THE WESTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY BULLETIN

July, 1991 Volume XXIV, No. 2

GEN. & MRS. CHARLES JACKSON PAINE AND THEIR WESTON ESTATE

by Thomas M. Paine, a great-grandson

As you drive along Highland Street's scrubby fields between Love Lane and Chestnut Street, or as you roam the trails in the Town Forest to the east, you will find very little today to suggest that all of this vast void, now all but surrounded by mini estates, was once Weston's first showplace, the home of one of Weston's earliest summer pioneers.

Soldier, statesman, sportsman and financier Gen. Charles Jackson Paine of Boston found in Weston the fulfillment of an ambition recorded repeatedly in his Civil War letters to his father. Noted for his coolness under fire, the thirty-three year old major general returned to Boston something of a hero. His black troops had been the first not only to storm Confederate lines but to take them, at the battle of Newmarket Heights in September of 1864, and for this display of valor won fourteen of the first Medals of Honor ever issued.

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One of his dreams during the four years that he served in the conflict was to buy a farm and settle down in the country life, but just where he could not yet say. As he wrote his father, Charles Cushing Paine, he even considered moving south: "Farming is the only occupation I fancy. . . But if not Jamaica, then a big farm in Maryland, Delaware, New Jersey, or somewhere south of 42 [degrees] 40′ & where icebergs don't pass the summer."

Paine had developed an attachment for the country life when a boy of ten. His father had acquired a farm along the North Shore at today's Prides Crossing in 1844, and there the family of eight children had spent almost six months each year, developing a taste for the simple pleasures of planting vegetables, mowing hay, milking cows, keeping bees, and sailing.

No, the South never got Paine back, for in March 1867 he fulfilled a more important dream, which had eluded him all through his twenties: marriage. His betrothed was a young Boston lady of sweet disposition and unmatched social position: Julia Bryant of Louisburg Square on Beacon Hill. With her came the Bulfinch-designed house at 87 Mount Vernon Street and a seaside cottage in Nahant. That alliance seems to have removed Paine's interest in the practice of law, which his father had pressed upon him ever since gradua-

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tion from Harvard College in 1853. No matter. The reluctant lawyer soon found himself on the boards of the Chicago Burlington & Quincy and Atchison Topeka & Santa Fe Railroads, and that was more to his liking.

Married all of one year, the couple wasted no time in fulfilling the dream that was now Julia's as well. In 1868 they bought their first 140 acres in Weston, the Jones-Marshall estate farm on Highland Street. An architectural landmark that was already antique, the mansion house boasted not only a pedimented doorway and windows but corner quoins or mock masonry blocks as well, to frame the whole. Above its gambrel roof rose twin chimneys. The architectural distinction of this amply proportioned showplace was unsurpassed (if not unequalled) in town. The place stood east of Highland Street, just behind the stone wall, about a thousand feet south of the Chestnut Street intersection. Here, after a winter in Boston, the young couple came each spring, followed by a retinue of trunks, only to leave for the summer interlude at the cottage in Nahant, before returning each fall.

Over the next three decades the Paines added several other contiguous farms, with four or five farmhouses, and even more cellar holes. The acreage eventually extended south of what is now Regis College along both sides of Wellesley Street and South Avenue. On land now occupied by Weston High School, the Paines acquired what had once been an old soldiers' farm and before that the estate of Ward Nicholas Boylston, once entrusted to the care of Charles Francis Adams. The land which the Paines assembled eventually covered some eleven hundred acres.

The history of the Jones-Marshall core of the estate is better known than that of the other acquisitions. The land was owned by the Jones family from about 1665, the period of earliest settlement by farmers from Watertown, which then included Weston. The pioneer Jones' grandson Col. Elisha Jones built the mansion house sometime between 1755 and 1760. Jones was a Loyalist. When revolution came, he fled to Boston and died not long after; his family fled to Nova Scotia, leaving the estate to be confiscated. In 1782 a government committee auctioned the estate to General Thomas Marshall for $1,000. And yes, on October 23, 1789, George Washington *did* spend the night here.

Not only did Washington sleep here, but the high point of the estate, Sanderson's Hill, due south, was the site of a Revolutionary War beacon which relayed messages from Boston to points south and west. That site is now marked by a plaque on Highland Street opposite the Love Lane intersection.

In the nineteenth century, before the arrival of the Paines, the Jones-Marshall estate changed hands four times. After Marshall's death in 1800 his executor sold the estate to physician John Clark of Cambridge for $7,000. In 1808 the place passed to Clark's mother-in-law Ruth Mackay, a widow from Boston whose son John was in the pianoforte business with Babcock, later Chickering. The water on the place was effective for bleaching keyboard ivories, and glass houses were set up near a spring for the purpose. The alleged site of this bleaching spring was a small frog pond behind the house where

Paine boys later sailed model boats. The Mackay family maintained attractive gardens and statuary in front of the house.

