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Thomas Smith Webb
and
Other Distinguished
Citizens

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"The Old Stone Bank"
Providence, R. I.

Thomas Smith Webb
and
Other Distinguished
Citizens



Presented by
“The Old Stone Bank”
Providence, R. I.



THE PROVIDENCE INSTITUTION FOR SAVINGS, known as "The Old Stone Bank," is one of the historic institutions of the State of Rhode Island. Founded in 1819, it has since that time been a vital factor in the life of this community.

Because of its own historical significance, "The Old Stone Bank" brings to light in its educational advertising, interesting facts of Rhode Island and national history.

The stories of Rhode Island that are told in the following pages are selected from local history that is one long narrative of romance, adventure and deeds of accomplishment. In the hope that the lives and works of famous men and women may be interesting to review, and that their biographies may serve as inspirations to both young and old, this book is presented with the compliments of

THE OLD STONE BANK

Thomas Smith Webb



A RECENT estimate placed the number of persons of voting age in this country at 68,000,000. If that figure is reasonably accurate, then it can be said that nearly half of the persons of voting age belong to one or more fraternities. With nearly half of our adult men and women belonging to organizations which teach and practice helpfulness to others, it might be assumed that these people and these organizations must accomplish no little good. The assumption would be correct but conservative. The influence of fraternities on American life today and the amount of good they do are incalculable.

Conspicuous among these is the great and honored craft of Freemasons, of whom, in the United States, Porto Rico and the Philippines alone, there are close to three and a quarter millions. And, they unanimously acclaim as the brightest of the constellations in the Masonic firmament, that illustrious Rhode Islander, Thomas Smith Webb—founder of the American system of Chapter and Encampment Masonry and developer of the ritualistic and ceremonial forms now universally employed.

Thomas Smith Webb was born in Boston, of English parents, on the 30th of October, 1771, and was named after an uncle of his mother's, the Rev. Thomas Smith, the first minister in Portland, Maine. He was educated in the public schools of Boston, and because of his keen interest in and special aptitude for the ancient classics and higher branches of knowledge he was transferred from Grammar School to the Latin School, from which he graduated at the age of 15.

He immediately started to learn the printer's trade at which he worked after his removal to Keene, New Hampshire. At Keene, Webb, then in his 20th year, entered Freemasonry for which he was later to accomplish so much, receiving his first degree in Rising Sun Lodge on December 24th, 1790.

An unsuccessful business venture in Keene was followed by the establishing, by Webb, in Albany, New York, of a paper staining factory which he operated successfully until the early part of 1799 when he came to Providence to engage in the manufacture of wall paper, a business which he sold to become the managing head of the Hope Manufacturing Company in which he had purchased a large interest. Here again he prospered and it is generally conceded that he played a large part in the advancement of Rhode Island's cotton manufacturing industry.

On September 12th, 1797, while still in Albany, Thomas Smith Webb made his first bid for fame as a Masonic ritualist and authority by publishing "The Freemason's Monitor, or Illustrations of Masonry." This small volume, now exceedingly rare, was in two parts, the second containing a description of "The Ineffable Degrees of Masonry" and his own original Masonic songs; the "Master's Song", "Senior Warden's Song", "Junior Warden's Song" and the "Senior Warden's Toast". Webb published successively enlarged and improved editions of this work in 1802, 1805, 1808, 1816 and 1818 and there have been numerous editions since the author's death. The work is today regarded as the standard on the subject of which it treats.

Webb was given a warm welcome by the Masons of Providence, then a bustling community of 7500 people, and he accepted the invitation to affiliate with St. John's Lodge, one of the oldest and most flourishing in the State, signing its By-laws in February, 1801. Immediately he began to make Masonic history by instituting a Lodge of Instruction with himself as principal instructor. In June, 1902, Webb was elected to the Grand Lodge as Junior Grand Warden and a year later was elected Senior Grand Warden. He became Grand Master in 1813, was re-elected in 1814 but declined another term in 1815.

Thomas Smith Webb framed the present system of Royal Arch Masonry following his election in 1801 to the office of High Priest of Providence Royal Arch Chapter. He was instrumental in the forming of the first Grand Chapter in 1798 and was elected Grand High Priest of the Grand Chapter of Rhode Island in 1803, and continued to serve until 1815 when he removed to Boston.

