

# WESTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY BULLETIN

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*The Ernest Jones family about 1920. Standing l-r, Arthur (in white shirt), Alex, Mae, and George. Seated l-r, Ernest, Harry, and Marie. (Courtesy of Harry Jones)*

## Growing Up in the Northwest Corner

*Editor's Note: Author Harry Jones was born in 1913 at 455 Concord Road. His father, Ernest Jones, was caretaker for a well-to-do Cambridge family that owned the property and used it as a summer and weekend retreat. Harry's family, including four older siblings, lived in the rear ell of the picturesque mid-19th century farmhouse. Aside from the four years he spent in the Navy during World War II, Harry has lived on Concord Road all his life, first at #455, then across the street at #448, and presently at Stonegate off Concord Road. He describes the idyllic life of a boy growing up in a very different world from today.*



*Ernest Jones, Marie Zimmermann Jones, and baby Mae Alice, 1901.  
(Courtesy of Harry Jones)*

I'm now in my mid-nineties. Often pictures flash before my eyes and memories surface. To the best of my knowledge, I am the oldest person still alive who grew up in this northwest corner of Weston, and for this reason I have recorded places, people, and things as they were from about 1918 to the 1930's.

I was born in a house on Concord Road on July 7, 1913, but

the world didn't mean much to me until I entered first grade in 1919. My very first remembrance in this life was on November 11, 1918. That day my mother took my hand and led me to a window, which she had opened wide, and told me that all the church bells would be ringing shortly. So true this was—the sound of the ringing bells seemed to come from all directions. She told me they were ringing because the fighting in World War I was over. Of course, this didn't mean anything to me but I thought the ringing bells was pretty "swift." So this is where I'll begin this narrative about the area starting with Concord Road at the Lincoln line and heading south to the intersection of Sudbury Road and then along Sudbury Road to the Wayland line. I will talk about the roads first, then the homes, the people and finally just a bit of this and a bit of that, all intertwining at times.

## ***The Roads***

Concord and Sudbury Roads were not as we know them today. They were narrower and surfaced with gravel. In the springtime and after heavy rains, sizable puddles formed in low places. A few weeds would occasionally appear in the center of the road, where the wheels of cars and horse carriages didn't crush them. Perhaps two or three times per year, town highway department workers

came through with horse-drawn scrapers and levelers that maintained the roads in quite good, traversable condition. One of the most irritating problems was the dust. After a prolonged dry spell, the wind would blow the dust from the gravel surface all over the place, much to the displeasure of our mothers. The dust factor was undoubtedly the main underlying reason for the beginning of modern highway improvement, which began with oiling the roads. Once, sometimes twice during the summer, a big oil tanker truck would slowly pass by with the black oil spewing from spigots across the rear, saturating the gravel surface of the roadway. Following the oil tanker, a sand truck would spread new sand over the fresh oil. This cured the dust problem but it created another problem that was even worse. For quite some time after the procedure, whenever we walked on the road our shoes would pick up the sticky sand and oil, which was not welcome in the house. After a decent length of time, this problem would disappear as the oil and sand united into a hard surface.

In the early twenties, we emerged into the modern world when the town approved the hot topping of Concord Road. The preparation required widening in many places, blasting of ledges, and removal of trees. Around the same time, poles for telephone and electricity were erected. Finally, the happy day arrived, when the macadam laying equipment and steamroller appeared. As an eight- or nine-year-old boy, I remember sitting on the stonewall with wide eyes watching this miraculous operation, especially the steamroller with the big roller in front, two wide wheels on the sides, water swishing out, and smoke puffing away. The resulting road surface was smooth and hard. We had “arrived.”

With telephone and electricity about to be installed, we were introduced to the new world. What a fascination to a young boy to watch the linemen scamper up poles with spurs attached to their legs! The telephone service seemed so great then but so archaic when compared to the telecommunication system of today.

You could have a private line, a two-party line or a four-party line. We had a two-party line and when someone called you, it rang at both houses. Both occupants answered, and when the right one spoke, the other party hung up (hopefully). It worked



*Author Harry Jones as a second grader, c. 1920 (Courtesy Harry Jones)*

*Detail from the 1908 Atlas of Middlesex County, showing Concord and Sudbury Roads.*



out fine. Usually the other party was one of our neighbors. Of course with a four-party line, it was a bit more complicated. To place a call, you took the receiver off the hook, an operator in Waltham asked “number please,” you gave her the number, such as “Waltham 1234,” and she would plug in the connection and ring the telephone in the designated house.

