

□ CURATOR'S REPORT

On Wednesday, Nov. 16, at 2 and 7:30 p.m., the film classics series in the Brookline Library will feature a film of special interest to Society members: "Architect of the New American Suburb: Henry Hobson Richardson (1838-1886)." Written and narrated by John Coolidge, Director Emeritus of the Fogg Art Museum, the 26-minute film profiles the outstanding collaboration between Richardson, Frederick Law Olmsted and the Ames family in North Easton.

This summer the society received a gift of a Victorian doll's house (formerly in a High Street house). Any members willing to decorate it and furnish it in time for candlelight tours in December are asked to contact Steve Jerome.

A special thanks to Leslie Larkin, Nancy Peabody, Chris Idzik and Morton and Ruth Vose for their service as guides at Putterham School during the Festival in the Park at Larz Anderson on Sept. 18. Many of the visitors who toured the schoolhouse for the first time during this well-attended event have expressed interest in Society membership.

Recent queries from students, scholars, genealogists, descendants of past residents, members and others are included below. Any member with information is asked to contact the curator at 566-5747:

1. Paintings by and biographical information on the following Brookline artists: Edwin Tyron Billings (1829-1893); Frederick Dickinson Williams (1829-1915); Anna Tomlinson (active 1920's); Margaret Fitzhugh Browne (active 1920's); and Gertrude Koch (active 1940's).

2. Reminiscences of Mrs. Peter Burtchaell, the former Grace Bigelow Sears Mead (1864-1948) and/or her niece, Margaret S. Urann (d. 1993).

3. Reminiscences of Dr. William W. Jacques (1855-1932), inventor, physicist and pioneer of anti-submarine detection science, formerly associated with Alexander Graham Bell.

4. Information on Stanwood Hillson Corp., artisans of silhouettes on glass in Brookline in the WW II era.

5. Reminiscences of the Clattenburg family: Mabel, Elizabeth, George and Clara, residents of 105 Washington St. in the early-mid 1900s.

6. Photographs and memories of the original positions of trolley and bus shelters on Rte. 9, including the relocated existing structures at the Warren and Lee Street intersections.

7. Information on Albert Mason, Massachusetts Superior Court Justice at the time of the Lizzie Borden trial and a resident of Summit Avenue.

8. Information on family of Richard Johnson (b. Bklne 1856), his brother Patrick of Johnson Brothers, Contractors, and Leo Alphonsus Johnson (b. Bklne, 1888), who emigrated from Ireland in the 1840's.

-- Steve Jerome

□ PRESIDENT'S REPORT

Once again, the Society took to the road for our Spring meeting. On Saturday, May 14th, we made a special visit to scenic Essex and Cogswell's Grant, the Summer home of the late Bertram and Nina Fletcher Little.

Their daughter Selina, son Jack and his wife Françoise joined us for lunch at the Hearthside. After lunch we proceeded to Cogswell's Grant, a circa 1732 farmhouse Bert and Nina began restoring in 1938. The house will be preserved by the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities (SPNEA). Bert served as Director for SPNEA from 1947 until his retirement in 1970.

We were very privileged to have a tour of Cogswell's Grant since the house will not be open to the public until 1998. Our tour was further enriched by having Selina, Jack and Francoise join us and share with us many informative stories of family life. Special thanks are also due to our Curator, Steve Jerome for putting this bus trip together.

When Bert and Nina moved from Cambridge to Brookline in the 1930's, they joined the Society and almost immediately found themselves in leadership positions. Bert was elected Clerk in 1934 and would later serve as President. Nina became Chairperson of the Committee on Rooms in 1935; a position she held for the next 41 years (when she was succeeded by Helen McIntosh). During Nina's tenure, she oversaw the care of the Devotion and Widow Harris houses and Putterham School. Both the School and Harris House were spared from demolition largely through her scholarship and leadership.

