

Proceedings  
of the  
Brookline  
Historical Society  
For 1979-1984



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## 1980 Officers

### PRESIDENT

Mrs. L. Smith Larkin

### VICE-PRESIDENT

Mr. Nikita Zaitzevsky

### TREASURER

Mr. Nathan Wise

### CLERK

Mrs. Yvonne Egdahl

### TRUSTEES

Mrs. Theresa A. Carroll, Mr. Edward Hertz, Mrs. Henry Kohn,  
Mrs. James McIntosh, Mr. Edward Ostrander, Mrs. George Peabody,  
Mrs. Kurt Schmidt, Dr. Irvin Taube, and the officers, *ex-officio*

## Report of the President

There has been Society membership participation and support for a variety of activities this year. This has meant a stronger, more interesting Society for its members and a Society which has played a visible and more active role in town affairs. I hope these strengths will continue to develop.

A series of six illustrated lectures on historic New England architecture, using Brookline buildings as examples when appropriate, was given by architectural historian and consultant Monique Lehner. These were offered jointly by the Society and the Brookline Historical Commission in September. This excellent educational opportunity was well-attended by nearly one hundred subscribers who paid a modest \$12 for the series. Funds so raised were shared by the sponsors. Special thanks are extended to Mrs. Richard Benka, Society member and staff member of the Brookline Historical Commission, for her publicity efforts in helping to make this project such a success and to Longwood Towers, who provided the facilities of the Tudor room free of charge

for our use during the lectures. There have been many compliments for this series with hopes that there will be more such educational programs planned in the future.

The Society membership meetings have been well-attended. The spring meeting on Sunday afternoon, May 20, took place at Coolidge Corner, in the fine 1931 Art Deco style Bay Bank/Norfolk County Trust Company lobby. President-elect Leslie S. Larkin presented an illustrated paper about early Coolidge Corner families: the Coolidges, the Griggs, the Stearns, and the Whitneys. In celebration of the new issue of *The Proceedings*, members enjoyed champagne and cream puffs in the bank vault following the meeting. I would like to thank both Editor Jean Kramer and her assistant, trustee Nancy Schmidt, for their many efforts in the preparation of this fine issue.

The October 14 meeting of the Society was held at the old Park School on Kennard Road, adjacent to the historic (c. 1840) Kennard House, once the home of ornithologist Frederick Kennard. "Birding That Can Be Done in Brookline" was the illustrated paper presented by Henry T. Wiggin, a Brookline Conservation Commission member and a keen and active birder in Brookline for over forty years. Sherry and "birdseed" biscuits were served at the conclusion of the meeting by Leslie Larkin and her much-appreciated hospitality committee.

Christmas time generated a new adventure this year, a small house tour of four members' houses decorated for Christmas festivity. The committee, headed by Carolyn Wetherbee and Nancy Peabody, carefully planned the event and special thanks are here expressed to the participating homeowners: Dr. and Mrs. Belton A. Burrows, Mrs. Anita R. Klaussen, Dr. and Mrs. James S. Sowles, and Mrs. Yvonne Egdahl, who also hosted the tea party. Many Society members and their guests enjoyed the tour.

The 1980 annual meeting will take place at Pine Manor College on Sunday afternoon, January 27, in the handsome Founder's Room, once the music room and a 1909 addition to the 1891 Richardsonian style home of the Dane family. Mildred J. Davis, director of the American Institute of Textile Arts, noted author and scholar in the fields of textiles and embroideries, will share with the Society the history and activity of the textile research center and its present collections. Participating Society members sharing historic textiles for discussion from their collections include Mr. and Mrs. S. Morton Vose, Dr. and Mrs. Irvin Taube, Miss Elsie Briggs, Dr. Norman Lenson, and Mrs. Yvonne Egdahl. Tea will be served following the meeting.

The trustees met on February 28 at the home of president Nancy Smith; June 4 in the Brookline Room, Brookline Public Library; October 3 in the Clock Tower Room of the S.S. Pierce Building; and on January 17, again in the Brookline Room. Special concerns of the trustees this year have been the security of both the Putterham School and the Devotion House, with various alarm system approaches presently under consideration, and the completion of the Devotion House inventory as a first step in the revision

of insurance coverage for the Society's collections. The inventory committee, under the chairmanship of Ruth Vose, continues to make progress with a completion goal of spring 1980. Treasurer Nathan Wise has expended great time and effort on the conversion of the Society membership list to a computerized printout. This will result in easier handling of Society business and mailings in the future; the Society is most grateful to him.

I have enjoyed serving the Society as its president during these past three years. I thank the trustees, committees, and members for their interest, support and willingness in the many projects we have undertaken together.

Respectfully submitted,  
Nancy A. Smith

## Report of the Committee on Rooms, 1979

During the year 1979 the Brookline schools used the Devotion House, with its period furnishings and historical collections as a teaching aid. A total of 163 children visited.

We have had visitors during the year from ten different countries, as far away as Japan, India, and Greece, and from six different states: California, Arizona, Louisiana, New York, Connecticut, and New Jersey.

April is still the most fun. On Patriots Day William Dawes made his annual visit to the Devotion House on his way to Lexington.

This summer Leslie Larkin and I took another trip to Scotland, Connecticut, to the ancestral home of John Devotion.

Our large portraits of Ebenezer and Martha Devotion will be leaving us next week to go on loan to the Whitney Museum in New York. They will be in the exhibition, "American Folk Painters of Three Centuries."

