

WESTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER



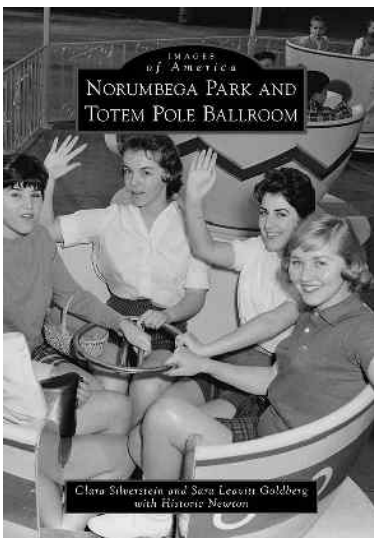
Volume LIV No. 1 — Spring 2023

MEET THE AUTHORS

In addition to the documentary *Return to Norumbega*, the April 27 program will feature three park experts—filmmaker Joe Hunter and authors Clara Silverstein and Sara Goldberg. Their recently published book *Norumbega Park and Totem Pole Ballroom* explores the colorful history of the park through nearly 200 images of vaudeville acts, aerialists, musicians, and rides. The book will be for sale and is also available from Historic Newton, www.newtonma.gov/museumshops.

One of many “trolley parks” that opened near American cities around the turn of the 20th century, Norumbega Park outlasted much of the competition because of its reputation for cleanliness and family-friendly fun. For 66 years, management adapted to changing tastes offering an impressive range of entertainment, rides, and games. The Totem Pole Ball-

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Return to Norumbega

Take a nostalgic look back at the history of Norumbega Park, in its heyday one of New England's prime recreational sites and the home of the famous Totem Pole Ballroom. The documentary by Joe Hunter is based on the work of the late Bob Pollock, a Norumbega enthusiast who spent more than a decade documenting the park's rich history and gathering Norumbega photographs and memorabilia.

Watch the trailer: youtube.com/watch?v=qzvNX1xEP74

“Remembering Norumbega Park and the Totem Pole Ballroom”

featuring the documentary film *Return to Norumbega*
by Joe Hunter

Thursday, April 27

7:00 pm

In person at Weston Public Library Community Room
Refreshments. All are Welcome.

This program will not be taped.



CELEBRATE WESTON!

Saturday, May 20, 2023
11:00 a.m. – 3:00 p.m.



Music & Entertainment
Local Food
Festivities
Historical Exhibits
Games & Activities
Fun for All Ages



For further information, please contact Dusty Rhodes at drhodes@conventures.com or call at 617-204-4200.

www.westonma.gov/Celebrate

MAY 20, SAVE THE DATE, COME CELEBRATE!

Last year Weston held the first town-wide Celebrate Weston day. According to Select Board member Laurie Bent, “The first Celebrate Weston was prompted by a desire to recognize and thank people and organizations who worked so hard to create our beautiful and vibrant new Town Center. It also gave us a joyful opportunity to banish the isolation of the Covid years by bringing residents of all ages together in our welcoming new gathering spaces.”

With the enthusiastic support of Dusty Rhodes, chair of last year’s festivities and president of the Boston event-planning firm Conventures Inc., the Select Board voted to make Celebrate Weston an annual town party. Activities for all ages will take place on Saturday, May 20, from 11 am to 3 pm in Town Center. (rain date Sunday)

Weston Historical Society will be re-opening “History Under One Roof: The Evolution of the Josiah Smith Tavern” for this special day. Explore the history of Weston’s taverns and view furniture, decorative arts, household items, and photos belonging to the Jones family, who lived at the JST for three generations. If you missed it last year, or didn’t have enough time to enjoy this amazing exhibit, this is your chance.

CELEBRATION MARKETPLACE 11 am–3 pm
Josiah Smith Tavern parking lot
Main Stage Entertainment
Clubs & Organization Marketplace

GOLDEN BALL TAVERN BEER GARDEN
Garden adjacent to JST parking lot

WESTON-WAYLAND CHILDREN’S BUSINESS FAIR
Knox Park

WESTON HIGH SCHOOL SPRING FLING
Town Green
Ticket sales for food and activities-benefit Camp No Limits, a destination camp for children with limb loss and differences

