

# WESTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY BULLETIN

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## Special Edition: Weston Fire Department



*H. Bentley "Ben" Crouch (right) and Don Vatur in the 1914 "White," Weston's first motorized fire truck, at the 1963 celebration of Weston's 250th anniversary. The White was retired from service in 1941. The truck was subsequently restored and now belongs to the Weston Firefighters Relief Association. It was recently exhibited at the 300th in 2013. (WHS photo)*

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*H. Bentley “Ben” Crouch (Photo courtesy of James Crouch)*

*Editor’s note: This history of the Weston Fire Department was written by H. Bentley “Ben” Crouch. The untitled, undated typescript probably dates to the 1950s. On the last page, Crouch notes that “a new house is now (1953) occupied by the Beebe family.” The manuscript covers the period 1882 to 1929. Crouch passed away suddenly from a heart attack in 2005. The Weston Historical Society would like to thank his wife, Janet, and son, James, for enthusiastically supporting publication of this manuscript in the WHS Bulletin.*

*Ben Crouch (1928-2005) lived most of his life in Weston, a town he loved. He grew up at 41 Summer Street in a house built by his parents, Herbert “Dick” and Grace (Bentley) Crouch, and attended Meadowbrook School, then Belmont Hill for high school. He would take the train to Belmont from Stony Brook Station, which was located near the present Exxon Mobil gas station but has since been demolished. During high school he had a job taking care of the train station, including making a fire there every morning. He rebelled against going to college and instead followed his passion and joined the Weston Fire Department, serving for 40 years. He also served in Germany during the Korean War. Crouch married Janet Bassett in 1957, and the couple built the house at 81 Montvale Avenue where he lived until his death. They had two children, James and Mary. Crouch was known for his collection of railroad memorabilia, later donated to the Beverly Historical Society Walker Collection. He also documented the activities of the Weston Fire Department, taking photographs of fires and writing this history.*

*I have made minimal changes to the manuscript and added photographs and captions. All photographs and illustrations are courtesy of Weston Historical Society unless otherwise noted.*

*Pamela W. Fox, Editor*

# A History of the Weston Fire Department: 1880 to 1929

While the Town of Weston did not begin to enjoy the benefits of an organized fire department until 1890, it was certainly not because of a lack of fires. The decade from 1880 to 1889 saw the night's sky illuminated more than once by the demon fire. The *Waltham Free-Press Tribune* provides some most interesting accounts of some of these conflagrations together with some enlightening (sic) references to the "Weston Department" and the "Lincoln Navy Yard."<sup>1</sup>

A few of these accounts follow:

September 9, 1882

The house of J.B. Case, situated about a mile from the center of Weston, with its contents, was destroyed by fire on Tuesday night, involving a loss of about \$20,000.

The house had been unoccupied during the winter months and the fire caught from the furnace, a hot fire having been made to dry the house. The Waltham steamer did a good service, saving the barn. The Weston Department, consisting of two old fire hooks, was prompt on the spot.

September 7, 1883

The Silver Hill station of the Fitchburg R.R. was totally destroyed by fire early last evening. The fire is supposed to have been caused by a spark from a passing locomotive. The loss will be small. It is noted that the company will erect a better depot in its place. An engine from the "Lincoln Navy Yard" was sent for but failed to respond.

Leaving the *Waltham Free-Press Tribune* and its Weston reporter conferring on the merits of "two old fire hooks" and the "Lincoln Navy Yard" Fire Department, we find that on Saturday, October 25, 1884, at 12:15 A.M., Hall's Shoddy Mill, situated on Church Street at the Fitchburg R.R. grade crossing (later known as Kendal Green), was completely demolished with loss set at \$18,000.

<sup>1</sup> Editor's note: The "Lincoln Navy Yard" was a name given to the East Lincoln summer estate of Strong Benton Thompson. Although formally named "Woodvale," it may have acquired the Navy Yard name because Strong was a naval officer. He sold the property in 1876 but apparently the name stuck.

FROM

**E. A. HALL,**

**Dealer in FINE ALL-WOOL SHODDIES**

AND HARD END STOCK.

Mill at Weston Depot,                      WESTON, MASS.

*Hall's mill on Church Street at Stony Brook produced "shoddy," a fabric made from reclaimed wool. The mill burned down for a second time in 1886 and was never rebuilt.*

That the mill was of substantial size is testified by the following dimensions that appeared in the *W. F-P T*:

Mill- main section-	wood 3-story	119' x 36'
Mill-ell	wood 1-story	26' x 34'
Mill-ell	wood-1-story	32' x 34'
Picker house	wood-1-story	32' x 38'
Dye house	brick-1-story	36' x 38'

Cause was unknown but the structure was immediately rebuilt, only to burn down again for the final time exactly two years later on Saturday, October 23, 1886. While cause of the second blaze was never definitely established either, there was talk of highly illegal goings on within the mill in regards to acquiring (?) of the shoddy from railroad freight cars; plus the fact that the foreman in the mill had in previous years spent considerable time enjoying free room and board in establishments owned and operated by the Commonwealth.

One of the first recorded deaths by fire in Weston occurred on November 7, 1885, when a blaze destroyed one of the large boarding houses fronting on Summer Street near River Street, used by contractors constructing the Stony Brook reservoir. The fire was caused by a kerosene lantern overturned during a drunken brawl; and though there were some 50 men in the building at the time, through some miracle all but one, a Patrick Sullivan, escaped. Loss was set at \$3,000.

Another death in Weston occurred in November 1889, when one Oscar Coburn, in attempting to save several horses from a burning barn on Church Street at the location of the present Kendal Green Riding School was trapped by falling timbers and burned to death.

## **1890**

If the townspeople of Weston thought that the previous 10 years had shown an exceptionally high toll in fire, they were hardly prepared for what was to happen in 1890. It all started when a pyromaniac went to work in the northwest section

of the town. Between April 21 and June 9, he had managed to set 13 fires, two of which destroyed barns owned by Dennis J. Eldridge and George H. Stratton. A \$500 reward was posted for information leading to his (or her) apprehension, but no arrests were ever made.

It was the mid-summer fire that destroyed the historic Fiske house at the corner of Central Avenue (now Boston Post Road) and Fiske Lane that finally brought matters to a head. This fire, breaking out in the back hallway during the morning hours, took many hours to work its way through the structure and cause its total destruction.

When the blaze was first discovered, the neighbors were naturally all in deep slumber. In order to arouse them to the dangers near at hand, the master of the house or some other equally quick-witted person fired a shot-gun many times into the still night air. A disturbance such as this, of course, caused much consternation among the peaceful citizens nearby; and once it was ascertained what was taking place, several of the more able-bodied men obtained from the Town Hall, where they were stored, the two previously mentioned "fire hooks". These were simply long spruce poles with hooks attached to the ends, the purpose of same being to pull down the outside walls of burning structures in order to get at the fire in the partitions from without. These proved to be entirely ineffective (true probably every other time they were used); and it was only through the use of large rugs removed from the house, soaked in water, and



*The Fiske house and barn were located where 625 Boston Post Road is today. The historic house was destroyed by fire in 1890. In 1921, the Fiske barn (above), which had been saved in the that fire by placing soaked rugs against the side, was moved across the street and east to its present location at No. 582 and converted into a Colonial Revival-style commercial building (below). (WHS photos)*



placed against the side of an adjacent barn that the latter structure was itself saved. It was felt that, had there been available a group of men trained in fire-fighting and equipped with the proper tools, the house could have been saved.

From shot-guns to the Gamewell system, from wet blankets to high-pressure fog; yes, there has been some progress in the last 60 years, even though there are some who don't or won't want to admit it.

The people of the town then united and a special town meeting was held on September 2, 1890, to consider buying fire apparatus. On September 16 the Committee of Fire Appropriation submitted a report in which it recommended three things:

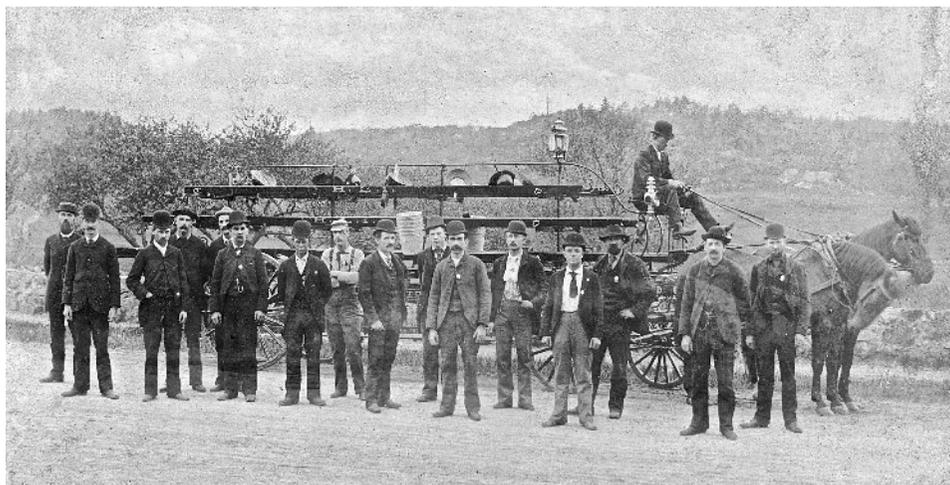
- 1) Individual fire buckets, fire extinguishers, and Johnson pumps to be kept in key houses throughout the town
- 2) Three one-horse fire trucks, equipped with ladders, axes, pikes, hand pumps, etc. to be stationed "... in the three principal sections of the town whenever these sections, one or all, shall organize in each a fire company of not less than 10 suitable persons. . . "
- 3) A chemical engine to be placed near the Town Hall

The money necessary to do this, the committee felt, would be \$2,300 divided as follows:

- |  |         |               |
|--|---------|---------------|
| 1) Three one-horse fire trucks @\$500 .....  | \$1,500 |               |
| 2) Incidental expenses, say .....            | \$200   |               |
| 3) 2 <sup>nd</sup> hand chemical engine..... | \$300   |               |
| 4) Purchase of fire pumps, etc, say.....     | \$300   | Total \$2,300 |



*Fire was of particular concern for organ factory owner Francis Henry Hastings, whose 280-foot-long, wood-frame factory building was located next to the railroad tracks on Viles Street. Burning embers from trains were a common cause of fires. The Hook & Hastings Co. purchased Weston's first fire truck and donated it to the town. (WHS photo)*



*This hook-and-ladder truck, the town's first piece of fire apparatus, was kept in a shed next to the Hastings barn on North Avenue. It was pulled by Tom Coburn's heavy farm horses. Left to right: Frank H. Gowell, Howard Richardson, George H. Stevens, Everett Vittum, Arthur Vittum, Roland Rand, Nathan Fiske, Jack S. Banford, Albert L. Brown, Herbert Lewis, John H. Guthrie, Fred Tucker, Harry Harding, Tom Coburn, Bill Quinn (driver), Will Reilley, and Al Coburn. (WHS photo)*

On October 4 an appropriation was made for the equipping and manning of a hook & ladder truck, located on North Avenue at the Hastings Organ Factory. This truck, purchased by the Hook & Hastings Co. for \$364.09 from the Boston

