

THE WESTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY

BULLETIN

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Photo 1910 by Harold Stevens

THE RUINS OF THE FLAGG TAVERN

“When I was young, it (Weston) was known as the Town with the chimneys. Route 20, or Central Avenue as it was called, was the main automobile route between Boston and New York and the principal landmark in Weston was a pair of chimneys that rose prominently from a cellar hole by the side of the road. For many years motorists traveling along the highway passed these unsightly objects and, seeing them year after year, no doubt wondered why they weren’t pulled down. People in town wondered the same thing. There were various theories, one being that . . . the owner refused to disturb them until an insurance claim had been settled, while the insurance company, believing the fire of incendiary origin refused to settle, so the stalemate persisted.” (*Travel and Transportation: Weston Historical Society Bulletin*, May 1969).

The old Flagg Tavern had burnt to the ground on November 6, 1902 but the chimneys weren’t demolished until more than thirty years later. George Washington wrote in his journal on October 23, 1789 “. . . and thence to Weston . . . where we lodged.” On October 24, 1789 he noted: “Dressed by seven o’clock and set out at eight.” The two upstairs fireplaces that are visible in the picture heated the front chambers, and no doubt Washington got dressed in front of one of them. It was in this historic building that he passed the night as mentioned in his diary.

On the preceding day (Thursday) he had written to Governor John Hancock from Brookfield: “A few miles west of this village I met the express, who delivered me your Excellency’s letter of yesterday. I have been so

fortunate as to proceed thus far, without any accident to delay my journey; should nothing occur to prevent me, I shall be at Weston tomorrow night, and I purpose taking dinner so early at Watertown on Saturday, as to reach Cambridge by half past two o'clock. Thence I presume we shall arrive within an hour at Boston.

"I am highly sensible of the honor intended me: But could my wish prevail I should desire to visit your Metropolis without any parade, or extraordinary ceremony. From a wish to avoid giving trouble to private families, I determined, on leaving New York, to decline the honor of any invitation to quarters which I might receive on my journey; and with a view to observe this rule, I had requested a Gentleman to engage lodgings for me during my stay at Boston. I beg your Excellency to be persuaded of the grateful sense of the honor you intended to confer on me, and I desire to assure you of the respectful regard with which I am &c." In view of this policy, so carefully explained to the Governor, would Washington have broken down the very next day and stayed with General Marshall on Highland Street, Weston, as some have alleged? (See Weston Historical Society Bulletin, *A HOUSE THAT TRAVELED*, October 1970).

During his stay at Weston, President Washington despatched a letter under date of October 23, 1789 to Governor Hancock informing the latter of certain changes he had made in the plans that had been outlined in his letter from Brookfield. He explained: ". . . have the honor to inform you, that in consequence of suggestions made by the Gentlemen from Boston and the Deputy Adjut. General . . . that it would be more convenient for the troops . . . if I should pass through Cambridge at an earlier hour than I intended, I thought it best to alter the time of my arrival at that place, which I had the pleasure to mention in my letter of yesterday . . . that it is my determination to be at Cambridge to-morrow at 10 o'clock, and I will do myself the honor to accept your Excellency's polite invitation of taking an informal dinner with you. I have the honor &c."

A footnote, however, at the bottom of Page 452 in *WRITINGS OF WASHINGTON* reveals the following: "Washington lodged at Weston the night of October 23 and left it at 8 a.m., October 24. According to schedule he reached Cambridge at 10 a.m.; but the militia was not ready until 11 a.m. A conflict over local precedence delayed his entry into Boston. Lieut. Gov. Samuel Adams, who had been sent by the Governor to welcome the President at the town limits, encountered opposition from the town authorities, who claimed the right to welcome the President to the town. Adams was forced to give way. The details of this controversy are in Washington's *DIARIES*." On reaching Boston Saturday afternoon, October 25, 1789, Washington was neither met by the Governor nor called upon by him. Instead, Lieutenant Governor Samuel Adams met him at the Cambridge line and, on reaching his Boston lodgings, Washington canceled the dinner appointment and dined with Vice President John Adams.

