



The Chronicle Quarterly

Weston Historical Society

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A METEORIC STONE

Close your eyes and imagine living in Weston in the year 1807. Most of the land was farmed leaving few large trees to obscure the view of the sky. You get up early one morning to go to the privy or to check on the animals in the barn, and you suddenly see a large globe of fire streaking across the sky followed by its quick disappearance. This is quickly followed by three loud blasts (or reports as they were referred to in 1807), followed, lastly, by objects falling from the sky.

Such was the scene on December 14, 1807 at approximately 6:30 a.m. when the first documented meteor fell to earth. Just imagine the emotions it would have caused the viewers such as fear, confusion, terror, curiosity and alarm. Intrigue was the emotion of Benjamin Silliman, Professor of Chemistry at Yale College and Professor James L. Kingsley, also of Yale College. They hear about this amazing phenomenon and raced to Weston to interview people and to collect samples of the rocks that had fallen.

Nathan Wheeler, esq. of Weston, one of the justices of the court of common pleas for the county of Fairfield, was one of the witnesses to this meteor. His reputation as a "gentlemen of great respectability and undoubted veracity," coupled with his calm explanation of the sight made him an extremely credible



This piece of the "Weston Meteor" fell in Weston, now Easton. It weighed about "thirty pounds' weight". Article from the Connecticut Journal.



Benjamin Silliman, Jr., scientist who became internationally known for his papers on Weston's Meteor. The first recorded in U.S. history.

witness for Professor Silliman who based most of his paper on this interview.

Although the morning was cloudy, there were breaks in the clouds that made the meteor visible, especially along the Northern part of the horizon. Mr. Wheeler said that the "apparent diameter was about one half or two thirds the apparent diameter of the full moon. Its progress was not so rapid as that of common meteors or shooting stars. When it passed behind the thinner clouds, it appeared brighter than before and, when it passed the spots of clear sky, it flashed with a vivid light, yet not so intense as the lightning in a thunder-storm, but rather like what is commonly called heat-lightning. Where it was not too much obscured by thick clouds, a waving conical train of paler light was seen to attend it, in length about 10 or 12 diameters of the body. It grew rapidly fainter and fainter, and there was no peculiar smell in the atmosphere. The whole period between its first appearance and total extinction was estimated at about 30 seconds."

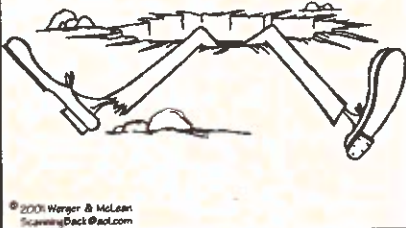
Seconds after the disappearance of the meteor there were three loud "reports." "Then followed a rapid succession of reports (blasts), less loud, and running into each other so as to produce a continued rumbling. (continued page 2)

SCANNING BACK . . .

by Werger & McLean

In 1807

A huge meteor landed with a thud in Weston, Connecticut. Examined 8 years later, its weight was determined to exceed 6 million tons.



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Cartoon found in "The Harbor News", Old Saybrook, August 23, 2001.

Courtesy of Carolyn Jackson of Weston

A METEORIC STONE *continued*

like that of a cannon-ball rolling over a floor, sometimes louder, and at other times fainter." Mr. Elihu Staples said, "when the meteor disappeared, there were apparently three successive efforts or leaps of the fire-ball, which grew more dim at every throe, and disappeared with the last."

The meteor was seen East of the Connecticut River, and West of the Hudson River, South to New York, and North to Massachusetts, and the explosion was heard approximately 40 to 50 miles in all directions. From all the accounts, Professors Silliman and Kingsley approximated that the real diameter of the meteor could not be "less than 300 feet."

The Professors continued their research visiting places where stones had fallen, six particular places in a line approximately nine or ten miles long. It is surmised that the northerly stones fell first, the southerly last. In every case "immediately after the explosions had ceased, a loud, whizzing or roaring noise in the air at the moment of the fall. In every instance immediately after this, was heard a sudden and abrupt noise, like that of a ponderous body striking the ground in its fall. Excepting two, all the stones which have been found were more or less broken."

