

# THE WESTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY BULLETIN

OCTOBER 1971, VOL. VIII No. 1



The Burgoyne Elm and its neighbors, the George Washington Memorial Highway marker, Weston Historical Society, and the old Central Cemetery.

Photo by Sherry Jenkins 1970

## Our Historic Burgoyne Elm and Its Memories

All that's left of one of New England's oldest, most venerable elms today is its mammoth trunk, eighteen feet high and twenty-five feet around its base. Until four years ago, the Burgoyne Elm had for almost three centuries spread its branches over the old Boston Post Road and watched the race of men go by. To us it seemed to be "Mistress Eternal" but it had to give up the ghost finally on August 21st, 1967. With block and falls, its giant, lifeless, still majestic limbs were removed one by one, and our hearts were heavy. Until then many had come to feel that as long as that old tree stood there at 626 Boston Post Road nothing in today's suburban explosion could ever rob this town of its quiet charm and dignity. Only three months before in our May 1967 BULLETIN, our historian Brenton H. Dickson had given us a lively account of the events long ago that led to the naming of this landmark.

Now it is timely as we cling with nostalgic adoration to its memorable history, to raise again the query: "Can't somebody somewhere come up with a practical suggestion for

prolonging its stately trunk far into the future?" No longer does the sap course through its body and the bark that's more than an inch in thickness is daily drying out and losing its gummy grip on the now almost ossified trunk. As a temporary restraint, three heavy steel bands of strapping have so far done the job. Inquiries to various chemical, horticultural, and mechanical experts having availed us nothing, we desperately appeal once more for a common sense idea.

Hopeful though we may be that some solution leading to such preservation can be brought to light, we realistically faced the inevitable two years before the giant elm's demise. In 1965, our then fellow townsman and member, Dr. Donald Wyman who has only recently retired as Horticulturist of Harvard University's Arnold Arboretum, propagated several scions of the historic tree from its seed. Now today, four of the babies, one already fifteen feet high, are quietly growing within a hundred feet of their mother. They are identified and tagged "*ULMUS: BURGOYNE*". If nature continues to cooperate and we can keep the pests away, Weston will always have a Burgoyne Elm! The current odds may well be against us but the Weston Historical Society is doing its best to preserve Weston's rich history in this, and other, ways. By caring now for these little trees that surround our headquarters at the Isaac Fiske Law Office, we invite destiny to protect them in the centuries to come.

What history this old tree could tell. Its plaque reminds us that when it reached its first century it sheltered for one anxious, harried night more than two thousand foot-sore and weary British, German, and Hessian soldiers who had been captured by General Horatio Gates at Saratoga on October 17, 1777. They comprised probably half of General ("Gentleman Johnny") Burgoyne's army of 5,791 men who were being escorted by General John Glover to General Washington for encampment at Winter Hill, Somerville. The other half of Burgoyne's men were in the custody of General Brickett and passed through town at about the same time on the old Framingham Turnpike, now Route 30.

Gates agreed to Burgoyne's request that his surrender was to be known as "The Saratoga Convention" and his men as "captured soldiers",—not "prisoners". Also without consulting General Washington as he should have done, Gates promised that the captives would be returned to Europe on condition that they would never again fight in North America. His pledge proved worthless, for the Continental Congress, suspecting that the British would send them back into action, refused to parole them. After a hard winter at Cambridge and Somerville, the unhappy convention troops were subjected to another killing march. They were moved to a prison camp at Charlottesville, Virginia, and later to Pennsylvania. Not until Lord Cornwallis's surrender were they released.

On that night of November 6th, 1777, Generals Burgoyne and Baron von Riedesel, with their ladies, were entertained in luxury at nearby taverns but their mass of poorly disciplined troops were treated no better than cattle. These were men who had burned fences, destroyed crops of flax, grain, and hay, — robbed houses and molested householders. As Weston's little populace quaked in uneasiness, its unkempt and unwelcome visitors bedded down in the meadow beneath the old elm tree.

Little was ever written about that long night in Weston, the Puritan town! The town's treasurer was Major Samuel Lamson who two springs before, had led our Minute men toward Concord and Lexington. His report for the year 1777-78 shows that Joshua Jeaneson was paid his usual salary for "taking care of ye meeting house" during the entire year. A few lines later, Major Lamson with typical brevity listed an even greater amount paid to the same Joshua for "cleaning up ye Meeting House immediately after the prisoners were taken at Bennington". It took the town weeks to restore cleanliness and recover from the largest dose of litter in its history.

