



WILLIAM SUMNER APPLETON IN 1917. (Photo SPNEA.)

Beacon

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When William Sumner Appleton, Jr., was born on 29 May 1874 to William Sumner Appleton and his cousin-wife Edith Stuart Appleton, he entered not merely the human dimension, but that of Beacon Hill. The name conjures up a world of culture unknown to most of America by personal experience, one which has earned national significance as an image, a foil, a vision, a contrast to the vast physical quality demonstrated by the burgeoning west, the corporate appetite, and the political machine. It connotes a world of the mind, active, abstract, esoteric. It suggests both leadership and subtlety of approach. The triple mound whose beacon early gave the name has long since changed; the beacon visible in ancient prints has disappeared. Yet the beacon's image has remained, carried forward from the 18th century by an articulate handful whose vitality of self-definition and intellectual vigor helped to create 19th century Beacon Hill, which was then real and which has become a vision. Sumner Appleton did not discover that he too was a carrier of that vision and image until 1910, when he was 36 years old; his contribution to the environment of preservation in the 20th century was a direct result of Beacon Hill's contributions to him.

In real terms, the hill in 1795 rose in empty splendor over the crowded city elements clustered near the Boston waterfront — the small timber detached houses and stores, the few mansions of the energetic, not-so-idle rich, the public

buildings of increasing architectural magnificence. In that year, a development syndicate created a commercial scheme and unwittingly helped to create a cultural revolution. With eighteen and a half acres purchased from John Singleton Copley, portrait painter fled to England, the developers under the name of Mount Vernon Proprietors began to shape a social world. Among the proprietors were Charles Bulfinch, who represented the arts — he had just returned from England's Adam influence, and Harrison Gray Otis, of politics and the law, whose three houses built by Bulfinch across the hill date that social spread and yet remain to grace the urban scene. There were apothecary William Scollay, merchant Jonathan Mason, shipowner Joseph Woodward, representing commerce in all its variegated forms, and the only woman member, Mrs. Hepzibah Clarke Swan.¹ In their combination of interests, they built a residential world, as the vigorous, the successful, and the ambitious in the port of Boston began to establish themselves on Beacon Hill.

Bulfinch was planner first as he laid out the grid of streets, then architect. Having lost money on the Tontine Crescent tract, he was forced to become a professional architect, not merely a gentleman-amateur. On the spine of the hill on Mount Vernon Street grew at first the choicest residential properties, including in 1800-1802 the second Harrison Gray Otis house at #85. Otis had moved up there from Cambridge Street on the north side,

Dramatis Personae

NATHAN APPLETON (1779-1861)

married 1. Maria Theresa Gold
(1786-1833)

Issue:

Thomas Gold Appleton (1812-84) un-
married, painter, writer, aesthete, wit
Mary (1813-1889) married 1839 Robert
James McIntosh (1806-64) of Lon-
don, Gov. of British Leeward Is.

Charles Sedgewick Appleton (1815-35)
unmarried

Frances Elizabeth (1817-61) married
1843 Henry W. Longfellow

Issue:

Charles A. Longfellow (1844-93)

Ernest Longfellow (1845-1921)

Fanny (1847-8)

Alice Mary Longfellow (1850-1928)

Edith (1853-1915) married Richard H.
Dana III

Anne Allegra (1855-1934) married
Joseph Thorp

George William Appleton (1826-7)

married 2. Harriot Coffin Sumner
-1867)

Issue:

William Sumner Appleton (1840-1903)
married Edith Stuart Appleton

Issue:

WILLIAM SUMNER APPLETON
(1874-1947) unmarried, founder
SPNEA

Dorothy

Eleanor

Gladys

Harriot (1841-1923) married Maj.
Greely Stevenson Curtis

Nathan Appleton (1843-1906)

and, again ahead of the social tide, would move to #45 Beacon Street in 1806-07 where Bulfinch built him a third house at about the middle of the Common. Each of these houses was imposing, of brick facing lightened with stone, a freestanding monument to worldly success.

This Bulfinch-Otis combination was irresistible, so a younger group of the ambitious middle class followed their lead to Beacon Street, where windows looked on trees and open space. Just down the hill was (and still is) a pair of bow-front town houses, graceful and elegant in brick

behind carved wooden pilasters which stretch to the fourth floor (Figure 1). Built by James Colburn in 1806, their architect was Asher Benjamin, who became another leader in the development of Beacon Hill's style. In 1808 Colburn sold #54 Beacon Street to Nathan Appleton, a rising merchant who thereupon began to move in the best social circles.

In real terms, Beacon Hill was an attractive residential area for leaders and potential leaders of Boston. They by their ideas — creative and far-reaching — and



FIG. 1. 54 AND 55 BEACON STREET, BOSTON, 1806, ASHER BENJAMIN, ARCHITECT. (Photo SPNEA.)

by their real accomplishments molded in succeeding decades the public image of the hill.

Nathan Appleton was clearly a success (Figure 2). From Ipswich, Massachusetts, where Samuel, his Appleton ancestor had farmed since his arrival in 1636 from Little Waldingfield, England, near the Winthrop home, to New Ipswich, New Hampshire, where Isaac Appleton began to farm about 1750,² the Appletons were good Yankee stock. Nathan, however, rejected the farm and chose the city. Before the age of 27, he had become a successful merchant, dealing in fabrics, laces, and other textiles, and established himself sufficiently to marry well. On 13 April 1806 he married Maria Theresa Gold, daughter of Thomas Gold and Marsha Marsh Gold of Pittsfield. Progressive and affluent in western Massachusetts, Gold, lawyer and Yale graduate, believed in education for women; he sent his daughter to boarding school at the age of 12. The young Appletons were intelligent and also handsome. Nathan commissioned Gilbert Stuart in 1812 to paint his wife's portrait, and then consented to have his own done as well.³ They offered distinction to the second floor parlor or the oval dining room at 54 Beacon Street.

Nathan Appleton was a collector. He first collected wealth. Although he had made a solid mercantile start prior to his marriage, in 1811-1814 he took vigorous steps towards founding the fortune which would enrich not only his descendants, but also the cultural institutions of Boston. At that time he invested \$5,000 (thinking that \$10,000 would be foolhardy) in the Boston Manufacturing Company at Waltham, thereby entering the business of cotton manufacture of plain, unprinted goods. Like others in New England, he had begun to believe that the future of American business was in true

freedom from British manufacture. With cotton from the South, Yankee vigor and water power and labor, textiles could be made in Massachusetts. Although prospects looked bleak for a time, and New England's mercantile problems increased with the Embargo, Appleton's far-sighted investment was only the first of many. In 1821, he was one of the founders of the Merrimack Manufacturing Company (and thereby the town of Lowell) owning 180 out of 600 shares of its stock. In 1825 he was its president, the company a growth stock paying annual dividends for decades to come of 12%.⁴ It was the power loom which changed the face of New England, and indirectly that of all the nation, and it was Nathan Appleton who had the responsibility for establishing works for the manufacture of printed cloth.⁵ From this time on, his investments had a ripple effect, multiplying geometrically.

