Vanished Acts

“Your wooden arm you hold outstretched to shake with passers-by.”


Rapaport reports the appearance in 1677 of an early Bad Influence, one Onesephorus Stanley, a nonstudent, who fetched hard cider into College rooms and was heard swearing therein. Under questioning by Cambridge magistrate Thomas Danforth, Stanley disclosed the names of two “drinking and carousing” students: Urian and Laurence Oakes. These were sons of the College president. Danforth dropped the Harvard investigation, but he kept his eye on Stanley, whom he later threatened with jail and convicted of many offenses, among them “being a night walker... of...dissolute behaviour” and “drawing ye students from their studies....”

Danforth went on to serve as a judge at the Salem witchcraft trials in 1692, where he and his fellow justices condemned 20 people to death. Samuel Sewall, A.B. 1671, famously, was the only one of the nine judges to repent, which he did in 1697.

“He experienced spiritual relief within a week,” writes Eve LaPlante, Ed.M. ’92, in *Salem Witch Judge: The Life and Repentance of Samuel Sewall* (HarperOne). “On the night of January 26, while the new court met at Charlestown, he lodged in the Charlestown house of Anne Tyng Shepard. Mistress Shepard mentioned to Samuel that John Harvard had built and lived in her house....

“That night in bed...Samuel lay awake for hours. He was struck by ‘how long ago God made provision for my comfortable lodging this night, seeing this is Mr. Harvard’s house.’ This led him to meditate on Heaven, ‘the house not made with hands, which God for many thousands of years has stored with the richest furniture: saints that are from time to time placed there.’ It occurred to Samuel that he might now ‘have some hopes of being entertained in this magnificent, convenient palace, every way fitted and furnished.’...

“Around this time...Samuel began wearing a hairshirt,” according to LaPlante. She is Sewall’s sixth-great-granddaughter and credits a great aunt for this sartorial intelligence.

Editor Daphne Abeel ’59 has skillfully marshaled 19 contributors of essays on Cambridge politics, activism, town-gown relations, folk music, architecture, immigrants, and much else in *A City’s Life and Times: Cambridge in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge Historical Society), an engaging history. One of them is Michael Kenney ’57, a retired *Boston Globe* reporter, who chronicles literary Cambridge.

He quotes the poet and music critic Lloyd Schwartz, Ph.D. ’76, on poet Robert Lowell ’39, who taught creative writing at Harvard from 1963 to 1977, with some interruptions. “Once, after lunch, I walked with him back into Harvard Square. He wanted an ice cream at Bailey’s, where I ordered a vanilla malt with an egg in it (a Bailey’s specialty). He’d never heard of putting an egg in a milk shake and had to try one too. He was so excited, he wanted to take a long walk, and we strolled all the way up Brattle Street to Sparks Street and back. It was, I think, the longest time I’d ever spent alone with him.”

The literary lions have vanished, mostly. So has Bailey’s. Primus attests that the Square was a far richer place when it had malted milks with raw eggs whipped up in them.

~Primus V