

# The Chronicle Quarterly

Weston Historical Society

Summer 2001

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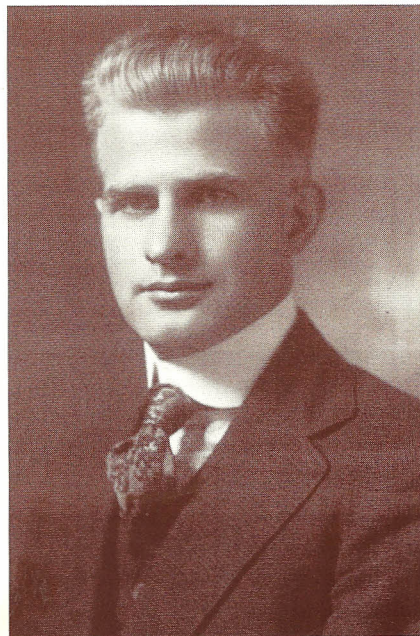
## MEMORIAL DAY WESTON'S OWN WAR HERO

In 1865 in the village of Waterloo, New York, a druggist by the name of Henry C. Welles mentioned at a social gathering that honor should be shown to the patriotic dead of the Civil War by decorating their graves. In the Spring of 1866 the entire town adopted the idea and made wreathes, crosses and bouquets to decorate each veteran's grave. A parade was held and speeches were made and "Decoration Day," as it was originally called, was born.

The country celebrates Memorial Day in many ways. In the nation's Capitol, the President lays a wreath at the tomb of the unknown soldier and a huge concert is held on the Capitol lawn with music and readings honoring the men and women who fought for our freedom and for those who gave their lives. Many small towns, including Weston, hold parades to honor our heroes, and this year the entire country was treated to a blockbuster movie commemorating the 60th year anniversary of Pearl Harbor.

There is also a private ceremony that takes place in the Branchville Cemetery (located off Rt. 102 in Ridgefield), at the grave of Charles Arvid Johnson who was born and raised in the northern corner of Weston on Covenant Lane. Charlie and Jean Howes go to Arvid's grave each and every Memorial Day and Veteran's Day to honor our fallen soldier. Jean and Charlie live in the

house where Mr. Johnson was born and came upon his story in a rather exciting way. We would like to share with you the story that was written by Jean for the Weston Forum in November, 1987. (Because of space considerations, we are going to have to write the story in two parts, as it is a story that should be told.)



War hero, Carl Arvid Johnson

### PART 1

"The story of Arvid Johnson came to light a dozen years ago (1977) when my husband Charles, while insulating our attic, discovered a packet of dusty letters tied with a shoestring hidden under a

board in the attic floor of our house on Covenant Lane in Georgetown.

Most of the letters dated from January 10 to March 14, 1918, are from a sweet young lady who lived in Darien to a 23-year old soldier stationed at Camp Upton's officer training school on Long Island. A few, written during those same months are from two of his sisters.

Three go back to 1913 from a high school girl to Arvid, then a freshman at Storrs, Ct. Agricultural College. These letters reveal not only the individual personalities of the writers, but also reflect something of the lifestyle and mood of the period. Also, they offer some personal glimpses of Arvid's experience.

Carl Arvid Johnson was born in the old house where I live on February 5, 1895. He was the sixth of seven children, five sisters and an older brother. His mother was Maria C. Peterson, and his father Charles W. Johnson, who is still remembered in the neighborhood as "Papa Johnson."

There were Johnsons in this corner of Weston as early as 1865, and at the turn of the century there were four different Johnson families all living along what is now Georgetown Road, north of Cobb's Mill.

*Continued page 2*

**MEMORIAL DAY  
WESTON'S OWN  
WAR HERO** *Continued*

Our house, where Arvid was born was built, or purchased (records are not clear) by his father in 1890. It stood not far from the Swedish Covenant Church on what was then the main road into Weston from the north. Charles W. Johnson, an original founder of that church in 1897, added an extra room to the house where Pastor Anders Nordlund, the first minister could stay until the parsonage on Maple Street was completed.

