



The Chronicle Quarterly

Weston Historical Society

Spring 1995

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ANNUAL MEETING - MARCH 16, 1995 SPOON RIVER ANTHOLOGY

*The Annual meeting of the
Weston Historical Society will be held
Thursday evening, March 16, 1995,
in the Community Room
at the Weston Library.*

The meeting will start at 7:30 p.m. All members are encouraged to attend. For those who might have missed last year's meeting (and for those who were there) Roger Core will again be presenting the Spoon River Anthology, and Judy Darby will be updating recording of the Coley cemetery.

The Anthology is primarily a collection of verse in which the author, Edgar Lee Masters, tells the life of Spoon River in the epitaphs of the people buried in the cemetery where he had grown up. As in many small towns everyone knew everyone else and through the gossip, family relationships and successes and failures of the people, Mr. Masters tells his story.

Edgar Lee Masters was born in Garnett, Kansas but grew up in Petersburg and Lewistown, Ill, 'Spoon River country.' He attended Knox College and was admitted to the bar in 1891. He opened a law office in

Chicago and built up a flourishing practice. In 1920 he gave up the law in favor of literature, the Spoon River Anthology having been published in 1915, causing a literary uproar.

Mr. Masters then moved to New York and wrote prolifically turning out poetry, novels, biographies, an autobiography and even a play. Unfortunately his one great triumph could not be repeated. In 1946 he did, however, receive a \$5,000 fellowship, the first to be granted by the Academy of American Poets. The forties were lean years and Masters suffered from great illness. He passed away in March 1950 at the age of 81.





JAMES MELTON

Among Weston's new and famous faces of the 30's and 40's was an American Tenor named James Melton.

Mr. Melton was born on January 2, 1904, in Moultrie, Georgia*. He studied opera in New York with Enrico Rosati and made his opera debut in June 28, 1938, playing the role of Pinkerton in *Madame Butterfly* with the Cincinnati Opera.

* He began his career on the radio and made his concert debut in New York on April 22, 1932.

On Dec. 7, 1942, he appeared for the first time with the Metropolitan Opera in New York as Tamino in *Die Zauberflöte*, and

remained on the roster there until 1950. Mr. Melton also toured the U.S. as a concert singer and later appeared in films. He was described as a "handsome man with a confident stage presence. He had a voice of great beauty but limited power."

James and his wife, Marjorie, and daughter Margo came to Weston in 1937 to make their home in the Peter Thorp house at 89 Steep Hill Rd. Not only did Mr. Melton sing, but he was a collector of old cars. His large garage was filled with antique autos in mint condition. During the War years when gas rationing was in force, James would be seen driving into Westport and beyond seemingly without a care. His car

was electric.

The Meltons moved to Greenwich in 1951. He died in New York 10 years later on April 21, 1961.

(editor's note: As a small child growing up in Weston I was very good friends with James's daughter, Margo. I have very vivid memories of running through their beautiful old home and riding a child-sized train, tracks and all, around and about the back yard. My most spectacular memory is being loaded into an old surrey and driven down Good Hill Rd while James sang the very popular tune from Oklahoma "The Surrey With The Fringe on Top." His beautiful, clear voice was something to behold.)

EMMANUEL EPISCOPAL CHURCH 150 YEAR HISTORY (PART II)

Hanford Nichols, in his quest for the new church to be on his land, had a meeting on the 8th day of January.

The meeting had been warned to be held at the Church on the 13th of the same month in order to vote the Plane. As no warning had ever been seen, and one couldn't be produced at the meeting, nothing was done.

Mr. Nichols immediately began making preparations for building on the Plane near his house in the Norfield Parish. He began digging the basement and drawing timber and stone. He held a meeting, around the first of February, 1845, at his house and formally organized, though not in accordance with the Statute. Edmond O. Sturges was appointed clerk and Hanford Nichols, Treasurer, and five building committee members. They continued their preparations and actually had started building before the next Society meeting.

A warning was issued for a Society Meeting to be held on Saturday, the 22nd day of March, 1845 at 2 o'clock in the afternoon to choose the annual officers of the Society and to dispose of and appropriate funds of said Society. A vote was to be taken on the appropriation of the fair money. Also a vote was to be taken as to whether they would build a new church agreeable to their subscription, designate where, or whether, they would move the location to some other place in the Parish, to appoint a new building committee and sell the old Church and appropriate the monies to building of a new Church.

