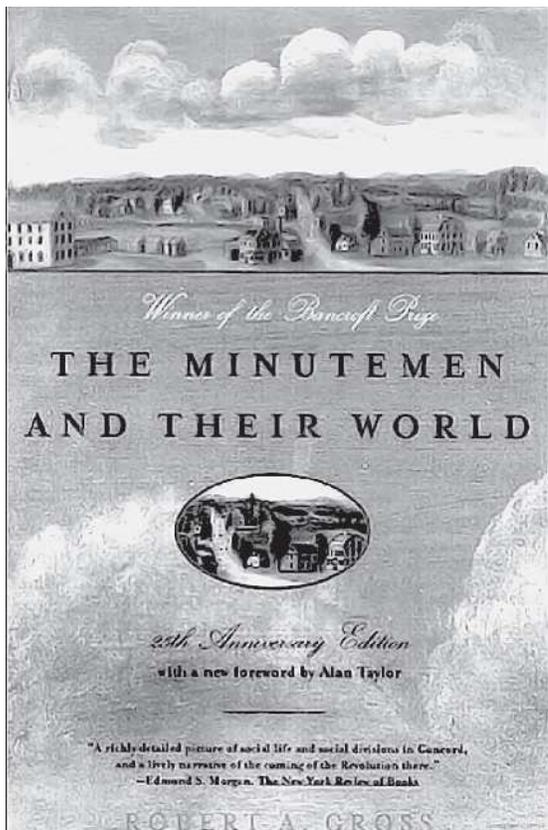


# WESTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

Volume LV No. 2 — Fall 2024



## WHS Annual Meeting and Lecture "The Minutemen and Their World"

by

**Dr. Robert Gross**

**Wednesday, October 30**

7:00 Annual Meeting

7:15 Refreshments

7:30 Lecture

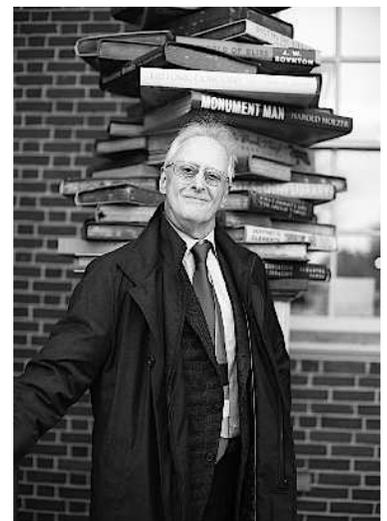
**Weston Public Library Community Room**

**All Are Welcome**

In preparation for the 250th anniversary of the March to Concord in April 1775, WHS is honored to present Dr. Robert Gross, author of the Bancroft-Prize-winning book *The Minutemen and Their World* (1976). A specialist in the social and cultural history of the United States from the Revolution to the Civil War, Gross focuses particularly on New England. His study of Concord in the 18th century portrays the lives and circumstances of inhabitants at all levels of the social order. He traces the internal conflicts that shaped the town's participation in the mobilization against British rule. A revised and expanded edition of the book was issued in 2022.

In the new edition, Gross added a section about Col. Elisha Jones and his family in Weston. Elisha was a cousin of Isaac Jones, proprietor of the Golden Ball Tavern, and the great-grandfather of Henry David Thoreau. He was one of the richest and most politically powerful figures in late colonial Massachusetts, and an outspoken Loyalist. He was also a close ally of Concord's leading men. It turns out that Concord and Weston followed similar slow paths to Revolution—a point Gross will discuss in his upcoming lecture.

*Continued on page 8*





Samuel Philips Savage, "Weston's most prominent patriot," moderated the meeting that preceded the Boston Tea Party and presided over the Massachusetts Board of War. This portrait by John Singleton Copley is in the Worcester Art Museum.

**THE 250TH IS COMING!  
(ACTUALLY, IT'S HERE)**

From 2023 to 2025, the United States is celebrating the 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the American Revolution. Why the multi-year effort? Events in these three years propelled the colony on the path to revolution, culminating with the signing of the Declaration of Independence on July 4, 1775. Next April, Weston will celebrate the 100 men and three officers who gathered at Captain Samuel Lamson's house in the town center and marched to Concord to fight the British.

