

THE WESTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY BULLETIN



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HISTORICAL HUMOR OR ECONOMIC TESTIMONY?



Weston Bridge

The above drawing by H.O. Rider is from a booklet “Early Days in Auburndale, A Village Chronicle of Two Centuries: 1665-1870,” published by the Auburndale Women’s Club in the early 1900s. It represents the old bridge over the Charles River on Route 30, near the present Marriott Hotel; once upon a time this route was called the South County Road, nowadays it is referred to as South Avenue. We are reproducing it from the March 1980 issue of the BULLETIN.

As is evident, the Newton side of the bridge is built of stone in the shape of elegant arches. The Weston side is rather pedestrian and looks like it is made of wood. The steps lead to the duck feeding area.

What do you read into this picture? Is it humorous that Weston did not manage to keep up with Newton in style, elegance and show of affluence? Is it a testimony of Weston’s economic plight that it could afford only a wooden continuation of the stone arches? It is a “puzzlement”!

We hope that this unanswered question would bother some of you sufficiently to invest time, money and energy into pursuing this puzzle further. If you come up with the answer, including the years of the lifespan of the bridge and the reason why Weston looks like Little Orphan Annie on its side of the bridge, please let us know in a

typewritten note, and the winner will be rewarded with a copy of *ONCE UPON A PUNG* by Brent Dickson or *ONE TOWN IN THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION: WESTON, MASSACHUSETTS* by Brent Dickson and Homer Lucas (winner's choice). Deadline: August 31, 1994.

Vera Laska

Vera Laska received her PhD in American history from the University of Chicago and teaches at Regis College in Weston. She is a freelance writer and lecturer, has columns in several local newspapers and is editor of the Weston Historical Society BULLETIN.

THE HISTORY OF THE WESTON COMMON

The following article has been abbreviated from the brochure "Weston Town Common: A History," written by Nancy M. Fleming and privately printed by the Weston Garden Club on the occasion of its 50th anniversary in 1991. It has been prepared by Vera Laska, the editor of this BULLETIN, with the kind permission of Nancy M. Fleming of the Weston Garden Club.

The Weston Town Common as we know it today is to a large extent a gift we all inherited from some farsighted Weston residents of yesteryear and the master planner of this lovely center-piece of our town, the pioneering landscape architect Arthur A. Shurtleff.

Shurtleff was a disciple of the father of landscape architecture Frederick Law Olmsted, worked under his direction in Olmsted's firm before he made himself independent in 1905 in Boston. Olmsted's firm had several Weston clients, among them Horace S. Sears, who built his dream house called Haleiwa on the Boston Post Road, and the Weston native Arthur L. Coburn, who married a Weston school teacher and built a house near the golf club on Church Street.

Arthur A. Shurtleff (1870-1957) was a graduate of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and of Harvard. With his mentor Olmsted, he believed that the stress of modern times could be relieved by placing greenery such as parks, trees and shrubs among the urbanized buildings of towns and cities.

By 1911 wise Weston town fathers established a Town Improvement Committee, funded with \$500, to develop the town center into a practical, safe and at the same time esthetic unit. They engaged Shurtleff to come up with a plan.

By the end of the first decade of this century, the town of Weston contained slightly over 2,000 people, (of whom only about 40% were males eligible to vote). The TOWN REPORT for 1910 recorded 436 horses, 774 cows, 4,395 fowl, and 18,847 books in the Public Library.

The old village green evolved with history but without any systematic planning. At the time that Shurtleff submitted his first plan to the town in 1912 at a public hearing, some of the buildings we are familiar with now stood there, among them the First Parish Church (see photo. 1), the Public Library (see photo. 2), and the Josiah Smith Tavern, sometimes referred to as the Jones House for the name of the last family to have lived there (see photo. 3). Facing the library was the old Town Hall, put to many uses; for instance the Fire Department was in its basement. Nearby stood the Cutting Store and stables (see

photo. 1). The Cutting Store had a window for the post office. This central square was at times a confusing scramble of horses, people, carts, carriages and by 1911, automobiles. There was also a flagpole and an iron watering trough.



