



The Chronicle Quarterly

Weston Historical Society Summer 2000 Volume 19, No 2



291 NEWTOWN TURNPIKE. This home was built in 1769 by David Godfrey. The original portion of the house is on the right side and a recent addition is on the left. The house has been lovingly occupied for over 200 years and is know to many as the Toll House as it was on this property that a toll was collected for travel on the Newtown Turnpike in the early to mid 1800's



STOP - PAY TOLL

Roads in Weston in its early days were just about non-existent. Our roads were paths that farmers cut through the woods to get from point A to point B. They were mostly ruts from wagon wheels which cut around trees and rocks and were impassable during the spring rains and the mud that followed. These "roads" however were adequate for most of the local residents. However, these paths were sometimes an embarrassment to the townsfolk and an inconvenience for travelers. So at the end of the eighteenth century a new idea gave hope to our situation. This was the privately owned turnpike. Weston welcomed this idea and one of the six eventual tolls roads that were built was the Newtown Turnpike which brought travelers and farmers' goods from Norwalk to Newtown. The Turnpike was started between 1825 and 1834, but because of the problems with upkeep the owners eventually abandoned their hoped for profits and turned the road over to the town. The Newtown Turnpike became a public road in 1851.

In order to help with the maintenance of the roads a toll was charged for users of the highway. We believe that the toll was 5 cents and it was collected at the toll booth which is located at 291 Newtown Turnpike. The house which sits back from the road was probably built around 1770 for Silliman Godfrey, son of David Godfrey. The house then passed on to

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JIM HOE, LOVER OF HISTORY

Each year the Voluntary Action Commission of Norwalk (VAC), awards citizens of surrounding towns, Weston, Westport, and Norwalk, for their outstanding voluntary spirit. Organizations such as the Weston Volunteer Fire Department, the Weston Young Women's Club, and the Weston Historical Society nominate someone from their organizations for this award. In the case of the Historical Society all of our trustees are worthy of such an award, but it is felt that the honor should go to someone outside of the board who volunteers his or her time to make our Society a better place.

This year the award was given to Jim Hoe, a lover of history and a lover of the Duesenberg car. Jim has been volunteering his time every Saturday morning to go through the myriad of documents, letters, and papers that have accumulated at the Society over the years. His knowledge of Weston, its people and its history, is of great help to us in sifting through these papers.

Our Summer issue of the Chronicle Quarterly (Vol. 14, #2) gave us an great insight into Jim's love affair with the Duesenberg car. Jim was born in 1913 on a farm in Bedford Hills, New York, and came from a mechanical background. He always wanted to work on cars and at the end of W.W.II Jim was able to buy his first Duesenberg for \$275. The car needed a complete overhaul, and this was the start of Jim's career which has led him to be one of, if not the finest, mechanics of the Duesenberg. His reputation runs from Massachusetts to California. Jim has a shop at his home on Newtown



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

Turnpike where with the help of Gayle Smith, Jim still works on what he calls "a glorious machine."

We admire Jim for his illustrious career and we thank him too for all the work that he continues to do for the Society as well as the articles he has been working on for the newspapers. Jim certainly helps to keep our past alive.

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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR:

Last Sunday morning my dog decided that we should go a different route for our regular walk so I tagged along. As we approached the corner of Weston and Norfield Roads, I looked up and was so struck by the dichotomy of the picture before me. All I could think of was Preservation and Progress??????

It left me with a sense of how important the Historical Society is in our community. I understand that no town wishes to remain stagnant and that progress sometimes requires devices such as our new tower to benefit us all. We as a Society unfortunately do not have the means to purchase old homes and keep them as museums. Fortunately, most of our historical sites are privately owned by people who respect their history. We can, however, preserve our history through pictures and other documentation.

We should be so very thankful to those people who have donated old pictures, letters,

documents, old tools, furniture, etc., as evidence of our past. We should also be thankful to those who are identifying, sorting, and cataloging all of these donations, and to those who are working for an archival facility in which to preserve all these items for the future generations. As progress goes on around us, we must preserve the past, and how lucky I feel to be a part of this process in some small way.





BLUEBIRDS

In the spring of 1998 the Historical Society held a workshop, led by Bob Jirucha, for members and the public to build bluebird houses. Since 1980 the Wildlife Division of the Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection has been sponsoring the installation of nesting boxes for bluebirds around the state.

This year we held another workshop, this time led

by Herb Day with the help of Jack Light and Jim Schaper. Children and adults were aided in making the bluebird houses and given tips on how to keep away snakes and unwanted birds.

