

Forge Village Historic District

Description

Introduction

Forge Village is an industrial and residential village in the town of Westford, Middlesex County, Massachusetts. It is the location of the former Abbot Worsted Mill that comprises the central architectural feature of the village. A branch of the former Boston and Maine Railroad passes through the village along the banks of Stony Brook. Architectural resources consist of moderate to well-preserved residential, institutional, commercial and industrial properties built during the Colonial to Early Modern Periods. Most buildings are either multiple or single unit factory worker housing but several commercial and industrial resources exist as well as a former religious mission, a historic playground and two former schools. Two hundred seventy-four historic buildings exist in the district. One historic site and five historic structures are also present. Architectural styles include Colonial, Federal, Greek Revival, Second Empire Victorian Eclectic, Queen Anne, Colonial Revival, Bungalow and Cape Cod. Boundaries of the district are determined by changes in density of historic resources and by topographic changes.

The town of Westford is located in the coastal lowland region of the commonwealth, approximately 10 miles south of the New Hampshire border and 30 miles west of Boston. The town is bordered on the east by Chelmsford, on the south by Acton and Carlisle, on the west by Groton and Littleton and on the north by Tyngsborough. The area of the town is 31 square miles.

The village is set along the banks of Stony Brook and on the sloping hills to the north and south. Small residential lots with single and multiple unit dwellings are typical with the central section of the area occupied by the multitude of large industrial buildings of the former Abbot Worsted Company (now Courier Corporation, a textbook printing company). Physical relationships of the buildings varies from dense residential development, such as on Smith and Orchard Streets, to large former agricultural homes on large lots, as on West Prescott and Pleasant Streets. The towers of the former Abbot Mill are visible from many points in the village. Residential buildings are typically within 25 feet of streets and arranged in a dense pattern typical of company-built housing from the late 19th and early 20th century. Industrial properties are built of brick and set close to the road, forming an industrial streetscape along the east side of lower Pleasant Street. The core of the district is where Pleasant Street crosses the former Boston and Maine Railroad and joins East and West Prescott Streets. The combination of industrial and commercial activity and rail traffic creates a village atmosphere similar in nature and size to that of Graniteville, one mile to the east. The Forge Village Historic District retains integrity of design, feeling, association, materials and workmanship.

Development

Members of the Prescott family of Groton began occupying Forge Village during the Colonial Period for the purpose of operating their grist mill on Stony Brook and, later, manufacturing iron from bog-ore they mined in Groton. Presence of mills and the forge is reflected on maps produced in 1795, 1830 and 1855. The Stony Brook Railroad began service in the valley in 1848 and provided a connection between Lowell and Ayer, two important regional rail hubs. Shortly after its completion, several of the railroad's board members introduced large-scale iron-manufacturing to the village. The forge began manufacturing axles and other machined iron parts in 1853 under the name Westford Forge Company. Customers included the Stony Brook Railroad, machine shops in Lowell and Lawrence and local shops. The forge remained in business until 1865 when the Forge Village Horse Nail Company overtook the forge's operations. The nail company occupied the former forge building until 1877 when it too went out of business. Subsequently, the Graniteville-based Abbot Worsted Company acquired the forge and expanded their manufacture of carpet yarn here in 1879. They acquired the old forge which served as the manufacturing facility for woolen goods until it was replaced with the current brick mill in 1910.

Abbot Worsted began its program of intensive residential construction for its workers during the late 19th century. Bradford Street, which was first developed around 1885, is the site of the district's earliest worker housing. After that time, the company began recruiting workers from Ireland, Scotland, Russia and other European countries to fill

the demand for labor. Immigrants occupied the neighborhood in increasing numbers until the mid 20th century when the wool industry in New England had entered decline. During that time, residential subdivisions had been built on Abbot, Palermo, Orchard, Pine, Lincoln, Elm, Smith and Pershing Streets. These side streets of detached single and multiple family residences lend the district a great deal of its character. They are second in importance only to the Abbot Mill Complex on Pleasant Street

Colonial Period Residential Architecture 1620-1775

The **Heald House at 62 Pleasant Street, built ca. 1730**, is a Federal style side-gabled cottage of five by two bays and one and one-half stories. A single-story ell connects the house to a side-gabled barn at the south side of the plan and a hipped porch expands the plan at the north. A shed dormer occupies the front slope of the roof. The center entry is covered by a hipped porch, which was added after the original construction. Windows are modern 8/8 double-hung sash and the two chimneys at the roofline are brick. Walls are clad in wood clapboards, the roof in asphalt shingles and the foundation is built of cut granite. Openings in the facade of the barn are occupied by a roll-up garage door, a sliding vehicle door and by a 6/6 double-hung sash. A wooden ventilator is at the roofline. The house and barn are in good condition and may be the oldest buildings in the district. They are set 25 feet from State Route 225.

The Colonial cottage at **39 Pleasant Street, built ca. 1765**, is a one and one-half-story, five-bay side-gabled residence built with sparse classical ornament. A one-story ell projects from the rear of the house and the front slope of the roof is expanded by a tall gabled dormer. A screened porch enlarges the plan at the left elevation. The house is clad in wood clapboards, the roof in asphalt shingles and the foundation is cut granite. Decorative elements include the classically molded trim and sidelights around the center entry and gable returns in the gabled dormer. First story windows are 1/1 double-hung sash with simple trim. Second story sash are smaller with multiple panes. Three chimneys rise from the roof, two of which are located on the ridge. The third is in the rear ell. The house is in good condition and is located on State Route 225.

Federal/Early Industrial Period Residential Architecture 1775-1853

The house at **7 West Prescott Street was built ca. 1800** near the core of the village. The front-gabled form is three by four bays and one and one-half stories. Gabled dormers and a center brick chimney occupy the roof the house. Walls are clad in wood clapboards, the roof in asphalt shingles and the foundation is built of cut granite. Windows are 6/6 double-hung sash. The house is in fair condition and retains integrity of design and materials.

The house at **23 Pleasant Street** was also built around **1800** and has some similarities of scale and materials to the house at **13 Pleasant**. The side-gabled, five by two bay plan rises two and one-half stories and is enlarged at the rear by two perpendicular ells. The northern ell has lower posts than other parts of the house and may predate the Federal Period main block. A pedimented porch with classically molded piers, a closed gable and molded cornice covers the center entry and, with the corner boards on the main block, represents the principal ornament on the house. The entry is flanked by ½ length sidelights and classical trim. Windows are 1/1 modern sash in the left (north) and 6/6 wooden double-hung sash on the right. The ells are fenestrated with 6/6 sash. Walls of the house are clad in wood clapboards, the roof in asphalt shingles and the foundation is built of cut granite. Two brick chimneys rise from the ridgeline. The house is in good condition and retains integrity of design. A front gabled garage of one bay with a roll-up door exists behind the house on Oak Street.

The **Levi Prescott House at 25 Pine Street** is another Federal style residence built around **1800**. Like 10 Pleasant Street, this has brick end walls with integrated chimneys. The central five-bay, two-story wood-framed portion has been rebuilt due to a late 20th century fire, but the design nearly replicates the original according to photographs taken before the fire. Exterior walls are clad in wood clapboard, the roof in asphalt shingles and the foundation is built of cut granite. Windows are 8/12 double-hung sash with beaded trim. The center entry is surmounted by a fanlight and flanked by ½ length sidelights. An attached two-bay garage expands the plan at the east side. The house is in good condition and represents a strong effort at reconstruction after fire.

The Wright House at **13 Pleasant Street** was built around **1820** in the Federal style. The five by two-bay, two-story form has a low, hipped roof, matched brick chimneys rising from the side walls and symmetrical fenestration typical of the style. Decorative elements include the corner pilasters, molded cornice and classical trim at the center entry. Windows are 6/6 double-hung sash with beaded trim. The exterior is clad in wood clapboards, the roof in asphalt shingles and the foundation is built of cut granite. A low stone wall lines the yard at the street. The house is well maintained. A two-bay, front-gabled garage with a single roll-up door occupies the rear of the lot.

The house at **34 West Prescott Street** was built around **1840** with elements of the Greek Revival style. The three by three-bay gable-front main block is enlarged by a full-width hipped porch and by a one and one-half-story west side ell that attaches the barn to the house. A shed dormer occupies the front slope of the ell and an integral porch covers the entry. Decorative elements consist of the molded cornice, gable returns, corner pilasters, wide classical trim and sidelights at the side-hall entry. Windows are 6/6 double-hung sash with beaded trim. Those on the first story are extended in length, as is common in buildings of this style. Walls are clad in wood clapboards, the roof in asphalt shingles and the foundation is cut granite. The barn is a side-gabled form of two stories and three bays. It is also clad in wood clapboards and built on a cut granite foundation. A granite retaining wall exists between the house and barn. The house and barn are in good condition and retain integrity of materials, design and location.

Industrial Period Residential Architecture 1853-1910

The house at **27 West Prescott Street** was built around **1860** with elements of the Victorian Eclectic style. The three by four-bay, two-story main block is enlarged by an ell and attached barn. A porch covers the front and side elevations of the front-gabled house. Decorative elements include gable returns and a molded cornice. Windows are modern 6/1 double-hung sash. The walls are clad in vinyl clapboards, the roof in asphalt shingles and the foundation is cut granite. The attached barn is accessed by a single roll-up vehicle door in the facade. Windows in the barn are 6/6 double-hung sash and walls are clad in vinyl clapboards. A modern detached shed and post and rail fence are also present. The house is in fair condition.

The **Sartell House** at **44 Pleasant Street, ca. 1865**, is a Victorian Eclectic style residence set back farther from the road than others in the neighborhood. It is a two and one-half-story, front-gabled, three by four-bay form with a rear ell of one and one-half stories. A two-story gabled bay occupies the north (right) elevation. Exterior walls are clad in wood clapboards, the roof in asphalt shingles and the foundation is cut granite. Decorative elements are varied and include wide classical trim at the side-hall entry, corner pilasters and wide frieze boards at the cornice. The two-story gabled bay and the front gable of the main block have gable returns and molded cornices. Molded hoods articulate the 2/2 double-hung sash and a flat-roofed porch with carved brackets covers the double-leaf entry. An interior brick chimney rises from the roof peak. The house is well maintained and retains integrity of design and materials.

The Victorian Eclectic style house at **15-17 Bradford Street** was built as one of several units of worker housing around **1885**. The main block is a two and one-half-story, side-gabled duplex of four by two bays with two gabled dormers on the front slope of the roof. A one-story ell expands the plan at the rear. Exterior walls are clad in wood clapboards, the roof in asphalt shingles and the foundation is built of cut granite. Decorative elements include the entry hoods with carved brackets, the frieze board at the eave, corner boards and molded window surrounds. A detached front-gabled garage occupies the rear yard. The house is well maintained, retains integrity of materials and design and is identical in form and detail to **19-21 Bradford Street**.

