

# WESTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY BULLETIN

Vol. XLVIII, No.1



Spring 2017

## Town Improvement



*In 1961, the three Weston garden clubs and Women's Community League combined to form a Civic Committee with the goal of making Weston "a more beautiful place in which to live." By the time of the town's 250th Anniversary in 1963, the renamed Beautification Committee had tackled problem areas like this commercial block and spearheaded dozens of projects. See article beginning on page 19. (Photo courtesy Weston Garden Club 250th scrapbook)*



*Welcome signs were designed by Peg Kronenberg and installed for the 250th anniversary.*

## Table of Contents

1. The Village Improvement Idea . . . . .	3
2. 1911: Town Improvement Plan. . . . .	11
3. 1963: Town Beautification for the 250th Anniversary. . . . .	19
4. The Cracker Barrel: Back Room Politics? . . . . .	32
5. The Town Center Master Plan. . . . .	46

The theme of this *Weston Historical Society Bulletin* is town improvement. The first three articles are about physical improvements, from planting trees to creating the present Town Green. The fourth is about the Cracker Barrel, an institution that might be viewed as elitist but had the admirable goal of bringing good people into town government. Because of its progressive views on planning and land conservation, the Cracker Barrel influenced the physical appearance of Weston as we know it today.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank Weston’s three garden clubs for their ongoing work in beautifying the town. The oldest, Weston Garden Club, was founded in 1941 and celebrated its 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2016. Since 1948 they have been planting the watering trough with colorful seasonal arrangements. They plant and maintain Fiske Triangle at Boston Post and Concord Roads and the Center Street median strip. They maintain the trails on the Forbes Conservation Land, a wooded wetland off Church Street, and make the evergreen wreaths that decorate town buildings at the holiday season. The Weston Garden Club Provisionals maintain the plantings around the Scout House.

The Country Garden Club of Weston, founded in 1954, does the seasonal plantings and beautification of Brook School Apartments. The group re-landscaped the high school courtyard and maintains it as an inviting space for students and faculty. They plant and maintain the Paine Garden, an intimate outdoor living space behind the Recreation Center. The Country Garden Club also decorates the Golden Ball Tavern for the holiday season.

The Community League Garden Club of Weston, founded in 1954, plants and maintains the garden at the Josiah Smith Tavern, the seasonal containers at Field School, and the Fiske Memorial at Boston Post and Concord Roads. The ideal of “village improvement” lives on through the efforts of these dedicated volunteers.

Pamela W. Fox, Editor



*The attractive, well-maintained fence and recently planted trees suggest the influence of the late 19th-century village improvement movement. This photograph shows the Hews House, which once stood on Boston Post Road in the 600 block. (Photo c. early 1890s, courtesy Weston Historical Commission)*

## **The Village Improvement Idea**

While Weston did not have a formal village improvement organization until 1886, it appears that residents were aware of the movement and its goals, as expressed in popular periodicals such as *Putnam's Magazine*. In an 1869 article entitled "Village Improvement Societies," author Susan Fenimore Cooper discussed how to form such a society and what its role should be:

The general aspect of an American village is cheerful and pleasing. The dwellings have an air of comfort, they turn a friendly face to the street, they are neat and orderly in themselves and their surroundings; their porches and verandahs, their window-blinds without and shades within, their door-yards and their trees, are all pleasing features forming the general rule, to which the exceptions are rare. (1)



*In 1874, the selectmen established a watering place with a stone trough and pump at the intersection of North Avenue and Church Street, seen here in this c. 1894 photo of 88 North Avenue. (Courtesy Weston Historical Society)*

The author hastened to add “We have not yet achieved perfection. There are many finishing touches still needed” and continued:

. . . still in every American village we have yet seen there is room for much improvement. And these desirable improvements are many of them simple and easily brought about, requiring only a moderate fund, placed in the hands of judicious persons — requiring, in short, a local *Society for Village Improvement*. (2)

In the 1870s and early 1880s, town leaders carried out some of the suggestions in Cooper’s article regarding water supply, street naming, and general neatness. In 1874, the selectmen established a watering place with pump and stone trough near the Hagar house (now 88 North Avenue) at the corner of North Avenue and Church Street. They wanted a second location in the town center but were unsure of how to obtain water there. By the following year, a public watering place had been established near the Sparhawk house (now 293 Boston Post Road) at the corner of Wellesley Street and Central Avenue as a present to the town from an anonymous citizen “interested in the comfort and care of the dumb animals.” (3)

In 1880, the road commissioners admitted that the town was “very deficient” in sidewalks and recommended a small appropriation. In 1882, the town adopted its first by-laws, some of which would fall into the improvement category. Residents were forbidden to place rubbish, dirt, or wood where it would obstruct a road or sidewalk or mar its appearance. They were not to tie horses or wagons to street

trees, drive nails into street trees, or deface trees, walls, fences, or buildings with posters or handbills. (4)

The 1880 *Town Report* was the first to introduce a theme that would echo throughout the next two decades as the town considered what improvements were really “necessary.” That year, road commissioners wrote that, in their opinion, “nothing tends more to advance the material interest of the town than good roads.” They urged residents to do their part to make roads more attractive:

In conclusions, we would suggest to all owning real estate abutting upon the highways that much might be done by cutting unnecessary wood growing on the sides, repairs of fences &c., not only beneficial to the roads, but would make our town much more attractive to those seeking places to locate a permanent home for themselves and families. (5)

The following year, the road commissioners made an even more explicit connection between good roads, summer residents, and the town’s increasing prosperity.

In 1882, estate owner General Charles Jackson Paine donated a large sum for the purchase of crushed stone for road building. The next year he donated a roller. Paine, one of the first Boston businessmen to settle in Weston after the Civil War, would become the first president of the Town Improvement Society of Weston.

The influence of estate owners on town improvement efforts cannot be overstated. These newcomers had money and were accustomed to holding leadership positions in their business and Boston civic enterprises. They looked around at the scruffy, backwater town of Weston and set about improving it.

### *The Town Improvement Society*

The Town Improvement Society of Weston was organized in 1886. Weston Historical Society records include a list of the original officers, with General Charles Jackson Paine as president and the following officers: vice-presidents, General J. F. B. Marshall, Rev. Amos Harris, Charles W. Hubbard; secretary, Andrew Fiske; and treasurer, Mrs. Charles H. Livermore. The names of the 25-member executive committee are listed in footnote No. 6. It was a diverse group of 18 men and seven women and included estate owners, members of long-time Weston farm families, organ factory owner Francis H. Hastings, and Rev. Charles Russell, minister at First Parish Church, who came to Weston in 1882 and was an energetic church and civic leader. (6)

The group was called on for support and monetary assistance in beautifying Weston’s main street:

We would suggest . . . that the Town authorities and the abutters unite in striving to improve the avenue by uniform sidewalks and fences where desirable, believing that our Main Street can be made second to none in the County of Middlesex in point of beauty and attractiveness, and also

that our Town Improvement Society will cheerfully approve . . . and materially assist in so doing. (7)

A year later the society was erecting lampposts, according to *The Waltham Free Press*. When a major fire destroyed the Coburn block in 1893, the newspaper carried an article suggesting that buildings erected in its place have the same setback as surrounding structures. (8)

### *Search for a Library Site*

By the 1890s, it was becoming increasingly clear that the library was outgrowing its quarters in the 1847 Town Hall. The search for a site for a new library build-



*Photographs of the Golden Ball Tavern in the 1870s (above) and 1890s (below) show the influence of the village improvement ideal. In the earlier photo, the fence is rough and unpainted and the lawn is roughly cut. Two decades later, the Jones family has added foundation plantings and a climbing vine framing the door. (Courtesy Golden Ball Tavern Museum)*





ing was part of the impetus behind the first formal plan for the “town square” — the term used for the intersection of Central Avenue (now Boston Post Road), School Street, and Church Street.

Estate owner Charles W. Hubbard, a vice president of the Town Improvement Society, was also a member of the Committee on Library Site. Its 1892 report points out the need for an overall plan for the future of the town square:

. . . before erecting such a building, the town should have some comprehensive plan for laying out its central group of public and private buildings and some general idea of the style of architecture to be used, so that when the plan is fully developed, we may have our public and semi-public buildings so arranged as to best minister to the needs of the town, and foster our pride in Weston. (9)

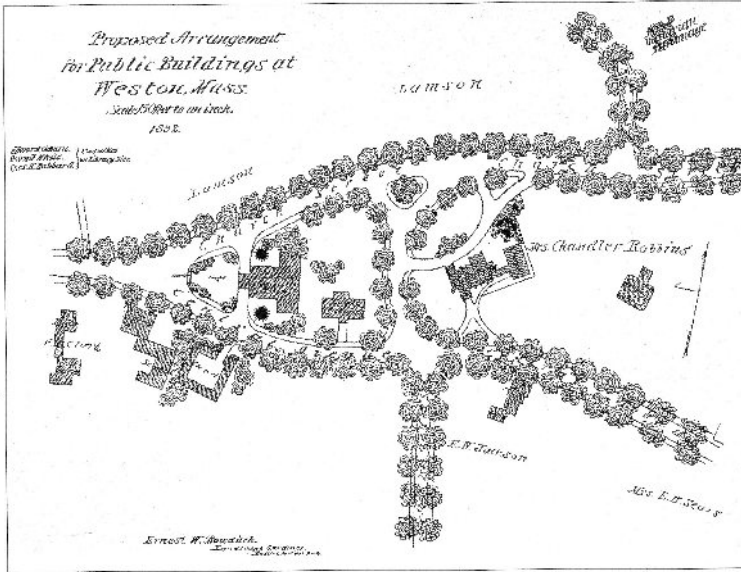
The committee consulted Ernest W. Bowditch, a well-regarded professional with experience in both planning and garden design and a relative by marriage of both Hubbard and estate owner Francis Blake. Bowditch prepared two plans, the second of which was printed in the 1892 *Town Report*, with the comment that it was preferable “as being less expensive, as conforming more to the custom of New England towns, and as capable of being developed piecemeal; whereas plan No. 1 would have to be carried out all at once.” (10)

The 1892 site committee report called for buying the two 18<sup>th</sup> century houses at the corner of School Street and Boston Post Road, belonging to the Cutting and Jones families (the latter is now called the Josiah Smith Tavern). The town decided that the corner lot would be sufficient. When Charles H. Fiske Jr. heard that the Cutting house was to be demolished to make way for the library, he bought it from the town and moved it to its present site at 36 Church Street. Whether the Bowditch plan was ever seriously considered is unclear, but Weston is fortunate that Arthur Shurcliff’s more far-reaching vision was adopted two decades later.

### *The Village Improvement Association*

The Village Improvement Association of Weston was formed in March 1895. Since some of the same people were involved in both the Town and Village Improvement groups, it appears that improvement advocates had decided to make a fresh start, with a constitution and a different name. The printed announcement stated their goals:

The object of this Society shall be the preservation of the natural beauties of the town, the improving and ornamenting of the streets and public grounds of the town, by planting and cultivating trees, the establishing and maintaining of walks, the establishing and protecting of good grass plots and borders in the streets and public squares, the providing of public drinking troughs, the lighting and watering of the streets, and generally the doing, in conjunction with the town authorities, whatever may tend to the improvement of the town as a place of residence. (11)



This plan by landscape gardener Ernest Bowditch appeared in the 1892 Town Report. It was the first attempt to redesign the town square and find sites for a new library. Note the suggested site for a “pretty wayside inn,” as it was described in the 1892 report.

Membership was open to anyone who paid an annual fee of \$1.00 or who annually planted and protected a tree under the direction of the Executive Committee. A four-page printed summary of goals, by-laws, and officers was inserted into the 1894 *Town Report*. It included a strong appeal to all residents to become members and thus provide “moral support and hearty co-operation.”

