

# Brookline Historical Society

Incorporated April 29, 1901

**Winter Meeting:** "The Once and Future Larz Anderson Park", an illustrated talk by Michael Berger and Mary Dewart of the Brookline Greenspace Coalition. Additional special presentation by our hosts, the Museum of Transportation.

**Date:** Sunday, Feb. 12, 3 p.m. (note time carefully).

**Place:** The Carriage House at Larz Anderson Park, 15 Newton St., Brookline.

**All members and their guests are invited to attend**

## President's Report

The year 1988 found the Brookline Historical Society making progress on several of its goals.

**Membership:** Departing members, who will be missed, were replaced in greater numbers by new enrollees, many of whom joined at the "Sustaining" level of \$20 per year. As a result, income from dues achieved a record level (for details, see the Treasurer's Report on page 2). Many of the new members were reached through innovative outreach efforts -- local advertising and direct mail.

A reminder: all members were recently billed for 1989 renewals. PLEASE RENEW if you haven't already done so -- and consider increasing your level of membership. Coming in the spring: the annual list of paid-up members.

**Officers:** An excellent candidate has been recruited as president in 1990. Miriam Sargon will begin by serving as vice president in 1989, with membership approval.

**Research:** Papers were researched, presented, and printed in the newsletter on three topics of interest. On Feb. 28, Christopher Smith marked the return of the U.S. Open to Brookline by retelling in colorful fashion the history of golf at The Country Club. On June 12, Greer Hardwicke and Carla Benka of the Historical Commission opened our eyes to the wealth of town-owned properties of historic importance. And on Oct. 30, Heidi Gitelman and others enhanced our appreciation of the now-threatened Coolidge Corner Moviehouse.

**Upkeep:** Our own Edward Devotion House at long last benefitted from some expert repair work under the

supervision of the town's new building commissioner, Jim Nickerson. As Helen MacIntosh reports (see inside), much remains to be done both at Devotion and Putterham.

**Newsletter:** As of this issue, a new feature has been added -- reprints of papers from the Society's archives. I am delighted that the first offering is Elmer Cappers' 1973 history of the Society, in which he notes, "The Brookline Historical Society has gone its quiet way for almost three-quarters of a century, compiling a record of dedication to the purposes for which it was formed." Make that four score years and ten, Mr. Cappers.

The Cappers history reminds me that we have fallen behind in the five-year cycle of gathering all the Historical Society papers together in the form of the "Proceedings", a bound volume which then becomes available to all future researchers. This is something I would love to attend to in the year ahead -- volunteers to assist in the project are welcome.

For all the successes of the past year, thanks go to the trustees, who have regularly joined with me in making important decisions about society business. And double appreciation to Helen MacIntosh for assistance beyond measure.

-- John VanScoyoc, president

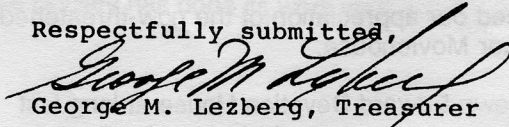
## CONTENTS

|                            |       |
|----------------------------|-------|
| Treasurer's Report         | p. 2  |
| Coolidge Corner Moviehouse | p. 3  |
| Collections and Rooms      | p. 8  |
| Reprint                    | p. 10 |

TREASURER'S ANNUAL REPORT

|   | <u>1 9 8 8</u>  |                     | <u>1 9 8 7</u>  |                     |
|---|-----------------|---------------------|-----------------|---------------------|
| <u>Cash on hand, January 1:</u>           |                 |                     |                 |                     |
| Checks on hand                            | \$ 276.84       |                     | \$ -0-          |                     |
| Term deposit                              | 23,947.47       |                     | 22,431.04       |                     |
| Money market                              | 1,391.65        |                     | 1,318.77        |                     |
| Savings account                           | 6,825.64        |                     | 6,206.47        |                     |
| C. H. Blanchard Mem'l. Fund               | 1,348.16        |                     | 1,275.53        |                     |
| Bank of N. E.                             | <u>2,599.43</u> | \$ 36,389.24        | <u>2,975.86</u> | \$ 34,207.67        |
| <br><u>Income Year Ended December 31:</u> |                 |                     |                 |                     |
| Dues & contributions                      | \$ 2,655.00     |                     | \$ 1,970.00     |                     |
| House tour                                | -0-             |                     | 235.00          |                     |
| Misc.                                     | 100.00          |                     | 50.00           |                     |
| Wallace Trust                             | 127.25          |                     | 41.84           |                     |
| Interest earned                           | <u>2,629.55</u> | <u>5,511.80</u>     | <u>2,437.10</u> | <u>4,733.94</u>     |
|   |                 | \$ 41,901.04        |                 | \$ 38,941.61        |
| <br><u>Payments:</u>                      |                 |                     |                 |                     |
| House tour                                | \$ -0-          |                     | \$ 200.00       |                     |
| Postage & mailings                        | 616.00          |                     | 363.20          |                     |
| Printing & typing                         | 940.25          |                     | 300.75          |                     |
| Meeting expense                           | 617.86          |                     | 101.50          |                     |
| Insurance                                 | 1,494.00        |                     | 1,380.00        |                     |
| Advertising                               | 361.26          |                     | -0-             |                     |
| Dues                                      | 15.00           |                     | -0-             |                     |
| Slides transfer                           | -0-             |                     | 60.00           |                     |
| Vault                                     | 110.00          |                     | 110.00          |                     |
| Misc.                                     | <u>-0-</u>      | <u>4,154.37</u>     | <u>36.92</u>    | <u>2,552.37</u>     |
| <br><u>Balance, December 31:</u>          |                 |                     |                 |                     |
| Checks on hand                            | \$ -0-          |                     | \$ 276.84       |                     |
| Term deposit                              | 25,822.12       |                     | 23,947.47       |                     |
| Money market                              | 1,493.03        |                     | 1,391.65        |                     |
| Savings account                           | 7,218.21        |                     | 6,825.69        |                     |
| C. H. Blanchard Mem'l. Fund               | 1,425.68        |                     | 1,348.16        |                     |
| Bank of N. E.                             | <u>1,787.63</u> | \$ <u>37,746.67</u> | <u>2,599.43</u> | \$ <u>36,389.24</u> |