During these years the Appletons both established a family and moved farther up Beacon Street, higher on the hill. They produced five children, and by 1817 had outgrown their house. The grace and delicacy of their Asher Benjamin house at #54 had been newly stylish when the Appletons had moved into it in 1808. By 1817, however, a different style offering an interpretation of classic forms far more austere, formal, and masculine was coming into vogue. It is probable that the architect they selected in 1817 who built for them #39 Beacon Street was Alexander Parris⁶. (See cover.) It was (and yet remains) handsome, bow-fronted and generous in proportion, with one of the first Greek doorways in Boston, characterizing an entirely new architectural expression. The interior of this house, finished in 1821, shows a graceful curving stair and a mantelpiece on which was carved a symbolic laurel wreath. This was

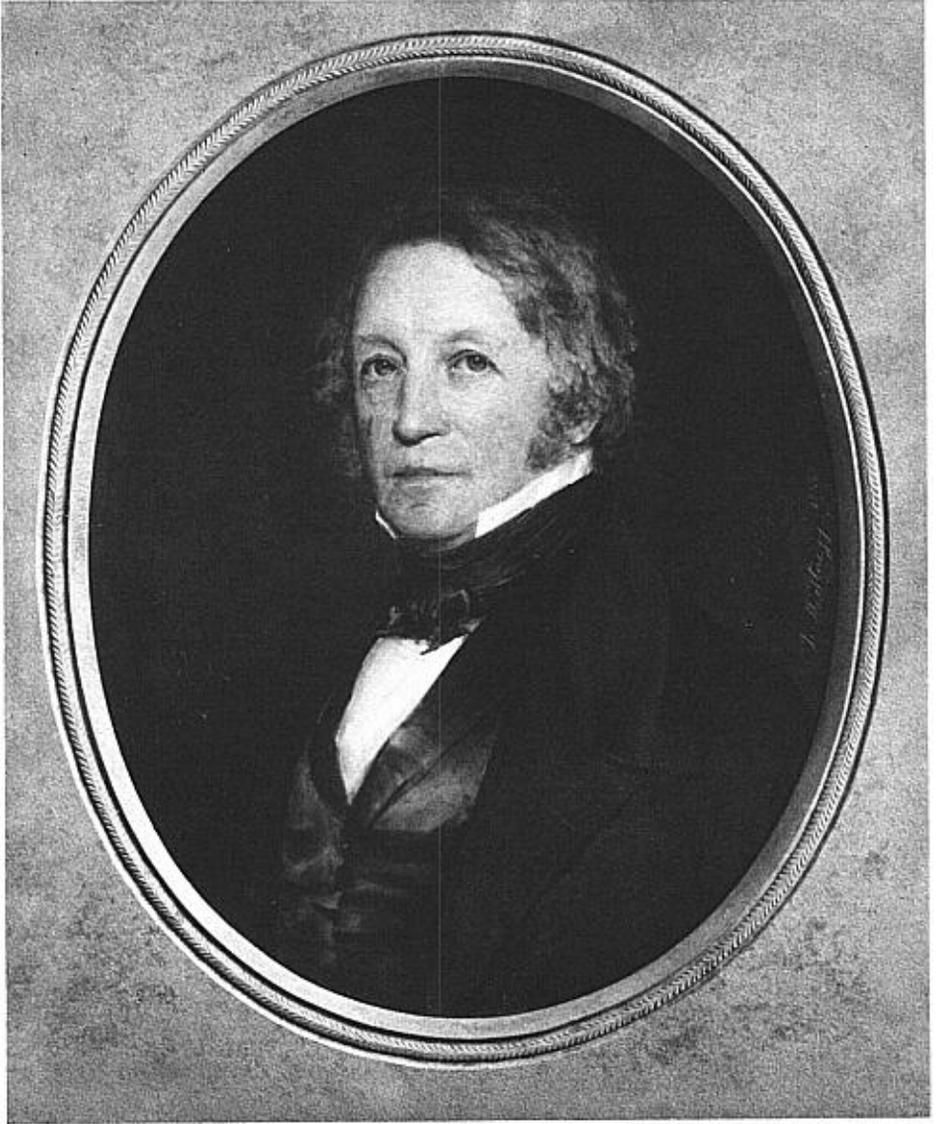


FIG. 2. NATHAN APPLETON, 1884. From a miniature by B. M. Staigg. (Photo SPNEA.)

a sophisticated townhouse appropriate to the economic and social status of a merchant-industrialist king.

Other Appletons of the merchant generation had also come to Boston early in the 19th century and likewise established their families on Beacon Hill — both Samuel and William Appleton had done so, and been at least as successful in financial terms as Nathan. Samuel, for example, memorialized in a plaque on the wall at King's Chapel, was the donor of Appleton Chapel to Harvard University Memorial Church, and he was also a benefactor of the Boston Atheneum where his portrait hangs today. William Appleton prospered too and married well. With his wife, Mary Ann Cutler, he had ten children, among whose descendants are connections to the great and near-great names of Boston: Coolidge, Lawrence, Mason, Saltonstall and others. Distinguished jurists, bishops of the Episcopal church, and businessmen are numbered among them. Still another Appleton whose affairs touched those of his Bostonian relatives was Daniel, who in 1825 moved south to New York where he formed D. Appleton and Company, publishers. For a century after its founding, it helped provide connections to the scientific and literary greats of the 19th century.⁷

Direct familial lines into art and literature occurred in Nathan's and Maria Theresa's own children. Two of them who continued to adorn the local scene were Thomas Gold Appleton and Fanny.

Thomas Gold Appleton (1812-84) was Nathan's eldest son, a leader in Bostonian culture as painter, writer, wit. Like his father, he began early to collect oils by European painters in a self-consciousness of art. Upon the founding in 1870 of the Museum of Fine Arts on St. James

(facing what would shortly become Copley Square) he was appointed one of the Harvard Trustees according to the charter's special category.⁸ He was sufficiently enthusiastic about the museum, and yet self-conscious then as a patron of the arts, that he wrote "A Companion to the Catalogue" of that museum anonymously. He began in a literary vein:

One fine day, I proposed to visit our new Museum of the Fine Arts, and on my way encountered my friend STARBUCK . . . and Starbuck had that directness and honesty which breathes from the soil; there were no traps for artifice in his surrounding. He was genuine to the core . . .

