

THE WESTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY

BULLETIN

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Isaac Fiske's Desk

One of many appropriate and attractive features of our headquarters at 626 Boston Post Road. On its right is one of the 1850 handcarved oak chairs that once graced the study of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle.

Our Next Event

On Friday evening, October 24, at 8 P.M. at the Country School the musical, pictorial film, **MUSIC OF WILLIAMSBURG**, will be shown.

Against the colorful background of restored Williamsburg this picture depicts the charm and scope of music in a colonial community.

You'll see a seafarer from Liverpool, the fifers and drummers of the Colonial militia, merchants and craftsmen. You'll hear country fiddling, the work songs of the field hands and the sound of Benjamin Franklin's glass armonica. (That's the way he spelled it.)

No charge for members. Dollar contributions for guests will be most acceptable.

The "What, Who, When and How" of Weston History

WHAT made Weston the great little town that it is? These green fields and forests, the picturesque Town Green, parks, cemeteries, winding roads, and buildings both private and public, didn't just happen. Weston's esprit de corps, surpassed by none and equalled by few towns, has always been a matter of record, and once again has just been exemplified by the spontaneous beautification of the Kendal Green railroad station not alone by those who still commute to Boston by train but by others who, recognizing its historic value, wanted to lend a hand just as a few years ago, citizens by the score at the time of the 250th Anniversary of the Town's incorporation brought forth a new park in an equally prominent spot.

WHO it was that made Weston the lovely town it has always been makes no difference. The host of people who have worked for this community over three hundred years and more did so not for personal gain but were motivated by their pride in the town. Their satisfaction came from working together for the common good, and we of today must emulate their example if we are to preserve and protect the character of this community despite its growth.

WHEN is yesterday, today, and tomorrow. Just as the Weston of today is due to people who cared enough to work for it, so must we now in every conscious effort, strain and strive to protect what is unique and beautiful. If history were only yesterday and ended there, coming generations would soon lose our spirit. In restoring and preserving the best of what's old, we establish something real in the hearts and minds of our youth. Had no one recently cared, what would have happened to the Josiah Smith and Golden Ball Taverns, the Isaac Fiske Law Office, the John W. Scott house and many other magnificent examples of Colonial times? A hundred years from now, suppose nobody would currently have recognized the unique character and stately beauty of many of our more recently built buildings such as the Library, the Town Hall, the Fire Station, and yes, the two railroad stations at Weston and Kendal Green? Indeed history is being made today and as we give way to progress in architectural style, let us make sure that we fight to preserve the best of today for the sake of tomorrow.

HOW can we, the members of Weston Historical Society, best work to this end? First of all, our example by being members is contagious to the extent that by our deeds as well as words, we show that we are doing something to preserve and protect the town's image. After all, the Weston Historical Society is the very heart and soul of Weston. Its membership, open to all, is town-wide and there is no reason why every single soul in this town should not be glad to support our united effort by joining and taking part. Have you done as much as you can to bring your neighbors and friends into our enthusiastic group? Let's see what we each can do to swell our ranks. Also we want volunteers for our active program. The three garden clubs of Weston won an award for the design of the new bulb garden behind our Law Office headquarters. Who will volunteer to keep it weeded and tasteful? Who will step forward without being asked, to help maintain, catalogue, and display the many historic objects and records in our possession? Come forward and be welcomed for your active interest in any field you feel is historically worthwhile. Then indeed will you, and we all, fully come to realize "The What, Who, When and How" of Weston history.

Travel and Transportation Through Weston

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

2. Pre-stagecoach era.

The first successful stagecoach on the Boston Post Road was operated by Captain Levi Pease of Shrewsbury, "captain" being a courtesy title given to stage drivers. In 1783 he inaugurated service between Boston and Hartford despite considerable criticism and ridicule. "The time may come," a Boston hack driver said, "when the public will support a stage from Hartford to Boston but not in your day or mine." Nevertheless, Pease went ahead with the project and not long afterwards got a contract to carry mail and extended his route to New York.

