



THE  
**CHRONICLE**  
 QUARTERLY

Volume 10

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March 1991

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**Weston Historical Society**

**THE  
 EDITOR'S  
 EDGE**

**SPRING?**

One of my hobbies for the last ten years or so has been tapping our maple trees and making maple syrup. My interest and the coming of age of the trees seemed to happen about the same time. Over the years, the weather has been favorable for a good flow of sap from about the middle of February to the middle of March. However, when the temperature gets too high, the sap begins to ferment, which can give any syrup made from it an off flavor — this means that I throw away a lot of sap during the 60 degree days we have been having. The warm weather cycles we have experienced over the past several weeks may turn heads to thoughts of spring; but I think the flow of sap in the maples is all the spring I need at this time of the year. For, when the sap flows, we know that spring is not far behind. And when spring does come, the sap stops flowing, and the mapling season is over — for another year.

*Herb Day*

Herb Day - Editor

**HAPPY BIRTHDAY TO THE  
 WESTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY**

This marks your Society's thirtieth birthday, HAPPY BIRTHDAY!! The founders laid a good foundation for the Society to grow on. And with the dedicated efforts of many of Weston's citizens, the Society has grown and prospered; not in a monetary sense, but in an historical way. Yes, we do have some money in the bank to help cover our expenses. But we have gained more in the lure of Weston's history by adding to our artifacts, by printing an interesting history of Weston by Dr. Thomas Farnham; by collecting a number of oral tapes of Weston's population; thru events sponsored at the home of the Society, and thru this newsletter. If you haven't been to the Coley Homestead, the secluded home of the Society, we invite you to visit the next time we have an event at the Coley house or the Barn Museum.

**CURRENT EVENTS**

**ANNUAL MEETING — MARCH 21**

The annual meeting of the Society will be held on March 21, at 7:30 at the Norfield Church Parish Hall. A short business meeting will include the nomination and election of Trustees for the coming year. The program for the evening will be an informal discussion with six of our native-born senior citizens talking about Weston as they knew it while growing up. We hope you can make this interesting meeting.

**OTHER EVENTS IN 1991**

Other events at the Coley Homestead this year include:

A weaving demonstration (tentative)	May
The annual Seniors picnic	July
The annual Scare fair	Oct.
A Magic Lantern slide show —	Nov.
Christmas at the Coley house	Dec.

Dates for the events will be announced at a later date.

**CIDER MILL SHED PROGRESS**

We are expecting the final construction plans for the shed this month. Then we will proceed to get the foundation constructed so the cider mill can be moved to its final location. We are hopeful that the adage 'the best takes longer' is true in this case, since it has been over two years ago that we obtained the cider press and began to get approvals to build the shed.

# PICTURE QUIZ



## CAN YOU NAME THIS?

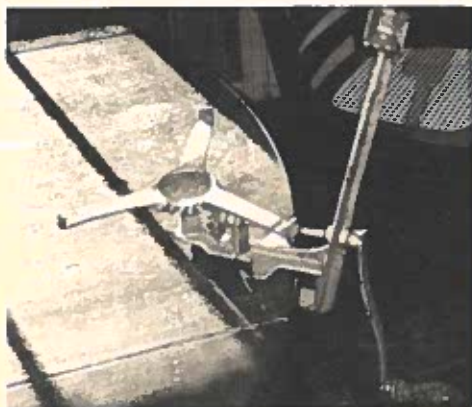
If you can tell what the item above is, send your name and the answer to:

EDITOR  
THE CHRONICLE QUARTERLY  
P.O. BOX 1092  
WESTON, CT 06883

The item in the last picture quiz has not been identified. We did not provide a very clear picture, so we have printed another photo of the item below which gives a better view.

The handle turns the four supports and acts like a centrifuge; but there is no visual means to keep an item from falling off. We will keep looking in old catalogs.

We should say that we almost always know what the item is which we use or this quiz; however, sometimes we are up a stump. This is one of the times.



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Current Events Cont'd. . . .

## THE BARN MUSEUM

We expect to start on the renovation of the exhibit areas this spring. We may have to replace part of the floor which could hold us up for a few weeks.

## THE COOK BOOK

The reception and sales of the Society's Cookbook has been great. We have received good publicity and expect sales to increase. The book is available at the Library, or from the Historical Society. The price is \$6.50.

## NEW ITEMS IN THE MUSEUM

We received a corn sheller from Mr. Jim Daniels. This sheller has the original paint and the name and address of the manufacturer — BELCHER AND TAYLOR AGRICULTURAL TOOL CO. CHICOPEE FALLS, MASS.

