

THE WESTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY

BULLETIN

OCTOBER 1966, VOL. III, No. 1

Annual Meeting:

Tuesday, November 15, 1966 — 8 P.M.

In the early third of the 19th century, New England's industrial development was accelerated by the building and operation of the Middlesex Canal which extended from Boston to Lowell. Barge movement of raw materials and merchandise at the rate of 2½ miles per hour was slower than by team but the enormous loads that each barge carried brought significant savings in transportation cost.

How the Canal flourished from 1803 until 1853, when it finally succumbed to the railroads competition, is the fascinating theme of our fellow-member and Historian, Brenton H. Dickson. His lecture, which has already been delivered before various historical societies and other organizations, will be the main feature of our annual meeting in the Town House, Tuesday evening, November 15th at 8 o'clock.

The Program Committee aims at each annual meeting to present contributions of outstanding talents and knowledge by our own members. It is hoped that on November 15th there will be an even greater turn-out than the audience who so thoroughly enjoyed "Around the Cracker Barrel" a year ago — exclusively written, produced and portrayed by members headed by Mrs. Allan T. Wheeler and Mr. Henry Patterson.

A short business meeting will precede Mr. Dickson's address with a review of the year's activities, a discussion of those planned for the new year and the election of directors. Be sure to attend this worthwhile meeting and bring a new member so that another year of stimulating work may be enthusiastically launched.

Structural Soundness Important

After careful inspection of the Isaac Fiske Law Office in early June had revealed the existence of some dry-rot in the structure's underpinning, the Directors decided to postpone definite work and expense until fuller explorations are made this fall. Certainly of paramount importance is the condition of the basic structure before the Society embarks upon its plans to restore the interior for our use. We feel sure that the committee was wise in deferring extensive remodelling until it can be assured that this venerable landmark can be put into proper condition. As we go to press we are hopeful that very shortly the necessary steps will be taken so that the plans outlined in our last issue will come into being. Then will our patience be rewarded.

"That It May Live Forever"

In a recent conversation with former Park and Cemetery Commissioner, Dr. Donald Wyman of 102 Wellesley Street, we were delighted to learn that under his direction the Case Estates of the Arnold Arboretum Division of Harvard University has reared a healthy scion, already 6 feet tall, of the famous 250 year old Burgoyne Elm that towers over our new headquarters.

As the days of the parent elm are undoubtedly limited, Dr. Wyman has agreed to propagate for the Park Commissioners a few additional "children" that should be ready for planting in a couple of years, ensuring that "There'll always be a Burgoyne Elm in Weston." It is none too early for Weston historians to begin recommending where these scions of our noblest tree should be placed.

Thinking Aloud With Our Members

Your Society is cooperating with the Bi-Centennial Commission recently appointed by the Governor, and invites members to help us formulate plans for the commemoration 9 years hence of the 200th anniversary on April 19, 1975 of the Battle of Lexington and Concord. One of our officers has already suggested that a monument of Captain Lamson and his 102 Weston Minute Men is long overdue. Perhaps some public spirited citizens, eager to preserve and perpetuate our heritage, will soon start a movement in that direction so that dedication exercises could be held alongside the Town House during the Bi-Centennial exercises. Obviously, the monument should be placed near where the Minute Men assembled and by that time markers should be in place to trace the route our men took over Lamson Hill the morning "The Shot Heard 'Round the World" was fired. This route is shown on the map distributed by the Society during its pageant last year when we commemorated the 190th anniversary.

As the Town grows, surely our members should take the lead in suggesting ways and means of memorializing our historic past and of preserving the charm of those locations that played such an important part in the early days of the Town and Commonwealth.

The Bulletin will be glad to publicize additional suggestions. Let us all put on our thinking caps before it is "too late"!

Notes of Interest

Mr. Homer C. Lucas, retired president of Ginn & Company, has accepted the chairmanship of a committee that will study how the Society can best cooperate with Schools and community to make Weston history more meaningful to us all, young and old. Much material is being supplied by the Society's Historian, Archivist, Curator and the Research Committee. It will be augmented by further findings of our members and all will be correlated by this new committee.

* * *

The members of the Weston Historical Society are indebted to the Town Library for a gracious service. One of the Staff has inserted in each of the five library copies of the "Lamson History of Weston" the paragraph from page 6 of the May "Bulletin" containing the name of the Editor of the history, Mr. William S. Kennedy.



