

THE BOSTON MEETINGS OF THE AMERICAN
ANTIQUARIAN SOCIETY.

BY CHARLES A. CHASE.

THE American Antiquarian Society holds its spring Sémi-annual Meeting today, as the guest, for the fifty-second time, of its sister organization, the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. At its meeting on May 26, 1847, President Edward Everett communicated a vote passed by the Academy on the day previous, inviting the Antiquarian Society to use the Academy's rooms for its meetings in Boston "when it may be convenient and agreeable"; whereupon it was voted:—

That the Society with pleasure accepts the kind offer, and will in future avail themselves of the politeness of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences; and that the thanks of this Society be extended to the Academy therefor.

The Academy was then occupying rooms at No. 7½ in Tremont Row, and there our Society met on the last Wednesday of May in 1848, 1849 and 1850, and on the last Wednesday of April in 1851. The Boston Athenæum moved from its old quarters in Pearl Street to this building erected for its use, in 1850. The American Academy took a lease of this room in February, 1852, and on the 28th of April following, our Society came here and has continued to meet here every year to the present time. What possible quarters could the world have furnished, more appropriate and more congenial! The poet Tennyson, if he could have looked in at one of our meetings, would have said that it was certainly an inspiration which

prompted the original invitation for the Antiquarians to occupy the seats of the Academicians.

Books to right of them,
Books to left of them,
Books in front of them;—
Nobody blundered.

But where did the Antiquarian Society meet for the first thirty-five years of its history? And why is its home forty miles away, at Worcester?

Without taking too much time in the threshing of old straw, it may be briefly stated that it was the original purpose of the founder of the Society that it should be national and not local. New England would naturally furnish the greater proportion of men who would be interested and zealous in promoting its objects, and Boston was of course the natural seat of the Society. Here was held the first meeting of the organization, and here the annual meetings were held for eighteen years. But the founder of the Society had, just previous to the battle of Lexington, by night, removed the press and type with which he printed the *Massachusetts Spy* to Worcester, to save them from the tories and the British; and at the very time of the organization of this Society we were engaged in a second war with the mother country. Who could give assurance that the Mather literature and the other choice treasures which were to be gathered, would not suffer destruction in an Atlantic seaport from some future bombardment by Cuban monitors or the armored cruisers of the Filipinos? It was conceded that a *refugium* in the interior would be safer and more desirable, and Worcester was the chosen place.

The Society was incorporated by an Act of the Massachusetts Legislature, approved by Governor Strong on October 24, 1812. The first meeting of the corporators was called by Isaiah Thomas, duly authorized under the Act, to meet at the Exchange Coffee House in Boston, on Thursday,

Nov. 11, 1812, at 11 o'clock in the forenoon. It is noticeable that while the correct and present name of the Society was given in the advertisement, it bore the head-line "American Society of Antiquaries." I cannot find that it was ever the desire of Mr. Thomas or others to give it this appellation. There were present at this first meeting, Isaiah Thomas, President Kirkland of Harvard College, Benjamin Russell, Ebenezer T. Andrews, Dr. Redford Webster, Edward Bangs, Aaron Bancroft, D.D., Prof. William D. Peck, Rev. Thaddeus M. Harris and Isaiah Thomas, Jr., only three of them being residents of Worcester. The senior Mr. Thomas was made President.

At an adjourned meeting at the same place, on May 3, 1813, President Thomas presented a large and valuable collection of books, estimated at \$4,000. By-Laws were adopted, providing for an annual meeting on the 22d of December and a meeting on the first Wednesday of June, both at Boston, and a meeting at Worcester on the Wednesday next after the fourth Tuesday of September. The first meeting in Worcester was held "at the dwelling-house of Col. Reuben Sikes, innholder, Sept. 29, 1813." This was "Sikes's Coffee House," an old hostelry at the court end of the town, where Lafayette slept eleven years later, and which was for many years the home, in court time, of visiting members of the bench and bar. It still stands, on the main street, not far from Antiquarian Hall.

On Oct. 23, 1813, the Society celebrated the landing of Columbus by a meeting at the Exchange Coffee House in Boston, and after some routine business, marched in procession to the Stone Chapel, to hear "an ingenious and learned address" by the Rev. Prof. William Jenks of Bowdoin College.