Respectfully submitted,



George M. Lezberg, Treasurer  
January 12, 1989



## **Coolidge Corner Moviehouse: A Social History**

*From a paper presented to the Oct. 30, 1988 meeting of the Brookline Historical Society.*

**By Heidi Gitelman**

Newspapers in a small town claimed that it would lead to the disintegration of family life. It would arrest the mental development and weaken the moral fiber of children. And crowds and automobiles would increase an already serious traffic congestion problem.

This wasn't the reaction to a new video arcade, or another MacDonald's, or even an X-rated peep show. Instead, these were views expressed in a series of editorials, articles and petitions which ran for 11 years between 1922 and 1933, protesting the opening of a movie house in Brookline. Finally, when it opened on December 29th, 1933, however, one newspaper described the Coolidge Corner Theater as more Roxy than the Roxy.

It's appearance evoked descriptions such as this one that was found in the local newspaper:

"An imaginary tour of inspection, will serve to convey the impression of Brookline's first temple of the film. Remember that it's not a large house, but rather, what is designated as intimate. The orchestra seats 870 and the balcony, 412 persons. A brilliant marquee projects over the sidewalk at the west end. Passing from the lobby into the foyer, a vague impression of pomp grows upon one. A deepening consciousness of unmitigated luxury. From the walnut and ebony ensemble of the foyer, voluptuous carpeting leads up the staircase, with shining chrome banisters to the balcony. The mezzanine lounge continues unbroken the riot of sumptuousness. On the walls of the lounge are figures of athletes. Similar graphic representations of various sports adorn the men's room, which is decked in pigskin.

"In the balcony, a comprehensive view of the auditorium, a fantasia of pigment will burst upon the moviegoers. Color and more color, design, pattern, angles, lines, curves, figures suggesting, we offer for what they are worth, the terms modernism and futurism. Recovering from the sudden climactic explosion, one observes details; a gold curtain faces the auditorium. Over the proscenium, a large frieze with a red background and figures in gold and blue represent symbolically the seasons, in company with a dancing bacchante significant of the perennial homage paid to the theater.

"The motley ceiling is stepped from the sides with a wide and elaborately embellished central panel. The step

sections, painted different shades of blue, sweep longitudinally across the house in a streamline effect. The central panel is adorned with a series of large, stellar, fantastic patterns, painted in silver and hues of red, blue and green. Flowery designs in powdered gold rise against the gay colors of the wall."

Other articles describe additional, unique attributes of the theater, such as exceptionally wide aisles and audiophones for the hard of hearing.

In the past 56 years, the theater has changed ownership, management, appearance and repertoire several times. These types of changes stem from shifting trends in social activities and in response to community demand. Again, over its 56 years, the Coolidge Corner Theater, or Coolidge Corner Moviehouse as we know it today, has been an unspoken landmark in the Brookline community.

It's where as a child, my mother went with her friends to see Saturday afternoon matinees. It's where numerous kids from Brookline High School have made extra money selling popcorn and used to usher. It's where hundreds of young couples have gone for a Friday night date, where Brookline's increasingly diverse ethnic community can come to see films in their own native language, and where students and local residents can see a film series, either classics or something new and innovative.

The Coolidge Corner Moviehouse plays a significant role in the local history of Brookline. It conveys a social history of twentieth century Brookline. The theater reveals information that illustrates aspects of Brookline residents' everyday life.

The moviehouse provides a unique look at what people do for recreation and what some people do as a livelihood. It provides insight into what people think and how they learn, how people act and what artifacts and buildings surround them.

For example, by looking at the architecture and the interior space of the theater, we can see that the environment in which people went to see movies. By looking at movie programs at the theater, we can see what types of movies were popular in Brookline, such as first run versus repertory, and what types of morals might have been reflected in the movies.