The first officers were Justin E. Gale, president; Henry J. White and Francis H. Hastings, vice-presidents; and Albert H. Hews, secretary and treasurer. The 13-member executive committee included Rev. Charles F. Russell, minister of First Parish Church, as well as estate owners Horace Sears, Robert Winsor, Charles W. Hubbard, and Marion Case. In addition to Miss Case, five other women were on the committee: Edith Coburn, Hattie Perry, Mrs. Louis Roberts, Mrs. Frederick Fuller, and Mrs. David Lane. The other executive committee members were Howard Cooper, Charles H. Fiske, and Nathan Fiske.

In an 1895 issue of *The First Parish Calendar*, an article appeared extolling the “new-born but rapidly thriving infant.” It reported that a committee had been chosen to attend to tree planting and another to care for existing trees and protect them from the ravages of caterpillars and canker worms. Another committee was tasked with laying out foot-paths “through pleasant woodlands between different parts of the town.” (12)

Perhaps most important of all, according to this article, was the move “to consider the practicability of watering the streets during the summer,” a goal that required an adequate water supply. Finally, “some bold spirit has suggested that an electric light plant would not be difficult to achieve when once we have the





*This 1896 building, which still stands on Warren Avenue, housed the Weston Water Company and Weston Electric Company. The two private companies, which had largely the same small group of stockholders, were formed by well-to-do residents to provide water and electricity to the town. (Courtesy Weston Historical Society)*

water” and from there, “. . . it does not require a particularly vivid imagination to picture our town, its streets well watered and lighted, a supply of electricity in its houses, and an efficient hose company added to its fire service. (13)

The Weston Aqueduct Company (later renamed the Weston Water Company) was formed in 1895 as a corporation with capital of \$30,000 contributed by six well-to-do residents: Horace Sears, A. H. Hews, Charles J. Paine, George Perry, Robert Winsor, and Dr. F. W. Jackson. By December 1896, the company had built a pumping station, reservoir, and about five miles of water mains along parts of Church Street, Central Avenue (now Boston Post Road), School Street, and Forest Street (now Conant Road.) Water was drawn from wells in the vicinity of the pumping station and pumped to a 250,000-gallon “reservoir” that stood on the highest point of Highland Street on land of General Paine. The “reservoir” was a tank 50-feet across and 14-feet deep, with a concrete bottom and shingled roof. The brick pumping station was located on Warren Avenue and has recently been converted to three affordable housing units.

The pumping station also housed the Westinghouse dynamo belonging to the fledgling Weston Electric Company, formed in 1896 by many of the same shareholders. The dynamo had a capacity of supplying 1,000 incandescent 16-candle power lamps, according to a lengthy report in *The First Parish Calendar*. (14) The report credits the energy and efforts of A.H. Hews, who made liberal loans of teams, men, and supplies from his Cambridge pottery factory.

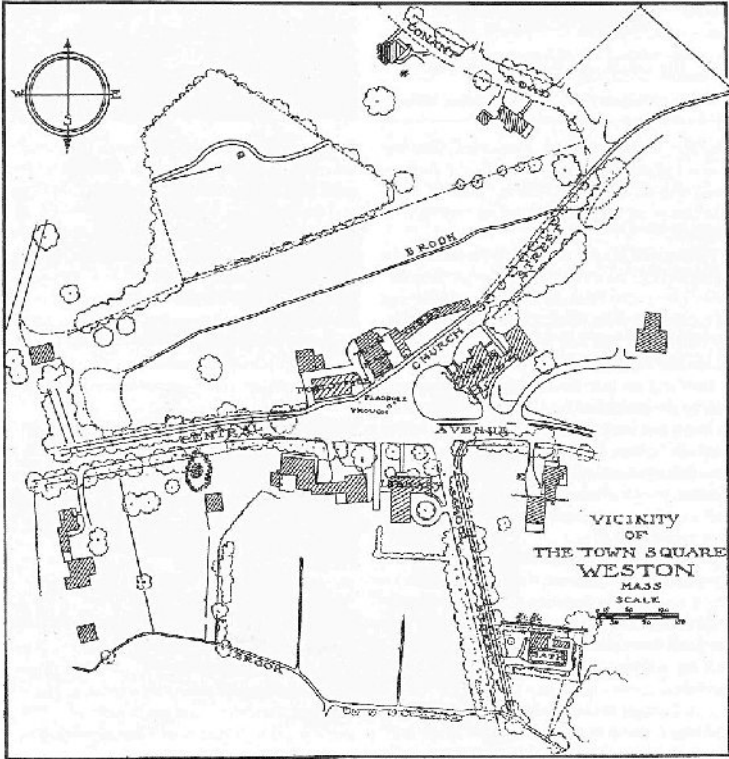


*Once a water supply had been established, the Village Improvement Association could achieve its goal of watering the streets in summer to keep down the dust. This is a turn-of-the-century photo of the watering wagon. (Courtesy Weston Historical Society)*

The water supply made possible the installation of the watering trough in the center of the town square where residents and teamsters could water their horses. It was in place shortly after the water system was completed in 1896 or 1897. The coppery-black metal trough had a water pipe up the middle and a grate at the bottom to drain the overflow. It sat next to the flagpole on a small circle of cobblestones level with the road surface. A twin trough was placed at the intersection of Church Street and North Avenue, replacing the earlier stone trough.

### ***Footnotes***

- (1) "Village Improvement Societies" by Susan Fenimore Cooper, *Putnam's Magazine*, Sept. 1869, 359-366. See website: [external.oneonta.edu](http://external.oneonta.edu).
- (2) Ibid.
- (3) 1875 *Town Report*
- (4) Printed in final form in 1883 *Town Report*, 46-50.
- (5) 1880 *Town Report*, 30.
- (6) Executive Committee of the Town Improvement Society: Francis H. Hastings, Marshall Cutting, Nathan S. Fiske, Geo. B. Stedman, Arthur L. Coburn, Mrs. H. A. Gowing, Mrs. A. E. Coburn, James B. Case, Justin E. Gale, Henry J. White, Geo. W. Dunn, Rev. C. F. Russell, Col. D. S. Lamson, Henry L. Brown, Horace S. Sears, Miss Hatty S. Perry, Mrs. Edw. Fiske, Mrs. H.A. Train, Francis Blake, Samuel F. Clark, Marcus M. Fiske, Frank H. Upham, Benjamin L. Young, Mrs. B. F. Cutter, and Mrs. Herbert Seaverns.
- (7) 1887 *Town Report*, 40.
- (8) *Farm Town to Suburb*, 80, from *Weston Free Press* article of 1893 in Coburn scrapbook, WHS.
- (9) 1892 *Town Report*, 97-99.
- (10) 1892 *Town Report*, 98.
- (11) Copies at WHS.
- (12) *The First Parish Calendar*, Vol II, No. 6, April 15, 1895.
- (13) Ibid.
- (14) *The First Parish Calendar*, Vol III, #2, December 1896



*This map was included in a circular sent to Weston residents in 1911, requesting their suggestions for changes to the town square. Note the location of the “Bath” (the town pool) at the lower right.*

## The Town Improvement Plan

*Author’s note: In 2016, I came across two dusty folders in the vault at Town Hall, labeled “Committee for Improving Center of Town of Weston” and “Weston Improvement Committee: Suggestions as to changes, etc. received from citizens and those interested in the town.” These records of distinguished landscape architect Arthur A. Shurtleff (later Shurcliff) provide insight into the planning process behind the creation of our much-loved Town Green. One folder is devoted to the completed 1911 circulars which residents used to map and explain their own ideas for town center improvements. This article will focus on their suggestions.*

*For more history of the Town Improvement Plan from inception in 1910 to completion in 1921-22, readers may wish to consult Nancy Flemings’s Weston Town Common, A History (1991), privately printed by Weston Garden Club, and Farm Town to Suburb: the History and Architecture of Weston, Massachusetts, 1830 to 1980 (2002) by Pamela W. Fox.*

*Pamela W. Fox*

## *Introduction*

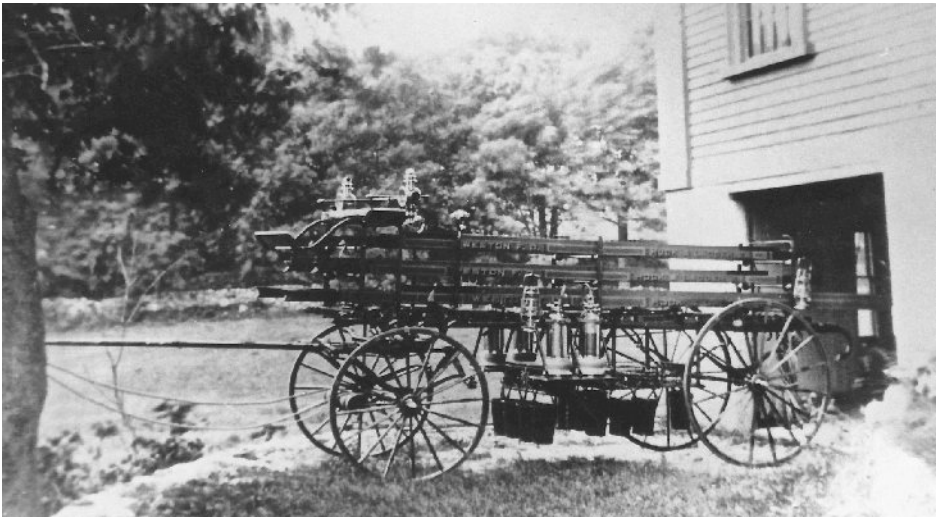
In the 304-year history of the Town of Weston, the planning and execution of the Town Improvement Plan was by far the most ambitious and far-reaching contribution not only to the beautification of the town center but also to community life as we know it today. Who can imagine Weston without the town green, scene of winter sledding, spring high school graduation, summer concerts, the September 11 memorial flags, and children playing in all seasons?

The previous article in this *Bulletin* noted the connection between the need to find a suitable site for a new library and the first comprehensive town center plan of 1892, which was never implemented.

In 1908, the town needed a site for another new public building, this time a fire station. The fire department's antiquated horse-drawn apparatus was housed in the above-grade basement of the 1847 Town Hall. Horses had to be brought over from P. J. McAuliffe's stable at what is now 39 Church Street. Meanwhile, motorized fire trucks were becoming more and more common.

In 1910, Town Meeting voted to appropriate \$1500 to purchase land on Central Avenue between Coburn's block and Hersum's block as a site for a fire station. (1) This small lot is now the location of Bank of America. In a newspaper article written in 1925 entitled "Weston's Civic Center Has Won National Fame," the reporter writes:

The town made a mistake in picking a spot to build its new firehouse. The committee on the building found out, after town meeting, that the



*At the turn of the century, the horse-drawn fire equipment was kept in the basement of Town Hall and horses had to be fetched from P. J. McAuliffe's stable on Church Street. (Courtesy Weston Historical Society)*

approved location was not where it ought to be in relation to the rest of the town and of the town's prospective development. (2)

According to the article, the building committee consulted Selectman Alfred L. Cutting, who promised that if they waited until the next town meeting, he would move for a committee to take up the whole problem of laying out the town center. (3) Members of this first Committee on the Improvement of the Center of Town were Charles F. Richardson, chairman; B. H. Dickson Jr.; Alexander S. Jenney; Benjamin S. Blake; and B. L. Young. They explained their decision to hire Arthur Shurcliff in this way:

That the Committee, in its study and solution of the problems, might have an able adviser, not only on the practical questions that might arise, but also on those involving what is refined and in good taste, it employed Mr. Arthur A. Shurtleff, [later Shurcliff] of Boston, one of our leading landscape architects. He virtually became one of the Committee, and one of its untiring co-workers. (4)

### *“The Circular of Inquiry”*

Given the magnitude of the changes contemplated, the funds that would be needed, and the businesses and property owners that would be affected, the improvement committee prepared a circular sent to each citizen with a map of the town square and this message urging their participation:

Your committee has raised what seemed to it the problems to be solved and has solved them tentatively, but before making its final recommendation to the Town, it desires to consider all pertinent suggestions . . . . In order, therefore, that those interested in the matter may have an opportunity to ponder over it, and then present their ideas in a clear and simple way, to your committee, you individually are earnestly requested to study the following problems, and others as you may believe to be material, and indicate in pencil on the map your solution of them. (5)

There followed a list of problems and goals:

1<sup>st</sup>. Changes in roads leading to and through the center of the Town, to reduce or avoid the dangers and noises incident to the use of motor vehicles.

