# TOWERS

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*The Story*
*of*
*Worcester Tech*
*1865-1965*

*by Mildred McClary Tymeson*

# TWO

*They tell the whole story, those two towers on Tech Hill. For a hundred years they have stretched toward the sky in their telling, their own eloquent picture of the ideas for which they stand. In the old days their bid for attention was known as theory versus practice. Now there are terms of engineering and science. But whatever the words, the towers tell of the proverbial conflict between hand and mind and of the long, aching travail of the heart to reconcile the two.*

*This, of course, is the story of all life. This, too, in precise miniaturization, is the story of Worcester Tech. Although the two towers are now almost lost in the buildings which surround them, the symbolism still stands, and within its philosophical framework, this book has been written.*

*Ideally the history of Tech will be told only when there is one book about its students, another about its teachers and trustees. There should be several books confined to alumni and friends, and certainly one to the school as an educational facility. Compressing a hundred years of life into capsule form, especially when so many people are involved, means the sacrifice of content, no matter who tries to distill the essence. So this is the story of Tech, not only as I see it but also as I can tell it in these few pages.*

*It would have been so easy to rely on coincidence and chance for readability. But this was not fair. The most wonderful things about Tech have not been dramatic; the strength of the school has evolved from intangibles. These I have suggested only in passing, leaving the final impression to depend more on the reader's perception than on my own words. I have tried more than anything else to portray Tech as a segment of human life, a venture conceived and nourished by ordinary and extraordinary people who got up in the morning, did their work, and went to bed at night. Sometimes, but not too often, they simply sat in the sun to think and to grow. To them their life was not a momentous affair, although they were often sure that it was part of one. And life bounced along, keeping its zest and always their interest.*

*To mention everyone was impossible. To mention only important persons was presumptuous. My solution was to use personalities only for color, for outline, not for credit. And I have had an almost total irreverence for titles. I have called every instructor a professor, whether he was a graduate assistant or a full professor. I have treated departments and courses with the same disregard for exacting information. After all, this was supposed to be a story, not a catalog or register.*

*This book will always be my own best illustration of the axiom that no one ever does anything alone. I must make special acknow-*

*ledgment to the president, the publisher, the alumni office, the administrative staff, and the teachers.*

*In the latter category I mention chiefly Francis W. Roys, dean and professor emeritus, whose unpublished manuscript of Worcester Tech's history was the nucleus from which this story emerged. Dr. Roys' comprehension of curriculum and engineering education was uniquely helpful. From his perspective of more than fifty years on Tech Hill, he gave the story an outline. This book attempts to add the personality which only someone from outside could possibly see or tell.*

*Neither must I forget the other two professors to whom this story owes so much—Herbert F. Taylor and Zelotes W. Coombs, the first for his published book* Seventy Years of the Worcester Polytechnic Institute, *the second for three big cartons of unpublished long-hand chapters which I found in the basement of Boynton Hall.*

*Without the resources of the American Antiquarian Society and the courtesy with which they were extended to me, this book in its present form would have been impossible. The Society's fund of information is legendary; in this case, it was almost inexhaustible.*

*There are other persons—Olive Higgins Prouty, Esther Goddard, Robert S. Parks, Mary Brown, Bernece Harkins, Jerome Howe, Leota Wadleigh, Nils Hagberg, Roger Perry, David Lloyd, M. Lawrence Price, Warren Zepp, and my husband. They will each know best what my thank-you means. And if there is a gentleness occasionally spilling over on the pages of this book it is because of Tawny, a little brown dog who gave up many hours of play to be my quiet companion during the long hours of research but died before the writing.*

