

# *New England* & *New York* 1998



CHARLES GANNON © 2023

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## PART ONE: NEW ENGLAND



The maps in this travelogue are based on Google maps.  
Once again, my thanks to Andrew Robinson for his proofreading.

## I – BOSTON

Saturday, 3 October

At about 7.30 p.m. (2.30 p.m. local time) the plane started its descent towards Boston, sweeping around by Cape Cod and the various islands far below us; by now the sky was completely clear. Fifteen minutes later we touched down in Logan International Airport. Although a little windy, the temperature was 65 °F, which turned out to be quite warm by Irish standards. Inside the airport we collected our baggage, submitted it to be X-rayed, then made our way out to the main arrivals area.

The journey to America had started shortly after eleven o'clock in the morning when our Aer Lingus plane had taken off from Dublin Airport. My friend Colm and I had been driven to the airport by Colm's sister; as traffic was light, the journey had been short. There were few people in the airport and we checked in quickly. We bought some bottles of booze in the Duty Free shop, relaxed, and finally boarded an almost empty plane. After a journey of just twenty-five minutes, we arrived in Shannon Airport, which we discovered was full of Americans. Here we joined a queue and went through the American immigration checks. As this procedure took up most of the available time, we were glad that we had made our purchases in the Duty Free shop back in Dublin.

We had boarded the plane again at about one o'clock and had set off on the journey across the Atlantic Ocean. The flight had gone very smoothly; the hostesses had been friendly and good humoured, and the food had been tasty.

Originally I had had no inclination whatever to go to America. It was a musical friend who worked as an architect who had persuaded me to travel around New England, for he had been there and had loved the local architecture and scenery. Once I had done a little research and had read some information about this interesting corner of the New World, my interest had been aroused and I had decided to see if for myself. Because driving through the various small states would be the best way of getting from one place to another, I had thought it best to rent a car and have somebody with me to help with the map reading. I invited my friend Colm to join me and he had agreed to come. I made all the necessary arrangements in advance and, on discovering some check shirts on sale at bargain prices in Guiney's shop in Dublin, I had bought several of them in one fell swoop, knowing for sure that the Yanks would be suitably impressed by them as (of course) they were the real McCoy.

Once we had collected some maps and brochures at various information desks in Logan Airport, we wandered out into the sunshine and waited for the bus to Woburn, which arrived shortly after four o'clock. Colm sat in the front seat of the bus and, as the one beside him was broken, I sat beside a friendly lady who had come here for the first time in order to attend a conference. She was South African and her husband was Irish.

We now drove along a bewildering number of highways until we entered a more countrified area with trees. When we arrived at the terminus in Woburn we were

met by Rita and Roy (known as Bud), who were cousins of my father; they had emigrated to America many years previously. They had very kindly offered to accommodate Colm and me while we were visiting Boston. Our hosts now led us to their large Chrysler car and off we sped to their house in Concord. Once again we journeyed through a pleasant rustic area, passing trees and pretty clapboard houses. Bud pointed out various places of historical interest, such as the house where Louisa May Alcott (the author of *Little Women*) had once lived.



*Bud and Rita's house in Monument Street, Concord, Massachusetts*

We eventually arrived in the delightful town centre of Concord, Massachusetts, and turned off for Monument Street. This turned out to be a country road where each house had two acres of land. Rita and Bud's home was one of these: a simple building with a cosy modern interior of a type often seen in American movies. The setting proved to be an excellent introduction to the country. Here it was blissfully peaceful; by now it was a balmy evening with the sun beginning to set behind the trees. As the leaves were on the verge of changing into their autumnal – or rather fall – colours, the scene was magical.

Colm and I were brought up to our bedroom: a large room with two beds. Once we had unpacked some things and organized ourselves, we both had showers. Later I wandered outside to take some fresh air; Rita then showed me her simple but



pretty garden. Indoors again, we chatted and discussed plans, and I gave our hosts some tips on operating their new computer, which was running on Windows 95.

Later we sat down to a simple but tasty evening meal, which finished with home-made apple pie served with ice cream. Over the meal we discussed plans for the following day and looked at maps. Bud had very kindly got us lots of maps and brochures about the various states in New England.