The multiple unit residence at **8-10 Bradford Street** is one of several similar buildings on the street constructed as worker housing for the Abbot Worsted Mill around **1885**. The house is a four by two-bay, side-gabled Victorian Eclectic style duplex with an ell attached to the rear elevation. Exterior walls are clad in wood clapboards, the roof in asphalt shingles, and the foundation is built of cut granite. The restrained ornament consists of wide trim boards at the eaves, corner pilasters and wide window surrounds. The double entry is protected by a flat roofed entry hood with exuberantly carved brackets at the sides. The building is identical in design to **24-26 Bradford Street**.

The front-gabled residence at **36 Pleasant Street** was built around **1890** in the Victorian Eclectic style. The two by two-bay plan is enlarged at the right elevation by a one-story ell built perpendicular to the main block and by a one-story Mansard-roofed bay in the first story of the facade. The side-hall entry is also covered by a Mansard-roofed

hood with carved brackets at the sides. Decorative elements include brackets at the corners of the eaves, corner boards and the ornament in the gable peak. Exterior walls are clad in wood clapboards, the foundation is built of cut granite and the roof is sheathed in asphalt shingles. Windows are 2/2 double-hung sash with molded trim. A detached, one-bay garage clad in wood clapboards and accessed by a modern roll-up door is in the side yard. The house is well maintained and retains integrity of materials and design. The house is similar in form and detail to **30 Pleasant Street** and was probably built at the same time. The house at **38 Pleasant Street** has a similar plan and form but has been relieved of its architectural detail.

The house at **8 East Prescott Street** was built around **1890** in the Victorian Eclectic style. The front-gabled duplex is four by five bays and rises two and one-half stories. The plan is expanded by a full-width, flat-roofed front porch with a balustrade at the second story. Decorative elements include corner boards, a closed gable, jigsaw brackets on the porch posts and a molded cornice. Windows are modern 2/1 double-hung sash with beaded trim. The sash in the gable-peak is articulated with a denticulated hood. Exterior walls are clad in vinyl clapboards, the roof is sheathed in asphalt shingles and the foundation is built of cut granite. A brick chimney with corbel cap rises from the west slope of the roof. A detached two-bay carriage house clad in wood clapboards occupies the back yard. The house is well maintained and bears a strong similarity of form to its neighbor to the east, **10 East Prescott Street**.

The Victorian Eclectic style house at **10 East Prescott Street** was built around the same time as its westerly neighbor, **8 East Prescott Street**, and shares some elements of form. The main block of the two and one-half-story, building is three by four bays with a wrapping hip-roofed porch across the front and west side. A gabled bay projects from the west elevation creating a cross gabled plan. Ornament consists of corner brackets at the eaves, jigsaw porch posts with brackets and molded cornice. Exterior walls are clad primarily in wood clapboards except for the front gable peak which has wood shingles. The roof is clad in asphalt shingles and the foundation is built of cut granite. Windows are modern double-hung sash with beaded trim. A brick chimney rises from the west slope of the roof. The house is in fair condition.

Three Victorian Eclectic style multiple unit dwellings on **Canal Street** were built around **1900** and share elements of form and ornament. Houses at **4, 6 and 8 Canal Street** are 6 by 2-bay, side-gabled forms of two and one-half stories. Some examples of original 2/2 double-hung sash remain at 8 Canal Street but the majority of windows have been replaced. The house at **4 Canal Street** retains its wood clapboard exterior but the others have been re-sided with vinyl. The main block of **8 Canal Street** is enlarged by a gabled dormer.

The house at **4 Pine Street** was built around **1906** with restrained Victorian Eclectic style details. The side-gabled, one and one-half-story form is built on a three by two bay plan. Three examples have enclosed hipped entry porches projecting from the facade. Architectural details include gable returns, molded cornice and corner boards. Walls are clad in vinyl clapboards, the foundation is built of granite and the roof is clad in asphalt shingles. This and the three similar examples on Pine Street are well maintained but have been altered with the addition of synthetic siding. Four Single family homes on **Pine Street (Numbers 4, 6, 8, 10)** and nine on **Pond Street (Numbers 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 14, 16)** share aspects of form and detail due to their construction by a single contractor to the Abbot Worsted Company. These are similar in form to the group described below on Orchard Street although the entry porches on Pond Street are either pedimented or enclosed and not hipped with carved brackets. Several of the houses on Pond and Pine Streets have detached garages built in a front-gabled, single-bay plan with novelty board cladding. Historic detached garages exist at **4, 8 and 10 Pine Street and 2, 5, 8, 14, and 16 Pond Street**. The example at **10 Pine Street** has been altered with the installation of vinyl siding but retains the original form.

Modern Period Residential Architecture 1910-1956

Sixteen houses on Orchard Street share a side-gabled, one and one-half-story form of three by one bays. Houses at **1, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 19 Orchard Street** were built **around 1911** and are all identical in form and detail although some have been altered with the addition of porches and synthetic siding. Examples that survive with few alterations are at **1, 3 and 7 Orchard Street**. These are clad in wood clapboards, have 6/6 double-hung sash with hood moldings, a Victorian Eclectic style entry hood with carved brackets at the sides and gable returns. Foundations are built of brick and roofs are sheathed in asphalt shingles. The houses on Orchard Street are

similar in form and detail to the groups described above on Pond and Pine Streets. Several of the houses on Orchard Street have detached garages built with a front-gabled, single-bay plan with novelty board cladding. Historic detached **garages exist at 3, 4, 7 and 8 Orchard Street**. Also, the garage at 6 Orchard Street is a historic pyramidal hipped example.

Pershing Street is a short, semi-circular residential subdivision with three multiple unit dwellings and some single-family homes, all built around 1920. Two of the multiple unit dwellings, located at **10-12 and 14-16 Pershing Street** are identical in their unusual forms and share some Victorian Eclectic details. The main block is a side-gabled, two and one-half-story, four by two-bay form oriented parallel to the street. The main block is enlarged by a half-width shed dormer and by matching entry porches projecting from the sides of the facade. A convex slope articulates the roofs of the porches. Both houses are clad in wood shingles with uncut stone foundations. The house at **10-12 Pershing Street** has asbestos shingles on the roof and jalousie windows in the projecting entry porches while **14-16** has an asphalt shingle roof and fixed multiple-pane sash. Single family homes on Pershing Street are typically two stories or less in height and bear restrained architectural detail. For example, the house at **1 Pershing Street** is a front-gabled block enlarged by a shed dormer and an ell at the right side. A large central chimney, built of brick, projects from the center of the roof.

A house with a form similar to the duplexes on Pershing Street exists at **3-7 Lincoln Avenue**, however it is ornamented with Colonial Revival style details. The central block is a side-gabled, five by two-bay, two and one-half-story form with symmetrical fenestration typical of the style. The main block is enlarged at the side elevations by matching ells that project from the front of the house. The ells contain integral porches with roofs supported by classically molded piers. The center entry in the main block is trimmed with paired pilasters, a blind fan and a pediment. Windows are primarily 6/6 double-hung sash except in the tripartite sash in the side elevation which have 4/4 sash flanking 6/6 sash. Exterior walls are clad in wood shingles, the roof in asphalt shingles and the foundation is uncut stone. Three brick chimneys mark the roofline and lunettes light the side gable peaks. It is in fair condition.

A group of **13 houses on Abbot Street** was built as Abbot Worsted worker housing **around 1940** in the Cape Cod form. The example at **23 Abbot Street** is typical. It is a rectangular one and one-half-story, side-gabled, three by two-bay form. A one-bay, front-gabled garage is attached to the south side by an open porch. The roof of the house is clad in asphalt shingles, the walls in wood clapboards and the foundation is cinderblock. Windows are 8/8 double-hung sash with beaded trim. The center entry is surrounded by ½ length sidelights and a hood molding above. Similar designs exist at **1, 3, 7, 11, 12, 13, 15, 16, 17, 19, 20 and 21 Abbot Street**. The house at **3 Abbot Street** was featured in a news article published around 1939 describing the five rooms on the interior and noting that the price of a furnished house of the type cost \$3800. Detached garages were built on Abbot Street at numbers 3, 11 and 13 around the time of construction of the houses. Attached garages exist at numbers 1, 7, 12, 15, 16, 17, 19, 20, 21 23. Seven houses located on the west side of Abbot Street and two on the east are not historic and were built between 1960 and 1985. Other groups of Colonial Revival style and Cape Cod form Abbot Worsted worker homes were built around 1940 on Elm Street. Houses at **6, 8 and 9 Elm Street** are Colonial Revival style homes and houses at **13, 15, 17 and 18 Elm Street** are Cape Cod forms built around the same time. **Lincoln Avenue, Pershing Street and Smith Street** were also built at this time and intended for occupation by Abbot company workers.

Institutional Architecture

The **Prescott House/Abbot Worsted Company Hospital at 10 Pleasant Street** was built between 1760-1800 in the Federal Style. It is a five by two-bay, two and one-half-story form with a rear addition of one story. A one-story porch is attached to the rear addition. The building is clad in wood clapboards on three sides with the southeast wall and foundation being brick. The roof is sheathed in asphalt shingles. Eaves are trimmed with a slim cornice and corner boards mark the sides of the facade. The entry has a wide surround with pilasters and a full entablature above a row of transom lights. The double-hung 2/2 sash have simple hood moldings above. There are two brick chimneys at each side of the house in a typical Federal arrangement. A four-foot high retaining wall exists at the northwest side of the house and exposes the brick foundation. The house overlooks the Abbot Worsted Mill complex and Forge Pond. Another Federal style residential example in the district is at 13 Pleasant Street.

The former **District Three Schoolhouse at 35 Pleasant Street** was built of brick around **1825**. The three by two-bay, front-gabled form rises one and one-half stories and has a low brick chimney at the ridgeline. Access is through the unornamented center entry. Windows are modern double-hung sash. Little ornament exists on the exterior of the former school. An addition of one story has been made to the rear of the building. The facade, however, retains much of its historical appearance.

The former **Cameron School at 20 Pleasant Street** was built in **1872** and remodeled in 1908 in the Colonial Revival style and is now in use as a senior center. The two-story, deck-hipped building is constructed on a five by seven-bay plan that has been expanded in the rear by a two-story addition. The central three bays of the facade comprise a projecting pavilion which is flanked by matching shed roofed entry porches. The roof is surmounted by an octagonal ventilator. Decorative elements include corner boards with molded caps at the corners of the main block and of the pavilion on the facade, piers with molded caps supporting the shed entry porches, prominent hoods above the sash on the facade and side elevations, and ornamental panels between the first and second story windows. The roof is clad in asphalt shingles, the walls in wood clapboards and the foundation is built of cut granite. Windows are 6/6 double-hung sash and are arranged in groups of six on the side elevations. The former school is well maintained and retains integrity of materials and design.

