

THE WESTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY BULLETIN



Fall, 2003

Volume XXXIV, No. 2

3000 Flags on the Town Green



*George F. Amadon standing before a multitude of flags.
The flags were planted on the Town Green in honor of the lives lost in the
September 11, 2001 attacks.*

LAND PROTECTION AND STEWARDSHIP IN WESTON

Land conservation in Weston turns fifty this year. In 1953, the town established a Committee to Investigate and Report on the Matter of a Town Forest. Within a few years, several small tracts of Town Forest had been acquired, the seedpods of more than 2,000 acres of open space that we own today. Weston at that time was a town of dwindling farms, fading estates, and a few other small seedpods -- of residential development. The genetic map by which Weston would unfold was set in the early 1950s by two critical decisions: residential zoning, and open space acquisition. The upshot is the suburb we see today: two-thirds detached houses on large lots and one-third schools, golf courses, and protected open space.

The first half of this period, 1953-1977, could be called the era of land *protection* in Weston. The next quarter-century, running into our own time, has marked the era of land *stewardship*. My purpose here is to review protection, look more closely at stewardship, and briefly consider what may become of our land in the next fifty years.

Half a century ago, the only available mechanism for protecting land in Massachusetts was "town forest." The acquisition of municipal forests had arisen in the early 20th century, when the eastern United States was severely deforested and there was a fear of timber famine. The original purpose of town forests was to promote reforestation and timber management, but the movement faded as New England reforested itself and lumber remained cheap and plentiful on the world market. The town forest idea was revived as a means of open space protection in the 1950s. Weston was among the leaders in this new drive to preserve the rural character of suburbanizing towns.

Beginning in 1955 Weston began acquiring town forests on Highland Street, in Jericho, and on Sudbury Road. In the same year the Weston Forest & Trail Association was formed to educate townspeople about the forests and maintain trails within them. Dr. William Elliston was the leader in all these efforts. From the start, the strategy was to acquire large tracts of backland at reduced prices, leaving the owner with street frontage increased in value.

In 1961, as a result of new state enabling legislation, the Conservation Commission was established and took over the job of protecting open space for broad, ecological, scenic, and recreational purposes. Land acquisition continued through the 1960s, but became more difficult as land values continued to rise. With completion of the turnpike connector to downtown Boston the pace of development increased, and it became clear that most of the remaining large tracts of open land would soon be gone. Townspeople rallied by passing two bond issues totaling over \$4 million, in 1972 and 1974. This marked the heroic climax of open space protection in Weston. Again Dr. Elliston led the charge, along with Hugo Uytterhoeven, Ken Germeshausen, and Bus Willis. Over 1,000 acres were quickly added to the 763 already existing. The Weston College land, bought in 1977 with a separate bond issue and state matching funds, provided a crown jewel.

That largely concluded the era of major land protection in Weston. Some important parcels have been acquired since, but they hardly amount to a hundred acres. The Case "Forty Acre Field" was purchased from Harvard in 1986 (as municipal purposes land), more Coburn fields on Church Street were protected through a partial development arrangement, the Dickinson and Danforth fields were acquired with state funds in compensation for the taking of conservation land for the MWRA tank at Norumbega. The "Sunday Woods" on Concord Road marked the first parcel to be bought primarily with funds from the Community Preservation Act surcharge on property tax. With that steady stream of income, Weston is likely to continue acquiring small pieces of land for years to come, adding perhaps another one or two



Elmer Jones Leading a walk.



Morning birders in the Coburn meadow.

hundred acres. Emphasis has shifted mainly to open fields that are visible from the roads, and protection of these valuable parcels will often require creative mixtures of partial development, private fund-raising, and CPA funds.

Let us turn now to the era of stewardship, or “community land management.” During the decades that land was being acquired to protect “rural character,” genuine rural activity in Weston was disappearing. At the beginning of the 20th century Weston was a town of active farms and managed woodlots, but productive land use largely ceased during the middle part of the century. In the past 50 years, Weston has rapidly grown up in wild forest even as it has suburbanized. Very little open farmland is left, and you could count the remaining private farms on one hand -- Danforth, Anza, Dickinson, Carter,...?