After the meal I helped Rita and Bud understand some more about their computer, and then Colm and I gave them the presents that we had brought them. Afterwards we retired to bed. It had been a very pleasant and successful start to our 'vacation'.

Sunday, 4 October

Colm and I had a night of broken sleep, and both of us were awake long before my alarm went off at 7.30. From the window we could see a fresh and sunny morning breaking, although patches of frost on the grass were visible here and there. In the bathroom, my razor buzzed louder than normal and at a higher pitch because of the electric current oscillating at 60 cycles per second.

We joined Rita and Bud in the kitchen just before eight o'clock and were given hot porridge, coffee, and slices of delicious home-baked bread.



*Saint Bernard Church, Concord*

Thus fortified, we set off in the plush car to the village centre, where we parked. We now found ourselves in a quintessentially New England village: a peaceful place with bright sunshine illuminating the freshly-painted clapboard buildings. We crossed the road and climbed the steps of the elegant Catholic church of Saint Bernard. The spotlessly clean and unusual interior was almost empty when we arrived, but it soon filled up with well-dressed people, many of whom were elderly or retired. The church was unusual in that the altar was not placed in the apse, but in the middle of the long wall on the left. The pews were placed at an angle and there was another door at the far end of the building. A lady appeared and played

some music on an electric organ that had a very acceptable sound, and then the Mass started. The hymns were sung by a young man dressed in a suit, who sang confidently and invited the congregation to sing along with him. The hymns, most of which were new to me, were referred to by number, as in a Protestant church. (I would have preferred to have been in the nearby Protestant church, where a Bach cantata was being performed at a service!)

The Mass, which was conducted with a certain amount of pomp, lasted about forty-five minutes; we left immediately after communion as our hosts had to go to a baptism in another church. We returned to the car and Colm and I were driven to the nearby railway station – a sleepy place beside a quiet road. We were told that, if the bakery was open, we could buy our tickets there. Here we said goodbye to Rita and Bud and entered the bakery, where a wonderful aroma of freshly-baked bread wafted from an oven. We bought two round-trip tickets to Boston and, as we had a good forty-five minutes to spare, Colm bought coffee and a blueberry muffin, and I bought a bottle of water. We sat down for our ‘elevenses’ and then went outside for a short walk. It was delightful to step out into the fresh air and move around after so much sitting and eating during the previous day. As we walked, we noted many features that we had seen on American movies and took a note of the price of gasoline.

We then joined one or two people on the platform in the station and, at about 10.45 our train – a grubby silver one with small windows – pulled in to the sound of a clanging bell. It was long and spacious inside, and it moved very smoothly. A cheerful fellow appeared and punched our tickets. The train now passed a lot of trees and a couple of lakes; the countryside, illuminated by the bright morning sunshine, looked very pleasant. After a while, however, we began to approach the industrial areas and suburbs, then the ugly flyovers of Boston city. We finally came to a stop in the North Station at the end of the line. The journey had lasted about forty minutes.



*The USS Constitution, Boston, Massachusetts*

We walked out of the station into a busy street, got our bearings by studying a map that Bud had given us, and found the red line of the famous Freedom Trail. As we now found ourselves at the northern end of the trail, we decided to investigate this part of it first. We therefore set off and, following the line on the footpath (or rather the sidewalk), headed northwards by crossing the bridge over the Charles River. We then turned right and walked towards the *USS Constitution*, the famous

frigate of the United States Navy, and the world's oldest ship still afloat. As we neared the elegant vessel, which had been launched in 1797, tourist coaches passed us; by the time we reached the ship, there was a very long queue (or rather line) of people waiting to go on board. Because of this, we decided against visiting it and contented ourselves by admiring the ship and its fascinating tangle of masts and rigging; it certainly looked very impressive.

We then retraced our steps and turned northwards again, approaching a beautiful square that heralded the beginning of Charlestown. Here the old buildings were very pretty, although many of them were replicas. Walking along narrow winding streets, we made our way uphill through this quiet, peaceful and quite exclusive suburb. We passed the fire brigade museum and another beautiful square, then approached the Bunker Hill Monument. As we neared the entrance, we stopped to admire a beautiful street that Colm thought he recognized. This was elegant Soley Street, now suffused in bright sunshine.



