

Montgomery

At the beginning of last year, I moved from New York to New Haven, Connecticut, partly for study, partly for other reasons which were never entirely clear to me. I entered the city, known to me previously only by name, on a glorious early winter's day. However, even on my arrival, as the train rolled pulled along side the staid monumental arches of Cass Gilbert's Second Revival Beaux Arts Union Station, I had begun to feel unwell. Still, after stowing my bags, I spent my first few hours uncertainly walking the streets and alleys of New Haven's historic downtown, until at last, plagued by head-ache, I sought out what would be my new home for the following year.



It was some weeks later when I first encountered Morgan. I had spent the evening at a Cabaret theatre with some colleagues. We had known of a serious winter storm predicted to strike the area that evening, but had decided to brave the elements to attend the performance. On arriving, a number of inches of snow had already accumulated on the city's streets and sidewalks and there was a line extending outside of the theaters small lobby as people took the extra time to shake the snow from their boots.



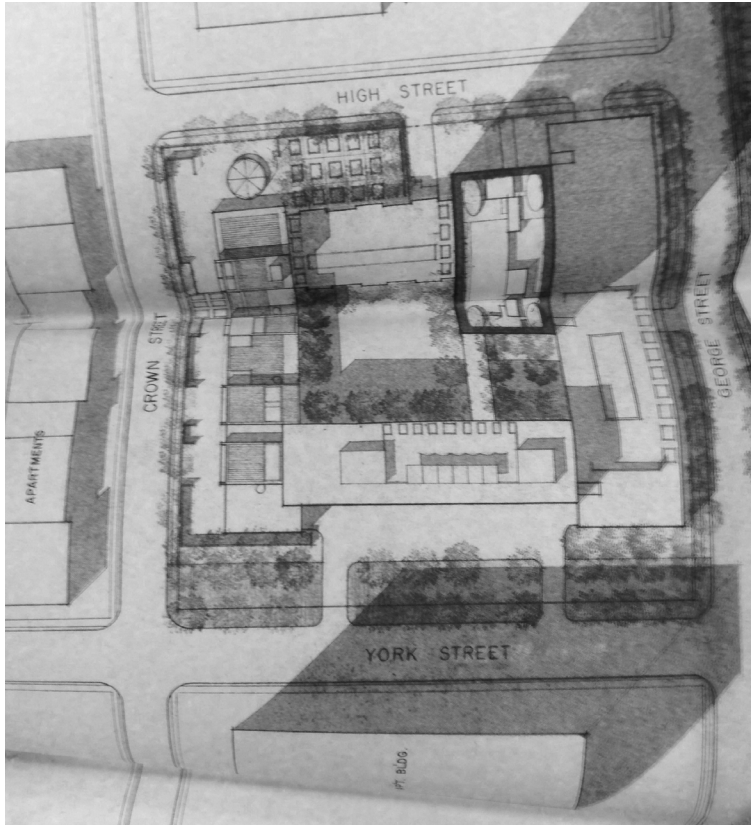
But when we emerged from the theater, sometime after midnight, there were well over three feet of snow on the ground and it was still falling heavily. Drifts had formed that extended from their leeward origin all the way across streets and sidewalks to such an extent that entire stoops of row houses had been buried under snow. Street signs, rendered illegible on one side by the blowing snow, appeared only a few feet above the new, white ground.

Having parted ways with my group, I began my journey home. I was forced to find my way through the middle of the street, where the snow was the shallowest. Thankfully, there were few cars on the road save for those that had gotten stuck in the snow and been abandoned by their drivers until morning, when the city would begin to clear the roads. There were only a few others outside, braving the weather in their thick coats and their eyes at their feet to avoid the feet.



I was still only just beginning to familiarize myself with the New Haven, but knew the nearby streets well enough to recognize them even in their disguised state. I remember I had just turned off York Street onto Crown, which was for the most part protected from the wind, if not the snow when I first encountered Montgomery. With my head down and the snow insulating all sounds but that of the wind, I had not recognized the presence of another soul on the street until he was quite close. He came upon me quickly, as he was traveling through the snow on a pair of cross country skis. Upon pulling alongside me, he slowed. When I turned to him with a question about his mode of transportation, he was not at all surprised by my direct approach and answered me without the slightest hesitation, as, in my experience, is often the way of solitary travelers who pass so many days in uninterrupted silence. Occasionally, they even open up to strangers unreservedly in such circumstances, although this was not the case with Montgomery in front of the thin-shell concrete parking arches at the foot of the York Street Towers, nor did he ever tell me much about his origins and his own life. Upon removing his hood and goggles, he appeared almost youthful, with gray, curiously wavy hair. That day, as on all our later meetings, Montgomery wore a heavy hiking coat over a tailored but long outdated suit jacket, with thick, workman's trousers. Our Crown Street conversations, as he sometimes called them later, turned primarily on local history, in accordance with his own somewhat astonishing expertise.

