

**THE MASSACHUSETTS SOCIETY OF THE
CINCINNATI, 1783-1883. AN HISTORICAL
ADDRESS
DELIVERED ON THE OCCASION OF THE
CENTENNIAL CELEBRATION AT BOSTON,
MASSACHUSETTS, JULY 4, 1883**

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The Massachusetts society of the Cincinnati, 1783-1883. An Historical Address Delivered on the Occasion of the Centennial Celebration at Boston, Massachusetts, July 4, 1883 by Samuel C. Cobb

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SAMUEL C. COBB

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THE
MASSACHUSETTS SOCIETY OF THE CINCINNATI.

CENTENNIAL ADDRESS.

1883.

By Samuel C. (Samuel Crocker)
1783—1883.

The Massachusetts Society of the Cincinnati.

AN HISTORICAL ADDRESS

DELIVERED ON THE OCCASION
OF
THE CENTENNIAL CELEBRATION

AT BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS,

JULY 4, 1883,

BY SAMUEL C. COBB,
PRESIDENT.



BOSTON:
PRINTED BY ORDER OF THE SOCIETY.
1883.

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3-24-61

AT the Centennial Dinner of the MASSACHUSETTS
SOCIETY of THE CINCINNATI, given at Boston July 4, 1883,
on motion of Mr. WILLIAM H. SAVAGE, seconded by Mr.
DANIEL C. LILLIE, it was unanimously voted that the
Historical Address delivered this day by the President, be
printed, and that a copy thereof be sent to each member
of the Society.

Attest:

DAVID G. HASKINS, JR.,

Assistant Secretary.

A D D R E S S .

BROTHERS OF THE CINCINNATI :

THE pleasant duty devolves upon me of welcoming you, which I do most cordially, to this reunion of the MASSACHUSETTS CINCINNATI.

Besides the pleasures that are wont to attend these annual gatherings, it is our privilege to-day to perform a most grateful service, in taking note of the fact that this honored Institution has recently completed the first century of its existence. I am sure you would hardly forgive me, — indeed, I should consider myself to be remiss in the performance of my duty, — if I did not take occasion at this time to glance briefly at some of the facts and incidents connected with the history of this Society.

There is in our archives a paper in the well-known handwriting of General Henry Knox, with this indorsement: "Rough Draft of a Society to be formed by the American Officers, and to be called 'The Cincinnati.'" It is dated "West Point, April 15, 1783." It

covers eight foolscap pages, and exhibits various erasures and interlineations, but is in substance the same as the present Institution. The discovery of this interesting document, the existence of which was long unknown, settled the question which had sometimes been asked as to who was the founder of the Cincinnati?

The idea of forming such an organization was at first supposed to have been suggested by Baron Steuben, as stated in Judge Burke's famous pamphlet, entitled "Considerations on the Order or Society of the Cincinnati;" but this is shown to be an error by the Baron's letter to Knox of Nov. 11, 1783, in which, referring to Burke's assertion, he says, "He makes me author and grand-master of the Cincinnati; this is whipping you over my shoulders."¹ Brigadier-General Huntington, of Connecticut, who was one of the committee to consider and report upon the original draft of the Institution, probably had a hand in revising and shaping the instrument as finally adopted.

A glance at the condition of affairs at the close of the Revolution — a most critical period of our national history — is essential to a proper understanding of the motives and objects of the founders of the Society.

During the winter of 1782-83, the American forces lay encamped at Newburg, on the banks of the Hudson. The war was over, and independence secured; but the country was exhausted, and the outlook anything but promising. The army felt that its dissolution was imminent, and that very soon its members were to

¹ Steuben's letter is among the Knox Papers in the library of the New England Historic Genealogical Society.

be dismissed forever from the service of their country, with no other resources than such as chance or their own private means might afford. Congress, no longer the illustrious body that had once riveted the attention of the civilized world, and wielded autocratic power,— Congress was now so destitute of influence as to be wholly unable to provide for the payment of the troops, then largely in arrears; all it could do was to recommend to the different States to permit the money for national purposes to be levied: a recommendation was regarded or not, as the case might be. All this was well understood by the army. The members felt that they would never get their money unless some definite arrangement were made before the organization was disbanded. To add to their irritation, the public prints made strenuous opposition to granting pensions for military services,— an opposition prompted by those prudent patriots who had stayed at home during the war, but who now, when danger was over, fearlessly came to the front. Congress afterward issued certificates for five years' pay, in lieu of the half-pay for life that it had previously granted. These the more needy of the soldiers were obliged to part with at a ruinous discount. Often, on reaching home, the war-worn veteran had nothing to show for his long service but his ragged uniform and his honorable scars.

Poverty had made sad work among these men. Poorly paid, they had as a general rule been compelled to depend to a greater or less extent upon their own scanty resources. Their wives and daughters (and we should never lose sight of this fact),— the women of the Revolution,— had borne a part in the toils and

sacrifices of the long and arduous struggle for independence with a patient heroism no whit inferior to the more active valor of husbands and brothers. Not only did they encourage and stimulate the men in the performance of patriotic duties, but often, besides discharging their own household labors, they did the men's work in the cultivation of the farm.

"The situation of the officers," writes Washington to Hamilton, March 12, 1784, "I do believe is distressing in the extreme. It is affirmed to me that a large proportion of them have no better prospect before them than a jail, if they are turned loose without liquidation of accounts, and an assurance of that justice to which they are so worthily entitled."

It is not wonderful, therefore, that a spirit of disaffection pervaded the ranks. An anonymous writer¹ gave forcible and eloquent expression to this feeling in a paper distributed throughout the camp, in which it was proposed that the army should relinquish the service in a body if the war continued; or, in case of peace, that they should still retain their arms, in defiance of civil authority. This paper produced intense excitement.

Impressive and critical as was the exigency, however, Washington was fully equal to its requirements. Calling the officers together, he counselled moderation in a dignified and patriotic speech, calmed the general agitation, and restored order and discipline. As he put on his spectacles to read his address he said, "You see, gentlemen, that I have not only grown gray but blind in your service." This incident, simple as it was,

¹ Major John Armstrong.