

MUSEUM MUSINGS

WESTON HISTORICAL MUSEUM

P.O. BOX 266 ~ 601 MAIN STREET ~ WESTON, MISSOURI 64098 ~ 816-386-2977

JULY ~ AUGUST ~ SEPTEMBER 2015

Weston Girl Wins In National History Day

Grace Cogan, a Weston girl and student in the Deerfield Academy in Weston, took 5th in the National History Day finals held in College Park, Maryland on June 18th. Grace was accompanied by her teacher, Lennie Medcalf, her father, Brian Cogan, and Clay Bauske, Curator of the Truman Museum and Library in Independence.

Nearly 3,000 students across the nation and also from several other countries such as South Korea and China competed in five categories.

Grace's performance in the Junior Performance category, "The Moral Path: Francis Perkins' Leadership in Forming a Legacy for Workers' Rights," focused on America's first woman Cabinet member and her work with President Franklin Delano Roosevelt to bring about ground breaking legislation: Social Security and the Fair Labor Standards Act.

Miss Cogan was also recognized with a special award for the outstanding entry from Missouri in the Junior Division.



Grace Cogan shows a little Royals Loyalty while in Maryland to be recognized at the National History Day. With her are Clay Bauske, Museum Vice-President; teacher Lennie Medcalf; and her father, Brian Cogan.

Merriment and Rivalries Tell of Weston Baseball

During Weston's early days, long before the schools had begun to include sports in their curriculum; before there were such things as little leagues; before the debut of girls' teams, there were town baseball teams. At first there were those which included only white men. Next came the "colored" teams and still later the mixed teams, all males. Regardless of the make-up of the teams, one thing was certain—games were filled with fun, rivalry, and the simple joy of playing the game.

Platte City, Woodruff, Leavenworth, Iatan, and Farley were some of the small towns and villages in the area that had their own teams. Games were scheduled and played on empty lots in town, or on land belonging to the school or perhaps a real area designated as a ball field. Mothers, fathers, wives

and children as well as those just interested in the challenge of the games were the spectators. Entrance fees were not charges at first and the fields were cared for by team members and their friends and families. Sometimes a business or a wealthy fan would help to defray the costs of uniforms, equipment, even the making of a field.

As early as August 16, 1895, one could find an article in the local newspaper stating that the Weston team, known as Pastimes, defeated the Dearborn Hobo's by a score of 16 to 14. The game was played in Dearborn on a Sunday and it was noted that the batteriers were Harpst and Richardson; Berntsen and Gross.

With a rather large headline, it was trumpeted

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Merriment . . .

(Continued from Page 1)

in *The Weston Chronicle* on June 18, 1897: "This week a Baseball Association was founded in our city, and all lovers of the national game will now have a chance to witness some good ball games at home without having to go to the cities for such sport. The association elected the following officers: George Sebus, President; W. L. Newhouse, vice-President; O.P. Anthony, Sec.; and Matt V. Schindler, Treasurer."

The first game on the much-awaited field was played on July 25th of 1897, against the Leavenworth team. "The Weston boys put up a good game, but lack of team work was their great drawback." However poorly they might have played, the Weston Blues won over Ft. Leavenworth 11 to 10. According to another article there was a good turnout of Westonians to watch the game and declared the field to be a dandy ball ground with a great view from the bleachers. There were also many visitors from Fort Leavenworth.

August 12, 1889 the newspaper boasted about the local team in this manner, "A Leavenworth baseball team was over Sunday to play a game with the Weston Blues. The score was 21 to 6 in favor of Weston. The intentions of the Leavenworth boys were good but they don't know how to play. When it comes to baseball every kid in Weston knows all about the great American game."

August 26th of that same year we read, "A picked baseball team, composed of the best ball players in Leavenworth were over Sunday and played a game with the Weston Greys. This was the best game played on the Weston grounds this year as these teams were evenly matched. It is useless to state that Weston won the game with a score of 14 to 12. Our boys don't know the meaning of defeat, even if the *Platte City Argus* does call them "paw-paw eaters."

Were the Weston Greys the same as the Weston Blues? It might have been that, or at different times, there were two or three Weston teams playing.

By a request, a letter to Mr. Jim Murdock of Weston, written Aug. 10, 1898, was published in *The Weston Chronicle* and read thusly, "I would like

to arrange a game with the Weston Blues for a purse of \$25.00 or more as a side bet. If you or any of the boys would like to back the Blues to that extent, kindly inform them to write me at once and state the amount they want to bet.

