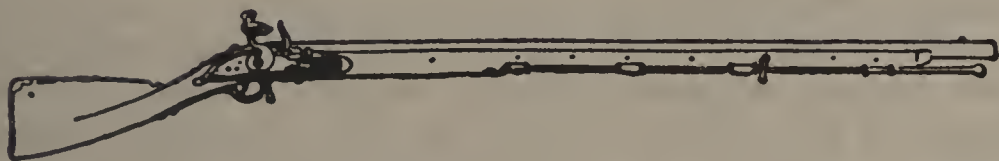


March 1965
Vol. 16 No. 3

THE WESTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY

BULLETIN



Brown Bess, a Flintlock

Hear Ye! Hear Ye!

Hear ye! Hear ye! Circle this date on your calendar and mark it "IMPORTANT":

MONDAY, APRIL 19, 1965

Plans for the commemoration of the 190th anniversary of the participation of Weston patriots in the rout of the British as they returned from Concord to Boston are developing rapidly. They include a pageant, an opportunity to walk over a part of the route the farmers took, and open house at the Jones House.

Small though Weston was at the time, 100 men and three officers of Captain Samuel Lamson's Militia Company and 11 men and three officers of Captain Israel Whittemore's Militia Company of Artillery marched on April 19, 1775, to join in this beginning of a Revolutionary War that was to separate 13 colonies from a mother country and result in a United States of America.

The pageant will unfold at 10 A.M. at the intersection of the Old Boston Post Road and Church Street, in the vicinity of the Town Green and those two cherished possessions of our heritage, the Jones House and the First Parish Church. It will show bits of the way of living in those days, touch on the political problems of that moment, recreate the arrival of the alarm, how it was spread, the gathering of the minutemen, and the departure of these patriots with a firm idea but an uncertain fate.

Representatives of many Weston organizations are planning to march "with the farmers". It is hoped that each and every one attending also will walk over the course of the road as it was in 1775 — this course having been recently established by members of the Weston Historical Society for this celebration.

At the conclusion of the pageant and march, the Society will provide hospitality and an opportunity for a tour of its headquarters at the Jones House, which in 1775 was known as Josiah Smith's Tavern.

The day will be the Monday after Easter Sunday, the date April 19, and the time 10 A.M.

WANTED

Wanted: For the April 19 pageant: guns, edged weapons and accessories, vintage 1775 or earlier.

The committee has encountered and solved many stimulating problems in developing this event, but a thorny one remains: the arming of the cast, authentically and sufficiently.

The standard firearm of the time was the flintlock musket with bayonet, of European pattern, a muzzle-loading weapon of smooth bore and large caliber. Pistols of the period had the same characteristics. Pennsylvania and Kentucky rifles were in existence, but scarce in New England and of little value for fighting. Because they required more time for loading and lacked the much-needed bayonet, they played a minor role. The percussion system of ignition had not yet been devised.

The available muskets were British in origin or were patterned after them by colonial gunsmiths. The Brown Bess, developed during the reign of Queen Anne (1702-1714), was the fashion for well over 100 years. For purposes of identification, these flintlock muskets were of barrel round in entire length and about .75 caliber, in the earlier years 46 inches long, reduced in the reign of King George shortly before 1760 to 42 inches, and probably a few years after our 1775 date to 39 inches. The name Brown Bess stemmed from the color of the barrel, resulting from the acid pickling process used. Stocks were usually walnut, the mounts brass, ramrods wooden (though iron ones were introduced about 1724, but adopted slowly), and bayonets were attached to the top of the barrel. American gunsmiths had to use metal parts over and over again and often made maple stocks.

