



The Chronicle Quarterly

Weston Historical Society

Spring 2002

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LEATHER MAN

The Society is given many items in the course of the year. Most of these items are very special and give us insight as to our history here in Weston and the surrounding area. On January 26 of this year we were given some extremely exciting items by Pat and Dolores Gruet of Wilson Rd. in Weston. Dolores grew up in Wilton and her father, John Moore, worked for many years on Rt. 7, just south of the Rt. 7, Rt. 107 corner. Mr. Moore was extremely interested in the history of the Georgetown area and spent hours, weeks, and months typing out the history of Gilbert and Bennett Wire Mill and the Gilbert and Bennett School. There are many other interesting articles from this history which we will share with you over the coming months.

Included with the History of Georgetown were several pictures, one of which was taken of a person known as the Leather Man. After spending considerable time on the Internet (history at your fingertips), we located information on this individual. Much of his history has become folklore with every person who met him telling their own story.

The Leather Man's real name was Jules Bourglay, (according to "Our Conn. Leather Man" by LeRoy W. Foote, Lure



The Leather Man, Jules Bourglay

of the Litchfield Hills Magazine, Dec. 1952). Mr. Foote's article continues to tell the tale of this mysterious figure known by everyone as the Leather Man.

Although there is nothing to prove that the story has its beginnings in Lyons, France, there is nothing to prove that it didn't. As with old folklore, the stories

were told over and over and passed on from one generation to the next, becoming fact over time. "There is some evidence that the story was acknowledged as true by the Leather Man himself without his uttering word, but from one who was dedicated to a self-imposed silence, perhaps a verbal denial was too much to expect."*

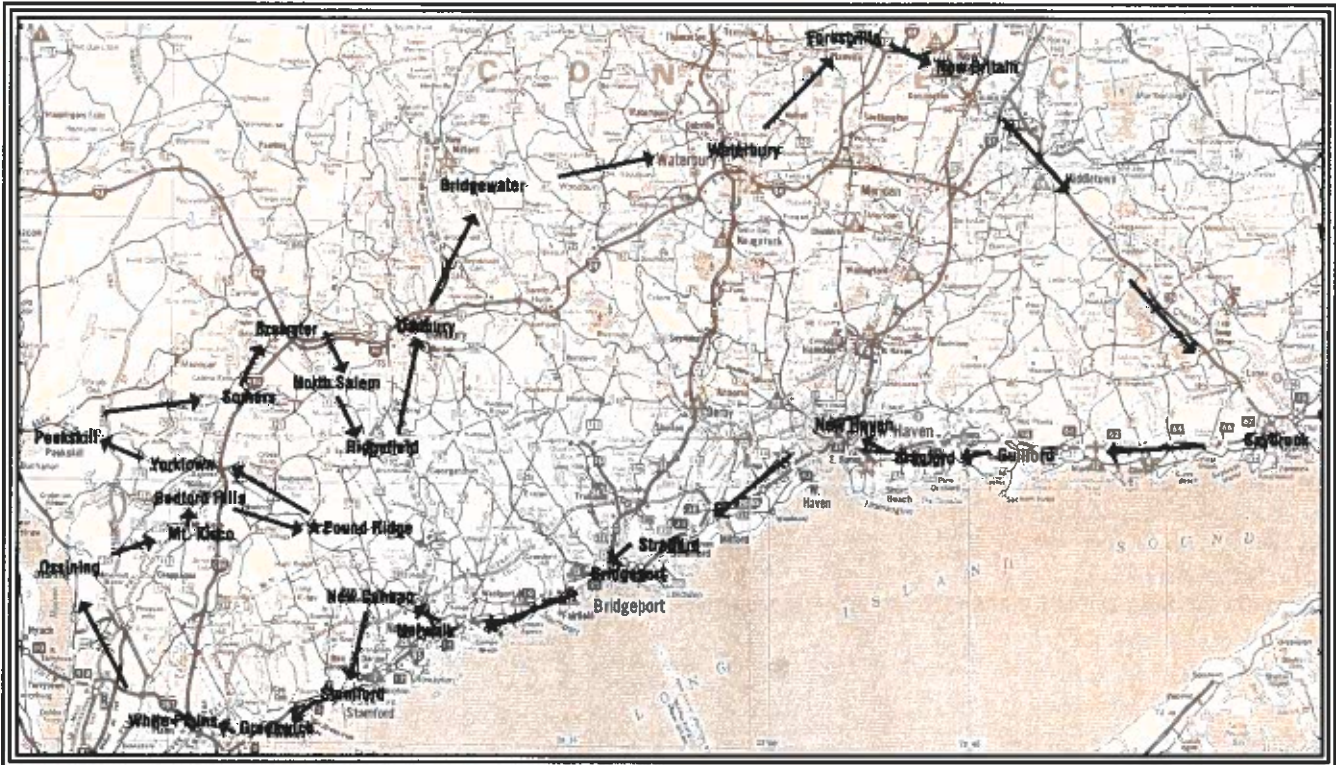
In the early 1800's a family named Bourglay lived in Lyons France. Their son, Jules, met and fell in love with Margaret Laron, the daughter of a leather merchant. Jules was a wood carver which put him in a different social level. Therefore, the two families objected to their match. A solution was given in that Jules would be taken into the leather firm and if he performed adequately, he would be given the hand of Margaret.

