

# WESTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY THE WESTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY BULLETIN



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## THE THREE SPIRES OF THE MERRIAM BARN - 1876 - 1926

For the first time in history, a reproduction of the famous Merriam Barn appeared in our last issue. Pictured above is an enlargement therefrom showing its rooftops with the spires that gave much character to the mammoth structure. Of the trio, the cupalo at the left was the most utilitarian. Unlike its companions, it was round in shape and housed a rotary windmill with vertical vanes to pump water into a large tank which was located under the roof of the barn. Over the years the tank's supports became too weak for so much weight, and gave way. The tank dropped all the way to the basement, killing a few cows in the process. Fortunately no human life was lost.

This episode was the least serious of 3 tragedies that beset the barn during its all too brief existence. The October 30, 1926 fire which completely destroyed what was generally believed to have been one of the largest barns in Middlesex County, was a feature of our last issue. Herein you will find on Page 3 a vivid account of the ravages wrought by the devastating foot and mouth disease epidemic which struck New England in 1915 and included among its major victims, the large herd of cattle to which Mr. Charles Merriam was so wholeheartedly dedicated.

As the barn had not been built on the highest elevation of the property, these spires did not catch a spectacular vista which a poet might describe as "a prospect fair and wide." They did, however, command a view across pastureland, hayfields, and the quarter mile track where, on the flat land of today's "Green Power Farm," Mr. Herbert Merriam, the father, exercised and trained his trotting horses. That part of the Merriam Farm which occupies the triangle formed at the junction of Concord Road and Merriam Street, extending down to what we still call "College Pond," gradually went back to nature. Among Weston's extensive conservation holdings, it stands out today as a guardian of the Town's rural character and charm.

*(Continued on page 2)*



Merriam Barn's foundations are still to be found, albeit after a little searching, in sturdy condition that attests to the remarkable engineering skill and ingenuity which characterized its construction. The 3 spires as pictured may remind some of us of 3 tragedies that befell the Merriam Barn of Weston during its all too short half century — The Collapse of the Water Tank, the Foot and Mouth Disease Epidemic, and the Disastrous Fire of 1926.

We continue to be grateful to the librarian of Weston College for locating and loaning to us the picture which for many years we had constantly and emphatically been assured, did not exist!

## A LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

It is good to report that an overflow audience attended the annual meeting of the Weston Historical Society on November 12, 1980, at the Josiah Smith Tavern. Small wonder, for after the annual reports and election of Directors and Officers we had the special treat of a talk by Director Elmer O. Cappers, retired banker and devoted historian. In his charming and witty way Mr. Cappers told us about the famous Harvard-Boston Air Meet of 1910 and the great enthusiasm it aroused both here and abroad. His informative talk\* made us aware of the great advances in the development of the airplane since the early days of the Wright brothers. At the Massachusetts Historical Society there is a letter written by Octave Chanute to Godfrey Cabot from Chicago on December 19, 1903, quoting a telegram received two days earlier: "I had a telegram from the sister of Messrs. Wright on 17 'Boys report four successful flights today from level against 21 mile wind. Average speed through air 31 miles. Longest flight 57 seconds.'" About 10:30 on that morning Orville Wright made the first successful powered flight.

On February 28, 1980 a group of Society members enjoyed a rewarding visit to the Cardinal Spellman Philatelic Museum at Regis College. There Dr. Guy Dillaway showed us commemorative stamps as well as rare American and foreign stamps. Handicapped by an attack of laryngitis, Dr. Dillaway was forced to postpone his talk on "Weston's Postal History" to a later date. Mr. Riley, who is usually prepared for such emergencies, spoke on the Irish famine of the 1840's and the 1847 voyage of the *U.S.S. Jamestown*, Robert Bennet Forbes, commander, loaned to carry contributions from Boston to the sufferers from the famine. Last March 20, our meeting at the Smith Tavern was turned over to students and teachers from the Weston schools who demonstrated most effectively how our local history is being taught. Frederick S. Allis, Jr., retired teacher and former head of the history department at Phillips Academy, Andover, was our speaker at the Annual Charter Dinner on May 28. He traced in a most informative and interesting way the Academy's history "From Calvinism to Co-education." Author of the recently published history of the Academy, Mr. Allis was strongly grounded in his subject.

