



# Brookline Historical Society

Incorporated April 29, 1901

**Spring Meeting:** "The Irish Presence in Brookline," an illustrated talk by David Coleman, to be followed by Irish refreshments and small group tours of the environs of St. Mary's Church.

**Date:** Sunday, May 20, 3 p.m.

**Place:** The auditorium of St. Mary's Grammar School, 75 Harvard St.

**All members and their guests are invited to attend. Please mark your calendars**

## President's Report

Fiscal doldrums may have prevailed in the State House and Town Hall this Patriots' Day. Not so at our society's headquarters. The sun shone, a brisk breeze blew, forsythia and daffodils bloomed in front of the Edward Devotion House. Almost 100 Brooklinites greeted William Dawes. Then, about 65 came inside for coffee, 18th century doughnuts and an explanatory tour. Afterward I learned that this year our society enjoys the largest voluntary increase in levels of membership.

All of which leaves your new president ready to go full steam ahead. John Van Scoyoc's legacy and his presence as president-emeritus, the continuation of terms of his strong, loyal trustees and officers, and this upbeat news of our membership's commitment inspire me to defy doldrum or wind from Capitol Hill, Beacon Hill or Town Hall. Like the proverbial woman of valor, I "laugh at the time to come." In spite of, perhaps because of, Brookline's desperate economies, our society must now more than ever safeguard and enhance its holdings in the bank, in the library and in the three historical town houses which are our sacred trust.

So on April 19, the real Patriots' Day, your trustees met to take a hard, in-depth, long-range look into

1. financial management programs as a hedge against inflation and as a basis for the Society's growth, hopefully in new and more functional headquarters staffed by a salaried professional;
2. maintenance, preservation, protection and expansion of our historical collections in the public library;
3. supervision, preservation and improvement of

the Devotion House, the Widow Harris House and the Putterham School so that the potential of these historic treasures may be realized.

Such long-range commitments are formidable in these times but they are not visionary or anachronistic. They are necessary if our society is to grow into the 21st century. And the time seems right. Experts like Ray Moreno of the Building Department and Michael Steinfeld, our town librarian, have joined us and will work with our seasoned stalwarts who have already laid the groundwork to help us achieve these vital long-term goals. And as I get to know more of you as individuals -- and I'm learning fast, thanks to your friendliness and frankness -- I'm inspired by the professional backgrounds, specific historical interests and commitment to hard work we can draw upon from our membership.

The newsletter will keep you abreast of our progress. But every step of the long way we need and invite input from the membership at large. Please write or call me at 232-0810 evenings so that together we may forge a truly contemporary historical society.

What better way to start than to begin to settle a society debt long overdue? Although the people, places and events about Brookline's first wave of Yankee settlers have been researched, reported and celebrated at our society's meetings, we have yet to do justice to the second wave, the Irish and Scotch Irish in our town. We have long known that the Irish have lived here since pre-Brookline Muddy River colonial days. Fleeing English oppression, Irish weather and famine, they came here in larger numbers from the 1820s on, peaking in the 1850s and into the 1880s. Undaunted by proper and improper Bostonians' xenophobia and anti-Catholicism, they have lived, worked and come into their own in Brookline.

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## President's report

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So it is only fitting that at St. Mary's, Brookline's first Catholic parish, and in May, the loveliest month of St. Mary's calendar, we gather to hear David Coleman's slide-talk on "The Irish Presence in Brookline." If you want to mark milestones, this is the hundredth anniversary of the election of two Irish Catholics to our school committee. If you want to enjoy Irish wit, word-horde and bite at its best, give an ear to David Coleman, Hibernian and local history buff and Precinct Five's Town Meeting Member extraordinary (who has rescued many a session of that body from the doldrums). And bring a guest, young or old, to see what our society and its members have to offer each other. After Irish refreshments, we break into small groups for guided tours of the historic Andem Place area.

Until we meet in St. Mary's auditorium at three o'clock on May 20th, "May the roads rise with you and the wind be always at your back."

Cordially,

Miriam Sargon

## History in the Making

By Jean Kramer

(From a slide presentation delivered to the society at its 1990 annual meeting.)

For at least ten years, some of us concerned with local history -- Helen McIntosh, Nancy Peabody, Carla Benka, past president Leslie Larkin, incoming president Miriam Sargon, and others -- have felt the need for a new history of Brookline. The last supposedly complete account, John Gould Curtis' History of Brookline, was published in 1933, and reflects an attitude, fading even then, that the Brookline most familiar to us today -- a diverse, cosmopolitan community -- was to be lamented. "Apartment dwellers who come home only to sleep may, it is true, be worthy citizens, but their interest in the community where they live is not the interest of the man who has a stake in the land ... There are substantial names in Brookline still, and fine old estates, but the population now is preponderantly of those who cannot possibly have the town's affairs at heart as did most inhabitants a century, or even fifty years ago."

