

# WESTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY BULLETIN

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*The Ernest Jones family about 1920. Standing l-r, Arthur (in white shirt), Alex, Mae, and George. Seated l-r, Ernest, Harry, and Marie. (Courtesy of Harry Jones)*

## Growing Up in the Northwest Corner

*Editor's Note: Author Harry Jones was born in 1913 at 455 Concord Road. His father, Ernest Jones, was caretaker for a well-to-do Cambridge family that owned the property and used it as a summer and weekend retreat. Harry's family, including four older siblings, lived in the rear ell of the picturesque mid-19th century farmhouse. Aside from the four years he spent in the Navy during World War II, Harry has lived on Concord Road all his life, first at #455, then across the street at #448, and presently at Stonegate off Concord Road. He describes the idyllic life of a boy growing up in a very different world from today.*



*Ernest Jones, Marie Zimmermann Jones, and baby Mae Alice, 1901.  
(Courtesy of Harry Jones)*

I'm now in my mid-nineties. Often pictures flash before my eyes and memories surface. To the best of my knowledge, I am the oldest person still alive who grew up in this northwest corner of Weston, and for this reason I have recorded places, people, and things as they were from about 1918 to the 1930's.

I was born in a house on Concord Road on July 7, 1913, but

the world didn't mean much to me until I entered first grade in 1919. My very first remembrance in this life was on November 11, 1918. That day my mother took my hand and led me to a window, which she had opened wide, and told me that all the church bells would be ringing shortly. So true this was—the sound of the ringing bells seemed to come from all directions. She told me they were ringing because the fighting in World War I was over. Of course, this didn't mean anything to me but I thought the ringing bells was pretty "swift." So this is where I'll begin this narrative about the area starting with Concord Road at the Lincoln line and heading south to the intersection of Sudbury Road and then along Sudbury Road to the Wayland line. I will talk about the roads first, then the homes, the people and finally just a bit of this and a bit of that, all intertwining at times.

## ***The Roads***

Concord and Sudbury Roads were not as we know them today. They were narrower and surfaced with gravel. In the springtime and after heavy rains, sizable puddles formed in low places. A few weeds would occasionally appear in the center of the road, where the wheels of cars and horse carriages didn't crush them. Perhaps two or three times per year, town highway department workers

came through with horse-drawn scrapers and levelers that maintained the roads in quite good, traversable condition. One of the most irritating problems was the dust. After a prolonged dry spell, the wind would blow the dust from the gravel surface all over the place, much to the displeasure of our mothers. The dust factor was undoubtedly the main underlying reason for the beginning of modern highway improvement, which began with oiling the roads. Once, sometimes twice during the summer, a big oil tanker truck would slowly pass by with the black oil spewing from spigots across the rear, saturating the gravel surface of the roadway. Following the oil tanker, a sand truck would spread new sand over the fresh oil. This cured the dust problem but it created another problem that was even worse. For quite some time after the procedure, whenever we walked on the road our shoes would pick up the sticky sand and oil, which was not welcome in the house. After a decent length of time, this problem would disappear as the oil and sand united into a hard surface.

In the early twenties, we emerged into the modern world when the town approved the hot topping of Concord Road. The preparation required widening in many places, blasting of ledges, and removal of trees. Around the same time, poles for telephone and electricity were erected. Finally, the happy day arrived, when the macadam laying equipment and steamroller appeared. As an eight- or nine-year-old boy, I remember sitting on the stonewall with wide eyes watching this miraculous operation, especially the steamroller with the big roller in front, two wide wheels on the sides, water swishing out, and smoke puffing away. The resulting road surface was smooth and hard. We had “arrived.”

With telephone and electricity about to be installed, we were introduced to the new world. What a fascination to a young boy to watch the linemen scamper up poles with spurs attached to their legs! The telephone service seemed so great then but so archaic when compared to the telecommunication system of today.

You could have a private line, a two-party line or a four-party line. We had a two-party line and when someone called you, it rang at both houses. Both occupants answered, and when the right one spoke, the other party hung up (hopefully). It worked



*Author Harry Jones as a second grader, c. 1920 (Courtesy Harry Jones)*



with front-end plows were a vast improvement over the V-shaped plows. I vividly remember a severe blizzard with snow piling up to great depths. The road between our home and the Stratton's was covered with drifts up to three-feet high. Neither horse plows nor truck plows were capable of getting through. Here was an example of neighbors pulling together. My father, my three older brothers, and the Sheehans, Cronins, and McMahons all manned their snow shovels and cleared the whole stretch of road, which allowed the plows to get through to where drifting hadn't been quite so severe.

### *The Houses*

Beginning at the Lincoln/Weston town line and heading south towards Sudbury Road, the first house on the right was the Sheehan home [484 Concord Road]. Brightly painted and well kept, it looks today substantially as it looked then. There was a large barn to the right of the house that is no longer there. A short way straight back towards the woods and invisible from the road was the slaughter house built by one of the Sheehan forebears in the late 19th century. The foundation stones are still there.

The next house, located across the road at the end of a long driveway, was (and still is) the Cronin house [#483]. Mr. James Cronin kept a fairly large herd of milking cows. There was a large barn (now demolished) near the house, a windmill behind the barn, and a large level field for growing corn and many other vegetables.

The next house, on the right on the top of a steep hill, was a small two-story home belonging to the McMahon family [#474]. Mr. and Mrs. McMahon had three children: Barnard (Barney), Francis, and Mary, none of whom ever married.



*This Queen Anne house, which still stands at 484 Concord Road, was built by John Joseph Sheehan. He was a wholesale butcher and ran a slaughterhouse on what was then a 25-acre property on the Weston-Lincoln town line.*



*Above: Mary McMahon at her Weston High School graduation in 1898. (Courtesy Harry Jones). That same year, itinerant photographers A.W. and G.E. Howes took the photograph of the McMahon's Mansard cottage below. (Courtesy Ricki Stambaugh)*

These three families, the Sheehans, Cronins, and McMahons, were really a small Irish settlement. They always helped each other out and did many things together. The Sheehans and Cronins were also closely related, as the grandmothers, Mrs. Sheehan and Mrs. Cronin, were sisters.

The next house, located on the left close to the road, belonged to the Cheney's and later the Whitmans [#455]. The large house had a covered porch along the front side and an ell with separate living quarters. This ell is where I was born and brought up. The large main barn still stands a short distance from the house; but a connected cow barn was razed long ago. The whole estate encompassed 65 acres including about four-fifths of Kidney Pond. [Editor's note: This pond is located on what is now town conservation land just west of 65 Juniper Road]. In the 1930's, because of the nearness of the house to Concord Road, the new owner, Mrs. Francesca Frazier, had



the unusual serpentine brick wall constructed in front of the house.

