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TROUTBECK IN 1916

# Troutbeck

## A Dutchess County Homestead

By  
Charles E. Benton

With an Introduction by  
John Burroughs

Dutchess County Historical Society  
Dutchess County  
New York

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"In the grace of twilight, what outer fate  
Can pass this portal, this garden gate?  
All the world is rent with doom,  
But here these furies find no room."

—J. E. Spingarn, "The Garden at Troutbeck."

## INTRODUCTION

Mr. Benton's little history of Troutbeck has revived very pleasantly my own associations with the place.

I first saw Troutbeck in the early autumn of 1862. Myron Benton had written me apropos of some nature pieces of mine which he had seen in the *New York Leader* and thus a correspondence was begun which lasted as long as Myron lived. We first met by appointment in Poughkeepsie, and our first sit-down talk together took place on that round rocky point just south of the Highland ferry. It is nearly covered with buildings now, but at that time it was a naked rock. We sat there an hour or more and opened our minds to each other. Charles Benton, Myron's brother, had enlisted in the 150th Regiment which was then in camp near Poughkeepsie. We saw him then—a fine farm boy, just out of his teens, and in the afternoon Myron drove me home with him to Leedsville, thirty miles away.

I liked Myron from the first sight of him. I was then twenty-five, and he was a few years older. He was a large man, nearly or quite six feet tall and of sturdy build. He had the flavor of the farm and of the country, as probably I myself had—a rural quality of mind and character that had been touched and mellowed by the influence of the best literature, which I hope was also true in a degree of myself. Our tastes were much the same and we discussed our favorite authors, among them Emerson and Thoreau, and probably Whitman, with great satisfaction, though Myron never got on very well with Whitman. Like many persons of poetic temperament he only found in him dainty morsels here and there, and I used to say to him that to look only for dainty poetic and literary morsels in Whitman is to miss the main matter. It is like going to the sea merely for the pretty shells upon the shore.

But we both loved nature and the nature literature with undivided love.

I had just begun to get hold of myself with my pen; I was like a young bird just out of the nest. My flights were short and rather awkward. I had contributed an Emersonian essay to the *Atlantic Monthly* two years before, and Myron had also appeared in print. On the whole there was enough of the literary atmosphere about us both to make our meeting interesting and profitable on other than the ordinary grounds, and our acquaintance and correspondence continued as between men of similar tastes and aspirations.

I remember Myron's father as a serious, silent man, and his mother as a woman of great serenity and sweetness of character, and breadth of mind. I probably met his cousin, Joel Benton, on the occasion of that first visit to Troutbeck, but of this am not sure.

The Benton farm came nearer being the ideal farm and country home than any farm I had ever seen, and after all these fifty years and more I have seen no country place that makes the same impression upon me in this respect that does the farm of my old friend. It is so near New England that it seems to have caught some of its atmosphere of ripeness and mellowness. It sits there in a series of easy fertile river and glacier benches and gently rolling pasture lands, with the placid and picturesque Webutuck winding lesiurely through it, walled in on the west and the north by a high wooded ridge which gives one a comforting sense of protection and seclusion, running away to the east in a broad expanse of meadow land dotted with noble oaks and elms, and suggesting a bounty of hay and grain on the easiest terms, lifted up in the southwest into low rounded hills and wooded slopes, then opening its arms to the south in many acres of tillable land to all the genial influences that one so readily associates with such an exposure—fertility, picturesqueness, seclusion, and over all a look of repose and contentment that I believe would be hard to find in the same number of acres anywhere else in this state. The spirit of the place begat Myron Benton, and he left his stamp upon it in a way that will long endure.

JOHN BURROUGHS.

Roxbury, October, 1916.



# TROUTBECK

## A DUTCHESS COUNTY HOMESTEAD

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"Troutbeck" is the name of a homestead nestling at the head of a quiet inland valley in the eastern part of the town of Amenia, New York, near the hamlet of Leedsville. It lies in that portion of the town which was once a part of Connecticut. In 1731 Connecticut ceded to New York a strip of land one and three quarters miles in width, which became known as "The Oblong," extending northward to Massachusetts.

It is drained by a river which has its furthest source in a large spring which rises in the western shadow of a mountain, on the summit of which three states, New York, Connecticut, and Massachusetts, meet. Thence it flows southward, sometimes in New York and sometimes in Connecticut and drawing additional bulk from both states, until it reaches Troutbeck, where its real valley begins. Thence onward, winding along alluvial plains and washing the slopes of fertile uplands, it compasses a valley, framed in the foothills of the Green Mountain range, of surpassing beauty and fertility. John Burroughs, the poet naturalist, especially admired its pastoral tranquility, saying that it reminded him, more than any other American scene, of the Valley of the Clyde.

When the first white settlers came they did not find the surface of plain and rolling upland an unbroken forest. The Indians had followed the practice of annually burning it over when the herbage was dead in order to make the new grass grow sweet and abundant, for this attracted the deer, one of their principal sources of food. Doubtless this was also one of the attractions for the early settlers, for much of the land was already cleared and ready for the plow.

Scattered over its park-like surface are some enormous oaks and other ancient trees. My father told me that he could detect no change in the size of these trees in all the time that he remembered them. He was born in 1788, and in such matters especially his mind was very clear. They probably did grow a trifle during that time, but it was so little that he did not notice it. Their great size, and the fact that they had practically attained their maturity, indicate that they had hailed the advent of the white man from the crown of many centuries.

The fact that so many of them still adorn the landscape may be owing to the circumstance that they presented so tough a proposition to the axe-

man, for our first settlers were more filled with the spirit of a conquest of the forest than they were with a spirit of sentiment about preserving old trees. But communities, like individuals, grow to the reflective age, a time when the finer fruits of life are appreciated, and this community now cultivates a fine sentiment for the preservation of the beauties of nature.

## INDIANS

The Indians called the valley and the river "Webutuck," the synonym in their tongue for "Pleasant," or "Pleasant Hunting Grounds." This was the explanation given by Eunice Mauwee, the "Queen of the Schaghticoke," (or "Pishgachtigoks," as the Moravian missionaries wrote it,) which she gave to Myron B. Benton, when, accompanied by Joel Benton, he visited her on the Indian Reservation near Kent, Connecticut, in 1859. According to the record of her baptism at Kent—at the age of eighteen years—she was at the time of this visit a hundred and three years old. Her title, "The Queen," was not an idle one, for she was the daughter of the Chief, and the granddaughter of the Chief, and moreover was the last full-blooded Indian of her tribe. She passed away before the close of that year.

The Indians of this valley were never at war with the whites, and no blockhouses or other defenses were built against them, and on the other hand all honor is due the first white settlers for their uniformly just and humane treatment of the aborigines. They had villages near the lakelets at the northward, which constitute some of the sources of the Webutuck, and there is indisputable evidence that a large village of them once occupied the plateau back of the great spring at Troutbeck, doubtless attracted by the spring and its surroundings. Tradition says that their cemetery was a few rods south from there, on the lower plateau south of Dunham Brook and directly in front of Troutbeck. The place was pointed out to me by my father, but I do not know that it has ever been explored.

About the time that this valley was settled Moravian missionaries from Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, came and established an Indian Mission near Indian Pond, one of the lakes referred to. They called it *Gnadensee*, "The Lake of Grace." The late Rev. Edward O. Dyer, formerly the Congregational Minister at Sharon, wrote an essay upon this mission, and it furnished a title for the book which he later published. The mission, though forwarded by the wealth and genius of Count Zinzendorf, a Count of ancient rank and lineage, and later by his daughter, the Countess Benigna, was destroyed through political influence, but let us hope that the name, "Gnadensee," so appropriate for the beautiful lakelet about which so much of the romance and pathos of worthy and unworthy effort clusters, will be adopted in place of the prosaic "Indian Pond" of the early colonists.

