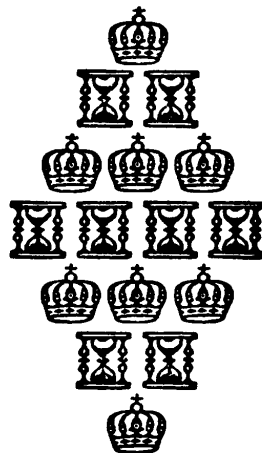


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Early Days
on
BOSTON COMMON

By
Mary Farwell Ayer

With many Illustrations after Old Prints



BOSTON
Privately Printed

1910

II

ALTHOUGH the authority of the King was now represented in Massachusetts Bay by the presence of a royal governor, matters relating to the improvement of the town of Boston still remained in the hands of a board of selectmen, elected by the people. These selectmen made the Common their special care, and were untiring in their efforts to improve it.

One of the first steps taken was to order any holes to be filled up with dirt and mould, and trenches to be dug for the removal of superfluous water.

In 1728 trees were planted along Common Street, now represented by our Tremont Street. In 1734 there was some discussion as to the location of a second row of trees, which resulted in placing it to the westward of the row already planted.¹ Many years later a third row of trees was set out parallel to the other two. These trees formed a protected walk known as the Great Mall, in contradistinction to a pathway in front of the Granary Burial-Ground called the Little Mall. In 1756 this latter walk was lined with elms planted by Adino Paddock, and for this reason it was also referred to as Paddock's Mall.

Lime trees and poplars were also set out on the Common, but the favorite tree seems to have been the elm. A gardener was placed in charge, who at one time was receiving four pounds ten shillings a year.² A watch was often maintained at night in order to prevent any damage,³ and a reward of forty shillings was given to any one convicting a person of injuring the trees.⁴

The bonfires lighted from time to time on the Common were also likely to do injury and had to be carefully watched.⁵

¹ See Price's map, facing page 4; also German map, facing page 6. *Boston Town Records*, vol. xii, April 3, 1734. ² *Boston Town Records*, vol. xvii, March 28, 1744.

³ *Boston Town Records*, vol. xv, August 14, 1738. ⁴ *Boston Town Records*, vol. xii, March 11, 1733.

⁵ *The Independent Advertiser* for July 3, 1749, mentioned a fire on the Common: "A Pasture at the Bottom of the Common took Fire... and spread over an Acre of Ground in a Quarter of an hour; the People were oblig'd to pull down the Fences to prevent their being burnt, having took Fire."

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Special precaution was taken on the fifth of November, for on that night the townspeople were in the habit of burning effigies in bonfires on the Common,¹ or in different parts of the town.

In order to keep carts and carriages from injuring the trees it was thought best to erect more fences, and in 1739 the selectmen ordered a committee to "set a Row of Posts and Rails from Common Street up to Beacon Street to prevent Carts etc. from spoiling the Herbage of the Common."² As early as 1733 a fence had existed along Common Street, leaving openings for the streets,³ but in 1737 all these openings were closed except for one gap near the granary.⁴ By 1740, therefore, the Common was well fenced in on two sides, and by 1772 the Beacon Street side was fenced in to the water's edge. Until 1768 carriages were admitted to the Common through a gate, which was probably placed at the opening near the granary. In that year, however, a law was passed forbidding the opening of the gate "except for the carrying in or bringing out Powder for the Magazine."

In 1739 great trouble was caused by the water from Beacon Hill, which ran across the Common and through Winter Street. The ground near the entrance to this street, however, was raised, and in this way the water was forced to spread over the Common.⁵

The buildings which began to appear in the neighborhood of the Common soon caused this part of Boston to lose its neglected appearance. One of the first to be erected was the Bridewell, for the confinement of disorderly persons. It was probably built in 1712 on land below the almshouse.⁶ Mention is often made of the whippings administered here on some unruly servant or slave.⁷ Notices similar to the following newspaper cutting were likely to appear: "Whoever shall take up Ann Flood (who was forcibly taken out of the Officer's Hands

¹ *The celebration of Pope's Day. See Letters and Diary of John Rowe.* ² *Boston Town Records, vol. xv, March 29, 1739.* ³ *Ibid., vol. xii, March 11, 1733.* ⁴ *Ibid., vol. xv, March 15, 1737.*

