

THE WESTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY BULLETIN



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THE ABRAHAM HEWS HOUSE AT 651 BOSTON POST ROAD

How many of the legends surrounding this house can be authoritatively documented? For example, did Abraham Hews actually build "New England's earliest pottery" here in the year 1765? Did he, at the same time, also build the little house that still stands today as an almost hidden ell of the brick-ended addition, shown above? Was this addition erected in 1824 by his son, Abraham Hews, Jr.? See the story beginning on Page 2.

NOVEMBER 6 ANNUAL MEETING OFFERS NOSTALGIC PROGRAM ON TWO OF WESTON'S MOST HISTORIC STREAMS

The Josiah Smith Tavern's ball room will be the scene of our Society's annual meeting Wednesday evening, November 6th, at 8 P.M. After committee and officer reports, the Nominating Committee, headed by Samuel J. McDonald, will present a slate of three directors for terms of three years each. The terms of Mesdames Dwinnell and French and of Donald D. Douglass are expiring. Continuing for another year are Mrs. Dudley B. Dumaine and Messrs. Brenton H. Dickson 3rd, Grant M. Palmer, Jr., and Harold G. Travis, and for two more years, Mrs. Kirkbride Patterson, and Messrs. Erlund Field and Edward W. Marshall. The committee welcomes suggestions, and nominations from the floor will also be in order. With so much talent concentrated in Weston, a strong board is assured as the Society plans its prominent role in commemorating the imminent Bicentennial of the American Revolutionary War.

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“ABRAHAM HEWS’S BOOK WESTON 1780”

These are the words inscribed in the front of a ledger, preserved at the Baker Library of Harvard Business School, in which Abraham Hews kept an erratic record of sales of his “wares” and other goods from 1780 until 1810. On the inside front cover is a list of sales made in 1774 and, if held and read in reverse, the ledger has several pages devoted to the totaling up and marking as “settled” of several accounts with local individuals. The rest of the pages between are disappointingly blank.

Abraham Hews may not have been a systematic record keeper but his name has survived as one of the few early potters of this area. His name, is, in fact, better known to American ceramic historians than it is to the present citizens of Weston. To eighteenth century residents his name must have been a household word. According to the ledger it was to Hews they turned to rent a horse, or horse and sleigh, for a trip to Framingham or to Boston. It was Hews who had a pair of oxen to rent out for Spring plowing and it was Hews who had spare bushels of wheat and rye as well as corn, pork, and beans to sell his neighbors. We get the impression that Abraham Hews was a busy farmer as well as potter and, to paraphrase an old saying, did not live by “pots” alone.

The names of the purchasers read like an eighteenth century Weston Directory. Some of the best customers were Harrington, Livermore, Flagg, Jones, Sanderson, Rand, Fisk, Wheaton, Ward, Brackett, and Greenleaf. Rarely is the purchased ware specified as to type in the ledger with the majority of entries being as terse as the following 1774 examples:

April 19	Isaac Flagg	ware	0.2.7
April 29	Isaac Jones	ware	0.2.0
May 9	Jonas Sanderson	ware	0.1.0

Fortunately, between 1789 and 1806, a few entries are designated as “milkpan,” “chamber pot,” “mug,” “pot,” or “porringer.” Most frequently mentioned are milkpans:

July 30 (1789)	Doct Ward	3 milkpans	0.1.9
July 23 (1803)	Isaac Flagg	2 milkpans 1 pot	0.2.3
June 16 (1806)	Abram Fisk	½ Doz milkpans	2.9.0

Aside from these five types the ledger gives little hint of the variety of redware produced by Hews at this period. We need to know a great deal more about the man and his ware.

Town Records give us a few fairly reliable facts. We glean that Abraham Hews, born 1741, came from a Watertown family and had married Lucy Jennison in January of 1766. On May 30th Abraham (Junior) was born. Lucy, the first daughter, was born in Weston July 3, 1768, the year that Abraham was first taxed as a new resident. The often stated date of 1765 for his establishment of a pottery in Weston is probably inaccurate and 1769 would appear a more likely date. More evidence is needed on this point.

