

THE WESTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY BULLETIN



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Viles Street, looking toward North Avenue, in the 1920's. At the left is the drying shed, followed by the four-tenement house razed in 1936. The last two houses, #126-134, were built in 1897 and remain in use today. Note the three automobiles in the background.

FRANCIS HASTINGS' LABOR EXPERIMENT

Francis Henry Hastings' decision in the mid-1880's to move the Hook-Hastings organ factory to Weston from a modern building in Roxbury was made for reasons now partially obscured by the passage of one hundred years. Hastings, then forty-nine years old, longed to return to Weston, the scene of his childhood. His only child — always sickly — was forced to leave Harvard due to ill health in 1884. Perhaps the air in Weston would be beneficial. Family land was available on which to build the factory, Hastings' parents being too old to care properly for the farm. Further, a railroad ran through the property, making the Weston location as convenient as any other. All of these reasons are plausible and have been advanced by family members. Yet the turmoil in America created by the arrival of large numbers of immigrants, and the resultant rise of the labor movement, cannot be overlooked as additional reasons. 1884-86 were years of often-violent railroad strikes. In 1886 an anarchist bomb exploded in the Haymarket in Chicago — the year in which the American Federation of Labor was organized. The well-known strikes at Andrew Carnegie's Homestead steel mill near Pittsburgh in 1892 and at the Pullman factory in 1894 served further to emphasize the difficulties of the times.

Mr. Hastings expressed his special concern for labor relations in remarks delivered on the occasion of the completion of the 2,000th organ in March, 1904:



Seven houses on White Lane — now Brook Road — were built in 1893-95 in connection with the organ factory. They remain today as #75-87 Brook Road. The ballfield across the street from the houses was built for the employees and their families.

“To my employees generally I am under obligations of more than common extent, for is it not a fact that we are bound together more closely than is usual in manufacturing establishments? . . . [Organ-building] exacts much in thought and skill, of brains and hands, and a field is given in all directions for more than perfunctory services . . . When an organ is completed and tested, not one but finds a personal pride in the result . . . I am able to say now as I said to a reporter who came out here fourteen years ago — *‘We have never had any labor troubles here’.*”

Hastings’ reference was to an article in the *Boston Herald* of Sunday, July 13, 1890 which outlined his hope to create both a harmonious work-place and community at Kendal Green. The story, “A Community of Labor” — which bore the subheadlines “An Object Lesson for Employers and Employed - The Labor Experiment at Kendal Green - Harmony of Relations Between Those Who Work and the Man Who Employs the Workers - A Community Like a Family” — follows:

“One of the most vital questions of the day is the labor question . . . Thoughtful men and women everywhere are considering the best way to deal with the matter, and they welcome everything in the way of suggestion that comes to them. More than ever welcome is this suggestion when it comes out of the experience of some man or set of men who have worked out a possible solution of the question for themselves. There are men who do this, and they stand but as examples for others to follow . . . A practical lesson of this kind is better than all the suppositions that may be advanced, and a description of what one man has done and is doing is of more value than all the vague suggestions based upon theory that may be advanced by the inexperienced reformer.

The existence of a small, but growing, community at Kendal Green, in the pretty town of Weston, is the reason of the present article. This community [Kendal Green] is growing up around a manufactory there, and it is so united in its aims and its work that it represents almost the ideal of relations between man and man. It has not come into sudden being, nor was it the outgrowth of an accident. It was the result of long, serious thought on the part of one man — a thought that took definite shape at last, and has proven to have been a happy one. The man who had the inspiration to do this was Mr. Francis H. Hastings, and the result of it was the removal of the manufactory of the Hook & Hastings organ concern to the pretty town of Weston, in that portion of it known as Kendal Green. The removal was made some three years since, and already the wisdom of it has been shown.

At first many of the employees kept their homes in the city, and went out daily to their work, but as the influences of the country grew upon them, they found it harder and harder to pull away from the lovely place, after passing the day there and come back to sleep in the city. Mr. Hastings had already established himself there, building a house just above the factory on a hill overlooking it and the railroad, just across the street from the house where he was born and passed his happy boyhood. When the men began to evince a desire to reside permanently in Weston, he built cottages for them, renting them to them at a less figure than they could obtain two or three rooms in the city. As rapidly as the cottages were built, they were taken possession of and by degrees Mr. Hastings got the control of other houses already built, and made them available for his workmen. Thus house after house was filled, and cottage after cottage built. As Mr. Hastings owns three large farms, he was able to put the cottages about in different localities, so that the workmen are not massed together in one place, but are in different parts of the little community.

