

# THE WESTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY BULLETIN

MAY 1971, VOL. VII, No. 4



Whittemore House as it appeared at the turn of the century. Originally built as a Congregational Church it was later converted into a dwelling house by Mr. Homer Whittemore. Today it belongs to the Baptist Church and is used as a Parish House and for Sunday School.

## Memorial Day Open Houses

Both our headquarters at the Isaac Fiske Law Office and our museum in the Josiah Smith Tavern will be open to members and their guests on Monday, May 31st, from noon to three P.M. A large reunion of old and new friends is expected immediately following the traditional Memorial Day Parade and the concert on the steps of the Town House across the Green.

As a special feature, the Curator's Committee has arranged to display the new acquisitions of the past two years, particularly the unique and tasteful costumes, fans, etc. that Mrs. Frank Owen has recently given to the Society. In charge of the exhibit is Mrs. Edward Hall, and light refreshments will be served by our gracious Hospitality Committee.

## Announcement of Interest

The Bay State Historical League has broadened its base of membership whereby individuals and corporations may become *associate* members with all rights and privileges except voting. Founded in 1903, the League's membership comprises more than two hundred and twenty local historical societies and commissions of Massachusetts. A booklet describing its many services and benefits is on view at our Society's headquarters in the Isaac Fiske Law Office and in our rooms in the Josiah Smith Tavern.

Through the years many of our members have attended the stimulating meetings that are held quarterly throughout the Commonwealth. Mutual exchange of ideas with leaders in the historical field is both pleasant and instructive. The quarterly Bulletin which is sent to all members contains much information and inspiration. The Weston Historical Society is a regular member and our president is a director. To keep intimately posted on all League affairs and events, our members may join as associate members at dues of \$5.00 per annum. Corporations and banks likewise may become associate members at \$100 annually, and it is hoped that many from this community will support this very important work particularly at a time when we are preparing to commemorate the Bicentennial of the American Revolution four years hence. A member of the League sits on the Massachusetts Bicentennial Commission. Application blanks for membership may be obtained from Mr. Travis, 899-4515.

## We Can Use More Volunteers

Now that heat has been installed in the Law Office, our headquarters there will be open year-round on Wednesdays from two to four. Wouldn't you and your friends enjoy sitting together down there for an hour or so amid such attractive surroundings to welcome visitors? At this time of year, the garden is particularly pleasant. Just call Mrs. Ford at 899-8171. If no answer, dial 899-4515 or 893-7388. Already many people are forming the habit of dropping into our rooms at the Josiah Smith Tavern where the Curator's committee extends such a cordial welcome, and the Law Office is a gracious supplement thereto.

An even steadier and urgent need lies in the Archivist field. We have a great many valuable papers, photographs, and records that need constant cataloguing and revising. Somewhere in our vast membership we hope to find a ready and qualified volunteer to supervise this vital phase of our work. Through the generosity of our friends we are accumulating more material and it is obviously imperative that we guard it well and protect it for the future. If you are willing to help, we'll put you to work. Call Mrs. Fraser, 894-2872.

## New Members

A warm hand of welcome is extended to the following:

Mr. and Mrs. Ellis H. Dana, 35 Woodchester Drive  
Mr. and Mrs. Raymond A. Mayer, 338 Boston Post Road  
Mr. and Mrs. Robert McLaughlin, 71 Lexington Street  
and Mr. Kenneth Roy, 205 Newton Street (fifth generation of the Upham family in Weston).



# Many Splendored Westons

Dr. Vera Laska

## 1

One lazy summer afternoon I was enjoying a quiet walk over the forest trails of our Weston. My thoughts wandered from birds to creeks, from farming to population explosion. Casually I recalled a walk in another Weston in Vermont; there were similarities in the surrounding woods, the peace and quiet, the occasional hiker met in the solitude of the trail. By sheer association of thought, I was suddenly in Cobb's Hill, one of my favored New England restaurants, located — you guessed it — in Weston, Connecticut. Out of the blue I was reading mentally a letter received months ago from friends at Argonne Laboratories near Chicago, who mentioned that perhaps in the future they would also reside in a Weston, if the new accelerator would be built there. . . .