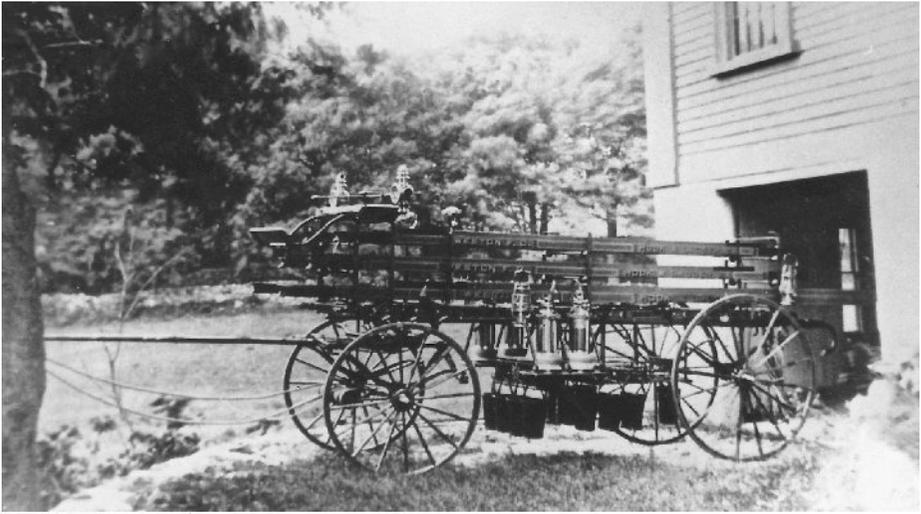
Woven Hose Co. and donated to the Town of Weston, was installed, and on November 18, 1890, the following appointments were made:

F.H. Gowell	Roland Rand
H. Lewis	C.B. Floyd
A. L. Brown	W. Reilley
C. L. Berry	J. N. Guthrie
Nathan Fiske	T. Coburn
G. H. Stevens	F. T. Tobin
T. V. Alcock	J. S. Banford
W. Quinn	A. N. Garfield

These men were to serve as Engineers of H & L #1, Weston Fire Department. The above occurrences and acts were the first steps taken in the establishment of the Weston Fire Department.

## **1891**

April 25, 1891, saw an appropriation granted for the purchase of a hook & ladder truck for the center of the town. The truck was obtained from the H. K. Barnes



*In 1891, the town appropriated money to buy a fire truck (above) for the center of town. It was housed in the basement of the Town Hall (left), which was three stories in the rear because of the change in grade. (WHS photos)*

Co. for \$540; and on June 13, 1891, the following men were appointed Enginemen of H & L #2, stationed at the Town Hall:

W. N. Gowell	F. T. Fuller
J. M. Smith	C. A. Freeman
E. O. Clark	L. E. Clark
A. L. Cutting	M. French
B. R. Parker	N. Barker Jr.
P. MacAuliffe	R. Kenney
J. H. MacAuliffe	G. W. Kenney
W. F. Sherburne	C. M. Kelliher

During the first year of operation, the department had two bad fires to contend with. On December 8, the wooden knitting mill located at the corner of South Avenue and Pine Street and owned by James Walton was destroyed with a loss of \$9,300. On December 31, the slaughter house on North Avenue owned by George Trask was leveled with loss set at \$3,500.

It is interesting to note at this time how many small industries were once located in Weston; but once they were burned out they rarely rebuilt. This was possibly

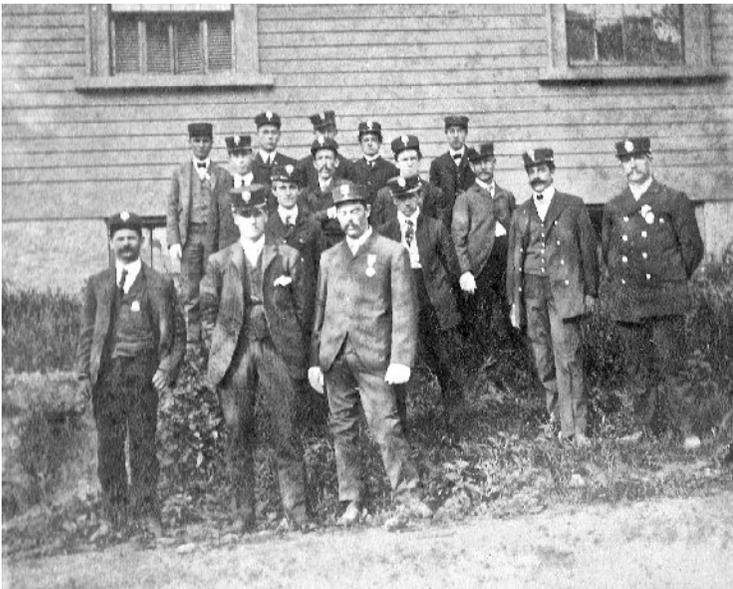
because of finances but quite probably because the policy of the town has always been to discourage business enterprises within its limits.

## **1892 - 93**

The organization of the fire department remained substantially the same throughout 1892 and 1893, but several incidents of note took place. The need for a fire alarm system to unite the north and central sections of the town was deemed necessary, and on February 24, 1892, an article was inserted in the town warrant seeking \$1,000 for that purpose. It was appropriated in 1893.

A September 23 fire that destroyed the boat factory of H. V. Partelow and Co. at the South Avenue bridge, with a loss of \$6,000, was the only large fire in 1892; but in 1893 things were different. There were four blazes of \$1,000 or more and all are worthy of special mention. The year had hardly begun when the first of a series of severe fires occurred that were to plague Edward Jennings on Glen Road for several years. A dwelling house owned by him was a total loss of \$1,550.

It was not until August 9 that anything more of note took place. However, on that date at 11:45 PM, the house of George N. Stevens on North Avenue was leveled. An interesting sidelight on this fire was that Mr. Stevens's neighbor, Mr. J. N. Guthrie (a member of the fire department) refused to let the department use his (Guthrie's) well for fear that it would run dry. It was only through the strenuous work of the firemen that Guthrie's house was itself saved.



*Enginemen for  
H & L #2 posing  
next to the Town  
Hall, c. 1910.  
(WHS photo)*

Again on August 23 at 7:15 AM, a fire partially destroyed the house of C. H. Fiske on Concord Road, with a loss of \$1,500. The last of the four severe blazes occurred on October 23 at 2:05 AM and destroyed or damaged three two-story buildings in the center of town owned by Edward Coburn and occupied by himself and W. G. Wark, W. T. Burrage, and C. L. Keefe. This fire caused a loss of \$20,000 and seriously threatened the entire center of town.

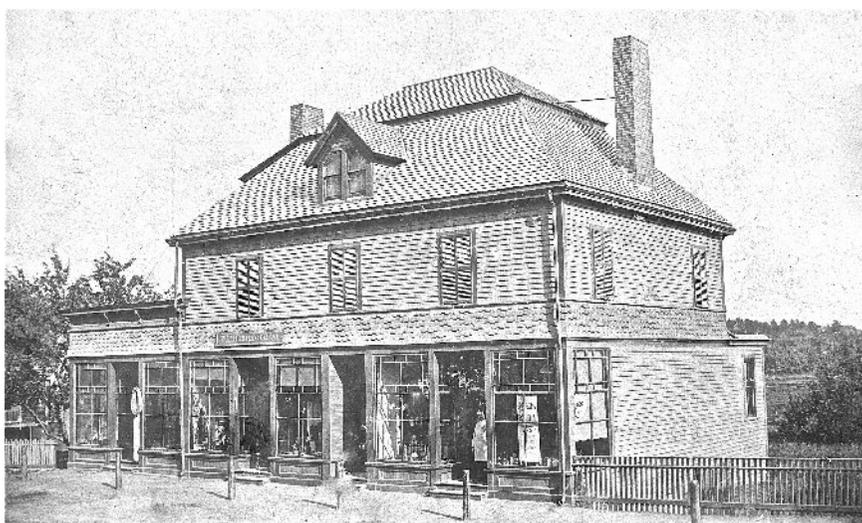
Arson was definitely established in these latter two fires, and while the Fiske blaze seemed to center around family differences, there were far more sinister implications concerning the Coburn conflagration. Talk of criminals, hideouts, etc. was prevalent; and the townspeople, taking notice of same, caused the following notice to be posted:

#### \$500 REWARD

The TOWN OF WESTON offers a reward of \$500 for the arrest and conviction of the person or persons who set fire, this morning, to the buildings on Central Ave. occupied by C. L. Keefe, Burrage and Co. and William G. T. Wark; or for the arrest and conviction of the person or persons who set fire, Aug. 23, 1893, to the dwelling house on Concord Street, owned by Charles H. Fiske.

October 23, 1893

However, as was the case before when a reward was posted, no arrests were ever made; and the whole business was finally forgotten.



*The Coburn building, Weston's first "business block," is shown in this c.1895-96 photo. Constructed to replace the stores burned out in the 1893 fire, it was home to two of the displaced businesses, W. T. Burrage, dry goods, and W. G. Wark, harness maker. The building still remains at 450 Boston Post Road. (WHS photo)*

# \$500 REWARD.

The Town of Weston offers a reward of Five Hundred Dollars for the arrest and conviction of the person or persons who set fire, this morning, to the buildings on Central Ave., occupied by C. L. Keefe, Burrage & Co. and William G. T. Wark, or for the arrest and conviction of the person or persons who set fire, Aug. 27, 1893, to the dwelling-house on Concord Street, owned by Charles H. Fiske.

**HENRY J. JENNISON,  
FRANCIS BLAKE,**

*Selectmen of Weston.*

WESTON, Oct. 23, 1893.

*Despite the offer of a large reward, no one was ever convicted of setting fire to the Fiske house in August 1893 or to a group of stores on Central Avenue (now Boston Post Road) two months later in October.*

The description of the Fiske fire is interesting to note as it indicates the conditions the men of those days had to contend with.

Saturday August 23, 1893. At 7:15 this morning two alarms were sounded from Box 26 and called 14 members of the company (H & L #2) to the house of C. H. Fiske Jr. located on Concord St. The main part of the house was saved by tearing away the ell. Twenty-four chemical charges were used. Returned to house at 9:45 AM.

Strenuous work such as this was apparently going unnoticed by the townspeople and selectmen, because 1893 saw the 16 members of the department submit a petition seeking pay for actual time put in at fires. It was decided to pay each man 25 cents per hour for each hour actually worked. As an indication of how active the department was during 1893, H & L #1 made 13 runs and H & L #2 made 12 runs.

## 1894

On February 26, 1894, the Committee on Fire Alarm (sic) submitted a report stating that the following fire alarm boxes had been placed in service:

72	North Avenue and Viles Street
76	Church Street at Fitchburg RR Depot
24	Central Avenue opp. H. J. Jennison
26	Central Avenue opp. Town Hall
28	Central Avenue opp. Baptist Church

Also call bells at F. H. Gowell's, Hastings's Organ Factory, MacAuliffe's Stable, Chair Factory, and a bell striking mechanism in the Baptist Church steeple.

The system, installed by the Gamewell Co., was an interesting one. There was no transmitter; instead Box 26 was used as such. Whenever there was a fire, the first person notified pulled that box. Therefore no matter where in the town the fire was located, Box 26 was sounded unless somebody should happen to pull another box closer to the fire.

The results from this initial installation were apparently good enough to warrant an additional appropriation of \$10,000 for further extension to the system. It is interesting to note that the wires of this first system were strung from tree to tree and were not transferred to poles until some years later.