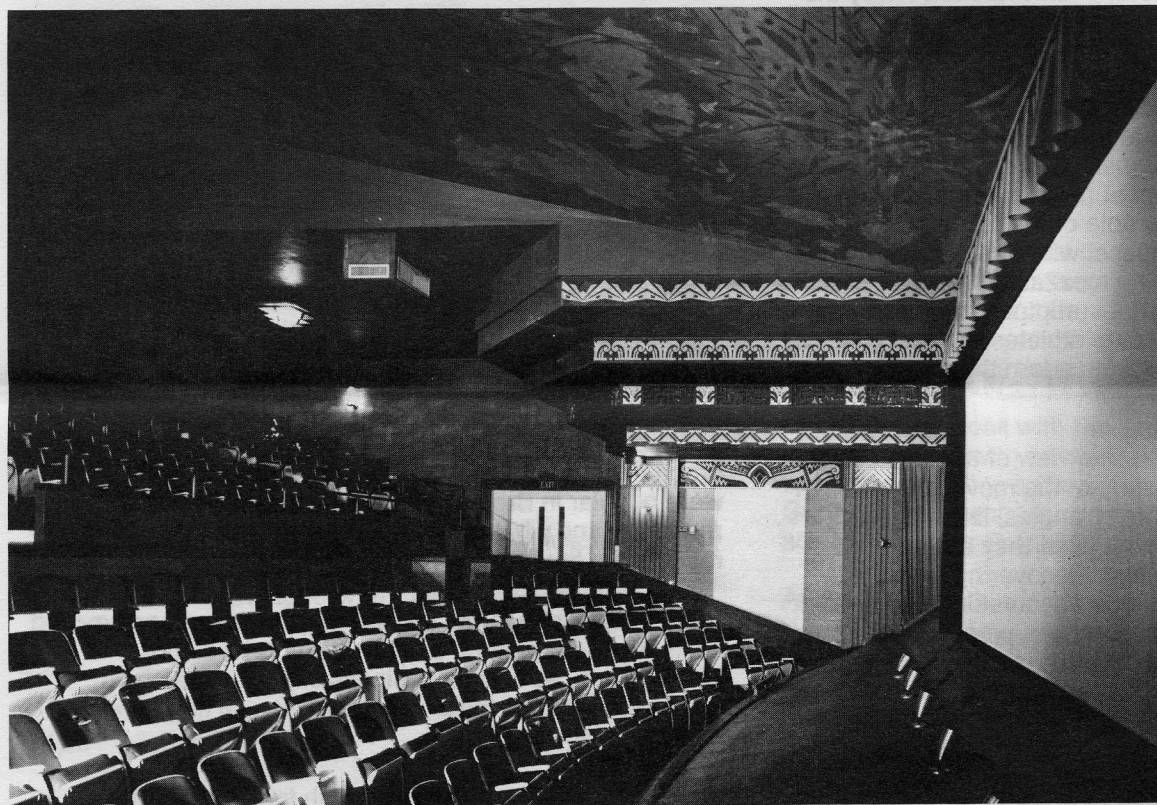
From business records, we can learn about changing costs of entertainment, such as ticket prices and concessions, as well as business expenses, such as heating, electricity, the price of commercial carpeting and popcorn machines.

From local newspaper articles, both from the 1920s and 1988, we can see how the community felt about movies





Coolidge Corner Moviehouse: The familiar marquee promised entertainment over the years.



Inside, "temple of film" offered "a fantasia of pigment, design, pattern, angles, lines, curves."





The Moviehouse lobby, where generations gathered.



Overhead, "a dancing bacchante signified the perennial homage to the theater."

and this movie theater and what issues have been important in the growth of this town's commercial space.

And finally, by looking at the theater as a whole, we can examine the fading of a very important aspect of our twentieth century culture -- the community moviehouse, which is owned and operated by a local entrepreneur.

In 1986, I began a project to document and interpret the Coolidge Corner Moviehouse. The twentieth century will come to a close in less than 12 years and the face of Brookline is rapidly changing. I heard that the theater was about to close and I wanted to record the past and the present look, feel and history of the theater since it is Brookline's first and last moviehouse.

My goal was, and still is to answer the questions, "What was it like to go to the movies at the Coolidge Corner Moviehouse?", "What was it like to own, manage or work at the moviehouse?" I also wanted to record how it was different in the thirties, forties and fifties and from the sixties and seventies and why it was different. And I wanted to document what goes on there today for future historians and teachers and curious Brookline residents.

With the support of the current owner, Justin Freed and financial help from the Brookline Council for Arts and Humanities, and private donors, I began a very extensive project to document the theater. This is still going on.

The Coolidge Corner Moviehouse project includes contemporary documentary photography of the theater, both in black & white and in color. It includes collecting historical photographs, business papers and ephemera such as posters, tickets, programs and leaflets related to the moviehouse. It includes collecting and or recording all significant artifacts and architectural elements that are related to the moviehouse. It includes conducting videotaped interviews with past and present owners, management and staff as well as customers. It includes developing written and pictorial history of the theater which I hope will ultimately result in an exhibit, probably at the Brookline Public Library.

