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HISTORICAL SKETCH

OF THE

TOWN OF BROOKFIELD,

FAIRFIELD COUNTY, CONNECTICUT,

U. S. A.

Read in open session before Grange
No. 141, in the "Lecturers Hour,"

Wednesday Evening, Dec. 2, 1896,

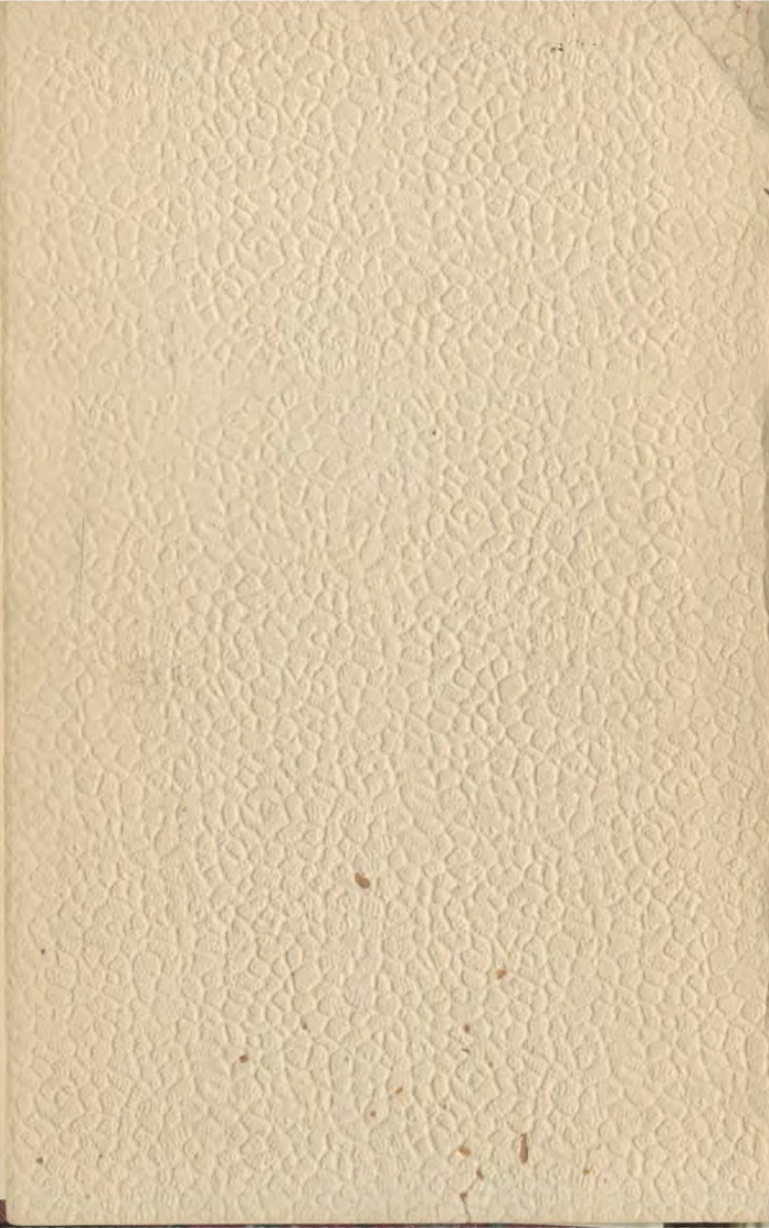
BY

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BROOKFIELD.

The worthy Lecturer of this Grange, has seen fit, in his official capacity, to prescribe it as my duty to prepare and read before you this evening a paper on the History of this Town, "*giving its earlier boundaries, with their location, its inhabitants, incidents, anecdotes, etc.: its present condition, number of square miles, acres, population, number of legal voters, its variety of productions, etc., etc.*"

Our active and accomplished Lecturer has omitted to require a revised list of all the saints and sinners that now occupy, or that have ever dwelt within its boundaries—or the names and address of those, living or dead, who have voted for the several Presidents of the United States of America, as each of these branches of inquiry might ultimately lead to an overt infringement, or downright rupture of the rule that neither politics nor religion shall be injected into the legitimate exercises of our Grange work; and so we may thank our stars that there is some limit to the scope and field of our enterprising and indefatigable Lecturer's duties, which in all conscience, are far-reaching enough, even with these restricted curtailments.

