

# PART I

## AMERICA:

### THE WALTONS AND GIAMMATTEIS

Because of [my father's] openness, an openness that hated shadows and caviling and prejudice and stereotyping of individuals in any form—he had suffered from that himself—he was open above all to ideas.

—A. Bartlett Giamatti,  
Eulogy for Valentine John Giamatti, April 15, 1982



## FROM ENGLAND TO AMERICA

Who can set a limit to . . . the influence of a life that is thoughtful and earnest and idealistic, a life that finds its circumference not in the contracted circle of its own selfish interests but in the welfare of humanity.

—Mary Emma Woolley, President, Mount Holyoke College

### THE FORMATION OF FAMILY VALUES: THE WALTONS AND DAVIDSONS

Peggy Walton understood a central thread in America's formation: the insidious force and harm of Anglo-Saxon prejudice.

King Henry III of England was nine years old when he assumed the throne in October 1216. He was Catholic. When, following civil and European wars, Henry was ready to govern without formal guidance from others, he promised to enforce the terms of the Magna Carta, which had been negotiated by his father, King John, in 1215. Though that enforcement flowed unevenly, well beyond Henry's reign, the principle of constraining the monarchy's—the government's—arbitrary rule was set in time, if not yet in stone. It became one hard-earned, critical antecedent to how men and women who immigrated to America thought about the values underpinning the form that government should take. Henry III's Catholicism did not survive. England and other parts of growing Great Britain became Protestant, the product of Henry VIII's pique with the Catholic Church over divorce and the intellectual and spiritual revolt against the Church led by Martin Luther and John Calvin.<sup>1</sup>

One other outcome of Henry III's reign—through his marriage with Eleanor of Provence—was five children, and varied descendants. Two of those descendants, Thomas Rogers and his son Joseph, were passengers on the *Mayflower* when it arrived in Plymouth, Massachusetts (so named), in 1620, the moment of disembarkation that provided the essential factual predicate in the later, quintessential Protestant, Anglo-Saxon claim for being “the white man par excellence”

in America. Joseph Rogers survived the first winter and married. Rogers and his wife finally settled in Maine's first community, Berwick. Rogers was an ancestor of Mary ("Peggy") Claybaugh Walton, Bart Giamatti's mother.<sup>2</sup>

In 1634, Richard Bartlett, a shoemaker from West Sussex, and in 1635, the Reverend William Walton of Devon and his wife, Elizabeth, arrived. Walton's grandfather served as private secretary to Sir Francis Walsingham, who was secretary of state and chief of intelligence during the reign of Elizabeth I—the era of William Shakespeare and Edmund Spenser. With the settlement of Bartlett and Walton, the enduring geographic base of family life for Peggy Walton was largely settled: Maine and Massachusetts.<sup>3</sup>



In the English settlement of America's northeast coast, Protestantism took various forms, none more dogmatic in its proscriptions for acceptable conduct and self-centered in its belief for exploiting others than Calvinism. It was the form embraced largely by the English colonists in Boston Bay settlements. Jonathan Edwards (Yale 1720) refined it with two critical tenets: God, Edwards believed, had specially elected individuals to determine the cultural and social rules—and the law—of those people who needed to be governed, that is, the doctrine of the elect, predestination, theological determinism, what cultural historian Vernon Parrington described as "the theological complement of the class prejudices of the times." The Calvinists "were . . . rigidly aristocratic," the ministry brutally hierarchical in its exercise of control. Everyone else was "born to sin and heirs to damnation." Also implicit in the same tenets, until it became explicit, was that "God means us to be ambitious. . . . The Protestant religion encourages success in capitalist endeavor. . . . Business was virtuous, and success was blessed." The consequence was easily predictable: support for slavery, suppression of Native Americans, justification for slavery after it was outlawed in Massachusetts, missionary zeal beyond the pale, and, in time, the cultural foundation for the "Great Race" and the "science" of eugenics.<sup>4</sup> Parrington put it plainly: "That the immigrant Puritans brought in their intellectual luggage the system of Calvin . . . must be reckoned a misfortune, out of which flowed many of the bickering and much of the intolerance that left a stain on . . . New England history."<sup>5</sup>

