

Weston, Wilton and Redding.

Miss Ina E. Driscoll came as its teaching principal in 1926 and remained for 31 years. Enrollment ran about 250 pupils. Several Weston residents today fondly remember their schooldays and the kindness of Miss Driscoll whose caring influence extended into their very homes.

One longstanding school custom required that each girl in the graduating class design and sew her graduation dress. This white dress would later be worn at confirmation time. Another tradition was the annual Swedish smorgasbord of home-cooked foods, a fund-raising affair to provide special extras for the school, such as a motion picture camera to record school programs and activities.

Because of the nearby railroad station, most of Weston's "G&B" graduates went on to further education at Norwalk High School, or to trade and technical courses in Danbury.

The low building with its Spanish tile roof and pretty playground was sold about eight years ago and continues today as the Landmark Academy, a private school.

Not until 1934 were all the children of Weston's Georgetown corner assimilated into Weston's own school. But a trust fund established in 1906 by Edwin Gilbert, son of the mill founder, has now been reactivated to benefit children who reside in the former School District 10. Six Weston students who received scholarship funds in 1988 were Christopher Andersson, Nicholas Bodor, Catherine Huegi, Susan Johnson, Stephen Sundlof, and Beth Witthon. C. Bertil Rosendahl of Maple Street is one of three trustees of the Edwin Gilbert School Trust Fund.

A FACTORY WEB

The Gilbert and Bennett factory wove more than wire, it wove together the separate corners of different towns into its own private domain. As already mentioned, it provided school and a train depot for its workers' families. But, that was not all. The wire mill was the prime influence in procuring a first class post office and a fire department to service the area. Also, in the 1920's, the company extended loans to employees -- up to 90% of building costs -- for building their own homes.

These benevolent provisions served to bond this part of Weston into the Georgetown circle more securely than to the rest of Weston.

Although the work was difficult, dirty, meagerly paid, and sometimes danger-

ous, the Scandinavian newcomers were satisfied to stay. For the work was close by; it was steady; and offered the good company of fellow workers speaking a familiar language.

Charles Samuelson walked three miles back and forth carrying his lunch pail to work a 10 hour day, six days a week for 10 cents and 15 cents an hour. He continued working at the factory for 50 years. In the early 1900's these working conditions and rates were typical of all factory employment.

When the young fellows were drafted for service in 1917, young women and boys as young as 12 were encouraged to join the work force. A special weaving room was set up for the women. Esther Wahlquist started to work there at the age of 14 and continued at G & B for 55 years.

When the Roosevelt administration set minimum standards in 1933, the factory was obliged to raise the rates with beginners starting at 40 cents an hour, and Saturdays were half-days. Charles Samuelson continued there for 50 years, and other Weston folk, Rudy Jacobson, Gus Forsberg, and Nils Hansen among others also continuing through all their working lives.

OTHER ATTRACTIONS

Some of their children and grandchildren followed their fathers' work pattern, but others, after trying a turn at the looms during a summer vacation, decided to try something else. They went on to trade schools and became electricians, plumbers, carpenters and automobile mechanics.

Arvid Johnson went to Storrs to



Gilbert & Bennett Wire Mill about 1900



The A&P Store that was situated near the stone Methodist Church on Rte. 107 in Georgetown, in 1927. L-R: F. Ragnar Bergfors and Gustaf R. Hohnson, Mgr.

learn farm management. Harry Samuelson got a cart and ox team and found work plowing. William Samuelson went to tonsorial school in New York and set up a local barber shop charging 25 cents a haircut. Walfred Carlson became a clerk, then manager, of the early boutique-sized A&P.

Connery Brothers General Store, established before the turn of the century on the very spot where the Old Red Shop once stood, remained a focal point for many decades. This building until recently housed the Shaker Real Estate office.

At Connery's you could buy groceries and household goods, furniture, clothing, lumber and coal. Many staples were displayed and sold from barrels. James Connery always employed at least one Swedish-speaking clerk. Some older people here still remember when a clerk made the rounds of our neighborhood taking market orders in the morning which would be delivered by horse and cart in the afternoon.

Social life in the early days centered on Miller's Hall where dances were held and the first silent movies were shown while a young Mary Fox played appropriate themes on the piano.

Although the factory's attraction grew weaker, a growing variety of stores, banks, gas stations, liquor stores, restaurants and offices just over our town line has kept an economic hold on this corner for many years.