

The only lightless dark  
is the night  
of ignorance and  
insensibility.

—Helen Keller,  
*The World I Live In*

# The Chronicle Quarterly

Weston Historical Society

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## WHENEVER I PICK BLUEBERRIES I THINK OF HELEN KELLER

By Margo Melton Nutt

The first eight years of my life were spent on a 40-acre hilltop “farm” on Steep Hill Road in Weston. We had an apple orchard, grape arbor, and a variety of fruit trees and bushes – blueberries amongst them. We considered Helen Keller and her companion, Polly Thompson, our neighbors, although their home in Easton was about 15 miles from ours in Weston. Helen and Polly came annually in mid-summer for a day of blueberry picking.

Helen’s magnetism radiated so that even our dignified German shepherd, Caesar, usually slow to make friends, sat at her feet accepting loving pats. It had somehow been explained to me, age three, that Helen would “see” me through her hands – not to be afraid, but just to stand still and quiet when Helen touched my face, my hands, my hair. I remember standing there awed while this large shadow in slacks with a huge sun hat bent down to meet me. Afterwards she said through Polly: “Beautiful! Slender, pretty, lovely hair.”

Then she and Polly and our dog would go off for the berries, while my mother prepared a lunch



Helen at age seven

of freshly picked corn on the cob from our vegetable garden, and hamburgers cooked to order on the outdoor stone grill. Someone would ring the big old Navy bell on the back porch to call everyone to chow. Afterwards, Helen loved to wander through the vegetable garden, gently touching the sun-warmed tomatoes, bell peppers, and squash. The berry picking would

resume in the afternoon.

My logical mind now wonders: How did she know which ones were ripe? Was her touch so delicate that only the ripe ones fell into the bucket hung on a string around her neck? Or did she simply pick everything for someone else to sort out later? *Or didn't it matter?* Was it the sun and activity and a meal with friends that were the only important thing?

I have another story about Helen Keller, though this I learned through family recounting, as I was only a year at the time. The community and the world was shocked when Helen’s home on Arcan Ridge burned to the ground one night in 1946, while she and Polly were traveling on one of their missions. The American Foundation for the Blind made it possible for her house to be rebuilt, but personal housekeeping items assembled during thirty years would be difficult to replace. My mother decided to have a party for Helen and Polly, and ask each guest to bring them a house gift: a dish towel, a kitchen spoon, some small but useful item.

With a guest list of over one hundred people, and my father

*continud page 2*



James Melton, Marjorie Barkley McClure and Margo Melton Nutt

– tenor James Melton – rehearsing in New York and unable to share the hosting duties-my mother decided to invite the guests in staggered groups; one group was invited to come between two and four, the next group between four and six. It was a radiant, warm fall day. The guests brought a fabulous array of gifts, and not a duplicate among them (except where duplicates would be useful, such as dishtowels.) One friend brought a breadboard, bread knife, and freshly baked loaf of bread. Another brought a delicate tea set from China, saying “I’ve loved it for many years, and now I want Miss Keller to have it.” By three o’clock the tables set up for gifts were overflowing.

Each guest wanted to meet Helen, and during tea there was always a group around her. By six o’clock, all the guests were still there, stimulated by her presence. The sandwiches and cakes were gone, but the party wasn’t. My father arrived home from New York about this time. His accompanist was with him, for they planned to continue rehearsing that evening.

He had always

appreciated the fact that my mother never asked him to entertain guests. This time he was happy to oblige. Everyone gathered in the music room, on the floor, or outside the open French doors, on the terrace. And Polly, her fingers dancing across Helen’s hand, explained to Helen what was happening.

My father led Helen to the piano, and she stood beside him. She placed the fingers of her left hand lightly against his lips. Her thumb touched his throat. Her right hand was pressed to the sounding board of the piano. Thus she “listened.”

It was after seven when the guests finally departed. Each one expressed the same feeling. “I came, with joy in giving to wonderful Helen Keller. I leave, enriched. She is the one who gives...joy and inspiration.”