## HELP NEEDED

We are still looking for a person to become EDITOR of the Chronicle starting in 1992, or before, an assistant EDITOR. If you are interested, please call the office (226-1804) or Herb Day at 227-6130.

## MEMBERSHIP RENEWALS ARE DUE

With the beginning of our fiscal year on April 1, membership dues for 1991 are due. The dues have been kept at the same level as for 1990. A renewal form will be sent to you along with a letter about the annual meeting.

## IN THE NEXT ISSUE

NOTES ON THE ANNUAL MEETING  
CURRENT EVENTS  
THE STORY OF A HEAD STONE  
PICTURE QUIZ

# WESTON'S HISTORICAL NOTEBOOK

## THE BUILDER OF THE THIRD NORFIELD CHURCH

The letter below is a transcription of a hand written letter from Uriah Ambler to the people of Norfield Church, probably about 1831-1832. (Courtesy of the New Canaan Historical Society).

'To the people of Norfield

Mr. Uriah Ambler wishes to state to you that since he contracted to build the meeting house in this place he thought he could do it for the stipulated price, but on counting the cost of the materials and the wages and board of himself and workmen he found that they exceeded the contract at a very moderate computation. He is now in a feeble and helpless state and has been unable to labour for ( ) month past. He has a wife and four children and is indeed in needy circumstances. In view of the fore going considerations he prefers his petition that you did not wish him to be a ( ) by building your house of worship, and tho he has no legal claim upon you, yet he flatters himself that you will bid his case, and gladden his heart by generously contributing to his necessities. May the house of worship which he has built for you be made the gate of heaven to thou who enjoy its privileges, and may you not fail of a blessing on its ordinances, for want of duly remembering the builder.'

(We we not able to read a few words).

Uriah Ambler was born in New York State where he learned the carpenter's trade and prepared to become a contractor and builder. He married Miss Augusta Henson, a native of New Jersey, and soon after moved to Weston. On April 12, 1831 he bought 2½ acres of land from Samuel Rowland, with buildings, on the southeast corner of Norfield and Weston Road. He paid \$400. for this property. In 1825, the title records show that there was store listed on this property. In 1813, the store was listed as being on the opposite corner, where Eliphalet Coley had a house built in 1830. There is enough similarity in the construction of this house (and the one on the southeast corner) with the Norfield Church to speculate that Uriah Amber also built these two houses. It may be that he incorporated part of the store building into the home he built for himself on this southeast corner. Eliphalet Coley bought the northeast corner from his father, Eliphalet, who lived on Fanton Hill Road. His father bought the land, including the store building, and the old poor house (which stood where the library is), some years before.

Uriah Ambler sold his property in 1837 to Joseph Godfrey for \$1200. Joseph Godfrey sold the property in 1840 to William Buckley who founded a business school in the building. He sold it to his son-in-law, Andrew Jarvis, who changed the business school into the Jarvis Military Academy, which he ran until 1988, when it closed.

Ambler also built the Saugatuck Congregational Church in Westport in 1832. He was paid \$2900. Since the Norfield Church is smaller, we would expect that he might have paid in the range of \$1800 to build this church.

Uriah moved to Norwalk in 1838 and died in 1843 at the age of 37. He is buried in the Norwalk Union Cemetery. His wife passed away in 1894 at the age of 85. Uriah and his wife were Methodists and belonged to the First Methodist Church in Norwalk. Their only son, William, was born on December 26, 1836 in Weston. He became a leading citizen of Norwalk and was a soldier and a prisoner during the Civil War.



Uriah's letter above indicates that he and his workmen boarded locally while building the church. The 'communication' below, which was printed in May, 1830 indicates that the corner stone was laid on April 13; the raising of the house was commenced on April 28 and accomplished on May 3. The church was dedicated one year later, on April 13, 1831.

(COMMUNICATION)

Agreeably to public notice, the Corner Stone of Norfield Meeting House was laid on the 13th ult. and on that occasion, prayer was offered; an appropriate address delivered, and the exercises concluded by singing the 118th Psalm, C.M.

The raising of the house was commenced with prayer, on the 28th ult. and accomplished on the 3d inst, without any diaster to those who were engaged in the work. Although the raising was in progress several days, yet the people persevered in laying aside their ordinary concerns, and in prosecuting the erection of the house, till the show was finished. Thanks, at the conclusion, were returned to God, for the preserving goodness.

Norfield, May 1830.

N.B.A. A collection was taken up to defray the expense of laying the underpinning which was generous, considering the object and the number of the people present. The day was favorable. Our friends from abroad who contributed on the occasion, are requested to accept the thanks of the contracting committee.