Early stagecoaches were uncomfortable affairs with no springs to take up the shock of the rough roads and no backs to the seats which were essentially planks laid across the body of the vehicle. The entrance was in front and in order to reach the back seat — a preferred location because there you had something to lean against — the passenger must climb over all the other seats. Most coaches were equipped with leather curtains which could be let down in rainy weather and buttoned up when it was fair. Nine passengers and driver was the usual capacity and any luggage was stowed under the passengers' feet. During spring when the mud was deep, "mud wagons," open affairs with three or four seats and no cover, were substituted. This whole method of travel was fraught with discomfort — or as one stagecoach passenger remarked, "It's a help to shift your position now and then and be bruised in a new place."

Passengers were expected to get out and walk up steep hills and to push the vehicle through snowdrifts or deep mudholes. The story is told of a time when the passengers flatly refused to get out and help. The perplexed driver sat down on a log by the side of the road and lit his pipe and when the passengers complained, he calmly answered, "Since them horses can't pull the carriage out of the mudhole and you won't help, we'll just have to sit here and wait till the dern thing dries up."

In retrospect, the stagecoach era may seem picturesque but a journey could be quite unpleasant. On a summer day there was intense heat and great volumes of dust stirred up by the horses hooves as they galloped along the parched highway and on a rainy day, great mud puddles through which the unguarded wheels churned, splashed mud and water onto the passengers. In winter the intense cold was bad enough but when the coach ran into a blinding snowstorm the discomforts were all but unbearable. Moreover, the journey was apt to start at an unreasonably early hour — two or three in the morning with several hours of travel before daylight. Longfellow, in describing a trip to Howe's Tavern in Sudbury (Wayside Inn) wrote: "The stage left Boston about three o'clock in the morning, reaching the Sudbury Tavern for breakfast, a considerable portion of the route being traveled in total darkness, and without your having the least idea who your companion might be."

When Levi Pease began operating, the distance from Boston to New York was 254 miles and the trip took a week. Over the next half century the roads were straightened and the distance cut down to 210 miles and the traveling time reduced to 1½ days. Most travelers, rather than get shaken to bits on the road, preferred to go by coach to Rhode Island and the rest of the way by sloop. But inland travel must still use the highway and during the first third of the nineteenth century the era of stagecoaching got into full swing. In Badger and Porter's Stage Register for 1830 we find 42 stagecoaches a week passing through Weston via North Avenue (Route 117) and nearly as many more on the Boston Post Road. The North Avenue coaches used four routes to Albany, one to Deerfield and one to Fitchburg. There were five routes on the Post Road, two of which went to Albany, two to Worcester via Sudbury and Marlboro, and another to Worcester via the Old Connecticut Path through Saxonville and Framingham.

Taverns in Weston where stages stopped were Daggett's on North Avenue and Flagg's on the Post Road. The earliest tavern in Weston was Baldwin's across from the Isaac Fiske Law Office and this as well as Flagg's, the Golden Ball and Josiah Smith

taverns, antedated the stagecoach and for many years served travelers on horseback, transient teamsters and thirsty citizens. Overnight guests were packed into tavern rooms regardless of whether or not they were strangers. Sometimes curtains were drawn around beds to give a feeling of privacy. Teamsters slept on the barroom floor near the fireplace or in the attic to which they often gained access by outside ladders so as not to offend the more genteel guests who could afford to pay for a bed.

The landlord of a sophisticated tavern such as we had in Weston was a genial soul and was usually standing at the door with a smile, ready to welcome his guests when they arrived. These men were often practical jokesters and a favorite stunt was to measure the girth of an obese customer and calculate the price of the dinner accordingly. And if an oversized traveler purchased two seats in the coach so he would have plenty of room, he was apt to find, on arriving at the coach, that one was inside and the other on top!