CELEBRATION PROGRAM: 11 am–3 pm
Weston Historical Society Exhibit at Josiah Smith Tavern
Reenactors, JST patio
First Parish Church- Clock Tower Climb, Tours
St. Julia Church Tours
Fiske Law Office Tours
Cemetery Tours
Town Square Musicians
Kid’s Fair
Touch a Truck (Fire Engines and Police Cars)
Classic Cars

JST EXHIBIT WILL BE OPEN 11 AM TO 3 PM



“History Under One Roof: The Evolution of the Josiah Smith Tavern”

THE CHARLES RIVER RECREATION ON THE WESTON SIDE

Between 1893 and 1897, three major recreational facilities were established along the Charles River in the “Lakes District,” the area in Weston and Newton where the river bulges out. Norumbega Park on the Newton side, the subject of the WHS lecture on April 27, was devoted to amusements. The two facilities in Weston emphasized organized sports and physical fitness and were an outgrowth of the turn-of-the-century progressive movement. They were meant to encourage urbanites to participate in outdoor sports and games as an antidote to the physical inactivity of office and factory work.

Boston Athletic Association

In 1893, Weston estate owner Francis Blake agreed to sell 20 acres (later increased to 25) along the river to the Boston Athletic Association (BAA), reportedly at a favorable price. Blake was an outdoorsman, athlete, and early supporter of the association, organized in 1887 “to encourage all manly sports, and promote physical culture.” By 1892, the private, all-male, distinctly upper-class club had 2,250 members, a clubhouse and boathouse in Boston and plans for an outdoor facility in Weston with a football field, tennis courts, running and bicycle tracks, a boathouse, clubhouse, and more. The BAA is perhaps best known today as the sponsor of the Boston Marathon.

Boston University purchased the property in 1927 and renamed it Nickerson Field. It was used by B.U. for home football games until 1953. In recent years, the Liberty Mutual Insurance building was constructed on the site.

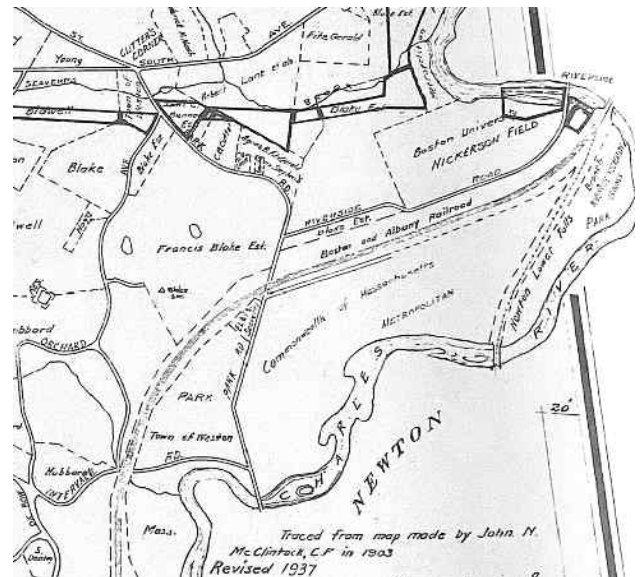
Riverside Recreation Grounds

In 1896, Charles W. Hubbard, brother-in-law of Francis Blake, proposed a plan “to foster Outdoor Sport” by providing “Youth of the Metropolitan District with a Splendid Reservation . . . for all Forms of Athletic Exercise.” Hubbard wanted the Metropolitan Park Commission to acquire riverfront land and work with him to develop facilities. The MPC declined to participate, and Hubbard proceeded at his own expense, acquiring 40 acres with a half mile of riverfront. Riverside Recreation Grounds, popularly known as “The Rec,” opened in September 1897, just four months after Norumbega Park opened across the river.

The Rec had a large shingled building with a restaurant, dance pavilion, two bowling alleys, storage racks for 300 boats (and more nearby), dressing rooms and lockers, 14 bedrooms, 16 meeting rooms, and a 200-foot balcony overlooking the river. The swimming pool, the largest in New England, was spring-fed, with a gravel bottom and diving tower with platforms at 5, 10, 15, and 25 feet. There were six gravel tennis courts, a quar-

ter-mile cinder track, sports fields, and an open-air gymnasium. The Rec was used for athletic contests and company picnics as well as general recreational use, mainly by urbanites arriving by train or trolley and later by children from Auburndale and Waltham. It appears that it was not widely used by Weston children, who generally swam at the town pool on School Street.