(The Address above alluded to, shall be published next week).



## A WINDOW ON THE PAST

On August 19, 1977, Scott Hill talked to Clyde Holbrook, a former minister of the Norfield Congregational Church in the early 1940's. Ruth Lockwood transcribed the tape and put it in a narrative form. Here is what Clyde Holbrook related to Scott Hill:

My original home was in western Massachusetts, in Greenfield. I went to Bates College in Maine. I graduated from there in '34 and then went on to Colgate-Rochester Divinity School.

I came to the Norfield Church as the student minister in 1937. I had graduated from Colgate-Rochester Divinity School and was just entering my graduate experience at Yale University. As it happened, I came down and preached at the Norfield Church. At the same time the Baptist Church in Rowayton was looking for a minister and, since I was a Baptist, I figured I should try the Rowayton Church. So I went down there and preached but, as luck would have it, a member of that church who had previously supported it rather handsomely had died and they felt rather concerned about my ability to raise money. I had been told at the Norfield Church, maybe by Frank or Fred Bennett, those pillars of the church, that if Rowayton didn't want me, to come back so that's what I did. And from that time on I was virtually no longer a Baptist. The professor at Yale who had charge of placing men in ministerial positions was very irritated that I didn't have the Rowayton Church because the Union Theological Seminary sent an older man up who got the Rowayton Baptist Church.

We commuted from New Haven for about a year, often coming down on a Saturday afternoon. During the week we sometimes borrowed a car from a friend of mine at Yale and drove down to do a little calling. Then in the middle of 1938 we moved into the parsonage which, as my wife reminds me, was prepared, within limits I must say, for our reception. They had gathered a number of things there to make it seem a bit like a home. We came with some trepidation to the parsonage but we lived in it until 1942 with various experiences that pertained to the house and the rats therein. It was really a delapidated building and I don't know what insulation it had, if any, but there wasn't very much. We had our first child when we were here at Norfield. He was born in the Norwalk Hospital and we brought him back to this place. We always wondered if either the chipmunks or the rats would get at him, because we have an experience with a roast which my wife rather carelessly left on the refrigerator in what was then the shed. We went to get it and there was not a sign of it. It had been devoured lock, stock and barrel. My wife always made noise before she went in the kitchen to scare any rats that might be in there. It wasn't a very pleasant place to live in to be blunt about it. A problem with the heating was sometimes in the foreground. Water seeped into the basement so a little concrete pit was devised which was going to protect the oil burner. Unfortunately it acted as a receptacle what would hold the water although it was supposed to have been waterproofed. I can still see a number of trustees standing in mutual consultation about what should be done with no answer forth coming except, "So that's the way it is," and other words of similar support.

At that time the church was pretty much as it is today. I don't remember that there was anything you could technically call a parish hall. The town offices were in the building behind the church and the old stables ran across the back there.

The fire department was there and, once in awhile on a Sunday morning, the whistle would go off in the midst of one of my important messages with the result that my congregation was robbed of some of my felicitous thoughts. Weston at that time had a rather small population, under a thousand. We had somewhere between 125 and 130 or 135 members and we considered it a pretty good Sunday if we had 50 or 60 people in the congregation.

The Bennetts were certainly part of the backbone of the church, people who could always be depended upon. Frank Bennett was a butcher and very helpful to the church. He used to get the fire started in the furnace. I can't tell if it was always on a Saturday night but I know he was always there early on a Sunday morning to ring the bell. He and his brother, Fred, used to take the collection. People commented on these two men who were identical. Both of these men I look back upon as really being, very, very fine representatives of the church and strong supporters of the work of the church. Fred I guess I knew a little less well than Frank. Of course I knew their families. Frank's son, the youngest boy who went to Bob Jones University, was in my Sunday School class. I had a small group of boys. Mrs. Nydvedt as she's known now, Ruth played music together with her husband, Thor, who played the flute. I composed a few pieces of music during my stay here which had a limited appeal to our group of three.

There were the Banks, the whole family. There was Father Banks. He was well along in years when I knew him, a very cautious elderly gentlemen. I recall his saying once at one discussion that seemed to be getting heated and his opinion was asked for, he said, "well mebbe, mebbe." There was Florence and she was a delight. She was again a strong supporter of the church and a regular attendant. She had a wit and charm about her that I recall were very pleasing. Willis and Verna lived down at the corner of Norfield and Weston Roads. Willie was usually on the board of trustees or deacons or maybe both. He was there every Sunday also. He and Verna often took us in. I recall one time when were commuting that we came down on a weekend without any thought of staying over Saturday night. Willis and Verna entreated us to stay, which we did. Of course without any night clothes, we were called upon to use theirs. Willis was somewhat larger and I somewhat thinner in those days with the result that Willis's pajamas draped beautifully around my ankles. We got to laughing about them. The next morning Verna said, "We heard you laughing and we thought it was probably because of those pajamas." She had a good sense of humor. She was a wonderful person and an excellent cook.

