

The South Danvers Observer

The South Danvers Observer is published quarterly.

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Inside this issue:

Mr. Peabody, American Ambassador	2
Mr. Peabody's Aid Goes Beyond Maryland	2
"National Disgrace" turned to Victory by Peabody	2
George Peabody's Concern for those in South Danvers	3
Peabody's Generosity Extends beyond his Family	3
Mr. Peabody's Next Dinner	4

George Peabody's Dinner a Triumph!

July 5, 1851— It has been no secret that tensions between the Americans visiting London for the Great Exhibition and the British have been at an all time high.

The American exhibitors had to bear under the ridicule of both British and American press when they arrived in London without enough funds to properly display their wares.

No stranger to hosting U.S.-British friendship dinners in the past, Mr. George Peabody decided to hold one on the grandest scale ever. All with the hope it would ease the animosity between his fellow citizens and the residents of London.

But the date chosen, July 4, was one no one could ignore. To the Americans, it is the most patriotic of days. To the British, it is a tasteless reminder of what was lost.

And when Mr. Peabody approached his long time friend, Abbott Lawrence, the U. S. Minister to Britain, he was told not to expect anyone to attend.

"The fashionables are tired of



balls," Emily Mary Lamb Temple, the Viscountess Palmerston was heard to say. Her words were certain to doom Mr. Peabody's upcoming event.

Upon hearing this, Mr. Lawrence advised his friend it would be best to exclude the British when planning his invitations.

But acting with the same confidence which has guided him throughout his life and has brought him so much success, Mr. Peabody consulted with the Duke of Wellington.

"Good idea!" the Duke was known to say and it was with that

endorsement that Mr. Peabody went forth with his plans.

More than a thousand guests were invited. Over eight hundred stayed for dinner.

Among those who attended were the Baroness Angela Georgina Burdett-Coutts, Joseph Paxton who designed the Crystal Palace for the World's Fair, members of Parliament, the Lord Mayor and Lady Mayoress of London and, of course, the Duke of Wellington.

It was Mr. Peabody's great honor to introduce His Grace, Arthur Wellesley Wellington to the Honorable Mr. Abbott Lawrence. Few will forget how the band struck up "See The Conquering Hero Comes" as they met or the rousing applause from all who were present.

And with His Grace, the Duke of Wellington's pronouncement he had a good time, Mr. Peabody's place as an "eminent American merchant," has been sealed.

The Great Exhibition at The Crystal Palace



When Henry Cole, a member of the Royal Society of Art, returned from the Paris Exposition in 1849, he met with Prince Albert, the president of the Society, to suggest London host an Industrial Exposition of All Nations.

Once it was approved and Hyde Park chosen as the site, Joseph Paxton's remarkable design for a "Crystal Palace"

The Great Exhibition

was chosen. The building extended across twenty acres of land and allowed for trees to be included inside the building.

Not all were enthralled with the choice. One member of the House of Commons was reported to say "It is the greatest trash. . .it is meant to bring down prices . . .and to pave the way for the establishment of cheap and nasty trash."

He was proved wrong. When it opened on May 1 of

this year, thousands of visitors flocked to the fair. Exhibits depicting the art and architecture of the past are included as well as the wonders of technology today.

The Crystal Palace is able to hold 13,000 exhibits from all parts of the world, including our own American displays and those of as far away as Australia and New Zealand.

George Peabody Has Long Been An Unofficial American Ambassador To Great Britain

When George Peabody left from New York in February, 1837, little did he know he wouldn't return to his home for almost twenty years.

He had been elected by the State of Maryland as one of three Commissioners to sell the state's bonds. These bonds, amounting to \$8 million were to be sold in Europe to finance both the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal and the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad. Fellow Commissioners, John Buchanan and Thomas Emory, joined Peabody in London in August of 1837.

Mr. Peabody arrived in England on Feb. 13, 1837. As had happened in his previous four voyages to Europe, he suffered greatly and arrived unwell.

It didn't take long for his health to return, however. And when it did, he went to work with a passion to accomplish his goal.

Times were bad. The Panic of 1837 was in full swing. The standing of American credit and the reputation of American business in Europe was at an all time low.

