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Address at duplicate
of Rimbun
Weston Aug 1914

One hundred years ago today a charter was granted by the Legislature of Massachusetts to the Town of Stroudwater afterwards changed to Westbrook. So far as I can find there is no record of the acceptance of this charter by the inhabitants of the new town, and presumably if there was a formal acceptance it was some time later as a copy of the act could not reach them for some days and then preliminaries would have to be arranged, but presumably in some church, for the school houses were not then built, the citizens gathered, a Moderator was chosen, there was a long quaint prayer by Parson Bradley, the act was read by one of the magnates, a board of selectmen was chosen, and the new town was fairly started, after which all pledged its future in a glass of New England rum. The new town included double the territory which it now includes, but we today take into account only so much of it as is within its present borders. The principal business of the new community was that of lumbering, for it was here in Westbrook that the larger part of the splendid pine growth of the Presumpscot valley and the Lake Sebago basin was manufactured and taken to market, and it was from this that the early revenues of the community were largely derived. It was the Presumpscot River then as now that made Westbrook.

With the passing of the first half century the lumber interest was somewhat lessened and textile and paper mills had been established in their place on the river. At the time of the organization the War of 1812 had but just closed and peace was declared during that year. The war with Mexico had but little effect upon the town, but the war for the Union in 1861 took a deep hold on it as it did upon all our rural communities and the town did its full share in furnishing men for the Union cause. Shortly after this war closed there was a movement for the division of the town, those living in the Eastern part desiring an independent existence. The residents of this part of the town yielded, and although we objected to this move at the time it was probably right, as the interests of the two sections were somewhat diverse, the Deering District being a suburb of Portland which Westbrook proper never has been as yet and probably never will be, and there is a wide region of comparatively unoccupied territory between the two parts of the old town. The separation effected, both towns grew in population and wealth until in the early 90's both obtained city charters. Later the city of Deering was absorbed by Portland and it has been thought that the city of Westbrook might share the same fate, but I do not think we need to take that into account.

At the present time the lumber of our region has been largely cut off and from being a lumber manufacturing community we have become manufacturers of paper and textile goods. The water power of the Presumpscot River, now fully developed, by reason of the recently developed methods of electrical transmission is largely concentrated and is being utilized within the limits of our city, and we have a distinct place as a manufacturing community.

We meet today to note the passing of our first century and among other things are dedicating a small park or reservation on the bank of the Presumpscot River and have named it Riverbank as a permanent memorial of this centennial. The need of such a park is not yet very urgent as the open spaces are all around us, but it is well to appropriate land when it can be obtained and the need of such a reservation will be a growing one. It is the Presumpscot River that has made Westbrook and will continue to be its principal physical factor in the years to come. The quiet stretch of water of a mile or more in length between the upper and lower dam is in the center of our city and should be cared for and protected, and it is desirable that the South bank of this river for the whole distance between the two falls, which has as yet been but slightly occupied for residences, be made public ground and that there should be along the river bank a continuous path for the whole distance, reaching from Cumberland St. at the lower end to Ash St. at the upper end. Already about two-fifths of this has practically been made public ground by the action of Miss Cornelia Warren who has laid out what is really a park at the lower end, including a swimming pool in the river, tennis courts and play grounds, and above the railroad an athletic field with a grand stand, and with the path along the river bank for this distance, and although this does not belong to the city it serves the public purpose just as well.

In this same year of 1814, a patriotic citizen, Peter Thatcher by name, left a fund for the maintenance of a grammar school at Saccarrappa. Our public school system was not then in sight and his thought was that others would add to the fund until it was sufficient to maintain free education. This fund after having fulfilled its purpose for a hundred years in one way and another has been used by the Trustees to acquire a considerable section of land along the upper end of this river bank with the intention of making it a playground for the schools which border it, and this in turn will become public land. If the city now dedicates its ownership along the middle section, the whole river bank will be included lacking only two or three short sections which may hereafter be acquired and the continuous path with its bordering lands of lesser or greater width be made possible. The North bank of the river is now wholly owned by the S. D. Warren Mill Trust and their use for this bank will not be detrimental to the beautifying of this stretch of the river. If some action of this kind is not taken, sooner or later houses will be built along the bank and ordinarily not of the best class, the location will not be sightly, and indeed be very likely to degenerate into the slum of the city if slum there be. If however it is protected and bordered with trees and the dumping of waste prevented, it will become a thing of real beauty. It is not a grand or noble prospect but one of quiet beauty, and a parkway which lies in our daily path is worth more to us than a finer park at a distance, and so along this path which we make possible by today's action there will pass in the summer mornings of the years to come the men and girls going to their daily labor with their lunches, later the children trooping to and from school, and throughout the day those who have occasion to pass from one part of the city to the other, the women with their baby carriages, comrades and lovers out for a stroll, or the casual traveller, all will have this opportunity for a quiet walk with the river and trees, the birds and the flowers, rather than the dusty street, and although they may think

little of it or of our effort to inaugurate it, life will be somewhat pleasanter and our city a more desirable place to live in because of it.

Our city is as yet without any soldier's monument or other memorial of the Civil War which was the great event of our first century and it is a very natural desire on the part of our citizens that such a memorial be erected and it would seem that there ought at least to be a permanent record, bearing the names of those who went from our community and gave their lives to that cause. They may not have been more patriotic than others who served in that war and returned to their homes but they, to use the words of another, "paid the last full measure of their devotion" to the cause and are in a way our representatives, and it would seem fitting that we who survived that great struggle and have been permitted in the intervening half century to live our lives and bear our part in the growth of our redeemed land should in some way rescue the names of our comrades who fell from oblivion, and preserve them through the years to follow, and perhaps there will be no more fitting site for this memorial than this spot where we now gather.

