

The Chronicle Quarterly

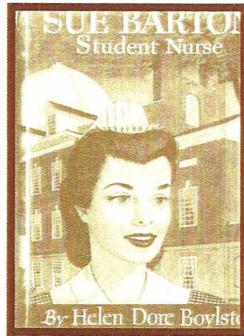
Weston Historical Society

Summer 2007

Volume 28 No 2

HELEN DORE BOYLSTON NURSE, WRITER, & WOMAN OF ADVENTURE

“The train began to move at last. Sue leaned forward, her red curls crushed against the windowpane, and looked back to where her father and mother and Ted stood on the station platform. Their faces were growing smaller. Sue’s resolute young mouth quivered suddenly, and her eyes misted.”



These were the words of Sue Barton Student Nurse, written by Helen Dore Boylston. This was the first book in a series of seven chronicling the life of Sue Barton from her days as a nurse, published between 1936 and 1953. They have become classics for young adult readers and reveal an amazing portrait of the feelings, hopes, ambitions, sadness, and learnings of a young girl.

The books were based on the life of Helen Dore Boylston who lived right here in Weston for a good many years. She was born in Portsmouth, New Hampshire on April 4, 1895 and spent a happy childhood there. She attended Simmons College in Boston and after one year at Simmons she

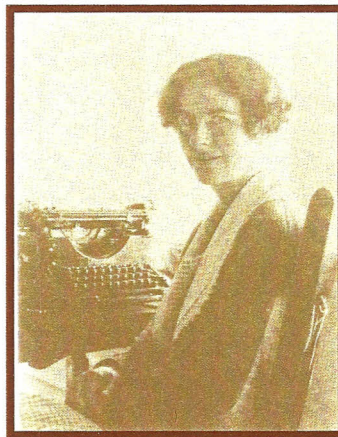
attended Massachusetts General Hospital School of Nursing. She graduated in 1915, promptly enlisted in the Harvard Medical Unit, and served as an anesthesiologist with the British Expeditionary Force in France During World War I, achieving the rank of captain. Her first book “Sister; the War Diary of a Nurse,” published in 1927, detailed her wartime experiences.

After the Armistice of November 11, 1918, Miss Boylston joined the Red Cross and spent several years in Europe, living and working in Albania, Germany, and Italy. During this time she met Rose Wilder Lane, daughter of Laura Ingalls Wilder (author of the Little House books). Ms. Lane was a reporter covering the postwar reconstruction, and the two women became fast friends.

Upon her return to the states, Ms. Boylston served as the head of an

outpatient department and an instructor in anesthesiology back at Massachusetts General, and also worked as a psychiatric nurse in New York City. She was also a head nurse in a Connecticut hospital. In the late 1920s she began writing and publishing some of her wartime memoirs, as well as stories and magazine articles.

Drawing on her experiences as a nurse, her portrayal of Sue Barton is extremely realistic and poignant. In discussing the most important thing a nurse can do with her fellow students, Sue exclaimed: “The



patient’s attitude.” “When people are sick they need something to steady them – some – some idea. It depends on the person. Maybe it is just being a good sport, or a noble martyr, or – or thinking they will

get well twice as quickly if they put their mind to it. You can help them think the way they want to. Nobody likes being frightened, or



Helen Dore Boylston Continued

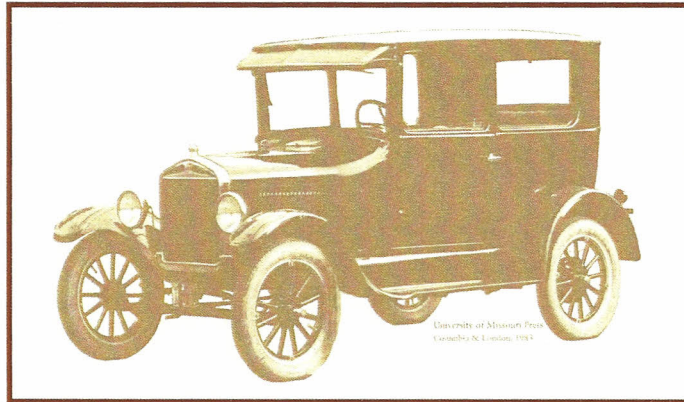
bored, or terribly nervous. They (the patient) always try to hang on to something, and if you pay attention and find out what it is you can encourage them along that line. If they haven't anything to steady them they're miserable, no matter how good a bath you can give, or how many stories you tell them. If they have something to steady them, then the other things just make being sick that much easier." Ms Boylston's true feelings of how things should be and her unwavering belief in people's goodness comes across the pages as if she were speaking directly to you.

