

By William Frederic Worner

In "An Old Turnpike-Road," a most interesting little volume published in 1888, the author, Jacob L. Gossler, describes, in fascinating style, the town of Columbia, Pa., as it existed in his childhood days. The book is charmingly reminiscent, and vividly pictures to our imagination many of the memorable scenes and stirring events that took place during the first half of the last century in the ancient borough so delightfully situated on the eastern bank of the noble Susquehanna,—a borough that, in 1789, failed, by a single vote, to become the capital of the United States. Not only does the author entertain us with vivid descriptions of the customs and habits of our forbears of a generation or more ago, but he also calls forth, from an almost forgotten past, prominent characters who lived, moved and had their being in the little river borough. And then, too, he brings to our attention ancient landmarks of his day and generation. It is an alluring picture; and most interesting of all is that part of the canvas on which are portrayed distinguished men and women who visited Columbia or stopped in the town for a brief period, as they journeyed through the state.

On page 115 of his delightful book, Mr. Gossler thus refers to Daniel Webster's journeys through Lancaster county:

"Here, too, came Daniel Webster and his wife, on their annual journey from the Old Bay State to Washington. I think they must have become familiar with the route. They traveled, in early days, in their own conveyance. I remember their carriage and coachman—the former, a bright yellow, with a wooden bucket (New Englanders say pail) underneath; the latter, black as night. Mr. Webster was, at that time, in his prime—his hair rivaling his marvelous eyes in blackness, his form erect, his countenance rather stern than attractive."

So far as I have been able to ascertain, this is the earliest reference in any publication to the journeys through Lancaster county of Daniel Webster, the great Expounder of that immortal document, the Constitution of the United States. It is a fact, however, though not generally known, that he once spent several days and nights in Lancaster city.

In February, 1835, Mr. Webster, who at that time represented Massachusetts in the Senate of the United States, was nominated by the Whigs of the Old Bay State for the Presidency of the United States, and received the electoral vote of that state in 1836. He had a strong body of friends in Pennsylvania who desired him to come among them immediately after the adjournment of Congress. He was in Harrisburg, Pa., on the 19th of March, where the Legislature was in session, and received from a committee of the members of both branches an invitation to a public dinner, which was tendered as a mark of respect for his distinguished public services and his eminent character as an American statesman. This invitation he felt obliged to decline.

At this time, Mr. Webster, accompanied by his wife, and daughter, Julia, was on his way to his home in Marshfield, Mass. On Friday evening, March 20, 1835, they arrived in Lancaster, Pa., as we learn from the following account, which appeared in "Der Volksfreund und Lancaster Beobachter," a German newspaper published in Lancaster under date of Tuesday, March 31, 1835:

"The Hon. Daniel Webster, that distinguished United States Senator from Massachusetts, who has already been proposed by his friends and admirers as a candidate for the next presidency, arrived here in Lancaster, Friday a week ago [March 20, 1835], on his way home from Washington city. Scarcely was it known that this famous man was come among us when our citizens, without distinction of party, crowded to pay their respects to him. An invitation to partake of a public dinner was declined, Mr. Webster

preferring to meet this fellow citizens of town and country in the soberness and freedom of unrestrained social conversation."

Where the distinguished statesman and his family were entertained on this memorable occasion I am not able to hazard a guess. The newspapers of that day throw no light upon the matter. It would be quite interesting, and a distinct contribution to local history, if we could ascertain the hostelry or home in which he and his family were entertained.

The Examiner & Herald, of Thursday, March 26, 1835, in describing the stay of Daniel Webster in Lancaster, states that "The unusual mildness and beauty of the weather on Saturday [March 21, 1835,] enabled him to take an excursion in the evening to Abbeyville." This newspaper further declares that "It is due to the ladies of Lancaster to say that they were not wanting in respectful attention to the family of Mr. Webster" while they were in Lancaster city.

On Monday, March 23, 1835, in company with the committee and other gentlemen, Mr. Webster visited Columbia and Marietta, and returned to Lancaster in the evening.

Concerning his visit to the former borough, the Columbia Spy, of Saturday, March 28, 1835, states:—"While here [Columbia] he was called upon by many citizens of the place, who were desirous of paying their respects to him. He expressed himself much pleased with the public improvements in our town and vicinity, and particularly noticed the noble bridge over the Susquehanna. He left Lancaster on Tuesday morning for Philadelphia, via railroad. He is accompanied by his wife and daughter. Public dinners were tendered him in York, Harrisburg and Lancaster, all of which were respectfully declined."

