

**FIFTH OF REPORT RECORD
COMMISSIONERS, 1880.
DOCUMENT 105-1880**

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VARIOUS

**FIFTH OF REPORT RECORD
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FIFTH REPORT

OF THE

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RECORD COMMISSIONERS.

1880.

Nathaniel Ingraham Bowditch



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FIFTH REPORT

OF THE

RECORD COMMISSIONERS.

Boston, Dec. 10, 1880.

In their fourth report, dated Sept. 1, 1880, the Record Commissioners announced that the City Council had appropriated the sum of five thousand dollars for the publication of historical documents relating to Boston. This was in conformity with a suggestion of the Committee on Printing for 1879, and it is presumed that the grant will be continued annually. As already announced, the first of the volumes thus ordered is the present fifth report, and it contains a series of articles relating to the history of estates lying on or around Beacon Hill. These articles were contributed in 1855 to the "Boston Daily Transcript" by the late Nathaniel Ingersoll Bowditch, under the signature of "Gleaner."

Mr. Bowditch was confessedly the most learned conveyancer of the day. He was born at Salem, June 17, 1805, and was the oldest child of Dr. Nathaniel Bowditch, the distinguished mathematician. In 1823, the year following the graduation of the subject of this sketch, his father removed to Boston, and Nathaniel studied law under the late Hon. William Prescott. From this time until his death, April 16, 1861, Mr. Bowditch was an honored and useful citizen of Boston, pursuing his chosen department of practice with unrivalled skill, and accumulating treasures of information of which but a small portion is here shown. In 1851 he printed a "History of the Massachusetts General Hospital," and in 1857 a collection of curious facts entitled "Suffolk Surnames." The latter volume has been twice reprinted.

In 1855, Mr. Bowditch began the interesting series of "Gleaner" articles, which aroused a lively interest among all conversant with the subject. Often a single article would call forth the reminiscences or comments of other writers, and the whole collection has been for years regarded as indispensable to any one who would write on that portion of our local history.

Although the series terminated abruptly in the manner explained on page 180 of this volume, enough had been written by Mr. Bowditch to make its republication a matter of public interest. When, therefore, the Record Commissioners received the munificent grant of the city, they at once selected these "Gleanings" as among the first documents to be issued.

It will be seen that the portion of our territory covered by these notes is small; but the articles are consecutive, and the treatment is exhaustive. Beacon Hill and its surroundings are considered, every estate is scrutinized, and the proverbial dryness of antiquarian and legal discussions is relieved by anecdotes of the distinguished citizens who have lived upon this noted territory during the past two hundred years.

It has seemed unnecessary to attempt annotations to the original work. Of course the twenty-five years which have elapsed have produced many changes; but these matters are within the recollection of the present generation, which is now to reperuse these sketches.

The consent of the representatives of the family to this reproduction was given a number of years ago, and has been renewed at the present time.

The commissioners have to announce that their sixth report is nearly completed, and that it will contain the Roxbury Land Records, together with the records of the First Church in Roxbury. It is intended that it shall appear among the city documents for 1880.

Respectfully submitted,

WILLIAM H. WHITMORE,
WILLIAM S. APPLETON,

Record Commissioners.

ERRATA.

The following errors of the press have been noticed:—

P. 54. (Note.) Abbott Lawrence died Aug. 18, 1855.

P. 62. (Note.) Mr. Bowditch died in 1861; Mr. Savage died in 1873.

“GLENER” ARTICLES.

I.

HISTORICAL.

July 6, 1855.

It is well known that when our forefathers first came to this peninsula they found here a solitary settler, — Mr. William Blackstone. Thus the Charlestown records say : —

Mr. Blackstone, dwelling on the other side of Charles River, alone, to a place by the Indians called Shawmut, where he only had a cottage at or *not far off* the place called *Blackstone's Point*, he came and acquainted the Governor of an excellent *Spring* there, withal inviting him and soliciting him thither. Whereupon, after the death of Mr. Johnson and divers others, the Governor, with Mr. Wilson and the greatest part of the Church, removed thither. Whither also the frame of the Governor's house was carried, when people began to build their houses against winter, and this place was called Boston.

Mr. Drake, in his excellent “History of Boston,” quotes this extract, and remarks that “this place was not thought of for a town until Blackstone urged it.” He thinks that Blackstone's Point was that afterwards called Barton's Point, at the northerly end of Leverett street, towards Charlestown, and adds: “His *Point* is more easily located than his *house* or his *spring*,” and proceeds to suggest as not unlikely that these may have been near Poplar street.

