

THE WESTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY BULLETIN



May 1980

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Donald S. Robinson: © Boston & Maine Railroad Historical Society

The three morning commuter trains on the Central Massachusetts Branch were known somewhat irreverently to the local populace as the “Worker” (7:03 a.m.), the “Clerker” (8:02 a.m.), and the “Shirker” (8:43 a.m.). Shown here is train No. 3106, the “Shirker”, leaving Tower Hill for Weston in the spring of 1956 during the last month of steam operation on the branch.

See page 4 for continuation of Weston's Three Railroads.

ANNUAL CHARTER ANNIVERSARY DINNER DELIGHTFUL TRADITION HIGH POINT OF THE YEAR'S CALENDAR

Wednesday evening, May 28th, is the date for our annual Charter Anniversary Dinner in the attractive and spacious Undercroft of St. Peter's Episcopal Church which faces Children's Park at the junction of the old Boston Post Road and the Route 20 Bypass. The ample parking space and “no stairs to climb” provides an ideal setting for this always gala occasion.

The Directors have voted to defy higher costs by setting the same price as last year's. Headed by Mrs. George J. Pink, a large committee has arranged for the *Sherry Hour* to

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commence promptly at 6:30. A buffet dinner, delicious and sumptuous as always, will be served at 7:15. Be sure to come early. Invite guests to join you, letting them see, hear, and feel for themselves how worthwhile and entertaining are the programs we have increasingly enjoyed these past 17 years. Members, young and old, proud of Weston and anxious to preserve its character, charm, and unique heritage, have worked together happily and productively in supporting our many projects.

Our featured speaker, Frederick S. Allis, Jr. - recently retired head of Phillips Academy's History Department at Andover, has aptly chosen "From Calvinism to Coeducation" as his topic. During his 40 year career as a member of its faculty, this popular speaker acquired an unmatched background for the scope his subject embraces. In 1964 Yale University awarded him its prize for Distinguished Teaching. A year later he received an honorary L.H.D. from his Alma Mater, Amherst. Author of many articles and books on historic topics, he is a member of the Massachusetts Historical Society and occupies a prominent position in the Colonial Society of Massachusetts. Those who know him promise us unhesitatingly a treat that we'll enjoy and long remember.

Please be sure to complete the reservation form and enclose your check in the envelope accompanying this BULLETIN. To help ensure that you and your party are accommodated, a reservation form is available in the envelope you will find enclosed for that purpose as an adjunct to this BULLETIN. We promise you a happy occasion: one that is truly "WESTON AT ITS BEST".

THE "BLAKE PAPERS"

At the beginning of our eventful March 20th meeting, Mr. Riley made an announcement which proved to be an amazing revelation to most of our large audience. He told of certain precious papers given from Weston to the Massachusetts Historical Society during his long career as its Director. At our request, he has handed us descriptive entries that are to be found in "M. H. S. Proceedings," as follows:

Nov. 1961

"From Mrs. Stephen S. Fitzgerald of Weston, the diaries of her father, Francis Blake, the inventor of the Blake transmitter, 1866-1913, and the records of the '95 Sewing Circle."

May 9, 1963

"From Mrs. Stephen S. Fitzgerald of Weston, twelve additional volumes of the diary of her father, Francis Blake, the inventor of the telephone transmitter. The diary, now complete, extends from 1866 through 1913."

May 14, 1964

"From the descendants of Francis Blake (1850-1913), of Weston, his personal papers, 1866-1912, in 132 volumes. Blake, an inventor and physicist, is best known for his telephone transmitting instrument, which was purchased by the Bell Telephone Company and was a major factor in its success."

For untold years to come, this collection will, without question, be a goldmine of information for historians with various interests and objectives. The discoveries that lie latent in these volumes defy our imagination and cannot be predicted. Suffice it to say that Weston particularly should be thankful that this precious material is in such good hands. When the justly famous Blake Estate* was about to pass from the scene in the early 1960's, it was the family's confidence in "Steve" Riley and the great institution he so ably directed which led them without hesitancy to respond to his assurances.

We of the Weston Historical Society can especially be proud that Mrs. Fitzgerald was, until her death, one of the original life members to give us her generous support and encouragement. She helped get us off to a flying start and imbued many of us with a determination to "carry on". Equally can we be thankful that hardly more than a mile away lived the director of the Massachusetts Historical Society, now our own inspiring president.

*See Brenton H. Dickson's article "*Keewaydin and the Telephone*", Pages 3 and 4, Weston Historical Society BULLETIN, October 1966, Vol. III, No. 1.

