

**AN HISTORICAL ADDRESS,
DELIVERED IN THE TOWN HALL,
AT AMHERST, JANUARY 19,
1874, ON THE OCCASION OF THE
HUNDREDTH ANNIVERSARY**

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An Historical Address, Delivered in the Town Hall, at Amherst, January 19, 1874, on the occasion of the Hundredth anniversary by William B. Towne

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WILLIAM B. TOWNE

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A. B.

HISTORICAL ADDRESS,

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HUNDREDTH ANNIVERSARY

OF THE

Dedication at the Congregational Meeting-House:

Being an historical sketch of the territory embraced in the first parish in
Milford, an account of the origin of the parish, then a part
of Amherst, the organization of the church,
and the services of its ministers.

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Historical Society of Wisconsin.

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Historians rarely descend to these details from which alone the real state of a community can be collected.—*Meaday*.

The present state of things is the consequence of the past; and it is natural to inquire as to the sources of the good we enjoy, or the evils we suffer. If we act only for ourselves, to neglect the study of history is not prudent; if interested with the care of others, it is not just.—*Johnson*.

History maketh a young man to be old, without either wrinkles or gray hairs, privileging him with the experience of age, without either the infirmities or inconveniences thereof.—*Fuller*.

ADDRESS.

OUR FATHERS—THEIR FAITH AND THEIR PRACTICE.

After God had carried us safe to New England, and we had builded our houses, provided necessaries for our livelihood, reared convenient places for God's worship, and settled the civil government, one of the next things we longed for and looked after was to advance learning, and perpetuate it to posterity.* Such was the polity of the early settlers. With a country poor, and the people few in number, we find a college† established, and

* *New England's First Fruits*, London, 1648. *Mass. Hist. Coll.* 3, p. 262.

† In the autumn of 1636, only six years from the first settlement of the Massachusetts colony, the General Court voted £400, equal to a tax for one year upon the entire settlement, towards the erection of a public school or college, of which £200 was to be paid the next year, and £200 when the work was finished. In 1638 the Rev. John Harvard, a consumptive, who had been in the country a year or two, died, leaving £779 17s. 2d., one half of his estate, and his entire library, consisting of three hundred and twenty volumes, towards the erection of a college. In that day of small things this bequest was a large sum, and in March, 1636, it was ordered that the college should be called Harvard college, in honor of its benefactor. The first person who had charge of the institution was Nathaniel Eaton—a very unfortunate appointment. He was accused of ill-treating the students, of giving them bad and scanty diet, of exercising inhuman severities towards them, and of beating his sabel, Nathaniel Briscoe, in a most barbarous manner. As a result, the court dismissed him from office, fined him one hundred marks (£96 18s. 4d.), and ordered him to pay £30 to Briscoe. He was then excommunicated by the church at Cambridge, soon after which he went to Virginia, from thence to England, where he became a violent persecutor of the Nonconformists, was at length committed to prison for debt, and there ended his days. But this misfortune neither checked the zeal nor dampened the ardor of the earnest men who had the work in charge.—*Pierce's History of Harvard University*.

a little later, an enactment "to the end that learning may not be buried in the graves of our forefathers, every township, after the Lord hath increased them to the number of fifty householders, shall appoint one to teach all children to write and read; and where any town shall increase to the number of one hundred families, they shall set up a Grammar school,—the masters thereof being able to instruct youth, so far as they may be fitted for the University."* Here we have a distinct recognition of the idea of education for the whole people. In these measures, says the historian,† "especially in the laws establishing common schools, lies the secret of the success and character of New England. Every child, as it was born into the world, was lifted from the earth by the genius of the country, and in the statutes of the land received, as its birthright, a pledge of the public care of its morals and its mind."

Within thirty years of their settlement we find this people surveying land, and laying out farms in the valley of the Souhegan, regarding it as within their province. And such a conclusion was not strange. Gosnold, Pring, Waymouth,‡ and Smith,§ of Virginia fame,—an escaped Turkish slave, whose life seems to have belonged more to a mythical age than to that century,—with others of less celebrity in the mother country, had explored the coast, its bays and its rivers; but of the interior but little

* Colonial Laws 74, 183.