Our long-time members will recall Society meetings held in the John Warren House (the Little's Federal Period farmhouse on Warren Street). Others will remember her

IN PHOTOS: Selina and Jack Little greet Historical Society Members to Cogswell's Grant, Essex. Center, Society members gather. Bottom, of the Little children, only Rennie could not attend. Present: Francoise, Selina and Jack.



wonderful book, *Some Old Brookline Houses*. The Society also had a memorable meeting at the Maimonides School, the site of Nina's childhood home. Bert read her paper of early reminiscences and showed slides of the original house and garden.

Bert and Nina made a incredible contribution to this society and their years of energy and devotion may never be matched. The Board of Directors would like to establish a suitable memorial to the Littles. There have been several ideas, but the Board would like the input of our members before making such a decision.

Presently, we have the opportunity to purchase a 1813 watercolor of Brookline and the distant Boston skyline. It was painted by Susan Heath, an eighteen year old young woman then living on Heath Street. We hope that the painting, which is now in the Littles' estate, could be part of whatever memorial we dedicate to Bert and Nina. However, the painting is fairly expensive. In order to purchase it, we ask for your help. Any contributions toward the painting would be greatly appreciated. (A special appeal is also in the newsletter)

One final note. Our Clerk reminded me the other day that I still hadn't sent in my 1994 dues. I had seen the renewal form in the Spring newsletter, but I put it aside somewhere and promptly forgot about it. Now I realize that many people are probably like me and just haven't gotten around to renewing their dues. So I got my reminder and here's yours. If you have not yet renewed your 1994 dues, please use the form in this newsletter. And one more thing, please be as generous as you can since your dues provides the Society with the funds it needs to continue our activities.

Hope to see you at the Fall meeting.

--Chris Crowley

□ LIGHTS IN THE DARKNESS

(Paper presented by the Rev. George Chapman Feb. 27 at St. Paul's Church. Accompanying video can be borrowed from the Brookline Public Library.)

The history of Blacks in Brookline begins the way the history of all African-Americans began: packed spoon-fashion into a space three feet high between the decks of a small sailing ship, a foot-wide area per person; shackled in irons, captured, kidnapped and bound for slavery.

As horrified as we are today at the thought of slave trading, as sickening as we find the cruel kidnapping, the inhuman conditions of the slave ships, there grew up in New England "a privileged class of slave-trading merchants whose wealth was drawn largely from the Negro traffic." In his book *The Negro in Colonial New England*, historian Lorenzo Johnston Greene also notes that "These people enjoyed the highest social position and held offices of the greatest trust and responsibility."

He lists among these families the Cabots, in particular, George Cabot. On December 10th, 1793, the wealthy Mr. Cabot purchased this lovely home, called Green Hill, located on Warren Street.

In fact, the history of Blacks in Brookline is bound up with many of the most prominent and best-known families in Brookline. Even those who may not have known of the particular historic individual know of them through the names of the streets of the Town.

Joseph Aspinwall, for example, was the son of Peter Aspinwall, one of the earliest settlers in Brookline. He was born in this house, built by his father in 1660, on a lot located across from where St. Paul's Church came to be built on Aspinwall Avenue. Joseph Aspinwall grew up in

Brookline, went to sea at an early age, and eventually rose to the position of Lieutenant of the merchant ship "Queen of Spain" which was engaged in the slave trade in the West Indies. Various members of the Sewall family, whose name survives in Sewall Avenue owned Black slaves, imported and sold them (along with indentured Irish servants and Native American slaves) and even, it is recorded, charged the Town of Brookline for the services of a slave, Felix, as janitor of the Parish Church.

Professor Greene, in his book previously mentioned, lists 71 "leading Slave-Holding Families" in Massachusetts. Among them several other well-known Brookline names appear. Samuel Gardner is one, Dr. Zabdiel Boylston a third.

This latter gentleman, who lived in this impressive home on what is now Boylston Street opposite the reservoir, is highly regarded as the physician who first inoculated people in the American colonies against smallpox. It is interesting to note that, before making these highly controversial inoculations widespread, the pioneering Doctor Boylston experimented on three people: his 36 year old slave, an African-American toddler of 2 1/2 and his own son, aged 6.

