

Sat. May 9

Cheapside of the Olden Time

Condensed from a paper read by Albert L. Wing at a meeting of the Greenfield Historical Society December 2, 1910

Greenfield's Cheapside is presumably the namesake of the famous Cheapside of London, although it has been said that the word may be a corruption of "Sheepsides" because of the flocks of sheep that formerly fed along the banks of the streams flowing through the meadows. Like its English original, our Cheapside was formerly "a place to sell and bargain", for in its palmy days it was the leading commercial center of this locality, with stores and warehouses, wharfs and hotels. Cheapside, now a part of Greenfield after a fight for annexation beginning nearly two centuries ago and terminating in 1896, lies to the north of the Deerfield River and the Sheldon brook, and includes the southern portion of Greenfield.

The opening of the railway from Springfield to Greenfield put an end to the business prosperity of Cheapside. The boats ceased to come up the Connecticut river from Hartford bringing up supplies and taking back the products of this part of the country; the wharves fell into disuse; the stage lines that formerly passed through went out of business after the coming of the railroad, leaving Cheapside as we know it today. In its days of prosperity Cheapside was not only a leading business center, but had ambitions to become the shire of the county and put up a persistent and well-organized fight which was backed by considerable money. Its ambition was thwarted, and wisely so, for the configuration of the land is such that a county seat of any size could not be accommodated there.

The earliest highway from Deerfield" ran through the North Meadows to a ferry at the north end of Pine Hill, on through Cheapside by Fort Hill, the "Sequestered Land" which was set ~~aside~~ apart in 1686 for the support of the minister and lay on either side of Green River. This route was often obstructed by floods , and various plans were suggested for a betterone. As early as 1722 t the town chose a committee to consult with Joseph Parsons about building a bridge. In 1727 the town voted to build a bridge at the first turn of the river below the crossing. Twenty@nine years later a committee was chosen to make inquiry relative to the construction of a bridge across the river and get estimates of the cost. Of this nothing was heard, but in 1758 Deerfield was ordered by ~~a~~ thority to keep a ferry at the old crossing ." In the year 1758 the committee chosen by the town to petition the Legislature for the grant of a lottery to raise money to build a bridge ~~was~~ were given leave to withdraw. In 1786 Jonathan Hoyt and others were grated permission to construct a bridge across the Deerfield river at the Rocky Mountain gorge, a short distance below the bridge of the present day. In 1787 a road was laid out from the Old Street to Cheapside east of the North Meadows and a ferry established a short distance above the present bridge. In the meantime parties from Deerfield and adjoining towns were trying to get legislative authority to start a lottery for a bridge, the sum of 600 pounds being the sum named in the bill that passed the legislature in 1792. It is doubtful if the bill became law. In 1798 a bridge was built at Cheapside at the present location. It cost \$5000. By 1805 it was in such a tumble-down condition that the contractors were obliged to the proprietors the sume of \$1364 in damages. This bridge was superseded in 1806 by a structure costing \$8000. Attempts had been made to obtain a charter to

build a bridge at Rocky Mountain, near the present stone-crusher plant, the latest in 1823, but no bridge has ever been built at that place.

The tolls charged for use of the Cheapside bridge were : for stages on wheels, 20 cents; on runners, 12 cents; chaise, 8 cents; horse and wagon, 6 cents; four-horse wagon, 17 cents; cart and oxen, 17 cents; a ~~cur~~rricle, 20 cents ( a curricule is a two-wheeled chaise, drawn by two horses abreast) ; footmen and oxen, 2 cents; sheep, 1 cent; man on horseback, 4 cents. People became tired of paying tolls and looked forward to the time when this tax should be removed. The charter to the Cheapside bridge corporation was to run for 70 years, and at the expiration of this time a good substantial bridge was to be left to the town. The town took the matter up, and in 1867 a committee was named to obtain legislative action, or to take such action in the matter as in their judgment the best interests of the town required. After a long search to find evidence as to the first day the bridge had been used, /the Day Book of Dr. William S. Williams noted an entry in a "ferriage" charge for a Cheapside patient, and three days later a "toll" charge, which term was used in all later entries. This Day Book was taken before the Legislative Committee in Boston and on its evidence alone the date was determined on which the bridge was to become free.

With the development of the surrounding country after the Revolution, business at Cheapside kept apace, and with the opening of river navigation came a decided impetus to its commercial growth. In Sheldon's History we read: Joseph Swan appears as the pioneer trader, advertising September 6, 1795, 300 bushels of salt to sell or exchange for flaxseed on terms

pleasing to the farmers. Asher Benjamin, one of the earlier architects, advertised for carpenters. In 1799 John Williams, Jr., opened a store in Cheap side a short distance below the bridge, where he offered at wholesale and retail West India goods, tobacco, and other articles like staves, headings, hoop poles, and exchanged ~~bar~~ barrels for "cedar", and salt for flax seed. Spirits were no inconsiderable part of the incoming freight, along with salt ~~of~~ which immense quantities seem to have been brought in) molasses, iron, steel, groceries and other necessities of life. Goods were sent by boat where practicable, and teams ran regularly from western Massachusetts to Boston until the advent of the railroad.

