



The Chronicle Quarterly

Weston Historical Society

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ANSON KEENE WESTON NATIVE, FIREMAN AND FRIEND

Anson Keene was born in Weston in his father's house at the northern corner of Weston Road and Broad Street. Anson's father Charles (or Charlie as he was fondly known) moved from Westport to Weston in 1899, and became Weston's mailman for 32 years "plus five or six months." He also raised two sons, Harold and Anson. Charlie came from a family of 14 children, including two sets of twins (both sets died). Charlie's parents came from Germany and settled first in the West, as cattle ranchers. However, the winters were so severe that they moved to Westport and became onion farmers over in the area of the Red Barn in Westport. That whole area was originally onion farms. The Keene

family built many houses in that area, as well as the bath houses at Compo Beach and the brick buildings on Wilton Road down by National Hall.

When Charlie started delivering the mail, the Post Office was in Westport where the current National Hall (formerly Fairfield Furniture) is now located. Charlie had three horses which he used for the mail. One horse was used to go to Westport to pick up the mail and come back. One horse was used to go all around the reservoir, and the third horse would be used to go down by the Red Barn and then back to Westport. He made as many as 500 stops in a day, and often picked up medicine in Westport to be delivered as well as the mail. Charlie also brought workers up from Westport to work at the axe factory on Lyons Plain, a cider mill up by the reservoir, various foundries located around town and various farms. The workers would stay for the week and Charlie would bring them back to Westport on Friday afternoon.



Photo by Roger Core

Anson Keene - Weston Native

In the winter, Charlie would often have to walk out in front of his horse to get through drifts of snow on the roads, as they were not plowed in those days. One year he used his sled to deliver mail for 66 days in a row up around the reservoir. He said the winters then were "pretty fierce". He always had to warm the bit before he put it in the horse's mouth so that it would not stick. All of this Charlie did 6 days a week.

In the early 1900's, Charlie switched to the Model T to deliver the mail. Apparently every Sunday it was the family job to change the bands (an early version of the transmission) on the car due to their wearing out from so many stops and starts every day. Despite all the work Anson

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Home of Charles Keene located at the north corner of Weston Road and Broad Street - visible in front of stone wall (circa 1910)



The Keene family posing on Broad Street. Charles and his wife, older son Harold and Anson. (circa 1910)

COLEY CEMETERY

There has been a great deal of publicity concerning the Coley Cemetery, located on Rt. 57 just south of the Broad Street/Goodhill intersection. Progress is being made to restore its grounds through the efforts of many wonderful volunteers. Although the true origin of the cemetery is still in doubt, it is believed that it was a grave site for undesirables (paupers, slaves, and Indians) who lived in Fairfield, before Weston broke off and became a separate town. At one time it was thought that Norfield Church owned the site, so in 1991 Norfield quit claimed the property to the town in the hopes that it would be cleaned up and maintained.

On April 4, 1991 the Board of Selectmen established a "Weston Cemetery Study Committee" composed of seven members, for the purpose of reviewing ownership of the cemetery, reviewing the condition and the upkeep, determining available burial sites, investigating the historical nature of the cemetery, and recommending a plan of use and management.

Some interesting details were brought to the committee meeting on July 10, 1991 by Maryann Root, title searcher. It was reported that a cemetery for undesirables would normally have been about 10 miles from the center of town, which leads to the possibility that it may have been originally from the



Headstones in Coley Cemetery before the cleanup



Hydrangea located near the Coley family plot at the Coley Cemetery

town of Fairfield. Prior to 1900 the cemetery is referred to as the "old burial ground." After 1900 there is a reference to the "Kettle Creek Cemetery" or "Norfield Cemetery." In 1924 the reference became the "Coley Cemetery" which it is still called today. After much research of town records, however, no evidence was given that the ownership of the cemetery was by the Coley family.