The next morning our big red International Harvester truck was loaded with the gifts.

A few days later, Helen wrote in her distinctive neat block printing, “..Your singing, Mr. Melton, was the crown to a perfect day. It was a rare treat...Your art enchanted us in which you blended

the graces of the sphere-born harmonious sister, Voice and verse!”



In 1932, Helen, Annie, and Polly posed with two of their many dogs.



*Ed Note:* Margo Melton Nutt, lived on Steep Hill Road from her birth in 1945 until 1954. She now resides in Vermont. She is writing a biographical memoir of her father, including her childhood experiences in Weston.

I was extremely privileged to be a friend of Margo’s in kindergarten. I remember her wonderful family and their beautiful home. We were reunited a few years ago because Margo’s research led her to our website and she emailed asking who had written the article on her house. It seems that we picked up just where we left off 50 years ago. I hope that everyone will be pleased to know that a former Weston family has purchased the Helen Keller home and is restoring it to its glory when Miss Keller lived there.

Thank you Margo for a wonderful memory.



Helen at age eighty remained a devoted reader.





## “THE GREAT LAW”



“**T**he U.S. constitution, a document that outlines the organization of the three branches of government, defines the powers of the government in relation to that of individual states. It was framed in 1787 and was adopted in 1789. One of the most significant influences on this document was the Iroquois constitution, also called the Great Law of Peace.”

This is the beginning of a fascinating article given to us by Sandy O'Brien, former President and trustee of the Weston Historical Society. According to the article, the Great Law of Peace was created by the Iroquois to stop neighboring tribes from fighting. The document was recorded on wampum belts and formed a confederacy among the Oneida, Mohawk, Cayuga, Onondaga and the Seneca tribes. Contemporary historians date the article at about A.D. 1450. It was conceived by an Indian named Deganwidah, and with Hiawath as his spokesperson, he traveled the land trying to bring peace to warring tribes.

“The Iroquois Constitution prevented government interference in everyone’s daily lives and enhanced individual freedom. It also separated the civilian government from military and religious affairs; allowed many different religions and faiths to coexist; and recognized the importance of one’s religious belief, no matter what its content or origin. Section 99 of the Iroquois Constitution stated outright the guarantee of religious freedom “The rites and festivals (religious practices) of each nation shall remain undisturbed and shall continue as before because they were given by the people of old times as useful and necessary for the good of men.”

Benjamin Franklin became familiar with the Iroquois political system and was very interested. He

later became convinced of its uniqueness compared with the governments of Europe. He publicly advocated that a federal union of the colonies be based on the principles of “The Great Law.” Thomas Jefferson also preferred the American Indian concept of liberty over that of the European monarchy. When the convention convened in Albany in 1754 for the purpose of forging an agreement that would help the colonists retain their individuality and at the same time operate as a unified whole, Mr. Franklin presented a plan that was highly influenced by the Iroquois constitution.

Unfortunately we do not have the room here to print all the similarities and differences of the two constitutions, but it is highly likely that without the Iroquois document that our society would be quite different than it is today.

We are also very fortunate to be the recipients of many Indian discoveries made long before the settlers landed on American soil. Of course we all know that Indians used plants, berries, and flowers for medicines. But did you know that the Indians are credited with the discovery of the toothbrush? North American Indians cleaned their teeth with the frayed end of stick. The Indians are also noted for performing complex surgeries, using human hair for sutures. The Indians also invented syringes to administer medicine beneath the skin. These were made from hollow bird bones and small animal bladders. They also used anesthetics to cause patients to lose consciousness during surgery.

The Indians of Mexico and South America were the first to domesticate avocados, pineapples, zucchini, beans, sweet (bell) peppers, chili peppers, tomatoes, and vanilla. Rainforest Indians used cashews for food and medicine. They built houses from

cashew wood, which contains natural insect repellent. Indians also planted herb gardens filled with medicinal plants. By domesticating these herbs, they were assured that these sources of medicine would be available when needed.

