

[No. 2.]

WEYMOUTH HISTORICAL SOCIETY.

HISTORICAL SKETCH

OF THE

TOWN OF WEYMOUTH,

MASSACHUSETTS,

FROM 1622 TO 1884.

COMPILED BY

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P R E F A C E.

By the courtesy of Gilbert Nash, Esq., the author of this Sketch of Weymouth, I have been permitted to examine the advance sheets of the book. Finding that his labors have been so conscientiously and faithfully executed, it gives me great pleasure to accede to his request to write a few prefatory words.

The town of Weymouth has a remarkable history, and may well be congratulated on having an historian so familiar with the details of its early life and so competent to record them. It was the first settlement made within what afterward became the Colony of Massachusetts Bay, and this very antiquity gives an additional interest to its annals. The obscurity surrounding its origin tends to invest the story with a romance which only increases the zeal of the antiquary. It has attracted the attention of the novelist, and in modern times has prompted the most critical researches of the scholar. Under these circumstances the appearance of this work makes an important accession to the literature of our local history.

Within a few years the study of the origin and nature of New England towns, with a special reference to their political methods and their management of practical questions, has received a fresh impulse, which opens a wide field for investigation. There are now but few places in the State that have not their history either in book or pamphlet; and it is to such publications that writers on this subject must look hereafter for their authorities. The New England town system is of native growth, and has sprung from the needs of the people. This system took root in the soil of Plymouth, and afterward in that of Massachusetts Bay, though its development has been modified from time to time by the varying circumstances of different communities. Some features were inherited from the

parishes of England, and perhaps even from earlier sources ; but the essential characteristics, such as levying taxes, settling the minister, supporting free schools, laying out highways, and attending to the prudential affairs of the town, were decidedly New England in their origin. Nowhere else were these subjects managed with such freedom and without restraint from any quarter. In other words, the small settlements springing up under this system were little republics, and they have since furnished the germ of our State and national governments. Inseparably connected with their existence was the town meeting, where the utterance of popular wants took shape, — where the abstract idea in politics assumed a concrete form and went abroad as the will of the people.

The town meeting is the unit of political expression, and the value of the aggregate depends upon the extent of personal conviction. The instincts of the masses coming together to act on questions of public policy are always honest, and here the popular heart is best studied. The rulers of the nation, who are but the servants of the people, appreciate this fact, and are ever ready to feel the impulse, so delicate and sensitive is the connection between the power and its source.

Local histories deal largely with these matters, and sometimes the humblest narratives throw the clearest light ; and writers of philosophical history, which treats of causes as well as of results, cannot afford to overlook them in their investigations. Such works hereafter will be a great help to the author and scholar.

The Weymouth Historical Society, under whose patronage this Sketch is now published, is an association formed for the purpose of preserving the history of its neighborhood, and has already printed one other volume. By its labors the Society has placed itself abreast of the active organizations of its kind, and set an excellent example to be followed in the several towns of the Commonwealth.

In conclusion, I wish to call attention to the full and complete Index of the book, which adds largely to its value.

SAMUEL A. GREEN.

Boston, January 20, 1885.

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