

Providence Institution for Savings

Established 1819

A Mutual Savings Bank
where interest is allowed
from day of Deposit to
Day of Withdrawal

MAIN OFFICE

86 South Main Street

OLNEYVILLE BRANCH

1917-21 Westminster Street
Olneyville Square

EMPIRE-ABORN BRANCH

Between Westminster and Washington Sts.

Open all business days and Tuesday evenings
5 to 8:30. Olneyville Branch open
Saturday evenings also.

“The Old Stone Bank”

F
79
P971
#5

AUTON HOUSE



Presented by

“The Old Stone Bank”

Providence, R. I.

March 2, 1931



Auton House

AUTON HOUSE . . . who would recognize it now? In fact, how many have ever even heard the name? It is not in the property files of Providence. Officially it does not exist. But the initiated, familiar with its origin, revel in their intimate knowledge of its full significance. For them the name "Auton" conveys up the picture of a charming mid-nineteenth century Providence family, one which was in some respects similar to the Alcott family of Concord, Massachusetts.

Auton House stands on Westminster Street at the corner of Walnut Street, nearly opposite the Modern Theatre. At this writing it serves as the home of several business concerns, its first floor given over to stores, its second and third floors to offices and workshops. Someday it will probably be torn down, destroyed to make room for a modern office building; but now, in spite of its constant usage for more than 120 years, its brick walls seem as sturdy as the day they were raised.

And this was the house in which twelve little Autons were born, in which eleven

grew up, and of which one paused, in his later years, to reminisce. He called his reminiscences *Recollections of Auton House*, issuing them in the form of a small book and illustrating it himself. In it he tells of countless little details in the child life of the Auton family, describing many a piece of mischief—the romps and games in the nursery, the thoughtless persecution of poor Deborah, the tyranny of T. Auton in the matter of jonnycake—and portraying character after character, from Rosannah to Mother Auton, with tender humor and intimate understanding.

But so far we have been talking ambiguously; so far you know nothing about Auton house except its location. Let us then unfold the rest of the mystery without more ado.

The Auton family was none other than the Hoppin family of Rhode Island. And the author of the reminiscences was Augustus Hoppin, the ninth in line of the twelve children. Perhaps desiring the opportunity to expand more liberally upon the theme that engrossed him in his writing, he hid his family behind the pseudonym "Auton," "Auton", it seems, is a Greek word meaning "self" and therefore was a very apt choice.

For distinction among the eleven living children, Augustus Hoppin then prefixed the correct first initial of each individual before his fictitious surname. Thus, in order of arrival in the world, they were

J. Auton.....	William Jones Hoppin
A. Auton (girl).....	Anna Jones Hoppin
T. Auton.....	Thomas Frederick Hoppin
S. Auton (girl).....	Sarah D. Hoppin
F. Auton.....	Francis Edwin Hoppin
H. Auton.....	Hamilton Hoppin
E. Auton (girl).....	Eliza Jones Hoppin
W. Auton.....	Dr. Washington Hoppin
A. Auton.....	Augustus Hoppin
H. Auton (girl).....	Harriet Jones Hoppin
C. Auton.....	Dr. Courtland Hoppin

The family moved into Auton House in 1815, although it had been built some eight years earlier, and continued to occupy it until 1874, the year of Mother Auton's death. The father of the family was Thomas Coles Hoppin who, with his brother Benjamin, engaged in business as a merchant, dealing in such commodities as dye-stuffs, drugs, and Chinaware and importing many goods from the West Indies and China. Both men became influential and highly respected citizens of the community. From the various

bits of description Augustus Hoppin gives us, we can picture his father as an individual of unusual charm. The former writes that if ever a father was loved by his children Father Auton was, their greatest delight arising in being compared with him whether in matter of virtue, feature, or eccentricity. He would often thrill them when they were quite small by swinging them in a circle until they were literally flying through the air, like the partner of a spinning, dance performer. Every morning, early, it was he who would take a basket on his arm and set out for the heart of the town to do the daily marketing. On each trip one of the elder boys would be taken along to help in bringing home the purchases, and it was not unusual for Father Auton, after buying a live gobbler in the stalls, to give it to his son to carry. This the young man would have to do, regardless of his attire and of the affront to his vanity if he chanced to meet any friends (particularly those of the opposite sex) on the way. Nevertheless, despite the possibility of being ordered to carry an obstreperous turkey home, the chance to accompany Father Auton on his morning expeditions was considered a privileged one and was valued accordingly.

Not all of Father Auton's shopping was done in the market-place, however, for many farmers would come into the town and cry their products through the streets from house to house. When a huckster with a wagon load of berries came up Westminster Street, Father Auton would stop him, sample his goods, and then, if they proved satisfactory, buy five or six quarts.