This arrangement went well, and Jules worked hard and was given promotions and greater responsibilities, making him a purchaser of leather. One day in 1855 the price of leather dropped about 40%. Poor Jules with his lack of background experience overbought in stock, bringing ruin on himself and those he loved. He was found wandering the streets of the city, placed under a doctor's care, and two years later he disappeared, never to be seen in France again. *continued on page 2*



THE LEATHER MAN'S CIRCUIT

300+ Miles ~ 34 Days for the Loop
(many towns visited are not shown)



http://www.leathermansloop.org/files/Leatherman_Circuit.jpg

LEATHER MAN

Continued

Some time shortly after his disappearance from France a man was seen walking through the town of Harwinton, New York, wearing an outfit of leather patches. People may have shown a casual interest at first, but when he showed up again a month later, asking nothing more than a meal and to be left alone, folks became fascinated with this visitor. When asked his name by some curious residents, he failed to communicate so he was aptly named "The Leather Man."

Jules Bourglay became accepted over time for what he was, an itinerant who asked for nothing but food and who made a circuit of 365 miles that he covered every thirty-four days. At night he slept in caves. During the day, he traveled in a clockwise direction, never retracing his steps. "His route took him from Harwinton to Bristol, Forestville, Southington, Kensington, Berlin, Middletown and south along the westerly side of the Connecticut River

to the shore towns, thence westerly to Westchester County in New York state, and without crossing the Hudson, burned easterly into Connecticut near Ball's Pond [Danbury]. From Danbury he went northerly to New Milford to Roxbury, Woodbury, Watertown, Plymouth and back to Harwinton, completing his cycle."*

People told that he was obsessed with leather as evidenced by his visits to harness shops where he would accept donations of leather scraps which he sewed together himself. His outfit consisted of "a leather hat with visor, a pair of trousers which went well up to his chest, held by suspenders, a leather greatcoat which extended just over the knees, and a pair of wooden soled shoes with leather tops."** He knew how to take care of himself, making his own utensils and looking to kind friends for food, tobacco and marches only. Many housewives took great pride in feeding him, and his welcome never wore out. He knew how to stay warm in caves at night and never let the weather stop his travels. Stories do tell, however, that

after the blizzard of 1888, the Leather Man was four days late on his never-ending circuit.

Tales of the Leather Man covered almost a third of a century. It began before Lincoln was President and continued until his death in 1889. Although he seemed always in perpetual motion he only walked ten miles a day, resting and eating along the way. In March of 1889 Jules Bourglay, the Leather Man, passed away on the George Dell farm in Briarcliff, New York. He is buried in Sparta Cemetery in Ossining, New York with a headstone reading "Jules Bourglay of Lyons, France." The stone was placed there by local historical societies in 1953. Although this gentle man chose to be alone he touched the lives of so many, many people and became a legend passed on by generations.

