

Brattle Street Elegy

Note: In September 2007, the Cambridge Massachusetts Stake History Committee sponsored a three-day reunion commemorating the growth of the Church in Boston and the surrounding towns. Claudia Bushman delivered the following reminiscence as part of that celebration.

On May 17, 2009, the LDS chapel at 2 Longfellow Park in Cambridge was destroyed by fire. The fire has been ruled accidental, probably caused by an electrical malfunction in the attic. That day, Samuel Brown, a blogger at By Common Consent and former Cambridge University Ward member posted news reports and made space for commenters to share their memories associated with the building. Following Claudia Bushman's essay are some of those comments, reprinted with permission. The blog post, links to news reports and photos, and dozens of further comments can be viewed at <http://bycommonconsent.com/2009/05/17/in-memoriam-the-cambridge-mass-chapel/>.

We Should Do a Study

Claudia L. Bushman

It is a great pleasure for me to be here with all of you Cambridge veterans and to be asked to represent the huge cohort of LDS women who have sat in these pews—those who have preceded me and those who have come after me. What an opportunity this has been to recall some of my happiest and most vivid memories. What happened to me here? Just about everything important that has happened in my long and eventful life.

I feel very privileged to have been plucked from the West Coast and placed on the East Coast. I was hesitant about leaving California. I could see the Pacific Ocean from my San Francisco bedroom window. I thought that I could not live without an ocean in view. My atlas map indicated that Boston was on the East Coast

and that Wellesley was pretty close to Boston, so I thought I'd be near the ocean. So much for geographical innocence, but I did have many compensations.

I was here for the dedication of this building in 1956. I sat right about here when President David O. McKay came out to speak. I remember the date because I was very pregnant with my first child, my daughter Clarissa, wearing what I thought was a particularly pretty blue jersey maternity dress with a sleeveless overcoat. There had been some doubt that I would make it to the dedication at all because Clarissa was due on October 1, but she was not born until the 3rd, and so I was here, a member of the dedication choir. We sang "How Lovely Is Thy Dwelling Place" from the Brahms German Requiem and the "Hosannah Anthem." As I recall the dedication, I also remember that I spent time at the rehearsals making a christening dress by hand with white lace and embroidery, white on white. Many Bushman babies have worn it since. So the birth of this building is closely allied to the birth of my first child. I became a mother here.

But I have detailed memories that precede the dedication. When I began as a freshman at Wellesley College in 1952, I called the mission office and asked for directions to the chapel, an aged dark Longfellow house on this same location. I was quite scornful that the missionaries were unable to provide clear and concise directions on how to get here. What were they there for, if not to help people get to church? I discovered why they couldn't give directions after transferring twice and finally coming in on the long-gone Mount Auburn streetcar and walking up through a rather scruffy Longfellow Park. It was a long and complicated journey.

That first day I was incensed and grumpy. When I finally met some of the other college students, my question was, "Why did the Church ever buy property in this slum?" Not a very nice thing to say when the Church had sacrificed to buy two spacious and significant houses on Cambridge's finest thoroughfare, Brattle Street. But after growing up in beautiful San Francisco with its emphasis on the new, the beautiful, and the fashionable, I found Boston drab, frumpy, full of treasures but too sure of itself to bother to show them off. Boston and Cambridge are much better looking now than they were then, but still it was insulting and je-

june for a brash westerner to say such things of the glorious city that we have all come to love.

Still, the snide comment was a great benefit to me in that year as a Harvard sophomore, Garr Cranney (whose wonderful and long-lived mother, Naomi, just recently came to the end of her productive and virtuous life), decided to take me on as an almost-lost cause. He decided to educate me about the glories of Boston and Cambridge. Once a week he took a bus to the family home in nearby Belmont, borrowed a car, and drove out to Wellesley to pick me up. Then on the twelve-mile ride back to town, he would lecture me about some magnificent site we were about to visit. "Today we are going to the Saugus Iron Works and this is important because . . . We're going to see the Christian Science Mother Church and the mapparium. . . . The Cooper-Frost-Austin house is the oldest house in Cambridge, built in . . ." He worked hard on his preparation and learned a few things himself. He also took me to Celtics and Red Sox games and explained the only sports strategy I've ever learned. After a while, I began to take him to concerts and art museums and tell him why they were important. As a result of this activity of students teaching each other, we became close friends, we both became better informed, and I became much more appreciative of Boston. I've been to lots of places, more than most of you, I'll bet. And I did come to appreciate Brattle Street.

