

The Boston Connection

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This paper is by no means meant to be anywhere near a history of the Phillips family, but this past summer (1997), I came into possession of two books on early Boston, and since we knew that the first mayor of Boston was a Phillips, and Grandfather of Gideon Phillips, Sr., I just had to see what those books had to say about the Phillips family in particular. It turned out to be real interesting, so I thought I'd copy a few choice parts and pass them on.

The first part is copied from "BOSTON AND THE BOSTON LEGEND" written by Lucius Beebe, and published by the D. Appleton-Century Company of New York in 1936.

"While the mass meeting had been in progress at the Old South Meeting House another meeting had been under way over in the south side of Court Street in the Long Room which was the back office of Edes and Gill's printing house. Edes and Gill were patriots; had printed a twenty four page feuilleton called "The Stamp Act," and were the publishers of the Boston Gazette and Country Journal. Sam Adams was moderator of the Long Room Club. Hancock, Otis, Samuel Dexter, Paul Revere, William Cooper, the town clerk, Quincy, Royal Tyler, Thomas Fleet and Sam Phillips were among the members. There were seventy or eighty of them and all those who were not attending the mass meeting had spent the afternoon at the Long Room. They had been shouting with laughter and sticking feathers in each other's hair and cutting up the furniture with trade tomahawks got from an old warehouse that had supplied them as far back as King Philip's wars. On the deal table there had been a five-gallon punchbowl and nobody had neglected it. The Massachusetts Historical Society later collected a considerable literature about the bowl, but neglected the detail of what had been in it. Bostonians familiar with the legend, however, assert that it was an arrangement very like modern fish house punch with a base of Medford rum, arrack, lime and brandy, probably in this case apple brandy rather than Cognac or Charente spirits, since they were very costly then as now. By six-thirty everybody was looking and acting precisely like Mohawks.

It had been the intention of the Long Room Members to attend the mass meeting at the Old South but, heartened with oratory, mutual encouragement and fish-house punch, they started straight for Griffin's

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Wharf with the overflow crowd from Milk Street at their heels. The wharf watchman was told it would be to his advantage to go somewhere else and, whooping and screaming, the mob of Mohawks descended upon the three tea ships. They rolled back the tarpaulins from the hatches, sprung the battens, and in ten minutes there was a cascade of lead foil cases of tea going over the ships' sides and into the harbor. The crowd on the pier cheered and slapped each other on the back. The Mohawks brandished their trade axes and dared the King of England to stop their tea party.

Sometimes the Indians missed their footing and fell to the deck with cries of surprise and indignation, scattering tea leaves under foot. Sometimes they mistook the water side of the vessel and tossed the cases down on the heads of the crowd on the dock. Now and then they stopped to give their attention to the supply of punch which had been brought along from the Long Room in case of emergency. They disposed of three hundred and forty-two chests of tea valued at 18,000 pounds sterling in a little under three hours, and the tide carried it out, past Wing's shipyard and the South Battery, past Gibb's Wharf and Wind Mill Point, and the next day the Dorchester shore was covered with it.

..... For, while the passage of time may make the Tea Party seem more of a gesture of protest than an act bordering on open revolt, it was a momentous business at the time and, for all that it was executed in a manner not totally devoid of comedy, it was a valiant undertaking. As long as they lived the members of the Mohawks were held in high esteem in Boston, first citizens in a time when citizenship was held in more regard than perhaps a later generation can understand.

.....It was this type of unpretentious patriot who formed the backbone and core of the Revolutionary Party, but associated with him were affluence and prestige, learning and the cloth. There was John Hancock whose mercantile connection and social position made him one of the first citizens of the community; James Bowdoin, a member of the General Court; Benjamin Church, a physician with the most conservative practice in town; James Lovell, a scholar and instructor of wide accomplishments; William Phillips, the merchant prince and Deacon of Old South Church; David Jeffries, the town treasurer and Timothy Newell, Deacon of the Brattle Street Church. And the list continues impressively through Dr. Warren of imperishable glory at Bunker Hill; William Cooper, for half a century the town clerk; Samuel Adams of Puritan pride and

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probity; Paul Revere, the silversmith; the wealthy and amiable Henry Hill. The American Revolution, so far as Boston was concerned, probably had more people of quality associated with it than with any similar revolt before or since.

.....The times were changing and mutation, social, political and scientific, was in the air. In the affairs of national state the Federalist party had already faded from the American horizon, and in the year 1822 after a heated but decorous debate, the old town government of Boston was voted into discard and the city's first mayor, a compromise candidate named John Phillips, was elected to office.

..... Boston in the early thirties was not an altogether urban community. True, the form of municipal government had been altered from that of a town to a chartered city, and a notably distinguished succession of mayors, beginning with John Phillips and continuing through the terms of Josiah Quincy, Harrison Gray Otis and Theodore Lyman, Jr., promised a high level of office-holders for some time to come.

