

Proceedings
of the
Brookline
Historical Society
For 1979-1984



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Annual Meeting – January 25, 1981

The annual meeting of the Brookline Historical Society will be held in the Lyon Chapel of the First Parish church, 382 Walnut Street at three-thirty o'clock on Sunday afternoon.

The second national conference of the National Association for Olmsted Parks will be held in Boston and Brookline on April 24-26, 1981. Frederick Law Olmsted's many landscape projects in Brookline, and the fact that his firm and its successors were located here for nearly one hundred years, make this an important occasion for the town and for students of its history.

Betsy Shure Gross, member of the Brookline Conservation Commission, is the national coordinator for the April conference, and will speak on plans and events scheduled for the three-day period.

Shary Page Berg, park manager of the Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site at 99 Warren Street, will speak on the Park Service's acquisition of Olmsted's house, office, papers, and its future plans for the property.

Report of the President

This has been a good year for the Historical Society, and I would like to thank all of the trustees, officers, and members who have helped to make it so. We have twelve new members and have had three very interesting, informative, and well-attended meetings.

The spring meeting was held on May 25 at All Saints' Church, where Douglass Shand Tucci, author of *Built in Boston: City and Suburb*, gave a slide lecture entitled "French Flats and Three Deckers" on the development of the apartment house in Boston and its environs, with special emphasis on Beacon Street's Stoneholm and Richmond Court in Brookline.

On October 19, at Boston University's African Studies Center at 10 Lenox Street, Richard Berenson took us back to the eighteenth century with a slide lecture on the history of Fort Brookline. The fort, located on the Charles River near the Boston University Bridge, was the site in 1775 of the only

Revolutionary War action in Brookline.

Today we hold the Society's annual meeting in Lyon Chapel, First Parish Church, with the Second National Conference of the National Association for Olmsted Parks, to be held in Boston and Brookline April 24-26, as our focus. Betsy Shure Gross, national coordinator, will speak on plans for the conference; Cornelia Hanna McMurtrie, project coordinator for Friends of Leverett Pond, will give a slide talk on the pond entitled "A Walk with Olmsted"; and Shary Page Berg, Park Manager of the Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site, will speak on the Park Service's plans for Olmsted's house and office.

The Society made a donation of \$500 this year to the town of Brookline's window fund, aiding the town in the purchase of three stained-glass windows taken from the old Town Hall, which was built in 1872 and torn down in 1965. We also made a contribution in the same amount to the Brookline arts center, which is housed in the 1886 former chemical engine house on Monmouth Street, specifying that the money be put toward the restoration of the town-owned building.

As you all know, the Chandler portraits of the Rev. Ebenezer Devotion and Martha Devotion were exhibited at the Whitney Museum in New York from February 26 to May 13, 1980. As a result of the publicity, we have received several requests for the right to include the portrait of Ebenezer Devotion in forthcoming books.

The trustees met on April 24, September 23, and January 15 of this year. The inventory of the Society's possessions in the Devotion House is nearly complete, and Morton Vose has again appraised the Devotion portraits, the Seaver portrait, and that of John Devotion, while past president Nancy Smith is finishing the appraisal of the silver and furniture. Security at both the Devotion house and the Putterham school has become a serious problem, and alarm systems for both are being investigated. The Society's silver has been placed in a safe deposit box, and the trustees are giving consideration to placing the Devotion and Seaver portraits in a museum to ensure their safety. In the event that we do take this step, we hope to have good copies made, at least of the Devotion portraits, so that they can be displayed at the Devotion house.

In conclusion, I want to thank the various chairmen of the Society's committees and I want to give special thanks to two people without whom I am sure the Society could not function — Helen and Jim McIntosh.

Respectfully submitted,
Leslie S. Larkin

National Association for Olmsted Parks

by Betsy Shure Gross and Shary Page Berg

We are delighted to be here this afternoon around the corner from Fairsted, Frederick Law Olmsted's home and offices on Warren Street, to preview the second National Conference of the National Association for Olmsted Parks with you, particularly because this conference honors a nineteenth-century genius who was our Brookline neighbor. A neighbor, I might add, whose social vision and land-use skill, whose imagination and talent, reached far beyond his own time into our own in its awareness of the continuing human need for relief from the consequences of industrialization and urbanization.