Washington himself came by that tree at least twice. The monument nearby marks his passage through Weston in 1777 while enroute to Cambridge where he took command of the Continental Army. Later as president he revisited Weston and is said to have spent an October 1789 night at the home of his old friend, Colonel Thomas Marshall. (This lovely house still stands but at a different location—see "A House that Traveled" in our January 1971 BULLETIN.) In commemoration of our first president's 200th birthday in 1932, a stone marker was placed beneath the elm. It designates the old Boston Post Road as "The George Washington Memorial Highway". Directly across the street, determined apparently to outlive us all, are two quite decrepit buttonwood trees which, according to tree wardens, are older than our erstwhile elm. They too could tell us much of days that are gone.

*Continued on Page 4*



## Annual Meeting Unusually Important

Tuesday evening, October 26th, at 8:00 P.M. sharp, the Josiah Smith Tavern ("Jones House") Ball Room will be the site of the annual meeting of our Society. Important announcements are anticipated and we expect the customary good turnout of enthusiastic members to hear reports of committees and officers, to participate in the active discussions relative to future plans and programs, and in all ways to join us in a stimulating "History Evening."

During the business meeting, Mrs. Margaret Floyd will tell how a couple dozen of our members have been working diligently this past year in helping the Weston Historical Commission of which she is currently chairman, to conduct and complete a survey of all houses and structures along the Boston Post Road from the Wayland to the Waltham line. This survey has great meaning to the whole town and the section along the Post Road is only the beginning of similar inventories that eventually should embrace every part of the town.

The terms of John W. Boyd, J. Kenneth Bennett and John L. Kronenburg will expire as directors at this meeting. A Nominating Committee comprising Samuel J. McDonald, Chairman, Mrs. Kirkbridge Patterson, Mrs. Horace Nichols and Homer C. Lucas will propose action thereon. This committee is anxious to have the benefit of your suggestions for members of this board. Directors whose terms are continuing are: 1972, Brenton H. Dickson, Grant M. Palmer, Jr., Mrs. D. Stephen Thrall and Harold G. Travis; 1973, Erlund Field, Edward W. Marshall and Mrs. Arthur A. Nichols.

Present officers comprise Harold G. Travis, President; Edward W. Marshall, vice president; John G. Brooks, Recording Secretary; Roy L. Dickson, Treasurer. Mrs. J. E. Fraser is Curator with a large and helpful committee. Mrs. Marshall Dwinnell is chairman of the Program Committee, Mrs. F. Leslie Ford and Mrs. Harold G. Travis continue to supervise our headquarters at the Isaac Fiske Law Office; Mrs. Everett Schwartz, Jr. sees that tender loving care is extended to the bulb garden, Mrs. Reginald Wells and Mrs. George Pink head the Hospitality Committee, and Mrs. D. Stephen Thrall is chairman of liaison with other societies.

As the meeting's windup, Mr. James B. Muldoon will once more review some of the court decisions of yesteryear that are in turn amusing and still applicable to us today.

October 16 — BAY STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY MEETING  
First Parish Church, Billerica Center, Rte. 3A  
11 a.m. Meeting — Chowder Luncheon 11:30 to 1  
Followed by tour of Lowell historic buildings  
Contact Mrs. Thrall 891-0723

In addition to George Washington, three other presidents have passed our historic site. In 1798 while enroute to his home in Quincy, John Adams stopped here, declaring in a short address — "I congratulate the Town of Weston . . . upon all such may the choicest of blessings descend". Forty-two years later, James Garfield lived here with his grandfather while attending the Northwest School on Concord Road near its junction with Merriam Street. Later when president he had specifically planned a return visit in 1881 but an assassin's bullet forced cancellation of elaborate plans to welcome him. At Weston's dedication of its new Town Hall in 1917, Calvin Coolidge as lieutenant governor, never suspecting that within six years destiny would place him in our country's highest office, acclaimed its architectural glory and scenic setting.