Starbuck, rebellious yet obedient first mate on the *Pequod* under Captain Ahab, continued to listen as the esthete of Boston taught.

There is a way of talking about the Fine Arts which takes the life out of them . . . For they survive . . . because they were the very freshest and brightest things of the hour which then was."⁹

He commented on the collections and exhibitions for the uninformed, and closed with a plea for donations to the museum: "We, of greater democracy than Greece knew, have accepted the half-jeering and half-complimentary title of the 'Modern Athens' . . ."¹⁰

Leader of Boston, and therefore American culture, Thomas Gold Appleton had begun his own collection fairly young. As early as 1852 he had written home from Paris, "I have bought a little Diaz — the French Rubens — Spanish blood and Murillo stealing constantly into his pictures."¹¹ This painting now belongs to the Museum of Fine Arts, which benefited from Appleton's patronage that was "discriminating and generous," according to Oliver Wendell Holmes.¹² Thus, Thomas Gold Appleton was a leader of the whole

new generation on Beacon Hill which made the arts rather than commerce an occupation.

A daughter of Nathan, Frances Elizabeth Appleton (called Fanny) became the wife of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow in 1843. Their home at 105 Brattle Street in Cambridge was for years a center of literary and cultural life. Longfellow, an early professor of modern languages at Bowdoin College in Brunswick, Maine, was delighted to accept a post at Harvard. There he taught and wrote, and also courted the lovely heiress. Their family born between 1844 and 1855 added to their pleasures. Among the children of some note were Ernest, who would become his father's biographer, and three girls who will always be known from their father's poem, "The Children's Hour," as "Grave Alice," "Edith with the golden hair" who married Richard Henry Dana III, son of the writer of *Two Years Before the Mast*, and "Laughing Allegra" who chose to live on Brattle Street near home when she married. Further Beacon Hill ties to culture were provided by the Longfellow friendships with Charles Sumner, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Nathaniel Hawthorne, and Cornelius Felton, distinguished President of Harvard, whose portraits still hang in the study at 105 Brattle Street.¹³

Great changes were to occur in the household of Nathan Appleton at 39 Beacon Street during the decade of the 1830s. Grief-stricken over the death of his wife in early 1833, he remained single for some years, concentrating his energies on national issues at Washington. Towards the end of the decade, however, he married a young woman of good family and ancient American lineage, Harriot Coffin Sumner, who became in rapid succession bride, step-mother, and moth-

er. Three children enlarged the household: William Sumner Appleton in 1840, Harriot in 1841 (who grew up to marry Major Greely Stevenson Curtis and found another prominent Hill family — also collectors of art), and Nathan in 1843. Each of these would benefit from the acumen of their father, whose collection of wealth was an important one.

At his death on 14 July 1861 and the proving of his will on 2 September, Nathan Appleton's estate was apportioned according to his six pages of instructions.¹⁴ In addition to bequests to his wife Harriot of the "Mansion House" at 39 Beacon Street and their summer place at Lynn, with stables, furniture, silver, works of art and the like, he left a trust fund for her life benefit of \$10,000 per year, which he later increased by codicil to \$12,000. The first accounting of his estate was in the sum of \$1,669,312.32, of which furniture in the Mansion House bequeathed to Harriot was valued at \$10,000, and "plate, works of art and books" at \$11,634.¹⁵

Harriot C. Appleton survived her husband only six years to 1867. The settlement of her estate shows that she was frugal, for her accounting totals some \$78,000: furniture listed at \$9,285, pictures at \$1,500, and books at \$100, along with the family pew at King's Chapel, \$500.¹⁶ The trustees and administrators of these two estates obviously showed great care — they had important decisions to make with great sums at stake and children of two marriages to consider. Nathan Appleton's trustees were ultimately T. Jefferson Coolidge, jurist of note, Franklin H. Story, and Thomas Amory; his widow's were Amos Adams Lawrence, the merchant-partner of Nathan, Thomas Gold Appleton, her stepson, and William Sumner Appleton, her elder son. Among their decisions was

a petition to the court for revaluation of Nathan's personal estate, which when appraised showed the categories abbreviated to:

Plate as per schedule on file	\$ 4,028.
Works of art as per schedule on file	7,855.
Books as per schedule on file	<u>2,818.85</u>
	\$14,701.85 ¹⁷

Of interest is the trustees' phrasing, indicating their understanding of their late friend's intentions for his family and his material possessions. At the death of the widow, Nathan's six children would come into the property equally, "share and share alike in fee simple", the children to take the share of the deceased parent. The trustees would have the power to sell anything, whether real or personal property, "of which he should die possessed 'except his plate, works of art, and books' looking no doubt to their preservation, after the decease of said Mrs. Appleton, by his children or their representatives as heirlooms and family memorials."¹⁸ Thus, the intention of deliberate collection is made clear.

On a more practical level, perhaps, Nathan Appleton's will provided trusts for each of his three younger children by his second wife, specifying, "One hundred thousand dollars include what each shall have received from me, if any as shall appear by the charges on my books. The foregoing is to make them equal to my three oldest children, viz. Thomas Gold Appleton, Mary Macintosh, and Frances E. Longfellow, who have each received the like sum of \$100,000."¹⁹ On these trust funds hung the necessities, the comforts, and the cultural-collecting practices of future generations on Beacon Hill.

While the family fortune was a large one, and while Nathan Appleton shows us

a kind of dynastic sense of collection, he was not just a money-maker or pack-rat in outlook. In 1856, he prepared a memoir of his late friend, captain of industry Abbott Lawrence. In it, Appleton described his friend only after he had made a philosophical statement, obviously his own as well as Lawrence's.

It is to be taken for granted, however, that it has always been the use made of the wealth acquired in trade, which has been the object of commendation and honor, rather than the success in accumulation.²⁰

At the same time, he also indicated a feeling of responsibility for the "moral character and respectability of the operatives" working in the mills which made his fortune, for on his first trip to Europe in 1811 when he had met Francis Lowell in Edinburgh and they had discussed the possibilities of the loom run by power, he said,

The operatives in the manufacturing cities of Europe were notoriously of the lowest character, for intelligence and morals. The question therefore arose . . . whether this degradation was the result of the peculiar occupation, or of other and distinct causes . . .²¹

It may here be seen that the process of making money was not the only motive for those industrialists, capitalists, merchant kings. Part of the mystique of the collection of wealth was a higher benevolence and a contribution to culture. Nathan Appleton was a part of this idea which he thereupon transmitted to posterity. He left his descendants not merely wealth, but paternalistic, elitist philosophies on the association of the arts for purposes of collection, amid grandiose expressions on justice, honor, and the desirability of liberalizing the mind. Both wealth and collection were very real on Beacon Hill. Upon their solid base rose an image and a vision of leadership.