And finally, it involves locating a repository for this material that is accessible to the Brookline community, so that there will be a collection of this material in one place. The project has gone slowly and funds have been short, but at this point all of the components that I mentioned are either under way or completed.

The information and materials that I have found thus far are like pieces of a puzzle, which is just slowly coming together. Once the project is complete, whether or not the theater is still standing, there will be a record of Brookline's social history surrounding the theater; a record of activities surrounding the theater, its relationship

to the Brookline community and the role this landmark has played in the lives of Brookline residents.

At this point I thought I would show you some of the documentary photography that's been taken of the moviehouse for this project. It was taken about a year and a half ago. These are photographs that I think will be of help to future historians. (See photo spread on adjoining pages.)

I thought that it was important to take photographs of the theater as is, so no one vacuumed, no one straightend up, no one cleaned up. I feel it's a better representation of what it's like to go to a movie and have a good look at the theater.

I also wanted to document unseen places that most people wouldn't see in the theater -- to round it out so we have a very comprehensive record of the theater.

As well as taking general pictures of the overall theater, I wanted to document some of the details which add to the entire look of the theater.

I also felt that you really can't get a sense of the theater unless you take pictures of people using it.

Ultimately, when the project is done I hope to have interviewed older managers, ushers, older people in the community, not just people who are contemporary to the theater today.

## Memories of a Theater-goer

*(Presented to the Oct. 30, 1988 meeting of the Historical Society as one contribution to a gathering of oral history recollections of the Coolidge Corner Moviehouse.)*

**By Sela Skolnick**

First of all I should say that I think I'm one of the few long-time residents who's here. I've lived here since I was six years old and I won't say how long ago that was, but in the 1950s I was a school-aged child here and I was in high school and college in the 1960s and I'm still here now in 1988.

When I was a very small child in the 1950s, one of my early memories was always walking to the Coolidge Corner Theater. Everyone always walked there. There was no such thing as a mall theater. Families and children just walked there and walked home because it was a neighborhood theater.



The Saturday matinees were always a ritual for me and my friends and they were also a fine excuse to have orgies of food, and in those days it was a pre-health food. They didn't serve cider as they do now and there were no healthy things that you could eat. Everyone would have to have ice cream and candy and soda and popcorn or you thought you didn't have a real afternoon.

Something else that has struck me: we didn't call films films. We saw movies, no films. It's a very earthy, social kind of experience and I don't think that people spent as much time analyzing movies -- films -- as works of art. You went there so you could be in this kind of fantasy world.

It was a social experience as well as a cultural. There was a strong friendship element, a family element, the comradeship of being there with friends and family. In those days, '50s into early '60s, you had whole families who went there. I can think back to when I saw "West Side Story", I think it was probably around 1960, with my own parents.

I also have a very strong memory of when there was a change in programming and there was a more controversial film there. I think it was "Two Women." There was a very graphic rape scene, and I was about 12 then and I heard that this was a fine film and it was foreign and I said, "Ma, I really want to see it." She said, "No way, that's not the kind of film...you know, it's very graphic.... Uh uh." That was one of the few arguments that I had lost with my parents.

In those days, there was just one screen and everything that we saw was a first-run film. In my high school years in the 1960s, you could see all the Sean Connery James Bond films and they were extremely popular.

Looking back to high school and college, I can't think of the Coolidge Corner Theater without remembering all the different men that I saw films there with. This is where.... If I could have 50 cents for every man I was there with I'd be a rich woman today. That was THE place to spend Friday or Saturday evening. There was a very homey atmosphere to it and whether you were there with someone who was a long-time friend or someone who you had just met, you could always feel very much at home.

And I can't think of this theater without also thinking of Jack and Marion's which was a real landmark in those days. Many people here ate corned beef sandwiches there at one point, cheesecake, chicken in the basket... In those times, the ideal evening, socially, was to have somebody take you over to the theater first and then afterwards take you into Jack's and have something. Every college girl here in the the 1960s -- I was at Simmons, but I'm sure this held true for all the neighboring colleges -- would

ask, "Where did he take you afterwards, Jack and Marion's?"

Many, many things have changed. I've lived here for almost 35 years and I've seen many places move in and move out. But somehow this has always been a very stable presence in town and I would feel very sad if we were to lose this real cultural and social resource.

## A Meeting Place for Friends

*(Presented to the Oct. 30, 1988 Historical Society meeting as one contribution to a gathering of oral history recollections of the Coolidge Corner Moviehouse.)*

**By Adam Scotto**

As a Brookline High School student, looking back, the Coolidge Corner Theater has always been central item in my life.

When I was very young, my parents would take me to movies there, and at home I would always search for the movie schedules that my parents would bring back. I don't know if any of you have ever seen them but they always had these neat little etchings around them. I'd usually end up begging my parents to take me to movies, and half the time they'd say yes and half the time they'd say no, but I always remember jumping up and down in front of them, asking them to take me to whatever movie they saw.

When I went to the theater as a child, half the fun of going would be seeing the interior, which is not as extravagant as some of the theaters of that era that I've heard about, but I think it's pretty amazing: the chrome staircase going up... the neon light in the front of the building on the inside. The best thing about it is the ceiling in the main theater.