Mr. Merwin Burr, who lived in the town of Huntingdon on the border

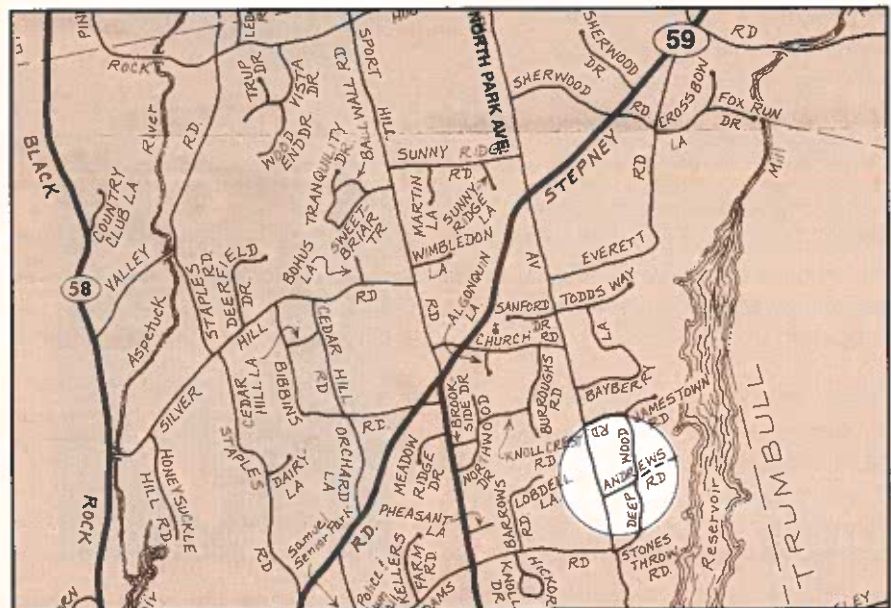
of Weston, was standing on the road in front of his house when he heard the first stone fall. In the dark it took him about twenty minutes to find the stone, which he found to be stained at the place of contact with a deep lead-color and was still warm to the touch. This stone weighed approximately 20 pounds.

Mr. William Prince of Weston seemed to have been the location of the second explosion and fallen rock. The Prince family had been asleep at the time of the explosion and only after they had heard the news from their neighbors about the meteor did they examine a hole in their yard about 25 feet from the house. There they found a stone buried in the dirt two feet deep, nearly 12 inches in diameter, and weighing about thirty-five pounds. Unfortunately, this wonderful specimen was immediately broken into pieces and heated in the hopes of extracting gold and silver, none of which were found.

At the foot of Tashowa Hill, two miles southeast of Mr. Prince's, lived Mr. Ephram Porter and his family. They believed that lightning had hit the ground and did not search for any stones, until, like Mr. Prince, they heard from neighbors about the meteor. The Porters found a stone weighing about 20-25 pounds and later a boy by the name of Jennings found a second large stone on the hillside which his father exhibited in New York, for money.

At the time of the third "report," Mr. Elijah Seeley heard a noise like a "whirlwind" which passed to the east of his house and immediately over his orchard. At the same moment a streak of light also passed over the orchard and hit the ground. Like many others, Mr. Seeley assumed that the ground had been struck by lightning. However, when Mr. Seeley went into his field looking for his cattle he "found some of them had leaped into the adjoining enclosure, and all exhibited strong indications of terror." As he walked along he saw some recently laid turf to be extremely torn up and a "great mass of fragments of strange looking stone." Many of these stones were carried away by neighbors and passerby's, leaving few specimens for Professor Silliman.

Professor Silliman and Professor Kingsley poured over their specimens and found that the smaller pieces have a "variety of form which might be supposed to arise from fracture, with violent force. On many of them, especially the larger specimens, there is a thin black crust, destitute of splendor. The color of the stone is generally a dark ash, or leaden color. It is interspersed with distinct masses, from the size of a pin's head to the diameter of one or two inches, which are almost white, resembling the crystals of feldspar. The texture of the stone is granular and coarse.