Licenses to sell liquor were given to the early taverns providing they were near a meeting house. During the winter the poorly built houses of worship were unbearably cold and drafty and in summer hot as an oven and the tavern offered welcome refreshment during the "nooning" period between morning and afternoon services. Alcohol was considered far less degrading and harmful than tobacco. Planting and use of tobacco was tolerated for medicinal purposes only. In Colonial times no smoking was allowed in public or in the presence of strangers. Two men couldn't smoke together or within two miles of the meeting house on Sundays. In Connecticut a man was allowed only one smoke in a journey of ten miles!

Liquor, on the other hand, was considered a necessity in New England. Even little children were given hot toddies to stop them crying. This was an infallible remedy for wind in the stomach. Almost everyone imbibed frequently although drunkenness was not too common. At weddings, funerals, church raisings and all kinds of gatherings a liberal supply of intoxicating drinks was deemed proper and healthful. Cider was a very common drink and as apple trees were not grafted this was the only use for the fruit they bore—which explains why, during the early temperance movements, whole orchards were cut down. If a caller was offered a mug of cider and the host apologized by saying, "I'm afraid it's pretty hard," the polite reply would be, "But it's harder when there is none."

Blackstrap, a combination of rum and molasses, was a popular drink and very inexpensive. Josiah Quincy remarked that blackstrap was a composition of which the secret, he hoped, reposed with the lost arts. "Of all the detestable drinks on which our American genius has expressed itself, this blackstrap was truly the most outrageous." Even so, a cask of rum and molasses could be found wherever liquor was served with salted codfish hanging nearby to stimulate the thirst of the potential customer. New England rum was more famous for its quantity and cheapness than for its excellence and it was blended with various ingredients and given such names as "mimbo" and "flip" and into these concoctions a red hot iron or "loggerhead" was inserted to make them creamy with foam and to give a burnt and bitter taste.

At a New England minister's ordination in 1785, eighty people attended and drank thirty bowls of punch before going to meeting. Sixty-eight of these people stayed to dinner and drank forty-four more bowls besides 18 bottles of wine, 8 bottles of brandy and a quantity of cherry rum. The account fails to mention how large the bowls were and whether the bottle were quarts or pints.

In the latter part of the 18th and early 19th centuries stagecoaching had become so important that there was a real need for better roads and as New England townspeople were reluctant to improve town roads for the benefit of outsiders, turnpikes financed by private capital came into being. These were sometimes referred to as "artificial roads" because they weren't made of local dirt but of gravel and fill brought in from nearby sources. The tollgates in Massachusetts were usually placed about 10 miles apart. Travelers who turned off on an intersecting road just short of a tollgate and joined the turnpike again on the next intersecting road were known as "shunpikers."

The first turnpike in Massachusetts went from Warren to Palmer and was incorporated in 1796. In the next 18 years, 97 more were chartered in the state. The Worcester Turnpike, the present Route 9, was incorporated in 1806. It was believed that shortening

the distance between Boston and Worcester would make this highway an important stage route but it didn't work that way; the coaches mostly continued on their old routes in order to get local business. Besides, the Worcester Turnpike was quite hilly. It is said that the surveyors from Boston lacked courage to locate in new and untried places and they more or less followed old roads as far as Brookline Village where they stopped for refreshment at the Punch Bowl Tavern. Afterwards, when they resumed their surveying, lack of courage was no longer any problem and they gaily laid their compasses for the longest possible straight lines ignoring hills, dales and other topographical obstacles.

Straightness seems to be a characteristic of the old turnpikes. As a result they went up and down too many hills to be practical and most of them in New England were financial failures. Except for the present Massachusetts Turnpike, no other has ever gone through Weston nor was Weston much affected by those in neighboring towns. The Worcester coaches still passed along the Post Road although a New York stage or two took the new and shorter route.

