

Political issues prevalent in Fall River's beginnings

Herald News Staff

FALL RIVER — It was 24 years after the Freeman's Purchase that Freetown was incorporated; that was 88 years before the line was extended south to the "buttonwood tree" and 144 years until the town of Fallriver was separated from Freetown.

Fall River became a town in 1803, and eventually became a city in 1854.

In 1802, it was enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives that the southerly part of Freetown in Bristol County as described in the following bounds, "that the inhabitants thereof, be and they are hereby incorporated into a separate town by the name of Fallriver...

"And the said town of Fallriver is hereby vested with all the powers and privileges, rights and immunities to which other towns are entitled by the constitution and laws of the Commonwealth."

Back then, it was built into law that a town take care of its poor.

In Section 3 of Chapter 89 of the Acts of 1802, it states: "Be it further enacted, that the said town of Fallriver shall take upon itself and support one-half of all the poor now entirely chareable to said town of Freetown and shall also bear and pay one-half of the expense of supporting such poor persons as may be sent back upon said town of Freetown from other towns who removed from said town of Freetown prior to the passing of this act."

The manner of voting on town business was outlined in Section 5 of the same chapter.

"Be it further enacted that Charles Durfee, Esq. be and he hereby is authorized to issue his warrant, directed to some suitable inhabitant of the said town of Fallriver, requiring him to notify and warrant the inhabitants of the said town, qualified by law to vote in town affairs, to meet at such time and place as shall be expressed in the said warrant to choose all such officers as other towns within this Commonwealth are required by

law to choose in the months of March or April only, and the officers so chosen shall be qualified as other town officers are."

That was approved on Feb. 26, 1803.

The meeting was duly called by Charles Durfee for April 4, 1803, and was held at the home of widow Louisa Borden. Here, in Town Meeting the few citizens qualified to vote constituted the legislative branch and proceeded to choose three selectmen as the chief executives, according to the "Phillips History of Fall River."

Thomas Borden, Benjamin Durfee and Robert Miller were the first to be so honored. Seemingly, each section of the town, with the exception of "the region east of the pond," was represented on the board.

The first general school committee was not elected until 1826. It is interesting to note, Phillips stated, that during the first 10 years, 19 of the town's voters were given an opportunity to serve on the board of selectmen.

Town life

Many familiar Fall River names are recorded among the first officers elected at the first Town Meeting. Names like Borden, Davol, Winslow, Snell, Durfee, Blossom, Brightman, Read and Valentine were among the surveyors of highways, surveyors of lumber, tithingmen, hog reeves and pound-keepers.

For many years, it was requisite to properly enclose property to protect lawns and gardens and to keep domestic animals from going astray.

Rock was always available and many substantial walls made of cemented roughly cut stones were erected. Foundries were nearby and cast iron fences, some of elaborate design, were used to enclose building lots and family burial grounds. At the same time that iron fences were in style, public buildings and houses were made ornate by the use of cast-iron filigree work.

The family stable was never complete without its weather-vane. Even if neighbors built their barns alongside each other, each must support its vane.

Troy

When Fallriver was incorpo-

rated, there were about 1,000 inhabitants, and less than a tenth of those lived near the "Four Corners."

It was not unusual that the majority of the voters were dissatisfied when their town was given the same name as the rather insignificant little village near the falls of the Quequechan River. Consequently, in a little more than a year, the name was changed to Troy.

By 1804, the trying times of the reconstruction period had passed. Conditions were approaching normalcy when the town of Troy came into existence. The chief occupations of the inhabitants of Mount Hope Bay and Taunton Valley settlements were farming and the building of small ships, frequently privately owned, to transport farm and forest products.

Form North Tiverton, along the shore to Steep Brook, there were few spots which were not directly exposed to the prevailing winds, so that, for the most part, shipbuilding and shipping were carried on by the localities upstream.

Slade's Ferry was the connection with the towns on the other side of the water way. The Post Road from Boston to Newport ran through the town. Wilson and Yellow Hill roads were the direct arteries from the hinterland to the east.

More changes

On Feb. 12, 1834, the Senate and House of Representatives voted to change the town's name from Troy to Fall River.

The introduction and continued growth in the manufacturing and finishing of textiles and, to a considerable extent, the organization of the "Iron Works" in 1821 gave impetus to the town's growth and changed the mode of life for many of its inhabitants.

The dominant center of the town shifted from Steep Brook to the village and the name Fallriver was probably better known to outside business and financial interests than was the name Troy. The petition of the voters of the town to the General Court was granted and the original name was restored with a change in orthography.