In 1993 Judy Darby and Herb Day, both trustees of the Weston Historical Society, began mapping out the cemetery. They made measured drawings of sections approximately 50 x 50 feet. Inscriptions on the stones were collected and numbered to correspond with appropriate stones. It was difficult work because of the terrain, the uneven placement of the stones, and the terrible condition of the cemetery.

This past summer Mrs. Williams spoke to Mark Harper who is in charge of the new Millennium Committee which is working on plans for the celebration of the year 2000. For Mr. Harper it seemed a natural project to clean up the cemetery for the upcoming occasion. With the help of Rosemary Cashman, Weston's Town Administrator, the Town Highway Department was dispatched to clear the stone wall on both sides of the entrance. They planted grass and removed stumps. The Beautification Committee met with Tom Johnson of Lexington Gardens, and a resident of Weston, to make a plan for clearing the grounds. Mr. Harper was able to recruit local landscapers to volunteer a day's work

each, and now the cemetery has been pruned, cleaned and mowed.

Although great strides are being made, there is still a wish list for more. Cynthia Williams is preparing a presentation to have the property listed on the National Register. Hopefully with that listing we can apply for a state grant which would help in the restoration of grave stones and a survey of the graves. A Weston family has donated money for etching the Coley Cemetery name into the stone pillars. Money is needed to restore the original gates and some new plantings would be desirable as well.

A continuing effort is also being made to prepare some kind of map/key and history of the cemetery. The Girl Scouts will be planting bulbs in October and Kiwanis is planning on spending time there as well. This town project is being coordinated in conjunction with the Beautification Committee headed by Aleeta Attra. If you would like to contribute any time or money to this project, please contact Cynthia Williams or Rosemary Cashman at the Town Hall.

As Mark Harper said "It is one of the first things you see when you drive into town." It is a lovely piece of land and holds such historical significance for us. Although there are no longer plots available, some of the existing sites date back to the Revolutionary War and before. We hope that through the continued efforts of the town and all the wonderful volunteers we can restore the cemetery to its original beauty.

ANSON KEENE

continued from front page

remembers that if there was a delivery of baby chickens at the Post Office, his Dad would make a special trip down to pick them up and deliver them so that they would not have to stay at the Post Office overnight.

Anson has fond memories of growing up in Weston. He remembers that there was a log cabin across the street from their home that was used as a store for a short time. He believes that the gentlemen that used to live there was from Easton and that he contracted TB so that no one would buy from him. The store went out of business almost before it began.

As a child Anson remembers playing ball in the field next to George Guidera's home on Lyons Plain every Sunday morning. He spent many hours palming around with Dave Coley whose home was on River Road. One memory which sticks out in his mind is Dave and he throwing a whole bushel of Mrs. Coley's tomatoes at each other. Needless to say, Mrs. Coley was not as happy as the boys. As to the rumors that Anson raced cars on Lyons Plain and flew planes overhead, Anson admits to flying with his friend from the airport which used to be located on West Rocks Road in Norwalk. The gentleman who used to own Weston Gardens was angry with the boys as they scared his chickens when they buzzed the area. Anson did not admit to racing cars although he did say that he could never get his Chevrolet up to 85.

Before the days of cars and planes, Anson would ride his bicycle or walk. He would walk to Westport sometimes and pick up the trolley car which came as far north as Clinton Avenue. He could ride all the way to Norwalk that way, switching trollies to get to South Norwalk. He saved his money one summer from cutting the large lawn (formerly the home of John Orr Young) across from Norfield Church. He made 50 cents an hour and the job took him four hours. With the money he had saved he went to Sears and purchased a new bicycle for \$60, which was expensive in those days. That very afternoon he rode it to the movie

theatre in Westport with his friend, and after the movie let out, his bicycle was gone. He did not even have it half a day. Another incident involving bicycles came when Anson grabbed onto the running board of a friend's car going down Gifford's Hill. Unfortunately he wound up in Weston Gardens in a tumble, as he was going too fast to make the turn into Broad Street, the tires came off the bike, landing him in the Gardens. Anson and his friends also skated on the pond off of Broad street, now Crystal Lake, and occasionally snuck a car onto the pond on Steep Hill to drive on the ice. After a rain, Anson would sail a little boat down the big hill in the dirt ruts. He also recalled a time when the area now known as Nimrod Farm was very hilly and the owner, Mr. Waterbury, planted two to three acres with cauliflower. Anson would be hired to help plant and then later to pull leaves up over the head of cauliflower and tie them up so that the plant would not turn black. Mr. Waterbury would then sell the cauliflower commercially.

