

**AN HISTORICAL ADDRESS,
DELIVERED IN
SCITUATE, RHODE
ISLAND, JULY 4TH, 1876**

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An Historical Address, Delivered in Scituate, Rhode Island, July 4th, 1876 by C. C. Beaman

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C. C. BEAMAN

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HISTORICAL ADDRESS,

DELIVERED IN

SCITUATE, RHODE ISLAND,

July 4th, 1876.

AT THE REQUEST OF THE TOWN AUTHORITIES,

By *Charles Beaman*
By C. C. BEAMAN.

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1877.

THE OCCASION.

The great republic of the world celebrates its first century to-day! It has invited all nations to participate in the occasion by an exhibition of the products and workmanship of their respective countries, in the city where the assembled Congress framed, adopted, and sent forth, July Fourth, 1776, their Declaration of Independence. It has selected an orator and poet, and other exercises appropriate to the event to take place in the same city. Our own State has requested, through its legislature, that every town in our borders should have a local celebration; and Congress and the President have sent a similar appeal to every town in the Union.

The extraordinary growth of the country in the last century, the very high position it occupies to-day, the success on so large a scale, and for so long a period, of a free government, would seem to demand an uncommon manifestation of the nation, on the happy event of completing our first one hundred years; and that to-day our Union is perfect and complete, with not a single star blotted out from our banner, and many more added to the original thirteen, standing to-day stronger and more immovable than ever.

It was with fear and trembling, one hundred years ago, that the delegates from the colonies assembled in a small hall in Philadelphia, put forth their immortal Declaration, July 4, 1776. They were wise and prudent men—some of them, as was our own Hopkins, advanced in years; a few, like Hancock, were rich. They all had much at stake, having families, high character, the ablest men chosen from Virginia, Massachusetts, Rhode Island and the other

colonies: they exposed themselves, in case of defeat, to confiscation of property, banishment, imprisonment, loss of reputation, and death by being hung as traitors, but they drew not back, there was no faltering while they cut the tie which bound them to the mother country, and launched their bark upon the tempestuous ocean of conflict with a mighty nation that had the resources of a standing army, vessels of war, wealth, and all the munitions ready for instantaneous and deadly war. To oppose all this strength of warlike array, there were a few regiments of militia, no ship of war, and guns, cannon balls and powder; and other requisites of military warfare were few indeed, and neither money nor credit but in a very limited degree.

The infant Congress staggered not at the impending and deadly struggle looming up at the future, and boldly appealed to the arbitration of the sword, and the decision of the impartial nations of the world:

“When,” they said, commencing their declaration, “in the course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bonds which have connected them with another, and to assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the laws of nature and of nature’s God entitle them, a decent respect for the opinions of mankind, requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation.”

Many and dear were the ties which bound them to the mother country! It was beyond other great nations, a free country; and the men of the revolution often expressed themselves as demanding nothing more than the rights of a British subject enjoyed at home. England was dear to them, as the source whence their supplies and protection proceeded; they had an interest in her glory as a nation; as the country from whose bosom the colonies came as from a mother. Their literature, religion, language and customs had been brought over to America—the graves of ancestry made the burial places of Britain dear to Americans. Ties of interest, affection and consanguinity were sundered with regret.

But Great Britain, her rulers, and her people looked upon the colonies to be sources of pecuniary profit; they were jealous of all manufactures and commerce which interfered with their own; and by custom-house taxes and vexatious laws to prevent the Americans from trading with any people but England and her colonies, they turned the love of the people into hatred. The people were treated in some respects as a conquered or dependent race, and not to be ranked in privilege and honor with subjects at home. All these reasons, and more, are stated in the declaration; then comes the solemn determination that they will bear the injustice and oppression no longer, but set up for themselves. In well considered words they take their final farewell:

“We, therefore, the representatives of the United States of America, in General Congress assembled, appealing to the Supreme Judge of the world for the rectitude of our intentions, do, in the name and by the authority of the good people of these colonies, solemnly publish and declare, that these united colonies are, and of right ought to be, free and independent states; that they are absolved from all allegiance to the British crown, and that all political connection between them and the state of Great Britain, is, and ought to be totally dissolved: and that as free and independent states they have full power to levy war, conclude peace, contract alliances, establish commerce, and to do all other acts and things which independent states may of right do. And for the support of this declaration, with a firm reliance on the protection of Divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our lives, our fortunes and our sacred honor.”

The fighting at Concord and Lexington had already taken place, and two months afterwards the battle of Bunker Hill sent its echo round the world. Boston had been evacuated by the British forces March 17, 1776, and now, July 4, 1776, the rebellion had taken shape in an official act of the newly organized government, casting off all allegiance to Great Britain, and asserting its entire independence and determination to maintain it by all the force they could command.

