Cape Cod Yesterdays

By Gustavus Swift Paine

Mr. Paine will welcome comment, information or questions addressed to him in care of The Enterprise.

Christopher C. Crowell, Grain Merchant

Born in East Dennis May 19, 1844, Christopher C. (Columbus?) was a son of the more famous Prince Sears Crowell (1813-1897), the railroad builder. Prince Crowell from Dennis became interested with John F. Blair in a construction company, which built many railroads developing the western country. These included the Chicago, Iowa, and Nebraska from Clinton to Cedar Rapids, the Cedar Rapids and Missouri River from Cedar Rapids to Council Bluffs, and the Sioux City and Pacific from the Missouri River to Sioux City. All these are now parts of the Chicago and Northwestern.

Prince Crowell was president of two banks and in Boston conducted a large marine insurance business. He was a devoted friend of the public school system and a radical abolitionist. His home was a meeting place for William Lloyd Garrison, Wendell Phillips, the Burleighs, Lucy Stone, Anna Shaw, and others. Among his close friends must have been Willard Sears, who was from near his birthplace on the Cape, and who ran the Marlborough hotel in Boston largely for the benefit of abolitionists and other kindred spirits.

Christopher C. Crowell, the son, was educated at Eastman's Business College, Poughkeepsie, N. Y. Then he was clerk in a ship chandlery store Boston. At 24 he began fish oil manufacturing at Portland Harbor, Maine. On December 5, 1867 he married Polly D. Foster, whose grandfather had been a slave owner in Brewster. In 1869 he moved to Nebraska where he rented and ran a flour mill at DeSoto, north of Omaha. Then in the larger town of Blair he developed the Crowell Lumber and Grain Company and the Crowell Elevator Company. He had several places in Nebraska along the Elkhorn and Missouri Valley Railroad, and was one of the first to make commercial salt at the salt springs near Lincoln, Nebraska. No doubt he knew much of the salt making at Suet, or Dennis. Mr. and Mrs. Christopher C. Crowell in 1907 established in the old Crowell homestead at Blair the Crowell Memorial Home for the Aged, under Methodist auspices. Then he moved to Los Angeles, where he died in April 1910.

In politics Christopher Crowell was first a Republican, then a member of the Labor party, then a Democrat, and after 1884 a staunch Prohibitionist. He left $10,000 in trust for the Prohibition party. In all their activities Prince Sears Crowell and his son, Christopher C. Crowell, were typical Cape Codders. Like countless others from the Cape, they helped immensely in the development of the middle west.
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