



# Brookline Historical Society

Incorporated April 29, 1901

**LATE BULLETIN:** Governor Dukakis has had a change of plans and will NOT be tentatively scheduled for SUNDAY, OCT. 27. This will be confirmed later.

Spring/Summer Newsletter

Aug. 1, 1991

**Fall Meeting:** "Governing Massachusetts, a Personal View," with special guest, former Gov. Michael S. Dukakis.

**Sunday, Oct. 20, 3 p.m.,** at the Baker School. Please mark your calendars.

## Editor's report

This newsletter arrives unexpectedly for those of you who keep track of our usual publication schedule. Because of the special nature of our spring meeting -- a field trip to New London, Connecticut -- a simple notice rather than newsletter went out in March. This, then, is the spring newsletter, despite the August date. It contains a report from the New London field trip and other news, as well as the 1991 list of members.

Several dozen of you will find your names on the list of members despite your failure to pay dues at the beginning of the year. This is your grace period. Those who do not respond to the additional billing included with this mailing will have to be removed as members, with our regrets. Please support the Society's activities.

A note about Gay Myers' talk transcribed starting on page 2: The work of the Lyman Allyn Art Museum in assembling its Devotion family exhibit was impressive and inspirational. The 30-or-so of us who made the trip returned with a fresh appreciation of the energies of the Devotion family and their contribution to New England's colonial history.

Steve Jerome pulled off the logistical details of the trip with aplomb. Like a pied piper, he took us places we never expected to go -- down back roads and up cemetery hills of Scotland, Connecticut. I will hold in my memory the sight of our group milling among the stones of one of Connecticut's earliest burying grounds, while Steve shouted out a tutorial on cenotaphs.

Please hold several dates for future Society activities: Sept. 22 we participate in the Brookline Council for the Arts Festival at Larz Anderson Park. Oct. 20 is our meeting with former Gov. Dukakis, about which

more information is to come. And Saturday, Nov. 2, is the tentative date for a Harvest Festival at Devotion House. -- John VanScoyoc

## President's report

For those of you who missed or wish to relive the pleasures of our winter meeting, we hope to have copies of the complete script of the dramatization of "Letters from the Civil War Battlefront" available for distribution in the fall.

Soon to be seen and enjoyed: the Society is co-sponsor with the Brookline Public Library of an internship project which will fill out the Library's local history photography collection. John Nanian, a graduate student in the Boston University historic Preservation program, and a professional photographer of the built environment, is taking pictures of Brookline's public buildings, bridges, street scenes and cemeteries. To suggest subjects, call Deborah Abraham, reference librarian, 730-2369.

Michael Foster is researching and interviewing in Brookline for a forthcoming book on the Kennedy women. If you recall Kennedy's Beals Street and Abbotsford Road years, please call him at 508 653-8475.

Our two Chandler portraits of the Rev. and Mrs. Ebenezer Devotion and the portrait of Mr. and Mrs. Nathaniel Seaver are now on permanent loan and will be on view on dates yet to be determined at the Worcester Art Museum, 55 Salisbury St., Worcester.

Objects loaned to the Lyman Allyn Museum are now back at Devotion House. Curator Steve Jerome welcomes visits Tuesday and Thursday, 2:30-4:30, and by appointment, 566-5747. -- Miriam Sargon

## The Devotion Family in Connecticut

By Gay Myers

(Editor's note: The following is an edited version of a gallery talk given to members of the Brookline Historical Society during their visit to the exhibit, "The Devotion Family: The Lives and Possessions of Three Generations in Eighteenth-Century Connecticut," at the Lyman Allyn Art Museum, New London, Conn.)

The idea of this exhibition really started with the phenomenal collection of portraits that were done of the Devotion family. Eight portraits were painted in 1770 and 1772 by Winthrop Chandler, who was a Connecticut portrait painter.

