

# REMINISCENCES

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Reminiscences by Charles Brewer

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**CHARLES BREWER**

# **REMINISCENCES**



*For some time past, my children and friends have urged me to commit to paper some recollections of my life, more especially that part of it relating to my various sea voyages around the world.*

*At the advanced age of eighty years, I realize that my memory is failing me in a great measure; at the same time, I find that I can recall the scenes of my early youth and manhood, and many events of "long ago" are much more vivid to-day than those of later date.*

*As this is intended only for FRIENDLY critics, it needs no apology for any want of literary merit; and if, in the long future, it will afford any pleasure to my children, it will more than repay the time which has been devoted to it by their loving father.*

CHARLES BREWER.

Jamaica Plain, 1884.

## REMINISCENCES.

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My ancestor was Daniel Brewer. He left London for Roxbury (Mass.) in 1632, accompanied by his wife and daughter; but the former did not live to reach America. Sarah Brewer, the daughter, married John May, 2d, son of John May, 1st, of Roxbury; and Sarah was the first recorded name of our ancestors in the May family in New England.

My father was Moses Brewer. My mother was Abigail May. They were married in 1798, at Roxbury. My father was a dry-goods dealer on Cornhill, in Boston, until 1813. He died June 17, 1813. After his death, my mother carried on the business for several years. She then retired, and passed the remainder of her life at the old homestead, at Jamaica Plain, her native place. She died on April 24, 1849, aged seventy-nine and a half years. She was the mother of five children,—one son and four daughters. I am the only remaining member of the family (1884).

I was born in Boston, on Cornhill, on March 27, 1804. At a very early age I had a strong desire to

be a sailor, but, being an only son, my mother strongly objected, and sent me to a woman's school at East Sudbury. I remained there two summers. During the year following I attended the East Sudbury Academy. I had a companion from Boston who attended the same school, and we boarded together with a farmer and his wife, who took good care of us. The farmer was very kind, and would often allow us to use the "old horse" when he was absent from home. The horse was a very quiet one, but somewhat in years.

One day, while the old farmer had gone to Boston, we thought we would improve the opportunity and have a ride, so we got the "old horse" out, and, without either saddle or bridle, we mounted him, I in front and my companion behind. It was rather hard work at first to get him into a trot, but after awhile we got him started into a full run. As we had no switch, we began slapping him with our hands on each side. As that did n't have much effect, we gave him one extra-hard slap, when he started off suddenly with great speed, and we both slipped off behind. As I fell, the horse's iron shoe struck me directly on the side of my face, cutting it open nearly up to my eyelids, and breaking my jaw-bone. I was left senseless on the ground, and alone, as my companion was frightened and ran off to get some assistance. I laid on the ground as if dead

for a time, but assistance came at last, and I was carried home. A doctor was sent for, but, as he lived some miles away, it was two hours before he reached the house. My cheek and jawbone were badly mangled; the surgeon trimmed off the small pieces and sewed up the deep cut in my face. The old farmer made up his mind that I could not live, and he sent a messenger immediately to Boston for my mother to come to Sudbury. When the doctor heard that, he at once sent another messenger, forbidding my mother to go to Sudbury, as he feared it might set me crying and break the stitches open in my face. I was obliged to sit upright in a chair for two or three weeks, and there were many months before the face was entirely healed. I had every kind attention I could wish from the old farmer and his wife, and from other friends in our neighborhood.

After leaving Sudbury, I attended a private school in Boston for several months; but I was always wishing for a sea voyage. One day I asked my mother to let me go privateering,—boys of my age were shipped during the war as powder-monkeys, their duties being to carry powder from the magazines to the upper decks when required,—but I could not get my mother's consent, so I said no more about it at that time.

During the latter part of the war (1814), the



British frigates were at one time cruising in Boston Bay, and it was expected they would enter the harbor. The inhabitants were then working very actively to finish off Fort Strong (Noddle's Island). The banking of the sides of the fort required assistance, although it was nearly finished.

The public-school boys were offered as volunteers to work. They turned out from the schools about three hundred at a time, and were marched down State Street in ranks and military order, with the American flag flying and drums beating. We marched to Long Wharf, where we embarked on board sloops and schooners, and were landed at Fort Strong, on Noddle's Island (now East Boston), where we worked two days. The boys' work was mostly carrying sods and pins and pickaxes.

After working two days, we were taken to Dorchester Heights, where we worked one day, and were then dismissed. We marched back to Boston in the same military order; and the boys enjoyed the labor, for the fun attached to it.

After remaining some weeks at home, my mother sent me to the Woburn Academy, as I was so young she did not care to have me attend school in Boston. I was the youngest scholar in the academy, but I only remained there one year. The younger boys were not treated as well as the older scholars, there being a great difference in the quality

of the food. My mother had made three complaints without any notice having been taken of them, so I decided to leave.

One morning I got up very early, and, without my mother's knowledge, ran away from the school before daylight, and endeavored to find my way to Boston. I had not been long on the road before I discovered that I had lost my way, and I sat down upon a stone wall and began to cry. Soon a gentleman came along and asked me what was my trouble. I told him I wanted to get to Boston and did not know the road. He said he was going to Charlestown, and would show me the way. I told the gentleman I knew the way home from Charlestown, and would follow him, which I did, although I was very tired, as he walked so fast; but I finally reached home at one o'clock in the afternoon, and my mother was very glad to see me.

After remaining a short time at home, I attended a private school in Boston for a few months, when my mother concluded to send me to the Rev. Mr. Richardson's school, at Hingham. I remained there over a year, and was very much pleased in every way. There was a limited number of scholars,—about fifteen boarding scholars and five outsiders. The living was good throughout. As a general thing, we had a fine set of scholars; among others were Samuel G. Howe, James Davis, Josiah T.

Marshall, George, Henry, and William Barry (three brothers), and Edward N. Howe, brother of Samuel G. Howe (and who was afterwards drowned at sea), all of whom were Boston boys. Both our teacher and his wife were always very kind and pleasant with the scholars, and I left the school after a year and a half well pleased.

I was then fourteen years old when arrangements were made by my mother for me to enter the store of Messrs. George & Thomas Searle; but, as the position was then filled by a young man who had three months longer to serve before his time expired, I had an opportunity for three months' more schooling.

I entered the private school of the then celebrated teacher, Mr. Walsh, author of "Walsh's Arithmetic," which was highly prized in those days. At the end of my term, I entered the store of Messrs. George & Thomas Searle as an apprentice. After a service of three years, I concluded to continue in the store until I was twenty-one years old, as I should then be my own master, and could go to sea as a sailor, — for I still had the same desire for a sea life.

One day, my mother, without my knowledge, called on several of her old friends to consult with them about my going to sea. Among those whose advice she sought were Capt. John Pratt, Capt. Holland, and Capt. Benjamin Rich, three old retired mer-