

# Old Stone News

*The Newsletter of  
The West Boylston  
Historical Society  
Fall 2014  
Volume 17, Number 2*

## MEMBERSHIP

The dues for the calendar year 2015 are payable by January 1, 2015, but will be accepted any time prior to that date. An envelope is included for your convenience. We appreciate your continued support of the society and its programs.

## CONTACT INFORMATION

[www.wbhistory.org](http://www.wbhistory.org)  
[Bigelow@wbhistory.org](mailto:Bigelow@wbhistory.org)

We would very much like to have everyone's email address so as to notify you of changes when we need to reach you quickly and efficiently. It also saves us time and money. Please share. We promise not to pass them out.

## BUILDING AND GROUNDS

The house committee, with Don's assistance, has been busy with mowing and keeping our building in good shape. Dwight has restored the well house. Norman is in the process of redoing the attic windows. The committee is currently in the process of restoring the bench from Thomas Hall.



We are hoping to paint the front of the Tavern this fall.

## MISSION STATEMENT

"The West Boylston Historical Society collects, preserves and honors the history of the Town through programs, exhibitions, publications and maintenance of the historic Bigelow Tavern as its headquarters and museum."

## From the President

It has been, by most accounts, a very nice summer, weather wise. Change is coming though, if this week is any indication and with that activities pick up at the society.

Thursdays have been quiet some weeks and busy, busy others. On July 12<sup>th</sup> the society took part in the Garden Tour sponsored by the Friend's of the Beaman Library. It was a beautiful day and a lot of people stopped by to see our collection of period plants and to take advantage of touring the tavern and the barn. Thanks goes to Barbara Deschenes, Dwight and Norman Goodale and David Lindberg for helping me out at this event. The program committee has been hard at work planning for the coming year. There are a number of other events of interest highlighted in the newsletter that we want to make you aware of. We have a couple of new columns in addition to Steve Carlson's "History by the Inch". David Lindberg has written a very informative piece on the GAR Monument in the Cemetery and Barbara Deschenes has submitted one of Mary Cooke's articles, always an interesting read. Let us know what you think.

Our Fundraiser this year will be a "Basket Raffle" on October 4, 2014. Barbara Deschenes and Jane Harrington are co chairing this endeavor. You will find more information in this mailing stating what you can do to help. We will be set up on the Gazebo Common as part of the Art's Foundation Fall Festival. In conjunction with this, we will again have an Antique and Collectable Car Show at the Historical Society as it was a great success last year, and also the society will have a table selling our wares. We need your support to make this a success whether you are donating to the basket raffle or manning a table the day of the event. Thank you in advance for your help.

We look forward to seeing you in the coming year. Do note the changes in some program dates as we try to accommodate speaker's schedules. See you soon.

Beverly K. Goodale

## Historical Happenings

**Sept. 6<sup>th</sup> - 2 pm** The Beaman Memorial Library and the West Boylston Historical Society are leading a Historical walk of West Boylston center. Sign up at the library. Approximately 1 hour. Wear comfortable shoes.

**Sept. 7<sup>th</sup> - 10 am** Worcester Revolution of 1774 commemorating the 240 anniversary of that event. Go to: [www.revolution1774.org](http://www.revolution1774.org) for full schedule including time of events.

**Sept 14<sup>th</sup> - 2 pm** At the Boylston Historical Society, Mary Fuhrer is speaking about her new book "Community in Crisis", the Trials and Transformation of Boylston; 1815-1848

**Oct. 1<sup>st</sup> - 7 pm** West Boylston Society Meeting "Growing up in West Boylston" Featuring Janet Buck, Charles, Dwight and Norman Goodale.

**Oct. 4<sup>th</sup> - 10 am - 4 pm** - West Boylston Historical Society Fundraiser and the WB Arts Foundation Fall Festival and Scarecrow Contest, Gazebo Common

**Nov 1<sup>st</sup>** - West Boylston Historical Society Trip (details to follow at later date)

**Nov. 30<sup>th</sup>** - Bigelow Tavern Open House and Tree Lighting

**Most of these events are free**

## CURATORS CORNER

A collection of Record's of Deeds from 1967 - 2010 has been given to the society by the Town Clerk's office. This will be a great resource for people researching their homes and other properties in town.

Work continues on our inventory and documentation of society holdings.



"Potty Chair"  
gift of Lou Phelps Hawley  
to the WBHS

Be sure to check the Historical Society website for up to date information at:

[www.wbhistory.org](http://www.wbhistory.org).