This is a portrait of Reverend Ebenezer Devotion, painted in 1770 on his birthday, which is an interesting idea. When Winthrop Chandler painted this, he was in his early twenties. This portrait and that of Reverend Devotion's wife are the earliest Chandler portraits we know of. For a man in his early twenties, he's obviously a very accomplished painter already. There's been a lot of speculation and a lot of research trying to figure out how such a young man suddenly started painting really striking portraits. After all, he was from Woodstock, Connecticut, which was not the center of the world. No one has ever been able to actually pin it down, but the obvious thought is that he probably went to Boston. A lot of artists went to Boston to be trained, and people see in Chandler's early works things that remind them of Copley. So if he didn't work with Copley maybe he saw paintings that were by Copley to give him an idea. He left Woodstock, went somewhere, came back, and the portraits of the Devotions were his first commissions -- very important in his life.

We're very excited by the fact that we have been able to reunite the portraits for the first time in many years. This man obviously is Reverend Devotion. It's a very riveting portrait. This portrait has just recently been used on the cover of a book that was written by a historian and the title of the book is "Knowledge Is Power." That pretty well sums up the message of this portrait. Here is a man who is obviously of great intellect, and when it came time to have his portrait painted, how did he want to be portrayed? He wanted to be portrayed in his study with all of his books. In our research we found his inventory. In the 18th century when a person of means died, the family made a list of everything he owned. A vast amount of his wealth was in books. Books were very expensive, they were very rare and he owned over 200. He wasn't just a minister who

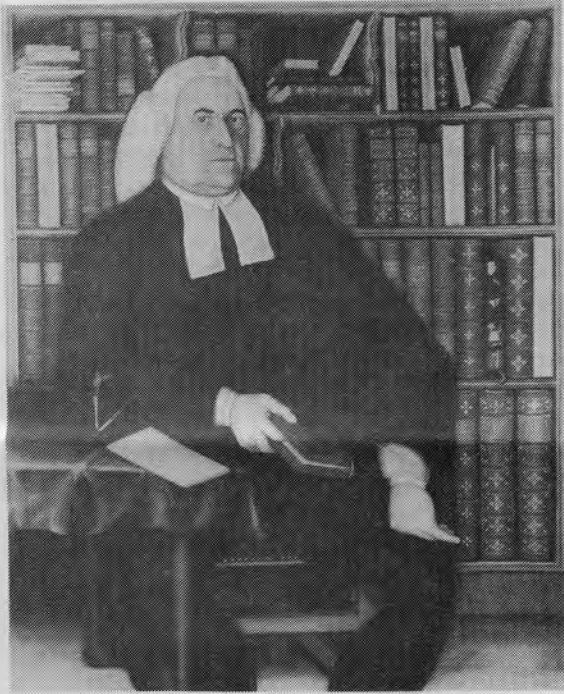
was interested in religious issues -- he had books about science and natural history and the world.

Imagine a man who went to Yale, who is the minister in a small community but who wants to stay in touch with the world at large. He got magazines from London, he knew what was happening in the world. He was actually a teacher who prepared young men to go away to college. If you studied with Reverend Devotion you were studying with a man of the enlightenment. In the first person accounts, people who knew him talk about his great knowledge and his speaking ability. The quote that we started this off with was written by the president of Yale College when he heard that this man had died: "He was a gentleman of solid understanding, extensive reading and eminent for every kind of merit, a great divine, a pious man and an able politician."

Three generations of Devotions were painted by Winthrop Chandler, and we're now in the section that we call "An 18th Century Minister and his Wife in Rural Connecticut." This is a portrait of Rev. Devotion's wife. Both of these paintings are owned by the Brookline Historical Society. When Reverend Devotion got his first job, he was 21 years old. He was unmarried. He was leaving Yale and he was going to a new community. Arriving in that community, he was instantly the most important man in town. At 21 years old, he had to establish his position and authority and fit into the community. In the 18th century, the way that ministers often did that was to look around for a marriageable daughter of a prominent member of the community. Devotion met Martha Lathrop. Her parents were well known and respected. Her father was a colonel. She came from a family that were also cabinet makers, which is interesting. Edward Devotion married her soon after arriving in Scotland, Connecticut and that gave him a connection into the community.

