

THE WESTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY BULLETIN



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Members of the Boston Athletic Association who competed in the 1896 Olympic Games in Athens. Sumner Paine (front row, second left) holds cigar and pistol. John B. Paine (front row, second from right) has his finger on the trigger. Each Paine brother won a silver first place medal, and Sumner a bronze second place medal. Gold medals had not yet been introduced as a prize. The Paines presumably learned to shoot at their home on Highland Street. Not all Boston athletes enjoyed the same success as the Paines. Swimmer Gardner Williams, finding the cold Mediterranean waters not to his liking, jumped in and out of the water and did not swim a stroke in competition.

WESTON'S OLYMPIC MEDALISTS

When the Olympic Games were revived in April, 1896 after a lapse of 1500 years, thirteen self-appointed American delegates went to Greece to compete. Sumner and John Paine, sons of General Charles J. Paine, won three medals in the revolver and pistol contests against the pick of the military and civilian shots of Europe.

The Boston Athletic Association, which sent eight representatives, was the only club in the United States to accept the invitation of the International Olympic Committee. Upon arrival in Athens, the Americans were given a red carpet welcome as they marched through the streets to the cheering of the Greek people and attended a large dinner held in their honor.

On the first day of the competition over 40,000 spectators were in the recently renovated stadium while more than 30,000 additional spectators observed the games

from the hillsides overlooking the athletic fields. Throughout the whole competition the Greeks were amazed at the skill displayed by the Americans in track and field events as well as in shooting.

The following excerpts are from a letter written from Paris by Sumner Paine which was published in the May, 1896 issue of *Shooting and Fishing*:

"I came home to luncheon one day and found my brother, Lieutenant John B. Paine, sitting in my office. I had not the slightest idea that he was on this side of the pond.

"When does the next train start for Athens?" said he.

"I don't know," said I.

"Well," he said, "find out, and get your revolvers and we will go there, for the Boston Athletic Association (of which we are both members) has sent a team over, and as there are two revolver matches we may be able to help out the Americans."

We were unable to find out the conditions of the matches, except that the target revolver match was at 30 meters. I spent the afternoon at the gallery (in Paris) experimenting with the nitro powder to get a load that shot well at that distance, for I found that the regular gallery load was too light to shoot so far, especially as we were likely to have to shoot out of doors. I ended by adopting 21 centigrammes of powder, with a round bullet cast by George R. Russell & Co. of Boston. I did not care to trust the French bullets, with their long screw tails, in such an important match.

If we had started from New York we would have surely been arrested as Cuban filibusters, for we each had a Colt army revolver and a Smith & Wesson Russian model revolver. My brother also had a Stevens .22 caliber pistol and I had my old reliable Wurfflein; besides, each of us had a pocket weapon. We knew that the games at Athens lasted ten days, and as we feared it might be a re-entry match, we took 3500 rounds of ammunition in all for the different weapons. We fired just ninety-six shots in the matches.

We arrived at Greece safe and sound, and the first thing we did was to find the rest of the American team (which had arrived the previous day on the steamer Fulda from New York). They at once told us we were obliged to show a certificate that we were bona fide amateurs, so we sought out the vice-consul who gave us some sort of a certificate of good moral character and we went home to bed, and although the shooting began at 8 o'clock the next morning, as yet we knew nothing about the conditions.

Early the following morning we went with our six guns and 3500 cartridges to the shooting house; we found it the prettiest shooting house in the world — 200 feet long, built entirely of snow white marble. The range is 300 meters, and is entirely surrounded by earth embankments, while a system of screens renders it impossible to get a bullet out of the enclosure . . .

We went to the range officers and learned that there was only one match for the day with military revolvers at 25 meters — two sighting shots and thirty shots in the match. Inside (the target, slightly smaller than the standard American target) was a black bullseye and inside of this was a white spot the same width as the black circle around it. This, in the blinding light, gave the same effect to the eye as those trick cards with rings painted on them, which seem to revolve when you look at them closely. The target was nailed to a gray board. Because our Colt's revolvers were sighted for 50 yards, we had to hold off the target altogether, and the gray background gave no opportunity to pick out some imaginary point to hold on, so it was all guesswork . . . First of all we had to submit our weapons for the examination of the committee, and all went well until they came to the .22 caliber pistols, which they immediately disqualified. The rules said, "Any pistol of usual caliber." They ruled that the .22 caliber was not usual. It was not usual there; but it rather took our breath away. In the pistol match all the contestants used muzzle-loaders about .45 caliber. They were the only things "usual" in that country.

