



# Brookline Historical Society

Incorporated April 29, 1901

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Winter, 1988

Annual reports issue

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**Winter Meeting:** Sunday, February 28, 3 p.m.

**Place:** The Country Club, Clyde Street, Brookline

**Topic:** "A History of Golf at the Country Club" (in celebration of the return of the U.S. Open to Brookline)

**Speaker:** Christopher Smith will present a talk with slides

Please take note of the time of this meeting, since it is a slight departure from recent scheduling. Also, please note that this meeting is open to paid-up members only.

Refreshments will be served.

**This is the only notice members will receive -- please mark your calendars.**

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## PRESIDENT'S REPORT

This is only our second annual reports issue of the still-young Historical Society newsletter, so herewith a brief review of some rules of order:

Inside are the official reports that in years past were delivered to the membership at the winter meeting -- the president's report, treasurer's report, report on rooms and collections, and activities reports.

The good news is that presenting them in this fashion means the membership will not have to sit through a reading of the reports at the next meeting.

The bad news is that you are expected to pay close attention to the contents of this issue, and raise questions if you have them at the winter meeting.

I don't mean to make this assignment sound like punishment. The reports are worthwhile. I would draw your particular attention to Helen McIntosh's words concerning the woeful condition of Devotion House. This is the town owned property of which the Historical Society is the resident guardian, and it is Brookline's most valuable historical house. Unfortunately, it has not received the care appropriate to its stature.

Thankfully, through the efforts of Helen and Jim McIntosh, Luster Delany, Ed and Irene Hartz and others,

the town has begun to take notice of the needs of the house. But recent repair efforts are just a start. As members of the historical society, we must do all we can to keep pressure on the town to meet its obligations to maintain its historical properties.

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## CONTENTS:

President's report	p. 1-2
Collections and rooms	p. 3
Treasurer's report	p. 4
Activities	p. 5
Fall meeting papers	p. 5-8

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## A note on the weather

Last year marked the return of the annual meeting to a date much closer to its traditional place on the winter calendar. We were lucky in that no ill winds blew and over one hundred people were able to turn out.

Again this year I confess that I cannot offer guarantees, except to say that the Feb. 28 meeting will go on as scheduled, short of a crippling blizzard. There is no "snow date"

*Continued, page 2*

## PRESIDENT'S REPORT

*continued from page 1*

One note of optimism: In early January, in order to attend a Symphony Hall concert, Barbara and I braved a snowstorm that was dumping ten inches on Boston. The hall was better than two-thirds full despite the driving snow. I'm certain our next program will be just as strong a draw, whatever the weather.

### **An embarrassing confession:**

By rights, this should have been my "farewell" report as your president. The society's bylaws call for presidents to serve two-year terms, to be succeeded by the vice president. All the officers, by the way, are elected by the board of trustees.

Unfortunately, vice president David England faced an unexpected burden of business and volunteer obligations this past year which compelled him to withdraw from consideration as the next society president. At my urging, he has stayed on as a trustee where he has continued to be of great help to the society.

The trustees accepted my offer to continue for a second term -- something I am glad to do since, after two years, I feel as though I am just beginning to get the feel of this assignment.

We remain without a vice president, and I would welcome suggestions as to candidates.

This prolonging of a president's term has occurred before, and reflects another of the changed realities for volunteer organizations such as ours.

In 1988, I hope the trustees will join with me in changing the bylaws to allow for more flexibility in choosing officers.

### **Three cheers for new members**

A great source of pride this year has been the large numbers attending historical society meetings and the growing list of new members.

This is in keeping with a change in our philosophy toward membership -- it is less "by invitation" now and much more "by inclination". In other words, people can join simply by showing their willingness to support society activities through payment of their dues and participation in society activities.

In that regard, we successfully experimented this winter with a new approach toward solicitation of new members.

In advance of this winter's meeting, letters were sent out to a small list of prospective members. Recipients were advised that they could attend our meeting at the Country Club only by joining as members prior to January 15. Furthermore, and the trustees intend this to be a policy for all new members, they were asked to join at the "sustaining rate" of \$20 per year.

Of the eight who did so, two made additional contributions (\$50) to the society. Bravo!

I intend to repeat this process periodically, in hopes that our membership base will continue to grow, and that it will eventually contain a substantial portion for whom the renewal rate is \$20, which is a more realistic level for continuing and enhancing historical society activities.

At the same time, incumbent members of the historical society are being asked to increase their renewal fee to \$10 this year, and many of you have already responded, for which the trustees and I are grateful.