They like this, and it does away with the uniformity of appearance, which is the usual mark of distinctive communities. These cottages, as a rule, are owned by Mr. Hastings, and are rented by the year, but he is now encouraging them to buy their own land and build their own houses, and thus become landed proprietors. A street ["White Lane", now "Brook Road". Ed] is to be laid out on the opposite side of the railroad from the factory, and already the house lots have been marked off and sold. A moderate price was asked for the land, and the only provisions were that the houses were to be built within two years and that none were to cost less than \$1,000. This stipulation was made as much in the interest of the men as of Mr. Hastings, for the better the houses that are built, the more assured is the value of the property. Besides, it is Mr. Hastings' idea that the better the house is, the more highly the owner will value it, and the more pains he will make to keep it in good repair. All the grading of the land is done by Mr. Hastings, and he also pays half the expense to each householder of making wells and obtaining a water supply. There is nothing that dignifies the laborer so much as holding tangible proofs of the value of his labor in the shape of property in one or another form . . . To be a capitalist even in a small way is to learn to respect capital. This was recognized by the head of the little community at Kendal Green, and he has encouraged his men in becoming landholders.



Three two-family "cottages" were built in 1897 on a part of the old Warren Farm at #17-29 Lexington Street to house additional organ factory employees.



In a white apron in the second row, second from the right, is Carl Fredrickson, a cabinetmaker. Fredrickson, of 29 Lexington Street, left Hook-Hastings about 1910. Mr. Hastings once remarked, "a large factory like ours must comprise almost every branch of mechanics . . . workmen in wood, in metal, in leather, knowledge of music and acoustics, architecture, electricity, pneumatics, hydraulics . . ."

The men appreciate the interest that is felt in them and they return it with a loyalty of service that is very pleasant to see. Every man feels that he has a friend in his employer. If there is any trouble coming, if there is sickness in the family, or does affliction come to any household, the one to whom they all turn for help, for sympathy, for comfort is the head of the concern. He knows personally every man in his employ, and he not only knows him, but he knows his family if he has one; he knows just how he is situated, and he is always ready with the word of advice, of sympathy, or encouragement or congratulation. The smallest events in the lives of the men about him are of interest to him, and, no matter what his own stress may be, he never goes through the factory without stopping to speak to the men, and showing them that he has not forgotten them and their affairs.

In answer to the question whether he had ever had any strikes, Mr. Hastings replied that he never had had the least word of difficulty with the men in his employ. "I have," he says, "men here who were men well grown when I came into the business 35 years ago and I have young men who have come as learners during the last year and from any one of them, young or old or middle-aged, I have never received one word of complaint. It probably is due to the fact that the men know that I mean to treat them justly and fairly. They know that I feel that there are certain disadvantages which the wage earner labors under, and that I try, as far as possible, to make things easier and pleasanter for those with whom I have to deal. Take the question of wages. If I see a man is deserving of advance, I give it to him. I try and make him see that I care for his interest." And, judging from the perfect frankness and kindness which characterize the relation between the employer and those whom he employs this is true even as in a wider sense than Mr. Hastings claimed. There is an atmosphere of friendliness and of contentment that one feels in the shops and in the homes, and even in the streets. In a smaller way it is like the Cheney community of silk workers in South Manchester, Ct. The same idea prevails, the same patriarchal relation between the head of the concern and those who do the work for him. It is possible that much of this is due to the class of men who are employed; a fine kind of work like this, with all the refining influences which it must extend to those who engage in it, cannot have a rough class of employees. There is no doubt that one's occupation does stamp the worker, and nothing could be

more directly softening than the work on the fine organs in the midst of beautiful surroundings. It must call into life all that is best about a person, and make him finer and more true in spite of himself.

As the little community grew, there was found a need of better means of social intercourse. Family visiting was all very well, but family visiting often degenerated into gossip and mischief-making; not with intent, perhaps but because the human mind must find vent for its actions and so seizes, naturally, upon that which is the most easily within reach. So the thing to do was to make a hall and clubhouse, which should be the popular place of resort. This was built; a simple little wooden structure unpretending in architecture, but conveniently located and well arranged [“Hastings Hall” on Viles St., Ed.]. Here is a hall for entertainments and lectures, a reading room, with all the daily papers, many of the weeklies, the leading scientific journals and the popular magazines of the day. Connected with this is a small library, which, it is hoped, will in time grow larger, as this is a feature which is appreciated by the women of the community, as well as by the men. Beside the reading room and hall there is a room where games of all sorts are played, and where the younger men pass many of their winter evenings. There is a club connected with the factory, and there are very spirited debates on the leading public questions. Entertainments are frequently given at the hall, and almost weekly lectures. Very near the hall is a large playground [corner of Brook Rd. and Viles St., Ed.] which has been given to the young people, and there the baseball team takes its daily practice, and the children find a common gathering ground.

