



FRONTISPIECE. THE CODMAN HOUSE, "THE GRANGE," (ca. 1741) 1980. (SPNEA Archives, photograph by Edward Jacoby.)

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## Lincoln and the Codmans

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The Codman House stood, quiet and retired, far back from the narrow road. The road was a thin line of bumpy black, running between wide margins of plain dirt edge that merged casually into a green side of cropped grass and weeds. Beyond were hickory trees and stone walls. And across the walls, on either side, were hayfields and pasture. The sunk pasture below the Codman House was inhabited by two or three cows, heads down, forever grazing. There were more cows in the other fields, farther from the house, but they moved about. Sometimes you would see them, sometimes you saw only the empty green fields. Occasionally there would be a cart in sight, standing, or moving slowly about pulled by a pair of work horses. If there were any men, they would be in faded blue overalls shoveling manure. There was a faint and pleasant smell of well rotted manure, silage, and mown hay as you passed the Codman barns.

Every inch of the countryside was cropped and combed. Every household had a cow or two, and usually a horse. Forage was in demand. We used to walk from our house on Old Concord Road to the

station sometimes with our father. Our road was plain dirt, very dusty in summer. The trees that lined it, here and there, were not very tall. Some of them had been planted by our father when he was a boy in college. The hickories along Codman Road were taller and we would fill our pockets with the hickory nuts in the morning in October. The nutshells left by the squirrels crackled merrily under our feet as we walked along the thin strip of hard tar.

Who lived in the Codman House we vaguely knew and little cared. They were of no interest to children, and as far as we knew, to our parents. Sometimes we would see the Codman limousine come swaying out of the driveway and turn towards the station. It was an immense contraption, long as a locomotive, and high as it was long. Around the latter part of its roof it had a tall rack. My brother and I used to laugh about that rack. We wondered what it was for. We thought it must be to hang out the

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Thomas Boylston Adams, formerly president of the Massachusetts Historical Society, is a descendant of both John Adams and John Quincy Adams. His family has resided in Lincoln, Massachusetts, since the late nineteenth century.

Codman wash. Sometimes figures were barely glimpsed within the huge glass cage. They were heavily swathed in black and wore large black hats.

There were very few houses in South Lincoln then. Nothing, as far as we knew, had ever changed. The Codmans wore black. So did our grandmother and aunt. That annoyed our father. He called them crows. Our father and mother rebelled against the custom of wearing black. My mother, as she sewed a heavy black band around the left sleeve of my father's coat, explained that it was to show that you were in mourning and did not want to talk about it.

The Codmans were in mourning for their husband and father, who had always been dead. Widows in those days wore mourning forever. Our grandfather had died much more recently, so our parents had to put up with black for a year or two. But then the war came and the custom of mourning, widows weeds, black hats and heavy veils faded slowly into limbo. People could not stand that much gloom. It was discouraging enough to move those lines of red- and green-topped pins on the map at our grandmother's at teatime, usually towards Paris. Only the Codmans continued to wear black.

We knew about the Codmans because our father used to joke about them at tea. They would be on the morning train to Boston. Not, of course, Mrs. Codman, the Mother. She had disappeared completely behind the beautiful Federal façade of the Codman House, the rhododendrons and well-clipped shrubs that concealed the garden. But Tom and Hugh and Dorothy and Ahla Codman were often on the train now. They were working at the French Wounded. One brother would always sit beside a sister. The family would sit as near together as possible. Sometimes, if the car were crowded, that would be some seats away, which would be inconvenient as it was then necessary for one brother to move back and forth along the aisle at least once

during the trip. For it was the Codman custom to buy one newspaper, the *Boston Herald*, and share it among the four of them. The *Herald* cost two cents. Our father was amused.

