

THE WESTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY

BULLETIN

OCTOBER 1970, VOL. VII, No. 1



The West House on Church Street

FALL MEETING FEATURES JOSEPH HUDAK

On Wednesday evening, October twenty-eighth, at the First Parish Church Hall, the Society welcomes as its guest speaker, Mr. Joseph Hudak, member of the firm of Olmsted Associates, nationally known landscape architects. Mrs. Marshall Dwinnell, our Program Chairman, was a member of the group that accompanied him last April on the "Origins of Gardening" Tour through Italy, Spain, and Portugal. In her words she found him "an interesting and vibrant informal speaker."

The meeting will start at eight o'clock but all are urged to come early in time to enjoy a cup of coffee and brownies with him. Our hospitality committee suggests you arrive at seven-thirty. A special invitation has been extended to Weston's garden club members. Admission is free to all members of the Weston Historical Society while our guests will be asked to contribute a dollar. Come and bring your friends and family to what will surely be a most delightful evening on October twenty-eighth.

Mr. Hudak's career in practical and planned landscaping has been extensive. He graduated from Pennsylvania State College in 1951 with a degree in landscape architecture after three years of service in OPERATIONS CROSSROADS, BIKINI, U. S. Navy. Coming to Boston in 1952, he has been with his present firm continuously, being elected vice president in 1964. He has served as lecturer in the Graduate School of Design, Harvard University, is a

member of the American Society of Landscape Architects and the author of many articles in such notable publications as *House Beautiful*, *Horticulture*, *Flower and Garden*, and the Massachusetts Horticultural Society Flower Show Magazine.

While his lecture's title is "How Pure Do You Want To Be?", Mr. Hudak, who was host of the above mentioned "Origins of Gardening" Tour, will dwell substantially on a theme that's close to our hearts, — the philosophy of old fashioned gardens. We hope that prior to his talk, we may show him the bulb garden that was planted a year ago on the rear lawn of our own Issac Fiske Law Office by the three garden clubs of Weston and which has been so beautiful from the outset.

ANNUAL MEETING: NOVEMBER 18th

Our annual meeting of members has been scheduled for Wednesday evening, November eighteenth, at the Josiah Smith Tavern (Jones House). It will be called to order promptly at eight o'clock, and following the President's annual report, talks will be given by various activities chairmen and light refreshments served. Election of three directors whose terms are expiring, will be held after the recommendations of the nominating committee which is headed by Mrs. Kirkbride Patterson. Suggestions from the membership will be welcomed by her and her committee.

It is expected that a proposal will be made to permit the annual meeting to be held either in October or, as now, in November. All members are urged to come and participate in our discussions. Your active cooperation in helping the directors formulate the most worthwhile program for the year ahead is urgently solicited. Come with the whole family and bring your friends. We expect, as usual, to have the meeting terminate at nine o'clock and then spend an extra half hour socializing while listening to a few local personages who are known to be authorities on some of Weston's richest historical possessions. There's a story behind every book in the law office, every picture on the wall and, in fact, every possession of the Society both in the Jones House and our headquarters at 626 Boston Post Road.

A REMINDER AND A REQUEST

As one by one the oldsters disappear and their old homes are sold, we still see evidence of the tragic losses that occur in the discarding of articles and written information when the heirs break up the homestead or the new owners ruthlessly clear out what's left behind in order to make way for their own possessions.

Owners of old "things," whether still in the front parlor, upstairs in the attic, or out in the barn, are again asked to give us for the record, a list of such articles or papers, plus all that you know about them. Now, before it's too late, get them on the record so that your Society may serve a most useful purpose in helping to answer the many inquiries that steadily come to us not only from local people but from visitors and folks far away.

Resolve during the next few months to set forth what you have and what you know along the lines of Weston's historic objects or events and mail it to Weston Historical Society, Inc., Box 343, Weston, Massachusetts.

A House That Traveled

The story of the Thomas H. West House on Church Street

On the twenty-third of October, 1789, George Washington spent the night in Weston. He was on a tour through the eastern states to observe the condition of things under the new form of government and, as new President, was enthusiastically received along the way. On the morning of the twenty-fourth he left Weston for Watertown where he was met by troops sent out to escort him to Cambridge.

There are uncertainties as to where exactly he spent the night but we can be fairly sure that it was either at the Flagg Tavern on the Post Road or at the home of his friend, Col. Thomas Marshall, on Highland Street. Historians favor the former location but the latter cannot be dismissed without more information than has so far come to light. Arguments in favor of the Flagg Tavern stress the fact that he had deliberately planned to spend nights at public houses to show how democratic he was in mingling with the citizenry; those who cling to the second theory maintain that Marshall and Washington were such good friends that the plans would naturally be changed in this special instance.

Col. Marshall's house stood where the Paine house is today and was moved to its present location on Church Street by Charles H. Fiske, Esq. in 1882 and it is from research done by him that much of the material for this article has been obtained. Quoting Mr. Fiske: ". . . as to the house in which he stayed, I think that it must have been as Col. Marshall's guest . . . although the General says to the Governor (Hancock) in a letter declining the Governor's invitation to stay with him in Boston that he did not intend to accept private quarters. One of my reasons for feeling fairly sure of it is that Mrs. Knox, Col. Marshall's great niece, if I rightly remember, informed me of the fact; and also as to the particular chamber which he occupied, the southeast corner one." So, we'll let the matter rest here until further evidence comes to light, and return to the main subject.

