

Dr. Edward H. Bemis

March 4, 1849 - December 9, 1901

Plot 29 Lot 3

Dr. Edward H. Bemis was born March 4, 1849 in Bethel, Vermont. He received a public school education in Marlboro, NH. He removed himself to Long Island for the sole purpose of studying medicine. He was apprentice and pupil of Dr. Roland B. Gray, President of the Long Island Medical Society. He was a specialist in eye care of national reputation. He interned with him and when it was time for his own practice, decided to move to Glens Falls, NY.

The Village was flourishing and the need for schooled physicians was great. He also found that no one specialized in diseases of the eye. In the year 1874 there were only 15 Physicians, but 26 Dressmakers in the Village. It was a perfect opportunity for business.

Dr. Bemis married Marion Estella French and they resided in a home at 88 South Street. They had two daughters, Laura and Jane. Dr. Bemis worked as both a Physician and Optician. In 1890 he opened the Bemis Eye Sanatorium after finally deciding it was the right time to use his discoveries for the good of the people of the Nation. It was built in the center of Glens Falls, with the main building at the corner block of Notre Dame and Glen Streets. The large edifice, complete with tower, is still there and in much the same shape as when it was built. Between the house and Notre Dame Street was a beautiful fenced garden with plants and fountains. It was a place for patients and their families to relax between treatments. He also built two gigantic buildings for housing families just behind the Augustus Sherman House, near the corner of Glen Street and Sherman Avenue. One of these Mansard-roofed buildings still stands today and is used as an apartment house. The other has burned. Dr. Bemis would have also liked to own the Argent Building on the corner of Homan Avenue, but it was owned by Mr. Ames, the silver manufacturer.

Dr. Bemis had a very well run Sanatorium. He even had a special train station in Moreau called Bemis on the Hudson, which was really a 700-acre farm which produced dairy and produce for the Clinic's boarding houses. The railroad would bring patients to there and he would livery them to town. He had a real impact on the wealth of Glens Falls, accomplishing over 58,000 treatments a year at an average cost of \$1.00 each. Above and beyond that, fees were charged for housing and transportation. Room and board was \$7.00 per week. Dr. Bemis brought in money and also spent many dollars in Glens Falls. In one year alone his payout was over \$135,000. The main expense he incurred was for advertising, spending over \$65,000 on this alone. Figuring the average man at the time was making \$6.00 per week; that was a considerable sum. Ads ran in *Life Magazine*, *Ladies Home Journal*, *Argosy*, and all the big magazines. He also advertised heavily in New York, Boston and Washington, DC daily newspapers.

Dr. Bemis' was the accepted eye treatment for the rich. Many patients would come for treatment bringing an entourage, averaging over 26 people. The railroad charge was over \$2500 per year. These visitors were close to the Village's business district and would meander into town, spending money in the available businesses. It was estimated that Dr. Bemis' patients spent at least \$1000 in the jewelry stores alone.

Dr. Bemis' cataract cure featured a patented magnetic vaporizer, a secret method known only to himself. He also specialized in non-surgical ways of treating eye disease. One involved making the eye hemorrhage, with the blood cleansing the eyeball. Dr. H. Paine of Albany caused him much bad publicity when he referred to Dr. Bemis as "a Vampire, whose malpractice, influence and power had become a threat to the medical profession." It was because of people like Dr. Paine that Dr. Bemis kept his processes secret. When he died on December 9, 1901 at the age of 52, he took these secrets with him.

Prepared by Noreen Dove from theatrical script written by William Woodward for the Chapman Historical Museum fall Glens Falls Cemetery tours in 2002 and 2010.

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.