

THE WESTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY BULLETIN



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WESTON – THE 275TH ANNIVERSARY



Mrs. Jeanette Cheek addressed the town during ceremonies held in front of the Town Hall.

Photograph by Roberta W. Siegel

Weston: A Community

Delivered by Jeannette Cheek

At the 275th Anniversary Ceremonies on June 18, 1988

I wonder how many here paused, on one of those mornings in mid-May, at the edge of the Town Green, arrested by its beauty, by the flowering dogwoods with the late spring bulbs still blooming at their feet. Or it may have been the cherry blooming in your own back-yard that made you pause. For three centuries people have been coming to Weston, finding the countryside beguiling and deciding that it was here that they wanted to live and raise their families, and for the first two of those three centuries, to farm—good old New England subsistence farming. That long parade of individuals, together with what they did with the land that lured them here, what sort of custodians of it they became, what kind of human community they built, that *is* the history of Weston that we are celebrating today.

In this brief talk I want to focus on the last of those three centuries, the twentieth. A sea change was occurring in the late 1890's in the once solid farming character of the Town. Individuals who lived in the Greater Boston area were coming as visitors to Weston for the summer, staying at inns such as the Drabington Lodge on North Avenue or the Glen House on the south side, falling in love with the country, buying a farm, and after a period of living in two places, Boston in the winter and Weston in the summer, opting for living permanently in Weston. Land was plentiful and many of this group were both talented and wealthy. There grew up, in consequence, a number of large estates which were for the most part also working farms, but on a new scale and with a new influence.

We have read a good deal recently in the public press about the wealth of Weston, as if this were the one distinguishing characteristic of the Town, and I thought it might be interesting to explore together with you some of the realities about wealth in Weston. The first quarter of the century is a good place to start.

Among the recent oral histories that a group of us have been conducting with individuals whose roots go far back in the Town, there is one with Brent Dickson. Let me quote from his interview a passage in which he is talking about his father:

“Gardy Fiske (my cousin) decided that John Marquand would be interested in talking to my father. He (Marquand) was always looking for individualists. So he took John up to my family house and into the smoking room where my father was sitting. The smoking room was a terrible mess, furniture all threadbare and stacks of this, that and the other thing. You couldn't see any walls because there were all sorts of pictures and newspaper clippings and photographs pinned all over them, and my father was in his usual old clothes, using safety pins for buttons. Whenever Gardy Fiske and my father got together they always talked about the hard times they were having, and wondered how they were going to get along, how they were going to make ends meet and so forth. On the way home John Marquand said, ‘I suppose you have to help your cousin out once in a while?’ Gardy said ‘Hell, no! He's the richest member of the family.’ (Is this what is sometimes referred to as ‘old money’?)”

Brent Dickson Sr. was, of course, a Selectman of Weston for many consecutive years, one of the famous triumvirate pictured in the painting that hangs downstairs. His was a life-time of serving the Town with wisdom and integrity.

Then there was Charles W. Hubbard who had large land-holdings on the southern side of town. A man of vision and imagination, he wanted to create a park along a beautiful half-mile stretch of the Charles River on land he owned. Mr. Hubbard conceived of what was to become the Riverside Recreation Grounds as a facility which would serve the entire Boston metropolitan area for recreation, one which all could share at a minimum cost. His letters to civic and educational leaders at the time reveal a plan of use by groups from the public schools, by business for outings with their employees and by others.

When he offered the land in 1894 to the Metropolitan Park Commission for this purpose, they refused it. So he proceeded to develop it himself with a half-

acre swimming pool, six tennis courts, boat houses, a baseball field, a track and a restaurant. Hugely successful though it was, Mr. Hubbard felt it ought rightly to be a public, not a private, operation and he gave it in 1914 to the Metropolitan District Commission who ran it without proper maintenance as the years went by, letting the wooden buildings slowly deteriorate until they were destroyed in a fire.