American Indians began growing tobacco in about A.D. 1. They gathered strawberries and made a pudding-like bread from cornmeal and berries. European colonists borrowed the idea and turned it into strawberry shortcake. In the Southwest, Indians were the first to use the sap of American aloe to treat chapped lips and skin rashes. In the Northeast, Indian cooks used black walnut oil in corn pudding. Plains cooks ground the nuts and used them for soup.

Among other discoveries attributed to Indians of South and North America are such things as shampoo, latex, plumbing, deodorants, sunscreens, detergents, daily bathing, fishhooks, soldering, colanders, mouthwash, needles, suspension bridges, concrete, asphalt, fertilizer, irrigation, straight pins, hammocks, umbrellas and calendars.

As the saying goes “necessity is the mother of invention.” It is amazing how many things the Indians used that were part of their land and their surroundings, never wasting any part of the animal, plant, stone, or bone. They loved the land and honored its very existence. Although the land has changed since the Indians traversed our forests, rivers, and plains, we should never forget their presence and their importance in our history.

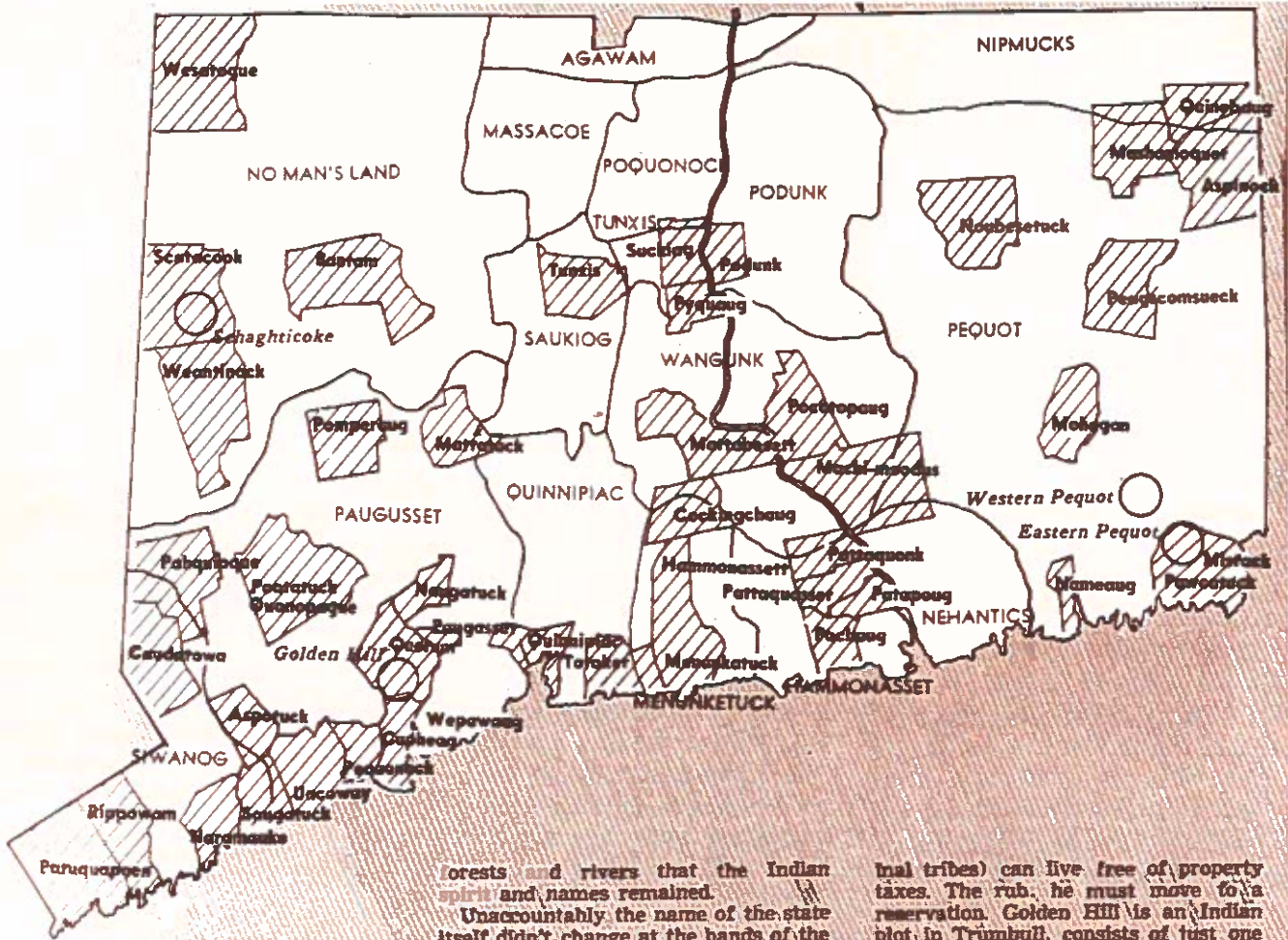


*(ed. Note)* We thank Sandy O'Brien for sharing these interesting and informative articles with us.



St. Life  
2/2/67

# Last reservations



Pity the poor Mohican who tries to locate his Connecticut relatives. While the state's palefaces grouse about poorly-marked highways, the redskin would be confused by the signs themselves. The exit off the Connecticut Turnpike to Patuquapaen is marked Greenwich. To blaze a trail to Rippowam requires a turn at Stamford. He would have the same trouble in 45 of the state's towns which have long since found a more-pronounceable Anglo-Saxon substitute for their original Indian names.

True, there are still villages like Nepaug to recall the state's earliest residents, but of the 169 towns only Naugatuck clung to its original. Of the state's largest cities, Pequonock had become Bridgeport, Quinniapiac was renamed New Haven, and Suckiag was changed to Hartford. It was in the

forests and rivers that the Indian spirit and names remained.

