

THE WESTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY BULLETIN



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HISTORICAL PUZZLE

This photograph of eleven charming young ladies was found in a box marked “Weston High School Alumni Association, c. 1866 -.” Can you identify any of the faces? Try to compare them with photos in your family album. If successful, please call George Amadon at 893-8870.

We have literally hundreds of photographs at the Museum of the Weston Historical Society, most of them without any indication of time, place and subject. We are calling for longtime residents of Weston to come and try to identify at least some of these photos, which could be a treasure trove of Weston history. Come and see us on Wednesdays between 10 and 12 a.m. at the Josiah Smith Tavern.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF WESTON, 1638 - 1995

Wherever one looks, Weston's land shows the marks of glacial action. Its few relatively open fields, boulder strewn, and now defined by stone walls, are the lake bed of the glacial Lake Sudbury which covered most of the area around Weston, as well as Weston itself. The natural dike which held back the lake waters is in the eastern part of Weston, and the breach through which the waters drained is still visible today. A "glacial erratic," a large boulder said to be at the geographical center of Weston, was carried here by the glacier from its original ledge twenty-five miles away. The water courses which drained away from the glacier's retreating mass became Indian trails which were quickly broadened and deepened by the first European settlers. State highways Routes 117, 20 and 30 follow these old trails.

Weston was first known as the Farmers Precinct of Watertown, and was surveyed in 1638 in order to allocate holdings. The first allotments were disputed, and the area was nicknamed "The Lands of Contention." A later survey, in 1663, was accepted by the settlers, and the area became the Third Middlesex Precinct.

Church attendance on the Sabbath was compulsory, but travel to the church in the eastern part of Watertown was burdensome for farmers in the outlying area. After many petitions and angry debates, the General Court in 1710 acted on a petition to incorporate the Farmers Precinct as the parish (town) of Weston, and the Town of Weston was formally established in 1713.

The local residents had, however, already started building their own church in 1695, a building which was never completed. Another meeting house, on the site of the present First Parish Church, was begun in 1721. This building was remodelled and repaired in 1800, and two porches and a steeple were added. The church also bought a bell, still in the present church, from Paul Revere for \$443.12, an allowance of \$72.89 being made for the original bell (a part of the loot from the Battle of Bennington, or so it is said).

The First Parish was not only the center of the town's religious life. It was also the administrator for town affairs for most of the eighteenth century. Unfortunately, both the parish records and the precinct records for the period 1713 - 1746 have disappeared. The Town of Lincoln separated from Weston in 1746 (again, over church attendance difficulties, Weston having been negligent in maintaining its roads). The records then reappear.

Other denominations, the Baptists in 1776 and the Methodists in 1794, were gaining parishioners, and in 1820 were exempted from paying tithes to maintain the First Parish. A Town Hall replaced the church as the meeting place for administration of town affairs shortly thereafter.

Weston schools have a long and mostly honorable place in the history of the town. Salary for a school master was first voted in 1650, for a Mr. Richard Norcross, who continued in this capacity for more than fifty years. Classes were generally held in private homes, until district schools were built, when town affairs passed out of the hands of the First Parish. A high school was built in 1875 with town funds, and the Weston public school system has become a major attraction to people moving to the area.

The town also voted funds for the establishment of a public library, in 1857. It was housed in the Town Hall for many years. Public spirited citizens saw to it that in 1899

work started on a library which until 1995 has served Weston residents. A new, modern library now stands near the town center.

The early settlers were, from their first arrival, accustomed to the use of firearms and organized themselves in military units as trained bands and alarm men. They saw action during Indian raids and during the French and Indian Wars. They were ready, when on the morning of April 19, 1775 news reached Weston of the British foray into Concord. Colonel Samuel Lamson mustered one hundred men in front of the church and marched to join in the attacks on the retreating British troops. Weston's residents have served their country in all its military engagements since. Bronze plaques on the walls of the Town Hall bear the names of Westonians who served in the two World Wars.

Although established as a Farmers Precinct, Weston's mostly thin, rocky, acid soils could not sustain commercial crops. The farmers soon turned to animal husbandry, importing hay and grain to supplement their pasturage.

The roads leading north, west and south from Boston through Weston did, however, provide a profitable alternative to farming. Inns were soon established on these highways. The Golden Ball Tavern and the Josiah Smith Tavern, now historical sites, remain as vivid reminders of those days. The Flagg Tavern, also on the Boston Post Road, at which General Washington and his aides overnighted on October 23, 1789, was destroyed by fire in about 1906, but the chimneys were still standing in 1940.