### **Meetings and other activities**

Again, good news to report. Our winter meeting drew upwards of one hundred people for a presentation on The Legacy of Roland Hayes, Brookline Tenor. WGBH producer Barbara Barrow Murray shared with us a shortened version of her video documentary on the life of Roland Hayes. His daughter Afrika Hayes spoke movingly about her father's influence, as did Elma Lewis of the Elma Lewis School of Fine Arts.

The meeting was a fitting tribute in the 100th anniversary year of Hayes' birth, and served as a prelude to a musical program presented later in the year by the Brookline Library.

In the spring, we heard Euterpe Dukakis, mother of the governor, speak about the life of one Brookline family of Greek heritage. Our hosts, the Greek Orthodox Diocese and Hellenic College, opened up one of the grand rooms of the former Weld Estate for the occasion, and served Greek pastries as refreshments.

The fall meeting was notable for Joel Shield's slide presentation from his extensive collection of early Brookline postcards. He demonstrated that postcards can be a valuable tool for illustrating the early architectural history and sometimes dramatic changes (not all for the better) in the streetscape of the town.

-- John VanScoyoc

## DEVOTION HOUSE AND THE SOCIETY'S COLLECTIONS -- 1987

The Devotion House was busy most of the year. As usual, January and February were the slowest months.

The schoolchildren continue to use the house as a classroom. Five third grades visited and worked on their environmental studies. The three kindergartens came for the holidays to have a story read to them in front of the huge fireplace in the kitchen.

The fifth grades worked on puzzles based on implements in the fireplace and throughout the house. Eighth grades have had an opportunity to learn first-hand about early architecture, and to learn about the early government in Brookline. The use of the house for educational purposes is endless. There were a total of 229 children who visited from both the Brookline schools and from private schools in the Boston area.

The visitors in 1987 represented seven states and eight cities in Massachusetts. The members of the Marshfield Historical Society and Brockton Historical Society visited as a group. The Girl Scout Troop from Allston came and made candles, and children from the Writer's Workshop had supper in front of the fireplace.

Many of our future programs will coincide with programs run by the National Park Service at the Kennedy House.

April 19th is still one of the best celebrations, with the arrival of William Dawes escorted by the National Lancers. Seventy people greeted him this year as he rode up on his horse.

The most festive occasion was, as usual, the Hanukkah and Christmas open house for the elderly: a time to reminisce, enjoy the decorations, and have special treats.

### We received gifts this year consisting of:

-- a "crazy quilt" made from silk textiles and embroidered. This was made by a group of friends for George F. Hussey, who married Kate Willard Nash; both were from Brookline. It was originally given to the Wilton, Conn., Historical Society, who in turn gave it to the Brookline Historical Society since the Husseys were originally from Brookline.

-- a photo was given by Jerald Kaplan, principal of the Devotion School. This 6x8 photograph shows a group of children standing in front of the Edward Devotion House, c. 1900. It was given to Mr. Kaplan by the Reverend Frank B. Greene of Center Harbor, N.H.

-- a book, "New Hope for the Retarded", by Morris P. and Mariam Pollock, was donated. Morris Pollack was owner and principal of the Pollock School for the Retarded that was on Alton Court. The school building was demolished in the 1980's. (Gift of James R. McIntosh.)

-- Two silk engravings were given by Paul and Adele Weiner. "Fort Sewall 1776", on silk; and "Lee Street", engraving on silk. Both are 4x6.

This year, 1988, our portraits of Ebenezer and Martha Devotion, by Winthrop Chandler, will be on loan to the National Heritage Museum in Lexington. The portraits were on loan most recently to the National Portrait Gallery at the Smithsonian. We would like to have a small painting or portrait to replace them.

A total of 32 letters, inquiries, and etc. were received and answered.

Repairs to the Devotion House are a constant concern: gutters, roof, wet walls, loose windows. In addition, the front stairs are not safe to use anymore, and the cellar stairs and bulkhead are all broken down.

The House, in fact, needs many repairs. Greer Hardwick of the Historical Commission has applied for a grant to have a survey done of the necessary repairs.

The Edward Devotion House is worth saving.

The Putterham Schoolhouse has been used by the children of two of the schools in town.

The Putterham School faces constant vandalism, though we are grateful for the protection given by the people at the Auto Museum.

