

Forward

To begin with, all history is local. If we accept history as the record of all that man has thought and said and done, we recognize that most historical events began in a small area and expanded until larger areas, and countries, and continents were involved.

The real record of history began when people lived closely together and formed communities. Much of what we know of history is available because towns kept accounts of activities and records that we may now read and interpret and find the consensus that makes history. The accounts provided by these microcosms help to give us a better picture of the whole. A few men and women dominate the stage of history, but the masses in small towns and villages live out their lives growing crops, caring for animals, weaving cloth, making shoes, in short, keeping the country and the world moving and growing.

In New England, especially, we are grateful that our earlier settlers realized the importance of records and record-keeping and provided us with the whole picture that we have needed to understand our past. About 150 years or so ago, particularly in Massachusetts, local historians and anti- quarians began writing accounts of town histories while many of the founders or early descendants were still alive.

In recent years, many of these histories have been revised and new editions have appeared. Many are excellent sources and well-written, but unfortunately devote the bulk of their attention to the early years of the town. This book is a happy exception to that pattern. Cities and towns in Massachusetts have witnessed more change since World War I than they did 'in the first two or more centuries of their existence. The Avon of today, a little more than a century after its separation from Stoughton, is an outstanding example of the great cultural, ethnic, social, and economic changes that are too often neglected in contemporary town histories. Dr. Hanna is to be congratulated for

recognizing this fact and enriching this work.

The Centennial Committee has chosen Avon's historian carefully and well. He is recognized as an outstanding local historian, well-established in his field, a successful writer who has produced a number of excellent articles and lectures that have won unusual acclaim. I have known him for twenty-five years as an unusual and creative student in history, a successful teacher on the high school and college levels, and a meticulous researcher, who shows outstanding judgment, has a strong sense of history, and a proper conception of the role of the local historian. In the field of local history, he is well-known as Secretary of the Old Colony Historical Society and the Lincoln Group of Boston. He has been called upon to lecture on a number of occasions to both groups. His book Abraham Amnna t.ho Yankees about IJncoln'a viait to Massachusetts in 1848, has been established as the standard work in that period of Lincoln's life. It is an unusual example of the pragmatic use of local history, for he followed Lincoln's footsteps visiting every town in which Lincoln spoke and checking newspapers, reminiscences, and diaries of the period. The town of Avon is fortunate to have obtained the services of such a distinguished scholar.

Your town history will not need to be written again for many years, but you should be able to retell the story often, thanks to Dr. William F. Hanna, and he has proved that the story is well worth the telling. The town of Avon and Dr. Hanna well deserve the congratulations of the historical profession and of the generations to come.

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