The same year of 1894 saw the appointment by the selectmen of the first Board of Fire Engineers: Everett O. Clark, Albert E. Coburn, and Brenton H. Dickson Jr. Previous to this time the appointees were known as Forest Fire Wards.

There were 19 alarms of fire in 1894, of which three caused damage in excess of \$1,000.

April 14, House of A.C. Dearbon on North Avenue. Totally destroyed with a loss of \$1,900.

May 2, House, barn, and carriage house of A.G. Loker on Winter Street. Totally destroyed with a loss of \$13,000.

July 21, Barn of Willard Sibley on Central Avenue. Struck by lightning and burned with a loss of \$2,140.

In regard to the Sibley fire, the following quote from the *Waltham Free-Press Tribune* is quite interesting:

. . . the old (fire) engine destroyed (in the Sibley fire) was formerly owned by the Boston Manufacturing Co; (built about 1800) and was left at the Sibley's about 50 years ago. At that time its company went to a fire in Wayland and, becoming tired out on returning, stored the machine "for a few days." There it remained ever since with two exceptions: once when it was in the firemen's parade of July 4, 1887, and again when borrowed by its owners. The (hand) tub was named "Guard" and was probably the oldest engine in existence. Portions of the machine were taken home by the firemen and will be preserved as relics.

## **1895 - 96**

Eighteen hundred and ninety-five was a rather quiet year for the fire department, with the only excitement being a fire at the meat market of E. O. Clark on Central Avenue. It was destroyed on January 20 with a loss of \$1,300. Also, 800 feet of hose was purchased from the Boston Woven Hose Co. for \$420.50, and six men were transferred from H. & L #2 to the newly formed hose company.



*The Weston Aqueduct Co. (later Weston Water Co.), established in 1895 as a private company, had a pumping station on Warren Avenue and supplied a limited area in the town center. As a result, the town was able to install 20 hydrants. To cover the cost, property valuations were increased on those who lived close enough to benefit from a hydrant. This 1890s photo appears to be a training session. (WHS photo)*

The new hose wagon, which was built by Daniel Smith at a cost of \$131.05 and ironed (sic) by G. A. Hirtle for \$100, was placed in service as Hose Co. #1 at the central station in April 1896, and with completion of the water system during the same year, the firemen felt that they could handle all fires within the reach of the water mains.

The fire alarm system was extended during the year to include Box 29 at the corner of Central Avenue and Elm Street (now Love Lane). The alarm system, incidentally, was becoming somewhat of a headache to the fire department; for in the report of the Fire Engineers they stated that “. . . too free use of the electric fire alarm system in cases of small brush fires has put the town to considerable unnecessary expense; and hereafter holders of box keys are not allowed to give an alarm for a brush fire unless by consent of one of the engineers.”

The report for the year showed that H. & L #1 made seven runs, H & L #2 15 runs and Hose #1 16 runs, and that one fire caused loss in excess of \$1,000. This fire on July 8 destroyed a house, barn, and shop of James Walton on South Avenue at Pine Street, with damage set at \$8,000.

A report on the water system that was submitted during the year spoke quite favorably of it and ended up with a bit of advice to the firemen that still holds very true today, and that was “. . . put your water where it will do the most good, viz; on the burning material, not in the smoke and flames 10 or more feet from the fire . . .”



*The 1828 Methodist church building, located at the corner of North Avenue and Conant Road, burned to the ground on the last day of the year 1899 in a fire caused by an overheated furnace. The importance of hydrants was underscored when a house near a hydrant was saved while the church and Robert Winsor's barn, both far from a water supply, burned to the ground. (WHS photo)*

## 1897

The year 1897 was an active one for the fire department as far as fires were concerned. There were 23 fires and 19 alarms were sounded. Of these 23 fires, four deserve mention:

January 18, 2:40 PM, House of John Schwartz, Highland Street. Total loss of \$4,000.

May 3, 10:00 AM, House of Mrs. Addie Parsons and Mrs. Isidore Eldridge, Merriam St. Total loss of \$3,100.

June 26, 10:00 PM, House of E. J. Shaler [Shaylor], South Avenue. Total loss of \$8,800.

September 21, 7:40 PM, Barn of D.B. Vittum, Lexington Street. Total loss of \$4,300.

The Shaler [Shaylor] fire presents an interesting sidelight on operations of those days. The house took fire late one night, and the Newton Fire Department was notified and responded. The structure was beyond hope of saving. What is unusual, however, is that the Weston Fire Department was never notified of the blaze and no alarm was at any time sounded. It was not until the next day that anyone in the center knew of the conflagration.

During the year the fire alarm wires were transferred from trees to the poles of the Weston Electric Company. This certainly must have been quite an improvement.

## 1898 - 99

Two fireboxes were added in 1898: Box 34 at Cutter's Corner and Box 36 at South Avenue and Oak Street. Also, the need for a fire alarm repeater was becoming apparent.

Total losses in 1898 and 1899 were, as usual, quite common, with three occurring in the former year. One, at the original Drabbington Inn belonging to G. A. Thurston on North Avenue, caused damage on November 9 at 1 PM of \$10,000.

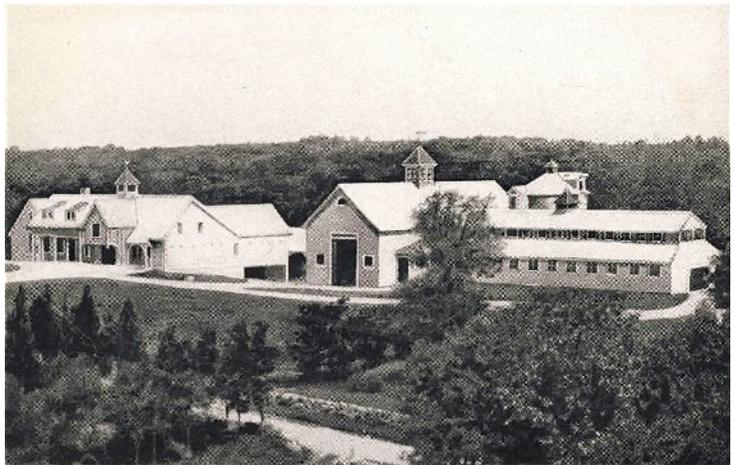
Two fires in 1899 combined to make that year a success. The first one, on September 3 at 7:45 PM, was caused by lightning and leveled the barn of Robert Winsor on Wellesley Street, with a loss of \$6,500. An overheated furnace had the same effect on the Methodist Church on North Avenue. This latter fire occurred on the last day of the year and caused some \$6,000 damage.

## 1900 - 01

On April 10, 1900, the Board of Fire Engineers organized as follows: Chief: B. R. Parker; 1<sup>st</sup> Assistant: R. Atkinson; 2<sup>nd</sup> Assistant: B. H. Dickson Jr. Among the fires these men had to contend with was the August 11 blaze on Glen Road. The report of the Hose Company #1 follows:

August 11, 1900. An alarm from Box 26 at 10:40 pm called 8 members to a fire on the estate of Mr. Edward Jennings. On account of the delay in ringing in the alarm Mr. Jennings's large barn was all ablaze when the department arrived. A line of hose was laid from a pond some distance away and a steamer from Wellesley pumped water to the fire. By this means the fire was kept from spreading and the greater part of the contents of the icehouse was saved.

*After a 1900 fire destroyed one of his barns, dairy farmer Edward Jennings built a new modern replacement at his Glen Farm on Glen Road. This building, seen at left in this c. 1903 photo, was destroyed by fire in December 1903. Another Jennings barn burned down in 1906. (WHS photo)*



It is wise, when mention is made of the Jennings's fires, to bear in mind the fact that at the time it was suspected, although never proven, that they were set, for it was a known fact that the Jennings farm was not a paying proposition and that Edward had had little success in trying to sell his property.

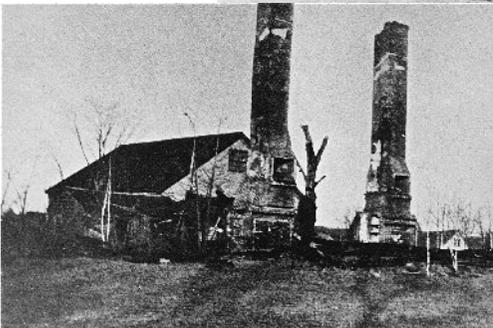
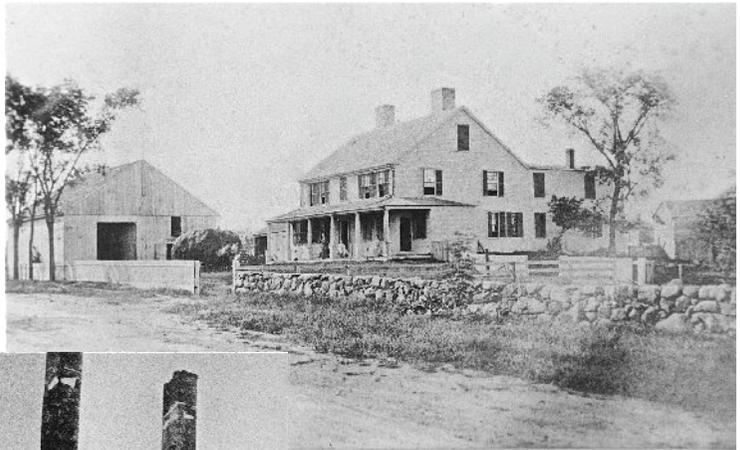
In May of the same year (1900), a hose wagon and hose were purchased for \$474 and assigned to the house of H & L #1 on North Avenue. This wagon was organized on December 19 as Hose Co. #2, and A. E. Coburn was appointed foreman.

The need for a new firehouse in the center of the town was felt necessary but the committee of three appointed early in 1901 could not locate a suitable site and therefore recommended an appropriation of \$300 for repairing the existing quarters and erecting a hose tower.

### ***1902 - 03***

Two fires of note occurred during 1902. P. J. MacAuliffe's livery stable and 14 horses were destroyed in a blaze on February 13. The report of the fire would seem to indicate that the department did an excellent job, however, for three big lines were laid and two buildings less than 20 feet distant were saved.

*The Flagg Tavern, located in the 700 block of Boston Post Road, was among the most important in Weston. George Washington stayed here in 1789. (WHS photo)*



*The historic tavern burned to the ground in 1902. The two charred brick chimneys weren't demolished until decades later and, in the interim, served as the principal landmark in Weston for early motorists traveling by automobile to New York. (WHS photo)*

On November 6 at 10:45 PM occurred the disastrous Flagg Tavern fire on Central Avenue. A delayed alarm brought about its destruction and the death by burns of a small baby. Its mother, though seriously burned, managed to flee the burning structure.

The value of the water system in the extinguishment of fire was readily demonstrated in 1903. The report of Hose Co. #1 relative to the fire of January 18 bears this out:

An alarm from Box 76 at 1:40 PM called 7 members to a fire in the house owned by E. J. Brown on North Avenue. 1000 feet of hose was laid by Hose Co. #1 and as much more by the Kendal Green company. With the help of these two streams the fire was quickly extinguished, the lower two stories of the house being saved. On duty three hours.

