

# THE WESTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY BULLETIN

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## ISAAC FISKE'S MONUMENT

Stands in Central Cemetery just 200 feet west of his restored law office which is shown in right background. Shown in picture are, left to right, F. Leslie Ford, Chairman of Restoration, Harold G. Travis, President, and Roy L. Dickson, Treasurer.

## Isaac Fiske's Law Office: A Significant Restoration

Continued from our March issue

Downstairs were problems identical to those already described, and in addition we found other problems occasioned by the improvisations employed in the 1920 adaptation of the old barn shed into a downstairs living room, kitchen, and bathroom, so-called. Here an even larger gas heater dominated the available space and there was about an 18-inch clearance between the bathtub and sloping ceiling! Component parts of the wing were of different vintage. Heavy shingles or "Shakes" on the east side obviously antedated the building to which it was attached. The newel post at the foot of the stairs showed with scenic wormholes that it was really old.

One day Mr. Ford exclaimed, "Come over here and feel this." With persistent skill, he had reached the original wood and it was so smooth and beautiful that even though we knew it meant hundred of additional hours and ergs we excitedly agreed that we'd go all the way and wax the original woodwork.

By the spring of 1969 we had blended Steps 1 and 2. Restoration was 90% done and presentable enough for public inspection and limited use. Everything wasn't in apple order, but we felt we would let people see what had been accomplished, what more

had to be done, and what fixtures and furnishings still were desired. We could hardly believe after more than three thousand man hours of labor in two years that such a miraculous transformation had been made, bringing back into being another historic gem for Weston always to prize.

The long list of workers who gave their strength, talents, and time includes: Mr. and Mrs. Richard W. Albrecht, Mrs. F. William Aseltine Jr., Messrs. Charles G. Ball, Edward Briggs, Alan M. Campbell, George L. Downs, Dudley B. Dumaine, Edward Edmunds, Mesdames Dwight Foster, Edward H. Hall, Lyman Stone Hayes, David M. Kellogg, Jr., Robert Murkland, and Robert McLeod. Also Messrs. George J. Pink and George K. Sauerwein, Miss Joan Simpson, Mr. and Mrs. Leander Rafuse, Mr. Ed Willems, and the late Mrs. Allan T. Wheeler who, a few days before her death last February wrote: "I did get completely exhausted after 'Around The Cracker Barrel' but I was happy to make the curtains for the little Law Office." A few other comments should be noted to portray the same exultant spirit of all of the volunteer workers: —

"I was merely a window washer but each time that I was assigned to what ordinarily is a monstrous chore, I felt honored with a sacred trust. It was really exciting to touch those old, old irreplaceable panes. Their wave-like irregularities made them more interesting than modern glass. It was a fun enterprise rather than toil. In many respects I'm sorry it's over, but in every respect, I'm proud." — Carol Goodale Hayes.

"Everyone else did more than I. Besides, I'm ashamed to confess that in my zeal, I broke a window pane. After that I was set to washing the stove and sink; both unbreakable!" — Barbara Hall.

"When I arrived I was still recovering from broken and fractured vertebrae. Mary Aseltine and I started together, scraping paint, pulling off wallpaper wherever it was. Betty Travis and Marion Ford were busy with paint remover, scraping window casings and sills. The men were working in the waiting room. Ed Fraser let us use his tank vacuum cleaner. The fireplace was being cleaned and various doors and panels removed for bench work at home. Other days I scraped, and mixed patching plaster, filling many holes in both rooms. This was a dedicated group of people determined to finish their job. With the outside painted, the building looked just beautiful: such a wonderful achievement for the Town." Ruth Murkland.

"Restoration of the old Fiske Law Office was worthwhile. I was glad to participate in it. My assignment was to replace broken window panes and renew the putty on all windows. We had fun." — George Saurwein.

"Without your inspiration, Weston Historical Society might not now have a hearth of its own. The dark woodwork in the two front rooms was a discouraging sight and I was dismayed with the noxious fumes which came from the varnish remover the Fords were using when I came to work. Though I scraped, sanded, and cleaned a few of the windows, it was the overwhelming amount of work done by others which created the warmth of our Society's home. I'm sure all Weston is pleased and proud of your achievement." — Hope Albrecht.

