



THE

CHRONICLE

QUARTERLY

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THE PRESIDENT'S CORNER

Recently, we had the opportunity to give a short talk on the Heritage of Weston. We mentioned that the heritage is manifested in it's people—past and present. The fact that there were no natural settings that could dictate to the settlers what they should do to make a living, i.e., a seaport or river for shipping or fishing or good open farm land for raising crops, the early settlers of Weston had to mold the land to what they needed to survive. Thus they moved large quantities of rock and stones and trees to create fields for planting and grazing. They cut trees for lumber and charcoal, built mills (and dams) for industry.

They worked together to build a community. This spirit is still in Weston—concerned citizens become involved in government, schools. Civic organizations and the Churches strive to help all that are needy. In it's own way, the Historical Society relies on volunteers to keep things going. Many of you have offered to help, and as we expand our services to Weston, we will be calling on you for assistance.

On another matter, we hope that we will be able to report to you shortly after the first of January that our requests before the ZBA have been finalized and we can proceed with our development plans for the society.

A CALL FOR VOLUNTEERS

We need three to four people to help research several old houses in Weston. Please call Elda Bardsley 227-0203 if you would like to help.

MEMORIES OF CHILDHOOD HOLIDAYS

From our house on the northwest side of town we could see a glow in the sky toward the southeast that we always thought was reflected from the lights of Bridgeport. Sometimes when the wind was right on New Year's Eve, we could hear church bells ringing and horns blowing in that direction. Before the Second World War, when some of us were old enough to drive, a group of young people would go to a midnight movie in Norwalk or South Norwalk. One New Year's Eve we came out of the theater to find an ice storm. We just about crawled all the way home so it was well into New Year's Day before we reached Weston. Our parents were very glad to see us!

I don't remember hearing anything about the Easter bunny when I was small. We each were given a big, fancy chocolate Easter egg with a cocoanut cream filling that lasted for days but that was from our mother. In our teens on Easter Sunday we always thought we had to wear our new straw hats and spring outfits even if it came in March that year and the ground was covered with snow and the thermometer was down near zero.

The Fourth of July was a great day for us youngsters. In the morning Daddy would go to Fred Bennett's ice house for a chunk while Mother stirred up a rich, almost golden, custard. It was up to us to turn the handle until the ice chips and rock salt had frozen it to the right consistency. The one who did it the most got to lick the beaters. There had been a birthday the day before and how good that ice cream tasted with leftover cake on a hot afternoon! One year we had a whole dishpan full of fireworks. How we gloated over such wealth! To begin, we lit sticks of punk which burned for a long time so we could set off the other things with them. We were allowed a very few big firecrackers but we had strings of little ones. There were small cones from which long fragile "snakes" curled out. We had cherry bombs which exploded with a loud bang when thrown against a stone. After dark we ran around the lawn waving sparklers. There always seemed to be a thunderstorm the night of the Fourth. Folks said so much banging had jarred the clouds.

Labor Day meant school was about to open. We were always eager to get back to Upper Parish.

On Hallowe'en we dressed as ghosts or tramps and walked up the road to "scare" our elderly cousins and then up to Corsas'. We were treated with cocoa and cupcakes or cookies. There was no trick or treating in those days although the next morning there might be someone's gate or sign on the schoolhouse roof.

In the beginning we went to our grandparents for turkey and all the fixings on Thanksgiving. After Mother's younger brothers married, Grandma found there were too many so then each family made their own. (We usually had roast chicken as Mother didn't care for turkey.) Grandpa always got his sons and neighbors together to butcher his pigs Thanksgiving morning. We children had to stay indoors but I can still hear those poor animals squealing. In later years they found they could shoot the pigs in the head and kill them instantly.

Christmas was, and still is, the most wonderful day of the year. We kids were up before daylight tiptoeing downstairs into the cold, dark living-room to see the shadowy tree in the corner with the heaps of white tissue wrapped gifts under it and our stocking hanging from the mantel bulging with oranges, popcorn balls and candy.