The house itself needs much attention. Gutters need to be fixed; there is water damage to the rear wall of the house; and the house itself needs scraping and painting.

The inventory of furnishings in the house is going quite well under the capable leadership of Ruth Vose. Barbara Lender, with the help of Barbara Hill, has completed the manuscript inventory and has cross referenced four old inventory books.

Respectfully submitted,  
Helen McIntosh

## Treasurer's Annual Report, 1979

Cash on hand – January 1, 1979	
Brookline Savings Bank	
90-day special account	\$19,009.53
Regular account	2,206.98
Charles B. Blanchard Memorial Permanent Fund	658.69
One-half annual interest for special use	158.67
Brookline Trust Company checking account	<u>1,251.70</u>
	\$23,285.57

Income during 1979	
Membership dues	\$1,535.00
Interest – Brookline Savings Bank	
Money Market certificate	458.45
90-day special account	850.39
Regular account	84.23
Charles B. Blanchard Memorial Permanent Fund	45.56
Interest – Commonwealth Bank/Norfolk, NOW account	9.93
Book and miscellaneous sales	210.00
Wallace Trust disbursement	89.18
Donations	348.70
Architectural lecture series	<u>1,113.00</u>
	\$4,744.44

\$28,030.01

Payments during 1979	
Secretary's expenses	\$228.99
Treasurer's expenses	15.80
Meetings expenses	761.66
Insurance premiums	52.00
Staffing – Putterham School	108.50
Bay State Historical League dues	25.00
Audit and tax service	150.00
Secretary of State filing fees	50.00
Architectural lecture series	801.43
Printing proceedings	<u>2,792.00</u>
	\$4,985.38

Cash on hand – December 31, 1979	
Brookline Savings Bank	
Money Market term deposit	\$20,458.45
Regular account	151.13
Charles B. Blanchard Memorial Permanent Fund	681.46
One-half annual interest for special use	181.46
Commonwealth Bank/Norfolk, NOW account	<u>1,572.13</u>
	\$23,044.63

\$28,030.01

Respectfully submitted,  
Nathan S. Wise, treasurer  
January 1, 1980



## Report of the Committee on the Putterham School for 1979

The year 1979 commenced on a positive note for the little schoolhouse, though subsequent events have dulled the burnish of early expectations.

As has been the custom for several years, the Park School fourth grade again used our building on May 8 and 15 to simulate early nineteenth-century class sessions. As on previous occasions, teachers and pupils arrived in period costume and occupied the building from 8:30 A.M. to 12 noon. The classes were conducted with the discipline of 150 years ago; pupils were addressed as "Master Smith" or "Mistress Jones," and even a dunce stool and cap were part of the equipment. Subsequently a letter of thanks from the pupils was received by the committee. These early spring sessions have become a part of the Putterham School program, and are a real joy to watch. On May 24 Mrs. Kramer opened the schoolhouse for a group of school children from New Ipswich, New Hampshire, and on another occasion for a Golden Age group.

An unfortunate incident marred this otherwise very positive period. On arriving to open the schoolhouse for the Park School children on May 8, your chairman found that extensive vandalism had taken place. A number of windows had been broken, the heavy plate glass covering the large table top smashed, and other less serious damage inflicted. Broken glass covered the entire room, including chairs and table tops. Fortunately there was just time to do a hurried sweeping before the arrival of the children. A complete repair and replacement of windows was finished before the following week. Two points must be particularly mentioned. Our member, Mr. William Gillis, undertook the professional repair work and donated his time and materials to the Society. In the meantime the Park School had graciously presented us with a check toward the cost of the work. As it was not needed in view of Mr. Gillis' kindness, it could be applied to the custodian's salary for the summer months.

As in previous years, Mrs. Owen Carle acted as our docent at the school for weekends starting in mid-June. However, by the end of July she had determined that the suspension of activities at the Museum of Transportation across the driveway had so diminished traffic in the park that it was no longer worthwhile to open the schoolhouse except for groups by prior appointment. As usual Mrs. Carle submitted a thoughtful report of her expenses and observations at the school.

During the spring, Mr. Richard Leary, executive secretary of the Board of Selectmen and Mr. McMahan of the building department, met at the schoolhouse with Mrs. McIntosh and your chairman to discuss the condition of the building. As a result the school was repainted and now presents a very tidy appearance.

Returning to property damage, the matter of security has of course been of primary concern to the trustees and the committee. Your chairman has talked several times and met once with the representative of the security company which is responsible for the Transportation Museum building, hoping to develop some means of extending that system to the school. His recommendations have been passed on to the trustees. Since there was some evidence that unauthorized access to the schoolhouse had been obtained with a key, the lock was changed at once. Fortunately no further vandalism has been experienced except one later window break. Some trouble with the security flood lights has been corrected.

This report cannot be closed without thanks to Mrs. James McIntosh of the committee, whose interest in the Putterham School is well known, and to Mrs. Kramer and Mrs. Carle.

Respectfully submitted,  
S. Morton Vose II

## Annual Meeting – January 27, 1980

The annual meeting of the Brookline Historical Society was held in the Ferry building of Pine Manor College, at three o'clock on Sunday.

Mrs. Mildred J. Davis, Director of the American Institute of Textile Arts and noted author and scholar in the fields of textiles and embroideries, shared with the Society the history and activity of this textile research center and its present collections.