Both reality and image of cultural leadership fell next upon William Sumner Appleton, born in 1840, eldest son of the merchant's second marriage. He, like his half-brother Thomas Gold Appleton, reaped the benefits of wealth, becoming a scholar in the first generation brought up to wealth. He was graduated from Harvard in the Class of 1860, delivering a Commencement Address entitled "A Uniform Coinage", his interest in money having by that time taken a different direction from that of his father. Later in that same year, the young graduate was a founder of the Boston Numismatic Society. Throughout his life he studied and collected coins; at his death in 1903, his collection consisted of some 12,000 coins and 3,000 medals, which his son later helped to catalog. The scholar continued to study — he earned an A.M. in 1864 and L.L.B. in 1865. Like other young men of good family and financial ease, he continued in the tradition of his generation established by his elder half-brother — he enjoyed in 1866 the Grand Tour of Europe, accompanying his life-long friend Phillips Brooks. Although they were traveling companions and good friends, Appleton retained his King's Chapel (by then Unitarian) allegiance. Other Appletons, however, belonged to Trinity Church while Brooks was rector.

Among other scholarly, cultivated interests pursued by William Sumner Appleton was genealogy. He researched and wrote many lengthy monographs on the ancestry of both his parents, in family studies of not merely Appleton, Coffin and Sumner, but Armistead, Badcock, Oliver, Baker et al.²² His interest in history was on a larger scale than familial — he was one of the founders of the American Historical Association, and even extended his interest to the arts. In 1868 he wrote a

clause in his will indicating his wish to sponsor a museum of art in Boston, sharing this interest too with his elder half-brother. It was said that William Sumner Appleton had an exactness of classical training rarely to be found — of himself, he wrote, "It has been my fortune or misfortune to be generally in the minority . . ."²³ In addition to the family predilection for collecting objets d'art, it may readily be seen that this son of Nathan and Beacon Hill concentrated on historical material more than artistic. His library was distinguished.²⁴ As the century waned, he developed a strong interest in the preservation of Boston's buildings. During that centennial period, when enthusiasm grew for this civic "obligation," William Sumner Appleton became a founder and life member of an organization designed to foster preservation in the city he loved, the Bostonian Society.

On 12 August 1871, he married Edith Stuart Appleton, daughter of his cousin William Stuart Appleton of Baltimore, Maryland.²⁵ Like many women of her class in that day, she remains a shadowy figure to her death on 20 January 1892.

Since William Sumner and Nathan Jr. had inherited the family house on Beacon Street upon their mother's death in 1867, the bridegroom bought out his brother's interest and moved his bride into #39 where they lived until the mid-1880s. Photographs taken about 1886 show the interior, filled with high style furniture, collectibles and Victorian clutter (Figure 3). Some of the original furniture — a pair of rosewood torchieres, a pier table, and a mahogany dining table — may be seen today at the first Harrison Gray Otis house, and an ornate gold French clock still adorns the mantelpiece at #39.²⁶ In this house were born a new generation of children, Dorothy, Eleanor, and Gladys, all of whom would marry and leave

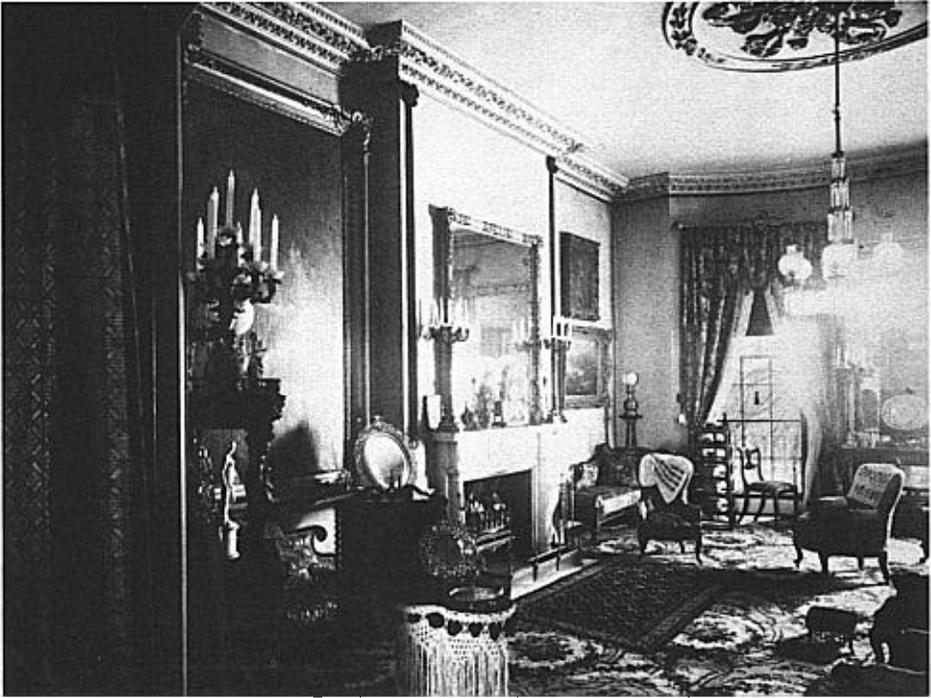


FIG. 3. FRONT PARLOR AT 39 BEACON STREET, c. 1886. (Photo SPNEA.)

Boston by the end of the century, and one son, William Sumner Appleton, Jr., born 29 May 1874.²⁷ He would be the last of Nathan's male descent, remaining a bachelor like his uncles Nathan and Thomas Gold.