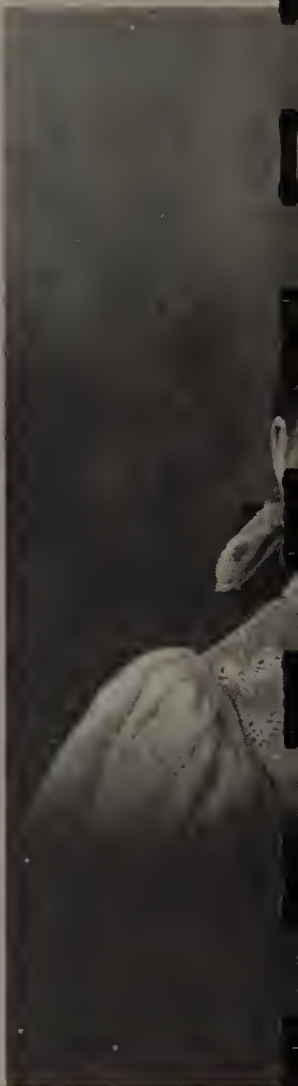
Another aim of Mr. Hastings has been to make the men better citizens by imbuing them with the spirit of the town in which they live which is full of revolutionary traditions. The very road on which Mr. Hastings’ house is situated and along which many of the men live is a direct continuation of Beacon Street, Boston, the old “Lancaster turnpike,” known later as the Concord Road. It is now known as North Avenue, and was on the Indian Trail leading to the frontier, and was at first kept open for the transportation of cannon and supplies. There is a story in the Town that it was along this road that a British spy was sent the day before the battles of Concord and Lexington, but finding the whole country through so hot with patriotism that he was obliged to turn back. Just at a little distance from Mr. Hastings’ house is the residence of Mr. Thorndike of Boston, which was in the revolutionary days the home of a celebrated patriot, Judge Samuel Phillips Savage



“Hastings Hall” on Viles Street, about 1892. This clubhouse with reading rooms — built in 1891, demolished in 1944 — was the site of lectures, charades, dances, piano concerts, whists, and suppers throughout each year. A review of turn-of-the-century newspapers reveals more social activity in this hall than in the Town Hall. Although built for employees, the hall was used extensively by townspeople generally. Adults are visible on the steps of the hall and children in the right foreground. The view is toward the west, with the Viles Farm — at the corner of Conant Road and Viles Street — visible on the horizon to the right of the hall.



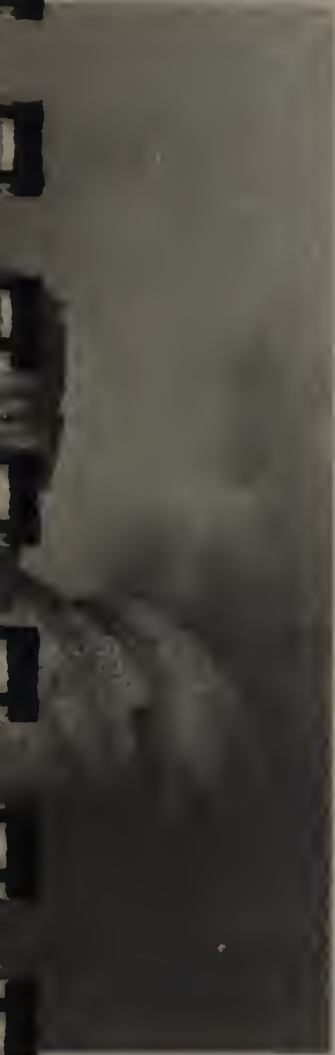
Over 250 persons attended the 1893 reunion at "the old North School" and signed their names in a testimonial book to Frank Hastings "the moving spirit in the occasion. . .many of those present had not visited Weston for forty years. To such the modern Kendal Green with its organ factory, its pretty cottages and its handsome mansions was quite a revelation. The Cuttings improved the occasion to have a family reunion." Oliver Hastings Wellington, teacher of the school over sixty years previous, attended the reunion.



