



The Chronicle Quarterly

Weston Historical Society

Spring 2010

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#32 WESTON ROAD

Levi D. Coley Circa 1844

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When I was a child it was called the “Danneman” place as the family with their six children lived there during the years when I grew up in Weston. Later on, it became known as the Lamazzo Gravel Bank when the land behind the house was excavated and used as a gravel pit (Now Crystal Lake).

Generations before this, the property at 32 Weston Road was known as the Levi Coley property. Our genealogist and house historian, Lynne Barrelle, wrote in her incredible history of this house and its

inhabitants, that history is often an account of the doings of men, with little or no emphasis on the roles played by women. The Land Records of the Town of Weston are no exception; the deeds are filled with references to the “land of John Doe and wife.” Further examination often finds that the land



The north face of the original house. The two fireplaces and the placement of windows indicate that the room on the first floor was originally two rooms.

in question is actually the woman’s property, frequently through inheritance of a separate estate. Although the omission of the wife’s name gives us the impression that her role as co-owner is of minor importance, this can be a mistaken impression. In a small town like Weston, everyone knew their neighbors and the neighbor’s wife as well. It would have been clearly understood at that time that the land may indeed have belonged to the wife; that it had probably been her father’s before her (or her mother’s for that



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#32 Weston Road, cont.

matter); and that John Doe's claim to the land was justified only through their marriage by her ownership. As she was known by his name, it was logical (although frequently misleading) for her property to also be identified by his name.

Lynne goes on to say that following these conventions, the house at #32 Weston Road was attributed to the man who built it or caused it to be built. That man was Levi D. Coley. At the same time we should recognize the importance of the roles played by the two most important women in his life. The land upon which he

built his house a century and a half ago was owned by his mother, Mary H. Coley; and the woman for whom it was built was, of course, his wife Sarah M. Nichols Coley.



Lynne writes that the night of October 14, 1844 was the last night that young Sarah Maria Nichols spent in her childhood home on Good Hill Road. The following day she was married to a fellow Weston resident; her neighbor and life-long acquaintance, Levi D. Coley.

Sarah was born about 1826, the fifth daughter of Weston entrepreneur Ward Nichols and his wife Sally Hickock Nichols. Ward left Weston as a young boy to go to Bethel to learn the hatting trade. He was extremely successful in learning the business but in also wooing a hatter's daughter, Sally.

Ward returned to Weston where he set up his own hat shop. One of his uncles, Elihu, set the young couple up with a house and shop on Good Hill Rd. By 1820, the hat business was apparently lucrative enough for

Ward to redeem his uncle's mortgaged property, including a house, two barns, various other buildings and 50 acres of land. As his business prospered, he was able to refurbish his family's home in the latest and most elegant style. Young Sarah was raised in this world of wealth and prosperity and although her father's business had fallen on hard times by 1844, Levi D. Coley would undertake to build for her a new home that was as elegant, comfortable and welcoming as the one she was about to leave.



Mary H. Coley and her husband Levi Coley, both natives of Weston were living in Lansingburg, New York when Levi D. Coley was born

in 1818. It is not clear as to why they left Weston, but it may have been due to the opposition of their marriage, as they were cousins. Although not unheard of, it was, as now, discouraged Mary's father David Coley, Jr. died in 1819 leaving a considerable estate. A portion went to the heirs of Mary's deceased sister Rachel Coley Rowland. An even larger portion, including David's mill and over 400 acres of land, fell to



#32 Weston Road, cont.

Mary. In 1826 Mary and her husband Levi returned to Weston to take up her inheritance. Many years later Mary's son, Levi D. Coley would choose a part of his mother's inheritance known as the "great plain" as the site for the new home he would build for his bride Sarah Maria Nichols.

Traveling north out of Westport along Weston Road, shortly after crossing Burr's Bridges (now Twin Bridges) over the Saugatuck River, one will come to the store of Levi D. Coley. Built on land inherited by Mary H. Coley from her father in 1819, it is now operated by Levi possibly in partnership with his younger brothers Ebenezer and Frederick. If one should care to stop here, one could probably purchase such commodities as tea, coffee, molasses, salt and sugar, as well as surplus produce from local farms; perhaps even such locally manufactured items as boots, hats, shirts, buttons, chains, sieves, cloth, axes, soap or candles. More importantly, one could catch up on the local news.

When her husband died in 1859, Mary H. Coley wrote in her will to bequeath this store and 20 acres to her son, Levi D. Coley, the current proprietor. Her oldest son David L. Coley was already fully occupied with his grandfather's sawmill on River Road.