Between 1770 and 1787 at least seven more children were born. We know from the muster-roll of Captain Lamson’s Militia Company that Abraham served in 1775 at Lexington but we need to know more of his war-time activities. Later he served the Town as a Warden twice, Surveyor of Highways, 1784, Surveyor of Hemp, 1790, and Fence Viewer in 1802. It was during these years, as the ledger indicates, he was managing both a productive pottery and a productive farm. This farm, according to the 1801 tax inventory consisted of;- 1 house, 1 separate shop, 1 Bake House (pottery kiln?), 1 other building, 2 barns, 2 acres tilled, 6 acres upland, 8 acres fresh meadow, 19 acres pasture, 20 acres woodland, 10 acres unimproved, 3 acres unimprovable, 1 horse, 2 oxen, 8 steers and cows, and 3 swine. Eighty-eight out of the two-hundred fifty landowners had oxen so one can understand why Abraham’s were needed for odd jobs.

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THE BEACON ON SANDERSON HILL

Harold G. Travis

Our story starts on September 4, 1778 when from his Boston headquarters, General William Heath wrote to the WAR COUNCIL asking them whether or not they agreed “with the absolute necessity as soon as may be to fix proper signals for calling out the militia of the State with the greatest expedition should occasion require it. If your Honors approve of and define it, I will order it to be done immediately . . .” Along the margin he added: “I am this moment informed there is no beacon either on the Blue or Malden hills.”

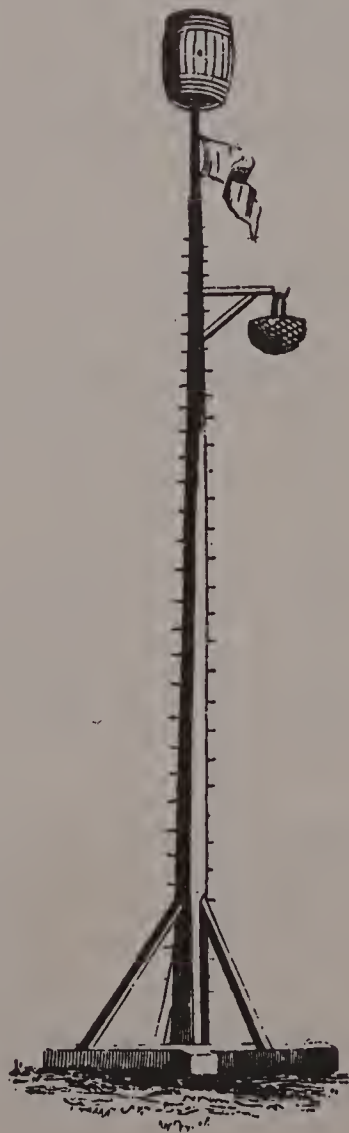
Action was immediate. On the following day a proclamation signed by John Avery, for the State of Massachusetts Bay Council was delivered to the General. It read:— “WHEREAS Major General Heath has represented to this Board the necessity of fixing proper signals for calling in the Militia of this State with the greatest expedition, and that if the Council approve of, and desire it, he will order such signals to be erected, whereupon it is advised by the Council, --- That General Heath be and he is hereby requested forthwith to erect upon the highest or most proper place of the Hill known by the name of Blue Hills, such Bacons or Signals as he shall think proper. Also that he erect upon the highest or most proper place of the Hill in Weston formerly called Coolidge’s Hill, and upon the Hill in Malden a little to the Northward of the Meeting House in said town,— such Bacons or Signals as he shall Judge Sufficient for Alarming and Calling in the Militia, and it is

ORDERED That the foregoing Signals are not to be fired until the Signal be given from Bacon Hill in the Town of Boston unless they have certain evidence of the approach of an enemy from Rhode Island.”

No time was lost. On September 7, 1778 an order came direct to Major Lamson--- Weston on the War Council’s letterhead and signed by John Avery which read: “You are hereby ordered and directed to detach from the Militia of Weston a capable Sergeant and five Men for the purpose of attending the Bacon in that Town and to follow such orders as they shall receive from Major General Heath for that purpose.”