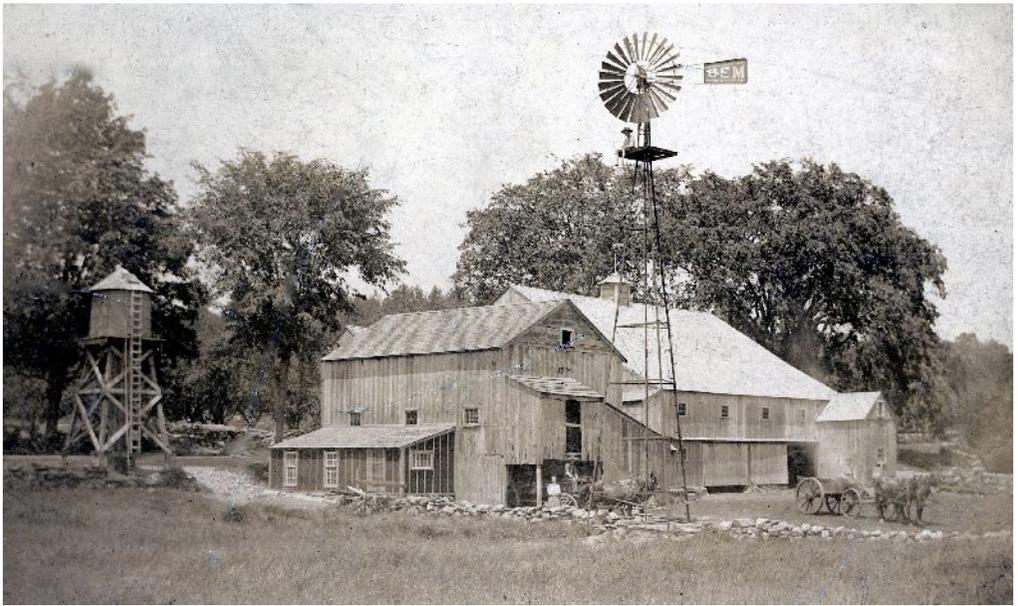
The next house on the right on top of a knoll is the Stratton house, now owned by the Merrills [#420]. The original large barn burned to the ground. According to my father, the replacement barn was built for the Strattons with a great deal of help from the neighbors. There was a windmill for pumping the water. My father came to live with the Stratton family as a small child, attended Weston schools, helped on the farm, married the girl next door, and settled down in the ell of the Whitman house as previously noted. There were no houses between the Stratton house and the intersection of Sudbury Road.

*Right: The Cronin barn, unknown date (Courtesy of Joseph Sheehan Jr.) Below: The Cheney/Whitman house at 455 Concord Road in the 1920s, before construction of the brick serpentine wall. Both the house and nearby barn are still standing. (Courtesy Harry Jones)*





*Above: Photo of the Stratton farmhouse at 420 Concord Road taken in 1898 by itinerant photographers A.W. and G.E. Howes. Gramma Stratton is seated between one of her three daughters, a grandson, and the family dog, whose doghouse can be seen behind them. The 18th century house was built by farmer Jonathan Stratton and remained in the family until 1911, when it was purchased by Alice Anthes. Below: (l-r): Edith Stratton Plumb, "Grandpa" George Stratton, and Ernest Jones, c. 1894. Ernest was born in Arlington about 1875. His father died when he was a baby and he came out to live with the Strattons, who treated him as a member of the family. After completing the eighth grade, he went to work for the Strattons and later for the Whitman family. (Courtesy of Harry Jones)*



*Photo (c.1885) of the massive Stratton barn that stood behind the farmhouse at 420 Concord Road. Notice the windmill, which pumped water to the water tower at left. On top of the windmill is 10-year-old Ernest Jones. Generations of Strattons farmed this property from the 1730s until the death of "Grandpa" George Stratton in 1903. (Courtesy of Harry Jones)*



*Marie Zimmermann (Jones), c. 1896. Marie was born in 1874 in Vitznau, Switzerland. After one post-secondary school year at a French finishing school, she got a summer job at a hotel in her home town. There she met newlyweds Edward "Ned" and Jeanette Whitman. Mrs. Whitman asked Marie to come back to the U.S. and work for them, and her parents reluctantly agreed. The Whitmans had a summer home at 455 Concord Road in Weston, and there she met Ernest Jones, who lived just down the street. The young couple was married about 1899 and moved to the ell of the Whitman house, where they raised their five children. Marie never went back to Switzerland. (Courtesy of Harry Jones)*

*This house at the corner of Concord and Sudbury Road was used to house staff at the Grant Walker Estate. The property was later bought by the Society of Jesus, which still owns the house. (Courtesy of the New England Jesuit Province Archives, College of the Holy Cross)*



The first house on Sudbury Road [#10] was on the left side when headed towards the Weston/Wayland town line and was called the Walker Cottage. This is where the help for the Grant Walker estate (now Campion Center) lived. There was a barn and carriage house located a short distance from the cottage. The next house was on the right side of Sudbury Road [#45] and belonged to the Rands. Mr. Roland Rand was a civil engineer who was instrumental in the development of the Sunset Road area.

A short distance beyond the Rand house on the left is Ripley Lane. At the end of the long twisting road is the Ripley house. Mr. Ripley was a Civil War veteran, and his daughter, Emma, taught school in Weston for many years. During my high school years, I mowed their lawn and helped in the flower gardens.

On Sudbury Road, the next house on the right belonged to the Roberts family [#63]. The large barn was located across the road, with a windmill behind it. The farm was operated by a brother and sister, Joseph and Helen, who owned a large herd of dairy cows. Joseph was kicked in the head by one of the “frisky” farm horses, an accident which resulted in his death. Helen expanded and updated the milk distribution business and named the place Strebor Farm, which was Roberts spelled backwards. Health and help problems led to its closure in the late 1930’s.

The next house on the right [#89] was one of two Smith houses, near which was a large barn and a garage or carriage house. As I recall, there was a large water

tank and two windmills, one across the street at the foot of a high hill and the other at the top of the hill behind the barn.

Farther along Sudbury Road on the right side was another Smith house [#111], one of the oldest houses in Weston. Over the years, many alterations and changes have been made, but a substantial amount of the original still remains. Across the street, there was a barn, but all I remember seeing were the foundation walls. These were the houses on Concord and Sudbury Roads in the northwest corner of Weston during my growing-up years. Now let's dwell a little while on the people who lived in them.

### *The People--Neighbors and Neighborhoods*

It was the custom in early days for neighbors to visit neighbors. I remember tagging along with my mother to visit for a cup of tea with Mrs. Sheehan and Mrs. Cronin and smelling the wonderful fragrance of something simmering on the back of the wood-burning kitchen range. A Sheehan son, Anthony, was the postmaster in Weston after our postal address was changed from South Lincoln to Weston. The Post Office was located in the what is now the DiVito building in Weston Center [464-478 Boston Post Road]. Anthony never missed a day – the mail must go through. During one winter, a severe snowstorm made the roads impassable. Anthony borrowed Jim Cronin's farm horse, threw a blanket over him, jumped aboard, and rode to the Post Office, with the snow in many places reaching the horse's belly.

Jeremiah (Jerry) Cronin drove the school bus (called the school barge) for many years and was much loved by the children. Francis McMahan worked for the Weston Street Department. I think he was the first person in the neighborhood to own a car, a brand new Model T Ford, which he proudly demonstrated to all, interested or not. Mary McMahan worked as a secretary in the State House in Boston. Every morning she walked from her Concord Road home to the railroad crossing on Tower Road, Lincoln, then down the tracks to the Silver Hill Station to ride the train to Boston.