Another project that was dear to his heart, and which he carried out, was the creation of the Chiltern Hundreds up near the present Dean Road. He wanted to sell reasonably small lots of land at low cost to individuals who wanted to build a house. He felt Weston ought not to be just for the very large land-holder. Mr. Hubbard was clearly a man with democratic hopes for a future Weston.

Then take the Case Estates, fresh in Weston's mind today. Two of the Case sisters, Marion and Louisa lived there. Marion ran the farm and with it, a school that was like none you have ever heard of before or since. She called it Hillcrest Farm, later Hillcrest Gardens, and took in boys from 7 to 14 years of age. They worked, of course, in the extensive vegetable and flower gardens, but she brought in famous botanists as lecturers and staff from the University of Mass. Experiment Station. She provided uniforms and lunch and a doctor who gave the boys physical exams; she read poetry to them and had them write essays with observations on what they saw daily in the world around them. These were collected in the so-called *Green Books* which Dr. Howard, former director of the Arnold Arboretum, told me contained a remarkable amount of accurate and valuable information on the birds, the weather, the plants and insects of Hillcrest Gardens.

Marion Case fostered the ambitions of each of "her boys" and put them in touch with those who could further their careers. Peter Mezitt, for example, was an early one and it was Miss Case who gave him the money to start what we know today as *The Weston Nurseries*. At her death, the Case Estates were willed to Harvard University as part of the Arnold Arboretum and have been a showplace for Weston residents and visitors every since.

And there was Horace S. Sears, son of a much loved minister of First Parish, who was from boyhood an active citizen of Weston. The fortune that he eventually accumulated was of his own making. He built an Italian villa, containing a complete theater seating over a hundred, on the hill behind First Parish. It was there that *The Friendly Society*, which he helped to found in 1885, performed many of its famous, often original, productions. Apart from his own love of the theater and the arts in general, he saw the Society as serving the social cohesion of Weston, which it still does one hundred and three years later. Deeply interested also in political life, he helped to complete the funding of the new Town Hall, the one in which we now sit; a member of First Parish, he gave the exquisite Sears Memorial Chapel; a graduate of Weston High School, he left trust funds for scholarships that still continue. Never having married, Sears died without heirs. One could say of his wealth that his living and his giving were of one piece.

The uniting factor in the four cases I have chosen randomly, from many, is that the individuals named sought, with their wealth, to build community, that they cared and took part in Weston's common life.

In the late twenties and early thirties a change began with the breakup of the large estates by the formation of real estate trusts ready to sell lots to eager buyers. The population of the Town was still only 2500 as late as the 1930's, but it was to increase rapidly as we reach the World War II years. Those coming in then were doctors, lawyers, financiers, professors, architects, businessmen, high-tech entrepreneurs. Farmers were notably absent. This heady brew of newcomers and specialists brought a new liveliness to the Town's public discourse.

I suppose it is only when the existence of something is threatened that we begin to talk about conservation. The word is so frequently on our lips today that we forget how recently it has become a major concern for communities. Weston was fortunate in having individuals in the post-war period who were ready to give leadership to the idea of having the Town acquire land while it was still available and saving it for future generations to enjoy and be nourished by. Dr. William Elliston, Stanley French, and Marie Lewis and others too numerous to mention come to mind as we think of the creation of the Forest and Trail Association which became a vehicle for persuading private individuals to give, and the Town to purchase, pieces of land that in a few years became a continuous, permanent, Green Belt. In the 1980's this would have been nigh impossible because development had gone too far. In the 50's and 60's it could be done, but we should warn those who are new to Weston, and take the Green Belt for granted, that this did not come easily or all at once, but step by slow step. Vision of the goal, the education of an unaware public, and effective action by caring individuals were and are the key to conservation in Weston.

More recently the Conservation Commission has been struggling with aquifer protection to help insure a future water supply for the town. Behind the affirmative vote on the subject at the May Town Meeting, one sees the appealing figure of the then chairman, Julie Hyde, in hip boots out there week after week probing, measuring and mapping. She has been another resident equipped and willing to lead.