These guns could not be accurately aimed at the enemy. They could only be pointed in his general direction. Perhaps for this reason the basic formation for engagement was the line of battle, two or three rows of men shoulder to shoulder, one row immediately behind the other, and file closers or reserves a few feet in the rear to take the places of casualties. Those attacking marched within sure range, delivered a volley, then charged to decide the issue hand to hand. The defenders waited for sufficiently close approach of the enemy, fired, tried to reload and fire again before the attackers were on them with bayonets. It is said that the patriots were defeated at Bunker Hill because they were not armed with bayonets.

All loading and firing was done by command. The volley was ordered to be pointed ahead or to the right or left oblique. The object was to produce a pattern of fire, the rapidity far more important than the accuracy.

In comparison with present standards, the Brown Bess was an unreliable weapon for doing damage. Accounts of the time relates that an expert with a musket "not ill-bored" could strike the figure of a man at 80 yards, possibly at 100. The impact of the bullet was such that "only the very unfortunate" was ever wounded by a shot from 150 yards.

The rapidity of fire possible from the Brown Bess was of quite a different order. A military treatise of 1768 required that a recruit be drilled until he could load and fire 15 times in three and three-quarter minutes, or one shot every 15 seconds—a rate assuring two volleys at an approaching enemy in an average charge.

Combat in 1775 involved two opposing forces (perhaps a regiment of 500 men on each side, each a compact mass), the contact close range, accuracy of fire unimportant but the speed of it crucial. The attackers had to expect to receive 1,000 bullets in the two volleys during the 20 to 25 seconds it would take them to negotiate something less than 100 yards, the second volley to be received at no more than 30 yards. They could count on only 500 bullets to send — and then their bayonets. The patriots won the battle at Stony Point because they were ordered in the attack not to use their firearms but to engage the enemy with their edged weapons.

It is of interest that there were only two battles in the Revolutionary War fought by the patriots from behind trees and over stone walls: ours and at Kings Mountain, Tennessee. All of the other battles were conducted in the accepted European fashion of the time.

Pistols were available, though not in common use. Of the British ones, those made in the reigns of William III and Queen Anne had 14 inch barrels, those in George I's reign (1714-1727) 12 inch .60 caliber barrels round the entire length, and in 1760 the barrels were reduced to nine inches and the caliber increased to .69. French pistols of the period had nine inch barrels and iron ramrods.

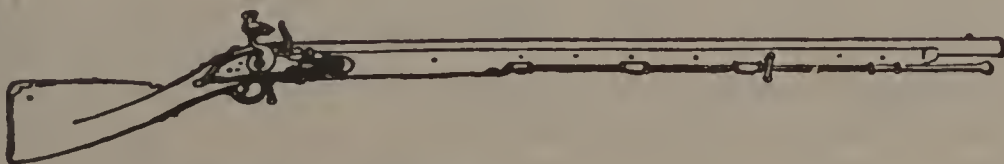
Gunpowder was the propelling force and always in short supply. The spherical lead ball was the standard missile. Muskets were usually loaded with one full-sized ball and a few buck shot. There are evidences that at times the balls were cut, and that nails and other iron were used — so that there are records of Revolutionary War "atrocities". The powder and the balls for a shot were rolled into a soft brown paper, and the result was known as a cartridge.

Cartridges were carried in boxes hung on the right from shoulder straps, or from the belt. The cartridge or cartouche boxes each held 20 to 30 of the paper rolls and weighed five to six pounds when filled.

Other pieces of equipment were powder horns, shot pouches, flints, bullet molds, scourers or worms, priming wires, picks, brushes, plugs for muzzles and touch holes, gun slings, sword and bayonet belts and (popular with the colonists) tomahawks.

The April 19 Committee would very much appreciate the loan of any of this circa 1775 armament now in possession of members and friends of the Society, either to be used in the pageant or so that patterns for facsimilies could be made. Harold G. Travis, President, TW 9-4515, will welcome calls, and the Committee assumes responsibility for all articles loaned for this occasion.

