



A Boston Women's
Heritage Trail
in the neighborhood of
Charlestown,
Massachusetts

Developed by Grade 5
Harvard/Kent Elementary School
A Boston Public School

☞ May 1998

"Walk Her Way" - Charlestown Women's Heritage Trail

1 City Square Park

Charlestown can be called the "Mother of Boston," since it was settled in 1629, one year before Boston. It is a peninsula formed by the Mystic and Charles rivers and is separated from Boston by these waters. When the English settlers arrived, the land was inhabited by Pawtucket and ruled by a queen, the *Squaw Sachem* (d. 1667). The Pawtucket submitted to the rule of the English in 1644, but the *Squaw Sachem* reserved her right to use her old fishing places and hunting grounds until her death.



Mother Goose Plaque

Elizabeth Foster, born in Charlestown in 1655, married Isaac Vergoose. They raised 16 to 20 children, some from his first marriage. Her son-in-law, Thomas Fleet, published the little songs she sang to her children and grandchildren. They became known as "Mother Goose Rhymes."

Charlestown Courthouse
The Charlestown District Courthouse is located near the site of the first judicial court in Massachusetts, founded in 1630. Judge Mary Brennan presided here from 1980-1989.



2 20 Devens Street

The Colbert Apartments in the old Harvard Elementary School are named for *Mary Colbert* (1890-1974). She was born in Charlestown and lived here all her life. She was a political activist, working tirelessly for Franklin Delano Roosevelt and John F. Kennedy, among others. She devoted herself to a myriad of Charlestown causes and helped

found the Doll Carriage Parade to give children a more active part in Bunker Hill Day ceremonies. Her house at 59 High Street is Stop 10.

3 108 Main Street

Julia Harrington Duff (1859-1932) and her husband, Dr. John Duff, lived here. Duff was a teacher in Charlestown for 14 years before her marriage. She was the first Irish-American woman to serve on the Boston School Committee (1901-05). She championed the cause of the Irish-American women who wanted to be Boston Public School teachers.



4 Corner of Thompson and Main Streets

Sarah Colby rented a room here in the Timothy Thompson house. She ran a successful milliner shop out of the room and lived in it with her four children. She was born in Waterville, Maine. Later, her son Gardner donated so much money to a college in Waterville that it was named Colby College.



5 85 Warren Street

Laurette Murdock (1900-1994) moved here in the 1960s. She was one of the pioneers in the restoration of historic Charlestown houses. A writer, an editor, an artist and a gardener, Murdock was involved in many community organizations. Always full of energy, she loved people, talk, friendship, reading, and travel.

6 43 Monument Square

The words "Free For All" and "Charlestown Branch" are still on the facade of this building, which was the Charlestown Public Library from 1913-1970. When the library was formed in 1860, the first assistants, *Miss Jane Edwards* and *Miss Helen Wise*, established the library's first card catalog system and prepared the first 1,200 books for circulation. *Charlotte Harris* (d. 1877) was a major benefactor of the library.

She also gave the chime of bells which hung in the tower of the First Parish Church, the oldest church in Charlestown. Each bell was inscribed with a biblical quote. The library building is now the home of the Charlestown Historical Society's Bunker Hill Museum.

7 Bunker Hill Monument

In September 1840, *Sarah Josepha Hale* (1788-1879) organized the Bunker Hill Monument Fair, a weeklong event which raised \$30,035.53. The money was needed to complete the monument, which had stood unfinished since 1823. Hale also edited *Godsey's Ladies Book*, wrote "Mary Had A Little Lamb," and convinced President Lincoln to establish Thanksgiving Day as a national holiday.

8 22 Monument Square

Sisters *Mary Sherkanowski* and *Helene Sherkanowski Rush* ran a boardinghouse here from the 1940s. It was called Monument Square House. Helene lived on the ground floor, and Mary lived across the street. Helene wrote a book, *Rooms To Let*, about their experiences.



9 56 High Street

Ellen Augusta Brown Ranlett (d. 1895) lived here. She developed the "For To-Day" column in the *Boston Transcript* and was a warm and welcoming hostess. The motto over her fireplace said, "The ornament of a house is the friends who frequent it."

10 59 High Street

Home of *Mary Colbert*. See Stop 2.

11 73 High Street

Mass. General Hospital Clinic

Two important female doctors lived and worked in Charlestown. *Rebecca Lee Crumpler* (b. 1833) was the first African-American female physician. She worked as a nurse when she moved to Charlestown in 1852. She received a Doctress of Medicine from the New England Female Medical College in 1864. After the Civil War, she practiced in Richmond, Virginia. Later she returned to Boston with her husband, Dr. Arthur Crumpler, and lived on Beacon Hill. She published *A Book of Medical Discourses in Two Parts*.

Harriot Kezia Hunt (1805-1875) is known as the first woman to practice medicine in the United States. Hunt gave informal talks and led discussions at a Ladies' Physiological Society she founded in Charlestown in 1843. Although never admitted to a medical school, Hunt practiced medicine all her life, thus paving the way for women in medicine. She was awarded an honorary degree by Female Medical College of Philadelphia in 1853.



12 327 Main Street

Charlotte Cushman (1816-1876) lived here as a young girl.

She went to school and received her first elocution lessons in Charlestown. She grew up to become America's first superstar actress. She was famous for playing both female and male roles. She lived in Rome for several years, where she encouraged many young actresses and artists. She died in Boston.

13 Corner of Main and Salem Streets

Elizabeth McLean Smith (1916-1986) designed the Samuel A. C. W. Donnell plaque on the side of this building. Smith, a talented sculptor, lived at 92 Russell Street. She was a graduate of Boston's Museum School and later taught there. She sculpted the commemorative medal for the 200th Anniversary of the Battle of Bunker Hill, as well as *bas relief* murals of the Freedom Trail which are now stored at the Bunker Hill Museum. She was president of the New England Sculptors Association. Some of her work is in the Museum of Fine Arts.

14 Charlestown Navy Yard

During World War II, more than 8,000 women were employed at the Navy Yard as welders, riveters, and ship fitters. These women and 3 million others throughout the United States successfully did "men's" work. They became known as "Rosie the Riveter." They changed people's ideas of the work women could do. After the war, these women lost their jobs to the returning soldiers.



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Developed by Grade 5
Harvard/Kent Elementary School
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Support provided by:

- Boston Globe Foundation
- Boston Private Industry Council /Youth as Resources Project
- IMPACT II Teachers Network

Thanks also to:

- Marie Alves • Boston Park Rangers
• Celeste Bernardo • Charlestown Public Library • Christopher Cox • Maura Fitzsimmons • Florence Johnson
• Rosemary Kverek • Eddie Loan • Barbara Locurto • Maureen Marx • Oren McCleary
• Suzanne Roche • Patricia Rooney • Mary Rudder • Amy Souza • Marlene Walch
• Kay Whelan • Carl Zeller

Photos & graphics credits:

- Map of Charlestown from *Historical House Styles of Charlestown*, published by the Charlestown Preservation Society
- Sarah Hale and Charlotte Cushman courtesy of The Bostonian Society
- Julia Duff courtesy of Dr. John Duff
- Rosie the Riveter courtesy of Charlestown Navy Yard
- Pamphlet by Gretchen O'Neill and Mary Smoyer
- Cover illustration by Benny Diep

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