We hope that you all have bluebirds in your yards this spring. They are truly a beautiful sight.



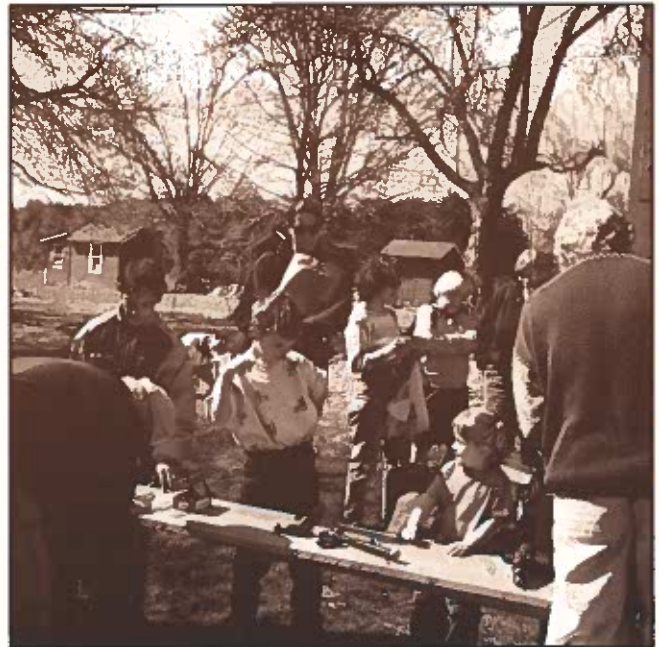
Getting instructions from Herb Day is Christian DeVito, son of Judy DeVito, Weston's Assistant Town Clerk.



Proudly holding the finished project is Maya Kotsogiannis.



Former WHS Trustee Glenn Major helps his son Ryan and daughter Erin with their bird house. Missing from the picture is Mom, Elise.



Ready to start building are Taylor Walket (second from left) and his cousin Sarah Gilbertie. Behind looking on is Heather Williams Walket, daughter of our very own Cynthia Williams.



These pictures show the living room of the main house.

Silliman's youngest son, Joseph, then on to a host of owners over the years. "The most famous toll collector in Weston was Henry Hamilton, a cobbler, who bought the house in 1840. He may have built the small building for a cobbler shop as well as a toll booth. Henry and his wife had a large family. He also served a postmaster for four months in 1846."

Another notable owner of this home was Grace Robinson. Grace and her husband, Robert Conway, who was a correspondent for the New York Times, bought the Toll House in 1922 and lived there for many years. Grace also worked as a correspondent for the New York News and wrote on gardening. She kept many diaries of her gardening at the Toll House and shared events of historical interest with local papers.

On May 3 of this year, Jeanette Dryburgh of Coldwell Banker Real Estate, invited members of the Historical Society to an open house of the Toll House, main house and grounds. The current owners, Ann and Peter Goldstone, are moving and they wanted to share the "fruits of their labors" with us. They have worked very hard at maintaining the historic climate of the home and grounds and were kind enough to give us a tour.

The original house was located on the right side (as shown in the top picture on page 1) and the



The fireplace is original with its tiles but the floors have probably been redone.



The small alcove off this room is used as a small study.



The original stone and mortar walls of the basement. This part of the house was built in 1769.

To the right is, a small building, known as the Toll House, was built in the early 1800's and fronted the street. This picture shows a view of the Toll House from the back side. Notice the window that matches the one in the upstairs bedroom of the



LY TOLL

addition, put on 10 years ago by the last owner, is located on the left. The addition contains a kitchen and great room. This area is full of light and the beams were brought from Vermont in keeping with the original home. The living room is original with its huge fireplace and original tiles around the opening. The ceilings are a low 6'8". The floors in this room are probably not original, but those in the den are. The front door on the house is called an accordion door. Perhaps because of the area being so small and the staircase right at the door, this served to save space when the door was opened for guests. The upstairs rooms, used by Peter and Ann's children, Maggie 8 and Jack 5, are also original. Many of the window panes are wavy and have the bubbles imbedded in them. The master bedroom and bathroom are part of the new addition. Care was taken to use Vermont barnboards for the bathroom cabinets and decorations. The window in the bedroom matches that in the tollhouse and the fireplace connects to the one in the kitchen. Ann and Peter have painted and added copper gutters and central air-conditioning.

It was a lovely afternoon and we want to thank Ann and Peter as well as Jeanette for the lunch and for the invitation to look back at this piece of Weston history.

