

LOVE, PURITY, and FIDELITY: The Satuit Division of the Sons of Temperance

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I recently studied a hand-written journal containing the minutes of the Sons of Temperance Division of Scituate, known as the Satuit Division, from the collection of the Scituate Historical Society. What do these minutes, which cover the period from October 5, 1850 to February 17, 1855, tell us about the Scituate Sons of Temperance? In order to understand the beliefs and practices of the Sons of Temperance, as seen in the minutes of their meetings, one has to know some of the changes that the temperance movement was undergoing at this time and that the Scituate Division was influenced by the beliefs and practices of both the state and national divisions of the Sons of Temperance.

At the time the Sons of Temperance was created in New York City in 1842 the temperance movement in the United States was coming out of a period driven by a temperance society known as the Washingtonians. This society initially emphasized the tactic of moral suasion to convince consumers of distilled alcoholic beverages, also referred to as "ardent spirits," versus fermented spirits, such as wine, beer, and cider, to moderate their consumption of these beverages. Their goal was to reform drunkards, the term alcoholics did not exist at the time, by showing them that their lives, and those they were close to, would improve if they pledged to abstain from "ardent spirits." This meant giving drunkards whatever support they needed, including financial, to help them control their drinking. This was in contrast to the dominant temperance position that legal suasion, passing laws to punish drunkards and sellers of intoxicating liquor, including fermented spirits, was necessary to eliminate the evils of alcohol. As one supporter noted, the Washingtonians had replaced the love of law with the law of love. This redirection of the temperance movement was extremely popular and membership in Washingtonian societies skyrocketed across the country, with Massachusetts having 80,000 members in 160 towns and cities by 1842 (Hampel). And although there is no evidence that there was a Washingtonian society in Scituate, it would not be surprising to discover that there was one. However, during the later years of the 1840s due to the growing acceptance of legal suasion, along with issues of propriety among Washingtonian society members, the organization rapidly declined with other temperance societies, such as the Sons of Temperance, gaining more influence. (Hampel).

The Sons of Temperance was a brotherhood of men who promoted temperance and mutual support. Its three major goals, which were influenced by the Washingtonian society, were to assist brothers to avoid the evils of intemperance, provide them assistance in times of sickness or death, and to raise the moral character of brothers (Hansen). It was not easy or inexpensive to become a member. Applicants had to be between the ages of 18-50, although in June 1851 a change in Article 5 of the constitution lowered the Satuit Division's age to 16. Of the 33 members of the Satuit Division whose birth records I could find in the Town Archives, 84% were younger than 40 years old, with only 1 member being 50 years old. The members of the Sons tended to be respectable, hard-working young men of modest means, like Satuit Division member Henry Young who was "age 23 a resident of Scituate and a shoemaker." Applicants had to be nominated by an existing member and then investigated by an Investigation Committee to see if he was worthy of membership. Once accepted a member had to pay an initiation fee that was at minimum two dollars, raised to three dollars by the Satuit Division in November 1852. This was the equivalent of the average worker's weekly wage. Each week every member was required to pay 6 cents or more in dues.

These dues would help provide the funds necessary to pay benefits to any brothers who could not work because of illness, such as Brother Beal who was awarded \$12 for four weeks of illness in January 1853. Death benefits of \$30 were paid to a deceased brother's family and \$15 to the family of each brother whose wife died, such as E.A. Young who in November 1854 received \$20 in funeral benefits after the death his wife. One special case of a funeral benefit occurred in July 1851 when the Satuit Division agreed to take charge of the affairs of Brother John Riley and to notify his friends in Ireland of his death. Four months later the Division approved \$15 to purchase a grave monument for Brother Riley who was the first Catholic buried in Scituate (Old Scituate).

The Sons of Temperance was designed to be temperance reform's most centrally controlled organization. Grand Divisions - the state organizations - controlled the age of admission, the requirements of officers and their number, the rules each division followed to run their meetings, the music sung, if any, and the punishments handed out to delinquent members. The leaders of the State Divisions made up the National Division that maintained control over the affairs of the order (Blocker). This is clearly reflected in the minutes of the Satuit Division, which with rare exception followed the same format for every meeting, which were scheduled for 7 pm every Saturday. After members were allowed to enter the Division Room by giving the password to a Sentinel, the meeting was called to order by the Worthy Patriarch (president), the minutes of the previous meeting were read by the Royal Scribe and approved, the absent officers were identified and whether or not their absence was excused, the number of members delinquent on their dues reported, sick members were identified and the benefits they were entitled to determined, reports of committees were given, discussions of issues, which adhered to strict rules of order, took place, and at the closing of the meeting the amount of receipts collected by the Scribe were noted.

