

WESTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY BULLETIN

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Developing Weston Estates: A. J. Comeau Construction Co.



Weston Estates is a manicured neighborhood on 244 acres straddling the Weston-Wayland town line.(1) It was developed beginning in the 1960s by the A.J. Comeau Construction Company, the first builders in Weston to specialize in custom houses for high-end clients. The photo above shows Buckskin Drive and one of two landscaped traffic islands created on flat former farm fields off Boston Post Road. Ernest Comeau later wrote: "We sacrificed land at the entrance to give the area a more prestigious entrance." The wrought iron Weston Estates sign, which is lit at night, was designed by Comeau's daughter Christine. Note that because utilities were buried underground, the neighborhood has no utility poles. The house in the photo has since been demolished. (Photo by Chalue, courtesy of the Comeau family)



(left to right) Alfred, Alphonse, and Ernest Comeau, officers of A.J. Comeau Construction. (Courtesy of the Comeau family)

Ernest A. Comeau (1919-2007), the man behind Weston Estates, came from a family of builders. His father, Alphonse Joseph, was born in Nova Scotia, the son of a carpenter. Alphonse moved his family to Belmont, Massachusetts, in 1920 and started the A. J. Comeau Construction Company several years later.

Ernest, the eldest of five children, began designing houses for his father after taking mechanical drawing in high school. He attended Boston University and was at B.U. law school when he was drafted into the army in World War II. In 1943 he married Anne Leblanc, whose parents also came from Nova Scotia. After the war, Ernest finished his degree but did not enjoy practicing law, deciding instead to go into business with his father.

Ernest persuaded his father to move the business to Weston, where he felt there would be more available land for new home construction. In 1948, the company built the Garrison Colonial house at 20 Old Coach Road, where Ernest moved with his young family. The office was also located there for many years. In the 1950s, A. J. Comeau Construction Company built dozens of homes on Lantern,

October, Perry, and Rolling Lanes and Baker's Hill Road. In general, the company built larger homes than the basic "G.I. house" of the late 1940s and 1950s. They built in traditional Colonial and Modern styles. Some of the work was done in conjunction with Irving Connelly.

In the 1960s, the company started building substantially larger houses, often custom designed for families looking to build their "dream house." In 1961 they purchased from Eliot and Esther Shepard two large parcels of land totaling about 106 acres, located on the west side of Highland Street. The Weston Estates Corporation was set up to handle the financial end of buying and developing this land. The Shepard property was subdivided into 32 lots on the new streets of Deer Path Lane and Country Drive.

In 1965, Weston Estates Corporation purchased 138 acres formerly belonging to Louis W. Dean, owner of Dean Dairy in Waltham. Dean had operated an ice cream stand on Boston Post Road. The rest of the property was rented as a piggery and a vegetable farm. The land consisted of 91 acres in Weston (developed into 52 lots) and 47 acres in Wayland (developed into 30 lots). With this second purchase, Weston Estates extended from Boston Post Road all the way to Highland Street. A small section of Westerly Road was designed and built by the Swiedler Building Company on a separate parcel.



Map of subdivision on former Dean land, including Buckskin Drive, Westerly Road, Whispering Lane, and Apache Drive. Ernest Comeau wrote: "I finally decided that a land bank was absolutely necessary for us to have income from our construction business, for without land, we could not plan and build, but were at the mercy of customers who might come in, then competitive bidding would take all the profit out of the job." (Courtesy of the Comeau family)



*Phillip, Lorraine,
and Christine
Comeau at a 1952
birthday party.
(Courtesy of the
Comeau family)*

The Comeau company laid out the streets and built the vast majority of the houses, while also exercising the right to approve houses built by others. The company kept many existing trees and worked with the topography. Many of the houses were larger than they appeared. Some were designed by Weston architect Marjorie Pierce, Cambridge architect Arthur Brooks, or Claude Miquelle, an architect who designed houses for builders throughout New England and as far west as Ohio. Because of the 60,000-square-foot zoning requirement, houses were distant from each other, providing a sense of privacy that Comeau saw as an attraction.

The lots in Weston Estates were sold with restrictive provisions in force until 1985. Only single-family residences were allowed, with no business activities of any nature. Professional offices were allowed with a “small professional nameplate.” Pets or other animals or birds were not to be “kept in such number as to be unreasonably noisome or offensive in the neighborhood.” Boats and boat trailers could not be parked on the premises unless out of sight from the street, except temporarily. Radio and television towers were not allowed, nor were clotheslines if visible from the street.

Owners needed to submit plans and specifications for structures, fences, swimming pools, and driveways to an Approval Authority for official permission to proceed. The Approval Authority was Weston Estates Corporation or a desig-

nated three-person committee. According to Ernest Comeau's daughter Lorraine, her father had visited other communities, including some out of state, where these types of provisions were in place. Other Weston subdivisions also had restrictive covenants.

In a *Boston Sunday Herald* article of July 14, 1963, subtitled "Families Prefer the Informal," real estate editor William E. Dorman discusses Comeau houses under construction and on the drawing board at that time. Comeau is quoted as saying that he and his architects had been asked by clients to de-emphasize the living room. Comeau said he used to build more contemporary-designed homes, but the emphasis had turned to colonials. He no longer built three-bedroom houses. Another trend Comeau mentioned was the desire for a master bedroom suite with "his" and "hers" closets and its own bathroom. His bathrooms were "quite posh," according to the article. In the kitchen, one of his major shifts was to locate the counter-top cooking unit in a center island. He also liked wall-to-wall built-ins.

A. J. Comeau Construction was a family business, at times employing Ernest's wife, Anne, and his two brothers, Francois Alfred and Edward, as well as his daughter Lorraine and son Phillip, who both worked there during school vacations and in the summer. In the late 1980s, Francois Comeau started his own business in Wayland, specializing in commercial construction. At that time, Ernest changed the name of his company to E.A. Comeau Construction.

In a 2009 interview with Pam Fox, Lorraine Comeau recalled how she began working in the business.

I remember when I was a little girl he'd let me ride with him to the jobs in his truck. He'd let me watch the carpenters as they built the houses and "help" the men stir the concrete mix. When the houses were completed, he'd bring me back and proudly take me on a room-by-room tour.



The sign at the entrance to Weston Estates was designed by Ernest Comeau's daughter Christine. (Photo by Pamela Fox, 2013)

A. J. COMEAU CONST. CO., INC.

395 Boston Post Road

WESTON



TW 3-1104

TW 3-3181

Building and Painting
Remodeling · Decorating

Early 1960s advertisement in Weston High School yearbook. (Courtesy Weston Historical Society)

I started working for Dad's construction company part-time (during school vacations) when I was 14 years old—doing odd jobs and simple clerical work. Later I went to work for him full-time, first as his Office Manager then his bookkeeper. All in all I worked for Dad for over 13 years.

Lorraine remembers taking Sunday rides with her father to “check out the competition.” They would walk through Open Houses, and Ernest would say: “this is a great plan but it should be situated this other way.” He did not like it when people cut down all the trees or simply oriented the house to the road.

In 1958, Ernest Comeau built a larger house for the family at 25 Perry Lane. The office was moved to 395 Boston Post Road and later to 21 Center Street. The Perry Lane house had amenities like double sinks and a huge shower stall in the bathroom, a fieldstone fireplace, three interior gardens, an intercom system, and the latest in lighting, for example, “high hats” (recessed downlights) and spotlights. The family had to keep the house neat because Ernest would bring customers over day or night to show them the lighting. (See next article for more information on 25 Perry Lane).

Ernest became known for building higher-end houses, with fancier bathrooms and lighting. According to his daughter Lorraine, “he liked to be on the cutting

edge.” Later he built some “Scholtz” houses, which were pre-engineered and came with certain parts already assembled.

