

THE WESTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY BULLETIN



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A memento of a pleasant Weston Sunday afternoon: Mr. & Mrs. Sam Payson, Doug Henderson and Jacques Wajsfelder in front of the Town Hall during the October 5, 1997 walk in the town's center, with Henderson as narrator. Photo by Andrew J. Laska

CONGRATULATIONS TO THE FIRST PARISH CHURCH OF WESTON ON ITS 300TH ANNIVERSARY — 1698-1998

Please refer to our commemorative article on the history of the First Parish Church, which appeared as a lead article in the Spring, 1997 issue of the BULLETIN from the capable pen of Mary Maynard, author of five books and Chair of the First Parish Historian's Committee.

THE TOWN COMMON THROUGH THE CENTURIES

This is an essay about a place, the Town Common, or Meeting House Common, as it once was called. History is apart of it, and landmark dates are duly noted. Buildings are a part of it, as elements in its evolution. The Boston Post Road is at its heart. People used to congregate here and made it a vibrant element of life in Weston.

Stand with me today on the cobblestones surrounding the old watering trough. How old? I can only conjecture that it was part of a municipal water system, started by a group of Weston citizens sometime in the 1890s. The Weston Water Company and the Weston Electric Company are stories waiting to be told.

In the year 1600 we would be standing in a grove of hardwood trees—oak, elm, chestnut, sycamore. The land sloped away from this ridge, as it does today. Meandering streams flowed eastward at the foot of the slope on either side, the remnants of glacial outwashes.

The woodland Indians, sadly diminished in number by diseases caught from European fisherman who plied the offshore waters, made their camps along the Charles and Sudbury Rivers. Some of our roads today follow old Indian trails.

The first organized European settlements in this area were established in 1634 as the Farmers' Precinct of Watertown. Boundaries were quickly established along the lines of present day Weston, with the exception of the Town of Lincoln, which broke off from Weston in 1752.

Farm and forest products moving to the markets in Watertown and Boston soon were well established, albeit rutted and muddy thoroughfares. Drove of farm animals, wagons laden with hay and grain, travellers on foot and horseback made this the Great Road, the King's Highway, and finally the Boston Post Road.

The first official post rider passed through here on his way from New York to Boston, a two week journey in the winter of 1673. He was the pioneer of a regular service between New York and Boston, a service which was replaced by stage coaches in 1740. This stage coach service gave rise to taverns along the route. The Josiah Smith Tavern, built in 1765, was a breakfast stop for travellers who had been picked up in Boston at about four o'clock in the morning.

The first settlers were members of the Congregational Church in Watertown. Church service on the Sabbath was required of all members in good standing in the church. Thus the residents of the Farmers' Precinct made a weekly journey to Watertown. Both for convenience and protection the trip was made in convoy. The Post Road was equidistant from the north and south sides of the Precinct, and a meeting place was quickly established here. However, the day-long absence from their crops and animals imposed a severe hardship on these farmers, and by 1690 they had begun to agitate for a separate precinct and church. A shelter or meeting house was built in 1698 at this already established meeting place, and a minister was called to serve here several years before final authorization was granted. It was not until 1712 by the old (Julian) calendar, 1713 by today's calendar, that the General Court in Boston legalized the Town of Weston. A new church was thereafter built near the old site in 1722.

The citizens of Weston were at that time almost entirely members of the First Parish. Church and state were intermingled, with the government of the Parish carried out by wardens elected by adult males in good standing. An annual meeting, to discuss and vote on articles in a published warrant, was led by a moderator, elected by adult males of the congregation. All male citizens of the Town, whether church members or not, had to pay an annual tax, or tithe, to the church. This treasury was not only for the maintenance of the church and clergy, but also to pay for town services including upkeep of roads. Poor road upkeep led Lincoln to secede in 1752.

Alarm bands (militia) had been formed in most of the communities of the colony soon after its establishment. These bands were drilled in military skills, at first to ward off possible Indian attacks, but soon to take part in the French and Indian War, 1754-1763. It was a well prepared group of about one hundred Weston farmers under the command of major Samual Lamson which, on the morning of April 19, 1775, fell into formation in the meeting place and marched off to join Minutemen from neighboring towns as they harassed the British regulars in their retreat from Concord.

The Lamson home was located near today's Lamson Park next to the Common. The Lamson family had a significant role in Weston, as farmers, military men, historians and proprietors of a general store and millinery shop a short distance to the west from the First Parish Church along the Boston Post Road. The store was later bought by Charles Merriam, and then by George W. Cutting, Senior.

