



BROOKLINE HISTORICAL SOCIETY BROOKLINE, MASSACHUSETTS

SPRING 2021

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Curating A Photograph With Modern Detective Work by Larry Barbaras

Historic photos of seemingly innocuous scenes can reveal, with a little detective work, complex storylines from the past. This is a story of how we unraveled the details of one such ordinary scene along with a look at some widely-available investigative resources that were utilized. This photo was taken by the chief town engineer, Henry A. Varney, on February 5, 1927, a Saturday. Remember that date. Varney was a long-time engineer for Brookline. He first got a job with the town around 1897 and worked right up until his death in 1941. His photographs of Brookline streets remain invaluable records today.

The first mystery in the photo that catches our eye is the corner of a store and its "Pastry" sign. The detective process begins with a pro forma search of an atlas to determine the street address: 289 Harvard Street, at the corner of Green Street. A search of the 1927 Brookline town directory follows to determine the occupant: Gurley's Vienna Bakery. A deeper dig into the town directories will map out for us the history of the occupants of that address. (Directories from 1871 to 2016 are available and linked on our website under Research. Those with a subscription to the paid site ancestry.com can also access the 1868 directory). Some legwork with the directories

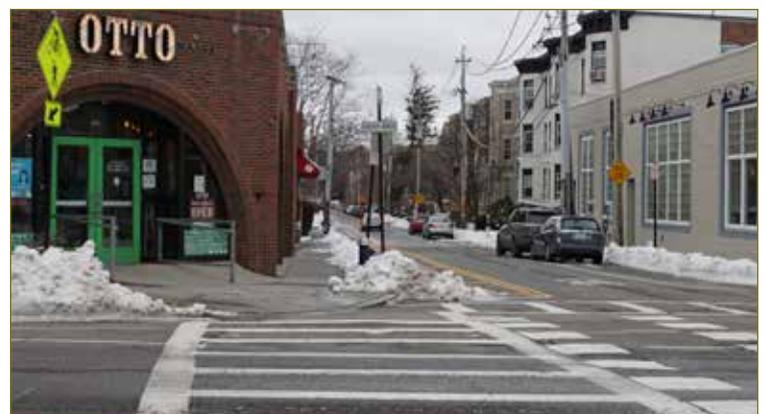


Corner of Harvard Street and Green Street-1927

establishes that William and Marie Gurley maintained a bakery there from 1917 to about 1933. A cross check of the Massachusetts Historical Commission housing records (also linked under Research) establishes that this multi-address building was constructed in 1916 which indicates that the Gurleys were the first tenants. The building, with a much-modified front, still stands today, home to a pizza place and a bank.

There is a lingering curiosity about who the Gurleys were and how they might have come to open a bakery/restaurant in Brookline. Ancestry.com is the next stop for that information. This subscription web site contains innumerable family trees, censuses, family histories, and can facilitate the recreation of a life's storyline. It seems that William Gurley married Marie Stubenrauch in 1896 in Boston. Census

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Corner of Harvard Street and Green Street-2021

The Brookline Historical Society is dedicated to the documentation and interpretation of Brookline's diverse history, to collecting, preserving, and maintaining artifacts of Brookline's past, and to sharing the story of the town and its people with residents and visitors alike.

The Society's headquarters are located in the heart of Coolidge Corner at the Edward Devotion House, one of Brookline's oldest Colonial Period structures.

The Society also maintains the circa 1780 Widow Harris House as well as the Putterham School located in Larz Anderson Park.

The Society's extensive collection of historic information, photographs, postcards, and atlases can be viewed on our website BrooklineHistoricalSociety.org

Our membership program is active and volunteers are always welcome.

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and city directory entries indicate that they were employed for a number of years in various restaurants there. It can be deduced that they ultimately decided to open their own establishment in this newly-constructed location. They soon moved to an apartment at 34 Garrison Road where they remained until, reaching the age of retirement, they sold the bakery.