The Pennsylvania Republican, a newspaper published in York, under date of Wednesday, March 18, 1835, thus refers to Mr. Webster's visit to that town:—

"The Hon. Daniel Webster arrived in this place [York, Pa.] on Monday afternoon [March 16, 1835] last, from Baltimore. On yesterday morning, he was waited on by a committee in behalf of many of our citizens, who tendered him an invitation to a public dinner, which he respectfully declined in a short address appropriate to the occasion. After receiving the greetings of a large number of the most respectable inhabitants of this town and the adjacent country, he proceeded on his journey to Harrisburg."

Daniel Webster died at his home in Marshfield, Mass., on Sunday, October 24, 1852. When the news reached Lancaster, a number of our most prominent citizens appended their signatures to the following communication, which was forwarded to the mayor:

Christian Kieffer, Esq.,  
Sir:—

Lancaster, Pa.  
October 25, 1852.

A "mighty spirit is eclipsed." Let us, as American citizens, pay an appropriate tribute to the memory of one who, in this 19th century, has fulfilled the truth of Holy Writ, as contained in Genesis: "There were giants in those days." And who, intellectually, in the history of the Anglo-Saxon race, as developed in our own happy land, has more decidedly shown the strength of a giant than the departed son of New Hampshire—the great citizen of Massachusetts!

Under these circumstances, as the men of our day and generation, and those who stand and have stood between our country's early days and the present, permit us to call upon you, the Mayor of our City, to give, what your own sense of the loss sustained by the nation, will have already suggested, the proper notification for a public testimonial to the memory of Daniel Webster, Esq., "late Secretary of State of the United States."

Very respectfully, your obedient servants,

Lewis Hurford, Charles F. Hager, Nathaniel Ellmaker, George Calder, James Evans, John F. Shroder, Henry M. Reigart, Michael Withers, William S. Amweg, John S. Dougherty, H. A. Wade, James B. Wager, Edward C. Darlington, Henry G. Long, W. W. Brown, Samuel Humes Porter, John Metzger, Emanuel Schaeffer, Thomas C. Wiley, Thomas E. Franklin, Isaac E. Hiester, Frederick Augustus Muhlenberg, Jacob B. Amwake, Emanuel C. Reigart and Henry Carpenter.

In pursuance of the call by the Hon. Christian Kieffer, mayor of the city, the citizens of Lancaster assembled in the old Court House in Penn Square on the evening of Thursday, October 28, 1852, for the purpose of expressing their sense of loss which they and the whole nation had sustained in the death of Daniel Webster.

The Hon. Henry G. Long was appointed president of the meeting, the Hon. Christian Kieffer and Hon. Emanuel Schaeffer, vice presidents, and Col. George W. Hamersly and William S. Amweg, secretaries.

After the meeting had been briefly and eloquently addressed by the president, on motion of Thomas E. Franklin, Esq., the following were appointed a committee on resolutions: Thomas E. Franklin, Samuel Humes Porter, Alexander L. Hayes, Dr. John L. Atlee, Hiram B. Swarr, John W. Jackson, John Bear, Col. Bartram A. Schaeffer, William Mathiot and Col. David W. Patterson. The committee subsequently reported the following resolutions, which were unanimously adopted:

"Resolved, That this community has received with profound emotion of sorrow the intelligence of the death of Daniel Webster, Secretary of State of the United States.

"Resolved, That while we feel that in this dispensation of Divine Providence one of the great luminaries of the age has been extinguished, our hearts are animated by the reflection that his name and fame belong to our common country; and that throughout his long career as a legislator and a statesman he has, by his eloquence in the Senate, and by his wisdom in the Cabinet, promoted her interests, her honor and her glory.

"Resolved, That the rare intellectual endowments of Mr. Webster have excited the admiration of the world, and his eminent public services, his devoted attachment to the Constitution and the Union, and his exalted patriotism, have secured to him the veneration and gratitude of his fellow citizens.

"Resolved, That as a tribute of respect for the memory of the illustrious departed statesman, the bells of the city be tolled from 12 to 2 o'clock, P. M., on to-morrow, the day of his funeral.

"Resolved, That a copy of these proceedings be transmitted by the officers of this meeting to the Mayor of the city of Boston, and to the family of the deceased, and that they be published."

Eloquent and impressive addresses were made by Thomas E. Franklin, Samuel Humes Porter, Esq. and the Hon. Alexander L. Hayes, after which the meeting adjourned.

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Mr. Webster was one of the ablest statesmen of our country, and contributed largely to the influences which have made it the foremost nation of the world. On several occasions he seemed to be within reach of the presidency of the United States, an office which undoubtedly would have been greatly magnified under his administration. As a lawyer, an orator, a statesman and a lover of his country, he has had but few, if any, equals. All honor to such men who have given us higher ideals of living and nobler conceptions of our duty to our beloved land!

Mr. Webster's only surviving son, Fletcher, gave his life at the Battle of Bull Run in 1861, in defense of the perpetuation of the great nation which had been so dear to the heart of his world-famed father.