It was from Brookline that much of Frederick Law Olmsted's mature work was done — and so our 1981 conference is dedicated to him, not to deify the man, for he doesn't need that, but to honor his work, and to give that honor meaning by rededicating ourselves to the preservation of the spaces he designed. What better time than at this meeting of the Brookline Historical Society to assume new responsibility for the historic landscape — our heritage of open space — to accept the opportunity for preservation of the landscape as you all have for the preservation of the built environment here in Brookline — as a privilege and a prerogative of living in Brookline.

Shary and I are here today as representatives of the National Association for Olmsted Parks, an organization comprised of landscape architects, community activists, scholars, environmentalists, preservationists, politicians and park managers — all who come together from across the country to share our common problems and to seek creative solutions to them.

We have a growing national membership and an emerging national commitment to preserve, protect and maintain our historic parks.

We come together this year to share our strategies and to teach one another about these historical, cultural, environmental, educational, recreational resources — our Olmsted parks — these jewels in the Emerald Necklace — these oases in the city. It is your leadership role in this community which has given us the model for what we now do — and we look forward to your continued interest and commitment to guide us on our way. □

—B.S.G.



The following is excerpted from the Fall/Winter 1980/81 National Association for Olmsted Parks.

"A most important component of the national artistic and historic patrimony. . . its preservation is of prime significance to this country." So wrote Professor James Marston Fitch of Fairsted, Olmsted's home and

office and its contents: thousands and thousands of drawings by Frederick Law Olmsted, Sr. and Jr., John C. Olmsted, and others associated with the Olmsted firm from 1883 until the early 1950s; a continuum of professional creativity unmatched in America.

Now, finally, after years of effort by William Alex and others, and with the support of Senator Edward M. Kennedy, Congressman Robert Drinan and the numerous co-sponsors of U.S. Public Law 96-87, and the signature of the President, Fairsted has become a National Historic Site.

The National Park Service assumed full responsibility for the site only on July 1, 1980. For the immediate future its primary responsibility is to provide maintenance and security for the physical plant and its contents. Funds have not been appropriated by Congress for the purchase of the archives, which remain the personal property of Mr. Artemas P. Richardson, a member of the Olmsted firm. An agreement has been reached with Mr. Richardson, however, for limited access by written appointment to the collection.

A major goal of the National Association is to facilitate the purchase of the archival collection by the National Park Service, or to secure its donation to Fairsted in one way or another. When linked to the Olmsted Papers at the Library of Congress, and other lesser collections around the country, it constitutes the real legacy of FLO, his sons and associates, and remains the touchstone for Olmsted's impact on the American scene.

Describing what he found during his initial survey of Fairsted in 1973-74, William Alex said, "The archives in Brookline . . . contain approximately 800,000 drawings distributed over some 10,000 individual jobs. However, between 15 to 20,000 drawings may be said to constitute the significant core of historic drawings. Among these are jobs that have continued for decades and demonstrate a rare continuity of work by a single American professional organization, now one hundred seventeen years old . . . This core . . . comprises the history in the United States of environmental design, a concept not even named until our own generation and held nowhere else in the world except in the mind of one man whose life activity was a demonstration of its most valid principles."

Registrants to the National Association's April 1981 conference in Brookline will have a rare opportunity to see and understand the importance of Fairsted today. □

— S.P.B.

Spring Meeting – June 7, 1981

The spring meeting of the Brookline Historical Society will be held at the Church of our Saviour, Monmouth and Carlton Streets, at four o'clock on Sunday afternoon.

"Fifty Years of Brookline Music and Song" will be presented with historical allusions, and with the Reverend George Blackman at the piano and leading us in song

Fifty Years of Brookline Music and Song

The spring meeting, held on June 7, 1981 in the parish house of the Church of Our Saviour, was the occasion for the presentation of nine musical pieces which either were written by Brookline residents or concerned Brookline subjects. The piano music was played by the Reverend George L. Blackman, who also led the assembly in singing two of the pieces. The historical background of each selection was given by Mrs. Larkin.

