

The Josiah Smith Tavern has not functioned as a tavern since 1838, the year the “Fifteen Gallon” law made it illegal to sell alcohol in small amounts. One hundred and seventy years later, in 2008, Weston voters will decide whether they like the idea of a Tavern on the Green, with a restaurant serving not only food but also “spirituous and intoxicating liquors.”

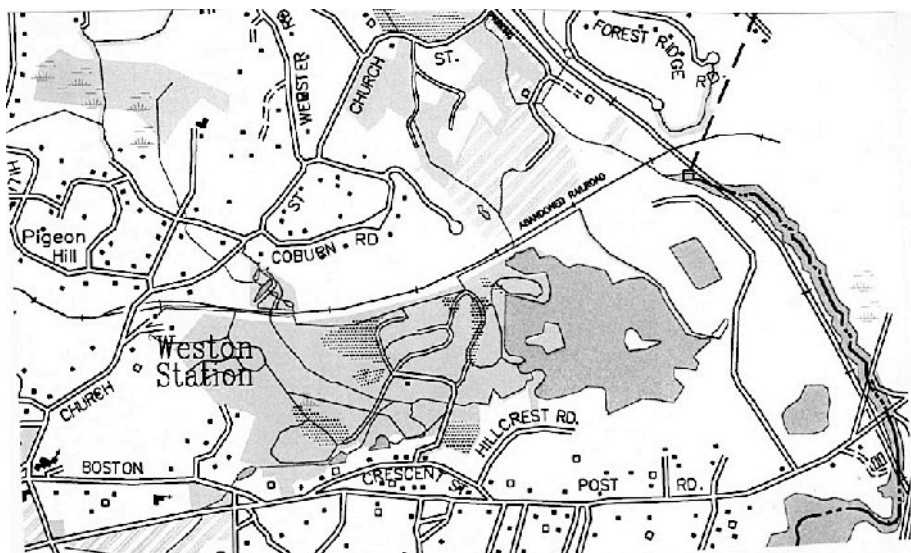
*by Pamela W. Fox*



*This image of the Melone Homestead was altered by computer to show the size of the original two-over-two house and location of the original front door. (Courtesy of Judy Markland and Pam Fox)*

## **The History of the Melone Homestead and Sears Conservation Land: Part I**

*[Editor's Note: Cindy Bates began researching the Melone Homestead (27 Crescent Street) in 2004 at the behest of her father, long-time Conservation Commission chairman George Bates. The house is located on town conservation land and its history has long been the subject of debate. How old is it? Who built it, and why? Has it been moved? Was it used to house chair factory workers? The Weston Historical Society is pleased to publish this abbreviated version of Ms. Bates's report, beginning with Part I below and continuing in the Fall 2008 Bulletin. The extent and complexity of her research is even more evident in the complete report, which includes extensive footnotes and bibliographical information along with many additional illustrations and maps. Copies will be available at the Weston Public Library and Weston Historical Society]*



2001 Weston Forest and Trail map (detail). Note the location of Crescent Street, which was part of Boston Post Road before that roadway was straightened about 1860. A long driveway extends from the mid-point of Crescent Street to the Melone Homestead, shown as a small black dot. The map shows Three-Mile Brook and the three mill ponds that provided power to small mills in the Crescent Street neighbor-

## ***Preface: Diary of a Researcher***

What began as a simple request, to finish up the title research and complete a report on the history of the Melone Homestead begun by my father in the late 1990s, evolved into a significant and in-depth research project. My first draft, 13 pages completed in May 2004, summarized the ownership of the Sears Conservation Land from the early 1800s. I made no attempt to date the house beyond stating that it was at its present site in 1859 and had not been there in 1850. In the process of writing this first draft, I was struck by the notion that none of the owners probably ever lived in the house. The report, primarily a history of the owners, shed little light on the occupants of the Melone Homestead prior to the Melones themselves.

To focus more on the house and its story, I proposed to gather information on occupants. Also, my father and I wanted to look for historical evidence of the house being moved. I traced the titles even further back, to the early 1700s, and broadened the scope to include the entire Crescent Street neighborhood. Tax records and early maps provided evidence of houses. Based on the census and these

other data, I made maps of all the houses in the neighborhood for each census year beginning in 1820. I was looking for a house in one location that disappeared about the time that the Melone Homestead first appeared in its present location (1859). I identified three possible dwellings, and in the course of describing the evidence for and against the possibility of each one becoming the Melone Homestead, I made a discovery that led me to choose one over the other two. This second draft, which contained some 31 pages, led immediately to research for the third draft.