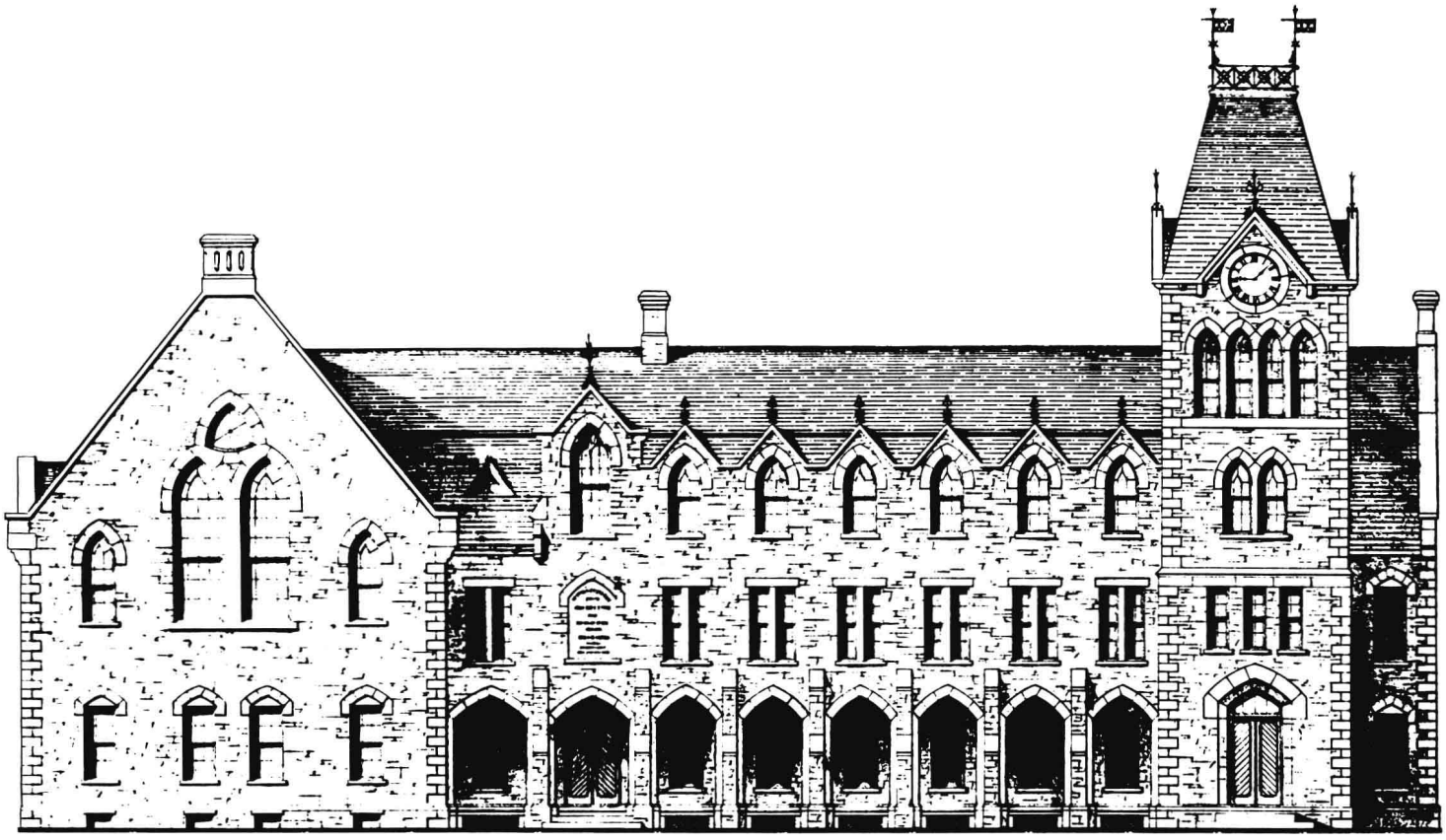
*The number of persons to whom I am grateful is inconsequential compared to the countless number to whom Tech owes its very existence. There is something both sad and splendid when a man gives his whole life to a cause, so precious is human life, so precarious is any cause. But Tech has had many such supporters. There have been others whose brief brilliance flashed across the campus to leave a lasting sheen. There have been still others, almost unnoticed at the time, who by the faithfulness with which they turned duty into monotony, added stability to the rhythm so necessary in a school program.*

*To all these persons, Worcester Tech owes much. So do I.*

*But the real poignancy is an inability to speak with enough spirit of the most important person of all—the student—that personable, capable young man who for a hundred years has shared so intimately this history of a school.*

*It is to him that I give my heart and my book.*

*Mildred McClary Tymeson*
*June 30, 1964*



"Prove all things:
hold fast that which is good"

*Boynton Hall in Worcester and Boynton Castle in England, with their striking similarity. Stephen Earle, who designed the Hall, visited the British Isles in 1866 and was undoubtedly influenced by the architecture which he studied in the northern part of England. It may be that the resemblance was deliberately intended to strengthen the Boynton connection.*

# PROLOGUE

The ships rocked with impatience in the muddy river at the wide mouth of the Thames.