The Marshall house, which today is owned and occupied by the Thomas H. Wests of Church Street, was probably built between 1755-1760 by Elisha Jones. An eminent architect told Mr. Fiske that the lines of the roof were as perfect for that style of architecture as he had ever seen. Elisha was a member of a prominent Weston family of Joneses. The Farmer's Precinct, one of three precincts of Watertown and later Weston, was also called "the Precinct of Lieut. (Josiah) Jones Co.," Josiah being the first of a long line of Joneses in town. It is interesting to note that his wife Lydia, who survived him by twenty-nine years, died at the age of ninety-five in 1743 and that the Scotch Magazine, Edinburgh, Scotland, 1743 states, "She lived to see her children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren and their children, in all two hundred ninety-six, of whom two hundred thirty-three remain alive."

One of Lydia and Josiah's sons, Josiah, Jr., is said to have "built a house and settled on the western side of his father's land, about eighty rods southwest from his father's house, which, at his decease, descended to his son Elisha." There was an old Jones house at the corner of Chestnut and Highland Streets, and eighty rods southwest from its foundation is the Paine house which occupies the original site of the Elisha Jones-Thomas Marshall house. It is possible then that these are the two locations referred to above and that Elisha built his excellent new mansion on the same site. Whether the earlier house was razed to make room for it or destroyed by fire is not known.

Elisha was a rich man. He owned real estate in Weston as well as large tracts in several other parts of Massachusetts and he had two slaves — a badge of distinction in pre-revolutionary days. He was conservative in politics and held many important town offices from time to time as well as representing the town in the General Court for ten different years between 1754 and 1774. But with revolution in the offing, popularity waned for confirmed loyalists like Elisha and instead of continuing to be an influential and respected citizen he was now looked upon with scorn. For a while he kept a company of militia — of which he was colonel — around his house for fear of being attacked. His life was constantly in danger and mobs came so often to threaten him that he finally fled from home, leaving all his possessions behind, and went to Boston to be under the protection of the British troops. Elisha did not long survive these changes. He died in Boston in 1775 less than a year after his arrival, "more than likely of a broken heart at what he may have considered the cruel treatment received at the hands of his former friends whose welfare he had had so strongly at heart and also the loss of his estate."

All the property that he owned in Weston and in other towns was confiscated to be sold for the benefit of the government. His mansion on Highland Street was sold at public auction to Col. Thomas Marshall, friend of George Washington, who took possession and occupied it in 1782. Twelve years later Col. Marshall's wife died and soon afterwards he wooed and won the heart of Abigail Woodward, the widow of Parson Woodward, well-known in Weston history.* She lived in the house until her husband's death in 1800. During Col. Marshall's ownership the house maintained the dignity and elegance of its former days. It is said that James Otis, the eminent patriot and orator, wrote to Col. Marshall requesting him to find some place in Weston where his family could spend the summer and where there would be ample accommodation for his horses and carriages. Col. Marshall reported that he could find no suitable place but offered him the hospitality of his own house which Otis accepted.

Col. Marshall died in 1800 and his will bequeathed out of his estate "\$1666.66 from which to make an annual payment to his beloved wife of \$100.00 (one-quarter yearly during her life) the principal to be used to make up the deficiency provided the income is insufficient." Whether or not she lived within her income, history doesn't say. It is hard in these days of inflation to realize it was possible to live on what seems so little. However, the fact that the property was sold in 1801, four years before Abigail died, might indicate that her husband hadn't left her enough to continue life in the manner to which she had grown accustomed.

*See Weston Historical Society Bulletin, Vol. V, No. 2, January 1969.

In 1801 the house was deeded to John Clark, a Cambridge physician who died in 1805. Quoting Clark's will in part ". . . if it meets the wishes of my surviving friends," (that my body) "be buried in some part of the farm where I now reside." No evidence of these wishes being carried out has come to light as far as I know.

The house changed hands again in 1808, the new owner being Ruth MacKay, Clark's mother-in-law, and she lived there until her death thirty-two years later. "From my earliest remembrance," Mr. Fiske wrote, "it was called the MacKay farm."

(Mrs. MacKay's son, John, was in the piano business and it was during these years that ivory for piano keys was taken to Weston to be bleached in a pond on the farm, all of which will be dealt with in a continuation of this article.)

The foregoing is the seventh in a series of eight articles on historic Weston buildings by our Historian, Brenton H. Dickson. It will be concluded in our next issue.

LIFE MEMBERSHIPS

Everyone agrees that the Weston Historical Society is a solid institution that must grow stronger with the years. An endowment fund of growing size will safeguard the future, and the present practice of spending *income only* should be preserved.

It is the policy of the directors to use for current operating expenses if necessary, only the income from the principal, which is in truth the beginning of our Endowment Fund, derived from the payment of life memberships. In the seven years of our Society's existence, only nine life members have enrolled as life members by the payment of two hundred dollars. Such life membership entitles them to all privileges of the Society during their lifetime without payment of annual dues. The income itself is in excess of the nominal annual dues for regular members.

We'd like to see the list of life members substantially increased. The directors would like to know how many members would be interested in a husband and wife life membership involving the whole family or, for example, a father and son, mother and daughter, brother and sister, or similar family grouping. Address your recommendations to us at Box 343, Weston Massachusetts 02193.



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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