



THE

# CHRONICLE

QUARTERLY

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Published By The  
Weston Historical Society

## THE EDITOR'S PAGE

### THE BLACK HOLE

A black hole is reported to be a burned out star that has recaptured all that has happened to it and turned it inside out so nothing can escape—even light.

I feel that some parts of Weston's history have been turned inside out, resulting in a black hole, probably never again to be rediscovered. Finding information on some of the happenings, the mills, and the taverns has been fraught with dead ends and conflicting information. This is one reason your society embarked in an oral history project over 15 years ago. Our trustee emeritis, Scott Hill, undertook this job and interviewed many old-time residents. Now we have personal recollections of life in Weston in their time.

Too bad it wasn't done 200 years ago.

*Herb Day*

Herb Day ~ Editor

## SPRING IS PLANTING TIME,

Every year—however, the way crops are planted has changed as much as our mode of transportation has changed over the past 200 years. Gone is the oxen—drawn wooden plow, replaced in this day and age with a 10-12 bottom steel plow drawn by a 2-ton giant of a tractor, covering as much land in one hour as many of the early Weston farmers had in plowable land (his speed was more like one acre per day).

The crops planted by the early farmer of Weston increased over the years as he changed from being a subsistence farmer to one who grew some crops for market. And, as the crops changed in kind or volume, so did his planting equipment requirements change.

Hay was the major crop as the settlers began to populate this section of Fairfield in the late 1600's and early 1700's. It was needed to sustain his livestock over the long winters. He grew wheat, rye, and flax for his own use and barley and oats for his livestock. These crops were planted mostly in the spring. Until the grain drill was invented, these seeds were planted by hand. Hay was mostly native grasses until the pasture land could be roughed up enough to sow some timothy and maybe some clover.

After the stones were picked up and dug out and moved into fences, the farmers were able to plow some of their fields (around the stumps until they were able to burn them out). The early plows were wide and crude and required great effort to pull and hold on to. The moldboard plow (see pictures), first pulled by oxen and later by horses, became a standard on all farms. It replaced a wooden plow which had not seen much change for centuries. Even these cast-iron plows broke frequently. It wasn't until John Deere made a moldboard out of steel that this plow became a relatively trouble-free farm implement.



Horse-drawn, farmer-controlled (some of the time) moldboard plow.



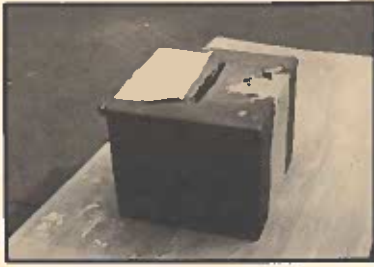
Planet Jr. Planter for vegetable seeds. Used in Weston.



Corn planter one hill at a time.

# PICTURE QUIZ

CAN YOU NAME THIS?



If you can, please send your name to:

The Editor  
The Chronicle  
P.O. Box 1092  
Weston, CT 06883

## LAST ISSUE'S QUIZ

The picture in last issue's quiz was (is) an outhouse, also known as a necessary house or a privy. One person sent in an answer which we call correct. He is Mr. Gerhard Hoelter. One of our board members came up with the same answer, however, he knew what it was all along.

The answer they gave was Chic Sale. Charles (Chic) Sale was, in 1929, America's great rural character actor. He wrote a short story called "The Specialist." This was about a carpenter, Lem Putt, who became a specialist in the building of privys. While our privy is the same color that Lem Putt recommended (red with white trim so you could see it at night) he usually did not build one with a window. Lem said "they ain't so popular as they used to be; and I'll tell you why. Take fer instance, somebody comin' out—maybe they're just in a hurry or maybe they waited too long. If the door don't open right away and you won't answer 'em, nine times out of ten they'll go around and look in the window, and you don't get the privacy you ought to."

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# CURRENT EVENTS

## THE HERB GARDEN NEEDS HELP

We received the following request from Beatrice Crane-Baker.

"Last summer Nadine Tichy and I discovered a romantic herb garden hidden outside the barn near the old crabapple tree. Under ten foot tall brambles, cornweed, and assorted jungle we found yarrow, oregano, marjoram, daises, garlic chives, and wooly mint layed out in an old-fashioned circle-in-the-square design complete with flagstones. It was obvious that at some time someone had taken great pains with it but now the weed devil was king. Mike Gilbertie of Weston Gardens cleared away the brush and we planted some new herbs also adding an old stone bench found on the property.

