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The 1888 First Parish Church.

THE FIRST PARISH CHURCH IN WESTON

The Four Churches, 1698 - 1997

During the nearly 300 years which spanned the period from the founding of the parish in Weston in 1698, to today, 1997, four church buildings have stood almost on the same spot on the same ''green knoll'' in Weston center.

It was here on Sunday mornings in the middle of the seventeenth century where the farmers and their families, the ''Inhabitants of the West End of the Town of Watertown,'' gathered to begin their long and often difficult journey on foot or by horse-drawn cart, in all kinds of weather, to their church approximately ten miles away. It was also on this

spot where they met the group from Lincoln who joined them, coming over ''a rough path,'' now in part Conant Road. Together, they made the long trek to the most easterly side of Watertown on the Cambridge line. Not only was it a long trip, but once there, they had to remain for both a morning and an afternoon service, each lasting two to three hours. Their return trip home was often made in the dark over poor roads.

In 1694 the farmers from the West End of Watertown petitioned the General Court to be set off into a separate precinct and to build their own meetinghouse. They cited the great distance to the Watertown church and protested against being obligated to journey far from home. It took more than three years before their petition was granted, in 1698.

In the meantime the inhabitants of what is now Weston, then referred to as the ''Farmer's Precinct,'' began, in 1696, to build their first meetinghouse on the old gathering spot. The land was given by Nathaniel Coolidge and formally deeded to the First Parish in 1715 by his son, Jonathan, for the sole purpose of building a meetinghouse.

The terms ''meetinghouse'' and ''church'' are often employed loosely. Technically, the first is a structure used for both secular and religious purposes, whereas the second is primarily a house of worship. Some old New England church buildings are still sometimes called meetinghouses, and going to church is ''going to meeting.''

1. The 1698 Church

Architect's sketch of the 1698 Church, based on historical information.

No pictures of the first meetinghouse exist, but according to old Parish records, it was described as ''a rough hewn structure, built of logs,'' according to a later description by Rev. Francis B. Hornbrooke, thirty-three feet square, with a hard dirt floor and wooden benches. The little congregation of 18 men (women were not members at first) and their families who met in this humble dwelling ''were called together,'' said Rev. Hornbrooke, ''not by the ringing of any bell, but by the beating of a drum. It was fitting that a people should be called to worship as they were called to the defense of their homes.'' [1]

According to custom, men sat on one side, women and girls on the other, and boys somewhere under the watchful eye of the tithing man. A minister of that day timed his sermon with an hourglass and often turned it over for several runs of sand. Pity the poor boy who grew restless and fidgety and was made to go and sit with his mother and sisters! Although this building was used for the next twenty-four years for all church and town meetings, it was never completed.

2. The 1722 Church

The 1722 Church, updated in 1800.

By 1721, the rustic little meetinghouse, sadly in need of repair and no longer large enough to accommodate the growing congregation, was torn down, and a new, larger colonial style meetinghouse was erected.

It was built of solid oak timber with a bell tower and large windows. The interior had a gallery around three sides, square, high-backed pews, hinged seats called slam seats, and a raised pulpit with a sounding board. A small Canadian bell, brought back from Canada by Weston soldiers who served in the French and Indian Wars, hung in the bell tower.

In 1800 this meetinghouse was completly updated. It was repaired and painted, two porches adjoined, as well as a steeple added to the lower tower, and a much larger bell ordered from the Paul Revere foundry. Weighing 997 lbs. and costing $72.88, raised by private subscription, it bears the inscription: ''P.R. and Sons, 1801,'' and remains today one of the church's most cherished possessions.

This meetinghouse, having already stood for seventy-eight years on ''Meeting House Common,'' as the areaa had been known, was to serve the parish needs for another 40 years, a total of 118 years in all.

"The meeting houses, as they were always called, were icy cold in winter, for there was no means of heating them, and the women sometimes carried little foot-stoves filled with live coals to keep their feet warm during the service. Men sometimes brought their dogs to serve as foot muffs. When stoves were first introduced, they met with great opposition in some congregations. Alice M. Earle, author of a book on early customs, tells an amusing story about their first use, one of which is that in Litchfield, Conn., a woman fainted on account of the great heat from the stove, only to be told on recovery that there had been no fire lighted in it." The first stove appeared at the First Parish meetinghouse in 1815 and was a most welcome addition.[2]

Lack of heat was not the only hardship in early day churches. Not every sermon was lively. Hence no wonder that at a meeting of the church held on April 27, 1726, it was voted as a general sentiment that "turning ye back towards the minister to gaze abroad, and laying down ye head upon ye arms, in a sleepy position, in ye time of public worship, are postures irreverent and indecent, and which ought to be reformed where any are faulty therein, and carefully avoided." [3]

None of our past churches have ever burned down (as often rumored). As each new church was built, the old one was carefully dismantled, and the material and furnishings sold off. The only serious fire associated with the church was the one at the parsonage, formerly the Benjamin Pierce Tavern, that was purchased by Rev. Samuel Kendal when he came to Weston in 1783.

A favorite anecdote about Dr. Kendal regarding the parsonage fire reveals his keen sense of humor. On a cold winter night in February, 1791, as he stood by, helplessly watching his home burn to the ground, Dr. Kendal, knowing his books, writings and sermons were going up in flames, good-naturedly quipped, "For once, at least, my sermons were able to give light." [4]

3. The 1840 Church

First Parish Church, Weston 1840

After the birth of the independent United States, most states, Massachusetts included, followed to a larger or smaller degree Virginia's enactment of the Statute of Religious Liberty, written by Thomas Jefferson, which called for the complete separation of church and state.

