

**THE HISTORY OF WENHAM:
CIVIL AND ECCLESIASTICAL:
FROM ITS SETTLEMENT IN
1639, TO 1860**

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The History of Wenham: Civil and Ecclesiastical: From Its Settlement in 1639, to 1860 by
Myron O. Allen

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P R E F A C E .

THE history of a small country town, and that one no way conspicuous among its neighbors, can hardly be expected to furnish much to interest the general reader. Such a work must be made up of particulars and minute details. It is seldom that great events or distinguished characters occur to give life and interest to the story. The narrative must derive its claim to the reader's attention mainly from his acquaintance with the scenes, or his connections with the actors described.

Yet there is a point of view from which local history may deserve the attention of the thoughtful and philosophic mind. The township is the primary and fundamental institution of our government — the basis upon which the superstructure of state and national organization is erected. The State is but a confederation of towns as the general government is a confederation of States. In either case those powers only are entrusted to the larger body which could not be conveniently exercised by the smaller. In this consist the strength and security of our republic, that so much of the power is retained by the people themselves, and so little delegated to those who represent them at Boston and Washington.

Those little independent municipal corporations are therefore the germ of all our free institutions. Whoever would trace the history of "Liberty in America," must study the history of

towns. From their origin, these were miniature republics, where public affairs were discussed in open meeting, and the result determined strictly by the majority of votes. These town meetings — scenes, as they often were, of earnest contention, and even wrangling — were the schools of republicanism. When the Provincial Government was overthrown, it was several years before a State Government was organized, yet there was nothing of anarchy or confusion; each town went on with its own affairs, and the construction of a state, and afterwards of a national organization, was a work of little difficulty. It was merely the development and application of principles which had existed and been in operation ever since the landing at Plymouth. In this point of view the history and interior structure of a New England township, is the history in miniature of the nation.

The problem of history may be stated thus: given, the present state, condition, and character of a people, to determine those influences in the past which have tended to produce these results. It is the task of the historian to trace the development of these influences, and so to arrange the history of events as to give a miniature of the character and spirit of the age which he describes. He must set before us not only great men — statesmen and scholars — but also ordinary men in their ordinary dress, and engaged in their ordinary employments. He must visit the dwellings of the poor and the abodes of misery as well as the palaces of wealth and luxury. No anecdote, no familiar saying is insignificant which can throw light upon the state of education, morals or religion, or mark the progress of the human mind.

Since the natural features of a country have an important influence upon the character of its inhabitants, they must be described in their primitive wildness as well as in their present state of cultivation and improvement. He must paint the stern and sturdy Puritan, shrewd as the shrewdest in worldly things, yet sacrificing all at the call of duty; trampling on bishops,

lords and kings, but reverencing the majesty of the law and bowing in the dust before his Maker. He must trace the slowly kindling flame of liberty from its first faint sparks till it burst forth in the revolution. He must mark the progress of education and literature, the changes in manners and modes of life. He must deduce, by a process strictly logical, the Yankee of the 19th century, from the Puritan of Plymouth Rock. And with all he should mingle those lessons of instruction and true philosophy which history is designed to teach.

The author is deeply sensible how far he has fallen short of the ideal here proposed. His time has been limited, his materials imperfect, and his abilities inadequate to the task.

It is much to be regretted that the work was not undertaken fifteen or twenty years ago. Many interesting incidents, especially of revolutionary history, which were recorded only in the memories of aged inhabitants, might then have been preserved, but are now irrecoverably lost.

In preparing this volume, I have made a careful examination of the Town, Church, and Parish Records, the State archives, the histories of adjoining towns, the Historical Collections, and several Histories of Massachusetts, as well as of many manuscript papers. It is possible that some incidents of interest may have been omitted, and that some errors of detail may have crept into the narrative. Those who have had much experience in researches of this character, know the extreme difficulty of avoiding such errors, and will be least disposed to criticise them with severity.

The author would take this opportunity to acknowledge special obligations to Dr. John Porter, Col. Paul Porter, Charles A. Killham and B. C. Putnam, for valuable materials and generous encouragement. Many others whom he has had occasion to consult, have expressed a kindly interest in the undertaking.

He now with regret takes leave of a work which has occupied so many of his leisure hours in a manner pleasant, and as he fondly trusts, not wholly unprofitable. It has been to him a la-

bor of love, and if it shall have the effect of awakening in the people of Wenham an interest in the antiquities and history of this ancient town, — if it shall excite them to emulate the virtues and avoid the errors of their forefathers, he will feel that he has had his reward.

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