

THE WESTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY BULLETIN



May 1978

Vol. XIV, No. 4



THE ARTEMAS WARD HOUSE IN WESTON
AT 543 BOSTON POST ROAD

Though built in 1785 by the two Eaton brothers, it was bought three years later by Artemas Ward, Jr., shortly after his marriage to Catharine Maria Dexter. In 1836 it was acquired by a Weston resident, Benjamin Peirce (1819-1872), and remained in his family for 78 years during which time it became temporarily known as "Lilac Farm." His daughter, Mary Frances Peirce, was the seventh of his ten children and survived them all. When she died at age 83 in 1914, the estate passed into the hands of Joseph Seabury who moved the house back to its present position on the knoll from which it more quietly surveys the passing scene.

THE UNTOLD STORY OF MARY FRANCES PEIRCE

Since the 19th Century's last decade, residents of Weston and their descendants have increasingly owed a tremendous vote of thanks to Mary Frances Peirce whose four great publications of and for the Town of Weston are listed below. These volumes represent years and years of ingenious, intelligent, and persistent research with never any slackening of her zeal for perfection and preservation.

- 1893: "Records of the First Precinct, 1746-1754 (now mostly the Town of Lincoln—Ed)
And of the Town of Weston, — Records of the Town Clerk 1804-1826."
- 1894: "Town of Weston, Records of the Town Clerk 1804-1826."
- 1897: "Tax Lists, Town of Weston 1757-1827."
- 1901: "Births, Marriages, Deaths 1707-1850
(Gravestones 1703-1900)
(Church Records 1709-1825)."

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BAY STATE HISTORICAL LEAGUE COMES TO WESTON NEXT APRIL

At the Worcester meeting of the Bay State Historical League on Saturday, April 15th, it was announced that the invitation of our Board of Directors to host the League's meeting next April has been gratefully and unanimously accepted. Weston Historical Society has been a member of the 75-year-old League since our incorporation 15 years ago. Three of our members are past directors or officers of that outstanding organization to which more than 300 local historical societies and commissions are also affiliated with combined membership representing a minimum of 50,000 citizens of Massachusetts, all dedicated to the preservation and promotion of our historical heritage.

Those who were at Worcester on April 15th enjoyed a good day of seeing, hearing, learning, and greeting old and new friends of similar interests from all over the Commonwealth. The next meeting will be at Longmeadow on Saturday, June 17th, while Duxbury will host us on October 14th. As a member of our Society, you individually are welcomed at all League affairs. Mrs. Dumaine at 899-1098 will gladly supply fuller information and endeavor to be helpful regarding transportation.

THE CHARTER ANNIVERSARY DINNER WAS GREAT!

A large crowd of members and their guests turned out Tuesday evening, April 25th, for the traditional Charter Anniversary Dinner, fifteenth of its kind. The Undercroft of St. Peter's Episcopal Church was attractively decorated for the occasion. Sherry and a social hour preceded the dinner. Our distinguished guest speaker was Thomas Boylston Adams, past president of the Massachusetts Historical Society, whose comments on the recent "*Adams Chronicles*" which had been viewed by millions of Americans, provided us with new insights and sidelights. As direct descendant of two presidents and an historian of note, he spoke authoritatively in a charming and witty manner.

AN AFTERNOON AT THE MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL SOCIETY LOOK FORWARD TO JUNE 23RD!

Members of our Society have been honored by an invitation from Mr. Louis L. Tucker, Director of the Massachusetts Historical Society at 1154 Boylston Street, Boston, to be his guest at "AN AFTERNOON AT OUR NATION'S OLDEST HISTORICAL SOCIETY" on Friday afternoon, June twenty-third at two o'clock. Mr. Tucker will be remembered pleasantly as the speaker at our Charter Anniversary Dinner a year ago, shortly after having succeeded our President, Stephen T. Riley, as Director of the Massachusetts Historical Society. After a few appropriate remarks, he will conduct with Mr. Riley a tour of the building. It should be of enormous interest to us all.

To be guided by two such knowledgeable authorities through this world-famous setting is a rare treat for those of us who will have that privilege. Perhaps not all of our members realize that Stephen Riley's entire career since college comprised 42 years of distinguished service to the Massachusetts Historical Society. In 1947 he was promoted to the position of Librarian and in 1957 he headed the institution as Director until his retirement at the end of 1976.