*<http://members.skyweb.net/channy/leatherman.html>

**<http://www.leathermansloop.org/legend6-ns4.html>





THE JOURNEY TO HAVING A PLAQUE

(or *Maybe Not . . . Just Yet.*) by Lynne Barrelle

The road to receiving a plaque for an old house can be long and arduous, but as Lynne Barrelle aptly put it recently, "It's the information you pick up along the journey which makes it all worthwhile, not just receiving a plaque dating the house."

Some months ago, Lynne was approached through the Historical Society by Sue and Mark Keim. They live at 1 Old Mill Road and were told by real estate brochures that theirs was an early 1800 farmhouse. Curious about the house the Keims, with Lynne's guidance, began to research their home's history.

Sue and Lynne began with the Land Records at Weston and Fairfield Town Halls, and traced the owners of the house and property back, back, and back. Sue eventually ended up finding records in Fairfield showing that in 1769 Eleazor Sturges transferred ownership of 40 acres to his son Thaddeus Sturges. Based on deed descriptions, that property appeared to include the land on which the Keim's house now stands. In 1769 the 40 acres included both a sawmill and a dwelling house inhabited by Eleazor Sturges. Several other documents found in Weston and Fairfield proved the existence of both Eleazor's sawmill and his dwelling house as early as 1749.

Having established what they thought was a fairly convincing chain-of-title back to 1749, Sue and Lynne began "phase two" of the research. They enlisted the aid of Louis F. Bregy, a Society member with extensive knowledge about the construction of our older local houses, to examine and analyze the

physical evidence presented by the structure of the Keim's house itself.

The first features that Mr. Bregy pointed out were exposed joists in the dining room ceiling. The close, even spacing of the vertical saw marks on the sides of the joists suggested they were produced with a band saw, while marks on the lower face indicated a sash saw

was used on at least one surface. While a sash saw would have been present in an up-and-down sawmill of the mid 1700s (such as the nearby Sturges mill), a band saw would not have been available at that time. So it seemed that these joists did not date from 1749.

The next features Mr. Bregy pointed out were the 8 supporting posts, at least 2 of

which were visible in the front corner rooms. Since most of the dozens of early Weston houses he has examined have only 6 posts, these 8 would indicate a somewhat larger-than-average dwelling for the mid-1700s. The height of the ceilings was also somewhat greater than might be expected for that period, although Mr. Bregy explained that ceiling height in

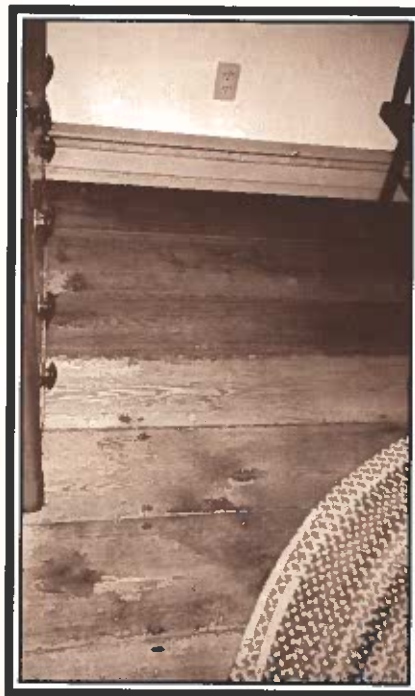
the average colonial home was often more closely related to financial status than to a particular date. (In other words, the lower the ceilings, the poorer the owner.)

One of the two front corner posts had obviously been repaired or replaced. The other exposed post, as well as the front and end girts, exhibited the common mortise-and-tenon joinery that would have been used from the colonial period right up until nearly the end of the nineteenth century. In addition, these framing members had all been "hacked" to provide a rough surface to accommodate a covering of plaster. Although this can be an indication of early construction, Mr. Bregy also pointed out that in a substantial (i.e., wealthy) early dwelling, particularly given the proximity of a sawmill, we might have expected these posts and beams to have

continued on page 6



1 Old Mill Road, home of Sue and Mark Keim



Original floors on second story of 1 Old Mill Road

Over the past year, Jacqui Schneider (with a little help from some of the trustees) has taken on the enormous task of taking inventory of the house. She has tirelessly gone from room to room taking pictures of items, measuring them, and recording the information in booklets. She has also had the job of trying to match certain items which were found on a 1990 appraisal. Since this appraisal, many new items have been donated and many have been moved making the job a real treasure hunt.