Further evidence was offered on March 2 at 7:15 PM when the house of E.C. Green on Central Avenue took fire. Although the roof and upper stories were burned off, the lower half and the contents were saved. Had it not been for the water supply, the entire house would certainly have been consumed.

Edward Jennings made the headlines again on December 16 when another large barn on his estate on Glen Road was leveled.

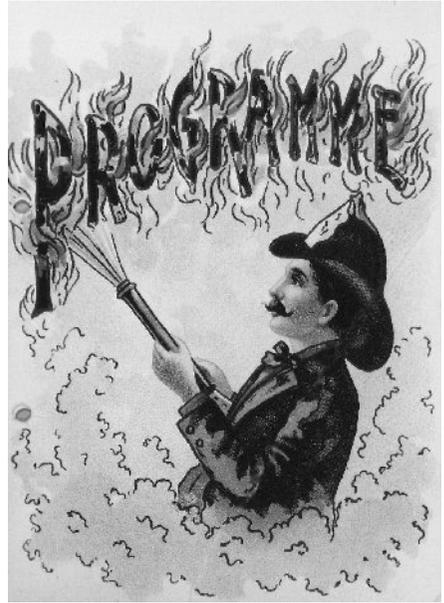


*Thomas Coburn's work horses, housed in the west wing of the barn at left, were used to pull the Kendal Green fire apparatus. Coburn operated a 70-acre dairy farm and kept 25 to 30 cows in the main barn. The early 19th century house, stone wall, and stone posts still remain at No. 163. (WHS photo)*

*The Programme on this page and the next was used for the First Annual Ball of the Weston Firemen's Relief Association, held in 1893. The Association was started in the 1890s but not incorporated until 1906. (WHS photo)*

## **1904 - 06**

In 1904 things quieted down a bit and there was little to report. Box 23 at the corner of Central Avenue and Summer Street was installed and \$200 was appropriated for blankets to be carried on the apparatus for the use of the horses. Incidentally, the fire horses, since the department was organized, were kept at P. J. MacAuliffe's in the center of the town and in the barn of Thomas E. Coburn for the north station.



Nineteen hundred and five was an extremely busy year with 51 bell alarms and 19 still alarms. There were several total-loss building fires as follows:

March 31, 5:00 PM, House of J. M. Schwartz, Highland Street. Total loss.

May 21, 8:00 AM, Chair Factory, Kenney Bros, Central Avenue. Total loss.

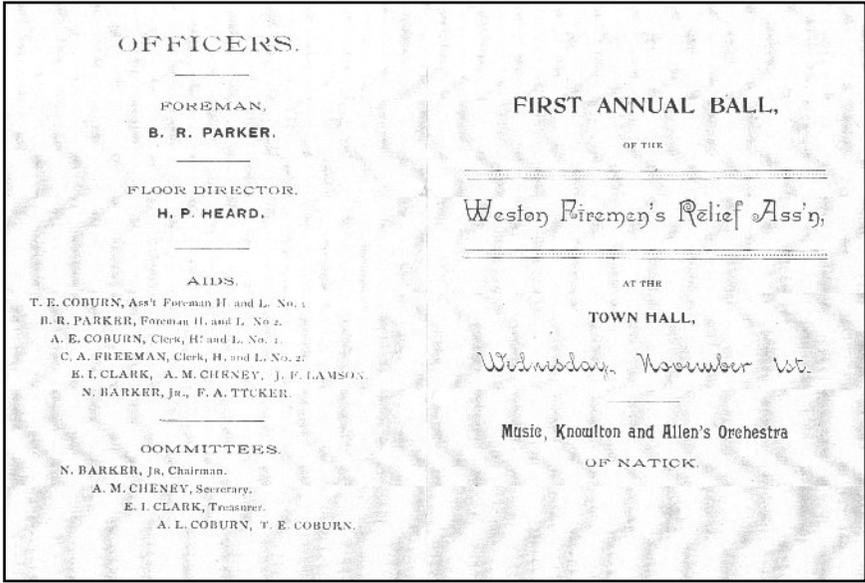
May 28, 5:20 PM, Barn of J. B. Robertson, Park Road. Total loss.

May 31, 4:30 PM, Barn of F. B. Sears, Central Avenue. Total loss.

July 9, 11:30 PM, Cow barn of Robert Winsor, Wellesley Street. Total loss.

Apparently delayed alarms were all too frequent (as was the case at the Flagg Tavern fire), for the department indicated that several of the losses could be attributed directly to that cause and asked the townspeople to be more prompt in their notification. This appeal did little good, however, for on February 25, 1906, the house of Francis B. Sears on Central Avenue at the corner of Wellesley Street was entirely consumed. The official fire department report follows:

February 25, 1906. Alarm from Box 26 at 4:40 AM called the department to the house of F. B. Sears. Alarm was pulled so late that the whole structure was almost down before the department arrived. On duty 8 hours.



Other bad fires in the year included:

January 8, 6:25 PM, Barn of Charles W. Hubbard. Total loss.

August 14, 10:10 PM, Barn of A. A. Brigham, River Street (original factory of Auburndale Watch Co.) Total loss.

And coming as no surprise, to wind up the year, on September 9 at 8:15 AM, a large barn of Edward Jennings on Glen Road was a total loss.

The fire alarm system was further extended in 1906 with the addition of Boxes 38 and 65 in their present locations.

In 1905 Mr. and Mrs. Francis B. Sears and General C. J. Paine contributed money to be used as a nucleus in the forming of the Weston Firemen's Relief Association. On December 7, 1906, the association was incorporated under a Massachusetts charter and the following officers elected:

President:	B. H. Dickson Jr.
Vice-President:	H. F. Warren
Treasurer:	T. E. Coburn
Clerk:	F. A. Sherburne
Auditing Committee:	A. M. Cheney
	T. W. Scott
	A. L. Vittum
Directors:	A. L. Coburn
	E. S. Coburn
	B. R. Parker
	J. M. Smith
	B. H. Dickson Jr.



*In May 1900 a hose wagon and hose were purchased for \$474 and assigned to the Kendal Green company. This photograph shows the horse-drawn wagon, christened Hose Co. #2. (WHS photo)*

Nineteen hundred and six saw the first automobile fire in Weston. This incident occurred on October 28 when a car of unknown make, owned by L. R. Speare of Newton, was destroyed with a loss of \$515. The alarm was sounded from Box 29 at 3:30 PM. It must have done old Dobbin's heart good to come pounding up Central Avenue and see one of the new-fangled contraptions writhing in fiery agony.

## **1907 - 08**

On August 18, 1907, at 6:30 AM the house of D. L. Demmon on Newton Street was leveled, but other than that there was little to report for that year. It was an entirely different story, however, in 1908. The first of two bad fires early in the year occurred on January 22 at 6:00 PM, when the barn of George S. McCausland on Viles Street was struck by lightning. Hose was laid from Hastings's reservoir on the side of Cat Rock Hill down Viles Street and across the railroad tracks. While there was not enough hose to reach the fire, it made no difference, for the train ran over the hose. By the time things got straightened away again, not only the barn but also the house were flat.

Again on April 8 at 12:30 PM, I. O. Lovewell on Wellesley Street saw his house consumed with a loss set at \$1,300. Records of B. H. Dickson Jr. indicate that at this fire and many others during the early 1900s, Mr. Ripley's "bug men" rendered valuable service in aiding in their extinguishment. The "bug men" were employed by the Town of Weston for the purpose of destroying the tent caterpillars that were prevalent in the woods of Weston and surrounding towns at

that time. Cans of burning tar were attached to long poles and used to burn out the tents. More often than not, the “bug men” started fires that they were later called upon to help extinguish.

With these two conflagrations fresh in their minds, the townspeople had much to say relative to the worth of the fire department at the open town meeting on April 29. The organization became the focal point of so much criticism that the Board of Fire Engineers, in an attempt to save face, found it necessary to make a statement in the 1908 *Town Report* relative to the matter:

We wish to refute the statements made in the open town meeting April 29, 1908, i.e., that the Weston Fire Department has never saved a building after it has once caught fire—by giving this partial list of buildings which the members of the fire department have saved after they were on fire:

House of	C. H. Fiske	Concord St. (sic)	
	G. E. Trask	North Ave.	
	C. L. Field	Central Ave.	
	S. E. Tyler	North Ave.	
	E. O. Clark	Central Ave.	
	F. H. Hastings	North Ave.	
	H. Andrews	Viles St.	
	C. J. Paine	Highland St.	
	Mrs. J. M. B. Knox	Central Ave.	
	C. F. Russell	Conant Rd.	
	F. J. Coburn	Church St.	
	W. Whittemore	Warren Ave.	
	M. Sherman	Central Ave.	
	E. Fiske	Central Ave.	
	S. P. Dwight	Lexington St.	
Dry House	Kenney Brothers	Central Ave.	
	Barn of	Edward Page	South Ave.
		E. Jennings	Glen Rd.

The Board of Fire Engineers also quoted a letter from the above Mr. Hastings in which he praised the work of the fire department at a fire in one of his houses.

Mr. Charles W. Hubbard climbed aboard the bandwagon in criticizing the efforts of the department. In a minority report of the Committee of Fire Prevention and Extinction, he made the following statements:

. . . I have never made any study of the work of the fire department and such experience of it as I have had, in cases of fires on my own place, has been confirmatory of Mr. Clark’s criticism of its want of discipline.

. . . I believe it is a fact that no building of any size, once on fire, has ever been extinguished by the fire department, and it is my own opinion

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No. 7



THE town of Weston, Mass., a suburb of Boston, about twelve miles from that city, has a population of about 2,500. The population is scattered over a considerable area, most of the territory being devoted to farming and country estates. The matter of fire protection in the town is rendered more difficult by the extent of the territory to be covered combined with the small expense which might be considered to be warranted by the population. A central fire station is located at the point where the population is most concentrated; but about four miles from the center of the town is a sub-center called Kendall Green, for which more adequate fire protection was deemed necessary than could be furnished from the existing station four miles away. The town therefore located a sub-station

at this point, housing the apparatus in a building rented from private parties. Last year a regular fire station was built to furnish adequate quarters. An effort was made to give it an appearance which would be sufficiently artistic for its surroundings; and the station, which has recently been completed, was built of reinforced concrete, simple in outline, but of attractive proportions. It consists of one story and a basement, the latter being rendered the more practicable in that the lot falls away rapidly below the street level. The building is about 36 feet square, with an extension at the rear 14 feet long and 12 feet wide; the extension having a second floor which contains the sleeping quarters of the one attendant. The apparatus is kept on the main floor. No arrangements for stabling horses

*The all-concrete 1908 Kendal Green Fire Station was completely fireproof. It was praised in this 1909 article in the Municipal Journal and Engineer, which noted that "an effort was made to give [the new station] an appearance which would be sufficiently artistic for its surroundings." Critics responded that it was too low to the ground, too close to the street, and "in the worst place that could be found on North Avenue." (WHS photo)*



*This 1910 photograph shows hose truck #2, the chief's car, and H & L #1, along with members of the Coburn family. (Courtesy of Jane Coburn)*

that the fire department has never made good its cost to the town.  
... In my own opinion more people would be kept out of the town by the fear of unnecessary future expenditure on the fire department and increased taxes than would be kept out of the town by further economy on a fire department which has never put out a house fire.”

