



# The Chronicle Quarterly

Weston Historical Society

Winter 2010

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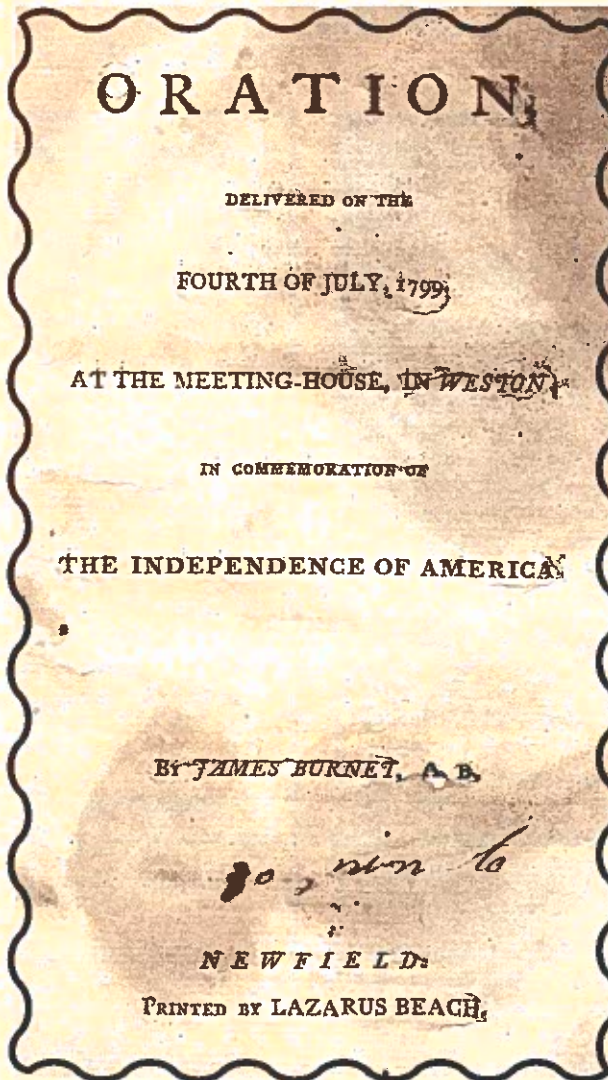
## An Oration

“By the goodnefs of God we are fill continued in exiftence, and permitted once more in common with our brethren, to affemble together to celebrate the independence of our country, the birth day of our liberty. While many of the nations of the earth have been deprived of their moft invaluable blefings, have had their governments fubverted, their religion abolifhed, and an experience of all the defolating horrors of War: We with a few exceptions have had every endearing privilege fecured, the pleafing fatisfaction of beholding the progreflion of the arts and fcienes, the moft important improvements in agriculture, the advancement of the Chriftian Religion in fpite of the exertions of infidels, or the malevolence of athiefts, and our country enriched by freams of wealth conducted from the Eastern world; in various and almoft innumerable channels.

These are the words of James Burnet, A.B. who presented his oration on July 4, 1799 at Weston’s meeting house. We are now in possession of a copy of this oration thanks

to one of our members and formers trustees, Ted Lockwood who alerted us to the fact that this pamphlet was coming up for auction at Fairfield Auction in Newtown. After notifying the Board of Trustees that this was available, they felt it would be a great addition to our archives. The Board generously allotted money for the auction and Sharon Gilbert and Karin Giannitti went to Newtown. We were able to outbid another bidder and with applause from all, brought this piece of history back to Weston for future generations to enjoy.

As you can see, all the s’s are f’s so the reading is somewhat difficult. After reading most of the pamphlet, we surmise that Mr. Burnet felt that we were so very lucky to be free of the British and of all the blessings our country encompasses. However, he was quite adamant about his feelings about the French and the threat they possessed. He spoke “Honor them not with your fuffrages, choofe them not



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An Oration, cont.

for your rulers, for they will surely be the barriers betwixt you and your happiness. They will be a flow poison which will diffuse itself throughout the body politic of your constitution, weaken the system, and produce a dreadful and lamentable death. The dissolution will not be an euthanasy, but the struggling of a dire convulsion by which every feature of the frame will be distorted and every joint dislocated."