Among the items listed on Mr. McLellan's appraisal were several quilts. Although we knew some of the patterns, our knowledge was rather limited. We invited Janet Hochsprung from J.H. Homestead Quilts in Bethel to spend a morning with us and help sort out the various quilts stored away.

Although many of the quilts are not in the best of condition, Janet examined each one with a loving eye. She was able to give an approximate date for each quilt because of her knowledge of the fabrics used. Each quilt was held up to the light where many showed little cotton seeds, the cotton having been used as the batting between the layers of the quilt.



ABOVE:
Rail Fence This pattern is Rail Fence. The pattern is strips of equal length and width sewn next to one another. Each block is turned 90 degrees and set together without sashing. This quilt is made of wool scraps, most likely on a foundation with some raw edge piecing. Made mostly of solid fabrics in dark red, blue brown, tan and some plaids. The quilting is crude, corner to corner, one pass. Approximate size is 43 x 56 inches. I would date this about early 1900's.

ABOVE:
Sixteen Patch This quilt is made up of v. These blocks are made with madder bro straight set with sashing about 3 1/4 i. likely a utility quilt with simple cross hal

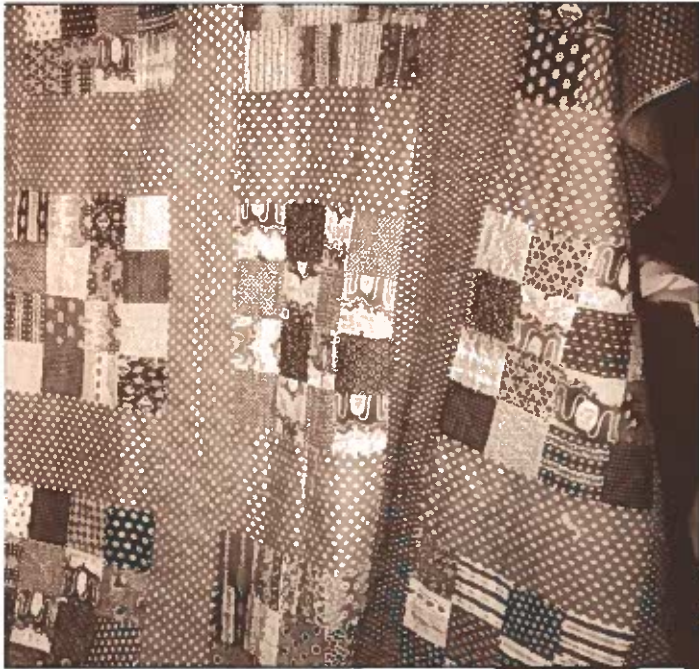
TO THE RIGHT:
Red and White This quilt is made of re-point, red sashing, red binding, and str cornerstones. Cross hatch quilting, not



ABOVE:
Leaf and Lozenge This is a four panel quilt approximately from the 1850. The four blocks are 32 inches each with a 7 1/2 inch border. It's faded red or pink large flower (one per block) and green leaves, and stem are nicely applique. It has a swag border with leaf and lozenge pattern. It is finely quilted in a hanging diamond pattern, approximately one inch a part, apparently by one quilter. It has a red/pink piping as a binding. Muslin is the backing. It has water damage, and wear damage of the applique pieces. Evidence of cotton seeds is noted.