In 1926 Helen and her friend Rose Wilder Lane, along with their French maid, decided to take a trip across Europe in a Model T they named Zenobia. The account of their travels is one of optimism and humor. It is hard to believe that two women in that day and age would even take on such a trip alone. They went from Paris to Albania and each wrote about the experience in a book "Travels With Zenobia". The book was written in a diary-like fashion with notes and observations from Rose and then from Troub - Helen's nickname - short for Trouble.

On August 20, 1925, Rose and Helen began their journey from Paris to Albania in a Model T Ford. Along their many stops people took them for German women rather than Americans. Near the end of their trip they learned that the reason for this misjudgment was that only German women would

have ever been driving alone in a car during those years.

Their fond memories of the trip not only included the sights they saw and the people they met along the way, but Troub's memories of



Zenobia, the car. She writes "Today, almost all day, we climbed dreadful mountains, and the faithful Zenobia, struggled and perspired and panted and even shed rusty tears from her radiator." They often stopped to let the car rest and give it oil and water.

Rose writes a very funny passage about asking directions in Italy. She says that it is better than a vaudeville show. "Troub: Please signore, is this the way to Spezia. Man: Spezia? Troub and I: Si Signore! Spezia! Man: Are you Germans? I: No. Man: You are not Germans? Troub: No, we are Americans. Is this the way to Spezia, please?" After going on about their nationality for another two minutes, the man brightly tells them that this is the road to Spezia. "Si, Si! Sempre dritto, Spezia. They learned that

Sempre Dritto in Italian means straight ahead, but 200 feet down the road turns are left, right none straight ahead so they had to rely on their best instincts. They finally did make it to Albania.

Following Helen's adventures overseas, she sat down to turn her hand to writing books. The Sue Barton books were published with the help of Jane Ayer Cobb (Berry) who lived at the corner of Cobb's Mill Rd. and Rt. 57. Jane was one of the Cobb family who at one time owned Cobb's Mill Inn. Through this friendship, Helen

Boylston came to Weston often and purchased a house on Georgetown Road at the corner of Hillside South.

This move also proved fruitful to



Helen in that she became friends with her neighbor Eva Le Gallienne and started a new series of books about an aspiring actress named Carol Page. Miss Le Gallienne allowed Helen backstage access to many

theatrical stage performances so as to lend realism to her books. In her first book about Carol Page, Helen writes "Ever since my first book, I have looked to Jane Cobb for her lively suggestions and her true ear



Helen Dore Boylston Cont...

EDUCATION OUTREACH 2006 – 2007

for dialogue. In this new story of Carol, she has cheerfully assumed the role of collaborator and godmother, and in gratitude I should like to dedicate the story to her.”

In a passage from *Carol Plays Summer Stock*, Helen writes the following: When he returned, half the company was crowded around the steps of the Pullman, where Carol was waiting for the train to pull out. She made a startling picture against its dark grime, for the glow under her skin seemed lighted from an inexhaustible eagerness within her. Her hair was polished in the sunlight, and the smart green hat accentuated the clear greenness of her eyes. She stood straight and light, one hand on the iron guard rail, and she was laughing, though her throat, smooth above the white cascade of her blouse, felt tight with nostalgia for the summer that was gone, with affection for the affection in the faces below her, with a surge of panic for what the future might hold.” How easy it is to remember the excitement of youth and the dreams and hopes of new careers, jobs, friends and adventures.

Helen Boylston spent the last years of her life in a nursing home in Trumbull, Connecticut. She died there on September 30, 1984 at the age of eighty-nine. She was a neighbor, friend, and prolific writer of classic stories for young adults. We are grateful to add her to the list of important and grand citizens of our community.

