

WESTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY

THE WESTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY
BULLETIN

JANUARY 1968, VOL. IV, No. 2

Next Meeting

March 5 8 p.m.

First Parish Hall

Illustrated Lecture by Mrs. William B. Floyd

LOWER NEWTON STREET
AN ARCHITECTURAL PERSPECTIVE

During the years since 1956 when Margaret Floyd received her M.A. from the University of New Mexico in the History of Art in Architecture, she has actively engaged in surveying and analyzing buildings, in speaking and in writing. Her interest in architectural history now has focused on the southeastern part of Weston, particularly on the older homes in the Chiltern Hundreds area. This lies to the west of Park Road, the lower part of which formerly was known as East Newton Street. According to a plan of land conveyed in 1888 by the Executors of the Estate of Charles T. Hubbard to his heirs, five homes had been erected there. They formed the nucleus of one of the finest residential areas in town. The magnificent view from this hilltop across the Charles River valley is truly impressive. It so intrigued Mr. Hubbard that he purchased numerous parcels of it along East Newton Street. Mrs. Floyd will begin with what we now see in this general vicinity and explain its development in the light of the personalities which influenced it.

EXCERPTS FROM THE PRESIDENT'S ANNUAL REPORT

For the benefit of those who had to miss the Annual Meeting held on November 14, 1967, the following highlights are given:

Achievements of the Year:

Historical Map (50c each, Postage 4c): Prepared by the Lucas Committee, the map is on sale at The Jones House, The Newton-Waltham Bank and Trust Company, The Village Book Stall, The Kien Chung Tea House and The College Store at Regis College. It is an authentic, scholarly souvenir of Weston to be kept and cherished by every citizen. Many are mailing maps to friends and relatives throughout the world.

Restoration Law Office: Under the supervision of Mr. and Mrs. F. Leslie Ford and Mr. and Mrs. Travis, a miracle of restoration is underway. Special thanks go to volunteers George Pink, Mr. and Mrs. Richard Albrecht, Mrs. Robert McLeod, Mrs. Robert Murkland, Mrs. F. William Aseltine, Miss Joan Simpson and Weston's spryest octogenarian, Eddie Edmunds. Come spring, the work of these volunteers, augmented by the many more who are needed, will reflect itself in an amazingly attractive transformation. If you are unable to work (a log fire will keep you warm), you are invited to give or get objects suitable for the decor of an early 19th Century Law Office.

Town and Gown: The Burgoyne Elm Project with the schools, the rewarding archaeological "dig" of High School history students on the site of the original Hews Pottery Works, the research papers being prepared with membership sponsorship by 17 Regis College Students majoring in history and the ready cooperation of Weston College in our plans to explore the historic sites on their campus, are all instances of remarkably significant import to Town and Gown. These activities are spreading an air of excitement throughout the community, contributing as they do to an awareness of our matchless history on the part of every living generation from cradle to grave.

Program: Accolades to Mrs. Boardman Bump and her Program Committee for the lectures of Jean Gorely, Brent Dickson and Roger Webb plus the tour of the Kendall Whaling Museum in Sharon. Mrs. Richard Albrecht and her committee have planned the attractive future program listed elsewhere in this issue.

Every Member Get A Member:

We are proud of the many citizens who are regularly paying dues but each of us should see that every family in this great town supports our Society. The cost of our "Bulletin," of the Law Office restoration and of our many other projects is steadily rising and we must have a commensurate increase in revenue which can best be assured through a larger number of supporting members. Life Memberships, the principal of which is maintained as endowment, represent in annual interest, the equivalent of five yearly dues, and there is no more helpful investment that any of us can make to safeguard the preservation of Weston's best. By the kind of teamwork for which we are famous, let us determine that by June we shall have doubled the membership of the Weston Historical Society. Let us thus know that the future of Weston's past is secure.

Checks should be mailed to Harry B. Jones, Treasurer, 448 Concord Road, Weston, Massachusetts, 02193

Annual Meeting Election Results

Acting on the nominations proposed by Mr. Leonard Dowse and his committee, members at the annual meeting on November 14th elected the following:

Honorary Director for Life: Henry W. Patterson

Directors for 3 years: John W. Ayer, John G. Brooks and Mrs. Homer N. Sweet.