Fortunately not all of the people of the town were as shortsighted as Mr. Hubbard, and an appropriation of \$9,315 was granted in the 1908 town meeting for the construction of a new fire station in the Kendal Green section. The building, erected by the Aberthaw Construction Co. of Weston, was completed during the year.

The job must have been a good one (for those days) for the *Boston Sunday Herald* printed a photo of it and called attention to its beauty, and the *Christian Science Monitor* cited it as the best of work in reinforced concrete and also as the only fireproof fire station in the United States. Amen!

While the need for better quarters (the equipment for 20 years had been housed in a barn of Francis Hastings on North Avenue) for the apparatus in the Kendal Green section was undoubtedly one of the principal reasons for the erection of the new station, there was another more obscure reason for building such an expensive structure. At the time there was considerable agitation among the residents of that district against the contemplated construction of a street railway line from Waltham to Concord via North Avenue in Weston. By placing the fire station at the narrow point in the road and opposite the ledges it was felt that the street railway project would be blocked. This, in part, explains the poor location of the firehouse and also why so much money was put into its construction.

## **1909**

An inventory of the fire department in 1909 listed the following apparatus and equipment:

### **KENDAL GREEN**

#### **H & L #1**

1 H & L truck	2 bars
6 ladders	1 chain
5 extinguishers	2 rubber suits
4 lanterns	3 hats
1 pole	2 rubber coats
3 ropes	42 charges
4 brooms	1 set double-harness
2 shovels	1 pr. harness-hangers
1 fork	1 pr. blankets
6 force-pumps	1 whip
4 rubber pails	1 hammer
12 tin pails	1 monkey-wrench
2 pickaxes	5 ladder straps
2 axes	1 chisel

#### **HOSE CO. #2**

1 hose wagon	1 blanket
1000' 2 1" hose	1 bar
2 nozzles	3 rubber suits
2 lanterns	4 hose spanners
2 chemicals	1 wrench
1 axe	1 single harness

### **WESTON CENTER**

#### **H & L #2**

1 2-horse ladder truck	4 axes
1 set double-harness	2 bars
1 pr. blankets	6 oil coats
4 helmets	1 canvas coat
2 life-belts	2 hats
2 ladder-dogs	9 tin pails
2 shovels	1 whiffletree



Men from the Weston Center company pose in front of the Josiah Smith Tavern in 1910. Left to right: Benjamin R. "Ross" Parker (standing), Bill Tozier, Harold Coburn, John Ketchum, Brenton H. Dickson Jr. (standing) and Frank Mulock (far right). The name of the driver is unknown. (WHS photo)

- |         |                        |
|---------|------------------------|
| 2 forks | 1 50' extension ladder |
| 1 hoe   | 2 15' roof ladders     |
| 4 poles | 1 16' roof ladder      |

#### HOSE CO. #1

- |                                |                      |
|--------------------------------|----------------------|
| 1 hose wagon                   | 12 coat straps       |
| 1 set double-harness & hangers | 3 lanterns           |
| 1 pr. street blankets          | 4 nozzles            |
| 2050' 2 1/2" hose              | 1 siamese (sic) gate |
| 2 axes                         | 26 hose spanners     |
| 1 bar                          | 6 oil-coats          |
| 3 hydrant gates                | 3 rubber hats        |
| 2 hydrant wrenches             | 1 whip               |
| 5 body belts                   | Misc: 1 hose sled    |

#### FIRE ALARM

- 25 miles iron wire
- Arms & brackets to support same
- 1 large striker in Baptist Church
- 5 mechanical gongs

15 5" tappers  
7 vibrator bells  
7 relays  
7 keys  
7 switches  
14 dry batteries  
20 fire alarm boxes (18, 23, 24,  
25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 32, 34, 36,  
38, 41, 47, 65, 69, 72, 74, 76, 78)

A \$4,000 fire on May 21 at 5:25 PM that destroyed the house of F. H. Upham on Ash Street was the only blaze of note in 1909.



*Unidentified Weston firefighter,  
c. 1910 (Courtesy Weston Fire  
Department)*

## **1910**

Nineteen hundred and ten was quite a different story. There were almost as many building fires as brush fires, with 16 of the former and 23 of the latter. Nevertheless the only large fire, with \$20,000 in losses, was on May 11 at 2 PM. It leveled the Grant Walker mansion on Concord Road, despite the fact that Waltham's steamer pumped from a brook for several hours. The department did good work at a \$3,000 blaze in Cutting's Store on May 14.

## **1912**

While the town wrangled over the advisability of a new truck and a new station, fire still reared its ugly head. On January 21, 1912, at 2:00 PM a fire destroyed an ell of the W. H. Harrington house at the corner of North Avenue and Conant Road. This blaze was the center of much controversy at a later date. The letters appearing in the *Waltham Free-Press Tribune* pertaining to it are sufficiently interesting to be reproduced here at this time.

### **Letter #1**

Editor *Free-Press Tribune*

I have been asked by a great number of people why I resigned from the Fire Department. It was because members higher up, acting the "dog in the manger," cannot or will not eat themselves (sic) or let me. I was a member for about 10 years. During that time I never knew an officer of H & L #1 or Hose #2 to take charge of the firemen at a fire. Everyone did as he pleased. Those who stood and looked on got as much pay as those who worked. At the fire station no one was at the head. Members took

the rubber suits home and wore them out. The ones who worked at the fires were drenched to the skin. No rubber suits on the trucks.

I wanted to be put in as an assistant foreman of Hose #2, but was prevented by those who got all there was in it and gave nothing in return. Then I asked to be put on as engineer, but was prevented by the big man, who evidently likes the condition, for he has done nothing himself and will not let me.

(Signed) James T. Foote

## Letter #2

Editor *Free-Press Tribune*

In a recent article appearing in your columns our fellow citizen, James T. Foote, set forth the reasons for his resignation from the fire department and also took occasion to criticize the department and its members. Since he seems to think that his case requires publicity, it would not be inadvisable to present some facts concerning it which Mr. Foote seems reticent in publishing.

According to his avowal, which he has repeated many times, Mr. Foote resigned from Hook & Ladder #1 in order that he might join Hose #2, where he believed he could render better service to the dept. In order to accomplish this he asked to be put on the Hose Co. as Asst. Foreman. When his name was presented at a meeting of that company, it was decided that his presence would not make it any more efficient and he was not elected to that office. The reasons for refusing him admittance were several, the most important of which are:

During his experience on the department, which has extended over a period of several years, Mr. Foote has been a constant fault-finder and has repeatedly attempted to create dissension among the men. This has not added to his avowed efficiency as a fireman nor has it added to his popularity among his fellow-members. To put such a man in a position of authority where he would not have had the goodwill of the men to whom he is a superior in office would be a calamity to the department and hinder the progress of the company.

Again Mr. Foote was a member of a company which is called upon to render more service to the town than the hose company, a company which cannot be claimed by anyone to be more efficient than the hose company, and which Mr. Foote himself declares was without proper leadership. Therefore it would seem very inadvisable for him to leave such a company where his self-alleged qualities of firemanship would make him of such great service. Mr. Foote admits he was a member of that company for 10 years and no improvement was effected. During that

time several vacancies in office occurred and Mr. Foote was not called upon to become an incumbent. If his services were so slight as to make him of such little value to his company, it would seem extremely unwise for the members of Hose 2 to elect him to their membership and place him in a position of authority.

Mr. Foote complains that the members of the various companies took home rubber suits and wore them out. . . . At the time of his resignation from the fire department which was over a year ago Mr. Foote had in his possession a rubber coat which he has worn at various times in inclement weather and has not yet turned in to the proper authorities.

Mr. Foote complains that he was refused the position of engineer by the man "higher up." It seems evident that that man was unaware of his remarkable ability for he did not obtain the coveted position.

For a man who has made such assertions as he has made in print and out of it, and who has tried to force himself into a position of authority which he has not earned and where his presence would only create harm, the most becoming course would be to apologize to those whom he has attacked and subside forever.

(signed) Earl H. Townsend  
Francis R. Atkinson  
Harold W. Coburn

Members of Hose 2

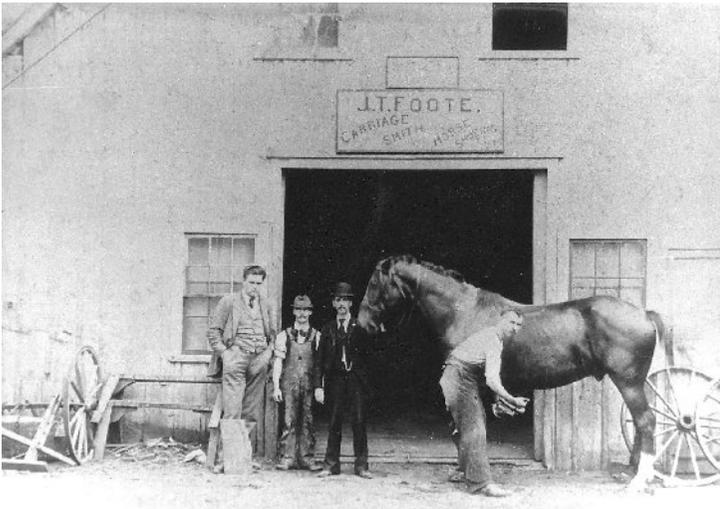
### Letter #3

Editor *Free-Press Tribune*

The article in your paper last Friday signed by Earl H. Townsend, Francis R. Atkinson, and Harold W. Coburn was designed to mislead and deceive.

Some of the officials of the Hose Co. chafe under the collars because I said the company was without proper leadership. Where was the leadership at the fire of W. F. Harrington's, corner of Conant Rd. and North Ave., which took place Sunday afternoon, January 21<sup>st</sup>, 1912?

All the windows in the lower part of the house were broken out, even in the main part of the house where there was no fire at any time, and where was the leadership when spectators ordered a hoseman who was playing on the fire to leave his post and play on the roof because they happened to see smoke coming out through the shingles, which did as much good as to pour water on a turtle's head in trying to drown it.



*James T. Foote, shown here next to the horse in this c. 1903 photo, operated a blacksmith shop and cider mill on North Avenue on the site of the present Weston Market. As automobiles became popular, he tore down the blacksmith shop and built a general store and gas station. (WHS photo)*

The trouble with the hose company is the men who were firemen have got out and those who were not firemen have stayed in.

As to information who wore out the rubber suits and other things concerning the Fire station, inquire of the man who has been clerk and steward so long.

(signed) James T. Foote

#### **Letter #4**

Editor *Free-Press Tribune*

It is with some regret that we feel called upon to make reply to the statement of James T. Foote appearing in your issue of June 27. It seems evident that Mr. Foote feels bound to continue making extravagant statements that will only succeed in counteracting the purpose that they were intended to promote.

In his first article he set out with the avowed intention of giving his reasons for his resignation from the fire department. In two very short articles he criticized the fire department as a whole, found fault with the officers of the various companies and the companies themselves, gave an account of his office seeking efforts, highly praised his own ability as a fireman, and accused the undersigned of deception and making misleading statements.

Quite an interesting array of alleged facts but very inconsistent with his original purpose and certainly not to the point.

Therefore Mr. Foote has again made it imperative that we make reply to his allegations and remind him that it is well for him to curb his desire to roast the fire department of which he is erstwhile champion.

Mr. Foote declares that our previous statements were “designed to mislead and deceive,” important if true.