While initially supporting the tactic of moral suasion and the abstinence from "ardent spirits," the Sons of Temperance evolved by the 1850s to support legal suasion and abstinence from all alcoholic beverages, i.e. prohibition. This can be seen in Scituate with the Division's support for no license laws and especially the Maine Law of 1851 and its Massachusetts' equivalent in 1852. In the early 1830s the Massachusetts General Court had passed a liquor license law which gave county commissioners the right to decide whether or not to grant liquor licenses (for the sale of distilled liquors) for the towns of their respective counties, which if granted, would be renewed yearly. No license would be granted or renewed without approval from the selectmen of the town where the license was intended to be exercised (Acts and Resolves 1832). No license campaigns by the temperance movement, including the Sons of Temperance, gradually led to election of sympathetic county commissioners in county after county until by 1851 licenses were granted almost nowhere in the state (Blocker). The southeastern part of the state, which included Plymouth County and Scituate, was known as a "dry section" of the state (Hampel).

In 1838, Massachusetts passed the 15 Gallon Law that forbade the purchase of distilled liquors in quantities of less than 15 gallons. One could not purchase distilled liquors by the glass, making it difficult for people of low or modest means to purchase ardent spirits. Because of the strong reaction to it and the belief by many that it was undemocratic (the rich could still drink their wine) and unconstitutional, the law was repealed in 1840. This made the 1832 license law active by default (Hampel). However, there were big issues with the enforcement of no license laws. Most importantly that public officials generally lacked either the capacity or the will or both to prosecute unlicensed sellers. As a result when Maine passed the first statewide prohibition law in 1851, which provided for the seizure and destruction of liquors held for

illegal sale; fine and imprisonment for the illegal sale and manufacture or sale of liquors, temperance supporters in Massachusetts flooded the state legislature with petitions for a harsh and more enforceable law. The Massachusetts Anti-Liquor Law, which was almost identical to the Maine Law, was passed in 1852. It was soon declared unconstitutional by the state Supreme Court in 1853, but a revised version was enacted in 1855 until it too was repealed in 1868.

The Sons of Temperance endorsed legal suasion in 1848 and by 1850 demanded stiffer license laws. This position is reflected in the minutes of the Satuit Division's meetings in 1851 and 1852 by clearly indicating the support it gave to the no-license law and the 1852 anti-liquor law. The very first meeting minutes recorded in the journal on October 5, 1850, state that the Division discussed the question: "Is the current license law a righteous law?" A month later the Division discussed the question: "What measures may we take to suppress the sale of intoxicating drinks in this town?" The Division responded with a vote to choose a committee to prosecute violations of the license law. This was followed by a vote to raise a Committee of Vigilance with 7 members "whose duty shall be to watch for the traffickers in intoxicating drinks." The Division's Moral Suasion Committee is cited for its success in December for writing letters to two men in Cohasset to point out the "immorality of dealing in intoxicating drink" and for convincing Brother T.J. Curtis to stop selling intoxicating drinks. At the end of December, after what was labeled an "exciting debate concerning the vitality of the Vigilance Committee, all members seemed to urge the committee to prosecute forthwith." In January 1851, the Vigilance Committee made a "complaint against E. Wallace for violating the license law," with Brother Litchfield reporting in February that E. Wallace has been convicted on three counts of violating the license law and fined the sum of \$60. In December 1851, the Division voted to support a petition "for the law similar to the Maine Liquor Law." In a demonstration of its strong support for the anti-liquor law, on March 1852, the Division voted on the question "of having a law similar to the Maine Law enacted in Massachusetts" with 28 brothers voting yea and 1 nay. In June 1852, the Division approved funds to purchase copies of the Maine Liquor Law and other temperance documents. In July the Division discussed the importance of "acting in concert with the campaign out for the Maine Law." In another July meeting there was a debate over the proposed Massachusetts' version of the Maine Law with only one brother objecting to the law because of its "vast machinery."

