

Abner Hazeltine.

Born at Wardsborough, Vt. June 10th, 1793.

Died at Jamestown, N. Y. Dec. 20th, 1879.

The subject of this paper, a direct descendant of the earliest settlers of Plymouth Colony, was born in the town of Wardsborough, Windham County, Vermont, on the 10th of June 1793 when that County was new. His parents being pioneers from Eastern Massachusetts, his earliest experiences were those of privation and hardship. Without the advantages of schools, such as the humblest child now enjoys, it was a difficult matter to obtain the very beginnings of an education, a desire to obtain which was early developed in him.

The writer has often heard him relate, his first attendance at school which was taught in a barn, and for the want of better seats, the scholars occupied the sills. However he made the very best use of his opportunities, and in a single Winter completed Pike's Arithmetic, that then being the only text book attainable. Not satisfied with the attainments possible to be reached in the ordinary schools, at that time by the farm boy, he pursued with eagerness and industry the classical studies necessary for admission to College, under the direction of his pastor, and was in this manner fitted for entrance into Williams College, from which he was graduated in 1815.

While in college some of his friends and relatives, influenced by that spirit which has ever sharpened the desire to occupy all of the land, had emigrated to Western New York, themselves, the sons of pioneers becoming such, in regular

succession. Immediately on his graduation, Abner Hazeltine set his face towards that new country, into which his friends had preceded him. He arrived at Jamestown in September 1815. Here it was his expectation, to begin, as opportunity offered, the study of the law; the practice of which he expected to make his life work. Without means, without the opportunity even, to begin his preparatory studies, he engaged for a time in teaching. Soon after he went to Mayville, then as now the county seat, and entered the office of the late Jacob Houghton as a student. His opportunities were limited, but he made the very most of them, and was soon admitted to practice his profession in the Court of Common Pleas, and at the expiration of the regular stated period thereafter, as was the rule in those days, to the Supreme Court and Court of Chancery.

After his admission to practice he returned to Jamestown, the place he had selected for his home, and there began his life work. Events soon after this induced him to remove to Warren, Pa., and ^{he} there resided for a time. Warren County was at that time just organized, and at the first Court held in that county, he was admitted to practice there. This was in 1820. He continued to practice in the courts of both New York and Pennsylvania, although his residence at Warren was limited to three years.

He devoted himself with untiring energy and industry to his chosen profession, and pursued it constantly to the very end of his long life, never abandoning it to engage in other pursuits. His profession was his delight, and to it he gave not merely his best but the whole of his energies. Not

gifted with eloquence, nor with remarkable brilliancy, it was
great labor, and complete and thorough preparation of and for
every single cause, no matter how small its amount, or indif-
ferent its result might be, that he succeeded in obtaining
a full mastery of the whole subject of the law, and made him-
self familiar with its history, and principles from the very
foundations, and of their application. No emergency found him
unprepared, and when seeming difficulties appeared, apparently
blocking further advance or threatening defeat, he was fully
equipped. He often attained success when disaster was immi-
nent, by the knowledge and complete mastery he had acquired,
that enabled him to state and elucidate the principles upon
which the matter in controversy rested, and show how the ap-
plication of those principles controlled the case.

Such powers are greater than mere eloquence, which pro-
duces no lasting result; and they are only acquired by dillig-
ent research, careful analysis, complete information, and
patient labor. All these, the subject of this sketch brought
to his chosen work, with untiring zeal and indomitable indus-
try. Endowed with great endurance he worked in his office,
when other men were seeking recreation. His habits and tastes
were simple, and he found his pleasures in his labor. Not a
rapid worker, not adopting conclusions until they were severe-
ly tested, and their results fully known, and the foundation
upon which they rested ascertained to be impregnable; and
with the habit of finding out for himself the reason for
every step, not trusting to the mere statements of others; it
was only through long continued examination, testing and per-

-fecting every step, selecting each with care, that he made progress. He devoted more hours in his office to his daily labor than was common in his day, and an amount that would be appalling to a worker at this date. It was an ordinary thing for him to work beyond the hours of mid-night by the light of a common tallow candle, that being the best illuminant in his day. This was not merely in his youth and in the strength of his manhood, but he continued the practice throughout his busy career. It was a common saying, that when the light in his office was extinguished, it was time that all people should be at their homes. Many are the letters that the writer, when pursuing his education, has received from him dated at, "the office, 1.A.M." and written after the fatigues of the day, as a relaxation from labor, full of paternal counsel and advice.

