



The Chronicle Quarterly

Weston Historical Society

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DEFINING THE "ROARING TWENTIES"

In our last issue, we told you about the house of Levi Coley located at 32 Weston Road. The house belonged to the Coley family for many years and 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 was married to John Held, Jr., a well-known artist who portrayed the "roaring twenties" in his drawings. It has been said of John that "Few artists define an age as thoroughly as John Held, Jr. Born in 1889, he was the right age at the right time with an outlook and sense of humor that shaped as well as recorded a generation."

It seems that perhaps John Held was a child prodigy, supposedly selling his first drawing at the age of 9. It is certain that he sold his first drawing to the original Life magazine at the age of 15 and was hired as the sports cartoonist for the Salt Lake City Tribune when he was sixteen. He studied art for a short time in his teens with sculptor Mahonri Young.

In 1912 he relocated to New York where he spent his

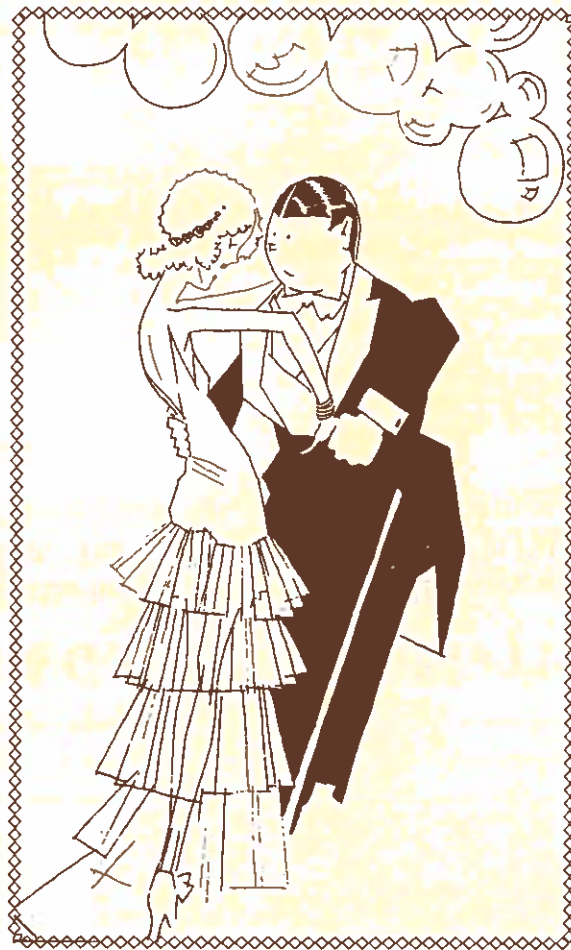
early days doing ads and trying to break into the magazine market. In 1918 he was recruited by U.S. Naval Intelligence to accompany a pair of archaeologists

on an expedition to Central America. Purportedly he was sent to study Mayan art forms, but his real job was to sketch the coastline and scout for sites for military operations. He spent most of his time developing his cartooning skills and honing a sophisticated edge on his humor.

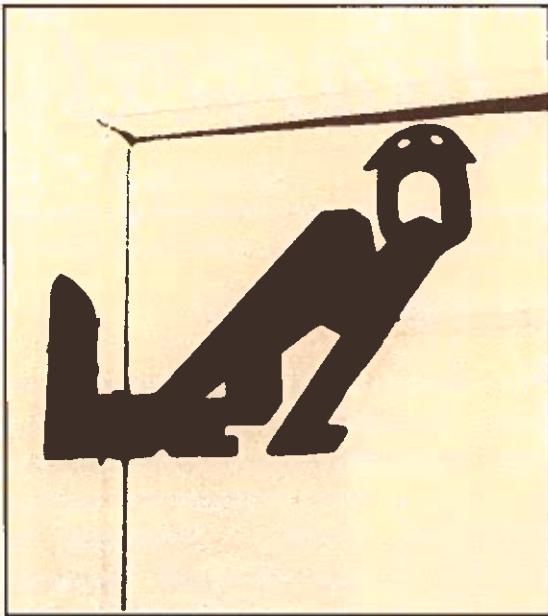
Held's sense of humor could be seen in a feature called Gay Nineties featured in The New Yorker. However, John Held is best known for his portrayal of the Roaring Twenties and the "flapper" drawings which brought him fame and fortune. In magazines like Vanity Fair, Harper's Bazaar and Redbook, his images of Betty Coed and Joe College were placed weekly to the delight of his adoring fans. The teen-age crowd and the col-

lege kids looked to John Held's drawings as role and style models.