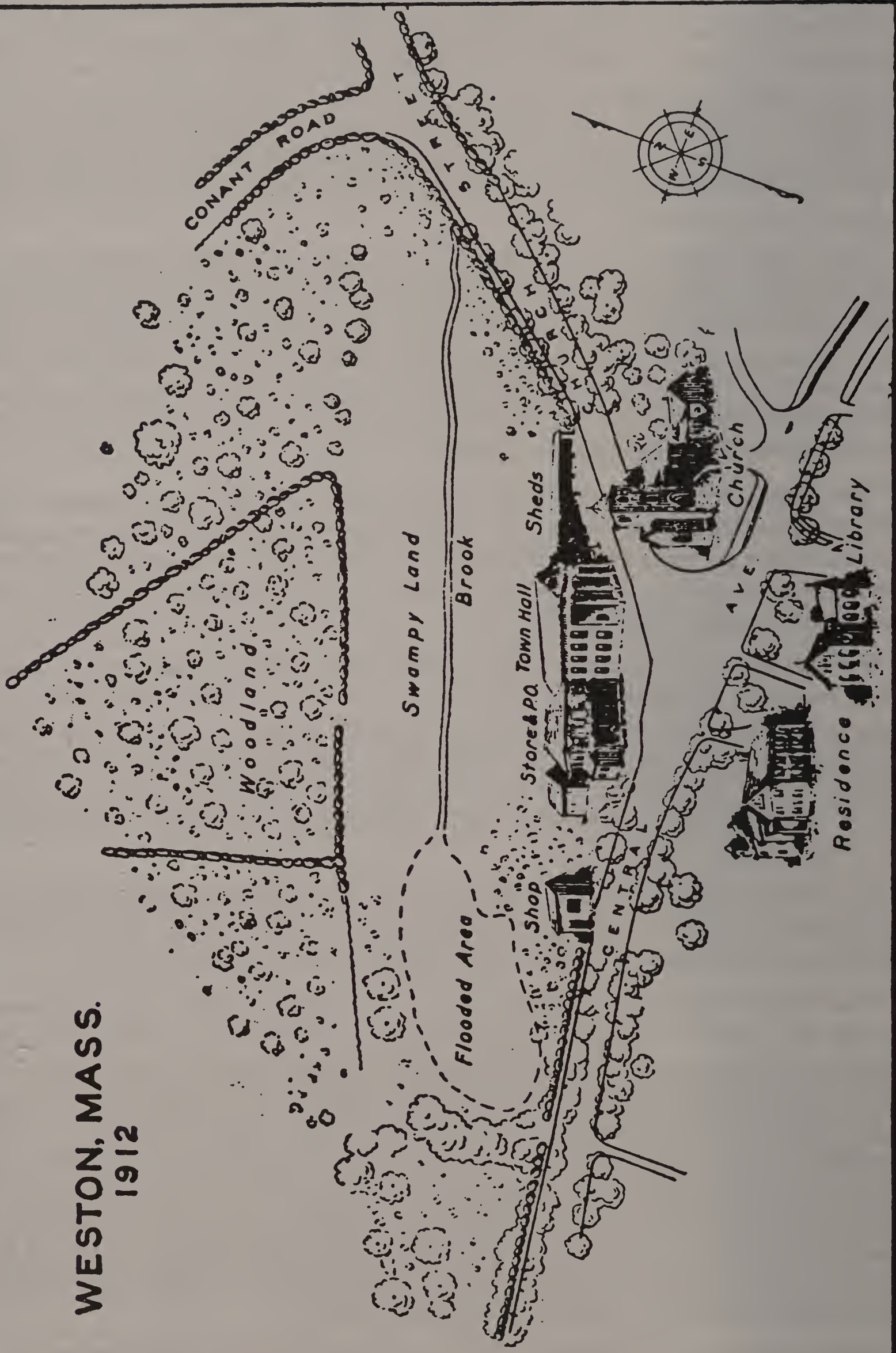
The legal separation of church and state was slow in coming to New England, finally being enacted in Massachusetts in 1833. Not until 1847 was a Town Hall erected on the Boston Post Road adjacent to Cutting's Store. This Hall was used not only for town offices, but, at one time and another, for school rooms, a library, and arsenal (rifles were stored here during the Civil War), and many other civic activities. The basement housed fire apparatus for the volunteer fire department. The horses were kept in a livery stable a few hundred yards away on Church Street.

By 1840, railroads had begun to replace the stage coach, and the taverns, including the Josiah Smith Tavern, declined in importance. It should be noted that this Tavern had been used for town meetings after 1833 and until 1847 when the Town Hall was built.

