

The Waltham Historical Society
190 MOODY STREET
WALTHAM, MASSACHUSETTS



The Waltham Historical Society
190 Moody Street, Waltham, MA 02453

And



The Historical Society of Watertown
Organized 1888
28 Marshall Street, Watertown, MA 02472



CHARLES RIVER
MUSEUM OF INDUSTRY

Will hold a combined meeting meet at the

Tuesday, September 13, 2005 ***7:00 pm: Tour the Charles River Museum*** ***7:30 pm: Raytheon presentation***

The next meeting of the Waltham Historical Society will be held at 7:00 pm, Tuesday, September 13, 2005.

This special meeting, in cooperation with the Historical Society of Watertown, will be held at the Charles River Museum of Industry.

The meeting will feature a tour of the Charles River Museum of Industry at 7:00 pm, followed by a presentation by Alan Earls and Robert Edwards based on their new book about Raytheon.

Parking is available in the Embassy lot off Pine Street.

Once parked, cross the foot-bridge over the Charles River and turn right to the entrance of the Museum.

If you have any questions, please contact Sheila FitzPatrick at 781-894-0062 or email Wayne McCarthy at waynemccarthy@rcn.com.

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Historic Waltham Days 2005 ***September 17-October 1, 2005***

The Waltham Historical Society is sponsoring a number of events during this year's Historic Waltham Days, September 17- October 1, 2005.

High School history teacher Jack Cox will be conducting a free tour of some of the historic gravesites in the Grove Hill cemetery on Thursday, September 22, at 6:30 pm.

On Saturday, September 24th at the Charles River Museum of Industry, Mr. Douglas Carrier will be giving a lecture and slide show on the buses and trolleys that plied the roads in and around Waltham at the turn of the 20th century.

The lecture begins at 11:00 am, and will feature information about Trolley 41, a vehicle that saw duty on Main and Moody Streets.

The Society is also conducting a self-guided driving tour of some of the most architecturally significant homes in North Waltham. The purchase of this tour book will guide you past many homes of special interest, and can be purchased for \$10 each at the Mayor's Picnic on Waltham Common, September 17th. Books may also be purchased after the 17th by contacting the Society.

The Waltham Historical Society is grateful for the continued support of the RTN Federal Credit Union.



About this issue's featured story

The intent of The Waltham Historical Society's Newsletter is to provide information on historical, current, and upcoming events in which the Society is involved. We will also attempt to include items of interest that are in the possession of the Society.

This issue contains part three of a previously unpublished work researched and written by Mr. Edmund L. Sanderson, secretary of the Historical Society in the 1930s.

This article, and the others to come, have been retyped

by students at Waltham High School in the Youth Tech Entrepreneurs class. Led by Ms. Suzanne Bozak (WHS '05) the material is also being prepared for use on the Historical Society web site:

walthamhistoricalsociety.org

We hope you enjoy.

"Are you mortal
or immortal?"

The Ghost of Plympton Pond Part III

By Edmund L. Sanderson, May 1939

INTRODUCTION

At a meeting of the Waltham Historical Society held May 16, 1922 the subject of the Plympton Pond Ghost was introduced and Mrs. Sumner Milton suggested that the secretary make complete notes of the remarks so that an accurate description of the event might be preserved for posterity.

Mrs. Milton and Thomas H. Armstrong were the principal ones to take part at that meeting but the secretary consulted with Charles F. Stone, Nathan Warren and George L. Johnson, the latter a grandson of the originator of the ghost.

The manuscript made from these notes was placed on file with the Society's collection. It has been shown to a number of interested persons and was read at one of the Rotary Club meetings as an authoritative account.

However the event took place long before the birth of any of the narrators and they could only tell their remembrance of what they had been told. In the secretary's search of the Waltham newspaper files for material for his Waltham History a number of communications in regard to the ghost were found. There were a number in 1875 in which statements made in one issue were corrected in the next and as some of the corrections were made after consultation with the sole living participant the truth in respect to the names of the actors and the sequence of the events seems to be fairly well established. The accurate description mentioned above is therefore superseded by the following account.

