PROCEEDINGS
IN CONNECTION WITH THE
One Hundredth Anniversary
Of the Incorporation
OF THE TOWN OF
West Boylston, Massachusetts
HELD IN THE TOWN HALL, THURSDAY
JANUARY 30TH, 1908, AND THE
Centennial Celebration
HELD THURSDAY, JULY 16, 1908
ADDRESS BY DR. G. STANLEY HALL
“Although personally a stranger to many of you, we are not only neighbors, but have
today one common bond of sympathy, for in a peculiar sense I regret with you the absence
from this program of the Ex-Secretary of the Navy,* an illustrious patriot, statesman and
orator, who is bound to you by local ties that made him your logical spokesman to bring out
the lessons of the day, and whose words would make even a less occasion memorable. The
recollections of the dedication of our own City Hall are so fresh in the minds of Worcester
citizens that I know I may present their hearty congratulations, as well as my own, for we
know something of the satisfaction you must all feel.

"While our edifice was building, and still more just afterward, we experienced
something of a revival of local pride and interest in good citizenship. We revised and
improved our charter, and there was a marked awakening of zest in public affairs.
Positions in the city government became more dignified, were filled, on the whole, by better
men, and there was especially in the community at large a broader and more intelligent
view of local problems. It is this that suggests to many that I can choose no fitter theme
than to try roughly and briefly to indicate a few of the traits that marked the good citizen.

"But before entering upon this topic, I must make one premise. It is one duty of the
academic teacher to everywhere seek to cultivate idealism, so if as I proceed it shall occur to
many of you that the good citizen I describe may live in Plato's ideal state or in the New
Jerusalem, but not in Worcester or in West Boylston, and perhaps not anywhere, I begin
with a frank confession that this is true, and that my own practice is not up to my theory,
and that as I proceeded in preparing this address I realized more and more that in many of
the following items I have not myself in the past been a very good citizen, and that from
this time on I am resolved at least to try to be a better one.

"There have been times and places in the past when citizenship was an honor
reserved for the few. Plato would have it conferred almost like a university degree. It has
involved oaths, consecrations and qualifications of birth, wealth and intelligence now quite
obsolete. Indeed we have now gone quite to the opposite extreme and its prerogatives have
been so cheapened that instead of being a special boon it has become so common-place and
matter of course that its homeliest duties and obligations are often forgotten. So far has
this gone that some eminent students of government have deliberately advanced not only a
progressively higher scale of educational qualifications and probationary tests, but have
even proposed to insist upon moral standards by disfranchisement not only for all those
convicted of certain crimes -- bribery, corruption and vote selling -- but for quite a list of
dishonorable acts. By these means they have hoped slowly to raise the standard of full
membership in the body politic and to invest it with more dignity and honor. Let us try
then to count off a few of the attributes of an ideal good citizen.

"1 -- He should know something of the laws under which he lives; should have read
and studied the charter of his own city; should know personally something of its
institutions, its library, hospitals, houses of detention and correction, its provisions to
insure the public health, and all that immediately pertains to his own rights and duties. In
our early New England communities many men, as they advance in years, become squires
who were authorities even in the smallest communities on all minor and most local
matters. This does not mean that every man can become his own lawyer, still less that he
should know the contents of the tons of law books a recent writer says are necessary in a
large, model law office, but he should know what pertains to all local charities, and should
consider both local economies and deficiencies and their methods. To this and the I have
long urged instruction in what is often termed civics in our schools perhaps with visits to
institutions as object lessons in order to make the duty to the community a moral
obligation, and also to make it intelligent. How many of us here today have satisfied this
requirement? Certainly I have not lived up to the full measure of this ideal.

"2 -- The good citizen will do all in his power to obey and to help enforce the letter
and the spirit of the laws. He will not seek to evade them in his individual or in his
corporate capacity. Of course, we must not carry this so far as to disallow the right of revolt
or even revolution against laws that are really iniquitous. This is always a sacred
palladium of liberty in the community and of the individual conscience. Even defective
laws should be treated with respect, and when in doubt the decision should always be
conformity and not violation. Our statute books are full of inoperative laws that are a dead
letter, and the enforcement of some has never been seriously attempted, but we have often,
especially since Roosevelt tried this as police commissioner of New York, learned that the
best way of securing the repeal of unjust laws is to enforce them literally.
"3 -- The good citizen will pay his taxes cheerfully, promptly and completely. He will wish to reserve nothing from the appraisal list. This, too, he will make a matter of civic honor. He will reflect that he profits to the full extent by the roads, the protection of the laws, schools and other public institutions, and will desire to do his full share to support them. The very term taxes and tax collector is sometimes obnoxious, especially in these days of increasing rates, but here again, under the great law of division of labor there is probably no investment that brings a larger return than for taxes. To shirk or evade these and thus throw all our burden upon others, especially for the rich to throw the expenses of local government upon the poor in a community, is bad citizenship. We must probably expect that tax rates will increase, and we must do all in our power to ensure the more and more equitable distribution.