That was the church where Arvid received his religious training and was confirmed. His early schooling was in a four room building situated on a ledge behind the present A & P (ed. note: now Waldbaums located at the corner of Rt. 107 and Rt. 7). Later, boarding the train each day from the Georgetown station, he attended Norwalk High School. The Town of Weston paid tuition and transportation for all the students going from this end of town.

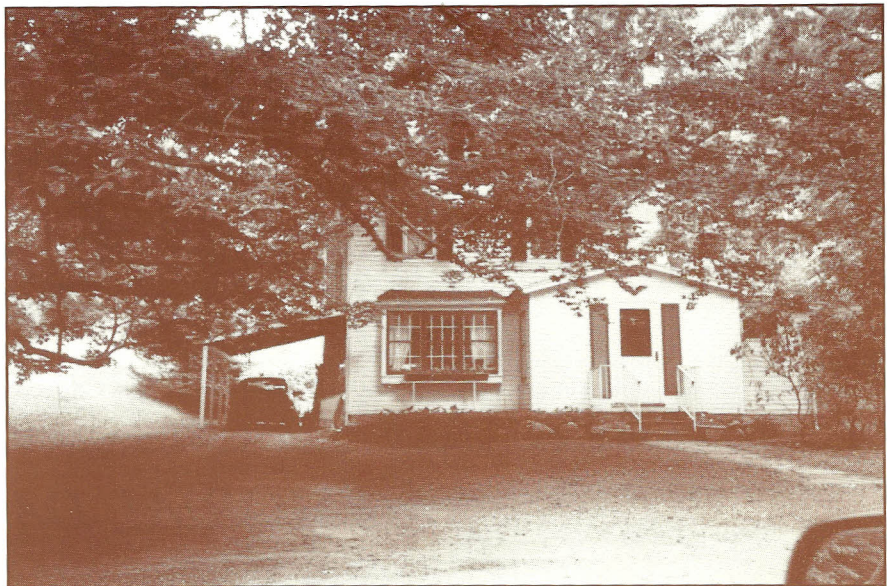
When Arvid went away to Storrs to study agriculture, letters came to him from a vivacious girl from Ridgefield who still rode the same train to high school. A member of the Junior class, no more than sixteen or seventeen, she seems eager to impress this college fellow with her advanced and daring outlook.

One letter written boldly in a classroom while avoiding 'Miss Dana's darting glances' boasts of a ride in an early automobile. 'Oh such a time! Sunday we went about fifty miles in a car and I ran it all the way! What do you know about that? No more horses for me.'

Having missed the first train to Norwalk one day, she decided to skip school. The next morning she was taken to account by the principal - 'Gummie' she calls him. Her use of the teenager's slang of the day has a breezy charm. 'He lit into me and I felt like saying "rain again, old man, I don't get your patter." But I resisted and absorbed the lecture but I've forgotten what he said now.'

Objecting to a remark of Arvid's calling some Ridgefielders 'similar to pumpkins', she offers this chilling retort: 'snow again, I don't get your drift, I don't get your drift.'

*She expresses boredom with*



Home of Carl Arvid Johnson, born February 5, 1895 in this house

the school's afternoon dances, 'not enuf fun! I'd rather go to the movies even than dance with the bunch of "enfants" here this year.

Remarking that Arvid has a good command of the French language, she suggests that he write to her from time to time 'en francais. Peut-etre un pen, oui.'

She speaks of exams and an 'awful' course in solid geometry. But social life interests her more - dances, plays, pantomimes, tableaux, movies, school concerts and basketball games. Arvid's high school years could not have been all dull study.

Baseball was one of his real loves, and he probably played on the college team. She complains, 'baseball must be your pastime ... That's all I hear about in your letters'

Arvid liked her well enough to send her a college banner. 'Honestly', she wrote, 'it's perfectly lovely of you to send it.' Their relationship, however, soon ended. Perhaps Arvid's future as a farmer seemed too tame for this high-spirited girl, or he may have thought that a more serene, steadier type would be his ideal.