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This kitchen is part of the house that was added on. Wood from Vermont was brought in for the cabinets in keeping with the older part of the house.



This room is inside the Toll House. To the right is a spiral staircase to the loft above.



To the left and below, is the master bedroom which was added on several years ago. The window below matches the window in the Toll House.



The children's bedrooms which contain original windows and floors.



CORRESPONDENT, GARDNER & KEEPER OF THE TOLL HOUSE

In 1922, Grace Robinson and her husband purchased the house at 291 Newtown Turnpike. It is also known as the Toll House as it was used to collect tolls from farmers and travelers along the Turnpike in the early 1800s. According to an article written by Herb Day for the March, 1986 Chronicle, Grace was a correspondent for the New York News, now called the New York Daily News, and was married to Robert Conway who was a correspondent for the New York Times. He was also a charter trustee of this Society. Herb noted that Grace kept a garden notebook in which she recorded all the plantings and harvests, canning and jelly-making dates, her landscaping efforts, visits of friends and historical notes.

In November of 1967, some of the candidates for office accused Mr. Conway and Grace of buying land for speculation and profit. On November 2, 1967, an editorial from Grace Robinson appeared in the Westport Town Crier. It stated "Here are the Facts: I purchased my home on Newtown Turnpike in 1922 when I was little more than a girl. Fearing possible future proximity of business or industry, I later purchased little dabs of land contiguous, or nearly contiguous, to me, to protect my quiet rural haven.

"Years later, the Bridgeport Hydraulic Co. proceeded with its plans to flood the Saugatuck Valley (now the Saugatuck Reservoir) and simultaneously announced that they hoped eventually to flood the Newtown Turnpike--West Branch Saugatuck side of Weston. This alarmed me, so I purchased seven high acres fronting Godfrey Road, with the hope that I could move myself, possibly with my house to that (hopefully) un floodable area. As population increased, and Weston property values rose slightly, Bridgeport Hydraulic abandoned its West Branch flood scheme, but for a time the fear lingered in my mind.

"So I purchased other land near Weston's Tubb Spring. My broker,

the late John A Anderson, assured me that this, under no possible future circumstances, could be flooded. I felt that this sequestered forest land would be a hedge against new menaces--traffic and increasing population--that were beginning to loom on Newtown Turnpike.

"I have never disposed of any land despite the importunities of developers. I purchased not one square foot for speculation. Every bit was purchased to protect my rural environment, with its wild life, peace and beauty.

"My Weston place was for me a blessed retreat from jammed courtrooms, political hurly-burly, exhausting travel here and abroad, dead-line tensions, and all the other frenetic conditions that make up the life of a magazine writer and journalist on a big New York newspaper. After watching the desperate ordeals of murderers, visiting the dreadful precincts of prisons and witnessing the tragedies of slums, it was heavenly to come home to the songs of birds and the smiles of flowers in my garden. Somewhere in those hectic years, I met Robert Conway.

"About 15 years ago, when Weston had one-acre instead of the present two-acre zoning, some land and the two barns owned by Mrs. Mabel Bean (a newspaper friend) were offered for sale. (This is near my home and opposite the now Euclid Shook home.) I learned that a potential purchaser planned to build five houses on this five-acre-plus tract. In a panic I telephoned the bad news to Mr. Conway, who, also a journalist, was somewhere on a newspaper assignment. He loved my place and loved Weston. The result: he purchased the property from Mrs. Bean, moved one barn back and made it into a charming house which he used as a studio for years. Later he remodeled the other barn into what is now his office. (ed. note: Mr. Conway also wrote an editorial to the Town Crier which appeared on

November 2, 1967, stating that he had never purchased his land in Weston for speculation.)

"At the time of purchase, it appeared an unwise move for him--if the making of money had been his motive, he could have invested far more astutely in some other area." Sentiment--nothing but pure sentiment--love of beauty and nature--guided each of us in our transactions.

"Instead of being an exploiter which Mr. 'F' has tried to make me appear, I have in my small way helped preserve open space in Weston, as is true of other land-holding Westonites. I expect to remain in Weston unless industry or exorbitant taxes force me out. Regardless of love for a long-time home, with the roots that I have put down here, a time might come when my situation would be untenable. In that event, I would have to do what anyone else would do--make the best deal that I could make in a lovely but deteriorating Weston--and move elsewhere."

