



The Chronicle Quarterly

Weston Historical Society

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A SPECIAL CORNER OF WESTON

by Jeanne Howes

(Ed. note)

The following article, written by Mrs. Jeanne Howes of Weston, December, 1987. Part I December, 1987. Part I will be featured in this issue of the Chronicle with Part II in the next issue.

Mrs. Howes was born in Massachusetts and is a graduate of Mt. Holyoke College with a Master's Degree. In 1942 she married Charles Howes, a native of Connecticut, and they moved to Weston in 1951. Jeanne has written a book on the circus, The Howes Circus Story, detailing the circus 75 years before Barnum bought it. She started the organization "S.T.A.R." in 1952 and served on its board for 10 years, its President for two, as well as being senior writer for Save the Children. Mrs. Howes served as the Democratic registrar in Weston for 10 years and is a member of the Melville Society, having written much about Herman Melville.

Mrs. Howes enjoys Scrabble and her husband Charles who has been involved with meteorology for 60 years and writes a column about our local weather for The Weston Forum. We thank Mrs. Howes for her interest and hard work putting together this interesting history of our northern corner.

This is a fascinating but neglected chapter of Weston history - the story of our northwest corner which some people still call "Georgetown," and its Swedish settlers.

Actually, this part of Weston is but a small part of the Georgetown area which also embraces for the most part adjacent corners of Redding, Wilton, and Ridgefield.

Because of its close connection to the busy village at our border, some people have been confused into thinking that this place lies outside of Weston. Not so. Our special corner has always been contained within the bounds of Weston. Unlike the commercial and industrial parts of Georgetown, it remains residential. Residents here have always paid Weston taxes, and some have always paid



Weston taxes, served our town devotedly in various capacities and over many long years. However, close proximity to the border towns influenced this tip of Weston to develop in a separate way from the rest of Weston.

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As a paperweight, a photo of the Swedish Covenant Church and its first pastor, Anders Nordlund, in 1905. The church is now a private residence.

DR. THOMAS FARNHAM TO SPEAK AT ANNUAL MEETING

The annual meeting of the Weston Historical Society will be held on Thursday evening March 21, at 7:30 in the Weston Library Community Room. Our guest speaker will be Thomas J. Farnham, historian and author of the book, *Weston: The Forging of A Connecticut Town*, published by the Weston Historical Society in 1979 as part of its celebration of the U.S. bicentennial.

Dr. Farnham will be telling us about the second edition of our book which he is now completing. As so much has happened to change Weston since the 1940's, Dr. Farnham decided to use this time period as a starting place for his new book.

A resident of Pollocksville, North Carolina, Dr. Farnham was formerly professor of history at Southern

Connecticut State College. He is the author of *A Child I Set*

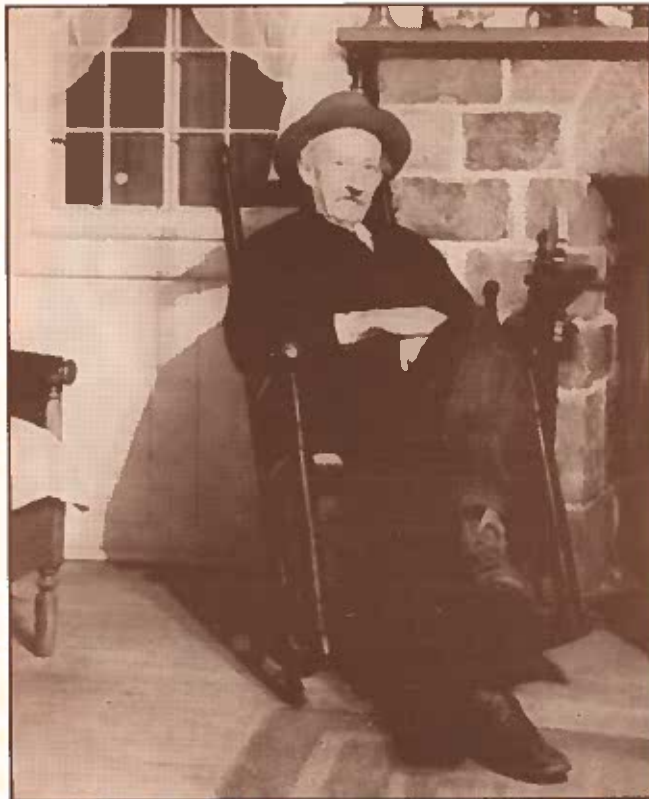


Much By: A Life of Nathan Hale and of *The North Caroline Regulators*. In addition, he has also published articles in such journals as *New England Galaxy*, *Connecticut Review*, *Arizona* and the *West and Louisiana History*. The lecture will provide members and friends a unique opportunity to hear about the more recent history of the town as well as a sneak preview of the anticipated book.

