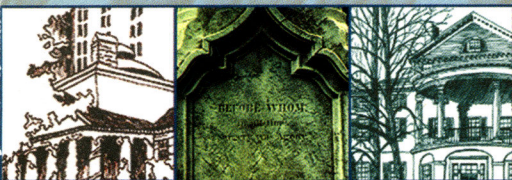


# BARRELL OF LUNATICS

Places Associated with the First Public Demonstration of Ether Anesthesia

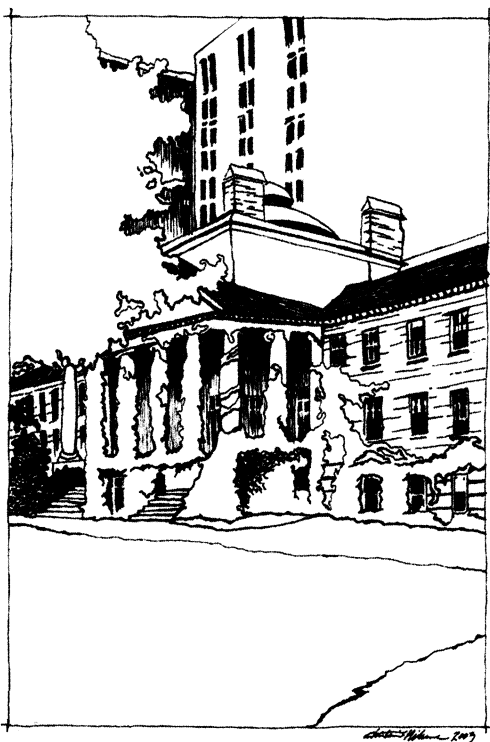
David C. Lai, M.D.

*Foreword by Donald Caton, M.D.*





BARRELL OF LUNATICS:  
PLACES ASSOCIATED WITH  
THE FIRST PUBLIC  
DEMONSTRATION OF  
ETHER ANESTHESIA



Ether Dome, Massachusetts General  
Hospital. Charles Bulfinch, Architect





BARRELL OF LUNATICS:  
PLACES ASSOCIATED WITH  
THE FIRST PUBLIC  
DEMONSTRATION OF  
ETHER ANESTHESIA

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Wood Library-Museum of Anesthesiology  
Park Ridge, IL  
2003

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To Marianne

It's all I have to bring today -  
This, and my heart beside -  
This, and my heart, and all the fields -  
And all the meadows wide -  
Be sure you count - sh'd I forget  
Some one the sum could tell -  
This, and my heart, and all the Bees  
Which in the Clover dwell.  
-Emily Dickinson



Morton Park, Wellesley

## FOREWORD

No part of our country is richer in historical sites related to anesthesia than New England. Recognizing this, the Wood Library-Museum published a guide to such places in 1972, on the occasion of the meeting of the American Society of Anesthesiologists in Boston. It re-published the pamphlet in 1996, this time for ceremonies celebrating the one hundred and fiftieth anniversary of Morton's demonstration of ether anesthesia at the Massachusetts General Hospital.

David Lai has now prepared an all new pamphlet, one which complements its predecessors with important new material. He describes the Barrell House, designed by Charles Bulfinch, which became the McLean Asylum, the institution that housed Charles T. Jackson after his personal and legal conflicts with Morton left him insane. Bulfinch, it should be noted, was also the architect who designed the Massachusetts General Hospital, which, of course, contains 'the ether dome.' Ironically, John Collins Warren's first son, John Warren, was a patient at McLean from April 19, 1841 until his death December 4, 1875. It has been said that if he [John Warren] was not crazy when admitted, he was when McLean was finished with him.

Lai also includes epigrams and epitaphs from grave markers of several principals involved in the initial discovery of anesthesia. Most significant, he includes reproductions of water colors, by anesthesiologist Leroy D. Vandam, of several buildings associated with W. T. G. Morton. Original drawings by Christine Mihevc, a Wellesley graduate, illustrate the cover and several other pages. One such drawing depicts 'Etherton Cottage,' originally built by Morton on the site now occupied by Wellesley Town Hall.

Dr. Lai's catchy title is appropriate. Two structures designed by Bulfinch, the Massachusetts General Hospital and the Barrell House, played pivotal roles in the progression of events from the first successful demonstration of ether anesthesia to subsequent peculiar, sometimes lunatic, behavior of those involved.

This pamphlet is an important addition to its predecessors. Together they offer physicians and students of history an opportunity to experience some of the sites associated with the first events in the development of surgical anesthesia.

Donald Caton, M.D.  
Chair, Publications Committee  
Wood Library-Museum of Anesthesiology  
April 30, 2003



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Kathy McGoldrick and Don Caton on behalf of the WLM were enthusiastic supporters from the start. Patrick Sim has once again been a persuasive advocate for new and original contributions to the literature. The History of Anesthesia Society (UK) and the Anesthesia History Association (USA) have both shown strong backing for this publication. Thomas Evans was instrumental early on in providing images to jump start the creative process. David Kruh wrote a wonderful book on Scollay Square. Miss Porter's School sent a much appreciated history. The Somerville Museum graciously provided the Kirker book on Bulfinch and numerous images. Julie Fenster's *Ether Day* and Alex Beam's *Gracefully Insane* inspired me to tell more of the story. Christine Mihevc was kind enough to accept this latest commission, which led to the final title of the book. Ms. Fenster and I are both graduates of Jamesville DeWitt High School in DeWitt, New York. My wife Marianne has yet again helped out immensely behind the scenes. Picking up from the Ralph Waters book, where she tracked down articles that the Countway librarians could not find, and the WLM did not have, she has purchased or borrowed many books for this project. Marianne was also invaluable in downloading digital pictures and facilitating immense data transfers by "burning" countless CD's. Don Caton, Adrian Padfield and Julie Fenster kindly reviewed the manuscript. Finally Roz Pape pulled everything together.

David C. Lai, M.D.

Somerville, Massachusetts

April 30, 2003

## PREFACE

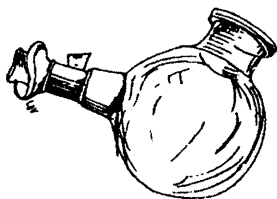
John McLean, wealthy from his paper mill on the Neponset River in Milton, came upon hard times and landed in bankruptcy court. Only the miraculous return of a long lost ship of his to Boston harbor reversed his fortunes yet again. In 1823 he mysteriously left \$120,000 to the Charlestown Asylum.

