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by Isaac Davis

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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK SKETCHES OF FIFTEEN MEMBERS OF
WORCESTER FIRE SOCIETY ***

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SKETCHES

OF

FIFTEEN MEMBERS

OF

WORCESTER FIRE SOCIETY,

BY

ISAAC DAVIS.

WORCESTER:
PRINTED BY CHARLES HAMILTON,
PALLADIUM OFFICE.
1874.

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ADDRESS BY HON. ISAAC DAVIS,

AT THE QUARTERLY MEETING, APRIL, 1874.

The history of the Worcester Fire Society is intimately connected with the history of Worcester, of Massachusetts, and the United States. Ten of its members have been Mayors of Worcester, three have been Governors of the State, three have been Speakers of the House of Representatives, and many have been Councillors, Senators and Representatives. Five have been judges of the Supreme Judicial Court, five have been judges of the Superior Court or Court of Common Pleas, ten have been Members of Congress, and many have held office under the United States Government, and one has been a Foreign Minister.

This Fire Society, organized in 1793, was precisely like one formed by Benjamin Franklin, in the city of Philadelphia, in 1735:—The number of members limited to thirty, the same equipments, the same rules and regulations. No person could be admitted under thirty years of age, and none over sixty. The Fire Society in Philadelphia was in existence when this was formed.

Governor Lincoln gave his reminiscences of the twenty-two original members in 1862. Eight years after, in 1870, a member of this society gave a written account of the next *fifteen* members. Both of these historic papers were published by this society. Subsequently Judge Thomas, in his fascinating language, gave a graphic biography of the *next* fifteen members, commencing with Governor Lincoln, and ending with Edward D. Bangs. The object of the present historic sketch is to give some account of the members from Edward D. Bangs to the oldest living member, all of whom have long since passed to the "spirit land." Among them were distinguished scholars, statesmen, lawyers and physicians, and five of them were graduates of Dartmouth College.

SAMUEL JENNISON

Was no ordinary man. He did not enjoy the advantages of a college education, still he became a learned man and a very able writer. Some of the choicest articles in periodical literature were from his pen. He was born in the town of Brookfield, in 1788, and at the age of twelve years came to Worcester to reside with his uncle, Hon. Oliver Fiske. In April, 1810, he was elected accountant in the Worcester Bank. In August, 1812, he was elected cashier of said Bank, and continued to hold the office and discharge the duties with promptness, fidelity and accuracy, for more than thirty-four years. During much of the time while he was cashier he was treasurer of the American Antiquarian Society, treasurer of the State Lunatic Hospital, treasurer of the Worcester County Institution for Savings, treasurer of the town of Worcester, and clerk of the town, discharging all the duties of these offices, much of the time without any assistant. No *irregularities* were ever found in his accounts. He was one of the Council of the American Antiquarian Society, and was a member of many historical and literary societies. He was admitted a member of this Society in October, 1816, and remained an active member more than forty years, till his death, March 11th, 1860.

Mr. Jennison was a modest, unassuming man, a gentleman in his deportment, a man of rare taste and discrimination, and of wonderful executive talent. He would accomplish more business in a given time than any man I ever saw; yet it was done quietly. He was loved and respected by all who had the pleasure of his acquaintance. He wrote much in prose and verse; his style was clear and lucid as a mirror. He gathered much valuable biographical material, part of which he passed over to the Rev. Dr. Allen just before the publication of the second edition of his Biographical Dictionary. The large remainder is now in possession of the American Antiquarian Society.

REJOICE NEWTON

Was born in Greenfield, October 18th, 1782. He was graduated at Dartmouth College, in 1807, and was a classmate of George Ticknor and Sylvanus Thayer. He commenced the study of the law with Judge Newcomb, of Greenfield, and finished his studies in the office of Hon. Elijah H. Mills, of Northampton, in 1810.