It might be well to note that Mr. Foote did not deny one of these misleading or deceptive statements but promptly proceeds to make more accusations and terminates with a grave insinuation against the man who has held the offices of clerk and steward “so long” and intimating that he could supply information as to who wore out the rubber suits and “other things concerning the Fire station.” In justice to the clerk and steward, it might be said he has made repeated efforts to keep the rubber suits in their proper places but could not do so because there were some who persisted in removing them from the wagons.

Apropos of the absurd statements condemning the poor leadership of the Hose Company at the fire of the residence of W. H. Harrington on January 21, 1912, it might be said that this poor leadership did not seem to detract from the efficiency of the company as the fire was extinguished after it had done but little harm to any part of the house but the rear L; and this despite the fact that the fire was well under way before the apparatus was at the scene of the conflagration.

It would be well for Mr. Foote to refrain from making further remarks unless he has something he can prove.

(signed) Earl H. Townsend  
Harold W. Coburn

No good, public or otherwise, seems to develop from this controversy, and as each side has had two equal opportunities to state its case, it is wise to end it here.

Editor *Free-Press Tribune*

## ***1912 - 14***

On Graduation Day, June 16, 1912, an attic fire in the Unitarian Parsonage on Conant Rd. caused small fire damage but the department poured so much water on the blaze as to collapse all the floors and render the structure a total loss.

It was in July, however, that fire took its greatest toll for that year. On the 11<sup>th</sup> at 11 AM, the barn of Alphonso Dunn on Maple Road was struck by lightning and was a total loss; and on the 29<sup>th</sup> at midnight, Ernest Lovewell’s home on Glen Road was entirely consumed.

*The First Parish Church Parsonage at 3 Conant Road was destroyed by fire in 1912 and subsequently rebuilt. (WHS photo)*



However it was probably the March 25, 11:20 AM fire in 1914, which destroyed the house of F. B. Layton on Conant Road, that emphasized the need for a motor fire truck and a station to house it. At the town meeting a few days later, the townspeople, by a vote of 107 to 18, appropriated \$16,500 for the erection of a firehouse in the center of the town. The plan, submitted by architect A. S. Jenney, called for a three-stall brick structure. It was adopted and Gannon Brothers proceeded immediately with the construction. The building was completed late in 1914 and the apparatus was moved from the basement of the town hall early in 1915.

Money was also voted for the purchase of a motorized fire truck. This money, along with \$3,000 contributed by Mr. Horace S. Sears for that purpose, was used to buy a 4-cylinder White combination hose, chemical, and 250-gpm pump car from O. F. Kress and Sons of Lawrence for \$5,500. With two new stations, a new fire truck, and a rather extensive fire alarm system that at the time totaled 28 fire alarm boxes, Chief Parker asked for a permanent man to maintain the above equipment and to drive the White truck.

## ***1915 - 16***

An interesting fact that may not be generally known is that the Town of Weston contributed in 1915 the sum of \$100 as part payment for the erection of a fire tower on Nobscott Mt. in Sudbury by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

Nineteen hundred and sixteen saw further improvement to the department, with the installation in the central station of a battery system and repeater. This equipment was bought second hand from the Gamewell Co. and installed by them at a cost of \$1,500.



*In 1914 residents voted to build a firehouse in the town center to accommodate motorized fire trucks. Local resident and architect Alexander Jenney designed the handsome brick Colonial Revival building.*



*The four-cylinder White truck, purchased in 1915, was the town's first motorized vehicle, paid for in part by a gift from Horace Sears. Call firefighters no longer had to borrow horses from McAuliffe's livery stable on Church Street. (WHS photos)*

A permanent man, Reginald Stevens, was also added to the department. His duties were to spend every night at the station and to drive the motor fire truck, while during the day Chief Parker or one of his men would perform the same duties.

This new truck, according to the Board of Fire Engineers, gave great service to the town during its first year in operation and without its aid they said, the chair factory of Kenney Brothers, the house of Dr. Van Nuys on Central Avenue, and the barn of C. H. Fiske Jr. could not have been saved. However, it did not affect the outcome on June 20, for on that date the house of F. A. Mazzur on Glen Road was a total loss of \$9,400.

During the year H & L #2 and Hose #1 were combined into one company known as Combination #1. The following officers were appointed:

Captain:	F. C. Mulock
1 <sup>st</sup> Lieut. and Treas:	J. W. Tozier
2 <sup>nd</sup> Lieut. and Clerk	C. A. Hews

The second piece of motorized fire apparatus in the Town of Weston was bought in 1917 with \$750 appropriated in 1916. This truck, a 6-cylinder White converted from an Army seven passenger automobile, was obtained from O. F. Kress & Sons. It became known as Combination #2 and had the same officers as Combination #1.

During the war years of 1917 and 1918, the department was left extremely shorthanded. During the worst of it, in 1918, there were only 16 men on the department, with seven of them assigned to the Kendal Green station. Fortunately there was only one bad fire in the two-year period. On April 19, 1918, at 5:30 PM, the first of a series of fires took place that completely wiped out the property of Austin T. White on Lexington Street. This blaze destroyed the large stone house of his on what is now the property of the Cambridge School. On the same day as the White fire, the department lost by natural death one of its charter members and greatest boosters, A. M. Cheney, who was only 46 at the time of his demise.

## ***1919 - 20***

With the return to peacetime in 1919, a new running card [protocol for what apparatus answers what calls] was inaugurated in the department. The apparatus from the center of the town responded to all alarms in the town. With this new setup in operation, the Board of Fire Engineers recommended an increase in the pay of the callmen. The new pay rate, adopted at town meeting, was \$1.00 per hour. The salary of the permanent man (Lewis Stevens having taken the job when his brother enlisted in the Army) was also increased.

It was in December of 1919 that fire took its worst toll for that year. On the first at 5:55 AM, it was the farmhouse of Barna T. Morrison on Wellesley Street that was a total loss. On December 16 at 9:35 PM, Edward Jennings on Glen Road did away with another of his large barns.

One of the most severe woods fires in the department's history occurred in 1920. The first alarm was sounded on August 19 at 2:45 PM. The fire, which burned several hundred acres of woodland on both sides of South Avenue, required five additional alarms in the next ten days in order to extinguish it.

It was in November, however, that the only severe building fire in the year occurred. This blaze, on the 9<sup>th</sup> at 2:15 PM, started in the barn of Austin T. White

on Lexington Street and spread to another barn and a farmhouse across the street. All three, and all the property of White, were totally destroyed.

There were two incidents involving personnel during the year. On August 22, A. E. Coburn, Captain of Hose Co. #2 and formerly a member of the Board of Fire Engineers, died at the age of 63. Lewis Stevens resigned as permanent man and B. R. Parker Jr. took the job. Parker, however, remained less than a year before he in turn resigned and William H. (Bert) Smith was named to fill his position.

## 1921 - 22

There were a few bad fires in 1921 and 1922. The barn of Philip Miller at the corner of North Avenue and Lexington Street on February 28, 1921, at 8:45 PM and the barn of Louis Benotti on South Avenue on December 4, 1922, at 11:45 AM were the only total loss building fires. However, the department had to contend with another severe woods fire in 1921. Between October 23 and October 31, six separate alarms were sounded for a fire in brush and woods on land of W. E. Schrafft on North Avenue.

During 1921 several changes in the department's apparatus and organization took place. H & L #2 was motorized, H & L #1 was withdrawn from active service, and Hose #2 was disbanded. Shortly afterwards the north station was closed down, H & L #1 was disbanded as an organized company, and all the personnel of the department were grouped, for the first time, into one company consisting of Combination #1, Combination #2, H & L #1 (in reserve) and H & L #2. This consolidated company was comprised of the following men:

Captain:	C. Mulock
1 <sup>st</sup> Lieut. and Treas:	C. A. Hews
2 <sup>nd</sup> Lieut. and Clerk:	H. R. Stevens
Steward:	E. A. Merrill



*This c. 1920s photograph shows the new fire station with its original doors and two early motorized fire-trucks. (Courtesy Beverly Historical Society Walker Collection)*

*Above: Lt. Dean Munson shows a leather fire bucket from the department's collection. Below: Captain's badge, H&L #2. (Photos by Pamela W. Fox)*



#### Hosemen and Laddermen

F. G. Hews	J. Sliney
H. O. Mulock	J. V. Cronin
R. W MacAuliffe	W. A. Martin
G. W. D. Emerson	D. E. Compton
H. D. Travis	G. M. Upham
A. J. Colpitts	M. C. Giles
A. F. Mulock	H. B. Colpitts
W. Scott	L. W. Stanley
O. S. Payne	M. Upham
J. R. Upham	J. Lingley
E. Howe	E. West
H. W. Coburn	P. Miller

#### Permanent Man & Electrician

E. A. Merrill

#### Board of Fire Engineers

Chief: R. Parker  
 B. H. Dickson Jr.  
 A. L. Vittum

Upon Mulock's appointment as Chief, J. W. Tozier assumed command of the company and Mulock automatically stepped in to the Board of Fire Engineers.



The first mechanized ladder was an unusual rig. A Corbin automobile, donated to the town by B. H. Dickson, was cut in half and the rear end moved back several feet. The ladder brackets and racks were then taken from the horse-drawn truck and installed between the front and rear units of the Corbin. This kit, while rather awkward and ungainly, and with a drive shaft that looked like a jump rope while in motion, served the town well for a number of years. Most of the work in building this truck was done by the permanent man, W. H. Smith.

The well-remembered ice storm of November 1921 badly damaged the fire alarm system, which was repaired at considerable expense. The storm, which severely weakened the steeple of the Baptist Church, necessitated the removal of the bell striking mechanism from the steeple. This loss of an audible alarm left the department with no means of notification of fire except for the few tappers [fire bells located in each fireman's home] and the steam whistle on the Hastings Organ Factory. This was a critical situation, and although the fire engineers realized it, they stated in their annual report to the selectmen that they did not wish to put the town to the additional expense of buying a whistle or siren; and therefore they asked for no appropriation to cover same.

The people of the town, however, decided that money could be spent more foolishly than for a fire alarm whistle and voted \$2,200 at the town meeting of 1922 to purchase an audible alarm signal of a type suitable to the fire department. A whistle, replaced in 1952, was bought from R. W. LeBaron for the above price and installed during the year. With the installation of the whistle, the no-school signal of 22-22 was established. This lack of notification in cases of no school had long been a bone of contention both with the school committee and the parents.

Also in 1922, Chief Parker declined to accept his reappointment to that duty and the selectmen named Franklin C. Mulock as the second chief of the Weston Fire Department. Another change in personnel found Erlon A. Merrill assuming the duties of permanent man in the place of W. H. Smith.



*Erlon Merrill (right) was Weston's only full-time firefighter from the early 1920s until the mid-1940s. At that time Cutting's Store was located just east of the fire-house. Merrill lived in an apartment above the store. When there was a fire, he would get the equipment out and his wife would ring the alarm. Also pictured: Chief Franklin Mulock (left) and Town Auditor Herman Dolbeare. (WHS photo)*

## **1923 - 24**

Article four of the town warrant of 1923 advocated the appropriation of \$1,000 for the building of a fire station in the south part of the town. It was voted, however, at the town meeting of March 26 to refer the matter to the selectmen for appropriate action. The chief, in his report for the year, felt that another

permanent man for the central station would be a more practical solution to better coverage than establishing another station.