After completing his courses at Storrs Agricultural College, Arvid found a good position managing a farm for a Darien businessman with several out-of-town properties including a store. Arvid had his room and meals with the family who all became his friends. There were two girls and two boys. The friendship between Arvid and the oldest daughter, the lovely Elsa, gradually ripened into warmer feelings.

Some months after America entered World War I, Arvid was called to duty. As the New Year opened, he was a private enrolled in Officer's Training School at Yaphank, Long Island. Back and forth every other day or so letters were exchanged between Arvid and Elsa.

Letters from his sisters praised him for serving his county and am mighty proud of him and his determination to take the grueling challenge of officer's training. One sister, a newly registered nurse, proud of her own certificate with its gold seal, sympathizes and understands the rigors of strict discipline. She brings news of the family in Georgetown and of the dogs Teddy and Jenny.

'Big Sister,' who lives in Darien near Elsa's family, also writes encouragingly. It is to her that Arvid confides his 'secret' love for Elsa. 'Big Sister' approves of the romance and assures him of Elsa's devotion. Although she considers herself a 'haithen', she feels that Elsa, sincere religious faith is a fine quality.

'Big Sister' also, is the one most aware of what Arvid's service to his county may cost. After hearing a lecture at Carnegie Hall by a returned Canadian soldier wounded at Ypres, she recalls his words that each one who enters the service is offering his life and 'whether they get "theirs" or not' this is a sacrifice 'second only to the sacrifice of Christ.'

Both sisters tell of hardships on the home front. New York is in a dreadful state -- no coal and some people even without gas. Country

*continued page 3*



people are lucky because they have woodpiles. The nurse says, 'Everyone looks sad.' She is war weary and writes, 'Arvid, I'm afraid if this war continues we will soon starve or freeze to death.' 'Big Sister' his more upbeat, 'Tomorrow is Heatless Monday, Eatless, Wheatless, Meatless, everything, but thank goodness not altogether Hopeless.' She notes that 'Cheer Up' is playing at the Hippodrome, and concludes 'Everyone is willing to stick it out as long as it takes, and confident that we won't be beaten.'

If Elsa was aware of public hardships, she does not mention them. Her letters, touched with a sweet simplicity, portray a protected young lady contented with her family circle, her Bible and her music, but always most eager to hear every detail of Arvid's new experiences as a soldier. She reports the daily events -- Mama's birthday, the return of a lost horse, the train ride to Greenwich for her piano lessons, helping Papa to start the Ford on a frigid morning, going with her parents to a New York banquet to meet friends from 'the old country', memorizing an extra piece of music to play for Arvid, reading a chapter of St. John, arranging to meet Arvid at her aunt's in Freeport, re-arranging schedules for her own piano pupils, knitting and re-knitting a

helmet for his birthday, and always at night the prayers for him and the whispered 'Good night.'

As Arvid's sister noted, Elsa is not a 'gusher' and Arvid's letters, at first, were impersonal enough to share with the family and the fellows at the firehouse. Later, his sister hints, they may have included some 'twiddly parts.' Elsa prefers to call him 'Arvid' rather than his nickname 'Jack' and her first letters close 'Sincerely yours.' Later, she slips in an occasional 'Jackie'. For his birthday she sends 'Lots of lub', and the last letters all close 'Lovingly.'

The letters indicate that Arvid finds it very hard at first; the discipline is tough and he misses Elsa. He aches from many vaccinations and studies hard for difficult exams. Some fellows drop out, but he's sticking. His commanding officer is very strict and he's not allowed any candy or food from home, But he's with a nice bunch of young men, is well supplied with clothes and the food is fairly good.

After his first leave in late January, he misses his train connection and rides back in an open touring car. Arriving late and thoroughly chilled, he faces the Captain's wrath.

There are long drills, long marches carrying a heavy pack, long hours digging trenches. Sometimes he

wishes he could come back to the farm where twenty-four hours of work a day would seem like a rest.

