

ISCHUA VALLEY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

AN EMINENT FRANKLINVILLE PHYSICIAN

The Honorable Alfred Spring wrote a biographical sketch of Dr. Henry Van Aernam describing him as a man who made a marked impression on the people in Cattaraugus County. This esteemed physician was born in Marcellus in Onondaga County on March 11, 1819 and came with his family to Mansfield in 1822.

His early education happened in a log school house and was later supplemented by a term or two as a district school teacher. He clerked in the store of William Ellicott and as a young man went to Virginia and engaged in the construction of the Kanawha Canal. He served as a paymaster and confidential clerk of the William Pierce & Company.

He returned home and attended Springville Academy. In 1841 he began the study of medicine with Dr. Levi Goldsborough in Otto. He attended Geneva Medical College but received his diploma from Willoughby College in Ohio.

After graduation he practiced his profession in the Village of Allegany until he moved to Franklinville in 1848 where he resided throughout the remainder of his career. On November 30, 1845 he married Amy M. Ethridge, a marriage that lasted for decades.

He had the remarkable ability to accurately diagnose diseases and had an intuitive insight into the mental characteristics of his patients. He was sympathetic to those he treated vigorously and was willing to ride out to the huts of the poor as well as the homes of the rich. He was considered the expert when it came to determining the pathology of the most difficult patients and even after he became crippled and unable to continue with his daily practice, his judgment was regarded as the ultimate authority.

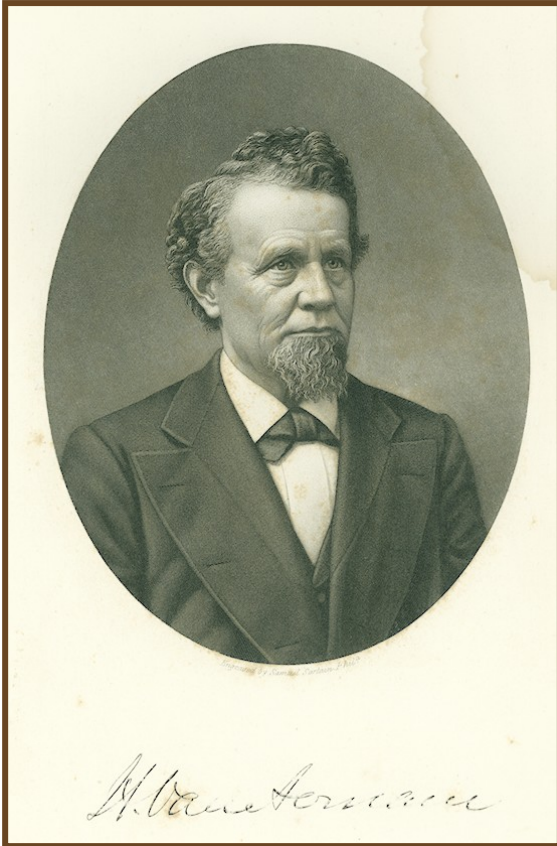
Early in life he turned to politics and was a charter member of the Republican Party with strong feelings of Abolitionism. He became a political convention organizer. In 1867 he was elected to the Legislature from the First Assembly District of the County.



Henry Van Aernam, Surgeon
Courtesy of William C. Welch Collection
at the U.S. Army Military History Institute
Carlisle Barracks, PA

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On August 20, 1862 he was mustered into the 154th Regiment of New York Volunteers with the rank of major, assigned to duty as Surgeon-in Chief of the Second Brigade. He was discharged in 1864 due to disabilities. He had gained the ardent affection and respect of men of the 154th Regiment. In 1864, while with Sherman in Atlanta he was elected to the Thirty-Ninth Congress from his home district and re-elected to the following Congress. He became the friend and medical advisor to Secretary of War Stanton.



An ardent radical, he believed that civil rights for the Blacks should be a reality, not a myth. He felt the South, that had engaged in the Rebellion must give unquestioning allegiance to the Union and that maltreatment of the former slaves should be followed by vigorous punishment. He also held that since the South, which had been treasonous in trying to disrupt the Union, should give proof of allegiance before being given the full privileges of citizenship. Hostility to the North and to the civil rights of Black Men should be crushed out. The former slaves whose intellect and ambitions had been repressed by bondage should be exulted into citizenship.

In 1869, he was appointed Commissioner of Pensions. He worked to have legislation passed to change the former method of paying pensioners semi-annually and forcing them to pay the expense of making and executing the vouchers and collecting pensions.

In 1878 and 1880 he was again elected to Congress. Dr. Van Aernam was made the Chairman of the Committee on Education and Labor. He dedicated himself to studying the problems that began to arise between organized labor and corporate capital.

After two terms were completed he returned to Franklinville where he assumed his medical practice. His home was a gathering place for survivors of the war. And especially of his old regiment. He was always ready to assist the soldiers in securing a pension. In 1884 he was appointed a trustee of Ten Broeck Free Academy, its endowment accomplished through his association with its founder. His death occurred on June 1st, 1894.

Information was obtained from the Cattaraugus History Book.