At school we had parties before Hallowe'en, Thanksgiving, Christmas, Easter and the last day of school. The mothers came bearing cakes to have with cocoa and to watch the entertainment. We did recitations and skits. We all made greeting cards from heavy drawing paper to exchange with the other pupils and to take home to our relatives.

PICTURE QUIZ

Can You Name This?



If you can name the item in the picture, send your answer and your name and address to the Editor:

THE CHRONICLE
P.O. Box 1092
Weston, CT 06883

The answer will appear in the next issue.

LAST ISSUE'S QUIZ

The picture in the last issue was of a stack of logs ready to be fired to make charcoal. The stack would be covered with soil or sod to keep the air out of the stack. This stack is in Devil's Den and was built by Cliff Emanuelson with a grant from the Weston Historical Society. Four people sent in the correct answer: Mrs. Joan Klaus, Mr. Clifford Smith, Mrs. Margot Mathewson of Pawlet, Vt. and a life member, and Mrs. M.M. Gifford of Richmond, Vt. We have reprinted the interesting letters received from Mrs. Mathewson and Mrs. Gifford.

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ANNUAL MEETING

The annual meeting of the Society was held on October 26 at the Norfield Parish Hall. Mr. James Glynn, the Connecticut Tinsmith, Wilton Ct., presented an interesting slide show on the history of tin smithing in the U.S. and gave a demonstration of his craft.

The following Trustees were elected to serve a 3 yr. term 1983-1986:

REV. ROBERT GREENE
RALPH GREENWOOD
ANSON MORTON
GARY SAMUELSON
MARGE SCHNEIDER

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

from Mrs. Margot Mathewson

I believe the item in your picture quiz is a mound of logs which will be burned to make charcoal. It was a very active industry in Weston for many years and usually run by Italian immigrants. The wood would burn for two weeks and the resulting charcoal would be gathered and sent to Westport and shipped out. The hardwoods in the area made a superior charcoal. Evidence of this industry can be found in our woods. The intense heat would sterilize the ground in a circle and the remains of a hut can usually be found close by with just the chimney remaining.

PROGRESS

Recall those homes of yesteryear
with outhouse way out back,
and how Mom's kitchen glowed with cheer
with spotless shelf and rack?
But now it's gone—that little path
and plumbing is our pride
Now all our trails lead to the bath
and our cooking's done outside

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v 3 no. 2

NEXT ISSUE

—Museum Plans
—Industry in Weston
—Historical Brief
—The Old Post Office

from Mrs. Margaret M. Gifford

To the Members of the Weston Historical Society

Dear Members:

Have just enjoyed the Chronicle (quarterly) which my son Bill Gifford sent me where I live in So. Hero, Vt.—an island in lake Champlain.

Enjoyed seeing Jim and Florence Coley's home. Spent many happy hours there. We, the Rolland Giffords lived on Gifford hill and the George Giffords lived above Coley's, but just opposite the Kettle Creek Rd.

I enjoyed the picture quiz and tho my sight is not the best, I will be brave and say it looks like a charcoal kiln which I have seen burning some years back.

Perhaps some of your members will remember me? Am 76 years and healthy, happy and active.

Lived on Godfrey St., the old Brewster Sturgis Farm. The Upper Parish school was built on a small piece of this farm. We were aware of much doings years ago.

The west branch of the Saugatuck River ran thru our farm.

Do hope the powers that control too much laws and rules will allow the museum to become a real pleasure to our Weston.

Hope that all will appreciate Jim and Cleoras gift.

Thanks for letting me come in to sit and chat for awhile.