In 1840 John Mackay sold the estate to Philip J. Mayer for $6,200. The well-known Boston confectioner, whose customers frequented the estate for week-end parties, owned it until 1865. During that time it was already known for its peach orchards. Alas, the Mayers separated, and he went off to live as a Shaker in Shirley. William Roberts bought the place in 1865, three years before he sold it to Paine.

Change was now in the offing. By 1870 two sons had been born to the Paines, Sumner and John Bryant. For all its antique grandeur, the house lacked certain conveniences, particularly in the kitchen, a bottleneck in the chain of production of this budding model farm. About this time the Paines added an extensive ell to provide a new dining room and kitchen, a large "back kitchen" on the first floor and four more bedrooms on the second. This ell had a French Mansard roof, of the type fashionable in Boston's Back Bay for the previous decade, but suitable enough for the lines of the old house's gambrel roof. Among other citified touches were the bay windows, Italian marble fireplaces in the dining room and the bedroom above it, and the steep stairway with heavy balustrade and even heavier newel posts. Outside the bedroom over the dining room bay window was a balustraded balcony with globular finials.

Indicative of the scale of this addition, the dining room measured 18 by 22 feet, and the kitchen 15 by 26 feet. In the attic, lit by dormers, were, eventually, four or five maids' bedrooms. And in the basement, surrounded by whitewashed stone foundations and dimly lit, were a laundry, milk room and cellar, with great double swinging doors, where coal was stored. The architect of the ell is unknown, but may have been a Mr. Dorr, whose name Paine

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penned on a sheet covering the roll of plans of this addition.

By the early 1880s the family had grown. There were now five children — after Sumner and John arrived Mary Anna Lee, Charles Jackson Jr., and Helen. Running the Weston establishment not only for family residence in spring and fall but year-round took quite a staff, all orchestrated by the housekeeper, Maria von Gerber, or Mimi. She took her responsibilities seriously, and over the years, though working closely with Julia Bryant Paine, doubtless came to be very much in charge. Her strength of character and high-mindedness added incalculably to the upbringing of the children; she stayed with the Paines for the rest of her life, and by the end seemed to have become something of a saint in residence.

Mimi arrived in 1881 at the age of twenty-six as Helen's wetnurse, moving with the family between Boston and Weston. As some indication of this attachment between Mimi and "Miss Helen", the latter grew up to be a locally well-known artist and painted more portraits of Mimi than she did of anyone else.

Mimi's is a poignant story. Blinded in childhood, Swedish-born Maria Nilson had survived medical malarkey and through a specialist miraculously recovered her sight. Her step-father had beaten her. But she escaped. Through a kind uncle, she married the German Kaiser's wine taster and keeper of his stables, Wilhelm von Gerber, a German aristocrat whose mother lived in Stockholm.

Newlyweds Herr and Frau von Gerber had come to America full of anticipation. They could avoid being snubbed by the von Gerbers, who had a haughty disdain for this match. Besides, von Gerber had invested in some Western silver mines, and wanted to cash in. Not only that, the young couple were expecting their first child.

In a plot that outmaneuvers any romance of the era, soon after they arrived, von Gerber discovered that his investments were worthless. He had lost everything. Before there was time to adjust to that disaster, Mimi gave birth to a daughter. When the baby was a week old, the father died of a heart attack, leaving Maria penniless, a parent, ignorant of English, and in Boston.

Without a husband, Maria had nowhere to turn but the local Lutheran Church, then located near Mount Vernon Street. The pastor took her and her baby in for several months. If the Paines had not already known von Gerber, as Mimi's niece recalls, then it was through the church that Maria learned that Mrs. Paine was looking for a wet nurse. And so the Paines and Maria came together.

The little infant, named Wilhelmina after her father, had to be given up to a foster family, but later came for summer and vacation visits, and became a friend of Helen, Georgina, and Frank. Wilhelmina grew up to do something none of her Paine contemporaries even attempted: after boarding school in New York, she not only went to college, for which the Paines paid tuition, but she went on to get her M.D., truly a pioneer of whom her mother must have glowed with pride. When she died of heart failure at age thirty-three, Mimi's grief left its mark on Georgina, who in 1954 felt compelled to write in her

memoir *Afterthoughts* that she still could not think of Mimi's grief without weeping.

