THOMAS H. O'CONNOR Soston

Abigail Adams · African Meeting House · Arnold Arboretum Athenaeum · Crispus Attucks · Bathhouses · Beacon Hill The Big Dig • Boston

Boston Marathon • Terrier • Boston Unit

Terri Bulfinch • Busing • Vinatown • Citgo Sign City Hall . The Common . Curse of the Bambino . Durgin-Park · Emera unnie Farmer Fenway Park
Floating Hose
The Great Fi me's Basement The Garden thatch Shell Anne Hutchinson • Influenza "Honey Fitz" . The Hu

Epidemic • "Mrs. Jack
Philip's War • The Last
Square • Make Way for
Museum of Fine Arts

The Molasses Explosion
or Row • Northeastern

Museum of Fine Arts

University • Old North Church • Parker House • The Pops

Public Garden • Paul Revere House

The Ritz-Carlton ·

Tollay Square · Sto

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Tyster House • The Vault • Hotel Vendome • WASPS • West End • John Winthrop • The X-Way • Yankees • The Zoo



Thomas H. O'Connor

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Preface: Travels with my Aunt Nellie

years ago, when I was a little boy about 9 or 10 years old, my Aunt Nellie would regularly take me on the trolley from South Boston, where we lived, for visits to downtown Boston. Aunt Nellie was my mother's aunt, a maiden lady who resembled the wonderful English actress who plays the part of Miss Marple on the PBS series about Agatha Christie's slightly dotty but disarmingly clever detective—she even talked like her in that deceptively quiet and ruminating manner. It was probably Aunt Nellie who first got me interested in history. She gave me presents of two books a year, one for my birthday and one for Christmas, usually books about American history written for boys. I still have the copy of Ralph Waldo Emerson's Essays she gave me for Christmas when I was in the eighth grade.

Aunt Nellie was an avid reader of the morning newspapers and always knew all about what was happening in the city that day—celebrations, parades, visiting dignitaries, grand openings, special department store sales, and anything else that was mentioned in the daily columns. And so, after we emerged from the Park Street Station, looking up at the tall white spire of the Park Street Church, we would wander around town all day, with Aunt Nellie pointing out the historic spots, describing the interesting sights, and identifying the passersby. One morning as we were walking up School Street on our way toward Tremont Street, passing City Hall (the old one—the new one hadn't been built yet), I looked up and saw a tall and very distinguished gentleman walking toward us on his way from Beacon Hill to Washington Street. "That's Representative

Leverett Saltonstall," Aunt Nellie confided to me, leaning down. Then she raised her head, smiled, and said "Good morning." Mr. Saltonstall raised his gray fedora politely, smiled, nodded his head, said "Good morning" to the two of us, and continued on his stately way.

Our travels around the city took us to many different places. During the cold winter weeks between Thanksgiving and Christmas, we would walk through the slush and snow to the corner of Washington and Summer streets to enjoy the brilliantly lighted windows of the Jordan Marsh department store, with their colorful tableaus of the Bethlehem story, the visits of Santa Claus, scenes from Dickens's Christmas Carol, and other familiar images of the holiday season. In summer months, we would stroll hand-in-hand through the Public Garden, where Aunt Nellie described in great detail the various species of flowers, shrubs, and trees, before we bought our tickets for the obligatory ride on the Swan Boats. On cold winter days, when the pond was encased in ice, we would cross Arlington Street and end up on the second-floor gallery of Schrafft's, on Boylston Street, to enjoy a cup of hot chocolate—topped with real whipped cream!—with a packet of plain saltine crackers on the side. No two visits to Boston with Aunt Nellie were ever the same, and rarely did we see the same sights twice.

