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## As Tewksbury's Fifth Oldest Falls

*By Frances Berg*



*Picture of homestead from Patton's History of Tewksbury*

**TEWKSBURY** – In 1656 one John Rogers of Watertown received the deed to 156 acres in as yet unnamed Tewksbury, which, along with Billerica, parts of Bedford and Carlisle and Lowell's Belvidere section, was then part of an expanse named Billericay by its Wamesit Indian tribes.

Indian encampments still flourished along its Merrimack Concord and Shawsheen River Banks, around the shores of Long Pond and Round Pond, when Tewksbury was incorporated in 1734 and when, in 1744 descendent Timothy Rogers laid muscle to ax and hewed Tewksbury's mere fifth homestead out of the wilderness.

Still standing testimony to Tewksbury's historical beginnings are its first homes; the 1728 Thomas Marshall homestead at 379 Pleasant St., the Rev. Sampson Spaulding homestead at 60 East St., the 1740 Hardy homestead at 464 Main Street., once known as the "Half-way House," and the 1742 Battles House at 1002 North Street.

Tewksbury's fifth, the 1744 Timothy Rogers Homestead at 336 Whipple Road, however, is no more. Deemed beyond restoration by current owner Charles Gath, it has just been demolished. And what rises on the site is expected to echo the surrounding development of modern homes, albeit largely of historic aire which have long since changed the landscape of much of the original Rogers acreage.

THE HOMESTEAD was the boyhood home of the late Melvin G. Rogers, a saga in himself. Graduating from Tewksbury's then one-room school house at the age of 10, from high school at 14, later from the University of Pennsylvania Law School, eventually becoming the law partner of the late Judge Stanley Qua, at the age of 27, he became Tewksbury's town moderator, a post he held for 40 years, meanwhile spending decades as associate county Commissioner, then Middlesex County Commissioner.

The last male descendant of original owner John Rogers, Melvin Rogers was the last of seven generations of direct descendants to own the homestead, the last of five continuously resident there. Following Timothy Rogers were David (1766-1846), whose brother Zadoch founded the farm on Rogers Street which later became the famed Rogers Hall school for girls; Joel (1801-1860); then David (1840-1921), father of Melvin Rogers.

Aside from some 24 acres given to the town, which now memorializes him as Melvin G. Rogers Park, the homestead and most of its acreage in 1958 became the property of Rogers' niece, Mrs. William G. Ramsay, and her husband, since deceased.

Their son, William G. Ramsay, who, like current owner Gath, had hoped one day to restore the deteriorating Tewksbury landmark, is nevertheless unequivocal about today's facts of life.

"PEOPLE SAY, 'Isn't it a shame to take it down!! – And they're right. But the government doesn't care. The town does nothing. The taxes are exorbitant. If they said you could keep it standing and not pay taxes, but you can't do that."

Young Ramsay recalls when the former homestead's dairy farm was still in operation. "We had a dairy in Billerica doing our pasteurizing, but, rather than just pay them to do it, we had to sell the milk to them government at Grade B prices, and then buy it back after it was pasteurized at Grade A prices. Meanwhile government money was helping to sustain parity for New Hampshire farmers who were competing with us!

"We used to have a roadside vegetable stand, selling at lower prices than the markets. But the government told us that was illegal, that we had to charge the same prices as the markets. And who's going to drive all that way for the same prices?"

"By the time I was 25 years old, what with the taxes rising all the time, we were making only Seven Hundred Dollars per year on the farm... It was impossible!"

And so ends the saga of the Timothy Rogers homestead.



### From 1744 Rogers homestead

Mrs. Melvin Rogers, right, of 272 Whipple Road, widow of Melvin Rogers, seventh generation descendant of Timothy Rogers who founded Tewksbury's fifth oldest homestead in 1744, and her daughter, Mrs. Russell Shaw, view relics of the just demolished historic structure at 336 Whipple Road. The original deed, a picture including the original (then Tewksbury's largest) red barn, one each of the original weathered wooden shingles and their sub-

sequent slate overlays, one of the long wooden pegs which held the ancient beams, two odd handmade children's shoes found behind one of the home's 14 fireplaces, a candlesnuffer, Ben Franklin era eyeglasses, handwrought pewter plates and spoon are displayed on the Governor Winthrop desk long used by the late Middlesex County Commissioner Melvin Rogers. In foreground is a fireplace baking oven.

MRS. MELVIN G. ROGERS and daughter, Mrs. Russell Shaw, now residing at the 272 Whipple Road home build and long shared by the couple, are saddened by the nearby homestead's demise, but comprehend the problems of the times. They have been given numerous mementoes of the historic dwelling, some, such as one of the huge wooden pegs that held the ancient beams in place, salvaged by Mrs. Shaw herself as the demolition was in progress. A wooden shingle, pitted by centuries of New England weather, is another. And two tiny hand-bade leather children's odd shoes, found wedged behind one of the home's original 14 fireplaces, seem an utterly rare find.

Mrs. Rogers and Mrs. Shaw reminisce gladly about earlier days there. They recall the ox-drawn wagons, winter sleighing, as many as 30 men cutting hay and being fed, snow whirling into fireplaces on cold nights, cows being driven through Lowell and over the Bridge St. bridge to summer pasture in New Hampshire. All a few short decades ago.

THEY TELL OF Indian attacks in which some of the long ago Rogers family members were lost. They recall that Whipple Road was once the trail broken by a man named Whipple, who made gunpowder and carted it to Boston in ox-drawn wagons along this route. They recall that one early Tewksbury Rogers owned a woman slave, this being legal in those days, and that her affection was such that she chose to stay on after all slaves were freed. A piece of early parchment lists apples, horses, cattle, sheep, hay, a buffalo robe, a shay and sleigh, oats, potatoes, lumber... on and on ... belonging to the first David Rogers. A 1794 map shows the location of Indian villages...

But the 1744 Timothy Rogers homestead has passed into memory, along with the life that hummed with so much meaning in those yester-years, along with the leaves of the Indian summers of the centuries...

What does it all mean to us in 1972? Perhaps only time will tell...