

THE WESTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY BULLETIN



January 1974, Vol. X, No. 2



VENERABLE LANDMARK ON RIPLEY LANE THE HOUSE OF "DOCTORED" HISTORY

Known up to now as having been built "by 1740", this house came into the possession of the Ripley family in 1878. After 63 years of ownership and occupancy, that family sold it in 1941 to Mr. and Mrs. Reginald B. Elwell whose family likewise owned and occupied it for another 28,—making a total of 91 years under just two families. Since at least 1913 when LAMSON'S HISTORY OF WESTON was published, it was commonly thought that a Dr. Wheaton had built it and in 1775 had harbored a British spy overnight, concealing him in a space behind the central chimney. To learn how fallacious both of these reports were, see elsewhere in this issue, COLONEL LAMSON DID NOT SAY IT.

In 1969 Mrs. Elwell, one of our charter members, sold the house and barn with certain acreage to Dr. and Mrs. Ralph Earle, Jr., also members. The historic property remains in trusted hands. It also, now for the first time, is in truth owned and occupied by a real doctor of medicine and his family.

Research currently underway by members in conjunction with the Weston Historical Commission's townwide survey of houses has just turned up a possibility that the house was built perhaps in the 17th Century. Book 17 at the Middlesex County Registry of Deeds contains a 1701 deed which is being carefully explored, for in it Joseph Allen, Sr. conveys seventy acres and half a house to his only son, Joseph Allen, Jr. "for and in consideration of the fatherly affection that I have and bestow. . . ." The elder Allen includes ". . . my house Father Walter Allen formerly purchased of Mr. Bowman of Watertown." Though the house pictured above as it stands today has had additions and alterations through the years, the main part is indeed an original 4 room, central chimneyed house which indicates an early date. Without further documentation, however, we would not dare or care to say positively that what is pictured here is the structure in which these early owners of the property lived in 1701.

JANUARY MEETING FEATURES REVOLUTIONS IN ART

The Hall of the First Parish Church will be the site of the Society's meeting on Tuesday evening, January 29th at 8 P.M. The speaker will be Carole Taynton, popular and gifted lecturer at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts for the past six years. The topic she has selected for her illustrated slide lecture is:

AMERICAN ARTISTIC REVOLUTIONS: COPLEY TO CASSATT.

Before coming to Boston in 1967, Miss Taynton was an instructor at the Toledo Museum of Art in Ohio. She had graduated from Oberlin College in that state with both B.A. and M.A. degrees in Art History. While studying for her masters degree, she held the position of Curatorial Assistant in the Oberlin Museum.

While she devotes almost full time to her chosen profession, she has served as Music Critic for the Boston Globe on many occasions. Well known by several members of our Program Committee, she is sure to provide a fascinating and enlightening evening. At the social hour which will follow, we shall have an opportunity to talk with her informally. Members are urged to bring friends and other prospective members to join us at this most worthwhile event.

PRESIDENT'S ANNUAL REPORT

Let me first thank all members for their interest and support. The Society has been fortunate during the past year in having an increased number of donations to its collection, and we are most appreciative. We continue to urge members to offer items that are, or may become, of historical value for our collection that is housed both at the Josiah Smith Tavern and the Isaac Fiske Law Office. The shed at the Tavern is soon to be re-enforced and made available for proper storage. Our rooms in the Tavern are in sore need of painting and re-furbishing: a project we hope will be completed before the Bicentennial.

Officers, directors, and members continue to lend assistance to other historically oriented town organizations, such as The Historical Commission and the Bicentennial Committee. It is gratifying to note that the house survey project of the Commission on which we have given major support, has progressed sufficiently to warrant the appointment by the Selectmen of an Historical District Study Committee to which we offer whatever aid is needed.

The Society is cooperating with the Weston Public Schools in courses in American history prior to the Civil War. Students pursuing specific topics in Weston history are matched with Society members knowledgeable in those areas. Some twenty subjects are being researched and should any member wish to assist one or more students, either Mr. Travis (899-4515) or I (893-7388) will be pleased to outline subjects and procedures.

Our lecture series have been well attended and well received. We hope their continuation will be stimulating to all members. The BULLETIN, under the editorship of Mr. Travis, has maintained its usual high standard and has kept members informed on our activities. While finances are at present adequate, increased membership is necessary to maintain a viable organization. Wider interest and active support by all Weston residents is most desirable. This is particularly timely in view of the growing interest in Historical Districts and the upcoming Bicentennial events. This issue of the BULLETIN is being mailed gratis to every Weston household and we therefore urge all present members to encourage their friends and neighbors to join our Society. Each of you is a member of the Membership Committee of which Donald Douglass is chairman.

