

THE WESTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY

BULLETIN

MAY 1969, VOL. V, NO. 4



This issue of our bulletin is dedicated to the memory of Henry Whitely Patterson. Harry was one of our original directors. His leadership as chairman of Weston's Two Hundred and Fiftieth Anniversary Celebration inspired the organization of our society. Though he patiently endured poor health, it was his contagious spirit that motivated our programs.

Eulogy by Dr. Miles Hanson

May 2, 1969

We are gathered together here in this place of hallowed memories, to express our heartfelt gratitude for the great privilege we have enjoyed of having shared the friendship and companionship of Henry Whitely Patterson, whose labors now are ended, as he rests in the peace and quietude of God's nearest presence.

Harry was blessed with a full, a rich and an unusually varied life, for which he was wholeheartedly grateful.

He always had the courage of his convictions. He served, during the First World War in the Foreign Legion of the French Army in Europe.

In the second World War, he joined the United States Air Force. He was highly honored for his skill and devotion, as he took part in the fierce battles at Guadalcanal, and the surrounding islands, which were so very important in the Great War.

He loved life in all its many aspects. He possessed a never-failing creative imagination, which made him an authority on the history of the two towns he ardently admired, Wayland and Weston. He firmly desired that the happenings in these two communities should not be forgotten, so he preserved them in the stories he wrote, taken from their very interesting history of almost three centuries. This attitude of his stimulated the formation and the direction of the Weston Historical Society which has attained such a high reputation.

He was a born playwright. His plays were highly regarded when they were performed by the First Parish Friendly of this church, of which he was a loyal and devoted member.

He was always calm in spirit, modest, sympathetic, humorous and kind.

He was unfailingly thankful for all the gifts of nature and of grace, bestowed upon him, which brought him happiness and joy.

When sickness came to him, he faced it with unbroken courage, without murmur and without complaint.

Wherever we may be, as we now go our separate ways, we shall always feel that we are all more closely bound together in the gracious bonds of friendship, because we have been privileged to share our companionship with Harry, the memories of which will remain in our hearts, unto our life's end. May we ever be loyal to the ideals he so deeply cherished.

Lively Programs Ahead

At its May twelfth meeting, the Board of Directors unanimously endorsed a continuation of the type of programs that has featured every one of the many meetings which the Society has held in the past half dozen years. Emphasis as usual will be placed on the contributions of our own talented members. New skills and stories are coming to the surface and the Program Committee plans to announce a detailed schedule of forthcoming events in our next issue.

Meanwhile we look forward to more use of the Josiah Smith Tavern museum and of our new headquarters, the Isaac Fiske Law Office. A series of exhibits and teas is now being planned. Arrangements are also being made for the showing of MUSIC OF WILLIAMSBURG, a 16mm sound and full color motion picture. Against the colorful background of restored eighteenth century Williamsburg, it depicts the charm and scope of music in a colonial community. It includes the work songs of the field hands, country fiddling, the sounds of a summer storm, the songs of children at play, and as a special treat, Benjamin Franklin's harmonica is heard at a drawing-room recital.

Travel and Transportation Through Weston

Presented at the Weston Historical Society Charter Anniversary Dinner
April 15, 1969 by Brenton H. Dickson.

1. Pre-stagecoach era.

Considering Weston's glorious past in the transportation picture, it seems a little ignominious that today it should be known to the outsider as the place where you pay toll on the Massachusetts Turnpike. But then, when I was young, it was known as the 'town with the chimneys.' Route 20, or Central Avenue as it was called, was the main automobile route between Boston and New York and the principal landmark in Weston was a pair of chimneys that rose prominently from a cellar hole by the side of the road. For twenty-odd years motorists traveling along the highway passed these unsightly objects and seeing them year after year no doubt wondered why they weren't pulled down. People in town wondered the same thing. There were various theories one being that George Emerson, the owner, refused to disturb them until an insurance claim had been settled while the insurance company, believing the fire of incendiary origin, refused to settle; so the stalemate persisted.

