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THE FORBES FAMILY
IN
WESTBOROUGH, MASSACHUSETTS



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Since the new name — “Forbes Junior High School” — has appeared on the front of the former High School on West Main Street, there has been considerable speculation about and interest in the Forbes name. In the present day of shifting population, when our citizenry goes and comes, often putting down no roots, it is good to dwell for a moment on one family which has remained in Westborough for eight generations, taking an active part in the town's progress and development, and, in a measure, benefitting the town by its generosity and by its old-fashioned standards of neighborliness, integrity and sense of duty. Many newcomers to Westborough know nothing of the family which is one of the oldest in town, and doubtless have no inkling as to the use of the name in connection with several civic institutions. Consequently, this brief account is being written, both to give information and to correct some misapprehensions in relation to the Forbes family.

The first member of the family, Daniel Forbes (or Forbush, as the name was sometimes spelled) 1620-1687, was an immigrant from Kinellar, Scotland. He settled in Cambridge and married a second wife, Deborah Rediat, in 1679. He subsequently moved to Marlborough, of which Westborough was then a part, when his third and youngest child, Jonathan Forbes (1684-1768) was born. Daniel died when Jonathan was three years of age. In 1705 Jonathan married Hannah Holloway, and his uncle, Nathaniel Oakes, gave them a farm, the deed reading: “for the love and affection I bear my kinsman, Jonathan Forbes, 40 acres of my Coran farm and 12 acres in Strawberry Meadow”.

In 1714 Jonathan and Hannah bought three tracts of land near our town reservoir. He built a dam and a sawmill near the present dam, and built his house on Spring Road. The cellar-hole is still there and the great

door-stone provides the front step of the old Brigham-Forbes homestead, formerly the home of Miss Helen Cady Forbes and now owned by Mr. George MacDonald, on the Grafton Road. This house was erected about 1750 by Moses Brigham. Upon his death it became the property of his son-in-law, another Jonathan Forbes, and remained in the Forbes family until 1870. It came back into the family in 1929, when it was bought by Fannie Hooker Forbes.

Jonathan and Hannah had nine children, the second eldest being Jonathan (1746-1805). In 1775 his son Jonathan was born and he married Esther Chamberlain of Westborough. Their son Ephraim (1815-1863) married Catherine Avery White of Roxbury, and their children were Catherine Salome Forbes, Francis White Forbes, William Trowbridge Forbes, and Esther Louise Forbes. Catherine White, incidentally, was the great, great, granddaughter of Samuel Adams of Revolutionary fame, and her great grandmother was one of the Daughters of Liberty.

Catherine Salome married Charles Brigham Kittredge and established themselves in Seattle, Washington.

William T. Forbes, a graduate of Amherst, taught for some years at Roberts College in Constantinople and later became Judge of Probate Court of Worcester County. Of his five children, the youngest, Esther L. Forbes, is the distinguished novelist.

Esther Louise Forbes was a graduate of Mt. Holyoke College when it was a Seminary, and taught for many years in Westborough Schools. She taught the primary class in the Congregational Church Sunday School for forty years.

Francis W. Forbes married Jane Nason of Westborough and they had one daughter, Helen Cady Forbes, a writer of children's books and a librarian in the New York Public Library. His second wife was Fannie E. Hooker, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Henry M. Hooker of Chicago and their children were Henry Hooker Forbes, of Worcester, Mrs. Edward D. Homans and Mrs. Howard S. Foster, of Westborough. Mr. Hooker was a native of Enfield, Massachusetts and was of a long line of dis-

tinguished ancestry. He was a direct descendant of Captain Joseph Hooker and a cousin of General "Fighting Joe" Hooker of Civil War fame. He was one of the pioneers of Chicago and had seen it destroyed twice by fire and twice rebuilt; and took an active part in its rebuilding. His daughter, Fannie, remembered vividly the second great fire which occurred in 1871 when she was eleven years old.

Both Mr. and Mrs. Forbes were deeply interested in their town and always had a lively interest especially in young people and their futures. They were active workers in the Congregational Church, in which Mr. Forbes represented the seventh generation of Deacons in his family. He was also President of the Westborough Savings Bank, President of the Algonquin Council Boy Scouts of America, Treasurer of Westborough State Hospital, one of the founders, with his sister, Miss E. Louise Forbes, of the Thursday Club.