## HISTORY BY THE INCH



The Beaman oak tree, or as it was familiarly called the "old white oak" was the oldest boundary line in West Boylston, being used as a boundary line for over 250 years before it was cut down. It stood on the road going from West Boylston to Boylston opposite the Beaman cemetery on the boundary of the Beaman farm. The tree measured in circumference at the base 27 feet, its height was 75 feet and its branches covered over 100 feet.

The Beaman oak stood in the heart of the metropolitan district, and on January 21, 1902 at 10:30 a.m., it was cut down by order of the metropolitan water and sewer board. When cut the tree had as near as could be counted 227 rings, many of the rings could only be seen with the aid of a magnifying glass because they were only the width of a hair.

The trees that were cut down to make way for the reservoir were cut at three and a half feet from the ground so the stumps could be extracted from the ground, however; the Beaman oak tree was cut much higher, because legend had it that Major Ezra Beaman filled the base of the oak tree with huge iron spikes to prevent "against the axe of any future destroyers". When the tree was cut down there was no trace of any iron spikes that could be found.

On July 5, 1902, Joseph L. Howe and his son Ernest Howe, cut up the Beaman oak onto quartered oak planks. Joseph Howe stated that while he found no spikes, he struck some pretty big nails, large enough to warrant him in sawing the next plank three inches thick.

The tree itself was owned by the ladies of the Dorcas society of the West Boylston First Congregational Church. The Dorcas society proposed to put the wood of the tree to many good uses. Some of the wood was used in the pulpit furnishings and some in the parlor and mantel of the new Congregational church that was built on the town common. The Dorcas society received many orders from people in Boston, Worcester and West Boylston for souvenir pieces; which included request for canes, table tops, small tables, chairs, gavels, toothpick holders, etc, to which all souvenir pieces were sold for the benefit of the Dorcas society.

Tracing the history of the tree still earlier in time was once included in the Davenport grant. The Davenport grant, contained over 600 acres, and it is said that the starting point of the grant was at the "old white oak". The Davenport grant was a tract of land granted by the General Court of Massachusetts to Capt. Richard Davenport in 1659 in consideration of public service in the Indian wars.

In 1746, Jabez Beaman bought a large tract of land which was part of the Davenport grant and included the land to which the oak tree stood. At Jabez's death in 1757, he was succeeded by his son Major Ezra Beaman, the founder of West Boylston. The oak tree was one of the boundary lines of the Ezra Beaman farm. Major Ezra Beaman was closely connected to the early history of West Boylston and identified himself in the life of the first church in West Boylston, located on the town common where the present Congregational church now stands.

The Dorcas society having in mind the history of the oak tree, both in regard to the Davenport grant of land and the history of Major Ezra Beaman part in the formation of establishing the first church of West Boylston; decided to purchase the tree from the Metropolitan Water and Sewer Board. The society spoke to William N. Davenport, secretary of the metropolitan water board,(who also is an ancestor of the said Davenport family, who in his childhood days played under the oak tree), and Hiram A. Miller, engineer of the metropolitan water board presented the oak tree to the Dorcas society to use for the benefit of the society. The committee in charge of the tree was George W.Reed, Mrs. Waldo B. Howe and Mrs. M.A. Cook.

The "Beaman Oak" became the official town seal and still remains so today.

Steven Carlson, Historian

## LOOKING BACK

### *Excerpts taken from the Mary Cook scrapbook collection*

April 6, 1900

#### DORCAS SOCIETY HAS MOCK TOWN MEETING

The Dorcas Society of the Congregational Church had its mock town meeting last night in Thomas Hall. At 8:00 the crier announced that the meeting was about to begin by the ringing of a large dinner bell and the women of the Dorcas Society filed into the hall in costumes, rich and rare, antique and unique and took their seats on the platform.

The town clerk, Miss Carrie Holmes, called the meeting to order and proceeded to read the warrant when 20 of the town fathers, each with a high hat and cane, came into the hall in single file, marched to the stage and after a low bow to the members of the society, retired. This unlooked for event broke up the meeting for some time but was soon restored to order. After the reading of the warrant Miss Susie Jewell was chosen moderator and the articles of the warrant were taken up. The reports of the officers of the society were read and accepted.

