

# WESTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

Volume XLXI, No. 1 — Spring 2020



## THE BATTLE OF SARATOGA

### A LECTURE BY ROBERT LEWIS

*with remarks by Pam Fox on Weston's Burgoyne Elm*

**Thursday, April 2, 2020, 7:30 pm, Weston Public Library**



Above: British General John Burgoyne, portrait by Joshua Reynolds, c. 1766.

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Weston Historical Society is a private non-profit organization. Membership is tax deductible. Members receive copies of the newsletter and invitations to lectures and special events; plus they help support our mission: to collect and preserve items related to Weston history and educate residents about our community heritage.

The 1777 Battle of Saratoga is the focus of the Weston Historical Society spring meeting featuring Robert E. Lewis, a local speaker on the American Revolution. The American victory is considered a turning point in the war. The battle has a Weston connection: General John Burgoyne's defeated troops camped in Weston as they were escorted to Cambridge as prisoners of war. Pam Fox will speak about the venerable "Burgoyne Elm" that once stood just east of the Fiske Law Office and was said to mark the camp site. The lecture is open to all, and refreshments will be served.

The British strategy after Lexington, Concord, Bunker Hill, and the Siege of Boston was to mount a three-pronged attack to cut off New England — considered the hotbed of rebellion — from the rest of the colonies. To some extent, the grand strategy was based on the belief that loyalists would join the British effort in significant numbers. They never did. (continued on page 2)



Weston's Burgoyne Elm (left) before 1967, when limbs of the dying tree had to be removed. Wood from the elm was used to make items such as the decoupage plaque (above) with the not-so-handsome face of Gen. Burgoyne. (Weston Historical Society collection)

**Lecture (continued from page 1)**

British General Burgoyne was expecting reinforcements from British generals in New York and Canada, but the additional troops never arrived. He surrendered to American General Horatio Gates in October 1777.

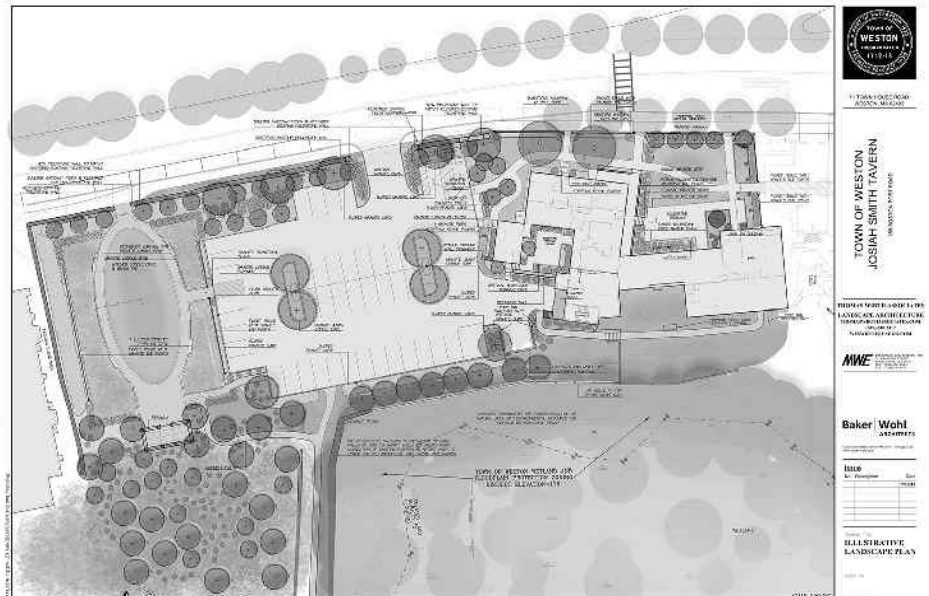
The Saratoga campaign was one of the most important military operations of the American Revolution and is considered a turning point because the American victory convinced France to enter the conflict in February 1778. In addition to financial and material support, France contributed thousands of troops under the command of Rochambeau and a naval fleet under Comte de Grasse. This ultimately led to the American victory at Yorktown and secured American independence.

