

**AN ADDRESS DELIVERED AT
WORCESTER: OCTOBER 16, 1912, BEFORE
THE AMERICAN
ANTIQUARIAN SOCIETY ON THE
OCCASION OF THE ONE HUNDREDTH
ANNIVERSARY OF ITS FOUNDATION**

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An Address Delivered at Worcester: October 16, 1912, Before the American Antiquarian Society on the occasion of the one hundredth anniversary of its foundation by Charles G. Washburn

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CHARLES G. WASHBURN

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CHARLES G. WASHBURN

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Mrs. William C. Lane

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ADDRESS

WE are gathered here to-day, surrounded by the memorials and records of the past, to celebrate the centennial anniversary of this Society. The last survivor of the charter members died more than forty years ago, and yet through that wonderful art of photographing the thoughts and deeds of men upon the printed page, he and they, together with the others who have gone before, are a real and substantial part of this living company met

*"To celebrate a Century's flight
And gather ere it disappears
The harvest of a hundred years."*

While the Society was founded one hundred years ago, the activities of its distinguished patron and his associates extended over a period which began before the Revolution. Those who signed the petition for incorporation, in the order in which the names appear, were: Isaiah Thomas; Nathaniel Paine; Dr. William Paine, his elder brother; Levi Lincoln, Sr.; Aaron Bancroft; and Edward Bangs. Every detail of the fruitful life of Isaiah Thomas has been noticed in the proceedings from the time when, at the tender age of six years, he was bound as apprentice in 1755 to Zachariah Fowle, a printer, of Boston, until his death in Worcester in 1831 at the age of eighty-two.

Mr. Thomas was not only a printer and publisher, but a book-binder and paper-maker, and his business extended all over the country. He was,

too, a man of great public spirit, and his gifts to this community were numerous and substantial. Brissot de Warville, one of the leading spirits of the Girondists and a celebrated writer of his day, who visited this country in 1788, "not," he says, "to study antiques, or to search for unknown plants, but to study men who had just acquired their liberty," writes of Worcester: "This town is elegant and well-peopled; the printer, Isaiah Thomas, has rendered it famous through all the continent. He prints most of the works which appear; and it must be granted, that his editions are correct. Thomas is the Didot of the United States."

Nathaniel Paine, lawyer, graduated from Harvard College in 1775. He was, for a time, prosecuting attorney for the county, and represented Worcester in the legislature for three years. He was Judge of Probate for thirty-five years.

Dr. William Paine, his elder brother, graduated from Harvard College in 1768. One of his early instructors was John Adams, in 1775 teacher of the grammar school in Worcester, who writes in his diary: "The situation of the town is quite pleasant and the inhabitants, as far as I have had opportunity to know their character, are a sociable, generous and hospitable people; but the school is indeed a school of affliction, a large number of little runtlings, just capable of lisping A B C and troubling the master. But Dr. Savil tells me for my comfort 'by cultivating and pruning these tender plants in the garden of Worcester, I shall make some of them plants of

renown and cedars of Lebanon.'” Upon his arrival from England, after the war broke out, Dr. Paine found himself denounced as a royalist and did not return to Worcester until 1792, where he lived until his death, highly respected as a citizen and a physician.

Levi Lincoln, lawyer, graduated from Harvard College in 1772; marched as a volunteer with the minute-men to Cambridge; was an active member of the committees of the Revolution, Clerk of Courts, Judge of Probate, delegate to the convention at Cambridge for framing a state constitution, member of the legislature, representative in Congress, Attorney-General of the United States and provisional Secretary of State in the Cabinet of Thomas Jefferson, lieutenant-governor and acting governor of this Commonwealth, and associate justice of the Supreme Court of the United States. Such is a brief summary of his great career which terminated in 1820.

Aaron Bancroft, clergyman, historian, graduated from Harvard College in 1778, minister of the Second Parish in Worcester for more than fifty years, father of George Bancroft. In 1832 Dr. Bancroft sent to John Adams a volume of his sermons, in acknowledgment of which Mr. Adams wrote: “I thank you . . . for the gift of a precious volume. It is a chain of diamonds set with links of gold. I have never read nor heard read a volume of sermons better calculated and adapted to the age and country in which it was written. How different from

the sermons I heard and read in the town of Worcester from the year 1755 to 1758."

Edward Bangs left Harvard College to participate in the Concord fight, graduated in 1777, read law in the office of Chief Justice Parsons, served as a volunteer in the suppression of Shays's rebellion, was representative in the General Court, associate justice of the Court of Common Pleas, and an accomplished scholar in literature.

The petition to the Legislature for incorporation states of the Society that: "Its immediate and peculiar design is to discover the antiquities of our continent, and by providing a fixed and permanent place of deposit, to preserve such relics of American Antiquity as are portable, as well as to collect and preserve those of other parts of the globe. By the long and successful labors of the College of Antiquaries in Ireland (probably the most ancient institution now existing in the world), their historians have been enabled to trace the history of that country to an earlier period than that of any other nation in Europe."

Mention is made in the ancient annals of an early society in Ireland, but the Society of Antiquaries of London, incorporated in 1753 and succeeding a similar society formed in 1572, is the premier society for the study of antiquities. In this country, the Philosophical Society of Philadelphia was founded in 1743; the American Academy of Arts and Sciences in 1780; the Massachusetts Historical Society in 1791.

The act of incorporation was signed by Governor

Caleb Strong on October 24, 1812. The incorporators were: Isaiah Thomas, Levi Lincoln, Harrison G. Otis, Timothy Bigelow, Nathaniel Paine, Edward Bangs, Esqrs.; John T. Kirkland, D.D.; Aaron Bancroft, D.D.; Jonathan H. Lyman, Elijah H. Mills, Elisha Hammond, Timothy Williams, William D. Peck, John Lowell, Edmund Dwight, Eleazer James, Josiah Quincy, William S. Shaw, Francis Blake, Levi Lincoln, Jr.; Samuel M. Burnside and Benjamin Russell, Esqrs.; Rev. Thaddeus M. Harris, Redford Webster, Thomas Walcut, Ebenezer T. Andrews, Isaiah Thomas, Jr.; William Wells. The amount of the annual income from real estate was limited to \$1500, and the personal estate was limited to the value of \$7000.

The first meeting of the Society was called for Thursday, November 19, 1812, at the Exchange Coffee House in Boston, where less than three months before Captain Isaac Hull had been banqueted because of the victory of the Constitution over the *Guerrière*. A committee was appointed to draw up regulations and by-laws, to report at the next meeting, at which the president, Isaiah Thomas, presented the Society with a large and valuable collection of books valued at \$4000. He was requested to retain possession of them until a place of deposit could be provided for their reception, and they were kept at his house on Court Hill for a period of eight years.

The by-laws provided for three meetings annually: one in Boston on December 22 and again on