Brookline Historical Society

Incorporated April 29, 1901

Fall Meeting: Sunday, Nov. 7, 3 p.m.

"Inventing 'Old Holland': Representations of the Past at World's Fairs" will be the topic discussed by Nancy Stieber, associate professor of art at UMass-Boston.

Hosts: Dr. and Mrs. Robert D. Mehlman, owners of Brookline's "Little Dutch House," 20 Netherlands Rd.

Paid-up members invited (see important note below).

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Some notes about our next meeting

This will be a return visit for the Historical Society and our guest speaker. At the suggestion of Jean Kramer, and with the indulgence of Dr. and Mrs. Mehlman, the Dutch House will open its doors to Historical Society members, just as it did for a memorable meeting in 1978. The occasion is the upcoming centennial of the house. The speaker, Nancy Stieber, recently returned from Holland where she had a fellowship grant to study exposition and fair architecture. Brookline's Dutch House was built by the Van Houten Cocoa Company for the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago and was moved here by Mr. and Mrs. Charles B. Appleton of Brookline at the close of the fair. It is one of four surviving structures from that exposition.

Pay the piper, please

Because we are meeting in a private home, only paid-up members may attend. **You can check your membership status on the address label on this newsletter. If you do not see a "'94" in the upper right corner of the label, then you must renew membership by Nov. 3 in order to attend the Nov. 7 meeting.** To do so, or to correct our records, please contact Steve Jerome at the Historical Society, 347 Harvard St., 566-5747.

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Curator's Report

The recent acquisition of a collection of nine items pertaining to the opening of Longwood Towers, then known as Alden Park Manor, sheds new light on the venerable apartment complex. The materials inlcude the menu for the Opening Dinner on October 1, 1925; holiday menus; and an amply illustrated brochure featuring floor plans, interior and exterior views, rental information and other details. As Brookline evolved from a country town into a dense suburb, the apartment house emerged with unsurpassed elegance and modernity. Such places as the Stoneholm, a Chateauesque monument on Beacon Street, and Pelham Hall in Coolidge Corner, both designed by Arthur Bowditch; Richmond Court on Beacon Street, lauded as the first courtyard apartment complex in the country, and a notable early work of Ralph Adams Cram; and Longwood Towers remain as enduring monuments to the aspirations of turn-of-the-century Brookline planners and promoters.

The Brookline Historical Society collects material from every chapter of the town's history. Gifts of 20th Century materials, such as the Longwood Towers collection, are always welcome. Much of this material will be included in a forthcoming Historical Society exhibition at the library next April.

Book Signings: Dr. Bertram H. Holland, past headmaster at Brookline High School and a BHS member, will sign copies of his new book after the program on Nov. 7 at the Dutch House. The title is "Safeguard of the Republic: A History of the Brookline High School Alumni Association. Cost: $10.95. Jean Kramer will also be on hand to sign copies of her book, "Brookline: A Pictorial History."

Report from England: I had the honor of attending the Attingham Summer School, an annual seminar on the architecture, landscape and decorative arts of the British country house held at assorted locations in England earlier this year. Throughout the history of New England, particularly during the Colonial and New Republic periods, Americans looked to England for cultural identification. Boston merchants including Thomas Handasyd Perkins and George Cabot drew inspiration in the planning of their Brookline country seats from the English country houses and gardens seen on their European grand tours. It was a pleasure to be able to enhance my own understanding of this important local heritage.

Our thanks to David A. Johnson, minister of First Parish, for the text of his excellent talk on The Reverend John Pierce, presented in full in this newsletter.

-- Steve Jerome

Proceedings of the Brookline Historical Society: Recent Paper

JOHN PIERCE AND THE ISSUES OF SLAVERY AND ABOLITION
Address to the Brookline Historical Society - March 7, 1993
by David A. Johnson, Minister, First Parish in Brookline

John Pierce was the son of a shoemaker in Dorchester and a Phi Beta Kappa graduate of Harvard, with a deep love of music and a strong personal piety. He disliked public conflict, unless unavoidable. Physically he was more than 6 ft tall and muscular. When he arrived in Brookline in 1797 he is described with his tri corner hat, his hair in a queue, ribboned 2/3rd of the way down his back, silver buckles at his knees and buckles on his shoes. His was another world from ours. The end of the American Revolution was hardly more than a decade past. The agonies of governing this chaotic congeries of states were evident all about as his friend, John Adams son of Brookline's Suzannah Gardner Adams, was elected to the Presidency in that same year of 1797.

