



Author William Howell grew up at 326 Highland Street. This 1929 photograph shows the house as construction was almost completed. (Photo courtesy of Wm. Howell)

Happy Memories: Growing Up on Highland Street

This is the story of my family's home at 326 Highland Street. It was one of three adjacent houses constructed by Weston builder Murray Burke during the time period 1928-29. The house next door to the north we called the "Kenney" house and the one to the south, the "Pinkham" house. All were constructed as a shell, allowing the future owners choices as to the interior. My parents, Frederick A. and Harriet B. Howell, were married in April 1929, and they were quite anxious to get settled into their own home. They moved to 326 Highland Street in July 1929, paying in the range of \$5000 for the house.

My father, Fredrick A., and his father, Charles M. Howell, were the owner/operators of the Charles M. Howell & Son pearl button manufacturing company, which was located on the corner of Willow and River Street in Waltham from 1911 to 1933. This time period of 1928 to 1933 was extremely busy for the young Fredrick Howell, with his marriage, the move to Weston, and assuming control of the business due to the passing of his father. During the Depression years, the declining demand for pearl buttons and growth of the plastic industry caused my father to sell this company in 1933. The factory building was sold to a little unknown start-up called Raytheon. It was the company's first building, named the Power Tube Division, and was in use right up to the mid-1990s. The tall chimney displayed the words "C.M. Howell & Son" for many years.

326 Highland Street was constructed as a reproduction Colonial with wide pine floors and low ceilings. The interior antique doors on the first and second floors came from the old Wayland Inn known as the “Pequod House,” located in Wayland Center on the lot where the police/fire headquarters building sits today. Built in 1771, the inn was in disrepair from fire and neglect and in 1928 was being torn down. The antique window glass panes located in some of the windows, along with various door and hinge hardware, came from the same source.

Other tidbits of information. . . The tall spruce tree located at the right front of the property was a live 1930 Christmas tree planted in the spring of 1931. The room off the kitchen was planned to be a live-in maid’s room and was utilized for four to six weeks after the birth of several of the children. The living room had stained pine wood paneling, open ceiling beams, and a fireplace that was made to look like an old inn’s common room. I understand that this may have been painted or remodeled at some later date. All the closets on the second floor were lined with real cedar wood. The room and bathroom in the attic was added in 1948-49 due to our expanding family of six children. On several occasions, I can remember escaping punishment by sneaking out the little casement window over the original kitchen door on the left side from my bedroom on the second floor. This room was unique because it had windows on each of its four walls and two walk-in closets.



(l-r) Barbara, Harriet, and Charles Howell, c. 1936-37, with Highland Street house in the background. (Photo courtesy of Wm. Howell)



C. 1944 Howell family photo, taken in front of the living room fireplace. Note the paneled walls and ceiling beams. Back row: Harriet, Charles, and Frederick A. (father); mid-row: Barbara, Robert (twin), and Harriet B. (mother); floor: Francis, William (twin). (Photo courtesy of Wm. Howell)

After the 1938 hurricane there was a tremendous amount of damage in the area due to the high winds. Highland Street was inaccessible for a week by road and electricity wasn't restored for four to five weeks. Mother was home with six children, three under the age of two years. My twin brother, my sister, and I produced a multitude of diapers to be washed outside by hand in a bucket over an open fire. Water was obtained from a well at the southwest corner of the property (since filled in) as well as from the brook to the rear.

The clean-up of the property after the hurricane produced so many logs that later my father had a log cabin constructed in the southeast corner of the property. In 1951 this log cabin was disassembled and relocated to the Nobscot Boy Scout Reservation in Sudbury, as my father and the twins were very active at the time in Weston Troop 53. Unfortunately, vandals destroyed the cabin by fire a few years later.

During the war years, we raised several pigs and maintained about 50 chickens just to the right of the rear lower yard. The rear yard was a vegetable garden where my father loved to putter, and we maintained it right up until we sold the house.

Until the 1960s, Pine Street was a dirt road with only a single house (#23). There were no houses on the west side of Highland Street from South Avenue to Love Lane except for a house at the end of a three-quarter-mile-long driveway now known as Deer Path Lane. Behind the house on Pine Street, in the middle of the woods, stood the “Anna Dickson” cabin, furnished with a wood stove, rustic furniture, and beds. Several of my sisters rode horses at the Dickson’s on Love Lane, and its barn looks the same today as it did back then. Sandy Anza’s farm also looks the same today, and on more than a few occasions we had to chase his cows back to the farm.

We sold the house in 1960 to F. Swift Gibson after he drove by once and then made several increasingly large offers through a real estate broker. The final one we could not turn down.

William B. Howell now lives in Stow, Massachusetts. This memoir was inspired by discussions last June at his 50th Reunion from Weston High School.

Editor’s Note: The *Weston Historical Society Bulletin* invites you to send your memories of growing up in Weston or of choosing Weston as a place to settle as an adult. Communities grow and change in each generation. Individual memories and photographs like these of the Howell family and home can illuminate change in charming and personal ways. Bill Howell’s article includes wonderful anecdotes that give us a flavor of the town in the years before widespread post-World-War-II suburban development. We may know about the Hurricane of 1938, for example, but who would have thought about the need to wash diapers (no Pampers then!) outside over an open fire for weeks until electricity was restored.