Nineteen hundred and twenty-three was one of the busiest years the department had experienced to date, with 86 alarms of fire. The worst ones were:

April 21, 11:20 AM, Grassland of John Nason, Mrs. Fannie Thompson, F. H. Brooks, E. E. Peakes, and Alvin Dudley; the houses of Thompson and Brooks, and the barn of Peakes. This fire, which destroyed the house of Thompson and caused damage to two other structures, came very near to wiping out the entire Silver Hill section of the town.

May 26, 2:50 PM, House on Pigeon Hill Road owned by Mrs. H. Everett and occupied by Pratt. Gutted, with loss of \$6,000.

August 10, 1:45 AM, Unoccupied house of J. J. Burns (Brigham Estate) on River Street. Total loss.

An unfortunate accident took place when the six-cylinder White brush truck was in a collision with an automobile at the corner of Central Avenue and School Street. H. Colpitts suffered severe acid burns, and the frame of the truck was warped so badly that it was no longer of any use to the department. To replace it, a Reo truck was bought from the Yetten Motor Co. for \$1,353. The acid tank was removed from the White and placed on it. This new kit became the second Combination #2. While the Reo was being converted, the town hired a truck from E. C. Howe for \$152; and this was used as the brush rig. This same truck, by the way, was severely damaged by fire at the afore-mentioned Silver Hill blaze.

Nineteen hundred and twenty-four saw the department make 110 runs, but the only fire of any consequence did some \$1,500 damage to the house of C. H. Jones, Glen Road, on August 7 at 9:45 AM. \$8,000 was voted at town meeting for the purchase of a combination ladder truck, and the fire alarm system was extended by adding Box 227 at the schools. During the year, a hose wagon, probably the White brush truck, was sold for \$40.

## **1925**

Nineteen hundred and twenty-five started in an auspicious (sic) manner. On January 1 at 3:30 PM, an alarm was sounded from Box 37 for a fire in the house of E. R. Pierce [Peirce] on Cliff Road [now 99 Westcliff]. Upon arrival it was found that the Wellesley Fire Department, which was first in at the blaze, was attempting to hold the fire in check. Although the two departments managed to control the fire after an hour's struggle, an unfortunate series of events resulted in the total destruction of the huge mansion with a loss of \$250,000. The Wellesley Department was forced to make up (sic) and leave because of a severe fire in their own town; and Weston's White pump, after drafting for several hours from the frog pond at the side of Cliff Road, finally froze up in the bitter cold and was of no more use at the fire.



*This elegant Tudor mansion on Westcliff Road, built for Arthur Clapp, was purchased by Boston wool merchant Edward R. Peirce in 1909. It was destroyed by fire in 1925 and rebuilt in similar style using almost the same floor plan. The second mansion is now known as Henderson House. (WHS photo)*

An interesting aftermath to this conflagration occurred in the spring of the following year. The new mansion, built on the site of the destroyed one, was nearly completed when a brush fire, starting in Wellesley, burned to the very doorstep of the house. The second fire flattened the tool-house being used by the men working on the job.

These affairs were only the beginning of the department's troubles for the year, however. On April 24, somebody with a perverted sense of humor set 15 brush fires along the road from Concord Road at Merriam Street to Sudbury Road at the Wayland line. Box 52 was struck at 9:20 PM and the department was occupied the better part of the night.

It was on July 21, though, that things really began to happen. At 10:55 PM the huge barn of Mrs. Fannie Morrison on Wellesley Street was destroyed. On July 23 at 11:55 PM the barn of Mr. Post on South Avenue was likewise eliminated, and on the 26<sup>th</sup>, the large brooder house of B. L. Blake on Park Road completed the series.

After this final display, the men were able to settle down to the more routine matter of putting the new ladder truck into service. This truck, a White city service (sic) with chemical tanks and booster reel, was purchased from the Foamite-Childs Corp. for \$7,750. A lung-motor was also obtained for \$205.25 and placed on the new truck.

## 1926

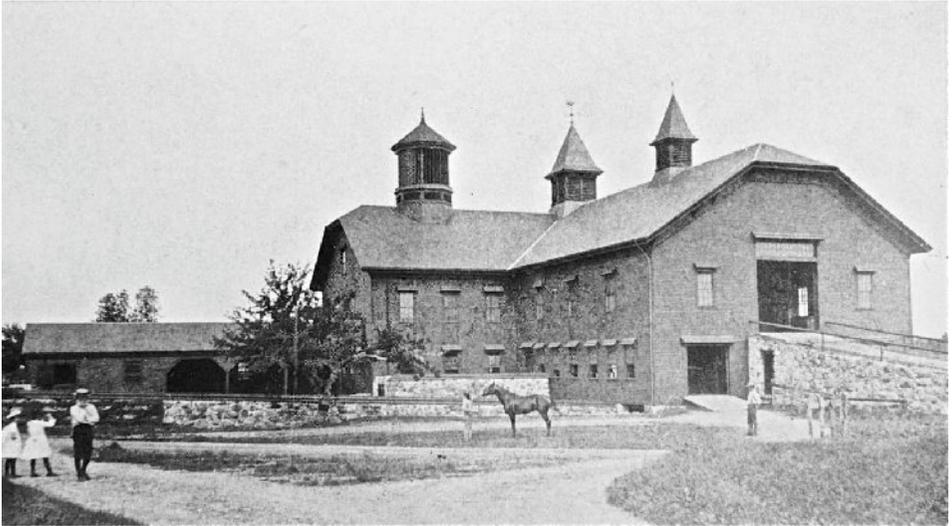
Hook & Ladder #2, or what was originally Hook & Ladder #1, was removed from the active list in 1926. To replace it and to give the town more equipment for handling brush and woods fires, an appropriation of \$2,500 was granted for the purchase of a forest fire truck. An additional sum of \$1,600 was voted for tying in the fire alarm system with the City of Waltham.

While the number of fires in Weston in 1926 was about average, with 92 runs being recorded, property damage was way above normal, with several severe fires occurring. In mentioning the worst of these, it is worthwhile to set down some of the background of the destroyed structure. One of the most thriving establishments in Weston during the twenties was the Weston Airport, located at the corner of Winter and Brown Streets on land of Peter Mezitt. Not only was the hangar used for the storage of aircraft but also for their construction. Located at one end of the building was the living quarters of the caretaker and his wife. At 2:45 AM, June 16, the entire plant and 19 airplanes were destroyed in a \$50,000 fire. This blaze, one of the worst in Weston up to that time, spread so rapidly that the caretaker and his wife barely escaped with their lives.

On Halloween night another serious fire struck the town. The largest barn in the community, located on the Merriam Estate on Merriam Street, was leveled in a



*Weston had a "flying field" or "airdrome" from 1919 or 1920 through 1926, located on leased land at Brown and Winter Streets. Runways were cut through the forest, and a U-shaped airplane hangar for the flimsy biplanes was fashioned by connecting two existing barns. The planes were used for commercial as well as pleasure flying. The airport operated until June 1926, when a spectacular fire, quickened by a series of gas tank explosions, destroyed the hangar and 18 or 19 aircraft. (WHS photo)*



*The Merriam Barn built in 1876, was said to be "one of the largest in Middlesex County." It was destroyed by fire in 1926. (WHS photo)*

\$25,000 blaze. [see story and photo on next page]. The last serious fire in the very eventful year occurred on November 18 at 12:35 PM, when the house of Eleanor W. Furness on Hilltop Road was gutted with a loss of \$3,000.

## **1927**

The fire alarm tie-in with Waltham was completed in 1927. A. L. Holbrook did the work at a cost to the town of \$1,480. The Reo was redesignated Chemical #1. The organization of the fire department on December 31 of the year showed Combination #1, Chemical #1, and Hook & Ladder #1 all under the charge of Chief Mulock who, by the way, was made a permanent chief at the town meeting earlier in the year.

Three total loss dwelling fires in 1927 must have made the department feel that old times were back again. The first of these occurred on March 17 at 8:00 AM, when the house of Warren Jenney on Summer Street was gutted with a loss of \$8,100. The last two both occurred in June and both destroyed buildings on Conant Road. At 2:35 AM on the fifth of the month, Albert Shepard was burned

(Continued on page 42)

## *The Merriam Barn Fire*

by H. Bentley Crouch (reprinted from The Weston Historical Society Bulletin, October 1980)

It was 1:40 in the morning of October 30, 1926, when Erlon Merrill, Weston's only permanent firefighter, answered the phone to his upstairs apartment over Cutting's Store (located then where the present rectory stands) immediately adjacent to the Central Fire Station. An excited voice announced ". . . the Merriam Barn is on fire!" Although the weather was cloudy with intermittent rain showers, the glow of the fire was already in the sky as Merrill raced next door to the station. Setting up Box 64 on the whistle, he responded by himself with Weston's first line truck - the 1914 White equipped with 350 g.p.m. pumping engine.

Arriving at the scene he was confronted with a rapidly spreading blaze that had originated in the center section of the barn. Call fighter Harold Stevens had already come on the fire, driving over from his house on Conant Road. Together they drove the truck past the burning barn and down to so-called "College Pond" about 1,000 feet to the rear of the structure. In order to get the apparatus close enough to the pond to draft water (no hydrants in the area in those days), it was necessary to drive into the mud at water's edge, where the truck became mired. A 2 1/2" hose line was stretched from the pump back to the conflagration and directed upon the barn, which by now was totally engulfed in the fire.

By then it was evident that the barn itself would be totally destroyed, and efforts were made to prevent the fire from spreading to the house. In this the Fire Department was successful, but by dawn all that was left of the barn were a few smoking timbers and other rubble that had fallen into the basement. All livestock had been released early and not a one was lost. Although no cause was ever assigned to the fire, there was speculation that a wood stove, fired up a few days earlier, might possibly have caused timbers to smoulder for some time before igniting during the night. The *Waltham News Tribune* reported the loss as estimated to be \$35,000, while official Fire Department records show that \$11,000 was the amount of insurance paid. Regardless of which figure one chooses to accept, it seems hard to realize today that one of the largest barns in Massachusetts could be totally destroyed with a dollar loss of such small amount.

An interesting sidelight on the fire is recounted by a Weston citizen who chooses to remain anonymous. It seems that there was another large barn which was torn down in 1950 and was situated on Conant Road near today's Sears Road. Its tenant was the Weston Saddle and Bridle Club. Although it was during Prohibition, rumor has it that the Club was known to hold soirees on occasions at which various tonics were dispensed. While absolute truth of this rumor has never emerged, it is a fact that when word of the fire was spread about, a large

gathering of well-attired ladies and gentlemen set out from the Club across the fields to the Merriam Street site of the blaze. As they “carried on” in rather loud and boisterous manner, it was remarked that only a fire of such magnitude could cause members of the “Saddle and Bottle Club” to be drawn away from their nightly pleasures!

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### **1927** *(Continued from Page 40)*

out of house and home; and on the twentieth at 5:45 AM, a tenant in one of Harry L. Bailey’s houses met the same fate. Things weren’t quiet for long, however, for the Fourth of July spirit got the better of some young boys on the north side of town, and on July 5 at 12:01 AM the ice house of A. T. White on Lexington Street disappeared from the scene to conclude the series of fires on his property.