What do our members have in store for them this coming year? Interesting and provocative evenings, we hope. On January 13, 1981, Rev. Daniel Linehan, S.J., an internationally known seismologist from Weston Observatory, will speak on volcanoes with particular reference to the Mt. St. Helens eruption. He will illustrate his talk with colored slides. On April 14 certain Weston High School students under the direction of their instructor, John Williams, will tell us about their research on Thomas Jefferson. The speaker at the Annual Charter Anniversary Dinner on May 6 will be Robert J. Taylor, Editor-in-Chief of the Adams Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society. Mr. Taylor's subject will be "John Adams and Thomas Jefferson — an Up and Down Friendship." The relationship of these two great men is fascinating. You will have a splendid meeting. Abigail Adams warned her husband John "to remember the ladies." We intend to do just that at our Annual Meeting in November, for Vera Laska will tell us about the place of ladies in American history. The exact title of her address will be announced later with details of time and place.

With such appealing fare offered for this coming year, I strongly urge you to attend all of these meetings. Moreover, bring your friends. They will enjoy becoming members of the Weston Historical Society once they have been introduced to it.

Stephen T. Riley

\*Be sure to read Dr. Laska's review on page 6.



# THE FOOT AND MOUTH DISEASE

From newspaper accounts assembled by  
Homer C. Lucas and edited by Brenton H. Dickson

At Weston's annual Town Meeting in 1915, Charles H. Fiske, Jr. Esq. read the following resolution:

*Whereas*, since the last annual Town Meeting our fellow townsman Charles Merriam has died after a very short illness; and

*Whereas*, his family have long been residents of the town and in various ways have been benefactors of it;

Now, therefore be it resolved in the death of Charles Merriam the town has lost a valued and respected citizen. In the last eleven years he devoted himself to the management of his father's farm, and by his industry and skill made it a model of its kind. Most of his life was spent in the town. A loyal and devoted townsman, warm hearted, simple, friendly and sincere, he won the regard of all who knew him, and they who knew him best most deeply mourn his loss.

Charles Merriam, son of Herbert Merriam who outlived him by several years, died in Weston, March 29, 1915 at the age of forty-three. Dr. Van Nuys, who signed the death certificate, gave the cause of death as "Ludwig's Angina" and "Septicemia", but it might also be said that he died of a broken heart upon seeing his outstanding herd of cows suddenly obliterated, victims of the epidemic of Foot and Mouth Disease. Every last one of them had to be "put down", — the only means of curbing this extremely contagious and fatal sickness. A long trench was dug in a field below the barn, the entire herd driven into it and shot, one by one. The trench was filled in with dirt: — Mr. Merriam's life work had come to an abrupt and tragic end!

For eleven more years the Merriam barn, famed for being one of the largest of its kind in all of Middlesex County, stood looking as it always had, but housing only a few cows and horses. When Herbert Merriam, Charles' father, died in January 1926, little except equipment was left in the barn which itself was destined for destruction just nine months later after a life span of only fifty years.

Although the Food and Mouth Disease had been known in Europe since the 16th century and had wrought the most damage in Russia, its first incidence in the United States was in 1870. Then in 1910 when another epidemic broke out in Russia, it spread to Germany and Austria, thence in 1912 to Great Britain, and to America shortly after the outbreak of World War I in 1914. Within months it struck Weston when the Inspection Corps condemned a herd of 35 cattle in Waltham and the Daily Free Press Tribune of February 17, 1915 stated:

*"... the foot and mouth disease in this city and vicinity has become alarming and despite efforts of State and National forces... spread continues... In addition to the discovery of a new case here, the disease was found among a herd of 60 cattle at the Charles Merriam farm on Merriam Road, Weston, and quarantine... not only [on] the premises but also [on] the entire town with reference to the transportation of cattle."*

In one case in Waltham an inspector was refused admission to a barn, the owner contending that he was keeping all persons away from his cattle as a means of preventing the disease from reaching them. "The inspector intends to force his entrance to the barn if it is necessary to resort to legal methods to have papers served by a sheriff if the owner does not withdraw the barrier." The owner stood his ground and there was no incidence of the disease among his cattle. Swine were also susceptible and at the Harrington Farm in Watertown, more than 500 pigs were killed.

Middlesex County's cure for the 1915 epidemic had to be gruesome and drastic. It was the only means by which the authorities could bring it under control.