Other well-known streets, named for well-known Brookline families, figure in the early days of Black History in this Town, inasmuch as members of those families are noted as owning slaves. Crafts Road reminds us of the Crafts family, who once occupied this house; the Heath family lived here, on the street of the same name. The Davis family, whose name lives on with Davis Avenue, also owned slaves.

Captain Edward White, living on property including what is now White Place in Brookline Village, inherited at least one slave from his father, Benjamin White, Sr.

In 1735 Edward White added to his human holdings, purchasing from one Licestor Grosvenor of Pomfret, Connecticut, "...a Negro man servant named Cuffe of about twenty seven or twenty eight years of age" this from the bill of sale - "for the sum of eighty pounds..." White, in turn, when he died, left a Black girl to one of his daughters, designated which of his male slaves was to wait upon Mrs. White for as long as she lived and then, together with another man, he was to choose which of White's sons he wished to live with and serve. The choice of masters was, interestingly left to the slaves. The choice of freedom, however, was never mentioned.

The names of the slave traders and slave owners of Brookline are certainly well known. But what of the slaves themselves? Do we know anything about them at all, or only that they existed, like horses and cattle, on someone's list of possessions?

For the most part, we know little beyond a few names. Some of them appear on headstones in the old Brookline Cemetery on Walnut Street. "Hagar", "Cuff, died February 6, 1762; Catherine, died November 8, 1792", African-American servants of Esquire Samuel White. In her 1874 book, *Historical Sketches of Brookline*, Harriet F. Woods wrote of that cemetery, "The ground beyond the range of tombs which front northward, a narrow strip compared with what is now enclosed, was the Potter's Field', or burying place for the slaves. There were few stones, but one bore the name of "Dinah", an old slave in the Heath family, and another the name of Ben Boston', another slave of a still more ancient Heath".

Other names have come down to us from a yet more chilling source: a bill of sale transferring ownership of a slave from one master to another. Edward White's purchase of the man, Cuffe from Mr. Grosvenor of Connecticut has already been

mentioned. In 1693 Thomas Nowell of what is now Brookline bought a slave named Jane from a Mrs. Abigail Davis. Deacon Ebenezer Crafts appears in several slave purchases: in 1735 he bought a girl name Flora for 105 pounds, but was dissatisfied with her for some unrecorded reason and pressed her former owner to take Flora back and give him a refund. Four years later he purchased "an 11-year-old Negro girl named Dinah".

Dinah lived to serve the family for sixty years, and at her death in 1803 Widow Elizabeth White, daughter of Ebenezer Crafts, wrote a poem in her memory. It would seem, from this poem, that in her later years Mrs. White came to understand and appreciate the cruel horrors of slavery, as her poem includes these lines in which she imagines the grief of Dinah's parents when she was (presumably) kidnapped in Africa:

"How were their bleeding hearts with anguish torn
When she was o'er the raging billows borne,
No more to see her native land again,
But distant far, to feel hard slavery's chain".

In a later verse, she wrote of being tended by Dinah in her childhood:

"In days of yore when in my infant state,
Her weary arms did oft sustain my weight".

Mrs. White's poem ends with this verse:

"Rest, rest in peace, thou relic of a slave
Soft be thy slumbers in the silent grave,
And may'st thou rise washed in the Savior's blood
Spotless and white at the great day of God."

It is clear that in Dinah we find not merely the record of a name, a possession, but of a person, and a beloved person at that. We also note that her kind-hearted friend Elizabeth White could imagine for her nothing more heavenly than to wake up White.

A few other slaves of Brookline are also known from particular anecdotes remembered about them. Primus, for instance, one of the Heath family slaves, was known for his quiet pride and quick wit. One day his master, John Heath, asked Primus this teasing question:

"What is heavier, a pound of feathers or a pound of lead?" Primus quickly answered, "a pound of lead", and was laughed at for his answer.

But Primus was not about to be put down or made a fool of. Right away he turned to Mr. Heath, "You don't believe it? You go stick your head in the fireplace and I'll go up on the roof. I'll drop down a pound of feathers and a pound of lead. Then see which you think is the heaviest". Primus iced him.