Please join us for this interesting evening with Dr. Farnham. There will also be a short business meeting and refreshments will be served.



LYONS PLAIN FOLLOW-UP



Frank Lyon sitting in his home on Lyons Plain Rd. A descendent of Captain Ephram Lyon who was a soldier in the Revolutionary War, Mr. Lyon was known to most of his neighbors as someone always there to help and as the man who brought the comics to the Gjuersko children. Frank had three children of his own, Mort, Willis and Minnie and owned one-half of the duplex situated right on Lyons Plain (currently being remodeled) Photo courtesy of Julia Studwell

THE EBENEZER MOREHOUSE HOUSE - 1861

by Herb Day

The Society recently made a plaque for the house at 479 Newtown Turnpike. This is the home of Mr. and Mrs. Ernest Albin Jr. This house originally stood across Newtown Turnpike from its present location and was built for Ebenezer Morehouse in 1861. The date is marked on a beam in the basement.

At one time the Morehouse family owned somewhere around 2000 acres in this part of Weston, from just south of Blue Spruce Circle, north to Redding (including part of Redding), west to include all of what is now Blue Spruce Circle, and east down to the Saugatuck river which is under the reservoir. This land was inherited by sons and daughters, or sold to others over the years, *continued on page 7*



Ebenezer Morehouse House - 1861, now owned by Ernest Albin, a descendent. The house was moved from across the road in 1960 just before Mr. and Mrs. Albin moved in.

STONEWALLS

Any New Englander who has ever tried to dig a garden or plant a tree can attest to our most prolific crop -- the rock. Rocks seem to be everywhere and in all sizes and shapes. However, Yankee ingenuity, as usual, found a way to use these rocks for all types of building from homes, fireplaces, and the wonderful stone wall.

Stone walls run through the New England landscape, along roadsides, through woods and beside fields. They are so commonplace that we forget what an incredible work they are. Silent and gray, they have lasted for hundreds of years as relics of old-time husbandry. These walls marked the boundaries and confined the animals of the farmers who were the original settlers of the land. However, the stone walls are not only monuments to antique agriculture, but they brought measure and reason to the land. Although more casual structures could have been used, the farmers made works of extraordinary effort and performance, bringing order and design that has lasted 200-300 years.

The main ingredient in the stone wall is gravity. If properly built each rock sits squarely on the ones below it, and as long as gravity keeps pulling on every stone, it will stay put. The first step in building the wall is the proper equipment. First you need time and ambition. Secondly you need a pair of heavy gloves with a good grip for slippery stones. Then you should have a good pair of steel-toed boots to protect your feet as you are bound to drop a boulder on them at least once during your work.

John Vivian in his book *Building Stone Walls* states that "there is no such thing as a half-built stone wall. It's either a wall or a stone pile." To get from the pile to the wall takes a lot of lifting. A cubic foot of rocks weighs the better part of a hundred pounds. A small decorative wall only 3 ft. high and 2 ft. wide and 20 ft. long weighs some five tons or more, and it comprises a thousand or more average-sized stones.

Depending on the area of the country in which you live will determine the type of rock you will find. Most of New England has igneous rock,



the hardest and densest rock, usually granite, formed underground and exposed, or deposited, by the glaciers. Although not perfect, these rocks can be used successfully for a wall. "Good" stones have three or four flat sides, but igneous rocks are usually rounded but can be used successfully after chiseling.

Now that you have your rocks, you should lay out string where you want the wall to be. It is wisest to dig out topsoil so that the bottom layers of rock rest on the underlying subsoil. Next lay out your "batter boards," stout stakes hammered into the ground to mark the four end corners of the wall. These stakes should be several inches higher than the wall - then run with twine that is at the level you wish for the top of the wall.

Large irregular shaped stones are best for the trench underground, saving any flat rocks for the top layers. The first course, as for those that follow, should be a bit lower in the higher out at the ends creating a slight "V" so that the wall leans into itself. Keep the best flat face of each stone facing out when possible, being sure each rock is placed solidly on the ones below. Keep leveling the top as well as the sides as you go.