Fifteen years later, this society brought out Nina Fletcher Little's book, Some Old Brookline Houses, which admittedly limited itself to a study of houses from the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries that then remained in the town -- a poignant endeavor when one reflects how many of these have since gone down -- but which also included a brief history of past Brookline historians in its preface.

From the eighteenth century comes our celebrated Revolutionary patriot, Jonathan Goddard, who in 1740 compiled a list of "Owners of Dwelling Houses in Brookline," with notes on each house and its inhabitants. A younger Goddard, his son Samuel, later published "Recollections of Brookline: Being an Account of the Houses, Families and Roads in Brookline in the years 1800 to 1810." In 1845, Brookline's beloved Rev. John Pierce made a list of house-owners in 1796, indicating which houses still stood in that year, which had been demolished, and what new houses had been built on the sites. And in 1874, teacher Harriet Woods published, at her own expense, Historical Sketches of Brookline, Massachusetts, in which, according to Mrs. Little, "once again we may traverse the familiar streets of the old Town and learn from her observations what changes the industrial nineteenth century had brought to the agricultural community known to Dr. Pierce in 1845."

The point in these contemporaneous accounts, and one which I think was lost on Mr. Curtis, was that they come to us from eyewitnesses, people who were recording history more or less as it happened, sensing that it would become ever more "historic" to those of us who would come later. Whether we approve its course or not, history is never over and done with. All of us inhabit it, and our first duty as historians is to keep accurate records for the future, as did the Goddards, Rev. Pierce, Miss Woods and Mrs. Little. It is in hopes of gathering and preserving these records that the Brookline Adult and Community Education Program and the Brookline Public Library have established the Brookline Archive of Living History.

In the more than fifty years since the Curtis history appeared, there have been scholarly articles, historical sketches, dissertations and personal memoirs published concerning aspects of Brookline life, but no comprehensive compilation has been attempted. Ninety years into this century, there is not yet one single source to which a student of our local history can turn. In fifteen years, Brookline will celebrate its tricentennial. Surely it's time.

What has kept us who talked of a new history only talking has been the usual obstacle -- money. With printing and publishing costs spiraling out of sight, which of us could afford to spend the several years and uncongenial labor of raising funds for such an enterprise, let alone the time out of our other lives to do the actual research, writing and editing needed? So gradually there has been less talk, and the project began to seem beyond reach. Therefore, it seemed scarcely believable when late last summer a commercial publisher approached me about putting together a pictorial history of Brookline. Could I assemble enough material, find appropriate pictures, make and fill in a historic outline, and have it ready by this Christmas season? Of course not, but if the choice were between doing it or its not being done, which it was, there was no way to refuse to try.

When I have thought about what I wanted to include in a history of the Brookline I know, it has been in terms of this century, our century. To begin with an outline, I chose to divide my version of the shaping of this Brookline into seven chapters. I'd like to mention each one briefly, but instead of untold stories, I'd prefer to touch on some of the unexpected discoveries I made -- proof again that the last word is never written, the final observation not yet made.



The first chapter is a necessary brief history of the town, to establish a framework on which to hang the pictures. And of the pictures, my favorite for this chapter came from the Town Report for 1915. This report is a treasure trove in several ways, containing a list of all town offices, archaic as well as up-to-that-minute, and illustrations of the zoning by-laws being set forth by the newly established Planning Board, but its high point for me is a photograph of the dedication of the Civil War monument in front of the library. Assembled beneath the bronze bugler who forever sounds his country's call is a row of Brookline veterans, some with white beards and some with medals pinned to the old uniform jackets now stretched slightly across their chests. There is a special poignance in that pictured moment; the War to End All Wars had begun in Europe.

The second chapter, on Brookline before the Civil War, is also brief; both because the ground has been well covered by earlier historians and because photography was unknown throughout most of the period. An acquaintance recently asked why there were so many pictures of buildings here and so few of people. The obvious answer is that buildings, unlike people, didn't mind standing still for long periods when early photographs were being made, and painted portraits like that of General Edward Wild or Gilbert Stuart's painting of Dr. William Aspinwall are relative rarities compared to the heavy documentation that surrounds almost every aspect of contemporary life.

The next chapter, on daily life in Brookline Village from the late nineteenth century, when it was the undisputed center of town, to recent decades, presented the opposite case -- too many pictures, a plethora of them. Photography had come into its own and it appears that every citizen had a camera. Wonderful pictures abound: buildings under construction or under bunting for local holidays; group and individual portraits, posed professionally or preposterously as the subjects clowned; streetcars; advertisements; solemn ceremonies; picnics; parades; bicycle riders; swan divers and hair dryers at the public baths; graduation classes; and proud storekeepers. The problem here was which ones could be included and which would have to be left out. An entire volume of them is still waiting.