The 250th Anniversary Committee of the Weston Historical Society is researching life in Weston in the early 1770s. How big was the average farm? What items were made in Weston? (Did you know that one of the nation's earliest potteries was located in Weston?) What houses remain from this period? We will also look at how Weston evolved from being a Tory Town to supporting independence.

We are seeking volunteers to help in creating a celebratory project. Media skills are particularly needed.

Please support the 250th anniversary special project by including an extra contribution with your membership dues.

**NEW ACQUISITIONS**



Above: Untitled watercolor of the Josiah Smith Tavern by Harold W. VanHeest (1895 - 1988), who lived in Weston for a time. He was a skilled commercial artist who worked for The Boston Post and later headed the creative production department of Edmund S. Whitten, Inc., a Boston advertising agency. (WHS purchase)



Left: Weston Methodist Church (built 1901, demolished 1971). Framed giclee print of watercolor by Weston artist Jack Richardson (Gift of Joseph and Carmen Konzem) Below: Irresistible early 20th century marketing.

A prominent Weston Lady served CAMBRIAN SIFTED SUGAR PEAS to her guests at a recent dinner party. The exquisite flavor of these delicious tender peas, so tickled the palates of these particular people that the demand for them was immediately established. The price is 15 cents a can although the quality is much higher. If you haven't tried them you are missing one of the good things of life.

**George W. Cutting & Sons,**  
Family Store, Central Ave., Weston

## BUTTERFLY AND MOTH MAGIC

Among the Weston Historical Society treasures are two books of colored pencil drawings of butterflies and moths done by Edward Brenton Jennings. In all, Jennings did 421 life-size drawings of 131 species of butterflies and moths in the five years between 1934 and 1939. Each is labeled with the species name and male/female symbol. The artistry is extraordinary.

E. Brenton Jennings (1888 – 1953) was the fourth of five sons born to Edward and Ella Brown Jennings. Beginning in 1880, Edward operated a dairy business on his family farm on Glen Road. His older brother Willard operated the Glen House Hotel, part of which survives at 345 Glen Road. The dairy and hotel are discussed in the book *Farm Town to Suburb* by Pam Fox.

Brenton was deaf and mute. He attended Horace Mann School for the Deaf on Newbury Street in Boston from 1893 until his graduation in 1908. It is not known where he learned magic, but he put on evening entertainments for his uncle's summer hotel guests. He was said to be a brilliant man and an excellent writer. He corresponded with Henry Houdini, probably the most famous magician of his time, and wrote several articles for magic periodicals. His name appears in Magicpedia, a website on magic history, which notes simply that he was a deaf/mute amateur magician who did sleight-of-hand magic and shadowgraphy to pantomime. His Magicpedia page lists five articles, four submitted to Goldston's *Magical Quarterly*

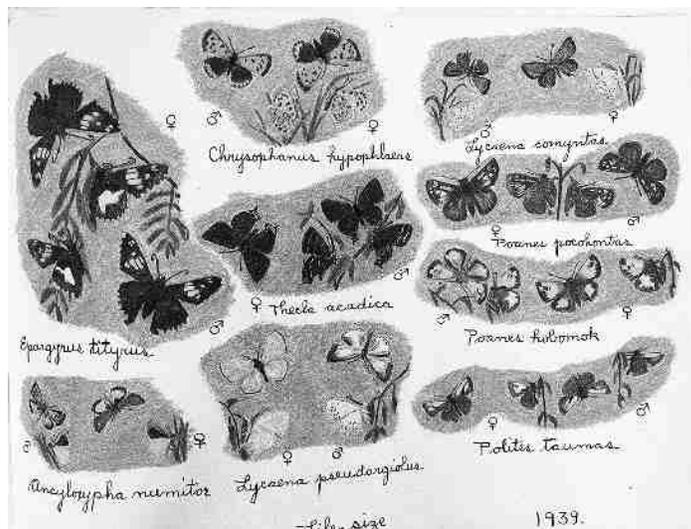


An amateur magician, Edward Brenton Jennings entertained his uncle's hotel guests on Glen Road with magic tricks. His 421 colored pencil drawings of moths and butterflies (example at right) were done during the years he was institutionalized at Danvers State Hospital. (WHS collection)

between 1935 and 1939 (for example, "Two Good String Tricks" in Autumn 1935) and another published in *Sphinx* in July 1940.