Those Calvinist tenets were challenged elsewhere, including by Peggy Walton's ancestors in one evolving Protestant variation in which community control and consensus—a form of democracy—were paramount: Congregationalism. Thomas Hooker, an intellectually gifted minister, became an ardent foe of Boston Bay's Calvinism. He emphasized "the voice of the individual subject" and sought "to remove the veil [of Calvinist sanctimony] from the faces of the common people . . . thereby proving his right to be remembered among the early stewards of our American democracy."<sup>6</sup> That community control and consensus and "voice of the individual" happened in South Berwick, Maine (as Berwick grew

and incorporated into North and South), where, by 1825, in the First Parish Congregational Church, Peggy Walton's more immediate ancestors—the ones she would have observed or heard about directly and who tempered her fate—came to worship.<sup>7</sup>



In a family to which history mattered, there was irreverence for custom that formed the family's values and Peggy's in a way that mattered in her son's life.

Two of Peggy's ancestors were members of the Society of Friends—Quakers—in abhorrently conservative, Calvinist Salem, Massachusetts, in the early years following the landing at Plymouth. Banished by the governor under pain of death for not being Calvinists, they took refuge on Shelter Island in Long Island Sound, where both died of privation and exposure. Neither would renounce their religious beliefs. Their children, Daniel and Provided, were separated from them yet refused, also under threat of banishment, to abide by the governor's directive. With the confirmation of the local court, the governor directed that both children be sold as slaves. It was only the failure to find anyone who would take them that led to their freedom. Within the Walton family lore, the conduct of the Calvinists was understood as “gut-wrenching” and flat-out “persecution.” The lesson for the Walton ethic was plain: religious tolerance mattered. Quakerism remained in the lineage and was embraced in the family culture. And Boston Bay, the symbol of Calvinist intolerance and how it was inherited or praised by successive generations of Anglo-Saxons resonated in abhorrence as well. A further cleavage in values had occurred.<sup>8</sup>

Edward Burleigh Davidson—Peggy's uncle (her mother's brother)—married Leah Friend of Ellsworth, Maine. Her father, an artisan tailor from Prussia, came to Maine in the 1850s, and there he met her mother, also from Prussia. The family was Jewish. Leah went to Wellesley College and became a teacher. Edward went to the University of Maine, where they met. The Friends retained their religious beliefs. Edward and, now, Leah Friend Davidson were embraced within Peggy's family culture. Certainly, everyone who entered the Davidson family was well educated. Good judgment in making marriage choices was at play. At a time of emerging anti-Semitism, especially among Anglo-Saxons, embracing the differences in religious beliefs and cultures was considered good judgment.<sup>9</sup>

To add clarity to those values was another family characteristic. In a succession of large homes, the last built in 1890, Matilda Burleigh, Peggy's maternal great-grandmother, and her grandmother, Elizabeth Burleigh Davidson (when she became head of the same household), regularly housed family members in need of support—after the loss of a spouse, the advent of ill health, the need for more space for children. The home was where Peggy's mother was raised and lived for a period with her new husband, Bartlett, before moving to Mayfield, Massachusetts. The house was built atop a gently sloping grass hill, spring yellow

with white trim, three stories high, with a wrap-around porch and grand views that included the nearby Berwick Academy. Inside was a large piano room and library with large windows that looked out toward trees and rows of flowers and shrubbery. Following the wedding of Peggy's parents in 1910, the reception was held on the porch and inside. Peggy lived there periodically during planned visits with her grandmother. Holidays were hosted there, well into Peggy's adulthood and marriage. The house was a lesson in stability, continuity, and the value of certainty of welcome.<sup>10</sup>

### CIVIC DUTY

Both sides of Peggy's family had business acumen, with resulting financial comfort, and participated in political and civic life in their community. Both characteristics defined the opportunities and purpose for education, women included.

The context is important. New England had waterpower for electricity and access for ships and ferries. The cities had intellectual and financial wealth and, from the 1850s on, burgeoning railway networks and immigrant arrivals with artisan skills—tailors, artists, fine shoe craftsmen, printers, sculptures, masons, and tool and machinery makers. The immigrants were English, Scottish, Irish, Eastern European Jewish, Southern Italian, and others. These forces were occurring—roughly, unevenly, and relentlessly—within a growing nation moving and settling west; among frequent, sometimes meanly contested labor-management disputes from women and men who would not be exploited; and, in time, through two major conflagrations for which resource mobilization mattered for leadership and victory—the Civil War and World War I. The Waltons and the Davidson-Burleighs helped define that mixture. Their businesses: textiles (clothing and blankets), shoes (boys and girls), and community banking.