Sincerely with kind wishes,
Margaret Gifford

To Mrs. Gifford: Thank you for your wonderful letter and please come back anytime you wish.

the editor

WESTON'S HISTORICAL NOTEBOOK

WESTON'S ONE ROOM SCHOOL

The history of the one room school in Weston starts in the mid 1700's. The population of this part of Fairfield was increasing and became large enough to exert influence on the church elders in Fairfield and Hartford to request a separate parish. They were successful and in 1757, the Norfield Society was founded to provide a local place of worship. The Parish was charged with building a church—and schools to teach the children the three R's.

A school tax was collected and divided among three school districts. These were at Lyons Plains, at Norfield Center and on Kettle Creek (called the oblong). In the early years, the schools were open for only a few months of the year and even with this short school term, many children only attended for a day or two at a time and in bad weather, sometimes not at all for weeks.

Any expenses over what were collected in taxes were paid for by the parents.

As Norfield population grew, so did the need for more schools. By 1769 two new schools were added. Norfield was still part of Fairfield and by agreement ran the schools in cooperation with the Town of Fairfield.

Again growth necessitated additional schools and Norfield was redistricted by the Parish into six districts: Southern district, Southwestern district, Northeast district (Lyons district), Northwest district, Upper Parish district and Middle district (called Bushy Ridge district).

Mrs. Lillian Squires Morton (Mrs. Morton died in 1956 at age 83). "I went to the Upper Parish School on Godfrey Road. It was a wooden one-room schoolhouse. We had to walk three miles. We had both men and lady teachers. We had a man, Ruf Fitch for a good many years. His sister Annie Fitch was my first schoolteacher. There were 25 to 30 children of all sizes and ages. There were long benches on three sides with a wood stove in the middle. I liked to go to school but we couldn't go very much because there were terrible snows in the winter and if they didn't break the roads out, we couldn't get through."

Miss Florence Banks; Miss Banks taught at Valley Forge School for a year. "I boarded with Charles and Nettie Perry for two dollars a week. School started at nine and ended at four. After one year I went to Danbury Normal School for two years. When I graduated, I taught at the Middle School for six years before teaching in Norwalk. There were usually 15-18 students, sometimes only one or two to a grade. The older ones helped the younger children. They all had to buy their own textbook so they kept them when they finished. We had Harper's readers. There was a pot belly stove in the middle of the floor. My father furnished the wood that he cut up in Devil's Den. We burned big logs in the stove, but in cold weather they didn't go through the night so we had to build a fire the next morning. I was paid \$25 per month. I got up to \$40 before I left. I lived at home. Some of the teachers lived as far away as Norwalk, so they had to board."

In 1787, Norfield Parish became Weston Town. As the town fathers became stronger, they took over the supervision of the schools and abolished the old districts, forming eight new ones. They were: Southern, Kettle Creek, Middle, Upper Parish, Osborne Town, Den, Lyons Plains and Goodhill. These districts were maintained until 1856, some 60 years.

The school districts were supported by the taxes paid by residents. Since most of the residents were poor, the support to build the one room school house and pay for a teacher was minimal. A 20 ft. by 20 ft. building with a fireplace and benches for the students was a typical school. Fire wood was provided by the parents of the students. School was open for 2-4 months per year and if the wood ran out the school closed earlier. Most students went to school in the winter (if weather didn't keep them away) and worked on the farm during the rest of the year.

Mrs. Ruth Lockwood. "We all went to the Upper Parish School. I have always heard that this is the second schoolhouse. The first was across the road. My grandfather went to the school on the north side of Godfrey Street before it burned down. When I went to school there were usually 12 to 14 pupils, 18 at the most. It was a very good learning experience as we had a lot of individual attention from the teacher and could hear the other classes recite."

Some students went beyond the Weston Schools to the Staples Academy in North Fairfield (present day Easton). Samuel Staples was a wealthy bachelor with no living relatives. He provided money to build and run a free school for older students which became Staples Academy. He also provided help to needy families to help them pay their school tax so their children could attend the one room school.

Usually, each school had from 5-30 students and if the school district did not have any children of school age, it would close down the school. Whatever the reason, there were only six schools in 1856. However, with mills and factories springing up in the Valley Forge area, a school was needed to provide for the education of the children of the factory workers.