Brookfield is one of fourteen other townships of the same name, that are scattered in as many different states and territories of our American Union, to say nothing of the Brookfield in England, G. B., where the eminent philosopher, Thomas Dick, of splendid memory, lived and died—and our town, though one of the earliest in our country, is one of the smallest in the entire group, at least territorially, if not in population.

It is situate in the northerly portion of Fairfield County, Connecticut, in the south-westerly section of New England, in the United States of America, within a radius of 65 miles from the cupola of the city hall of the greatest and richest municipality in the New World, with which it is to-day connected by steam railway and electric telegraph and telephone, and it has more than 20 trains of cars, both passenger and freight, running to and from that metropolis daily, except Sundays, throughout the year. Our town is thus easy of access and egress to and from all parts of the habitable globe.

During the Revolutionary war, in which our ancestors achieved our independence from Great Britian, the territory now comprising our Township belonged to two different counties, Fairfield and Litchfield, and to three separate towns, New Milford, Newtown and Danbury.

Their respective boundary lines met, or centered in, and started from a large granite rock or boulder, that half a century ago stood some ten feet high in what is now the north-easterly corner of the front door yard of the author of this historic sketch. That "Bound Rock," as it was then called and known far and wide, has almost wholly disappeared from off the surface of the earth, and now forms a part of the foundation walls of his present dwelling; and some of it was used in the construction of more than one hundred rods of stone fencing on the family homestead.

Shortly after the cessation of hostilities between the British forces and the American patriots, in consequence of some real or supposed hardship of the state law requiring, under fixed penalties, and compelling all its inhabitants, of whatever creed, condition or color, to contribute to the support and maintainance of religious worship in each town, (which was here and then dominated largely, if not entirely), by the Puritan or Congregational element, to the exclusion or suppression of all others differing in form or mode of religious worship. Some of the inhabitants of this section, who had recently come over from England, members of, or attached to, the Angelican Communion, and some, perhaps,

who belonged to no particular denomination, except they were permanent and persistent oppositionists to all rigor, or hardship, in any and every established order or form of religious or social life, sought to emancipate themselves, and their children, from a religious taxation and civic thralldom they abhorred, claiming the right to worship God after the dictates of their own sweet will, or not at all, as the Spirit within might move them—banded together to form an independent Parish, or a new Township, under the proposed name of NEWBURY, in honor of the combined nomenclature of the triple townships out of whose domain they proposed to form a separate Community.

Eary in 1782 an organization was formed in the proposed Parish, to petition the General Assembly of the late Colony (now state) of Connecticut, for a charter of incorporation as a separate town. The enterprise was new; the petitioners were inexperienced in dancing attendance on the legislative body of the State that was so recently a Colony—besides their organization was defective, and the difficulties of combining and blending the concessions of two different counties, and three several townships—a task always difficult and sometimes insuperable—and it is not strange that their application

was not granted until it had been agitated repeatedly year after year, in several successive Legislatures, until in the session of 1788, on the 10th day of June, the petition was granted, and BROOKFIELD became the name of the new corporation. This was the year before George Washington became the first President of the United States of America, and fifteen months before the ratification and adoption of our grand and glorious National Constitution.

The philology of the proposed name of Newbury is derived from a blending of the first syllable in the names of the two townships that had contributed the most territory and population to its formation, and "bury" was the last syllable in the name of the town that had contributed the least.

But, "the best laid plans," says the Scotch Poet, "go aft agee"—so instead of the well chosen, complimentary and philologically correct Newbury, Brookfield was substituted, and became the legal title of the newly incorporated entity, derived from the double counties and triple townships we dwell in to-day, and to-night delight to honor as our home.

Some hold to the opinion that the name of our town was selected in consequence of the numerous rills, and bright and beautiful brooks running down the slopes and hillsides, and meandering through mead, meadow and valley, affording gracious draughts to thirsty man and beast, and feathered flock, and finny tribe, to say nothing of the increased fertility of the soil, the luxuriance of the vegetation, and the beauty of the landscape spread out on every hand—and Brookfield, or “the field of Brooks,” as its philological roots signify, becomes a fitting and appropriate name for this spot of earth, in which its inhabitants, both native and naturalized, delight to dwell and call their own.