Once there was a movie I really didn't like. It was four hours about Napoleon's life and I was about age seven or eight -- it was not for me. After about the first hour, I just sort of put my head back and looked up at the ceiling for the rest of the remaining three hours and fantasized about the science fiction story that was occurring in that ceiling. There's all these stars and sort of monsters coming at each other and it's pretty incredible. So in the end, I had a great time. My mother walked out, I walked out and she sounded sort of happy and kind of amazed. Not something for a seven- or a six- year-old to be excited about.

In high school, on and off, friends have worked there. The theater, interestingly enough, was always a meeting place for my friends, not only to see movies. We'll call each

other up and say, "Let's meet at the theater." From there we might go in and see a movie, or we might just meet there, talk a while in the lobby.

There's a great group of Brookline High School kids who have actually developed a relationship with the older people who work at the theater as well as the kids who work there. Sometimes, when I'm bored, maybe nobody's around, I can just walk down there and talk to whoever's there, because I know most of the employees, and just say hello.

There is no comparison with theaters today -- the big theaters around Brookline, the chains with sort of stucco on the inside and lots of screens. I noticed one thing that's different. It's a personal approach. The employees aren't just stamping tickets and saying, "Go in! go in!"

The employees have lots of friends of all ages who come in and talk to them and go in to see the movies. In big theaters you just don't see that.

The Coolidge is from a time when theaters gave you a touch of comfort as well as a movie. The screen is really big! In the lower part of the Coolidge, you're below the screen and you look up at it. You have this great view of the ceiling and you have the big screen which kind of envelopes you, a nice thing that I haven't seen in other places.

For me, the Coolidge Corner Theater has been a place not only to enjoy a movie, but to enjoy a few laughs with my friends as well. Whether it goes or not, I'll always remember it as a place where I hung out as a teenager.

## The Coolidge Corner Theater Foundation

By David Kieller

We know the economic factors that forced owner Justin Freed to sell the Coolidge Corner Moviehouse. A group of admirers of the theater and its contribution to Brookline's social fabric have decided to form a non-profit organization, The Coolidge Corner Theater Foundation, to devise a development plan to make a truly multi-use facility.

Not only could the theater present old films, such as the Frank Capra retrospective currently at the Brattle Theater, but also return to a repertory format, taking advantage of archives of films from around the world.

We'll work with some organizations like the Boston Film and Video Foundation; also, commercial operations, through some of the major studios or the museums.

As educationally rich as Brookline is, in terms of cultural facilities we're a little on the disadvantaged side. The moviehouse is our last public place where we can go to cultural events. What we're left with if the Coolidge closes is only school auditoriums and church halls. There are organizations -- like the Brookline Adult and Community Education Program and the Brookline Arts Center -- that are doing wonderful, imaginative work. Some of those programs could fill the Coolidge Corner Moviehouse.

Another example: The American Repertory Theater has a large subscriber rate in Brookline. Wouldn't it be great to walk down the street and hear Mort Sahl do a political satire for an evening at the Coolidge Corner Moviehouse? The A.R.T. has expressed interest in becoming part of the Theater Foundation.

We're looking at developing a broadly-based group of programs. We want to revive programming for the elderly. We could even hand out dishes again, like they used to in the old days.

And there's an organ mount that's long been dormant at the theater. We've already found an organ on Cape Cod -- if you were able to preserve that first floor space, it would be packed solid with live organ accompaniment. We'd like to bring a little showmanship, a little pizzazz to it.

A non-profit organization has economic resources beyond straight ticket sales. What we'd like to be able to achieve as part of the revitalization of Coolidge Corner is to make the theater a fun place to go to again, where you could look at a schedule and say, "Wow, what's going on there this week?" I think we could preserve the community spirit and, in so doing, preserve our last public assembly place for cultural events.

## The Edward Devotion House

By Helen MacIntosh

The little house is usually very quiet in January and February -- too cold for visitors, perhaps?

During March, we did a project on architecture for the Mass. Council for the Arts, using fifth graders.

The Park School had a program, "Early Brookline," and we were able to provide artifacts for their show and help with displays.



The March 19 D.A.R. meeting and luncheon was a great success. Three days later we had guests. They came from Roxbury and they were able to trace their ancestry back to the original slaves in this area.

Also in March, people came to research the Devotion portraits, and a retired physician researched his roots in Brookline (Aspinwall and the Babcock family).

In April, a total of 166 school children visited, and on April 18, Patriots Day, there was the traditional visit by William Dawes and his aides. Eighty-five people came into the house to visit and have coffee.

May was a fine time for Wheelock College students to plan a unit with me on the Devotion family for elementary students.

May was also the month we had a total of five classes visit from the Heath, Lawrence and Lincoln schools. We were able to help the Devotion School with the annual fair, assisting with photo taking, setting up booths, and providing electricity.

June saw a dinner party with ten former third grade students from Lawrence School on the occasion of their recent graduation from their respective colleges. This group, as third graders, did a study of Brookline buildings and places which resulted in the publication of their small book, "A Mouse Sees Brookline."