A few years ago while exploring the premises for additional grading material on Weston College's grounds, bones were unearthed in such quantity that the diggers, who knew nothing about the 1915 tragedy, were extremely puzzled until enlightened by local historians.

**Addendum:** In 1968 I made a canal voyage in England through a section recently afflicted, and where many large herds had been wiped out. It was believed that the epidemic had been caused by meat imported from Argentina. There is still grave danger of another epidemic in our own country, especially the middlewest. I am told there is a serum to combat it but is in very short supply.

B.H.D.





COULD THIS HOUSE BE "WESTON'S OLDEST?"

Will We Ever Know?

Another charter member of our Society, and its first secretary too, is Elsie Cooke who was born in Weston and has lived her whole life here. While a member of the Weston Historical Commission, she took the above picture of the old house at 71 Lexington Street. At our request, she has written and at hers we have edited, the following article, condensing the vast fund of information she and others have accumulated.

## THE JOHN WARREN HOMESTEAD

71 Lexington Street, Weston

To distinguish him from five other early New England Warren immigrants, genealogists have called him "*John of Watertown*". With wife Margaret, their two sons and two daughters, all born in England, he came over in 1630 on one of the *Winthrop* Fleet's 14 ships. Promptly a freeman of Watertown, he was a selectman from 1630 to 1640 inclusive. By King's grant and purchase he shortly owned 178 acres including "Lot No. 33" in "Western Farms". On this lot, now 71 Lexington Street, was built the so-called "Old John Warren House" by his grandson, Ensign John Warren, whose grave in Farmers' Burial Ground, it has consistently been agreed, is indisputably Weston's oldest. As he died, aged 38, in 1703 after 21 years of marriage and when his son, the future "Deacon" John Warren, was 19, it tantalizes us not to have any documentary evidence as to *when* Ensign John Warren actually did build this house. It originally was clapboarded, painted red, later shingled and stained brown, but now, we observe, is being brought back to clapboards. Its central chimney with four fireplaces served two large bedrooms above the first floor kitchen and living room. The downstairs fireplaces were larger of course, the one in the kitchen having a crane. As the family grew, the house expanded into 13 rooms altogether.

Until 1774, the road went on the other side of the house from where it runs nowadays. As it always did, the house sits on a knoll overlooking a valley and its terraced front yard has a "lovely retaining wall". Unlike most of its few contemporaries that are still standing, this venerable house has never undergone any serious alteration, remodeling, or restoration.



# THE REWARDS OF RESEARCH

Below is reproduced a worksheet we borrowed from Mrs. Dorothy Ellis so that we might prove a point. For last issue's article on the Merriam Barn fire in 1926, we all wanted to know when the barn had been built. Nobody knew. Mrs. Ellis, one of our busiest fellow members, volunteered to "try" to find the answer. How she uncovered 1876 as the reliable date is best shown by the condensed notes she made in the process of spending hour after hour in diligent searching. She proved again that when no other records or reports are on file, it's still possible through dogged scanning of Town Valuation Lists or other papers, yellowed and dusty though they may be by now, to uncover what others might have considered lost forever. The object lesson, here portrayed, may persuade *you* that ingenuity, patience, and persistence often provide fascinating rewards. You may perhaps even join us in learning that "One *find* is worth a dozen frustrations".

TOWN OF WESTON VALUATION LISTS			Dorothy Ellis 9/19/80 To H.G.T.		
HERBERT MERRIAM	CASH	LIVE STOCK	OTHER	VAL. DESCR.	NO. ACRES
May 1st YEAR	ASSETS	VALUE	PERS. EST.	BUILDINGS	VAL.
1870	—0—			Nothing listed	
1871	—0—			"	
1872	Money \$20,900	1 horse 200 2 cows 200	Car. 200		
1873	Money 22,000	1 horse 200 2 cows 100	Car. 200		
1874	Money 22,000	3 horses 550 10 cows 700 2 swine 40 3 bulls 150	-0-	3 dwell. 3400 2 barns Hennery	Roberts Farm + 160 Gregory Farm 6600 → 10,000
1875	Money 22,000	4 yearl. 120 2 bulls 200 7 swine 600 4 horses 750 10 cows 750 2 oxen 1 3 yearl. olds	3 Carriages 600	4 Dwell. 15,500 2 barns Hennery	Roberts Farm + 150 Gregory Farm 6600 22,100
1876	"	6 yearl. 160 1 bull 100 5 swine 600 4 horses 950 13 cows 6 yearl. 2 oxen	Carr- iages 600	4 Dwell 16,500 2 barns Hennery	" 153 6600 23,100
1877	"	13 cows ETC.	"	4 Dwell 31,500 3 BARNs Hennery	" CHERRY 153 6600 38,100 BROOK FARM
1878	"	16 cows ETC	"	"	Woodland 5 150 150
1879	Stocks 12,000 Money 10,000	21 cows 7 horses 11 swine 2 bulls	"	26,500 Homesstead Cherry Brook Farm Woodland	" 11 11 150 33,100
1880	Money 22,000	22 cows ETC.	"	"	" →

