

Address Given at the Presentation of Diplomas to Members of
the Graduating Classes of Grammar Schools of Pittsfield

Earl Clement Davis

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Pittsfield, MA

Members of the Graduating classes and Friends.

In the month of May 1808, the Rev. Thomas Allen, whose personality did much to mold and determine the history of this town, wrote a little historical sketch in which he calls attention to the fact that, at that time, there were some fewer than three thousand inhabitants in this town. He points out also that the settlers in this town, "have been liberal in the support of schools and have taught their families industry and virtue..." Then in a particular paragraph upon the educational advantages of the town in the year 1808 he speaks as follows, "There are in the town of Pittsfield ten schools, at which six hundred youth are instructed every winter in the various branches of common education for their future usefulness in society; and an academy, incorporated by government, for the instruction of young misses, which is of excellent utility and growing reputation, at the head of which is an excellent instructress."

You have the fortune to graduate from these grammar schools at a time when the city is recognizing the one hundredth anniversary of the founding of the town. I wish to call your attention to the contrast in numbers. One hundred and four years ago the town had attained to the size of three thousand inhabitants. There were ten schools and five hundred youth who attended in the winter. You are now graduating from the grades into the high school in one class 366 or about 60 percent of the total school population of one hundred years ago.

But while the numbers and proportions have changed the purpose of it all has remained the same. You are instructed in the various branches of common education for your future usefulness in society. It is an investment that we older people make for the two-fold purpose of making your life broader and richer, and also for the sake [of] assuring to

us an increasingly intelligent and efficient citizenship. All the efforts of the Board of trade, the Churches, the schools, libraries and all the rest are fruitless unless you uphold with integrity your part of the bargain that we enter into together. Upon the degree of your future usefulness in society depends the fate of the city. Ten years hence you will be appearing at the polls (the girls as well as the boys it is to be hoped) active in the political and industrial life of the city. Can you make good?

In that same article Parson Allen made the prediction that the town would become an important manufacturing place. His prediction has been realized. You are learning to become citizens, not in a small country town, but in a city of some size, whose industries form the background and determine the general character of the life here. In our schools we have given you, not an education, but the means of becoming educated, of becoming intelligent, well-read citizen[s]. These diplomas with which I am presenting you on behalf of the School Committee and the citizens of Pittsfield are witness that you know how to read, to write, and have some knowledge of history and human life. They are [a] signed bond stating that into your hands we have placed certain working tools of a citizen. Use them with all diligence, and honor, and integrity as becomes the citizen of a free democracy.