Meteor site: North Park Avenue and Andrews Road, Easton

The stones collected were analyzed at Yale College and found to consist of the following ingredients: "Silex, iron, magnesia, nickel, sulphur--the two first constitute by far the greater part of the stone. The sulphur exists in a small but indeterminate quantity. Most of the iron is in a metallic state; the whole stone attracts the magnet.

Professor Silliman's examination of the stones and their composition is defined in great detail in his report. His conclusions, however, said that "two things we consider as established.

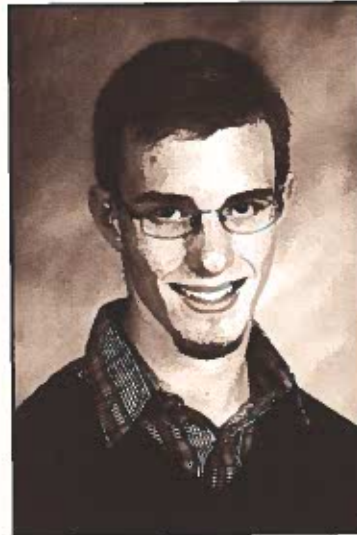
1. These bodies did not originate from this earth.

2. They have all come from a common source, but that source is unknown."

The entire report was sent to Mr. John Vaughan, Librarian of the American Philosophical Society of Philadelphia. Although news of the meteor was published in the Connecticut Herald, it was the hope of Professors Silliman and Kingsley that their communication be viewed as "sufficiently original, to merit the attention of the respectable body to who it is transmitted." Indeed it did merit everyone's attention and Mr. Silliman made an international name for himself and the meteor that fell in Weston.

Ed. Note: All the quotations in this article were taken from the first report of Benjamin Silliman published in 1809. I give great thanks to Barbara L. Narendra of the Peabody Museum of Natural History, Yale University for sending me all the wonderful information. In Ms. Narendra's article that she wrote about "Benjamin Silliman, The Weston Meteorite," she states that the "largest and only unbroken stone of the Weston fall, which weighed 36.5 pounds, was found some days after Silliman and Kingsley had spent several fruitless hours hunting for it. The owner was urged to present it to Yale by local people who had met the professors during their investigation, but he insisted on putting it up for sale. It was purchased by Colonel George Gibbs for his large and famous collection of minerals; when the collection became the property of Yale in 1825, Silliman finally acquired this stone--the only specimen of the Weston meteorite that remains in our collection today."

WESTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY AWARD



Aaron Bell

In May of 2002, the Weston Historical Society presented its annual award to a high school student who has shown an active interest in Weston and its history during his/her high school career. This year's winner is Aaron Bell.

Aaron, a lifelong resident of Weston took on a Wastewater Management Alternative for the Weston Schools and Municipal Expansion project from the Fall of 1998-2000. The project began as an environmental problem solving assignment in Honors Biology, but Aaron continued his work as an independent study and presented to various town boards and committees an alternative, environmentally friendly wastewater (septic system) technology.

Aaron has also served as a Crew Coach for the Norwalk River Rowing Assn., spent two summers working for a residential construction company, three summers as a teaching assistant for the Four Town Summer Program, a marine science theme given for 5th and 6th graders from Westport, Weston, Wilton, and Norwalk. He has also served as a National Ski Patrol, Junior Volunteer Patrol Candidate, Mad River Glen Ski Area, Vermont.

As well as winning multiple awards this year and his previous three years in Weston High School, Aaron still finds time to be a member of the Weston High School Concert Choir, Madrigal Choir/Chamber Singers and Men's Choir, the Norwalk River Rowing Association Varsity Crew Team, the Connecticut Republicans 1998-2002, and star skipper and member of the Cedar Point Yacht Club. In his spare time, Aaron loves skiing, hiking, rock climbing and archery.

We send our congratulations to this outstanding young man and wish him well at MIT this Fall.