We want only five men while they can have nine. Our men are Rohring, Baker, Clemings, Bunten and myself.

We want to play the Blues at these odds as they have been playing good ball this season. I think you can easily arrange a game for us.

Remember we want only five men and they can play their whole team.

Answer by mail if game can be arranged to play at Weston, and I can come over. Respectfully, O.P. Anthony."

Challenges such as this one were common between the teams and especially between the Weston and Platte City teams. This particular challenge was met with great excitement and expectation. Bets between the individual of both towns were many and varied, everyone betting on their favorite. Legend has



This photo, taken in the late 1890's, is of a Weston team. It appears to be one of the first pictures of a group of baseball players both African American and white. We have no identifications of the members, unfortunately. The team appears to have uniforms, but again, there is no identification of their name.

it that the game was played with five men from Weston against the five from Platte City and the attending crowd was large and loud. In the end, that included extra innings, Platte City lost. The recorded final score cannot be found, but the heckling and gloating lasted quite some time and many went home with lighter pockets than before the game was played.

One thing we find interesting in looking back, is that O.P. Anthony was, in 1897, the Secretary of the Baseball Association of Weston. Now, in 1898, Mr. Anthony issues his challenge from and for Platte City. Had he moved to Platte City or just decided it was the superior team and thus move his loyalties to them?

Later in September of 1898, it was noted that James Murdock and George Sebus, managers, sold the Weston baseball park to Jesse Newhouse and William Berntsen.

(Conclusion in next edition of the newsletter.)

Special Commentary. . .

The staff and volunteers in the museum have been watching and cheering on, a very special individual as she has been “getting into” history, both local and national. That would be Grace Cogan who won at both the state and federal History Days.

This editor wants to say “WOOHOO Grace!” Fifth across the nation—no small accomplishment! It took many hours of research, writing, and practicing to do this, as well as stamina and courage. Weston can be justly proud of this young woman. You go, Grace!



Bee Creek Tavern Found to be Attractive

(In the 1930's Mrs. B.J. Bless Jr., assistant editor of "The Weston Chronicle", wrote a regularly appearing column called "The Rambler." The following was one such column and was in the May 13, 1931 issue.)

“Having heard a great deal about the Bee Creek Tavern in New Market, the Roamer decided to explore to find out what it was and where it was. Right in the middle of the main block is a two-story frame building, painted white, that bears the sign “Bee Creek Tavern.”

It is operated by Mrs. Louie Langner who with her husband, has lived in New Market two years. Mrs. Langner was born there, her parents were Mr. and Mrs. Sim Bryant. Until recently, the Langners have made their home in St. Joseph.

When the store, which was originally a saloon, was remodeled a date was found on the wall—1863; it is not known if this is the date of the building or a remodeling date. The downstairs has a small store back of which is the kitchen and a spacious porch.

A room, used for a living room is being made into a dining room and there are three large bed rooms so furnished that fourteen tourists may have sleeping accommodations. Most of the furnishings in the bedroom are of old-fashioned walnut. Some of the dressers have marble tops. Dainty curtains at the windows and convenient appointments make it a very inviting place to anyone.

Mrs. Langner serves chicken dinners on Sunday, mostly by appointments, and short order meals through the week. She has a lovely flower garden with bird bath, fish pool and pergola which holds some rare specimens of annuals and perennials. A rustic bridge, bird houses and other attractive features are being added daily.

At the invitation of Mrs. Langner and her husband, the editor and his family were guests at chicken dinner on Sunday. It was a marvelous dinner with six different vegetables, all grown in the Langner garden, gracing the board. Chicken with cornpone was the big dish and for dessert, homemade ice cream, the best the Roamer has eaten in years.”

“A mind that is stretched by a new experience can never go back to its old dimensions.”

— Oliver Wendall Holmes, Jr.

Father and Son Named for Weston

(This article appeared in "The Weston Chronicle", dated February 9, 1940.)

"Have you heard of Kerker's Bakery? Neither had we until the visit here of Roy P. Kerker of Davenport, Iowa Wednesday afternoon. Mr. Kerker, almost sixty years old, is the president of the Iowa Plumbers Guild and was in Excelsior Springs to talk before a Missouri convention of the same tradesmen.

After the meeting he came to Weston . . . just to see what he could find out about his grandfather Peter Kerker who came here in the late 1830s. He and his wife were emigrants from Bavaria; their first son was born in Weston Sept. 19, 1844 and was named Henry Weston Kerker.