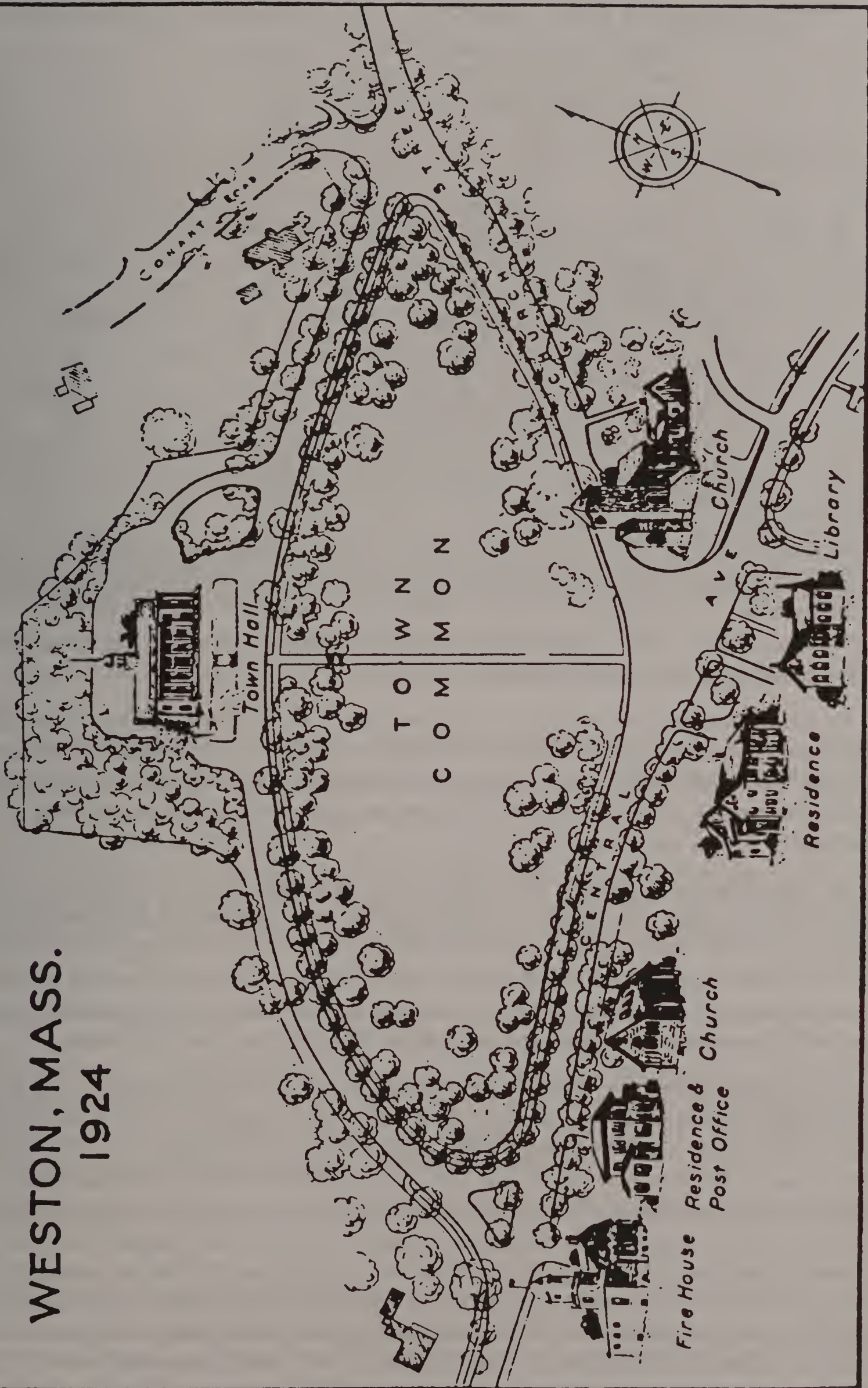
The evolution of the Town Common into the center of life in Weston had begun when church goers gathered here to journey to Watertown, following the route laid down by farmers and travellers on foot and horseback. The building of the First Parish Church, one of four buildings to be erected on or near this site, brought Weston families here. The stage coach travellers, interrupting their east or west journeys to patronize the Smith Tavern, brought news from beyond the Weston limits, as well as patronage for local shops. The railroad, with its station at the Weston depot replaced the stage coach as a source of information and income. Cutting's Store, with its post office behind the front window, brought trade into this area. The Town Hall, with its offices, small library, school rooms, and fire station, as well as its large hall, used for dances and social occasions, teemed with activity. The Public Library, built in 1899, put the final block in place.

The Weston Town Common had become, by custom and long usage, the functional civic center of Weston.

WESTON, MASS.
1912



WESTON, MASS. 1924



The Sunday Herald of Boston, dated May 11, 1902, had the following headlines:

Weston has become the Lenox of the East

One Town Without a Trolley Line

Sylvan Retreat of Busy Boston Men

The headlines were followed by pictures of ten mansions. The accompanying text told of four additional edifices.¹

Agriculture and small industry which had supplied the livelihood for most of Weston's families for nearly two centuries were diminishing in importance. Railroads and later the telephone made it possible to live in Weston and earn an income elsewhere, principally in Boston. Starting with the advent of rail transportation, prosperous professionals and businessmen had moved their households from Boston to Weston in the summer months to escape the crowded streets and sweltering heat. By the time of the headlines noted above, a number of them had acquired large estates on which they built homes deserving the name of mansions. These homes were usually sited well back from the streets, with sweeping lawns and careful plantings to protect the privacy of these "sylvan retreats" while still allowing glimpses of the splendid buildings.

The design and maintenance of these estates required professional assistance, as well as a substantial support staff. The art and science of landscaping in the United States begins with Frederick Law Olmsted, who had established a home and office in Brookline in the 1880s. A number of these "Busy Boston Men," now living in Weston, looked to Olmsted and his staff for professional landscaping services.

In the preparation and execution of the celebration of the town's 200th anniversary in 1913, a civic parade created a modernized Weston. It had become evident to townspeople that the Town Hall, built in 1847, would require extensive and expensive repairs. Furthermore, the marshy land behind the building was unsightly and a breeding ground for mosquitos.

A Town Meeting in March, 1911 appointed a Town Improvement Committee to work with the Town Parks Commission "to consider the improvement and development of the centre [sic] of the town and the securing of proper sites for Town buildings."² The members of the Committee and of the Commission, some of whom had used the services of Olmsted or one of his assistants, Arthur Shurtleff, who had by that time established his won business, naturally turned to a landscape professional, i.e., Shurtleff, for plans and advice.

The Olmsted school was based on the principle of using the natural terrain of the site and the planting of native shrubs, ground covers and vines.³ Shurtleff's 1912 submission laid out a bow shaped street beginning at the Boston Post Road on the west, along the high ground above the marsh, and ending at the junction of Church Street and Conant Road. This plan showed a fire station at the west end of the Town House Road, the new Town Hall on a small rise at the center of the arc and building sites on either side of the Town Hall. The marshy stream was to be channeled underground, and a greensward planted, sweeping up to the Post Road and to the new road. The use of native trees, particularly a large graceful elm already in place, and shrubs would break up the monotony of the stretch of grass and allow glimpses of the Town Hall from the Post Road. Shurtleff's second submission, in 1913, kept these basic elements, but omitted the building sites. The fire station was built in 1913 on its present site. Both plans provided for the removal not only of the original Town Hall, but also of Cutting's Store and the little shop beside the store, by that time a harness shop.⁴



Shurtleff's plan consistently envisaged the Town Common, or Green, as a separate entity, a Town Common, not a public park. No war memorials, no bandstands, no playing fields.