Even the briefest account of conservation in Weston should embrace the irreverent and joyful figure of Bill McElwain, tireless manager of *Green Power* and a kind of farming Pied Piper for the youth of Weston. Nor should the recent emergence of *Land's Sake* be unacknowledged.

Wise conservation policy, like a good school system, is, in a sense, taking care of one's own, but towns are not islands and events in a larger world impinge upon us.

Selma, that most brutal of encounters in the civil rights movement, and later the assassination of Martin Luther King, struck the consciences of Americans everywhere, Weston included. A small group after Selma met to discuss what citizens of Weston might do about racial justice. This led to the creation of a summer camp where fifty youngsters from Roxbury would be bussed to Weston

to join fifty children of the same age here for a day camp experience together. Within two years this grew into the enlarged Roxbury-Weston Program with a pre-school that operated for the entire school year. The seriousness of the effort on both sides, plus the skill and quality of the teaching staff, black and white, has been such that the school has flourished for over twenty years and still does.

Adding to this was Weston's participation in the larger Boston Metco program. Thanks to our excellent public school system, much thought, careful review and planning, over the years, has gone into making it a success, and special tribute should be paid here to the guidance of Roland Gibson. For purposes of this talk, I want also to stress the network of community support that has come from people who serve on the Metco Coordinating Committee and on the Metco Scholarship Committee which raises money for the students going on to college.

Throughout these remarks I have spoken of the sense of community that has seemed part of the air we breathed in Weston. The speed of growth in the last decade or two has been putting that sense to a test. As with any other human relationship of any depth, community has to be worked at and one of the things I've observed that generates this sense is working on official town committees. At least half this audience, I suspect, has probably already served on one or more of these committees, and I hope the other half will soon. What this involves is individuals working seriously in a small group on an issue the town faces that must be solved — a new fire station, a larger library, an empty school house (Ah, those weekly meetings that are supposed to end at 10:00 P.M.!)

One wonders what in 2013 at the Town's three hundredth anniversary those committees will be doing. I hope the sewer committees will be a matter of history, but what about toxic waste disposal? Perhaps by then Weston will be planning to protect the ozone layer. Who knows? What we do surely know is that the Town will be wrestling with tough problems, tougher even than today, and I hope that whatever managerial changes take place in the Town's government, the role of these committees will still be kept intact. They educate us; they chasten us; they acquaint us with honest differences of opinion; and they make us think of the community as a whole.

In conclusion, I want to say a word about one of them, the one bravely chaired by Polly Trumbull on middle and low-income housing. Here is a problem that is not in origin of our own making. A growing Boston is pressing outward into the country towns that are adjacent, causing land values there to skyrocket. As the pressure increases on Weston, only the rich can afford to move in. I say this dispassionately, just as a statement of fact and I have no settled opinion about the solution, but I do see the dangers that we face. If we are to have any influence on the changes that *will* occur, we shall have to make up our minds about the direction they are to take. Otherwise changes will come despite us. This is a problem ripe for enlightened discussion and for leadership. *DOES WESTON WANT TO WORK TOWARDS AN OPEN AND A JUST SOCIETY IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY?* This is, as yet, an unanswered question.

The 275th Anniversary — A Scrapbook of Memories

Photographs by Roberta W. Siegel



Edward M. Dickson, Chairman of the 275th Anniversary Commission, presided over the ceremonies at the Town Hall in the morning. Other members of the Commission were Joan M. Behringer, Joseph Benotti, Ellis H. Dana, Granton H. Dowse, Jr., Robert W. Ellis, Douglas Henderson, Lee C. Marsh, and Jack A. Williams. Martha Katz, publicity, and Paula Schwenk, public relations, assisted the Commission in all of the planning.



Weston had a first-class parade, complete with enough fire engine sirens to alert all neighboring towns that we were having a celebration. The restored White Fire Truck from the Weston Department joined in the merriment.



