

Sturdy town center homes survive the centuries

Built of solid walls, family stories

By June W. Kennedy
Staff Correspondent

This is part of a series of recollections by Kate Hamlin (1847-1937) about her youth in Westford, recorded late in life from her California home. The following is part of a walking tour of historic homes in town center:

To pass now a short distance to the angle where the Littleton and Boston roads meet, there stood, and I hope, still stands, my old home, in which five generations of my family had lived — three of whom were born there. In days long past, the house must have witnessed many interesting scenes, as for many years it was another of the many taverns."

[This is the home of George and Betsy Glenn on Westford Common, a photo of which appeared in the first part of this series.]

"Before the days of the railroad, travelers arrived by stage, or more frequently on horseback. Daniel Webster, in one of his rides through the country, met and fell in love with Grace Fletcher whom he married. She was the niece of my step-great grandmother.

"The small orchard adjoining the one of the Nelson Tuttle [the Bob Jeffries' homestead at present] on the Boston Road was willed to Grace Fletcher by her aunt. After her marriage, the orchard was bought by my grandfather and the deed, long in our possessions, bore the signature of Daniel and Grace Fletcher.

"Almost at our door was the old schoolhouse consisting of two stories. [This building was directly across the street from the Westford Town Museum; it was torn down in the mid-1960s.]

"The lower story was used in summer for the village school. But, in winter, when many older boys were supposed to attend school, the upper story was used for the younger children, under the care of a female teacher, and the lower story for the older boys and girls taught and disciplined by men.

"How dreary to me those school days were! I remember once, when a big snowstorm was raging, my father's hired man came and took me home on his shoulders. [The schoolhouse was right in her front/side yard.]

"On the right, continuing along the Boston Road, the first house was occupied by a family of Millerites whom Amos had aroused with his fish-horn. [The Millerites thought the world was going to end on April 3, 1843. This is the present home of Mildred Alling. The front door and porch have been added. The main entrance was orig-

inally on the side of the house.]

"The next, a low one-story building, was owned and occupied by the Whiting family. [David and Sandi Myer are current owners.] That, however, was before my day, although I heard much of them.

"Besides the father and mother, there were two sons, Augustus and Newton. Ambition stirred in these young men, and they both left Westford to seek fortunes elsewhere — Augustus to New York; Newton to Columbus, Ohio, at that time the Far West.

"In New York, Augustus laid the foundation of a large fortune by the purchase of land. This land greatly increased in value as the city grew, and Augustus Whiting became one of the wealthy men of New York. After his death the property continued to increase in value, and his family became prominent, but conservative, citizens of New York and New-
port.

"When the parents in Westford died, it was found that a life interest in the home and land had been given to Mr. Carroll, a man who had been many years with the family. Mr. Carroll lived in the little house until his death, at the advanced age of 80. For many years he was known and respected in the village as 'Uncle Moses.'

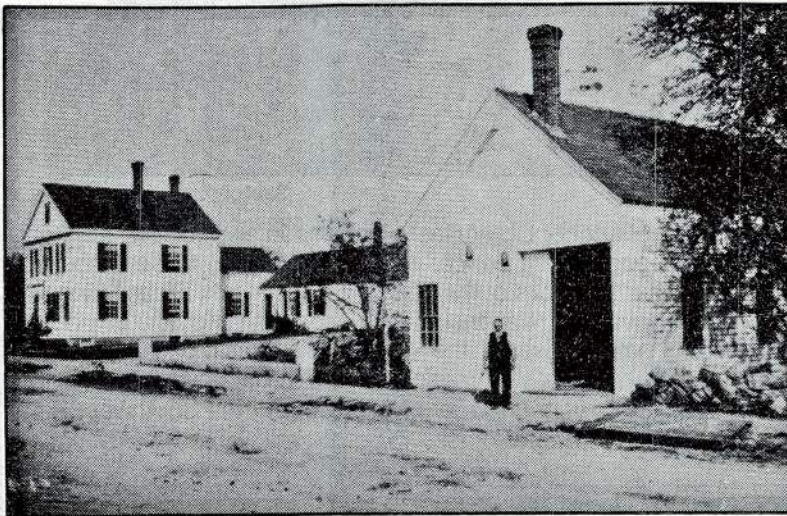
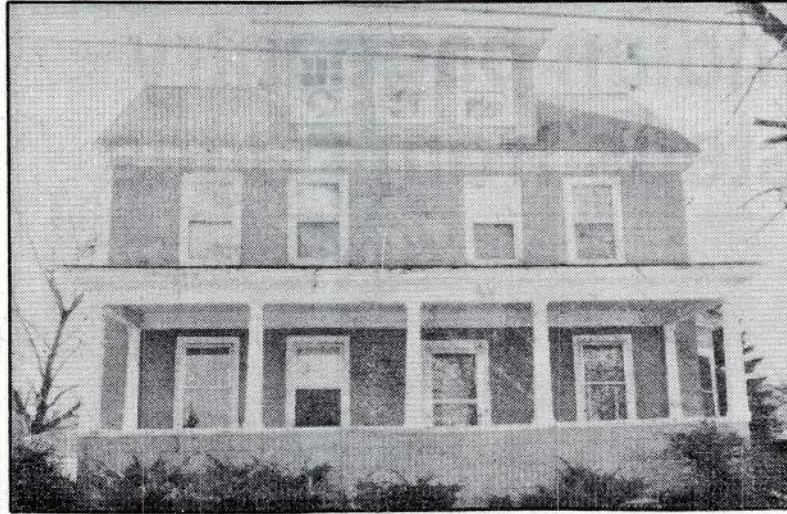
"The neighbors of the Whitings were the Wrights. [In recent years the house was owned by the Fred Robinson family; today it is owned by Wayne and Cheryl Garlepy. An old beam in the barn has etched into it the date of 1814.] This family consisted of father, mother, two sons and two daughters.

