

Quirky Facts about Boston/Cambridge

by Sarah Jensen

Jensen is a member of the Boston BIO group, will serve as the conference agent speed dating concierge, and is writing a biography of musician and vintner Maynard Keenan.

Blue Laws

Heads-up to visitors: These laws are still on the books! In Boston, it is illegal to:

- Allow your sheep and cows to graze on the Commons on Sundays
- Kiss in front of a church
- Make or sell candy containing more than 1 percent of alcohol
- Frighten a pigeon from another person's property
- Hang a vending machine on a utility pole
- Take a bath without a prescription
- Wear heels higher than 3 inches when on the Commons

Whispering Gallery

Christian Science Center

175 Huntington Ave, Boston

In the Mapparium on the main floor of the Mary Baker Eddy Library is the whispering gallery. The hard spherical surface of the globe reflects sound and allows visitors at opposite ends of the bridge to speak to each other and be heard as if they were standing next to each other.

First Printing Press in America

Stephen Daye set up the first printing press in British North America in 1638 in what is now Harvard Square. First work printed: the broadsheet, The Freeman's Oath; first book: the Bay Psalm Book. A plaque marks the site on a building near the intersection of Dunster Street and Mass Avenue across from the Au Bon Pain.

America's First Female Poet

Anne Bradstreet, b. in England 1612, came to America 1630. She lived for a time in a cabin in the heart of what is now Harvard Square, and at 1380 Mass Ave. (site of Starbucks and Citizens Bank)

Another Poet

A 1690 tombstone in Boston's Granary Burial Ground on Tremont street is that of Mary Goose, first wife of Isaac Goose. His second wife, the Mother Goose who is said to have inspired the fictional character, might be buried here too, but no one is sure.



The Statue of Three Lies

The wording at the base of the statue on the campus of Harvard University states that it is a likeness of John Harvard, who founded the school in 1638.

However:

- Sherman Hoar, a Massachusetts lawyer and congressman, posed for the sculptor
- The Great and General Court of the Massachusetts Bay Colony voted to establish the school, not Mr. Harvard alone
- The Court's vote came in 1636, not 1638, the year John Harvard made a bequest to the school

The Back Bay

It really was a bay. Before a landfill project began in 1857, the area was a 570-acre body of water.

The First Telephone Call

On March 10, 1876, Alexander Graham Bell made the first phone call in history from his workshop at 109 Court Street in Boston. The call was to his assistant, Thomas A. Watson.

A Boston Martyr

Mary Barrett Dyer (c. 1611- June 1, 1660) was an English Puritan turned Quaker who was hanged in 1660 on the Boston Commons for repeatedly defying a Puritan law banning Quakers from the colony. A statue of her stands outside the Massachusetts State House.

The Ether Memorial

In the northwest corner of Boston's Public Garden, near the intersection of Arlington and Beacon streets, stands a statue and fountain commemorating the first use of ether in anesthesia at Mass General Hospital in 1846.

America's First Public School

The first public school in America was established by Puritan settlers in 1635 in the home of schoolmaster Philemon Pormort and was later moved to 45 School Street. The site includes a statue of a famous pupil (Benjamin Franklin), and a mosaic in the sidewalk in the form of a hopscotch.

The Pie That's a Cake

Boston Cream Pie was invented at the Parker House in Boston and is now the official dessert of the state. The Parker House dinner roll was also invented there.

The State House

A golden pinecone sits on top of the gold dome of the State House, symbolizing the importance of logging to Massachusetts in the 18th century. Inside, suspended in the House of Representatives Hall, is the Sacred Cod, a five-foot-long fish carved of pine symbolizing the bygone importance of the fishing industry in Massachusetts. The Speaker of the House faces the cod during meetings.

The Weather Report

The colored lights atop the old Hancock building tell the weather: "Solid blue, clear view. Flashing blue, clouds due. Solid red, rain ahead. Flashing red, snow instead." (During the summer, flashing red means the Red Sox game is rained out.)

A Christmas Carol

Phillip Brooks, the ninth rector of the Back Bay's Trinity Church, wrote the Christmas Carol "O Little Town of Bethlehem" after visiting the Holy Land in 1865.

Libraries

Harvard University's is second largest library in the country (after the Library of Congress), containing more than 15,000,000 volumes. The Boston Public Library is third with more than 14,000,000.

The Steaming Kettle

At 63 Court Street in Government Center hangs a large tea kettle manufactured in 1873 to advertise the Oriental Tea Company. It contains an apparatus that produces steam. (Location is now, appropriately, a Starbucks.)

Boston's Buildings

- The Darth Vader Building: One Exeter Plaza, constructed in 1984, took on the name due to its tall mansard roof and dominating appearance.
- The Pregnant Building: 100 Federal Street is so nicknamed because of the bulge of several stories near its base.

Trains, Planes, and Automobiles

The Boston University Bridge on Commonwealth Avenue is the only place in the world where a boat can sail under a train going under a car that is driving under an airplane.

The Great Molasses Flood

On January 15, 1919, a large molasses storage tank in the North End burst, and two million gallons of molasses gushed through the streets at an estimated 35 mph, killing 21 and injuring 150. North End residents claim that on hot summer days, they can still smell molasses.

The Shaw Memorial

A bronze monument on Beacon Hill opposite the State House commemorates Col. Robert Gould Shaw and the soldiers who served under him in the 54th Massachusetts (Colored) Volunteer Infantry Regiment during the Civil War.

Love is in the Air

The pair of swans living in the pond in Boston Public Garden are named Romeo and Juliet. They've been together for 10 years, and both are female.