Please play your own part in recruiting each and every resident of the Town so that all of Weston may participate in our plans to make the second decade of our organization increasingly useful in protecting, promoting, and preserving our rich heritage.

Edward W. Marshall

IN MEMORIAM

With regret and sympathy we record the deaths since our last issue of charter members Mrs. Webb White and Mr. Albert R. Speare.

COLONEL LAMSON DID NOT SAY IT

Too often authors die before completing their manuscripts. When this happens, some outside writer is often drafted to finish the job. After Colonel Lamson's death, the late Horace Sears employed one William S. Kennedy to edit Lamson's notes and follow them through publication in LAMSON'S HISTORY OF WESTON, MASSACHUSETTS for distribution to every citizen during the Town's Bicentennial Celebration 60 years ago. This Kennedy lived in Belmont and was listed on that Town's 1913 Assessors' List as "Writer" with residence on Concord Road in that neighboring town. His preface was dated "Belmont, Mass. Feb. 24, 1913" and included these pertinent extracts:

"As to the accuracy of Colonel Lamson's History of Weston, all has been done that could be done to authenticate and correct the data . . . proofs have been passed under the critical eye of several persons . . . we have done our best to do this work for him . . . hence over our shortcomings would it be too much to ask that kindly charity draw the veil of silence?"

For six decades that plea has been respected. Even now, we have great sympathy for the difficult task he undertook. Yet with the American Revolutionary War Bicentennial upon us, our eyes have sharpened. Insistence on "Facts at any Cost" compels us to set the record finally straight on one very important and significant part of Weston history.

On pages that follow are pictured (A) Pages 7 and 8 from Lamson's original, meticulously handwritten manuscript as used by Mr. Kennedy, (B) through courtesy of the Massachusetts Historical Society pages 10 and 11 of its photostatic copies of "A JOURNAL kept by MR. JOHN HOWE, while he was employed as a BRITISH SPY During The Revolutionary War. . . ." as published at Concord, N.H. by Luther Roby, Printer, in 1827, and (C) Page 77 from the book as finally published. Comparing these three documents carefully, you'll see several harmless changes in wording, but there's one change in the final book that makes all the difference in the world.

See how in both Howe's original journal and the Colonel's handwritten transcriptions therefrom, reference is consistently made to "one Wheaton", "for Mr. Wheaton's. . .", "at Mr. Wheaton's", "Mr. Wheaton", and finally again "Mr. Wheaton." Nary a mention of *doctor* anywhere. But in the Kennedy rendition which he honestly terms an abstract, we detect some amplifications and, despite or perhaps because of, that "critical eye" which may have been looking over his shoulder, a few highly imaginative surmises. Specifically, look at the parenthecated explanation in the following: ". . . one Wheaton in a remote part of the town, where I must remain until he sent for me (the Dr. Wheaton house is now that of Mr. Ripley)." . . . "After dinner Dr. Wheaton. . . ."

Who gave Writer Kennedy from out of town the idea that "one Wheaton" was "Dr. Wheaton"? How did he document, we wonder, that Howe's haven on that exciting night was the house that the Ripley family owned in 1913? Why don't the records at the Middlesex County Registry of Deed show that "one Wheaton" or that "Dr. Wheaton" as a previous owner of that Ripley property? Hazardous though conjectures, guesses, and deductions assuredly are, we point nevertheless to the bottom of Page 7 of Lamson's own manuscript. Can't you picture certain agitated Liberty Men, perhaps with knives unsheathed and teeth bared, backing Isaac Jones' terrified black servant against the kitchen wall and demanding "You tell us where he went!?" And, in her loyal, wily way to throw them off the track would that l'il ole gal have pointed in the wrong direction to "down there in the Swamp." But we must tolerate no more guesswork in our search for "the truth and nothing but the truth."

During our inventorying of Weston's houses, we discovered that no "Dr." Wheaton's name or property ever appeared on the Weston scene before 1793,—18 years after Sergeant Howe's flight from Isaac Jones' tavern! So, having discarded the myth that a Dr. Wheaton ever lived in Weston during the 1770's and that in fact any Wheaton had ever lived on Ripley Lane, we resolved to find out for once and for all, where in Weston that "One Wheaton" actually did live.

