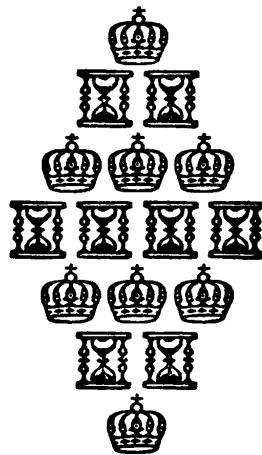


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Early Days
on
BOSTON COMMON

By
Mary Farwell Ayer

With many Illustrations after Old Prints



BOSTON
Privately Printed

1910



Zeppan & Bradford's Lithog. Boston.

VIEW OF THE WATER CELEBRATION,

On Boston Common October 25th 1848



B. F. Smith Jr. del.

IN 1833 the Common was called upon to play its part in the reception accorded President Jackson.¹ Although Jackson was a man of violent passions, he was honest and sincere, and did not know the meaning of fear. The eight years of his administration, therefore, were filled with innumerable political contests, which deeply enraged the party supporting the existing government.

These supporters of the Bank and of the American System, led by Henry Clay, gradually drew closer together, and became known as the Whig Party,—a party which endeavored to excite opposition to Jackson's reforms.

In July, 1834, the Whigs held a magnificent festival on Boston Common. An immense pavilion, two hundred and thirty-five feet in length by one hundred and forty feet in breadth, capable of accommodating twenty-five hundred persons, was erected near the old mall.² In spite of this elaborate display, the Whigs were politically weak, and it was not until 1840 that they proved sufficiently strong to win the presidential campaign.³

Jackson was followed by President Van Buren, who in turn was succeeded by William Henry Harrison. His sudden death occurred scarcely a month after his inauguration. The day appointed in Boston for commemorating the sad event opened dark and gloomy. "Even the Heavens seemed to contribute their share to the solemn feelings of the day."⁴ One regiment formed in Bowdoin Square and marched into

¹"The procession will move through Washington street and Boylston street to the Common, where the Instructors and Pupils of the Public Schools will be placed in line, in front of the Fire Department. On arriving at the bottom of the Common, the Cavalcade and carriages will proceed up Tremont street, as far as St. Paul's, while the remainder of the Procession crosses the Common to the head of Winter Street." *Columbian Centinel*, June 21, 1833.

²The seats were arranged in a semicircle, partly surrounding an elevated platform, reserved for officers of the day and invited guests. "The interior of the Pavilion was decorated by national flags, patriotic banners, pendants, festoons, and a profusion of flowers, and the revered names of Washington and Lafayette, of Hancock and Adams, and other heroes and statesmen of Revolutionary memory, appeared conspicuous. The centre of the pavilion was supported by a grand Liberty Pole eighty feet in height." *Columbian Centinel*, July 9, 1834.

³Accession of President Harrison. ⁴The *Atlas*, April 22, 1841.

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the Common to join the Lancers, Infantry and Artillery. Some idea of the length of the procession may be inferred from the fact that when its escort had reached the State House, after marching through Warren and Tremont streets to the foot of Beacon Street, the end of the line had not entered Tremont Street.¹

A subject which was gradually arousing great interest was the temperance question, for reform in this direction was greatly needed. The public entertainments furnished in Boston were becoming more and more low and revolting in character. At one time a play entitled "The Drunkard" was the attraction at the Boston Museum.² "One Cup More, Or the Doom of the Drunkard" was having a successful run at the National Theatre.³ Mrs. Presbrey's waxwork exhibition of "the Intemperate Family" also proved a drawing-card.

In order to improve the existing condition of affairs total abstinence societies were formed. In May, 1844, several of these societies appointed a day for holding exercises on the Common. A procession was to be formed by ten o'clock, and after passing through some of the principal streets, was to return to the Common, where all present were to join in singing "The Teetotallers are coming with the Cold Water Pledge."⁴