.....The two outstanding figures of the anti-slavery movement in Boston were Wendell Phillips and William Lloyd Garrison. Stemming from different backgrounds, but each thrilling to the joys of a cause which enabled its partisans to deliver interminable addresses and harass their fellows with, presumably, the indulgence and even the approval of heaven, they emerged upon the unwilling consciousness of the city in the early thirties and have never been entirely erased from it since.

.....The exploitation of the reform movement remained largely in the hands of idealists and churchmen, Charles Sumner, Theodore Parker, Stephen Phillips, Harriet Beecher Stowe, Thomas Wentworth Higginson, and other nominal leaders and prophets, who, in the language of another generation, would be described as "front men."

.....The only fatal duel ever to have been fought in Massachusetts, according to the archives, took place on the Common in 1728. Whether or not the record is to be credited in chronicling only this unique death from such an encounter in a time when the practice was extremely widespread, especially in Tidewater Virginia and the Deep South, may be debated. Surely many other duels must have been fought in Massachusetts, if not among the Colonists, almost certainly among the king's officers quartered there at various times. That none of them were

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fatal in an age when surgery was still largely the business of the local barber would seem a matter for remark.

The difference of opinion between Benjamin Woodbridge and Henry Phillips arose in the tap-room of the Royal Exchange. Its subject was never known, but even in an age innocent of gossip paragraphers to solve all the riddles in the morning editions, the word spread that it was an affair of gallantry, and both gentlemen, in pursuance of the convention in such matters, retired from the Royal Exchange and left the drawing up of a cartel to others who had agreed to be their seconds.

The meeting was at dawn the next day at a secluded spot believed to have been near the Powder House. The seconds in attendance and the surgeon examined the military sabers which had been selected as weapons for similarity of length and weight. The principals removed their cloaks, hats and boots, standing in their stocking feet for more secure purchase on the damp grass, saluted, bowed and engaged their blades. A few minutes later Woodbridge slipped to one knee in an attempt to come up under his opponent's lightening parade, thrusting forward and blindly up. The sword passed under Phillips' arm, and Phillips ran him through the heart as he crouched unsteadily before him.

The man-o'-war Sheerness was sailing for the Carolinas that morning on the tide, and before a stroller on the Common had come across Woodbridge's body Phillips was aboard her, and Oliver's Dock and Wind Mill Point were falling rapidly astern. For although there was no law in Massachusetts which forbade dueling, there is no doubt that the Puritan community would have regarded the encounter as murder for all the punctilio with which it may have been carried out. There was a vast pothole over the affair and the coffee-houses and drawing rooms of the town talked of little else for days. Phillips, according to legend, never returned, but in the Granary Burying Ground there is today a headstone which tells that Henry Woodbridge, Esq., died July 3, 1728, in his twentieth year. He was Boston's only recorded victim of the code duello".

This is the end of the Lucius Beebe book, and the words quoted are exactly as written.

The second part of this paper is quotations from "THE PROPER BOSTONIANS" By Cleveland Amory, and published in 1950 by E.P. Dutton & Co., Inc., of New York.

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....."No true Boston merchant took any unnecessary risk. "Keep in shoal water" was a mercantile byword on Merchants' Row. This carried over into other fields as well. Jonathan Phillips set a standard for the future Proper Bostonian's love of understatement when, asked for a recommendation on behalf of his friend, William Ellery Channing, Boston's saintly Unitarian minister, he stated: "I have known him long. I have studied his character. I believe him capable of virtue".

.....Wendell Phillips, the abolitionist, though a son of Boston's first mayor and a First Family man, was still another young bridegroom far removed from the merchant-husband when he admitted that his wife invariably preceded him in the adoption of the various causes he advocated. Leaving his London boardinghouse one day to attend a convention where he was to deliver an address, he went out the door with the parting words of his young wife ringing in his ears: "Wendell, don't shilly shally." Wendell did not. Though the convention was a World Anti Slavery meeting and had nothing to do with women at all, Phillips ended by delivering the first speech ever made by a man in advocacy of the rights of women.

.....Agitator Wendell Phillips was a genuine First Family man but was not admitted by the front door in the best houses on Beacon Street. When the time came to tie a rope around the neck of the radical editor William Lloyd Garrison, a "mob of gentlemen," it is recorded, did the trick - and would have hanged him but for the timely arrival of outside aid.

.....Hand in hand with the conscience tradition there has come down in Boston a definite feeling for charity on a class basis. The example of one of Boston's earliest merchants who left his money to provide for persons reduced "by the Providence of God from Affluence to Penury" - and then, twenty-five years later, was again "by the Providence of God" called upon to "solicit his own charity" - would seem not to have been lost upon later generations of merchant Families. Of the eighteen Family trust charities in existence in Boston today six of them must still be administered, by the stern will of the donors, on what amounts to a riches-to-rags basis. The largest of these, the David Sears Charity, representing a sum of over \$300,000, goes directly, in the words of its donor, "for the support of citizens or families who may have seen better days." The Boylston Relief fund is even more specific and must be

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administered, again in the words of its originator, for the relief of persons "reduced by the acts of Providence, not by indolence, extravagance or other vice."