Unaccountably the name of the state itself didn't change at the hands of the anglicizers. The Algonkin phrase "conne-tic-ut" ("by the long river") was simply condensed. Originally 16 distinct tribes located their homeland by reference to the river. In the summer of 1614 the first white man, Dutch navigator Adrian Block, landed at a fortified Indian village where South Windsor now stands. Even now the campfire stones of the original Podunk village are scattered over several hundred acres. The Pequots themselves resent Mohican invaders from New York, claimed they owned the state and proceeded to sell parts of it at Saybrook and Hartford to the Dutch. The river tribes encouraged English migration in an attempt to find allies against the Pequots.

Inevitably the Indians were nudged off their land or propelled into the happy hunting ground. Inter-marriage as well accounted for the shrinkage of the state's original 6,000 population to today's handful. Nevertheless the state maintains (through the welfare department) four reservations for 14 full-time Indians. Four are only part-time, summering in Connecticut.

There is an advantage these days in being an Indian. Any Connecticut resident who can prove he has one-eighth Indian blood (from one of the 16 orig-

inal tribes) can live free of property taxes. The rub, he must move to a reservation. Golden Hill is an Indian plot, in Trumbull, consists of just one house on a lot. Two Indians are enjoying tax-free living but miss the company of other tepees. On the New York border at Kent, the Schaghticoke reservation covers 400 acres on which two houses stand. Only one family keeps its house open year-round; the other uses its ancestral home as a summer cottage.

The Pequots, western and eastern varieties, have still not gotten together after three centuries. The eastern tribe makes its digs in North Stonington on 220 acres. Five houses hold eight natives. In Ledyard the three western Pequots find more room for dance and hunt with 186 tax-free acres and two houses.

In fact the state's redskins are mostly comfortably well-off, assimilated citizens who go to barber and hairdresser and wouldn't know how to scalp a paleface. They see cowboys only in movies and on TV. Yet for some the call of an away-from-it-all life on the reservation might be appealing.

The map shows state towns that still have Indian names, according to the State Manual and Register — and where the Indian tribes used to be in Connecticut. The four circled areas are the present-day reservations.



