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JONATHAN PITNEY, M. D.

FIFTY YEARS OF PROGRESS

ON THE
COAST OF NEW JERSEY.

PREPARED AT THE REQUEST OF
THE NEW JERSEY HISTORICAL SOCIETY,
AND READ AT THEIR MEETING IN THE CITY OF NEWARK;
MAY 20, 1886.

BY
REV. ALLEN H. BROWN.

NEWARK, N. J. :
DAILY ADVERTISER PRINTING HOUSE.
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It has been suggested to erect in Atlantic City a statue, or a monument to the memory of Jonathan Pitney. Atlantic City itself is his monument.

In a brief biographical sketch in 1848 he wrote to his son thus: "About one hundred and fifty years ago, as near as I can ascertain, my great-grandfather and his brother came to this country from England, to enjoy civil and religious liberty, of which they were deprived at home. My grandfather was born in Morris county. At the commencement of the Revolutionary War he was an ardent Whig. He, and a preacher by the name of Kennedy, traversed the county to encourage the people to resistance and the young men to enlist in the cause of the country. By this means he became obnoxious to the Tories, who twice plundered his house of all they could carry off, and finally, in controversy with a Tory, he received a blow from which he died. My maternal grandfather was a soldier in the Revolutionary War at Haddonfield and Red Bank, and served during the War. His brothers were all soldiers; one died early at Ticonderoga. My father was too young to be engaged in the service of the country in the Revolutionary War. I was born and educated in Morris County. In 1820 I removed to this county and have resided here since."

Jonathan, the son of Shubal and Jane Pitney, was born in Mendham, Morris County, New Jersey, October 29, 1797. He received a part of his early education at Fairchild's Academy.*

*Ezra Fairchild, at Mendham, many years ago, had a famous classical school and educated many young men for Princeton. He afterwards removed his school to Plainfield and finally to Flushing, L. I., where he died. He was a brother of the late Dr. Elias R. Fairchild, of the American and Foreign Christian Union, who died at Morristown. Both were sons of Ebenezer Fairchild, who was for fifty-seven years an Elder of the Presbyterian Church of Mendham, and nearly one hundred years old when he died.

After enjoying such advantages for education as his own county afforded, Mr. Pitney turned his attention to the profession of medicine. He prosecuted his medical studies in New York, attending lectures in the medical school of Columbia College, where the late Dr. Valentine Mott was Professor. He also studied in the office of Dr. Woodruff. After his graduation he spent two years in the hospital on Staten Island and then practiced a short time in and around his native place. In 1820, on a bright May morning, he rode into Absecon on horse-back, and for the space of almost fifty years thereafter he was probably the most influential physician of the county.

In 1831 (April 21st) he married Miss Caroline Fowler, an amiable lady, eminent in all domestic virtues and much younger than her husband. Tall in person, with a prominent aquiline nose, with long flowing locks brushed backward from a high forehead and enveloped in his long cloak, Dr. Pitney was a man to arrest attention and inquiry. It was his ambition to make his influence felt for the benefit of the community in which he lived. A man of decided convictions, he was ever ready to assign reasons for his intelligent views. With indomitable will he seldom failed to accomplish his plans.

AS A PHYSICIAN.

In old Gloucester County, before Atlantic County was formed, he entered upon a practice extensive and arduous. Not only was he called from one Egg Harbour River to the other, but oftentimes were his services required in the regions beyond. The Doctor, occupying for so many years such an extensive domain, regarded with rather a jealous eye any encroachments upon his territory. This, of course, made him rather exclusive towards other physicians who might trespass thereon. His hatred of quackery, or of any semblance thereof, was intense. Doctor Pitney's method of diagnosis was chiefly by inspection. Having studied medicine prior to the days of auscultation and percussion he placed but little reliance upon them; but every feature or expression that appealed to the eye had its significance with him, and he rarely gave it a wrong interpretation.

CIVIL LIFE.

In civil life he was honored by his fellow-citizens with important positions. In 1837, living more than fifty miles from the county seat, he had much to do with the division of Gloucester County and the erection of its eastern half into the county of Atlantic.