Long-standing First Family institutions have benefited greatly by this kind of severely upper-bracketed charity. The Boston Symphony is of course one of these. Another, of far more ancient vintage, is the Boston Athenaeum, the city's "gentlemen's library." Still another is the Massachusetts General Hospital. This old-line blue-blood institution stands unique among hospitals in its sheep and goat division of private patients, having its Baker Memorial for persons with incomes of \$7,000 or less, and its Phillips House for persons with incomes exceeding \$7,000. The price of rooms and doctors' fees are scaled accordingly. In the Baker no doctor may charge more than \$150. regardless of the nature of the operation he may perform or the number of times he may have to see his patient: in Phillips House he may charge what the traffic will bear.

.....The student body at Harvard had by the middle of the eighteenth century a system of caste that not even Boston Society of that day could match. By 1749 all students were, upon entering, ranked by the president according to their social standing. The ranking was strictly official; students were listed in the catalogue by it, and it determined not only the order of chapel seating and marching in college processions but also precedence for classroom reciting and serving oneself at table. While all ranking was done in what was to become the great Boston Society tradition - according, it was recorded, "to the Dignity of the Familie whereto the students severally belonged" - there can be no doubt that it caused a certain amount of hard feeling. In a noted essay on the subject the late New England historian, Franklin Bowditch Dexter, a Yale man, put the matter of these early-day Harvard rankings as tactfully as possible but made it clear that it was usually some time before each newly ranked class was "settled down to an acquiescence in their allotment," and that often the parents of the young men were "enraged beyond bounds." Dexter blamed most of the trouble on the "intermediate" members of the class, claiming that the highest and the lowest rankings were more "comfortably ascertained" than theirs. He cited the case of one Bostonian who, piqued to note his son was ranked fourteenth in a class of thirty-five while he had been tenth in a class of thirty-seven, went off and tried unsuccessfully to found a new college in western Massachusetts.

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The most notable case of dissatisfaction with the rankings was no matter of the "intermediates" or Harvard bourgeoisie, however, but concerned the distinguished Phillips Family, noted for their connection with Andover and Exeter Academies. It took place in the summer of 1769 with the publication of the rank list for the following fall. Searching the list Samuel Phillips, wealthy merchant, discovered that his son Samuel, Jr., later founder of Andover Academy, was well down the line, and in time-honored Proper Bostonian manner he complained directly to Harvard's president. He felt particularly strongly about his son's being placed below a boy named Daniel Murray, but it is worth noting that he did not make his complaint on the grounds that he was a wealthy merchant and that Murray's father was not. The merchant era had not yet come into its nineteenth-century own in Boston Society; this was the magistrate era, and Phillips rested his case solely on the point that while both he and Murray, Sr. were Justices of the Peace, he had been a Justice longer than Mr. Murray, and therefore Phillips, Jr. deserved precedence over Murray, Jr.

Harvard's president was a man named Edward Holyoke, distinguished in the college's social history largely through the fact that it was in his reign - 1759 - that an edict was passed forbidding the wearing of nightgowns by students. At the time of Phillips' complaint he was in the last of his thirty-two years on Harvard's throne and had apparently little stomach for a quarrel over the point. In any case, he promptly re-ranked his entire student body, elevating young Phillips not only the number of notches demanded by his parent but also a few extra ones for good measure. Phillips never troubled to thank Holyoke for this, but upon noting the new ratings, under date of 29 August 1769 he wrote his son a letter which remains - more for what it does not say than for what it says - a sharp commentary on Proper Bostonian father-to-son protocol.

"You are now in the most difficult situation & the eyes of all, above and below you, will be upon you, & I wish it might be that you could be at home till the talk about the change was a little over. Every word, action, and even your countenance, will be watched, particularly by those who envy you, and perhaps by those who do not. If any difficulties should arise with any of your classmates who fall below you, treat them with all possible tenderness. If Murray is uneasy and manifests it to you, say nothing to irritate him. On the whole say as little as possible."

It is significant that Harvard's presidents finally abandoned official

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social ranking, not in deference to democratic ideals, but simply because, as highlighted in the Phillips case, it had begun to cause them a great deal of trouble in their public relations”.

Again, the quotations are exactly as written. Funny, though, how accurately some of those words describe members of the family, or family characteristics, of those living today. I probably wouldn't dare say that if I was an outsider, but after over thirty years of living with Vivienne, who is the daughter of John Gideon Phillips, who was the grandson of Mayor John Phillips, I feel not only qualified, but entitled, to express my opinion.

Jim Jennings