*Bunker Hill Monument and the view of Boston from the top*

We arrived at the monument, a tall stark structure rising towards the clear blue sky, and entered it via a fine classical building behind it. Inside the building was a display that outlined the history of the battle of Bunker Hill, which took place in 1775. From here we crossed over to the monument and climbed the 294 stone steps to the top. By the time we reached it, I was quite out of breath. Up here we peered through some small and grubby windows to see extensive views of the city.

We then walked down Soley Street, which turned out to be something of an anticlimax, and found our way back to the red line. As it was approaching lunchtime, we decided to eat something. Wandering along one of the streets, we followed our noses, for we could smell food being cooked somewhere. We ended up at an old-fashioned tavern that offered interesting meals at affordable prices. The place was dark inside – and packed. We found a table in a quiet corner and ordered a meal of eggs benedict, which was both tasty and filling.

Fed and rested, we set off on foot once again, crossing over the river and continuing along the Freedom Trail. Our first stop was Copp's Hill Burying Ground, established in 1659, where we saw the grave of the Mather family, two members of which had been Puritan ministers (Increase and Cotton Mather) and



one an Independent minister (Samuel Mather). We were quite amused by the unusual Christian names. Just beyond the graveyard could be seen the elegant white spire of the Old North Church which, as we approached it, ambling down a narrow street full of tourists, turned out to be a very fine old building. We tacked ourselves on to a large group of tourists and entered the superb interior, which was painted white. It was like stepping back in time to the 1720s, when the church had been built. The décor was pure and restrained; two fine chandeliers hung from the ceiling and a sounding board had been placed over the pulpit. The seats were separated from one another by wooden partitions arranged in the shape of boxes. Up in the loft could be seen a fine old organ. A young man of immense girth gave us a short introduction to this famous church, which had been the starting point of Paul Revere's famous midnight ride to Lexington in 1775 to alert the colonial militia of the approach of the British forces. The young man also mentioned that there would be an organ recital here at 5 o'clock, which Colm and I decided to attend.



*The Old North Church (left) and the New North Church, Boston, Massachusetts*

We then left and walked down the tranquil Paul Revere Mall, with its fountain and statue of Revere, and approached the New North Church, which had been designed by Boston's most famous architect Charles Bulfinch. Although it was very austere inside – like the other church it was painted white – it was nonetheless very pleasing.

Following the line again, we found our way to a small square in which the Paul Revere House was situated. Although there seemed little that was authentic or original about this nondescript dark wooden house, we decided to pay the entrance fee and have a look inside. It turned out to be quite interesting, and it seemed that an honest attempt had been made to recreate the house as Paul Rivoire (the hero's original Huguenot name) might have known it. The descriptions and historical notes on stands in the house were well written and informative. Upstairs a young lady explained some things to us. The furniture here was more sophisticated than what we had seen downstairs; this was meant to reflect Revere's rising fortune.

After we left, we followed the line under an ugly expressway, leaving the North End behind. Looking to one side, we were struck by the unusual sight of four tall



transparent towers. This turned out to be an unusual but very moving memorial to the Nazi Holocaust; on the sidewalk and inside the square towers were brief descriptions of the atrocities inflicted by the Nazis in the various concentration camps.

We then visited Faneuil Hall and Quincy Market: historic buildings filled with up-to-date shops. We bought some stamps in the post office just inside Faneuil Hall, mingled with the crowds in the shops for a few minutes, then left. We found a public telephone nearby; I rang Rita and told her that we would be back at about 8.15 this evening, arriving on a later train. We walked a little more of the trail and stopped at the site of the Boston Massacre: a confrontation by some three or four hundred local people that had taken place in March 1770, and during which five people were shot by British soldiers. We then looked inside the Old State House, in which we found an elegant spiral staircase. Our last stop was the Old South Meeting House, which by this time was closed.

We then turned around and walked back quickly to the Old North Church, taking a short cut at one point. As the sun was setting, it now began to turn cool. We arrived at the church by about ten to five and found a seat up near the altar. I spoke to a lady nearby, who was curious to know where we were from. Her husband joined in the conversation and gave me tips on where to go in the car during the coming days: he recommended driving up to New Hampshire along the Kancamagus Highway.

