



The Chronicle Quarterly

Weston Historical Society

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LIFE AND ECONOMY IN OLD-TIME WESTON

Jim Hoe

The following article was the last one that Jim Hoe sent to the *Chronicle* before his death. Jim had been going over papers, letters, diaries, and taped interviews during his usual Saturday morning at the Coley House. He became fascinated with the population figures that Professor Thomas J. Farnham, author of *Weston, The Forging of a Connecticut Town*, quoted in his book. Jim wrote to us to clarify and/or change those figures.

Jim started out quoting *Weston, The Forging of a Connecticut Town* by Prof. Thomas J. Farnham 1979-1996, "By the early nineteenth century there was a small iron industry in the Valley Forge section of Weston operated by Oliver Sanford. Most of the iron that Sanford produced ended up in the hands of local blacksmiths. During the War of 1812, he sold iron to the United States Government, but the expense of transporting the iron to New Haven seriously cut into his profits. A six day round trip by ox cart. In regard to forestlands: "By 1810 little first growth timber remained in Weston." Farming: "After the Civil War, farm produce (commercial farming) died in Weston and the town's farmers returned to subsistence farming. Hanford Nichols owned the biggest farm in town, 300 acres. He owned only 14 dairy cows.

Almost nothing that was produced in Weston was produced for a market beyond the town's border. The population in 1790 was 1117 people, and remained stable until 1860 when it began to decline until 1930 when it was

population of Easton was 1,432 people."

"The late Scott Hill, an able and active trustee of the Weston Historical Society for many years, interviewed many of the town's oldest citizens. The interviews were all taped and transcripts were made of these tapes. These interviews along with diaries, old letters and business records in the archives of the Weston Historical Society tell a different story. Following are excerpts from these records."

"Irving Patchen, 265 Lyons Plain Road, born about 1900, interviewed Dec. 31, 1977: 'My great-grandfather lived in the west side of town. He was a carpenter as was my Grandfather Jarvis Patchen. My Grandfather built the steeple on the Lyons Plain Church. He built a lot of houses here and in Westport. I think that he had 50 men working for him in the 1860's. He was an architect too. I built Frank O'Dwyer's house and he wanted me to work for him, but I didn't want to. I did my

building with a crew of 4 or 5 men. My father, Clifford Patchen, was a wizard at laying out the work. He worked a lot for a man named Quinlan in Westport. They built the big Bedford barn in Greens Farms where Stauffer Chemical is now. Father built houses all over

Vetromile		
Stairs	200.00	150.00
Hardware	1.00	100.00
Garage door	196	180.00
Plumbing	75	100.00
Plumbers for wiring	1500	1250.
Masonry work	2000	1600.
Roofing	100	250.
Lumber & material	4000	3500
Carpenter labor	4300	2900.
Tile bath	450	275.
Kitchen cabinets	500.00	600
Shutters		150.
Very expensive	325	180.
Paint		450
13,000		11615.60
Electrical	262	
	200	
	16788	

A page from Irv. Patchen's journal. The name at the top was Vetromile. the house is on the corner of Norfield and Weston Road (the old Jarvis Academy). Peter Vetromile started Peter's Market in Westport and then in Weston.

630 people." Up until 1845 the Town of Weston included the present town of Easton so the source of the number 1117 people is unknown. Helen Partridge in her book *Easton-It's History* writes that the population of Weston in 1777 was 2,489 people and that after the towns were divided in 1850, the

continued page 2



Weston and neighboring towns, Greenfield Hill, Westport, etc. Here in Weston he built Budd's house (Kettle Creek) and Waterbury's (Waterbury Rd.).

"Irving began working with his father in 1917 on a house in Southport. James Coley, who gave his home to the Weston Historical Society, worked with the Patchens for 5 years, learning the trade. Bennett Johnson was a good sized builder in the 1840's. He lived on West Godfrey Rd. where Cy Weed lived in the 1950's. I think that he had a big gang of men. He built the Emmanuel Church in 1845.

"Mrs. L. Morton {Valley Forge} - Interview date Oct. 5, 1973: The Hoe Factory below the Glen made big hoes for the southern plantations (cotton plants need a big, oversized hoe). The button factory on the Saugatuck (Lyons Plain Rd.) was very successful, selling for export. Anson Morton made charcoal for Bridgeport Brass Companies, up to 50 bushels a day. There were lots of parties and dancing in Weston in the late 19th century and early 20th century.

