

# THE WESTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY BULLETIN

JANUARY 1972, VOL. VIII, No. 2



## THE GARFIELD HOUSE

Built about 1710 by Thomas Garfield on 120 acres his father, Captain Benjamin Garfield, had bought March 13, 1702-03 from Simon Tainter. It passed successively to Thomas Garfield, Jr., Rebecca Garfield (Mrs. David) Fiske, her son Elijah Fiske, and from him to his children who sold it about 1880 to Richard Barrett, ending 17 decades of Garfield ownership.

The house stood "at the end of a grass-grown lane about forty rods" from what is now Weston Road, Lincoln, less than a mile north of the present Route 117. The house was burned to the ground in 1944. On its site stands the residence of Dr. and Mrs. Charles Keuper. A century-old lilac grove, visible to the left of the picture, still flourishes beside the old well on their side lawn. Those lilacs, the well, and the bricks in the chimney are the only relics of the old homestead that still remain.

## SCHEDULE OF EVENTS

Tuesday, January 4: 8 p.m. — Isaac Fiske Law Office:

**The Human and Timely Side of Early Court Decisions.**

Call Mrs. Fulkerson, 899-5469 for reservations

Tuesday, January 11: 8 p.m. Josiah Smith Tavern (Jones House)

Mr. Brenton H. Dickson, the Society's Historian, and Mr. Edward W. Marshall, the Society's President, and Mrs. Marshall will take members and their guests on a scenic inland cruise through the small canals of Midland England, a trip they took during September. They will describe and illustrate with pictures their self-conducted canal boat tour of historic canals and ports of old England otherwise seldom visited.

Saturday, January 15 Bay State Historical League — open to all members:

9:15 a.m. — Old North Church, Boston

1:15 p.m. — Old South Meeting House

Contact Mrs. Thrall, 899-0723 for details

## FOR YOUR COPY OF LAMSON'S HISTORY

Through the generosity of two charter members we are the owners of a limited number of neatly mimeographed copies of the

### Index to Daniel S. Lamson, HISTORY OF THE TOWN OF WESTON, MASSACHUSETTS 1630-1890

These are available to owners of Lamson's History at three dollars each. They comprise a forty-one page alphabetical listing of the significant persons, places, and events that are contained in this rare and authoritative book. This original INDEX was compiled in 1969 by Patricia A. McDonald, a history major at Regis College in Weston, as part of "The Weston History Project" directed by Dr. Vera Laska. As long as the supply lasts, we shall be happy to make them available.

Col. Lamson's original manuscript and notes are in the Society's possession at the Josiah Smith Tavern. The author died before their publication, but thanks to the benevolence and enterprise of Mr. Horace S. Sears, the great work was published in time for the Town's Bicentennial in 1913. Mr. Sears not only engaged a professional writer, Mr. William S. Kennedy of Belmont, to edit the notes into a dramatic story of Weston from the beginning, but also underwrote the expense of publication and distribution of one copy to each family residing in Weston at the time of the Town's Bicentennial. In the emergency and pressure of time, no index was included, but now, at long last, a gold mine of information becomes instantly available to the reader.

## HIGH SPOTS OF ANNUAL MEETING

At the Society's eighth annual meeting on October 26th, the President called for a moment of silence in memory of four loyal members who had died since the last annual meeting,— ex vice president Charles P. Gorely, Jr., Mr. Albert Morse, Mr. Thruston Wright, and Miss Constance Burrage.

The Curator, Mrs. Fraser, acknowledged many generous gifts, the Historian, Brenton H. Dickson chose "Hearsay repeated often enough becomes fact" as his text to bring out that President Garfield had never been educated in the Northwest School on Concord Road, Mrs. William B. Floyd made some salient comments on the ongoing work of the Weston Historical Commission, and Mr. James B. Muldoon amused and enlightened members with descriptions of some politically and historically significant opinions of the Massachusetts Supreme Court in the early 1800's, pointing out their extraordinary similarity to many of today's issues.