The town's storekeepers also served the travelling public as well as Weston residents. Lieutenant Jones' account books dated 1745 record his transactions in beef, clothing and lumber as well as his banking activities. The Lamson family, noted earlier, kept a dry goods store on the Post Road which was famous in the area for the quality of its merchandise. The Lamsons were succeeded as storekeepers by the George Cutting family whose store, moved from its original site beside the old town hall when the new Town Common was built, continued in business until the 1930s.

The water courses noted earlier were also put to profitable use. Weston was the site of many small mills and factories. Saw mills, grist mills and a tannery were first, but later came machine shops for tools and machinery for the cotton mills, and wood working shops, for school furniture.

Weston's streams were too small to allow effective competition with the nearby Charles River, and Waltham and Watertown became factory towns. The streams did, however, prove attractive to the City of Cambridge Water Authority, and so the Weston mills were dismantled. The last industry in Weston was the Hastings Organ Factory, and it closed its doors in 1936, a victim of the Great Depression.

Some dairy farms persisted in Weston until the 1920s. Many of the farms, however, had been bought by Boston merchants and professional men in the late 1800s, first as summer homes, but later as year-round estates. These people were active in town affairs, and much of the quality of Weston living is owing to their care.

Most of these large estates are gone now. The Merriam and Morrison estates were bought in the 1920s by the Catholic Church, the first for Weston College (now the Campion Center), and the second for the Regis College campus. The Case Estates were given to the Arnold Arboretum by the last Case heirs. The Hubbard estate donated a large tract of land along the Charles River to the state for public recreation. This has become the Leo T. Martin public golf course. Some of the holdings were acquired by the town

as town forest, conservation land, or municipal purposes land under state regulation. Large areas were taken over by the state for distribution reservoirs. It may be noted that Weston is the uncompensated guardian of water quality for both Cambridge and Boston.

Weston now is a privileged enclave in the midst of urban sprawl, a desirable status address for professional people whose real interests lie elsewhere, as voting patterns demonstrate. Registered voters in Weston number about 6,500, but the average turnout over the last ten years for town elections and town meetings was fewer than 1,000. The town is well served by its employees, few of whom can afford to live in town. The cost of land in Weston makes it difficult to find locations for affordable housing, either for these employees, the elderly, or for minorities. The small group of concerned residents man the many boards, committees and commissions, with the overall guidance of three selectmen and the capable town administrator, Mr. Ward Carter. It is by their efforts that Weston's sense of community is kept alive.

Douglas Henderson

Douglas Henderson is a lifelong resident of Weston and a graduate of Weston High School. He received his Bachelor's degree from Boston University and his Master's degree from the Fletcher School of Diplomacy at Tufts University. His career at the Department of State took him to Mexico, Chile, Peru and Switzerland, culminating in the U.S. ambassadorship in Bolivia. He also served as U.S. representative with the Organization of American States in Washington, D.C. Parts of this article appeared in the 1995 - 96 guide "Living in Wellesley and Weston" of the Ruby Press.

EDITOR'S NOTE: More details about Weston history can be found in the following books:

Hurd, D. Hamilton, *The History of Middlesex County*, 3 vols., Philadelphia: J.W. Lewis, 1890.

Lamson, Daniel, *History of the Town of Weston, Massachusetts*, Weston: no publisher, 1913.

Ripley, Emma F., *Weston, A Puritan Town*, Weston: The First Parish, 1961.

*Dickson, Brenton H. and Lucas, Homer C. *One Town in the American Revolution: Weston, Massachusetts*, Weston: Weston Historical Society, 1976.

Reminiscences of old Weston are contained in Brenton H. Dickson's

**Once Upon a Pung*, Weston: by the author, 1963, and

**Random Recollections*, Weston: by the author, 1977.

Books marked with an asterisk are on sale at the museum of the Weston Historical Society for \$7.50 a copy, Wednesdays between 10 and 12 a.m. (Think of Christmas presents).

HISTORY IN PICTURES THE WESTON PUBLIC LIBRARY



The old Weston Public Library, 1899 - 1995, on the corner of School Street and the Boston Post Road. The only clue as to the date of this postcard is the note that it requires a 1¢ stamp for domestic and 2¢ stamp for foreign mailing. The U.S. Postal Service informs us that these rates were in use from 1919 to 1925 and again from 1929 to 1952.



Photo Andrew J. Laska

The new Weston Public Library, at 87 School Street, on the corner of Alphabet Lane, opened on Monday, April 10, 1995 at 10 a.m. Opening celebration took place on Sunday, May 7, 1995 from 2 to 4 p.m.