Her husband, Dick, adds: "I fall into the classification of *also helped*. Whenever I appeared you others were already at it and you were still working when I left. During the fall of '67, George Pink and I did manage some outside painting." . . . .

"What appeared to be a hopeless, gargantuan task turned out to be a miracle in authentic restoration due to the dedicated labors of love by the participants who cared enough to work diligently and prudently. I gave the fewest hours and was not on hand at the beginning but I recall the lovely grain of wood showing through after scraping, the yanking of wallpaper, and the scrubbing and scouring of those stairs. When all is said and done, we will all remember the broken finger nails, the weary muscles, and differences of opinion, and all with a smile." — Helen McLeod.

"My work at the Law Office started in March, 1968. In the beginning I spent most of my time removing paint on window frames and sashes. Innumerable other things are noted in my diary. By the time I joined the crew the building had been put in good structural condition and we first concentrated on the two original rooms in front, particularly the east room." — Joan Simpson.

Then too, there was Eddie Edmonds. When his talents as a mason and all-round house problem solver were recalled, this World War I veteran proved to be the answer to many anguished prayers. We stood in the rundown landmark wondering what could possibly be done with that chimney and those yellowed drooping ceilings. We had been told that we'd have to rebuild the old chimney from the ground up and install a new ceiling. After one look, Eddie told us confidently what could be done. It sounded sensible

but we dreaded the cost. Sensing this he said, "Do I understand you and the others aren't charging anything for all the time you're spending here?" and being answered in the affirmative, added, "Well, I can't believe my time is worth any more than yours, so I'll be glad to do it for the people of Weston too."

With his assurance that the chimney would draw as well as it did in Isaac Fiske's day, we removed the big heater. Loose bricks were re-formed and re-set in both fireplaces. Soon a cheerful fire made us happy while we worked. While Ed carefully shored up the ceiling with so-called buttons, others of us set up window sashes for scraping and sanding while still others removed layer after layer of paint from doorsills and frames. Happy voices rang out above roar and racket. Workers of all degrees of skill could be placed into two categories. (1) those who worked while they talked and (2) those who couldn't, simultaneously!

The frosting on the cake was Roy L. Dickson who had just succeeded Harry Jones as Treasurer of the Society. One March morning in 1968 he encountered our President downtown and quietly inquired if we were still looking for volunteers. At that point we were beginning to sag worse than the ceilings Eddie Edmunds had bolstered. Let Roy give you his version in his own too modest words:

"Much preliminary work had been completed, the stripping of wallpaper, paint, etc. which was so necessary before we could proceed with the work under Chairman Ford's direction. The following are some of the remembrances of Vi and myself, for she faithfully jotted down the time I spent and some of the things I did.

"From March 30th through April we met in groups of 2, 3, and sometimes several, to sand woodwork, fill holes in plaster, paint, etc. from 9:30 through noon. From May 1st to 18th the work intensified as we got ready for open house on the 25th. The old linoleum floor covering was ripped up, floors sanded, walls painted, ceiling whitened, sometimes needing many more than two coats.

"Much debris was carted to the dump where we rescued enough Broadloom carpet to cover that cold downstairs floor: looks rather decent, — not perfect, — but will do. Now we had come to the final stages, — more painting, hanging doors, finishing windows. Alan Campbell who had done such a great job in renewing the oak door upstairs, brought back the old kitchen door after working at it at home for more than a hundred hours: a fine job of restoring.

"On November 1st we were again at work. The attic of the Jones House yielded the badly needed Franklin Stove for downstairs, and on the 16th, Les Ford and I got the pipe set up. Soon a brisk fire started but almost immediately we noticed that the clay tile flue which worked so well for gas, was starting to crack. Out went the fire and we asked the Fire Chief what he thought we should do. He suggested a new chimney from top to bottom.

