



## STILLWATER HOUSE

CIRCA 1870

### A BRIEF HISTORY

This well known historic property is bordered by both a river and a pond, being referred to as Stillwater House for many years. Why “Stillwater”? The answer lies in how the river interacts with the pond, the part of a river where no current is visible. This occurs as the West Branch of the Saugatuck River flows into and through the pond. While the pond always appears to be calm and serene, the current continues to flow below the surface.

### Historic Roots of Weston



Weston’s first English settlers in the early 1700s were mostly farmers living to the southeast in the Town of Fairfield, the boundaries of which extended to Weston until the late eighteenth century. In 1787, the North Fairfield parish was created in the area now occupied by the towns of Weston and Easton. In 1845, Northfairfield was split into the two towns and Weston was created. Some say Weston is named after a town in England. Others say it is purely geographical, presumably named for being the western section that split off when the two towns of Easton and Weston were formed in 1845.

Despite the rocky soil, this was primarily a farming community. The town did have nine manufacturers by 1850, but two decades later only the Bradley Edge Tool Company still thrived. Until the 1930s, Weston was farm country, made up of several agricultural communities, each centered around its own one-room school and/or local grist mill and forge. At one time there were as many as seven one-room school houses in Weston.

Unlike other nearby towns, Weston never had a railroad built through it, which hurt nonagricultural businesses, so between the Civil War and the Great Depression, the town's population dropped from about 1,000 to a low of 670 by 1930. Artists, writers and actors from nearby New York then became attracted to the community's wonderful natural surroundings and began settling in it. Construction of the Merritt Parkway, which arrived just to the south of Weston in 1938, resulted in population growth.

## Prologue to Stillwater House



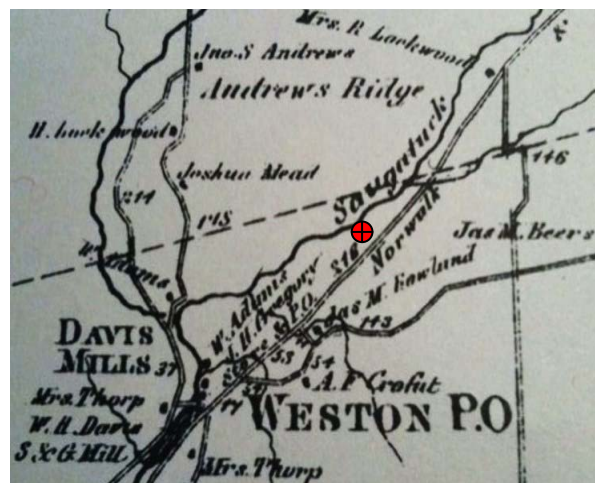
The house that would later be called Stillwater House was built by **James Perry** with family and friends around 1870. James was a descendant of the Perry family of Fairfield. How James and his family got to Weston begins with a story about the local Indians who originally populated the area.

In the early 1700's, Fairfield was the main town and the area now known as Weston was considered wilderness area. Few people wanted to travel or settle there. What may seem like a short trip today was quite a journey in those days. However as Fairfield grew, expansion progressively began. A well to do merchant by the name of Roger Ludlow purchased a large inland parcel of land from the local Indians, in an area around what is now known as Long Lots Road.

This land was divided into "long lots" and granted to settlers based on their land holdings in Fairfield. In 1758, **Nathan Perry**, great grandfather of James Perry, and Joshua Knowles settled one of the "Long Lots" parcels, a 523' strip of land that accommodated the homes of both families. Succeeding generations of the Perry family continued to live here while some moved farther inland. One of those was **Stephen Perry**, a son of Nathan, who settled in the Weston area in the early 1780's. James Perry, Stephen's grandson was born here, married and settled with his family just north of the town center after the Civil War in the late 1860's.

## The Site for Stillwater House

In 1870, James purchased a well situated parcel of land from Joseph M. Rowland. The land was situated advantageously on Newtown Turnpike at the base of Andrews Ridge (west across the river) and on the banks of the West Branch of the Saugatuck River. The Lockwood family lived about a half mile north on the river. Most neighbors like the Adams (local postmaster), Hamiltons, Fitches, Gregorys, Fawlunds and Thorpes congregated to the south around the town center now marked by the junction of Rte 57 and 53.



Circa 1870

To build Stillwater House and create room to grow crops, James first had to clear the land of many rocks and trees. This took about a year to complete and another year for the first crop. The trees immediately in front and back of the building site were left standing and remain today.

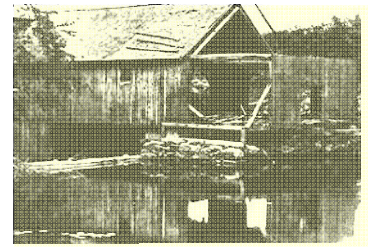
### Early Life at Stillwater House



Original house

No life on easy street. The original Stillwater House probably took two years of hard labor to complete, all with local materials. It was a small two story candle lit, fire heated home, centered around the fireplace which still exists today in the kitchen, along with the original wood peg floor boards. There was a small living area (now the dining room and two bedrooms over the kitchen area.

Like most others, James also worked locally at one of the places like the Davis Mills, Bradley Tools or the famous Cobbs Mill. It is now the Cobbs Mill Inn, three quarters of a mile south from Stillwater House.