Dr. Rodman Henry, professor of Art History gave a short talk about the history and architectural features of the administration building. After Dr. Henry's talk, Jeanne Goldin modeled costumes from the Institute's collection.

A gallery talk was then given by Mrs. Davis about the exhibits on display from the A.I.T.A. collection and from some of the Brookline Historical Society members. It was an unusual and fascinating meeting for many of these textiles had never been on exhibit before.

## Spring Meeting — May 25, 1980

The spring meeting of the Brookline Historical Society will be held at All Saints' Church, 1773 Beacon Street at 4 o'clock on Sunday.

Douglass Shand Tucci, lecturer on the history of the American apartment building and author of *Built in Boston, City and Suburb, 1800-1950*, will give a slide lecture on the development of the apartment house in Boston and its environs, including Richmond Court and the Stoneholm.



[Mr. Tucci gave a very witty and erudite slide presentation of the history of apartments. Included in the lecture were many of the apartment houses along Beacon Street as well as some of the three deckers in other sections of Brookline. Several years later Mr. Tucci wrote the following article in a plea for preservation of the "La Grande Allee," Beacon Street.]

## French Flats and Three Deckers

by Douglass Shand Tucci

**A** Brookline drawing room in deep winter: darkly-paneled in richly-detailed mahogany, a warming wood fire framed by a superbly carved mantelpiece of black marble. Or, perhaps, it is spring, late enough in the day for the room's elegant French doors to stand invitingly open to the intricate wrought-iron balcony overlooking the flowering trees which filter the sunlight streaming into the drawing room. A mansion? No, an apartment house — a magnificent Edwardian one — called the Stoneholm, on Beacon Street, designed by Arthur Bowditch in 1909 and perhaps the most splendid in greater Boston. Even the continual traffic and the screech of the green trolleys seem vaguely romantic from a balcony of the Stoneholm, making Beacon Street seem again the elegant boulevard it once was.

And could be again, but not if all those splendid apartment house parlors are cut up into studio apartments! As I tried to point out when I had the

privilege of lecturing at the Brookline Historical Society in 1980, few Americans — for we are, alas, in so many ways a very anti-urban people — dream of buying and fixing up apartment houses. The tyranny of the single-family home (For we are also a relentlessly middle-class people!) is such that even the most ardent preservationist does not rise too often to the defense of French flat or three decker.

But Brookline takes much of its character, historically and architecturally, from these splendid apartment house blocks. It thus has much more to lose than most towns if it does not guard this aspect of its heritage seriously.

Where on earth, for heaven's sake, can you find a half-timbered, Shingle style three-decker? In Brookline of course, at 128 Davis Avenue, designed by Gardner Bartlett in 1904. Then there is Richmond Court on Beacon Street, the first Tudor Revival courtyard apartment house in the country. Richmond Court was designed in 1899 by two of the leading American architects of the twentieth century, Ralph Adams Cram and Bertram Goodhue. One day walk into the courtyard, gathered around a fountain by Lee Lawrie (the sculptor of the famous Atlas at Rockefeller Center). This courtyard is one of the most charming refuges in the Boston area.

Most celebrated of all, of course, is Longwood Towers. In Boston, only the Ritz is more venerable, and for its lobby alone, Longwood Towers deserves to be preserved.

This is not the place to develop the long, intricate and fascinating history of the apartment house in Brookline. The importance of these buildings, after all, is extensively documented in my book *Built in Boston, City and Suburb, 1800-1950*. But this is perhaps the place to point out that in my experience nothing and nobody ought to be taken for granted in the struggle to conserve your glories. There are landlords and there are landlords. Hampton Court, for example, on Beacon Street has over the years suffered from so many — and such revolting signs and other appendages — that I'm naturally a little suspicious about the latest building activity. On the other hand, the Richmond Court fountain next door has just been restored.

Nor are landlords the only ones to watch. Tenants can destroy buildings, too. So also can a town. I understand that the upper floors of several parts of Longwood Towers are uninhabitable because of water damage, and that given current rent-control laws in Brookline it is unlikely that even the most sensitive developer could afford to renew Longwood Towers. If it means endangering buildings of historical and architectural significance, rent control (especially at the level of luxury apartments) might well be thought to be counter-productive.

It is my earnest hope that the citizens of Brookline will consider well the future of these splendid landmarks of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The character and future of Brookline depends to no small extent on their preservation. □



FIGURE I. MAP OF BOSTON IN 1776

*This map by Henry Pelham shows the ring of fortifications around the Boston peninsula.*

(Courtesy of the Boston Athenaeum)

## Fall Meeting — October 19, 1980

The Fall Meeting of the Brookline Historical Society will be held at the African Studies Center, 10 Lenox Street, Brookline, at four o'clock on Sunday.

Mr. Richard Berenson will present "Brookline Fort: Strategic Gateway to the Charles River." As the author of this paper notes, the year 1980 marks not only the 350th anniversary of the founding of Muddy River, but the 205th anniversary of the repulsion of the British attack on Fort Brookline as well. In 1975 to commemorate the bicentennial of that event, Mr. Berenson organized and staged a re-enactment of the attack. The Brookline fort was located on the Charles River near the present Boston University bridge, close to the site of our meeting.

