

Sweet Auburn

Spring 1996

The Newsletter of the Friends of Mount Auburn

The Statues of Bigelow Chapel

by Kathleen Fox

In 1843 when the building we now call Bigelow Chapel was planned, one of its purposes was to be "a repository of busts, statues, and other sepulchral monuments." The correspondence between Mount Auburn and the four expatriate American sculptors who were commissioned to create commemorative sculptures was carefully preserved in the voluminous business papers of the Cemetery and discovered by volunteer Kathleen Fox. These commissions reveal the influential role played by the Cemetery as an early patron of American sculptors and the complexities of the business of art in the 19th century.

When Supreme Court Justice Joseph Story, President of Mount Auburn, died in 1845, the Trustees put into action their plan for commemorative sculpture by allocating space in the Chapel for a statue of Justice Story, "when such a work worthy of the character of the original shall have been completed through the contributions of the public." Over forty subscribers came forward. The prime candidate for creating the statue was Story's own son, the artistically inclined lawyer William Wetmore Story (1819-1895). Story was honored to be selected, responding to Mount Auburn's new President Jacob Bigelow on January 19th, 1846: "I need scarcely say how fully I appreciate the kind consideration which must have prompted such a selection, nor how gladly I shall embrace the opportunity, to dedicate my best powers to such a work."

In 1847 a contract was drawn up specifying that the statue would be delivered within five years. Story would receive half his fee on delivery of a clay model, and the remaining half on delivery of the statue in marble. The \$3,970 raised by public subscription was put aside to accrue interest.

Story gave up his successful Boston law practice and moved to Rome, joining the expatriate community of American artists and writers. Alas, by 1851, only the clay model had been completed. Bigelow expressed his concern, suggesting among other things that carving the stone in America from American marble might expedite the process. Story responded:

I have certainly done all that the contract required. I have in all respects endeavored to do my duty to the Trustees — by doing my duty to myself & to my Father. I had supposed that the object of the statue was honorably to recognize my Father's character & services — that the time taken in making it was of vastly less consideration than the spirit of the work itself.

Story suggested giving the job to someone else. The Trustees annulled the original contract but drew up

Interior of Bigelow Chapel, circa 1890s, showing the statues of Otis and Adams. Photo by Phineas Hubbard.



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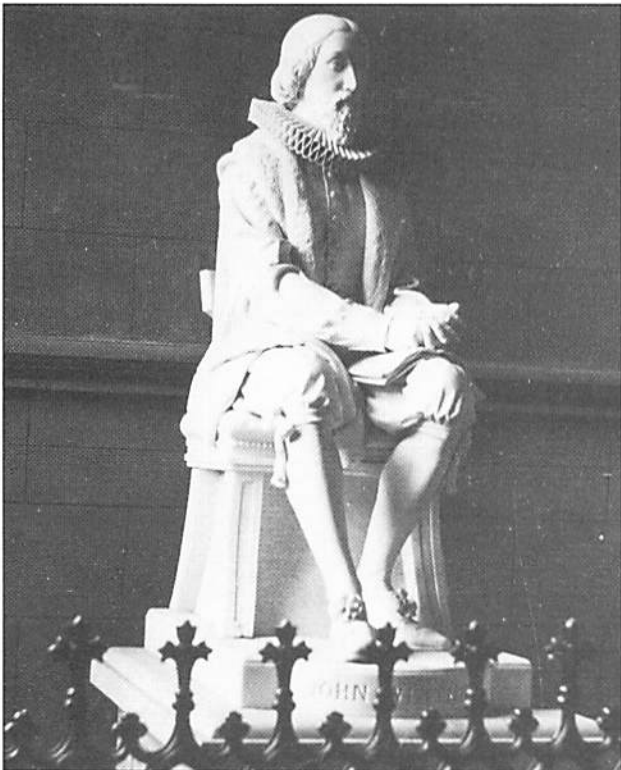
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*James Otis, patriot and orator of the Revolutionary period,
sculpted by Thomas Crawford.
Photo from a stereocard, circa 1870s.*



*John Winthrop, first governor of the Massachusetts Bay Colony,
sculpted by Richard Saltonstall Greenough.
Photo from a stereocard, circa 1870s.*

another with Story, who finally shipped the completed marble to Boston in 1855. It was exhibited at the Boston Athenaeum until September 1856, when local marble worker Thomas Bayley was paid \$50 to move it from the Athenaeum to Mount Auburn's Chapel.