Simultaneously dated September 7, 1778 General Heath himself sent a letter to the Sergeant of the Guard at Malden Bacon notifying him “You are detached with men for the purpose of guarding the Bacon on Malden Hill and for Sitting Fire thereto when the Signal is Given from the Bacon in Boston. You are to keep a Sentinel day and night by relief at the Bacon, his Duty is to preserve it from being Injured by any Person or Persons—and constantly to be observing the Bacon in Boston. If he observes it to be on Fire He is immediately to call for You upon your own view of it, being certain that it is on Fire, You will immediately Sit Fire to your Own—but not otherwise . . . You will Inculcate on your Sentinels the greatest vigilance in Duty and acquaint them that they will be liable to Suffer Death at the Discretion of a Court Martial, should they be found absent from or sleeping on their post.” On the lower left hand corner of this order, General Heath noted “ORDER OF LIKE TENOR AND DATE TO THE SERG.T AT WESTON.”

When, 8 days later on September 15, 1778 General Sullivan wrote General Heath from his Providence headquarters: “I would likewise recommend to your consideration . . . the use of beacons



Here is The Boston Beacon for whose light Weston’s vigilant sentinels on Sanderson Hill had to maintain a constant 24 hour daily watch. Was Weston’s own beacon a replica of Boston’s? Who will find its remains? All Weston is urged to help solve the challenging mystery for Weston’s commemoration of the American Revolutionary War’s Bicentennial.

on commanding eminences to communicate an alarm”, Heath was able to reply on September 17th “. . . in order speedily to alarm and collect the Militia I sometime since ordered a number to be erected and have kept sentinels constantly at them with written instructions for their conduct. . .”

Additional proof that the beacon at Weston was in operation is found in General Heath’s letter to the War Council on October 28, 1778 wherein we find this paragraph:

“Permit me to request to be informed whether any number of bacons other than those at Stoughton, Malden, and Weston have been erected by order of the Hon. Council, and if not, whether it would not be advisable to do it as soon as may be.”

We are indebted to the Massachusetts Historical Society for having given us access to the original Heath Papers from which the above are quoted verbatim. Copies made therefrom are in our files and in those of the Bicentennial Committee of Weston for safekeeping in the Town Hall vault. In addition we have copies of a great many additional copies of correspondence between Commander in Chief George Washington and Major General Heath as well as of letters that passed between Heath and other generals in Rhode Island and New York where the beacon system was subsequently put into effect.

Research by the Bicentennial Committee confirms that what the War Council had designated as “the Hill in Weston formerly called Coolidge’s Hill” became known as “Sanderson’s Hill”. Indeed our “Sergeant at the Beacon” was Jonas Sanderson whose house on the western slope stood about 800 feet south of Love Lane on today’s Highland Street until it burned to the ground in 1897.* The only expense for guarding the beacon on Sanderson Hill is found in the following annual reports of Isaac Hobbs, War Treasurer. In 1778 he entered:

FOR GUARDING THE BACON (Beacon)			
Pd. Mr. Jonas Sanderson in ful	28	12	
Pd. Mr. Nath’el Felch in ful for his Son	22	8	
Pd. Joel Harrington in full	22	8	
Pd. Nath’el Parmenter in full	22	8	
Pd. Thad’s Peirce in full	4	12	
Pd. Daniel Rand in full	27	—	
	£127	8	0

and in his May 22, 1779 to March 2, 1781 report, are noted:

Pd. Mr. Sam’ll Livermore in ful for his Son			
guarding the Beacon	4	12	0
Tho’s Graves in full Ditto	4	12	0
do. Tho’s Rand in for his Sons guarding ye Beacon	24	0	0

Expenses of the Beacon itself cannot be found. The only entry other than recorded above is the report of Samuel Fisk, Town Treasurer for the period from March 2, 1778 to March 1, 1779 which contains this item: “Pd. . . .to 3 of the Selectmen going to ye: Counsel in order to get ye: guard dismissed yt: was set to guard ye: Baken erected in sd. Town of Weston £6— 0--0”