History is a dangerous subject. One idea follows another; you try in vain to direct your thoughts elsewhere; the ideas persist and engulf you: just how many Westons are there? Where are they? What are they like? What do people do there? Are the other Westons older than our own? The urge to find at least some of the answers to these persisting questions sent me home to atlases and reference books. Once I know that there are — most likely — a half dozen Westons all over the United States, my mind will rest peacefully. One atlas listed nine Westons, another sixteen! One source did not mention Weston in Massachusetts — how many others did it omit? I could not rest my case with such unfinished business. What started as an innocent thought, became a little research project in its own right. After much searching and correspondence I tabulated the results of a questionnaire sent to about two dozen Westons; a rather interesting mosaic emerged.

I found twenty-two Westons in the United States, namely in Colorado, Connecticut, Georgia, Idaho, Illinois (two), Iowa, Maine, Massachusetts, Michigan, Missouri, Nebraska, New Hampshire, New York, Ohio, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Vermont, West Virginia, Wisconsin (two) and Wyoming.

## 2

The Westons of New England are of course the oldest ones — especially since I did not come upon any among Virginia's early settlements. Weston in New Hampshire could not be traced; the listing of it must have been for an earlier settlement that either disappeared or melted into another town. Of the remaining four New England Westons, ours in Massachusetts is without any doubt the oldest, which makes it the most ancient one in the United States. The respective years for the first known settlement and for the incorporation of the four New England Westons are:

Weston (originally part of Watertown), Mass.	1640's	1713
Weston, Connecticut	1756	1757
Weston (originally part of Andover), Vermont	1761	1800
Weston, Maine	1828	1835

In New England, Weston, Connecticut compares most closely in size to our Weston. Our Connecticut sister town is expected to grow soon to almost double its 1960 size. My correspondent from its Historical Society predicted almost 15,000 residents by the seventies. The Westons in Vermont and in Maine are much smaller in size, having had 450 and 210 residents respectively in 1950. During the sixties, the population of the former was expected to increase moderately, while in the latter to decrease drastically by about one third to 140. This realistic estimate was made by one of the selectmen of Weston, Maine. Shocking as these figures might appear when contrasted with the population explosion elsewhere, they are understandably typical of many northern New England towns, which are losing their young people to the lure of the cities.

All four Westons still have a variation of the New England type of government with town meetings and selectmen; none has major industries, although Weston in Maine lists a dairy and lumber industry. Westonites from Vermont send their children to out of town district schools; Weston in Maine maintains its own primary and secondary schools; Weston in Connecticut has four primary and one secondary school, all public institutions. Weston in Maine has one Protestant church; the other two towns both have one Catholic and two Protestant churches.

This historian in me had been surprised that our town waited until 1963 to organize an Historical Society; it might serve as a consolation to know that Weston, Connecticut founded its Historical Society only two years before us, Weston, Vermont two years after us, while Weston in Maine has none.

The history consciousness of the Westonites in the Green Mountain State is noteworthy. While once almost deserted, the town is now a showplace of historic restoration reflecting an old pioneer village. Entering the Farrar-Mansur house you find yourself in a century old tavern; thanks to the efforts of the Vermont Guild of Old Time Crafts and Industries, visitors may enjoy viewing woodworking and weaving shops and a water powered gristmill in action. Even so, our residential Weston with its many restored buildings need not take a back seat.

3

Venturing outside New England, there is quite a crop of Westons. In the Midwest, both Illinois and Wisconsin offer two Westons. In the Land of Lincoln there is a Weston in McLean County; settled around 1850, it is an unincorporated township where the lives of three hundred or so inhabitants center around grain.

The other Weston is nearer to Chicago, or rather used to be, just slightly west of the Windy City in Du Page County. This village of Weston was created in 1963 as a real estate development in the town of Batavia; by 1968 it had 550 residents. Then the place won the much contested bid as the site of the National Accelerator Laboratory. The site was officially acquired by the state of Illinois for the U. S. Atomic Energy Commission. Nearing completion there is the 250 million dollar accelerator, the largest in the world. The biggest single component of the system is a concrete ring enclosure, four miles in circumference and one and a quarter miles in diameter. In September 1970, twenty-two months after the last residents were moved out, the Circuit Court in Wheaton signed the dissolution papers. Thus this Weston passed into history seven years after its birth. Nobody resides there now; the houses were moved or linked together, serving as laboratories and offices for the builders and scientists.