Alice Fraser, Curator of the Weston Historical Society, (far right) entertained over two hundred visitors who enjoyed seeing the many special items on display. Open houses were held at the Brook School Apartments, the First Baptist Church, the First Parish Church, the Golden Ball Tavern, the Isaac Fiske Law Office, Morrison House of Regis College, and the Spellman Philatelic Museum at Regis College.



"Weston High School: Then and Now" was the theme of the next float; Kate Billings, Allyson King, Jim Ryan, Grover Heintz, and Amy Vezza enjoyed the contrast—and agreed that they did in fact prefer the "Now."

ATHENA'S TREASURES

The Weston Historical Society's Annual Meeting for 1988 took place on Tuesday evening, November 15, 1988 at 8 p.m. at the Barn of the Josiah Smith Tavern in Weston. After the reports and election of new officers, we were treated to a delightful lecture with slides by Mr. Rodney Armstrong, Director and Librarian of the Boston Athenaeum, who spoke on the topic "Athena's Treasures, An Illustrated History of 175 Years of Collecting Paintings, Sculpture and Objects of Decorative Arts."

The very history of the Athenaeum is fascinating. It was founded early in our national period, in 1807. It is one of the oldest and certainly most distinguished libraries in the country meant first as an oasis of calm for those who wished to read their periodicals in "splendid isolation." The private library and the art gallery were launched in 1827.

"Athenaeum" means a seat of literary learning. Actually, in classic times it was a temple dedicated to the goddess Athena, patroness of wisdom, a place where poets gathered and read their creations. The tradition is maintained at the Boston Athenaeum with occasional concerts, lectures and readings of poetry and plays. Among the members of the Athenaeum were such greats as Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Margaret Fuller, Daniel Webster, Amy Lowell and Oliver Wendell Holmes.

The Athenaeum holds some precious collections, among them Confederate States imprints, newspapers, sheet music and documents. The eighteenth and nineteenth century periodical press is also represented, as well as books from the George Washington and Henry Knox libraries.

Its art gallery was the first of its kind in Boston and its collection helped to launch the Boston Museum of Fine Arts in 1876; this part of the Athenaeum served as the basis for the lecturer's slide show.

It is not possible to describe what the audience enjoyed visually through the slides. I recall at random two busts by the French master Houdon, namely of Franklin and of Lafayette, which are exquisite and truly a remarkable likeness of the two men, as well as a copy of the Discobolos (the original is a Greek classic by Myron). The paintings represent portraits, landscapes and still lifes. The newest addition to the Athenaeum is a print room for its Print and Photograph collection; the print room holdings are mostly from the nineteenth century, and are rich with maps, prints and photographs of historical value.

The Athenaeum is open from 9 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. Monday to Friday, and from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. on Saturdays. Tours are offered on Tuesdays and Thursdays at 3 p.m.; but in any case, call 227-0270 to confirm this information. The address is 10½ Beacon Street.

Dr. Vera Laska



Photograph by Jonah Disend, Weston High School, '90

THE ROBERT GOULD SHAW MEMORIAL ON BEACON HILL

An attentive audience listened to the interesting lecture of Stephen T. Riley at the March 22, 1988 evening meeting of the Weston Historical Society in the Barn of the Josiah Smith Tavern.

We all know from pleasant experiences that Steve Riley is a superb raconteur. In addition to that, he is a thorough investigator of historical facts and a meticulous scholar.

The planning and building of the Shaw monument on Beacon Hill, actually on the very Boston Common, was a welcome topic. Everybody seems to know about that monument, but few knew of its origin and its painful birth.

Robert Gould Shaw of Boston (October 10, 1837 - July 18, 1863) was an army colonel in charge of the 54th Massachusetts regiment of black troops. He was called to duty just a few weeks after his wedding. After a parade in Boston, he took his regiment to South Carolina, and shortly thereafter he was killed in an assault on Fort Wagner. He was buried in a mass grave with his soldiers. His family later expressed the wish that he not be reburied separately, but that he be left where he wished to be: with his troops.