Emily Dickinson wrote 1,789 poems. Most never saw publication during her lifetime. Those that were often did not maintain her unique spelling, punctuation, capitalization and usage. Active until the end, her last poem was written one month before her death:

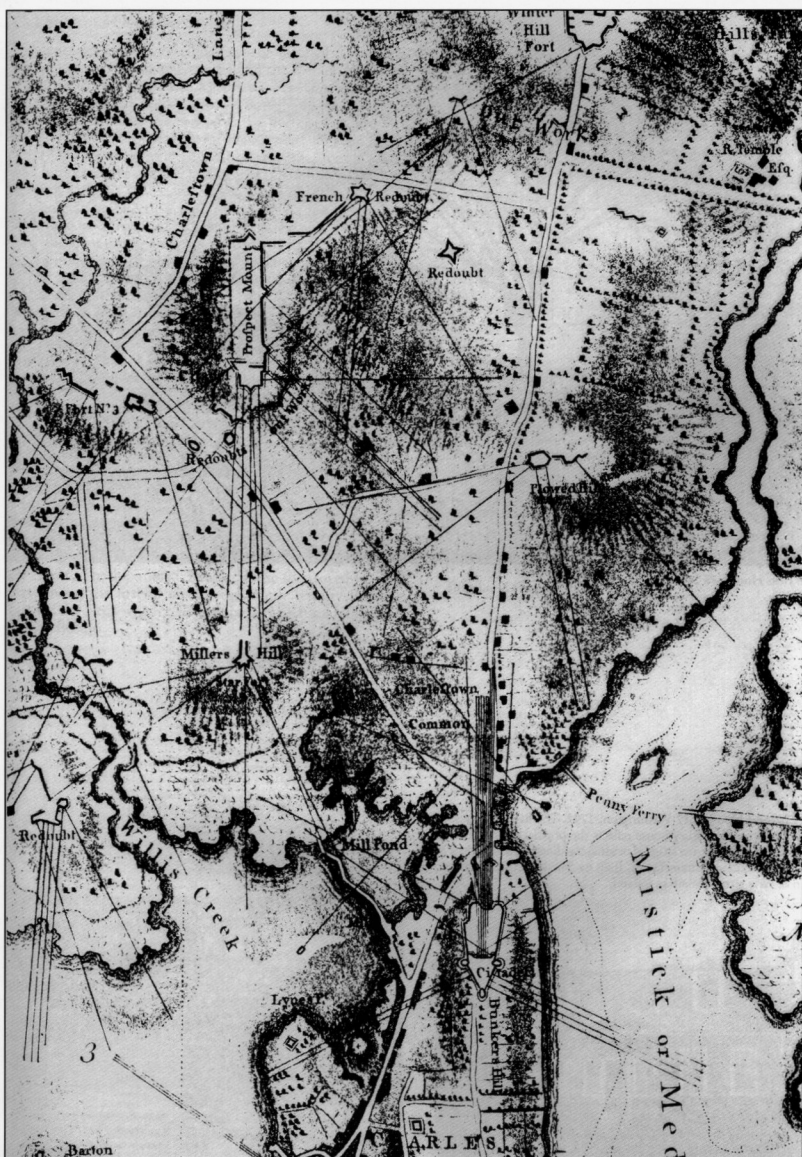
Of Glory not a Beam is left  
But her Eternal House -  
The Asterisk is for the Dead,  
The Living, for the Stars -

Humphry Davy, whose second book *Researches, Chemical and Philosophical; chiefly concerning Nitrous Oxide* had the enigmatic famous sentence “As nitrous oxide in its extensive operation appears capable of destroying physical pain, it may probably be used with advantage during surgical operations in which no great effusion of blood takes place.” His last book, published posthumously, was *Consolations in Travel, or the Last Days of a Philosopher*.

In Bigelow’s *Address At the Dedication of the Ether Monument* on June 27, 1868, he describes the era before painless surgery: “The philanthropist had indeed yearned to relieve suffering humanity; the poet had prophetically announced a world freed from physical pain; the philosopher had made fruitless efforts to unveil the hidden secret.” One wonders if he had John McLean, Emily Dickinson, and Humphry Davy in mind.



(Illustration by Leroy D. Vandam, M.D.)



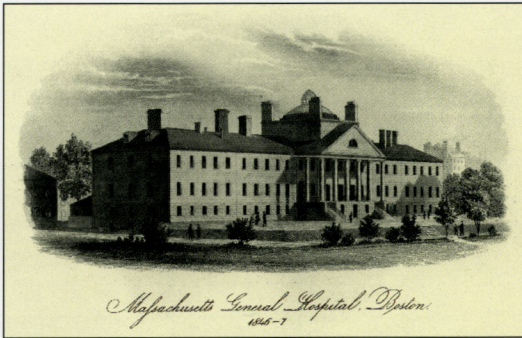
Military Works Constructed in Boston and Environs, 1775-1776 by Henry Pelham.  
(Courtesy Somerville Museum)

A better orientation is obtained if the map is rotated 90 degrees counter-clockwise. Charlestown is then seen to the right. Going left, 'Beyond the [Boston] Neck' one will reach the apex of a triangle formed by Plowed Hill (Mt. Benedict), Prospect Mount (Prospect Hill) and Millers Hill (Cobble Hill).

## Prologue

Surgeons must be very careful  
When they take the knife!  
Underneath their fine incisions  
Stirs the Culprit - *Life!*

Emily Dickinson  
Poem 156



(Courtesy Archives of the Massachusetts General Hospital)

I breathed enough to take the Trick -  
And now, removed from Air -  
I simulate the Breath, so well -  
That One, to be quite sure -

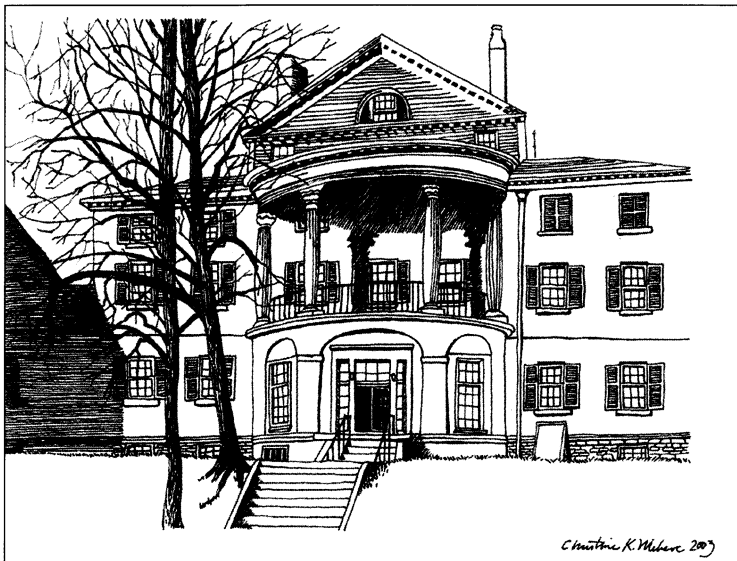
The Lungs are stirless - must descend  
Among the cunning cells  
And touch the Pantomime - Himself,  
How numb, the Bellows feels!