Edmund L. Sanderson. Sec.

May 1939.

THE GHOST OF PLYMPTON POND.

Sometime, probably early in the 1840's John McClannan, a man in the employ of Dr. Newell Johnson and who lived on Pond Street, saw one evening on the shore of Plympton Pond a figure draped in white. Now Mr. McClannan was a firm believer in ghosts and he claimed to have seen and dispelled many a one. He took his Bible and carrying it open before he advanced boldly towards the apparition which promptly disappeared. Of course McClannan told many of his experience and aroused great interest. The ghost did not stay exorcised but soon appeared again. On one occasion McClannan summoned up enough courage to ask, "Are you mortal or immortal?" In sepulchral tone the reply was, "I am the spirit of a murdered man". "Who murdered you?" "Old Plympton, and my bones are buried in yonder field under that large stone." The next morning McClannan was actually found by the owner of the field and others digging for the bones. This incident added to the excitement and people in large numbers from surrounding towns, even from Boston, drove to the nearby fields and waited for the ghost to appear. It was very obliging and about three times a week would return to its favorite resort on the marshy shore of the west part of the pond. Various attempts were made to capture it but without success for as soon as it was closely approached it would disappear only to reappear a considerable distance away. Finally the military company took a hand in the affair and one young man who had considerable reputation as a marksman fired his gun at the apparition. It disappeared and was not again seen.

Mr. Plympton, a prominent man of the town and owner of a large amount of land including the pond that bears his name, became

Ghost of Plympton Pond (continued)

very indignant at the publicity given him and had Dr. Sherman, who was suspected of being the impersonator of the ghost, arrested and brought into court for defaming his character. The principal witness was John McClannan and when he testified that "What he had seen was a real ghost and no Sherman nor any other man" the case was dismissed and Sherman released.

Nevertheless Dr. Sherman was undoubtedly the ring leader in the exploit, ably assisted by Phineas Upham and Gideon Haynes and others. One, whose name is at present unknown, who took the part of the ghost the last night took cold from exposure in the water and died not long after. The scheme seems to have been to have the members take turns in impersonating the ghost while the others mingled with the crowd to divert suspicion. Sometimes two or three would station themselves in different parts of the marsh but only one show himself. When he was approached too closely he would throw off and conceal his sheet whereupon the one next to him but some distance away would show himself and so continue making the spirit appear to flit from place to place in a miraculous manner. It is believed that there was no malice shown in selecting Mr. Plympton as a victim of the joke but that it was done because he was a prominent man whose slight physique made the idea ludicrous.

The above was written from information furnished by Mrs. Sumner Milton, Thomas H. Armstrong, Charles F. Stone, Nathan Warren and a clipping probably from the Boston Herald, published probably Feb. 1883 or earlier given by George L. Johnson a grandson of Dr. Sherman.

Thomas R. Plympton was a very erect man but small and very slender. One evening he was in company with other townsmen in the Stearns & Crehore store wearing very close fitting trousers. His appearance reminded one of the company of the candles so much in use at that period. He said "Colonel, were your legs run or dipped?"

The above is an anecdote related by Thomas H. Armstrong.

"What he had seen was a real ghost and no Sherman nor any other man!"

CALENDAR

FGS/UGA Reminders of the Past: Visions for the Future Conference to be held in Salt Lake City, Utah on September 7-10, 2005. www.familysearch.org. The 2006 Conference will be held at the Hynes Auditorium in August-September and be co-hosted by NEHGS.

Fourth Annual Conference at the Mass. School of Law, October 1-2, 2005. **The North in the Civil War.** For information contact Rosa Figueiredo at 978-681-0800 or rosal@msslaw.edu.

The O'Hara Dial Company, by Gerrit A. Nijssen will be the presentation at the Waltham Historical Society's November 20 meeting. Held at the Waltham Public Library, the meeting will begin at 2:00 pm.