It is not to be intimated that he had no recreation and pleasures. With his great industry, he had no patience with idleness; with his gentlemanly culture, he found no delight in frivolity, with his scholarly attainments, he found no pleasure in mere muscular or physical development. He sought his pleasures in literature and science, and in keeping himself informed in the worlds work, and his acquisition of knowledge outside of his profession, was full and singularly accurate. His reading was extensive and methodical, and on any occasion, and on all subjects he was ready to converse or write, with great intelligence, and in a manner that afforded instruction. He was thoroughly informed in all matters of local and family history of the region, and could give with accuracy from

memory the dates of settlement, and of other events. He was often called upon to write historical and obituary notices, from the fact that he was better informed, and had a better memory of events than the families of the persons whom they concerned.

His qualifications and willingness to work attracted clients, and he was never without abundance to do, during his whole busy life. He could not dispatch work with the ease and facility of ~~many, from~~ many, from his extreme thoroughness and care. Whatever he undertook he did with his whole might, and matters that seemed plain and beyond doubt he verified with caution, and never uttered an opinion, nor adopted a line of action to be pursued, until every step had been scrutinized and his footing established. His opinions were sought not alone by clients, but by his brethren of the bar, to ~~whom~~ whom he freely accorded any assistance. His conduct was on all occasions gentlemanly and polite, not yielding his convictions until he was convinced of error, then ready to renounce it, firm in maintaining his dignity, not bending to or resorting to any questionable or doubtful act, or utterance, scrupulous of his honor, and ready to maintain the right at all times, at any cost of ease to himself. No one accused him of wrong, or of him thought evil. There was no occasion.

It was not long before his attainments became known to his associates, and his advice and counsel were sought, and he was without effort or solicitation on his part, placed in positions of honor and trust. In 1828, he was elected to the Legislature, and again in 1829. In 1832, he was elected a

Representative in Congress; and again in 1834. After the adoption of the new constitution, he was elected District Attorney in 1847, and County Judge. He was also elected Special County Judge in 1873, but because of the change in the Constitution providing that a judicial office cannot be held in this State, by a person upwards of seventy years of age, he did not accept the office. For a number of years he also held by appointment, the office of Commissioner of the Circuit Court of the United States, for the Northern District of New York.

Public life had for him no attractions and he never sought after it. He was content to fill his measure of usefulness to his fellows, in his chosen profession. Although associated with Silas Wright, Millard Fillmore, Francis Granger, Solomon G. Havens, and William H. Seward in the affairs of the State; and with John Quincy Adams, Daniel Webster, Henry Clay and many others of the leaders in national matters; he preferred the retirement and labor of the bar, and the pleasures of his home to advancement in matters of state. Not that he was without a proper degree of ambition, or shrank from the discharge of the duties, which his associates and friends would gladly have given him to do, in the shaping of the events that developed our state and national character, and importance; but these in his modesty and simple tastes and habits, he surrendered to others, and pursued more congenial paths.

His successes were at the bar. There he found a field wide enough, and difficult enough, to fill his greatest ambi-

-tion and to require his closest attention. Of it he never wearied, and gave to it an unflagging devotion until the very evening of life. He came of stock noted for vigor and longevity, and his simple habits assisted in his attaining to a greater number of years than is usual. Of great physical force as well as mental he retained, by a judicious use of his powers, and regularity in all his habits, great vigor, especially of intellect to the very last, Although suffering in the later years of his life from an infirmity that would have discouraged most men, his mental force was not abated. He continued his professional work until his last illness, which was of but one weeks duration, and even during that, at his home, directed the method of the labor in progress at his office.

It was related of him, by one of his associates,* At a meeting of the bar held after his decease, "It is but a short *time*, Mr. Chairman, that we heard an argument, from the Hon. Abner Hazeltine involving, one of the nicest and most intricate questions of law; when from his physical appearance, from his great age, and apparent weakness, it was hardly to be supposed that we were to have an elucidation from him, such as we would have expected years before. When he took the floor, it is true we witnessed some degree of physical weakness, but there was yet that strength of mental power in that argument, that I do not think I ever heard Judge Hazeltine himself excel. And only within a year a portion of that case having been referred to me, there came up a question of the construc-

* Hon. Lorenzo Morris, at Chautauqua bar meeting. 7

-tion to be given to an instrument in writing; Judge Hazeltine came to the office for the argument, it is true in a carriage, which denoted his febleness physically, but there again, in the argument of that question, I felt an utter astonishment at the clear and lucid exposition made by him on that occasion, sitting in his chair too feeble to keep the floor."

