

Farwell Village? No, West Chelmsford

APRIL 16, 1987

A visitor to Farwell Village in the north-western part of Chelmsford shortly after 1820 would have discovered a beehive of activity. What, a few years before, had been a tiny hamlet of three houses was suddenly coming to life. Deacon John Farwell had moved here from Fitchburg and was busily engaged in damming the stream and erecting a mill for the manufacture of scythes.

Deacon Farwell, his son, and a few others would build homes along "Main Street," actually the only street in the village. The scythe manufacturing business proved to be a successful venture with about 20,000 scythes being produced annually. As a result, the community became known as Scythe Factory Village.

The Farwell family operated the factory until 1844 when the real estate was sold once or twice, ending in the hands of F. T. Sawyer and Christopher Roby, who refurbished the factory building and continued the production of scythes under the name of Roby, Sawyer & Company.

On July 4, 1848, railway trains began passing through the village. Soon a post office was established and the name was changed to what we know today: West Chelmsford.

The building was destroyed by fire but was quickly rebuilt. Upon the retirement of Mr. Sawyer in 1853, the name was changed to C. Roby & Co. Because the market for their product had been developed mainly in the southern states, the outbreak of the Civil

The way It was

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War in 1861 left the company in poor financial condition with many uncollectable accounts receivable for goods shipped the previous winter.

Making the best of an unfortunate situation, Roby shifted his production from scythes to swords and sabers for the military, until 1865 when he discontinued the business. Roby swords have become a collector's item. (Samples of these swords may be seen at the Chelmsford Historical Society museum at the Barrett-Byam House.)

After Roby closed his business the Hixcox File Company purchased the factory for the manufacture of files and machine knives. This factory stood a short distance down Stony Brook in the field east of School Street. The file business was discontinued about 1888.

In 1830 Stony Brook was dammed above the scythe factory pond and a mill was erected for the manufacture of worsted yarn. It was operated under the ownership of several different parties until the building burned in 1883 for the second time, having been razed and rebuilt in 1863. The last owner was the Eagle Mills.

West Chelmsford was connected to North

Chelmsford by a street car line in the early 1900's. At that time North Chelmsford was a veritable transportation center with four trolley lines emanating from Vinal Square. One line went along Middlesex Street to Lowell, a second followed Tyngsboro Road to Tyngsboro, the third went out Groton Road to Forge Village and on to Ayer, the fourth proceeded along Groton Road and Main Street through West Chelmsford to the Westford line just beyond the Methodist Church. It then continued to Nabnasset and into Brookside, ending at the railroad track by the mill. Between 1907 and 1920, another trolley began on the far side of the railroad tracks and went to Westford Center.

With the population growth because of the factories, a non-denominational church, the West Chelmsford Union Church, was formed and a meeting house was built in 1848. Gradually the Methodists became the majority and the Methodist Episcopal Church was built in 1887. This church burned in 1920 and two years later the present Methodist Church was dedicated.

Many of the residents of West Chelmsford were employed as stone cutters by the H. E. Fletcher Company which is located partly in West Chelmsford and partly in Westford.

Actually there was an industry in West Chelmsford long before Deacon Farwell arrived. Chelmsford's second saw and grist mill was built in 1669 on Saw Mill Meadow Brook which flows into Stony Brook near the Westford-West Chelmsford line.

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