The idea of connections was very important in the 18th century: your family, in effect, provided you with the means of getting on in society, provided you with health care if you were ill, provided you with some sort of financial support if you were unemployed, took care of you when you were old. And you wanted very much to move into a family that would put you in the right level of society.

After Martha Devotion became Reverend Devotion's wife, they settled into the community and he began his career. We have a copy of the contract of the church settling with him when he began his job as a minister, from 1735. We have books he owned which were listed in his inventory and show his interest in the world at large. We have a great little fragment of a dressing gown Reverend Devotion owned with a little story attached to it which shows how legends about people pass down



**Winthrop Chandler**  
*Rev. Ebenezer Devotion*  
Brookline Historical Society



**Winthrop Chandler**  
*Martha Lathrop Devotion Cogswell*  
Brookline Historical Society



**Winthrop Chandler**  
*Eunice Huntington Devotion  
and Her Daughter Eunice*  
Lyman Allyn Art Museum



**Winthrop Chandler**  
*Judge Ebenezer Devotion*  
Scotland Historical Society,  
Scotland, Connecticut

through the generations, a sort of family tradition. This is a desk which he probably owned.

This section here deals with religious controversy in 18th century Connecticut. About ten years after Devotion became a minister, during what's called The Great Awakening, revivalists or enthusiastic preachers would go around Connecticut and get people all worked up. And those people oftentimes broke off from the established church. Reverend Devotion was appalled when, approximately ten years after he started, a group of his congregation left and said, in effect, "We don't like your style of teaching. It's too reasoned, it's too intellectual. We're going to go off and we're going to start our own church because we're very excited about this idea of God's grace coming down to us. We don't want you telling us whether we have grace or not. We want to go to these preachers and hear about it and find it ourselves."

We have a book from a whole group of ministers -- we'll call them the establishment -- and in it ministers write out their complaints about the fact that these other ministers who haven't gone to college and haven't studied are going around stealing the flock. Reverend Devotion signed it. We also have some books which talk about the question of what's wrong with the state of religion in New England. Again, Rev. Devotion was trying to figure out how to cope with the new situation.

In the 1760s, the first movements towards independence came up in the colonies. It's interesting because, as a minister, Ebenezer Devotion was active in politics. Don't forget that quote from the President of Yale: he was an able politician. He was actually elected and sent to Hartford during the Stamp Act crisis when England tried to raise taxes in the colonies, and the colonies answered: no taxation without representation. Reverend Devotion sowed the seeds for his son's activities in the Revolution. His son was an ardent supporter of independence but Reverend Devotion died before the actual revolution came about.

We have also a copy of Rev. Devotion's will, which you might want to take a look at. We studied the inventory and we found things which he probably owned. The high boy -- the high chest which you saw when you first walked into the stairs -- which is also owned by Brookline, is probably the high chest listed in his inventory. The clock, which isn't here because it's too fragile, is from Brookline. It's the most expensive thing he owned, and his inventory mentions a London clock. This clock has the history with it -- it was always in his house. These pictures were in his inventory, still owned by descendants. We also have his gravestone and one of those long epitaphs of the 18th century talking about what a really admired man he was.

We discovered there is much less known about the women's lives. The men left all manner of documents: they had books, inventories, wills. It was uncommon in the 18th century for women to have those. We really wouldn't know much at all about Martha, Ebenezer's wife, if it hadn't been for the fact that, after Rev. Devotion died, she remarried. Again, connections were important. The new minister in town married the old minister's widow. He moved into the house, took over the family in a way; and, he kept a diary. His name was Reverend Cogswell. The Connecticut Historical Society has 600 pages of his diary, which covered ten years. I'll read what we put on the label of the Martha Lathrop portrait, a truly wonderful quote written about this woman by her second husband: "Though friends and children are kind, no one is so kind or sweet as my wife, who is almost overjoyed to see me safe returned. I was no less glad to see her so well. May God make me thankful and enable us to walk together as the heirs of life." At least for me, she looks a little somber and maybe a little severe, and if all we had was the portrait we might not find her very sympathetic. But all the way through the diary and through letters that her grandchildren would write, she was described as a very affectionate, loving woman. It's wonderful to give her her due, that she was very much loved by her family.