George Cutting's home, at the corner of the Boston Post Road and School Street, had already been moved to Number 36 Church Street, providing the site for the Public Library, built in 1899. Now his store, including the post office and hitching rail, was moved across the Post Road, next to the new fire station. Tullis' harness shop was moved about one hundred yards west along the Post Road and ended its separate existence as the nucleus of the Weston Center Building. When Cutting's Store closed in 1926, the post office was moved first to the Coburn Block, built in 1895, and then to its present location on Colpitts Road.

Olmsted's belief that pastoral scenery would relieve stress and promote a sense of tranquility⁵ is embodied in the present Town Common. It puts a skillfully landscaped and visually attractive distance between the center of Weston's administration and the traffic and business on the Post Road. The Town Hall, in addition to housing the Town's offices and committees, serves occasionally as the site of townwide gatherings, e.g., the High School graduations, Memorial Day observances or theatrical performances.

The watering trough still sits at the center of the old Town Common, but only memories remain of the vibrant civic life which found its focus here.

¹ This page, framed, hangs in the Weston Historical Museum.

^{2, 3, 4, 5} A more detailed story about the new Town Hall and Common is to be found in a pamphlet "Weston Town Common – A History" by Nancy A. Fléming, printed by the Weston Garden Club on the occasion of its 50th anniversary in 1941.

Douglas Henderson



THE GIRL WASHINGTON KISSED

There is a picture of a lady with an expression of resignation on her face hanging on the wall of the Weston Historical Museum. It is a daguerreotype copy, representing Hannah Gowen of Weston. The lady intrigued me sufficiently to delve into her story and ferret out the reason why she inhabits the eminent space of our museum.

Hannah Gowen's claim to fame dates back to our Revolutionary times and the early years of our republic. In 1789 President George Washington undertook a tour of New England that he did not see since the start of the Revolutionary War. On October 23rd of that year, his party, including his companions Tobias Lear and Major Jackson and six servants, stayed overnight at the Flag Tavern in Weston. The tavern keeper took care of the carriage and its four horses, as well as the horses of the servants; the party was wined and dined at the Tavern (which burned down on November 6, 1902).

The following morning, the 24th of October, 1789, Colonel Thomas Marshall officially welcomed President Washington to Weston. Then the notables of the town were presented to him, together with local veterans of the war who served under Washington. It was at this time that Washington kissed a young teenager, Hannah Gowen, who then cherished the moment during the rest of her long life.

Hannah Gowen unfortunately did not keep a diary, and little is known about her. We do know that she died on May 23, 1870 at the ripe age of 95 years and 8 months. She is buried in the Old Burying Ground on Weston's Boston Post Road. The story goes that there was a new hearse in town at that time, and some Westonites who knew Hannah Gowen commented: "Was it not just like Hannah Gowen to be the first one to ride in it!"

There is a sentimental aftermath to this story. To commemorate the event of Washington's visit and of the memorable kiss to Hannah Gowen, a tree was planted. It survived until 1923, when it was blown down by strong winds. It lay on the ground till 1924 when it was cut up; one cross section of it is also in the Weston Historical Museum. This tree had lived

near Hannah Gowen’s house on Highland Street. Not far was the Marshall house; rumors have it that on his 1789 visit, Washington actually stayed with the Marshalls, while his retinue spent the night at the Flag Tavern. The Marshall house was originally a loyalist property, confiscated and sold to the Marshall family. Eventually it was owned by the Paine family, moved to Church Street, and sold to the Fiske family.

Behind the Gowen house was—and is—Sanderson Hill, where Jonas Sanderson kept the beacon light during the Revolutionary war, a link in a chain of signals.

The last word about Hannah Gowen: allegedly she was fond of skunks and kept some as pets inside her house. It might have been some of their descendants who generations later took up residence in the hollow of the famous Hannah Gowen tree while it was lying on the ground.

Vera Laska

Reprinted from the Town Crier, 1/8/98, p.9.

RECREATION ON THE MELONE HOMESTEAD, WESTON, 1940s.

Recently I attended a Recreation Commission Forum and subsequent Special Town Meeting on December 9, 1997, which approved the spending of \$95,000 to design a new recreation building. It was interesting to compare what the town had available for organized recreation in the 1930s and 1940s at the Riverside with what is being proposed and afforded now in the 1990s.

After having heard the wonderful slide presentation at the Weston Historical Society on December 4, 1997 by my friend and local historian Bob Pollock about that earliest recreation center known as Riverside “Rec” in Weston, I decided to answer Bob’s question as to why I had never gone to this fantastic area. The reason was that I lived on a farm on the other side of the town and rarely ventured out of my neighborhood of Crescent Street. Here we had our own recreational area. My biggest venture out of my neighborhood in my elementary school days was to take the school bus to my friend’s house on Summer Street, which was still within walking distance from my house.

* * *

I feel very fortunate to have had the privilege to have grown up on Weston at the Melone homestead, the place of my birth, on a 62 acre farm of the Sears Estate, with fields, open space and forest. Here I and my siblings and neighbors had freedom to recreate. I loved nature, so I was outdoors during most daylight hours, when not at school or doing chores, and would have to be called home for supper. Our form of recreation was literally “re-creating.” In winter the ponds and swamps of Three Mile Brook were our skating areas for pickup hockey with me wearing hand-me-down brother’s hockey skates. I loved the interaction, though, at times, being the youngest skater, I felt I was the puck. We’d play hide and seek in and among the trees in the swamp, or attempt figures, or play “come over.”