Webb's cherished ambition was to form a General Grand Chapter of Royal Arch Masons, for the government and regulation of the Grand and Subordinate Chapters throughout the country and in October, 1797, he presided over a Convention of Committees to this end, at Boston. The first

General Grand Chapter held its first meeting in Middletown, Connecticut, in September, 1798, and adjourned to meet again in Providence in January, 1799. At this meeting a new constitution, presented by Webb, was adopted. At the third meeting held in 1806, Webb was elected General Grand King, succeeding to General High Priest at the fourth meeting in 1816 and continuing until his death in 1819.

During this same period the untiring Masonic zeal of Thomas Smith Webb accomplished the formation on August 23rd, 1802, of St. John's Encampment No. 1 of Knights Templar—now known as St. John's Commandery—in Providence, the ranking body of all of the Templar organizations of America. Webb provided the ritual and ceremonial of the Templar Orders and was made the first Eminent Commander, being re-elected annually until December 5th, 1814, when he declined re-election.

Then came the now Grand Commandery of Massachusetts and Rhode Island, organized by Webb in 1805 and headed by him until he voluntarily retired in 1817. The achievement which has been declared to be the crowning glory of Webb's Masonic work—The Grand Encampment of Knights Templars of the United States—came into being in 1816, in New York City, with Webb as Deputy Grand Master, the office he held at the time of his death in

1819. St. John's Commandery has as one of its most carefully guarded possessions the original draft of the Constitution of the Grand Encampment, with all of the changes, additions and interlineations in Webb's own handwriting.

The Masons of Rhode Island may well be proud of their association with this remarkably able organizer and keen minded ritualist. This pride has been expressed in the Thomas Smith Webb Commandery of Providence, the Webb Council, No. 3 Royal and Select Masters of Warren, the Thomas Smith Webb Lodge of Providence, and the recently instituted Thomas Smith Webb Chapter of Providence, now meeting under dispensation and soon to receive its charter.

Thomas Smith Webb's death came suddenly, at the early age of 48, while he was on a business trip to Cleveland. His body was first buried in Cleveland, being later sent to Providence, in accordance with his wish that he be laid beside his first wife in his tomb in West Burial Ground, the site of the present Hayward Park. A Masonic Association was formed in 1859 to raise funds for a suitable monument to this much loved man and in 1862 the memorial was completed where it now stands in North Burying Ground where the body of this great Mason now rests.

Webb lived in Providence at the corner of Westminster and Eddy Streets in a three-story brick house where the Browning, King & Co. store stands today. Webb married, in 1797, Miss Martha Hopkins of Boston and two of their five children survived him. The death of his first wife in 1808 was followed one year later by Webb's marriage to her sister and she and two of their four children survived his death. A son, Dr. Thomas H. Webb, who died in 1866, graduated from Brown University in the class of 1821.

Thomas Smith Webb joined the Second Regiment of the State Militia as a private and rose to the rank of Lieutenant Colonel. His various commercial activities included his association with Col. John Carlisle and William Wilkinson as trustees of the Providence Mutual Fire Insurance Company.

An interesting event occurred during the Second War with England and just before Webb retired as Grand Master of the Grand Lodge. It was in 1814 that the English fleet filled Narragansett Bay and menaced the safety of Providence and its 11,000 inhabitants. Something must be done and done quickly. Webb accordingly headed a Committee of Defence organized at a Special Meeting of the Grand Lodge on October 3rd, and 230 members of Lodges from all

parts of the State marched to Tockwotton Hill (now Tockwotton Park) and built in a single day, in the name of the Grand Lodge an earthworks 430 feet long, 10 feet wide and 5 feet high, giving it the appropriate Masonic name of "Fort Hiram".

The Masonic bodies, during Webb's day, met in the upper floor of the Market Building, now the Chamber of Commerce Building and many old timers will recall the Masonic emblem which occupied the spot high up on the Market Square wall which now houses the clock, which by the way was originally in the old horse car station in the square.

Thomas Smith Webb Commandery has converted some wood taken from the old Lodge Room into a frame which holds the only remaining piece of iron from the old Point Street Bridge and which now serves the Commandery as a gong. As a matter of sentiment this same Commandery received its dispensation for organization in the old Lodge Room on the third floor of the Market Building where its revered namesake held forth so gloriously.