There's another quote where Cogswell talks about his wife as she was getting old and infirm and worrying about her spiritual state. In 1790, she was of the generation that went through the religious controversies, and she was left to wonder: Did I live a good enough life? Am I saved? Will I go to heaven?

Martha Devotion had six children but only the one son. Of the six children, three of them married into the Huntington family -- again, the idea of connections played a part. The Huntington family was prominent, and there were two sets of brothers and two sets of sisters. The families got cemented together. The only son, Judge Ebenezer Devotion, had portraits painted of himself, his wife and their four children the year after Rev. Devotion died. His own portrait is one in which he seems to be announcing: I've come of age. I've inherited the family wealth. My father is dead. I am the new head of the family. This painting is more sophisticated, which shows that Chandler has developed as an artist, but it has a different sort of psychology to it. When I look at this painting I sense confidence. Here's a young man -- he's 32, has a growing family, he's starting out his career, and he's proud and confident. Unlike his father, who was depicted in effect as a man of thought, he almost strikes you as a man of action. He's shown at work, which wasn't that common in portraits in the 18th century. He's a merchant at this point in his life. He's writing in his ledger and it's actually dated January 15, 1772, which is taken as the date that this series of portraits was

painted. He's shown at the beginning of his life rather than at the end of his life, the way his father was.

Judge Devotion became progressively more wealthy as a merchant. He also got involved in politics. He was a member of the Sons of the Liberty, and very active in his support of the Revolution. He supplied the Continental army with food and equipment and jackets. He became a representative to the legislature and he became a judge -- a very prominent man. In a way the story symbolizes the shift from religion. Here's a rival to the minister as the prominent man in the community: the man of business, the man of politics. He married one of the Huntingtons. That instantly connected him with Samuel Huntington, who was the first president of the Continental Congress. We have a letter from Samuel Huntington written to Judge Devotion when Huntington was down in Philadelphia hammering out how the colonies were going to be governed.

This wonderful piece of furniture was traditionally said to be a wedding gift for Judge Devotion when he married Eunice Huntington. This case has a lot of the documents relating to Judge Devotion's activities in the revolution, including what we think is his copy of "Common Sense" and his copy of the proceedings of the first meeting of the Continental Congress. In this case we have Judge Devotion's court books, so we can take a look at what sort of cases he was trying. Perhaps most important of all for our understanding of Judge Devotion, we have an original of his account book. By studying this we were able to discover who he was buying furniture from. Did he make a lot of money through the revolution? How much did his father's gravestone cost? How much did he pay to send his children to school? We learned a lot about his life and we've done photo blow-ups of different pages. There are four rooms of chairs. Through documentation, we think that he owned all of these chairs, and they are connected to things he was buying in his account book.

The generation of Reverend Devotion didn't buy that much furniture in Connecticut, but oftentimes ended up with furniture from Boston or even England, as with the tall clock. Judge Devotion, the son, bought his furniture almost exclusively from local cabinet makers in eastern Connecticut. One of the most important was Felix Huntington -- that name again -- who worked in Norwich. On the wall you see a blow-up of the account that Judge Devotion kept with Felix Huntington. Felix Huntington was buying coffee, tape, muslin, cheese and pork from Judge Devotion. And Judge Devotion in exchange was taking one mahogany bureau, a dozen pair of chairs, one large table. This chair, which is also owned by the Brookline Historical Society, is the type of chair attributed to Felix Huntington. This is a cherry bureau, also attributed to Felix Huntington.

