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BOLTON BROWN, DRESDEN'S OTHER FAMOUS SON

by

Herbert A. Wisbey, Jr.

Dresden, on Seneca Lake, has received much attention as the birthplace of Robert G. Ingersoll, nineteenth century anti-religious orator. The house in which he was born, then the Presbyterian manse, is now a museum dedicated to his memory. Few know that in this same simple building, thirty-one years later, another person was born who achieved international recognition in the field of art. He also was a militant Free Thinker who rejected his minister father's religion.

Bolton Coit Brown was born in Dresden on November 27, 1864. His father, a graduate of Yale and Union Theological Seminary, was minister of the Presbyterian church there, but soon moved his family across Seneca Lake to Burdett, his old family home. Here Bolton spent his boyhood in the midst of a loving, close-knit family that included his parents, grandparents, and, eventually, seven brothers and sisters. Late in life he recalled his memories of a mischievous, dare-devil boyhood on and around Seneca Lake and the Hector hills. He was attracted to dangerous physical challenges and showed the stubborn qualities that characterized his later life.

The manuscript of his memoirs was arranged and written in 1986

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ELECTION STORIES

including

GRANDDAD'S POLE

by

Robert V. Anderson

Consider the trade of the politician: To be high minded about it we may say that given the talent, you have a public duty to lead the people. That immediately splits the population into them and us, or upper and lower classes. The ritual act of voting connects us and any rascal who may be voted in, or voted out, although it takes a while to rectify the error.

The general rule seems to be that the higher the office the harder to get into it, but the harder to be displaced.

In the United States most of us exist removed from personal participation in these power struggles. If you move into an area and think you should do your duty voting (it takes a fair amount of indoctrination to form a voting habit) the local party people will be delighted to recommend their candidates. The local editor may also recommend, but the person who shakes your hand and inquires about your problems may very well get your vote. How we vote probably depends more on contact with real persons than on high-priced promotion. It is far more real to know personally the party people and the office holders.

The right to vote in political processes as distinct from the right to vote as stockholders, which is associated with ownership, has a geographical base that probably dates back to membership in primitive tribes and the control of territory. A place of residence as a credential to vote is taken for granted. To be legal you should live within the jurisdiction. But consider how to interpret this requirement.

We would now condemn the "voting train" to be illegal, but when it ran, it was looked upon as clever or only sharp practice. As the story goes the train started on voting day from Albany with a load of men (this was before the female vote had "Purificated the Process") who had already voted in

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THE OUTLAW

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"CANISTEO CASTLE"

by

David D. Robinson

Mysterious "Canisteo Castle" was located along the Canisteo River near the present village of Canisteo, about 60 miles south of Rochester.

Facts about "Canisteo Castle" are few and difficult to come by. The first written eyewitness report we have of a substantial settlement there is by the French commander Sieur de Villiers who in 1690 estimated there were several score of good houses at the site.

In the *History of Steuben County, New York* (1879) Clayton describes "Canisteo Castle" as consisting of 60 "luxurious barracks of hewed logs and stone fireplaces." In his book with a similar title (1911) historian Near reports that each of the buildings had four stone chimneys. Information concerning the fort tends to be repetitive, since writers have to go back to the same sources, which are few.

The "Castle" was located on the south side of the Canisteo River, east of the start of the bend where the river stops flowing south, and turns southeast, its southward progress turned by the highest mountains in Western New York State.

The site has attracted many different people. Traces of a village inhabited around 800 A.D. have

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by Marian S. Sweeney and published by the Watkins Glen Library. (See *BOOKS* page 13, column 3 for availability.) The book is filled with descriptions and anecdotes about life around Burdett in the last half of the nineteenth century. The book also includes his essay written in later life entitled "How I Shed Religion." It is interesting that Bolton's older sister, Ellen, also recorded her reminiscences of the same people in the same places at the same time. Her memoirs are better written and also reflect a more pleasant personality than that of her brother. Her memoirs are part of a full-length autobiography that was first published in 1940 and reissued in 1987 by two granddaughters as *It Happened This Way* by Ellen Coit Elliott, Beejay Press, Burlingame, CA.

A scholarly, well-written biography of Bolton Brown, *Crayonstone, The Life and Work of Bolton Brown*, was written by Clinton Adams and published by the Uni-

versity of New Mexico Press in 1993. It is a handsome, definitive biographical work, beautifully designed, and includes some 90 illustrations, a catalogue of Brown's lithographs, and a bibliography.