Traveling further on the Weston Road one would pass the Burying Hill and on through Weston. However, one might pause to consider the home of the merchant. Set on a small rise to the west of the highway, a genteel distance from the road stands the fine house that Levi D. Coley built for his bride, Sarah who must have felt quite at home for it shared several features of her father's house on Good Hill. Inside there was an impression of light and space provided by high ceilings as well as side-and-top-lighted entry. The granite foundation on which it stands contributes a feeling of solidity and security both physical and financial.

Lynne's history of this house continues throughout the many years it has stood on that small rise. Levi D. Coley's mother, who owned the land upon which his house was built, chose to advance to him a portion of her estate. That quit claim deed gave

Levi Coley a 50 acre tract. The appraised value of the land without the buildings was valued at \$2,500. The valuation of the land without the buildings being included said that the land was part of Levi's inheritance, not the house.

When Levi died seven years later, Mary wrote her will bequeathing to her second son several additional parcels of land. One was the 20 acre "river lot" with Levi D. Coley's store and another 70 acres of "the Plain land", adjacent and contiguous to Levi D. Coley Homestead lot. Thus by 1871, Levi was in possession of the entire 120 acre "Great Plain" land which had belonged to his grandfather David Coley, Jr. at his death in 1819.

Levi and his wife Sarah raised their family in the big house including their oldest son Frances; daughters Sarah, Carrie, Mary and Anna and younger son William F. Coley. Frances received his inheritance, the store lot, in advance. Sarah married Edward Godfrey and moved to Bridgeport. Carrie married Charles Porter in 1871 and died ten years later at the age of 30. Mary and her husband Cornelius Finch buried their two young daughters on the Baren Hill across the road before moving to Jamestown, New Jersey. The fate of Anna is unknown.

Levi D. Coley passed away on November 25, 1874 at the age of 56. Sarah remained in the house with Anna, then 19 and William, then 16. Sarah received from her husband's will life use of the house and other buildings with 25 acres of land as well as 1/3 of Levi D. Coley's personal estate. The remainder of the land to the south and west of the house was distributed among her daughters. Sarah's dower was to pass to young William at Sarah's death, on the condition that he remain with her "aiding and comforting her in sickness and in health and in all respects demeaning himself towards her as becomes a dutiful, obedient and affectionate son."

William apparently fulfilled these conditions and shortly after reaching his majority he purchased the adjacent land from his sisters. A short time later he married Harriet (Hattie) Hoyt and brought her home to his mother's house. Unfortunately, they buried two young children on the Hill, first infant son William F. Coley, Jr., then another son Henry I



#32 Weston Road, cont.

Coley. A third son Ward N. Coley was born early in 1890. In 1889 Sarah Coley quitclaimed the house and her dower land to her son William who about this time purchased the remaining sisters' distributions and was then in possession of 100 acres of the "Great Plain." A short time later, he moved his family to Bridgeport and took his mother with him. In 1892 he sold the property in Weston back to his mother who in turn sold it to a Daniel P. Morrell of Norwalk. It is unclear if the Morrells ever resided in the home and three years later they sold to John Gorham of Wilton. Mr. Gorham almost immediately sold it to William J. Sherwood who also purchased several other parcels previously owned by the Coley Family, including the "store lot." They occupied the house for the better part of 28 years.

In 1924 William Sherwood and his wife Jennie sold the house and 120 acres of land, still known as "the Coley farm" to Ada Held. Ada's husband John was a well-known and well paid artist of the times and he and his wife lived and entertained in high style in the former Coley homestead, which they renovated and enlarged according to the tastes of the times.

In 1940, after John fell on hard times, Ada sold the house and 8 acres of the former homestead to John Dallett. The rest of the 120 acres was divided up over a period of time and several pieces were sold as building lots. For many years the part of the property

containing the spring or pond was operated as a gravel pit, and resulted in what we now know as Crystal lake. In time that portion would be divided into building lots.

In 1946 John Dallett sold the house and about 6 of his 8 acres to Dorothy Danneman. The remaining 2 acres was sold to George Van Riper, but after changing hands several times, this property was acquired by the Dannemans. They lived there with their family for over 25 years before selling it in 1972. Shortly after, the house fell in disrepair and was badly neglected, until purchased in 1989 by George Adin. The house changed hands again in 1992 to Dolores and Alexander Spitzer who undertook the renovation and enlargement of the beautiful home that had once been built with love by Levi D. Coley for his bride, Sarah.

