

# THE WESTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY BULLETIN



March 1977 Vol. XIII, No. 3



This was the First Parish Church of Weston. It was the second building used by the congregation and was built in 1721. Remodelled in 1800, a Paul Revere bell weighing 997 pounds was installed in 1841, and that was replaced with the present church in 1888. The 176-year-old bell is still in use and hopefully it will continue to be for many years to come.

## THE REMODELLING OF THE FIRST PARISH CHURCH IN 1800

Brenton H. Dickson and Homer C. Lucas

Until 1825 town government controlled the established Congregational churches in Massachusetts. As in other towns the ministers of the First Parish Church in Weston were chosen at town meetings. At Weston's annual town meeting in March the amount of their salary was voted and arrangements made for the year's supply of firewood. At the same meeting a keeper was chosen and his salary determined. Frequently there would be an

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## NOTES FROM THE PRESIDENT

The Society has received as a gift from H. Bentley Crouch, a collection of prints and negatives of the construction of Route 128 in Weston and Waltham, and of the Toll Road (Massachusetts Turnpike) in Weston. They are most interesting, and we thank Mr. Crouch for his generosity.

Weston's "FAMILY DAY" will be held on June 11th. Plans are under way for the Society to cooperate with the Committee in utilizing the Josiah Smith Tavern and the Isaac Fiske Law Office, as we help to keep the spirit of the recent Bicentennial at peak level.

Thanks to the many people who turned out at the Tavern on December 31st to assist in our complimentary mailing of the January BULLETIN to every family in town. Its contents record the stirring events connected with the Town's commemoration of the American Revolution's Bicentennial. New memberships are resulting from this mailing and we aim to enjoy the support of every Weston resident in our worthwhile work.

J. H. B.



### THE START OF WESTON'S DOWNTOWN TRAFFIC PROBLEMS

Shown above is Officer George Faber at the close of World War I in the act of presenting a ticket for speeding to a subdued motorist. Behind our guardian of law and order may be seen the original Lamson Tailor Shop that had just been moved to its present hillside location diagonally opposite the Bay Bank building when the new Town Hall was about to be completed and the Town Green landscaped to its present scenic slope and scope starting at the Post Road and extending up to the front steps of the Town Hall and up to Lamson Park on the west.

Behind the 1917 Model T Ford Runabout can be seen an old house that also belonged to the Lamson family. Its cellar hole is still visible today. When the house was condemned as unsafe and ordered destroyed in the late 1930's, the property was purchased by the Vestry of St. Peter's Church who a quarter of a century later conveyed its Gothic structure and this adjoining land to the First Church of Christ, Scientist. This original Episcopal Church, obscured by the house, had been built in 1924 on land given by Col. Lamson's widow, and when a larger building was required to cope with the Parish's postwar growth, the present structure facing Children's Park and the rising sun on a knoll a quarter of a mile east on the Post Road, was erected on land donated likewise by a Unitarian, the late Charles O. Richardson whose three daughters are members of Weston Historical Society.



## WESTON'S TOWN CENTER ALWAYS A DRAINAGE PROBLEM

Back in 1641 a dictionary of that time recorded that "The *Sewers* are Commissioners that sit by vertue of statutes, to enquire of all nuisances and offenses committed by the stopping of rivers." A legal description of "Commission of Sewers" — explained that it was "a royal commission issued to a number of persons (hence called Commissioners of Sewers) constituting them a temporary court with authority for the repair and maintenance of wells, ditches, banks, gutters, sewers, gotes, causeys, bridges, streams, and other defences by the coasts of the sea and marsh ground liable to inundation from sea and rivers."

A member of our original Research Committee, Mrs. Richard Albrecht, recently espied on Page 366 of MASSACHUSETTS ARCHIVES, VOLUME I, the following petition dated at Weston 215 years before our fellow citizens in formal Town Meeting January 15, 1977 were deliberating still on the same inherent problem of drainage in the "middle of the Town . . ." As it would be almost illegible in spots due to its age, we have had it reset in modern type for easier reading.