# The Brookline Fort: Strategic Gateway to the Charles River

by Richard Berenson

**I**n 1775, after Concord and Lexington, the officers of the Continental Army lived in constant fear that the British would make another sortie into the countryside. So they created a ring of fortifications around Boston, a ring which ran from Chelsea, through Cambridge, and down into Roxbury.<sup>1</sup> In particular, the Americans were afraid the British would stage a two-pronged attack on American headquarters in Cambridge: one prong leaving Charlestown and marching through the farms in eastern Cambridge to the town of Cambridge itself, the other leaving Boston, marching through Brookline, and crossing the Charles River into Cambridge at Harvard Street. To get to Brookline, the British would either have to fight through the American lines at Boston Neck, land on the marshy west bank of the Back Bay, or land on Sewall's Point.<sup>2</sup>

Soon after his arrival in Cambridge, General George Washington recognized the danger of an unopposed British landing on Sewall's Point. He took

immediate action to remove the threat by fortifying the point.<sup>3</sup> In a letter dated July 10, 1775, he wrote, "Such intermediate points [between Cambridge and Roxbury] as would admit landing, I have, since my arrival, taken care to strengthen down to Sewall's farm, where a strong entrenchment has been thrown up. . . ."

This entrenchment, known as the Fort at Sewall's Point or the Brookline Fort, was strategic from a naval as well as a military standpoint. Because it was situated on a crucial bend in the river, the Brookline Fort could act as a sort of epiglottis and regulate the passage of ships between the wider mouth and the narrower neck of the river. Before reaching Sewall's Point, the Charles River ran southwest and was approximately 600 feet wide. But just beyond this point, the river widened and turned to run due east for a half mile before opening onto the Back Bay. Because four of the fort's six guns pointed out from the pharynx into the mouth of the Charles, British ships could not blockade the river by anchoring in its mouth without being subject to close bombardment. Thus the fort could keep the river open so that the American gun boats, which occasionally went down stream from Cambridge to bombard Boston, could pass freely. The fort could also close the river and prevent any British ships from slipping upstream to bombard Cambridge.

Perhaps the greatest contribution the Brookline Fort made to the American war effort was to prevent the British from making an extended campaign into the country. In a secret letter dated August 20, 1775, General Gage explained to Lord Dartmouth that he could not leave Boston due to the strength and number of the American fortifications and to the unavailability of houses and carriages and other articles needed to establish a supply line. In another letter, dated July 24, 1775, Gage commented that, because of the lack of land carriages, the only way to establish a supply line would be along a river. Fort Brookline, by guarding the mouth of the Charles, prevented the British from using the Charles River to transport supplies and thus helped stop the British from making any major campaign into the country. It is easy to see why the Brookline Fort was one of the fortifications attacked in the only major British offensive in Boston after Breeds Hill.

**T**he history of the Brookline Fort can be said to start on the day of the Battle of Bunker Hill. On that day, two companies of Colonel Samuel Gerrish's Essex County regiment were sent to strategic Sewall's Point to establish possession of it. One of the companies was the seventh, commanded by Captain Timothy Corey of Brookline. There is no record of any works being established on Sewall's Point before the Bunker Hill battle; it is probable that the two companies camped near the end of the point in tents.

After their defeat at Breeds Hill, the Americans were afraid that the British would come out of Boston and attack them at Roxbury. So, on June

18, "The general and field officer of that station [Roxbury] met in council to see what to be don (sic) about our exposed situation. It was the unanimous advice of the officers that some lines of defence should be immediately commenced."<sup>4</sup> As a result of that council of war, the command of the fort was turned over to Lieutenant Colonel Rufus Putnam of Colonel David Brewer's ninth regiment. Captain Corey's company, however, remained at the point until its commission ran out at the end of the year.

The right wing of the American army was, at the time, commanded by General Thomas. Since Colonel Gridley, the designer of the American works at Breeds Hill, was preoccupied designing the works for Cambridge, Thomas ordered Rufus Putnam to design the works for Roxbury. While Putnam had never made an in-depth study of the science of fortification, and, in fact, claimed "never to have read a word on the subject," he had gotten a firm grasp on it while employed on some works under British engineers during the French and Indian War. He set right to work "tracing out lines in front of Roxbury toward Boston and various other places on the Roxbury side particularly at Sewall's Point."<sup>5</sup> The first part of the works to be thrown up was a redoubt constructed on the lower end of the point and meant to obstruct a possible British landing. After General Washington took command of the American Army on July 4, breastworks were added on either side of the redoubt.

The expansion of the works continued and on July 10, as part of a general reorganization of the army ordered by the July 9 council of war, all of Colonel Oliver Prescott's 430-man First Middlesex County regiment was ordered to take post at Sewall's Point, so they could speed the strengthening of the works. Oliver Prescott was the dashing young patriot who had braved British cannon fire to walk the ramparts and encourage his men at Breeds Hill. From July 10 on, four until eleven o'clock each morning was set aside for the construction of the earth works.

