

Dr. Billy J. Clark

1778 – 1867

Plot 9 Lot 10

Doctor Billy J. Clark, one of the 19th Century's most famous temperance advocates, was born in 1778 and died in 1867. Clark noticed the evils of liquor, how it changed the best of men and its impact on families thrown into life threatening poverty from the use of hard cider. He spent his life trying to keep alcohol away from the poor people who wander this earth.

He was born in Vermont, not far from Glens Falls, New York. He spent his early life working on the family farm, then clerking in a store and as a bartender in his father's tavern, where he saw the evils of alcohol at an early age and realized that all men were weak. This inspired him to not partake in drinking. Instead, he decided to become a doctor, with the help of Dr. Gibbs of Pownal, Vermont, who taught him the science of medicine. Billy interned there and then went to work for Dr. Lemuel Wicker in Easton.

There was a need in Northern Saratoga County for a doctor, so he settled in the Town Of Moreau and doctored the folks in Schuylerville, Moreau and Corinth for 30 years. Through the efforts of Dr. Clark, the Saratoga County Medical Society, the first of its kind, was formed. In 1820 he was a Representative to the State Assembly from Saratoga County.

Dr. Clark settled at Clark's Corners which is two miles North of Gansevoort and married Joanna Payn. In 1833 he gave up his medical practice and since Glens Falls was becoming a bustling Community, he opened a Pharmacy in the Village. He served as President of the newly reorganized Glens Falls Academy in 1841 and President of the Glens Falls Plank Road Company. In 1849 he moved back to Moreau to retire.

While serving as a Doctor, he found that many of the ills of his patients were directly related to alcohol consumption. The people of this region were used to starting their day with liquor. They never thought a thing about using liquor to get them going in the morning. Then they would break for 11 am bitters, and 4:00 for an alcoholic interlude. In some villages, the town bell would ring to signal these drinking breaks. These drinking sessions would cause men to fall off hay wagons, drown themselves in streams and caused great violence against the women and children.

Dr. Billy formed a temperance guild and held its first meeting at Mauney's Tavern at Clark's Corners. Meetings were held for the men to show them the bad paths they were going down and also to encourage sobriety, increase productivity and to increase their hygiene. He tried to tell the men about the evils of their ways; but, with their favorite drink being Rum Fustian, it was difficult. Rum fustian was a potent brew which contained 1 gallon of rum, 1 pint gin, 1 quart beer, 1 bottle sherry, 12 egg yolks, sugar and nutmeg to taste. When you finished drinking that, you didn't need sobering up, you needed resuscitation. Through perseverance some of the farmers and lumbermen joined the Temperance Societies in Moreau and Northumberland.

These societies tried to temper the mean's drinking, not prohibit it. Encouraging a man to abstain; but, forgiving the sinner if he imbibed. If a man had a drink and was a member, he was to pay 25 cents, if he was drunk, he'd owe 50 cents. The rules were relaxed on the 4th of July and for barn raisings.

In the 1860's Billy moved back to Glens Falls to live with his son until his death in 1867. He was originally buried in the Reynolds Cemetery in Moreau but a few years later was moved to Bay St to be with his family.

Prepared by Wayne Wright, Glens Falls City Historian from the Historians Office Files. Questions and comments should be directed to the Glens Falls City Historian at: City Hall 42 Ridge St. Glens Falls, NY historian@cityofglensfalls.com 518-761-3871.



Dr. Billy J. Clark and his wife Joanna's grave stone