2<sup>nd</sup>. The attainment of a village common or green, always found in the best types of old New England villages.

3<sup>rd</sup>. The provision of suitable locations for Town Buildings, say, a Town Hall, a Fire Station, a Village Store and Post Office, each by itself surrounded by generous open spaces.

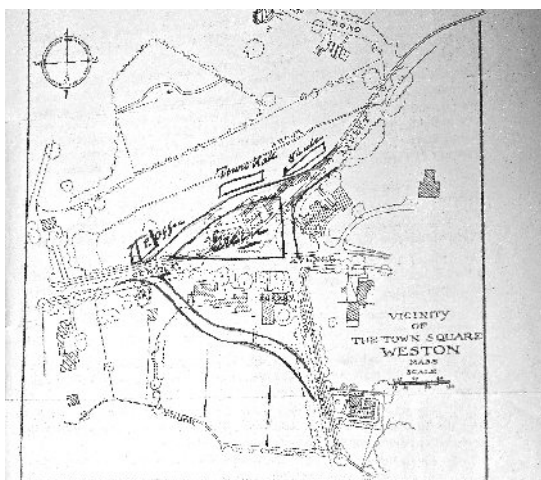
4<sup>th</sup>. The resolution of all of the above problems, and such others as suggest themselves, into one simple, reasonable, beautiful, lasting scheme.

Respondents were requested to sign and send the completed circulars to Charles F. Richardson, Chairman, in an enclosed envelope, not later than January 9, 1912.

## Residents Express Their Views

Included on the following pages are some of the responses to the circular, chosen from several dozen saved in the two Shurcliff folders in the Town Hall vault. As might be expected, some people submitted elaborate plans for changes while others urged the selectmen to leave the town center just the way it was.

Livingstone Cushing wrote that he thought the Bowditch plan of 1892 was an “excellent suggestion” but that the most important problem, in his mind, was at Mrs. Case’s corner. A. T. Johnson suggested “a pond or small lake—of 3 acres more or less—material excavated to be used where needed for filling” to be located directly south of the library and tavern. He improved the connection from School Street to Church Street by taking away half of the First Parish lawn.



Note.—Space hereinafter is for written description of the above changes, etc.

*Take School St across present green to  
church St - traffic noise at that end -  
church will not give much trouble. Swing  
church St to north side, moving it, & the noise.*

Albert Thorndike drew a small town green and wrote: “Green should be fenced (with a low fence) to keep off traffic, and trees planted there.” Thorndike was one of many residents who suggested relocating School Street to keep traffic out of the town square.

Historian Mary Francis Peirce used this opportunity to point out simpler problems. Regrettably her suggestion in the last paragraph was not followed:

I’m not sure that I am in favor of great changes in roads and buildings at the centre of the town at public expense.

There is a \_\_\_ of Poison Ivy filled with seed vessels in Church Street, a short distance from Conant Road. This, I think, the Road Commissioner should remove, as it is a menace to passers by. I could mention other dangerous spots, but they are outside the limit mentioned.

There is a boulder to which I have called the attention of various persons, apparently to no effect. It lies in front of the library, where I have made a blue dot [on the map]. It is a little to the west of the path, scarcely above the ground. If a team should hit it just right, it might do some mischief.

If any changes are made, it would perhaps be well to reserve a room somewhere for storing

ancient domestic and industrial implements, which, if not cared for, will probably in a few years be lost.

Francis B. Sears, brother of Horace Sears, typed this rather dark comment:

Dear Sir or Madam:

I am not competent to devise a comprehensive plan for the improvement of the village of Weston, and therefore any suggestions which I may make may not harmonize with the general scheme.

Improvement should be effected at the junction of School Street and Central Avenue . . . It is remarkable that many accidents have not occurred at this point. While I should regard it as a benefit to the world at large if all automobiles were smashed, and if a number of automobilists were killed, yet I have not reached the point where it would please me to have my personal friends sent to have their halos fitted on.

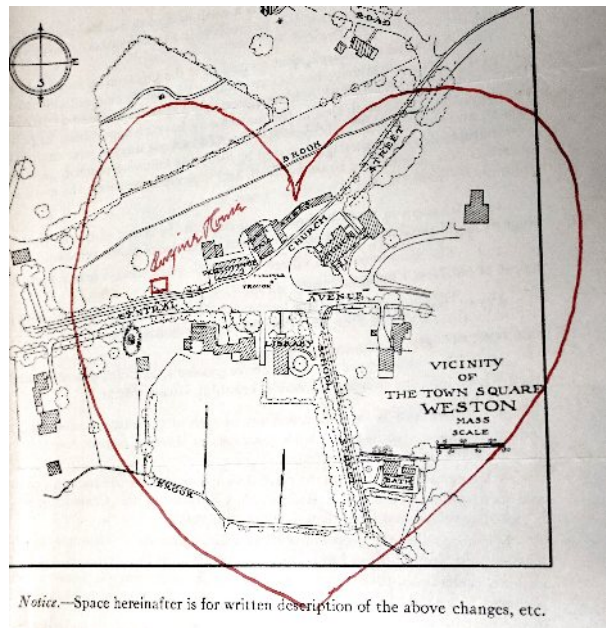
The swimming-pool on School Street is an eye-sore, and never will be anything else. Occasionally its use is accompanied with such a racket that everybody within a mile or two must be disturbed, except the occupants of the cemetery, and I am not altogether sure about them.

I respectfully suggest that the swimming-pool be removed to the remotest suburbs. Yours very truly,

George H. Wheeler drew a large heart in red on the map. He explained that his only change was to locate the "engine house" just west of the existing Cutting's post office and store:

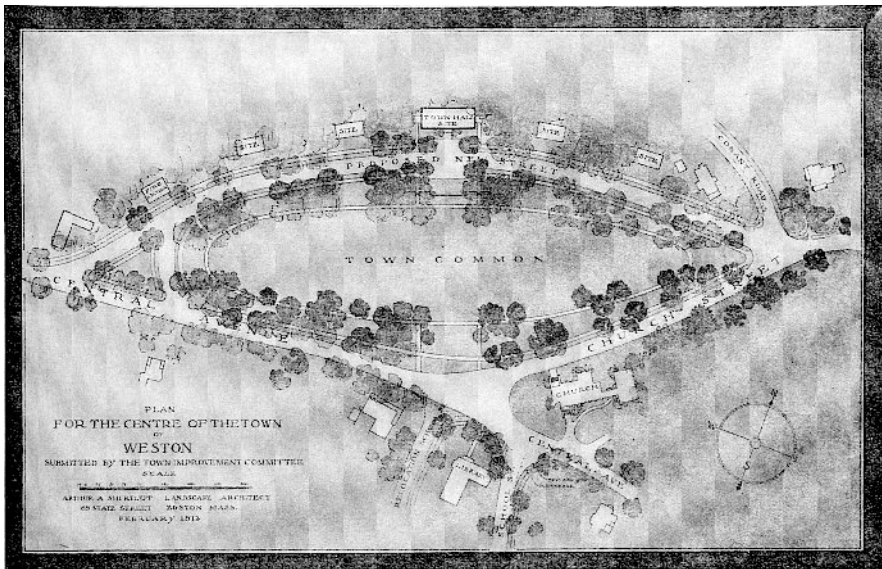
I love the "Heart" of Weston just as it is. Please leave it alone. It was a shame that they should have taken down the old church some years ago.

The Auto nuisance will regulate itself as time goes on.



*George Wheeler's only request was for a "brick or concrete engine house . . . with an Auto Chemical therein." He added: This seems as other up to date towns have now had for many months." Unfortunately, the "auto nuisance" did not "regulate itself."*





*Arthur Shurcliff's first Town Common plan, dated February 1912, shows six building sites along the new semi-circular roadway, including a fire station site at the far left. Note also the provision for a relocated School Street between the library and the Josiah Smith Tavern, requiring removal of the JST barn.*

The committee set up meetings with landowners likely to be affected. On January 31, 1912, a public hearing was held where “all the suggestions received were grouped and graphically shown and discussed by those present.”

In its concluding report, the committee wrote that the final plan evolved out of the physical conditions of the site:

The natural contours of the present streets and neighboring hillside favor the construction of such a Common, and a marginal road, with suitable sites for Town Buildings. . . These plans represent something more than mere lines on a map. They are the result of a consideration of practical questions. In short, the beautiful solution of the problem has been evolved from a study of the actual physical conditions present. (7)

Nevertheless, in a letter from Arthur Shurcliff to Town Improvement Committee Chairman Charles F. Richardson, dated March 5, 1912 and printed in the 1911 *Town Report*, Shurcliff acknowledged the importance of the public input:

They [the plans] are in no sense my own designs merely, but are the expression of the Committee's feelings and the ideas of many residents who have been present at hearings and who have presented suggestive sketches on the circular of inquiry. (8)

Arthur Shurcliff was not only a talented landscape architect with good political instincts but also a savvy promoter of the Town Common Plan. In the same March 5 letter, he spoke of both the positive outcome that would result and the negative consequences of inaction:

In my opinion the execution of this scheme would give Weston a Town Common of remarkable individuality and in many respects the finest open space of the kind in the Commonwealth. This plan would also guard the town against congestion at the center and also avoid further traffic dangers, and at the same time head off the growth of a slum district in the wet land behind the present Town Hall. (9)

### *The Town Common Plan*

A second public hearing was held on February 28, 1912, to consider preliminary plans and costs. Shurcliff's plan of February 1912 shows the town common with six buildings facing the new roadway. The Town Hall site was in the center and the new fire station site at the west end. The committee reported that at the hearing "Little was said, except in praise of the 'Town Common Plan.'" (10)

To establish construction costs, Shurcliff submitted the plans and specifications to seven contractors, and six sent in bids. The committee also consulted two real estate experts about land costs. George H.D. Lamson was the major landowner affected. The committee recommended buying the 9.5 acres at once. The February 1912 Shurcliff plan was included in the 1911 *Town Report*, along with a grading plan, plan of properties that would need to be taken, and a line drawing of the future Common. (11)

The Town Common Plan was adopted at the annual Town Meeting of March 25, 1912. A second committee was appointed later that year, however, after it was decided to make a few changes and request a new vote. Ironically, given that finding a fire station site had been the impetus for the whole planning process, Shurcliff's second and final plan changed the proposed site for the fire station, in part because of the expense of excavating into the hill. The revised plan, dated January 1913, eliminates all building sites on the new road except for the Town Hall. It was adopted at Town Meeting that year.

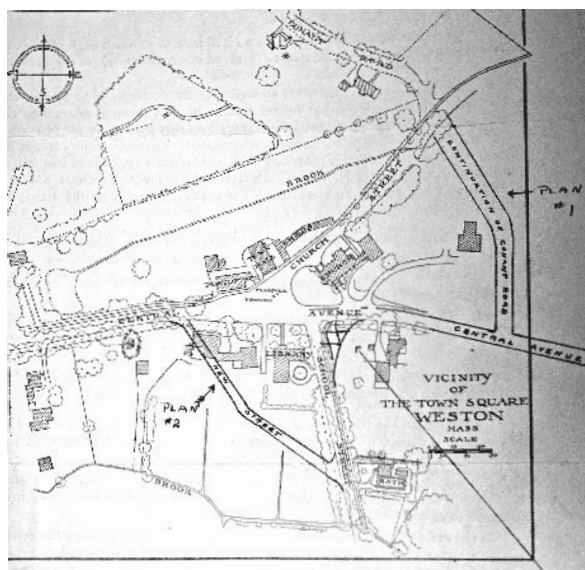
### *Proposal for Relocating School Street*

Many residents drew one or two additional roads to by-pass the town square. The most common was a new road from School Street near the "Bath" (the town pool) to Central Avenue (now Boston Post Road). A number of possibilities were suggested as to how far west the new road should join the post road.