The introduction of electricity changed our lives significantly. So much brighter were our rooms after dark. No longer did I have to do my school homework by the dim light of a kerosene lamp. Gradually, the luxuries of life began to appear: an electric toaster, a vacuum cleaner, a washing machine. Mother really appreciated this even though sometimes, when not balanced correctly, it jumped all over the kitchen. With our new hardtop road, telephone, and electricity, we felt as if we were really part of the Weston community.

Breaking open the roads after a winter snowstorm was a major project. My first remembrance is of two horses pulling a weighted-down V-shaped plow. The road was not plowed very wide or very close to the road surface. Because of this, when melting occurred, vehicles made ruts where the wheels traveled; and when refreezing followed, driving could be rather unpleasant. As time went by, B. L. Ogilvie and Sons took over some of the snowplowing for the town. Their trucks

with front-end plows were a vast improvement over the V-shaped plows. I vividly remember a severe blizzard with snow piling up to great depths. The road between our home and the Stratton's was covered with drifts up to three-feet high. Neither horse plows nor truck plows were capable of getting through. Here was an example of neighbors pulling together. My father, my three older brothers, and the Sheehans, Cronins, and McMahons all manned their snow shovels and cleared the whole stretch of road, which allowed the plows to get through to where drifting hadn't been quite so severe.

## *The Houses*

Beginning at the Lincoln/Weston town line and heading south towards Sudbury Road, the first house on the right was the Sheehan home [484 Concord Road]. Brightly painted and well kept, it looks today substantially as it looked then. There was a large barn to the right of the house that is no longer there. A short way straight back towards the woods and invisible from the road was the slaughter house built by one of the Sheehan forebears in the late 19th century. The foundation stones are still there.

The next house, located across the road at the end of a long driveway, was (and still is) the Cronin house [#483]. Mr. James Cronin kept a fairly large herd of milking cows. There was a large barn (now demolished) near the house, a windmill behind the barn, and a large level field for growing corn and many other vegetables.

The next house, on the right on the top of a steep hill, was a small two-story home belonging to the McMahon family [#474]. Mr. and Mrs. McMahon had three children: Barnard (Barney), Francis, and Mary, none of whom ever married.



*This Queen Anne house, which still stands at 484 Concord Road, was built by John Joseph Sheehan. He was a wholesale butcher and ran a slaughterhouse on what was then a 25-acre property on the Weston-Lincoln town line.*



*Above: Mary McMahon at her Weston High School graduation in 1898. (Courtesy Harry Jones). That same year, itinerant photographers A.W. and G.E. Howes took the photograph of the McMahon's Mansard cottage below. (Courtesy Ricki Stambaugh)*

These three families, the Sheehans, Cronins, and McMahons, were really a small Irish settlement. They always helped each other out and did many things together. The Sheehans and Cronins were also closely related, as the grandmothers, Mrs. Sheehan and Mrs. Cronin, were sisters.

The next house, located on the left close to the road, belonged to the Cheney's and later the Whitman's [#455]. The large house had a covered porch along the front side and an ell with separate living quarters. This ell is where I was born and brought up. The large main barn still stands a short distance from the house; but a connected cow barn was razed long ago. The whole estate encompassed 65 acres including about four-fifths of Kidney Pond. [Editor's note: This pond is located on what is now town conservation land just west of 65 Juniper Road]. In the 1930's, because of the nearness of the house to Concord Road, the new owner, Mrs. Francesca Frazier, had



the unusual serpentine brick wall constructed in front of the house.

