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JOSEPH BRADLEY VARNUM.

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A SKETCH
OF THE
LIFE AND PUBLIC SERVICES
OF
JOSEPH BRADLEY VARNUM
OF MASSACHUSETTS,

Member of the United States House of Representatives from 1795 to 1811, and its Speaker from 1807 to 1811; Member of the Senate of the United States from 1811 to 1817, and its President pro tem, 1813; Member of the Constitutional Convention of Massachusetts and its Presiding Officer, 1820; an Officer in the Massachusetts Volunteer Militia from 1776 to 1821, and its Major-General from 1805 to 1821.

By JOHN MARSHALL VARNUM,
OF BOSTON.

BOSTON :
DAVID CLAPP & SON, PRINTERS
1906.

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Reprinted from "The Varnums of Dracutt, Mass."

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JOSEPH BRADLEY VARNUM.⁵

By John Marshall Varnum.⁷

JOSEPH BRADLEY VARNUM was born, lived and died in Dracutt on the farm left him by his father, Samuel. In his early years he had the common school advantages which was the lot of all youth of his day and generation, which although meagre in the light of modern educational advancement was an excellent foundation, because thorough even in its limits. Of his three brothers, James Mitchell alone attained to a college education, graduating in the first class of Providence College, now Brown University. Samuel Varnum, the father, like all New England farmers, could not afford to all his sons the same advantages of education, and Joseph Bradley, the third son, had to remain to carry on the home farm. He was, however, a youth with a definite purpose in life, and sought diligently to improve his mind with such means as was then available. It is said of him, that he used to lay down evenings before the blazing wood fire, and despite the fatigue and monotony of farm life, devote himself to study.

In his autobiography,* written in the last years of his life, he narrates that he had "but a very scanty library for a young man to refer to, in order to obtain knowledge without a teacher, but a strict attention to agriculture did not prevent him from often recurring to it, and he spent many hours in pursuit of his

* Autobiography dictated by him to and written by his niece, Harriet Swett Varnum, in 1818, in the possession of John M. Varnum.

object." It was, perhaps, unfortunate that his self-taught knowledge, which in after life, with his commanding intellect, gained him high credit in the many public positions which he filled, led him to place undue stress upon it, and to regard a common school or academic education sufficient for his sons, who greatly lamented their deficiency of knowledge, although they all went to the academy at Westford, of which their father was one of the incorporators.

A thoughtful, studious boy, young Varnum could not but make a sober-minded man. Even at the age of thirteen he was mindful of the sense of his obligation to his Maker, and that turn of mind so actuated him during his long political career, that his character was ever of stern and inflexible integrity. Many years after, towards the close of his life (1818), he became an ardent Baptist, and together with his wife and others was immersed in the waters of the little brook flowing through his farm. There being none other than Congregational or Orthodox worship in the Dracutt Centre Meeting-house, to which he was an original subscriber, he joined the Baptist Society in Haverhill. Secession from stated worship, for which every man was compelled to pay tithes, was, in that day, rank heresy, and in consequence of this act the use of the Centre Meeting-house was denied to his son, for a funeral discourse after his father's decease.

When he was twenty-two years of age, he took unto himself a wife, who, in all senses, was a valuable and efficient helpmate. He speaks of her, after their forty-eight years of married life, and twelve children had blessed their union, of the "cordiality and friendship which had uniformly pervaded their minds since their first acquaintance, and how when, in 1782, nine years after their marriage, they lost by fire their home and its contents, which their industry and economy had accumulated, yet finding that none of their dear children were consumed in the

flames, they blessed God that nothing more grievous had befallen them." Molly Butler was the daughter of Jacob and Mary (Eames) Butler of Pelham, N. H., a town adjoining Dracutt. She was of sturdy New England stock, and ever retained the love and esteem of her husband, and the warm affection of her children. On the tablet to her memory, erected in the little burial-ground adjoining the Gen. Varnum farm, is justly inscribed: "Her children rise up and call her blessed." Her husband further says of her: "Throughout the whole of the struggle (Am. Revolution) he had the consolation and accordance of his beloved wife. When soldiers were called upon to go into service who were not possessed of blankets, she furnished them, even to taking of the last she had. When they needed shirts or knapsacks, she supplied them by cutting up her sheets, even to the head tester sheet of her own bed, relying on Divine Providence for strength to manufacture more." That she was a woman of sturdy independence and imposing dignity of character, is shown by her conduct during the inflammatory times of the Shays Rebellion (1786), which her husband, at the head of his military company, assisted in suppressing. He says: "Mrs. Varnum was visited by a number of those friendly to the insurrection, and insulted in a most menacing manner; but that heroic zeal and undeviating patriotism, which was her uniform characteristic during the Revolutionary War, enabled her to promptly repel their insinuations and menaces in such a manner as to compel them to retire with shame and discomfiture."

Samuel Varnum, on the marriage of his son, 26 Jan., 1773, gave him as his portion "160 acres of land, with half a dwelling-house and a barn 30x30. A small portion of the land was under cultivation, but it was almost entirely without any permanent fence; but having been raised a farmer, he became attached to that occupation, and pursued it with all industry and

perseverance, so that by economy of his wife and the aid of his children" he, in 1818, "owned 500 acres of land, the greater part under good cultivation, with extensive buildings, and more than ten miles of good stone fence upon it."

He was a practical and successful farmer, as is evident from the fact that his farm was the main means of support of his large family; at least, up to the times when his public services took him from his home to Philadelphia and Washington, in the early days of the Republic. A letter written to his son George in the beginning of his Congressional career, is an evidence of his practical turn of mind, and his deep interest in affairs on his Dracutt farm.

"Philadelphia, Nov. 28th, 1797.

You are no doubt apprised of the probability of a hard winter, and the consequent necessity there will be of strict Economy In the Expenditure of every kind of Fodder. Tend the Cattle carefully, fodder them often, keep them clean and warm, water them three times in a day, and never give them more than they will Eat, and still Retain an appetite for more; all this will not only save fodder, but will be of much Service to the Cattle, both in their Flesh and Strength. Throw no Straw, or other fodder into the yard, on the common principle of making manure; but let it all be eat by the stock. The Calf which was nigh coming when I left home had best be Vealed, and killed at a month old. This will be a saving of at least four times the value of the Calf, by the milk of the Cow. Let all the Cows which give milk, be tyed together, that they may have provender and other high keeping; from this mode of Treatment additional profits will be derived from them. Do not fail to have all the Cattle curried every morning, & the Horses twice in a day, every day. Sheep, although Generally the least attended to, in the Winter season, in order to ensure profits from them, I think, require the strictest attention of any species of stock; they have a very delicate Taste, and although they will live on very little when the Ground is bare if suffered to range, yet in that way they are but little profit to the owner; but if they are properly tended to, they are the most profitable stock a Farmer can keep; they should be

watered often, have a small matter of sweet fodder at a time and frequently repeated; no oats should be suffered to lay before them from day to day, neither should their dung be suffered to remain in the Hovel where they feed together for any considerable time. All Cattle, Horses, Sheep and Swine should have their feed at particular set times, each day; a scanty allowance in that way, will keep a Stock much better than even a Surplusage dealt out to them in a different manner.