George Emerson lived beyond the cellar hole in a dilapidated shack that was surrounded by all kinds of rubbish and junk. He himself was as ungroomed as the surroundings. He had a perpetual growth of black stubble on his face and streaks of grease and grime; his clothes were old and dirty and he looked something like a scarecrow; yet out of this extraordinary creature came a voice as soft-spoken and cultivated as you could ask for. This may have been on account of a college education — or perhaps the type of person he associated with in business. His business was raising and training gamecock, and as cockfighting in New England has always been the 'gentleman's sport' his clientele was naturally of the higher order. Before the barn became too dilapidated for safety these gentlemen would congregate there to fight their cocks on the sly. Now anyone who has ever attended a New England cockfight knows the precautions that must be taken against a possible raid. It is not only illegal to hold one of these bouts — it is also illegal to attend one and guards must be posted at strategic points to warn the audience of any encroachment by the law. The mere mention of the word 'cops' precipitates a sudden scramble in all directions.

Once a young man was attending his first cockfight at Emerson's when the alarm was sounded and he escaped through a window and took to the woods. Soon he realized he was being followed and he ran as fast as he could over the rather uneven terrain. Finally he became exhausted, tripped on a fallen branch and fell to the ground. When his pursuer caught up to him he said, "I give up. Might as well arrest me. I can't go another step."

Whereupon his pursuer explained, "I'm not a cop — I've just been following you because I thought you knew the way out of here."

Now what has all this got to do with transportation? Well — the chimneys were all that remained of the historic Flagg Tavern. Though not Weston's earliest tavern by any means, in its day it was a noted hostelry which Duncan Hines, had he been living, would have heartily endorsed. Here George Washington spent the night and John Adams dined on his way to Boston — indeed many a weary traveler along the old Post Road stopped at Flagg's for rest and refreshment. It is said that at one time the 'post rider,' for whom the road was named, made periodic stops there to deliver mail, newsletters and any gossip from the outside world. The earliest post rider, who antedated the tavern by many years, was the first traveler through town who operated on schedule. Other travel, and there was plenty of it, was unscheduled.

The Post Road, or the Weston section of it, originated as an Indian trail, at first ill-defined and later marked by the hobnailed boots of the early settlers who traveled on foot. Even colonial governors walked to their destinations. Sometimes they were carried across the streams 'piggy-back' by their Indian guides and there is an account of Governor Winthrop's crossing a stream by this method. The hoofs of cattle made these trails better defined and trees were blazed to serve as guideposts.

Two important Indian trails diverged near the western boundary of town — the Bay Path which went to Sudbury, Marlboro and on to Worcester and the Old Connecticut Path which veered off to the south through Framingham and Grafton. As near as I can tell, the Bay Path went across the Wayland Plains through the old East Sudbury Village, across the river and over the hills to what is now South Sudbury. This was undoubtedly the route of the first post riders and the early stagecoaches. The present Route 20 through Wayland is of more recent origin.

Long distance travelers on these early roads were principally merchants and pedlars, artisans, an occasional clergyman and, in times of war, soldiers. As the roads became

better marked travelers began to go on horseback. An ingenious method of travel, known as 'riding and tying' made it possible for two men to share a single horse. One of them would ride an agreed distance while the other followed on foot. At the end of the distance the rider would dismount, tie the horse to a tree and walk on ahead. His companion, when he got to the horse, would mount it, overtake his walking friend and proceed to the next tying point. This technique gave both rider and horse a chance to get some rest and it was possible to travel all day without stopping.

On January 22, 1673 the first post rider left New York and arrived in Boston two weeks later having traveled via New Haven, Hartford, Springfield, Worcester and Weston. Within a month he was back in New York again. He continued running his route, leaving monthly, until August when service was discontinued because the Dutch had taken possession of the city. Then came King Philip's war which further interrupted service, but in 1685 the route was reestablished and continued until the Revolution. By this time the road, or trail was in better condition and a Boston-New York post went weekly in summer and fortnightly during the winter months. The rider covered about 50 miles a day. There was not too much communication between the two cities — no more mail than could be carried in a pair of saddlebags.

The early post rider was a well informed individual for he not only picked up gossip in the towns along the route but he also took time off to read and digest the letters he carried. Government officials, realizing this, were apt to use code in communicating with one another. On Post Day, when the rider was due in town, the inhabitants would assemble in the local tavern for the distribution of mail, if there was any, and of newsletters and of course, the rider's hearsay.