Now the wall is built, you need an end. Save your best rocks, nearly rectangular and even thickness for this job. End stones should have at least one good square corner and top stones should be the largest you can handle. Corners can be even more complicated using extra long rocks that extend into the length of the wall.

A well-built wall needs little annual care. Some stones that have been knocked off by weather or visitors, may need to be replaced. Cut back any vines, poison ivy, or brushy plants that invade the wall and force stones apart. Do away with any woodchucks who have taken up residence. If you have used mortar, check for damage and dig out old mortar and replace. You may want to finish off with chiseling your initials in the wall for a final touch.

This is just a very brief overview of building a stone wall using perfect stones that are hard to come by. It is a huge job that requires brains and brawn, but the results are rewarding, with the end product lasting for hundreds of years. It is hard to imagine our landscape without these great works of art.



A SPECIAL CORNER OF WESTON

by Jeanne Howes

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Also, it should be noted, there have been exciting moments here when legislative efforts at times, sought to tear off this part altogether from its proper Weston roots. These attempts failed. But the ambivalent struggle adds more color to our story of the corner of Weston that almost got away.

BEGINNINGS

In the earliest days, life in this section, then called "Osborn Town" must have been similar to that of the rest of Weston. In the Osborn graveyard still standing on Old Farm Road, the oldest stones are crumbling, but one which is still barely visible reads as follows: "In memory of Mary, wife of William Osborn, died Jan 6 1790 in 82 yr of her Age". Next to it, a broken stone marks the grave of William Osborn who died in February 1795.

Also, in that time and place, a general store operated by Burr Gilbert and Isaac Bennett sold provisions for the farmers. Sales of knives, molasses, lumber, rum and salt, saddles and oxen were duly recorded in pounds, shillings and pence. The store is long forgotten, but those family names have left a permanent mark here.

Another reminder of that period was found in the attic of the old Betts house where Mary Fox resided, now occupied by the Scott Parry Family. It's an antique clay bottle glazed in brown and stamped with the name ORRIN H. OSBORN. Once a container of milk or cider, today a mute witness to the life that was here.

The Betts house, the Osborn houses and cemetery are clearly shown in the top square of the Weston map of 1867. This area was still sparsely settled, but within the next fifty years there came such an influx of Swedish settlers that Osborn Town came to be known as "Swede Town." These Swedish people were the only

immigrants to settle as a group in our town - another distinctive feature of our Weston history.

JELLIFF'S WIRE MILL

Several small industries had ready sprung up in other parts of town, and in this corner, as the old 1867 map shows, Aaron Jelliff had established a wire factory. This fact is important to Our Story, as it was the wire industry which attracted the



Anders and Augusta Gustafson, grandparents of Gertrude Walker, former town clerk. A circa 1915 framed photo given to the Society by Jeanne Howes.

Swedes, many of whom were skilled machinists to come here to find work in America.

Jelliff's wire mill produced riddles and sieves. Riddles (not the guessing kind) were large coarse sieves or ash-sifters for saving reusable coal when shafting out the ashes. Products also included coal screens against which shovelfuls of hard coal were thrown to get rid of the coal dust.

From notes preserved by the late Rudolph Jacobson, a long time resident of our area, the quaint and primitive method of operation at the Jelliff Mill is described:

"The motive power used in this shop was a one man power tread mill. The treadmill was on the outside of the shop, south side. It was about twelve feet in diameter and six feet wide. It was built with treads to step on. The weight of the person inside the wheel stepping on the treads turned it and furnished the power to run a saw and several small machines."

"The wheel was operated by Abraham Dreamer, a veteran of the Mexican war. It was a great treat to the boys of fifty or more years ago to see Uncle Abe walking in the wheel, never reaching the top." (From The Wilton Bulletin, August 24-25, 1983.)

Not surprisingly, considering that peculiar treadmill, Jelliff's wire mill went out of business. But an earlier established wire mill, where Aaron Jelliff had learned his trade, now flourished and continued to expand. This was the Gilbert and Bennett wire factory just over the line in Redding, which ceased operations in June, 1989.

As the Gilbert and Bennett manufacturing company evolved from a Weston enterprise, and played the dominant role in changing the development of Weston's "Georgetown" corner, a brief account of its origins and early growth is essential.

