



The Chronicle

Weston Historical Society

Spring 2012

Vol. 33, No. 1

SAUGATUCK RESERVOIR COMPLETING A WATERSHED YEAR

One of Weston's loveliest places has to be the Saugatuck Reservoir off Valley Forge Road. It is lovely at any season, but certainly is not without its history of controversy. As most of you know, underneath thousands of gallons of water there was the village of Valley Forge. There were homes, businesses, forges, a schoolhouse, and the local doctor. However in 1938 the big conglomerate known as Bridgeport Hydraulic had other ideas for the area known as Valley Forge. Water was needed for towns south of Weston and this area was deemed the perfect place to build a reservoir. Some in the community saw it as progress while others felt that their lives were being torn apart. Construction began in 1938 and four years later the reservoir and the Samuel P. Senior Dam, were opened in 1942, 70 years ago.

In June of 1993 Kevin Cassidy wrote an article for the Weston Forum about the reservoir. Following is his article.

"For some, the proposed Saugatuck Reservoir meant progress.

"For others, especially those who lived in the small villages of Valley Forge or Bulkley's Four Corners, the reservoir meant watching the houses they grew up in disappear under water.

"My parents had always lived there," said 88-year old Anna

Coley. "Our place at Bulkley's Four Corners was taken. We just had to let it go."

"Mrs. Coley had already married and moved out of the valley when Bridgeport Hydraulic Company (BHC) came through in the 1930's and began buying hundreds of acres in Weston, Redding and Easton in preparation for building the great reservoir. However, her mother was still living in the valley.

"When she had to sell to the water company, she bought a place in Westport', Mrs. Coley recalled. Mrs. Coley's father and his mother had purchased the six-acre farm when he turned 21 and Mrs. Coley was born there.

"She remembered the valley as a fertile place that was 'wonderful for growing vegetables.' Her family always



This house was in Valley Forge and was moved to Godfrey Road East before the reservoir was completed.

had cows and pigs and rented land nearby to pasture the cows.

"Sometimes the roads leading out of the valley became so muddy they were impassable. 'You had to wait til spring to get out,' Mrs. Coley recalled. She and her family kept busy during the wintertime playing cards and games and tending to their animals.

Since they were so near the Redding line, when Mrs. Coley's family did get out for a night of square dancing, they would go to Danbury, Bethel or Redding. 'It was a good life,' she said. 'We didn't have the trouble of electricity in those days.

Putting up a Fight

"Some residents in the proposed reservoir area were reluctant to give up the 'good life.' They were joined by concerned citizens and the Saugatuck Valley Association was formed, rallying around the cry 'Save the Saugatuck.'

"The opposition was headquartered on Church Street in Westport. A framed copy of the Westporter Herald hanging today in Weston Town Hall shows 90 names on the associations' membership committee.

"Ruth Lockwood worked as a secretary for some of the members, helping out with publicity.

"A number of writers and artists who had purchased summer homes in the area backed the association, she said. 'They didn't want to see the little villages flooded,' she recalled.

"When it went to court, they lost the case of course,' she said. 'But the Bridgeport Hydraulic Company had to pay a whole lot more for the houses than they expected to.'

Building the Dam

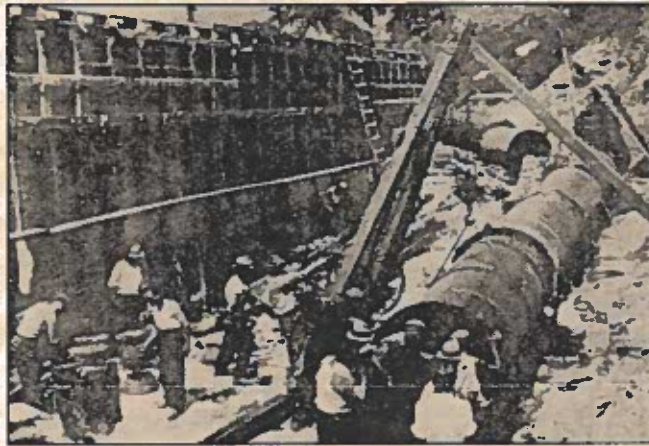
"The BHC was able to buy up all the land in the valley

by 1938 and construction began on the dam. Four hundred men worked on the project from 1938 to 1942. Occasionally Mrs. Lockwood and her family would visit the site to watch the slow process.

"She particularly recalled the tunnel running through Pops Mountain connecting the Aspetuck and Saugatuck Reservoir. 'My younger brother and sister walked through the tunnel to Easton.' She said.

