

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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Boston's Old Granary

Among many books and pamphlets about Boston which I gathered while in that historic city a number of years ago there is a copy of a Knights Templar edition of 1895, "How to See Boston."

It gives this note: "The Granary Burial Ground has more distinguished inmates than any other in Boston, including seven governors, three signers of the Declaration of Independence, Peter Faneuil, Paul Revere, the victims of the Boston Massacre," etc.

Benjamin Franklin's parents have the most conspicuous monument, erected in 1837 by citizens to replace the one put up by the philosopher himself. There may have been other Mother Gooses, but the Boston one actually lived and died there in the late 1600s.

When I went to the old burying grounds for the purpose of actually seeing the grave of Mother Goose, I gazed at many of the old slate markers but could not find the important one I was seeking. There were two old men raking the grounds of leaves and cleaning up the quiet and peaceful place.

Finally one of them, a true Irishman, approached me and said, "I wager I know what you are looking for – Mother Goose's grave." Of course, I admitted that was the purpose of my visit.

We walked together for a few feet; then he raised his rake and spread apart the limbs of a weeping willow tree which swept the ground, and there was the state marker which read: "Here lies the body of Mary Goose, died 1690." Beside it is a little one, reading: "Here lies Hannah, another little Goose."

The name "granary" has an interesting history. The Granary was once the largest building in Boston. It was maintained by the town during most of the nineteenth century, holding 12,000 bushels of grain in reserve, to be sold at cost to the poor in time of famine.

It stood on the place of the Park Street Church, a plain, old-fashioned meeting-house with a really fine spire, built by an English architect in 1809. The intense orthodoxy preached here won for the locality the name of "Brimstone Corner," and the great choir enjoyed wide renown.

John Fenno, a noted wit, was the keeper of the Granary before the Revolution. It stood next to the burial grounds by the same name. The building was not used as a granary after the war but was occupied by various minor town officials. In 1795 the town voted to sell the building, but it was not until 1809 that it was removed to Commercial Point, Dorchester, and altered into a hotel.

In Samuel Adams Drake's "Old Landmarks of Boston" (eighth edition published in 1893), he wrote: "The frigate's (Old Ironsides) sails were made in the Old Granary at the corner of Park and Tremont streets, where now stands the Park Church. No other building in Boston was large enough. In the Park Street Church the national hymn "America" was sung on July 4, 1832. It was written by Samuel Francis Smith."

Mrs. Mary L. Greene, former curator of the Old Custom House, visiting here from her new home in San Miguel Allende, Mexico, has told me that the little white school house where Mary took her lamb to school one day was directly across the street from her grandmother's summer cottage in Sterling Mass.

The historic little building was later purchased by Henry Ford and is now among the exhibits in Dearborn, near Detroit, the home of the late Henry Ford and the site of the early American village founded by him.