As authorized at the special town meeting of December 2, 1927, the fire department purchased for \$2,500 a GMC one-ton Model T motor truck with S & S fire equipment for brush and forest fires. This truck, equipped with a 185-gallon booster tank and booster reel became known as Combination #2 on the department roster.

### **1928 - 1929**

Although the department made only 67 runs in the entire year of 1928, they had their usual quota of damaging fires. On January 23 at 6:40 AM, a blaze did some \$6,500 damage to the Coburn Block in the center of town. On October 31 at 1:45 PM the men were forced to leave the funeral of Captain W. Tozier, who had passed away two days earlier, and fight an \$8,000 fire that destroyed a barn of Mrs. L. A. Thurston on North Avenue opposite to the Drabbington Lodge.

In a letter written to the selectmen in 1929, Charles W. Hubbard offered to give to the town a lot of land on Ridgeway Road for the purpose of building a fire station to house the smaller pump (Comb. #1) when and if it was replaced by a bigger truck. The Board of Fire Engineers felt that some action should be taken in that direction to insure the people of that district of better fire protection.

This same year [1929] was a bad one with a high fire loss resulting from four total loss alarms. The first of these occurred on April 21 at 11:55 PM when the “Noir et Rouge,” a tea room owned by J. L. Card on Bogle Street, was destroyed in an incendiary fire. This building had been constantly guarded through the preceding winter by the Weston Police because of anonymous threats to blow it up. Shortly after the police guard was discontinued in the spring, the building was touched (sic) off by a man who was later apprehended.

The large barn on the Dean Farm, Conant Road, was leveled in a \$7,000, June 7, 12:30 AM incendiary fire that is largely remembered for the difficulties encountered with the 500-odd pigs that were kept in and about the barn.

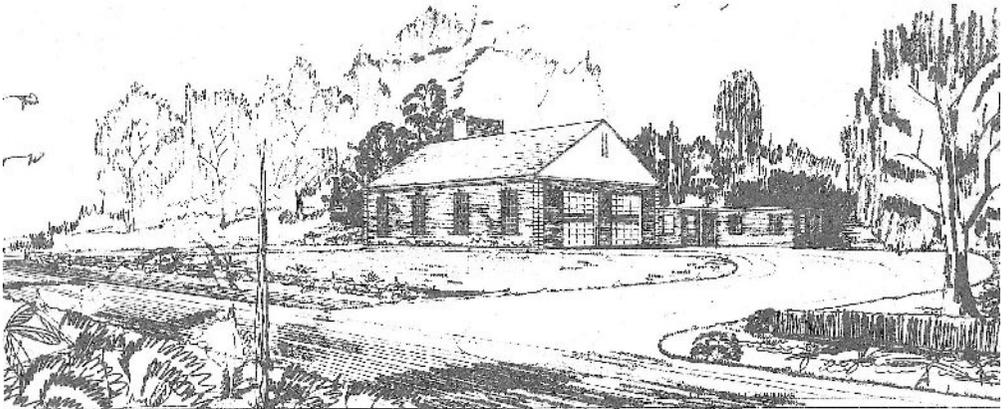
During a severe electrical storm on August 1 at 5:20 PM, the unfinished mansion of E. A. Merritt at 479 North Avenue was struck by lightning and leveled in the ensuing \$20,000 fire. A new house was erected on the same foundation and is now (1953) occupied by the Beebe family. Finally, on December 23, J.A. West, 85 Chestnut Street, was treated to a rather unhappy Christmas. On that date at 11:50 PM, in the midst of a terrible sleet storm, his house was completely gutted with a loss of \$23,000.

These several bad fires apparently made the organization realize how utterly inadequate their equipment was in case of a serious fire. The need for a new large capacity pumper was deemed a must by the Chief.

*Postscript*

*Ben Crouch was an invaluable resource for my 2002 book Farm Town to Suburb: The History and Architecture of Weston, Massachusetts, 1830 - 1980. He shared his extensive knowledge of railroads and fires and gave me a copy of his fire department history through 1929, reproduced here. I am seeking information about the present location of Crouch's scrapbook of Weston fire photographs.*

*Pamela W. Fox*



WESTON FIRE DEPARTMENT - SOUTH AVENUE STATION

DONALDSON RAY McMULLIN ASSOCIATES

ARCHITECTS

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*The question of building a fire station to serve the south side of town was discussed for decades. The Crouch fire department history notes that in 1929, south side estate owner Charles W. Hubbard offered to donate land on Ridgeway Road for a fire station. Not until 1966-67 was a south side station constructed, on South Avenue at Ash Street.*



*In his article below, Jim Crouch describes the fire department burning down the Dean Dairy as a training exercise in 1970. The small ice cream restaurant was located on Boston Post Road near the Wayland town line. Unfortunately, no one took a picture of the handsome Colonial Revival structure before it was engulfed in flames. (Photo courtesy Jim Crouch)*

## **Childhood Memories of the Fire Department**

*by James Crouch, son of H. Bentley "Ben" Crouch*

While looking through photos that Dad took related to the fire department, I remembered with fondness some wonderful times I had as a youth at the station. I used to ride my bike there many times to get a dime coke and spend time visiting. All the guys were so friendly and treated me as one of them. The department back in the early 60's to mid 70's, my main times spent there, was really a family. At least, so it seemed to me at the time. I can remember the smell of the station like it was yesterday. Of course, a trip there would always include a ride or two down the fire pole. When I was very young and wasn't able to ride the pole, I was scared to death looking down from the second floor through the pole opening; but I looked forward to being older and big enough to do so. Funny how such a small thing like that was so thrilling to me at the time. If my cousin Phil Upham was on duty I would visit him in his shop in the basement. I thought he had the coolest job of any one, working on the trucks and keeping them ready for action. The stairs in the station were metal of some type. It was fun tromping up and down, making a racket. I'm sure this must have driven the guys crazy, but I loved doing it.

Other memories include Leander Rafuse on the desk when a box call would

come in and hearing him say over the radio "KCI 424 Weston Fire Alarm broadcasting an alarm of fire..." I still can hear his voice in my head. When that happened, the place jumped with guys flying down the pole, into their suits, onto the engines and away they went. I was able to go on a couple of runs myself sitting up in the cab of the ladder truck as Dad would drive. This was the old ladder truck they had at the time. I never rode to a fire in the new ladder truck, which I think the town purchased in the early to mid-70s. One day when they demonstrated it to the town in St. Julia's parking lot, I did attempt to climb the ladder to the top, but only made it halfway due to my being too scared to continue. A couple of times I was able to ride on the back of a fire engine in the part where the firemen would stand, strapped in, on the way to a fire. I never rode to a fire that way but the couple of times I got to ride in the back were great. Imagine a youngster doing that today. Those were different times, and in many respects better ones.

I never joined the force myself, though I had it in my mind until dad tested me. When I was getting close to being old enough to be a call man, Dad took me out to the fire fighting academy in Stow. He took me to the third floor of a practice building that had a ladder braced against the side underneath a window. He said "okay, now get out there and climb down the ladder." I looked out the window and froze. No way was I doing that; I was too scared of heights. Dad looked at me, said "Let's go," and added that unless I got over that fear, I could never be a fireman. I am 56 now and still haven't gotten over it, so being a fireman was not in the cards for me.

A few final memories of those days are dad taking me out in the Fire Alarm truck when he tested the boxes or painted them. When I was a little older, 12 or so, he would let me help with the testing and painting. Those were great times spent with Dad and as much fun as going with him on his trips to chase trains around New England and Quebec. Those who knew my father knew what a train buff he was. Those who remember the Dean Dairy ice cream restaurant on the Post Road near the Wayland line might not know that when it was sold, the department was able to use it to practice fire fighting. I was lucky enough to be there that day and was in the building while oil was pumped into the basement and close by when they lit it up and burned it down. It was a beautiful building, and in hindsight, I bet the town or someone wished it could have been saved.

I was also at another planned house burning where they tested a new foam product that the department had recently acquired. This was a house on Ash Street near the reservoir. At one point before the burn I believe they blew out a huge area of the foam and we all had fun getting lost in it. Not just the kids that were there but some of the firemen as well. A last story is that throughout my school years in town I always knew when we were going to have a fire drill, as Dad would tell me the day and time. A small thing, but I always felt like a big shot knowing this and telling my friends ahead of time. Of course Dad told me not to tell anyone, but how could I not?

## Weston Fire Department Today: An Interview with Chief David S. Soar

*Editor's note: David Soar has been Weston's Fire Chief since 2008. WHS asked him to share some observations on the fire department of today.*

“Weston Fire Department responds to approximately 2500 emergency calls a year, about evenly divided between fire and ambulance. In 2014 Weston had four major building fires: one was, tragically, the first fatal house fire.



*Weston Fire Chief David Soar (Photo from 2010 Town Report)*

“Everyone calls the fire department. We get calls for flooded basements, hazardous materials and spills, car fires, accidents, unwelcome animals in houses, people injured on trails, and many more situations. When the experts panic, they call the fire department. The firefighters are always busy. It's not like the old image of fire fighters playing checkers at the station.

“Presently Weston has 29 full-time firefighters and four dispatchers. The department operates with seven officers and firefighters assigned to each of four work groups operating out of two stations: five on duty at the Central Fire Station in Weston Center and two at the South Avenue station. The department has two ambulances; one is staffed full time and the other is staffed by call-back personnel. The department has between five and ten on-call firefighters at any given time. All fire department members are EMT certified. All firefighters go through both EMS and fire-related training while on duty.

“Each piece of fire apparatus carries medical equipment, so that if the fire engine arrives before the ambulance, medical care can be started. Due to the multiple jobs we perform and the amount of equipment necessary to carry on the trucks, the size of the trucks has increased dramatically. Maneuvering around some of the town's narrow roads and driveways is difficult.

“The fire service is still a brother and sisterhood, and the members still look out for one another. But with the change in the economy, most firefighters work a second job. People are not around as much as they used to be.

“The fire department is responsible for the protection of lives and property from disasters both man-made and natural. We accomplish this through fire prevention, education, and suppression. Additional responsibilities include the town's basic

life support ambulance and emergency management. The Fire Chief is also responsible for emergency management planning.

“Fire prevention education is a large part of the department’s job. We go into the schools every fall to familiarize the kids with different safety information. We hold numerous CPR and AED (defibrillator) classes during the year. Another popular item is a fire safety tour of the headquarters station.

“The fire department is responsible for plan review of new construction and remodeling. We conduct smoke detector inspections for new homes and home sales as well as inspections of nursing homes and other public buildings. We issue permits for blasting, oil tank removals, sprinklers, burning, fuel storage, propane storage, cutting and welding, and more. The department also has a comprehensive lockbox program, where a lockbox can be purchased and the fire department will install it on a resident’s home.”

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# **READY, WILLING & ABLE**

*A History of Weston  
Fire, Police, and DPW*



**A WESTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY EXHIBIT**

**April 3–29, 2015**

**Weston Public Library**

## **SPECIAL EVENTS**

**Saturday, April 11**

Opening Reception

1–3 pm

Weston Public Library

**Thursday, April 16**

Spring Program

WPL Community Room

7:15 pm: Refreshments

7:30 pm: Lecture

*Please join the Weston Historical Society for our April exhibition “Ready, Willing, and Able: a History of Weston Fire, Police, and DPW” at the Weston Public Library gallery. All special events are free and open to all.*