

Forge Pond District.

Helen Tyson Woods.

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Given before the Jones River

at a regular meeting on the

evening of January the

twenty third

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Characters, Houses and Events of the

Forge Pond District.

by

Helen Tyson Woods.

A love of old or ancient things is said to be a quality which has to be cultivated. I cannot recall, however, when I did not love old houses and furnishings, and stories about things as they used to be.

When it became possible for me to purchase a home, I spent the greater part of a year in locating a community of old homes in the country. Twenty years ago, after visiting every section of Massachusetts, the village of Silver Lake interested me from the day of my first visit on account of the number of old houses therein.

Mr. Walter H. Faunce, who made out the necessary papers for the transfer, told me that the community was one of the oldest settlements in the United States, that the houses had been built by good old families, industry had sprung up all about and the community had flourished for many years. At that time, there was no industry or particular interest in the community of which I am aware. The Brockton Water Works had acquired the mill rights, and the lake privileges hitherto enjoyed had been denied.

But the community to me was very interesting and beautiful. Every foot of land, every old home had been the work, the hope of some pioneer and his family back in the early days of the settlement. To me there was a certain sacredness about it, a feeling of awe as I went about the old house or walked the paths made hard by long years of tramping feet. Here was a clump of sweet grass pinks, a bit of bleeding heart, a lilac bush, planted by unknown hands, yet giving me so much of their beauty.

As I sat by the century old hearths, thinking of the generations who had gathered there, and of the many who must glance back in their memories, picturing again the house and its surroundings, I marvelled that none ever came to visit the Old Home.

The timely visit of a dear old lady friend, Mrs. Anne Pratt, noted genealogist and a co-worker with Alexander Graham Bell in his research for the deaf, was first instrumental in helping me to gather a few facts in regard to the Forge Pond Community.

As we sat by the open fire in the wide panelled room, picturing the men and women who had lived, loved and died, leaving no written record of their lives under this roof, my friend said: "Helen, the best way to get the real history of any place or person is to get it first hand, since all history which is not supported by contemporary evidence is romance. Since we cannot talk with those who built this house or first occupied it, cultivate the acquaintance of the oldest residents. Think of the deep interest we would all have in seeing the past as our parents can see it.

To them it is a clear picture, an interesting, inspiring panorama, passing through their minds from day to day. Theirs the memory of early struggles, of keen disappointments, of joyous companionships, of daily accomplishments; while to us, it is all a closed book, except for now and then just a peek at some exceptionally interesting or noteworthy thing."

And to me in this quest there is just one thing I envy in others, an actual participation in events of long ago. Old age, the most interesting, the most desirable of the ages of man.

Twenty years ago I began keeping minutes of whatever was told me as having happened in the Forge Pond District. I have talked with every elderly person in the community innumerable times during those years, and I ~~and~~ for my own edification, enough to fill quite a volume gathered from these sources. Like Walton I shall probably keep adding to it the rest of my life. A few of the personal experiences which have been told me I will relate later on.

Next to actual personal contact, a house speaks to us from the past. We cannot speak with the early settlers about Old Forge Pond, but their houses speak to us. In their staunchness, their comfort, their beauty, they tell us what manner of men and women peopled them. Like their English forebears they loved everything that was sound and unpretentious.

In the community there are a number of houses dating back over one hundred years and several approximately two hundred years old. I shall mention only the older ones.

Beginning with my own house, since it was the first of which I was able to gain any information. I do not know when it was built. Mr. Faunce told me that my house and the next two on the same side of Lake Street were built by three men, presumably brothers, by the name of Holmes, and were known for many years as the Holmes houses. In my house there is some of the original hair plaster and in one place there is an imprint in the plaster plainly visible "J. H. and J. Holmes". This is in the extreme El which was originally an old store. John Hall used to go to this store when he was a boy. As was usual at that time the stock consisted largely of rum and molasses which were brought back from the packets when the anchors which were forged there were taken over the road in ox carts.

The house as it now stands has some interesting features, although before I bought it much had, unfortunately, been done to modernize it. John Hall told me he remembered when the windows were about two feet wide and the glass diamond shaped.