It is suggested, since parking facilities are limited, that you arrange with other members to organize pool cars. Also, your attention is particularly called to the convenience of parking at Riverside or Woodland, and traveling by M.T.A. From the AUDITORIUM station, you are only two short blocks from 1154 Boylston. Let's all have a great afternoon together on June 23rd.

WELCOME TO NEW MEMBERS

With real pleasure we welcome into our membership Mr. and Mrs. Elmer O. Cappers, Dr. and Mrs. Edwin Dyer, Mr. and Mrs. John M. Hamilton, and Mrs. Laura E. Hersum, — all of Weston, — and Mr. Charles D. Childs of Acton whose illustrated lecture on "American Art as The Artist Has Seen It" made our February 1st meeting so enjoyable, — Mr. Frederick S. Kenney of Templeton, Mr. and Mrs. Andrew Oliver of Boston, and Mr. Richard B. Peirce of Wellesley Hills, nephew of the late Mary Frances Peirce.

THE TELEPHONE IN WESTON

Quotations were gathered by Homer C. Lucas from items mostly in the Waltham Free Press. Editorial comments are by Brenton H. Dickson.

1875: The human voice was first transmitted over electrical wires.

1877: The first "outdoor" telephone line was constructed from Boston to Somerville.

1878: Mr. Francis Blake of Weston invented the **BLAKE TRANSMITTER** which amplified the voice to the extent where telephony became practical. He was made a director of Bell Telephone Company which later became the American Telephone and Telegraph Company, and remained a director until his death, January 19, 1913.

March 28, 1884

"A patent for a switchboard has been issued to Mr. Francis Blake."

December 3, 1886

"The telephone has been removed from the store of Mr. Cutting. Mr. Cutting could not stand the expense that the telephone company proposed to charge him for what was much more of a public than a private convenience."

December 9, 1887

"Mr. Robert Winsor has had a private telephone put in."

September 28, 1888

"Nearly fifty telegraph and telephone wires run through Weston and yet there is no direct communication with the outside world. The people should agitate the matter and compel the telegraph and telephone company to do something!"

"When there was a telephone station at Mr. Cutting's store it paid the corporation about \$120 a year. This was enough and should have satisfied them. When they wanted Mr. Cutting to transact this business for nothing and pay them \$50 a year besides, he very naturally concluded the 'game was not worth the powder' and the instrument was removed. If pressure is brought to bear in the right way we believe the people of Weston can have both telegraph and telephone service."

February 21, 1890

"We are informed that residents of Kendal Green or Lincoln who desire to communicate with Dr. Jackson of Weston can do so by the telephone at the organ factory."

In this same year: 1890: Mr. Francis Blake became a selectman of Weston and held that office until 1909.

November 20, 1891

"A public hearing on location of poles to residence of Mr. Case."

Also a "need for a public telephone which should be at Cuttings."

December 1, 1891

"The telephone line to Mr. Case's will probably run across lots and not by way of the road."

March 30, 1894

"Francis Blake has been re-elected one of the directors of the Bell Telephone Co. at its annual meeting in Boston."

Special Note: As the current year marks the Centennial of Mr. Blake's transmitter, it is appropriate to remind our readers of Mr. Dickson's article, "KEEWAYDIN AND THE TELEPHONE" which appeared in our October 1966 issue, Vol. III, No. 1. Therein he quoted Bell's famous assistant, Thomas A. Watson, who in his "Birth and Babyhood of the Telephone" declared: "Fortunately for my constitution, Frank Blake came along with his transmitter."



MARY FRANCES PEIRCE
1831-1914

SHE RESCUED AND PRESERVED THE RECORDS OF WESTON

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Mary Frances Peirce was born in Weston on June 9, 1831 and died here on July 26, 1914. Quite fittingly the family lot in which she is buried is located in the very heart of Linwood Cemetery where she lies not only with her parents and some of her brothers (4) and sisters (5) but is surrounded on all sides by families she knew and by their ancestors and descendants.