## IN MEMORIAM

Again it is with heavy hearts that we must record the deaths of the following longtime members, all of whom in so many important ways gave much support to our work and were, in addition, active in other phases of civic work. Weston is better because of them. To their families we extend our deepest sympathy. Mrs. Philip D. Bassett, Mr. Robert L. Casey, Mr. Leonard H. Dowse, Mrs. Katherine C. Fitzhugh, Mrs. Gordon B. Whitman, and Mrs. Wilmot Whitney, Sr.

## THE HARVARD BOSTON AERO MEET - VINTAGE 1910

At the November 12, 1980 meeting of our Society, we were offered a double treat; in Elmer Osgood Cappers, a first rate raconteur, and in his story a rare glimpse into the first exploits of some magnificent men on their flying machines over the historical landscape of Boston, anno Domino 1910. It all happened between September 3rd and 13th at the Harvard Aviation Field in Squantum. The pilots, who were strapped into various types of mono-, bi-, and tri-planes that looked more like kites than today's planes, were exposed to the elements, to the view of spectators below, and at times to oil splashing from the propellers.

About 10,000 eager viewers were on hand to observe the incredible aerial navigation, in spite of murky weather and uninvited mosquitoes from nearby marshes. Competition was fierce for various prizes, beginning at \$150, many of them having been subscribed by Boston businesses and in categories of speed, altitude, duration, distance, slow lap, get-away and accuracy. \$5,000 was promised the pilot dropping most "bombs" into the funnels of a fake battleship. Three Japanese gentlemen, following this manoeuver through binoculars, were noted by a reporter.

Taciturn Wilbur Wright, the greatest name in aviation, did not receive such good press as Britisher C. Grahame-White: "a splendid horseman," - "crack automobilist," - "record holder able to get off the ground in a run of 20 feet," and [flies] "with the daintiness of a bird." He won the top prize of \$10,000 by completing in 33 minutes and 2 seconds the course that comprised circling the aviation field, the State House, and Boston Light. Spectators went wild, the band struck up "God Save The King," hats and parasols were tossed in the air!

President Taft was there but declined to ride in an aeroplane. Not so Boston Mayor Fitzgerald! "Honey Fitz" always relished applause, excitement, and headlines. The Wright brothers' planes established new records in duration and altitude. A Miss Phoebe Dwight took a ride in Boston aviator Charles F. Willard's machine, thus becoming the first woman ever to soar over Boston. A Ralph Johnstone drove the crowd wild by performing an "aerial dance" that kept time to the music of the band.

Shortly after this fabulous aero meet, there was one also in Weston. But that is another story.

Dr. Vera Laska

## BAY STATE HISTORICAL LEAGUE MEETINGS SCHEDULED AT LOCATIONS NEARBY

January 17 - Franklin

April 18 - Wellesley

June 13 - Leominster

As members of our Society, you are invited to attend. For details call Mrs. Fraser at 894-2872. Pool cars are sensible, patriotic and fun! You'll enjoy mingling with contemporaries from over 300 other local historical societies who come to enjoy the inspirational and hospitable schedules, programs, and tours, which are arranged by League officials and the host societies. Several of us have become individual members through the years. For details contact the Editor or our faithful Curator, Mrs. Fraser.

## MEMBERSHIP STEADILY GROWS

We warmly welcome the following new members into our Society: Dr. and Mrs. Frank F. Davidson, Jr., Mrs. Harwood Ellis, Mr. and Mrs. William W. Gallagher III, Miss Lisa Luchetti, Mr. and Mrs. Arthur Makechnie, Mr. and Mrs. Jack F. McGlynn, and Mr. John Williams.