On March 22, 1845, Hanford Nichols attended the meeting and brought people to vote from the Norfield Parish. Most of these people never did belong to this, or any, Society and had not been to Church in 50 years. Mr. Nichols nominated Woolsey Nichols of Norfield as Chairman. Despite objections about his legality, Woolsey took the chair, not being duly elected, but at the Clerks' request.

Judson Winton then made a motion to admit Eli Winton and others, whose names were on a piece of paper, to become members of the Society. Mr. Nichols also proclaimed he had the names of a number of persons who wished to be members. Despite objections again about legality, Mr. Nichols' list of people were voted in and Hanford started nominating Society Officers. In effect Hanford Nichols had stacked the meeting and had his way. On April 25, 1845, the cornerstone was laid in the new church building by the Rt. Rev. Thomas C. Brownell. The new Society met and recognized Hanford Nichols' subscription to build a new edifice, recognized the land given by Hanford Nichols and W. Treadwell, and recognized the edifice already begun.



Emmanuel Church From Plain Dec. May. 1896



*Marriage of Julia Gjuresko and Robert Studwell
September 21, 1946
at Emmanuel Episcopal Church
by Reverne C. Wilding from St. Mathew's in Wilton*

NOTE: The arches have been removed and the stained glass window, that was donated by Rev. Thomlinson in memory of his wife, has been covered up. The stained glass window can be seen on the outside.



BARNs

One of the most delightful sights while driving through the countryside is that of an old barn.

No matter what condition, we seem to be drawn to the barn's mystique. No matter what profession a man chose, doctor, lawyer, printer, he still needed a farm to feed his household and his livestock. A barn was a natural part of that farm and perhaps it is the closeness to nature and the "simple" life that attract our eye and our heart.

The word barn was originally a word meaning "a place for barely," from the Old English word bere (barley) and æsn (place). Barns date back hundreds of years in Europe. The Americans were credited with putting an entire farm complex under one roof -- stabling horses and cattle, plus being a cornhouse or grange.

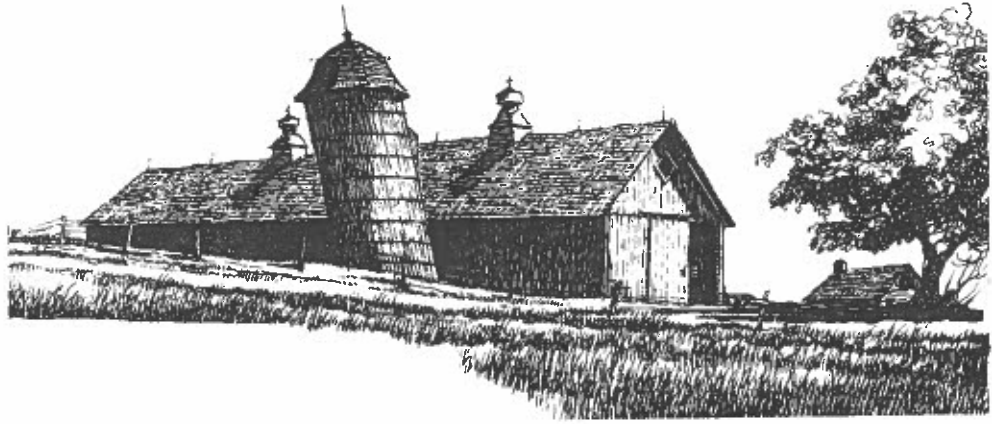
Barns were usually built by men who specialized in framing with many primitive tools, the framing hatchet being the most used. The shape of the barn had less slanted roofs than their European counterparts and higher walls with horizontal siding. Many different styles of barn have been built in particular parts of the country. There are large log barns built on four log cribs with a crossed wagonway running through the center. Many of these are found in Tennessee and the Carolinas. Pennsylvania is famous for its stone barn, and the Georgia barn had clapboard slats along the peak and covering the long cracks in the wall.

Two common roof styles were used most often on the barns. A pentroof was a small roof attached to a building. A gambrel roof made the most use of the space within the roof area. Extensions to the barn were to become more frequent as years passed. These additions were called bays and were used for thrashing areas, grain bins. Later additions were added for wagons, carriages, corn, wood, sheep and swine.

Barn raising was not only for the construction of a barn but usually became a social event. The foundation was most often made without mortar and the main girder (12-18 inches thick) was the heart of the barn. The flooring was usually left loose for a year or so before it is nailed down, but often was never permanently fastened.

The main framed and braced sections (usually four or five) were called "bents" and they were made on the ground. Neighbors came from miles around to help in raising which meant only putting up the framing. The sides and roofing work requiring much more time, was done by the owner. Men came equipped with their own tools and there was always food, drink and entertainment on hand.