Other some, maintain that our town name was bestowed in honor of the first Puritan pastor called Brooks, who held ecclesiastical sway over this portion of the Lord's Vineyard, from his ordination on the 28th of September, 1757, for nearly forty years, his being the first and the longest pastorate hitherto ever holden in this town by a minister of any religious denomination. It was 100 years ago when he retired (some say he was actually dismissed in his declining days, and that he survived his retirement, barely two years), from preaching while this community was in its plastic or formative

state, as to church tithes and civic taxation, and fines and penalties and 'punishments made to fit the crimes,' created as well as regulated, by the now obsolete, but not forgotten, code of what is still known as the "Blue Laws of the Land of Steady Habits," and as has been perhaps already intimated herein, or might be readily inferred, it was largely a supposed question of religious liberty blended with the sacred and inviolable personal rights of the citizen, that set the political and social wheels in motion, that after repeated struggles, ultimately resulted in the establishment and incorporation of our town.

Now it is said that our good parson Brooks had an eye to the *useful*, as well as to the *good* and the *true*—he owned, or at least he occupied and tended an apple orchard for his own use and enjoyment—so between the duty of composing or selecting his sermons hebdomadally for his Sabbath meetings of prayer and praise and thanksgiving, he could look out of his sanctuary window near the pulpit, when he delivered his bi-weekly discourses to his flock, and see that some of his orchard needed attention and tree-trimming in the Springtime; and he then and there resolved to leave no duty conspicuously neglected, so Domine Brooks, one week-day morning; (the accounts at this point are conflicting, or

as the old Romans would say, are *in nubibus*) as to whether this important incident occurred on a Wednesday, or took place on a Thursday morning—you will please forgive this painful, but irremediable uncertainty—for the writer of this biographical sketch, so delights in exactitude of expression, and precision of statement, that he is nothing if not accurate—about the true name of that particularly momentous week day—but on reflection, he ventures to suggest that with earnest study and prolonged meditation, it will be perceived that the incident contemplated, might have occurred on either one, or perhaps on both of said days, without materially affecting the actual result, either to him, or to us, however extendedly the consequences might reach.

So our devoted hero, with his ladder and his hand-saw, mounted a limb of his apple tree, with intent to amputation; and seating himself complacently astride of the offending branch, plied his instrument of excision with great vigor and constancy, sawing *between* himself and the trunk of the tree, regardless meanwhile of the inexorableness of the universal law of gravity, as expounded by Sir Isaac Newton, but alive to the mandates of holy Moses' decalogue, and not forgetting Bunyan's Pilgrims' Progress; while he was singing snatches of

Milton's *Paradise Lost*, when suddenly, and without warning, down fell the Parson on the excised limb, both striking the ground, sixteen feet below, at about the same instant of time—the limb with broken twigs and branches, and the poor Parson with a hatless head and a broken arm, with soiled and tattered raiment, shrieking with both fright and pain, and crying out lustily for help, as His Reverence lay sprawling on the muddy ground'.

The unhappy experience of our good Pastor clinging to that dissevered limb, so dissimilar in some respects to the fall of our first parents in the Garden after partaking of the forbidden fruit—(vide III ch. Genesis, first to last verses inclusive), more violent and painful perhaps to our unlucky Puritan, but not so serious in its effects and consequences to him later on, as with Father Adam, as well as with his wife, and also with almost every member of their numerous family, in whatever habitable part of our planet they dwell, down to this present hour.

The repeated and earnest struggles before the Legislature—the efforts to effect a concord between the two counties, and to produce harmony in adjusting the several concessions of the three towns before mentioned, and the forgiveness, or withdrawal, of the opposition

against the party who had so sturdily and bravely maintained the established order of things in both church and state, or rather in matters both sacred and secular, by an unexpected stroke of fortune—poor parson Brook's fall into the mud, under that apple tree and his injuries sustained so manfully, and so uncomplainingly, like the Phoenix from his ashes in old Mythology, he rose in the consideration and esteem of his fellow townsmen, until they agreed to call the newly constituted corporation after his own name, and hence we have our Brookfield.

So much for the *name* and its *legends*—each theory has the merit of some plausibility, though each is entirely distinct and diverse from the other—you now have them both, and are at liberty to select for yourselves the more likely, or the more logical, according to the light, or faith, within you.

After the foregoing preface, or introduction to our article, we now come to the consideration of the so called "EARLIER BOUNDARIES OF OUR TOWN, AND WHERE LOCATED."