1. First Parish Church and Cutting Store (Weston Historical Society)

Shurtleff's several plans showed an evolving central common (see photo. 4). It included the razing of some buildings and the relocation of others. It envisioned a new Fire Station and Town Hall, (see photo. 5) both of which were eventually erected where we can see them now. For the new Town Hall that was to "preside" over the new Weston Common, the town allocated \$75,000, and Horace S. Sears added to that another \$20,000; it was dedicated on November 27, 1917, with Lt. Governor Calvin Coolidge delivering the inaugural speech.

The plan provided an improved traffic pattern that was more strategically acceptable and safer; meadow lands were drained and changed from swamp to dry land; the town common slowly acquired its own individuality. As Shurtleff wrote to the town of Weston on March 5, 1912:

The execution of this scheme would give Weston a town common of remarkable individuality and in many respects the finest open space of its kind in the Commonwealth. This plan would also guard the town against congestion at the centre and also avoid further traffic dangers, and at the same time head off the growth of a slum district in the west land behind the present Town-hall.

Truer words were seldom spoken.



*2. Weston Public Library, built in 1899
(Weston Historical Society)*



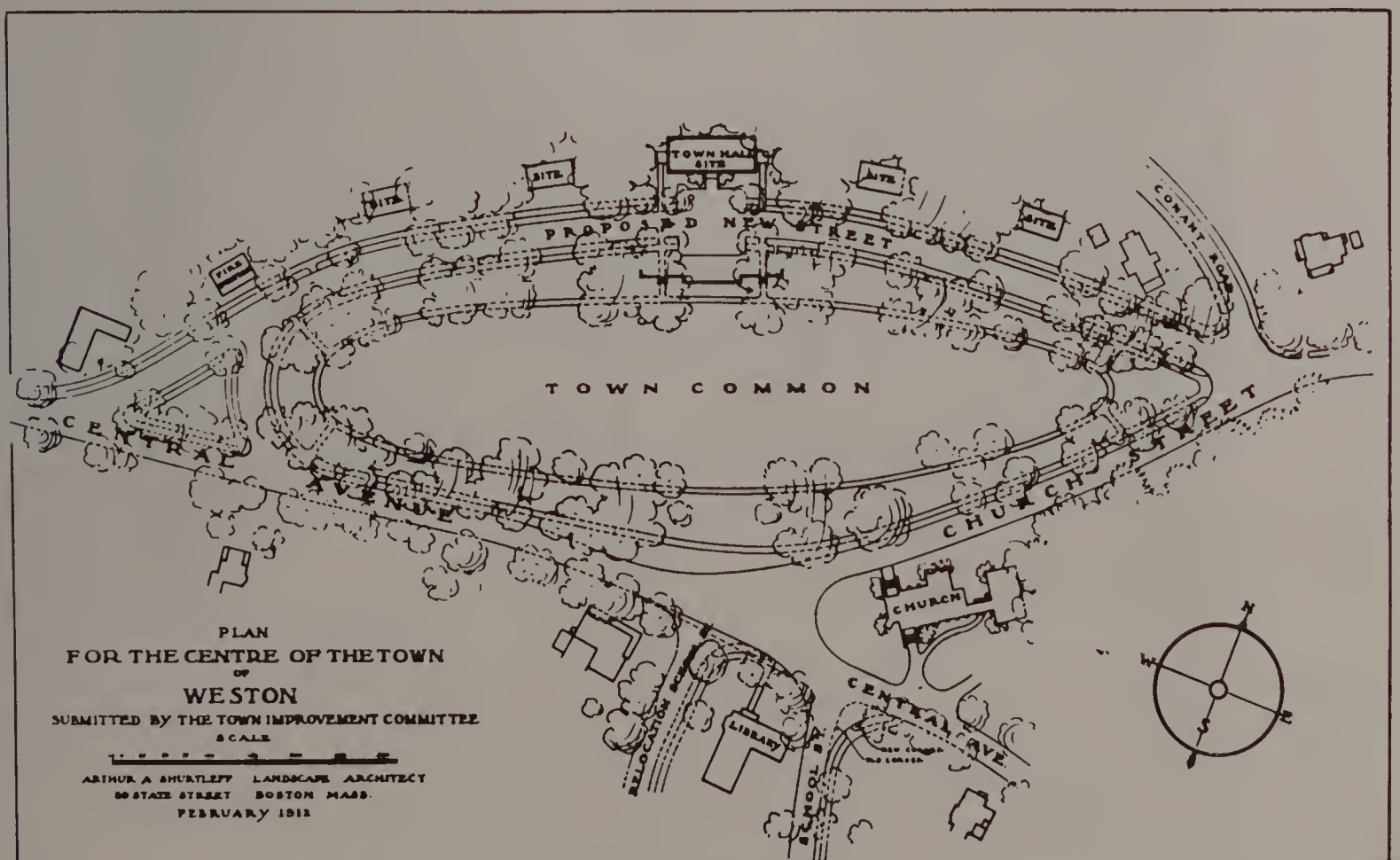
*3. Josiah Smith Tavern with the Barn on the left
(Weston Historical Society)*

