



Another



When Scotch Plains Divorced The Old Towne

It's odd how historical documents will turn up in the least expected places, observed Old Timer as he reached into his pocket and brought forth a small leather-covered notebook across the face of which was written: "Fanwood Democratic Minutes." That, said he, was found in a scrap pile during a recent paper drive and turned over to Richard B. Gendall, Town Treasurer. It contains the original account of the first Democratic Primary, held at Dean Hall, Scotch Plains, March 9, 1878, to nominate the party candidate for the recently formed Township of Fanwood. It was written in long hand by Thomas J. Nichols, Secretary; and signed by him and the chairman, C. W. L. Martine.

According to this report, there were pretty lively goings-on around the old cracker barrel in those days. After being married to Westfield for nearly two centuries, the 'Plains folks decided to go it alone, and got a bill of absolute divorce, in 1877, taking the larger half of the old town along with them. Tom Nichols, Levi Darby, George Squier, Joseph A. Patterson and Charlie Martine were the leading Democrats, and they had made plans to take over the reins of government in the new township.

They were slow getting started with the meeting. First, they had to declare a recess "to allow the delegations from distant parts to arrive". Then, they had a time finding the right man for Assessor. Levi Darby, who was holding out for an office where he could exercise his authority, declined, and George Squire was not at the corner grocery store when a committee was sent to wait on him, so his name was withdrawn. John Darby was next in line and he said he didn't seek the office, but he'd take it if it was agreeable to all those present, which, of course, it was. The rest of the slate went through

without much argument. Tom Nichols got the big plum, Township Clerk; and George Squier showed up just in time to be named for Collector. The Town Solons—that was what they were called in those days—were headed by Levi Darby; his associates were Jacob D. French, Joseph A. Patterson, Max Griebel and Isaac Lambert. By some fine electioneering, the entire Democratic ticket was elected with the exception of Griebel, who lost out to Stites Parse, the Demosthenes of the G. O. P. Levi Darby got his wish and was named the first chairman of the Township Committee, and that, along with the political strategy which he acquired in Westfield, made him the party boss.

It's likely the Democrats would have remained in power a long time if they hadn't neglected the Fire Department. They were liberal with their appropriations for roads—\$1000; and the poor, \$400; and under the head of "incidental expenses" they allowed the boys \$100 for spending money. But not one solitary cent did they appropriate to help the volunteer firemen defray expenses.

That started a rumpus. The firemen had worked hard to organize the Excelsior Hook and Ladder Co., and they thought the town ought to contribute some financial encouragement. Boss Darby promised to help them out next year, but he was too late. The Republicans joined up with the Excelsiors to form a coalition government. They called it The Greenback Union Labor Party.

The campaign of 1879 was one of the hottest on record. The leading orators of the township held forth nightly on the village green. Both sides were pro bono publico, but the Union Labor Party had the support of all the firemen and the mugwumps, of which there were quite a few, and when the votes had been counted, election night, Boss Darby and his party were beaten by nearly 75 votes—a landslide in that day.