Eight ships there were—and ready to sail on the morrow.

It was April of 1637. Sir Matthew Boynton sighed with relief that the long winter of waiting was over. At last he and his "great family" of eight sons and four daughters, of whom he had written to Governor Winthrop, were ready to begin their journey to the new England.

Not without nostalgia did Sir Matthew contemplate leaving England, where his ancestors had lived in the ancient Yorkshire village of Boynton since before the time of the Norman invasion. It was almost with embarrassment that he remembered his position as commander of a troop of royal horses and as governor of the castle during the reign of Charles I. Now those days were over. No longer would his daughters serve as ladies in the Queen's Court. And his title of baronet, conferred by King James not twenty years before, would give few prerogatives in the new country.

So much he must now forego by joining the fortunes of the Puritans, for whose cause he was so strongly sympathetic.

Sir Matthew had been preparing for this journey since 1630, when John Winthrop had landed in Salem with the priceless Charter which permitted the settlement of a territory "from sea to sea."

*We have a history in this country which should be written, but my grandfather's traditions give us a greater one in England. We were always for freedom, and for liberty, were ever ready to fight.*

*—Moses Boynton, 1832*

*He [Sir Matthew Boynton] did more than any other person to stock this country, supply means of emigration, and sustain the colonies in America.—Wm. Betham* Genealogy and Baronets of the Boynton Family in England and Burke's Peerage.

During the intervening years Sir Matthew had sent several shiploads of cattle to Governor Winthrop. There had also been bucks, rams, and many "goates." Even oxen and farming implements had preceded him—and servants. More money and materials than he wished to count had crossed the sea for the erection of forts and surveying of land.

Several times he had been able to send letters to the Winthrops, who had arranged for the shelter of Boynton livestock at a place called Ipswich. There Sir Matthew's servants were caring for the herds and the increase, which Sir Matthew had directed be saved so there would be "beeves to kill" as soon as he arrived.

It had not been easy to supervise such holdings so far away. And the servants were finding it increasingly difficult to take care of the fast-growing herds. The sensible thing, as Governor Winthrop advised, was to "let out" the cattle, reserving the increase. This Sir Matthew Boynton had decided to do, but with no small misgiving about the welfare of his servants. Perhaps they might not want to return to England, especially, as he wrote to Governor Winthrop, "if they understand the condition of things here."

*I desire to hear from you as often as possible how my stock prospereth; and I shall long to hear how they have increased this year.*
*—Sir Matthew Boynton to Governor John Winthrop*

The persecution inflicted on the Puritans was becoming intolerable. Almost fifteen thousand persons had already transported themselves to the new continent. And the eagerness with which they made the rigorous journey was becoming an uncomfortable and uncomplimentary reflection on conditions in England. Finally the Government took sufficient umbrage to issue a proclamation restraining persons from going to "the Plantations in America without a license from his Majesty's Commissioners." On the following morning an Order came from the Council to "stay the eight ships in the Thames" which were so soon expecting to sail.

Wearily, and with no little resentment, Sir Matthew Boynton unloaded his family and provisions. Joining him in both the unloading and the resentment was a young man by the name of Oliver Cromwell. In that moment a hot coal of conscience blazed into a torch of purpose.

England was never the same again.

Neither was the new England.

Eventually the ships did sail, but without Sir Matthew Boynton and Oliver Cromwell. On board, however, there were two Boynton brothers, William and John. In 1638 the ships landed at Hull, and within a few months the wealthy families of the party had settled between Newbury and Ipswich—Ipswich, where the Boynton animals had been stabled for so many years.

John Boynton, twenty years old, was a tailor by trade. He also manfully tilled the "acre and a half" assigned to him, and when the colony established a school, he became its first teacher.

New England was becoming a land of such small settlements. Within the same five-year period, John Washburn settled in Duxbury (where John Alden and his wife Priscilla were already living with their eleven children), Seth Sweetser in Charlestown, John Whit-

comb in Dorchester, John Salisbury and Leonard Hoar in Boston. Richard Higgins, a tailor of Plymouth, was soon to start a settlement on the Cape; Miles Morgan, of Boston, a community called Springfield.

It is possible that some of these men, all living in a semicircle of about fifty miles, knew each other. Even so, they could not have guessed that in two later centuries, and in another place, their descendants would share a common dream.