The Bicentennial Commission established a special committee headed by me to work with the children to create this series of impressions. Publication of the book was made possible by the Bicentennial Commission and the Norfolk County Development and Tourist Council. The money earned through sales of the book added over \$250 to the Historical Society treasury. Money is to be used to repair the Edward Devotion grandfather clock.

On June 4 and 11, Ms. Jeanne Traxler conducted dances on the front lawn performed by "Small Feet", a project of Moving Experience. It was delightful.

Repairs to the exterior rear wall of the house were finally made, the badly worn buckhead was repaired (cellar stairs had fallen in). Mr. Jim Nickerson is a wonderful building commissioner for the Town of Brookline.

On June 28, the principals of the Brookline Schools held a luncheon meeting at the house to climax a busy school year and to convey best wishes to Mr. Alvin V. Fortune, who was leaving the Pierce School to accept a position in California.

July and August: visitors from the Milton Historical Society, Weymouth, Hingham, Indiana, Rhode Island, and Bakersfield, Ohio.

September: Students from Buckingham, Browne and Nichols School came to write their research papers on the history of the Devotion family. Telephone calls from as far away as Paris and from our own national media (including David Letterman) sought background information on Gov. Michael Dukakis, keeping me very busy.

I participated with one of our members, Paul Weiner, in search for information concerning two Brookline women who designed and built a motor car. Their names were Ms. Davis and Ms. Knight -- and the car did run!

November: more school visits.

December saw my favorite day, the holiday party for senior citizens, planned and organized with Jean Kramer. It was a very festive occasion.

On Dec. 4-5, students from the Baker School visited: a real treat for them.

We had a communication from a professor Brown of UConn.-- History Dept. requesting negatives of Ebenezer Devotion to be copied for his book.

A final note: The house still needs extensive repairs, but that is always true.

## The Putterham School

Brookline is fortunate in having one of its early school houses still preserved -- the Putterham School. It has been presumed that the earliest part of the present school house was erected soon after 1768, and in 1847 the final additions took place which gave the school the appearance which it bears today.

When the school was moved to the Larz Anderson estate we thought it could be protected from vandalism, being right across from the Auto Museum.

This year we have had three broken windows, destruction to the rear wall and an attempt to get into the addition; in so doing, the vandals damaged the door.

This has all been corrected, but the school needs paint, structural repairs and restoration of the fence.

The school has not been opened to the public on a regular basis for three years. The Historical Society needs a volunteer to sit there a few hours one or two days each week. It can be very pleasant on a warm spring day.

I am grateful to the employees of the auto museum for watching the building and calling when there is a problem.

The school was used three times this year by school children: two visits and one use of the school for a classroom.

-- Helen MacIntosh

**REPRINT--**  
**Brookline Historical Society:**  
**A History to 1973**

*(This begins a new feature of the Historical Society Newsletter: reprints of notable papers from the archives. What better subject to begin with than the history of the Historical Society itself.)*

**By Elmer O. Cappers**  
 Sept. 30, 1973

The Brookline Historical Society is not the oldest such society in the United States, but it can surely lay claim to being one with an outstanding record of contribution to its community.

The Massachusetts Historical Society is the first one in our country, having been founded during President Washington's first term.<sup>1</sup> Reverend Jeremy Belknap of Boston invited four persons, two clerical and two lay, to gather with him on August 26, 1790, and at their meeting they adopted a Plan of an Antiquarian Society. The Society's first home was the library room of the Massachusetts Bank in Hamilton Place, Boston, proving that banks do contribute on occasion to the intellectual advancement of society. In a very few years, the establishment of state historical societies had taken place in the other New England states, several of them receiving annual legislative financial aid, something which has not happened in Massachusetts. In 1884, the American Historical Association was founded, but it was more an association for the gathering and publication of historical material. The growth of town and city historical associations continued with such vigor that one writer stated at the turn of the century that in eastern Massachusetts there were almost as many historical societies as there were towns<sup>2</sup>.

The Brookline Historical Society first met on April 17, 1901 in the Town Hall and was duly incorporated four days later. But before proceeding forward, as every well-ordered history paper should, let us violate the rules and look

backward to a situation which has some elements of mystery attached to it. In the stacks of the Brookline Public Library is a record book which tells of the formation of a Brookline Historical Society and sets forth proposed by-laws. The handwriting is truly a splendid example of chirography such as we seldom see nowadays. The records show that a meeting was held where the by-laws were adopted and officers chosen, but the mystery is that the meeting took place in November 1891, almost ten years before our Society actually came into being, and then nothing else occurred. What happened? Ten years later, Capt. Rufus G.F. Candage, the first Historical Society president, commented on the 1891 effort and remarked that all the preliminary organization work had been done, and then he makes this curious observation, "The certificate from the State House was not obtained because it was *not asked for* by the person having the matter in charge and the Society's incorporation was held in abeyance."<sup>3</sup> Upon first reading that sentence, it occurred to me that the person who had been remiss in making application to the State House was possibly sitting in the audience and that the usually very forthright Captain Candage was walking on egg shells.

