

Reminiscences & Traditions of Boston. By Hannah Mather Crocker.
Edited by Eileen Hunt Botting and Sarah L. Houser. New
England Historic Genealogical Society, 2011. 539 pp. \$39.95. ISBN:
978-0-88082-253-4.

In her dedication of *Reminiscences* to the Massachusetts Historical Society, Hannah Mather Crocker writes, "May it serve as a key to open the door for further investigation of former days" (245). Elsewhere she states "Restore, preserve, and transmit to future ages that they also may be able to look to the rock from whence they were hewn . . . with this wish I commit my reminiscences with antiquarian researches to the candour of the benevolent public" (233, also 94). Crocker sent her manuscript to her friend Henry Moore, who in returning it wrote on May 8, 1829, that he was "wiser than I was when I borrowed it. I hope at some future day to see it in print" (139). Unfortunately Crocker died two months later. Her manuscript eventually made its way to the R. Stanton Avery Special Collections at the New England Historic Genealogical Society but was not published until this year.

As her middle name indicates, Hannah Mather Crocker (1752-1829) descended from the illustrious Mather family, as the granddaughter of Cotton Mather. In addition, her mother, Hannah Hutchinson Mather, was the sister of Thomas Hutchinson, Jr., royal governor of Massachusetts from 1771 to 1774. In 1779 Hannah Mather married Joseph Crocker, a captain in the Massachusetts army from 1777 to 1781 and later a Boston merchant. The couple had ten children, only some of whom lived to adulthood. Left a widow in 1797 with little income from her husband, Crocker maintained her economic independence by selling property she had inherited and gained recognition as a writer in the 1810s. Her *Reminiscences* reflects Crocker's desire to compile and record Boston's history from its founding through the 1820s, as well as to demonstrate her literary instincts.

Composed between 1822 and 1829, *Reminiscences* combines narrative excerpts, poems, biographical sketches, patriotic sentiments, tributes to and from friends, and accounts of historical events. The three parts, Version 1, Version

2, and Appendix, contain lively stories and anecdotes. For example, a certain Thomas Kemble was ordered to stand in the stocks for two hours because he publicly embraced his wife after long separation (10). Crocker relates her own important role in an incident shortly before the Battle of Bunker Hill in June 1775. Writing in the third person ("a young lady"), she describes delivering letters to General Joseph Warren from her father Samuel Mather, then being held hostage by the British (41-43, 198). Similarly, she tells of an escapade from 1765 when, as a thirteen-year old, she helped her uncle Thomas Hutchinson, then lieutenant governor of Massachusetts, escape from her father's house during the Stamp Act riots (91, 152). As one of the many curiosities in the volume, Crocker quotes from a 1641 New England law book which ordered "rebellious children" to be executed if they continued their sinful behavior "after due correction from their parents" (83).

In the helpful and thorough introduction, editor Eileen Hunt Botting offers five ways to appreciate Crocker's reminiscences: 1) as local Boston history which Crocker, with her "elite connections" to the Hutchinson and Mather families, can render in detail; 2) as political history of Boston from the 1620s to the 1820s; 3) as women's history, in which Crocker emphasizes women's participation and her own perspective on Boston's political and social events; 4) as family history and genealogy giving information about Bostonians not available elsewhere; and 5) as church history covering the 1740 Great Awakening and the splits and theological differences in various Boston churches (xxxii-xxxv). These subjects overlap; they are not organized in either a thematic or chronological way. For example, several pages describe a series of early Boston physicians (95-98), followed by a list of epitaphs on Copp's Hill graves (99-101), followed by anecdotes about London mayor Sir John Calf, General John Burgoyne, and poet John Hawkins (101-102). What are we to make of this compilation? Botting's "reader's guide" (xxxii) to the five prevalent themes is essential to understanding the *Reminiscences*.

The editors note Crocker's prominence in early women's history. In 1778 she founded St. Ann's Lodge, intended to balance men's Masonic lodges and to establish educational opportunities for women. Boston newspapers published several of her poems on the lodge, which are included in the *Reminiscences* (e.g. "An Address to Female Lodges," 259-60) as well as in her *A Series of Letters on Free Masonry by a Lady of Boston* published in 1815. Crocker's *School of Reform*,

or *Seaman's Safe Pilot to the Cape of Good Hope* (1816) cautioned sailors against immoral behavior from a woman's viewpoint. In her 1818 *Observations on the Real Rights of Women*, Crocker "argued for a robust vision of women's informal political participation" (p. xxvi). Crocker's latter work received attention from figures ranging from Thomas Wentworth Higginson in 1859 to Judy Chicago in 1979 ("The Dinner Party," p. xl). Crocker's activism is well represented in the *Reminiscences* with statements and poems. For example, a poem "Quid pro quo," complains about doctors' demand for full pay from women: "As all you do, we plainly see/ Is only done for double fee" (271). Her 1799 "North Square Creed," intended as a vow for husbands, declared, "I do verily believe it is proper and best for every man to believe in every thing his prudent wife wishes him to believe" (258, 357-58).

