

# Greene County Gleanings

by Raymond Beecher

Written by his son Benjamin Woodbridge Dwight, *Reminiscences of the Life and Character of Benjamin Woolsey Dwight, MD*, came from the printing press of John F. Trow, 50 Greene Street, New York, in January 1862. For two periods in his lifetime, Dr. Dwight was an active participant in the economic, social and religious life of Catskill Village.

Born in 1780, the second of 8 sons of the Reverend Timothy and Mary Dwight, his early years were related to the New England scene, he finally entering Yale College in the sophomore class of 1799. Subsequently, even suffering from poor health, he successfully completed a course of study at Philadelphia under the celebrated Drs. Rush and Physick. Catskill was then a thriving, rapidly growing river port and it was here he decided to set up both as a practitioner and surgeon. But poor health and dyspepsia continued to haunt his professional career. Taking careful notations of this stomach disorder, he prepared and had published his "Dissertation on Chronic Debility of the Stomach," a report of 90 pages. It gained impressive attention with medical societies and subsequently was re-published in England.

In 1805, Dr. Dwight left Catskill and for a period of time served as the private secretary to his father, then president of Yale College.

Subsequently he followed a mercantile career, being a partner in a crockery store in New Haven and next operating a hardware store in the city of New York. His marriage to Miss Sophia Woodbridge Strong of South Hadley, Mass. brought into being a family of 6 offspring.

Early in the year 1817 Dr. Dwight with his growing family, returned to Catskill where for 14 years he operated a hardware store, importing much English merchandise and selling the same to the counties westerly on the Susquehanna Turnpike. In 1803 he had been one of the founders of Catskill's Christ Church (Presbyterian). (See Beers *History of Greene County*, pg. 134.) Upon his return, the Dwights renewed their religious membership, at that time the congregation was under the pastorate of the Reverend Dr. David Porter. Dr. Dwight would be elected an elder by that body.

During this second Catskill stint of time this scholar/orator, fluent in Greek, was frequently called upon to speak on literary subjects and other matters of community interest. Poor health continued to be his lot, he relying on modera wine and tonics such as iron, columbo, and Peruvian bark or quinine. Outdoor exercise on horseback was another priority, as was traveling about the countryside in a wagon without springs. Dr. Dwight had his pecu-

liarities, one being his fear of lightning. He concluded such storms were more prevalent in Catskill than elsewhere and if such an electrical storm occurred during the night, he roused the family to move to the parlor, placing their legs on the rounds of chairs.

As cautious as Dr. Dwight was in matters of safety, while on one Erie Canal journey to the westward he fell asleep on a trunk stored on the top deck of the canal packet. As it passed under a low bridge at Montezuma, Dr. Dwight was forcibly struck, scraped and taken up insensible, having failed to heed the warning of "low bridge." He did, however, recover from this accident.

Dr. Dwight was one of the first persons in Catskill to give up the use of tobacco, preaching against its negative effects on the human body. Throughout his lifetime he had a special interest in Africa, being a strong anti-slavery man even before this became a northern cause.

In the spring of 1831, the Dwights again left Catskill for Clinton, New York, where this father served as treasurer of Hamilton College for 19 years. Death came at age 70 years, on May 18, 1850. In several ways, Dr. Benjamin W. Dwight was one of Catskill's "original characters," lost sight of in the passage of time.

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