Our conversation was interrupted by the appearance of the Episcopalian minister, who welcomed us, invited us all to a reception after the concert in the Clough House next door, and introduced us to the organist who was Croatian and now had a post here. The recital was quite good and consisted of music by Mendelssohn, Elgar, a couple of composers that we had never heard of (one eighteenth-century and the other modern), and Bach. We recognized the latter's Passacaglia in C minor.

After the recital, the man near us spoke to us again. We then shook hands with and complimented the organist and, as we had time to spare, walked around to Clough House (the oldest residential building in Boston), where we joined other people for the reception. We accepted drinks and chatted once again to the couple whom we had met in the church. They kindly introduced us to some of their friends. It was very pleasant meeting these people, all of whom were very polite and kind to us. I felt quite at home here.

Before leaving, I had a quick look at some of the other rooms in the house; they were elegant and pleasantly furnished. We then walked back through the noisier and more modern parts of the city to the North Station, where we waited a short while for the train. We now had to listen carefully to the announcements so that we would get off at the right stop; when we finally approached Concord, we barely recognized the name when we heard it over the loudspeaker system, for it was pronounced 'Can-cad'.

Bud was at the station waiting for us and drove us to the house, where we freshened ourselves up and prepared for dinner. This consisted of another helping of Rita's simple but wholesome food, which had been kept hot in the oven. We finished our meal, once again, with some apple pie. We chatted during the meal and then decided to go to bed early. It had been quite an impressive start to our holiday – or rather vacation.

Monday, 5 October

Both of us slept reasonably well and woke early. After we had showered, we went downstairs for breakfast. This morning we were given oatmeal porridge, fried eggs (Colm's were sunny side up and mine easy over), slices of crispy bacon, home-made bread and coffee. It was another perfect morning outside.

When we were all ready, Bud drove us to the station and we caught the train into town once again. We then, after a little confusion, found our way to the green subway line and hopped aboard a train marked 'Heath Street'. This brought us south-westwards fairly quickly and eventually emerged at street level. We got off at the Museum stop, which left us right beside the large Museum of Fine Arts. By now it was about 10.45 and crowds of tourists were making their way to the entrance. The big attraction was a Monet exhibition that had been recommended to us. We joined the queue (or rather the line) for this but when we were told that we would not be admitted until half past one, we decided to skip the exhibition and instead bought a general ticket for \$10 each.

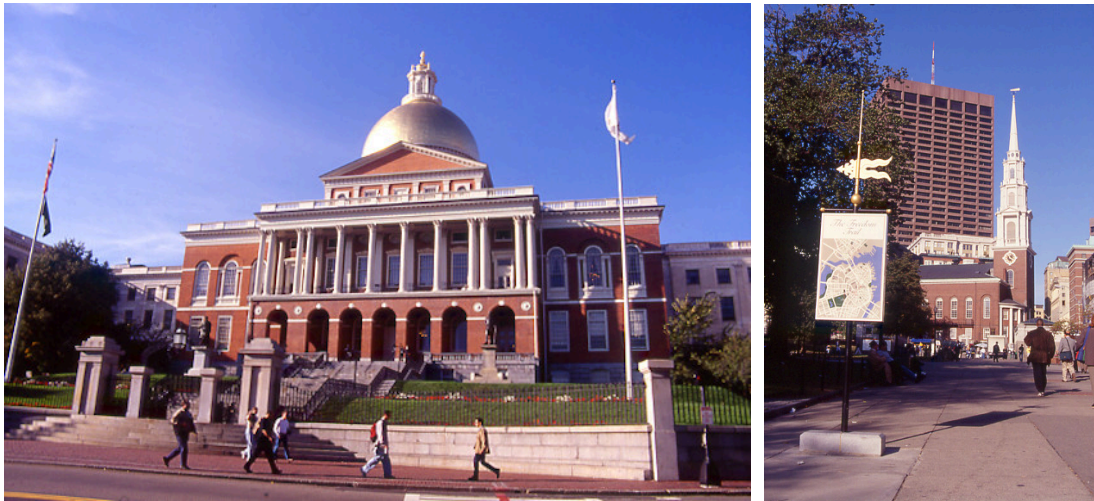
We now wandered through some rooms of ancient Mesopotamian artefacts and stopped to look at the ancient Egyptian exhibits, which were quite impressive. These rooms were full of schoolchildren who were busily running about taking notes and filling in answers on printed questionnaires. From here we made our way through some rooms of English and American furniture (the early examples were very elegant) to a room containing portraits from the colonial period. Here were the masterpieces of John Singleton Copley and Gilbert Stuart, including the famous portrait of Paul Revere by Copley. All the paintings had been very well restored. It was wonderful to discover that these great figures of American history had been preserved with such accuracy. I was delighted that I could now put faces to the various names that I had read about over the previous few months and weeks. I admired the works of Copley for their precision and the works of Stuart for their finesse.