When we think of Weston's first settlers, we might think of Roger Ludlow who, with his band of puritans, settled this area when he came from England in 1620. We might think of the names of Godfrey, Sanford, Sherwood, Moorehouse, and Nichols, whose names are associated with the founding of Weston.

However, what of the names, Saugatuck, Aspetuck, Nowake, Pequot, Rippowam and Mohawk? These are the names of the American Indian tribes who used our forests and streams for hunting, trapping and fishing, long before Weston settlers arrived in the area. Our land was rich with deer, bear, moose, fox, raccoon, mink otter, and many varieties of fowl. It is our understanding that the Indian tribe that walked the lands of Weston was the Paugusset Indians, part of the Aspetuck Tribe - Aspetuck meaning a river starting in a high place. It has also been reported that the Indians that inhabited our lands were referred to as the Saugatuck Indians.

According to a 1964 article in the Connecticut Warbler written by Marion and Henry Lee, land was acquired from the Nowake (Norwalk) Indians in 1640. Although there was no monetary number given, the Indians agreed "that the palefaces could claim all the land between the Norwalk River and the Saugatuck, including the tributary Aspetuck from the Sound as far inland as a man could walk from sunup to sundown". It was reported that the whites used their best hunters and woodsmen, and they reached the borders of what today is Danbury, Bethel and Newtown, a distance of 20 miles.

Daniel Godfrey, the first settler according to Mr. Lee, must have been a hardy soul to come into Weston which was referred to as the "Devil's Den" - a "fearsome menagerie of wildcats, bears, wolves, copperheads, great snapper turtles, screaming eagles, screeching owls, and poisonous spiders." There was a legend that the name Devil's Den derived from a "gigantic footprint on a rock, generally believed to be the devil's own." Needless to say, most residents never saw the devil himself so this legend was forgotten.

Robert Harper, father of Weston resident Mark Harper, worked for the water company as overseer of the Saugatuck Reservoir and over the years collected 10,000 Indian tools, in the "Devil's Den." Mr. Harper, his wife and two sons found Indian tools, stone weapons and other Indian relics when the waters of the reservoir were very low. Mr. Harper discovered an unsuspected

*continud page 6*

## Weston Historical Society *cruc 5/21/66* Holds Largest Meeting

By GRACE ROBINSON  
 Stone relics of Indian civilizations in the Saugatuck River Valley in Weston, Westport, Redding and Easton, dating as far back as 6,000 B.C., were described and in part exhibited Monday night at the largest meeting ever held by the Historical Society of Weston. The speaker was Robert Harper, Sr., local amateur archeologist, who agreed to a return engagement at which other artifacts and different phases of Weston's archaeological past will be discussed.

Besides Harper's display of the Weston, Westport and Redding Indian relics, a number of persons brought their own artifacts for identification and comment.

Mrs. Lloyd Scribner, who, with her husband, has donated the 18th century Weston Post Office and General Store to the Society as a museum, brought stone arrowheads she had picked up as a girl on her father's farm opposite Cobb's Mill Inn.

Harper and the Weston Historical Society's curator, Arthur Hoe, Jr., both cast fresh light on the long-lost, "Devil's Den" section of Weston. Hoe has located the spectacular Den (a little valley surrounded by high cliffs on all sides), and Harper found an illustration in an old book, of what is listed as "one of the seven wonders of Connecticut." Also the location is on a map printed in 1858 of Fairfield County, which Hoe brought to the meeting.

Harper, who is overseer of the Bridgeport Hydraulic Company's Saugatuck Reservoir, told how he was "forced to become an archaeologist because he and his men were always turning up Indian artifacts - stone arrowheads, spearheads, axeheads, harpoonheads, stone drills, stone hammers, stone pendants, stone chisels for making dugout canoes, bone tools and bones of ancient redskins."

He said that "all these things were around on the Hydraulic company's property waiting for somebody to collect them; but, I haven't space for many more. Why, for a long time I had two Indian skeletons under my

bed, and Mrs. Harper objected!"

