

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

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REPORT OF THE JOINT SPECIAL COMMITTEE  
APPOINTED TO DETERMINE APPROPRIATE  
PLANS AND PROCEEDINGS FOR THE COM-  
MEMORATION BY THE GENERAL COURT  
OF THE HOLDING IN 1630 OF THE FIRST  
GENERAL COURT IN MASSACHUSETTS.

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MARCH 31, 1930.

*To the Honorable Senate and House of Representatives:*

The following order was adopted by the House on January 22, and by the Senate on January 27:

*Ordered,* That a joint special committee, to consist of three members of the Senate to be appointed by the President thereof and nine members of the House of Representatives to be appointed by the Speaker thereof, is hereby authorized to consider and determine upon appropriate plans, arrangements and proceedings whereby the General Court may properly commemorate in the current year, at a special legislative session or otherwise, the holding in the year sixteen hundred and thirty of its first session. Said committee shall also consider and determine as to the advisability of adopting a certain House order filed with the Clerk thereof on January eleventh in the current year, providing for the holding of a legislative session in the town of Watertown, during the current year, as a part of the observance of the tercentenary of the founding of the Massachusetts Bay Colony and also of the town of Watertown. Said committee shall report, not later than April first in the current year, to the General Court its recommendations, together with drafts of legislation necessary to carry the same into effect. (See House, No. 995.)

Pursuant to the provisions of the above order, the President of the Senate appointed as members of the Joint Special Committee Senators Wragg of Needham, Keith

of Brockton and J. P. Buckley of Boston, while on the part of the House the Speaker thereof appointed Representatives Briggs of Lexington, Anderson of Boston, Luitwieler of Newton, Standish of Stoneham, Damon of Williamsburg, Day of Salem, William P. Hickey of Boston, Healy of Natick and Roach of North Adams. At the first meeting of the Joint Special Committee held at the State House, February 18, organization was effected by the election of Senator Wragg of Needham as Chairman, Representative Briggs of Lexington, Vice-Chairman, and Representative Standish of Stoneham, Clerk. The Committee held two public hearings, one on February 25 and one on March 6, at which hearings public expressions as to the character of the Tercentenary observance were obtained from representatives of various interests and activities.

In the initial stages of its study of the subject matter referred to it the Committee discovered many events scheduled for celebration during the centenary year of 1930 by the several cities and towns, all in commemoration of the three hundredth anniversary of the founding of the Massachusetts Bay Colony. While recognizing that the early history of the General Court was indissolubly a part of such stirring records, yet the Committee was constrained to conclude that the commemorative exercises by the General Court should be restricted solely to its own history as a legislative assembly and not in any way become a part of other celebrations, whether under the auspices of the State or of a city or town. The history of the General Court, as a law-making body, is of unique character, and would lose its peculiar significance if merged with any other historical celebration.

Having reached this conclusion, the Committee does not recommend the holding of a formal legislative session in the town of Watertown during the current year as a part of the observance of the Tercentenary of the founding of the Massachusetts Bay Colony and of the town of Watertown. The Committee would, however, suggest the appropriateness of members of the General Court accepting

an invitation, if proffered, to go to the town of Watertown on such a day in the current year as may be determined upon by that town as the day of its local Tercentenary celebration. The General Court on that day might well adjourn at an early hour to facilitate the perfecting of the arrangements.

Exact accuracy of terms might call in question the historic date of October 19th, 1630, as the first session of the "Great and General Court." It is true that in that early period the charter term "a General Court" was alone in use. The Charter of William and Mary, October 7, 1692, provided that there should be held each year one "Great and General Court". The first meeting with this title was held at Boston, June 8, 1692, and the title was used for the last time at a meeting held at Boston on May 31, 1780. Its use for almost a century, and its frequent occurrence in historical writings, lead many persons to think it still the official name of the Legislature. But the Constitution of the Commonwealth, adopted 1780, provides that the title shall be "The General Court of Massachusetts", and the first session under that designation was held at Boston, October 25, 1780.

It is interesting to note that while in the first years of the colony a general court consisted of the governor, the deputy governor, the eighteen assistants, and the freemen (shareholders) of the company sitting as one body, the increasing number of freemen, as immigration from England progressed, made it necessary to limit the participation of freemen (1634) to deputies elected in the towns to represent the voters. In 1644 the assistants and deputies were separated into two bodies, sitting apart from each other and taking concurrent action on all public measures. We must look to this date to find the prototype of our present General Court, with its Senate and House of Representatives.