## ANOTHER MYSTERY! WHO WAS THAT "FORMER INHABITANT"?

His descendant, also unnamed, was suspected - yes virtually *accused* - of hiding those precious 1712-1754 Town Records which are still missing (thus increasingly frustrating many of us 1980 "delves"). The poster, here reproduced, boldly made the accusation and offered the huge reward 90 years ago. Now in 1981, indefatigable sleuths are still alerted to look again into old attics, barns, or other storage repositories. You *might* well earn unsuspected glory! If understandably our current Board of Selectmen declines to fulfill the promise of its 19th century predecessor body, we know someone who will! That's the spirit that has kept Weston a well-run and wholesome community of happy people for the past 268 years.

# **\$100 REWARD.**

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There are grounds for the assumption that Vol. I. of the Town Records of Weston, from 1712 to 1754, is in the possession of the descendant of some former inhabitant of the town. To stimulate a search therefor, we hereby offer a **REWARD of ONE HUNDRED DOLLARS for the return of said volume to the Town Clerk of Weston.**

Minor rewards will be paid for the return of other records or documents which properly belong to the Town.

HENRY J. JENNISON,  
FRANCIS BLAKE,  
NATHAN S. FISKE,

Weston, Mass., April 11, 1891.

Selectmen of the Town of Weston.

## NEW DATE FOR JOINT MEETING WITH WAYLAND

Our meeting with the Wayland Historical Society will be held early next year instead of on the date previously announced. Many of us recall the address Mr. Riley, featured luncheon speaker, gave in Wayland on April 19, 1969, "The Honorable Samuel Savage: A Westonian Prominent in the Revolution", when our Society with Wayland's hosted the annual spring meeting of the Bay State Historical League.

## COMING EVENTS

MARK THESE IMPORTANT DATES ON YOUR CALENDAR NOW!

- Jan. 13 (Tuesday): 8:00 P.M., Josiah Smith Tavern  
"The Mt. St. Helens Eruption. Volcanoes in General with special respect to St. Helens"  
Speaker: Rev. Daniel Linehan, S.J., internationally known Weston Observatory seismologist. Illustrated lecture with colored slides. Come early to ensure a good seat.
- Apr. 14 (Tuesday): 8:00 P.M., Josiah Smith Tavern  
A group of high school history scholars, under the direction of Mr. John Williams, will give a graphic report on their current studies of *Thomas Jefferson*. Your attendance will add to their enthusiasm. A treat is in store for us all.
- May 6 (Wednesday): CHARTER ANNIVERSARY DINNER  
Speaker: Mr. Robert J. Taylor (See President's letter, page 2.)  
*"John Adams and Thomas Jefferson: An Up and Down Friendship"*. Further details will be given in our next issue.



### WESTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY, INC.

President: Stephen T. Riley  
Vice President: Mrs. Reginald B. Elwell  
Secretary: John S. Hodges  
Treasurer: Camillo F. Petri  
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Editor of THE BULLETIN: Harold G. Travis

#### Board of Directors

Elmer O. Cappers, '82; Brenton H. Dickson '81; Roy L. Dickson '81; Mrs. Dudley B. Dumaine '81; Mrs. Reginald B. Elwell '83; Donald G. Kennedy '83; George J. Pink '82; Stephen T. Riley '83; and Harold G. Travis '81.

#### SCHEDULE OF DUES

Annual: \$5 per person; \$8 per family including children under 21  
Life: \$250 per person

Gift memberships are suggested

(Currently the age span of our life members is from 3 to "over 80"!)

Contributions and Bequests to the Endowment and Memorial Fund are welcomed.  
All checks should be mailed to:

Weston Historical Society, Inc.  
Box 343  
Weston, Massachusetts 02193

Additional copies of THE BULLETIN may be obtained by phoning Mrs. Raymond Paynter, Jr., 899-3533, or Harold G. Travis, Editor, 899-4515; also by calling at the Josiah Smith Tavern any Wednesday afternoon during "Open House". If you have a spare copy of BULLETINS, vintage 1963-1970, our Curator, Mrs. J. E. Fraser, 894-2872 would be glad to have them.