Not until Sunday the 26th did Governor Hancock finally call on the President. At half past twelve o'clock he sent a note and at one o'clock, thirty minutes later, President Washington replied "The President of the United States presents his best respects to the Governor, and has the honor to inform him that he shall be at home 'till 2 o'clock. The President of the United States need not express the pleasure it will give him to see the Governor; but, at the same time, he most earnestly begs that the Governor will not hazard his health on the occasion." Hancock on his arrival assured the President that indisposition alone had prevented his calling before.

THE CENTRAL MASSACHUSETTS RAILROAD

The year 1971 marked the end of passenger service on the century-old Central Massachusetts Railroad. Although at one time this little line boasted of two long distance trains—one to Washington D.C. and the other to Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, it was never an important trunk route like its neighbors, “The Fitchburg” and “The Boston and Albany”. It served commuters, however, for many years in the towns lying between Lancaster and Boston,—and even the longer run to Northampton was well patronized.

Incorporated in 1869 as *The Massachusetts Central*, its purpose was to proceed westward from Boston through the center of the state. Towns along the route were high pressured into subscribing to the stock, and those who did, little realized what disappointment lay ahead for them.

In an 1870 Weston town meeting it was

“Resolved,—to authorize the Town Treasurer to subscribe to 500 shares of Massachusetts Central Railroad upon certain specified conditions regarding depot accommodations for the town; and also that the road shall be an independent through line to the city of Boston.”

A vote was taken, and the resolution was defeated, 85 to 72.

Despite Weston’s uncooperative attitude, construction was started in 1872—just 100 years ago—and during the next decade less than 50 miles of track were laid. By then the road was so badly in debt that the bondholders foreclosed. Service consisting of four trains from Boston to Jefferson and return each day and two round trips between Boston and Hudson were suspended. Vegetation quickly took over the unused roadbed and for the next four years the section through Weston had a stand of scrub birch growing between the tracks and ties.

In 1886 the Boston and Lowell Railroad came to the rescue and, for a consideration, agreed to complete the tracks to Northampton. There was no diddling around this time. The Boston and Lowell was an efficient organization and laid the remaining 50 miles of track in about a year,—about a mile a week, by man and beast,—no bulldozers, cranes, and tractors then!

So in 1887 the line once more became operable, its name was changed to *The Central Massachusetts Railroad* and, along with the Boston and Lowell, it became a part of the Boston and Maine system. Once more the melodious whistle echoed through the valley, and once more the puffs of steam and smoke rose from the locomotive as it left one station for the next,—and once more the sparks from the smokestack would set fire to the bogs between Cherry Brook and Tower Hill in a dry season, causing the peat to smolder away for days and even weeks at a time.

By then there were nine westbound and nine eastbound trains a day,—three each way between Boston and Northampton, one each way between Boston and Ware, two between Boston and Hudson, and three between Boston and Wayland. Of this operation, Col. Daniel S. Lamson in his *History of the Town of Weston Massachusetts 1630-1890* wrote:

“The Massachusetts Central Railroad, in its inception purely a speculative enterprise, has now come to maturity on a solid basis after twenty years of incubation. Not one of the original officers had personally any practical experience either in building or operating railroads. They went to work blindly, and began their road ‘nowhere’, and ended it in about the same place, as regards being within the reach of business.”

In 1890 two new trains were advertised:—*THE PHILADELPHIA AND WASHINGTON EXPRESS* leaving Boston at 5:45 P.M. with Pullman Buffet sleeping cars,—first stop South Sudbury,—and *THE HARRISBURG EXPRESS* leaving Boston at 8 A.M., Pullman Buffet, Drawing Room cars,—first stop Waltham. The eastbound *HARRISBURG EXPRESS* stopped at Weston every evening at 9:05 to discharge passengers from Oakdale and stations west.

Our little single track line with such grandiose equipment was now beginning to look important. Alas, that one track with only occasional turn-outs for trains to pass one another, took a tortuous course with considerable grade from Waltham to Weston. Once west of Hudson it meandered all over the place. This was hardly conducive to the speed needed for long distance travel.