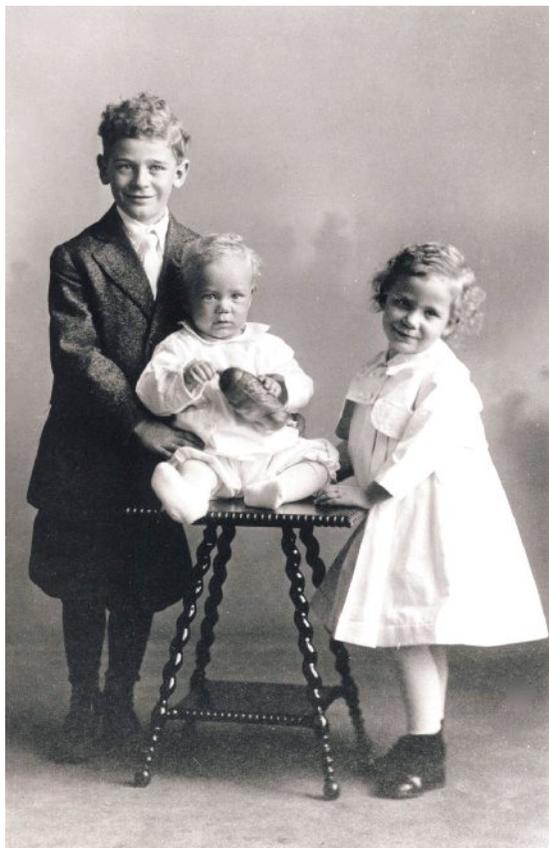
My family of four boys and one girl lived in the next house on Concord Road [#455]. My father was the caretaker for many years. The owner, Mr. Whitman, seldom came from his home in Cambridge to use it. Maybe two or three times during the summer, he came with friends. It was a wonderful place to grow up. After school and during the summer, the neighborhood kids (there were not too many – the Smiths, the Rands) would gather at one of three homes to play their games: hide and seek, tag, swinging on birch trees, skating on Kidney Pond, sledding, and skiing. For those who have never tried swinging on birches, this involved climbing up the tree until your weight brought it down to the ground, at which point you would climb up again.

The Strattons lived in the next house on the right [420 Concord]. Personally, I have no memory of them living there, as both Mr. and Mrs. George Stratton died before I was born, but I heard a great deal about them from my parents and siblings. They told me how Grandpa ran the farm, producing eggs, poultry, and produce that he took by wagon once a week into Waltham to sell to customers. In 1903, while on one of these marketing trips, he died of a heart attack at age 77. Gramma Stratton took care of the house and family including my father, whom she loved like a son.

The Stratton estate was sold to Miss Alice Anthes, who lived there with her unmarried sister, Emma, and brother, Lincoln. Alice was the secretary for Mr. Horace Phipps, a prosperous stained glass manufacturer and installer. Shortly after buying the Stratton place, Alice and Horace were married. For reasons unknown to me, the stained glass business deteriorated and likewise the Phipps fortune. Their last years in Weston were quite sad because of health and money issues.

The neighborhood kids included the Rands on Sudbury Road. Their four children, one boy and three girls, were all within our school age span. As a civil engineer, Mr. Rand had the expertise to construct a dam on the brook on his land on the opposite side of the road from his house. In the fall, a huge area was flooded. The skating was excellent and drew many people from all parts of town. There were many skating parties with bonfires at night. Of course, when snow came, lots of shoveling was necessary to clear the ice (no snow blowers!) In the spring, water was released through the dam.

There were no children in the Ripley house. Miss Ripley taught in the Weston schools and rode on the school bus, which stopped for her on Sudbury Road at



*(l-r) Lincoln, Carl, and Sylvia Smith (Courtesy of Carl Smith)*

the end of Ripley Lane. In winter, Ripley Lane was seldom plowed; and Miss Ripley would walk from her home, quite some distance, on snowshoes and stick them up in a snowdrift, ready to use when the bus dropped her off. There were no children in the Roberts household either, although during the summer, two nieces from Lexington spent much time there and joined in the fun with the rest of us.

The Smith residence on Sudbury Road was a favorite for the neighborhood kids. Lincoln, Sylvia and Carl were the Smith contingent. The games were fast and noisy. Mrs. Smith always had cookies and cold drinks for us. If we didn't use our bikes to get to each other's house, we used shortcut paths through the woods.

### *Bits of This and That*

*Mail delivery.* The mail for the northwest corner of Weston came through Lincoln. Our mail address was Box 96, South Lincoln, Mass. Our mailman was Mr. Coyle and his transportation was horse and buggy. In the winter, Mr. Coyle let us kids hitch our sleds to his horse-drawn buggy and we had a great free sleigh ride. He made sure we didn't get too far from home. Sometime in the 1920's, the

automobile age arrived and Mr. Coyle was provided with a strange-looking government vehicle, black and boxy, unlike the automobiles of that time. Shortly thereafter, our postal address was changed to Weston and Mr. Anthony Sheehan became the postmaster.



*A case for global warming!* In my youth, we always had snow on the ground at Thanksgiving. It was a tradition for my father on that holiday morning to borrow Mr. Cronin's horse and sled drag. He and my brothers would take off into the woods to haul

*Philip and Joseph Sheehan. Both boys died young, Philip at age 15, in 1912 and Joseph at age 23, in 1916. (Courtesy of Joseph Sheehan Jr)*

out the cordwood my father had cut the previous year. This seasoned hardwood, when further cut and split into kitchen range lengths, made great firewood. The event also served to whet our appetites for mother's great Thanksgiving dinner.

*Baseball games in our backyard.* My three older brothers worked hard to make a baseball diamond and field in our backyard, even constructing a high backstop to protect our house from foul balls. They assembled a team of school friends and, if needed, older neighborhood men including Jerry Cronin and Anthony Sheehan. On Sundays, they would play pickup teams from Waltham or Watertown. People driving by would stop and watch the game. I was too small to play but not too small to retrieve foul balls hit into the thickets!

*Highbush blueberries.* The wooded land owned by Alice Anthes was abundant withighbush blueberries. During picking season, it didn't take long for us to fill large kettles with luscious berries that my mother preserved for winter use. The hurricane of '38 leveled all of the tall pine trees and also destroyed the blueberry bushes.

*Cranberries in Weston.* Abutting the Whitman land to the east was a large area of lowland that flooded in the spring and fall. This area is now at the far end of College Pond. Wild cranberries grew here, and we gathered them in with the welcome aid of a hand-raking cranberry picker.

*Politics.* Before TV, before radio, before receiving the next day's newspaper, how did we find out who won the elections for Governor or President? On election night, at the published hour, we would all sit outside and watch for the results sent from Boston. A searchlight beam would indicate the leader or winner



1898 photo by itinerant photographers A.W. and G.E. Howes of the farmhouse and barn at 455 Concord Road built by the Cheney family and later purchased by the Whitmans. (Courtesy of Harry Jones)

(i.e. one flash meant someone, two flashes meant someone else). What tremendous advances we have made in telecommunications!

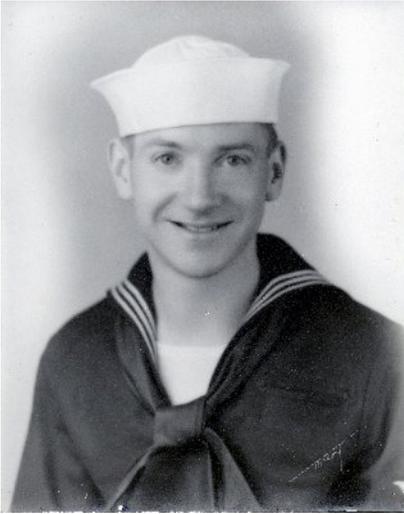
*First radio.* I remember our first radio, an Atwater Kent. There were three tuning dials on the front that had to be manipulated to bring the stations in clearly. It required a large storage battery and an antenna wire that stretched between the house and the barn. The speaker was a separate piece of equipment.

