

THE WESTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY BULLETIN



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The Bicentennial Quilt, an album quilt, stitched by the fifth-grade students of Mrs. Jane Marshall in the Woodland School, Weston in 1976. With a color scheme of red, white, and blue, the quilt is made up of blocks individually designed and stitched by the students. Each block is initialed by a student.

Photographs by Peter D. Fishman

PRESERVING QUILTS AND TEXTILES

Lucky is the family who has inherited a quilt. Nothing connects us in a more personal way to the past than the handiwork of an ancestor. Quilts in particular—because there were few rigid rules for either design or construction—allow us inside the mind and spirit of the maker.

Old textiles are more fragile than we might think. Quilts are museum pieces today, and many of the techniques developed there for care and preservation can be helpful to us at home. The home seems an innocent environment, and our intentions are certainly benign, but threats to textile longevity are always present: light, heat, moisture, dirt, pests, chemical pollution, pressure, and poor handling. When choosing a place and method for storage, we must avoid these agents if possible.

Light—even artificial light—fades colors, and the combination of heat and moisture can be disastrous in itself. Humidity in the presence of the sulfur-containing materials (wood, paper or cardboard) produces an acid environment which can ruin colors, produce indelible spots, and destroy the textile fibers. If cardboard boxes, tissue paper, bureau drawers, and wooden chests and shelves are “out,” what does that leave us for storage facilities? Not plastic bags. The inevitable moisture content is trapped in the bag, evaporating and condensing, depending on the temperature changes. There is an answer to this dilemma: Cloth. A pillow case or custom-size wrapping in a well-washed sheet allows circulation of air, while protecting the textile from dust, soiled hands and rough handling. Layers of cloth around the textiles, separating them from contact with acidic cardboard or wood, will safeguard them when they are laid in a box or chest. Also, museum-quality acid-free tissue and cartons are available and, though expensive, worth the investment to secure a valuable textile.*

Moth damage can be disastrous to wool quilts, and other insects will attack textiles too. Fumigate wool quilts in an air-tight container for 2-3 months, using paradichlorobenzene crystals. The vapors are heavy, so place the crystals above the quilt and do not let them touch the fabric.

Quilts should not be folded and stored under pressure. Those on the bottom of a stack will be permanently crushed at the folds. Most quilts have been folded in half since they were made, and many show a visible cross, dividing them into quarters. Give them a change each time you refold—thirds is almost as easy to do—or roll them loosely over a fabric padding before slipping into a loose cover.

As for temperature and humidity, that which pleases a human being is best for a quilt: moderate and stable—sometimes difficult to attain in our New England homes. Remember that the threads of the fabric, as well as the quilting threads, have inevitably weakened with time and any kind of stress on them may cause breakage. Deterioration is then very rapid and becomes difficult and expensive to halt or restore.

Most of us want to display these treasures where we and others may enjoy them in our homes. It is essential to avoid, as much as we can, their exposure to dust, sunlight, cooking fumes, tobacco smoke, and heating vents. Beds are certainly appropriate for display, as well as for safe storage. Used as spreads, quilts may be layered on the bed, avoiding folds and allowing for quick and easy change of the exhibit. Watch out for those daily rays of sun from the window, and loungers—human and animal—who stretch out on vacant beds! Hanging quilts against a wall is also a popular and attractive display. A fabric “sleeve” or tube must be attached across the width of the back through which a rod (wooden dowel or metal conduit pipe) may be run. Sew the sleeve by hand with fairly large and loose running stitches which pass through all layers of the quilt so the weight will be distributed. Any other method for hanging is likely to be detrimental.

Cleaning of quilts presents many problems. It is surely best if we can be satisfied with our quilts “as is,” appreciating their signs of age. Old silk is almost impossible to clean, either by dry or wet methods, and should be done only after



Log Cabin Quilt displayed by Mrs. Alice G. Fraser and Mrs. Shirley Weinberg. The quilt, a classic design produced in white and shades of brown, was handmade by Abbie Cook (Mrs. H. E. Cook) of Salem, Massachusetts about 1850. Mrs. Cook was the grandmother of Walter H. Trumbull of Weston, who generously donated the quilt to the Historical Society in 1967.

consultation with a professional conservator of textiles. Very fine quilts or those with damage should also be handled by a professional. There are methods of washing a strong cotton quilt at home, but *never* in a washing machine. Even with the accepted technique of careful washing by hand, the potential for nasty surprises must be assumed. Certain repairs are possible; others detract from the beauty and authenticity of the original work and decrease its value considerably. We are fortunate to have textile conservation workshops nearby for consultation, cleaning and restoration. The Textile Conservation Center of the Museum of American Textile History in North Andover, Massachusetts and the Textile Conservation Workshop in South Salem, New York both specialize in this work, though it is costly.

This care-taking requires thoughtful effort and, sometimes, expense. We are, however, custodians of these most personal of heirlooms, as they pass through our hands—and our lives. Future generations will thank us as the quilts live on, to amaze, delight, and comfort.