The battle and its aftermath are part of Weston's history as well. The defeated General Burgoyne and his troops were escorted to Cambridge along what is now Boston Post Road. Officers from both armies stayed at local taverns, while enlisted Continental Army soldiers and British enlisted prisoners — an estimated two thousand men — camped somewhere near the juncture of Concord Road in Weston. In later years, an elm growing next to the Fiske Law Office was designated as "The Burgoyne Elm" to commemorate Weston's role in this moment in Revolutionary War history. Fox's remarks will center on 1960s efforts to save the venerated but dying elm.

Robert Lewis is a former Aircraft Carrier-based Patrol Plane Commander and a retired Navy Captain and MITRE engineer. He graduated from Colorado College and Boston University and lived in Germany for 13 years while working as an engineer at HQ US Army Europe. He has lived in Weston since 1980 and is a member of the Weston Historical Society board. Lewis researches and lectures on the American Revolution and is currently preparing a talk on the Siege of Yorktown, the last major land battle of the American Revolution.



*(Above) Items made from the wood of the Burgoyne Elm are on display in the historical society display case at Weston Public Library including a block of wood (center) that was distributed with the tree's history. (Below) Winners of the Weston Junior High Burgoyne Elm Woodworking Contest in June 1968.*



*Site map showing the outline of the tavern at right, new parking lot in the center, and garden at left, which will be located above the septic field. (Courtesy Friends of the JST)*

**JST UPDATE**

Work began in early February on the adaptive reuse of the Josiah Smith Tavern, following the approval of \$12.9 million in Community Preservation Act funds at the December 2019 Special Town Meeting. Baker Wohl Architects, Metrowest Engineering, Inc., and Thomas Wirth Associates have been contracted to provide services, and general construction will be done by M. O'Connor Contracting, Inc. of West Roxbury. Inside work will be done first. The project is expected to take approximately 19 months, meaning that the building could be ready by Fall 2021.

The work is being done under the auspices of the town's Permanent Building Committee. The Friends of the Josiah Smith Tavern, a 501-c-3 organization, will be leasing the building from the town as lead tenant.

Beginning this summer, the Friends will be working with a restaurant consultant to hire the restaurateur. According to Adrienne Giske, president of the Friends, many operators have expressed interest. Because the Friends will be sub-leasing the space to the restaurant, a town-issued Request for Proposals is not required.



## NEW ACQUISITIONS

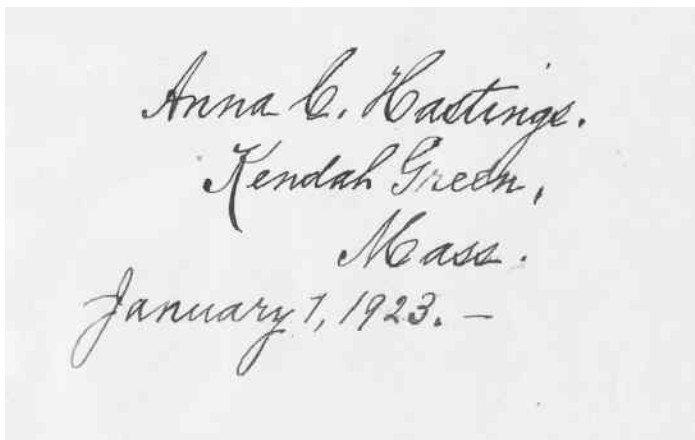
### *Diary of Anna Coburn Hastings*

Jessicca Viles has donated a five-year diary kept by Anna Coburn Hastings from 1923 to 1927. The diary contains one page for each day of the year, each page divided into five sections of five lines each. In this way, Anna Coburn recorded what she did every day during this five-year period.

Hastings (1853 – 1950) was an important figure in Weston history. A member of the prominent Coburn family, Anna taught high school and intermediate school until 1880, when she was transferred to the one-room District School #4 on North Avenue. She was credited with transforming the unruly class of 57 “scholars.” As was the custom of the time, she retired from teaching upon her marriage to organ factory owner Francis Henry Hastings in 1899.

Hastings was 70 when she began this diary. The short entries describe an active lifestyle, with two or three activities or meetings every day and church every Sunday.

The following is the entry from Friday, February 29, 1924, which was a leap year: “Beautiful. Awoke early. To Boston on the 8:11 train. Tried on three dresses at Stearns — Miss Nevins fitter — Rested in the afternoon and went to the Friendly Costume Party — masked — very pretty costumes.”