Comeau sold the house on Perry Lane in the mid-1970s and moved to another “Comeau” house on Lantern Lane. No. 25 Perry Lane was demolished in recent years. Although the house was large (7000 square feet), Lorraine explained that it did not adapt easily to today’s lifestyle. The living room and dining room on the main floor were very formal, and the family room was at the opposite end of the house and on a different level from the kitchen. The present house on the site, built in 2011-12, is almost 10,000 square feet.

Ernest retired in the mid-1980s and he and Anne moved to Florida. In 1999, when he was 80, he took the Florida real estate exam and became an agent for Century 21. After several years of award-winning sales achievements, he suffered a severe stroke in 2003 and passed away three and a half years later, never having regained the communication skills that had contributed to his long and successful career.

Today, many of the original Weston Estates houses have been demolished, replaced by larger dream houses. The winding street layout, traffic islands, and attractive house sites—all features of the Comeau subdivision plan—are among the reasons why the neighborhood is attractive to the present generation of builders and owners.

by Pamela W. Fox

Footnotes and bibliography on page 23, at the end of the next article.



*The company office moved to 395 Boston Post Road in 1958. Artist unknown.
(Courtesy of the Comeau family)*



(l-r) Christine, Ernest, Lorraine, Anne, and Phillip Comeau, about 1955, before the birth of Arlene. (Courtesy of the Comeau family)

Ernest A. Comeau: An Autobiography

The following are excerpts from “Ernest A Comeau: An Autobiography,” written between 1994 and 1999 and edited by his daughter, Lorraine Comeau Miller Doyle. This section discusses his career in the construction industry. Items in brackets have been added by the Bulletin Editor. The narrative begins about 1950.

A. J. Comeau Construction Co. , Inc.

“In order to have sufficient volume of work building houses, we had to have an inventory of land ready to be built on. Towards this end I took an option from Tony Antico to buy the six remaining lots on Old Coach Road for \$3,500 each. I later designed the plans and our company built homes on each of these lots. The next year we took an option with the J. Irving Connelly Company for another six

lots, this time on October Lane and Bakers Hill Road in Weston. We bought these lots for \$5,000 apiece. Then we bought a big parcel of land from Guy Garland. This was raw land at the end of Rolling Lane. We had to go to the Planning Board to get approval for the sub-division layout. We designed it so that Rolling Lane was continued, and we added a new road called ‘Perry Lane.’ There were a total of eleven lots, one of which Garland was to retain for his own house.

These lots were priced at \$15,000 per lot. Again, I designed the plans for all of the houses, and A. J. Comeau Construction Company did all of the building. At this time we began to build ‘custom homes.’ The houses on Rolling Lane and Perry Lane sold for between \$45,000 and \$60,000 each.

“The company then entered into an agreement with Win Couette, a real estate broker whose office was in Lexington. We would build houses on Follen Hill and he would be the exclusive agent. This arrangement continued for about 10 years, to the benefit of both of us. One of these Lexington homeowners would later become one of our silent partners in a multi-million dollar land purchase.

“From the very beginning, Anne [Ernest Comeau’s wife] was a terrific asset to the company. And she did it all for NO pay! Looking back, Anne should have been on our payroll. It really wasn’t fair to have had her work so hard and not get compensated. She did all of the typing for the company. All of the specifications, the contracts, the letters, the bills—and answered the phones (day and night since the office was part of our house). Later on she did a lot of interior decorating—assisting our clients when they needed to choose wallpaper, paint colors, electrical and plumbing fixtures, appliances, etc.

“About five years after Pop [Alphonse Joseph Comeau] and I formed the company, my brother Al (who by then preferred to be called ‘Francois’) returned from France with his new wife, Jeanette. Al had been married in France right after the war and had settled down there. After a few years, though, he had become disenchanted with Europe and decided to move back to the States. . . .



“Pop thought that Al should be given a position in the company, so we gave him a one-third share of the profits. This was Pop’s idea—I wasn’t so sure, since he had no previous experience in the construction field—not in estimating, or drafting, or construction. We decided to break up the responsibilities so that Pop would be the Chairman of the Board, I would be the President in charge of all the residential construction, and Al would be the Vice President and would be in charge of all the commercial construction and our painting division. This system worked well. We had a large painting crew by now, which Al supervised. He was very good at public relations,



According to newspaper reports, this building was the “first pre-cast office building on Route 128.” It was designed by Arthur H. Brooks Jr. of Cambridge and built by A.J. Comeau Construction. All carrying members were “pre-cast and pre-stressed,” saving time and money. (Courtesy of the Comeau family)

and he rounded up quite a bit of commercial work for us. Al became very friendly with an architect named Arthur Brooks, who was a professor at Harvard University. Arthur did design work from his home and worked with us on a number of projects over the years. Arthur designed all of our commercial work.

“One of our commercial buildings was the first pre-cast concrete building on Rte. 128. It was called The 128 Office Building and it was on Bear Hill Road in Waltham. This building got the attention of some reporters, and we were written up in a Boston newspaper for that job. It was a four-story pre-cast concrete office building that had street access from each floor by means of ramps. We had started something—soon all of the builders were using pre-cast concrete.

“Al also became friendly with a man named ‘Tiny’ [Paul] Yewell, whose house we had built. It turned out that Tiny had made a huge profit when he sold his business and had a lot of money that he wanted to invest. He formed a group that bought land in Burlington, Massachusetts, and gave us the exclusive right to build on it. Burlington was a town that was right on the Route 128 belt, which was a real hot spot for the rapidly growing electronics industry. The area was growing by leaps and bounds.

“I had devised a very effective costing system that the company used to price all of our jobs. I had gone to seminars on Cost Control and Management every year

and had established a 17-page estimate sheet that could be used for both residential and commercial buildings. Dave MacDonald, our bookkeeper, kept all of our accounts on the Burroughs machine.

“At first our office staff consisted of Dave MacDonald, Ed Szabo (the draftsman), and Anne (our secretary for many years). We all worked out of the office in our house on Old Coach Road. When we finally outgrew that one-room office we moved our corporate headquarters to Weston Center. Our new office was at 395 Boston Post Road. This new location afforded us with more visibility, plus it gave my family more privacy. . . . Much later we outgrew this office too and moved diagonally across the street to 21 Center Street. . .

“Our office work was done before the advent of the computer or copy machines or faxes. Everything took much longer to do. When we had to type up several copies of a set of specifications (which could run to more than 50 pages), the originals were typed onto special mimeograph stencil paper. The stencils were then run off, one at a time, on a mimeograph machine. Proofreading was time consuming and tedious. Numbers were calculated with an adding machine. This was even before electric typewriters. Things were very different back then.

“We constantly scouted out new products and new applications of existing products. The entire country became our back yard. After we attended any out-of-state seminar we would spend a few days checking out their local building trends. Builders in our area started to look to us to show them how the industry was changing and improving.

“Our next big land purchase was the Shepard Estate, off Highland Street in Weston. I went to the Planning Board and had our road layout approved. The new streets were to be called Deer Path Lane and Country Drive. Mrs. Shepard sold Anne and me two beautiful marble statues at a fraction of their real value. The larger one was called “The Coming of the Dawn” and stood over 7 feet tall. The other statue was a bust of St. Beatrice. We were in the process of designing our second house, and we made sure we made a special place in the house for both of them.

“The Suffolk Franklin Savings Bank was the bank that financed all of our land deals and put the mortgages on all of our homes. I had become well known to their Vice Presidents and always got prompt service. I did all the designing of the roads for these land acquisitions with the assistance of a civil engineer. The Shepard Estate parcel was the biggest property yet, and it was sure to keep our company supplied with buildable lots for many years to come.

“A few years later Mr. [Louis W.] Dean died. He owned another large piece of land that was almost back-to-back with the Shepard land. The negotiations for the Dean land took well over a year. This was the largest chunk of land to be sold and developed in Weston at that time. There weren’t any other large parcels

available in the town. We finally agreed on a purchase price of \$550,000. This price included the raw land and the two houses and an ice cream stand that were currently on it. We secured a mortgage of \$1,000,000 so that we would have enough capital to build the roads and set up the area. These funds were to be paid out in stages as we developed the land. As each lot was sold we would be able to reduce the mortgage.