Providence's Most Distinguished Citizen



IN the shadow of the imposing new Providence County Courthouse, a few steps from Market Square, has come to rest for time unending the little wooden dwelling house that was once the home of Stephen Hopkins, illustrious Rhode Island citizen who played such an important part in the early history of the city and the state. This permanent memorial was turned over to the Society of Colonial Dames in Rhode Island in the year 1929, and its doors were opened to the public for them to view the interior of a typical dwelling of Revolutionary days, and picture in imagination the quaint scenes that took place within its walls. Originally this house stood on South Main Street. In 1804 it was moved half way up the hill, and

now is permanently located on the west side of Benefit Street, on the corner of Hopkins Street.

Stephen Hopkins, who is remembered as one of the signers of the Declaration of Independence was responsible for the rapid strides made by the city and state in industry, education, commerce, and legislation during the early stages of their history. He was respected as a student, merchant, leader of public sentiment, writer, historian, orator, legislator, jurist, executive officer, patriot and statesman. Upon his death in 1785 he was universally mourned as a genial comrade.

Let us look into the pages of history for one or two sidelights on the character of this man who occupies one of the prominent niches in the Rhode Island hall of fame.

John Adams, who was associated with him in Congress, speaks of him thus: "The pleasantest part of my labors in the four years I spent in Congress, from 1774 to 1778, was in the Committee on Naval Affairs. Mr. Lee and Mr. Gadsen, two members of the committee, were sensible men and very cheerful, but Governor Hopkins of Rhode Island, above seventy years of age, kept us all alive. Upon business, his experience and judgment were very useful, but when the business of the evening was

over, he kept us in conversation till eleven and sometimes twelve o'clock. His custom was to drink nothing until eight in the evening, when his beverage was Jamaica spirits and water. It gave him wit, humor, anecdotes, science, and learning. He had read Greek, Roman, and British history, and was familiar with English poetry, particularly Pope, Thompson, and Milton, and the flow of his soul made all of his reading our own, and seemed to bring in recollection in all of us all we had ever read . . . Hopkins never drank to excess, but all he drank was immediately converted into wit, sense, knowledge and good humor, and inspired us all with similar qualities."

Here is a letter he wrote in Philadelphia to his son's wife, on June 21, 1775:—"Beloved Ruth. . . I wrote you on the 25th of May and gave you an account of our journey hither. Since then I have had an ill turn and two or three fits of fever and ague, but am now well. Your mother has not been well for several days, and is now quite poorly. I hope she will soon be better. George I expected to have seen here, but believe he has gone to South Carolina. Col. Washington will set out from here in a day or two for New England to take command of the Continental Army of which he is appointed Commander-in-Chief. He will be accompanied by General Lee, who also has

a command in the army which is taken into the pay of all America. I can give no guess yet when we shall leave this place—certainly not very soon, unless we adjourn to the Northland, which is talked of, but not agreed to yet.

Give my best to all parts of the family, and respects to all who may ask after me. Should be glad to hear from you, and remain your Affectionate Father, Stephen Hopkins."

In March, 1781, it became necessary for Washington to visit the island of Rhode Island to make arrangements with the newly arrived French allies, for the conduct of the approaching campaign. On his way he stopped for a few days at Providence.

It was doubtless on this occasion that Washington paid the visit to Stephen Hopkins of which Moses Brown has left so interesting a record:—"I was sitting with him," says Moses Brown, "when General Washington alone, called to see him. I sat some time viewing their simple, friendly and pleasant manner . . . these two great men met and conversed with each other on various subjects." Moses Brown adds that he had occasionally seen Washington before and after this occasion, and had been impressed by his simple, easy manner, as resembling that of Governor Hopkins.

In 1774 Stephen Hopkins, although in feeble health, was a delegate from Rhode Island to the first Continental Congress. Of the fifty-five delegates present he was the only one who had been a member of the Albany Congress in 1754. (Franklin, who also had been at the Albany Congress was not a member of the Continental Congress until 1775.) Hopkins, above all others at that gathering, apparently appreciated the gravity of the situation that war was inevitable, which conviction he expressed in the following memorable and courageous words:

"Powder and ball will decide this question. The gun and bayonet alone will finish the contest in which we are engaged, and any of you who cannot bring your minds to this mode of adjusting the question, had better retire in time."

