OAKES AMES: A MEMOIR: WITH AN ACCOUNT OF THE DEDICATION OF THE OAKES AMES MEMORIAL HALL AT NORTH EASTON, MASS. NOVEMBER 17, 1881

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649508716

Oakes Ames: A Memoir: With an Account of the Dedication of the Oakes Ames Memorial Hall at North Easton, Mass. November 17, 1881 by Various

Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
Cover @ 2017

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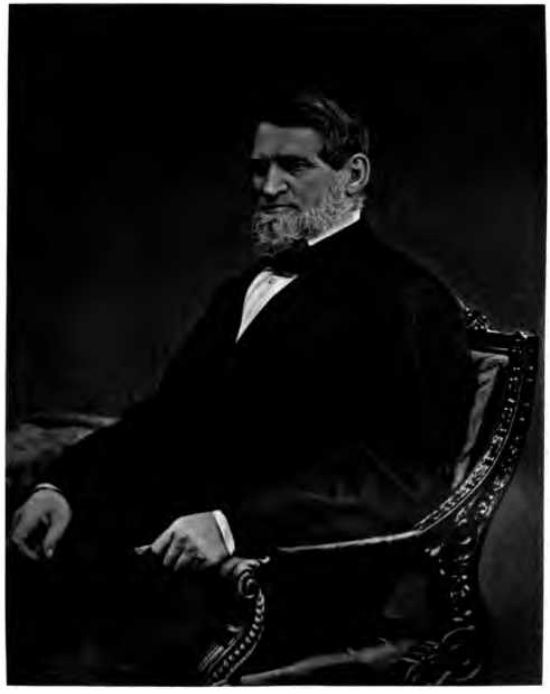

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— OAKES AMES

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CAMBRIDGE
Printed at the Riverside Press
1883

OAKES AMES.

OAKES AMES, the eldest son of Oliver and Susannah Ames, was born in Easton, Massachusetts, on the tenth day of January, 1804. His father moved from Bridgewater in the previous year, attracted by the abundance of water-power for manufacturing uses in the region of Easton, which formed the heads of the Taunton River. There the son passed his boyhood and youth, acquiring a district-school education, and assisting his father in the workshop and on the farm. About the age of sixteen he enjoyed the more liberal advantages of a few months' instruction at Dighton Academy; and after that he became the faithful apprentice of his father, until he was afterwards his foreman and chief reliance. He was possessed by nature of a large and athletic frame, which laborious industry developed and matured, so that when he reached manhood he was fully prepared to engage with vigor in the pursuit in which he had been trained, and which was to be the engrossing one of his life.

The first of the name, William Ames, emigrated from Burton, in Somersetshire, England, to Braintree, in Massachusetts Colony, in 1635. His only son was John Ames; his fourth son was Thomas Ames; his eldest son was Thomas Ames; his second son was John Ames; his youngest son was Oliver Ames; and his eldest son was Oakes Ames. On the maternal side, he was fifth in the line of descent from Rev. Urian Oakes, one of the earliest presidents of Harvard College, from whom he took his Christian name. Susannah

Angier, the mother of Oakes Ames, was a descendant of the famous Dr. William Ames, the Francker Professor, whose daughter Ruth, coming to Massachusetts with her mother and brother in 1637, married Edmund Angier, of Cambridge; whose son, Rev. Samuel Angier, married Hannah, daughter of President Urian Oakes, of Harvard University. Their grandson, Oakes Angier, a law student under the elder President Adams, became the father of Susannah Angier, who in April, 1803, became the wife of Oliver Ames.

The repressing influence of the war of 1812 on his father's business — which was the manufacture of shovels — was not without its effect on the mind of the youth, as the crushing disasters of 1837 also left their permanent impress on his mature manhood. The observation of the former helped him to a thorough understanding of the latter. He enjoyed the paternal confidence from the beginning; and on emerging from his minority, he naturally assumed the superintendence of the manufacturing works, and his course of life thereafter was established. From being overseer in the growing works he gradually became his father's main dependence, and with his wife he continued to live in the same house with his parents until they died.

The simple and undeviating rules in the establishment were industry and integrity; to these everything was made obedient. The son Oakes was possessed of great quickness of apprehension in all things pertaining to the business. He drove, but was never driven by it. He developed inventive powers of a high order, and exhibited superior capacity to administer affairs. All that he did advanced the interests of the establishment. He inspired more and more the movement about him. He answered promptly the call of every emergency. Having reached the age of sixty-five, the father, in 1844, withdrew from all further active participation in the business, turning it over absolutely to his sons Oakes and Oliver, from which date the firm bore the name of Oliver Ames and Sons. Five years later followed the discovery of gold in California, and two years after a similar discovery in Australia. The first event, by causing a new and sudden