Anna C. Hastings.  
Kendal Green,  
Mass.  
January 7, 1923. -

(Right, above) Katie Emans, Tom Selldorff, Kristine Vezza, Bob Freeman, Mary King, Ricky Karofsky, Monique Uyterhoeven, Hilary Hanson, and Phyllis Biegun give “A Toast to Weston Center in Clay” prior to an exhibition of their work at the Josiah Smith Tavern in September 1984. For her First Parish Church, eight-year-old Katie Emans made scores of miniature clay stones and roof tiles. (Photo by Herb Randle)

(Right, below) Historical Society volunteers holding clay sculptures donated by Tom Selldorff: (l-r): Jonathan Dowse, Tony Davies Pam Fox, Kitty Smith, and Mary Marder. (Photo by Mark Marder)

### *Clay Sculptures of the Town Center*

Tom Selldorff has donated a set of five ceramic pieces that he created as part of a “multi-generational clay project” done in 1984 under the direction of artist Mary King and sponsored by the Massachusetts Arts Lottery Council. The Selldorff gift is comprised of five separate pieces varying in length from 8 to 16 inches.

Eight Weston residents created detailed three-dimensional clay models of First Parish Church, Weston Fire Station, Town Hall, Josiah Smith Tavern, Weston Library, and the watering trough, as well as the two-dimensional Town Center streetscape. Selldorff explained that because he was traveling frequently, he didn’t have too much time. King suggested that he make his buildings two-dimensional, which he did, using photographs he took along Boston Post Road. Selldorff added his sailboat on a trailer in front of Florentine Frames.

In 2013, another member of the group, Hilary Hanson Bruel, donated to the society her model of Town Hall, made when she was 13. (In center of photo below) These works not only document Weston buildings but also honor Mary King, who for many years encouraged creativity in the ceramics studio in the basement of her home on Rolling Lane.



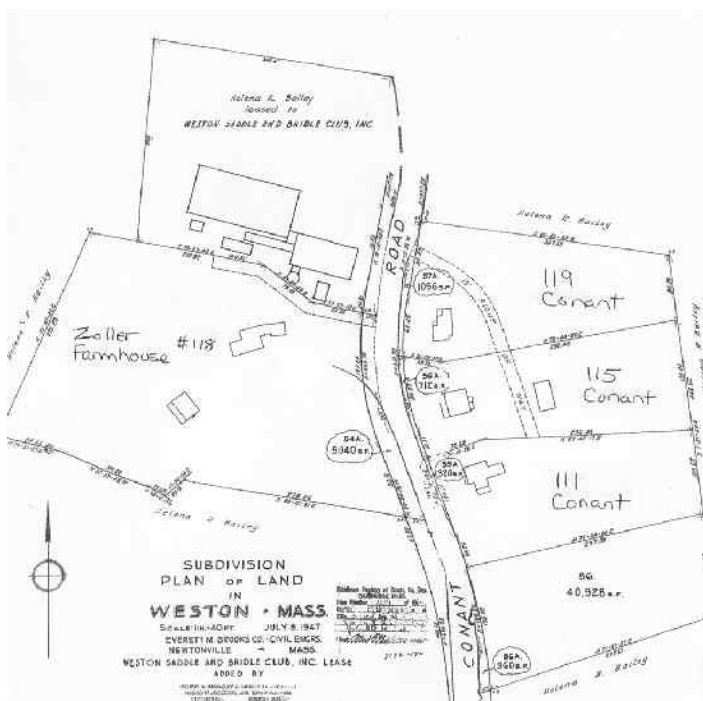
## Weston Organizations:

### Weston Saddle & Bridle Club

One of the many notable scrapbooks in the Weston Historical Society collections is a three-ring binder containing minutes and written communications of the Weston Saddle & Bridle Club (WS&BC), founded in 1928 "to encourage horseback riding and other equestrian sports in the Town of Weston."

About 30 men and women were present at the official organizational meeting on September 30 at the home of Harry L. Bailey. Bailey has been described as a protégé and "like a son" to Weston estate owner Horace Sears, founding partner of Wellington, Sears & Co. and a bachelor with no children of his own. Bailey began working at the company in 1901 as a clerk and rose to partner, president, and later chairman of the board.