"Weston Fire Marshal Fred Moore also remembers the dam bring built. 'I remember the reservoir when they cut all the trees out' he said. 'As a kid, I remember it looked like a bowl.'

"Chief Moore said the BHC used a giant bucket to mix the cement for the dam. It was pulled across to the top of the structure on cables and dumped in. The oversized metal bucket remains today up in the woods overlooking the dam off Valley Forge Road.



"In 1942 the dam was completed and the valley began to fill with water. The reservoir was used to supply water to Bridgeport's population, which burgeoned during the industrial growth that occurred during World War II. The dam also served a wartime purpose.

"When the war first started, they were afraid of air raids' Chief Moore said. 'They had big search lights up on the dam.'

"The vision of former BHC president Samuel P. Senior, the dam was eventually named after him. As it nears the end of its 50th year in operation, it remains a reliable source, not only of water, but of rich folklore and tradition.

The same is true now 70 years later and most likely will remain that way. A sad story for some, but a beautiful spot for Weston. ☺

HE REMEMBERS WHEN THEY BAKED CAKE IN DUTCH OVENS

We believe that the date of this article is sometime in 1932, although we do not have an exact date. However, we felt it was worth printing. The Sturges family was a prominent family in early Weston and this is a great article from Wilbur Sturges who found himself the "Last Authority on Yankees."

"Dignified, erect and keen with the blood of the very earliest pioneers in his veins, Wilbur Sturges, among all the old timers, pictures the real Yankee Weston most vividly.

"Mr. Sturges was selected by Professor Hanley of the Linguistic Society of America as an authority on the peculiarities of Yankee speech.

"Today he is selected as the best living authority on Yankee Weston, Not only does he remember the detailed happenings of his own 60 years, but also the stories of his forbearers, the first of whom, John Sturge, (later Sturges) landed at Yarmouth in 1630.

When First Sturges Arrived

"Of pioneer stock is the Sturges family. 'My great grandfather, James Sturges,' said the great grandson, 'came to Weston from Fairfield around 1760 and married Mary Dikeman. They lived on that road running perpendicular to the George Clifford place and I don't know but what some of the old timers are still there.

"Sergeant James Sturges served in the Fourth Connecticut Regiment through the Revolutionary War and was under Captain Daniel Godfrey (house on Norfield Road) who kept a hotel down near the former William Clifford place. Mr. Sturges never heard them tell much about the log house period, but he does remember his mother telling about the Indians on the Danbury Trail. He also clearly recalls the stories passed down about the burning of Danbury.

The Greasy Time at Danbury

"The British" he said with a chuckle, must have had a greasy time in Danbury, if they burned 100 barrels of pork. I remember {the} telling of Mrs. Thomas Cole who took her family, her children and cow and fled to

the woods. They lived there in safety until the British had left.

"When Mr. Sturges was a boy, home industries and pioneer ways were just about fading from the picture. 'But I do remember,' he said, 'that some were still making cloth at home. When I went to school with Harry Lockwood about 70 years ago, he wore a light blue homespun suit.

He Remembers Dutch Ovens

"Of course, stoves were mostly used at that time, but I can see to this day, my grandfather's sister, Sarah Godfrey and Abigail Bates who lived in the house now owned by Mrs. John Fitch - I can see them now doing all their cooking in the fireplace and Dutch Oven. They never used a stove.

And the Freed Slave Colony

"Traveling back then was done mostly on horseback. Mr. Sturges describes the young blades taking their girls to the parties (?) and sitting them on a pillow placed behind the saddle. This was called a pillton. The slaves had been freed in Connecticut before his childhood, but many still remained here. He recalls Pamp Coley, freed slave of Eliphalet Coley and east of Valley Forge there was a whole settlement of freed slaves. This settlement was called 'Egypt'. In Mr. Sturges' youth the slaves were very old.

One Family had 20 Children

"There wasn't much race suicide in those days,' he continued. 'In three generations of my family, father, son and grandson, there were 20 children. But most of the old timers have gone over the river now. Some of our tribe was lawyers, some of 'em farmers, and one thing and another.

"Oh yes, I remember the Civil War from A to Z. I remember when Fort Sumter was fired on, and I remember when Lincoln was elected. It seems to me that the first real shot was fired when Colonel Ellsworth of a regiment of New York volunteers was killed pulling down a Confederate flag in Washington.