In his eighth and final report, the President traced the many accomplishments of the Society since its establishment finally in 1963, and thanked the "literally hundreds of you for your encouragement, support, and hard, generous work." He urged that the Endowment Fund be raised from its present approximate sum of \$4,000 to at least \$10,000 through increased life memberships, bequests, and special contributions. He expressed the hope that recent appeals to the Metropolitan District Commission for the restoration of the historic Norsemen's Tower at Norumbega and to the Selectmen for restricted parking in front of historic monuments would bear fruit. On cooperation with schools and colleges he declared, "The chain of immortality depends for its durability upon the degree to which we communicate with those younger than ourselves."

**Save The Date!**

**Charter Anniversary Dinner**

**April 20th, Senior High School**



## GARFIELD STORY DISPROVED AND A NEW MYSTERY POSED: TO WHOM DID NAHUM REFER?

James Abram Garfield, 20th president of the United States, had indeed many Weston connections and forbears, but we now know that, contrary to rumor so often repeated that in many quarters it was accepted as a fact, he never set foot on our soil. The first generation of his family was represented by Edward Garfield who, born in England in 1575, came over probably with Winthrop in 1630, and died in Watertown at the age of 97 on June 14, 1672. By coincidence the pioneer's son, Edward Jr., who likewise had been born in England, died on the same day as his father, having served as Selectman for several years. A son in the next generation, Captain Benjamin Garfield was born in Watertown in 1643, served twenty years as Selectman and died in 1717. His son, Lieutenant Thomas Garfield of the fourth generation, was born in Watertown on December 12, 1681, and married Mercy Bigelow, the daughter of Joshua Bigelow of Watertown on January 2, 1706-7. Their son, Thomas Garfield, President Garfield's great, great grandfather, was born in Weston in February 1713 and died January 3, 1774 on the Garfield place which for the previous twenty years had been, and still is, a part of Lincoln. Both he and his wife, Rebecca, whom he married in 1742 at her Lunenburg home, are buried in Lincoln's hill burying ground, their graves being marked by simple slabs of slate.

Their son Solomon Garfield, brother of Abram who fought at Concord Bridge, was born on the Garfield farm about a mile north of what is now Route 117 on Lincoln Road in 1743 when it was still part of Weston. He and his wife, the former Sarah Stimson of Sudbury, were the great grandparents of President Garfield and they moved to Westminster where Solomon had acquired some lots. About 1790 they moved again to Cherry Valley, Otsego, New York, taking with them Thomas Garfield who had been born in 1775. The latter married Asenath Hill of Sharon, New York (Schoharie County). Their son who was to sire a President thirty-one years later, was Abram Garfield, born December 28, 1799. It is interesting here to note that just as he was left fatherless when but two years old, so was he himself destined to die when his own son, James Abram Garfield, was still a mere infant. The latter was born on November 19, 1831, in Orange, Cuyahoga County, Ohio where his father was to die fifteen months later on March 3, 1833. Whereas nine generations before, their direct ancestor, Edward Garfield, was to live for ninety-seven years, it is interesting to note that the President died before his 50th birthday, his father at 33, and his grandfather at 26, all three living in the aggregate only nine years longer than Edward I.

Thus it is true as Hon. George F. Hoar wrote on Page 386 of the October 1881 American Antiquarian Society: "Six generations of his family lived in Middlesex and Worcester Counties from 1630 until after the Revolution. In the summer of 1880 the graves of his ancestors were discovered in the hill burying ground at Lincoln, and the house built and occupied by them. The President was much pleased with the discovery and several times during the spring, expressed quite eagerly his desire to visit the scenes of his family history. When Mrs. Garfield's illness compelled him to abandon a great portion of his scheme for visits in Connecticut and Massachusetts, he still maintained his purpose of making a pilgrimage to Williams College, and to the old homes of the Garfields. As is well known he had set out upon this journey,— his first recreation from 13 weeks of herculean labor and care, when he was stricken down."

