

## Remarks of Mayor Michael Tautznik – June 17, 2010

The 225<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the incorporation of Easthampton,  
Massachusetts

June 17, 1785 to June 17, 2010

Good evening and thank you for joining us to celebrate this important occasion. I am so very proud to serve as your mayor and I want to extend my sincere thanks and appreciation to Michelle and to all of the individuals who have taken a role in planning this four-day event. It's not that we commemorate every birthday like this but, at 225 years young, Easthampton has a lot to celebrate. In addition, we'll have a special treat later on, when our oldest citizen, Esther Mesh joins us to blow out the candles on our cake!

Let me begin with a slightly different birthday acknowledgement, that of Samuel Williston, born on June 17, 1795. The son of Payson Williston, the first minister to serve Easthampton, Samuel married Emily Graves of Williamsburg and together, with the influence of their families and contemporaries, they changed the way of life for every generation to come. Their influence extends to this day in this

educational institution, in the library that bears Emily's name, and in the historic ponds and mills that we are so affected by.

Of course, that is not the beginning of our story. I spent a great deal of time doing research for this evening and I want to acknowledge the generous assistance of our local Library Director, Mr. Francis DiMenno. The resources at the Emily Williston Memorial Library are quite complete when it comes to our history and our prior celebrations. Access to the rich text of countless speakers before me has been invaluable in my efforts.

The first non-native settler in what is now called Easthampton is said to have been Mr. John Webb. He is mentioned frequently in the early history of our region as a hunter, trapper, negotiator and purveyor of wine, cider and hard liquors. In December of 1664 Mr. Webb was granted a piece of land at Pascommuck, "on a rise of ground near the bank of the river, at the westernmost bend of the old bed". He built his home near the Connecticut River Ox-bow at what is now the intersection of Clapp Street and Fort Hill Road. At the time, this area was still a part of Northampton and all of the land

that make up the four “Hamptons” was owned by John Pynchon (the son of Elizur Holyoke) and his son-in-law, Samuel Chapin.

During the early days water was the preferred means of transportation and settlements took root along the Connecticut and Manhan Rivers and near the larger tributaries to the Manhan River. Of even more importance were those locations where water power could be harnessed, such as Basset’s Brook near West Street, the falls just downstream along the Manhan River and at Broad Brook, just above its junction with the Manhan. We can still see the economic connection of the great watersheds here and all over New England. Our major north/south highways follow the Connecticut River and many of our primary roads follow the varied waterways that the first settlers used. In 1785, with no east/west river to follow, “it was a full week’s journey by man and horse to Boston, over a path marked by nicks and cuts in the trees”. By contrast, the journey on horseback along the Connecticut River from New Haven to Easthampton, the trail ridden by Payson Williston on his way to settle here in 1789, is said to have taken less than three days.

With the exception of a few houses grouped around the three or four small water powered mills associated with the Manhan River, this part of Northampton (and the southern part of Easthampton that was once Southampton) was sporadically populated by farmers and hunters. In remarks published more than 200 years after John Webb built his log home local resident and jurist Judge William G. Bassett is quoted as saying at our Centennial celebration that “in 1664 this place was a wilderness, almost unbroken except by the meadows near the rivers, by the grassy glades of the forest, and by corn patches”.

The municipal corporation known as Easthampton was created through an act of the state legislature on June 17, 1785. This legislation, known as Chapter 6 of the Acts of 1785 states in part, that “a number of inhabitants of the towns of Northampton and Southampton have petitioned the General Court to be incorporated into a separate district known by the name of Easthampton”. At the time, becoming a town required residence of 150 men of voting age. Made up of only 65 families from Northampton and 15 families from Southampton, our new community was too small to qualify. While

our first meeting house was built in 1785 and the first minister began his service in 1789, it took another 24 years to achieve a population sufficient for representation to the General Court and, on June 16, 1809, our district of Easthampton was officially designated a town. It would be another 187 years before we voted to become a city.

The distinction between a town and a district was no small matter to some and when the town decided to celebrate its Centennial in 1885, rather than waiting until 1909, a local businessman named David Hill filed suit in Hampshire District Court seeking to prevent funding for the celebration. Judge Bassett argued successfully for the town and Mr. Hill's petition was denied by the court in the spring of 1886.