Let us begin on the westerly side of the Township, at the meeting or union of the easterly boundary lines of Danbury and New Fairfield, at a point one-third of a mile southwestwardly from the residence of John Coggs-

well, running thence East by North, in a straight line through the site of the said Bound Rock, on the Sherman Homestead, to the middle line of the Housatonic River three and three-fifth miles, to a point one and one-half miles northwardly from the meeting or union of the boundary lines on the westerly side of the Counties of New Haven and Litchfield on the middle line of said river, and following said line of said river, in its windings and turnings up-stream, two and three-quarter miles to the boundary line between New Milford and Brookfield, thence southwardly along said boundary line, three and one-third miles, to the boundary line of New Fairfield and Brookfield, two miles, to the point or place of beginning—including all of what was once a portion of Litchfield county, now incorporated as a part of our town, and including all of Long Meadow Hill School District, and a part of Obtuse, all of the Mountain District, and most of the two Ironworks School Districts and together containing $5,141\frac{1}{4}$ acres of land, equal to eight and one-thirtieth square miles.

The Danbury section is bounded and described as follows:—Beginning at the initial point on the westerly side of our town, described in the New Milford portion, thence southerly along the boundary line between Dan-

bury and Brookfield, two and one-twelfth miles, to the Bethel boundary line, one and seventeen-twenty-fifths miles, thence due South along said last mentioned line, one-fifth of a mile, to the northerly boundary line of Newtown; thence North by West three and one-fifth miles to the said site of said Bound Rock on the said Sherman Homestead, one and one-half miles to the said initial point or place of beginning—including the West-erly part of the Centre School District, part of Whisco-nier, and nearly all of the old Bound Swamp and Huck-leberry Hill School Districts, and containing two thousand three hundred and twenty acres, or three and three-quarters square miles—coming to us from Danbury.

The Newtown portion or parcel is bounded and de-scribed as follows: Beginning at the site of the said Bound Rock on the Sherman Homestead, thence South-erly retracing the said boundary line on the Easterly side of said Danbury section before mentioned, three and one-fifth miles, to the northerly boundary line of Newtown, thence northeasterly along said last men-tioned line, four miles to the middle line of the Housa-tonic River, where the boundary lines of New Haven and Litchfield counties meet, thence northwardly and westwardly, following the middle line of said river in its

windings and turnings up stream, one and a half miles to the southerly line of said New Milford section, herein before described, thence West by South along the southerly line of said New Milford section, two and one-twelfth miles, to the site of the said Bound Rock, the point or place of beginning—containing three thousand eight hundred and forty acres of land, equal to six square miles, and including nearly all of the Centre, Obtuse, Whisconier and a portion of Ironworks School Districts, as at present constituted.

The entire Township of Brookfield, according to this survey, contains eleven thousand three hundred and eighty and two-thirds acres of land, equal to seventeen and forty seven-sixtieths square miles—which is thirteen sixtieths of a square mile less than one-half of the size of the usual modern, or ordinary township, in most of our states and territories, which are generally laid out six miles square and contain thirty six square miles each—though many, vary greatly in magnitude, in some of the older states.

The longest straight line that can be drawn, in any direction, within the boundary limits of our township is six and four-twenty-fifths miles long, and it runs nearly due North and South, and almost coincides with the

geographical meridian—starting at the Newtown boundary line, about fifty rods South of the house of the late Hubbell Smith, running thence due North through the West side of the chimney top of the dwelling house of Brother J. Wesley Wells, striking the westerly side of of the South Cemetery, and thence cutting the easterly side of the chimney of Brother Arthur S. Mansfield, and continuing through a point sixty-four rods eastwardly from the cupola of our Town Hall, and passing near the house of J. Homer Merwin, in Hop Brook, and thence continuing through the easterly section of Long Meadow School District, to the homestead of the late Lemuel B. Wildman, near the New Milford line and the Housatonic river, the former dwelling houses of the said Wildman and Smith, were the most widely separated of any in our town, and it is a curious coincidence that each of said residences should have stood on the same meridian, in the same town, and should be the furthest apart, and should also be respectively the north and south pole to each other—while they themselves probably never realized this relationship during their sojourn on this planet.

So much for the metes and bounds, distances, dimensions, and locations, of the “earlier” (and other) lines of our township, its School Districts. acres and square

miles—what lots of work, and worry, and weariness, have they caused us, fearing too that our bretheren and sisters of the Grange might suffer with us in the bare recital—excepting always our worthy and ingenious Lecturer, who is primarily responsible for “all these tears,” or in the version of Virgil, *hinc illæ lachrymæ*—but the Lecturer himself is as stoical, if not as heartless, as Nero, who is said to have fiddled while Rome was on fire.