“It was a . . . [large] parcel going from Route 20 on the Weston/Wayland line and extending back well into both towns. We had to move one of the houses [6 Buckskin Drive], as it was right smack in the middle of where we planned to put one of the roads. We totally redecorated the other house [24 Buckskin Drive]. The ice cream stand became somewhat of a pain in the neck, because some of the local people thought it should be left as a historic site. They wrote articles for the town paper, condemning us for wanting to tear it down. (Even though by this time it had become an eye-sore, and was in terrible disrepair. It hadn’t been used as an ice cream stand for years.) In the end we asked the Weston Fire Department if they wanted to use it for their men to practice on. They agreed and safely and efficiently burned the building to the ground. . . .

“We developed this land by forming a company called Weston Estates Corp. My daughter Christine designed a beautiful sign, which we put up at the formal entrance to “Weston Estates.” The sign was right on Route 20 at the Weston/Wayland town line and was a fantastic marketing tool. . . .

“Few people realize how much the cost of a finished lot is actually underground. There are many, many steps that must be taken before a house can be built on a piece of raw land. First there’s the engineering. All of the roads have to be located in such a way that the house placement will be at the most advantageous location. We wanted the roads to wind around a bit; not be straight and uninteresting. Then the roads had to be cleared of trees for a full 50-foot right of way. Then all the subsoil had to be removed and the roads had to be graded so that the maximum road grade is under 10%. . . The road base had to be good clean gravel.

The drainage is a major consideration. This is often the most difficult step, as there has to be adequate drainage for any run-off, which has to go into catch basins. These catch basins then have to lead into an underground drainage system, which ultimately had to lead to some natural drainage system (such as a river).

“We installed underground telephone and electric service in conduit pipes for easy replacement in case of trouble. These lines had to be separated by sand, and an “as built” plan had to be prepared as the work progressed . . .

“After the roads were finally finished and approved by the Planning Board, the lots could be put up for sale. The real estate taxes began to accrue the moment the lots were approved, regardless of how long it might take to sell them. Our selling

Above: 6 Buckskin Drive was built for the Brown family. Elijah and Simeon Brown purchased the 143-acre Ephraim Livermore farm in 1834. The farm passed from Elijah to Simeon in 1850 and remained in the family until sold by the heirs of Henry L. Brown to Louis W. Dean in 1917. The house originally faced Boston Post Road and was turned 90 degrees and moved to the east to make way for Buckskin Drive. Below: A second farmhouse on the property was remodeled into the present house at 24 Buckskin Drive. (Photos by Chalue, courtesy of the Comeau family)



price for a vacant lot was \$35,000. We had a \$25,000 mortgage on most of those lots. We would realize a profit on this venture only after we had sold all but the TEN LAST LOTS. These ten lots were the ‘make it or break it’ for us. In the meantime the interest on the mortgage and the real estate taxes were eating away at our capital. If the whole deal was going to work, we had to be able to sell the lots and build the houses on them within five years. The Massachusetts economy was strong at the time, and everything looked possible.

“Our goal was for A.J. Comeau Construction Co. to be the only builder in the entire Weston Estates parcel. We had high standards for the estates and made up a set of restrictions on all of the house lots so that it would remain a prime residential area. A Boston newspaper [date unknown] carried a long article about the project, part of which is quoted here. . .

WHAT A WONDERFUL
WAY TO LIVE

A LOVELY HOME LIKE THIS IN A BEAUTIFUL
WOODLAND SETTING — WESTON ESTATES



A. J. COMEAU CONSTRUCTION CO. INC.

21 CENTRE STREET, WESTON, MASSACHUSETTS

Phones: 893-3181 AND 893-1104

Advertisement from the 1973 Weston High School yearbook. The house shown, built in 1971, is at 37 Buckskin Drive. (Courtesy Weston Historical Society)

The Comeau's are currently completing construction of an area of Weston known as Weston Estates, where 35 homes on Deer Path Lane and Country Drive in the \$50,000 - \$100,000 price range have been built or are now being built. There will be 30 lots in Wayland.

. . . There will be an impressive entrance to the area, where one drives through stone wall entrances, along a one-way road which is divided by a three-quarter-acre park or planting area.

The main artery is Buckskin Drive, which has a planting area and traffic goes one [way] before one reaches an apple orchard. The old wooden water tower is on top of the orchard.

To the left there is a 4 ¼ acre community recreation area, where there are to be tennis courts, a swimming pool, a wading pool, equipment for children, etc. All of the home owners will be entitled to membership in the community recreation club. This club will be run by a Home Owners As-

sociation once the homes have been built. Access to the area will be by car; by horse over bridal paths that run throughout the area, or by foot paths which will inter-connect the entire area. Brooks intertwined through part of the land will afford a skating pond with illumination for night skating. . . .

The entire development was designed with site location of each home paramount. The homes were located as to the best possible site, then the roads laid out, so that each home will be an estate itself, some with a view, some with brooks in the rear, some with frontage on a small pond.

The A. J. Comeau Construction Co. is well-known in the Weston area, having built homes there for over 20 years. October Lane, Bakers Hill Road, Old Coach Road, Lantern Lane, Rolling Lane, Perry Lane, Deer Path Lane and Country Drive all bear the fruits of Comeau design and construction practices

This development will contain a new trend in land-planning—providing all recreation facilities within the area. Within walking distance of each home there will be ice skating, swimming, tennis, fishing, bridal paths and nature trails.

As with past Comeau homes, all new homes will be electrical masterpieces, with all of the modern conveniences and lighting controls for both indoors and outdoors.

[Editor's Note: The newspaper article is not an accurate description of what actually happened. According to Comeau's daughter Lorraine: "It's what Ernest Comeau had seen in other developments and thought COULD happen (and hoped WOULD happen) with Weston Estates. Unfortunately the economy went into a tailspin before many of the homes in Weston Estates were completed. As a result the things mentioned above were never built – i.e., the association tennis courts, the swimming pool, an association recreation club"]

“Around that time Anne and I attended the National Home Builders Association Convention and discovered the “Scholz Pre-Cut Homes.” I signed up to represent Scholz as one of their dealers, and we opened up a fully furnished model home near the entrance to Weston Estates. This was the only furnished model home in Weston. These Scholz homes could be ordered through colorful brochures that showed different elevations for the same house. The houses would be delivered in three or four 40-foot trailer trucks. All of the outside walls would have plywood attached to them and were numbered. We had to be very accurate in laying out the walls so that everything would fit like a glove. The beauty of it was that things like circular stairways came in one piece. If we had had to build that kind of thing on the job the old-fashioned way, we would have had to find someone qualified to build it, then would have to schedule a few weeks for the labor. The

Scholz way was much more efficient. Once we started using the Scholz construction we used them on about half of our new houses. Our first and only furnished model house [61 Buckskin Drive, since demolished] was built to start our advertising campaign. It was a two-story home that was built to be reproduced for \$125,000 including the land. This was the same house that sold for over \$700,000 twenty years later.

“In developing Weston Estates we had an agreement to pay Tiny Yewell \$15,000 a year interest on the \$150,000 he had put in. Al and I received a salary of \$15,000 per year for our supervision. Everything looked feasible on paper, until a few years after we had started. Then a recession hit New England and the whole picture changed. As the recession dragged on, our list of prospective buyers dwindled. The post-war building boom that had been growing non-stop for years had suddenly died. We had been able to sell all of the lots in Weston, but the lots in Wayland weren't moving at all. At the time Wayland didn't carry enough prestige to sell in a neighborhood like that. During this recession we had two semi-finished homes for sale in the Wayland section. They were on the market for over a year. I had to go to the bank to ask for relief and refinancing. I knew that once the recession was over, everything would be fine again. The bank, though, would not go along. They foreclosed on us. Al and I were particularly worried because we had both personally signed the note. The only bidder at the foreclosure sale was the bank. This was the end of a dream for Al and me.