In 1914, C. W. Hubbard gave Riverside Recreation Grounds, valued at “\$200,000 or more” to the Metropolitan Park Commission. The gift included 41 acres of land. Part of that land is now the Leo J. Martin golf course. In the 1940s, land was taken by eminent domain for construction of Route 128, which cut across the tennis courts. The Rec continued in operation into the 1950s but never reopened after the 1958 season. Three months before their scheduled demolition, the two remaining 60-year-old wooden buildings burned to the ground. The charred remains were leveled and the pool filed in. Today, the area, known as Riverside Park, has been reduced to about 10 acres accessible from Recreation Road and Route 128 north. An iron footbridge in this location still spans the Charles River.



Above: Swimming at The Rec, 1950. Below, 1937 map showing location of B.U.'s Nickerson Field (north of Boston & Albany RR tracks) and Riverside Recreation Grounds (name blurred) (south of B & A tracks and east of Newton Lower Falls Branch, which is no longer extant). Bold lines relate to the Hultman Aqueduct.

DID YOUR KNOW? FUN FACTS ABOUT CANOING ON THE CHARLES RIVER

Based on the essay "Down by the Riverside" by Robert F. Pollock, in Historic Auburndale (Auburndale Community Association, 1996)

- The "Lakes District" is the name given to the bulge in the Charles River around the South Avenue bridge in Newton and Weston. The bulge was created when the Moody Street dam in Waltham flooded land upstream.

- During the late 19th century, mass production of wood and canvas canoes was perfected.

- Two well-known manufacturers, Robertson and Partelow, had factories and rental facilities in the Lakes District.

- Trains and, by the 1890s, a trolley along Commonwealth Avenue, improved transportation from Boston to the Lakes District.

- At the turn of the century, an estimated 4,000 and 5,000 canoes were stored in dozens of liveries for the convenience of city dwellers.

- The superintendent of the Metropolitan Park Commission was quoted in 1902 in the *Boston Globe* as saying, "More canoeing is done on this stretch of the river than is done on all the rivers in the rest of Massachusetts put together."

- "Down by the Riverside," a popular song in the early 1900s, was inspired by the activities along the Charles River in Auburndale. The music and refrain were based on an old Negro spiritual.

- To maintain order on the river, a new police detachment was formed. The

Fifth Annual Gala Day sponsored by the Auburndale-Riverside Canoe Association in August 1919. (Detail of panorama, courtesy of David Kingsbury)

police sergeant and seven officers were deputized by both towns and could make arrests anywhere on the river.

- In 1904, the Metropolitan Police Station opened on the Newton side. This building is still standing and is now used by Paddle Boston.

- At the turn of the century, a canoe was one of the few places where a young man and young woman could be together without a chaperone nearby.

- The police station had a spyglass mounted on the second level to observe canoeists at a distance.

- The police posted strict rules. Couples were forbidden to recline side by side in a canoe. A couple was arrested for kissing and fined \$20. Boston papers reported, "At that rate it is estimated that over a million dollars worth of kisses are exchanged . . . every fine Saturday night and Sunday."

- Band concerts were very popular along the river. On weekends, it was not uncommon for 1,000 canoes to be in attendance,

- During concerts, it was said that a sure-footed person could walk from the Newton to the Weston shore by stepping from canoe to canoe.

- Canoeing continued to be popular through the 1920s. By then, the automobile gave young couples the same opportunity for privacy and made new recreation sites accessible.

- The Depression, fires, and a severe flood in 1936 also helped bring an end to the golden age of canoeing.

THE

Heinz River Luncheon


MAKES A
DAINTY REPAST

Some of **The 57**

Heinz Tomato Soup
Heinz Baked Beans
Heinz Sweet and Sour Pickles
Heinz Preserved Fruits

LUNCHEONS PUT UP AT THE OFFICE OF

The Weston Country Club



COLUMBIA

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at a
Special Price of
\$28.90
with 6 double
disc Records
You can pay
\$5.00 a month



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Columbia Graphophone
at home—keep it there
This \$28.90 outfit is
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A Special
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The ONLY HORNLESS Instrument under \$50.00 that has a CONTINUOUS TONE CHAMBER
Columbia Phonograph Co., Gen'l. 174 Tremont St., Boston, Mass.
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**THE KINGSBURY FAMILY:
CANOE BUILDING IN WESTON**

The Kingsbury family settled along the Charles River beginning in the late 18th century. Alden “Ollie” Kingsbury (1878–1958) was the great-grandson of Elijah, the first of the family of farmers. Ollie learned the canoe-building trade working at two of the largest boat houses, Robertson’s and Emerson’s, located across the Charles River in Newton.

