

THE WESTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY BULLETIN



January 1982

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Dedication of the "flag staff in the public square", 1890. The flag pole, which was erected with \$250 voted by Town Meeting, remained in this location until 1917 when it was moved to the present site next to the new Town Hall. Several articles in this issue are devoted to life in Weston at the turn of the century.

LIVELY TALK AT ANNUAL MEETING

"Women of the Revolutionary Era" was the subject of a spirited and witty presentation by Dr. Vera Laska at the Annual Meeting on November 5. Dr. Laska, Professor of History and Chairman of the Social Science Division of Regis College, pointed out that women played a far more active role at the time of the American Revolution than they did in Nineteenth Century America. Women in the Revolutionary era participated in the economy — Sarah Cutler ran a tavern in Weston — ran all kinds of businesses; served as attorneys-in-fact; sailed with their husbands and helped as navigators; contributed as teachers, midwives, inn-keepers, and pharmacists. Although only Deborah Sampson of Plympton, Massachusetts, served as a soldier, women — including Martha Washington, Lucy Knox, Catherine Greene, and the wives of many soldiers — accompanied their husbands to war. 10% of all shops were run by women — including John Singleton Copley's mother — compared with 5% in the 1900 census. Mrs. Landman was sexton at Harvard in the 1760's. Hanna Fisher, who lived on the Boston Post Road near New York, was a "bung-hole drinker." And the Martha's Vineyard liberty pole was blown up by girls. Many women had literary talents, published novels, poetry, plays, and feminist pamphlets. Some of these are well-known, as Mercy Otis Warren or Judith Sargent Murray; others are still hidden from history in the dusty attics of old homes or archives, awaiting discovery. Women in American History have been ignored for too long, pointed out Dr. Laska. As a result of the Bicentennial and of the growing interest in minorities, more research is being carried out regarding the role of women in the development of our country.

“... AND ONLY ONE REGISTERED WOMAN VOTER”

“You can almost hear the whirr of machinery in wideawake Waltham . . .” reports the *Boston Sunday Herald* of May 11, 1902, featuring photographs of Weston estates, which is reprinted on pages 4 and 5. The original newspaper hangs, framed, in the rooms of the Society in the Josiah Smith Tavern. The text, quoted in part below, provides a view of Weston 80 years ago. Weston’s relationship to trolley lines has been described in the *Bulletin* by Brenton Dickson in October 1978 and by Harold Travis in January 1979.

Weston is sometimes styled as the Lenox of the East, and as a figure of speech, the term is not inappropriate. A little comparison would, doubtless, give Lenox a decided advantage on the score of magnificence, but in all the elements that incline to make a quiet, retired (and convenient) country town of residences of the first class, Weston is probably not surpassed by any place in the state.

Weston isn’t particularly prominent in the public eye. She seldom gets her name in the papers unless some streetway company tries to invade her town; then she protests with a vigor which emphasizes her conservative opposition to such innovations. She has insular prejudice against such things, a selfish desire (although a natural one) to keep her sylvan harmonies from the discord of clanging gongs and buzzing trolleys.

This policy has not only produced good results from the artistic and sentimental point of view, but also from a financial standpoint. It has attracted to the town a class of wealthy residents and caused a ready sale of land. The assessors still measure real estate by the acre instead of by the foot, but the time is fast approaching when the foot-rule will be applied.

Schools, libraries, electric lights, newly macadamized streets — all these refinements have been supplied with a generous hand, and still the tax rate is only \$9.80. This latter statement, coupled with the natural beauty of the town, explains, perhaps, as clearly as anything the reason for this migration of wealth to Weston — this, and the fact that the assessors are such poor mathematicians that when they get very high into the thousands in estimating the value of a man’s personal property or in appraising his realty holdings, they become confused, falter, and then arrive at a full stop.

It is difficult to believe, driving along the shady highways of this pretty town, that busy Boston is only 14 miles distant, and that by listening intently you can almost hear the whirr of machinery in wideawake Waltham, only four miles away.

Here is the great charm of the place. One is not, like the New Yorker at Lenox, several hours away from his business. From Weston it is only a little more than a half-hour ride to Boston; and at night when a busy man returns to it the quiet seems to act as a balm to nerves drawn by business cares and by the manifold irritating noises of a large city. In this fact lies one of the chief objections to the entrance of the trolley car.