Brookfield has a Town Hall, with a Probate and Justices (civil and criminal). Court Room, and vault for public records, etc.; seven public school houses, and seven and one-half school districts, five church buildings, with a seating capacity sufficient for every inhabitant of the town—St. Paul's Episcopal Church, with two free Chapels, has a membership or attendance of 320 individuals. See Parochial Report in “Diocesan Journal of Connecticut,” pages 189 and 190, published at Hartford in June last. This Church was organized on January 21st, 1785, when 55 male persons resident, filed a formal certificate with the Parish Clerk, declaring themselves favorable to the ‘doctrine, discipline and worship’ of, and desirous of belonging to, the Episcopal Church. A few years since, these early original documents were lost in a disastrous fire that consumed the residence of the

late Eugene T. Shepherd, the then Parish Clerk of St. Paul's Church, in which these precious documents were stored.

The Congregational Society is the first and the oldest religious body established within our corporate limits; having been organized just 30 years before St. Paul's Church, viz: on the 21st day of January, 1755, nearly one-third of a century, or a complete generation before the incorporation of the Town of Brookfield. It has not quite so full a membership or attendance as St. Paul's Church, its communicants to-day numbering 88 souls, of both sexes, with a church attendance of about 200 individuals all told; though, perhaps, it ought to be said here, that we have had no access to official data, except such as has been furnished by friends in that society.

See "Memorial Discourse" by the late Rev. Asa C. Pierce, of happy memory, pronounced in his pulpit the Centennial year of 1876, and published by request of his grateful parishioners, in pamphlet form, and containing many interesting statistics that have aided us in the preparation of this paper. From that pamphlet is gathered the fact that the Rev. Thomas Brooks, of the apple tree incident referred to herein, held the earliest, as well as the longest, pastorate of any clergyman

hitherto in this Township, being of about 40 years duration—that he died in the eidgetieth year of his age, just three months and one day prior to the death of the First President of the United States, and that his mortal remains were interred at the Landsend Cemetery, in Newtown, where a simple stone, with a line of Latin engraved thereon, announces his departure from this planet. Is it not a pity that his ashes are slowly dissolving in ground at least half a mile or more, outside of and beyond the borders of the land believed to have been called after his own name, and loved so well by him while in the flesh.

The ingratitude of Republics is proverbial. But “men may come and men may go,” but Brooks “run on forever.” So teaches Sir Alfred Tennyson, the Poet Laureate of the British Monarchy.

Our Roman Catholic population, some forty years ago, held their first services in their own, or in hired, dwelling houses, from time to time, as they found it practicable, until four years ago, when aided by some of their protestant friends and neighbors, they built St. Joseph's Church, in the autumn of 1892, in Ironworks District, on the four hundredth anniversary of the discovery of America by Christopher Columbus, and they

hold their services bi-monthly by a Priest from out of town, claiming an adherence of some 120 individuals, of both sexes, about one-third of whom are in full membership—mostly of Irish birth, or parentage—they are industrious, and excellent members of society, and good and thrifty citizens.

The Methodist and Baptist societies are disbanded as ecclesiastical organizations, and their former edifices for religious worship, are not used by their respective denominations at present. The former is now occupied as a Chapel of ease, by St. Paul's church people, at Ironworks, and the latter is sometimes used as a mortuary chapel, for some funerals at Laurel Hill Cemetery

There are some restrictive clauses in the title deeds to this Baptist property—working a forfeiture, in case of alienation, or for *non-user*, by the faithful of that society.

The Swedish Colony among us numbers 65 individuals, of both sexes, and of all ages—the African Colony contains about 30 persons, native and resident. Each Colony holds religious meetings, with more or less regularity, at stated places, but neither of them, as yet, have a church building, or separate hall of their own, for such purpose. The Colored Colony, however, generally preferring to worship with the congregation of our

excellent Brother Francis, whose extensive acquaintance and eminent success in his philanthropic and missionary work, since the war of the Rebellion, among their bretheren in the Southern states, seems to have attracted and endeared them to him, both there, and here.

There are other groups in our midst, not racial, but religious—such as faith-curists, divine healers and evangelists, so called, and other religious itinerants, and enthusiasts, each searching faithfully for the true light and life, individually and independently, who meet together, here and there, irregularly, or statedly, for preaching, praying and singing their songs of praise and reading God's word, "Searching the Scriptures," at their own, or at their friends houses, always pleased to have the dear people attend their celebrations, wherever and whenever held.

