

THE WESTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY BULLETIN



October 1980

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Annual Meeting will be held Wednesday, November Twelfth

Details are to be found on page two of this issue



THE MERRIAM BARN 100 YEARS AGO

For many years, steady inquiry failed to locate a picture of what had once stood on extensive stoneworks to be found in the triangular area between Merriam Street and Concord Road, which until recently when acquired by the Town for conservation purposes, was modernly known as "Weston College Land." When the foliage disappears, why not stroll down the lane (no vehicles) to take a look for yourselves? Overgrown with brambles and scrub, the large foundations provide no insight as to the exact appearance of the structure they had once supported. Visitors share our admiration that ramparts of such size could have been set in place by oxen-powered block and tackle prior to the advent of modern weight-lifting equipment.

The above photograph came to light last May 7th in Campion Center ("Weston College") Library when our newest member rewarded our call of the previous week by phoning: "Our archivist will gladly loan you an old, not too clear picture of the Merriam Barn." We rejoice in sharing this "find" with our readers. Article(s) in preparation for future issues will bring out certain facets of Merriam Barn and Farm lore, adding references to the family itself whose contributions to the character and culture of our Town were substantial.

The Merriam Barn in Weston, built in 1876, was said to have been "one of the largest in Middlesex County." Such an elaborate landmark should have lived for centuries. Its tragic destruction by fire 54 years ago is described on Page 3.

ANNUAL MEETING AT JOSIAH SMITH TAVERN
NOVEMBER 12 FEATURES TALK ON
"BOSTON'S AEROPLANE FEVER 70 YEARS AGO"

What is sure to be another lively annual meeting will take place in the Ball Room of the historic 1757 Josiah Smith Tavern on Wednesday evening, November 12, beginning promptly at 8 o'clock. At that meeting we'll be treated to an account of a dramatic event that happened over Boston in 1910 - only seven years after the Wright Brothers made man's first heavier-than-air flight.

Today most of us take airplanes for granted. We aren't the least bit excited when we see or ride in one. There was a time, though, when we kids rushed outdoors to see that man in a machine way up there in the air! Our speaker, Elmer Osgood Cappers - member of our own board of directors - will tell about the first time Boston people actually saw men flying about in their kite-like contraptions. In an event that the press described as "The Harvard-Boston Air Meet", the men in their flying machines had taken off from Squantum across the Bay. Mr. Cappers, Harvard '23, headed one of Greater Boston's banks through many busy years. History was always his avocation. Already author of many books and papers on historical topics, he currently is writing the centennial history of the Country Club.

Prior to Mr. Cappers' talk, a concise review of the year's accomplishments will be directed by President Riley. He will welcome comments and additional suggestions to plans he will announce for the coming year's program of activity. Mr. John Brooks, phone 894-3232, again heads the nominating committee which would like to have suggestions from you of available and qualified members to serve and be actively supported by every resident of the Town. Ideally our boards and committees comprise members who compositely embrace all facets of Weston life so that all of us are joined together in keeping Weston what it has been to so many of us for so long.

Don't miss this great meeting. A pleasant social hour will follow when old friendships are renewed and new ones formed. It's a perfect occasion, too, to introduce a new member. See you November 12th!

OUR NEXT ISSUE REACHES YOU IN JANUARY

When looking for that Christmas gift - or welcome to the new neighbor, a family birthday, a wedding or other gift - don't overlook the following Weston Historical Society publications, ranging from bedside favorite "Once Upon A Pung" (second printing), amusing "Random Recollections", historical tour guide "Windows on Weston" and the "Historical Map of Weston," to nationally acclaimed "One Town in the American Revolution: Weston Massachusetts" which was one of our Town's most outstanding accomplishments during the commemoration of our nation's Bicentennial observance in 1976. All the above are available at our Society's rooms in the Josiah Smith Tavern during Wednesday afternoon "open house". At all other times, Mrs. David M. Kellogg, Jr. at 893-0824 will gladly supply delivery and other information, including costs. All proceeds swell our growing Endowment-Memorial Fund, thanks to the authors' and publishers' generosity.