Ventilation of the barn not only provided air and light but was a source of decoration on many barns. The Dutch imitated church windows for the cutouts and Germans used "flat hearts," stars and tulips. Brick windows includ-

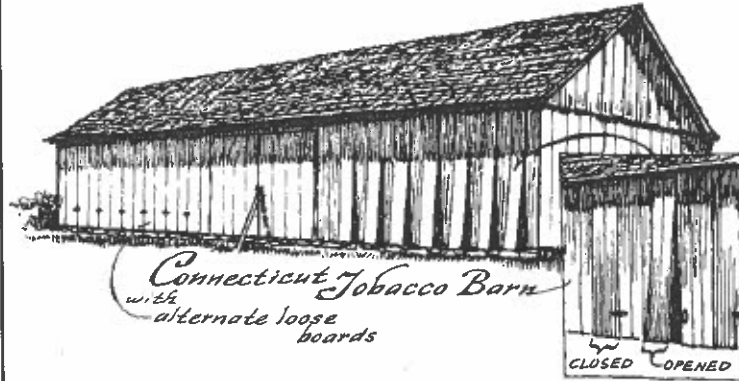
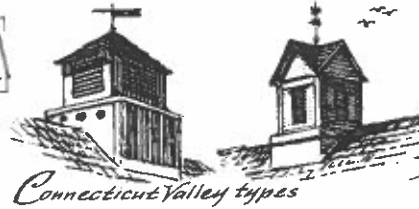
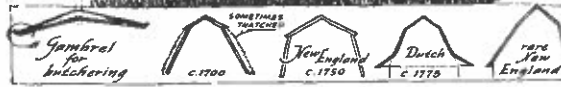
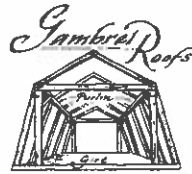


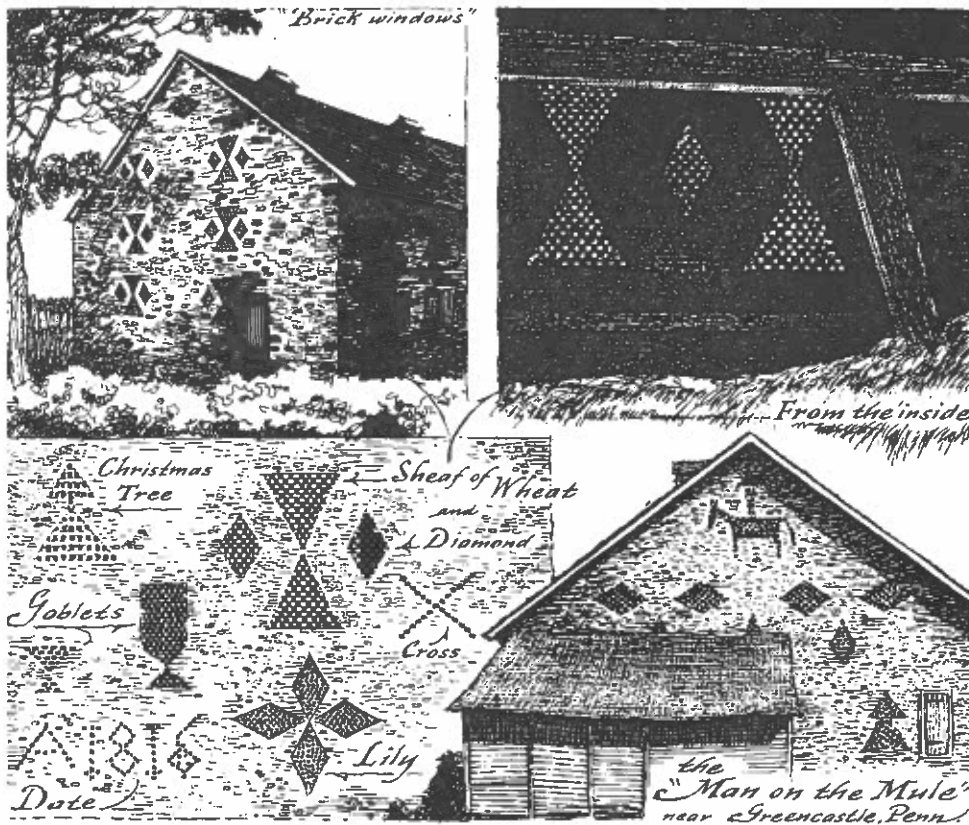
One old Barn may have several ages:

c. 1890 1840 1850 1780 c. 1800 ?



