

DOVER TIDINGS

Winter 2016-2017
Volume XVI, No. 3



Pamela Kunkemueller
Editor

The Dover Historical Society, P.O. Box 534, Dover, Massachusetts 02030
www.doverhistoricalsociety.org

The President's Letter

The interested local historian can stumble across a story anywhere, even while in search of something else. Several years ago I found myself in Highland Cemetery, looking for grave stones belonging to the town's Civil War veterans. I came upon a marble stone bearing the image of an anchor and the name Captain Gardner C. Whiting. While Whiting is certainly a common name in Dover, our Whitings were farmers, soldiers, tavern-keepers, and mill owners. I knew of no seafaring men of that name. Curious, I returned home to discover what I could of our apparent mariner.

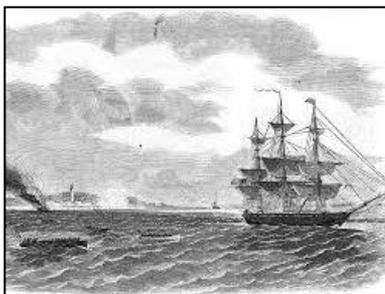


Captain Gardner Cook Whiting was born 10 February 1809 in Charlestown to Gardner and Susannah (Russell) Whiting. The family does not appear to be related to the Dover Whitings. On April 7, 1836 he married Margaret A. Beck at the Green Street Church in Boston's West End. The 1850 Federal Census lists Gardner Whiting, ship master, and his wife Margaret as residing in

Boston's 10th Ward (Mission Hill). At some point prior to 1861 Margaret Whiting appears to have died and Captain Whiting married, as his second wife, Mary Eleanor Hawthorn. Presumably born in London, she was christened at Christ Church in Southwark on 22 November 1835 which suggests that she was some 25 years younger than her husband.

In February of 1861 Captain Whiting left Boston as Master of the bark *Alvarado*, bound for Cape Town with Mrs. Whiting aboard. The *Alvarado* reached South Africa late in the month of April, well ahead of news reports detailing the bombardment of Fort Sumter on April 12 and the ensuing commencement of the Civil War. The bark left Cape Town on June 3rd, bound for Boston with a cargo of wool, sheep skins, and scrap metal, still unaware that she was sailing into a war zone. On July 21st, some 1,100 miles east of the southern tip of Florida, she encountered an unknown vessel flying the British Union Jack. As the vessel approached, the British colors dropped and were replaced with a flag that was completely unfamiliar to the crew of the *Alvarado*. She proved to be a Confederate privateer, the *CSS Jefferson Davis*, whose Captain then claimed the *Alvarado* as a prize of war. The Confederates then removed most of the crew, leaving a prize crew, Captain and Mrs. Whiting, and the African American ship's steward, George Ellet, on board while the *Alvarado* was sailed to the port of Saint Mary's, Georgia for auction. On August 5th, while still off the coast of Florida, the *Alvarado* encountered the Federal warship *USS Jamestown*, which gave chase. Unable to out sail their pursuers, the Confederates grounded the *Alvarado* just off Amelia Island, leaving the Whitings and their steward once more in charge of the ship. Captain Whiting promptly hauled down the Confederate flag and ran up an inverted American flag as a distress signal while attempting to back the sails and free his vessel. A stiff

on-shore wind made the maneuver impossible. On seeing the inverted flag, the privateers then returned to the grounded *Alvarado* and forcibly removed the Whitings and the steward as boats from the *Jamestown*, now several miles offshore, neared the scene.¹ The



Whitings were deposited on the beach amidst a large group of spectators and several artillery pieces hastily brought from nearby Fort Clinch. The local militia fired the 12 rounds in their possession without apparent effect as the boats from the *Jamestown* boarded the *Alvarado* and, being unable to free her, burned her to the waterline. Captain and Mrs. Whiting remained as prisoners for a week in Fernandina, Florida before being sent north to Norfolk, Virginia and exchanged at Fortress Monroe under a flag of truce.

The *Jefferson Davis* ultimately suffered much the same fate as the *Alvarado*, running aground while attempting to enter the port of St. Augustine on August 18, 1861. Capturing nine vessels, she was the most successful Confederate privateer of the war, however only two of her prizes were safely conveyed to a Confederate port for sale at auction. We do not know what circumstances brought Captain and Mrs. Whiting to Dover, but they appear to have settled here at some point after 1869. Captain Gardner Whiting died of consumption in Dover on 22 August 1876 at age 67. His adventuresome wife, Eleanor, remained in the Charles River Village area of Dover at least through 1885, ultimately dying in Chicago on October 16, 1913.

