

Walking Boston

Walking Tours of Historic Boston

What follows is a complete transcript of two different articles on the inauguration of the statue of Benjamin Franklin that appeared in the *Boston Semi-Weekly Advertiser* on September 17 and September 20, 1856. These original newspapers are part of an extensive collection that author, historian, and private tour guide Ben Edwards has developed over the past 15 years. Ben shares many of the newspapers in his collection on his Walking Boston private tour. After the transcript, you'll find an image of a rare ribbon actually worn during the ceremonies, and beyond that, interesting excerpts from the book *Memorial Of The Inauguration Of The Statue Of Franklin* printed in Boston in 1857.

The *Boston Semi-Weekly Advertiser*—Wednesday, September 17, 1856

THE STATUE

The project of erecting a statue to the memory of Franklin in the place of his birth, which is this day culminated, originated but a short time ago. In an address before the Massachusetts Charitable Mechanics' Association, delivered November 29, 1853, Hon. Robert C. Winthrop suggested the plan, giving a brief review of the life of Franklin to whom he first, we believe, applied the name of "The Great Bostonian." The plan met with approbation, and a large joint committee from the Mechanics' Association and Citizens at large was raised to consider the subject. Their preliminary meeting for organization was held on Franklin's birthday, Jan. 17, 1854, about two and a half years ago. The public responded to the call for subscriptions with such alacrity that the amount required for the statue, about \$15,000 or \$16,000 was almost immediately subscribed. This sum has been increased by subsequent subscriptions to complete the pedestal and mounting of the statue.

Some extracts from Mr. Winthrop's address of 1853 will be found on the first page.

Mr. Richard Saltonstall Greenough was selected as the artist of the statue. It is of bronze, and was cast by the Ames Manufacturing Company, at Chicopee, Mass. It is eight feet in height, and represents Franklin clad in an ordinary dress, his outside coat being fur, which is traditionally a printer's material. The expression of the face in the plaster cast which we saw in the artist's studio, was noble and dignified. The bronze statue is now concealed from view, and will be unveiled today.

The site selected for the statue is the area in front of the City Hall in School street, between the two gardens.

The statue is mounted on a pedestal of which the foundation is granite, surmounted by a block of "verd-antique" marble, on each of the four sides of which will be placed a bas-relief representing a prominent scene in Franklin's life. These are not quite yet finished. The four faces of the granite foundation bear the following inscriptions:—

On the South side, fronting School street,
“BENJAMIN FRANKLIN, BORN IN BOSTON, 17TH JAN. 1706.”
“DIED IN PHILADELPHIA, 17TH APRIL, 1790.”

On the North side,
“ERIPUIT CELO FULMEN SCEPTRUMQUE TYRANNIS.”

On the East side,
“DECLARATION OF AMERICAN INDEPENDENCE, JULY 4TH, 1776.”

On the West side,
“THE TREATY OF PEACE AND INDEPENDENCE, 3D SEPTEMBER, 1783.”

The top of the pedestal is ten feet from the ground.

The day selected for the celebration is the anniversary of the settlement of Boston and the anniversary of the adoption of the Constitution of the United States. “The Great Bostonian,” (as Mr. Winthrop calls him,) and the “true father of the American Union” (as Mr. Bancroft calls him) is appropriately honored on the 17th of September. The propriety of these titles cannot be doubted.

It is indeed a little singular that of the many illustrious men who have made Boston their residence, and whom Boston has delighted to honor, a large number have been *born* in other places. We have heard it said that of the Representatives in Congress from the city of Boston, up to the time of Mr. Winthrop, the orator of today, none had been born in Boston. We are not sure that there may not be one or two exceptions to this remark.

We have observed in another part of today’s paper that Franklin the hero, Greenough the artist and Winthrop the orator of today’s celebration are all “Boston boys.”