“Not only were we strapped for cash, but now we were forced to build on scattered lots owned by the person who wanted his house built. This cost us more in overhead since our men would have to drive from one job to another, and move materials from one place to another. It also meant that we were at the mercy of the homeowner for the final payment.

“We decided to redirect our efforts into the commercial side. Tiny Yewell had agreed to give us exclusive rights to do the commercial work on a small tract of land in Burlington, Massachusetts. It was a very difficult time for everyone. New England was still in a recession, Anne was sick, the building industry was stagnant, and my future was less than assured. Around that time my other brother, Edward, came to work for us. . . Edward would be our on-the-job Super.

“Ed made our estimating system even better than it was. I would estimate the jobs, then Ed would double-check my work, and vice versa. Ed stayed with the company for a few years, until a bad recession hit and knocked out most of our commercial work. The construction world was looking pretty bleak when Ed told us that he would have to find work elsewhere. This turned out to be the early stages of a long recession where the custom-built home industry would be hit particularly hard. Our company required about \$1 million in yearly sales in order to adequately cover the officers' salaries and the overhead. The officers drew \$25,000/year in salary and a percentage of the company's profits.



Above: Contemporary fieldstone house at 4 Whispering Lane in Weston Estates, built in 1969 for financier Robert Linnell and his wife Marianne. Center: Garrison Colonial house at 39 Westerly Road, built in 1968. (Photo by Chalue) Below: A. J. Comeau Construction Co. exhibit at a 1964 trade show. (All photos courtesy of the Comeau family)



“It was while we were developing Weston Estates that the Cuban Missile Crisis occurred. There was a real danger of a nuclear attack from Cuba, as Russia was supplying them with nuclear weapons. To everyone’s relief, President Kennedy averted a disaster when he forced the Russian ships to turn back. But this caused a lot of fear in the U.S citizens. As a testament to this, two of the houses under construction at that time in Weston Estates had real bomb shelters in them. These bomb shelters had special air systems from the outside [and 16” thick reinforced concrete walls and ceiling]. We didn’t know it then, but I doubt whether these bomb shelters would have done any good at all had a nuclear attack really happened.

“We had some very challenging jobs back then. One of them was to build a house for Wallace Pierce, who was the president of a big food company called ‘S.S. Pierce.’ The house was to be built on Fernwood Road in Brookline. This was the first time our estimated contract was for over \$100,000. But our jobs got bigger and better, and more expensive—and once we reached that \$100,000 plateau we never did a house for less than that amount.

“Another unique home was the one we built for Bob Lee on Yarmouth Road in Brookline. Mr. Lee was from China and owned a large restaurant in Boston called “Bob Lee’s Islander.” He had a Chinese architect, Ed Sue, from Hong Kong, who designed the house. The main body of the house was in the shape of a hexagon, using steel I-beam from the roof framing. The house had a free-standing circular stairway that was over a lily pond. The roof was made of ceramic tile that was imported from China. There were also Chinese ornaments on the roof and on the second floor balcony, and hand-carved front doors.

“There was also the house we built for John Bush in Weston Estates [11 Whispering Lane, 1970). They had an indoor Olympic sized swimming pool and a gigantic lounge/bar area with tropical plants that overlooked several acres of wooded land. . . .this was the most expensive house in Weston Estates, built for \$360,000.

“We also did the Weston Center Shopping Center. This was a real challenge because it was built on top of a big peat bog. The peat was 10 – 20 feet deep and the rear of the building had to have piles driven through the peat. The front of the building was on solid ground. The parking lot is floating on a deep layer of peat—but now, some 40 years later, it has stood the test of time. . . .

“Another thing that had an affect on our company was when the ‘Architect License Law’ was passed in Massachusetts. After that law went into effect I wasn’t able to get a license because I hadn’t worked in the office of a registered architect for two years. So, although I had drawn up plans for well over 100 houses, and those well-built homes had sold for up to and over a million dollars apiece (from the 1940s to the 1960s), the new law stated that I would not be able to be considered an architect. Fortunately this was more of a concern in the commercial work than in the custom home work.



A. J. Comeau Construction Co. built this 25,000-square-foot commercial building, which opened in 1967 with the Triple A Supermarket as the principal tenant. The building was constructed in wetlands, which was allowed before passage of the federal Wetlands Protection Act. (1965-66 photo courtesy Weston Historical Society)

25 Perry Lane, Weston

“Our home on Old Coach Road started to be too small for our growing family. By this time Arlene had been born and all six of us were cramped into a 3-bedroom house. Things were even more crowded whenever Anne’s folks came over to babysit. . . . We moved to Perry Lane in 1958, when Phil was 15, Christine was 12, Lorraine was 10, and Arlene was 3.

“We had developed Rolling Lane and Perry Lane. It was adjacent to the Weston Country Club. I had reserved a large 2 1/2 acre lot at the end of Perry Lane for myself. I drew up the plans for a modern two-story house that was 99 feet long by 32 feet wide, with a front “L” section that was 24 X 24 feet. The total square footage of the house was 7,000 feet, plus it had an oversized two-car garage. The lower floor was designed with space for a large office should I ever want to bring the office back into the house. . . .



1967 Town Crier advertisement for the Grand Opening of the new Triple A Supermarket on Center Street. Comeau Construction took a long-term lease on the second floor. They finished the 2000-square-foot space, added dormers, and moved their offices from 395 Boston Post Road. (Courtesy Weston Historical Society)

“I used all of the tricks I had learned in seminars to make this Perry Lane house SPECTACULAR. The house would end up having over two miles of electrical wiring, and each room had special lighting effects. The living room alone had three distinct lighting systems, with dozens of variations at the flick of a switch. The finished house had a lighting system that was so fantastic and so state-of-the-art that General Electric sent a team of photographers to the house to take pictures and notes. G.E. used those slides in their future seminars to show how lighting can affect the mood and appearance of a room. Our house was written up in two national magazines. From that time on, I designed all of the lighting for every home we built.

“The Perry Lane house was built on a sloping wooded lot. The front of the house was 1 ½ stories above ground and the rear of the building was two stories above ground. There was no cellar, but there was a huge storage space in the attic and in the garage. The ground floor had a lovely L-shaped playroom. In one corner of the playroom was a built-in garden with a running waterfall; another corner had a bar; one wall had a massive stone fireplace; and part of the room was surrounded on three sides by several sliding glass doors. The sliding glass doors opened into a patio and a lovely wooded area. The remainder of the ground floor contained a large bedroom. . . , a large laundry room that contained a second kitchen, a boiler room, a half-bath, and a huge office that contained a couple of desks, a full-size slate pool table, filing cabinets, and bookshelves.

“The house was so spacious that we were able to host both Phil’s and Christine’s “After Prom Parties.” Those were parties where the entire graduating class and

their dates were invited to our house for a midnight dinner and dancing after their prom ended. We relied on an intercom system when people in one part of the house needed to talk to people in another part of the house.

“When this house was assessed by the Town Assessor it was the third highest assessed house in Weston. That high valuation was probably due to the large square footage. Most of the other houses in Weston at that time were about 3,000 to 4,000 square feet. We built this house for just \$67,420, since there was no overhead or profit added to the actual cost. Most of the subcontractors had given me a break on their bids, since we were all in the construction business together.

“One thing I learned when I built this house is that there is a ‘base cost’ to building any home. The chief costs are in the kitchen and bathrooms. . .and the special features. Enlarging a house from 3,500 to 7,000 square feet did not double the cost of the house. In fact, it may only increase the cost by 25% or so. Also, the ground floor cost per square foot was less than half of the first floor cost per foot.

“Every room in the house on Perry Lane had large picture windows (80 inches wide.) I had a \$40,000 mortgage and our real estate taxes were about \$3,000 per year. We sold the house 15 years later for \$175,000 during a bad recession. At the time I was house rich and cash poor. The house was a steal, but I had to get cash to operate. In less than 20 years the price of this house would escalate to well over \$1 million.

