

THE MYSTERIOUS CHIMNEY

Now that we have introduced you to Lynne Barrelle, we can tell you about some wonderful research that was done by Lynne and Carolyn Hess who is part of a new Facebook page called "Weston – a small town with a big heart." Perhaps many of you have driven on Davis Hill Road at the intersection of Steep Hill and wondered about the proud little chimney that has no house.

On October 8, 2012, Lynne and Carolyn went to the site of the chimney and did a little searching. Here is some of the information that they gathered that day and through further research. "This is a free-standing chimney made of rough fieldstone. It is estimated to be between 20 and 25 feet tall, and the width at the bottom is about 80 inches. The chimney is fronted by a cement hearth about 4 or 5 inches thick and 74 inches wide. The depth is approximately 6 feet. The firebox is 4 feet wide by 3 feet high.

"There is an indentation for a mantel across the front of the chimney. The mantel, which was most likely composed of wood, probably tied into supporting posts at either side of the chimney, where wider, shallower indentations can be found running down the sides between the stonework. About a foot above the mantel is a round opening into the front of the chimney. This was probably to accommodate a metal stove-pipe. It was impossible to tell from the ground whether this hole was original to the chimney or had been cut into it after construction." As Lynne pointed out in her research, there are terra cotta tiles used for the liner of the chimney. If she is able to locate an expert with this type of information, then she would be able to better date the chimney.

Further research into documenting the owners of the

land by title-searching in the land records was then performed. Lynne found that a Charles Jennings and his wife, Mary Esther Brown, were living there in the second half of the 19th century. They also discovered that Charles and Mary had several children who all predeceased them, except for the youngest, Edward, born about 1871. Lynne states: "Actually we are not

entirely sure that Edward was their biological child as we don't have birth records. We are relying on census information which is inconsistent from one census year to the next at best, and totally faulty at worst. Being that Edward was born 13 years after the next youngest child, it is possible that Charles and Mary may have taken in a nephew or other relative, perhaps even an orphan. Additional information from the land records show that when Charles Jennings died in 1892, he left a will, and nothing was left to Edward. It all went to his widow Mary Esther."

The story continues with Mary Jennings who died in 1893, a year after her husband. Lynne found that "thirteen years later, Edward sold the land, but first he had to show that he was Mary's only legal devisee (another clue that he

may not have been their actual son.)" Unfortunately they have not had success in tracing some of the information, but they feel that there is a lot of "weird stuff" out there about Edward Jennings.

"In 1905 Edward Jennings sold the homestead, described as 63 ½ acres with buildings, to two men (possibly brothers) whose homes were in Westport. We still need to clear up a few details, but I think one of the brothers quit claimed his share to the other, who would then have been the sole owner. This man, Edmond C. Smith, passed away about 1929, but the property



remained in the Smith family until after his widow's death. In 1961 the property was sold to local developers by the estate of Mary A. Smith.

Lynne further states that "We don't know the exact boundaries of the Jennings homestead but some of it is probably now Hill Farm Road (off Davis Hill). Intensive and laborious research COULD determine the exact boundaries of the 60 plus acres, but there is not a pressing need at this time. The chimney is now part of a 2.37 acre lot which includes a house built about 1963. The current owner explained that the chimney was from a "hunting camp" that burned down in 1955. That would have been while the property was owned by the Smith family of Westport, as they held it from 1905 until 1961. We don't as yet know any other details of that time period."

"It is possible that the chimney really was part of the original Jennings house, which was used by the Smiths as a vacation retreat. In that case, the structure that burned in 1955 would have been the Jennings house. Alternatively, the Jennings house could have been gone even before the Smiths bought the place in 1905. It is also possible that the chimney was original to the Jennings house, but then something happened to the house and later a cabin was built around the same chimney.

The current owners of the property believe that the Jennings house was in the family since 1710. Lynne feels that this date is a little early for the occupation of this neighborhood, but if further documentation could actually be found, it would somewhat revise the general understanding of the early history of Weston.

In closing Lynne said "It may eventually prove impossible to determine the true provenance of the chimney. But in the meantime, the investigation will help us to learn a great deal about the history of the neighborhood, and also about some of the people who lived here before us. It may lead us to other areas of investigation (the possibilities are endless.) If you've read this far, you've already become part of the learning process. We hope you have enjoyed it, and that you will begin your own investigations into the past, or join us in ours in the future."

A complete copy of the research and article can be found on www.facebook.com/pages/Weston-History-or-The-Fellowship-of-the-Chimney/29455341724586. Our thanks to Lynne for all her research and we know that if the information is out there, she will find it. At least we now know a bit about the little chimney without a house, and our imaginations can still keep the stories alive. 🍷

