

A TOPOGRAPHICAL
AND
HISTORICAL DESCRIPTION
OF
BOSTON.

BY
NATHANIEL B. SHURTLEFF.

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CHAPTER XXXI.

PONDS AND AQUEDUCTS.

The Town's Watering Place in Pond street, now Bedford street . . . Its Site . . . Attempts to have it filled up . . . Its Sale in 1753 to David Wheeler . . . First Mention of it in the Book of Possessions, 1643 . . . Estates Contiguous to it . . . Size of the Pond Lot . . . The Rowe Estate . . . Avon Place . . . Owners of the Pond Lot . . . Swamps and Marshes . . . Jamaica Pond Aqueduct . . . Aqueduct Company incorporated in 1795 . . . Location of the Logs, and Extent of Supply of Water . . . The Lake Cochituate Water Act Passed 1846 . . . Water Introduced into Boston in 1848 . . . Mystic Water Introduced into East Boston, January, 1870,

EXCLUSIVE of the ponds on the Common, there were, two hundred years ago, two other ponds so called; but both of them have now disappeared forever. One of these was formed by natural causes, and was coexistent with the town; while the other, a work of human art, had its origin in the exigencies of the early settlers of the peninsula. The latter of these, the Old Mill Pond, made by the building of the Old North Causeway, has been sufficiently described in a former chapter; the former, the old watering place, is worthy of a short notice.

The natural pond was of very small size; but its water is said to have been of considerable purity for such a location as it possessed, and was much valued by the townsmen of the olden time, who took good care of it, it being, as the old records styled it, the "Town's watering place for their cattle." Although this ancient convenience, which our forefathers enjoyed, has been

destroyed, and no vestige of it left, yet its position is distinctly noted on the oldest map of the town, — Bonner's plan, as it is called, published by William Price in 1722. It was on the northerly side of Pond street, which took its name from this circumstance, and which, in February, 1821, took the name of Bedford street, in honor of the late Jeremiah Fitch, Esq., one of the last Board of Selectmen, whose family had a summer residence in the town of that name; and its exact site was a short distance west of the meeting-house occupied by the society of the Second Congregational Church, now under the ministry of Rev. Chandler Robbins, D. D., and nearly opposite the Latin school-house.

Tradition, passed down from the early inhabitants, would lead to the inference that this pond was the convenience chiefly used for the cattle, and that cows and horses were driven to it from great distances in the town. This may be true, for the nearest public pump, a hundred years ago, was farther from it on the north than State street, and there was no accommodation south of it belonging to the town. The spring in Spring Lane was undoubtedly used somewhat for the same purpose, and the ponds on the Common were chiefly for the supply of the cattle that pastured there.

In course of time the pond became a great trouble to the families in its immediate neighborhood, and motions were made by the inhabitants to have it filled up, and the Selectmen were required to consider the subject; but no satisfaction could be obtained from this body, further than the following opinion, which was ventured by them on the second of May, 1739: "That it is with the town to give leave for filling up the said pond if they see fit, and we are of opinion it may be convenient

to have it so done accordingly." Nothing resulted from this opinion, except renewed efforts for getting it out of the possession of the town; and with this view Mr. Benjamin Church, a land-owner in the vicinity of it, petitioned the town, on the fourth of May, 1743, that it might be granted to him; but the town refused the request. Again, in the year 1753, David Wheeler, who owned the estate just west of it on the main street (then Newbury street), petitioned, requesting that he might be allowed to hire or purchase the same; and the matter was referred to a committee to examine into the condition of the pond, and ascertain what encroachments had been made upon it. The committee subsequently reported that the pond, so called, was a nuisance, and recommended that it be sold to help pay Mr. Dolbeare a debt owing him, he having erected certain buildings near the town dock for the benefit of the town; and on the fifteenth of May, 1753, the freeholders and other inhabitants in town meeting accepted the report, and voted to sell the land on which the pond was situated, which was done at public auction, on the twenty-seventh of the following August, to Mr. David Wheeler, blacksmith, for fifty-one pounds in lawful money.

The first mention of "the watering place" is to be found in the "Book of Possessions," which contains an inventory of the landed property of the real estate owners in Boston, as it was held by them about the year 1643. This book, which is carefully preserved among the city archives, had its origin in an order passed by the General Court of the Colony, on the ninth of September, 1639, and complied with imperfectly by the town about the years 1643 and 1644. At this early

date, the land in which the pond was situated was at the then southerly part of the town, abutting southerly on the south lane leading to Fort Hill, then known as the Pond street, and fronting the estate of Mr. Robert Woodward, a carpenter, who had his house and workshop upon his lot, which extended westerly to the High street (now Washington street). Westerly the pond lot was bounded by the estates of Mr. Thomas Wheeler and Mr. William Blantaine, and northerly by the estate of Mr. Blantaine, — the easterly boundary being open land or highway between the pond and the estate of Mr. John Viall.