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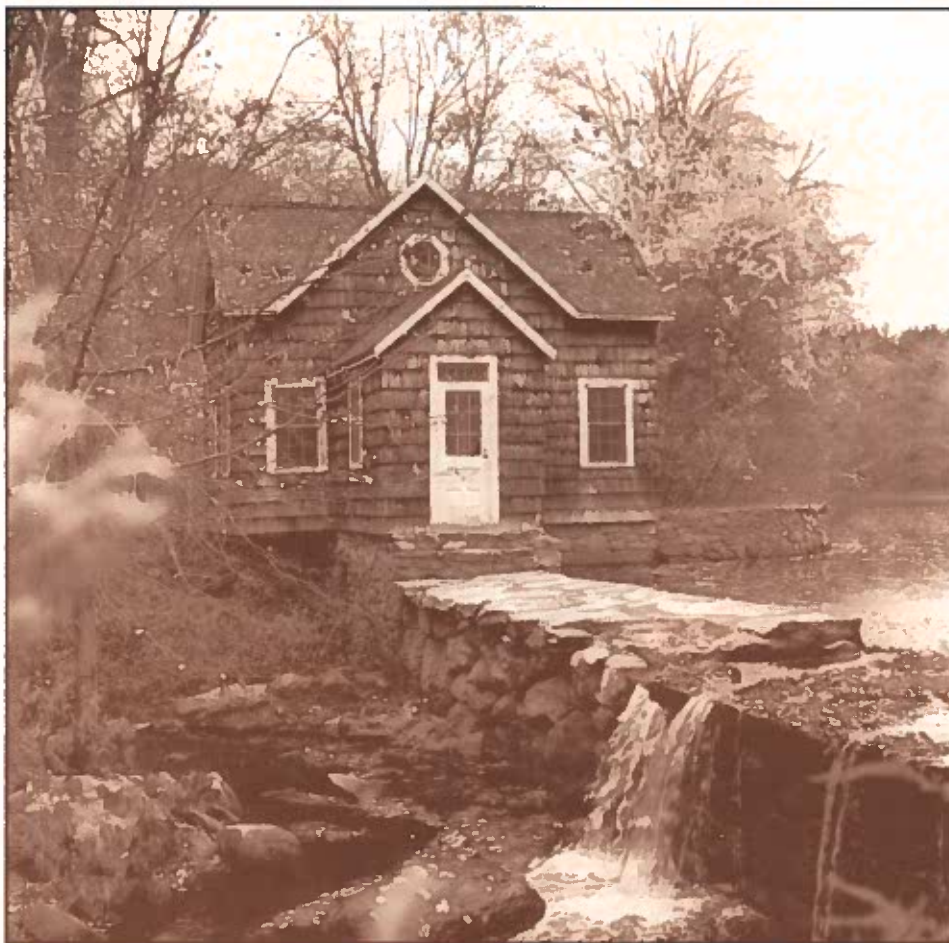
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In 1935 Gus Pfeiffer who owned Aspetuck Corners, replaced the old mill dam and built the small decorative building on top.



Weston Toy Factory originally located at Aspetuck Corners.

Ed Note: The following article was sent to us by Jim Hoe, one of Weston's best historians. We would like to share it with you here.

Long before Weston became incorporated in 1787, followed by Easton in 1845, the settlement of Aspetuck Center was established. Capt. Moses Dimon's lovely house on the south-west corner of the crossroads (located at the corner of Easton Rd. and Old Redding Rd.) was built before 1725 and the big grist mill on the north-west corner was built before 1787. For over 150 years Aspetuck Center, now called Aspetuck Corners, was a busy place of mills, stores, a post office, cider press and the Weston Toy Factory.

In the 1920's a millionaire chemist by the name of Gustaves Pfeiffer and his wife, Louise Foote Pfeiffer, discovered Aspetuck Center and fell in love with it. They bought and restored Capt. Dimon's house and added a new kitchen, dining room and a beautiful, very large sunken parlor, and a music room. Gus and Louise didn't have any children and they were lonely for family and old friends. Thinking it would be nice to have nieces and nephews and their children living nearby, Gus and Louise began to buy every house that they could within a quarter mile of the center and began to repair and restore them. Being a great admirer of Helen Keller he built a house for her on one of the lots he had purchased. A few years later this house burned down and he built her another one. As he restored the houses he invited his friends and relatives to live in them for One Dollar per year rental. This seemed like a great boon during the depression years and about 25 families moved in. One house was for Ernest Hemingway who wrote "The Sun Also Rises" while he lived there.