NEW MEMBERS OF WESTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Previous BULLETIN issues - particularly March 1969, Vol. V, No. 3, pages 3 and 4, "The Fiske-Field House," and May 1976, Vol. XII, No. 4, first five pages, "The House That Isaac Fiske Built: An Unusual Centennial," - add enthusiasm to our introduction of Dr. and Mrs. Frederick H. Lovejoy, Jr. as the new owners of this handsome and historic residence at 637 Boston Post Road. Likewise, we welcome Mrs. Jane Cronin of 212 Concord Road as our newest member. It was she through whom "at long last" we secured for reproduction on Page One of this issue the picture of the Merriam Barn. For over a dozen years we had been emphatically assured "there is no such picture". Since becoming a member, she has been instrumental in our receiving, again through Campion Center's archivist, additional data which adds to our records of "Weston College Land" in its earliest days more than two centuries before 1922.

THE MERRIAM BARN FIRE

By H. Bentley Crouch

It was 1:40 in the morning of October 30, 1926 when Erlon Merrill, Weston's only permanent firefighter, answered the phone to his upstairs apartment over Cutting's Store¹ immediately adjacent to the Central Fire Station. An excited voice announced "... the Merriam Barn is on fire!" Although the weather was cloudy with intermittent rain showers, the glow of the fire was already in the sky as Merrill raced next door to the station. Setting up Box 54² on the whistle, he responded by himself with Weston's first-line truck - the 1914 White equipped with 350 g.p.m. pumping engine.

Arriving at the scene he was confronted with a rapidly spreading blaze which had originated in the center section of the barn. Call fighter Harold Stevens had already come on the fire, driving over from his house on Conant Road. Together they drove the truck past the burning barn and down to so-called "College Pond" about 1,000 feet to the rear of the structure. In order to get the apparatus close enough to the pond to draft water (no hydrants in the area those days), it was necessary to drive into the mud at water's edge where the truck became mired. A 2½" hose line was stretched from the pump back to the conflagration and directed upon the barn which by now was totally engulfed in fire.

By then it was evident that the barn itself would be totally destroyed, and efforts were made to prevent the fire from spreading to the house. In this, the Fire Department was successful but by dawn all that was left of the barn were a few smoking timbers and other rubble which had fallen into the basement. All livestock had been released early and not a one was lost. Although no cause was ever assigned to the fire there was speculation that a wood stove, fired up a few days earlier, might possibly have caused timbers to smoulder for some time before igniting during the night. The Waltham News-Tribune reported the loss as estimated to be \$35,000³ while official Fire Department records show that \$11,000 was the amount of insurance paid. Regardless of which figure one chooses to accept, it seems hard to realize today that one of the largest barns in Massachusetts could be totally destroyed with a dollar loss of such small amount.

An interesting sidelight on the fire is recounted by a Weston citizen who chooses to remain anonymous. It seems that there was another large barn which was torn down in 1950 and was situated on Conant Road near today's Sears Road. Its tenant was the Weston Saddle and Bridle Club. Although it was during Prohibition, rumor has it that the Club was known to hold soirees on occasions at which various tonics were dispensed. While absolute truth of this rumor has never emerged, it is a fact that when word of the fire was spread about, a large gathering of well-attired ladies and gentlemen set out from the Club across the fields to the Merriam Street site of the blaze. As they "carried on" in rather loud and boisterous manner, it was remarked that only a fire of such magnitude could cause members of the "Saddle and Bottle Club" to be drawn away from their nightly pleasures!

1 Located then where present rectory stands.

2 Near railroad bridge on Concord Road, Cherry Brook Station.

3 Miss Elizabeth Kastner of the Waltham Historical Society and a member of the Waltham Public Library's Research staff had already painstakingly copied for us all six paragraphs of the article to which Mr. Crouch refers. It occupied much of Page One in the paper's October 30, 1926 issue. Condensed excerpts that follow may provoke further research.