"4 -- Next to this duty I should place that of attending the caucus. This in wards and precincts has inherited not a few of the functions of the old-fashioned town meeting -- the palladium of liberty in the early rural communities. A voice here is often far more effective than a vote in elections. The chief business of the caucus is to steer good men in and bad men out of candidacies. The briefless lawyers, the man out of a job, petty bosses with their still pettier henchmen, boodlers and chronic office seekers, $300 men seeking $3000 places, schemers with their slates, those who trade and dicker with patronage -- some or all of these exist in most communities, large and even small, and they are best antagonized in the caucus, which is often the storm center of the fight for good local government. Everything here ought to be free and questions and candidacies opened, but now we sometimes have even the preliminary caucus, and wherever this is held the good citizen will penetrate and let his voice be heard.

"5 -- The good citizen will have it on his conscience to vote at every election. Every real vote involves intelligent and moral purpose. It is our duty to know something of the candidates whose names appear upon our ticket and, if possible, to be able to give an intelligent and truthful reason for our choice. The effects of weather upon elections is not an edifying topic to a truly democratic republican. He would brave the storm and penetrate to the farthest corner of a gerrymandered district if his personal business were at stake; why not all the more when that of the public is concern?
"One of the most impressive facts to me has always been that of the president of the United States, often journeying far, to cast his single vote, although he knows that some unlettered and unwashed renegade, just naturalized and bribed with a dollar, can neutralize his vote. There is a good old ring in the well-worn phrase, 'the freeman casting with unpurchased hand the vote that shakes the turrets of the land.' We should reflect more upon the fact that each individual does count for one than upon the fact that he counts for only one.

"6 -- My ideal citizen, if sought for an office, will accept it, however humble, and will not let it go begging. He will feel that the voice of the people in this respect is the call of God. The ideal office holder in our smaller communities will be a man with a business of his own and not dependent on the public crib for his daily food, and he will gladly bear some personal inconvenience and make some sacrifice of personal interest if he is called to do so. Sometimes I have even thought that the European way of man, who knows he is fit, announcing his candidacy with no secret overtures, pledges or backers, would in some cases make for both the dignity and efficiency of an office. All these public functions should be exercised by people known to the community at large that the voter may be freed from the suspicion that unknown men are unworthy and also relieved from the onerous duty of investigating each name upon his ticket. China and Germany, under two very different systems, may be said to almost confer the degree of fit for office. Every position has its educational qualifications. As the student goes up the grades each opens more offices to him. Mayors are educated and have a diploma. Their function is a profession, and cities sometimes rival each other in bidding for those of proved efficiency.

"When the Niagara Improvement Company advertised for the best physicist in the land to tell them how they could overcome the enormous friction of a stream of water 12 feet wide, falling 130 feet on a turbine, with a 12-inch shaft of the same weight, a friction that involved great loss of power, Professor Rowland of the Johns Hopkins University came forward with a simple plan of having the stream curve around at the bottom and strike the turbine from below upward, thus almost exactly overcoming the friction. He wrought this scheme out in a few minutes and charged $10,000, at which the Company, which could easily have afforded to pay twenty times that amount, demurred, and in the trial the professor was asked home he regarded as the most eminent physicist in the country. He
replied, ‘I am,’ which everybody would have admitted was true. When afterwards his friends remonstrated with him for this reply, which seemed to them egotistic, he replied, ‘But I was under oath and had to tell the truth.’ Thus a just sense of one’s qualifications for any duty, office or function, justify seeking it, but this alone. I have tried to study education for years by never sought office and do not believe I could be elected on a Worcester school board in my own ward, but what troubles my conscience is that if I were elected I fear I should not have the virtue to serve because of the sacrifice, and I think it would not be egotistic to confess that I would be a bad citizen.

"7 -- Another duty of the citizen is to speak out when things go wrong. I have no sympathy with the chronic grumbler and critic who finds everything rotten in our civic life, who is always scenting corruption where its does not exist, who accepts no explanations but the worst; but I have no whit more respect for the citizen whose maxim is, ‘Make no enemies.’ I believe it is everyone’s duty to make enemies and to let his virtue been known by the kind of enemies he makes. There is enough virtue in every town to keep it pure, if it would only come forward and be patent and not latent. I love to hear the pulpit sometimes speak out with emphasis where moral questions are involved or to see signed letters of remonstrance in the press. I deem it cowardly to let evil go unrebuked. The strenuous life demands that the individual should judge and judge intensely and vigorously. Gossip at its best is a potent psychological engine.