† Bancroft's History of the United States, vol. 1, p. 459.

‡ Waymouth entered the Penobscot or Kennebec river, and in a shallop, brought in pieces out of England, ascended not much less than three score miles, and kidnapped and carried away five of the natives. "One, standing before, carried our box of merchandise, as we were wont when I went to traffic with them, and a platter of pease, which meat they loved; but before we were landed, one of them, being so suspiciously fearful of his own good, withdrew himself into the wood. The other two met us on the shore side to receive the pease, with whom we went up the cliff to their fire, and sat down with them; and while we were discussing how to catch the third man that was gone, I opened the box and shew them trifles to exchange, thinking thereby to have banished fear from the other, and draw him to return. But when we could not we used little delay, but suddenly laid hands upon them, and it was as much as five or six of us could do to get them into the light horseman (boat); for they were strong, and so naked as our best hold was by their long hair on their heads."—Mass. Hist. Coll., vol. 23, p. 144-5.

§ Smith made a rude map of the coast, superior, perhaps, to any that had preceded it, and was the first to give the country the name of New England. He declared that "truth was more than wealth, and industrious subjects more available to a king than gold."

was known. The marvellous accounts of the explorers, and the religious condition of the country favored colonization; and between 1621 and 1631, including both years, there were not less than twenty charters granted for the purpose of settlement or commerce on the coast of New England.* The grant of Capt. John Mason, in 1622, extended on the coast from where the waters of the Naumkeag discharge themselves into the ocean to the river Merrimack, extending inland to the sources of these streams. The same year Mason and Sir Ferdinando Gorges obtained a grant from the Merrimack to the Kennebec river, bounded by the ocean, and extending back to the great river of Canada. In 1628 Sir Henry Roswell and others received a grant, in width from three miles north of the Merrimack river to three miles south of the Charles, bounded on the Atlantic, and extending back to the western ocean; and it was under this grant that the Massachusetts settlers held their possessions.

The next year, 1629, John Mason received a grant extending "from the middle of Piscataqua river and up the same to the farthest head thereof, and from thence north-westward, until sixty miles from the mouth of the harbor were finished; also through Merrimack river to the farthest head thereof, and so forward up into the land westward until sixty miles were finished; and from thence to cross overland to the end of the sixty miles accounted from the Piscataqua river; together with all islands within five leagues of the coast."† Now it is obvious that grants so profuse and inconsistent could not all stand, and out of the two last mentioned grew the controversy between New Hampshire and Massachusetts, which lasted nearly a century, and was renowned for its acrimony and bitterness. A generation passed away, a new generation took it up, and thus it was carried along till terminated by royal authority. I have already stated that within thirty years of their arrival the inhabitants of the Massachusetts colony were surveying land and laying out farms in the valley of the Souhegan. Within the period mentioned, settlements had extended up to Groton and Chelmsford. From 1655 to 1665 the country was at peace with

* Palfrey's History of New England, vol. 1, pp. 307-8.

† Farmer's edition of Belknap, p. 8.

the aborigines, and the tide of population rolled onward rapidly. In addition to those on the Souhegan, grants were made on both sides of the Merrimack river, on the Nashua river, on Salmon brook, on Penichuck pond, on Penichuck brook, and in other localities, and, with their continuance, the grantees, and those who desired to settle on the farms granted, felt the need of the privileges and immunities of an incorporated township. In accordance therewith, in 1673, they petitioned the General Court and were incorporated, the township being named Dunstable,* and deriving its name from Dunstable in England, some of the proprietors being from that place. It must have been something like fifteen miles from its eastern to its western boundary, and more than twelve miles from its northern to its southern, as it embraced the city of Nashua, the towns of Hudson, Hollis, Tyngsborough, all of Amherst that lies south of the Souhegan, all of Milford on the same side of that river, except a strip a mile in width on the west side of the town, contiguous to the towns of Wilton and Mason, all of Merrimack on the same side of the same river, most of the town of Litchfield, and portions of the towns of Londonderry, Pelham, Brookline, Pepperell, and Townsend. At this time the north-western corner of the county of Middlesex, Massachusetts, was on the south bank of the Souhegan river, a few rods below the bridge recently erected east of the Pine Valley Corporation, and the county maintained its jurisdiction till 1741, when the boundary line between Massachusetts and New Hampshire was determined, severing Dunstable, and bringing about two thirds of the township