Headed "MERRIAM BARN IN WESTON IS BURNED TODAY" with subheading "Stock is saved but the building is a total loss", the article tells us:

"The large barn on the Merriam estate in Weston was totally destroyed early this morning by a fire of undetermined origin . . . With great difficulty farm hands and others saved cattle and horses . . . The large barn, one of the finest in Weston and erected on an elaborate plan . . . was located on Merriam Street . . . the fire was discovered this morning shortly after 1:30 by one of the farm employees and he sounded the alarm. When the fire department arrived, the flames were making rapid headway . . . the central part of the large structure was in flames . . . cattle and horses had been released . . . all were saved.

"The fire department laid long lines of hose but before the water streams were in action . . . the structure was doomed . . . comparatively little hay in the loft but large amount of farm equipment and dairy material was stored in the building and destroyed . . . The house which is some distance from the barn was wet down and saved . . . stove in harness room but as far as could be learned . . . no fire in it for the past two days . . . investigation to be continued . . . Damage is estimated at \$35,000."

OFFSHOOTS OF FROM ORGAN BELLOWS AND TULIP TREE



“THIRTEEN OF THE FIFTY ARE LEADBETTERS!”

Six members of today's history-minded Girl Scouts with one of their leaders, scan the names of the 50 “scholars” at Southwest District School 142 years ago that show through both sides of the beautiful frame which was made and presented to our Society last March by our fellow member, Gilbert Upham as announced in our last issue. Listed according to classes by the still unidentified teacher from a little girl of 3 in the “First” Class to three 19 year old boys in the “Fifth”, we are summarizing them by families as follows: Leadbetter 13; Jones 6; Brown, McIntire, Smith and Train 4 each; Earl, Greenwood, and Harrington 3 apiece; Stevens 2, and just one each with names of Child, Childs, McNeal, and Roberts. Quite a few of the above are to be found on the tombstones of Old South Burying Ground as described in our January 1978 BULLETIN, Vol. XIV, No. 2. Space limitations prevent listing each full name, age, and subjects taken by each pupil. We single out for mention one Susanna Jones who though only 12, was already in the “First” Class, and in addition to Arithmetic, Grammar, and History, is the sole occupant of a column with the bewildering title “Watts”. Any member wishing to examine our valuable new possession should contact our curator, Mrs. J. E. Fraser, at 894-2872.

In the background of the above picture, taken by our ever-cooperative ally on the Junior High School staff, is shown the Winter Street side of the old schoolhouse, long since a residence, which was erected in 1854 on the site of its predecessor at the corner of Brown Street where 16 years earlier, our 50 “scholars” had learned their 3 R's. As early as 1816, a committee of Nathan Hagar, Abijah Fiske, and Isaac Fiske reported to the Town that it was “out of repair both externally and internally” and that the committee was “divided in opinion . . . repairing or rebuilding, one or other absolutely necessary.” In those days, times were hard, and as the 1837-38 record shows, school lasted only 15 weeks - November to March - as for the rest of the year, every member of the family from youngest to oldest, had to work fulltime to keep it together.

Left to right above are: Laura Harmon, Caroline Marple (mostly hidden), Alison Kamp, Scoutleader Mrs. Joseph Kamp, Gretchen Kamp, Lisa Cacciatore, and Jeanne Hart. Photograph by Jack Delaney.

WESTON HISTORY

SCHOOLS AND SCHOLARS AND SCOUTS



THE HOOK AND HASTINGS ORGAN FACTORY

This company was moved from Boston's Roxbury section to Weston's Kendal Green in 1888. It was headed by Francis H. Hastings who later became the husband of Anna Coburn. When he died in 1916, his brother-in-law, Arthur L. Coburn, Sr., succeeded him and ran the business until his own death in 1931. During this era, one of the factory's masterpieces was the organ that is still kept in steady use in Riverside Church, New York City. In 1936 his sister, Mrs. Hastings ("Aunt Anna"), majority stockholder, had the buildings torn down. Though the railroad siding at Viles Street was removed, "Hastings" station still stands to serve and shelter commuters of the present day. The Society's collection at the Josiah Smith Tavern comprises many papers, photographs, relics, and tools of this enterprise which brought enduring prestige to Weston.