In his first plan of February 1912, included in the 1911 *Town Report*, Arthur Shurcliff shows the relocated road passing between the library and Jones House (now Josiah Smith Tavern). In some of the citizen plans, the part of School Street adjacent to the library would become a walking path closed to all vehicles, which would have given the library a much better architectural setting. Chairman Richardson liked this idea and pointed out that probably 75% of automobiles would have a more direct route to and from Wayland and Boston, plus it would be easier when hauling heavy loads to make the turn onto Central Avenue.

Several residents also drew an extension to Conant Road passing to the east of First Parish Church, thus allowing westbound traffic to go from Central Avenue directly to Church Street or Conant Road, by-passing the town square.

The committee investigated the cost both of relocating School Street and of simply widening the mouth of School Street at Central Avenue to make the turn less dangerous. They determined that relocating School Street was a better plan but would cost 20 times as much. The cost of a new School Street, including construction and land, was estimated at \$14,784, while the cost of widening the mouth was only \$615. The latter amount was included in the total project cost estimate of \$62,952.



*Edward Dooley's plan shows a relocated School Street extending west from the Bath (town pool). He widened the corner of School and Central Ave opposite the library and suggested a new street called "continuation of Conant Road" going through the Sears property east of First Parish Church. In his description, he called for purchasing and moving the Jones buildings (Josiah Smith Tavern and barn) to make way for the new road off School Street. Dooley did not make any provision for a town green.*

### **Footnotes**

- 1) 1910 *Town Report*, 273. (2) "Weston's Civic Center Has Won National Fame," unknown newspaper, probably *Boston Herald*, unknown date in 1925, original clipping in Town Hall vault. (3) *Ibid.* (4) 1911 *TR*, 111. (5) "Town of Weston" circular, 1911 (6) omitted (7) 1911 *TR*, 112. (8) 1911 *TR*, 119. (9) *Ibid.* (10) 1911 *TR*, 113. (11) 1911 *TR*, 119.



This “before” photo shows one of the seven adjoining storefronts where uniform new signage was in place by 1963. Note the neon protruding sign and neon “same day shirt service” sign. Are the “after” photos always better? (Photo by Larry Forman Studios. Courtesy Weston Garden Club)

## 1963: Town Beautification for the 250<sup>th</sup> Anniversary

### “Our Shabby Center”

“It all began three years ago with a soft drink dispenser” explained *Boston Herald* reporter Gloria Gould in her 1963 article “Town of Weston Grows Anew in Beauty: Community is Lifted by Old-Time Spirit.”

. . . [the soft drink dispenser]. . . stood on the sidewalk of the shopping center on Boston Post Road. As the mecca of the town’s teenagers, the red and white machine was surrounded with a litter of cups and candy wrappers. The debris and traffic made a few of the townfolk sit up and take a closer look at all of the Boston Post Road business blocks and the town as a whole. (1)

The scope of the problem is further described in a typed report included in a comprehensive scrapbook assembled by the Weston Garden Club:

The center of Weston had been allowed to deteriorate with untended grounds, litter, and lack of paint. The situation was so serious that comments were coming from people in other towns about our shabby “center.” The already struggling small businesses were losing ground rapidly as customers began to refuse to shop under such circumstances. Not only did the outside of the buildings give a disreputable appearance but the dirty windows, crowded with posters and merchandise, repelled instead of attracted customers. People began to shop out of town.

Parking became a problem. The already limited space was not being utilized to its fullest capacity. The grade in front of one block of stores was so steep as to be dangerous if a brake released, allowing a car to roll back into the heavy traffic of the Boston Post Road. Loose stone bumpers were at all angles, narrowing an already too narrow sidewalk where no one could pass with an armful of groceries. Broken awnings held water which in rainstorms would pour off onto pedestrians and in winter become glare ice. Store signs vied with each other in gaudiness. (2)

### ***The Role of the Weston Garden Club***

The Weston Garden Club took up the challenge under the leadership of Elizabeth Sweet (Mrs. Homer Sweet), who led the three-year town-wide effort, assisted by Mrs. E. Olsen Field and Mrs. Reginald D. Wells. [Author’s note: women were always referred to by their husband’s name at this time.] Realizing that the scope of needed projects was too large for any garden club to accomplish alone, they worked for a year to draw up plans for a town Beautification Committee. The groundwork was completed in January 1961, when they invited citizens with professional qualifications—architects, horticulturalists, landscape architects—to a meeting at Mrs. Sweet’s home. According to the 1963 *Herald* article, “The response was overwhelming.” (3)

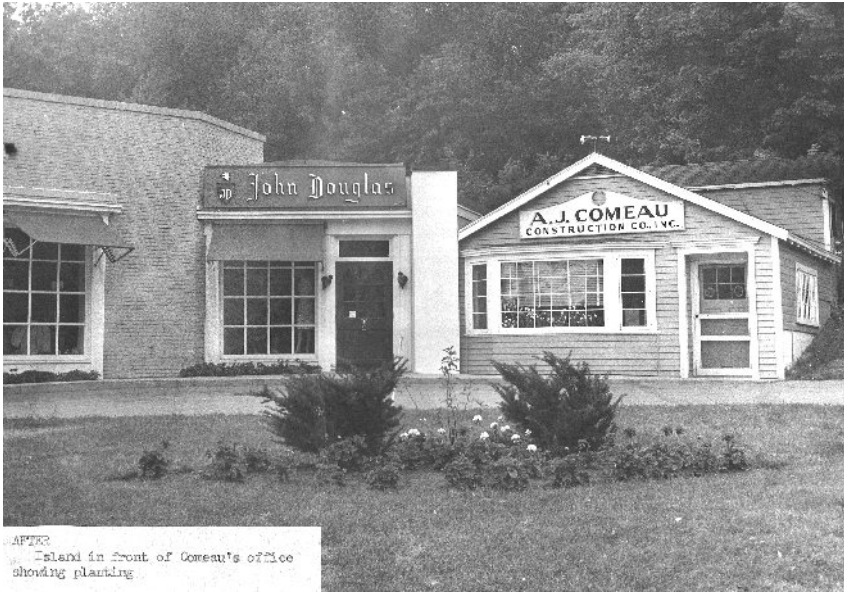
By 1963, community organizations, businesses, town employees, and school groups had completed scores of projects large and small. Among the most important were the removal of the old town pool and creation of Anniversary Park, re-landscaping of the grounds around Town Hall, and refurbishment of the center business district. The names of the 31 committee members and 57 assistant members of the Beautification Committee of Weston, included in the *Herald* article, reads like a “who’s who” in Weston.

Elizabeth Sweet (Mrs. Homer Sweet) was chair of the "Beautification Program for Weston," which was part of the 250<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Committee.

Weston Garden Club received an award from the Garden Club Federation of Massachusetts in 1963-64. The "public relations" award honored a club "who, by some projects, have reached the general public in an especially outstanding way." (Weston Garden Club 250<sup>th</sup> scrapbook)



(Left to right): Donald Wyman, Director of the Arnold Arboretum, Elizabeth Sweet, chair of the Beautification Committee of Weston, and Henry W. Patterson, chair of the 250<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, with Professor B.W. Martin at the presentation of a plaque from Weston-Super-Mare, England in 1963. (Courtesy Weston Historical Society)



AFTER  
Island in front of Comeau's office  
showing planting

*The above photo shows two storefronts in 1963 after new plantings had been installed on the island. Ernest Comeau of A. J. Comeau Construction Co. donated paint and provided labor at cost for the repainting of town center stores. (Courtesy Weston Garden Club 250th scrapbook)*

### ***“A full fledged, energetic program is being planned”***

In April 1961, a letter was sent to every club, organization, business, and church in town explaining that the three garden clubs and Women’s Community League had combined efforts and formed a “Civic Committee” whose responsibility was “to make Weston a more beautiful place in which to live.” The letter added: “A full fledged, energetic program is being planned . . .” (4)

The letter asked for suggestions on painting, parking, window boxes, signs, cleanliness, planting, landscaping, and window displays. The Executive Committee—the Mesdames Sweet, Field, and Wells—asked the recipients: “Would you approve the painting of all the buildings in the Center, with the exception of the bank, a light gray similar to that of John Douglas’ [sic] store or some similar idea?” People were asked to send their suggestions to the chairman of the Civic Committee, Arnold Arboretum Director Dr. Donald Wyman.

The following six-person Design Committee met on May 11, 1961 at Dr. Wyman’s home to review the responses: Frank Owen (architect), Henry Davenport (architect), Mrs. Alfred Wypler (liason between Design Committee, business





AFTER  
Weston Post Office showing door and trim  
painted, window boxes and new foundation  
planting with annuals

*The “after” photo of Weston Post Office in 1963 shows the newly painted doorway, new window boxes, and foundation planting of annuals. (Courtesy Weston Garden Club scrapbook)*

community, and Weston Council of Garden Clubs), Polly Marshall, Bernice Cafrey, and Elizabeth Sweet. (5)

Mrs. Sweet read a letter from Ernest Comeau of A. J. Comeau Construction Co. offering his enthusiastic support. He liked the idea of uniformity of color: “It would go a long way towards making the Center conform to the New England spirit” and he offered to donate paint and provide the labor of his large painting crew at cost. Concerning signs he wrote: “We can stand improvement here; if we don’t take action, some day we may wake up to find an intermixture of Neon signs and colonial atmosphere.” (6)

Design Committee discussions focused on cleanliness, parking, painting, and signs. They tasked themselves with finding out about town statutes and whether there was a possibility of fining litterbugs and requiring owners to keep their properties clean. Would the town itself clean the streets, provide good-looking receptacles, and see that they were emptied? What about a public relations campaign with publicity and signs to “Keep our town clean”? Could the “nice police” cooperate in the matter? How could the committee foster pride in the project? (7)

The group enthusiastically accepted Ernest Comeau’s offer to donate paint and provide labor at cost. The minutes record a detailed decision on what color to paint each building in the two central commercial blocks:

Starting with hardware store to bank, paint light gray with white trim; leave Bank as is; paint the rest of the building, the same color. Leave color of Bookstall as is also the Doctors' building. Paint the post-office the "color of iced coffee with lots of cream" and if possible (Mrs. Caffrey) [sic] change the front door to look less like a penitentiary.

On the opposite side of street, paint the drug store the same color as that of John Douglas' store; in fact, paint the entire block with white trim.(8)

The group agreed that "good taste in signs" was a critical but complicated issue. In general they felt that smaller was better ("the more one is apt to read it") and that the town should have signage regulations. Signs should be "reasonably colonial," as defined here:

Suggest they be reasonably colonial- Suggested barber pole-antiqued- on barber shop, a rake for the hardware store; in other words, indicative of their particular business. Mrs. Caffrey willing to help in this. (9)



*These seven merchants "changed their unsightly and large signs for uniform, well-designed, discreet new ones," according to the project summaries in the Weston Garden Club 250th Beautification Committee scrapbook, which contains this 1963 photo.*

*Harold Travis was chairman of Special Projects for the town center and E. Olsen field was chairman of General Projects, working with Henry Wile, contractor; and Leslie Ford, architect. John Duffy, the tree warden, was involved in the 250th improvements, as was Charles Stimpson, town engineer; Stanley Fabri, highway department superintendent, the three selectmen (E.H. Dickson, L. H. Dowse, and S.H. Tyng), and J. Ward Carter, Executive Secretary.*

## *“The spirit of change became contagious”*

According to a project summary in the Weston Garden Club scrapbook, “The spirit of change became contagious, sweeping Weston.” Business buildings were painted or touched up and enhanced with window boxes or foundation plantings. Store signs were changed to “colonial design.”