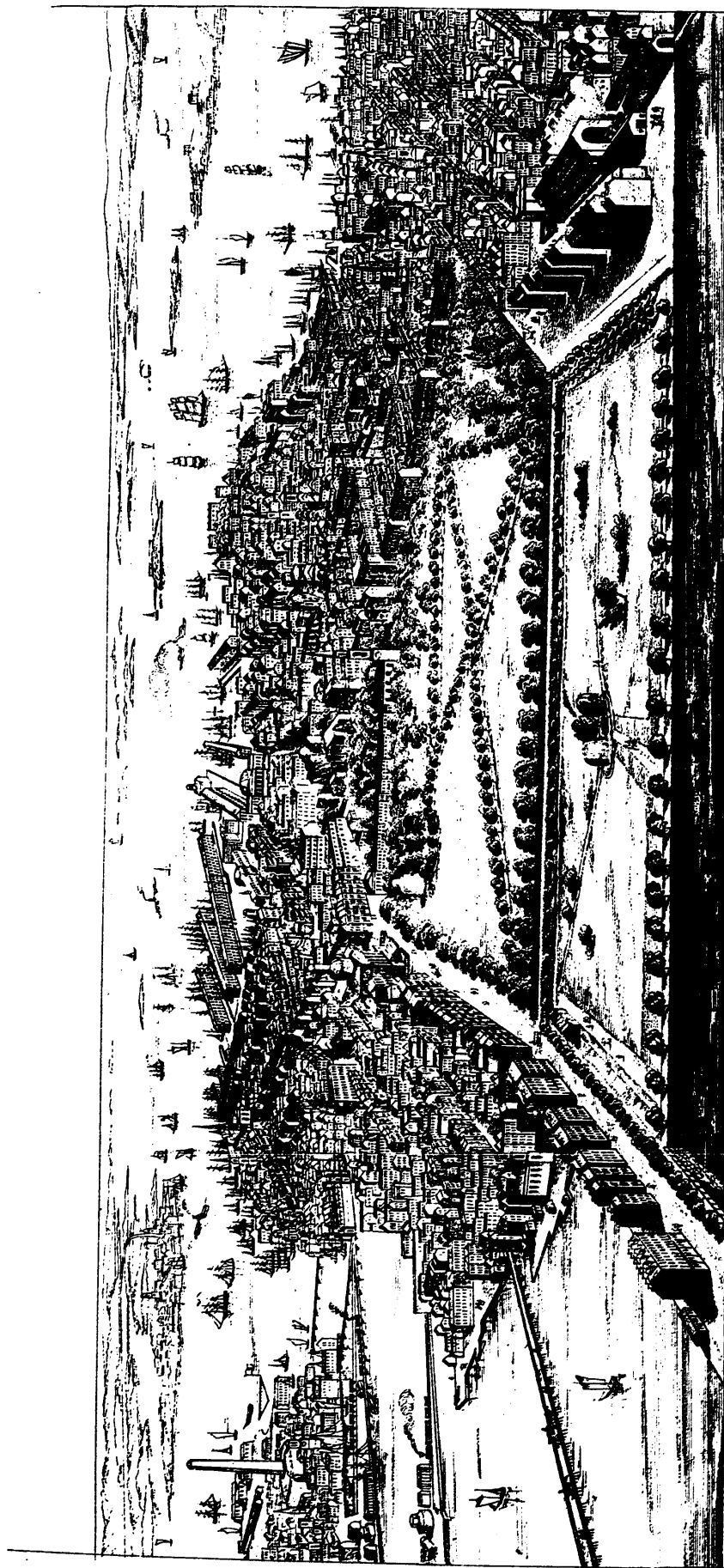
An attempt was also made to interest the young people of Boston in the great cause of temperance. On one occasion we read that "the Girls and Boys of Boston, usually called the 'Cold Water Army,' mustered strong in the Tremont Temple. . . . After the exercises in the Temple, an adjournment took place to the 'Frog Pond,' which was surrounded by the Army, and three times three cheers given for Cold Water." It was said that on this occasion two hundred signed the pledge.⁵

In June the Norwich Cadets from Lowell encamped on the Common, and in August the New England Guards wel-

¹"The Mall along Beacon street was lined with the scholars of the various schools, with their teachers,—the girls being on the upper, and the boys on the lower side." *The Atlas*, April 22, 1841.

²*The Boston Daily Bee*, May 29, 1844. ³*Ibid.*, May 30, 1844.

⁴*Daily Evening Transcript*, May 28, 1844. ⁵*The Boston Daily Journal*, May 18, 1846.



A BIRDSEYE VIEW OF BOSTON COMMON, TAKEN ABOUT 1850

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comed the Brooklyn City Guards and escorted them to the Common. They pitched their tents on the old redoubt which still existed on the hill.¹

In September a Whig Convention took place. It is said that the procession, which comprised about ten thousand persons, took one hour and three quarters to pass out from the Common.² In spite of the efforts made by the Whigs, however, the Democrats won the election, and James K. Polk was elected president.³

At the time of this political campaigning, the city officials were interested in a matter which concerned vitally the health of the citizens. As Boston was increasing so rapidly in population, it was found necessary to improve the water supply. This question had been brought up at intervals for consideration, but each time the matter had been allowed to drop.⁴ The committee which the city authorities had finally appointed to investigate the matter reported after mature deliberation that a supply of fresh water might be obtained from Cochituate, some twenty miles from Boston. The plan was adopted and pipes were soon laid. In 1848 the work was completed, and on an appointed day the inhabitants gathered in the Common to watch the streams of water which were thrown up in the air for the first time from a fountain in the Frog Pond.

The Water Celebration is the last incident relating to the early history of the Common to be mentioned. Its history since the middle of the nineteenth century is too close to our own time to be of great interest to the present generation.

¹ *Boston Daily Journal*, August 4, 1846.

² *The Boston Daily Bee*, Sept. 20, 1844. "The procession got back on the Common about two o'clock, when the Convention was called to order by Hon. Daniel Webster, the President of the meeting, who then made a short address. . . . Great enthusiasm prevailed throughout the afternoon, and the Convention adjourned at half past five, to meet again by torchlight on the Common in the evening."

³ As New England disapproved of the Mexican War we find little reference to any assistance rendered the cause. A volunteer company of seventy-five men besides officers arrived the 10th of May from Norwich, Vermont. They encamped on the Common and left for Fort Adams on their way to Brazos, Texas.

⁴ In 1842 the suggestion was made that the water dropping from the top of the State House might be reservoired for a fountain, to be placed in the centre of the Frog Pond. This scheme, however, was not carried out.

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It may be a surprise to some to remark how closely allied the history of the Common is, not only to that of the city, but also to that of the New England states, and we trust that the events chronicled may awaken new interest in our early history and added respect for Boston Common.