At the time of the dismantling 44 years ago, Mr. Upham rescued some surplus spare parts that had been tossed into the nearby dump off Church Street close to Kendal Green Station. "These discards," he writes, "included brand new bellows too heavy to carry home intact, so I sawed them into feasible size." One of his hobbies is carving, and it was most fitting that the frame he made to protect the list of 50 scholars from the Southwest side of town should have come from wood he salvaged from the dump in our Northeast corner. But this is not the end of coincidence! Back in 1927, the even younger Mr. Upham had helped to plant 16 seedlings of the same variety of tree out of which the organ bellows had been made. Details surrounding this phase of rambling history should be of interest.

Having visited the site of the original Southwest District School, the group asked their guide to take them to those 16 tulip trees which he had said were in full blossom that very morning. Our photographer's neighbor and Junior High School pupil, Laura Miltner, replaced the Scoutleader's daughter, Alison, already late for another appointment.

Town reports make no mention of the 1927 planting of those 16 seedlings, 2 feet high, which, thanks to the "vision" of Benjamin S. Blake, Jr., with the backing and blessing of other town officials and especially the Case family, had been raised by Peter Mezzett on "Hillcrest Farm" of the vast Case Estate in the geographical center of the Town. Each seedling was surrounded by three "sawed-off Two by Fours", pounded into the ground. Running along the sidewalk of Newton Street from Ash Street to where Wellesley Street intersects, they grew rapidly to add much beauty and charm to that lovely spot. Apparently the project was all done privately, for no record of expenditures appears in any of the Town's bookkeeping, as far as can be learned.



“The wood for the frame came from such a beautiful tree”

It is quite probable that as has been true so often before and since, here is just another case of beautification projects being undertaken and effectuated by motivated citizens with approval and full cooperation of responsible and appreciative town officials. It is delicate to mention names, for through these past three centuries, Weston has been blessed with innumerable benefactors, some large and some small, some publicized and recognized, others modestly anonymous, but all of them made great contributions to the character and charm of this great little Town of Weston.



“LIRIODENDRON TULIPIERA”

According to Albert Constantine’s “KNOW YOUR WOODS” (1959), Page 315, “the wood . . . works very easily with all kinds of tools, being suitable for carving . . . excellent wood for painting.” Weston has many of these trees. One novelty is rapid growth. Transplanting is hazardous and usually fails. “The flowers are very sweet and a mature tree will yield as much as 7 or 8 pounds of nectar a year.” These two “close-ups” by fellow member Victor C. Harnish reveal details of the tree’s delicate and rare beauty. They were taken right after a small segment of Weston old and young walked into yesteryear together one morning in early June 1980.

Harold G. Travis

A ROAD COMPLAINT OF LONG AGO

Preface: Members of the Weston Historical Commission are now keeping us faithfully posted as little “scraps” of old town records turn up unexpectedly. Though as in the following quotations, they often are incomplete and inconclusive, we publish some of them as matters of *Weston* interest both educational and entertaining. May they inspire amateur researchers to come forward with what might prove to be a “missing link”!

