, it would shrink and tighten up. It was really there for good.

"You know, the first snow roller used in Westford was made at the Wheelwright Shop across from our farm. Time slips by, I'm not too positive, but I think it was about 30 years ago that the Wheelwright Shop was torn down (1940s); the Blacksmith Shop was made over into a house."

Lucinda Prescott reminisced: "I remember the blacksmith right across the street. You could sit in our house and see them come there to get their horses and oxen shod. Upon the little rise was the Wheelwright Shop.

"Mr. Walkden made farm wagons. He was bent over almost double; his hands would almost touch the floor. If I saw him standing in the doorway of the shop, I made it my business to get out where he could see me and he'd say, 'Oh, you're just the one I want. Come on over, will ya?' I want ya' to help me."

"Just had to put my hand on the wagon to steady it...didn't have to lift any weight to it or anything. He would move the wagon. I thought I was pretty big...thought I was doin' some-

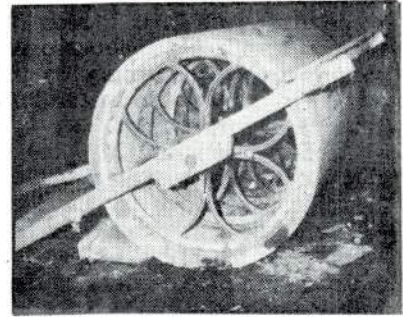


Photo courtesy June Kennedy

Shoeing oxen at the turn of the century (top) involves an elaborate, sturdy system of support for the animals which, unlike horses, cannot stand on three legs. A snow roller (above) once was used to deal with winter roads, a simpler method than today's snow plows.

thin'. At the blacksmith, I remember Mr. Miller and later, Mr. Jenkins and George O'Brien as partners."

Clyde Prescott remembered: "We youngsters could hardly wait till the spring of the year for it to get warm enough so we could take off our shoes and stockings, go barefoot...went barefoot all season long... were sorry when winter come...had to put on our shoes and stockings again.

"Well, I was over there in the blacksmith one time (Mr. Jenkins always went barefoot too). The blacksmith had a piece of iron in the forge. Some of it he didn't want so he just put it on his anvil and cut it off with his tools there. This barefooted fellow accidentally stepped on this iron. He had a time there!"

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