A marble monument erected by the Moravians near the lake commemorates their labors there. I have known people who remembered seeing these Indians as they traveled up and down the valley on their frequent migrations. The Moravians had also established a mission with the Indians at Schaghticoke, and doubtless there was much friendly visiting between the stations.

## WHITE MEN

The next name applied to this stream was "Ten Mile River," and I recall that in my boyhood this name was in frequent use, but when it was first used, and who formulated it, remains a mystery. Yet the reason for the name was revealed when the journal of Rev. Benjamin Wadsworth of Boston was discovered. It was he who was afterward president of Harvard College. In 1694 he accompanied the Massachusetts and Connecticut Indian Commissioners on their journey to Albany, there to make a treaty with the Five Nations, the Indian autocracy of New York. The party traveled on horseback and were accompanied by sixty mounted dragoons. On their return trip, which was in August, they passed down this valley.

The young gentleman of culture and theology may have started out gayly on this tour, as one who sought relief from study by a pleasant excursion in the woods which should be a sort of picnic experience. If so he must have been sadly disappointed, for in the unique journal he makes full record of his discomforts and hardships, of climbing mountain ranges, floundering through brambles and swamps, saddle-sore by day and sometimes sleeping in the rain at night.

His first mention of this valley is when he was passing the spring at the furthest source of the Webutuck. Here the great mountain rises a sheer thousand feet above the road at its base, its granite crest dividing earth from sky with a horizon line as sharp as the stroke of a pen. Yet his journal dismisses the scene of grandeur with the pithy line—"On our left a hideous high mountain."

The party traversed the valley southward from its beginning, and must have passed over the land of the farm, and mayhap over the present site of Troutbeck itself. It is not unlikely, indeed, that they paused to drink from the sparkling spring there in the wilderness, and converse, through their interpreters, with the Indians of the village at its borders. It was a friendly party, returning from a friendly council with other tribes, and those who wish may picture to themselves dusky Indian maidens, dressed in deerskin bedecked with beads and feathers, dipping gourds of cool water from the spring and handing them up to the weary horsemen! It is the first recorded presence of white men.

In his journal he speaks of the river as "Ten Miles River, (so called from

its distance from Wyantenuck—runs into Wyantenuck) by Ye side of which we rode." "Wyantenuck," it should be noted, was the Indian name in Connecticut for the river then known in Massachusetts as the "Ousetonnuck," but which is now known throughout its course as the Housatonic.

But not many decades passed after this first visit of whites when others began to drift in, at first from the Hudson River settlements. Most of them were Dutch, and they came bringing with them the Dutch language and Dutch methods. I recall many of the early houses which they built, now mostly vanished, one-story structures with low roof sweeping down and outward over the "stoop." They called the river "Mink-in-Kill."

A new name for each new comer! First the Indian "Webutuck," or something which sounded like that to the white man, then the Yankee's descriptive title of "Ten Mile River," afterward the "Mink-in-Kill" of the Dutchman, and finally "Oblong River," of obvious origin. But at last by common consent there is a return to the musical synonym employed by the Indians, and the name "Webutuck" is now applied to both the river and the valley.

## THE BORDERLAND

It is not my purpose to write a history of *Amenia*, for that has already been done, though all too briefly, by Newton Reed. But this Valley of the Webutuck, in the story of its early settlement, is a most interesting bit of ground,—none more so in the country, and as it formed the environment of Troutbeck it is fitting that some brief description, however inadequate, be given of it. It was the borderland between many races, and, still more important, between several civilizations. New England was then a *new* England, while over the border was a *new* Holland. From time immemorial the wilderness has been famed for its hospitality to strangers, but the settlers here were not only strangers to the valley, but they were strangers to each other, each set of arrivals bringing their own language, customs and sanctions, and we can but marvel at the alkahest of that hospitality which brought about their solution into a homogeneous community.

First came the slow and reliable Dutch from the Hudson River, with their excellent farming and fine horses, who labored all day in the field and at eventide meditated with pipe and mug on their stoops. But they got no further eastward, for they were met here by the New England colony which had settled the adjoining town of Sharon, Connecticut, and the Englishmen at once flowed over the border and mingled with the Dutch. The Yankee was not only of another language, but he was an entirely different creature. His first thought was for the social organism, and he reckoned his own individuality as being, at all times and under all circumstances, part of a cor-

porate individuality. He organized a town with its churches and schools, and elected town officers, before he fenced his fields.

There were also some Palatines who had been driven from their homes in the Rhine Valley by the French army of Louis XIV, and had at first found refuge in England. Then good Queen Ann colonized them on the Hudson, and—doubtless with the thrifty thought of turning an honest dollar while doing a good deed—expected them to make some return for her many favors by producing hemp, tar, pitch, pine lumber, etc. But the camp was far from home and the scheme did not work well. So some of them fled to this valley, bringing their own language and adding one more element. One of them, Uldrick Winegar, lived to a great age, passing away in 1754 at the age of 102 years. He was buried in the cemetery at Amenias Union, where his gravestone is still extant.

Another element was added by some Huguenots, who brought their French language and their three fold names, such as *de la Vergne*, *de la Mater*, and *de la Noyse*. On the English tongue and pen these soon became single words, and to us they were known as "Delavergne," "Delamater," and "Delano." There was also now and then a Scotch family, and it would be strange indeed if some Irish were not there with the others. The seasoning of this mingled community would not have been complete without them.

Another class which contributed its portion—an educated and cultured portion—was the Moravian missionaries already spoken of. They were Germans, and after the missions were destroyed some of them remained to minister to the churches of this valley, thus becoming an element in the forming of the new community. The first preaching at Amenias Union of which there is a record was by one of these missionaries.

It was a foregone conclusion that in the meeting and mingling of so many elements the ready-made organization would prevail, and they all woke up one fine morning and found themselves transformed to Yankees. Who shall say how much we are indebted to the modifying influence of each of these races for our present fine poise, wherein we preserve, to a degree, a blending of individual liberty with a wholesome sense of public duty!

## TITLE TO TROUTBECK

As already stated, this land was ceded by Connecticut to New York in 1731, and New York immediately sold the tract to a land company, and allotments of the land were made to individuals of the Company. Cadwalader Colden, who was Surveyor-General and Lieutenant Governor of New York at the time, was a member of the Company, and it is supposed that the land set off to him included that which now composes Troutbeck and its farm. The first known occupant was Captain William Young. It is not



known whether he was related to Dr. Thomas Young, poet and patriot, who lived at Amenia Union and was a friend of Ethan Allen. It was Thomas Young who gave Amenia its name, constructing it from a Latin word which signifies "pleasant". He is also credited with having furnished the name for Vermont.

In 1765 Captain Young built a frame house here. It was on the site of the present house, but eight feet further south. It was of the Dutch type of architecture, one story, with the roof sloping outward over the stoop which occupied the whole front, having steps at each end, for the highway came to its front. Tradition says that in those primitive days carpenter's tools were scarce, and that in making the frame for this house but three implements were employed; the axe for cutting and hewing the timbers and chopping the tenons, the post-axe for making the mortises, and the auger for boring the pin holes. The heavy siding was made secure by hand-made nails of wrought iron, and there was a substantial chimney and fire place at each end.

This building forms the dining-room ell of the present structure, and though its interior partitioning has been much changed its exterior still retains much of its original form. Its rear foundation wall is now close to an unusually large and clear spring, in which the water rises silently through its broad gravel bed and flows away, a considerable brook, to the cooling room and the milk house, and thence into the Webutuck. The flight of rough stone steps leading from the side door down to the margin of the spring are of unknown origin, and were probably built by one of the early owners.