He has a bad cold, some men are sick with scarlet fever. He's required to take the body of a private who died of pneumonia to the train station. He is using the little Bible Elsa gave him before he left.

His plans to meet Elsa at her aunt's in Freeport are canceled when his next leave is denied. The Captain chooses Arvid to take command of the company and companies, and he acquits himself well. In late February he gets a leave, meets Elsa in Darien and they go to Georgetown. In early March he manages to meet Elsa in Freeport; the aunt is sympathetic and Arvid's new authoritative voice scares off her chaperoning brother. He returns to camp with a button missing from his uniform -- a token left with Elsa.

Now there are rumors the camp is going to France, but he may get home for Easter.

Here the letters ended, leaving us in great suspense. How did the story end? Did Arvid go to France to fight in the great war? Did he every marry Elsa?"

*(Part II of Arvid's Story will appear in the next issue of the Chronicle.)*



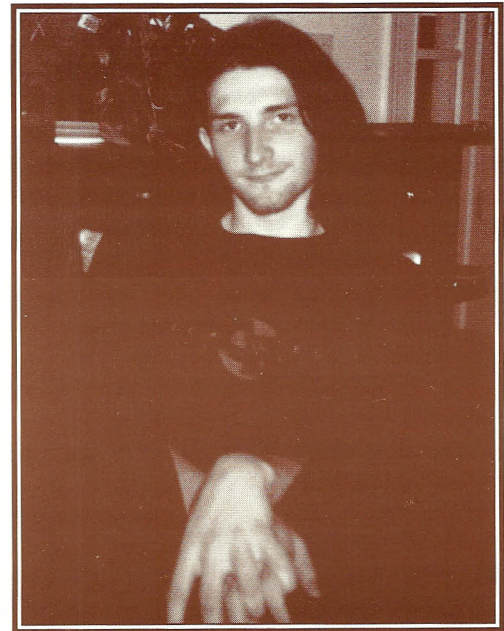
## SCHOLARSHIP

While Sandy O'Brien was attending the Weston High School Awards Assembly in another capacity, she began to wonder why the Historical Society did not give out an award of some kind. She brought it before the Board of trustees this year and it was agreed that we would give a scholarship to a deserving senior who was passionate about history.

The 2001 award for excellence in history went to Sean Tubridy. Sean is 18 years old and has lived in Weston for fourteen years. He has received A's in history throughout his high school career. He told us "this year I really enjoyed the night course with Ed Kaufman, a seminar course tracing western political thought from Plato/Socrates to Dewey."

Sean enjoys playing in a rock band in his spare time, writing poetry, and reading. This coming fall he will attend New York University. He felt badly about not being at the first awards ceremony, but he was unaware that he was receiving an award. Sean said, "I believe that history is the key to the present and the future. It is only through studying the past that we can understand the present and change our future.

Our congratulations to Sean for his accomplishments and we wish him the very best of luck with his future plans.



Sean Tubridy, winner of the Weston Historical Society's \$500 Scholarship for excellence in history.

Cartoons, theatre, novels, music - words that would replace oxen, onions, farms, mills and foundries in Weston's history. In 1910 the population of Weston had dropped to an alarming 648 residents. Farming on a large scale had gone the way of the young men who wanted to work in the big cities, and our rather inadequate water power was being replaced by steam, and our wagons and carriages for transportation of goods were being replaced by trains.