"Mrs. Anna Corsa {Georgetown Rd.} - Interview date Oct. 5, 1973: My family had 35 dairy cows. We sold milk and dairy products in Norwalk. My Grandfather was Burr Coley and my great-grandfather was Eliphalet Coley who built the house on the corner of Norfield and Weston Roads that was used as a dormitory for the Jarvis School. My father raised and sold onions (onion barn across from Weston Shopping Center), which were sent via boat from Saugatuck to New York. The seeds were taken to a seed dealer in Milford, Ct.

"Ruth Lockwood {Georgetown Rd.} - Interview date March 11, 1977: My parents had a big farm using hired help, most farmers in Weston had hired farm help. We had one man who stayed with us for 30 years. Our farm was a busy, booming place. Our produce included, butter, milk, chickens, eggs, and turkeys and lots of hay, all of which were sold in Norwalk. This was in my grandfather's



This is the Andrews-Lockwood House circa 1805. this house is located along Georgetown Road.



This barn was part of the Lockwood Sawmill located to the right of the big house.

time in 19th century too...farmers came from miles around to breed their cows to our prize bull. Father had steam powered saw mills for lumber he sold.

"Mrs. Cleora Coley {Weston Rd.} - Interview date Jan. 15, 1979: David Dimon Coley (1811-1884) bought this farm, cleared it and raised onions (farm was more than 100 acres). All the farms



Old onion barn where Mr. Coley and others stored their onions awaiting shipment. The onions were then transported to Westport (behind the Main Street stores) where large ships would pick up the onions and take them as far as New York.

around us raised onions. They were shipped out of Westport, Norwalk and Southport. They started farming with oxen and then used big horses. They had hired farm help of 9 men working full time and they built a house for them to live in. They bought cattle and horses in England. They had 13 milk cows and then raised beef cattle pigs and lots of sheep. They sold the produce in Bridgeport and shopped in Westport. They did lots of sleighing in the winter time. Weston taverns were very busy with lots of dancing. Compo and other beaches were very popular.



446 Newtown Turnpike
Old bulkley House circa 1846.
Jim Hoe lived here from 1948-2002

"Morehouse Family {Newtown Tpk} - Information given 1950's: Charles Morehouse bought the old Bulkley house at 446 Newtown Turnpike, Weston with 200 plus acres in the 19th century. He farmed it along with other property that he owned. In all he owned over 2000 acres. The old barn on the former Bulkley property had stalls for 12 yoke of oxen - all of them used. As no one lived in the Bulkley house, he used it as a dormitory for his hired farm laborers.



96 Ladder Hill North
was also built by the Bulkley family.



96 Ladder Hill North
Photo taken mid 1800's. People in photo - probably Bulkley's who build original house.
Photo courtesy of M.A. Barr

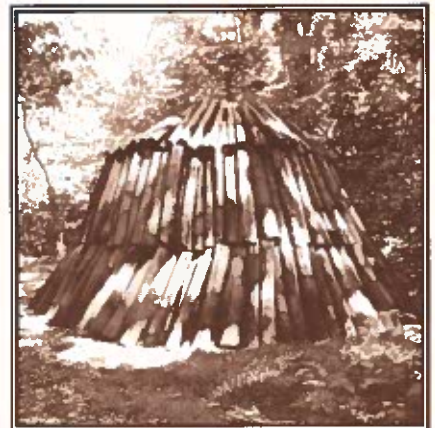
“David Coley {River Rd.} - Information given 1970: The Coley machine shop, Goodhill Road, was a busy business at the time of the Civil War. It was three stories high. After the foundry and machine shop closed and into the 20th century, the machine shop was used as a dormitory for hired farm laborers. In the 1920's and 30's the big Coley cow barn on River Road was used for monthly square dances. Everybody who was able attended these dances including families from the 20 cabin Wessel camp on Georgetown Rd. These families enjoyed the concerts at Music Hill too, accommodations for over 4000 people.



