

THE WESTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY BULLETIN



March 1974, Vol. X, No. 3



THE BARN OF ISAAC FISKE—In the spring of 1920 this old structure which stood northwest of the Fiske house and across the Post Road from the Central Burying Ground, was moved downstreet some 600 feet to its present location immediately west of the Farmers' Burying Ground and facing north onto Soldiers' Park. It was converted into shops and office space. This photograph was taken by the author. See story on Pages 3, 4, and 5.

CHARTER ANNIVERSARY DINNER: OUR BIGGEST ANNUAL EVENT

Be sure to set aside **TUESDAY EVENING, APRIL 23RD** on your calendar. On that evening in the Cafeteria of the Senior High School, the members of our Society will gather to enjoy the traditional dinner and fellowship that has always marked this event as the high spot of the Society's year. Our speaker will be Mr. Stephen T. Riley, Director of the Massachusetts Historical Society, a charter member of our Society and a popular speaker before several of our previous gatherings. Of particular significance as the American Revolutionary War Bicentennial approaches will be his lively topic:

COLONIAL RIVALRY: JOHN ADAMS AND ROBERT TREAT PAINE

Further details regarding arrangements and reservations will be mailed to each member, but meanwhile it is important that you save the date and plan to attend with your friends on Tuesday, April 23rd. It will be a great evening.

IN ANTICIPATION OF SPRING

Any day now the daffodils in the lovely bulb garden behind the Isaac Fiske Law Office will be bursting into bloom, heralding a summerlong procession of rare beauty. Can't *you* spare a few hours to help keep it trim? If enough of us have a piece of the action, the work will be fun and the result a constantly neat and blooming old-fashioned garden, filled with enjoyment and satisfaction for all. Call Susan Dumaine at 899-1098.

FIRE DESTROYS ISAAC FISKE HOUSE (BALDWIN TAVERN)

ITEM FROM THE DAILY PRESS Aug. 22, 1890

“Early this morning the old mansion house on the corner of Central Avenue and Fiske Street in Weston, known as the Squire Fiske house, was discovered to be on fire and in spite of all efforts to prevent was totally consumed. Fire was first discovered in the shed at the rear of the ell by Mr. Winslow who is occupying the house for the summer. He supposed that he had extinguished it but soon after he found that it was working in the partition between the shed and the ell.

“Mr. Winslow at once went to Mr. Dickson’s for assistance and Benton Dickson Jr. promptly responded taking with him a force pump and a revolver. On arriving at the spot Mr. Dickson fired his revolver twice to arouse the neighbors and set to work with his pump to subdue the flames. This was about half past two o’clock. The fire was found to have gained too much headway for the successful use of the apparatus at hand and the neighbors, having rapidly gathered, exertions were made to save the furniture. In this they were remarkably fortunate for the fire burned very slowly. Nearly everything of value was gotten out of the house including an Emerson upright piano. Nothing more could be done save to protect surrounding buildings from the shower of cinders that filled the air to the eastward.

“Fortunately the wind was very light; what there was was away from the outbuildings and the large trees were an excellent protection on the east side. Nothing now remains of the building but a pile of smoldering ruins and one chimney. Almost everything in the way of wood work is burned. Even some of the surrounding trees took fire and the heart of one large one on Fiske Street was still burning late this forenoon. A servant who was asleep in the attic had a narrow escape, being nearly insensible through suffocation from the very dense smoke when pulled from bed by those who discovered her situation.

“The property is understood to be insured although to what extent could not be ascertained this morning. Among the occupants last night were Mr. Graham Train and sister, who came to Weston to pass the night with Mr. and Mrs. Winslow. They were on the Pullman car on the ill-fated train at Quincy. Mr. Train was intending to go on a yachting cruise, but these two disasters following him so closely have changed his plans, and, although not inclined to be superstitious he thinks he will remain on land.

“We are requested by the family to insert the following:

CARD OF THANKS

‘The heirs of the late Isaac Fiske, Esq. desire to return sincere thanks to their neighbors and friends who exerted themselves so strenuously to save the ancestral home, through whose efforts furniture was saved from the destruction which unfortunately involved the house.’”

From the diary of B. H. Dickson, Jr.

“Friday, August 22, 1890

Our old house burnt at 2:45 A.M. Pat and I got there first. Worked there as long as necessary. To our house.** Worked there putting blankets on roof, etc. Luckily no more houses caught the roofs being damp there having been a heavy shower in the night.
Caught from —?—*

Saturday, August 23, 1890

*to store got fire hooks tried to knock over chimney n.g.
Nothing thought of or talked of except the fire whole town excited.”*

*probably P. J. McAuliffe

**the Parson Woodward house on Concord Road, less than 100 yards away.

* * *

ITEM from the Daily Press of Aug. 27, 1890

“A town meeting is called for next Tuesday evening to see what action the town will take in regard to fire apparatus.”