Elisha Lee

¹ *Harpers Weekly*, September 28, 1861

Caryl House Holiday Open House, December 2016

Merry carolers sang to usher in the Holiday Season at the Benjamin Caryl House annual Holiday Open House accompanied by local pianist, John Arcaro. Period cookies and other goodies along with special eggnog prepared and served by Stuart Swiny were enjoyed by all.



Many new guests toured the House with our volunteer docents. Benjamin Caryl was the first minister in Dover coming in 1762 at a time when Christmas was not celebrated as a separate or special holiday in the early years of what would become the Dover Church. However, even then and as time progressed and customs changed, houses were increasingly decorated to celebrate winter and bring life and brightness into the dark interiors. Most likely these were comprised of evergreen branches, ivy, various fruits both fresh and dried as well as herbs and spices of many kinds.

In keeping with this tradition, the kitchen fireplace was highlighted with a period appropriate vegetable display created by Dale Cabot. Other floral arrangements through the House showcased apples, oranges, cinnamon and cloves and other herbs and spices. We are grateful to the many volunteers who created these displays



and contributed to the success of the day in so many other ways, including Priscilla Jones, Clare Burke, Bob Hillberg, Jane Moore, Kay Guild, Kevin Shale, Charlotte Surgenor, Stuart Swiny, Pam Kunkemueller and my husband, Richard Gianinni. Special thanks go to Dorothy Boylan for the Christmas light display in the windows and Barbara Provost for demonstrating weaving on the loom.

The Historical Society is always looking for new volunteers to be docents. There are extensive materials available from which to learn and training is also provided. We would also love to add to our junior docents program in the spring. If you think you might be interested, please contact me: janetcomiskey@comcast.net or 508-785-0253.

Janet Comiskey-Gianinni
Curator, Benjamin Caryl House

Save The Dates

Annual Meeting

Wednesday, March 22, 2017

7:30 p.m.

Dover Library, Lower Level

The United States' Involvement in World War I

Professor Paul Jankowski

Brandeis University

Wednesday, April 26, 2017

7:30 p.m.

Dover Library

American Carousel Art

Barbara H. Palmer

Dover Historical Society Advisory Committee

Caryl House Garden Party

107 Dedham Street

Sunday, June 4, 2017

2:00 – 4:00 p.m.

All events are free of charge and open to the public. Refreshments will be served.

All are welcome!

The Tavern Corner Mural

Many a visitor to the Sawin Museum has admired the engaging mural painted by Diane Gilson in early 2016. Since this allegorical



view of Dover and its setting is replete with details meaningful to the artist who grew up across the street from the Museum and the curators, Pam Kunkemueller and I, we feel that it might be beneficial to provide some information on these details so that future art historians or Dover history enthusiasts will not have to wrack their brains in order to grasp and explain, most probably incorrectly, the “inner meanings” of the scene represented.

First of all, why a work in the style of Rufus Porter (1792-1884), that prolific and well known painter of murals in New England private residences and taverns from 1825 to 1845? Porter was also a versatile inventor -- and founder of *Scientific American* no less -- keen to improve the lot of his fellow Americans and someone who would surely have been appreciated by forward thinking individuals like John Williams and Benjamin Sawin. In addition to Sawin’s theoretical approbation, the major reason for painting this scene was the fortuitous gift to the Dover Historical Society of the Chippendale arm chair rescued from the Williams Tavern as it was consumed by fire in 1908, apparently the result of arson. This chair, after much needed repairs to its frame, and then upholstered to great effect, inspired the creation of the Williams Tavern Corner. It sits on original 18th century white pine floor boards salvaged from the Fisher Farm that overlooked the Charles

River on Center Street prior to its demolition in 1999. Beside the chair stands a fine copy of a period tiger maple table, with replicas of a “frog mug” similar to that also retrieved from the burnt tavern and a clay pipe, not to mention the French leather-bound 1731 prayer book of unusual function. Despite the obvious gravitas conveyed by the eye-catching arm chair and accompaniments, the corner needed to be anchored to the main Sawin exhibition room, and how better to achieve this than by painting a scene in the Rufus Porter School style on the surrounding walls displaying details that the tavern’s patrons would have noted in the neighborhood, or known about? After all, such a scene could well have been commissioned from Porter himself.