The Second Great Awakening ripped through Brookline in these years, as had evangelical awakenings in many forms and persons during the term of his predecessor, Joseph Jackson, making his life difficult to say the least. Jonathan Edwards of Northampton is credited with setting this great fire of the spirit burning. John Pierce's wife, Lucy Tappan, was from Northampton, from Edwards' church - a fact John Pierce may have had reason to ponder in the evangelical warfare that engaged his family, his children, his church, his generation causing great rifts and deep personal pain.

Brookline at the dawn of the last century had 605 residents, and achieved only four times that number at his death. It was a small town. The residents were in 1800 mostly small farmers - few if any involved in slavery in any way.

Mary Pierce Poor, John and Lucy's youngest, remembered the old church as a child:

> *"...old Captain Goddard,.sometimes standing up to keep himself awake; and my uncle Charles Tappan, Shaking his head at me when I was restless; the kind old ladies who had footstoves...which they passed over the tops of their pews to neighbors after they had suficiently warmed their own feet. It was a relief from the tedium of a long sermon to watch them."*

There were few Blacks in town or church, though everyone recognized the friendly round face of Sukey, a Pierce housekeeper, looking down from the high balcony pew reserved for Blacks.

Separation of African Americans from the whites was almost absolutely and everywhere observed. When Theodore Parker, the great abolitionist preacher years later, spoke in the Melodeon Theatre in Boston African Americans sat in the gallery. Theodore Dwight Weld, one of the most outspoken abolitionists, was counselled in Cincinnati that one must not walk the streets with African Americans, for they not he, might pay a terrible price for such an act. That was as true of Boston as Cincinnati for years.

Free Blacks were not truly free. In all the Northern states by convention and by law they were sharply restricted in employment and opportunity to the most menial tasks, and in a host of other ways great and small. Thus when Dr. Pierce remonstrated with the Philbrick family for seating a Black child that they had brought into their home, in their pew, he was attempting to enforce a convention that was all but universal even in Boston, even in Brookline. It is sad that this incident alone has come to be seen to represent Dr. Pierce's attitude toward African Americans. It is also a tribute to Brookline that there were people like the Philbricks willing to challenge this racist convention. Even in New York City, years later, Lewis Tappan, Lucy's brother, fought to have his progressive abolitionist Presbyterian church eliminate such segregation. He failed and resigned. Long before this incident, in December of 1806, John Pierce had attended the dedication of Boston's African Meeting House, something few clergy of his day would have done. This suggests that Pierce's views were more complex than they have usually been represented to be.

The anti-slavery issue is also far more complicated than it looks, looking back from a safe century and a half and more. Let us consider what was happening during those years. Through the years leading up to the Revolution and after there were repeated petitions to Congress from free Blacks to end slavery and secure human rights. They were routinely ignored and Congress passed the 1793 Fugitive Slave Act in the face of them, attempting to molify the South. The focus turned in the late 18th century to stopping the remaining slave trade. Slavery, for all intents and purposes ceased in Massachusetts in those years, but the slave trade did not. Much of it flowed not through Boston but Salem and Newport. The underwriters, investors and insurors, however, were often from Boston. One of these, the firm of Thomas Handasyd Perkins, appears to have continued its interests in the slave trade not only when it was illegal in the Commonwealth, but even beyond the absolute Federal prohibition of import of slaves, January 1, 1808. Perkins was a contributor to the building of Brookline's second meeting house on this hill in 1806, but it is doubtful that anyone in Brookline knew of his firm's activities. It is said that one of the Sewalls had continuing interests in the slave trade. Judge Samuel Sewall, author of the **Selling of Joseph** in opposition to slavery, and signer of First Parish' original covenant certainly wasn't. Nor was his attorney grandson of the same name who became an early supporter of William Lloyd Garrison.

Benjamin Lundy began his paper, **The Genius of Universal Emancipation** (later to be published in Boston) in 1821, but he supported Colonization, not abolition, at first. Despite his relatively non controversial message he was assaulted and nearly killed in Baltimore. Denmark Vessey's plot to free fellow slaves in North Carolina bred waves of repressive reaction in the South, and waves of caution in Northern politicians.