After graduating from Framingham State Normal School, she taught in Cambridge Latin School for 34 consecutive years, 1852-1886. Her subjects covered the unusually wide range of Arithmetic, Algebra, Book-keeping, Plane and Solid Geometry, Trigonometry, English Literature, French, Greek, Latin, History, Physics, Political Economy, and Rhetoric. Also as an unpaid labor of love, she made a card catalogue of every book in the school library. She was a collector of butterflies, coins, insects, minerals, shells, and stamps. Appreciative former students kept sending her coins and stamps from all over the world. She was an enthusiastic teacher via what would today be termed the Case Method of asking, showing, collecting, analyzing, discussing, etc. Because of failing health she retired to her native home, the "Artemas Ward House in Weston" and for the next 28 years of her life, made an incredible career of searching, sorting, and publishing Town Records that otherwise would have been irretrievably lost. One should read her letter to the Board of Selectmen as reproduced on Pages 17 to 21 inclusive of the Town Report for the year ending February 28, 1891 to gain insight into the confused disorder and misplaced, inadequate, and missing records she encountered at every turn. Her diligence was contagious and won her the commendation and cooperation of our Town fathers who on April 11, 1891 distributed through the mails of Weston and nearby towns a notice of a hundred dollar reward to anyone who could return the Town Records of Weston from 1712 to 1754 which, they suspected, might be in the possession "of a descendant of some former inhabitant of the town."

A dozen years ago while studying in the library of the New England Historic Genealogical Society, we came upon a large bundle that contains hundreds of her working papers.

Subsequent references to them have been of inestimable help to several of us. As she mentioned in many letters, she also supplied that Society with records pertaining to towns other than Weston. In 1893 Arthur C. Goodell as Editor of the Commission on Publication of the Province Laws, wrote our Selectmen from the State House in Boston: "I cannot refrain from expressing my admiration of the extreme fidelity with which the work appears to have been performed . . . Weston is exceptionally fortunate to have one so admirably qualified to do this kind of work perfectly, as the modest editor of these records has shown herself to be." During the same year Robert T. Swan, Commissioner of Public Records, wrote the Board of Selectmen . . . "In my annual report for 1893 I have called attention to this action of Weston in the hope it may be an incentive to other towns to do likewise." Five years later Mr. Goodell wrote directly to Miss Peirce: "I repeat the town is fortunate in having its work done so thoroughly and intelligently, and you are to be felicitated upon the success of your great undertaking. I believe your work is unique and the most perfect work of the kind ever done in this state, and it gives me a sense of real satisfaction to know that the citizens of the small suburban towns of the Commonwealth are as intelligent and enterprising as their support of your labors prove them to be."

Through the years, the publications which she brought into being almost single-handedly without benefit of copier, computer, or even typewriter, have been consulted and appreciated by literally thousands of people from near and far. Copies may be readily seen in the rooms of the Weston Historical Society both at the Josiah Smith Tavern and in the Isaac Fiske Law Office, (our official headquarters), and of course at the Town Library and in the Archives at the Town Hall.

Perusal of the Weston Town Reports of the 1890's and early 1900's would be more fully revealing to our readers than are the scant excerpts. All of us can be grateful for the contributions of Mary Frances Peirce to Weston and for having stimulated through pioneer example, the rediscovery and preservation of similar town records in many other cities and towns of this Commonwealth. Her grand niece, Marjorie Childs Hunt of Newtonville, and her nephew, Richard Bartlett Peirce of Wellesley Hills, are members of our Society. We are grateful to them not only for the photographs which appear with this article but equally for their reminiscences of her as "a gracious lady of the old school" whose personality was one of inspiring dedication, dignity, and warmth, — whose versatility as a researcher, recorder, editor, and teacher was nothing short of amazing.