“In hindsight, though, this house caused me some unforeseen problems with my customers. They took one look at this magnificent house and assumed I was making far too much profit off their houses. They thought I was too rich and was pricing our construction too high. When we lived on Old Coach Road we had no such problems. I had never wanted to buy a Cadillac because I didn’t want to give the impression that I was making too much money. I never thought about how my grand house would look to other people”



Unknown artist's sketch of 25 Perry Lane, built by Ernest Comeau for his family in 1958. (Courtesy of the Comeau family)



Photos of the Ernest Comeau house at 25 Perry Lane (1958).

Above: Living room. Note the use of soffit lighting and recessed downlights (“high hats”). Center: The house at 25 Perry Lane had three interior gardens, including this one in the dining room. Note the lighting and flagstone floor. Below: Sculpture niche, double closet, and flagstone floor in the entry hall. Next page: The master bath at 25 Perry Lane had double sinks, wall-to-wall mirrors, soffit lighting, and a large shower with clear glass—a novelty at the time. An article “Seeing the Light” written about the Comeau Company use of lighting states: “No better job of selling residential lighting is being done anywhere, probably, better than by Comeau Construction.” and “So strongly does Mr. Comeau feel about the proper selection of fixtures and the scientific application of lighting that he [and his wife] attended a three-day conference at General Electric’s famous Nela Park before designing his own home.”(Courtesy of the Comeau family)



Footnote

1. The figure of 244 acres consists of 106 acres in the Shepard parcel (based on 1950s assessor’s maps), plus 138 acres in the Dean parcel (91 acres in Weston and 47 in Wayland.) Subtracting the Wayland lots, the acreage in Weston is 197. See Middlesex County Registry of Deeds, Book 11037, Page 84, January 26, 1966 for the Dean acreage. Comeau’s autobiography gives the Dean acreage as 178 but this appears to be incorrect.



Bibliography

1. “Weston Estates Subdivision Plan of Land Court Case No. 12045B in Weston, Mass.”, February 8, 1962, Dana F. Perkins & Sons, Inc. Civil Engineers, Plan Number 663 of 1963, Recorded in Book 10267, page 124. (shows 54 lots on Deer Path Lane and Country Drive in Weston).
2. “Subdivision Plan of Land in Weston, Mass” dated Sept 28, 1965 by Everett M. Brooks Co, recorded as Plan 78 of 1966 with Middlesex South District Registry of Deeds in Book 11037, Page 75 Approved by the Weston Planning Board on December 14, 1965. (shows 52 lots on Buckskin Drive and Westerly Road in Weston).
3. “Dean Estate: Subdivision Plan of Land in Wayland, Mass.” dated November 5 1965, by Everett M. Brooks Co., duly recorded with said Deeds as Plan No. 383 of 1966, Book 11089, Page 234.
4. Purchase of Dean Land, Book 11037, Page 91, January 26, 1966.
5. Restrictive Provisions, Book 11409, Page 104, September 29, 1967.
6. Interviews with Lorraine Comeau Miller Doyle and Christine Comeau Mullen, 2009 and 2013.
7. “Ernest A Comeau: An Autobiography,” written between 1994 and 1999 and edited by his daughter, Lorraine Comeau Miller Doyle. A slightly different version of the unpublished typescript, owned by Christine Comeau Mullen, includes additional information, some of which is included in this Bulletin in brackets or in photo captions.
8. Dorman, Wm. E., “First Pre-Cast Office Building on Route 128,” *Boston Sunday Herald*, July 9, 1961.



9. Dorman, Wm. E., “Living Rooms Look More Like Parlors,” *Boston Sunday Herald*, July 14, 1963.

10. “Seeing the Light,” unknown periodical, unknown date, Comeau family collections.

Living in Weston Estates

In his 1998 senior thesis, Weston native and Yale University history major Nick Madden contrasts the Weston Estates neighborhood, a “south side” neighborhood of high-end houses developed in the 1960s and 70s, with Silver Hill, a more modest early 20th century subdivision on the “north side.” Madden interviewed former and current residents of both neighborhoods. According to Madden, those buying into Weston Estates were professionals and executives who wanted access to the Weston public schools, as well as open space, all within a short distance from Boston. While this was true of many who settled in Weston over the years, there was a difference, according to Madden:

What separated Weston Estates from a typical suburban neighborhood, and from some neighborhoods in Weston, . . . was the inclination towards privacy and seclusion afforded by the large lots, large homes, and demanding professions of its inhabitants. As thirty-year resident Dr. George Drake suggested: “like most people in the neighborhood, I was so dedicated to my profession and spent so much time at the office, that I wanted to spend my free time with my family . . . we had no social life to speak of.”

Those interviewed by Madden talked about a lack of neighborhood feeling. Houses were far apart and screened by landscaping, and residents hired companies to do their yard work. There was nothing to bring residents together:

Thus moving into the Weston Estates meant building a large home for a family, but not necessarily becoming part of a larger social unit. Twenty-three-year resident Dr. Edwin Wyman did not feel like Weston or the Weston Estates were part of his identity . . . [George] Drake felt that because he and other residents had not grown up there, they were simply unable to identify to Weston. The place—the land—held little intrinsic value for Wyman and Drake, even though they raised children there. . . Many longtime residents expressed plans to move out of the Estates once their nests were empty.

Homeowners were part of a Weston Estates Association that oversaw maintenance of the entry sign and the landscaped traffic islands. Madden tells of one homeowner who wanted to spend more time with her neighbors and build relationships. She suggested that they get together to improve the common land, but residents opted instead to write checks to cover the cost of the work.

All quotations from *“Elite on Common Ground: Good Fences, Good Neighbors, and the Suburbanization of Weston, Massachusetts, 1870-1998,” unpublished typescript by Nick Madden, submitted to the Department of History in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a Bachelor of Arts Degree, April 13, 1998*

Edward Swiedler: “Building the Future’s Antiques”

Of all the post-World War II builders, Edward Swiedler was the most prolific, building nearly 400 homes in Weston and Wayland from the early 1950s until 1972. Unlike Ernest Comeau, who was eager to experiment with new styles and building materials, Swiedler was best known for traditional Colonials. According to one realtor, “he was building the future’s antiques, not tear downs.”

Swiedler Building Company developed a parcel of land between the first and second parts of the Weston Estates subdivision. In 1965, Viola and Joseph Lynch were looking for a house to buy. As she describes it, “one day we were driving down Westerly Road and we saw the house at No. 43, painted in yellow with brown shingles and so appealing.” Her husband was working in Cambridge for a chocolate company, and somehow the house seemed right. They contacted the owners, who had purchased No. 43 the previous year as a “spec” house and had done some cosmetic improvements.

In comparison with the Comeau houses, Vi Lynch describes her house as “more Early American,” with bay windows and knotty pine paneling. They moved in with their seven children and had two more, plus a mutt named “Pierre.” The Lynch family was one of the last to move to lower Westerly Road. The rest of what is now Westerly Road (the future Weston Estates) was a pig farm.

Their neighborhood was close and congenial. Says Lynch, “We were “all young couples with young families,” and the Swiedler houses “suited us just fine.” They would send the children out to play in the morning with no concerns for their safety and see them again when they came home for dinner. The Lynch children played hide-and-seek in nearby cornfields (the corn was used as fodder for the pigs) and got plenty of exercise “on their own.” Some of the neighbors had pools. It was “better than summer camp.”

Many families moving into Weston after World War II loved their Swiedler houses. But in this age of the “tear down,” it seems unlikely that these houses will have the chance to become antiques.

Viola Lynch was interviewed by Pam Fox in February 2013. If you moved to Weston after World War II, send us your memories of a time when there were still cows and cornfields, families had one car, and children roamed the neighborhoods of Weston.