In 1908, Ollie Kingsbury and his friend John Sunderhauf moved to Monohon, Washington, and built a shop for the production of canoes. After the death of his father, Otis, in 1912, Ollie returned to Weston to look after the family farm and continue building canoes in a shop on his late father’s farm



on Loring Road (now 5 Prescott Lane). He also ran the concessions at Riverside Recreation Grounds in the early World War I years. After the Loring Road property was sold about 1922, he built his own house, garage, and shop on River Road.

Kingsbury Canoes became well-known and successful in the Charles River area. Ollie Kingsbury supplied many of the local canoe liveries until demand fell off during the Depression.

After World War II, Ollie and his son David (born 1926) went back to building canoes in the shop on River Rd. In 1947, they built 36 17-foot canoes between January and June to supply the post-war demand, selling them for \$135 each to Norumbega Park and Riverside Recreation Grounds. David Kingsbury recalls that it took 1½ days to build a canoe from start to finish. Shortly thereafter, father and son gave up canoe making and began building houses.

According to David Kingsbury, his father’s original handmade canoe molds were still being used at least through 1998 by a canoe manufacturer in New Hampshire, who was making “Kingsbury Canoes” by the same handcrafted method.

The River Road property is now owned by the the next generation of Kingsburys, Scott and his wife Beverly. Behind the house is the shop built by Ollie Kingsbury in 1924 and doubled in size



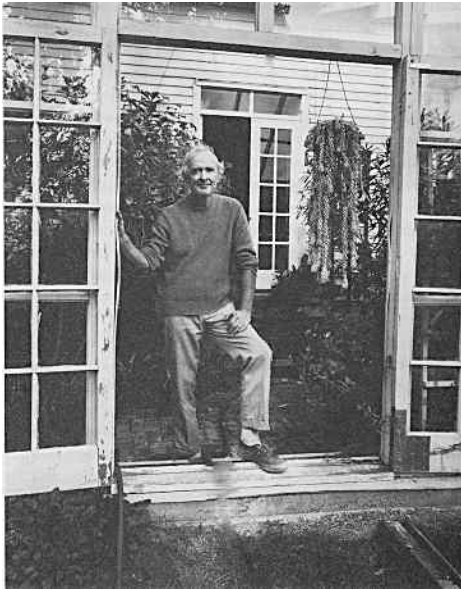
in 1929. He worked there with one assistant. A gasoline engine on the ground floor powered several belts reaching the second floor. These belts ran tools such as a planer, band saw, circular saw, and shell grinder. A wood stove on the second floor supplied heat for steaming the canoe ribs so they could be bent around the shell.

Below and clockwise: Business card for the Monohon company (Courtesy David Kingsbury); David Kingsbury, March 2023 (Photo by Pam Fox); Shop on River Road (Photo by Pam Fox); Ollie Kingsbury, his wife Esther, and children Hazel and baby Ella, parents and siblings of David Kingsbury. (Courtesy David Kingsbury).



J. O. SUNDERHAUF A. R. KINGSBURY
MONOHON BOAT AND CANOE CO.
MONOHON WASHINGTON





**WHS RECEIVES GIFT OF BILL
McELWAIN PAPERS**

Weston Historical Society would like to thank Mary “BZ” Nobles for the gift of 13 notebooks of newspaper articles, photographs, and writings of Wm. “Bill” McElwain (c 1919–2009), documenting his work with Weston Youth Commission (1970–1974), Green Power Farm (1970–1980), and the Sugar Shack (1973–2007).

Land’s Sake evolved out of 1960s social and environmental activism. In Weston, its roots go back to Green Power Farm and the vision of Bill McElwain, a Harvard-educated one-time farmer, French teacher, mentor, free-thinker, and affordable housing advocate. McElwain began the farm in 1970 as a way to enlist volunteer labor to grow healthy food on unused Weston land, to be donated or sold cheaply to inner city residents. About the same time, the town established the Youth Commission to tackle teen drug abuse and disaffection. McElwain was hired as project director, and Green Power became a town-run program enlisting young people to plant, weed, and harvest during their summer vacations. McElwain also organized a recycling program and town-wide maple sugaring operation. (The Sugar Shack at the middle school is still in use!)