After the Civil War a group of Boston residents started a collection of funds to establish a memorial to commemorate this young fallen hero. The money accumulated slowly. After almost two decades, the fund amounted to \$16,000,

and the commission in charge selected the sculptor: Augustus Saint-Gaudens (1848-1907). While born in Dublin, Ireland, he had lived in the United States since his early childhood. He had studied in Paris and Rome and was known for his imaginative designs. Among his masterpieces is the statue of Admiral Farragut on Madison Square in New York. This statue established Saint-Gaudens as a master sculptor. Unfortunately, this genius of characterization and plastic design did not count punctuality among his virtues. The Boston commission signed a contract with him on February 23, 1884; his fee was to be \$15,000, and the monument was to be ready for unveiling in two years. After several delays, the good Bostonians were so fed up that they threatened to hire another artist! Daniel French was the likely candidate, the same one so well known to us from the magnificent Lincoln Memorial in Washington D.C. and the equally splendid Farmer at the Concord North Bridge.

Finally Saint-Gaudens completed the monument. It is a large relief work, with Shaw on his horse in the center, an angel floating high above him, and his black troops surrounding him. The inscription proclaims:

The Shaw-54th Regiment Memorial honors Colonel Robert Gould Shaw and members of the Massachusetts 54th Regiment who died in the assault on Fort Wagner, South Carolina, July 18, 1863. The 54th was the first regiment of black volunteers from the North to fight in the Civil War. On the back of the Monument are inscribed the names of the members of the 54th who died with Colonel Shaw in the cause of freedom and union. The Monument was erected through private donations and given to the City of Boston in 1897. It became part of Boston African-American National Historic Site in 1980. Funds contributed from across the United States made possible its restoration in 1982-1984.

The dedication ceremony took place on May 31, 1897 with lots of pomp, including the attendance of several of the survivors of Shaw's troops. Booker T. Washington and William James were among the speakers.

The monument stands just below the State House and is easily accessible. It was beautifully restored a few years ago (at the cost of \$125,000). On your next visit to Boston, stop by to dedicate a few moments of reflection to a young officer who led black troops into one of the battles of the Civil War and sacrificed his life so that all men should be free.

Dr. Vera Laska

Dr. Clement Silvestro and the Museum of Our National Heritage

Members of the Weston Historical Society convened on Thursday, May 5, 1988 for the Annual Charter Anniversary Dinner. For the second time, it took place at the upper lounge of the Student Union at Regis College. It seems that the Society will make this a tradition, because the room has a friendly atmosphere, nice art work, and the view from the windows on both sides of the spacious room is lovely this time of the year: magnolias and forsythias are in full bloom. The dinner, again, was excellent.

The speaker for the evening was Dr. Clement Silvestro, Director of the Museum of Our National Heritage in Lexington. The title of his talk was "Sorting It Out," and it covered the interesting story of the birth of this unique museum, its history, and its various exhibits. Good slides accompanied the talk, and thus we had a chance to see some exhibits which we might have missed at the museum.

Dr. Silvestro received his Ph.D. from the University of Wisconsin in 1959, majoring in American history. His previous position was Director of the Chicago Historical Society; he was lured away from the Windy City in 1974, to become the head of a new museum which existed mostly on paper.

One exciting aspect about the Museum of Our National Heritage, founded by the Masons, is that it is mostly a place for travelling exhibits. By now the museum has established such a good reputation, that some very special collections are loaned to it, thus enriching the cultural lives not only of Lexington residents, but of all Massachusetts, and even of the surrounding states.

Dr. Silvestro arrived to an empty building. Yet within a few months, he started filling out the museum with pieces of historical and artistic value. In 1976, the year of the American bicentennial, there was a brilliant exhibit to commemorate that meaningful anniversary.