In 1919, Horace Sears had purchased the 90-acre Zoller Farm on both sides of Conant Road. He remodeled the Colonial farmhouse at No. 118 and built a large modern stucco dairy barn with a slate roof, valued at \$24,500, a huge sum for a non-residential structure. Newspapers reported that Sears was planning to move his choice cows from his summer home in Cotuit. Instead, he deeded the entire property to Bailey's wife, Helena, not long thereafter. The couple developed Colchester Farm, a dairy advertising Guernsey milk and cream. After Sears's death in 1923, the Baileys inherited Sears's other Weston real estate including the monumental Italianate villa "Haleiwa" on Boston Post Road, where many Saddle & Bridle Club annual meetings were held in later years.



This 1947 subdivision plan shows the location of the Weston Saddle & Bridle Club barn and indoor riding ring, at top left.

The Baileys operated Colchester Farm for only a few years. In the 1920s, they began developing the land that is now Sunset, Sears, Colchester, and other nearby roads. Organizing the Weston Saddle & Bridle Club provided a use for the barn.

Harry Bailey was the first WS&BC president and served in that post for most if not all of the organization's history. Other founding executive committee members were Lyman W. Gale, vice-president; Charles G. Squibb, treasurer; Mortimer A. Seabury, secretary; as well as Harold B. Willis, Arthur H. Morse, Austin B. Mason, John G. Wright, L. Manlius Sargent, Sinclair Weeks, W. G. Renwick, and Wm. T. Glidden Jr. The initial initiation fee was set at \$25 and raised to \$50 after the club was incorporated in April 1929. At that time, the member list of 80 was printed in a booklet along with club by-laws. The club held an annual meeting each year, often featuring dinner at one of the estate mansions owned by members.



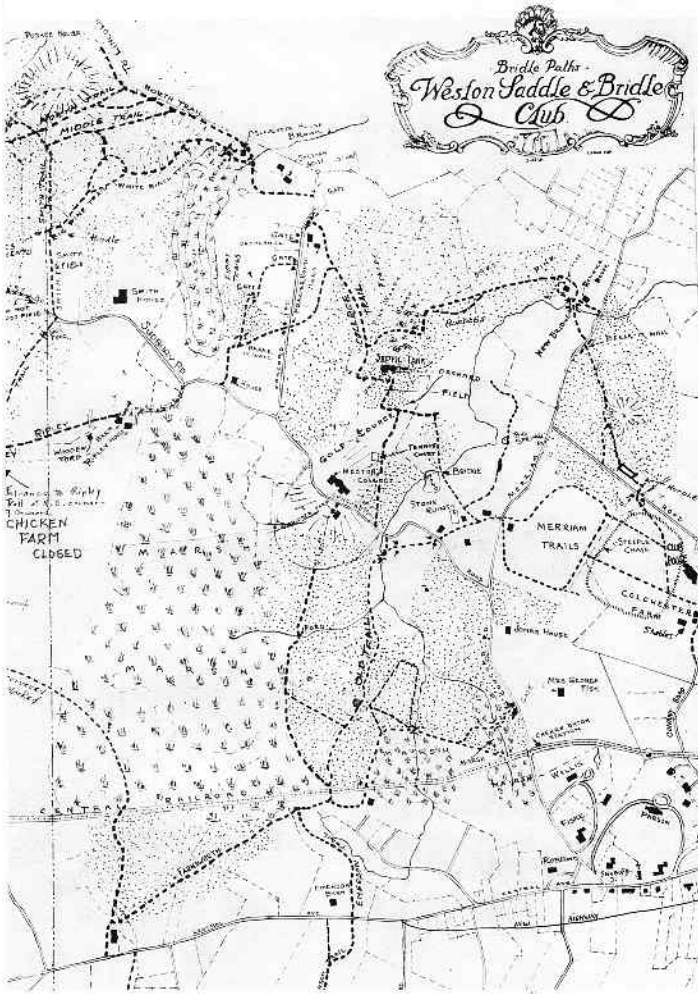
Thomas Cabot, a charter member of the Weston Saddle & Bridle Club, is pictured here with his wife, the former Virginia Wellington, and son Ned at the final meet of the Millwood Hunt in 1953. (Wellington family collection)

The first action of the new organizations was to get bids of up to \$2500 to repair the barn, which Bailey rented to the club. Members who wanted to keep their own horses at the club paid for box stalls to be built in the basement. The former dairy building was renovated and furnished as a clubhouse, including toilet facilities. Funds were raised by borrowing from club members in non-interest-bearing notes.

