



# The Chronicle Quarterly

Fall 1993

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30 Years Ago . . .

## Hurlbutt School Destroyed by Fire

by Karin Giannitti

This fall marks the 30th anniversary of the fire that destroyed the original Hurlbutt School. The single-story brick building, built in 1932, was a sign that Weston had come of age. It replaced the collection of one-room school houses that had served the town since its earliest days.

Up until the 1920s, Weston's educational system was serviced by six drafty one-room school houses located on Godfrey Road, Kettle Creek, Lyons Plains, Norfield Road, and Good Hill Road and Valley Forge. With an influx of

voted to spend \$30,000 for an addition, which was completed a year later.

Hurlbutt served Weston as an elementary and middle school, with students attending kindergarten through eighth grade. In 1950, the ninth grade was added. High school students were sent to Westport to attend Staples High School. As the population increased, the town built yet another addition—East House, which still serves the community. It opened in 1950. South House, where the principal's office is located today, was opened in 1952. With the construction of a junior high school in 1954, Weston was on its way to operating an independent school system.

But the fire that destroyed the original Hurlbutt School changed all that. On Oct. 30, 1963, a milkman was making his early morning run, delivering milk to the school,

when he saw smoke pouring out of Hurlbutt. The building was located at the top of the hill on the elementary school campus, where North House, its replacement, stands today.

At 6:10 a.m. the alarm sounded at the Weston Fire Department. Volunteers immediately responded. But strong winds and a lack of water on site hampered fire fighting efforts. Fred Moore, who is Weston's Fire Chief, recalls that as a young fireman fighting the blaze he and others had to connect hoses to stretch from the Saugatuck River's West Branch, near Cobb's Mill Inn, to the school so water could be pumped from the river.

Although the 31-year-old building was virtually destroyed, the blaze was stopped

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*"After all these years, I still remember the reaction of one little girl, who stood watching as tears rolled down her face." Carol Moore, teacher.*

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newcomers in the 1920s, the population grew and townspeople felt the need for a central school.

In 1927, Horace C. Hurlbutt donated 10 acres of wooded land for a school site. The gift was accepted at a 1929 Town Meeting. The town appropriated \$50,000 to build the new school. It was completed in 1932 and consisted of a single story brick building with four classrooms. The school library also served as the town's public library.

By 1937, the school population had grown so much that an addition was needed. At a meeting in 1938, the town



**Up In Flames** - As smoke engulfed Hurlbutt School on Oct. 30, 1963, volunteer firemen wrestled with hoses and ladders to fight the blaze that destroyed the building.

Photo contributed by Weston Volunteer Fire Department.

# Your Antique House

by Judy Morgan Darby

Let's suppose you found deeds conveying a house on your property more than 100 years ago. You might be tempted to order a plaque from the Weston Historical Society listing the date and original owner's name. Before you call with your order, there are a few things you need to know.

One is that an accurate chain of ownership is only half the proof you need. The other part of your application is a building report.

Fire destroyed many homes that were later rebuilt over the same foundation or nearby. Many colonial homes were remodeled during the Victorian era and give few hints of their original age. So, the age the deeds indicate must match the style and technology used to build the house.

The first step in a building report is to study the location of the house. Land that became the town of Weston was originally common land owned by inhabitants of Fairfield. In 1671, the common land was divided among the inhabitants, who created long lots



The Wakeman Godfrey House, 1831.

stretching from what is now Long Lots Road in Westport to Redding. Settlement was not immediate. Beer's Atlas (1867) is a valuable resource for house historians, available for purchase from the Historical Society. In addition to roads and rivers, homesteads are identified on the maps. When gathering information from the maps, here are two things to consider. If your house is on the map, but the occupant's name is not listed in your chain of ownership, the owner was probably an absentee landlord. But, if your road isn't on the map, then a major rethinking is in order.

A key thing to look for is the siting of your house. Is it set back from the road or on the road? Most early houses were built close to the road, unless there was some compelling reason not to do so. For farmers, the convenience of getting from one's door to the wagon parked on the road took precedence over a lovely setting on a manicured lawn. Also, it was economical to build near the road. It took up less space and left more for farming. So, if your house is old, but is set

back consider that, the road's right-of-way may have changed after the house was built. An example of such a house is 189 Godfrey Road East, built 1831 by Wakeman Godfrey for his bride Nancy Perry. The lot on which Wakeman built was bought 30 years earlier by his grandfather, Captain Daniel Godfrey, a veteran of the Revolutionary War. In those days it was squarely at the intersection of the Godfrey cross highway and an upright highway. When the upright highway was eventually abandoned by the town, the lovely old Federal-style house was left at a curious angle to the present Godfrey Road.