HORSEHAIR SIEVES

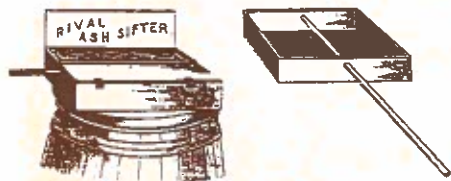
Benjamin Gilbert who was born in Weston in 1789 tried a number of jobs working with a shoemaker, also in a tannery currying the hides to make them supple. One day in 1818 as he looked at a pile of discarded horsehair, he had a bright idea. This wasted material could be woven into a fabric and made into sieves. His wife thought that was a capital idea. She wove some strands on her handloom and Gilbert tacked the fabric to a hoop shaved from a sawed strip of wood. Now they had a marketable product. Gilbert's sieve business

egan in Weston as a cottage industry with housewives weaving the long strands and husbands making and mounting the hoops.

Next, thrifty Mr. Gilbert invented a "picking machine" to untangle the short matted hairs so they also could be put to productive use, and his business grew.

THE OLD RED SHOP

Then in 1830 he set up a small factory on Weston's doorstep, using water power drawn from a small Weston pond above the mill. Where Sasqua Trail is now



Ash Sifters

located next to that pond, there were vats for cleaning and sorting hog, horse and cattle hair. Water from the pond flowed down a wooden flume to turn a great water wheel which powered saws, looms, and the new picking machines.

The original building, called "The Old Red Shop," had two floors. Downstairs long strands of hair were woven into sieves which were peddled to housewives and



Wire Sieve

farmers for sifting flour, meal and grain. Upstairs, picking machines separated the short hairs which were then steamed, curled, wound into hanks and sold for stuffing mattresses, carriage seats, and Victorian horsehair furniture.

Sturges Bennett married Ben Gilbert's daughter and became a partner in the enterprise. Not long afterward, fine wire became available, and these astute businessmen improved their sieves by making them out of wire instead of horsehair. They turned out the first wire sieves

on a carpet loom in 1834. Thus was born the woven wire business in America.

Now the factory could produce many new products - wire screening for windows, poultry netting, ox muzzles, pie and cheese safes, and the aforementioned riddles which Aaron Jelliff copied for his Weston factory that failed. Long before the Old Red Shop was torn down in 1869, the industry had spread out into several new buildings along the Norwalk River on Weston's Wilton and Redding borders.

At the very time that Weston's small industries began to go out of business and most of Weston returned to a rural agrarian way of life, this top corner of Weston was pulled by the magnetic force of the Gilbert and Bennett wire factory into the industrial age.

When the Danbury and Norwalk rail line came by in the 1860's the factory owners built a Georgetown rail depot. The railroad made it very convenient to bring in needed supplies and to transport their ever growing lines of wire products to new markets. It also brought in new workers.

SWEDISH IMMIGRANTS

Exactly when the first Swedish families came to Weston is uncertain, but at least one family was here by 1865. Within the next twenty years enthusiastic reports to relatives in their homeland encouraged many to follow. Swedish sailors found it easy to "jump ship" in New York and make their way here. One young seaman was so excited he got off in Virginia to the wrong Georgetown before he found his way north.

As many of the Swedes were skilled and committed to a strong work ethic, the mill owners were glad to employ them. Factory representatives went down to the docks to recruit these and other Scandinavian immigrants. The Andersons, Berglunds, Borgesons, Carlsons, Dahlbergs, Ekstroms, Forsbergs, Gustafsons, Hansens, Jacobsons, Jaderlunds, Johnsons, Nelsons, Olsons, Petersons, Quists, Samuelsons, Vidmarks, and Wahlquists all found a secure place to work and many continued at the wire mill all of their lives, some attaining positions of high responsibility. Many of their third and fourth generations are still living in Weston.

Fifteen years ago, when the contents of the Quist house (once the Old Lockwood home) on Georgetown Road

was sold, I was pleased to purchase an old framed portrait of a typical old Swedish couple sitting outside of their Weston home. This large, hand-tinted photograph in a curved frame covered by convex glass shows a man and wife seated on wooden kitchen chairs placed near the wellhouse. It is not a stiff formal portrait, but a relaxed domestic scene, natural and unposed. The woman in her house apron concentrates on her knitting. The old gent, wearing his Sunday hat, white shirt and suspended trousers peers through his glasses at the newspaper he holds.