In 1934 there was a very heavy snow and Anson remembers skiing to Westport for medicine. A bunch of men shoveled Lyons Plain Road to the intersection of Lyons Plain and Weston Road, and another group shoveled down Weston Road from Norfield to meet them. Shopping in those days was done on Main Street, Westport at the A & P Store, and also at Daley's which is now Bogey's Restaurant and the corner of Main Street and Canal Street. Saturday night was the big night out when square dances were held at the old Weston Town Hall (which burned down in 1951) and also at Rippe's Barn in Westport on Long Lots Road.

Anson told us that there were many fewer homes around town when he was growing up. He could actually see the house on the hill at the corner of Good Hill and River Road from his house as the farmers used to cut all around their property so that the brush would not grow up. There were many grass fires in town and Anson would go. In 1936 he joined the Weston Volunteer Fire Department. There were no phones at the time so they were alerted to fires by the siren on the old school house. Anson remembers that almost every Good Friday for years they would have a

grass fire up on Langner Lane. The biggest fire, of course, was when the school burned down in 1963. When Anson started with the Fire Department they only had one "Mac." It was a great truck, but really hard to steer. It held 275 gallons of water but often blew off the hose. They would have to crawl underneath the truck and reattach the hose which no one liked to do. Sometimes they would drive to fires with the lights out to save the batteries. Someone would use a spotlight to light the way.

In the early 1940's when the reservoir was being built, Anson remembers walking through the tunnel several times before the dam was complete. He told us that Earl Moore, who was the nephew of the late Dewitt and Ivy Moore (old timers of Weston) worked the cable that brought the cement out to the worksite. They would drill 10 feet a night, then blast and clear it ready for the next shift. The late Anson Morton was the electrician on the job and Dewitt Moore was in charge of blowing fresh air into the tunnel for the workers. Most of the workers came from Binghamton, New York. There was a narrow gauge railroad, with 8 or 10 drills on it. They would drill into the rock every night. Unfortunately Anson went off to the service and did not get to see it completed until he arrived home.

Anson met and married his wife, Marie, in Wales while serving as a Staff Sergeant in the 8th Air Force 4th Fighter Group. He spent four and one-half years in the service. Upon returning to Weston an old friend in Westport told him that Gilbert & Bennet Wire Mill was looking for help. He went and applied for a job and retired 35 years later. Anson and Marie built their home on Weston Road in 1949. When Marie came to this country she had a couple of short-lived jobs then went to work for Peoples Bank where she worked for 29 years. She retired and then went back to work there for 11 years on a part-time basis. Anson stays active taking care of their lovely home, which he just finished painting, gardening and volunteering at the Fire Department.

We thank Anson and Marie for sharing their pictures and their memories of Weston.

As the cold winter months approach, and we start to batten down the hatches, we should be very thankful for our indoor plumbing. As my age increases, and subsequently my needs, I cannot imagine trudging outside to use the facilities two or three times on a night with the wind howling, the thermometer reading 10 degrees, and six inches of snow on the ground. I truly know now why everyone in old pictures seemed to lack any sense of humor. Although indoor plumbing is not a totally new invention, we have certainly brought it to heights of pleasure with heat, light, hot and cold running water, and all just steps from the warmth of our beds.