There are several beautiful old doors, some interesting hinges and latches which I was told had been forged at the Anchor Forge. In the west room there is a room-wide panelling, a fire place with no mantel which is very good, while in the east room there is little panelling but a beautifully carved mantel. There is a fine large brick oven in the unusually large kitchen. The great iron door to the oven and the straight heavy high mantel above is most attractive. The house has an unusual feature in a third story overhang which gives it a distinctive appearance. The

rooms all have wide beams and the upstairs rooms have cross beams supporting the corner beams. All of the fire places are constructed differently, several of them being unusually quaint.

The floor boards were extremely wide and very much worn, so much so that it became necessary some nineteen years ago to lay two new floors. The old boards when removed were in some places literally as thin as paper. The timbers underneath in the upstairs room were as sound as though just placed there. They were not old in appearance except for a dull yellowish tinge to the wood. When the thin boards were removed, we came upon a written message. The writing was old style in character but clear and distinct. It read "April 15, 1722. This is to let you know that I am blind".

The message was written on one of the hand hewn floor timbers and apparently had been cut off at the end of the timber. The supposition being that this must have been written on the lumber when on the ground, and the rest of the message may possibly be on another timber some where in the house. Perhaps those who know Kingston history may have some knowledge of a blind man in the town at that time.

John Hall recalled when a very small boy of going with his father to this house, then the home of Col. Holmes; he thought Col. Charles Holmes. They went into the sitting room on the south east corner of the house on a very cold winter day. They were well wrapped up, or rather he was, with a heavy coat and a long knitted muffler or "cloud" as he called it, and Col. Holmes unwound him as he stood towering above, being a very tall, spare man with a kindly face and hearty laugh. Col. Holmes related stories of a war in which John Hall thought Col. Holmes had served. Mr. Hall could not remember anything in particular which Col. Holmes said except that he had ridden a fine mare which was lost, whether in battle or otherwise Mr. Hall did not know. There was a great fire on the hearth and when they arose to go Col. Holmes went with them to the side entrance on the road leading to the Anchor Forge, stooping at each door to prevent hitting his head, as he followed them out. The doors are very low and I had thought those who lived there had been short in stature. The call was made in regard to timber, and Col. Holmes said he was sorry not to go with them to see the timber but he was too old a man. Up to seventy years ago this house commanded an unobstructed view to the Bearse or Long Point Estate, which is next above it on Silver Lake. All the land between was in tillage, raising chiefly rye and corn. 'Uncle' Edwin Maglathlin and Horace Maglathlin both lived here when they were young boys, with James Holmes who was the last one of the Holmes family to own it. About 74 years ago this summer, Mrs. James Holmes who was Lucia Brewster before her marriage, was preparing a hearty dinner for her family on the hearth and in the brick oven in the great old kitchen. A thunder storm was threatening but a large piece of fresh killed beef done to a turn on the spit, heaping dishes of well cooked vegetables, platters of hot johnny bread and fresh churned butter heaped the great old table in the middle of the room. The blessing had been asked and the plates were being piled high when the storm burst, lightning striking the kitchen chimney, tearing out the brick oven and scattering masses of embers and ashes over the appetizing dinner. A very small part of the food was salvaged

after the excitement was over and Mrs. Holmes decided that Uncle Edwin who was then a boy of nine and who had been hoeing potatoes all morning, should have the greater part of it. During the time that he lived with them in this house and doing the chores for his board, he attended the north west school where everything was taught from primer to navigation. He tells many interesting stories of the pupils and teachers in those days. One winter Mrs. Holmes made him an especially good looking suit out of an old one of her husband's, trimming it all up with brass buttons and braid and finally permitting him to wear it to school. The weather had been cold the day and night before and as he hurried across lots he stopped to try the ice on a small pond and in a moment was completely submerged. It was very cold when the wind struck him as he waded out, but his first thought was for the new suit, and with a boy's instinct he hurried toward his mother's home on Egypt Road where she took him in, dried and pressed the new suit and sent him to school at noon, Mrs. Holmes never knowing of the accident.