Four views of the Coley Foundry, one of Weston's largest businesses. The Foundry was located on River Road and Goodhill Road



“Leon Stone - Interview date 1969: We cut railroad ties for the New Haven RR, hired workmen from Italy and France. We built shanties for the men in the woods. They used feed bags stuffed with hay to sleep on. When cutting down the trees, the trenches were used for charcoal and we had big 200 bushel wagons to deliver the charcoal to Bridgeport. We cut wood in Devil's Den, Weston for 15 to 18 years. My father went to all the factories in Bridgeport and tied the market up. We had a crew of 180 - 185 men full time, cutting in Weston, Easton and Redding. We sold a lot of lumber to Barnum & Bailey Circus for their wagons which they made themselves. We sold 3" planks to neighboring towns for bridges. Men would come into the woods looking for special bends for boats. We sold lumber to dealers like A.W. Burr. When up in the Saugatuck Valley we used to see a man trapping eels. He used to trap them by the hundreds and sell them in Westport.



A pile of stacked wood used in the making of charcoal which was shipped out of Weston to places like Bridgeport. Sometimes as many as 200 bushel wagons.

“Aspetuck Center and The Weston Toy Company {Redding Rd.} - Weston Forum March 23, 2000 - First owner Gershon Bradley built a fanning, grist, bolting and saw mill at Aspetuck Center in the mid-18th century. His son Jonathan joined him in operating the mills but after Gershon retired in 1789, they sold the mills to Peter Perry. Peter was joined by his son Job Perry (1768-1804) who was joined by his son Orrando Perry in 1818. The three Perrys ran the mills for 51 years, but Orrando
continued on page 6



446 Newtown Turnpike
Jim Joe House circa 1960s (Bulkley house on 1867 map)



Arthur James Hoe
May 1913
to
September 2002

From the Editor:

As many of you may be aware, the Historical Society recently lost one of its most active members. Jim Hoe passed away in October, leaving a huge hole in our hearts. Jim had been an active member for many years, serving a President of the organization in its early years. More recently Jim had been pouring over many of our documents and pictures, as well as writing articles for the Chronicle, one of which is included in this issue.

Our summer issue of the Chronicle from 1995 had an article on Jim and his life. He was born in 1913 in Bedford Hills, New York. He came from a mechanical background - his family had been in the printing press business for generations.* Jim had always been dazzled by cars, fancy

and racing, and in 1925 he visited relations in North Dakota where he fell in love with the Duesenberg, which was to become his passion.

After graduation from school, Jim worked at a hotel and a ranch. He worked at a mine in California, and worked for Boeing as a mechanic. He worked as a steel sharpener and finally ended up at Sperry Gyroscope in Long Island where he worked as a mechanic and engineer for electrical transformers used on gun turrets.

With the advent of WWII, the price of cars dropped and Jim was able to buy his first Duesenberg for \$275. The car needed a great deal of overhauling, but Jim was up to the task. He started fixing cars for relatives and friends and never went

back to Sperry. In 1945 the Sports Car Club of America which had its headquarters in Westport was sponsoring a meet at Longshore (then privately owned). Jim brought his "Duesy" and won the acceleration competition down the tree lined drive, hands down. The aim of the club was to reestablish road races around the country and Jim went with them and won most of the competitions.

Road & Track magazine and Car & Driver featured Jim and his expertise in many articles, thus giving him a fine reputation. He heard from people all around the country and around the world. He decided to come up the Merritt Parkway and set up a shop between New York and Boston where many Duesenbergs were located. He bought property on Rt. 7 in Wilton and found his house on Newtown Turnpike in 1948. He built a garage at his new house and found that he liked working at home so much he applied for a business license from the town of Weston and sold the Rt. 7 property. Here he served as an agent for buying and selling Duesenbergs as well as servicing the engines.

Jim also was an avid genealogist and lover of local history. We will miss him terribly and we extend our sympathies to his family. Weston has lost a true treasure.

**Mary Ann Barr of the Historical Society recently received a call from Ty Haines of Rowayton. Ty told her he had once worked on a Hoe Press in Stamford and that the plaque from that machine is now located in the New Canaan Historical Society.*



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

If you have ever used the expression, "it's a doozy" you were actually talking about the Duesenberg automobile (Duesy), by far one of the greatest of all cars produced in America.

The Duesenberg was the creation of two brothers, of the same name, who were among many mechanical creators of the late nineteenth century. Their machine, combining flawless craftsmanship with engineering brilliance, is one of the most valuable automobiles in the world.