As soon as the first string was finished it was evident that the match was between my brother and myself, none of the other contestants being anywhere near us . . . At the close of the match my brother had a grand total of 442, and I had 380; the third man having less than 200 . . . The third man was a Dane; then came several Greeks, and one Englishman, making in all eighteen contestants . . .

On the second day of the shooting came the target revolver match, in which John did not shoot, as when we saw how completely everything was in our power the first day, we



Freshly restored to its dazzling Pentelic marble form of 144 A.D., the stadium was filled to its capacity of 40,000 for Marathon Day of the 1896 Olympic Games. Sumner Paine described it as "the prettiest shooting house in the world." The Olympic Games were revived by Baron Pierre de Coubertin of France following public excitement at the discovery, in 1878, of the remains of the ancient stadium. Competition among women was added in 1912, and the Winter Games in 1924.

agreed that whichever of us won the first match should stay out of the second. The Greeks, having seen us do several little tricks that were new to them on the first day, endeavored to benefit themselves by some of the tricks on the second. For instance, they noticed that we smoked our sights (to eliminate the glare), and the following day, if the house had not been made of marble, there would have surely been a conflagration, for they burnt everything, from camphor to rags, and smoked their guns all over — top, bottom, and sides. They did not seem to know why we had done it, and they got as much smoke on their trigger-guards and butts as they did on their sights. I feel ashamed of myself for making fun of them, for there is no other place in the world where we could have gone and received such a magnificent and wholehearted reception. They did everything in their power to entertain us from first to last.

The match on the second day, with target revolvers at 30 meters, I won, strangely enough by exactly the same score as John won by the day before, 442 points . . .

The Greeks are a splendid nation; thrifty and industrious. We were sorry indeed when the time came to leave, as we had made friends of the whole city. I don't think there was a man on the team who was not glad to sleep all through the voyage to Brindisi, for they were pretty well tired out. After the games it had been one continual round of pleasure. A state luncheon with the king, a reception by the princes (including the grandfather of Philip, Duke of Edinburgh); and functions too numerous to recount by the different consuls and their wives. I think the most enjoyable occasion was a picnic given by the officers in a town about ten miles out of the city, where we instructed the three princes in the mysteries of baseball . . .

Paris, France.

Sumner Paine."

Brenton H. Dickson



Edmund Hamilton Sears (1810-1876) and Ellen Bacon Sears (1811-1897)

EDMUND SEARS: PASTOR, POET, MYSTIC

*"It came upon the midnight clear,
That glorious song of old,
From angels bending near the earth,
To touch their harps of gold."*

Little did the members of the First Parish Church in Wayland realize that they would be making history when they gathered on Plain Road at the home of their minister, Edmund Hamilton Sears, on Christmas Eve, 1849. Rev. Sears had sent word to his parishioners that he had written a new Christmas hymn which he would like to have people try out on Christmas Eve at his farmhouse. They arrived in their sleighs, bringing also on a horse-drawn sleigh, the only spinet in town, with which the singing was accompanied. The hymn was set to a familiar air — the tune sung today was not written until the following year. When used in public worship at the Christmas service, it was printed on slips of paper distributed throughout the pews. "It Came Upon The Midnight Clear" was successful and was used in the 1850 Sunday School Festival. The invitation to sing Sears' new hymn would have been exciting because Rev. Sears had gained a widespread reputation for his "Calm on the Listening Ear of Night," a Christmas hymn written in 1834 while he was a student at Union College — a hymn which the poet Oliver Wendell Holmes, in one of his Lowell Lectures, declared to be the finest in the English Language.

*"Calm on the listening ear of night
Come heaven's melodious strains,
Where wild Judea stretches forth
Her silver-mantled plains."*