Another clue to its age is the location of its entrance. Before the 1840s, stoves were not commonplace and homes were situated to take advantage of the sun's warmth. The kitchen was where the family spent most of its time so, that room was often on the south side.

After 1840, when new styles in architecture and modern conveniences, such as stoves, were introduced, most homes were built facing the road.

The Godfrey House is a splendid late-Federal house, with centered doorway and windows, five-over-four. The gable ends, which are returned about 18



The Beer's Atlas, 1867

inches, feature lovely semi-elliptical fan lights.

While traditional in design, the builder incorporated a number of innovative features. Sawed post-and-beam framing, rare for this time period, was provided by the Godfrey sawmills. In the kitchen, the enormous fireplace contained an unusual bake-oven. Located on a pier standing some fourteen inches from the back wall of the fireplace, it saved the cook from reaching past a hot fire to take the food out, but it was far enough from any surrounding woodwork that might scorch. The house has an unusual chimney that is split from the base to the attic where the two flues then join and exit as one. Only one other such design is known to exist in Weston.

### Godfrey Genealogy

The Godfrey family descended from Christopher Godfree, who bought land in the Greens Farms section of Westport in 1686. Westport, like Weston, was originally part of Fairfield. Family tradition says he was of Norman descent.

CHRISTOPHER GODFREY, born 1657; died 1715; married Ann \_\_\_\_\_.

Children:

- + i. *Christopher*.
- ii. *John*, b. 1699.

CHRISTOPHER GODFREY, 2d, born about 1685; baptized 17 July 1698; died 20 Aug. 1758; married 11 Feb. 1711, Margery Sturgis born about 1689, died 4 Nov. 1759; buried Westport. Children:

- + i. *David*.
- ii. *Stephen*, b. 8 Sept. 1715; d. 22 Mar 1777, Westport; m. 11 June 1739, Elizabeth Lewis.
- iii. *Sarab*, bapt. Mar 1718; d. 12 June 1756, Westport; m. 3 Feb. 1742, Gideon



Enormous twin maples in front of the Wakeman Godfrey House dwarf owner Kristine Fleisher.

Morehouse.

iv. *Nathan*, b. 25 Sept. 1719; d. 1800, Ridgefield; m. 1st, 11 June 1747, Martha Couch; m. 2d, 24 Jan. 1764, Sarah Nash, widow of Jonathan Nash; dau. of John Andrews.

v. *Eleazer*, b. 15 Mar 1721; d. 1793, Weston; m. 21 Jan 1747, Rachel Bennett, dau. of Deliverance.

vii. *Isaac*, b. 25 Dec 1724; d. 20 Nov. 1790, Westport; never married.

viii. *Ebenezer*, b. 27 June 1727; d. 9 Feb. 1793, Westport; m. 25 July 1790, Mary Taylor, widow of Asher Taylor and also Joseph Gorham, Jr.; dau. of Samuel Gray.

DAVID GODFREY, born 20 February 1713; married 24 June 1738, Fairfield, Mary Silliman, dau. Daniel. Children:

- + i. *Daniel*.
- ii. *David*, b. 15 Sep. 1743, Fairfield; m. 2 Jul 1781, Weston, Salome Finch.
- iii. *Silliman*, b. 1 May 1750, Fairfield; d. 1 Mar. 1829, Weston; m. 1st, by 1771, Mary Goodsell; m. 2d, Mindwell Osborn.
- iv. *Mary*, b. 24 Feb. 1752, Fairfield; m. 24 Jan. 1779, Weston, Squire Adams, son of David.

v. *Jonathan*, b. 23 Dec. 1754, Fairfield; d. 19 Jan. 1842, Weston; m. 22 Nov. 1778 Weston, Mary Rockwell.

vi. *Sarab*, b. 12 Feb. 1757, Fairfield. DANIEL GODFREY, born 30 March 1740; died 4 April 1808, Weston; married 22 March 1759, Weston, Eunice Bulkley, dau. of David. Children:

i. *Grace*, bapt. 27 Apr. 1760, Weston; d. 22 June 1832; Weston; m. 12 Apr. 1781, Weston, Colonel Albert Lockwood b. 10 Apr. 1757, d. 16 Feb. 1846

ii. *Eunice*, bapt. 23 May 1762, Weston; m. 6 Mar 1773, Joseph Gray.

iii. *David*, bapt. 21 July 1765, Weston; d. young.

iv. *Ellen*, bapt. 1 Nov. 1767, Weston; d. 13 Oct. 1822; m. 10 Feb. 1790, Weston, Daniel Dikeman, d. 2 Feb. 1835. Removed to Norwalk.

v. *Daniel Silliman*, bapt. 7 Dec. 1777, Weston; d. 12 Apr. 1829; m. Rachel Andrews, bapt. 7 May 1780, d. 30 Dec. 1861.