Our curation of this photographic record of Brookline's past would typically be complete at this point but we can't help wondering why those two boys are standing there. (Oddly, Varney's photos typically do not contain people; they are engineering photos of streets). Using the magnifier tool attached to the photo, we zoom in for a closer look. It is apparent that there are papers of some sort in their Peerless wagon; they are certainly paper boys on their route. But remaining in zoom mode for a moment yields another curious item: there is a periodical sticking out from underneath one boy's arm and it appears more like a magazine than a newspaper.

Can we identify this magazine and what will it tell us about the story of the boys' Saturday? First up is Google to find out what magazines existed back in 1927. A simple search yields several promising names: *Life Magazine*, *Liberty Magazine*, the *Saturday*



Paperboys and their Peerless wagon, 1927

Evening Post. Subsequent Google searches produce assorted images of covers from the 1920s but none match the partial image sticking out from under the boy's arm. As any regular Googler has discovered, finding what you are looking for can require some experimentation with language. Finally, happening upon just the right search phrase leads to one of those treasure troves of information unimaginable before the development of the World Wide Web. A person with an evident passion for vintage magazines has collated every single issue of this magazine with photos of each cover along with detailed information on the cover artists, and the subjects and authors of every article. We have our answer: the boys are delivering the



Liberty Magazine, February 5, 1927

February 5, 1927, issue of *Liberty Magazine*. This magazine promoted a program for sales, one apparently only aimed at boys. They received 1/2 cent per copy sold, there were "Liberty Boy Salesman" award pins and *Liberty* shoulder bags.

Finally, with photos like these, there is the thought that the boys and the photographer surely never imagined that we would be wondering about their lives almost one hundred years later. And, regrettably, it is likely that the children and grandchildren of these two boys will never know of this marvelous snapshot of their lives.

New Online Projects

The Historical Society, like individuals, families, schools, businesses, and organizations everywhere, has been affected by the caution and restrictions brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic. Our public presentations, walking tours, meetings, and other activities have had to be curtailed.

At the same time, we've taken the time to develop new activities and new ways to bring Brookline history to our members and the wider community. Some of those activities are described in detail in this newsletter, including the online presentation of two mid-19th century Brookline diaries

and our upcoming virtual program on H.H. Richardson.

We have also added other online content, all available via our website. This includes:

- Online versions of two popular walking tours: *A Century and a Half of Shopping in Coolidge Corner* and *The Beaconsfield Terraces: "An Experiment in Domestic Economy"*

- An online interview of Society president Ken Liss about Brookline in the 1918-19 flu pandemic, conducted by the Brookline Interactive Group.

- A presentation made for Brookline Strong about Florida Ruffin Ridley and the legacy of activism in several generations of her extended family.

- A database of Brookline buildings with links to reports on the Massachusetts Cultural Resources Information System (MACRIS) plus news articles, blog posts, and other information.

We look forward to resuming in-person activities when it is safe. In the meantime, we will continue to bring Brookline history to you in as many ways as we can.

Two Brookline Diaries from Middle of the 19th Century

<http://brooklinshitoricalsociety.org/diaries>

We bring you two diaries, both started in the winter of 1850/51 by people living not far from each other in Brookline Village. There are coincident excursions to the same concerts and lectures, mentions of the same neighbors. When the young diarist Adeline Faxon records the talk-of-the-town breakoff of the engagement between Edward Wild and Mary Howe, she is referring to the very son of the other diarist, Mary Wild, who on the very first page of her diary expresses relief - "Heaven be praised" - for the end of a relationship she was happy to see

come to an end.

While the two diaries have much in common, they are also very different. Much of that difference can be attributed, no doubt, to the difference between the diary of a teenage girl and that of a woman with a family and a household to attend to. The same six months covered in the one hundred pages of Adeline's diary, for example, take up just the first seven pages of Mary's 140-page diary covering 15 years of her life.

With supplementary research and today's extensive availability of digitized historic materials, we have been able to annotate the diaries with details of the people Mary Wild and Adeline Faxon discuss, the places they visit, and photos wherever available. Coupled with the detail routinely included by both Mary and Adeline, it has been possible to create a "you are there" experience. You can view the very editions of books that Mary read or from which Adeline did her "recitations" for school, as well as contemporary newspaper accounts of events they describe.