Lynne Barrelle has not only given us a chain of title for a house, she has given us a history of a family who lived their lives in Weston, worked and loved, laughed and cried, and raised their family. We thank you for such a complete and interesting history of this beautiful home.

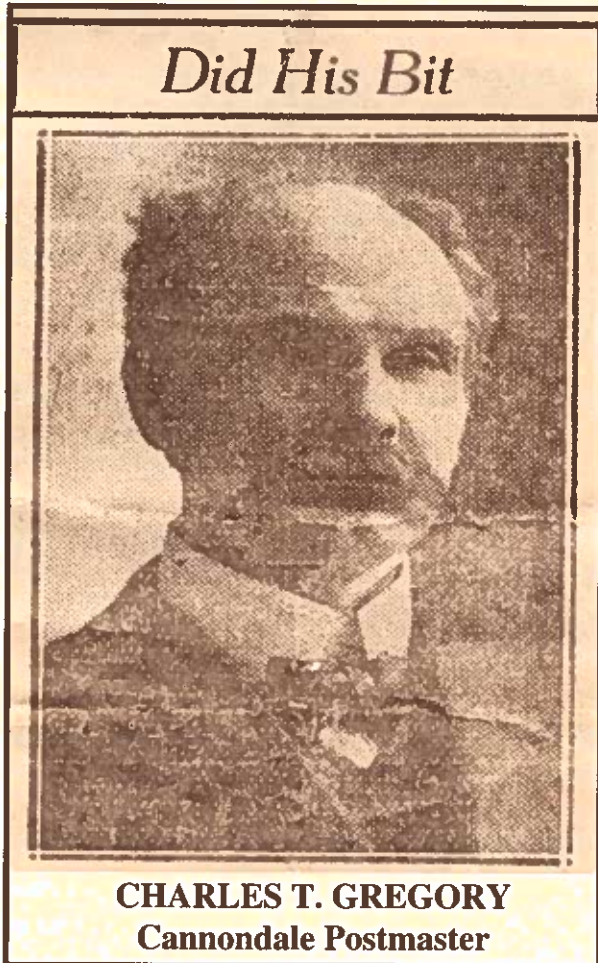
Chain of Title

1992	198-74	Spitzer, Alexander and Dolores	2.3448 acres/(house)
1989	174-544	Adin, George	2.3448 acres/(house)
1984	131-163	Lomazzo, Henry J., estate of	?
1974	98-252	Hartford Real Estate Investors, Inc (Henry J. Lomazzo, President)	14.07 acres/buildings
1972	95-128	Joblin, Warren P., and Hastings, Peter J.	14.07 acres/buildings
1946	42-81	Danneman, Dorothy M.	6.15 acres/buildings
1940	37-299	Dallett, John	8 acres/buildings
1924	30-349	Held, Ada	120 acres/"Coley Farm"
1896	27-178	Sherwood, William J	100 acres/buildings
1896	27-168	Gorham, John	100 acres/buildings
1893	27-116	Morrell, Daniel P.	100 acres/buildings
1892	27-101	Coley, Sarah M.	100 acres/buildings
1889	26-158	Coley, William F.	20 acres/buildings
1874	[4-439]	Coley, Sarah M [Probate Records Weston/Easton(Bridgeport)]	25 acres/buildings
1852	23-333	Coley, Levi D.	50 acres/buildings
1819	[28-373]	Coley, Mary H. {Probate Records Fairfield}	120 acres/barn ("great plain")
?	?	David Coley Jr.	?



HOW C. T. GREGORY BUCKED HIS WAY THROUGH DRIFTS

WAS MAIL CARRIER ON NORWALK-WESTON AND MADE TRIP OVER, UNDER, AROUND AND THROUGH EIGHT MILES OF GIANT SNOWDRIFTS WITH HORSE AND SLEIGH AFTER SIX HOURS OF STRENUOUS SHOVELING



The following is from a newspaper article found in our archives. Although it is incomplete – the last page missing – we felt you could get a sense of how tough life was back in 1888 – no plows, tractors, trucks, and just a shovel.

“Just what the big blizzard of 1888 did in the way of isolating Norwalk’s neighbor towns is most graphically told by Charles T. Gregory, who has been postmaster at Cannondale for thirty-four years, or almost exactly one-half his lifetime to date.

At the time of the big storm he was living in his native town of Weston and had one of the old star route contracts for carrying Uncle Sam’s mail bags between the Weston post office and Norwalk for which he was paid the sum of \$1.25 per diem, and the privilege of carrying light packages and a passenger now and then.