School Reunion, Kendal Green, (Weston) Mass.

JUNE 24, 1893.

PROGRAMME.

2.00 to 3.30—Reception at the Schoolhouse by

Mrs. Maria A. (Warren) Pierce,	Mr. Alonza S. Fiske,
Mrs. Mary J. (Hastings) Giddings,	Mr. F. H. Hastings,
Miss Annie C. Coburn,	Mr. Arthur L. Coburn.
Miss Alice Tucker.	

3.30 to 5.00—Social Intercourse, Rambles, Games, Etc.,

At the Ball Ground, at the Tennis Court, at the Residence of Mr. F. H. Hastings, and in the woods and fields; and at Hastings Hall.

5.00 to 6.00—Supper at the Large Tent.

6.00 to 6.30—Brief Exercises at the Large Tent.

- 1.—A HISTORY OF THE OLD SCHOOL, prepared by Miss Elizabeth S. Gowing and Miss Mary Frances Pierce; read by Arthur L. Coburn.
- 2.—SHORT ADDRESSES by Rev. C. F. Russell and others.
- 3.—POEM, Whittier's "Reunion," read by Wm. H. Coburn.
- 4.—"AULD LANG SYNE."—All Singing.

CLOSING HYMN.

“Auld Lang Syne.”



Should auld acquaintance be forgot.
And never brought to mind ;
Should auld acquaintance be forgot,
And songs of auld lang syne ?
For auld lang syne we meet to-night,
For auld lang syne ;
To sing the songs our fathers sang
In days of auld lang syne.

We've passed through many varied scenes,
Since youth's unclouded day ;
And friends and hopes and happy dreams
Time's hand hath swept away ;
And voices that once joined with ours,
In days of auld lang syne,
Are silent now, and blend no more
In songs of auld lang syne.

But when we cross the sea of life,
And reach the heavenly shore,
We'll sing the songs our fathers sing,
Transcending those of yore :
We'll meet to sing diviner strains
Than those of auld lang syne,
Immortal songs of praise, unknown
In days of auld lang syne.

On reverse side of the announcement, the rarely seen full text of “Auld Lang Syne:”

QUERY -- Mystery Manuscript

We have in our possession a dark blue, 8 × 11 inch, three-ring binder, with several hundreds of typed pages without pagination, without a cover page that would indicate author, title, date or any other information leading to the solving of the mystery of what this manuscript really is.

The first page starts thus: “H1.50.1, Massachusetts Historical Guide,” followed by an introduction and chronology, indicating events from 1600 to 1800.

The volume is the result of endless hours of work and sincere tender loving care. We are looking for the AUTHOR!

V. L.

THE 1995 ANNUAL CHARTER ANNIVERSARY DINNER

The Annual Charter Anniversary Dinner took place on Thursday, May 11th, 1995 at the Upper Student Union Lounge of Regis College, starting with wine and cheese at 6 p.m., dinner at 6:45 p.m. and the speaker's presentation at 8:15.

The speaker was professor William Fowler, chairman of the Department of History at Northeastern University and editor of *The New England Quarterly*; his topic: "History of Boston Harbor". This was the second appearance of Professor Fowler at our Society.

He presented a convincing case that the past as well as the future of Boston depends upon the activity in and around Boston Harbor.

The Atlantic provided the early colonists with a source of food, the "sacred cod," and a strong defense against the French and the Spanish. The safety of a large, protected harbor encouraged shipbuilding and trading in a city whose major homes and commercial businesses faced the sea. Colonial farmers from communities such as Weston provided additional food products and raw materials which became the basis for a very profitable Massachusetts trade within the British Empire. This trade generated the great fortunes which helped finance the revolution against the mother country. John Hancock's considerable success as a merchant, smuggler, and revolutionary leader would have been impossible without the strong development of the harbor as a center of transatlantic trade.

Having separated themselves from the control of the British monarchy in 1776, Massachusetts residents found themselves abruptly "thrust out of the British Empire, losing the protection of the British Navy and the guaranteed markets of the Empire." Consequently, the Barbary pirates, seeing U.S. ships as fair game, chose to force ship captains to pay or fight. The *U.S.S. Constitution*, currently undergoing extensive renovations, was one of three frigates built to meet this challenge to U.S. shipping rights. Professor Fowler described the ship as a "living symbol of the maritime crafts and skills of the early nineteenth century."