*School classmates.* Our peers in school good-naturedly referred to all of us in the far away northwest corner as “the kids from the Indian Reservation.”



*Ernest and Marie Jones built this house at 448 Concord Road in anticipation of the day when the Whitman house would be sold. In 1934, Harry's brother Arthur built a small house next door at #454. After returning from the war, Harry Jones continued to live at 448 Concord Road. The small shingled cottage was expanded over the years by Harry and his wife Jean. After they sold the property in the early 2000s, the house was torn down to make way for one of the large new houses typical of 21st century Weston. Plans call for Arthur's house to be transformed into a matching guest house. (Courtesy of Harry Jones)*

*New home.* My father realized that “our” Whitman home would someday be sold and we would have to move. In the early 1920s, he had the good fortune to locate the owner of two acres of high, level land on the opposite side of the road, which she was anxious to sell. Over several years of family effort, the land was cleared of brush, boulders were removed, apple trees and shade trees were planted, and eventually a small but adequate house was constructed. In 1929, the Whitman property was sold and we moved into our new home.



*Above: Harry Jones, c. 1942, as a Navy sailor: Right: Marriage to Jean D'Intinosanto in 1957. Although both Harry and Jean grew up in Weston (Jean on the Charles Jones estate on Glen Road) they did not meet until the 1950s, when both participated in a play put on by the Weston High School Alumni Association. Their son Stephen was born in 1961. (Courtesy of Harry Jones)*

## ***In Conclusion***

I have tried to relate what was seen through the bright eyes of a small boy and young adult growing up in the northwest corner of Weston. I have tried to put into words my memories of things that happened and I'm sure many have escaped this aging brain. Although I enjoy reading history, I am neither an historian nor a researcher. If I have misstated the facts or circumstances in any way, it was not intentional.

We had no iPods, but we did have cherry trees loaded with sweet cherries. We climbed the trees after supper, propped ourselves on branches, and ate our fill, spitting out the cherry stones. We had no cell phones, but we did have chestnut trees with nuts to gather in the fall. We had no high definition TV, indeed, no TV at all, but we did have graceful tall elm trees with colorful orioles nesting in the branches.

What we didn't know about, we never missed! There were times of sadness when a neighbor left us but that is also an important part of life. All in all, these years in the northwest corner of Weston were happy, healthful times.

*by Harry B. Jones*



*Jean and Harry Jones in 2009, with painting of Ernest Jones in the background. After returning from World War II, Harry worked as Assistant Treasurer at Tufts University for 16 years and as Controller at Wellesley College for 16 years. After retiring from Wellesley College, Town Administrator Ward Carter enlisted his aid and Harry became Town Accountant for Weston for 18 years, until his retirement in 1996 at age 83. (Photo by Pamela W. Fox)*

# Dancing till Four AM

## *Miss Ellen Jones Tells Tales of the “Jones House”*

*Editors Note: Last May, Town Meeting voted to use Community Preservation Act funds to develop reuse proposals for the Josiah Smith Tavern and adjacent Old Library. To provide historical background as the Town explored options, the Spring 2008 Weston Historical Society Bulletin featured the Josiah Smith Tavern. This historical account by Miss Ellen Jones provides additional insights.*

*Ellen Jones and her sister, Alice, lived in the former tavern until their deaths in the mid-1950s. Their grandfather and great uncle bought the building in 1842, a few years after it ceased to function as a tavern; and the Jones family lived there for three generations. Miss Ellen read this account at a meeting of the First Parish Friendly Society about 1908.*

*Miss Jones began with this observation: “The old saying ‘They know the worth of water when the well runs dry’ has been forcibly impressed on my mind these last few weeks while I have been hunting up facts concerning the house. . . .”*



*Ellen Jones (second from the right) relaxes on the porch of her home, now known as the Josiah Smith Tavern. Her sister Alice is at the far right. With them is their Aunt Emma L. Cutting (first on left), Aunt Harriet F. Stimpson (center), Uncle John Jones Jr., and father, Theodore Jones. (Courtesy Weston Historical Society)*

*[The excerpt below begins in 1842, the year Ellen Jones's grandfather and great uncle purchased the former tavern.]*

[Josiah Warren] sold [the property] in 1842 to Marshall and John Jones, who owned it together till 1848, when John Jones, my grandfather, bought it and soon after came with his family to occupy it.

The house originally was smaller than it is now—the west side being the older part. When the addition was put on I do not know, but one can see the traces of the old window frames in the partitions between the two parts.<sup>(1)</sup> The shed on the west side, now used for wood and coal, was in the old times used by the tavern keeper to store his barrels of liquor.

When the addition was made on the east side, the upper story consisted of a hall running the whole length of the house from north to south with two windows at each end and eight on the side.<sup>(2)</sup> It was used for all sorts of public occasions and I remember my grandmother Jones telling me that when she was a young girl, she came many a time from her home in the north part of Waltham to balls in this hall and danced till four o'clock in the morning and never had any lack of partners either.

This hall was heated by two fireplaces one at either end and lighted by two oil lamps hung from the ceiling. We found one of them last summer tucked away under the eaves.

At one time a school was kept here which Miss Pierce<sup>(3)</sup> says she used to attend. She also told me that the old pulpit which used to be in the old meeting house was put up in the end of this hall between the two north windows. This pulpit was covered with red woolen damask, which had evidently been put in over a silk covering; and she and some other girls found a little hole in the covering and pulled out some pieces of the silk damask and carried them home.

When the old Meeting House was pulled down, the town meetings were held in this hall until the town provided a place of its own.

When my grandfather bought the house and came with his family to live in it, he made three sleeping rooms, with big closets and a small hall out of the large one. Downstairs our present sitting room was the old bar room and I suppose the room on the northeast corner was the reception room of the old tavern. What is now our kitchen consisted of an entry way and two small rooms – one of which was used by Mr. Henry Brackett as a shoe shop and the other a bed room in which my uncle said he used to sleep.

In the east side of the house there is a hall between kitchen, sitting room and dining room which was always known as the Well room because under it is a well

and there used to be a big wooden pump there which was taken out about nine years ago.

In the west side of the house a Mr. George Bigelow kept a dry goods store. He always recommended his goods by saying that his wife and daughter Gracie had a dress or whatever the article might be – just like that which he was trying to sell.

My Grandfather Cutting<sup>(4)</sup> in his early married life lived for a while in a part of this house and had for his kitchen a room on the southwest which still has a brick oven, a fireplace with a crane, and hearth running the whole length of the room.

Nearly every room has a fireplace—even in the attic. Under the eaves in the attic there used to be a dark room up there in which card playing on Sundays could be carried on without fear of being discovered. The door which led into it is still there but the partition which separated it from the main attic has been torn down.

Other old taverns along the road have rooms into which their visitors are taken and shown with great pride the bed in which Washington slept, with the very same sheets, pillow cases and quilts—or Lafayette danced in another room and admired the wall paper, which has been left on ever since. Search as we may we can't find that Washington so much as glanced at the house as he passed.

The only event which gives it any historical distinction is that of the detection of a British spy and inviting him to move on. The story has been told ever so many times. . . .<sup>(5)</sup>

In the old times when the place was used as a tavern the stable stood out near the street and extended east and west so that the old coach could drive through it when it drew up at the door. There were no trees in front – the old elm trees now on the place having been planted by my uncle in 1862. There was a seat fastened to the house and running the whole length of the piazza and I have no doubt it was a popular resting place.”