As for active forestry, some pine planting and “timber stand improvement” took place on town forest land in the 1950s, but that also petered out. There was no real market for timber, and no real taste for cutting trees. With commercial agriculture and forestry in decline, and a growing feeling among conservationists that the best management was no management at all, one might have reasonably predicted that Weston’s open space would be left to look after itself. But once 2,000 acres of land had been acquired in the 1970s, something much more interesting happened. We can review the rise of community land stewardship in Weston under four headings: trails, fields, market gardening, and forestry.

Weston in the 1950s had an extensive network of riding trails left over from the estate era. Equestrians in town played an active role both in protecting land, and in maintaining the basic trail system. As more conservation land was acquired, many smaller walking trails were added by the Weston Forest & Trail Association. The leading figure in this work has long been George Bates, who along with Hugo Uytterhoeven and others laid out trails, acquired easements over private land to allow access and connect the pieces, and got the whole system properly marked and mapped.

Trail maintenance began as a volunteer effort, and many people continue to help out in various corners of town. But volunteers alone were found to be inadequate to the task of keeping the trails clear, especially following storms such as the heavy May snow of 1977. In 1979 Forest & Trail decided to hire someone--me, actually-- to maintain the trails on a regular basis, removing windfalls and cutting back encroaching branches and brush. The following year Land’s Sake was formed and has performed this work ever since, under the direction of Forest & Trail . Taking care of trails has proven a good way to introduce Weston’s young people to conservation land. Besides the work done by Land’s Sake, the trails have been improved by occasional Eagle Scout projects as well. For years, the trails have hosted monthly Forest & Trail outings, and more recently a series of “Biodiversity Day” walks each June. Oh the whole, Weston has one of the most extensive and best-used systems in the region, with some 65 miles of trails--and the work continues.

Although most of Weston’s “open” space is forested, there are also three dozen small fields on public land scattered around town. Most are only a few acres, amounting to perhaps 100 acres in all. These fields provide a lingering element of rural character along our roads and lend real charm to some of our better-used conservation areas such as Cat Rock, the Weston College land, and the Sears land. At the same time they provide diverse habitat for grassland and shrubland species not found in deep forest. For some years the fields were mowed by the Highway Department, until the job was delegated to Green Power Farm in the mid-1980s. The mowing duty came to Land’s Sake along with the rest of Green Power in 1991. Many of the fields are not mowed until August, to allow time for ground-nesting birds to fledge their young.

Mowing fields and maintaining trails for scenery, wildlife, and passive recreation is about



Squash Harvest at Land's Sake.



Author with woodpiles, Highland Forest.

what one would expect a suburban town to do with its conservation land. But in Weston things took a new twist with the birth of community farming and forestry. Market gardening, timber harvesting, and an ethic of active land stewardship have become part of our heritage as well. This story began in 1970 with Green Power Farm on Merriam Street, and a man named Bill McElwain. Green Power started as a volunteer effort to grow vegetables for the inner city, but within a few years the town acquired the land (for municipal purposes) from Weston College, and McElwain was hired by the newly-formed Youth Commission. Green Power grew to about 15 acres, and apple cider and maple syrup [described in the Spring, 2003 Weston Historical Society Bulletin] were soon added to the program. The aim of these projects was to involve middle school and high school students with agriculture, and to send low-cost food to urban shelters and lunch programs.

Green Power was transferred to the Conservation Commission upon the demise of the Youth Commission in the mid-1980s, and in 1991 the program was merged with Land's Sake. That organization had been incorporated as a non-profit in 1980, with three central aims: to provide ecologically responsible management for town farm and forest land, to actively involve young people with that land, and to generate as much income as possible directly from sales of products and services. Land's Sake was founded primarily by Martha Gogel and Doug Henderson, who saw an opportunity to build upon what Bill McElwain had begun. The resulting arrangement, by which Land's Sake contracts with the Conservation Commission, Weston Forest & Trail, and private landowners to carry out a range of land stewardship and educational projects, has proven reasonably efficient and stable.