During the discussion of the articles many local hits and jokes were sprung on the men of West Boylston. The chief sufferers were civil engineers of the water board and their agent F.H. Baldwin as well as E. A. Cowee, Louis Cutting and the youths and maidens of West Boylston. The officers of the water board also came in for a good share of friendly fun. The bantering was taken good naturedly. The meeting adjourned at 10:00.

Those taking part in the meeting were Mrs. W.T. Holmes, Mrs. Ellen Warren, Mrs. M.E. Kidder, Mrs. Joseph L. Howe, Mrs. Waldo B. Howe, Mrs. S.H. Spooner, Mrs. W.E. Parker, Mrs. John Smith, Mrs. W.E. Robbins, Mrs. F.H. Baldwin, Susie Jewell, Jessie Pierce, May Robbins, Helen Warner, Cora Peck, Marguerite Burns, Edna Baldwin, Fannie Hair, Louise Smith, Ruth Harrington, Nellie Reed and Mabel Greely.

Barbara Deschenes

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## CIVIL WAR PROFILES

*By Dave Lindberg, Civil War Historian*

Drive through Mount Vernon Cemetery and you will come upon the splendid Civil War monument, topped by a stone sentinel keeping eternal watch over his fallen comrades. The monument was erected in 1895 by the Ladies Relief Corps "To honor the men of West Boylston who fought to save the Union." The monument was placed in the center of a 20-grave cemetery lot established by the town in 1868. Ownership was transferred to the Grand Army of the Republic (GAR) in 1890. Only 3 Union veterans are buried in the lot.

The words "George D. Wells GAR Post 28 Dept. of Mass." are engraved on the monument. GAR Post 28 refers to West Boylston's Grand Army of the Republic post, the 28<sup>th</sup> post formed in Massachusetts following the war. The GAR was a fraternal organization, a forerunner to today's American Legion and Veterans of Foreign Wars, which allowed veterans to network and maintain connections with each other. But who was George D. Wells? Why was Post 28 named in his honor? And who are the Union soldiers buried in the GAR lot?

**George Duncan Wells** was not a son of West Boylston. He was born in Greenfield, Massachusetts, on August 21, 1826, and graduated from Harvard Law School in 1848. He was quick to enlist when the Civil War broke out and was appointed a

lieutenant in the 1<sup>st</sup> Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry Regiment and participated in the First Battle of Bull Run and the Peninsula Campaign. In July 1862, Wells was promoted to colonel and given command of the newly formed 34<sup>th</sup> Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry Regiment which was recruited from the 5 western counties of Massachusetts and included nearly two dozen West Boylston volunteers.

He excelled as regimental commander and was promoted to brigade command in May 1864, leading the 1<sup>st</sup> Brigade of the 1<sup>st</sup> Division, VIII Army Corps in the Shenandoah Valley campaigns. Wells fought in the Battles of Piedmont, Third Winchester, and Fisher's Hill. Just before the Battle of Cedar Creek, Wells was leading his brigade, including the 34<sup>th</sup> Massachusetts, in a reconnaissance mission near Hupp's Hill when they came under fire from Confederate troops. The 1<sup>st</sup> Brigade, especially the 34<sup>th</sup> Massachusetts, was badly hit. Wells was mounted and directing the brigade when a rifle ball hit him just below his breastbone and he fell mortally wounded. His body was recovered and returned home to Greenfield for burial in Green River Cemetery. He was posthumously promoted to Brigadier General for "Gallant and distinguished services at the battle of Cedar Creek, VA."

Wells' men deeply mourned his death. Captain Charles Elwell wrote of him, "God only knows how tenderly and sincerely we all loved him and how grieved and heart stricken we are at his loss. The 34<sup>th</sup> has lost its idol; and the service of one of the best officers that ever stood before the enemy." Following the war a monument honoring the 34<sup>th</sup> Massachusetts Volunteers was erected in the National Cemetery in Winchester, VA. The monument, although dedicated to the whole regiment, includes a large bronze bust of Brigadier General Wells.

GAR Posts were assigned a sequential number based on their admission into the State's GAR organization and most posts held informal names honoring comrades, battles, or commanders. The surviving West Boylston veterans of the 34<sup>th</sup> Massachusetts and the charter members of Post 28 honored the beloved General Wells by naming Post 28 in his memory.

There are 114 Civil War soldiers buried in West Boylston cemeteries. However, only three were laid to rest in the Grand Army of the Republic lot established in 1868.