The Anchor Forge closed down shortly after the Civil War. During the century and half that the Forge operated, Forge Pond and Silver Lake or Jones River Pond as it was then called were dredged for iron ore, the work being done by hand. Quantities of the old slag from the Forge is today in evidence on these Holmes places at Silver Lake, particularly on the one which I purchased. Under most of the land in this immediate neighborhood there is a layer of iron ore about 2 1/2 to 3 feet below the surface. It is 20 to 24 inches thick and has caused much difficulty in driving wells.

The Anchor Forge Building was gone when I came to Silver Lake but Porter Reed's factory which graced the head of Jones River was a most interesting building. My first thought on seeing it was, what a perfect studio for an artist. The building itself was unusually attractive but the setting was perfect. A sloped roof, story and a half building of Cape Cod architecture, lighted by innumerable small paned windows, the west ones facing Beautiful Forge Pond, than which there is none more lovely at any season of the year, but particularly in Autumn. The east windows overlooked the head waters of winding Jones River which flowed under the building. The shores of this little stream were Nature-dressed by clumps of wild plum, peach, shad bush, red maple, alder and willow. In spring when these burst into life, one could look out the window frames, the glass having all dropped into the river long since, and feel that fairy land centered about the building.

On spring evenings I used to take my children over there to see, hear and smell its beauty. There was the ripple of water underneath, the song of an occasional thrush singing in the woodland nearby and the air sweet with plum, and peach blossoms. But the building itself was perfect in its beauty. A stairway across the north end led to an upper floor. The floor boards were two to three feet in width and in excellent state of preservation. The ceiling boards were even more beautiful. The floor was sprinkled with tacks, rusty and rather dangerous to foot-wear. One day in a corner of this building, sticking in between timbers my son found a faded ticket, on which was printed by a hand press "Good for one admission to an entertainment given for the benefit of the Meeting House"; the month and day were illegible but the year 1847 was readable.

I tried to purchase this building but the real estate man told me it could not be bought as it belonged to the Brockton Water Works. The burning of this building as a Fourth of July prank a few years ago was a real loss to the community. Most of the older men in the neighborhood learned their trade in this building, including the late Edgar Reed. A few years before his death he was able to get one of the old machines, which had been rusting out of doors for many years, for his collection.

Just beyond the old tack factory, across the dam, is the Squire Holmes house, the most interesting architecturally of the Holmes houses in this district. It is low and rambling, having a huge fireplace with crane and brick oven in which today beans are baked. There is a divided stairway leading to the upper floor. Wallace Nutting, the artist, showed one of these stairways in a lecture which I attended, stating he knew of but two of this type anywhere in New England. This house also contains a fire place taken from the Bradlee or Boston Tea Party house when it was torn down a number of years ago, and is in use here today. The kitchen is most interesting with a partially flagged floor and a fire place across a corner of the room. The house is now owned by Rev. and Mrs. Joseph Evans who have done much to retain the old features and enlarge and beautify the garden and grounds.

The Eben Plimpton house which was one of the so-called Holmes houses, now owned by Arthur Moody of Boston, has had a colorful history. The oldest residents say that the one time owner became despondent and drowned himself in Forge Pond. The Reed family came to this house from Bridgewater many years ago and Eben Plimpton bought it from them. Mr. Plimpton told me that he was at the peak of his career when he experienced an unfortunate love affair and determined to bury himself somewhere in the country. A wide awake real estate man advertised this property and Mr. Plimpton bought it on the occasion of his first visit. He immediately named it "The Grange" though the name has been changed to "Plympton Borders" in honor of Mr. Plimpton. When Mr. Plimpton asked the agent for shipping directions for sending his household effects, he was somewhat surprised and pleased to find that the station so near his new home was named Plympton. The public highway passed directly in front of this fine old home formerly, but later it was straightened, leaving a lovely stretch of lawn and shrubbery between the house and the road.

After Mr. Plimpton bought his place the Barrymores came to be his neighbors across the road at the Porter Reed house, spending the greater part of two summers there. They contemplated buying it but I think Georgia Drew Barrymore's untimely death changed their plans.