Somebody there must have a special predilection for western lore; most of the streets bear Indian names as Blackhawk Boulevard, Winnebago, Potawatomi and others; a herd of buffalos was imported, and the animals roam openly as on a range. What a picture of twentieth century America: accelerator and buffalos sharing the same space!

There is still another aspect to the N. A. L. Village in Batavia, as former Weston is now called. In the summer of 1970 students of anthropology professor Stuart Struever of Northwestern University in Evanston uncovered some two dozen pre-historic sites as they searched the entire 6,800 acre grounds. Fourteen sites belonged to the Archaic period (from about 7500 to 1000 B.C.), others to the later Woodland and Mississippian periods.

I had quite a time untangling the two Westons in Wisconsin. My inquiry addressed to "Weston, Wisconsin" brought a nice package of information; on the map I found Weston, Wisconsin; yet the information did not match at all what I saw on the map: wrong rivers, wrong distances from large towns, wrong railroads. After extended mental acrobatics I concluded that there are two Westons in the Dairyland of America, but maps list only one: Weston in Dunn County, a small town in the western part of the state with a few hundred inhabitants. It must have been fate that directed my postal inquiry not to this Weston, but to the other one: Weston in Marathon County of central Wisconsin, with about 6,000 people.

This town has quite a story. It was settled in 1842 when the fur frontier was invaded by lumbermen, who made their first camps on the Eau Claire river. Early history of that region is full of stories on log running, timber rafts, and drownings among the lumberjacks. In the 1840's a thousand feet of select pine brought six dollars; a hundred years later the price was four hundred! Laborers were paid in the early days about sixteen dollars and "keep" monthly; wages were usually paid in lumber. Shortly after 1842, the first mill was built and launched an industry that flourished for about a century. Photographs from around the turn of the century show lumber sleds piled up with logs as high as sixteen feet, scaling over 16,000 feet of wood at present prices in the neighborhood of \$5,000 per load! Senseless exploitation of nature and lack of conservation killed the industry. By 1942 not a single mill operated along the Eau Claire river. In 1856 three towns were created by Marathon County: Mosinee, Wausau and Eau Claire; the latter adopted three years later the name Weston, after a somewhat obscurely documented pioneer, Charley Weston. As time went on, about a dozen parts broke away from the original town and



formed their own governments; the last thus to leave was the village of Rothschild in 1917. In 1904 the present city of Schofield was created, which is worthy of mentioning because today this former "colony" of Weston is its mother city; the town of Weston is a municipality which is officially part of Schofield; an analogy would be Great Britain as one of the states of the U. S. The history of the American lumber frontier can be illustrated in the town of Weston, Wisconsin: just as the cattle kingdom or the fur frontier, so this lumber frontier ran its course; it had its accelerated rise and decline. The town switched from forestry to agriculture, concentrating on potatoes, grains and dairy products. In 1959 on the occasion of its centennial, the town Historical Committee commemorated the event with an extensive pamphlet, in which nostalgia is entwined with civic pride and optimism for the future.

4

The town historian of Tyrone, New York, added a warm personal touch to her report by sending along a handwritten letter. Her Weston is a "populated village," not incorporated, with a constant population of 85-90 souls. It is in the middle of a vacation area, with one Protestant church, general store, liquor store, garage, boat storage and kennel, "as well as a place to buy a pony, if you are young at heart." It was first settled in 1800; in the nineteenth century it used to be a busy place and trading center, with two churches, school, post office, tavern, hotel and several businesses. Those were the days gone by; the historian herself found it interesting to leaf through old records to bring to light the history of the place that changed so much. What is unique about this Weston is the fact that nearby is the site of New York's oldest known Indian village, dating from around the year 1000 B. C.

Journeying to Weston, Missouri, we come into a different world. The town was first settled in 1837, incorporated five years later, and named after an officer from Fort Leavenworth who helped lay out the town. In 1960 it had 1012 residents, but expected to grow to 1500 by the time of the next census. As most towns outside the New England area, it has a mayor and town council. There are four public schools, four Protestant and one Catholic churches. Livelihood is based to a large extent on tobacco — the town boasts of the only tobacco auctionhouse west of the Mississippi. I surmise that corn must be of importance there, too, not only because there is one of the country's oldest distilleries there, but because in 1928 the National Corn Husking Contest took place in the town.

