

Mrs. G. Wright
2 months in Boston
4 months in U.S.
from Olso
11/30/55

The first thing I noticed was a very large grey building across the street as we come up from the underground station. It didn't give a harmonious impression to me, I like a lot of windows and this building had lots of windows but they were too small and they had too much decoration between the windows and also a horrid blue color that was very distracting. And then the same thing, too much color around the windows of the houses down the street. There was one house on the same side of the street that had about three different shades of green around the shop windows and it really looked very bad. The shop window was nice and big but it was lost in all the color around it, and you hardly noticed what was inside, at least from the other side of the street it appeared to be that way. And then on the same side of the street there were all different styles of houses, they didn't seem to match, especially the heights of the houses varied so much so with some houses you could see the sides and you could see that they were not really meant to be exposed. I remember one, a darkish brick that was especially ugly that stuck up beside a lower building and it gave the impression of a dirty factory. And the pavement was out of proportion, it was so large the street seemed narrow in comparison to the pavement which was very wide. I noticed that there were a lot of cracks and mended places in the pavements, parts of them were laid with with brick, parts with cement. It didn't give a very uniform impression. All the high staircases that led down from the houses especially on the side by the subway, on Arlington Street, that disturbs the picture too. Staircases with either heavy stone railings or black iron railings, that I thought was very ugly. I noticed the church on the corner as we came to the intersection and we could see across to the park. I thought that was really a very lovely park with the exception of the house that was sitting out in the pond there, I particularly remember that. Then we walked back and we could see the big Ritz Carlton building, very big. It gave the impression of being very modern in the midst of a not too modern area but personally I didn't like it too much, it was too much like a big crate, it didn't have any graceful lines to soften the impression of square block. I noticed again the lower houses that followed especially the dark colors in the woodwork in the houses surrounding the windows, mostly black I think and the houses themselves were dark brown or dark red, altogether they give a rather gloomy impression. I noticed on the other side of the street where the hotel in (Newbury St.) there were some nice big shops windows. Yes, the side that we walked on.

Then we saw the church. Then these dark, ugly houses. I liked the church but the surroundings didn't do it justice. It was squeezed in between so much rather bad architecture. I thought the church itself, with the tall spire, was nice but you only noticed the top part because the bottom was squeezed between all these little dark houses. There was no garden, no open space around it. Then I noticed there were a couple of trees on the same side of the street. A very welcome sight, also. There was sort of a square behind the trees, one house sitting a little further back from the rest – Bonwit Teller's. And then this dark passageway where I was surprised to find that anybody lived. I didn't realize that the signs were so mis_____ I was surprised to find that somebody lived in the alley. It was quite gloomy and dark, fire escape ladders. Another thing I noticed was that the streets weren't too clean. Places of paper spread everywhere.

Then we came out again of that long, dark passageway.

I noticed that the traffic moved kind of slowly. It may be due to the street being narrow, I suppose.

I imagine this is a busy section of the town.

What thing or.....greatest impression on you?
I think it was the sight of the park, such a relief.

Do you remember.....buildings?

Yes, I remember those I have described. I can see practically every one of them. The hotel and all the little dark buildings and the grey one with the windows, the Cunard, the church, two churches rather.

Do you remember architectural etc. features...?

She felt she had already answered this and could say no more.

Do you remember people?

I thought they were business people most of them, in a hurry. Also workmen were loading the garbage trucks in the alley. People out shopping, ladies were in the majority.

Do you remember sounds?

Nothing but the ordinary street sounds from traffic.

Do you remember smells?

No, I don't think so. I was trying to remember if the smell in the alley was bad but I cannot specifically.

What....traffic?

It seemed to move slowly. There was a traffic light at the intersection so that the cars were sitting there but it seemed that they were sitting there quite a bit.

Signs?

I remember the street signs for street crossing along the park. I saw Cunard in black, the window was surrounded by black tiles, shiny. The Ritz-Carlton Hotel, which I probably wouldn't have noticed but the building was so unusual that I wanted to see what the name was, and Bonwit Tellers. I remember that I saw names of shops but I can't recall them.

Definite areas?

I would probably say that there were at least two areas. The business street that we passed along first (Boylston) and alley that was not a business section at all, and possibly along the church, down from the hotel, that didn't give the appearance of being such a busy business section. There were some shops along there but there were not as many people or so much traffic, it seemed to be much quieter street (Newbury) Three areas.

Was the corner where the toy department is, downstairs, with the fence, was that in the actual area? I noticed that, the fence seemed to be in the way there and the gap in the pavement.

Was there.....character of their own?

No I wouldn't say so there were so many styles, such a mixture of design and architecture that you really didn't get the impression of the whole of anything. No character of their own. Maybe the part after the hotel where the little houses with the dark wooden frames, they really looked old, you could count 4 or 5 houses as a whole and

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they were of the same period and you could say they had a character of their own but I wouldn't say a favorable one.

Order?

so that things look neat! Yes I remember the view down from Bonwit Tellers there were some new modern buildings (down Berkley street across Boylston toward Stuart) that was the only harmonious thing I saw.

Continuity?

Definitely no continuity in the area.

Sidewalk pavement?

First there was a part where there were brick laid down and it was not smooth and even then there was a section where there was cement which looked like it had been mended in several places so there were squares of black asphalt and it looked very bad and it was slanting too, the pavement was.

Street pavement?

That was asphalt and it didn't appear to be in such bad shape as the pavements but not in excellent shape.

How does...cityfit in with you conception of Boston?

I wish I had seen more of Boston to be able to tell you. I have been down to the business section around Park street . I really cannot give any comparisons.

First time in this area.

Could you find your destination?

Oh yes, I have a picture of the whole area, mainly because I knew I was coming for an interview and I looked carefully at things, I wouldn't have remembered much otherwise.

feel at ease?

I didn't feel at ease when we walked through that dark passageway, I wouldn't have liked to walk along there along but on the other streets I felt at ease.

feelings experienced as we walked?

My impressions were really my feelings too. I didn't think it was a very nice section because there was too much disorder, too many unharmonious sights, except the park, that gave me a very good feeling inside.

Mrs. George Wright, originally from Oslo. At the time of interview 11/55 she had been in the U.S. four months, the first two in Texas, the last two in Cambridge.