It can be no surprise that young Sumner, so called to distinguish him from his scholarly parent, from the beginning had two advantages — his world was materially affluent, based as it was on New England textile mills and other sound investments made by his forebears, and his cultural, familial environment spanned the humanities. From childhood he respected his father, but felt a certain awe and distance from him, often a minority of one, who had the capacity to act with vigor as well as think creatively in his chosen field of interest. He was always attached to his aunt Harriot Curtis who

lived around the corner on the hill, in whose home he was something between resident and guest. At one time he added up the number of days spent with Aunt Harriot's family, and the total was large — 1908 - 145 days, 1909 - 133 days, 1910 - 213 days.²⁸ He was also influenced by his uncle Thomas Gold Appleton, whose new house at 10 Commonwealth Avenue was built in the French Academic style in the fashionable Back Bay. There hung paintings which would later go to the new Museum of Fine Arts, and engravings from the collection of Cardinal Tosti in Rome which would enhance Boston's fine libraries.²⁹ The boy's associations touched the world of letters too through the Longfellows in Cambridge. "Grave Alice" was a special friend with whom Sumner came to share a sense of history — he assisted her about 1914 with the Long-

fellow Foundation and the preservation of the family home at 105 Brattle Street. In adult life, Sumner Appleton alternated Sunday dinners with "Grave Alice", Aunt Harriot Curtis at 28 Mount Vernon Street on Beacon Hill, and poet Amy Lowell in Brookline.

The formal education of young Sumner began at Miss Garland's School on Chestnut Street, just around the block from home. It continued at St. Paul's in Concord, New Hampshire, and the Hopkinson's School in Boston. It is significant that this educational experience is described by the term "prepared" — it prepared him for Harvard in 1892.³⁰ Among items still in his alumni file at Widener Library is a group of course programs indicating his studies between 1892 and 1896 when he was graduated: French, history, fine arts, Latin, philosophy, economics, government, and of course English — a gentleman's curriculum. Also extant is evidence of undergraduate humor in a document which begins 21 January 1895:

Know all men by these presents! That I, William Sumner Appleton of the City of Boston, State of Massachusetts, and John Gorham Palfrey, of the City of Boston, State of Massachusetts, do hereby solemnly promise not to use the following words in an exclamatory sense, or in the sense of abuse, without paying to the other five cents on demand.

All names of the Deity, and all words which would not be used in the presence of Miss Eleanor L. Gray, (with the exception of "to hell with Yale").³¹

Accompanying this document are a number of I.O.U.'s from Palfrey for the large sums of \$.05, \$.10, \$.25, and even one for \$.50. There are none signed by Appleton.

The influence of Harvard upon Appleton was very great; it provided him with a social world for the rest of his life. He was of course a member of the Harvard Club of Boston, and additionally of the New York Club. He even attended the first meeting of the Harvard Club in

Florence, Italy, noting the occasion in his diary on May 1, 1909. Significantly too, Harvard provided him with some experience in publication and club life which would be later helpful. Of these he wrote:

In college I made practically no clubs or athletic teams, but, if my memory is correct, I landed an editorship with two others on the *Advocate*. An unsuccessful tour of the shops in Boston in an effort to secure advertising remains in my memory as one of the most unpleasant and unsatisfactory days of my college life. As a salesman I simply wasn't there. It was during my college years that it occurred to me to start a small society known as the Amphadon. The idea was to have occasional meetings, possibly every fortnight or so, at which someone would read a paper, followed by criticisms or comments from the others with the assistance of beer and pretzels. All went well, and the Society grew and prospered, until sometime soon after my graduation when the outstanding members of some of the classes were all members. That was enough to wreck the Society, for, of course, each of these men had so many other societies and clubs that the Amphadon was to each a minor interest and so became neglected and finally disappeared. . . .

Continuing in more personal terms, Sumner Appleton wrote further:

As for distinctions and honors at graduation, it was distinction enough for me to graduate at all . . . I suffered from weak eyes to such a degree that it was only with the help of others reading to me that I was able to pass my exams . . .

I started out in business with Lombard Williams as a real estate broker. We also had a line of soft drinks in a company in which his father was interested. In neither of these enterprises did we make any startling success. My health broke down, and I had one of the worst cases of nervous prostration I have ever come across. From then until 1910, my principal interest was an effort to regain my health and correct my eyestrain which was a fundamental cause of the breakdown.³²

Implicit is a feeling of failure. His health was "nervous", his business had disap-

peared, "the home and family life to which I looked forward as the natural future due every adult '96er eluded me", and when his father died in 1903, he left his son's portion of wealth tied up in trust. The son would be protected, perhaps even from himself. He would enjoy a pleasant income for the rest of his life, but he could not touch the capital. This fact has, characteristically for such an elitist world, been offered as a reason why Sumner Appleton never again entered business, even when his health improved.³³

Sumner Appleton occupied himself, then, with a rigorous social life. He wrote in 1946: "Those of us who made Sunday afternoon calls in Boston in frock coat, silk topper and cane, seem as far removed from contemporary life as are the knee breeches and crinolines of earlier times."³⁴ Evidences of Appleton's social life are in his diaries, in which he recorded daily events.³⁵

Jan. 5, 1906. 1st Assembly. Fine. Cotillion Anna Phillips. O.K.

Jan. 7. Sunday. Afternoon calls. Elizabeth Gray, out, Sally Lawrence, in. Molly Hooper, in. Elizabeth Shattuck, out.

Jan. 18. Thurs to Holbrook in the afternoon. Evening with Amy Lowell.

Feb. 5. . . . Supper with the Thorps in Cambridge. Erica played Parsifal. Beat Alice at billiards.

Mar. 9. Just plain busy. Called on George Weld. Frightful weather, inches of slush, rain, snow, etc.

May 29. Tues. . . . my birthday. 32 years old. Dined with Amy Lowell.

Throughout the months, the diary indicates a succession of feminine companions. "Stroll with Delia." "Had Minnie all to myself." "An o.k. time." It also indicates his acquaintance with the best theater of the day — *Man and Superman*, *Agamemnon*, Maud Adams in *Peter Pan* which he described as "most unusual", Barnum and Bailey's Circus. He regularly involved himself in Harvard's alumni

events. In the winter he remained in Boston, in the spring he often went to South Berwick, Maine, in the summer, to Moon Island on Squam in Holderness, New Hampshire. No matter where Appleton was, he recorded only his activities, never his thoughts, and his notations were always telegraphic in style. The entries show a pattern of life which was socially rigid, empty and trivial.

Aug. 27, 1906. Mon. Tennis in the morning. Left on Rockland boat in afternoon and took the Boston boat at Rockland, to attend Uncle Nathan's funeral.

Sept. 9 at Moon Island. Canoeing with Hattie all morning . . . Charles spent most of the day canoeing au naturel.

Sept. 10. Charles and Eleanor left . . . swim on beach au naturel . . .

Dec. 27. . . . Swept the green in vingt et un in evening.

Feb. 18, 1907. Thought I had appendicitis, but Dr. Putnam thought differently.