Mr. Gregory, in an interview with the writer yesterday said:

“You might as well say that I was born and brought up in a post office, for I started life in the one where my parents lived at George Adam’s Corner in Weston (at the corner of Newtown Tpke. and Georgetown Rd.) and began to help my father John H. Gregory, who was postmaster with the mail as soon as I could read and write and have been at it ever since except for one year when I was in a private school in Derby, where father and mother lived for awhile.

“When I married we went to house keeping a mile above the Weston post office, and I got the contract for carrying the mail to Norwalk, then I was employed in the post office and general store in Southport, and then came back to Weston and helped out there until father died, and in 1891 was appointed postmaster at Cannon Station, as it was called then, and here I have been ever since. “Well sir! To get back to the blizzard. It didn’t seem much of a storm when I went to bed Sunday night, but I thought I better make an early start, so I got up at 4 o’clock and had my breakfast; then hitched up and drove the mile down the road to the post office, and even then it didn’t seem so bad, but at 6 o’clock, when I began my trip. I stopped and got a snow shovel. All the folks laughed except mother and she just said ‘it’s better to be safe than sorry;’ and so I took it along and have been thanking my lucky stars ever since.

“I got along pretty well for quite a ways, but it kept getting worse and worse, and by the time I was down towards Poplar Plains Four Corners, (Newtown Tpke. and Route 33) I tell you I had my work cut out for me. When I came to a drift that my horse could not get through, I’d leave him and shovel out the thickest of it, and then go back and lead Jim through it. That worked all right until I got down near Cranbury Plains; then the first thing I knew I shoveled out a path and then by the time I had gone back for the horse, the wind had piled it full again. “So after that I would lead him in as far as I could, shovel out a couple of feet, lead him up again, and so on until I was in better traveling once more. Well, Sir! I managed to reach Norwalk somehow, and left the horse in the old Gregory livery stable



Charles T. Gregory, cont.

and carried the mail bag over to the post office, which was where the Benedict News Co. is now. Just then the clock struck 12, so it had taken me just exactly six hours to make that eight miles.

“Well, I just had to stay there until Wednesday, and on that morning I met a man I knew from Westport. I said ‘How in the world did you get over here?’ and he said: ‘Walked.’ I said, ‘Like fun you did;’ and then he went outside and brought back a pair of snow shoes. That gave me an idea so I went to a store and got a wooden box and knocked a couple of boards some 20 inches long and five or six inches wide off of it, and nailed cleats at the back so my heel wouldn’t slip, took ‘em down to the harness shop and had some leather straps put on ‘em, and at noon I started out. My homemade snowshoes worked fine and I have them yet with their history all written on them.

“Say! That was some trip. The snow had packed down pretty well most of the way, but it sure was hard going. It would have done your heart good to see the way the people along the way acted whey they got sight of me. I was the first person they had seen outside of their own

neighbors since the storm began, and they seemed to think that all I had to do was to eat, drink and be merry with them, but I managed to keep going pretty steadily and got to father’s house at just 6 o’clock that night well tuckered out.

Come Thursday morning, the question was what to do with the mail. There was no use trying to get back to Norwalk, so I went ‘cross country three miles to Cannon Station, but there hadn’t been a train through yet, so I went back home again and next day, tried it once more with better luck, for a train had butted through Thursday night and things were in pretty good shape again.”

Unfortunately the article ends here and we do not have the last of the interview, but we think you would have to agree that men were made of strong stuff back in the day. C. T. Gregory certainly lived up to the phrase “Neither Snow, nor rain, nor heat, nor gloom of night, stays these couriers from the swift completion of their appointed rounds.” Sure do wish we had those hand-made snowshoes and their history.

Annual Town Meeting

Wikipedia defines A Town Meeting as a meeting where the population of an entire geographic area is invited to participate in a gathering often for a political, administrative, or legislative purpose. It is a form of democratic rule that has been used primarily in the U.S. since the 1600’s. Traditionally, a town meeting is a time when community members come together to legislate policy and budgets for their town.

We recently went to the Town Hall and looked at the book of Town Meetings that have taken place since 1787. The first record, although difficult to read at times with all the flourishes and s’s looking like f’s, the first minutes read as follows:

“At a General Assembly holden at New Haven on the second Thursday of October, 1787.

