

The Chronicle Quarterly

Weston Historical Society

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SUMMER CAMPS IN WESTON

There were several summer camps for children here in Weston in the early 1920's and 1930's.

The first camp was established by Gertrude Jelliffe Perry in 1916.

She bought 10 acres of farmland on a plateau, above and on the east side of Newtown Tpke about 1 1/4 miles north of Godfrey Rd. Mrs. Perry's summer home was in Fairfield and the campground was used just by her family.

Sometimes there would be as many as 20 people in tents. There was one permanent rustic building for storage.

In a recent edition of the Chronicle we told you about a second camp located on Newtown Tpke. This was the "Toltec Boys Camp" which later became "Singing Oaks Day Camp" which operated until 1987 when the property was sold for private development.

A third camp was located south of "Singing Oaks" on Ladder Hill. It was a boys camp named "Camp Saugatuck." In April,

1926, Mary Taliaferro of New York City purchased the original Fitch farm (53 acres) from William Robinson. In 1930 Ms. Taliaferro sold the camp to her husband George P. Weddle. The Weddles built the dam and dredged out the lake. The camp boys played baseball and other games on the big field which is now a lake. Creating the lake destroyed a section of Ladder Hill Rd. which is why there are North & South sections. Mr. Weddle leased the camp to the Weston Field Club in May of 1948 and later sold it to them. The camp remains today for children of members of the Club.

In the early 1930's the Y.M.C.A. had a boys camp on the river near Valley Forge. The grounds were leased or borrowed from Bridgeport Hydraulic Company but the camp had to close when the reservoir dam was completed. The Girl Scouts of America opened "Aspetuck Camp" in 1939 along the Aspetuck River.

John & Helen Wessels came to Weston from New York City in 1921. They purchased the Elizabeth Mead Farm located at 159 Georgetown Rd. The Wessels loved the land and wanted to share it with city

people who could not afford the mountain and beach resorts. In 1924 John and his sons Albert, George & William, built three of 20 cabins. They advertised in the "Bronx Home News" and the camp became a great success. Fathers would leave their families at the camp and join them on weekends. John (or Pop) Wessels would drive the housewives into Georgetown once a week to shop at Connery's, the A&P and Bonsignore's.

Pop built a spring-fed swimming pool whose water always tested pure. He also constructed a community recreation building for parties, games, special affairs and dances every Saturday night. Many romances between city and country folks sprang up, resulting in eight weddings. The camp had to close in W.W.II with gas rationing and other problems. Some of the cabins being outmoded were torn down and others were fixed up into year-round homes that are still lived in today.

(ed. note: This is a condensed reprint of an article written by Arthur James Hoe for The Weston Forum several years ago. With the advent of summer we thought it was well worth repeating.)



In 1954 Peter Travostino bought Toltec Camp and converted it to "The Singing Oaks Day Camp" for both boys and girls. In 1968 Peter and Ree Meehan bought the property and continued to run the camp facility until 1987 when the property was sold for private development



In 1920s Wallace Greene Arnold of New York bought a number of parcels of land between Newtown Turnpike and Godfrey Road East and combined the more than 100 acres into campgrounds where he owned Toltec Boys Camp.

JIM HOE AND THE DUESENBERG



*1930 Duesenberg Model J Dual-Cowl Phaeton (Barrel-Side).
Jim's first Duesenberg, purchased for \$275.00. Just sold for over \$1000,000.00*

If you have ever used the expression, "it's a doozy" you were actually talking about the Duesenberg automobile (Duesy), by far one of the greatest of all cars produced in America.

The Duesenberg was the creation of two brothers, of the same name, who were among many mechanical creators of the late nineteenth century. Their machine, combining flawless craftsmanship with engineering brilliance, is one of the most valuable automobiles in the world.

Jim Hoe of Newtown Turnpike in Weston is one of, if not the finest, mechanics of the Duesenberg car. Jim was born in 1913 on a farm in Bedford Hills, New York. He came from a mechanical background; his family having been in the printing press business for generations. As a small boy Jim was dazzled by fancy cars and racing cars. His father owned a 1910 chain driven Mercedes Benz which Jim would pretend to drive sitting on his dad's lap.

Growing up on a farm, Jim drove his first car, a Model T, about the age of 10. In 1925 he went to visit relations in North Dakota. They had a Model J Duesenberg which impressed Jim greatly. From that time on he was a real fan of the "Duesy."

All through school he hoped one day to own one of the great cars or at least work on one. However, Jim's life would take many turns before his dream would be realized. Upon graduation from school Jim decided to see what the world was all about.