Mr. Moody has completely restored this house and the old barn, and the estate is one of the most beautiful in Kingston. Practically all of America's old time actors have been entertained in this house.

The Wallace Maglathlin "up and down" house on Egypt Road, looking not unlike a cottage in Old England, was built by Miller Tom Johnson who conducted a Milling business, grinding native corn and rye. The old mill stone is there today. The house is said

to have been built in its quaint style through the influence of Thomas Jefferson Johnson who lived in the brick house facing Plympton station. Thomas Jefferson agreed to help his cousin Miller Tom in a financial way if he would build his house with a cellar kitchen in an ell on a little lower level than the main part of the cottage. Miller Tom did not want to do this but because of his cousin's financial backing, finally acquiesced.

The plan was to have the kitchen as nearly separate from the rest of the house as possible without having it in a different building as was so frequently done in southern colonial houses where the climate made it possible.

I do not know who built the beautiful brick house facing Plympton station, but it was owned and occupied for many years by Thomas Jefferson Johnson. Before the railroad came through, a driveway into this place went directly from where the station stands and is easily distinguished now by a slightly raised surface of the lawn. Mr. Johnson was unmarried and had a housekeeper by the name of Rebecca Bryant. His father, Richard Johnson, a very old man, lived with him. This family lived on a more lavish scale than others in the community. They had horses and a chaise, cattle, oxen, sheep in numbers. One horse owned by Thomas Jefferson was always spoken of as a colt because of its fine appearance, even though it lived to be thirty years old.

Mr. Faunce and John Hall both told me that men had gathered in front of the brick house from surrounding towns and marched to Concord and Lexington to combat the British. I consider this house with its lovely doorways, both front and back, since the house faced a roadway on two sides, a very beautiful one.

When Thomas Jefferson Johnson died, he left about \$30,000, and was considered very wealthy. I have seen several interesting mirrors, Currier and Ives prints and beautiful candelabra which were bought at the auction held to settle "Tom Jeff" Johnson's estate. All of the older people with whom I have talked recall old fashioned dances at this house every winter. There were several old time fiddlers who made these occasions merry ones. One of the best of these lived in the old house just over the town line in Halifax, in which house there is a perfectly carved witches' cross in the paneling over the fireplace, believed in early days to be a protection from witches. This particular witches' cross was featured some time ago in the Antiquarian magazine.

Another interesting house in the community which has lately been restored by Maglathlin and Stein was, I believe also built by one of the Johnson family, and later owned and occupied by Pelham Brewster whose house in Egypt was burned many years ago. Locust and plum trees and an old cellar mark the place where it once stood. The Johnson who lived in this house is said to have had his head badly injured while working in the well and a doctor from Plymouth to have inserted a piece of silver in the injury which was worn thus to the day of his death. From this house to the corner of Lake Street, one of the Johnsons operated a good business in charcoal pits for many years, selling charcoal in surrounding towns as far away as Bridgewater and Easton.