Now, the exact location of Mr. Blackstone's homestead lot is as definitely fixed as that of the Milldam or Western avenue. He made a deed to the inhabitants, of the whole peninsula, *retaining this homestead lot of six acres.* By the town records of 1735, “the release of Mr. Blackstone, the first proprietor of the town of Boston,” is mentioned as “now on file in the town clerk's office.” The original, however, has never been seen by either of the historians of Boston, —

Shaw, Snow, or Drake, — and is doubtless lost. Blackstone, wishing to live a more retired life and amid fewer neighbors, subsequently sold this reserved lot; but no deed from him is found on record. In the course of time, therefore, its precise location became doubtful. It was, however, accidentally discovered by an investigation of my own. In May, 1829, I was examining the titles of the Mt. Vernon proprietors, claimed under John Singleton Copley, the celebrated artist. I succeeded in tracing back his lot in part to a deed from one *Richard Pepys* and Mary his wife, of Ashon, Essex County, to Nathaniel Williams, by a deed not found on record, but expressly referred to as dated January 30, 1655; and a deposition of Anne Pollard, in 1711 (Suffolk, Lib. 26, p. 84), proves that Blackstone sold to Richard Pepys. In 1676 is recorded a deed of Peter Bracket and Mary his wife, late widow of said Williams (Suffolk, Lib. 9, fol. 325), conveying to her children, Nathaniel Williams three-quarters and Mary Viall one-quarter — all that messuage, with the barns, stables, orchards, gardens, and also that *six acres* of land, be it more or less, adjoining and belonging to said messuage, called the *Blackstone lot, being the same which were conveyed to said Nathaniel by Richard Pepys, of Ashon, Essex County, and Mary his wife, as by their act, bearing date January 30, 1655, will more fully appear.*

Mary Viall's one-quarter gets into said Nathaniel, who conveys the whole lot in 1709 (Suffolk, Lib. 24, f. 103) to Thomas Banister as "an orchard and pasture, containing *six acres* more or less on the N.W. side of the common with the flats; the upland and flats being bounded *N.W. on Charles river* or a cove," etc., etc. "Southerly on the Common."

Blackstone's six-acre lot, therefore, was at the lower part of the south-westerly slope of Beacon Hill, or, according to the present monuments, it was *at the bottom of Beacon street, bounded southerly toward the Common, and westerly on the river.* In other words, his fine taste led him, at the outset, to select for his abode the precise spot which is now the "Court-end" of the city. It must have been a sheltered and sunny enclosure of almost unrivalled beauty. Charles street was, in 1804, laid out along the water's edge, and, in the cellar of one of the houses easterly of that street (set off to the late B. Joy, one of the Mt. Vernon proprietors), is a copious spring, which was doubtless Mr. Blackstone's. Shaw, in his description of Boston, p. 103, says: "Blackstone's spring is yet to be seen [1800] on the *westerly* part of the town, *near the bay which divides Boston from Cambridge.*"

I felt as proud of my delivery as a hen does that has laid an egg; and it was the subject of much *cackling* on my part. An account of it will be found in the "Boston Courier" of that time. "The Sexton of the Old School" has also made it the subject of one of his later lucubrations in the "Transcript." *I had every reason, indeed, to believe that the public mind was forever enlightened on this momentous topic.* Judge, then, of my mortification, Mr. Editor, when I found the old erroneous surmises reproduced in a standard work by so careful and well-informed an antiquarian as Mr. Drake! — my "pet" discovery wholly ignored by the very man of all others who should have known everything about it! — my "credit" as clean gone as if I had been an original stockholder in the

"VERMONT CENTRAL."

II.

HISTORICAL.

July 6, 1855.

Mr. Editor: — Being at present confined to my house I am unable to refer to certain abstracts of my own which I well remember, especially a deposition of Odlin, etc. Mr. Drake's history, however (p. 530), supplies me with all I want, and proves, as I think, conclusively that *Blackstone's point was the six-acre lot which he reserved, and that his house stood on part of it.* Mr. Drake speaks of the four depositions, in 1684, of John Odlin, Robert Walker, Francis Hudson, and William Lytherland, and he represents them as saying that they had —

Dwelt in Boston from the first planting thereof, and continuing so at this day (June 10, 1684); that in or about 1634 the said inhabitants of Boston (of whom the Hon. John Winthrop, Esq., Governor of the Colony, was chief) did agree with Mr. William Blackstone for the purchase of his estate and right in any lands lying within the said neck called Boston; and for said purchase agree that every householder should pay 6s., none paying less, some considerably more, which was collected and paid to Mr. Blackstone to his full satisfaction for his whole right, *reserving only about six acres on the point*