1829 was another watershed year with Andrew Jackson's election, the emancipation of slaves in Mexico (threatening slave owners in Texas), the terrible anti-Black riots in Cincinnati and the pressure to abolish slavery in Washington, D.C. In 1831 a free Black, Nat Turner, led a slave revolt in Virginia, precipitating furious new laws against both slaves and free Blacks, and bitter debates in Congress on the subject. The State of Georgia issued a hefty reward for the editor of the **Liberator**, William Lloyd Garrison of Boston. That was the year John Pierce first, on the record in his **Memoirs**, attended an anti-slavery lecture, by Charles G. Finney at the Park Street Church in Boston. He was not pleased by Finney's screaming and wild gesticulations. He preferred cogent arguement to popular ranting, but he was there when it was certainly not safe to be so. In December of the next year he attended a meeting of the American Colonization Society, but was unconvinced that this was a solution to the problem of slavery. Clearly he was trying to explore all the possible solutions.

In 1833 the American Anti-Slavery Society was organized in New York by Arthur and Lewis Tappan, Lucy Pierce's brothers. The next year, in apparent reaction, there were anti-abolition riots in New York, damaging and burning churches, sacking a theatre deemed friendly to abolition, and burning down Lewis Tappan's home. October 21, 1835 saw the Boston riot that threatened Garrison's life. The Women's Anti-Slavery Society meeting at which he was to speak was mobbed. Mayor Lyman urged the women to leave - drawing from Maria Weston Chapman the immortal response; "If this is the last bulwark of freedom, we may as well die here as anywhere."

In 1837 the death of the abolition publisher, Lovejoy, in Alton, Illinois sent shock waves through the North. The Rev. William Ellery Channing, Pierce's former tutorial student at Harvard, had just published the second of his anti-slavery treatises. He petitioned the mayor and aldermen for permission to use Faneuil Hall for a memorial service to Lovejoy. He was refused. A determined appeal obtained permission. The service saw the emergence of a new face, a new voice, Wendell Phillips, who said in response to those who excused the Alton rioters as freedom fighters like the patriots of half a century before:

> *"Sir, when I heard the gentleman lay down principles which place the murderers of Alton side by side with Otis and Hancock, with Quincy and Adams, I thought those pictured lips* [pointing to the surrounding portraits] *would have broken into voice to rebuke the recreant American - the slanderer of the dead. The gentleman said he should sink into insignificance if he dared to gainsay the principles of these resolutions. Sir, for the sentiments he has uttered, on soil consecrated by the prayers of Puritans and the blood of patriots, the earth should have yawned and swallowed him up."*

The house was bedlam.

During the 1820's and 30s the last century the battle focussed on new states and territories and the right of petition. An increasing tide of petitions hit congress culminating in the great drive of 1838-9 which produced two million names. Slave state congressmen were increasingly embarrassed. To quel this welling public demand for action, on May 26, 1836, a gag rule proposed by Pinckney of South Carolina was adopted. All petitions were to be laid aside. No action was permitted. This was a terrible defeat for, John Pierce's friend, John Quincy Adams who had given years to the battle for the right of petition. The battle seemed futile but in the process Adams laid the groundwork for Lincoln's later Emancipation Proclamation. John Quincy Adams was small, old and fierce, finding his allies where he could, increasingly among the abolitionists. Again and again he found ways to introduce petitions on the subject of slavery, risking constantly censure or expulsion. When the case of the slaves from the Spanish slave ship, Amistad, came before the courts it was Adams who was called upon for the final defense of the rights of the slaves to freedom. He attacked the government's bias and malfeasance. At the end he could write to Pierce's brother-in-law Lewis Tappan, who paid the court costs:

> *"The captives are free!*
> *The part of the decree of the District Court, which placed them at the disposal of the President of the United States to be sent to Africa is reversed.*
> *They are to be discharged from the custody of the marshall - free..."*

When the service of rejoicing in the verdict was announced for Marlborough Chapel in November, 1841, John Pierce was there singing and rejoicing with several of the freed slaves, as he rejoiced again later when the 28th Congress overturned the gag rule in 1844.