The ambition of every boy in those days was to go into business for himself. Two young boys in this old neighborhood seventy years ago made their initial success by making a raft and going out on Forge Pond at night to spear fish. Pitch pine knots were gathered and stacked in readiness as high as a large stack of hay. These were used for torches in order to spear the fish at night. The home-made raft not being very substantial, the boys decided to buy a boat and go into business in earnest. They walked to Kingston and after some deliberation and questioning, a man named Peterson who built boats, sold them one for \$16, with the understanding that they should pay for it when they sold their fish. The boys walked back to Silver Lake, and taking a stout home-made wheelbarrow back with them to Kingston town, on which they wheeled the boat all the way to Forge Pond, and launched it, going right up the Pond and the length of the Lake. After putting in a good night at spearing, they packed their fish in boxes and wheeled them to Plympton Station where Peleg Brooks, the Plymouth to Boston express man took them to market. He told them to be at the station at four o'clock to get their money, and at the appointed time they were there anxiously awaiting it. An envelope was handed them which they carried home before opening, meantime consumed by curiosity as to the amount it contained. They received \$16.50 and walked to Kingston, paying for the boat that night, the very day after they bought it. They were questioned closely as to where they got the money, but the boat builder was satisfied that they had earned it, and they were sure themselves that they were now fully equipped to carry on a paying business. These boys trapped from Stephen Bradford's pottery on Wapping Road to Halifax Station, using box traps and snares. From their net earnings they first purchased a beautiful gown for their mother, and the younger finally saved enough to purchase a colt from his mother's family at Turner, Maine. For many years before the Railroad was put through the family had journeyed back and forth over the road on horseback and by chaise to Turner, Maine, following a trail of "spotted trees". It took seven days and there were certain farm houses where they usually stopped over night. The grandmother was born Lovisa Dawes of Duxbury and had first married Seth Delano, first mate on a vessel. The next voyage he was to have been captain but was lost at sea. Lovisa then married Ephraim Bradford of Kingston and they went to Turner, Maine, whither Ephraim's father, Wait Bradford, had previously migrated. They went on horseback carrying their goods. Their first child was a son and the mother named him Seth Delano for her first husband. Lovisa used to ride horseback to Portland carrying eggs, butter, and cheese, trading them in for family supplies. The trip totalled one hundred miles. She used to ride back to Kingston on a four year old colt, but more frequently in a chaise. Unable to make her usual stopping place, on one of these trips, she stopped with strangers. In the middle of the night she heard one of them come into her room, tip toe to the edge of her bed and back to whisper, "She is asleep". At this Lovisa turned in bed and stirred about a bit to let them know that she was not sound asleep. As soon as they went to their room and closed the door, Lovisa arose and dressed herself, crept quietly from the house, mounted her horse and rode on through the wilderness, toward home, in the dead of night.

Lovisa lived to a ripe old age and told her grandchildren many interesting stories of their pioneer days. At night she invariably

told them witch stories and while they loved to listen to her vivid recitals of "actual witches" they were afraid to go to bed when the story was over. Lovisa and Ephraim used to walk seven miles to church, carrying the baby. As a neighbor woman accompanied them with her baby, Ephraim took turns carrying the babies, which resulted in his carrying one all the time. They took their lunch and were gone all day, getting home in time to do the chores at night. When Wait Bradford of Kingston took up land in Turner, Maine, there were numerous families who accompanied him there, and as they were all from this section, they conducted their town meeting here in Pembroke, Hanover and I think Kingston, making all their laws here for their government there. These journeys back to Plymouth County finally resulted in several of the children and grandchildren returning to this vicinity. In the Forge Pond neighborhood, Marcia Bradford married Peter West Maglathlin, a ship calker who used to walk to Boston Sunday night to be ready to go to work Monday morning. He walked home from Boston Saturday night to be with his family on Sunday. Hattie Bradford married Onslow Maglathlin, and Edmond Bradford married Alice Maglathlin, all settling in the neighborhood. When Horace Maglathlin, now a man of eighty years, was fourteen he had saved enough to buy a young colt from his uncle in Turner, Maine. He had never been to Boston but took the boat there for Portland, and a train the next morning to Auburn. It was twenty miles walk to Turner where he arrived before ten o'clock that night in a pouring rain. After a short visit, he started back with the little colt, his cousin taking him as far as Auburn with the colt hitched behind. When he reached Portland it was growing dark, he had difficulty in finding the wharf and when he found it, they told him it was too late to get the colt aboard. But he told them that the colt must go as he had no where to take it. An old man came forward and insisted that the boy should be taken on with his colt. They arrived in Boston in due time and the boy and colt walked joyfully from Boston down to Silver Lake, where the colt was greatly admired by everyone and placed in a field to pasture. One evening after work, when the boy went to see his colt, it was gone. A search was made in surrounding fields and woodland but the colt could not be found, until the next day he came upon it where it had fallen into an old well and broken its neck.

On the southern shore of Silver Lake is a place called "Flax Waterin", so spoken of by young and old. There is a beautiful little cove with a white sandy beach. Here the early settlers came from all about bringing their flax, washing it in the good clean water and spreading it out to bleach. From thorn trees which grow nearby the thorns were used to fasten or pin the flax to trees where it might hang and bleach in the sun.