At the moment there was no time for dreaming, only for hard labor and adjustment, while the tiny settlements evolved into miniature replicas of the English country village. But there was a difference. In this new loaf, there was now the tangy yeast of independence.

*Nothing else in the world—not all the armies—is so powerful as an idea whose time has come.* —*Victor Hugo*

Thanks to Oliver Cromwell, the mother country meanwhile became embroiled in its own revolutionary developments and did not worry overmuch about the colonists. Cromwell and Sir Matthew Boynton, who had returned to English politics with a vengeance, both soon became members of Parliament. By 1649 Cromwell had gained control of the army and declared the country a Commonwealth. He had abolished the title and office of king and also the House of Lords. During this period the successor by "divine right," Charles II, was crowned surreptitiously in Scotland. Cromwell pursued the party and the king escaped, but the royal army was defeated at the famous Battle of Worcester. There one of Matthew Boynton's sons was slain.

Cromwell became the Lord Protector of the Commonwealth, uniting the kingdoms of England, Scotland, and Ireland for the first time. He established courts of justice and principles of free trade—and most importantly, he let the colonies govern themselves.

After his death and the Restoration in 1660, when English supervision again became relentless, Cromwell remained a hero to his friends across the sea. There are many persons who now believe that without this lull in British surveillance the Liberty Tree might never have had a chance to root so deeply.

Small wonder then, that when a plot of land eight miles square was surveyed on the western trail from Boston, the plantation was named Worcester after Cromwell's most notable victory.

A pathway was cut through the woods only a few feet wide to accommodate men and pack horses. Crossing a busy little brook at the north end of the plot, the trail wandered westerly toward the horizon and, at one point, hugged the southerly slope of a hill which would some day be named Boynton.

*

Great masses of human energy were forming. Already there had been an uprooting from one side of the sea to the other, and many stories of epic proportion would be told of the upheaval.

*History is a record of every day but yesterday, and of every generation but this.* —*James Logan, 1909*

There was still no poetry, except for the pull of tired arms and the pulse of a patient heart. But form had been established, measure determined. Already, some of the lines were beginning to rhyme.

*Jo Bill Road, marked on campus by trees at left, first path through Worcester to link East and West*

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CHAPTER I

## *The Townsfolk of Templeton* * * * * * * * *1864*

No, they didn't want the school.

The town was noisy enough, what with the hammering down at the tinshop making a rhythm to which Templeton had adjusted its pace for forty years.

It wasn't that the townsfolk were ungrateful to John Boynton or that they were unsympathetic to education. They had supported a high school for several years, long before other towns of their size had voted such munificence. An unusually large number of their boys had traveled great distances to go to college, and some of them were giving Templeton a reputation for breeding brilliant sons. Christopher Columbus Baldwin had become librarian of the American Antiquarian Society in Worcester. And just two years before, in 1862, Jonathan Turner had brought credit to Templeton when the nation had adopted his plan for federally-supported state institutions to be known as land-grant colleges.

Now the young Alden boy down on the Partridgeville Road was soon to enter the Scientific School at Harvard.

George Alden's mother deserved a lot of credit. Although this year, for the first time, the town records had listed the boy now that he was old enough to pay a poll tax, there was no one to breathe a whisper of criticism in face of the dignity with which Priscilla Alden had brought up her son. She had been accorded every possible courtesy and had been given the five-hundred-dollar tax exemption usually reserved for widows. When she had had to mortgage the homestead farm, the words had blazed out from the page almost in defiance: "Know all men, I, Priscilla E. Alden of Templeton, single woman . . ."

But she wore no scarlet letter.

Often young George had climbed the hill to the maple stump marking the boundary line of the Turner farm, there to look across the valley toward the mountain which separated him from an unknown world. All his life he had lived in the shadow of this mountain.

*New England is probably the only country in the world, where every man, generally speaking, has or can have the means—that is, the money, the intelligence, the knowledge, the power—to choose his career; to say where he will live, what profession he will follow, what position he will occupy.*

*—Samuel Griswold Goodrich, 1857*

Now Wachusett seemed almost friendly, for soon he would be able to walk around to its other side. This was what "going to school" helped boys to do.

How George Alden could manage to go to college there was no one brash enough to question. He had worked for several months in the chair factory, and he planned to live with his Uncle Harvey, overseer of the Union Railroad stable in Cambridge. But even so, going to college was almost a precedent and it did cost money.