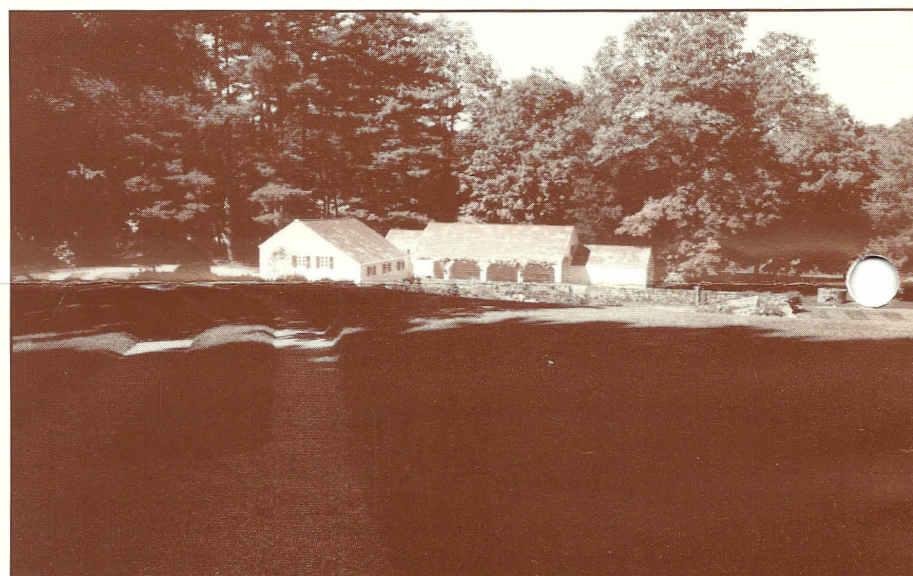
However, our bucolic setting and peaceful existence became a draw for many artists, writers, and musicians who were living among the hustle and bustle of New York City. Many of these folks came to Weston to escape the crowds and stayed, not only for weekends, but built homes and raised their families. Some of the more notable names include James Melton, tenor; James Daugherty, muralist and illustrator; Franklin P. Adams, author; Eva Le Gallienne, actress; and Wood Cowan, cartoonist. This is only a handful of the artists who have lived, and continue to grace, our community. They brought with them not only their cultural backgrounds, but an enthusiasm for Weston and its future.

One such person was Alice Delamar. Although Alice was not an artist in her own right, she did have a love for art and being surrounded by artists. Miss Delamar's father, Joseph, had come to this country as a stowaway, and made a fortune mining silver and copper. Upon his death, his daughter, Alice, became one of the wealthiest women in America. Instead of living the wild life which was common for those women in her era, she became a volunteer for the Red Cross American Women's Ambulance Corp. In 1930 Alice bought property on Newtown Turnpike which stretched from Cobb's Mill to the Country Store (at the corner of Rt. 33 and Newtown Tpke. in Westport). In 1934, Miss Delamar purchased Cobb's Mill which had been turned into an inn in 1928 by Moira Wallace and Sydney Dyke. Alice and her partner, Jacques De Wolfe, converted the inn into an expensive restaurant which catered to wealthy Fairfield County residents and visitors from New York.

Miss Delamar's home, which she designed, stood on 22 acres with many smaller buildings gracing the property. She built a large addition onto her home to house her large library which she donated to the Weston Library upon her death. The proceeds from the sale of some of the books went toward the library



Alice Delamar's house.



Garage, store rooms & workshop which originally held antiques owned by Miss Delamar.