The *Boston Semi-Weekly Advertiser*—Saturday, September 20, 1856

The Franklin Celebration

September 17, 1856

The celebration of Wednesday was brilliantly successful. In the first place, the weather was magnificent; one of those delicious sunny days, with a fresh clear atmosphere, not cold, which are the charm of our climate at this season. The morning was “ushered in” by the noisy sounds of the ringing of bells and the firing of cannon. No business was transacted; it was a general holiday. The railroads and other means of conveyance poured into the city, crowds from the adjoining towns, and other places far and near. It is perhaps not too high an estimate to suppose that the ordinary population of the city was nearly trebled yesterday—and the out-door multitude was magnified

enormously. Two or three hundred thousand persons walked the streets. At an early hour citizens who designed to take part in the procession, decked with their badges and appropriate insignia, might be seen proceeding to the appointed places of meeting; while men, women and children, anxious to see the spectacle, hastened to secure favorable positions along the line of the procession. Citizen-soldiers in uniform, bands of music, and wagons decorated with devices, were frequently met in the streets, on their way to their several points of rendezvous; while private carriages and vehicles of all kinds hastened to perform their errands before the hour when the streets through which the procession was to pass, should be cleared.

The route of the procession was about seven miles in length. At various points on this line and at other places in the city, there were appropriate decorations, some of them of great beauty, bearing witness to the universal veneration entertained for the character of BENJAMIN FRANKLIN in the place of his birth. Throughout the whole distance the windows, in some places the roofs of the houses, and the sidewalks everywhere, on both sides, were crowded with eager spectators. The procession was of such length that it occupied the whole route,—that is, it was seven miles long—so that when the escort at the head had proceeded from Park street church, northerly through Tremont street, Court street, &c., and thence the whole distance in a reverse direction to Dover street, and thence turning, had returned passing around the Common, it encountered at the corner of School and Tremont streets, the last division of the procession which was then only beginning its progress. The procession started with commendable punctuality shortly after ten o'clock, and was about four hours in accomplishing the march. It occupied two hours and fifty minutes in passing a given point. To an observer from a balloon above the city at about two o'clock the spectacle would have been superb. At that moment every element of the celebration was in action. The procession was filling the whole route; the escort just finishing, and the rear-guard of mounted police just beginning the appointed march. All the spectators on the line of the procession of course were at their respective posts of observation. The ladies admitted to hear the oration were gathered in their seats in the square. At just this period, an observer from the point we have imagined, would have seen a population nearly equal to the whole number of able-bodied men in all America at the date when Franklin first saw the light, simultaneously engaged a century and a half afterwards, in the city of his birth, in doing honor to his memory.

The procession was a fine pageant, and presented many points of special interest. A full catalogue would be little else than a repetition of the “order” which we have printed in anticipation for several days past. We will only remark, therefore, upon one or two features.

The escort, composed of the military and the fire department, presented a fine display.

The first division contained under different designations nearly all the gentlemen who in any walk of life, or for any natural or acquired talent, have become conspicuous in the community. Magistrates, judges, legislators,—the representatives of learning, and art, in all their forms,—official and private personages, all were proud to take a day's march about the streets of Boston in honor of the memory of Benjamin Franklin. These prominent characters, however, were not confined to the first division; many others appeared in the other divisions.

The second division was the great feature of general interest, presenting the *trades*. Amid the great variety here displayed, we will only allude especially to—The industry of the bakers who made bread as they passed and threw out to the multitude with liberal hands wherever they passed, ample quantities of delicious fresh-baked crackers. A splendid locomotive engine, the “Benjamin Franklin” from the Boston Locomotive Works, a ponderous load, was drawn by a long line of horses. The Ames Manufacturing Company presented a strong array; they were cheered as “the men who cast the statue,” and they carried a bronze fac-simile, in miniature, of the great work. The Chickerings’ men made a fine display, and were accompanied by the first and last grand pianos from their celebrated manufactory, in cars very tastefully arranged. Messrs. Hallett, Davis & Company, piano-forte makers, also made a fine display. The silversmiths’ shining wares were a brilliant feature in the procession. The hatters, busily at work, were another interesting feature. These and many others made the second division the great object desired to be seen.