My favorite purchase: in 1799, Judge Devotion paid three pounds for a cherry bed. Behind you is a cherry bed that's still owned by the descendants, and every time it changes hands it comes with the tradition that this was the Devotions' bed. As far as we can tell, it probably was.

Here's a page of the inventory of Judge Devotion, and again, you can sense the same intellectual curiosity that his father had. Among his books he owned "The Life of Mohammed", "The Works of Voltaire", "The Voyages of Captain Cook" and many religious works. He was a man who was trying to stay abreast with the times even though he was in a small town. He was educated at Yale. He traveled among the circle of the educated and the knowledgeable. And he was a reader. He subscribed to four newspapers; that was his way of staying in touch with the world.

His will lists various articles of furniture. He described a mahogany secretary to be given to his two surviving children. This is a locally produced piece which descended in the family of the Devotions and which is probably the secretary described in the will.

Here is Chandler's portrait of Judge Devotion's wife, Eunice Huntington Devotion, holding on her lap her first daughter, also named Eunice. This is my favorite of all of the portraits. Like the other portraits it tells you a lot about how the subjects saw themselves -- in this case, well enough to dress to the teeth. We know they were well to do, and we also know that the dress looked very much as portrayed because the family saved fragments of it. We have little pieces of the ruffle and of the lace. It was said that this was clearly her best dress and that when she and her husband went down to Philadelphia to visit their brother-in-law, the president of the Continental Congress, she wore this dress at a state dinner.

The Eunice Devotion portrait was painted in 1772. In 1871 a descendant, a great granddaughter, wrote a little description of it: "Her face is handsome and expresses pride or haughtiness, though I've heard that she had little of either in her character." It's interesting to search back to the closest source we can find and check our reactions to a portrait against someone who actually knew the subject.

As far as we know these are the first four works Chandler ever painted. He was still very young. Actually, he had a very sad career. These paintings are marvelous and every museum in the country would love to have one. But Chandler had a very hard time making a living as a portrait painter. He tried to increase his income by doing artisan work like painting interiors and fireboards. There's a record that he gilded a weather vane to make money, but he was constantly in financial difficulties. At one point he had to send his children away because he couldn't support them. He wrote over everything

he owned to the state to help take care of them in his illness and he died at 42 -- a very tragic life.

That table is still owned by the family, and there's a little note inside the drawer that says this was the table that was portrayed in the Eunice Devotion painting. But that table is a Hepplewhite style table, for those of you who follow furniture styles. It wouldn't have been made in Connecticut until the 1790s. The painting was painted in 1771, however, so clearly there's a problem. Probably, the family memory over the years is wrong, or they just wanted the table to be the one in the painting.

This chair was found in Windham, Connecticut, which is where the Devotions were living. There's no tradition that it was owned by the Devotions, but it looked so much like the chairs in the portrait, it's likely that they owned a chair very similar to this. These chairs would have been very expensive -- twice what a Windsor chair would have cost. The fact that they owned groups of these joined chairs with upholstery on them was a sign to the world: look, we're better off than you are; we can afford it.

We don't have much relating to Eunice Huntington Devotion, but we do have this absolutely spectacular baby cap which she made for one of her eight children, and we have two prayer books: one that she inherited from her father and inscribed her name on, the same year that her portrait was painted. The other is a psalms book. She went through and made corrections where there were typos, not wanting to make a mistake when she was reading.

In 1806, Judge Devotion advertised a house that he and his family were living in. As a result, we have his description of what his house was like. We also have a gravestone. The Devotions lost a lot of children when they were young, which was not unusual. A certain number of their children who grew to adulthood died young or died unmarried. This is the gravestone of Elizabeth Devotion, who died at 11 years, 11 months and twice 11 days. Cogswell's diary actually describes the death. On August 3rd, he writes, "Visited Esquire Devotion's. Betsy continues much as she has been only she declines very gradually. She told me her hope is in the mercy of God. She was too weak to talk much." And then, on the 5th, it says, "Was sent forth to Esquire Devotion's. Mrs. Cogswell (the grandmother of Betsy) went with me. Betsy was dead when we got there. They were much affected with it, especially the young ones in the family."