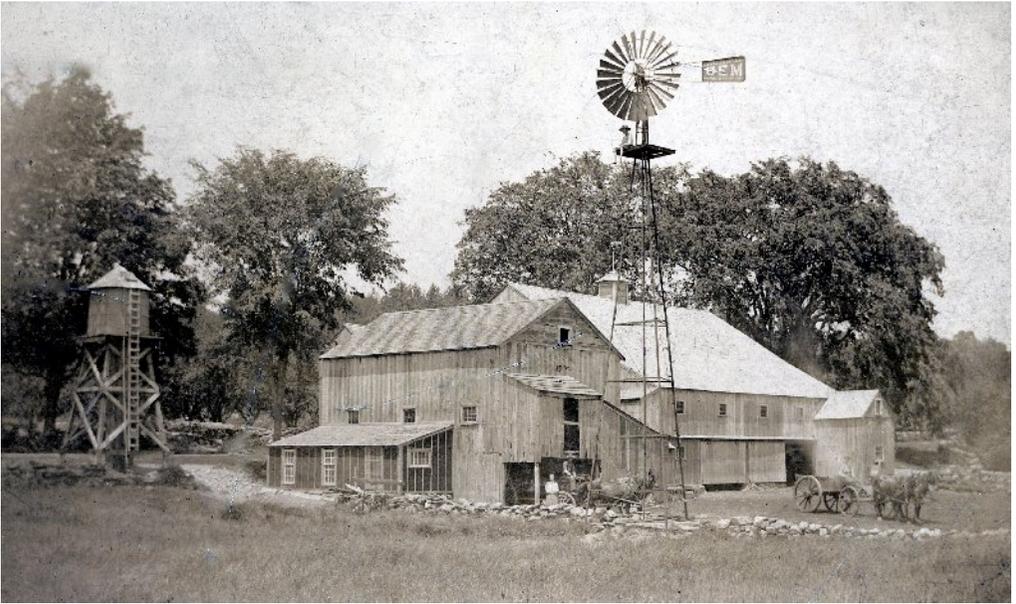
The next house on the right on top of a knoll is the Stratton house, now owned by the Merrills [#420]. The original large barn burned to the ground. According to my father, the replacement barn was built for the Strattons with a great deal of help from the neighbors. There was a windmill for pumping the water. My father came to live with the Stratton family as a small child, attended Weston schools, helped on the farm, married the girl next door, and settled down in the ell of the Whitman house as previously noted. There were no houses between the Stratton house and the intersection of Sudbury Road.

*Right: The Cronin barn, unknown date (Courtesy of Joseph Sheehan Jr.) Below: The Cheney/Whitman house at 455 Concord Road in the 1920s, before construction of the brick serpentine wall. Both the house and nearby barn are still standing. (Courtesy Harry Jones)*





*Above: Photo of the Stratton farmhouse at 420 Concord Road taken in 1898 by itinerant photographers A.W. and G.E. Howes. Gramma Stratton is seated between one of her three daughters, a grandson, and the family dog, whose doghouse can be seen behind them. The 18th century house was built by farmer Jonathan Stratton and remained in the family until 1911, when it was purchased by Alice Anthes. Below: (l-r): Edith Stratton Plumb, "Grandpa" George Stratton, and Ernest Jones, c. 1894. Ernest was born in Arlington about 1875. His father died when he was a baby and he came out to live with the Strattons, who treated him as a member of the family. After completing the eighth grade, he went to work for the Strattons and later for the Whitman family. (Courtesy of Harry Jones)*



*Photo (c.1885) of the massive Stratton barn that stood behind the farmhouse at 420 Concord Road. Notice the windmill, which pumped water to the water tower at left. On top of the windmill is 10-year-old Ernest Jones. Generations of Strattons farmed this property from the 1730s until the death of "Grandpa" George Stratton in 1903. (Courtesy of Harry Jones)*



*Marie Zimmermann (Jones), c. 1896. Marie was born in 1874 in Vitznau, Switzerland. After one post-secondary school year at a French finishing school, she got a summer job at a hotel in her home town. There she met newlyweds Edward "Ned" and Jeanette Whitman. Mrs. Whitman asked Marie to come back to the U.S. and work for them, and her parents reluctantly agreed. The Whitmans had a summer home at 455 Concord Road in Weston, and there she met Ernest Jones, who lived just down the street. The young couple was married about 1899 and moved to the ell of the Whitman house, where they raised their five children. Marie never went back to Switzerland. (Courtesy of Harry Jones)*

*This house at the corner of Concord and Sudbury Road was used to house staff at the Grant Walker Estate. The property was later bought by the Society of Jesus, which still owns the house. (Courtesy of the New England Jesuit Province Archives, College of the Holy Cross)*



The first house on Sudbury Road [#10] was on the left side when headed towards the Weston/Wayland town line and was called the Walker Cottage. This is where the help for the Grant Walker estate (now Campion Center) lived. There was a barn and carriage house located a short distance from the cottage. The next house was on the right side of Sudbury Road [#45] and belonged to the Rands. Mr. Roland Rand was a civil engineer who was instrumental in the development of the Sunset Road area.

