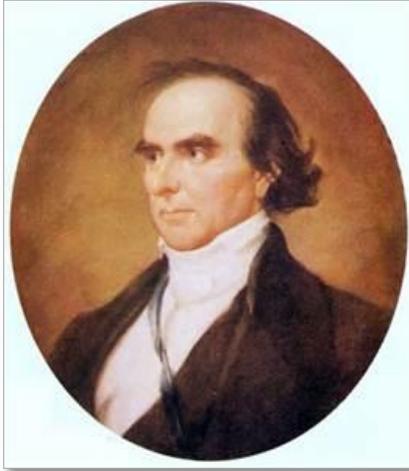


Today in Our History

Daniel Webster Speech at the Plymouth Bicentennial Anniversary

22 December 1820



Internet portrait of Daniel Webster

*Daniel Webster was a state legislator and well-known speaker, even at an early age. His first public address was made on July 4, 1800, commemorating Independence Day as a third-year student at *Dartmouth College in Hanover, New Hampshire, at the age of 18. In addition to Daniel Webster, another notable graduate was Dr. Seuss.*

During his life, Daniel Webster made many speeches, but was nationally known for the debate with the leader of the Senate, Robert Hayne, regarding the nullification of tariffs by the states. At the age of 70, Webster argued for a strict adherence to the federal government and the Constitution, while South Carolina's Robert Hayne, leader of the Senate, believed in states' rights. There were a number of speeches which were later called the Hayne-Webster Debate. In addition to being a great orator, Webster was also a hard-working and leading lawyer in the early 19th century.

In 1820, at the age of 38, Daniel Webster spoke in Plymouth, Massachusetts, to commemorate the 200th anniversary of the landing of the Pilgrims at Plymouth Rock, giving tribute to our country's Pilgrim forefathers, while touching on political issues of the day. It has been one hundred ninety-six years since that speech. When we celebrate the 400th anniversary in the year 2020, our ancestors will be remembered again with similar, and possibly shorter, tributes. The first part of his speech is contained in the paragraph below.

“Standing in relation to our ancestors and our posterity, we are assembled on this memorable spot, to perform the duties which that relation and the present occasion impose upon us. We have come to this Rock, to record here our homage for our Pilgrim Fathers; our sympathy in their sufferings; our gratitude for their labors; our admiration of their virtues; our veneration for their piety; and our attachment to those principles of civil and religious liberty, which they encountered the dangers of the ocean, the storms of heaven, the violence of savages, disease, exile, and famine, to enjoy and to establish. And we would leave here, also, for the generations which are rising up rapidly to fill our places, some proof that we have endeavored to transmit the great inheritance unimpaired; that in our estimate of public principles and private virtue, in our veneration of religion and piety, in our devotion to civil and religious liberty, in our regard for whatever advances human knowledge or improves human happiness, we are not altogether unworthy of our origin. There is a local feeling connected with this occasion, too strong to be resisted; a sort of *genius of the place*, which inspires and awes us. We feel that we are on the spot where the first scene of our history was laid; where the hearths and altars of New England were first places; where Christianity, and civilization, and letters made their first lodgement, in a vast extent of country, covered with a wilderness...we are here, at the season of the year at which the event took place. The imagination irresistibly and rapidly draws around us the principal features and the leading characters in the original scene...”

For Daniel Webster's entire speech, please visit: <http://www.dartmouth.edu/~dwebster/speeches/plymouth-oration.html>

*Dartmouth is committed to Native American education. Please see the link in the first paragraph.

Mourt's Relation: A Journal of the Pilgrims of Plymouth - page 72

The Penguin Book of Historic Speeches - MacArthur, Brian, ed. Penguin Books, 1996.

<http://people.uncw.edu/rohler/rohler/Spears.htm>

<http://www.dartmouth.edu/~dwebster/intro.html>

<http://www.dartmouth.edu/~dwebster/speeches/plymouth-oration.html>