Hon. Geo. W. Patterson

By

Frank Hall

Westfield, NY

1914

Coll No. 206
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Hon. Geo. Patterson
of Westfield, N.Y.
By Frank Hall, of Wfd.
GLORY - WASHINGTON PATTERSON.

Then your esteemed president requested that I prepare a word of neighborliness, respecting one of the honored citizens of Westfield, George Washington Patterson, it suggested to me a tribute of love more than any of the many speeches that are brought to us when speaking of those well known and greatly regarded—and along these lines I beg or you that you bear with me a little time.

First, how came he to Westfield—and to Chautauqua? He was the son of Lieutenant Thomas and Elizabeth (Wallace) Patterson, and was born November 11th, 1799. Dr. George W. Patterson, a grandson, of Ann Arbor, Mich., tells us that he was named John. About a month after his birth, his parents, as loyal Scotch-Irish Covenanters, were taking him to church for baptism when a courier arrived, telling of the death of Gen. George Washington, and the parents, responding to the universal desire to honor that great name, bestowed it upon the handsome boy baby, which they brought to the baptismal font. Many a time a name ill-fits a person, but in this instance the name and the man were as the glove to the hand.

In my early years I always associated the name George Washington with Gov. Patterson, and on one occasion I addressed to a portrait of Gen. Washington because it did not look enough like my George Washington which was George Washington Patterson.

Possibly you have seen him in some of the Old Folks Concerts, garbed as Gen. Washington. No one had to have the character explained—the personification was complete, and when he would lead to the front of the stage some lady made up for Lady Washington, the audience would shout and cheer until at least three recalls had been made. He was a great lover of music, and when it came to the music of his boyhood, he sang with the spirit and with the understanding.
Nothing ever happened and then one of these concerts was proposed, and he had entered into it—the project never fell down. The concert was given and always on time.

Mr. Patterson was born in Londonderry, New Hampshire, the home of my mother's ancestry, who came from Londonderry, Ireland, and possibly gave name to that then little hamlet upon that rugged soil. He was the youngest of twelve children, eleven of whom live to mature age. He was educated in the common school and the Pinkerton Academy of Londonderry. At the age eighteen he taught school but soon came to Groveland, Livingston County, New York, accompanying his brother, William Patterson, where they manufactured fanning mills. In 1824, the brothers came to Ripley continuing the business less than a year when he returned to Livingston County, locating at Leicester. It was there that he established his first home and brought his bride, Hannah Whiting Dickey, a playmate of his boyhood in Londonderry. Here he erected an elegant colonial home which is still standing.

It was while residing in Leicester that he was elected to the New York Assembly, where he remained by re-elections for eight years, the latter two years as speaker.

During these years his time was not taken up with watchful waiting; his natural activity was sure to find vent. Among the matters he introduced was the statute regulating the issuing of currency, which was known as the New York Law. It was enacted by several states, incorporated in the law governing the issue of United States currency.

During this time he was largely associated with the prominent men of the state, with whom he held close relations until they had passed away. He outlived nearly all of his early associates.
He was at one with such men of his day as Hamilton Fish, Thurlow Weed, Horace Greeley, Judah P. Benjamin Seward, the latter when he purchased the home on North Fortune Street, Westfield, which he occupied thru life, and which has been handed down to the third and fourth generations. To give a list of his acquaintance with men of prominence in the state and nation, would be impossible. The great number of important positions which he held brought him in constant contact with leading men of the country during the earlier years of his life.

Under Gov. Seward, he was made Basin Commissioner at Albany: a place of much responsibility as the commerce of the state was then very largely done through the Erie Canal.

Gov. Clark appointed him Harbor Commissioner at New York, while Gov. Morgan made him Quarantine Commissioner at the same great gateway to the nation. Gov. Patterson never asked for a vote or a position. They came to him unsolicited.

He was a delegate to the first Republican Convention at which John C. Frémont was nominated for president, and also to the National Convention which nominated Abraham Lincoln for his second term.

In April 1851, when the New York and Erie Rail Road was completed to Dunkirk, and became the longest Rail Road under one corporation in the world, Chautauqua County gave the most notable celebration known in its history. The President, Millard Fillmore, and a part of his cabinet, with the Governor of the state and many state dignitaries were present. Governor Patterson was master of ceremonies, and introduced the President to the great mass of people who were in waiting, and also Daniel Webster and other notable men. This was repeated at the banquet given on that occasion.
In 1848 he was nominated and elected on the Whig ticket for Lieutenant Governor with Hamilton Fish for the first place. His familiarity with matters at the state Capitol gave him a position that was of great value to the state, while he was spoken of as the best presiding officer that had graced the chair of the Senate.

During these years he was very much in demand as a counselor and practical man in the political affairs of the state and nation.