Land's Sake got its start farming the Case "40 Acre" field in 1981, under the auspices of the Arnold Arboretum. Over the years a successful farmstand and pick-your-own business has been built up, employing young people and largely paying its own way. Harvard pushed the Arboretum to sell the land, and the town bought 35 acres for \$3.5 million in 1986 -- the largest land deal in Weston's history at the time (and not much less than what had been spent to acquire over 1,000 acres a mere decade before). With the Green Power land on Merriam Street and Concord Road, Land's Sake now cultivates about 25 acres. In any given year 15-20 acres are growing organic fruits, flowers and vegetables, while the rest rotates through soil-building cover crops.

Partly by design and partly by chance, Land's Sake has developed a new model for community farming of suburban open space. The farm strikes a balance between commercial rigor and educational and social purposes -- a fruitful marriage of conservative and liberal precepts. It is run by hard-driving professional staff, but also employs and educates interns in their twenties and middle school students. Crops are cultivated by a judicious combination of power equipment and intensive hand transplanting, weeding, and harvesting. On-site retail sales pay most of the bills, but in addition some 20,000 pounds of produce are shipped every year to the city food security network, a donation underwritten by the Town of Weston. Small, irregular fields interspersed with ornamental plantings make an attractive blend of working market garden and arboretum, a place where visitors feel welcome to go for a stroll. Here is open space stewardship that looks terrific, engages people with the land in many ways, and all but pays for itself. Land's Sake is now internationally recognized, and frequently hosts visitors who hope to try something similar in their own communities, ranging from Rhode Island to Tuscany.

Meanwhile, something even less predictable was going on in the town forest. No active management had been undertaken since about 1960, and letting nature manage its own affairs appeared to be settled doctrine. But with the 1970s energy crisis and the revival of heating with wood came new calls for forest management. The Conservation Commission

initiated firewood thinning on a small scale in 1981, and the cutting was carried out by Land's Sake. Through the 1980s 50-100 cords were cut each winter in Jericho and Highland Forest and sold to local customers. In 1989, the Conservation Commission approved a long-range forest management plan prepared by John Potter, who had grown up working for Land's Sake, gone on to the Yale School of Forestry, and returned to run the forest program in Weston for several years. This initiated a new era in Weston's approach to its town forest.

The plan identified 1,440 acres of manageable oak, pine, and red maple forest throughout Weston's conservation lands, of which part was to be set aside as a wild reserve. The remainder was to be thinned every 15 years or so as it grew, and then to be harvested of mature pine and hardwood timber on about a 120 year rotation. This would mean that some 10 acres every year would be cut heavily enough to release young seedlings, using either "shelterwood" or "group selection" methods that avoid jarring clearcuts. The purpose of such sustainable forestry is to continually regenerate a small percentage of the forest in ways that imitate the periodicity and scale of natural disturbances such as hurricanes and nor'easters. This allows one to harvest high-quality wood products and at the same time maintain a diversity of habitats, dominated by mature forest but with some younger patches scattered throughout the forest.

In practice, nothing like as much cutting as the plan called for has been carried out. It's very hard to make such careful, small-scale forest management pay -- it's just not the same as selling organic strawberries to an eager local retail market. Nevertheless, through the 1990s and to this day Land's Sake has continued cutting on about 5 - 10 acres every winter, on the Sears land and in the Ogilvie forest as well as the Highland forest and Jericho. This has been mostly firewood thinning, but some larger hardwood and pine timber has been harvested as well. Most timber has been sold to commercial sawmills, a smaller amount cut into lumber on a bandsaw mill and sold to local customers. Young people are involved in the forest project by splitting firewood. Modest as it may be, this program of active suburban forest management is also widely regarded as a model, and like the farm has attracted visitors from as far away as Scotland and Japan.