Being the only girl of our age of 8 to 12 years in the neighborhood, I joined my brothers and friends with many re-creating times. One such summer project that my brother Danny,



Haying at the Melone farm: friends Nick Giampetro (with pitchfork), Nick Foskini and Sears chauffeur's daughter Jeanette Comeau helping Joseph Melone, who is leading his team of horses Charlie and Lightning. In the lower left corner is Melone's black labrador dog Peter. Photo from the 1930s.

Bo Perry and I did was to build a tree house and an airplane which was to fly across the tomato field from the big maple tree to the big cedar tree, a good 500 yards spread. We got hold of some old cable line left over from the Boston and Maine railway, pulled as taut as we could, and proceed to traverse the field holding the cable, at about our heads' level. It was exciting to complete the wooden airplane made of a box with board wings. The tree house of old scrapwood had been completed weeks before. When the christening and first flight was to take place, consensus was the smallest of us should pilot the plane. I was delegated. I jumped into the plane from the platform of the tree house, and my brother Danny got the plane to move on the cable. Low and behold, the plane and I went down the cable, which, with my weight, went right down into the center of the ripening tomatoes! So much for sauce! Needless to say, we were not able to use the cabled airplane again.

We loved to climb trees, we did so often, and we had our favorites. The maples had the nicest angles, and it seemed we could climb higher in them. One day our tree climbing fun turned into disaster, though my memory of it is not so much of pain as of the care I received. One of the branches gave way, I slid down the trunk, was impaled, then hit the ground, hard. It was Dr. Van Nuys who advised my mother about the care I would need at home. She made the most wonderful flaxseed poultices, and to this day when I smell flaxseed, I feel comfort. I was carried by my brothers for two weeks; it was a unique form of transport: they would hand me over their heads one to another, as I was held horizontally as a log, and that made it fun for me.

Another summer, even though we swam at the old Town Pool at the ByPass, we three decided to begin the construction of a swimming pool of our own in an area between the swamp and the chicken coop, not only a sunny spot, but also with softer soil. We shoveled for what seemed like weeks, digging up an area of about 4x4 yards. We finally gave up, deciding that not only was it too much work, but there were too many mosquitoes.



The Melone homestead at 27 Crescent Street.

In the winters, our neighbors, the Perrys, had nice hills for sledding and skiing, with their leather bear-claw strap skis we all shared. We had so much fun and before we went home, Mrs. Perry would serve us hot cocoa and her delicious cookies. At one point, we decided to begin a ski club which included Bo Perry, my brother Danny and me. Danny was president, Bo was treasurer, and I was secretary. Rules and regulations were drawn up, and criteria for membership and advancement were drafted. The most important membership criterion was that the member had to have the ability to ski down between the trees on the Perry slope, not just down the open broad slope. We were in a dilemma because the secretary could not meet this criterion for membership, even after many tries and many contacts with trees. That criterion had to be waived for the secretary to remain secretary.

On the farm we had cows, pigs, chickens, goats, a team of horses and a pony named Polly, who would pull the little red pung (sleigh). One day my brother Tony took the reins, and six of us piled into the pung, with my younger sister Celia seated on my older sister Josie's lap. We headed up the old road from the house, up the hill to the back field in what seemed like at least 2-3 feet of snow, with Polly pulling and us gliding along behind her. I remember it being so wonderful, especially when we began our descent toward the back field. As we came out of the wooded section of the old road with the field in view, Polly headed to the right, the rung of the pung went over a rock, and we all tipped out into the snow. I remember Tony having good control of the situation, and Josie picking up toddler Celia, digging her out of the deep snow. We all laughed, as no one was hurt, and this was all part of the adventure and excitement of the trip.

There were many episodes around the horses. One summer day we were playing in the hay loft of our huge barn, which had a chute where you pushed hay down from the loft for the horses, cows, and goats below. We would ride the chute down to the pile of hay. Even though it was work, we younger siblings would consider it fun to stomp the hay down as it

was being pitched to the loft by my father, his friends, and my brothers during the hay harvesting times. One day when coming out of the barn, I heard shouting. Tony was riding the tip cart being drawn by Charlie and Lightning, our team of work horses. Tony looked like Ben Hur driving his chariot, standing erect. Every so often Lightning would go wild, and this was one of those days. I looked on in horror to see Tony do a back flip off the tip cart, the reins in the air, and the horses pulling in opposite directions, rearing and bucking. My sheer fright brought me behind the nearest big maple tree, and that was exactly where the horses finally came to a stop, crashing into the very same tree! I ran to the house and looked back to see Tony again, taking control of the team.

In the Spring, an enjoyable event was blueberry picking and pussy willow cutting. One day my sister Josie and I decided to pick blueberries for some pies. Our blueberry patches were up behind the corn field and the piggery and near the Boston and Maine railroad tracks. There was a barbed wire fence that bounded the corn field and needed to be crossed to get to the blueberry patches. Josie cleared the fence, but my attempt resulted in my thigh snagging the wire, causing a painful tear. Being accustomed to “home remedy” medical care, a clean, white handkerchief sufficed for a bandage until after all the blueberries were harvested. It seemed that that was more important than being home crying about a cut. I do not recall it being very troublesome, though I still have the scar to remind me of the incident.