Concerning President Garfield's Ancestry at the Massachusetts Historical Society Meeting in Boston on October 13, 1881, Rev. Edward G. Porter quoted a letter that the future president had written from Washington D. C. on Jan. 8, 1872, citing "... my father moved into the wilds of Ohio before he was 20 and died when he was 33. I was but an infant . . ." Garfield in the same long letter remarked: "It seems to make the conclusion very strong that the Garfields themselves were from Weston . . ." On a later page Rev. Porter quotes a letter from Garfield on House of Representatives Washington, D. C. stationery dated Feb. 7, 1880 to E. I. Garfield at East Lexington, Massachusetts asking for details of Watertown and vicinity. Finally he quotes a letter from the Executive Mansion, Washington July 1, 1881 signed for the President by J. Stanley Brown, Private Secretary, and addressed to E. I. Garfield at 27 Franklin Street, Boston. It was probably one of the very last written or dictated by the President, for it was written late Friday evening, July 1, 1881 and postmarked

"Washington July 2 1 P. M.," 3 hours after the President's assassination. It read in part: "The pressure upon the President's time prevents him from sending a personal response to your note of the 30th ultimo. He directs me therefore . . . to say that it is impossible at this time for him to tell whether he will be able to spare the time to make the trip you propose. He expects to be at Concord for a short time and if it is possible for him to go to Watertown he will be glad to do so, but can't tell certainly till he reaches Concord."

Rev. Porter concludes: "It is well known that the President was anticipating great pleasure in his projected trip to New England upon which he had just started when he was stricken down by the hand of the assassin. It was his intention after visiting his Alma Mater at Williamstown and making a brief tour of the mountains, to fulfill a long-cherished desire of seeing the early homes and graves of his ancestors . . ."

How then, we wonder, could most of us so readily have believed that "In his boyhood for several years, James Garfield lived with his grandparents in the Garfield homestead on Lincoln Road; dinner pail in hand — there were two sessions in those days — he walked the distance over the rough road or short cut through the fields to little old Schoolhouse Number III in Weston." This quotation, taken from a book published in 1961, was based on the Weston Town Report of 1882 that, we now find, had been extracted incorrectly. Two very important little words had unfortunately been left out as we now shall see. Actually Nahum Smith's report on Schoolhouse #3, Northwest District, Miss Ida A. Gould, Teacher, had said: "In the coming years it may be that some of our ambitious boys may become men to whom the world will look up, and whom the world will delight to honor; what has been, may again be,— for out of the little North-West Schoolhouse, many years ago, went a poor boy who, before life's close, had attained to some of the highest honors in the land." The 1961 book quoted the above exactly but alas the words "some of" in the very last clause were missing.

Since our annual meeting on October 26 we have spent much time in verification of the above as a result of Brent Dickson's assertion that "Hearsay repeated becomes fact as witness the myth of President Garfield being educated in the Northwest School on Concord Road." The days spent in various libraries as we read biographies, records, genealogies, and papers were fascinating and rewarding. The dozens of personal calls to old residents of the town for at least a picture of that School that wasn't taken down until 1931 and whose foundation may still be viewed were pleasant but futile. The big mystery, "Of whom was Nahum speaking?" has whetted our zest to examine the school roster of the early and middle 1800's, but we learn to our dismay that no school records of that nature prior to 1908 are anymore in existence, having been destroyed by fire many years ago. As we go to press we are even looking over old assessors' lists of that period in the hope that perhaps we can hit upon the name of an historical figure "who before life's close, had attained to *some of* the highest honors in the land."

Won't all of you readers and members share the challenge with us? *To whom did Nahum Smith refer in his 1882 report?* The suspense is tantalizing to the true historian. Any clues or old school pictures of the early nineteenth century will be helpful. We hope that by digging into your shelves, albums, garrets, and even barns, you will turn up something of value.

## Even Then Crime Didn't Pay

On May 2, 1898 Weston's three selectmen, Henry J. Jennison, Chairman, Francis Blake, and Nathan S. Fiske published the following:

### \$500 REWARD

will be paid by the Town of Weston to the person who will furnish information which will lead to the arrest and conviction of the colored man who shot and robbed William Flitcroft in Weston, about 8:45 o'clock in the evening of

April 30, 1898

Among the archives of the Weston Police Department is a penny postcard mailed from Waltham four days later by James H. McKenna, Waltham's Police Chief, to Mr.