Dating the Old Barn





ing designs in the shape of a Christmas tree, diamonds, goblets and a sheaf of wheat. Unfortunately most wooden barns with the cutout designs have disappeared.

Not until the end of the eighteenth century did it seem necessary to paint wood. In earlier settlements it would have been considered a useless extravagance vulgar and showy to paint a barn. Soon wood seasoning gave way to artificial preservation and the farmer became paint-conscious. Ready-made paint was unavailable so it was made on the farm. The northern farmer found that the red oxide of iron and skim milk with lime made a plastic-like coating that hardened and lasted for many years, giving birth to our famous "barn red." This recipe for Farm Paint was taken from an 1835 almanac:

skimmed milk	4 lbs. or half gallon
lime	6 oz.
linseed oil or neatsfoot	
(cow's hoof glue)	4 oz.
color	1 1/2 lbs.

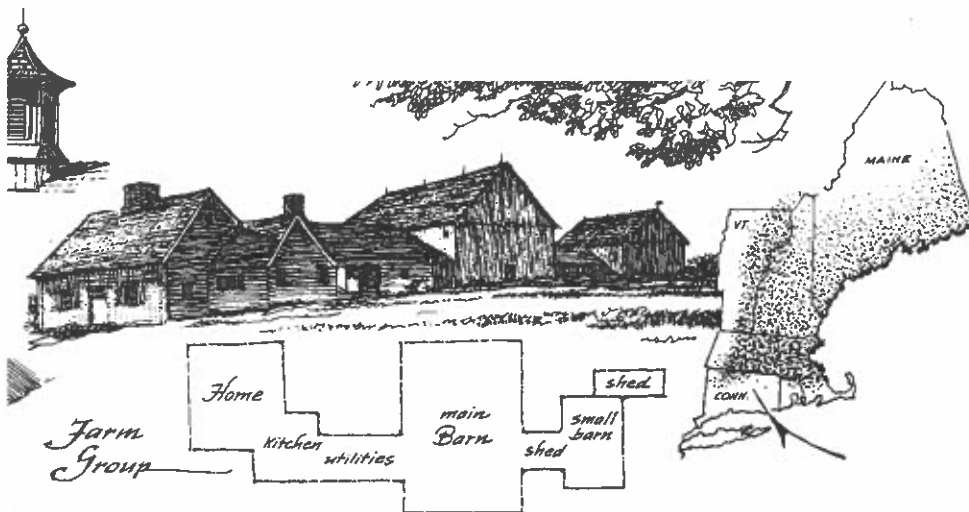
For outside painting, add 2 ounces of slacked lime, oil and turpentine.

Last, but not least, is the crowning glory -- the weathervane. A barn without a weathervane looks rather naked, but the early barns did not have decorations of any kind. It was part of the farmer's religion not to decorate anything -- least of all their barns. The very first weathervanes were socklike pieces of cloth moving in the wind.

These windsocks gave way to lightweight wooden pieces in the shape of an arrow or a painted hand. Sometimes fish or whales were used in barns near the coast. Later the vanes became so heavy that they could not work but in the strongest wind. During the 19th century the ornate weathervane became vogue. Some designs included tiny men sawing wood and ducks with flapping wings. Unfortunately these became so complicated that they were less than accurate, and simple designs returned.

Our love affair with the barn seems to be ongoing. We love the gray ones, the red ones, and those made of stone. We even love those that are slowly decaying and falling down. As we are in the "age of vanishing barns" it is fortunate so many artists have captured their essence in paintings, photos, and books.

NOTE: Barn Illustrations have been taken from the book *An Age of Barns* by Eric Sloane.



Annabelle Remembers . . .

1923, Winter/Spring



The snows are beginning to melt, and I am anxiously awaiting signs of Spring. The Holidays, as always, were wonderful seeing old friends and sharing time with family.

The Westporter Herald printed the names of students who had perfect attendance for the month of January. At the Upper Parish School Irene, Walter and Albert Rattay and Emerson Burritt were recognized. At the Norfield School were Charlotte, Clayton and Lillian Brock, and Frederick Waterbury. Clarabelle and Florence Lockwood, Helen and Emma Fanton, George and Walt Fancher all had perfect attendance. At the Lyons Plain School Earl and Clarence Beers, Margaret and Rose Gjuresko were the commended students.

