

JOHN H. LANDIS, PUBLISHER

MILLERSVILLE
LANCASTER CO., PA.MILLERSVILLE, PA. March 10, 1916.

Linn. L. Reist, Esq.,
Portland, Oregon.

My Dear Linn.:

I was very much gratified to learn of the proposed anniversary of the birth of Thaddeus Stevens, on his coming birthday, on April 4th.

I never heard Thaddeus Stevens speak, but, when I was a boy, I read his speeches in Congress during and after the Civil War; I never saw him except when I looked upon his face at his funeral, which I attended on August 7, 1868. During my boyhood and ever since, I have been a great admirer of "old Thad.", as he was called by his constituents during his last years. I admired him on account of his strong sympathies for the deserving poor and the down-trodden, for his ardent friendship for the cause of popular education, for his intense loyalty to the cause of the American Union during the Civil War and for his unwaivering devotion to the cause of equal rights before the law.

Stevens was born, as you know, in 1792. This was a very proper year for this bold and fearless champion of human freedom to have been born in. It was in 1792 that England voted for the gradual abolition of the slave trade; the year in which Louis the XVI was dethroned and the French Revolution born and the year in which Hayti was prepared for emancipation. A year of such historical occurrences, so closely related to the cause of human freedom, was surely an exceptionally proper and appropriate year for one, who devoted a lifetime in strenuous battling for the liberation of 4,000,000 enslaved fellow countrymen and for their equal rights, as did Thaddeus Stevens, to be born in.

A number of years ago, I visited the scenes of his boyhood in Caledonia County, Vermont. From the information that I gleaned at the time from the oldest residents of the place, he was born in a little stone house on what at the time of my visit there was known as the Estabrook farm, near the village of Danville, Caledonia County, Vermont. He was the second of four children, all boys. The father was inclined to be shiftless and left home when the children were quite small and was not heard from thereafter. The mother was very poor, but was a strong, Christian character and she resolved to educate her boys. She was especially interested in Thad because he was a cripple. She moved to the village and there sent the boys to the Centre School. She continued to supervise the little farm close by and did all of her own housework and managed to find some time to engage in spinning and weaving and in this way earn and save enough means to educate her boys. She had no help in the home but her boys, she dug and cultivated her garden and raked and loaded hay in the field. As before stated, Mrs. Stevens was an extraordinarily strong character. She possessed unusual strength of mind and will. Whatever she undertook to do she did,

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and did it "with a will". She took an active interest in church work and was a prominent figure in the Baptist Church at Danville.

Thaddeus Stevens in speaking of his parents said: "My mother was a very extraordinary woman. I have met very few women like her. My father was not a well-to-do man, and the support and the education of the family depended on my mother. She worked day and night to educate me. I was feeble and lame in youth, and, as I could not work on the farm, she concluded to give me an education. I tried to repay her afterwards, but the debt of a child to his mother, you know, is one of the debts we can never pay."

Mrs. Stevens decided to move to Peacham, about seven miles South of Danville, so as to enable the boys to attend the academy at that place; known as the Caledonia County Grammar School. The house in which they lived was a small, two-story, unpainted frame building. Thad's study was on the second story and was poorly lighted. I spent quite a while in the room and found it a ten by twelve room, with only a small window. He was very studious and here he spent much of his time while attending Peacham Academy. It was here that he prepared himself for college, entering Dartmouth, as a sophomore, in 1811, and graduating in the summer of 1814.

The poorest of the poor boys of our country today are no poorer nor are they surrounded with more discouraging conditions than was Thaddeus Stevens when a boy. He had no aid or support whatever than that given him by his poor though industrious mother. Not only was he reared in poverty, but he was lame, a cripple for life. Even at that early day, however, he was blessed with an indomitable will power. This, with an intense desire to obtain an education, enabled him to overcome all obstacles. An old resident of Peacham told me about an experience which occurred during his school days, which shows the extreme poverty of the Stevens family, and the extreme lengths they at times were forced to go - was on a certain occasion when Thad needed a Latin Grammar. He, of course, had no money, and his mother did not have sufficient to buy the book, but she determined that Thad should have the grammar without delay. She raised the needed sum by selling a copper kettle, which she had been using and which she actually needed for domestic purposes in the family. How many boys can be found in this country today whose road in obtaining an education is beset by as many obstacles, ~~as~~ ~~embarrassed~~, as embarrassed Thaddeus Stevens, when a school boy?

One day a fire broke out in the school which Thad attended, when a number of the pupils' books and other belongings were destroyed. Thad had his books and hat burned up. On his way home that day, without a hat on his head, his books gone, he met one of the leading citizens of the place, by the name of John Mattocks, who handed him ten dollars, saying: "Here Thad, take this and buy some books and go to college

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without a hat."