His sense of melancholy continued. The older generation had died, his sisters had married and moved away, he had emptied and sold the house at Holbrook and given up the family pew at King's Chapel. In 1905-06 he took a course at the Bussey Institute at Harvard, an occasional adjunct to the School of Botany. In the following winter, he took a course in the Department of Mining and Metallurgy, of which he later wrote, "Since I was wholly unprepared for such courses the results were negligible."³⁶ He then took a trip west to the mining camps of Nevada with Professor White, and spent a day or two in San Francisco, going on August 30th to the St. Francis Hotel which had survived that earthquake-fire of 1906, commenting on August 31st in his diary, ". . . walked about city, hideous, mostly ruins. Abominable layout anyway . . ." He was filling in time, feeling futile, depressed, empty, unengaged.

A spark had struck, however. In the fall of 1906, Appleton took one course on

which he commented, "Enjoyable." It was Architecture 7 with Professor Ross, a general course described in the Harvard catalog as "Theory of Pure Design, Harmony, Rhythm, Balance. Lecture with examples." In the same year he became conscious of certain old buildings, and the need to preserve them. He was fearful of more subway damage to the Old State House and met in committee on the issue. He served as secretary of the Paul Revere Memorial Association, which raised the money to preserve and restore the house in which Revere had lived with his family in the North End. His consciousness of architecture began to be reflected in his diary. In 1906 he took a trip south to Maryland, visiting Annapolis. His diary notes, "Saw town, charming. Best houses superb . . ." Closer to home, he began looking at houses seriously.

April 16, 1907. Tues. to Salem. Saw Tommy Jenkins at Peabody Academy and lunched at Salem Club with him. Took many photos of old houses

April 18. Thurs. 9 a.m. train to Newburyport to see Fanny Stone. Lunched with her and spent day seeing old houses . . .

April 27. Sat . . . afternoon to Bedford with Barbara Hinkley. Saw a flag, and a fine old house, and over a smithy's establishment . . .

He rejoiced the next year at the success of the Revere campaign for which he had worked, and continued thinking about collections, as he helped to sort and catalog his father's coins, and also the Appleton Papers which he would later give to the Massachusetts Historical Society, of which he was a loyal member.

On a lighter note, the year 1909 was better. He embarked upon a trip to Europe by steamer with his cousins Isabella and Harriot Curtis. From Plymouth they journeyed to Paris, and at the Louvre saw first the Venus of Milos

and Victory of Samothrace. In Bourges, on March 16, he wrote, "There are many old timbered houses." On March 24 in Carcassonne, he wrote, "All morning on the walls, and glorious they are. Much improved since my 1896 visit . . ." April and May they spent in Italy, then back to Paris via Lucerne. On June 11, Sumner Appleton noted, "Finished ground floor of Louvre." Sailing home on the *Mauretania* after a short trip to Britain, he spent the rest of the summer as usual on Moon Island, Squam Lake.

The leisurely trip offered more than idle entertainment — it gave visual experiences and an opportunity to see something of European preservation to compare with what he had learned on the Old State House and Revere campaigns. The journey also offered concentrated study of collections in major European museums. It held the heritage of western culture which everything in Sumner Appleton's familial associations, education, and experience enabled him to appreciate. It pointed to a vision of art and culture as well as to its reality.

These months of travel and study, his mind and senses barraged by stimulation of the highest intellectual and artistic order, were followed by a period of quiet routine on the island. It was a period of germination, for although the diary entries continue on a seemingly trivial note, it is clear that by November 18, 1909, some ideas had begun to take shape in the back of Sumner Appleton's mind. He went to the opening of the new building of the Museum of Fine Arts at Huntington and the Fenway, and examined the exhibits with care. "Building not as bad as rumored. Too many poor pictures hung." He was reminded again of family collections — his grandfather's, his uncle's, his father's, his own.

Within the month Sumner Appleton had quickened. He was involved in preservation the week before Christmas.

Dec. 18, 1909. All day in Lexington and Concord on assessments of property of revolutionary value.

Dec. 20. All morning on Harrington House. Found LeRoy Brown was owner and didn't intend pulling it down.

Dec. 22. To Lexington in a.m. with Joe Chandler and Mrs. Barrett Wendell in her auto. Went all over Jonathan Harrington house by Common. Should be saved as it is. Then over Lexington Historical Soc. rooms in Hancock-Clarke House.

Dec. 23. Talk with C.D. Burrage about Harrington House, not encouraging.

Immediately after the holiday, on Dec. 28, 1909, a landmark entry reads in laconic terms: "Chores of all kinds. Chats with Mr. Bolton on founding a Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities." The next week he and Charles K. Bolton of the Atheneum talked further — the diary indicates "Looks like a go." Bolton would become the Society's first President, and after months of patient, developmental work, Appleton would take the place he chose as Corresponding Secretary. Later he explained that it was the decision to rebuild the Harrington House on Lexington Common which had affected him. "It was to this house that Harrington, mortally wounded in the skirmish of April 19, 1775, dragged himself, only to die at the feet of his wife as she opened the door to meet him. This story had always made a strong appeal to me and it seemed as though a house having such associations should be safeguarded against all alterations . . . From that minute on my life's work seemed to be cut out for me . . ." ³⁷

And so in May 1910, William Sumner Appleton sent forth a call to arms as he published the *Bulletin* of the brand-new Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities. On its cover was a photograph, captioned,

The Home of John Hancock, Beacon Street, Boston. Built 1737 by Thomas

Hancock. Destroyed 1863. The fate of this house has become a classic in the annals of vandalism.

Having caught the reader's interest by the strength of his phrasing, Appleton continued persuasively to describe the purposes and directions of the Society which he felt was so badly needed. "Our New England Antiquities are fast disappearing because no society has made their preservation its exclusive object. That is the reason for the formation of this Society."³⁸ Still remembering the demise of the Amphadon, his Harvard club, and the dangers of fragmentation of historic interest, Appleton knew that other, existing organizations would not, could not fill the need he saw. He had been a member for years of Massachusetts Historical Society. He had also been a member of the Massachusetts Society, Sons of the Revolution, a patriotic organization, and he knew that they could not save old houses. He was also a member of the Bostonian Society, and although its interest was preservation, this interest was limited to Boston. He then went on to say:

The buildings and sites which make our New England antiquities of surpassing interest are remarkably varied in form. There are blockhouses and garrison houses, of which but few are left; the oldest settlers's houses of the simplest form, often having but one room and an attic; also variations of these and later evolutions from them, including the picturesque overhanging second story, and houses like the Fairbanks house in Dedham, with others of scarcely less note. The Georgian or Colonial type of house supplies us with a wealth of material worthy of preservation, and New England has her full share of notable specimens still standing. . . .