This book of essays about Boston has something of the perpetually perambulating and essentially serendipitous nature of my trips to the city with my Aunt Nellie. It is neither a dictionary nor an encyclopedia; it is certainly not a reference book or a tour guide. Instead, it is a stroll through a highly personal, completely subjective, and decidedly eclectic list of topics relating to Boston that I have chosen to write about as my fancy struck me. If a reader were to ask—as some invariably will—"Why did you include this topic?" or "Why didn't you include that topic?" I must admit that while I have no really satisfactory answer, I can perhaps suggest the kinds of remarkable changes in the city's history that brought many of the topics to mind.

Some thirty-five years ago, the eminent historian Samuel Eliot Morison wrote a delightful memoir called *One Boy's Boston*, recalling what it was like to grow up in the city at the turn of the twentieth xi PREFACE

century. His Boston generally encompassed the sedate areas of Beacon Hill and the Back Bay, home to the kinds of wealthy Brahmin families Oliver Wendell Holmes had described as enjoying "their houses by Bulfinch, their monopoly of Beacon Street, their ancestral portraits and Chinese porcelains..."

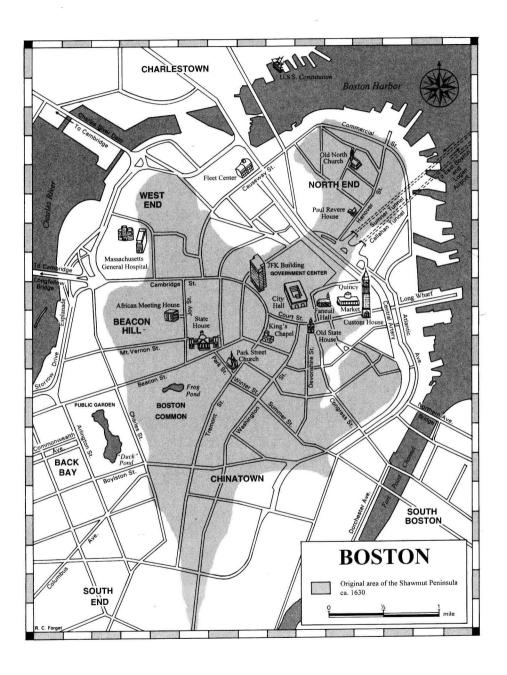
My Boston is a different place, in a different era. It is no longer a nineteenth-century town of gaslights, cobblestone streets, and horse-drawn carriages-although these can be readily found if you know where to look for them. Boston today is a bustling twenty-first-century urban metropolis, a sometimes bizarre mixture of the past and the present, where historic residences and colonial meeting houses are set against an incongruous backdrop of the high-rise buildings and modernistic skyscrapers that announced the arrival of the "New Boston." Standing on Tremont Street, just beyond the cemetery at King's Chapel, you can actually see three centuries of Boston architecture at once: the eighteenthcentury Faneuil Hall, the nineteenth-century Sears Crescent, and the twentieth-century City Hall-and perhaps catch a glimpse of Boston Harbor, where the ships of the first English settlers arrived in the early seventeenth century. It is this curious blend of the old and the new, the juxtaposition of the antique and the modern, that gives Boston perhaps its most distinctive flavor. While it is true that the rather calm and measured pace of an earlier time has been replaced by a noisier and much more frenetic way of life, Boston continues to offer the pleasures of a charming diversity to those who walk its winding streets and explore its historic trails.

My Boston also covers a much wider geographical area than Professor Morison's "tight little island" around Brimmer Street a century ago. It extends out from the central city into the various neighborhoods and reflects a much more varied population, whose social customs and cultural observances offer a sharp contrast with those of earlier generations of Bostonians. It makes for a curious and fascinating mixture. Here you will find nativists and newcomers; Boston Brahmins and Irish ward bosses; Puritan ministers and Catholic prelates; Revolutionary heroes and modern-day scoundrels; Back Bay matrons and African American activists; colonial dames and burlesque strippers; world-class surgeons and celebrated jazz art-

PREFACE

ists; college professors and short-order cooks; connoisseurs and con men. Whether they are legends of the past or realities of the present, they have all helped personalize the extraordinary character of a city that, in the course of the last century, acquired the sophisticated complexities of the modern age without losing touch with its colonial heritage.