The chapter on Wealthytown takes up the aspect of Brookline for which the town was perhaps best known at the turn of the century: its wealth. I have always rather self-righteously chosen to see this wealth as lying beyond the incomes and possessions of our people and resting in their talents and accomplishments, but as current media trumpery

reiterates, most of us love to look at lifestyles of the rich and famous. Our rich and famous, alas, seem to have been a sedate lot and if there was much titillation in their lives, it has been hushed up. Nevertheless, there is a nod, though not a deep bow, to large estates, fashionable society, and The Country Club. There is a faded glass slide from the Baker collection showing the U.S. Open Golf Tournament at The Country Club in 1913, when Francis Ouimet, a former caddy at the club, won the championship. As Christopher Smith noted in a paper for this society, "The most significant thing about this victory is that it changed the American public's attitude toward golf. Heretofore it had been regarded as an elitist sport. Now the common man had won, and from now on it was to be the common man's sport as well."

The chapter following, *Castles and Cliffdwellers*, concerns the widening and transformation of Beacon Street into a great urban boulevard designed by Frederick Law Olmsted, surely one of the most ambitious and best realized plans for an American townscape of the nineteenth century, and our own. Several amusing pictures came to light for this chapter, one of them being a 1926 drawing of "Coolidge Corner of the Future" that depicts clusters of ten and twelve-story buildings (with an aircraft landing strip on the roof of one) overshadowed by a jaunty dirigible called *The Coolidge*. I've given copies to members of a new town committee that is exploring possible opportunities for development in Brookline in hopes that they, unlike Queen Victoria, will be amused.

*Everyone Participates* is the title of the sixth chapter, and in it I attempted to trace what many of us think is the most important characteristic of the town we know today: its diversity. I have looked at the two major ethnic groups to come into Brookline -- the Irish in the nineteenth century, and the Jews in the twentieth. Because of time constraints, I have been barely able to mention the two groups arriving in numbers now -- the Chinese and the Russians -- although I was able to reach Brookline's first Chinese Town Meeting Member, Mr. Robert Wong, who contributed not only his portrait but a tray of pastries sufficient to feed an entire meeting of the Brookline Council on Aging. And although Afrika Hayes Lambe was most generous in sharing pictures and reminiscences of her remarkable father, singer Roland Hayes, I cannot pretend to have done justice to the small but distinguished number of African Americans who have lived in Brookline since its beginnings. Again, another volume is needed.

I found this the most difficult chapter of any, both to compile and to write. It is one that, to my



A gathering of the Griggses. Deacon Thomas Griggs, at left, was regarded as the most prominent Baptist in Brookline in the mid-nineteenth century.



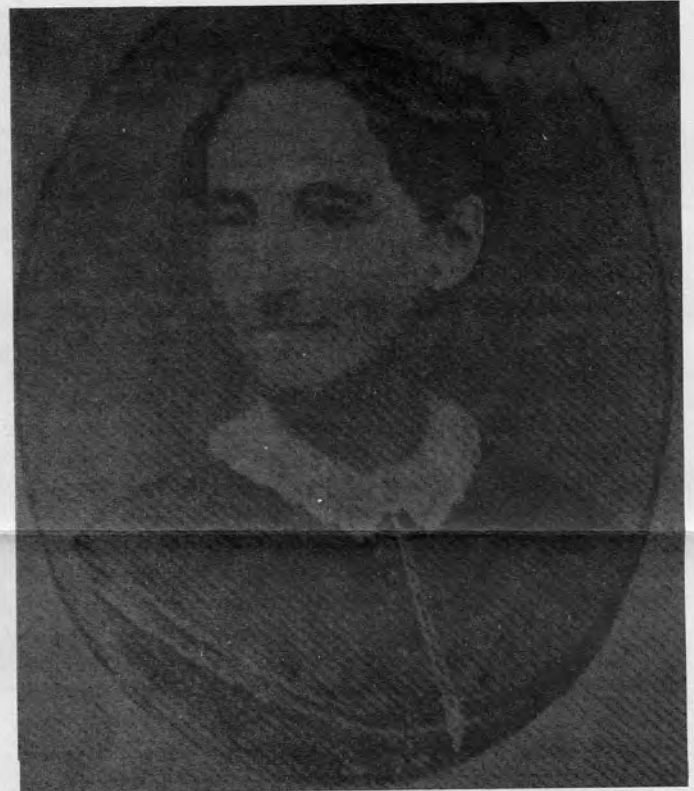
Brookline's Civil War veterans gather in 1915 in front of the monument in their honor.



