

**THE CENTENNIAL FOURTH.  
HISTORICAL ADDRESS  
DELIVERED IN TOWN HALL,  
MELROSE, MAS., JULY 4, 1876**

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The centennial Fourth. Historical Adress delivered in Town Hall, Melrose, Mas., July 4, 1876  
by Elbridge H. Goss

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**ELBRIDGE H. GOSS**

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DELIVERED IN

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JULY 4, 1876.

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ELBRIDGE H. GOSS.

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ALSO, THE PROCEEDINGS OF THE DAY.

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Privately Printed.

MELROSE,

1876.

## ADDRESS.

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*Mr. Chairman, and Fellow-Citizens:—*

In accordance with Congressional act and Presidential proclamation, the people throughout the length and breadth of this good land of ours, are to-day assembled to make a note of passing events; to take a retrospective view of the past; to contemplate for a short time the small beginnings of our ancestors; their hardships, their struggles, their victory. And we are assembled in our spacious town-hall now, to think, to talk, to hear something about Melrose—its early days, its growth, its people, its institutions. And we are here not only in accordance with the President's proclamation, but by recommendation, also, of our own, individual town, through its Board of Selectmen. These towns of ours: do we appreciate them as we ought? Do we fully realize what little independent kingdoms they are, governed and controlled in every minute particular by the people? Nothing like them was known before our own New England was settled. Neither England nor any other country had known such independencies, such self-governed municipalities as have been, and are ours. Virginia, and all the rest of the colonies, excepting New England, were governed in a different manner. They had their counties, towns, hundreds, plantations and parishes; but the "municipality in New England was the simplest of all the municipal forms and the best adapted to develop the republican idea." Referring to our early town system, George William Curtis says: "Each town was a small but perfect republic, as solitary and secluded in the New England wilderness as the Swiss

cantons among the Alps. No other practicable human institution has been devised or conceived to secure the just ends of local government so felicitous as the town meeting." The choosing of selectmen and other officers at annual town meetings was first adopted by Massachusetts; and to Charlestown—of which we were originally a part—belongs the honor of establishing the first Board of Selectmen, in 1635, six years after its settlement. Dorchester, two years before, had tried a plan which approached this idea, but the inhabitants of Charlestown matured and consummated it, and adopted an order, the original of which is still preserved, with the signatures, and of which the following is a copy; and a fac-simile of which may be found in Frothingham's "History of Charlestown:"—

"An order made by the inhabitants of Charlestowne at a full meeting for the government of the Town by Selectmen.

"In consideration of the great trouble and chearg of the inhabitants of Charlestowne by reason of the frequent meeting of the townsmen in generall and y<sup>e</sup> by reason of many men meeting things were not so casely brought unto a joynt issue. It is therefore agreed by the sayde townesmen ioyntly that these cleven men whose names are written on the other syde, (w<sup>th</sup> the advie of Pastor and Teacher desired in any case of conscience,) shall entreat of all such business as shall concerne the Townsmen, the choice of officers excepted, and what they or the greater part of them shall conclude of the rest of the towne willingly to submit unto as their owne propper act, and these 11 to continue in this employment for one yeare next ensuing, the date hereof being dated this: 10<sup>th</sup> of February 1634 (1635.)

"In witness of this agreement we whose names are under written have set o'r hands."

Soon afterward the General Court embodied this idea in its legislation, and provided for general town government. Thenceforward, from that day to this, year after year, the people of the towns have met in open town-meeting, and with free discussion upon all questions, elected their Board of Selectmen, and other officers, and transacted all other necessary business. In short, the town-meeting ever has been, and now is, the true glory of New England; and before

the Revolution, it was, indeed, "the nursery of American Independence."

Long before our independence was achieved, the Scripture, "Proclaim liberty throughout all the land unto all the inhabitants thereof," had been cast into a certain bell,—destined to become a most famous one,—and placed upon the State House in Philadelphia. True, "prophetic voices concerning America" had spoken as early as 1752, when this bell was cast. Bishop Berkeley, Samuel Sewall, the Marquis D'Argenson, Turgot, and others, had plainly predicted the time when the colonies would be free; the latter saying in 1750, "Colonies are like fruits, which hold to the tree only until their maturity; when sufficient for themselves, they did that which Carthage afterwards did,—*that which some day America will do.*" And it came to pass that this very bell, which had been broken and recast twice, and been in constant use since 1752, with this heaven-born inscription upon it, should, one hundred years ago, declare Liberty, and ring out to the world the glad tidings, that a new nation had "sprung into existence, proclaiming in language understood by every ear, All Men are Born Free and Equal." A century has passed since the declaration thus heralded, and which we have heard read to-day, became a reality; and we are now enjoying the blessings then fought for and established; and, at this moment, almost every town, city, and hamlet is commemorating the event. To-day we celebrate the one hundredth anniversary of that all-important, that eventful epoch in our history. It has been said that centennial celebrations are "striking of the great clock of time, which admonish us to ponder upon the teachings of the past, and rightly appreciate the responsibilities of the present." This *is*, indeed, the glorious fourth of July: the centennial fourth of July! and are we not excusable if we indulge in a little self-glorification? But, to do this the most thoroughly, the most satisfactorily, it seems to me, it will be necessary for each to trace the rise and growth of their respective towns, from their small beginnings to their present stand-point.