Where is this innovative program of community land protection and management likely to go in the next half century? Historians never predict the future with much confidence, but I will venture a few guesses in order to provoke some thought. The largest challenge that Weston's land will face in the coming years may be increased public use of our trail system. Overall, I believe this is a good thing -- Weston now depends on the city of Boston for its existence, and suburban conservation lands are inevitably a metropolitan resource. On balance the educational value of city people walking in the woods far outweighs any minor ecological disturbances. But recreational use does pose some difficult issues. We will need to steer people and dogs away from areas that harbor rare species, for example. Heavy dog traffic that makes the trails uninviting for other users may prove the greatest challenge of all, and the Conservation Commission is already confronting it.

Our open fields present a challenge that might be made into an opportunity. Every year the forest creeps in closer behind the mower. Now the Forest & Trail Association and the Weston Historical Commission are looking into using CPA funds to push some of the field edges back to the stone walls, restoring their historic dimensions. This would greatly improve their scenic quality. And we might also look into maintaining these expanded fields with livestock. Nothing restores rural character like putting a few sheep in a field, as Faith and I discovered when we kept sheep throughout Weston. Concord and Carlisle are now *renting* sheep to maintain many of their open lands. Rotational grazing with portable fences

need not hinder public access, and can be compatible with grassland birds. Since there is a growing niche market for grass-fed meat, such a project could cover a substantial part of its own costs, while reducing the need for mowing.

We should see continuing growth in demand for local, organic produce as well. We can expect market gardening in Weston to slowly expand in acreage, in intensity, and in variety of crops produced, and to keep involving plenty of young people. But there will be competition from other users for the limited supply of open land in Weston. Most of what is now being cultivated is “municipal purposes land” which may also be desired for recreation, schools, or community housing. Just how strongly distaste for the industrial food system will push us to prefer using our municipal land for locally-grown food rather than these other pressing needs, is hard to guess.

It may be even more risky to predict future trends in forest product markets than in farming. Will the energy crisis return to stay? That would improve demand for firewood and for chips, which might be used to efficiently heat a municipal building. Sustainable local timber production is being promoted by some environmentalists as a way to combat the “illusion of preservation” --that is, setting our own forest aside while we import 98% of our forest products from other, more vulnerable parts of the world. This might work best as part of a community forest coalition across several towns in the region, which would provide an adequate forest base to support timber procession for a local retail market. We can imagine sustainably-certified flooring, paneling, and furniture made of our own “character wood.” The major challenge facing such a program will be to satisfy Weston residents that other ecological values of the forest, such as protection of biodiversity, are also being served.

During the past half century Weston has emerged as a national leader in land protection and stewardship at the local, community level. This did not happen by chance, but because of the foresight and persistence of Bill Elliston, Bill McElwain, George Bates, and many others who poured themselves into the cause. These people did not always agree on which land was most important to protect, or how best to care for it, but they did share an unshakable conviction that hanging onto a decent amount of farm and forest land, and encouraging townspeople to stay in touch with that land, is vital to our community. Whether the coming generations of Weston conservationists are willing to devote themselves to this land with the same generous vision and tenacity will determine what is to become of this noble heritage.

Brian Donahue

SOURCES:

Pamela W. Fox, *Farm Town to Suburb: The History and Architecture of Weston, Massachusetts, 1830 - 1980* (Portsmouth, New Hampshire: Peter E. Randall, 2002).

Elmer E. Jones, *Walks on Weston Conservation Land: A Guide* (Weston: Weston Forest & trail, 1999)

Brian Donahue, *Reclaiming the Commons: Community Farms and Forest in a New England Town* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999)

Open Space & Recreation Plan: Resource Analysis for the Town of Weston, MA (1996)

All photos are by Nina Danforth, and we appreciate her contribution.

