

PROCEEDINGS
OF THE
BROOKLINE
HISTORICAL SOCIETY
FOR 1975-1978



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1976 OFFICERS

PRESIDENT

MR. JAMES ARNOLD LOWELL

VICE-PRESIDENT

DR. IRVIN TAUBE

TREASURER

MR. CHARLES L. SHORT, JR.

CLERK

MRS. THERESA A. CARROLL

TRUSTEES

MISS ELSIE P. BRIGGS, MR. ELMER O. CAPPERS,
MR. EDWARD HEARTZ, MR. RICHARD LEARY,
MRS. JAMES MCINTOSH, MISS MAUD OXENHAM,
MRS. DANIEL TYLER, JR., and the officers, ex-officio

ANNUAL MEETING – January 25, 1976

The seventy-fifth Annual Meeting of the Brookline Historical Society was held at "Wishingstone," the former home of novelist Olive Higgins Prouty, and home of Mr. and Mrs. Edward Ostrander at 393 Walnut Street.

Reports on Rooms and Membership were given by Mrs. Bertram Little and Miss Elsie Briggs, and Mr. J. Frederick Nelson, who is retiring as Treasurer of the Society after twenty-one years of service, was thanked for his loyal efforts on our behalf.

Following the brief business meeting, Mr. Mason Smith, an architect living in Cambridge and a grandson of Olive Higgins Prouty, presented some personal reminiscences of his late grandmother and of her house, in which the meeting was taking place.

Built in the mid-nineteenth century, the house was originally a typical tall Victorian structure with a bracketed roof and elongated windows. In 1913, Mrs. Prouty, who had grown up in a similar house in Worcester and found the ambience gloomy, engaged architect Charles M. Baker to remodel the house along the highly fashionable lines of the Colonial Revival style, then at its zenith in this country. Three old photographs reproduced in Mrs. Prouty's autobiography, *Pencil Shavings* (Cambridge, Riverside Press, 1961), show the original house undergoing transformation into an elegant Federal-style mansion: the tall windows have been replaced by others of more Georgian proportions, the entrance has been given a graceful portico, dentils have replaced brackets, and a crowning balustrade has given an appearance of more horizontal and compact dimensions. It is one of the handsomest "Colonial" houses in Brookline, and possibly in New England.

Its name, "Wishingstone," is derived from a large stone in the wall which runs along Walnut Street in front of the Prouty house and which was claimed by old Brookline residents to have certain magic properties. Further afield, Mrs. Prouty was best-known as a popular writer, her novel, *Stella Dallas*, being particularly celebrated. She was also a warm and generous friend to younger people of talent, most notably the poet Sylvia Plath.

Refreshments were served at the close of the meeting.

REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE ON ROOMS

The chief problems concerning the Devotion House during 1975 arose from the construction of the new wing of the Devotion School. The house became an oasis surrounded by noise, mud, and confusion and was very difficult of access by visitors. At Patriot's Day ceremonies, which 65 visitors attended, William Dawes had to ride around a large fence and much construction before he could deliver his warning about the coming of the British!

Many much-needed exterior repairs were made by the Town, which included repairs to downspouts, windows, chimney, and fence. Interior renovation by the Historical Society of woodwork, walls, ceilings, and floors was also done in the two front halls, stairway, front bedroom, parlor, and old kitchen. Special thanks go to Mr. Vose for his repeated visits to the house to check on repairs, and to Mrs. McIntosh for her continuous supervision of the progress of the work. Her full report is on file with the Secretary.

Still to be undertaken are several very important items: repair of the chimney, which is deteriorating badly in the basement, causing sinking of the floor in the parlor and cracking of the paneled chimneybreast; painting and papering of the buttery, which is now so shabby that it should not be shown to the public — this is particularly unfortunate because our collection of small objects is on display there; replacing of a rotted window and door in the front bedroom and old kitchen respectively. Your chairman had several conferences with Mr. McMahon, representing the Town, on the subject of finding the proper shade of yellow for new exterior paint. This has now been successfully applied.

School children, and a number of school classes and groups have visited during 1975, some to receive assistance with Bicentennial research papers. They came both from Brookline and neighboring towns including Weymouth, Rockport, and Newton. The Brookline Historical Commission met twice at the house, and a meeting was held by the Historical Society with tea in the parlor. A delightful Christmas tea was held for Senior Citizens, the invitations extended by Mrs. Kramer and Mrs. Castle.