The former **Saint Andrew's Episcopal Mission at 25 Pleasant Street** was built in the Shingle style in 1903 and is now in use as a residence. It is a two and one-half-story form with a central, side-gabled block and matching front-gabled secondary masses attached to both side elevations to form a broad H-shaped plan. The architect was the Reverend Thomas L. Fisher. The builder was Westford resident, A. Ferguson. A Saint Andrew's cross as is found on the flag of Scotland designed in 1385 during the war of Richard II, ornaments the facade of the building.

The Forge Village **Fire Station is located at 1 East Prescott Street** and was built in 1941. It is a two by three-bay, two-story form with a front-gambrel roof and two vehicle doors in the facade. The building is constructed of brick with an asphalt shingled roof and concrete foundation. Shed-roofed dormers enlarge the second story.

Commercial Buildings

The former **Splain Store at 2 East Prescott Street** is a Victorian Eclectic building built **ca. 1895** at the corner of East Prescott, West Prescott and Pleasant Streets in the core of Forge Village. It is a three-by-two-bay, front-gabled form with a hipped enclosed porch across the entire first story of the facade. A one-story ell is attached to the north (left) elevation and a shed dormer expands the roof above. Wood clapboards sheath the exterior walls, asphalt shingles cover the roof and the foundation is built of cut granite. Little ornament remains on the exterior of the moderately well-maintained building.

The former **Pigeon Family House and Store at 16-18 Pleasant Street** was built around **1910** and is currently in use as a multiple unit dwelling. The two and one-half-story, front-gabled, three by five-bay Queen Anne building is sheathed in wood shingles on the second story and wood clapboards on the first. The roof is sheathed in asphalt shingles and the foundation is built of uncut stone. Decorative elements consist of the change in exterior cladding between the first and second stories separated by a flared course of shingles, a small semi-circular gable ornament, flat window hoods, brackets at the corners of the eave line and a hipped entry hood with carved brackets. Windows are 2/1 double-hung sash. A single brick chimney marks the center of the roof line. The house is well maintained and retains integrity of materials and design.

The former **offices of the Abbot Worsted Company** are located at **4 Pleasant Street**, across the street from the Abbot Mill Complex. The residential-scaled building was constructed in **1923** and is now in use as offices of a company unaffiliated with the mill. The Colonial Revival style building is a one and one-half-story, side-gabled, five-bay form built mainly of brick. An attached garage of five bays is at the rear of the building. Secondary masses include a semi-circular center entry porch and two gabled dormers on the front slope of the roof. Construction is brick with a wide denticulated wood entablature. The roof is slate shingles, and the foundation is built of brick. Colonial Revival design elements include the wide frieze, Ionic columns supporting the entry porch, pedimented dormers, brick corner quoins and flat arches of brick over the windows. The entry is surrounded by sidelights and a transom as well as a wood frieze and brick flat arch. Windows are 12/12 double-hung sash. The

well-maintained former Abbot office building is a more formal Colonial Revival design than most others in the village and retains integrity of design and materials.

Forge Village Auto Service at 1 West Prescott Street is a one-story, three-bay, ridge hipped building that houses an auto and marine equipment repair business. It was built around 1940 with elements of the foursquare form. The facade is pierced by two vehicle doors, a pass door and a single window. The building is sheathed in wood clapboards, the ridge-hipped roof in asphalt shingles and the foundation is built of cinderblock. It is utilitarian in function and design and has little ornament. A single chimney is located east (left) of the center of the roof ridge. Vehicle openings are filled with glazed roll-up doors with simple trim. The pass door and window also have simple trim.

Industrial Buildings

The former **Abbot Worsted Mill at 7 Pleasant Street** is a complex of industrial buildings, the principal members of which are constructed of brick to a level of three stories. Two ornamental Victorian Eclectic style towers face Pleasant Street and contribute defining elements to the center of the village. The older of the two principal brick mill buildings is the **Yarn Mill**, which is built over the canal south of Stony Brook and has one wall adjacent to Pleasant Street. It is largely rectangular but the northwest corner is canted or beveled to accommodate the passage of Pleasant Street, the slope of which causes the building to rise three stories at its north end and two at the south. The focal point of the exterior of the mill is the Italianate style tower that faces Pleasant Street and signals the location of the main pedestrian entry. The square tower is three stories in height with a flat or gently sloping roof, brick corbels, a recessed central panel between pilasters with molded caps. An arched opening with rounded brick hood pierces the upper level of the tower and may contain a carillon. A granite marker built into the tower is carved with the title “ABBOT & CO / 1857-1887”, the later date indicating the time of construction of the Yarn Mill. The entry at the base of the tower is a Colonial Revival style door with transom and sidelights under a pedimented hood. The Colonial Revival entry replaced a Victorian design in the mid 20th century. The door is reached from Pleasant Street by crossing a short bridge over an excavated area between the building and a granite retaining wall. Twenty bays with sash set into recessed panels line the Pleasant Street elevation. Windows in the Yarn Mill are paired, wood-framed, multiple-pane double-hung sash with brick lintels and arched tops. Interior beams are wood supported by wood columns. The lowest level of this building housed power generating equipment and machinery. At the time of construction, water wheels driven by the flow of Stony Brook transmitted power upstairs via a system of belts and pulleys. Pulleys and shafts are visible inside the building in some places. Steam engines were in place by the late 19th century and may continue to exist.

North of the 1887 Yarn Mill is part of the 1910 **Top Mill**. (Top is a type of wool that has been relieved of its shorter fibers by combing, a procedure necessary for making worsted wool.) This is also a three-story brick building that faces Pleasant Street and is articulated with an ornamental tower capped by a hipped roof and belfry. The six-bay facade faces northwest and is articulated with Victorian Eclectic style corbels and arched window hoods. A recessed panel in the tower bears a plaque inscribed “1910”. Windows are multiple-pane, double-hung sash that are paired in some openings. This is the facade located closest to Stony Brook, the intersection of Pleasant and Prescott Streets and the railroad, all of which comprise the core of the Forge Village Historic District. Interior construction of this building consists of iron I-beams and lattice trusses for supporting the wide interior work spaces. The interior of the top floor is lit by windows in the monitor roof.

A third mill building exists east of the **Yarn and Top Mills** and may be seen to their rear. This was additional space for performing the work done in the **Top Mill**. Like the other two, it is built of brick and has arched openings for the windows which are multiple pane, double-hung sash. Additional metal clad and wood-framed buildings exist to the east and serve primarily as storage. One is brick and has a date stone inscribed 1951. This is connected to the tall brick smoke stack and may have served as the **power house**. It is currently in use as storage. Adjacent to the Power House and the second Top Mill is a **Gate House**, possibly built for controlling the water level in Stony Brook. It is a square, pyramidal hipped building. Other buildings to east are Butler-type prefabricated units that serve as storage.

The former electric powerhouse for the **Fitchburg and Lowell Street Railway** was built around 1907 and is located at **4 East Prescott Street**. It is a one-story brick building built as a two bay plan with a one-bay, wood

shingle addition to the east side. Openings in the original brick mass are arched and filled with a door and paired double-hung sash. The opening in the addition is filled with a roll-up garage door. The top of the facade of the brick section is articulated with a stepped gable and tile coping. A corbel table ornaments the eave of the right (west) side of the building. Brickwork with Victorian Eclectic style details resembles that found on the much larger Abbot Mill located across Stony Brook to the south.

Structures

The Westford Forge Company dug out and enlarged in 1853 the **canal** or **millrace** between Forge Pond and the **Abbot Mill Complex**. It runs parallel to the natural outflow of Forge Pond and West Prescott Street. The canal crosses under Pleasant Street south of the Railroad to achieve a total length of approximately a tenth-mile. The canal is approximately twenty feet across and eight feet deep. It is lined with granite ashlar and allows a stream of water approximately three feet deep to flow from the pond to the opening in the lower level of the **Yarn Mill** where water and steam power equipment was housed. The **dam** across the outlet of Forge Pond is located just south of West Prescott Street and west of Pleasant Street. The dam impounds around five feet of water to allow a stream of three feet in depth to flow through the canal. The structure is submerged beneath a sheet of water flowing over its top.

The former Abbot Worsted Company **ball fields** are located at the extreme west edge of the district on **West Prescott Street**. They are currently owned by the town and serve as public recreation space. There are two historic baseball diamonds as well as several modern facilities such as a deck hockey rink, basketball courts, lights and sheds. The diamonds are flanked by dugouts and chain link fences that are not historic.

Statement of Significance

Summary

The Forge Village Historic District is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places under criterion A for its associations with trends in 18th, 19th and 20th century industry and village planning practices. The industries of iron forging and woolen yarn manufacture were carried out over the course of nearly three centuries at the core of the district. The current form of the streets and homes of the district is the result of town planning practices in use by the Abbot Worsted Company during the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

The village is also eligible for the National Register under criterion C for its embodiment of the distinctive characteristics of its 18th, 19th and early 20th century architectural and industrial historic resources. The hundreds of worker houses, Victorian Eclectic style mill buildings and the street pattern focusing on the mill are illustrative of historic construction methods and styles. The district retains integrity of design, craftsmanship, setting, feeling and association.

The period of significance for the district is 1730-1956, which opens with construction of the Heald House, the district's oldest surviving residence, and closes with the Early Modern Period of history. There are approximately 280 contributing buildings, sites, structures and objects in the district.

Contact Period 1500-1620

Algonquin-speaking Wamesit, Pawtucket and Nashoba tribes of Native Americans inhabited the area between the Concord and Merrimack Rivers. Habitation of Westford was concentrated near wetlands such as those along Stony Brook. Projectile points have been recovered in these areas and in upland sites, which indicates scattered hunting activity throughout the town. None of the three suspected Native settlements in the town were determined to be in Forge Village although it is possible that tribe members exploited the hunting and fishing opportunities in the area. Fishing on Stony Brook during the Contact Period is indicated by the existence of a fish weir that was recorded at the outflow of Forge Pond in the mid 17th century near the site of the former Abbot Mill. Travel by Native Americans through the area is conjectured to have been along Stony Brook, possibly the current alignment of North Main Street.

Colonial Period 1620-1775

Travel by White settlers between Chelmsford and Groton began in the mid 17th century on the road that paralleled Stony Brook on the south side (now Forge Village Road, Pine Street, Cold Spring Road) that connected West Chelmsford to Forge Village and Groton. At this time, Westford was part of Chelmsford and residents of that town were responsible for improving the transportation network. In 1655, the town of Groton resolved to build a road leading east to Forge Pond that would connect with roads to West Chelmsford. Westford was a hinterland at this time, nearly devoid of settlers, and was viewed as little more than a geographical barrier between the established villages of Groton and Chelmsford. Settlement was sparse in the town and in Forge Village. No buildings survive from before 1730.