Colonel Putnam, who continued to be in charge of planning the works, was at the fort when Generals Washington and Lee crossed the Charles to inspect the works on the Roxbury side. Putnam was flattered when both men praised his plans. General Lee in particular, "Spoke much in favor of the works at Sewall's Point compared with those which had ben (sic) constructed on the Cambridge side. . . ."<sup>6</sup>

On July 22, the American headquarters transferred Colonel Prescott and his regiment back to Cambridge, apparently to help with the construction of some works there. Prescott was replaced by Colonel Samuel Gerrish, who arrived at the fort with the rest of his 498-man regiment later that day. Gerrish, described by Colonel Swett in his account of the Bunker Hill battle as a rather corpulent, middle-aged man with a disposition "too quiet for a soldier," had refused to lead his men across the heavily-bombarded Charlestown neck to reinforce the redoubt on Breeds Hill (a reinforcement which could have won the battle for the Americans). Because of his "cowardly"



conduct during the British bombardment of the Brookline Fort on July 31, Colonel Gerrish was relieved on August 1 by his second-in-command, Lieutenant Colonel Baldwin. Colonel Gerrish was court-martialed on August 19, was convicted of cowardice, and lost his commission. However, the Judge Advocate who presided over the case felt that the Colonel had been treated too severely in being convicted because of a "constitutional defect." Samuel Gerrish got a new commission in 1776 and commanded the American troops at Chelsea during the final months of the siege of Boston. It is ironic that the two most notable of the fort's many commanders, Putnam and Gerrish, were the hero and villain respectively of the battle of Bunker Hill.

Colonel Prescott again took charge of the fort on August 24. About a month later, on September 17, Lieutenant Colonel William Johnnot of Colonel John Glover's Fifth Essex County regiment came from Cambridge to relieve Colonel Prescott while the Colonel was sick. But after he recovered, Colonel Prescott resumed command of the fort and kept it until after the British evacuated Boston on March 7, 1776. By November, the works were nearly complete and General Washington ordered that they be finished by December, "in case," as Washington wrote in a letter dated November 28, "of a sortie when the bay gets froze." By the time the fort was completed in December, it had taken over 20,000 man-hours to build.

The command of the fort changed many times after Washington moved his headquarters to New York in April, but by May, 1777, the command was back in the hands of Rufus Putnam, who had by then been promoted to full Colonel.

**W**hen finished, the Brookline Fort's works reflected a firm understanding by their designer of the art of fortification. The fort itself was about 600 feet long, about 470 feet wide, and covered a total area of more than 250,000 square feet. The works were all made of earth piled around fascines or bundles of sticks, into walls five or six feet high. Since men were shorter in 1775 than they are today, the men in the fort could stand behind the works and still be safe from enemy musket fire.

The earth walls, often called ramparts, were flat on top, almost vertical in back and slightly slanted in front, so that a cross section would have looked like an irregular trapezoid. Surrounding the works there was probably a trench, lined at the bottom and rimmed along the bottom edge of the walls with fleches or pointed sticks meant to hinder the advance of an enemy. Since the fort was designed for defense against attack from one of two directions, two irregular bastions with flanking ramparts (each 120 to 144 feet long) were built: one facing out into the mouth of the river and one facing up the point. The bastions were triangular projections in the walls designed to allow the defenders to attack the flank of an enemy attempting to force the walls on either side. These two structures with their flanking ramparts,



FIGURE 2. LINE DRAWING OF THE FORT

*This modern-day artist's rendition of what the Brookline Fort may have looked like was done by Ric Cavazos.*

were about 300 feet long (the bastions having 80 foot faces) and joined each other at a right angle to form the southeast corner of the fort (see Figure 2).

The works which ran from either end of this defensive configuration to the marsh at the rear of the fort were designed specifically to resist the type of attack they might be faced with. The ramparts along the river were irregularly zigzagged with short faces either 80 or 120 feet long and designed to deflect any cannon shot fired from hostile boats in the river. From the southwestern end of the main configuration, a 120-foot face parallel to the edge of the marsh joined, at an obtuse angle, a 240-foot face, which ran to the marsh. If an infantry attack were made on the 240-foot face, the attackers would be fatally trapped in a corridor between the marsh and the 120-foot face. The rear of the fort was open for 240 feet, but since it was open onto the marsh, there was no danger of attack from that side.

The fort had six iron, four-pound cannon which were mounted on low, flat, small-wheeled, wooden carriages similar to those on which sea cannon are mounted. The carriages were placed on raised platforms so that the cannon could fire out through embrasures or openings in the top of the wall. Since the fort's main function was to guard the mouth of the river, four of

the fort's cannon were placed about the first or river bastion: one in each face and one in each of the flanking ramparts. A cannon pointed out into the mouth of the river was also placed in one of the faces of the zigzag ramparts along the river. The sixth cannon was placed in the left face of the second or point bastion in order to guard the entrance of the fort.

The fort was designed to make unauthorized entry very difficult. The fort had two baileys, or major defensive courts, so that even if the outer bailey fell, there would still be a second line of defense against invasion from the point. The outer bailey could be entered through a gate or doorway, probably located in the rampart to the left of the point bastion. The cannon in the left face of that bastion guarded the road which ran up the point to the gate, the fort's only entrance. A wooden plankway bridged the ditch between the road and the gate. Inside the entrance, a second set of ramparts, about 120 feet behind the first, divided the outer from the inner bailey. The easternmost portion of this second line of defense was another bastion-with-flanking-ramparts configuration, the left rampart of which reached to the right rear corner of the river bastion. This rampart, combined with the left face of the inner bastion and the two ramparts which made up the southeast corner of the fort formed the entrance way, a small court behind the entrance meant to trap any unauthorized visitors.