When I showed it to Gertrude Walker, our former town clerk, she said, "Those are my grandparents, in about 1915. I must tell you their love story. Years ago in Sweden young Anders Gustafson fell in love with cute and lively Augusta Borg. But one day they had a frightful quarrel, and she said she never wanted to see him again. Heartbroken, Anders decided to come to America and he left."

"Not long after, Augusta repented. She blamed herself for the trouble. Now she made up her mind to come to America to find Anders, although she had no idea where he was. She wrote to a friend who lived in Brooklyn asking her to meet her when she would arrive."

"By a stroke of luck, this good friend happened to see young Gustafson on the street and told him the news. So, it was Anders, not the girl friend, who came to meet Augusta. They were married soon after and decided to come to Georgetown."

The old families, the Osborns, and Betts, who were already employed in the wire mill, no longer needed large acreage for farming. Newcomers were happy to buy off the extra land for a cheap price. Those who had worked as ship carpenters now helped the others to build their houses, working late after long hours at the factory.

As relatives and friends arrived from the old country, extra rooms were added and land further divided to accommodate them. No longer a farming community, this part of Weston formed part of a little rural village encircling the factory. While the men toiled at the looms, the women kept house, raised the children and tended a vegetable garden and chickens, sometimes a pig or cow.



LETTER TO EDITOR

To the Editor:

I also enjoyed our discussion and really appreciate sending me the copies of the Weston Historical Society Chronicle Quarterly. Enclosed is a donation to the Weston Historical Society to continue your efforts to preserve the memories of Weston. As someone who grew up on Lyons Plain (I'm glad Mr. Mansbridge settled this issue for us.) I feel privileged to have known many of the old Weston families and their children.... You can take the boy out of New England but not the New England mind set out of the boy.

I lived on Lyons Plain from 1937 to 1961 at 50 Lyons Plain and 56 Lyons Plain. After college at UCONN (Electrical Engineering/Mathematics) I moved to Southern California, Northern Virginia, and have been in Annapolis Maryland the last 20 years. However, virtually every year we are back in Connecticut with our extended family for good times and family occasions. I still call Lyons Plain my real home.

After reading the Fall issue it brought back my memory of meeting Helen Keller and her companion near a coal fire stove in the Westport train station when my dad, Frank, an electrical engineer, took me to New York City to his workplace just after WWII. I can remember not knowing who she was and her companion tapping on her hand as the small group around the stove asked her questions. It wasn't until years later when I delivered flowers to her home that my mom, Alba, gave me the history of her amazing life story.

Chance meeting with interesting Weston people occurred often when I grew up. I remember my mom one day when I was a Junior in high school how I knew Amy Vanderbilt?? (She had stopped to use the phone after a flat tire.) I was amazed when I found out the nice lady who would give me a ride, in her Nash Rambler, to Staples High school most days was Amy. Since it was a walk to the bus stop (in the 1950's) I often hitchhiked on the way to the bus stop. I always got a ride to the old Staples on Riverside avenue because so many

people went the to train station in the morning.

When I delivered flowers for Fillow Flower company I finally realized how many famous people lived in the area.

This was a special issue to the Castiglia family. I will send copies to other family members who remember the stone house and "Sun Dial Farm" on Lyons Plain Rd. My Uncle, Bruce Wilkins, recently shared his surprise on receiving this quality publication.

When I was young I probably hunted and fished in virtually every nook and cranny in Weston. Hunting and fishing was a major boyhood activity for me because it was hard to get enough children together on Lyons Plain Road to play baseball. As a result of knowing Weston's geography so well I was hired by Fillow Flower Company as a flower delivery person; and this helped with expenses in high school and College.

Karin, after our conversation I thought some more about Cedar Lane and I remember your brother Rickey, Bob Walton and Sandy Lawson who I believe also lived in that area. We didn't know each other well until High School because I lived just over the town line and attended Bedford Elementary. I don't remember seeing Rickey at the Staples reunion last month. Tell him hello from me after 40 years. Smile.

You are absolutely right about history and memory... I thought some more about the quantity of wine my family made. The five or six barrels of wine were more like 50 gallon barrels, so 250 to 300 gallons is probably a better estimate for a good grape year.