President: Harold G. Travis

Vice President: Harold B. Willis, Jr.

2nd Vice President: Charles P. Gorely, Jr.

Treasurer: Harry B. Jones

Secretary: Mrs. C. Vinal Cooke

Clerk: John G. Brooks

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Continuing Directors: J. Kenneth Bennett, Philip F. Coburn, Brenton H. Dickson, Erlund Field, Grant M. Palmer, Jr., Harold G. Travis, Harold B. Willis, Jr.

Thank You, Rotary!

We are proud to announce that The Rotary Club of Weston has agreed to equip the Welcome Wagon with enough copies of our Historical Map of Weston so that each new comer to the Town will be presented a copy with the Rotary's compliments. This is not the first act of cooperation with our objectives by this civic organization, and we are indeed grateful.

Welcome to New Members

The Society is pleased to welcome the following new members: Miss Lee Dineen, Angele Hall, Regis College, Mrs. Joseph L. Knowlton, 633 Boston Post Road and Mrs. Bryant O. Spencer, 44 Sunset Road.

One regular member has recently changed to a Life Membership.

News from The Jones House

The Society's rooms in The Jones House will not be open on a regular basis until early March. They will, however, be open on appointment by calling Mrs. James Fraser, 894-2872 or Mrs. Robert McLeod, 893-0406.

Thanks and appreciation are given to the following for their recent gifts and donations: Mrs. Roger Woodbury, Mrs. William Elliston, Mr. Walter H. Trumbull, Mrs. Helen Wells, Mrs. William R. Dewey, Jr., Mrs. Richard Howard, Mrs. Roger Woodman, Mrs. J. Herbert Lawson, Mrs. David Little, Mrs. George W. Cutting, Jr., Mrs. Edward Hall, Miss Elizabeth Kenney, Mrs. M. Kirkbride Patterson, Mr. Harold G. Travis, Sister Fidelma of Regis College and the late Miss Rebecca McKenna.

THE JOSIAH SMITH TAVERN (The Jones House)

"I asked . . . how far it was to a tavern; he said a mile . . . another half mile above, the first kept by Joel Smith, a good tavern and a good liberty man; the other kept by Captain Isaac Jones, a wicked Tory, . . . British officers go there from Boston. Came to Smith's tavern where two teamsters were tackling their teams. . . . I went into the house and asked for a drink of rum and molasses, one of the men followed me and told Smith he guessed I was a British spy. . . . Smith . . . sent me to Captain Jones who kept a tavern at the Sign of the Golden Ball." (Excerpt from John Howe's Journal)

Such was the Smith tavern just prior to the Revolution. Today it overlooks the Town Green — a sentinel that has spanned the centuries — a lone survivor of a group of buildings which constituted Weston Center. It opened as a tavern in 1757 and immediately became successful. Six years later Josiah Smith enlarged the original square building by the addition of a new kitchen, barroom and reception room downstairs and a large ballroom upstairs where a Weston belle, according to an entry in her diary, "danced until three o'clock in the morning." Over the years this room has been put to many uses — school classes, town meetings, church services, etc. Measuring 20 by 50 feet, it compared favorably in size with many of the ballrooms of its time.

In stagecoach days, horses were "baited" at Josiah Smith's while the passengers ate breakfast. This was often the first stop on a journey from Boston to New York — a journey that, before 1800, required as much as a week. The taverns along the way offered entertainment for man and beast and were an important feature of any village with their large kitchens, ample dining facilities and, of course, the barroom — that democratic place where the village squire and itinerant tramp (welcome as long as his pennies held out) might exchange gossip and opinions over a glass of rum and molasses. With rum selling at 37¢ a gallon the tramp could do better than today. Many taverns were provided with large stabling capacity, numerous stalls and adjoining sheds with feed troughs. Landlords were usually men of consequence and Josiah was no exception. In the early 1770s he was one of the few people in town rich enough to own two Negro slaves. Isaac Jones of the Golden Ball Tavern owned but one.