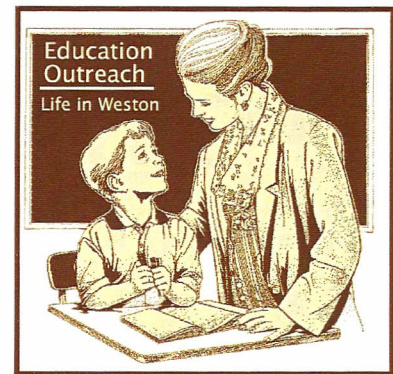
The Board of Trustees of the Weston Historical Society is so fortunate to have a liaison to the school system to reach out to the teachers and administrators finding ways in which we can help the schools teach children about life in Weston. That person is Judy Albin. Judy has been extremely busy this past school year coordinating programs with different classes and grades in all four schools.

We began last August with a box lunch on the grounds of the Coley House for new teachers in Weston. They were given a tour of the grounds and the buildings and shown our collections and archives.

“Old fashioned” games were taken in to the first grade classes and shared with the children. For a unit on mapping, we prepared a simplified map of Weston with locations of historic buildings. Children placed photos in their proper place and then colored them in. The children then asked our volunteers a series of questions about life in “old” Weston.

The second graders study Weston during the year. Judy has created two field trips, one to the Coley Homestead (4 years) and one to the old and current Weston Post Offices (2 years). During the first trip in the fall, the children come to the Homestead and are separated into three smaller groups. One group visits the barn where Ernie Albin and his volunteers show the children various tools and have hands on activities which they enjoy. The second group gathers in the kitchen where Peg McCullough and her volunteers have the

children make the batter for old fashioned oatmeal raisin cookies. The third group goes to the front parlor of the home where they are shown pictures of an old fashioned farm, a gold nugget, and read a story. The groups then move every 15 minutes or so. At the end of the trip all the children are given a one-year honorary membership in the Society.



During the Post Office trip, the children begin at the old post office where they are told about and shown some of the items sold in a general store during the 1800's. They are then given a talk about the post office side of the building and shown letters that were written to people in Weston. They even address envelopes (special Post Office issue), and insert letters they have written to their families. Then its on to the new Post Office where they are shown how letters are mailed today.

The WIS School (Weston Intermediate School) Grade 3 had a visitor who discussed the gold rush days in California and in the Yukon. The students were shown a California gold nugget and told the story of Yukon's “Soapy Smith.” The WHS arranged for a Holocaust

Education Outreach Cont...

survivor to visit and relate her experiences with the TAG Class.

The activities for the Middle School this year included a classroom visit to TAG classes who were shown our artifacts that were dug at the old Jarvis Military Academy. The students then created their own artifacts to be discovered and studied by another class to determine the civilization that left them.

Six 6th grade students have chosen to become the Historical Society's first junior docents. With the guidance and help of Judy Albin the children are researching information about an item of their choice from the inventory of the Coley house. They will be at the Coley Homestead in the fall with their presentations. There was also a classroom visit by James Lomuscio, author of "Village of the Dammed." All the social studies classes in the 6th grade were presented with information and material regarding onion farming in Weston.

At the High School level, the Albin's took their gold nugget to a science classroom where students examined and weighed the nugget. It was then tested with acid for purity. In the geophysical department class, information was given concerning the charcoal industry in Weston. Material on slavery and the Underground Railroad was supplied at the request of one particular teacher. A senior student was helped with research for a paper on the Weston Meteor shower (this year is the 200th anniversary of the event which occurred December 14th, 1807.

In addition to classroom visits and field trips for the students, the Social Studies teachers from the Middle School took a tour of the Coley Homestead where they were shown some of our resources which might enrich their programs of study. We talked about how students might be able to help the WHS with archiving, creating/maintaining a web site and interviewing elder Westonites. At the end of the school year, some of our honorary second grade students marched with us at the Memorial Day Parade.

Judy Albin has done an incredible job this past year sharing our resources with students and we certainly hope it continues. We will again be having a box lunch in August for new school staff members who always bring energy and great new ideas to the table. We, of course, want to do more with the students and faculty, but we are off to a great running start and thank Judy for her tireless energy in her Education Outreach.