WESTON HIGH SCHOOL HISTORY STUDENTS MADE MOST IMPRESSIVE PRESENTATION

The March 20, 1980 meeting of the Weston Historical Society at the Josiah Smith Tavern featured the cream of Mrs. Marylee Marsh's crop of history students from Weston High School. All presented their own research into our town's early 1770's history. Five members of the Sophomore Class with the serious mien of scholars *in spe* (not one of them in blue jeans and teeshirt!), acquitted themselves splendidly. Content and delivery were on high level.

For posterity, let it be recorded here that they were:

Audrey Epstein, speaking on the "Weston Tax Lists of 1771";

Barry Albert, "An Analysis of the Weston Economy in 1771";

Marcy Sandler, "Weston Town Records";

Steve Rossiter, "Elisha Jones and William Upham"; and

Douglas Linde, "Samuel Phillips Savage and Captain Brady Smith".

Chief congratulations go to their teacher, Mrs. Marsh, for her time and energy, her dedications and her talents, for guiding her students capably through this annual project. We strongly urge that she collect these reports and file them each year with the Society.

An additional comment illuminates the healthy relations between "town and gown" and the interest our school representatives take in local history. Present were also Dr. Donald G. Kennedy, assistant to the Superintendent of Schools, who has been working with students on Weston history for many years, and introduced the evening's program; Mr. John Williams, Head of the History Department; and Mr. Daniel S. Cheever, our Superintendent of Schools.

It has long been the policy of our society to encourage young people to dig into Weston's history. For many years former Society president Harold G. Travis conducted tours of historical sites for the children in our schools. The historical map and several publications are not merely helpful aids but treasure troves that yield valuable finds.

Historical research can take various forms. The little exhibit that formed the background of the presentation included a large quilt with patriotic motifs stitched by fifth grade students, and a truly exquisite series of photographs of Weston homes and historic sites taken by ninth grader Christie Kennedy.

Most of all, the evening was a heartwarming happening because it presented us with the fait accompli that young people *are* interested in the roots of our town not only when swept by the temporary wave of enthusiasm connected with the Bicentennial, but also afterwards. This is an encouraging sign for all of us in Weston.

Dr. Vera Laska

A MOST APPROPRIATE GIFT

At the close of last March's meeting, we were delighted when fellow member, Gilbert Upham, who grew up in Weston, served as Superintendent of Streets for over a quarter century until his retirement, and now lives in Barre, presented in behalf of his aunt, Anna Upham and himself, an old paper, handwritten on both sides, which listed with the subjects they were taking, the names of the 50 "scholars", aged 4 to 18, of the Southwest School during the 15 week term held in the winter of 1837-38. Obviously it was compiled by the teacher who modestly did not identify herself. Who can find out what her name was?

An equally significant part of the gift is the frame which Mr. Upham made for it. When Weston's world-famous Hook and Hastings Organ Factory was demolished in 1936, Mr. Upham alertly salvaged the unused bellows which careless wreckers were throwing into a trash pile on the site of the present dump. In that day, the town had two other dumps for local convenience — one on South Avenue and another on Ash Street. The organ bellows (we have one on display in our rooms at the Josiah Smith Tavern) were made from the beautiful wood of the tulip tree. The frame has been very cleverly fashioned from it. Coming at the close of such an outstanding program by *today's* local "scholars", this gift was most fitting and timely.

WESTON'S THREE RAILROADS

Brenton H. Dickson III

PART 2: THE FITCHBURG

(Continued from last issue)

In extending the line through to Troy, N.Y. (Troy and Greenfield Railroad) one of the big accomplishments was the "Great Bore" or Hoosac Tunnel, four and three-quarters miles long and for many years, the longest tunnel in the country.

The original estimates fell short of what the tunnel actually cost, but after 20 years of political haggling and endless litigation it was finally completed. At one point, when frustration was at its height, a skeptic remarked that he knew how to finish the tunnel in no time — "just put a group of lawyers at one end and a large fee at the other."

An interesting event occurred in Weston in 1908 when the MacCausland barn on Viles Street caught fire. The fire department connected a hose to the Hastings reservoir and laid it across the Fitchburg tracks, but as they approached the burning structure they realized that they couldn't get close enough without another length or so. But it didn't matter. A train came along about then and cut the hose in two.

Now, returning to Henry Thoreau for a moment, I would like to read you a few lines written by Frank Hatch, Senior, sometimes known as Boston's Poet Laureate.

