

**ADDRESS AT THE
CENTENNIAL CELEBRATION
OF THE TOWN OF
FITCHBURG; JUNE 30, 1864**

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Address at the Centennial Celebration of the Town of Fitchburg; June 30, 1864 by Charles H. B. Snow

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CHARLES H. B. SNOW

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CENTENNIAL CELEBRATION
OF THE TOWN OF
FITCHBURG; JUNE 30, 1864**

ADDRESS
AT THE
CENTENNIAL CELEBRATION

OF THE
Town of Fitchburg,

June 30, 1864.

WITH AN APPENDIX
CONTAINING THE
Poems, Speeches and Letters
CONNECTED WITH THAT OCCASION.

FITCHBURG, MASS.
PRINTED AT THE OFFICE OF PIPEK & BOUTELLE.
1876.

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~~10334.56~~ 1879, April 19.

Gift

Edward B. Sawtell,

of Fitchburg

To the Honorable City Council of the City of Fitchburg:

GENTLEMEN:—The undersigned petition your honorable body to cause to be printed fifteen hundred copies of the valuable Historic Address, delivered by the late HON. CHARLES H. B. SNOW, at the Centennial Celebration of this town, June 30, 1864, which for certain reasons has never yet been published, that the same may be preserved to those who may come after us, and to the future historian of our city.
Fitchburg, Jan. 4, 1876.

LEWIS H. BRADFORD,
H. A. WILLIS,
A. NORCROSS,
T. K. WARE,
E. TORREY,
JONAS A. MARSHALL,
JAMES P. PUTNAM,

Survivors
of the
Centennial
Committee,
of 1864.

CITY OF FITCHBURG.

IN CITY COUNCIL, January 4, 1876.

ORDERED:—That the Committee on Printing be authorized and instructed to cause fifteen hundred copies of the Historic Address of the late HON. CHARLES H. B. SNOW, delivered June 30, 1864, to be printed for the use of the city.

Attest:

HENRY JACKSON, *City Clerk.*

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ADDRESS.

We are to-day assembled to celebrate the Hundredth Anniversary of the Town of Fitchburg. It is a custom almost universal, to celebrate in some form the birth-day—to mark as it were in a visible and impressive manner, the commencement of a new chapter in the volume of life. The existence of Corporations, invested as they are, by what is styled the omnipotence of the law, with the liberal gift of immortality, is not to be measured by the same standard by which we designate the different periods of human life. Centuries do the office of years in their majestic duration, and serve appropriately to mark their various eras.

We are therefore come together at the expiration of the hundredth year of our municipality, to pay it a fitting tribute.

We come also to review the years that are passed, and to draw from them lessons for the future—lessons no where so impressively taught as in the record of the labors, the trials, the failures, and successes of those who were once the actors upon the same busy stage on which we are now playing our respective parts in the drama of life.

I do not propose however, on this occasion, to give you the history of Fitchburg. It would be impossible for me in the limits within which I am necessarily con-

fined, even faithfully to outline it. The history of a hundred years of any of our municipal communities, faithfully and fully narrated, would embrace no small or unimportant part of the history of the nation. It would present in miniature a picture of the people in their first struggle with the wilderness and its savage tenants; in their painful but invigorating contest with hardship and privation, and their final victory over the unfriendly circumstances of their first condition—in their gradual achievement of the comforts and some of the luxuries of civilization—in their successful establishment upon a firm basis, of those chief elements of individual and social goodness and greatness, religion and education—in their sharp, stern contest for a distinct nationality and political independence—in their anxious and difficult construction of that government, which, securing the fullest liberty to the people, should consolidate the Confederacy into the splendid unity of the Republic—in their subsequent wonderful development of all the acts of peace, by which they have established themselves high and dominant among the powers of the earth—all these and much more would go to make up a full and truthful account of the little community of which we are, to-day, the representatives. He who faithfully tells the story of the common pebble in the highways, at the same time necessarily gives the history of the granite arches of the globe.

Nor can I, though I would gladly do so, present to you minutely those features peculiar to our own town history—sketches of the lives of our prominent and best citizens—aneecdotes of the perils and hardships of our ear-

ly settlers—reminiscences of the eccentricities, fun and humors which crop out so quaintly from the rugged surface of New England character, although a volume not by any means uninteresting or unreadable might be filled with them. Such a treatment of the subject would evidently be foreign to an occasion like the present, nor would it be possible within the limits of any ordinary discourse.

Instead therefore, of attempting an end clearly beyond my reach at this time, but which, I am happy to say, has been admirably attained to a certain point comparatively recent, by our former townsman, Rufus Torrey, in his excellent history. I propose to occupy the hour allotted to me, in considering, in a very general manner, as I necessarily must do, how faithfully and successfully this municipality of ours, has, during its hundred years of existence, discharged its duties and answered the end of its creation—and to do this we must consider for a moment the purposes properly to be subserved by town organizations, as well as the end which our forefathers principally had in view in establishing them. In the division of the State, or rather Province, into counties and towns, our ancestors followed the precedent of the mother country. In England, however, the territory was subject to two distinct divisions: one ecclesiastical, the other civil; one sub-division of the former being Parishes, and of the latter, Towns. This distinction was not generally made by our ancestors, or rather the ecclesiastical and civil functions were usually united in their town organizations; and it was the usage of our town's anciently

to transact their parochial affairs at town meetings, making no difference in the forms of their proceedings when acting upon those subjects, or upon matters of mere municipal or political concern. Corporate powers were bestowed upon communities that they might thereby as one great, and perhaps the chief end of their existence, maintain a minister of the gospel and stated religious services.

The construction of highways and bridges, the erection of public buildings, and the raising of money for the necessary municipal purposes, were of course objects of consideration, but they were subordinate. Experience, however, has shown that the union of church and town, like the union of church and state, although perhaps natural in the earlier stages of social development soon becomes an inconvenience, and a cause of difficulty and dissension. Availing myself therefore of the lessons of experience, I think I may safely enlarge somewhat upon the early idea of the legitimate functions of towns, and pronounce them to be the establishments of unrestrained public religious worship, the diffusion of general education, the affording of facilities for political deliberation and representation and for united political action and the development of all conveniences of a public nature, and such as promote social and business intercourse.

I propose to regard the town briefly in each of these aspects.

But first revert with me for a moment to the commencement of our corporate existence, one hundred years ago. The year 1764 was pregnant with events of vast importance. The causes that concurred to bring the

American Republic into existence in that year sprang into full activity. The war that had been waged between Great Britain, France and Spain, had just been terminated by a treaty of peace. England was at full liberty to turn her attention to her colonies, and to mature schemes for converting them into profitable sources of revenue. In 1764 the intention of the British Ministry to quarter troops in America and support them at her expense was first announced. The question of the right to tax America without allowing her the right of representation was at the same time unanimously determined in the affirmative. And on the 10th of March of the same year the House of Commons voted a resolution that it was proper to charge certain stamp-duties on the colonies or plantations. Thus the year of the incorporation of the town was signalized by the inauguration of a policy on the part of the mother country that led to revolution, and terminated in national independence. At the incorporation of the town more than forty years had elapsed since David Page, the first white settler upon Turkey Hills, as the region now comprized in Fitchburg and Lunenburg was then called, had heralded civilization with the smoke of his clearing.

Between that time and 1764, great changes had been effected. The unbroken forest, the echoes of which had once been only awakened by the screams of the eagle, the howl of the wolf, or the whoop of the Indian, had here and there been rolled back, and its gloomy recesses irradiated by the gladsome light of the sun, smiled with the tender promise of spring and were clothed with the golden splendors of autumn. The