The seven adjoining stores in two blocks on the north side of Boston Post Road replaced their signs, “at great expense,” with signs of uniform design and color. Old awnings and “excess electrical signs” were removed. The parking area in front of these stores was redesigned to make it one way, add a safety zone, widen the sidewalk in front of the stores, and add granite curbing on Boston Post Road. According to the summary: “With these improvements one real estate agent remarked ‘the valuation of this particular area was improved by \$50,000.’”

A large group of artists and interior decorators designed permanent backgrounds and window displays for practically every store in the center of town, with the goal of helping merchants attract customers. A large and attractive bulletin board for posters and notices was installed for community use, and shopkeepers were notified that they no longer needed to post every notice of events given to them. To curb littering, the grocery store window was used for a litterbug display (see photo page 29) and no-littering signs were placed at four entrances to the town.

## *1961-63 Beautification Projects*

Over the course of three years, community groups took up beautification projects throughout the town. The following summary of 12 projects is taken largely from the Weston Garden Club 250th Beautification Committee scrapbook.

### **Project #1, Anniversary Park**, State Road By-Pass and School Street

The old town pool and adjacent wooden bathhouse were abandoned in 1951 when the Memorial Pool opened. The town did not own the land, however, and the buildings remained until 1963, when the structures, by then covered with underbrush, were taken by eminent domain and razed. The land was graded, seeded, and planted with specimen trees and shrubs at the edge of an open lawn, which was needed to maintain visibility at the busy corner. Dr. Donald Wyman, Director of the Arnold Arboretum, oversaw the project, and the arboretum donated more than \$800 worth of plantings. The lovely natural park was named “Anniversary Park” in honor of the 250<sup>th</sup>.

**Project #2, Library Park**, opposite Anniversary Park beginning at traffic light and continuing west for 300 feet

Dr. Donald Wyman and Harold Travis did the design, transforming the marshy area into a park. On May 7, 1963, 90 shrubs were planted (5 Junipers, 6 Yews, 2 Shad, 16 Yellow Twigged Dogwood, 8 High Blueberry, 14 Swamp Azaleas, 8 Rhododendrons, 15 Ilex Inkberry), to which was later added a large Yew, 6 Andorra Junipers, 10 rhododendrons, and 6 mountain laurel. Volunteers watered the shrubs. Many of the plants were donated or obtained at substantial discount from Weston Nurseries and Arthur Leiby. The work was done with the combined efforts of town employees, community volunteers, and Boy Scouts.

**Project #3, Weston Garden Club, Weston Town Hall**

The “Conant Memorial Planting” was done in memory of Mrs. William C. Conant, first president of Weston Garden Club. The Town Hall facade was planted with evergreens, English and Japanese yews, leucothoe, and pachysandra. The island between the town hall and town green was planted with the help of a subsidy from the Selectmen. Granite curbing was installed and the steps leading to the town green were reset. In the surrounding woods on each side of Town Hall were planted with 44 pink and white dogwood trees of different varieties donated by individual members of Weston Garden Club.

The Civic Committee of Weston Garden Club was in charge of the planning and planting. That committee included Mrs. Reginald Wells, chair, Mrs. J. Kenneth Bennett, Mrs. John H. Stewart, Mrs. David M. Kellogg, Jr., Mrs. Erlund Field, Mrs. J. Allen Torrey, Jr., Mrs. George P. Bates (chairman of the Provisional Planting at Knox Memorial) and Mrs. Frederick R. Coburn. The watering trough was planted with red geraniums, white ruffled petunias, and Boston ivy.



*The Weston Garden Club did major planting at the base of Town Hall and on the island in front and planted dogwoods in the surrounding woods. (Weston Garden Club 250th scrap-book)*

#### **Project #4, Garden Interest Group of the Women's Community League**

The club did planting at the Fiske Memorial and the Jones House [Josiah Smith Tavern]. Mrs. Martin Marshall was in charge of plans for a 4 X 6-foot community bulletin board designed by Leslie Ford and placed on the property of Raymond Coburn and John Boyd. It was protected by glass and kept locked, with the key at the hardware store [450 Boston Post Road]. Letters were sent to merchants asking that they cooperate in this effort by refusing to allow posters in their windows. The project was coordinated by Hector Osmond, built and installed by Robert Lazzari, and landscaped by Arthur Leiby.

#### **Project #5, Country Garden Club**

The Country Garden Club cleaned and terraced the Memorial Pool area and planted Mugho pines. The terracing was needed to prevent erosion of the steep banks. The club continued its planting of wild flowers on the Weston Forest and Trail Association's Hubbard Trail "wooded walk," with wild flowers from Garden in the Woods in Sudbury. They planted a dogwood tree at the Josiah Smith Tavern. Work was done under the direction of Mrs. G.N. Lempereur, chairman, with Mrs. John Perry, Mrs. Edgar Brister, and Mrs. Lewis Mustard.

#### **Project #6, Women's Community League**

Co-chairs Mrs. Alfred Wypler and Mrs. Robert Fitzgerald guided the Women's Community League restoration of a room "part of the ell" at the Jones House [JST] to be used for the Children's Exchange [later Clothing Exchange]. They restored old hand hewn beams and installed new floors and a new heating system. Herbert Hastings of Brook Road designed fixtures for the room and provided them at cost. He also presented a lantern, copied from an old design, for the front door of the tavern.

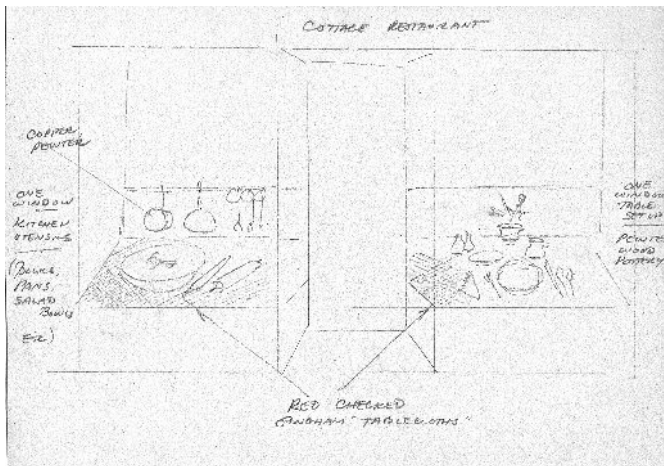
#### **Project #7A, Window Display- Welcome to Weston signs**

Permanent backgrounds were designed for all store windows in the center. Thirty-three volunteers were involved with window displays, either in design, construction, or donation of materials. According to the Weston Garden Club summary, window display group members were "well qualified to organize displays of merchandise as well as historic objects," which they did for the 250<sup>th</sup> celebration in color schemes of red, white, and blue color. According to the summary, they did so in hopes of encouraging the local merchants to artistically arrange their windows — "Power of suggestion."

Two permanent "Welcome to Weston" signs were erected at entrances into the town center. They were designed by Peg Kronenberg and fabricated and installed by Hector Osmond, with material and painting donated by Paul Redden (material) and John Perry (painting). Polly Marshall was chair of the welcome signs.



Above: As part of the 250th Anniversary beautification effort, store owners were offered assistance to organize window displays of merchandise or historical objects. This is a close-up of the hardware store window after the make-over. The people are unidentified. See page 30 for before and after photographs of the hardware store building. (Weston Garden Club 250th scrapbook)



Below: Artist William Dav-enport made sketches for window displays labeled “drug store,” “hardware store,” and “cottage restaurant” (at left) The latter called for red-checked table cloths and copper and pewter pots and pans.

## **Project #7B, Planting Projects**

Planting projects undertaken as part of the beautification campaign.

St. Julia’s Church — religious garden (Jean Antell)

Christian Science church — “patriotic mass garden” (Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Haddock)

Weston Studio — “Painted and geraniums on steps”

Dr. David Reid and John H. Clark — window boxes

Ed Abbott, filling station owner — “first to paint and redecorate with plantings”

John Douglas — garden of geraniums

Comeau Construction Co. — “furnished paint free to all merchants and store owners who were anxious to paint”

St. Peter’s Church — steeple lighting and garden

Bernice Caffrey — “designer and co-ordinator of décor”



Ruth Leiby, garden shop owner —landscape advisor (free advice)  
Newton Waltham Bank and Trust Co. Richard Lincoln was chairman of the center businessmen  
Fire Department—Assisted with watering town plantings

### **Project #8, Center of Town**

These merchants changed “their unsightly and large signs for uniform, well-designed, discreet new ones. They also permitted the decoration committee to arrange window displays”

Henry Acconcia, Triple A Market, the first to cooperate  
Joe Giamo, Ye Olde Cottage Restaurant  
Howard Bickford, Central Cleaners  
Warren Eaton, Weston Pharmacy  
Clair McGrath, Village Hair Stylist  
Weston Cleaners, Tailor and Furrier

### **Project #9, Litterbug Campaign**

Mrs. Francis Shepard and Mrs. Paul Redden, co-chairs

### **Project #10, Commemorative Tree Planting**

This project, directed by Mrs. Victor Harnish, Mrs. Robert Deleeuw, and Mrs. Hamilton Reilly, “furnished and printed free 1600 tags”



*The Triple-A market was located in the block of stores on the north side of Boston Post Road next to the present pharmacy. Notice the litterbug cartoon characters in the store window. (1963 photo, Weston Garden Club 250th scrap-book)*





*The historic preservation movement was in its infancy in 1963. The “before” photo above shows the original hardware store windows. As part of the beautification campaign, the decorative window panes were removed and replaced with the simpler window configuration seen in the “after” photo below. Notice the Mobil gas station sign, two gas pumps, and phone booth in the “after” photo. (Weston Garden Club 250th scrapbook)*

## **Project #11, Weston High School**

Irving Keene, retiring biology teacher, had the goal of attempting a reforestation project, according to the summary. In honor of the 250<sup>th</sup>, he obtained trees from the State Department of Forestry in Clinton. Five-year-old pine and European Larch were planted in the school's "Artificial Grand Canyon," an area where contractors building the school had dug a deep ditch to lower the water table. The area was barren and in bad condition. The planting was a two-day project in which 167 students participated and 250 trees were planted.



*Weston High School students plant trees in the "Artificial Grand Canyon" where contractors building the school dug a deep ditch to lower the water table. 167 students planted 250 trees. (Weston Garden Club 250th scrapbook)*

Country Garden Club donated \$200 to be used as Mr. Keene saw fit for the development of the "Nature Trail" a natural walk through woods and bog at the high school. This walk was used in connection with biology teaching and is a 1 mile nature trail typical of a New England bog. Four senior boys in the Industrial Art Class, supervised by Industrial Arts teacher Donald Duncan, planned a further development of the trail by putting a bridge 60 feet long across one section. They built the bridge with materials secured by donation, using a foundation of railroad ties with telephone poles on top.

*by Pamela W. Fox*

## ***Footnotes***

(1) "Town of Weston Grows Anew in Beauty: Community is Lifted by Old-Time Spirit" by Gloria Gould, *Boston Herald*, 6/18/63. (2) Weston Garden Club 250th Anniversary Beautification Committee scrapbook, in WGC archives at First Parish Church. (3) *Boston Herald*, op.cit. (4) Letter of April 18, 1961, WGC scrapbook. (5) Design Committee meeting minutes, May 11, 1961, WGC scrapbook. (6) Letter dated May 9, 1961, WGC scrapbook. (7) Design Committee, op.cit. (8) Ibid. (9) Ibid.



WE'RE  
SEARCHING  
FOR THE  
BEST HIGH-  
SCHOOL ROCK  
'N' ROLL BAND

see page 13

## Missing minimum

Low-wage workers alienated from political system

By Leslie Miller  
Special to The TAB

A coalition of labor unions and community groups campaigning to raise the minimum wage in Massachusetts has a hard time finding any workers who actually earn the minimum wage. It seems the few minimum wage workers who show up in statistics—minimates and immigrants—don't belong to the political system that will determine their fate this year.