*Acid-free boxes and tissue available from the Hollinger Corporation, P.O. Box 6185, Arlington, Virginia 22206 and Talas, 213 West Thirty-fifth Street, New York City 10018.

Shirley Weinberg

AN ARMCHAIR VISIT TO THE NEW ENGLAND HISTORIC GENEALOGICAL SOCIETY

At the annual meeting of the Weston Historical Society on Thursday, November 14, 1985, we were treated to a most rewarding and interesting lecture. The topic itself was quite an attraction, and the ballroom of the Josiah Smith Tavern was filled to capacity.

The lecture was titled "The New England Historic Genealogical Society and Its Services." The invited speaker, Dr. Ralph J. Crandall, the Director of the Society, was called out of town for personal reasons, but was kind enough to send us another member of his organization, Mr. David Dearborn, whose talk fascinated his audience.

Most of us knew that there was a genealogical society in Boston, but few of us were familiar with its history and its services. The entire lecture was accompanied by slides, so we had the adventure of an inside view of the premises and services of the Society.

Founded in 1845, the Society was the first "to direct its energies toward collecting and preserving family histories and papers for the purpose of genealogical research." The philosophy of the Society was that family and local history were the keys to understanding social history.

The collections housed in the archives and library of the Society are rich indeed, reaching back three centuries. They contain personal diaries, letters, town records, and even ship's records as well as maps, drawings, and photographs. The library and manuscript collections may be consulted in a spacious and tastefully appointed reading room. There is also a circulating collection, the individuals who are unable to come to the Society may receive books on loan by mail. The Society also publishes the *New England Historical and Genealogical Register* and a *News-Letter*, both quarterlies. Lectures are offered at the Society's headquarters.

Membership dues for twelve months are \$10.00 for students, \$40.00 for adults, and continue up to \$300.00 for patrons. The address of the Society is 101 Newbury Street, Boston, Massachusetts 02116, and the telephone number is 536-5740.

One might assume that the materials so lovingly collected at the Society relate only to the "old families" of New England, but we hasten to inform you that this is not so. A considerable portion of the holdings deal with families who moved to the Midwest or West. There are precious manuscripts which deal with Yankee families who journeyed around Cape Horn to California in the decade before the Gold Rush. In addition, there is a wealth of material on the ethnic populations of New England, especially the Irish. A special cooperative project with Northeastern University is preparing the history of the Irish in this part of the United States.

The Society also owns papers from overseas, collections of family histories, British heraldic surveys, and European peerage genealogies. The New England Historic Genealogical Society owns one of America's largest private collec-

tions on European gentry and nobility, related both to Great Britain and to continental Europe; it consists of over 10,000 volumes! So if you suspect that your ancestors originated in the "upper crust," visit the Society to find out.

Dr. Vera Laska

CAPTAIN BLIGH AND BREADFRUIT

The Annual Charter Anniversary Dinner of the Weston Historical Society took place Wednesday evening, May 6, 1987, in the Upper Lounge of the Student Union at Regis College. The consensus of the participants was most favorable to the location: a friendly room, with large windows on two sides looking out at flowering shrubbery; and to the food provided by the Saga Food Service at the College which was tasty, warm, and served by accommodating waitresses, who were all students of Regis College. All went well in spite of the fact that at the same time a larger banquet was taking place on a lower level, honoring the sports achievements of the students during the year. At one moment their loudspeaker was connected to our room, to the hilarity of all present.

The speaker of the day was Dr. Richard A. Howard, professor of dendrology at Harvard and director emeritus of the Arnold Arboretum. His talk was on "Captain Bligh and Breadfruit." Steve Riley introduced the speaker in his usual flowery way. For the record, Dr. Riley is conducting the interview with Dr. Howard, a former Weston resident, in the framework of our town oral history project; so soon you will be able to find out more details about the many-splendored and checkered career of Dick Howard.

Most of us think of the Pacific when we hear the name of Captain Bligh. Not so tonight; the focus of the lecture, with appropriate slides, was actually the Caribbean, especially the island of St. Vincent, just three islands up from Trinidad. It is a most attractive place for tourists, perhaps less spoiled by hordes of tourists than islands closer to the mainland. St. Vincent has dark sand, the result of volcanic activities in the past, and the early inhabitants left some petroglyphs for us to ponder. The flora is fascinating, as our speaker illustrated for us in his slides. One of the crops in St. Vincent is arrowroot, which produces the finest starch, used in baby food and geriatric diets because it is most digestible. Bananas are another local item, once cultivated by United Fruit; the fruit is actually grown on the tree with all stems wrapped in plastic bags to prevent bugs and spiders from settling among the fingers of the banana hands. The other crops are coconuts, and recently tourists.

A few years before the American Revolution, in 1765 to be exact, a botanical garden was established on British St. Vincent; it was under the supervision of General Robert Ellwell. It was a splendid place; it even had an aquatic garden! Its building now houses the St. Vincent Historical Society.