Mr. Newton then removed to Worcester, and formed a co-partnership in law with Hon. Francis Blake, which continued till April, 1814. He was selected by the citizens of Worcester, in 1814, to deliver an oration on the fourth of July. This oration was published, and accelerated his rising fame. Soon after, he was appointed County Attorney, which office he held for ten years, when he resigned the position. In 1825 he formed a co-partnership in law with William Lincoln. His talents and capacity were appreciated by his fellow citizens, and he was elected to the House of Representatives in Massachusetts, in the years of 1829, 1830, and 1831, and a State Senator in 1834. He had great equanimity of character, and never lost or gained a case but the result was precisely what he expected. Hence he was perfectly satisfied with the result of every case. He was honest, confiding and capable. He became a member of this society in October, 1816, and remained an active member for forty-seven years, when his health became poor and he withdrew. He was long a member and officer in the American Antiquarian Society. He died in Worcester, February 4th, 1868. Major Newton married a sister of the late Governor Lincoln, and was a resident in Worcester for more than half a century. He was honored with important and responsible positions in the military, legislative, and executive departments of the government of the State; all the duties pertaining to these offices he discharged with ability and fidelity, and to the entire satisfaction of his constituents.

SAMUEL M. BURNSIDE.

His ancestors were Scots. He was a son of Thomas Burnside, and was born in Northumberland, New Hampshire, July 18th, 1783. His education was at the common schools in New Hampshire, except nine months at an academy, preparatory to his entering Dartmouth College.

After he was graduated from college, in 1805, he took charge of a Female Academy in Andover, Mass., for two years. He read law with Hon. Artemas Ward, so long Chief Justice of the Court of Common Pleas. He was admitted to practice in 1810, commenced the practice of the law in the Spring of 1810, in the town of Westborough, in this County, and removed to Worcester in the autumn of the same year. He married the daughter of Judge Foster of Brookfield.

Mr. Burnside was a well read lawyer, and it is no disparagement to any lawyer of the Worcester Bar to say that none excelled him in his extensive knowledge of the law. He was also well posted in theology, and took a deep interest in our public schools. He was trustee in Leicester Academy, and for many years was a member of the School Committee of Worcester, a member of the American Antiquarian Society, and one of the Council of said Society at the time of his death. He delivered an able address before the schools of Worcester in 1826, and represented the town in the Legislature the same year. In 1831 he was selected by the citizens of Worcester to deliver an oration on the fourth of July, which was considered a very able production. He was admitted to this society in January, 1817, and remained an active member for thirty-three years. He died in Worcester, July 25th, 1850, much respected by a large circle of friends.

Mr. Burnside was a good classical scholar, an upright and honored citizen, and a kind christian gentleman.

REUBEN WHEELER

Was a member of this society from 1817 to 1822. He came from Rutland, where he was born, to Worcester, to execute the purposes of certain members of the Fire Society, who had become convinced that the business of *tanning* was very profitable. They raised thirty thousand dollars to put into the business—Mr. Wheeler was superintendent and manager—a large yard was built on Market street, the largest in the county—Mr. Wheeler built a spacious house on the corner of Main and Thomas streets, and business went on swimmingly for five or six years, Mr. Wheeler always assuring the proprietors that the business was very profitable. Some of the proprietors having had no dividends for several years, succeeded in raising a committee to investigate the affairs of the company, when it turned out that the concern was bankrupt. It was a South Sea bubble on a small scale. Wheeler left town, and the tannery rotted down. "*Sic transit gloria mundi.*"

BENJAMIN F. HEYWOOD

Was the son of Hon. Benjamin Heywood, of Worcester, who was judge of the Court of Common Pleas for nine years.