Brian Donahue is Associate Professor of American Environmental Studies at Brandeis University. He worked at Green Power Farm, was among the founders of Land's Sake and the Weston Land Trust, and serves on the board of the Weston Forest & Trail Association. He is a member of the Weston Conservation Commission and the Community Preservation Committee. He has lived in Weston since 1976, is married to Faith Rand, and has two children, Liam and Maggie, who are fifth-generation Weston residents.

A MOVIE MADE AT THE JOSIAH SMITH TAVERN

In early March, Ted Garland, a Weston High School teacher, called and inquired if his photography group could use the porch of the tavern to shoot a few scenes. I told him that we would be delighted. Mr. Garland is head of a project to make a full length movie about the Mable Page murder which took place in 1904, in a house on South Avenue in Weston. They plan to take scenes in front of some homes that were in existence in 1904. The Board has agreed to support this project.

On Friday afternoon on March 2, 2003, Ted Garland with about 15 students arrived at the Museum, the actors putting on period clothing of the time, and crew setting up cameras and microphones with coaches placing actors. They even asked me to put on a long coat for a stand-in non speaking part. I was thrilled.

They were a most enthusiastic group of young people and cooperated very well with Ted Garland. It was a real pleasure to watch; it was an enjoyable afternoon.

George Amadon

THE SUGAR SHACK

This is an addendum to the Spring 2003 Bulletin article on maple sugaring in general and the Weston program in particular.

The Weston public in 1970 was becoming aware of both environmental concerns, and of new pressures on teenage children. Town Meetings, in several successive years, approved budgets for the acquisition of public lands and for programs specifically designed for after school and summer activities for children.

A newly arrived Weston resident, Bill McElwain, assumed the responsibility for the children's programs, which he gave the significant title of "Green Power". His first inspiration was a farm program to grow vegetables on a piece of public land off Merriam Street. The produce was sold in Weston from a small portable stand near the Town Common, but much was donated to Boston food aid programs.

The maple sugar and syrup was a logical extension of the summer program, and with volunteer help, a sugar shack, complete with a furnace and boiling pans, was built in the early spring of 1972. Middle school student volunteers helped in the collection and processing and were paid for their efforts out of the sale of the syrup at the end of the season.

The Green Power programs were funded out of a line item in the Town's annual budget, but Town managers eventually dropped it. Green Power continued for several more years, but the non-profit Land's Sake group gradually assumed all of its function. The Conservation Commission has supported Land's Sake here, and in other Land's Sake's program which it deems to be in the Town's interest.

The Green Power name for the farm operations off Merriam street, and the Sugar Shack still stand as reminders of Bill McElwain's vision.

Douglas Henderson

**MEMORIAL DAY ADDRESS BY GEORGE F. AMADON,
AIR FORCE VETERAN AND PURPLE HEART RECIPIENT,
MAY 26, 2003**

Today we celebrate in the town of Weston the 124th remembrance of the sacrifices made by our armed forces striving to maintain the freedoms of our country. Unfortunately, we have been at war again, and we must add to the casualty list those killed, wounded and missing in action, fighting in Iran.

We remember the casualties of all our former wars, and of Iraq, those who served in the army, navy, marines, and air force in known and unknown locations. We also honor the loyal women who worked in the factories and anxiously awaited the return of their loved ones.

We are again living in a troubled world, one that requires skilled leadership, compassion and most of all an interest in diplomacy. Our young men have gone through a terrible experience in Iraq, and we hope that our prayers have helped bring them back to us.

As we enjoy the newly renovated Town Hall, it might be a time to retell some historical events that this hallowed ground that the edifice stands upon saw. In the beginning, the present green was a swampy area with a small pond on the west side and a river running through it to the east side. There was a field near the Lamson house in which Colonel Lamson trained his militia. The Lamson house was near where the drugstore is now located. He used to graze his cattle on the green.

The first use of the common was upon the bluff at the eastern end of the common where a series of churches were built. The first two were meeting houses where discussions of the town affairs were carried out, as well as religious services. In 1841, a Paul Revere bell was installed, and its pleasant ring heard ever since. A watering trough and Cutting's store were erected on Center street, and a town hall was added in 1847 which included a library, schools, and a large open hall for meetings and social events.