Our family was very self sufficient as many families in the area were. I remember during the early '40's we had fresh veal that Mr. Arcudi would butcher, chicken, occasional duck, fresh milk, butter, mozzarella, ricotta, suprasod, sausage, cream, milk, home-made grape juice, current jellies, all types of vegetables preserved from the garden, dandelion salad, vinegar, cider, apples, pears, some peaches and other items I just forgot about.

When I grew up at the end of the depression we had many of the family living at the "big stone house" known affectionately in our family at

the "big house". Included as periodic residents from the late '30's to the early '50's were my Grandfather, (Domenic); my Great-grandmother (Marianna born in 1856); my Grandmother, (Virginia); my Aunt Marion Sorisi-Castiglia ; my Uncle Charles Sorisi; my cousins Marcia & Carla Sorisi; my mom Alba Deleo Castiglia, my dad Frank; my brother Dennis; my Aunt Laurie Lachat-Castiglia; my Uncle Leon Lachat; my Aunt Virginia Wilkins-Castiglia; my Uncle Bruce Wilkins and my cousin Jeffery Wilkins. Ooops almost forgot my Great Aunt Concetta who lived there from 1914 until the early '50's then lived at 52 Lyons Plain until she died in her mid nineties a few years ago.

While we all didn't live there at the same time there generally were 10 to 14 people living there during most of 1940's. In fact my Daughter Carla Bagdon Castiglia, husband Tony, and our grandchildren Danielle and Tony slept in the same area of the house I did when I was a baby until last year.

One family story that I remember in addition to the dead horse, buried next to the stone wall in the back field, is the one about the day my grandfather shot at a deer. He stood on the back porch with his 41 caliber Swiss Army rifle a relic from Garibaldi's war in Italy in the late 1800's and took a bead on a deer near the old bridge over the Aspetuck River. My guess perhaps almost a 300 yard shot. After he shot, someone in the family, maybe my Aunt Concetta, and my dad thought they saw the deer fall. A few of the family went to investigate and surprisingly two deer had fallen. The large caliber rifle had gone through the first deer and killed the second deer my grandfather had not seen at the extreme distance.

While we now have many deer today when I grew up we had very few. Although the occasional one would bother our garden there were not the herds that exist today.

There are many other funny stories to tell ... remind me to tell a few parrot stories if we some day get a chance to meet..

Thanks again for your article and for listening ... Sorry I just ran on...

Noel Castiglia
Annapolis, Maryland

MOREHOUSE HOUSE

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so that today there is much less land presently owned by the Morehouse descendants. Much of it was farmed and cleared fields could be seen in all directions. There were woodlots for lumber and firewood. The Morehouses raised cows, pigs, and chickens. Some of the land was tillable for improved pastures and hay fields. They were farmers in Weston for over 200 years.

Ebenezer's house was built next to his brother David's house, which was built in 1858. This house is the home of Mrs. Minerva Morehouse Heady.

Next to Ebenezer's house was a barn which stood about where Blue Spruce Circle road enters onto Newtown Tpke. The 1867 map of Weston shows these three buildings, whereas the 1858 map just shows the house built in 1858.

Ernest Albin inherited the house from his mother and father, W. and Mrs. Ernest Albin Sr. He is a great, great, grandson of Ebenezer Morehouse.

This house was moved across the road in 1960, when the land was sold for development. No changes have been made to the house except to add a back porch, to replace the original porch which had to be removed to get the house around the large pine trees on the property.

SANDY O'BRIEN AT HOME WITH MAX



One of our newest and most avid volunteers is Mrs. Sandy O'Brien. Sandy came to us from California where she lived for 10 years. Previously she had lived in Arizona for 23 years and was born in Missouri. Sandy's husband Mike was born and raised in New York City so that this was a move home for him. In searching for a new home Sandy felt there was something that attracted her to Weston.

Sandy's "obsessive" interest in history led her to the Historical Society. She spent two days in the library reading all about the area and after seeing an article in the Forum about the Society she called to volunteer her help. She has helped with Christmas Open House and the Scare Fair and membership mailings. We hope to be seeing a lot more of her in the future.

The Chronicle Quarterly

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

Karin Giannitti
Editor

Roger Core
Art Director, Photographer

Tad Dillon
At the Keyboard

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Design and Production

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*You are Invited
to The Annual Meeting
of the Weston Historical Society*

*Thursday, March 21, 1996 at 7:30 p.m.
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Public Welcomed

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STONEWALLS

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

SANDY O'BRIEN - VOLUNTEER