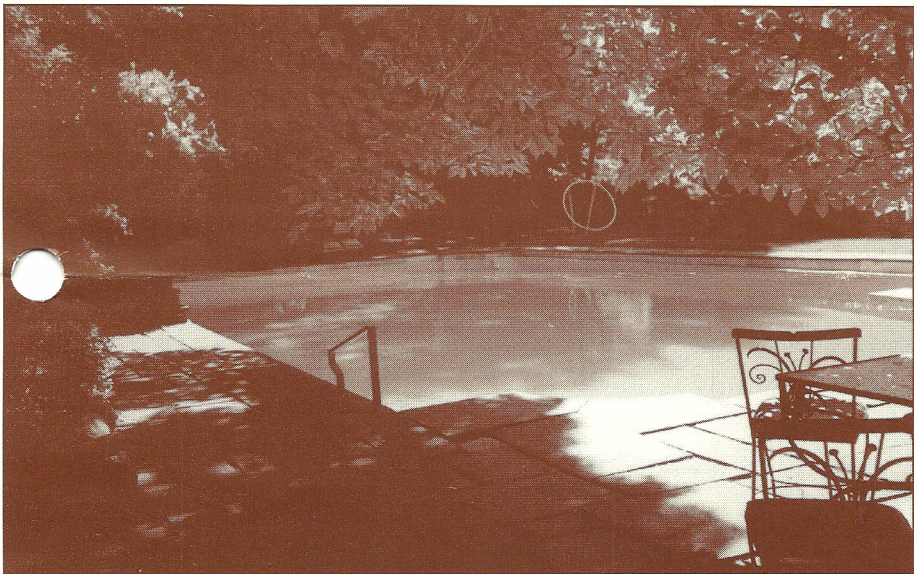


Green house & guest cottage on right, barn on left.

# TRONESS OF THE ARTS



Statues of Whippets guarding the entrance, since 1930, to an outstanding garden which includes 77 peonies.



Pool 36'x36' containing 105,000 gallons. There is an aquatic tunnel leading into the house.



Exit of brook tunnel that runs under the house.

addition which is now the children's room. She also built an Olympic sized swimming pool in the back of the home with an aquatic tunnel leading indoors. This beautiful home also had laid brick floors, bull's-eye glass panes and a portion of a 26 foot pewter bar which had been imported from France for Cobb's Mill.

Alice surrounded herself not only with antique rugs, furniture, and glassware, but also with art and artists themselves. She built guest houses in which she entertained artists such as Eugene Berman, Leonard Fine, and Tsuguharu Foujita. George Ballanchine also built a home on land that he purchased from Miss Delamar. However, her favorite artist was Pavel Tchelitchev. Pavel left his native Russia and moved to Paris from which he fled to America days before the Germans occupied the city.

Tchelitchev's most famous painting is called "Hide and Seek," a large fantasy in oils that delights visitors of all ages at the Museum of Modern Art. It is a somewhat surrealistic picture of a dreamlike woodland in which lurk, hidden as a puzzle, faces and bodies of children and a few adults such as Miss Delamar. It has been written that Alice gave a costume ball in October, 1945 for which Tchelitchev created the decorations. Invitations went out to approximately 200 people, many more came. Miss Delamar had renovated one of the barns, putting in a kitchen, bathrooms and a hardwood floor for dancing. The party began at 10 p.m. and was still going strong at 6 a.m.

Miss Delamar died in 1983 at the age of 88. She donated part of her property to the Aspetuck Land Trust on Newtown Turnpike which is a truly lovely parcel with wild flowers, a small pond, and a gurgling stream. There are trails for walking and benches for sitting to enjoy the beauty that abounds. Alice has left a grand legacy of art and nature for the whole community to enjoy.

*(ed. note: We would like to thank Walter and Bernice Erickson, the current owners of this beautiful home, for allowing us to wander through the property to take pictures.)*



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## ACQUISITIONS

Since our last Chronicle, the Society has received as gifts, a bale hook from Cecile Renzulli, and a scrapbook of 30 pictures from the Hurlbutt School Fire, 1963. The album was donated to us by Richard and Betty Smith. We have also received, in connection with the album, a diploma from the

Horace Hurlbutt Junior High School, 1960, from Karin Giannitti. (ed. note: The Society is still looking for other memorabilia from Hurlbutt School, i.e., report cards, pictures, etc. We would appreciate anything that you might have and would be willing to give us.)

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## VOLUNTEERS

(by Lynne Barrelle)

We are again looking for some volunteers to help us at the barn museum. Lynne Barrelle is desperately seeking people to help her catalog items in the barn. We need some strong folks who could move items, and some not so strong people to write down information about the various items to be catalogued. If you could help Lynne, please give her a call or email her at Lmbarrelle@aolcom.

