

SOJOURN TO BOSTON

YEAR 1941 (?)

On a bright October morning, Mom and Pop arrived in Boston in a commodious bedroom of the New York, New Haven, and Hartford Railroad line. They took a cab to the Statler Hotel, where the National Council of Churches was opening a four-day conference. Pop was a member of the Executive Committee and was therefore scheduled for meeting with the Africa Committee as well as attending the General Sessions with Mom.

Pop had long looked forward to the Boston trip with much enthusiasm, not just because his historical interests made him think of the city as the "Cradle of Liberty" but also because the struggle of Negroes for freedom and justice in these United States is so intimately entwined with the history of Boston.

The problems of Protestantism and its services to the people would frankly not receive as much of Pop's interest on this trip as at previous meetings. While he had made trips to Boston several times before, this would be the trip on which he would desert at least in part the interests of the church meetings and turn the pages of history and walk down the corridors of time for his own personal enjoyment.

They had eaten breakfast on the train, so they went immediately to the registration desk and briefly exchanged greetings with friends whom they had grown accustomed to meeting at these interracial and interdenominational meetings. Miss _____ Shotwell and _____ were helping with registration.

"Hello, Dr. Berry and Mrs. Berry. I haven't seen you since Buckhill Falls." Dr. and Mrs. Emory Ross who were at their fiftieth anniversary stopped them for a brief chat in the lobby.

"So glad to see you!" Pop rejoined. "We'll be talking to you later."

As they walked through the revolving doors and then to the outer glass doors, opened for them by a tall red-coated Irishman, they stepped onto Providence Street. Pop said, "You know, Hon, since I was a boy down in Virginia, and that covers more years than I care to talk about, I've heard about breathing the 'free' atmosphere

Sojourn to Boston - 2

in the staid old city of Boston, the home of the proud Yankee and the aristocrats of Beacon Hill."

It was a brisk fall day with a bright shining sun against a deep blue sky and scattered white clouds. "My! It feels good out here in this brisk air, and what a beautiful sunshiney day," said Mom. "Where are we going?" she inquired.

"I just want to take my time and see some of the historical spots along Boston's 'Freedom Trail'. Let's walk around the corner here a half block to the Lincoln Triangle."

As they walked they soon came within sight of the historical memorial. "See that tall monument? Notice the massive standing figure of Abraham Lincoln at its top." As they approached closer and closer, Pop continued. "The figure of the man kneeling at Lincoln's feet on one knee, but looking upward and ready to rise, is that of a Negro. The gesture of Lincoln's hands suggests compassion as he lifts the imaginary veil of slavery."

Now, they had reached the foot of the monument which sat on a tall grass covered mound of earth about four feet above the sidewalk, triangular in shape. Along the sides of the triangle ran a heavy iron fencing. The statue, some thirty feet tall, is beautifully sculptured in granite.

"Come to this side, Hon." The eleven o'clock morning sun was shining directly into the faces of the picturesque statue. "Look at the expression of compassion, but of honesty and conviction on the face of Lincoln." "Yes,"

"Yes," said Mom, "and that's a striking figure of a Negro man. Look at the strong and sinuey muscles of his arms and legs, and his extremely curly hair."

"Oh, yes, he is a fine physical specimen alright. His broad nose and heavy determined lips are unmistakably Negroid. It will stand here through the centuries to tell its silent story to generations yet unborn like the Negroid countenance of the Sphinx on the desert of Giza. Look at the expression of hope and determination on the face of a man who feels the loosening of the bonds of chattel

slavery."

"My! You sound poetic today."