It was possible that someone was helping the boy. Perhaps even John Boynton was planning to pay the bills. He had been known to

help many a such lad, and he had an obsession—not that every boy should go to school, but that every boy should be given a chance to go. Recently Mr. Boynton had given ten thousand dollars to the town of Mason in New Hampshire, his birthplace, for the support of the common schools. He did not know that a coterie of grateful students would one day climb the winding hills to that little town, there to erect for him a memorial stone with the inscription: "He opened the door of opportunity to youth."

*He [Boynton] wished to make the avails of his industry a permanent means of aiding the young in obtaining advantages and privileges in preparing for active life which had been beyond his reach.*
*—David Whitcomb*

There was now a rumor that Mr. Boynton intended to establish a special kind of school, different from the public schools, for boys who planned to be manufacturers and mechanics, or even farmers, instead of lawyers, clergymen, or physicians. No wonder the townsfolk of Templeton declared it "all nonsense." What was wrong with the old apprentice system that had served so long so well?

*There has been scarce anything which could be called education for practical life.* *—Edward Everett, 1869*

No, they really didn't want the school.

But they might have to take it, because no one was in a position to refuse Mr. Boynton. There was scarcely anyone in town to whom he had not loaned money at one time or another. Even the town had borrowed from him, and the State, and other towns, and other States. For two years he had been president of a bank. He was listed as owning more than one-eighth of the town property. And the books in the County Courthouse revealed him as being the grantor and grantee of nearly one hundred and fifty pieces of land.

Even now, when he no longer lived in Templeton and his business had been transferred to other persons for almost twenty years, the big white-pillared house on the Common with its second-story door opening nowhere, reminded the townsfolk of John Boynton. "You ought to build a veranda up there," advised a bystander, when the house was being built. Although this had been his original intention, John Boynton was incensed at the interference and vowed no upstairs veranda would ever be added. No one was going to tell *him* what to do.

*He [John Boynton] was always thoroughly devoted to his business and gave less thought to other matters.*
—History of Worcester County, *1889*

Now John Boynton was all alone in the world, and childless. He was getting old, reaching his seventy-third birthday on May 31 of this year, 1864. People thought him sometimes dour and strange. As so often happened, he had lost touch with his eight brothers and sisters. His money, as well as his time, lay heavy on his hands, and he had become almost a recluse in his personal habits.

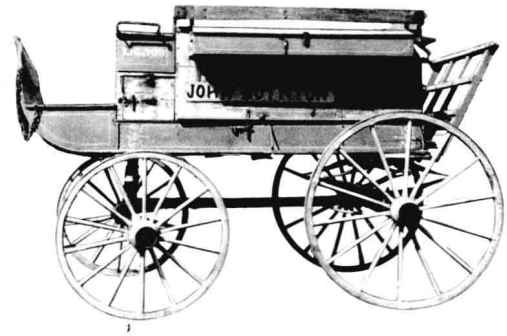
Mr. Boynton lived now in Leominster with relatives of his first wife, but he often came back to visit the town which had, for him, "opened the door of opportunity." Sometimes he traced the trail back to the day in 1825, when he had first arrived in Templeton. As miles go, the little town had not been far from his New Hampshire home in Mason or from New Ipswich, where he first learned about making tinware. But it had been far enough away to give him, at thirty-four, a new start in life and to initiate many another future far off into other centuries.

When John Boynton started his shop in Templeton, there was no more promising a business in America—for two reasons. It in-

volved the manufacture of tin products and it involved peddling.

Tinware had just begun to supersede crockery. This was no light succession, for compared to the thousands of ingenious articles used by the householder in the eighteenth century, the gadgetry of the twentieth seems almost inconsequential.

Before 1820 the few pieces of tinware in this country were considered as treasures, high priced and highly prized. With the importation of cassiterite, the raw material from which tinware is made, and the discovery of a small quantity of it in this country, tinware became popular. Its shiny cleanness appealed to housewives who were tired of the drab pewter, black iron, and heavy crockery with which their buttery shelves had been burdened.



*The profit is greater than that which is made by the sale of any other merchandise of equal value.*
*—Timothy Dwight, speaking of tinware*

Making tinware was an extremely uncomplicated process, requiring no more than an anvil, hammer, and a charcoal fire to heat the soldering iron. In fact, John Boynton had first set up a shop in his own room at the Templeton Tavern. When later a device was invented by which it was possible to stamp out the pieces of tin (much as if making a batch of cookies), production began to catch up with demand. Tinware became less costly, more decorative, and John Boynton erected two shops, one for stamping out the tin and the other for adding color and design.

