

A TOPOGRAPHICAL  
AND  
HISTORICAL DESCRIPTION  
OF  
BOSTON.

BY  
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## CHAPTER XXX.

### THE OLD CONDUIT.

The First Attempt to introduce Water into Boston... A Conduit Suggested by Capt. Robert Keayne in 1649... Keayne's Bequests, 1653... Capt. William Tyng's Grant to Everell and Scottow in 1649, confirmed in 1656... Conduit up in 1652, and incorporated... Description of the Conduit... Its Situation... Conduit street... Uses of the Conduit... Great Fire of 1679... Surroundings of the Old Conduit... Old Sun Tavern... Bight of Leogan... Old Hancock House in Corn Court... Old Fish Market... Swing Bridge... Triangular Warehouse... Roebuck Passage... Old Feather Store... Old Museum... Elephant Tavern... Draw Bridge... Golden Candlestick... Sign of the Key... Scottow's Alley... Union Stone... Boston Stone... Mill Bridge... Star Tavern... Green Dragon Tavern... Old Franklin House.

NOTWITHSTANDING the numerous springs which poured out water in various parts of the town, the good people in the olden time were so illy provided with this necessary element, that very soon after the settlement of the peninsula resort was had to artificial means for obtaining a more plentiful supply of this important and much needed article. Among the most noted of the early attempts for procuring water for the daily use of the towns-people was the conduit, a very singular contrivance, but one which answered a very good purpose in the limited space in which its benevolence was experienced. Most persons who have read the accounts of the old town have undoubtedly noticed allusions to this structure, but few have been able to form a definite idea of this early handiwork of the enterprising forefathers

of the town, or been fortunate enough to designate upon the map its exact position.

If the early constructed wells are excepted, the ancient conduit may be justly said to have been the first attempt towards introducing water works in the town, and had its origin in the early necessities of the townsmen. The want of something of the kind had become so evident as early as the year 1649, that the subject of a public conduit had been mooted in the town, and Captain Robert Keayne, of the Artillery Company, had made certain provisions for the establishment of such a contrivance in a will written that year, but subsequently superseded by the voluminous instrument of one hundred and fifty-eight recorded pages, executed on the twenty-eighth of December, 1653, and proved on the second of May, 1656, he having died on the twenty-third day of the previous March of the last-mentioned year. This remarkable individual in his curious document used the following language: "Haveing beene trained up in Military Discipline from my younger yeares, & haveing endeavoured to promote it the best I could since God hath brought me into this country [in 1635], & seeing he hath beene pleased to use me as a poore Instrument to lay the foundation of that Noble Society of the Artillery Company in this place, that hath so far prospered by the blessing of God, as to helpe many with good experience in the vse of their armes, . . . I shall desire to be buryd as a Souldier in a Military way." After providing for his family, he sets apart the sum of two hundred pounds for any man or woman, in Old England or New, who could make it justly appear that he had unjustly wronged them. He made bequests for a market house, a conduit (a good

help in danger of fire), conveniences for the courts, commissioners and townsmen; a room for a library, a gallery for the elders, an armory, a room for divines, scholars, merchants, shipmen, strangers and townsmen, and many other things, according to his strange fancy. If the town should slight or undervalue his gift for the conduit and other "buildings," then his money, and the books he proposed for the library, were to go for the sole use of the College at Cambridge. While it is certain that Captain Keayne's books did not go to found the library, — for that good act was left to be performed by Mayor Bigelow two hundred years later, — it is undoubtedly true that the conduit had its origin in the provision of the Captain's will; for it appears that in the year 1649, during his lifetime, Mr. William Tyng, a wealthy and distinguished townsman of Boston, and subsequently of Braintree, gave certain rights and privileges to Messrs. James Everell and Joshua Scottow, and their associates, in a certain estate, "with free liberty to dig, find out, erect and set up one fountain, well, head spring, or more, within his land or pasture ground, situate, lying and being on the westerly side of his then dwelling-house in Boston aforesaid, as also from said well or wells, fountain or fountains, to dig or trench through said pasture ground, to lay down such pipes or water-work conveyances as should be necessary for the carrying or conveying of water from the aforesaid fountain or fountains, well or wells, unto such place as the said neighborhood and company shall see convenient for the erecting of a conduit or water works." Mr. Tyng died on the eighteenth of January, 1652-3, and subsequently the grant was confirmed by the trustees of his children, on the twenty-ninth of April, 1656. It is

certain that the conduit was "set up" in March, 1652, for at that time the townsmen voted that Mr. James Everell and the neighbors should have one of the bells which were given to the town by Captain Crumwell for a clock, and enjoy while they make use of it there. In 1652, at the May session of the General Court of the Colony, on petition of the inhabitants of "Conduite Streete in Boston," the water-works company was incorporated for building the conduit, and provisions were made for the use of the water in case of fire.

From what has been stated, it would appear that the conduit was a large reservoir, about twelve feet square, made for holding water, conveyed to it by pipes leading from neighboring wells and springs, for the purpose of extinguishing fires and supplying the inhabitants dwelling near it with water for domestic purposes. Over the reservoir was a wooden building in the olden time, used for storage purposes; but in more modern days the old building was removed, and the conduit covered with plank, raised in the centre about two feet, and sloping to the sides like a hipped roof. On Saturdays, this platform was used as a stand for a meal market, which was as noted in its day as the hay-stand in Haymarket Square is at the present time. As it stood in the very old times with Captain Crumwell's bell, it must have been one of the most remarkable of the ancient landmarks of the town.