It is proposed to preserve the most interesting of these buildings by obtaining control of them through gift, purchase, or otherwise, and then to restore them, and finally to let them to tenants under wise restrictions, unless local conditions suggest some other treat-

ment. . . . This plan has the merit of continuing the property in the use for which it was intended . . . and finally of leaving the estate on the local tax list.³⁹

Appleton had learned to be practical. He knew having a vision would be pointless without solid financial underpinnings. He said, "In all plans leading to effective work two things are essential, namely, money and the ability to spend it wisely."⁴⁰ He began to sound like his merchant grandfather Nathan. He knew that before he could begin to collect houses, he would have to raise the money, so he started with friends and relatives. The first *Bulletin* informing the world of Beacon Hill that the SPNEA was in existence, ready to begin its work, lists the first eighteen members of the Society who were its officers, local people all, and proper too:

President, Charles Knowles Bolton,
Shirley, Mass.

Vice-Pres. Mass., Miss Alice Longfellow,
Cambridge; Waldo Lincoln, Worcester

Treasurer, William C. Endicott, Danvers
Rec. Secy, John Albree, Swampscott
Corr. Secy, William Sumner Appleton,
Boston

Lib. Mus. Dir., Ernest L. Gay, Boston

Board of Trustees, 1910

Miss Caroline Emmerton, Salem
Mrs. Adeline F. Fitz, Wakefield
Mr. Worthington C. Ford, Boston
Dr. Charles M. Green, Boston
Pres. Henry Lefavour, Boston
Mrs. Ida Louise F. Miller, Wakefield
Mr. Walter Gilman Page, Boston
Miss Elizabeth W. Perkins, Boston
Mr. Julius H. Tuttle, Dedham
Miss Mary Lee Ware, Boston
Mrs. Barrett Wendell, Boston

Appleton had done his work well; he had picked good people as his first workers. A year later the list of officers shows not only the addition of vice-presidents for the other five New England states, but a total membership list of 476, which included 69 life members at \$50, 190

active members at \$5, and 217 associates at \$2.⁴¹

In quantitative terms, a permanent fund had reached nearly \$3,000 — which would be used for the purchase of properties — and the membership had shot from the first eighteen who were officers, friends, and relatives of the founder, all of them in eastern Massachusetts, to 476 members in twenty states. In terms less readily measurable, several categories of collection had been established. Of initial importance was the photograph collection which with the other graphics, the measured drawings, would be invaluable to students of New England's architectural history. In the first year four hundred were on deposit in the Library. The Museum was still only a dream without space to house collections, but a permanent director, Henry Davis Sleeper, had been appointed.⁴²

Most significant of all was the announcement in 1911 that the Society had made its first purchase, the Ilsley House in Newbury, Massachusetts⁴³ (Figure 4). The house had been built about 1671 as a two-room, two-story house with later additions. Its interior shows several stages of growth. It was highly appropriate for acquisition, and the funds with which to do so were in fact over-subscribed, so that Appleton planned to apply the overage immediately against the mortgage on the first day possible. Appleton was delighted at the ripple effect he had created and he was himself the epitome of his philosophy that a society's greatest asset is the "energy and will" of its members.⁴⁴

From the beginning, therefore, the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities was an unusual organization. It had begun as the impact of a romantic Revolutionary War tale struck and shocked a man who was ripe. Sumner Appleton was thirty-six years old, midway in life. He had felt like a failure. He had no



FIG. 4. SWETT-ILSLEY HOUSE, NEWBURY, MASSACHUSETTS, c. 1671. (Photo SPNEA.)

occupation, no wife, no child. What he did have was a trust fund which freed his energies. He had some real estate experience, a little formal coursework in architecture, in public speaking, in publication. He had been in society on the hill which spread out to include Harvard — his acquaintance stretched through a vast and well-placed family into an erudite, if occasionally precious, world. He had absorbed his familial predilection for collection, perhaps even unknowingly. There were obvious pleasures of ownership as well as the benevolence of civic obligation fulfilled. It had been nearly a century since Nathan Appleton had been one of the subscribers in 1823 to the costs of building a “Lecture Room” at the Boston Athenaeum which was designed

to encourage a taste for the Fine Arts . . . [so] that class of proprietors of the Athenaeum, who seldom frequent the Library . . . will *all* be capable of enjoying the Paintings and Statues, and have the opportunity of introducing strangers to the Museum of the Fine Arts . . .⁴⁵

It was in this sense that in Harvard Class Reports, Sumner Appleton would call himself proudly, “Antiquarian” — he was fulfilling the cultural obligations which his ancestors on the hill had imposed upon him.

Yet he was not merely a copyist. Nathan Appleton had been a man of commercial vision whose work had changed the landscape of New England and its people in the names of Progress and of Wealth. First in any structure comes the placement of the rough-hewn beams; Nathan’s work was to carve out an empire for himself and his descendants. After the huge beams are laid in place, the carver or the turner may do his work in the refinement of aesthetic interest. Sumner’s was the task of saving buildings and their artifacts for scholars, treasures of furniture and art for museum use, drawings and photographs to make a graphics library. Each man contributes to the whole, for each has seen a vision which propels him — each develops from

his past. It was this combination of reality and vision which shaped the Society. This was no static sense of preservation, elitist though it no doubt was, for Appleton's vision was of a rippling, moving force, based upon the exercise of intellect, yet richly flexible and creative too. Appleton would lead the Society in succeeding decades to become a living history showing a way of life now gone, through accuracy of architectural restoration, and scholarly, rather than patriotic or romantic associations with historic properties.

On 25 November 1947 the Boston *Herald* carried a modest notice, in understatement characteristic for residents of Beacon Hill, on page 21.

William Sumner Appleton, 73, of 16 Louisburg Square, Boston, founder of the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities . . .

A native of Boston, he was credited with the preservation of many old New England landmarks and antiques, and had been secretary of the organization he established since its beginning. . . .

A bachelor he leaves three sisters . . .

The *Herald* found it unnecessary to add that he also left the preservation movement a working model of success. It had given meaning to his life. In return he had led the cause of preservation from purely local or regional levels into national consciousness and significance.

The beacon visible in ancient prints has disappeared, yet still remains an image.

NOTES

¹ Walter Muir Whitehill, *Boston, A Topographical History*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Harvard Press, the Belknap Press, 1973), p. 60 ff. Whitehill, however, did not mention Mrs. Swan in any capacity except artist.