The third division contained an illustrious array of printers, bearing among other things, a car with an old printing-press from Portsmouth, N.H., upon which Franklin himself actually worked. It was occupied on Wednesday with throwing off fac-simile copies of the “New England Courant,” No. 80, of Feb. 11, 1723, which was the first newspaper which bore the imprint of Benjamin Franklin. The electrotypes and telegraphic operators, and others engaged in avocations having a particular reference to the life of Franklin, also came within this division.—This part of the procession was peculiarly interesting and appropriate.

The fourth division included the masonic bodies, whose brilliant regalia attracted much attention.—The fifth division included the Board of Trade, who appeared in large numbers—the FRANKLIN MEDAL SCHOLARS, of whom nearly a thousand collected at first, and whose ranks presented throughout an imposing appearance—and some other bodies, all bearing “Franklin” as a part of their name. The sixth, seventh and eight divisions consisted of numerous respectable societies of different descriptions, anxious to do honor to the memory of Franklin. The whole made an impressive spectacle.

There was frequent cheering from those in the procession, and from spectators at various points on the route. The students of Harvard College, (who turned out in large numbers,) distinguished themselves particularly, we believe, as is their wont on such occasions, by their enthusiastic and well-timed cheers for “the ladies,” and for the objects of historical and traditional interest upon the line of the procession. Altogether, the spectators were delighted with the display.

Exercises in the City Hall Square

It was ten minutes before two o’clock when the carriage in which Hon. Robert C. Winthrop, the orator of the day, was seated, together with His Honor the Mayor and other gentlemen, reached the City Hall Square. Here platforms had been erected over the gardens, with seats for the accommodation of a part of the audience. Four or five hundred ladies admitted by invitation and ticket had already entered through the City Hall, from Court Square, and had been provided with seats upon the front platform, by an efficient corps of young gentlemen acting as marshals at this place. About two hundred school-children who were to sing, were gathered upon the platform on the lower side,

and presented a very pretty sight, the girls all dressed in white frocks. The stage for the orator was erected in front of the platform on the upper side, a little nearer the street than the statue. With the exception of the reporters for the press, and a few other exceptional personages, all persons besides those we have named, had been kept without the square by an adequate police force, until the arrival of the procession.

Mr. Winthrop took his place upon the stage, conducted by His Honor the Mayor, and accompanied by F.W. Lincoln, Jr., Esq., and Rev. Dr. Blagden, who were to take part in the ceremonies. Mr. Winthrop wore his Franklin medal, suspended by a blue ribbon from his neck, and two other badges. Other gentlemen soon followed as the procession approached. Among the gentlemen who first took seats on the platform were the following (we mention the names as we happened to notice the gentlemen: there were many others whose names we did not record):—Edward Everett (wearing *two* Franklin medals), James Savage, Jared Sparks, James Walker (President of Harvard College), Dr. Jacob Bigelow, Osmyn Brewster, Samuel H. Walley, William Appleton, Nathan Appleton, the venerable Josiah Quincy, his son Josiah Quincy, Jr., George T. Bigelow, Dr. N.B. Shurtleff, Richard Frothingham, Jr., Sampson Reed, Benjamin A. Gould, George Morey, Otis P. Lord, John H. Thorndike, James Lawrence, Anson Burlingame, John M. Clark, Sheriff of Suffolk County, (wearing *two* Franklin medals), His Excellency Henry J. Gardner, governor of the commonwealth, His Honor Henry W. Benchley, lieutenant-governor, the governor's aids and the adjutant-general in uniform; John H. Clifford, attorney general, E.C. Baker, president of the Senate, and other functionaries of the State government; the city government of Boston; Professors Felton, Pierce, Bowen, Lovering, Wyman, Cook, and other officers of instruction in Harvard College; Rev. Thomas Worcester, D.D., Rev. E.S. Gannett, D.D., Rev. Chandler Robbins, D.D., and many others of the Rev. clergy; John H. Sleeper, mayor of Roxbury, and others representing the municipal governments of sister cities. This brief and imperfect list can give but a faint idea of the dignity, learning and weight of character represented by the gentlemen who were collected upon the platform.