As Weston grew in population and diversity, the inevitable separation of church and town government also came about, and in 1839 plans for a new building began to take place. After many emotionally charged meetings it became clear that two new buildings would have to be built, a new church and a new Town House. Thus the venerable landmark, the colonial meetinghouse that stood on Meetinghouse Common for 119 years, was dismantled, and the material and furnishings were sold at public auction. Many parishoners were sorry to see the old church removed, and their feelings were probably best described by Col. Daniel Lamson, author of the seminal book on Weston history, in which he writes: "There was an air of solemn dignity, an emphasis of religious fervor, which this old church typified, that empresses the beholder with a reverence its successor never succeeded in doing. The destruction of this old landmark, built of solid oak, and replaced by a monstrosity which only a nineteenth century architect could devise, shows both a lack of reverence and the decay of faith — a marked trait of our times." [5]

The 1840 church, our third church, followed the Greek Revival style of architecture so popular in the early nineteenth century. It was a wooden building, smaller, plainer and nowhere near as elegant as its predecessor. It was erected a little to the east of the old one on adjoining land that was donated by Mrs. Clarissa Smith. It faced the west, with the entrance porch nearly on a line with the present Parish House, and the Country Road (now the Boston Post Road), passed a few feet in front of the church steps. As it was built soley for church purposes "and no other," a committee was set up by the town to build a separate Town Hall which was completed in 1847.

4. The 1888 Church

For forty-seven years, the "1840 Church" served the First Parish well. As it gradually fell into disrepair, and the desire for a larger, more attractive edifice was felt, a committee was once again appointed to look into the possibilities of building a new church. On April 7, 1884, the committee unanimously recommended "that the Parish build a new church edifice of stone, its cost not to exceed $10,000, provided $8,000 is pledged during the ensuing year and the full amount of $10,000 before the building is begun." [6] These conditions were quickly met, and the work on the new church began immediately.

The firm of Peabody & Sterns was selected as the architects and they designed what was considered at that time to be a somewhat controversial and dramatic structure. It was designed in the style of the Norman Gothic churches of the English countryside, as recently seen and admired by two very influential members and generous benefactors of the First Parish, Horace Sears and Arthur Coburn.

"Building a Norman Gothic structure in a Puritan country town was not without its critics," said Rev. Harry Hoehler in his sermon honoring the 275th Anniversary of the First Parish. "There were those who believed the proposed church violated the architectural integrity of the town. Others objected because the new church would look more like an Anglican chapel than a Unitarian meetinghouse." [7]

Many parishoners, however, appreciated the fact that the building was to be made of native field stones which they could readily and cheaply supply. Thus, as the local farmers hauled wagon-loads of stone from their fields and farms to the center of town — to the same green knoll where their forefathers had gathered so many years ago — the new, and remaining church was built in 1888. The stones for the flooring of the north and south porches of this church were collected at the seashore by the members of the Sunday school.

In April, 1875, General Charles J. Paine, of Mt. Vernon Street, Boston, and a summer resident of Weston, gave the Town of Weston, a Town Clock, leaving it optional where it should be placed.

At the next town meeting it was "voted to accept the gift and to place the clock in the tower of the First Parish Church, as the most convenient and conspicuous place, providing the said "Society" give its consent." This the "Society" did.

When the church, built in 1840, was taken down to be replaced by the present stone church (see front page) due notice was given. On a biting cold day in February, 1888, the Town Fathers — Selectmen, Treasurers, Assessors, Town Clerk — met on the Church Common to witness the removal of the clock. The faces, the hands, and the delicate machinery were carefully housed until the new bell tower was built. At the same time the Paul Revere bell was lowered and taken for temporary safekeeping to the coach-house on the Jones Estate.

Eventually, the much awaited day arrived. Clock and bell back in place, the parishoners gratefully listened to the "Dedication Hymn" composed for the occasion by Harriet Ware Hall (see below). This stone church has survived safely over one hundred years and keeps serving faithfully its growing number of members.

Dedication Hymn

The rugged product of our soil
The stones that vex our farming toil,
We took to build our holy place —
They rise to glory and to grace.

So shall the worship offered here.
Still keep our earth to heaven near,
And out of earthly joys and cares
We'll build our praises and our prayers.

What fills our lives, or great or small,
To thee, dear Lord, we bring it all;
We bring ourselves, that here may be
Of living stones a house for thee.

[1] Francis B. Hornbrooke, "First Parish, Weston, Founded 1698," sermon at dedication service. March 28, 1888, p.26.

[2] Elizabeth S. Coburn, "History of the First Parish, Weston, Massachusetts," Weston, Mass: The Women's Alliance, 1921, p. 7

[3] Emma Ripley, "The First Parish in Westn 1698-1948," pamphlet published by the Parish for the 250th anniversary celebration of the church, 1948, p. 9.

[4] Emma F. Ripley, Weston, A Puritan Town (Weston, Mass.: The Benevolent-Alliance of the First Parish, 1961), p. 72.

[5] Daniel S. Lamson, History of the Town of Weston (Boston: By the author, 1913), p. 11.

[6] Ripley, Weston, p. 72.

[7] Harry H. Hoehler, "275th Anniversary Sermons and Anniversary Prayers, The Middle Years," sermon on December 2, 1973, p. 8

Mary Maynard

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The original Demmon-Morrison House: notice the clapboards.

When the Hosea Davis farm on Wellesley Street in Weston became available in 1889, due to the death of its owner, Demmon purchased the homestead, barn and 104 acres of land for $8000.[3] Demmon and his daughter Fannie began the pattern of living which was to continue for the next two decades, enjoying their summer residence from early May until as late as Thanksgiving some years, and returning to their fashionable town-house on Beacon Street for cozy winters. Evaluated in 1888 at $4500: $1800 for buildings and $2700 for land, after a full year in Demmon's control the tax value of the property had increased to $6000: $2500 for the buildings and $3500 for land.[4] Demmon continued to operate the farm to the same degree that Hosea Davis had, maintaining horses and a few cows, raising vegetables, and keeping apple orchards. In 1891 a small twenty acre plot was added to the Chestnut Street side of the property, as under Demmon's direction the estate continued to grow in size, beauty, and value.