A short distance beyond the Rand house on the left is Ripley Lane. At the end of the long twisting road is the Ripley house. Mr. Ripley was a Civil War veteran, and his daughter, Emma, taught school in Weston for many years. During my high school years, I mowed their lawn and helped in the flower gardens.

On Sudbury Road, the next house on the right belonged to the Roberts family [#63]. The large barn was located across the road, with a windmill behind it. The farm was operated by a brother and sister, Joseph and Helen, who owned a large herd of dairy cows. Joseph was kicked in the head by one of the “frisky” farm horses, an accident which resulted in his death. Helen expanded and updated the milk distribution business and named the place Strebor Farm, which was Roberts spelled backwards. Health and help problems led to its closure in the late 1930’s.

The next house on the right [#89] was one of two Smith houses, near which was a large barn and a garage or carriage house. As I recall, there was a large water

tank and two windmills, one across the street at the foot of a high hill and the other at the top of the hill behind the barn.

Farther along Sudbury Road on the right side was another Smith house [#111], one of the oldest houses in Weston. Over the years, many alterations and changes have been made, but a substantial amount of the original still remains. Across the street, there was a barn, but all I remember seeing were the foundation walls. These were the houses on Concord and Sudbury Roads in the northwest corner of Weston during my growing-up years. Now let's dwell a little while on the people who lived in them.

### *The People--Neighbors and Neighborhoods*

It was the custom in early days for neighbors to visit neighbors. I remember tagging along with my mother to visit for a cup of tea with Mrs. Sheehan and Mrs. Cronin and smelling the wonderful fragrance of something simmering on the back of the wood-burning kitchen range. A Sheehan son, Anthony, was the postmaster in Weston after our postal address was changed from South Lincoln to Weston. The Post Office was located in the what is now the DiVito building in Weston Center [464-478 Boston Post Road]. Anthony never missed a day – the mail must go through. During one winter, a severe snowstorm made the roads impassable. Anthony borrowed Jim Cronin's farm horse, threw a blanket over him, jumped aboard, and rode to the Post Office, with the snow in many places reaching the horse's belly.

Jeremiah (Jerry) Cronin drove the school bus (called the school barge) for many years and was much loved by the children. Francis McMahan worked for the Weston Street Department. I think he was the first person in the neighborhood to own a car, a brand new Model T Ford, which he proudly demonstrated to all, interested or not. Mary McMahan worked as a secretary in the State House in Boston. Every morning she walked from her Concord Road home to the railroad crossing on Tower Road, Lincoln, then down the tracks to the Silver Hill Station to ride the train to Boston.

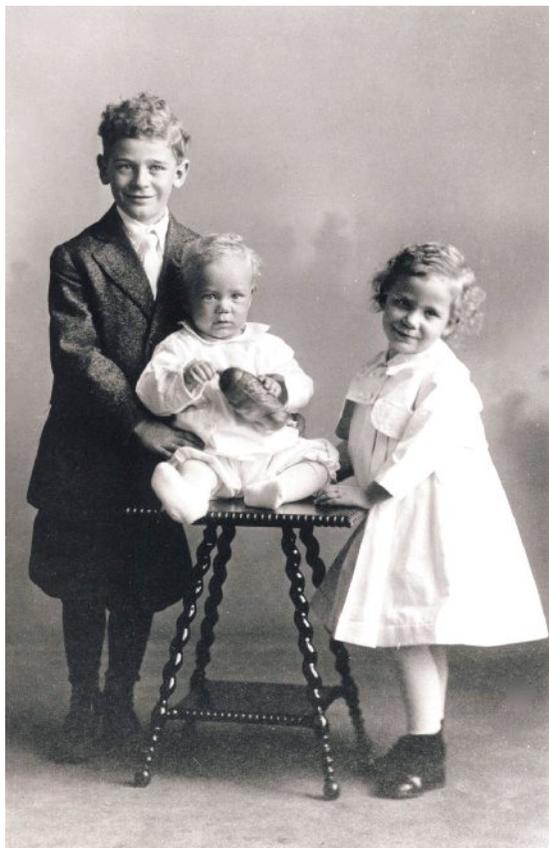
My family of four boys and one girl lived in the next house on Concord Road [#455]. My father was the caretaker for many years. The owner, Mr. Whitman, seldom came from his home in Cambridge to use it. Maybe two or three times during the summer, he came with friends. It was a wonderful place to grow up. After school and during the summer, the neighborhood kids (there were not too many – the Smiths, the Rands) would gather at one of three homes to play their games: hide and seek, tag, swinging on birch trees, skating on Kidney Pond, sledding, and skiing. For those who have never tried swinging on birches, this involved climbing up the tree until your weight brought it down to the ground, at which point you would climb up again.