House Tour 2005

The 2005 Waltham House Tour was a huge success! The weather cooperated—it was a sunny, mild day. Nine owners opened their lovely homes to us. We viewed from late 18th century to early 20th century architecture, with beautiful décor inside.

A big thank you to co-chairs Joline Fish and Joan Sheridan. And thank you to all who helped in a variety of ways—homeowners Jackie Bauer, Joyce Gianfelice, Bob and Kathy LeBlanc, Nathan and Barbara Liskov, Candy McGann, Roberto Pineda, Ellie and Pete Smerlas, Stacy Thayer, and the Philosophy Foundation. Our docents included Ruth Arena, Ann Channell, Marie Daly, Ginny Hays, Jean Husson, Mort Isaacson and Erica Zissman, Virginia Kosvo, Joyce Kelly, Barbara and Frank Maloney, Esther Seeley, David Smith, and Mary Spiers. Ticket takers were Joan Sheridan and Mike Squillante. Kathy McMenimen honored the home owners with certificates of appreciation from the City Council. Assistance with printing was provided by students in the Graphic Communications class and Waltham High School. Frank Maloney and Joan Sheridan sold "business" friends. Louise Hamilton sent out publicity.

A big thank you to all who helped.

We are already planning for our 10th Annual House Tour in June, 2006. Please let Wayne, Sheila, Joan, or Joline know if you'd like to help. We need people to obtain ads, do publicity, write/research homes, sell tickets prior to the event, be docents the day of the event, and especially—**WE NEED HOMES TO VIEW!**

2005 Business Friends of the Waltham Historical Society

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Francis Alexander Durivage, Waltham Author

By Marie Daly,



Traveling east on Trapelo Road, one passes a red shingled house at 280 Trapelo Road, a quarter mile beyond the National Archives. The lawn sign indicates that the house is named "Cardinal Cottage," and is the Volunteer Center for the Fernald Development Center. The history of the house predates its current use and ownership. In fact, the house was built by Abraham Sanger in 1849. From 1855 to 1862, Francis Durivage and family occupied the house. In 1880, the occupant was J. W. Munroe, a farmer, and his family; and in 1900, Hardwick Bryant, a milk dealer, rented the house. The house was also known as the St. Elizabeth's Hospital Farm, and the house served as a retreat for nuns from the hospital. The house was named for Cardinal William O'Connell.

The second owner of the house, Francis Alexander Durivage was a well-known author in his day. Over his sixty-five year lifespan, Durivage wrote many poems, short stories, plays and dime novels. His writing was published in the *Atlantic Monthly*, the *Flag of Our Union*, the *Ladies Home Companion*, *Gleason's Pictorial Drawing Room Companion* and *Ballou's Pictorial* magazines, and various New York and Boston newspapers. He co-edited the *Boston Daily Times* and *Ballou's Pictorial*.

Francis Alexander Durivage was born in Boston on 7 April 1814, and was the son of Francis S. Durivage and Lucy Everett. His mother was born on 17 October 1791, and was the daughter of Rev. Oliver Everett and the sister of Hon. Edward Everett, Governor of Massachusetts. His father was an artist and teacher of modern languages in Boston. Durivage demonstrated a flair for writing at an early age, and was awarded several academic prizes, including a gold medal for poetry, at the Boston Latin School. Among his friends at Boston Latin was John B. Fitzpatrick, who later became the Roman Catholic Bishop of Boston. He began writing for Boston and New York newspapers as a schoolboy, and at the age of sixteen, edited a literary magazine, *The Amateur*, to which Oliver Wendell Holmes, among others, contributed.

In 1837, he established a school in Boston, but soon left that occupation to work as an engraver for the state survey of Massachusetts. Durivage was an accomplished artist, and at one point was torn between careers in writing or art. When Americans became fascinated with a new technology, the daguerreotype photographic process, Durivage and his cousin, Rev. Edward Everett Hale, built themselves a camera. With this camera in 1840, the two cousins took what Hale believed to be the first photograph of a person in Boston.