There was another man who was a pillar in the church. He was a gardener I think on an estate down in Westport, David McBeth. He and his wife and two daughters were quite faithful attendants at church. He was what I would call "doughty Scotsman." One of the stories that was told to me when I first came was that of his experience with J.B. Watson, the voted behaviorist who lived in Weston at that time. Mr. McBeth had gone out on the very Member Canvass and, as was customary in those days at least, many people who didn't have much, or anything, to do with the church often gave us support, a few dollars here and there. So Mr. McBeth, as fortune would have it, called upn J.B. Watson. My Watson was noted for his antipathy to all things religious and I guess he gave McBeth a rather stony welcome. The report has it that McBeth finally, his Scottish

blood being upon, said, "Well, you'll need the church before the church needs you." As fate would have it, if not destiny itself, not too long after that Mrs. Watson passed away. There was the questions of what would be a suitable memorial or funeral service for her. Friends of the Watsons, particularly friends of Mrs. Watson, finally prevailed upon him to have a service and that service was in fact held in the church. Which was a sort of strange fulfillment of Mr. McBeth's prophesy.

One other person that I can remember quite clearly was an older man who was a faithful attendant at church and sat near the front. No sooner would we finish singing the first hymn than he was off to sleep. I don't believe I ever kept him awake once with my preaching.

Ray Fitch was a car salesman in Norwalk or somewhere. It was time for me to get rid of the Chevrolet which we had more or less inherited from my wife's father. Ray was helping us get a second hand car, which he did, a Dodge which we finally used to go all the way to Colorado in. First he let me try out a Buick. I had never driven a Buick and coming up to Weston from Westport, I decided to go as fast as I could for a little way. It really scared the daylight out of me when I got a-going. I was afraid I wasn't going to make the turn at Norfield Corners. I was really speeding along. This was some years ago when cars were much more powerful than most of them are now. That was the first time I have ever tried a Buick and I decided I couldn't afford it. Ray was very good about it, he got me a car and we went across the country in that Dodge.

I remember his wife, Betty, said something that has always haunted me. I'd said something about the ecumenical movement and how the churches were getting together in a rather favorable way. She made an observation I've thought of so many times. She said, "Doesn't it suggest that the churches are weak and therefore getting together rather than they are strong and getting together?" I guess that over the years I'm inclined to think that since Christianity is a minority religion, in a sense Betty was right. It was weakness that brought the churches together in spite of all the talk of strength and all the panoplies of power and authority and all the big theological statements, there is a certain kind of weakness that prompts this and not necessarily great strength or great affirmative action in spite of much of the theological jargon that's gone into the while movement. Betty is the daughter of a minister.

During the second World War I was assistant deputy or something air raid warden. When we'd have these blackouts, it was my job to go down Kettle Creek Road. The greatest danger that I encountered during those evening were dogs. So my contribution to the air effort at that time was somewhat muted. We had a friend down from Yale one time staying with us when the alarm went off. I had to pace up and down. He thought it was hilarious to see me as a deputy air raid warden. It wasn't a very good one but at least I went through the motions.

Jimmy Melton, the singer, sometimes brought us strawberries. He came down one day and I still can remember him saying "You know, I could have been a minister too, I'm so sincere." It always seemed to me rather ironical that he should confide this. So it was possible he had a secret desire to be a minister. He was really very good to us.

A number of people were very good to us. I remember the Brocks particularly. Mrs. Brock was a prodigious worker in the church. It was a very sad thing that their son, Clayton was apparently shot down over the North Sea. Understood he was tail gunner on a bomber or something of that sort. A number of years later, in 1956, we were in England and visited Cambridge University. Just outside the University there is a large American cemetery. There is a reflecting pool there and a little chapel. On one long wall exposed to the elements are the names of all the army, coast guard, navy, air force and marines who died unknown in the defense of Britain against Hitler. There I traced out the name of Clayton Brock. We took a picture of it and sent it to the Brocks and I believe it was some comfort to them to know that some place in a foreign land their son's name had been engraved on its marble plaque. Mrs. Brock ran the church fair dinners and things of that kind for years and years. She was a wonderful cook. She was one of the key people in the church.