In 1854, the Trustees voted to appropriate \$15,000 for three additional marble statues of persons distinguished in American history to be sculpted by the foremost American sculptors. Richard Saltonstall Greenough (1819-1904) was to carve a statue of Governor John Winthrop, representing the colonial period; Thomas Crawford (1813?-1857) to carve James Otis, representing the revolution; and Randolph Rogers (1825-1892) to carve John Adams, representing the independence of America.

The correspondence between Bigelow and these noted American sculptors working in Italy is full of complex details. In 1854 Bigelow wrote to Greenough proposing a contract. Greenough replied, responding to the suggestion that a penalty be imposed if a statue were not completed on time:

I think this is a mistake for several reasons. If an artist desires to defraud he has many more expedient means of doing so than by the delay of his work, in fact the most obvious way is to hurry his work. Again, many circumstances such as difficulty in finding good marble, no good workmen, the recasting and improving important points, illness or death of near relatives, . . . may delay an artist. . . . The better way is to arrange the installments of his pay so as neither to leave him or his employer in debt.

Bigelow agreed. Based on Greenough's suggestions, all three contracts were essentially the same. Each sculptor was to produce a small model in plaster, a life size model in plaster, and the final statue in marble. The artist would receive \$2500 after completion of the life size model, and the final \$2500 when the statue arrived at the Cemetery. The completed statue was due within three years and six months of signing the contract.

In 1856 Bigelow wrote to Greenough with concern:

I have not heard from Mr. Rogers since he left the United States. To Mr. Crawford I have sent duplicate copies of his contract & hope to receive one of them soon with his signature. I hope that all the statues will be completed & delivered within the specified time, as some of our Trustees are precise mercantile men, whose regard for punctuality might induce them to make trouble if the contract should lose its validity from non fulfillment on your part.

As proof that the work was progressing, artists sometimes sent photographs, as Rogers wrote to Bigelow in May, 1856:

I enclose two photographs of the statue of John Adams, which you were kind enough to commission me to execute. It has been seen during the winter by a great many Bostonians and as far as I can learn has been highly spoken of by all. I have already purchased the block of marble and shall commence blocking it out as soon as the model is

sufficiently dry, which will be in the course of a week or ten days . . . Mr. Crawford has finished the Otis. He leaves tomorrow morning for America.

Unfortunately, Crawford died of eye and brain cancer in October, 1857, before his marble statue of James Otis was completed. His wife Louisa contracted to have the piece finished by Randolph Rogers and wrote to Bigelow in January of 1858: "the statue of James Otis, modeled by Mr. Crawford for the Chapel at Mount Auburn, will be entirely completed by the end of this present month and ready for forwarding from Rome so soon as a safe opportunity may occur."

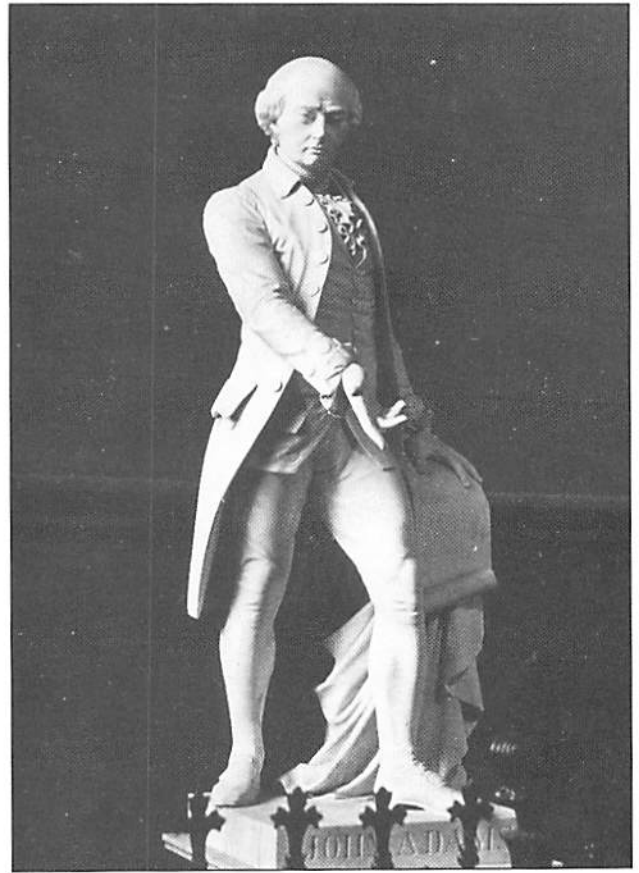
Bigelow replied:

. . . the plaster model will revert to the estate of Mr. Crawford, and, I think far better remain in Rome so that in case of accident a new statue may be constructed after it. And here let me suggest the expediency of having the statue insured for a sum sufficient to pay for a duplicate in marble if the original should be lost. A statue of John Adams by Randolph Rogers, & one of Webster by Powers, are supposed to be each having been shipped from Leghorn in the Oxford Sept. 1 & not since heard from . . . The statue should be shipped to Boston (not to New York) in the spring if a vessel is ready.