The Strattons lived in the next house on the right [420 Concord]. Personally, I have no memory of them living there, as both Mr. and Mrs. George Stratton died before I was born, but I heard a great deal about them from my parents and siblings. They told me how Grandpa ran the farm, producing eggs, poultry, and produce that he took by wagon once a week into Waltham to sell to customers. In 1903, while on one of these marketing trips, he died of a heart attack at age 77. Gramma Stratton took care of the house and family including my father, whom she loved like a son.

The Stratton estate was sold to Miss Alice Anthes, who lived there with her unmarried sister, Emma, and brother, Lincoln. Alice was the secretary for Mr. Horace Phipps, a prosperous stained glass manufacturer and installer. Shortly after buying the Stratton place, Alice and Horace were married. For reasons unknown to me, the stained glass business deteriorated and likewise the Phipps fortune. Their last years in Weston were quite sad because of health and money issues.

The neighborhood kids included the Rands on Sudbury Road. Their four children, one boy and three girls, were all within our school age span. As a civil engineer, Mr. Rand had the expertise to construct a dam on the brook on his land on the opposite side of the road from his house. In the fall, a huge area was flooded. The skating was excellent and drew many people from all parts of town. There were many skating parties with bonfires at night. Of course, when snow came, lots of shoveling was necessary to clear the ice (no snow blowers!) In the spring, water was released through the dam.

There were no children in the Ripley house. Miss Ripley taught in the Weston schools and rode on the school bus, which stopped for her on Sudbury Road at



*(l-r) Lincoln, Carl, and Sylvia Smith (Courtesy of Carl Smith)*

the end of Ripley Lane. In winter, Ripley Lane was seldom plowed; and Miss Ripley would walk from her home, quite some distance, on snowshoes and stick them up in a snowdrift, ready to use when the bus dropped her off. There were no children in the Roberts household either, although during the summer, two nieces from Lexington spent much time there and joined in the fun with the rest of us.

The Smith residence on Sudbury Road was a favorite for the neighborhood kids. Lincoln, Sylvia and Carl were the Smith contingent. The games were fast and noisy. Mrs. Smith always had cookies and cold drinks for us. If we didn't use our bikes to get to each other's house, we used shortcut paths through the woods.

### *Bits of This and That*

*Mail delivery.* The mail for the northwest corner of Weston came through Lincoln. Our mail address was Box 96, South Lincoln, Mass. Our mailman was Mr. Coyle and his transportation was horse and buggy. In the winter, Mr. Coyle let us kids hitch our sleds to his horse-drawn buggy and we had a great free sleigh ride. He made sure we didn't get too far from home. Sometime in the 1920's, the

automobile age arrived and Mr. Coyle was provided with a strange-looking government vehicle, black and boxy, unlike the automobiles of that time. Shortly thereafter, our postal address was changed to Weston and Mr. Anthony Sheehan became the postmaster.



*A case for global warming!* In my youth, we always had snow on the ground at Thanksgiving. It was a tradition for my father on that holiday morning to borrow Mr. Cronin's horse and sled drag. He and my brothers would take off into the woods to haul

*Philip and Joseph Sheehan. Both boys died young, Philip at age 15, in 1912 and Joseph at age 23, in 1916. (Courtesy of Joseph Sheehan Jr)*

out the cordwood my father had cut the previous year. This seasoned hardwood, when further cut and split into kitchen range lengths, made great firewood. The event also served to whet our appetites for mother's great Thanksgiving dinner.

*Baseball games in our backyard.* My three older brothers worked hard to make a baseball diamond and field in our backyard, even constructing a high backstop to protect our house from foul balls. They assembled a team of school friends and, if needed, older neighborhood men including Jerry Cronin and Anthony Sheehan. On Sundays, they would play pickup teams from Waltham or Watertown. People driving by would stop and watch the game. I was too small to play but not too small to retrieve foul balls hit into the thickets!

*Highbush blueberries.* The wooded land owned by Alice Anthes was abundant withighbush blueberries. During picking season, it didn't take long for us to fill large kettles with luscious berries that my mother preserved for winter use. The hurricane of '38 leveled all of the tall pine trees and also destroyed the blueberry bushes.