John Orr Young proved to be one of the finest supporters of the church in two ways. I guess one way maybe was less significant than the other. He was in the advertising business and he printed up a series of cards and sent them to this friends saying, in short, that there was young man doing a good job at the church and he'd like to meet his friends there. He sent out these cards throughout Weston, all on his own. His daughter was a lovely girl and her wedding was the first I'd had at the church, the first wedding I had as a matter of fact. I was in time trepidation about it but you have to brazen those things through as if you knew what you were doing. Anyway it went off beautifully and the church looked beautiful and so did she. The fee that I was given was far beyond my highest expectations, a real bonanza. It was quite a social occasion and I had dinner with the Youngs. His wife was a very gracious person. She fell in with Christian Science before her death. Because of her sickness I guess she felt that Christian Science would help. I had her funeral.

I don't remember the first funeral I had in Norfield Church. I have a sort of gruesome memory of the undertaker whom I went with several times. I would ride in the hearse with the undertaker. He would drive by cemeteries and say, "we've buried in there and we've buried in there," as though we were talking about streams he'd fished in or something.

In 1942, I went from Norfield to the Westville Congregational Church in New Haven where I stayed for three years while I was finishing writing my dissertation which I passed in '44 but the degree was awarded actually in January of '45 and so I received my PhD. at Yale. Shortly thereafter I became dean of the chapel at Colorado College in Colorado Springs, Colorado and also assistance professor of religion. I stayed there for four years enjoying the mountains and the great out-of-doors. Colorado is one of my favorite states, if not my favorite state. Then I came back to Ohio where I taught at Dennison University in Granville for two years. Later I was awarded an honorary degree from the institution. I then came to Berlin College where I remained until my retirement in 1977. I was chairman of the Religion Department there, also for five years professor of Christian Ethics in the Oberlin Graduate School of Theology and remained there as Wm. H. Danforth, Professor of Religion until my retirement.

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# FIFTY YEARS (OR SO) AGO

In March, 1932, Mrs. Margaret Lylburn wrote an article on Mr. Wilbur Sturges, who was 80 years old when interviewed. We present some of what she wrote below:

'Dignified, erect, and keen with blood of the very earliest pioneers in his veins, Wilbur Sturges, among all the old timers, pictures the real Yankee Weston most vividly.

Mr. Sturges was selected by Professor Hanley of the Linguistic Society of America as an authority on the peculiarities of Yankee speech.

Today he is selected as the best living authority on Yankee Weston. Not only does he remember the detailed happenings of the his 80 year sojourn here, but also the stories of his forebears, the first of whom, John Sturges landed at Yarmouth in 1630.

Of pioneer stock is the Sturges family. 'My great grandfather, James Sturges, came to Weston from Fairfield around 1760 and married Mary Dikeman. They lived on that road running perpendicular to the George Clifford place.

When Mr. Sturges was a boy, home industries and pioneer ways were just about fading from the picture. 'But I do remember that some were still making cloth at home. When I went to school with Harry Lockwood about 70 years ago he wore a light blue homespun suit.'

'Of course, stoves were mostly used at that time, but I can see to this day my grandfather's sisters; Sarah Godfrey and Abigail Bates, who lived in the house now owned by Mrs. John Fitch — I can see them doing all their cooking in the fireplace and Dutch oven. They never used a stove.'

In discussing the liquor question, Mr. Sturges did not remember any details of the very early taverns. 'It was this way in my time; he said. 'At first they didn't have to have any license and the grocery store sold rum — more rum than they ever did groceries.'

Then we had license selling and after that, local option. When local local option came, Weston went dry, so they started up with what they called the 'Jug Taverns' right near the Valley Forge school there was a Jug Tavern run by David Hull.

'We didn't have any wood alcohol in those days, but there isn't anything you've got now can beat New England rum! And I've had it so I ought to be qualified to taste. I'll never forget the way my mouth tasted the next day after a dance over at Captain Billy Sanford's when us youngsters sneaked out twice to the Jug Tavern and each time had a drink of rum.'

'Well, yes, things have changed a lot. In Weston, the biggest business was charcoal burning as far as I see. And they used to raise a lot of corn, grind it into meal, and ship it to the West Indies. Probably there it was made into more rum.'

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## HAVE YOU READ ABOUT THAT OLD HOUSE?

We take this opportunity to congratulate Mrs. Jane Darby on the fine articles she has written on the research she and Lou Bregy did on two of Weston's old houses. These articles appeared in the Weston Forum over the past two months. It is our intention to reprint these in the CHRONICLE later this year. Judy is a recognized authority on genealogy and searching old house titles; and Lou Bregy is our in-house expert on dating old houses based on their construction.

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