Only in the Twentieth Century have the tables turned. "Calm on the Listening Ear of Night" — if sung at all — is not now identified exclusively with Christmas. "It Came Upon The Midnight Clear" — judged by the Nineteenth Century to be decidedly second-best to Sears' first hymn — has become the hymn by which Rev. Sears is remembered. For a century the name of Edmund Hamilton Sears has remained un-noted and unknown, save as it appears in a line or two on the yellowed pages of some old biography. Yet, Sears was for most of his career, the beloved pastor of the Unitarian parishes in Wayland and Weston. Sears — a descendant of Richard Sayer (Sears) who landed at Plymouth in 1630 — was born in Sandisfield in the Berkshire Hills on April 6, 1810, the son of a strong-minded farmer of sturdy Cape Cod stock. The father, though a

man of scant education, had a natural love of poetry and was a proprietor in the town library. "My earliest recollections," wrote Sears, "are associated with his reading, or chanting, of poetry; for he never read without a sing-song tone. He was a great admirer of Pope's Iliad, and he would read it by the hour. Sometimes when busily engaged, he would break out in a chant of several lines of a poem until they became to me like nursery rhymes; and I was afterward surprised to find them in Homer . . . I became so familiar with his Homer that I could repeat nearly whole books from beginning to end . . . It is not strange then that I soon began to produce lyrics and epics without number. I wrote whole books of rhymes; and when I worked [on the farm] some poem was always singing through my brain . . . This rhyming propensity so early waked up with me, proved a benefit I was little aware of then . . . It did not, as I then thought it would, make me immortal, but it gave me a command of the English language as I could not have gained during those years of boyhood by being drilled through all the classbooks in existence. In puzzling my head 'to find a word that would rhyme,' I was taking the best course to enlarge my vocabulary and acquire a graceful and nervous style. My ear became quick to the harmonies of language, and I do not think I could have had a more profitable exercise in the best classical schools in New England. I was mastering the English tongue and making it flexible as a medium without any unpleasant association or pedagogues . . . But my natural shyness and timidity as I grew older were a source of perpetual disadvantage. I used to see the young people of the town enjoying sleigh rides, balls, and parties to which I would be invited but afraid to go. Nevertheless, there were always some who understood me. A kind-hearted fellow who sat next to me in school sometimes coaxed me into parties, and there were many good-hearted girls who had a real regard for me and overlooked all my awkwardness. Instead of giggling at my mistakes, they did all they could to bring me forward and make me appear well, and always had a kind inviting word . . . But I could not be persuaded to go into company except with those few who understood me . . . I have not the least doubt that here was a turning point in my history. From my shyness of company I confirmed all my habits of study and meditation. I felt my breast fired with a lofty ambition to put to shame those who were outshining me in society. I thought I would rise far above them one day as a scholar or literary man, and absorb the attention of the whole town."

Edmund Sears attended school in his native town, and subsequently spent nine months at the Westfield Academy. In 1831 — at the age of 21 — he entered the sophomore class at Union College in Schenectady. Upon graduation in 1834, Sears studied law for nine months, taught school and studied for the ministry under the Reverend Addison Brown, in Brattleboro, Vermont, then graduated from the Harvard Divinity School in 1837. A few weeks after his graduation from Harvard, Mr. Sears preached one Sunday in Barnstable. As the guest of Mrs. Ebenezer Bacon — who often entertained visiting ministers — he met her daughter, Ellen, and was impressed with Ellen's beauty of character, as was she with his persuasive sermon. After doing a year of missionary work in the West — mostly in Toledo, Ohio where the first railroad was but a year old — Sears returned to Massachusetts and was called to the church at Wayland. "My first coming among you seemed a mere accident," Sears told the church many years later, "I came from the theological school to read a sermon one Sunday, the minister was too ill to preach, I was charmed with the quiet scenery, we went over the Sudbury River [until 1835 Wayland was known as "East Sudbury"] to visit a sick boy . . . I had no other ambition than to lead such a quiet pastorate as Goldsmith describes in the "Deserted Village". So I was drawn back to this spot, and became your pastor." In February 1839, Sears was ordained in the Wayland church and on November 7 of the same year, married Ellen Bacon, whose image had remained in his memory since that summer day two years earlier. In 1840, Rev. Sears accepted a call to the parish in Lancaster, where their daughter Katherine was born and many life-long friendships formed. Sears did not have a robust constitution. His voice, never strong, could not bear the strain which was necessary to fill the spacious church in Lancaster. Intellectual efforts soon exhausted him, and the social and pastoral demands of the large parish put a severe strain on his physical powers. Mr. Sears, "suffering from mental exhaustion," resigned the pastorate in 1847. He hoped to regain his health at his home in Lancaster, but the friendly parishioners would not give him the solitude which he required.