TO THE RIGHT:
Double Irish Chain This Double Irish Chain quilt is made with faded green and with a pink center of the chain. The squares are 1/2 inches in size. It is a signature quilt and those signatures make it very desirable. All those signatures were real people and could be traced. Almost all the pieces are damaged and worn. It has a muslin back.





led a sixteen patch. Just the blocks all the same size, set four by four pinky blues. Fabrics dating to late 1800's. Post Civil War era. They are le, with a wider 4inch border. Brown gingham is on the back. Most g. It is in good condition.

te solid fabric in a "Bear Paw" style. There are 10 inch blocks, set on tern on the backing on a cream ground. Half blocks along sides, no stitches are large. Does not appear to be old.



TO THE RIGHT:

Mariners Compass This quilt is arranged in a nine patch (three by three) manner, each block being 24 inches. Each block is circled with an applique wreath with leaves and stem and four flowers, one on each straight sides of the block. The colors appear to be faded red and green. Each circular wreath has 24 leaves. There is a 5 3/4 inch border around the entire quilt. It has a applique vine and leaf arrangement with a large flower and leaf profile evenly spaced. This same flower and leaf profile is applique in the corners of the blocks where four blocks meet. The Mariners Compass block is red calico, pink shades of calico and solid green and the wreath and border appliques are a solid fabric. Diagonal straight line quilting is shown, apparently one quilter. This quilt has a primitive feel to it. Muslin backing. Late 1800's according to pattern. Fading, deterioration of the fabrics is evident. Little evidence of seeds.



From her examination, Janet told us which quilts were very probably done quickly so that they could be used on beds. These quilts have large stitches and not much quilting. The fabrics are also fairly plain. Other quilts have more finely worked stitches, closer together, indicating that a good deal of time and effort went in to the work. These were more decorative than utilitarian.

Many of these quilts are in very good to fairly good condition. As Janet is not a professional appraiser she did not put a value on each quilt. However, she did tell us that they are certainly well worth keeping, some of them being quite valuable.

Janet has been sewing all her life. She began admiring old quilts and started doing a lot of reading on textiles and how to date these old pieces of art. She admits to being self-taught in this area, but it has been her passion for many years. In 1989 Janet opened J.H. Homestead Quilts in Bethel where she has a large inventory of fabrics and sewing supplies for the new and seasoned quilter. Janet also teaches many quilt classes during the year (one fun event is an all-nighter during the summer months) as well as having guest teachers. There is always a new and different technique to learn, and the companionship of other quilters.

We thank Janet for her time and effort on our behalf. It is nice to know that we have some true treasures in our midst.

THE JOURNEY

continued

been "cased" with wooden boards rather than plastered like the walls.

Our search for confirmation of the house date through physical evidence was becoming somewhat clouded, as we began to suspect we might be looking at a nineteenth century home of average means, rather than an above-average eighteenth century dwelling.

Examination of the attic indicated that a large central chimney had been removed and replaced by a smaller one, but it was not determined when or to what extent the interior lay-out had been altered. Many of the attic floor boards were obvious replacements, consisting of recycled lumber of indeterminate origin. Newer rafters of modern dimensional lumber (2x6) had been nailed to the sides of the older rafters to provide additional support for the roof. Holding up the rafters at mid-span was a recent purlin also of dimensional lumber. There was no evidence that the original roof framing included the heavy rafter supports so common to this area that they were known as "Connecticut" purlins, and which are found in most of our early local dwellings. (One notable exception that both Lynne Barrelle and Lou Bregy have examined is the circa 1830 house at 47 Norfield Road, which lacked both original purlins. New rafter supports had been added to that roof as well.) This absence of the Connecticut purlin may speak more to the origins of the carpenter/joiner responsible for the construction than it does to a particular time period.

Examination of the basement revealed that extensive modifications had been made, perhaps related to the removal of the central chimney. Most of the joists were of dimensional lumber, and were obvious replacements. The exception seemed to be the area under what is now the dining room, in the southeast corner of the house. Here the newer joists have been nailed to either side of the older ones, which consist of half logs rather than sawn lumber.

Mr. Bregy mentioned that some architectural historians consider this type of half-log joist to be "degenerate architecture" and indicative of a later period rather than an early one. He also mentioned that he has seen them in houses of varying periods and does not consider them a good chronological indicator one way or the other.