But the turnpike as well as the stagecoach was soon to be replaced by the railway and the coachman's horn by the steam whistle. The taverns were also doomed. With the advent of the railroad they would lose their transient businesses and with the advent of the temperance movement, their attraction as a place for meeting and good fellowship. Resolutions were signed by benevolent citizens who realized the evils of the demon rum and even little children were taught to abhor the stuff through the medium of moral rhymes such as the following:

Ladies and gentlemen — list to my song
Hurrah for temperance all the day long.
I'll taste not, touch not, handle not wine
And every little boy like me a temperance pledge should sign.

A Framingham clergyman who liked a little nip now and then was approached by a young crusader and asked to sign the pledge. He read the terms of the instrument aloud and when he came to the provision "unless under the advice of my physician" he agreed to sign and added that he wished it clearly understood that he was his own physician.

This same man was apt to visit the tavern every morning for his toddy and one very cold day he said, "Landlord — we'll have our toddy extra hot and extra strong this morning." The landlord brought the toddy and two glasses and hung around a minute, but as no invitation to drink was forthcoming, he left. Later that morning the old gentleman was picked up from the roadside by a passing Samaritan and carried home. Next morning he called at the tavern and told the landlord that something was wrong with yesterday's toddy.

"I know," said the landlord. "When you ordered it you said '*we'll* have *our* toddy extra hot and extra strong.' I thought *we* meant you and I, so I made double the usual quantity — and you drank it all."

"Hm," said the clergyman, "I see. In the future I must be more careful in the use of — er — the personal pronoun."

In New England railroading, Weston nearly scored another first, for the Boston and Worcester Railroad passed within its borders although there were no stops in town. The first train operating on this line went from Boston to Newton in May 1834 but by August, when trains were running through Weston to Wellesley, the Boston and Providence had already initiated service as far as Dedham. The Fitchburg Railroad through Kendal Green was completed eleven years later and now the only stagecoach through town met the train at Stony Brook and took passengers and mail to Weston, Wayland, Sudbury and Marlboro, and continued operating until the Central Massachusetts was completed in 1886.

The next and last installment of this article will deal with railroads and other forms of modern transportation.

Annual Meeting November 17th

Every member, which means *every* member, is urged to attend our annual business meeting in the Ballroom of the Josiah Smith Tavern on Monday evening, November 17th at 8 P.M. You will hear reports of committees and officers and will be asked to participate in the discussion of several significant projects. The three-year terms of Messrs. Dickson, Palmer, Travis, and Willis as directors are expiring. Phone your suggestions to Erlund Field, Chairman of the Nominating Committee, at 237-9899 prior to the meeting, and come prepared to participate in a meaningful evening.

"Weston's Fifty Oldest Houses" — November 22nd

By popular request, our fellow member, William R. Dewey, Jr., has agreed to show again at the Josiah Smith Tavern his collection of colored slides of Weston's oldest houses taken by him through the years. Those of us who saw them six years ago when they were one of the highlights of our 250th Anniversary Celebration are eager to see them again. Literally thousands of new residents have come to Weston since then, and there's nothing that will give them the feel of Weston as dramatically as these attractive scenes of interior and exterior old Weston homes.

The date is Saturday afternoon, November 22nd, and two showings are planned in order to accommodate the greatest number. The first run will start at 2 P.M. and the second at 3:30. Mr. Dewey has agreed to narrate the pictures as he shows them, and as seating is limited, you are urged to come early. Invite that new neighbor of yours to come and enjoy an afternoon in Old Weston.

Before and after, you are invited to visit the Society's rooms downstairs in the Josiah Smith Tavern ("The Jones House") where our Curator, Mrs. James E. Fraser, with Mrs. A. Bruce Downes of our Exhibits Committee will show you and your guests around. Our headquarters in the restored Isaac Fiske Law Office at 626 Boston Post Road will likewise be open for visitation. Come and see the miracles that have been wrought by those thirty-two volunteers who call themselves "The Midnight Sons." We know you'll like what you see and we hope it will suggest some finishing touches that you may be able to give to this historical gem.



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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