“I believe in the principle of the greatest good to the greatest number,” said one Westonite, “but Weston people are well supplied with travelling accommodations without having the street railways. There are so many places where a man can live, if he wants to live on the line of a street railway, while there are so few places where a man can live if he does not want to live on the line of a street railway.”

Weston was originally “the farmer’s precinct” of Watertown. This sounds somewhat funny, considering the character of most of Weston’s “farmer’s” today.

So gradual has been its growth that the census of 1900 credits it with a population of only 1834. There were 349 registered men voters and only one registered woman voter. Three railway lines pierce it — the Fitchburg and the Central Massachusetts on the one side and the Boston & Albany on the other.

General Charles J. Paine might be called the modern discoverer of Weston. About 30 years ago he built a large house there, and he is today the master of the largest estate in the place. His fine residence on Highland Street — roomy and comfortable rather than outwardly magnificent — is surrounded by 739 acres of land. Here the general and his family spend the greater part of each summer, going out there before apple blossoms bloom and remaining until fall . . .

“OBNOXIOUS BUSINESS” AND “EVIL-DISPOSED PERSONS”

How did Weston residents view the town as a place to live at the turn of the century? Two sections of the 1891 *Town Report* reveal a partial answer. On December 6, 1890 the Selectmen held a hearing on the application of H. V. Partelow and Company for a license to establish additional steam power for their wood-working machinery at the South Avenue Bridge. Several residents spoke against the petition, arguing that the business constituted “. . . a serious injury to the value of their estates, and a drawback to the future growth of the town as a place for country homes.” The Selectmen agreed, giving the petitioners “leave to withdraw”. The reasoning of the Selectmen provides a contemporary statement of their view of Weston:

The nature of their business is such that it cannot be carried on . . . without damage to passers-by, by reason of frequent obstructions in the highway, escaping steam, and the noise of wood-working machinery . . . if the present natural and municipal advantages of Weston are preserved, her future growth and prosperity must be largely due to the advent of persons seeking country homes in towns at a convenient distance from Boston. These advantages can be preserved only by a conduct of town affairs which shall ensure a low tax rate and a non-existence of business enterprises, which are obnoxious to the pleasure home life in the country.

In the same *Town Report*, the section labeled “Offences Against The Public Peace” contains both an admonition from the Selectmen regarding behavior and a hint that the need for a police department is increasing:

A regard for the future good name of the town, constrains the Board to mention certain disgraceful occurrences in the central district, during the year . . . there have been a number of minor offences, which have imperilled the safety and convenience of the general public; such as the destruction or removal of sign boards, the breaking of street lights, and the breaking or theft of lanterns . . . It is not unlikely that some of these offences may have been committed by evil-disposed persons passing over our highways at night on their way from Waltham to neighboring towns; but without doubt most of these offenses have been committed by residents of our town . . . sober though on the part of the offenders, and exceptional vigilance on the part of all friends of good order, will make it unnecessary for the town to go to the expense of maintaining a paid police force.

GYPSY MOTHS AND A PHONOGRAPH CONCERT

Snatches of daily life in turn-of-the-century Weston appear in excerpts from the November 1, 1907 “Weston” and “Kendall Green” columns of the *Waltham Free Press-Tribune* found in the historical papers of Harold G. Travis.

The Ellis house is being connected with the Water company’s main . . . One of Stony Brook’s citizens has developed a case of ivy poisoning this week . . . The Tennis and Racquet club had a Harvest supper and Hallowe’en party Thursday night. The tables were set for about 30 . . . At the Town meeting called to take action regarding gypsy and brown-tail moths a committee was appointed consisting of C. H. Jones (chairman), Benj. W. Blake, B. Loring Young, C. Merriam, W. B. Clark, Mrs. Francis H. Hastings, Miss Marion Case and local superintendent Edward P. Ripley to have control of the matter. The committee was authorized to expend a sum not exceeding \$6,000 between the present time and the time of the annual Town meeting. Charles H. Fiske, Esq., was moderator . . . Mr. Bryant of the Drug store announces a phonograph concert at the Drug store next Tuesday evening from 7 to 9 o’clock to which the public is invited . . .

