

THE BURLINGTON CENTENNIAL

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The storm of last Sunday evening interfered seriously with the complete carrying-out of the elaborate program prepared by Mrs. Martha E. Sewall Curtis, in honor of the one hundredth anniversary (Feb. 28, 1799) of the town of Burlington. Rev. Dr. March of Woburn, Rev. Elijah Harmon of Wilmington and Mr. Stephen Thompson of Winchester, all of whom were set down for addresses, were unable to be present. The storm also kept many of the townspeople and residents of Woburn at home. The anniversary was celebrated, however, and the exercises proved to be most interesting and instructive. But for the storm the old meeting house would have proved inadequate to accommodate the audience.

The exercises opened with an instrumental selection, *Softly rang the Bells of Heaven*, by an orchestra conducted by Mr. James M. Kimball of Woburn, Mrs. C. M. Strout of Woburn, as accompanist. Rev. Austin Dodge read scriptural selections and offered prayer.

The following hymn, written for the occasion by Rev. Austin Dodge of Burlington was sung to the tune "Hamburg."

O God! Our fathers, strong in Thee,
Were patient, hopeful, valiant, free;
Thy presence, their unfailing light,
A fiery pillar in the night.

Through all the past, thy goodness led,
Thy power guarded, bounty fed
Facing the foe on battlefield,
Thou wast their fortress, and their shield.

When heart was faint, and flesh was weak,
They never doubted clouds would break;
They wrestled thro' the night with wrong
And, out of weakness were made strong

Wachusett, with its crown of gold,
Shines in the sunset, as of old;
The stars, heaven's sapphires, nightly glow,
The same, one hundred years ago

Stout hearts are needed in our day
To scale truth's steep and rugged way
Freedom of old was bought with blood,
By pierced hands we climb to God

Rev. Mr. Dodge extended a cordial welcome to all who had braved the inclement weather, reviewed briefly the history of the country since the town's incorporation, and paid tribute to the memory of the town's noted sons and daughters.

Mrs. M. E. S. Curtis, granddaughter of the historian gave the following historical address:

It is an old New England custom for the children to return to the homestead to keep Thanksgiving, and in accordance with this time honored observance a few years ago, we journeyed to the home of our Mother, Woburn, to join in celebrating her two hundred and fiftieth anniversary. Now, having completed one hundred years of housekeeping on our own account, we have reversed the order and invited our mother and sister towns to celebrate our centennial. We consider ourselves, especially favored in this place of meeting—this house of God, builded by our fathers. Very few towns in the Commonwealth, although more fortunate in other respects, can celebrate their centennials in the meeting house of their forefathers.

The present town of Burlington, as you well know, was once included in the broad territory of ancient Woburn, settled as Charlestown Village in 1640 and incorporated as a town in 1642. This part of Woburn in olden days was called Shawshin from the Indian name of the river on its borders. There is evidence that it was very early explored and settled. We have one house which is kept for us a witness of those days—the oldest house in town where the oldest man in town is rounding out his ninety-eighth year. The house now owned by Mr. Joshua Reed was built in 1664-1666 and from the portholes in its weather beaten sides, the early settlers watched the Indians encamping on the Shawshin meadows, fearing that there might be repeated a tragedy like that which happened in a house on the site of the present house of Mr. Charles Haven, where a young girl was murdered by an Indian, to whom she extended hospitality. The Reed house was one of two houses built by John and Francis Wyman, tanners of Woburn, on their great farm of 1000 acres, which embraced all the territory in that region. The other house was occupied by Abel Wyman at the time of the Revolution and here Hancock and Adams took refuge when they fled from the house of Madam Jones on the day of the Battle of Lexington. It has long been gone and its site is now marked with a cairn.

When the second meeting house was built in Woburn in 1672, it was undoubtedly nearly central to the majority of the population, but as settlements increased in Goshen—now Wilmington—and in Shawshin, it began to be a hardship for the people to attend service on the Sabbath, often traversing the drifts of winter by the aid of "rackets" or snow shoes. The family of Sergt. Abraham Jaquith traveled seven miles from Goshen, and the people from the Wyman farm in Shawshin came five miles to attend Divine worship. Notwithstanding, they would go to meeting and be there...had borne this for years, they began to seek relief by petitioning the General Court. After three years of struggle for naturally Woburn was unwilling to part with their support, their efforts met with success and Sept. 27, 1730, the Second Parish or Precinct of Woburn was incorporated. Of the 312 persons taxed to pay the salary of the minister at Woburn, 82 were set off to the Precinct.