Mr. Kerker, senior, engaged in the bakery business, in a two-story frame building on the site of the present Electric Light building. The frame building burned two years after (the) family moved to Davenport, in 1853. In the spring, they took a boat down the Missouri and up the Mississippi from St. Louis to Davenport, where the family of eight grew to maturity.

While here, Peter built a fortune out of his bakery. This was the last outfitting point for the prairie schooners, overland trains, and gingerbread was one of the favorite sweets. It was packed in \$5.00, \$10.00 and \$20.00 boxes.

The Weston visitor was the second child of Henry Weston Kerker and has a daughter and a son. The son bears the name Albert Weston Kerker and lives in California.

The visitor said he could remember his grandfather telling of the frequent visit of Indians from across the river. "When they came, "he said, "grandfather said he would fasten up the windows and doors."

After *The Chronicle* had furnished as much information as it could dig up for Mr. Kerker, he was directed to the home of Weston's oldest citizen, J.M. Baker. Mr. Baker was, of course, too young to remember the establishment here, but recalled his father telling him much about it. He also recalled that Mr. Kerker had a fine reputation in Weston as a pie baker.

Mr. Kerker thinks he has among his keepsakes a tag which reads: "Good for 50c in trade at Kerker's Bakery." He promised, if he could find it, he would send it or a photo static copy of it."

Did You Know . . .

. . . that the school yearbooks first came out in 1922? During most of the 1930's there were no yearbooks, due to the lack of funds. The yearbook named two mascots. The first was The Owl which continued until the early 1940's when it became the Blue Jay.

In 1930 and 1931 students in the elementary classes made their own yearbook, handwriting it and using snapshots friends and family had taken.

The Weston Historical Museum has a collection of most of the school yearbooks for research. Some duplications are available for sale at the museum for \$10.00 each.

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. . . that May 1954 was the last time an eighth grade graduation was held in Weston? Prior to that many students would attend the first eight grades and then go no further in their education. The State of Missouri decided to require a full twelve years of school before one could graduate. By observing graduation only after 12 years, the State hoped to encourage students who were thinking of leaving to stay on and finish the extra four years.

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. . . that W.H.S. first "Play Day" was sponsored by the Alumni Association on May 12, 1938? Graduates from the 8th grade to the number of 48, and their parents, were invited.

Classes were visited, games and sports were enjoyed under the tutelage of Coach Eskridge and Miss Forestyne Loyles. A picture show was held in the afternoon and lunch was provided by the hosts.

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. . . that 1951 was the beginning of a different type of class for the Weston school? Driver's Education was added to the courses offered at the school and was a very popular class.

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. . . that in 1954 new names were given to elementary schools within the Weston school district? Weston elementary became Central Elementary, Bean Lake became Lakeview and the elementary in Farley remained Farley Elementary..

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. . . that the National Honor Society initiated a new program in 1969? The program chose a student-of-the-month and each chapter joined in the program. The student, recommended by faculty, was approved by NHS members. Kent Jackson was the first such student at West Platte to be so honored.

# Wedding Cake Maker Added Love to Recipes

During the 1950s and 1960s many a blushing bride in and around Weston included in their wedding plans a cake made by Mrs. Reta Shenkner.

Whether it was a four-tiered creation with columns between each tier or a one-layer lovely frosted edifice, it had to be done by Mrs. Shenkner. She was the cake baker extraordinaire!

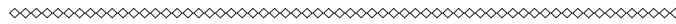
Reta was the mother of twin boys and one daughter and not only produced lovely wedding cakes, but all sorts of delectable items emanated from her kitchen within the large home on the corner of Spring and Summer streets. Cookies, pies, rolls, hot chocolate---all were just so much better coming from her hands.

The Shenkner home was another house

in Weston that saw large numbers of children coming for "Trick or Treat" on October 31st each year.

Some might think Reta had a special ingredient she used in her recipes, some secret she did not share with other cooks and bakers. But, the children of Weston knew better. It was the love she added to the labor she put into all of the different edibles. It didn't hurt that she had a warm, welcoming smile and always a good word or two to each child. She was the same with the adults and all basked in her smile and love.

Next to her wonderful cakes, perhaps one of the other favorite products from her kitchen was the following recipe:



## Reta's Texas Brownies

- 2 cups flour
- 2 cups sugar
- ½ cup butter
- ½ cup shortening
- 1 cup coffee, strongly brewed
- ¼ cup unsweetened cocoa
- ½ cup buttermilk
- 2 eggs
- 1 teaspoon baking soda
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract

Preheat oven to 400 degrees and lightly grease an 11 x 17 inch baking pan.