In these days, Thad was the butt of much ridicule. He was both sickly and lame and as he limped along to and from school, the other boys frequently laughed at him and mimiced his limping walk, which sometimes brought tears to his eyes.

That he never forgot the debt of gratitude he owed his mother is shown when writing his last Will, during the last year of his life, he made provision for the care of his mother's burial lot. The clause reads thus: "That the sexton keep her grave in good order, and plant roses and other cheerful flowers at each of the four corners of said grave every spring". Then further on in his Will, he devised \$1000.00 to aid in the erection of a Baptist Church, of which denomination his mother was a faithful member, and then he says:-

"I do this out of respect to the memory of my mother, to whom I owe what little of prosperity I have had on earth, which, small as it is, I desire to emphatically acknowledge".

It is touching, indeed, to see this hero statesman just before passing to his reward shows how strong throughout his entire life was his love for his mother.

After graduating at Dartmouth College, he went to Pennsylvania in 1815, and located at York, Pa., and taught school in the Academy of Dr. Perkins of that place. He read law, teaching by day, and studying his law books by night. He was admitted to the bar and began the practice of the law. Here, again, he was confronted by very discouraging conditions. He was backward and modest. He was very poor. He had but few friends. He was dubbed by his associates as the "club-footed attorney". Failure seemed to be staring him in the face. Several times, he was seriously thinking of giving up the profession. Thank God, the iron will, which he inherited from his mother, served him well during these trying days. Deformed, half-starved and friendless he fought on. Fought for what? It can probably be explained in no other way, but that God was preparing him through these cruel, discouraging and heart-breaking experiences for the great work which lie before him. Such experiences as these could not otherwise but create in him strong sympathies for the deserving poor and a burning desire to serve the downtrodden and oppressed among his fellow-countrymen.

The nearness of Gettysburg to Mason and Dixon Line, with runaway slaves constantly crossing over into free territory, gave Mr. Stevens the opportunity to defend them, which he frequently did after it became known that he was in sympathy with them. This gave him an opportunity to learn about the institution of human slavery what he had not known before. These experiences with his unfortunate clients fleeing from slavery made a deep impression upon his young mind.

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These dark days were now passing. The clouds were breaking and the sun was beginning to shine. His practice grew, although for a while largely composed of the poor. His masterly presentation of cases and the impressive manner in which he placed them before the Court and jury caused his fame to spread rapidly and he became a man of prominence and influence in his county.

The first time he took an active interest in politics was in 1828, when he supported John Quincy Adams for President, and was later a zealous supporter of the Adams administration.

He repeatedly declined to allow the use of his name as a candidate for office until in 1832 he was prevailed upon to become a candidate for the Legislature. He was elected and re-elected for several times thereafter.

In 1834, largely through his vote and influence, the law establishing a free school system was placed upon the statute books of Pennsylvania. The question as to whether or not the free school law was to be repealed was made an issue at the next election, and a majority of the members of the Legislature of 1835 were elected to vote for a repeal of the law. Thaddeus Stevens was the leading champion of the law in the House of Representatives. His masterly argument so electrified the House that a sufficient number were influenced to vote against the repeal that the cause of free schools won a glorious victory. He was the savior of free schools for the boys and girls of Pennsylvania.

In 1842, he moved to Lancaster, Pa., and there made his permanent home. In 1848, the Whigs nominated him as their candidate for Congress in the Lancaster District. He was elected and re-elected in 1850, but declined a re-election in 1852. He was again elected to Congress in 1858 and re-elected without serious opposition until he laid aside all that was earthly and lay down to take his last rest on the 11th of August, 1868.

Two weeks after he was laid in the grave, the primary election to nominate a candidate for Congress was held. It was too late under the party rules for another candidate to obtain a place on the ticket and it was agreed by common consent that out of respect to his memory and in appreciation of his distinguished services in Congress the vote of his party be cast for him, although he had retired forever from all earthly scenes. This, doubtless, is the only case in the history of this country where the people of a Congressional district practically re-elected a Congressman after he had passed to his eternal home.

If there was a man born during the last nineteen centuries, save the Savior of mankind, who loved all nationalities, who recognized every man as his brother, who loved his neighbor as himself, and was the friend of the entire human race, who was a deadly enemy to all forms of injustice and

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oppression and who was an enthusiastic champion of the rights of all men to freedom and security that man was Thaddeus Stevens.

The people of Mr. Stevens' former home are delighted to know that the sons of Pennsylvania in Oregon see fit and proper to thus honor the memory of "Old Thad".

*Most cordially and sincerely yours
John H. Landis.*

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