A Native American fish weir existed by the mid-17th century on Stony Brook at the outlet of Forge Pond, part of the town of Groton at that time. According to Hodgman's history of Westford, the town of Groton bought the weir from the Native American named Andrew some time around 1680. At about the same time, the blacksmith and Groton landholder Jonas Prescott built the first iron works at the location and began the 300-year history of industrial activity in Forge Village. Mr. Prescott lived with his wife Mary at the southwest corner of Pine and Town Farm Roads and mined bog-ore in Groton to be smelted into iron at the mill site on Stony Brook. The iron was used for making candlesticks, farm tools and household items such as irons according to local historian Gordon Seavey's 1988 article on the influence of Stony Brook. A grist mill might also have existed at the outflow of Forge Pond at this time according to town histories of Westford and Chelmsford. A relative of Jonas named Jonathan Prescott built for protection from Natives a garrison house near the forge, which survived until 1876.

Westford, which acquired independence from its parent town of Chelmsford in 1729, retains original boundaries except for a narrow triangle of land in the western part that included Forge Village. The triangle remained part of Groton until 1730 when it was ceded to the newly established town. Here were contained the improved forge of Jonas Sr. (b. Lancaster, Ma, 1648) and his wife Mary Locker; the homes of town clerk Jonas Prescott Jr. (b. ca. 1678 d. 1750) and his wife Thankful Wheeler; grandson Jonas (b.1703) and his wife Elizabeth Spalding. The great-grandson Lieutenant Jonas Prescott, (b. 1727 d. 1813) also occupied a house in the village, served as Lieutenant in the French and Indian War, representative to the Massachusetts General Court from 1758-69 and is described as a forgerman in the genealogy in the town history. He lived at **25 Pine Street, built ca. 1780**. The Prescotts made an immeasurable impact on the village by beginning its industrial activity and maintaining a family interest for several generations.

Other residents around 1730 included Captain Jabez Keep (b. 1706), a deer reeve and county road commissioner who may have operated a saw mill in Forge Village based on the note in the town history that he provided 1500 feet of lumber for construction of a belfry in 1763; Thomas Heald, whose house at **62 Pleasant Street** is the oldest in the district, built ca. 1730, and later owned by David Lawrence and the Guerney Family; Ebenezer Townsend and Abner Kent who were petitioners in 1730 to the Massachusetts General Court in favor of annexing part of the town of Groton to the town of Westford, probably to be closer to the meeting house; and Ebenezer Prescott who probably was also a forge man and brother of Captain Jonas Prescott. The Francis Hosmer House at **39 Pleasant Street** may have been built around 1765 according to previous research. Other residents probably lived in the area and practiced agriculture or were employed in the forge. Forge and mill buildings were made of wood, were powered by water, and were probably two stories in height or less. No period industrial buildings survive.

Westford bears significance as a town with many residences that retain distinctive Colonial Period fabric, design ideas and details. Colonial Period architecture in Forge Village is similar in form, materials and design to other examples in the Westford Center National Register Historic District and throughout the town. The Heald and Hosmer Houses, and the 17th century Jonathan Prescott tavern (no longer standing northeast of the crossing of Pleasant Street over Stony Brook) for example, are Colonial style residences built of wood with classical details and symmetrical facades, a description that fits the Colonial Period house at 2 Hildreth Street in Westford Center.

Federal/Early Industrial Period 1775-1853

Iron manufacture continued adjacent to a fulling mill that had been established during the Federal and Early Industrial Period according to the 1795 series map. The iron works were located on the site of the existing mill building, south of the stream and east of Pleasant Street. The fulling mill was on the opposite (north) side of Stony Brook. Personal recollections of the early decades of the 19th century were transcribed in the 1883 town history and depicted a village with agricultural activity, small industry along the brook and frequent passage on the county road by travelers from Boston, Vermont and New Hampshire. The image is of a busy small village with a high degree of self-sufficiency based on its ability to supply nearly all of its own economic needs. The Early Industrial Period closed with the 1853 corporate organization of and sale of stock in the Westford Forge Company.

Transportation Routes

Late 18th century travel through Forge Village was on what is now West Prescott Street to Groton; Pleasant Street led southeast to Concord and Pine Street led out of the village to the east toward **Westford Center (NR District, 1998)**. There may have been a path along the current route of East Prescott Street, north of the brook but it is not represented as a road on the 1795 series map of Westford. Travelers between Boston, southern New Hampshire and Vermont used West Prescott and Pleasant Streets, providing a great many customers for the tavern, in operation throughout the period northeast of the crossing of West Prescott Street over Stony Brook (currently the site of Spinner's Store). While it is possible that alternative routes of travel existed through Forge Village during the period in the form of unnamed paths, possibly across private land north of Stony Brook, West Prescott, Pleasant and Pine Streets would remain the only roads depicted on maps of the district until the addition of East Prescott Street on the 1875 Beers map. The town report of 1840 indicates that Asia Nutting built a stone bridge near the forge, which may have carried the current Pleasant Street over Stony Brook but has since been replaced.

The 13-mile long Stony Brook Railroad opened for business parallel to its namesake brook in July 1848 between South Groton (now Ayer Center) and North Chelmsford. The company was based in Lowell and built the road primarily to ship manufactures along Stony Brook to its distribution points, but also offered passenger service. Indeed, Forge Pond was touted by a local resident in the early years of the Stony Brook Railroad as a recreational destination, easily accessible by rail and located in a quiet rural setting.

The railroad never owned any rolling stock (engines or cars) and was leased upon its opening by the Nashua and Lowell Railroad, a larger operation with rolling stock operating between the manufacturing centers of its name. The improved shipping opportunities provided by the railroad allowed towns on Stony Brook to grow much faster than before. Forge Village and Graniteville, one mile to the east (**National Register District, pending review**) were the villages in Westford that benefited by their new ability to ship products to customers in Lowell and across New England.

Population

Population in the district in the late 18th century was only around 20 adults, although the number was sufficient to begin the industrial development of this part of the Stony Brook Valley. Iron forging continued to drive the local economy but as many residents were farmers as were employed in manufacturing according to federal census information. With the opening of new travel routes and increasing population density after the Revolution, farmers and industrialists alike were drawn to new settlements in northern New England and Western Massachusetts. Perhaps 100 families migrated out of Westford as a whole, a number that must have included many from Forge Village. But as old residents moved out, new arrivals replaced them as forge employees and farmers.

In 1820, federal census information indicates there might have been 35 individuals in the village. Slightly less than half were employed in manufactures with the remainder in agriculture. Ebenezer Prescott was the principal member of his family involved in iron forging at this time. This was probably the Ebenezer Prescott born in 1776 and married to Hannah Wait in 1800. He lived at **10 Pleasant Street** and is responsible for creating the 1795 map of Westford. His brother Jonathan Prescott (b. 1783) was the tavern keeper in Forge Village until 1845. Prior to 1850, Forge Village was superior to Groton in terms of its population and amount and value of industrial goods produced.

The equal ratio of industrial employees to agricultural workers indicated by the 1820 census remained intact through the time of the 1840 census. Ebenezer Prescott and other members of his extended family remained heavily involved in the iron forging business. By 1850, a fifth man named Jonas Prescott (b. 1810) and Nathan Prescott (b. 1817) were the principal iron manufacturers, labeled “forgeman” in the census. Employees of the forge were described as laborers, of which there were four in addition to Samuel Prescott (b. 1822) who was also listed as a forgeman. Charles and Asa Prescott were labeled as traders in the village. In 1850, the approximately 80 village residents were almost all of English descent. There were two people in the village born in Canada and two from Ireland at that time. Residents attended the Congregational Church in Westford Center.

Economic Base

The 1795 series map of Westford, carried out by Ebenezer Prescott of the iron forging family, indicates the existence of a fulling mill northeast of where Pleasant Street crosses Stony Brook and the iron forge at the southeast, very near the existing mill complex. William Chandler operated the first fulling mill further down Stony Brook in the early 18th century but it is unknown who operated the one described in Forge Village at the end of the 18th century. However the Prescott family continued their deep involvement with iron forging in the village and may have been involved in the fulling mill as well. During the Federal Period, the number of forges increased to three which may have been owned by different members of the Prescott family.

Recollections of a resident printed in the 1883 town history indicate that Forge Village in 1828 was the site of a “store, hotel, three iron forges, two blacksmith’s shops, two wool carding machines, one clothier’s mill, a grist mill and a wheelwright’s shop, all located near the [existing] worsted mill”. The 1831 Hales map of the town shows a forge, an iron foundry and a tavern in the village in addition to a school and several residences. Jonathan Prescott built a significant addition to his tavern in 1817 and continued to operate it as a tavern until 1845, after which time he operated his business as a store and dance hall. Dozens of residents carried out agricultural activities as well as industrial jobs. This diversified economy provided the solid base on which the village would survive as a traditional mill community far longer than others in the region.

By 1850, two members of the Prescott family were operating separate forge companies in the village. Jonas and Nathan Prescott operated businesses of similar scale according to the value of their machinery and created nearly identical products. Indeed, these men owned more valuable machinery and stock in trade than anyone in town, including affluent Westford Center and the expanding industrial village of Graniteville. Items produced at the forges included axles, sledges, box molds, and anchor palms (the pointed end, also called a fluke on a yachtsman type anchor). Production at the forges was sufficient to attract the attention of investors from the manufacturing cities of Lowell and Nashua, several of whom were made aware of the possibilities of manufacturing in Forge Village on a large scale by virtue of their involvement with the new Stony Brook Railroad. Investments in the business by members of this group would carry the village into the next growth-oriented phase of its development.

Architecture

Institutional

The former **District #3 School** is located at the corner of Pine and Pleasant Streets. It was built in ca. 1825 as one of 8 district schools established in 1822. The district was divided in 1851 and students attended either school #3 or #10 in Graniteville. The building at 35 Pleasant Street served as the village’s primary education facility until 1872 when a new school was built by G. W. Howe. The old brick school was sold to David Lawrence in 1875.

Residential

The residence at **23 Pleasant Street** was built prior to 1830 and is depicted on the map of Westford printed in that year. The first known owner was A. Prescott in 1855 whose occupancy is shown on the map drawn in 1855 by Edward Symmes. This may have been Abram Prescott who lived with his wife Olive and their 11 children. Abram was representative to the Massachusetts General Court in the 1820s and 1830s, town clerk in the 1820s, military captain and deacon of the First Parish Church. Abram’s youngest son, Edward, was the subsequent owner of the

property into the late 19th century and had the largest amount of property among his family members, including at one valuation four separate residences.