Brookline April 22, 1861 J. 6

The undersigned, citizens of Brookline hereby enroll themselves for the purpose of acquiring a knowledge of military drill & discipline under the orders of the Military Committee of the Town -

Name	Age
Thomas B. Hall	37 years
Edw. L. Long	64
Wm. E. Hoag	41
Charles H. Loomis	32
James Beatty	24
James J. ...	21
W. H. ...	20
W. H. ...	19
W. H. ...	21
W. H. ...	24
W. H. ...	20
W. H. ...	19
W. H. ...	20
W. H. ...	21
W. H. ...	40
W. H. ...	20
W. H. ...	22
W. H. ...	19
W. H. ...	15
W. H. ...	18
W. H. ...	16
W. H. ...	67



Brookline Civil War volunteers.

Early historian Harriet F. Woods.



The Country Club at the time of Francis Ouimette's historic victory.

knowledge, hasn't been written before; material for it is not so readily available from the usual sources, although much may be found in such places as church and temple archives, privately printed histories, such as those of St. Mary's Church or the Free hospital for Women, and in obituaries on file in the Brookline Room. Obituaries, incidentally, are a superb resource. For several years I have been trying to persuade The Brookline Citizen to revive its old custom of noting the deaths of residents important to the town (or to the nation, for that matter; the Boston papers sometimes offer more complete coverage) by providing brief biographies. Forty years on or so, these may be the only information we have. I intend to keep nagging the editors, armed now with this book, and I would welcome any support the Society could give.

As is always true of relatively recent events, it was hard to piece together a pattern for this story if indeed it is possible. I decided to look for a unifying thread in the Brookline public schools, which most of the town's children, rich and poor, have attended and whose quality has been a common concern for most citizens. I also sought to tap "private history," asking and receiving help from old and new residents, teachers, past and present town officials, and people from all walks of life whom I have encountered in my twenty-five years in Brookline. In the end, this was for me the most rewarding chapter.

I think it might be summed up in two pictures found in the archives of Temple Kehillath Israel that were taken on November 22, 1963. They show first a religious procession moving from the temple down Beals Street toward the birthplace of President John F. Kennedy, who had been assassinated in Dallas that morning; and, from the porch of the Kennedy home, a sea of people instinctively drawn to the site, filling the street. I thought of Walt Whitman's lines:

I see a sad procession,  
And I hear the sound of coming full-keyed  
bugles,  
All the channels of the city streets they're  
flooding  
As with voices and with tears.

The lines have gone into the book, beside the two pictures.

The seventh, final chapter was pure pleasure, being a sort of patchwork celebration of the town. Some pictures for which I hadn't room in earlier chapters but couldn't bear to leave out found a place here. Others, to my regret, must wait for another chapter,

another book. I did manage to include such topics as people who have come to Brookline from all over the world, generations of prominent families, singular first persons, notable women, politicians, volunteers, public servants, and a few of the glorious pictures of Brookline seasons from the library collections; there are enough left over to print at least a decade's worth of calendars.

Brookline: A Pictorial History was published early last December. Despite the rush, love had found a way. For it was love of this community and a generosity springing from it that made the book possible. It was extended by the Brookline Library first, with its irreplaceable collection of historic photographs, the resources of the Brookline Room, and the unfailing helpfulness of the director and staff. The Brookline Preservation Commission and its inventory of information on town buildings which are, like pictures, a visual text of our history, and this Historical Society, whose Proceedings and Baker Glass Slide Collection have proven indispensable, also helped. The Brookline schools were represented by teachers, athletic coaches, headmasters, students and former students, and the Adult and Community Education Program's archive of living history. Other archives included those of the venerable Brookline Citizen and Temple Kehillath Israel. The enthusiastic young staff at Brookline's two National Historic Sites, the John F. Kennedy Birthplace and the Frederick Law Olmsted Home and Studio, convinced me anew that history is not merely the province of the old.

These were the attics I visited, if you will. As important were the individual townspeople who contributed to the project with their own stories, their memories, their family photographs, their postcards, their talents as writers, researchers, and photographers, and their perceptions of their community. One, Margo Lockwood, even wrote a poem for the book. Whether famous or obscure, in Brookline for five generations or five years, all whom I asked for help gave it graciously, each perhaps eager to share some personal vision of Brookline. Many were or became my friends, and because their generosity was coupled with limits on time and space, I can truly say I have friends I haven't used yet. Theirs are really the untold stories of the book, although they deserve to be recounted. This pictorial history is only a beginning. Here, among friends again, let me ask you to encourage more voices, more histories. They can never be finished.