

Scenes from the Past...



The home of Charles B. Boynton, Howard University's first President, at the intersection of N Street and Vermont Avenue, NW.

photo—Walter Dyson, Howard University (1941).

The first President of Howard University, Charles B. Boynton, took office on March 19, 1867, marking the official beginning of the esteemed institution that had been conceived in his house near the intersection of N Street and Vermont Avenue earlier that year. His contemporaries called him "President of the Board of Trustees," and his tenure would be short; he resigned on August 27, 1867 over a dispute with namesake Oliver Otis Howard stemming from their differing racial policies.

Charles Brandon Boynton had been born in Stockbridge, Massachusetts, on June 12, 1806. He entered Williams College in the class of 1827, but, owing to illness, was obliged to leave during his senior year. He took up the study of law, and, after filling one or two local offices, was elected to



photo—courtesy, Kelsey & Assoc. private collection. Charles Boynton's son, journalist Henry Van Ness Boynton, owner of 1321 R Street, NW.

the Massachusetts legislature. While studying law he became interested in religion, qualified himself for the ministry, and was ordained pastor of the Presbyterian Church at Housatonic, Connecticut, in 1840.

After a stay of three years, he moved to churches in Lansingburg and Pittsfield, Massachusetts, and in 1846 to Cincinnati, Ohio where he remained until 1877; with the exception of his terms of service as chaplain of the House of Representatives in the 39th and 40th Congresses (1865-1869), while he resided at N Street and Vermont Avenue. Boynton had earlier ventured to Washington to serve as the first pas-

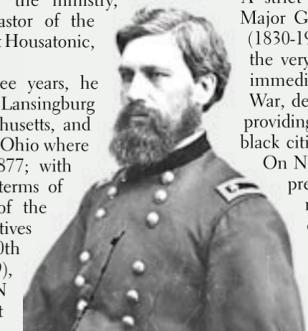
tor of the First Congregational Church upon its founding in 1865.

On November 20, 1866, 10 members including Howard, of various socially concerned groups of the time, met in Washington to discuss plans for a theological seminary to train "colored" ministers. Interest was sufficient, however, in creating an educational institute for disciplines other than the ministry. The result was the Howard Normal Institute for the Education of Preachers and Teachers. On January 8, 1867, the Board of Trustees met at Boynton's house and voted to change the name of the institution to Howard University.

Boynton bore an important part in the anti-slavery controversy, which was fiercely waged in Cincinnati during the early years of his pastorate. His published books include *Journey through Kansas, with Sketch of Nebraska* (Cincinnati, 1855); *The Russian Empire* (1856); *The Four Great Powers—England, France, Russia, and America: their Policy, Resources, and Probable Future* (1866); and *History of the Navy during the Rebellion* (New York, 1868).

A strict abolitionist, Boynton and Major General Oliver Otis Howard (1830-1909) had differing views of the very early forms of segregation immediately following the Civil War, despite their common goal of providing affordable education for black citizens at the collegiate level.

On November 17, 1867, Boynton preached a sermon on race relations in which he advocated that blacks be allowed to enter churches of white congregations and become members, but where existing black churches were located he encouraged them to remain and strengthen their own religious institutions,



photo—Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division. Major General Oliver Otis Howard, as photographed by Matthew Brady.

advocating voluntary segregation. Howard, on the other hand, mandated integration at every society level.

Boynton also advocated the self-reliant "city within a city" theory of advancement, opportunity, and business patronage that black leaders lectured on during the 1920s along U Street. In 1867, Boynton preached that "every one taken thus from the number of the black, diminishes to that extent, their strength and their power of progress and elevation. We can afford to receive the Colored people, but their own race can not afford to lose them." (From Walter Dyson's *Howard*



The intersection of N Street and Vermont Avenue is seen here in the 1853-1884 Sachse Map. Depicted at the lower left is Thomas Circle with Logan's Circle shown in the upper right.

University: A History, 1941)

Howard and his followers continued to publicly push for racial integration in all aspects of private and public life, and Boynton left the position as both pastor of the First Congregational Church on September 6, 1867, and as the first President of Howard University, a month earlier, on August 27, 1867. He was replaced by Byron Sunderland until Howard became President a year later, in 1868.

Boynton's son, Henry Van Ness Boynton, was a well-known newspaper correspondent who built the house at 1321 R Street between 1875 and 1879, where he and his father lived, according to the 1880 federal census.

Henry Boynton charged Howard with misappropriating funds from the Freedman's Bureau which he controlled, and a federal investigation ensued in 1870 to determine if Howard directed funds donated to public institutions such as Howard University to promote his own namesake institution. As Commissioner of the Freedmen's Bureau, Howard was known for promoting the welfare and education of former slaves, freedmen, and war refugees.