Mr. Clark

Ashland March 5th [1870]

Dear Sir

I wish to inform you that owing to the []ness of the town on account of not being broke out that runs from the main road to Weston from Ashland up to Mr. Jones i broke my sleigh and tipped over and it cost me 3 dollars and 75 Cts to fix my sleigh and i want you to pay the same if i hear from you before the end of the week and received the amount \$3.75 i shall take no further notice of it if not i shall try other means to collect it. you may go and see Lizzie Leadbetter and she will tell you about it she was with me at the time it happened hoping to hear from you soon i remain yours truly

S. Frank Bell Ashland Mass

P.S. i shall not take any further steps to recovering damages this week if i dont get an answer from this this week look out

Apparently Mr. Clark wrote an answer on March 23rd, 1870 which wasn't found by our sleuth with the other letters, quoted herein, which were discovered by former Historical Commission member, Elsie Cooke, just before she left office in the spring of 1980: 110 years after the distressing incident described above. Chronologically, the next letter probably interprets its contents clearly. Ed.

Mr. Clark

Ashland April 3 1870

20Dear Sir

Your letter is at hand of the 23rd of March you say in it that you are not one of the selectmen but you are the surveyer and you are the one to settle all damages and if you want to save any further trouble you send me 3 dollars and 75 cents to pay for my [slay] it will save a great deal of trouble for i am going to get payed if i cost me 500 dollars to get and i have 5 witnesses to go on the stand and swear that the road was not passable and 2 of them had to go over it and led their horses all the way if you take notice of this and send me my pay it could save me from doing that much it will be for this for both parties that i should not do. hoping to hear from you soon i remain yours in hast

S. Frank Bell

PSS i have been about see a lawyer and he will take hold of it if you do not pay me in one week

S. F. Bell

To S. Frank Bell

Weston April 10th 1870

Sir Mr. Sam'l F. Clark informs me that you have made a demand upon him for damages to your sleigh last season on the Highway if you have a just demand against the Town the Selectmen are ready to pay it but as yet we know nothing in regards to the matter the Selectmen will be in Session on Sat. April 30th from 7 to 9 oclock P.M. at the Town Hall when if you will present your claim with the circumstances attending it without doubt it may be amiably adjusted

Alonzo S. Fiske Char Selectmen

Ashland April 12 70

Mr. Fiske

Dear Sir

I received your letter last night stating that if i would be at the Town Hall on Sat April 30th and make my case known to the selectman that they would pay it if i had good cause for my complaint i broke my [t] hill. and whiplery on a cross road up by Lorenzo Leadbetters and the [road] was not passable and that i can bring 5 or 6 witnesses to state that they had to lead their horses over that road the same week. i have not asked anything only what it cost me to get my sleigh fixed and that is 3 dollars and 75 Cents you wanted me to come and lay my case before the selectmen if they want to pay 3 dollars for my team to come down there to see them i will come i can not come without they will pay my bills but it will save further trouble if they inquire into the matter and settle it as soon as possible you can go to Lorenzo Leadbetter and find out all about it and if you want a bill i will send it as i can get one made out any time hoping to hear from you soon i remain yours truly

S. Frank Bell Ashland Mass

P.S. i want to know what you will do about it as soon as possible until then i remain yours. S. F. Bell

Editor's Query: 110 years later, who can tell us how this “hassle” ended?

COMING EVENTS: MARK THEM ON YOUR CALENDAR NOW!

Nov. 12, 1980: Annual Meeting, Josiah Smith Tavern. See Page 2.

Mar. 25, 1981: Joint meeting with Wayland Historical Society in Wayland. Details will appear in January issue.

May 6, 1981: Charter Anniversary Dinner - the year's high point.
Speaker: Robert J. Taylor, Editor-in-Chief of the Adams Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society. His topic will deal with the relationship between John Adams and Thomas Jefferson. Details later.

As other plans progress to definite conclusion, they will be announced also, but meanwhile, we can all look forward to another active and worthwhile year.

REMINDERS THAT ARE STILL ALL-IMPORTANT

Notify us in *writing* whenever your address changes, even from one address to another in Weston! Keep your dues paid up! Get your neighbors and friends to join us too. With all citizens working together with us, Weston's standards and traditions will never wane!



WESTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY, INC.

President: Stephen T. Riley

Vice President: Mrs. Reginald B. Elwell

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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 4 - 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.