While my correspondent from Weston, Missouri was the City Collector, the town has a very active Historical Society, founded in 1945. In 1960 the Weston Historical Museum was opened; it also offers tours of about half a dozen ante-bellum homes; on some tour days they clocked as many as 30,000 visitors. Among the historic homes is one in which Buffalo Bill Cody lived with his uncle, and another one built by the stage-coach king Benjamin Holladay. The pamphlet about historic Weston mentions that the town used to be the "Queen of the Steamboat Days." Truly steamboats docked from about the time of Jackson to the days of Cleveland; but in the eighties the Mississippi river started edging away; today it is three miles from town, thus ending a chapter in the history of Weston, Missouri. This town also is unique in having had a genuine Polish count for its first priest, but expatiating on that would make the story too long.

Weston in Wyoming turned out to be not a town, only a post office, store and gas station, as the postmaster informed me. It is in the middle of cattle country and "very pretty we think;" the place was named appropriately after an early-day cow puncher, who was a noted bronco buster and also ran the post office!

The Weston in the Rockies of Colorado was originally, in 1880, named La Junta, because the three forks of the Purgatorie [*sic*] river meet there; but it caused confusion with another place of the same name, hence it was rechristened Weston, honoring the first settler, Julien Albert Weston. It has a primary and secondary school, a Catholic and a Protestant church. Population in 1960 was 260, but is down by about a hundred. The residents are working in one of the most mechanized mines of the world; others raise cattle or do lumbering.

Moving westward we reach Weston in Idaho, which was settled during the Civil War and incorporated in 1901. It was first settled in old pioneer days (Idaho was admitted to the Union in 1890) by the Mormons. Around the time of World War I the town had over a thousand inhabitants, but nowadays the young people are leaving. In 1960 there were 600 people living there, now only 300. They have one primary public school and a Mormon church. The chief occupation is agriculture.

Weston in Oregon was incorporated in 1878, almost twenty years after the Beaver State entered the Union. While its population almost doubled from 1940 to 748 residents in 1960, it has no expectations of change in the population. It is located near the old Oregon Trail; it has an elementary and a secondary school and four Protestant churches. The mainstay of the area is agriculture, including the canning of some products. Skiing is good in the neighboring Tollgate area. While many cities in eastern Oregon may be larger than Weston, "none exceed it in exuberant civic-mindedness. The homes are neat, well kept, showing pride in ownership and belonging to Weston."

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The above stories are the result of my exploratory research. There are other Westons in Canada, in England and in other parts of the English speaking world. There is a Weston Point in the Pacific on Fanning Island (and I am ready to accept a travel grant to investigate that one, in the path of north-east tradewinds and among exotic palm trees). There may be other undetected Westons within the United States.

I satisfied my own curiosity as to the identities of some Westons in America, and gladly share them with the residents of our own Weston. I am content that we are not necessarily the largest — but then we do not want to be; our ambitions do not lie in the direction of a big town but rather in preserving a peaceful country atmosphere. As an historian I take pride in having rendered certain that ours is the oldest Weston in this country. I hope that other Westonites will be "Weston conscious" in their travels and thus will augment our knowledge of our counterparts elsewhere.

I satisfied my intellect and my soul. If there be anybody wishing to continue the search, I welcome it in the spirit of the common cause.

Dr. Vera Laska, M.A. in history, M.A. in philosophy; Ph.D. in American History, Univ. of Chicago;

Chairman of the Division of Social Sciences, Regis College, Weston;  
Chairman of Weston Historical Commission.

## Peeking at Random (into the Isaac Fiske Law Office Library)

Beginning on Page 67 of "Reports of Controverted Elections in the House of Representatives of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts from 1780 to 1852" as published by White and Potter, Printers to the State in 1853, we find the following regarding a spirited 1809 contest in Weston that was lost by our own Isaac Fiske 81 votes to 80: —  
"WESTON

Where a member returned was elected by a majority of one vote, and it appeared that several persons, legally qualified, who were present and desired to vote at the election, were prohibited by the selectmen from so doing, the election was held void, although it did not appear that any more than one of the rejected voters would have voted against the sitting member, if they had been permitted to vote.