*Cranberries in Weston.* Abutting the Whitman land to the east was a large area of lowland that flooded in the spring and fall. This area is now at the far end of College Pond. Wild cranberries grew here, and we gathered them in with the welcome aid of a hand-raking cranberry picker.

*Politics.* Before TV, before radio, before receiving the next day's newspaper, how did we find out who won the elections for Governor or President? On election night, at the published hour, we would all sit outside and watch for the results sent from Boston. A searchlight beam would indicate the leader or winner



1898 photo by itinerant photographers A.W. and G.E. Howes of the farmhouse and barn at 455 Concord Road built by the Cheney family and later purchased by the Whitmans. (Courtesy of Harry Jones)

(i.e. one flash meant someone, two flashes meant someone else). What tremendous advances we have made in telecommunications!

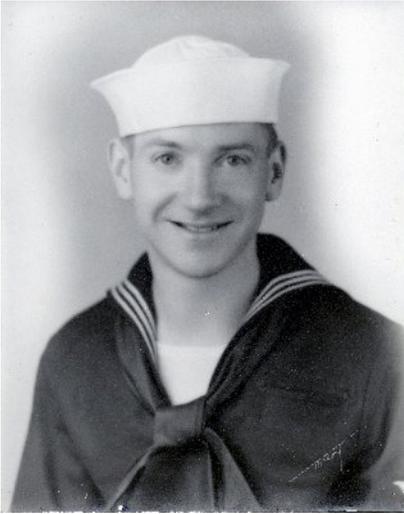
*First radio.* I remember our first radio, an Atwater Kent. There were three tuning dials on the front that had to be manipulated to bring the stations in clearly. It required a large storage battery and an antenna wire that stretched between the house and the barn. The speaker was a separate piece of equipment.

*School classmates.* Our peers in school good-naturedly referred to all of us in the far away northwest corner as “the kids from the Indian Reservation.”



*Ernest and Marie Jones built this house at 448 Concord Road in anticipation of the day when the Whitman house would be sold. In 1934, Harry's brother Arthur built a small house next door at #454. After returning from the war, Harry Jones continued to live at 448 Concord Road. The small shingled cottage was expanded over the years by Harry and his wife Jean. After they sold the property in the early 2000s, the house was torn down to make way for one of the large new houses typical of 21st century Weston. Plans call for Arthur's house to be transformed into a matching guest house. (Courtesy of Harry Jones)*

*New home.* My father realized that “our” Whitman home would someday be sold and we would have to move. In the early 1920s, he had the good fortune to locate the owner of two acres of high, level land on the opposite side of the road, which she was anxious to sell. Over several years of family effort, the land was cleared of brush, boulders were removed, apple trees and shade trees were planted, and eventually a small but adequate house was constructed. In 1929, the Whitman property was sold and we moved into our new home.



*Above: Harry Jones, c. 1942, as a Navy sailor: Right: Marriage to Jean D'Intinosanto in 1957. Although both Harry and Jean grew up in Weston (Jean on the Charles Jones estate on Glen Road) they did not meet until the 1950s, when both participated in a play put on by the Weston High School Alumni Association. Their son Stephen was born in 1961. (Courtesy of Harry Jones)*

## ***In Conclusion***

I have tried to relate what was seen through the bright eyes of a small boy and young adult growing up in the northwest corner of Weston. I have tried to put into words my memories of things that happened and I'm sure many have escaped this aging brain. Although I enjoy reading history, I am neither an historian nor a researcher. If I have misstated the facts or circumstances in any way, it was not intentional.

We had no iPods, but we did have cherry trees loaded with sweet cherries. We climbed the trees after supper, propped ourselves on branches, and ate our fill, spitting out the cherry stones. We had no cell phones, but we did have chestnut trees with nuts to gather in the fall. We had no high definition TV, indeed, no TV at all, but we did have graceful tall elm trees with colorful orioles nesting in the branches.

What we didn't know about, we never missed! There were times of sadness when a neighbor left us but that is also an important part of life. All in all, these years in the northwest corner of Weston were happy, healthful times.

*by Harry B. Jones*



*Jean and Harry Jones in 2009, with painting of Ernest Jones in the background. After returning from World War II, Harry worked as Assistant Treasurer at Tufts University for 16 years and as Controller at Wellesley College for 16 years. After retiring from Wellesley College, Town Administrator Ward Carter enlisted his aid and Harry became Town Accountant for Weston for 18 years, until his retirement in 1996 at age 83. (Photo by Pamela W. Fox)*