Emily Dickinson  
Poem 308



## Bulfinch and Barrell

Charles Bulfinch, architect of the Joseph Barrell House and its later conversion to the McLean Asylum for the Insane, once worked in the counting room of Barrell, a well-known Boston merchant and Bulfinch family friend. The Barrell House resembled Sir John Soane's Tendring Hall, Suffolk (England) and was described as "the beautiful and commodious edifice ... [that] will be infinitely the most elegant dwelling house ever built in New England." Bulfinch and James Hoban brought the "elliptical salon on axis" to American architecture.



Barrell House, Somerville, built 1792-1793

"It was Mr. Barrell's ambition to create an ideal country-seat, adorned with all the accessories of lawns, trees, gardens, terraces, greenhouses, fish-ponds, dove-cotes, poultry-yard, stable, coach-house, a well-stocked barn, and an attractive boat-house. And here he was able to carry out this magnificent plan. All the resources of Nature and Art were combined to make Pleasant Hill - as it was then called - the most complete and sumptuous residence in the suburbs. The choicest plants were imported from Europe, and gardeners to take care of them. Elms and poplars lined the winding avenues in different directions. At one time the place was called Poplar Grove. Trout and gold fish were domesticated near a fountain by the summer-house at the foot of the garden." - *The Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society*, March and April, 1896



Barrell House, rear view (Courtesy Somerville Museum)

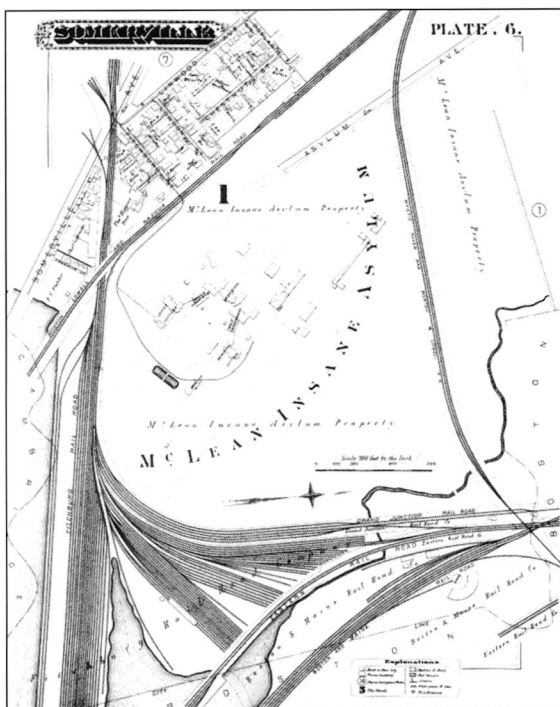
The Barrell House sat fifty feet in the air on top of Cobble Hill, providing excellent views of Boston, the Charles River, and the Miller River. Inside was a grand staircase likely modeled after one in Doddington Hall, Cheshire (England), the ancestral home of the Delves Family, whose motto was ‘Defy Fortune.’ It was described as: “a flying staircase, ascending at each end - 32 feet long - and coming together at a landing in the centre, supported by four fluted posts, and again ascending three steps to another landing, and then diverging right and left to landings connecting with each wing of the house as well as the centre.”



Bulfinch's Flying Double Staircase (Courtesy Somerville Museum)

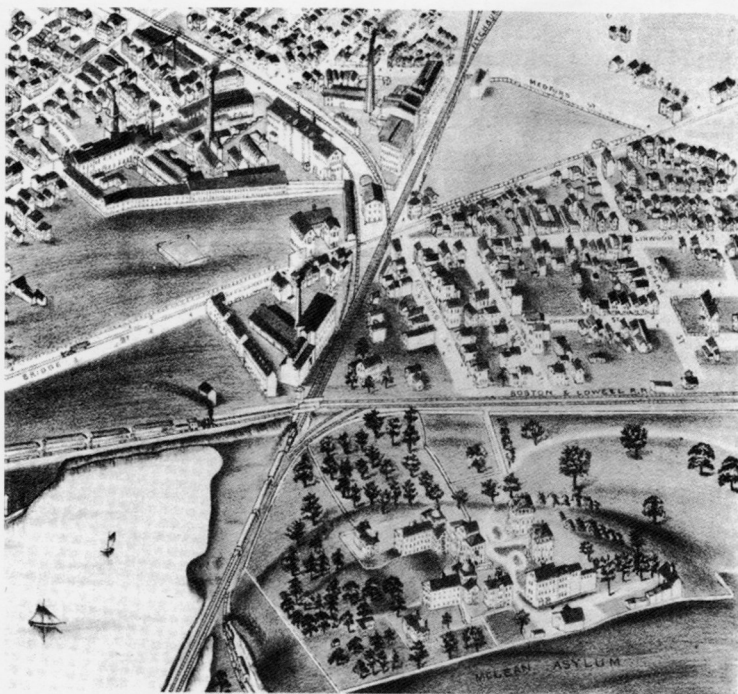
“While the corporation (Asylum) has been building up and beautifying within, the opposite has been going out without. What, with slaughter houses, miasmatic swamps, dirty habitations, and the railroads, the area may be said to be slightly unpleasant even if it is not very unhealthy ...”  
Somerville Journal, 1870

Railroads and other implements of industrialization began to crowd the Asylum in the 1830's. In 1869 Somerville began to fill in Miller River, as the once “limpid stream” was now overflowing with pollution. In 1874 Prospect Hill was partially excavated. The site of the raising of the first American flag in the colonies on January 1, 1776 was now being sold for landfill at 25 cents a load. Only a small mound was left at the original elevation.