At some time during the early days there was a tannery between the house and the river. Caleb Benton, who moved there in 1794, did not know of this ancient tannery until he discovered the vats, covered over, near the river. Later the foundation of the currier's shop was discovered.

A little to the westward, at the meeting of the highways, a blacksmith's shop stood, before the Revolution. Later a schoolhouse occupied the site, and though the first building was burned another in time occupied the place, which was the one I attended. One of the amusements of my childhood was digging between the schoolhouse and the great willow tree for old horse-shoe nails, drawn from hoofs whose resounding thud has been silent now for more than a century. The highway now passes directly over this place.

To the southeast, just across the brook from Troutbeck, stands a house which antedates that at Troutbeck by some four years. It was built by John and Mary Delamater in 1761, and their initials and the date stand plainly, built in the wall in dark-colored brick, on the end towards the street: "J. M. D. L. 1761." Though the brick end with its great chimney and bearing the infallible historical record is probably the same as when it was built, yet the remainder of the structure has passed through many transformations. In my childhood there were the ruins of an enormous chimney



**THE DELAMATER HOUSE AT TROUTBECK**

- (1) From a sketch by Myron B. Benton, about 1860
- (2) From a photograph, 1911





to those in authority," and desired to take no part on either side. But the storm center of a revolution has small regard for private sentiments, and one is not surprised to learn that his peaceful tendencies more than once got him into trouble. But as usual his conscience came out ahead and he never enlisted.

After the line had lived there for more than a century and a half Caleb became dissatisfied with the conditions and decided to go west. The place finally selected for his new settlement was what is now known as Troutbeck, eighty miles distant. One or more journeys thither on horseback were made to select the farm, and another by the same method was necessary to carry the bag of silver dollars with which to make the payment to Captain Lasell. Then preparations were made for the moving. It was before four-wheeled vehicles were in use, and before horses were used as draft animals. But Caleb and his son Joel had been to New Haven and carefully measured a *wagon* which some one in that town had in his possession. And then—for at that time every farmer was also a mechanic—they built for themselves an "experiment;" a heavy, cumbersome wagon, the first four-wheeled vehicle ever seen in the streets of Guilford.

A large sloop was chartered, on which were placed the heavier articles and the women and children, and it sailed from the harbor, destined to pass safely to the extremity of Long Island Sound, through Hell Gate, East River, New York Harbor, and up the Hudson River to Poughkeepsie. Some of the bulkier articles were loaded on the new contrivance, to which were yoked the oxen; the cattle and other live stock could do their own traveling. So the procession took its way out of the village, but there was no one present with a camera with which to take a "snap shot" of that caravan with its first wagon!

In time the migrants arrived safely at the new farm, and, unloading the things, Joel immediately started with the wagon and oxen for Poughkeepsie, thirty miles distant, to bring the remainder with the family. There is no record of how long a time was required for the journey, but on the 20th day of May, 1794, they arrived at the new home, which was destined to remain in the family one hundred and eight years. It must have been an unusually forward season, for upon their arrival they picked and stewed green currants. Only once since then has the garden yielded green currants large enough for stewing at so early a date.

## CONDITION OF THE COUNTRY AFTER THE REVOLUTION

At that time Troutbeck and its surroundings did not present the appearance they do to-day, and the farm did not have the same boundaries as the present one. The land in front of the house was owned by a Jenks fam-

ily, who lived in the Delamater house, while that at the west was owned by a Mr. Wardwell, who lived near The Narrows in a house which has since been removed. The farm connected with Troutbeck extended eastward to the state line. Leedsville street was not straight as at present, but followed 'round at the eastward near the base of the hill. In fact there was no Leedsville, for the village began with the building of the factory in 1809. The superintendent of the factory was from Leeds, England; hence the name, "Leedsville."

There was no stage or post route in this part of the country, and letters, the few that were written, were sent by private hands. The newspapers, from Hartford and Poughkeepsie, were brought by men on horseback. Caleb Benton must have been a regular newspaper "fiend" for that day, for I found among his effects a package of newspaper clippings from Hartford, Poughkeepsie, and Hudson papers, ranging in dates from 1792 to 1810.

These clippings from newspapers of more than a century ago are curious in some respects, for they are devoted to but two subjects, agriculture and poetry. Can it be that Caleb was not only extremely practical, as family tradition asserts, but idealistic as well? Or was it that—this happy suggestion has come to me—while his mind was intent on "Merino Sheep," "Receipts for Preserving Cider," and "The Hessian Fly," (the worst thing the Hessians inflicted on this country!), his better half was contributing poetry to the family scrap basket? But wherever the talents were located it is interesting to know that some of their descendants have been excellent farmers while some others have been still more notable as poets and essayists, beside some who were learned professors and preachers.

As often happens in like cases, the backs of these scraps contain some things of more interest to-day than the articles for which they were saved. They are the real magical glasses which reflect the life of the community as it was more than a century ago. An article to "vindicate our right to make slaves of the negroes" is followed by a list of the presidential electors of New York, who were destined to elect to his second term the unique Thomas Jefferson. There were rumors of Burr's conspiracies in the West, and the following was then perfectly fresh news:

"The most interesting foreign incident now before us, in respect to this country, is the proclamation of Bonaparte, declaring England in a state of blockade."

In the same column are advertised a runaway wife and a runaway slave. At the time of Caleb Benton's moving both New York and Connecticut were slave states, and with regard to the influence of the institution of slavery and its standing in the community I find myself somewhat at a loss from lack of first-hand information in regard to it. Though many slaves were owned in

the valley Caleb Benton never owned any, and as far as I can learn none of the Benton line owned slaves. Slavery, as an industrial institution, was never a success in this valley, and public sentiment, allied possibly with natural environment, was setting strongly against it when Caleb arrived, and it soon declined, so that laws were passed for its final extinction.

From all that I can learn I do not think slavery had much effect in shaping the social and industrial life of this community, it being incidental rather than a controlling force. It was not a civilization built upon slavery, and all records and traditions show that the slaves were treated kindly, and were looked upon as a weaker people who were not capable of caring for themselves but were dependent on their owners for care and direction. The principle was recognized in legislation, for when New York set about the task of abolishing slavery it forbade owners emancipating slaves who were too old to care for themselves, holding that it was the duty of the owner to care for his slaves in their old age.

I feel how difficult it is to convey to the reader an adequate picture of life in this remote valley at the time the Bentons arrived. There was with the people about them no background of common thought, nor even the heritage of a common language. They had nothing in common but the necessity of meeting present emergencies and making the best of them, and possibly that is why they succeeded so well. The close of the Revolution had left them poor in all save opportunity; opportunity and spirit. Freed from the authority of the king a rampant and aggressive individualism asserted itself. In this reaction of the spirit religion was also at a low ebb, and not until the reorganization of the national life did the churches reach their normal condition again.

Nor were their hardships ended with the ending of the war, for there was a pathetic aftermath of that heroic struggle, one that is never referred to in the gatherings of the "Sons" and "Daughters" of those who wrought and suffered in that drear time. Many who served in the ranks were industrious men who had acquired a little foothold in life and owned small farms. The colonists were straightened for means wherewith to carry on the war, and pay for the soldiers was uncertain and slow in arriving. Some served for years without being able to draw their small pay, and meantime their families at home were getting deeper and deeper in debt for their necessary subsistence.

When the war was ended and they at last received their pay it was in continental currency which at once became worthless. By this means the men who had done patient duty in the army for years returned home only to lose their farms and homesteads, and discouraged by their losses and by the general confusion in political and industrial affairs, many lost hope and courage and drifted into vagrancy.