John Pierce, like John Quincy Adams, was opposed to slavery. His colleague and idol in the ministry, William Ellery Channing struggled with the question of how to end slavery, as all thoughtful people did. Channing's influential treatises against slavery explored the real fear of disrupting the Union established at such cost in blood. The Union kept the still contentious states from warring against one another. If the Union were broken the country would be thrown into factions, contentious coalitions seeking their own advantage, bristling at other's demands. Disunion would invite other nations to take advantage and break the nation further. This was a serious matter to those who had not forgotten the hard years of the American Revolution, like John Pierce.

For his anti-slavery expressions Channing was all but banned from his own pulpit. Van Wyck Brooks wrote of the risks of the outspoken in Boston, in his **Flowering of New England.** If;

> *"a popular author, like Mrs. Child...published a plea for slaves, one's fame went out like a candle. Noone bought one's next book....One might have...a gallery of Copleys and Stuarts, but if one uttered a phrase with 'colour' in it, one's cousins would cut one dead in the*

street....In the morning mail one might receive a bulky anonymous letter from the South, containing a withered ear and a piece of rope. The ear had been cut from a slave who had tried to escape. The rope was for the Boston gentleman, in case he crossed Mason and Dixon's line."

Abolition was tangled in almost every other issue. Should women speak on the anti-slavery hustings? Should they belong to the same anti-slavery societies as men? Should they speak to mixed audiences? Didn't their presence confuse the issue with women's rights? Should they be permitted to speak of women's rights, and abolition? Wouldn't forward women alienate some all important Northern supporters? Few beyond Garrison were not troubled by such questions concerning women advocates. Many Temperance organizations, and John Pierce belonged to and/or chaired at least six, were also predominantly abolitionist in sentiment. John Pierce was a founder with Noah Worchester of the Massachusetts Peace Society, which in time was abolitionist, as well as pacifist.

Anti-slavery was also entangled with pietistic, millenial, anti-institutional convictions, most especially in Garrison. Much of the fervor of anti-slavery was found in its ecstatic preachers, evangelicals with an emphasis on immediate salvation, sanctification and personal holiness. For some the only godly course was to persuade people one by one to end their collusion with slavery. For many to use the political system or believe in political action was to doubt God's power, authority, rule over all the affairs of people. For Lewis Tappan political action exhibited faithlessness in God's ability to resolve the anti-slavery crisis. Garrison was yet more extreme in such convictions.

Garrison also savagely attacked the church in almost every form in the mid 1830s:

"The Methodist Church was 'a cage of unclean birds and a synagogue of Satan'; Congregational clerics were 'implacable foes of God and man'; Presbyterians and Baptists were controlled by 'blackhearted clergy' who 'connived with slaveholders.' An 'oath taking, war-making, man-enslaving religion' passed as Christianity in New England."

He did not make it easy for religionists of much of any stripe to support him. They, on the other hand, didn't make it easy for him. The Massachusetts Association of Congregational Clergy in July of 1837 issued a "pastoral letter" to all Congregational Churches complaining of "alienation and division" caused by agitating controversial subjects - calling on clergy and laity to avoid them. They further counselled women not to speak in public on such subjects, and preachers or lecturers to ask the consent of local clerics to speak in their parishes. John Pierce was there. He had voted in the affirmative 25 years before on a like resolution directed toward itinerant evangelists. He does not record his vote

in his **Memoirs**, but he went directly from this meeting to an abolition meeting at Park Street Church. Afterwards he was to meet the famous abolitionist Grimke sisters at Francis Jackson's.

Pauline Chase Harrell, in her address to the Brookline Historical Society twenty years ago on "Anti-Slavery Days in Brookline," notes that there was much abolition activity from the 1830s to the Civil War. There was also so much reaction that the Selectmen closed the Town Hall (Pierce Hall today) to abolitionist meetings in fear for the fate of the building. She says that the first Anti-Slavery meeting in Brookline was at Samuel Philbrick's house (known today as the Tappan House, as John Tappan, Lucy's brother built it in 1822) in 1837, with Sarah and Angelina Grimke Weld as speakers. The story has always been told that John Greenleaf Whittier hid around the corner in the house to listen in. John Pierce records that several men were there, including two of Sam's brothers, along with some 70 women. John escorted his wife Lucy to the meeting, but says he was refused entrance! The Grimkes spoke throughout New England, including before the Massachusetts General Court, and retreated often to the Philbrick's for rest. One historian has also claimed that in these dangerous days William Lloyd Garrison retreated to his house in Brookline. There is an investigative task for an historian - to find out if this is true. There were several well known abolitionists, including Philbrick and Ellis Gray Loring, who had houses in Brookline which were used as safe houses for escaping slaves. The Crafts were probably the most famous former slaves hidden here.

