

CAMBRIDGE STREET SMITHY

By Ellen Knight¹

The village smithy, it was common in Longfellow's time and for many years afterward. With the advent of the motorcar, however, it soon became extinct—but not entirely. One smithy survived in Winchester down to 1978. For most of that time it continued as a functioning iron shop, though in its later life it also stood as a relic of an earlier time when blacksmiths were an important part of the community.

Winchester had several blacksmiths shops over the years. In 1800, Woburn (to which most of Winchester then belonged) had five shops. The one in South Woburn was owned by Capt. Joseph Brown, a Revolutionary War veteran. His apprentice Francis Johnson succeeded to the business, which he taught to his brother Nathan, one of the town's first selectmen. The brothers' smithy stood on Main Street near the intersection of Mount Vernon Street.

According to Oliver Clark, writing in 1885, it was customary to work until 9 p.m. from October to April, "the old blacksmith's shop being in full blast and the old mill and the shoeshop brightly lighted till that hour."²

The earliest town directory issued after Winchester was incorporated, printed in 1874, lists two smiths. A third was established by 1881. In 1893 there were five, located on Main and Forrest streets.

THE LAST SMITHY



The last smithy. Built on Cambridge Street opposite Pond Street, it stood there until 1978.

During the next two years the smithy which became the last to survive was built on Cambridge Street opposite Pond Street. It was run by Dennis Lawton and Samuel McDermott and later by Lawton alone.

Lawton, a native of New Brunswick, came to Winchester as a young man, worked first as a carpenter, then for about 16 years as a smith, and again as a carpenter. In 1905 he was one of seven blacksmiths in town. By 1920 his successor was the last.

About 1912 Thomas Ford took over Lawton's smithy. Born in Fitchburg, Ford learned the blacksmith's trade before coming to Winchester. He worked in the shop on Cambridge Street until shortly before his death in 1952.

Smiths always had other work than shoeing horses. The Johnsons, for example, furnished hardware and ironmongery for the railroad. Patrick Dowd, a smith in the late nineteenth century, was also a carriage manufacturer. In his later years Ford traveled by car to many farms to shoe horses. In his shop he did wrought iron work and repaired andirons and other metal house furnishings.

Ford's shop stood on land belonging to the Russell farm which was handed down to the Mahoney family. Though in use for several more years after Ford's death, at the end of its time the building was not used much and was damaged by fire. It was torn down in 1978.

When Ford died, it was written that "artists and art students were never tired of reproducing his old shop in many media." One of these artistic reproductions was recently donated to the Historical Society. Photographs also were taken. Thus, though the village smithy itself is gone, its image has been preserved.



¹ This article © 2018 is a revision of an earlier article by the author, Ellen Knight, published in the *Daily Times Chronicle* on Oct. 12, 1998. This revision supersedes all previous articles.

² Oliver R. Clark, "Reminiscences of South Woburn, *The Winchester Record*, 1:3 (July 1885) p. 126