THE BALDWIN TAVERN

By Brenton H. Dickson

The history of the old building, often known as "The Baldwin Tavern," dates back to 1736 when Joseph Woolson, Weston innholder, conveyed the land at what is now the corner of Fiske Lane and the Post Road to his son Isaac. The Woolson family had been innholders in Weston since at least 1686 when Joseph's father, Thomas, was issued a license to keep an inn and sell liquor. (See Weston Historical Society BULLETIN, Vol. IX, No. 3, March 1973). He carried on the business until his death in 1713 and was succeeded by his son Joseph, who was licensed from then until 1739. In that year a license was given to Joseph's son, Isaac. The following year Isaac petitioned the Court of Sessions for a continuation of his license, "having moved his house some distance from the original site." From then on he conducted his business at the location his father had deeded to him on the Post Road. This would indicate that the oldest part of the house which was to become The Baldwin Tavern was built about that time.

Isaac continued running the inn until his death in 1743. In 1744 and for the next five years we find his widow, Sybil Woolson, a licensed innholder. Presumably she moved to Waltham at the end of this time for, when deeding her property to Samuel Baldwin in 1751, she called herself "Sybil Woolson of Waltham." Baldwin was first licensed in 1749 and probably kept the tavern on Sybil's property until buying it three years later.

When Parson Woodward, Weston's minister during the Revolution, was called to the Weston church in 1751, he bought land of William Smith on Concord Road on which to build his house. "Probably the buyer and seller sought refuge from the bitter March winds in the neighboring tavern of Samuel Baldwin and settled the terms of the bargain over mugs of flip or a jug of hard cider. There were present at this interview, presumably sharing the good cheer, Col. Francis Fullham, Elisha Jones Esq., and mine host himself, Weston worthies all three who signed as witnesses to the deed. . . ." (from an unpublished paper by Andrew Fiske).

When Burgoyne's captured troops were being marched to Boston along the Post Road and bivouacked under the elm across the road, American officers are said to have lodged in the Tavern,—and probably British officers also. The period, 1780-1785, seems to have been Weston's wettest years with as many as nine innholder licenses issued in a single year. A constant procession of teams passed through town during the daylight hours carrying produce and firewood to Boston. The thirsty drivers needed alcoholic refreshment at the end of the day and a place to spend the night.

Baldwin died apparently owing money to one John Clewly of Halifax, Nova Scotia, a carpenter. His executor recovered a judgment against the "goods and chattels, rights and credits that were of Samuel Baldwin dec. in the hands of Rebecca Baldwin" (1787). In order to satisfy debts the place was sold at auction and Rebecca ended up with only a quarter of the house which she owned until her death in 1795. The portion she was able to keep was "the northwest room, the chamber above and the cellar under it with privilege to pass to and from the well through the kitchen and whatever other privileges might appertain to said part of house." The remaining three quarters of the house was bought at auction by Rev. Samuel Kendall of Weston and after Rebecca's death he sold it to Benjamin Allen of Tisbury. At about the same time Allen also bought the quarter that Rebecca had owned. It is interesting that Kendall should have held his share in the house

from the time of the auction until Rebecca's death and it might be speculated that he bought the place out of charity so Rebecca could continue having use of the whole house—a nice thought but undocumented.

Rebecca got her last license in 1785 and there is no indication of the building having been used as a tavern again until 1802 when Allen sold the property to Joseph Smith, a licensed innholder in Weston from 1802 until 1806. Then in 1807 Jonas Green succeeded Smith and carried on the business until at least 1810, possibly 1811, after which time his name does not appear on the license list. He continued to live there until 1815 when he sold the property to his neighbor Isaac Fiske. No doubt there were many alterations to the house between the time Woolson built it and Fiske owned it, especially about 1805-6 when its valuation went from £90 to £120 and then to £170 in 1807.

Isaac Fiske made the house his Weston headquarters from 1815 until his death in 1861. He also resided part of the time in Cambridge where for more than thirty years he was Register of Probate for Middlesex County. When he died the property went to his heirs one of whom in 1920 built the house that still stands on the knoll overlooking Soldiers' Park, and across the street from his law office. At about this time, as pictured on the front page, Fiske's barn was moved down the Post Road to be converted into shops. It continues today to be an historic part of the downtown scene.