PARTNERS FOR DINNER

"A most enjoyable party was given by Miss Florence Sturges on the evening of Decoration day, at her home in Cannon. Twenty-five guests were present. Five minutes each was allowed for conversation on twelve topics that ranged from dogs to Trilby, the gentlemen selecting different partners for each subject. All entered heartily into the spirit of the game, and at times the buzzing in the parlors was a strong reminder of an animated bee hive. Partners for supper were selected through the medium of

duplicate scarf pins of dainty design, and to the strains of lively music all were marched to the dining room, where an elaborately decorated table laden with good things was a sight to gladden the heart of an epicure. The game selected to wile away the balance of the evening was another novelty, cards were distributed to each of which was attached a bright cent of the vintage of 1894, and on the cards was the following inscription: 'Find on the accompanying coin the following, a fruit, part of a mountain, flowers, a scholar, a messenger, a defense, a small animal and youth and age.' The correct answers are as follows: Dates, the brow, tulips, pupil, one cent, a shield, a hare, and 18 and 94. Miss Anna Hyatt and Miss Bertha Brady were tied for first ladies' prize, each giving five correct answers. The question of ownership was decided by lot, Miss Brady proving the lucky one. R. H. Fitch won the gentleman's first prize, and Mrs. Elmer Jackson and Seth L. Grumman secured the 'Booby' emblems. The first prizes were head-rests made of silk, American flags, and mucilage bottles were presented to those last in the race with the hope that they would not get 'stuck.'

Ed. Note: This was a newspaper clipping found by Sandy O'Brien in papers at the Coley House. It is a lively account of what a party might have been like back in the day. Unfortunately we have no date on the article, but we thought it would be fun to share with you.

EBENEZER FITCH

His Life and Times, His Grandson

As most of you know, the Weston Historical Society has recently been given 15 diaries of Ebenezer Fitch who was born and raised in Weston in the 1800's. He was a man of many accomplishments, that of a farmer, notary public, teacher, bookkeeper, husband, father and a man of strong religious beliefs.

In 1858 Ebenezer started keeping diaries of his daily activities. Although these entries were short sentences and just an occasional mention of his family, they are an incredible account of his years as a farmer and a religious man. The entries are short, but say so much about the man and his times in Weston. We were very moved by the entry on July 4, 1876. "Our Country Turns 100 Today." The following is an example of a page from one of Ebenezer's diaries:

The diaries ended in 1893 and Ebenezer passed from this earth in April 1905. There were many notes of sympathy to Ebenezer's wife, Amelia, (collected papers with the diaries) expressing love and respect for such an incredible man. He led an exemplary life, at times struggling, but always headed in a forward direction.

We have been given these amazing diaries from the Fitch Family great-grandchildren of Ebenezer: Kay Fitch Farrar, Mary Ellen Fitch Hauge, and Raymond Fitch, Jr. They felt that keeping the diaries in Weston as a major part of our history was in the best interest of their family and the town. We are extremely grateful for this generous and meaningful donation as the Fitch family is part of the

