

Memoirs are an important source of information on local history. In this article, Calvin Patriquin (1927-2005) talks about his father, Oliver (1882-1972), the village blacksmith, and his childhood on Chestnut Street. If you know the whereabouts of any of Oliver Patriquin's ironwork, please contact the Weston Historical Society, P.O. Box 343, Weston, MA 02493. Originally published in *The Weston Historical Society Bulletin*, Fall 2005. Edited by Pamela W. Fox.

Oliver Patriquin, Weston's Last Town Blacksmith



Oliver Patriquin (1882 - 1972), an immigrant from Nova Scotia, worked as a blacksmith in Weston for decades beginning about 1918. He not only shod horses but also made andirons, plant holders, candle holders, garden gates, stair railings, and other wrought iron items.

Letter from Calvin Patriquin to Pamela Fox, received January 29, 2001

[My father, Oliver Patriquin, the village smithy] came down from Nova Scotia alone at the age of twelve, settling in Boston first. It must have been an almost overwhelming experience to be in the melting pot with thousands of immigrants mainly of Irish, Italian, Jewish and German extraction, all struggling to make America their home. He told me that his first job was with an ice man carrying heavy blocks of ice up many flights of stairs in tenement buildings while the Irish ice man waited for him in the nearest pub. Also at this time very gifted German ornamental iron workers took him in and taught him the blacksmith trade along with horseshoeing. I would like to mention that the Irish taught him the art of boxing. I have a number of medals awarded him in his youth. When the influenza epidemic struck Massachusetts he moved his young family to Chestnut Street, Weston, where he remained the rest of his life. He set up the blacksmith shop in the center of town. It was located between the red book store on the right [494 Boston Post Road, then the Village Book Stall, now Cambridge Trust Company] and the block of stores on the left [where Florentine Frames is today]. The barn [that] the shop was in was eventually torn down and the present brick building [486 Boston Post Road] was first a post office and I think now business office [now Weston Pediatric Physicians].

I remember as a child bringing my friends in the shop. If dad was not too busy he would make all of us rings made out of horseshoe nails. He had a number of employees at the time. It was a very busy shop with the ringing of hammers striking the anvils and horses milling around waiting to be shod. There was always a number of old timers sitting around telling stories.

Things went well for a number of years. All of the estates in town had something made from his shop: beautiful garden gates,

driveway entrance gates, beautiful interior iron stair railings, fireplace andirons and screens, door hardware, and all sizes and shapes of plant holders. The ironwork I was most familiar with was at the Case estate, where I worked summers. Anyway, everything went well for my father until the great Depression struck. He, like many others, was forced to downsize, so he moved his



During the Depression, Oliver Patriquin moved his blacksmith shop from the town center to this small building at the corner of Love Lane and Boston Post Road. (Photo by Pamela Fox)

shop up on the corner of Love Lane and Boston Post Road. The small building is still there. I would go around with him to the estates...to shoe their saddle horses, work horses, and sometimes oxen. He had horse shoes already made hanging all around the shop for all the horses stabled at these estates. He would do wagon repairs, etc. and horse shoeing for farmers who could not pay, so in return they would supply him with hay and vegetables. I remember one farmer who built us a stone wall that took two years. I suppose dad would shoe his horses and he would come over and work on the wall.

He was truly the village smithy with a large shade tree out front of his shop in the center of Weston. He did part time work right up into his later years. House restorers came to his home giving him orders for hardware...

Now a little bit about myself. As I mentioned before we lived on Chestnut Street a short distance up the street from the Thomas Allen house [One Chestnut St]. When we were living there it was known as the Slayton House. A family with two boys, John and Holly, who we played with. There was also a large barn with the house—since torn down—that we would play hide and seek in on rainy days. There was a hill owned by Regis College across the street for sledding and tobogganing in the winter time. Perhaps the most enjoyable time on rainy days was the upstairs in the Slayton house. They had Lionell train tracks laid out everywhere, down the halls, in and out of all the bedrooms, anywhere there was floor there was tracks, stations, sidings, everything. They also had a pony. We would all take turns riding. This was a real fun time of our lives. Since then as you know the house has been restored, the barn torn down, and a smaller structure replaced it.