Keewaydin and the Telephone

The year 1965 witnessed the razing of a prominent Weston landmark, *Keewaydin*, residence of the late Francis Blake, astronomer, surveyor, physicist, photographer, inventor and a selectman in Weston for more than 20 years. Judged by Colonial New England standards, the house was not an object of beauty, yet it seemed to fit into the landscape and become an integral part of the surroundings. Great stone terraces ascended in giant steps from the Charles River valley to the eminence upon which the house stood. The southern exposure of these terraces rendered them ideal for the culture of fruit trees and vines. For nearly eighty years the house stood, a monument to an era of grandeur and elegance and to an important development in modern living of which we shall speak later. To the north of the house and across a broad sweep of rolling lawn were the stable buildings, grouped around an interior court yard. The stable constituted the central portion, while living quarters for help occupied one wing, and a theatre, a bowling alley, a squash court, a machine shop and Mr. Blake's laboratory the other.

At one time the house as well as the stable was heated by underground pipes from a common boiler room and "the estate had a complete system of water works including a reservoir holding a quarter of a million gallons, with a head of 110 feet at a fountain which rises from the pond at the base of the northwestern slope." Adjacent to the house was a sunken garden said to be similar to the one at Hampton Court, England.

The beginnings of the house date back to 1873. Over the next few years it was altered and enlarged and the grounds around it extensively developed until it became Weston's principal showpiece.

Mr. Blake's early scientific training was with the United States Coast and Geodetic Survey. He was associated with them for thirteen years and during that time acquired a wealth of knowledge. His survey work was extremely accurate and he made important astronomical calculations both in this country and in Europe. He was especially noted for his transatlantic longitudinal work, calculating time differences between points in the United States, England and France, and timing messages through transatlantic cables. During his last two years of service in the Coast Survey, he devoted his leisure moments to experimental physics and, soon after his resignation from the Survey, he began a series of experiments that resulted in the Blake Transmitter—a device in the telephone mouthpiece that amplified the voice to a point where it could be successfully heard over the telephone wire.

The invention of the Blake Transmitter came at a most fortunate moment for the Bell Telephone Company as illustrated in "Birth and Babyhood of the Telephone" by Thomas A. Watson. Mr. Watson, it will be remembered, was Bell's famous assistant who heard the first words ever to be transmitted by telephone.

"Professor Bell's financial problems had begun to press hard for solution," Watson wrote. "We were . . . disappointed because the President of the Western Union Telegraph Company had refused, somewhat contemptuously (to buy) all the Bell patents for the exorbitant sum of \$100,000 . . . Two years later the Western Union would gladly have bought the patents for \$25,000,000. But before that happy time there were lots of troubles . . . to be surmounted." Public exhibitions of the telephone had stirred up a tremendous amount of interest. "The Western Union people . . . discovered that the telephone was not such a toy as they had thought, and as our \$100,000 offer was no longer open for acceptance, they decided to get a share of the business for themselves, and Edison evolved for them his carbon-button transmitter . . . (It) talked louder than the magnetos we were using and I had to work nights to get up something just as good. Fortunately for my constitution, Frank Blake came along with his transmitter. We bought it and I got a little sleep for a few days. Then our little David of a Corporation sued the big Goliath, the Western Union Company, for infringing the Bell patents."

The above is the third in a series of articles on historic Weston buildings by our Historian, Brenton H. Dickson.

Costumes and "Sacred Cows"

On Monday, October 10th, the Historical Society's rooms at the Jones House will feature a costume display open to members and guests of the Women's Community League of Weston. The occasion is the League's President's Reception and display of members hobbies. Our Curator, Mrs. James Fraser, and her hostesses, who have kept these rooms open to the public every Wednesday afternoon throughout the year, have arranged to have three rooms open instead of the usual two. This will enable them to display better the costume collection that they have created.

