Number 2, Winter 1997

Groton Gazette

The Newsletter of the Winthrop Papers Projects: Number 2, Winter 1997
Published by The Massachusetts Historical Society
Edited by Professor Francis Bremer, Millersville University and Donald Yacovone, M.H.S.

The Journal of John Winthrop

Harvard University Press has just published The Journal of John Winthrop, prepared by Richard Dunn of the University of Pennsylvania and Laetitia Yeandle of the Folger Library. This new and definitive edition is the first since its original publication in the nineteenth century by James Savage. Editors Dunn and Yeandle corrected errors in the first edition and added new materials from the manuscript notebooks of John Winthrop. In size and appearance, this new volume is designed to be compatible with previously published volumes of the Winthrop Papers. Harvard University Press also has printed an abridged, modernized version of the text in hardcover and paperback for a general audience and for classroom use. To order any version of the Journal contact Harvard University Press at: 1-800-448-2242.

The Massachusetts Historical Society

Also of note is the recent publication of Louis L. Tucker's The Massachusetts Historical Society, A Bicentennial History, 1791-1991, which is available from the Society's distributor, Northeastern University Press, Box 6525, Ithaca, NY 14851. This attractive and entertaining book by the Society's director is an unvarnished history of the country's oldest historical society. It has much to say about the Winthrop family's role in shaping the M.H.S., especially that of Robert C. Winthrop. Harvard Professor Bernard Bailyn judged the book a "fascinating, witty, droll, at times hilarious account."

New Winthrop Materials

On his most recent excursion to England in November 1996, Frank Bremer continued his search for long-forgotten Winthrop materials. In the Public Record Office he found rare documents of William Winthrop's (1529-1582) support of Puritan clergy in Elizabethan England. At the Suffolk Record Office in Ipswich, Frank uncovered documents relating to Adam Winthrop's (1548-1629) donation of land in Boxford in 1602 where the Boxford school was erected. And at the Suffolk Record Office in Bury St. Edmund's, he found deeds and other legal documents dealing with the property holdings of the Winthrops in Edwardstone, the village next to Groton where John Winthrop (1588-1649) was born.

Groton Place and Groton Hall

Frank also continued to investigate the mysterious question of where "Groton Manor," the ancestral home of the Winthrops, actually stood. Adam Winthrop (1498-1562) had purchased the estate from Henry VIII in 1544. But the "manor house" (Groton Hall) -the estate's principal house- was already occupied under the terms of a previous lease. With Groton Hall unavailable, Winthrop entered into a ninety-nine year lease to the rectory and glebe land. He enlarged the rectory, turning it into what he called his "mansion house," what became known as "Groton Place." That became the principal residence of the family for as long as they owned the manor. Groton Hall continued to be leased and occasionally occupied by other members of the family. Thus, John Winthrop, the future governor of Massachusetts, lived in Groton Place as lord of the manor, while his father and mother occupied Groton Hall. Groton Hall, later expanded, still stands. The Winthrop "manor house," long believed to have been torn down, also still stands, and is known locally as "Groton Place." If this was not confusing enough, later changes made to the structure, specifically a Georgian facade, had been placed on the old structure disguising its true antiquity.

During his last English sojourn, Frank gained permission from current residents to have the interior of the house photographed. Much original carved woodwork, brickwork, and wall paintings from the time of the early Winthrops survives.

Groton Church

While visiting Groton, Frank was privileged to read the lesson during the Remembrance Sunday service. The lectern and a table that served as the altar were located in the nave. The chancel area was covered by large plastic sheets as repair work on the chancel roof proceeds. The service was accompanied by the melodious sound of water dripping from the roof onto plastic.

Like many historic church buildings, St. Bartholomew's Church at Groton is expensive to maintain. Over the years members of the Winthrop family have done much to aid the small congregation of the parish to bear the costs of historic preservation. Members of the congregation speak with great gratitude for the assistance Winthrop family members have provided.

The church's roof repairs remain a major challenge and any assistance from readers of this newsletter will be much appreciated. Contributions can be sent to "The Winthrop Family in America Fund for Groton Church", New York Community Trust, 2 Park Avenue, New York, New York 10016, and are tax deductible.
The Letters of Robert C. Winthrop

Statesman, Whig party leader, orator, philanthropist, editor, historian, and president of the M.H.S., Robert C. Winthrop embodied the high culture of nineteenth-century Boston. Known throughout the country in his lifetime, Winthrop, regrettably, has fallen from view in ours. For someone once so powerful and influential, it is difficult to understand his current anonymity. The Society's ongoing effort to restore Winthrop's place in history, with a select edition of his letters took an interesting turn recently. Donald Yacovone, editor of the Letters of Robert C. Winthrop, spent last September at the Library of Congress's manuscript division searching for previously untapped Winthrop letters. In anticipation of his trip, Donald was able to identify over 40 different manuscript collections at the LC that were either known to contain or likely to contain Winthrop correspondence. Little could prepare Donald for what awaited him.