They demonstrated their unfailing concern for people and their thoughtfulness of others in their efforts to make Westborough a better place in which to live. It was philanthropy in the highest sense with the thought of money only as a necessary means of attaining the results. Such gifts, in this day of excessive taxation, are things of the past, except through means of tax-saving foundations.

During a period of many years Mr. and Mrs. Forbes made many donations to Westborough, as follows:

1. Before the Boston and Albany Railroad built the present railway station and followed its present course, the railroad lines passed through the east end of the town square, across the lower end of Summer Street and parallel to Milk Street, and across what is now the lower part of Winter Street. In 1913 Mr. and Mrs. Forbes paid for the extension of Winter Street from Summer Street through to Phillips Street, thus making a through way from High Street to Church Street. At that time the American Legion Post planted along the new street seven trees in memory of the men who died in World War I.

2. In 1924, new sidewalks with stone curbing were built at their expense on High Street.

3. In 1917 before the days of Old Age Assistance and Social Security, realizing the need for living quarters for elderly men and women, Mr. and Mrs. Forbes built and endowed Kirkside on Church Street, a beautiful home "to provide and maintain convenient and healthful rooms, apartments for persons of limited means or in need of better quarters than they can afford". In 1950, because of new state regulations involving great expense in staffing and remodelling the house, and because people no longer needed its particular facilities, it was discontinued as a home and sold by Kirkside Corporation to the Congregational Church for use as a parish house. The endowment fund plus the money received from the sale of the house now constitutes The Kirkside, Inc. managed by the Forbes daughters, Mrs. Edward D. Homans and Mrs. Howard S. Foster, and a board of directors, to administer it for the same general purposes of the original endowment.

4. In 1924 Mr. and Mrs. Forbes saw the great need of a high school which would be not only a replacement of the greatly inadequate building on School Street, but a monument of civic importance and interest to add to the efficiency of our schools and to the beauty of the town. They chose the site of the former Whitney House Hotel on West Main Street, which had been destroyed by fire in 1907, and offered to build a Junior-Senior High School upon the site. In November, 1924, a town meeting voted to accept from Mr. and Mrs. Forbes the deed for the old Whitney House land, provided they build a school upon it. Later in 1924 work began on the construction of the new building, designed by the architectural firm of Ritchie, Parsons & Taylor, by P. G. DeArmond & Sons, Contractors. These names, together with those of the donors and building committee, are on a large bronze plaque on the second floor of the school, opposite the entrance to the Auditorium.

In May, 1926 the building was ready for occupancy. A ceremony of dedication was held in the new Auditorium on May 11, the day on

which the pupils moved in. Only the finest materials were used in its building, and it was the wish of the donors that the school be complete in every detail. The woodwork was of uniform finish throughout; sewing, cooking rooms, shop, gymnasium, laboratories, were completely equipped with the latest type of seats, lockers, floor coverings. The Auditorium was furnished with four types of scenery, hung with blue velvet curtains on stage and at the windows; Wedgwood plaques were inserted on the walls and the lighting fixtures were of Venetian glass. The grounds were completely landscaped and the flag-pole was bought in Seattle and brought here via the Panama Canal and fitted into the bronze-and-stone base prepared for it. During the next twenty-five years the school was under the supervision of the Superintendent of Schools, J. Harding Armstrong, and its janitor, Mr. Lee Enman (one janitor being completely efficient at the time) and a janitress, Miss Catherine Merchant. At a twenty-year anniversary celebration it was noted by all visitors that the condition of the building had not noticeably deteriorated in any way. The pupils and teachers were very proud of their high school, and their affection for it remains unchanged today.

5. In 1926 Mrs. Forbes established a trust fund of \$25,000 at the Mechanics National Bank of Worcester — “the income of which is to be expended to assist pupils who have graduated from Westborough High School, in securing a higher education. The loans shall be decided upon by the Superintendent of Schools, the Principal of the High School and the Chairman of the School Committee”. The fund has grown in value during the past years and has been used by many young men and women. It is interesting to note that nearly all borrowers have repaid the loans.