Henry Thoreau - Harvard man
Found a philosophy of life.
Lived in a cabin with a frying pan,
Never found the need for a wife.
Love in nature gathered round him-
Henry still was unimpressed.
Women's fetters never bound him,
Life without petticoats seemed best.
Henry Thoreau never fell for a blonde -
Henry Thoreau fell in love with a pond.

PART 3: CENTRAL MASSACHUSETTS

Weston's third railroad, the Central Massachusetts, in its early days was referred to as the "Boston to Nowhere". It was my favorite and far and away the most informal of Weston's three lines. Originally planned as a line connecting Boston with Northampton, it was beset with serious financial difficulties from the day it was born. Grading began in 1871 and after ten years of work and the expenditure of millions of dollars, less than fifty miles of track had been laid. After two more years, money problems became so acute that the bondholders foreclosed and service came to a standstill. Over the next two years, trees grew in the neglected roadbed while erosion from melting snow and heavy rains played havoc with the grading.

Finally an agreement was made in 1885 with the Boston and Lowell to complete the line to Northampton. Service was first resumed to Hudson, and on September 28, 1885, my father made the following entry in his diary: "I went in on the 7:30 train from Cherry Brook. It was the first train on this railroad for more than two years. Mr. Merriam gave the conductor a watermelon and Jessie gave him some flowers." Mr. Merriam owned a large farm at the junction of Merriam Street and Concord Road. Jessie was his daughter.

Service was opened to Northampton in 1887. For about three years (1890-93) two important trains passed through Weston on the Central Massachusetts line. One of them, with sleeping cars and dining car, went from Boston to Harrisburg, Pa. and the other with parlor cars and a diner went from Boston to Washington, D.C. They crossed the Hudson River on a bridge at Poughkeepsie, N.Y. Any crossing downstream from there had to be made by ferry as there were no other bridges or tunnels under the harbor at that time.

As far back as I can remember my father commuted on the Central Massachusetts

daily. When I was first married I lived in Wayland and also used this line daily; then when I moved back to Weston I often walked down to Tower Hill Station from my house on Love Lane. As I walked I knew just where I had to be at certain times. I could hear the distant whistle of the train as it approached various grade crossings, and could gauge my position with each blowing.

It was a pleasant 18 minute walk in the early 1930s and mostly downhill. There was very little traffic on the Post Road and practically none on side roads — no bumper to bumper stuff that characterizes the Post Road rush hours today, and no disagreeable fumes from roaring motor cars hurrying to and from the Raytheon plant in Wayland and other industrial establishments beyond.

The Central Massachusetts was patronized by the same people day after day. If you forgot your ticket the conductor would let you bring it to him the following morning. The three morning trains left Weston at 7:03, 8:02, and 8:43 and were known respectively as the “Workers”, the “Clerkers” and the “Shirkers”.

There were several unforgettable characters on the 8:02 o’clock train, one of them being my Uncle Ned Bennett who commuted from Tower Hill. Once aboard the train he would walk from one seat to another to converse with his various friends. One morning the conductor was heard to remark: “I don’t charge Mr. Bennett any fare. He walks all the way to Boston.”

On holiday eves, decorations appropriate to the season were attached to the cow-catcher — lilacs in the springtime, goldenrod in the autumn, a pumpkin on Halloween and evergreen boughs at Christmas.

The earliest conductor I can remember was Mr. Wheelock. He lived in Lancaster and had an incubator in his cellar where he raised chickens for us. On the appropriate day he would bring the baby chicks in the baggage car and deliver them to us at Weston Station.

One of the unforgettable early station agents was Bert Giles, a short wirey man who always seemed to be in a hurry. I never remember seeing him walk leisurely; he was more like a jogger. This could well be accounted for by his moonlighting during off hours to make extra money to fulfill his life’s great ambition — a trip to the Oberamegau Passion Play in Southern Austria. When he had finally saved enough money he went.

No description of Weston Station would be complete without a story or two about P. J. McAuliffe who ran a livery stable nearby. He began with horse drawn vehicles and later converted to gasoline taxis. In the days when I was a chain smoker my wife’s stock remark, when entering our automobiles, was “Phew - this smells just like one of McAuliffe’s Taxis!” Now that I no longer smoke I can appreciate how she must have felt.

P. J. McAuliffe for many years was the chief of police and he was known and respected by everyone in town. He also had the town’s only gasoline pump. Late one night an automobilist stopped at the pump and blew his horn . . . Pat stuck his head out the window and asked him what he wanted. “Gasoline,” was the reply.

“Wait a minute and I’ll put on some clothes and come down,” said Pat.

When he had unlocked the pump and taken the hose out he asked, “How many gallons do you want?”

“How far is it to Wellesley?” the driver asked.