From the rampart to the right of the inner bastion, two walls, 200 and 240 feet long which met at a 135° angle, ran across the rear of the fort to join the ramparts along the river, about 200 feet from the marsh. The entrance to the inner bailey was probably in one of these walls. Thus a person would have to move past the cannon in the point bastion, over the wooden plankway, through a gate, into the entrance way, then all the way to the other end of the outer bailey before reaching the entrance to the inner bailey: not an easy task for an unwelcome visitor.

If an attacking army managed to force or take the first line of defenses, the defenders of the fort could drop back to the walls of the inner bailey. The attackers would then be in a predicament: they would be forced to take the second wall without the cannon support they had against the first since the cannon would be unable to get past the first wall. Reinforcements would be slow in arriving, for they would have to negotiate both the trench and the first wall before joining their colleagues; and, in the event a retreat was ordered, the first wall would prevent the attackers from escaping easily, trapping them like red rats in a cage.

No one really knows what was inside the inner bastion. Lieutenant General Archibald Robertson of the British army made some sketches in the winter of 1776 of views of the countryside from Mount Whoredom, a hill inside Boston. One of the sketches shows the Brookline Fort in the distance; rising above the works of the fort is what appears to be the top of a wooden barrack house. The sketch is the only known record of what might have been inside the fort. If there were wooden barracks for the men, they

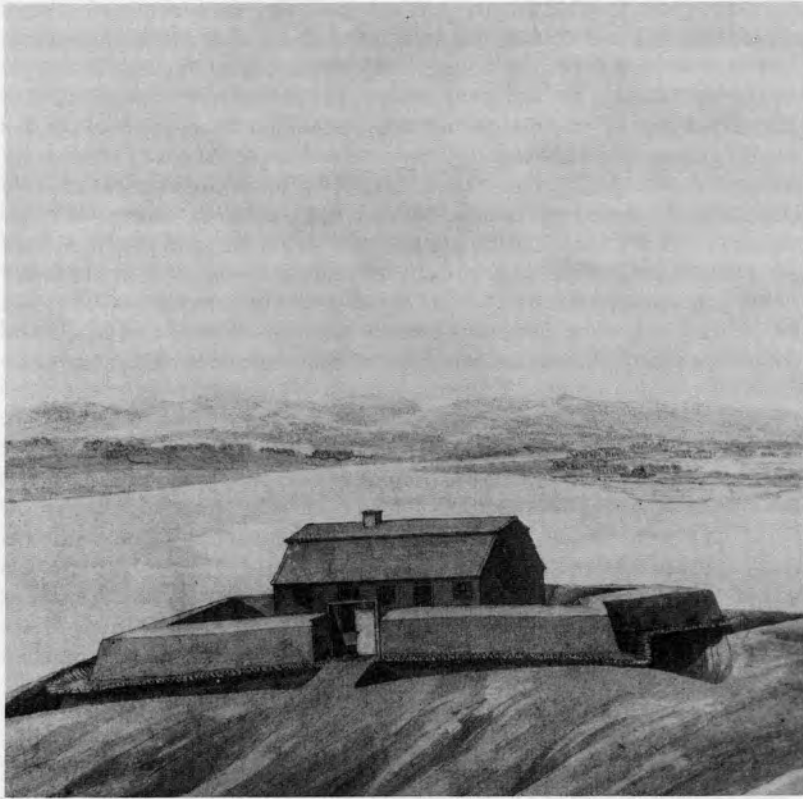


FIGURE 3. WATERCOLOR OF A FORT WITH BLOW-UP OF FORT IN DISTANCE  
*This watercolor by British Lieutenant Colonel Archibald Robertson, dated February 13, 1776, is the only known portrayal of the Brookline Fort, seen in the distance.*  
(Courtesy of the Boston Athenaeum)

were probably built in late November, when the cold weather forced the Americans indoors; during the summer the men attached to the fort were probably quartered in tents. The barracks would have been quickly-thrown-up, barn like buildings, each of which might have housed between 50 and 300 men. But it is impossible to tell exactly how many of these barracks there were or how they were laid out.

However, a slightly more detailed description of the lives of the common soldiers stationed at the Brookline Fort may be given. Boston's besiegers were well supplied with provisions donated by sympathizers all over New England. A general order dated December 24, 1775, provided that the following rations

should be given the Continental soldiers, including those at Sewall's Point: corned beef and pork four days a week, salt fish one day, and fresh beef two days; one and a half pounds of beef or eighteen ounces of pork per day (to replace milk during the winter when it could not be procured); a half pint of rice or a pint of Indian meal per week; one quart of spruce beer per day or nine gallons of molasses to 100 men per week; six pounds of candles per 100 men per week for guards; six ounces of butter or nine ounces of hog's lard per week; three pints of peas, beans, onions, potatoes, turnips, or other vegetables in any combination per man per week; and one pound of flour per man per day (hard bread to be dealt out one day in a week of lieu of flour).

But in spite of this plenty, and it was a plenty compared to what the British had in Boston, there was a severe shortage of wood and hay in the army. This shortage caused a fair amount of suffering and hardship, especially during the winter months. Clothing was also a problem. Most of the Continental soldiers considered clothes washing "women's work," so, rather than washing their own clothes, they let their shirts rot on their backs. (Shirts continued to be a problem for the Brookline Fort, even after the British fled Boston; on May 27, 1777, Colonel Putnam, then in command of the fort, put in an urgent request to General Washington for 190 shirts to clothe his men, many of whom were going barebacked.) While, a few weeks after his arrival, General Washington informed his men that he would make uniform coats available at a reasonable price, the dress of the Continental soldier remained so diverse that they resembled more a farmer's convention than an army.