The only WHEATON of Revolutionary War days who lived in Weston was Nathaniel Wheaton. Over at the Middlesex Registry of Deeds, we unearthed easily on Pages 107 and 108 of Book No. 74, a deed that recorded the sale of 575 pounds that one John Brown of Newtown made on Dec. 4, 1772 to NATHANIEL WHEATON OF ROXBURY, HOUSEWRIGHT, of a "certain farm lying in Weston containing a Mansion

(Continued on page 6)

Her horse would be needed and I should be taken. Here I got some dinner; then he said he would send his hired man with me to the house of one Wheaton, in a remote part of the town, where I must remain till he sent for me. After dinner I set out with his hired man for Mr Wheaton's; I arrived at Mr Wheaton's about sunset. Then the hired man informed Mr Wheaton of my business, and that I was a British spy, and Capt Jones wished him to keep me secure until he sent for me. Then I was conducted into a chamber, with a table furnished with a bottle of brandy, candles, paper &c. Now I went to work to copy from my head on a journal. I remained here all night; the next day being the 1st, the good hired man came to see me early in the morning. He informed me that the news of the conversation which took place at Watertown between Col. Smith and a black woman reached Capt Jones last evening, by the same teamsters you saw at Joel Smith's farm yesterday. They insisted that there was a British spy in the house, the news spread, and by eleven o'clock there were thirty men collected. Capt Jones gave them leave to search the house, which they did in part; then they went into the kitchen and asked the black woman if there were any strangers or Englishmen in the house; she replied she thought

A.

not; they asked her if there had any been there that day; she answered one or two gentlemen dined up stairs this afternoon; they asked her where they went to; she answered they sent them off to General Denamp, a dismal swamp about two miles from Jones' tavern. By this time their fury was subsided, Capt Jones set on a bottle of spirit to drink, which they drank and all retired. Now the hired man went home and said he should call again in the evening; after breakfast I went to work upon my journal, here I sat down the number of militia, arms & ammunition of this place sent to me by the hired man from Mr Jones. After dinner Mr Wheaton introduced his two daughters to me, stating to them that I was a British officer in disguise. Here we sat and played cards until tea time. After tea the ladies retired and I lay down, being very tired, and expecting company that evening. About eight o'clock the hired man called for me and said he was going with me to Marlborough, but said he could not go by Capt Jones for they were lying in wait for me there. So I bid Mr Wheaton and his family goodbye, and off we set on the back road coming out above Capt Jones one mile on the Worcester road. Here I found the road good to Sudbury river; here I found myself twenty miles from

that had taken place from Boston here, it being fourteen miles. He informed me that it would not do for me to stay over night, for his house would be mobbed and I should be taken. Here I got some dinner; then he said he would send his hired man with me to the house of one Wheaton, in a remote part of the town, where I must remain till he sent for me after dinner. I set out with this hired man for Mr. Wheaton's; I arrived at Mr. Wheaton's about sunset. Then the hired man informed Mr. Wheaton of my business, and that I was a British Spy, and Capt. Jones wished him to keep me secure until he sent for me. Then I was conducted into a chamber, with a table furnished with a bottle of brandy, candles, paper, &c. Now I went to work to copy from my head on a journal. I remained here all night; the next day being 6th, the good hired man came to see me early in the morning. He informed me that the news of the conversation which took place at Watertown between Col. Smith and a black woman reached Capt. Jones last evening, by the same teamsters you saw at J. Smith's tavern yesterday. They insisted that there were British Spies in the house, the news spread, and by eleven o'clock there were thirty men collected. Capt. Jones gave them leave to search the house, which they did in part; then they went into the kitchen and asked the black woman if there were any strangers or Englishmen in the house; she replied

she thought not; they asked her if there had any been there that day; she answered one or two gentlemen dined up stairs this afternoon; they asked her where they went to; she answered they sent them off to Jericho swamp, a dismal swamp about two miles from Jones' tavern. By this time their fury was subsided, Capt. Jones set on a bottle of spirit to drink, which they drank, and all retired.—Now the hired man went home and said he should call again in the evening; after breakfast I went to work upon my journal, here I sat down the number of militia, arms and ammunition of this place sent to me by the hired man from Mr. Jones—after dinner Mr. Wheaton introduced his two daughters to me, stating to them that I was a British officer in disguise. Here we sat and played cards until tea time. After tea the ladies retired and I lie down, being very tired, and expected company that evening. About eight o'clock the hired man called for me and said he was going with me to Marlborough, but said we could not go by Capt. Jones' for they were lying in wait for me there; so I bid Mr. Wheaton and his family good bye, and off we set on the back road, coming out above Capt. Jones' one mile, on the Worcester road. Here I found the roads good to Sudbury river; here I found myself twenty miles from Boston, Here we examined the river for a fording place, providing the bridge should be moved, we found one place which was fordable in Fra-