Of another Brookline Black - probably a slave - nothing is known except his name: Prince. Almost nothing. What we do know about Prince is that he was a Minuteman. When Paul Revere took his famous ride and his partner William Dawes rode through Brookline on the night of April 18th, 1775, he summoned Prince no less than Colonel Aspinwall, and Prince joined five other African American minutemen, as recorded in Professor Green's book. It is written that 3,000 Blacks fought on the American side in the Revolution.

Deacon Ebenezer Davis owned a slave who lived to more than ninety years of age, with the dubious name of Sambo. A number of stories concerning Sambo are detailed in Miss Woods' book. Showing the bias and attitude of her time she wrote in the 1870's - Miss Woods described the man as "...a curious combination of stupidity and wit", and recorded his words in the "Negro dialect style".

One of the tales concerning Sambo shows him to have been a person of loyalty,

shrewdness and determination. It seems that he had accompanied his master to a lawyer's office in Boston, where Deacon Davis was to pay a debt. Davis overpaid the lawyer, and then asked for his change. The attorney, much to the indignation of Sambo (and, presumably, Deacon Davis as well), refused, saying "he never returned money in such cases". "Sambo", writes Miss Davis, "revolved the subject over and over in his thick head, and "bided his time".

Several months later he carried some produce into Boston to sell. One of his customers was none other than the lawyer, who gave Sambo a dollar for a nine-cent melon. Sambo calmly pocketed the money.

"Where's my change?" demanded the lawyer.

"You gave my Master no change, I give you none", replied Sambo, and he brought home the dollar.

Deacon Davis died in 1776, and granted Sambo his freedom as part of his will. Nevertheless, Sambo decided to stay in service, first to the son, then the grandson of the deacon. It was winter when Sambo finally died, and Miss Woods writes that his body was carried through the deep snow on a toboggan and laid to rest near that of Deacon Davis.

Susy Backus, of whom Miss Woods writes extensively, was a free African-American who went to live with the Croft family as a chambermaid when only a young girl, staying on with various members through three generations and dying at the age of 84. Her father was a slave, kidnapped from Africa, who served a blacksmith in Dorchester. When the blacksmith died he continued the shop as a free man and changed his name from Backus to what Miss Woods rather disdainfully refers to as "the more imposing and aristocratic title of Mr. Cleveland". There was at that time a poor Indian woman living in Brookline by

the name of Molly Hill. Mr. Cleveland married Molly Hill and they had a daughter named Sussana. For some unrecorded reason the name Cleveland never stuck to her and she was always known as Susy Backus.

Susy worked for Capt. and Mrs. Croft not only as chambermaid but also as cook, milkmaid, gardener and tender of the horses. It is recalled that when road conditions on Sunday appeared muddy, Susy was sent to run up and down and see whether or not the mud might splatter Capt. Crofts' fancy carriage. If so, she would hitch up the old one and they would all drive off to church.

Susy's place in the Church was in what was called the "Negro Pew", a small place above the singer's gallery. She was, apparently, the last person to occupy that place - which concerns another story we will soon get to.

Mrs. Croft died around 1820 and left Susy \$200.00 to provide for her when she became too old to work.

Susy continued to work for and live with several families, keeping house, tending gardens, caring for children.

In her later years her worn body was bent over almost double, yet she was always seen on Sunday, in a neat white dress, carrying a fan, a well-worn Bible in her hand, on her way to Church. She also visited regularly in the homes of many of the well-known old families of Brookline, and was often invited to join the family for tea.

The time finally came when she was no longer able to do any work, but the family with whom she had lived so long did not turn her out to a hospital or poorhouse. Instead, calling on the money left by Mrs. Croft, they fed, clothed, housed and cared for her, indulging her in her only known

luxuries: a handful of peppermints and a glass of rum once a day.

Susy Backus died in 1863 after a month's illness. The old Croft family tomb, which had not been opened for any bodies for some forty years, was opened to receive Susy Backus as the family had directed, and was then sealed forever.