At half-past two o'clock the school children sang their welcoming chorus.

At ten minutes before three o'clock Mr. Winthrop began the delivery of his oration which will be found *in extenso* in another part of this morning's paper. He had proceeded about half an hour, when a temporary interruption was caused by the entrance of the public into the area which had hitherto been kept clear, in anticipation, we believe, of the arrival of some part of the procession which was in the rear. This entrance was necessarily somewhat abrupt, but the people were as quiet and orderly as the circumstances allowed. It was much better that the open space should be filled than that it should remain empty, and the presence of a numerous audience rendered the scene vastly more imposing.

We shall not attempt any analysis of Mr. Winthrop's admirable oration, trusting that none of our readers will forgo the pleasure of reading the whole of it. He spoke without recurrence to his notes, which he held in his hands, and only once consulted. His voice was distinctly heard where we sat, at some distance, and the whole audience listened attentively. When he began speaking the sun shone with cruel fervor upon his bared head—, but, very shortly, kindly clouds were interposed and he proceeded without further inconvenience from this source. There were frequent bursts of hearty applause; not so many as when an oration is made in a hall, because the difficulty of hearing and the difficulty of making one's approbation significant are necessarily greater in the open air.

The statue itself had been veiled from view by a drapery composed of the stars and stripes of the American flag, hung from a large circular ring, raised aloft, and placed about the statue. At the moment when the orator said "LET IT BE UNVEILED" the canopy instantly dropped to the earth, the rods which supported it were thrown down in another instant, and the glorious statue stood exposed to view in all its grand simplicity and exquisite beauty. The effect upon the spectators was electric. They cheered and applauded, again and again. And the orator seemed to feel the inspiring influence of the presence of the hero of the day; we thought the close of the oration was delivered with greater animation than the former portions.

Mr. Winthrop ceased speaking at 18 minutes after 4 o'clock, having occupied about an hour and a half. At the close, there was a cordial burst of applause.

The ode written for the occasion by James T. Fields, Esq., was then effectively and beautifully sung by the school children, under the direction of Charles Butler.

The address of presentation was then made by Frederick W. Lincoln, Jr., Esq., President of the Massachusetts Charitable Mechanic Association. His Honor the Mayor replied, accepting the statue in behalf of the government and people of the city of Boston, and promising in their behalf that it should be forever maintained. These addresses occupied about a quarter of an hour each in delivery. They will be found in full on the fourth page.

The members of the Massachusetts Grand Lodge of Masons were then introduced into the area about the statue.

We have now to record one of the pleasantest features of the occasion. While the Masons were assembling, Col. Newell A. Thompson, the Chief Marshal, announced that when Mr. Winthrop began to speak, a telegraphic message was sent to the Mayors of the principal cities in different parts of the country; and that a number of answers had been received, which the Mayor would proceed to read. This announcement was received with manifestations of surprise and delight by the audience. It was about two hours since Mr. Winthrop had begun to speak, and here were answers in acknowledgement received from places at distances of 300 miles South and East. The Mayor proceeded to read the responses, which will be found in another part of this paper. They were all received with applause and when those from Philadelphia and from Halifax were announced, the assembly caught with an instant perception the peculiar significance of a message from Franklin's adopted city, and of the courtesy of an acknowledgement from the British province of Nova Scotia. These were received with the greatest enthusiasm.

Winslow Lewis, M.D., Grand Master of the Grand Lodge, then made a brief and pertinent address and directed the proper masonic officers to try the structure before them with square, level and plumb;—which they did, and reported to him that "the craftsmen had done their duty;" whereupon he pronounced the structure true, trusty and well-formed, and expressed the hope that "it may long stand, a monument to the gratitude, taste and liberality of the metropolis of New England."