The "catch" was that Gus and Louise were buying company. Gus invited all the tenants to gatherings at the Pfeiffer Home, which they called "The Manor House." They attended church in the big

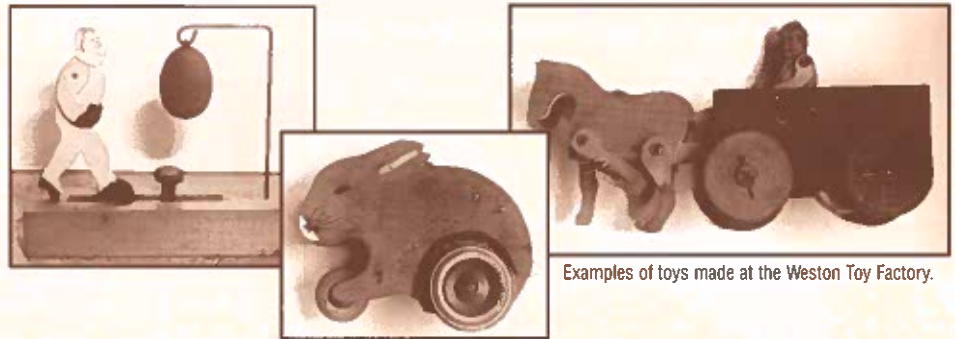
studio barn Sunday morning, and played croquet on the lawn Sunday afternoon. Then there was tennis on the courts Saturday and week days for those who could come. A formal party was held every Saturday night in the studio barn and entertained any visiting guest. To enhance the housing offer, every tenant could finish his house as he chose and Gus had a crew that went about mowing all the lawns. All this was lots of fun for a while but being socially obligated and not being able to have a private life of their own began to chaff, so after a few years the families began to move away. All during this time Burton Merwin would not sell his toy factory and home to Uncle Gus, but by 1935 the depression had continued for so long that Burton got discouraged and on June 2, 1935, he sold to Louise F. Pfeiffer; the toy factory, his home on the hill above and 20 acres of land.

After the purchase Uncle Gus replaced the old mill dam with a new one and built the small decorative building on top of it. Aunt Louise died in 1941, and Uncle Gus must have died around the same time. All the houses and properties were left to their nieces and nephews who sold them over a number of years. The last Pfeiffer property in Weston was sold in the 1970's. All the records of the Pfeiffer houses, complete with maps and pictures taken in the 1930's and new pictures taken in the year 2000 are in the Hemingway-Pfeiffer Museum and Educational Center, 1021 West Cheery St., Piggott, Arkansas 72454. The Director, Mrs. Ruth A. Hawkins, implied in April, 2000 that they might be able to send copies of the records and pictures to the Weston Historical Society. They had to get permission from the Pfeiffer family. The Hemingway-Pfeiffer Museum was opened in July, 1999. It appears to be connected to the Arkansas University.

Thank you Jim for such a wonderful story. We hope that we do indeed get those pictures and information of which you speak.



Farmers with wagons of apples at Merwins Cider Press in the early 1900's



Examples of toys made at the Weston Toy Factory.



Toy Factory, Weston 1970's





HERE WE GO ROUND THE MULBERRY BUSH, THE MULBERRY BUSH, THE MULBERRY BUSH, HERE WE GO ROUND THE MULBERRY BUSH, ON A COLD AND FROSTY MORNING

This children's nursery rhyme/song took on a new meaning after reading an article about Mulberry Trees in a history of Georgetown that was recently donated to us by Pat and Dolores Gruet of Wilson Road. The history was written by Wilbur F. Thompson of Danbury, Ct. in 1922, and includes many interesting articles about the history of Weston's northern-most corner and its impact upon our history.