At first, religious services were held in the house of Simon Thompson, in the centre of the town. In 1732 this old meeting house was built at a cost of \$943.17, a considerable amount of money for those days. The land on which it stands was given by Benjamin Johnson, and in the ancient deed, this hill is called Forest Field Hill.

In 1733, Mr. Johnson also gave the town a lot of land for a burying ground. An evidence of the simplicity of the time is shown by the fact that in the deed, the right is reserved to pasture cattle thereon. It must be remembered that the stirring events of the Revolution occurred in the Precinct days. The records testify that the inhabitants of Woburn Precinct nobly bore their part in the great

struggle for independence. Twenty-two graves in the burying ground (including those of Madam Jones and Cuff) bear the markers of the Sons of the American Revolution, and there are undoubtedly many more than that have no headstones. On one stone, you may read the name of one of the patriots of Bunker Hill—George Reed, son of the first deacon of the church in the Precinct, who as Rev. John Marrett tells us "died of a fever which was occasioned by a surfeit or heat that he got at Charlestown Fight." Capt. Marston took refuge here during the siege of Boston, and a stone was erected in memory of his child, who died as the epitaph relates "while British forces held his native town."

In the house of James Reed still owned by his descendants, the first prisoners of the Revolution were confined. The library of Harvard College—not so voluminous as now—was kept for safety from the enemy, in the house of Dea. Samuel Reed, which has been but recently taken down. The story of the Sewall house is told on your programs tonight. The retreat of Hancock and Adams to his house, then the residence of Madam Jones, and afterward to the house of Abel Wyman in one of the best authenticated tales of the Revolution.

After the war was ended and a few years of recovery and prosperity had elapsed, the people of the Precinct began to turn their attention to civic affairs. Our forefathers desired to found a town. Petitioning the General Court was again in order, and after a year of struggle, as the mother town objected to losing her Precinct, their efforts were crowned with success, and on February 28, 1799 the town of Burlington was incorporated. Ninety-six of the 353 tax payers of Woburn were included in Burlington. The population of 535 and the territory embraced 8000 acres. A small part was afterwards set off to Lexington.

The first town meeting was held March 11, 1799. It was called by John Walker, Justice of the Peace, by a warrant, summoning John Caldwell, one of the principal inhabitants of the town of Burlington, to notify the inhabitants qualified to vote in town affairs to meet in the meeting house on the day appointed. The officers chosen were: Moderator, Capt. John Wood; Town Clerk, John Walker, Esq.; Selectmen and Overseers of the Poor, Lieut. Joseph Winn, Capt. John Wood, Ensign Jesse Dean, Thomas Skilton, Samuel Walker; Assessors James Walker, Timothy Winn, Jonathan Simonds; Treasurer, James Walker; Constable, David Winn; Surveyors of Highways, William Abbot, Jonas Carter, Ishmael Munro, Reuben Kimball; Fence Viewers, Abel Wyman, William Johnson; Surveyors of Lumber, Lt. Isaac Baldwin, Ishmael Munro; Sealer of Leather, Capt. John Wood, Jr.; Measurers of Wood, Jotham Johnson, John Wood, Jr.; Clerk of the Market, Benjamin Blanchard; Sealer of Weights and Measurers, Gideon Simonds; Hog Reeves, Edward Walker, Matthew Skilton, Jr.; Field Drivers, William Carter, John Caldwell, John Kendall.

A motion to dissolve the meeting passed "in the affirmity." A hint at the customs of the times is shown in an article in the warrant, the next spring, "To see what was to be done about swine going at large?" It was not voted upon, but they increased the number of hog reeves to four; also having built a pound, they chose a pound keeper. April 7, 1800, it was voted that horn cattle should not go at large, agreeable to an act of the General Court. It is amusing to note that as late as 1823, the care of the meeting house was let to Joel Winship for \$2.95 and the next year, it was awarded to John Center for \$2.50 "to be taken care of as usual."