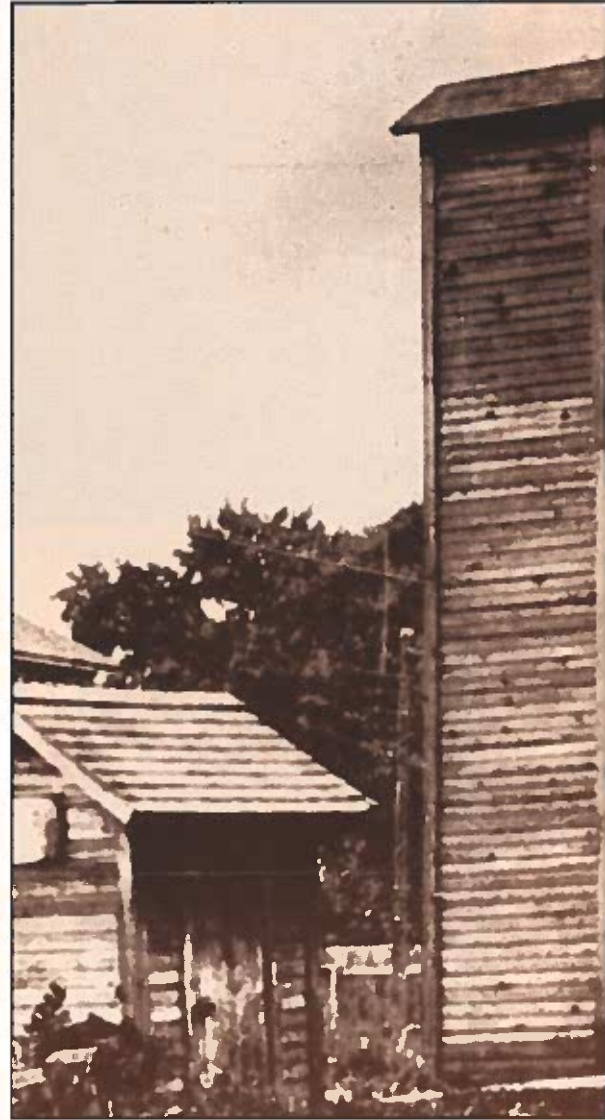
Plumbing has seen many changes and improvements over the years. In biblical times the word paddle (or shovel) was used for the purpose of covering what came from thee. Chamber pots, or slop jars were names given to portable pots. The wealthy might have a pot made of onyx, brass, silver or gold, while the common folk would have pots made of stoneware, pewter, enameled iron, or tin. Inns and wealthy families had

chamber maids whose job it was to empty, wash, and return these vessels to their place under the bed. In the 1600's people of Great Britain sometimes concealed their pots in chairs, trunks, chests and bedside stands. Wealthy Greeks favored indoor plumbing, including tubs. Roman conquerors took these ideas and improved upon them, adding hot and cold running water, lead pipes, and early flushing devices.

Until 1760 Madrid, the capital of Spain, had no backyard conveniences so that after dark, all chamber pots and slop jars were thrown out of windows into the streets below. It was several years before the King's idea of underground sewers, at public expense, actually took wing. In England, the idea of flushing it all away came back into vogue, and by 1815 a pan-valve type hopper was installed in many London bathrooms. These water closets were connected to private cesspools, sometimes on the homeowner's land, which most often contaminated

public wells. They were also unvented, leading to lethal time bombs, with the accumulation of methane gas. With cholera reaching epidemic proportions in England - claiming 20,000 lives between 1845 and 1855 - strong support was given to the construction of a modern sewer system completed about 1853.

The American Colonists brought with them some ideas and the name "privy" (after the Latin word Privus, or private place). They also coined Outhouse and the more proper, "House of



1890's room



Birdhouses were privy status symbols often set on rooftop poles.



These Texas roadside Teepee privies for

G OUTHOUSE

by Karin Giannitti



ouse privy

Office." Many, many synonyms have grown over the years -- one holer, backhouse, pokey, loo, throne, and so on.