The following description proceeds from left to right, starting with a tall stylized elm tree in the foreground, followed by a towering white pine further from the viewer, all in signature Porter style. Equally characteristic are the rather tropical looking ferns and other vegetation in a dark foreground enhancing a sense of perspective common to many of this artist’s scenes. Other features create the local landscape such as the Dover Church with its elegant spire on the left beneath the imposing mass of Noanet

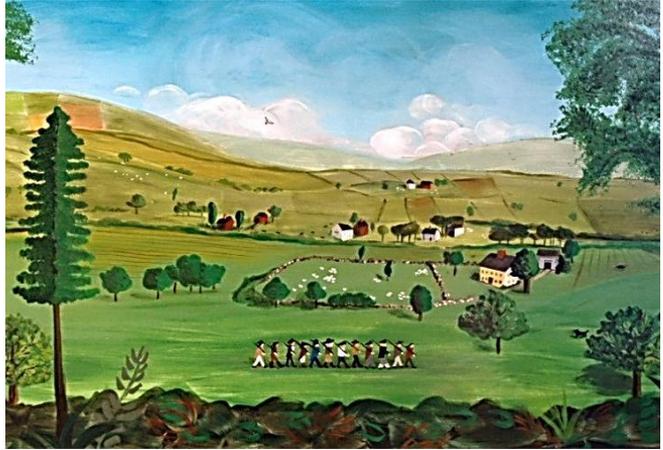


Peak, chosen over loftier Pegan Hill by Diane because she visited it frequently as a little girl. Since it rose a mere mile southeast of the tavern, it was

probably visible at a time when the original forest had made way for agricultural land. Indeed, it should be noted that the mural’s landscape consists of a patchwork of meadows and plowed fields delineated by rough stone walls, whose stones had been painstakingly and laboriously cleared from the very pastures they defined so they might be plowed with ease. Several herds of cattle

graze in the mid-distance, but the white dots in the field in front of the Caryl House in the center of the scene, are none other than Ancon sheep, that short legged breed arising in Dover and exploited throughout New England from 1791 onward, but allowed to go extinct in 1876. Nor should one overlook a bubbling brook lined by trees running behind the Caryl House and Fisher Barn towards the Charles River which winds its way through the countryside.

The landscape of rolling hills dotted with farms and their barns, and general lack of dense stands of trees, would have been typical of the



period when most land in eastern New England was grazed by sheep and cattle or plowed to be sown with wheat, barley and various root crops.

A notable feature in the foreground is the line of twelve rather rag-tag militia men learning how to march and bear arms on the Old Training Field, already designated as such in 1755. One may be certain that many would have retired to the Williams Tavern opposite for a pint of ale once their drilling was completed. The second towering elm tree partially hides the so-called “Great Primeval Oak”, in the mid-19th century a stately middle-aged tree that would only succumb in 2016 in what was perhaps its fourth century of life. At the time represented in the mural, the Town House was yet to be built next to the oak. The last elm on the right of the mural is accurately shown supporting the tavern’s sign. The 18th century original now hangs above the chair and arguably

represents one of the Sawin Museum's most prized possessions. On one side it displays a rather enigmatic fierce looking feline (were it really a bob cat it should have a short tail) prowling the countryside on a moonlit night, and on the other a mad eyed, aggressive wolf.

In addition to the livestock, the mural is also populated with an assortment of creatures, common then as now. The little black dog running towards the militiamen is none other than Diane's childhood pet, "Ivan", which she included as a personal touch. The fox slinking away to the left with a last look at the marchers would have been a common visitor to the farmyards with their poultry, perhaps to be chased by a second dog



sitting under a tree near the church. Fortunately the fox has yet to notice the rabbit at the edge of the pasture. The turkeys heading across a field behind the Fisher Barn would surely have been eyed by the red tailed

hawk circling far above. With its four foot wing span it remains the most commonly seen, and heard, bird of prey in the region and would on occasion have been mobbed by the vociferous crows flying hither and thither. Finally, one should not forget to look for the red dashes representing cardinals partially hidden in the dense foliage of several trees.

As the mural matures with time, it will surely become a well-known and loved memento of our 19th century town, also serving as a token of the Historical Society's endeavor to further enhance the Sawin Museum as an engaged member of the Dover community.

Stuart Swiny
Curator, Sawin Museum

Inventory of Midcentury Modern Houses

Built all over the United States, *Historic New England* estimates that 1,500 to 2,000 midcentury modern houses stand in Massachusetts. Close to Cambridge's Harvard and MIT and with available land, Belmont, Concord, Lexington, and Lincoln became hotbeds of early modern architecture in this area. Dover's important, yet untold, role in this story needs to be documented. The Inventory of Midcentury Modern Houses, which I have begun and which is described in this article, should address this need.