He had the unlimited confidence of his associates and the community, and another* of his associates said of him, at a bar meeting, "Paramount to all professional duties, he recognized allegiance to the moral law. His word was better than his bond, as his store of moral virtues exceeded his acquisition of attachable goods. Throughout his long life there blended in beautiful harmony, the lawyer and the honest man, ---the barrister and christian. The confidence of the early settlers of this County in his integrity, was never equaled by that extended to any of his associates or successors."

Any sketch of Abner Hazeltine would be imperfect that did not make mention of his christian life and character, for these were so marked as to mould and influence the whole man. He was the son of godly parents, his mother was especially a woman of strong christian character, so that he grew up under vital religious influences. In his early youth he avowed his faith in Christ as his Savior, and gave his adherence to Him as a follower. His whole after life was a carrying out of that adherence. His confession of Christ was no formal outward thing. He had its roots in the depths of his heart,

* Hon. S. P. Johnson, at Warren bar meeting.

that felt the power of divine things, and was thoroughly consecrated to his Lord. Out of the depths of such a heart, devotedly loyal to the Master he had chosen, and to the truth of his word which he fully accepted, grew his life, the life of one who was before all things else a follower and servant of Christ. Hence in his life he embodied ever the practice of those things which he most surely believed. He was not of a fervid spirit, nor effusive in his religious feelings, he was not wanting in words when it was needful and wise to speak, but he did, more than he said, and was known by all as a

disciple steadfast and faithful in all his christian convictions and principles. When a young man he came west, one of the pioneers of a new country, he came as a christian man and as a pioneer of its christian and church history. He was one of the nine who organized the first church of Christ formed in Jamestown, and was at the outset one of the foremost in fulfilling its duties in standing by and promoting its interests. So he continued through all his life, a pillar in that Congregational Church, zealous for its welfare, strongly attached to it, first of all as a church of Christ, in fellowship with all christians, and then to that special church as accepting and holding the doctrines of truth and methods of organization which seemed to him most scriptural and effective. He gave not only of his sympathies to the church but also freely of his means, and though never able to bestow large sums, his benevolence was a steady stream of gifts, large according to his ability, to the varied service of the Kingdom of Christ.

In the church and its work he had rare wisdom ^{to} counsel
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and guide, and at the same time a breadth and largeness of spirit that made him a hearty worker with fellow-members, willing to conciliate and ready to adopt the suggestions and plans of others. He always honored and upheld his pastor, and accepted the decisions of the majority.

Such were his practical wisdom and his clear understanding of the principles and history and methods of his own christian denomination that his counsel and help were much sought in ecclesiastical matters and difficulties in neighboring Congregational Churches, and in fact throughout western New York, and his influence was felt over a wide region in which he was able often to render most efficient christian service.

It could not be otherwise than that the home life of such a man was precious in its influence. His family was his comfort and joy. Six children grew up to adult life under most kindly and faithful training, and they loved and honored their father. He did not care to provide their home with luxurious furnishings and adornments, but chose rather to open to them the best advantages of education, and of intellectual and christian training, and to kindle in them his own elevated tastes. His was a most hospitable house, not only to a wide circle of kindred and friends, but also its doors were ever open to welcome as guests many strangers, such as ministers and other christian workers. In those early days there was need for much of such hospitality, and few were so cordial as he in offering it, or able to make it so delightful in the sympathies and kindly interest which he

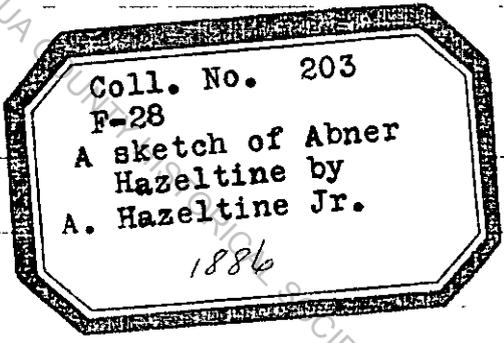
extended to all. His social converse with his guests was an elevating influence in his home, for he knew how to draw out abundant anecdote and information from others, as well as to pour out freely from his own stores that were never exhausted. His was preeminently a christian home, and his children and the other inmates ever had before them a living example of high integrity, of large-hearted kindness, and of unswerving christian devotion.

A. Haglitt Jr.

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A Sketch of

Abner Hazeltine Jr



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Sketch of Abner Hazeltine

January Meeting
1886.

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