The house at **25 Pine Street** was built for Lt. Jonas Prescott around 1784 according to the family genealogy. He was born in 1727 in Westford and married in 1750/51 to Rebecca Parker. Lieutenant Prescott earned his rank while fighting in the French and Indian War. He probably operated a forge in the village. Jonas' son Levi married Hannah Prescott in 1809 and occupied the house throughout their lifetimes. Like his father, Levi was also a forgerman. Subsequent owners were Prescott descendants Levi and Rebecca, the widows B. and L. Prescott in 1855, Levi and Ella Prescott and finally Alice Luella Prescott Collins until 1984.

The small residence at **7 West Prescott Street** may have been built as a blacksmithy for Timothy P. Wright (b. 1806) according to the map from 1855. It was probably built around the time Mr. Wright married Elnora Prescott in 1832, when they lived outside the district near Beaver Brook Road to the south. Census records from 1840 indicate Mr. Wright to have worked as a blacksmith. On the maps printed in 1875 and 1889, S. A. Hamlin is depicted as the owner. This is probably Samuel A. Hamlin (b. 1832) who graduated from Westford Academy and later worked for many years as the railroad station agent in Forge Village.

The **George Wright House at 13 Pleasant Street, built ca. 1820**, may have been built and first occupied by Amos Heywood (1791-1875) and his wife Lydia Buck according to the 1883 town history. (p 352) Mr. Heywood later occupied a house in Westford Center on Forge Village Road. He was involved in an unspecified industry according to the 1820 census and was active in the formation of the Union Congregational Church in the Center in 1828. The forgerman George Wright acquired the house before 1857 according to the volume Westford Days. He may have bought the house around 1833, the time of his marriage to Mary Ann Prescott and occupied it until his death in 1882. George and Mary Ann's son Ellery worked as a nail-maker in the Forge Village Horse Nail Company and may have occupied the house as well.

The Federal style house at **10 Pleasant Street** was built ca. **1800** for the forgerman Ebenezer Prescott (b. 1776) around the time of his first marriage to Hannah Wait. He had two successive wives and 15 children by 1823. He was the owner of the Westford Forge Company until at least 1840 according to census information. Ebenezer Prescott was the principal member of his family involved in iron forging at this time and probably had sons in the industry. Ebenezer's son Nathan Pollard Prescott was the subsequent owner by 1855.

Industrial

The forges were probably contained in a wood-framed building similar to the Forge Village mill depicted in the 1883 town history. It was a two-story form with a gabled roof, bell-tower at one end and a prominent smoke stack at the side. These buildings were replaced with the existing brick mills in 1910. Other industrial buildings had been constructed prior to 1853 at the crossing of Pleasant Street over Stony Brook but their appearances are not known.

Commercial

Jonathan Prescott added to his 17th century tavern at the northeast of the crossing of Pleasant Street over Stony Brook (current site of Spinner's Store). The Colonial Period two-story, side-gabled building was enlarged with a seven-bay, two and one-half story side-gabled form in 1817. 12/12 sash are visible in historic photos. The 17th century block was demolished in the early 20th century. The 19th century block was destroyed by fire in 1976.

The depot of the Stony Brook Railroad combined the functions of ticket office, freight depot and passenger station based on the description in railroad records. The plan of the building was 20'x40' with ornamental brackets, probably supporting the deep eaves typical of railroad stations. A platform 56'x10' connected the building and the tracks. A siding 571' in length existed off the main line of the road.

Many Forge Village examples of Federal architecture adhered quite closely to the period's distinguishing design principles. As in Westford Center, stylish residences have facades rendered in wood with symmetrical fenestration. Hipped roofs, brick walls and paired chimneys also exist. Designs at 10 and 13 Pleasant Street in the district possess these characteristics and are comparable in style and scale to residences built around the same time in the

civic and commercial area of Westford Center. Thus did the patterns of architectural development and artistic values exhibit themselves throughout the district and the surrounding town.

Industrial Period 1853-1910

The iron industry continued in Forge Village during the Industrial Period with the corporate organization and expansion of the Westford Forge Company. In 1853, a group of investors, primarily from Nashua, New Hampshire and Lowell but including two residents of Westford, met in Lowell to determine the improvements necessary for increasing production in the aging manufacturing facility. The placement of investment capital and construction of new mill facilities came in response to the 1848 opening of the Stony Brook Railroad and marked the Forge Village Historic District's beginning as a company village.

Transportation Routes

The village retained the transportation patterns of the Federal/Early Industrial Period into the 1850s. Through-travel continued to pass on West Prescott and Pleasant Streets. Access to Westford Center to the east was on Pine Street. East Prescott Street does not appear on historic maps until 1875, when it is labeled Union Street and served as a thoroughfare to Graniteville. A row of houses for factory employees appears on the 1889 Walker map of Forge Village. This ultimately became Bradford Street although it is not named on the map. Other residential subdivision roads were built in succession after this time until, by 1910, new streets with company-built homes included Pond, Story and Canal Streets.

The Stony Brook Street Railway operated through the village starting in 1907. The route entered Forge Village from the east between the former Splain Store at 2 East Prescott Street and the Stony Brook Railroad. The streetcars paralleled the Stony Brook Railroad west toward Ayer. The railway company constructed a spur line up Pleasant Street to Pine Street to Westford Center and down the opposite side of Tadmuck Hill, reconnecting to the main line at Lowell Road. Streetcars eventually offered service from Graniteville, Forge Village and Westford Center to Ayer in the west and Chelmsford in the east. The railway remained in operation until 1921 when competition with the automobile forced it to close.

Population

Population levels of Forge Village remained steady between 1850 and 1860 at around 80 people. By 1890, however, Abbot Worsted employed 200 people in the village. Based on the number of employee housing units constructed by 1910, it is estimated that approximately 400 people lived in Forge Village by the end of the Industrial Period.

Residents were almost entirely of English descent until 1850 when census records show the first Canadian and Irish immigrants. In that year, two residents of each nationality were recorded in Forge Village. Numbers of both of these groups increased steadily after this time. The number of immigrants would equal that of native born residents by the 1880s. Twenty-six children were born to parents of foreign birth in 1875 according to statistics printed in town reports. In 1902, 39 of 55 births were to foreign-born parents. Other common countries of origin were England, Sweden, Finland and Italy. Beginning in 1889, the Abbot Worsted Company offered English language classes to its non-English speaking employees as one of many company benefits. This was in response to the company's successful efforts to entice Canadian emigrants from Trois Rivieres in Quebec, Poles, Russians from the city of Grodno and English from the city of Keighley in Yorkshire. While the number of industrial workers was increasing, farmers continued to make up an important part of the local population. Heightened density, however, encouraged construction of a public water supply system that was put into service in 1908.

By 1907, Russian surnames begin to appear on lists of residents and in marriage records. In the first years of the 20th century, the Abbot Worsted Company sent agents to countries in eastern Europe and to Russia to recruit employees. Agents enticed workers to come to Westford with the promise of steady work, good housing and prepaid travel expenses. So successful were the agents in attracting the immigrants that the Russians soon had a cemetery of their own between Forge Village and Graniteville. Emigration from Eastern Europe brought with it a stronger Catholic

presence in the mill villages. A parish church to serve Westford's members of that group was built in Forge Village in 1894. During the second half of the 19th century, the village of Forge Village attracted more residents than Forge Village due to expanding machinery manufacturing and wool spinning operations there.

Economic Base

The local economy flourished before the Civil War under the driving force of the Westford Forge Company and the Stony Brook Railroad. Transportation opportunities improved circulation of manufactured items as well as farm produce. Travel between Forge Village, Ayer and Lowell became simpler and facilitated interdependent economic growth. Other concerns such as an ice house, blacksmithies and other small shops provided a range of products and services to the residents who came to Forge Village to work in the factory.

Westford Forge Company

In October, 1853, a group of men gathered at the Merrimack House in Lowell to discuss the organization, construction and operation of the Westford Forge Company, a newly capitalized, enlarged and highly productive incarnation of the iron forging shop founded in Forge Village in the 17th century. Of the 17 shareholders, two were from Westford and one was from Forge Village. Local resident Jonas Prescott, descendant of the 18th century iron forger, joined with John William Pitt Abbot of Westford Center, a successful lawyer, state representative and senator, and 15 others from Lowell and Nashua, New Hampshire to create articles of association and by laws for the new company. Jonas Prescott was the largest shareholder and presumably had the most direct involvement in the operations. J. W. P. Abbot was a principal financier of the new company; George Stark of Nashua acted as clerk and engineer.

Mr. Stark, Mr. Abbot and others on the board were involved in the operation of the Stony Brook Railroad, creating a strong tie and cooperative relationship between the management of the two enterprises. Also, in 1854, one year after the organization of the Westford Forge Company, the Abbot family built their first facility for producing worsted yarns. The factory was located in Graniteville, one mile east of Forge Village. The Abbot Worsted Company manufactured woolen yarns with machinery made in Forge Village by the C. G. Sargent & Sons machinery manufacturing company. As with the railroad and the forge company, John W. P. Abbot was involved as financier in the initial organization of the worsted company.

Initial efforts of the board were to direct George Stark to prepare plans to cut a new channel from Forge Pond to the iron works, to deepen the existing channel and to construct a dam of stone at the head of the works. Jonas Prescott was appointed superintendent of dam and channel construction, rehabilitation of the old trip hammers and existing works. Improvements were to be based on information gathered during field visits made by another board member to other iron forges. The new forge was in operation with three trip hammers by 1855 as described in the 1855 annual report. Other components of the forge were the main undershot water wheel (a water wheel powered by water flowing beneath it), a blast apparatus driven by a breast wheel (a wheel half submerged in water, suited to streams with significant fall such as Stony brook), a furnace and cranes for lifting the iron. Separate from the blast works and the main forge housing the trip hammers was a small machine shop furnished with its own water wheel. This was part of the old iron forge and contained drills and lathes for finishing machined parts. An additional forge that served as a component of the former iron operation was used intermittently during times of high water. Of these buildings and structures, only the canal and possibly part of the dam survives. While the papers of incorporation do not indicate it directly, it is likely that, around the time of its incorporation, the forge company built the building which later served as the main facility of the Forge Village Horse Nail Company and the first woolen mill until its demolition in 1909.

According to annual reports, the Westford Forge Company was founded with the intention of providing manufactured parts to the machine shops of Lowell and Lawrence, located 10 miles away near the northern terminus of the Stony Brook Railroad. The unforeseen economic downturn of 1859, however, forced the company to seek business from local farmers and smaller industrial firms in Chelmsford. Their original idea of supplying custom made machine parts gave way to the manufacture of windlass necks, axles for railroad cars and wagons, sledge hammers, nuts, bolts, shafts, farm tools, andirons, candlesticks, mortars, pestles, sheet iron and boiler plate. By 1857, the company had a small amount of steel in stock, which represents an early foray into that type of forging.