During the summer and autumn months, most of the soldiers lived in tents, rising very early and retiring, for the most part, fairly late. The Rev. William Emerson described the tents of the Continental soldiers soon after the arrival of General Washington: "Every tent is a portrait of the temper and tastes of the persons who camp in it. Some are made of boards, some of sailcloth. Some partly of one and partly of the other. Again, others are made of stone and turf brick or brush. Some are thrown up in a hurry, others curiously wrought with windows, some with wreaths and withes in the manner of a basket. Some are your proper tents and marques looking like the camp of the enemy. In these are the Rhode Islanders who are furnished with tent-equipage and everything in the most exact English style."

**T**he series of events which led up to the British bombardment of the Brookline Fort began on July 24, 1775. On that day, General Lee ordered that the works on Winter Hill in Cambridge be strengthened. The strengthening continued for several days; and on July 29, the British placed a new bomb battery on Bunker's Hill to oppose the newly strengthened American works. The British also pushed forward their advanced lines at Charlestown Neck. That evening, General Washington ordered Captain Dawdle and the

men of the York County Rifle Company to cut off the new British outpost on the Charlestown Neck and capture a few prisoners. Later that night, Captain Dawdle and thirty-nine men crept on their hands and knees around to the right of the British outpost. Lieutenant Miller crept around to the left with a smaller party. The two groups were just about to meet behind the outpost when the British relief guard coming from the British fort on Bunker Hill discovered them. In the skirmish which followed, the Americans lost one man, but killed five and took two British captives, before retreating back to Winter Hill. The next morning, at eleven o'clock, 500 British troops marched out over Charlestown Neck and built a breastwork to cover the guard of the outpost and to prevent the Americans from sneaking around behind the British lines again. As a result of this action by the British, the American camp was in a state of alarm all day, and that night the American soldiers slept in their clothes.

At one o'clock on the morning of July 31, the British responded to the American offensive of twenty-six hours before by staging a three-pronged attack upon the American positions. The British had been mortified by the success of the American riflemen and were resolved to have their revenge. So on the morning of July 31, the whole British line went out. Orders for the attack probably came from the upper echelons of the British command; it is even possible that the attack was coordinated by General Gage, since the attack was led on the left by the ranking General Clinton and was directed on the right by General Howe.

The three attacks began almost simultaneously. Preceded by a heavy bombardment of the American works by British cannon, General Clinton led the Fourth Regiment of Marines from the lines at Boston neck into Roxbury, which he found to be deserted. He then waited in Roxbury for three quarters of an hour while materials were being procured to set the St. George's Tavern and several other buildings on fire. About 2:30 A.M., after the tavern had been ignited, the British retired to their Boston lines. Meanwhile, in Charlestown, General Howe had ordered two parties of sixty men each to attempt burning the American advanced posts in East Cambridge. The British, under cover of the artillery on Bunker Hill, went out and drove the sixty-man American advanced guard behind the main American lines. But the Americans were soon reinforced and drove off the British, killing several and taking seven British captives.

The third and perhaps most important prong of the attack was the center one. Under orders, two British gunboats or floating batteries moved up the river to within 300 yards of Sewall's Point and began a brisk cannonade of the fort. The floating batteries were large, rectangular, flat-bottomed boats which mounted six twenty-four pound sea cannon: two in the bow, two in the stern, and one in each side. While the batteries may have had a small mast with a square sail, they were moved primarily by rowers. On the morning of the thirty-first, there were probably a couple of companies of

marines on board the British batteries, so that a landing could be made on Sewall's Point in case the Americans ran (as the British always seemed to expect them to) in the face of the British bombardment.

The Brookline Fort, which had been firing cannon shot into Boston since midnight,<sup>7</sup> ceased fire when the British batteries began their bombardment. It seems that Colonel Gerrish, who had always been afraid of bombardments, ordered the Americans not to return fire, saying, "The rascals can do no harm and it would be a mere waste of powder to fire at them with our four-pounders." (About a month later, a British floating battery in the Mystic River was sunk by a shot from an American four-pounder.) It was this cowardly order which resulted in Colonel Gerrish's court martial. The Americans remained in the fort under bombardment for many hours, probably returning scattered musket fire at the boat, but not returning any cannon fire. Luckily, the bombardment was highly unsuccessful: the lights had been extinguished and all the shots flew wide of the fort. By five o'clock, the floating battery had returned downstream and the skirmishing at the Charlestown and Roxbury lines had ended. While the British made little material gain through the attack, the burning of George's Tavern and the bombardment of Fort Brookline in some ways made up for the humiliation of the British losses in Charlestown that morning and on the twenty-ninth.

The bombardment of the Brookline Fort, combined with the other two skirmishes which occurred that early morning, was the most significant confrontation between British and American forces to occur between the battle of Bunker Hill and the evacuation of Boston by the British.

**T**he fort's site has been built over so many times it is almost unrecognizable. Sewall's Point was part of a farm which occupied most of the northeastern portion of Brookline and extended as far southwest as Harvard Street.<sup>8</sup> The farm was owned by Samuel Sewall, a descendant of the famous Justice of the Salem "Witch Court." Sewall, because of his strong Tory tendencies, left the Whig countryside early in 1775 to seek refuge in Boston. His land was confiscated by the new Massachusetts government; after the war the farm was broken up and sold to help pay the state's war debt.<sup>9</sup> Some of the fort's earthworks were leveled by the anxious new farm owners who wanted more land to plant, but for forty years the works suffered mainly from the erosion of Boston winters.

