



The thorough renovation of the Fiske Law Office will allow the building to be used, rather than standing empty as it has for more than two decades. (2009 photos courtesy of Pamela Fox)

Fiske Law Office Readied for a Third Century

Construction work is underway to renovate and readapt a local landmark, the Isaac Fiske Law Office on Boston Post Road, using funding from the Community Preservation Act. When completed, the Town will issue a Request for Proposal (RFP) for a tenant. One possible use — a law office!

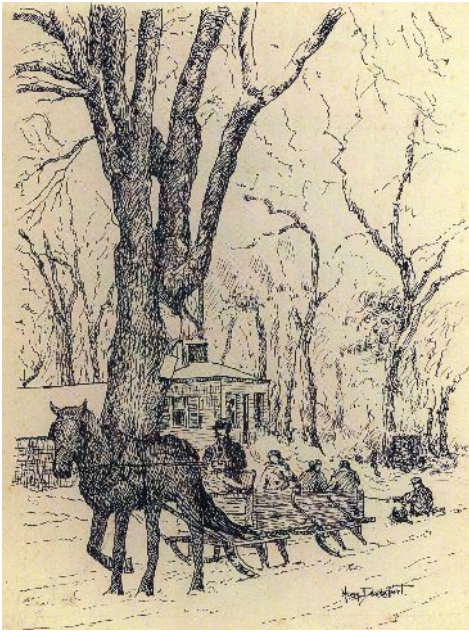
Isaac Fiske (1778-1861) is thought to have built the law office about 1805, the same year he built the fine Federal house still standing across the street at 639 Boston Post Road.

Fiske, one of Weston's most prominent citizens, was born on the Fiske homestead on North Avenue and graduated from Harvard College in 1798. In 1802, his marriage to Sukey Hobbs, daughter of tannery owner Ebenezer Hobbs, united these two prominent north-side families. Isaac trained in the law under Artemas Ward Jr. He practiced law, traded in real estate, and held several local and state offices.



Although Isaac Fiske was the first of many generations of Fiske lawyers, he was the only one to conduct business from the quaint two-room office. An article in the *Boston Globe* of 1916 shows a picture of the “little old law office” then being used as a playhouse where Fiske children could give parties, play games, and dress their dolls. In 1920, when Fiske heirs divided their Weston property, Charles H. Fiske Jr. got the law office. He enlarged it by adding a rear ell. In 1928, Charles Jr. gave the building to the Town of Weston with the stipulation that if the town ever wanted to tear it down, Fiske heirs would have the right to purchase and move it.

The building was used as the town cemetery office until 1936, when it was turned over to the five-year-old Weston Historical Committee as a repository for its growing collection of historical records and relics. Miss Gertrude Fiske was chair of the original committee, which also included Alice Jones and Edward P. Ripley. Alice and her sister Ellen left their house (the former Josiah Smith Tavern) to the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities (SPNEA, now Historic New England) in 1950, and the town’s collection was moved there. The Fiske Law Office was pressed into service as veteran’s housing. Plumbing was simple



Depictions of the Fiske Law Office and Burgoyne Elm by Weston artists Henry Davenport (above) and Peg Kronenberg (below)

and adequate, but “insulation was conspicuous by its absence” and tenants had trouble keeping warm.

When the last tenant died in 1965, the recently formed Weston Historical Society offered to restore and maintain the building as its headquarters. Led by President Harold “Red” Travis and Restoration Chairman F. Leslie Ford, the society leased the building in 1966. Members put in hundreds of volunteer hours restoring it over the next four years. Beginning in the 1970s, the society moved parts of its collection to the Josiah Smith Tavern. In the early 1990s, the Society returned responsibility for the Fiske Law Office to the Town.

The exterior was repaired and painted in 1996 under the auspices of the Weston Historical Commission. Because of septic issues and an interior in total disrepair, the building could not be rented. The Commission decided that the best way to preserve the building was for it to be occupied. Toward that end, voters at the May 1997 Town Meeting passed a zoning amendment allowing certain types of uses by Special Permit in municipally owned buildings of less than 1500 square feet located within a single family residence district. Funding was not available to renovate the building until after the passage of the Community Preservation Act. Town Meeting voted to approve a total of \$258,000 in CPA funds (\$230,000 in FY06 and \$28,000 in FY08). Work commenced in November 2008 and has involved totally rebuilding the rear ell.

by Pamela W. Fox