In order to Succeed in any profession or Occupation in life it is highly necessary and important, to pay strict attention to the duties of it, and at all such times, as the nature thereof shall require. To be a Farmer, a consistent Farmer, happy in the Occupation, and respectable in Society, it is necessary to rise Early in the Morning, Pay Speedy attention to all necessary requirements, and take advantage of the Labours of the day, by performing the most arduous part, before the Sun arises to its Meridian Splendor. The strictest attention must be paid to the Buildings, Fences, Stock of Cattle, husbandry tools, and every species of produce. All necessary repairs must be Early made. No part of the produce must be suffered to be wasted or lost for want of care. Thus the Farmer becomes wealthy, respectable and happy. * * * * *

I highly revere all the laudable professions and Occupations in Life, and I should be very happy to have it in my power to place each of my Children in such of them as they might choose. Yet From the variety of different situations I have Experienced, and the many professions and Occupations with which I have been acquainted, I have not discovered any other situation in which I think I could make myself so Comfortable and happy as in the cultivation of a good Farm. * * * * *

I was about to close this Letter, but several matters of family, police, and agricultural relations, which I wish you to attend to, occur to my mind. I have been apprehensive from the severity of the weather since I left home, that you have not been able to compleat the plowing of the field assigned for planting Indian Corn the next spring. If that be the case, pray do not fail of Imbracing the first opportunity to Effect it. Whenever the frost and snow will permit, if in mid-winter, let the plough be going until it is accomplished.

Be cautious of Cutting any Green Wood for the fires, if the winter will permit you to do otherwise, if not, select those Trees which are on the decay in the back Thicket. Let your wood be cut at the door, for sum-

mer, and neatly piled up. See that all the Husbandry Tools are kept under cover in their proper places, when they are not in use. Thrash the Grain as soon as possible and have it secured in Casks in the Corn barn. Dress out the flax before spring work shall Interfere. You will keep the doors, and the passages for water about the House, clear of Snow. Make a point of keeping all the windows of the House fastened down. Bolt all the doors, and lock the Corn barn every night. I hope you will be scrupulously attentive to the fires, see them properly Extinguished every night before you retire. Keep the Children at school; take them to Meeting as constant as the weather will permit. Minute your accounts in the day Book every Evening. Keep a Cash account of the money you receive & pay away. And I do Conjure you to be particularly kind and attentive to your Mam'm, and let all other kinds of business give way, when you can thereby become Subservient to her wishes, Comfort, or happiness."*

His sons were kept on the home acres until fully of age, when their father's influence and their own sturdiness advanced them to more advantageous and lucrative positions. The youngest, Benjamin Franklin, by agreement, remained with his parents until their deaths, and received the larger share of the landed estate.

MILITARY SERVICES.

He early imbibed a taste for military life. At sixteen years of age, when "in 1767 the British troops were transported hither with an avowed design of enforcing submission to the mother country, he visited said troops in Boston from day to day, with a view to acquire a knowledge of military tactics and discipline to better enable himself to become useful in the defence and in anticipation of the Independence of his country."

"Previous to the war with the mother country, there was

* Letter in possession of John M. Varnum.

one military company in Dracutt, but not under any recognized authority, nor tactical instruction. The Boston Massacre in 1770 aroused and fired a latent spirit of the Love of Liberty and Independence in the old Town, and soon after the Massacre, there were formed two volunteer companies. One of these included about 70 men, and organized itself similar to the companies under the Royal Government. This Company unanimously chose Joseph B. Varnum for their Captain. The Train Band included men from 15 years of age upward. This Band met frequently, and made much progress, until December, 1774, when the Provincial Congress decided to enlist 12,000 men to act as Minute Men under any particular emergency. The Train Band then reorganized with Stephen Russell as Captain; Simon Coburn as Lieutenant; Abraham Coburn as Ensign, older men, but retained young Varnum as Instructor both to themselves and the militia under their command, in which capacity he continued to serve until the commencement of the Revolutionary War." He marched with said Company under Capt. Russell to the fight at Lexington. On Jan. 1, 1776, there was a reorganization of the militia, and Varnum was chosen Captain of the Dracutt companies of Minute Men and was accepted, and received his commission from the Bay State Council dated 31st of May, 1776.* He held command of this Company until the 4th day of April, 1787.

Upon Capt. Varnum devolved the duty of keeping up the quota of requisition for men from his town, and he "never failed in a single instance." In this capacity he was of signally efficient service to the cause. The Continental Congress was continually calling on the thirteen States for men. None could or would enlist beyond a few months. Even at the siege of Boston, the Connecticut troops, their terms of enlistment expiring, refused to serve unless they were promised bounty, and

* Mass. Muster Rolls, Vol. xli. 155.

many returned home because they were so refused, as no authority had been granted by the Continental Congress in the matter.

Capt. Varnum was drawn with his Command, 29 Sept., 1777; and marched to "reinforce ye Northern Army," and had "the consolation of seeing a whole British Army with Burgoyne at their head, march from the heights, music beating a retreat, upon the plains of Saratoga."

John Varnum in his Journal says,

"27 Sept 1777, Orders came for 1-2 of ye able bodied officers and soldiers immediately to march to Tyconderoga."

"29 Sept., Capt. Joseph Bradley Varnum was drawn with 40 men to march to ye Westward."

"1 Oct., Capt. Varnum and his Company tarried until afternoon waiting for horses."

"2 Oct., The Company marched early in ye morning."

"12 Oct., Had news that our people had arrived safely to Bennington."

"16 Oct., Old Mr. Davis came home from the Army with ye horses that went with the last recruits. Brought word that our friends was all well, in high spirits, that Burgoyne's Army was retreating, our Army harrassing them giving battle. Got many advantages greatly embarrassing Burgoyne's Retreat."

"Sunday, 26 Oct., 1777. Lt. Ephm: Coburn, Jona: Jones, & Dr. Abbot came home from ye Army. Confirmed the surprising account of ye Wonderful Victory over Burgoyne and his whole Army, being about 7000 all taken, Surrendered to Gen. Gates and laid down their arms to us, resigned their public stores, that our Militia was conducting them to Boston, expecting they would be in this week. Mr. Davis preached an excellent sermon suitable to the occasion, from that part of the song of Moses where Pharaoh & his host were pursuing the children of Israel, 'And God overthrew them in the Red Sea.'"

"1 Nov., Jona: Parkhurst came home from ye Army, brings word that all is well. Zealous for a fifer & fiddler for the grand appearance the day that Burgoyne's Famous Army is to be brought in. A Wonderful Show,

a day that our hearts should be employed to speak & live to the praise of God."*

On the 29 July, 1778, Capt. Varnum was drawn with his Company, and marched in Gen. Lowell's Brigade to Rhode Island, to join Gen. Sullivan who was acting in conjunction with the French fleet under Admiral D'Estaing in repelling the British. This expedition was unfortunuate in its results, as the fleet was scattered by a gale of wind, and the land force, after a sharp engagement, forced to retreat. Capt. Varnum's Company lost one man killed, two wounded and one missing. The Company served out its term of enlistment at East Greenwich and Warwick.†

* A Muster Roll of Capt: Joseph B. Varnums Company of Volunteers from Dracutt, in Colo: Jona: Reeds Regt., State of Massachusetts Bay, who marched and reinforced ye Northern Army, according to A Resolve of the Great & General Court of that State 22 Sept. 1777.