ROBERT J. MACMILLAN, *Pageant Chairman*



Brown Bess, a Flintlock

What They Were Wearing in Weston

Mrs. Frank Shaw and Mrs. Gordon Littlehale are co-chairmen of the display of old costumes to be shown in the ballroom of the Jones House on April 19, 1965. They are planning a display of old-fashioned costumes of various periods and they are eager to hear from members willing to exhibit and/or model old costumes, to lend dress forms, and to serve as hostesses.

Digging Up the Past

Two Seminars to acquaint members of the Society with techniques they should have to pursue their genealogical or archæological undertakings have recently been held. On March 10th twelve members of the Society met at the home of Mrs. McKinley Warren, our genealogical consultant. The second seminar took place on March 17th at the Jones House (subsequent to the day this bulletin went to press). It was led by Mr. and Mrs. Charles P. Gorely, Jr. and dealt with the art of archaeology.

The Research Committee, headed by Erlund Field, has many important projects under way, including a search for data on the milk house that once stood on the Hubbard estate, the Hook and Hastings Organ Factory that moved to Weston in 1888, the Jericho area, the Harrington House at 555 Wellesley Street, and old tombstones in Weston cemeteries. It is interested generally in information about old houses and in old photographs, and specifically in biographical material concerning Isaac Fiske.

The committee wishes to start immediately a record file of historical material pertaining to these and other historical sites, events and inhabitants of yesterday's Weston that may be in the possession of today's residents. If you have any such material, will you please notify Mrs. Lyman Hayes, Miss Constance Burrage or Mr. Field. They will wish to know whether it is available either now or at some future time as either a gift or a loan to the Society, or for study by the archivist, custodian or members.

Did You Know . . . ?

When last November two brothers were elected to the United States Senate, it seemed at first blush that here must be a "first." But very promptly it was noted by Life magazine and various newspapers that Robert and Edward Kennedy were following a trail blazed 164 years earlier by the Foster brothers, Dwight and Theodore, ancestors of Weston's Dwight Foster, who lives now at 96 Church Street.

The earlier Dwight Foster (great-great-grandfather of today's Mr. Foster) was elected Senator from Massachusetts in 1800 and Theodore was elected that same year as U. S. Senator from Rhode Island. Both men served for three years. They were descended from Reginald Foster, the first Foster settler in this country, who was born at Exeter, England, and immigrated here in 1636.

OPEN HOUSE

in the Golden Ball Tavern

Saturday, April 10th from 1:30 to 5:00 P.M. the Golden Ball Tavern will open its doors to visitors to display many of its treasures. Various organizations of the Town of Weston are participating in the preparations. Refreshments will be served by our hospitality committee under the chairmanship of Mrs. E. Paul Floyd. The Country Garden Club is doing flower arrangements and members of the Antiques Appreciation group of the Community League are busy making a quilt to be shown in one of the bedrooms.

Among the treasures to be seen is a pastel portrait of William Pitt Jones who lived in the Tavern on the day a spy for General Howe knocked at the door and obtained directions for General Howe's army. His subsequent report may well have been responsible for the itinerary change so that the battles of Concord and Lexington took place where they did rather than in Watertown and Weston. There will be a nominal admission charge of 25 cents per person.

To protect the floors of the Golden Ball Tavern, please do not wear spiked heels.



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MR. & MRS. EDWARD W. MARSHALL
10 CRESCENT ST.
WESTON, MASS.

The Weston Historical Society
Bulletin
March, 1965



Annual Dues: \$2.00 per person
Gift Memberships Are Suggested
Life Memberships (\$200) are also available

CALENDAR HIGHLIGHTS

1965

April 10: Open House — Golden Ball Tavern

April 19: Patriots' Day Pageant on the Town Green

Every Wednesday from 2 to 4 P.M.:

Open House at the Jones House (Josiah Smith Tavern)

Mr. Harold G. Travis
President
899-4515

Mrs. Eric Reissner
Information Chairman
TW 3-7039

Mrs. William G. Burt, Jr.
Bulletin Editor
TW 3-0804