The Ward School March, 1867, G. P. Benjamin. The Ward School was built in 1864 at the foot of Allerton Street on Pond Avenue. A curve in the roadway now indicates the school's former location. A primary and intermediate school, it replaced the old Pearl Place School and served children from that area and from the growing population of "The Farm," the site of the Ward family's home. This land, annexed to Brookline from Boston in 1820 at the petition of John Ward, and later known as the Kimball Farm, was bought by the Brookline Land Co. in the 1860s and developed for housing. The Ward School was torn down in the late 1880s when Olmsted's Muddy River improvement was undertaken.

The Longwood Clog, 1888, G. L. Kennan. A clog, or clog dance, was performed in heavy wooden high-heeled shoes of the same name. David Sears, an admirer of Napoleon, named his Brookline estate "Longwood" after the lieutenant-governor's house on St. Helena where the exiled emperor and his retinue were confined in 1815.

The Brookline Redowa, 1880, Owen Wister. The redowa is a Bohemian

dance which can resemble a polka, or, as in this case, a waltz or mazurka. Owen Wister is of course best known as the author of *The Virginian*. In 1880 he was a sophomore at Harvard, from which he graduated in 1882 with highest honors in music. He played both the banjo and piano, and wrote many songs for Hasty Pudding theatricals. In his book *My Friendship with Roosevelt* he spoke of visiting good friends in Brookline.

Brookline High School Waltzes, 1895, Wilson S. Belches. These were dedicated to the class of 1895, of which Belches may have been a member, since he was listed in the local directory of that year as living at his father's house at 42 Harris Street. A new high school with a tower, designed in 1894 by Andrews, Jaques, and Rantoul (the first two of whom were Brookline residents) was built on the site of the present high school to replace the one which had stood at the corner of Harvard and School Streets. Quite likely the class of 1895 was the first to graduate from this building.

The Waving of the Grasses: A Romance, 1902, Augusta J. King. Very little is known about the composer of this song, who published it herself. In 1902 she lived in a house at 124 Winthrop Road which was owned by a Charles C. Parsons. That was her first year at that address, and she may have come from Denver, since her song is dedicated to the YWCA of Denver, Colorado!

The Persian Love Song, 1895, words: R. D. Ware, music: Joshua Crane Jr. This song was apparently a High Street Hill endeavor. Joshua Crane Jr. lived at his family's house at 123 High Street and was an electrical engineer with an office at Court Square. In 1895 there were Wares living on both Upland and Allerton streets, but no R. D. Ware is listed in local directories.

The Red Sox Speed Boys, 1912, words: Henry E. Casey, music: Martin Barrett. The composer, who published this piece himself, owned a sporting goods store at 184 Washington Street. The building, since torn down, stood between the Brookline Savings Bank and the MBTA tracks. Barrett lived at 49 White Place, where Henry Casey, who worked in Boston, boarded. This song is rather remarkable for including the names of seventeen Red Sox players.

The Riverdale Casino March, 1895, Wilson S. Belches. This march was dedicated to the members of the Casino, which undoubtedly included the Belches family. It was a family-oriented club, which allowed no liquor or gambling, located next to the Lawrence Playground on Francis Street and organized in 1893. The Riverdale Casino had social rooms and an assembly hall where entertainments, lectures, concerts, and dances took place, and it sponsored bowling, billiards, pool, and whist tournaments. The building

was later owned for many years by the Knights of Columbus. After it was purchased by the town of Brookline, it was demolished in 1977.

The Lincoln School March, 1910, Samuel W. Cole. The original Lincoln School was built in 1888 on a lot to the west of the present school, which the town had bought, complete with house and barn, for \$10,000 from the same Clark sisters who sold their Warren Street family home to Frederick Law Olmsted. The school was named for William H. Lincoln, who served as chairman of the School Committee for sixteen years. The present school replaced the old one in 1931. Samuel Cole was director of music in the Brookline Public Schools and lived at 56 Thorndike Street at the time he wrote this march. □

Fall Meeting — October 18, 1981

The fall meeting of the Brookline Historical Society will be held at the Devotion House, 347 Harvard Street, at two o'clock on Sunday afternoon.

A number of heretofore unseen objects relating to the Society and the history of Brookline will be on display. Come and see: an 1864 view of Brookline from Corey Hill, pencil drawings of Brookline by Lucy Wilson Ripley Heath, a sampler executed by Nancy Devotion, a painting of the William Lawrence house (demolished), an 1853 weathervane which stood atop the Brookline village depot for many years, and many other interesting items and papers.