From this coming June until October, two of our important large portraits — Mr. and Mrs. Nathaniel Seaver, and Mrs. Ebenezer Devotion — will go on loan to the Museum of Fine Arts, to be included in their Bicentennial exhibition, *PAINTINGS BY NEW ENGLAND PROVINCIAL ARTISTS, 1775-1800*.

The Committee feels that the house is now in much better condition to be shown to the public than it was a year ago, and looks forward to a busy and stimulating Bicentennial year.

Respectfully submitted,
MRS. BERTRAM K. LITTLE
Chairman, Committee on Rooms

REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE ON THE PUTTERHAM SCHOOL

In recent years the Annual Reports on the state of our little School House must have seemed like the repetitions of a cracked phonograph record, the dismal recitation of a tale of broken windows, vandalized building, fence and wall, and continually postponed repairs. Happily, this year we can turn the page, and report real and heartening progress on all fronts.

In line with a general effort to improve the face Brookline presents to visitors in this Bicentennial period, much-needed restoration work on our building has been accomplished by the Town. Our building is of course Town property, though it is administered by the Society. During the course of the year, the retaining wall and fence, partially destroyed by vandals, have been repaired and replaced, water stains on the interior ceiling have been eliminated, and perhaps most noticeable to the passerby, the exterior has been scraped and repainted. In this connection, decaying clapboards on the southwest corner have been replaced, correcting a situation which has given us concern for some time. As the work progressed, we were faced with a decision as to the window shutters, which had all been torn off, and many of which had been destroyed. Two considerations, first the fact that they were obviously not original to the early years of the schoolhouse, and secondly that their presence invited repeated vandalism, led to the decision not to replace them. The Committee's appreciation is expressed to our member and Trustee, Mr. Leary, Executive Secretary to the Board of Selectmen, and to Mr. Beatty, the Building Commissioner, for their interest in seeing that the project was put into motion, and in following it through.

This season, as last, the Society has been fortunate in having the services of Mrs. Owen Carle as hostess and docent at the school during the warmer months. Although opening later than usual because of the work in progress, and interrupted at one point by a prior commitment, Mrs. Carle's spirited exposition of the school's history to visitors, and her thoughtful written reports and suggestions to your chairman afterwards have been a real contribution to the work of the Society.

This report would be woefully incomplete were it not to acknowledge the interest and effort which Mrs. James McIntosh continues to direct toward the preservation of the Putterham School.

Respectfully submitted,
S. MORTON VOSE II

REV. FRANCIS A. CASWELL

My lines are fallen in pleasant places, particularly today's lines. For it is my pleasant assignment to say a few words about a very distinguished yet amiable friend who is our latest past president, Rev. Canon Francis A. Caswell. He is so universally known as "Cas" that it seems a little stilted and formal to refer to him as Rev. Canon Francis A. Caswell, however much he may deserve that honorable appellation.

How many cities claimed the honor of being Homer's birthplace? I do not know, but up to now only old Salem in Massachusetts has come forward to claim the distinction of being the municipal parent of "Cas." It was right and proper that Salem should have balanced off the austerity of Nathaniel Hawthorne with the outgoing warmth of Francis Caswell.

Harvard sent him forth in 1919 with the degree of Artium Baccalaureus cum laude. The Episcopal Theological School later added onto that by conferring on him the degree of S.T.B. However, it became evident almost at once that his life's main work was to be in the field of education. He served as assistant headmaster at Rivers School and later at Dexter School. In 1938 he became headmaster at Dexter School and served in that office until 1964. Many a bright lad went on to greater heights as the result of guidance from Francis Caswell, one of them becoming President of the United States.

He really has not forgotten his clerical training. His years as associate minister at St. Paul's in Brookline and as canon in St. Paul's Cathedral in Boston will testify to that.

"Cas" is indeed a man of many parts. He plays the piano. He curls. He bowls on the green. In his days in the educational field he taught Latin, German, modern history, and choral music. And he displayed unusual skill on the baseball diamond. With all these attributes it was no wonder he was called on to become a member of Brookline's Town Meeting, a trustee of the Public Library, and a trustee of various philanthropies. "By good example, this was his business."

But it is particularly as the President of our Brookline Historical Society that we have loved him. Let not his pleasant, easy-going, Abraham Lincoln-esque approach deceive you. He has demonstrated a great capacity to get things accomplished, and even while he was being our administrative executive he found time to prepare and deliver to us papers on various subjects.