We should be thankful that neither Weston’s beacon, nor those at Stoughton and Malden, ever had to be set afire. The same can be said of those in Rhode Island, but it is recalled that one of them tried a “rehearsal” which despite widespread efforts to prepare people for it, was responsible for serious panics in many isolated communities as far away as Connecticut. Indeed any rehearsals were forbidden and when a few years later General Heath was headquartered at Peekskill, New York he wrote on August 29, 1781 to Major General McDougall “I am informed that the Bacon on Fishkill Mountain has been twice of late lit on fire and the country thoroughly alarmed, which false alarms you are culpable, are pregnat (sic) with most dangerous consequences, for the People having been once and again deceived by false alarms will scarcely believe a real one the consequences may be

*See Weston Historical Society BULLETIN, January 1973 Vol. IX, No. 2.

fatal . . . If guards have made false alarms they ought to receive the most exemplary punishment and I request you to take such measures for that purpose as you may judge proper . . .”

Two questions about our Weston Beacon still are unanswered. What sort of structure was it? Where specifically on Sanderson Hill *did* it stand? Did it simulate the one on Beacon Hill in Boston for whose fire our sentinels on General Heath’s orders, had constantly to watch? (See illustration). Certainly had our own structure been that substantial, the War Treasurer’s account would have contained some itemization of expenditures. To get the clear view of the Boston Beacon, ours had to be located somewhere within fifty yards of the center of the summit which, once it is reached, is quite broad. At the time of the War and afterwards, Sanderson Hill was cultivated as a farm. Later, cattle grazed there. Today only ancient stonewalls remind us of those days. The terrain has completely reforested itself and the view of Beacon Hill in Boston even in winter is now obscured by large and dense growths of trees. Finding the exact spot where the beacon stood is not simple. A trained archaeologist, employed by the Bicentennial Committee, spent several hours trying to locate such clues as ashes from the fires our men would have built to keep warm, remnants of a shelter from the wintry blasts, an arm or leg of the beacon itself, or even old rum bottles whose contents were used for the humane and human purpose of keeping warm. Somewhere up there on Sanderson Hill, and some time, some one will somehow come across one or more of such tell-tale relics. Surely our Beacon would have comprised much more than a bucket of tar impracticably suspended from the top of a tall tree which would itself have burned down as soon literally as the heat was on.

Plans for fitting Bicentennial observance are rapidly approaching final form. Suffice it to say that they include a commemorative boulder and plaque and other exercises of historical interest and significance to Weston people, old and young. We can be proud of having had Sanderson Hill chosen as one of three surrounding Boston where a beacon signal if needed would have alerted all of Eastern Massachusetts to an enemy’s approach. While such an alarm thankfully never had to be fired, Sergeant Jonas Sanderson and the men who served with him under Major Lamson were at all times wide awake, reliable, and ready. In 1775 Weston had been fortunate that due to the report of John Howe the British spy, the Battles of Concord and Lexington did not occur here. We can be equally thankful that in the long war that followed, no British troops came through here except as prisoners.

Listed below are documents from the Heath Papers that through the cooperation and courtesy of the Massachusetts Historical Society, were reproduced. Copies may be seen in our Town files.

- Sep. 4, 1778: General Heath to Massachusetts Bay War Council urging immediate establishment of beacons.
- Sep. 5, 1778: War Council’s Proclamation authorizing General Heath to erect upon the “highest or most proper place of the Hill in Weston . . .”
- Sep. 7, 1778: War Council to Weston (Major Lamson) and Stoughton (Col. Benj. Gill) directing “to detach a capable Sergeant and five men for the purpose of attending the Bacon . . .”
- Sep. 7, 1778: War Council to “Sergeant Commanding the Bacon at the great Blue Hill” instructing him “You are detached with six men to Guard the Bacon . . .”
- Sep. 7, 1778: General Heath to Sergeant of the Guard at Malden Bacon: “order of like tenor to the Serg’t at Weston . . .”
- Sep. 15, 1778: General Sullivan at Providence to General Heath recommending Beacons on commanding Eminences to communicate an Alarm which might be the Means more universally and rapidly given than by any other mode of Conveyance.”
- Dec. 20, 1779: General Heath to Governor Clinton (3 pages) saying that General Washington in bitter winter had told General McDougall to take the

guard off the Butter Hill Beacon, and so he, Heath felt guards at other beacons, dependent on Butter Hill, were superfluous and should be taken off.

