

Edward Devotion & the Former Devotion School: A Chronology

1645 - Edward Devotion (1621-1685), an immigrant French Protestant (or Huguenot) first appeared in the records of Muddy River, a hamlet of the Town of Boston. He would go on to serve several roles in the hamlet.

24th of the 9th month 1651.—Mr. Davis, Peter Oliver and Edward Devotion and Henry Stebons are chosen to go the bounds of the town betwixt Braintree Cambridge, Dedham and that way :

One of several mentions of the first Edward Devotion in early records of Muddy River

c.1680 – This first Edward Devotion, or possibly his son John, built a house on what is now Harvard Street.

1740 - Edward Devotion (1668-1744), the son or grandson of the first Edward Devotion — records are unclear — sold the Harvard Street house and land to Solomon Hill. (Devotion's primary residence at this time was another house on Washington Street.) The current Edward Devotion House was probably built by Hill over the frame of the c1680 house.



Edward Devotion House in the 1890s

1744 - Death of the second Edward Devotion. His will decreed that any money left over after payment of his debts and funeral expenses and other bequests be used "*towards building or maintaining a School as near the centre of the said town as shall be agreed upon by the town.*" **An inventory of his property included land, livestock, household goods, and "one Negrow" valued at 30 pounds.**

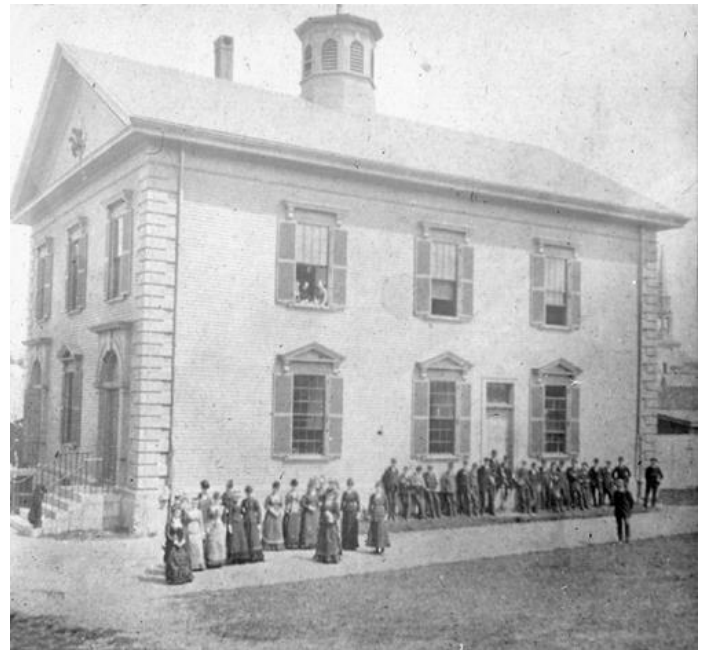
1762 - The former Devotion land and house on Harvard Street reverted to Devotion's widow Mary upon the failure of Solomon Hill to pay the mortgage on the property. It was then sold, and the town, as stipulated in the will, received funds.



Old Town Hall, Prospect Street

1844 - The money in the Edward Devotion Fund was allocated toward the construction of the new Brookline Town Hall on Prospect Street, near the location of the current Town Hall. The building contained two rooms used as school rooms. It was used as the Town Hall from 1845 to 1873.

1884 - Town Meeting, apparently considering the use of the funds for the Town Hall not to have fulfilled Devotion's bequest, voted to add \$5,000 to the Devotion Fund to be put toward expansion of the Brookline High School on School Street. A large hall in the school was named the Edward Devotion Hall in recognition of Devotion's bequest, and a plaque commemorating his gift was placed in the school. (The plaque was lost when the old Brookline High School was replaced by a new building on Greenough Street in 1893.)



Old High School, 1856-1893

1891 – A large portion of the former Edward Devotion property, including the Edward Devotion House, was purchased by the Town from the estate of a later owner, Nahum Smith, for \$61,000. The property had passed through several owners after 1762, including William Marshall, Israel Thorndike, and George Babcock.

1892 – A new school named the Edward Devotion School was built on the property, next to the old house.



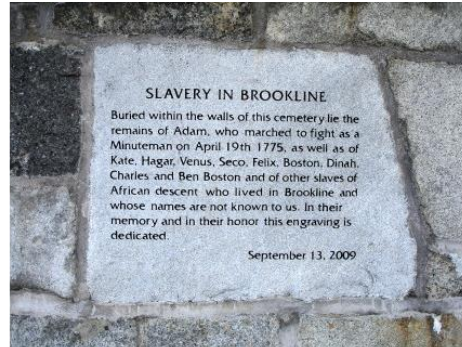
No record of a discussion of the naming at the time has been found, but an 1898 paper on the Devotion family stated that although the money he left was not used for a school *“the beautiful school building on the old Devotion farm on Harvard street, next to the ancestral home, bears the name of the ‘Edward Devotion School’ and is a fitting tribute to the worth of its name-sake.”* Devotion’s history as a slaveholder was apparently either forgotten or not considered worthy of discussion at the time.

1899, 1913 – Two new buildings were added to the 1892 school, with the old house in the middle of the complex.



1954, 1974 – The 1892 and 1899 buildings were replaced by new wings.

2009-2012 – Brookline’s “hidden history” of slavery and slaveholders (including Edward Devotion) received increased attention through articles in the local press and, especially, through the efforts of Barbara Brown and the Hidden Brookline Committee.



Barbara Brown at Brookline's Old Burying Ground (where Edward Devotion and other slaveholders were buried) in May 2009, left, and a memorial to enslaved men and women that was dedicated in the wall of the cemetery later that year.

2018 – With a new Devotion School under construction, local residents Deborah Brown and Anne Greenwald introduced a warrant article to change the name of the school. The article was approved overwhelmingly by Town Meeting in May 2018, and a process, led by students, for choosing a new name was established.

2019 – Town Meeting voted that the former Devotion School be renamed the Florida Ruffin Ridley School in honor of the African American educator, author, civil rights activist, and suffragist.



Deborah Brown, left, and other speakers participated in the school’s renaming ceremony, delayed by the COVID-19 pandemic.