Some of the Indian artifacts found in Weston, Harper said, resemble in workmanship stone artifacts found in Siberia. But whether the craftsmanship was transmitted from tribe to tribe, from Siberia to Alaska and then eastward to the Atlantic Coast, is a "problem for the experts, not for an amateur like myself." In some old stone foundations of the destroyed homes of earlier settlers in Weston, Harper dug out of the earth coins dating from 1787 to 1831.

Also, in one of three Indian villages, which are accessible only during drouths, in the reservoir itself, Harper found a string of glass beads of French make. This was confirmed by the Museum of the American Indian in New York. Just how this artifact reached Weston - whether French traders came this far down along the coast from Canada, or whether the raiding Mohawks (the warlike tribe of Indians who gradually dominated the peaceful older tribes in Fairfield County) - nobody knows.

Harper has no objections to interested persons who wish to dig or search for Indian artifacts in the properties which are under his jurisdiction, but, those who wish to do so, must first obtain a permit from the overseer. Besides, the search should be methodically done and a record of findings made available to Harper.

As one of the very active members of the Connecticut Archaeological Society, Harper will see to it that such records are preserved.

Checkerboard maps of the regions to be explored must be made and the location and depths of the findings must be carefully recorded, along with a description of each artifact. Those who find Indian relics may keep them after the details have been recorded.

The date of Harper's return speaking engagement will be announced later.

The WESTPORT NEWS May 21, 1964



**ARTIFACTS SHOWN** - A display of artifacts and other items found in the Weston area were shown by Robert Harper, center, to James Hoe, curator and Edwin Phelps, president of the Weston Historical Society.

Indian cave-shelter in the Devil's Den, close to the Weston and Redding town lines, according to an article by Robert Conway, trustee of the Weston Historical Society, printed in June of 1965.

This find was kept a secret until Mr. Harper could have a properly controlled "dig." According to Mr. Conway's article "the Harper family found almost 50 stone, bone and copper weapons and tools. Axe heads, chisels and knives were chiefly made of granite, (a hard stone). Arrowheads and spearheads of flint (a stone easily chipped), needles and pipe-stems of bird bones, were among other items found."

Although there is no real evidence of Indian burial sites in Weston it is believed that some graves exist on Kellogg Hill and in the Coley Cemetery. It is possible that some of the unmarked fieldstone headstones with foot stones facing east to west, mark the graves of Indians. What an honor it would be to think some of our earliest residents rest in the grounds they cherished as much as we do today.



### *The Chronicle Quarterly*

9 Christopher Hill, Weston, CT 06883  
(203) 762-9208

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**Karin Giannitti**  
*Editor*

**Wendy Giannitti**  
*Patent Proofreader*

**Custom Printing & Graphics**  
*Design/Production*

## FROM THE EDITOR:



The Society recently had a painting restored that was in dire need of a cleaning and work on a lovely frame. We would like to acknowledge the work of Ray Acampora of Wilton who lovingly cleaned our painting revealing a sweet and lovely scene. We would also like to thank Ernesta Cicconi of the River Road Gallery in Wilton for finding us a wonderfully skilled expert who fixed our ornate gold frame just like new.

The painting is hanging in its proper place in the front parlor of the Coley House and it is just wonderful. We thank all those who made this possible.



## DATES TO REMEMBER:

Our **Annual Meeting** this year will be held on **Sunday, March 26**, at 4:00 p.m. in the community room at the Weston Library. We will have a short business meeting and Dan Burstein will be the guest speaker. Light refreshments will be served.

Our **Annual Easter Egg Hunt** will be held this year on **April 15**.

The **Antique Show** will be happening on **May 21st** (rain date of May 28th). This year we will have more vendors, so please join us.