In a large mixing bowl combine flour and sugar.

In a heavy saucepan over medium heat, combine butter, shortening, coffee and cocoa. Stir constantly until heated to a boil.

Pour boiling mixture over flour and sugar. Add buttermilk, eggs, baking soda and vanilla. Mix well, using a wooden

spoon or high speed mixer. Pour batter into baking pan.

Bake for about 20 minutes, or until done in center.

### Frosting

- ½ cup butter
- 2 tablespoons cocoa
- ¼ cup milk
- 1 ½ cups powdered sugar
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract

While brownies are baking, prepare the frosting combining butter, cocoa and milk in a saucepan over medium heat. Stir frequently until heated to a boil.

Mix in powdered sugar and vanilla and stir until smooth.

Pour warm frosting over brownies as soon as they come out of the oven.

Cool and cut into squares.



## New Feature

## Characters of Weston

Is there any town in America, or the world for that matter, that does not have at least one person that the citizens consider a “character?”

They come in all sizes, genders, colors and walks of life. We consider them “weird”, “quirky”, or “just not quite normal” and sometimes just plain irritating. Yet, for the most part we find them lovable, fun to be around and certainly a source of humor.

Weston, through the years, has had her share of such individuals and has actually cherished them or at least tolerated them among the population of the town, realizing that we all have our own set of quirks.

This column will be an occasional look into the past “Characters of Weston”.

### *The Barefoot Mayor*

One such gentleman was a former Mayor of the town, Bernard Meeker. Highly intelligent, gentle, friendly and kind, the Mayor went to city meetings, met dignitaries and greeted the general public barefoot. He only wore shoes or boots in the event of snow and ice. Meeker was retired by this time, so as far as it is known he did not go barefoot at work.

Bernard insisted it was healthy and normal. He argued that man had been born without shoes and had, for many years walked upon the earth without them. Mr. Meeker said he found no early references to foot problems before shoes and therefore considered it a very healthy thing to do for one’s feet. He insisted that shoes had caused bunions, ingrown toenails; uneven gaits due to high heels; as well as blisters and calluses.

Newspapers, other than that of the town, often referred to Bernard Meeker as “the barefoot Mayor” and visitors to town sometimes asked if the Mayor was around and, if so, was he perhaps barefoot? He was frequently asked if he would mind if they took his picture—barefoot of course.

It should be noted that the gentleman also liked to run around in old, but clean, bib overalls. He relished the fact that his appearance with his shock of silver hair that stood on end, the bib overalls and his bare feet gave the appearance of a real small town hick.

Bare footedness was not the only quirk in Mr. Meeker’s nature. He was interviewed and quoted in The Kansas City Star as being a champion of weeds. He studied, and believed, many weeds were good to

eat; others were good for medicinal properties.

Character that he might have been, his death in later years was mourned by many.

### *Handyman and Troublemaker*

Dee Didell loved to play pranks on friends and family. He had a lively sense of humor and liked to “kid” around. He also could be something of a troublemaker and was never one to run from a fist fight or brawl.

His love of practical jokes was the reason he was shot one evening in April 1889. The shooting was a result of a quarrel over a small snake that Dee either attempted, or feigned to attempt, to put on the person of one Lawson Brock.

The quarrel, which occurred in the north part of town, was loud and lengthy until the two men finally separated and went off to their own homes. Lawson’s home was quite near and when he arrived there he grabbed his shotgun and proceeded to march over to Dee’s house, where he called to Dee to come out and settle the argument. Dee did so and, again, the two men quarreled over the snake incident and Brock emptied one barrel of the gun into Didell, the load scattering from his knees to his throat.

Neighbors contacted the town Marshal who promptly arrested Lawson, placing him in the town’s jail. His preliminary hearing was set for Monday morning. Lawson was eventually fined and sent to prison for a couple of years.

Though painful, the doctor assured Didell that he would recover and do just fine. It took a while but Dee was back on his feet fairly quickly.

Following that episode, Dee tried to settle into one job or another, but just did not stick with them. He was a good handyman, when he worked, but still continued to get in one scrap after another. In August of 1899, Dee and a fellow by the name of Lawson George butted heads over something.

The upshot of this quarrel or fight was that Lawson George shot Dee. Dee spent some time recuperating while George was sent to prison for a term of two years. A bit of research does not show that Lawson George ever returned to Weston, but the story is that Dee Didell decided his luck had just about run out and from then on he kept a low profile and became an often called-upon “jack of all trades” in the town.