Over the fall and early spring, weeds are now taking over again with a vengeance faster than one can cope with. We need a few people to get together once or twice to clean up and plant. Afterwards, we could set up a rotating system of upkeep. With four or five people sharing the tending once a week, it would really mean one would only need to go up there once a month.

It is a lovely little garden and I hate to think of the weed devil taking over again. Anyone who likes herbs and is interested can call me, we might have some fun with it."

Beatrice Crane-Baker  
17 Sachem Road, Weston  
226-0253

*Editor's Note:* The Historical Society appreciates the interest shown by Beatrice and we hope someone can find the time to give Beatrice the help she asks for.

## LANDSCAPING

If you have been past the Coley Homestead in the past month you might have noticed the junipers planted around the sign post and up the bank by the driveway. This was done by Nadine Tichy, one of our green-thumb trustees.

## POST OFFICE UPDATE

The building is moved but not yet set on the foundation. We have put a concrete vapor and dust cover under the building and a new sill on the north side. We do expect work to continue soon and the building set down before the next Chronicle comes out.

## MEMORIAL PARADE PRIZE

The Weston Historical Society was awarded third place in the float contest with our carriage pulled by a proud horse. Riding in the carriage were Peg Sanford, MaryLou Perry and the driver and horse's owner, Nancy Dillon.

## DATELINE, WESTON

We recently found several copies of the Connecticut Courier and the Connecticut Patriot newspapers which were printed in Bridgeport in the early 1800's. We will be reproducing some of the articles of interest, especially those about Weston. The first is printed below.

### WOOL CARDING

The subscriber has erected a complete double carding machine in Weston, five miles from Saugatuck Landing on the road leading to Redding, near the mills of Ezehiel Sturges, Esq., where the road leading from Norwalk to Redding and Newtown intersects, which will make it convenient for those at a distance wishing to favor him with their custom to communicate their orders, which will be thankfully received and punctually attended to.

Elephalet Smith

Weston, June 18, 1816

### REGIMENTAL ORDERS For the Third Regiment of Horse-Artillery

Moss K. Botsford, is appointed Adjutant  
Joseph D. Wilton, Chaplain  
Robert Middlebrooks, Quarter-Master  
Stephen Summers, Pay-Master  
Elijah Middlebrooks, M.D. Surgeon, and are to be obeyed and respected accordingly.

Abell Hall, Colonel

Weston, January 8, 1817

## SPRING IS PLANTING TIME (Cont. from page 1)

From Weston south to Long Island Sound some farmers made a living planting and selling onions. Weston's onion fields ran from the center where the Hurlbutt School and the town hall are now to the plains of the Saugatuck and Aspetuck Rivers. Onions were planted using a Planet jr. planter (see picture). This planter would also plant other vegetable seeds by changing the size of the seed opening.

A partial list of the plants grown on Weston farms include: rye, corn, barley, oats, buckwheat, flax, potatoes, tobacco, cabbage, tomatoes, onions, and squash. In addition to these, the farm also had a kitchen garden for vegetables and fruit for the family's daily use and for storage for winter use.

Plowing and harrowing the land for planting was hard work. Consequently, the acreage plowed and cultivated was not large, in 1850 the average farm in Weston included 63 acres of improved land. In 1860 this figure had risen to 75 acres: but by 1880 the figure was down to 34 acres. This was primarily due to the cheaper crops grown to the west and brought to the eastern markets by the railroads. Weston farmers kept their local Fairfield County markets, but lost the big markets such as New York. However, this limited market could not support the farm families and farming, as with Weston's manufacturing, became a thing of the past.



## Inside Of Last Issue Picture Quiz Our 3 Hole Privy

### WESTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY BOARD OF TRUSTEES

### NEXT ISSUE

The Sawmill  
P.O. Update  
50 Years Ago  
Current Events  
Our Cistern

Lou Bregy, President  
Sylvia Bowles, Vice-President  
Dan Sanders, Treasurer  
Ralph Greenwood, Secretary  
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Peggy Sanford  
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Marie Golden  
Ruth Lockwood  
Gene O'Hare  
Joe Spetly  
Herb Day  
Doris Rickerich  
Gary Samuelson  
Marge Schneider



Formerly the Banks Tavern, circa 1780-1860, built in 1730. What is now Lyons Plains Rd. ran right in front of the house, presently the home of Mr. & Mrs. Fred Rickerich.

# WESTON'S HISTORICAL NOTEBOOK

Henry David Thoreau once said:

"The gods who are most interested in the human race pre-  
side over the tavern . . . The tavern will compare favorably  
with the church. The church is the place where prayers and  
sermons are delivered, but the tavern is where they take ef-  
fect and if the former are good the latter cannot be bad."