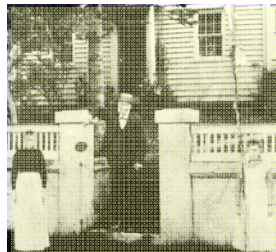


Cobbs Mill (Weston Historical Society)



Neighbor Ebenezer Fitch on his Newtown Turnpike farm circa 1880 (Weston Historical Society)

James worked his land for crops to eat and sell. He kept his own livestock on his land. He also hunted local wildlife and drew many meals from the Saugatuck River and its many varieties of trout which remain plentiful today. Transportation was by foot or horse and buggy at the time.



Henry Hamilton

The church, school, post office and local stores were in Weston center just over a half mile down the road now known as Rte 53 Newtown Turnpike which at one time was a toll road. Henry Hamilton, a cobbler and neighbor of the Perrys, served as the toll collector.



Post Office and Gen'l Store

### Passages

Shortly before he passed away, James Perry transferred ownership of Stillwater House to his son Oliver James Perry in 1890. Oliver would live there with his family for nearly 40 years. Like his father and most others, Oliver continued to grow crops and work in town as the economy was uncertain. The house was wired for electricity and an alteration was made to the house with the addition of a living room and 2<sup>nd</sup> floor master bedroom, nearly doubling the size of the house.

After a period of economic recovery and growing stock market in the early 1920's, real estate values began to decline steadily in 1926, perhaps a harbinger of what would come a few years later. In May, 1929, just months short of the Great Crash, Oliver sold Stillwater House. No records have been found on where Oliver and his family went next.



circa 1870

circa 1920

## Later Years

By the late 1940s and early 1950s, Weston was populated with a combination of farmers and business people who commuted to New York City and had evolved into a bedroom community with one central school. During this time, an additional ground floor room and attached garage were added. Also added was a covered, screened-in patio perched beside the river.

In 1955, the road leading into the property was extended and a bridge was constructed to accommodate construction of an additional home across the river from Stillwater House.



In early 1970's, an enclosed bar room off the dining room was added. This completed what is now the current footprint of Stillwater House.

In 1974, the road was further extended up Andrews Ridge to build a new home.

In October, 1975 Stillwater House received recognition from the Weston Historical Society as a historic home – designated “James R. Perry House” after the original owner, even though it had been referred to as Stillwater House for many years.

At the time, the address was 178 Newtown Turnpike. A short time thereafter, the road connecting the three homes was designated by the Town of Weston as Stillwater Lane.

## The Current Owners

In mid-1998 G. Kelly and Karen O’Dea were preparing to move back to their home on Central Park West in New York City after spending 10 wonderful years based in London, England. They wanted a country home close to the city that might be similar to the charm of the English countryside they had grown so fond of. Seeing Stillwater House for the first time, they instantly knew they had found it and in November, 1998 became the proud owners of what would become their little piece of paradise, just 45 miles from the center of New York City.

Stillwater House had all the charm in the world but needed updating. The O’Deas put a plan together that would completely modernize the house while maintaining its timeless charm. The transformation of Stillwater House proceeded carefully but steadily over the course of years and required an investment of over \$350,000. The entire infrastructure of the house was totally re-done and brought up to highest standards. The exterior had a complete makeover, including

new roof, new perimeter fencing and a new entrance to the property. Extensive tree clearing and new landscaping dramatically opened the stunning views while maintaining the privacy of an enclave.

More recently, the O'Deas worked with planners and a leading local architect to explore expansion possibilities. The winning plan included an additional bedroom, new library and new detached garage with separate quest quarters. In the end, they decided to postpone those plans and invest in further improvements in the existing house. This led to significant improvements to the bar, dining room, study, all bedrooms and bathrooms.

This all resulted in Stillwater House as it is today.

### **The Genealogy of Stillwater House**

According to public records, there have been 11 owners during the last 139 years.

1. James R. Perry	July 19, 1870
2. Oliver J. Perry	Mar. 5, 1890
3. Joseph L. Fodor	May 20, 1929
4. Verna N. Scofield	July 19, 1948
5. Peter Lomazzo	Sept. 3, 1953
6. Otto J. and Caroline R. Steih, Jr.	Dec. 17, 1953
7. David and Jacquelyn A. Goler	Apr. 7, 1960
8. Ernest O. Flatt	Mar. 10, 1964
9. Mr. and Mrs. Melvyn A. Kohudic	July 3, 1968
10. Victoria and Charles Gleber	June 13, 1988
11. G. Kelly and Karen O'Dea	Sept. 10, 1998

### **Some Notable Weston Neighbors Over the Years**

Weston has and continues to attract accomplished people who enjoy the wonderful natural surroundings and small country village feel that community planners have steadfastly protected over the years. A partial list of notables who have called Weston home:

Christopher Walken (born 1943), actor

Lucie Arnaz (born 1951), actress

Frank Converse (born 1938), actor<sup>[7]</sup>

Rodney Dangerfield (1921-2004), comedian

Bette Davis (1908-1989), actress

Jose Feliciano (born 1945), singer and songwriter

George Balanchine (1904–1983), choreographer and influential figure in ballet

Paul Cadmus (1904–1999), painter

John Marshall Harlan II (1899–1971), late U.S. Supreme Court justice

Mariette Hartley (born 1940), actress, native of Weston

Erica Jong (born 1942), author

Eartha Kitt (1927-2008), entertainer, moved to town in 2002  
Lawrence Langner (1890–1962), playwright, author, and producer.  
Brent Musburger (born 1939), sportscaster  
James Naughton (born 1945), actor  
Christopher Plummer (born 1929), actor  
Robert Redford (born 1936), actor  
Keith Richards (born 1943), musician, member of the Rolling Stones  
James Thurber (1894-1961), writer  
Fritz Reiner (1888 - 1963), Conductor of the New York Philharmonic, the Metropolitan Opera.

### **Sources and Acknowledgements**

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