A topographical study, commissioned by Demmon in 1896 from the firm of John McClintock,[5] was more than likely associated with the plan for the Metropolitan water system. An aqueduct running from the Sudbury River to the Chestnut Hill Reservoir required an ''equalizing'' reservoir in Weston.[6] The plan, submitted to the Legislature in 1895, was approved in 1900 and initiated in 1901. Demmon was one of seven Weston residents involved in the land taking on the eastern side of Wellesley Street for the Weston part of the project. Despite this, Demmon continued to develop his estate, perhaps because of the prestige of the designing firm, the Olmstead Brothers. Between 1897 and 1899 four separate land parcels approximating 55 acres were purchased in Fannie's name, all contiguous to the original farm.[7] The most important of these was the Deavale (Devaive)-Keller property and homestead south of the Davis farm on the western side of Wellesley Street purchased for $6500 in March of 1899.

Fannie Demmon lived in the Deavale homestead that summer, refurbished it and beautified the property.[8] In August her engagement to Barnabas Thacher Morrison, identified as treasurer of the Reading Rubber Company, was announced, and the wedding took place on October 16, 1899 in the Arlington Street Church, Back Bay.[9] While the couple toured Europe, Demmon began the construction of a new mansion house situated on the highest land of the estate, the Deavale-Keller parcel, facing directly toward the rising sun, the newly created area of green around the Weston reservoir, and the direct view downtown to the Statehouse dome.[10]

The Demmon-Morrison House, after a new brick facade replaced the clapboards in 1914.

Unfortunately no information exists relating to the architect or the plans of this house; however, the mansion to which the family adjourned in the summer of 1890 was a splendid two story neo-Georgian structure located about a quarter of a mile from the street at an angle on the hillside. A winding entrance drive circled under a porte-cochere, passed around the rear of the building, and returned to the street. The whole effect, carefully sought and achieved, was one of largesse, of demonstrable wealth and elegance, the country seat of a merchant prince and gentleman farmer.

The house represented classicizing containment in its boxlike shape, combined with a wonderful openness and freedom in terrace, portico, and porch treatment. Sheathed in clapboard, it was set on a richly balustraded broad terrace rising from a man-made foundation of natural rock. Several broad steps led to the terrace, from which rose an imposing pair of pedestalled, free-standing, wooden ionic columns, two stories high. The entablature of these columns supported a classical pediment featuring a fanlight window as a focal accent. Recessed within the protecting shelter of the columned portico was an oversized oak entry door, tabernacle framed by traceried glass and surmounted by a balustraded second-story porch.

On either side of the portico were two symmetrical double-hung sash windows surmounted on the first floor by triangular pediments while the upper windows featured simple flat lintels. The corners of the mansion were decorated by pedestalled ionic pilasters whose entablature repeated that of the portico. The rectangular block of the mansion was capped by a hipped roof with a delicate balustrade repeating the design of the second story porch. Two dormer windows projected on either side of the center bay topped by broken pediments. To the right of the main block jutted a centrally placed enclosed porch or sun parlor, confined within the terrace area and entered directly from it. This was surmounted by an entablature repeating the central motif and supporting a balustrade repeating the roof and second story porch theme.

To the left of the mansion jutted a similarly placed structure which served as a portico for the entrance from the driveway, but also extended over the road as porte-cochere. The portion which served as a portico matched the porch extension on the right side in entablature, but the porte-cochere was supported by double, free-standing, ionic detailed columns at the four corners. The entire extension was balustraded as the right side, roof, and second story porch. The porte-cochere provided an exception to the otherwise strictly symmetrical structure.

The outward contour of the Demmon House bore a striking resemblance to the Vassall-Craigie-Longfellow House (1759, 1793) in its rectangular two story elevation, its yellow clapboarding with white trim and black shutters, and especially in its center bay treatment. The structure was so similar that one could wonder if Demmon, who knew the Cambridge area well, had requested his builder to imitate it. The Demmon House facade, however, was flat planed and achieved the center projection by means of free standing columns, while the Longfellow House had a projecting bay of nine inches with the decorative pediment supported by pilasters.[11] The Longfellow House also carried twin dormers with a simple pediment, a balustraded double hipped roof, side projections, and a balustraded grass terrace. All these combined to create an overall effect of striking similarity.

But the Demmon House more truly evoked the period in which it was built. Examining the H.A.C. Taylor House (1885-86) in Newport by McKim, Mead and White, one is also struck by a similarity of style which had no basis in structural similitude as in the Longfellow House. Instead, the likeness was more a spiritual evocation, an airy lightness, an outward stretching that defied containment within the rectangular block of the colonial tradition. This quality is best illustrated in these two houses by the balustrading of roof and porches in the same delicate tensile pattern and the terrace treatment which symbolized both expansiveness and unity as it reached out like the roots of a tree to master the soil which nourished it and at the same time served as a barrier to all intrusion. The effect was at once flamboyant and restrained: flamboyant in decorative detail, restrained by the exactitude of architectural expression of the Georgian style.