We were quickly called away by a yell from a nearby street corner where two emergency vehicles were trapped in the snow, their blue and yellow lights still cycling. Apparently, one had come to the aid of the other and both had gotten stuck. Together, we worked to excavate the wheels from the snow to clear an opening to the narrow path a snow plough was struggling to carve.



After freeing these vehicles—who knows how far they made it after that—I invited Montgomery to join me for a late night coffee in my new apartment. The history of New Haven and Crown Street specifically was the subject we discussed that evening as we sat together until the early hours.

Before taking his leave, he removed a photocopied sheet of paper taken, it seemed, from the city records, that recorded the minutes of the town meeting when Crown Street was officially named and dedicated on 22 September 1784. Crown Street was to be constituted of the street from Joseph Howell's across the squares between the old and new houses of Mr. Joel Atwater. Did you know, he asked, that the numbering of Crown Street has been altered on three separate occasions? In fact, originally, the numbering began at Howe Street extending easterly to State Street with the odd numbers on the south side. In 1862, however, the houses were renumbered so that the odd numbers appear on the north side of Crown Street. Governor H.B. Harrison's house between College Street and High Street was number 85 in 1854, 160 in 1862, and 266 in 1884. If the renaming indicates the increase of building density on Crown Street, what explanation might there be for the oscillation of the even and odd numbers, he asked? Did it imply some sort of metaphysical flip in the inhabitant's conception of Crown? What was 'odd' about Crown's north side? You wouldn't imagine how difficult it is tracking down individual addresses in this chaos he offered on his way out the door.

N.H. Register
3/22/1725

Crown Street

Land sixteen feet North of the North end of said
Moses dwelling house and said Street is to extend
fifty feet Northward in breadth from said Southward
line through the land of Miles Gorham, Pehtab
Webster and Jeremiah Atwater. To be and remain
an open Public Street for the use of the said City
of Concord. In witness whereof We have hereunto set
our hands this 22 day of September 1784.

Roger Sherman, Mayor
Samuel Bishop,
David Austin } Aldermen
John Whiting }

Timothy Jones, Jonathan Sitch, James Rice, Stephen
Ball, Joseph Howells, Jeremiah Atwater, Ebenezer
Bridgely, Asaph Edwards, Jonathan Ingerson,
Joseph Bradley, Joseph Thompson, James Hillhouse,
Eneas Munroe. Common Council.

Our next conversation took place some weeks later in an unusual bar known as the Black Bear Saloon on the corner of Crown and Temple. It was unclear to me why Montgomery had chosen this place until he directed my attention to the elaborate marble work and terra cotta detailing overhead. This late Renaissance Revival building was the former home of the United Illuminating Company. It's construction marked a boom for Crown Street's development as a commercial zone. Montgomery presented me a newspaper clipping from April 25, 1915 titled 'The Transformation of Crown and

How The House Numbers Were Changed On Crown Street.

In 1840, the first Directory shows the numbers on Crown Street began at or near Howe Street and extended easterly to State Street, the odd numbers being on the south side. Governor H. B. Harrison's house, for instance, between High and College St. was No. 85 in 1854.

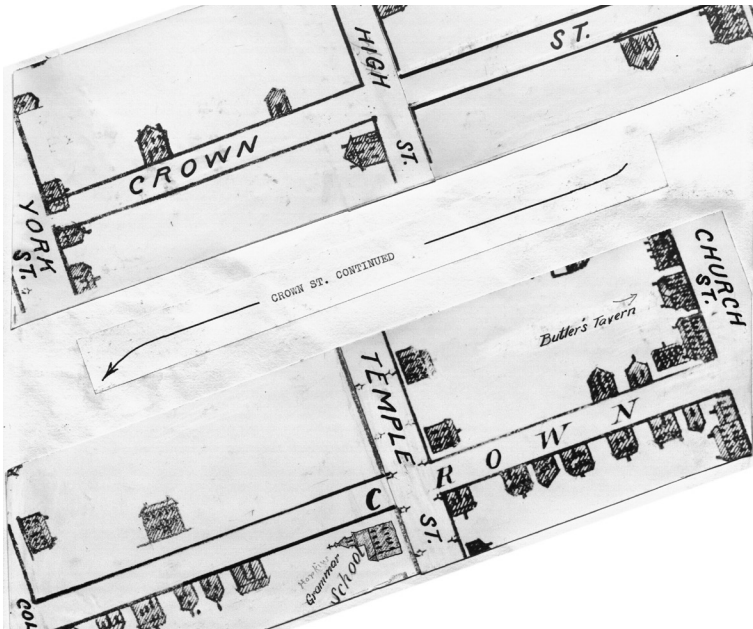
In 1862, the numbering was reversed running west from State Street, the even numbers being on the south side. Governor Harrison's house then became No. 160.