6. In 1927, a former resident, Mrs. Isadore Forbes (not a relative of Mrs. Francis Forbes) left the sum of \$35,000 for the building of a new Town Hall. Since the amount was not sufficient to replace the old Town Hall, Mr. and Mrs. Forbes gave the town \$50,000 for that purpose. Later the town appropriated \$67,500 to finish the building.

7. In 1924, they built the Community House on East Main Street and gave it, with the large tract of land adjoining it, as a field house and playground for the town. It provided quarters for the High School Athletic Association, members of the Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts and visiting players. This action was in line with their constant wish to improve the appearance of the town. The Community House was built on the cellar hole of a factory destroyed by fire some years previously, which was an eyesore on East Main Street. Tennis courts were built nearby on the remains of another burned factory. From 1924 when the building was finished until 1946 when the building and playground were turned over to the town, the Forbeses paid for the maintenance, heating and janitorship of the building. The entire playing field was graded by Mr. Forbes, personally, with the occasional assistance of a helper. He, literally, gave of his strength and sweat to the youth of the town. The town later sold the field to the Bay State Abrasive Co.

8. In 1933, they presented to the town the Spurr House on Parkman Street, now used by the American Legion and the Westborough Historical Society, together with one-half acre of land and an additional 12,000 square feet of land belonging to the Moulton house adjoining the Spurr house. "This land is to be used for playground facilities for the Junior-Senior High School".

9. At the same time Mrs. Forbes purchased and gave to the town the land beside the Town Hall, consisting of 13,360 square feet, to be used as a parking lot by townspeople.

10. On July 18, 1939 Mr. and Mrs. Forbes set up a trust fund of \$5,000 for the Boy Scout work in Westborough. Some years previously, Mr. Forbes gave a substantial gift to Algonquin Council. He had been deeply interested in Boy Scout work for many years and was a life member of Algonquin Council. In appreciation of his work and strong interest he was honored by being made a Silver Beaver Scout.

11. In September, 1946, the Forbes Assembly Program Trust Fund of \$5,000 was established "the income of which is to be paid over to the

Principal of the High School to provide an address by a speaker, or an entertainment of an educational nature for assembly programs”.

12. Market Block, a 100-years-old building at 4-6 West Main Street was bought by Mr. Forbes and demolished. On its site the handsome business and apartment building was built, now owned by Mr. William Ford. The sole purpose of this project was to enhance the appearance of our Main Street.

13. About this time, realizing the need of a Postoffice building of dignity and efficiency in Westborough, Mr. and Mrs. Forbes erected the building on the east side of the square for that purpose, and it was opened for business in April, 1930. The need for larger quarters made it necessary for the Postoffice to vacate the building and it was sold to Mr. Emmanuel Aronson.

14. By the terms of her will, Mrs. Forbes left the Evangelical Congregational Church a fund of \$25,000 — this in addition to numerous gifts during her lifetime. To recognize her work in the church and her generosity to it, a room in the vestry was furnished in her honor and named “The Fannie Forbes Room”.

15. At a critical time in the fortunes of the young Bay State Abrasive Co. Mrs. Forbes made them a very substantial loan, which carried them through that critical period.

16. In 1930 Mr. and Mrs. Forbes gave the Forbes Hall of Science, together with its complete equipment, to Yankton College, South Dakota.

17. In 1929 they gave a fully equipped Library to a missionary school in Japan.

18. In 1939 they gave a room, completely furnished, to the new campus of Colby College in Maine.

Of the private philanthropies, nothing, of course, can be said except that they were numerous and continuous over the many years of their

lives. Many a homeowner in Westborough has clear title to his property because of mortgages that were cancelled after a few payments, or because of personal loans without interest that were cancelled.

Since World War II, the changes in living conditions, caused by increased incomes as well as by greatly increased taxation, make it virtually impossible for such civic and individual philanthropy. Mr. and Mrs. Forbes will be remembered by those who knew them and by those who benefitted by their graciousness and generosity; and for those who are new to the town, it is well to know of such selfless people.

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