But progress was slowed down by the needs for labor, materials and money for World War I. By the end of the war work picked up again.

Here we want to quote for reasons of historic sentimentality parts of a report of the Park Commissioners, among them Horace S. Sears, Arthur L. Coburn and Benjamin Blake, in December of 1919:

It was with a certain tinge of sadness that the citizens of the town watched the demolition of the old Town Hall with all its precious associations and memories – or merrymakings and parties – of the exhibitions, and graduation exercises – of the pleasant library room when the library was in its small beginnings – and of patriotic and philanthropic meetings when the walls echoed with eloquent and moving appeals. But it is pleasant to remember that its crowning service was during the last year of its honorable existence, when it offered spacious accommodations for the devoted and energetic labors of the workers for the Red Cross and French Wounded during the great war. And our thoughts cannot but go much further back to the same magnificent work that these walls looked down upon two generations ago when the country was nearly torn asunder by our own Civil War, and the noble patriotic women of this old town worked indefatigably for the comfort and relief of our soldiers whose saving remnant still lives in the Grand Army of the Republic, whom we all venerate and hold in undying gratitude and affectionate regard.

Finally the last touches preparing today's Weston Common were carried out. Care was taken of standing water and shabby grass; retaining walls were removed;



4. Shurtleff's 1912 plan for the Weston Town Common (Town of Weston, Annual Report for 1912)

exposed foundations were obliterated. Shrubbery was planted of native kind, such as common barberry, dogwood, witch hazel and woodbine; the center was planted with good grass. It became indeed a town common of remarkable esthetic value and in many respects, as Shurtleff originally predicted, “the finest open space of its kind in the Commonwealth.”

The Weston Garden Club, since its founding in 1941, devoted much tender loving care to the common. While during the war years its members took care of patients in army hospitals, after World War II they planted 500 daffodil bulbs on the south slope of the Town Common; they bloom every spring to the joy of all residents and visitors. In 1948 the Garden Club started the tradition of planting of the old watering trough next to the Common. Its members also carried out plantings around the Town Hall, at the flagpole island, and at the occasion of the town’s 250th anniversary in 1963 celebrated by the planting of forty-two white and pink dogwood trees on both sides of Town Hall.

Arthur A. Shurtleff went on to greater projects, such as using his talents as landscape architect at Colonial Williamsburg and at Old Sturbridge Village. In 1930 he Anglicized his name to Shurcliff – but that was long after he had written his name into Weston history with his legacy of the “finest open space of its kind in the Commonwealth.”



5. *The New Town Hall (1917)*
(*Photograph by Andrew J. Laska of Weston, 1994*)

WESTON'S OLD TAVERNS



Front view of the Golden Ball Tavern. For picture of the Josiah Smith Tavern, see photograph 3 on page 4.

Much of the early history of Weston comes alive with a visit to our two old taverns, the Josiah Smith Tavern and the Golden Ball Tavern, both located in the center of town on the Boston Post Road. Weston is fortunate to have two such venerable structures, carefully preserved, in which local historians have strived to keep the past in proper focus. Each building has a fascinating story to tell and each reveals its secrets in a different way.

Old inns and taverns, often called “ordinaries,” were an important and necessary part of daily life in colonial New England. The term “ordinary,” derived from the British, meant a place where all guests were served “ordinary” fare or a standard meal at a fixed price.

As early as 1634, towns were beginning to issue licenses to innkeepers, often the local magistrate, justice of the peace, or sheriff. It was actually mandatory in those times for each town to provide accommodations for travelers as well as their livestock, and there were strict laws governing them. Regulating the consumption and sale of “spirits” was one of the main concerns of town officials. One old tavern sign, for instance, spelled out such restrictions saying “a cupp each man at dynner & supp & no more.”