⁵ *Ibid., vol. xii, May 2, 1739.* ⁶ *See frontispiece.*

⁷ *The History of the Voyages and Travels of Capt. Nathaniel Uring, 1726, page 121.*

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as he was carrying her to Bridewell last Thursday Night) and deliver her up to Justice, shall have Three Pounds Reward.”¹

Below the Bridewell, and on the land formerly occupied in part by the town granary, stood the workhouse, a two-story building one hundred and forty feet long.² An order appears in the Town Records for 1737 allowing thirty loads of sand to be taken from Fox Hill to be used in its erection.³ The workhouse was built for the accommodation of the idle and poor of the town, and was paid for by a subscription among the townspeople.

The granary, which had been built in 1729, was moved further down the hill, in order to make room in part for the workhouse, and was placed near the site of the present Park Street Church.⁴ Back of the granary and workhouse stretched the burial-ground, on the further side of which stood a pound.⁵

Above these buildings stood the beacon, in a pasture-ground some six rods square owned by the town.⁶ Thomas Hancock owned waste land on Beacon Hill, and used it as a pasture for his cattle. His house, which was built in 1737, stood a little further down the slope on the lane represented by our present Beacon Street.

Below Hancock's house were a few scattered buildings; in one of these lived later the artist Copley. Two others, near Bannister's Wharf, were used as stores by Admiral Vernon.⁷

At the foot of the Common was a beach where the townspeople were accustomed to obtain sand and stones for building purposes. This was a favorite landing-place for persons coming by boat from Roxbury or Cambridge.⁸

¹ *The Boston Evening Post*, July 27, 1741. ² *Boston Town Records*, vol. xii, March 29, 1737. See also Price's map, facing page 4.

³ *Boston Town Records*, vol. xii, September 21, 1737. ⁴ A granary had stood near by several years earlier than this, for on May 20, 1713, Sewall wrote of a riot committed "by 200 people or more, breaking open Arthur Mason's Warehouse in the Common, thinking to find Corn there." For a picture of the town granary, see Price's map, facing page 4.

⁵ *Boston Town Records*, vol. viii, April 19, 1704. Mr. Ernst thinks that the pound stood next to the Tremont Building.

⁶ See Price's map, facing page 4, and frontispiece. A new beacon was erected from time to time. In the *Treasury Accounts* for 1707-8 is the following entry: "Paid John Barnard for Erecting a Beacon in ye Town of Boston allowed by the General Assembly £15."

⁷ *Boston Town Records*, vol. xv, March 5, 1740. ⁸ *Sewall's Diary*.

TO THE READER
 The principal parts of this Plan are
 drawn by the late Major-General
 G. B. Gordon, and are now by the late
 Major-General G. B. Gordon, and are now
 by the late Major-General G. B. Gordon.

**A PLAN
 OF
 BOSTON,
 and its ENVIRONS,
 showing the true SITUATION of
 HIS MAJESTY'S ARMY,
 AND ALSO THOSE OF THE
 REBELS.
 Drawn by an Engineer in the Year 1775.**



- REFERENCE.**
- A. The British Army, as it stood on the 17th of March 1775.
 - B. The Rebel Army, as it stood on the 17th of March 1775.
 - C. The British Fortifications, as they stood on the 17th of March 1775.
 - D. The Rebel Fortifications, as they stood on the 17th of March 1775.
 - E. The British Ships, as they stood on the 17th of March 1775.
 - F. The Rebel Ships, as they stood on the 17th of March 1775.
 - G. The British Batteries, as they stood on the 17th of March 1775.
 - H. The Rebel Batteries, as they stood on the 17th of March 1775.
 - I. The British Camps, as they stood on the 17th of March 1775.
 - J. The Rebel Camps, as they stood on the 17th of March 1775.
 - K. The British Lines, as they stood on the 17th of March 1775.
 - L. The Rebel Lines, as they stood on the 17th of March 1775.
 - M. The British Posts, as they stood on the 17th of March 1775.
 - N. The Rebel Posts, as they stood on the 17th of March 1775.
 - O. The British Strongholds, as they stood on the 17th of March 1775.
 - P. The Rebel Strongholds, as they stood on the 17th of March 1775.
 - Q. The British Forts, as they stood on the 17th of March 1775.
 - R. The Rebel Forts, as they stood on the 17th of March 1775.
 - S. The British Castles, as they stood on the 17th of March 1775.
 - T. The Rebel Castles, as they stood on the 17th of March 1775.
 - U. The British Towers, as they stood on the 17th of March 1775.
 - V. The Rebel Towers, as they stood on the 17th of March 1775.
 - W. The British Towers, as they stood on the 17th of March 1775.
 - X. The Rebel Towers, as they stood on the 17th of March 1775.
 - Y. The British Towers, as they stood on the 17th of March 1775.
 - Z. The Rebel Towers, as they stood on the 17th of March 1775.