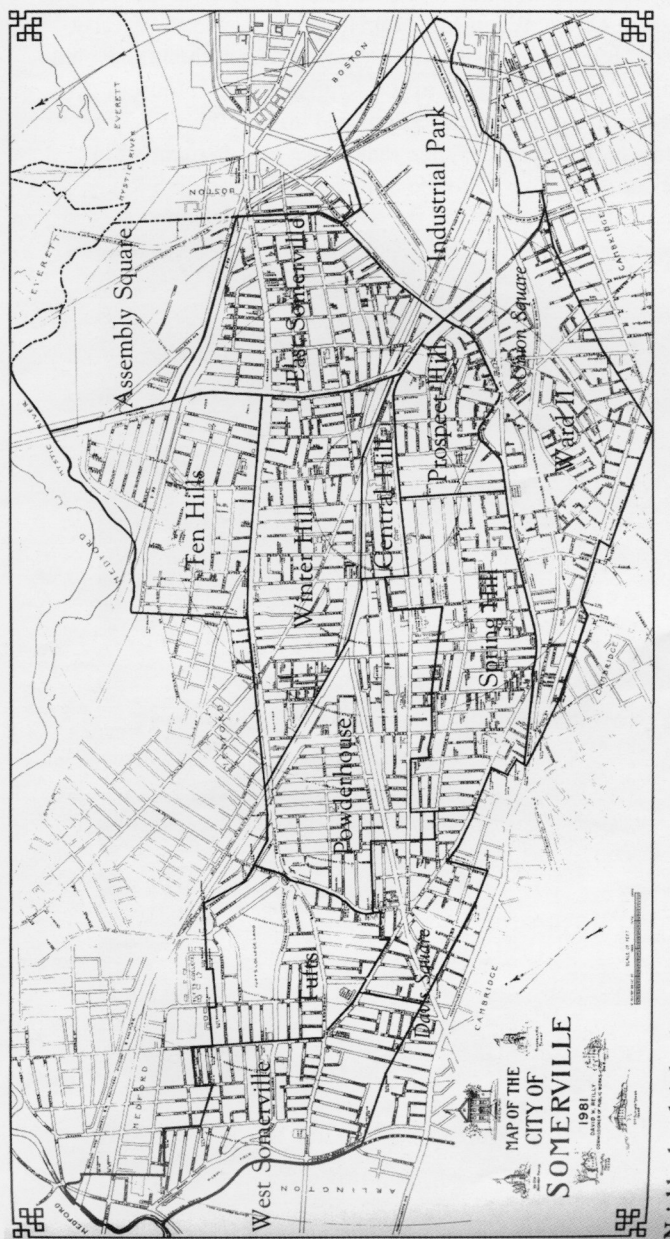
McLean Asylum, 1884. This atlas plate dramatically illustrates the extent of railroad construction near Cobble Hill. (Courtesy Somerville Museum)

“None but the antiquary, who is ready to discard every sense but that of sight, need explore the margin of Miller’s River. If he expects to find a placid, inviting stream, with green banks and clumps of willows, - a stream for poetry or meditation, - let him be aware. If he looks for a current in which to cast a line, or where he may float in his skiff and dream the day away, building his *aerial chateaux*, let him discard all such ideas and pass by on the other side. Miller’s River! faugh! it smells to heaven; not even the Rhine at Cologne could surpass it. Such draughts of air as are wafted to your nostrils from slaughterhouses, where whole hecatombs of squealing victims are daily sacrificed, are not of the chameleon’s dish.- Samuel Adams Drake, 1875.



Ward II, 1879. From 1879 Bird's Eye View of East Cambridge.  
(Courtesy Somerville Museum)





The Joseph Barrell House and the McLean Asylum were located in the area now designated Industrial Park, bounded by railroad lines, Washington Street, and McGrath Highway. Previous names include: Lechmere Point, Miller's Hill, Stearnes' Marsh, Pleasant Hill, Cobble Hill, Joy's Hill, Asylum Hill and Brick Bottom. The Somerville Museum, with the Bulfinch Stairs, is in the Spring Hill area at the intersection of Central Street and Westwood Road. Seven Hills Park, with the Barrell House above the Cobble Hill Monument, is in Davis Square behind Holland Street. (Courtesy Somerville Museum)

By the late 19th century the Asylum was in disrepair. The original mansion was even compared to the ruins of Kenilworth Castle or an old Yorkshire Abbey. When McLean Hospital moved to Waverly, Belmont in 1895, the mansion was demolished and the hill leveled for landfill. Fortunately, parts of the original Barrell House, including the staircase, were incorporated into Francis Shaw's country house in Wayland. When that house was dismantled in 1942, the stairs were given to the Somerville Historical Society. They may still be seen today at the Somerville Museum.



Somerville Museum, 1 Westwood Road. The original granite gates of the Shute estate are seen in the left foreground.



Somerville Museum, main exhibition hall



Somerville Historic Afghan, detail

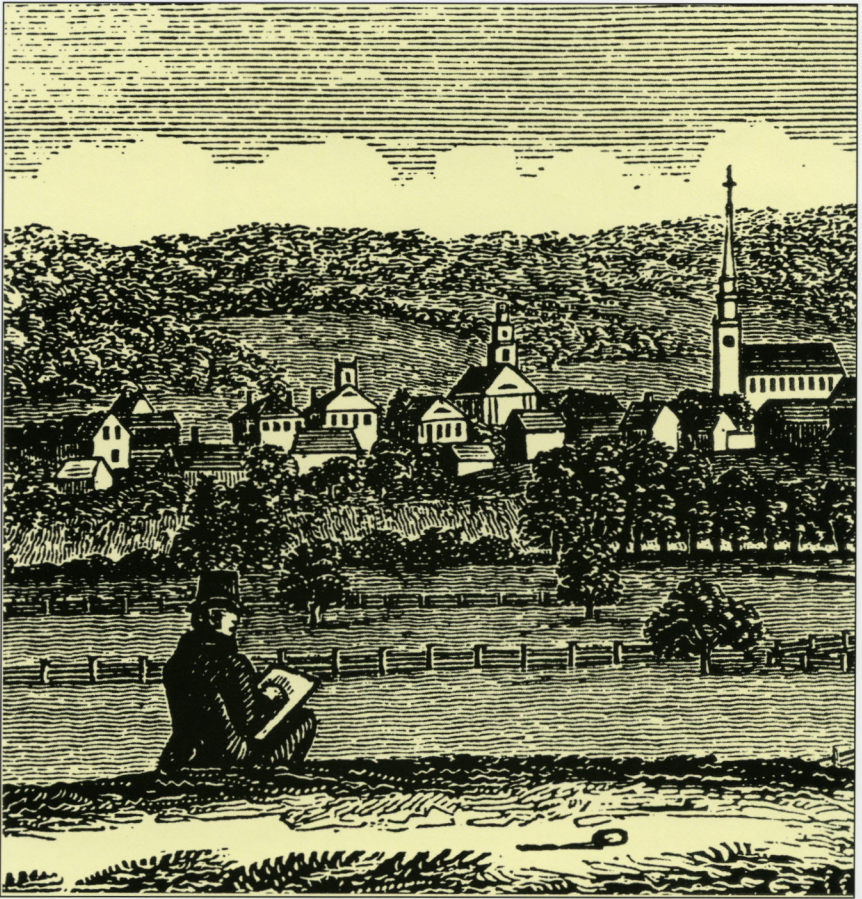


Bulfinch Staircase



Bulfinch Staircase, detail





A view of Farmington from the west bank of the Farmington River, about 1836.  
From a woodcut by John Warner Barber. (Courtesy Miss Porter's School)