For the next several years Jim worked at a hotel and a ranch. He worked at a mine in California as well as becoming a life guard. He worked at Boeing as a mechanic, he worked as a steel sharpener and finally ended up at Sperry Gyroscope in Long Island where he worked as a mechanic and engineer for electrical trans-

formers used on gun turrets.

With the advent of W.W.II the price of cars dropped tremendously and Jim was able to buy his first Duesenberg for \$275 (see insert). The car needed a complete overhaul but that was okay. At the end of the War there really was not a lot for the people to do at Sperry and Jim took a leave of absence to work on cars.

His father had come for a visit and wanted a car. They found one which they bought "in the basket" -- all torn apart. Jim's former schoolmate, Bradley Mortin, had a Mercedes SSK racing car he wanted rebuilt. An engineer at Sperry had polio and asked Jim to fix up a car for him with manual controls (the brake, the throttle and the shift all had to be worked with the hands, not the feet). More work came in as well and Jim never went back to Sperry.

In 1945 the Sports Car Club of America which had its headquarters in Westport, was sponsoring a meet at Longshore (then privately owned). Jim brought his overhauled Duesy and won the acceleration competition, on the tree lined drive, hands down. The aim of the Club at that time was to reestablish road races around the country. Jim stayed with it several years and won most of his competitions. In 1948 & 49, the town fathers of Bridgehampton and a town in upper New York decided to have road races. In his spare time Jim had made a light bodied car for these races and hill climbs. His car was a crowd pleaser as he took the muffler off while racing and it made a great roar.

Road & Track magazine and Car & Driver featured Jim and his expertise in many articles earning him a fine reputation. He began to hear from people all over the country and around the world. Jim also had found a supply of 19" tires, used on the Duesenberg, on Long Island after W.W.II. He had cards printed and mailed them around the country. People in those years drove cars such as the Duesy to and from work so there was a need for tires as

well as service.

Jim decided to come up the Merritt Parkway and set up shop between New York and Boston where many Duesenbergs were owned. He bought property on Rt. 7 in Wilton for a garage and found his house in Weston in May 1948. He was building a four-car shed on the Weston property, and selling tires and found he liked working at home. He obtained a business license from the town of Weston and sold the Rt. 7 property.

People began to contact Jim and he served as an agent for buying and selling Duesenbergs as well as servicing the engines. He once had a man drive in his driveway from Arizona and asked him for a complete over-

haul. Jim's clients have included Thomas & Arthur Watson of IBM, Perry Eggbert of the American Locomotive Co., and many prominent businessmen.

Jim tells of Perry's chauffeur coming over to test drive one of Jim's cars. Jim's son took him out and under the railroad bridge in Norwalk they hit a bump. Unbeknownst to them they had hit the fuel pump switch located under the dashboard. Soon the car came to a complete stop. Jim got a frantic call and had to go to their rescue. He flipped the switch back on and the car continued on. Jim made the sale.

He once had a call from a man in Santa Barbara, Calif. who wanted to buy a Duesenberg. Jim knew of one in Massachusetts which had been taken apart. He got the car, brought it here, and put it



Photo-Roger Core

Jim Hoe (seated) and Gayle Smith taking a break from work on a 1937 Dual-Cowl Phaeton Model Duesenberg.

together. In the meantime the gentleman in California had heard of another Duesy and Jim was able to purchase this one as well. Jim and his wife both drove one of the cars out to California. The gentleman had a Duesenberg he wanted to sell. It had been driven by Elizabeth Taylor in the movie GIANT. They drove the car back with a U-Haul attached to the back.

Jim has many fond memories of his clients and the beautiful cars he has rebuilt. He is currently working on the engine of a 1937 Duesenberg with his assistant Gayle Smith. Gayle came to work for Jim right after high school and has been with him ever since. Their work has included Rolls Royce as well as other late model cars. Most of the Duesenbergs today are in private collections and are trailered to shows rather than driven. Jim says he has

had a wonderful life working on such a glorious machine.

(ed. note: In addition to his mechanical work on cars Jim is an avid genealogist and has spent many hours researching various people as well as collecting books on the subject. This he does in his spare time. We thank you for sharing all of this with us.)



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ROGER CORE



Our newly elected President, Roger Core, standing in front of the Coley Homestead's graceful apple tree.

Roger Core, the new President of Weston Historical Society, came to Weston in 1966 with his wife Ellie and their 5 children. They moved from San Francisco and moved East so that Roger could work in New York City advertising. They lived at Singing Oaks until they moved to their current home on Weston Road in 1969.