My sister Josie was an avid knitter and she taught me to knit the multi-designed argyle sweater which I knitted for my doll with Josie’s leftover yarn. My mother taught me to cook Italian cuisine which she would say was “different,” but today is considered the healthy “Mediterranean diet.” Each year we celebrated the harvesting of corn and vegetables. I recall my whole family and our friends and their families, who participated in the harvesting, gathering for the occasion. My mother would prepare roasted chickens, peppers, potatoes, onions, home made bread, salad, and roasted corn on the cob. We would all gather outdoors with this good food and home made wine and enjoy singing and harmonizing. I can still remember my father and his friend Albino leading us all in “Mazzolino di fiore,” and my mother harmonizing with her friend, Giaginda.

During the summer on warm Sundays, after church, our family would pile into the Plymouth car, picnic basket filled with roast chicken, peppers, tomatoes and bread, and head for either Revere Beach or Nantasket Beach for the day. I remember one Sunday, when we were all in the car, and I was seated on my brother Johnny’s lap. I had forgotten a bathing cap, so I ran back into the house to get it. Upon my return to Johnny’s lap, I shut the car door on my thumb. I remember it hurting me, but I was not going to spoil the family outing. My good mother used her clean white handkerchief, I applied pressure, and with a lot of reassurance from Johnny and everyone else, I had a great time at the beach.

The wonderful thing about living on a farm was having the vast spaces for play. I recall driving around the entire area with Danny showing me how to drive the Model T Ford. That is a fun memory!

The more usual occurrences were the neighborhood baseball games. All the Perrys and Melones would play competitively.

Recreation at school included not only the usual outdoor games and sports, but also skating on the pond behind what is now Brook School apartments. I recall our teacher, Miss

Marble, skating upright in her usual correct posture, on her figure skates, enjoying it, yet monitoring us students as we skated our recess away.

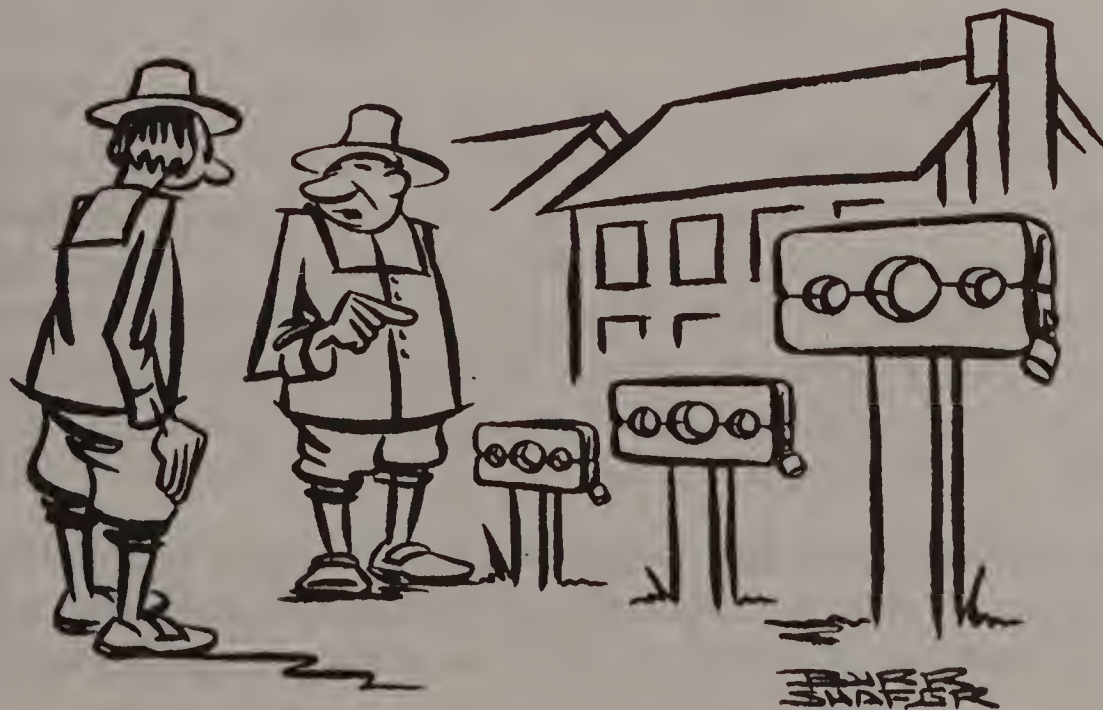
In the Fall and Spring, roller skating was fun. My furthest venture beyond my neighborhood was to Summer Street, where my friend Arlene lived. Our fun was sharing roller skates, the type that were strapped to one's shoes. She would wear one, let me wear the other, and we would roller skate on Summer Street, with one foot on the dirt without a skate, and the other with the roller skate on the pavement. This was a treat, because we could both roller skate, 50% rolling, but 100% fun. Friends were also made through Girl Scouts. I had one memorable summer when I was able to attend Camp Helen Storrow for two weeks and learned about canoeing, boating, and summer camping, which was great! Another memorable recreational event took place at the Weston Golf Club at a friend's birthday party, during which we bowled. Bowling was not a common sport for us, and I was surprised that I could get a score that rewarded me with a silver bracelet which I still wear.

I feel so fortunate to have experienced such a diversity of recreational activities. The main thing that I recall about living at the Melone homestead was the freedom to play, to explore, without fear, without scheduled play; and time constraints. Even though I had chores, piano lessons, Girl Scouts, church, and school homework to contend with, the general sense was one of freedom and interdependence of family and friends, and for that I am truly grateful.