Choosing a location for the outhouse was determined by climate, soil conditions, and domestic water. However, the most important determination was exactly how far a child or old family member could safely maneuver during an emergency. Wood was the preferred medium for construction, but many privies were built of brick, bark, stone, mortar and adobe clay, bamboo, sheet metal, oil drums and corrugated cardboard packing crates. In colder climates no provision was made for windows, as any opening would allow in the cold chills. Windows were used for admitting light not air. Portholes and rifle slots were sometimes used. Vents sometimes designated gender identification. Luna, a crescent shape, was the universal symbol for womanhood, thus the sign for "Ladies Room." Sol, or the sunburst pattern, was cut into the door for the men.

These backyard houses, however, were foul smelling and dangerous, as methane gas (produced by organic decomposition) could accumulate with no obvious odor, and a careless smoker could blow up the entire privy, if not careful. Sometimes the dung was used by the farmer himself and sometimes a professional "gog fermor" came in the dark of night and carried it away. More often than not, the owner would cover the dung with gravel, pick up the entire outhouse, and place it in a new spot, downwind, of course.

Privy doors could take on many forms from bedsheets to louvers, wire woven cornstalks, and recycled Coca-Cola signs. Here creativity reigned. There was discussion, however, on whether the door should swing to the inside or the outside. A very heavy outward-opening door might sag on its hinges and entrap the occupant for days. A stuck push-to-enter door, on the other hand could have disastrous results for the user who waited too long. Some outhouses were of the two-story variety, especially in areas where heavy snow and drifts covered the ground level door.

Most private residences had two-hole conveniences, but some homes with many residents, or servants, would often have as many as six, in assorted sizes. Accessories included a bucket of lime, a corn cob, a fly swatter, and a long willow pole for knocking down wasps' nests. In some wealthy homes, calendars, and magazine pictures, as well as an occasional mirror adorned the walls inside. Outhouses actually enjoyed a boom during the period of the WPA between 1933 and 1945.

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is" and "Squaws" are traffic stoppers.



Portable privy for field workers on a Morrisville, PA farm.



THE VANISHING OUTHOUSE

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Federally trained and funded "Specialists" built 2,309,239 "Sanitary Privies." Old structures were replaced by new ones made with concrete bases, airtight seat lids and screened ventilators. This not only helped create more sanitary conditions, but put many men to work during the depression years.

As indoor plumbing became more and more common, our modern-day life does not include the wonderful stories of the trip to the backhouse being such an adventure. On Halloween, many a farmer would sit on his front porch with a loaded rifle, as it was the custom to upend the outhouse, or move it completely. Snakes and lizards were often confronted on the path to the privy, or found inside curled up in the most inconvenient places. Other guests you might find were wasps, hornets, bees, bats, rats, scorpions and skunks, plus an occasional porcupine.

Toilet paper took the form of corn cobs, newspapers, dress patterns and other "uncoated" paper, including mail order catalogs. There is a wonderful series of letters from a gentleman who found an old Sears, Ward & Company catalog. He ordered 10 rolls of toilet paper for \$1.00. Sears returned his letter stating that he must have an outdated version of the catalog, as the price of the toilet paper was now \$1.50. The gentleman wrote back and said "If I had one of your old catalogs, I would not have needed any toilet paper. Please send me your latest catalog, and return my money."

We can now look back at these rather archaic bathrooms and snicker about all the stories. As modern day plumbing brought the "privy" inside, many of the outdoor structures were torn down because they were thought to be objectionable. The 1950 census showed that there were nearly fifty million "unplumbed households" and it is thought that there are as many as 4 million outhouses still in use across the country. Thank goodness there is not one in my backyard.

(The text and pictures for this article were taken from *The Vanishing American Outhouse* written by Ronald S. Barlow. Special thank yous to Windmill Publishing Company, El Cajon, California, for giving us permission to use their words and pictures so that we can share this with you. Also, thanks to Jane Atkinson for bringing it to my attention in the first place.)



Victorian public park privy, (panelled door has been covered.)



