

**AN ADDRESS DELIVERED AT
THE FORMATION OF THE
BLACKSTONE MONUMENT
ASSOCIATION, JULY 4, 1855**

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An Address Delivered at the Formation of the Blackstone Monument Association, July 4, 1855
by Various

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VARIOUS

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AN

A D D R E S S

DELIVERED AT THE FORMATION OF THE

BLACKSTONE MONUMENT ASSOCIATION,

TOGETHER WITH THE PRELIMINARIES,

AND

PROCEEDINGS AT STUDY HILL, JULY 4, 1855.

PREPARED FOR THE PRESS BY THE SECRETARY,

AND

PUBLISHED BY ORDER OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS OF SAID ASSOCIATION.

Remember the days of old, consider the years of many generations.—Deut. xxxii. 7.
Remove not the old landmark.—Prov. xxiii. 10.

PAWTUCKET, R. I.,
PRINTED BY JAMES L. ESTEY, No. 12 MILL STREET.
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PRELIMINARY.

ON the 26th day of May, 1855, being the anniversary of Blackstone's death, the following communication appeared in the "Business Directory," a newspaper published at Pawtucket, R. I.

WILLIAM BLACKSTONE.

Who was this almost mythical personage, whose name has been perpetuated in the waters that flow through our village, and what was his history? A brief reply may be interesting just at the *present time*. William Blackstone was an Episcopal clergyman of England, early in the 17th century. He was a bold, independent and intelligent man—far in advance of the age in which he lived. He was one of those self-poised spirits who would not submit to the theological dictation and civil usurpation of that weak-minded, fiery-headed, yet eminent scholar, Archbishop Laud. He left England and landed on this coast soon after the first band of pilgrims, and chose to stray away alone. He settled at *Shawmut*, the Indian name of the spot where the city of Boston now stands, and lived there several years as the first and only inhabitant of that peninsula. There in the solitude of his choice, he commenced his career of progress—planted his gardens and raised the first apples in Massachusetts. When in 1630 the English emigrants began to settle around him, he could not submit to the dictations they had imported with them; but to settle the difficulty, they taxed themselves and bought his improvements and rights, to his satisfaction; and in the Spring of 1635 he bid them adieu and started for what was then to them the unknown "Far West." He pitched his tent near the spot now occupied by our Lonsdale depot. The place was called *Wawepooseag*, a compound Indian term for catching wild geese and birds with nets and snares. Here he built his house (called "Study Hall") by the side of what he called

"Study Hill," through which the rail cars and telegraph wires now pass. Here he planted himself as the first white inhabitant of what is now our State; and also raised the first apples known to Rhode Island. He lived here twenty-four years as a bachelor, and then married a Boston widow. He had a large library for those times, and cultivated his lands and his mind with industry and taste. He differed in sentiment, with Roger Williams at the village of Providence (a settlement subsequent to his own) but lived on good terms with Williams, and often preached for him and his people free, and gave them the first apples they ever saw. All that is known of this pilgrim father of Boston and Cumberland, discovers him to be a very benevolent, intelligent specimen of independent oddity. He lived at Study Hill forty years after he sold *Shawmut* (Boston,) and died at his Study Hall respected and lamented by all the inhabitants who had grown up around him during his long and patriarchal life, being over 80 years of age at his death. He died on the 26th of May, 1675, JUST ONE HUNDRED AND EIGHTY YEARS AGO THIS DAY, and was buried near his house on the 28th of May, as the records declare, and his grave remains to this day, designated by two small bowlders of semi-crystallized quartz rock.

The well he stoned is still to be seen; and the localities and boundaries of his lands are known from records and plats, although oaks of a hundred years growth have since flourished on the flowery gardens of Blackstone. Although this Pilgrim Father and patriarchal defender of rational liberty died a hundred years before the Revolution, and our "Declaration of Independence" was to him a century in the future, yet the 4th day of July was celebrated by him as his principal holiday because it was the anniversary of his marriage to an excellent and amiable lady who shared with him the last fourteen years of his long life—she having died but two years before him. He left one son, but his race is extinct—no blood of Blackstone flows in any living veins, and none but the above named unlettered stone marks his resting place. The sparkling waters of the Blackstone river will for ages to come reflect his *name*; but the thousands and tens of thousands of his successors, who have flourished and lived on the utility of this stream, have too long remained in ignorance of the illustrious character and amiable oddities of him whose name it bears.