Privates.

J. B. Varnum	Capt.	David Jones.	Josiah Hildreth.
Ephm: Coburn	Lft.	Samuel Barron.	Daniel Jaqueth.
Abijah Fox	Sergt.	William Abbott.	John Mears.
Jonas Varnum	"	Simeon Coburn.	Jona: Parkhurst.
Jona: Jones	"	Leonard Coburn.	Ebenezer Sawyer.
Timo: Parker	"	Saml: Coburn.	David Sawyer.
John Hancock	Corp.	David Coburn.	David McLaughlin.
David Trull	"	Saul Coburn.	Isaac Parker.
Joshua Pillsbury	Clerk.	Reuben Coburn.	Samuel Piper.
Barzala Lue	Fifer.	Jona: Crosby.	Jona: Taylor.
		Moses Davis.	Thomas Taylor.
		David Fox.	Solomon Woods.
		Zach: Goodhue.	John Woods.
		Bradley Varnum.	Peter Hazletine.

Dracutt, 23 Jan. 1778.

(Military State Records of Massachusetts, Vol. liv. p. 45.)

† Pay Roll of Capt. Joseph Bradley Varnum's Company, Colo: McIntosh's Regt. Gen. Lovell's Brigade of Militia, from the State of Massachusetts Bay on an expedition to Rhode Island, July & August, 1778.

	Joseph B. Varnum	Capt.	
	Temple Kindall	Lft.	
	Abraham Stickney	"	
	John Robbins	Sergt.	
	Privates.		
Reuben Lewis.	Saul Coburn.	James Harvey.	Thompson Bacon.
David Aston.	Oliver Coburn.	Paul Hill.	John Bowman.
Asa Spaulding.	Ephm: Crosby.	James Lewis.	Jesse Auger.
Wm Spaulding.	Benj: Danfort.h	Sam'l Coney.	John Webber.

In the winter of 1786-7, Capt. Varnum, leaving the Senate Chamber of the General Court, where he represented Middlesex County, marched with his Company to aid Gen. Benjamin Lincoln in quelling the Insurrection of Shays and others, in the western part of the State. While this was a short and bloodless campaign, it was a severe one, because of its being in the dead of winter. During this campaign, Gen. Lincoln found it necessary to send a post to the General Court at Boston, to procure funds to pay the troops. He selected Capt. Varnum who successfully performed the mission in three and one-half days, making a journey of 320 miles. For this he received from his commander the following letter of approval:

"Pittsfield, 12 Feby., 1787.

Sir:—The business for which troops were ordered out seems to be pretty much over. Your services will be important, and are much needed in the General Court. It is, therefore, my wish that you assign your Company to ye next officer and meet the assembly as soon as possible. Your example in turning out on this occasion meets the esteem of your Country and entitles you to its thanks. Mine you have most sincerely.*

With Great esteem, I have the honor to be your ob't

Servant, B. LINCOLN."

Jona: Heywood.	Wm: Danforth.	John Perham.	Ebr: Leman.
Jesse Heywood.	James Davis.	Wm: Parker.	Jona: Foster.
Oliver Bowers.	Josiah Fletcher.	Chester Parker.	David Merrill.
Oliver Farmer.	Levi Fletcher.	Simeon Parker.	Jona: Dunn.
Jona: Botteys.	Edward Farmer.	John Shed.	Andrew Hall.
Amos Bradley.	John Gordon.	Jona: Woodward.	John Thompson.
Jesse Butterfield.	Eben; Hunt.	Timo: Bancroft.	G. Flagg Lane.
Jeptha Coburn.	Jona: Hunt.	Nat: Ingalls.	Thomas Goodwin.
			Abraham Jaquith.

Dracutt, 6 Oct. 1778.

(Military State Records Massachusetts, Vol. liv, p. 22.)

"Aug. 1778, Six men were drafted from the militia to go to R. I., viz: Oliver Bowers, Josiah Fletcher, Levi Fletcher, Jona: Dunn, Jesse Heywood, Wm: Spaulding. Dr. John Beatty went as a volunteer and was chosen clerk of the Co. commanded by Capt. Joseph Bradley Varnum. The above named were drafted for six weeks, and were in an Engagement in R. I., in which one man from Capt. V's Co. was killed, two wounded and one missing." Hist. of Chelmsford, p. 181.

* Letter in possession of John M. Varnum.

He was chosen Colonel of the 7th Regt., 3d Division, Mass. Militia, in which he had served eleven years, and received his commission 4 April, 1787. He was a rigid and very successful disciplinarian and his regiment received high praise for its unexampled order and military spirit, at its first Muster in the autumn of 1787.

On the 22 Nov., 1802, he was made Brigadier-General; and on 12 June, 1805, Major-General of the 3d Division of the Militia of the State. When he died, in 1821, he was the senior Major-General in service. This long term of over 45 years of active and continued service is unparalleled in the history of military affairs in the State of Massachusetts. A part of it, from 1817 to 1821, was after his retirement from national politics, when his influence from such a source availed him nothing, and after too, he had excited much hostility because of his support of the war of 1812, unpopular in Massachusetts and throughout New England, which conduct was largely influential in his failing election for Governor in 1813.*

The Adjutant-General's office of the State of Massachusetts reports that "under Act of Congress of 12 April, 1812, requiring the Commander-in-Chief to take effective measures for organizing the Militia, the Western Division of Massachusetts was organized under Maj:-General Jos: B. Varnum, to consist of 3,145 men, including officers, to form two Brigades"; and the War Department at Washington has this record: "The name of Joseph Bradley Varnum appears with rank given as Major-General in the Caption of a Pay roll of Capt. John Reed's Company, 3d Mass. Militia, detailed under General Orders of 6 Sept., 1814. This roll is dated Boston, Feb. 27, 1815, and is for the period from Sept. 11 to 13, 1814." Capt. Reed's com-

* Strong, who had rendered himself peculiarly obnoxious to the Administration by refusing to call out the State's quota of Militia, received nearly 57,000 votes, while Senator Varnum (the Republican candidate) received 43,000. (Adams Hist. U. S., Vol. vii., p. 60.)

pany was serving under General Varnum, who was detached Sept. 5, 1814.

GEN. VARNUM'S MILITARY COMMISSIONS.

As Captain 10th Co., 7th Regiment, County of Middlesex, Massachusetts.
From the Council, dated 31 May, 1776.

As Captain 7th Regiment.

From John Hancock, Governor, dated 1 July, 1781.

As Purchasing Commissary and Agent.

From Oliver Phelps, Supt. of Purchases, dated 14 July, 1781.

By authority of the General Court.

As Colonel 7th Regiment, 3d Division, Militia of Massachusetts.

From James Bowdoin, Governor, dated 4 April, 1787.

As Brigadier-General, 2d Brigade, 3d Division, State Militia.

From Caleb Strong, Governor, dated 22 Nov., 1802.

As Major-General, 3d Division, State Militia.

From Caleb Strong, Governor, dated 12 June, 1805.

POLITICAL CAREER.

