

**AN ADDRESS, DELIVERED
AT THE CENTENNIAL
CELEBRATION IN WILTON,
N. H., SEPT. 25, 1839**

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An Address, Delivered at the Centennial Celebration in Wilton, N. H., Sept. 25, 1839 by
Ephraim Peabody

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EPHRAIM PEABODY

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Rec. by Mrs. C. 1839

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ADDRESS,

DELIVERED AT THE

CENTENNIAL CELEBRATION,

IN

WILTON, N. H., SEPT. 25, 1839.

BY EPHRAIM PEABODY.

WITH AN APPENDIX.

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Boston;

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1839.

At a legal Town-meeting held April 30, 1839, it was " *Voted*, That the Town, some day in the course of the present year, celebrate the One Hundredth Anniversary of the settlement of the same." The town at the same time appropriated a sum of money to defray the expenses of the Celebration.

It was also " *Voted*, That a copy of the Address to be then delivered, be furnished, if printed, to each family in the town, at the town's expense."—The following gentlemen were chosen for the Committee of Arrangements, viz. Messrs. Jonathan Livermore, Jonathan Parkhurst, Zebediah Abbot, David Wilson, Ezra Abbot, Abel Fisk, Joseph Smith, Abram Whittemore, John Dale, Elijah Stockwell, Caleb Putnam, Josiah Parker, Daniel Batchelder, Oliver Whiting, Asa Stiles, Sam'l King, Moses Lovejoy, Jr., Joseph Newell, Joseph Gray, Jr., Timothy Parkhurst, Samuel Sheldon, Jr., Timothy Abbot, Jonathan Burton, Ashby Morgan. The 25th day of September was appointed for the festival.

At a meeting of the Committee of Arrangements, Jonathan Livermore, Timothy Parkhurst, Abel Fiske and Abiel Abbot were appointed a sub-committee to collect materials respecting the history of Wilton for the Address, and were instructed to invite Rev. Ephraim Peabody, of New Bedford, Mass., to prepare said Address.

After the day of celebration, Jonathan Livermore and Abiel Abbot were appointed a publishing committee. Having requested and received a copy of the Address, they have added to it such statistical details as they have thought might be interesting, and also an account of the Proceedings on the Day of Celebration; all of which they now submit to their fellow citizens of Wilton.

JONATHAN LIVERMORE,
ABIEL ABBOT.

ADDRESS.

WE meet this day to commemorate our Fathers. Around us are the products of their toil. In laborious poverty they accumulated this abundance for their children. Our comforts speak of their hardships; our advantages, of their deprivations. On every side, are the proofs of their thoughtful, self-forgetting care for the welfare of their descendants. Here are the institutions established by their wise foresight; on every side, lying warm in the sun, spread out the cultivated fields, freed by their labor from the forest; here yet may be seen the foundations of their dwellings; and here too — forever sacred let them be! — are their graves.

We stand on the horizon that divides two centuries. As the subject suitable for the occasion, I would dwell, first; on the history of the town during the past century; — and secondly, a topic suggested by the preceding one, consider some of the chief causes on which our New England towns have been dependent for their growth and prosperity.

When we point to a well-peopled town, to a community possessing all the comforts and desirable luxuries of life, and blest with settled institutions to bring within reach of all the means of mental, moral, and religious instruction, and then say that a hundred years ago none of these existed; that the region which is now sending emigrants over the whole world, was then itself first explored by emigrants who watched against the Indian, the wolf and the bear; we see the whole amount of change, but we have a very imperfect idea of the hardships and labors encountered in bringing it about. A single incident may show us through what our fathers passed. The first death that occurred was that of John Badger, in Feb. 1740. He died in the night. The nearest neighbor was three miles distant, and the ground was covered deep with snow. His wife composed him on the bed as for rest, left her children, (of whom she had three, the oldest but eight years of age,) with their breakfast, and with strict injunctions not to awake their father, as he was asleep, and putting on her snow-shoes proceeded to seek assistance. That indeed was a dreary morning as she went forth through the solitary woods of winter. Death is in her home, and her children wait her return. Uphold her trembling heart, thou Father of the fatherless and the widow's God! Neighbors returned with her. A tree was hollowed out for a coffin, and so in the solitude was he committed to the earth. Death at all times comes, chilling the hearts of men with awe and fear. Even in populous cities, in the midst of the throng and busy voices of life, an awful sense of solitude rests on those who witness the departure of the dying; and days and years shall pass, and they who beheld the scene shall enter that chamber