Soon after her arrival, Mimi was responsible not only for the children much of the time, but for the exhausting job of packing up a caravan of trunks for each move, for running the kitchen, for overseeing the canning of jelly in jars by the hundreds. Sometimes these things came together in unexpected ways. Once, when "Mr. Frank" had been naughty, Mimi locked him up in the jelly closet, and after enough time had elapsed for Frank to have learned his lesson, Mimi asked him, "Are you good, now?" And Frank replied, "No, but the jam sure is."

With the further enlargement of the family and household, it was decided that the original portion of the house be replaced with something even more spacious. In 1883 Paine offered the old mansion house to Charles H. Fiske, who had it moved in two pieces across town to Church Street where it, unlike its successor, survives.

Boston architect Carl Fehmer designed its replacement in an early colonial revival style, complete with an imposing tower, expansive piazzas, and palladian windows on the outside, and lots of oak paneling, pressed brick fireplaces, and a grand three story staircase surrounding a broad stairwell inside. Here was room enough not only for a family with five children, but for the two more who arrived by 1890, Georgina and Frank, and for family friends who came to stay by the week.

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If the scale of things in the ell dwarfed that of things in the original mansion house, it was the ell's turn to be treated to much the same indignity. Fehmer's addition was the most colossal thing yet. The ceiling height was ten feet, one or two feet higher than in the ell. Dwarfing all around it was the enormous stairhall, 18 by 40 feet, with an open stairwell reaching up to the third floor, and lit by a skylight above and banks of windows and glazed doors on three sides. Two of the doors led to a piazza that ran over one hundred linear feet on the north and west sides of the house. The stenciled name of William H. Leatherbee & Sons, Beaver Brook, Waltham, was found on the porch rafters during the 1972 demolition.

On the right as you entered the hall were the parlors. The front parlor measured 20 by 25 feet; likewise the back parlor or library, with its large swell of a bow window. Just to the right of the front door was the General's office, 16 by 18 feet (including its bay window). All of the formal rooms had paneled dados and heavy moldings.

When the house was electrified perhaps in the late 1890s, the wiring was not buried in the walls but left exposed. Over time the wiring was masked behind wooden moldings connecting primitive switches and converted gas-light sconces and chandeliers. One of the bamboo filament bulbs from this dawn of the Edison era survived right to the end, in a remote third floor cedar closet. In fact it still works.

Upstairs were six bedrooms surrounding the stairhall; each had one or more

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closets, four had fireplaces. The master bedroom was 20 feet square. In the age of chamber pots, there were no bathrooms in Fehmer's additions; the only "w.c." was found in the ell. Later the retreat of the boys, the attic was for the moment left unfinished except for the billiard table area at the top of the stair; perhaps the clicking of billard balls and wafting of cigar smoke up here did not quite disrupt life in the parlors two stories below. But come a generation, the noise and sawdust of the third floor workshop must have been more intrusive.

The earlier mansard ell fit this new appendage somewhat less well than it may have the Jones-Marshall house. Upper floor levels and rooflines refused to match. Fehmer provided a distraction from this in the form of a massive tower at the junction of the two parts of the house. It had sash windows on all four sides; a narrow stairway wound around to a ceiling hatch. Later bookcases lined the way up, and this became a favorite retreat for young Paines and, later on, Mimi's nephews and nieces. The views from the tower extended to the gilt cupola of the State House fourteen miles away. In a more utilitarian vein, the tower provided ventilation and housed a water tank.

Around 1888 Mimi sent for her half-sister Elna, then employed in Denmark as a seamstress. Her father, Mimi's step-father, had beaten her so severely that she was made lame for life. Soon she came as the Paines' seamstress and not only mended clothes and fitted curtains but did the laundry work. This took her back and forth between the basement where whites were boiled and a stove heated flatirons, and the fenced-in clothes yard. When one hamper arrived, another left. She met her husband, Carl Anderson, also Swedish, in language class in Boston, and after their marriage in 1895 Carl and Elna Anderson, tailor and seamstress, spent their winters at the Paines in Weston, raising five children, eventually, with Mimi's help, sending three off to college.

For them the Paines built a second ell off the original ell, approached up its own long outside stairs. This new ell consisted of a separate kitchen and bedroom downstairs and two bedrooms upstairs. The lower window panes were frosted for privacy. And so, at times, two families, both large ones, were sharing this huge house. Physically, the two worlds were linked not vertically by a stairway, but horizontally, through a door in the back of the kitchen.

Sandwiched in between these families were the nurses and maids who lived in separate rooms on the third floor of the original ell. Mimi hired only Swedish women, perhaps four at any one time, including Christine Larson the cook, her assistant, and an upstairs maid.

Certain tasks in that era required male intervention. Sam the house man sharpened knives, made up fires, and stoked the coal furnace in the cavernous whitewashed cellar. There was no butler.