The New England States have generally been noted for a recognition of the ability and character of their sons in public life, and for honoring them with long tenures of political office. Mr. Varnum's entrance into State politics began in 1781, when he was thirty years of age, and from that time up to his death his was an active and prominent personality in State and National affairs. From 1781 to 1785 he represented his native town in the State Legislature. From 1786 to 1795, and from 1817, after the cessation of his Congressional career, up to 1821, the year of his death, he was a Senator from Middlesex County. In 1795* he was elected a Representative from his

* Hildreth, History of the United States, vol. iii., p. 577, says: "Among the new members of the 4th Congress was Joseph Bradley Varnum of Massachusetts, who had defeated Samuel Dexter after a violent and protracted struggle." Mr. Dexter was an eminent lawyer, and became Secretary of the Treasury during a part of the administration of the elder Adams. He was a federalist and a supporter of the treaty of 1795 between the United States and

District to the 4th National Congress at Philadelphia, and after the removal of the seat of Government was one of the first to sit as a member of the National House of Representatives at Washington.

At the beginning of his Congressional career, Mr. Varnum met with a rebuff which threatened to imperil his political life. Four memorials were presented to Congress from his District, impeaching his election, and demanding that he be regarded as ineligible to his seat as Representative. These protests were seized upon by his political opponents and made so much of that they seemed likely to cause him much trouble. It was alleged that inasmuch as he was one of the selectmen of Dracutt at the time of his election, he had allowed certain votes to be received and counted which were illegal if not fraudulent. At that period a citizen in order to qualify as a voter in Massachusetts, must be "possessed of 60£ in Real Estate or what was equivalent to 3£ yearly, in any property whatever." On Mr. Varnum's own motion the memorials were referred to the Committee on Elections.

When the matter finally came up, Mr. Varnum being called upon to vindicate himself, said "he did not think it necessary to speak on the subject. It was not very pleasant to sit and hear gentlemen from his own State treat him with all possible personalities; but he would submit with patience." This manly position was characteristic of him, and won him the sympathy of the House.

It came out in the investigation, and was a cause of offence to the Memorialists, that the "people of Dracutt were so satisfied as to give no information on the subject, and that the uni-

Great Britain. This measure of the administration was very unpopular in Massachusetts. Mr. Varnum was a republican and opposed to the treaty. Apropos of the controversy, the Providence, R. I., *Journal* of Sept. 19, 1795, under "Items from Salem, Mass.," published the following squib: "Should the treaty become the law of the land, the towns of Boston and Dracutt are determined to detach themselves from the Union, and form a mighty independent nation of themselves."

versal respect for Mr. Varnum where he lived, contradicted the old proverb that "a prophet is not without honor save in his own country." The report of the Committee was a complete vindication, and upset all the plans of the conspirators to ruin him. Its Chairman reported that "no one of the plaintiffs or their agent had appeared to prosecute the complaint; that the sitting member had evidence that the election in the town of Dracutt (the unfairness of which had been complained of) was conducted with justness and propriety, and though there had been some irregularities committed in other places, they were mostly owing to the misconduct of the petitioners, and that the conduct of the sitting member has been fair and honorable throughout the whole transaction. Your Committee are therefore of the opinion that Joseph Bradley Varnum was duly elected, and that the charges against him are wholly unfounded." *

After the removal of the archives of the United States from Philadelphia, and the establishment of the Seat of Government at Washington, he continued to represent his District. In the Ninth Congress (1805-1807), he was a prominent candidate for the Speakership, receiving 24 votes, 57 being necessary to a choice. In the Tenth Congress (1807-1809), he was chosen, the vote being Varnum 65, Nathaniel Macon, candidate for re-election, 45, scattering 9. This election resulted in overthrowing the power of John Randolph, Speaker Varnum ignoring his claim to the Chairmanship of the Committee of Ways and Means, which position carried with it the leadership of the House.†

* Annals of Congress. Vol. v., pp. 368, 369, 785, 789, 823, 838; vol. vi., pp. 1913, 1984, 1985, 1987.

† The schism which has taken place between the Northern and Southern Democrats, looks to me to be of such irreconcilable nature that it can never be healed. John Randolph and some of his friends lead the Southern Junto; while Bidwell, Gen. Varnum, Crowninshield and Gen. Thomas appear to manage the Northern phalanx. Gen. Varnum, he has styled "Sworn Interpreter of Presidential messages," &c. — Letter of Col. Ben Tallmadge in Life of Manasseh Cutler, page 327.

Speaker Varnum appointed in his place George W. Campbell of Tennessee.* Concerning this important change, Hon. Albert Gallatin, then Secretary of the Treasury, wrote: "Varnum, much against my wishes, has removed Randolph from Ways and Means and appointed Campbell of Tennessee. It was improper as to public business, and will give me additional labor." † Randolph's acerbity of temper and bullying disposition had made him unbearable, and this change, if it did not expedite business, at least created harmony. In the 11th Congress (1809-11), Speaker Varnum received the compliment of a reelection, the vote being Varnum 59, Goldsborough 17, Bassett 17, scattering 24.

On the question of Direct Taxes, Mr. Varnum made in Jan., 1797, a long and able speech. It is full of statistics taken from Government reports, and does him great credit as a maiden effort. He said: "I am clearly of the opinion that any sums needed for defraying the expenses of the Government or for the payments of its just debts, ought to be raised by duties on imposts and excises. That is a method of taxation with which we are acquainted and which experience has taught us the operation of, under this Government. There are almost insuperable objections to a direct tax, and until all the objects of indirect taxation are exhausted I presume the Government will never adopt one." ‡ He argued from figures taken from the annual reports of receipts and expenditures of the Treasury, that the proceeds from existing taxes would be commensurate with the demands of the Government for the ensuing four years. This doctrine was in unison with the political tenets of his party, and he consistently maintained it during his Congressional career.

* Mr. Campbell became a member of the United States Senate, and took his seat the same session as Mr. Varnum (1811). In 1814 he was appointed Secretary of the Treasury, by President Madison.

† Adams' Gallatin, p. 363.

‡ Annals of Congress, vol. vi., pp. 1879 to 1885.

On the question of receiving the petition of certain manumitted slaves, whom parties had seized and sold again into slavery, but who had escaped and fled into Philadelphia where they had been held under the Fugitive Slave Act, and had prayed relief from Congress, Mr. Varnum in Feb., 1797, said: "The Petitioners had received injury under a law of the United States (the Fugitive Act), and therefore had an undoubted right to the attention of the General Government. They declared themselves to be free, and he did not see any argument of force to convince the House that they were not. Surely it could not be said that color alone should designate them as slaves. To be deprived of liberty was more important than to be deprived of property." *

On the question of striking out the clause relating to the punishment of persons found guilty of importation of slaves, insisted upon by the Southern members, Mr. Varnum voted in the negative. He remarked that he "thought the Southern States were in imminent danger from slavery. He recalled that he had heard a former member from the South compare that part of the Union to a bundle of combustibles which only needed a little fire to kindle a blaze which would consume them. He had often heard gentlemen from the South express this dread of the final ruin of that country from slavery." †

These expressions of his sentiments on slavery tally with the tribute paid him by Henry Wilson in his "Rise and Fall of the Slave Power in America," who quotes him as an earnest opponent of the traffic in human beings, and asserting it to be "equally criminal with the practice of the Algerines in carrying American citizens into slavery," which was a burning question in his day, and made the simile most caustic and forcible. "Where there was a disposition to retain a part of our species

* Benton's Debates of Congress, vol. ii., 60.