The Dance this week at the Weston Hall was well attended by all the neighboring towns. The music was provided by piano, violin, cornet & drum. A "djer Kiss" compact was given to Miss Mabel Patchen for holding the corresponding # in the lucky number dance and Miss Lizzie Adams received a necklace for the lucky number given at the door. Refreshments were served and money cleared will be used to start a fund to paint Norfield Church.

Walter Brown Wilson of New York bought the summer home of Allen Dawson, formerly owned by Howard Beers of Good Hill Rd. Mr. Dawson was many years a critic for the Globe and the Tribune. The house has been remodeled into a fine residence with all the modern improvements. He will take ownership April 1 and will make Weston his summer home.

William Samuelson is suffering at Danbury Hosp. from a broken jaw from an accident in the woods. The neck yoke broke, the team ran away, and the wagon struck a tree.

Roland Gifford & Richard Coleman were installed in the order of the Red Men in Norwalk.

Miss Helen Budd visited over Sunday w/ Miss Mary Kramer in Springdale.

Charles Barnes is driving a new horse, and Linsley Corsa has purchased a new Ford truck.

PETER THORP HOUSE

The house at 89 Steep Hill Rd. was at one time owned by James Melton, but the history can be traced back to the year 1739, the year it was built.

Peter Thorpe owned the land, but the Brown family was the owner for the longest duration, 1840-1889. (The 1867 map of Weston confirms James Brown to have been the owner.)

At the turn of the century it was used as a woodcutters house and owned by William Coleman. Gladys Clark bought the property (120 acres) in 1927. She describes the house as a "dilapidated pre-Revolutionary house -- with evidence that it was originally a 'salt box' which had been added to." The road originally passed right in the very front of the house but when Mr. Melton wanted to purchase the property he wanted the road moved. Mrs. Clark went to the town and a town meeting was held and approval given to move the road. Gladys donated the land in front of the house in order to make this possible. The Clarks were the people who gave Steep Hill Rd. its name. A carriage shed that was across the road was moved to where the garage now stands. It was later used to store some of Mr. Melton's fine cars. Until 1925 the only source of water was the well at the front door.

In 1937 James Melton and his family moved into the house and made several changes, always retaining the original beauty of the old house. The Meltons sold the property in 1954.

Dr. Aaron, the current owner of the property, spent many hours researching the history of the house, and we thank him for sharing his work with us. The Aaron's have also made changes to the house



but have preserved the beauty of the original building with its huge cook's fireplaces, complete with bread warmer, large oak ceiling beams, and old oak flooring. During the renovations, a carpenter who was removing a large closet uncovered a brick wall in which was placed a grindstone. Chiseled on the stone was the image of a candle and holder, the same cutout used on the shutters. This cutout was once used to indicate the building was used as a tavern but there seems to be no evidence of that. It is, however, one of Weston's oldest and most charming homes.

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HOMESTEAD UPDATE

So many wonderful improvements have been made to the Coley Homestead during the past few months. The house has had a complete sanding and two new coats of paint. New shutters, now green, adorn the house and the new outdoor lights illuminate our new look at night.

The cider shed has had a new coat of paint and the broken windows in the house have been replaced. The board is researching quotes for work on the carriage shed, the roof on the cow barn, updating the fire and burglar alarms and a new walkway coming in from the parking lot. Much done and much to be done.

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Letter to the Editor

We received this nice note at Christmas Time from Edwin J. Phelps.

He writes "as a founder I am extremely pleased at all the activity that has developed in the last 10 years."

Thank you, Mr. Phelps. It was nice to hear from you.



WESTON COON HUNTERS with their coon dogs. Picture probably around 1900. Man on the left is carrying an old Civil War rifle. This picture was taken in the Valley Forge area.

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HISTORICAL SOCIETY PUBLISHES SECOND ANNUAL CALENDAR

The Weston Historical Society's 1995 calendar, entitled: "From the Sea, A Days Walke Into the Country", is now available at the Weston Public Library and Weston Pharmacy for a cost of \$10.00. The calendar can also be ordered by calling the Historical Society at 226-1804.

The calendars will again feature a variety of vintage photographs of Weston homes and residents. The text was written by Herb Day, Gary Samuelson and Judy Darby. Editing was done by Jane Atkinson and design done by Roger Core. The photos were selected by the Board of Trustees of the Society and by Herb Day.

Order your calendars today while the supply lasts. They make great gifts for family and friends.

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9 Christopher Hill
Weston, CT 06883
(203) 762-9208

Karin Giannitti
Assistant Editor

Roger Core
Art Director, Photographer

Tad Dillon
Typist

Custom Printing & Graphics
Design and Production

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12 LORDS HIGHWAY EAST
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