ONE REVIVAL THAT WOULD BE TIMELY

Looking through old Town Reports that fill one whole cupboard in our Isaac Fiske Law Office Library, we noted that the first four pages of the report for the year ending February 28, 1895 were devoted to the *VILLAGE IMPROVEMENT ASSOCIATION OF WESTON*. Its constitution and By Laws were printed in full. Its officers and executive committee comprised names that will never be forgotten in the annals of our town. Justin Gale, High School Principal was President, Henry J. White and Francis H. Hastings Vice Presidents, Albert H. Hews Secretary and Treasurer, while the Executive Committee bore such names as Rev. Charles H. Russell, Miss Marion R. Case, Miss Edith Coburn, Howard L. Cooper (Tree Warden), Charles H. Fiske, Nathan S. Fiske, Charles W. Hubbard, Mrs. David W. Lane, Miss Hattie S. Perry, Mrs. Louis E. Roberts, Mr. Horace S. Sears, Mr. Robert Winsor, and Mrs. Frederick T. Fuller.

Article II of the Constitution read:

“The object of this Society shall be the preservation of the natural beauties of the town, the improving and ornamenting of the streets and public grounds of the town, by planting and cultivating trees, the establishing and maintaining of walks, the establishing and protecting of good grass plots and borders in the streets and public squares, the providing of public drinking troughs, the lighting and watering of streets, and generally the doing, in conjunction with the town authorities, whatever may tend to the improvement of the town as a place of residence.”

Fellow citizens, as we drive over smoothly paved streets that don't need to be watered in order to lay dust, how many of us realize that it was this group of dedicated people who planted and watered and “cultivated” the beautiful, now venerable, ash and maple trees that, despite ravages of telephone and electric light company wires, still majestically adorn our principal roads in all parts of the town? How often during the past 80 years were these monuments to yesteryear cultivated, fed, nurtured, or even *noticed*?

As we approach the Bicentennial, we invite you to ponder the above. Do we owe better maintenance of those trees to those who planted them for us? Should not we in turn plant trees for *our* own posterity too?

THOSE EARLY 18TH and 19TH CENTURY LAW OFFICES

Supplement to Vol. IX, No. 1, Oct. 1972:—Harold G. Travis

We wondered how many additions to our list of 15 would result from our article that appeared 17 months ago. The answer is actually SIX although we did uncover four more that have been so utterly altered or mutilated as to make their restoration hopeless. As was true of the original 15, the stories of the interesting and worthwhile people who built and occupied these little gems cannot be adequately told in limited BULLETIN space. Hence as soon as possible we aim to publish the collected material in lengthier form.

Pictured here are the six "1973 discoveries".

JOHN FOWLER WILLIAMS' 1815 Law Office at West Woodstock, Connecticut. Direct descendant of "The Redeemed Captive" and the latter's son, "The Boy Captive of Old Deerfield", John F. Williams had two ties with Weston. Another ancestor was Rev. John Davenport, founder of New Haven, whose carved initials are still believed to adorn a Weston boulder.* Likewise, he was related to Abigail Williams, widow of Parson Woodward who later married Col. Thomas Marshall.**

ARTHUR McARTHUR's 1817 Law Office, Limington, Maine, when we visited it last fall was badly in need of restoration with its hip roof close to complete collapse. Literally, this building exudes some glamorous history. McArthur and his son, Brigadier General William Miltimore McArthur, each lived to be 84 and jointly accounted for 107 of the building's 157 years of life to date. Through non-use and neglect it has been deteriorating for the past half Century and the entire McArthur estate of which it is but a minor part, cries out for friendly hands.

The 1826 Law Office of CHARLES PARSONS CHANDLER at Dover-Foxcroft, Maine, tells the inspiring story of a lawyer whose father had been a judge, and whose son, two brothers, two nephews, and a granddaughter all followed him into the profession. His Bowdoin friends included Franklin Pierce, 14th President of the United States, Chief Justice John Appleton, and the immortal poets Hawthorne and Longfellow.

The ALBERT LIVINGSTON KELLY 1829 Law Office in Winterport, Maine is a unique brick structure whose ship-lap boarded front and iron shutters are worthy of special note. Kelly and Daniel Webster were closely related, for the former's mother, Rebecca Fletcher Kelly was the sister of Webster's wife, Grace. With Webster's backing he was appointed agent in Frankfort, now Winterport, to look after the claims in the *Ten Proprietors' Grant*. He studied law under Steven Longfellow, the poet's father and lived in their home. The present owner is Mrs. Edward McKeen whose late husband was a cousin of our charter member and director, Mrs. Stanley G. French.