So far, the evidence we had found seemed to point to a possible early- to mid-nineteenth century origin, although no single feature could be dated with any reliability. In addition, the many repairs and modifications (including those to the frame) made it difficult to distinguish original features

from later ones.

The one feature of older houses that can be reliably dated is the type of nail used in the original construction. Prior to about 1790, only hand-wrought nails were available. After that time, some cut nails may be found in certain areas, but their use was not common until about 1820. By 1830, cut nails of a superior quality were being produced by machine and their use soon became widespread, virtually replacing wrought nails throughout the building industry except for a few specialty applications. Cut nails were used almost exclusively throughout the nineteenth century, and were gradually replaced (for most purposes) by wire nails beginning just prior to 1900.

There were nails found in several areas of the Keim's house. The ends of cut nails showed in the underside of the roof (which we would expect to have been replaced many times regardless of the original construction date) as well as in the floors. The area under the dining room where the half-log joists were present showed the ends of cut nails used to secure the floor above to the sub-floor. It is possible that this section of floor and sub-floor, as well as the joists below it, are original features of the house which previous owners had, for some as-yet-unknown reason, chosen to retain rather than replace. Alternatively, this sub-floor could actually be the original floor, and the second layer with the cut nails a later addition. This seemed unlikely, however, given the unusually wide spaces between the boards.

Mr. Bregy also located a cut nail in a stud visible from the attic stairwell. No wrought nails, which might have supported an eighteenth-century date, were in evidence.

As the only features found from which to project a date, these cut nails seemed to indicate the house was built no earlier than about 1830, probably a bit later.

Although the date first suggested by the title search was not compatible with the

continued



Entry way at 1 Old Mill Road.
Ceiling shows original beams with one of 8 support beams showing on right side.



Chimney in attic of house - this was a replacement of a larger central chimney.

THE JOURNEY

continued

physical evidence, the research so far has not all been in vain. Lynne and Sue are still confident of their title-search back to at least 1847, when Eli Thorp conveyed 12 acres of his land, with buildings, to his wife Polly; there's no question but that it was the same house in which the Keim's now reside. What's less obvious now is the identity and location of the house that Eli Thorp bought 36 years earlier from Ezekial Sturges, along with 43 acres of land. Did Thorp buy the original, circa-1749 Eleazor Sturges house, and then build another? What happened to the old one? Much more research will be needed just to determine the exact boundaries of that 43 acres; a necessary first step to locate an older house or its probable site.

The documentary evidence has already proved without a doubt that as early as 1749 Eleazor Sturges owned both a house and a sawmill somewhere in this neighborhood. The elusive house that Thorp bought in 1811 may well have been Eleazor's former dwelling. If it (or its site) can be located, perhaps the original Sturges sawmill site will also be

confirmed. Was it in fact the same mill owned by Eleazor's grandson Ezekial Sturges as early as 1782, later owned by Zalmon Sturges (1809), Curtis Cole (1835), William H. Davis (1849), Osborn Taylor (1866), Sarah Dean (1876), Nathan B. Johnson (1878), and Simeon Carver (1891); last operated as a mill in the early 1900s by Frank I. Cobb; and known for the last three-quarters of a century as Cobb's Mill Inn?

Now the research will continue for Lynne and Sue. Between them they have already examined almost 100 deeds in both Weston and Fairfield, just to establish the chain-of-title for the Keim's property. But the search will have to expand throughout the entire neighborhood if the mystery is ever going to be solved. Was the Keim's house built by Eleazor Sturges prior to 1749, or was it built by Eli Thorp at some time between 1811 and 1847?

Before a plaque can be awarded, they must seek out every bit of both physical and documentary evidence that they can to confirm an accurate date for the house.

We thank Sue and Mark for allowing us to examine their home. Sue tells us that as a child she lived on the opposite end of Cobb's Mill Rd. and later moved to Fairfield. There she lived in an old home, circa 1780, which started her love affair with old houses. Mark grew up in Pennsylvania in the Delaware Water Gap area. He too lived in an old home that his parents restored. Aside from taking care of a new baby, Sue and Mark spend their leisure time making Shaker furniture which blends in beautifully with their home. Mark has a workshop over the garage in which he makes beautiful tables and other pieces of furniture. Sue lends a critical eye and some muscle power for sanding and finishing the pieces.