On the western side of the green was Lamson's Park, upon which the militia were trained and soldiers were mustered for duty in the French and Indian wars and the 1775 march to Lexington and Concord. In 1787, during Shay's rebellion, when Lamson's Weston Light Infantry company of 10 privates joined General Lincoln's army, the command of this C company was given to Abraham Bigelow, which infuriated Colonel Lamson.

There were some unusual events that took place on the green. The first was the memorial service for the returned soldiers on August 22nd, 1865, in honor of the fallen in the Civil War. The exercises began in the First Parish where upon the walls were written, "My peace I give unto you, the noble army of martyrs, Praise Thee," and other fitting mottos. After the exercise at the church the assembly was escorted by Gilmore's brass band of Boston to the Town Hall where a repast was enjoyed, followed by remarks by Rev. E.H. Sears who said that "A New England mother could now rock her baby in safety," and to the memory of "those who returned shrouded in the flag which they could defend no more."

Early in 1761 the town received a grant from the powers that were and was able to clear out the river in the green which created a meadow instead of a swamp, but it was not until 1911 that Arthur Shurtleff was approached and eventually drained the green underground and designed the green as it is today with no bandstand or monuments. The old Town Hall was to be moved to where the new one stands but it was not possible, so among many tears it was torn down. The new edifice was completed in 1917. At the dedication Lt. Governor Calvin Coolidge gave the keynote address. Calvin Coolidge was not known for his oratory skills. However, he managed to say: "We are coming to see in these modern days

that we need not only utilitarian motives, but that we need to give some time, some thought and attention to the artistic in life. That need to pay some attention to that which is beautiful as well as that which is merely useful.” As the town green had been planted as a war effort, the setting of the dedication was a bit unusual, among ripening squash, green beans and turnips.

In 1918 the people gathered together at the center to honor Capt.. Robert Winsor Jr., Commander of Company F 303rd Infantry which was in training at Ft. Devens. His father, Robert Winsor, Sr. made arrangements with the Fitchburg railroad, and Company F. was transported to Weston! They marched to the new town house to enjoy an elegant collation and an evening of entertainment. On July 5, 1918 the Company then sailed for France.

George Amadon

MORE ADDENDA TO THE SPRING, 2003 BULLETIN

Re “Weston Winter Wonderland” on p. 15 of the Spring, 2003 Bulletin: It was written on the 13th of February, 2003, when the Bulletin went to press. Little did we know that the storm to outdo many a previous storm came upon us on Monday, Presidents’ Day, the 17th of February, with more snow than any of us liked to see - or shovel!

The maple article was not written by Steve Cyr but by the lady working under him, Kerisa Perasella; the editor regrets the misunderstanding.

JUST FOR THE RECORD

Town leaders salaries, from Weston Town Crier, 8/7/03, pp. 1 & 5:

Jeff Ritter, Wayland, Executive Secretary	\$93,000
Tim Higgins, Lincoln, Town Administrator	\$111,000
Carl Valente, WESTON, Town manager	\$113,000
Philip Lemnios, Natick, Town Administrator	\$119,000
Maureen Valente, Sudbury, Town Manager	\$120,000

Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) scores for 10th graders, percentage of passing English and Math:

WESTON 2002:	English 100	Math 99	2003:	English 97	Math 97
WAYLAND 2002:	English 98	Math 96	2003:	English 99	Math 98

Not in Our Time (?):

TIME on 6/6/03, p.22, reported that “one in five teenagers had sex before age 15; one in three parents knew that their 14 year old had sex.” 0 tempora, 0 mores!

Unwind from shock: 10% of US potato crop is bought by McDonald’s; 8% of Americans eat daily at McDonald’s, reported by TIME 8/18/03, p. 20

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.
4. Lee Marsh, comp.: Weston, photographs from the Museum of the Weston Historical Society, paper, \$15.00.

All 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.

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BULLETIN Editor

Vera Laska

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 02493. 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.