

Upon opening the time capsule, this letter from Edward F. Dickinson summed up the intent of those who chose to capture time in 1923, as well as look to the future. I included photos of just a few of the artifacts that lay in the "Copper box" at the end of the letter. We have a display case filled with items for you to see.

Billerica MA October 27th, 1923, 2:00 PM

Upon this bright October afternoon (Saturday), we gather here in the Historical rooms at the Bennett Public Library, members of the Society, citizens, and friends of Billerica; to give greeting to you of another generation - and to enclose within a substantial chest, various mementoes touching the past and present life of the Town, that we trust will have value to you, citizens of the Billerica, to be – a hundred years hence!

As our own thoughts have often turned backward with historical interest, we have found, from scarcity of material, a difficulty in knowing and picturing the earlier town and times. Billerica of the past has left its memorials of the larger sort; but the finer painting of its life and progress has not been made fully, for us.

That you, citizens of the town in coming time, and descendants of those now making its life, may have, in some degree, a fuller knowledge of antecedent Billerica, we fill this chest today with material that will give you a story of our town and our period, - one that will grow in value with the years.

Some minor touches of realism may help you to visualize our community life of 1923.

The electric car has just left on its hour's trip to Arlington Heights and Boston, via Lexington. In this time, it will meet perhaps 200 automobiles (unknown 20 years ago) and but half a dozen horse teams. An airplane or two may pass overhead! Electric lines to Woburn and to Wilmington have been discontinued in recent years. All our main highways are hard and smooth, being built of macadam or cement. Most autos of the thousands that pass through our town daily are of the cheaper sort, called Fords. At this date, their maker, Henry Ford, has not been elected president, though said to be an aspirant. Upon the Branch of the Boston & Maine railroad that runs through the Center, some ten trains run daily. This is half the number needed for public travel before the general use of trolley cars and autos. All crossings on our Branch are at grade. Such dangerous places will probably be unknown to you in 2023; and we will trust that control of auto traffic (if all travel is not then by air) will have eliminated the greater number of fatalities now experienced. In Massachusetts, these now number fifty per one hundred thousand cars yearly - as I read today – fifteen thousand in the entire country.

Billerica has mostly very comfortable homes. Gas is not in use, but electricity is common for lighting and ironing; and in many places it is employed for cooking, sweeping, washing, and in radiators for heating small spaces. Most houses in both villages have open grounds about them, used for gardens and lawns; flower beds and shrubbery help to make them tasteful and attractive. The Talbot Mills Co. has a plan of prizes for the best gardens, shrubbery, etc. In this connection, it must be said, the Tal-

bot Mills Co., among its many claims to appreciate its enterprise and good management, is publicly credited with having homes for its employees that are among the best in the country. At the Telephone Exchange in the Center, connection is made (at this date) with 488 phones, with constant service day and night. Town water (now generally taken) was introduced in 1898. Sewerage System is in operation only in the North Village yet.

Tax Rate this year - \$31.00 per \$1000.00!

About 1000 pupils in Billerica schools! There are 174 students in the High School. The new Howe High School was built in 1916, and cost over \$90,000. A new school at Pinehurst opened this year. There is general transportation for pupils to and from the Central Schools by cars and auto busses! Appropriation for schools this year \$75,000. Thirty-five years ago, it was \$3000.

The population of Billerica in 1920 was 3646.

Regular meetings in the Baptist Church here were suspended last month. The other churches at the center, - the Unitarian and Congregational, and the Baptist, Catholic and Episcopal at North Billerica, are all prosperous, though our time is called one of waning church attendance.

North Billerica is continuing its long record of success in its manufacturing interests. The Talbot Mills and the North Billerica Company give employment to hundreds and so mainly support the homes and activities of our smart North village. The Boston and Maine railroad shops were established a few years ago, half a mile south of the North Billerica Depot, and employ some 1200 men. These, however, mostly have homes in Lowell and other places, though a plan has lately been made for a housing development that will give them homes and citizenship here.

There are about fifty large farms in town, and as many of less size. These grow vegetables and fruit and send them to Boston and Lowell markets - for the past few years using auto trucks for delivery. As gardening in the Arlington district loses out to home building there, the large market gardens may move this way, but it is our prediction that you of 2023 will see the territory of Billerica covered mostly with home-sites, with generous garden surroundings - the most desirable development possible, both socially and civically.

Hailstorms in August and September hurt many of our farm crops this season, and high labor costs and low prices in the market for our produce have united to make this a bad financial year for us farmers. We will trust that you by 2023 will have found a solution for these problems now vexing us, the question of labor and markets, if not control of hail. Two years ago, December 1st, the great ice storm visited us. Our common was covered with debris from its beautiful trees so that many cords of wood came from its clearing up. Our own historic elms, in front of our home on Cummings Street south of the common, the Parker, Richardson, Dickinson house - these trees that in their 150 years

had spread to have their branches just meet - after the storm damage their nearest limbs were 15 feet apart.