Again we thank you and hope that you are having some fun on this long journey, learning about the history of your home and the area.

The thought of all that research would be daunting to some, but Lynne (ever the joker) says, "We just couldn't find the right kind of nail to hang the plaque on!"

ACCESSIONS

We have received so many wonderful donations over the past several months that we wanted to share with you. In December we were given 6 maps compiled by Susan Pitkin of the League of Women Voters. These maps were used for a land use study of town owned parcels from 1994-1995. Lucy Bowden of the League donated these maps to us.

Helen Mason was kind enough to give us a diary/journal - baby book of her brother Edward O. Budd. It is a 7 1/2" x 8" red leather bound notebook with an inscription inside the front cover "Edward Oscar Budd, Weston, Ct. 1907." The inscription is in ink. Inside there was also a postcard postmarked 12/21/1914.

We also received an old cyclone seeder which was found in an old house in Weston. Mrs. Pauker donated it to us and it possibly belonged to Mike Samuelson who was the caretaker of the Wein estate (Byebrook) located on Newtown Tpke.

Sirje Helder Gold of Codfish Lane gave us a spinning wheel the history of which is not known. Although we have two wheels, neither are in such good condition so it will be ideal as a demonstration piece.

A black ring binder cookbook was also donated to us by Charlie McCullough. The book belonged to George & Rosemary Sasseen of 222 Weston Rd. The book is entitled

"The Ct. Cookbook," copyright 1943, was compiled by the Woman's Club of Westport. It is the precursor to the bound edition of 1947, which was also donated by Mr. McCullough.

We have also acquired two books donated by Jacquie Schneider from her mother. One is "Journal Houses," 1921, and the other "Songs for Little Children," 1887, from the Philadelphia Normal School in Pennsylvania.

A scythe which was most likely a genuine old Weston farm tool was given to us by Charlie McCullough. He was given the item in 1971 by Florence Banks. Mrs. Banks found it in her barn.

And last, but certainly not least, several items were donated by Pat and Dolores Gruet of Weston. These items include a complete history of the Georgetown area written by John Moore, Dolores Gruet's father. There were also 30 photographs of this area, a Gilbert & Bennett Mfg. Co. booklet, a teacher's report to school visitors from the Gilbert School, and 353 postcards with some pictures of the local and surrounding area as well as cards from Easter, Christmas, Valentine's Day, etc.

(Ed. note:) We are so grateful to all who have thought to give us these items. I'm sure you will be seeing stories from the "History of Georgetown" in future Chronicles as well as these new items displayed at the Coley House. Thank you all.

The Weston Historical Society
Chronicle Quarterly

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COMING EVENTS

Please mark your calendars for the following events to be held by the Historical Society over the next year. More details will be available closer to each event, but we wanted to alert you to our plans:

- March 21,** **Annual Meeting** - Mr. Gengo speaking about barn restoration,
- March 23,** Come and make a Blue Bird House at the Coley Barn
- March 30,** Bring a basket, don an Easter bonnet and join us for an Easter Egg Hunt
- July 10,** The Annual Seniors Picnic Lunch on the grounds of the Society
- October 27,** Halloween Fair held on the grounds of the Coley House
- December 6,** Christmas at the Coley House.

Please join us for the annual meeting, and if you can help us out with any of the other events, please call the WHS at 227-1604 and leave a message. Thank you.



ANNUAL MEETING

On March 21, 2002 the Weston Historical Society will hold its Annual Meeting. There will be a short business meeting and the election of two new Trustees to the Board. Then we will be treated to a program presented by Mr. David Gengo who will talk about the stewardship of old buildings. Mr. Gengo is a certified restorer and owns Salem Preservation, Inc. He is currently working on Phase I of our own barn restoration, reworking the stone foundation on the SE side of the barn and replacing the rotten sills.

It should be an interesting and informative evening, so please join us at the Weston Library Community Room at 7:30 PM. Light refreshments will be served.

