History of Yarmouth
Reported in Discourse

Editor's Note: This is the final installment of a discourse by Philip H. Sears on the occasion of Yarmouth's 250th anniversary. It was found in a Register dated Sept. 7, 1889. It traces early history of the town.
Receiving such an inheritance, how have their successors acquitted themselves in the trust? How have they performed their part on the stage of life?

Looking down the long vista of the generations that have followed, we shall not find that they have proved unfaithful. The patriotic record of these towns is surpassed by none. What important service they rendered, especially by their whale boat fleets, to the Province of Massachusetts Bay and to Great Britain in King William's war, in Queen Anne's war, in the French wars, which resulted finally in the overthrow of the power of France in America. But it is in the Revolution and the war of the Rebellion that their brightest record appears. Upon the first news of the battle of Lexington, the military companies of the two precincts of Yarmouth, one hundred and twenty strong, started forth, like minute men, for the scene of action. When in 1776 the towns were requested to express their...
opinion whether, if Congress should declare the independence of the Colonies, the people would sustain them in the act, the town of Yarmouth, rising in its sovereign authority with unparalleled boldness, voted unanimously "That the inhabitants of the town of Yarmouth do declare a state of independence of the King of Great Britain, agreeably to a late resolve of the General Court, in case the wisdom of Congress should see proper to do it."

Patriots All
The town of Yarmouth and the other towns in that county during the Revolutionary war absolutely exhausted themselves in furnishing money, men, provisions, clothing and other supplies for the army and the cause of independence.

The action of these towns in our civil war it is unnecessary to relate. The resolutions passed at their meetings breathed the soul of patriotism; every demand for men throughout the war was promptly filled, and much more than filled; more than forty thousand dollars were spent in bounties to volunteers and in providing for their families and incident expenses, over and beyond what was advanced to the government and repaid; and the men sent forth did honor to their towns. No greater patriotism, or valor, or heroism was exhibited on the plain of Marathon, or in the Bay of Salamis, or at the Pass of Thermopylae than was displayed by men of Yarmouth and Dennis in the battles of the Revolution and on southern fields and waters in the war of the Rebellion.

The military captains of Europe have expressed great surprise at the facility with which the peaceful American citizen is transformed into the bold and heroic soldier; but the explanation of this phenomenon is to be sought in the inherited blood of the American; it must be traced back to the fights of the Vikings, to the conflicts of Saxon and Briton, of Angle, Norman and Dane, to the wars of the Crusaders, and the wars of the Roses, to wars with Scotland, with France, with Indians, with England herself, which together have helped to evolve the character of the American of today. When the bugle of his country calls, it evokes an echo in his breast.

The system of common schools founded by the fathers has been enlarged and improved beyond their utmost conception, and was never better than today. The work of the schools, too, has been supplemented and extended by the several libraries that have come into existence, and especially here in this place, by the large and beautiful library to which so many citizens and natives of Yarmouth have contributed. The church which was organized by the fathers, has steadily done its work through the successive generations and still flourishes in undecaying vigor, doing a fuller and better work than ever. Other churches of the same and of different creeds have sprung from it, and supplying the wants of every section suiting every belief and shade of sentiment, but, however differing in some respects they all indulge that fear of God which is the beginning of wisdom, and all cooperate in that charity which is greater than the faith that can move mountains.

A Changing Life
But it is the practical pursuits and interests of the people of these towns that have experienced the greatest changes and vicissitudes, and that have most fully tested the resources of their character. After the opening up of more fertile lands elsewhere, which had diminished the profits of their agriculture, and after the withdrawal of the whale to remoter waters required larger vessels than their harbors would admit of, the people of these towns on both shores of the peninsula, prior to the Revolutionary War and immediately after, took up successfully the business of cod fishing, the business of coasting to southern ports, and also the making of voyages in small vessels to the West Indies, to New Orleans and to the ports of France and other countries of Europe. During the Revolutionary War and afterwards the high price of common salt had turned the attention of a native of the eastern precinct of the town to the question of the practicability of producing salt from seawater, and before the end of the last century he had succeeded in inventing and perfecting a set of contrivances by which this end was accomplished. The invention of salt works gave a business of great value and profit to these towns and to this county and the neighboring counties for nearly fifty years, until through the abolition of duties on foreign salt and the development of new sources of supply within our own land, the business at length ceased to be any longer profitable. Meanwhile the growth of the foreign commerce of the country and the employment of large ships in this business from the year 1820 to 1861, opened a new field for enterprise and character. The shipmasters from these towns have had no superiors. They found here a congenial element and burst forth with unwonted splendor. Energy, courage, skill, presence of mind, coolness of judgement, commanding authority and high honor characterized these men. Transcendent success in this vocation has made the names of Crowell, Eldridge, Hall, Howes, Taylor, famous for masterly seamanship and noble manhood as widely as the ocean rolls. But with the war of the Rebellion American ships disappeared from our foreign commerce and the great shipmasters found their occupation gone.

