

George Herman Babcock

By David Snyder, Herrick Memorial Library, Alfred University

George Herman Babcock was born in Unadilla Forks, Cortland County, NY on June 17, 1832. At the age of 12, his parents moved to Westerly, RI. Here he attended school and finally went to the Institute of DeRuyter, N.Y.

Stephen Wilcox was a mechanic at DeRuyter and the two met. Babcock's health was fast failing but was restored because of the iodine fumes given off in daguerreotyping, which Babcock took up for this reason. From then on, daguerreotyping was a sort of hobby to him.

In 1851, he was but 19, George H. Babcock established the first printing office in their immediate locality. The paper was called "The Literary Echo" – later "Westerly Weekly." This was continued for three years before he sold out. With his father in 1854, Babcock introduced a polychromatic press—one that would print three colors at the same time. Charles Potter Jr. took care of the manufacturing until the press had paid for itself and then they shared equally in the profits.

Babcock and Wilcox incorporated and operated the N.Y. Safety Steam Corporation until the expiration of the Corliss patent. In 1856 the B.&W. safety, or sectional tubular, steam boiler made its appearance. This boiler was of the non-explosionable type. Besides being famous the world over, it was used.

From these things Babcock reaped a lucrative income. Not being endowed with the Scotch characteristic of excessive frugality, he donated large sums to his Faith, the Seventh Day Baptists. Most of what remained went to educational purposes. From 1885 to 1893 he was a non-resident lecturer at Cornell in the Sibley College courses in mechanical engineering. His papers on steam were very important.

He was president of the board of trustees of Alfred University for some time; hence Alfred's interest in him. His intense interest in Physics led him to donate Babcock Hall of Physics to the University. The Hall was donated in 1897 and in 1929 was destroyed by fire.

His activity in community life showed itself when he had moved to Plainfield, NJ. Here he was president of the board of education and was deeply interested in the public library. As at Alfred, improvements were registered.

In 1893, Alfred, the Seventh Day Baptists, friends and friends by reputation bowed their heads as death overcame this religious and educational philanthropist.