Examination of a few small collections in the first two days went quickly and some new letters surfaced. But on the third day, Clio opened the flood gates. The next three weeks were devoted to a page by page examination of ten enormous bound volumes of manuscripts in the Jabez Lamar Monroe Curry (1825-1903) collection. Over 90% of these volumes -approximately six hundred letters- -were authored by Robert C. Winthrop!

The importance of this particular collection is hard to overstate. Curry was the second general agent of the Peabody Education Fund and Winthrop was chairman of its board of trustees. Curry, a former Confederate officer and member of the Confederate Congress, became Winthrop's right hand. The two men formed an intense friendship, which, to a large measure, symbolized the process of national reconciliation in the years after the Civil War. The correspondence between Winthrop and Curry, preserved at the Library of Congress, charts the history of the Fund between 1881 -when Curry became general agent- -and Winthrop's death in 1894.

Founded in 1867 by the Anglo-American merchant George Peabody, the Peabody Education Fund was the first philanthropy established in the wake of the Civil War to promote free public education in the South for whites and African Americans. As chairman of the Fund, Winthrop exercised decisive leadership. The South's modern public educational system, in part, is the result of Winthrop's and the Fund's work. Much new light will be shed on the Fund and on the history of education and race relations in the South from this one body of manuscripts.

Research in the Curry papers also cleared up a strange mystery. The Peabody Education Fund's first general agent was the Massachusetts educator and colleague of Horace Mann, Barnas Sears. Sears had resigned the presidency of Brown University in 1867 to become the Fund's general agent and assume control of its day-to-day operations. Sears maintained an extremely close professional relationship with Winthrop, and undoubtedly corresponded several times each week. The number of Winthrop-Sears letters must have numbered in the thousands. Sometime prior to his death, Winthrop had returned his Peabody Fund letters to Curry, thus uniting both sides of the correspondence. Upon Curry's death, his papers were given to the Library of Congress. But what had happened to the Sears-Winthrop Peabody Fund letters? Only a few survive in the Winthrop papers at the M.H.S. An earlier national search for a collection of Sears letters turned up nothing. The Curry papers held the key to this nagging mystery.

Near the end of his life, an ailing Sears obtained the assistance of his daughter to help manage the crushing burden of Peabody Fund work. During his attempt to manage the Fund's transition to its new general agent, Winthrop learned that Barnas Sears's helpful daughter had incinerated all her father's papers. A sad loss, indeed. The flames did more than simply envelope an enormous body of precious Winthrop correspondence. They destroyed our best chance of fully recovering the inner history and founding years of the Peabody Education Fund, a fascinating and important episode during the era of Reconstruction.

New Winthrop Projects!

Religious Manuscripts Volume: Work continues on the preparation of a new volume in the M.H.S. Winthrop Papers series titled Winthrop Papers, Series II: Religious Manuscripts. This collection of sixteenth and seventeenth century Winthrop manuscripts will include the sermon notebook kept by John Winthrop in 1628, which never has been published. Other items in the proposed volume will be newly edited with more complete versions of published manuscripts. Updates on this project, which is projected to be completed in the Fall of 1998, can be found on the Winthrop Papers home page on the world wide web (see below).

Winthrop Medical Notebooks: Under the editorial direction of Robert Anderson of the New England Historic Genealogical Society, the M.H.S. has begun work on publishing the medical notebooks of John Winthrop, Jr., the son of Massachusetts's illustrious founder and a governor of colonial Connecticut. This volume will also appear in Series II of the Winthrop Papers. These medical notebooks are the largest single record of individuals’ symptoms and their treatment in the colonial period. The book will be thoroughly annotated and promises to be a major contribution to the social and medical history of early America.

Winthrop Papers on the Web

The Winthrop Papers project has a home page and all readers of this newsletter are invited to visit. The site includes copies of the newsletter and a web archive which includes drafts of manuscripts which have been edited and are awaiting publication. You can visit the Winthrop Papers home page at: http://muweb.millersville.edu/~winthrop