

Speech of

**Judge Ellsworth B. Foote**

corner stone laying of

**Atwater Memorial Library**

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Sunday, October 5, 1942, 3 p.m.

North Branford, Connecticut

History records that in 1760 the proprietors of the common and undivided lands of the Town of Branford surveyed and laid out to Samuel Baker of Branford, a piece of land described as being in the North Parish near the meeting house, part of which had thertofore been used by the inhabitants of the parish as a place of parade and other public exercises and uses. Mr. Baker enclosed the property and one of the residents, Nathan Palmer, felt that such action had been very detrimental to the inhabitants of the parish and of the Town in general, and purchased it from Baker and it having come into possession of Nathan Palmer, he "induced by the public advantage and benefit of the Town in deneral and the inhabitants of the second parish in particular, and believing that said land should forever remain open and unenclosed as a place of parade for the use of the inhabitants of the Town as it was used and improved before being surveyed and enclosed, for the sum of 9 pounds received from Timothy Barker of Branford, granted to him and to the rest of the inhabitants of the Town, and their successors forever, the land on which we now stand, to use and improve for the public convenience and advantage as a place of parade and public exercises." This spot was later used as a training camp for the local residents who a few years later, answered the call and went to fight in the War of the Revolution. Nathan Palmer in his deed of conveyance to the inhabitants of March 11, 1765, failed to provide that if this land was no longer used as a training camp, that it should revert to his heirs or any other person. Therefore, by judicial decree of the Superior Court for New Haven County, on June 1, 1936, the title of the land on which we now stand, was decreed to be in the Town of North Branford absolutely.

Little did Nathan Palmer, Sam Baker, Timothy Barker, or any of the inhabitants of this Town in those early days, realize that some one hundred and seventy years hence, this country would have grown to be the richest and greatest in all the globe and allied with the mother country in a war involving the entire world, calling not for a small training camp as on which we now stand, but for the construction of some 460 camps scattered throughout the nation, all of varying strength, some of them like Fort Bragg at North Carolina housing 53,000 men.

So much for the public spirited men who through their foresight, saw to it that this land remained dedicated to public use, which in the days of the Revolution, had been used by Reverend Eels and the members of his church as well as the community, as a place of training so that they might be equipped to go forth to answer the call of General Washington.

Some few years after the events referred to concerning this land, an individual settled in this community, who was destined to play an important part in the history of our Town. I refer to Reverend Charles S. Atwater, born in New Haven in 1786. In March, 1809, he was ordained pastor of yonder Congregational Church by President Dwight of Yale at a very impressive ceremony. He served continuously from 1809 until his death on February 16, 1825, which was untimely, he being only in his 39th year.

That portion of a history of New Haven County devoted to the early history of this Town, particularly as compiled by Bertha Russell Holabird, mother of our First Selectman, Douglas B. Holabird, tells us that "Reverend Atwater was acceptable and useful and his memory is still cherished. He was the third pastor of this Church whose united labors filled a century and died in the course of duty and were laid to rest a few feet east of the Old meeting house. The stones were removed and placed in the cemetery across the street in 1886."

Inscribed on Reverend Atwater's tombstone which now stands in yonder cemetery are these words:

"Reverend Charles Atwater was born in the city of New Haven, August 18, 1786, ordained pastor of the Congregational Church and Society in this place March 1, 1809, and died in that connection February 21, 1825. As a husband and father he was affectionate and attentive, a man of faith and of prayer, a diligent and faithful pastor."

"They that be wise, shall shine as the brightness of the firmament, and they that turn many to righteousness, as the stars forever and ever."

Three sons were born to Reverend Atwater, viz: George Atwater, Dr. David F. Atwater of Springfield and James Atwater of Brooklyn, all of whom became prominent and useful men. James was in business in New York City and amassed a considerable fortune. He executed a last will and testament on August 19, 1895, and died in November, 1911, and when his will was admitted to probate in New York, among its 40 articles which disposed of his estate, there was an Article No. 20, which it is very appropriate to read at this time:

"I give to my brother, David F. Atwater the sum of ten thousand dollars absolutely, requesting but not commanding or directing him to use the same as he may deem advisable, for the benefit of the Town of North Branford in the State of Connecticut as a memorial to my father, who was formerly settled in that Town, in case said memorial shall not have been previously erected by me."

