

still remains ; yet great changes have been wrought in the town during the last seventy years.

In 1815 there was not a wagon in Westfield, the roads being mere bridle-paths, and so poor that it was hardly safe to ride a horse over them. There were probably not more than twenty-five families in town, and the greater part of these had settled in the eastern half.

Politically, the settlers were about equally divided, one party being known as Federals and the other as Democrats ; and though voters were few, political feeling ran high. Among the Federal leaders were Captain Medad Hitchcock, Esq., his son, Thomas, and a nephew Caleb. Prominent among the Democrats were Thomas Stoughton, Jairus Stebbins, James Brown and Walter Stone. Beside these, each side had its corps of adherents ready to cast their votes in support of their party.

The time for holding the "Freeman's meeting" in 1815 was approaching, and the legal voters of the town were duly warned to meet at the house of Medad Hitchcock on the first Tuesday in September (the 5th), at one o'clock p.m., to vote for State officers and a town representative.

The meetings of the town were usually held at Captain Hitchcock's—that being a convenient place for the settlers from all directions to congregate ; and furthermore the captain, for his own profit as well as for the accommodation of the public, always kept on hand a barrel of whiskey.

The captain's house stood less than a hundred rods south of where Westfield village now stands. It was a one-story log structure fronting the east. But though the town meetings were warned to be held in the captain's house, they were in reality (when the weather was warm enough to permit) held in his barn—which was a grand one for the times, being a frame building thirty-six by forty.

In view of the coming election, the Federals had settled on Captain Hitchcock as their candidate for town representative, while the Democrats had decided to place Thomas Stoughton in the field. Heads had been counted by the leaders on both sides, and estimates made as to the result of a ballot. Each side knew that the contest would be close—that they had not a man to spare, and both wished that in some way the other might lose a vote.

Aaron Frost was a man of the Democratic faith—a basket maker by occupation, at least a part of the time ; and though not of large proportions, either in body or mind, his vote counted the same in the ballot-box as did that of the ablest citizen of the town. The Federals, anxious to further the interests of their party, conceived the idea of having Frost absent on election day. That this might be brought about, Asa Dunham went to Frost and told him that Mr. W——, of Potton, Canada, wished to get some basket timber out of the woods, but that he was a novice at the business ; and Dunham asked Frost to go down and help select some for him.

Frost was persuaded ; and Monday afternoon, September 4, he and Dunham set out for Potton. They reached W——'s just at nightfall, staying there until morning, when Dunham started for home, and Frost and W—— set off on their expedition.

A quantity of timber was selected and marked ; time passed, and at length W—— (who understood Dunham's scheme) said that he was lost, but that he thought there were some marked trees in such a direction, and that if they could find them they could make their way out.

But a suspicion was arising in the mind of Frost that a trick was being practised on him to prevent his getting to Westfield in season to vote. Irritated by this suspicion, he exclaimed, "You and your marked trees go to the d—! I'm going to Westfield !" and at once set out for himself.

The early settlers did without many things that add to the comfort of the present generation. It was necessary that they should be industrious and economical if they would insure prosperity. There was one couple in Westfield careful and saving to the extent of being penurious—Iddo Stebbins and his wife Susan. They were hard-working people, but did not rank very high in intellectual ability. This, perhaps, does not account for his being a Federalist. Another character was Uncle Tom Stoughton, a shrewd old fellow. Wishing to help their party, he and Walter

Stone (both Democrats) early on election morning went to Stebbins's house. Now it happened that Stebbins had at different times smuggled a few things from Canada—though in this particular he was perhaps no worse than some of his neighbours. Their object as to Stebbins was the same as was Dunham's with Frost—to prevent his voting. That this might be accomplished, Stebbins was duly reminded of his smuggling, and told that the officers had got wind of it ; but that they (Stoughton and Stone) had found out about it, and, being his friends, had come to tell him. And as friends they advised him to keep himself where he would not be found until the danger should blow over. This communication had the desired effect. Stebbins and his wife were alarmed ; and it was decided that he should secrete himself in a willow tract nearly a mile distant, and, as an additional protection, Rudolphus Reed should go and stay with him.

Reed was a Democrat, and the real purpose of his staying with Stebbins was that he might watch him. Accordingly, Stebbins went to the willows, and there, with Reed as his only companion, he remained until into the afternoon. He had nothing to eat ; but he had opportunity for bodily repose, if not too greatly harassed by fears.

But Reed did not intend himself to miss voting for Stoughton ; so after the sun had passed its meridian and the afternoon was wearing away, he became anxious to leave Stebbins and go to the town meeting. At length he started off with the remark, "Darn it all, I don't believe any body'll git ye now, Iddo. Guess I'll go down and see what the boys are about."

The great doors of Captain Hitchcock's barn were swung back, the floor had been cleanly swept, and at one end stood a table that had been brought from the house. The legal voters, accompanied by the younger male portion of the town, had congregated in and about Captain Hitchcock's buildings, and were engaged in various ways, some in little groups, talking ; others wrestling ; and still others, in pitching quoits.

At length, about one p.m., Walter Stone and Thomas Hitchcock, the constable and clerk of the town, emerged from the house and went to the barn, where they took their places at the table.

The men and boys soon assembled in the floor, and Stone formally opened the meeting. Then the momentary hush was broken, and the voting began. The ballots of the freemen were soon mostly in the box—only a half dozen or so were lacking ; and the afternoon was before them to while away ere the votes could be inspected and it could be known who was elected—so evenly were the voters divided between the two candidates.

Iddo Stebbins and Aaron Frost were nowhere to be seen. Dunham had told the Federals privately of the supposed success of his mission to Canada, and feeling confident of victory, they were in high spirits. The Democrats also knew something that pleased them greatly, and they also hoped to win the day. And so the two parties laughed in their sleeves at each other without the others knowing it, or once imagining that a trick had been played on one of their own men. Of course the absence of Stebbins and Frost had been noticed ; and as time passed and neither appeared, each party began wondering what detained their man, and sent messengers for them.

Stebbins lived only about a mile south of Captain Hitchcock's, and the person who went for him soon returned, but alone. The Federals held a secret consultation, and it was decided to send two men (who had already voted) to look up Stebbins.

The messenger who went for Frost returned with the simple but unwelcome information that he had gone to Canada the day before, and had not returned. The Democrats knew there was no time to send for him.

Dolph Reed made his appearance and voted ; but though he reported to his friends that he had left Stebbins all right, they became uneasy, for they knew the Federals were searching for him.

Matters assumed a more serious aspect ; the faces of those in both parties lengthened perceptibly ; the quoit-players lost interest in their game, the wrestlers tired of their sport, and the assemblage became monotonous. Both parties were deeply anxious, the one fearing that Frost, and the other that Stebbins, would appear.

At length Stone, the constable, demanded, "Gentlemen, are your votes all in ?"