In 1893, a year and a half after the unsuccessful effort to form a historical society, Charles K. Bolton was elected librarian of the Brookline Public Library. He was an able man with strong opinions of his own. Writing in 1896, he said rather caustically, "An historical society often does little more than print addresses of the presidents and the obituaries of the members."<sup>4</sup> He went on to urge the formation of historical *publication* societies, ones which would have "no officers, no elections, no meetings, no rules." Their function would be "to collect and print in a uniform series such manuscripts as shall seem worthy of permanent preservation."

Actually, Mr. Bolton was describing the Brookline Historical *Publication* Society which he had founded with Miss Ellen Chase and Daniel S. Sanford the year before. It published several pamphlets containing very interesting material which was thereby preserved for posterity.

We have now dealt with two societies; first, the still-born society of 1891 with its beautifully written records; and second, Mr. Bolton's Brookline Historical Publication Society. So at long last we come to the origin of the third society, our own Brookline Historical Society.

At the twenty-fifth anniversary meeting of this Society, Mr. Edward W. Baker presented a paper<sup>5</sup> on its first days. He mentions the 1891 occurrence but does not explain it.

<sup>1</sup>Independent Historical Societies - Walter Muir Whitehall

<sup>2</sup>Work of American Historical Societies - Henry E. Bourne

<sup>3</sup> Proceedings - 1902

<sup>4</sup> New England Magazine - March 1896

<sup>5</sup> Manuscripts in Brookline Public Library



He paid extensive tribute to the first president, Capt. Candage, but modestly does not give himself credit by name as the treasurer who had held office in the Society for all of its years. Long service was a family trait with Mr. Baker since he and his father served for seventy-six consecutive years as town clerk.<sup>6</sup> In his anniversary paper, Mr. Baker remarked that the State document under which the Society was incorporated did not bear the usually appended statement: "God Save the Commonwealth of Massachusetts", and he took this to mean that the founders must have been pretty solid citizens. I would add to his observation that right down to the present day the opening sentence of Article III of our by-laws has required that each member must be a "person of moral character" and careful obedience to that injunction has left the Commonwealth nothing to worry about here.

As already stated, the organization meeting of our Society was held in the Selectmen's room at the Town Hall on April 7, 1901. Curiously enough, Mr. Bolton, despite previous expounding of his philosophy, was one of the founders of a Society which did not fit in with his earlier stated outlook. At first, there were meetings each month except during the summer; but in 1918, possibly because of World War I, the number of meetings was reduced to three or four a year.

For a time the new Society printed in its annual reports or "Proceedings" not only papers which had been presented at meetings, but also various historical documents or historical essays submitted by interested writers. Thus, in a way, it seems to have continued the publication work of the Brookline Historical *Publication Society* which had put out a number of pamphlets before our Historical Society came into being. There is no mention that I can find of any official merger taking place, but I suspect that the departure of Mr. Bolton in 1902 to become librarian of the Boston Athenaeum and the appearance at the same time of the energetic Capt. Candage as head of this Historical Society rather put the Publishing Society in the shade, as the old saying has it.

The Historical Society got off to a good start. It was solvent from the beginning. The first annual report shows \$349.20 on hand and a membership of 112. As already remarked, the Society published an annual report known as the "Brookline Historical Society Proceedings". In these will be found the record of speakers and of projects undertaken by the Society. I shall discuss the speakers and their papers shortly, but first a word about the projects.

I cannot hope to do justice to all the undertakings, so I shall be brief. One of the first projects was to rescue from oblivion the Paul Dudley milestone of 1729. It was the

fifth milestone in a series of eight which marked the way from the Town House (the old State House) over the Neck to Roxbury and out Harvard Street through Brighton to Harvard Square -- in other words, "the Way to the Colleges". In 1902, when a builder was about to erect an apartment house where the stone was placed, the Society and Mr. Baker got the Selectmen to rescue the stone and put it in the basement of the Town Hall. The next year, Harvard Church, across the street from the stone's original location, was persuaded to place the stone on its front lawn, to stand there "in perpetuity". On July 12 of this year (1973) vandals stole the milestone, and thus the first project of the Society came to a sad end.

An early and still-continuing project has been the care and preservation of the Edward Devotion house on Harvard Street. At the Society's fifth anniversary meeting in 1906, President Candage called the Society's attention to the possibility that Edward Devotion's house, "the oldest structure in town", as he called it, might be demolished. At a town meeting held that year, the building was turned over to the Selectmen to manage. The Selectmen then made an arrangement with our Society so that it might hold meetings there. Charles H. Stearns, President of the Society, in 1911 spoke of the terms under which the Devotion House was to be supervised by the Society; those terms have been extended and modified from time to time. In 1948, President Little announced the signing of a lease between the Town and the Society and outlined our terms of use and responsibility. At the 1950 annual meeting he gave an extensive summary of how the Society had cared for the interior of the house, while the Town of Brookline "had seen to the main structural elements". For those interested, the "Proceedings for 1950" has further information.