With recently motorized Fire Equipment, losses by fire (except in wooded sections) are small! The two libraries, that of the Talbot Mills in the North Village and the Bennett Public Library in the Center (in which this meeting is held) serve us well for reading matter, both in books and periodicals.

Enough, perhaps, has been said in a descriptive way of the Billerica of today. May we now turn more to sentiment! - as this has been the motive leading in our enterprise of connecting our era with yours, a century hence. John Burroughs in his inspiring essay, "The Summit of the Years", has said:

"I am in love with this world; by my constitution I have nestled lovingly in it. It has been my home. It has been my point of outlook into the universe. I have not bruised myself against it, nor tried to use it ignobly. I have tilled its soil, I have gathered its harvests, I have waited upon its seasons, and always have I reaped what I have sown. While I delved, I did not lose sight of the sky overhead. While I gathered its bread and meat for my body, I did not neglect to gather its bread and meat for my soul. I have climbed its mountains, roamed its forests, sailed its waters, crossed its deserts, felt the sting of its frosts, the oppression of its heats, the drench of its rains, the fury of its winds, and always have beauty and joy waited upon my goings and comings."

So, Billerica has been our home - our point of outlook on the world, and the universe, - and, like him, we have found life mostly good, as seen from our viewpoint here. The thought touches us as we realize we are walking what will be your streets in 2023. Our houses - should they last - will be your homes. Our fields you will till; The harvest from trees we have planted will be yours to gather. Our suns will still rise and set for you, and the changing seasons that are New England's own will speak to you as they have to us in prose and poetry of experience. The business of your newer day, large and small, will be under your control and management. The town government will be in your hands, perhaps with Selectwomen as well as men- or a Mayoress, if Billerica becomes a city in your time.

The Concord's blue waters will still flow slowly to their union with the Merrimack; and to the West, Wachusett and Monadnock in turn will make a bed for the setting sun. What of the work of 100 years with many landmarks of today? Will the present town Hall (enlarged perhaps) still be here? The old first church (Unitarian); the other churches remain as now? Will the Washington Oak stand the stress and storms of another hundred years? We think it will do this, and carry its tablet message to you of Washington's visit here in 1789, but many a time-honored monument of past and present Billerica will succumb to years and change before that time - and only its story remain to be told, perhaps by some historical authority like our own president, Dr. A. Warren Stearns.

For a question interesting to myself, as I look forward mentally to 2023: What of the home between the elms on Cummings Street, just south of the common, ours for 60

years - since 1860? Who will have made it a home center since? Who will be living in it (or on the site of it) when the period for which our chest is to be closed is rounded out? My own farm at Richardson and Parker Streets (Dickinson Street - just named)- crossing the upper part of my 30-acre holding – this I have owned since 1881 and have planted on it 2000 fruit trees and the care and thought of 40 years. What of ownership of this since my hands ceased to till its acres, and to gather its fruit harvests annually? Will some trees of my planting still live and bud and blossom and bear fruit for you in 2023? Yes, I believe some will live out the century unless re- moved, and may you have good from them!

What of social and civic changes to come? Will the churches be more active than now, and influential in social leadership? Will there be more equality of property in 2023? Will there be an 8-hour day in all industry, or one of 6, or 4 hours? Will the farmer have come into the privileges and pay of workers in industry? Will everybody have higher education, and still some be found to do the lower work?

What new inventions, like our recently discovered Radio, will have broadened your life and multiplied your powers? What will you have to inspire in literature and art, in music and eloquence, that is undiscovered now? What great leaders in thought or action will have arisen between our time and yours? What will the town be in its territory? What is in its government? What in population, in 2023? My own estimate of the number then to be in the pre- sent area of Billerica is 20,000.

Will some boy or girl of Billerica have been called to occupancy of the White House during the century before the chest is un- sealed, and this message read, as our honored citizen, Thomas Talbot, was called to become Governor of Massachusetts, elected in 1878?

Who of the descendants of the town's present families will see its opening, and receive its messages and reminders of a time and generation long past? What a picture is suggested by this thought! An unborn generation, as the clock of the century strikes the time prescribed, coming to this building, we trust, to see the chest unsealed, and taking from it what we now deposit in safe- keeping for them - material of value to the story of our place and time, that has lain untouched by human hands for 100 years.

Our poet Holmes has said, in his inimitable "1 horse Shay":

"Little of all we value here

Waits on the mourn of its hundredth year" But, by the poet 'twas all unguessed

We could cheat old Time with a metal chest.

Now for you, citizens of the future, our wish is this:

May our thought and plan for you in this enterprise have value equal to our desire - and generation of tomorrow; as our written message enters the Chest and the lid is closed, the generation of today wishes you all good things - and God Speed!

Edward F Dickinson