After this came two rooms of American landscapes: paintings by Edwin Church and others. If I had seen nothing else in the museum, I would have been happy. However, we found quite a large collection of excellent works by the Dutch masters, including Rembrandt, upstairs. We also stopped to admire works by the French impressionists and post-impressionists. We did see a few paintings by Monet, despite the fact that we had not been able to attend the special exhibition. When we saw the number of people in the exhibition, we were not sorry to have missed it.

When we had seen enough, we passed quickly through a number of rooms, most of which were empty, stopping only to examine some Roman and ancient Egyptian artefacts. We paid no attention to a room containing rows of Chinese Buddhist statues. We then had a look in the café, which was full and too expensive, spent some time in the museum shop, and finally left at about one o'clock, tired and hungry but happy. We walked along the Fenway near the park, passing by what I guessed must have been the famous Brownstone houses, and stopped in a cheap diner for a filling meal of chicken fingers with bread, French fries and salad, which cost about \$7 apiece – quite reasonable.

Thus fortified, we walked along the exclusive Newbury Street, stopping frequently to look inside the wonderful shops, many of which were converted houses. It was delightful to find such high-class shops in such a quiet, tree-lined street, without traffic roaring up and down.

We soon reached Boston Common, a pleasant enough green, and found the beginning of the Freedom Trail at the door of the Visitor Center. The first place of



*The State House (left) and Park Street Church (right), Boston*

interest was the magnificent State House, built in 1795 to 1798 by Charles Bulfinch, with its gold cupola shining in the sunlight. Climbing up the steps to the entrance, we went inside. Although the interior was quite imposing, the style of architecture was heavy and rather cold. After a cursory look around, we left the building and returned to the red line; it led us back through the park and on to the next point of interest: Park Street Church, with its beautiful spire. Unfortunately this church was closed. We turned the corner and, passing the Old Granary Burial Ground, we paused to look at the grave of Samuel Adams, the Founding Father of the United States. Nearby we found the Omni Parker House Hotel, which looked quite sumptuous – a fitting place for the likes of Charles Dickens and John F. Kennedy, both of whom had stayed in it. We then went into the shop next door, where Colm bought some tee shirts and I just had a look around. As there was access to the hotel from the shop, I went downstairs to use the men's rest room and afterwards telephoned Rita to say that we would be back by seven o'clock.

We then ambled on and bought some chocolates for Rita and Bud in a high-class confectionery shop. We then returned to Faneuil Hall and Quincy Market, where we had a leisurely look at the shops; fortunately they were not so packed this time. We noticed that a few policemen were patrolling the area.

Afterwards, we returned to the station and caught our train home. It was dark by now and we felt weary. Once again, Bud collected us at the station and drove us back to the house, where we refreshed ourselves and sat down to dinner. This evening we finished with a warm chocolate-flavoured dessert topped with ice cream, which was quite delicious. We cleaned the table after we had finished eating, took out the maps and guide books that Bud had given us, and discussed our plans for travelling. Rita had managed to get our rented car transferred from the airport to somewhere nearby, thus saving us the bother of trying to get away from the airport along a confusing tangle of new roads. Bud also gave us helpful hints on how to find accommodation, and told us how much we should expect to pay for it. The guide books that he had given us (including one published by the American Automobile Association – AAA) listed hotel and motel prices in the various states.

After a while I began to wilt, and so excused myself. I went straight to bed, for I wanted to get a good night's sleep before trying to drive an unfamiliar car on the other side of the road tomorrow.