In 1753, the time the estate was purchased by Mr. Wheeler, the lot was very small, containing less than one-ninth of an acre, and measured southerly on Pond street (now Bedford street) only forty-seven feet. Westerly it measured one hundred and eight feet, partly on the estate of the heirs of Samuel Adams, Esq., and partly on land of Mr. Benjamin Church; northerly forty-six feet on the same estate of Mr. Church; and easterly ninety-four feet in part on land of Mr. Church, and partly on land of Mr. Robert Thompson.

The estate on the east of the pond, which, in 1753, belonged to Mr. Thompson, was purchased by him of Mr. Benjamin Church in 1742, and, in 1764, was sold to Mr. John Rowe (the person who gave name to Rowe's Pasture), and his heirs sold a large portion of it to Hon. William Prescott on the thirty-first of May, 1817. The Prescott heirs conveyed their portion of the estate, in 1845, to Hon. Henry B. Rogers, for the Church of the Saviour, then under the ministry of Rev. Mr. Waterston; and on the easterly portion of which his congregation erected the meeting-house now occupied by the

society of which Dr. Robbins is the pastor. On the northerly part of the Prescott lot now stands a large brick dwelling-house, and immediately west of this was the Old Pond, the Town's Watering Place, or Wheeler's Pond, just as any one pleased to call it. The two lots on the west of the Pond lot extended to the High street, as it was called, and have been divided and subdivided many times, until they now number many independent estates. The portion of Mr. Church's land on the rear was, in the year 1818, in connection with other estates, laid out into Avon place, chiefly through the instrumentality of the late Charles Ewer, Esq. This place has recently, by an order passed in 1867, been extended into Chauncy street, and now with Temple place forms a continuous avenue to Tremont street.

Mr. Wheeler did not destroy the pond when he bought the estate, but probably kept it many years in the condition in which it was when he received it. He died on the twentieth of September, 1770, giving his wife Hepzibah a life estate in the property, and providing that at her decease two-thirds of it should go to his son David, and the other third to his daughter Sarah, the wife of Jonathan Jones, a hatter. Goodwife Wheeler died in January, 1773; and David Wheeler, the son, also a blacksmith, as his father had been, died on the sixth of August, 1772, and his third wife, Dorcas, survived him, together with his daughter Elizabeth by his first wife, Elizabeth Davis. This daughter died unmarried on the first of December, 1808, and the Pond estate passed into the possession of her aunt Sarah Jones, who with her husband Jonathan Jones and her maiden daughter Nancy conveyed the estate by quitclaim deeds in 1809 and 1811 to their daughter Hepzi-

bah Jones. Hepzibah, in turn, on the thirtieth of July, 1830, quitclaimed her right in the estate to Richard Dewerson, a well-known ingenious mechanic, who died not long ago.

The long continued interest that the early Wheelers had in this estate, it being contiguous to the possession of the earliest of the name long before David became the purchaser, gave to the pond the name of Wheeler's Pond; and by this designation it was most generally known during the last half century of its continuance. It has not been known to supply water within the memory of any person living, although there are many persons now on the stage of life who think that they can remember skating on this pond during their early years. Be this as it may, it is certain that the boys of fifty years ago used in winter to gain access, through a passage-way leading from Washington street, not far from the present Avon place, to a small plat of ice, which was situated not far from the back part of Mr. Wheeler's lot.

With this pond disappeared all that could be called a natural pond on the peninsula; for there is no evidence whatever that the Frog Pond on the Common was ever anything more than a marshy bog transformed into an artificial pond by the industry and labor of the older townsmen. Similar places were in other parts of the town, and it would be an omission, deserving of being considered a fault, were no mention made of the most memorable of the swamps or bogs which were once to be noticed in Boston, and some of which can well be remembered by the old people now living in the city. The most noted of these were in places now perfectly dry, and so well guarded as to defy the scrutiny of the

most profound geologist to point out their locality from any present indications. A very noted one occupied a large space south of the Public Library building, between Boylston street and Eliot street, its central part being where Van Rensselær place now is. Another covered the territory of Franklin place, extending from Hawley street nearly to Atkinson street; and a third, nearly contiguous to the last named, was situated where the southerly end of Devonshire street now is, a little north of Summer street. Where the estates lie between Rowe place and Kingston street was another, which was formerly a part of the large field known as Rowe's Pasture; and on this spot a noted antiquarian writer has been known to have shot a kildee not far from the commencement of the present century. At the South End, marshes were on each side of the main street, especially in the neighborhood of Northampton street; and at the West End, between McLean, Allen and Blossom streets, was a considerable swamp, the remembrance of which has not entirely passed away. Unquestionably there were other low places of a marshy character, but those mentioned above are the most known.