My mother was born in 1800, and she often recalled that during her early life there were many tramps of a certain type travelling the country roads. They were harmless, discouraged old men who often asked for food or the privilege of sleeping in the barn. But whatever other wants they might have there was one thing they never failed to ask for, and that was for "just a drink of cider, Ma'am!" For this reason they were always spoken of as "cider tramps." Cider was then the common beverage in the country.

Rarely or never were their requests for food, drink, or lodging denied, for it was well known and understood by everyone that they were old Revolutionary soldiers who had become impoverished by the war. As time elapsed and those who had served in the war passed away the "cider tramps" disappeared from the roads. This is not a pleasant thought upon which to dwell, but it is best to read history truthfully.

## CONDITION OF INDUSTRY

At the time of Caleb Benton's arrival at Troutbeck industry and manufacturing were still in a most primitive state, hardly advanced from what they were in England two centuries before. Grain was cut with a sickle, threshed with a flail and laboriously separated from the chaff in a winnowing basket. Grass was cut with a scythe and raked by hand, and it is even within my own memory, and forming one of my most treasured recollections, that in those broad interval meadows a common midsummer scene was the group of six or eight sinewy mowers sweeping with keen blades adown the sea of billowy grass.

My brother Myron, in a poem entitled "The Mowers," has immortalized this scene in a poem which is as much a classic of summer on the farm as is Whittier's "Snow Bound" of the New England winter. I cannot refrain from quoting its concluding stanza:

Still hiss the scythes!  
Shudder the grasses' defenceless blades—  
The lily-throng writhes;  
And, as a phalanx of wild geese streams,  
Where the shore of April cloudland gleams,  
On their dizzy way, in serried grades—  
Wing on wing, wing on wing,—  
The mowers, each a step in advance  
Of his fellow, time their stroke with a glance  
Of swerveless force;  
And far through the meadow leads their course—  
Swing, swing, swing!

On account of lack of transportation facilities it was necessary to manufacture almost everything at home by hand, and the few articles that were marketed and brought actual money returns had to be carted thirty miles to Poughkeepsie and sent by boat to market. Caleb Benton saved his beef hides and took them to the tanner, and the shoemaker brought his kit of tools and established himself by the fireplace, and was a member of the family until he had made them a year's supply of shoes from this home-grown leather.

Caleb sheared the wool from his sheep and his wife cleaned and carded it by hand, while her daughters spun it on the spinning wheel and wove and knit it by hand into clothing for the family. This was supplemented by flax which passed through a corresponding process of home manipulation until it furnished the family linen chest. The production of food, clothing and utensils, from the raw material to the finished product, was carried on mainly within the household. The supply of fuel required more thoughtful consideration then, for stoves had not been invented and fireplaces were depended on for both warmth and cooking, though much of the baking was done in large brick ovens. But open fireplaces consume wood to an extent past the belief of those who have had no experience with them, and an important part of the winter's work consisted in chopping and drawing an immense woodpile.

If I seem to dwell unduly on this period it is because I wish the reader to gather some adequate picture of the life into which my grandfather came. He had lived on the coast where there was some commerce transacted, but in this new community, still in its pioneer stage of developement, exchange of products outside the locality was reduced to a minimum. In 1821 an effort was made to furnish connection with the outside world by means of a canal which should reach New York City, but the project fell through and the valley remained isolated. It was not until 1850 that easy communication with the city was made possible by the extension of the Harlem Railroad.

Yet, isolated as they were, the people of so mixed an ancestry were early awake to the advantages of the higher education, and both Sharon and Amenia were famous, far and near, for their excellent schools. As "an institution is the lengthened shadow of a man"—or a group of men—we must conclude that this early interest in education was the heritage from some of the early settlers, but whether from the English Yankees, the educated and cultured German Moravians, the refined French Huguenots, or the painstaking Dutch, who may say?

In 1835 the Amenia Seminary was established at the village of Amenia, two and a half miles from Troutbeck, and it at once became the centre of scholarship for the whole country about, notwithstanding that the students



had to be brought long distances in wagons. In the half century or more of its career it was so successful that missionaries and traveling men reported that there was no state, and scarcely a civilized country, where *Amenia Seminary* graduates did not occupy prominent positions, and many of them became famous in their chosen fields of activity. William A. Benton was one of the most active of those who furthered the foundation of this famous institution, and the immediate neighborhood of Troutbeck was originally intended to be its site. It closed its doors in 1888.

All traditions assert that the community was cheerful and optimistic to the last degree, and in trying to account for this I am impressed by the records of large families, from six to a dozen or more sons and daughters growing up in each household, the whole community being literally alive with young people, and the further thought comes to me that youth must have been the preponderating influence. Youth and Hope go hand in hand. Doubtless they gave more unhindered play to the social impulses then, and every occasion for assembling, whether at a raising bee, a husking bee, an apple bee or a road making bee, was made the most of socially, where free refreshments were usually provided.

My father's life began in those times and he took an active part in their revelries. He has told me that it was well understood by the older and wiser ones that, from a monetary point of view, it was not profitable. But the younger element had other profits in view and long continued to bring the social element as much as possible into all their life, their work as well as their play.

This was the community and its environment into which Caleb Benton moved, when he was past fifty years of age, with his two sons and five daughters. The eldest, Joel, was twenty-two at the time, while the youngest, William Alfred, was five. *Clarissa* returned to Guilford four years later for a visit, but sickened and died there. The others married in Dutchess County, and in the adjoining town of Sharon, Connecticut, and five of them left descendants, who are now numbered in the hundreds. The migration seems to have been fortunate for the family in many ways. It was an era of peace and prosperity, the War of 1812 causing hardly a ripple in this secluded valley, and Caleb succeeded beyond his expectations.

In their old age he and his wife continued to live at Troutbeck, making their home with their youngest son, William, and at last Nature gathered them home, Sarah at the age of seventy-seven, and six years afterward, in 1832, Caleb, in his ninetieth year. They were interred in a family cemetery which had been established on the place, for at that time there were no well cared for public cemeteries in that vicinity. Many of his descendants were afterward buried there, but in 1911 the remains, with the gravestones, were removed to a plot in the South *Amenia Cemetery*.

They had been thrifty in the world of industry and had shared in the great advance in the methods and comforts of life, but there are higher measures of value than these. They had lived worthy and upright lives, helpful to the forces of morality and the welfare of the social organism, and in bringing up their family of seven children in a clean and wholesome moral life, with habits of industry, they conferred a legacy of infinitely greater value than material wealth, not only upon their descendants, but upon those about them.

Caleb Benton was a blond of short stature and great physical strength, a strength which lasted far into old age. He was a quiet and reserved man, endowed with a keen appreciation of the humorous, a cheerful disposition and an aggressive conscience. He was given to carefully thinking out subjects for himself and was not at all disposed to accept the conventional opinions of his neighbors as his standard, but arrived at his own conclusions and held them firmly. Regarding the personality of his wife, Sister Harriet, who was eleven years old when her grandmother died, wrote me as follows:

The general testimony of her children and others who knew her, was that she was a diligent housewife, ruling her family with energy and diligence; one of whom it might be said, "She looketh well to the ways of her household, and eateth not the bread of idleness."

In their church affiliations they were early attracted toward the sect called "Sandemanians." But in their old age they joined the Disciples of Christ, sometimes spoken of as "Campbellites," of which their youngest son and some others of their descendants were members.