"Miss Annie" — Anna Cutt
Weston High School Class of 1
S. Sears. From 1872-1898 sl
school, and — from 1882 — "
During one typical year, "Mis
attendance 36". "Order prevail
the School Committee of her t
and mind. . .and the inspiratio



An outing a



— was valedictorian of the
 e class of seven included Horace
 the high school, intermediate
 Northeast District School #4.
 and “54 total scholars, average
 neatness enthroned itself” wrote
 “Her peerless qualities of heart
 enthusiasm” were noted as well.



In 1899, Anna Cutter Coburn (1853-1950) married Francis Henry Hastings. She was 46, he was 63. Mrs. Hastings was active in the Friendly Society, Women’s Community League, Waltham Hospital Aid Society, Weston High School Alumni Association, First Parish Church, Republican Club of Massachusetts, and served on the Gypsy Moth Committee appointed by the Town! “They were church people, not society people” recalls one long-time resident.



ond in 1896.



Participants in the Walden Pond outing may have been students — or Sunday School students — of “Miss Annie” Coburn.



Frank Hastings' carriage about 1896.

[479 North Ave., Ed.] . . . Lexington, with its battle memories, is but three miles away, and Concord not so very far off; so in a way these men have found themselves taken up out of a city where they had no special interest and set down in the very heart place of Massachusetts' pre-revolutionary history. Already the men, being good Americans, well-versed in the historical traditions of their country, have become imbued with the spirit of their adopted town, and begin to feel an individual interest in her welfare. Lectures on local history are well patronized by them, and the story of the struggle of their own country to become a country is more vividly real than ever it was before. All this will make better citizenship, and the children who are coming up in this atmosphere will be better men and women for the influences which are surrounding them.

To some of the men this life comes as a relief from temptation; the young men in particular are not in the way of the snares that are set at every corner in the city. They come to feel that intemperance and vice are out of harmony with the life about them, and having always this example of rectitude before their eyes, they are led in better ways than they could be were they lost and swallowed up out of sight in the crowded city life. The women too, get a better chance of life. They have their own club, and to this belong the school teacher, a young woman who more than any other except Mr. Hastings himself, exercises a moral influence in the community, and the lady members of Mr. Hastings' family. The same feeling of helpfulness and kindness permeates this club that is felt in the other, and they help make the

social side of life in the little community. As one may easily see, it is a community in which every one has a share and does a portion of the work of help. Nothing quite like it has ever been seen in this part of the country. It was an experiment, taking these people away from town and setting them down to make an individual community for themselves, but it has been an experiment which has proven its own wisdom by becoming an assured success. Whether another man could successfully undertake it is an open question, but there certainly seems no reason why he should not, and make the same success of it as Mr. Hastings has made at lovely Kendal Green."

Apparently many of the organ factory workers were skilled immigrants who had received previous specialized training. Several were Scandinavians, and a number were Methodists. Hastings Hall was used a good deal by the Methodist Church, and about 1890 Mrs. George F. Harrington gave the church an organ "from Mr. Hastings' factory". Also in 1890 Daniel Lamson wrote in his history of Weston that Frank Hastings' "... relations with eminent European builders, the employment of experts trained in their factories, the ingenuity and skill of our American workmen, and his constant endeavor to advance the standard of his work have enabled him to obtain and hold the highest place in his craft. The work of the house is found in every part of the country, and has a worldwide reputation."

Donald G. Kennedy

DAILY LIFE IN WESTON IN THE 1890's

The pages of the *Waltham Daily Free Press* reveal glimpses of daily life in Weston at the time when Mr. Hastings was moving the Hook & Hastings organ factory to the Town:

"May 31, 1889: Last night the house of F. H. Hastings at Kendal Green was entered by burglars who pretty thoroughly ransacked the house and took away silver spoons, knives and forks to the amount of \$200. The house of Mr. Hastings' coachman was also entered but nothing of value secured. The same person or persons who entered the store and post office took about \$2 in coppers. . . . June 6, 1890: The Ladies' Benevolent Society connected with the First Parish Church met with Mr. F. H. Hastings at Kendal Green, Thursday evening. The ladies did the usual work in the afternoon and in the evening the gentlemen put in appearance and a dance was indulged in at Hastings Hall. . . . October 19, 1894: The Methodist Society held a fair in Hastings Hall, Kendal Green, Wednesday afternoon and evening. No notice of it was posted in Weston Centre. If the Society would post all of its notices there, its gatherings would undoubtedly be even more largely attended. . . . October 26, 1894: Warren Hastings, President of the Hastings Organ Company, started Sunday night for Bermuda where he will remain some time. . . . November 9, 1894: The people of Weston were surprised at the unexpected snowfall on Monday. Trains were quite seriously delayed on Tuesday. The train for Troy due at Kendal Green at 7.12 did not arrive until about half past eight. The employees of the organ factory that came on this train from Boston and Waltham were there much delayed in reaching their work. . . . March 10, 1899: The private dancing party given by Mrs. Charles F. Russell and Miss Anna Coburn on Friday evening in Hastings Hall was well attended and a great social success. Arthur Gilson of the Hastings factory expects to ride a Columbia chainless bicycle this year. It will be the first chainless machine owned in this vicinity: Carpenters are constantly arriving to work on the building of "Drabington Lodge" [now "The Westonian", 135 North Ave. Ed.]. George Warren Brodrick, the new proprietor of the grocery store, is surprising everybody by his display of goods. . . . March 31, 1899: Today was the first use of a fire hydrant on a house fire. . . . April 21, 1899: Wednesday was a quiet holiday in Weston. Very many bicyclists from surrounding towns passed through here during the day. A concert by the Wayland military band will be given in the Weston Town Hall Wednesday evening. (The band is making much improvement). Mrs. A. H. Sibley gave a very pretty reception to Miss Anna Coburn on Saturday. The farmers in this vicinity are disposing of their hogs, as it is hard to get swill enough to feed them since the new law went into effect in Boston [requiring the burning of swill]. . . . April 28, 1899: The

Selectmen have posted notices like those posted in 1893 prohibiting the riding of bicycles on the sidewalks of the Town. Several violators of the law have been warned orally by the members of the Board of Selectmen. . . . May 4, 1899: The fifteenth anniversary of the Henry A. Upham Lodge #52, Ancient Order of United Workmen, was marked by a supper. Francis Hastings' grounds are unusually beautiful this season, shrubs and roses having recently been set out. Upon the return of Mr. and Mrs. Hastings from their wedding tour, they will be "at home" to friends on Tuesdays after June 1. Miss Edith Coburn will reside with Mr. and Mrs. Hastings and the old Coburn homestead then vacated by the family will be the dwelling place of the foreman and the help. Mrs. Gilson whose husband is employed in the organ factory is riding a new Columbia chainless bicycle. This is the second Columbia chainless machine in the family. Miss Florence Jacobsen is riding a new bicycle. She is an easy skater and bids to be an unusually graceful rider of the wheel. . . . March 12, 1899: An organ was shipped Monday to Hamburg, Pennsylvania. A very large organ, the largest built in several years at the Hastings factory is being constructed for a Catholic cathedral in New Jersey. Charles Spear is riding a new Waltham Comet bicycle. The Weston Acqueduct Company is introducing water service into many Weston houses this year and the use of water furnished by the Company probably will become universal before long. For the first time since the incorporation of the Town the authorities have deemed it necessary to have the streets patrolled by a salaried police officer. This action has been taken on account of cyclists riding on the sidewalks. Notices have been posted in conspicuous places warning riders of this practice. . . . May 19, 1899: Mr. and Mrs. Francis Hastings returned Monday noon from their bridal trip to Washington, Baltimore, Philadelphia, and New York. Many of their friends were at the station to greet them upon their homecoming. Wednesday afternoon there passed Kendal Green Station a regular freight train consisting of 65 cars drawn by two locomotives. Until that time the longest train noticed by Station Agent Trask consisted of 56 cars besides the mode of power. An organ was shipped Monday from the Hastings factory for Sandwich, Massachusetts. . . . May 26, 1899: Men employed at the Hastings organ factory are preparing for a road race to be given by the good riders of Weston and Kendal Green. An organ was shipped Saturday for Woodsville, New Hampshire and another one Wednesday for Middleborough, KY. . . . June 2, 1899: Mrs. Andrew Olsen, whose husband is a skilled workman in the case department of the organ factory, started Wednesday afternoon accompanied by three children, for her old home in Sweden where she will spend a year. She left Boston on the steamer "New England" and was bidden farewell by quite a party of friends among whom were Mr. and Mrs. Hastings. Quite a large number of strangers were here Memorial Day to engage board at Drabington Lodge . . ."