Jennings was said to be emotionally disturbed and was institutionalized at Danvers State Hospital for 37 years, dying there in 1953. It was during those years that Jennings wrote the magic articles noted above and executed the two books of butterfly and moth drawings now in the society's collection.

Researchers at Weston Historical Society are looking for the link between the Jennings drawings and the Denton Butterfly and Moth Collection at the Wellesley Historical Society. Wil-



liam and Elizabeth Denton moved to Wellesley in 1865. Their sons Willie and Winford established Denton Brothers, a firm that sold specimens and collections to museums and collectors. Their butterfly collection won gold and silver medals at the Paris Exposition of 1900. Another son, Sherman Foote Denton (1856 – 1937) was known for his faithfully colored specimens of fish. He also developed and patented the glass and plaster mounts used by his brothers for their butterflies, and he invented a process to transfer the scales from butterfly and moth wings to paper. In the 1890s he used this process to produce 500 copies of his four-volume work *Moths and Butterflies East of the Rocky Mountains*. Sherman and his family moved to Weston in 1901, first to Glen Road and then to nearby Oxbow Road. His son, Robert Baird Denton, was killed in World War I.

Did Sherman Foote Denton befriend young Brenton Jennings when Denton's family moved to Weston in 1901? Jennings would have been around the age of Denton's son. Jennings was institutionalized about 1916, just before the US entered World War I. Did Sherman Denton supply Brenton Jennings with the butterfly and moth specimens he would have needed to create these detailed drawings? Please contact the Weston Historical Society at [info@westonhistory.org](mailto:info@westonhistory.org) if you can shed light on this mystery.

**BACK TO SCHOOL  
WESTON SCHOOL BUILDINGS OVER THE YEARS**



The first schools in Weston were small one-room "district" schools. In the early 1850s, the town replaced the six district schools, including #6 (above) at Brown and Winter Streets. Not until 1858 did the state mandate schooling for all children between ages 8 and 15.



Susan Emily Cutter (back row) was the teacher at this district school, probably #5 at South Avenue and Ware Street. This photo was probably taken in the early 1890s. Of the six district schools, only #5 and #4 on North Avenue continued in use after a centralized school system was implemented in 1893.



A Centre School was established in the town hall in the mid-1850s for the "larger scholars that needed a male teacher." The first high school building (above) was constructed in 1878 from designs by noted Boston architect Carl Fehmer. The wooden building was later used for lower grades and then torn down in the early 1930s to make way for what is now Brook School Building C.



Above: This photo was taken in the mid-1890s, after the brick high school was built and the 1878 wooden building became the Grammar School. Note the handsome porch detailing. Below: High School students in 1899, with long-time principal "Boss Eaton" in the top row (third from left)..

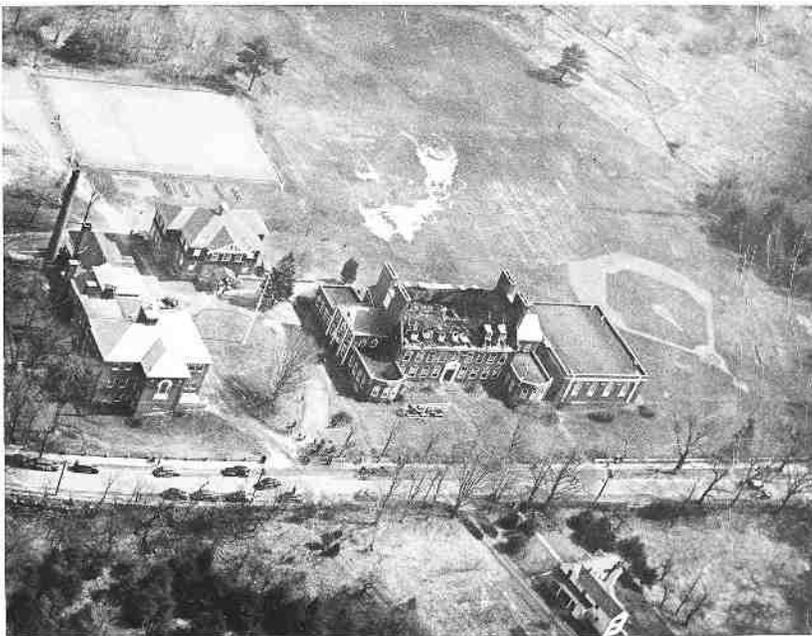


Architect and local resident Samuel Mead designed the second Weston High School (now Brook School Building A), constructed in 1895. Boys and girls had separate entrances and walls were hung with "beautiful new classical pictures."