## CALEB BENTON'S CHILDREN

In the year 1795, the next after their arrival at Troutbeck, Joel was married to Delia Sears of Sharon, and his father immediately built for him a house on the farm, but on the other side of Webutuck River. It is the one now known as "Century Lodge." Joel rented that portion of the farm and lived there for the remainder of his life, keeping the house as a hotel for a long period. He held many public offices, and was four times elected to the New York Legislature. His eldest son, Albert S. Benton, was the law partner of William H. Seward. Mr. Seward was afterward Governor of New York, and finally became Secretary of State in Lincoln's cabinet. Joel's grandsons, Albert S. and Andrew J. Hunt, were Methodist ministers, and the former was for many years Secretary of the American Bible Society.

Another grandson, Joel Benton, was widely known for his literary talents, and especially as a poet and essayist. When the *Amenia Times* was established in 1852, the first paper to be published in that whole region south of Albany, Joel Benton, then but nineteen years old, took charge of it as

editor and manager and he made the venture a signal success, continuing his connection with it, except for brief intervals, until 1873. A few years ago its name was changed, and it is now known as the *Harlem Valley Times*. Joel Benton's books include *Emerson as a Poet*, *In the Poe Circle*, *Greeley on Lincoln*, *Persons and Places*, and *Memories of the Twilight Club*; and some of his poems have been included in such various collections as Frank Moore's *Lyrics of Loyalty and Personal and Political Ballads* (1864), Stedman and Hutchinson's *Library of American Literature*, Stedman's *American Anthology*, and Rickert and Paton's *American Lyrics* (1912). In an obituary notice of him, which appeared in the *Amenia Times* in 1911, some interesting details of his early life, when he lived at Century Lodge, two or three hundred yards from the main house at Troutbeck, are given:

A literary bureau was then in active operation, and lectures from the best on the celebrated roll of New England orators and thinkers were heard in Amenia by large and interested audiences. Horace Greeley, Margaret Fuller, Wendell Phillips,<sup>1</sup> Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Mark Twain, and others were here, some more than once, and many of these notabilities were entertained at Mr. Benton's home, now under modest guise known as Century Cottage.

It might be added that many of them also found their way across the Webutuck to Troutbeck.

Of Caleb Benton's other children, Sarah married Stephen Reed, a farmer of South Amenia, and passed the remainder of her life there; Betsey married Amos Beecher, of Sharon, Connecticut, a prominent official of Litchfield County; and Juliana married William Germond of Washington Hollow.

William A. Benton was the youngest of Caleb's children, and when he had reached manhood's estate he began business for himself by hiring Troutbeck and that portion of the farm not leased to Joel. The line between the two was defined for a considerable distance by the river. Caleb was then nearly seventy years old, and about that time he seems to have retired from active participation in business. After his death the division of the farm was made permanent by each of the sons purchasing of the heirs that portion of the farm which he occupied, and William became the owner of Troutbeck.

He prospered in his industry and in time purchased of the Jenks heirs the land south from his residence, sixty acres, and from the Wardwell family

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<sup>1</sup> "I told Wendell Phillips, as we were riding one day, after I had introduced him to a lecture audience the previous evening, that I had never been in Boston . . . . And this was at least thirty years ago."—Joel Benton, *Persons and Places*, p. 28. The *New York Sun*, in an obituary notice, September 16, 1911, says: "The long white hair which Joel Benton affected (he prided himself upon his resemblance to Tennyson) for the past ten years or more made the aged poet a figure to be remarked."



the land to the westward. In 1836 he purchased of his brother Joel the northern and eastern portion of the land set off to him in the division of the estate, so that in the end his farm consisted of three hundred and twenty acres.

William was twice married, first in 1812 to Cythera Reed, whose home was four miles southward in the valley. He was twenty-three and she was nineteen at the time of their marriage. She had seven children, but died at thirty-two, carried off by a fever which devastated the household. His second marriage was to Betsey Reed, a sister of his first wife, and by this marriage he had eight children, of whom the writer was the last born. William died in 1865, and Betsey in 1876, and upon their death Troutbeck passed to the ownership of their son, Myron B. Benton.

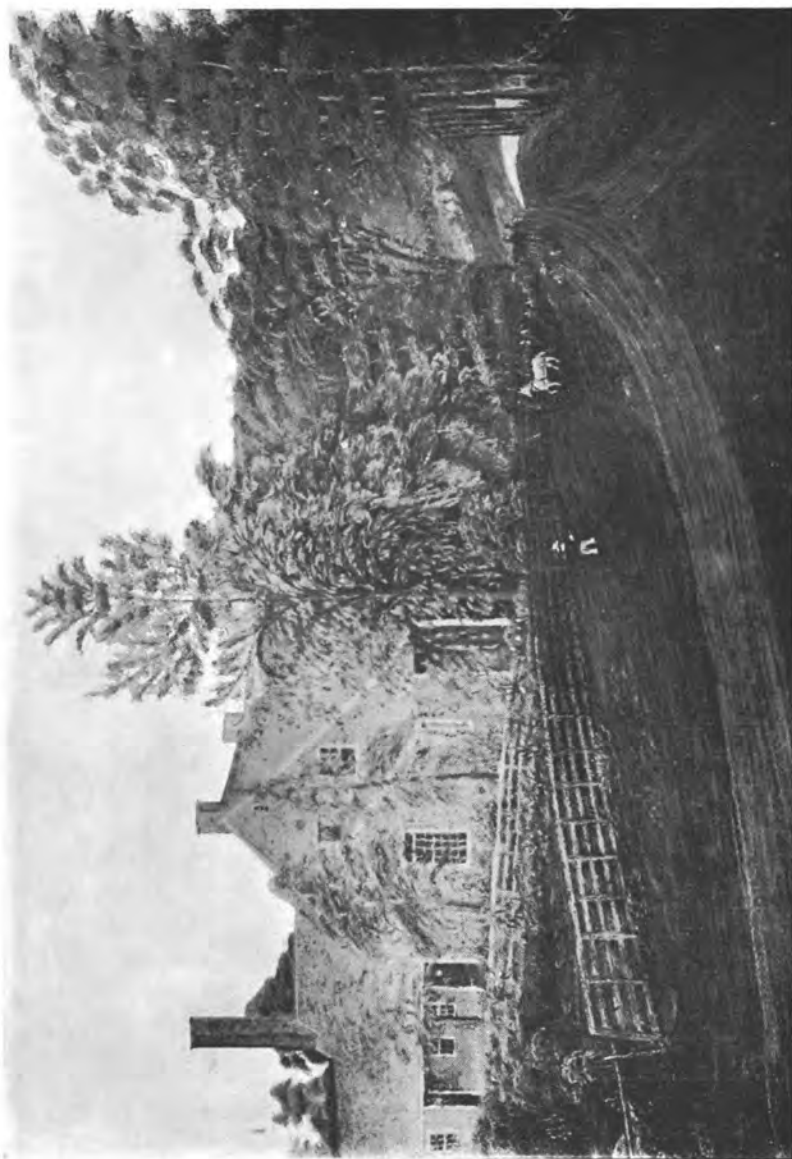
William A. Benton was a blond of medium height, strong framed and with a tremendous capacity for work, and he was a very busy man all through his middle life, for in the purchase of so much land he incurred considerable debt. He had a good education for the time and an excellent mental capacity, being well grounded in the classics, but possibly the demands of the farm debt and a large, growing family, prevented him from developing to the full his intellectual qualities.

He was kind and gentle in his disposition and gifted with a rare fund of humor, yet he was rather uncommunicative, at least as far as talking was concerned, and I have heard him spoken of as "a silent man." But in spite of this he was a fair public speaker and what he said was usually considered worth remembering, and his letters, the few that have come into my possession, are models of lucidity, and are really literary in their clearness of expression.