Prior to that time, railroads used iron for rails and wheels. The forge company employed around ten hands who were listed, in decreasing order of pay rate, as forgemen, hammer men, machinists, blacksmiths, tenders and helpers. It is possible that the economic depression of 1859 was an insurmountable obstacle to the company as it was out of business in 1865. The company was then reorganized under new ownership and the forge adapted for use as the Forge Village Horse Nail Company.

It was the Westford Forge Company, however, that developed the Stony Brook mill site, in use since the Colonial Period, into a corporate industrial complex with multiple water wheels for highly mechanized heavy manufacturing. The company was not as large as concerns in Lawrence or Lowell but it did have a range of iron and steel products which were shipped by rail across New England and as far as New Jersey and Philadelphia. John W. P. Abbot and Jonas Prescott, with their backers and agents, created an integral member of the economic framework that continues to influence the daily lives of many Westford citizens who live in view of the site and the Stony Brook.

Forge Village Horse Nail Company

The Forge Village Horse Nail Company was founded in 1865 by John Daly, John Haskins and Alexander Caryl in the former iron forge complex according to town and county histories. The men were able to make use of much of the former forge company machinery but introduced some nail-specific manufacturing equipment. A historic photo of the nail manufactory depicts a wood-framed building, probably the former forge, as a gabled form of two-stories oriented perpendicular to Pleasant Street just south of Stony Brook. The factory is long and in the historic photo recedes from view to the east along Stony Brook. A second two-story, gabled building labeled "Office" occupies the foreground. Neither one survives today.

The company continued in business making horse, mule and ox shoe nails until 1876, after which, the Abbot Worsted Company, based in Graniteville, assumed ownership of the building complex and began the manufacture of carpet and other yarns in Forge Village.

Abbot Worsted Company

Like the Forge Village Horse Nail Company, the Abbot Worsted Company in Forge Village operated for a time in the former building complex of the Westford Forge Company. The worsted yarn manufacturer was founded in **Graniteville** in 1854, one mile to the east, and expanded its operations to the western village in 1879. The locally-owned company utilized the buildings, machinery and water privilege of the former iron forge and employed 185 hands in the two villages. The Abbot company, however, enlarged the mill complex with the construction in 1887 of a three-story brick mill building still standing on Pleasant Street. This coexisted for over 20 years with the wood-framed gabled building of the former forge company. The wood-framed building was ultimately demolished 1909 to accommodate a second three-story brick factory constructed in 1910 which comprises the complex as it is seen from Pleasant Street today.

Corporate Growth

The Abbot Worsted Company was begun in Forge Village in 1854 by local residents John W. P. Abbot, also a founder of the Westford Forge Company and the Stony Brook Railroad, and his son John W. Abbot who acted as treasurer and, by 1890, principal manager. John William Pitt Abbot was a graduate of Harvard University in 1827, an attorney and state senator. He was a principal financial backer of the undertaking. J.W.P. Abbot's son John William was principal manager of the Forge Village facility. He was educated at Westford Academy and Phillips Andover Academy. He served as trustee to Westford Academy and to the J. V. Fletcher Library and lived in Westford Center (**NR District, 1998**). The Abbots later hired Allan Cameron as agent and bookkeeper. Mr. Cameron was a Scottish immigrant who arrived in this country in 1843. He worked as a machinist and agent for Charles G. Sargent & Sons in Graniteville, served as trustee of Westford Academy, school committee member and lieutenant in the cavalry.

The Abbot Worsted Company began manufacturing carpet yarns at Calvert and Sargent's **Mill #1** in Forge Village in 1858. By 1865, industrial statistics of the commonwealth indicate the Abbot Worsted Company employed 80 hands, a sufficient number to encourage management to consider expanding beyond the confines of Graniteville. In

the failure of the Forge Village Horse Nail Company in 1876, the Abbots saw an opportunity to acquire enlarged manufacturing space and so bought the wood-framed buildings that had formerly housed the Westford Forge Company. The Abbot Worsted Company proceeded to install new Sargent-manufactured equipment in the former nail factory and in 1887, constructed the three-story mill now located on the toe of the slope of Pleasant Street. The brick building has its foundation built over the canal dug by the forge company in 1855. The water wheels took their power from the millrace that flowed through the lower level of the building. Waterpower was augmented by steam around 1885 when Abbot Worsted was taxed for ownership of a steam engine. The 1890 county history indicates it was a single 650 horsepower model. By 1893, a 160 horsepower engine had been added to the power plant. Valuations by the town of Abbot Worsted's property show that the value of the operation in Forge Village surpassed that of Forge Village between 1885 and 1895. In 1885 in Forge Village, 5 houses were available for employees and 19 were in use in Graniteville. In 1895, the Forge Village operation offered 42 residences while the number in Forge Village remained the same. The total value of the company's property in Forge Village was around double that of Graniteville, a situation that would remain constant well into the 20th century.

Offices of management-level employees occupied the southwest corner of the 1878 brick mill building. This, combined with the former forge/nail building (used then as the spinning room) and some smaller wood-framed sheds were the principal accommodations of the company until demolition in 1909 of the forge and the construction of the three-story brick mill in 1910. The forge building was described in a news article written at the time of its demolition as one of the oldest buildings in the village.

The designer of its replacement in 1910, the Top Mill #1, was Charles T. Main, an engineer practicing in Boston who maintained an enduring association with the Abbot Worsted Company. Mr. Main first worked for Abbot Worsted as part of the firm Dean and Main in 1905 to design an unspecified brick mill building in the Forge Village Complex. He subsequently worked on his own and was retained to design the Wash House Wing and an addition to Mill #1 in 1915, the Reeling Department in 1916 and the Combing Building in 1922.

John W. P. Abbot's son and John W. Abbot's younger brother Abiel J. Abbot was general manager of Abbot Worsted from 1897-1912. He attended Westford, Phillips Exeter and Highland Military Academies and Massachusetts Institute of Technology. His first job was in a mill in West Chelmsford where he worked four years and returned to the family business. It was Abiel Abbot who headed the company during its incorporation in 1900. John C. Abbot (son of John W.) became general manager in 1912. He attended Westford Academy, MIT, and Worcester Polytechnic Institute before joining the family firm. In 1927 after training in mills in Lowell, Edward M. Abbot, son of Abiel, became vice president and manager of the Forge Village mill; Julian Cameron, son of investor Allan Cameron, was manager of the Forge Village mill. Owners and managers of the Abbot Worsted Mills lived principally in Westford Center (**See Westford Center NR District Nomination, 1998**).

Corporate organization of the company had much to do with its success. It was a small mill in comparison to those in Lowell, Lawrence and Manchester, New Hampshire, capitalized by a handful of local residents. Mill construction in Lowell, in contrast, was funded with money raised from sources in Boston, such as the Lowell family whose name the city bears. The Lowells and others saw the investment as a way of earning interest on their money and not as a day-to-day concern or the primary component of their livelihood. The Abbot mills were owned and operated by local residents who had an urgent daily interest in the mills' success. The Abbots saw as part of this success the contentment of their workers for its own sake, for the financial and industrial efficiency employee contentment brought and for the longevity it could bestow upon their business. Methods of promoting contentment among the workers included the offers of low-cost (\$6 per month in the early 20th century), clean, attractive company-built housing, night school classes for immigrant workers, libraries, athletic playing fields, health benefits, company sponsored band and athletic teams and above all, good wages that were not reduced in hard economic times as they were at other textile mills. Labor strikes afflicted mills in Manchester, New Hampshire in 1885, and elsewhere during the 19th century (and more violent strikes in Lawrence and Lowell in 1912, 1919 and throughout the Depression) but never in Forge Village or Graniteville.

Industrial Process

The process of manufacturing woolen yarns at the Abbot Worsted Company began with the purchase in Boston and other ports of raw bales of wool, which were shipped to Forge Village on the Stony Brook Railroad. The first tasks

in the factory were scouring or picking, washing and drying in which impurities such as sticks, oil and dirt were removed from raw wool by machinery developed in Forge Village by the C. G. Sargent Company as well as machines that were manufactured by the Prince Smith Company and imported from England. Scouring and washing operations were located on the middle level of the **Top Mill (SEE Map, Mill Building)** one floor below the sorting room. The next step was to sort the wool according to thinness or coarseness of the fibers, which varies from one breed of sheep to another and determines the type of yarn to be made. Sorting at the Abbot Worsted mill took place on the top floor of the Top Mill and was carried out by relatively high-level employees. Carding and combing were the subsequent steps in the preparation of wool for spinning into yarn, all of which took place on the bottom level of the three-story Mill. Tasks in the Top Mill were carried out by male employees. In 1893, five mill buildings existed and were supported by three store houses.

Sorted, washed and combed wool was taken to the **Yarn Mill** to be drawn, where the wool was separated by weight; it was then spun and twisted into yarn for carpets, clothing, knitting or furniture upholstery. Yarn was then shipped in one of several formats. The final product, worsted yarn, was either wound, reeled, redoubled or hanked (coiled) and delivered to the buyer who would dye it, after which it could be woven or knitted. Worsted yarn requires longer strands and the removal of short strands in order to create a smoother quality than other types of yarn. The yarn is most frequently woven or knitted into hosiery, suiting and fabrics. Women and children were employed in the Yarn Mill. Children were supposed to have been at least 14 years of age but that guideline was not always followed according to former employees. Children below 14 were occasionally hidden in baskets during inspections by labor authorities. Children were also, however, encouraged to work half-days by the company, and to attend school the remainder of the day.

Secondary Industry

Between 1853 and 1910, many smaller businesses existed in Forge Village, such as an ice house, blacksmith shops, small retailers of groceries, butchers and farmers. Of course most owed their existence to the railroad, the Westford Forge Company or one of its successors. Thomas Hittinger of Boston owned the ice house, located from around 1870-1930 west of the mill between the railroad and the pond. The operation employed 50 hands at the peak of the harvesting season in 1880 and remained in operation for 10 out of 12 months each year. Blacksmith shops typically employed fewer than five people, as did retail store owners.

Architecture

Residential

Many of the houses constructed during the period were Victorian Eclectic style multiple-unit dwellings built by the Abbot Worsted Company to house its employees. The earliest examples are from around 1885 and exist on Bradford Street. The house at **5-11 Bradford Street** is probably the earliest surviving company-built house. The 1885 town valuations enumerate three residences called “blocks”, a description that fits the multiple unit dwelling. Another block stood parallel to Pleasant Street between Bradford and Pond Streets but was demolished in the early 20th century. Six of the 10 other houses on Bradford Street are Abbot Company worker houses, also from the late 19th century. The former worker residences at **1-3, 8-10, 12-14, 16-18, 20-22 and 24-26 Bradford Street** were built by the time of the 1889 Walker map of Westford. Residents of Bradford Street around the turn of the century included Israel Berthiaume, an operative living at **30 Bradford**; Francis Lowther was an overseer at Abbot’s and lived at **17 Bradford**; the laborer James McMurray lived at **21 Bradford**. Most houses on Bradford Street and other company developed streets remained under Abbot Worsted Company ownership until around 1940.