EXPLANATION.
 The British Army is represented by the letters A, B, C, D, E, F, G, H, I, J, K, L, M, N, O, P, Q, R, S, T, U, V, W, X, Y, Z.
 The Rebel Army is represented by the letters a, b, c, d, e, f, g, h, i, j, k, l, m, n, o, p, q, r, s, t, u, v, w, x, y, z.

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On the Boylston Street side of the Common probably stood the houses used later as hospitals by Mr. Chapman and Dr. Sylvester Gardiner. Here also was the land owned in early times by Elder Oliver, which was bought in 1757 for a burial-place; this was called the South Burying-Ground, and was used chiefly during the siege as a place for burying the soldiers. Before that time it was customary to let it out to different persons for a pasture-ground.

Land near the Oliver estate was owned by Mr. Foster, and was later bought and included in the Common. Near by stood the gunhouse, hay-scales, and schoolhouse.¹

The gunhouse was built in 1712 for the accommodation of some field carriages, and was let from time to time for terms of years.² Later it was enlarged "for the reception of the Artillery given by the Province for the use of the Boston regiment."

A windmill was erected on Windmill Hill in 1703 by John Mallet.³ No powder-house was built at this time, for in 1702 the town authorities ordered that the gunpowder be placed in James Allen's bakehouse, Arthur Mason's granary and John Foster's warehouse "until Other & better provision be made for the Same."⁴

The powder-house which is represented on early maps was built in 1706. An order of the town appointed two men to walk twice each night to the Common to keep guard over it; and special precautions were taken to protect it on holidays. Great care was taken in conveying powder to the powder-house, for when the river was open it was transported in covered boats to the bottom of the Common.⁵

About the time that the powder-house was built, a watch-house was erected on a neighboring hill. This is also to be seen on early maps of the town.⁶

¹ See Price's map, facing page 4. ² Boston Town Records, vol. xiii, May 19, 1736.

³ Boston Town Records, vol. xi, November 29, 1703. ⁴ Ibid., vol. xi, March 16, 1702. See also Price's map, facing page 4; German map, facing page 6; and French map, facing page 10.

⁵ Boston Town Records, vol. xii, May 2, 1739. See also State Archives, July 2, 1706.

⁶ See Price's map, facing page 4; also German map, facing page 6. In the Treasury Accounts for 1710-11 is the following entry: "Paid Sam Bridge Carpentor in full for building a Watch house near ye Powder house in Boston Common; Including an article of 20/ for masons work which

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During this period of improvement many interesting events were occurring on the Common. In 1720 much curiosity was shown in regard to the spinning industry, which had been introduced by two gentlemen from Ireland. It was pecuniarily encouraged by the selectmen. On pleasant days old and young, rich and poor, would repair to the Common with their wheels, and would vie with each other for the five pounds offered as a prize to the one spinning the best yard of cloth. This craze lasted only two or three years, though spinning was revived later as a means of employment for those in the almshouse and workhouse.¹

In 1723 another interesting event was witnessed, for some Indian delegates to Boston camped out on the Common. The Boston Newsletter mentioned that the "said Delegates had an Ox given to them on Friday last, which they kill'd with Bow and Arrows, and in the Evening a Fire was made in the Common, and a Kettle hung over it, in which part of said Ox was boil'd; where they Danced after their own manner, in presence of some of our principal Gentlemen, and also some Thousands of Spectators."²

Five years later occurred a duel between Benjamin Woodbridge and Henry Phillips. Both young men were merchants and belonged to respectable families. The two men had been at the Royal Exchange Tavern on King Street, a place noted for gaming and drinking, and had entered into a dispute. On the night of the third of July they met at the foot of the Common and fought a duel, in which Woodbridge was killed. Phillips escaped to France, but died from remorse in the ensuing year.³

It was not long before a second duel occurred here, for in 1742 two negroes, Cæsar and Tom, were tried for duelling on the Common.⁴

In 1740 Boston was first visited by the great revivalist, the

he is to pay £10." An entry for the year previous states that the General Assembly allowed £500 for building the powder-house.