C.

would not do for me to stay at his house over night, for his house would be mobbed and I would be taken a prisoner. He gave me some dinner and sent me by his hired man to the house of one Wheaton in a remote part of the town, where I must remain, until he sent for me [the Dr. Wheaton house is now that of Mr. Ripley]. The man told Dr. Wheaton I was a British spy. I was conducted into a chamber, where I found a bottle of Brandy, candles and paper. I went to work to write up my journal. The next day Captain Jones' man came and told me that the news of what had occurred at Watertown between Col. Smith and the black woman had reached Captain Jones's in the night, by the same teamsters that had seen me at the Smith tavern. By eleven o'clock that night some thirty men had collected at the Jones tavern [with tar and feathers.] Capt. Jones gave them permission to search the house. The black girl told them some persons had been sent into Jericho swamp. After dinner Dr. Wheaton introduced me to his two daughters as a British officer in disguise and we played cards until tea time. That night Captain Jones's man came to take me to Marlboro'. We came out on the road about a mile above Jones's on the Worcester road. I found the roads good to the Sudbury river, twenty-five miles from Boston. I examined

House and Barn with about 67 acres. . . also a second piece of land containing about 13 acres . . . and one other piece of land being wood land containing about 13 acres bounded southerly on the line between the Towns of Weston and Needham . . .”

Getting rapidly to the point by skipping formalities, there is no doubt whatsoever that this Wheaton house (“Mansion”) and property stood in the southwest quarter of Weston at, or mostly quite close to, the Wellesley line of today. Thus, after uncovering his purchase of land from John Brown (Was our Brown Street named for him? Ed.) we searched Roxbury’s early Town records, and to our delight, found under ROXBURY MARRIAGES on Page 423 “WHEETON (see also Whealan) Nathan(ie)l, & Molly Richards Oct. 7, 1759.” Elsewhere in the same book under ROXBURY BIRTHS we unearthed first on page 294 “Molly, d. Joseph & Mary (Wheaton), April 15, 1741.

(So she was 18 when she married our Nathaniel.)

Turning to Page 365 under the same heading we came to:

“Wheaton (see also WHEETON)

Amy d. Nathaniel & Molly, Nov. 17, 1765

Caleb s. Nathaniel & Molly, March 2, 1761

Molly d. Nathaniel & Molly, Jan. 5, 1763

Obviously when “after dinner Mr. Wheaton introduced his two daughters to me” and they played cards until teatime, Amy was almost 10 and Molly was 12. Equally significant is the fact that, continuing his journal, Howe says “About eight o’clock the hired man called for me . . . but said we could not go by Capt. Jones’ for they were lying in wait for me there . . . so . . . off we set on the back road, coming out above Capt. Jones’ one mile, on the Worcester Road.” Note here that instead of going to Weston Center on what is today’s Wellesley Street from the Glen Road vicinity, the two connivers could have swung over to Highland Street, headed north as far as today’s Love Lane, and have come out à la Howe’s diary, “. . . a mile above Capt. Jones’ on the Worcester Road.”

How can we find out more about Nathaniel, and where his house (“mansion”) was? From Mary Frances Peirce’s books we know that first their daughter Amy in 1776, and then his wife Molly, and finally he himself on July 4, 1777 died “of smallpox”, but we can find no record of where they were buried, for they are not recorded in the records of the South Burying Ground or the Farmers’ Burying Ground on South and Central Avenues respectively. Nor does Roxbury/Boston have any record of their interments “back home.” Maybe their bones are in somebody’s backyard on “the south side”. Their son, Caleb, paid real estate taxes on 13 acres of land here through 1810, but he and his younger sister Molly have left no trace as to what their destinies were. Will we ever know? There’s always a chance.

As we came to press time, we began to hit real “pay dirt” in our yen to locate the exact spot where Nathaniel Wheaton’s house (“Mansion”) stood (stands?). Where are those 67 acres on which the mansion and barn were located? How about those two 13 acre tracts, one apparently open field, the other identified as woodland? Did either or both abut the 67 acre main plot? On December 14th at 3:45 P.M. (the Registry closes at 4 SHARP) we “clicked” on one of the 13 acre pieces. To save space, we now record that “as at” December 17th as we “go to press”, one of these 13 acre tracts is indeed part of the large estate in the South Side of Weston whose owner(s) agrees with us that until we are sure, we will not divulge any premature, half-finished bits of information. Certain puzzles will smooth themselves out to the point where documented findings can be revealed. Meanwhile it’s too easy to leap to false conclusions just as was done 60 years ago, and we’re just too “Yankee” to get ourselves caught in such confusion and conflict.