For the first few years, Alfred James was in charge of the stables and lived with his family on the premises. The fee for hiring horses was \$2 for the first hour and \$1 for each succeeding hour on Saturdays, Sundays and holidays; otherwise \$1.00. Private lessons were \$4. The charge for boarding members' horses, including exercise at the owners' request, was \$10 a week.

The club's first priority was development of bridle paths. Board members were tasked with getting permission from owners of land where club members might ride. A map was prepared and members were instructed to stick to the paths shown. By





Section of the WS&BC trail map (Courtesy Thomas Paine)

April 1929, a reported six or seven miles of “beautiful bridle paths” had been completed, wide enough for two horses to go abreast, with connections to neighboring towns.

Initially, non-members were allowed to use the paths if they abided by club rules. But within a few years, landowners were complaining about damage to lawns, incivility, and smoking by riders who “apparently are not club members.” Signs reading “Riding by invitation only” were erected with the approval of owners, and the Bridle Path Committee was authorized to post police occasionally at strategic points to check riders’ identities.

Social activities revolved around horseback riding. Weekend rides were often followed by tea or lunch at member homes. In April 1929, a notice was sent with details about the first spring picnic, to take place in a “lovely spot” in Sudbury or Wayland. Members could go by automobile or ride the ten miles in groups of six, at a pace “set to fit everyone’s need.” Families had to provide their own food, delivered to the stable before 11 am to be transported to the picnic place. A sunset ride was planned for May 1929, followed by moonlight supper in a field near the club. Again, riders provided their own picnic supper, and non-riders and children were urged to attend.

The first Horse Show and Gymkhana (an equestrian event with games) was held in November 1929. Open to members, guests, and Weston residents not members of the club, it included a Shetland Pony Class, Ladies Saddle Horse Class, Pair Class for children under 18, Children’s Jumping Class, and High Jump starting at 3 feet. The afternoon gymkhana featured a masquerade parade, barrel race, egg and spoon race, needle and thread race, doughnut race, tilting the ring, balloon flight, musical chairs, and steeplechase. The club sponsored regular “paper chases,” where one member served as the “hound” and left a “scent” to be followed, in the form of shredded pieces of paper. The club held “drag hunts” where a bag filled with fox urine was dragged along the course for the hounds to chase. Detours around jumps were created for those not wishing to jump. The club also arranged for joint events with the venerable Millwood Hunt Club, based in Framingham.

In the winter, the club had sleighs and carriages that could be hired by the hour. Members were encouraged to ride in winter when conditions were good. In January 1930, a Sunday Winter Field Day in the snow featured skijoring, tobogganing, and riding for all ages.

In 1931, a badminton court was created in the stable loft, with an extra charge for badminton privileges. The court proved to be very popular. Exhibition matches were arranged with national amateur champions and professionals “so members could see how the game should really be played.” Badminton tournaments were organized.



In May 1935, the club engaged Victor deBellefroid to take charge of the stable. The tall and austere Belgian riding master ran a strict program for Wellesley College girls, who were required to appear in proper riding attire. In October that year, the executive committee decided that the club needed to build an enclosed riding ring “in order to retain the services of Victor deBellefroid and to continue the Club as a going concern.” A Grand Opening was held in January 1936.

Organizational records drop off in the late 1930s and early 40s. Harry Bailey was still president in 1941, the last annual meeting report in the WHS loose leaf binder. The landmark barn was demolished after the club closed in the early 1950s. Sadly, no photographs have been located of the barn, indoor riding ring, or dairy building, or of the many activities that took place at the Weston Saddle & Bridle Club in its heyday.

## WINTER IN WESTON

In his 1963 book *Once Upon a Pung*, Brenton H. Dickson writes: "Much has been said about New England winters becoming milder. It is hard to say definitely whether or not this is true, because the idiosyncrasies of nature are unpredictable. . . ." But looking at this question today, Dickson's descriptions as well as reports in the Weston columns of the *Waltham Daily Free Press Tribune* make it clear not only that winters were colder but that recreation and transportation were very different as well.