This fund passed into the possession of James Atwater's brother, David F. Atwater, father of Charles B. Atwater now of Springfield, Massachusetts. David died in 1916 before he had erected the memorial. His son Charles was Executor of his father's estate and the sum that had been bequeathed to his

father by his uncle for this purpose passed into the legal possession of Charles B. Atwater in the year 1917. Since that time this fund has been kept intact by Mr. Charles B. Atwater and has been wisely and judiciously invested by him. On several occasions during the past twenty-five years the question of a suitable memorial has been given consideration by Mr. Atwater and he has made trips to this Town to ascertain the sentiment of the people in regard thereto. For the past six years I have been corresponding with and had personal interviews with Mr. Atwater as to the type of memorial that should be erected, whether Town Hall, Fire House, Library, etc. Mr. Atwater has felt up to now that the time was not right to proceed as he wished the fund to grow so that it might not only permit the erection of a suitable memorial but the establishment of an endowment fund for its maintenance. The time has now arrived. The delay has been beneficial, for it now permits the erection of this building at a cost of approximately \$25,000.00 and also the setting aside of a substantial fund for endowment purposes.

As you well know, Mr. Charles B. Atwater has decided upon a Library as being the most suitable Memorial. He agreed with that great philanthropist Andrew Carnegie who built and gave to the people 2,000 libraries in the United States; 660 in Great Britain; 156 in Canada; and 46 elsewhere, that the giving of money for charity or for relief of a material distress was temporary in nature only, and that the real gift to a people meant an institution for their mental and spiritual culture which raises countries and people out of the lower places of social evil. He also believed that every gift of his to a community was conditioned on the latter supporting it. An inscription on the face of the Carnegie Library at 5th Avenue and 42nd Street, New York City, demonstrates the value of a Library; when it says:

"On the diffusion of education among the people rests the  
preservation and perpetuation of our free institutions."

The records disclose that there are over 200 public libraries in the State and that hardly any Town is without one. This end of the Town for many years has been without any library facilities whatever except as it may have been obtained by going to Branford or to the small library at Northford. In passing it should be noted that in 1889 there was established a small public library controlled by the North Branford Library Association of which the Reverend Franklin Countryman was called General Manager. It was run in conjunction with the post office and maintained at the same point yonder store, at which Ralph Beers, father of Town Clerk R. Earle Beers, was Postmaster from 1882 to 1890. Upon the discontinuance of the post office and substitution of rural free delivery the public library apparently disappeared with it.

Now as to this memorial itself: it will be 25 x 40 feet. In the basement a lecture hall 16 x 26 feet directly accessible from the exterior, amply lighted by windows from three sides. Boiler room, storage room and toilet facilities on this level.

On the first floor a reading room, provision for books being made by ample shelving with initial capacity of 5,300 volumes on one floor alone.

On the second floor there will be a space approximately 15 x 38 feet devoted to a court room space for Town safes and records, and desk room at least for certain Town officials.

All floors will be oak, roof of slate, faced with Colonial Connecticut Brick. Building will be furnished complete including walks, drive, grading and shrubbery.

We are most fortunate in having the Paterson Construction Company as the contractors. We are even more fortunate in having as the architect and supervisor of construction, William Thomas Towner, of Middletown, one of the country's greatest architects, who has supervised the construction of several Carnegie endowed libraries. We are indebted to him for making the final arrangements with Mr. Charles B. Atwater and for his keen personal interest in this project.

It was apparently not obligatory under the terms of the will of James C. Atwater that his Brother David or his Nephew Charles should erect this memorial or any other, as the will "Requested," but did not "Command". However, no member of the Atwater family is the type who will stand upon a technicality, and a request from a departed relative is equivalent to a command. Hence this fitting memorial erected on what the founding fathers had decreed should be used as a training camp for soldiers. May God speed the time when all presently used training camps throughout the nation may be converted from instruments for war prosecution into agencies of peace having for their object the dissemination of knowledge, creation of brotherly love, a spirit of constructive effort and good will among fellowmen.

In closing it should be noted that while this memorial finds its source through a former minister of yonder Congregational Church, yet as provided in the will which created it, it is for the benefit of the Town of North Branford. It is a MEMORIAL for the benefit of all its people regardless of race, color or creed. It will be a truly AMERICAN institution as its donor has directed that it should be.

We regret exceedingly that Mr. Charles B. Atwater cannot be with us today being ill at his residence in Springfield. However as the representative of the people of the Town of North Branford, and its officials, I request his secretary, Miss Anna Willson, who is present today to convey to Mr. Atwater that our gratefulness cannot be measured by words; that as his grandfather, Reverend Charles Atwater walked the streets of this Town over a century ago spreading good cheer, sunshine and aided in its mental and spiritual culture, so will this memorial bring to us, our children and our children's children that same good cheer, sunshine and mental and spiritual culture. Lastly, that the generosity and thoughtfulness of the Atwater family in giving to the inhabitants of the Town this Memorial will radiate and shine forth from this spot like a beacon light across the horizon, and may it endure "Even as the stars, forever and ever."