The buildings are modern, spacious and elegant. The patio and large floor length windows create the impression of additional space. The landscaping is soothing. There is ample parking space. The museum usually displays four exhibits about diverse subjects, with most of them staying for six to eight months. In June 1988, there were exhibits of lithographs, Navajo weaving, Thomas Nast cartoons; a show on Paul Revere had just ended in March. Some of the earlier exhibits dealt with France's views on America, with the Loyal Americans who left the new United States for Canada, Lexington history, different styles of pewter and other subjects of local and global interest. There are also Sunday programs of concerts, lectures, and movies, available free or for a small fee.

The auditorium is busy with lectures; the gift shop offers appropriate souvenirs and books. Those of us who regularly visit the museum know that it is a place not only for viewing, but for contemplation. Those of you who do not know the museum, should place it on your program as soon as possible, because it is one of the most attractive spots around us, both as to beauty and as to cultural contents. For a small fee, you can become a Friend of the Museum and receive regular notices of what is going on at all times at the museum.

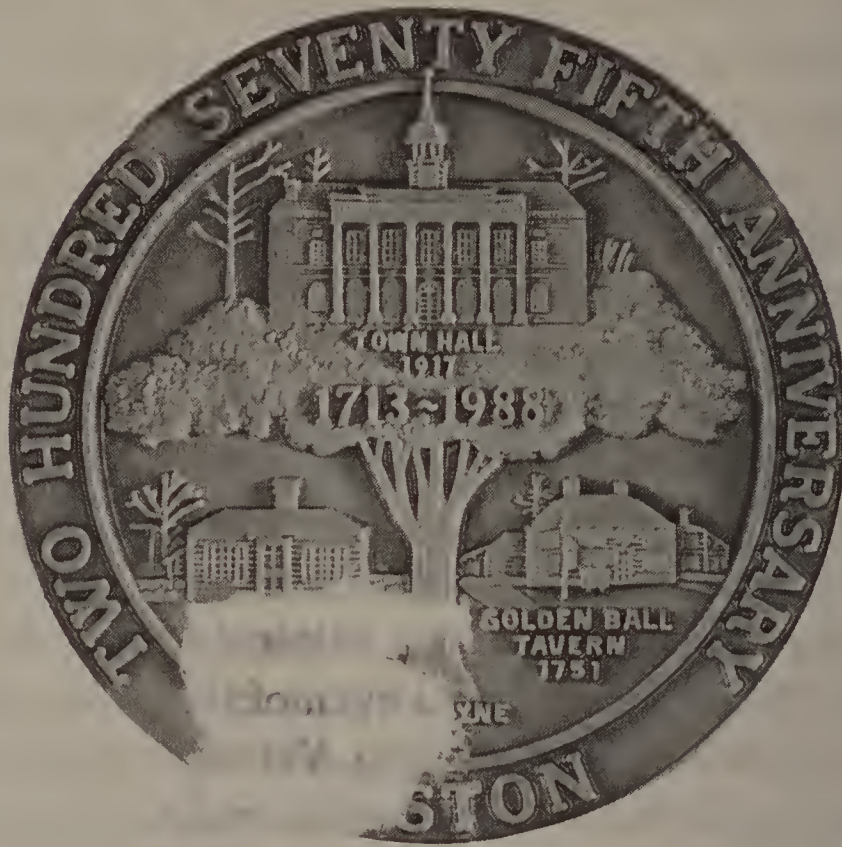
This is a perfect place to go to on a family outing and expose the children to meaningful cultural experiences the painless way.

The Museum of Our National Heritage is at 33 Marrett Road in Lexington, Mass. 02173; telephone 861-6559.

Go and visit—you are in for a treat!

Dr. Vera Laska

Commemorative Medals and Plates



Andrea Humphrey drew the designs for the commemorative medal and plate. A few silver medals (\$30) and bronze medals (\$5) are available at the Chestnut Shop and The Susan Foster Gallery. Plates (\$27.50) are available at the Chestnut Shop. Ed Dickson will also fill orders for both medals and plates at 894-0165.



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