One indicator of consistent cold temperatures in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century was the cutting of ice, generally beginning in January. Ponds froze each year, enough for one, two, and sometimes even three "harvests". Ten-to-thirteen-inch thicknesses were regularly reported. Farmers and estate owners cut their own ice, but for those who needed to buy it, George Albert Foote was the town's local supplier.



*Ice cutting on Schenck's pond (Weston Historical Society, gift of Fred Campbell)*

Ice was cut by hand or with horse-drawn cutters, later replaced by machine cutters. Foote's ice harvest was a community event, with as many as 25 men needed. Ice cakes were floated to the shore, split apart, and directed onto an inclined ramp where they were pulled out and stored in Foote's two large wooden icehouses on Warren Avenue, packed in layers separated by sawdust and insulated with hay. Foote's employees delivered ice in yellow delivery trucks. They chipped off chunks to be weighed and carried to the customer's "ice box." Electric refrigerators came into use in the 1930s, but Foote is still listed as an ice dealer in the 1941 directory.

The winter of 1902-03 was especially cold. The thermometer registered a reported 18 degrees below zero at Kendal Green Station in December. Several children that week had "frozen ears" and were sent home from school. Principal Eaton cancelled school for primary and intermediate students, and classes did not resume until mid-January.

Cold temperatures also disrupted work at the chair factory on Crescent Street, which had to shut down when the water powering the undershot water wheel froze.

In the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, only a few well-to-do residents had automobiles. When it snowed, autos and carriages were put away and sleighs and pungs took over. The highway department used a roller four-to-six feet in diameter to compact and preserve the snow for better sleighing. In his book *Once Upon a Pung*, Brenton H. Dickson III writes that "nearly every year the roads were packed hard with snow from the last week of December to the middle of March." (continued on page 8)

## OPEN HOUSE AT CASE HOUSE SATURDAY, MARCH 28

The Weston School Committee is planning an open house at Case House on Saturday, March 28, to give residents a chance to see the newly restored school administration offices. The landmark 1889 Victorian building is now code compliant and energy efficient while retaining the architectural elements that make it a spectacular example of its type. The original porte cochere was replicated and original sash restored. Almost all the handsome detailing in public spaces has been repaired, restored, or in some cases replicated to return the rooms to their original form. This is especially true of the main entrance hall and beautiful oak flying staircase that rises three stories.

Henry Stone, a member of the Weston Historical Commission and specialist in historic building restoration, was involved in all phases of design and construction of this challenging project.

The work included replacement of all plumbing, heating, electrical, and fire alarm systems and the addition of a fire sprinkler system, elevator, bathrooms, a high capacity storage system, and handicapped accessibility, as well as a new parking area and exterior lighting, for a total cost of \$8,474,000.

Case House, originally known as "Rocklawn," was built as a summer home for Boston businessman James Brown Case, his wife Laura, and their daughters Caroline, Louisa, and Marion (a fourth daughter, Mabel, died in an accident in 1883). It was designed by Boston architect Ernest N. Boyden and at the time was one of the three most expensive houses in Weston. The Town of Weston acquired it in 1946 along with the 46 acres where Field School was built. The kindergarten wing was added in 1951. In later years, the town acquired additional parcels of former Case land for a total of some 200 acres.



## MEMBERS' EVENING HONORS FRIENDS OF THE JST

On Friday, January 10, 125 members and friends of the Weston Historical Society enjoyed a festive "Members' Evening" celebrating the December vote to approve construction funds for the JST restoration (see article on page 2) and honoring the Friends of the Josiah Smith Tavern.

Historical society board members Molly Varnau, Syamala Swaminathan, Pam Riffin, and Liz Hochberger served as co-chairs of the event. The parish hall at First Parish Church was decorated for the occasion, and party goers enjoyed hors d'oeuvres and desserts made by members of the WHS board, along with wine and beer.

The historical society presented a brass bucket with a seasonal arrangement to Friends President Adrienne Giske, who for years has been the driving force behind the Friends proposal that is on its way to fruition. WHS will be leasing four rooms in the restored tavern as its headquarters.



Other Friends board members are Con Chapman, first president; Leslie Vensel; Pam Swain; Al Aydelott; Henry Stone; Terry Eastman; and Kristin Vallila. Aydelott was a member of the first Josiah Smith Tavern Committee, appointed in 2004.