At the first meeting of the Board of Chosen Freeholders of the new county, held at May's Landing May 10, 1837, Jonathan Pitney, one of the two representatives from Galloway Township, was elected the first Director of the Board and was sent to Trenton to receive the surplus revenue which was apportioned to this county by the State. For many years he was the Postmaster at Absecon.

In 1844 he was the delegate of Atlantic County to the convention which sat in Trenton from the 14th day of May to the 29th day of June to frame the Constitution of the State of New Jersey. In that convention Burlington County had five delegates, Essex County had seven; but Hudson, Cape May and Atlantic Counties were entitled each to only one delegate. Jonathan Pitney was the honored delegate from Atlantic County and served on the committee on the "Executive Department," having as his associates on the same committee, Joseph C. Hornblower, Robert S. Kennedy, George H. Brown, A. Parsons, Martin Ryerson, and R. P. Thompson. (See Journal of the Proceedings, 1844, p. 42).*

In 1848 Dr. Pitney was nominated by the Democratic party, of which he was a life-long advocate, as Representative to Congress from the First Congressional District. He failed of election, however, and among the causes of this failure was the reluctance of the people of his county to part with his services. Many voted against him simply because they would rather have him at home as a physician than at Washington as a legislator.

*In a family Bible he made this record: "Jonathan Pitney's. Bought with money received for pay as a member of the Convention that formed the new Constitution of New Jersey. July 3rd, 1844."

WRECKS AND LIGHT-HOUSE.

From November 27, 1844, to December 8, 1865, Dr. Pitney, as Notary Public, received the protests of captains, whose vessels had been wrecked. Among his official papers are now found the data of about seventy-eight vessels wrecked during the above-mentioned period. All these protests or affidavits mention the names of the vessel and the captain or master; the port of departure and the destination; the date of the wreck and the extent of the damage or the probability of total loss. More extended affidavits by the crew give a full and interesting account of the disaster to nine vessels, viz.:

1. The Schooner *Baltimore*, Captain Samuel Jarvis, of Newark, N. J., "capsized May 12th, 1846, on her voyage from Newark to Philadelphia, and has since drifted ashore on Absecon Beach, where she now lies."

2. The Schooner *William Young*, Captain William Somers wrecked on Peck's Beach February 1st, 1846.

3. Schooner *Yazoo*, of Baltimore, Md., Captain Wm. H. Harrison, March 25th, 1847, struck on the north bar of Absecon Inlet. All hands lashed to the rail to prevent being washed overboard.

4. Schooner *Margaret and Elizabeth*, of New York, wrecked on the bar of Absecon Inlet January 7th, 1847.

5. Brig *Potapsco*, of Boston, Mass., wrecked and stranded September 28th, 1847, on the south bar of Absecon Inlet. Got off on the 30th and brought into the inlet.

6. Brig *L'Orient*, of Newburyport, Mass., driven ashore and stranded October 7th, 1847.

7. Schooner *Village Belle*, December 22d, 1853.

8. Barque *S. J. Roberts*, of Providence, R. I., from Marseilles, France, cast ashore February 22d, 1854, on the south bar.

9. Schooner *Maria*, of London, cast ashore March 8th, 1855.

The manuscripts give extended accounts of the loss of the above-named vessels, attested by the crews.

One of the most heart-rending disasters upon our coast oc-

curred on April 16th, 1854, when the ship Powhattan, on a voyage from Havre to New York, with two hundred and fifty of the better class of German emigrants, was driven ashore in a northeast storm. One narrative says that, including the crew, three hundred and eleven lives were lost, and it is not known that one escaped. Scores of dead bodies came ashore upon Brigantine, Long Beach and Absecon Beach. The knowledge thus gained of so great danger and loss of life, as well as of property, prompted the philanthropic Doctor and others to urge upon Congress the erection of a light-house.

Between 1834 and 1840 the proposal had been agitated, and encountered much prejudice.* After a great expenditure of trouble and money, a Congressional appropriation of \$5,000 was at last voted upon the *proviso* that a satisfactory report should first be made by a competent official of the Navy Department. Commodore La Vallette was commissioned to make the aforesaid report. He visited the beach; examined the coast and requested a letter from Dr. Pitney on the subject. In this letter Dr. Pitney explained his own original notion of prismatic lights. Notwithstanding the exertions of the Doctor, the Commodore made an unfavorable report, and the light house project slept for several years.