With the advent of the stagecoach, more and more inns and taverns began to spring up along the “post” roads that linked New England towns and cities together. Not only were the taverns or ordinaries a haven for weary travelers, but they were the social and political gathering places for the local population as well.

Throughout the events leading up to the Revolutionary War, the town taverns often became a hotbed of clandestine activities. They were frequently the rallying ground for the local militia, and as such, were often visited by spies, both Patriots and Tories, who dropped by in hopes of obtaining some important bits of information.

Both the Josiah Smith and the Golden Ball Taverns had their share of covert activities and “spy” incidents during this period. It was a well-known fact that Isaac Jones,

proprietor of the Golden Ball Tavern and a Tory sympathizer, had, on several occasions, harbored British spies. Townspeople, especially the “liberty boys,” did not take kindly to this fact.

The story that best illustrates Isaac’s tenuous position in town has been called “the Weston Tea Party,” which occurred in 1774, three months after the famous Boston Tea Party. Isaac Jones had ignored the Patriot ban on tea and continued to sell it to his customers. In March of 1774, an enraged mob stormed the tavern, “ransacked the whole House from Cellar to Garret” and “made free with the Bottles of Liquor in the Cellar.” Pressure was soon brought to bear on Isaac, who eventually changed his views, apologized, and joined the cause.

The Josiah Smith Tavern, on the other hand, was a popular gathering place for Patriots, and it was here that a British spy, Sargent John Howe, paid a visit on April 5, 1775. He had been sent from Boston on a scouting mission by General Gage to check the roads, bridges and crossings between Boston and Worcester and to find out what he could about the local sentiments. Howe’s disguise did not fool innkeeper Joel Smith, nor some of the local “liberty boys” standing about. After giving him a cup of rum and molasses, Smith quickly sent him on his way to keep him from being “tarred and feathered” by the suspicious men. (Howe, like Isaac Jones, was eventually to switch his allegiance to the Patriots’ cause.)

The Josiah Smith Tavern, built in 1757, is the oldest structure in the town center. The large, white, rambling building with a gambrel roof, a lean-to, and an attached barn, overlooks the town green. The main part of the house has two rooms displaying Weston artifacts and furnishings and is the headquarters for the Weston Historical Society. Members of the Museum Committee are currently updating and cataloguing the Society’s vast collection of records and memorabilia but welcome visitors on Wednesdays from 10-12 a.m. Other rooms in this town-owned building are used as town offices and for meetings by local organizations. The attached barn, restored and furnished by the Women’s Community League of Weston, Inc., is rented by them and used for their meetings and activities. Visitors are welcome on Tuesdays when “The Clothing Exchange,” a busy, fashionable, consignment shop, is in full swing and lunch is served.

The Golden Ball Tavern ceased operation as an inn and tavern in 1793 but remained as a residence to the Jones family until 1964. At that time it was acquired by the newly formed Golden Ball Trust. The mission of the Trust was to establish a museum “to present, illustrate, and teach the architectural, artistic, and social changes over the 200 years of the Isaac Jones family occupation of the tavern.” It remains today a unique archeological and historic museum, with furnished period rooms showing changes made by six generations of the same family. Many educational programs and special events centering on colonial life are held throughout the year. The museum is open for guided tours from 1:30 to 4:00 p.m., Wednesdays and Sundays, from April to November.

While “fine vittles and drink and a kleen bed” are no longer available at either the Josiah Smith or the Golden Ball Taverns, they are both still well worth a visit.

Mary Maynard has lived in Weston for 38 years and has been active in many local organizations. She currently chairs the Historians’ Committee at the First Parish Church and is on the Board of Directors of the Weston Historical Society. She is the author of a series of Yankee Guide Books focusing on New England, and parts of the above article are excerpted from her latest book, HOUSES WITH STORIES, released in March, 1994 by Yankee Books.

OUR OLD HOUSE – A REMEMBRANCE

Our old house at 465 South Avenue, once called South County Road, used to be named Train's Tavern. One can imagine the smoke coming from the burning logs in the fireplace mixing with that of the customers' pipes... This was not an inn where one spent the night, but rather what we would call a pub.