+ vi. *David Bulkley*. DAVID BULKLEY GODFREY, bapt. 7 May 1780; d. 7 Mar. 1861, Weston; m. 4 Oct 1801, Sarah Bulkley, b. 23 Dec 1780.

Children:

+ i. *Wakeman*.

ii. *Eunice*, b. 4 Sept. 1807; d. 7 Dec. 1807, Weston.

WAKEMAN GODFREY, bapt. 21 July 1805, Weston; died 11 Aug. 1888, Weston; will proved, 12 Sept. 1888; m. 1st, 31 Dec. 1829, Redding, Nancy Perry, d. 7 Nov. 1837, Weston; m. 2d, 14 Nov 1838, Weston, Huldah Perry, d. 30 Apr. 1882, Weston. Children by 1st mar.:

i. *George Perry*, b. abt. 1831; d. June 1850.

ii. *Eunice Jane*, b. Apr. 1833; m. 1856, Weston, David B. Morehouse.

Children by 2d mar.:

i. *David Gilbert*, b. abt. 1840; m. 6 Sept. 1876, Mina L. Shipman; d. 14 May 1914.

ii. *Stephen W.*, b. July 1843; d. 8 Apr. 1931; m. Mary E. Nash, dau. Herman, b. Mar. 1847, d. 20 June 1926.

Sources: Town and church records of Weston and Fairfield; Jacobus, *The History and Genealogies of the Families of Old Fairfield*.

# Weston Remembers the Jazz Age and Artist John Held, Jr.

by Kathleen Saluk Failla

Last March, Weston rediscovered part of its cultural heritage, when a mysterious stranger arrived in town with a wrought iron sign by artist John Held, Jr. The sign, which was missing for more than 20 years, had been found in a Bethel barn.

With its return to Town Hall the sign rekindled an interest in Held, the Jazz Age artist, who lived in Weston in the 1920s. No artist had a greater affect on shaping the image of the Twenties than Held, whose own frenetic life in Weston mirrored that era.

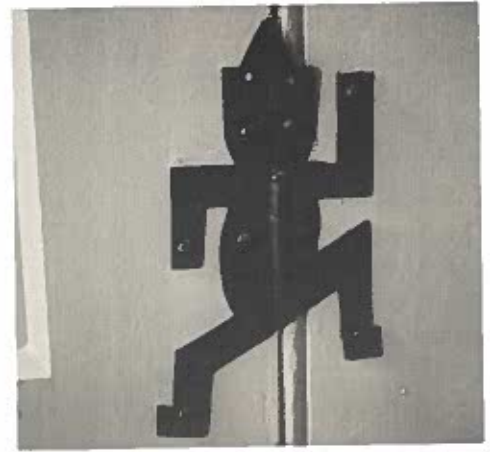
He moved to Weston in 1918, buying the first of two houses he owned here. As a celebrated artist with a lavish lifestyle, he entertained the literary and artistic colony that grew up in Weston and Westport. He illustrated covers for all the magazines of the age, including *The New Yorker*, started by his boyhood friend Harold Ross. He created the flapper, and set in motion a national craze.

From an old forge at his home at 96 North Ladder Hill Road, he fashioned wrought iron signs, hinges and weather vanes, which reflect his sense of humor and affection for country living. One of these signs was sold, or perhaps given, to Weston. It pictures an Indian hailing the rising sun. For many years, it hung at the center of town.

Its return was noted in a *New York Times* article that drew response from people around the country. James Daniel, curator of the art collection at Town Hall, said a Darien woman wrote

him, offering the town a Held weathervane, valued at \$5,000. The weathervane, which features a cow kicking over a bucket, was given to her family in 1925 by Held, who was a house guest.

In a special ceremony to be held later this year, Mr. Daniel said the donor will be invited to visit town hall, when the art work is installed in the meeting room. It will join Weston's rising sun sign and another Held work, a block print, acquired several years ago. "It is just wonderful that this 88-year-old woman decided to give the town this magnificent gift," Mr. Daniel said.



Jim Daniel holds the John Held, Jr. weathervane.



"THEY WANT TO FIX YOUR TIE"



John Held, Jr. (undated). Courtesy of Judy Held

## Atkinson Plans to Increase Historical Society's Role

When the Historical Society's trustees met last April, Jane Atkinson, who had served as vice-chairman, was elected chairman, replacing Herb Day. In an interview, she was asked about her plans for the society.