In 1857, a seventh school district was formed, the Valley Forge school district.

Weston was becoming a larger town with responsibilities to the residents. The selectmen had the responsibility for educating; however, the school districts continued to manage the schools, when they had students to provide for.

Ruth Fox (Treadwell), "We went to school right up here on the hill, it's Kellogg Hill now but it used to be called School House Hill. This was the Lyons Plains school. It was about 100 feet up Kellogg Hill."

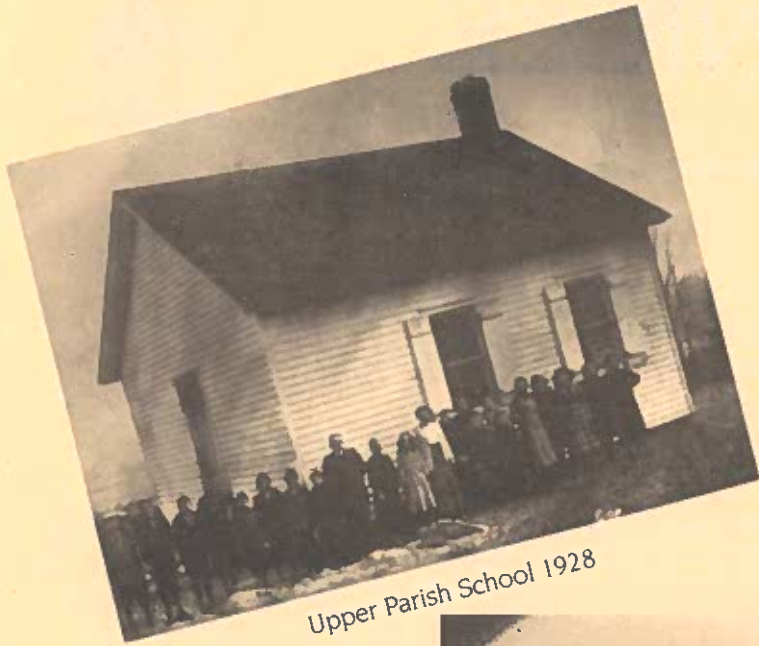
From this school Ruth Treadwell and her sister Margarita went to Norwalk High School, staying with relatives in Wilton and Norwalk.

In 1870, the Kettle Creek school closed and the Den school followed eighteen years later in 1888. The remaining five schools stayed open until the early 1900's (Middle School, Upper Parish, Goodhill, Valley Forge and Lyons Plains). Stoves had replaced fireplaces and desks had replaced the hard seats that must have made learning an uncomfortable experience (the mind can only absorb what the seat can).

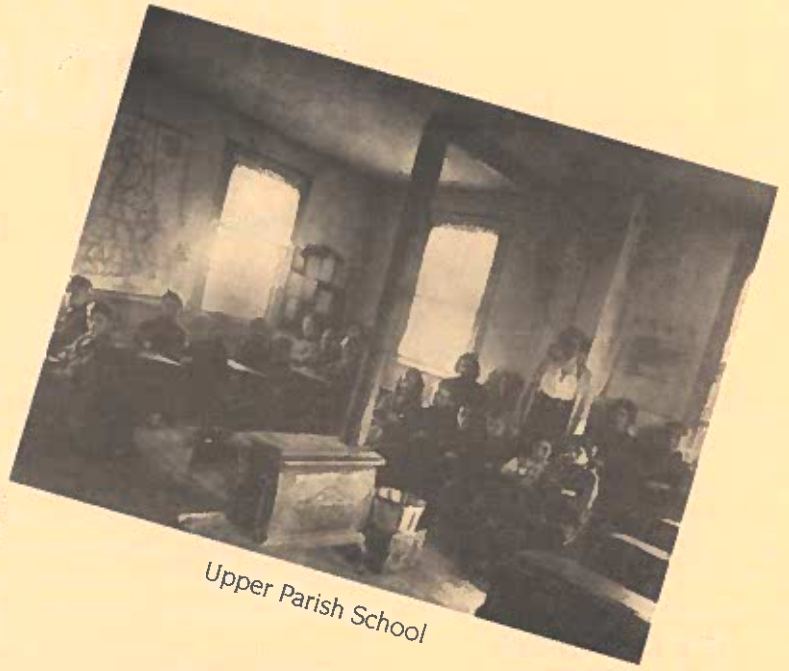
One of the earliest teachers on record was Mrs. Eula Fancher. She was a descendant of Chief Tousant of the Petugreapoem Indians. Mrs. Fancher taught in the Valley Forge School. She told of arriving at the school the first day as a substitute, "With three feet of snow on the ground, I thought I was in the last country God ever invented. Cold! Heavens, it was terrible. Those were the days of hard winters. The schoolteacher had to chop her own firewood or get one of the boys to do it and time had to be taken out for hand warming before lessons could be commenced." The teachers received \$25 per month. Out of which she paid her own board and brought her own wood to heat the schoolhouse.