Trade and shipbuilding prospered in the nineteenth century, and therefore Boston prospered. Donald McKay, from Nova Scotia, built the fastest ships that ever sailed. His clipper ships broke records traveling to Britain, California, and China and made Boston one of the best-known towns in the world. Fitzhugh Lane came to paint scenes of the town waterfront, as metropolitan as any in the country in the variety of its languages and the travels of its people.

The Civil War ended this successful era; with the Confederates threatening to burn Union ships, ship owners rushed to register their ships under other flags, and the tonnage of the U.S. merchant marine plummeted. Boston Harbor never recovered from this change, as merchants and ship captains retreated to the coastwise trade in timber and coal.

The combined impact of railroad expansion and competition with New York challenged and ultimately defeated, the prominence of Boston. As people began to look inland for travel and markets, a popular saying was heard: "People who went to the sea for fun would go to hell on a lark." In spite of this view, many wealthy individuals did look to the sea for their entertainment, organizing yacht clubs and sailing "down east" to Bar Harbor, while others found a boat trip to New York City an inviting vacation.

By the end of the nineteenth century, Boston Harbor had lost much of its commerce, in large part because of the difficulties of redeveloping an area which had been designed

and artificially filled to meet the needs of a much earlier time. Rail lines did not go directly to the docks because of houses and warehouses built tightly together near the port. South Boston had the rail yards, while East Boston had the cargo lines. When the shipping industry adopted the steel container as the standard unit of shipping, further damage was done to the port because Boston does not have the large parking and loading areas required for the most economical use of containers.

Professor Fowler listed a host of difficulties in rejuvenating the port, including the small parking lots, Boston traffic, poor linking of rails and roads, bridges over railroads in New England which are not high enough to accommodate double-stacked containers being shipped to and from ports, terminals surrounded by residential areas, and the building of the Third Harbor Tunnel, which will prevent dredging lower than thirty-six feet.

Why should we care? Boston imports virtually everything it needs, and water is still the least expensive method of transportation. The Harbor promises to be a great playground for the twenty-first century, and in a global economy, trade will be more important than ever.

Professor Fowler's illustrations of the history of the Harbor through his slides supported his thesis that the Harbor has been under constant change. Visit the *U.S.S. Constitution Museum* (Boston Naval Shipyard, 242-0543 and Charlestown Naval Shipyard, 426-1812) and take a walking tour of the waterfront district given by Boston By Foot (367-2345: \$7.00) if you would like to learn more about the past and present of Boston Harbor, one of our greatest natural resources.

Lee Marsh

Lee Marsh is a long-time Weston resident and one of the outstanding teachers in the Department of History in the Weston High School. She has been the initiator of numerous innovative history programs, connecting her students to town history.

MEMORIAL DAY 1995

Memorial Day of 1995 was celebrated in Weston on Monday, May 29th in the Town Hall and in front of it at the flagpole. After the ringing of the Paul Revere bell, the service started at 10 a.m. Welcoming remarks were spoken by *George F. Amadon* as follows:

We welcome those who join us in a common desire to leave our fractured society behind us on this day, when we meet together to embrace the old-fashioned values. We are honoring our veterans who have died, were wounded, and served in our armed forces to bring peace and tranquility to our daily lives. We must also credit those who waited, worked and prayed for the safe return of their loved ones.

Welcome to the 116th Memorial Day Celebration in the town of Weston. According to the town records, the first official celebration was in 1879 when the town cornet band was paid forty dollars for their performance.

The first unofficial memorial service took place in Columbia, Mississippi on April 25, 1866, when the ladies of that town scattered flowers over the graves of their beloved confederate sons and husbands. They also decorated the graves of some 40

union soldiers who were buried nearby. The first official day of remembrance was designated by General John A. Logan, Commander-In-Chief of the G.A.R., a union veterans organization, on the 30th of May, 1868. No compassion was shown for the confederate dead. Later still, the last Monday in May became a national holiday to honor veterans of all wars. We now also remember, on this day, our loved ones and friends who are forever gone from us.

We have come together this morning to honor the man and women of the Army, Navy, Marines and Air Force who have given their lives in battle defending our world against aggression. They have lost their lives in far away places, at Louisburg, San Juan Hill, Mexico, Gettysburg, seven miles in the air over Tokyo and 200 feet beneath the North Atlantic, Iwo Jima and the Coral Sea. We have not forgotten Korea nor Vietnam. We honor on this day the veterans who had returned and those no longer with us.

50 years ago this year, peace was declared after VE and VJ days were celebrated. This year we again enjoy a relative peaceful existence. May the good Lord allow this to continue.