The Royal Charter as given by King Charles the First on March 4, 1629, provided for four courts or assemblies. This provision quoted from the charter in a condensed form reads as follows: "be held . . . vpon every last

Wednesday in Hillary, Easter, Trinity and Mich(el)mas termes respectively for ever, one greate, generall, and solemne Assemblée, which foure Generall Assemblies shalbe stiled and called the Foure Greate and Generall Courts of the saide Company.”

Although a literalist or a strict historian might dispute the right of claiming the year 1930 as the date for the three hundredth anniversary of the General Court, yet your Committee is assured that such a celebration is not only appropriate but historically accurate when the position is taken that the celebration is to commemorate the three hundredth anniversary of the first “General Court” held on American soil at Boston, October 19, 1630, as authorized by the charter as given by King Charles the First on March 4, 1629.

With this fact established the Committee would recommend that when the present annual session of the General Court has disposed of all matters brought before it, His Excellency the Governor be requested to adjourn the General Court to eleven o'clock in the forenoon on Monday, October 20, 1930; and that the General Court assemble on that date for the purpose of holding a joint convention to commemorate the first General Court held on American soil under the charter of March 4, 1629, granted to the Governor and Company of Massachusetts Bay in New England, which first General Court was held in Boston on October 19, 1630.

Such a historical convention should be held in the Chamber of the House of Representatives, to which should be invited not only the Judiciary and distinguished guests, but all surviving former members of each branch of the Legislature. Necessary funds covering additional traveling expenses for the present membership of the Legislature should be provided for by the introduction of an order for that purpose. An outstanding speaker of national reputation, preferably a resident of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, should be invited to give an oration at that time, tracing the unfolding of the beneficent legislation enacted by the Commonwealth during the three centuries since 1630.

The Committee would also suggest the fitness of a reception in the Hall of Flags from ten until eleven o'clock on the day of the celebration, just prior to the assembly of the convention, at which reception opportunity would be given to greet our distinguished guests. Obviously there would be numerous other matters of detail to claim the attention of the Committee, such as appropriate music, decorations, programs showing the order of the day, and other minor matters incident to such an occasion.

To serve as a permanent memento of this impressive celebration the Joint Special Committee should have prepared by an eminent historian, printed and distributed, a brochure or pamphlet setting forth with historical accuracy the notable history of the Great and General Court, reflecting the source and inauguration of the unique system of parliamentary administration, adopted anciently and since continued in the General Court of the Commonwealth.

The Joint Committee has not considered it a part of its duty to record the historical facts leading up to this significant event. Such facts have been set forth in the able report of the Special Commission on the celebration of the Tercentenary of the Founding of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, which report was filed with the Legislature in December, 1928.

#### JOINT SPECIAL COMMITTEE,

SAMUEL H. WRAGG, *Chairman*,  
ROGER KEITH,  
JOHN P. BUCKLEY,

*By the Senate.*

GEORGE E. BRIGGS, *Vice Chairman*,  
LEMUEL W. STANDISH, *Clerk*,  
GEORGE P. ANDERSON,  
CLARENCE S. LUITWIELER,  
CHARLES R. DAMON,  
HARRY E. DAY,  
WILLIAM P. HICKEY,  
JEREMIAH J. HEALY,  
JOSEPH N. ROACH,

*By the House.*

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*Ordered,* That a Joint Special Committee, to consist of three members of the senate, to be appointed by the president thereof, and nine members of the house of representatives, to be appointed by the speaker thereof, is hereby authorized to make all necessary arrangements whereby the General Court may effectively and appropriately commemorate on Monday, October twentieth, nineteen hundred and thirty, at eleven o'clock in the morning, the first General Court held on American soil under the charter of March fourth, sixteen hundred and twenty-nine, granted to the Governor and Company of the Massachusetts Bay in New England, said first General Court having been held in Boston on October nineteenth, sixteen hundred and thirty.

For such general expenses incident to such observance, including music, decorations, printing and other necessary items, inclusive of the printing of a historical sketch of the General Court, the Joint Committee may expend such sum not exceeding                      dollars as the General Court may hereafter appropriate.