"When on January 11, 1969 Mrs. Sweet donated the money for six new storm windows of the right style to protect the Law Office, Les, Red, and I each took two and gave them two coats of paint, ready for installation. Les drew plans for the new chimney and Red and I went to Waltham to inspect some granite blocks from an old building being razed, hoping they'd be adaptable for retaining walls and possibly the future garden. The cost of handling such heavy slabs proved too much. While the Fords basqued in Florida during February, we took his plans and found where the prefabricated chimney could be made. On March 20th, Eddie Edmunds agreed to install a base for the new chimney and we garnered some appropriately old bricks. On March 22nd while several of us were working like beavers, Charles Gorely came to hang the old clock he and his wife had donated. He had quite a job but did it right and it looks great. March 25th, Herb Nelson and his men finished installing the new chimney for us without charge, — a tremendous gift of time and skill. March 29th, Vi and I spent the whole day painting inside.

"Much work was done from April 5th to 18th getting ready for our Bay State visitors on the 19th. We painted the new chimney with two coats. Les brought the hinges for the doors and we hung them. The beautiful antique reproduction light fixtures which Mr. Herbert W. Hastings of Brook Road and the Georgian Brass Company of Newbury Street, Boston had donated for every room in the house were installed by one of our many anonymous allies. Vi finished second coats on doors, hinges, and andirons, — also the beams in the downstairs room. Joan Simpson, Marion Ford, and Betty Travis were all there working with us in various rooms. On the 15th I helped Betty lay her beautiful hand-hooked stair runner and there are many compliments on this work of art. She and Helen Wheeler finished the curtains and hung them on every window.

"April 19th was miserable and rainy, but large crowds of Bay State League visitors were much impressed. Memorial Day was celebrated on May 25th. On June 12th we had an outdoor picnic of all the workers. We voted to make it an annual affair. We recently purchased a timer for the Christmas lights. They look very pretty especially with snow on the ground and Betty's wreath on the door."

We have saved Leslie Ford's recollections for our dessert. His seasoned judgment and sense of humor shine through it all. His guidance in detail and over-all concept brought us triumphantly from darkness to dawn.

"Among thousands of memories are dropping a marble on the floors to check for unevenness—measuring to determine the amount of sagging in the ceilings—taking building measurements and drawing plans to show the two floors as they existed, with elevations of principal rooms. Such plans were the groundwork on which the course of future development depended, and I spent 60 hours on them. I remember that big gas heater with thermostatic control that was connected to a poorly installed electric plug by a cord with *no* insulation over the wires in several places. Fearing a jolly fire some cold, dark night I took the cord away. We removed old aluminum foil that had been installed over doors and around the rooms to conserve heat. And of course I remember scraping door frames and doors, taking apart the window casings, scraping and cleaning them and the muntins of all windows. What a job! Then the sanding and staining of all the wood, removing the picture molding that had been nailed around the perimeter of the rooms at the base to conceal the wide cracks and stop the passage of cold air.

"I remember: visiting four Boston hardware supply places for hinges, knobs, pulls, etc. of a design suitable for a building of this period,—making signs to place around the building to show the amount of work to be done by badly needed workers and helpers,—making plans for possible development of closets, and treatment of two fireplace walls. I must have spent forty hours on this alone.

"Yes I remember—rebuilding the office closet, adding a shelf, fixing the upper part for books and making doors for the lower door out of the old doors,—recutting the old doors in the waiting room, rehanging them and the doors to the entry closet. Parts of the old broken hardware were removed and new installed. All woodwork was scraped, sanded, and stained, taking well over 60 hours. I recall checking the old storm sash: few were of proper size and as the windows were not of standard size, we could use only custom made sash. Several windows had broken sash, so new panes of glass had to be installed. I also made a bar gate, staining and installing it at the head of the stairs to prevent anyone from falling due to the narrow passage and the winding stairs. It took about twenty hours to build this with no metal hinge.

"On and on my memories go:—making a sign to identify the building to people passing by, thus placing the Society's name before the public. At this time I was engaged in remodeling and adding to an old church that had been erected about the time of our building. I was able to acquire an old rough board, sand it somewhat so as to keep the feeling of age, paint it, and letter the sign in a style used in the 1800's. It took me two weeks. As the old chimney was wide open at the top and there was no regular heat from the fireplaces to create an up draft, the snow entered in quantities apparently to spend the winter. I designed a new chimney top to prevent the unwelcome intrusion and the work was ably and gratuitously done by Harold Breen of North Avenue, son-in-law of Eddie Edmunds.