When I first came to church in Cambridge, we met only in the morning for Sunday School. The trip in took longer than the service. This difficulty was alleviated when I discovered that Clare and Rulon Robison, long-time pillars of the Church, brought the Wellesley girls to church. Rulon, a teacher of voice, conducted a rousing and informative song practice. I remember him noting that a good singer could hear instruction and learn from it so he had improved by the next time. But he commented that our congregation always began from scratch. I thought that this idea was refreshing and vowed to do better.

Soon after my arrival, the ward instituted an evening sacrament meeting of the old style. The Robisons still came in, and then went home after the morning meeting, but I wanted to stay for the evening meeting. This meant that I was soon lunching and

museum-going with one male student or another, because, for one thing, I frequently forgot to bring carfare and lunch money and had to charm someone into taking me to lunch and then persuading someone with a car to drive me home to Wellesley. But this is what girls were used to in the old days. I expected it, and it happened.

I do remember how shocked I was after attending a formal dance at a Harvard house. I watched a girl and her date stroll out of the hall. He kissed her goodnight, she unlocked her bicycle, tucked up her taffeta skirt, and rode away to Radcliffe. We Wellesley girls would never have put up with that. And I am still shocked—shocked, I tell you!

I was surprised when Ira Terry, the branch president, called me in that first year. He said he had gotten a letter about me. Amazing! It seemed that my lively grandmother feared the worst about me—that I had disappeared from view as many young Mormons did on going to another city. She urged him to find me and put some pressure on me to come to church. The letter even had a threatening tone. He had better get busy and do it. President Terry urged me just as strongly to write to my grandmother and tell her that I was very active in church. I know that it doesn't always happen, but I have watched with interest as many young people, supposedly fleeing from Zion, become more religious here, decide to go on missions, and get married in the temple. Meanwhile, when young people from here go west to BYU, they sometimes get bored, alienated, and into trouble. This is all anecdotal evidence, but I think we should do a study.

A related phenomenon was one I experienced each year in September as the wives of new graduate students came to town and at testimony meetings, in tears, told how sorry they were to be away from their mothers, their wards, and Zion. Then in June, another group of wives and mothers would stand, weeping, and say how much they regretted having to leave Cambridge which they had come to love so deeply. We should do a study about that as well.

I loved coming to church here with its variety of interesting people of all ages. I particularly liked teaching Junior Sunday School which I was soon called to do. Wellesley was a paradise, but it was occupied only by girls ages eighteen to twenty-two, along with a few desiccated professors and administrators. I, who

had been very active in church, but also very casual about it, now spent Sundays going to church and, of course, engaging in social activities. At college I stopped doing any school work on Sunday. At the same time, I became a better Church person, I also became a more serious student rather than the smartie I had grown up to be. It was much longer before I became a serious student, and I doubt that I am really one yet, but the seeds were planted then.

The student group in my day was small and tight. People told me right away about all the other students who were around but whom I had not yet seen. Chase Peterson was the senior member of LDS students in Boston, having been to prep school and Harvard College, and about to attend Harvard Medical School. He was widely admired, so it was in tones of hushed awe that I was informed one Sunday that he was in the infirmary with mumps. For some reason, I joined a group that went to see him there. I was eager to see this heroic paragon. But there he was in flannel pajamas, suffering from a childhood illness, not in his most imposing and impressive style. I was, however, impressed at how stylish and nonchalant he could be, even as an invalid.

Richard Bushman, another important absent student, was off on a mission to the New England States, whose headquarters were in another old house, next door to the old house where we had church. I guess that people in the Salt Lake missionary office thought he had learned the language and would be able to communicate with and convert the locals. He had told his Harvard friends that he would be going to some exotic clime to preach the gospel and was somewhat crestfallen to have to admit that he would be only moving next door, as it were. He drove around New England checking on the missionaries from Connecticut to Nova Scotia all by himself as missionaries were in short supply during the Korean War. When he came to Cambridge, his mission president, J. Howard Maughan, who always called him Dick, warned him to stay away from his old friends, but somehow he turned up once at an after-church gathering in the room of one of his old friends. I happened to be there, and we met, beginning a relationship that bloomed after his return to school.