It was for the St. Vincent Botanical Garden that Captain Bligh was commissioned to procure breadfruit. He did secure cuttings, but we all know what happened next: the mutiny of the *Bounty*, Captain Bligh's not so voluntary

change of direction in a small boat, and the breadfruit cuttings went overboard. Not until six years later, in 1793, was breadfruit collected and taken to St. Vincent.

The breadfruit trees are magnificent specimens of the mulberry family; they come in seven varieties, of which five still grow on St. Vincent. It was disappointing that the people on St. Vincent did not quite take to the taste of the breadfruit, although if well prepared, it is delicious, according to our speaker. Now-a-days one can have a taste of it as a local speciality in the St. Vincent hotels.

In all honesty I must add that this review does not do half justice to the colorful, informative and overall fascinating talk of Dick Howard. I was so spell-bound listening to him and watching the slides that my pencil often remained idle. Perhaps the Society should make it a matter of policy to tape all our speakers.

Dr. Vera Laska

“New England – Myth or Reality?”

This was the title of the Weston Historical Society’s Thursday, March 26, 1987 lecture at the Barn of the Josiah Smith Tavern.

First of all, a technical comment. Circumstances shifted our lecture from the usual place in the Ballroom to the Barn of the Josiah Smith Tavern. It turned out to be a blessing in disguise. The audience almost unanimously showed preference for this location, because it is a warmer—literally and figuratively—place; in addition, attending a meeting in the Barn does not require climbing of uncomfortable stairs, a difficulty which prevents a few of our members from enjoying the pleasure of our programs in the Ballroom. Chances are good that future programs will take place in the Barn.

Our lecturer for the evening was Mr. Judson D. Hale, Sr., the distinguished editor of *Yankee Magazine* and of the famous *Old Farmer’s Almanac*, from our good neighbor state of New Hampshire. He is a graduate of Dartmouth College and author of several books, among them *Inside New England* and *The Best of Yankee Magazine*. (Some of the members might recall that I reviewed the latter in very positive terms in my Christmas column in the *Town Crier*.) He is just “putting to bed” his latest book, to be published this fall by Harper & Row, entitled *The Education of a Yankee*, the new book will be ready for Christmas giving.

Mr. Hale’s photogenic appearance and his charming wit make him a frequent guest on various television shows, among them the “Today Show” and “Good Morning, America.”

Indeed, the audience on this Thursday night had a marvelous time sitting back and enjoying the flawless ability of this born raconteur. He took us by the hand—and imagination—and we visited the six New England states. He analysed for us the different characteristics of the people in each state. How foolish it is, really, to put all New Englanders into the same bag! There are regional differences. Mr. Hale dwelled about a dozen minutes on the details of each state; the bottom line was that the main characteristic of a person in Vermont is common

sense, in Maine a practical turn of mind, in Massachusetts the Puritan work ethic, in Rhode Island tolerance, in New Hampshire frugality, and in Connecticut shrewdness. Local humor is also different, corresponding to the local lore.

We also heard about the origins of *Yankee Magazine*, founded in September of 1935 in order to preserve the great culture of New England. As we all know, it is still doing just that. As to the *Almanac*, it follows in the footsteps of the one which must have been the prototype of all almanacs, carved into tablets hundreds of years before Christ, and lo and behold, the *Old Farmer's Almanac* predicted the mild weather for our evening!

A brief question and answer period followed the most enjoyable lecture, and refreshments were served.

Dr. Vera Laska

JAPAN AND MASSACHUSETTS

On Thursday, January 15th, 1987 the Weston Historical Society inaugurated its 1987 program with a fascinating lecture, presented at the Josiah Smith Tavern at 8 p.m. by Dr. Charles Thayer, Jr. Dr. Thayer is a lifelong student of Japan and is a resident fellow at the Peabody Museum in Japanese Arts and Crafts.

The speaker mentioned how misleading the images of Japan are that we see on television these days. The news usually presents only the extremes, be it a teenage girl wrestling in tofu or a business executive who practically commits ritual suicide on camera. The real Japan is quite different.

Massachusetts had very close ties with Japan a century ago. These connections were woven by a number of scientists and interested entrepreneurs, like the marine biologist Edward S. Morse who carried out his studies at Sagami Bay at Kagoshima, or William Sturgis Bigelow, who spent several years in Japan and became a Buddhist. Bigelow was a friend of Theodore Roosevelt who became the mediator between Japan and Russia at Portsmouth, N.H.

Another bridge was formed by Ernest Francisco Fenollosa, who first brought art history to Japan in 1884 and in turn created the list of all art treasures in Central Japan for the West; he also was a Buddhist and lived in the historical city of Kyoto, formerly the capital of Japan.

Most of the lecture was accompanied by slides, showing the Japan of the days of the above mentioned men's era. They included rikshaws, the Kamakura Giant Buddha, Nikko Palace and numerous artifacts that one could see only in museums. For contrasting effect, some slides of modern Japan, the Ginza of Tokyo, for instance, were included.

Refreshments and discussion followed the highly enjoyable lecture.

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

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 Lee Marsh, Editor, 891-4662; 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.