*“There still isn't
anything you've
got now can beat
New England
rum, and I've had
my share so I ought
to be qualified
to taste”*

The Civil War Slacker Racket

"What was it like here? Oh, there was drafts and substitutions and enlistments and graft. Some of 'em would hire a foreigner to take their place. Why it was a regular business. A man would hire men to substitute for a few hundred. It was graft then, the same as it is now.

"In discussing the liquor question, Mr. Sturges stated: [Editor's note] (it was very difficult to decipher the copy of this part of the article, but we think we have at least have most of the paragraph correct):

The Jug Taverns of Weston

We didn't have any wood alcohol in those days, but there still isn't anything you've got now can beat New England rum, and I've had my share so I ought to be qualified to taste. I'll never forget the way it tasted. The next day after a dance over at Captain Billy Sanford's tavern, we youngsters sneaked out twice to the 'jug tavern' and each had a drink of rum.

"Well yes, things have changed a bit. Why it was years when Westport was known for only two things - New

England rum and long cabins. In Weston, the biggest business was charcoal burning as far as I see, and then they used to raise a lot of corn, grind it into meal and ship it to the West Indies. Probably there it was made into more rum.

A Word About His Car

"When asked what kind of a car he drove, Mr. Sturges tried to look serious, but he failed. 'Now don't you dare put this in the paper,' he said 'I drive an under-slung (?) Regal Roadster of his vintage of 1914 and in all that time it's only gone 9,000 miles. I don't have any trouble getting parts for it either. I broke the axle last year, but a man up here got me a new one right away.

"Reluctant to pose for his picture, Mr. Sturges said, 'I don't believe the camera will stand the strain. But if you want to take a chance on it, all right.' And with the bearing and courtesy of the great Yankee race which he represents, he faced the 1932 camera lens. (We are so sorry that the picture in the paper copied as a bunch of lines. Perhaps the camera couldn't stand the strain after all.)

POETRY

By the Fifth and Sixth Grades

The Hurlbutt Review February 1935

THE ROBBER CROW'S FATE

*There is a Junco eating seeds
He picks them up with care
O! Bring the food the Chickadee needs
With Tree Sparrows seeds he shares
The mean old crow sweeps down on all
And chases them away
Alas! Too late comes the sentinel's call -
Eugene's gun saved the day.*

CRACKED ICE

*Here come the skaters down the pond
Skating's a sport of which they're fond
Fat Jimmy fell and tripped his friend
Under such weight the ice did bend*

THE BLUEBIRD - Anna Corsa

*I like the Bluebird
That flies in the air
As if he did not
Have a single care
But he's loved a lot*



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Editor's Note

We are very sorry to have to report the passing of two of our favorite volunteers of the Weston Historical Society. William Beyea passed away on April 25 after a brief illness. Bill and his wife Gale were both trustees of the Historical Society and gave many hours of their time. Bill will always be remembered for dressing up in his gorilla suit each Halloween Fair and scaring as well as delighting children and their parents. Our hearts go out to Gale and her family.

We have also lost Tom Studwell who lived in town for many, many years. Tom was seen out at the barn at our second grade field trips teaching children about farm tools and life as it was a century ago. Tom was a gentle man who most likely taught the children more than just the way to use tools. Our hearts go out to Tom's family as well.

Both these men will be sorely missed by the Historical Society

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UPCOMING EVENTS

The Weston Historical Society is having a very busy year. We have two activities planned, one for May and one for June that we would like you to be aware of. In addition the art show is still going on in the new Archive building and is open on Saturdays and Sundays from 1 - 4.

On May 19 we will be having a wonderful evening of entertainment with one of cabaret's best loved performers, actress/singer Leslie Orofino. Leslie has entertained audiences across the country from New York to California and has agreed to a one evening show at the historical society. On May 19th at 6:30 p.m., Ms. Orofino will present her brand new show "Affairs Of The Heart." The program will include comedy, jazz, rock and tender ballads. It is certain to be a romantic spring evening. Reservations are limited, so please call the Historical Society at 203-226-1804 and make a reservation.

On June 1, 2, and 3, the Historical Society will be having an Americana weekend which will feature a quilt show displaying historic quilts from Weston as well as family quilts from some of our members. The Weston/Westport Community Band will be performing on Saturday around 2:00 and there will be soft drinks and popcorn. There will also be something for the gentlemen as well. There will be further information as we get closer to the event.

Please join us. Both events should be wonderful. ☺

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Karin Giannitti, Editor
9 Christopher Hill
Weston, CT 06883

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The Chronicle

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

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Karin Giannitti
Editor

Wendy Monahan
Patient Proofreader

Mark-It Works, LLC
Design/Production