Karin,

The following paragraph appeared in the Aug. 27 - Sept. 1 issue of the Auburn Cord Duesenberg Festival Newsletter:

A brief history of the Auburn Cord Duesenberg Club
Robert McEwen

[Referring to the early '50s] "At the time, I was the Newsletter editor and I thought it was time for some of our members to finally meet face to face. A member named Bob Fabris tried an afternoon get together near Pittsburgh but it only drew 15 members and three cars. I felt that with our widely scattered membership, some kind of attraction would be needed to motivate good attendance. The attraction I came up



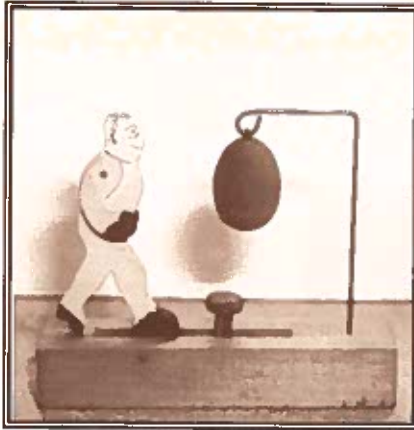
1930 Duesenberg Model J Dual-Cowl Phaeton (Barrel-Side)
Jim's first Duesenberg, purchased for \$275.00. Sold for over \$1000,000.00

with was Hoe Sportscars in Westport, Connecticut which was owned by member A.J. "Jim" Hoe. At the time Jim was generally acknowledged as the leading Duesenberg expert in the East and was campaigning a Duesenberg powered special in S.C.C.A. events.

He always had two or three Duesenbergs in the shop so I had a great draw and a very successful gathering of 26 members and 12 cars from seven states."

Tad

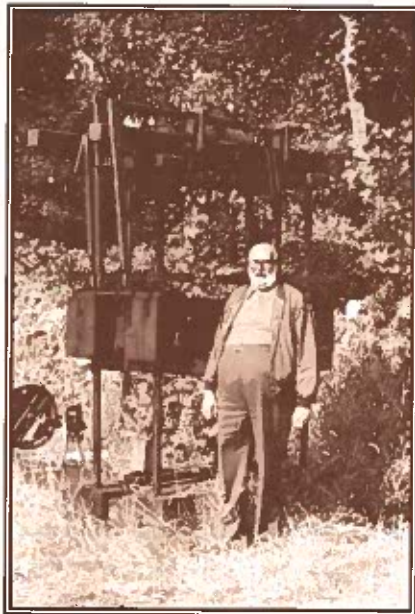




Four toys made at Weston Toy Factory

had no sons to carry on and sold the mills to Edwin Weed (the fifth owner). Edwin Weed had worked as a miller for the Perry family for years. Way back in 1830 Edwin bought the rights to use the Henry Atwood patent for an improved milling machine, which was patented just three months before Henry's

purchase. Edwin devised a bread flour of mixed grains that was very popular and sold over a large area, and he sold a lot of flour to the U.S. Government during the Civil War. When he retired in 1874, Edwin was a very wealthy man. In fact all the owners of that mill retired as wealthy men. Upon his retirement



Herb Day and Joe Spetty standing next to portions of the Cider Press once located at the Toy Factory. The press is together inside the Cider Shed at the Coley House.

Edwin Weed sold the mills, land, a house and cider mill on the Weston side of the river to David B. Gould. He was joined by his son Franklin S. Gould, and they ran the mills for 20 years. David B. Gould died in 1880 and David sold the entire property to Burton P. Merwin in 1881. In August, 1892, the old mill was struck by lightning and burned to the ground. Fortunately it was covered by fire insurance and as the local grain growing was declining, Burton added a store and wood shop to the cider mill in Weston. He made ax handles, wooden grocery baskets, sold groceries and ran a post office. He used to make small animated toys for his children and a man urged him to make them for the market. He made thousands of these toys and sold them throughout the country for over ten years.

Valley Forge - Interview with Oliver Sanford, great-grandson of Oliver Sanford who founded the Valley Forge Iron Works in Redding in the 18th century in partnership with Aaron Barlow, brother of Joel Barlow, statesman and poet {The Bridgeport Post.}: Government contracts stated that the Iron Works supplied iron for the Revolutionary War, War of 1812, Civil War and the Spanish War. The iron was sent by ox-cart to New Haven and sometimes all the way to New London. The Government paid for the trip, not the Iron Works. The workman loved to be assigned the hauling trip to the big city. The Works moved to Weston in 1805 and a foundry was built across the river from the Forge in 1840. It was sold to Bradley Hull in 1840 and its operation continued by his son in law, Henry B. Wheeler from 1870 until 1900. Henry bought the patent rights to make a chilled steel plow and sold them over a large area of southern Connecticut.