Some historians have even gone so far as to acclaim Stephen Hopkins as the most distinguished citizen to whom the city of Providence has given birth. Roger Williams first saw the light of day on the other side of the Atlantic, and Nathaniel Greene, whose name is held in deepest honor throughout the state, was born in Warwick, and was never a resident of Providence. The great names of Berkley and Channing have inseparable associations with Newport, though none with Providence; but Stephen

Hopkins was born on Providence soil; was thoroughly satisfied with her interests, and was one of her most assiduous public servants, to whose exertions she is most deeply indebted.

One who knew him well, and had carefully studied his influence said of him long after his death:

“Providence from the beginning has had to boast some men—the number more or less from time to time—of this peculiar, this Themistoclean character. Men who might say, as Themistocles said: ‘True, I do not understand the art of music, and cannot play upon the flute; but I understand the art of raising a small village into a great city.’”

This striking tribute most properly might have been Stephen Hopkins’ epitaph, and those whose efforts are identified with the city of the present day, with its varied interests of manufacture, commerce, railways, schools, libraries, and all the multiform elements of a city’s life, owe more than can be readily realized to the intelligent exertions of Stephen Hopkins.

Colonel John S. Slocum



WHEN the war of the Rebellion opened in 1861, it found the people of Rhode Island ready to respond with enthusiasm to any call that would likely be made upon them for the defence of the imperilled nation. President Lincoln issued his proclamation calling for 75,000 men for three months on the 15th of April. In the course of the week the First Rhode Island Regiment, composed of ten companies of Infantry and a battery of Artillery, under command of Colonel Ambrose E. Burnside, was dispatched to Washington. The battery, under the command of Captain Charles H. Tompkins, accompanied by Lieut. Governor Samuel G. Arnold embarked at Providence on the 18th; the first detachment of infantry, with Colonel Burnside in command, accompanied by the governor, and Colonels William Goddard and Lyman B. Frieze, aides-de-camp, embarked on the

20th; and the second detachment, under Lieutenant Colonel Joseph S. Pitman, on the 24th of April.

The first detachment of troops arrived at Washington on the 26th; the second on the 29th; the battery on the 2nd of May; and were mustered into the service of the United States—the Infantry on the 2nd, and the artillery on the 7th of May.

But it soon became evident that the government had undertaken a task not to be completed by a service of three months. The alacrity with which the people of the loyal states had answered the appeal encouraged the authorities at Washington to make a second. This time the period of service was to be for three years, unless sooner discharged, and the number of men summoned to the field was 42,034. The president issued the new call on the 3rd of May. In Rhode Island, stimulated by the public sentiment of the state—always intensely loyal and patriotic, enlistments had been actively made since the day of the departure of the First Regiment. On that day, Governor Sprague had directed Adjutant-General Mauran to issue an order at some subsequent time, looking to the formation of another regiment. General Mauran issued the order on the 29th of April, directing “the commandants of the several military companies to fill their companies

at once to seventy-four rank and file, including two musicians, to be officered in accordance with the regulations of the Army of the United States.” On the 30th, the governor, then in Washington, sent word that no more enlistments were necessary, as the capitol was safe.

But so zealously had the work been carried on and so readily had the people engaged in it, that when the call of the president was made, a new regiment was in a good state of forwardness. By the 7th of May four full companies had been raised and officers had been chosen—one at Providence, commanded by Captain W. H. P. Steere; one at Bristol, commanded by Captain Nathan Goff, Jr.; one at East Greenwich and neighborhood, commanded by Captain C. W. Greene; and one at South Kingstown, commanded by Captain I. P. Rodman. By the order of the 29th of April, General Charles T. Robbins, of the state militia, had been assigned to the command of the regiment when full, but on the 13th of May, Major John S. Slocum, accompanied by Surgeon F. L. Wheaton, both of the First Regiment, arrived in Providence. Governor Sprague—still in Washington—had been authorized on the 7th to raise a new regiment, and his offer to furnish another battery of artillery had been accepted. He detailed Major Slocum and Dr. Wheaton

to organize the regiment, and selected the major to take command. General Robbins accordingly declined the position, and on the 18th, Major Slocum was announced, in general order, as the commander.