The good citizen should also feel it his duty to let no good act go unpraised. Quintillian declared that one of the chief offices of the orator was to eulogize every good and great deed done in the community, and Beecher said that no funeral sermon should be preached that did not discriminatingly sum up and award its meed of praise to the best qualities of the dead. Tacitus tells us, if I remember aright, that the ancient Scythians had a large chair upholstered with the leather made from the skins of judges who had pronounced unjust judgments, and in this chair, as an awful warning, every judge must sit when he rendered a verdict. But it is much better for us as we sit in our untanned hides to remember the moral of this custom when we are tempted to violate the Bible adage, ‘Judge not, lest ye be judged.’
"8 -- Local pride and even patriotism begins in each man's dooryard. It is the very kindergarten duty of good citizenship to keep this tidy and to make it add something to the beauty of the street, to adorn it with flowers and shrubs, to perform the homely function of shoveling our paths promptly after storms and scatter ashes on the ice. Like everything else, the best virtues begin at home. Zeal for good roads, drinking fountains and watering troughs, numbers on the houses, street signs, and I would even add public latrines, every monument, inscription on and old site with dwelling, or on a stone to mark an historic spot, every act of village improvement -- all these are items of significance and tend to make even the smallest localities attractive to the young, who are too prone to leave them, and also to create a wholesome local pride.

"9 -- I will even venture to add another duty with which you may not all agree. I believe that the good citizen and voter, unless there is some special reason to the contrary, will marry, have a home of his own, be the head of a household and the father of children. I am no faddist on this theme. I recognize that there are exceptions. I am not ready to vote a progressive tax on all bachelors after the age of thirty, but I do believe the public opinion is now slowly beginning to set in this direction and that in the future is liable to ask more and more insistingly of every able-bodied, intelligent man, who can earn the means of support, and who does not marry, why! Not only is the home the heart of the town, the state, the country, the world, and heredity the most ancient form of wealth and worth, but the science of biology is urging with more and more insistence that the best test of an individual or the race, is the power to bring healthy children into the world and to rear them to full and complete maturity. The promise to Abraham of old was that if he kept covenant with God, his seed should be as the stars of heaven for multitude, and the enormous growth of the Jews in all lands seems like a fulfillment of this prophecy. If this be true, the decay of American families and the increase of abandoned farms is a sad commentary upon our solution of perhaps the greatest over all the tests of public and private well-being.

"10 -- Once more, and with some hesitation, I would raise here the question whether it is not the duty of every man of means, who makes a will, to bequeath in it something for the benefit of the community in which that wealth was acquired. Many laws, ancient and modern, not only tax inheritance, but by years of jubilee and in other ways sequester large fortunes for the good of the public. I know the dangers of mortmain for the dead hand and
how and older countries large properties are tied up by conditions of donors generations and centuries ago, who insisted on attaching conditions that in later generations were found to actually violate the purpose had in mind. Next to the virtue of being ashamed to die rich, however, is that of so making one's last will and testament that it shall bring relief to suffering, service to the public, advantage to higher education, or in some other way recognize the great fact that no man liveth or dieth to himself. In those communities sure to increase with the progress of years in a country like ours, where the living thus profit by the thoughtfulness of the dead, I would have their memories kept green.

"We need not worship ancestors like the Chinese, but we should remember with gratitude all those great and thoughtful souls that have attempted to make the world that was to come after them better and richer in opportunities than it would otherwise have been. I would have something of the lives of all great local benefactors piously taught in the schools, that their purpose be kept living and their names known and respected by the young.

"11 -- In times of great crisis, when vital national issues are at stake, no one need to be reminded that the good citizen will fight, and, if need be, lay down his life for his country. War is, alas, sometimes a stern necessity, and while most men in most times can best serve righteousness by their lives, they are sometimes called to die for what they live for. There is no nobler exhibition of man's profoundly social and gregarious nature than that he is ready for great causes to make this supreme sacrifice. The lives of those who have answered thus the call of the state make the purest, best, reddest blood of heroism, on which the souls of youth grow estate be themselves heroic. I have little faith in the programs of universal peace and I am not sure that in the present estate of man the wager of battle is not sometimes necessary to weed out the unfit and to bring to the front the power of higher motives that slumber through the entire lives of most of us.