The interior of the Demmon House was also closer in spirit and plan to the H.A.C. Taylor House than to the Longfellow House, and this difference typified the contrast between the colonial and neo-colonial style. The closed contained feeling of colonial space divisions gave way to a spaciousness that began in the entry hall and continued in the wide open stairwell and the broad doorways. Entering the house through the main lawn/terrace doorway, one came immediately into the broad stair-hall living room which stretched the full length of the main block of the dwelling. This room was dominated by the five foot wide stairwell ascending on the right of the room, transversely crossing at

the landing to form a centrally bowed balcony before rising to the second floor. The stairs had a naturally stained oak tread; a dark mahogany smooth flowing handrail terminated at the newel with an elegant double twist. In overall effect (except for the balcony) it bore striking resemblance to colonial stairwells, in particular to Arthur Little's line drawing of the Cabot House, Salem (1755) stairwell, from his collection which did so much to inspire the neo-colonial revival.[12]

The landing/balcony was lighted by a triple double casement window of traceried glass, the upper halves highlighted by stained glass crest figures. Tucked beneath the balcony, in inglenook style, was a fireplace whose six foot mantle was flanked by ionic pilasters. Matching engaged piers supported the balcony, and one free-standing ionic column both centered the fireplace location and formed a passageway to the servants' area beyond. The exposed ceiling beams, the two and a half foot wainscotting throughout the house, and the ceiling cornice were all painted creamy white in keeping with the style then in vogue: dark wood in urban homes, white for summer and/or country homes.

To the left of the entrance hall, centrally situated, was the passageway leading to the porte-cochere entrance, lighted from the traceried glass panels which framed the door. To the left of this passage was a small reception room with a pink marble fireplace topped by a six and half foot mantle. Two windows faced the lawn, one the drive; all surmounted by a molding which echoed the architrave of a classic entablature. To the right of the passage was a somewhat larger dining room with triple double-hung sash windows forming a semi-circular bay facing out to the drive and the garden area beyond. The right side of the room was dominated by an eight foot fireplace, flanked by double ionic columns, which jutted two feet into the room forming two recessed areas on either side. The recessed area to the left of the fireplace contained the entrance to the butler's pantry and the serving area.

On the right of the main entrance hall a seven foot opening led to the parlor, which stretched the whole length of the central block of the house. In contrast to other rooms, the parlor featured Corinthian details to dramatize its superiority. The fireplace dominated one end of the room with its seven and a half foot mantle, framed by two free-standing eight foot Corinthian columns with an elaborately bracketed cornice. Matching alcoves in the four corners of the room were set off by free-standing Corinthian columns enclosing the window areas. Opening off the far wall of this parlor was a heavy oak door, tabernacle framed with traceried glass sidelights and fanlight Palladian accent above, which originally opened into the sun room/porch area noted in the exterior description.

The stairhall, reception, dining and living rooms encompassed the whole rectangular block of the first floor living quarters. Lovely oak floors were laid throughout the house without thresholds. Concealed sliding doors could be drawn for privacy or left open to create a sense of flowing space, contained, yet free. Brass chandeliers and matching wall sconces, all with spherical globes, were featured throughout. The placement of fireplaces was distinctly modern in this neo-colonial home, since there was no sense of economy of chimney structure. Each fireplace has its own chimney. The whole tone of the house was modern.

The impact of the H.A.C. Taylor House of McKim, Mead, and White on the reinterpretation of classical/colonial domestic architecture was pivotal. The plan had emphasized the Palladian-colonial system of the axial central hall with two rooms on each side and service wing located on a cross axis.[13] The Demmon House plan is strikingly

similar in the layout of the central block but the cross axis is achieved by the extension of the sun parlor and porte-cochere. This sense of dependencies to the main block was further accentuated in the more formal refurbishing of the exterior which took place in 1914.

In February of 1908 Daniel Demmon died at the age of 76. Within two years Fannie and her husband Barnabas abandoned their Chestnut Street townhouse, made the Weston property their permanent residence and soon determined to formalize the character of the house. The brick veneering which they commissioned in 1914 was entrusted to Samuel Mead of Weston, an architect who had been associated with the firms of Ware and Van Brunt, Cabot and Chandler, and finaly Cabot, Everett and Mead.[14] Brick veneering older houses was not a trend in Weston at this time. It was an independent departure for the Morrisons to make this decision, since even the larger houses in Weston built in the first decades of the twentieth century survive, if at all, in wooden frame form.

The new home was a striking contract to the pillared frame structure. The terrace was enclosed by a brick and granite balustrade with formal urns and jardinieres as decorative effects. Simple French doors with a traceried glass overhang were granite enclosed, flanked by Corinthian pilasters carrying a semi-circular broken pediment housing a classical garlanded urn. This center bay, extended three feet from the old structure to afford a protected entry, opened onto the original entrance door with the traceried glass tabernacle frame. This three foot extension necessitated the removal of the second floor balcony, leaving a slightly recessed triple window over the entrance. The center bay was outlined in a simply bracketed roof cornice surmounted by a formal escutcheon with side urns for decorative effect.

The window treatment of the main block of the building remained unchanged except for material, granite triangular pediments on the first floor and flat arches with keystone crowns on the second floor. Unlike the clapboard structure, these pediments appear not as appendages or decoration, but as integral elements of the structure of the building. Three dormers, whose triangular pediments echoed those of the first floor, jutted from the hipped roof now slated and simply turned at the peak. A granite string course outlined the second story, and the simple bracketed cornice continued the roof treatment throughout.

A fundamental change was evident to the right of the structure where the simple terrace porch gave way to an expanded sun room outlined in three sections with granite pilasters topped with urns. To the left, the porte-cochere also assumed a brick and granite formality, the structure basically unchanged from the original except for the substitution of red brick and granite. The second house provides a stricter interpretation of Georgian formality and symmetry. The extension of the sun room corrected the imbalance on the first.