Alaska has more outhouses than any other state in the Union



Photographer found 1930's catalog still in place on the seat of this old outhouse.



Transplanted Colorado privy now serves as an attractive tool shed.



This outhouse was the recent victim of an aluminum siding salesman.

"The Vanishing American Outhouse" reprinted with permission of the Windmill Publishing Company.

COLEY GROUNDS

The grounds at the Coley Homestead are looking better and better under the able direction of Jim Schaper. The Mexican Bamboo is gradually disappearing along with the overgrown "jungle." There are new Boxwood bushes planted along the top of the stone wall at the front of the house, courtesy of the generous donation of Lee Schneider. Craig Smith, of Weston Gardens, has volunteered to landscape around the house itself, and Jim is looking into some local landscapers lending their time and talents to pruning trees and plantings around the yard. The board went before the Historic Commission and the Zoning Board and was granted permission to pave the section of the driveway which has been washing out for years. Thanks go to Joe Spetly for taking care of this much needed improvement. A portion of the carriage house has been reroofed and some electrical improvements are being made. Thanks go to Jack Light for his help on publicity and on managing the entire Boxwood project, to Roger Core's enlisting 20 Kiwanians to dig and plant them, and to Joe Spetly for hauling them on his flatbed trailer. Our heating system has been modified which will yield substantial savings. Also a new circuit breaker panel will be installed to replace a defective panel. Some of that expense is being donated by Lucci Electric of Wilton. Jim has ideas for more improvements and hopes that some of the local landscapers will help us out. If anyone has a desire to help, please give Jim a call.



Preparation work for paving the driveway at the Coley house coordinated by Joe Spetly.



New Boxwood bushes donated by Lee and Jacqui Schneider, planted by Kiwanis and coordinated by Jack Light.

FROM THE EDITOR



It is with great sadness that I report the death of our trustee Robert (Bob) Jirucha. Bob was known to us not only because of his great smile and gentle way, but for digging in when we were renovating the house, helping fix, polish and move furniture, always with a smile. We are especially grateful to Bob for the workshop he did for us on building Blue Birdhouses as part of the State Department of Environmental Protection Wildlife Division. Our deepest sympathies to his wife Mary Dee, and his three children.

SCARE FAIR

The annual Scare Fair was held Saturday, October 25, from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. Thanks to the efforts of our trustee, Sandy O'Brien, all of the food that was served was donated and Sandy instituted a new feature this year - a prize drawing for adults and children. She had several great prizes including a gift from Dillarias Toys (formerly TyBrand Toys) of Westport. Kiwanis under the direction of Harvey Shapiro graciously accepted the job of doing the games this year, and Miss Joy, Weston's Children's Librarian, did face painting. This year was bigger and better than ever. Thanks to everyone who volunteered to make this a great success.

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HOME FOR THE HOLIDAYS

Please join us at our annual Christmas celebration at the Coley House.

See the bear room, little girl's bedroom, the angel tree in the parlor...

Preview Party for Society Members only is Friday, December 5, from 6-9 pm. The House will be open for visitors Saturday December 6 and Sunday December 7 from 12-4 pm.

Refreshments
and
Christmas treats will be served.



DILLARIAS TOYS

While soliciting raffle prizes for the Scare Fair, Sandy O'Brien was offered a Parent/Grandparent Shopping Night from Dillarias Toys, formerly Ty Brand Toys, located at 190 Main Street in Westport. Our night will be on Friday November 28th from 5 - 10 p.m. People who come to the store and mention the Weston Historical Society will be treated to refreshments, and in return, the Historical Society will receive 10% of all sales for the evening. The store has unique, one-of-a-kind toys, so if you are looking for a special gift, please keep this evening in mind.

RECOGNIZING THE OLD HOUSES OF WESTON UPDATE

A clarification is in order: Houses which are old enough to be "plaqued" should approach the Weston Historical Society to discuss any necessary research. When you have what you need, The Society will make your plaque for \$100.

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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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