Notes:

- (1) These window frames are no longer visible
- (2) This *hall* is now referred to as the *ballroom*.
- (3) After retiring from teaching, Mary Francis Peirce (1831-1914) spent her last 28 years collecting and organizing Weston historical records
- (4) George Warren Cutting Sr., proprietor of G.W. Cutting & Sons general store, was Ellen Jones's grandfather. Ellen's mother, Sarah Lord Cutting, married Theodore Jones in 1857.

- (5) The British spy story that mentions Joel Smith and his tavern is apocryphal. It was written in 1827 and elaborates on the true story of two British spies who stopped at the Golden Ball Tavern in 1775. The apocryphal version was generally accepted from the late 19th to the mid-20th century. Daniel S. Lamson quoted excerpts from it in his *History of the Town of Weston*.



*Ellen Jones's address to the Friendly Society helps to date this photograph, the earliest known of the Josiah Smith Tavern. It shows the young elm trees that, according to Miss Jones, were planted by her uncle in 1862. Note the archway in the connector between the house and barn. Miss Jones's account describes such an opening, used by coaches to drive through to the rear of the property. (Courtesy Weston Historical Society)*



*The thorough renovation of the Fiske Law Office will allow the building to be used, rather than standing empty as it has for more than two decades. (2009 photos courtesy of Pamela Fox)*

## **Fiske Law Office Readied for a Third Century**

Construction work is underway to renovate and readapt a local landmark, the Isaac Fiske Law Office on Boston Post Road, using funding from the Community Preservation Act. When completed, the Town will issue a Request for Proposal (RFP) for a tenant. One possible use — a law office!

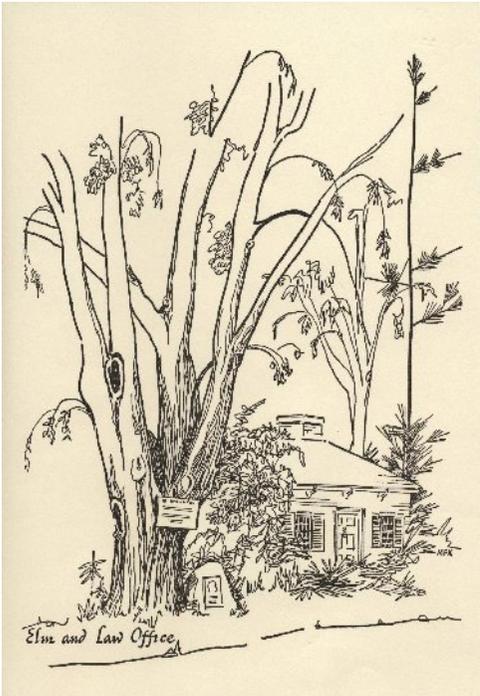
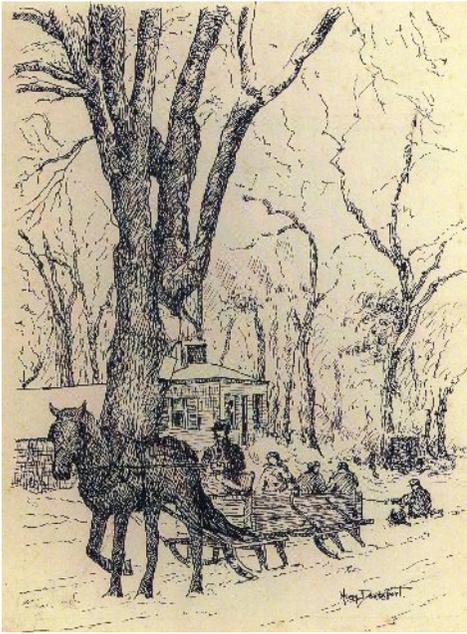
Isaac Fiske (1778-1861) is thought to have built the law office about 1805, the same year he built the fine Federal house still standing across the street at 639 Boston Post Road.

Fiske, one of Weston's most prominent citizens, was born on the Fiske homestead on North Avenue and graduated from Harvard College in 1798. In 1802, his marriage to Sukey Hobbs, daughter of tannery owner Ebenezer Hobbs, united these two prominent north-side families. Isaac trained in the law under Artemas Ward Jr. He practiced law, traded in real estate, and held several local and state offices.



Although Isaac Fiske was the first of many generations of Fiske lawyers, he was the only one to conduct business from the quaint two-room office. An article in the *Boston Globe* of 1916 shows a picture of the “little old law office” then being used as a playhouse where Fiske children could give parties, play games, and dress their dolls. In 1920, when Fiske heirs divided their Weston property, Charles H. Fiske Jr. got the law office. He enlarged it by adding a rear ell. In 1928, Charles Jr. gave the building to the Town of Weston with the stipulation that if the town ever wanted to tear it down, Fiske heirs would have the right to purchase and move it.

The building was used as the town cemetery office until 1936, when it was turned over to the five-year-old Weston Historical Committee as a repository for its growing collection of historical records and relics. Miss Gertrude Fiske was chair of the original committee, which also included Alice Jones and Edward P. Ripley. Alice and her sister Ellen left their house (the former Josiah Smith Tavern) to the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities (SPNEA, now Historic New England) in 1950, and the town’s collection was moved there. The Fiske Law Office was pressed into service as veteran’s housing. Plumbing was simple



*Depictions of the Fiske Law Office and Burgoyne Elm by Weston artists Henry Davenport (above) and Peg Kronenberg (below)*

and adequate, but “insulation was conspicuous by its absence” and tenants had trouble keeping warm.

When the last tenant died in 1965, the recently formed Weston Historical Society offered to restore and maintain the building as its headquarters. Led by President Harold “Red” Travis and Restoration Chairman F. Leslie Ford, the society leased the building in 1966. Members put in hundreds of volunteer hours restoring it over the next four years. Beginning in the 1970s, the society moved parts of its collection to the Josiah Smith Tavern. In the early 1990s, the Society returned responsibility for the Fiske Law Office to the Town.

The exterior was repaired and painted in 1996 under the auspices of the Weston Historical Commission. Because of septic issues and an interior in total disrepair, the building could not be rented. The Commission decided that the best way to preserve the building was for it to be occupied. Toward that end, voters at the May 1997 Town Meeting passed a zoning amendment allowing certain types of uses by Special Permit in municipally owned buildings of less than 1500 square feet located within a single family residence district. Funding was not available to renovate the building until after the passage of the Community Preservation Act. Town Meeting voted to approve a total of \$258,000 in CPA funds (\$230,000 in FY06 and \$28,000 in FY08). Work commenced in November 2008 and has involved totally rebuilding the rear ell.

*by Pamela W. Fox*

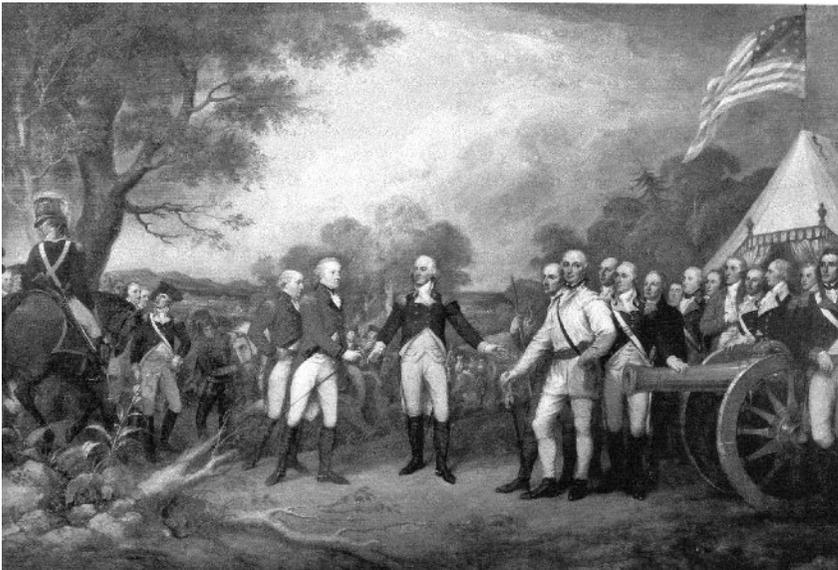
# The Burgoyne Elm Do We Still Care?