We are also in need of volunteers who would be willing to spend a couple of hours on a Saturday morning (10:30 - 12:30) to greet any visitors that we might have and to show them around (we will give you a quick history if you need one). Also we have a need for people to do some housekeeping - dusting, vacuuming, emptying trash and doing a few dishes. Our trustees do a great job, but they could use some help. Maybe some of you might have ideas as to how to make our house look more like a "living history" museum (setting up a

sewing machine with a half-finished garment, scissors and pincushion nearby).

Mary Ann Barr also needs people to help catalog archives and new accessions in the house, just as we do in the barn. We also could use some people to run the computer end of things, inputting the catalog records, scanning photographs and documents, and putting them on CD - No experience necessary - we will train.

*(ed. note: If everyone could give a little of their time, we could continue to make progress towards our goals. It is a great place to spend some time, and a great group of dedicated volunteers. Please give us a call if you can help, or stop by on Saturday morning. Now that we have the Farmer's Market on the grounds, you can shop and help us too. Thanks.)*

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## COLEY HOMESTEAD ON TV

If anyone was watching Weekend Today on Sunday, May 27, you might have been surprised to see scenes of the Coley Homestead. In April of this year, Barbara Simon of NBC News called the Center for Disease Control to find out information on ticks and the resulting Lyme disease as she wanted to do an important segment on this subject.

Barbara was told that there were projects being developed in the hardest hit states, including Maryland, New Jersey, Massachusetts, and Connecticut. She was told that Weston already had a display of do's and don'ts and a factual tour on the property of the Weston Historical Society. Because of its proximity to New York City our spot was ideal for Barbara and her crew.

Ms. Simon and her NBC crew arrived the first part of May. They met with Judy Nelson from the Aspetuck Health District, Pru Bliss (WHS trustee and overseer of this project), and other members of the Society and the town. The crew took pictures of all corners of the property which show do's and don'ts of controlling the tick population in our yards.

The story on ticks and Lyme Disease aired on Memorial Day Weekend during the health report by Dr. Ian Smith. The first segment dealt with the tick itself, the resulting rash, and the further effects of tick bites. During the Sunday

segment Dr. Smith showed pictures of things that can be done in our yards to decrease the number of ticks, and gave other suggestions on controlling the tick population. Several scenes of our property were highlighted in the story.

Although the Historical Society and the Coley House were not mentioned by name, it was still fun to see ourselves in living color on the TV screen.



Keith Sandler (left) from NBC Weekend Today taking pictures at the Coley property for a segment on Ticks & Lyme Disease



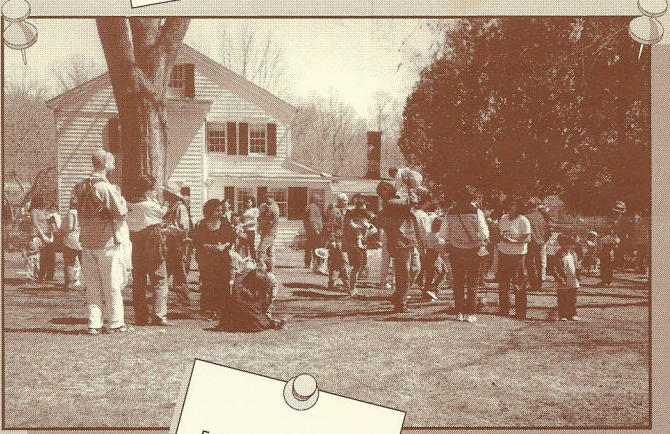
Wagon loaned to us by Rob Brosseau for the Memorial Day Parade. L-R Sandy O'Brien, Jim Brosseau, w/Chester Sheri Lynne Barrelle, Bill Beva, Marianne Barr



Mathew McCullough and his wife Jane, with Mike O'Brien getting ready for the Memorial Day Parade. The car is a Model T, 1927



The Easter Bunny greeting children (and their parents) at the Easter Egg Hunt held April 14.



Folks enjoying our first Annual Easter Egg Hunt.



Sandy O'Brien holding a plaque listing all of the Society's Past Presidents. Sandy spent weeks tracking down names and dates and has donated this lovely and timely plaque to the Society.

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