Brookfield has five cemeteries and burial places, one undertaker, one hotel, two bar-rooms, two post offices, two railroad stations, two miles apart; telegraph, telephone and express offices, three stores, dry goods, groceries, hardware, drugs and medicine—three halls or club rooms for social amusement, religious, educational, or charitable entertainments, one boarding school for boys, one private day school for girls, one grist mill, one saw

mill, one cider mill, one lime kiln, two blacksmiths and carriage shops, three leather shops for boots, shoes and harness making, repairing, etc. Two agencies for Agricultural Implements, one shear shop and tools, one fur cutting shop, two resident ministers of the Gospel, two or three preachers without churches, ordination or Holy orders, two resident physicians, one lawyer retired from the active practice of his profession. One Lord High Sheriff of the County, made out of a brother granger, one professional Pedagogue, teaching school on his own premises, with a large salary, for so small a place, with 20 boys from out of town, one Grange, Patrons of Husbandry, No. 141. Free and Accepted Masons, and the Odd Fellowship Fraternities. not enumerated, besides lots and lots of other good people, in the various avocations of life, outside of pure agricultural pursuits, which is at present, the chief calling or employment of its inhabitants.

There are some traders and dealers in horses and horned cattle, tobacco, apples, fruit, grain, hay, straw, vegetables, cider, and other crops and products of the farm and dairy, as is the case in nearly all well regulated New England farming towns.

Ten years ago, in 1886, the value of the property in

the Grand List of the town of Brookfield was over half a million of dollars, or more exactly, \$590,195.00 Value of the dwellings, \$155,930.00 Acres of land taxed, 10.582 $\frac{1}{4}$

Last year the town property had shrunk on the Grand List to the sum of \$495,138.00 while the number of acres had increased to 10.595 $\frac{3}{4}$, which is still 885 acres (or more than one square mile) *less* than are contained within the actual boundary lines of our township, as just now surveyed, which land, one might suppose, must be lost in impenetrable swamps, or inaccessible rocks, to so cleverly escape, or evade, the vigilance of the tax gatherer, at the time of making up his annual account for the Grand List, but if we *count to* the middle line of the river, and waters surveyed, we can *account for* the lost lands in the tax list.

In 1840, over half a century ago, the population of our town was greater than ever before or since, numbering then 1445. In the decade from 1840 to 1850, Elijah Sturdevant, a wealthy resident hatter, in consequence of his inability to make satisfactory arrangements with the railroad company, for freighting his goods, both raw and manufactured, removed his factory to Danbury—where he subsequently failed to continue in business—Brookfield then lost 125 of her inhabitants by that

removal, and it has averaged an annual loss of about ten persons for the last fifty years, until our population had become reduced to 990 at the last National Census—but now a reaction seems to have taken place within the last year or so, in spite of the hard times, and it is estimated that our actual present population is 1015. May this reaction continue with increased violence!

At the last Presidential election, here, this year, the number of voters on the list was 263, out of which, it is gratifying to know, that 91 majority was cast for the Republican and victorious candidate, William McKinley.

The value of the houses and homes in Brookfield today, is greater than ever before, in spite of the smaller population, and an unfortunate or mistaken administration of the General Government, causing loss of work, and wages, and confidence of capital, and corresponding hard times, such as might be felt by every class, all over the country, for a period of three and three-quarter years, growing each month more rigorous in hardship and gloomy in outlook, until the election-lightening rifted the clouds and darkness that had lowered so long over our land—thank God for the promise of the coming of a better day for us and for our country!

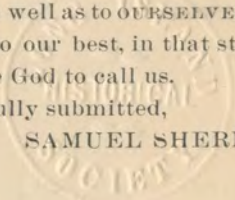
Yes, our dwellings are better built; more conven-

iently constructed; better furnished and fitted for domestic use, and social comfort, than ever before.

There are more daily, weekly and monthly papers, periodicals and magazines, secular, sacred, social and scientific, taken regularly, and read in the various sections of our town, than at any previous period in our history. But whether the inhabitants are actually happier, or wiser, or better than their predecessors, or are making the best use of their advantages and opportunities, must be left for solution to when the final accounts shall be made up at the last Great Day—while we must ever strive, day by day, to faithfully perform our duty to our NEIGHBORS, as well as to OURSELVES, and always and everywhere, to do our best, in that state of life, unto which it may please God to call us.

Respectfully submitted,

SAMUEL SHERMAN.



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