The Historical Society will also exhibit for the first time the two, carved oak chairs from the study of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. A gift from Mrs. Barbara Hudnut Boston, these chairs will eventually have a permanent home in the Society's headquarters. The following is an excerpt from a letter that Mrs. Boston recently wrote to Mr. Harold G. Travis, President of our Society, about the history of the chairs: "In piecing together my memories with actualities — I believe most of the following to be reasonably accurate. For many years my aunt, Maude Hudnut (Mrs. Robert) Chapin and her husband, were fond friends of the Doyles. When Sir Arthur lectured here he was their guest and each year they in turn would spend a week or so with the Doyles at "Windlesham", Crowborough, Sussex. A moody man, Sir Arthur would sometimes spend weeks writing in his flat at Buckingham Mansions in London proper, or at the Author's Club, Whitehall Court. These chairs flanked the fireplace in his library at "Windlesham" for several decades until the autumn of 1927 when they were crated and shipped to the Chapins as a 25th wedding anniversary present and his "Casebook of Sherlock Holmes" was published. These chairs had in turn been a wedding present to the Doyles in 1907 from a descendant of Sir Thomas Boleyn and thus a collateral descendant of Ann Boleyn, and came from his estate, "Great Fosters" in Staines, where it still stands and is a new and enormously attractive inn.

"Fully verifiable answers to many questions concerning the 'Sacred Cows' can never be forthcoming. Although quite similar, the chairs are not identical. The Chapins were as sentimental and romantic as the Doyles who breakfasted in the library when Sir Arthur was in residence — and it is possible these chairs were sent as tokens of times remembered. No one was allowed to sit in them after they reached New York and they were always said to have belonged to Ann Boleyn but it is possible they were made by forgotten hands in the time of James I — 50 years too late.

"As Sir Arthur's interest in spiritualism increased, the figures of Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson receded into oblivion. Lady Doyle was as devout a believer as her husband — so — if you should be ever so silent some wintry night when darkness comes early, and look in the direction of the chairs — you may see two shadowy forms waiting patiently for the morning meal to be served.

"On this note I shall take my leave — quite contented that the 'Sacred Cows' have reached their journey's end in safety."

A "Light" Episode

Weston has a nice library room, recently fitted up in the Town Hall building, with costly carpet, furniture, chandelier, and a beautiful marble tablet, bearing the names of her deceased soldiers. A charming room it is. A few evenings since, as the lighting-up hour came, the librarian proceeded to the ceremony of lighting the new chandelier in the presence of a few bystanders, and moving his steps about, — "Swingin' 'round the Circle," — as the phrase is, a gentleman suggested that it would be a more reasonable way to whirl the chandelier than to peregrinate around it. But alas, before the lamps had all been lighted and regulated, the machine, which had no swivel, was unscrewed from the ceiling and fell with an awful smash. The central shaft of the chandelier "lit" in a tin pail of eggs on the table and penetrated to a decent depth. The lamps brought up on the carpet, in "Improper Vulgar Fractions," as a school boy would say, or an example in "Short Division." The kerosene took fire, and for a few minutes there seemed to be a lively time in the room, but the kerosene did more damage than the fire.

Waltham Sentinel April 26, 1867



IN MEMORIAM

To our fellow director, Harry Patterson, Chairman of the Town's Historical Committee and of the Town's 250th Anniversary Celebration Committee, we extend our deepest sympathy in the great loss we all sustained during the summer in the passing of his wife, Elizabeth Nichols Patterson.

In her quiet, gracious way, Betty Patterson stood and worked for all that was good. Though gentle, she was strong. Her charm was instantly felt by all who worked with her for the good of the Town. To enumerate her many contributions would be redundant and superfluous, and the picture we'll carry in our minds and hearts most of all will be the one taken of her during our April 19, 1965 "Open House" when she wore so lithesomely the 1870 ball gown of which she was so fond.

Annual Dues: \$2.00 per person

Gift Memberships are suggested

Life Memberships (\$200) are also available

Contributions to the Society are always welcome

Checks should be made payable to Weston Historical Society, Inc., and sent to Mr. Harry B. Jones, 448 Concord Road, Weston 02193.

President

Mr. Harold G. Travis

899-4515

Information Chairman

Mrs. H. Eugene Jones

899-0177



Extra copies of the "Bulletin" will be available for 15c, starting with this issue. Please contact Mrs. H. Eugene Jones, Bulletin Editor.



WESTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY, INC

Calendar Highlights

(Please save the dates)

Annual Meeting — Town Hall — November 15, 1966 — 8:00 P.M.

Speaker: Mr. Brenton H. Dickson, a founder and director of our Society will speak on his original research on the old Middlesex Canal.

Mid-winter — Date to be announced.

3rd Annual Anniversary Dinner — Weston High School — April 11, 1967

Speaker: Mr. Roger S. Webb, president of R.A.R.E. (Relocaters of Antique Real Estate) of Cambridge, Mass.

Tour of historic spots in Duxbury — May — Date to be announced.