I operated a small business in town for a number of years. I, like my father, did remodeling and general carpentry at many of these estates in town. I stored my building equipment in the right hand section of the Coburn red barn on Church Street [154 Church Street]. I also did all of the carpenter work on the Coburn house across the street —lovely home [No.153]. Mrs. Coburn was well along in years, middle or upper 90's. She loved to garden. She would work in the flower beds for hours. When she could not stand up she would call as loud as she could for help. She also liked to ride in the car. Her house person would take her out every afternoon and sometimes all day for long country rides. Sweet person.

I built and lived with my wife Joan and two boys John and David in the white saltbox house on the corner of Fiske Lane and Merriam Street [now 10 Fiske Lane].

Letter from Calvin Patriquin to Pamela Fox, received March 12, 2001

Shortly after arriving in Weston my father purchased a piece of land on Chestnut St...I am not sure, but probably from the Barkers [Amri Barker lived at what is now 52 Chestnut Street]. The property is long and fairly narrow, located on the first driveway on the left coming up Chestnut St. from Wellesley St. It fronts, of course, on Chestnut St. and the rear borders on Regis College



40 Chestnut Street (above) and the three houses behind it were built on Oliver Patriquin's land. No. 40 was constructed about 1920 by carpenter William Henderson, who lived down the street. It was remodeled in the early 2000s. (post-renovation photo by Pamela Fox)

land. Over time he was able to build four houses on this land. A lot of ledge was discovered when the foundations were being excavated. Huge fires made with brush & large pieces of wood were set on the ledge. When the fires died down and the rock was extremely hot, cold water was thrown on the ledge. It was like the Fourth of July.

The ledge would then split up into manageable pieces used to build the stone foundations. Three of these houses had stone foundations built in this manner. He also set up a small saw mill to saw framing lumber, etc.

The first house on Chestnut Street [No.40, c. 1920] was built by Bill Henderson, who lived up the street, after the foundation was in. The second house [No.38] was built by William Compton [of] Golden Ball Road. The third house [No. 36] was built by my father with the help of several carpenters. This house has a beautiful wrought iron stair railing going up the stairs and down the hall. This was of his own design, ornamental leaves, etc. The fieldstone fireplace had his andirons, screen, and tools. The fourth house up [No. 34] was more of a summer camp. We lived there for several early Depression years. The roof and walls were covered with heavy tarpaper. The only plumbing in the house was a water closet in the bathroom, and a sink in the large room. For lighting, a large oil lamp that was suspended from the open rafters, and could be moved up or down by pulling on a small chain. The large wood stove in the middle of the large room provided enough heat to warm the three small bedrooms. Eventually my father finished this house. This is where they lived in later years. He also had his blacksmith shop here. These houses have had improvements made over the years—additions, garages, etc. and fit in well. He had a lot of ambition and drive to put all of this together, plus maintaining his blacksmith business. The same is true of others in your book, some like my father, who had very little education. I was able to find two of his ancient ledger books. What a simple way of doing business.

After working at Hillcrest Farm for two summers for small wages, and a very strong dislike of pulling weeds, my father was able to get me a job at the Dickson Estate for two summers. [The

estate of Brenton H. Dickson Jr. was at the corner of Highland Street and Love Lane]. One of my chores was gathering vegetables for the kitchen. Upon entering the kitchen, the Irish cook would sit me down at the large table and serve fresh baked bread dripping with home made butter, donuts, pie, cake, or whatever else came out of the oven, along with a fresh cup of coffee. I looked forward to this ritual every day. It is said that later in life Ruth Dickson's eyesight began to fail, but she still continued to ride her horse along the many trails. Her favorite horse seemed to know of the dangers on all of these trails, such as low limbs, etc., and would automatically avoid them.

The Paine house [Highland Street]...[had a] great hall and the beautiful oak staircase. On a dark or rainy day, going up the stairs could be a little scary with all of those African animal trophies staring down at you. Especially the lion and tiger with teeth barred. The third floor workshop was of real interest. It was full of state of the art woodworking machinery. I often wondered where this machinery ended up...

Alexander Sauer [farmer at 412 Highland Street] did have a sour disposition. He would reprimand us if we walked across his property. He owned this large steam driven tractor used for plowing, etc. the farm. Probably one of the last steam tractors used for farming. We would hide in the woods near the edge of the field and watch [in] amazement as the monster moved up and down the field. We could only imagine what a ride would be like, but did not dare ask.

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