Benjamin F. was born in Worcester, April 24th, 1792, and graduated at Dartmouth College, in the class of 1812. He attended the medical lectures at Dartmouth College, and at Yale College, and took his degree of M. D. at Yale, in 1815. He formed a co-partnership with Dr. John Green, in the practice of medicine, which existed for twenty years. Dr. Heywood was councillor and censor in the Massachusetts Medical Society, and became a member of the Society of Cincinnati in 1859, in the right of his father, who was an original member. As a physician he was very popular among his patients. He had the confidence of his fellow citizens, being repeatedly elected to both branches of the City Government. His manners were pleasant and agreeable—a man of good judgment and sound discretion. He was admitted a member of this society July, 1817, and remained an active member for more than fifty-two years, till his death, December 7th, 1869.

Dr. Heywood married for his first wife, and also for his second wife, sisters of Dr. John Green. He was a skillful physician, a good citizen, honorable in his dealings; a man of few words, kind and courteous, honored and respected by those who had the pleasure of his acquaintance.

ABIJAH BIGELOW

Was born in Westminster, county of Worcester, Dec. 5th, 1775. He was graduated at Dartmouth College, in the class of 1795, studied law, and was admitted to practice in 1798, and opened an office in the town of Leominster, served the town as town clerk for five consecutive years, was twice elected by his fellow citizens a member of the General Court of Massachusetts, and was elected a member of Congress in 1810, and held the position till 1815.

Mr. Bigelow removed to Worcester in 1817, was elected a member of the American Antiquarian Society, and a trustee of Leicester Academy. From 1817 to 1833 he held the office of Clerk of the Courts in the County of Worcester.

In 1838 he was appointed Master in Chancery for the county of Worcester. He held the office of Justice of the Peace for about fifty years. He was admitted to this society about a year after he was appointed Clerk of the Courts, to wit, in 1818, and continued a member till 1848, when he withdrew from the society. In the evening of his life he devoted much of his time to horticulture, agriculture, literature and poetry. Some of his choice poetical productions are in print. He died in Worcester, April 5th, 1860, at the ripe old age of eighty five years, and is well remembered by most of the living members of this society.

JOHN MOWER

Was a son of Ebenezer Mower of Worcester; he received his education at the common schools and at Leicester Academy. He entered the mercantile business, and opened a store on the corner of Main and Thomas streets. He married Dolly Chamberlain, a daughter of William Chamberlain. He was a bright, intelligent and well educated young man; was popular with the young men of the place, and especially with the young lawyers.

Soon after he was twenty-one years of age, high sheriff Ward appointed him deputy sheriff for the county, and for years, by the prompt and able manner in which he discharged his duties, he did a larger business than any other officer in the county. He was a member of this society less than a year, when he emigrated to the South, and died at Fort Gibson, Mississippi, April 15th, 1828.

SAMUEL WARD

Was born in Guilford, Vermont, June 9th, 1793. He was educated by his uncle, Capt. Ward, of Lancaster; came to this place when a young man, and married into one of the oldest and most respectable families of Worcester.

He was admitted to this society in 1819, and remained an active member for eleven years. In the military department of the government he was deeply interested. At this time every able-bodied citizen, between the ages of eighteen and forty-five years, was obliged to perform military duty at least five days in each year. Worcester, then with a population of little more than three thousand, had full and well disciplined companies of artillery, cavalry, riflemen, and two very large companies of infantry. Mr. Ward took great pleasure in military affairs, and was ambitious to excel and become a good disciplinarian; and he succeeded remarkably well. He was promoted from one position to another, till he was finally elected Colonel of the Sixth Regiment.

The next morning after he was promoted from Major to the office of Colonel, he was walking down Main street, in his most dignified manner, very straight—a little more than perpendicular, when Israel Whitney, who wanted to see him on business, called out, "Major Ward!" Ward walked on. Whitney called a second time, louder, "Major Ward!" No attention was paid to the call. He called a third time, "*Colonel Ward!*" Ward turns immediately and walks towards Whitney, and says, "Good morning, Mr. Whitney. I am glad to see you. *I did not hear you the first two times you called!*"

Colonel Ward was a gentleman in his manners, intelligent, kind and courteous; prompt, energetic and faithful in the discharge of his duties, and agreeable and entertaining in conversation. He died in Boston, March 1st, 1842.