Mackerel, Coasting and Cranberries
Contemporaneously with the engagement of shipmasters from Yarmouth and Dennis in foreign commerce, a part of the people of these towns engaged in the mackerel fishery and others, again in ship building; industries that flourished much for a time, but, practically came to an end also with the Civil War. The coastal trade, which began before the Revolutionary War, has undergone many and great vicissitudes; the introduction and extension of railroads long ago superseded the earlier forms of the business; but the sagacity and enterprise of citizens of these towns quickly took advantage of the development of coal mines and the substitution of coal for wood and have in recent times built up a new coastal business surpassing all that has preceded it.

Fifty years ago a native of Dennis discovered the art of cultivating the cranberry; and this discovery, revealing a better use for the many swamps and marshes throughout Cape Cod, has introduced a new industry which brings to these towns a greater annual income than any previous branch of business. In looking back over the history of these changing pursuits we shall be struck with the recuperative power so constantly displayed. New kinds of business have quickly arisen to take the place of the old that had succumbed to fate. What inventiveness and sagacity, what enterprise, versatility and energy have been shown in meeting the exigencies of "all-destroying time!" Where such recuperative power is shown, there is never occasion to abate hope or effort. The capacity, that has been able to answer the demands of the past, will not be found inadequate to the requirements of the future. When the foreign commerce of the country in American ships shall be resumed, the sovereigns of the seas will step forth anew from these shores. If the protection of home industry continue to be the national policy, the inventive talent here existing will soon discover the sort of manufacture suited to these environments.

The history of these towns is not confined wholly within their own local bounds. They have sent forth colonists in great numbers, to the
State of Maine, to Western Massachusetts, to Western New York, to every State and City in the Union, and indeed to every part of the habitable globe, who have everywhere maintained the prestige of their ancestral home. They have contributed their due proportional number to the learned professions; they have contributed much more than their proportion to the active callings of the metropolis of the Commonwealth, and especially to the mercantile calling whose roll of successful and eminent merchants bears the names of Thacher, Hallet, Sears, Haves, Baker and many others that have belonged to natives of these towns. The complaint is sometimes heard that these towns have not made any like contributions to the ranks of science, literature and art. If there be any truth in this complaint, it is for the future to remedy it. The President of Harvard University has called attention to the fact that the County of Barnstable sends to college a less proportional number of students than do the other counties of the State, and he ascribes this fact to want of an established classical school within the county. His explanation is undoubtedly correct, and there is at this moment no more important want in this county than the establishment of an endowed academy having a classical department supplied with competent teachers, with libraries and with engravings, photographs and casts of the best works of ancient and modern art, and having also an English department provided with scientific apparatus fit for the profession of teaching and for all the higher active callings in the community.

Where so much native talent gleams out on every side, there is urgent call for its due development. If such an academy were established in one of these towns so central for the whole county, what a mighty power for good would arise? What talents would be evoked into new activity? What genius might be awakened? What improvements in practical industries and the enterprises of business originated? What elevation and refinement of social life promoted?

These towns are now organic parts of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, “The heir of all the ages in the foremost files of time.” In the front line of Massachusetts civilization a higher and broader culture, a more complete and full-orbed life is gradually rising. New influences are at work in our midst. The education now given in Harvard College has a comprehensiveness never known before in our land; the great musical compositions of Beethoven, Mozart, Mendelssohn, Wagner, are heard in Boston today in no less perfection than in Vienna or London; the great works of European art are beginning slowly to migrate to our shores and to exert their influence on the young as well as the old. In the philosophy of Plato the ends of our rational intelligence are defined to be the Good, the Beautiful and the True. Our ancestors devoted their attention mainly to the good,—the good in material things, in civil affairs, in spiritual concerns and to the true as subsidiary to good; but the beautiful entered very little into their consciousness. Today the beautiful is taking its place by the side of the good and the true, awakening new emotions, aspirations, and ideals, and helping to elevate, expand and round our life more nearly into that height and breadth and symmetry which the nature of man and the Author of his nature prescribe. This completer life belongs here as well as in Boston or Cambridge. Our ancestors in their day made Yarmouth a typical town of the Old Colony; it is for their descendants to make Yarmouth and Dennis typical towns of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts in the twentieth century.