Drovers on their way East, farmers from Boston with empty wagons but full purses, would relax and feel free to talk with their friends about politics, farming or whatever the local gossip might have brought up, concerning perhaps a leading citizen whose love for a maiden was not required.

This ancient house was built in 1802 by Isaac Train. It proudly wears a round plaque that testifies that it is among the fifty oldest houses in Weston. We bought the place in 1946, when I returned from the Air Force after World War II. I collected my family in Minneapolis and returned to New England. Our daughter experienced her first birthday in this house.



The old house, so full of memories

With its seven fireplaces, chair railings and low ceilings, it was easy, during candlelight suppers, to imagine hearing the farmers hitching their horses to the posts, covering their animals against the bitter cold, and crashing through the front door of the tavern, shaking snow off their thick coats and boots, boisterously greeting old friends, backing to the warm fire, and ordering a draft of cider, or if with a full purse, a drink of hot rum.

We lived there almost forty years... had a son, then a horse for our daughter, and a small flower garden for all of us...

I look back on our residence in this old house, our first, with great pleasure and with some sadness. Sitting before the fire on a cold winter evening during peaceful family times, before television... at Christmas all seven mantels decorated cheerfully... or relaxing on our porch on a hot summer evening, with the smell of lilacs in the air... It all seems like a dream without reality.

But it was there, and so were we, once, oh, so long ago.

George Frazee Amadon

George F. Amadon is a native of Framingham. During World War II he served in the Pacific as senior gunner in a B-29, with 37 missions over Japan. He received the Distinguished Flying Cross and a Purple Heart. He is author of the book The Rise of the Ironclads (1988, now in its third printing). His civilian career included national marketing with the Howard Johnson Co. and retailing with the Sears-Roebuck Co. He has lived in Weston since 1946 and is working on a second book.

THE TWO WESTON FLAGPOLES

During my years in Weston – and I have lived here since 1951 – the town has owned two flagpoles. Both of their existences have involved the late Ralph Woodworth, a lifelong resident of Weston.

The first flagpole stood on the site of the present one. It was erected as a World War I memorial. The tree from which the 100-110 foot pole was manufactured was shipped via the Panama Canal to Boston, where it was tooled in the Boston shipyard that used to make masts for sailing ships. At its completion, it was the longest single piece pole in the country. Because of transportation difficulties in those days, the pole had to be shipped to Portsmouth in New Hampshire, then overland to Weston. There the proud flagpole stood until Tuesday, June 25, 1968.

It was in the late 1940s that Ralph Woodworth was observing the painting of the flagpole. The painter had been hoisted aloft in a chair-like contraption to perform this operation. Suddenly there was a cry, and camera in hand, Mr. Woodworth snapped the photograph of the unfortunate painter as he hurtled to the ground. The picture of this incident appeared on the front page of the Boston Herald. The painter, though injured, survived to tell the tale. Thus ended Mr. Woodworth's involvement number one.

It was approximately twenty years later, that Mr. Woodworth became involved a second time in the story of the Weston flagpole. This was on a sultry Tuesday in June, 1968. Dark, threatening clouds appeared from the West, and shortly after that, a bolt of lightning felled the magnificent flagpole. Ralph Woodworth headed up an ad hoc committee of patriotic residents to raise money and purchase a new pole.

He approached the Board of Selectmen, chaired by "Bud" Koester, with a proposal to duplicate the tall Douglas fir pole and to restore the original bronze eagle to its top. Donald W. Pigeon, president of the Pigeon Hollow Company, estimated the total cost of the project from beginning to end to come to \$8,045. At a Special Town Meeting held in December of that year, the town voted to appropriate the necessary funds for the restoration of the flagpole.

During the years 1969-1970, Mr. Woodworth was instrumental in obtaining an American flag from the famous World War II battleship Missouri. It is a huge flag, and it may be observed on national holidays flying from the 110 foot Douglas fir flagpole next to the Town Hall.

Samuel R. Payson

Samuel R. Payson, a longtime Weston resident, retired from a career as an insurance broker. He is a charter member of the Weston Historical Society. Morris Earl, also a Weston resident, helped with tracking down some of the facts and figures for this article.