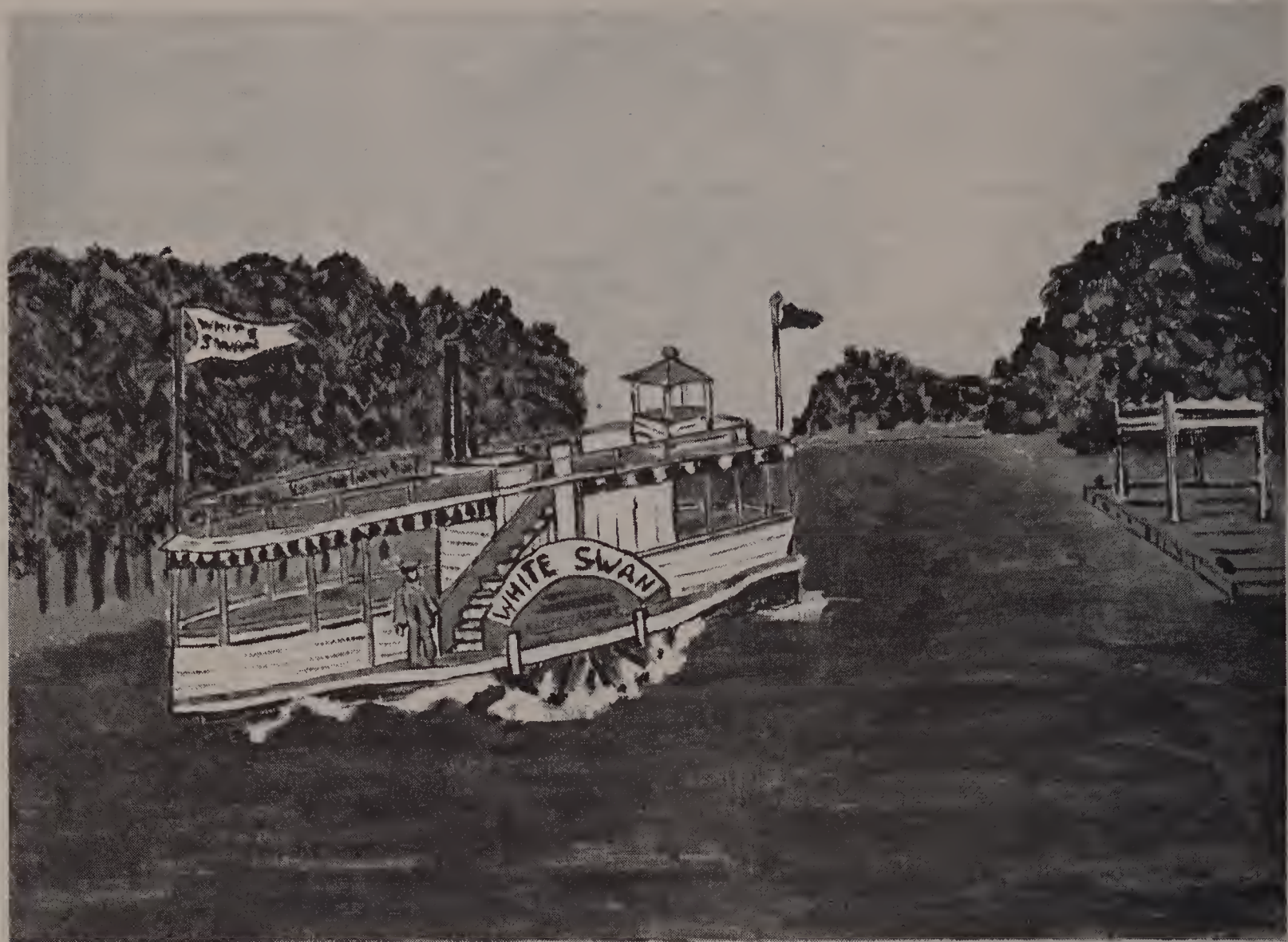
On the list of those many Westonites to whom we of today and you of tomorrow owe so much for making and keeping Weston the exceptional town that it is, the name of Mary Frances Peirce must never be allowed to fade away or to be forgotten.

H. G. T.



THE BARN AND ADJOINING CARRIAGE AND TOOL SHED ABOUT 1870

Facing east and on higher ground, these two buildings had disappeared by the time Mr. Seabury moved the Artemas Ward House back from the roadside almost to their former location. Today only the well where the horses and cattle were "watered" in earlier days is still to be seen, though the well itself is, of course, no longer open. In the left background may be glimpsed the Parson Woodward House next door at 19 Concord Road.



STEAMBOAT ON THE CHARLES "THE WHITE SWAN" 1873 – 1889

The primitive watercolor, photographed above, was painted by our versatile fellow member, James B. Muldoon. It sent us scurrying to the Waltham Public Library where after scanning the July 18, 1873 issue of the "Waltham Sentinel", we learned that "quite a large boat" had been brought into town "upon 3 or 4 wagons drawn by 6 horses", and was unloaded on the banks of the Charles just above the Moody Street Bridge, where the Middlesex Hotel stood in later years, "and we hear it is the property of Colonel Gibbs, the expressman." A week later another article described the launching which "came off at about 5 o'clock last Wednesday afternoon" and informed its readers, – "Now that the boat lays upon the water, the machinery will be put in and the decks and saloon arranged in fine trim." In the left margin, a neat hand had written in ink: "WHITE SWAN."

Longtime curator of the Waltham Historical Society, Marjorie Childs Hunt, an active member of our Society too, was contacted and sent along significant excerpts from articles by the late Percival M. Stone which had appeared in "The News Tribune" issues of July 30 and 31, 1948 under the heading "Steamboats on the Charles."