To write about occupants before 1859, I revisited the census data and reviewed manuscript highway tax records from the 1840s and 1850s, located in the basement of Weston Town Hall. I also tried to learn more about the occupants I had already identified. In the third draft I presented evidence for my theory that the Melone Homestead began life behind the “Mansion house” at 293 Boston Post Road. It read like a legal brief and weighed in at 86 pages.

To keep track of all the data about who lived where when, and especially how many dwellings each family owned, I constructed a database in MS Excel. There are about a dozen columns, each representing an address on Crescent Street or the Boston Post Road. Each row contains data from a particular source. Row headings include, for example, 1709 Deed, 1830 Map, 1858 Tax Valuation, 1917 Directory, 1930 US Census. The database let me track all the information on a house’s occupants over time and enabled me to put pieces together that led to new insights.

Regarding the question of whether the house had been moved, my evidence was largely historical. My father felt we should engage the professional services of an architectural historian with experience in house moving to examine the building. We were particularly interested in physical evidence of a move and the likely date of original construction. Architectural historian Anne Forbes and architect Lawrence Sorli visited the Melone Homestead in October 2005. Their observations and conclusions were incorporated into Draft 6.

In early 2007 I began final editing. On page 43 I stopped at a sentence expressing my hunch that Luke Brooks had built the Melone Homestead between 1845 and 1850. “Why?” I wrote in the margin. As I looked at the evidence, I realized there was none for this statement—the house could just as easily have been built earlier. Then, on the 1840 census, I noticed an “unknown” family in the neighborhood. Soon I was back doing additional title searches at the registry, genealogical research at New England Historic Genealogical Society, and reviews of 1830s tax records at the Newton archives. The result of all this late activity led me to conclude that Alpheus Cutter built the Melone Homestead between 1834 and 1840.

## ***Introduction***

The Melone Homestead is a small red clapboard house sited well back from Crescent Street at the end of a long winding driveway. The house is named for the Melone family, who lived there for more than 50 years beginning in the 1930s. Because it is located on conservation land, it is administered by the Weston Conservation Commission, which has leased it to the non-profit Land's Sake since 1997.

The Melone Homestead is unusual in Weston because it has, with one exception, always been a tenant house, that is, a house owned by one person and lived in by others. It is small and economically built.

This report begins with the recent history of the house and its architectural features. Part II, to be published in the Fall 2008 *Weston Historical Society Bulletin*, traces the house from its original construction as a small tenant house for mill workers, to its relocation and renovation into a two-family dwelling for workers at the school furniture factory next door, to its use as housing for workers on a large estate. While it is easy enough to trace the ownership of a house and property, determining the inhabitants of a rented house is more challenging and not always successful. Part II summarizes research on the origins of the house, its owners, and its many inhabitants.

## ***Recent History, 1975 to 2008***

The Melone Homestead and 61.47 acres now known as the Sears Conservation Land were acquired by the Town of Weston in 1975 from the Sears family. Its acquisition was part of conservation efforts going back to the 1950s, when the town began buying undeveloped woodlands to create a Town Forest. In 1961 the Conservation Commission was formed to protect open areas and acquire additional lands to form a "green belt." By 1966 the town had purchased some 600 acres, but each acquisition required a Town Meeting vote. Increasing land values and new housing developments in the 1970s led some residents to propose and win support for a broad land acquisition strategy. By 1977 Weston voters had authorized bond issues totaling \$5.1 million and had acquired conservation land throughout the town with an emphasis on linking existing parcels. Nearly 1900 acres had been protected. The acquisition of the Sears property on December 31, 1975, was made possible by these bond issues. One undivided half interest was purchased with town funds from Rosamond Sears; the other half was a gift from her brother, Edwin B. "Buck" Sears.