Dr. Johnson once said:

"There is no private house in which people can enjoy them-  
selves so well as at a capital tavern . . . at a tavern there is  
general freedom from anxiety; you are sure you are wel-  
come. . . and the more trouble you give, the more good  
things you call for, the welcomer you are. . . No, sir, there has  
been nothing yet contrived by man by which so much hap-  
piness is produced as by a good tavern or inn."

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## WESTON'S TAVERNS

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Researching for information on taverns in Weston has proved difficult. There is virtually no written information on the number of taverns there might have been in Weston or who ran them. We know of one for sure: This was the Tom Banks Tavern on what is now Lyons Plains Road. The first Tom Banks in this area built his house in 1730 on land he bought from his father Benjamin. We know that this Tom Banks was a farmer from the items listed in his will, probated in 1747.

In the mid-1700's some towns and cities were required by law to have at least one tavern to accommodate travelers passing their way. If this applied to Weston, then probably Banks Tavern was the one set up. It would probably be a good guess that Banks Tavern was opened about the time that Weston was incorporated as a separate town in 1787 as the need for tavern accommodations increased. This not only for the travelers, but also as a meeting place for the increasing population of Weston.

The laws of 18th century America required that tavern keepers be orderly, honest, and temperate. . . that they have, in short, the qualities of an outstanding citizen. Based on what little we know about the Banks family, they fit this description and undoubtedly ran a good tavern. We say the Banks family because we do not know which Banks family members ran this tavern. The tavern was known as Banks Tavern and was probably opened by his brother's son Thomas. When he died in 1819, his wife was willed a few items and some land, but refused these things and took legal dower (which means that she exercised her right to remain in the house as long as she lived). This could mean that she wanted to continue to operate the tavern, if it was a tavern at this time, along with her son Thomas. This son (Thomas) married Abigail Merwin. They had a son Thomas Merwin Banks, who could have run the tavern until he sold the property to Phillip Gerhardt about 1871.

Margaret Lylburn, writing for the Bridgeport Post in 1932, states that "Tom Banks Tavern offered a hospitable fire and ready amusement, making it a comfortable place to retire to. Tom Banks' was a most gracious example of life in Weston. Frank Lyon, who was 80 years old in 1932, recalled the gay dancing in the tavern. He said "folks used to come from all over the countryside, afoot, a horseback, and anyway they could get here."

A tavern was a place for people to get food, lodging, entertainment, and drink. The most famous drink in the Banks Tavern was FLIP, made from ale and rum (we gave the recipe in an earlier issue of the Chronicle). If Frank Lyon remembered dancing in Banks Tavern, then it must have been still operating in the mid-1800's. Maybe until Phillip Gerhardt bought the building and remodelled

it into a home for his family. The old ballroom on the second floor was divided into several (small) bedrooms. This means that the Banks Tavern could have been in operation for almost 80 years. This is just a rough guess, since we do not have any definite information as to the dates of operation.

We would appreciate any information anyone might have regarding the Banks family as it might relate to the operation of the tavern.

If we can assume that by being in business for this length of time, this tavern was well thought of, we could also assume that it conformed to the average rural tavern of the day:

- It had a tavern sign—which was required by law in the 18th century.
- Tavern conversation might revolve around local events, gossip, or turn to a discussion of colonial and worldly events.
- Prices for alcoholic beverages were established by the courts, and it was required—legally—to post the rate schedule in the most public room of each licensed tavern.
- Rum was the most popular distilled liquor of the time, sold in an assortment of measures, ranging from the gallon to the glass.
- At parties held in taverns, a formal drink was punch, made with brandy and lemon juice. Beer and (hard) cider were also consumed.\* Local residents would most likely drink their cider at home since most of them made their own.

We are not sure that there were any other taverns in Weston. Rumor has it that there was a tavern in the Scribner House on Weston Road (Giffords Hill). Some reports refer to a Scribner Tavern, however, one report mentions Grays Tavern. The Gray family did own this house at one time.

Also, reference is made to "jug" taverns being located in several sections of town. Particularly Upper Parish and Valley Forge. Jug taverns were local watering holes where a drink of home brew could be bought. These were like the speakeasys of the 1920s-1930s. These were illegal 'taverns' which had a short life.

We have not found any reference to any town meetings being held at Banks Tavern, although the selectmen and others in attendance at an annual meeting did repair to Tom Bank's after the meeting. This meeting was held in the Emanuel Church Meeting Room.

The story of taverns in Weston is not over until it is over and we will continue to research more sources for additional information.

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