The three main factors responsible for Josiah's immediate success were: intensive travelling along the highway, a lively commerce in the village and finally the sale of liquor.

There were many stage coach lines out of Boston at an early date "but none earlier or more important than the one along the Boston Post Road" through Weston and on to Worcester and New York. Even after the completion of the Worcester Turnpike (Route 9) in 1810, stage coaches continued serving the towns along the old line and remained the all important way of travel to the west and south until the opening of the Boston and Worcester Railroad in 1835. From 1820-35 there were several well established lines that made five trips a day in each direction through Weston. Two of these, whose proprietors came from East Sudbury, ran in relays of horses — first from Boston to East Sudbury with the second change at Northboro.

Other familiar sights along the 'great roads' in the early days were the canvas-topped wagons of the marketers, laden with produce from up country, and the constant flow of 'heavy teams' drawn by oxen, carrying such merchandise as wood, hay, cider, apples etc. The great open spaces on the third floor of the Josiah Smith Tavern provided sleeping accommodations for the teamsters and marketers as well as the drovers who brought cattle down to market on foot. They were a rough crowd, rendered even rougher by their prolonged visits to the barroom and the landlord must always be concerned lest they set fire to his hostelry. It is said that Mr. Reeves of the Reeves Tavern in Wayland slept with these men on the third floor to guard against such a possibility and no doubt Josiah Smith and his son Joel did the same.

Completion of the Boston and Worcester Railroad marked the end of intensive stagecoaching through Weston. By 1845, when the Fitchburg Railroad was completed, Weston stagnated as a stage stop and tavern business had long since been discontinued.

The second factor contributing to the prosperity of Weston taverns was the commercial aspect of the town. In the early nineteenth century Weston became an important shopping center. People from out of town would come once or twice a year to do their shopping and put up for the night at the various taverns. In those days nobody would think of going to Boston to shop. It was a long, circuitous trip — either through Roxbury or by ferry from Somerville — so Weston, at the intersection of three important thoroughfares, was ideally situated to attract trade from the outside. People even came from Waltham to do their shopping in Weston. Lamson's store, across the street from the tavern, was noted for the quality and variety of its dry goods and a tailor next door was available for fashioning the cloth to the desires of the customers. Lamson's store was considered the most important of its kind in Middlesex County. George Smith, Josiah's grandson, operated a store where the library is today, selling mostly groceries. A George Bigelow operated still another store in the west end of the Josiah Smith Tavern (1838).

Mr. Charles Merriam who succeeded Mr. Lamson in the dry goods business and Mr. H. W. Wellington, who succeeded Mr. Merriam, both went to Boston and became prosperous merchants. They timed their departure well for within a few years Weston's era of prosperity was "blown out by the whistle of the steam engine."

The third factor influencing the success of Weston taverns which, like the other two, has become a thing of the past, was the sale of liquor. Bar-rooms did a lucrative business with town toppers and transient teamsters and had their own entrance so that the gentlefolk would not have to be humiliated or embarrassed by the presence of ruffians and habitual drunkards. The custom of drinking was not frowned upon in the early days. Liquor was considered a necessity and water more or less superfluous. Housewives made homebrew and their husbands, cider. There was always a drink available for any guest who happened to drop in at the house. Drunkenness, as we know it today, was a rarity. The farmers were hard drinkers but they worked it off. Temperance and anti-cardplaying crusades didn't get underway until the 1830's.

Nor was the clergy averse to an occasional snorter. Ministers distilled liquor for their private use and sometimes owned commercial distilleries. The story is told of a minister's wife who gave an Indian a drink of her hard cider. When he had finished he set the pot down, smacked his lips and said Adam and Eve were "rightlie damned for eating ye appills in ye garden of Eden, they should have made them into cyder." Another minister, during one of the early crusades was asked by a female temperance worker to sign a pledge. He read it aloud and was arrested by the phrase, "unless under the advise of my physician." He agreed to sign the pledge with the understanding that he was his own physician!