Finally, in 1929 the town began construction of a four-classroom school near the Norfield Church, the Hurlbutt School, completed in 1932. The one room schools closed. Some of our present residents and a few of those who have died in the past few years have given us some insight as to the conditions in these one room schoolhouses that they went to.

The schools which our present residents attended were built in the early 1800's. We are fortunate to have pictures of some of the schools and the students and teachers who attended these schools. Some of these pictures are included in this issue of the Chronicle. Some of the people who were teachers in these schools were John Noyes, Jr. (1812), Florence Banks, Willis Banks, Mary Coley Zimmerli, Miss French, Mr. Lefrowitz, William O'Dell, Sarah Fox, Helen Sullivan, K. Fitch, A. Thompson.



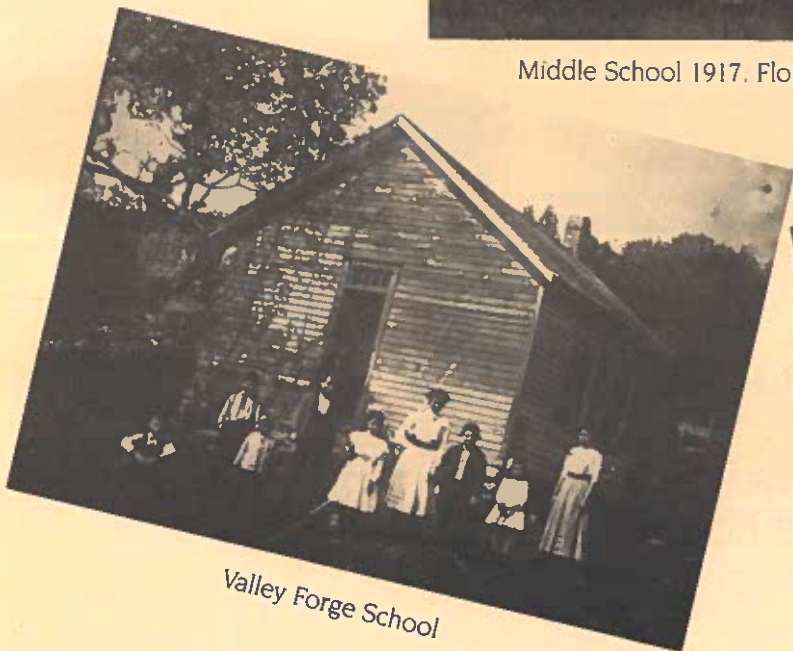
Upper Parish School 1928



Upper Parish School



Middle School 1917. Florence Banks, Teacher



Valley Forge School



Lyons Plains School burned about 1920

THE

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HIGHLIGHTS

- Holiday Times in Weston
- Weston's One Room Schools
- Annual Meeting
- Letters