In his award-winning book *Reclaiming the Commons* (1999), Brian Donahue gives this description of McElwain and

(Left) 1979 photo of Bill McElwain, founder of Green Power Farm, which later merged with Land’s Sake. He once wrote “I like growing vegetables, but that’s not why I do it. It’s an avenue by which desirable social change is brought about.” (Below) McElwain with his young farmers. (1976 photo by Jerry Howard)

his suburban farm in 1975:

Bill was then in his mid-fifties, a vigorous man with sharp, grizzled features, a hawk nose, piercing blue eyes, and sparse white hair. Bill was . . . a blithely positive anarchist whose operating philosophy in dealing with obstacles to farming in the suburbs was “It is easier to gain forgiveness than consent.” The name Green Power itself was emblematic of the farm’s era and purpose: this was a farm devoted to radical social and environmental change.

In 1975, Green Power Farm had 20 acres on Merriam Street under cultivation and employed 35 Weston youth in producing 100 tons of vegetables. These were distributed in Roxbury and Weston at reasonable prices, which helped the farm to be self-sustaining. A newspaper clipping of 1973 describes hundreds of inner-city residents lining up in Dorchester and Roxbury every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, the days McElwain would drive in with a truckload of freshly harvested vege-

tables. Black families who enjoyed this food came regularly to the farm to help with cultivation. An article in the *Massachusetts Farm Bulletin* in 1979 noted:

McElwain sees Weston’s farm as a living sample of what agriculture could and should be. He runs the place with too little money, scrounges and borrows and begs, and measures success not in terms of a profit and loss statement, but rather in human and political terms: who gets what out of working the land, how many kids got an introduction to agricultural work (and got paid for it), how many Boston low-income families came out on Sunday to harvest some vegetables for Sunday dinner?

In the end, Green Power was not a sustainable model for a community farm. In 1991, the town-funded Green Power was merged with Land’s Sake (LS), a non-profit formed in 1980 to help manage town conservation land and involve residents in its productive use. Land’s Sake took over the summer farming for high schoolers. Forty-two years later, the twin goals of education and donation of produce to those in need has not changed. In 2022, LS reached approximately 5,000 people through its education and community programs and donated almost 46,000 pounds of food (valued at

Continued on page 8





Brian Donahue, Professor Emeritus of American Environmental Studies at Brandeis University, is now enjoying retirement on his farm in Gill. (c.2000 photo, McElwain Collection, WHS)

A FOND FAREWELL TO LAND'S SAKE FARMSTAND

In late March, the Land's Sake farmstand will be disassembled to make way for a modern well-equipped replacement. Pieces of the stand and surrounding artwork will be preserved and repurposed on the farm. In the following article, Brian Donahue, a founder and early directors of Land's Sake, tells the story of the iconic farmstand, which he and a group of volunteers constructed 37 years ago.

by Brian Donahue

When Land's Sake (LS) started farming at the 40-Acre Field in 1981 under a contract with Harvard's Arnold Arboretum, the Arboretum did not allow on-farm sales. They assumed neighbor and town opposition would be too strong. So we sold at farmers markets, to the golf clubs, to Harvard dining halls, at the Green Power stand in Weston Center (Green Power and Land's Sake were separate until 1991) — whatever we could think of. It was tough. We didn't make much money. Just at the end of the 1984 season Harvard allowed some on-farm sales and the smaller white farm stand (photo at upper right) was built by Robbie Crockett, Keith Shields and others.

Harvard was disillusioned with LS's ability to run a financially viable operation, so in 1985 they turned most of the land over to Tom Hanson of Hanson Farm in Framingham. Tom built a farmstand very much like the present one on that spot and sold vegetables he grew on the place and in Framingham. Land's Sake kept the little stand under the Norway Maple and one acre in front, where we grew flowers and odd-ball vegetables that Tom wasn't growing. We actually did quite well with that intensive operation.

Also in 1985, Harvard decided to sell the property and the town considered its purchase at Town Meeting in December, 1985. Someone made disparaging remarks about our nice little farmstand. Said it looked like an outhouse. That helped us win votes. The overwhelming positive vote was challenged



(bad microphones in the gym), so the Selectmen decided just to redo the town meeting in January 1986. The price for all 35-ish acres was \$3.5 million — the largest single land sale in Weston at that time.