Mr. Peabody's first order of business was to save the Liverpool firm of William and James Brown, which was the source of his own credit in Europe. He did it by traveling over five hundred miles in five days to conduct as many face to face meetings as he could.

And with his tireless efforts, the firm of William and James Brown

was saved. This was only the first step he took to demonstrate the honor of the Americans to the British.

With his fellow Commissioners from Maryland, Peabody went first to Paris and then Amsterdam to sell the bonds. They were unsuccessful. Emory and Buchanan gave up and returned to the U. S. the following October.

With the Maryland legislature under pressure not to pay interest on the bonds, Peabody's task was nearly impossible. And when at last he did manage to sell the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal portion of the bonds, he did so at a very low price. He was blamed for that, especially when soon after the price of Maryland's bonds rose.

But without all of his hard work, Maryland wouldn't have been able to maintain her credit in Europe. And because Maryland was still struggling financially, Peabody didn't seek to collect the \$60,000 commission which was his due for the sale.

It wasn't until 1847, when Maryland emerged from the depression and could begin taxing its citizens, that the state began to pay interest on the bonds. And it was

then that it came to light that Peabody never asked for or received his commission.

Through those years, Peabody demonstrated to every wary European that Americans could be trusted. His insistence that Maryland would honor the bonds, his determination to save the firm of William and James Brown and his continual work which changed from import-export business to that of a bond and investment banker, Peabody showed that trust in Americans would not be misplaced.

In this way, he always acted in our country's best interests. When Maryland couldn't honor the interest on its bonds, Mr. Peabody insisted to all those who doubted, it was only because times were bad. But that once things turned around, Maryland could be counted on to honor its debts.

With his colleagues and business associates, he further proved American goodwill by fair dealings and with gifts from his native land. These could be anything from hickory nuts to hominy or apples or Boston crackers. And these, along with his words and practice, demonstrated to all those he met the nature of the land he called home.

"Whereas George Peabody, then of Maryland, now of London, negotiated a loan for this state and refused to apply for compensation allowed him; because he was unwilling to add to the burden of Maryland when she was in need—It is unanimously resolved by the General Assembly of Maryland to tender the thanks of the State to Mr. George Peabody."

Maryland Resolution to George Peabody, March 7, 1848

"A National Disgrace" Turned To Victory by Mr. Peabody

It is well known by now just what our own George Peabody has done to spare our country further embarrassment.

Mr. Edward Riddle, the commissioner appointed by our government to oversee this project, arrived in London to discover he had no money with which to create a display appropriate for the American exhibit.

With 40,000 square feet of space provided for the Americans in the Crystal Palace, the pieces comprising our exhibit were too sparse to provide much interest. Our nation's pride was at stake. And hearing of the problem, Mr. Peabody quietly approached Mr. Abbott Lawrence with 3,000 pounds or \$15,000 to assist in the

display.

In all, our country contributed 599 exhibits, which included Hiram Powers statue, "The Greek Slave," Colt revolvers, Richard Hoe's printing press, Albert Hobb's unpickable lock and Cyrus Hall McCormick's reapers.

And because of our very own Mr. Peabody's generosity, they were shown to the best advantage.

"Every American connected with the Exhibition owes a debt of gratitude to Mr. George Peabody."
New York State agent Benjamin Pierce

George Peabody's Concern For His Native Country Isn't Confined to Just Those Visiting London.



George Peabody's birthplace on Washington Street.

"Life at any time is uncertain and more so at the advanced age of yourself and wife. I have therefore written to you both to let you know you are not forgotten and to express a hope that our lives may be spared to meet again in this world."

George Peabody's letter to Captain Sylvester Proctor

As poor as his beginnings were, there is nothing humble about George Peabody's efforts to put his country in the best light possible.

Ever ready to enthuse to all who know him of the honor of his native Americans and always willing to lend a helping hand to those who visit England, George Peabody's hospitality has long been evident to any who have made his acquaintance.

But this is not limited just to those who find themselves lonely or homesick for their native land. He has also asked often for news of his past friends and acquaintances from South Danvers.