This oration was given at Weston's Meeting House, perhaps the second site of the Norfield Church (before its permanent home), located further along Norfield Road towards Old Hyde Road. "It was voted that Samuel B. Sherwood and Nathan Wheeler, Esquires, be appointed a Committee to wait on Mr. Burnet, with the thanks of the audience for his Oration and to request of him a copy for the press." The oration was printed by Lazarus Beach, in Newfield (the former name of Bridgeport) and apparently distributed to the inhabitants of Weston.

We are so delighted to have obtained this important piece of Weston's history, but are distressed that we have been unable to determine the identity of Mr. James Burnet. We will continue to research this gentleman and keep you informed if we discover any further information.

AN ORATION, &c.

FRIENDS AND FELLOW COUNTRYMEN.

**B**y the goodness of God we are still continued in existence, and permitted once more in common with our brethren, to assemble together to celebrate the independence of our country, the birth day of our liberty. While many of the nations of the earth have been deprived of their most invaluable blessings, have had their governments subverted, their religion abolished, and an experience of all the desolating horrors of War: We with a few exceptions have had every endearing privilege secured, the pleasing satisfaction of beholding the progression of the arts and sciences, the most important improvements in agriculture, the advancement of the Christian Religion in spite of the exertions of infidels, or the malevolence of atheists, and our country ~~enriched~~ enriched by the streams of wealth conducted from the Eastern world, in various and almost innumerable channels. Notwithstanding our currents of trade have received some impediment in their courses, by the mounds and obstructions thrown into them by a nation the most abandoned in principle, by a nation that has disgraced humanity by excesses and rendered herself terrible to the world by her conquests, yet we have been great gainers by our commerce—The exertions of individuals, united with the commendable vigilance of

Voted that Samuel B. Sherwood and Nathan Wheeler, Esquires, be appointed a Committee to wait on Mr. BURNET, with the thanks of the audience for his Oration, and to request of him a copy for the press.

SAMUEL B. SHERWOOD, } Com'te.  
NATHAN WHEELER, }

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TO  
THE INHABITANTS  
OF  
WESTON,  
THIS ORATION  
DELIVERED AND PUBLISHED AT THEIR  
REQUEST  
IS RESPECTFULLY INSCRIBED,  
BY THEIR FRIEND AND FELLOW-COUNTRYMAN,

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**JOHN & EDITH FANTON  
115 LYONS PLAIN ROAD  
ORAL INTERVIEW 11/11/70  
By Scott Hill**

While researching information for our Cemetery Tour in October, we reached back into some of the oral interviews that had been done over the years by different members of the Society. Although this interview is only 40 years old, the Fantons were in their 80's at the time and had lived in town many, many years. They saw many changes to our community and we would like to share some of this interview with you.

Edith (Bradley) Fanton: John was 89 in October so he calls himself 90. Women don't do that, you know, they go the other way. He came from Fanton Hill.

John: My grandmother owned about 325 acres up there at one time. When we got married we lived in John's place right up there on the four corners. I was in the meat business 25 years. I saved about ten years to buy my own place. I had it paid for when I got married.

Edith: I was an only child. My mother died of pneumonia just before our son was born. That was before they had penicillin. We had three children. My father was down here alone. He was helpless about doing anything for himself – I don't think he could boil water. We wanted him to come and live with us, but he wouldn't so then we came down here about 1921 and have lived here ever since. This house is about 140 years old. My grandfather Bradley built it, the one that built the factory.

*The Fantons apparently had a collection of Bradley tools which they showed Scott Hill which prompted the following conversation:*

Scott Hill: I was going to ask about the axe factory and the Bradley family. Here's an 1876 price list: Spanish tools, coopers' tools, carpenters' tools, tools for farmers. Hatchets were \$8 a dozen and axe heads \$14 a dozen for the most expensive type, and here's adzes and gutters.

John: There are three different grades of axes.

Scott Hill: For house carpenters, railroads, etc. The most expensive are \$27 a dozen, \$2 apiece for a head.