During 1915 Barnabas Morrison's health failed. At his death in 1921, the center of Fannie's world shifted to Pasadena, California, where she became one of the original benefactors of the Pasadena Playhouse as well as of a local hospital. She soon determined to sell the Weston property. The Weston Town Report of 1927 listed her as a non-resident, and before the year was over, the property had become the possession of the Congregation of the Sisters of Saint Joseph of Boston for $225,000. In September of that year the mansion house provided an administrative center, library, residence hall, chapel, and dining room for the fifty-five students who became the pioneer class of Regis College.

Except for the removal of the porte-cochere and side entrance portico in the pragmatic fifties to allow for free traffic on the driveway, the building remains as an outstanding example of the neo-Georgian style of American domestic architecture at the turn of the century.

ENDNOTES

[1] Boston Sunday Herald, May 11, 1902.

[2] Will of Daniel Demmon, Middlesex Probate Court; Boston Daily Globe, February 10, 1908.

[3] Middlesex County Courthouse, Registry of Deeds, Book 1946, p. 6-8.

[4] Weston Town Reports, 1888-1891.

[5] John McClintock, "Topographical Plan of the Estate of Daniel L. Demmon," Weston, MA, November, 1896, Regis College Archives.

[6] Dorothy Ellis, "The Weston Reservoir," Weston Historical Commission, 1979.

[7] Middlesex County Courthouse, Registry of Deeds, Book 2358, f. 501; Book 2402, f. 505; Book 2596, f. 363; Book 2572, f. 457.

[8] Waltham Free Press, June 26, July 14, August 18, 1899.

[9] Boston Sunday Globe, October 22, 1899.

[10] Waltham Free Press, November 17, December 8, 1899.

[11] Bainbridge Bunting and Robert Nylander, Survey of Architectural History in Cambridge. Book Four: Old Cambridge, Cambridge, 1973, p. 80.

[12] Arthur Little, Early New England Interiors, Boston, 1878.

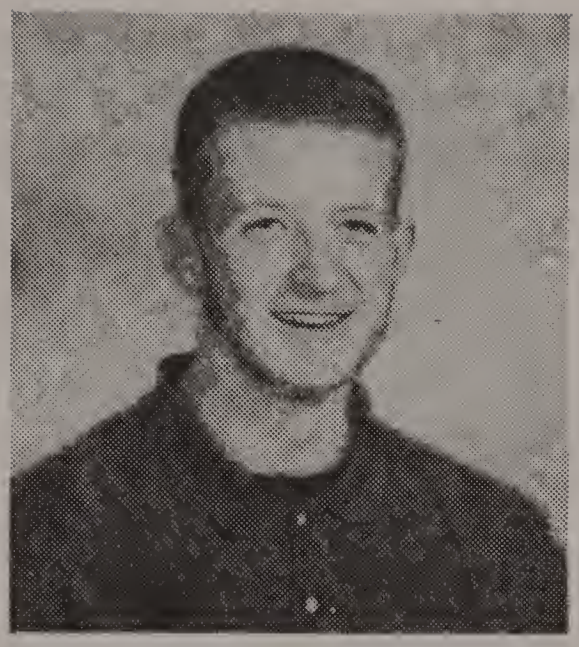
[13] Vincent Scully, The Shingle Style and the Stick Style, rev. ed., New Haven, 1978.

[14] Charles Mead (son) to Catherine Meade, April, 1980.

Sister Catherine M. Meade is a native of Dorchester, Massachusetts. She recieved her Ph.D. in American History from Boston College in 1972. She was chairman of the Department of History at Regis College from 1981 to 1994, and has been co-chairman since then. Her book My Nature is Fire (New York: Alba House, 1991) is a study of the medieval mystic Catherine of Siena. Her article on the Demmon-Morrison House is an abbreviated form of her longer study of this landmark. Sister Caherine has lectured far and wide on Catherine of Siena and on the Demmon-Morrison House, among others at the Bay State Historical League, the American Association of University Women, and in 1991 at the Weston Historical Society. Her upcoming lecture on the house will take place at the celebration of the 70th anniversary of the founding of Regis College this October.

Is there anything new under the sun?

"It's intolerable, General Washington. The farmers of Valley Forge deserve more consideration. Drilling at all hours, drums scaring the livestock, and several chickens stolen. We have friends in the Continental Congress, you know . . ."



Bill Martin, Jr.

SKIING AT CAT ROCK: YESTERDAY AND TODAY

During the winter of 1995-1996, it seemed as if every week was broken up by a snow day. But unlike most high school students, I did not spend those days inside eating popcorn and playing Nintendo — not when there were feet upon feet of fresh powder lying untouched on Cat Rock, near Drabbington Way.

Instead, I gathered up my friends, braved treacherous driving conditions and hiked up Cat Rock. We were rewarded with soft snow, tight glades, large cliffs, and most importantly, no ski patrol. It was like having a little slice of heaven right here on the north side of Weston. At Cat Rock, hardcore Weston skiers can venture into the woods, hurl themselves off cliffs, do just about anything thay want, without having to worry about ski patrollers clipping lift tickets, and without any annoyances presented by intermediate skiers crowding up the slopes. Right now, there is only one drawback to the skiing at Cat Rock, and it is a major one. Cat Rock today exists with the ''Earn Your Turns'' philosophy. For every vertical foot one can ski down, one must be hiked up. The lone rope tow now stands rusty and dormant, lifeless for more than a decade.

Skiing at Cat Rock was not always for extreme ski wannabes who lived to hurl themselves down the most dangerous mountainsides they could find and did not mind if they had to slog up those very mountains to do it. Cat Rock was once an operating ski area, where Weston families could learn to ski on one open slope and a narrow trail, accessed by a rope tow. Those days are gone now, and the only people who ski at Cat Rock nowadays are the skiers who shun groomed trails and look upon managed ski areas with disgust. Cat Rock has become wild and untamed.