The Society continued to hold its meetings at the Exchange Coffee House until the year 1818 inclusive, but in 1819 it met at Foster's Tavern in Congress Hall, and in 1820 at the Marlborough Hotel. The Coffee House,

destroyed by fire in 1818, was rebuilt, and the Society returned there in 1821, continuing its meetings in that hostelry for fifteen years. From May, 1836, to May, 1847, the meetings were held at the Tremont House, and since the latter date in the quarters of the American Academy.

The Exchange Coffee House, built in 1808, served as a Merchants' Exchange during its existence. The original hotel, "when opened for business was much the largest public house in the country. It covered an irregular tract of ground measuring 12,753 square feet and was seven stories in height. It was highly ornamental, but not with good taste, on the exterior, and within was spacious and elegant. There were a great hall for the meetings of merchants, a dining-room capable of seating three hundred persons, a great ball room, and a Masonic hall above."¹ The new hotel with the same name, but not as large, continued until 1853.

Two Doric columns of granite, from the portico of the Tremont House, now stand in Institute Park in Worcester, placed there by the President of this Society, and may serve as a souvenir of what was for eleven years one of our Boston homes.

In October, 1831, the By-Laws were changed, providing for two meetings in the year instead of three, appointing the annual meeting at Worcester on the 23d of October, and providing for a spring meeting in Boston on the last Wednesday of May. The latter day would fall in "anniversary week," and it was thought that a fuller attendance of members might be secured at that time. But the other attractions of that week proved more potent, and in May, 1850, the time was changed to the last week of April.

The dry statistics of times and places, and even the preserved official records of the meetings, can give us no

¹The Memorial History of Boston. Vol. 4, p. 55.

idea of the spirit which possessed the early members of the Society. The Hon. Robert C. Winthrop, Rev. Dr. George E. Ellis and other members of a former generation have entertained us at times with delightful impromptu reminiscences, but even these have not been preserved. In the archives of the Society today, however, there is a thesaurus of riches, the diary of one of the earliest librarians,—Christopher Columbus Baldwin,—before whose brilliancy as a chronicler the star of Pepys fades almost into insignificance. This diary, covering the last six or eight years of a life which closed, by accident, at the early age of thirty-five years, is almost without a parallel; and, now that more than sixty years have elapsed since it came to a sudden end, should be printed by the Society, or by subscription, as a pen picture of our early days and of the well-known people, the customs and manners of the early years of the now closing century.

EXTRACTS FROM MR. BALDWIN'S DIARY.

Oct. 24, 1831. I am in Boston at the Tremont in company with Hon. John Davis, William Lincoln, Isaac Goodwin, Samuel M. Burnside Esqs., all of Worcester. This day is the annual meeting of the American Antiquarian Society which is the occasion of our being in Boston. The Society met at the Exchange Coffee House. The following gentlemen were present. Rev. Aaron Bancroft, His Excellency Levi Lincoln. His Hon. Lieut. Gov. Thomas L. Winthrop, Rev. Abiel Holmes, D.D., Rev. Charles Lowell, Rev. Thaddeus M. Harris, Rev. Wm. Jenks, Hon. Benjamin Russell, Hon. James C. Merrill, Hon. John Davis of Worcester. James Bowdoin, Esq., Joseph Willard, Esq., of Boston, William Lincoln, Isaac Goodwin, Samuel M. Burnside, Esq., Pliny Merrick, Esq., of Worcester, Hon. Edward D. Bangs, Mr. Ebenezer T. Andrews and Mr. [name omitted] of Boston. The meeting was very pleasant, and an entire revolution was proposed and carried into execution, tho' not without manifest opposition from Col. Merrick. At 5 the Society adjourned to 7, and in the interim partook of a magnificent dinner from His Honor Lieut. Gov. Winthrop. Hon. Edward Everett and Rev. Dr. Parkman, of Boston, were present, who were also present at the meeting. The meeting resumed its sitting after dinner, and at about 8 in the evening dissolved. I then went to the Theatre and saw Miss Clara. Fisher. She is

delightful! She looks well, acts well and is in truth a most interesting lady. I never have seen any female, off or on the stage, whose appearance gave me so much pleasure. Gall and Spurzheim would swear her head was cast under the direction of a committee of taste chosen at the Court of Beauty. She is not, after all, so handsome, but she looks well, and has decidedly the best shaped head that I have ever seen upon the shoulders of a female. She is rather short, tho' not too much so, and is just fat enough to look delicious. She looks as tho' she might be about 20, yet is about 26 or 7.