# 70 YEARS OF COOKING WITH QUINEBAUG GRANGERS

*While taking an inventory of our books at the Society, we often run across a newspaper article tucked into the pages or a dried flower or piece of ribbon used to mark a special word or story. We also have a collection of old cookbooks, some local and some from nearby towns. It is always fun to peruse these books and see how our recipes, and ingredients have changed over the years. Sometimes there are also funny clips and helpful hints from cooks themselves. The following recipe came from a book entitled "70 Years of Cooking with Quinebaug Grangers – Dedicated to the 70th Anniversary of the Quinebaug Pomona Grange No. 2 – 1887 – 1957. This is one we couldn't resist, during this Valentine season.*



## How To Cook A Husband

A good many husbands are utterly spoiled by mismanagement. Some women go about it as if their husbands were bladders and blow them up. Others keep them constantly in hot water; others let them freeze by their carelessness and indifference. Some keep them in a stew, by irritating ways and words, others roast them. Some keep them in a pickle all their lives.

It cannot be supposed that any husband will be tender and good, managed in this way, but they are really delicious when properly treated.

In selecting a husband, you should not be guided by the silvery appearance as in buying a mackerel, nor by the golden tint, as if you wanted salmon. Be sure and select him yourself as tastes differ. Do not go to the market for him, as the best are always brought to your door. It is far better to have none, unless you patiently learn how to cook him.

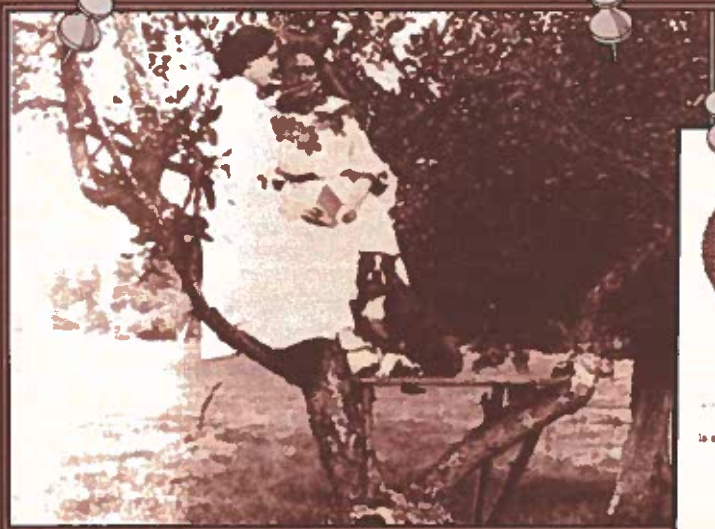
A preserving kettle of the finest porcelain is best, but if you have nothing but an earthenware pipkin (a small earthenware jar), it will do with care. See that the linen in which you wrap him is

nicely washed and mended, with the required number of buttons and strings nicely sewed on. Tie him in the kettle by a strong silk cord, called comfort, as the one called duty is apt to be weak. They are apt to fly out of the kettle and be burned and crusty on the edges, since, like crabs and lobsters, they have to be cooked while alive. Make a clear, steady fire out of love, neatness and cheerfulness. Sit him as near to this as it seems to agree with him. If he sputters and fizzes do not be anxious, some husbands do this until they are quite done. Add a little sugar in the form of what confectioners call kisses, but no vinegar or pepper on any account. A little spice improves them, but it must be used with judgment. Do not stick a sharp instrument into him to see if he is tender; stir him gently, watch the while, least he lie too flat and close to the kettle and so become useless. You cannot fail to know when he is done. If thus treated, you will have him very digestible, agreeing with you and the children, and he will, as long as you want, unless you become careless and set him in too cold a place."

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Chronicle Quarterly*

*Karin Giannitti, Editor  
9 Christopher Hill  
Weston, CT 06883*

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*Helen, Annie, and Phiz climbed a tree to read a book during endless studies at Radcliffe.*

*Helen's certificate of admission to Radcliffe opened new doors for her quest for knowledge.*



RADCLIFFE COLLEGE

CERTIFICATE OF ADMISSION.

CAMBRIDGE, *July 14* 189*9*

*Robert Adams Keller*

is admitted to the FRESHMAN CLASS in Radcliffe College.

*Agnes Weston*  
Dean of Radcliffe College

*Miss Keller passed with credit in Advanced Latin*