In the early 1950s a group of local skiers set up a rope tow on Cat Rock and cut a couple of trails down the hill, establishing the privately owned Cat Rock ski area. During the fifites the Cat Rock ski area was open to anyone who wanted to ski there. It was fairly popular because other ski hills in the Boston area, such as Nashoba Valley and Wachusett Mountain had yet to open. At the time, Cat Rock had one open ski slope and a wooded trail, a rope tow, and a small tin warming hut with a stove inside. Cat Rock was only open on weekends, and many residents of the western suburbs would ski there, if they could not make it up to the larger ski areas in New Hampshire and Vermont.

Weston resident Ed Dickson was one of the owners of the area when it opened. He recalled that the owners did all the work there. Unlike ski areas today, in which the ski patrol, lift operators, and grooming crew are all separate entities, at Cat Rock in the fifties the small group of private owners did all three jobs and more.

On days when the lift was running, Dickson remembered ''taking turns running the rope with the other owners.'' The owners would run the tow and charge people who came to ski one dollar for a lift ticket. In addition to ensuring the safety of the riders of the rope tow, the operators also had to deal with the donkey engine that pulled the rope, which often broke down, as well as with the rope itself, which was cut by vandals or sometimes broke.

As well as running the rope tow, the owners also groomed the slope by hand. They would use rakes, shovels and hoes to cover up bare patches and smooth out rough spots to make the slope easier and safer to ski. Grooming was a constant process, according to Dickson, because the snow underneath the rope tow was always being worn off. Unlike ski areas today, Cat Rock had no snowmaking machine and had to rely on what mother nature saw fit to drop on it. Because of the lack of artificial snowmaking, the grooming crew had very little work to do. Dickson recalls often having to shut down the ski area because it was too icy. The season at Cat Rock was short, compared to ski areas today. When Dickson co-owned it, the season usually ran from Christmas to March and was often stopped in the middle by the typical New England January thaw.

The same men who were the administrators, financiers, lift operators, and groomers also patrolled the mountain to keep skiers safe. Dickson, a member of the National Ski Patrol, said that in addition to patrolling the mountain and rescuing injured skiers, the Cat Rock ski patrol gave informal lessons. If a child did not know how to ski, one of the co-owners who happened to be patrolling the mountain would give the young skier a few pointers on the narrow wooded trail coming off the open slope.

Cat Rock remained privately owned until the early sixties, when the group of private owners was overcome by the financial difficulties of maintaining the ski area. The town of Weston bought the ski area from the private owners and passed operation of the ski area into the hands of the Weston Recreation Department.

Under the Recreation Department, Cat Rock itself did not change much. It was still just a rope that was pulled up a hill by a donkey engine. The big difference was that now only Weston residents could ski at Cat Rock. A season pass, in the form of a badge, cost twenty-five dollars, and, as Weston resident Joe Sheehan recalls, just about every skier in Weston had one. Sheehan started skiing at Cat Rock when he was about ten and skied there until he graduated from high school in 1973.

During the sixties and seventies, Cat Rock was crowded with Weston skiers every weekend. Sheehan remembers the ski area as "packed," and that there were fifteen minute lift lines, but at Cat Rock that was not so bad because everyone was just out to have fun, and everyone knew everyone else, Weston being the type of town that it is. According to Weston resident Ward Carter, Cat Rock was the place to go when people could not get up north, and in Sheehan's teenage days, skiing at Cat Rock was "the thing to do every weekend." To Sheehan, one of the nice things about skiing at Cat Rock was that there were so many people involved that skiing there was like a town event. Cat Rock really caught on during the skiing boom of the late sixties and early seventies, when skiing became repopularized by the freestyle movement. During this time Sheehan remembered kids building jumps to practice new tricks being introduced to the sport by the first generation of freestyle skiers.

Coupled with a resurgence of popularity for the sport of skiing in the late sixties were several very snowy winters. Joe Sheehan likened the winter of 1969 to that of 1995-96, in that there were major storms almost every week, and this string of good snow years helped Cat Rock stay open through the seventies.

In the early eighties, Cat Rock finally shut down, for a number of reasons. According to Ward Carter, the main reason was liability. In the insurance boom of the early eighties, liability insurance prices rose, and the town had difficulty covering them. Along with the

liability came new regulations that made the ski area difficult to run without significant changes. There were also problems with the shape that the ski area was in. The donkey engine running the rope was old and extremely unreliable, and vandals often cut the tow rope, both of which caused expensive problems. Its popularity also dwindled in the early eighties, with more and more skiers heading up north where there was snowmaking, grooming and high speed chairlifts. In the modernization rush of the eighties, Cat Rock fell by the wayside. In about 1983, the town decided to shut down Cat Rock because it was becoming a financial burden.