This book does not attempt a comprehensive and exhaustive listing of every single person, place, and event related to Boston history—an impossible task in any event. Rather, it provides an alphabetical overview of a number of topics that I feel are *representative* of the fascinating, distinctive, and unique character of Boston. Such a book by another author would, I'm sure, have a completely different list. But this is mine, and in its attention to matters large and small, sacred and profane, honorable and disreputable, I hope it gives some sense of the rich rewards of the interest in the past and present of Boston that my Aunt Nellie bequeathed to me, which has sustained me through a lifetime of studying my native city.



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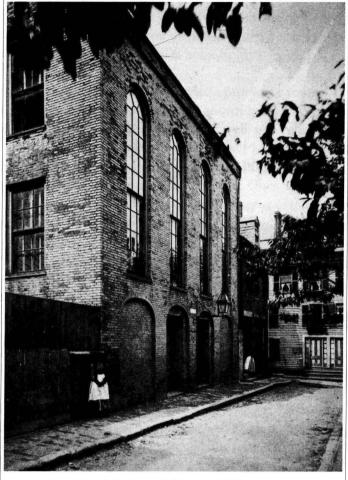
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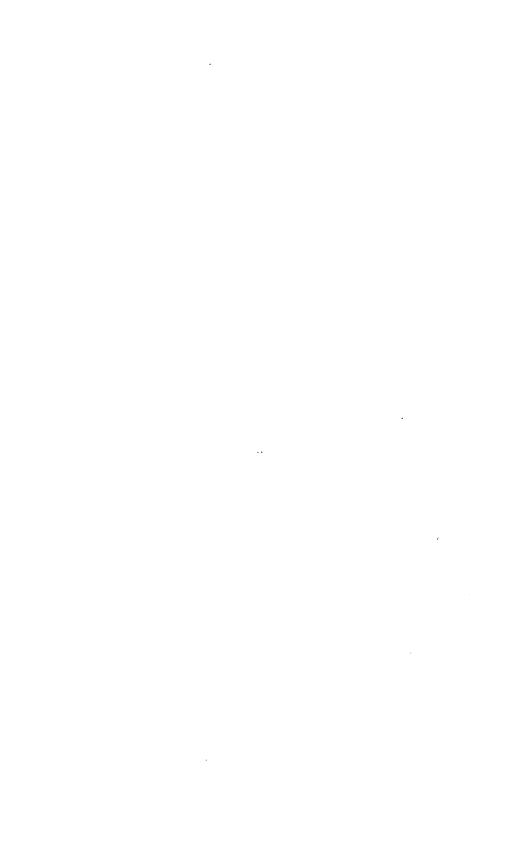
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A



African Meeting House



Abigail Adams

Abigail Smith was born in 1744, the second child of William Smith, a Weymouth minister, and Elizabeth Quincy, of the nearby town of Braintree. A highly intelligent young woman of strong Congregational convictions, Abigail never attended school because of poor health, but instead was instructed at home by her parents, her sister, and her grandparents.

On October 24, 1764, Abigail married a promising young lawyer from Braintree, John Adams, who had known her family for many years. While John spent most of his time traveling to court sessions in Boston, Abigail kept the house and produced five children, two of whom died in infancy. In 1768 John moved his family to Boston, where they rented a house in Brattle Square. Once again Abigail kept the home and concentrated on the upbringing of the children while John was off to Philadelphia to serve as a member of the Continental Congress.