*As the school population increased in the early 1900s, fiscally conservative town leaders approved only this small, two-room schoolhouse for the four primary grades. Constructed in 1908, it had to be enlarged two years later by adding the brick first floor. (Now Brook School Building B)*



*Above: In April 1948, a disastrous fire gutted the inside of the 1932 high school building pictured at the right. The building was remodeled without its original gambrel roof and used for the elementary grades. Below: Students in the 1950s in front of their high school (later Field School).*



*Noted Boston architect Ralph Harrington Doane designed the Georgian Revival brick high school, building completed in 1932 (now Brook School Building C, photo c. 1934) It had a library, cafeteria, gym, science and art rooms, shop room for boys, and home economics unit. A commercial department offered typewriting and bookkeeping.*



*Field School was initially planned as an elementary school, but after the 1948 fire (see photo at upper left), the plan was adapted for grades 7 to 12. When the present high school was built in 1961, the building became a junior high, then later a grade 4-5 school (Field School). It was demolished in 2015.*



*The innovative design of the elementary Country School won awards for architect Hugh Stubbins Jr. The building opened in February 1955 and was demolished in 2001-03 to make way for the present Country School.*



*The new Field School was completed in 2014 and houses grades 4 and 5. The old Field School, which had been built as a 7th to 12th grade school in 1950, was demolished in 2015.*



*Woodland School, also designed by Hugh Stubbins Jr., was dedicated in January 1960 and enlarged and reconstructed in 2001-03.*



*The present Weston High School was dedicated in 1961. The building was completely remodeled in 1997-98 and a science wing added in 2021. This photo was on the cover of the dedication brochure.*



*The 600-pupil junior high school (now the Weston Middle School), designed by Cambridge Seven Associates, was completed in 1969 and remodeled in 1998-99.*

## WESTON HIGH SCHOOL IN THE 1950'S



*See the Weston Historical Society website, [westonhistory.com](http://westonhistory.com), for these and other 1950s photos, including identifying information where we have it. The building was known in recent years as the Field School.*

*These photos of high schoolers in the 1950s are among many in the historical society files. Visitors are invited to come to our office at the Josiah Smith Tavern to look through the photo collection, archives, books, and exhibits. Hours are 10 to 12 on Tuesdays or by appointment.*

*Can you help enrich the photo collection with school pictures from the 1960s through 2020s?*

## A WALK THROUGH THE COBURN MEADOW

*The following account was written in 1975 by Anne Cutter Coburn to Harold "Bus" Willis following the purchase by the town of the parcel of Coburn land called the "Long Meadow" and today known as the Coburn Meadow. The author is Anne Cutter Coburn, whose father, Arthur Leslie Coburn (1860-1931), farmed the family property on Church Street until 1897, when he became superintendent of the Hook & Hastings organ factory. He took over leadership of the company after the death of his brother-in-law, Francis Henry Hastings, in 1916.*

"As the senior member of that branch of the Coburn family from which the town has recently purchased the "Long Meadow" . . . I believe it may be of interest to the Conservation Commission to have some knowledge of the use of this land during the early part of this century.

"Brought up in a house (later sold and subsequently destroyed by fire), our family looked directly down on the big bend in the brook, a spot where we hooked many a perch, pickerel, and horned pout.

"A path down the hill toward Viles Street led to the lower field, shared by golfers and grazing cattle. [Editor's note: The Weston Golf Club was originally located on these fields.] This path was our father's route to the Hook and Hastings factory, where he served for many years as president of the firm. It was a treat to be invited to accompany him on a day when molten metal was being poured on a taut bed of linen ticking to make the sheets of soft alloy from which many organ pipes were formed. On a warm day, when the windows were open, the neighbors would hear the voicing of these pipes by craftsmen so skilled that a tuning fork was unnecessary.

"Walking along among the cows was not without trepidation for a small child, and on one occasion our mother emerged from this field wearing a swarm of bees around her head and neck, and nary a sting!