SAMUEL HATHAWAY

Came to Worcester in the early part of this century, from the town of Taunton, in this State. He became the owner of the Central Hotel, on Main street, standing where the Bay State House now stands. At that time there was a large farm connected with the hotel, and Mr. Hathaway carried on the farm and kept the hotel. He was admitted to this society in 1819, and remained an active member as long as he lived.

The society frequently held its meetings at his hotel, where the members were always sure of having good fare.

About 1823 Samuel Hathaway sold out his estate on Main street, purchased a farm at Washington Square, and built a hotel. His farm included all the land occupied by the Boston & Albany Railroad, and on both sides of Grafton street. He became a wealthy man, and built for himself a house on Front street, retired from business, and died in Worcester, March 16th, 1831, much respected by his fellow citizens. Mr. Hathaway was a man of good common sense, fond of wit and anecdote, very pleasant and agreeable in conversation, and was willing to give and take a joke in a pleasant and agreeable manner.

WILLIAM EATON

Was a lineal descendant from the first settlers of Worcester. His influence with his fellow citizens was seldom surpassed. For twelve years, from 1810 to 1830, he was elected one of the selectmen of the town of Worcester. For ten years he represented the town in the Legislature of Massachusetts. He held office under the United States Government in the war of 1812. For many years he was one of the County Commissioners for the county of Worcester, and for many years a deputy sheriff within and for said county. All the duties of these various offices he discharged with kindness and ability. He was a man of strict integrity, upright and honorable in all business transactions, and commanded the respect and esteem of all who had the pleasure of his acquaintance. He was a member of this society for thirty-three years. He died in Worcester, May 4th, 1859, at the age of ninety-three. His daughter now owns and occupies the estate on the west side of Main street, where Mr. Eaton resided most of his lifetime.

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Very few men have lived in Worcester who understood the workings of the human mind among the masses better than William Eaton. Hence he never was at loss to know how to approach a man and control him under any circumstances. His gentle and kind manner enabled him to exert a powerful influence over his fellow citizens. This was the secret of his great power among the people.

GEORGE A. TRUMBULL

Was born in Petersham, in 1793. He removed to Worcester and opened a book store on the site on the west side of Main street where the house of Harrison Bliss now stands. His agreeable manners attracted customers to his store, and he had a lucrative business for ten years, till he sold out his stock and store to Clarendon Harris.

He was elected cashier of the Central Bank in 1829, and held the office till 1836, when he resigned, and was chosen cashier of the Citizens Bank. He held this office for eighteen years, when he resigned, and his son-in-law was elected in his place. Mr. Trumbull wrote a beautiful hand, was a good accountant (never any irregularities in his accounts), strictly honest, easy and agreeable in his manners, a gentleman in his deportment, modest and retiring, always declining any public office offered him by his fellow citizens, and always had about him a large circle of warm friends. He was a member of this society for eleven years. Few men have lived in Worcester more respected than George A. Trumbull. He was the father of a large family, and moved in the first society in Worcester, lived in a house situated on what is now called Trumbull Square, and now occupied by Mrs. Trumbull, which was occupied by his father before he came into possession of it.

JOHN W. HUBBARD

Was a relative of Rev. Samuel Austin, D.D., so long the pastor of the Old South Church. Dr. Austin adopted him and gave him his education. In 1811, at the age of seventeen years, he was selected by the Federal Party to deliver a fourth of July oration at Worcester, which was printed. His production was well received and gave him character for talent and ability. He was born in Brookfield, Vermont, in 1794, and graduated at Dartmouth College, in 1814, in the same class with the famous Thaddeus Stevens and Governor Dinsmore; studied law with Governor Van Ness, of Vermont and Samuel M. Burnside, of Worcester, was admitted to the Bar in Worcester County in 1817, and practiced law in Worcester till his death, September 19th, 1825. Mr. Hubbard possessed a well cultivated mind, clear and discriminating, and had an extensive practice. He formed a co-partnership in law with the late Judge Kinnicutt, but lived only a few weeks after the co-partnership was formed. He was a member of this society only four years. Mr. Hubbard owned and occupied an estate on Main street, including some ten or fifteen acres of land on each side of Austin street. He was a gentleman in his manners, upright and honest in business transactions, energetic and persevering in his profession; an able and well read lawyer.