**Q:** Can you tell me a little about yourself and your family?

**A:** I was born in New Haven, Ct. and raised in Middletown, Ct. My husband, Bob, also a Connecticut Yankee, and I moved here 28 years ago due to Bob's job. I have one son and one daughter and a wonderful granddaughter. (Jane neglected to say that she is also head librarian for the Weston Public Library).

**Q:** Other than the Historical Society and the library, what do you do with your spare time?

**A:** Over the years, I have served on many different boards and committees, including the Zoning Board of Appeals and Building Committee. I am a Justice of the Peace and about to perform my 45th wedding.

**Q:** What are your plans for the Historical Society?

**A:** I hope that we will be able to see our visibility increase throughout the town, and that seems to be happening. Also, I would like to be able to finish all the projects, which are now in the works. I would like to thank the trustees for backing up such a busy person. They are incredibly supportive and do a great deal of work for the society.



**A New Look For the Old Post Office**  
The Adams-Scribner Museum, also known as the Old Post Office and General Store, got a face lift this summer thanks to the town, which hired contractor Gary Samuelson.

He replaced the siding and performed other work, such as installing new window frames. While the restoration is far from complete, things are looking up on the corner of Routes 57 and 53, where the building is located.

### "Christmas At The Coley House"

Dec. 3 - 5

Dec. 3, 6 p.m. Reception for members and preview sale of Christmas handicrafts.

Dec. 4 and 5, 2-5 p.m. The public is invited to view the house and shop the boutique.

Decorations by the Women's Club and Weston Garden Club.

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## Annabelle Remembers 1923. . . The Fall



After a few weeks in New York, it's great to be back in Weston, especially in the fall with all these magnificent trees putting on a show everywhere you look. Some news from the Big City. Did you hear about the new weekly news magazine Henry Luce and Briton Hadden started? They are calling it "Time." My New York friends are all wondering how Calvin Coolidge will handle things as President. Its only been a few months since Warren Harding died so suddenly and Mr. Coolidge took over. One of the big questions is: Will he enforce prohibition? In New York, Gov. Alfred E. Smith has repealed it, you know.

Here in Weston the big item is politics. Republican Harold Burritt and Democrat Edgar B. Perry are vying for the office of First Selectman. There are no women on the ballot for elected office—yet. But Weston does have two women serving in appointed positions. I heard a story about one of them. Mrs. John Fanton, who is on the judicial bench in the town court, recently handed out fines to violators, Fred Davis and Patsy Cavetto, both charged with "harboring an unlicensed dog." Mrs. Fanton fined them each one dollar and court costs. The total assessment was \$15.46. The trial was held in the justice's home, and the prosecutor was David Coley. A reporter for the *Westporter-Herald* seems to have taken issue with the fact the justice was a woman. In a recent news article, he stated, Refreshments were not served, but even at that, all those present claimed to have had the time of their lives, and are going to circulate a petition to have a certain number of arrests made every week so the court scene can be re-enacted." It is hard to believe that now, five years after Congress adopted a resolution asking the states to ratify women's suffrage, there are people who still think it's a joke!

The season is a busy one with so many socials, dances and parties in full swing. The Norfield Grange threw a big party for their Grange neighbors from New Canaan and Easton on a recent Friday evening. They hosted a fine supper. William Wakeman and Frank Ferris provided music for dancing until a late hour, and everyone reported "a most excellent time."

Mrs. Clara J. Coley of Ridgefield and Miss Mary Coley of Danbury spent Sunday with Miss Louise Coley and Mr. and Mrs. David Coley. Mr. and Mrs. Frank Weed and their daughter of Godfrey Road have returned to New York City for the winter.

Mrs. Eli Wakeman, Mrs. T.W. Treadwell and Mrs. John Fanton attended the Westport Bridge Club on Monday afternoon with Mrs. Horace Hurlbutt. And while his wife was playing bridge, T. Walter Treadwell, not a man to be idle for too long, was busy on his own. He killed four copperhead snakes and found a starved dog opposite his home on Monday afternoon.

Charles DeBlandi of Bradley Street just bought a new Buick sport model on the advice of Doc Palmer, who advised it for comfort and handling. With Weston roads in such disrepair, how WILL Mr. DeBlandi make his way around town?

The Fine Arts picture program in Westport should fill the theater, if any picture show will. Manager Thomas F. Flaherty has booked Charles Ray's latest production, "The Girl I Loved," adapted from James Whitcome Riley's story. It is conceded to be one of the finest screen releases of the season.

