

Obituaries

BERTRAM KIMBALL LITTLE

Bertram Kimball Little, retired director of the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities, died at the age of ninety-three in his home in Brookline, Massachusetts, on June 21, 1993. He was a gentleman of the old school, a man of wit and charm who exemplified New England frugality, honored its traditions, and loved its antiquities, its buildings, and its people.

Bert Little was born in Marblehead and grew up on Chestnut Street in Salem, the son of a marine architect, silversmith, and mayor of Salem. He attended Middlesex School and received his B.A. *cum laude* from Harvard in 1923.

He began his career in publishing in the advertising and editorial departments at Little, Brown & Co. He and James Howgate founded the Counting House, a rare book shop on historic T Wharf. He returned to publishing in 1934, working for eight years as associate editor of *The Open Road for Boys* later serving for three additional years as circulation manager for that magazine and also for *Child Life* and *Outdoor Life*. During World War II, he served as director of the Blood Donor Center for the Boston Metropolitan Chapter of the American Red Cross.

Bert Little married Nina Fletcher in 1925 and, in 1928, they purchased an old house in Hudson, Massachusetts, for a weekend and summer retreat. Needing furnishings for the old house and having established a close friendship with Bert's cousin and their new neighbor, Edna Greenwood, sparked the beginning of a mutual interest in antiques collecting and related historical research which lasted throughout their lives. Together Bert and Nina enjoyed travel to historic sites and they cherished their friendships with collectors, antiques dealers, professional histo-

rians, and fellow antiquarians. Bert took particular pleasure in the convivial fellowship of the Walpole Society, to which he was elected in 1949 and with whom he regularly shared new acquisitions and his wife's fine research.

Bert's own interests were primarily in early New England architecture and lighting devices. Both he and Nina were active members of most of the antiques collectors clubs established in the thirties, and he took special interest in the Rushlight Club, the Early American Glass Club, the Early American Industries Association, and the Wedgwood Club. He shared his wife's interest in ceramic history and took a certain pleasure in serving as an honorary member of the (then primarily female) China Students Club of Boston. Bert served as secretary of the Cambridge Historical Society from 1930 to 1932 and continued as an associate member from 1936 until 1945. During these years he published articles on a variety of what he called 'antiquarian subjects' in *The Magazine Antiques*, the Walpole Society's annual *Notebook*, and *The Rushlight*, the journal of the Rushlight Club.

Recruited by William Sumner Appleton to serve as recording secretary of the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities in 1932, on Appleton's death in 1947, Bert Little assumed the positions of corresponding secretary and director which he filled ably until his retirement in 1970. At the end of his tenure he was praised by SPNEA's President, Charles F. Batchelder for his 'expertise, perseverance, and cheerful personality.'

During the Little regime the SPNEA staff averaged five and never numbered more than twenty, yet the number of historic properties situated throughout New England and managed by the Society reached as high as sixty-one. SPNEA's New England Museum and its Research Library made significant acquisitions during these years and its quarterly journal, *Old Time New England*, was published regularly. The Society's rich collections and the expertise of its staff were recognized throughout the country as important resources for historical research. Little himself was honored for his wise counsel in matters of historic preservation, building conservation, and the documentation of New England

architecture and artifacts, as well as many other subjects. In his 1954 Annual Report, Bert Little sketched out the range of topics on which he had been consulted: 'My advice, for example, has been sought during the past twelve months on such subjects as costumes for an historical pageant; reproductions of early pine furniture; the construction in an exhibition of a seventeenth-century façade and the composition of a dooryard garden for it; restoration and management of eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century houses in such diverse locations as Maine, Massachusetts, Virginia, and North Carolina; and the revitalizing of exhibits in the museum of one of our Massachusetts historical societies.' Those who approached the man knew that their inquiries would be received with respect and that his response would be timely, thorough, and helpful.

Throughout his career in historic preservation Bert Little was active in local, regional, and national historical organizations, serving as a member of the Committee of Standards and Surveys of the National Council for Historic Sites and Buildings and, later, as chairman of this committee for the National Trust for Historic Preservation. He also served as a member of the Historic American Buildings Survey Advisory Board.

Within Massachusetts he was elected to the Massachusetts Historical Society, the Colonial Society of Massachusetts, and the Club of Odd Volumes. He was a member of the Massachusetts Society of Mayflower Descendants. He joined and served on the Standing Committee of the Society of the Cincinnati in the State of New Hampshire and worked on cataloguing their collections. He served in elected positions with the Shirley-Eustis House Association, Fruitlands Museums, the Gibson Society, the Moses-Pierce-Hichborn House, the Gore Place Society, and the Bay State Historical League. He was a member of the executive committee of Historic Boston, Inc. and the Boston Historical Conservation Committee (popularly known as the Mayor's Committee). He also served as a member of the faculty of the Radcliffe-Harvard Institute of Historical and Archival Management from the time of its founding until his own retirement.

Bert Little was an active member of the Brookline Historical Society, serving on the committee on the restoration of the Putterham School. He was also a deacon of the First Parish in Brookline and chairman of the 250th Anniversary Committee of the Parish. He was, at various times, chairman of the District VI Advisory Committee of the Boston Council of the Boy Scouts of America, as well as a member of the Brookline Thursday Club, the Union Club, and the Appalachian Mountain Club.

Bert's early interest in theatrical performance prompted him to continue as secretary and a member of the House Committee for the Harvard Musical Association and as president and director of the Footlight Club in Jamaica Plain. He participated in many of the Footlight Club productions during the thirties and forties as stage director and actor and he continued to enjoy good theater at any time. He was a regular subscriber to Boston theatrical seasons and remained active in the musical life of the First Parish in Brookline.

Bert Little was elected to membership in the American Antiquarian Society in the spring of 1948 and declared himself 'conscious of the honor done . . . and the confidence it expresses in me and my work in the historical, antiquarian, and conservation field.' At the time of his election, Bert expressed his 'keen anticipation' of attending meetings of the Society 'and the opportunities they present for learning, discussion, and real encouragement among men of like interests and desires for cultural accomplishments.' He was a regular attendant at AAS meetings and served on the membership committee for three years.

In thinking of Bertram K. and Nina Fletcher Little, one does not think of one without the other. Theirs was a partnership of mutual interest, respect, intelligence, and great good humor. In 1955, Bert summed it up nicely when he wrote that he 'was lucky in having my wife's participation in the carrying out of this project.' Really, they were both lucky and the best project was their life together.

Jane C. Nylander

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