With the passage of the law the Division raised a committee of five "to see that the law was enforced." In August the Division discussed the question: "Will this Div. sustain the agency appointed by this town according to the law to sell alcoholic liquors for purposes specified in the law" and directed the Prosecuting Committee "to prosecute the proprietors of the Glades House for violations of the liquor law." In October the Division resolved: "That the Division will not support any person for representation who is not a firm supporter of the Anti-Liquor Law of Massachusetts."

In 1853, when it became clear that the law was in danger of being repealed, the Division asked every member to sign a remonstrance against the repeal of the liquor law. In May 1853, the Division voted to put up notices throughout the town that they are determined to prosecute all violations of the liquor law. Although not totally void of references to the liquor law, after the repeal of the law in 1853, the Division's meetings appeared to be more concerned with internal, and often contentious issues, instead of being actively engaged in the enforcement of liquor laws. Some historians believe that the Sons' strong endorsement of prohibition resulted in increased dissension and was in part responsible for a decline in membership from its peak of 238,000 in 1851 to less than 100,000 by 1856 (Blocker).

Good fellowship was one of the major reasons young men joined the Sons of Temperance, which was reflected in its motto of LOVE, PURITY, FIDELITY (Hempel). The Sons disliked strife and conflict and tried to avoid anything that might begin a quarrel among the brothers. Before the debate over the Massachusetts Anti-Liquor Law and its passage in 1852, almost all cases of expulsion from the Satuit Division were for violations of Article 2 of its Constitution, which was the pledge to abstain from drinking alcohol. Some expulsion cases, such as that of A.A. Faxon were debated for months, in his case over a year, from November 1850 to November 1852. It appears that his defense was that he had used alcohol for medicinal purposes, but in December 1850 the committee investigating charges against him obtained a pledge that "he would refrain from all use of it hereafter." However, in January 1851 a vote was taken to "wait on" (visit), A.A. Faxon to answer certain reports "derogatory to his character" after which he asked for more time to clear up his character. Three weeks later he was again charged with violating Article 2. However, at the same meeting the Division censured Brother Merritt for the "claim that A.A. Faxon was heartily drunk on the authority of another person then withdrawing the accusation without explanation." In February the committee investigating the charges reported him guilty, but the Division passed a resolution that in effect reinstated him by a vote of 14 to 7. However 10 months later, in December 1851, Brother R. Turner charged Brother Faxon once again with violating Article 2. Although "nobly defended by T. Litchfield and R. Clapp" the Division voted to expel him by a vote of 17-5, "unless he can vindicate himself from the charges brought against him." At the January 24, 1852 meeting Brother A.A. Faxon was expelled, but on March 20 his case was brought up again and indefinitely postponed. The next mention of his case occurred at the November 6, 1852 meeting when Brother Beal asked for the censure of Brothers Cole and T. Litchfield for "making a bargain with A.A. Faxon to leave the Division, with the motion negated by a large majority." Since this is the last mention of Brother A.A. Faxon and his case in the Division's minutes one can assume that this was the final resolution to his case. While Brother Faxon's case took an unusually long time to play itself out, there were no examples of brothers who were charged with violations of Article 2 being expelled immediately. It appears that the Sons bent over backwards to give brothers who may have violated their pledge to abstain from using alcohol every opportunity to defend themselves and/or promise never to violate their pledge again. However, one expelled brother, David Totman, mocked the Division telling them "he thought we were not very shrewd or we should have found it out before as he has violated said Article several times."

Although after 1852 there were a few examples of brothers being expelled for violating Article 2, an increasing number of expulsions were the result of non-payment of dues or non-attendance. There were several meetings at which 5 or more members were expelled for non-payment of dues, including the expulsion of 5 members at the last meeting recorded in the journal of minutes in February 1855. At the July 31, 1852 meeting 8 brothers were expelled for non-payment of dues. At the September 25, 1852 meeting the Division asked Brother Clapp to investigate the reasons for non-attendance. He reported that there were three reasons: brothers were too tired after working all week, brothers did not like the company of the other brothers, or that they had prior claims on their time at home. Another reason for non-attendance was simple boredom. Many of the young men who had joined the order soon became familiar with its ceremonies and the routine procedures followed at every meeting and became disinterested in the Division and finally left it (Hempel).