† Annals of Congress, vol. xvi., 243.

in slavery, there could not be a proper respect for the rights of mankind."*

Such sentiments were far in advance of the morals of the time. The conscience of the North was not generally sensitive on the subject of slavery. It had not long disappeared in New England, and trade in slaves was winked at. In Dec., 1811, the brig "Saragossa," from Bristol, R. I., was underwritten in Boston, "at and from the leeward coast of Africa to Havana," in which policy it is stated, "The assurers are not liable for the mortality of the slaves, but take the risk of insurrection." †

In May, 1798, on the question of a temporary Direct Tax, he made strong opposition, and said in reply to the argument that the said tax might at any time be repealed. "Although this House might consent to a repeal of this tax, it was by no means certain that the other House would consent to it. Indeed it was his opinion that if this tax was established as a permanent one, that the people of this country would not be relieved from it for many years. Many objects, no doubt, would be found by gentlemen over fruitful in this respect, upon which to expend any surplus which might arise from it." ‡

These were words of wisdom and foresight uttered on the threshold of our Nation's history, and the legislation in our Country proves their accuracy. It has taken years of determined effort to wipe from our statute books laws or enactments made to fit peculiar exigencies, and Mr. Varnum's prediction as to the bill referred to was a wise and sagacious warning.

Again in June, 1798, on the question of Direct Taxes, he interposed his objections. He said he "had always thought, since the establishment of our Government, that there should be no necessity for resorting to direct taxes, except in case of our being engaged in war; but he now believed a majority of

* Wilson, vol. i., 36.

† Original in possession of John M. Varnum.

‡ Benton's Debates, vol. ii., 272.

the Government of the United States are determined on war, and he would on that account have given his vote for the bill, if the tax proposed was to be laid on just and equitable principles.”*

Party lines were strongly drawn in the early days of the Republic, and in March, 1802, the repealing of the Act of 1801 relating to the Judiciary was made an issue between the Republicans and Federalists.† Adams says, that the fear was that the Federalists, who had found the courts favorite places for their patronage and the setting forth of their theories as to government, would gain great advantage in the promulgation of their views through decisions. He asserts that Joseph Story, a republican, was elevated to the bench of the U. S. Supreme Court to offset the influence of John Marshall the Chief Justice.‡ In the debate, Mr. Varnum made a lengthy argument as to the right of Congress under the Constitution to repeal the Act creating the Court. It occupies many pages of the Annals, and is a strong exposition of his views. In his speech he pays this fine tribute to the judicial system of his State: “There has never been a Court of the United States of which the Judges possessed more eminence of character, ability, law-knowledge, impartiality, correctness of decision, and moral principle, than has adorned the Bench of the Supreme Judicial Court of Massachusetts from its first establishment under the present State Constitution up to the present time.”§

In the Committee of the whole in the debate on the Act erecting Louisiana into two Territories and providing for the tem-

* Benton's Debates, vol. ii., 304.

†“The Republicans were strict constructionists of the Constitution, narrowing down powers of the Federal Government to the express and exact terms of that instrument, while the Federalists claimed a broader and more liberal exposition in favor of the States. The opposition between these parties was the strength of State Sovereignty against Federal Sovereignty.”—Life of Joseph Story, Vol. I., pp. 276-277.

‡ Adams' Hist. U. S., Vol. I., p. 260.

§ Annals of Congress, Vol. XI., pp. 971 to 981.

porary government thereof, Mr. Varnum was in advance of his party, and took strong ground as to the rights of the people. Adams says "Varnum of Massachusetts denounced the whole system, and demanded an elective legislature."* In February, 1804, he said, "I am of opinion that the bill provides such a kind of government as never has been known in the United States. Sound policy, no less than justice, dictates the propriety of making provision for the election of a legislative body by the people. There is not only the common obligation of justice imposed on Congress to do this, but it is bound to do so by treaty. This treaty (with France) makes it obligatory to admit the inhabitants of Louisiana as soon as possible to the enjoyment of all the rights, privileges, advantages and immunities of citizens of the United States." He moved the reference to a select committee to so modify the act. Mr. Speaker Macon strongly supported Mr. Varnum in his views.†

On the question of Revolutionary Pensions, Mr. Varnum, in Dec., 1805, said that "during the late Revolutionary War with Great Britain, the Government of the United States thought proper to place on the Pension list, certain officers and soldiers who had been wounded or disabled in the war. It had so happened from a variety of circumstances, that a large number of our meritorious officers and soldiers of this description had not been on the list. A number of them had kept back and omitted to reap the benefit of the provision, under the expectancy of supporting themselves by their own industry or through the assistance of friends. He believed that many had been prompted to do this by the most laudable of motives. Many of them had since found themselves unable to earn a decent subsistence. A number of petitions of this kind had this morning been referred to the Committee on Claims, and Mr.

* Adams' Hist. U. S., Vol. II., p. 123.

† Benton's Debates, Vol. III., p. 144.

Varnum said that it was his wish that a general and ample provision should be made for all who had been disabled. The Independence and happy situation of our country were owing to their exertions, and our wealth now enables us to make generous provision for their future comfort and welfare. He therefore moved that the Committee on Claims be instructed to enquire what further measures are necessary to be adopted to remunerate the meritorious officers and soldiers who were wounded or disabled in the Revolutionary war with Great Britain, with leave to report by bill or otherwise.”*

The offering of this motion was a peculiarly gratifying act to Mr. Varnum, who himself a patriot of the Revolution, felt deeply for those whose pride had kept them from receiving the bounty of the Government and for whose relief a special enactment was necessary.

In January, 1808, a bill was under consideration by the Committee on the Whole in the House, “to provide more effectually for the national defence by the Militia of the United States.”

It authorized the President, on the appearance of national danger, to order out the militia of the United States, to be known as the “Junior class of Militia.” This bill was a peculiarly obnoxious one to Mr. Varnum, who thoroughly acquainted with the militia system from experience and practice, being at the time a Major-General of the Militia of the State of Massachusetts, and having been an officer in continuous service from 1776, saw clearly the shortcomings and defects of the measure and its utter impracticability. There was no man more competent to throw light on such a question than himself, and his words on this and a subsequent occasion, on a bill of similar import in the Senate, carried a conviction which led to its defeat. Mr. Varnum (Speaker) said “he hoped the committee

* Annals of Congress, vol. xv., 267.

would rise, and be refused leave to sit again on this bill. He believed that the situation of the United States at present would by no means admit of the classification of the militia. If ever it was necessary this is not the proper time. It had been said that the classing had been recommended by the several Presidents of the United States. If that is a fact it was not known to him. He could see no kind of advantage to be derived from the proposed modification of the militia system. Were not the militia, under the present laws, equal to any service which could be required of them? If particular States had failed to carry into effect the part assigned them by the Constitution, would any other plan induce them to attend to it? It was a fact that where State Governments had taken up the subject of the organization and discipline of the Militia and carried it into effect as far as in their power, those States had a respectable body of militia, from 18 to 45 years in age, banded together as brothers in arms, and they from their discipline, would regard it as an invidious distinction if men at particular ages were selected from the mass, and thus destroy the present efficiency. He was aware that it has been said that the militia was inefficient in some parts of the United States. What was lacking, was that subordination which existed in other sections, and nothing more."