Roger hopes, during his term, that there will be even more volunteer involvement. There appears to be a new wave of interest in our building's new paint job and good press from the Forum. He hopes to expand our activities such as our Christmas Open House and Senior's Picnic. We will have a children's haunted house this year - not so scary for the little ones. Roger also would like to see an egg rolling event at Easter time.

There will also be a new thrust this year with a concentrated effort to decorate the interior of the house to reflect its vintage. Roger hopes people will volunteer to help with various projects such as landscaping, decorating, The Chronicle, special events and

administrative help.

As well as his new duties for the Society, Roger is active in advertising and photography. He has been involved in many town activities; Little League, Boosters, Kiwanis, Warm-Up Fund, Red Cross, Cultural Events Committee and the Republican Town Committee. His wife Ellie has been a teacher in Weston for 25 years.

We also welcome three new Trustees. Pat McLaughlin has joined us and brings her decorating talents. Dave Bushley will serve as our Treasurer and Beverly Zill will be our Public Relations rep. The new Trustees join Joe Spetly, Rodie Thompson, Eileen Buckley, Judy Darby, Barbara Jonsson, Bill Correll, Gene O'Hare, Lou Bregy, Kathleen Failla, Julia Studwell and Helene Weatherill.

If you would like to share your talents with us, please call Roger Core at 226-0088 or any of our Trustees.



Several years ago a small committee job of making an herb garden outside the bar Bea Crane-Baker was in charge of establishing from the area. The Aspetuck Valley Garden Club project and we were in need of help.

Three years ago Sal Gilbertie helped den and suggested plants. The women in the husbands cut down some bushes and trimmed up to the light. They prepared the soil and mperennials such as iris and peonies along the t birdbath was already in the garden area, as we which were both incorporated into the design ous herbs were planted including cat nip, chi savory, broom and ladies mantle. A rose bush was a common sight in colonial gardens. Some have been made to accommodate the wood cl

The Garden Club each Spring come needed. They water the garden throughout th additional weeding if necessary. If any of our helping please contact Jean Drever at 226-829

HISTORY OF F



The Coley Barn at the Weston Historical Soc

HERB GARDEN

Members set about the Coley homestead garden but soon moved as in need of a pro-

club to design the garden Club and their branches opening it some staggered of the garden. A grinding stone, following spring varragon, thyme, also planted as this nges in the plantings

weed and replant if umer months and do ers are interested in



Members of the Aspetuck Valley Garden Club spring cleaning the Coley House Herb Garden. L-R Barbara Martin, Joyce Erwin, Birgitta Ljungdahl.

PLANTING ON DISPLAY DURING JULY, SUNDAYS 2-4



Photo: Roger Core

showing a very informative museum display about the history of farming in Weston, curated by Herb Day.

EMMANUEL EPISCOPAL CHURCH 150 YEAR HISTORY (PART III)

*The new church building, having been started by Mr. Nichols, was helped along by the parishioners, who donated \$50 each. The lumber was cut in the local woods and sawed at a mill set up at a temporary dam built below Davis Hill.

The new church being finished, Bishop Browell consecrated the building on October 28, 1845 and named the church Emmanuel. On June 3, 1848, the first recorded meeting was held in the basement of the church and four years later the actual adoption of the name "The Parish of Emmanuel Church" was made.

In 1895, to mark the 50th anniversary of the church, the interior was remodeled and refurbished in the Gothic Revival style. Around the turn of the century Mrs. Thomas Treadwell (her father-in-law gave the land for the church) used to make tea in bone china cups and dainty cakes which she served to friends and neighbors on the church lawn. A table of handmade gifts raised a small amount of money. These events were the beginnings of the Church Fairs.

For Emmanuel's Centennial year, Steven Dahanos made two paintings of the church as it had been in 1845. One painting was used for the cover of The Saturday Evening Post and the other was donated to Emmanuel. Many events were celebrated throughout the year. The next few years saw the building, and the addition of the Parish Hall and renovations going on inside the church.

On the occasion of the 150th year of the Emmanuel Church, we wish you all a very very Happy Birthday. We know you will continue to grow and serve the needs of our community. We look forward to the entire history of the church being compiled by Cubby Hickcox.



Letter to the Editor

The 1995-96 membership drive has been very successful. By the end of May 156 members have renewed their memberships with \$6065. Also they contributed an additional \$2230 for the special contribution to help us cover our extra-ordinary costs.