Randolph Rogers' statue of John Adams was indeed lost at sea. A duplicate was made, and by 1859 that statue was on its way to the U. S. The ship carrying it had to make an emergency landfall at Savannah, Georgia, and the statue didn't arrive in Boston until a year later. Richard Greenough was the only one of the sculptors to complete his work within the three years and six months called for.

All four statues, examples of the finest sculpture of their time, remained in Bigelow Chapel until 1898 when the building was remodeled to accommodate a crematory. The sculptures were then moved to the rotunda in the new Administration Building, designed to display them. In 1935 Mount Auburn closed its Boston office and moved all operations to the Administration Building. Prompted by the need for more office space, the Trustees offered the statues to Harvard University as a gift, provided that they "eventually will be placed on exhibition in a location consistent with their historical interest and sculptural merit." The statue of Justice Story was appropriately moved to Langdell Hall at the Harvard Law School. The other three went to Harvard's Memorial Hall, where to this day James Otis stands stage right in Sanders Theater. Winthrop and Adams, having spent the ensuing 60 years in relative obscurity looking down upon meals, registrations, and examinations in the old dining commons, are now handsomely displayed in Memorial Hall's recently renovated and renamed Annenberg Hall.

Kathleen Fox, Director of Teaching Support at Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government, has created a database of over 5,000 gravestones at Mount Auburn and continues to study these works of art and craftsmanship. Photos of the statues courtesy of the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities.



John Adams, a founding father and second President of the United States, sculpted by Randolph Rogers. Photo from a stereocard, circa 1870s.



Joseph Story, Associate Justice of the Supreme Court and first President of Mount Auburn Cemetery, sculpted by his son William Wetmore Story. Photo from a stereocard, circa 1870s.

Champion Trees

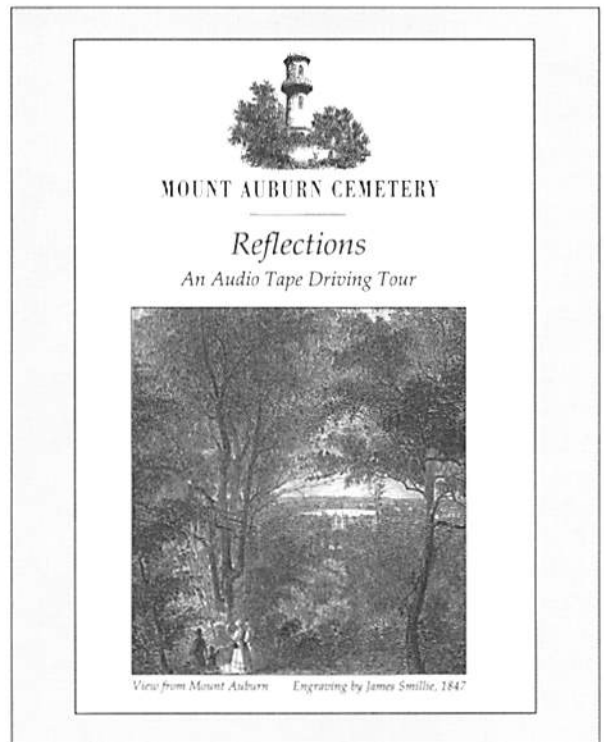
For the past twenty years, state foresters have been compiling records of the largest specimen trees of every species that grows in New England. In 1994, arborists at Mount Auburn located and carefully measured the largest candidates of 138 species at the Cemetery. The circumference of each trunk was measured at a point 4.5 feet above the ground. The height of the tree was measured from the ground to the highest growing point using a device called a clinometer, and the longest and shortest measurements of the tree's spread were averaged to give a value for crown spread. All three factors — circumference, height and crown spread — are considered in determining the champion tree of each species.

Our nominations were submitted to the Regional Foresters of the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Management, and forty-eight trees at Mount Auburn were accepted as Massachusetts State Champion Trees. Of these, seventeen qualified as New England Champions.

