

# THE WESTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY BULLETIN



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*Wendell E. Ryerson, a long-time admirer of the Fiske Law Office, wrote the following article. For further reference please read the following books available for purchase from the Society: ONCE UPON A PUNG, RANDOM RECOLLECTIONS, AND ONE TOWN IN THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION — WESTON, MASSACHUSETTS, by Brenton H. Dickson, III.*



Fiske Law Office viewed from across Boston Post Road.

## THE LIVES IN WESTON OF TWO PROMINENT PROFESSIONALS

Isaac Fiske, possibly Weston's most prominent lawyer of the nineteenth century, and Joseph Field, one of Isaac's closest friends, minister of the First Parish in Weston, were two persons whose nearly parallel careers are surely worth following.

Isaac was born in Weston in 1778 and died in 1861. Within that span of time he became Register of Probate for Middlesex County, Clerk, Selectman and Moderator of the Town of Weston, Representative from Weston to the General Court, and most importantly for this tale, a pillar of the First Parish in Weston.

Prior to the time that he became a law partner of Artemus Ward, Jr., son of the famous general, Artemus Ward of George Washington's staff, he attended

Harvard College, where he was a member of the Hasty Pudding and Porcellian Clubs. After graduation he proceeded to prepare himself to practice law.

There were no law schools in this country at that time and a young man with similar ambitions to Isaac was obliged for all practical purposes to read law with a lawyer who had been admitted to practice before a particular court or courts; to learn the legal precepts as they were known and practiced at that time, and literally dig out the law from reading Sir William Blackstone's "Commentaries on the Laws of England", and other scholarly legal tomes on English Common Law.

Artemus Ward was six years Isaac's senior and had built an office near the corner of Central Cemetery Road and Central Avenue, now known as the Boston Post Road. Their partnership began in 1806 but was later ended when Artemus moved his practice to Concord and turned over the office to Isaac, where it now remains within thirty feet of the crumbling bole of the once great branching Burgoyne elm of historic fame.

Shortly thereafter, a young man, Alpheus Bigelow, Jr., joined Isaac for a few years until he opened his first office near the Weston/Wayland line.

Isaac acquired a house on the north side of the Post Road and made substantial improvements to it, prior to selling it to Joseph Field, minister of the First Parish Church. He then built a house adjacent to the Field house and diagonally across the Post Road from his law office.

Somewhat later another house arrived on the north side of the Post Road near Dr. Field's house, which became famous as the "House That Travelled". General Charles J. Paine had come into possession of the house of Elisha Jones, Weston's famous Tory whose property was the only Weston property confiscated by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. Elisha fled to Boston for protection of the British Army, where he died on February 12, 1776, brokenhearted from patriot abuse and the loss of all his property.

General Paine had ambitions to use the lot on which the Jones house was standing, to build for himself a more pretentious residence and in a moment of generosity gave Elisha's house to his friend Charles H. Fiske. Fiske thereupon moved the house to a lot opposite the Central Cemetery and made it known that it was for rent. It did not rent, and Charles Fiske moved it again to Church Street where it now stands, a beautiful white and yellow house, much enlarged, improved and beautified. Its address is 22 Church Street and deserves a close and admiring inspection.

We, however, at this point have gotten well ahead of our story. Before starting the house from the north side of the Post Road on its way to Church Street, it was determined that it should first be cut into two sections. The first, hauled by oxen, was nicely in place when the second section began its journey down the Post Road, and had gotten just beyond Concord Road when a blizzard, piling up six foot drifts, hit the town. How to get around the half house then taking up nearly all of the traveling surface of the road? That was the question facing the embattled road commissioners. Out came all the oxen, horses, plows, shovels and shovelers, and the street was finally cleared enough to get the half house off the Post Road. But the indignation ran very high when there was time to appraise the damage to the trees and limbs that the house had wrought on its brief journey.

*Continued on page 8*



*David Webster*

In 1820 Isaac Fiske served in the Constitutional Convention as a member of the Committee on Oaths and Subscriptions of which the "Immortal Daniel" was chairman.





## SHIPWRECKS OF NEW ENGLAND

The Annual Meeting of the Weston Historical Society took place at the Josiah Smith Tavern Barn on Tuesday, November 27, 1990 at 8 p.m. After a brief business meeting and elections, a full house listened to our guest speaker, John Perry Fish, who talked about his experiences with "The Shipwrecks of New England."

Somehow we usually connect old shipwrecks with "old salts" of the seas. Not so this time. The speaker is a vigorous, tall young man, who hails from Catumet, Massachusetts. He has been at the job of locating shipwrecks for many years and hopefully will continue for many more.

Today's shipwreck researchers and searchers are armed with a lot of technical knowledge, they use among others sonar and magnetic devices to locate their targets, because the unaided eye is in most cases of no use. Before the search in the water can take place, there are months and years of time spent in libraries and various offices, trying to pinpoint the approximate places where a wreck might be on the bottom of the ocean. Chances are that the drifts of currents might have even moved the wreck from its place where it was once a proud ship that went down to Davy Jones'.