The Diary of Adeline Faxon by Larry Barbaras

From time to time, by sheer serendipity, remarkable things just fall into one's lap. And so it was with the 1850 diary of a Brookline teenager which was found, otherwise unnoticed, at a New Hampshire antiques fair a few months ago. Adeline Faxon's diary is exactly one hundred pages long and covers six months of her life in 1850-1851. It provides a rare documentation of the development of modern Brookline, its first high school having just been started three years earlier, all from the perspective of a young adult.

The Faxons were one of the relatively well-off families, predominantly of merchants in Boston, who had recently built houses in what was essentially the first development in Brookline - Linden Place.

Adeline chronicles her daily social com-

munications which, in a world before telephones, appear to be based primarily on stopping by people's houses in the hope that they are home. The diary is a who's who of Village-area people many of whom have not yet come into their future importance and renown: Winsors, Philbricks, Frederick Knapp the pastor. And it is all from the vantage point of a sometimes anguished, occasionally snarky, remarkably not-so-different-from-today sixteen-year old.

You can picture Adeline's frequent walks past Lizzy Davis' house to the Village post office (then in the train depot) much as she would have seen it. And when little eleven-year-old Willie Candler visits Adeline from his house nearby (447 Washington St., both houses still standing today) we realize that he will be, just a few years later, in the heat of battle at Antietam.

On a final note, how impossibly strange it is that a man with a super computer in the palm of his hand can, 170 years later, instantaneously bring the words she wrote, in her bedroom at 53 Linden Street, to anyone anywhere in the world. Adeline died of consumption two months after her eighteenth birthday. If only "Ade" could have known all this.



53 Linden Street

The Diary of Mary Johanna Wild by Ken Liss

Mary Johanna (Rhodes) Wild was born in North Providence, Rhode Island, on February 7, 1799. In 1820 she married the young physician Charles Wild, an 1814 graduate of Harvard College who would soon become Brookline's leading doctor. The Wilds built a house - still standing though much changed - in Brookline on the south side of Washington Street at the base of Aspinwall Hill. They had

nine children, six of whom -- three sons and three daughters -- survived past infancy.

Mary's diary, digitized by Boston College from its collections in 2018 and transcribed over the past year by Brookline volunteers, covers the years 1851 to

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26 Weybridge Road

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1865. It's a chronicle of the life of a mid-19th century Brookline woman, her family, friends, and neighbors.

Mary often writes tersely and matter-of-factly. She describes daily activities, including keeping house, making clothes, buying household supplies, attending to her own health and that of her family, etc. But she also describes an active social and community life, including concerts, lectures, visits with neighbors and family members. Regular visits to church on Sunday, and comments on the sermons, appear throughout the diary.

She travels frequently to Rhode Island to visit her daughter Mary and other family members. (She will eventually move back there in the late 1850s while staying connected to Brookline people and events.) She describes important events locally and nationally, including, of course, the Civil War. (Her sons Edward and Walter served in the war, and Edward had his left arm amputated after being badly wounded.)

She writes about relations with her husband. It was a difficult relationship. There are complaints about his behavior toward her, and there are hints of jealousy and perhaps extramarital affairs involving Charles and other women. But she takes care of him in Rhode Island during the difficult months at the end of his life.

The diary ends in August 1865, 15 months after the death of Charles. Mary would live another 18 years.



Page one from Wild Diary

Brookline in the Flu Pandemic of 1918-19 by Ken Liss



From the front page of the Brookline Townsman, October 5, 1918

The great flu pandemic of 1918-19 killed tens of millions of people worldwide, including an estimated 45,000 in Massachusetts and 675,000 in the United States. Its impact was felt everywhere, including in Brookline.

More than 125 residents of the town died. Schools were closed for four weeks right after the beginning of the school year. Homes of the afflicted were quarantined. Public gatherings at churches, meeting halls, soda fountains, billiard parlors, bowling alleys, and funerals were banned.