After a most unsatisfactory sojourn in Buffalo, New York, Miss Sarah Porter and her School For Young Ladies returned home to Farmington, Connecticut. The school re-opened on May 1st, 1847. Tuition was \$5 for girls under the age of 12, and \$10 for girls over the age of 12. "Instruction on the piano will be furnished to such as desire it at an extra charge." Boarders paid \$55 a term. The current yearly charges for 'tuition, fees and expenses' are \$22,875 for day students, and \$31,205 for boarding students. Notable Miss Porter's School alumnae include Nellie Grant, only daughter of President Grant, and Jacqueline Bouvier Kennedy. Etherton, William and Elizabeth Morton's home in West Needham, MA, had its own schoolhouse with teacher, separate French and pianoforte tutors, and even a pony for the Morton children.



## Farmington, Connecticut

William Morton has been revealed as a deadbeat and scoundrel, not simply a “public benefactor.” Dentistry in the early 19th century was considered an inferior profession with poor prospects. Morton was a self-taught dentist practicing in Farmington who traveled to Hartford for the occasional paid lesson from Wells. The partnership that Wells formed on October 21, 1843 to practice dentistry with Morton at No. 19 Tremont Row in Boston lasted less than one month. One of Morton’s patients, and his future wife, came from the prestigious Miss Porter’s School (MPS). Founded in 1843, the school still promotes the three “R’s” of Rigor, Ritual and Relationships. Elizabeth Whitman was one of the students who came as a girl and left as a woman. Her family home at 37 High Street was built by Deacon John Stanley in 1720. It is now the Stanley-Whitman Museum, a fine example of early New England framed architecture. The Whitmans refused to welcome Morton into their family until he was *studying* to be a doctor. Morton satisfied this by arranging preliminary studies (and later, lodging) with Charles Jackson, M.D. The Jacksons of Plymouth were of the same social standing as the Whitmans of Farmington. Although Dr. Jackson could not claim lineage via the *Mayflower* in 1620, his ancestor Josiah Winslow was not far behind, just eleven years later aboard the *White Angel*. The reception following Morton’s marriage on May 29, 1844 was held at the Elm Tree Inn on Farmington Avenue, now the Elm Tree Apartments. Elizabeth Whitman’s younger brother Francis, came to Boston to assist Morton after Well’s departure. Francis was unable to attend the ceremony as he remained in Boston to keep the office open. His mother wrote to him that “The wedding passed off pleasantly, with a profusion of beautiful flowers, an abundance of cake and a tub of lemonade, two colored men dressed in white coats to serve and three women to superintend other matters. William was most dignified, and Elizabeth, in white muslin and a long flowering white veil, was the most beautiful.” Wells, Morton’s former dentist, tutor and partner, conveyed a different impression in a letter to his mother and sisters: “He is now married. I attended his wedding at Farmington a few weeks since and if I ever pitied a body, I truly pitied that girl. She, however, had heard all these reports about him, but it made no difference. Love they say is blind and I am sure it was in this case. He has married a fine girl and I fear she has found her mistake ere this time.”

## West Needham, Massachusetts

The township of Needham was formed in 1711 from land originally incorporated in Dedham. In 1774 the western part of town was organized as the west parish of Needham or West Needham (now Wellesley) Massachusetts. An 1853 description of the town attributed to Morton's champion Sarah Josepha Hale matched the name 'Contentment' given by the early settlers: "West Needham, notwithstanding its poor prosaic name, is really a pretty, pastoral-looking place, surrounded by low, wooded hills, protecting, as it were, the fine farms and orchards, and the pleasant dwellings, everywhere seen in the valleys and on the uplands around. In twenty minutes after leaving the bustle of Boston, if the cars make good speed, you will reach this rural scene, where Nature still holds her quiet sway, except when the steam-horse goes snorting and thundering by." Hale described Morton's country estate, Etherton, as "a picturesque building of the English style of rural architecture. The prospect from its every window is, of course, superb. In the foreground are the serpentine walks, rustic summer-houses, flower-beds, young trees, sparkling streams and other appurtenances of the mansion itself." During the summer of 1846 Morton experimented with ether on goldfish, caterpillars, insects, worms, and even his father's dog Nig while at Etherton. Paralleling Morton's reputation, Etherton later fell into disrepair.

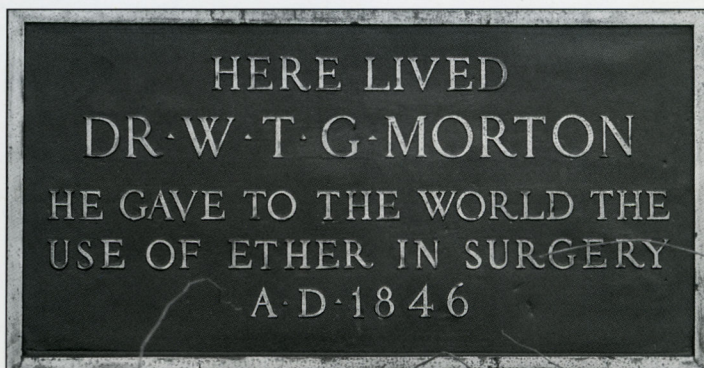


Etherton Cottage



Morton Park, Wellesley

Six years after Wellesley College was founded in 1875, the new town of Wellesley was born. The site where Etherton stood until 1918 is now known as Morton Park, marked by a meandering brook and a duck pond. The bridge seen in the background accompanies the Emily Dickinson poem 'It's all I have to bring today -' from the dedication. Up the hill is Wellesley Town Hall, the former location of the Wellesley Free Library. A plaque on a granite boulder commemorates Morton and his use of ether in surgery.



Morton plaque, Wellesley Town Hall





Wellesley Town Hall, front entrance

Etherton must have been equally impressive as present day Wellesley Town Hall. The Morton plaque is located behind 3 stone benches adjacent to the right side entrance.



Wellesley Town Hall, right rear view. Morton plaque in foreground.