Cephas Washburn at one time was the station agent at Silver Lake (when that station was actually known by that name). He was later elected to the legislature from this district. He was urged by political backers to trim up his hair and beard, and dress in a more modern fashion. Accordingly he went in town one day and at a men's furnishing establishment was fitted out for his first appearance on Beacon Hill. In the outfit was a stiff bosomed shirt, an article of clothing with which he was wholly unacquainted. Representative Washburn, while willing to conform

to some innovations in his manner of dress, clung tenaciously to the buttoned front variety of shirt, and wore it with the bosom across the back, complaining to an acquaintance on the train that he would like to know who ever got up such a contraption for a man to wear, for as far as he was concerned he would just as lief wear a wash board down his back.

I used to sit with Mrs. Leora Bryant in her little cottage at Silver Lake while her nurses had a few hours off duty. Mrs. Bryant was about 85 years with a keen memory and a ready wit. One day she asked me if I liked to look at old photographs, and entertained me royally with her apt descriptions of the men and women whose photographs she had collected. My regret is that I have not those photographs with her vivid descriptions. Among others there was a very beautiful daguerreotype of herself, and she told me the story of its making. A man who made daguerreotypes had come to Bryantville from afar, and those who could afford it were taking advantage of the opportunity. Leora, whose maiden name was Drake, was selected in her family as the proper one to have her likeness handed down to posterity. A dress was made for the purpose and on a very hot day in mid summer, Leora walked six miles under a scorching sun, carrying a Bible in her hand that a picture might be made according to the prevailing mode, clasping the good book in her hands. I have never seen a more beautiful daguerreotype.

I should like to see a town which would take enough interest in its citizens to preserve all the main historical facts in regard to every citizen therein, not just their births, marriages and deaths. I think the town owes them this interest, and incidentally the town would be making itself known the world over for generations to come for having done so. Any scrap of personal information about any citizen in this town will be of vital interest one hundred years hence and become of more and more interest as time passes. Who would not like to know what manner of man was Quash Quande, where he came from, and how he lived with his family of five in the town of Kingston in the year of our Lord 1790, and so listed in the U. S. Census of that year.

There are always so many, many little things of interest in any community, but particularly an old community, that I think there should be a chronicle kept in every family to preserve the characteristics and transactions of successive generations. The common incidents of any man's life are interesting. His vocation, and avocation, his mode of living, his means of livelihood and particularly his opinions on affairs of the day. As Dr. Johnson once said, it was never wrong to expose a person's defects after death because it is then history. All things are refined by time and all scenes improved by age. Every harsh experience acquires a softness by length of time. So we need never fear the skeleton in the closet in these family chronicles. Who among us but would wish to have the personal history of our ancestors no matter how humble, regardless of their short comings. Sometimes the humblest lives, if we knew them, would be found to be the most interesting. A family chronicle is one heritage which we can all bequeath to those who come after us.

It may be interesting to add that in addition to the three Holmes Houses mentioned, there were three other Holmes houses owned by brothers, said to be cousins of the first three mentioned. Of these houses, one has been burned and one so remodelled as to change its quaint architecture. These three Holmes houses, one which was on what is now known as the Peach Farm, and two on Pembroke Road, are nearly the same age as the three previously spoken of. One of these is now known as the Capt. Witherel place or Mrs. Tobey's, facing Lake Street, and the other the last house in Kingston, now owned by Charles Bouchard. It was formerly the home of Malitiah Holmes. I have been told that when rum was brought up from the packet to the Anchor Forge store, a stated amount was brought for each family, but in the case of Malitiah Holmes, double the amount was brought.

The Bryant house on Egypt Road which is probably one hundred and fifty or more years old has also an interesting history. Peleg Bryant, Senior, and junior, were whalers. The sons of Peleg Jr. all but the youngest, served in the civil war. His daughter Dolly wrote a book while living there, which was published, and eagerly read, at least by all the residents of the Forge Pond District.

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This paper on "Characters, Houses and Events of the Forge Pond District" was prepared by Mrs. Prince T. Woods and read before a regular meeting of the Jones River Village Club, at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Alexander Holmes of Kingston, on the evening of
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