"Province of the ) To His Excellency Francis Bernard Esquire. Captain General and Com-  
Massachusetts Bay ) mander in Cheif in and over His Majesty's Province of the Massachusetts  
Bay — and to the Honorable His Majesty's Council of said Province-----

"Humbly shews the subscribers being the Major part of the owners and proprietors of a Tract of Meadow Land lying near the Middle of the Town of Weston in the County of Middlesex and Adjoining to the Great Country road. That the said Meadows are unprofitable and of small benefit to the owners by reason of several Banks and Stoppages in the course of the Brook that runs Thro the same which may easily be removed and thereby the said meadows may be drained and become profitable.-----

"Therefore your Petitioners Humbly request your Excellency and Honours to grant a Commis-sion of Sewers to Some Suitable Gentlemen for the clearing and removing of the Banks and Obstructions in the passages of the Waters running Thro the said Meadows---- and also to Cut Such other Sluices as Shall be necessary effectively to Drain them at the Proprietors Costs--- as in duty Bound will ever pray."

Weston September 4, 1761

(s) Elisha Jones  
Benjamin Harrington  
Nathaniel Goddard  
Isaac Harrington  
Aaron Jones  
Thomas Rand  
Josiah Smith"

Those 8 neighbors found a peaceful way of getting their difficulties resolved and settled, at least for the nonce. In the extreme lower left corner, the following notation appears:

"Advised

Chambers Russell  
Edmund Trowbridge  
Captain Jno. Brown"

Now coming 129 years closer to the present day, though less apropos currently, an article in the Waltham Sun Herald of July 22, 1890 informed its readers "How The Work Was Done in China" under the heading: DISPOSAL OF SEWAGE. Therein we learn that "in that country, men carry pails on a yoke from house to house in all cities. Their pails are moving substitutes for sewers. . . . What they gather in the city they sell to farmers and gardners in the country. . . . It is said that typhoid fever is unknown there."

H. G. T.

## WHO HAS A COPY OF THIS SPEECH?

Just a few weeks before Weston turned out in full force to commemorate the Bicentennial of the Town's incorporation, Memorial Day exercises were held as usual on Memorial Day, May 30, 1913. An address, "*The War That We Commemorate*," was delivered by the renowned author, reformer, journalist, and abolitionist, Franklin Benjamin Sanborn. No account of Weston's traditional observance of Memorial Day appeared in local papers, but the Committee of C. M. Eaton, School Superintendent, Francis B. Ripley, oldest Civil War survivor, and John H. Stone paid \$12.50 for flags, \$5.00 for 50 geraniums, \$69.50 for a band, and \$25 for Mr. Sanborn's talk. Call the Editor if you know where a copy can be secured: 899-4515.

## A SORDID PRELUDE TO MABEL'S MURDER?

For years we've been delving into the sea of material, confusing and contradictory, that is found in old newspapers and in the two volume proceedings of the trial and conviction of Charles Louis Tucker for the murder of Mabel Page on March 31, 1904 in her bedroom on South Avenue, Weston just 1.4 miles from his home at 58 Bourne Street, Auburndale. "AFTERMATH OF A MURDER" which appeared in our Vol. XII, No. 1 issue of October 1975, is one of several potential sequels. In our breast springs the eternal hope that we can excite younger students to join in digging up all phases of Weston's fascinating and forgotten past,—in cataloguing it in proper categories, and in presenting it in fair and balanced perspective. Here follows one new angle that has emerged from a dozen years of such research. Others hang "in the wing", pending fuller documentation.

After the judge sentenced Charlie Tucker to die in the electric chair "during the week of June 10, 1906", a total of 155,000 citizens signed a petition urging clemency. Governor Curtis Guild denied the appeal and was promptly supported by a telegram from President Theodore Roosevelt. Even so, we continued to wonder, why should such an impressive number of people have cried that "this nice young man of 22" could not possibly have perpetrated so coldblooded a crime? Why too should so many others in comparable zeal have kept casting innuendoes on his character? We set out to see what we could learn about him.

He was born in Boston on April 18, 1881 and in recent years had held many jobs there, including Thorp and Martin's stationery store, and as elevator boy and baggage clerk at South Station. He was married on New Year's Day, 1903 in Waltham to Grace Emily Osborne, a native of that city and a popular worker in the plate department of the watch factory. Exactly 3 months and 22 days later, and 3 days after her husband's 22nd birthday, the front page of the Waltham Free Press-Tribune headlined her tragic death on Tuesday April 21st in a drowning accident on the Charles River. As related by the distraught husband, the only witness, we read how they had decided to take a noon hour canoe trip upstream from Robinson's Boathouse at Riverside where he was then employed. They reached a bend in the river when she suggested that she would like to paddle. This entailed changing seats, and the canoe tipped over, throwing them into the icy water.