JUDGE NATHAN CLIFFORD's 1845 Law Office at Newfield, Maine was the only public building to survive the disastrous 1947 fire. Long since converted to library use, it is a monument to a country lawyer who ended life as a United States Supreme Court Justice after a career of conspicuous service as Member of Congress, President Polk's Attorney General, and Minister to the Republic of Mexico.

The 1850 LUTHER SANBORN MOORE Law Office at Limerick, Maine has been owned by that town for the past 80 years and houses the public library. Moore rose to the Presidency of the Maine Senate before going to Washington as U.S. Congressman from that district. The last of his 10 children was the famous author-librarian, Anne Carroll Moore, who presided over the Children's Department of the New York Public Library for more than a third of a century.

Relics of four other early 19th Century Law Offices, one at Exeter, New Hampshire and three in Gorham, Maine, still exist but scarcely in "presentable" shape. In fact, only the front door of one remains at Gorham, rescued and now carefully preserved by an outraged, semi-retired Congregational minister who seized it from the mouth of a bulldozer that had been commissioned to make way for a new bank. The stories of the owner of this destroyed building and of the other three that have almost completely disappeared into other forms and uses, will be included in the anticipated publication mentioned at the outset of this article.

*See "John Davenport's Rock" by Thomas M. Paine in OLD TIME NEW ENGLAND, Vol. LVIII, No. 1, Summer 1967, the BULLETIN of the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities.

**See Weston Historical Society BULLETINS Vol. V, No. 2—Jan. 1969 and Vol. VII, No. 1, Oct. 1970.

Weston can justly be proud that here on the old Post Road some two miles apart, the Isaac Fiske 1805 and the Alpheus Bigelow 1811 Law Offices are in excellent condition and trustworthy hands. We congratulate the Town of Wayland for having recently saved its historic Mellen 1826 office with an expensive restoration. It adds to the charm of the Town Green upon which it stands. As Abraham Lincoln began his life in a humble log cabin so did other great Americans start their careers in tiny buildings such as these.



WILLIAMS 1815
WEST WOODSTOCK, CONNECTICUT



McARTHUR 1817
LIMINGTON, MAINE



CHANDLER 1826
DOVER-FOXCROFT, MAINE



KELLY 1829
WINTERPORT, MAINE



CLIFFORD 1845
NEWFIELD, MAINE



MOORE 1850
LIMERICK, MAINE

MEMBERSHIP KEEPS GROWING

More and more Weston people are rallying to support the exciting and worthwhile work of our Society. This month we extend a hearty welcome to the new members listed below. There's always room for more so don't hesitate to enroll all your neighbors and friends who may so far have neglected to join with us. By the start of the Bicentennial we'd like to have every household in Weston on our roll.

Mr. and Mrs. George P. Bates, Mr. and Mrs. Robert F. Cassidy, Mr. and Mrs. Donald B. Conant, Mr. and Mrs. Richard M. Cutter, Mr. and Mrs. Peter F. Davis, Mr. and Mrs. Roy W. Davis, Mr. and Mrs. John J. Doyle, Jr., Mrs. John E. Eaton,

Mr. and Mrs. John F. Graham, Mr. and Mrs. Clifford R. Heintz, Mr. and Mrs. John G. Hutcheson, Mr. and Mrs. Aubrey E. Jones, Mr. and Mrs. Donald G. Kennedy, Miss Sara J. Lempereur, Mr. and Mrs. George F. Lyman, Mr. and Mrs. Howard S. Macdonald, Mrs. Doris H. May, Mr. and Mrs. Lovett Morse, Mr. and Mrs. J. Edward Pawlick, Mrs. Anna Pollock, Dr. and Mrs. David H. Reid, Mr. Stephen A. Reno, Mr. and Mrs. Edward V. Rossiter,

Dr. and Mrs. Kenneth J. Ryan, Mr. and Mrs. David F. Squire, Mr. and Mrs. Allan W. Steere, Mr. and Mrs. Rolf Stutz, Dr. and Mrs. Roger H. Sweet, Mrs. Stanley E. Thomas, Jr., Mr. and Mrs. John T. Trefry, Mr. and Mrs. Hillard W. Welch, Mr. and Mrs. William A. Whittemore, Mrs. James L. Wittenberger, Mr. William D. Whynot, and Mr. and Mrs. Michael R. Yogg.

Added to the above Weston residents is our former fellow citizen, Mr. Gilbert M. Upham, Old Hardwich Road, Barre, Mass. 01005.



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.