When the regiment was advanced for service in the field Major Slocum was advanced to a colonelcy. Colonel Slocum was born in the town of Richmond, Rhode Island, November 1st, 1824. He was instructed in the public schools of Bristol, where he spent most of his early life, in the classical schools of Fruit Hill and Marlborough, Massachusetts, and at a commercial school in Hartford. His predilections for a military life were strong in youth, and before he was eighteen year of age he became a member of the National Cadets in Providence. He afterwards commanded the Mechanics Rifles. At the opening of the Mexican War he offered his services to the government, and received a commission of first lieutenant in the famous 9th Regiment, Feb. 18th, 1847. He distinguished himself at the battle of Contreras, winning a brevet of captain, and again at Chepultepec, where he won a full captaincy. At the end of the war his regiment was disbanded, and he returned to civil life. He was married in 1858 to Miss Abby J., a daughter of Hon. Charles T. James of Providence. In 1860 he was a member and secretary of the ex-

aming board at West Point. At the breaking out of the rebellion he was commissioned major of the First Regiment, and greatly endeared himself to the officers and men. As has been related he was appointed colonel of the Second, and in his brief command won the affection and admiration of the Regiment to a very high degree. He was a remarkably generous, gallant, and fearless man, and no officer in the army gave greater promise of a brilliant future. In forthcoming historical sketches the complete history of the valorous service of the Second Rhode Island Regiment will be traced. The regiment was engaged in active service from the beginning to the end of the war and it had the misfortune to lose its brave commander in the very first engagement at Bull Run, where the Union forces suffered serious reverses. Recalling that unfortunate incident, we find that our Rhode Island Regiment was hotly engaged with one or two regiments of Georgia, Alabama, and South Carolina troops, with artillery, and made so gallant a fight as to push the enemy off the plateau and down the hillside. In a corn-field on the slope temporary shelter was discovered. But the fire of the Second was hot and deadly, and although fresh troops were constantly coming up against them, our boys obstinately held the crest they had so bravely won. For

nearly half an hour—it seemed longer to those who were waiting for support—while the brigade was forming, did the Regiment fight on, single handed. Early in the contest, Colonel Hunter was wounded in the neck, and retired from the field. Meeting Colonel Burnside, he said, “Burnside, I leave the matter in your hands. Slocum and his Regiment went in handsomely and drove the scoundrels”. The brigade was immediately sent into the field, the First Rhode Island Regiment rushing through the woods with a shout, and relieving the Second, which made a flank movement to the left in the midst of the fire. The 71st New York, with its howitzers formed on the right, and the 2nd New Hampshire came gallantly up in support of Reynold’s battery, which was now upon the right of the 71st. The battle at this time was raging furiously, the enemy holding his ground well, and men and horses were falling on all sides before the rapid and scathing fire of the foe. To those who were in their first battle, the air seemed full of missiles. Governor Sprague, acting as volunteer aide to Colonel Burnside, and Lieutenant Weeden of the battery, had each a horse shot from under him, in the early hours of the fight. The enemy was in full and constantly increasing force, but our own troops were coming up, the day was going well with us,

and affairs looked promising for a complete victory.

Along the upper boundary of the cornfield, to which allusion has been made, ran a rail fence. The Second Regiment ranged near this, making a gallant fight. Colonel Slocum, climbing the fence turned to the Regiment, to cheer on his command. He was shot in the side and back of his head, and fell to the ground. He was carried to a house nearby, and was there attended by a Dr. Harris who was busily engaged in caring for the wounded men. But the brave soldier, though conscious and apparently recognizing his men, never spoke again. In a lull of the battle a door was taken from its hinges and he was borne to the rear.

He died too early for his country, but none too early for his own renown. “We expect a great deal of Rhode Island troops today” said Colonel Hunter as the Second went into battle. “You shall not be disappointed, sir” replied Colonel Slocum. Then turning to the Regiment he said, “Now, show them what Rhode Island can do” and thus he led his men into their first fight. The spirit of that injunction has made the precious history of the Second Rhode Island Regiment.



The Second Rhode Island in Action



RHODE ISLAND'S famous regiment, the Second, saw action from the first to the last of the War of the Rebellion. It had nobly responded to the hope of the people of this state, when it went forth to its mission of duty, heroism and sacrifice. On many fields it showed its valor. The first and last battle of the war bore equal testimony to its gallantry and fidelity of service. In a large army there are always certain regiments, known throughout the ranks as trustworthy in every duty to which they are sent. On the front line, at the outposts, or in reserve; on the march, in camp, upon the field, these are the picked men—the men to lead a forlorn hope, to inspire a charge, to cover a retreat. Many historians say that the Second