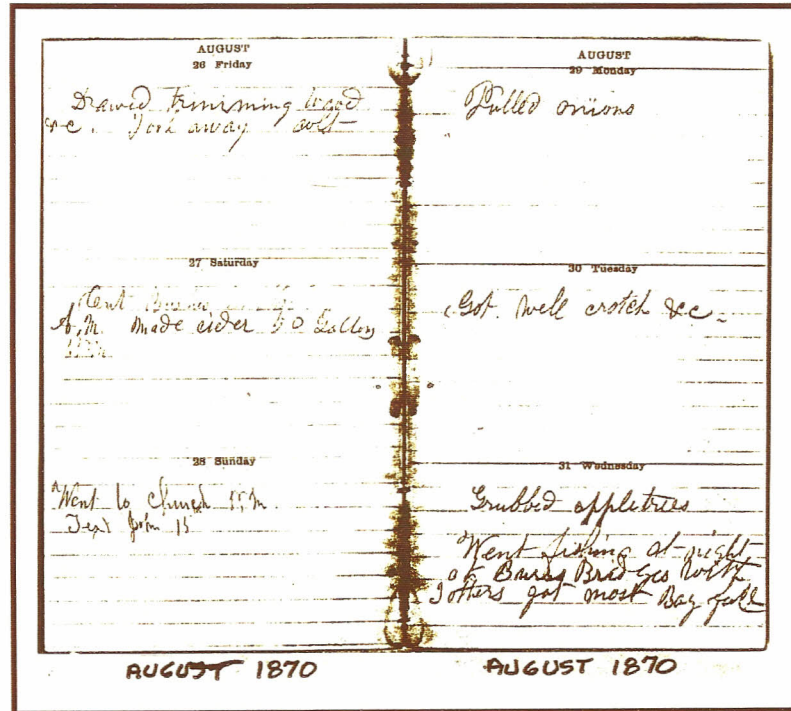


fabric of Weston life.

We recently came across an interview with Ray Fitch. Ray was the grandson of Ebenezer and the father of the three Fitch children. Although there is no date on the paper, we have to assume it was done in the late 1970's or early 1980's and recorded by three middle school children: Carrie Tendler, Kylee DiBlasi, and Megin Walden. We would like to share it with you here:

"It was a snowy day in 1911. Some of the kids going to Goodhill School trudged through the snow which crackled with each step. Some kids came in horse and

wagon, but most walked carrying their lunch in tin pails. Girls wore skirts and boys wore heavy pants.



They waited until Mrs. Treadwell, the teacher, rang the bell declaring school had officially started. They entered through the small entrance and older children took their seats at desks that were attached to the floor, while younger children sat at benches. Among them was Mr. Raymond Fitch whose recollections are what this story is based on.

"Goodhill School was about twenty feet by twenty feet with wood constructions and a really small entrance. The windows were small and not much light came through. Three of the four walls had benches and desks against them and on the fourth was Mrs. Stillman's desk. All children brought wood which they placed near the



Ebenezer Fitch cont...

fireplace. The wood was given by the parents. The fireplace was their only source of heat. The children were often afraid that the huge stove pipe would fall on them.

“Each morning, Mrs. Treadwell, like the other teachers would greet the children by saying, “Good Morning.” The children responded with the same greeting. Since it was winter, the children kept their lunches near the stove. If they did not, their lunches would freeze. The children felt that the teachers were very nice. They took out their slates provided by their parents and the teacher would announce the first subject, arithmetic. During the lesson the older children would help the younger children who didn’t understand. After arithmetic came reading and spelling. Then they would usually have music. They would sing a song.

“Finally came lunch. The children put on their coats and hats and whatever else they had to keep them warm. Then they took their lunches in tin pails and went outside, even though it was winter, for lunch and recess. Most kids sat with their friends on stones. They would spread out their lunches which would usually consist of a sandwich wrapped in bread wrappings and a piece of fruit. As soon as they finished they had recess. Boys would play tag, hide and go seek, or catch. Girls would play hop scotch, swing on the tire swing or have a snowball fight. When the teacher rang the

bell to signal the end of recess, the



Interior view of an old school house described by Ray Fitch.

children would return indoors. They would take out their slates and prepare for the next lesson. Usually it was history.

Since it was almost Christmas, Mrs. Treadwell announced they would be having a Christmas party. ‘Settle down, settle down Raymond’, the teacher said as the other children also quieted down. They played several games and ate some tasty treats. Soon it was 4 o’clock and time for dismissal.

“The ‘delicate’ children were picked up by their parents, but most walked home. Many had numb fingers and toes by the time they arrived home.

“The children never went home to soccer or baseball practice. They

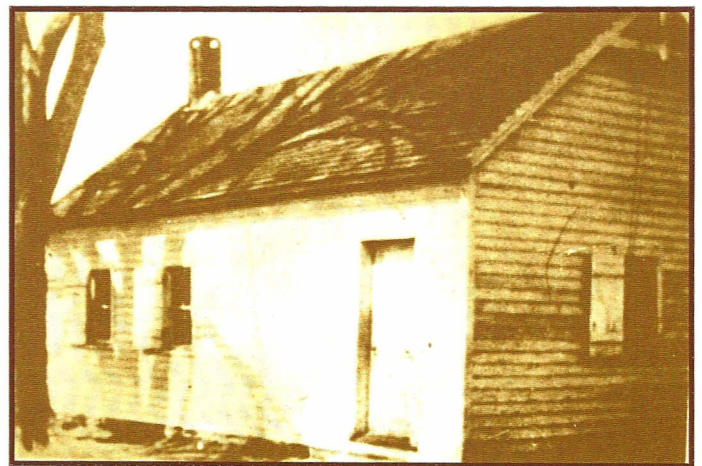
didn’t have homework either because they all had several chores waiting for them at home.