In 1884, the number of buildings having increased, the numbers were raised but still ran from east to west, with the even numbers on the south side. The Harrison house thus became No. 266 in 1884.

Neighboring College Street.' It read, rapid development is now in progress on Crown Street westward from Temple Street with the invasion of that street by commercial houses. The beginning of the changes dates back to about the time that the United Illuminating Company purchased the Abram Heaton house on the northwest corner of Temple and Crown Streets and put up its handsome office building. Back of the Illuminating Company stood the old Bowers house which was one of the fine residences on Crown Street in its day but marked to go to make room for the business expansion.



Montgomery went into detail regarding his own research into the expansion of business on Crown Street. On nearby College Street, the erection of the Taft Hotel and the Schubert theatre were signs of this new development at the start of the twentieth century. This new development marked a transformative moment in the evolution of Crown



Street, making it over for business purposes and radically changing its character. As the article relayed, there are not now left many tenants of even the homes of twenty years ago in College Street or in Crown Street. Reluctant as some of the owners have been to move, business has swept into the streets at such a pace as to force people to give



up their residences in these streets and move elsewhere. He described the establishment of a new club house for the New Haven lodge of Elks midway between Temple and College Streets with a large assembly hall and lodge room in the rear. A few doors to the west there stood a three story building that was the home for Hiram Lodge No. 1 of the Masonic fraternity. According to Montgomery, such fraternities and secret societies, like the Book and Gavel Club and the New Haven Aerie Fraternal Order of Eagles have had a long legacy on Crown Street, especially given its proximity to the Yale campus.



Some weeks later, we met on a fine Spring day to walk the length of Crown Street. As we walked, Montgomery would stop occasionally to remove a camera from his rucksack, an old Ensign with telescopic bellows, to photograph particular buildings. At one point, we paused where he claimed a house once stood at what was formerly number 155 Crown Street, formerly known as the Thacher house. In the late nineteenth century, Yale Professor Thomas Thacher's family resided in the house at 155 Crown Street. The house was built for Jeremiah Day, then Professor of Mathematics and Astronomy at Yale College in 1815. Asahel Tuttle owned the land and was contracted to build the



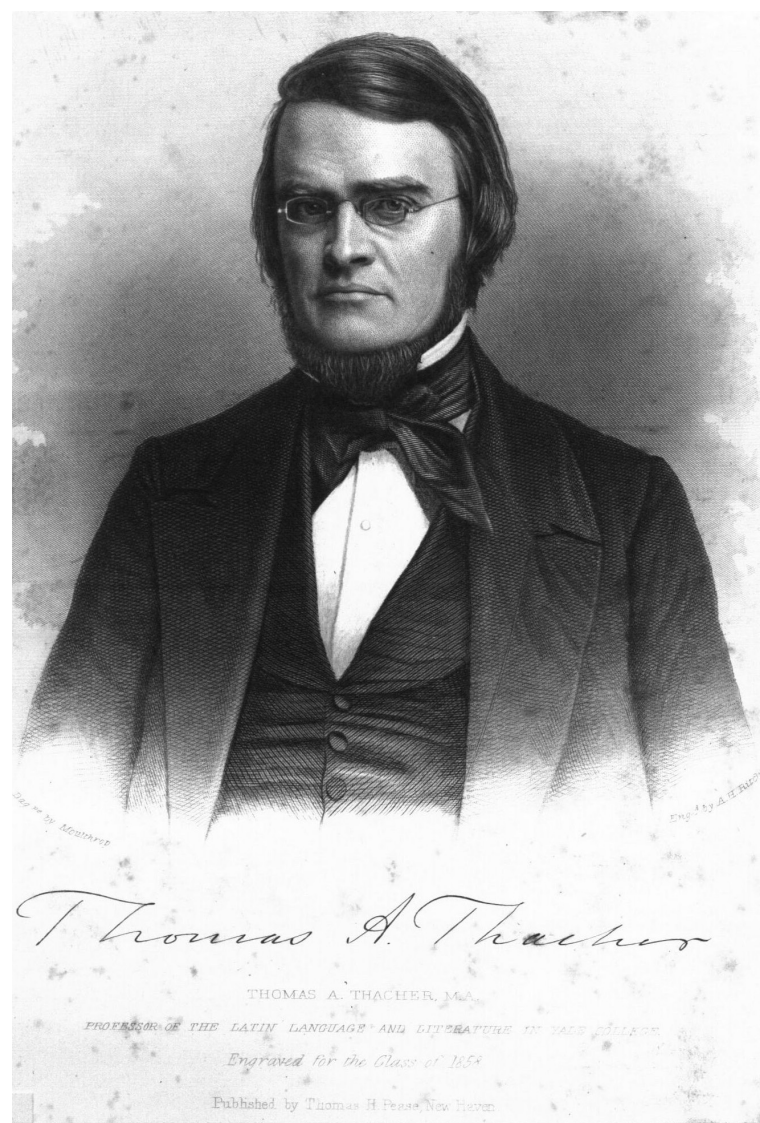
house. After their completion, the property was to be conveyed by deed to Professor Day. However, in 1817, when the house was nearly ready for occupation, then President of Yale College, Timothy Dwight died and Professor Day was appointed his successor. Having been appointed President, he asked permission of the Yale Corporation to occupy the house he had just built, but this was refused on the ground that the house was too remote from the College. The house was consequently occupied, during the next twenty-nine years by others, professors, bishops, generals, and, from 1830-1846 by Professor Josiah W. Gibbs.