There are an estimated 9,000 to 10,000 shipwrecks off the northeastern United States alone. So far only about one-tenth of these have been located and identified. The rest are, as Mr. Fish pointed out, "time capsules holding the secrets of our maritime history." They are all waiting for their discoverers.

Among the oldest shipwrecks was the *Tiger* that once belonged to the Dutch Captian Adrian Block. While scouting our shores, the *Tiger* caught fire and went down at a place where later New Amsterdam stood. That was in 1614. All men on board were saved, but the ship was lost. Then in the early years of this century, as the New York subway was being built, the *Tiger*, or what was left of her, was found.

Throughout the centuries and down to our days, there are ships that go down to the bottom of the sea. A relatively recent case was that of the *Vineyard* Lightship, manned by the Coast Guard. She was lost in a fierce storm on September 14, 1944 off Cape Cod; all twelve crew members also perished. It was only two decades later, when in 1963 Dr. Harold Edgerton of M.I.T. together with shipwreck expert Bradford Luther of Fairhaven set to work with new equipment. They used a sonar. After much searching, they located the *Vineyard* on the bottom of Buzzard Bay. Her bell was retrieved and set up as a memorial.

There are endless tales about shipwrecks, and Mr. Fish was telling them in a spellbinding manner, illustrating his words with slides. He also wrote a book about his own experiences, entitled *Unfinished Voyages, A Chronology of Shipwrecks* (Orleans, Mass.: Lower Cape Publishing, 1989; 299pp., \$35.00). It deals not only with shipwrecks but also with saving shipwrecked lives, and it all makes fascinating reading. The second half of the book contains good practical information on how to go about locating shipwrecks and a chronology of vessels lost on the north-eastern shores of the United States – just in case you get into the mood to go exploring. But remember, not all shipwrecks are hiding pots of gold!

Dr. Vera Laska

# 1815 - 1915

In token of 100 years of uninterrupted friendship between the Field and the Fiske families, begun by Isaac Fiske and Joseph Field at the time of the Napoleonic Wars and continued ever since by their children, grandchildren and great grandchildren unto this year of the Great War, we their grateful descendants hereto set our hands, as guests of Edward B. Field at a celebration held in the house in Weston that Isaac Fiske conveyed to Joseph Field, to record our own gratification and as an inspiration to those who shall follow us.

Weston, Massachusetts, December 20<sup>th</sup> 1915.

*[Faint handwritten text, possibly names of guests]*

*[Faint handwritten text]*  
 Charles H. Fiske <sup>3rd</sup>

Olsen Field  
 Theodore Lickson  
 Chandler Robbins  
 Rosemary Fiske  
 Anna + Dickson Lickson  
 Sarah Ripley Robbins  
 Elizabeth

August 20<sup>th</sup> 1915  
 Anne Lickson Robbins  
 William Field  
 Annie Fiske  
 Charles H. Fiske Jr.  
 James H. Fiske

August 20<sup>th</sup> 1915  
 C. F. Fiske

*[Faint handwritten text]*  
 Edward C. Field

*Continued from page 2*

Returning to Isaac, he is now represented in Weston by many descendents in our present generations.

We now turn to our other professional.

On the death of the beloved Dr. Samuel Kendal in 1814, the town and the parish were faced with the problem of finding a successor to Dr. Kendal with comparable qualifications.

Isaac Fiske, moderator of the Town Meeting on December 27, 1814, sent a letter to Mr. Joseph Field, Jr., graduate of Harvard, informing him that the Town and the parish had voted to give him a call. This invitation was accepted.

During Mr. Field's college days he met and was deeply influenced by Rev. William Ellery Channing, minister of the Federal Street Church in Boston, and the leader of the Liberal Christian Movement, which later became the Unitarian Church. Dr. Field embraced the Liberal Christian Movement.

It is a great credit to Dr. Field that he was so beloved by his congregation that no schisms developed within the membership during his long and important ministry.

Isaac Fiske became a close and devoted friend of Dr. Field. A remarkable picture of both Isaac and Dr. Field, sitting together as friends hangs in the hall beyond the sanctuary of the First Parish Church. A large plaque to Isaac's memory hangs in the rear of the sanctuary, attesting to his great importance in the life of the parish.

Many interesting events occurred in the vicinity of the Fiske law office and today it is a treasured property of the Town, held in the custody of the Weston Historical Society. At least two of the offspring of the great Burgoyne elm are flourishing within fifty feet of the office and can be seen by anyone interested in examining the grounds around the office.

The office is open to visitors on Memorial Day and also on the day of the flea market of the Golden Ball Museum. A tour of the law office can be arranged by calling 891-3224 and 894-2872.



## **WESTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY, INC.**

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