He was a good swimmer but his wife could not swim at all. The shore was 50 feet away and holding her with one hand while clutching the half submerged canoe with the other, he unsuccessfully battled the swift current for 15 or 20 minutes until finally his strength gave out, and he watched in horror as she was swept under and away. Upon reaching shore he raced along the river's edge to the boathouse where he made his terrible experience known. Both Newton and Metropolitan District police spent the whole afternoon grappling without success in the places indicated by Tucker, but it was not until evening that her brother, Herbert Osborne, located her body some distance away in four feet of water.

Rev. L. W. Staples of Waltham's Methodist Church conducted private services for her at the home of her parents on Robbins Street where he had married them less than four months before. When arrested not quite a year later for Mabel Page's murder hardly a mile from the scene of his own wife's death, Tucker was subjected to a trial that was to last over two years. Finally the jury convicted him and he was electrocuted in Charlestown on the 12th of June 1906. By pure coincidence and without significance or any knowledge that it was so doing, we note that the Committee that staged Weston's great "FAMILY DAY" last June which marked the climax of the Town's commemoration of the American Revolution Bicentennial, innocently had selected the 70th anniversary of Charlie Tucker's death, bringing to this writer's mind three more adjectives: — ironic . . . irrelevant . . . interesting!

H. G. T.





## NOTHING FRIVOLOUS ABOUT APRIL FOOLS' DAY 1904

Here a reporter and policeman somberly eat lunch at roadside outside the Page house on South Avenue as they await the medical examiner's report and other developments.

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## THE REMODELLING OF THE FIRST PARISH CHURCH IN 1800

*(Continued from Page 1)*

article in the warrant dealing with the "Repare" or the "Seeting of the Meeting Hous" or a plan to find more ways of increasing the seating capacity in order to accommodate the growing population whose attendance at church was compulsory.

Article 7 in the warrant for a meeting held on the third of March, 1755, read as follows: "To here the Petition of Sundry of the Inhabitants of the Said Town praying that they would grant Liberty to any that will . . . Build Pews in the meeting house where the two hind Seats now are, or in any other place, as the Town Shall think fitt and appropriate the money or any part thereof to Build a porch on the fore-side of Said House, and Stairs in it to Go into the Gallaries." This article "Pased in the Negetive."

Through the years all manner of proposals were made for repair, or alteration to the church and many of them were carried out. For example, in 1761 the town paid 14 shillings, seven pence, "for stuff and Labour to Repare the Ruff (roof) of the Meeting House." In 1768 the town voted to reconsider and build "Another Seet in the Women's Side Galerey and to build a Pew or Pues all a Long the Length of the women's Side Galerey."

Then, on October 7, 1799, the town meeting appointed a committee of Weston's more prominent men to make recommendations for "Alterations in the publick Meeting-House, and puting the same into a State of decent repair." The committee members were Artemas Ward, Jr., Capt. Isaac Jones, Joseph Russell, Capt. Jonathan Fisk, Thomas Rand, Deacon Isaac Hobbs, John Slack, Ebenezer Hobbs, and Caleb Hayward. It was evident that a major renovation of the church was contemplated. About a month later another town meeting was called to receive the report of the committee. This report was very comprehensive and recommended the following changes:

1. That a tower with a cupola with accommodations for hanging a bell be raised at the west end of the house.
2. That a low porch be erected in front (west end?) and one at the eastern end, rising high enough to furnish communications with the gallery.
3. That the inside of the house be painted.
4. That the brackets cut and all interstices in the posts which are not covered be filled with mortar and well covered with white wash.

5. That one of the (double) doors at each end of the meeting house be shut up.
6. That two pews be built in each corner where the gallery stairs now are, first making an adjustment with Mr. Whitney & the heirs of Mr. Coburn, deceased, of the terms upon which they will take the space which will be gained by shutting up the said doors and relinquish part of the ground they now occupy.
7. That a row of pews in the gallery from the right hand of the avenue from the tower into the westerly gallery round on the front of the meeting house until it meets the avenue from the porch at the easterly end of the said house, be built.
8. That the residue of seats which shall remain in the front gallery be converted into a pew for the accommodation of the singers.
9. That the said pews be sold and the proceeds of the sale be applied to defray the expenses of said repairs and alterations.