"Mr. Wright was a cabinetmaker by trade. What he made I do not know, beyond the fact he made all the coffins required in the town, and, as they were hastily finished for the funeral, the fragrance of varnish was stronger than that of roses.

"His shop was in the yard of his house, and I remember the fascination it had for children. They would climb up and look through the window, when, seeing a newly-made coffin or one in the making, they would jump down and run as if pursued by ghosts — or, something worse.

"The old hearse house which stood in the rear of the Unitarian Church had the same fascination for children. Who can account for this singular morbid strain! I think it is in George Eliot's 'Silas Marner' that the making of a coffin was gruesomely heard one midnight.

"Looking south from the Wrights, no house was seen on that side of the road for about a mile, when a house owned by the Minot family appeared. As this sketch is confined to the center village, we do not go



Standing more than 150 years as familiar parts of the landscape for those passing through town center by Boston Road are: (clockwise, from top left) the former home of the Millerites religious sect; the former home of Mr. Wright, the cabinetmaker who made all of the coffins

beyond this junction, but retrace our steps up the hill.

"On the right, is a large white house shaded by a beautiful elm. This is the home of one Tom Davis. He is a man little known, but he seems to have had some sorrow or disappointment, which makes him sad and unsociable. What became of him I do not know.

[The dwelling was burned in April of 1899. At the time it was owned by Nathan Prescott. Another home was built on the same site, and recently occupied by Mabel Prescott. It is now owned by the Robert Connell Family.]

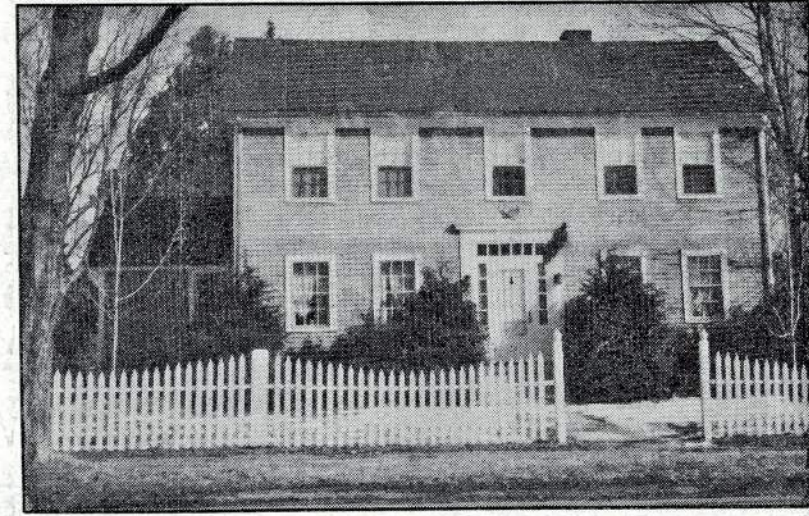
"A stone's throw from the Davis house was one occupied by a family named Bailey, consisting of father, mother and four children. Mr. Bailey was a Puritan of the Puritans — unsocial, strict and severe. It was told of him that at one time he

stepped into the midst of a cotillion set of young people ready for a dance and, waving his hands, said, 'This will never do!' But the couple joined hands and danced around him.

"In 1856, the Bailey family moved to another part of the town and the place became the property of Mr. Luther Wilkins. [Ralph and Jane Hinckley discovered that Mr. Bailey was a shoemaker.]

"The next house, now occupied by the Nelson Tuttle, was for many years the home of Marcellus Fletcher, the father of William Fletcher, who became notorious in connection with Spiritualism."

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



Photos courtesy June W. Kennedy

in town; the former home of a Puritan named Bailey who made shoes; and the former home of Nelson Tuttle, who is shown standing in front of the barn in a 1904 photo.