--Helen C. McIntosh

TREASURER'S ANNUAL REPORT

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Cash on hand, January 1:

Term deposit	\$ 22,431.04		\$ 22,199.80	
Money market	1,318.77		3,145.90	
Savings account	6,206.47		4,767.90	
C. H. Blanchard Mem'l. Fund	1,275.53		1,205.94	
Patriot Bank	<u>2,975.86</u>	\$ 34,207.67	<u>2,375.62</u>	\$ 33,695.16

Income Year Ended December 31:

Dues & contributions	\$ 1,970.00		\$ 2,055.00	
House tour	235.00		-0-	
Misc.	50.00		-0-	
Wallace Trust	41.84		91.76	
Interest earned	2,437.10		2,038.50	
Books sold	<u>-0-</u>	\$ 4,733.94	<u>30.00</u>	\$ 4,215.26
		\$ 38,941.61		\$ 37,910.42

Payments:

House tour	\$ 200.00		\$ -0-	
Postage & mailings	363.20		153.00	
Printing & typing	300.75		100.25	
Meeting expense	101.50		-0-	
Repairs	-0-		51.50	
Insurance	1,380.00		1,368.00	
Honorarium	-0-		100.00	
Dues and grant	-0-		1,250.00	
Slides transfer	60.00		570.00	
Vault	110.00		110.00	
Misc.	<u>36.92</u>	<u>2,552.37</u>	<u>-0-</u>	<u>3,702.75</u>

Balance, December 31:

Checks on hand	\$ 276.84		\$ -0-	
Term deposit	23,947.47		22,431.04	
Money Market	1,391.65		1,318.77	
Savings account	6,825.69		6,206.47	
C.H.Blanchard Mem;l. Fund	1,348.16		1,275.53	
Bank of N.E.	<u>2,599.43</u>	\$ 36,389.24	<u>2,975.86</u>	\$ 34,207.67

Respectfully submitted,

*George M. Lezberg*  
George M. Lezberg, Treasurer

January 18, 1988

## "TELLING YOUR STORY"

Each of us lives his or her own history. Even History, writ large, has been described as "some else's present."

With suspicion of the rich trove of personal histories contained in the lives of older persons living in Brookline, the Brookline Adult and Community Education Program established a seminar in autobiographical writing, called "Telling Your Story," in the autumn of 1985.

Planned for writers over 60, the course has offered help in recalling, organizing, and editing individual experiences into writings to be handed down to families and friends and to be put on record in the Brookline Library, as contributions to the town's continuing archive of local history.

As the course proceeded, it became apparent that local history would be only a part of it. All of the writers were indeed older Brookline residents in the 1980's, and several, such as the society's Blanche Taylor, had lived here throughout their lives, but even these had traveled widely and been touched by the momentous events of their times in a way that would not have been usual in earlier centuries. From those who had come more recently, the stories read like the Thousand and One Nights: an idyllic childhood on one of the Philippine Islands, another on the Canadian prairies; flight from Hitler's Europe; experiences as a journalist in India; weathering Depression and war in this country. Gradually, we became aware of the many microcosms all about us, behind the facades of "ordinary people."

A collection of writings from Telling Your Story has been made and is being readied for printing; we hope that it will be published this spring. Copies will be placed in the library's Brookline Room, where visitors traditionally come to explore the town's history. We are convinced that these individual stories will enrich our appreciation of the diversity and color that make Brookline such a vibrant community, and we are most grateful to the Historical Society for its generous grant toward their publication.

-- Jean Kramer  
Irving Schwartz  
Telling Your Story

## WHEN IS A SOCIETY READY FOR PROFESSIONAL ADMINISTRATION?

*EDITOR'S NOTE: At our fall, 1987 meeting, the Historical Society heard a presentation by Electa Tritsch, until recently the administrative assistant for the Dedham Historical Society. She spoke of process that led to the decision that a professional administrative assistant could be of benefit to the Dedham society:*

The choice of professional or volunteer management of a historical society is not an obvious one:

-- With a professional (or semi-professional) paid employee, even part-time, what the society gains is a measure of expertise; a number of contacts; a person to do the dirty work that everyone else keeps avoiding; but, most important, a watchdog whose primary responsibility is keeping track of the Society's best interests -- thus the planning ahead, the work done between Board meetings, the seeing-through to completion of tasks.

-- On the other hand, what a Society can lose with a professional employee, at least in theory, is a sense of control, of grass roots cooperative action, the elation of "pulling it off" with minimal resources but maximum involvement.