I was here when we began the many projects to raise money to build this chapel. How could that ever be done? We were a poor

bunch, nothing like today. We had ward suppers. We made small individual donations. We had some way to make money on stockings. Betty Hinckley had the Relief Society sewing purse inserts for a few more dollars. George Albert Smith Jr., who taught at the Harvard Business School, seemed our most established and successful member. He wrote to all his friends and former members of the branch and asked for contributions. Did we have to furnish 50 percent then? I just remember that it was a lot of money. I thought there was no way we could raise enough, but suddenly it was time to begin to build.

The locals were not pleased that the upstart Mormons were building on Brattle Street. Mark Cannon told me just this year that McGeorge Bundy, then a Harvard dean, had told him how much "he enjoyed seeing the disappointment of some of his Cambridge friends at their inability to prevent the spoiling of the neighborhood by the Mormons getting established with a new chapel. He believed that their unhappiness was very much deserved as a result of their negative attitude." But then McGeorge Bundy was a serious politician, as some of us remember, and was talking to Mark. In a more positive version of the same kind of comment, I remember George Albert Smith Jr. saying that a friend, looking at the plans, suggested that the Brattle Street facade enclosing the cultural hall looked pretty institutional, even penal, and suggested that it be broken up some with windows or other architectural devices. You can check to see how much compromise was made.

Bill Cox, the cigar-chomping engineer and insurance man married to our Relief Society president, was a potent force in policing the construction. He came every night to see that any slipshod work was torn out and replaced the next day. Cox reconverted himself to the Church by this building construction and went on to become branch president and later Manti Temple president where he singlehandedly, according to my sources, prevented the modernization of that august building. He was one of the category of "Irascible Saint" common in Mormonism.

And so, if you know that I became a mother in Cambridge, you'd better believe that I also became a wife. After his mission, Richard began to come and visit me at Wellesley. He was never very nice to me. He was very stern in his invitations, and we usu-

ally had study dates at the old Recreation Building. Even our movies were few and far between. He seemed so much more mature and serious than I was that we could hardly manage to carry on a conversation. I knew he disapproved of me, and he got so he would write letters between visits setting me straight about various things.

So when he actually proposed to me, I was astonished. I was not completely naive. I had already had a few proposals and could read the clues. But I never saw this one coming. I thought he had been coming out to see me on an assignment from the elders' quorum. Of course, he would tell a different story. In any case, I soon got used to the idea, and we became engaged. We were married after his graduation from Harvard and after my junior year. It wasn't until after we were married that I discovered he was really a very different person than I had thought. He had certainly not known who I was either. We stayed on in Cambridge for his graduate work and my last year of college. I graduated in maternity clothes.

We joined the ranks of the young marrieds. I remember Nora Cox collecting my fifty cents dues as I was now a member of the Relief Society. We were called to supervise the New England Mission Mutual Improvement Association, the forerunner of the Young Women and Young Men, then in its infancy in the mission. We traveled around and visited the branches, encouraging meetings, activities, and reporting systems to bring along these young congregations. We also organized mission-wide youth conferences bringing in the kids from Maine and Vermont to camp out in the chapel. I was also asked to be chairman of the first girls' camp—pretty remarkable since my lone camping experience was two weeks at Girl Scout camp which resulted in my being asked to leave the organization. But all these things are examples of the great opportunities we have in the Church. We are asked to do things that no one in another setting would ever ask us to do, and we learn how to do them. I have often said that everything I ever needed to know I learned at church.

Richard had come to Cambridge in 1949. I came in 1952. We left together in 1960. We went to BYU for Richard's first job. After three years, we went back east again, this time to Providence,

Rhode Island, for two years of a post-doctoral fellowship. We were once again called to head the youth organization in the New England Mission. The MIA had developed considerably in our absence. Then it was back to BYU for three more years, which made a total of eight since we had left Cambridge.