with silent steps and hushed voices and a shadow over their souls. What then must have been her loneliness, — a solitary widow in the wilderness. She must watch by the bedside of her children alone; her tears shall be shed alone — she shall no more kneel by her husband's side to pray — his voice shall no more waken her at morning, and when the night approaches she shall unconsciously look forth to the forest, watching for his return, who shall never return again.

A single example like this shows the hardships of the first settlers of a new region, better than any general description, however extended. But turning from the deprivations to which individuals were subjected, it may be interesting for us to trace briefly the gradual growth of the town.

In June, 1735, the Massachusetts General Court granted to Samuel King and others,* in consideration "of their sufferings" in the expedition to Canada in the year 1690, the township of Lyndeborough and about one third of Wilton on the north side, under the name of Salem Canada. In this part of Wilton, in June, 1739, was the first settlement made. The first settlers were Ephraim and Jacob Putnam and John Dale,†

* We are indebted to Joseph H. Abbot, Esq. for consulting the records of the General Court of Massachusetts on this point, where under date of June 19, 1735, the petition of King may be found. A copy of the same has been deposited by Mr. Abbot in the Wilton ministerial library.

† For the first three years after the settlement of Wilton, the wife of Jacob Putnam was the only woman who resided permanently in the town. During one winter, such was the depth of snow in the woods and such the distance of neighbors, that for the space of six months, she saw no one except the members of her own family. A part of the farm which belonged to Jacob Putnam, is still in the possession of his grandson, Caleb Putnam, who on the day of the centennial celebration exhibited at the meeting-house, a hill of corn raised on the land where a settlement was made a hundred years before.

The farm which was owned by John Dale is also now in the possession of his grandson, John Dale. This year he raises upon it more than four hundred

who removed to this place from Danvers, Massachusetts.

In 1749, the Masonian Proprietors made a grant of the rest of the town, under certain conditions, to forty-six persons. Forty-six shares were conveyed to them by a deed, dated October 1, 1749, each share containing two hundred and forty acres, to be drawn by lot. Besides these, two lots of eighty acres each, were granted "for encouragement for building mills." One share for the first settled minister, one share for the ministry and one for schools. The principal conditions were, that the grantees should make all highways, — the proprietors not being subject to any tax; — should build a church by November, 1752; — should have made settlements and built a house on forty lots; and that each settler should pay thirteen dollars and thirty-three cents to aid in bringing forward the settlement. Delinquents were to forfeit their land, except in case of an Indian war; — and white pine trees were to be reserved for the British navy. The grantees had it laid out, and annexed to a part of Salem Canada, and called No. 2. It was incorporated June 25th, 1762, under the name of Wilton, a name probably derived from Wilton an ancient borough in Wiltshire, England; and the first town-meeting was held July 27th, 1762, twenty-three years after the first settlement. Before the Revolution, a range of

bushels of grain. The house that he now resides in, was the first two story frame house in town. A man was killed in the raising of it — an iron bar falling accidentally on his head from the hands of a man on the frame above, and killing him instantly.

John Dale's (the first settler) eldest daughter taught the first school in town, and for some years was the only female teacher.

Ephraim Putnam, the remaining one of the first settlers, after residing here a short time, removed to Lyndeborough. His farm was taken by John Crane.