*(Clockwise from upper left): Adrienne Giske and Al Aydelott with WHS gift, taken on the day after the Members' Evening; Conversation around the food table; April Kiskaddon, Julie Hyde, and Bob Kiskaddon; Pam Riffin and Laurie Bent; Pam and Chick Swain. (Photos by Pam Fox)*



## MERRIAM FUND FOR THE SILENT POOR

The Merriam Fund originated in 1865 with a gift of \$1,000 from Charles Merriam (1803 – 1865), who wanted to assist Weston residents experiencing a temporary financial hardship.

Merriam, a wealthy Boston merchant, began his career as a storekeeper in Weston and maintained his ties to the town. In 1859 he donated \$1000 for the purchase of books for the new Weston library. In 1865, he sent the selectmen a \$1000 treasury note to establish a fund "for the benefit of what I call the 'Silent Poor of the Town.'" He wrote:

*And I desire that the interest and income shall be paid over. . . to that class of honest, temperate men and women who work hard or are prudent and economical, and yet find it difficult to make both ends meet. To such, a load of wood, occasionally a few groceries or a little flour or meal, will always be of service." (March 28, 1865. See History of Middlesex County, Vol. 1, 494)*

Trustees distribute the income in a manner that is entirely private.

According to Jack Doyle, one of the current trustees, "in Weston today there are many residents with limited resources for whom paying for basics can become a problem. Often the individual may be reluctant to ask for help even from family and friends." The fund is intended to help with short term issues. On December 31, 2019, the principal was \$42,185 and generated approximately \$1,600 of income annually.

With increasing demand, the trustees have decided to raise funds to assure that the fund continues to grow. A town-wide mailing in November 2019 resulted in more than \$12,000 added to principal. Tax deductible donations may be made at any time to the Merriam Fund, Box 378, Weston, MA 02493.

## Winter (continued from page 6)

Children were transported to school on pungs — large sleighs used for group transportation. Dickson writes: “a thick layer of hay or straw on the floor to keep feet warm and a buffalo robe on your lap were hardly adequate protection against the coldest weather.” Despite the cold, Dickson describes pung parties that lasted all day and into the evening. By the early 1920s, the transition from horse-drawn to motorized transportation was largely complete. In the 1922 *Town Report*, selectmen congratulated the road superintendent for his work in clearing snow from roads, noting: “the expense is large, but with the almost universal use of automobiles it seems to be a necessary expense.”

Snow and ice provided other recreational opportunities. Skating was popular on local ponds, particularly Foote’s Pond and the Winsor skating pond on what is now Skating Pond Road. In the late 1960s, Foote’s Pond was developed for skating; a warming hut and lights were added by 1971. College Pond became available after purchase of the Weston College land in 1977.

The non-profit Cat Rock Ski Club was formed in 1947, with fees used to operate a rope tow. The town took over from 1957 to the late 1970s. Dependent on natural snow, it operated only six days in 1958 and two days in 1959. One of the most successful seasons was in 1964, when 500 family memberships were sold. A daily ticket cost \$1.

Children also enjoyed sledding, sometimes in dangerous locations. For example, in January 1903, the newspaper reported: “There is a vast amount of danger in the practice indulged in by some of coasting down Viles street over the railroad crossing. The public are warned that they are likely to be run down by trains passing over that crossing at any time day or night.”

Brenton Dickson writes that sledding down Webster Hill “provided the coaster with a chance to exert real dexterity as he shot out onto Church Street at an amazing speed and barely avoided colliding with the stone wall on the far side.” No one ever thought to post a guard at street crossings, but “traffic was light and the laws of probability favored the coaster.”



A pung was a large sleigh used for group transportation. (Weston Historical Society)



On February 2, Liz Hochberger, a member of the Weston Historical Society board, passed away peacefully but very unexpectedly at age 59. Liz joined the board in the fall of 2014 and served as secretary and as co-chair of two Members’ Evenings, including the recent January 10, 2020, party. She was always willing to help. We will miss her radiant smile. More about her unusual life and many contributions to the Weston community can be found in this link to the Boston Globe: <https://www.legacy.com/amp/obituaries/boston-globe/195273849>.

### OFFICERS, WESTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY 2019-20

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