In 1949 Mrs. Bertram K. Little wrote a most informative book on "Old Brookline Houses" and the Society published it. I recommend it to you most sincerely as it is full of excellent pictures, plans and interesting narrative. Its preparation must have consumed many hours. The Public Library has copies for sale at a modest price.

Very early on, as the English say, the Society published two comprehensive pamphlets, one in 1903 on Jeremy Gridley, and a second the same year on Elhanan Winchester. Some years later came Harriet Alms Cummings' "Burials and Inscriptions in Walnut St. Cemetery"; then, in conjunction with the Tree Planning Committee, came "Brookline Trees" by Emma G. Cummings; and later on a pamphlet entitled "Land Ownership in Brookline from the First Settlement" was published. The last-named publication has ten maps as supplement to the genealogical and other information furnished, and was a splendid contribution to the Town's records. One minor project had to do with Mrs. Kent's "Brookline Trunk". At the annual meeting of 1955, our

<sup>6</sup> History of Brookline - Curtis - P.306

Society voted to pay half the cost of indexing that delightful work with "the library" to pay the other half. Later (1966) the Society contributed to the cost of microfilming old Brookline newspapers for the files of the library. Our most recent project has been the care of the old Putterham Schoolhouse. As early as the annual meeting of 1963, Mrs. Bertram K. Little asked if the Putterham School should not be made a preservation project for the Society. Her question was answered affirmatively. The subject came up again in 1965, and arrangements were made to obtain photographic reports and carry out some architectural research. That year a committee was appointed to be known as the Putterham School Committee, with Mrs. Florence P. Peabody as Chairman.

Over the years our Society has been collecting manuscripts, documents, publications, maps, books, pictures, even Edward Baker's collection of lantern slides of old Brookline. These are all on deposit at the Public Library.

Now I come, and this will be in conclusion, to what is in my judgment the most interesting of all the Society's projects. I refer to the "Proceedings", the little volumes that have been published over most of the years since 1901, giving the Presidents', the clerks' and the treasurers' reports; but what is more important giving many of the papers which have been presented to the Society. Unfortunately not all of the papers have been so printed. Personally, I should like the opportunity to read many of those unpublished papers, the titles of which were mentioned in the presidents' annual reports. One title of 1902 is "Mrs. Deming's Journal of Flight from Boston after the Battle of Lexington". How exciting it would be to read that one! It might not be exciting but it would be interesting to see whether a 1905 paper on "The Paper Money of our Father's Day" recites the same fiscal mismanagement which recent administrations have inflicted on the economy of the present. These and many other papers are regrettably not available, partly because the authors did not submit them to the clerk, but also because there was an unfortunate lapse in the publication of the "Proceedings" for the years 1931 to 1946. Some of the papers, such as Mr. Baker's 25th anniversary speech, are in manuscript form at the Public Library, and some other papers, including the Clerk's old records, are stored away because of the Library remodeling and cannot be reached at present.

I estimate that over three hundred papers have been presented to the Society. Some of them were not read to a meeting but were submitted for publication in the "Proceedings" by a member interested in a particular topic. Mr. Bolton would have been pleased by this, as I am.

To be sure there must have been times when a president was "up against it" for a speaker at which time a topic such as "An Earthquake in Sicily" or "A Summer's Driving Trip in New Hampshire" might appear. But there are very few of those. The papers have, to a rather astonishing degree, I think, a consistently high quality of excellence. Most of them give evidence of extensive and accurate research, and many have flashes of great human interest. I wonder whether any of the great Lincoln biographers ever read a paper presented by William J. Seaver in 1910. Mr. Seaver knew Mr. Lincoln in Illinois in 1856 and wrote in detail of the future Emancipator. He comments on how Lincoln was always ready to excuse the failings of others. Once, a clerk in Mr. Seaver's store in Springfield, Illinois was criticizing a lady patron and said that while she was lacking in tact she had many good qualities. Lincoln said, "That reminds me of a girl who wasn't much of a dancer. Her friends said that what she lacked in dancing she made up in turning around."

Many speakers were so good that they were invited to come back a number of times. One who probably never came back was a Mr. F.W. Bagley. In his annual report for 1921, President Stearns wrote as follows about a speech that was to have been given on the artist, John Singleton Copley. Mr. Stearns said, "The audience failed to appear. After some time twelve or fifteen people gathered. But Mr. Bagley took his slides and departed. He felt his paper was worthy of a larger gathering."

While there were many papers on the Revolution and on the Civil War, most of them dealt with Brookline families, houses and institutions. No serious student of the Town's history can afford to overlook the treasure of information contained within the pages of our "Proceedings". Perhaps some day a wealthy individual or institution will publish in book form selected papers from that treasure.

The Brookline Historical Society has gone its quiet way for almost three-quarters of a century, compiling a record of dedication to the purposes for which it was formed. Let me read from its charter the objectives to which the founders subscribed themselves:

"The study of the history of the Town of Brookline Massachusetts, its Societies, organizations, families, individuals, and events, the collections and preservation of its Antiquities, the establishment and the maintenance of an historical library, and the publication, from time to time, of such information relating to the same as shall be deemed expedient."

The Society has done its work well.