Photograph of the Indian campground scene at Weston's 200th anniversary pageant. The official program lists the names of 100 adults and children who participated in the Indian scenes. (Courtesy Weston Historical Society)

Joseph Lindon Smith and the Weston 200th Anniversary Pageant

Joseph Lindon Smith (1863-1950) was an artist, educator, writer, honorary curator, charismatic public speaker, and adventurous traveler. He was known for his paintings recording the discoveries of ancient Egypt and other distant cultures, based on visits to archeological sites throughout the world. But it is his “parallel career” as a theatrical producer that is of interest to Weston history, because it was Smith who produced the pageant for the town’s 200th anniversary in 1913.

Smith was born and raised in Pawtucket, Rhode Island and trained as an artist at the School of the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston (1880 - 82) and the Academie Julian in Paris (1883 - 85). On his return he painted portraits, served as an instructor in decorative arts at the Museum School, and painted a few murals in public buildings, including a Venetian-themed alcove in the Boston Public Library (1895).

Smith began his theatrical work by creating pageants for friends at his summer home in Dublin, New Hampshire, which he helped develop into a vibrant arts colony. Beginning in the 1890s if not earlier, he designed and produced pageants for countless private parties, civic occasions, fundraising events, and town anniversaries. Of the latter, the most elaborate was staged in 1914 for the 150th anniversary of the city of St. Louis, where a cast of 7,000 and audience of ten times that number were treated to four performances of a Pageant and Masque featuring a sweep through history in pantomime and dance. Additional information about Smith can be found in the excellent article “Joseph Lindon Smith: Interpreter of the Past (1863-1950)” by Diane Wolfe Larkin, published in 2008. (see www.monadnockart.org)

Theatricality rather than historical accuracy appear to have driven the script. Changing the historical record in the interest of “show business” is a long and continuing tradition.

Charles O. Richardson, who served as chairman of the Committee on Pageant, gave the following statistics in the 1913 *Town Report*. Two thousand five hundred tickets were distributed without charge. An estimated 2,300 people were present. (Note that the town’s population in the 1910 census was 2,106). Approximately 400 town residents took part, many appearing in different scenes. About \$1500 of the pageant expense was paid from a Town Appropriation, with the balance made up by private subscription.

Below are reports about the pageant excerpted from the *Waltham Daily Free Press Tribune*, followed by descriptions of each scene taken from the official pageant program. In the next issue, we will examine other events of the 200th anniversary, including the parade.

January 31, 1913 (*Waltham Daily Free Press Tribune*)

The committee appointed at the last annual Town meeting to plan for the celebration of the 200th anniversary of the . . . [Incorporation] of the Town of Weston has held many meetings during the past month and has now completed its program, which will be carried out on June 15, 16, and 17.

Two thousand dollars was appropriated in order that the committee might have ample funds to do justice, and to furnish fitting exercises for the celebration of the anniversary. . . .

The Pageant will probably be held on Monday P.M. and will be one of the most important features of the celebration.

The committee has engaged Joseph Lindon Smith to take charge [of the Pageant.] Mr. Smith has had much experience in this line of work, and is the one who so successfully conducted the Pageants at Lancaster and Milton.

April 11

Over 300 citizens of the town responded to the invitation given by the committee in charge of the Historical Pageant to attend its first meeting in the Town Hall last Tuesday evening, at which the plans of the committee were presented to the public . . .

The committee feels assured that by the general response to its appeal . . . that the Pageant is to be the greatest feature of the celebration . . .

The Pageant will take place on the Winsor estate, nearly back of the home of Philip Spaulding, and in the vicinity of Mr. Winsor's artificial pond. Admission will be by ticket. Just how these tickets are to be distributed will be announced at a later date.

It will require 353 actors to fill all the parts in the Pageant, and rehearsals will begin at once and continue at stated intervals until the great event.

April 25

Rehearsals for the Pageant . . . have begun.

The prologue and the Indian scenes were rehearsed on Thursday of this week, and the Puritan scene will be rehearsed on Saturday afternoon. Those included in this scene are to meet at the Town Hall at 3:30 o'clock and if the day is favorable Joseph Lindon Smith, who is to have charge of the pageant, will probably decide to hold the rehearsal on the pageant grounds. . . .

For the present, at least, the committee has arranged to run barges for rehearsals from Cutter's Corner, Stony Brook, and Silver Hill, through Kendal Green, so that all those who are to take part will be able to reach the rehearsals without inconvenience.

The committee in charge of the Pageant is very much gratified by the support which they are receiving and feel confident that the pageant will be a great success.

Any resident of Weston who wishes to take part in the pageant and has not yet been asked to do so should send his or her name to Charles O. Richardson, Weston, Mass., and an effort will be made to give a part to any who do so.

The chairmen of the various scenes are as follows: Prologue and Epilogue, Mrs. David W. Lane; Indian Scene, Mrs. Grant M. Palmer; Norse Scene, Brenton H. Dickson, Jr.; Puritan Scene, Mrs. Carolyn E. Burrage; "Call to Arms" scene, Edward P. Ripley; "Washington Scene," Harold S. Graves.

Anyone requiring any information in regard to any of these scenes should communicate with the chairman.

May 9

Rehearsals for the Pageant are now well under way. The Call to Arms scene will be measured for costumes on Monday, any in the other scenes that have not been measured should send their names and measurements at once to the chairman of the committee in charge of their scene, with the exception of the Indians.

June 20

[Long article on the three days of celebration. Only the report of the pageant is quoted here]

THE GRAND PAGEANT

The most elaborate feature of the entire program was carried out on Monday afternoon, when a grand historical pageant was presented on the estate of Robert Winsor before a representative gathering of over 2000.

The program composed a prologue, three historical scenes and epilogue, representing conditions, scenes, manners and customs and events from the years 1000 to 1789, in review of Weston history.

It was an elaborate tableau performance and was watched with interest and pleasure by the large crowd of spectators.

The presentation was highly creditable and the scores of Weston people, old and young who participated merit the highest compliments upon the success and excellence of the pageant presentation.

July 11

There is a large number of costumes and parts of costumes that have not as yet been returned. The list includes 27 pairs Indian Moccasins, 14 Indian Garments, 3 Costumes worn by the "Hours," 5 Military Vests, 1 Military Cloak, 2 Swords, 4 Light Infantry Coats, 6 pairs Sandals, 5 Flowered Skirts, and numerous other articles. As the Committee will be obliged to pay for these articles if not returned, it is hoped that a special effort will be made to send any such at once to George P. Raymond Co., 5 Boylston Place, Boston, or to Charles O. Richardson, Conant Road, Weston.

The 200th Anniversary Committee designed this official souvenir medal, which was sold for 25 cents. The committee used the Norumbega Tower as a visual theme and included the "Coming of the Norsemen" in the pageant. They chose to overlook the fact that prominent historians had debunked the idea of that Viking ships reached the Boston area.

The historical society has purchased a limited number of these medals, left over from the 200th, and is offering them for a donation of \$30.





The Prologue scene featured 70 participants, including Mrs. Charles Merriam as "Weston." and 24 women playing the 24 hours. (Courtesy Weston Historical Society)

PROLOGUE

Synopsis

(quoted from the official program)

A young woman representing the month of June enters the scene, accompanied by a group of little girls and boys bearing wreaths and garlands of flowers. They approach a throne in the foreground and perform the simple and expressive ceremony of decking the altar which stands there.

The Goddess Ceres then appears, leading in WESTON with her attendants and companions. Her path is strewn with flower petals. JUNE smiles her welcome, while dancing girls run in and offer their service in her honor.

WESTON sits before the altar, and a wreath of laurel is placed upon her head. Happy and contented, and enthroned before her people, all come to do her honor. She gives no thought to TIME, who, entering with the HOURS, is passing all too quickly across the scene.