Early in life he was attracted to the Disciples of Christ. This denomination was very young then, its first church having been organized in 1809, and he was well acquainted with Mr. Campbell, its founder. He became a Ruling Elder in this church, and for a long time the meetings were held at Troutbeck. William's first wife, Cythera Reed, is said to have been beautiful, and I have a silhouette portrait of the couple which seems to confirm the tradition, for it shows an intellectual face with the head carried in fine poise.

His second wife, Betsey Reed, like most of her brothers and sisters was quite tall, and her fine complexion was made more striking by her hair, which was black and very heavy and long. At the time of her death in her seventy-seventh year only a few silver threads were noticable in it. Her memory is treasured by those who knew her as of one who, though outwardly placid, was a woman of strong feeling and depth of character; one whose ideals were of the highest and who never failed to respond to the call of duty. Despite her wide hospitality and the care of her large family she kept up in her knowledge of current events, nor did she lose her taste for the best literature of the older authors.





TROUTBECK IN 1850

From a crayon sketch by Helen C. Benton

## MYRON B. BENTON, THE POET

"One of our rural poets, Myron Benton, whose verse often has the flavor of sweet cream."—John Burroughs, *Birds and Poets*, 1877.

It is fitting that I should give a brief account of the family of William A. Benton, born and raised at Troutbeck, some of whom however died in childhood. Harriet M. Benton, the second child and eldest daughter, remained single. She made her home with her relatives, and died in 1913 in her one hundredth year. She was refined in her tastes and with an intellectual trend of mind, a quality which showed in her letters, for which she was famous. In fact the absentees of the family sometimes humorously referred to her as the family "corresponding secretary!" I had two good letters from her after she had entered her hundredth year. She sometimes was a contributor to the press. Juliana Benton married Jerome T. Cobb, and they early settled in Michigan, where in time he became a prominent figure in the Grange movement, and was for many years editor of the Grange paper. Horace and Linus had no taste for farming, but started a manufacturing enterprise at the old factory which was built in 1809 for a woolen cloth mill. That enterprise had collapsed and the building was used for other purposes. They both died early in life. Helen C. Benton married Henry Barlow, and they lived in the town of Amenia, where all of their ten children were born; he was a farmer, and sometimes manufacturer. Orville remained single; he was a machinist and a civil engineer, and spent some time in railroad construction in the West.

Myron, the third son, was the most distinctive product of this "sheltered valley farm." He married Mary Anna Adams of Poughkeepsie; they had no children, which was a great cross to him, as he was exceedingly fond of children. As already stated, he purchased Troutbeck of his father's estate, and he spent his whole life there, and since he was the last of the Bentons to own Troutbeck it is fitting that he should have more than passing mention.

While he was a farmer all of his days and a lover of country life, he had also distinct literary tastes. I have sometimes wondered whether Nature intended him for an artist, a landscape gardener, or a poet. In fact his faculties were dominated most by the artistic temperament in everything. Sketching was one of his pastimes in early life, and some of his sketches have been pronounced works of art. He was an omnivorous reader, and in his own writing was gifted with a remarkably easy and graceful diction. He contributed poems, essays, book notices, and sketches to various publications, but never collected any of them in book form, though he contemplated doing so when he hoped for time of leisure—never to be realized—should come. But several of his poems have found a place in collections which

others have published, the last one being in Mr. Burroughs's collection of *Songs of Nature*. As a fitting tribute to his memory I have published since his death a thin volume of his poems under the title, *Songs of the Webutuck*. Perhaps he had no more striking characteristic than his intense love for his home and its environment. Of this he wrote to a friend as follows:

We have hugged the soil close—an unbroken line of farmers,—how far back in England green and old I do not know, but doubtless a long way. This bucolic association has permeated the very blood and I feel it in every heart-beat. My intense local attachment I doubt not has been fostered through many generations.

He especially admired Coleridge, and one of his essays, on "Coleridge's Introduction to the Lake District," appeared in the *Atlantic Monthly* in July, 1894. He was also an admirer of Thoreau, and Thoreau's last letter was written to him. It was first published in the *Letters to Various Persons* in 1865, and is reprinted in Sanborn's edition of Thoreau's *Familiar Letters*, with extracts from the letter of Myron Benton to which it was a reply. After mentioning that his own home was in a pleasant valley, once the hunting-ground of the Indians, Myron wrote:

The secret of the influence by which your writings charm me is altogether as intangible, though real, as the attraction of Nature herself. I read and re-read your books with ever fresh delight. Nor is it pleasure alone; there is a singular spiritual healthiness with which they seem imbued,—the expression of a soul essentially sound, so free from any morbid tendency . . . Of your two books I perhaps prefer the *Week*; but after all, *Walden* is but little less my favorite. In the former, I especially like those little snatches of poetry interspersed throughout. I would like to ask what progress you have made in a work some way connected with natural history,—I think it was Botany,—which Mr. Emerson told me something about in a short interview I had with him two years ago at Poughkeepsie.

Thoreau in his answer seemed particularly pleased that Myron liked the "little snatches of poetry" in the *Week*, "for these, I suppose, are the least attractive to most readers."

Among those who knew and sometime visited Myron were John Burroughs, Moncure D. Conway, Richard H. Stoddard, Mrs. Elizabeth Stoddard, and Mrs. Elizabeth Akers Allen. Moncure Conway, in his *Autobiography*, has given the following account of a visit to Troutbeck, probably in the early sixties:

My editorial experiences brought me into contact with a number of people possessing something like genius, and from some of them I expected large results. Myron B. Benton, for instance, wrote exquisite poems in the *Dial*, one of them, "Orchis," surpassingly beautiful. I visited him in his charming home in Dutchess County, New York, where he lived a retired

life. The sweet and delicate poet (he died near the close of 1902) was an enigma to me; but perhaps he had discovered, with Shakespeare, "the blessedness of being little."

Myron met Mr. Burroughs in 1862, and from that time until his death their friendship was unbroken. He sometimes accompanied Burroughs on his "nature" excursions, but for the most part their communing was in their libraries. They were real communings of the spirit, for they were greatly attached to each other, and exchanged visits of a week or more as opportunity offered. Between visits they exchanged letters of real interest, and as they have been saved they may some day prove of interest to the public. Some years ago Mr. Burroughs wrote of Myron in the *Twentieth Century Review* as follows:

He is a poet who writes his poetry in the landscape as well as in his books. Planter of trees and vines, preserver of old picturesque cottages, lover of paths and streams, beautifier of highways, friend of all wild and shy things, historian and portrayer of big trees, collector of local relics, and seeker and cultivator of all that gives flavor and character to a place, he is the practical poet of whom the country everywhere needs many more.

Myron was the first to apply the present name, "Troutbeck," to the homestead, for until he came into possession it had no specific title. The name was suggested by the fact that trout come up from the Webutuck and dwell in the spring the year 'round.<sup>1</sup> In my childhood the spring-house stood over the spring, and its foundation and floor furnished many hiding places for the beauties. Some of them attained considerable size, and with the friendly treatment they received these shyest of all the denizens of country streams became quite tame, so that I could put my hand in the water and stroke their sides. Mr. Burroughs especially admired the place—loved it indeed, as he loved its owner. Of the spring he wrote in *Pepacton* as follows:

I know a homestead, situated in one of the picturesque branch valleys of the Housatonic, that has a spring flowing by the foundation walls of the house, and not a little of the strong overmastering local attachment that holds its owner there is born of that, his native spring. He could not, if he would, break from it. He says that when he looks down into it he has a feeling that he is an amphibious animal that has somehow got stranded.