Versions One (V1) and Two (V2) cover many of the same subjects and the inevitable question arises as to whether there is a need for both of them. The editors defend their decision, stating that V1 "has the more topographical, genealogical, and political analysis of Boston's growth" while V2 emerges "more as a synthetic history of the city and its denizens." They argue that inclusion of both versions "enables the comparative analysis of their content and composition" (xxviii-xxix). Frequent repetition between the two inevitably occurs, sometimes with identical wording and notes (see for example, "Boston Ministers: A Ballad," 121-26, 222-26). An entry on black servant Jack Morey is similar in content but slightly more condensed in V2 (see 81-2, 196). Nevertheless, V2 does add some new material (e.g. 172, 186, 193, 200). Given the reasonable price of this volume (\$39.95), the press apparently did not object to the inclusion of V2 and users now have full access to Crocker's entire text. One wonders, however, if placement of V2 on a website might have been a better strategy, so as not to overwhelm the user with much repetitive material.

The Appendix is like a scrapbook. In this section Crocker displays her poetic skills with 81 poems of her own, pasted into the original manuscript. The editors have remarkably located the original publication of some of Crocker's poems, many in the *Columbian Centinel*. Crocker also included a number of poems by well-known authors such as Robert Southey and David Garrick. She also gathered those that were published anonymously. The Appendix contains patriotic expressions, some of which are also present in V1 and/or V2 (e.g. "Lines on the

Independence, 134 and 285). "Diverse" (xl) is certainly the appropriate word to describe this section.

Extensive apparatus adds to the merits of the volume. First, the editors have carefully labored to present a text that is readable yet provides comparison with the original. They offer a detailed statement of transcription policies, along with a separate section, "Textual Notes," at the end of the volume listing line by line substitutions. For example where Crocker wrote "epistopalian," the editors have supplied in brackets "Episcopalian." In addition, the Biographical Directory contains brief summations of the figures to whom Crocker frequently refers. Photographs include Crocker's Mather ancestors, along with well-known Boston figures such as Paul Revere and Phyllis Wheatley, a map of Boston's North End, and prominent churches. A fuller selection of photographs of the manuscript volume and samples of Crocker's handwriting could have further highlighted the editors' transcription accomplishment. Lastly, the excellent index contains a variety of topics such as black Americans and smallpox, along with separate entries for individual poems, churches, and Boston buildings. A separate index lists the first lines of all the poetry in the volume. Because of Crocker's scattered presentation, readers will find these indexes indispensable.

Fuller consideration of an annotation policy could have made the *Reminiscences* more user-friendly with fewer notes. Notes to V1 total 465; V2: 367. A large number of these are, of course, necessary to identify people and events and to define an unfamiliar word such as "gunter" (341). A note on the historical background to an event on, say, the 1755 Lisbon earthquake illuminates Samuel Mather's poem on the subject (n. 315, p. 119). But many notes could be condensed or omitted. Occasionally the notes give the same information already provided in the introduction (n. 224, p.64 on Esther Forbes) or in the text (n. 323, p. 91). Moreover, notes could be cut to one for a paragraph instead of three or four (as on p. 40, notes 143-45, or p. 84, notes 293-298). An editorial statement that no note will appear when information is unavailable could have eliminated notes 315-16 (p. 87) and notes 338, 341 (p. 99), for example. Lastly, italics inserted in brackets in Crocker's text (e.g. Edward H[*utchinson*] p. 8) could have eliminated some notes. Although many of the editors' notes supply essential explanations, the high number of extraneous ones distracts at times from Crocker's text.

The editors acknowledge that Crocker's *Reminiscences* is "not a polished document" (xli). Instead it is, as already noted, a combination scrapbook and reference work. The reader can well understand the characterization by Esther Forbes, the author of a biography of Paul Revere, who wrote that Crocker's work is a "jumble of reminiscences, chaotic, unchronological" (xxxix). The editors attribute Forbes's 1942 criticism to the fact that the manuscript was extremely hard to read and absorb, a statement that makes us appreciate the careful transcription and editorial attention to Crocker's compendium. Botting and Houser maintain that it "provides new perspectives on the early history of Boston via its unique combination of primary and secondary sources, oral tradition, and first-person witness" (xxix). The *Reminiscences* will certainly be a valuable resource for anyone researching early Boston history.

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