Over the years, John and Abigail engaged in a long, lively, and loving correspondence involving serious issues of state as well as personal expressions of affection. Into the period of rebellion and throughout the Revolution, Abigail proved to be a faithful, brilliant, and perceptive correspondent, responding to her husband's activities and offering her wise and mature advice. She followed his involvement in the affairs of the Continental Congress, and in March 1774 advised him to think through the implications of the Declaration of Independence on which he was working. "I desire you would remember the ladies," she wrote, "and be more generous and favorable to them than your ancestors!" She later told him of how she first heard the Declaration of Independence proclaimed from the balcony of Boston's Old State House. The news from Philadelphia concerning the opening of hostilities found a response in her description of the Battle of Bunker Hill from a rooftop in Boston. She anxiously waited for John to complete his work in Paris on the final peace treaty so that at last her "dearest of Friends and the tenderest of Husbands" would return home.

When the Revolution was over, Abigail and some of the children joined John in London while he was serving as ambassador to Great Britain. When they returned to America they lived in New York City while her husband served as the first vice-president, under George Washington. In 1796 Abigail somewhat reluctantly supported John's decision to run for the presidency in his own right, fearing that on the national scene she might not have the "patience, prudence, and discretion" of Martha Washington, whom she had come to know and admire. Following John Adams's victory in 1796, the couple moved to the temporary capital at Philadelphia, but after two years Abigail decided to return home to Massachusetts. After a serious bout of illness that almost proved fatal, she once again returned to her husband, and became the first First Lady to occupy the newly constructed Presidential Mansion in Washington, D.C. John and Abigail did not remain in the White House very long, however, for in November 1800 John Adams was defeated by his rival, Thomas Jefferson, and the Adamses returned to Massachusetts for good.

Although Abigail Smith Adams had the pleasure of seeing her oldest son, John Quincy Adams, sworn into office as President James Monroe's Secretary of State in 1817, she did not live long enough to see him become president. After coming down with typhus, John Adams's loving wife of fifty-four years died on October 28, 1818, just before her seventy-fourth birthday.



John Adams

Born in 1735 in the small farming community of Braintree, John Adams had Boston connections through his mother, Susanna Boylston, daughter of a Boston physician. Young John graduated from Harvard College in 1755, later studied law, and was admitted to the Massachusetts bar in 1758. In 1764 he married Abigail Smith of Weymouth, a loving union that was to have a significant influence throughout his life.

It was not long before John Adams showed signs of becoming in-

volved in the increasingly tense relations between the American colonists and the British government. In 1765, only a year after his marriage, he wrote the "resolution and protest" for the town of Braintree and came out against the Stamp Act, which he opposed because the colonists had not consented to it. In 1768 he moved his family to Boston and successfully defended the merchant John Hancock against charges of smuggling. In 1770, after British soldiers killed five colonists during the so-called Boston Massacre, Adams agreed to undertake the unpopular task of representing the soldiers in court. Insisting that every accused person had the right to a fair trial, Adams successfully defended the soldiers and they were acquitted on the grounds of self-defense, although the outcome went against his personal political views.

Adams was less judicious in his reaction against the passage of the Tea Act, however, and in December 1773 wrote that the destruction of the tea during the Boston Tea Party was "the grandest event" since the trouble with Britain began. The following year he was selected to represent Massachusetts in the First Continental Congress, and did so in the second as well. Early in 1776 Adams came out publicly in support of separation, seconded Richard Henry Lee's motion for independence, and worked closely with Thomas Jefferson in the preparation of the Declaration of Independence. During the initial stages of the Revolution, he served on the Board of War as well as on several congressional committees, where his legal talents were extremely helpful.

Late in 1777 Adams was sent to Europe as a commissioner to France. Accompanied by his 10-year-old son, John Quincy, Adams arrived to find that France had already decided to extend recognition to the colonies as the United States of America and was in the process of working a treaty of alliance with the new nation. Adams continued to serve the interests of his country overseas until Great Britain finally agreed to peace negotiations after its defeat at Yorktown in 1781. Adams was dispatched to Paris to assist Benjamin Franklin and John Jay in working out a final treaty that recognized the independence of the United States of America and ceded the new nation all territory east of the Mississippi River.

In 1785 John Adams was appointed Ambassador to Great Brit-