The later years of Susy's life coincide with another phase of the history of Blacks in Brookline: the Abolition Movement. As early as 1700 Judge Samuel Sewall of Brookline wrote the first anti-slavery pamphlet printed in New England. This, however, was a spark which quickly died, Judge Sewall's own descendants being slave owners themselves.

In 1830 a remarkable and outstanding man by the name of Samuel Philbrick moved with his family into this home on Walnut Street. It is still standing today. In less than ten years from that date, Mr. Philbrick had organized an anti-slavery group in Brookline, against severe opposition from most of his fellow Town residents, and provoked a scandal in Church and Town.

This came about in 1837 when Mr. and Mrs. Philbrick were asked by noted Boston Abolitionist Wendell Phillips to assist a poor free Black woman and her family. The aid agreed upon was for the Philbricks to take her ten-year-old daughter to live with them. The first Sunday that came, the Philbrick family, including the foster child (as we might refer to her), attended church. This caused a great stir, and a lot of opposition, since the Black little girl sat in the family pew instead of being sent off to the "Negro Pew" occupied for so many years by Susy Backus.

Many people strongly disapproved, and were not shy about making their opinions known. The following Sunday people waited to see if the Philbricks had gotten

the message, and what they would do. As before, the young girl accompanied the family to Church, walking next to the Philbricks' daughter to shield her from the insults of some of the local boys, and went with them into the pew. One of the disapproving members of the parish stood up and gawked, trying to see if she was in the Philbrick pew. However, the pews were so tall, and the children so short, that he could not be sure. He then sent his young son to walk over and look. When he reported that she was, the man gathered up his family and stormed out of church.

This sort of disruption was too much for the minister, Dr. Pierce, and the church leaders to bear. Shortly after this episode a group of men from the parish visited Mr. Philbrick and told him that, for the sake of peace in the congregation, if he had to bring the Black girl to church at all he simply must have her sit up in the Negro Pew. Mr. Philbrick politely but firmly refused. It was then Dr. Pierce's turn to deliver the same message. Mr. Philbrick, however, simply would not agree to the proposal, whether it was made by the minister, members of the congregation, or both. However, seeing that the girl was clearly unwanted and unwelcome in the Brookline Parish Church, Mr. Philbrick made it clear that the church would not have him, either. He never again set foot inside the church.

Unfortunately, this story does not have a happy ending. Many adults were rude and unpleasant to the Philbricks because of their anti-slavery beliefs, and especially because of their Black foster child. The children of these people were cruel and nasty to the Philbrick children, taunting young William Philbrick as a "bobolitionist". They were even nastier to the little African-American girl, who within a few years left Brookline because the community was so unkind to her.

The Philbricks, however, continued their

commitment to the anti-slavery movement. When one of the Brookline selectmen refused permission to hold an anti-slavery meeting in Town Hall for fear of a mob, the Philbricks held meetings in their home. Mr. Philbrick became treasurer of the Anti-Slavery Society of Massachusetts and Mrs. Philbrick and her daughter Anna led in encouraging the ladies of Brookline and Boston to join their cause. The Philbricks also allowed their home to be used as a stop on the Underground Railroad, assisting runaway slaves to escape from freedom. It was because of this that they became involved with William and Ellen Craft, two of the most interesting fugitive slaves who came to Boston.

William and Ellen lived in Macon, Georgia; William being a carpenter and Ellen a lady's maid. Though their owner treated them well, they longed for freedom and developed a clever plan to escape.

Since Ellen had a very light complexion she passed for white, and also disguised herself as a young man. William was the personal servant of this "young Master". Since suspected runaway slaves were often challenged to write their names, and Ellen could not, they kept her right hand and arm in a bandage and told people that they were going up North for medical treatment. These tricks worked, and William and Ellen came to Boston, where they stayed for several months.