JUNE, seeking to prolong her happiness, touches TIME'S shoulder as he passes, and begs that the HOURS may be halted and WESTON'S day made longer; and, while he turns to chide her for this request (she who amongst all the twelve months has the longest daylight hours for her enjoyment), the boys take away his scythe and bind its sharp edge with garlands of flowers. JUNE takes the hour-glass from the half-willing hands of TIME, who smiles at his ardor, and, turning it on its side, stops the flowing sand. The HOURS at the same time falter, then cease their ever-forward pressing on, and, gathering around their aged leader, they stand over at one side and watch the DANCERS, who now perform their share in the celebration.

At the end of the dance three figures appear at the edge of the woods, — PAST, PRESENT, and FUTURE.

WESTON stands to receive them as they approach the throne, and she asks PAST to recall some visions of the early days. PAST bows her willingness to do this, and WESTON leaves the throne, followed by JUNE and the children, and, with the Goddess Ceres, stands at the extreme right of the scene.

PAST takes a lighted torch from the hands of PRESENT, and kindles the altar fire, and from the thick smoke which arises appears the figure of the Indian Spirit. He calls to the shades of his departed race, and, leaving the altar, disappears into the forest, while PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE join Ceres and the group around her, and bring the Prologue to a close.

Dramatic story dancing was pioneered by Isadora Duncan and incorporated into historical pageants like the one in Weston. Allegorical scenes allowed dramatic dancers to tell part of the story through their movements and props. These symbolic dances added variety and depicted abstract concepts that could not be easily acted. (Courtesy Weston Historical Society)



Early Times

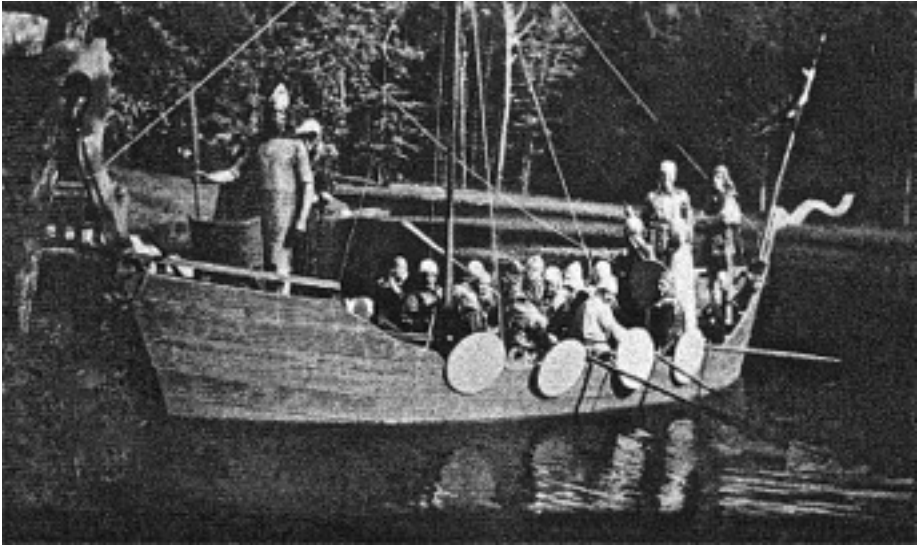
Part I. THE INDIANS

Young braves entering from the right discover the ashes of a former campfire. Following them come a large tribe of Indians,—men, women, and children,—with all their camp impedimenta. They are from the North, and have come on an annual visit to the coast for bartering.

The camp is at once made, fires lit, and food prepared; and, while they sit eating it, friendly Indians from a local tribe appear, bringing fish as a present from their chief to the visiting chief. He in turn sends back by them a fine fox skin, and soon the local tribe come into view and mingle with their visitors and trade with them. A young brave begins a story, —a thrilling tale which he acts out before them. It describes his stalking and killing of an enemy, and it stirs their savage natures. At its climax, when he pounces upon his imaginary victim, all the Indians are intently watching him, and are greatly surprised and alarmed when they hear a loud halloa from the shore of the river.

HISTORICAL NOTE

Little is known of Native American life in Weston, which did not prevent the pageant creators from including fanciful Indian scenes.



The pageant took place on the Winsor property and incorporated the man-made pond on Skating Pond Road. "The Coming of the Norsemen" featured 25 participants and a Viking ship. (Courtesy Weston Historical Society)

Early Times

Part II. THE COMING OF THE NORSEMEN

In the year 1000, according to the Saga narratives, a band of Norsemen proceeded in a ship southward and discovered the American coast, to which they gave the name of Vineland. In 1889 Professor Horsford caused the erection of a memorial tower in Weston at the confluence of the Charles River and Stonybrook, in memory of the Norse city of Norumbega, which once existed here. (Quoted from the pageant program, as is the synopsis below)

Synopsis

Disembarking from their boat, the Norsemen approach the Indians, and through their interpreter ask information about the course of the river. The Indians give them welcome, and the two old chiefs ask them to sit down and partake of food.

Some of the younger braves exhibit their skill with bows and arrows, to the amazement of the Norsemen, and they in turn show the use of the broad swords. The meeting comes to an end when the visiting chief offers to guide the Norsemen up the river, and all leave the scene.

HISTORICAL NOTE

The fact that prominent historians of the time did not believe that Vikings ever reached the Boston area did not deter the creators of Weston's "historical" pageant from including the dramatic arrival of a Viking ship to Weston shores.

Early Times

Part III. SETTLEMENT OF THE WESTERN PRECINCT

The town of Watertown was settled by Sir Richard Saltonstall, Rev. George Phillips, and others, in the year 1630. The part which later became Weston was at that time known as Watertown Farms, or the Western Precinct. (Quoted from the pageant program, as is the synopsis below)

Synopsis

Six hundred years have elapsed, and the great and powerful tribe of the Massachusetts Indians has suffered grievously. Decimated by wars and pestilence, the chieftainship is now vested in the person of an old woman, —the squaw sachem, —and the scene opens when a few Indians enter and put up a tent, and are soon joined by a group of traders, who buy the skins the Indian women are wearing, they binding branches of pines around their bodies after selling the skins. Soon, from the forest beyond, is heard a psalm of praise, sung by a great company of Puritans, both men and women and children, who presently troop into sight, and reaching the centre of the scene, prepare a simple repast, while the men, led by Sir Richard Saltonstall, endeavor to get the signatures of the Indians to a document, giving up their lands for various monies and goods, which are displayed. The Indians are afraid and cautious, but at length the trade is brought to a satisfactory conclusion when the old squaw sachem puts her signature to the paper. The Indians take the goods, and the Puritans are well satisfied with the bargain.

John Eliot enters the scene, and after a few words with Sir Richard and others, he begins to read the Scriptures to the Indians, while his compatriots walk off into the forest again, singing the psalm of praise.

HISTORICAL NOTE

It is unlikely that Sir Richard Saltonstall and Puritan minister John Eliot ever met, given that Saltonstall returned to England in 1631, the year Eliot arrived. Eliot is not a figure associated with Watertown or Weston, but Joseph Lindon Smith probably saw no reason not to include Eliot, the well-known "missionary to the Indians," rather than featuring the lesser known figure of Rev. George Phillips, the first minister of Watertown.

Revolutionary Times

Part I. THE ENGLISH SPY

On April 5th, 1775, John Howe, who was a sergeant in the British Army, acting under instructions from General Gage, passed through Weston on his way to Worcester, to discover if it were possible to move troops to that point to capture the stores which the Continentals had there. He stopped for lunch at the Smith Tavern, and from there went to the Golden Ball Tavern, but was told that it was not safe for him to stay there. He therefore went on to the house of Dr. Wheaton (now the Ripley House), where he spent the night. The spy's report was unfavorable in regard to the Worcester route, and General Gage therefore decided to send troops to Concord instead, to destroy the stores which the spy had seen in that town. (Quoted from the pageant program, as is the synopsis below)

Synopsis

Sergeant Howe, the English Spy, on his way from Boston to Worcester, enters the scene from the right, and is perplexed as to which road to take at this point. He is surprised here by an old colored man, and, asking him the way to Boston, finds out at the same time the way to Worcester, besides giving the impression that Boston is his destination. He misleads two horsemen, also asking them the same question, and an old blind woman and her children are also deceived by him. When he is about to proceed on his journey, he sees with alarm the same horsemen returning with a third, one who has already seen him earlier in the day on the Boston road. He climbs up into one of the big oaks, and later goes on his way, having misled those who were suspicious about him and his movements.