And now, Mr. Editor, I would suggest an unceremonious and unostentatious gathering at Study Hill on the approaching 4th of July—

a sort of "Old Folks Celebration" with all the young who may choose to attend, on the spot thus once occupied;—where by free and familiar modes, the localities of his homestead can be pointed out, and a more detailed portraiture of his life and character can be given; and where can be commenced the formation of a Blackstone Monument Association, whose ultimate object shall be to rear a respectable stone which shall permanently record the name, character and resting place of the first white inhabitant of Boston and Rhode Island.

S. C. N.

Nothing further was heard on this subject until Monday, two days previous to the 4th of July; when two or three persons on the spur of the moment resolved to issue a notice inviting a meeting at the grave of Blackstone. With this very limited notice, a goodly number, far exceeding the expectations of its projectors, assembled there at 10 o'clock, A. M., on the 4th, and organized themselves under the branches of a venerable tree, called the "Catholic Oak."

The meeting was called to order by one of its number, and Rev. David Benedict, D. D., of Pawtucket, was chosen chairman, and James H. Chase, of Valley Falls, appointed secretary. The services were commenced with prayer by the venerable chairman. The Hon. Johnson Gardner, of Pawtucket, Mass., then read the Declaration of Independence, very much in the style of a practiced electionist, and gave very general satisfaction. Mr. S. C. Newman, of the Pawtucket Telegraph, a native of the ancient town of Rehoboth, which once embraced the residence of Blackstone within its limits, and a lineal descendant in the seventh generation from the founder and first minister of that early Puritan town, next delivered the following discourse.

R. I.

DISCOURSE.

A NATION'S birth day! Truly this is, and long may it continue to be, a noble theme for contemplation. Yet time and circumstances, are fast changing the *mode* of its observance.

The exhilarating topics of its earlier anniversaries, have become familiar to the school boys. The story of the Revolution is enshrined in magic names from Lexington to Yorktown. Its language is stereotyped in granite on Bunker's consecrated summit; it is permanently engraved and daguerreotyped in the manifold dialect of patriotism, and scattered broad-cast throughout our land. Those martial descriptions and patriotic phillipics of earlier days, have become historic matters of the glorious past; and we leave the bon-fires and illuminated outbursts of those more exciting forms of external expression, to the times that gave them birth. It is ours to consecrate this day to a no less noble purpose. We devote it to the remote, antiquarian contemplation of a liberal-minded worthy who lived long prior to our nationality—to the Pilgrim Father of Boston and Cumberland—to the first white inhabitant of our gallant little State; and whose history, deeds and sentiments are yet but too firmly "ANCHORED" behind the oblivious curtains of the past; and whose venerable ashes sleep in peace beneath yonder simple flag, and like the expressive motto of our State, repose in "HOPE."

Before entering upon a description of the venerable Blackstone, it will perhaps be proper to offer a glance at the origin of Cumberland. Some few of the early Pilgrims near Ply-

mouth, with the Rev. Samuel Newman as their pastor, purchased of Massassoit, the chief of the Wampanoags, a tract of land and settled themselves as the town of Rehoboth, in 1643. That town acquired additional territory by various purchases until 1694, when it was divided, and what they called the "North Purchase," became the town of Attleborough; and the twenty-seven square miles which now constitutes the town of Cumberland, was then claimed by Attleborough, and called Attleborough Gore, from its triangular form. This "Gore" remained thus till 1747, when it became a part of the colony of Rhode Island, and assumed the name of Cumberland, and has remained so for the last one hundred and eight years.

The magnates of England in the 17th century, were remarkable for their civil, political and religious usurpations. While the Vanes and the Sydneys of that infatuated age, fell victims to the political code of judicial murders, the fooleries of Archbishop Laud were no less conspicuous and abhorrent, in the branding, the nose-slitting, and ear-cropping dogmas of the dominant theology of that day. There were some, however, even among the corrupted upper ranks of the clergy, who were disgusted with the oppressive dictations of the times, and who chose to bid an eternal adieu to their native land. Such an one, was the Rev. William Blackstone, of England.

He was educated for the Episcopal ministry, and initiated into the classical learning of his day; and what was then called a dissenter, or non-conformist—not assenting to the dogmas and externalisms of the functionaries of the church, because he saw in them the elements of encroachment upon the true independence and natural rights of man—the very elementary foundation of our "Declaration of Independence" in its broadest sense.

He was of a bold, independent, intelligent and original cast of mind. He was far in advance of the age in which he lived; and had pictured in his mind something of that state of civilization and independence which we now behold; but as freedom of opinion was out of the question there, he preferred to