

# The Soldiers' National Home in Weston

The Civil War left thousands of men with war-related injuries and amputations. For at least a decade, from the early 1860s through the early 1870s, some of those with no family to care for them found a home at the "Soldiers' National Home on the John Quincy Adams Farm" in Weston.

The J.Q. Adams farm totaled some four hundred acres on the north and south sides of South Avenue at the intersection of Wellesley Street. In the 18th century, the property had belonged to Moses Gill, who sold it to Ward Nicholas Boylston in 1805. When Boylston died in 1828, he bequeathed it to his friend, then President John Quincy Adams, and it remained in the Adams family as part of a trust until purchased by General Charles Jackson Paine in 1882. It is now the site of the Weston High and Middle Schools.

During and after the Civil War, the Adams trust was administered by Charles Francis Adams, then serving as Minister to England. According to a fundraising appeal of 1864, printed below, the farm with its "dilapidated" but "perfectly comfortable" farmhouse, was leased about 1863 "at a low rent" for the purpose of providing a permanent

## DON'T FORGET THIS URGENT REQUEST!

*An Appeal to the Generous for Crippled and Invalid Soldiers.*

### SOLDIERS' NATIONAL HOME,

ON THE JOHN QUINCY ADAMS FARM, WESTON, MASS.

Professor H. W. LONGFELLOW, GEN. BUTLER, and many other eminent men are contributors.

This place has four hundred acres of land, and is to be a PERMANENT HOME FOR INVALID SOLDIERS. It was formerly the old Gov. Gill Farm, subsequently the Ward Nicholas Boylston place, and bequeathed by him to President John Quincy Adams, and his son, Charles Francis Adams, Minister to England, now holds it in trust. An association of gentlemen have leased it for a long number of years, and are determined to see no invalid soldier suffering. Boston and Massachusetts have the reputation of doing more for this class of invalids than they are aware of; and we are confident that the old Bay State merchants and others will never turn a deaf ear to that class of men who have forfeited life, health and limb for a continuance of our Glorious Union. Several having resorted at this Home, have re-enlisted, and are now back in the Army. Lieut. George W. Calkins, prisoner of war in Richmond and other Southern dungeons for more than a year, is authorized to collect.

#### TO LADIES AND GENTLEMEN!

Do call immediately and help us prepare for the sick and wounded coming on shortly. HEADQUARTERS, 19 CHARLESTOWN STREET.

SAMUEL POOR, JR., Vice-President.

### DISABLED SOLDIERS' NATIONAL HOME.

JOHN QUINCY ADAMS FARM.

#### A CARD.

The undersigned, in behalf of the Directors, would thank the noble and generous patrons of the John Quincy Adams National Farm Home for Invalid Soldiers, for past favors. No one any longer asks if this Home is needed. It is the only Farm Home in the United States. Every merchant says it is just what is needed to resuscitate and recruit those who have gone out to protect our gold and silver, and our homes. Gentlemen of every shade of politics are becoming interested. This is no experiment—it is a success. It is already in operation, feeding and employing all who go there. There are about 400 acres of land; and if those who feel interested in this enterprise will call at 19 Charlestown Street, upon Samuel Poor, Jr., Vice-President, they will get full particulars.

We beg of ladies and gentlemen to help us prepare to make these noble and brave men comfortable for the coming winter.

Lieut. GEO. W. CALKINS is nobly laboring for them. While he was a prisoner in the hands of the rebels for more than a year, his mother was thrown into a declivity, lingered along until the 16th inst., and died. It is supposed that her over-anxiety hastened her decease, while he was suffering hunger and nakedness, suffering for bread many a day for thirteen long months within the walls of Charlestown Jail and Libby Prison.

True, others are sufferers; many a brave woman is ebbing out her life blood in prayer, as she did, for only sons in the army. Many a heart has been made sad, many there are whose cheeks have paled as they went out to meet returning regiments, welcomed by cheering thousands, and were answered, "He died upon the field," or "He died a prisoner." Let those of us who remain at home, do all the good we can to our brave returned soldiers.

SERGEANT NICHOLAS LAWLESS, minus a leg and some of his fingers shot off, is the gentlemanly Superintendent. The Farm is in Weston, three miles from Auburndale. JOHN MEADY, JR., at the latter place, will direct all visitors to the Home.

SAMUEL POOR, JR., Vice-President, 19 Charlestown Street.

*The above notice is a plea for funds to aid crippled and invalid soldiers at the "Soldiers' National Home" in Weston. A photocopy of this appeal was found in the Weston Historical Society files as this article was being researched. The little known soldiers' home, which operated in Weston from 1863 to about 1871, is described in detail on page 23, thanks to discovery of a document at the Massachusetts Historical Society.*

home for invalid soldiers. The “benevolent public” was asked to support this effort financially, as the farm did not produce enough food for the “twenty cripples” then residing there, including “four of them with only one leg, two or three with one arm, one shot through the kidneys and all used up in one way or another for life.”

The Soldiers’ National Home was administered by Samuel Poor, Jr. of Boston, who is described in fundraising appeals as vice-president. In one such appeal, Poor explains the organization’s mission:

An association of gentlemen have leased it for a long number of years, and are determined to see no invalid soldier suffering. Boston and Massachusetts have the reputation of doing more for this class of invalids than they are aware of; and we are confident that the old Bay State merchants and others will never turn a deaf ear to that class of men who have periled life, health and limb for a continuance of our Glorious Union.

This document states that “Professor H.W. Longfellow, Gen. Butler, and many other eminent men are contributors.” Another appeal states that “No one any longer asks if this Home is needed. It is the only Farm Home in the United States.”

