

## CHAPTER XLVII

### THE AMES FAMILY

JUST as Lancaster has become the manor seat of the Nathaniel Thayers, so North Easton, Massachusetts, is inextricably bound up with the Ames family. Yet the most distinguished Ames monument stands on the highest point of the overland route of the Union Pacific Railroad, more than eight thousand feet above the level of the sea, and is a memorial erected in 1875 to the memory of the brothers, Oakes and Oliver Ames, because they had much to do with the development of this railroad.

The ancestral home of the Ames family was at Bruton, in the shire of Somerset, England, and it was from this town that William,<sup>1</sup> the first Ames in Massachusetts' annals, removed to the settlement at Braintree some fifteen years after the New England fathers first set foot on Plymouth Rock. Oakes and Oliver Ames traced descent in direct line through five generations to William's only son, John. Their grandfather, also named John, was a blacksmith and a gunsmith of West Bridgewater who, about 1773, added the manufacture of shovels to his business. He had a son, Oliver, who was born at West Bridgewater, April 11, 1779, and who, though he attended the district schools, received the most

<sup>1</sup> Fisher Ames (April 9, 1758-July 4, 1808), statesman and publicist, was also a descendant of this William. Fisher Ames' father was Nathaniel Ames, innkeeper, physician and astronomer, but more especially remembered as the publisher for half a century of what became the standard New England almanac. The Ames brothers long associated with Edmund Dwight in the manufacture at Chicopee Falls of swords, brass cannon, cotton machinery, etc. were apparently *not* descendants of William Ames.

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important part of his education in his father's blacksmith shop. In April, 1803, he married Susannah Angier, daughter of Oakes Angier, a prominent attorney of Bridgewater, and three years later formed a partnership with the Plymouth firm of Russell, Davis and Company, still retaining, however, his relation to the shovel business at Easton. In 1828, and again for a year in 1833, he represented Easton in the lower house of Massachusetts, going to the State Senate in 1845. He died September 11, 1863, leaving eight children, of whom Oakes, the oldest, was born at North Easton, January 10, 1804.

Oakes Ames, like his father, grew up with more time spent in farm and factory work than at school. But the discovery of gold in California and Australia and the demand incidental to railroad building developed a tremendous demand for Ames shovels, and the family business at North Easton so prospered in his time that all his sons received a good education and he himself was free, at fifty-six, to give himself to public life. The year now was 1860, a crucial time in the country's history. Having been elected councillor for the Bristol District, Oakes Ames was able to render service of great value to Governor Andrew, "War Governor of Massachusetts." Growing out of this came his election to the Thirty-Eighth Congress. Four times in succession he was sent back to Washington, his business experience and sound judgment proving of great value there. President Lincoln was his warm friend and honored him with his confidence.

While he was a member of the Committee on Railroads in Congress, Oakes Ames' attention was first called to the project for a transcontinental thoroughfare. Thenceforward he threw himself and all that he had into the development of the Union Pacific.<sup>1</sup> This stupendous task made

<sup>1</sup> For an interesting account of the struggle to put this railroad through, see "Chronicles of the Builders of the Commonwealth", by Hubert Howe Bancroft, Vol. 5, pp 584-643.

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great inroads on his health and strength and he was stricken with paralysis and died of pneumonia, only a few weeks after the adjournment of Congress, at the end of his ten years' service. He had married (November 29, 1827) Evelyn O. Gilmore of Easton, by whom he had five children, among them Oakes Angier Ames who, July 19, 1855, made Catherine, the daughter of Judge Hobart of East Bridgewater, his wife, became president of the shovel works, and died at North Easton, September 19, 1899. Oakes Angier Ames had two sons, Winthrop Ames, the theatrical producer, and Hobart Ames, who carries on the family tradition by making his home in North Easton and interesting himself in the continuing success of the Ames manufacturing plants.

Oliver Ames, whose name is linked with that of his older brother, Oakes, in the development of the Union Pacific (he was president of the road during the most critical period of its history), was born at Plymouth, Massachusetts, November 5, 1807. His family removed to Easton when he was six, and he also received his chief education as a lad in his father's shovel works where he soon became an expert and thorough workman. Just before reaching his majority he met with an accident which for a time made manual occupation impossible; and it was then that he decided to enter the academy at North Andover where two years of cultural training gave him that taste for intellectual pursuits which lasted throughout his life. The profession he chose was that of the law, but after spending some time in the office of William Baylies of West Bridgewater he joined his father's firm, now first known as Oliver Ames and Sons. He was twice elected to the Massachusetts Senate, first by the Legislature in 1852, and again in 1857 by the vote of the people. During the Civil War period he rendered sorely needed financial aid to the Union besides helping vitally, just as his brother had done, by his untiring devotion to railroad development. He died March 2, 1877. He mar-

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ried Sarah Lothrop<sup>1</sup> in June, 1833, and Frederick Lothrop Ames, who came to be known as one of the largest capitalists in the country, was his only son.