Three houses on Pleasant Street bear a strong similarity to one another and were probably built by the Abbot Worsted Company. **Thirty, 36 and 38 Pleasant Street** are ornate Victorian Eclectic Style homes built between 1875 and 1889. They are marked on the 1889 atlas as “Abbot & Co.”. Resident directories indicate that a mill operative named James Berry was the resident of #38 in 1890. Thomas Brophy Jr. and Thomas Brophy Sr. both worked as mill operatives and lived at **39 Pleasant Street**.

Pond Street was developed starting in 1906 with three worker houses described in the local newspaper the *Westford Wardsman*, as cottages. These are among the group at **4-16 Pond Street** although the article does not specify the

individual houses. They are single-family homes that continue to function in that capacity. Additional single family homes were built here in 1909. The three double-houses at **11-13, 15-17 and 19-21 Pond Street** were built for the Abbot Worsted Company by the contractor P. Henry Harrington in May, 1909. Mr. Harrington was a busy local contractor who is responsible for construction of the Frost School in Westford Center, the Abbot Worsted company offices at the east end of Bradford Street and many worker residences in Graniteville. The duplexes on Pond Street are at the western end near its intersection with Bradford Street. Residents around the turn of the century according to resident directories included the mill operative Frederick Amission at #12, and stone cutter John L. Flynn at #14. Residents of Pond Street in 1910 included Helen Byrnes, a mill operative, and James Byrnes, a painter; Hugh Daly, a wool sorter; mill operative William DeRoehn and Alfred Drolet, an overseer in the Abbot mill. Houses in the neighborhood were under company ownership until around 1940.

Story and Canal Streets were first developed near the end of the Industrial Period. Examples of worker housing line these dense residential streets that are arranged as a short loop and a cul-de-sac. These were built near the end of the period, around 1900.

Institutional

The Abbot Worsted Company had a hall built on Bradford Street around 1880 to house stage performances, meetings and social events and, later, motion pictures. Musicians on piano, trumpet and violin accompanied the early silent films. Four bowling alleys, six pool tables and two dressing rooms occupied the ground floor. An assembly hall and reception rooms were upstairs where meetings took place and an occasional Vaudeville show was staged. A library was operated in the building as well. In addition to the secular activities, Episcopalian church services were held by residents of the Groton School community as part of their public outreach program. A historian at the school who is familiar with the papers and the activities of Franklin Roosevelt while at Groton believes the Forge Village legend that Roosevelt preached Sunday School service in the hall is entirely possible. An outdoor skating rink was available to residents and the local hockey team, the Forge Village Arrows. Employees of the company operated the hall and theater until the mid 20th century. The Victorian Eclectic style building was attached to the rear of the garage of the Abbot company offices at the foot of Pleasant Street but was demolished in 1980.

Cameron School at 20 Pleasant Street was built in 1872 and named for Allan Cameron, who arrived as an immigrant from Scotland in 1843 and worked his way into a management position in the mills in Lowell. Mr. Cameron became a wholesale textile buyer, salesman, worsted carpet manufacturer and bookkeeper who was a partner in the Abbot Worsted Company. He served in Westford as a trustee of Westford Academy, director of the public library, school committee member and lieutenant in the cavalry. His residence is a large ornate Victorian Eclectic style building located at **39 Main Street in Westford Center**. The school building served as classroom space for grammar school students until the 1980s. The building was enlarged in 1908 according to a design by the architectural firm Derby and Robison, a partnership that specialized in Colonial Revival style residential design, largely around Concord, Massachusetts. Local builder P. Henry Harrington performed the work.

The **Saint Andrew's Mission** was built at **25 Pleasant Street** in 1903 to promote the Episcopalian faith. The Victorian Eclectic style building was dedicated on October 3 in a ceremony presided over by clergy of the Groton School. The nearby Episcopalian college preparatory school was under the charge of Reverend Endicott Peabody who envisioned Forge Village as a location in need of religious opportunity. The mission held picnics and festivals in addition to traditional church services until 1963 when services were moved a new building.

Commercial

The Splain Store at **2 East Prescott Street** was built around 1896 and served as retail space for a grocer until some time after 1911 according to resident directories. The store was run by Daniel Splain, a graduate of Westford Academy around 1890 and of the Lowell Commercial College, after which he worked in Boston as a clerk. He was post master of Forge Village and died there in 1902, leaving the store in the charge of Abbie Splain. The building was used as a station or waiting room for the Fitchburg and Lowell Street Railway, which operated streetcars between Chelmsford and Ayer from 1907-1921.

The industrial period in Forge Village closed with the construction of the more recent brick mill building at the bottom of Pleasant Street in 1910. It was the final bit of development in the village, the peak of Abbot Worsted's economic growth. The company managed to progress into the 20th century as a profitable, sound, dynamic company that reacted positively to changes in the geographic focus of the industry, changes in demand for yarn types and to changes in expectations about the quality of life available to factory employees. Other mill towns faced labor difficulties sufficiently intense to have killed not only individual human beings but entire corporations, even regional sectors of industry. The Abbots' policy of fair treatment of employees, family ownership of the company and responsible corporate growth provided them with great wealth and the village with extended economic health and, according to some, a reputation as a Utopia.

Architectural development in Forge Village had previously adhered, through design choice and settlement locations, to patterns in other neighborhoods in the town such as Westford Center. In both locations, Federal style single family homes were built on spacious lots around the village core. Growth of industry in Forge Village and the need for more densely built employee housing after the mid 1800s changed the focus of new construction from scattered single-unit dwellings to company-built multiple-family homes. Employees rented homes with repetitive Victorian Eclectic style design elements and regular spacing along purpose-built streets, all of which was a departure from previous ways of life associated with the small industrial and agricultural village. The existing plan of village streets populated with houses of matching scale and many identical details is the embodiment of this period's distinctive development characteristics and bears a stronger similarity to its companion mill village of Graniteville than it does to Westford Center.

Modern Period 1910-1956

The extended life of the Modern Period in Forge Village opened with the construction of the Yarn Mill on the site of the demolished 1853 forge/nail factory. The company continued to grow, its value doubling every ten years from 1905-1935, at which point began the long slow decline into the Post-Industrial Period of the late 20th century. By the beginning of the decline, however, Abbot Worsted had left a permanent mark upon the town in the form of this industrial village.

Transportation Routes

The system of roads through Forge Village remained as it had been since the construction between 1855 and 1875 of East Prescott Street. There were, however, several new residential subdivisions, most of which were cul-de-sacs or short looping streets. Orchard, Elm, Lincoln, Smith, Pershing, Chestnut and Oak Streets were laid out, developed and accepted by the town as public ways during the period.

West Prescott Street and Pleasant Street connected the village to the towns of Groton and Concord and so was upgraded to state highway early in the century. The Fitchburg and Lowell Street Railway succumbed to effects of competition with the automobile and ceased operation in 1921. The tracks were removed from East and West Prescott Streets in 1931. Names of some streets in the village were changed in 1931. Union became East Prescott and Central became West Prescott in honor of the village's early settlers by that name. Pine Street was so named at the same time. Street lights were installed in the village in 1912 and auto road signs were installed in 1915. Streets were paved and painted with lines in 1932. Bradford, Pond, Lincoln, Elm, Pershing and Smith Streets were developed with residences in the 1910s and 20s but were not accepted by town government as public roads until 1938. Coolidge and Orchard Streets were accepted in 1941; Chestnut and Oak Streets in 1943.

Population

The number of residences increased dramatically during the Modern Period. Between 1910 and 1940, the Abbot Worsted Company built approximately 21 multiple-unit dwellings and 72 single-unit dwellings, all of which would accommodate approximately 300 additional residents in the district.

Around 1907, Abbot Worsted began recruiting Russian workers to join the mix of residents born in America, Canada, Italy, Ireland and Sweden. By 1910, something over half of all marriages involved at least one foreign-

born member. This trend would reverse itself by the 1940s when the second generation had become naturalized. The estimate of the number of farmers compared to mill workers for the village would fall significantly below the level of half seen in the town as a whole.

Economic Base

Abbot Worsted Company

The Abbot Worsted Company continued to expand. The corporation dominated the local economy and village life in general through the first half of the 20th century. The company added three brick buildings to the existing mill complex on Pleasant Street for the manufacture of woolen yarn. They became the first factory in the country to make yarn of camel's hair starting in 1890. The mill became in the 1920s the largest producer of mohair yarn in the country, selling to Ford Motor Company and Sears Roebuck. By 1950, they had become the world's largest producer of knitting yarn. The mills in Forge Village employed 800 workers, its highest level of employment before tapering off and selling its Forge Village operations in 1956. The company remained in business for some time with facilities in the southern United States.

At the beginning of the 20th century, the Abbot Worsted Company was in uniquely strong financial position in comparison to other textile mills in New England. A keystone in their economic foundation was their ability to avoid incurring the anger of labor organizers. Strikes were a problem of disastrous proportions in the large-scale textile towns of Lawrence and Lowell and elsewhere during the first half of the 20th century, bringing unemployment to workers and poor productivity to owners. Indeed many employers were forced to move their operations to South Carolina in order to reap the benefits of cheaper non-union labor. Abbot Worsted, however, ran an open shop, free of labor difficulties over the pay scale. Former employees claim the policy was to prevent dissatisfaction among personnel by paying whatever rates the American Woolen Company paid their union employees. The Abbots further improved their chances of survival by behaving responsively to market changes. Early in the 20th century, the company moved into the manufacture of fabric for automobile seat covers. They sought new markets for woolen fabrics in the United States Army, Canada and other countries.

During the 1930s when textile mills in New England were failing or being drawn to the American South for the cheaper, non-unionized labor, the Abbots accepted the financial losses from allowing their workers to live in company-owned housing rent-free so that they might weather the depression. This delayed the company's departure, inspired loyalty among employees, and empowered the company to remain in business into the 1950s. It is John C. Abbot who is credited with operating the mill on a strike-free basis during this difficult economic period. In 1927 John C. Abbot was treasurer and general manager. By 1950, Edward Mosely Abbot was president of the company. He attended Westford Academy, Saint Mark's School and the Lowell Textile School.