The Doctor was not disheartened by his first failure. In 1853, after the railroad had been surveyed, he started the light-house question again. With his own hands he circulated petitions for signatures, and wrote to Congressmen and published articles in the newspapers advocating the project. The disaster of the Powhattan, only a few months later, must have stimulated every friend of humanity. The result of these labors was the granting of an appropriation of \$35,000 for a light-house and an additional one of \$5,000 for a buoy. Thus, Atlantic has to-day one of the best light-houses in the country, which, with later improvements, cost upwards of \$50,000 in the aggregate. The buoy, however, has disappeared. The light is classed as first order; fixed white light, one hundred and sixty-seven feet high. The tower was first illuminated in January, 1857, nearly three years after the loss of the Powhattan.

* See History of Atlantic City, pages 61 and 62.

Since the erection of Absecon light, comparatively few wrecks have occurred, and with the additional life-saving service few lives have been lost.

CAMDEN AND ATLANTIC RAILROAD AND ATLANTIC CITY.

The last public service of Dr. Pitney, as the prime originator of a railroad across the salt meadows to the sea, together with all its actual and far-reaching possible results, seems to surpass in importance all that went before. It was his ambition not to live in vain; his purpose, to benefit his fellow-citizens. It is not here claimed that the construction of the Camden and Atlantic railroad, and consequently the erection of Atlantic City, were due to him alone; but more to him than to any other one person. The credit of all great works must be distributed. In obtaining the charter, and afterwards also, Dr. Pitney was efficiently aided by his neighbor, Gen. Enoch Doughty, an extensive land-owner of Atlantic county. They soon enlisted Joseph Porter, Andrew K. Hay, Thomas Richards, William Coffin, W. Dwight Bell, Stephen Colwell and others, who owned glass factories, iron furnaces or large tracts of land, through which the new railroad would pass.

In the words of another,* "There seems to be little doubt that Dr. Pitney was the real founder of Atlantic City—the spirit that first appreciated its wonderful curative powers, and placed effectively before capitalists its attractions as a watering place—dryness of atmosphere, bathing facilities, gunning, fishing and sailing privileges, with its proximity to Philadelphia. It had long been known to a few, who had struggled through bush and sand, with slow-going teams, as a great health lift; but to the multitude it was known, if known at all, as a lonely region, so inaccessible and remote from the line of the march of empire, as to be seemingly secure from the intrusion of population and totally beyond the reach of man's transforming energy. But Dr. Pitney was often called to the island in the discharge of his professional

* History of Atlantic City, p. 45, by A. L. English, 1884.

duties, and never missed an opportunity of strolling along the beach to breathe the exhilarating air that then swept in from the sea. He marked the continuous chain of sand hills, that then ran along the beach just above high tide line, which was then about one hundred feet south of what is now Pacific avenue, and recognized what a charming place it would be for summer homes. A desire sprang up in his breast to make the delectable spot accessible to the great business centres of the Union, and more particularly to Philadelphia. Imbued with a firm faith in its immense value as a seaside resort, he saw that railway communication only was necessary to cause the waste place to blossom as the rose. His faith was strong and his enthusiasm correspondingly great. * * The Doctor first made known his determination to organize a railroad company to General Doughty of Absecon, who zealously seconded his effort."

Their first attempts to obtain a charter met some opposition and delay. Later, the Doctor went to Trenton himself, and after a contest, the necessary legislation was procured on the 19th of March, 1852.

Some of the chiefs of railroads of that day, who afterwards strenuously opposed the Air Line railroad, withdrew their opposition to the charter of this Atlantic road, because they did not believe that it would ever be constructed. Who, said they, who ever heard of a railroad with only one end? After unexpected difficulties and delays, the road was opened for passenger traffic on July 4, 1854. The results of the construction of that pioneer road are not to be measured, nor limited by its own immediate success; nor even by the building up of a new city, with two other competing parallel railroads, running from Philadelphia to the new city by the sea.