Of particular note are the spring-flowering Saucer Magnolia (*Magnolia soulangiana*) on Eagle Avenue and the Flowering Dogwood (*Cornus florida*) on Amethyst Path, both New England Champions. Three varieties of Mount Auburn's European beeches are the largest of their kind in the state. The New England Champion Scarlet Oak (*Quercus coccinea*) on Iris Path stands 99 feet tall in Consecration Dell. Maps showing the location of these champion trees are available at the Cemetery to help you appreciate these impressive specimens.



Consecration Dell, circa 1870s. The specimens that tower over the tree canopy in this 19th-century image are now gone, but the smaller Scarlet Oak seen to the left of the tall White Pine has grown to be the New England Champion of its kind.



Reflections An Innovative Audio Tour

Have you noticed the small maroon signs "Audio Tour" around the grounds of the Cemetery? They indicate the route and suggested stops of *Reflections*, the audio tape driving tour of Mount Auburn. During the one-hour driving tour, visitors journey through Mount Auburn's magnificent landscape, hearing about one of the world's most beautiful and historic cemeteries.

Created by award-winning, Cambridge-based producer Michael Schaffer, this audio tour combines narration, music, and natural sounds to provide an evocative and entertaining introduction to this unique place so special in American history. Fascinating stories of some of the more than 89,000 people who rest here highlight the tour. The tape cassette can be played in automobile or portable tape players. A *Boston Globe* review finds *Reflections* "a quietly dramatic and eminently convenient way for visitors to rediscover aspects of our own spiritual and social past through the sampler of stories Mount Auburn has to tell." *Reflections* is available for purchase (\$12) at the Cemetery from 8:30 AM to 3:30 PM every day. Rental tapes are available for \$5 (\$12 deposit; rentals must be returned by 3:30 PM the next day) and mail order from the Friends of Mount Auburn Cemetery (\$15). The tape cassette is attractively packaged with a map and musical notes.



Hannah Adams

1755-1831

Born in Medfield, Massachusetts, Hannah Adams was the first woman of note in America to make writing a vocation, supporting herself by her literary talents. Growing up in a literate

but poor family, she gained an education by extensive reading in her father's library. She was blessed with a retentive memory and inspired by insatiable curiosity.

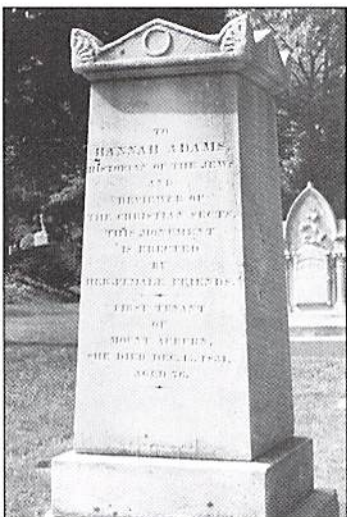
A conscientious compiler of historical data, her first book, *A View of Religions*, was published in 1784 and had four editions. Although handicapped by impaired vision, she completed a pioneering historical text, *Summary History of New England*, in 1799. This book, published in an abridged form, was used as a school textbook. After prolonged research, she completed her *History of the Jews* in 1812.

In spite of her intellectual accomplishments, she was compelled at one point to supplement her income by braiding straw for a living. Struck by the plight of this gifted woman, a circle of Boston ladies led by Mrs. Josiah Quincy succeeded in obtaining subscribers to give her a life annuity.

In Boston, she gained enduring fame as the first woman member of the private library and club, the Boston Athenaeum. She was voted free use of the library in March of 1829, prompting Josiah Quincy to comment: "One solitary female ventured to claim the freedom of its alcoves, and to endure the raising of the masculine eyebrows, provoked by the unaccustomed sight." Her portrait painted in 1827 by Chester Harding was donated to the Athenaeum as a gift from several ladies in 1833 and hangs in the Trustees Room today.

She died in Brookline on December 15, 1831, and her body was placed temporarily in a tomb in Boston. A subscription was raised by "her female friends" to erect a monument to her memory at Mount Auburn. A lot was donated for her burial by the Garden and Cemetery Committee of the Massachusetts Horticultural Society, then operating Mount Auburn, and Mount Auburn's

Treasurer was directed to pay \$35 for an iron fence to surround the monument. Although the inscription proclaims her "the first tenant of Mount Auburn," her burial in Lot #180 on Central Avenue on November 12, 1832, was the ninth interment. Her neoclassical monument, made by Cary and Dickinson, was, however, the first erected at Mount Auburn Cemetery.