In 1799 Jonathan Hoyt opened at Cheap side his tavern, the Black Horse Inn, the black horse being portrayed on a sign hanging outside. Warehouses and wharves were built for the accommodation of the river traffic. Boats came up the Connecticut from Hartford, leaving the Connecticut at the mouth of the Deerfield River, and ran to the wharves at Cheap side. In 1810 Edward Houghton of Northfield built a large store just to the east of the bridge. In 1830 Ira and Isaac Abercrombie purchased the Houghton store and engaged extensively in mercantile business and boating. Asiel Abercrombie was proprietor of the tavern on the palmy days of Cheap side, when staging was brisk on the various stagecoach lines passing through. Allen and Root had a store house and wharf nearly opposite the Abercrombie tavern. Thayer's furniture factory stood west of the bridge.

The opening of the Connecticut River Railway from Northampton in 1846 to Greenfield/dealt a staggering blow to Cheap side business

interests, from which they never recovered. In spite of the attempts to keep business at the old stands, the merchants were forced to see trade pass by to Greenfield. With the opening of the railroad came of course the decline and final extinction of the various stage lines which had passed through Cheapside and contributed to its prosperity.

Anyone passing through Cheapside today would see little to convince him that the place once had ambitions to be the county seat. After Franklin County was set off from Hampshire County in 1811, the wide-awake and hustling citizens of Cheapside put forth strenuous efforts to bring the shire town to that locality. From the address of Whiting Griswold at the opening of the new courthouse in 1873 we learn that the act creating the new county made Greenfield the shire town and that the controversy was waged by the two towns before and after the passage of the act.

Greenfield raised \$100 in its corporate capacity to carry on the fight, and citizens of Deerfield raised \$1900 for the purpose of bringing the county seat to Cheapside. John Williams offered to build a courthouse as good as the one in Northampton; to put up a fireproof building for the clerk of courts and another for the register of deeds, the latter to be south of the river; and to give land for the jail. Williams and Jonathan Hoyt, the two largest Cheapside landowners were not on friendly terms, and Hoyt would not give, sell, or exchange a foot of his land, which was best suited for these buildings. The Greenfield men were not slow in discovering the factional differences at Cheapside, and proceeded as best they could to take advantage of the tactical mistakes of the enemy. Nearly all the towns of the county took sides in the fight, In November, 1811 a convention was held at Greenfield with a view to changing the act of incorporation of the county

and move the shire town from Greenfield to Cheapside before the ~~new~~ county buildings should be erected. It was an exciting meeting, each side presenting a long list of reasons in its favor, but the legislature declined to come to the relief of Cheapside, and Greenfield has enjoyed the honor of being the shire town since the creation of the county in 1811.

But Cheapside remained for many years a bone of contention between Deerfield and Greenfield. The struggle for the shire of the county was short; the contest for the annexation of Cheapside continued a vexing problem for a century and a half, until 1896, when victory was won by Greenfield. It was in 1742 that Greenfield, then known as the Green River district, wished to be set up as a town or district by the name of Cheapside, the Deerfield River and Sheldon brook being the southern boundary, and finally in 1753 the division took place with the north line of the Dedham grant as the south boundary of the new town. The "Sequestered Lands" in Cheapside meadows, set apart in 1686 for the use of the ministry forever, proved a bone of contention between the two towns. The heated arguments made by the rival claimants were enforced by pitchforks, cart stakes and rakes. The courts decided in favor of Deerfield. But the annexationists were not satisfied, and with the passing of time came renewed efforts to set off Cheapside to Greenfield. In 1836 Philo Temple and others petitioned the General Court for division. Although the legislative committee after the customary hearings presented a favorable report, the House voted against the petitioners by a majority of 43. There was a great celebration in Deerfield upon receipt of the news. The artillery was brought out and guns fired to the number of the majority against division. This was followed by a dinner with speeches and resolutions. The ladies worked a banner nearly 100 feet in length on which were

inscribed the words "The Triumph of Principle", and caused it to be suspended from the spire of the church. Afterwards it was sent towards Bernardston in a fire balloon.

In 1850 David R. Wait and others were the next petitioners for division, and although that petition was later withdrawn, it was understood by the petitioners that a resolve for a recess committee to sit during the summer, hear the evidence and report to the next session of the legislature would meet with no resistance. However, the recess committee was not appointed, and it was not until eleven years later, in 1861, that David R. Wait again appeared as a petitioner for the annexation of Cheapside. But Deerfield again won, the vote of the House being 124 to 90 in favor of Deerfield.

In 1888 the struggle was again renewed by the petition of Joel DeWolf, owner of property in the Cheapside district, and again the vote was in favor of Deerfield, 103 to 53.

In 1896 the old issue made its final appearance on Beacon Hill and this time the forces of annexation were victorious, and Cheapside became a part of Greenfield, although not without a stiff fight on the part of the opposition.