Oct. 25. I called upon Joseph Willard in the morning and invited him in company with Isaac Goodwin to accompany me to visit the house occupied by Increase, Cotton and Sam. Mather, to see if there might not be found some of his [*sic*] paper in the garret. I found the house which I supposed to be the one they occupied, and I knocked at the door, and a fat lady came out, and upon my telling her that I came out of respect to the memory of the ancient occupants and wished to visit her garret, to see the famous study and to search for old papers, she told me that had I made such a request the week before she should not have known what answer to have returned to my inquiry, but her husband only the day before while in the garret, dropped a piece of money which slipped through under the floor, and when he raised a board to obtain it, he found the ceiling was completely filled with old papers which nobody could read: and added they can be of no use to you, for you cannot read a word of them!! I insisted upon going into the garret, but she refused outright, and persisted in it to the last. She finally agreed that her husband should gather up all the papers and I might have them and welcome; and again added, "But I tell you you can't read a bit of 'em." They were boxed up and sent to the office of Jo. Willard, Esq. I never have gone away from any house so reluctantly as I did from that. How much, how very much it is to be regretted that our Boston Antiquaries will not rescue such invaluable gems from destruction! Many old houses in the city are full of such treasures. They are perishing daily. The Rev. Dr. Harris, of Dorchester, told me that about thirty years ago, he went into this same garret and that at that time, there were many camels loads of old papers. He brought away some few papers from the great mass that lay heaped together there, and had never been there since! I intended to have visited the Hutchinson house, but other business necessary to be transacted before leaving town, compelled me to postpone the pleasure to some future visit to the city.

Oct. 26, 1831. William Lincoln, Esq., carries me to Worcester. We stop at the College Library and remain there till noon and then go over to Brighton and call on the Hon. Mr. Winship, a distinguished gardener. He is a pleasant, hospitable old Bache-

lor. We go thence and call on Mr. Kenrick, another gardener. He is now 78 and is prodigiously corpulent. He lives in Newton. We go to Dedham to dinner and I copy a few epitaphs; and go thence to Framingham and reach Worcester about 11 o'clock in the evening.

Oct. 27. I remain in Worcester until Saturday morning, visiting and idling away my time. I am a candidate for Librarian of the Antiquarian Society and am anxious lest I be outwitted and another get the place. And my friends desire me to stay on that account that I may reconcile some of my opposers.

1834. On May 27 I went to Boston with William Lincoln to attend the semi-annual meeting of the Society. We left Worcester at 6 in the morning in the mail stage and reached Boston at 12 at noon. Our stage company consisted of the Hon. Benjamin Russell, the famous Editor of the Boston Centinel, Gen. Mattoon of Amherst, Col. Edward G. Prescott of Boston, Mr. Porter from Sturbridge (a brother of Dr. Woodward's wife), a Mr. Green from Hartford, whose father was Benjamin Green, a merchant formerly in Boston and now dead, Mr. Lincoln and myself. This Mr. Green is an Antiquary, and, having a fortune, amuses himself in collecting old Books. He is a small man with very large and frightful whiskers and is very eccentric. He mentioned that he had two Books printed before 1500. He appeared to be a modest man, but a great lover of old things. Mr. Russell and Gen. Mattoon, being Revolutionary soldiers, entertained us with their fighting experience. They refought every battle from that at Lexington to the taking of Cornwallis. Both knew General Washington personally and also Dr. Franklin. Russell mentioned several anecdotes of the latter and one which occurred while he was a printer's boy with Isaiah Thomas at Worcester. Dr. Franklin was on some public business in this part of the country which required his stay at Worcester two or three days. Much of his time was spent in the printing office, and Mr. Russell says that he gave the men some very useful hints about working the press. The press was so constructed that only half of one side of a sheet could be pressed at one motion, and the Doctor took the apparatus out and in a few minutes arranged it so that the whole side of a sheet could be printed at one instead of two operations.