But Durivage returned to his writing career, publishing short stories and poems in magazines and newspapers. He wrote several dramatic pieces that played in New York and Boston theaters.

He was on the editorial staff of the *Boston Daily Times*, and wrote many editorials and articles for the paper. Along with W. S. Chase he translated Lamartine's *History of the Revolution of 1848*. He also wrote for the *Spirit of the Times* humorous short stories under the pen name, "Old 'Un." In 1849, he published a volume of these short stories, with George P. Burnham, *Stray Subjects*. He began writing in 1851 for *Gleason's Pictorial Drawing Room Companion* magazine, and later *Ballou's Pictorial*. In 1853, he published another volume of short stories, entitled, *Life Scenes, Sketched in Light and Shadow from the World Around Us*. He also published several short, "dime" novels: *Angela, or Love and Guilt: A Tale of Boston and Its Environs*; *Mike Martin: or, the Last of the Highwaymen: A Romance of Reality*; *Edith Vernon, or Crime and Retribution: A Tragic Story of New England Founded Upon Fact*; and *The Spanish Galleon: or, The Pirate of the Mediterranean*; and *The Romance of the Corsair Kidd*. The stories were erudite, well-crafted but predictable, with fainting heroines and dastardly villains, and

story lines that included European nobles and well-to-do Bostonians. Politically nationalistic, he wrote poems praising General Butler at Monterey and Civil War era cavalry.

He moved from Winchester to Waltham in 1855, and combined a nine-to-five job as a customs house official with his publishing career. In 1860, Durivage was living in Waltham with his wife, Almira (Aldworth), and their children, Mary, Francis A., Henry A., William, and Mary A., and his mother Lucy. His sons had joined the Light Dragoons, a Waltham paramilitary organization in the years just before the Civil War. Henry subsequently signed up for service with the Union cause in the Civil War in 1861. After his service under General Butler and in Fortress Monroe, Henry returned home to Waltham, and was given permission to enlist a company of cavalry. He was appointed a captain, leader of the Massachusetts 3rd Cavalry, and was dispatched to New Orleans. He drowned accidentally having fallen overboard a military transport ship in the Mississippi River on 3 April 1862. Durivage's poem, *All*, is a moving allegory of grief following a horseman's death, perhaps written following his son's death.

He moved to New York in 1862, after the death of his son in the Civil War, and was appointed to a clerkship in the Customs House. He toured Europe on numerous occasions, visiting France, Italy, Belgium, Holland and Prussia, and the European setting of many of his stories reflected his international outlook. In 1875, returning from a visit to Europe, he fell out of his berth and was badly injured. He was paralyzed on one side as a result of his injuries. On 1 February 1881, he died at his daughter's residence at 223 West Fifty-Fourth Street in New York City, at the age of 65 years.

The residence of Francis A. Durivage is currently owned by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, and as part of the Fernald Development Center campus, is included in the National Register of Historic Landmarks. If the Department of Mental Retardation closes the institution, the historic designation may protect many buildings from demolition. Waltham residents hope that the Massachusetts Historic Commission will require the preservation of the house, should the Fernald property be declared surplus.

Note: A number of books written by Francis A. Durivage can be found at the Boston Public Library, Harvard University Houghton Library and the largest number at the American Antiquarian Society in Worcester.

Sources:

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- United States Federal Census 1860, Waltham, Massachusetts, Series M563, Roll 511, page 529.
- "Francis A. Durivage," *Ballou's Pictorial*, Vol. XII, No. 12, November 21, 1857.
- "The Late Capt. Durivage," *Waltham Sentinel*, May 16, 1862.
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- "Francis Alexander Durivage," *Encyclopedia of American Biography, Handy Book of American Authors*. New York: Thomas Y. Crowell and Co., 1907. Available on-line at www.ancestry.com.
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