Finally though, to send a great many of you in Weston’s southwest quarter scurrying to your Safe Deposit vaults where your own deeds are kept, let us tell you that, since 67 plus 13 still by new or old Math equals 80, the above mentioned owners’ property actually includes without doubt one of the two 13 acre plats and traces back to 1771 as part of a deed for,-you guessed it,-80 acres (67 + 13). The perplexing part at this stage is that the abutters shown thereon are not the same as appear on the Brown to Wheaton deed of 1772 (a year later). Well, seasoned researchers are accustomed to such temporary frustrations. We, though, are impatient to get the pieces of the puzzles in place, so if any of you find that your property “identifies” in its abstracts of title with Nathan Jones, John Jones, Abijah Upham, Nathaniel Dewing, Nathaniel Stimpson, John Lamson, John Allen, or Samuel Fiske, please call the Editor at any hour of the day or night!

NEW MEMBERS

We welcome into our active membership:

Mrs. Conway L. Atwater, P.O. Box 938, Hamilton, Bermuda
Mr. and Mrs. William H. Coburn, Jr., 1580 Del Monte Court, Moraga, Cal. 94556
Dr. and Mrs. Joseph Gardella, 479 North Ave., Weston, Mass. 02193
Mrs. Lawrence W. Hunt, 131-D North St., Newtonville, Mass. 02160
Mrs. Albert B. Joy, 37-21 Middlesex Circle, Waltham, Mass. 02154
Mr. Stephen W. Maloney, 66 Radcliffe Road, Weston, Mass. 02193
Mrs. Weldon W. Keith, 12 Linden Road, Sudbury, Mass. 02176
Mrs. Ruth B. Murkland, 334 South Ave., Weston, Mass. 02193
Mrs. Lawrence A. Murray, 239 Winter Street, Weston, Mass. 02193
Mrs. Harold F. Nichols, 1 Legion Road, Weston, Mass. 02193
Mr. and Mrs. Gordon H. Silver, 35 Loring Road, Weston, Mass. 02193
Mr. and Mrs. Edward Yeoman Walker, 53 Ash Street, Weston, Mass. 02193
Mrs. Stewart C. Woodworth, Exmoor, 745 Boston Post Road, Weston, Mass. 02193

SPECIAL NOTICE

By vote of the Directors, this issue of the BULLETIN is being mailed to every Weston household for one reason and for one purpose:— (1) We are proud of WESTON, and (1) we seek the support of EVERY WESTON FAMILY.

Our many officers and committees are working diligently with all our members to preserve this great Town's rich heritage. Through family and single memberships at nominal rates we are one of the largest historical societies in the Commonwealth. Unlike some similar organizations our membership is not by any means confined to a select few old residents! Rather, people of all ages and stages of life are generously represented, and indeed, the contacts between oldtimers and youngsters are cordial and mutually rewarding. The programs of our regular meetings bring us real inspiration and helpful information.

The Bicentennial of the American Revolution is almost upon us, and we are particularly anxious to have every Weston household on our membership roll. That's why, with this issue, we are cordially inviting you,—if you are not already a member, to fill out the simple application blank below, and mail it with your check payable to the WESTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY, INC. to the address shown thereon.

New members will be welcomed by name in our next issue. We very much want to include your name. We'll be grateful for your tangible support. The Town whose blessings we all enjoy and share, will surely benefit from it too.

WESTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY, INC.

P.O. BOX 343

WESTON, MASS. 02193

Please accept the enclosed check for \$ _____ as payment for one year's membership as designated:

Family @ \$5 _____

Single @ \$3 _____

My name is _____

Others under 21 in my family are _____

Signed _____

Street _____

Town _____ State _____ Zip _____

COMING EVENTS

TUESDAY, JAN. 29: 8 P.M. First Parish Hall

Slide Lecture: COPLEY TO CASSATT

Story on Page 2

TUESDAY APRIL 23: CHARTER ANNIVERSARY DINNER

MARK THE DATE ON YOUR CALENDAR

Details in next issue

WESTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY, INC.

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