The town approved the report and appointed a building committee headed by Artemas Ward, Jr. who was about to serve his third term as chairman of the Board of Selectmen.

Six months later the town was asked in a special town meeting whether to erect a "Steeple" on a tower instead of turning a cupola as voted earlier. The steeple was approved provided the differences in cost would be raised by subscription.

The project became community wide and involved at least thirty families. Nathaniel Bemis and his son, Lot, were responsible for the new underpinning, Joseph Smith for stone, and Ephraim Livermore for mason work.

Piper and Wares furnished the "riging to raise the tower" and charged \$24.50 for their services. Major David Merriam, Lot Merriam, Nathan Childs and Thomas Rand were responsible for the tower and spire, the tower being strong enough to support a 997 pound Paul Revere bell which would be installed a year later. Goodwin also removed the stairs, shingled the roof and lowered the windows. Goulds, Dudleys and Joseph Russell finished the tower and the porches. They also built pews and did much work by the day, and "after deducting the boards and nails taken by them to make three coffins" presented a bill for \$91.58.0.

Isaac Lamson presented a bill for boards, shingles, nails, lime and supplied nine gallons of West India Rum to improve the enthusiasm of the workmen.

Vose and Makepeace presented a bill for \$10.50 for "the electricks rod." Although Benjamin Franklin invented lightning rods near the middle of the eighteenth century, this is probably one of the early records of their being installed in Massachusetts.

Aaron Whittemore carted a variety of things including a hogshead of lime from Boston, and Mr. Bates a barrel of fish oil. David Brackett charged \$72.20 for iron work and Eliakim Morse \$168.11 for sheet lead. At least 25,000 feet of joists, clapboards and other timber were brought in by sixteen or more men. There were hinges and latches for pew doors, white lead and turpentine for paint; — lampblack, gold leaf, and all kinds of nails, screws and tacks.

Caleb Hayward, one of the members of Artemas Ward's building committee, was authorized to negotiate for a weathervane for the steeple and he ordered it from one Ebenezer Lemon of Boston. When it was completed, July 1, 1800, Hayward's father-in-law, Isaac Jones, carted it to Weston. Apparently the "Vane and Ball" did not meet with the town's approval because we find that W. C. Hunneman was paid \$53.34 for a "copper Vane, ball, diamond, et cetera" in 1805. Meanwhile Mr. Lemon filed suit against Caleb Hayward for the \$40.00 he owed on account of the first weathervane, and the court decided in Lemon's favor. Hayward then attempted to collect \$40.00 from the town but it was not until eighteen years later that the town finally voted in town meeting to compensate him for his loss.

One aspect of such a remodeling project is the large amount of "refuse stuff" left over. The building committee decided to get rid of it all in one day and at the same time make some money by selling it at auction. They divided the scraps of old lumber and other materials into "lots." Here are some examples of the results chosen at random:

Lot no. 1 went to Artemas Ward @ 6/3 per hundred wt. It probably consisted of fragments of lumber.



Lot of old lumber at N.E. corner of Meeting House went to Deacon Samuel Fisk @ 12 shillings.  
 Lot of same north of Meeting House to Abraham Hews @ 20 shillings.  
 Lot of same N.W. of M. House to Capt. Isaac Jones at 3 shillings.  
 1 work bench to Rev. Sam'l Kendall @ six shillings.  
 All of the old bricks to Lot Bemis, — 160 brick 2/3 per hundred.

The net cost of remodelling was much less than the gross outlay of \$3059.11. The old pews sold for \$1066.00, the auction of “refuse stuff” brought \$35.50, and the town was reimbursed for painting the pews by their owners, for a saving of \$35.00, and these along with other savings made the net cost to the town only \$1430.76.