Except for these small incidents, the Codman House was nothing but a silent exclamation point of beauty in a landscape itself as beautiful and arranged as the setting of a precious jewel. We wandered through this perfect setting, children as unaware of its beauty as the birds that nested and sang in the trees. The birds' songs were the only sounds. The occasional rattle of a train, the passing of a slow cart, or the noise of a stray automobile were interruptions too seldom to matter. Children were occupied with more important concerns such as catching frogs and painted turtles in the pond in the open pasture across from the Codman gate. This we did with our particular friend, Elliot Bunker, whose widowed mother kept a few cows and sold milk for a living at the corner of Concord and Codman roads. Lincoln was still a puritan town. Elliot was not allowed to do anything on Sunday but go to church and read the Bible. Once, when he slipped away on a June afternoon, to join my brother and me for a swim in Beaver Dam Brook, we were at enormous pains to put him back together again, white shirt, carefully knotted tie and hair meticulously dried and smoothed with our handkerchiefs so that his mother should not discover his awful violation of the Sabbath.

Then we went to boarding school. We no longer passed the Codman House, for on vacations our interests kept us always looking the other way towards Fairhaven Bay where we skated and boated and swam. Only we heard of them in occasional scraps of conversation. We discovered that they were distant relations. Our grandmother's maiden name was Ogden. The eccentric elder brother of the Codmans, who lived in France, was called Ogden. He had gone to bed when the Germans invaded and not got up till they left. Now Tom Codman

was happy again, resuming his interrupted custom of spending the winter in Paris. Our aunt Elsie Adams, went there, too, accompanying Aunt Lulu, her sister. Aunt Lulu's husband, Nelson Perkins, was on the Reparations Commission, and gave full and amusing reports at tea at Grandma's. Tom took her to the theater and fell asleep. Ogden was being wildly extravagant, building a palace on the Riviera. We learned that long ago the Codmans had gone abroad to save money. Our father had seen them in Rome in the nineties, the Mater and the four younger children jammed into a victoria solemnly driving out every afternoon. Somehow, Ogden, the elder brother, had escaped. Ogden, the father, was never in the victoria. He liked good company and champagne and found occupation elsewhere. Then our aunts had seen them at Dinard in Brittany, where they lived for several years, along with our grandmother's sister, Mrs. Cryder and her husband, who had gone abroad for the same purpose, to save money. When enough money had been saved the families came home and brought the daughters out. The Cryder girls married millionaires. But the Codman girls did not marry anybody. Perhaps the reason was that when they went to parties they danced only with their brothers.

The Pater and our grandfather had been friendly and the families dined together. But after the Pater's death in the early 1900s only the most formal calls were exchanged, and after awhile these ceased. The Mater died in the early twenties, and Ahla soon after. The beautiful house became entirely silent. The shutters were usually closed—in winter when Dorothy and Hugh had gone to Number 5 Marlborough Street and Tom had gone to Paris—in summer to keep out the heat. Our mother very occasionally met Hugh at the Shaws' in Concord. He had become tragically ill with Parkinson's disease and had had to give up the violin. Our mother said he had been really good with the violin and even had been offered a place

in the symphony orchestra. But the Mater vetoed that. A gentleman did not play for money. The Shaws were a musical family. When Hugh went there he used to take his violin and his tea ball. He was charming and pleasant and everyone was delighted with his whim of preferring his own tea. But the illness became more distressing. News of the Codmans, when any came, came via Paris.

The depression ended any contact, even via Paris. Everybody cut down. The roadsides began to grow up to brush. The hay was not cut. The apple trees went unpruned. Imperceptibly the trees grew taller, and except in winter, the shuttered Codman House could be no more than glimpsed behind a veil of trees. Then occurred a curious accident: *fato profugus*, driven by fate like Aeneas, our mother's automobile stopped in front of the Codman gate. There was nothing to do but telephone for help. She walked up the driveway and to the side door and rang. There was a considerable rattling of chains and locks and the door was opened by a pleasant woman in a white uniform. But mother had only begun to state her errand when out of the gloom of the shuttered house—it was summer and the glare outside made everything within seem dark—burst Dorothy Codman, profuse in greeting, overflowing with pleasure and hospitality. The unexpected guest was brought into the drawing room, where Hugh was sitting, and comforted with a cool drink and eager conversation. She was not allowed to leave till she had promised to return on Sunday with our father for tea.