After WWII, the company responded to the growing demand for synthetic yarns. This and other adaptive strategies combined with good management and sensitive treatment of workers allowed the Abbot mills to remain in operation in Forge Village until 1956 when they, along with the company's other facilities in Forge Village and Brookside were sold and immediately closed. The mills in Forge Village were occupied within the year by the Murray Printing Company but the 75-year period of Abbot Worsted benevolent dominance in the village was over. The mill complex was expanded in the 1950s-1970s with modern construction. Printing operations continue in these buildings but the 1887 and 1910 buildings are now vacant.

Secondary Industry and Commerce

Residents carried out small independent retail and light industrial operations adjacent to the Abbot Worsted Mill and among the homes of its workers. The longest standing site of commercial activity was at the northern side of the intersection of East and West Prescott Streets and Pleasant Street, the location of the tavern in the 18th century, the post office and store during the 19th and into the 20th. It is now the site of Spinner's store. Around 1940, one resident constructed the existing garage now in use as an auto and boat repair shop at **1 West Prescott Street**. The Splain, and then the Nutting families operated the store at **2 East Prescott Street**. Grocers, barbers and a variety of vendors maintained shops in houses and basements. For example, a store existed in the first half of the 20th century in the basement of **9 East Prescott Street** according to a long time local resident. In 1930, the Grodno Co-

operative Co., a grocer and provisioner, existed in the house at **9 Pond Street**; Joseph LeClerc operated a grocery store on the east end of West Prescott Street; a branch of the Lowell Institute for Savings was located at **4 West Prescott Street**; Catherine and Edward Hanley operated Hanley & Co., a general store at the East end of West Prescott Street; E.E Gray Co. was another grocer in the heart of Forge Village as was Wosil Seadah; Edward Spinner had a candy store at Story Street near West Prescott in 1930; the ice retailer D. Gage & Co., located between the pond, the railroad and West Prescott Street survived into the 1930s and employed at least three Forge Village residents; the Boston and Maine Railroad employed 9 people in the Village in 1930. At least three farmers lived in the district at the time, probably near the west edge of the district. Olga Remis was the teacher at the Cameron School in 1930. A small number of quarrymen employed in Forge Village lived in the village.

Architecture

Commercial

The Queen Anne style building at **16-18 Pleasant Street** was built around 1910 and also functioned as a store during the early 20th century. Victor Pigeon operated the small grocery here according to the resident directory of 1910. This was rehabilitated into an apartment house in 1912. Additional retail establishments existed in the Colonial style Forge Village Tavern that was demolished in 1976. A photo depicting the Forge Village depot around 1950 shows a wood-framed, side-gabled building of one story and no architectural detail. It was located at the current site of the War Memorial.

Residential

Abbot Street was the final residential subdivision built by the Abbot Worsted Company. Small, one-story Colonial Revival and Cape Cod homes were sold beginning in 1938. Palermo, Pershing, Elm, Orchard, Lincoln, East Prescott, Canal, Chestnut, Oak, Pine and Pleasant Street also experienced significant additions to their housing stock during the Modern Period. Many of the homes built around this time have detached garages, indicating the increasingly important role played by the automobile. Most are single-family units rather than multiple family houses as were built frequently during the Industrial Period.

Institutional

The Saint Andrew's Mission continued its mission to promote the Episcopal faith in association with the religious leaders of the Groton School. Laird W. Snell was reverend and rector at the mission but he lived in Ayer. The existing firehouse was built in 1941 according to an entry in the town report.

Recreational

The Abbot Worsted Company, under the direction of John C. "Jack" Abbot, bought land on West Prescott Street around 1915 to use as a baseball diamond and soccer field. The company sponsored teams that competed in the Greater Lowell Twilight Baseball League, and regional soccer tournaments from 1919-1926. The team traveled to different parks around the greater Boston area and was well known in its dark blue and white uniforms according to a local newspaper columnist. The field may have been used for soccer as well given that the company sponsored a team in this sport.

The district's embodiment of period design characteristics continued to be illustrated through the numbers of company-built residences, by now arranged in modern subdivisions of Colonial Revival and Cape Cod houses. Abbot Worsted constructed single and multiple-unit worker residences well into the 20th century. Its final foray into home building came in 1938 with the construction of Abbot Street homes that were sold to employees in the 1940s. The Westford villages of Graniteville and Brookside, both focused on an industrial core, remain the areas most comparable to Forge Village in terms of housing density, scale and design refrain. While Cape Cod houses and some industrial buildings may lack individual distinction, the ensemble they create represent an entity that is distinguishable to residents as a village with clear boundaries, architectural character and strong sense of community.

Conclusion

The company had acquired, held and then lost an enormous amount of influence over the local community during its period of operations. The very shape of the streets and forms of the buildings is in almost every case directly attributable to the ideas and actions of the directors of the Abbot Worsted Company. The brick mill complex defines with its ornate Victorian facades the core of the village. Fully half the architectural resources of the district are worker houses. Many more are related outbuildings also constructed by or for the company. The streets the houses face were laid out by Abbot Company employees and of course they all lead to the mill. While the amount of influence the company had over its community of employees was large, it is extremely rare to find a discontented voice in the historical record. Instead, in a 1925 civic booster cartoon of resources and activities of the town of Westford and in a 1934 newspaper column, the company village is referred to by separate writers as a Utopia. These accolades were written at a time of great labor unrest throughout the country, union organization and frequent strikes by industrial workers brought about by mismanagement on the part of large corporations concerned only with financial and not human resources. Employee loyalty inspired by this attitude of benevolent paternalism allowed the Abbot Worsted Company to survive into the 1950s when other New England mills had been closed for decades. It is rare even today to find a former Abbot Worsted employee or long time resident of "Forge", as it is called, with negative recollections of the company or the village.

In February, 2000, a proposal was filed by a corporation engaged in real estate redevelopment to adapt the mill for use as apartments. Working under the Tax Reform Act, the corporation intends to carry out a certified rehabilitation project on the mill which involves maintaining the Secretary of the Interior's Standards of Rehabilitation. The standards exist to insure that significant historic elements and materials of the mill are retained and that no unnecessary demolition takes place. That work is currently in the planning stage.

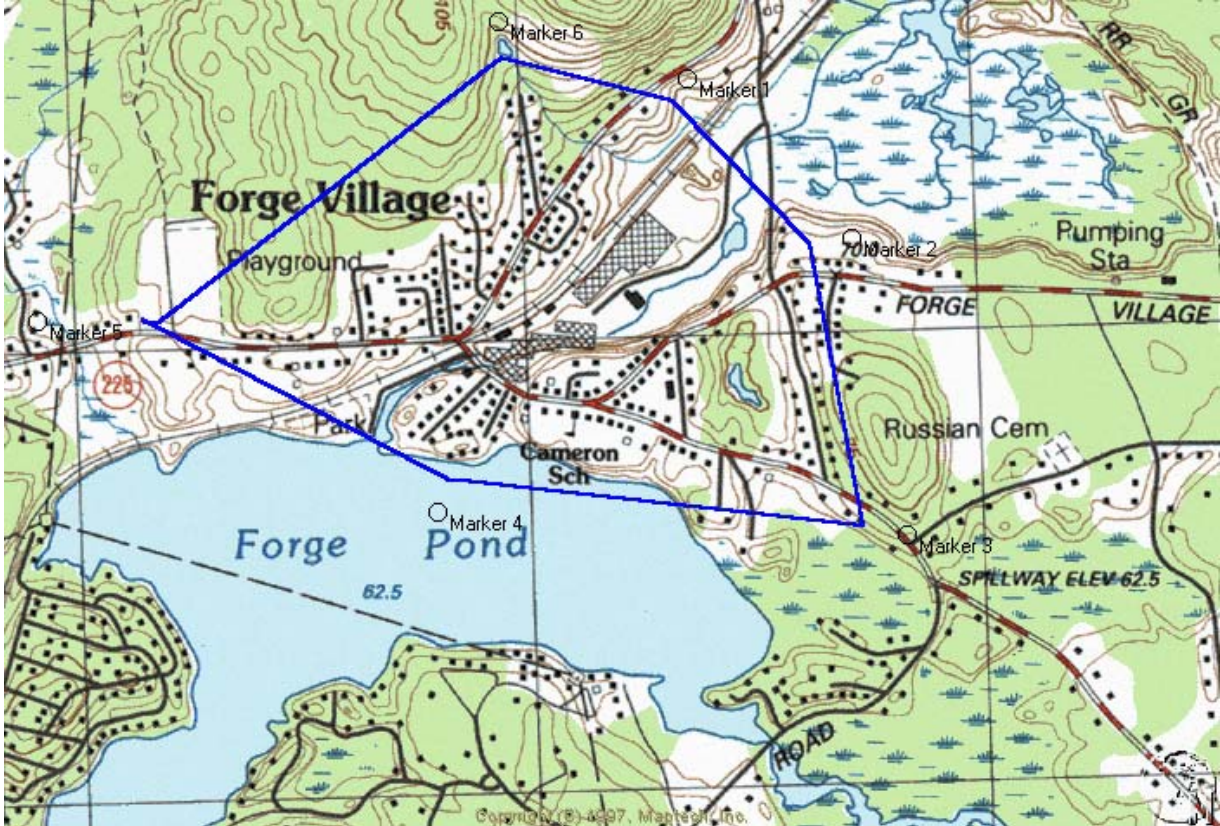
Geographical Data

Verbal Boundary Description

The Forge Village Historic District is bounded on the northeast by Kissacook Hill, a 127-meter eminence. The eastern edge of the district is marked by an estuary of Stony Brook. The western border approaches the Groton town line. The southerly border of the district is largely the shore of Forge Pond. Boundaries are indicated graphically on the sketch map attached below.

Boundary Justification

The boundaries of the Forge Village Historic District were selected for their demarcation of the limits of the historic fabric of the village. The subdivisions of worker housing on Story, Elm, Lincoln and Orchard Streets at the northeastern edge of the district have provided housing to residents of the village since the early 20th century and retain integrity of materials, design and setting. The former Abbot Worsted mill and Palermo, Pine and Abbot Streets line the eastern boundary of the district. The historic Abbot mill is the core of the district and gave rise to the construction of the residences that surround it. Forge Pond on the southern boundary was the power source for the mill when it was run by water wheels from the 17th to the 19th centuries. The western arm of the district is occupied by houses located on West Prescott Street. Some are Abbot-built worker houses and others are former farmhouses built prior to the mid 19th century. Streets within the district's boundaries include Bradford, Pond, Smith, Pershing, Pleasant, Canal, Chestnut, East Prescott, Pine and Oak Streets. Most are densely lined with residential construction occupied at one time by mill employees. Streets within the boundaries all contain a high density of historic structures, buildings and objects that lend a sense of historical integrity to the Forge Village Historic District.



Forge Village Historic District

Sketch Map

North toward top

Go to next section.