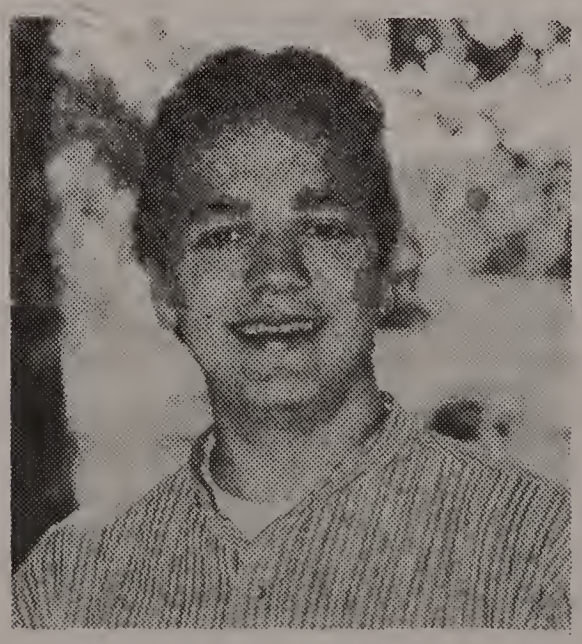
Today Cat Rock is a mecca for Weston's hardcore skiing population. With the extreme skiing movement of the early nineties, it became fashionable to jump off cliffs and ski as dangerously as possible. Skiing off groomed trails and into the forest has finally become the rage, and for the top skiers in Weston High School, Cat Rock is the place to be on snow days. Skiing at Cat Rock today means total freedom. Anything a skier wants to climb, he can ski. There are no boundary ropes saying, "If you ski this, you'll lose your lift ticket." There are no crowds of intermediate punters jamming the trail and destroying the snow. Skiing at Cat Rock today is skiing as it was meant to be, untamed, untouched by groomers and liability insurance, and free. There is of course the lack of a ski lift. Unfortunately, it looks as though there will never again be a lift at Cat Rock. It has become economically unfeasible. Both Joe Sheehan and Ed Dickson said that they would ski there if it were still open today, but the expenses of running a ski slope in the nineties are too high for a place like Cat Rock. Maybe it is better this way, my friends and I get the whole mountain to ourselves.

Thanks to Messrs. Ward Carter, Edward Dickson and Joseph Sheehan for providing information for this article.

William Martin, Jr.

We are pleased to print a piece of Weston sports history. Nevertheless, the editor, BULLETIN and the Weston Historical Society must enclose a disclaimer about supporting the idea of skiing described above. We are happy to welcome not one but two young contributors to our BULLETIN and hope that others from our schools or from colleges would share their thoughts and experiences with us.

Bill Martin, Jr., is a junior at Weston High School. He is an honors student, class president, center of the Weston High basketball team, and president of the Mountain Sports Club of Weston High. In his free time he enjoys mountain biking and skiing. Bill does most of his skiing in New Hampshire at the Mount Washington Valley, Attitash/Bear Peak, Wildcat, and Cannon, as well as in Tuckerman Revine. Ed.



Kristophe Karami

COULD THEODORE ROOSEVELT BE ELECTED PRESIDENT IN 1996?

With the assassination of President McKinley in 1901, Theodore Roosevelt, not quite 43, became the youngest president in the nation's history. He brought new excitement and power to the presidency and he vigorously led Congress and the American public toward progressive reforms and a strong foreign policy. He took the view that the president, as a "steward of the people," should take whatever action necessary for the public good, unless expressly forbidden by law or the constitution. "I did not usurp

power,'' he wrote, ''but I did greatly broaden the use of executive power.''

At the onset of his Presidency, Roosevelt created new directions in Washington in an effort to accommodate the developing reform movement. Like today, large corporations were gaining too much power. The Sherman Anti-Trust Act had been passed in 1890, but it had not been used to prosecute a trust, only unions. Meanwhile the changes in the business environment were phenomenal. Whole industries became dominated by a single company or a combination of companies controlled by a trust. Once it had a monopoly, a trust could unilaterally control prices and rack up huge profits. The king of trusts was J.P. Morgan, a banker who was to become the first target of Roosevelt's assault. Many progressives felt that all trusts were bad and should be abolished. Roosevelt was more moderate. He thought that the era of big business was inevitable, and that it had important economic benefits such as increased productivity and efficiency. In his opinion, there were good trusts and bad trusts. He only wanted to go after the ones that did not act in the public interest. In order to do this, he came up with the radical idea of actually enforcing existing law. On February 18, 1902 he directed the Department of Justice to use the Sherman Anti-Trust Act to prosecute the Northern Securities Company run by J.P. Morgan. Roosevelt was victorious in March of 1904 when the Supreme Court ruled against the Northern Securities Company and forced it to break up. This marked an important shift in the scope of government. Roosevelt became known as the ''trust-buster.'' In 1902, when the anthracite coal miners struck, he became the first president to intervene successfully in a labor-management dispute, threatening to seize the mines in order to persuade their owners to accept mediation. Is there a leader alive today who could act in this manner?

Today we are interested in conservation. We are destroying our natural habitats in the name of progress. Theodore Roosevelt had the foresight, the vision, to protect some of our land from destruction. He was a staunch supporter of The Newlands Bill (1902) on forest reclamation and irrigation. 150 million acres of forest land were turned into federal reserves. Roosevelt established the National Conservation Conference. He also supported Chief Forester Gifford Pinchot in expanding the nation's forest reserves, encouraging conservation on the state level. Today, he would be favored by many through his support of conservation.

President Roosevelt was a nationalist who believed in our country's greatness. His conduct in foreign relations was even bolder and more vigorous than his domestic program. He justified ''police power'' in Santo Domingo to keep the Europeans out. After Columbia's rejection in 1903 of a treaty giving the United States rights to a canal across the isthmus of Panama, he supported a local revolution, then negotiated a treaty with the new government of Panama. He supervised the construction of the canal which reduced the distance from the Gulf of Mexico to the Pacific from approximately 14,000 miles to 5,000 miles.

According to his motto, ''speak softly and carry a big stick,'' he signed the Roosevelt Corollary to the Monroe Doctrine which allowed the intervention by the United States in the affairs of Western Hemisphere nations if their weakness or wrong-doing justified it. This restricted European activities in the Western Hemisphere and alleged that in cases of ''chronic wrong-going,'' the United States could assume, ''however reluctantly,'' the role of an international police power in our hemisphere, a role still played by the U.S. in places like Panama or Haiti. In 1905 Roosevelt settled the Russo-Japanese War through the Treaty of Portsmouth. This won him the Nobel Peace Prize and the distinction of being the first American to win such a notable award.