"Well, I guess that's the way I am feeling right now. Look near Lincoln's right hand at the neatly sculptured bundle of sticks indicating strength in unity --meaning unity of all the people in these United States. You know, Hon, this country of ours is great in spite of its shortcomings.

page 8

Sojourn to Boston -

the figure of a goddess holding a flag in her left hand, a broken iron chain in her right hand and her right foot crushing a monarch's crown. On one face of the broad pedestal there is the sculptured likeness of Crispus Attucks, the Negro, lying fatally wounded on the ground and three white men, one falling almost to the ground, a second just beginning to fall, and a third catching a bullet in his chest. Across from this group stand the British Redcoats with their rifles aimed at the group as they were leaving a protest meeting at the Custom House. Another face of the pedestal bore the inscription "Erected in 1880 by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts in honor of those who fell in the Boston Massacre."

By this time Pop and the cabbie were vieing with each other in describing the significance of American history along Boston's "Freedom Trail." They had discussed the Negro soldiers who fought with the Minutemen at Bunker Hill and Lexington, especially of Peter Salem who was so handy with his rifle that he picked off Major Pitcairn as he stood up on a redoubt to announce to his Redcoat infantrymen the victory at Bunker Hill.

Boston represented many other things to Pop in American history as it particularly relates to its Negro citizens. ^{As} /they rode around he thought of the famous abolitionists, especially those who were also ministers like Henry Ward Beecher and Wendell Phillips, and Harriet Beecher Stowe.

They drove by the famous Park Street Church on "Brimstone" corner and over to the marker on State Street near the corner of Congress where they viewed the circle of paving stones in the middle of the street marking the place where the first martyrs fell.

They saw Faneuil Hall, effectonately known as the "Cradle of Liberty," the Paul Revere House and the Old North Church. From here the cabbie was directed to drive over to Roxbury because Pop, who was a ^{33° Past grand master of Va.} "died in the wool" Prince Hall Mason, wanted to see the headquarters of the first Negro Masonic Lodge.

Sojourn to Boston -

There before them was a sculptured granite wall with bas-relief effect of a column of Negro infantrymen in Civil War garb in the attitude of marching. The figures were twice the height of an average man. Their Negroid features were unmistakable--there was a stern look on their faces. Some were youthful, others appeared of middle age with long beards. The platoon was complete with corporal, sergeant, drummer boy and they were shown in stride as if in rhythmic military cadence.

In the foreground there was the sculptured likeness of the young and handsome regimental Colonel Robert Gould Shaw sitting astride a prancing spirited horse.

This was a story in stone of the gallant 54th Volunteer Infantry of Negro free men (raised - enlisted) in Massachusetts but also from other northern states to get into the War of the Rebellion in which Negroes saw the (opportunity) for freedom. The gallant 30-year old young Shaw was a member of a well-to-do Yankee family steeped in the tradition of the freedom-loving abolitionist New Englander of that day.

Pop had known the many stories of Shaw and his infantrymen, first heard as a boy listening in on conversation between his father and other Civil War veterans in his old home town of Hampton. As he stood there he thought of these stories including the one expressed in the poem entitled "They Buried Him With His Niggers."

From this point on the Beacon Hill side of the Common, the cabbie pointed in the distance and said, "Now, we will go around to the other side of the area to the Crispus Attucks Memorial."

So, they got into the cab and looked, as they rode, across this historic park. Five minutes later they stood before the Memorial which commemorates the incident of the Boston Massacre which set off the American Revolution. It consisted of a tall columnar monument on a broad pedestal.

The Memorial standing about forty feet high depicts high on its pedestal the

Sojourn to Boston - 2

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As they walked they soon came within sight of ^{an} the historical memorial. ^{Look at this} "See ^{I had before} that tall monument? Notice the massive standing figure of Abraham Lincoln at ^{the} its top." As they approached closer and closer, Pop continued. "The figure of the man kneeling at Lincoln's feet on one knee, but looking upward and ready to rise, ^{to his feet} is that of a Negro. The gesture of Lincoln's hands suggests compassion as he lifts the imaginary veil of slavery."

Now, they had reached the foot of the monument which sat on a tall grass covered mound of earth about four feet above the sidewalk, triangular in shape. Along the sides of the triangle ran a heavy iron fencing. The statue, some thirty feet tall, is beautifully sculptured in granite.

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