Local service, however, was excellent with trains going through town about every hour: twelve a day in each direction! After World War I these numbers were considerably reduced; then came the great 1938 hurricane which did irreparable damage to the tracks west of Clinton. No attempt was ever made to restore them. By the time of World War II about five trains remained and these were eliminated one by one until finally service was reduced to a single Buddliner that plied between South Sudbury and Boston, once a day in each direction, to accommodate the dwindling number of commuters. An experiment, conducted in 1971 to see if frequent service would bring back the commuters, was a futile effort. Once accustomed to road travel, the passengers that had been lost found it hard to change without something special being offered as an inducement. This the Central Massachusetts did not have; instead it had such a rough roadbed and its ties were in such deteriorated condition that the trains had to move very slowly to prevent derailment. The experiment was a failure, passenger service was discontinued, and that apparently ends the story of the Central Massachusetts.

B.H.D.

1972 RESTORATION

As our Historian handed us the preceding manuscript, a coincidence occurred. At almost the same moment, carpenters began to remove the old shingles from the roof of the old Weston Station as the first step in a thorough rejuvenation and restoration that safeguards the preservation of an attractive, nostalgic landmark. Weston is indeed fortunate to have on Church Street, hardly half a mile apart, two of the dwindling number of mid 19th Century railroad stations left in the country. One is at Weston Center,—the other at Kendal Green. Both are owned by the same man, Mr. James W. Ferrelli of Wellesley Street who has engaged the firm headed by our fellow member, Bruce Nickerson, to do the work. He has agreed to paint the building when the work is completed, in the original color which expert and experienced Weston Historical Society members are endeavoring by careful analysis of scrapings to uncover. Weston may well be thankful for this latest evidence of the continued regard of its citizens for the gems of the past. In time, these two railroad stations may become as rare as the two early 19th Century Law Offices of which Weston is so proud, the one at 626 Boston Post Road being the headquarters of our Society, open on appointment.



“MANY-SIDED FRANKLIN”

Dr. Vera Laska recommends for pleasant reading the following two books about our country's first Postmaster General,—Benjamin Franklin. It was he who, on a visit to Weston, selected 651 Boston Post Road to be our first post office. For a definitive biography, Dr. Laska brands Carl Van Doren's *BENJAMIN FRANKLIN* as “simply beautiful”, adding “from boy to diplomatist you meet an entirely new Franklin too.”

Her second suggestion is *MON CHER PAPA, FRANKLIN AND THE LADIES OF PARIS* by Claude Anne Lopez, a French author who is in charge of Franklin's French papers in the first edition of the complete *Papers of Benjamin Franklin* now being edited at Yale University. Of this novel Dr. Laska observes—“Whereas somebody once said the Vatican is splendid but lacks the woman's touch, Claude Anne Lopez surely provides this touch to a Franklin who was so many-sided. No wonder he was the best known person in the world of his time.”

MEMBERSHIP STEADILY GROWS

Welcomed to membership in our Society are Mr. and Mrs. Edward O. Carlman, Mr. and Mrs. David V. Harmon, Mr. and Mrs. Wade G. Asaff, and Mrs. N. T. Herndon. Another life membership has been pledged and will be added to our Endowment Fund, only the income from which will ever be used. Such life memberships thus are never-ending in their annual contributions to the Society's program, projects, and perpetuity. Life memberships, like annual dues and other contributions to the Society, are tax deductible. They may be taken out in anyone's name, and make a most appropriate, generous, and meaningful gift to dedicated progeny and devoted friends.

NEXT MULDOON LECTURE

On Tuesday, May 9 at 8 o'clock in the Isaac Fiske Law Office, Mr. James B. Muldoon will give another of his informal lectures on fascinating court cases and decisions of yesteryear. As seating is limited, phone your reservations to 899-5469 or 893-7388.



Annual Dues: \$3.00 per person, \$5 per family

Life Memberships \$200

Gift Memberships are suggested

Contributions to the Society are always welcome.

Checks should be made payable to Weston Historical Society, Inc.
and mailed to P. O. Box 343, Weston, Mass. 02193

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Extra copies are available for 25¢ each. Please contact Mrs. Frederick D. Bonner 893-4346.