*With the best wishes,
I am, truly,
your friend,*

Thomas A. Thacher

On 21 October 1846, the day he inducted his successor, President Woolsey, into office, President Day was finally able to move into the house which he had built for himself almost thirty years earlier, and he continued to occupy it until his death on 22 August 1867. From that date until the house's demolition in 1915 to make way for new business development, the house was occupied by Professor Thomas Thacher and his family. In fact, Montgomery pointed out, Thacher's wife, Elizabeth was the second daughter of President Day, so the house remained, to some extent a part of the Day family legacy until its eventual demolition.



I had not heard from Montgomery for many weeks, unsure of when our next contact would transpire, when I received a letter containing assembled fragments he had collected regarding a Mr. Ebenezer Huggins, a resident of the lower part of Crown Street, from public records and his surviving descendants. Mr. Huggins, a local well-heeled businessman had either been unable or unwilling (Montgomery seemed inclined to believe the latter) to engage personally in the military service of his country during the Revolutionary War. Instead, he hired a man to fight in the army as his substitute, regrettably common transaction at the time. When the alarm signaling the British were approach

New Haven one morning, Mrs. Huggins, concerned that her husband might be arrested and taken prisoner, sewed a guinea into the waistband of his clothes. Mr. Huggins, who had gone into the street with his musket after the British had seized control, was arrested at the foot of Crown St, where it intersects with State when encountered by some



British soldiers for bearing arms against the King of England. He was carried to New York and imprisoned aboard an old prison ship in the East River. According to the account of his granddaughter, he managed to escape his confines by ingratiating himself with the ship's commander. With the guinea so fortunately sewed into his waistband, he

CHRISTIANITY
The following is a list of the names of the
persons who have been baptized in the
church of Christ, since the last meeting
May 17. (Copies of the same may be
obtained on application.)

DOOLITTLE'S MAP OF 1824

OPERATIONS ON THE TERTH
J. B. WYMAN.
The following is a list of the names of the
persons who have been baptized in the
church of Christ, since the last meeting
May 17. (Copies of the same may be
obtained on application.)

FOR SALE.
A HOUSE in Crown street, con-
taining 10 rooms, and a
building lot in Orange st. for 15
feet, also a lot in the same street
for 10 feet, all of which are in the
Crown street lot, and are for sale
at a low price. Apply to
J. B. WYMAN.

FOR SALE.
THE HOUSE and LOT in Crown
street, containing 10 rooms, and a
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for 10 feet, all of which are in the
Crown street lot, and are for sale
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purchased a boat making a night crossing of the Long Island Sound and reaching New Haven under cover of darkness with a fellow escapee, a Mr. Robert Townsend, made his grand return to his wife and children.

I have spent many of my off hours trying to identify what might remain of the Huggins residence and have a number of leads. I await my next encounter with Montgomery, whose correspondence has grown increasingly sporadic, to explore the matter further.



W Sheridan

Sources:

New Haven Historical Society

Dana Archive