Day to day supervision of the farm was the responsibility of Sergeant Nicholas Lawless, who himself had lost a leg and several fingers in battle. The appeal printed below includes fascinating details about farm operations, the farmhouse, food, the small library, the cost of maintaining the Home, and even the fact that donation of “a few bath tubs would be beneficial.”

## **AN APPEAL TO THE BENEVOLENT.**

THE SOLDIER’S HOME ON THE JOHN QUINCY ADAMS FARM  
AT WESTON.

[From the *Saturday Evening Express* of May 14, 1864]

Now of all other times since the war began, the benevolent public must open their purses for the crippled soldiers. All of forty thousand wounded soldiers must be provided for, and our sympathies must be put into practice. The public hospitals are full, and the Sanitary and Christian Commissions are doing their duty. But the poor soldier who has lost his leg or his arm, who has neither home nor money, must be provided for, and in such a way that his pride will not be wounded. Permanent homes should be provided either by the State, city or towns, and the maimed soldier without friends or family should be made to feel that he has a home for life.

The above remarks occurred to us on the occasion of a visit to the Soldiers' Home at Weston, on the John Quincy Adams Farm on Wednesday last. This Home is established at Weston, about two miles from Auburndale, on the old Gov. Gill farm, now owned by Hon Charles Francis Adams, our minister to England, and leased for this purpose, at a low rent. The house is old and dilapidated, having been built in 1743—but is perfectly comfortable and watertight, and has recently been whitewashed outside and inside. There is no barn or sheds connected, and a good and generous neighbor (Deacon Jones) provides covering for a cow which belongs to the house; and he also boards the horse. There is plenty of wood on the farm, but every stick cut has to be paid for—the felling of the trees being done by the soldiers.

There are now upwards of twenty cripples at this House, four of them with only one leg, two or three with one arm, one shot through the kidneys and all used up in one way or another for life. One poor fellow was put under the sod last winter, having been sent from a place in this city all broken out with the small pox (sic). They all appear contented and happy, seemingly having made up their minds that they will be provided for in future. The superintendent, Mr. Lawless, with one leg, and his wife as matron, are paid \$30 per month, and a nice tidy house they make of it. The food is plain, consisting of flour and corn bread, meat at dinner, coffee and chocolate for breakfast, and tea for supper. For the sick, little niceties of jellies, and crackers and milk are also provided.

The farm land is very poor and run out, and quantities of manure is needed in order to produce a crop. Yet some six acres will be put under cultivation this spring, and it is calculated that hay enough can be cut to keep one horse and cow through the winter. Vegetables of all kinds will also be raised. They have only now about half-a-dozen hens, and as they have been setting, the soldiers have been deprived of eggs the past winter and spring. A new flag and hal-yards is wanted, as the sight of the floating stars and stripes gives zest and comfort to the poor fellows. On the occasion of our visit, three were employed on an embankment boiling the grease condiments for a barrel of soft soap. They have but one pig.

The cots, mattresses and quilt coverings are comfortable, only more are needed for the additional applications daily made. Groceries are purchased in Boston and Auburndale, and great economy has been used in selections of the same. Clothing of all kinds is constantly wanted, as we perceived the needle was daily used to keep up a neat outside appearance. Water, cool and limpid, is in profusion, and the soldiers need no urging in its use, although a few bath tubs would be beneficial.

Through the beneficence of a few individuals a small library has been gathered, the books of which are well thumbed. Intense interest was manifested to get hold of the news of the recent battles, and the countenances of all

beamed with delight on reading the recent victories by Gen. Grant. Three cheers were heartily given upon reading of the gallant victories won by our soldiers.

The cost of maintaining this Home has been considerable, but owing to the general munificence of the benevolent through the indomitable exertions of Lieut. Caleff, treasurer, and Mr. Poor, the Vice-President, the Home is kept out of debt, but with little money in the treasury. The cost of carrying on the Home is about \$100 per week, which includes aid to soldiers outside who make applications and are really needy.

On Sunday public services are held in what was once the parlor and receiving room of Gov. Gill, by the Rev. Mr. Farnham, of Boston, who is Chaplain of the institution. Some of the neighbors attend the services, and there is need of a larger room, and it is the calculation to erect a large tent for the same on the green in front of the house. With the tent, stools and settees are needed, as there is not half chairs enough now to accommodate those who take an interest in the religious welfare of the inmates of the Home. Mr. Farnham is truly beloved, although many of the soldiers are Catholics.

Having seen the operations of this truly benevolent institution we can in all honesty say that it is worthy of the patronage of the public; not only money, but groceries, clothing, shoes, hats or caps, bedding and tables, chairs, bedsteads, fish, meat, seeds, tobacco, crutches, canes, and a thousand other things are actually needed and would be thankfully accepted. The Head Quarters of this institution is at No. 19 Charlestown Street, Boston.

There should be a permanent fund raised to sustain this institution, and we understand exertions are to be made to accomplish it. To this end an appeal will be shortly made to the public. In the mean time (sic) the benevolent are cautioned against contributing to any but authorized agents.

The Soldiers' Home on the John Quincy Adams Farm at Weston has been established nearly a year and a half, and about two hundred cripples have been relieved and gone on their way rejoicing, making room for others. There has been about \$5000 received and expended for the same. Further particulars can be obtained by calling at the Home in Weston or of Mr. Poor at No. 19 Charlestown street, or the Treasurer, Lieut. Caleff, 37 Indiana Place, Boston.

- References: 1) Boston Almanac and Boston Directories, 1861 - 1871.  
2) "An appeal to the benevolent: the Soldier's (sic) Home on the John Quincy Adams Farm at Weston , Boston: s.n. 1864, 1 sheet, 23 X 13 cm, Notes "From the Saturday Evening Express of May 14th, 1864. Located at the Massachusetts Historical Society