Pauline Harrell notes that Lucy Tappan Pierce worked with Maria Weston Chapman. Chapman was Garrison's chief lieutennant, carrying on all the business of the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society including editing the **Liberator** when Garrison was out, which was often. She is especially remembered for the annual anti-slavery fairs, and her yearly **Liberty Book**. To work with her was to be involved at the heart of the Massachusetts anti-slavery movement.

In his 1812 Ancient and Honorable Artillery Company Election Sermon John Pierce had noted that; "I should please neither side of the violent political parties; and these embrace, at present, all persons among us." In that sermon he strongly opposed the War of 1812, but he was rarely so polemic. There were fierce battles through exactly these same years in the old standing Congregational order, resulting finally in the Unitarian expulsion. Pierce was for half a century a trusted peace maker. He kept trying to molify or sidetrack the narrowing agendas of brittle orthodoxies. The orthodox Congregationalists tended to be anti-Catholic and anti-Episcopalian (which Pierce was not) as well as anti-Unitarian, Universalist and a host of others. Pierce had all he could do to be a peace maker. His brother-in-law John Tappan had a house guest in 1837 who attended every church meeting of First Parish at which he might speak, and tried every time to foment an evangelical rebellion. John Pierce had to be a peacemaker on home ground as well. It would have been

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impossible for him to have been an outspoken abolitionist, and a peace maker in the Congregational order. Pierce, never resolved on abolition, made his choice.

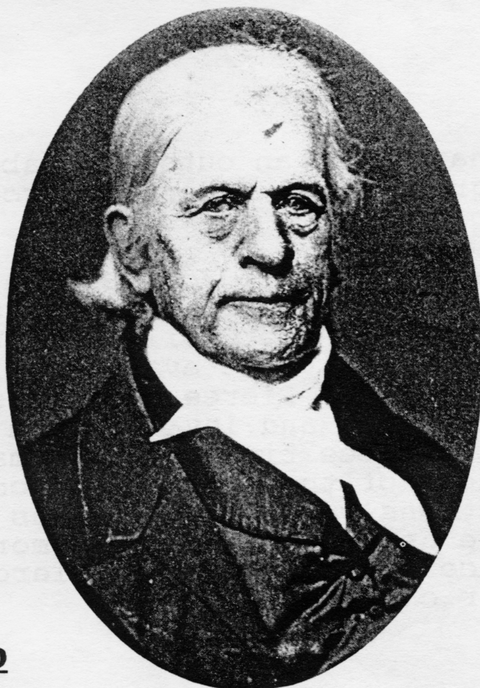
It is clear that almost all of John Pierce's children were abolitionists, from the gentlest to the ultra variety, and several of his grandsons were to fight in the Civil War. When his son John Tappan Pierce, an ultra-abolitionist evangelical graduate of Lane and Oberlin, returned to Brookline, Pierce did not silence him. He believed in freedom of speech, and invited John to speak at first Parish, not just once but three times. In summary it should be noted that New England was ahead of the rest of the country in resolving its anti-slavery convictions, and Brookline was at least as progressive on the whole as Boston, possibly more so. That is not unrelated to the presence and life of John Pierce, his wife Lucy Tappan Pierce, and their children.

I wish especially to thank the Massachusetts Historical Society for its grant to me in 1991 allowing me time and opportunity to examine the Memoirs and other papers of Dr. John Pierce in the MHS Collection. This is the second work based on that research. The first was the new history of First Parish, titled IMPRINTS, published also this year. ($10.00 - available from First Parish, 382 Walnut Street, Brookline, MA 02146) A further work on John Pierce and the evolution of the Standing Order is anticipated in the near future.

Rev. David A. Johnson

Read about the important part that Lucy Tappan Pierce played in the formation of anti-slavery opinion in 19th Century Brookline. **(page 3)**

Is your membership up-to-date? **(page 1)**



REV. AND MRS. JOHN PIERCE
Dr. Pierce was minister of the First Parish, 1797-1849