The discontent in the Division became more frequent over the time span of the meetings of the Satuit Division, with many of the controversies occurring over minor

issues. There were frequent arguments over following the proper rules of order at meetings and several charges against members for using disrespectful language about other members. There were discussions about brothers moving their seats to avoid peanut shells on the floor, there were debates over whether or not to sell the dishes belonging to the Division, or whether or not to give or sell a cloth (presumably a table cloth) to the Ladies Trinitarian Society, or a complaint about asking members to attend a temperance convention 16 miles from Scituate.

However, a more serious confrontation occurred in the summer of 1853 around the behavior of the Division's Worthy Patriarch (W.P.), Howland Otis. The confrontation began on April 16, 1853, when Brother J.E. Stewart preferred charges against Brother C.M. Jenkins for "using disrespectful language about a member of the division." In May the committee investigating the charges against Brother Jenkins was dismissed but a new committee was chosen the following week. In June this committee charged him with using disrespectful language and for violating Article 2 and recommended he be expelled and that the Scribe should notify him to attend the next meeting. On June 18 a resolution was made to just fine Brother Jenkins but the Division voted to uphold the stance of the committee. Apparently there was a heated debate over this issue and at the June 25 meeting Brother Rufus Clapp preferred charges against Brothers D.J. Bates "for improper and disorderly conduct in the Division meeting June 18" and Howland Otis, who was the Worthy Patriarch, "for improper conduct and disrespectful language towards a member of the Division in the meeting of June 18, 1853."

Brother Clapp's appeal of the decision on Brother Jenkins' case was reported in the minutes "to be not well taken" and a motion was made to keep the vote of the committee. At the next meeting on July 2 the Division voted to expel Brother Jenkins but a vote was taken to reconsider, which passed by a vote of 13-7. On July 9, the Division voted to correct the record on the vote to reinstate Brother Jenkins and to bring up Brother Clapp's appeal on the case of Brothers Bates and Otis at 9 o'clock at the next meeting. In his testimony defending his charges against Brother Otis, Brother Clapp stated, "Otis used language and made an allusion to him that Brother Clapp had talked enough and had talked the Division to near death." Brother Otis then testified that "he had used that language but it was not malicious" and that "he had [none] other but friendly feelings for Brother Clapp."

The committee investigating the charges against Brother Otis concluded that "the W.P. needs to provide for rigid control of order at meetings" and that "the duties of the W.P. have not been so regularly enforced as they ought to be." They continued by commenting that "however much the chair (W.P.) may be desirous to adhere and preach order in the Division if he is not seconded by the members his attempts will prove futile" and that "a strict regard for the rules both by the W.P. and the members will prevent much of the disorder, confusion and ill feelings which often occur in this Division." The committee then announced that the charges against both Brother Bates and Brother Otis were not sustained and that the Division should "let LOVE, PURITY, and FIDELITY continue to be our watchword and the day is ours."

This confrontation continued throughout the summer with Brother Clapp once again appealing the decision of the committee to reinstate Brothers Bates and Otis on the Division at its July 30 meeting. The Division once again sustained the committee's decision, with Brother Clapp being called out of order at the meeting because he was using disrespectful language. Brother Clapp then asked for his withdrawal card because "he had been insulted by the Division in sustaining the decision." In response the Division approved a resolution "that the Division in sustaining the decision of the

committee intended no insult to Brother Clapp and hope he will remain in the Division." And in September the Division chose Brother Clapp to be one of its two representatives at the Sons of Temperance State Convention.

One year later all seemed quiet in the Division when Brother Clapp was elected the Worthy Patriarch at the July 1, 1854 meeting. However, Brother Clapp became involved in another confrontation, which began at the August 19 meeting. The Scribe, in a lengthy report, described a confrontation that broke out between J.E. Stewart and the W.P. "who hammered Brother Stewart down and would not acknowledge him" and that "amidst some sensation" a motion was made to close the meeting. At the Division's next meeting on September 2 there was "a lot of debate about the procedures by W.P. - R. Clapp." The confrontation reached its climax at the next meeting on September 9, when members "refused to acknowledge his authority" to call the meeting to order, essentially removing him from office.