Other famous men who passed through Weston along this all important highway included Colonel Paul Revere, Postmaster General Benjamin Franklin, and the Marquis de Lafayette. It would be futile to attempt in one short summary to record all the people of note and the exciting processions this tree has seen. We commend to all the satisfactions that would come out of a leisurely walk along the Boston Post Road from the Waltham to the Wayland line. Within a quarter of a mile of the Burgoyne Elm are markers that you probably never noticed, houses and mansions of whose significant history you are wholly unaware. Steadily through the years The BULLETIN tries to select stories of authentic interest but meanwhile you are urged to browse along this veritable HISTORY ROW independently. Every few steps will bring you to a fascinating story, the uncovering of which by yourself will add to its value and interest. For example you'd find across from the Fire Station, just a thousand feet east of the Burgoyne Elm, a little marker that says "through this place passed General Henry Knox in the winter of 1775-1776 to deliver to General George Washington at Cambridge the train of artillery from Fort Ticonderoga used to force the British Army to evacuate Boston". Under the elm itself is the Isaac Fiske office that was erected there in 1805. Five of his great great grandchildren plus their children and grandchildren still reside in Weston to carry on the tradition of their ancestor who distinguished himself in service to Town and Commonwealth. A few feet to the west is the unmarked site of the old Powder House which until 1834 stood at the edge of Central Cemetery.

And so, as you inch your way westward and eastward no matter which side of the street you cover, you can't go far without touching fascinating history. Some of it such as the Tavern of the Golden Ball is being expertly "liberated" and "preserved" at great outlays of energy, talent, time and substance. Other Weston history likewise has been similarly restored at the Isaac Fiske Law Office and in private homes by their owners. Still untold are the full stories of the Sibley Mills at Stony Brook and many of the other early industries of our now "residential" town.

H. G. T.



Son of the Burgoyne Elm  
just a seed in 1965.



Twin buttonwoods opposite Burgoyne  
Elm, Old Post Road, Weston.



## Program Committee's Next Presentation November 30th

Mrs. Marshall Dwinnell, chairman of the program committee, announces that Mrs. Elizabeth P. Hammond will give us her fascinating illustrated lecture "*Touring New England Graveyards*" on Tuesday evening, November 30th in the Ball Room of the Josiah Smith Tavern at 8 o'clock. For the past five years Mrs. Hammond has been a member of the teaching staff at the Massachusetts Audubon Society where she has conducted popular morning and evening classes on "Preserving Nature's Bounties".

Puritan Folk Art as revealed from the rubbing of early gravestones has long been a hobby of our guest speaker. Those who have met and heard her are loud in their praises of her vivacious charm and absorbing presentation. We hope to have an overflow audience to greet her. Members are urged to bring prospective members as their guests.

The programs we have enjoyed over the past eight years have all been remarkably worthwhile. In that period we have had four program chairmen, Mrs. John W. Scott, Mrs. Boardman Bump, Mrs. Richard Albrecht, and now Mrs. Dwinnell. With real appreciation we recall speakers and events as follows beginning with our first charter dinner in April 1964:

Gilbert Beane: "What Heights An Historical Society Can Reach"

Stephen T. Riley: "The Oldest Historical Society in America"

Roland Wells Robbins: "Pick 'n Shovel Historian"

Dr. R. E. Pike: "Early Vermont Lumbering"

Brenton H. Dickson: "The Middlesex Canal" and "Early Transportation in New England"

Jean Goreley: "The Vineyard and the Tories"

Roger S. Webb: "Preserving our Architectural Heritage"

Margaret H. Floyd: "Lower Newton Street — An Architectural Perspective"

Col. E. P. Hamilton: "Early Mills Along The Charles"

Arthur F. Schrader: "New England in Song and Story"

W. R. Dewey, Jr.: "Weston's Oldest Houses"

Francis J. Koppeis: "America's Oldest Inn"

David B. Little: "America's First Centennial"

Joseph Hudak: "Early Gardens of America"

Edward Rowe Snow: "Ramblings and Reminiscences"

In addition we have had a Dinner Meeting and tour of the Early American Gallery at the Museum of Fine Arts, a colored film, "Music of Old Williamsburg," a Panel on School History Teaching and our Genealogy Seminar; also our own "Around the Cracker Barrel" first in 1965 and then enlarged and repeated in 1969, as well as trips to the Kendall Marine Museum at Sharon and the Textile Museum at North Andover.

OCTOBER 1971  
Bulletin  
The Weston Historical Society



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.