“ ‘Some kids felt that school was a vacation’ says Mr. Fitch. And in those days it was.

Ed, Note: Raymond Fitch was born February 10, 1906 in the Fitch house on Goodhill Rd. (known to many as the Jim Daniel home). He attended the Goodhill Rd. School and then Norwalk High School.

He married Elizabeth Fairchild in 1931 and they lived on White Birch Rd. until 1964 when they moved to a home on Old Farm Road. Daughters, Mary Ellen and Kay lived in the White Birch home until they went off to school.

Ray was very active in Weston as a historian, and in the Norfield



Good Road School House located near the Fitch family home.

Grange. At every grange fair for years, Ray could be seen using his one-lung cider press squeezing apples



Ebenezer Fitch cont...

into delicious juice for all the visitors. Unfortunately Ray and the making of cider without pasteurization have all gone from our lives. We are grateful to have had such a wonderful family give Weston so much fun, knowledge, and history for the generations to come.



Ray Fitch riding in the WHS Buggy in the 1985 Memorial day fair.



SUMMER RECIPES

With the abundance of wonderful fruits this time of year, many of which can be purchased at our local Farmer's Market held at the Coley Homestead on Saturday mornings from 8 a.m. until 12 noon, we thought it would be fun to share a couple of old fashioned recipes with you from "The Old Farmer's Almanac Colonial Cookbook", edited by Clarissa M. Silitch, Copyright 1976.

CHERRY SLUMP

- | | |
|---------------------|----------------------|
| 2 Cups Cherries | 2/3 cups sugar |
| 1/2 cup water | 1 tsp. cinnamon |
| 1 cup flour, sifted | 2 tsp. baking powder |
| 1/3 tsp salt | 1/2 cup milk |



Remove stems and pits from cherries and combine them with the sugar, water and cinnamon. Bring to a boil. Mix and sift the flour, baking powder and salt and add the milk gradually. Drop this dough by spoonfuls into the boiling fruit mixture. Cover and cook for 25 minutes. Remove the cover and cook 10 minutes longer. Serve with cream. Serves 4.

We also came across a recipe in the same book called "DR. ZABDIEL BOYLSTON'S HONEYCOMB PUDDING. The entry before the recipe says that Dr. Zabdiel Boylston, who braved the threat of mob violence in 1721 in order to get Bostonians inoculated against smallpox, favored this excellent pudding. We are wondering if Dr. Boylston might be a relative of Helen Boylston who lived many years in Weston, and worked many years as nurse.

The recipe is as follows:

- | | |
|-----------------------|-------------------------------|
| 1/2 cup flour | 1/2 cup butter, melted |
| 1/2 cup sugar | 1/2 cup warm milk |
| 1/2 tsp. each: cloves | 4 eggs beaten |
| cinnamon, allspice | 1 Tbs. soda in 1 cup molasses |
| 1/4 tsp. salt | |

Stir together the dry ingredients, add the rest of the ingredients, and pour the mixture quickly into a buttered baking dish. Bake in a moderate oven (350 degrees) for about 30 minutes. Turn out on a hot plate. When the pudding is sliced, the honeycomb will show.

Honeycomb Pudding Sauce

- | | |
|------------------|---------------------|
| 1 cup sugar | 1/4 tsp. salt |
| 1/4 cup butter | 3 tsp. cornstarch |
| juice of 1 lemon | 1 cup boiling water |
| 1 egg beaten | |

Cream the sugar and butter, add the rest of the ingredients and cook over low heat, stirring constantly until thickened. Serve the pudding and sauce warm.

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