*1959 photo of brothers Antonio (left) and Joseph Melone (right) in the front yard of the Melone Homestead, with the great barn in the background. Antonio was visiting from Italy to attend a family wedding. (Courtesy of Anna Melone Pollock)*

As part of their deeds to the town, Buck and Rosamond Sears granted a life estate to Joseph and Maria Anna Melone. The Melones continued to live in the house at 27 Crescent Street until their deaths, Joseph on May 9, 1979, and Maria on May 17, 1989. At the suggestion of their children and in recognition of the Melone family's 50-plus years in the house, the Conservation Commission voted to name the house the "Melone Homestead." Technically speaking, "homestead" is an inappropriate term in this case since it implies an ancestral home or ownership of a house and surrounding land, neither of which applies to the Melone family. On the other hand, it was the foothold in this country of a new American family.

In its 1975 arrangement with the Melones, the town accepted no responsibility for maintenance of the house or adjacent property. And, as they aged, Mr. and Mrs. Melone had less incentive to invest in maintenance. As a result, the house was in very poor condition when the Conservation Commission assumed responsibility in 1989. That year the Commission undertook major structural repairs including reinforcement of the collapsing foundation and replacement of sills. The goal was to create housing for the new director of Green Power Farm, a project administered by the Conservation Commission. While this plan was never realized, the Conservation Commission desired a mutually beneficial partnership with the new tenants of the Melone Homestead and actively sought tenants whose land ethic reflected its mission.

The first tenants after the Melones were employees of Land's Sake who moved there in the latter part of 1989 even as work continued on the house. Land's Sake is a private, nonprofit corporation founded in 1980 and dedicated to responsible stewardship of suburban farmland and forests. It provides a model of how public open space can be effectively used and enjoyed by the community by combining ecologically sound land management with hands-on environmental education. Land's Sake's efforts are centered on three themes: (1) sustainable land management and open space preservation, (2) environmental education, and (3) community building. Land's Sake manages both private and public conservation land in Weston. Under contract to the Weston Forest and Trail Association and Conservation Commission, Land's Sake maintains trails and practices sustainable forestry. Also under contract to the commission, Land's Sake manages the Green Power program. Middle school students work on the Land's Sake farm during the summer growing food for Boston area food pantries, shelters and soup kitchens. The program, begun in the 1970s under the auspices of Weston's Youth Commission, introduces young people to ecology and the notion of sustainability.

In May 1997, the Conservation Commission established a license agreement allowing Land's Sake to maintain its office in the Melone Homestead. The license included a provision to house staff members in the living quarters. Tenants have included three Land's Sake farm managers: Chrissie Madsen, Mike Raymond, and Johanna Flies.

The Sears Conservation Land consists of open fields and woodlands with a swampy area at the confluence of two brooks. About 20 acres are maintained as fields. Two very old farm roads are among the network of trails maintained by the Weston Forest and Trail Association. Both of these roads are important in the history of the Melone Homestead.

The Conservation Commission administers the Sears land and all other parcels acquired as protected open space. Private organizations such as Land's Sake and the Weston Forest and Trail Association provide significant assistance. In the late 1990s, the Conservation Commission undertook some major capital projects for the Melone Homestead including a new septic tank and leaching field (1997) and a new bridge over Three-Mile Brook along the driveway (1998).

### *The Melone Homestead Today*

The Melone Homestead is small in comparison with other Weston houses, with just 1730 square feet of livable space. The simple two-story frame house faces north and has a squat T-shaped footprint consisting of the original two-story, two-bay, side-gable main block in front and a rear addition with wings extending out on each side. A fieldstone foundation supports the front and sides. Small brick

chimneys are located in the approximate center of the main block in front of the ridgeline and in the approximate center of the rear addition.

The rear part of the house is also two stories, but because the house is built on a slope, its lower story is part of the basement. A retaining wall extending east and west from the house supports the slope. On the main level, the house has entrances on the east and west sides dating from the period when it was a divided house. A set of mirror-image stairs runs from the first floor to the cellar and a second set of mirror-image stairs leads to the second floor landing, where a door separates the two sides. A door on the north side of each landing opens into each bedroom, while doors on the south side open into two sides of the unfinished lean-to attic. The rooms are plain; the windows likewise.

Structural renovations to the Melone Homestead in 2000 required removal of the siding. Clapboards removed from the front of the house revealed the location of the original front entrance.

In June 2000 three Weston residents with expertise in architecture and historic preservation visited the house and made a number of observations in an attempt to ascertain when each part of the house had been built. The discovery of windows in each side of the attic in the interior wall—the rear side of the original—confirmed that the front part of the Melone Homestead was built as a two-over-two house. This original structure comprised about 900 square feet of livable space.