The Congressional act calling us together, suggests only



"an historical sketch of the town from its formation." Strictly adhering to this, we should have nothing to do, now, except with events which have occurred from 1850 to the present time. We occupy too interesting a spot, this domain has been too long settled, to be thus summarily dismissed.

The territory of Melrose originally belonged to Charlestown, which was settled in 1629, and was a far more extensive region than now, as it included Malden, Woburn, Stoneham, Burlington, Somerville, a large part of Medford, a small part of Cambridge and Reading. Difficulties concerning the boundaries of the different towns arose very early and were settled by the General Court. July 2, 1633, "Mystic side" was granted to Charlestown, when it was ordered that the "ground lyeing betwixte the North [Malden] Ryv' & the creeke on the north side of M<sup>r</sup> Mauacks [Maverick's] & soe vpp into the country, shall belong to the inhabitants of Charlton [Charlestown]. As "up into the country" did not determine how far the line should go, another order, passed March 3, 1636, was more definite: "That Charles Town bounds shall run eight myles into the country from their meeteing howse, if noe other bounds intercept." This undoubtedly covered our own Melrose territory. As Charlestown increased, its inhabitants crossed over the Mystic River as early as 1640, possibly before, and in that year a mill was erected near Mt. Prospect, by Thomas Coitmore. In 1649, this Mystic side was set off by the General Court and named Malden, from a town in England bearing the same name, whence some of the early settlers came. Johnson, in his "Wonder Working Providence" says that the "foundation stones" of Malden were laid "by certain persons who issued out of Charles Town, and indeed had her whole structure within the bounds of this more elder Town, being severed by the broad spreading river of Mistick the one from the other, whose troublesome passage caused the people on the North side of the river to plead for Town priviledges within themselves." The act of incorporation was brief, as compared with one passed now-a-days. It was as follows: "Upon the petition of Mistick side men, they are granted

to be a distinct towne, & the name thereof to be called *Mauldon.*" This whole region of *Malden* above the settlement was a dense forest and covered "with stately timber," say the *Charlestown* records; "and all the country round about an uncouth wilderness full of timber." It was the home of the Indian and the wild beast. It has been said that when the first settlers at *Boston* sent out an exploring party, they came as far as the line of small hills below us in *Malden*, and turning back reported that beyond the hills was a dense wilderness, and that probably nobody would ever penetrate the jungles. If it were possible that those same original explorers, could again come out from *Boston*, and, leaving *Malden* behind them, move slowly up the valley, emerge from behind "*Island Hill*" and "*Hog Island*," behold the beautiful landscape spread out before them, and then on to the first resting place, right here, they would be somewhat amazed. No Indians! no wild beasts! Nothing but harmless *Melroseians*! I think that this time they would not, as then, return and report that this was a "waste howling wilderness."

When *Malden* became a town, in 1649, all its northern part (the territory we now occupy) was a tract of over two thousand acres of undivided land; and came to be known as "*The Commons.*" In time it was very desirable both as woodland and pasturage, and a variety of action was taken by the town looking to its preservation and utility; and in Town Meeting, Nov. 20, 1694, it was "Voted, That ye common shall be divided: bottom and top, yt is, land and wood"; and, Nov. 26, a committee of three, Maj. Wm. Johnson, Capt. John Smith and Capt. John Brown, reported to the town the manner in which it should be done. A committee of seven were chosen to proceed with the division. It was ordered that this committee "employ an artis to lay out the lots." Every lot was to "run 82 poles in length," and there was to be allowed "two poles in breadth between every range of lots for highways." "Every proprietors name to be written distinctly, and ye lots be well shuffled together, and one man chose by the town to draw them out of a bag. The first name drawn to have the first lot."

This division was thus made in 1695, when seventy-four freeholders then in Malden received their respective allotments.

That this part of Malden known as "the Commons" was settled before this division of land was made in 1695, is very evident from the order laying out the first road through Malden by the General Court, in 1653, hereafter to be referred to; and in the Malden records at this time, March 26, 1694, there is a report by a committee "to run lines between the Common & proprietors lands," as follows: "Run y<sup>e</sup> bounds Round Reedy pond y<sup>e</sup> bounds are first a great buttonwood tree before Joseph Lines dore—and so bounded Round with seuerall trees marked with letter C next common." This "Reedy Pond" is supposed to be a small pond very near the boundary between Melrose and Malden; and there are those now living who remember to have heard it thus called, and who also remember the large buttonwood tree referred to. Another vote passed May 18, 1694, was "that Samuel Greenshall Enjoy his hous and y<sup>e</sup> land y<sup>e</sup> stands on and so much land about It as y<sup>e</sup> Commitee shall see cause to lay to It"; clearly showing that a Samuel Green had a house, and lived here thus early. A year later, when the division was made, in speaking of lot number 64, the phrase is used "part east against Redding Rhode & part on y<sup>e</sup> west of y<sup>e</sup> Greens farm." And it was not long after this division before a number of other families came here and settled; so that we had on our territory at the beginning of the year 1700, or very soon after, the families of six or seven different names.

In later years, as time rolled on, we were no longer "The Commons," but known as North Malden, and so remained until the year 1850, when, after several Legislative hearings, and a long struggle, an act incorporating the town of Melrose, was approved by Gov. George N. Briggs, on the 3d of May. Three years later, in 1853, after another severe contest, a part of Stoneham was set off to Melrose, giving us the greater portion of what we call the "Highlands"; and we now have a territory, roads and all, of nearly or quite thirty-five hundred square acres. Our name, Melrose, was