² Sumner Appleton later wrote of this property in the *25th Anniversary Report of the Harvard Class of 1896*, printed for the Class in 1921: "An ancestral homestead coming on the market in New Ipswich, N. H., I picked it up at auction sale, securing a 10 room house built by my great-grandfather, and some thirty acres . . . It was my hope to live there a part, at least, of every summer . . ." (p. 14 ff) Appleton, F.R. et al, *Appleton Farms . . . 1920* also.

³ Portraits of the couple hang in Longfellow House, Cambridge. Reproductions are in J. Winsor, *Memorial History of Boston*, 1881, vol. IV, p. 105.

⁴ Nathan Appleton, "Intro. of the Power Loom, and Origin of Lowell", Lowell, Mass., 1858, p. 2, 22.

⁵ "Correspondence between Nathan Appleton & John A. Lowell in relation to the City of Lowell", (Boston: Eastburn's Press, 1848.)

⁶ The opinion cited is that of Abbott Lowell

Cummings, Exec. Dir., Soc. for the Preservation of New England Antiquities, although he indicates it is yet "undocumented". Address to the Women's City Club, Boston, in October 1975 entitled "The World of Nathan Appleton".

⁷ Grant Overton, *Portrait of a Publisher and the First Hundred Years of the House of Appleton 1825-1925*, (New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1925).

⁸ *First Annual Report for the Year Ending Dec. 31, 1876*, (Boston: Alfred Mudge & Son, Printers, 1877). Walter Muir Whitehill, *Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, A Centennial History* (2 vols.), (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, Belknap Press, 1970, vol. 1).

⁹ Thomas Gold Appleton, *Boston Museum of the Fine Arts, A Companion to the Catalogue*, (Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1877), p. 1-7. A copy is in the American Antiquarian Society in Worcester, Mass.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 77.

¹¹ Susan Hale, *Life and Letters of Thomas Gold Appleton*, (New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1885), p. 282. "The Appleton Papers", Mass. Hist. Soc.

- ¹² Oliver Wendell Holmes, "Thomas Gold Appleton", *The Atlantic Monthly*, vol. 53, June 1884, p. 849.
- ¹³ The house is now operated as a museum by the National Park Service.
- ¹⁴ Will #43594, Probate Records, Suffolk County, Mass.
- ¹⁵ *Ibid.*, vol. 160 ¹, p. 263. See also vol. 299, p. 221. Inventory Vol. 298, p. 317.
- ¹⁶ Administration #48118, Probate Records, Suffolk County, Mass. Vol. 305, p. 34-5.
- ¹⁷ Petition in Vol. 166 ¹, p. 37; inventory at reappraisal of 25 Feb. 1868 in Vol. 305, p. 91.
- ¹⁸ Petition dated 13 Jan. 1868 in Vol. 166 ¹, p. 37.
- ¹⁹ Will #43594, Probate Records, Suffolk County, Mass.
- ²⁰ Nathan Appleton, "Memoir of the Hon. Abbott Lawrence", prepared for the Mass. Hist. Soc. (Boston: Eastburn's Press, 1856), p. 4-5.
- ²¹ Nathan Appleton, "Intro. of the Power Loom . . .", *op. cit.*, p. 15.
- ²² In the Library of the Boston Atheneum.
- ²³ Charles C. Smith, "Memoir of William Sumner Appleton, A.M." (Cambridge: John Wilson & Son, 1903); see also William T.R. Marvin "William Sumner Appleton", (Boston: Press of David Clapp & Son, 1904), NEHGR, July 1904; MHS, Vol. V.
- ²⁴ C. F. Libbie Co., "Catalogue of Nuggets of American History from the library of the late William Sumner Appleton . . ." (Boston: 1906).
- ²⁵ John Appleton, M.D., "Pedigree of Appleton", 1864. Nathan Appleton's younger brother Eben married Sarah Paterson; among their children was William Stuart Appleton who married Georgianna Armistead.
- ²⁶ SPNEA, 141 Cambridge Street, Boston. *Old-Time New England*, April, 1948, p. 72-3; *The Magazine Antiques*, May 1975, p. 876 ff. The clock, however, is on display at the Women's City Club, 39 Beacon St., Boston.
- ²⁷ Dorothy would marry the Rev. George F. Weld, D.D. of Harvard and an early Boston family and go to Santa Barbara, Calif. Eleanor A. Standen would be of Shipley, London, and Gladys H. Winterbottom would be of Tangier, Morocco, in 1948 when they were their brother's heirs. Suffolk County Probate Records, administration #338986.
- ²⁸ William Sumner Appleton, "Diary, 1906-10", pencilled note on p. 1. SPNEA files, Boston.
- ²⁹ Mabel Munson Swan, *The Atheneum Gallery 1827-73* (Boston: The Boston Atheneum, 1940), p. 158.
- ³⁰ Biographical File, The Archives, Widener Library of Harvard University.
- ³¹ *Ibid.*
- ³² Harvard College, *The 50th Reunion of the Class of 1896*, (Cambridge: For the Class, 1946), p. 41 ff.
- ³³ *Old-Time New England*, April 1948, p. 72, citing Miss Margaret Curtis, a cousin, for this information.
- ³⁴ Harvard College, *The 50th Reunion . . . Class Report*, p. 1. Reminiscences of such social customs in Boston are contained in Samuel Eliot Morrison's volume *One Boy's Boston*.
- ³⁵ SPNEA files. Total diaries now in existence are fragments: 1906-10; 1936-40; Jan 1, 1947-Nov. 13, 1947; inconclusive real estate notations on the Cooper-Austin House dating randomly 1919-32.
- ³⁶ Harvard College, *50th Reunion . . . Class of 1896*, *op. cit.*, p. 42.
- ³⁷ Harvard College, *25th Reunion . . . Class of 1896*, *op. cit.*, p. 14 ff.
- ³⁸ *Bulletin*, The Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities, (Boston: May 1910, Vol. 1, No. 1), pp. 1, 4.
- ³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 5-6.
- ⁴⁰ William Sumner Appleton, "Destruction and Preservation of Old Buildings in New England", *Art & Archeology* (Vol. VIII, No. 3, 1919), p. 180.
- ⁴¹ *Bulletin*, SPNEA, Vol. II, No. 2, August, 1911, p. 20-27.
- ⁴² *Bulletin*, SPNEA, "First annual report" and other reports by officers, Vol. 2, No. 2, p. 18 ff.
- ⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 9.
- ⁴⁴ Appleton, "Destruction and Preservation . . .", *op. cit.*, p. 157.
- ⁴⁵ Mabel Munson Swan, *The Athenaeum Gallery 1827-73*, (Boston: The Boston Athenaeum, 1940), p. 8-9.