Dec. 23, 1779: Gen. Washington (3 pages) to Heath regarding many details including Beacons.

Dec. 27, 1779: Heath to Washington (4 pages) reminding Commander in Chief he had been bypassed on the Butter Hill Beacon! More about provisions, clothing, money,—scarcity of, etc.

Dec. 28, 1779: Heath to Patterson respecting Beacons.

Other references include: *Sentry, or Beacon Hill the Beacon and the Monument of 1635-1790* by William W. Wheildon, and *The Beacon on Sentry Hill, Boston, Massachusetts* by Leroy L. Thwing (October 1938, Vol. XXIX, No. 2; October 1938 Old-Time New England.)

IN MEMORIAM

It is with great sadness that we record the deaths of three faithful charter members:

Katharine Pratt Dewey, wife of former Selectman William R. Dewey, Jr.; Miss Florence P. Gould, sister of Elizabeth G. Flint; and McKinley H. Warren, who, with his wife Vanetta, moved to Concord a year ago.

IMPORTANT REMINDER

If you move out of town, your BULLETIN and other non-profit organization mailings are not forwardable, and we both lose out. Be sure to let us know whenever your address changes! Just notify us through Box 343, Weston, Mass. 02193. Then come back as soon and as often as you can.

A BICENTENNIAL GIFT SUGGESTION

Why not give a life membership in the Weston Historical Society to someone close to you on the occasion of a birthday, wedding or other meaningful event such as Thanksgiving or Christmas? Tax deductible, it adds to our growing Endowment Fund, the income of which will only and always be used to promote the worthwhile program of our organization. During the Bicentennial and later, there will be many projects planned that will be greatly aided by your contributions. Such memberships, as is true of other gifts, may be made as memorials and will be so recorded in the permanent records.

OCTOBER 19TH FOLIAGE TRIP TO BARRE

The Barre Historical Society, hosts for the fall meeting of the Bay State State Historical League, of which our Society is a member, has cordially invited all of our members to attend. As these meetings are always stimulating, educational, and pleasantly worthwhile, it is hoped that car pools for the hour and a quarter drive to scenic and historic Barre will be formed.

Registration and a social hour will precede an address at ten o'clock on "Massachusetts Towns and the Revolution: Teaching your Local History in the High School." Panel discussions throughout the day will occur on matters of lively interest, and various tours through the little town of Barre have been arranged. The meeting of Bay State Historical League at 3 will last an hour and we are all invited to attend. Occasions such as this enable us to exchange ideas and information with our contemporaries in the more than 300 Massachusetts historical societies that belong to the League. For further details, call the Editor at 899-4515. Advance reservations are required.

Abraham Junior appears to have been an ambitious young man with no taste for farming who gradually took over active management of the pottery. At age twenty-eight he married Martha Griffen of East Sudbury. In 1797 we find him in the Weston Independent Light Infantry Company as a "Serjeant". Documentation for his title of "Captain" is needed. His name is not among those who served this Company as Captain between 1787 and 1830. After being a Tythingman and Surveyor of Lumber he became an Assessor and in 1802 a member of the School Committee. By 1818 when he inherited the pottery he was fifty-two years old and a respected member of the Community. The procession to Church that year of Abraham and Martha followed by their six sons and five daughters,—Samuel, Abraham, Marshall, George, Horatio, and Horace, Martha, Mary, Sophronia, Celinda, and baby Susan, must have made an impressive sight. The pot-works flourished under his direction or at least provided an adequate income. In 1828 he was elected a Deacon of the Church and served for twenty-one years. At eighty-three he resigned and was succeeded by his middle aged sons, Samuel and Marshall. Abraham III had been helping with the pot-works but preferred to be a Jeweler in Boston, according to the Directories, and died there in 1868. It was left for the fifth son, Horatio and his son, Albert Horatio, to carry on the pottery. It outgrew even their new plant and the whole operation was moved to North Cambridge about 1871. When Albert Horatio, the great grandson of the first potter, died in 1904 family ownership ceased but the firm of A. H. Hews Co. carried on until recent times.