If Theodore Roosevelt were living today, he would make a very desirable candidate for the Republican Party. To begin with, he had a certain charisma that Senator Dole, the November 1996 Republican hopeful lacked. Roosevelt spoke confidently and acted the same way. He was a very physical man, a ''rough-rider,'' one of our cavalry volunteers who fought in the Spanish-American War. He was a man of the people and decried the ''malefactors of wealth'' through his reform proposals to Congress, including federal supervision of all interstate business. He strengthened the authority of the Interstate Commerce Commission, and promoted the Pure Food Act which called for the inspection of packing plants and prohibited the iterstate transportation of adulterated drugs or mislabeled foods..

I feel that if Theodore Roosevelt were living today, he could have been elected president. Courageous, moral, trustworthy, ethical, bold, uncompromising in matters of principle, Theodore Roosevelt could be a candidate to lead America into another century. He stood correctly, firmly on the issues. He had a strong conservationist policy, preserving our wilderness and our heritage for the future, and a strong social policy, stressing self-reliance with an occasional ''helping hand'' from government. For strong, decisive, moral leadership, Theodore Roosevelt would be our man! Where are the others like him? Is anyone out there even close to achieving what he has, even though I have mentioned only a few of his accomplishments? At the present time, the answer is, NO!

Kristophe Karami

Kristophe Karami is a senior at Weston High School and an Eagle Scout. This article is an abbreviated issue of the essay which won him second prize in the national competition sponsored by the Theodore Roosevelt Association of Cambridge. He is also last year's winner of the Sons of the American Revolution essay contest. We congratulate this budding historian and hope that his peers will be encouraged to submit their work to the BULLETIN. Ed.

WESTON HISTORY - Available and On Sale

Every Weston resident should have on his/her bookshelf both of these authors. They are also a most appropriate gift for your friends, family members and neighbors old and new. Here is your chance to acquire these books at an advantageous price:

1. Brenton H. Dickson: Once Upon a Pung, a collection of delightful stories about Weston of yesteryear; hardcover, $7.50.
2. Brenton H. Dickson: Random Recollections, more of the same, including several old Weston family histories, softcover, $7.50.
3. Brenton H. Dickson and Homer C. Lucas: One Town in the American Revolution, Weston, Massachusetts, hardcover, $7.50.

Also available:

Historical Map of Weston with a brief history of Weston, $1.00.

For orders of the map only enclose a business size SASE envelope. Make out checks to the Weston Historical Society and mail to Box 343, Weston, MA 02193. For immediate service, come to the Museum of the Society at the Josiah Smith Tavern, on Wesdnesdays between 10 and 12 a.m., or mail your order to Vera Laska, 50 Woodchester Drive, Weston, MA 02193.

INTRODUCING: GEORGE AMADON

George Amadon was born in Framingham Center, Massachusetts, in 1916. After Lawrence Academy and William and Mary College, he married his college sweetheart Betty, who hailed from Minnesota. They had a daughter Pat and a son Reed. He has seven grandchildren. George started his career as manager of quality control in a frozen food plant in California.

He spent three years in the Army Air Force, went on 37 missions over Japan, and merited the Distinguished Flying Cross and a Purple Heart. He moved to Weston in 1946, to the former Train Tavern House, built around 1800. He joined his father as a food broker, and later worked as manager of market development first for the Howard Johnson Company and later for Sears Roebuck as assistant manager of five divisions.

After retiring, he turned to maritime history. His book The Rise of the Ironclads (Missoula, Montana, Pictorial History Publishing Co., 1988) is in its fourth printing. He lectures far and wide on the subject.

He is a totum factum in Merriam Village, and is on the boards of the Boston Authors' Club, Weston Community Housing, West Suburban Elder Care; he is a member of the Crescent Street Historical Commission, an election officer, and Chairman of the Weston Memorial Day Committee. He is a Director of the Weston Historical Sociaty and vice chairman of its Museum committee, in charge of the photograph collection.

JUST FOR THE RECORD

Global milestone: China's Deng Xiaoping died on Wednesday, February 19, 1997; he switched China to a new track, and the world is awaiting the direction his successor(s) will take.

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Population Today reported in its February, 1997 issue that as of October 1, 1996, the U.S. population stood at 266,109,000, while the estimated world population as of February, 1997 stood at 5.8 billion, with an annual growth of 88 million. Quo vadis, humanity?

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A recent real estate flyer lists 16 Weston houses for sale, at prices between $289,000 and $2,250,000. Weston has 3,208 single family homes, at an average value of $540,000, at an almost 14% average increase from last year.

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While our students are doing consistently well in national competitions academically, in February, 1997 some high school pranksters considered it a challenge to use the school computers to create phony ten dollar bills.

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The same month also saw the hanging of 270 pails on about 200 sugar maple trees by volunteers of Land's Sake, the non-profit organic farming group.

IN MEMORIAM
STEVE RILEY

We report with sadness that Stephen Thomas Riley (December 28, 1908 - February 15, 1997) is no longer with us. He was born in Worcester, but was a long-time resident of Weston, settling here in 1952. He was the director of the prestigious Massachusetts Historical Society, and from 1977 to 1984 president of our Society. He was the prototype of the scholar and gentleman. He will be missed by many of us whom he called friends and by his devoted wife Alice Riehle Riley.

His brief biography was published in the Fall, 1995 issue of this Bulletin.

REWARDS FOR YOUR DETECTIVE WORK

If you come to the Museum some Wednesday morning and manage to identify people or places in our photographs, you will be rewarded; for the identification of three (3) photos by the charming book on Weston history Once Upon a Pung; for identification of six (6) photos by the book One Town in the American Revolution; for the identification of 10 photos by one of the above books plus a one year membership to the Weston Historical Society.

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.