

[Botsford on Migration]

[?]

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Thomaston

Tuesday Nov. 22 ['3?]

Art Botsford:

“Names have always kind of interested me. There was a lot of discussion the time they [?] named Thomaston. Some wanted to call it ThomasTown; and some wanted to call it ThomasTon—and the last party won out. They had a big open meeting, and there was quite a lot of arguin' one way and the other.

“Funny [?] how names leave their impression on places, and [how?] people long dead sometimes live forever, you might say, or their [names?] live on, rather, in some town or city.

“My mother's [?] folks was Scrantons—her name was Abbott, [but?] the Scrantons were her folks way back. They wandered all over the country, I guess. Some of them settled down [?] around Pennsylvania, and there's a city there now you've heard of—Scranton.

“You take a map sometime, and look at the state of New Hampshire, and you'll find the names of more than twenty Connecticut towns and cities. Years ago, when this state began to get more thickly populated, people got discouraged trying to make a living here—they had big families [then?] and it was hard going—they just up and left the state in big

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bunches. A [lot?] of them settled up New Hampshire way, and of [c?] course it was [p?] perfectly natural for them to name a new town or village after the [one?] they left.

It's a fine thing for a community to be named after some [outstanding?] man who put something in to the building of it. That's why I'm strong for [t??] surnames. It would be a good thing if more people [were?] given first names after other branches of the family—I ofte?] often [wished?] I had—preserves the old family names.

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“Of course there's some that [????] favor [?] saints names or [Biblicl?] Biblical names, and that's all right too, but if I hadmy choice I'd name [???] youngsters with family names.

“There wasn't any question about what they'd call this town—that was after they'd broke away from Plymouth you know—nobody argued when the suggestion came up that they [call it Thom?] name it after the Thomas family. The only discussion was like I said—whether it'd be ThomasTon or ThomasTown. That was in 1875, and before that it was Plymouth Hollow.

“Plymouth, I suppose got its name from the original Plymouth up in Massachusetts. [?] This was all once the parish of Northbury.

“I like to see things commemorated in other ways, too. I often thought—though I never said anything about it—that when they was buildin' that tower down on the main building of the plant, they could just as easy have made it into the likeness of an old Seth Thomas grandfather clock. They could have painted the pendulum on the glass, and it would have attracted attention [bn?] better than a lot of advertisements.”

Consulting August Wehrle, who has something of a reputation locally as a historian of town affairs, I was given an insight into the social life of the community [by?] thirty to fifty years ago by means of a number of newspaper clippings describing social events. Clockmakers of that particular period were inveterate patrons during the winter season

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of “fairs,” staged by various social [or?] and fraternal organizations—The Criterion club—the Fire Department—The [Eastern?] Star—an [amat?] amateur theatrical group—the Thomaston Minstrel club All of these events were held at the Opera House— [and?] an auditorium in the town hall building—and all apparently were a “great success.”

They were held from one to three nights each, with various forms of entertainment each evening, climaxed on Saturday night usually, by a [?] pretentious stage show of some sort—sometimes a grand march thrown in for good measure. Following the show the moveable seats were stored [a?] away, and in booths which lined the auditorium on [?] both sides, members of the organization sponsoring the [?] event hawked merchandise and special prizes to be won on the “wheels”

One of the most active and popular of the old [organizations?], comprised very largely of employees of the clock company, was the Thomaston Minstrel Club. [?] According to a clipping from the local paper: “The Club was one of the most popular entertainment features in Thomaston and surrounding towns. Organized [?] in 1902, the first show presented was in Thomaston Opera House Jan 25, 1903 for the benefit of the T. A. B. society of St. Thomas' church. Michael Kegan, now of Boston, was manager and producer, and the late Frank T. Bidwell, a musician of great ability, was the director and pianist.

“The minstrel proved a great hit and from then on, they were in constant [d?] demand. For a number of years the club was called upon to open practically all the fairs and bazaars in this and [neighborhood?] neighboring communities, and always played to capacity houses.

“The last public appearance of the minstrels was in 1929, when by popular request, they staged an old-time show in the Opera House. Once again, the house was packed, and the S.R.O. sign was hoisted long before the curtain [a?] [rose?] arose. The ovation received by the few older members proved that they had lost none of their former appeal. Many in the audience had come from distant points to witness the performance. Assisting the few old timers that night were Miss Lois Biggs, daughter of Harry Biggs, one of the original

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members, and Harold, Francis and Joseph Conway, three sons of former members. These four continue as members of the club.

“The closest of friendships exist [b?] between the few remaining charter members, and frequently they unite with their families and friends for a 4 reunion. At these gatherings the old songs are sung and those [f?] fortunate enough to attend claim that the club members sing as delightfully now, to the [accompaniment?] of Arthur Henderson, present pianist, as they did 34 years ago.”