It seemed that John Held could do no wrong. People would send him blank checks begging for an



DEFINING THE "ROARING TWENTIES", cont.



original drawing. He appeared regularly in a half-dozen magazines, designed sets and costumes for Broadway plays, had two newspaper strips (Margie and Rah Rah Rosalie) and ran for Congress.

About this time, John and Ada moved to Weston, buying an old house on Ladder Hill Road off Newtown Turnpike. It was there that Mr. Held started his Grindstone Hill Forge. He made many whimsical hinges, many of which are still in use at #29 Weston Road which was formerly the Coley Store.

After selling the Ladder Hill home, they moved into the Levi Coley farm on Weston Road which Ada (who preferred to be called "Johnny") lived and entertained in very high style. They made many reno-

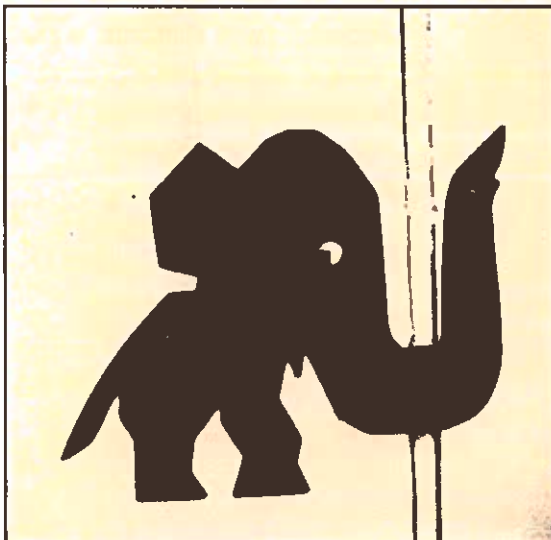
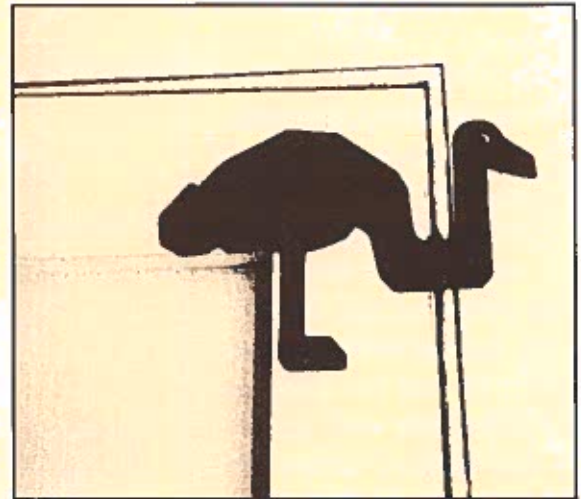
vations and enlarged the home according to the tastes of the time.

By the 1930's the Helds had fallen on hard times through his loss of investments and his work was no longer in great demand. The falling stock market and falling hemlines meant that John could no longer support their lavish lifestyle. His pictures of women in long skirts just did not have the same appeal. Ada divorced John and remarried in 1932.

After suffering a nervous breakdown and a divorce from his second wife, John turned more to writing and illustrating books. Dog Stories, I'll Tell My Big Brother, and

Grim Youth,

were all published in 1930. In 1937 he designed the sets of Hellzapoppin, a very successful Broadway show, and then turned to sculpture in 1940.



He painted all through his life and a lovely book entitled The Most of John Held Jr. contains many of his urban and rural watercolors. His most famous book Held's Angels appeared in 1952. Illustrated with raccoon coats, short skirts, bobbed hair and the Charleston, his original drawings were now nostalgia.

John Held died in 1958 and we are so very lucky to have bits and pieces of his incredible life, both in New York and especially in Weston.



WEDDINGS

When my daughter became engaged, she said she wanted to be a June bride. Although it has apparently changed to the fall, June always seemed to be the month in which everyone wanted to marry. Perhaps it was tradition or the promise of good weather that made June so desirable. Curious we pulled out the computer and looked up the history of weddings and were quite surprised by what we found. We'd like to share some of it with you here.

Weddings have not always been about walking down the aisle, exchanging vows and having a grand party with 100-200 guests. Quite the contrary. The earliest weddings were not about love and wanting to share your life with someone. They were about politics and survival. In the early days, the bigger a tribe, the better protected they were against all predators, other tribes and villages.

In these early days, the woman would be kidnapped by the groom and some of his trusted friends and relatives. This was the beginning of the tradition of the Best Man and grooms men. Once the "bride" was kidnapped she became the property of the groom and a member of his tribe. The couple would then stay away for as long as possible to avoid retaliation. This tradition has evolved into the honeymoon.

If a "bride" was not captured by the groom, she was being used as a tool to bring two tribes, or high ranking families, together. She might be traded for money, livestock, land, or other treasures.