The Historical Society also did a town-wide mailing hoping to attract new members. The response to this far exceeded our hopes. We have now enrolled 116 new members who have contributed \$4680. An open house tea to honor our new members was held June 25, 3-5

The Trustees want to again thank everyone who participated.

Eileen Buckley
Membership Chairperson



HELEN BUDD MASON LONGEST RESIDING WESTONITE

Helen Budd Mason

Mrs. Mason, of Kettle Creek Road, is the daughter of the late Mabel Sturges and Oscar Budd. She has lived in Weston since 1904

A former publicist and home economist, she earned a bachelor of science degree from Connecticut State College and a master of arts degree from Columbia.

Mrs. Mason taught in Weston for 20 years before joining the Women's Reserve of the U.S. Army, serving from 1943 to 1945.

In 1945 she became a food columnist for the Newark newspapers. She was also an assistant in the home

economics department at Columbia from 1947-49.

After a stint as assistant equipment editor for Parent's Magazine in New York and equipment editor for McFadden Publishing, she became a publicist for General Foods, a position she held until retiring.

Mrs. Mason was chosen for Who's Who in American Women in 1965.

She retired in 1966 to care for her ailing husband, Donald Mason.

Mrs. Mason has been a publicist for both the Wilton and Weston Historical Societies and is a member of the Daughters of the American Revolution.

Weston Forum May 24, 1995



ADDRESS GIVEN BY HELEN BUDD MASON WESTON MEMORIAL DAY GRAND MARSHAL MAY 29, 1995

Thank you for this honor - something I never expected to happen to me.

During a conversation with a friend the other day she remarked that Weston is Paradise'. I'd like to tell you about the Paradise Weston was in the early 1900's, a Paradise quite different from today - the Weston of my youth on a fairly typical farm.

Weston's population was considerably less than 1000 - and everyone knew everyone.

There were far more open spaces, only dirt roads, four 1-room schools, no electricity, no stores and many, many more birds and flowers than now.

In the open spaces there are now houses. Back then there were only five houses on Kettle Creek Road when I was born. Dirt roads changed with the seasons: Spring mud which was okay with horses, but often difficult when cars arrived. In summer there was dust and in

winter snow and frozen ruts (with the arrival of Fords it was rather fun to learn to ride the ruts). Snow removal was done by a crew of farmers and hired men who got \$1.00 a day, the going price for a day's work on the farm, too. With shovels they cleared the main roads, and all too often, no sooner did they finish than another snow storm came.

Children walked to the little 1-

room schools - they never heard of buses! And the teachers had to get to school early to start the fire in the old stoves so it would be at least warmish when the children came.

There was no electricity - only oil lamps and lanterns. No stores, and about once a week the horse was hitched up and there was the drive to Westport or Norwalk for staples, etc.

Farm life in those early days was a busy one and ours was fairly typical. My parents were hard workers: most of our food was raised on the farm. My father had cattle,

even chicken. We had three orchards - two apples and one just peaches and plums. There were several cherry trees, too. Mother's rows of canned things along a cellar wall was really spectacular - visitors were often invited to view it, and probably given a can of their choice to take home. I remember, in another part of the cellar there was a large pile of home-grown potatoes.

In summer we had an ice box in the pantry. A neighbor and my father cut large cubes of ice to fill the neighbor's ice house and we went up the road with a wheel barrow to get ice when needed. In winter the pantry was cold enough.

In those five houses on Kettle Creek there were no children our ages - our nearest playmate was cousin Jimmy Coley and he was a mile away. Mother's older sister, Florence, had married James Coley - and now that house is the Weston Historical Society.

Mother's and Aunt Florence's mother was born in what is now the

Wilton Historical Society - so I feel very close to both Societies. It is interesting that Mother and Aunt Florence taught school in about all the Wilton schools - one you all may know, the little Schoolhouse Cafe at Cannon Crossing.

Our parents were truly wonderful. After a hard day's work they were always ready to play games with us - old card



Photo-Herb Day

Helen Mason riding as Grand Marshal of this year's Memorial Day Parade

pigs, and chickens and a large vegetable garden. We had our own smoked hams, and bacon smoked in the little smoke house out in back. In winter these were hung in the cold attic - they made a wonderful fragrance up there. We had home-made sausage and head cheese - I wouldn't eat that - and I didn't know about calories then, either.