As Herb wrote on the occasion of her death in the Fall of 1985, "She and her husband loved Weston because of the seclusion it provided after a long work day in New York, or a long trip around the globe. In a note sent to a friend who was inquiring about available land for sale she wrote on September 8, 1933, 'Weston is mightily changed from the time you saw it; an improved road running past my house; we have electricity; and last summer even a symphony concert, to my horror, because it brought traffic past me. Personally, I'm beginning to despair of much seclusion in Weston anymore.'

"Well, she lived to see more changes in Weston, and the world. But she kept her mind active and was interested in many of the events in the world around her. Weston will miss Grace Robinson and her contributions."

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SCRAPBOOK PAGE

THURSDAY, MARCH 12, 1953

Weston's Own News And Picture Album



DEN CHIEF Billy Needham (right center) and Robert Nicolet head the lineup of members of the reactivated Cub Scout Troop 7 of Weston in the salute to the flag at ceremonies held in the Hurbutt School auditorium last Friday evening.

Record Attendance Of Reactivated Cub

The newly reactivated Cub Scouts held their first Pack meeting on Friday evening at the Hurbutt School, with a record attendance of parents and friends. Each den displayed an exhibit on transportation, which they had been working on each week at den meetings. Everyone was very much impressed with the excellence of the exhibits, which covered all means of transportation.

Preceding the presentation of awards, the Cubs marched into the auditorium, each den carrying a pennant with the den number. These pennants had been given to each den by Terrence Hanna. The program included the salute to the flag and a song, followed by a welcoming speech by Robert Vested. Awards were made by the Cubmaster Kenneth Glassbrook and Assistant Cubmaster Zenn Kaufman.

Bobcat pins were awarded to the following boys, who are now officially Cub Scouts:

Den 1: Bruce Mansbridge, David Falle, John Rogala, Rick Vetromile, Eugene Ference and Franklin Moore.

Den 2: John Van Deyn, Peter Bell, Skipper Shaeffer, Bill Hanna, Ricky Kortegast, Tommy Vetromile, Cam Coyle and Skipper Glassbrook.

Den 3: Webb Green, Tommy Cognato, Peter Ashe, Dick Bradley, Ian Smith and Tommy Golden.

Den 4: Michael Hecht, Tommy Stoddard, Lawrence Frisk, Sandy Brainerd, Russell De-Free, Gary Fraser and Bobby Meffert.

Den 5: Alfred Butterfield, Conrad Borgeson, Michael Willetta, Tommy Larkin, Skipper Snaith, John Richardson and Billy Walden.

Den 6: Danny Herman, Freddy Adler, Clark Sanford,

Jim Barnard, David Mattoon and Jimmy Kaufman.

Den 7: Andrew Gordon, Kenneth Allen, Jake Adams, Bruce Johnson, Tommy Richter, Michael Gannon and Hank Abrashkin.

Den 8: Terry Dolan, Tony Hyde, Dick Wren, Stephen Ojarsko, Frederick Guidera and Damon Van Vilet.

Wolf Badges were awarded to the following Cubs:

Den 1: Eugene Ference and Franklin Moore.

Den 2: Bill Hanna, Ricky Kortegast, Tommy Vetromile, Cam Coyle and Skipper Glassbrook.

Den 3: Dick Bradley, Ian Smith, Tommy Golden.

Den 4: Michael Hecht, Tommy Stoddard, Lawrence Frisk, Sandy Brainerd, Russell De-Free, Gary Fraser and Bobby Meffert.

Den 5: Alfred Butterfield, Conrad Borgeson, Michael Willetta, Tommy Larkin, Skipper Snaith, John Richardson and Billy Walden.

Den 6: Jimmy Kaufman.

Den 7: Hank Abrashkin, Jake Adams, Bruce Johnson and Tommy Richter.

Den 8: Terry Dolan, Tony Hyde, Dick Wren, Stephen Ojarsko and Frederick Guidera.

Bear Badges were awarded to Damon Van Vilet of Den 8 and Michael Gannon of Den 7. Robert Nicolet of Den 1, Elliott Bristol of Den 3 and Tommy Curran of Den 4, had all previously received their Bobcat pins and Wolf Badges.

Boy Scouts who are assisting as Den Chiefs, were presented with their cords. They are as follows: Bruce Bacon, Dean Hackley, Ralph Smith, Cloudy Smith, Peter Hanson, Jack Kortegast, Billy Needham and John Abrashkin.

This article was found in a garage located on Newtown Turnpike. Thanks to Barry Ressler for sending it to us.



One of Jimmy Coley's cows enjoying a lovely summer day.

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