On March 18, 1799 the incorporation was celebrated, as Rev. John Marrett records in his diary by an entertainment at the Social Hall in the house of Capt. John Wood, in the centre of the town—still

standing and owned by the Caldwell heirs. I have the pleasure of reading to you tonight from the original copy preserved among the papers of the Rev. John Marrett, the list of toasts given on that occasion.

This was evidently intended for a report of the proceedings of the press, as it is marked "For the Centinel."

The Principle Inhabitants of the Town of Burlington had a general and Social Interview at Capt. John Wood Social Hall, and after partaking of a sumptuous Dinner, the following Toasts were given:

1. The United States of America—may forrieng influence and domestic friction be discountenanced by every Citizen.
2. The President of ye United States—may the wise, firm, pacific & energetic Measurers which have marked his Administration insure to him the Love, Esteem, Confidence & Support of every American.
3. George Washington, Lieut. Gen'l. of the Armies of the United States—if that illustrious Character shall again have occasion to draw his Sword in the defence of his injured and insulted Country, may it never be returned until Complete Satisfaction be made.
4. The Commonwealth of Massachusetts—the first to assert its Rights; the last to surrender them.
5. His Excellency, Increase Sumner, our worthy and Meritorious Governor.
6. The Legislature of Massachusetts—the protection of the weak, the Relief of the oppressed and the watchful Guardian of all our Rights.
7. The Secretaries of State, of the Treasury, of the Navy and Way, wise as a Serpent, harmless as a Dove, Swift as an Eagle, and terrible as an Army with Banners.
8. Our Infant Navy—may it increase in proportion as ye Exegencies of our Country & of Commerce may require.
9. The Army of ye United States—may it Combat with none but our Enemies, and then may it prove invincible.
10. Our Ambassadors in all foreign Courts—may they maintain ye Dignity of their Station & be faithful to our Country's cause.
11. The Town of Wbn. (Woburn) —Altho' a part has been taken off, yet may ye remainder increase in number, Wealth and Beauty.
12. The Inhabitants of Burlington—may they unite like a Band of Brothers & increase in wisdom, strength and virtue, and may no private animosity or local prejudice ever annoy their future prosperity.
13. The American fair—may they be faithful and cover this good Land with their own Sons, and let the first Lesson which they teach them be Love...
14. Agriculture & ye Mechanic Arts—may we enjoy ye sweets of our own Labour, uninterrupted by forriengers.
15. Rational Liberty and happiness to ye whole family of Adam.
16. A speedy, honourable & permanent Peace to all ye Nations of the Earth.

"The company all rose & heartily joined hands."

After picturing the scene at the old-time festival, Mrs. Curtis paid a graceful and fitting tribute to the men and women who had given character to the ancient town and in conclusion said: —Is it better to aim at a rapid growth which will ruin our country home and fill it with those who will drive us out or to wait the sure development of the age, when the better class of people shall be forced from the crowded cities into the country and their beautiful homes shall crown our hills? It may come slowly but it is sure to come and we must remember our fathers did not found the town for the days or years, but for the centuries.

It is said not all our young people can make a living here. Natural selection will take care of that. There is a living and a competency for some and they will remain. The others will go, but they will return, bringing their treasurers with them. It is gratifying to see some of them coming back and taking the old homesteads for their summer homes. The tide that set out is returning with full flood. We are told that "Great men rise that there may be greater men."

Our forefathers sleep well beneath the slate stones on the hill, but their spirit should still our lives as their blood courses through our veins. Shall not John Wood and John Marrett live again in the boys of 1899? Shall not Ruth Wilson inspire the young girl in Burlington, today?

This is our only centennial. Shall we not resolve to build up in our lives the sturdy, honest, God-fearing character of our forefathers, and leave it as a heritage to our children and our children's children, so that years after we are gathered to our fathers, they should recall our names with reverent memory, when with great joy and thanksgiving in the full light and glory of the closing of another century, they shall come up hither, even to this old meeting house on the Forest Field Hill, to celebrate the Two Hundreth Anniversary of the Incorporation of the Town of Burlington.

