

## *Obituaries*

### GEORGE FRANCIS BOOTH

To write a satisfactory sketch of the life of George F. Booth within the limits of three or four pages is a manifest impossibility. No citizen of Worcester within memory has occupied so prominent a place in the community. He successfully conducted a business enterprise for a period of fifty-six years. He was instrumental in administering every civic enterprise organized for the good of the city. His counsel was sought, both locally and nationally, in such fields as journalism and good government. He was always ready to aid cultural undertakings, and gave generously from his own funds to support them.

The American Antiquarian Society is proud to record its indebtedness to him for his many kindnesses and benefactions. Elected to membership in the Society nearly thirty years ago, he always was ready to help in its concerns. As soon as he was shown that a cause was worthy, he was willing to contribute even more than his share. I well remember my experience with him in connection with the *History and Bibliography of Newspapers*, which was published in 1947. Fearing that a work of this scope, with only scholarly appeal, could not be printed without financial aid, I suggested to him that perhaps ten of the leading newspaper publishers of the country might contribute five hundred dollars each toward a fund of five thousand dollars. He replied that because of his great interest in the undertaking, he saw no reason why he could not supply the entire amount. He then consulted with his partner, Mr. Stoddard, and the fund necessary to launch the work was immediately forth-

coming. He also subscribed for fifty copies of the work, which he sent as gifts to friends who were newspaper publishers. Never did I call on him for aid but that he responded, and not only with material aid, but also with sound and constructive advice.

A brief summary of his career follows:

He was born at Hartford, November 11, 1870, the son of William Henry and Eliza (Jackson) Booth. Even in his school days he worked for the *Norwich Bulletin*, and soon found that he was absorbed by his interest in newspapers. He had thought of a college education and also of becoming a lawyer. But journalism engrossed his mind, and while still in his twenties he became connected with the *New Haven Register*, of which he was chosen general manager. But he foresaw a larger future. In 1899 with his partner of that time, John Day Jackson, he came to Worcester and bought *The Evening Gazette*. Mr. Jackson did not participate in the management and soon retired, leaving Mr. Booth as sole owner. Although established under that name in 1866, the *Gazette* through its weekly edition traced its ancestry back to the *National Aegis* founded in 1801. The *Gazette* plant in 1899 was in the old stone building on Main Street, on the site of the Slater Building. In 1902 the plant was moved to Mechanic Street which was its home for nearly twenty years.

When Mr. Booth took over the *Gazette* in 1899, its circulation was about 2200, but twenty years later this had increased to 35,000. In 1921 Mr. Booth sold the *Gazette* to Theodore T. Ellis who was publishing the *Worcester Telegram*. Five years later in company with Harry G. Stoddard he purchased from Mr. Ellis the *Gazette* and the *Telegram* and remained as editor and publisher of both papers until his death. This purchase included the *Telegram* marble front building on Franklin Street which Mr. Cristy had

erected in 1911, although many improvements and additions were made by the new management in later years. In 1938, when the *Worcester Evening Post* suspended publication the *Telegram and Gazette* purchased its name and printing plant, incorporating its name into the *Gazette's* masthead. Mr. Booth's newspapers were always independent in character and operated for the welfare of Worcester and Worcester County. At the time of his death the combined circulation of the two daily newspapers was 158,000. He also operated radio station WTAG, which he acquired when radio was in its infancy, and built it up to one of the influential stations of New England.

Mr. Booth was always prominent in national newspaper concerns. He was a charter member of the Associated Press upon its reorganization in 1900, and on its board of directors from 1941 to 1951. He was a constant attendant at its meetings, influential in its counsels, and one of the best of its after-dinner speakers. He was recognized in the national political scene and his advice was often sought. He was a delegate to the Republican National Convention in 1924, 1932, 1936, and 1944, and was chairman of the 1932 delegation. His reminiscences of the conventions were most entertaining.

Locally, in Worcester, his membership and presidencies included virtually all of the city's leading organizations. In 1911 he recognized the need for playgrounds in Worcester, raised funds for their establishment, and became chairman of the Parks and Playground Commission which position he held until 1926. During his busy life, he was president of the Worcester Area Council of Boy Scouts, president of the Young Men's Christian Association, a founder of the Community Chest and active in its drives, chairman of the War Memorial Commission which resulted in the building of the Auditorium, chairman of the Central

Massachusetts Disaster Relief Committee following the tornado of June, 1953, and an officer and adviser of many other organizations. He was generally regarded as Worcester's "first citizen," and it was but natural that the first Isaiah Thomas Award, established by the Worcester Advertising Club in 1950 for "distinguished community service," should be awarded to him.

In the cultural life of Worcester he was much interested. Whether it was music or art or letters, he always gave his support. He was an avid reader of serious books and was especially conversant with national and international affairs. He had an excellent library and a few good pictures. He could write well, in clear and convincing English. Occasionally he wrote editorials, and I have always thought that these I could distinguish because of their simple and characteristic style. He was a trustee of the Worcester Art Museum, the Worcester Polytechnic Institute, and Memorial Hospital. He was an outstanding member of the First Unitarian Church and aided notably in the rebuilding of the church after the 1938 hurricane. There were two local cultural societies of which he was especially fond. One was the St. Wulstan Society, limited to a dozen members, with a dinner and address given in turn by each member at his house. The other was the Worcester Fire Society, to which he was elected in 1939. When the Society celebrated its 150th anniversary in 1943, the members turned to Mr. Booth to deliver the address, which he did, taking as his subject "The Freedom of the Press." He received honorary degrees from Williams College, Worcester Polytechnic Institute, Suffolk University, Assumption College, and Clark University.

He married, on November 18, 1896, Minnie L. Welles of West Warren, Massachusetts, daughter of Edmund Galpin Welles, and a descendant of Thomas Welles, colonial gover-

nor of Connecticut. She died on December 30, 1954. His children are his daughter Doris (Mrs. E. Claire Butler) and two sons, Howard M. Booth and Robert W. Booth.

George Booth died at his summer home in Bass Rocks, Gloucester, on September 1, 1955. Although not in the best of health, his condition seemed to be improving, and his death was sudden and a shock to his family and friends. Always rugged and vigorous throughout his long life, it was not until the last three years that a heart condition slowed up his activities. His wife's death deeply affected him. To most of his friends it seemed that, because of his robust appearance, his optimism and his general good nature, the vagaries of life could never affect him. He seemed indestructible. A gift of humor was one of his outstanding qualities. Almost every Saturday noon a group of members would assemble at the Worcester Club for mid-day chat and news. When George Booth joined the group the whole room lightened up and conversation became enlivened. He was an entertaining companion and a good talker. As a public speaker he was always ready and interesting. With a life in Worcester extending back for fifty-six years, and invariably associated with people prominent in public life, his reminiscences of men and events were clear and trustworthy. What a fund of memories he possessed! I frequently suggested that his story of Worcester for half a century would be worth while, but he said that he could not take the time or make the effort. Now that he has gone, there is much that we have lost. All of the many who experienced his helpfulness and his understanding will cherish his memory.

C. S. B.

### ALLAN FORBES

Allan Forbes was born at Boston on November 20, 1874, a son of James Murray and Alice Frances (Bowditch)

Copyright of Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society is the property of American Antiquarian Society and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.