A long, gentle flight of stone steps leads from the back porch down to it under the branches of a lofty elm. It wells up through the white sand and gravel as through a sieve, and fills the broad space that has been arranged for it so gently and imperceptibly that one does not suspect its copiousness until he has seen the overflow. It turns no wheel, yet it lends a pliant hand to

<sup>1</sup> Troutbeck is the name of a small village in the North of England. Coleridge's association with it may in part account for Myron's appropriation of the name.

many of the affairs of that household. It is a refrigerator in summer and a frost-proof envelope in winter, and a fountain of delights the year round. Trout come up from the Webutuck River and dwell there and become domesticated, and take lumps of butter from your hand, or rake the ends of your fingers if you tempt them.

It is a kind of sparkling and ever washed larder. Where are the berries? where is the butter, the milk, the steak, the melon? In the spring. It preserves, it ventilates, it cleanses. It is a board of health and a general purveyor. It is equally for use and for pleasure. Nothing degrades it, and nothing can enhance its beauty. It is a picture and a parable, and an instrument of music. It is servant and divinity in one.

The milk of forty cows is cooled in it, and never a drop gets into the cans, though they are plunged to the brim. It is as insensible to droughth and rain as to heat and cold. It is planted upon the sand, yet it abideth like a house upon a rock.<sup>1</sup>

Let me anticipate a little and speak of a later visit Mr. Burroughs made to Troutbeck, which was in the summer of 1914, twelve years after Myron's death. He had expressed a desire to visit the place once more, which Mr. and Mrs. Spingarn had urged him to do, and he invited me to accompany him. He found its outward aspect greatly changed, but the spring had not changed, and while he gazed reverently into its crystal flood it must have flooded his soul with many sweet memories.

While Myron was never conspicuous in a public way, he took an active interest in the political and social life about him, and throughout his being there ran a certain fine personal quality, based on perfect sincerity of character, like a thread of gold woven in the fabric of life, which attracted about equally people of all ages and in all stations of life. Children came to him as by a sure instinct they come to one who appreciated and loved them, while those of a larger growth felt the same indescribable charm, though it was not easy to analyze it and say in just what it consisted.

He died in the marvelously beautiful autumn of 1902 at the age of sixty-eight years, and was buried by the side of his wife in Poughkeepsie. During his last illness, which was a prolonged one, he requested that his poem, "The Soul's Return," be read at his funeral, a request that was complied with. Of his work at Troutbeck I will speak later.

The next to claim our attention of this family at Troutbeck is Ezra R. Benton. He married Rebecca L. Hitchcock of South Amenia, and soon afterward purchased a farm in Salisbury, Connecticut. But in 1874 he removed to the Hitchcock farm in South Amenia, where he resided until his death in 1914 at the age of seventy-five years. As a neighbor he was known

<sup>1</sup> Concerning this passage Mr. Burroughs wrote to Mr. Spingarn in 1910: "You are correct in your inference—the spring referred to in my *Pepacton* is the spring which was then owned by my friend Myron Benton. I first made the acquaintance of Troutbeck in 1862. It is the most beautiful farm I have ever seen."



for his kindness and consideration for others, and in the business world for his integrity and just dealing.

The youngest member of this large family is Charles E. Bentori. In 1862, before he had reached his majority, he enlisted in the 150th New York Volunteers, in which he served to the close of the Civil War in 1865. His father died before he returned from the war, and in the settlement of the estate the farm was divided and he purchased Troutbeck. This however he soon afterward sold to Myron, leaving him in sole possession. In 1870 he purchased a farm in Sharon, and in the autumn of that year was married to Clara R. Foster of Southampton, Long Island. But she and her infant daughter died in 1872.

In 1875 he was married to Harriet M. Drown of New Bedford, Massachusetts, and they have one daughter, Mrs. Cogswell Bentley, of Rochester, New York. In 1891 his wife's father died, and he closed out his business in Sharon, removing to New Bedford to care for Mrs. Drown and the estate. She died in 1913, and as his daughter was living in Rochester he and his wife removed to that city where they now reside, not far from their daughter and their three granddaughters.

He has sometimes found relaxation by turning from the plow to the pen, and has contributed to various publications on a rather wide range of subjects. In 1902 the Putnams published a book from his pen entitled *As Seen From the Ranks: A Boy in the Civil War*, which was favorably reviewed, both in this country and in England. Later publications of his are *Caleb Benton and Sarah Bishop: Their Ancestors and Their Descendants*, and *Ezra Reed and Esther Edgerton: Their Life and Ancestry*. The former gives the ancestry of his father, while the latter gives that of his mother. He is the last survivor of Caleb Benton's forty-five grandchildren.

## CHANGES AT TROUTBECK

We have traced its history and spoken of the condition of the community and its industries, and somewhat of the life of the family which occupied it so long, and now let us turn to Troutbeck itself and notice the changes it has passed through. When Caleb Benton purchased the place in 1794 the house built by Captain Young had already passed its stage of newness. With its roof sweeping down and outward over the stoop, the highway coming to its front, it was a type of the early houses of that valley. There was a small addition for a kitchen at the rear, perhaps built when the house was. A little east of the stoop was a weeping-willow—which was removed more than seventy years ago—and an orchard of ungrafted apple trees crowned the hill at the rear. There were trees of a natural growth on the river bank and those now standing there are their successors. Without doubt all of the



trees now on the grounds at Troutbeck have been placed there since Caleb Benton came, and probably all or nearly all of them by his descendants, as he had already entered the "youth of old age," and probably he made few changes.

But his son William entered the field with the "vim" of youth. Flax dressing was quite an industry then, and he soon installed a flax mill west of the house and in time constructed a water-power there, so as to save hand power. This he later used for sawing marble, threshing grain, sawing firewood, and making brooms. He seems to have been quite enterprising, for he built and used the first threshing machine used in Dutchess County.

He set many trees about Troutbeck, the large elms now there being of his transplanting. In 1835 he set the row of sycamore trees now standing in front of the house, and at some period of his occupancy he built out the bank toward the south, moving the highway a little in that direction, which enabled him to inclose a narrow yard, about eight feet, in front of the stoop. The garden, with its row of bee hives and containing the double row of historic currant bushes from which the family supped when they first arrived, was just west of the house, while the barns stood between the house and the river. My sister Helen made a crayon picture of the place about 1848 or 1850, which is now in possession of her son, John Barlow, at Kingston, R. I. The large clump of arborvitae on the lawn was planted in 1856 to commemorate her marriage to Henry Barlow.

Before 1850 William made two journeys to Michigan and Ohio, and on one of them brought home in his pocket some buckeyes, and the buckeye trees now at Troutbeck are from that seed. The apple orchard at the west of the grounds is of his setting, and he also made some additions to the house, but did not materially change the exterior of the main building.

Myron was married in 1871 and not many years thereafter he planned radical changes in the place. The main building was moved back and turned, causing it to face westward, and a new house, the present structure, was built in front. He also moved the barns to their present position, and removing the garden to a less conspicuous place extended the lawn on the west to the highway. At a later date the schoolhouse was moved from its unpleasant proximity to the lawn to a much more appropriate site on the other side of Dunham Brook. To its cupola he contributed the factory bell, for the old factory had at last been removed. This bell is something of a relic of antiquity in a way. It bears the inscription,

BAILEY—:—N—:—YORK—:—1787.

It was cast the very year that the metal of our constitution, from an equally fiery furnace, was moulded. Myron wrote of it at the time as follows:

"Perhaps this bell was first rung September 17th, 1787, or a day or two later, when the happy news had been wafted the great distance from Philadelphia that the long labors of the constitutional convention were completed.