Mr. Kimball rendered a saxophone solo, entitled, "Dream of Paradise."

Then followed to the well-known "Duke Street" the following hymn, contributed by Mr. Frank E. Wetherell of Woburn: —

The lordly oak, from acorn grown,
Is monarch of the forest wide,
Deep rooted in the nurturing earth
It stands majestic in its pride

In summer's heat, and winter's cold
It braves the shock of Nature's strife,
And grows, throughout the fleeting years
A type of power and sturdy life.

And in our town's long, honored life,
So dear to ev'ry loyal heart
A symbol of the oak is found—
A true and fitting counterpart.

Our lives, its branches interlace;

Within our homes, its roots lie deep;
Its arms protecting stretch afar,
And over all kind vigil keep.

Its years are but a graceful crown,
And age but adds unto its fame
With grateful hearts we voice our love,
And sing in praise of its fair name.

Hon. William F. Davis, mayor of Woburn was introduced and said in part: —

In 1892 the Mother town of Woburn observed the 250th anniversary of its existence as a municipality, and at that time like the good mother she called around her all of her children. Not only those that were then living under her own roof-tree, but she was pleased to welcome this town, imbued with the patriotism of the fathers, rallied to the support of the nation, and contributed liberally to the end that "the government of the people, for the people, and by the people should not perish from the earth."

The Mother town is proud of the deeds of her children, and I am proud to stand here as her representative to extend her congratulations and wish you many centuries of health and prosperity.

The orchestra gave "Protect as through the coming night," and then Mr. Abram English Brown of the N.E. Historical Genealogical Society, author of "Beneath Old Rooftrees," "Beside Old Hearthstones," "Life of John Hancock," and other books and a noted student of New England life, spoke upon the benefits that may accrue from the celebration of anniversaries. He said it was fitting that the celebration should be given in the church, since the town grew from the formation of the church, as was common in early days—first the church and parish, then the district and the town. It was appropriate to the age that a woman should give the historical address; when the town was incorporated, women were subordinate to men. He recalled his early life as clerk in the Burlington post-office and what he owed in formation of character to Silas Cutler—the post-master—honest to the half cent. He received his inspiration to study history from the saintly Father Sewall: These celebrations tend to the profitable study of the past, and above all, to good citizenship and forming our characters after the example of the fathers.

The audience then joined in singing to the tune of "America" a hymn written for the anniversary of Rev. Daniel March, D.D. of Woburn.

God of our fathers' days,
To Thee our gift of praise
We gladly bring.
Though mad'st them true and brave,
And gav'st them strength to save
The heritage we have;
To Thee we sing.

In ways the fathers trod,
We worship Thee, O God,

And keep Thy work
For light that brighter grows
And truth that plainer shows
As on the century flows
We praise the Lord.

For morning's cheery light,
For realms of starry night
For land and sea;
For fields and wooded hills,
For springs and shining rills,
For dew that night distills
All thanks to Thee

Preserve, O Lord, our land
By Thy safe guarding hand,
From bitter strife,
May truth and virtue grow,
Nor home nor foreign foe
Bring all our greatness low,
And quench our life.

God guide our ship of State
Through seas of wild debate,
And give us rest
Bid Passion's storm be still
Restrain the reckless will,
And peace like dew distill,
And make all blest.

From all the coming years
Dispel our doubts and fears
Lead Though our choice
Let union bind our States
And love rebuke all hate
And justice guard our gates
With gentle voice.

The exercises closed with the benediction.

The pretty program was illustrated with a picture of the Old Sewall House, beneath which was the following paragraph "Built by Sergeant Benjamin Johnson previous to 1733; bought by Rev. Thomas Jones in 1751 and owned by his descendants for 146 years. It was the refuge of John Hancock, Samuel Adams and Dorothy Quincy, April 19, 1775, and for more than a hundred years, the home of the ministers of the church of Christ. Destroyed by fire, April 23, 1897. Owners: Sergeant Benjamin Johnson, 1733-1751; Rev. Thomas Jones, 1751-1774; Madam Abigail Jones, Rev. John Marrett, 1774-1814; Martha Marrett, 1814-1818; Rev. Samuel Sewall, 1818-1868; Samuel Sewall, 1868-1897."