The Conservation Commission decided to lease the whole property to LS again, so Tom was out. He took his stand down. Hence, in the spring of 1986 — maybe it was Earth Day — I built the present farmstand with volunteer help. We put the structure up in a few hours. The red cedar posts were cut by Doug Henderson from land being developed on Davenport Road. I sank them straight into the ground, with no footings or treatment. The site is high and well-drained gravel, and cedar is very rot resistant. So they have lasted almost 40 years, no problem.

The rest of the stand structure is rough-cut white pine from somewhere in town. LS had a small band sawmill at that time. The stand is sheathed with pine boards that we didn't have to cut. Bill McElwain had several enormous piles of those in his back yard on the Post Road — not sure where he got them. The whole thing couldn't have cost more than a couple hundred bucks.

The next year I added a lean-to shed at the back, continuing the roof line down. Since the stand faced west, the afternoon sun shone right in, which was a problem for the vegetables. As a volunteer project, Neil Baumgarten designed and built the scalloped overhangs on the front for shade, around 1990 or so. He used western cedar, I think — maybe even redwood.

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CHECK OUT WHS ON INSTAGRAM AND FACEBOOK

New Weston Historical Society board member Kara Fleming is bringing Weston history to new audiences through her regular posts on social media. Kara has a gift for choosing engaging stories and keeping them short to suit today's lifestyles. If you have not discovered this treasure trove, find us on Instagram (www.instagram.com/westonhistory) or Facebook (www.facebook.com/westonhistory). For people who are not on social media, Facebook posts are linked to the WHS website (westonhistory.org, upper left corner).

Kara holds a journalism degree from the Scripps School of Journalism at Ohio University and worked for the Town of Weston from 2008 to 2021, editing the *Town Report*, managing the town's communications, and serving as assistant to the town manager. She enjoys sharing stories from Weston's past and seeing people engage with the content. Said Kara, "The stories either bring up fond memories for folks or surprise them. It feels good reading comments from people who never knew the history or who have family ties to the story, as well as those who add to the story. Weston has an interesting history that has fortunately been preserved by great people, and that work needs to be shared." Suggestions for new posts are welcome! Contact WHS at info@westonhistory.org.

Farmstand, continued from Page 7

Neil made the mistake of going to the building department to get a permit for this — trying to do the right thing — at which it emerged that there was never a permit for the stand in the first place. Courtney Atkinson, Weston's building inspector, was demanding some elaborate plans and insisting we go through the whole process. I remember Neil and I went in there one day with some drawings to see if we were on the right track. It turned out Courtney was on leave for a few weeks and there was a substitute guy from Sudbury sitting in for him. Neil and I explained why we were there and started to unfurl the drawings. He looked at us like we were crazy, and said "You don't need a building permit to build a farmstand, in farm country!" So we rolled up our drawings, tipped our hats, and left. So there never has been any building permit for that farmstand.

McElwain, continued from Page 6

\$151,000) to needy families. Until recently, Land's Sake operated with only short term leases, which was not conducive to developing buildings or infrastructure. Food at the farmstand had to be locked away each night. Above-ground water pipes limited cold weather use. LS relied on adjacent neighbors for electricity and barn space for coolers and summer program animals. There were no bathroom facilities. In 2018 Town Meeting voted a 30-year lease, allowing the farm, under the leadership of director Pam Hess, to develop a multi-year program to bring water and electricity to the land and construct a new farmstand, animal barn, greenhouse, hoop house, and equipment barn. Phase II of the \$6M dollar campaign will begin this spring with construction of a 3,700-square foot, net zero, energy efficient farmstand, which will have a demonstration kitchen, proper food handling and storage facilities, enhanced public seating, and staff offices. The farmstand and animal barn (now a temporary farmstand) were designed on a pro bono basis by Payette, 2019 Architecture Firm Award Recipient.

Meet the Authors, continued from Page 1

room thrived in the Big Band era, bringing in new audiences. Many couples who later married went on their first dates there. From its Grand Opening in 1897 to when the gates closed forever on Labor Day, 1963, the legendary park drew thousands from all over New England.

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Membership dues: Individual \$35, Family \$50, Sponsor \$75, Supporting \$100+, Life membership \$500. Tax deductible contributions and bequests to the Endowment Fund are welcome.

Please visit our website: www.westonhistory.org.