¹ *Massachusetts Historical Society Collections*, vol. iii, page 253; also *Boston Town Records*, vol. viii, March 14, 1720. ² *The Boston Weekly Newsletter*, September 12, 1723. ³ S. A. Drake, *History and Antiquities of Boston. The Weekly Journal*, July 8, 1728. ⁴ *Suffolk Deeds*.

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Reverend George Whitefield. The desire to hear him was so great that he was often obliged to preach to a large audience on the Common. It was written in the Annals of Dorchester that he preached "generally twice a Day, sometimes in ye Meeting-houses & often in ye Fields unto vast assemblies. When he Preached his Farewell Sermon in Boston Common it was Judged by ye space of ground taken up by ye Auditory that there could not be less than 20 Thousand."¹

All the events occurring on the Common, however, were not of a peaceful character. For several years troubles had existed with the Spaniards in certain of the West Indies, which resulted in 1739 in the declaration of war. Throughout the province troops began to drill, in order to be in good condition if called upon. In Boston the militia often exercised on the Common, and went through their manœuvres in the presence of the townspeople.² In the following year it was found necessary to send several companies to Cuba. "There went 5 Companies of Soldiers from this Province of 100 men each to war with Spain. They went to Jamaica to Admiral Vernon, & so to Carthagena, Cuba etc. We hear many or ye most of them are dead."³

A few years later Boston was obliged to supply men for another war; in 1745 Governor Shirley sent out troops, under command of William Pepperell, to capture Louisburg. This "uncommonly rash adventure" proved successful, and caused much rejoicing among the English.

The loss of the fortress was very mortifying to the French, who immediately made preparations to recover it. In 1746 the colonists were alarmed to hear that a fleet under the command of the Duke d'Anville was on its way to attack Boston, and they at once sent to neighboring towns for aid. Douglass wrote in his Memoirs of the War that "6400 men from the Country,

¹ *Memoirs of Captain Roger Clap, in the Annals of Dorchester. Two years later, John Davenport, of Long Island, "a wonderful man to search hypocrites," came to Boston, and preached on the Common to a great throng. His conduct gave so much offence that he was finally obliged to retract much that he had said and done. See Christian History.*

² *The Boston Postboy, May 19, 1740.*

³ *Memoirs of Captain Roger Clap, in the Annals of Dorchester.*

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well armed, appeared in Boston Common, some of them from Brookfield, travelled 70 miles in two days, each with a pack (in which was a provision for 14 days) of about a bushel corn weight." The fear of this army, however, soon died away, for tempests so scattered the fleet that the attempt to attack the town was abandoned.

Besides this warfare carried on with different countries, the colonists were much troubled in regard to home matters, for each year the grievances between the officers of the Crown and the people of Boston were increasing. The colonists saw the importance of having well drilled troops as a protection in case of an outbreak with the Mother Country, and for this reason the troops were frequently ordered into the Common to practise.

The part of the Common not used as a training-field was improved more and more each year, and remained the popular recreation ground of the townspeople. Perhaps the best description of the Common as it appeared towards the middle of the eighteenth century was given by a certain Mr. Bennett, who wrote that "every afternoon, after drinking tea, the gentlemen and ladies walk the Mall, and from thence adjourn to one another's houses to spend the evening. . . . What they call the Mall is a walk on a fine green common adjoining to the south-west side of the town. It is near half a mile over, with two rows of young trees planted opposite to each other, with a fine footway between, in imitation of St. James's Park;¹ and part of the bay of the sea which encircles the town, taking its course along the north-west side of the Common—by which it is bounded on one side and by the country on the other—forms a beautiful canal, in view of the walk."²

¹ See Price's map, facing page 4.

² Bennett's *History of New England*. See *Massachusetts Historical Society Proceedings*, Series 1, vol. 7.