Then it was learned that William's owner had come to Boston looking for him. William and Ellen were then brought to Brookline and stayed at the Philbricks' home. The Philbricks would have been fined \$1,000 for each of them, under the Fugitive Slave Act, had they been discovered. During their time in Brookline, Mrs. Philbrick said that she was more afraid of them shooting themselves with the pistol they carried than she was of their being captured.

After three days they returned to Boston, assisted by William Bowditch, another Brookline abolitionist. They were married legally by Dr. Theodore Parker and put on a ship to Canada and safety. From there they sailed to Liverpool, England. Years later William Craft returned to Brookline to visit the Philbricks and Mr. Bowditch.

Mr. Bowditch, whose house on Linden Place was also an Underground Railroad stop, was involved in another daring rescue of a fugitive slave. Abolitionists in Boston learned that a runaway was secretly staying on the ship Florence, anchored in Boston Harbor. Mr. Bowditch and several companions went out by small boat to bring him to safety. As they left the dock Mr. Bowditch asked the captain of the little boat how he planned to rescue the slave. The man replied that he had no plan but would think of something.

As they drew along side of the ship the leader of the group called out in a voice of authority:

"Is the captain aboard?"

"No, sir", came the reply.

"Is the first mate there?"

"I'm the man", was the answer.

"Well," said the leader of the party in a moment of inspiration, "I want that nigger damned quick!"

The first mate, thinking him to be an official of some sort, quickly produced the fugitive slave from his hiding place and gave him over to the rescuers. In about two minutes the group was headed back to Boston with the fugitive slave safe in their company. Mr. Bowditch erupted in laughter. Later that day Mr. Bowditch took the rescued man to his own home in Brookline. From there the man was sent to a safe house in Newton and from there safely reached Canada.

Over the next several years, as people saw not only the dramatic escapes but also the

terrible sight of escaped slaves captured and returned to their owners, attitudes changed and Brookline became more thoroughly aligned with the Abolitionist group. Most of the efforts of the anti-slavery party were peaceable and political. Occasionally, however, an element of violence was present.

One such place was in the Territory of Kansas, in the 1850's. There, those who favored slavery and those who opposed it literally battled things out, since Kansas was to be admitted as a State, with slavery either legal or illegal, depending on how the majority of the population voted.

In order to increase the number of anti-slavery people in Kansas, the Massachusetts Emigrant Aid Society was founded. Amos Lawrence of Brookline was one of the founders and chief contributors of money. His home in the Cottage Farm area of Brookline illustrates his great wealth, which he freely used in the cause of freedom for African Americans. In gratitude for his support, one group of Massachusetts settlers in Kansas named their new town Lawrence. The Lawrence School, on Francis Street in Brookline, was also named in his honor.

When matters in Kansas became truly violent, Amos Lawrence raised a great deal of money to buy rifles for the anti-slavery settlers led by John Brown. In order to escape detection, these rifles were packed in boxes labeled "books". When the Civil War broke out a few years later, Amos Lawrence raised a troop of cavalry to serve in the fight to maintain the Union and forever abolish slavery in the United States.

The onset of the War Between The States brings to conclusion the first phase of the Black history of Brookline. In the darkness that was history for African Americans in this Town - the days of slave-trading and

slavery, of cruel discrimination which drove an innocent little girl out of town and her protector out of church - there were but a few lights. These lights, however, shone brightly: Primus, who maintained his dignity in spite of his condition; Dinah, whose faithful service enabled her mistress to fully appreciate the horrors of slavery; Sambo, more honorable and trustworthy than the lawyer with whom he did business and Prince, an African American Minuteman of the Revolution; The Philbricks and William Bowditch, who suffered the disapproval of their neighbors and risked their money if not their very lives assisting fugitive slaves to escape; Amos Lawrence, generously spending his wealth in the cause of abolition.

Yet, the first 200 years of the history of Brookline involves African Americans only in terms of what was done to them - namely slavery in the first 150 years; or for them namely abolition and the Underground Railroad. It would not be until the Twentieth Century that Black people would return to live in Brookline, and in the latter third of this century come fully into their own as community leaders and elected officials of the Town.

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