"It has been said that in the course of the Revolutionary war the militia in some instance abandoned their posts; but he was sure that the credit due to the militia of his part of the country had not been awarded. In some of the hardest battles of the war the principal actors were the militia. There is a radical difficulty in the system proposed. The bill provides that none shall be called into general service except those from 21 to 26 years of age. Is it expected that young men will be better able to perform military duty than those who have become veterans in the service, who have experienced the advan-

tages of liberty, and who have families and property to defend? The Constitutions of some of the States provide that the Captain and Subaltern of each Company shall be chosen from the whole Company from the age of 21 to 45. The officers would generally be over 46 years of age. The practice is at variance with this bill."

"Gentlemen may suppose that it is an easy thing for the State Governments to alter their systems to conform to the requirements of the General Government ; but it is a matter which some States will not do. The militia at the present time in some parts of the United States are well organized and disciplined, and display a spirit of emulation which does them honor. In the State he had the honor to represent, there are 70,000 militia, all fully armed and accoutred. They are individually subject to a fine of \$8.00 for every time they appear without arms, and if not always provided, to a fine of \$10.00 per annum. This severe regulation results in universal arming. Very few troops, take them from what part of the world you will, are better disciplined than our companies of artillery, every man of which is completely uniformed at his own expense, and every company of which is supplied with brass field pieces, of which they have 150. The whole body of militia would be ready to march, if called upon, in 12 hours notice, and under officers of their own choice would go into service with alacrity. They would consider it a hardship to see their younger comrades called into a State which did not happen to adjoin their own while they could not march to assist, as this bill provides that men between 26 and 45 shall go no farther than the border of their own or an adjoining State. If an enemy were to land in Connecticut the brave militia of New Hampshire or Vermont are not to assist in repelling them because the said States are not adjoining. It is the flower of the militia which is to be slaughtered, instead of repelling the ene-

my by the whole force of the body. Every man capable of bearing arms should be called upon to take part in the defence of his neighborhood, when invaded. It was felt to be a hardship in the time of the Revolutionary war that every man capable of bearing arms should be compelled to do his part, scarcely a man being left to till the ground ; but it was essential to the safety of the country. Have we increased to such a degree of population that we can afford to now leave at home three-fourths of our able bodied men ?”

“ This bill embodies a system which has many times been before the House for consideration, and has always been found impolitic to adopt. I hope at this critical juncture that we shall not wholly disorganize the militia because some persons do not choose to submit to military discipline and the subordination essential thereto. I am ready to assert that if the system is adopted, that our militia will be broken up, as the States have laws now in force in conformity with the Act of 1792 for the organization of the militia, and under said laws are ready to act.” *

Later, in the same month, the subject was again under discussion, and the Annals state, “ Mr. Varnum opposed the bill with considerable spirit and force.” † The result finally was that the measure died in the hands of the Committee, probably because its advocates were at last brought to see its inutility. It may be that the results of these early efforts of the General Government to enact laws to gain control over the militia of the several States led to the final abandonment of the subject. The General Government has never exercised control over the militia of the States, always making its requisitions, in case of war, through the governors. Even in the war of 1812, the Governor of the State of Massachusetts (Strong) refused to

* Annals of Congress, vol. xviii, 1484-5-6.

† Annals of Congress, vol. xviii., p. 1508.

acquiesce in the requisition of the President of the United States (Monroe).

The speech just quoted was the last appearance of Speaker Varnum on the floor of the House, and he spoke only on this occasion, in Committee of the Whole, to discuss a matter dear to his heart, as he was an active participant in the military affairs of the State he had the honor to represent, and from the inception of its military system had been its able exponent.

The State election in Massachusetts in 1808 resulted in the choice of Christopher Gore as Governor. Gen. Varnum was one of the candidates of the Republicans; the defeated ticket being Levi Lincoln of Worcester (afterwards elected Governor), and Joseph Bradley Varnum of Dracutt, Lieut. Governor.* The campaign of 1811 yielded a very important triumph for the party to which Gen. Varnum belonged. It had several times elected its candidate for Governor, but had failed to gain full control of the Legislature. In 1810 it elected Elbridge Gerry as Governor and a majority of Representatives, but lacked one vote of control of the Senate. The election of 1811 gave a majority of 40 in the House and secured the election of its candidate (Joseph Story) for Speaker and the one lacking vote in the Senate.

"This triumph was indeed a real one, for it enabled the Republicans to send Speaker Varnum to the Senate of the

* The official returns in State Archives of this election are:—

Gore for Governor	47,916
Lincoln for "	45,178
Varnum for Lieutenant Governor	44,729
Cobb " " "	47,540
Necessary to choice	46,662

As an evidence of the virulence of politics of those days the following copied from the *Columbian Centinel*, April 1st, 1808, is in evidence: "The Revd Clergy or the Deacons of the two religious societies in the Town of Worcester are invited and requested to certify from the best evidence they can obtain, how many times the new Democratic Candidate for Governor entered either of the houses of worship on the Lord's day, from Jan. 1, 1797, to Jan. 1, 1808, making a period of 10 years and including 520 Sabbaths."

United States in place of Timothy Pickering, whose term had expired, and at a critical moment of our history made Massachusetts a Republican State.”*

Joseph Story, Speaker of the House of Representatives of Massachusetts, and afterwards Justice of the United States Supreme Court, wrote May 7, 1810, of this contest: “In the glorious struggles of the Republicans I have not been an indifferent spectator, and I now have the right to rejoice in the honorable triumph they have achieved against intrigue, influence and wealth. We shall elect a Senator in the place of Mr. Pickering, or at least (if the Senate do not concur) we shall save our State from being misrepresented. Let us enjoy the present moment, and with sincere congratulation ‘pursue the triumph and partake the gale.’”†

In the Senate Gen. Varnum was made chairman of the Committee on Military Affairs. During his term as Senator (1813) he became the candidate of the Republican party and received the nomination of Governor of his State against Caleb Strong, who represented the anti-war element.‡ This campaign and

* MacMaster's History of the People of the U. S., vol. iii., pp. 422-423.

† Story : Life and Letters, vol. i, 198.

‡ The election for Governor was held April 15, 1813. The Republican banner bore the inscription :

FREE TRADE & NO IMPRESSMENT.
AMERICAN REPUBLICAN CANDIDATES.
HON. JOSEPH B. VARNUM
for Governor

HON. WILLIAM KING
for Lieut. Governor

of Massachusetts for the ensuing year.

The vote stood: Strong, 56,463; Varnum, 42,789; necessary to choice, 45,670.

A doggerel of this campaign ran as follows :

“ Let peace and commerce flourish long,
I give my vote for Caleb Strong;
But those who wish for war and tax,
Oh, darn 'um!
Let 'em vote for Gen. Varnum.”

that of Lieut. Governor in 1808, resulted in the only two defeats of his political career.