By shortening the time and increasing the facilities of transportation; by stimulating the construction of other railroads; by opening to settlement large tracts of land, which had been practically inaccessible; by the increase of population; by the enhanced value of property; by all these results, the system of railroad enterprise which was thus inaugurated and proven to be possible along the coast, has revolutionized that portion of New Jersey.

RAILROAD PROGRESS.

The sea-coast from Sandy Hook to Cape May was well known to our brave watermen, who there had their homes and there built vessels for the coasting trade. But to reach these homes overland, from the chief cities, by the slow-going stage-wagon, consumed a day and a good part of the night. Now, every important point is accessible in from two to four hours, and express trains with parlor cars run from the Delaware river to Atlantic City in ninety minutes or less.

Thirty-three years ago, the only railroad running in the southern half of New Jersey was the New York line from Camden, *via* Bordentown to South Amboy. Its branch of eleven and a half miles, from Jamesburg to Freehold, was opened July 18, 1853, only one year before the Camden and Atlantic. Now, more than five hundred miles of road have been constructed, covering the land with a network of rails, to Penns Grove, Salem, Bridgeton, Bay Side, Port Norris, Cape May, and all along the coast.

It was not difficult to construct a road over the fertile lands of Monmouth; nor through the sandy pines; but it was a problem how to construct a road which could withstand the storm tides and the ocean's waves rolling over many miles of salt meadows and submerging the tracks. "Most of the old settlers of that section opposed the scheme, and doubted the practicability of the project. Quite a number said that it would be absolutely impossible to get a train of cars across the meadows."

The difficult problem having been solved successfully by the Camden and Atlantic company, the example has been followed under similar conditions to Holly Beach and Anglesea, Sea Island and Ocean City, Long Port, Beach Haven and Barnegat City, Seaside Park, Berkley Arms and Mantoloking; while without the crossing of meadows, Bay Head, Point Pleasant, Brielle, Sea Girt, Manasquan, Villa Park, Spring Lake, Como, Ocean Beach, Key East, Ocean Grove, Asbury Park, Deal Beach, Elberon, Holly Wood, West End, Long Branch, Monmouth Beach, Sea Bright, Highlands and Atlantic Highlands, are more easily accessible by many trains from the north, as well as from the south.

LANDS OPENED TO SETTLERS.

Lands, which were held in large tracts by the owners of iron furnaces and, glass factories, were doubly closed to the settler and, for agricultural purposes, were despised. Having now become accessible and better known, they are more highly appreciated for productiveness as well as for healthfulness. In producing heavy grain they may not compete with western farms at the present low rates of transportation; but for the cultivation of fruit and everything which grows upon a vine, and as market gardens for neighboring cities, many of these lands, under judicious, intelligent and industrious cultivation are well adapted. If any are skeptical, let them visit and see for themselves Hammonton, Egg Harbor City and Vineland; each with their thousands of inhabitants who have lately turned the wilderness into a garden. Gradually, the remaining large estates must be brought into the market for industrious settlers; the valuable water-powers, now idle, will be utilized for manufacturing purposes, as in other places,* and and by all causes combined the population must increase in the future more rapidly than in the past.

INCREASE OF POPULATION.

The effect of railroads upon population is patent. The prosperous settlements last mentioned, with their thousands of people, are upon lands which only a few years ago were covered with timber, where the hunter pursued the fox and the rabbit, or the deer and the bear. Taking the four counties, Monmouth, Ocean, Atlantic and Cape May, which lie along the sea, and omitting for the present the eastern townships of Burlington County, which extends from the Delaware River to the ocean, the population of these four counties in 1850, before they had any railroad, was 55,339, and in 1885, 111,010; an increase of 100 per cent. in 35 years. At the same rate of increase, their population doubling in 35

* *e. g.*, Millville and May's Landing.

years will be 222,020. But when we take into account the recent more rapidly accelerating rate of increase, and then add the eastern townships of Burlington County, it is not impossible and it does not seem unreasonable to anticipate, without counting summer visitors, that the permanent population of the shore counties, which was in 1850 about 60,000, may increase by the year 1900 to a quarter of a million.

POPULATION OF COUNTIES.