distribution of population, imparted a stimulus to the building of railroads, and practically inaugurated a new era. The stir pervaded all circles and was felt in all branches of business. This unexpected planting of a modern people on the distant Pacific shores was what gave birth to the conception of a railway across the continent. The expansion of the manufacturing business of Oliver Ames and Sons from that time became rapid and largely profitable. Mining, railroad building, emigration to newly opened territory, and the multiplication of public works united in giving it an impetus that speedily raised it to a high rank in industrial importance. The same spirit of enterprise which became a commanding characteristic of Oakes Ames in after years conspicuously displayed itself during this portion of his business life. He confronted the brief but fierce financial storm of 1857 without disturbance, and all went smoothly and successfully with him for years to come. The growth of the business may be somewhat understood from the statement that since those days one thousand tons of iron, two thousand tons of steel, and five thousand tons of coal pass yearly through the hands of five hundred workmen into the great works, appearing again in the form of those indispensable implements which are not to be separated from the march of civilization.

The gathering clouds of civil war in 1860 caused an anxious search everywhere for the right men to meet the impending calamity. Oakes Ames, true to the Puritan instincts which were his inheritance, had, with other men in Massachusetts, come first to the rescue of Kansas in her hand-to-hand struggle for free institutions, and in a sectional conflict could be relied on to throw his whole weight into the same scale. The newly-formed Republican party in 1860 unanimously named him in convention for Councilor from the Bristol district, and he was chosen with scarcely any opposition. Thus, without any solicitation on his own part, he became one of the cabinet officers of Governor Andrew, who relied on him as he did on few other men around him in that gloomy and threatening period. None were more generous than the famous "War Governor" of Massachusetts in acknowledging the value of the service he then rendered.

The war for the Union was dragging on to the close of its second year, with no visible symptoms of a successful issue, and men of tried character were needed in the government as well as recruits for the army. The national existence was involved in the careful composition of Congress almost as much as in the operations in the field. Requests came to Oakes Ames from all sides to consent to become a congressional candidate in the Second District. Governor Andrew himself was personally urgent. Members of the Council joined their appeals to that of the Governor. Friends and neighbors felt a fresh hope kindle, in the possibility that he would represent them in the national government. There were several members of the party who aspired to the place; but when, a week before the convention, his assent was known to have been obtained, the majority of them withdrew from further contest. The intelligence was carried at midnight by one of his warmest supporters to a well-known citizen of the district, who, roused from his bed and summoned to the window to receive it, exultingly exclaimed in response, "That settles the question in the Second District!"

Enthusiasm immediately pervaded the district. On the informal ballot in convention he received two thirds of all the votes cast, and on the next ballot was nominated with unanimity. The popular vote by which he was sent to Congress was flatteringly large, and accompanied with numerous expressions of public confidence besides those strictly political. Thus entering the thirty-eighth Congress, he continued to be reëlected to the succeeding four Congresses, serving ten years altogether, with an acceptability to his constituents that was felt by him to be his most satisfactory reward. During these ten years in Congress he was a member of the several committees on Manufactures, on the Pacific Railroad, on Revolutionary Claims, and on Roads and Canals. His views met with an attentive hearing, and carried with them admitted weight. He enjoyed the personal confidence of President Lincoln in a large degree, who listened eagerly to his suggestions and advice, and relied on his judgment. He was

reckoned in the group of leaders who gave shape to the legislation of the time, among whom he held an undisputed place for the soundness of his counsel and the steadiness with which he held his opinions. The sentiment of patriotism was deeply seated in his nature. He believed in the unity of his country to the end. He aimed to be as faithful a public servant as he had always been citizen. He desired service before all things.

As a member of the Committee on Railroads, he became interested in the government project of building a road to the Pacific. On the first day of July, 1862, Congress passed an act authorizing and making provision for the construction of a railroad and telegraph line from the Missouri River to the Pacific Ocean. It was a practical appeal to the patriotism of the capitalists of the Northern States. The commissioners named in the act met in the following September, and the subscription books were opened, but not a dollar was subscribed. A little more than a year later enough was pledged to authorize the election of a board of directors, which barely preserved the life of the corporation. Congress passed a second act in July, 1864, more liberal than the first, increasing the number of shares, doubling the grant of land, authorizing the company to issue mortgage bonds to the same amount as the government bonds, and making the latter a second instead of a first mortgage on the road. It likewise offered to withhold only one half of the money which the road might earn for the government's transportation, instead of the whole.

No further legislation was had on the road's behalf prior to its completion. It had now been incorporated two years, and in the language of Oakes Ames himself, as one of the railroad committee, it was "in great danger of breaking down." The only practical result of this new offer by Congress was the contract with Hoxie, in the following month, to build one hundred miles of road westward from the Missouri River. Six months demonstrated his inability to execute his contract. The company began to discover that individual contractors were not to be relied on to do the work, — that consolidated means alone were equal to it.