

Marika's Antique Store: Legend and Legacy

By Mark Duffield

On Oct. 20, 2022, Marika's Antique Store at 130 Charles St. and its beloved owner, Matthew Raisz, took their last breath.

As Secretary of War, Edwin Stanton opined when President Abraham Lincoln had passed away: "He now belongs to the ages."

It was a sentiment that recognized a legacy that would echo through future generations. Marika Raisz and her grandson, Matthew, and their unique store were the last standing in the golden age of antique stores throughout Boston and, in particular, Charles Street on Beacon Hill.

The American antiques trade and its popularity and growth can actually be traced as early as the late 1920s as European immigrants flocked to Boston. They realized that New England colonial antique furniture, decorative arts and jewelry had a built in customer base that longed for and yearned to collect things from America's past. It wasn't long after that Charles Street was soon lined with antique stores that satisfied the wants and demands of this emerging customer base.

Throughout the decades Charles Street antique stores and their dedicated dealers would ebb and flow as history, as it often does, intervenes with economic disturbances, wars and other calamities.



Matthew and Marika Raisz.

After World War II, the antique trade on Charles Street would enter a prominent and historic age - a golden age. Store after store sprouted up and down the street, which quickly became the epicenter for collectors of American antiques.

In 1972 there were over 40 antique stores on Charles Street. This new age attracted the wealthy, movie stars like Jack Lemmon and regular folks seeking to beautify their homes with treasures that couldn't be found elsewhere.

Taking center stage in this new wave was Marika Raisz, of Hungarian descent, emigrating in 1924, who opened an antique store on Boylston Street. Later in the early 1960s she moved it to its present location on the corner of Charles and Revere streets. It quickly became an institution for friends, neighbors and discerning customers and regular clients in search of timeless gifts.

After the passing of Marika in 1986, her grandson, Matthew Raisz, took over the shop and quickly became a legend in his own right. He was beloved and admired by all. In describing Matthew many appreciated his knowledge of the trade and his love of educating customers on the history of each piece they bought. A recurrent phrase often associated with him was: "You entered as a customer and left as a friend."

This golden age would eventually begin to diminish somewhat by the early 1980s. Looking back, Beacon Hill is fortunate to have several individuals who were major players in the field of antiques during its heyday. One such individual is Helen Higgins.

Helen was the former owner of 37 River Street Antiques, among many former locations. She is a known and respected expert in the antique world. She was a great friend of both Marika and Matthew. Helen described that in the day all antique store owners knew one another and supported one another.

It was an era of collegiality when a rising tide of support would float all stores. Marika's was the center of it all. Like many who came to own an antique store Helen came to it humbly enough in Red Beach, Maine. It was here that her Aunt Molly had a small shop where Helen spent many delightful hours as a child. This piqued her early interest, and she absorbed all.

She would eventually travel the world buying antiques and like so many other Charles Street antique stores she sought only the *creme de la creme* of treasures learning along the way.

Memories of the magical world of Marika's Antique Shop from its admirers would fill volumes. But these few comments by Matthew's sister Kate and his brother's Jonathan, Nick and Stephen encapsulate the tenor of those times when all was right with the world.

From Kate: "As for family anecdotes, we have many! The thing that impressed me most about both my grandmother and brother is how knowledgeable and fair they were. Each could remember vivid details of every piece that they bought and sold, even decades later. And they wouldn't want you to buy something if they thought it wasn't right for you. On Saturdays, the shop was a meeting place for all sorts of characters, including one that my grandmother called 'Selma, the unmade bed.' All were welcome from the eccentric to the sophisticated."

From Matt's brother, Jonathan, these gems: "Matthew loved antiques in part for their fine craftsmanship, it pained him for instance, that beautiful silver piec-



KEN OLSON PHOTOS

Ken Olson is seen with a late 19th Century cast iron bank; a Meiji Period bronze vase; a circa 1915 inkwell; a Ming Dynasty plate; and a Japanese Satsuma vase. In the background is a 1933 painting of a Spanish woman by Margaret Fitzhugh Browne.

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