In fact, these two extremes are not so irreconcilable as might first appear. In many cases, a Society on the verge of dormancy can be rescued, and its communal spirit reawakened, by the right dose of employee. Certainly one employee, especially a part-time one, cannot accomplish an amount of work, nor have the range of local knowledge equal to that of Society members. An employee can do what is not being done currently by members, however.

He can identify and catalogue the collection. He can answer the general inquiries. Or he can organize, arrange, research, and coordinate a school program which has always been desirable but, either through lack of time or expertise, has never been put together.

A professional society administrator is an organizer above all who sets, or suggests, priorities, who gets the right people together at the right time, who evaluates the Society's resources and helps arrange them in such a way as to make the most of them.

-- Electa Tritsch



**Brandon Hall in postcard dated 1911**



**Washington Square in the early 1900's**

**"LOST BROOKLINE":  
A POSTCARD VIEW**

*In a paper presented to the fall meeting of the Historical Society, Joel Shield discussed changes in Brookline's streetscape as evidenced from his collection of postcards depicting the town in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.*

One of the great pleasures of locating "new" postcards lies in the sense of discovery at seeing for the first time architectural elements that have been lost over the years. Sometimes this leads to the solution to a mystery. For some time I had wondered about what was then a blank facade over the Lil Peach store in the Village. It looked like a man with a hat but no face, and was vaguely disturbing. The postcards made sense of it: of course, it was a sign announcing the business beneath it. (A couple of years ago it was restored to its use as a sign, although now announcing, a bit preciously perhaps, "Brookline Village".)

Mostly, though, I was struck by the extent to which these lost architectural elements added to the sense of security and invitingness I experienced when viewing these scenes. It is this sense of welcome, of connectedness, the opposite of alienation, that I want to focus on as we view these slides. It seems to me that these architectural elements help to convey this sense by providing a bridge between public and private space. Good manners serve a similar function by helping to modulate the distance between people, and by establishing a minimum standard of civility. It seems to me to be no accident that the flowering of manners and of the sort of architectural elements that I am discussing occurred in the same period in this country.

Before I illustrate what I mean with some scenes from an earlier Brookline, let me say a word about postcards. The golden age of postcards was roughly from 1905 to 1915. The widening of Beacon Street and the establishment of

the West End Street Railway on it, and the subsequent burst of development of Brookline as a streetcar suburb of Boston, occurred in the 1890's. So by serendipity we have excellent visual documentation of Brookline at what was probably its architectural peak. What follows are slides of postcards in my collection, as well as slides of other material in the collections of the Brookline Historical Commission and the Brookline Public Library, with some recent photos for comparison. I especially want to thank Greer Hardwicke for preparing the slides of the historical material.

The most obvious architectural bridges between public and private spaces are doors and windows, and we find much greater elaboration of these elements. As examples, let's consider window and door awnings, exterior window shutters, and window panes. While awnings were not universal, they were much more common then, particularly on store fronts. Here is the Village (then called Harvard Square) from about 1905, looking not all that different from the way it does today, but with a nice display of awnings adding a sense of welcome.

And some more examples: Coolidge Corner, circa 1912. "The Coolidge", still standing at the corner of Sewall Avenue and Stearns Road, off Harvard Street, originally a residential hotel with a dining room for its guests. Observe St. Mary's Street from Beacon. Exterior shutters, even when they're closed, lend a human touch - you can easily imagine someone opening them in the morning. Notice the balustrade, another humanizing touch, and the multipaned transom windows. The same scene today shows the shutters gone, as are the transom windows. Transom windows were quite common on storefronts, and have been steadily lost over the years, often to be covered by signs.

While we're looking at balustrades, in its day "The Willard" (which I call the Steve's hardware building, on Beacon Street looking toward Coolidge Corner) boasted a beauty. No longer. In a view of Coolidge Corner from the

opposite direction, a mystery object appears, near where the Brookline Trust is now. My theory is that it is a horse fountain. Well, whether for horses or people, it somehow manages to add a human touch, doesn't it?

Another type of bridge between public and private space is the public meeting hall. There were many more of them eighty years ago (Brookline Directories from that era list over a dozen), and I imagine they helped to create a more communal spirit.

First, of course, there was the Town Hall, built in 1871-73, which managed to survive until 1965. Unlike its namesake today, it actually contained a hall where Town Meetings were held. At Coolidge Corner, Whitney Hall (named after Henry Whitney, the developer of Beacon Street as a boulevard, but renamed the S.S. Pierce Building, undoubtedly by shoppers), built in 1898-99, contained halls for what were called "theatricals", dances, receptions, concerts, and lectures. The space was later converted to offices, and you have to wonder if some of this marvelous detail is still there, hidden behind drywall and dropped ceilings.