## Government Center at Scollay Square

Scollay Square was the location of several structures significant to the history of anesthesia. Major General Joseph Warren, a physician, lived on Hanover Street, one of the twenty-two streets now swallowed up by the jaws of urban renewal. From Scollay Square he sent Paul Revere on his famous midnight ride immortalized by the poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow "*Listen my children and you shall hear ...*" John Collins Warren was the first of seventeen children born to John "Jack" Warren, the martyred Revolutionary War hero's brother. Abby Warren did not have the benefit of anesthesia for any of her deliveries. Surely, however, Nathan Cooley Keep was inspired by the work of her son. Keep administered the first obstetrical anesthetic in the United States to Longfellow's wife Fanny on April 7, 1847. The grateful poet's words on this occasion were "the sufferings of the last moments were greatly mitigated." Charles Dickens read from his *Pickwick Papers* at Lorenzo Papanti's Dancing Academy located at 21 Tremont Row. Next door was #19, containing George Reed's music store on the ground floor, Morton's dental office above, and J.J. Hawes' daguerreotype studio (with the best light) on the 3rd floor. It has been said that Boston never lacked for dentists or photographers since.

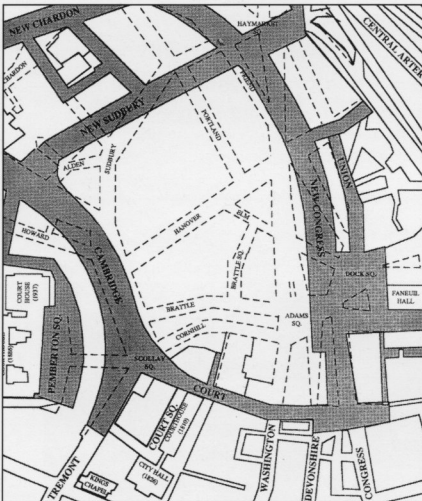


Postcard of Scollay Square ca. 1903 – 1918. (Courtesy David Kruh)  
Note the motorcar, horse and buggy, and straw hats. The old subway kiosk is seen in the foreground. Tremont Row, left, is now 1,2,3 Center Plaza. Government Center is to the right.





The building that William Scollay purchased in 1795 officially became Scollay Square in 1838. It stood near the traffic island at the intersection of Cambridge and Court Streets. This picture dates from the late 1860's to the early 1870's. (Courtesy of the Bostonian Society/Old State House)



Map adapted from the Government Center project by graphic artist Daniel Van Buskirk based on street alignments from 1968.

(From *Always Something Doing: Boston's Infamous Scollay Square* (Revised Edition) by David Kruh. Copyright 1989, 1999 by David Kruh. Reprinted with the permission of Northeastern University Press.)

The large open space in the middle now contains Boston City Hall and the John F. Kennedy federal building. Faneuil Hall is seen to the right. Once the "Big Dig" is completed, the Central Artery seen in the upper right hand corner will join Scollay Square as dashed lines from the past.

## **Charlton, Massachusetts**

The Morton House in Charlton is the reputed birthplace of William T.G. Morton. Dr. Vandam has painted several watercolors of this historic house illustrating various seasonal perspectives. In 1827 the Morton family moved into what is now known as the Waters-Morton House. Across the way at the intersection of Stafford Street and Cemetery Road stands the red barn where James Morton conducted a farm supply business.



Top of Morton Memorial, Mt. Auburn Cemetery (Collection of the author)





THE MORTON HOUSE I



THE MORTON HOUSE II

Watercolors by Leroy D. Vandam, M.D. © 1994,  
The Wood Library-Museum of Anesthesiology





THE WATERS-MORTON HOUSE

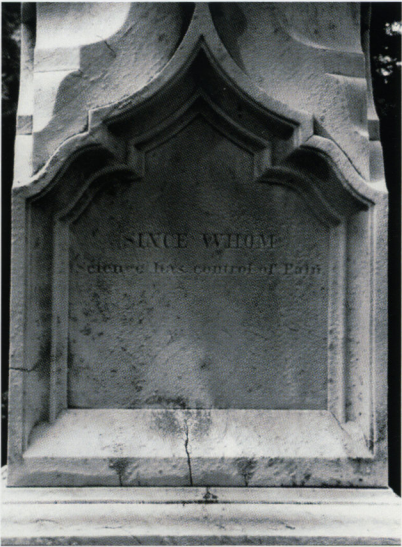
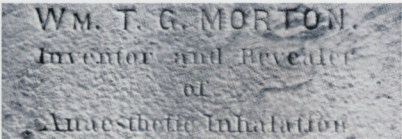


THE RED BARN

Watercolors by Leroy D. Vandam, M.D. © 1994,  
The Wood Library - Museum of Anesthesiology



William T.G. Morton's Grave, Mount Auburn Cemetery



(Collection of the author)



## **EPIGRAMS & EPITAPHS**

### **Grave of William T.G. Morton, Mt. Auburn Cemetery**

Wm. T. G. Morton / Inventor and Revealer of Anaesthetic Inhalation /  
Born August 9, 1819 / Died July 15, 1868 / Erected by Citizens of Boston  
/ BEFORE WHOM in all time Surgery was Agony / BY WHOM Pain in  
Surgery was averted and annulled / SINCE WHOM Science has control  
of Pain

### **Grave of Charles T. Jackson, Mt. Auburn Cemetery**

CHARLES THOMAS JACKSON, M.D. / SON OF / CHARLES &  
LUCY C. JACKSON / JUNE 21, 1805 - AUG. 28, 1880 / EMINENT AS  
A CHEMIST / MINERALOGIST GEOLOGIST / AND  
INVESTIGATOR IN ALL / DEPARTMENTS OF NATURAL /  
SCIENCE THROUGH HIS / OBSERVATIONS OF THE PECULIAR /  
EFFECTS OF SULPHURIC ETHER / ON THE NERVES OF  
SENSATION / AND HIS BOLD DEDUCTION / THEREFROM, THE  
BENIGN / DISCOVERY OF PAINLESS / SURGERY WAS MADE /  
THY GODLIKE CRIME WAS TO BE KIND / TO RENDER WITH  
THY PRECEPTS LESS / THE SUM OF HUMAN WRETCHEDNESS /  
AND / STRENGTHEN MAN WITH HIS OWN MIND