This marriage might also elevate social status for one or both couples. It was possible that the couple might never have met before the wedding.



In medieval times, laws regarding marriage forbade the bartering or selling of women. If a couple wanted to get married, they needed the blessing of a priest. It was also illegal for secret wedding ceremonies to take place. In many cases the wedding was still arranged and contracts were often drawn up listing the terms and rights of all parties involved. Some weddings of the aristocracy were arranged when the children were only 10 or 12 years old. For those in the lower classes, love still seemed to be the reason for marriage.

During Elizabethan times, weddings became events more like those we have today. An Elizabethan wedding would include bridesmaids, wedding rings, the exchange of wedding vows and women

were even beginning to carry herbs or flowers. However, most of these happy fair tail weddings were still mostly arranged. Even though they often did not meet until the wedding day, the groom was at least presented of a picture of the bride so he would know what she looked like.

Prior to the wedding, the groom was presented with a dowry. It was not always money, but often included land or goods.

This dowry was considered a gift as a way of getting around the bride price law. Colonial times were once again for the



Wedding Dresses From the 1800's

WEDDINGS, cont.

people of wealth, a marriage that was a business arrangement, not a marriage based on love. Courtships and marriages were usually arranged by the father of the young man. He would write a letter to the young lady's father requesting permission to court. These letters would declare the attributes of the young man and why the marriage would be profitable for all concerned. If the father of the young lady agreed, courtship would take place, followed by a negotiation of dowry and finally marriage.

Southern weddings during this time period were always more festive. The northern weddings were more solemn civil ceremonies, but in the south the marriage was followed by a large reception with food, drink and games.

The Victorian era found women finishing school around the age of seventeen or eighteen. She would then "come out" or make her debut. As she had been groomed for marriage her entire life, this was a very important and exciting time. New clothes and accessories would be purchased so she would look her best and impress any potential suitors.

Men, however, still viewed this courtship more as business than pleasure. Land, money, and the family business were all carefully researched since what belonged to the woman would be turned over to the man upon their marrying. The upper classes usually met at social engagements such as parties. The lower classes would meet through the church and church sponsored functions.

If a couple enjoyed each other's company and shared a similar lifestyle and social standing they might become engaged. Love was still not an issue, but women were becoming a bit more independent and might actually not marry someone they were not at least fond of.

All these weddings are far removed from the weddings of today. Love is the driving force for becoming engaged and planning a marriage in today's society. I am sure there are still financial considerations for both parties, but business is not the primary reason for marriage. I can hardly see a woman in the year 2010 having an arranged marriage. Isn't it nice that we can now choose who we love and marry? Congratulations to all the new brides and grooms married this year.



*Weston Family Wedding Dresses
Historic Coley House - Weston, CT.*





Jim Daniel's Charter Oak Cane

By Kathy Failla, Weston Town Historian with assistance from her husband, Dr. Tom Failla

The late Reader's Digest Editor and longtime Weston resident Jim Daniel served Weston in many ways as a selectman, historian and curator of the historical artifacts in Town Hall that he carefully assembled and displayed. In his later days, Jim walked with a wooden cane. Keenly aware of Connecticut's past and collector of memorabilia, Jim found the cane rummaging around an antique store in the Boston area. The piece with its hand carved acorn on top was an interesting curiosity that prompted questions. Jim happily obliged with a story about its origin and connection to Connecticut's past.

Jim would start by letting folks know the cane was made of oak and then ask inquirers if they knew the significance of the white oak tree to Connecticut. Some would know, of course, it is the designated state tree. Jim would press on: Why do you suppose the General Assembly selected the white oak? Some would indicate it is a common tree. Others would say it is stately and majestic. A few would recognize from their childhood Connecticut history lesson, it was an oak that saved the state's colonial charter, also known as the Fundamental Orders. The orders contained 11 articles drafted by Roger Ludlow and a committee in 1639. During this



Standing more than five feet tall, the Charter Oak Chair featured in this c 1915 postcard is the largest, most famous item carved from the fallen oak. It resides in the Connecticut State Senate chambers in Hartford

period thousands of Puritans were leaving England for the New World to find freedom from religious persecution and so the establishment of a self governing colony was an important consideration for the settlers. Thanks to the efforts of Connecticut Gov. John Winthrop Jr. the Connecticut charter was formerly accepted by Charles II in 1662 as the written framework that made Connecticut a self governing colony. The charter endured as the bedrock of colonial and state government until 1818, when it was superseded by a state constitution.