Most here remember 1835 when our town erected the Lexington Monument. When Mr. Peabody learned our town's efforts to raise

\$1,000 had fallen short by \$300, it was his generosity which made up the difference.

And when the Great Fire on Sept. 22, 1843 destroyed much of our fair town, it was Mr. Peabody who not only donated 50 pounds to the town at large but also contributed \$250 for the rebuilding of our South Congregational Church.

He has especially been concerned of late with the welfare of two of our own native citizens, Captain and Mrs. Sylvester Proctor.

Always conscious not to cause his former employer pain, he enquired through his sister, Mrs. Judith Dodge in 1846 whether they were in any need. And when Mrs. Dodge informed her brother they were comfortable, he was gratified to learn that Captain and Mrs. Proctor "were enjoying a 'green old age' in good health and comfortable circumstances,"

He sent them a gift of \$50 which was placed in the collection plate at church for the poor.

But he just recently learned his old master was in debt and instructed his sister to pay their debts and find them a home where they could be happy.

For he told her, "I have not forgotten that both himself & Wife were kind and indulgent to me." Though the "Religious and Moral principles," Captain and Mrs. Proctor tried to pass on to Mr. Peabody "had little or no influence at the time. . . I have the satisfaction to think that at least a partial compliance with those good lessons . . . Has in some measure led to my almost unexampled success in life."

Whether Mrs. Dodge passed onto her brother Captain Proctor's high opinion of the boy who once worked for him is unknown.

But we have heard through Sylvester Proctor Jr., that his father "often boasts of the smart boy that tended in his store some 40 years ago, who is now a merchant Prince in the great City of London."

George Peabody's Generosity Extends Beyond His Family

The death of George Peabody's father when he was sixteen was a severe blow to the Peabody family. They lost their home and were forced to separate and stay with various relatives.

But George never gave up hope he could buy back the family home for his aging mother.

And in 1817, when he was just 22, he succeeded. His concern for his family, however, didn't end there.

Since then, he has fully

supported his mother and sisters and nieces and nephews, and has aided his brothers in their business endeavors.

By 1827, his largesse extended to charities, as well. Both the Baltimore General Dispensary and St. Mary's Orphaline Female School were the recipient of his donations.

His nephew, George Peabody, the son of his brother David, shared a letter he received from his uncle long ago in 1831.

"Deprived, as I was, of the

opportunity of obtaining anything more than the most common education I am, well qualified to estimate its value by the disadvantages I labour under in the society in which my business. . . frequently throws me. . . and willingly would I now give twenty times the expense attending a good education. . . I can only do to those that come under my care, as I could have wished circumstances had permitted others to have done by me."

From all we have learned of those under his care, he has indeed fulfilled this promise to himself.

And we have learned that in 1832, when he amended his will, he not only provided for his family but also planned on leaving \$2,000 for education in Baltimore and \$5,000 for schools in our very own South Danvers!

Perhaps the day will arrive—and not long in the future—when he will return to South Danvers and so allow us to demonstrate our pride in our very own native son.