On the advice of his physician, Sears returned to Wayland, buying a farm on Plain Road — in what became known as the “Tower Hill” district — which he worked for several months. For a time complete recovery seemed impossible. He became weary with the slightest exertion, and could not use his mind at all. That he would ever resume his ministerial work seemed quite improbable. The most difficult task of all was to keep him from discouragement. He suffered from extreme nervous prostration and could not control his own state of mind. Sears was sometimes despondent and inclined to abandon all hope of recovery. Finally, with help from Ellen, the needed strength returned, though “slowly, very slowly”. In 1848, Sears once again became minister of his former church in Wayland, which he was to serve this time for the greater part of seventeen years. Here, three sons were born; Francis Bacon, Edmund Hamilton, Jr., and Horace Scudder, who became a great benefactor of the Town of Weston. Here too, in 1853, Katie died of scarlet fever. While in Wayland, Sears did a great deal of writing. Beginning in 1859 he served as an editor of the “Monthly Religious Magazine” and here published three of his seven books, one of which bears the marvelous 19th century title of *Foregleams and Foreshadows of Immortality*.

Ellen’s active and practical abilities balanced her husband’s dreamy and poetic disposition. It is reported that she knew more about the details of the parish work than her husband, and it was her custom to read over sermons before he preached them, as well as to scrutinize his literary work before it went to the printer. He was a quiet, country minister, with the heart of a mystic. Sears was well aware of his need for practical support from Ellen — and rather good humored about it — as witnessed in this letter which he wrote in 1852 to a friend of Ellen’s, and to which he signed Ellen’s name! “I do believe that my husband is a man of the very best intentions . . . but the trouble is how to get at him. He is always sailing among the clouds, chasing the ghosts of defunct ideas through infinite space; wandering and wool-gathering in the midst of dreamland . . . so he sits in his chair in all sorts of domestic breezes, knowing no more what is going on around him than if he had been cast into sleep. I have to deal with the sharp realities while there he sits building up theories and creating a world out of nothing. Sometimes I do speak to him pretty decidedly and say, ‘Mr. Sears, come down out of those air castles and take care of these children.’”

Although Rev. Sears portrayed himself accurately as a student and a dreamer, he nonetheless had a practical side. Contemporaries in the various towns in which he lived recalled instances in which his intelligent grasp of a public or business situation and his clear and dignified presentation of his views were instrumental in effecting a wise settlement of important business matters. Further, after the passage of the fugitive slave law in 1850, Mr. Sears preached a sermon denouncing the law and declaring that he would not obey it! “My aim generally is to unfold the central truths of the Gospel, so as to bring us individually before Them and feel Their power, but I do not forget that we are citizens and have duties to the times and the country we live in, and that the Gospel should sometime have a wider application to the sins of the times.” Undismayed by the angry feeling he had roused, he repeated the act after the first fugitive was taken from Boston and returned to slavery. In May, 1856, after the assault on Senator Charles Sumner of Massachusetts in the Senate Chamber, Sears preached a sermon on “The Impending Crisis” of which an immense edition was printed and widely circulated. Throughout his life, Rev. Sears was subject to occasional serious illness. One of the most serious occurred in the winter of 1862-63, when for more than three months Mrs. Sears watched every night by his bedside.

In 1865 — at the close of the Civil War — Mr. Sears resigned his pulpit in Wayland, feeling that he had done all he could for the church. He had done much writing, as well as serving as a member of the school and library committees of the town, and he wanted to devote himself to further literary work. In May, Rev. Sears began to preach occasionally at the First Parish in Weston, as a colleague of the minister, Dr. Joseph Field, who was retiring upon completing his fiftieth year in the Weston church. In 1866, there went out to Mr. Sears so urgent a call from the Weston church, that he accepted, purchasing the house which still stands at 338 Boston Post Road — across the street from the Weston church. Sears’ letter accepting the call did include one condition: he

requested that the afternoon service be omitted during the most sultry portion of the summer months. To this date there had been two services each Sunday, morning and afternoon, for which there must have been sufficient attendance to justify their continuance. The Weston church gladly agreed to the condition — and the Sunday afternoon service was never revived. Rev. Sears was to preach in Weston until his death ten years later, and his pastorate was marked by some of the greatest scholarly and physical activity of his life. Always a conscientious citizen, Sears — as in Wayland — served as a Library Trustee (1867-75) and as a member of the School Committee. He was influential in the Town's decision to erect a high school and in settling the question of where to create a new cemetery — an issue on which successive Town Meetings had reversed the votes of previous meetings. In church circles, Rev. Sears worked actively to bring local churches into association with one another, the better to lessen their individual isolation and to provide more adequate knowledge of each other's thought. In the gradual growth from the conception of the local church as the ruler of people's lives throughout the range of their activities, to a conception of it as a free body voluntarily united for spiritual communion and worship, Sears worked quietly for the latter. Most duties of the church soon were delegated to the members, rather than being under the exclusive control of the minister.