We have brought to mark this event from near the crest of Rocky Hill a great boulder of hard granite, and have embedded in one of its faces a tablet of imperishable bronze. This boulder is in itself a relic of the glacial period that took a rectangular piece of granite from somewhere in the Lake Sebago basin or beyond and transformed it into a boulder, the stone carrying in itself a record of the fierce ordeal through which it passed and which was landed by the receding glacier at that elevation which was, however, at the time probably but slightly above the sea level, for I take it that our Presumpscot valley has a geological history of peculiar interest which has not yet been written.

We are now a city of about 9,000 inhabitants and occupy a respectable position among the smaller cities of our state, but our history is largely yet to be made.

Having taken this brief look backward and stated the situation as it is today, let us look forward to the years to come. We have confidence in those that will come after us that they will supplement our efforts and correct our mistakes, and we launch our little schemes upon an unknown sea confident that they will not be wrecked. Do not we reverence that which comes down to us, and can we expect less of them?

We cannot say that a hundred years will quickly pass, but yet quickly or slowly as may seem to those who live in them, the years will pass and the people will again gather and note the passing of another century and the progress that has been made, and another tablet will be embedded in one of the sides of the old boulder commemorating the event. The river will still flow as today, the path along its bank will be travelled by larger numbers, the trees that we now plant will have grown to great size, but our city will be much the same. The people of that day will be akin to us, the same names will be common among them, many of the homes of today will still be standing, the school houses will be upon the same foundations, the churches in the same location, and the streets will follow the same lines. There will be, however, a bridge across the river near the

point where we now stand and on the opposite bank there will be school houses and other public buildings as this is the natural center of the city and we have little idea of the extension that will be required in school facilities in the years to come. There will still be paper mills at the lower dam and textile mills on the upper, for the industries which we maintain do not rest upon any passing condition and workmen will still gather for their work and children troop to and from school, and the citizens still travel the path along the river bank. They will not have wholly forgotten us and life will go on much as today.

But other centuries will pass. A thousand years covers a very important part of the written history of our race, but only a small part of the unwritten history, and we may believe but a very small part of the history which will yet be made in the view of Providence, and we may reverently quote the inspired words, "For a thousand years in thy sight are but as yesterday when it is passed and as a watch in the night." Possibly our municipality may be absorbed and its identity wiped out by the growth of the adjoining city of Portland, but I hardly think that this will be the case. Not every city will grow into a metropolis and there are natural limitations holding communities to their natural level and it is more than probable that our city will still maintain its geographical boundaries and its municipal integrity. That it will have grown somewhat in population and wealth we may assume, but it will still be a manufacturing city and paper and textile fabrics will still be made here. The farmers will cultivate their land more intensively than now, but our region I apprehend will not be more largely cultivated and will I think be largely given over to the growing of pine which is its natural product. There is no better white pine land in the world than our region from the sea to the mountains, and the growth under wise control will rival that which our fathers were harvesting one hundred years ago. Maine will still be the Pine Tree State, and its seashore and its mountains with the intervening forests, lakes and streams will still make it the summer resort and game preserve for those living in other parts of our land. There will be manufacturing communities of which our city will be one, but manufacturing will not have an indefinite extension. Much is said as to the water powers of our state and they are a rich heritage which will be fully developed in the future, but they are not boundless and will be largely needed for transportation, to light our streets, our places of business, and our homes, and will turn the wheels of extensive industries but not to such an extent as to bring the world to our feet to exploit them or unduly crowd our borders with men to operate them. The rich valleys will still be tilled and the uplands used for pasture, but the larger part of the area of our state will be given to the growth of pine and spruce which will be in demand and possess a value which will fully warrant such use.

The people of that day will again gather and perhaps upon this spot to commemorate the passing of their first millennium. The river will be much the same as today, and the winding path along its banks will have been trodden by countless feet as walking is the only means of travel we can safely predict will be as much practiced as now.

Rocky Hill with its crown of pines, and Deer Hill with the clustered homes upon its slopes will still look down on the river, and from their tops the people of that day will still look northward to the eternal hills. The stars and stripes will still float from a nearby staff, for our Nation was not founded for a day. Other nations have already existed for more than one thousand years and they were not built upon so good a foundation as our own, and our flag will float for ages to come so long as it represents as now the advancement of human rights. The old boulder will still be here and probably on the spot where we have placed it. It has already existed for no one knows how many thousands of years and it will suffer no impairment with the passing of the centuries. The school houses will crowd the northern bank, for education will be the great business of life, and the endowment which each generation will pass on to the one that succeeds it will not be so largely in material wealth as in boys and girls. The church spires will still point Heavenward, for though we know not the fate of our somewhat narrow creeds and theologies, "Men will still do justly and love mercy and walk humbly in the sight of God." The poor may not have wholly ceased out of the land for toil and endeavor will be the lot of most and poverty and misfortune that of some, but we may hope that the fabric of human life will be somewhat lifted out of the mire in which it now too often drags. The people of that day will not be alien to us. They will speak the same language for although it may be true that the world is slowly merging upon the time when again "the Earth will be of one speech and one language", neither the English or the French will be the first to yield. They will have their problems as deep and searching as our own, for although it sometimes seems to us that beyond the questions that we are facing there will be a level road, the path will ever be an upward and a difficult one. Human nature will remain the same, love and romance will not have faded out of life, which will still be worth the living. That which we have in common with them is more than that which will be alien. Their faces will still be set to the front, but looking back on that occasion will in spirit clasp the hand which we reach out to them today.

Westbrook June 9th 1914

John E. Warren