	1850	1860	1880	1885
Monmouth.....	30,313	39,346	55,538	62,324
Ocean.....	10,032	11,176	14,455	15,586
Atlantic.....	8,961	11,786	18,704	22,356
Cape May.....	6,433	7,130	9,765	10,744
	55,739	69,438	98,462	111,010
Burlington.....	43,203	49,730	55,402	57,558

POPULATION OF THE STATE.

1790	1820	1850	1860	1880	1885
184,139	277,420	489,555	672,035	1,131,116	1,278,033

ENHANCED VALUE OF PROPERTY.

As to the enhanced value of lands, especially of sea-side sands, which were once regarded as "Littleworth," we are not left wholly to conjecture. It is published that Dr. Pitney purchased for the Camden and Atlantic Railroad or the Land Company, two hundred acres, now embracing the centre of Atlantic City, for seventeen dollars an acre. Many a building lot in that city now commands double the price which was paid for those two hundred acres. The assessed valuation of property, and usually below the actual value, was for Atlantic City in 1885, \$2,602,312.50.

Asbury Park affords another illustration of enhanced value. In 1869 it was assessed at \$15,000, and in 1885 at nearly two millions. Ocean Grove also might report similar progress, while beyond, at Elberon, Holly Wood, Long Branch, Monmouth Beach and Sea Bright, numerous palatial residences are of the most costly style.

Standing sometimes at the mouth of a mighty river as it empties into the sea, we do not forget that many confluent streams have combined to make the flood of waters, and yet it is interesting to trace the main stream to its source and to find the little spring or fountain from which it started. So, too, as we contemplate the marvelous results of the combination of railroads in South Jersey, pouring their traffic to the ocean, we cannot forget that the Camden and Atlantic was the pioneer, the first to cross the State to the ocean, and that Dr. Jonathan Pitney was one chief originator of that enterprise and that he came from the hills of Morris County.

IN CONCLUSION.

To him a fellow-practitioner bears this testimony: "Dr. Pitney was a prominent man in all the interests of the county. His plans for its agricultural and material development were wide and far-seeing. He took a warm interest in education and had been for many years trustee of his school district. The cause of religion found in him ever a prompt and liberal supporter. As a man, he was benevolent and kind, hospitable and social. He was possessed of an indomitable will and energy, and acuteness of intellect and originality, and depth of thought. His knowledge was wide and extensive in various branches of science; although medicine was his favorite study, which never lost attraction while life lasted. In all the recent advances in the theory or practice of medicine he was well versed. For two years, declining health confined him to his house, and after the gradual decline of consumption he died on Saturday morning, August 7th, 1869, in his seventy-second year, leaving a widow and two sons."²*

Before bidding farewell to the subject some may ask, what were Dr. Pitney's religious views? Possibly to the asperities and slanders† which too often disgrace political strifes, we are indebted for the little autobiography which was quoted at the beginning. That manuscript of October 3, 1848, thus ad-

*See Somer's Medical History of Atlantic County, pp. 9 and 10.

†Some political enemy had charged that he was an infidel.

dressed his son, then in his eleventh year: "Dear Son— To correct some errors concerning myself perhaps it may be best to write you a small sketch of our family history. (And after giving the above account of his ancestors, adds): I was brought up in the doctrines and discipline of the Presbyterian church, and still think them right. Upwards of twenty years ago I joined the Gloucester County Bible Society. Last winter, I became a member of the Atlantic County Bible Society, and on the nomination of Mr. Loudenslager, the Methodist preacher of the circuit, was elected President of the Atlantic County Bible Society, which office I still hold. As to my political opinions, I adopt the Baltimore Convention Platform." To us, now, his religious opinions are more important than his political. From the time that a Presbyterian missionary, exploring the county, found him in 1847, his house was ever open to the traveling ministers of that church. For several years he paid the rent of a hall for religious worship, and was a constant attendant, and later was a trustee of the church. Once he remarked, "There is a good deal of the Quaker in me. I have often enjoyed Friends' meeting as much as any other." Probably he meant that, to his apprehension, religion was a question between a man's own soul and his Creator, and that the inner experience was more important than the outward expression. While we regret that he was not a professing member of any visible church, yet in connection with a marked change in his later life, there is consolation in the recollection that his dying testimony, the last utterance of his lips, was in these words: "Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil; for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me."

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