*British General John Burgoyne (1722-1792) (Courtesy of the National Archives and Records Administration.)*

The Burgoyne Elm stood on the south side of Boston Post Road just east of the Fiske Law Office. Until the death of the tree in 1967 and its removal in stages over subsequent years, the huge elm was a patriotic symbol venerated by local history enthusiasts for its age and link to the War of Independence.

General John Burgoyne was the British general defeated by General Horatio Gates at Saratoga on October 17, 1777. This battle marked a turning point in the American Revolution by giving hope to supporters of independence and convincing the French to enter the conflict as an ally of the United States. After the battle, Burgoyne signed the “Saratoga Convention,” as the British preferred to call the surrender. It stated that



*This painting of the surrender of General Burgoyne at Saratoga, New York, on October 17, 1777, is by American artist John Trumbull and hangs in the U.S. Capitol Rotunda. The battle was a turning point in the Revolutionary War.*

captured soldiers were technically not prisoners and were to be returned to Europe on the condition that they would never fight in North America again. The job of escorting the weary British, German, and Hessian soldiers to Somerville pending embarkation was assigned to General John Glover of Marblehead. The journey took about three weeks.

American troops and their captives suffered many hardships as they traveled along nearly impassible roads and crossed the Taconic Range in a heavy snow-storm. They left destruction in their wake, burning fences, destroying crops, and robbing houses. Little effort was spent in finding sleeping quarters for the enlisted men in either army. In contrast, Burgoyne, Glover, and other officers were entertained at fine houses along the way.

The poorly disciplined hordes, estimated to number in the thousands, arrived in “Westown” on November 6. According to an article by Brenton H. Dickson III in the *Weston Historical Society Bulletin* of May, 1967, British officers were housed at the Golden Ball Tavern and American officers at Baldwin’s Tavern, which was located just west of the present Fiske Lane. The troops and their prisoners camped overnight wherever they could, some in the shelter of what became known as the Burgoyne Elm. It reportedly took days to restore order and cleanliness to Weston after they left.

It rained incessantly on the march from Weston to Cambridge. When the troops and prisoners arrived there, the wife of a Harvard professor described them this way:

I never had the least idea that creation produced such a sordid set of creatures in human figure. Poor, dirty, emaciated men, great numbers of women who seemed to be the beasts of burthen (sic), having a bushel basket on their back by which they were bent double. The contents seemed to be pots and kettles, various sorts of furniture, children peeping through gridirons and other utensils. . . (and) some very young infants who were born on the road.

Despite the Saratoga Convention, the captured soldiers were not allowed to return to England. The Continental Congress suspected the British would send them back into action. After a hard winter in Cambridge and Somerville, they were marched to a prison camp in Virginia and later to Pennsylvania, where they were finally released after the surrender of Lord Cornwallis.

### ***The Burgoyne Elm Becomes a Patriotic Symbol***

In his book *The Republic of Shade*, Thomas J. Campanella writes that “no tree loomed larger in American history” than the American elm. During the colonial period, elms took root in public squares, where historic events took place under their spreading branches. According to Campanella, New Englanders felt the

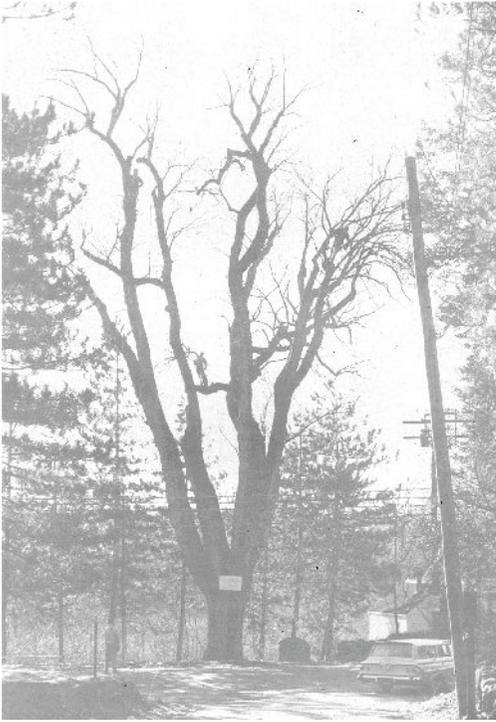


*Historical re-enactments in 1932 and 1963 (above) featured speeches under the Burgoyne Elm. (Courtesy of Weston Historical Society)*

loss of their European connections and turned to the American elm—a native tree—to bolster their identity. By the late 19th century, the elm had become a regional icon. Its uplifting branches were seen as a symbol of Yankee rectitude. The trees were systematically planted throughout New England, including Weston, as part of the village improvement movement.

Elm trees were often the oldest objects around and were redefined as beloved witnesses to important historical events and “repositories of memory” often linked with the Revolution. Weston was by no means the only town to revere a special elm. The Weston Historical Society owns a piece of the Washington Elm, the most famous of all. It stood in the Cambridge Common and by tradition, if not in fact, was said to have sheltered George Washington as he took command of the American Army on July 3, 1775. Thomas Campanella’s fascinating book includes pictures of the Lafayette Elm in Kennebunk and the Benjamin Franklin Elm in New Haven, among others.

In Weston, the Burgoyne Elm became the focal point for 20th century historical celebrations. In 1932, residents turned out to welcome a cavalcade on the first leg of a 115-mile trek commemorating George Washington’s 1789 journey through New England. Beneath the Burgoyne Elm, the costumed general greeted ladies in colonial gowns and gentlemen in long velvet coats and three-cornered hats. Local dignitaries presented state officials with a bronze plaque that was affixed to a



huge boulder under the spreading elm. This plaque is now in storage.

Speeches were delivered at the same site in 1963 as part of the town's 250th Anniversary celebrations. At that time the age of the tree was estimated to be 300 years old. Another source gives its life-span as 1740-1967.

### *The Fight to Save a Cherished Elm*

The Weston Historical Society was founded in late 1963 as an outgrowth of the 250th celebration. The society adopted and fixed up the Fiske Law Office as its headquarters and championed the huge elm that shaded its diminutive new home. The society's first president, Harold G. "Red" Travis (1898-1981), energetically embraced the cause of preserving the Burgoyne Elm. He kept a scrapbook, now at the Weston Historical Society, with letters, newspaper clippings, and photographs of the elm during the period 1966 to 1975.



The first letter, dated August 16, 1966, to Weston Tree Warden John J. "Jack" Duffy, praises him for reviving the tree after it lost many of its leaves to beetle infestation and drought that summer. By pumping 3000 gallons of fertilizer into the ground around the tree, Duffy encouraged a second growth. Travis, on coming back from the Cape, wrote "last week

when in Weston, I rushed to the sacred spot and found to my delight healthy and fresh green leaves on every one of those countless branches. Our richest treasure is saved again. . . .”