"12 -- Have we not nearly reached a point where municipalities, large and small, should be administered on business principles? I believe in parties and belong to one, but I have for years felt it my duty in local affairs to vote for the best man irrespective of party as well as creed. This is not mugwumpery. Everyone knows that if any man's private affairs were administered with the same loose and uneconomic methods as those with which most towns are managed, his business would fail. Is this right? Is this necessary? Must there
be, should there be jobs, soft snaps, precious franchises freely given for long tenures, unnecessary work provided to keep the unemployed busy, or high wages for poor work?

"Here is the weakest point in our whole American system, and one in which we may well hang our heads in shame when we compare all local government with that in most European lands. I believe there is progress, however, even here, very slow though it be. Boards of trade have done something to stimulate better methods, but the public purse is rarely safeguarded and a quid pro quo, dollar for dollar, rarely exacted, such as we would all require in private expenditures. Business is an immense machine, the laws of which no one knows, not even the political economist. It is more and more controlling. Its methods are pervading church, school, public life, giving us new ideals of arts and even manners and absorbing the best young talent of the world, but it is not yet recognized that the city is only a big corporation and should be administered with severe and rigid enforcement of every principal economy and efficiency. Ideally, it should set fashions in these respects to every business in it.

"13 -- Finally, the school and its administration is a civic duty. No institution is so world-wide in its extent or so influential. Comprehensive school systems are found in Africa, North and South, and in India, and Professor Fitch has told us that one of the best in the world is in Madagascar, opened there to the savage Maori. There has probably never been such a universal consensus as that which supports education today. Men differ in everything else, but believe enthusiastically in the schools. The world goes to school. In very many smaller communities school buildings are the largest and best in town, and this is well. The condition of the schoolyard is, I believe, a matter of civic pride, and I have heard it called an index of the vigor of local patriotism. School boards of communities often have charge of the largest of all expenditures. These boards should be small and given great responsibility, and held to commensurate accountability. I am inclined to agree with our governor that on these matters women, who constitute today more than three-fourths of the teachers of the country, should have a vote if they want it, and should want it. And its members should always be the best and wisest man in town. Into their hands the future is committed.

"President White has told us of the school board somewhere in New York state, where some matters of school hygiene yet had passed upon were brought into court, and it
occurred to a young lawyer to ask one of the members of this sapient school board what hygiene was, and he replied that it was a stagnant, slimy pool water with a green film over it.

"You remember a few years ago, went in one of the largest cities of the country the school board was discussing a motion to place twelve gondolas upon a shallow pond in the park for the delectation of the children, a new member gravely arose and said that he wished his first word and that board to be for economy, and that therefore instead of twelve gondolas he would suggest one male and one female gondola, entrust nature to make it twelve.

"A colleague of mine tells the story of a Southern squire, who, as he grew old and tired of judging tedious problems, told his son, who succeeded him in office, that he had adopted the principal of only hearing one side of the cases brought before him for decision, because hearing the other side confused his mind. School matters should more and more come into the hands of experts, but here, too, I am no pessimist, for I believe at any rate that in our smaller communities the best men usually serve in this office.

"You will all think of many more traits of the ideal citizen. The great enemy of municipal life in this country today is absorption in individual gain and neglect of public duties. This has been pointed out a thousand times, but there is no real remedy except to lay the matter upon our conscience on every occasion. Some compensate for the neglect of near duties by enthusiasm for those that are afar. I have read of the lady in New York attending a missionary meeting and weeping over the suffering and death of Alexander MacKay, the hero of Uganda, while her coachman was frozen to death waiting for her outside. I was invited to dine with half a dozen others at the house of a prominent lady, who kept us waiting and hungry for half an hour while she was attending a meeting of the woman's club, which was worked up to White teaching over the question whether Representative Smoot of Utah had one wife or two.

"Our philanthropy in these days of expansion is very liable to diffuse to cosmetic duties and make us forget the nearest duties for those that are farthest. The problems of citizenship are many and great. In Russia I once attended a meeting of the mir. It was a town meeting of those who a little more than a generation ago were serfs. It was held out of doors on the common. A city hall is the slow evolution of the old tribal house of the
primitive clans of savage men. It ought to be the citadel of all local civic virtue kept pure from every touch of corruption and be forever sacred to the highest interests of the town. As it is dedicated today, let us all rededicate ourselves to the cause of good local government, to doing the nearest civic duty and to subordination, wherever it is necessary, of personal to communal well-being.”

*Hon. John D. Long

[It was noted in the original text that the address was greeted with prolonged applause.]