We are so lucky to have all that is available to us today in recreation. I am glad that Weston will have a Recreation Center where supervised safe play, and interaction can take place, hopefully in an intergenerational milieu. For that, I am sure, the town's families will be grateful.

Anna Melone

Anna Melone was born and raised in Weston and graduated from the Weston High School. She received a B.S. and an M.S. in nursing from Boston College and worked as a family nurse practitioner in various cities, including the town of Weston. She was adjunct professor at Lasell Jr. College in Newton. She has two adult daughters and lives in Weston. She is a newly elected director of the Weston Historical Society.



"It seems that juvenile delinquency is on the increase."

LECTURES, PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE

The Weston Historical Society sponsored a centennial lecture with slides about the Riverside Recreation Grounds, at the Weston Public Library on Thursday, December 4, 1997 at 7 p.m. The speaker was Robert Pollock, familiar with the Riverside "Rec" from personal experience. The lecture was well attended.

The "Rec" was a popular social and sports center, welcoming one and all. Founded in 1897 by philanthropist businessman Charles Hubbard, it offered gym, football, baseball and softball fields, tennis courts, picnic grounds, athletic track and the largest swimming pool in New England. No wonder it was so popular. Unfortunately, in 1958 a fire destroyed two main buildings, and the same year the government (MDC) ordered the place closed.

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Attention: mark your calendar for **March 26, 1998, 7 p.m. at the Weston High School Media Center.** Our Spring slide lecture will be delivered by Michael Tourgias on the topic of **"King Philip's War in New England."**

Michael Tourgias is the author of the novel **Until I Have No Country** and of a number of other books dealing with New England and environmental themes. He is a frequent guest on the television program "Chronicle," and we have numerous laudatory comments on his lecture, among others that he "knows how to entertain a crowd."

King Philip's War raged in 1675 and 1676 and was a bloody encounter between the colonists and the Indians. Chief Matacomet, a.k.a. King Philip was the son of Massassoit, sachem of the Wampanoags, allied with the Nipmucks. Defeated by colonial troops, he was shot near Mt. Hope (RI) by an Indian in the service of Captain Benjamin Church's Plymouth company.

Our Speakers' Committee is busily working on the details of the presentation at our Annual Charter Dinner, which will take place in early May, 1998. Members will be notified in due time after the details have been worked out regarding place and time, and most importantly, about the lecturer and his/her topic.

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MUSEUM UPDATE

Work is progressing in an orderly fashion in the organization of the Weston Historical Society Museum at the Josiah Smith Tavern. The general division of labor is in the hands of the Curator and two highly dedicated permanent volunteers: **Douglas Henderson**, who is in charge of all documents, which he is sorting into systematic, chronological and alphabetical units; and **George Amadon**, in charge of the hundreds of photographs. Curator **Vera Laska** finished systematizing a small library into sections of books and pamphlets pertaining to the history of Weston, New England and other categories. She also produced two complete sets of BULLETINS and is now engaged in indexing them.

A major accomplishment at the Museum has been a two year project to organize its extensive photographic collection. The credit for this goes to **Pamela Fox**, who applied her know-how to achieve three goals: better preservation of the photographs by placing them in

archival mylar polyester sleeve protectors and acid free folders; identifying as much as possible the subjects shown in the photographs; and filing them by family name, subject matter and geographical location. The collection occupies four file drawers.

Under Pamela Fox' supervision volunteer **Sally Gilman** logged in nearly 100 hours on the project; others who helped were **Barbara Coburn** and **Jean Jones**. In addition to the hundreds of photographs that had been scattered in the rooms of the Museum, the Town Crier donated to the Museum two large boxes of hundreds of photos from their morgue; this was additional work for Amadon, Fox and her helpers. The Museum and the Weston Historical Society is beholden to all volunteers and especially to Pamela Fox for the time, energy and dedication to this work.

Pamela expressed her thanks to the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities and also to the Newton Historical Society for sharing their experience and methodology, which provided the basis for our system.

Vera Laska

I AM FINE – HOW ARE YOU?

There's nothing the matter with me
I'm just healthy as I can be.
Have arthritis in both my knees
And when I talk, I talk with a wheeze.
My pulse is weak and my blood is thin,
But I'm awfully well for the shape I am in.
I think my liver is out of whack
And a terrible pain is in my back;
My hearing is poor, my sight is dim,
Most everything seems to be out of trim,
But I'm awfully well for the shape I am in.
I have arch supports for both my feet
Or I wouldn't be able to go on the street.
Sleeplessness I have night after night
And in the morning I'm just a sight.
My memory is failing, my head's in a spin,
I'm peacefully living on aspirin,
But I'm awfully well for the shape I am in.
The moral is, as this tale we unfold,
That for you and me who are growing old
It's better to say "I'm fine" with a grin
Than to let them know the shape we're in.

This gem came to me from Prague, copied from a Canadian publication. The author is unknown. If anybody knows his/her name, please let me know; ed.

WESTON 2000: PORTRAIT OF A TOWN

The Weston Historical Society is looking toward the future and is hereby announcing an ambitious project, approved by the Board of Directors.

“WESTON 2000: PORTRAIT OF A TOWN” is a major undertaking, hopefully with the cooperation of all Weston cultural, social, religious, charitable and business organizations.

The results will be presented to the public in a major exhibit in the Weston Public Library in the early part of the year 2000. Planned are also lectures and possibly a commemorative brochure or book. Details to the participants will be forthcoming in the spring and announced also in the Town Crier.