It is about the early redware pot-works, however, that we seem to know so little. The finding of the 1780 ledger is only a small beginning. Several Weston residents have direct connections with families mentioned in the ledger and possess pieces which traditionally were made by Hews. Other Weston residents possess scraps of information based on oral tradition, and still others have done research in deeds, newspapers, etc. that have revealed new facts about the family houses and property. Scattered, this information, like the few attributed Hews pieces, is not available for scholarly study. Therefore, I propose, in the name of the Society, to establish two information files to be available to future researchers of Hews and his wares. One would be the personal data file and the other would be the photographic record of existing pieces owned by any individual or organization. This file of attributed pieces is important to establish now for use in a comparison study when an official archaeological investigation produces documented sherds. Such an investigation, carried out by trained historical archaeologists, is urgently needed if a definite identification of Hews ware is ever to be made.

Such a project, sponsored by the Weston Historical Society, would help the cause of American ceramic history. A coordinated file is the first logical step towards this end but it will take great cooperation. It is my hope that all who have or know of Hews pieces will write me about them. A small, clear but inexpensive photo is essential for the record. Likewise, the data file could be rapidly built up if readers would pool their information. Their names would be recorded with documented information they supplied so that proper credits could be given in future publications. In a year I would like to be able to make an exciting Progress Report. Let's put it all together!

Barbara Gorely Teller (Mrs.)
115 Brook Street
Wellesley, Massachusetts 02181

The author of the above article as the daughter of our late Charter members, Mr. and Mrs. Charles P. Gorely, Jr., had an early start into the ceramics field. Her parents founded and for many years headed internationally famous THE WEDGWOOD CLUB. A busy wife and mother, she has in her own right been Registrar, Assistant Curator, and Associate Editor of OLD-TIME NEW ENGLAND for the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities. Presently she is a Research Specialist and Consultant on Historic Interiors. We echo her plea for pooling information so that our scattered and piecemeal data on Weston's own Hews Pottery may be combined and at last properly compiled and published . . . Editor

PROGRAM FOR ANNUAL MEETING — *Continued from Page 1*

Featured as speaker will be Gilbert M. Upham, now a resident of Barre, Massachusetts. A native son and descendant of one of our oldest families, Mr. Upham spent the first half century of his life here as an active citizen and town official. Particularly as former superintendent of highways, he is familiar with every section of the town from border to border. His topic will be:

STONY BROOK AND THREE MILE BROOK

The area surrounding these two streams once housed quite a substantial industrial empire. It did not lose its character until his early boyhood, and his recollections of the old buildings that lasted from Colonial days should be fascinating. Today's passers-by would little suspect that many of our beautiful estates are located where once flourished busy factories. This talk by one of our members will be of absorbing interest to old and young alike. Oldtimers and newcomers are urged to attend, and to bring children, grandchildren, and prospective members to the Josiah Smith Tavern on November 6th at 8 o'clock P.M.

WELCOME TO NEW MEMBERS

Since our last issue, the following have joined our Society and are welcomed into our active membership:—

Mr. and Mrs. William L. Caffrey, 227 Ash Street, Weston

Miss Catharine Cook, 5 Brewer Street, Cambridge

Mr. and Mrs. Vincent H. Hazard, 89 Larch Road, Cambridge

Mr. Stephen Hinds, 136 South Street, Marlborough

Mrs. Marylee C. Marsh, 61 Rowe Street, Auburndale

Dr. Anita L. Martin, 98 Love Lane, Weston

Mr. and Mrs. Frank Messina, 120 Beaver Road, Weston

Mrs. Amy J. Nychis, 17 Applecrest Road, Weston



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

President: Mr. Edward W. Marshall 893-7388

Editor of the "Bulletin": Mr. Harold G. Travis 899-4515

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