Over ell, and over all, Mimi presided, sitting at the head of the table in the back kitchen, reciting poems, telling Bible stories. When the Paines were away, the Andersons took a customary Swedish afternoon coffee and treats, sometimes at a table, complete with tablecloth, set out on the lawn near the clothes

yard. And every Sunday the Paines provided a carriage with driver to take Mimi and the four maids to the Lutheran church in Waltham.

Despite the work, life was not unpleasant. And lest it be thought that Paines and Andersons kept their distance, Mimi's niece tells me two vignettes. Once, when Julia came back in the kitchen to talk with Mimi, she found her very upset. Julia sat right down with her to try to cheer her up. If Mimi seemed to

take life's setbacks stoically, for Julia tears came easily. Julia's devotion to her and to the Andersons had grown over the years. Another time, three-year-old Mildred Anderson escaped from the ell, to be found in the opposite end of the house, in seventy-five year old General Paine's lap. The Andersons named their youngest Charles Paine Anderson. When the Paines went to Europe in 1896, not only did Mimi come but Wilhelmina as well.

To be continued

This article is primarily excerpted from Thomas M. Paine, *Growing Paines, Paternal Patterns and Matrimonial Matters in a Family Boston Born & Bred*, Wellesley, Mass., 1991. This clothbound book of over 350 pages and 80 illustrations is for sale by the author. For further information contact the author at 2 Cushing Road, Wellesley Hills, Mass. 02181. Tel. (617) 431-9759. The author wishes to acknowledge the contributions of Mildred Anderson of Dubuque, Iowa, housekeeper Maria von Gerber's neice, and Linda Carmichael, of Lynnfield, Mass., Maria's great niece, for sharing reminiscences.

Key to Photographs

A portfolio of the Paine estate, mostly in its prime.

1. Charles Jackson Paine (1833–1916) with city attire and his habitual cigar on the front porch against the backdrop of open fields along Highland Street, circa 1900.
2. Conjectural restoration of the Jones-Marshall house and the French mansard addition, the state of things between circa 1870 and 1882.
3. Big House and the farm, looking roughly north, fall of 1965 (aerial view). Before Highland Street was realigned to remove its sharp curve, the road passed within fifty feet of the house. The barn quadrangle has since been converted into a house. Due south lies the bowling alley/henhouse right of the tennis court, and further to the right, remains of the greenhouses. The most obvious remnants of the once famous apple orchards lie along Highland Street. Totally obscure is the Seckel pear orchard that once lay between the tennis court and Highland Street. Part of the smaller trotting track survives as the curving driveway edging a small field northeast of the barns, beyond the rooftop of a house that once was part of the Big House.
4. The Big House after Carl Fehmer's loosely colonial revival replacement of the original house and the landscaping improvements of Frederick Law Olmsted's firm. Glass plate by Sumner Paine, circa 1900.
5. Front parlor, circa 1900, dressed to the nines. The pictures are photographs of Old Masters. Note the pianist's light, a new fangled Edison bulb, probably with a bamboo filament (in 1967 one such bulb still burned in a monstrous cedar closet in the attic). The most important piece of furniture in the house is the ornate seventeenth century court cupboard beneath the stuffed birds. This choice item, which Wallace Nutting called the finest piece of oak in America, is now safely housed in the Massachusetts Historical Society.
6. Stair hall on the same occasion. Color the wallpaper green. The stair well extended up three stories to a skylight. The ceiling height is ten feet. The chrysanthemums come from the greenhouses.
7. The back parlor seen from the front parlor in a tableau by a youthful party, including Frank and Georgina, circa 1900.
8. Stair hall, circa 1940, under the new regime. Gone the hideous green wallpaper, replaced with rice paper. African safari trophies adorn the walls, and yachting trophies fill the cabinet. Photograph and darkroom work done on the premises by John Bryant Paine.
9. The Paines hosting a tennis party, ca. 1887-8. Front row (left to right): John Bryant Paine, Brenton H. Dickson, Mr. Preston (?) with racquet, and, reclining, Charles J. Paine Jr. Second row, fourth from left: young Helen Paine, unidentified, Julia Bryant Paine, unidentified, Gen. Charles J. Paine, unidentified. Back row: Sumner Paine is at far right.

IN MEMORIAM

It is our unhappy duty to record the passing of three outstanding members:

Harold Buckley Willis, Jr.
Frederick Rhodes Coburn
The Rev. Theodore Jones

We are grateful for their contributions, each in different ways and in somewhat different fields, but each of them genuine and generous. We shall miss them greatly and extend our sympathy to their families.

WESTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY, INC.

Schedule of Dues

Annual: $5 per person; $8 per family including children under 21
Life: $250 per person

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