"This lower level was strewn with glacial rocks, one of which our mother chose as our father's gravestone. He had contributed others to help with the construction of St. Julia's Church.

"Toward Church Street there were two definite sections of the meadow, separated by a stone wall. The more rugged section, toward the brook, was used as pasture. There was located "the Big Hole" in which there was always water and near which we were forbidden to play. There too was a haven for birds and beasts, even an occasional deer or fox.

"The flat section nearer the barn was an enormous market garden, planted mostly with corn and potatoes, interspersed

with rotating fallow areas. Huge loads of produce left at dawn for Faneuil Hall Market, drawn for many years by a team of strong farm horses and later loaded on trucks. (My first equestrian adventure, as a very small child, was astride one of these very broad backs, convinced that I was guiding the cultivator between the rows of corn.)

"The wide section of this field, nearest Church Street, was drained by several deep ditches, with a sturdy bridge to carry the loaded wagons across. Our aunt, Edith L. Coburn, earned pocket money by marketing watercress and forget-me-nots raised along these ditches. Not so many years ago there were still traces of these dainty blue flowers, but through long disuse the ditches have been blocked by silt and roots, and in the season of spring rains and melting snow, there is sometimes water standing on portions of this land.

"Like other meadows in Weston, this one has shifting foundations in spots, and another lesson of our childhood was to beware the quicksands known to exist there.

"Obviously, this meadow has meant a great deal to many generations of Coburns. We are happy that it can be preserved for the enjoyment of the people of Weston."



*Anne Cutter Coburn grew up in this Shingle style house at 29 Webster Road. It was built in 1898 and destroyed by fire in 1968. (Weston Historical Society photo)*



*Anne's father, Arthur Leslie Coburn, walked across what we now call the Coburn Meadow from his house on Webster Road to the Hook & Hastings organ factory (above), where he was superintendent and later president. (Weston Historical Society photo).*

**Dr. Robert Gross, continued from page 1.**

Dr. Gross, a Professor of Early American History Emeritus at the University of Connecticut, also authored the recent prize-winning book *The Transcendentalists and Their World* (2021). He has lived in Concord since 2014.

**TOWN ISSUES A REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS FOR CASE SCHOOLHOUSE AND BARN**



*Case Barn and Schoolhouse (Photos by Pam Fox)*

The Town of Weston has issued a Request for Proposals for the sale of the Case Estates red schoolhouse and yellow brick barn on a 60,025-square-foot lot at 133-135 Wellesley Street. The property will be conveyed subject to a historic preservation restriction on both buildings, meaning that the buyer cannot tear them down.

Proposals must be received by the Town Manager no later than Friday, November 15. The exact manner for submitting bids is detailed on the town website.

To understand what is special about these buildings, it is important to know about Marion Case and Hillcrest Farm (later Hillcrest Gardens), which she founded in 1909 as an experimental farm and practical school of agriculture for local boys on their summer vacation. She purchased a

house under construction across the street and moved it to its present location. As the clubhouse, later known as the schoolhouse, it was used for educational and social activities for the boys, including lectures and daily study hours. In 1927 she built the up-to-date, well-appointed brick barn, designed by local architect Samuel Mead. Miss Case died in 1944 and left the property to the Arnold Arboretum of Harvard University.

The buildings were acquired by the town as part of the 62+ acre parcel known as the Case Estates. Nearly 20 years have passed since purchase of the property was first approved at Town Meeting. Since the deal closed in 2016, the buildings have been studied and preservation options considered. Because the Case Estates is grouped with the three nearby schools, Rec Center, and Library, the state has determined that the town cannot install a septic system; hence the buildings must be sold to a private owner who can do so.

Information about Marion Case and Hillcrest Farm can be found in Pam Fox's book *Farm Town to Suburb* or at the WHS website, <http://westonhistory.org/data/uploads/bulletins/2006-Fall-Bulletin-Case-I.pdf>. Let us hope that new uses can be found for the buildings at the heart of this fascinating chapter in Weston's history.

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Membership dues: Individual \$35, Family \$50, Sponsor \$100, Patron \$250, Life Membership \$500, WHS Fellow \$1000. Tax-deductible contributions and bequests to the Endowment Fund are welcome.

**Please visit our website, [westonhistory.org](http://westonhistory.org).**