This is how the Society has chosen to “take a written photograph” of the status of the town on the threshold of the new millennium. It will serve as a testimony of its present and a legacy to those who come after us.

At this time the project WESTON 2000 is in the hands of an executive committee, consisting of Mrs. Barbara Coburn, Mrs. Anna Melone, and Vera Laska, chairman.

Any suggestions and ideas are more than welcome by memo or phone to the members of the executive committee.

WHAT ITEMS WOULD YOU PLACE INTO A WESTON TIME CAPSULE?

Send your suggestions to “Weston 2000,” Box 343, Weston, MA 02193

AUTHORS WANTED!

During the past few years, we received quite a number of favorable comments on the BULLETIN, which we hereby gratefully acknowledge. What pleases us most is that you consider the BULLETIN lively, since that has been our intention.

We are constantly looking for local color, to keep our publication lively. You, the readers, can contribute to that by sending us your recollections. Memoirs, diaries, bibliographical vignettes are very much in vogue these days. Close your eyes and think of some amusing – or amazing! – episode from your lives, then put pen to paper and write them down for us. What easier way to become a published author?

We at the Weston Historical Society should be the keepers of the town’s collective memory. Before the waves of history roll over it, as it is apt to do, we all should try to salvage the particles that make up the mosaic of Weston’s history.

Practical hints: if possible, type and make it double spaced, anywhere between three or ten pages. If you have a photograph to go with your story, that is welcome but not obligatory. We retain the right to edit your copy. The best entries would be published in the very next issue in the fall of 1998. If you have questions regarding your opus, call the editor, Vera Laska, at 237-1447.

Vera Laska

INTRODUCING: VERA LASKA



Vera Laska

A native of Czechoslovakia, Vera Laska is an American by choice. Always on fellowships, she received MA degrees in philosophy (logic) and in history, and a Ph.D. in American History from the University of Chicago. She held teaching positions at the University of Illinois and at Roosevelt University in Chicago and served as Foreign Student Counselor at the University of Chicago for several years. She has been professor of American History at Regis College in Weston since 1966; here she held at different times the position of Chairman of the Department of History and Chairman of the Division of Social Sciences. In 1972 she was named among Out-

standing Educators of America. Among her other awards are the Kidger Award for Excellence in History (1984) and the George Washington Honor Medal in Communication (1990). She is listed in 5 or 6 WHO'S WHO compendia. She speaks eight languages.

She is the author of seven books, most in American history; her best known books are **Women in the Resistance**, which includes her experience in the Czech resistance and in three concentration camps, Auschwitz, Gross Rosen and Nordhausen (Tunnel) as a political prisoner; and **Two Loves of Benjamin Franklin, Women and Diplomacy**, which was published in Czech while she was Fulbright professor at Charles University (1348) in Prague in 1993. She is also the author of over 300 articles and reviews in professional journals and in newspapers. She reviews for three professional journals, and is on the editorial boards of the **New England Journal of History** and the **International Journal on World Peace**. Since 1972 she has been writing a column in the **Town Criers**. She is a free lance writer and lecturer; this includes chapters in four edited books and giving enrichment lectures on cruise ships.

She is married to Andrew J. Laska, a retired business executive; their two sons attended Weston High School. Vera Laska is a confessed dedicated Westonite, Curator of the Weston Historical Society's Museum and the editor of its BULLETIN.

She is an optimist, and some claim that she has a sense of humor.

JUST FOR THE RECORD

An old Bulletin fluttered down on me in our attic, and its pages reminded me of the proverbial "good ol' days." It told of the days past 125 years ago, when – in 1873 – total school enrollment in Weston was 235, total school appropriation was \$4,375 in a town budget of \$25,865.03! In those days we had six district schools and a high school.

Here are some of the comments of the erstwhile school committee:

"Many /text/books contain a mass of rules and facts which over-burden the memory."

"All our school houses are now in excellent repair and well furnished."

"It should be regarded as a misfortune for a teacher not to be able to sing."

Compare the above numbers with the last figures available, for the academic year 1996-97: we support 1,867 students with a school appropriation of \$13.7 million, out of a total town budget of \$30.4 million, i.e. 45% of the total expenditures. Look at those figures: we spend twice the amount of money on one of our offspring as was the entire school budget a century ago. (I know, I know, but please do not call me with economic lessons, I have homemade pontifications in this respect; I simply thought it an interesting comparison). What

is noteworthy is that all but 5% of our high school graduates go on to further education, 88% of them to four year colleges.

A footnote to the old school houses: school number 5 has been moved and is today on the Howe property on Ware Street. It is for sale. It is in debatable shape, used as a warehouse. A new owner wants to tear it down, and it would have to be moved if purchased. Sad ending for the walls that once heard the laughter of youngsters.

Vera Laska

WESTON HISTORY

1. Brenton H. Dickson: One Upon a Pung, delightful stories about Weston of yester year; hardcover, \$7.50.

2. Brenton H. Dickson & Homer C. Lucas: One Town in the American Revolution, Weston, Massachusetts; hardcover, \$7.50.

3. Daniel S. Lamson: History of the Town of Weston, Massachusetts, 1630 -1890; 1997 reprint, with new Introduction and an INDEX; this book should be in every Weston home; hardcover, \$29.95.

All three books available at the Museum of the Weston Historical Society, Wednesdays 10a.m.-12 p.m. or by phone 237-1447. Out of town orders: please add postage & handling \$3.00.

THE WESTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY, INC.

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Membership dues: Individuals \$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.