By this time much had changed. Having started out as the smallest populated town in the region, Easthampton was now becoming a leader in the textile industry. From button making to vulcanized rubber and elastic webbing, industries driven by water power from Broad Brook and the Manhan River were changing the very fabric of the community. No longer were we populated by descendants of the

early settlers, farming the land, trapping and hunting in the forests, now we were a magnet for immigrant populations from Europe seeking to work in our vast mill complexes. The National Button Company, the Nashawannuck Manufacturing Company, the West Boylston Manufacturing Company, the Glendale Elastic Fabric Company and the Easthampton Rubber Thread Company are a few of the industries noted in our early history. Later there would be the Hampton Company, the National Felt Company, the United Elastic Corporation, the Manhan Wallpaper Company, Lesnow Manufacturing Company, the Nickel Cadmium Battery Corporation, Stanley Home Products, Hampden Specialty Products, and the American Thread Company, and the list continues with dozens more.

Water power gave way to steam and eventually electricity, heavy transportation moved from boat and barge to rail and truck. Homes were built and neighborhoods created for our expanding population, schools were consolidated and new school buildings were built. Churches expanded and new congregations flourished. As Judge Bassett stated in his remarks to the community more than 100 years

ago, “This is a town of equality – she has had, among her neighbors, the standing of a brilliant municipality”.

Today we still make things here. The National Felt Company is now called National Nonwoven and instead of making things from thread we also use wood, glass, plastic, adhesives, cement and metal. Many of the buildings that were once part of our manufacturing heritage now serve as home to a new group of entrepreneurs. These citizens of today write software, invent technology and create products or offer services that enhance our lives.

I have had the great fortune of living here all of my life. I was raised on Hendrick Street, where my wife and I still reside, and I have attended to this community for all of my adult life. My childhood memories are of a prosperous economy with many industries and a busy downtown. I recall the freight trains that ran from Westfield and into Northampton. I attended one of the three catholic elementary schools that were located here and I graduated from Easthampton High School. I recall the 175<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebration as a child riding on one of the many floats my father would build, often with his friend Jack Dorman (from the Mt. Tom District, near

the end of East Street). My brothers and he would be riding parade horses or driving a team and wagon, my mom and sister working on props and costumes, riding or driving one of the floats and always volunteering for the greater good. I also recall our 200<sup>th</sup> Anniversary with fond memories of friends and family, building a bicentennial float with fellow members of the Pascommuck Conservation Trust and attending many of the celebratory events that lead up to the big parade.

As I was looking through the printed publications from these two more recent celebrations of our founding I was struck by the words of a man that I would later come to know and respect. His name was Fletcher Smith Jr.

I remember him as a member of the Board of Selectmen in the early years of my service to the community but these words were written in 1960 when he was our State Representative and I was just a child. His statement follows;

“We who are fortunate in having our homes here are grateful to those of the past who laid the foundations of Easthampton, as a town to live in, to work in, and to grow in. We rejoice in the

cooperation of our residents today, in the continuation of our progress, and we are pleased to note in our younger people those qualities that will maintain the Easthampton of the future as a strong and prosperous community.”

His words ring true today as much as they did 50 years ago. Our success as a community rests on the foundation of those who have come before us and our future depends on the citizens of today. Easthampton is a unique community, different than many – accepting of those who come here in search of a better place to live and nourishing to those who seek to find that place called home.

We are who we aspire to be and our city is blessed with residents and business people who seek to foster the greater good. Our Governor calls it a “generational responsibility”, the desire to do for others what was done by others for you.

While times have certainly changed, and the challenges we face today are as great as any we have seen before, the foundation of Easthampton is strong, its structure resilient, its finish bright and ever shining. If you have lived here before you want to return someday, if you know someone who lives here now you want to

come and visit, if you're looking to settle down somewhere you want to try it here.

As we celebrate Easthampton's 225<sup>th</sup> Anniversary let us remember what was and vow to work for what can be. The industrial giants of latter years remain mostly a memory but the buildings that fostered their success now bring us new beginnings. The railroad that no longer runs here has provided a new transportation link to our neighbors and the great technological advances of the past 25 years create new opportunities, measured in bits and bytes that are yet to be explored. The vitality of our people has been the hallmark of our past and, from my vantage point, it remains the strength that sets us apart in the future.

Welcome once again to our opening ceremony and thank you for coming to celebrate with us tonight. Please join us for the weekend of planned festivities!

And now please relax as you enjoy a video presentation entitled Easthampton; A Historical Journey, created by 225<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Committee member Ken Peters.