The Scribe reported in the minutes that the Assistant W.P., who happened to be Brother Stewart, "had taken possession of the property of the Division but somehow Brother Clapp had again got possession." The Grand W.P. of the State Division attended the next meeting where he addressed the Division at length and announced that he supported their decision and that any vacant offices would be filled at the next meeting. At the same meeting the Division "fined R. Clapp \$5 for improper conduct-a violation of Article 7."

It is difficult to determine the impact that the large number of expulsions for non-payment of dues and non-attendance and the escalating confrontations among the brothers had on the Division's membership numbers. Unfortunately, there is no membership roster of the Division but at the January 3, 1852 meeting the Scribe noted that there were 85 contributing members of the Division. The number of brothers identified by name in the meeting minutes is around 60, which is also the number of Regalia the Division possessed in 1854.

Another way to get some idea of membership trends is to look at the number of brothers who voted at meetings and the receipts for each meeting from collecting dues. The number of brothers who voted on resolutions and motions at meetings averaged in the twenties, until 1852 when numbers began to decline, with only 10 members voting at the August 7, 1852 meeting and 13 at the July 30, 1853 meeting. While receipts at meetings fluctuated there were several meetings where receipts were under \$1.00, with \$0.90 collected at the October 16, 1852 meeting and no receipts collected at the August 6, 1853 meeting, at the time of the confrontation caused by Brother Clapp. However, comparing the Treasurer's Reports of 1851 and 1854 seems to indicate the Division was financially sound, with the Treasurer reporting a balance of \$111.47 in January 1851 and a balance of \$66.42 in May 1851 compared to a balance of \$233.94 in January 1854 and a balance of \$52.52 in May 1854. These statistics and the fact that the Division continued to function well beyond 1855 appear to support this conclusion. One has to remember that finances were very important to the Son's function as a mutual insurance company that paid sickness and death benefits to its members and according to some even more important than its support for the cause of temperance (Blocker).

It would be inaccurate to think that the Sons of Temperance in Scituate were a cantankerous group of puritanical teetotalers. Although the Sons was a secret fraternal order in a small town with a population of just over 2000 residents, it would have been difficult not to know which men were members of the order. In fact, the Division's

engagement and promotion of many social activities in the town seemed to indicate they did not try to keep membership in the order secret. Every year they held Tea Parties, one usually on the evening before Thanksgiving and another in the spring to which they invited non-member guests. They held Jubilees once a year, usually around the Fourth of July. They had frequent contact with other Divisions in the area including most often the Speedwell Division in Weymouth, but also the Shakespeare Division in Boston and attended social events held by other Divisions. As indicated in several meeting minutes, they attended dinners together after meetings to enjoy meals of oysters and chowder. They even created a Chowder Committee at one meeting. And at their August 13, 1853 meeting they voted to have a Water Party. They might have abstained from drink but not tobacco, as is seen in the decision at one meeting to procure 1 dozen spittoons and we know they liked to eat peanuts. They also took serious their commitment to visit brothers who were ill and to award them benefits if they were unable to work or in the case of a death of a loved one. They celebrated Fast Day; an old Puritan holiday in Massachusetts initiated in 1670 and continued until it was replaced by Patriot's Day in 1894. They also contributed to other organizations in Scituate such as the Ladies Society for Improvement of the Burying Grounds, who tendered "their thanks for the generous donation from the Division."

Although there appeared to be a decline in interest and members in the Satuit Division of the Sons of Temperance in Scituate and that the nation would soon be consumed by the Civil War, we know that the Satuit Division continued to function long after the date of the last meeting minutes we have access to in February 1855. One piece of evidence we have that supports this is that the April 21, 1862 Town Meeting allowed the Sons of Temperance Satuit Division No.61 the use of the Union School House for \$1.00 a year, which was a significant decrease from the \$40 a year they had been charged for the use of Union Hall in the 1850s. However, after the Civil War the temperance movement would enter a new phase of its history, with women playing a major role in the crusade to prohibit the consumption, sale and manufacturing of liquor through organizations such as the Women's Christian Temperance Union. This meant that, although we do not know for how long the Satuit Division continued to function in Scituate, its role in the temperance movement would have been significantly diminished.

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