### Annabelle Pierreux

**Hurlbutt Fire** - continued  
from spreading to other buildings on the school campus, Chief Moore said.

From the recollections of Carol Moore, who taught at Hurlbutt for 35 years, is the image of the fire raging out of control. She recalls waking up to what she described as "a war in progress." The sound of roof tiles exploding, breaking, then shooting off the roof like projectiles as the heat surged, shocked her, she said. As parents and children arrived for what they thought would be a normal school

day, they encountered an almost unbelievable scene. "After all these years, I still remember the reaction of one little girl, who stood watching as tears rolled down her face," Miss Moore said.

James Bowman, who retired after 25 years at Hurlbutt, and who still substitutes at the school, said he was teaching sixth grade at the time. In a move that might have cost him his life, he and one of his students made a dash for his classroom in an attempt to save books. The fire was raging and Mr. Bowman and his student were overcome by smoke, but not before

they saved many books. He continued to use those books throughout his career at Hurlbutt.

Traces of the fire are gone today. Bricks from the original building are buried beneath North House, which opened two years later. Meantime, students attended classes at Temple Israel in Westport. Aside from Mr. Bowman's books, one of the few things saved was a bronze plaque posted in the entrance of the old school. It was retrieved from the ashes and given a new home—a simple rock monument near North House.

## From the Editor:

With this issue, The Chronicle changes editors. This publication has a long history thanks to one individual —Herb Day, who 12 years ago saw the pressing need for putting residents in touch with the town's unique history. Thank you, Herb for all you've done. We dedicate this first issue to you.

As your editor, I come to you with experience as a frequent contributor to the *New York Times* and freelance writer for national magazines. Karin Giannitti, who has long been active in the society, will serve as assistant editor. As a Weston native, Karin has a wealth of information at her fingertips. She came up with the idea for an article on the 30th anniversary of the Hurlbutt fire. The new editorial team includes trustees, Judy Darby, who is a historian and genealogist, and Roger Core, an art director and photographer. Judy's immense knowledge of history is matched only by her technical know-how on the computer. She will use her computer to do the newsletter's layout. Also, she will help by contributing research and by writing articles, such as this month's how-to on tracing the origins of your antique home.

Anyone who knows Roger Core, knows how active he is on a number of fronts in the community. Over the summer, with Roger's help we developed some ideas to give The Chronicle a new look. That's why you will see more photos and graphics. As a photographer, he will help us capture the beauty of Weston.

Kathleen Saluk Failla, Editor



Left to right: Roger Core, Karin Giannitti, Judy Darby, Kathy Failla

## Historical Society Publishes Special Edition Calendar

Weston Historical Society has published a 1994 calendar, entitled: "From the Sea A Days Walke Into the Country," on sale at the Weston Public Library and Weston Pharmacy for \$10. They can also be ordered by calling the Historical Society at 226-1804.



The title was taken from an original deed that laid out Weston's boundaries. The calendars, which make great holiday gifts, feature a variety of vintage photographs of Weston homes and residents, diary entries and historical records. The accompanying text of Weston history was researched by several trustees and written by Judy Darby. Roger Core coordinated the design and publication. The calendars were printed by Thames Printing in Norwich, Ct.

## Scenic Roads Routed In the Past

by Kathleen Saluk Failla

In July, the Weston Planning and Zoning Commission took steps to preserve the country look of Newtown Turnpike, also known as Connecticut Route 53. The town is taking advantage of a 1987 state law that enables the Connecticut Department of Transportation to designate state routes as "scenic roads." The scenic road designation is an attempt by the state to arrest the impact of development, which might turn a country road into a featureless speedway.

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*The law provides that such features as stone walls and mature trees be maintained.*

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The commission has applied for the designation and is awaiting word on a decision from the transportation department. The section earmarked for preservation is a one-mile segment, which would start at the Redding/Weston town lines and flow south to Hill Crest Lane. The proposal got underway after Weston was contacted by Redding, which already has received approval for five miles that would connect with Route 53 in Weston. At the commission's public hearing on July 12, 1993, at Weston Town Hall, residents were told that the designation would not alter Newtown Turnpike in any way. Instead, it would enhance it. For example, if modifications were to be made, the law provides that such features as stone walls and mature trees be maintained. Though the state does not prohibit altering a scenic road, it makes it more difficult and provides an opportunity for public comment.

The scenic road designation may help preserve certain endangered routes, like the Merritt Parkway, which was officially declared "scenic" in May. So far, 16 Connecticut roads have been protected.

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