*North and east sides, showing the “front” of the house, 2004 (Courtesy of Judy Markland)*



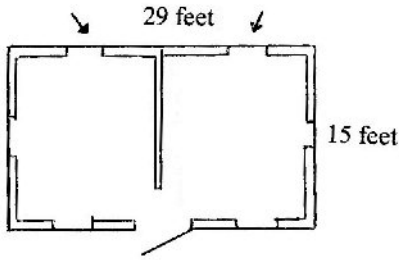
*South (rear) and west facades, 2004 (Courtesy of Judy Markland)*

Other distinguishing features of the older front section include very wide floorboards (15 to 20" wide in the bedrooms), corner posts, a ridgepole in the roof, studs morticed onto the plates, and square-cut nails. A patched area in the floorboards of the northwest bedroom may cover the opening of the original stairway.

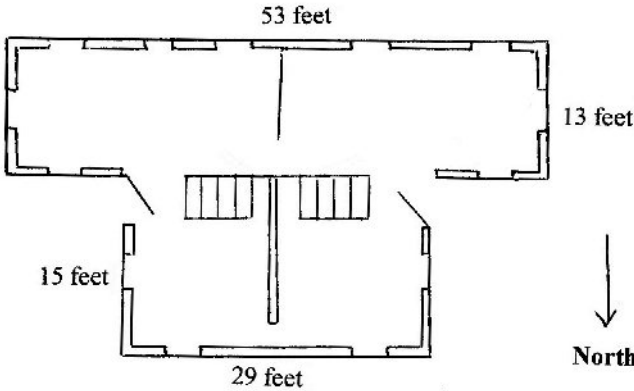
There was speculation among the group that the house was moved from somewhere else and that the enlargement occurred after the relocation. In a further effort to answer questions about the dates of construction of the various parts of the house, architectural historian Anne Forbes and architect Lawrence Sorli were asked to analyze the building. The two areas of greatest interest were in the basement and the two unfinished attic rooms under the lean-to roof in the rear. There, boarded-over window openings remain from when the earlier exterior south wall was exposed. This wall is sheathed with wide horizontal boards.

The consultants noted that the first floor framing, visible in the basement, is consistent with a construction date around the mid-1800s. The foundation provides clear evidence that the house was originally built in another location and moved to the present site. Stone foundations support the old part of the house under the north, east, and west sides. Had the main block of the house been built in the current location, the fourth (south or rear) side of the foundation would also have been made of stone to provide adequate support, or, given the steep slope to the rear, this fourth side might have consisted of a solid framing of wood posts. Neither is the case. Instead, the consultants found a wood-frame wall that is clearly of later construction than the original house.





*Above: First-floor plan of original house, showing location of front door. Arrows indicate location of window openings discovered on the second floor. Below: First-floor plan as enlarged in 1859.*



The physical evidence also makes clear that when the building was moved to its new site, the basement level of the addition was left at least partially open on the rear (south) elevation. The difference in grade on the south

side would have allowed for ground level access and vehicle storage in the basement under the new first floor living spaces. Sometime in the 20th century, the basement was fully enclosed. Two back doors exit at grade level. The entire south wall is covered with shingles rather than clapboards.

In 2004, the town approved CPA funds for restoration of the Melone Homestead to serve as a resource center for town conservation groups and residence for an employee of these groups. The Conservation and Historical Commissions have worked to retain the essential historic character. Preservation restrictions will be granted to the Weston Forest & Trail Association. Plans include general rehabilitation of all rooms. The sagging kitchen floor will be re-built and facilities replaced. The downstairs bath will be remodeled and a new full bath created upstairs in a new south-side dormer. The project will include structural and foundation work, de-leading, and rehabilitation of all windows. These renovations will create a space that meets the needs of Land's Sake and conforms to zoning and building codes. Work is expected to begin this year. *(To be continued)*

*Author Cynthia B. Bates grew up in Weston and now lives in Roslindale. She is presently self-employed as a local history researcher and database administrator. Part II of this article tells the story of the Melone Homestead beginning with its construction at 293 Boston Post Road between 1834 and 1840 and its move to the present site in 1859.*