The initial outbreak was met with caution but with confidence that it could be kept under control. "To one who is forewarned and prepared, there is no real cause for alarm," said the *Brookline Chronicle* on September 14th.

"For the individual, his or her course of action is simple [advised the paper]. Until it is evident that the epidemic has been checked or has run its course, it would be well to avoid crowds, to keep outdoors as much as possible, sleep with windows open, eat sanely and in general lay in just as large a stock of health as possible."

A week later, as it became clear how easily the disease could spread from

person to person, debate over how to respond intensified and the paper's tone, while still optimistic, changed.

"Whether the schools are kept open or are closed, whether or not the doors of moving picture houses and other places of assembly are shut, there will still be open other avenues of infection. We are in a state of siege and might as well accept it."

On September 24, as the number of deaths continued to rise, the schools were ordered closed, as were the town swimming pool and gymnasium. Shortly after, public gatherings of many kinds -- at churches, meeting halls, billiard parlors, bowling alleys and other places -- were banned. Public funerals could only be held with a permit from the town. A flier outlining how to avoid the disease was circulated to local households.

Health care facilities and medical personnel in town were soon overwhelmed. An emergency call for more doctors and nurses -- "to attend the many patients now suffering for want of the simplest care" -- was issued. There was concern, too, that with whole families afflicted people could not take care of their own. "When hundreds of families are affect-

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ed at the same time, and this not in a single town but in all towns, we suddenly outgrow our social clothes, and then we suffer from exposure," reported the Chronicle.



The Brookline Friendly Society

The Brookline Friendly Society, a social service agency and the forerunner of today's Brookline Community Foundation, sprang into action. Volunteers cooked broth in a kitchen set up in the Society's headquarters at the corner of Walnut and High Streets. Other volunteers collected "custards, jellies, fresh eggs, and other dainties" made by people in their own homes. These, along with broth and milk, were distributed to needy families every afternoon. Forty-nine automobiles were made available to the Society by local residents to help with the distribution.

In early October, town officials began to quarantine homes where cases of influenza had been found.

The number of people who were sick had an effect on all kinds of activities. (There were more than 2,600 cases reported between September 1918 and the end of the year, out of a population of 37,000, although the actual number was probably considerably higher). The police and fire departments, reported the Townsman, were crippled, and dozens of Town Hall and post office employees, as well as those of private businesses, were unable to report to work. The *Chronicle* urged residents to be patient:

"If telephone service is poorer, if the street cars run less often, if only one clerk is behind the counter when there should be two or three, if any of the ordinary daily services that we look for as a matter of course are less well performed than usual, remember the numbers on the sick list and have patience with those remaining who are

doing double duty."

Advertisements in the Brookline papers showed how local businesses tried to cope with the crisis, to reassure customers, and, perhaps, in some cases, to take advantage of the situation.

By mid-October the worst of the epidemic seemed to have passed in Brookline. The ban on public gatherings was lifted on the 19th. The schools reopened on the 23rd. (They were closed an extra week in January, part of an extended Christmas break, as a precaution.)

There continued to be cases, and a few deaths, in November and December and in 1919, though it was uncertain whether later cases were part of the same deadly strain of the flu. Overall, it appears that between 125 and 150 people -- precise numbers are hard to come by -- died.

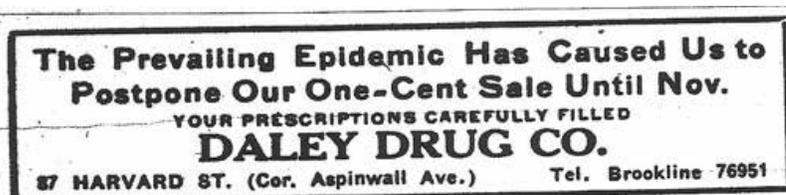
"That Brookline has suffered no worse may be due in part to the promptness with which the program of prevention was adopted," wrote the *Chronicle* on October 12th. "Most of these steps were taken here before they were taken

in other communities, and they have proved their value."

