

Time proves to be kind to these old houses

What may be the earliest home still stands off Hildreth Street

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:

“We have come a long way from the home of ‘Crazy Amos’ [currently the Brady home on Hildreth Street]. From there we cross the road and turn toward the village.

“The first house is that of Sylvester Hildreth. Ten or 11 sons and daughters were in the family, although at the time I knew the place, only three remained.”

[Presently this is the home of Timothy and Judith Jones; it is commonly known as “Hickory Acres.”]

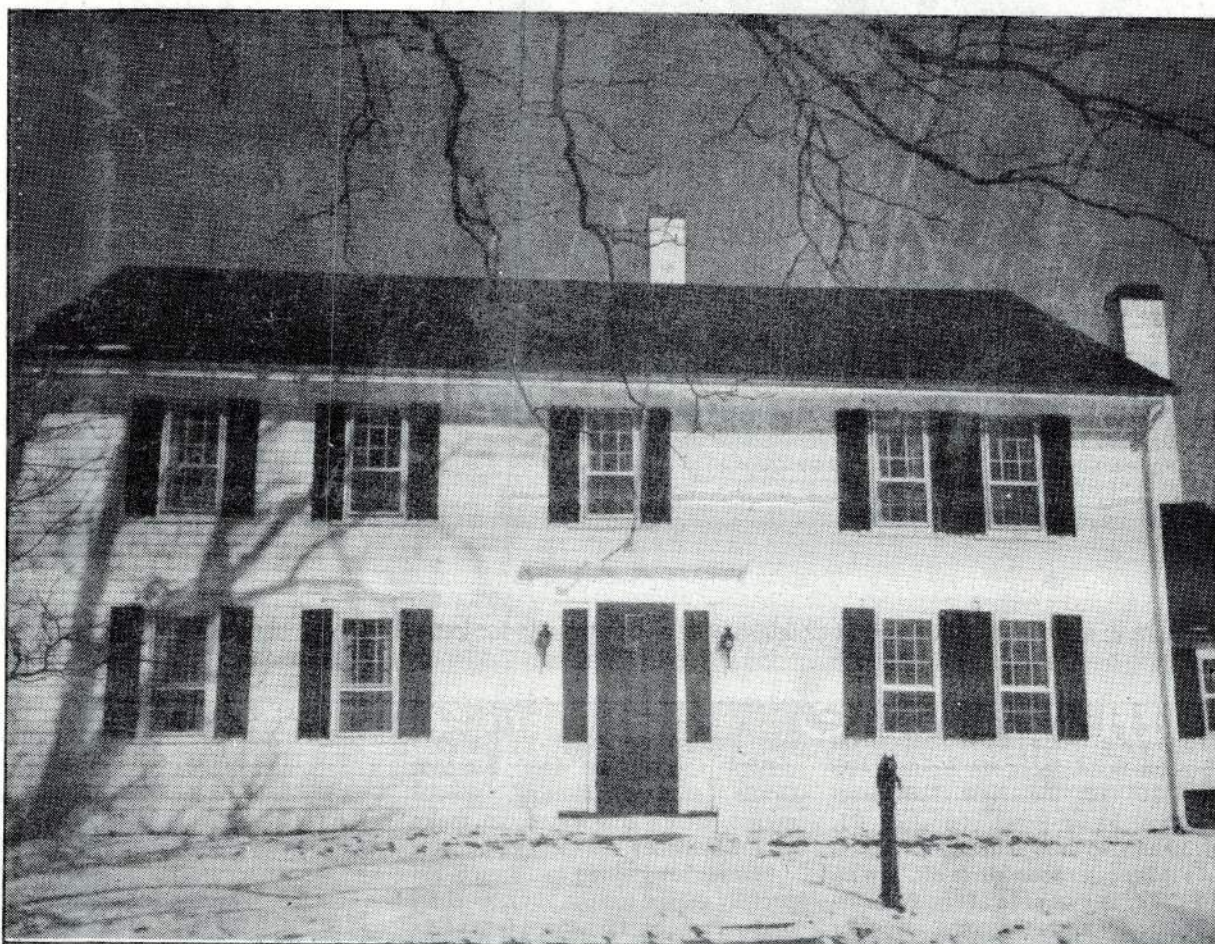
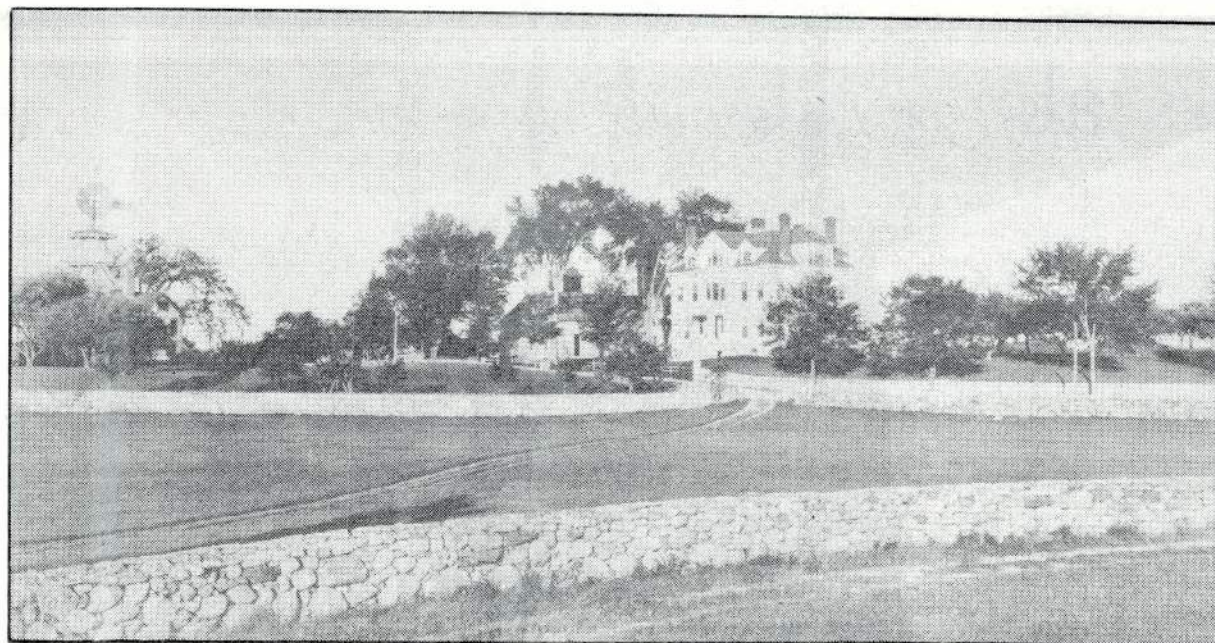
“The house of Boynton Read was the next one toward the village. As this house was at the end of a lane or private road, in the ignorance of childhood, I thought I had reached the end of the world.”

[This lane originally connected to Boston Road. The house dates back

to 1658 and is believed to be the oldest house in Westford. Salt box in style, it has remained untouched, retaining its early features. Charles and Beverly Collins are the owners.]

“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 Alan and Tricia Eckel. The earlier home located on that site was moved around 1900 and relocated on Boston Road and given to the lawyer, Charles L. Hildreth. We know it in more recent years as the former home of town clerks Charles and Alice Hildreth. In updating and researching this article, the Symmes map of 1853 and the atlas of 1875 verify her statement that there were only three houses between the Salt Box and Fletcher 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.]



Photos courtesy June W. Kennedy

Salt Box Farm (at left), dating to 1658, survives on a lane off Hildreth Street that once connected to Boston Road; what is today the Eckel home (top) at the turn-of-the-century stood almost alone on Hildreth Street with its majestic barn and a fine wind mill at a farm across the street; the house known as Hickory Acres (above) once was home to a family of about a dozen children.

“The mother lived to celebrate her hundredth 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 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. Smiling, she 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 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 — in the Fletcher Tavern at the head of Hildreth Street — was correct in her “Reminiscences.” I was told by the late 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 John and Cheryl Grant. According to maps, the house must have been moved sometime after 1886 and before 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.]

“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.”

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