While in Weston, Rev. Sears continued his scholarly activity. He remained as an editor of the "Monthly Religious Magazine" until 1871, the year in which he was honored by Union College with the degree of Doctor of Sacred Theology. In the following year he completed his best work, *The Heart of Christ* — still respected today — upon which he had been working for ten years. Mrs. Ralph Waldo Emerson kept *The Heart of Christ* next to her Bible, maintaining that it was the best sacred book written in modern times. Dr. Sears' two additional books, a revised version of *Foregleams*, and several articles and poems were written during this period.

Although nominally and sincerely a Unitarian, Sears was no sectarian, no zealot. He was particularly interested in the Catholic understanding of St. Paul. A study of his works shows that he was an extensive and careful reader of the best authors of many sects and communions throughout Christian history. He was much indebted to Swedenborg and was interested in the history of the Jews. Sears was surprisingly modern in his outlook. Lydia Maria Child wrote in the "Women's Journal" shortly after Sears' death: "I am especially grateful to him for his quiet courage in pleading the cause of the enslaved and for the uniformly high estimate he places on the influence of women. That he did not belong to reformatory societies . . . was from no fear of risking his popularity . . . it was simply not natural to him to work in the harness of reforms".

In 1874, Edmund, Jr. graduated from Harvard College. Working in his garden in the autumn, Dr. Sears suffered a fall. After fifteen months of weakness and suffering, he died on January 6, 1876 and was buried in Linwood Cemetery. The circuit of Sears' ministry was narrow, confined to three small rural towns, the two most distant from each other being not more than 20 miles apart, yet his Christmas hymns and writings attracted national attention — far beyond his youthful dream of "absorbing the attention of the whole town." On the occasion of Dr. Sears' death, the "New York Evening Post" editorialized: "Perhaps more than any other man of his day, Sears held convictions and made statements which won assent from considerable numbers of thoughtful and cultivated persons outside of the religious body to which he belonged." Two decades after Sears' death an historian wrote: "What with his delicate frame and many an illness [during] the whole of his ministry, we shall marvel that he accomplished so much. His life was not marked by striking changes, much disturbance or noise. It was passed in quiet neighborhoods and claimed little attention or concern from the multitudes."

Ellen Bacon Sears lived on in Weston for 21 years, founding the first youth group and continuing to serve as president of the Ladies Benevolent Society until the time of her death on April 24, 1897. Young people loved her and visited her at all hours, finding always a warm welcome and sympathy if her counsel were desired. A caller once found her passing the evening pleasantly with seven young men who, by chance, had gathered in her sitting room, so heartily did she enter into the interests of friends younger than herself.

Donald G. Kennedy

FROM THE EDITOR

How many Weston residents can you name who have competed in the Olympic Games? We were able to identify seven. In addition to the Paine brothers at Athens in 1896, there are: Hilary Smart of Byron Road who won a gold medal for sailing a Star Sailboat at London in 1948; Imogene Fish of Bradford Road who skied at Oslo in 1952; Robert Cleary of Hallett Hill Road who was a member of the ice hockey team which beat the Russians for the gold medal at Squaw Valley in 1960; Michael Botticelli of Westerly Road was a figure skater and Susan Charlesworth of Cherry Brook Road competed in the luge event — Swiss coasting sled — both at Lake Placid in 1980. Do you know of any others?

Brent Dickson's piece on John and Sumner Paine was prepared from material supplied by Thomas M. Paine of Lincoln. John Paine had seven children: the late John B. Paine, Jr., Helen Paine Dickson, Carol Paine Ganson, the late Julia Paine Wakefield, Louise Paine Erickson, Sarah Paine Forbes, and the late Charlotte Paine. In *Once Upon A Pung*, Brent has recorded one further anecdote regarding the participation of John and Sumner Paine in the Olympic Games:

In fact they shot with such uncanny accuracy that their international competitors suspected something unethical about their firearms. So in an unofficial bout they swapped arms with their opponents and did fully as well. After much questioning, they finally divulged their secret — “a very critical amount of whiskey taken at a very critical moment before shooting.” So another session was held but the experiment failed for everyone but the Paine brothers. Their competitors began to wonder if they had used the right brand of whiskey. Finally they discovered the real answer — simply that they had met their betters/



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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.