While thanking Travis for his chairmanship of “Jack Duffy’s Mutual Admiration Society,” Duffy’s answering letter states bluntly “I have no magic powers.” He mentions the effort by Dr. Donald Wyman, retired horticulturist at the Case Estates, to take cuttings. In the October 1966 issue of the *Weston Historical Society Bulletin*, Travis writes that Wyman had reared a healthy scion, already six feet tall, and had agreed to propagate a few additional “children” to be ready for planting in a few years, to ensure that “There’ll always be a Burgoyne Elm in Weston.”

The following January, 1967, workmen removed one enormous limb. According to an article in the *Bulletin* that March, it was cut into seven logs varying in diameter from 26” to 34.” These were sawn into planks and pieces. Travis began to think about how to use the wood once it had been seasoned for a year. In a report of January 12, 1967, he wrote that local artist Henry W. “Waddie” Longfellow had volunteered to “study the possibility of creating artistic souvenirs of the tree, to be made from the solid wood pieces. . . .” Travis added “We must preserve forever as much as we can of this venerable landmark under whose shadow for three centuries walked so many of our forebears who helped to make Weston ‘The Exceptional New England Town’!”

That summer, with Harold Travis again out of town, Longfellow wrote to say that the elm had been cut down. A new Tree Warden, David Pollock, had ordered its immediate removal for safety reasons. Pollock left an 18- to 20-foot trunk, 25 feet around at the base, as a monument that he hoped would last five to ten years through the use of preservatives. Over the next years, the Weston Historical Society searched for ways to preserve the tree trunk, which was generally referred to as the “bole.” Three heavy steel bands of strapping kept it together for a time. Inquiries to chemical, horticultural, and mechanical experts yielded no solutions.

In the October 1971 *Bulletin*, Travis looked back on that sad day, more than four years earlier, when the tree had come down:

With block and falls, its giant, lifeless, still majestic limbs were removed one by one, and our hearts were heavy. Until then many had come to feel that as long as the old tree stood at 626 Boston Post Road nothing in today’s suburban explosion could ever rob this town of its quiet charm and dignity.

It seemed that for Travis and perhaps for others, this one special elm was a reminder not only of a British general soundly defeated but also of an old Weston fast disappearing.

The next phase in the Burgoyne Elm saga began in January 1975. As one of its contributions to the nation’s Bicentennial, the Rotary Club of Weston had agreed

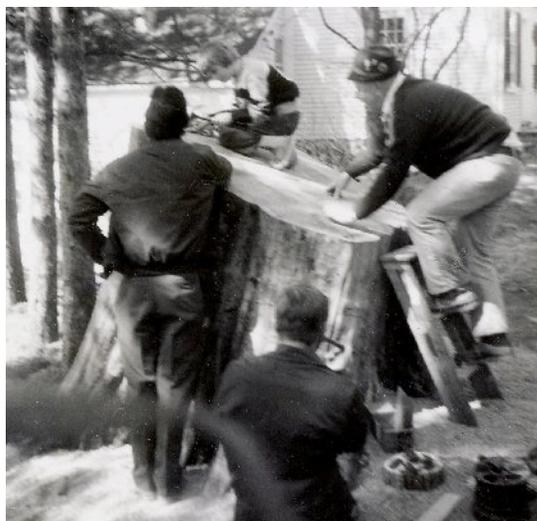


*Left: Harold "Red" Travis watches as the "Future Generation Slab" is carefully lifted, February 18, 1975. Below: This photo, labeled "Passing in Review before Weston Town Hall" shows the slab being transported to its "hiding place." (Courtesy Weston Historical Society)*



to aid Harold Travis and the Weston Historical Society in turning the elm into a tool for teaching history. The new Tree Warden, Palmer Koelb, supervised reducing the height of the bole to four feet at the front and five at rear, creating a sloping surface. Rotary president Bruce H. Nickerson and his son Andrew took on the work of counting rings and locating important dates at the appropriate intervals on the preserved bole. Travis's initial idea of marking Weston's incorporation in 1713 turned out not to work, as the tree wasn't "born" until about 1740. The dates chosen were war-related: 1775, 1812, 1861, 1898, 1917 and 1941.

Rotarians and others who participated in the preservation project included Reynold Thompson (conceptual rendering); Bryant Spencer (excavating and stonework); Thomas Duffy and Palmer Koelb (sawing); Stanley Fabbri, Weston Highway Department (hoisting); Bruce H. Nickerson (wood treatment); Vernon Goddard (sanding); Brighton Iron Works, Ashland (branding irons); Charles Boyd, of Waltham (polyurethane treatment); Jack Richardson (sign painting); and Fred Mitchell (copper work).



Travis took photographs of each step in this process and labeled them in his scrapbook. Several pages show the tree being taken down in slabs. On February 18, 1975, the portion labeled “Future Generation Slab” was carefully lifted and placed in the town’s front-loader. Another photograph is labeled: “On Route to Posterity.” After passing the town hall and Josiah Smith Tavern, the severed slab made its way to its secret hiding place, which appears to have been the abandoned 1908 fire station on North Avenue. There, protected by a preservative, it was to be kept ready to supply a 21st century replacement for the newly created Bicentennial monument. In this way, wrote Travis, “well into the 21st century, and perhaps the 22nd, the venerable old tree would keep on teaching history to generations of Weston children.”



Harold Travis’s scrapbook includes a letter to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Products Laboratory in Madison, Wisconsin, on January 5, 1976, describing the project and asking for help with preservation of “an artistic fungus growth” that was carefully removed from the side of the bole. Travis was concerned

*Above: Bruce H. Nickerson and his son Andrew work on the bole, counting rings in preparation for marking historic dates. Below: Harold G. “Red” Travis examines the finished monument. (Courtesy Weston Historical Society)*

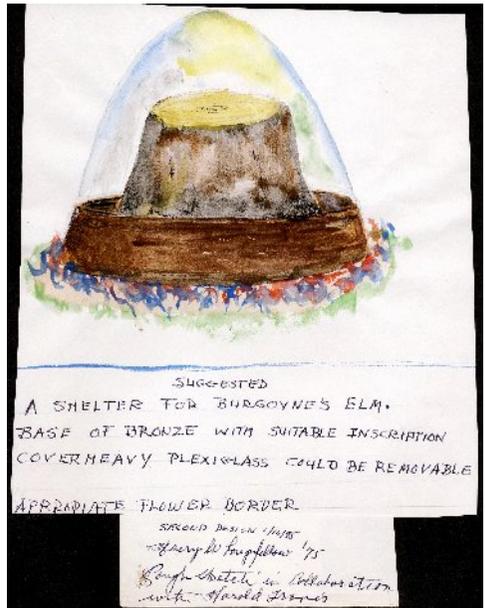
because maggots had begun to destroy the fungus piece and adjoining bark. He also asked for advice on preventing insect damage to the replacement slabs that were being saved.

By August, 1975, work on the monument was completed; but Harold Travis remained concerned about deterioration and vandalism. To that end, Henry W. Longfellow, before his death that year, made sketches of a bell-shaped wrought iron cage with an eagle on top and of a shelter with a base of bronze “suitably inscribed” and a removable dome of heavy plexiglass, the whole surrounded by an “appropriate flower border.” Neither idea was ever executed.

