

Family Roots + An Heiress = A Library for Boylston

by Patricia Kelleher Bartram

This article is part of a periodic series of “portraits” of some of Boylston’s early families and key figures.

Perhaps surprisingly, a major contributor to our community’s life never actually lived in Boylston – although her familial roots were here. Just after the turn of the 20th century, Salome Elizabeth White, an heiress based in New York, donated the funds to build a library in Boylston.

In Loving Memory of Her Mother

Salome’s gift to establish the Sawyer Memorial Library was made in loving memory of her mother, Harriet Sawyer White, who was the daughter of Oliver Sawyer and Harriet Goulding of Sawyers Mills, Boylston.



SALOME ELIZABETH WHITE
*Daughter of
Thomas White & Harriet Sawyer
BHSM Photograph Collection*



SAWYER MEMORIAL LIBRARY
*Front View
BHSM Photograph Collection*



SAWYER MEMORIAL LIBRARY
*Side View
Note: Hastings Center Store & Red Barn Restaurant in
background
BHSM Photograph Collection*

The library’s cornerstone was laid on Memorial Day 1904. Later that year, on 10 November 1904, the Sawyer Memorial Library was officially presented to the Town of Boylston by William White on Salome’s behalf. That November date was significant as it was the 86th anniversary of the birthday of her mother.

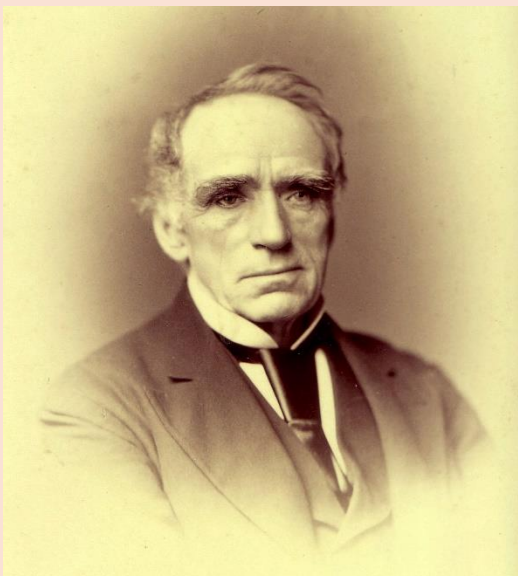
This unique fieldstone building that is our town library today was sited on land that had once been the location of the homes of her parents and grandparents. It was designed by Worcester, Massachusetts architects Fuller & Delano. In addition to donating the building, Salome furnished the interior with everything required for a then state-of-the-art library.

Boylston Roots

Salome had an unusual life for a woman of that period, and it is interesting to learn more. As noted, her Boylston roots were deep. Her maternal family, the Sawyers, had settled early in Boylston. Her parents, Thomas White, Esq. (9 February 1804-23 November 1896) and Harriet Sawyer (10 November 1818-1 December 1899) were both born in town. Her father was the son of the Boylston Town Clerk, Aaron White, and his wife, Mary Avery White, daughter of the then current minister. Her parents married in Boylston on 2 June 1841.



HARRIET SAWYER WHITE
*Mother of Salome Elizabeth White
BHSM Photograph Collection*



THOMAS WHITE
*Father of Salome Elizabeth White
BHSM Photograph Collection*

Thomas White studied at Harvard Law School and served as a lawyer and judge in Providence, Rhode Island. In 1852 Thomas and Harriet relocated to New York City where he practiced law for a time and then left his law practice to manufacture chemicals. Salome was born there, on Staten Island, on 26 August 1854. She was to be the couple’s only child.

The family moved several times; in 1860 they were living in Bergen County, New Jersey, and by 1870 they had relocated to Brooklyn, New York.

Treasurer of Chemical Company

Well educated, Salome graduated from the Packer Collegiate Institute, formerly called the Brooklyn Female Academy, in 1874. By this time her father was successfully manufacturing chemicals (particularly Sulphur) at 38 Burling Slip, Brooklyn, a property on the East River making easy access to maritime trade. Salome served as the treasurer of her father's company, a position that would seem relatively unusual for a woman of her time and class. When her father died some two decades later in 1896, he left an estate worth \$192,000 (more than \$5 million in 2024) to Salome and her mother. Harriet Sawyer White died just three years later, in 1899.

At 45 years old, Salome was now the sole owner of the family property at 135 Hicks Street in Brooklyn Heights where she lived with her cousin, Harriet Mears, a widow aged 45 years. Harriet Mears was working as a missionary and opened and managed the first Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) of Manhattan.

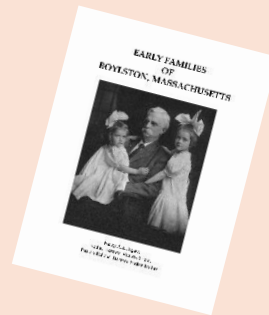
By 1910 Salome had moved to a new home at 115 Columbia Heights in Brooklyn. She died there at the age of 84 years on 5 November 1938. Salome never married and had no children.

Philanthropist

Armed with a sizeable fortune, Salome had become a philanthropist during her lifetime, donating significant funds to social causes. When she died, her estate was valued at \$810,472 (nearly \$18 million in 2024). She left bequests including \$55,000 (about \$1.2 million in 2024) to charities and \$42,000 (more than \$900,000 in 2024) in personal bequests. The remainder of her estate was divided among 26 first and second cousins as was stipulated by her father's will in the event she had no descendants. Her charitable bequests were comprised of \$10,000 each to the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) of Brooklyn, Holy Trinity Church, The Church Charity Foundation of Long Island, and Wheaton College of Illinois, and \$5,000 each to the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) of Brooklyn, Holy Trinity P.E. Church, Y.M.C.A. of Bayonne, New Jersey. To the Sawyer Memorial Library in Boylston, she bequeathed a \$5,000 trust fund to buy books. Her home, a townhouse which had been built in 1844, still stands and has an estimated market value of \$7.2 Million.¹

Although she was born and resided most of her life in New York, Salome joined her parents in death as she was buried with them in the White family plot in Boylston's Pine Grove Cemetery.

More can be learned about Salome White and many other of Boylston's early – and very interesting – families in “Early Families of Boylston, Massachusetts”, a 2022 book available for purchase from the Boylston Historical Society and Museum, Inc.



The BHSM is open for research: Sundays, 2:00-4:00 p.m.; Tuesdays, 9:00 a.m.-12:00 p.m.; and Saturdays, 9:00 a.m.-12:00 p.m., as well as by appointment by calling (508) 869-2720 or emailing info@boylstonhistory.org. Assistance with genealogical research is also available by appointment.

Acknowledgements:

- Ancestry.com
- Brooklyn City Directory, Brooklyn, Kings County, New York, 1907, newspapers.com
- Early Families of Boylston, Massachusetts, Filgate, Nancy, et al, 2022
- Editor, Nancy Filgate, Curator, Boylston Historical Society and Museum, Inc.
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