The Coalition for a Living Wage kicked off its campaign this month with the announcement that 25 Democratic legislators, including House Majority Leader Richard Voke (D-Chelsea), are sponsoring a bill to raise the hourly minimum wage to \$3.25 in Massachusetts, 10 cents more than President Bill Clinton's proposal for the nation. And the bill would go even further: Starting July 1, 1996, the minimum wage would be indexed to half the average hourly production wage. That would put the minimum wage over \$6 an hour.

Accompanying the Feb. 2 kickoff was a press packet filled with statements from union leaders about full-time, minimum wage workers who live below the poverty level.

# Back-room politics

Town prefers to resolve its conflicts out of the public eye

By Stephen Thomas  
TAB Staff Writer

I was once asked by the chairman of an important committee if I would refrain from attending an open committee meeting that night. The request was made off the record, of course.

The chairman told me it would be easier to get things done without the press there.

I respect and have a good working relationship with this committee chairman. But the request irked me. I saw it as an attempt to shut the press out of meaningful dialogue. I was not supposed to be privy

to the real decision-making process—only the sterilized end product.

I went to the meeting anyway and saw little conflict and apart from that, little news. Instead, gentle querying, plenty of agreement, plenty of consensus.

But the chairman's request raised questions: What if I hadn't come to the meeting? How much of Weston town politics happens in the public eye, and how much happens behind the scenes? Is there an insiders group that influences all decisions made at meetings?

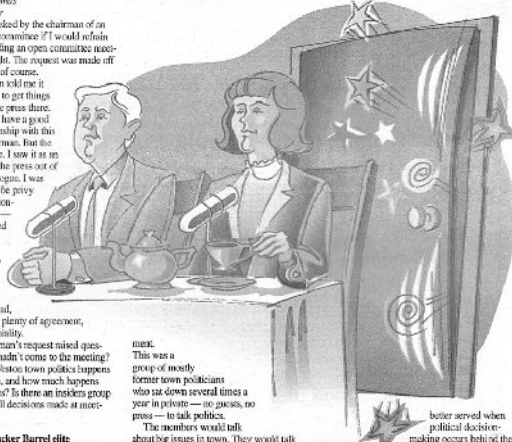
Cracker Barrel elite

ment.

This was a group of mostly former town politicians who sat down several times a year in private—no guests, no press—to talk politics.

The members would talk about big issues in town. They would talk

butter served when political decision-making occurs behind the



February 21, 1995, front page article on the Cracker Barrel in the Weston TAB. (Courtesy Weston Historical Society)

# Weston's Cracker Barrel: Back Room Politics?

Authors note: Town improvement can take many forms. The Weston Historical Society collection includes minutes and organizational records of the Cracker Barrel, a small private group of Weston residents that met irregularly for more than 40 years, from the late 1940s through the early 1990s. The society has two notebooks of minutes covering the period from October 1953 to March 1971, including lists of members for many of these years. The carefully composed and typed records provide a detailed picture of the group in its first two decades. The last dated document is a membership list from 1991. Many thanks to both members and non-members who were interviewed for this article, including members Deborah Ecker, Hugo Uytterhoeven, and Jean Thurston and non-members Joe Mullin, Ann Leibowitz, and Rip Hastings.

by Pamela Fox

## *Introduction*

“Back-Room Politics” is the front-page headline of a 1995 article in the *Weston Tab*, which went on to describe the Cracker Barrel this way:

If anything has led people to believe that big political decisions are made behind the scenes in Weston, it is rumors about the “Cracker Barrel” group, a legendary circle of current and former town politicians that is said to hold closed meetings in which members choose potential candidates for town committees. Some people talk about the Cracker Barrel as a secret order, a clandestine power group that is Weston’s equivalent to The Vault of Boston. (1)

The storied Vault was a shadowy group of chief executives who guided — some would say plotted — Boston’s future a generation ago.

The Cracker Barrel was formed in the immediate post-World War II period of rapid change in Weston. The small group met in members’ living rooms to discuss town issues and identify potential candidates for town offices. Most of the meetings were private. Some might characterize the group as elitist, but, of the people interviewed for this article, all agreed that Cracker Barrel members cared deeply about the town and its future.

In general, the Cracker Barrel did not have an education arm and did not exercise power as a group. The minutes include admonitions like this one in 1956:

The meeting ended with a warning by Ralph Hower as to a misconception about the nature of the Cracker Barrel. It is generally thought that we vote and act as a unit, but this is not usually true. (2)

On another occasion, however, Hower conceded that “in some instances it has organized some pressure.” (3)

Ann Leibowitz, who was recruited by the Cracker Barrel to run for selectman in 1989, described its influence this way:

To the extent that the group was successful in placing its chosen candidates in office, it surely influenced the direction of town politics. But I can promise you that in all my years in office, there was absolutely NEVER an instance where the group sought to influence any subject before the board. To the extent that I ever had a discussion with a Cracker Barrel member on a matter affecting the town, it was always understood that that individual was speaking for himself or herself, and not the group. (4)

## *Early History: 1940s to 1960s*

The date of the first Cracker Barrel meeting is unknown; however, records suggest it took place in 1947. In 1961, Francis Goodale spoke on the early history “from his memories and from recent perusal of the minutes of 1947 up to date,” suggesting 1947 as the date of first meeting. (5) These early minutes are now missing. According to Goodale, the name Cracker Barrel (sometimes spelled Crackerbarrel) was coined by Albert Speare.

In February 1957, Ralph Hower reviewed 10 years of accomplishments, again suggesting a 1947 founding:

- a) That in the last 10 years many things we set out to accomplish have actually been accomplished.
- b) That we now have many more members active in Town affairs and in a position to be ‘in the know’ than 10 years ago.
- c) That we are the only group in Town that gives serious pre-caucus consideration to vacancies and how they should be filled.
- d) That belonging to the Cracker Barrel is comparable to joining the Theatre Guild as an aid to going to the theatre instead of sitting at home talking about going.
- e) That there is a necessity for some group to educate the numerous new comers as to the New England Town Meeting type of Government and the issues important to the Town. (6)

A 1947 date makes sense given the sea change taking place in Weston after World War II. After slow growth during the Depression and war years, the population was increasing rapidly. The baby boom was underway and housing was in great demand. Weston still had large parcels of open land, but new subdivisions were already springing up on former estates. In 1946 the town voted to build the first of five new schools needed in the next 25 years to accommodate exponential growth in the school-age population. Over the next decades, the town would debate school decentralization, major zoning changes, and land acquisition plans.

While a few early Cracker Barrel members were from old estate-owning families, most were part of the wave of newcomers. They were “quite critical of town government,” according to lawyer John Brooks, who moved to Weston in 1942 and was a member for 40+ years. The minutes of 1961 echo this sentiment: “When Cracker Barrel started. . . there was a good deal of discontent with the way things were going in the town.” (Oct 22, 1961). It is not surprising that the views of long-time and new residents would differ, especially on fiscal matters. For example, the 1958 minutes note: “the major cleavage in Town is between those who want more money for schools and those who want a low tax rate.” (7)

Brooks noted how this situation changed over time:

Early on we began nominating people for town office. The nominations seemed to take fairly well and after some years we had members of the School Committee, the Selectmen, the Finance Committee, and just about every other committee that counted. It gradually dawned on us that instead of being the loyal opposition, we had become the establishment!  
(8)

Members included many of those involved in Weston's proactive post-war efforts to control and guide growth to create a certain kind of town, one that retained its rural character. Among the most important was Dr. William Elliston, who spear-headed efforts in the mid-1950s to establish the town forest and Weston Forest and Trail Association and then served on the Weston Planning Board for more than two decades, from 1958 to 1979.

Deborah Ecker credits Bill Elliston with founding the Cracker Barrel. She recalls hearing him tell how he (perhaps with colleague Stanley French) was sitting in the back of the Upper Town Hall observing the official Caucus in which "The (then) Establishment" determined who was going to fill the various town elected vacancies. According to Ecker: "That was when he and others decided to start the Cracker Barrel and bring in some new people." (9)

Elliston and other Cracker Barrel members worked to develop an informed and supportive constituency for land conservation to counter the strong resistance to spending money. Conservation-minded members included a core group of upper



*Bill and Harriet Elliston were active leaders of the Cracker Barrel. Along with John Brooks, Harriet Elliston was a member from the early years (perhaps from the beginning) through 1991, the date of the last known membership list.*

Concord Road neighbors: Dr. Charles and Betty Janeway, Charles and Barbara Cummings, Ralph and Betty Hower, and Albert and Eleanor Speare.

They also paid careful attention to planning for the future of the town. The following comment in the minutes is from a November 1953 meeting featuring guest speaker Frederick J. Adams, Professor of City Planning at MIT, on the topic "Planning Ahead in Weston."

The burning question for a town like Weston is how to keep its character as a rural community and still have the advantages of proximity to the center of employment. Any area of attractive undeveloped land within 20 miles of Boston faces development and expansion. It can be steered in the desired direction but not stopped by trying to keep the door shut."  
(10)

Members discussed 1954 by-law changes increasing the amount of land needed to build in most locations. In 1955, a meeting was devoted to the work of town planning consultant Allen Benjamin on land use and projected future growth.

Cracker Barrel members tended to be liberal on social issues. Bill Elliston's wife, Harriet, who was known for her progressive views and civil rights activism helped establish the Roxbury-Weston programs. In 1959, the minutes record a report by Cracker Barrel member Paul Hare, one of the organizers of the newly organized Fair Housing Practices Committee of Weston, who indicated that Weston had a "reputation of being high on the list of Boston suburbs for racial discrimination." (11) In the 1960s, the group discussed environmental issues and affordable housing.

## *Meetings*

Meetings were held in members' living rooms on Sunday evenings at 6:30 pm on an irregular schedule. In the 1950s, they were held every few weeks in the months leading up to Town Meeting and less frequently the rest of the year.

Members were generally admitted as couples, and meetings had a social aspect. John Brooks described the Cracker Barrel as a "very interesting, like-minded bunch [that] included a lot of our friends." They began each session with cocktails. Members were asked to leave a few dollars in the kitty to reimburse the homeowner. At one point the group discussed the optimum length of preliminary libations:

The time of beginning and ending meetings was then considered. We are on the horns of a dilemma; whether on the one hand we should expose ourselves to the temptation of delicious drinks for a preliminary hour, or on the other hand whether we have the character to stop at half an hour.  
(12)

Records suggest that they stuck with the full hour.



Each meeting had a chairman, a discussion topic, and, sometimes, knowledgeable guests such as town employees or consultants. During the discussion, members ate sandwiches brought from home in brown paper bags. In his autobiography, distinguished physician Dr. Charles Janeway wrote: "Meals were simple sandwiches, consistent with the conservative New England attitude. The politics were distinctly on the liberal side." (13)

Open meetings were held once or twice a year "to air topics of great moment at any appropriate time." At an open meeting in 1956, the chairman began by reading the names of all members and giving a brief statement about the group and its purpose. This suggests an effort to dispel the appearance of secrecy. In 1957, the group voted to have couples contribute \$1.00 every fall to pay for mailing expenses and the entertainment of guests at open meetings.