Mother canned vegetables, fruits -

games, dominoes, or Mother would play the organ and we'd sing old songs like My Old Kentucky Home, Old Folks at Home, and Love's Old Sweet Songs. We never felt deprived of the play facilities available today...we had too much to do! My parents were great readers and they saw to it we had books which were often Christmas or birthday gifts and I remember two magazines we subscribed to - Youth's Companion and Little Folk. There was no public library, just a bookcase of odds and ends at the schools, mostly by Horatio Alger - and I read every one of them.

The family often went for walks weekends in the woods. My father knew the names of every tree and Mother every flower. We had tree, bird and flower books, predecessors of Roger Tory Peterson.

In Autumn we all gathered chestnuts from the long row of trees on our property - later to roast with apples in the big fireplace. One outstanding walk was at night with a lantern. My Father had seen a Luna moth and thought we would enjoy such a trip. We walked deep into the woods and there it was, a thrilling moment!

Sunday rides with a team of horses were fun and one special one was driving from the very start of Easton Reservoir - when it was but a trickle - to the very end. I remember I lost a special hair ribbon on that trip.

At home we had lots of chores - some seasonal, such as keeping the two wood boxes filled for our two stoves, one a Franklin that never went out all winter, the other in the kitchen, and my father had to start that each morning before breakfast.

Other chores included getting the eggs, picking berries for Mother's preserves and in the Autumn, grapes for jam and jellies, filling lamps and keeping the chimney bright, and learning to use the washing machine and the wringer

The flowers I miss most were those on Kettle Creek and Norfield Road. Bloodroot, a big patch grew by Kettle Creek's brook - just a few left. I haven't seen Meadowsweet, Steeple Bush or Pink Lady's Slipper for years. At Norfield brook there was a large patch of lovely, fragile Anemones. There were Closed Gentians and many others. I wonder if today's children still

sound, dive for insects or maybe a mouse. And now we don't even have the delightful chorus of Peepers in the Spring!

One job that I liked one year was husking corn after it had been cut and stacked in the big cornfield on Kettle Creek and among the bright pumpkins. I'd sit on an upturned bushel basket and pull apart the husks with a contraption of bone and leather (now at the Weston Historical Society). I'd remove the husk and soon fill a basket of bright yellow corn. Not a soul would go by on that dirt road, but once in a blue moon an airplane would go over and it was a thrill. More often I'd surprise a nest of mice which



Helen Budd Mason with her 1923 class of students in Weston where she taught for 20 years.

1st row - Clayton Broch, Fred Waterbury

2nd row - Myron Waterbury, Charles Daugherty (featured in the Chronicle Quarterly, Vol. 13, No. 1), Lillian Broch, Estelle and Marguerite Canyfield.

make burdock baskets?

Wonderful bird songs I've not heard for 25 years: the Bobolinks that used to line Kettle Creek's telephone lines and repeat their names; Whippoorwills at dusk also repeating their names, and the Partridge's Bobwhite'. After supper I used to like to sit at the edge of the meadow south of our house and watch the Night Hawk make his huge circles, then suddenly, with an odd

escaped to another corn stack. This job was a perfect setting for an 11-12 year old dreamer.

This is only part of my story - I have so many, many happy memories of my childhood. I wish every child could spend at least a year on a real farm. My brother and I had a truly wonderful start in life in that farm family - Weston's early 1900 Paradise.



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Karin Giannitti sitting in front of Bi-Centennial quilt donated to the town from the Weston Historical Society, in 1987.

SIGNATURE QUILT

In 1986, the year preceding Weston's Bicentennial, Sylvia Bowles and Lu Harper, trustees of the Weston Historical Society, wanted the Society to participate in some way during the town celebration. Sylvia envisioned a quilt which she thought might be auctioned at the gala dinner dance.

A committee of local women interested in quilting convened and decided on a signature quilt. Sylvia designed the center block with the weather vane and chose the blue material. With the help of Lu Harper, Sylvia cut the triangles and readied them for signing. As a vehicle for signing the triangles, Sylvia and Lu put together a quilt show at the Coley House, home of the Weston Historical Society. The show was a resounding success and signatures (from old and young) were purchased for a quarter. With all the signatures gathered, Sylvia pieced the quilt together. Members of the committee and many of the Senior Citizens of Weston spent several weeks quilting.

When completed, the quilt was so beautiful that the committee felt it should be donated to the town to be hung in Town Hall instead of auctioned. Mark Harper and Karin Giannitti presented the quilt to the town at a ceremony held at Town Hall. The quilt was taken down so that the Fraser Panels could be installed. The quilt is being freshened up and will find a new home at the Weston Library.