However, in 1687 the charter came under threat when the Crown sent Sir Edmund Andros, governor of the Dominion of New England to seize the document and impose greater Crown control over the colonies. Andros came to Hartford and declared that the authority under the charter be dissolved. and sought its return. As legend has it, the charter was laid on a table in front of Andros and his troops as darkness fell on Nov. 1, 1687. Suddenly, the candles were snuffed out, a commotion ensued and when light was restored the charter was gone. It was whisked away by Capt. Joseph Wadsworth,

Jim Daniel's Charter Oak Cane , cont.



The carving of the Charter Oak, on display at the historical society, is part of a tall clock manufactured in the 1870s. The Charter Oak remains a powerful symbol of freedom and a key part of state history.



Connecticut, admitted into the Union on January 9, 1788, highlighted the The Charter Oak tree which proved to be a good hiding place for the state's original Constitution.



THE OLD CHARTER OAK.

The Charter Oak is one of the most colorful and significant symbols of the spiritual strength and love of freedom which inspired our Colonial forebears in their militant resistance to tyranny.

who hid it nearby in the hollow of a large oak on the property of the Willys family property. Unfortunately no contemporary account corroborates this legend, which first surfaced in the 1800s. Nonetheless, the colony continued to operate under its charter and showed a certain amount feisty independence from the Crown as early as 1699 when it passed a law that gave widows and siblings rights to an estate, which was contrary to English law, which conferred the estate to first born male adult.

The business of creating memorabilia from the wood of the Charter Oak followed a cult of veneration for the old tree. The tree sat on a knoll on the west bank overlooking the Connecticut River. It was estimated to be 900 years old and was a place where Connecticut Indians tribal leaders (sachems) gathered to settle differences. Canes were among the early artifacts made from fallen branches.

In 1856, the Hartford Courant reported: "The Charter Oak is Prostate... Our whole community, old and young rich and poor were grieved to learn that the famous old Charter Oak in which Wadsworth hid King Charles' Charter ... fell about ten minutes before one o'clock in the stormy morning of Aug. 21, 1856."

Among promoters of the cult of veneration for the Charter Oak was Issac W. Stuart (1809-1861) Stuart wrote pamphlets and helped publicize Samuel Colt's firearms enterprise which was based in Hartford. Stuart called the Charter Oak "the seed of liberty" and used such symbolism to persuade the Connecticut General Assembly to memorialize its stature forever in the annals of Connecticut history. Following the tree's toppling, a flurry of activity preserved its remnants in many forms. A polished piece of its trunk sits in the state Capitol Building. Chairs, cabinets and furnishings of all manner were constructed formed from its timber by several wood workers in the Hartford area. All told it is estimated that more than 10,000 pieces were fashioned from the wood of the fallen tree.

Editors Note (TBD): A display of Charter Oak canes and other artifacts can be viewed at the Connecticut Historical Society One Elizabeth Street in Hartford and thanks to Nina Daniel, Jim's daughter his cane and other items he collected are now with the Weston Historical Society at the Coley House on Weston Road.

Sources: *The Hartford Courant*, Aug. 22, 1856; *The Charter Oak*, *The Connecticut Historical Society Bulletin* Summer 1984 Vol. 49, No. 3.



GOOD HOUSEKEEPING

This year Good Housekeeping magazine is celebrating its 125th birthday. All year they have been including a page with bits and pieces from their very first issue published in May, 1885. We found a very amusing, but still true, article from May 2, 1885 when the magazine cost \$2.50. The first issue of Good Housekeeping was declared by the New York Tribune to be “admirable...practical, sensible, and cheery, and full of noble suggestions for the making of happy and healthful homes.” Here is how they did it back then:

A Chapter of Household Don'ts

Divided into Verses for Easy and Profitable Reading

Don't stand when you can sit just as well.

Don't put off the mending from week to week.

Don't you know that vinegar will clean the isinglass in the stove doors?

Don't you know your floor oil cloths can be washed in buttermilk or kerosene?

Don't give little children two languages to learn - first baby-talk, then afterward true pronunciation.

Don't hesitate to place a piece of zinc on the live coals in the stove; it will clean out the stove pipe.

Don't throw away nice woolen stockings when the feet are worn out, but cut them down for the children.

Don't fail to be clean and tidy in every nook and corner, but

Don't be a slave to a shining stove or carpet.

Don't do unnecessary work because your grandmother did. There was not half so much to be done in her day.

* * * * *

Good Housekeeping also states that they were ahead of their time with their joke column warning people of the perils of too much fat.

COLD BITS

Gathered up to Laugh and Grow Fat On

Doctor's daughter: “This cook-book says that pie crust needs plenty of shortening. Do you know what that means pa?” **Old Doctor:** “It means lard” **Doctor's daughter:** But why is lard called ‘shortening’ pa?” **Old Doctor:** “Because it shortens life”

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