Lothrop Ames, as he was usually called, was born in North Easton, Massachusetts, June 8, 1835, prepared for college at Exeter, entered Harvard at fifteen and graduated with the class of 1854. Though he desired to study law he entered the family firm and, advancing rapidly in the organization, was made treasurer of the Oliver Ames and Sons corporation, a post which he held until his death, September 13, 1893. Early in his business career he too became interested in the development of transcontinental railroads and soon found himself one of the principal owners and directors of the Union Pacific Company as well as intimately concerned with the management of a number of other very important railroads and related companies. At the time of his death he was officially connected with some seventy-five railroads and was considered to be one of the best informed men of the country on all matters pertaining to this important industry.<sup>2</sup> He was likewise intimately associated with a large number of important charities; and he was a particularly enthusiastic member of the Massachusetts Horticultural Society. His collection of orchids in North Easton was the most complete in the country and probably was unsurpassed in the world. Here might be seen eight thousand plants and seventeen hundred varieties of these rare exotics, some of which he had himself propagated. One of the Fellows of Harvard University, he became a liberal benefactor of the Botanical Garden and of the Harvard Arboretum. Always a devoted Unitarian, he was particularly interested in the attractive church of that denomination which had been erected in North Easton by

<sup>1</sup> The daughter of Honorable Howard Lothrop of Easton, and the sister of Honorable George Van Ness Lothrop, United States minister to Russia during the first administration of President Cleveland.

<sup>2</sup> Leverett Saltonstall in the Publications of the Colonial Society of Massachusetts, Vol. I, p. 260.

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his father; while in Boston he was an interested attendant at the First Church. A friend of Richardson, the architect, he was also one of that gifted man's most generous patrons. Thus it is that the public library in North Easton was designed by Richardson whose influence is likewise discernible in the railroad station erected at North Easton by Mr. Ames at his own expense. A true lover and an excellent judge of the fine arts he collected tapestries, jades, and crystals, as well as paintings. Two Rembrandt portraits of his, bearing the date of 1632, were presented to the Boston Museum of Fine Arts by Mrs. Ames.<sup>1</sup>

Though interested in politics and a staunch Republican, Mr. Ames had no desire to hold public office and it was against his strong remonstrance that he was elected to the Senate of Massachusetts in 1872. He rendered valuable service here, however, particularly on the committees of Manufacture and Agriculture. Five of his six children survived him: Helen Angier Ames, who married Robert C. Hooper of Boston; Mary Shreve Ames, who married Congressman Louis A. Frothingham; Lothrop Ames, John Stanley Ames and Oliver, who was born in North Easton, October 21, 1864. The last named graduated from Harvard in 1886, and contributed not only to the further development of the family business and the railroads in which his father had been interested, but was likewise active in building up the General Electric Company. Like his father, he was a trustee of a number of important charities and a benefactor of his Alma Mater and of North Easton. He was married in 1891 to Elise A. West of Boston; he was survived at his death (June 17, 1929) by his wife, by a son, Richard Ames, and by two daughters, Mrs. William Amory Parker and Mrs. Henry B. Cabot, Jr. Another son, Lieutenant Oliver Ames, Jr., was killed in action in France, July 28, 1918, during the Great War. In addition to his

<sup>1</sup> She was Rebecca Caroline Blair, only child of James Blair of St. Louis, Missouri; they were married June 7, 1860.

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place in North Easton, Mr. Ames had a Boston home at number 15 Commonwealth Avenue, and a summer home on the water front of Prides Crossing.

The Oliver Ames who became most prominent in Massachusetts politics was the second son of the Oakes Ames to whom reference has been made as a friend of Lincoln. This Oliver was born at North Easton, February 4, 1831, and received his early education at the schools of his native town and in the academies of North Easton, North Attleboro and Leicester. History was his favorite study and after he had served for an interlude in the workshop where his father and his grandfather had labored before him, he had a year at Brown University under the special tutelage of President Wayland. Thus he had acquired a good deal of political economy as well as history, geology and moral philosophy by the time he returned to the shovel works at North Easton. Here he not only labored at the bench from seven in the morning until six at night, but devoted himself in the evenings to a study of the details of the business and to the invention of new machinery. Soon he advanced to the post of traveling agent for the firm and in that capacity came to know well the various States of the Union.

Upon the death of his grandfather, in 1863, he was admitted to the firm of Oliver Ames and Sons, the other members of which were his father and uncle, his elder brother, Oakes Angier Ames, and his cousin, Frederick Lothrop Ames. When his father died in 1873 he, with his brother Oakes, was appointed executor of the estate which, though valued at six million, was encumbered with obligations and needed the best business ability of the brothers if it were to be saved for the family. The administration of the Ames property naturally brought with it an intimate knowledge of the railroad business and so fitted Oliver Ames to be of great service when he entered political life in Massachusetts, as he did in 1880 by being elected State senator from the Bristol District. For four times in succession (beginning with 1882) he was

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elected lieutenant governor of Massachusetts and in 1886 succeeded to the higher office, registering a plurality of more than eight thousand votes. The following year he was elected by a plurality of seventeen thousand votes and in 1888 the people chose him for a third time as their chief executive, giving him twenty-eight thousand votes plurality. It was during his administration that the first State House extension was made and Mt. Vernon Street bridged to provide for the erection of substantial additional quarters in the rear of the original Bulfinch building. Though renomination was urged upon him, in 1889, Governor Ames declined to serve again as chief executive. Nor would he consent to being considered a candidate for Congress, quietly resuming his place as a private citizen. He was singularly happy in his home life. In connection with his marriage (March 14, 1860) to Anna Coffin Ray,<sup>1</sup> adopted daughter of William Hadwen of Nantucket, there is recorded a story with a highly characteristic Nantucket flavor. The scion of the world famous manufacturing house had gone down to the island to be married and was accosted on the street by a native who asked him, without knowing who he was, if he had come for the wedding. "Whose wedding?" he inquired.

"Why, Anna Ray's. She's a Coffin, you know; but he is nothing but an off-islander."

<sup>1</sup> The children of this union were William Hadwen Ames, Evelyn Ames, Anna Lee Ames, Susan Ames, Lilian Ames and Oakes Ames, the distinguished botanist.