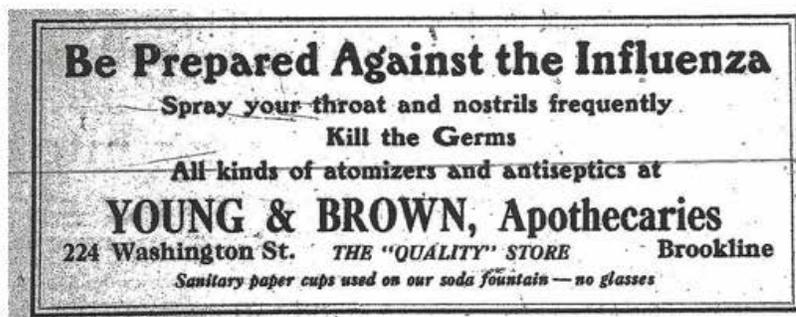
"Then, too, [continued the paper] Brookline has had the very great advantage that its 'congested' districts, its quarters of houses in which families are crowded beyond the minimum requirements of health, are comparatively slight. Although the epidemic, like the agents of Herod, spared no class or quarter, it is essentially a crowd disease, and where the congestion was the greatest its incidence was most heavy.

"Such an epidemic as this tests our social institutions, shakes our confidence in their sufficiency. It tries out our organizations for the protection of public health, raises questions as to whether the work of doctor and nurse might not be as much of a public concern as that of soldier or firemen and whether they ought not to be frankly in public rather than in quasi-private service. And it also raises, or should raise, a question or two about public living conditions and housing."

NOTE: A version of this article first appeared in Ken Liss' blog *Muddy River Musings*.



Advertisement, *The Brookline Townsman*, October 12, 1918



The Richardson House and the Cottage Street Cannonball

Camille Arbogast & Jesus MacLean



Photo by Jean Stringham

To accompany our March program on the Henry Hobson Richardson house - see the back page of this newsletter - we are highlighting an object in the

Brookline Historical Society's collection that was found on what once was the Richardson property: a twelve-pound cannonball stamped with a fleur-de-lis.

In the early 1980s, Caroline Hoppin found the cannonball in a bed of ferns in her backyard. The Hoppins' property had been part of the Richardson estate until it was sold to Caroline and her husband, Fred. Caroline related the story of the cannonball's discovery in a 2007 bulletin of the Park School (where she was Director of Admissions from 1977-2001): "I put my trowel into a little mound and discovered some metallic gravel. Digging a little deeper, I pulled out this heavy, earth-coated lump."

Caroline speculated that the cannonball was from the American Revolution. No battle occurred in the neighborhood, but John Goddard, a key figure in Revolutionary Brookline, had lived nearby. He was appointed Wagonmaster General of the Continental Army. According to

"Brookline and the Revolution", written in 1895 and published by the historical society's predecessor organization, Goddard had armaments and supplies stored on his farm and in the woods across the street before and after the Battles of Lexington and Concord. Prior to the Battle of Dorchester Heights, Goddard had cannons hidden in his barn.

Caroline surmised the cannonball "was in the cache of ammunition stored on the Goddard farm. It was loaded into a wagon, covered with hay, and bounced along on a secret mission to Concord or Dorchester Heights."

Fred and Caroline mused about other possible histories of the cannonball in later correspondence with the historical society. "Was the cannon ball brought here by privateers from French ports in the Caribbean? Or was it brought here by Henry Knox on his way to Dorchester Heights?" Perhaps one day an expert might be able to date the cannonball more authoritatively. We may never know for sure how it ended up on the Richardson/Hoppin property.

In 2012, when the Hoppin family decided to move from the Brookline area, they donated the cannonball to the Historical Society. They placed a special restriction on their gift, specifying that

it not be locked away inside a display case, instead emphatically requesting guests be able to touch the cannonball. "In our experience, the most fun most people get is from handling the cannonball. First, they are uniformly startled by its weight. Then they roll it in their hands, appreciating its roundness and surface texture. Finally, with a prompting, they turn it over and over, trying to get the light to an optimal angle to see the marking. ... This works for adults as much as for children."