Despite being shot twice in his life, Dee lived to be 65 years old, dying in August of 1944. He is buried in Laurel Hill Cemetery.

## Bits and Pieces From Bertha's Morgue

November 5, 1925 in an issue of the local newspaper we read, "J.C. Allison, manager of the Eureka Theatre, succeeded in closing a contract this week that will permit the patrons of the above theatre to see every Friday and Saturday night, a picture that is being shown in that same week at the Main Street Theatre in Kansas City."

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According to an article, dated Dec. 1, 1929, 'Nelson J. Alexander was the first cabinet maker in Weston. A friend of Theodore Warner, he was also a heavy dealer in Hemp and tobacco in Iatan. He came to Weston in 1837 and despite the fact that it cost him quite a bit of money, Alexander was the first man in this area to free his slaves voluntarily, in the late 1850's."

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*The Weston Chronicle* gave us this item in July of 1935:

"Miss Brownella Baker, personal secretary to Zane Grey, American author, visited in the home of her aunt, Mrs. George Russell, Sr., last Thursday and Friday. Miss Baker was returning from a hurried business trip back East to her home in Los Angeles, California.

She is an attractive brunette in her twenties. Zane Grey book lovers may be sure that much of the Grey style of writing comes from the hand of this brilliant Miss Brownella who takes Zane Grey's notes in the rough and converts them into readable books —sometimes novels and sometimes collections of short stories."

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An issue of *The Weston Chronicle*, dated June 1941, "The Fee triplets, Judith, Janice and Joyce are the first triplets in a number of years born in this area. The girls weighed 5 ¼ lbs., 5 ½ lbs., and 6 lbs. The identical triplets are the daughters of Mr. and Mrs. Bly Fee. The girls join a family of six brothers and sisters, ranging in ages 6 years to 14 years. They were delivered, at the family home, by Dr. R.J. Felling.

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December 17, 1965 "A young, former Weston musician has been chosen for the honor of playing the midnight mass at the Immaculate Conception Cathedral in Kansas City this year. Peter Gray has been one of the organists at the Cathedral for a little

over a year and has played on a number of important occasions. . . The service will be televised on WDAF. Following the Christmas services, Mr. Gray will join his mother, Mrs. Clay Mann and Mr. Mann for dinner, after playing for ten a.m. mass at Holy Trinity in Weston."

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This item was found in the local paper October 20, 1967: "W.D. Eskridge, son of Dave Eskridge, has just recently received his honorable discharge from the U. S. Army. W.D., a graduate of West Platte High School, has served this past year in Vietnam."

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In March of 1967 we read: "Airman Larry G. Page, son of Mr. and Mrs. George Page, of Rushville, has been selected for technical training at Lowry AFB, Colo, as a U.S. aircraft weapons systems specialist.

The airman recently completed basic training at Lackland AFB, Texas, His new school is part of the Air Training Command which conducts hundreds of specialized courses.

Airman Page, a graduate of DeKalb High School, attended St. Joseph Mo. Junior College and University of Missouri at Rolla.

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December 30, 1916 brought this: "Miss Daisy Polk, sister of W.C. Polk of Weston is in France doing relief work. The St. Louis Democrat says of Miss Polk; she is one of the figures of the war, having done relief work in England, France, Belgium and Germany. A scant three months after the outbreak of the war, she made a name for herself by becoming 'mother' to a number of German school girls who were stranded in England at that time. She took them back to Germany and convinced the authorities there that she was no spy and was there solely to help the girls.

Miss Polk at present is disbursing funds for reconstruction of villages bombed out during the war. The funds are furnished by Mr. Wm. Crocker of San Francisco."

Save The Date!

Sunday, November 8, 2015

is the date for our Annual Meeting.

Hope to see you there!



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*"If you don't know history,
then you don't know anything.
You are a leaf that doesn't
know it is part of a tree."*

Michael Crichton



? Mystery Corner

This photo, as one can see, is of a ribbon. It is black on one side and cream-colored on the other side. On both sides it reads "Lillie of Valley, Juvenile, No. 132, Weston, Mo. It also has a circle that holds a bird and a pyramid with a star inside it. Around the circle it says "Juvenile Department of the U.B.F. and S.M.T. The pin, which is attached to the ribbon, shows two hands clasping as in a handshake. It appears both hands are masculine.

We, at the museum, have no idea from where it came nor do we know what organization to which it is connected. Is there anyone among our readers who can tell us anything about this ribbon? If so, send a note, call the museum, drop by and see us, etc. Thank you for your help.