Joseph Hudnut came from Columbia University in 1936 to chair the Harvard School of Design. Settling on Centre Street in Dover, in a house not of his own design, he brought Walter Gropius to Harvard. Among Hudnut's colleagues who designed homes in Dover were Carleton Richmond and the so-called Harvard Five: John M. Johansen, Marcel Breuer, Landis Gores, Philip Johnson and Eliot Noyes. How many of these architects designed a Dover home remains to be seen.

Amelia Peabody worked closely with an MIT architect, Eleanor Raymond, who created houses constructed of newly available materials such as plywood and masonite as well as the sculptress's Bauhaus-style studio. Raymond introduced Miss Peabody to Dr. Maria Telkes of MIT who planned the recently demolished solar house on Powisset Street. She and Ms. Raymond actually lived in the house for a number of years, although they ultimately had to convert to more conventional heating.

In her book, *Inventing American Modernism*, Jill Pearlman describes the essence of modernism as "how to express the ideas, qualities, and spirit of the technological age in built form".¹ Other writers define midcentury modernism as that which encompasses selected architectural, interior, product, and graphic designs from 1933 - 1965. Some of the most obvious characteristics include the following: design derived from purpose, simplicity of form, visible structure, natural appearance of materials, inclusion of

industrially produced materials, visual emphasis on horizontal and vertical lines, ample bands of windows or glass walls, open floor plans, and structure related to the landscape.

I am in the very early stages of this project which I have begun by attempting to assemble a comprehensive list of houses meeting the criteria. I appreciate insights into the Town's online data system from Assessor, Karen MacTavish, and Assessor's Clerk, Amy Gow, which enables the first step. The next step in the project will be to interview current owners, using an Interview Form from the Massachusetts Historical Commission.

I view this as both an important and enjoyable project which will document an important era in Dover's history that is not yet old enough to be undertaken by the Historical Commission but one that needs to be completed before these buildings, which are rapidly disappearing from our landscape, are gone forever. This is obviously a multi-part project and I would welcome, and indeed encourage, as many others as might be interested to help. In addition to the above, information will need to be compiled, forms filled out and digitized, etc. If you would like to help in any way, please let me know! My contact information is on the Historical Society's website, or call me at 508-785-0236.

Eventually the completed project will be available at the Sawin Museum and in the Dover Library's history section alongside the Dover Historical Commission's compilation of houses older than 100 years.

Priscilla Pitt Jones

² *Inventing American Modernism*, University of Virginia Press, 2007, p. 8

Photo Credits

Page 1: Elisha Lee

Page 2: Bob Hillberg

Pages 6, 7, 8, 9: Stuart Swiny

General Information

Please note that our museums are open to the public, free of charge, in the fall (September – November) and spring (April – June). All visitors are welcome. The lower level of the Sawin Museum is especially enjoyable for children as there are many artifacts which they are welcome to try out.

Both museums are also available by special appointment. Contact the curators directly or leave a voicemail message of your request on the phone: 508-785-1832.

The Historical Society also has an exhibit of Richard H. Vara's watercolors on display at the Caryl Community Center, just off the lobby at the Springdale Avenue entrance. It too can be viewed, free of charge, whenever the Community Center is open (times vary).

Copies of the final edition of *Dover Days Gone By* by Richard Hart Vara are available for \$25.00 at both museums or by phone at the main Society number, 508-785-1832. There are also a limited number of hardbound copies still available for \$100.00. Call 508-785-0567 for further information and to order this item.

In addition, two companion guide books are available as above for \$3.00 each. They are: *Exploring the Center* and *Exploring: By Car, Boat, on Foot*.

Check out our website: www.doverhistoricalsociety.org and



FOLLOW US ON FACEBOOK

The Dover Historical Society is a 501(c) (3) non-profit organization supported by members, grants and donations.

Dover Tidings is published three times a year and is sent primarily to members. If you have not renewed your membership, please do so to avoid being dropped from the list. If you have already renewed, THANK YOU. If you would like to become a new member you can obtain a membership application at one of the museums or by calling the main number (508-785-1832) and leaving a voice mail message. Please be sure to leave your name and contact information.

**Dover Historical Society
P.O. Box 534
Dover, MA 02030
508-785-1832**