Adams says: "Of all supporters of the war (1812) Senator Varnum was one of the steadiest. He was also the highest authority in the Senate on matters pertaining to the militia. When Giles's bill came under discussion (Nov. 6th, 1814), Varnum began the debate with a speech vehemently hostile to the proposed legislation."* He said: "I am deeply impressed with the importance of the present crisis of our national concerns, and the necessity for the adoption of strong and energetic measures calculated to meet and repulse the force which the enemy contemplate placing in the field against us. No man in this Senate will go farther than I shall feel disposed to go, to effect the object which is dear to every friend of the nation, provided the measures pursued shall appear to me founded in justice and equity."

He first objected that "although the bill purported to call for an army of 80,000 men, yet in some of the subsequent sections of it we find that instead of realizing the pleasing prospect of seeing an ample force in the field, said force is to be reduced indefinitely, which contradiction in terms, inconsistency in principle and uncertainty in effect, cannot fail to produce mortification and chagrin." He objected to drafting men from the militia for two years service, "because the principle of nine months service was already established by common law. If the nation wants a regular force, why not make it a part of the regular army, without a system of militia drafting, unnecessary, unequal, and unjust. The machinery of classification and draft is wholly impracticable. The limit of service to adjoining States, abandoned the objects for which the Union existed. The proffered bounties would ruin the recruiting service for the regular army. The proposed exemptions and

* Adams's History of the United States, vol. viii., pp. 269, 270.

deductions in terms of duty, left no permanency to the service. The bill inflicted no penalties, and charged no officers with the duty of making the draft. I consider the whole system as resolving into a recommendation upon the patriotism of the States and Territories and upon the patriotism of the classes.”*

“The justice of Varnum’s criticism could not fairly be questioned,” Mr. Adams concludes.† This view was supported by Senator Daggett of Connecticut, who immediately followed Mr. Varnum, and by Jeremiah Mason of New Hampshire, “a man second to no one in legal ability or in personal authority.” Senator Christopher Gore, formerly Governor of Massachusetts, although opposed to Mr. Varnum in politics, supported him in opposition to the bill.

Formerly the office of President *pro tem* of the United States Senate was held to be a very important position, made especially so by its relation to the Presidential office. In Dec., 1813, Senator Varnum was chosen to preside over this body, and after the expiration of his term was repeatedly chosen as Chairman of the Committee of the Whole. At the close of his career as Senator from Massachusetts, when the overthrow of his party had ended his congressional services, his constituency thought him too able and sound a counsellor to relegate to private life, and from the successive years of 1817 to 1821, the close of his life, he represented them in the Senate of the State of Massachusetts.

He was a member of two important Conventions in his State: that of 1787, to ratify the Federal Constitution; and that of 1820, to revise the State Constitution. Over the latter he was the main presiding officer, President John Adams and Chief Justice Parker, the regularly chosen Presidents, being unable to perform their duties, the former declining the honor because

* Annals of Congress, vol. xxviii., pp. 58-69.

† Adams’s History of the United States, vol. viii., p. 270.

of enfeebled age, and the latter being unable to actively serve because of ill health. Gen. Varnum's weight of character and great experience as a legislator gave him a very important standing in this Convention. He was made Chairman in the Committee of the Whole, and that of the Militia. On questions of parliamentary law and methods of procedure, he was constantly appealed to, and his decision went without debate. The deference paid him, and the high honor of being selected and presented to the Convention by Chief Justice Parker, as President *pro tem*, who spoke of him as one "whose long public services in high stations, and whose able exertions in the Convention, entitled him to the respect of his country," was exceedingly gratifying to his feelings. In a letter written at that time to his wife, he says, of the high esteem shown him by members :

"BOSTON, Dec. 2d, 1820.

MY DEAR WIFE :

* * * * *

I have really been much disappointed since I came here. I did expect that the old frowns of Federalism would be poured down upon me in Torrents ; but from some Observations which I made in regard to the Rules of procedure in the Convention, and my Presidency in the Chair since, when in Committee of the Whole, seems to have eradicated every Idea of party prejudice in regard to me, and I am now hailed as the *Summum bonum* of Order in the Convention. Many gentlemen have declared to me that they had been impressed with an Idea that I was opposed to principles of order and good Government ; but that they had found out their mistake, and now all parties eulogize me as holding principles of correct intention."*

He appears to have made no lengthy remarks in the Convention, except on the matter of religious toleration. This came up in the debate on incorporating denominational religious

* Letter in possession of John M. Varnum.

societies. Gen. Varnum said, "if he had not been assigned to a duty which was incompatible with his taking any part in the debate, he would not have had occasion to detain the Convention at this late period. He would make no profession as to his regard for religion : his conduct would speak for itself ; nor would he make any invidious distinctions between different sects or denominations. He would wish all to live in fellowship so far as their principles were consistent with pure morality and the good of society. He wished the gentlemen would unite and adopt something which would give satisfaction to the denominations. For this purpose he hoped they would do away with all technical difficulties, and gave a full discussion to the subject before the Convention. It was a matter dear to the people at large, and they counted upon its being fully deliberated upon. It was for the benefit of all interested that we should act with such a spirit of conciliation as all might go home satisfied. We all agree until we come to the difficulties arising from differences of sects and denominations. He wished that everything like discrimination might be done away with, and we come together like brothers. It has been decided by the Supreme Court that before the law of 1811, no society was within the meaning of the article unless it was incorporated. It has been the practice to tax every person in the parish where he lived in disregard of what he might pay for the support of his own religious teacher. After burdening the Parishes with collecting ministerial taxes assessed on them from persons belonging to other Societies, it was often necessary to restore the money to the religious teacher to whom it justly belonged. He contended that every person should be taxed only by his own denomination, and that the Parish ought not to be put to the trouble of levying and collecting a tax nor a religious teacher nor the person paying it, the trouble of getting the money back. He was astonished that so many gentlemen from the Town of Boston were

opposed to everything that gives religious toleration. He was never better pleased than when the honorable Chief Justice, his associate in the chair, the other day came forward and in so manly a manner, advocated the rights of conscience and of private judgment in matters of faith and worship. He thought that everything like an intolerant spirit in religion was fast passing away, and he trusted that before long men of all denominations would be willing to worship together. He wished to promote this harmonious spirit, and to adopt a principle which would permit men of all beliefs to retire from this Convention satisfied with a work well done and one broadly promoting the cause of Christian fellowship.”*

This speech from General Varnum, who was brought up under the tenets of New England Congregationalism, and became in his later years a Baptist, distinguishes him as a man of very advanced liberalism, broad and catholic in his convictions, and remarkably progressive for his day.

HIS POLITICAL COMMISSIONS.

State of Massachusetts.	House,	-	from 1781 to 1786.
“ “ “	Senate,	-	“ { 1786 to 1795.
			“ } 1817 to 1821.
National Congress.	House,	-	“ 1795 to 1811.
“ “	Speaker of,	-	“ 1807 to 1811.
“ “	Senate,	-	“ 1811 to 1817.
“ “	Pres. <i>pro tem</i> of,		1813.
State of Massachusetts.	Convention to ratify Federal Constitution, 1787.		
	Delegate to Convention to amend State Constitution, 1820.		