Besides being a sworn messenger, the post rider was also required to assist any travelers who chose to accompany him, to direct them to the best roads and the best places to stop for a meal or for the night. He was also an early version of today's *moonlighter* in that he managed to do a certain amount of trading on the side, delivering cattle for farmers and transacting business for his own account and for the account of others. His schedule was not so tight that he couldn't do this. One rider, when he had extra time on his hands, was noted for knitting sweaters and scarfs as his horse shuffled along unguided.

The charge for postage was determined by the mile and in order that there be no mistake about this Benjamin Franklin, while postmaster, put milestones between Boston and New York. These were known as 'Franklinstones' and there are few, if any, left in their original locations. Franklin had a device hitched to the wheel of his carriage that registered mileage and at each mile a stone was dropped and set in place by a gang of diggers who followed him. This was in 1753, nearly 80 years after the first post rider made the trip from New York to Boston.

Roads were still very primitive. Rural inhabitants were not concerned with long distance travel and were not in favor of improving thoroughfares for the benefit of outsiders. A village was an independent community and self-sufficient. Women of the farm spun cloth from the wool of sheep they had grown; grain was harvested for the cattle and vegetables for the family. When cattle was slaughtered for meat the farmer dressed the hides and took them to the local artisan to be made into shoes. There was always a grist mill not too far away where grain could be taken and ground into flour. And so the only real need for roads as the farmer saw it, was for the weekly trip to church and an occasional visit to the store to buy various articles or sell any surplus produce.

Until well into the 19th century all private travel was by horseback. The farmers used a pillion — a double saddle where the woman sat behind the man. Bundles and articles of small freight were carried in baskets called 'paniers'. It was not uncommon to see a man with his wife and small family aboard a single horse either on their way to church or perhaps to visit some neighbors. Carriages were for the cities. Wheeled vehicles traveling country roads were for freight only. They were drawn by oxen if transporting heavy goods such as lumber and firewood or by horses if laden with perishables. The driver walked beside the wagon and guided the animals — he never rode. During the daylight hours a constant procession of teams traveled the important thoroughfares and so Weston got its full share of traffic — wagons, cattle drivers and, on North Avenue, turkeys from New Hampshire and Vermont which were driven down to Boston in large flocks every autumn.

Taverns for the accommodation of these travelers rapidly came into being and many householders capitalized on the situation by putting up people for the night, which explains why many old houses are said to have served as taverns at one time or another. In Weston there were several taverns operating exclusively as such and a number of these achieved notoriety in Revolutionary times and enjoyed prosperity in the stagecoaching era that followed.

(to be continued)

The second installment will deal with stagecoaches and taverns and the third with railroads, busses and planes.

An Outstanding Award

The Weston Historical Society is happy to announce that an award has been made to establish the planting of a simple, old fashioned garden at its headquarters, the 1805 Isaac Fiske Law Office at 626 Boston Post Road. This is a joint cooperative effort of the Country Garden Club, the Garden Interest Group of the Weston Community League, and the Weston Garden Club.

At the 42nd annual meeting of the Massachusetts Federation of Garden Clubs on May 21, 1969, Mr. Philip M. Read, Regional Director of Public Relations of the Sears, Roebuck & Co. presented a check for \$200 to Mrs. Reginald D. Wells, District Director. This civic beautification program is jointly sponsored by the Sears, Roebuck & Co., and the Massachusetts Federation of Garden Clubs of which Mrs. Ralph A. Parker of Wayland is chairman. Not only is this award a most helpful addition to our Restoration Fund, but even more significantly it is a worthy tribute to the spirit of Weston as exemplified by the manner in which our three garden club organizations are working together constantly for the preservation of Weston's natural beauty.



Annual Dues: \$3.00 per person, \$5.00 per family

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 P.O. Box 343, Weston 02193

President

Mr. Harold G. Travis

899-4515

Extra copies of the "Bulletin" are available for 25c. Please contact Mrs. Frederick D. Bonner, 893-4346.

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