Oliver Sanford installed a puddling furnace (the only one in Connecticut at that time) in 1830. The furnace used coal instead of charcoal and greatly increased their profits. The Forge was sold to Benjamin F. Bulkley in 1859. Benjamin's records show that he bought large quantities of Cumberland Coal from that date on. Among the Forge

continues on page 7



Old dam at Valley Forge Weston. Joseph Bulkley's Forge on the left, H.B. Wheeler's forge at right. circa 1885-1890 - Now under water at Saugatuck Reservoir.

items listed with the sale was a steam engine, thus they were not dependent on water power. A recently found Bulkley Iron Works ledger shows that Benjamin sold over 4000 pounds of ironware to 56 hat manufacturing companies in the 1890's. These factories were spread over Connecticut and neighboring states. Helen Partridge in her book *Easton - Its History* writes: 'One of the most prosperous businesses was the iron works at Valley Forge Corners. Easton farmers worked there in off seasons as well as at the pin factory below the present dam and at the Bradley Ax Factory.

"Bradley Edge Tool Company, Valley Forge Iron Works (Sanford-Bulkley) and Foundry (Hull-Wheeler) were all successful companies with big, out of town markets, county, state and country. They also hired out of town labor. Old letters and diaries mention constant visits with friends and relatives outside of Connecticut, both to and from. Old photo albums show members of these families in fine stylish suits and dresses.

"All of the above show that Weston was a very busy prosperous town for years and on into the early 20th century. There was Burton Merwin's Toy Company with nationwide clientele and the Fairfield County Music Society with thousands of members. Its inspiration and center was Music Hill on Godfrey Road, West, Weston, CT. that accommodated audiences of 400 people in the 1930's."

Jim's research certainly casts some doubt on the low figures of population and supposed desolation of Weston in the early 1900's. Our sleepy little town may not have been so sleepy. We wish we could thank Jim personally for all of the information he compiled over the last few months.



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The Weston Historical Society ACQUISITIONS

Mary Ann Barr, who spends each and every Saturday morning at the Coley House Archive Room, has had a very busy time of late. She has acquired many new items to add to our collection which we would like to share with you.

P.J. Letersky who lives on the old Irv Patchen property brought us some horseshoes he found there.

Mary Anne Hyde gave us a WWI coat that had belonged to her husband's father.

Ed and Mary Ann Roehm gave us a fire poker from a forge in Weston and several hand tools and farm tools, digging and hay rakes and an iron grate.

Lynne Barrelle received from Mary Ellen Fitch Hague (the daughter of Frank Fitch, a longtime resident of Weston) a pair of leather women's shoes, one white woman's bodice, and a white man's vest. Frank Fitch, Jr. gave us signs from his business, an oil painting of oxen, and a photo of a local Masonic group. We also received a "Weston Cook Book" done by the PTA. It measures 8 1/2" x 11" and is covered in red construction paper. This belonged to Alice Thompson Fitch. There was a scrapbook from Alice as well. She once was a Norfield School teacher.

There were two WWII uniforms belonging to Frank K. Fitch, Sr. who served as a C.B. carpenter's mate.

Aleeta Attra gave us several tools and a Regina pneumatic vacuum cleaner from the turn of the century.

Mr. & Mrs. Orvis who owned the old Good Hill school house gave us various tools from the property: a 2-piece sled for hauling maple sap, a drill press, a hand auger for cedar poles used for water, an oxen tree from a horse chestnut, and a separator for slaughtering hogs.

Gayle Beyea donated a Ladies Home Journal from 1910.

Lynne Barrelle gave us a program for the opening of the Weston Middle School from April 16, 1961.

As always we thank everyone for their most generous donations and the great pieces of history.



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A WEIGHTY QUESTION

This fall at the Grange Fair and the Emmanuel Church Fair, the Historical Society brought a cannonball which had been found on Jim Hoe's property many years ago. It is believed that it is a cannonball from the British Army which marched into and burned Danbury during the Revolutionary War. Folks were asked to guess the weight of the cannonball and we had two winners, one at each fair. The winners were Vonnie Whittleton and Colleen Brandon, both of whom won a hand-colored map of Weston. Our congratulations to them.

A little secret - the ball weighed 8 pounds exactly.



Cannonball found on Newtown Turnpike, thought to be left by the British when they were chased back to Long Island Sound after marching on and burning much of Danbury.