OTIS CORBETT

Was a native of Milford, came to Worcester in the early part of this century, and opened a jewelry store on the west side of Main street, opposite Mechanics Hall, where he acquired a very snug property in his business. He was much respected by his fellow citizens, and was elected a representative to the General Court from Worcester in the years 1824, '26, '27, '28, '30 and '31. He was also chosen one of the selectmen of Worcester in the years 1825, '26 and '29. In May, 1829, he was chosen cashier of the Central Bank, and resigned the office in the autumn of the same year. Mr. Corbett remained an active member of this society for twenty-seven years. He was a man of stern integrity, strictly honest, and commanded the confidence of all who knew him intimately. For many years he was one of the trustees of the Worcester Academy, and took a deep interest in the public schools of Worcester, and was for many years a member of the School Board.

Mr. Corbett owned and occupied a house on Front street, where the meeting house of Dr. Cutler now stands, for twenty years. He then became the owner of the house on High street, where Deacon Upham now lives. Here he lived until his death, February 6th, 1868. Mr. Corbett received his education in the common schools, still he was better educated than many who had received a collegiate education. A man of sound judgment, discreet and honest, kind and courteous, and a wise counsellor.

CHARLES WHEELER

Was a son of Theophilus Wheeler, so long Register of Probate for the county of Worcester. He was born in Worcester, August 10th, 1793; was educated a merchant and kept a store for many years, on the east side of Main street, in the modern building next north of the Wheeler mansion. He was somewhat eccentric in his character, had no fondness whatever for womankind, and always lived a bachelor. He was very modest in his deportment, and strictly honest in all his dealings. He was admitted a member of this society July, 1823, and withdrew from it in April, 1826, and died in Worcester, March 6th, 1827.

SAMUEL B. THOMAS,

While he resided in Worcester, was a portly, polite and pleasant landlord. He succeeded Col. Reuben Sikes, one of the founders of the first line of stages from Boston to New York, as the proprietor of the public house on Main street, now called the Exchange Hotel. It may not be inappropriate to mention here, that all the fuel that Capt. Thomas used for heating his hotel for years, was Worcester anthracite coal, procured at two dollars a ton. This coal was found in the northeasterly part of the city, where there is an abundance, when the enterprise of citizens shall develop it. He was admitted to this society in October, 1824, and after his admission the society held its quarterly meetings at his hotel. The fare was crackers and cheese, ham, or tongue, and wine, and each member paid twenty-five cents for his entertainment. At the annual meetings a sumptuous supper was provided, with wines and liquors, and the charge was one dollar for each member.

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Of course Capt. Thomas was a popular member, and remained an active member for sixteen years, until his death.

He was born in Brookfield in 1779, and died in Worcester, April 24th, 1840. Capt. Thomas was pleasant and agreeable in his manners, popular with his fellow citizens, and was chosen a representative to the General Court, from Worcester, in 1834, and had many warm admirers.

Gentlemen of the Society:

In obedience to a request of your Committee on Publication, I have hastily drawn up these historic sketches of the fifteen members of the Society next preceding the oldest living member. If I have been so fortunate in my sketches as to meet the approval of the members of the society, I shall feel myself amply compensated for the labor of gathering facts from history, and from the records of towns and counties, and taxing the recollections of our venerable citizens, in order to accomplish the object requested of me by the Committee.

ISAAC DAVIS.

WORCESTER, April, 1874.

W. S. Barton Esq.
With the regards of the
Author

SKETCHES
OF
FIFTEEN MEMBERS
OF THE
WORCESTER FIRE SOCIETY.

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