Donald G. Kennedy



Anna Coburn Hastings died in 1950 at the age of 97. This picture was taken in her driveway at 190 North Avenue. Her niece, Anna Hall, who had lived with Mrs. Hastings since 1916, continued to reside in the house until Miss Hall's death in 1978 at the age of 101.



Looking southward toward the Coburn barn, across Church Street from the house in which Arthur L. and "Miss Annie" Coburn were raised. The photo probably was taken in 1896.

ANNUAL MEETING SPEAKER SUPERB

Before I report on the superb speaker the Weston Historical Society presented at its annual meeting on Thursday, November 3, 1983, allow me just a small editorial comment. The public in Weston and surrounding towns is missing a great deal when they think that the programs of the Society are earmarked for its members only. In recent years, the Weston Historical Society, much through the merit of its president, Steve Riley, invited speakers who would draw hundreds upon hundreds of listeners even at high entrance fees and the Society offers free admission. Among them were such luminaries as Thomas Boylston Adams, Andrew Oliver, Max Hall, Robert Taylor — no, not the late movie star, but the director of the Adams Papers.

The last one — so far — in this series of extraordinarily superb lecturers was Paul C. Nagel, author, historian and educator, director of the Virginia Historical Society and president-elect of the prestigious Southern Historical Association. His latest book, *Descent from Glory: Four Generations of the John Adams Family* (Oxford University Press, 1983) was the February selection of the Book-of-the-Month Club.

He is now working on another book, dealing with the Adams women. His lecture gave us a fascinating glimpse into the life of one of them, Louisa, the wife of John Quincy Adams. High school students and Regis students, plus the public at large, missed out on a "scoop" to hear parts of a book that is forthcoming.

The subject of the talk, Louisa, was a fascinating and complex woman. Of course you know and I know that even the most fascinating subject can be "killed" by a boring speaker. It is that fortuitous combination of interesting topic AND dynamic speaker, who bring the subject alive. When you add to that the sensitivity of the lecturer to the psychological undercurrents in the life of his/her hero or heroine, the result is a delightful treat for all listeners. That was the case with Paul Nagel's presentation of "The Pilgrimage of Mrs. John Quincy Adams."

The title might have referred to the adventurous trek of Louisa and her young son, Charles Francis, accompanied by a single servant, from St. Petersburg to Paris. It was in the dead of the winter, her husband, John Quincy Adams, had left his post as Minister to the court of the Czarina of all the Russians to attend the peace talks at Ghent, that ended the war of 1812. The treaty was finalized by December of 1814, and Adams was appointed Minister to the court of St. James's. (Parenthetically: Andrew Jackson

battled in vain at New Orleans in January of 1815, unless of course we remember that his military victories catapulted him into the political arena).

The London years were some of the happiest of Louisa's marital life. The pressures of her husband's job were relatively lesser, and so were the political intrigues. Soon, however, she was back in the United States, as her husband rose to the position of Monroe's Secretary of State and eventually to the highest office of the land as the sixth president. She spent "four miserable years" in the White House.

The marriage had its ups and downs, to put it mildly. Louisa, a romantic, could not always reach her stern husband. It was after the presidency that John Quincy Adams mellowed, and the later years of the marriage saw a more harmonious understanding between the pair.

There is no greater tragedy that for a mother to lose her son, and Louisa lost two. Charles Francis remained, and mother and son were close throughout her life, as two understanding friends. It was this son who comprehended Louisa's soul better than her husband. In Nagel's words: "Charles saw . . . that his mother had achieved a tranquility, a serenity which 'the philosophy of my father did not attain.' Where John Quincy had fought anxiously to 'live to the last,' Charles looked at the gentle Louisa Catherine, now nearly helpless as an invalid, and gained a new admiration. 'The cheerfulness of her unassuming Christianity' left him deeply stirred."

In an amazing manner, the speaker made Louisa come alive. In a one-hour lecture, he conveyed countless details about his subject, yet never allowed his listeners to lose sight of her changing relations with her husband or the historical background of the times. Louisa in juxtaposition with her mother-in-law Abigail Adams were potentially an explosive duette, and the subtle analysis of the two women and their interactions was well conceived.

We can not guarantee that the next speaker of the Weston Historical Society will be of as high caliber as the ones in the last few years; however, with the track record as this, chances are good that the Society will again invite a winner.

Dr. Vera Laska



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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 6 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.