But we wish more than anything else to think of him and about him as he was known upon this ground, that was his real best home, a home, the doors of which swung easily upon their hinges. The air of hospitality was evidenced on every hand. Mrs. Patterson was the gracious hostess and the appellation of "Lady Patterson" came naturally to her, while everyone spoke of him as Governor Patterson.

While the title would have been dropped from almost any other man, it stayed by him to the end, for it exactly fitted the man. For many years he was the supervisor of our town, and as long as he was a member of the Board of Supervisors, he was naturally the chairman—and so it was when he was on the School Board, the Trustees Board of the Church, of which he was a constant attendant, and any other organization with which he became associated. He was always Governor Patterson to that organization and no one questioned the choice—and where he sat there was the head of the table.

Soon after coming to Westfield he took charge of the affairs of the Holland Land Company, in Chautauqua County. At once there came piece and quietness where there had been much of strife and contention. His very personality put people into good humor, and his maternal adroitness in adjusting differences, made him every man's friend. Chautauqua County should ever hold him as one of its best benefactors. A task always seemed an easy matter to him. Of large and
powerful build, with a sunny face, that was always ready with a smile, 
with a sharp quick eye that knew no fear and no unworthy favor, 
with the general equipment which made him ready for anything, 
he turned away or walked through the most troublesome problems in 
a manner that seemed wonderful to men who did not know him. Yes, 
"Governor" fitted the man.

In the fall of 1876, the Republican Congressional Convention 
was held in Dunkirk. Governor Patterson was one of the delegates 
from Westfield, and naturally he was made Chairman of the Convention. 
The leading candidate for member of Congress from Chautauqua County 
was Hon. Walter L. Sessions. Cattaraugus County had two candidates. 
The balloting went from afternoon until 1:30 at night with very 
little change in the results, Mr. Sessions always holding his 33 votes 
and the other two something less, with a scattering vote of about 
fifteen. A consultation was held and an adjournment taken until 
morning. Meanwhile compromise candidates were mentioned and among 
them Governor Patterson was spoken of but he was not advised or 
consulted. On the following morning when there was no prospect of 
the leading candidates being nominated, Loren B. Sessions proposed 
the name of Governor Patterson. He was nominated by acclamation, 
amid the greatest enthusiasm. When it came to the acceptance, the 
Governor was for once, completely overcome. He said he could speak 
for an hour for someone else, but for himself, he could only say 
that he would endeavor to fulfill the duties of the responsible 
position, if elected. While tears were in nearly all eyes, there 
followed the wildest cheering and hand-shaking. For Governor Patterson 
had a friend in every member of the large convention. In the following 
election he carried the district by the largest majority given to 
the Republican ticket.
Although seventy-eight years of age when he took his seat in the hall of Representatives at Washington, during the following years of his term he never missed a roll call or the meeting of a committee, of which he was a member.

A large factor in Governor Patterson's individuality was his ready wit. It fairly bubbled over when there was opportunity. He could see the humorous side of every proposition, and his reminiscences were an abundant entertainment for any social company. As to anecdotes, he was a storehouse, and the majority of them were drawn from his own intercourse with people. He had the rare faculty of calling up the one best fitted to the occasion.

The old New England families and the early settlers in this part of the country were very close to him; while their quaint ways and peculiarities were an especial joy in his never-failing recollections. It was noticeable that when he began one of his stories, every face in the circle was lifted up in anticipation of the treat in store.

Governor Patterson's gallantry was always in evidence. It was of no studied, book form, according to the edict of some self constituted critic, but it was a natural instinct of his nature. It was a part of himself; he knew no other way. It was reflected in his family; this you would understand had you known that noble personage, Mrs. Hannah W. Patterson, whose memorial to her parents, the Patterson Library, is the living outgrowth of the home life maintained through so many years, while the brother George W. Patterson was the active second in this great gift to the community.

With so much said how little have I given to show you the heart-throbs of this powerful gentleman.
Was there trouble and distress upon the community? Governor Patterson led the way toward the alleviation of it. It came to be expected. Did a poor family need a kindly lift, it came to them and in many instances they knew not from whither. No one ever succeeded in prying from him what he had done. The other party had to tell the story, and this covert of giving was true of many of his church benevolences.

Was there a great day in town and public honors to be given and expressions of gratitude to be extended, it was he who could best put into words the sentiment of the community. When the war broke out in 1861 and recruiting was in order old Clinton Hall was in constant demand and always reached to the limit and that little narrow stairway was filled with a rushing throng who was it who was ever in the chair to introduce the speaker? You need not guess for always it was Governor Patterson, encouraging the recruits, commending the efforts of the government, and in a few words after saying as much as was said in the long prepared address of the advertised speaker.

While we all knew him as a helpful and loved friend he was at one with the children—all the children—and this was only to be expected as, where he was present, there was a genial atmosphere.

Now I hope you can begin to see the man who beaming face looks down upon us today, and well you may envy the very many people of his day who came in close touch to him—and knew him in his gentle grandure.