### **Ether Monument, Public Garden, Boston**

TO COMMEMORATE / THE DISCOVERY / THAT THE INHALING  
OF ETHER / CAUSES INSENSIBILITY TO PAIN / FIRST PROVED  
TO THE WORLD / AT THE / MASS. GENERAL HOSPITAL /  
OCTOBER A.D. MDCCCXLVI / NEITHER SHALL THERE BE ANY  
MORE PAIN (REVELATION.) / IN GRATITUDE FOR THE RELIEF OF  
HUMAN SUFFERING BY THE INHALING OF ETHER, A CITIZEN OF  
BOSTON HAS ERECTED THIS MONUMENT. A.D. MDCCCLXVII /  
THIS ALSO COMETH FORTH FROM THE LORD OF HOSTS, WHICH  
IS WONDERFUL IN COUNSEL AND EXCELLENT IN WORKING

### **Grave of Horace Wells, Cedar Hill Cemetery, Hartford**

I SLEEP TO AWAKEN / I AWAKEN TO GLORY / THERE  
SHALL BE NO PAIN

### **Tiffany Stained Glass Window, Center Church, Hartford**

MERCY AND TRUTH ARE MET TOGETHER / RIGHTEOUSNESS  
AND PEACE HAVE KISSED EACH OTHER / NEITHER SHALL  
THERE BE ANY MORE PAIN / FOR THE FORMER THINGS ARE  
PASSED AWAY



William Thomas Green Morton.  
(Collection of the author, courtesy Dr. Linda Vroegindewey)

Cabinet Photo from Rockwood, 1440 Broadway, N.Y.  
(40th St.) Holland Building. "Rockwood NY copyright 1896"  
is seen above Morton's right shoulder. As Morton died July  
15, 1868, the photo was taken at an unknown, earlier date.

## **New York City, New York**

Like Boston's Emerald Necklace, Frederick Law Olmsted's Central Park was meant to create a peaceful environment. Not so at the building opened in 1838 as the "Halls of Justice." Charles Dickens remarked, "What is this dismal-fronted pile of bastard Egyptian, like an enchanter's palace in a melodrama!-a famous prison, called the Tombs. Shall we go in?"

Horace Wells 'went in' the Tombs after being arrested for throwing vitriol. While under the influence of chloroform, which he had smuggled in from his rooms at 120 Chambers Street, Wells slashed his left femoral artery on January 23, 1848. Ironically, Wells once treated patients at the Hartford Retreat for the Insane and had offices on Asylum Street in Hartford. His suicide note read in part: "My Dear Wife I feel that I am fast becoming a deranged man, or I would desist from this act. I can not live and keep reason, and on this account God will forgive the deed. I can say no more. Farewell. H." The death of Wells was not the first that took place in the Tombs. John Colt's death involved neither laughing gas nor revolvers. Hours before he was to be executed on November 18, 1842 for a gruesome hatchet murder, Sam Colt's brother stabbed himself in the heart. During the ensuing bedlam, a massive fire broke out.

William T.G. Morton and the rest of New York City were suffering through an especially severe heat wave on July 15, 1868. Attempting to move uptown, Morton left his room in the St. Nicholas Hotel and chose a route through Central Park. Emerging at 110th Street and 6th (now Lenox) Avenue, near Luff's Hotel, he suddenly rushed from the carriage and dunked his head in the Harlem Meer. Morton succumbed to "congestion of the brain" and died July 15, 1868 en route to St. Luke's Hospital. Only Morton is memorialized in New York City. In the Medical Bay of the Cathedral of St. John the Divine on Morningside Heights, stained glass windows are dedicated to the glorification of healing. Besides Christ, Imhotep, Hippocrates, Galen, Avicenna, Pasteur, Lister, and others, there is a figure of Dr. Morton. Morton appears as a physician in a long robe and turban-like headdress, administering something from a globular glass vessel to a patient half reclining in a chair. At the side, in the border of the lancet is depicted a building with a classic façade and the Bulfinch dome.

## A Hospital for the Reception of Lunatics

Charlestown (later McLean) Asylum for the Insane admitted its first patient on October 6, 1818 and the Massachusetts General Hospital admitted its first patient September 3, 1821. Why do both hospitals today prominently feature the date '1811' in their logos? The answer dates back to August 10, 1810 when Doctors James Jackson and John Collins Warren circulated a petition: "Sir - it has appeared very desirable to a number of respectable gentlemen, that a hospital for the reception of lunatics and other sick persons should be established in this town. ... It is worthy of the opulent men of this town, and consistent with the general character, to provide an asylum for the insane from every part of the Commonwealth." On February 25, 1811, members were "... incorporated and made a *Body Corporate and Politick*; by the name of the *Massachusetts General Hospital*, and by that name may sue and be sued, and shall have and use a common seal, to be by them devised, altered and renewed at their pleasure." The 18-acre Barrell estate was purchased in 1816 for only \$15,650, a bargain compared to the \$23,000 paid in 1817 for Prince's Pasture, four acres of undeveloped land at the west end of Boston that became MGH. The Massachusetts General Hospital was built on McLean (later Fruit Street) with white Chelmsford granite floated down via the new Middlesex Canal at a cost of only \$70,000. This was in part due to the low cost of convict labor at another Bulfinch designed building - the State Prison in Charlestown. After opening its doors in 1821, Massachusetts General Hospital was occasionally referred to as "McLean Hospital." A description of MGH three years later set the record straight: "No insane patients are admitted to this building, these being provided for at the Lunatic Asylum at Charlestown, which is another branch of the same institution." The transformation of the Barrell House into the Charlestown Asylum three years earlier cost \$89,821. The MGH board of trustees would later underwrite the care of Dr. Charles T. Jackson at McLean in recognition of his services "... in connection with the discovery and use of Ether at the Mass General Hospital; and furthermore, remembering his many kindnesses during the past years to the patients of the McLean Asylum."



McLean Hospital, Somerville. Built 1817-1818, enlarged after 1826, demolished 1896. Photo ca. 1885.

(Courtesy Somerville Museum)

McLean Hospital administrators in front of the former Barrell House. Joseph Barrell's house featured marble chimney pieces with iron hearths from London, entrance hallway walls painted with "neatish female figures & border" also from London and front steps of Scotch granite.





Entrance to Seven Hills Park, Somerville

“he thinks he is now on his way to fortune, but I think he is building castles in the air which soon burst. but I can do nothing but leave him in the hand of God.”

