

A LETTER FROM BOSTON

By Laura Boesch

December 3, 2001

My apologies for the delay in writing to you, but seeing as I'm supposed to be gathering details about my journey in the colonies, I presume you will excuse my brief silence. The ocean voyage was a relatively pleasant one, with favorable winds. I was afflicted with only a short bout of sea-sickness, and was able to spend much of my remaining seven weeks comforting others with their troubles, most of which lasted much longer than mine. At last, to my great relief, we arrived in the port at Boston, where I joyfully met my cousin, his spouse, and their four children, with whom I have been boarding ever since.

Boston's large port connects with a mid-sized city that resembles my dear London in its narrow, crooked streets and bustling activity. I became homesick at the sight of King's Street, for its crevices felt all too familiar. Many of the citizens I hear speaking on the streets and within my cousin's residence have had such impeccable English, no matter the class, that I have often thought myself to be back home. Some of the most educational and enlightening conversations that I have had, have taken place in what seems to be the center of the city, the taverns, with many travelers such as myself. Although the recent earthquake of 1855 in Lisbon has brought Charles Chauncy to warn men here of the sin of drinking, I have met many men surrounded by drink, who seem to know quite a bit about the somewhat celestial theories of Newton and Locke. Their theories about the planets, the earth, and the lack of general freedom of man are fascinating, radical as they may be. A certain optimism about the goodness of men spreads through these rooms, along with a certain confidence for the future that I have never seen the likes of back in London.

Don't fear, though, I have not had as much time as it sounds to waste away in the taverns. I have attempted to do my share and take up as little room as possible in my cousin's residence. I must take a bit of time now to describe this house, in which I have so far spent many of my days and all of my nights. It is a typical New England hail and parlor house made of English bonded brick. There is a beautiful, although small kitchen garden around it, full of enticing vegetables and delicious herbs that tease my taste buds. The central room is a warm kitchen that leads out to the low-ceiling parlor and hall where their guests are often entertained. I sleep on my bed mat (for mattresses are much too expensive for a boarder such as myself) on the second floor on the side of the outbuildings. This makes me farthest away from the vital fireplaces that warm the house, and also away from the rest of the household. I do not mind, though, as it is the

closest to a respectable privacy closet as one can get in a New England house of seven people. Not to mention, I am proud to have acquired a new wool overcoat.

On a typical day, I awake at six, according to the chimes of the clock in the church steeple, and say my prayers of the morning. The woman of the house has already lit a fire downstairs and gathered ingredients from the garden and outbuildings for breakfast, having gotten up two hours earlier. I read a chapter of the Bible in Greek and then head down for the meat that is our usual breakfast. It seems that pork is the main staple of most of the people around here. I have been forced to try many new foods that I would never have touched back in London. These include the oysters of the lower class that are also fed to the pigs! The children eat with us before the two young males complete their chores and head off to be schooled. Education has become a valuable part of the middle class here, so that they may learn the Scriptures to please God, and get ahead in life. The children are quiet and do not speak unless spoken to. My cousin has seen to it that they have been brought up with the rod that assists in forming such obedient offspring who are instilled with the fear of the Devil. The Massachusetts School system that has been newly founded by the support of taxes seems to have taught them well, too. I hear it may be the best in all of the colonies. My cousin's boys can be schooled but are not yet old enough to be apprenticed for a trade and are therefore made to do important chores around the house. My cousin's wife and female children go to do their daily chores of sewing and domesticity while we go off to the shop.

My cousin is a Master cooper and I have tried to help him with my own knowledge of woodworking. This is a very important trade in Boston, as it is important for the right barrels to be used to store food on the ships leaving the harbor. These barrels must be able to hold liquids safely and often give flavor to the drinks and food inside. I have also been trying to help with the negotiations to buy the oak and brass hoops at low costs along with helping to make some of the barrels. The days are long, for a cooper's work is hard and must be precise, using only eyesight as a guide.

There is a break midday, in which we stop for a nice large dinner that the women provide for us. During this time, I am usually able to watch some of the children in the street too young still for schooling, playing with a hoop and stick. This brings back memories of a childhood often forgotten. After the meal, we head back to work until it is time to come home in the evening for a light supper. Usually at night we are able to play an admittedly raucous game of billiards, go skate on ice, or play an unruly game of cards. The whole family is in bed by the time it is dark, so as not to waste any expensive candles needed to see at that time. Each day of the week brings something a little different and new. There is baking day in which there are only light meals, fish day every Friday to help support the local markets, and of course, the Sabbath.

The church in the center of town is Presbyterian to satisfy the religious needs of the majority of Boston, including my relatives. This is a new experience for me because it is not completely part of the King's Church of England that I am so used to back home. However, it is

the only way for me to worship rightly here and so I go to listen to the Yale-educated minister's fiery sermons. Sunday is my favorite day, for it is the day of rest. The colonists are so strict about it here that just yesterday, our neighbor was put in the stocks for excessively walking on the Sabbath! He is usually a faithful gentleman, however, and I was glad he was able to afford someone to wipe his face while he was trapped there. Dried fruit on the face can attract more ants than one can have nightmares about!

The most popular punishment here, though, I have found is whippings, which are the most common form of entertainment around. Why, just a week ago the children of my cousin were able to go to a public hanging for someone who had committed treason. It was the first time they had been excused from their chores to do so.

Lest I forget, I must not leave this letter without telling Ms. Annabelle of the latest fashions here in the colonies. The dress seems just as refined as in England. Whalebone stays are still in high fashion, helping women to obtain that exquisite curvature in their backs. Petticoats are becoming more abundant. Just yesterday, I must have seen a hoop petticoat that wasn't less than six feet wide! Women's headdresses are also something to marvel at with all of the lace and ribbons that go into them. Women seem to be getting taller not only with these high wigs but also shoes with heels on them. It must be quite similar back in London. As for us men, long coats and buckles are still of the latest fashions.

The breakfast meal is almost ready and so I must finish this letter so it can be sent off hastily today. I hope all is well in my dear home and country. My cousin and his family bid you, and the country of our king, a greeting. I shall write again as soon as the time permits. Until I do so, I bid thee farewell with my best regards.

Yours faithfully,

John Ward

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