



JOSEPH WHITCOMB PROVINCETOWN, MASS.

488 JOSEPH WHITCOMB.⁸ (Levi,⁷ Zadock,⁶ Israel,⁵ Israel,⁴ Israel,³ Robert,² John,¹) lived on the farm until he was twenty-four years of age; he went to Provincetown, Mass., in 1865, where his older brother, John Gray, was engaged in ship-building and with whom he took work at once. He continued with his brother about thirteen years, being appointed in the meantime Deputy Sheriff of Barnstable County in 1876. His fidelity and efficiency in office won for him universal respect and admiration and was the occasion of his being elected Sheriff of the County November 5, 1889, which office he continuously held to the time of his death.

As a public official whose duties are often very delicate and perplexing, and not infrequently perilous, he was as alert and brave as he was kind and generous. He was a citizen of much public spirit and enterprise, was a prominent Freemason, and was connected with many and various organizations. Had been an active member of Centre Methodist Episcopal Church of Provincetown since 1872. He was especially kind to the poor and the unfortunate and no worthy hand went empty from his door. "He was a 'loyally good man. His life stands a splendid testimony, an enduring monument to honor, industry, integrity, courtesy, fidelity and Christian charity."



JOHN GRAY WHITCOMB, PROVINCETOWN, MASS.

While still a youth he went to Thomaston, Me., where he learned the trade of ship carpenter in the employ of his uncle, William Stetson, a noted builder of that period. For several consecutive years, prior to the outbreak of the Civil War, his winters were spent in the forests of Virginia cutting ship timber, while his summers were passed in the shipyards at Thomaston, Me.

At the outbreak of the Civil War he and his company of men were hard at work in the Virginia forests. A party of Confederate soldiers led by Fitz Hugh Lee visited the scene of wood cutting, took the entire party into custody, and conducted it to Richmond, where the members were held for a time as spies. It was only by the rarest good fortune that the men were able to disprove the charge, gain freedom, and secure safe conduct through the troubled districts to friendly soil.

Mr. Whitcomb was married in Saint George, Me., on July 1, 1856, to Mary Jane Fountain. For a short time after marriage they lived in Saint George, while the husband worked at his trade at Tennant's Harbor and then removed to Thomaston, Me. As a result of the Civil War, the ship building industry in Maine was practically ruined, and Mr. Whitcomb and his family moved to Boston, where his services were sought by managers of large ship building interests in East Boston and Quincy, Mass. While filling a responsible position in an East Boston shipyard in 1865, he was induced to remove to Provincetown, Mass., to superintend the working of a large marine railway and to build vessels for the whaling and codfishing industries. Although intending to make but a temporary stay in that place, he nevertheless became greatly interested in the business and public interests of the town, and remained there until his death, in 1901.

Mr. Whitcomb built at Provincetown the following vessels: Schooner Alcyone, in 1866; Schooner Cora Morrison, 1867; Schooner Freddie W. Alton, 1867; Brig D. A. Small, 1868; Schooner Lotta Bell, 1860; Schooner Willie L. Swift, 1875, and Yacht Charlotte, 1901. While building the Schooner F. W. Alton, he cut timber on the sandy hills of Cape Cod, on account of the difficulty of obtaining material for the construction of the vessel. He was frequently urged to build other vessels during these years on account of his reputation for skill and trustworthiness, but declined these offers on account of difficulties in transportation of material, preferring to devote his entire time to the large and profitable business of repairing, as Provincetown was a prominent harbor of refuge for disabled vessels.

Mr. Whitcomb earnestly identified himself with the religious, social, and public interests of Provincetown. Although a member of the Baptist Church in Thomaston, Me., he became at once an active worker in the Centre Methodist Church,—the former denomination not being represented in Provincetown,—and for years he was Superintendent of the Sunday School, and Chairman of the Parish Committee. He was a prominent member of the Fire Department, being captain of the Ulysses Engine Company, and later for many years—almost until his death,—an engineer in the Department. He was a member of King Hiram Lodge, A. F. and A. M., and of Joseph Warren Royal Arch Chapter of Masons in Provincetown.

The death of his loving and devoted wife, a woman of strong character, wide sympathies, and affectionate nature, which occurred October 11, 1895, was a severe blow to him and marked the beginning of the gradual breakdown of his own health.

In the summer of 1900, he began the construction of the "Charlotte," a large schooner yacht, one of the most ambitious building contracts he had ever undertaken. He also entered into a contract with the Marconi Wireless Telegraph Company to erect twenty masts, each 212 feet high, for the Wireless Telegraph Station at South Wellfleet, Mass., during the spring and summer of 1901, while the yacht was under construction. These large undertakings illustrate the enthusiasm, ambition and tireless energy which characterized his life, but the mental and physical labor involved were too much for his failing strength, and with these contracts barely finished, he passed away suddenly on September 8, 1901, at his home in Provincetown. He

lies buried in Thomaston, Me., by the side of his wife. The following is quoted from a tribute to his memory:

"A noble Christian life came to its earthly ending, when on Sabbath morning, September 8, Mr. John G. Whitcomb of Provincetown, Mass., was found by members of his household to be sleeping the sleep that knows no human waking. The quiet harbor-town was profoundly moved as the tidings stole through it, that the loved neighbor and friend had crossed the bar, for every one knew him, respected him, trusted him, loved him."