I should add that this building was also consumed by fire, eight years after Myron's death, and the new one built to replace it is on a half-acre plot near The Narrows,

Not content with beautifying his own home Myron extended his artistic schemes. Purchasing the old factory place he removed the dilapidated factory, and transformed the house into an attractive summer cottage, now known as "The Maples." Later he purchased the house which Caleb built for his son Joel and transformed that in a similar manner, calling it "Century Lodge." His artistic sense was such that whatever he touched turned—not to gold, but to a thing of beauty. In the many changes he made at Troutbeck his ablest co-worker was his wife, whose taste corresponded with his. In the changes carried forward at The Maples and Century Lodge also she shared, giving the feminine touches and final suggestions, a field in which woman is supreme.

His wife died six years before he did, and after his death Troutbeck remained for a time in the hands of the executors of his estate, and those of his wife's estate, but was then rented and later purchased by Professor Joel E. Spingarn, who recognized its beauties and saw its possibilities.

## THE LATEST PHASE

With the purchase by Mr. Spingarn Troutbeck took on a new phase of existence. With the place he purchased two hundred acres of land, and later added to this one hundred and sixty-seven acres which he purchased from Mr. J. Boyce Smith. This last acquisition adjoins Oblong Mountain at the south-west; it was once the site of an iron mine, and is still known as "Yellow City" because of the yellow houses which formerly clustered about it. Here a small lake, now known as "Withypool," hides in the cup of the hills.

It seems fitting that the new owner of Troutbeck should be a poet, as the last owner was, and Mr. Spingarn is a poet, having published at least one volume of verse; he is also the author of several books of literary scholarship, one of which has been translated into Italian; and he has published several essays on the history and theory of literary criticism. In one of Eden Phillpotts's novels, *The Joy of Youth*, the hero quotes with enthusiasm some of the utterances of "an honest critic,—Spingarn, the American." He was educated at Columbia and Harvard, and taught at Columbia University for twelve years, being at the time of his retirement Professor of Comparative Literature, and Chairman of the Division of Modern Languages and Literatures. Possessed of this charming residence, he has had no

thought of playing the role of retired gentleman, but has entered wholeheartedly into the life in which he finds himself placed. Troutbeck has become in every sense his home. Many new activities have centred about it, and into all of them Mrs. Spingarn has entered with the same zest as her husband,—the welfare of Amenia, various problems of farm life and rural betterment, the progressive movement in politics, and many others. Only the other day the "Amenia Conference" on the rights of colored people met at Troutbeck, attended by many distinguished men and women and closing with an address by Governor Whitman.

Under these circumstances, it is not strange that he helped to bring new ideals into this country life. The former social life of the farm population had largely disappeared, except such as was preserved by the granges. The fairs and cattle shows had succumbed to their own abuses, and under these conditions he conceived the idea that the community to be well knit in its community life must co-operate in its amusements as well as in its work, for play is a necessary part of modern life and as important to the welfare of the rising generation as work is. So he set about introducing what is known as "organized play," or "co-operative recreation."

With this thought he founded Amenia Field Day, a day for public enjoyment which should be free of gamblers, alcoholics, and fakers; a countryside day of clean and wholesome recreation, managed by the whole community and free for all. It is held at Troutbeck in a broad level of perfectly dry ground in the intervale meadow, and from the first meeting in 1910 the annual gathering has been a marked success, attracting wide attention, not only throughout the county, but in the country at large. "Indeed, I do believe most cordially in the Amenia Field Day," wrote Theodore Roosevelt, "and it is just the kind of thing that ought to be done."

Under his ownership Troutbeck itself was destined to undergo even greater changes than it did under its previous owner. Externally he changed the house but little, except by adding a library wing at the east end of the main portion, its architecture in keeping with the rest; but the lawn, especially in front, has been very much improved. There was too little space between the spring and Dunham Brook to be traversed by the highway and still leave room to develop a suitable lawn. This was overcome by carrying the highway from the bridge across the brook, and by an easy curve re-crossing the brook and resuming its direction toward The Narrows. Once accomplished it seemed its most natural place, as the grade is easier, and the increased distance is not appreciable. The additional area thus obtained has been suitably developed, and the lawn now extends to and across Dunham Brook. The precipitous bank on which stand the row of sycamores lends an attractive feature to the lawn, and the whole area is shut off from the road by a large, informal hedge of native shrubs and trees. Across the



WEBUTUCK RIVER AT TROUTBECK

During the performance of the "Hiawatha Pageant" at the fifth Amenia Field Day, August 15, 1914



road a simple retaining wall has been made to serve the ends of beauty as well as utility by cramming the crevices with rock plants,—a “roadside wall-garden” as Dr. Wilhelm Miller, the well-known writer on gardens, calls it. These changes have given an entirely different expression to Troutbeck.

The life of a man is counted by years, but that of a homestead by longer stretches of time, perhaps by the passing of many centuries. Who knows what fond links of memory drew the primitive hunter from far wanderings to return to his native village by the great spring? But a people without a literature are a mysterious people, and the history of the Indians is buried in oblivion. Yet for the descendants of those who have since lived there the homestead has a distinct personality, and we can but rejoice that the old place has found appreciation and love in its last ownership, for the Spingarns have merged their life, not only in the life of the place, but in the life of the community as well, and we feel assured that Troutbeck will continue to be associated, in the future as in the past, with all that is beautiful and harmonious, as well as all that makes for the better welfare of the race of man.

With the peaceful river flowing past its borders, the wooded ridges at the north and west shutting off the wintry blasts, while away to the southward stretches the Valley Beautiful, it is the same restful place as always. The garden at the rear still yields its supplies for the house, and to the antiquarian its guerdon of Indian souvenirs, while the spring sends up its silent flood through its gravel base, “servant and divinity in one,” as it did in that far day when Indian maidens dipped gourds of its crystal fluid for the wearied troopers, the sun swings over Oblong Mountain toward Sun Set Rock until it illumines the trees on Wardwell Peak and at last sinks to rest. While its expression has changed Troutbeck is still “that sheltered valley farm” of which Myron wrote.

Let us read the poem:

There is one spot for which my soul will yearn,  
May it but come where breeze and sunlight play,  
And leaves are glad, some path of swift return;  
A waif—a presence borne on friendly ray—  
Even thus, if but beneath the same blue sky!  
The grazing kine not then will see me cross  
The pasture slope; the swallows will not shy,  
Nor brooding thrush; blithe bees the flowers will toss;  
Not the faint thistle-down *my* breath may charm.  
Ah me! But I shall find the dear ways old,  
If I have leave; that sheltered valley farm;  
Its climbing woods, its spring, the meadow's gold;  
The creek-path, dearest to my boyhood's feet:—  
Oh God! is there another world so sweet?

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## TROUTBECK WOODS

O blithe band of white-robed waterfalls! hand-in-hand springing  
Swiftly adown the precipitous height, like the angels resplendent,  
Jacob, in vision of glory, beheld descending from heaven—  
When the May winds, a-roving, seek dimmest, loneliest wood-glens,  
Into your murmurous haunt a daring mortal intrudeth,—  
Parting the mazes or clematis, weaving hemlock and hazel.

Reverent tread his feet the carpet of ground-pine and mosses;  
As the destined prince—a century's silence awaited—  
Far in depth of the haunted forest entered the mystic  
Circle of shade, and climbed the tower of the Sleeping Palace.  
Glow's his heart unsullied; his deep eye kindles with rapture;  
Kiss his cheeks the cool moss-lips—he claspeth the fern's reaching fingers;  
Lover, surprising thy virginal beauty—bewitching, coy Wildwood.

From Myron B. Benton's "Orchis", published in *The Dial*, 1860.



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