George F. Amadon



Gen. William A. Knowlton, Ret.

Our speaker for the day was four star general of the U.S. Army, William A. Knowlton, ret., born in 1920 in Weston, who invoked the poet Henry W. Longfellow to express his feelings:

Often in thought I go up and down
The pleasant streets of that dear old town
And my youth comes back to me.

Gen. Knowlton mentioned several Weston men who were decorated for bravery in World War II: Fred Talbott won the Navy Cross for sinking a Japanese warship; Jimmy Funderburk got the Silver Star for Gallantry in Action for bringing his burning plane back from a mission over Rumania; Knowlton himself received the same decoration for reconnaissance duty at Berlin before the American-Russian meeting on the Elbe. "There were many Distinguished Flying Crosses and many, many Air Medals won by men from here," he said.

Jack Pringle left from his freshman year at Harvard to enter the British army; he received three Military Crosses, one of them for escaping from a Nazi POW camp; he was in eleven prisons, in four countries, and escaped six times!

Henry Atkins was awarded the Bronze Star in 1947, but the army could not locate him then; so belatedly, gen. Knowlton pinned the medal on him.

The speaker also ventured on debated grounds when he touched upon the present controversy around the Smithsonian's exhibit of the plane that dropped the atomic bomb on Japan in 1945. The text has been challenged by many, and the exhibit reduced. The Japanese were not exactly behaving in the spirit of bushido, and the Americans were not brutes.

Gen. Knowlton also mentioned by name several Weston men who did not come back. We regret tht we can not print his entire speech verbatim because of the limits of space. But his speech is on file under “Memorial Day, 1995” at the Museum of the Weston Historical Society. A memorable speech, based on admirable research. We thank Gen. Knowlton for his speech, a real gift to the town of Weston.

Vera Laska



Stephen Thomas Riley

PRESENTING: Stephen Thomas Riley

Stephen T. Riley, or Steve, as he is known to his friends of whom there are many in and around Weston, was born in Worcester, Massachusetts in 1908, and moved to Weston with his wife Alice in 1952. From 1977 to 1984 he was president of the Weston Historical Society. Until his health failed, he was one of its directors, a tavern keeper of the Golden Ball and a member of the Weston Historic Commission.

An historian, Steve received his A.B., magna cum laude, A.M. and Ph.D. degrees, as well as an honorary LHD, from Clark University, on whose board of trustees he served for many years. He was associated with the prestigious Massachusetts Historical Society, first as assistant librarian and ultimately as its Director. He retired in 1976.

After enlisting in the Army in World War II, he was chosen for the University of Pennsylvania Army Specialized Training Program, which gave him some facility in the kind of Arabic spoken in North Africa. He completed the course but too late; the war had already moved from North Africa into Italy, where the Army had no need for his newly acquired skill. The Army did need him, nonetheless, as a cryptographer, first in Cairo and later in Abadan at the head of the Persian Gulf, reputed to be one of the hottest places on earth. There Steve spent his winter holidays wistfully dreaming of a white Christmas. It was during one of his six-hour shifts at the coding and decoding deck, however, that he was the lucky man to receive and forward to Chungking a momentous message: the Japanese have surrendered. Whenever on leave, he made the most of his tenure in biblical lands, setting foot in such unlikely places as UR of the Chaldees.

He was active in state historic commissions and was a member of the administrative body of the papers of three of our Founding Fathers. Visiting committees he participated in included those of the Boston College Library, the Harvard History Department, the Harvard University Press, Winterthur and Colonial Williamsburg. Among his publications are numerous articles contributed to historical journals. As a volunteer during retirement, he edited with Edward W. Hanson the papers by Robert Treat Paine, a signer of the Declaration of Independence. These papers had been given to the Massachusetts Historical Society by the Paine family of Weston. Volumes I and II were published in 1992.

On the lighter side, the Rileys were enthusiastic campers, crisscrossing the country from Alaska to Key West. They also saw something of the rest of the world, though scarcely in their trusty VW camper!

In addition to memberships in historical organizations, Steve was a fellow of the Royal Society of Arts and Manufacturers. He belonged to the Harvard Travellers Club, the St. Botolph Club and the Grolier Club of New York. He is a fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and an honorary member of the Club of Odd Volumes.

Steve has been confined to the Kathryn Barton Nursing Home in Wayland with Alzheimer's disease since November, 1991.

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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. Statements and/or opinions expressed in the articles are not necessarily those of the editor, the Editorial Board or the Weston Historical Society. ISSN 1083-9712.