Edith: This was sent to South America in August, 1875. There must have been an exhibit of our tools there. I know they did have a South American trade. These were the tools that they made. They had a big trade in machetes. There are dippers and turpentine tools for the southern trade.

Scott Hill: I don't know many of these names. A Froe, I wonder what that might be. A board axe, not a broad axe, a corn knife, a box scraper and box chisel. There are many kinds of draw shaves in here and a bill hook and machetes—26 inches, 30 inches and all the way down with different weights and sizes. The factory is almost unbelievable. People look at this picture and say "You mean all that was down there" and they don't believe it.

*The Bradley Edge Tool Company was located on Lyons Plains Road near Fanton Hill.*

John: They employed around 40 people.

Edith: In the winter they'd sometimes have around 50. That was their big season. In the summer it was kind of dull.

John: They used water power.

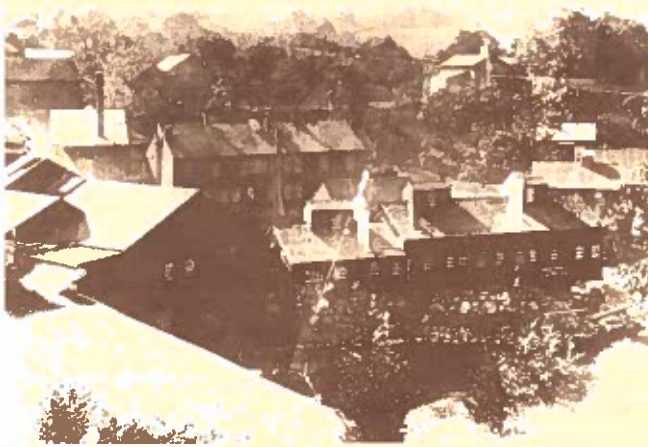
Edith: You see all these houses along here where DuBois Morris lives at 104 Lyons Plain Road and below on that side were factory houses. John and his brother-in-law bought the whole group for how much?

John: We bought eight of them for \$1,800.

Edith: Also the house at 130 Lyons Plain Road was also a factory house. There has been a lot of money spent on them since.

## JOHN & EDITH FANTON, cont.

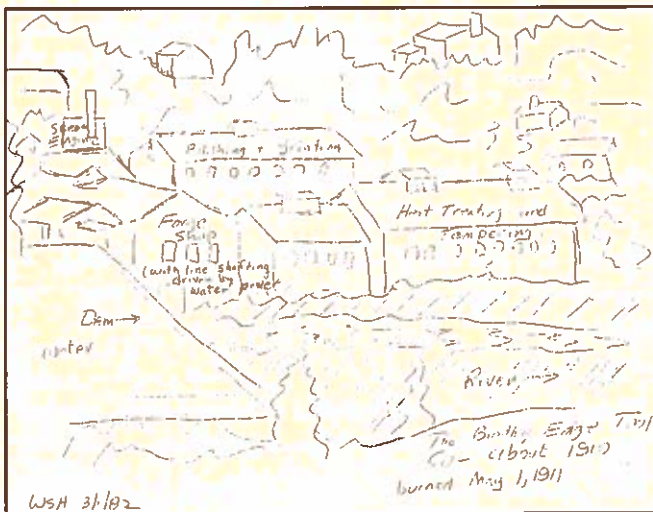
Scott: Was this picture taken from the other side?



*Bradley Axe Factory about 1910.*

Edith: I would think so. Here's the river, here's the dam, this was the forging shop, and these were the head gates. When they had to control water they had a flume or a stream of water that came around through. Then here was the engine room. Downstairs were the grinders. Upstairs here were polishers and on this end was the ronset (?) where they did the painting. There was also one little shop where they made the wooden handles. The biggest building right in the middle was where they forged the iron and steel. Then this shop was the tempering shop, it was down below the dam.

Scott Hill; that was near the water.



Edith: Yes. We had a bridge then that went across. That's the way we went to school. We went across that swinging bridge.

Scott Hill: A suspension bridge?

Edith: A suspension bridge. That was so the men who lived over on that side of town could come across to work.



