

Dancing till Four AM

Miss Ellen Jones Tells Tales of the “Jones House”

Editors Note: Last May, Town Meeting voted to use Community Preservation Act funds to develop reuse proposals for the Josiah Smith Tavern and adjacent Old Library. To provide historical background as the Town explored options, the Spring 2008 Weston Historical Society Bulletin featured the Josiah Smith Tavern. This historical account by Miss Ellen Jones provides additional insights.

Ellen Jones and her sister, Alice, lived in the former tavern until their deaths in the mid-1950s. Their grandfather and great uncle bought the building in 1842, a few years after it ceased to function as a tavern; and the Jones family lived there for three generations. Miss Ellen read this account at a meeting of the First Parish Friendly Society about 1908.

Miss Jones began with this observation: “The old saying ‘They know the worth of water when the well runs dry’ has been forcibly impressed on my mind these last few weeks while I have been hunting up facts concerning the house. . . .”



Ellen Jones (second from the right) relaxes on the porch of her home, now known as the Josiah Smith Tavern. Her sister Alice is at the far right. With them is their Aunt Emma L. Cutting (first on left), Aunt Harriet F. Stimpson (center), Uncle John Jones Jr., and father, Theodore Jones. (Courtesy Weston Historical Society)

[The excerpt below begins in 1842, the year Ellen Jones's grandfather and great uncle purchased the former tavern.]

[Josiah Warren] sold [the property] in 1842 to Marshall and John Jones, who owned it together till 1848, when John Jones, my grandfather, bought it and soon after came with his family to occupy it.

The house originally was smaller than it is now—the west side being the older part. When the addition was put on I do not know, but one can see the traces of the old window frames in the partitions between the two parts.⁽¹⁾ The shed on the west side, now used for wood and coal, was in the old times used by the tavern keeper to store his barrels of liquor.

When the addition was made on the east side, the upper story consisted of a hall running the whole length of the house from north to south with two windows at each end and eight on the side.⁽²⁾ It was used for all sorts of public occasions and I remember my grandmother Jones telling me that when she was a young girl, she came many a time from her home in the north part of Waltham to balls in this hall and danced till four o'clock in the morning and never had any lack of partners either.

This hall was heated by two fireplaces one at either end and lighted by two oil lamps hung from the ceiling. We found one of them last summer tucked away under the eaves.

At one time a school was kept here which Miss Pierce⁽³⁾ says she used to attend. She also told me that the old pulpit which used to be in the old meeting house was put up in the end of this hall between the two north windows. This pulpit was covered with red woolen damask, which had evidently been put in over a silk covering; and she and some other girls found a little hole in the covering and pulled out some pieces of the silk damask and carried them home.

When the old Meeting House was pulled down, the town meetings were held in this hall until the town provided a place of its own.

When my grandfather bought the house and came with his family to live in it, he made three sleeping rooms, with big closets and a small hall out of the large one. Downstairs our present sitting room was the old bar room and I suppose the room on the northeast corner was the reception room of the old tavern. What is now our kitchen consisted of an entry way and two small rooms – one of which was used by Mr. Henry Brackett as a shoe shop and the other a bed room in which my uncle said he used to sleep.

In the east side of the house there is a hall between kitchen, sitting room and dining room which was always known as the Well room because under it is a well

and there used to be a big wooden pump there which was taken out about nine years ago.

In the west side of the house a Mr. George Bigelow kept a dry goods store. He always recommended his goods by saying that his wife and daughter Gracie had a dress or whatever the article might be – just like that which he was trying to sell.

My Grandfather Cutting ⁽⁴⁾ in his early married life lived for a while in a part of this house and had for his kitchen a room on the southwest which still has a brick oven, a fireplace with a crane, and hearth running the whole length of the room.

Nearly every room has a fireplace—even in the attic. Under the eaves in the attic there used to be a dark room up there in which card playing on Sundays could be carried on without fear of being discovered. The door which led into it is still there but the partition which separated it from the main attic has been torn down.

Other old taverns along the road have rooms into which their visitors are taken and shown with great pride the bed in which Washington slept, with the very same sheets, pillow cases and quilts—or Lafayette danced in another room and admired the wall paper, which has been left on ever since. Search as we may we can't find that Washington so much as glanced at the house as he passed.

The only event which gives it any historical distinction is that of the detection of a British spy and inviting him to move on. The story has been told ever so many times. . . . ⁽⁵⁾

In the old times when the place was used as a tavern the stable stood out near the street and extended east and west so that the old coach could drive through it when it drew up at the door. There were no trees in front – the old elm trees now on the place having been planted by my uncle in 1862. There was a seat fastened to the house and running the whole length of the piazza and I have no doubt it was a popular resting place.”

Notes:

- (1) These window frames are no longer visible
- (2) This *hall* is now referred to as the *ballroom*.
- (3) After retiring from teaching, Mary Francis Peirce (1831-1914) spent her last 28 years collecting and organizing Weston historical records
- (4) George Warren Cutting Sr., proprietor of G.W. Cutting & Sons general store, was Ellen Jones's grandfather. Ellen's mother, Sarah Lord Cutting, married Theodore Jones in 1857.

- (5) The British spy story that mentions Joel Smith and his tavern is apocryphal. It was written in 1827 and elaborates on the true story of two British spies who stopped at the Golden Ball Tavern in 1775. The apocryphal version was generally accepted from the late 19th to the mid-20th century. Daniel S. Lamson quoted excerpts from it in his *History of the Town of Weston*.



Ellen Jones's address to the Friendly Society helps to date this photograph, the earliest known of the Josiah Smith Tavern. It shows the young elm trees that, according to Miss Jones, were planted by her uncle in 1862. Note the archway in the connector between the house and barn. Miss Jones's account describes such an opening, used by coaches to drive through to the rear of the property. (Courtesy Weston Historical Society)