At the time of the renovation of the church, the change over from the English monetary system to the American decimal system of dollars and cents was nearly completed. The new federal law establishing the system had been approved April 2, 1792 but before the law could take effect a mint had to be built and equipped in Philadelphia, manpower found, and gold and silver located, stamped into money and distributed. The average citizen was slow in adapting himself to the new form of money. On the Weston meeting house project the English system of pounds, shillings and pence was used in many of the bills presented to the town by a number of prominent Weston men. Some of them stated the equivalent in American money at the end, underneath the total given in English money. Here is a portion of the bill of John Stimson:

The town of Weston to John Stimson Jr., Dr.,	
To going to Boston 7 times at 15/ .....	£ 5- 5-0
To going to Watertown for stuff .....	4-6
To making six 12 panel doors at 33/ per pece .....	9-18-0
To fitting in and hanging 12 doors at 2/per door .....	1- 4-0
To putting on 7 Bolts at 6d .....	0- 3-6
After a long list of items we find:	Total ..... £44-10-3
	Equal to \$148-38-

The transactions at the “stuff auction” were entirely in the older more familiar system. Roughly the pound was equivalent to \$3.33. However, in its reports to the town the building committee used the new decimal system but by force of habit maintained their former custom of three columns with places for dollars, cents and mills. Here are some examples.

To Samuel Torrey of Boston, the sum of .....	\$90..65..0
To John Rand .....	19..50..0
To John Stimson .....	148..38..0
To Capt. Isaac Jones .....	31..16..0

In the treasurer’s book for the Town of Weston the change over was made as of the annual meeting of March, 1796. It seems simple to us to write \$148.38, but to the man who throughout his life had thought in terms of pounds, shillings and pence it was not so simple. In spite of its greater simplicity we are likely to have similar trouble converting to the metric system.

We have only one reference to the Paul Revere bell in the minutes of the Weston town meetings. On March 9, 1801 it was voted to appropriate the amount of money “necessary to make up the deficiency of the Sum raised by Subscription to purchase a bell for the Publick meeting house.” From the records of the renovation of the church it was clear that the tower was a very special part of the renovation. Important plans were under way but we have no copy of the list of subscribers, no vote of the town to purchase an important Paul Revere bell, — no vote of the church to contract for such a bell, — no money was paid by the town to make up such a deficit in subscriptions. It seems clear that all of the money needed was raised by subscriptions, so what are the facts?

We have Revere receipts which tell us certain important things. The original bill is dated March 28, 1801. The bell weighed 997 pounds and the price was \$443.12 with a credit for \$72.89 for the old “small bell, weight 164 pounds.” We wondered about the number of cents in each amount and we discovered that the price of both bells was exactly the same, — namely, \$0.444444 per pound. If one of the decimal points is re-

moved the result is not correct for either the large bell or the smaller one. The small bell must have been of good quality or Paul Revere would not have offered nearly 45 cents a pound for it.

Ebenezer Hobbs, chairman of the selectmen, made the first payment of \$150 in August. He must also have been chairman of the subscription committee. The receipt is signed by R. Revere who was presumably Mrs. Revere whose name was Rachel. In December the amount of \$171 was paid and the remainder soon after. Both receipts are signed "Paul Revere and Son" and are in Paul's handwriting. Later the town paid local blacksmith David Brackett for a "counter balance" for the bell, and Ephraim Livermore six dollars for hemp for a bell rope. Presumably the rope was made at a local rope walk without charge to the town.

What an important and long lasting contribution was made to our town by our forefathers who provided us with such a fine bell, now in its 176th year!

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## IN MEMORIAM

With deep regret we record herein the deaths of Elizabeth Campbell (Mrs. Kenneth) Wood and Mr. John J. Lawless. Both were faithful and loyal members who will be sorely missed but gratefully remembered. "Jack" delivered the Memorial Day address on the steps of the Town Hall three years ago, culminating over seventy years of devotion to his and our great nation.

Mrs. Wood and her mother were both charter members of this Society, and it is suggested that Page 4 of our January 1976, Vol. XII, No. 2, issue be re-read. They were directly descended from the Rev. Samuel Kendal and his wife, the former Abigail Williams whose home on Concord Road is one of Weston's most prized landmarks. Mrs. Wood's mother was the donor, it will be recalled, of the framed sample of Sophia Kendal Marshall's handwriting in 1805 that hangs in the Society's rooms at the Josiah Smith Tavern. Mother and daughter took great interest during the Bicentennial in the re-enactment of the Knox Trail when it reached Weston on Sunday afternoon, January 25th, 1976. At the time of her death we were still engaged in correspondence with Mrs. Wood trying to establish her relationship to the General through her great grandmother, Elizabeth Marshall Knox who lived until her death in 1905 at 334 Boston Post Road, Weston.



### Membership

Annual Dues: \$5.00 per person, \$8.00 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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For extra copies at 50c each, phone Mrs. Bonner at 893-4346