INTRODUCING: SABRA L. JONES

Sabra L. Jones, whose four generations of Jones family Weston roots go back to the 1800s, is the new President of the Weston Historical Society. Sabra, having been born and raised in Weston, graduated from Weston High School in 1978. Recruited as a competitive springboard diver to Indiana University in Bloomington, Indiana, she graduated in 1982 with her B.A. in Political Science. Subsequently Sabra returned to Weston for a family trip around the world, then attended Boston University School of Law from which she earned her Juris Doctor degree in 1986. After years as a trial associate with a greater Boston law firm, in

1990 Sabra returned to Weston to succeed to the practice of her father, Aubrey E. Jones (disabled for health reasons), and to expand her own practice within the firm of Jones & Jones. In 1993, she merged Jones & Jones with another local attorney, Jonathan A. White, of Freeman & White, to form the firm of Jones & White for the purpose of continuing to engage in a broad general practice of law, including litigation, from their offices at 30 Colpitts Road.

Active in a variety of town matters, Sabra has served as a member of the Board of Directors of the Weston Historical Society since 1989, as the Society's Secretary from 1990-1993, and since November of 1993 as the Society's President. Similarly, in 1990 she was one of the first two women to be inducted simultaneously into the Rotary Club of Weston and, as of July 1994, will become the first woman ever to serve as its President.

Professionally, she is a member of the Massachusetts Bar Association and lectures, on a regular, monthly basis, at the U.S. Small Business Association's S.C.O.R.E. workshops concerning "The Legal Aspects of Starting Your Own Business."

In her rare spare time Sabra enjoys historical novels and documentaries, skiing, golf, horseback riding, volleyball and more recently, fly fishing. Most importantly, however, Sabra takes great satisfaction in perpetuating the extended Jones family's legacy of public service to our beloved town.

MESSAGE FROM THE EDITOR

Unfortunately, the Weston Historical Society's BULLETIN has not been published for the last two and a half years. Our last issue was dated August, 1991; it was Volume XXIV, No. 3.

We are now resuming the publication of the BULLETIN. This is the Spring, 1994 issue, Volume XXV, No. 1. For the time being, we shall publish two issues per year, Spring and Fall. Members will automatically receive the BULLETIN by mail.

You might notice some changes in the BULLETIN. On the one hand, editorial policy will be somewhat stricter, approximating a more academic documentation; on the other hand, the philosophy behind the contents will be more liberal, by which we mean that we shall try to open windows to humor and include more articles dealing with people and their stories, about their laughter and their tears. Both prose and poetry will qualify. Articles will be written not only by professional and amateur historians but also by YOU, our members.

This then is an appeal and invitation to one and all, members and/or non-members, to put on your writing caps and search your memories for interesting vignettes from your lives in Weston. Between cradle and grave, there must be hundreds of stories floating around: a funny or tragic incident that happened in school, yesterday or years ago; your cat stuck in a tree (which reminds me to write about the raccoon stuck in our bedroom a few years ago), a sentimental journey, a never to be forgotten friend. All these tales are colorful little stones that make up the mosaic of our history.

Do not think that you can not write. Just take that paper and pen and tell it as it was, as if you were talking to a friend. And remember: whatever happened yesterday is HISTORY!

If you send us an article, always keep a copy for yourself. The Editorial Board reserves the right to print or not to print your contribution and also to edit it. It should be one to eight pages long, typed, double spaced, with one inch margins. Please indicate your sources in footnotes on the same page if you are quoting from letters, books, documents or interviews. Photographs are very welcome and must be identified: who, when, where is depicted on them, possibly also who took them and when. Naturally, if you are telling your own story, no footnotes are necessary. At the end include your name, address and telephone number, and a sentence or two about yourself. We can return manuscripts only if accompanied by a self-addressed, stamped envelope.

Send you contributions to The Editor, Weston Historical Society BULLETIN, Box 343, Weston, MA 02193.

For your information, the members of the Editorial Board are: Frederick A. Crafts III., Mary Maynard, Samuel Payson and Joseph Verovsek.

Dr. Vera Laska, Editor

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Membership dues: Individual \$10, family \$15, life \$250. Contributions and bequests to the Endowment and Memorial Fund are welcome. Make checks payable to the Weston Historical Society, Inc. and mail them to the Weston Historical Society, Box 343, Weston, Massachusetts 02193. Contributions are tax deductible. Additional copies of the BULLETIN may be obtained at \$2 each by mailing payment to the Society.