There was a fire Monday at Darius Vittum’s that had a funny denouement. The alarm was rung in and the apparatus started for the scene. The hose wagon got well under way for the locality and the horse came to the conclusion he had gone far enough and resolutely refused to pull the wagon any further. The ladder truck also had a peculiar experience. At the start the horse fell down. When he was set on his feet again and started a second time, he and the harness parted company. The third



MAGAZINE

THE SUN

BOSTON, SEPT. 18, 1894

WESTON HAS BECOME

One Town Without a Trolley Line.



FRANCIS A. FOSTER



SECTION

Y HERALD

MAY 11, 1902.



THE LENOX OF THE EAST.

Sylvan Retreat of Busy Boston Men.



L. N. KETTLE



HORACE S. SEARS

DANIEL A. DEAN

start was more successful, and commendable progress was made until the driver discovered that he had lost his whip and the apparatus was halted and a boy sent back after that indispensable piece of fire fighting machinery. In the meantime the fire, which was in a chimney, burned itself out and there was no further need for the department, but they had a fine time exercising . . . Mr. and Mrs. E. LaHaise have moved to St. Hyacinth, P.Q. from Hastings. (Mr. LaHaise worked in the organ factory — see list in this *Bulletin* — a clue regarding nationality of some employees — Ed.) . . . A concrete sidewalk is being built from Church street to Lexington street on North avenue.



Hook and Hastings Company, circa 1890, Viles Street in the foreground. The organ factory building, completed in 1889, was demolished in 1936. Buildings visible in the background, along North Avenue, from left to right include: North-East School #4; 199 North Avenue — the 1825 Hastings Homestead in which Francis H. Hastings was born in 1836; and 190 North Avenue, “Seven Gables” which Mr. Hastings built as his residence in 1885. In 1890, the approximate year of this picture, the Town paid Anna Cutter Coburn \$549.99 for keeping the North-East School for the 53 “scholars”. Miss Coburn was the second highest paid teacher in Weston — the man who was teacher-principal in the high school was paid \$1200. Why she was not paid \$550 remains a mystery. Nine years later, Miss Coburn married Mr. Hastings. The October 1980 issue of the *Bulletin* contains a picture of the factory with the east wing, completed in 1891.

ORGAN FACTORY INFORMATION WANTED

Philip F. Coburn is preparing a history of the Hook and Hastings Company, a manufacturer of organs which moved from Roxbury to Viles Street in Weston in 1889.

When Francis Henry Hastings — who had moved the business to Weston — celebrated his 70th birthday on July 13, 1906 he was given a party by his employees. About 400 people gathered at his residence on North Avenue to extend congratulations and to present him with an engraved testimonial signed by his employees as a token of their loyalty. The list is reproduced below. The order in which they signed the testimonial may offer some clues regarding groupings of occupations. Some of their names give clues concerning ancestry. “White Lane” is now Brook Road. Where are the descendents of these employees? Phil Coburn would like to hear from you if you have information about these persons or about the organ factory. His address is 56 Coburn Road, 899-2236.

Employees of the Organ Factory as of July 13, 1906

Name	Address	Occupation
Arthur L. Coburn	Church St., Weston	President
Herbert E. Brayton	Church St., Weston	Asst. Sec.
Alfred R. Pratt	Pigeon Hill, Weston	Secretary
Norman Jacobsen	North Avenue	Salesman
William E. Bennett		