"I remember working so well day after day with Roy Dickson and getting so much done together. We made many trips to get new parts for the Franklin Stove—flue sections, bends, and new smoke box. When we started a fire the old tile flue disintegrated, causing a real threat. I made the architectural details for the new chimney, its base and its extension through the second floor and onto the roof. We decided on the Van Packer chimney and Fire Chief Johnson approved it. It was ordered, Roy and Red delivered it from Roxbury, and Herb Nelson erected it at no charge. I also remember working on those ceilings. Having had good success with a heavy bodied sand paint I recommended its use. Mr. Willis graciously furnished this and all other paint for our entire project, and Red Travis, being some taller than I (therefore higher minded), did a fine painting job. I think he now has all the paint drippings out of his hair! Yes, there are countless memories, but I'll stop with just three more:—making a study of the framing of the old shed that was made a part of the building near the beginning of this century—checking the similarity of the window design, the muntins and the window catches,—also the *raison d'être* of the peculiar framing in the rear addition which supported the upper floor." — F. Leslie Ford.

The restoration of the Isaac Fiske Law Office is one of the finest examples of team effort that can be cited today. A band of Weston citizens from every walk of life performed a variety of menial tasks happily together in a common cause. While working diligently here, some were paying professionals for similar tasks at home. What was drudgery there was fun down here.

How can we measure the value of what these people did? The talent so freely given in literally thousands of hours, runs into astronomical figures, but money couldn't buy the care and concern each showed in every assignment. Truly it was a grand Weston project. Its spirit is reflected in the beautiful old-fashioned bulb garden created by the three garden clubs of Weston working in community effort as described in the January 1970 Bulletin.

What did it actually cost the Society in dollars and cents? For changing the wiring to 220 voltage, for six new storm windows, the final floor sanding, the new chimney from downstairs and a cap for the main chimney, removing the obsolete bathtub, gas stove and heater with pipes attached thereto, the new vacuum cleaner, the innumerable supplies of sandpaper, hardware, paint remover, etc., with much in the above categories donated by certain workers, the Society's treasury paid out only \$1,116.56. Simultaneously it was reimbursed by cash donations of \$206 and by the \$97 profit from the 1968 "Around the Cracker Barrel" production so that the net cost of a \$20,000 restoration was \$813.11. Annual membership dues enabled us to absorb this cost without detriment to our lively programs and many services. As long as Weston people support the work of preserving our rich heritage, the sky's the limit to what we can accomplish for the good of our Town and country.

This restoration report would be incomplete without acknowledging all the priceless gifts we have received for appropriately furnishing our headquarters. Long after most of us are gone the Isaac Fiske Law Office will bear grateful testimony to generous benefactors whose gifts are noted in a book that is displayed there.



President Harold G. Travis; Treasurer Roy L. Dickson; Recording Secretary John G. Brooks; Corresponding Secretary Susan Thrall; Curator Mrs. James E. Fraser; Exhibits Mrs. A. Bruce Downes; Finance Harry B. Jones; Garden Mrs. Everett Schwartz, Jr.; Hospitality Mrs. Reginald Wells; Information Mrs. Frederick D. Bonner; Law Office Mrs. F. Leslie Ford and Mrs. Travis; Liaison Mrs. D. Stephen Thrall; Library Grant M. Palmer, Jr.; Membership Mrs. Joseph Stubbs; Program Mrs. Marshall Dwinnell; and Research Erlund Field.

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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*

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899-4515

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

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## Memorial Days

The Law Office will be open for inspection on Monday, May 25 and on Saturday, May 30. Our library collection of law books, records of the General Court, and a complete set of Town Reports has been neatly assembled and catalogued. Outside in the garden, laurel, lilacs, and bulbs are in bloom. We hope many members will come to visit us with their friends.

## New Members

We warmly welcome into our membership Sister M. Jeanne d'Arc O'Hare, President of Regis College, Mr. and Mrs. George W. Newman of 66 Doublet Hill Road, Mr. and Mrs. Stephen W. Rowan, 173 Country Drive, and Selectman and Mrs. Thomas W. Underhill of 65 Aberdeen Road.

## In Memoriam

With deepest regret we record since our last Bulletin, the deaths of two loyal charter members, Messrs. Parker Harrison and William O. Kenney.