A second way to address these concerns was to insure the preservation of the replacement slab. In a letter to Harold Hestnes, Jr., Chair of the Board of Selectmen on January 31, 1976, Travis requested a conference to discuss “a safe reposing place for the extra slab during part of the next few centuries. . .” He added “To my mind this project is of such far-reaching potential that its implementation should be placed with discretion only in hands of the most reliable and stable parties.”

The winter of 1976-77 brought problems with heavy, wet snow plowed up against the aged landmark. By the summer of 1977, the plastic coating on the top was wearing off and the dates were getting hard to read. Carpenter ants had attacked the trunk, as had several types of mold.

Meanwhile, the six Burgoyne babies, now almost teenagers, were struggling. That fall, Red Travis sent six small samples from each of the trees to the



Above: Harold “Red” Travis removed and saved this “artistic fungus” growing on the Burgoyne Elm. Below: One of Henry W. Longfellow’s two designs for a protective cover for the Burgoyne Elm stump. (Collection Weston Historical Society, photos by Pamela Fox)

Shade Tree Laboratory at U. Mass Amherst. Three of the trees had died by then. In his letter of October 10, 1977, Travis expressed regret at not having given them special care: "Brazenly perhaps, we felt that if they were to be true and truly 'sons of the Burgoyne Elm' that had sheltered thousands of General Burgoyne's captured prisoners. . . they had to prove themselves worthy of their heritage by not getting twentieth century superior treatment." All six Burgoyne Elm scions eventually succumbed to fungus, Dutch elm disease, or unknown causes.

### *What happened to the wood of the Burgoyne Elm?*

After the limbs of the tree were removed in 1967, a "Project Burgoyne Elm" committee was formed, comprised of Howard Forbes, Mrs. Daniel F. Viles Jr, and Galen Green. Their task was to supervise the utilization of the wood and the making of souvenirs by students in the Industrial Arts Department of the Junior and Senior High Schools. The first Weston Historical Society awards for excellence were made at graduation in June 1968. First prize for junior high students went to Christopher Arthur Larsen for the "monk's chair," and honorable mentions were presented to William Grant (Lazy Susan), David Farrell, Jr. (spoon rack), and Michael Zirpolo (hanging clock).

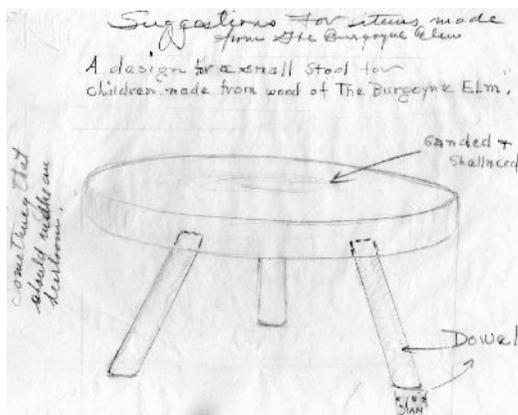


*Weston Junior High School woodworking contest awards, June 16, 1968, l-r, Harold G. Travis, president, Weston Historical Society; Howard M. Forbes, judge; Chris Larsen, first prize winner, with his "monk's chair"; David Farrell and Bill Grant, honorable mention; and Galen Green, Industrial Arts instructor. (Courtesy Weston Historical Society)*



Above: Connecticut organizers of the 1975 Great Trail Expedition used wood from the Burgoyne Elm to make at least 16 blocks given out to those who helped along the route. The above block was given to the Weston Historical Society by Jack Williams. Second from top: Weston artist Henry W. Longfellow designed this 3" X 3" X 2" paper weight with a facsimile of the Burgoyne Elm sign. Below: Longfellow's design for a child's stool. (Weston Historical Society collection, photos by Pamela Fox)

Above: Decoupage image of General John Burgoyne by W. Raynor on wood from the Burgoyne Elm. Below: Wall plaque by Harold Stevens (Weston Historical Society collection, photos by Pamela W. Fox)



Many Weston residents wrote to Harold Travis to obtain pieces of wood from which to make a souvenir or keepsake. Henry W. Longfellow designed a number of simple, practical items that could be made from the wood including a three-legged child's stool, paper weight, bookends, pen stand, candlesticks, letter rack, and book rack. The historical society owns an example of the paper weight, as well as objects pictured on the previous page and a large drop leaf table made by Howard "Mac" Forbes for the law office. The society's gavel was also made from the historic tree.

Some of the Burgoyne Elm wood was made into blocks about the size of a brick, which were presented as gifts to persons associated with the 1975 Great Trail Expedition from Fort Crown Point to Saratoga, New York, sponsored by the Connecticut-based Quinnipiac Council of the Boy Scouts of America. The Weston Historical Society recently received a gift of one of these blocks from Jack Williams, a former Weston resident who obtained the wood for the scout project.

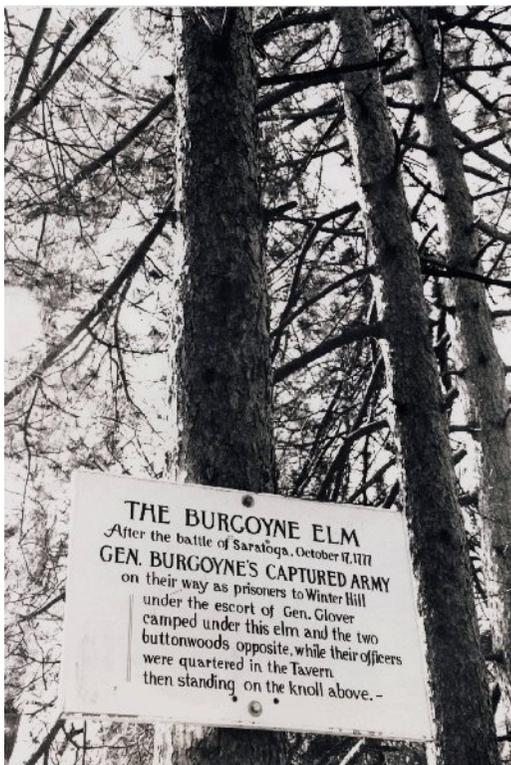
A few questions remain. What became of the replacement slab that Harold Travis so carefully hid away for posterity?

Do we still attribute significance to the wood of this particular tree, so revered in the past?

Can we still use objects made from this wood to make a connection to the events of the Revolutionary War?

Do we still care?

*by Pamela W. Fox*



*To find the approximate location where the Burgoyne Elm once stood, look for this historic marker affixed to a pine tree just east of the Fiske Law Office. (Courtesy Weston Historical Society)*

## ***With Special Thanks***

*To Joseph Sheehan Jr. for the gift of a scrapbook compiled by Mary Sheehan Barry (Mrs. Harlan Barry) including police news clippings. Also a framed photo of Mary McMahon, a collection of sympathy notes received on the death of D. Anthony Sheehan in 1939, and checks written by D. Anthony Sheehan.*

*To Stanley Pratt for the gift of personal and Hollingsworth & Whitney paper company correspondence between Weston estate owner Charles A. Dean and Waldo Elliott Pratt.*

*To the estate of Robert Sturgis for the gift of Town Reports including bound volumes for 1912-1916. These volumes, compiled by Weston lawyer Samuel Bennett, include additional reports and newspaper clippings.*

*To Gloria Fitzgerald for the gift of the Rumford Complete Cookbook.*

*To Jack Williams for the gift of a Burgoyne Elm wood block made for the "Great Trail Expedition" of 1975.*

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