

# LEGISLATURES OF THE PAST

## How They Dispatched Their Business Expeditiously

BY JAMES O. LYFORD

IT is too early at this day, some three weeks before the final adjournment, to summarize the work and accomplishments of this legislature. It may be of interest, however, to your readers to know some of the reasons why the biennial sessions of the New Hampshire legislature are more than twice as long as the annual sessions used to be.

A few people remember the former annual sessions of the legislature, meeting in June and adjourning after a session of from four to five weeks. The pay of the members was three dollars a day for every day, including Sundays, that the legislature was in session. The members were allowed ten cents a mile mileage for one trip from their homes to the capital and return. It was before the days of free passes on railroads for legislators, and the state allowed no transportation of members beyond the one-round-trip mileage. Except those members, who could reach the capital on early morning trains and return on late afternoon trains, the legislators came to the capital at the beginning of the session and remained until its close, a few of them making week-end visits to their homes. There were plenty of private houses in Concord where members could obtain rooms, and some where both rooms and board were furnished. Hotel rates were cheaper than now and more nearly fitted the pay of the members. The member who broke even on his salary of twenty-one dollars a week was satisfied; and many of them accomplished this result.

After the first week, which was given up to organization and the inauguration of the Governor, the legislature settled down to an actual session of four days a week, working Friday as it now does Thursday, and later in the session having a more than formal session Monday

evening. Public expectation was that the legislature would adjourn before July 4th to allow the farmers to begin haying; and if for any reason the session was delayed beyond this date, the press of opposition to the majority party of the legislature accused that body of extravagance. A session of only four weeks did not materially interfere with the every-day activities of lawyers and business men who might be elected to the legislature. Then again, election to the house was regarded by ambitious men, lawyers and others, as a stepping-stone to further political preferment.

The rules of the house were framed for the dispatch of business and not for the convenience of members. The committees began work as soon as they were appointed. If a member desired a hearing on a bill he had introduced, he was expected to arrange with the committee to which it was referred for that hearing. The active committees, like the judiciary, proceeded to weed out the bills referred to them that were without merit and report them immediately to the house as inexpedient. These reports were acted upon by the house at the same session that they were reported; and if the member had any pride in the bills he had introduced, he had to be on hand to defend them before the house. Before the second week of the session was over, the old chestnuts that appeared session after session were again laid away in the legislative graveyard.

As soon as the business warranted, the house met at ten o'clock in the morning and frequently sat until five or six o'clock in the afternoon, while the last week of the session evening sessions were held which were largely attended. Debates on important measures continued for two or three days before a vote