HISTORICAL NOTE

The Howe story is apocryphal. It was based on "A Journal Kept by Mr. John Howe While He Was Employed as a British Spy. . ." published in 1827 by Luther Roby of Concord, New Hampshire. Roby's literary hoax was loosely based on a true spy story published in 1779 under the title "General Gage's Instructions." The John Howe journal was generally accepted as a true account until the 1970s. Note that the pageant creators did not worry about accurately following the John Howe story, which did not involve him climbing a tree to escape capture.

Revolutionary Times

Part II. THE MARCH TO CONCORD

(Some Days Later)

On April 19, when the news was received that the British were coming, Captain Samuel Lamson's Militia Company started for Concord, but were informed by a horseman they met on the road that the British had been driven out of Concord. They then went through the woods to the Lexington road, where they met the retreating British and followed them to Charlestown. Captain Israel Whittemore's Militia Company of Artillery also marched to Concord. (Quoted from the pageant program, as is the synopsis below)

Synopsis

Into the scene, from both sides, come groups of farmers and townspeople with their wives and children. This is the meeting-place for a gathering of people who are going to a barn-raising near by. Captain Samuel Lamson is the natural leader, and, while the groups come together and are waiting for others, he and some of the older men talk over the situation in Boston.

While they discuss the affairs that interest them all so deeply, the chaise of Rev. Samuel Woodward is seen approaching from the direction of Boston, and in it sits the minister and with him Samuel Phillips Savage, who was one of those who recently threw the tea into Boston Harbor disguised as an Indian. All cluster



Seventy-five men, women, and children participated in "The March to Concord" scene. (Courtesy Weston Historical Society)

around the minister and hear the ominous news from Boston which he brings, and, even while they stand there, the storm breaks suddenly when a madly-riding messenger dashes across the fields and into their midst with his cry of alarm: "To arms! To arms!"

Captain Lamson at once takes charge, and men are sent on horseback to alarm the town, while others run to get their muskets. All is confusion and excitement, and a distant gun is heard; and presently the Weston Artillery Company enter, led by Captain Israel Whittemore. The two captains confer together. The minister says a short prayer, and then, shouldering his musket, walks off with the others, leaving the weeping women alone on the scene.

HISTORICAL NOTE

This scene seems to follow what is known about the happenings in Weston on the morning of April 19, 1775. One addition is the appearance of Samuel Phillips Savage, generally considered to be Weston's most prominent patriot. There is no record of Savage being present when the men gathered for the march to Concord, but he is accorded a role anyway.



Arrival of George Washington to Weston. The official program lists 173 participants in this grand finale. (Courtesy Weston Historical Society)

Washington's Visit

In October 1789, General Washington made a journey through the New England States. He reached Weston, October 23, and passed the night at the Flagg Tavern. On the morning of October 24 he was waited upon by the inhabitants of the town and later escorted to Cambridge by the Watertown Cavalry Company.

Synopsis

A travelling [sic] band of gypsies enters from the right and prepares to encamp under one of the large spreading oak-trees in the middle of the scene. The Constable of the town, accompanied by the Surveyor of the Highways, enters soon after, and tries to move the gypsies from their position; but, when they learn that Washington is expected to come to Weston, and the inhabitants are to meet him here, they are more than ever disinclined to go. The Surveyor of Highways has some of his men with him, and they set to work digging holes and putting up poles for garlands and flags, and the distracted Constable has his troubles with a troop of mischievous and merry boys of the village. The schoolmarm comes with many of her pupils, bearing the garlands for the poles, and soon the townspeople appear, dressed in their best attire for the expected visitor. While the final preparations are being made, a coach drives up, filled with a merry party from Boston, and they prepare to dismount here and have their lunch under the trees. The Weston Light Infantry enter, Captain Artemus Ward, Jr., commanding, and a messenger arrives with news that Washington's coach will soon be here, and all stand ready to receive the distinguished visitor.

Washington dismounts from the coach, and with him are Major Jackson and Mr. Lear. He is greeted by Mrs. Lamson, Colonel Thomas Marshall, and others. He speaks to all, shakes hands with many, and kisses little Hannah Gowan.

A detachment from the Watertown Cavalry enter (appointed by that town to escort the General when he leaves Weston). Refreshments are served, the Boston party dance a minuet, the gypsies tell fortunes.

Washington at length rises and says good-bye, and, escorted by the Cavalry, rides off, and the visit is over.

HISTORICAL NOTE

In its general outline, this scene follows the account in Daniel Lamson's *History of the Town of Weston*, including the mention of Lear and Jackson, the presence of Colonel Thomas Marshall, and the kiss for the child, Hannah Gowen. Lamson writes in his history that ". . . it was for her a matter of great pride and glory as long as she lived." Details like the band of gypsies are invented. The scene included dancing the minuet. Washington did spend the night at the Flagg Tavern on Boston Post Road on October 23, 1789, but no report of dancing made its way into the historical record. It would, however, have made for enjoyable theater.

Epilogue

PAST appears at the side of the altar, when all have left the scene: she scatters the ashes. She is joined by PRESENT and FUTURE from each side of the stage. WESTON advances from her side, and with her come the children—she thanks PAST for the visions seen. PAST then stands looking backward, PRESENT looking straight out at the audience, and FUTURE looking towards the East. WESTON lights a new altar fire.

The DANCERS enter with a great horn-of-plenty, garlands and more wreaths, etc., and all are laid on the altar, and the fruit is poured out of the horn-of-plenty in a great heap on the ground in front of the altar. Banners are unfurled. At this moment FATHER TIME picks up his scythe, and unwinds the flowers from its blade. JUNE enters from the opposite side, followed by the children. She walks to meet TIME, and gives him the hour-glass. Before he rights it and starts the sands running once more, he beckons to the HOURS, who run swiftly to their places, and then slowly walk off, TIME following them. WESTON and her companions then leave the scene, FUTURE leading, holding the lighted torch, PRESENT walking beside WESTON, and PAST, with shrouded head, following. JUNE and group of children remain at the altar, until all have left. They wave adieux to the departing characters in the pageant, then follow the others off.



Participants in the Prologue and Epilogue included the following women (children not identified) (l-r) Miss Elizabeth Hubbard as "Present," Mrs. J.D. Nichols as "Ceres," Mrs. Charles Merriam as "Weston," Miss Rosamund Bennett as "Future," and Miss Barbara Bennett as "Past." (Courtesy Weston Historical Society)



Two former Hillcrest Boys, Jack and Tom Williams, with Field School students at the Weston Historical Society tercentennial exhibition, which was on view at Weston Public Library from January 5 to 29. (Photo by Pamela Fox, January 2013)

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Back by Popular Demand

**The Weston Historical Society Tercentennial Exhibition
“The Farmer’s Precinct: Three Centuries of Weston History”
will be reinstalled this summer in the Town Hall auditorium
June 13 to September 3, 2013**



The historical society’s tercentennial exhibition was a huge success. Hundreds of town residents and former residents visited during its 25 days at Weston Public Library. Many came back multiple times to examine the wealth of material. Programs included three receptions and three gallery talks. Pam Bator, elementary school curriculum coordinator, worked with a third grade class to create a scavenger hunt used by the many third and fifth grade classes that came on field trips. Because so many people requested that the exhibit be up longer, the society has arranged to reinstall it at the Town Hall auditorium this summer.

*Here is one comment from our guest book:
“A museum in itself. The whole exhibit is so perfectly executed. It took my breath away.”*