“Six miles,” said Pat.

“Then just put in one gallon. I’ll get her filled in Wellesley in the morning.”

“You’ve woken me up,” said Pat, “and I’ve got dressed and come down here and I’m not selling you any one gallon. Either you take a full tank or you can walk to Wellesley.”

“I’ve a right to buy as little or as much as I wish,” replied the indignant driver. “You put one gallon in that tank or I’ll call the police.”

“I am the Police,” said Pat, gently.

At one time a school teacher complained bitterly to Pat about the bad language his son was using in class.

“Bad language?” Pat asked.

“Yes — really bad. It gets embarrassing.”

Pat thought a moment, then replied, “I’m G-- D----- if I know where he gets it from.”

IN MEMORIAM

Since our last issue, death has claimed another charter member, Mrs. Lyndall F. Carter, whose “spirit of steel” had for years surmounted handicaps of sight, hearing, and heart. An inveterate reader, world traveler, active in many specialized ways, she earned the admiration and affection of all who knew her.

THE LAW OFFICE GARDEN: “A LIVING MEMORIAL”

Now in its 12th year, with daffodils, tall blue grape hyacinths, and other spring flowers radiantly in bloom, our little gem that’s hidden from the street in the back lawn of Isaac Fiske’s 1805 law office, is again proving to be “A LIVING MEMORIAL TO WESTON’S CIVIC SPIRIT.” (Page 2, October 1979 *BULLETIN* Vol. XVI, No. 4)

The same article lauded Mrs. William (Mary Redfield) McElwain for having led a few neighbors to help Mr. and Mrs. Leander Rafuse, charter members, in battling ambitious and greedy weeds. The death of Mrs. McElwain on April 26th is a great loss to the entire community. Our sympathy goes out to the members of her family who will continue to share her appreciation of nature in all its forms of beauty, charm, and utility.

To help Mr. and Mrs. Rafuse keep this truly *memorial* garden “a thing of beauty and a joy forever”, call them at 899-5930. They and we who are now too old will appreciate your cooperation in making it spic and span by at least our traditional “open house” on Memorial Day, and in seeing that through summer and fall by an hour or two of watering and weeding, it perpetuates the spirit which motivated Weston’s three garden clubs to conceive and plant it as a joint civic project a dozen years ago.

ONE OF OUR FIRST “FOREIGN AID” PROGRAMS

Just before our February 28, 1980 meeting at Spellman Philatelic Museum, our scheduled speaker temporarily lost his voice, but our president “Steve” Riley came to the rescue and regaled the assembled members with a gem from the rich reservoir of his research. It dealt with the “*Jamestown Voyage*,” a paper he had presented a few years ago at the Boston Rotary Club. The *Jamestown* was Boston’s CARE ship sending aid to the starving people of Ireland at the height of the famine in 1847.

There had been potato famines before and after the 1840’s in Ireland; there have been potato famines also on the European continent; but none as severe as the one following the crop failures in Ireland in 1846 and 1847. The reasons for this were the high birthrate of the Irish (one source claims a total population in Ireland of nine million people, a number never reached since), and the fungus that destroyed many crops including seed potatoes, the major food source of the Irish in those years.

Ships importing timber to the British Isles brought emigrants to the new world with passage as low as 2-3 pounds per person. In 1847 alone 100,000 Irish migrated to America. 17,000 died at sea.

The Irish were received in America with less than open arms; they were considered cheap competition for American labor.

Boston people met at Faneuil Hall on February, 1847 and decided to petition Congress for a ship to take food and clothing to Ireland. The petition was granted and on St. Patrick’s Day the *Jamestown*, Captain Robert Forbes commanding, started loading casks and bales containing food and clothing worth close to \$36,000. Accompanied by cheers, the ship sailed on March 28, arriving at Cork on April 12, 1847 “without having lost a rope yarn.”

Captain Forbes was wine and dined with traditional Irish hospitality (no doubt with victuals from his ship). Poems were hastily written in his and his country’s praise. Aboard ship, he gave a farewell party of bread, gingerbread, and iced lemonade “with a little sprinkling of champagne.” The *Jamestown* sailed immediately after this party and anchored off Charlestown May 16th, thus completing one of the first foreign aid campaigns in our country’s history.

V.L.

MISCELLANY FOUND AMONG OLD TOWN RECORDS

by members of Weston Historical Commission

“ . . . To Be Used in the Arts . . . ”

“This certifies that we the subscribers selectmen of the town of Weston have this day appointed Joel Upham as agent for the purchase of spirituous & intoxicating liquors to be used in the arts, or Medicinal, Chemical & Mechanical purposes only, & also to sell the same for such purposes, and no other as the law directs, to be kept & sold at his present dwelling house in Weston.