The woodenware of a previous age was split into kindling; crockery was relegated to the root cellars. Every household need seemed to adapt itself well to tin, with its articles ranging from foot warmers, churns, bathtubs, candlesticks, roasters, milk pails, pots and pans, and chests, to lanterns, trunks, and farm implements. There was little waste in the manufacturing process, with the scrap pieces of tin being hammered into nutmeg graters, jewelry, and toys. Probably nothing increased production so much as the Government's order for canteens and army utensils.

Templeton became a prosperous town. It had no more people than did Worcester, the shire town of the County, but far greater promise, chiefly because it could boast of almost twice as many mill privileges as could Worcester.

Moreover, there were many valuable by-products from the tin shop. Scores of townspeople worked in the shop itself, hammering, soldering, varnishing, and polishing. There were always "floaters" who roomed and boarded in the big house on the corner of the Common. Then there were the carts, the harnesses, the horses—all necessary for the distribution of tinware—to say nothing of the occupation given to as many as a hundred men on the road, who traveled north to the Canadian line and as far south as New York.

These men were called "pedlars," a word which in a hundred years would change its spelling and lose much of its prestige. In the early eighteen hundreds, pedlars were the proudest men in the land, responsible for much of the country's distribution and communication. Sometimes pedlars acted as real estate agents, arranging for the sale of farms, of livestock, and lumber lots.

Pedlars were always welcome in New England. Never did they

*Only once did I stop at a hotel.*
*—Pedlar, after forty years*

have to pay more for a night's lodging than a tea kettle or a dishpan, and these were considered as gifts rather than payment. The business itself was negotiated with barter of every conceivable product that could be made or owned by a householder.

On Saturday nights the tincarts would rumble back into town dragging an unwieldy mowing machine or hay rake. There were sure to be several hens, a couple of hound puppies, or a turkey gobbler. There were butter and cheese, eggs and maple syrup, butternuts and chestnuts, honey and spruce gum, homespun woolens, furs and mittens, hides and yarns. One pedlar reported his payment ran the gamut from sewing needles to silos. Templeton became a veritable merchandising center, but the chief medium of exchange for the Boynton carts was rags and paper, always in great demand by paper manufacturers.

For twenty years John Boynton's business prospered so handsomely that he decided to retire in 1846. He relinquished the ownership of the shops, but never his interest. This was not an awkward continuation, for the new owner was no one less than his own cousin, David Whitcomb.

Genealogy reached a precarious point when it came to David Whitcomb, by such slight margin was he even included in John Boynton's story. Four times married, David's father was seventy-five years old when this twelfth child was born to John Boynton's Aunt Abigail.

When David Whitcomb first asked his older cousin for work in the Templeton shops, John Boynton, no party to nepotism, refused to hire him. Later, in 1830, he called the boy back. He may have had plans for David, but it hardly seemed so when David was required to make several payless trips on the road to prove his worth. In the first year of his apprenticeship, David Whitcomb earned only a hundred dollars, a vest pattern, his room and board.

But in the next year the two cousins became partners. In the next, David took charge of all the carts and also a branch of the business in Leominster.

Much like his predecessor, David Whitcomb decided to retire after twenty years of the tinware business. He, too, had what was considered an ample fortune. No one, not even David Whitcomb, would have guessed that two of his biggest business ventures were still ahead of him.

The tinware business was kept in the family, transferring to Mr. Whitcomb's son-in-law. The shops continued to thrive, watched over with close scrutiny by both Mr. Boynton and Mr. Whitcomb. Several new buildings were added, and there were still twenty men in Templeton who made a very good living as pedlars. A few pedlars who had retired had meanwhile become influential men in business. Significantly, several of them had become bankers.

But something was disturbing the monopoly of the tinware shop in Templeton. Every day, when the four-horse wagon with its extended sides made its trips to Otter River to pick up and deliver

*David Whitcomb*

*As regards my own history, I would say I left Hancock when quite a lad, with pack on my back and staff in my hand, without father or mother, and without home and no one to care for me.*
*—David Whitcomb, 1882*

*He [David Whitcomb] was one of the best types of New England character, faithful and true and strong and wise.*
*—George F. Hoar, 1887*