



LANDMARK IN RUINS—Part of original structure (on right) still faces Battle rd.

Hartwell Farm destroyed

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By ROBERT TAYLOR

Hartwell Farm, gutted by fire, lay in a heap of icicle-crusting rubble. A wintry sun leaked through frozen pine branches, across the boulders and split-rail fences of Lincoln fields, and flecked the remnants of the roofless, original structure.

At 10:30 last Sunday night Hartwell Farm burned almost to the foundations. It had been operated as a restaurant for some 40 years by the late Jane Poor and by Marion Fitch. The firemen had little chance to save the building. Miss Fitch, distraught, was restrained from rushing into the flames: for the interior contained marvelous antiques, possessions and memories.

Now Hartwell Farm tumbled in the slush. A cardboard, its "KEEP OUT" scrawled by red crayon, hung askew near a naked bulb dangling from the splintered lintel. To the left, as one looked at the farm from Battle Road, rose a chimney, an open hearth, blackened andirons and a welter of smoking debris.

This comprised additions to the house made by Miss Fitch to accommodate the restaurant trade. The original Hartwell Farm — a site of the utmost significance in American history and a potential highlight of the emerging Minute Man National Historical Park — still stood, as a shell.

The asphalt pavement before

the entrance was littered by crushed paper cups; and within the paint-blistered, sagging frame, a chimney staircase angled to nowhere.

Spectators had begun to straggle past the sawhorses that blocked that portion of the street, and stood jiggling in the cold and talking in low, awed voices. "There's the door Prescott rapped on," said a young woman, pointing to a slab of cracked lumber.

But it was not the door: the door was at the rear of the house, gone forever, and with it a part of the American past, something precious, fragile and profound.

In the chill silence one could invoke that past. For the sodden clutter represented a place where an epic had occurred—a drama of our national awareness.

It was Tuesday evening, the eighteenth of April, 1775, a mild, moonlit night. Down that road, past Hartwell Farm (which should not be confused with the Hartwell Tavern, beyond) cantered three cloaked horsemen. They wore cocked hats, dark blue military capes and swords: British officers patrolling the roads to seal off Concord from provincial messengers.

Outside Hartwell Farm, the home of Samuel Hartwell who was a sergeant in the Lincoln company of Minute Men (his father, Ephraim, kept the tavern), Sukey, the slave girl, was gath-

ering kindling. The dark riders filled her with grim forebodings. "Mistress Hartwell!" she cried, running into the house, "there's a funeral going by!"

Later that night, Dr. Samuel Prescott of Concord, who had been lingering with his sweetheart, a Miss Mulliken of Lexington, and who while on his way home from courting, had joined up with Revere and Dawes, the colonial messengers from Boston. Prescott did indeed hammer on the back door.

He had eluded the British patrol which scooped up Revere to end The Midnight Ride, and escaping through a swamp, emerged behind Hartwell Farm.

As Samuel Hartwell, a gunsmith and locksmith, saddled up, his wife Mary — leaving Polly, aged four, and Sally, two, and a five-month infant, with Sukey — ran through the elm shadows to the neighboring farm. This property was owned by Captain William Smith who galloped to Lincoln Center and aroused the town.

From Hartwell Farm, Mary could see the British grenadiers tramping in a brilliant red line, distinguish the infantry coming closer through the dawn, in scarlet coats, white leggings, pointed caps, powdered wigs, bosom-pins and frogged lace. And Hartwell Farm was situated amidst the guerrilla skirmishes of April 19th:

Bloody Angle, the swirling forays and counter-attacks. Retreating British soldiers fired several shots into the house; and one soldier thrust his broken musket into a window.

"The burning of Hartwell Farm is a great loss," said Benjamin Zerby, in charge of the National Park Service's Historical Park "There are 18 houses of Colonial vintage in the park — well over half the land has been acquired, although much property is still privately-owned — now there are 17: it's as simple as that."

Can Hartwell Farm be restored? Possibly. The Park Service is running out of its original authorization. "Unless we get an increase in the authorization," says Zerby, "it is out of the question." But the possibility exists, nevertheless, that measurements, photographs might yield a reproduction.

It is perhaps ironic that the desolate clapboards lying in the Winter dusk should mark the site of a restaurant known to moderns for the excellence of its chicken soup.

On that April day it was Mary Hartwell's lookout. Just up the road a fallen young British officer sprawled in the dust that whole afternoon, his head pillowed on the black ribbons of his regalia and his ruffled shirt gleaming in the sun.