We meet to-day without distinction of party or religious denomination; and though we come together as town's people of Scituate, we hold fellowship with all the towns of our State, and passing out of the bounds of Rhode Island we stand up to-day with every state, city and town in the Union in a GRAND NATIONAL JUBILEE! on the occasion of our completing our *first hundred years*. We go farther, and extend a call to every other nation to rejoice with us in our remarkable history; in the unexampled prosperity we have enjoyed, in the success which has attended the experiment of a people self-governed. We may be pardoned for some little self-exultation while we recognize the guiding hand of our God in our preservation and blessing.

In the city of Philadelphia, where our delegates in Congress assembled a hundred years ago, and framed and adopted a Declaration of Independence there will be an extraordinary gathering of our fellow citizens from all parts of our country, and many distinguished visitors from foreign lands will be convened to witness a national festival, commemorative of what transpired in that city a hundred years ago, and what great results have come out of it.

We have dared to invite an International Exhibition of Art and Manufactures, Inventions and Discoveries, Literature and Science, and other matters relating to man's progress in society, and to put side by side, our own skill and taste, not for vain show, but in order to bring the world into fellowship and useful and honorable competition.

We may not be able to grasp in our vision the spectacle which our still youthful nation presents to the world to-day. Our place is in the New World discovered by Christopher Columbus four hundred years ago. The vast extent of territory that maps out our heritage lying between two great oceans; its natural features of mountains, valleys and plains, and lakes and rivers, indented coasts by inlets, bays and harbors where proud navies ride and prosperous cities lift their spires is but imperfectly realized. A view of the manufacturing and mechanical establishments, a sight of the farms cultivated with all the help of newly invented agricultural imple-

ments, a perception of the warehouses where are stored the productions and workmanship of every clime, the schools and colleges filled with pupils of both sexes, the churches whose bells ring cheerfully on the Sabbath morn, the printing presses worked by steam power, scattering leaves of knowledge over the whole land, the railroads running in every direction, bearing immense freights and conveying passengers in multitude, the telegraph with its wires beneath the ocean and stretched out over the whole land, and the activity of the people, and the enterprise visible, and the arrivals of emigrants daily from the four quarters of the globe, with the general intelligence, comfort and happiness of the people, the steady march of population over the deserts, or uncultivated places, and the returning march from the West to meet midway the East; this is the picture too great and wonderful to be fully realized, as the orators of our centenary year vainly strive with uplifted voice and choice expression to describe to-day in the assemblies convened all over the land.

Praise and thanksgiving may well go up from the nation so highly favored of God! who has not so blessed every other nation under the broad heavens—no other nation has a history like ours. Behold what God has wrought for us! May thanks go up from the shores of both oceans, and from the banks of every river and lake, from every hill and valley, and all places where man has set his foot on the soil of these United States and sheltered himself from oppression and wrong beneath the folds of our star spangled banner.

Berkeley, the English philosopher, who made for a while his home in Newport, in 1730, filled as it were with superhuman foresight of the coming glory of America, wrote the well-known prophetic lines:

“ Westward the course of empire takes its way;
The first four acts already past,
A fifth shall close the drama with the day—
Time's noblest offspring is the last!”

SCITUATE IN EARLY DAYS.

The arriving of a centennial year naturally turns our thoughts to the past. We revert to the beginning and progress of men and

things, and love to connect old things with new. It is a duty which we owe to those who have gone before us to consider their wrongs and enquire for their principles! We cannot go back like China, Japan and India, to a very remote past, for our country is very new; but we may turn to ancient and discolored manuscripts, antiquated house furniture, old houses, by-gone burial places, deeds of valor, primitive and frugal ways, times of poverty and need, of honesty and patriotism, to the period of forest and self-denying and perilous lives, to the simple faith and child-like trust in God of the early days.

Wealth and luxury, numbers and power, things that are new and wonderful we can see every day and year, but we must make special exertion and set apart a time to explore the past and ruminate in the quiet shades of by-gone generations. We have before us to-day a *town history*: one that is eventful, that called out human strength and fortitude in an extraordinary degree, and developed what is good and noble in man and in communities.

It will be expected of me, on the present occasion, to present some outlines of the history of Scituate. Like other parts of Rhode Island, it was first inhabited by Indians, and the territory remained in a state of nature, for the red men were hunters and fishers, cultivating only little patches of ground, of corn, tobacco, beans, etc. Little collections of huts or wigwams formed their towns—of which there may have been a dozen in many miles travel.

The settlement of Roger Williams at Providence in 1636 is the commencement of our history. He dedicated himself to the spread of the gospel among the Indians, and traveled among the different tribes who were at war with each other, to pacify them and satisfy them that he and his associates had honest intentions to live peaceably with them. God gave him with Canonicus, the great and powerful Indian chief, favor so that he obtained as a gift large and valuable tracts of land. The deed of gift was dated March 24, 1637, in the second year of the Rhode Island plantation and reads —“in consideration of the many kindnesses and services he hath continually done for us.” The land given was of the lands upon