Still another factor contributing to the popularity of the Josiah Smith Tavern might be mentioned — surreptitious card playing. On the third floor, tucked away beneath the eaves was a secret room where the sporty set met and gambled. There were no windows, the only light being furnished by a candle or two on the table, which, according to Lamson was covered with a green baize cloth. An accumulation of candlewax on the floor could be found there many years later. So secure and so hidden from the outside world were these "degenerate sons of Bible-loving Christians" that they could indulge in their sinful occupation at any hour of the day or night, undetected. They even played on Sundays as the minister preached the gospel across the street "now and again seeking to drown their quickening consciences in free potations of rum and sugar." Despite the scandalous behaviour of these Sabbath breakers and the road to ruination that they chose to follow, it is a well-known fact that many of them prospered and became men of importance and highly respected citizens.

Josiah Smith died in 1782 and was succeeded by his son Joel. Both Joel and Josiah were prominent in town politics and held the offices of town clerk and selectman at one time or another. Joel's son-in-law, George W. Pierce, was the next landlord and he was succeeded by Messrs. Macomber and Warren respectively. By 1838 the building was no longer a tavern, although it was not brought by the Jones brothers until 1842.

Marshall Jones was born in the Hannah Gowing house on Highland Street in 1791. He served his apprenticeship in the harness business with Mr. Hobbs on North Avenue and in 1824 bought the Abraham Hews house, which today is occupied by doctor's offices, and there set up a profitable business in harness and paint. His brother John worked with him as a journeyman until taken into partnership when the firm became known as M. & J. Jones. They both became men of considerable wealth.

Even after they bought the Josiah Smith tavern, the ballroom was used for public purposes. A town meeting was held there in 1847. Some time after this the great room was divided into three bedrooms and numerous closets and it remained in this disguised condition until the house was restored in the 1950's.

John Jones's granddaughters, Alice and Ellen Jones, continued to occupy the house as long as they lived. Alice died in 1947 and Ellen in 1950, at which time the ancient landmark passed into the hands of the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities.

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



New Appointments

The President has appointed a "Project Burgoyne Elm" committee comprising Howard M. Forbes, Chairman, Mrs. Daniel F. Viles, Jr., and Mr. Galen Green to supervise the utilization of the wood and the making of souvenirs therefrom by students in the Industrial Arts Department of the Senior and Junior High Schools. The first Weston Historical Society awards for excellence will be made, it is expected, by Commencement in June, to be continued annually for many years to come.

Mrs. William B. Floyd, the speaker at our forthcoming March meeting, has been appointed to serve the Society, Town, and private owners of old homes and sites by outlining and guiding steps that should be taken in order to have historic buildings and sites certified by Federal and State authorities. With Miss Elizabeth Kenney, she and Mr. Travis attended at the Old South Meeting House in Boston on November 30th, the regional conference held by the Secretary of State on Public Law 89-665, The National Historic Preservation Act, The National Register. Delegates were present from New England and New York, and procedures were explained in detail by the Chairman of the Massachusetts Historic Commission and staff members of the National Park Service.

Keeping Faith With The Past

By vote of the Directors, our President relayed to fellow member, Rev. Harry Hoehler, the congratulations and gratitude of our Society to the members of the First Parish Church in Weston for the appropriate and tasteful addition that has just been completed on, or adjacent to, the sacred site of the original Meeting House. The letter said in part:

"The skillful manner in which the commodious addition has been blended into the natural setting which we all admire, and the courage and consideration you have demonstrated in carrying on the fieldstone motif, understandably at substantial extra cost, is to be most warmly commended. You too have kept faith with the glorious and historic past of old Weston so that generations yet unborn, will be inspired by your example to cherish their inheritance and to feed the altar fires their fathers lit. May the First Parish that started here in the 17th Century enter the 21st determined, no matter what the perils of the world may be, to continue in the tradition of service to Almighty God and through Him, to our fellow men."



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

Extra copies of the "Bulletin" are available for 15c. Please contact Mrs. H. Eugene Jones, Bulletin Editor, 899-0177.



Program Highlights

1968

- March 5 Illustrated Lecture by Mrs. William B. Floyd
 "Lower Newton Street — An Architectural Perspective"
 8:00 p.m. — First Parish Hall
- April 23 4th Annual Charter Anniversary Dinner
 Lecture by Col. Edward P. Hamilton on "Early Mills"