- Betsy Wells



## Castles in the Air

Boston had the first subway system in the United States. The closest current stop to the site of the Barrell House is Lechmere on the Green Line. From there, proceed inbound, past Government Center. In 1959 the Kingston Trio recorded “The M.T.A. Song” where *“Charlie’s wife goes down to the Scollay Square station...”* Change at Park Street under to the Red Line. Continue outbound towards Alewife, past Charles/MGH on the Longfellow bridge. As you head underground, continue past Harvard Square. Exit at Davis Square, just down the hill from Tufts University and the old Powder House. Behind the historic Somerville Theatre are monuments commemorating the 7 original hills of Somerville. The one depicting the Joseph Barrell House is seen above the Cobble Hill Monument. The Barrell House, which became McLean Asylum, housed the first son of surgeon John C. Warren, who performed the first public operation under ether anesthesia. Morton and Wells, former partners who became bitter rivals would die tragic deaths in New York City. Morton’s gravestone would later drive Jackson, his former landlord insane, sending him back to the institution where he used to give ether, but not before Ether Day when his former tenant was at MGH. Although Jackson had been described as a “raving maniac” and officially died of “insanity,” review of his medical records show that he had a stroke, just like Morton. Frederick Law Olmsted, designer of Central Park, became debilitated from multiple strokes and lived out his life at the new McLean Hospital in Belmont that he had landscaped twenty-five years earlier. Upon surveying the grounds Olmsted famously remarked, “They didn’t follow my plan, confound them!”



Seven Hills Park, Somerville. The Barrell House is the middle monument.





Wellesley Town Hall, detail



Principal works consulted. Humphry Davy's 1st book, *An essay on heat, light and the combinations of light*, is the 5th book from the right. (Collection of the author)

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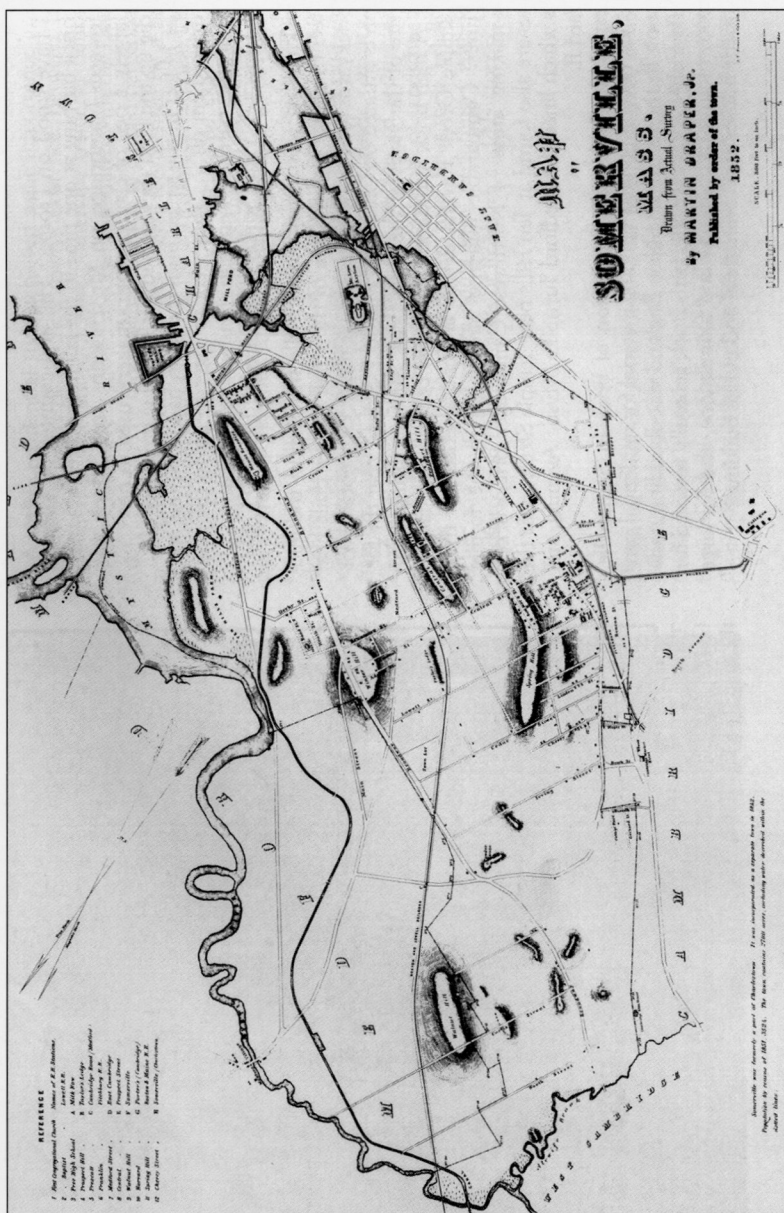
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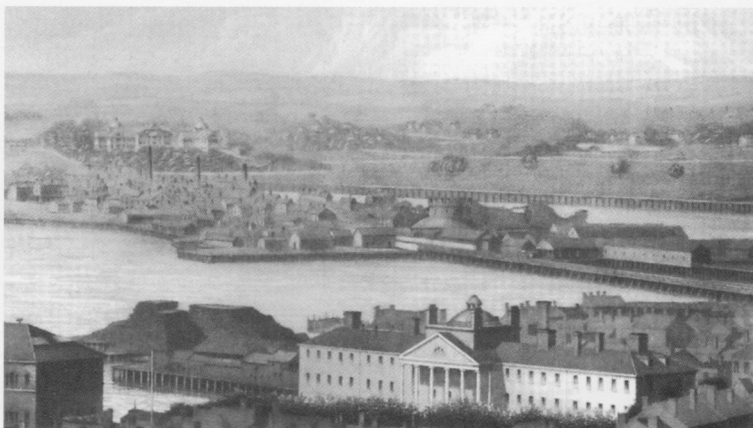
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Detail from the Map of the Town of Somerville, 1852 by Martin Draper (Courtesy Somerville Museum).  
 The area of Charlestown "Beyond the Neck" that became Somerville was almost named Warren in honor of Dr. Joseph Warren.



Rare double view of MGH in the foreground and McLean Hospital in the upper left on Cobble Hill Ca. 1895 in Charlestown. (Courtesy of Anthony M. Sammarco)



Aerial view of Boston (1956).  
(Courtesy Archives of the Massachusetts General Hospital)

The structure in the center is the White Building (1939), named for philanthropist George Robert White. The Bulfinch building and the Ether Dome are seen to the right of the White Building, current location of the operation rooms. The Barrell House was located in the upper left hand corner, as seen in the top illustration.







A long - long Sleep -  
A famous - Sleep -  
That makes no show for Morn -  
By Stretch of Limb - or stir of Lid -  
An independent One -

Was ever idleness like This?  
Upon a Bank of Stone  
To bask the Centuries away -  
Nor once look up - for Noon?

Emily Dickinson  
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