In 1772 the Ebenezer Devotions had four children: Eunice was the youngest, the one sitting on her mother's lap; and then there were three older brothers. We have two of the three Chandler portraits of those little boys. We're using them to close down the exhibition in the third section, "Growing Up In the New Republic." These little boys

grew up as the Revolution was happening and started their careers and the choosing of their professions right as all of the changes that were wrought by the Revolution took place. This case has some little tidbits of documents and things that the children owned.

Rev. Cogswell, who was their step grandfather, obviously sensed a certain amount of generational conflict. He was still of the old school of religion and seriousness. These children were changing. They were interested in other things, including singing. Cogswell said, in effect: if you're going to be interested in singing you should only do it for the right reason, which is to excite religious feeling. They were interested in tight rope walking, and they were interested in novels. There's a great quote -- Cogswell talking about a man who has novels in his library: "I told him I did not relish novels because they take up too much of the attention of young people. They did not include knowledge equal to other readings and they had much the same sentiments and run in the same strain and they almost all of them are whimsical rather than natural and had a tendency to raise too strong of a passion, and to describe feelings beyond real life." You get a sense of a man, of the same generation as Reverend Devotion, who wants to deal with reality and to understand things. But the kids are getting interested in what is actually the beginning of the romantic period. They want novels. They want the excitement of the world of the imagination.

## Curator's Report

By Stephen Jerome

Some notes of interest...

In late June, during the installation of a security system by Daniel Lohnes of Essex Alarm, portions of a massive 17th century house frame were exposed in Devotion House. These areas, later concealed by 18th century remodelings, were examined by James Z. Kyprianos of Ipswich, an expert in the field of First Period architecture, who estimates that the front, or oldest portion of Devotion House, was likely built between 1690 and 1710, but possibly (as local tradition subscribes) as early as 1680. More comprehensive investigations of the house's infrastructure and primary sources such as wills and deeds will be necessary to develop a greater knowledge of the 17th century origins of the house, one of three remaining First Period houses in Brookline and the only one open to the public.

Members and their guests are cordially invited to visit the house on Tuesday and Thursday afternoon, between 2:30 and 4:30 or Saturdays by appointment.  
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**Curator's Report, continued**

I will be the instructor for two courses of interest to Historical Society members. Both are being offered by the Brookline Adult and Community Education Program.

The first, "Mourning Glories", will be offered Mondays beginning Sept. 30 and Saturdays (tours) beginning Oct. 5. Through lecture and discussion, the course will analyze the rich legacy of design in the colonial New England burying ground and garden cemetery, with particular attention to Walnut Street Cemetery, Holyhood Cemetery, and Walnut Hills Cemetery, all in Brookline, as well as Granary and King's Chapel burying grounds in Boston.

The second is titled, "Brookline's H.H. Richardson and Frederick Law Olmsted: Giants of American Design", a description which speaks for itself. Through lectures and field trips, the course will look at the buildings, estates and public parks created by the two men in their rich careers. There is a Wednesday lecture section beginning Oct. 2 and Saturday field trips beginning Oct. 26.

Further details about both courses can be found in the Brookline Adult and Community Education Program fall catalog.

**Letter of thanks**

Dear Ms. Sargon,

We wanted to extend our thanks to you for taking the time to meet with our U.S. History class. The history of Brookline came alive with your stories and all of us left with a greater appreciation for both the history of Brookline and the important work of the Brookline Historical Society. We all liked the Brookline Room, too; it was a good place to meet you!

Many of us, including our teacher, Mr. Idzik, were very interested in thinking about how high school students could become more involved in the activities of the Society and in general researching of Brookline history. Some of us are thinking about possible projects.

We are appreciative of your knowledge and commitment to preserving and documenting local history. We all hope you keep up your good work in the field. Thank you for your time and suggestions.

Sincerely,  
(Signed by students of Mr. Idzik's class)