In 1820, Brighton Avenue was constructed right through the middle of the fort. An article in *Silman's Journal* in 1822 said that the fort "would still be perfect, were it not for the road, which divides it into two nearly equal parts, with this exception, the ramparts and an irregular bastion, which commanded the entrance to the Charles River, are entire." By 1844, the tracks of the Boston and Worcester Railroad had also been laid through the fort, going north by northeast and passing under Brighton Avenue almost at the

exact center of the fort's site. Sewall Avenue crossed Brighton Avenue at the same point before ending at a ferry dock built at the end of the point. This dock serviced the ferry to Cambridge.

By 1852, a bridge had been built to replace the ferry at the end of Sewall Avenue which was now known as Essex Street. This bridge, known as the Essex Street bridge, was soon joined by a second bridge, built to enable the Grand Junction railroad to cross the Charles River and join the Boston and Albany in the northwest corner of the fort site.

The next violation of the fort site can be traced back to the political ramifications of the changing demographics of the 1800s. About the middle of the nineteenth century, large numbers of immigrants arrived in Boston and settled, not far from the docks they landed on, in the southern and eastern sections of the Boston peninsula. Shortly thereafter, Boston began to expand to the west to accommodate the new population. This expansion, first evidenced by the filling of the Back Bay to create land for new housing, soon began to affect Brookline. Boston's nearest neighbor to the west, Brookline, stood right in the way of Boston's expansion into Allston and Brighton, which Boston had already annexed.

A fight soon began between Boston city planners, who wanted to annex Brookline, and the Brookline selectmen, who wanted to retain the independence of the town. The controversy reached a peak in 1874; on May 8, a compromise was passed by the state legislature: the border of Brookline was moved about 650 feet back from the Charles River to the inside of Brighton Avenue and was moved about a half mile back from the intersection of Brighton and Brookline Avenues (now Kenmore Square) to what is now St. Mary's Street. Thus the legislature created a land corridor between Boston and Allston-Brighton. Brookline retained its water rights to the Charles; and, in spite of the influence of the Boston City Council upon the legislature, stayed relatively intact through the crisis of 1874. However, as a result of the border shift, Brookline lost half of one of its major historic sites.

By the year 1876, the centennial of the evacuation of Boston, more railroad tracks had been laid alongside the Boston and Albany tracks; the Cottage Farm railroad station had been built in the southeast corner of the fort site. After getting the land corridor to Allston, the Boston city fathers began to sponsor the development of the area. In 1887, Brighton Avenue was widened into an extension of Commonwealth Avenue. The newly formed River Bank Improvement Company in 1889 created Bay State Road, which runs from the northeast corner of the fort site down to Kenmore square.

The almost systematic desecration of the fort site continued into the twentieth century as wave after wave of new construction eroded away the last remnants of the fort. By 1903, a railroad roundhouse for up to fourteen engines had been built in the northwest corner of the site, close to where the tracks from Cambridge joined those from Boston. The roundhouse was torn down in 1915. In 1913, an elevated electric trolley, the forerunner of



today's Boston College streetcar line, had been built up the middle of Commonwealth Avenue.

By 1920, the bridge at the end of Essex Street had been rebuilt into the Cottage Farm Bridge (now called the Boston University Bridge). Former Governor Alvan T. Fuller broke ground in 1927 in the southwest corner of the fort site to build his Cadillac-Olds Building; and by 1950 the Boston bank of the Charles River had been filled in to make room for Storrow Drive. As if the fort site had not been built over enough, in 1960 the Massachusetts Turnpike was built right through the middle of the site. All that is left of Sewall's point is a gentle rise in the land; there is no trace left of the fort.

However, the historic significance of the fort, its commanders, and its garrison has been remembered in the area around the fort site. For in the northernmost section of Brookline, where the town still barely holds onto its half of the site, several streets have been named in memory of the strategic gatekeeper of the Charles River: Mountfort Street (after a fort on a hill), Essex Street (after the Essex County Militia), and Prescott Street (a post-revolutionary road named after Oliver Prescott). These streets continue to hold in our memories the small, but significant part Brookline played in the fight to free Boston from the British. □

## Notes

1. Of this ring, only Fort Washington in Cambridge and the Roxbury Hill fort still survive.
2. Ironically, after their humiliating and expensive defeats at Concord and Bred's Hill, the British had no intention whatsoever of making any major excursions into the country before they were to be reinforced in the spring of 1776. See *Secret Letters of General Gage*.
3. The end of Sewall's point was an ideal place to build a fort because it was completely defensible. It was elevated above the surrounding land and encompassed on three sides by water or marsh.
4. Colonel Rufus Putnam's *Memoires*, 54-55
5. *Ibid.*

6. *Ibid.*

7. Bombarding Boston was a matter of course for the men of the American fortifications, especially on a night when the entire American camp was in a state of alarm.

8. Sewall Avenue, which now runs from Harvard Street to Kent Street, originally continued 2000 feet beyond Kent Street before turning northwest and heading out toward Sewall's Point. The last 1500 feet of the road ran north to the end of the point.

9. *Massachusetts Historical Society Proceedings*, 2d series, 10: 182-3