Mother Auton was the daughter of Governor William Jones of Rhode Island, and one of the best mothers imaginable, catering to her large brood with wisdom and love. Her ministrations extended outside of her family as well, for her sympathy and intelligent advice was sought by many a distressed female, whether black or white. She survived Father Auton by about twenty-four years, and it is of her in this latter period of her life that Augustus Hoppin gives us an especially fine picture.

"Mother Auton never would sit at a desk," he writes. "Neither 'secretary' nor 'davenport' suited her purpose. The little gifts presented to her from time to time, and admirably adapted to write at were always gratefully accepted, but never used. She took her writing materials on her broad motherly lap, pushed her cap-strings from

her face, adjusted her gold spectacles over her ample nose, dipped her pen daintily in the ink (just enough to fill it without blotting), and away it ran so merrily and easily over the paper that she would be on her fourth page before we children, who were seated around her, had half gotten through sucking our oranges

"There she sat in her chair every Sunday morning for over forty years, writing the weekly epistle, with bended head and benign expression, while the wood fire hissed and sputtered, and the old canary sang in the sunlight."

We have already mentioned Deborah, the long-suffering maid. She was the break-water against which the tireless waves of the young Autons' energy buffeted endlessly. She slept in the nursery with the children, being allotted a thin strip along the edge of the larger bed, but she was only allowed to sleep after she had brushed the bed clean of the crumbs which fell from the children's final rations of jonny-cake and had supplied all round with a last drink of water. Even then, with the first light of day, she was unmercifully pushed out of bed by several pairs of small feet braced against her back. Yet, though slowly worn to a

shadow, she never complained of her lot, and faithfully ministered to all the childish wants, from the youngest to the oldest, doctoring colds, combing hair, answering questions, drying tears, and adjusting sashes and ties.

Far different was she from Rosannah, the colored mistress of the kitchen. The latter was almost regal in her bearing, seldom smiling yet warm-hearted for all of that. She would dole out slices of bread to the small army of young ones that daily invaded her sanctuary, and she alone knew just what pinch of salt or dash of pepper was needed to make each dish exactly suited to the fastidious taste of Father Auton. But like many of the old-time cooks she could not endure the modern types of cooking equipment, and when coal stoves and ovens came into vogue, she resigned her culinary throne.

What became of the many young Autons who filled the old house with so much noise and merriment? What of those urchins who deliberately caught colds in order to stay home from school, who climbed all over poor Deborah, who played house in the nursery, who set out their shoes (instead of stockings) to be filled with candy and trinkets on Christmas Eve?

Well, the eldest, William Hoppin Jones, turned to law and established a considerable

practice in New York, later entering the diplomatic service and going to London. The next among the boys, Thomas Frederick, became a distinguished artist, his notable works being the chancel windows depicting the evangelists in Trinity Church, New York, and his bronze statue of a dog, now in Roger Williams Park. Others, among the boys, became well-known physicians and architects, while the girls attained social prominence, one marrying Elisha Dyer, Governor of Rhode Island in 1857.

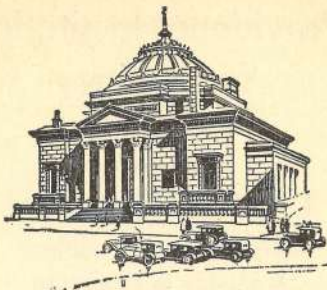
But last, and especially, we must speak of Augustus Hoppin, the author of the "recollections." He, too, was a noted artist, famous as an illustrator. It was he who did the illustrations for the original edition of Holmes' *Autocrat of the Breakfast Table*. He wrote a good many books, but of them all none is more delightful, more thoroughly charming than *Recollections of Auton House*, a pen portrait of a 19th century Rhode Island family.

Additional Copies of this Booklet sent
upon request

ADDRESS

"THE OLD STONE BANK"

86 South Main Street
Providence



THE PROVIDENCE INSTITUTION FOR SAVINGS, familiarly known as "The Old Stone Bank," is in its own right a historic institution of Rhode Island. Founded in 1819 as one of the first mutual savings banks in the country, it has since contributed vitally to the development and life of this community.

Proud of its own historical significance, "The Old Stone Bank" has adopted this method of educational advertising to bring to light much that is of value and significance in the colorful annals of Rhode Island and national history.

The sketches and vignettes of old-time Rhode Island and Rhode Islanders that are broadcast weekly and then printed in this form are selected from local historical records which are full of the picturesque, romantic, and adventurous. In the hope that these glimpses into the lives, customs, and environment of our progenitors may be both revealing and inspirational to young and old, this booklet is presented with the compliments of

THE OLD STONE BANK