### *Choosing Cracker Barrel Members*

In the 1950s and 60s, the Cracker Barrel was very well organized. Typed minutes and attendance records were kept. Rules for election of new members were adopted in October 1953 and were still in use in November 1964, when it was explained: "names of prospective members will be presented by the membership committee at a meeting of the Crackerbarrel [sic]. If these names are accepted, members will be notified in writing and voting will take place at the following meeting." Voting was by secret ballot and required a ! majority of those present. (14)

In 1955, members discussed how to make the group more inclusive, perhaps by having a few members rotate out each year. According to the minutes: "This was received with the utmost horror." They pondered, "splitting the Cracker Barrel into two half barrels" but this was not favored. The final suggestion, to keep the existing group but hold a number of larger open meetings each year, was accepted. (15)

In 1958, the group addressed the question of what type of new members were desired: young and interested new residents or older people whose interest had been proven by their work in the town. Some thought the Cracker Barrel should be infused "not with a *drop* of young blood but with quite a transfusion; that the elder members should resign, or become emeriti with the privilege of coming to occasional meetings." According to the minutes, a vigorous elder member objected that he would "only be able to come to the *dull* meetings." (16)

While service on town boards did not preclude membership, some felt it advisable to resign. For example, when Eleanor Bumps became chair of the School Committee in 1960, she sent this letter of resignation:

The office which I now hold is unquestionably one of the most sensitive in town, and for that reason it seems wise for me to avoid identification

with any particular group. Because we find our associations with Cracker Barrel highly stimulating and rewarding, it is with real regret that we withdraw. (17)

### *Other groups*

At the meeting of November 10, 1957, the first mention is made of a “newly formed Group II,” with 18 members present as guests of the Cracker Barrel. It is unclear whether this was a formal offshoot from the original Cracker Barrel or a separately formed group, but it is referred to in 1961 as “our sister organization, Group Two.” (18) Apparently, no more exciting name was ever adopted. In January 12, 1958, the question was asked “have we got in touch with Group II on their suggestions of candidates?” In 1963 the minutes record that “The state of health of Cracker Barrel #2 causes us concern, nor could any quick remedies be suggested.” (19) A few months later, the group was described as “resurrected.” In 1964, the Cracker Barrel minutes make a point of saying that members of Group II should not be nominated to their group.

The minutes of October 1960 report on the new 40-member Weston Civic Association, a more public group that held open meetings in Town Hall:

It is further rumored that the Weston Civic Association as a group is against spending money; they have questioned whether it was necessary to have even an average library in the town; why Weston schools should have to be second to none; and have gone on record to state that the teachers’ salary schedule in Weston is high enough. . . (20)

The group studied town issues and put up candidates for office. At later meetings, the Cracker Barrel discussed the Weston Civic Association’s complaints about the high tax rate. Several Cracker Barrel members expressed the view that Weston residents got more for their tax money than in other towns. Members were urged to make town committees aware that “there are cadres supporting them who would be willing to help if needed; i.e. should rumor of battle looming on the school budget be true.” (21)

### *Finding Candidates for Town Office*

From the beginning, a primary goal of the Cracker Barrel was to find good candidates for town offices. Their “idealistic standards” included those who were “straight thinking, upright, honest, etc. etc, i.e. the need was for ‘good people.’” (22) Some candidates were Cracker Barrel members but this was by no means a requirement. At one meeting, the secretary noted with humor: “It is *not* the policy of the Cracker Barrel to hustle all new members into candidacy for Town offices. If occasionally new members become involved in such a situation, they do so at their own risk.” (23)

The Cracker Barrel did not endorse candidates as a group. Their policy is described at a 1958 meeting:

- a) No action as a pressure group
- b) No voting en bloc
- c) No sponsoring of candidates by the group, but
- d) an attempt to find good candidates and persuade them to run. (24)

At that time, nominations were made at a “Citizens’ Caucus” held before the March Town Meeting. The 1954 minutes describe a meeting in October to consider upcoming vacancies:

With lists in hand of the various offices that are to be filled in March, members considered whether it would be best to choose candidates specifically for each office or to set up a pool of good names in general to be drawn upon. It was decided to choose with specific offices in mind, and also to set aside a list of names for future reference.

The meeting then went into secret session, and taking the offices in turn, proceeded to discuss the records of incumbents and to suggest possible candidates, desirable and undesirable, for the offices held to be most important. No record of these discussions has been made, but it is possible to reveal that the offices in question are those of Selectman, Assessor, School Committee (two members), and Planning Board. (25)

In subsequent years, the Cracker Barrel kept a “Secret File” of names. If a preferred candidate was present in the room “the art of persuasion was exercised upon him.”

Members discussed the qualities important for particular positions, for example, Selectman:

There was general discussion of the great importance of the office, that the Board does not need a lawyer professionally, but does need an articulate man who can think clearly and express himself briefly, and that “two bad kinds of candidates may appear, either somebody without experience chosen merely for the sake of making a change, or somebody “safe” but without enterprise or strength. (26)

At another meeting, a member expressed the desire for “a resolute, forceful, possibly brash candidate . . .” (27)

At one meeting, it was announced that a member of the Park and Cemetery Commission would not be running again and a “down to earth candidate is needed. See Secret File for a few earthy names.” (28) For Planning Board, Hector Osmond had this to say:

. . . [the candidate] should not be involved in Real Estate, Architecture, or Construction since this might lead to a conflict of interests. In addition an essential qualification was pig-headedness, that is to say, strong-mindedness, to withstand the erosion of standards. A qualified, strong-minded woman might be very desirable.” (29)

Members did not always agree. Commenting in 1959, Jim Robbins remarked that “the Cracker Barrel had always agreed to disagree, and should continue to do so.” (30)

### *Topics of Town Concern*

In its first decade, the Cracker Barrel considered a wide range of topics, not limited to the following: the need for long range planning; population growth; recreational needs; proposed new zoning regulations; establishing a town forest; the new Weston Forest and Trail Association; the desirability of small industries for Weston; the proposed new building code; the library; and a proposed state park near Cat Rock in Weston, Waltham, and Lincoln. The potential benefit of switching to a Representative Town Meeting was brought up periodically throughout the two decades for which meeting minutes exist.

A large percentage of meetings were devoted to Weston schools. Members discussed education policies, grade configurations, salaries and advancement opportunities for teachers, and how to attract better teachers. They carefully reviewed architectural plans for each new school. In 1955, several meetings were devoted to the question of why so many residents sent their children to private schools. (31) The major issue facing residents in the mid-1950s was whether to build new elementary schools in a central location or scattered throughout the town. (32) (33) [See *WHS Bulletin*, Spring 2014]

### *Cracker Barrel in the 1960s*

A notice to the membership about an upcoming meeting in 1961 may have startled recipients:

When Cracker Barrel started some years ago there was a good deal of discontent with the way things were going in the town. Its origin was an almost spontaneous gathering of people who wanted to learn more about town affairs in order to vote and act more intelligently. For a number of years there never seemed to be a shortage of issues or enthusiasm.

Last winter, while the town of Weston continues to have growing pains, Cracker Barrel seemed to some of its members to be suffering from incipient senility. Although the symptoms were mild, the steering committee feels it is time for a careful diagnosis and appropriate treatment. (34)

At that time, total membership was 55, of whom 13 were away or inactive. The average attendance at the eight meetings was 22. A questionnaire was sent out.

At the subsequent meeting, there were “expressions of distress that anyone could conceive that Cracker Barrel might be suffering from incipient senility.” The

group agreed to have six regularly scheduled meetings, with the possibility of canceling one or more if a meeting was unnecessary.

In the 1960s, the group discussed fall-out shelters and Civil Defense; traffic issues; and Mass Broken Stone's request for a variance. In 1963, the Cracker Barrel sponsored a petition for a footpath paralleling Wellesley Street from the junior high (later Field School) to the high school — a rare example of group activism. Following the 1962 publication of Rachel Carson's book *Silent Spring*, environmental issues such as spraying with pesticides and mosquito control were discussed at numerous meetings, with presentations by expert guests.

In December 1963, the Cracker Barrel topic was "our town and its needs versus the needs of the region." The guest speaker was Lincoln resident Robert Wood, MIT professor of political science and author of *Suburbia: Its People and Their Politics* (1958). He noted: "this question was part of the Rt. 128 Crisis Syndrome, producing characteristically psychopathic anxiety complexes:"

For the communities it is a choice of style. The choices are real . . . There is the Love-Thy-Neighbor community that will take on anything, houses, stores, industries, and treats ethical issues in classic supply and demand terms. There is the Garrison Suburb which believes that the last good suburbanite arrived yesterday, and has a curiously un-American way of station wagon socialism. There is the civilized suburb. In operation it fashions its strategy for continuing the past, but is open to change and the future. (35).

Regarding whether the town should try to attract more industry to help lower the tax rate, Wood quipped that the ideal industry "looks like a country club, has a product that smells like Channel #5, and is taken away by night by station wagon." (36)

In 1964, town-planning consultant Charles Downe was asked about housing for lower income groups, specifically "what the town ought to do, and to what extent it is wise to be an island of high cost housing with a frozen minimum of low cost houses?" There was a concern about "freezing population groups into segregated areas." (37) Downe's 1965 Master Plan was discussed on February 12, 1967. One of his major suggestions — construction of a shopping street between Boston Post Road and the by-pass, from Center Street to Colpitts Road — was never implemented, nor were his recommendations for more and wider thoroughfares throughout the town.

Ward Carter, the town's Executive Secretary, was a Cracker Barrel member from 1954 to at least 1971. In 1964 he was asked to characterize new Weston residents. He said most are in "professional or sales work" with a wide spread in incomes from "surprisingly low to surprisingly high," and that per capital taxes were \$47 higher in Weston than any other Massachusetts community. About 80 new houses were being built per year, with transiency high in newer developments in the south part of town. (38)

In November 1965, new member Imogene Fish and long-time member Bill Elliston reported on the Roxbury-Weston summer camp program as follows: “Rumors opposed to the program could not be tracked down to other than an anonymous ‘they,’ and both the Weston and Roxbury groups . . . hope it will be repeated next summer.” (39) At the meeting of November 6, 1966, there was a report on the School Committee meeting considering adoption of the METCO program and concern that misconceptions that had developed.

Topics for the second half of the 1960s included the proposal for a new library at Lamson Park [Note: this was ultimately defeated at TM, see *Weston Historical Society Bulletin*, Fall 2014]; the Special Sewerage Study Committee, another contentious issue [see *WHSB*, Spring 2014]; and south side fire station. Also discussed was the Blake-Fitzgerald property, a large tract on the south side that the Planning Board favored rezoning to Limited Industrial (location of present Liberty Mutual buildings); the proposal for a stadium on the Blake property; elderly and low cost housing; and the establishment of a Weston Historical Commission

## *The 1970s*

The Cracker Barrel reached its peak size in 1971, with 73 on the membership list. At the first meeting that year, the minutes record that the Cracker Barrel was “greatly refreshed and rejuvenated by the addition of an impressive collection of new and decorative members.” (40). Among them were Joan and Jim Vernon, Harold and Betsy Hestnes, Jane and Bob Danforth, Lee and Rhoda Cohen, and John and Marty Fiske.

Discussion topics in the 1970s included of the future of the Weston College building and land; loss of the Nickerson well to pollution; the annual cost for MDC water; and the turbidity of the town pool and its possible closure by the state. Members in the late 1970s discussed sewers; condominiums; elderly housing; snow emergencies and equipment; and the youth commission. The group raised the bar contribution to \$1.50. Bill Elliston made a suggestion that there be no guests on “controversial evenings.”

A detailed memorandum sent to members in November 1975 suggests that someone was attempting to whip the organization into shape. The Steering Committee was charged with setting up the meeting schedule, which at that time was four meetings per year: Opening Fall Meeting, Candidates, Budget and Special Issues, and Warrant Articles. The Steering Committee was to arrange for the host home, and the host would provide a cash bar, coffee, and optional dessert. The memorandum informed prospective hosts on what was needed for the bar: “Whiskey Sours (very popular), 1 Scotch, 1 Bourbon, 1 Gin, 1 Vodka, and Sherry.” The expected contribution was \$1.00 per person.



*By all accounts it was Joan Vernon who kept the Cracker Barrel alive in its last decade. According to Rip Hastings: "She had the best interests of the town at heart . . . no one cared more than she did."*

## ***The 1980s***

At a meeting in February 1982, the group discussed the Proposition 2 "override". All nine members of the Finance Committee were present. Four were members of the Cracker Barrel, including the Chairman. Such a meeting would probably not be legal under today's Open Meeting Laws.