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I stopped with Mr. Lincoln at the Tremont House. There were few gentlemen whom I knew. The only one among them any way famous was Stephen H. Long of the United States Army; the same who commanded the expedition to the Rocky Mountains, an account of which was published by Edwin James, and his expedition to discover the sources of the River St. Peter, an account of which was drawn up and published by Keating. He is a small

man of about 50, and not remarkably imposing either in his looks or conversation.

I was in Boston five days and during that time the sun did not appear. The weather was cold and uncomfortable, and it rained nearly every day. I amused myself by going among the different book stores and hunting up American History. I found some hundreds of vols. which I much wanted, that could be purchased for a mere trifle. I had only 15 dollars of the Society's money to expend and this I laid out as advantageously as I could.

May 25, 1835. Took the Stage this morning for Boston to attend the semi-annual meeting of the Antiquarian Society, which is to be on the 27th. At Westborough I left the Stage and took seat in one of the cars of the Rail Road, and reached Boston at 10 A. M. There were about two hundred passengers, nearly half of them being ministers on their way to Boston to attend the various charitable and religious societies that were to hold their anniversaries this week. I was surprised at their youthful appearance, none of them being above thirty-five or forty. The old ones, I think, feel that they are too poor to encounter the expense of such a journey: and besides, their maintenance from salaries is so precarious that they are compelled to exercise the most rigid prudence. Formerly the settling of a minister was a permanent life-matter and parishes took their pastors as men take wives. There must be no backing out from the contract or impatience manifested unless for downright adultery, or some such most flagrant fault. But now ministers are settled for a year or so, and some work by the month, and I have known some who job'd it by the single Sunday and glad to work so. There is a great change in public opinion in relation to the clergy. They are treated as a body with much less respect than formerly.

I stopt at the Tremont House. I went to see the Dioramic view of the Departure of the Israelites out of Egypt. The picture was about thirty feet square, and the light was admitted upon it in such manner as to make it appear infinitely larger. I believe the picture was designed by Martin, though I could find no author's name. The Israelites are represented as going out of the city of Memphis: they are proceeding through an immense street which is lined with the most gorgeous palaces, and in the front ground are seen Moses and Aaron upon an elevated place directing the march. I had more pleasure in examining the picture than anyone I have ever seen. The illusion was most perfect. I visited it twice a day during the four days I was in Boston. I went to the Theatre in the evening.

May 26, 1835. I went to see the famous Cartoons of Raffæle. They are not the Cartoons themselves, but the Tapestries wrought from them. There are four of them, each one being twenty feet long and fourteen feet high. The groundwork or foundation

seems to be a coarse canvas and the figures are wrought with sewing silk, with a needle! The expressions of countenance in all the figures are to the very life. The four pictures are, the "Death of Annanias," "Peter curing the cripple at the gate of the Temple," "Paul preaching at Athens," and "Christ delivering the keys to Peter." Peter curing the cripple pleased me most; but why the Painter makes the cripple a Negro, I do not know. In the same gallery was a copy of Rubens's famous picture of the Crucifixion.

May 27, 1835. The Antiquarian Society met at 12 o'clock at the Exchange Coffee House. Hon. Thomas L. Winthrop, Hon. Judge Merrill, Hon. Benjamin Russell, Hon. Rejoice Newton, Rev. Dr. Charles Lowell, Rev. Thomas Robbins of Rochester, Frederick W. Paine, Rev. Mr. Hill and S. M. Burnside Esq. of Worcester, were the members present. We were all invited to dine with Mr. Winthrop, President of the Society. The Society always dine with him at the annual meetings, and he gives a prime entertainment.

So much from the diary of one who took the long stage ride to the Boston meetings and improved his visit by ransacking old garrets in search of treasures to enrich the collection which he had so much at heart, and after five days' work for the cause, enlivened by visits to the theatre "to see Miss F.," returned to his rural home to enter his experience in a diary which proves so interesting after sixty years.

What Worcester member of today, who takes a morning train and enters this room an hour and fifteen minutes later, returns to his home and before sunset jots down in his journal the anecdotes of Vice-President HOAR, the crisp remarks of Dr. GREEN, the pearls which drop from the lips of EDWARD E. HALE, the nuggets furnished by a score of other members, and the expression of his gratitude to our kind hosts for so many years,—the American Academy of Arts and Sciences?

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