The first to be buried was **Private Edwin Hobson**. Edwin was born in Maine around 1838. He was listed in the 1860 census living in Wiscasset, ME, with his parents and siblings. By 1862 he was working as a mill operator in West Boylston when he enlisted in the 42<sup>nd</sup> Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry. He was discharged after nine months of service in the New Orleans, LA, area. One year later he enlisted in the 4<sup>th</sup> Massachusetts Heavy Artillery and served garrison duty in the Washington, DC area until final discharge from service in June 1865. Sadly, he passed away only three years later at the age of 30.

**Private John Jennings** was born in Massachusetts around 1820. The 1860 census shows him living and working as a porter in a Clinton, MA, hotel. He enlisted in the 21<sup>st</sup> Massachusetts Infantry Regiment in July 1861, shortly after hostilities broke out. The Massachusetts Adjutant General's Report indicates John was 42 years old and working as a farmer in West Boylston at the time of enlistment. He would be one of the oldest volunteers from town. During his tenure, the 21<sup>st</sup> Massachusetts saw action in several bloody battles including 2<sup>nd</sup> Bull Run, South Mountain and Antietam. He was discharged as disabled in November 1862. The AG's report does not include details of his disability, but he may well have suffered battle wounds. He later enlisted in the Veterans' Relief Corps. John passed away in 1889 at the age of 69.

The last Union soldier to be buried in the GAR lot was **Private Henry Knight**. Henry was born in the Mittineague neighborhood of West Springfield, MA, in 1840. In June 1861, he enlisted in the 10<sup>th</sup> Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry Regiment. The 10<sup>th</sup> participated in most of the heated actions of the Civil War including Fredericksburg, Antietam, Gettysburg, Chancellorsville, the Wilderness, and Cold Harbor. The 10<sup>th</sup> Mass was held in reserve during the Battle of Gettysburg when it came under the artillery barrage that preceded Pickett's Charge. Henry was wounded by a shell fragment, but recovered and served out his enlistment in July 1864. Two months later he enlisted in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Massachusetts Heavy Artillery and served garrison duty in coastal North Carolina until war's end. Henry passed away in August 1889 at the age of 50.

Learn more about West Boylston's Civil War history. Dave Lindberg will present a program about the life of **Sergeant Thomas Plunkett**, a West Boylston soldier who was awarded the Medal of Honor for his actions during the Battle of Fredericksburg.

**WHERE:** Beaman Memorial Library **WHEN:** Tuesday, September 23<sup>rd</sup> @ 6:30 PM

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## Calendars

2015 WB Calendar will be available for purchase at the Fall Festival October 4th

## **Coming Events**

### **Wednesday, Oct. 1, 2014**

7 p.m. at the Bigelow Tavern

**A Look Back – Round Table Reminisces of West Boylston**  
**Four “Old Timers” Look Back – Janet Buck, Charles Goodale, Dwight Goodale, Norm Goodale**  
Plus movies of West Boylston in the 1920s, 1930s – “The Ugliers”  
Bring your old pictures & yearbooks

### **Saturday, Oct. 4, 2014**

9 a.m. – 3 p.m.

#### **Historical Society Fall Festival**

Bigelow Tavern Open House & Table on Common

### **Saturday, Nov. 1, 2014**

2:30 p.m. sharp at the Bigelow Tavern

**Culinary Arts Museum, Johnson & Wales University, Providence**  
Dinner following at **Wright’s Farm Restaurant, R.I.**

### **Sunday, Nov. 30, 2014**

3-5 p.m.

#### **Bigelow Tavern Holiday Open House**

65 Worcester St.

**Lighting of Christmas Tree on the Common immediately following**  
Hosts/Hostesses – Board of Directors

### **Wednesday, March 4, 2015**

7 p.m. at the Bigelow Tavern

#### **WWII Experiences – Battle of the Bulge & The Wereth 11**

Christian de Marcken, Battle of the Bulge Historian

**To commemorate the 70<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the end of WWII**

### **Wednesday, April 8, 2015**

7 p.m. at the Bigelow Tavern

#### **Letters to Home – Civil War Remembrances – John Emerson Anderson**

David Lindberg, Civil War Historian

### **Wednesday, May 6, 2015**

5:30 p.m. at The MANOR

#### **Annual Dinner Meeting**

**Patriots of Liberty – Betsy Ross, Deborah Sampson, Elizabeth Cady Stanton & Amelia Earhart**  
Patty Carver – Creator & Performer of “This Old Hat”, original musical, “Women Patriots of American History”