A notice dated 1985 reported that membership was down and there followed the usual discussion of the need for "new, young

(sorry about that) blood."(41) The organization was definitely alive and well in 1989, as indicated in this account from Ann Leibowitz of her run for selectman in 1989:

I had never heard of Crackerbarrel [sic] until I was nearing completion of my second (and those days, last) term on the FinCom, when I was invited to lunch by Jean Thurston, and assumed she was going to try to get me to stay on the FinCom. I was quite taken aback when she announced, "we want you to run for Selectman." My immediate question to her was, "And who is 'we'?" Her answer was that "we" are a group of former town officials-- Selectmen, Planning Board members, ConCom members and concerned citizens who periodically met to identify and support candidates for Town office. When I responded that as a full-time working mother . . . I couldn't imagine having the time to campaign; also that I sort of gagged asking people directly for their votes, let alone their money to finance even a modest run. "Don't worry," she said. "We take care of all of that."

And they did. The first step was for me to actually meet with the Crackerbarrel which, by hindsight, was probably an interview; we met at Joan Vernon's home one evening-- probably around 20 people, and talked over wine and cheese. . . (I distinctly recall . . . a jar set out for financial contributions that people kicked into. . . Jean told me not to contribute-- I was a "guest."). They assigned me . . . a "campaign and finance manager" and subsequently arranged coffees at homes of Crackerbarrel members and others . . . All I had to do was show up, speak for a few minutes, and answer questions.





*(L-r) Selectmen Elizabeth Nichols, Ann Leibowitz, and Joseph Mullin with Ward Carter, the town's first Executive Secretary, c. 1993. Ward and Constance Carter were Cracker Barrel members from 1954 at least through 1971. (Courtesy Weston Historical Society)*

I was, frankly, dazzled and inspired by this group of people, most of whom I barely knew if at all, who knocked themselves out to get the best people they could find for what they saw as the town's long-term best interest. (42)

### ***“It just stopped meeting”***

By all accounts, it was Joan Vernon who kept the organization going in its last decade or two. Jim and Joan Vernon joined the group in 1970 or 1971. Joan served as selectman from 1974 to 1980 and later held other positions in town government. In a recent interview, former selectman Rip Hastings recalled her “ongoing and persistent influence” working to “take care of the town.” According to Hastings:

She was one of those people most interested and active in ensuring that the town was run well. She had the best interests of the town at heart. It was not about her. No one cared more than she did and had the ability to influence the trajectory of the town. She encouraged people to run. (43)

Ann Leibowitz recalled:

By the time I encountered it, I don't think anyone was taking minutes, and I think it continued to meet primarily at the instigation of Joan

Vernon. I don't think it ever actually formally "disbanded." It simply ceased to meet, in part because its founders moved away or otherwise passed on. (44)

According to Jean Thurston, a Cracker Barrel member who served as selectman from 1980 to 1989, "The meetings were erratic at the end. There just wasn't that much interest anymore" and the group "sort of died of itself." Deb Ecker recalled asking Joan Vernon "aren't you going to have any more meetings?"

Leibowitz believes that an unfavorable story in the *Town Crier* sometime in the early 1990s may have been the "one big coffin nail:"

As I recall, it wasn't exactly inaccurate, but neither was it flattering; it definitely emphasized the "non-democratic" aspects of a small group of people in Weston. The press, after all, is not exactly enamored of non-public meetings bearing on town government. (45)

The author was unable to find a *Town Crier* story but did find the 1995 "Back Room Politics" article quoted on page 32. In it, Joan Vernon is said to laugh at the "cloak and dagger" characterization. She is quoted as saying that the Cracker Barrel had been defunct for about three years, suggesting an ending date around 1992.

While some may find fault in its closed-door sessions and perceived elitism, Ann Leibowitz summed up her feeling about the Cracker Barrel in this way:

My bottom line: I think Weston was very fortunate to have had Crackerbarrel for as long as we did. We had good, non-political people in office to whom it otherwise never would have occurred to run. In the unlikely event such a group were to try to reconvene, I'd be right there with them. (46)

## *Footnotes*

(1) *Weston TAB*, Feb. 21, 1995. (2) Minutes of the Cracker Barrel, Feb. 5, 1956, WHS collection. (3) Minutes, Feb. 10, 1957. (4) Email to Pam Fox, Feb. 9, 2017. (5) May 7, 1961. (6) Feb. 10, 1957. (7) April 13, 1958. (8) *Memoirs: John Graham Brooks*, Vol. I, 2011, 293. (9) Email from Deborah Ecker, Feb. 27, 2017. (10) Nov. 22, 1953. (11) Nov. 8, 1959. (12) Feb. 10, 1957. (13) *Pediatrician to the World's Children* by Dr. Charles Janeway, 136. (14) Nov. 1, 1964. (15) Feb. 13, 1955. (16) April 13, 1958. (17) May 6, 1960. (18) Oct. 22, 1961. (19) Jan. 6, 1963. (20) Oct. 2, 1960. (21) Feb. 5, 1961. (22) Dec. 1957. (23) Jan. 17, 1954. (24) Dec. 7, 1958. (25) Oct. 24, 1954. (26) Jan. 15, 1956. (27) Dec. 4, 1955. (28) Jan. 15, 1956. (29) Dec. 8, 1957. (30) Jan. 11, 1959. (31) Jan. 16 and Feb. 13 1955. (32) April 29, 1956. (33) Oct. 7, 1956. (34) Oct. 22, 1961. (35) Dec. (date not given) 1963. (36) *Ibid.* (37) May 24, 1964. (38) Nov. 2, 1964. (39) Nov. 7, 1965. (40) Jan. 31, 1971. (41) March 1985. (42) Email, Ann Leibowitz to Pam Fox, Feb. 9, 2017. (43) Rip Hastings, telephone interview with Pam Fox, Feb. 12, 2017. (44) Leibowitz email, *op.cit.* (45) *Ibid.*



## The Town Center Master Plan

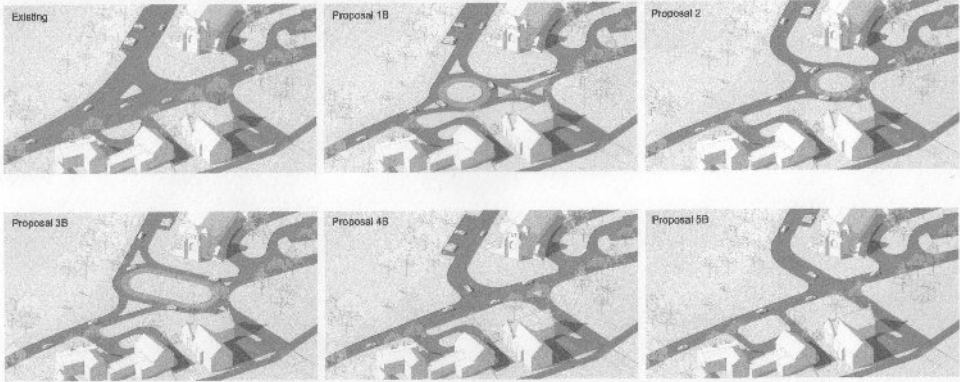
It has been a little more a century since Weston residents adopted the Town Improvement Plan that created the town green. At the November 29, 2016, Special Town Meeting, voters approved design and engineering fees for Town Center “Level Service Improvements” and the “Master Plan” concept. The vote for the “Master Plan Plus” failed by a small margin to win the required two-thirds vote.

The Level Service Improvements involve repairing curbs, streets, and sidewalks and making the required handicap accessibility and drainage upgrades. The Master Plan will create more continuous and ample sidewalks, safer crosswalks, new open space, and traffic-calming strategies. The Master Plan Plus, which was not approved, would have included all of the above as well as burying the utilities, removing poles, and planting new trees along Boston Post Road between School Street and Colpitts Road.

The concept plan shown above and presented at Town Meeting is not final. Design and engineering work are now underway. The most notable feature is the creation of two small parks. The proposed “Town Square,” park, which can be seen in the rendering above, is designed as a plaza with a trellis, brick paving, and moveable tables and chairs. The proposed “Knox Park,” with a small lawn and new flowers and trees, would be created by reducing the width of the intersection where Townhouse Road meets Boston Post Road.

The work is being done by Utile, a Boston architecture and planning firm, in conjunction with landscape architect Skip Burke of Richard Burke Associates.

## Church and School Streets Comparison



The diagrams above, done in 2016 by the consulting firm Utile, show the existing conditions (top left) at the intersection of Boston Post Road, School Street, and Church Street, along with five alternate configurations for this problem intersection. In 1913, the Town Improvement Plan created the town green and new Townhouse Road but made only small improvements at this intersection. (see pages 17-18)

### *With Grateful Thanks*

To Betsy Kaden and the “Friendly Singers” for performing at the WHS Annual Meeting program about the Weston Friendly Society. With Bonnie Dunham on the piano, eight talented Friendly Society alumnae sang six songs from three original Friendly Society musicals. Performing were Betsy Kaden, organizer and director, Holly Sullivan, Margie Quinlan, Philippa Condakes, Peter Condakes, Steve Condakes, David Charpie, and Rob Kulow. The program can be viewed on the Weston Media Channel, <https://vimeo.com/199870635>.

To Weston Friendly Society for the donation of institutional records, programs, photographs, posters, ceramic tiles, and other documents and memorabilia.

To Inge Thorn Engler for Boy Scout uniforms and accessories from Troop 157.

To Charles Morgan for a copy of his 2016 book *The Ancestry of Alice Rand and Siblings*, which includes photographs from the WHS collection.

To Tom Selldorff for his copy of the script for the 1971 original Friendly Society musical *Dump*.

To Russell Chamberlin for the gift of a young ladies autograph book belonging to his grandmother, Helen Cutter Tyler.

To Anna Wolf for a framed copy of the 1875 *Atlas of Middlesex County* map of Weston.

## **Tavern Proposal to be Voted at May Town Meeting**

Voters at May Town Meeting will be asked to approve \$630,000 in design funds for the adaptive reuse of the Josiah Smith Tavern and Barn. The money will come from Community Preservation Act (CPA) funds.

The proposal by the non-profit Friends of the Josiah Smith Tavern will provide rental space in the tavern for the Weston Historical Society and Women's Community League and an office for Weston Forest and Trail Association. There will be a 105-seat restaurant in the barn and connector operated by the successful Webber Restaurant Group. The second floor ballroom will be available for community and tenant use. The restaurant is smaller than earlier proposals, allowing for a smaller parking lot that will keep the on-site parking away from St. Julia's Church. Ownership of the tavern will remain with the town. The restaurant operator will pay both taxes and rental fees sufficient to pay for maintenance and return money to the town.

**Please vote to support this well-thought-out plan  
to restore and reuse one of Weston's  
most important historic buildings.**

### **OFFICERS, WESTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY 2016-17**

President: Pamela W. Fox

Co-Vice Presidents: Tania Deary and Tom Friedlander

Co-Secretaries: Mary Marder and Robin Reisman

Co-Treasurers: David Cail and Pam Riffin

Membership Chair: Tom Friedlander

*Bulletin* Editor: Pamela W. Fox

Webmaster: Robin Reisman

### **BOARD OF DIRECTORS**

Tom Brome, Mark Curelop, Tony Davies, Alan Day, Rebekah Gardiner, Liz Hochberger, Nancy Hughes, Susan Littlefield, Lenore Lobel, Robin Strickman, Syamala Swaminathan, and Molly Varnau. Madeleine Mullin, Liaison to Weston Public Library. WHS, P.O. Box 343, Weston, MA 02493. [Info@westonhistory.org](mailto:Info@westonhistory.org). ISSN 1083-9712.

Membership dues: Individual \$25, Family \$50, Contributing \$50, Supporting \$100+, Life membership \$500. Tax deductible contributions and bequests to the Endowment Fund are welcome. Statements and/or opinions are not necessarily those of the editor or Weston Historical Society.