In the Village, there was the Union Building, built in 1889 by the Brookline Friendly Society, located behind the fire station on Route 9. The focus of the Society was on charitable work in the Town, and the building contained a hall for dramatic and musical entertainment, a coffee room, a gymnasium, a billiard room, a bowling alley, and a "conversation room in the basement for working men to congregate to discuss the affairs of the nation." It was demolished in 1961 to make way for public housing.

In Washington Square, on Washington Street off Beacon, there was Gardner Hall, built in 1906 and named after Capt. Isaac Gardner, the first Brookline soldier killed in the Revolutionary War. It was rented out for concerts, dancing parties, banquets, coming out parties, and other functions. While the building still exists, the hall has been subdivided as retail commercial space. On middle and upper Beacon Street, there were two fine residential hotels that are no longer with us. At 1501 Beacon, there was Brandon Hall, built in 1904 and containing a hall available for rental. A contemporaneous account states, "The hotel is equipped with a very artistic ballroom and is frequently used by fashionable classes. It is specially equipped to serve ladies luncheons, private dinners and suppers." During World War II, it housed several hundred Coast Guard Women's Reservists, or so-called "Spars". After they vacated, there were plans to convert the building to apartments, but unfortunately it burned down in April, 1946, in what was described as a suspicious fire, only a week before it was to be turned back to the owner.



**Town Hall, 1905**



**Washington Street, looking south**

The Hotel Beaconsfield, at 1731 Beacon St., was built around the turn of the century by Henry Whitney, as an addition to the Beaconsfield Terrace complex. It was quite luxurious, with a beautiful park on the site now containing the Star Market, a stable, tennis courts, its own railway station, an elegant oval dining room, and seven party rooms rented for receptions, luncheons, banquets, bridge parties, and meetings. It fell on hard times in the 1950's and had been partially demolished when a fire (described as having been set) completed its destruction in November 1966, making way for a housing complex.

If public halls help to create a communal spirit, then surely the wonderful outdoor space of Beacon Street furthers it as well. As conceived by Olmsted, it does this by providing a grand boulevard, and also by facing it with buildings whose heights flow gently one to the next, with enough variation to be interesting without being jarring. (This device is used even more strictly in the Back Bay, to wonderful effect). In essence, the buildings state: "What I have to say is not nearly as important as what we have to say together." The unity of this architectural statement is furthered by the fact that the buildings on Beacon Street are, in general, taller than those in the surrounding neighborhoods, giving something of the impression of a river with riverbanks. The high rise

construction, both on and directly off Beacon Street, that has been so popular over the past 25 years has had, in my view, an enormously destructive impact on the communal statement that the street makes.

Another unified architectural statement that has unfortunately disappeared over the years was at Coolidge Corner. The familiar S.S. Pierce Building once featured steep gables. To the side on Harvard Street was the Universalist Church, the parapet of which echoed the lines of the S.S. Pierce gables. And on the Beacon Street side, the lines were again echoed by the Pierce Building. The effect was of a little mountain range, or, if you'll allow me some poetic license, since we're in New England, and since originally the corner tower had a belvedere on top, the effect of a lighthouse beacon on some craggy cliffs. The Universalist Church was remodeled in the 1920's and '30s as an art deco movie theater, losing its peak in the process; the building on Beacon Street had its peaks chopped off with the addition of a rather drab third floor in 1961; and the S.S. Pierce Building lost its belvedere in the hurricane of 1938.

I don't want to end on a sour note, and fortunately I have some good news to report. There seems to be renewed interest in historic renovation in our town. Note, for example, the details recently restored on a building across from Town Hall. Back at Coolidge Corner, the S.S. Pierce Building has been undergoing an historically sensitive renovation over the past two years. It's been exciting and encouraging to see the original brick and stone arches over the window bays uncovered, restored, and filled with multipane transom windows. The third floor of the Beacon Street building to its side is having three small peaks added, along with some tasteful new wooden windows, molding, and other trim. To complete the picture, a study to renovate the trolley shelters at Coolidge Corner is in the offing, and the MBTA has earmarked \$85,000 to complete the project. So things are looking up, and I hope to be able to return to you in another year with more good news to report and show you.

-- Joel Shield



**Beaconsfield Hotel in postcard dated 1912**



**Coolidge Corner and streetcar station**



**Universalist Church at Coolidge Corner**