According to Donald Wyman, author of "Trees for American Gardens," the White Mulberry (*Morus alba*) is described as:

- Fruit:** similar in size and shape to blackberries, white, pinkish or purplish 1/2-1" long
- Effective:** early summer
- Habit:** round-topped, dense
- Foliage:** bright green, often irregularly lobed
- Habitat:** China
- Introduced:** colonial times



White Mulberry

Mr. Wyman goes on to state that none of the mulberries should be used for general ornamental planting and probably should be placed on the discard list. The trees have no special fall color and the fruits are profuse and attractive to all

kinds of birds. If grown by pavement, the falling fruit makes a terrible mess and the hanging branches can be very troublesome requiring a great deal of maintenance.

With all of this said however, the mulberry tree served a great purpose not only in Georgetown, but in Weston as well. Mr. Thompson states that the white Mulberry tree could be seen along the highway and in the thickets of Georgetown. Any old longtime resident, when asked why they had Mulberry trees, would tell you "to feed silk worms."

Silk worms was an industry that flourished in rural communities throughout the state in the mid to late 1800's. This was called sericulture, or the rearing of silkworms. It was first introduced into New England by French colonists, some of whom settled in New Rochelle. In 1783, the General Assembly of our state offered bounties and rewards for the rearing of silk worms.

"In 1838, there was a revival in agriculture, causing a great demand for the Mulberry tree which could not be supplied. Trees of one year's growth were sold for \$1 each. Georgetown, like many other areas, had the silk worm craze, and hundreds of trees were set out (some of these are still alive). The industry gave employment to many women and children. The children gathered the leaves of the Mulberry Tree, and the women took care of the silk worms. The rearing house, or feeding sheds, where the worms were fed had to be well lighted and ventilated and kept at an even temperature. The eggs (called graine) of the silk worm were hatched out by artificial heat. After hatching the worms were placed in shallow trays which slid into frames, one over another. The bottoms of the trays were coarse muslin which gave required ventilation.

"The trays were filled with chopped Mulberry leaves for the worms to feed on. They were great eaters and grew rapidly. Persons who can remember back 70 years, say that when the worms were feeding, the noise could be heard 20 feet from the feeding sheds. After feeding a number of days, the silk worm matured and ceased eating. At this time small branches and twigs of trees were placed near the trays. The worms crawling up into them, commenced to spin their cocoon, always finishing them in three or four days. The cocoons, which were a light yellow color, were collected.

"Some of the best were saved to furnish eggs for the next season's silk worms. The others were pricked to kill the pupa and prevent further growth. These were placed in hot



Red Mulberry



Paper Mulberry



Mulberry Tree

water to loosen the gum on the surface. The silk was unwound onto reels or swifts, and formed into hanks or skeins. It was then spun into thread and woven into silk fabrics on the hand looms of the Olmsteads, Perrys, Bennetts, Battersons, Osborns, Wakemans, etc. There were many families who laid away silk dresses, waist coats, neckerchiefs, etc. which had been woven on the hand looms in Georgetown and vicinity."

Although the Mulberry Tree does not attract a lot of attention these days, it was not only inspiration for a popular nursery rhyme, but also served a great purpose for many communities in the 1800's. Mr. Thompson's article shed great light on one of our first "cottage industries."



ACQUISITIONS

Over the past several months we have acquired some new treasures which we would like to tell you about.

David H. Faile, Jr. of Fairfield gave us a picture that is an aerial view of Kellogg Hill, circa. 1930.

Anita McArdle also gave us an old photo taken along Newtown Turnpike.

Helen Mason donated three guide books on birds, flowers and trees from the 1930's.

Mary Ann Barr found among her belongings three school assignments from the 1950's. These were assignments from Hurlbutt Elementary School and were "business letters." Mary Ann has given these letters to the Society.

From Eugene O'Hare's family we received Bulkley Ledgers from 1820-1845, a scrapbook of John Belden dating from 1877, and an old fashioned cheese plate.

Frank Reeves who lived in Weston for many years and worked for the town (we are sorry to say that he recently passed away) sent us miscellaneous photos and clippings from magazines and newspapers.

Jim Hoe kindly gave us a cork squeezer, a gate hinge from Weston, and two strips of sleigh bells. He also donated a tin sugar/flour shaker and books "The History of the Fanton Family" and "Fight for Liberty."

As always, we are very excited to receive new items pertaining to Weston's history and we thank everyone for their generosity.

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