The whole assembly then joined in singing the doxology, "From all that dwell below the skies," after which Bishop Eastburn pronounced a benediction, and (shortly after 5 o'clock) the immense crowd dispersed in an orderly and quiet manner.

We have already mentioned that soon after Mr. Winthrop began to speak, the sun was obscured by clouds. It so continued until about half-past four o'clock, when the clouds cleared away; but by this time the sun had sunk behind the high buildings on the south side of School street, so that his rays caused no inconvenience to the speakers. They fell, however, on the bright face of the statue, and illumined with a rich glow the countenance in which the artist with singular skill has blended the aspects of dignity, serenity, learning and benevolence. The effect was exceedingly beautiful, and attracted for a long time the gaze of spectators.

In the Evening,

The Square was brightly illuminated by means of gas fixtures upon the City Hall, which displayed in letters of the fire legends

"FRANKLIN."

"September, 17, 1856,"

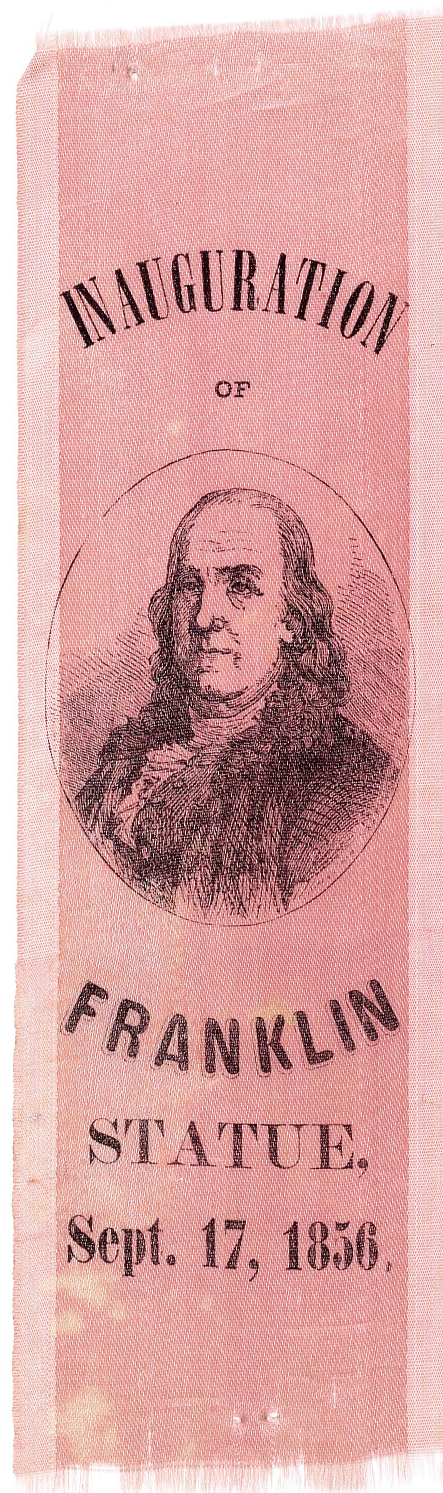
with floral and stellar ornaments producing a brilliant effect. A band of music was in attendance, and a large concourse of people assembled to gaze upon the Statue. The back of the figure was lighted up as clearly as in the day-time, while the front stood out in bold and dark relief, presenting an impressive appearance.

At the Tremont Temple, by invitation of the Mercantile Library Association, an oration was delivered by Rev. E.H. Chapin, D.D., to a large audience, among whom, seated upon the platform, were Mr. Winthrop, His Excellency the Governor, His Honor the Mayor, and other distinguished gentlemen. The oration was an eloquent discourse upon Services of Franklin in the cause of Freedom. It was attentively heard and frequently applauded.