Abbie A. Baker		
Charles H. Anderson		
George S. Richards		
Roland Rand		
Paul L. Benz		Voicer or Tuner
Ansel W. Broderick		
V. L. Patterson	81 White Lane	
Andrew Olson		Foreman & Supt.
Alex Arneson		Road man on installation
John N. Guthrie	293 North Ave. (own house)	
Wm. H. Dolbeare	225 North Ave.	
W. F. Tucker		
J. C. Miller		
Albert L. Brown	87 White Lane	
Albert H. Sibley	Stony Brook	
Carroll L. Berry	21 Lexington St., Weston	Mill Foreman
J. J. Brady	130 Viles St.	
Francis Tobin	17 Lexington St.	
J. Gilson		Voicing Room
J. A. Anderson		
Frank B. Pierce	White Lane	Cabinet maker
Neal Campbell		
John Olson	132 Viles St.	
Rudolph Olson		Action room & installation
Victor Carlson		Action room, made cable
Edward Melin		
Albin Lagerblade	132 Viles St.	
Ernst Pettisson		
L. C. Lahaise		Serviceman, Boston area
C. G. Fredrickson	29 Lexington St.	Cabinet maker
R. Nelson		
John Finn, Jr.	305 North Ave. (own house)	
C. Lahaise		Serviceman, Boston area
M. J. Cutting	Lexington St.	Warehouse man
Harry S. Martin		
Frank Cullen	251 Noth Ave. (westend)	Stationary engineer
Arthur H. Gilson	260 North Ave.	
Enoch Karlson		
Chas. H. Glines	227 North Ave.	Maintenance
George J. Zimmer		Pipemaker
J. S. Bamford	83 White Lane	
Chris A. White	77 White Lane	Pipe room
Arthur L. Vittum	23 Lexington St.	
Albert E. Harding		
Albert A. Flitcroft		
Joseph R. Miner		
O. H. Wheeler		
P. Bruce Hart		
Frank J. Monks		
R. Atkinson	108 Viles St.	
J. Maurice Gregor	27 Lexington St.	also 108 Viles St.
Fred H. Johnson		
E. Vittum	62 Lexington St.	
A. Fredricksson	29 Lexington St.	Cabinet maker
Albert March		
Henry McArt	85 White Lane	Stationary engineer
F. H. White		
Olaf M. Swenson	108 Viles St.	
Walter Pierce	81R White Lane	
Foster E. Beaman		
E. Lahaise		Road man on installation
Harold Jacobsen	North Ave.	Draftsman.
Dick Bourinot	29 Lexington St.	Cabinet maker
Bertram Skinner	23 Lexington St.	
Silas Small	126 Viles St.	Pipe room

FROM THE EDITOR

A motion of appreciation of the late Harold G. "Red" Travis was passed at the Annual Meeting in November. Officers and Directors were elected and, after the talk by Dr. Laska described elsewhere in this Bulletin, the 150 pleased members adjourned for refreshments. On December 11, approximately 35 members of the Society journeyed to the Museum of Fine Arts where Jonathan Fairbank, Curator of Furniture and Sculpture, hosted a special tour. "Prints for the People" — a slide-talk on Nineteenth Century prints by Sinclair H. Hitchings, Keeper of Prints at the Boston Public Library, was attended by nearly 100 members at the Josiah Smith Tavern on February 2.

Philip Coburn's *Growing Up in Weston* sold out the 300 copies of the first printing! Phil has ordered 125 additional copies which are now on sale at the Chestnut Shop and the Richardson and Weston Pharmacies.

One piece in this *Bulletin* is from the historical papers of "Red" Travis, which Betty has kindly passed to me. The papers, once sorted, will be placed in the Society's collection.

To member Fran Wypler goes the "Sharp Eyes Award" for spotting what, at first glance, appears to be an error in the October 1981 *Bulletin*. Fran asks whether "circa 1910" is the correct date for the photograph on page 4. She notes that the west transept of the First Parish Church — which today houses the Hook and Hastings organ and the choir — bears a "built in 1918" plaque. Excellent question. For an answer, look at the 1890 dedication of the town flag staff which appears in this issue. The same west transept appears! The architectural work in 1918 must have replaced or remodeled an existing transept. "Circa 1910" may be an accurate estimate after all. Perhaps if we knew when the watering trough — which appears in the "circa 1910" photo — was installed, we could be more precise. Can anyone find out?



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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 the age span of our life members is from 5 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, MA 02193

Additional copies of THE BULLETIN may be obtained by phoning Mrs. Raymond Paynter, Jr., 899-3533, or Donald G. Kennedy, Editor, 893-1319; also by calling at the Josiah Smith Tavern any Wednesday afternoon during "Open House". If you have a spare copy of BULLETINS, vintage 1963-70, our Curator, Mrs. J. E. Fraser, 894-2872 would be glad to have them.