“Upon the Petition of the Inhabitants of the Parish of North Fairfield in the County of Fairfield and of the inhabitants of that part of the Parish of Norfield which

lies in the Township of Fairfield in said county praying to be incorporated in a distinct and separate town as per Petition on file. It was resolved that the inhabitants who live within the Parish of North Fairfield, in the County of Fairfield and all the inhabitants who live in that part of the Parish of Norfield which ties in the Township of Norfield in said county, be and they hereby are incorporated in a distinct separate Town by the Name of the of the Town of Weston with full power and authority “to have, use, and enjoy all the rights, privileges and Immunities which pertain to the Several Towns in the State respectively with the following exception only. That they be allowed but one Representative to sit in the General Assembly of the State. The document goes on further to lay out the boundaries of our new Town of Weston with such descriptions as, “running Westerly from the Dwelling House now occupied by Walter Sherman”

“And that the Inhabitants of said Town of Weston shall hold their meeting at the public Meeting House in said



Parish of North Fairfield on the 14th Day of November next at 2 o'clock in the afternoon and that Samuel Wakeman, Esq. of said Weston shall be and he is hereby empowered and authorized to cause said meeting to be warned and said Samuel Wakeman shall preside as moderator of said Meeting until a moderator shall be chosen, at which meeting said Town of Weston shall have liberty and Authority to chose all such Town Officers as other Towns in the Sate have a right to choose who shall be vested with the same powers with which like officers in said other Towns are Vested and shall continue in office until others shall be chosen and sworn in their stead."

"The first actual Town Meeting for the Town of Weston was held on November 14, 1787. Samuel Wakeman, Esq. was the moderator.

"Nathaniel Wheeler was elected Town Clerk

"Abel Hall, John Sherwood, David Coley, Nathaniel Wheeler, Samuel Wakeman, Benjamin Dean and William Prince were elected Selectman.

"Samuel Wakeman was elected Town Treasurer

"Josiah J. Leavitt and Benjamin Dean were elected to be constables.

"Ephram French, Albert Lockwood, Squires Adams, John Andres, Joseph Banks, Nehemiah Cable Fanton, Christopher Godfrey, Seely Squires, Daniel Andrews, Johnathan Bradley, Seth Price, Abel Hall, Lloyd Wakeman, Robert Harris, Sam Wakeman were elected to be surveyors of highways.

"It was voted that warning for Town Meetings shall be put up - one on a Birch Tree near Henry Summers, one on the Post in the Society of North Fairfield, and one on the Post in the Society of Fairfield"

This established Weston's first form of governing for themselves and has continued over the last 223 years. During the early years, the town meeting normally met only twice a year according to Thomas Farnham in *The Forging of A Connecticut Town*. The principal business of the meeting was the election of officers, the setting of taxes and the appointment of committees. Otherwise, the meeting seemed to do little more than confirm the policies formulated by the selectmen, however, it could serve to resolve differences and find a consensus.

To become a town-meeting voter men were required to be freemen who lived in Weston and were 21 years old. They must possess a freehold estate valued at fifty shillings or more or a personal estate valued at forty pound.

The men also had to be "known to be of honest conversation and shall be accepted by the major part of the town or by authority of the selectmen of the town

To serve as a selectman year after year such as Wheeler, Wakeman, Sherwood and Coley, they not only knew their neighbors, but they were able and competent to serve. There was generally a considerable turnover among major officeholders that indicates that Weston's early political life was a dynamic one and to be a perennial officeholder was a genuine tribute to a man's abilities.

As the 19th century went forward, Weston became more democratic. People were not just Congregationalists, but now Methodists, Episcopalians, and even Catholics now lived in Weston. Not everyone had an English background as a large group of Irish resided in town. The result of these differences meant that what was good for local farmers was not necessarily good for factory workers. With this in mind, voting for town officers was changed at this time. By 1838 the selectmen and the town clerk were now voted by ballot. In 1857 school Visitors were elected by ballot, and in 1866 it was agreed to use ballots in the selection of all officers.

In 1936 a meeting was held on October 5 at the Horace Hurlbutt School. It was held to hear reports of the Town officers and vote, hear recommendations for appropriations, and to vote on an increase for the Town Clerk's salary to be raised to \$200. The meeting also fixed salaries and closed the fiscal year. Notices for that meeting were posted at Town Hall, near the residence of G.W. Bradley, near Lyons Plain Church, near residences of John Fouschette, L. Corsa, Charles Pearson and Mason Sanford.

Although some Connecticut towns have abandoned the Annual Town Meeting as a form of government, Weston still uses the practice which started almost 400 years ago and it still seems to work for our community. It is exciting to know that each of us has a say in our town and its running of the government.

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Karin Giannitti, Editor
9 Christopher Hill
Weston, CT 06883

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

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Karin Giannitti
Editor

Wendy Giannitti
Patient Proofreader

Best Impressions, Inc.
Design/Production