HIS CIVIL COMMISSIONS.

Justice of Peace and Quorum	-	from 1787 to 1818.
Chief Justice, Court of Sessions,†	“	1807 to 1811.
Member of Governor’s Council,		1787, 1792.
Sheriff of Middlesex Co. (declined),		1794.

* Debates, Massachusetts Convention, 1820, pp. 562, 563.

† Established 3 July, 1782, “To hear and determine all matters relating to the conservation of the Peace, cognizable by them at common law.” An amendatory Act of 19 June, 1807, provided for a Chief Justice and a number of Associate Justices throughout the State.

PERSONALITY.

John Randolph, who was never so happy as when imputing base motives to his political opponents, and whose sharp tongue was dreaded by all his associates in Congress, in the debate on Spanish affairs in the house, 7th April, 1806, charged Gen. Varnum as being the author of certain expressions and opinions as to President Jefferson, asserting that he "seemed thunder-struck and humbled" at the charge. "As to being humbled," replied Gen. Varnum, "I have never felt humbled by any man. I have never yet felt nor shall feel afraid of the face of mortal man. I have been many years in the service of my country, and I have never heard any argument that I was unwilling to meet, if it was worthy answer. I have done my duty unconscious of injury to any man."*

This incident illustrates the type of character of Gen. Varnum. He was fearless and independent. Throughout his whole political career there is no evidence that he lacked the courage of his convictions. He stood manfully up in maintenance of the right of petition in the case of manumitted slaves in the national Congress at Philadelphia in 1797, and for the freedom of religious thought in 1820, in the Massachusetts Constitutional Convention. Throughout his whole career he was strong and sturdy as a leader of his party, when Massachusetts and Maine were one political community, and was a consistent Republican, even when supporting the war of 1812, an unpopular measure in his section.

In 1809, when he was the nominee of his party for the office of Lieutenant-Governor with Levi Lincoln of Worcester as the candidate for Governor, he reluctantly permitted the use of his name, and only consented because of party fealty. His letters at that date show that he did not anticipate success; moreover, his position as Speaker of the National House was a congenial

* Annals of Congress, vol, xx, pp. 987, 988.

one, and he had nothing to gain by resigning it.* The *Boston Patriot* of Mar. 21st, 1809, said of him, "Gen. Varnum has spent the chief part of a laborious life in the public service. He is a farmer; a statesman and a soldier; of such estimation at Washington, that he was recently elevated by that august body, the House of Representatives, to the Speakership—a situation honorable to the country which has been so long distinguished by his useful services."

As a farmer he was so devoted to that pursuit, that he was ever speaking in its praise to his sons, as a vocation, and eulogizing it as the choicest, most honorable and most satisfying of occupations. His ancestors had been large, original land owners in Dracutt, and although his military and political life had led him into other and varied activities, he still clung to the arduous life and labor of a farmer. He well knew the hardship of it, for he says in his autobiography, "With his own hands he laid miles of stone wall," to enclose his acres.

It was a tribute to his personal worth, that as a Republican, and a leader of his party, he had the close confidence and esteem of the illustrious Jefferson. His relations with the elder Adams, Jefferson, Gallatin, Gerry, Granger, and other famous statesmen in the early history of our country, is attested by letters from them, carefully preserved by his descendants. One from John Adams, of 19 closely written pages, is alluded to by Joseph Story, at that date a member of Congress from Massachusetts:

" Washington, Jan. 14, 1809.

President Adams has written a very long letter to Gen. Varnum on our national affairs. He speaks in great approbation of the Administration, and goes the whole length in vindication of our national rights. I assure you that I read this letter with the greatest delight, and regretted that for

* Nathaniel Macon of Georgia, who was a candidate for Speaker with Gen. Varnum in the contest in 1809, said in withdrawing his name, "I regard the office of Speaker of the House one of the most honorable in the nation—perhaps none were more so after that of the President and Vice-President." Macon was Speaker 1807—1809.

a moment, I had ever doubted his patriotism. The letter would do honor to any man living."*

In personal appearance, Gen. Varnum was a man somewhat inclined to corpulency; of about the average height, having a light complexion, with dark blue eyes. The portrait accompanying this sketch has been pronounced by those who knew him in life, to be a very accurate likeness, and to convey a just impression of his personal appearance. His mental powers were of the highest order. He was a man of uncommon accuracy of judgment, and his opinions were given with promptitude. He was regarded as "the most distinguished man of his time in the Merrimack river valley." His republican simplicity was pronounced. He would wear no clothing of foreign manufacture. His apparel was of homespun, prepared by his wife on her loom at the homestead farm. Some years before 1790, one Ezekiel Hale came to Dracutt and engaged in business at Beaver brook—that of fulling, dyeing and dressing the homespun cloth made in the farmers' families. In 1810, Mr. Hale made a bolt of his finest cloth, and presented it to Gen. Varnum, who had it made into a suit of clothes, which he proudly wore as he sat as Speaker of the National House at Washington.

On the 4th of March, 1817, his term as Senator ended, and with it his congressional career. A letter to his wife describes his relief at laying down the cares and duties of his long service:

" Washington, Dec. 28, 1816.

My dear Wife.

With consolation, satisfaction and gratitude, I anticipate the fourth of March next, which will free me from the solicitude of serving my country in situations which have compelled me, for a considerable part of the time each year for thirty-seven years past, to abandon the enjoyment of domestic happiness."†

* Story, Life and Letters, Vol, 1, p. 192.

† In possession of John M. Varnum.

On his retirement to his home farm, his active political life did not end. He was elected Senator from Middlesex County to the Legislature of Massachusetts in 1817; and was a member at time of his decease in 1821. He was Senior Maj. General in the military service of his State. He was chosen a delegate to the Convention for the revision of the Constitution of the State in 1820.

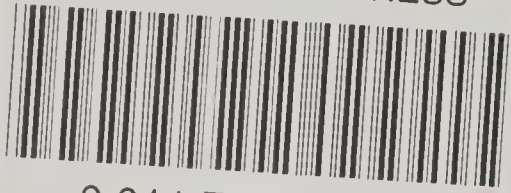
He passed away on the 11th Sept., 1821, from a sudden attack of angina pectoris. His son Benj. F. made this entry in his Journal, the month previous: "Father instructed me in case he should suddenly be taken away, to have a common coffin with a box, and no parade of military, and to purchase and hoist a black flag at halfmast."

His decease was sudden. He rode out on the day preceding it, but being indisposed speedily returned, and found his dissolution rapidly approaching. He called his family around him, acquainted them with his situation, gave directions that his funeral might not be attended with any military or civic parade, appointed his pall bearers and calmly awaited the final summons.

From the house to the little burial ground where his body has its last resting place, is but a step. There were no carriages, only a procession on foot, the coffin on a bier, borne by the pall bearers, followed by the family and those who came to pay the last tribute.

The *Columbian Centinel* of Sept. 15, 1821, said of him: "In all the offices he held, Gen. Varnum exhibited an assiduity which never tired, and an integrity above suspicion. Though of late years he differed on some points of political economy, from the majority of his fellow-citizens of the State, it may with truth and justice be affirmed that at his death, Massachusetts did not contain a more honest or independent man."

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