John: There were six or eight men on the other side who used to work in the shop. When it came a flood they couldn't use that bridge and had no way of getting across. So they got this Allie Hickson, who wasn't too bright, to go over above the dam with a rowboat to get whoever was there and fetch them across so they could go to work in the factory. Well, they had this Dan Brown who worked down there in the tempering shop. His hearing was worse than mine. Allie was taking him over but all he had was a board, he had no paddle. The current was pretty strong and he couldn't control the boat with that board. They were going down over the dam. Allie, to save himself, got in the other end of the boat to the north as far as he could and managed to get ashore. That sent Dan and the boat right down over the dam. He was wearing an old thick overcoat but he grabbed hold of something and pulled himself out. It didn't happen in a hurry. Then he came into Hiram's tempering shop and Hiram looked around and said, "Where in hell did you come from? The water was running off him like Niagara Falls.

Scott Hill: He came to the right place – a tempering shop.

Edith: It never hurt him.

## JOHN & EDITH FANTON, cont.

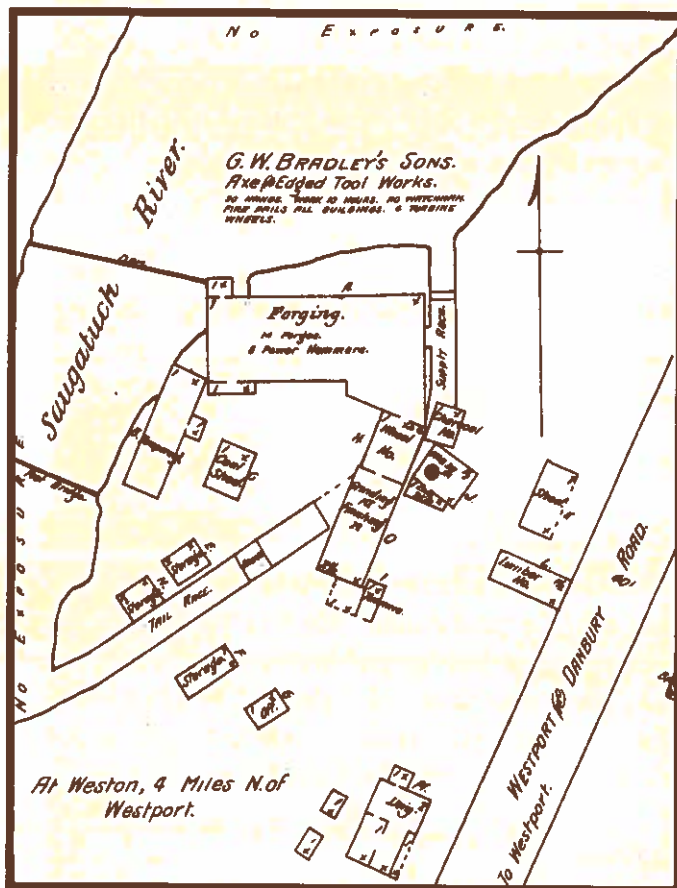
Scott Hill: What about the boat?

John: I think they picked it up down below.

Scott Hill: What time of year did you have the floods? Spring or fall?

John: Generally in the fall.

Edith: Well, that was the tempering shop John speaks about. In here was where they kept their great big wagon. They used to go twice a day to Saugatuck Station with horses to take tools and bring back whatever they needed. I think that little building up on the bank was the office. This is there the Whites live now, the first house on the right going down (No. 144). Well, half way up that bank was our office. That burned too when the whole thing burned.



Scott Hill: Can you see your house in this? No.

Edith: Now down by where this big oak tree is here, that's where our barn was. That burned in the fire too. They think it started here in the tempering room in 1911. The men had overalls they wore while working. There was a stove down in the back and they were in the habit of putting them near the stove at night to dry. That's a theory. Nobody knows. I don't think it was set afire, I think it was an accident.

Scott Hill: Did this happen at night?

Edith: Yes.

Scott Hill: Did the whole thing burn, including your barn across the road?

Edith: Yes, and this house would have burned if it hadn't been for a neighbor who got out on the roof and hosed in down. The wind brought the embers this way.

Scott Hill: That was a real catastrophe for the town, because a lot of people depended on it.