Thus was resumed the association of the families that had all but lapsed after the death of the elder Ogden Codman. At the insistence of Dorothy our parents brought all of us children, now quite grown up, to the house. Soon we were calling there often, and were asked to lunch or dinner. Especially I remember once after lunch, a very hot day, we went from the cool of the house to look at the Italian garden, now

much overgrown. Dorothy and Tom, my sister Mary, and I walked ahead. Hugh followed, more slowly. Arriving at the head of the garden we looked back. Hugh had disappeared! Then we saw his legs, upside down, pointing to the sky, behind some bushes! Mary and I hurried to pick him up. He was, by some miracle, undamaged. He had unfolded his shooting stick, sat down on it, and the stick had suddenly sunk half its length into the ground, into a crevice between two rocks.

We learned bit by bit, much of the history of the house. How the Pater and the Mater, about the time of the Civil War, had come out to see it, and been shown the drawing room, where apples were strung on wires to dry and corn cobs were hanging by their husks in bunches. How brother Ogden had found a paneled door from the east room in the ice house and put it back where it belonged; of the gradual restoration of the house, with its innumerable incidents of family life; the life of a family that had withdrawn from the life of the nation a generation past and had made a deliberate effort to recreate the eighteenth century, and to live in the age of Charles Bulfinch and Christopher Gore.

It was a refreshment to enter that house. The uncertain present was left behind, with whatever it might contain of joy or difficulty. Within was a settled calm. Everything that could happen, had happened. Nothing now would change. And the conversation was out of Jane Austen; amusing, vivid, of trivial incidents which, with their touch of nature, made the whole past come alive, so that "Uncle Doctor" Codman, Charles Chambers, Chambers Russell and John Copley with his painted corkscrew on the wine closet door, were as present as Mrs. Swan's French furniture in the drawing room. Mrs. Swan had a husband, Captain Swan, who preferred jail in France during the Revolution to domestic felicity with Mrs. Swan in Boston. Eventually he did return, with a shipload of Louis Seize chairs and settees, the property of would-

be émigrés who were less fortunate than their furniture. Meanwhile Mrs. Swan's "pet general" had died. But Mrs. Swan kept him permanently in the garden, and she and her husband were happily—or perhaps unhappily—reunited.

In a gallery of memory pictures, two are, perhaps, outstanding. It was a perfect afternoon in late October. We were crossing the Codman fields, a girl not much more than twenty, a young man not yet thirty. We had become engaged to be married that day. Nobody knew this but ourselves. I suggested we call on the Codmans. To them we told our secret, knowing it would be kept. Other than with each other, they communicated only with shadows. They were in the lovely white paneled parlor, the east room. There was a bright fire on the hearth. Tom was at the tea table, Hugh and Dorothy to either side. Their joy and happiness at our happiness was as sincere as if it had been their own. And immediately they began tracing our pedigrees and soon discovered that through them we were both related, on my side through the Ogdens, on my wife's through the Sullivans.

The other picture is later, perhaps ten years later. The war is over, we have returned from army life, and there are children. Two or three of them are playing on the floor of the west drawing room with mechanical toys brought from Europe before 1900. Tom is taking them out, one by one from the Chinese lacquer cabinet, and winding them up and setting them going for the children's delight. Dorothy is smiling and sipping the cup of hot water she calls tea. In my pocket is Hugh's watch. Hugh is lone, the sweetest-natured of the family, a very dear friend. He left me his watch, and with it I remember the concerts he took me to, his courage in the adversity of his illness when he had to sit on his hands to control their shake lest he disturb the music.

The link with the past does not break. The Codmans and their house join us still with the life of the nineteenth and even of the eighteenth centuries.