*The following year the plantation was surveyed and its boundaries were as follows: "It lieth upon both sides Merrimack river on the Nashua river. It is bounded on the south by Chelmsford, by Groton linc, and partly by country land. The westerly line runs due north until you come to Souhegan river, to a hill called Dram-cup hill, to a great pile near to the said river at the north-west corner of Charlestown school farm, bounded by Souhegan river on the north; and on the east side of the Merrimack it begins at a great stone which was supposed to be near the north-east corner of Mr. Brenton's farm, and from thence it runs south-south-east six miles to a pine tree marked F, standing within sight of Beaver brook; thence it runs two degrees west of south four miles and a quarter, which reached to the south side of Henry Kimball's farm at Jeremie's hill; thence from the south-east angle of said farm it runs two degrees and a quarter westward of the south near to the head of the long pond which lieth at the head of Edward Colburn's farm. And thus it is bounded by the said pond and the head of said Colburn's farm, taking in Captain Scarlett's farm so as to close again; all of which is sufficiently bounded and described.—*Proprietor's Records.*

within the jurisdiction of New Hampshire. This was very distasteful to many; nevertheless, with the settlement of the province line there was an improved condition of things.

Confidence was strengthened, the tide of settlers moved onward, real property was in demand, and with the increase of population petitions were numerous for a division of the New Hampshire part of old Dunstable. Accordingly, in April, 1746, the legislature of New Hampshire divided it, incorporating the new town of Dunstable,* also Hollis, Merrimack, and

MONSON.

This last named town embraced within its limits most of the present populous part of Milford on the south side of the Souhegan river, all of Amherst on the same side of that river, and a portion of the north-west part of Hollis. Col. Joseph Blanchard† was authorized to call the first meeting of the inhabitants, which was held May 1, only thirty days after the date of the act of incorporation. At a subsequent meeting, held on the 27th of the same month, Col. Joseph Blanchard, James Wheeler, and Robert Colburn were chosen a committee "to make the bound between the town of Hollis and the town of Monson." At the same meeting it was also voted "that there be a pound created and built near to the house of William Nevins upon the most convenient piece of ground." The following petition from the inhabitants was presented to the general assembly of New Hampshire, under date of May 13, 1747. "The petition of the inhabitants of the town of Monson, hereto subscribers, humbly

* In 1837 the name was changed to Nashua. In 1842 the town was divided, and the north portion incorporated by the name of Nashville. In 1853 Nashville and Nashua were consolidated and chartered as the city of Nashua.

† Col. Joseph Blanchard was son of Capt. Joseph and Abiah (Haskell) Blanchard; was born at Dunstable Feb. 11, 1704; married Rebecca Hubbard; was an accomplished land surveyor, and for several years was agent of the Masowian proprietors; was in 1746, by mandamus, appointed one of the councillors of New Hampshire, which position he sustained till his death; commanded a regiment in the French war, and was in 1755 stationed at Fort Edward, Washington county, New York; one company of his command being the famous Rogers rangers; was also judge of the superior court from 1749 to 1758. He died April 7, 1758, and his widow April 17, 1774. They had thirteen children, among whom was Augustus Blanchard, Esq., who died in Milford in 1869, having been clerk of the south-west parish ten years, town clerk for the first ten years after the town was incorporated, and a representative of the town to the general court.