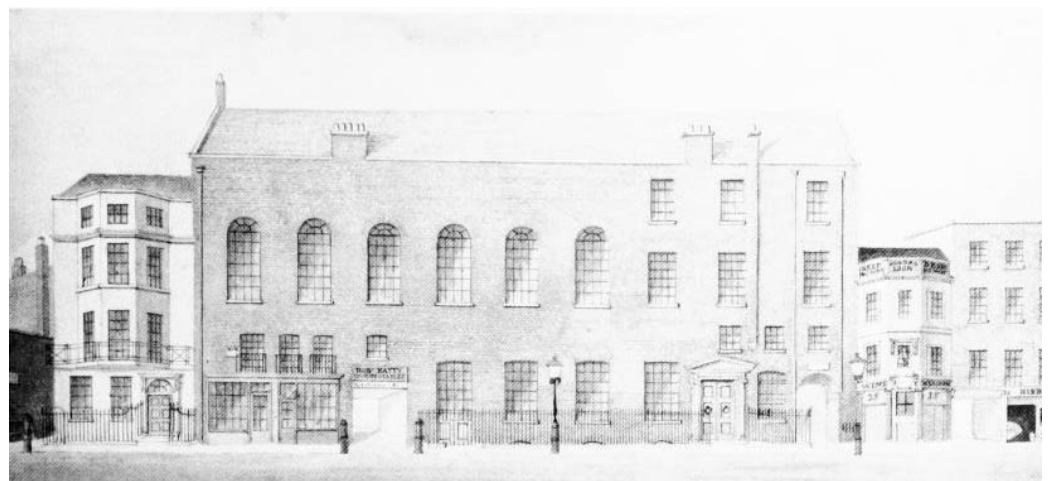
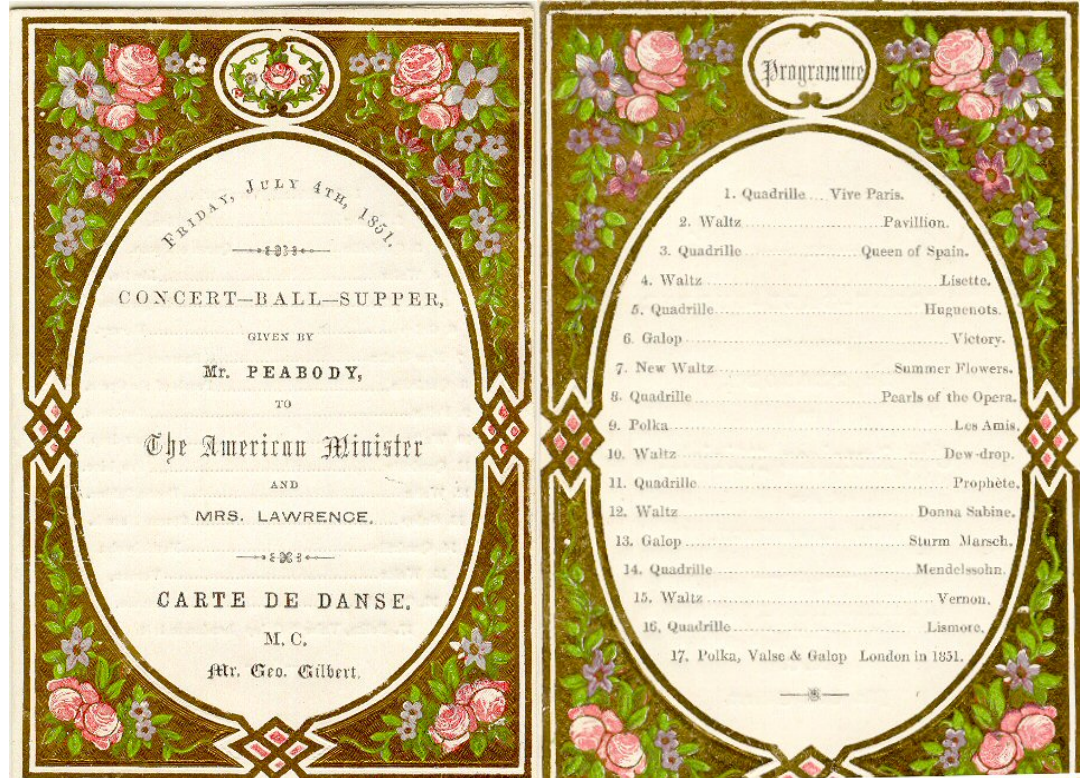
"Your idea of bringing together the inhabitants of two of the greatest nations upon earth. . .was a most felicitous conception."

U.S. Minister to Britain Abbott Lawrence's letter to George

My thanks go to Franklin Parker for his dissertation *George Peabody, Founder of Modern Philanthropy*, 1956.

And his recent work *George Peabody Handbook, A-Z*.

And to Franklin Parker and Betty June Parker for their 2005 work *Rediscovering Educational Philanthropist George Peabody*.



Almack's Assembly Rooms,
Location of George Peabody's July 4, 1851 Dinner

George Peabody's Next Dinner

Word has reached our ears that Mr. Peabody is considering hosting yet another dinner related to the Great Exhibition.

This one shall not be held until the American exhibitors depart London for home. But the projection for this event will be sometime in October of this year.

We look forward to hearing more about this anticipated event.