

# Laying of the Corner Stone of the New City Hall, HALIFAX, N. S.

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LADIES AND GENTLEMEN :—

It affords me very great pleasure to meet the gathering of Citizens here assembled and as First Magistrate of the City to participate in the ceremony now about to take place. The occasion is one which has not occurred before and is not likely to be repeated in the history of the City. As such it revives many reminiscences of the past and suggests many contrasts between our present position and the Halifax of the olden time, which I think, cannot fail to be interesting.

The Town of Halifax, being then near a hundred years old, was incorporated by an Act of the Legislature in the year 1841. I have to regret that the almost total absence of trustworthy records prevents me from giving as complete a statement of the condition and resources of the Town at the time of incorporation as I could wish. A few items however sufficient for the purpose of contrast may be submitted.

In 1841 the population of the City, as near as can be ascertained was between 14,000 and 15,000 inhabitants. Our population at the last census in 1881, exclusive of the Military and families connected therewith was 36,100. At the same rate of progress as marked the previous decade our population to-day is probably 43,000 to 45,000. Judged by that standard alone, it must be admitted that our progress as a City, though steady, is not equal to the progress exhibited by some younger Cities: but population is not the only test of progress, nor indeed the most important one.

Previous to 1841 there was neither gas-light nor regular water supply in Halifax. The streets and houses were dimly lighted with oil lamps, the inhabitants drew their water supply from private and public wells, in both cases not unfrequently polluted and poisoned by the immediate vicinity of drains, cess-pools and still more filthy abominations. Up to the date of incorporation the police force consisted of a Magistrate and three constables, as they were then called, nightwatchmen, consequently—except when paid by private parties, there were none.

The Fire Department consisted of the old Union Engine Company, then as now a most efficient body, but in cases of great fires the Department was all but powerless from the want of proper engines and the scarcity of water. In those days, in addition to the old Engine Company there were several Volunteer Companies whose duty it was when a fire occurred to form ranks and pass water in buckets for the supply of the engines. It was the invariable rule also in those days for the troops in garrison to be turned out, and yet such was the inefficiency of all these appliances that the destruction of a whole square was a matter of frequent occurrence.

In those days there were no sidewalks, no stone curbs, no places of public resort and recreation, no public schools, except on a very limited scale and leaving out the Poor Asylum, no public humane or charitable institutions of any consequence.

I think ladies and gentlemen that in all these respects the Halifax of to-day may not shrink from comparison with Cities of even greater pretensions. We have a Police Force numbering, all told 44 men—a force in every way creditable to the City; we have a Fire Department second to none on this Continent; we have steam fire engines, electric fire alarms, telegraphs and telephones; we have electric street and shop lights, a street railroad and a water supply we may well be proud of. If our system of public schools is costly it is something to say that we are able to bear it and that it affords to the humblest child in the community an opportunity to become qualified for the duties of life and good Citizenship. Of our Parks and Public Gardens what shall I say, but that they are the admiration of visitors and confessedly inferior to none on this Continent. As regards humane and charitable institutions I need not name them: they are familiar to you all, and all of them with one or two exceptions have grown up since the Town was incorporated.

In 1841, Halifax as a City was in a great measure isolated, with the exception of four or five miles at the Albion Coal Mines in Pictou, there was no railroad at that time in British America, and Ocean Steam Navigation was in its infancy. I cannot and do not claim for Halifax as a City that it has inaugurated the great improvements that have marked the World's history since 1841, but this much may be said, that it has had the good sense and the enterprise to see what public improvements were needed and as fast as was possible to adopt them. If these improvements have cost money it is some consolation to know that the City can afford the cost and that our credit, never doubted, in spite of our municipal debt stands higher to-day than it stood in the year of incorporation.

I think, ladies and gentlemen, I can fairly congratulate you upon the position which Halifax holds not only in your own estimation but in the eyes of the world. We are no longer an unknown and obscure Town supposed to be situated somewhere in the Arctic Regions blockaded with perpetual ice and enveloped in impenetrable fog. The progress of events has brought us within the circle of live communication and it will be our own fault if we fail to profit by the many and great advantages which nature and situation have undoubtedly conferred upon us.

I congratulate you, also, gentlemen of the City Council and Officials of the Corporation upon the near prospect of removing from your ancient and dingy quarters to an edifice which I am quite sure will be an ornament to the City, and a credit to the Architect and the Builders and indeed to all concerned.