Monument to Hannah Adams.
Photo by Hal Appleton/AKI.

An Invitation to Join

The Friends of Mount Auburn Cemetery

Please enroll me as a member.

- Individual \$20
- Household \$30
- Contributor \$60
- Donor \$100
- Senior Citizen/Student \$15
- Other \$ _____

Enclosed is my check for \$ _____ payable to
Friends of Mount Auburn Cemetery.

Name (please print)

Address

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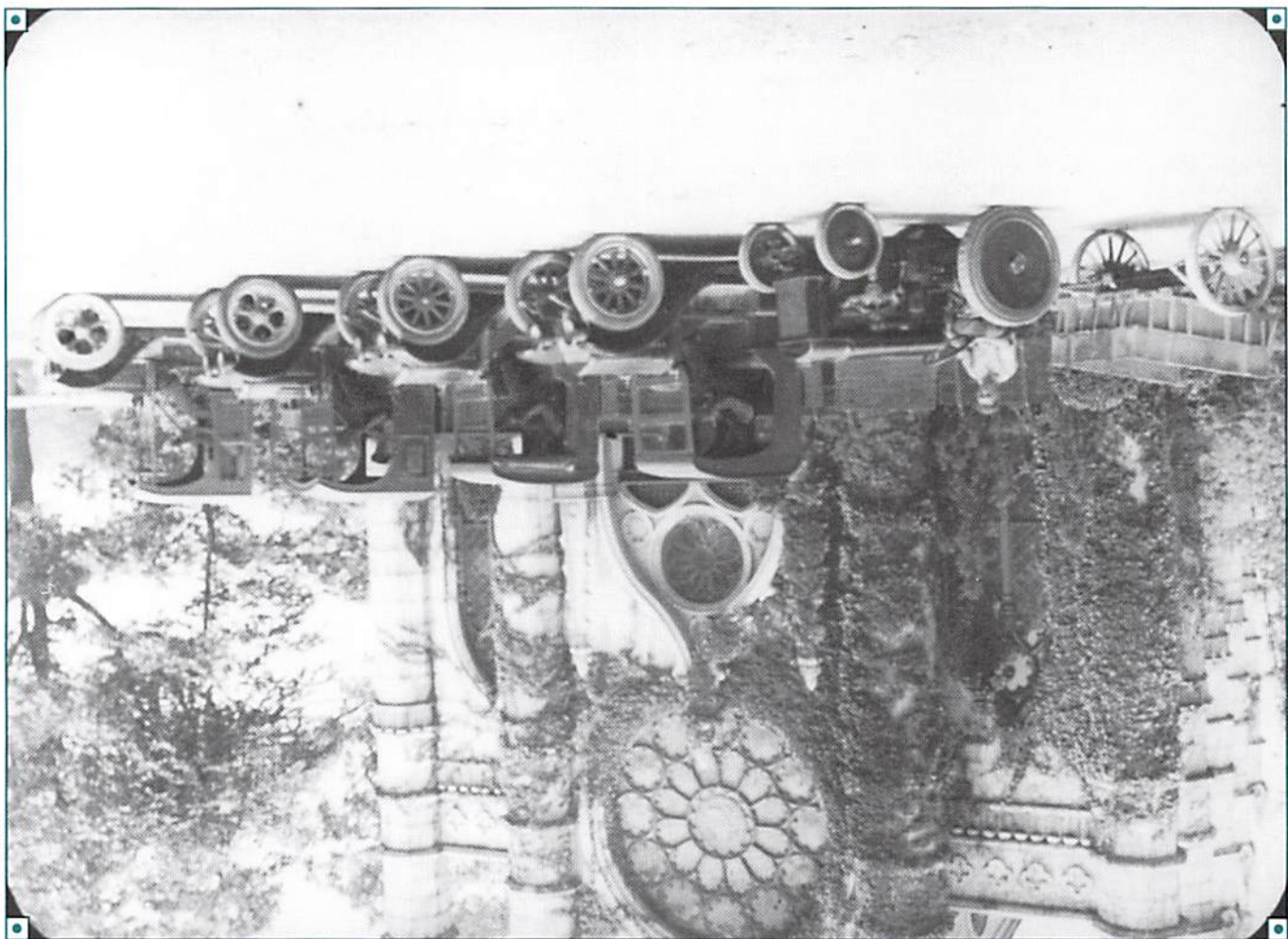
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Mount Auburn's working vehicles in front of Bigelow Chapel, circa 1910s.



MAC Archives

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