Before quitting the subject of water, it may not perhaps be amiss to say a few words about the Jamaica Pond aqueduct, which at the early part of the present century supplied so large a portion of the inhabitants of the south part of Boston with fresh water for domestic use. On the twenty-seventh of February, 1795, Governor Samuel Adams approved an act of the General Court, whereby Luther Eames, Nathan Bond and William Page, and their associates, were vested with corporate powers for the management and direction of the business, as a company, of bringing fresh water into the

town of Boston by subterraneous pipes; and, by a subsequent act, passed on the tenth of June, 1796, this corporation was empowered to assume the appellation of "The Aqueduct Corporation." The corporation was authorized "to bring from any part of the town of Roxbury into the town of Boston, and into any street in the same town, all such fresh water as they, the said Luther Eames, Nathan Bond, and William Page, and their associates, or any, or either of them, in their private and natural capacities" then had or hereafter should "have a right to dispose of, or to convey from the springs or sources thereof." The act gave power also to open the ground in any of the streets or highways in Roxbury and Boston as should be required for the sinking of the water pipes, but with very prudent provisions, which prevented the aqueduct from becoming a nuisance, or impairing any right of the town of Roxbury or any of its inhabitants in and to the waters of Jamaica Pond. The corporation could hold only \$33,000 in real estate, and the water works were to be divided into one hundred shares. The price of water was to be regulated by the General Court, the towns of Boston and Roxbury were to have the privilege of hydrants for extinguishing fires, and the first meeting was to be called by Hon. James Sullivan upon the proper application of the persons named in the act. On the twenty-second of June, 1803, an additional act was passed to facilitate the operations of the corporation. The capital of this company, as far as can be ascertained, was about \$130,000, or about \$1,300 to a share, which became much depreciated in value. No dividends were made during the first ten years after the commencement of the works, and subsequently the average of the divi-

dends for thirty years amounted only to a fraction less than four per cent a year. When the aqueduct was in its greatest prosperity, it supplied about fifteen hundred houses with water, chiefly at the South End, and in the neighborhood of Summer and Essex streets, and of Pleasant and Charles streets. The water was brought from Jamaica Pond in Roxbury through four main pipes of pitch pine logs, two of four inches bore, and two of three inches, the lateral pipes having a bore of one and a half inches. The lineal extent of the water pipes in Boston was about fifteen miles, and they extended north as far as Franklin street, and branched off easterly through Harrison avenue into Congress street nearly to State street, and to Broad street. They also branched off westerly through Pleasant and Charles streets, extending as far as the Massachusetts General Hospital, which was supplied with Jamaica Pond water. With comparatively a very small outlay, the aqueduct could have increased its benevolence in a tenfold ratio, and this the corporation desired to do, but was prevented by the citizens, who, on the twelfth of April, 1846, by accepting an act of the legislature, passed thirtieth of March, 1846, voted to introduce water from Cochituate Pond (then called Long Pond), in Natick, Framingham and Wayland, on a much more extensive plan; and ground was broken at Wayland for the purpose on the twentieth of August following; and the water introduced on Boston Common through the tall fountain in the Frog Pond on the twenty-fifth of October, 1848, to the great joy of the advocates of the measure, and also with the greatest acceptance of those who had conscientiously opposed the proposed plan of introduction at the inception of the enterprise. On the establishment

of the Cochituate Water Works, of course, all minor institutions of the kind had to yield way, and the old Jamaica Pond Aqueduct ceased to be of any special use either to owners or the public, and was consequently discontinued, leaving its more powerful rival a full possession of the field.

Since the annexation of the city of Roxbury, prudence and a foresight of the future requirements of Boston has induced the city to make arrangements for supplying East Boston and the public institutions at Deer Island with water from Mystic Pond; consequently an agreement was made with the city of Charlestown for this purpose, and water was let into the pipes leading to East Boston on the first of January, 1870, and from this date the inhabitants derive their supply of pure water through Charlestown from an extensive and undoubtedly never-failing source.