By 1870, an astonishing \$529,000 from the Bureau's coffers had been donated to Howard University, in contrast to 20 other black schools such as Lincoln University had only received a total of \$15,000. The issue softened, and Howard himself served as the University's President

from 1868 to 1874.

Charles Boynton died in Cincinnati, Ohio, on April, 27, 1883; his son, Henry Van Ness Boynton died at 1321 R Street in 1905. Mordecai Wyatt Johnson (1890-1976) later served as Howard University's first black president, and its 13th, from 1926 until 1960.

—Paul Kelsey Williams
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photo—Paul K. Williams—The InTowner. The Henry Van Ness Boynton House at 1321 R Street, NW as seen today, recently converted into condominiums.

FOOD

From p. 14

These first berries, green and unripe, are the parents of our black peppercorns. Workers today pick them by hand and lay them out on palm leaf mats to dry in the sun. In the steady heat, the berries shrivel and gradually turn black.

If the green fruit remains on the vine, they become "ruby and transparent clear," Peter Mundy wrote. The outer skin of this ripe fruit is removed to leave an inner core, which is dried to make the milder white pepper.

In the ancient Indian language Sanskrit, "pippali" meant berry. From this root, the Greek pepper and the Latin piper, the foundation of our name for the spice, originated.

Pepper was "hot" and "dry," Sanskrit writers emphasized. Indian physicians recommended it as a remedy for fever, hernia, and dyspepsia. Pepper, one medical text stated, perked up the stomach and cleansed the sinuses: "... it is light and adds relish to food. It dislodges or dries up phlegm and the like it is an appetizer." Because of the action of piperade, an alkaloid that stimulates the saliva and gastric juices, pepper does, in fact, help digestion.

Greek sailors who traveled to the Malabar Coast, were enthralled with the pepper berry, which locals nicknamed "yavanesta," Sanskrit for the "passion of the Greeks." It was the Romans, though, who became the supreme traffickers in the spice. By the first century AD, large Roman trading ships were sailing to India's Malabar Coast to reap the spoils of the pepper country. Harnessing the monsoon winds, the fleets headed east from Alexandria, the Roman outpost in Egypt, each summer and returned with their cargo of spices in the winter. The 5,000-mile passage was the longest trade route of the time.

Gold and silver coins, central to the pepper transaction, were a vital part of the cargo. "They arrive with gold and depart with pepper," Indian poet Tayan-Kannanar wrote of the Roman traders on the Malabar Coast.

Back in Rome, the pepper was unloaded and stored in mammoth warehouses. In the "perfume quarter," vendors sold paper packets of pepper. The wrapping was made from the papyrus taken from old books.

The enticing spice was also the equivalent of capital. Reserves of pepper were stored in the Roman treasury and the spice quickly became a medium of exchange. The Romans often demanded pepper as tribute from their subjects. Their enemies took heed. Alaric, the King of the Visigoths, threatened to destroy Rome with his army unless he received a ransom of 3,000 kilos of pepper. The Romans agreed but the city was sacked nonetheless.

Pepper pleased the Roman palate. It laced many of the rich sauces of imperial cooking. Pepper, cardamom, cumin, mint, honey, and other seasonings infused a "digestive sauce," that, historian Jack Turner notes, accompanied meat dishes. Sweets were also accented with pepper. Apicius, the Roman gastronome, offers a recipe for a honeyed white flour fritter spiced with black pepper. Pepper even added its punch to alcoholic refreshments. "... put ground pepper with skimmed honey in a small container for spiced wine," instructed Apicius. "When it is the time for drinking, mix some of the honey with the wine."

The "choice delicacy," as Apuleius, the Roman author called it, was most common on the tables of the wealthy and rarer in the homes of plebeians. A form of display, pepper was dispensed from piperatoria, silver pepper pots. Nobles gave gifts of pepper to show off their status. A lawyer cited by historian Turner, distributed three half-pounds of incense and pepper, Libyan figs, and Tuscan sausages at the annual festival of Saturnalia.

There were, however, naysayers who carped about the Roman infatuation with pepper. "Some foods attract by sweetness, some by their appearance, but neither the pod nor the berry of pepper has anything to be said for it," the writer Pliny complained. "We only want it for its bite — and we will go to India to get it! Who was the first to try it with food? Who was so anxious to develop an appetite that hunger would not do the trick? Pepper and ginger both grow wild in their native countries, and yet we value them in terms of gold and silver." □

Part 2 will conclude the story next month.

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photo—courtesy, Kelsey & Assoc. private collection. Charles B. Boynton, Howard University's first President.

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