There was a reception-party for citizens and strangers at the house of one of our Boston ladies, distinguished for her patriotism and her hospitality, which was the scene of much pleasure.

The occasion was remembered at the theatre, as is noticed in another part of this paper.

The city was crowded with people, and although large numbers left by the afternoon trains on the railroads, and by other conveyances, there were many strangers who remained during the night. No scenes of disorder or disturbance occurred, and no accidents or untoward circumstances of any kind happened, either during the day or in the evening. The arrangements reflect great credit on the various committees and marshals. The celebration was worthy the great man who was its hero. If from another world he were permitted to witness it, we believe it would afford him honest gratification to find how deeply and universally BENJAMIN FRANKLIN is honored in BOSTON.



A colored ribbon worn during the ceremonies on September 17, 1856 for the inauguration of the statue of Benjamin Franklin. Young women and girls apparently wore these while standing on temporary balconies at one spot along the parade route. *From the collection of Ben Edwards.*

Excerpts from *Memorial Of The Inauguration Of The Statue Of Franklin*

The following excerpts from the book noted above, printed in Boston in 1857, provide details of how the parade route was decorated at various locations.

Milk Street.

On entering the street from Washington Street the first objects of show which met the eye were upon the building occupied by Messrs. Widdifield & Co., opticians, and Messrs. Currier & Trott, dealers in jewelry, watches and silver ware. The whole building was handsomely hung with festoons of colored cloth, and exhibited the following inscription:—

WE RAISE A STATUE TO THE SAGE WHOSE WISDOM LIVES THROUGH EVERY AGE.

A large paper kite, significant of the great philosopher's celebrated electrical experiment, was also suspended from the building.

From the Excelsior printing establishment, in this neighborhood, were displayed very neat devices, among which was a well-proportioned shield, with the words,

“OUR BEN.”

On the Old South Church, forming one of the corners of the street, was presented on a tablet the following reminiscence:—

BENJAMIN FRANKLIN WAS BAPTIZED IN THIS CHURCH ON THE 17TH OF JANUARY, 1706, THE REV. DR. WILLARD BEING THE PASTOR.

From this point of view the street presented a magnificent appearance. The whole portion of the street through which the procession was indicated to pass was most elegantly and richly dressed with flags, streamers and bunting in the most profuse abundance. The eye was nearly bewildered by the beautiful effect produced by the almost numberless lines of variegated cloths and bunting which were employed to give effect to the scene, and which seemed to fill the street like a cloud. Never before was the appearance of this old street so transformed by holiday shows and dressing. The elegant display, the elaborate work of Col. William Beals, won the admiration and approval of all beholders.

Extending across the street was a beautiful arch, surmounted with a large American eagle, holding a large bouquet of natural flowers in its beak, and surrounded by a galaxy of national flags. Beneath the eagle was shown a fine bust of the renowned philosopher, and on both sides were ample folds of cloth, of various colors, hanging in graceful form, and making a beautiful arch over the route of the procession.

Unquestionably, the most tasteful and elegant decoration anywhere to be seen on the route was the elaborate and artistic display made by Messrs. Ordway, Bradish & Co., and Messrs. Mason & Lawrence, at Nos. 15 and 17 of this street, on the tall granite building which bears, in solid stone, the inscription,

BIRTHPLACE OF FRANKLIN.

Upon the sidewalk was erected, at much cost, a gorgeous canopy of rich red velvet, brilliantly ornamented with tassels and silver stars. Protected by this canopy was a large and excellent bust of Franklin. An elegantly ornamented arch, supported upon two columns draped with colored bunting and surmounted by an immense star, surrounded the above design. On the curve of the arch were the following words, neatly executed in golden letters:—

HE TOOK THE LIGHTNING FROM THE HEAVEN.

Within the arch was an admirable painting of the old house within the parents of Franklin lived several years, and in which many authorities declare that Franklin was born. Upon the painting was inscribed,

THE HOUSE WHERE FRANKLIN WAS BORN.