At that point, Richard had earned a sabbatical, so we returned to Cambridge where he had a fellowship at the Charles

Warren Center to do historical research for another year. The plan was to stay only for that year. BYU was paying half his salary, and Richard felt financially and spiritually obligated to return to Provo. That was our home. We had finally bought a house there. But circumstances contrived to make it attractive to remain in Cambridge. Richard's dissertation, his first book, had won a big prize and he was hotly pursued. The most vigorous campaign was waged by Boston University. The history department there finally persuaded him to stay and even bought out his BYU sabbatical.

I was glad to stay. I had been able to finish up my master's degree in American literature at BYU, but I could not see what else to do there. By then I was a mature wife and the mother of five children, but I wanted to go back to school. Boston University, with reduced fees for faculty wives, made that hope a possibility. This next time around in Boston we stayed for eleven years, leaving in 1977. It is a great gift to us to have visited the Cambridge scene twice over such a long period.

The 1970s were an exciting and fearful time in our nation's history. When Richard won his big prize at Columbia University, we were present for the last big event before Low Library was occupied by insurgents, the police were called, and the administration toppled. That summer we were in San Francisco, not too far from Haight-Ashbury which Richard travelled through daily to get to Berkeley where there was also trouble. We got to Cambridge in time for the take-over of good old Harvard. Anti-war demonstrations, civil rights activities, and other civic unrest encouraged the efforts of women to new possibilities.

It was a good time for me to begin work on a doctorate, even if I did have another baby along the way. I decided to study women's work of the past, using myself as a sort of touchstone. I said I was doing female studies, the first person I knew to stake out such a field. This activity gave me something to think about while I did

the dishes. It gave me something to escape to from my household labors. And school was painful enough that I was glad to escape it to make cookies and read to little people. Even scrubbing the floor was more welcome than writing papers. I also escaped the competition of LDS women for cleaner houses, more perfect children, and more good works. School worked very well as a device to insulate me from things I didn't want to do and also gave me the sense that I was making some kind of progress.

So I was very interested when Laurel Thatcher Ulrich invited me to her house with a group of ward members to discuss our lives as Mormon women. She and others had dramatically worked together to publish a very successful guidebook, *A Beginners' Boston*. Now we would talk about territory even closer to home. So began a series of memorable mornings when we met together for fervent discussions, voices raised, tears falling, and toddlers stepping on our toes, as we discussed authority, birth control, housework, and other burning issues.

Our first project in that group was to edit an issue of *Dialogue*, the renowned pink issue. But that was just the beginning of a long series of activities that came to include dinners, retreats, sponsored speeches, research trips to the library, painful hours before the typewriter, a class for the institute, a book from the papers, still in print as *Mormon Sisters: Women in Early Utah*, and eventually a newspaper, *Exponent II*. We found we could work together—that working together for tangible products added richness and satisfaction to our lives, that the lacks of some were made up for by the talents of others, and that there was nothing we considered doing that we could not do.

I've been a project person all my life. I've done lots of projects before and since that Boston run, but I've always felt that this was our finest hour, to coin a phrase. We labored on in ecstatic innocence before the serpent entered the garden. These were such heady, happy, constructive, effective days. We could accomplish so much. One innovation, one project after another, and we still have monuments available to remind us of those grand times.

The LDS scene in Cambridge had changed a great deal between our two sojourns. There were many more people. Many more successful people. More people staying. To see progress, we

had only to look back a little way. As Richard says, a ward becomes a stake in twenty-five years. The old Cambridge Ward reached as far away as Holliston. This time we had multiple wards in our building. Richard became the president of the student branch. I still took the children to the family ward and was asked more than once if I had married out of the Church. I agreed that my husband belonged to another church.

L. Tom Perry, the businessman who served as our innovative stake president before being drafted for his current stint as an apostle, encouraged creative activities. We held many special activities in our stake. When he departed for Salt Lake City, Richard became the stake president. He has since been bishop twice elsewhere and is now a patriarch in New York City where we sometimes live.

Our heritage from living in Cambridge is incalculable. I think all of us are different than we would have been from having had this experience. I certainly am. We share rich memories and a sense of initiation that others lack. Many of my best friends, even those I don't often see, date from those wonderful days. We share so many assumptions and memories that we just pick up where we were last time. We find friends everywhere, and now the children of many of my friends are friends to each other, and their children are also friends. How lucky we are to have had this rich gift in our lives. Maybe we should do a study about that!