When we are able to reopen the Devotion House in the future, we hope you will visit the cannonball and try lifting it yourself!



This recent photo shows the ravine where the cannonball was found, behind the Richardson and Hoppin houses. Photo by Jesus MacLean

From the Public Library of Brookline: Florida Ruffin Ridley & Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin



How much do you know about Florida Ruffin Ridley, the Brookline resident for whom the former Coolidge Corner School is named? Dolita Cathcart, Associate Professor of History at Wheaton College, will discuss the life and legacy of this groundbreaking figure, along with her influential mother, Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin, in a virtual program from the Brookline Library on Saturday, February 27th, from 3:00 to 4:30 PM.

This program requires pre-registration at <https://www.brooklinelibrary.org/events/event/the-legacy-of-florida-ruffin-ridley/>

Photo Sleuth: What's in This Picture?

In 1905, Brookline held a great town-wide celebration for its bicentennial. Photographs of fire houses and Town Hall festooned with huge red, white, and blue banners can be viewed today in books and online. Jean Kramer's seminal 1989 book on Brookline history, *Brookline, Massachusetts: A Pictorial History*, includes this photo (page 59) as part of the documentation of that historic occasion.

In curating the photo posted on the Digital Commonwealth for inclusion on our web site, we first identified the location. Can you? (The building in the center is still standing, though it has changed.) We then documented the date ranges of the identifiable businesses from their listings in the town directories of that era. And then, data dutifully assembled and prepared for inclusion on our web site, we uttered the proverbial phrase: "Houston, we have a problem."

The businesses we had identified were not compatible with the bicentennial date of 1905. Had our standard curation methods gone off the rails?



We turned to our society president and intrepid sleuth, Ken Liss, for help. He quickly located an oddity in the photo and, improbably, immediately knew what it meant. This photo had been misidentified for years. Further research confirmed the details and the real year the photograph was taken.

We invite you to take on this challenge. Turn to the online photo, <http://brooklinehistoricalsociety.org/mystery>. Use the zoom tool for a closer inspection. There is something quite odd in the scene that previously escaped the notice of editors and town historians alike. What is it and what is the real celebration pictured here? (The answer can be found at <http://brooklinehistoricalsociety.org/reveal>)

Join Our Board!

The Society is looking for new members of our Board of Trustees!

A key role is that of Treasurer, vacated last year when our former treasurer, John Vanscoyoc, became a member of the town's Select Board. It's a position that can't be filled by current members of the Board.

We are also looking for people who would like to be more involved in the society to serve on our board. The Collections Committee would benefit from archivists or people with experience in museum collections.

If you are interested in serving in any of these capacities, please contact us at brooklinehistory@gmail.com or 617-566-5747.

Help Keep Brookline History Alive! Renew Your Membership

Do you enjoy stories like these, plus walking tours, local history presentations, and members-only programs in historic locations? Your membership dollars and donations make all of this possible. Please use the enclosed envelope and membership form - or click on Membership on our website - to renew today.

You'll continue to receive newsletters like this one and invitations to special members events, while supporting both old and new ways of discovering and telling the story of Brookline's past.

Thank you for your continuing support.

Spring Program of the Brookline Historical Society

“At Home with H. H. Richardson”

Sunday, March 21, 2021, at 7 pm
Online Program

The Brookline home of famous architect H. H. Richardson, along with two noteworthy adjacent properties, is under threat of demolition.

William Tyre, the executive director and curator of the Richardson-designed Glessner House in Chicago, will talk about Richardson, his Brookline years, and the significance of the houses and the Green Hill neighborhood.

This a free and timely program provided by the Brookline Historical Society. To register and reserve a spot, please contact us at brooklinehistory@gmail.com or 617-566-5747 and let us know how many spaces to reserve for you.



Henry Hobson Richardson house-25 Cottage Street



1886 painting of H.H. Richardson by Hubert Von Herkomer. National Portrait Gallery

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