This strange construction was situated in a square formed by the junction of Wing's lane (now Elm street) and Union street, in the neighborhood of the present North street, and a short distance from Dock Square. The street leading from the Conduit to the Draw Bridge, placed over the Mill Creek (now the site

of Blackstone street), was one of the first highways laid out by the early settlers of the town, and was for a long time known as Conduit street, because the proprietors of the conduit owned an estate on the north side of the street, about where the old building stands, now occupied by Joseph Breck and Son as an agricultural warehouse, and which was in the early part of the present century the next east of the old Boston Museum, where so many curious and rare objects used to be exhibited; and one side of which, at no very distant date, was bounded by an open lane or passage-way, which contained a water convenience that may be remembered by persons who lived in the neighborhood only fifty years ago as the conduit, — a name which was given to it by the boys, who had probably heard of the old reservoir of 1652; and on the east of this lane was the old Elephant Tavern of bygone days. The exact position of the conduit is marked out on John Bonner's plan of the town, engraved in 1722, and has been pointed out by antiquaries as being near where the present North street and Market Square join Union street, just west of the "Old Feather Store," which was taken down between the tenth and thirteenth of July, 1860, to the great regret of many who delighted in looking upon that well-preserved specimen of the buildings of the first fifty years of the town's history. Old Conduit street, which was sometimes called Draw Bridge street, lost its name in 1708, and the way from the conduit in Union street over the bridge to Elliston's corner, lower end of Cross street, was named Ann street, in honor of good Queen Anne of blessed memory, just as Union street took its name at the same time in commemoration of the great British union.

The old conduit never fulfilled the expectations of those who devised and built it; and its traces have so entirely disappeared, that not a single vestige of it can be found, and only an occasional mention of the street that bore its name, and of the old estate alluded to, is all that can be found concerning it in the ancient town books and in the records of the conveyances of land in Suffolk Records. No digging in the street for the laying of drains or sewers has, within the remembrance of persons now living, shown any of its remains; although it was well remembered in its last condition by the old persons who have recently passed away.

With the exception of the companies for iron works in various parts of the colony, this establishment was one of the earliest incorporations for private purposes in Massachusetts; and it undoubtedly was of some service on washing days, and at times of "scathfiers" in the neighborhood. On the occasion of the great fire of the eighth of August, 1679, it was put to especial use, and undoubtedly did much to save the property situated north and west of it, although all the business part of the town south of it, from the old feather store corner to Mackerel Bridge near Liberty Square, was completely destroyed by the raging element.

The site of the old conduit was, until the recent improvements at the South End and on the Back Bay Lands, in the centre of the town; and probably there were more matters of interest within a minute's walk from it than from any other point on the peninsula. Just south of it, a few steps, was the westerly termination of the Old Dock, now filled up, but which extended to the buildings forming the western boundary of Market Square; and this separated it from the old "Sun Tavern,"

at the corner of Dock Square and the old Corn Market, favorably known the past sixty years as the grocery store of the famous George Murdock, and of his successor, Wellington. Taking a course around the conduit as a centre, next came the renowned "Bight of Leogan," late the Bite Tavern of James M. Stevens, and farther on "Col. Fitch's Lane," known better as Flagg alley or Change avenue, with its narrow passageway, "Damnation Alley," behind Dr. Noyes's old apothecary shop, lately renewed by William Read as a gun store. Then came Corn Court, with the "Hancock House," in which it is said Louis Philippe tarried while he made his short abode in Boston during the French Reign of Terror. Between these and the Dock formerly stood Palmer's warehouse, which gave way to Faneuil Hall and the "Old Fish Market"; and east of these was the "Swing Bridge" over the street that led to Ann street, passing by the "Old Triangular Warehouse," at the corner of North Market street and the ancient "Roebuck Passage," which was so narrow that only one team could pass through it at a time, and which often presented the curious scene between teamsters, made common by the custom of tossing a copper to see which should back out for the other. Between the conduit and the Roebuck Passage were the "Old Feather Store," the "Old Boston Museum," and the "Elephant Tavern" already alluded to; and not far from these was the "Old Draw Bridge" in Ann street over the Mill Creek, which gave way in 1659 when the crowd returned from the Common after the hanging of the Quakers. East-erly, in old "Ann street," between the conduit and the Draw Bridge, will be remembered Samuel Whitwell's "Golden Candlestick" at the corner of Union street

and William Homes's "Key," and the crooked old archway over Scottow's alley that led to Creek Square and Hatters' Square. In Union street to the northeast the memory will extend to the "Union Stone" near Atwood's Oyster House, and to the "Boston Stone" at the corner of the old building that used to stand in "Marshall's Lane." In Hanover street the "Mill Bridge," a stone arch, the old "Star Tavern" at the northeasterly corner of Union and Hanover streets, the ancient "Green Dragon Tavern" in North Union street, and the old "Tallow Chandler House," more generally known as the "Blue Ball," on the corner of Union street, in which the parents of Franklin dwelt the last years of their lives, and in which the great Bostonian passed his boyhood, and which was demolished on the tenth of November, 1858, and its site turned into the street, will not soon be forgotten. These, with innumerable other objects of interest, will occur to any one who retraces the steps of his younger days in passing around this noted neighborhood. Each of these could furnish a chapter of interesting reminiscences, and some of them could awaken memories of the past connected with the most important era in our national history.