Edith: That's right, it was. We didn't own it when it burned. Fortunately we'd sold it.

Scott Hill: Who did own it?

Edith: Adams and Staples, two men from Westport who didn't know an axe from a shovel. They didn't own it many years before it burned.

Scott Hill: Was it always a fairly prosperous kind of operation?

Edith: Yes.

Scott: Where did they get the iron and steel?

John: They got the iron from Norway.

Edith: They got English steel. They bought the best. These people after they bought thought, "Well, that's foolish," so they bought everything cheaper and the business kept falling off. My great grandfather started a blacksmith shop in the town of Fairfield before they moved up to where the Waldrons live on Valley Forge Road. My great grandfather built that place and had a shop up there. They were Bradleys and had the hoe shop up there at the time of the Civil War, but that burned. The hoe shop was to make southern tools, but the war ended their southern trade.

*The interview continues on and we will share it with you at another time. It is fascinating to put an oral history to the biggest business in Weston during the late 1800's and early 1900's. We are so grateful to Scott Hill and others who took the time to interview these wonderful old families of Weston to preserve their memories of a different time.*

## AUTOGRAPH BOOK

An autograph book is as stated. It is a place where one collects the autographs of others. Traditionally, however, these books would include small pieces of verse, personal messages, poems, and drawings from one's friends. Yearbooks and guest books are the modern version of the autograph book.

When they first emerged in the 1500's, an autograph book would collect signatures around the time of graduation and serve thereafter as a sentimental memento of college life. Eventually it became popular to use them well after graduation and scholars would carry the books on their travels to record the well-wishes of colleagues. Additionally, an autograph book may have been used as a crude address book to maintain correspondence to past and distant friends.

Until the late 18th century, German autograph albums generally consisted of loose sheets of paper or sometimes vellum bounded in an elongated octavo format. The binding material varied from cardboard to gold-tooled leather.

German immigrants transported the tradition to American culture in the late 19th century; but by the mid-19th century there was a sharp decline in autograph books across both cultures as yearbooks began to replace them.

Researchers have come to value these historical books in assessing biographical data of those who composed them and the cultural backdrop in which they wrote. The autograph books of Ludwig van Beethoven and Babette Koch are among the most famous.

Our autograph book seemed to cover the years 1888, 1889, and 1890 and all messages were addressed to Myrtle. Although we are unaware of Myrtle's last name, the book appears to have names familiar with Westonites of the times, Godfrey and Waterbury.

The cover of this book has a beautiful colored picture of flowers and the messages inside are sweet and quite poetic. Please enjoy.



Myrtle.

True friends are like  
diamonds, precious but  
rare. False ones like autumn  
leaves. Found every where.

Yours Friend,  
Edith Burgess

March 27 / 1889

To Myrtle,

May you ever be happy  
and at your ease!  
Have a good husband  
and do as you please.

Sincerely Yours,  
Stella E. Gardiner

Newark Conn. Oct 31 / 1889

Dear Myrtle,

Think of me long.  
Think of me ever.  
Think of the fun  
We had to gether.

Yours true friend  
Georgia

Feb 22 / 1890



## UPCOMING EVENTS

Several members of the Society are busy with plans for an extensive commemoration of the 150th anniversary of the Civil War. Although still in the planning stages, we are excited to tell you that we will not only have a display of Civil War memorabilia and a balladeer, we are hoping to have a re-enactment of some kind, readings of letters and diary entries, refreshments from the day, culminating in a costume ball. This will all take place the end of April, 2011 and the beginning of May, 2011.

We are pleased and honored to tell you that we have been selected to receive some grant money from the Weston Education Foundation to further our efforts to educate the community about Weston's roll in the Civil War and the war's effect upon the country. There will be events for the young and the old to capture your imaginations.

The Weston Education Foundation was founded in 1994 by a group of local folks who wanted to be able to fund programs and tangible items for our schools beyond the scope of the school budget. Recently, they have opened up grants to local non-profit organizations who are promoting educational programs for the benefit of Westonites. We are so grateful to be receiving part of this year's grant.

More details will follow on all our exciting plans.

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***Chronicle Quarterly***

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