I shall conclude on a personal note. While it has been a pleasure to be one of those who have worked with him as he guided the affairs of the Brookline Historical Society, it has been an even greater pleasure just to know him.

A tribute to retiring President Francis A. Caswell

by Elmer O. Cappers

SPRING MEETING – May 2, 1976

The Spring Meeting of the Brookline Historical Society was held on Sunday afternoon, May 2, 1976, in the Music Room of the Longyear Foundation on Seaver Street.

President James A. Lowell presided and gave a talk on the Longyear family from a paper which he had prepared for the Society in 1962. The paper, entitled "A History of the Longyear Family and the Longyear Foundation," has been published by the Society and may be found in the *Proceedings of the Brookline Historical Society for 1959-1963* (pages 73-79).

Following Mr. Lowell's talk, a "very pretty tea party" was presented by Mrs. Paul Walker and the Refreshments Committee.

FALL MEETING – October 26, 1976

The Brookline Historical Society and the Brookline Historical Commission held a joint meeting in the Selectmen's Hearing Room of the Brookline Town Hall on Tuesday evening, October 26, 1976.

Professor Wheaton Holden of the Art Department at Northeastern University showed slides of architectural work done by the prominent Boston firm of Peabody and Stearns. Peabody and Stearns were architects of national reputation who flourished at the turn of the twentieth century. They designed the landmark tower atop the original Customs House in Boston, early buildings for Smith College in Northampton, and structures in communities as far from Boston as Duluth, Minnesota, where Peabody and Stearns designed the Chateausque Union Depot, now preserved as the St. Louis County Heritage and Arts Center. The firm worked with particular success in the eclectic Queen Anne style which dominated domestic architecture at the close of the nineteenth century as well as in the increasingly popular Colonial Revival style.

Principal partners in the firm were John Goddard Stearns and Robert Swain Peabody, who lived in Brookline on Edgell Road in a house of his own design. Julius Schweinfurth, who was born and lived in Brookline, was for many years the Chief Designer for Peabody and Stearns. Brookline still affords many examples of the architecture of these men and Mrs. George Peabody, who is a member of the Brookline Historical Commission as well as of the Brookline Historical Society, has compiled a list of their buildings which remain here.

Following Professor Holden's slide lecture, Mrs. Peabody presented a brief, anecdotal and delightful report of social life on High Street Hill in the late nineteenth century when Peabody and Stearns were building stately mansions for many of the inhabitants.

WORK OF PEABODY AND STEARNS EXTANT IN BROOKLINE

ADDRESS	BUILT FOR:
House at 50 Edgehill Road	Robert S. Peabody, 1876
House at 44 Edgehill Road	Moorfield Storey, 1877
Church of St. Mary of the Assumption, 3 Linden Place	St. Mary's Parish, 1878-88
Chapel of St. Paul's Church, 27 St. Paul Street (Expansion of Designs by Richard M. Upjohn, 1852)	St. Paul's Church, 1880
House and Carriage House at 535 Boylston Street	Joseph White, 1880-81
House at 22 Irving Street	Arthur Mills, 1883
House and Carriage House at 30 Warren Street	Moses Williams, 1885
House at 135 St. Paul Street	Stephen and Charles Grant, 1885
Rectory at 130 Aspinwall Avenue	St. Paul's Church, 1885-86
Three Attached Town Houses at 101-105 Longwood Avenue	Charles H. Stearns, Jr., 1887
House at 36 Sumner Road	L. Shannon Davis, 1888
House at 100 Upland Road	Professor C. R. Cross, 1889
House at 5 Maple Street	George Dexter, 1893
Music Room of House at 78 Upland Road	C.H.W. Foster, 1896
Town Stables at 237 Cypress Street (Extensive Additions to 1874 Designs by Charles Kirby)	Town of Brookline, 1898 (Fee paid to Peabody and Stearns: \$752)
The Madris Building: Apartments and Shops at 353-359 Boylston Street, 131-135 Cypress Street, and 4 Brington Road	Joseph E. Davis, 1899
House at 35 Gardner Road	Agnes Young, 1902
Bank at 1-5 Harvard Street, now Brookline Trust (Alterations to 1893 Designs by Hartwell and Richardson)	Brookline National Bank, 1902-03
House at 29 Colchester Street	Edward Boit, 1903

List compiled by Nancy J. Peabody from information furnished by Professor Wheaton Holden.