

SIDE WALKS SANDI SERKESS THERE'S NO PLACE LIKE HOME!

We learn, as we should, about Columbus and Plymouth and Washington and the Freedom Trail. We visit Paul Revere's house, go to Plymouth Plantation, and visit the State House. For recreation we play in Billing's Field, but no one ever tells us who the Billings family was. (Grist for a future column!) We swim in Draper Pool, but are never told who the Drapers are! We drive on Weld Street, but are never given the connection of former Governor William Weld and his ancestors' trek on the Mayflower. Most shamefully of all, we, all of us, myself included, pass the Westerly Burial Ground perhaps several times a week for decades and never stop to enter or wonder or inquire. Were it not for the inimitable Bob Murphy of the West Roxbury Historical Society, its riches might never have been yielded in depth.

If you have not gone in, I implore you to do so. It is located directly opposite the Corrib and next to Walgreen's. Most of those interred there arrived on the Mayflower, and the dates will astound you. The history of the founding families of West Roxbury can almost be gleaned from the dates and proximity of the tombstones—who is buried next to whom? The Richards Family is yet another dynasty unknown unless you have been fortunate enough to have spent time with Bob Murphy and learned the history of Richards Tavern, built in 1730's and having been replaced only recently in the 1960's with the current post office.

Dare I tell you, will you believe me, that all the original bills for the staples purchased for the tavern (in pounds and shillings, no less) are safely stored in the archives of West Roxbury? That Hannah Richards, the daughter, kept a daily dairy and that the original diary still is to be found in the archives, in the Feeney Room of the West Roxbury Archives. That anyone can see it, read it, hold it. Most of it is boring, but the glimpses of life that it reveals... She lived in a mansion where CVS is now, taught in a school that was located at the corner of Mt. Vernon and Center Streets, and her best friend was Betsy Draper. Just think.

The rest of this article I have stolen from a web site (www.bostonfamilyhistory.com) which I urge you to visit. Its authorship is to be attributed to the Boston History Collaborative, as Maureen Taylor, the key person behind the website, informed me. Boston History Collaborative, 650 Beacon Street, Boston, MA 02215, phone: (617)350-0358, fax: (617)350-0357.

I am going to present the website as written, but severely shortened, in the interest of space. Please try to read the original yourself!

Pre-1630: Area is inhabited by the Wampanoag Indian Tribe.

1630: The first Puritan settlers arrive in Roxbury, led by William Pynchon. The town is originally called Rockberry. The town is named after the unique rock outcroppings later called Roxbury puddingstone. All the other Roxburys in the United States from the town of Roxbury in New Hampshire to Roxbury Drive in Beverly Hills have their origin in Roxbury, Massachusetts.

1632: The first meetinghouse and burial ground are constructed in what is now the John Eliot Square (Roxbury Highlands) section of the town. Reverend John Eliot is the minister. Eliot is known as "The Apostle of the Indians" for his efforts to christianize the Native American population.

1635: Reverend Eliot founds the Roxbury Latin School. It moves to West Roxbury in 1922.

1643: Joseph Weld, one of the first settlers of West Roxbury, is granted a large tract of land by the Massachusetts Bay Company stretching from Forest Hills to Brookline as a reward for negotiating a treaty with the Pequot Indians.

1652: Approximately 120 houses are in town. Most dwellings are in John Eliot Square, named after the preacher who wrote the first bible in the Algonkian Language.

1662: Centre Street is laid out as the main route between Boston and Hartford, Connecticut.

1683: The Westerly Burial Ground is located on Centre Street, in the area of the original Roxbury settlement.

1706: Approximately 45 families settled around Jamaica Pond form the independent town of Jamaica Plain.

1710: The area from Jamaica Plain to Dedham is known as Jamaica End or Spring Street. The area from Roslindale (known as South Street) out is known as West Roxbury Village.

1711: West Roxbury residents build The Second Church of Christ on Walter Street to avoid having to travel. They also establish the Walter Street Burial Ground. Today the site of this defunct house is located in the Arnold Arboretum.

1733: The congregation moves to a building on Centre Street. Today it is the Theodore Parker Unitarian Church.

1767: Jeremiah Richards donates money to build the first school in town.

1776: General George Washington uses Weld Hill for rallies.

1805: Washington Street is laid out. Originally called Dedham Turnpike, it is later renamed for General George Washington and is the main route connecting Dedham to Boston.

1835: The Old South Evangelical Church is built on Mount Vernon and Centre Streets. The church becomes the West Roxbury Congregational Church (1891) and now is a branch of the Boston Public Library.

1837-1846: Reverend Theodore Parker is minister of the Second Church of Roxbury. He is a staunch abolitionist.

1841: The pastor of Purchase Street Unitarian Church, George Ripley, comes to Roxbury with his wife Sophia. They establish Brook Farm, later used as a Civil War camping ground for the 54th Massachusetts Regiment, and the Martin Luther Home German orphanage (1870). The farm also includes a section of Roxbury Puddingstone (Drumlins or hills created by retreating glaciers) called "Pulpit Rock" where John Eliot preached to the Native Americans in the seventeenth century.

1848: The Boston and Providence Railroad creates stops at Central (Bellevue) Street, West Roxbury Village, and Spring Street. Increased access to town causes the area's population to expand and, in turn, urbanizes this previously rural farming community.

1849: Park Street and La Grange Streets are laid out.

1851: West Roxbury breaks away from Roxbury in an attempt to remain rural. West Roxbury includes Roslindale and Jamaica Plain.

1856: West Roxbury is connected to Roxbury by horse drawn streetcars.

1863: Colonel Robert Gould Shaw is killed along with 255 of his troops after an attack on Fort Wagner, South Carolina. A West Roxbury native, Shaw is the leader of the 54th Massachusetts Regiment, the first all black company of soldiers in the Civil War.

1873: West Roxbury is annexed to Boston.

1902: A group of Jewish families establish a farm co-operative modeled after Brook Farm. They raise cattle and horses on Washington Street but soon have to close down for economic reasons.

1909: The Elevated Railway runs to Jamaica Plain with streetcar lines into West Roxbury.

1911: The West Roxbury Woman's Club forms to educate and unite women.

1920: Three quarters of the current buildings in West Roxbury are built after this date.

1922: The Roxbury Latin School (founded by Reverend John Eliot in 1635) moves to West Roxbury.

1927: The Holy Name Church is established on Centre Street.

The history stops there. I can't imagine why.

Wow!

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