

## SOME RECOLLECTIONS OF CHARLES STORROW OF HIGH STREET HILL

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Having learned from Mrs. Wetherbee of the High Street Hill of two generations and more ago, when this house was built, and being about to hear from Mr. Adams of his experiences with the house itself, you may have begun to think a bit about the gentleman for whom it was constructed. As a typical resident of this section of Brookline at that time, as well as being an interesting person for other reasons, I think he fits well into our program.

Charles Storrow was born in Boston in 1841, the son of Charles Storer Storrow and his wife, Lydia Jackson, daughter of Dr. James Jackson. Within five years his family moved to Lawrence, Massachusetts, where his father was employed by the Essex Company. But let us go further back for a moment, to glance at his forebear's rather dramatic arrival in this country. The family in America originated with the capture by an American privateer of a vessel carrying a young English Officer of Grenadiers from Jamaica to England. The soldier, one Thomas Storrow, was brought to Portsmouth, New Hampshire, and there paroled. Within a short time he had fallen in love with a young lady of that port, Miss Anne Appleton, and the couple eventually settled in Boston, after brief sojourns in England and Jamaica. His descendants have always referred to him as "The Grenadier".

Their son, Thomas Wentworth Storrow, was the grandfather of our present subject. He led a most interesting life, which included some twenty-five years residence in Paris as agent for American importing firms. On one occasion when he happened to be absent in this country, the Marquis de Lafayette, a close friend, took his place at a family wedding, and gave the bride away.

Charles Storrow, to return to our subject, entered Harvard with the Class of 1861, and it is rather a contemporary note to find that during his sophomore year he was "rusticated" for participation in a college brawl. The term "protest" had not then become fashionable. Unlike contemporary parents, however, Mr. and Mrs. Storrow, senior, confided him to the care and discipline of a clergyman in Stockbridge for a cooling off period. The result, to their surprise, was his engagement to a young lady of that place. The affair did not last long, however, and was put down by the family as "engineered by her mother". Be that as it may, he returned to Harvard the next year, only to leave again in 1860, to become a supercargo for William Perkins & Co. of Boston on a voyage to India and China. The venture ended in his being shipwrecked in the Straights of Malacca.

Returning home in time to raise his own company of the 44th Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry, he served as its captain for fourteen months during the Civil War. At the expiration of that time he returned

home without reenlisting, and I have heard living members of his family wonder about that. It appears that his father had suffered a broken hip, and he was strongly urged by his grandfather, Dr. Jackson, to help him carry on his business in this difficult situation. His elder brother continued in the service and was killed in battle.

After a brief venture into the oil business in Western Pennsylvania, Charles Storrow formed a cotton brokerage firm in partnership with Walter E. Andrews, which continued until recent years. Mr. Andrews was a resident of High Street Hill, and the father of our Life Member, Mrs. Ira Rich Kent.

In 1865, Charles Storrow had married Martha Robinson Cabot, daughter of the Lt. Colonel of the 44th Regiment, and it was at that time that the family commenced its residence on High Street Hill. The Storrows at first lived on Allerton Street, and their granddaughter recalls hearing that Mr. Storrow's cornfield extended across what is now High Street, there being no roadway at the time. A little later they were living on what was then Walley Avenue but is now Upland Road, in the house now long occupied by our fellow member, Mrs. Eugene T. Redmond. It is she who tells us that when an extension was planned to carry a road from Walley Avenue across High Street, through Edgehill Road and right down the slope to Pond Avenue, Mr. Storrow feared that he would find himself on a busy corner. He resolved to move, and acquired the lot on the corner of High Street and Cumberland Avenue, on part of which we are now sitting. His father, Mr. Charles Storer Storrow, made him a present of the new house, and the architect was his father-in-law, Mr. Cabot. Whether Mr. Cabot also designed the stable — that is — the building in which we are meeting, does not presently appear. I think it is little remembered today that when the house was built in 1883, it was called the first big house on the hill, and that it included stained glass windows designed by John LaFarge. The grounds were landscaped by Frederick Law Olmsted, and the rhododendrons came from England.

High Street Hill is a pleasant place to live today, as indeed it obviously was in the eighties, nineties, and early nineteen hundreds when the Storrow home and stable were new. If it has lost something which it had then, I think it may be a characteristic which our whole society seems to have lost — a friendly neighborhood spirit, a sociable community bond which must have made life more gracious and satisfying. It is not, I believe, that we are basically a less friendly lot today, but that we just don't have the time, or think we don't. It gives one pause to learn of the social and cultural groups which were active in this neighborhood in those days. For example, in the times of the two generations preceeding our own, neighborhood theatricals, poetry readings, musical evenings, and other group activities were frequent and much enjoyed. Charles Storrow's daughter wrote that Dickens was very popular, and his characters were household words. At one time on Walley Avenue the Storrows gave a Dickens party and presented Mrs. Jarley's waxworks. When the High Street house was constructed, facilities were provided for plays and special

scenery constructed for them. The Storrows had traveled abroad while the house was building, purchasing many furnishings for shipment to Brookline. On arrival home, they found the street hung with Chinese lanterns, in welcome by their neighbors.

A particular group of neighbors called themselves "The Twelve Immortals", and seem to have managed to have a great deal of fun together in addition to the successful pursuit of their several chosen callings. The names will have a familiar and nostalgic ring to some among you; Mr. and Mrs. Moorefield Storey, Mr. and Mrs. Robert S. Peabody, Mr. and Mrs. Thacher Loring, Mr. and Mrs. Charles P. Ware, Mr. and Mrs. Moses Williams, Mr. and Mrs. Charles Storrow, and Dr. and Mrs. George K. Sabine.

At one time a maiden lady hereabouts informed Mr. Storrow that she would like an opportunity to meet the gentlemen of the neighborhood, and as a result the Shakespeare Club was formed. Parts were assigned for practice, and in this case were read by the characters, real acting being dispensed with. Some High Street Hill residents of today recall hearing their parents rehearsing behind closed doors for the Shakespeare evenings. A number of our well-remembered former members were participants in later years; Mr. and Mrs. Gorham Dana, Judge and Mrs. Henry Ware, Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Groom, and Dr. and Mrs. Francis Denny. Our neighbor, Mr. Groom, who has only just resigned from our membership, is perhaps the sole survivor, at a very bright and active ninety-two.

Mr. Storrow had an active and restless mind, and was always planning or pursuing some interest, whether travel, which he and his family did frequently and extensively, the planning of houses, which he much enjoyed though not a professional architect, or the social activities mentioned above. He, himself, played the cello. At one point he even managed a charade club which performed in Pierce Hall and elsewhere. He passed away in 1928, at the age of eighty-seven. A small incidental note which I find pleasant is to the effect that he and his father always held one another in the greatest affection, and had the custom of greeting after the French manner, embracing and kissing on both cheeks. That I have not seen practiced on High Street Hill during my residence here.