Jennison at his 811 Tremont Street, Boston office. Printed in bold type, it described the crime and denounced the suspect as follows:

**WANTED FOR ROBBERY AND ATTEMPT TO MURDER**

On Saturday, April 30th, 1898, about 8:45 P.M.,

William Flitcroft was held up and robbed on the tracks of the Fitchburg R.R. between the Kendal Green and Hastings stations, in Town of Weston, by a Negro who shot him through the stomach and he will probably die. He took a gold watch and a small sum of money from Flitcroft. The watch is gold hunting case, engine-turned to shield, gilt movement. No. 5474312, 11 jewels, stem wind, 10K case, No. 140055, plated chain, gilt movement, with Lord's Prayer engraved on one side and picture of the U.S. Mint Phila. on other. A Negro who answers description of the robber worked on a farm near where the shooting took place and left about one week ago and was seen around once since, he gave name of Harry Thompson, was about 38 years old, 5 ft. 6 in. tall, wore dark clothes and black derby hat and when talking, stutters. TOWN OF WESTON OFFERS \$500 FOR ARREST AND CONVICTION.

Notify, James H. McKenna  
Chief of Police, Waltham

or J. H. Whitney, Mass. Dist. Police,  
Medford, Mass.

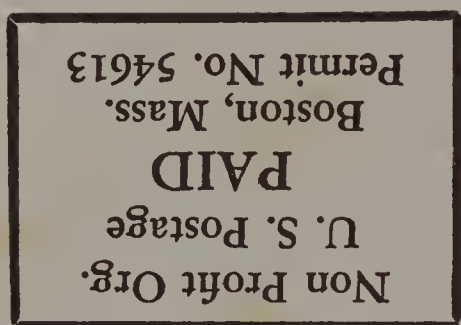
Was Harry Thompson, so dogmatically and emphatically condemned without hearing or trial, ever apprehended? We could uncover no evidence of it or of the reward money ever having been paid. Did poor 22-year-old William Flitcroft, employed at the Hook and Hastings Organ Factory, fulfill the chief's dire prophecy and die from his wounds? Search of our Town Records did not confirm it. Rather we found that almost sixteen months later, a daughter, Marion Elizabeth Flitcroft was born on August 26, 1899 to him and his wife, Lizzie Allen Thurston who, according to the same book, had married him after the shooting the year before. The little girl died at the age of 1½ on January 28th, 1901 and was buried in Lot 176, Linwood Cemetery.

While pursuing the above, quite a few aftermaths emerged to capture one's imagination and to inspire further speculation. For one thing, our William John Flitcroft, lucky though he had been in '98, actually did die on September 19th, 1903 in Wakefield through accidental drowning at the age of 27. His father, John A. Flitcroft, bought Lot 5, Plot G, in our Linwood Cemetery and brought his son's body home for burial. He himself died in Watertown at the age of 56 on January 7, 1909 and the mother, Annie Sharp Flitcroft, at age 67, followed him on April 9, 1920. Both were buried beside their son, William, and on April 28, 1950 his younger brother, George W. Flitcroft joined them at the age of 62.

In the course of our investigation, we bared another Flitcroft tragedy. William and George Flitcroft had a sister, Alice, who in 1903 earned \$438 as a Weston schoolteacher. On January 9, 1904, less than four months after her brother's accidental death by drowning, she committed suicide in South Station, Boston during a period of despondency by shooting herself through brain and heart. Her age was listed as 25 years, 11 months and 23 days. Two fresh graves in the same Flitcroft lot were sad enough, but in less than three months the peaceful town of Weston was shaken by the tragic murder of Mabel Page who lived across the street from Schoolhouse No. 5 where Alice taught. At first her death was ruled suicidal but when the medical examiner arrived many hours later, he discovered further stab wounds that indicated murder. His announcement to that effect came ironically on April 1st! The murder gained national prominence. One Charles Tucker of Auburndale, on the basis of circumstantial evidence alone, was convicted and executed: a subject for another time. Historically we can reflect that three quarters of a century ago, it paid to be, like Caesar's wife, "above suspicion," for anyone who "looked or acted" guilty could expect no mercy, mollicoddling, or sympathy.

H.G.T.

The Weston Historical Society  
Bulletin  
JANUARY 1972



### OFFICERS

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Extra copies of the BULLETIN are available at 25¢ each. Please contact Mrs. Frederick D. Bonner, 893-4346.