In front of the picture was an urn trimmed with evergreen, and beneath the inscription,

BENJAMIN FRANKLIN WAS BORN ON THIS SPOT ON SUNDAY, THE 17TH OF JANUARY, A.D.
1706.

School Street.

The Parker House was magnificently decorated. Six American flags waved from the balustrade. Upon this were arranged eight large vases containing beautiful natural flowers. On the front of the balcony were two well formed shields; the one at the right bore a representation of a printing press, with the motto:—

THINK INNOCENTLY AND JUSTLY; AND, IF YOU SPEAK, SPEAK ACCORDINGLY.

The shield on the left had the representation of a bee-hive, and the words,

INDUSTRY.
BE ALWAYS EMPLOYED IN SOMETHING USEFUL.

Immediately over the balcony was a large painting, very well executed, representing Franklin, as a printer, wheeling home on a hand-barrow a load of paper, with the following descriptive quotation from his autobiography:—

I SOMETIMES BROUGHT HOME THE PAPER I PURCHASED AT THE STORES, THROUGH THE STREETS ON A WHEELBARROW.

An architectural design served as a border for the picture, the two columns being entwined with grape vines, full of rich-looking clusters of fruit. At the top were the arms of the Franklin family. On the columns were two shields, one bearing a kite, the other an ancient electrical machine.

Union Street.

The old building standing at the corner of Union and Hanover Streets, formerly owned and occupied by the father of Franklin, and now occupied by Mr. Alexander Wood, presented a very showy appearance. From the corner was suspended on an iron crane, as in the days of the Franklins, the original ball that was used as a sign at the Milk Street House, upon which was perceptible the following name and date:—

1698. JOSIAS FRANKLIN. 1698.

The building was decorated with bunting of various colors, under the direction of the Committee of Arrangements, and bore a tablet upon which was printed in large letters,

THE FATHER OF BENJAMIN FRANKLIN REMOVED FROM MILK STREET TO THIS SPOT SHORTLY AFTER BENJAMIN WAS BORN. HERE HE WORKED FOR A SHORT TIME IN HIS BOYHOOD AT THE TRADE OF A SOAP BOILER AND TALLOW CHANDLER, WITH HIS FATHER.

The large building, erected on the site of the old Green Dragon Tavern, on the estate which has been the property of St. Andrew's Lodge of Freemasons for nearly a century, and which is noted for its connection with many of the patriotic proceedings in the days of the revolutionary struggles of the country, besides its other decorations, was distinguished by a large sandstone tablet, upon which is magnificently sculptured, in very high relief, a representation of a dragon. This emblem, designed to perpetuate in some degree the memory of the renowned hall in which Joseph Warren, Samuel and John Adams, John Hancock, Paul Revere, and the principal patriots of the American Revolution used to meet, and also to designate the Masons' Hall of by-gone days, was inserted in the walls of the present building, on the first of November, 1855, by the lodge, under the instrumentality of the late John Rayner, Esq.

In this portion of the route of the procession many temporary balconies for spectators were erected, and tastefully decorated. These were generally occupied by young women and girls, dressed in white, and decked with colored ribbons, producing a very pleasing effect, and, evidently, eliciting the approbation of those who composed the procession, if shouts of the passers-by can be taken as a criterion.

The number of persons who were collected in the street at this point of the route was very great.

Court Street, to Washington Street.

The building at the east corner of Franklin Avenue was decorated by the Committee of Arrangements. From the roof of the first story were hung heavy folds of red and white bunting, in a pyramidal form, and upon the front was the following inscription:—

BENJAMIN FRANKLIN, WHEN HE WAS TWELVE YEARS OLD, WAS APPRENTICED AS A PRINTER TO HIS BROTHER JAMES, WHOSE OFFICE WAS ON THIS SPOT.

The awning of Messrs. Klous & Co's store, in this building, was neatly festooned, and a line of flags were stretched across the street, making a very neat and handsome appearance.