From these sources, a fascinating tale developed. When the pleasure boat which held 150 passengers was moved from Fresh Pond in Cambridge, "The Sentinel" had called her "the prettiest and largest steamer ever seen on the river." Though a novelty, it was not the first, for some years before, the 1873 account related, one "John Clark had a little steamer capable of carrying an engineer, captain, steward, and one (sic!) passenger, and for some weeks past there has been another steamer, owned by parties in Auburndale, plying up and down the river."

The sturdy side-wheeler made its "Trial Run" on August 28th, 1873. Regular passenger service was promptly inaugurated from what was then called "Steamboat Wharf" in the "Basin" this side of the Moody Street Bridge to Auburndale, docking we presume at Riverside where, 30 years later, ill-fated Charlie Tucker, of Mabel Page murder fame, was employed for a time. Colonel Gibbs, founder in 1846 of Gibbs Express Company, was warmly hailed as the new owner of "The White Swan." It was he who piloted her on the maiden voyage to Auburndale. Subsequently regular schedules were set up and main-

tained, with departures announced for 2:30, 4:30, and 7 P.M. through the spring, summer, and early fall. Brief stops were made at Lily Point (Roberts), and occasionally at the new Pumping Station then under construction. Round trips were 25c each.

Frequently it was chartered for special runs featuring the presence of the Waltham Watch Company Band. It is reported that stern measures sometimes had to be taken to "trim ship" whenever passengers gathered in large numbers at one side of the steamer. When in 1889 the new Prospect Street Bridge was opened, it proved impossible for the stack of "The White Swan" to pass under it safely, and the trim little vessel that had brought so much enjoyment to so many Westonites for 16 years was temporarily moored alongside the wharf at Moody Street. Eventually she was sold and broken up, — thus ending another phase of life along the Charles.

H. G. T.

SPRING AT LAST! DAFFODILS ARE HERE! LILACS ARE COMING!

When passing the Isaac Fiske Law Office, slow down and stop at the nearest available parking space. Look down to the oldfashioned bulb garden that's bursting into bloom. What a charming, secluded spot it is, even though close to the traffic of the busy Post Road. Cast your eyes southward toward Linwood Cemetery over the neat expanse of low-ground that gives motorists a passing glance of our headquarters from the far-off Route 20 By-pass. We've had many of them tell us: "Though we couldn't stop, you must have a beautiful town over there." Be proud of our natural and historic setting, — grateful to all those who are helping to keep Weston unspoiled despite so many pressures. Be thankful that there still are, and always will be, these green pastures and sacred spots that we can forever protect from despoliation.

COMING BAY STATE HISTORICAL LEAGUE MEETINGS

Saturday, June 17th at Longmeadow, and Saturday, October 14th at Duxbury. Call Mrs. Dumaine at 899-1098 for arrangements. Those of us who were at the Worcester meeting April 15th had a great time seeing, hearing, learning, and greeting old friends of similar interests from all over the Commonwealth.

AN APPEAL FOR COOPERATION

This issue of THE BULLETIN is its 56th. Vol. I, No. I appeared modestly in October 1964. The editorial on Page 1 said in part: "After two and a half centuries Weston at last has an historical society, 650 members strong . . . Think of the history that's buried here . . . of the stories these old cellar holes can tell! . . . Not many towns in the country have so much latent history available for re-discovery, restoration, and preservation. This Society will be what we of today make it. Then indeed will we leave to our children a heritage that is real and inspiring."

In the ensuing issues we have recorded some thrilling discoveries and many accomplishments. Yet we feel that we have only begun to skim the surface, despite several outstanding achievements along the old Boston Post Road and elsewhere throughout the town. Now with even a larger membership in a much larger town, it is all the more important that we enlist more members in order to ensure that on every road and street, we can count on guardians of the heritage we cherish.

Past copies of THE BULLETIN are very rare. If you have any that are extra, please be sure to bring them to the Josiah Smith Tavern any Wednesday afternoon, or phone Mrs. Paynter or the Editor at 899-3533 and 899-4515 respectively. We often get calls for back copies and it is better to send an original rather than a poor reproduction. We wonder how many of our members have a complete set of all 56. Has anyone contemplated having them bound into a single volume?

Remember that to make sure you don't miss a single copy of THE BULLETIN and other Society communications, you must keep your dues paid up, and also notify us in writing of any change in address, even though it may be inside of Weston itself from only one location to another. Your cooperation in all the above will be appreciated, because to keep costs down, we use "non-profit organization" mailing which is not forwardable.