“Given under our hands this the 19 day of June 1855

(s) Nathan Barker
Luther S. Upham
Edward Coburn

Selectmen
of
Weston

SAVE YOUR BULLETINS: *Old Ones are Scarce*

Space is so precious that the editor's task is considerably expedited and simplified when he saves words by feasible reference to past issues. Increasingly it grows evident too that welcome but unnecessary calls are for information already in the BULLETIN but obviously forgotten. The Society of course keeps a complete file of all issues to date — so far numbering 64 — that, beginning in October 1964, have appeared every January, March, May, and October. These are kept untouched in the vault at headquarters, and also in the Society's room in the Josiah Smith Tavern, open Wednesday afternoons and other times by appointment. The Town Library is making a most conscientious effort also to keep a complete supply readily available to researchers and all interested citizens, young and old.

We still feel handicapped increasingly by the lack of an index that with each issue would become more useful and valuable. We know the project has been started but we are convinced that it has become more than “a one man's (or woman's) job”. If more and more qualified Weston citizens, whether members or not, would be willing, under skilled direction, to lend a hand, we would be most grateful and so would countless students of history in the future. Single-handed, it's a colossal job but if a dozen or so people would be willing to take, say, six issues apiece, how wonderfully helpful it would prove to be in Weston's unlimited future!

On a final note, we must add that the scarcity of extra BULLETINS of the 1960's is about to become a problem. We are steadily asked, and will continue to be asked, by researchers from all parts of the country for material that appeared in several of our articles. Rather than send Xeroxed copies, it would be preferable, both to them and to us, if we were able to send them a bonafide copy of an original BULLETIN, hence if by any chance or through a space problem, you no longer have use for BULLETINS of that period (or later, for that matter), please know that our Society would welcome them with open arms. Bring them to our rooms at the Josiah Smith Tavern any Wednesday afternoon, or call either the Editor at 899-4515 or Mrs. Paynter, 899-3533.

TWO SPECIAL REMINDERS

If you have moved, even from one Weston location to another, have you notified us in writing? If not, please do so in order to ensure your receipt of the BULLETIN and other Society mailings.

Have *YOU* secured *your* new member yet? Though our Society is one of the largest in the Commonwealth, we nevertheless are anxious to double our numbers, and would like to have the support of *every* Weston resident. This issue, like its predecessors, teems with examples of the resources and the resourcefulness of our unusual community. A yearly membership entered today will last through August 1981.

Life membership saves annual dues forever.

NEW MEMBERS

We are proud to extend a hearty welcome to Mr. and Mrs. John F. Condakes, Mr. and Mrs. Richard A. Robinson, and Mr. and Mrs. Robert A. Weaver, Jr., all well-known Weston leaders, and to Jeffrey T. Lawson of Westborough. Mr. Lawson, a native of Weston, is the son of our fellow members, Mr. and Mrs. Joseph T. Lawson. This latest evidence that our young people are interested in Weston and devoted to the preservation of its traditional assets should inspire us all.

Fellow member, Dr. Vera Laska, chairman of the Social Science Division, Regis College, has become our newest life member! Coming to Weston more than a dozen years ago, she threw herself wholeheartedly into joining town and gown together not merely by becoming a member of our society. In addition she stimulated her students to supply assistance in long-neglected local research.

An example of the latter is the "*Index to Lamson's History*" compiled by one of her students. We thank Dr. Laska for her spirit of spontaneous involvement as portrayed as recently as the present issue in which she has written articles which review the programs of our February and March meetings.



WESTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY, INC.

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Secretary: Mrs. David V. Harmon
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SCHEDULE OF DUES

Annual: \$5 per person: \$8 per family including children under 21

Life: \$250 per person

Gift memberships are suggested

(Currently our youngest life member is 3 - our oldest in his 80's)

Contributions and Bequests to the Endowment and Memorial Fund are welcomed. (It has now grown into respectable five figures, due to contributions, bequests, life memberships, and interest.)

Make all checks payable to Weston Historical Society, Inc., and mail them to its Post Office address: Box 343, Weston, Massachusetts 02193.

Additional copies of THE BULLETIN may be obtained at \$1.00 each by phoning Mrs. Raymond Paynter at 899-3533, or Harold G. Travis, Editor, at 899-4515. If you have any old copies of the 1960's, and are not saving them, please be sure to give them to our Curator, Mrs. J. E. Fraser, 894-2872.