Adam's primary interest in Brown was as a major figure in the art of lithography, but he also documents his long and complex career as teacher, painter, scholar, mountaineer, writer and social critic. Among the many honors that Brown received was having a mountain in the Sierra Nevadas named after him. It is clear that Adams admires Brown but the book is objective enough that a reader can conclude that Bolton Brown was a difficult person and not particularly pleasant. He was self-confident to the point of arrogance and never felt that he received the credit he deserved for his achievements. He

founded the art department at the new Stanford University in 1891, and was the principal founder of the first artist colony in Woodstock, New York. His personality led to unhappy endings to both of these accomplishments. As an acquaintance commented, "To his dying day, Bolton was always sure he was right."

His essay "How I Shed Religion" is a sad example of his self-wounding stubbornness. From early manhood until his

on the subject. For people interested in lithography, the work and writings of Bolton Brown are essential. Unfortunately, too few people were interested in lithography in his lifetime to enable him to earn a living from his work. His life ended in poverty near Woodstock on Sept. 15, 1936, at the age of 71.

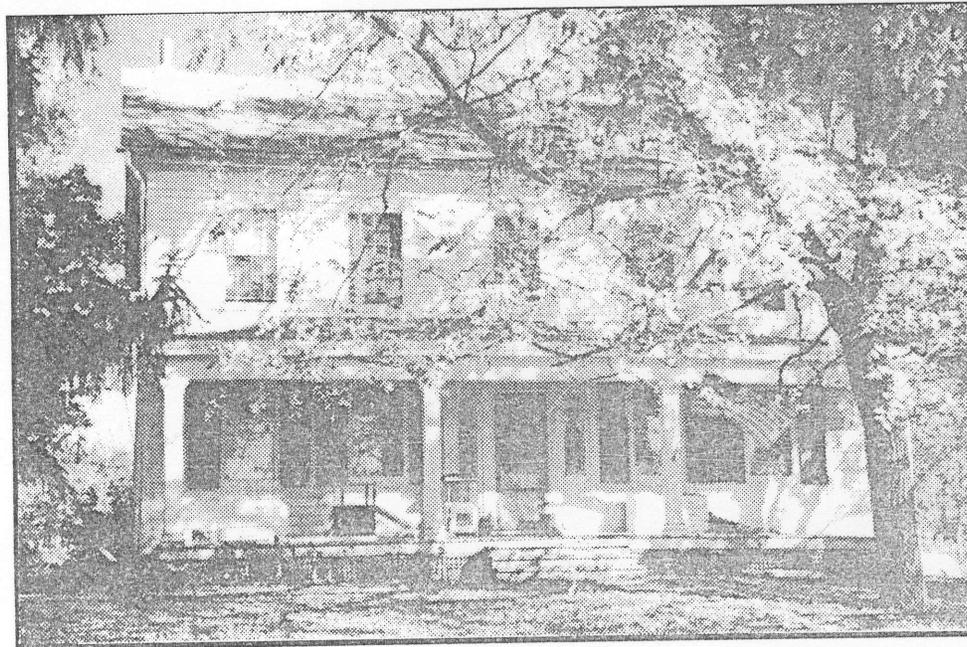
His sister summarized his life in her autobiography. "Bolton cooperated with Mr. Whitehead in founding the art colony at Woodstock, Ulster County, set up a Japanese print business in New York City, applied himself to oil painting, publishing a book about it, and did some beautiful pictures in that medium. Later he took up lithography, made himself an expert and authority, lectured and wrote on the subject, and taught it. His skill was marvelous, his industry prodigious, and his pursuit of the perfect Beauty enthusiastic and tireless to the end of his life."

For people interested in Bolton Brown, the Wat-

kins Glen Public Library is a good place to begin. The Brown family home, still in good condition, stands overlooking Seneca Lake in the town, not the village of Burdett. For people visiting the village of Dresden, it is interesting to know that two men from similar backgrounds, born in the same house some thirty years apart, should have such similar ideas about organized religion.

This topic was suggested by Mrs. Betty Smalley, Town of Torrey Historian, who provided some of the information. Mrs. Jean Argetsinger of Burdett furnished directions to the Brown ancestral home.

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—Photograph by Herbert A. Wisbey, Jr., October 11, 1995

The Woodward Homestead where Bolton Brown spent seven years of his boyhood.

father's death he engaged in a bitter dispute with his father over religious beliefs. His father was also stubborn, but it is sad that the two never found a way to reach an understanding. He did not allow his father to officiate at his wedding and did not attend his father's funeral. Bolton's own marriage ended in divorce and he was estranged from his children until shortly before his death. He disliked modern art and disputed with those who disagreed with him with the same no-holds-barred invective that he argued religion with his father.

Bolton Brown's fame rests on his mastery of lithography, an extremely difficult art form that involves drawing on a specially prepared stone using a special crayon and making printings. He studied, experimented, and wrote what are considered to be the best treatises