William Burleigh, a lawyer, was the first to seek elective office. In 1823, just three years after Maine was admitted to the Union, William was elected a member of Congress. He was described as a "John Quincy Adams Democrat." His son, John, was a ship captain. Once married, John took his wife, Matilda, on a rugged voyage in 1850 "down the coast of North and South America, through the passageway of Cape Horn, and north, into San Francisco harbor."<sup>11</sup> They continued to Hawaii, Japan, India, and around the Cape of Good Hope, up the African coast, and back across the Atlantic, a journey of nineteen months. Matilda Burleigh, Peggy's maternal great-grandmother, who died just before Peggy's birth, had traversed the world. Her tone and manner defined what was possible and expected.<sup>12</sup>

John and Matilda purchased existing woolen mills in South Berwick. The business prospered. John was elected to the state legislature as a Republican in 1862, when the party of Abraham Lincoln was severely challenged in other states

that had remained in the Union. In 1864, John was chosen a delegate to attend the national Republican convention held in Baltimore that nominated Lincoln for a second term. From 1873 to 1877, John served in Congress. Matilda also set a standard for civic duty. She was active in the First Parish Congregational Church and in the political life of Washington, DC, and Maine. Their home, the yellow and white house on the hill, became “the center of hospitality” for the South Berwick community.<sup>13</sup>

Matilda’s three children (Peggy’s great-uncle and great-aunts) went to private school and then to Berwick Academy. When Matilda’s son, John, went on to Exeter Academy in New Hampshire, the two daughters, Elizabeth and Ann, went to Washington, DC, to live with their parents. John graduated from Williams College in 1878 and then from Harvard Law School. Elizabeth (Peggy’s maternal grandmother, who attended Peggy’s wedding in 1937) and Ann went to private school in Portsmouth, New Hampshire, and learned to play the piano, quilt, speak French, recite poetry, and attend theater. Matilda also took Elizabeth and her other two children to Europe for four months. This travel was a preparation for civic duty as well as an education. In 1893, Matilda and others petitioned the state legislature to establish the Children’s Aid Society of Maine. She became a board member. When Matilda’s husband died, she took over the presidency of the family-owned mill company.<sup>14</sup>

Elizabeth, Matilda’s daughter, married James Davidson from Indiana. They lived in Lafayette, Indiana, where James engaged in a successful law practice. They had three children, including Helen, who would become Peggy’s mother. Their summers were spent with Elizabeth’s family in York, Maine, in modest, family-owned cottages along the coastline. In 1889, James, Elizabeth, and Helen moved east, into York, and James entered into the practice of law there. When the York National Bank of Maine was formed, its board asked James to be president. Elizabeth, who “moved with grace and poise,” was well informed and “most gracious to everyone.” When James died, Elizabeth became president of the York National Bank of Maine.<sup>15</sup>

Helen Davidson was raised within the cultural milieu of her grandmother, Elizabeth, and her great-grandmother, Matilda. She attended Smith College in Northampton and graduated in the Class of 1908. She also was, early on and for the remainder of her life, a steadfast, informed fan of the Boston Red Sox—witness to players like Tris Speaker and Smoky Joe Wood, to the last of the World Series victories in 1918, and to the seemingly endless plague of doom that flowed from the sale of Babe Ruth to the New York Yankees in 1919. As a baseball fan, she observed the stunning scandal of gambling, the Chicago White Sox descent into infamy in 1919, and the rise of Kenesaw Mountain Landis as the Commissioner of Baseball who preserved the game’s integrity by explicit rule, his own fist-held temperament, and his rapier slice through wrongdoers. She

read and cheered the awesome skill of the young, instantly popular Ted Williams. Without prompt, she was prepared to engage in commentary, dialogue, or good old-fashioned argument. At base, she was the relentless force that made Valentine Giamatti, and his son, Bart, Boston Red Sox fans.<sup>16</sup>

Enter the descendants of William Walton.