

Pelham at 200-Year Mark Revives Centennial Notes

By **FREDERICK W. COBURN**

July 6, 1946, being the 200th anniversary of the incorporation of the neighbor town of Pelham we can wonder how the observance of this week will compare with that of the centennial which, patriotically, was celebrated on July 4, 1846.

Pelhamites a century ago were so loyal to their town just over the state line that one of them, signing himself "a Native", wrote a piece for the Lowell Courier complaining that the fourth estate of this metropolis was not paying enough attention to the anniversary of its northern suburb. Said this native son in part:

"The 6th of July completes the first 100 years of the town's municipal existence: and it is therefore proposed to celebrate the fourth as well in honor of our revolutionary heroes as of the forefathers of the town. . . It is understood that the Morgan Rifle company will do escort duty, an excellent dinner will be provided and John Q. A. Griffin of Pelham will deliver an address on the "Early Settlement of New England."

Following an accompanying twit one would have expected ye Courier ed. . . had he been a modern newsman, to have rushed a special writer and photographer out to Pelham Centre in the interest of a page spread exciting to townsmen subscribers. Nothing like that happened in early July, 1946, of course. Even "a Native" failed to turn in a next-day report of the observance; but on the 8th "a Looker-on" contributed a few lines stating that the dinner tables at the Centre groaned with food, that the Morgan Rifles under Captain D. Butler made a resplendent showing and that the orator, Mr. Griffin, for so young a man, acquitted himself nobly.

Thus in a town where the

"eats" always were glamorous, and at OldHome Week time they still are, was celebrated the centennial of an incorporation which closely followed Surveyor George Mitchell's running the boundary line between Massachusetts and New Hampshire at all points precisely three miles from the bed of the Merrimack all the way from the sea to a tall pine direct north of the Great Bunt, and thence straight away to the Pacific Ocean. One of the most famous surveys of American history.

A book-size history is lacking of the town which geographically belongs in greater Lowell but which because of the accident (some might say misfortune) of its political adherence to New Hampshire seems more remote than it really is. The present year, therefore, might appear to be a good time for publication of a manuscript on which, we understand, a Pelham lady has been at work for several years past. Material is plentiful. The town records for 200 years have been admirably kept, the inscriptions in Pelham graveyards are often genealogically valuable, Pelham boasts in the Old South Bridge the earliest known WPA project in the United States, no other township of New England has a Gumpus Pond, the Pelham Sings in their day were unique, and there are many other features which deserve to be acclaimed in eloquent prose and sonorous verse. So, let it be hoped that this year's bicentennial observance, will be followed by an adequate literary and historical record of two centuries past.

Reverting to July 4, 1846, let it be noted that the day at Lowell was thrillingly active as well as at Pelham. Features in this city were: sunrise exhibition by the fire companies standing in John street; floral procession in the forenoon, the public urged to "encourage the children and teachers and please yourselves by buying a bouquet"; industrial celebration in Dracut by the riverside with addresses by Albert Brisbane, Elizur Wright and other well known radicals; Sabbath school picnic in the Grove, Chapel Hill; presentation to the Young Men's Temperance Society of a banner from the steps of John Street church; evening concerts, by Louis Strack in City Hall and by the Tremont Vocalists in Wentworth's Hall, etc.

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For this day, too, came the first printing of another poem by Lowell's prolific poetess, Jane Ermina Locke. It was evoked by the children's floral parade. The first and last stanzas will perhaps suffice to remind us of a style of occasional poetry regarded as good a century ago;

"Pass on, pass on, bright Floral
Train

With garland and bouquet;
All they who love the beautiful

Shall welcome give today,
"Pass on, with fragrant jasmine
flower

That bloomed so proud and tall,
With lily and with violet,
Fairest yourselves of all."