"The election of Ebenezer Hobbs, returned a member from the town of Weston, was controverted by Joseph Russell and others, on the several grounds that the selectmen were improperly chosen, and also that they rejected votes which ought to have been admitted.

"The committee on elections do not appear to have considered the first point, but in relation to the other they reported that the member returned had a majority of one vote . . . ; and that several persons legally qualified and who ought to have been permitted to vote, were prohibited by the selectmen . . . although they were present and desired to have that privilege, for which reason the committee were of the opinion that Mr. Hobbs was not legally chosen."

The committee accompanied the report by the following statement of facts, respecting the qualifications of persons who were prohibited by the selectmen from voting: —

1. "Alpheus Bigelow, Jr., is a young man whose parents are settled and reside in Weston, where he was also born; he is about twenty-four years of age, and is now a student at the University in Cambridge, in the junior class; he performs on Sunday on the organ at Cambridgeport meeting house for which he receives a compensation; he



resides at Weston during vacation, unless he can obtain employment elsewhere, which he sometimes has done; he has his washing and mending done at his father's in Weston . . . but was refused by the selectmen; he still attended the meeting and tendered his vote (for a candidate opposed to Mr. Hobbs) which was also refused.

2. "Isaac Sanderson is also a native of Weston where his father settled and is a young man, unmarried; he resided at Lexington about forty days in the spring of 1808 and also about four days in June following; . . . his father then died and he was administrator on his father's estate and has resided at Weston ever since. . . . He applied to have his name placed upon the list of voters in May but was refused; he attended the meeting but did not vote, and the only objection made by the selectmen was his want of residence in Weston.

3. "Jonathan Ryan came to Weston in March 1807; lived there the greater part of the year. . . . About two months and a half in the beginning of the year 1809, he was absent on a journey but returned last March and has resided there since; he applied but was refused by the selectmen for want of residence; he attended the meeting but did not vote.

4. "Nathan Childs lived in Weston with Mrs. Jane Clark from November 1806 till April 1808 and continued at the same farm which was sold to Mrs. Mackay, the mother of Mrs. Clark, until November 1808. Mrs. Clark then went to live in Boston, and some difficulty occurring with respect to Childs's wife, he went to live with Mrs. Clark in Boston, agreeing to return to work upon the said farm whenever called upon, and actually did, in the winter, go there several times from five to seven days each time. Mrs. Mackay paid him half his wages; considered him as in her employ, and has agreed with him to live with her till April 1st, 1810; and during the time he was in Boston he was frequently employed in loading her teams. . . . The objection to his having his name placed on the list of voters was his want of the qualification of residence. . . ."

Ten pages later, the case is concluded with the words: —

"The committee reported that Hobbs was duly elected." Town records show that Ebenezer Hobbs and Isaac Fiske each served four terms apiece in the General Court, Hobbs in 1807, 9, 10, and 11; — Fiske in 1808, 12, 13, and 14.

## Law Office Open Wednesdays Too

The society's rooms in the Josiah Smith Tavern continue to be open Wednesday afternoons from 2 to 4 and arrangements have been made to have our headquarters in the Isaac Fiske Law Office open at the same time. Members who would like to act as hostesses are urged to call Mrs. Fraser, 894-2872, Mrs. Ford, 899-8171 or Mrs. Travis, 899-4515. We continue to seek a few members to serve in the Archivist Department. Make your talents and availability known to the president or other officers.

## Memorial Fund Established

At its April 5th meeting, the Board of Directors voted to set up a Memorial Fund in which bequests and contributions in memory of departed members will be pooled. It will be a part of the general Endowment Fund that was created in 1964 with life memberships and special gifts. Only the income therefrom will be used for appropriate purposes as determined from time to time by the directors. With accumulated and unused interest, our Endowment Fund is now slightly in excess of \$3,600. Further memorial gifts and life memberships will lift this figure substantially.

The Weston Historical Society  
Bulletin  
MAY 1971



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.