

OBITUARIES

CLARENCE WINTHROP BOWEN

Clarence Winthrop Bowen, first vice-president of this Society, died at his home in Woodstock, Conn., November 2, 1935. Born in Brooklyn, N. Y., on May 22, 1852, he was the son of Henry Chandler and Lucy Maria (Tappan) Bowen. After graduation from Yale with the degree of A.B. in 1873, he spent a year in New Haven in the graduate department and at the Yale Theological Seminary, later continuing his studies in Brooklyn. In 1876 he received from Yale the degree of A.M. and in 1882 the degree of Ph.D. He had already started upon a journalistic career, entering in 1874 the editorial department of "The Independent," of which literary and religious newspaper his father was the proprietor and publisher. The following year he became foreign correspondent of his paper, spending six months in Europe, during which he interviewed Thomas Carlyle and Theodore Christlieb, made the ascent of Mt. Blanc, visited Florence to write about American artists living there, and was presented to Pope Pius IX. Returning to this country, he wrote continuously for "The Independent," taking especially upon himself the interviewing of important statesmen or writers or travellers who figured in the public news. On a later visit to Europe in 1883, he interviewed King Alfonso XII, the Duke of Veragua, who was a descendant of Columbus, and other prominent men of Spain, with reference to the four hundredth anniversary of the Discovery of America. This project, which he was first to agitate, resulted in the Columbian Exposition at Chicago in 1893. In 1896,

upon his father's death, he became the publisher of "The Independent" and in 1898 changed the size of the periodical from a large folio to octavo, magazine size. In 1912 he turned "The Independent" over to his nephew, Hamilton Holt, after having been connected with this fine and scholarly publication for thirty-nine years. After retirement from the field of journalism, he devoted the rest of his life to administering the several historical societies with which he was connected, to travel and to historical research.

Always interested in historical study, Mr. Bowen never took a subject for publication without making an intense investigation of original sources. His printed volumes were not the product of creative thought, although he could write well when he chose, but historical reference works of decided and permanent value. His earliest publication, "Boundary Disputes of Connecticut," issued in 1882, was a sound, scholarly monograph, written entirely from the sources and admirably illustrated and documented. "Woodstock, an Historical Sketch," 1886, was an extended oration which he read at the bicentennial of that Connecticut town and was a presage of his greater work to follow forty years later. In 1889 Mr. Bowen was chosen secretary of the committee of arrangements for the Centennial of Washington's Inauguration. The interest thus engendered resulted in his "History of the Centennial Celebration of the Inauguration of George Washington," published in 1892 in a massive volume which still remains as one of the finest productions of the American press. Although the contributed Chapters, by Mr. Bowen and other writers, on the history and events of the inauguration, are of undoubted value, it is Mr. Bowen's contribution on the portraits of leading Americans of the eighteenth century that gives the work its permanent use as a book of reference. Nearly six hundred portraits of Washington, Jefferson, Hamilton and scores of other statesmen and leaders of the Revolutionary and Constitutional

periods are reproduced, with elaborate notes on the artists and on the ownership of the originals. The labor of research which must have been performed to acquire all this information is impressive and makes the volume of constant use in a historical reference library. If the portraits and notes could be reprinted today in a separate volume, they would reach a much wider circle of users than in the bulky and unwieldy "History of the Centennial of the Inauguration."

The culmination of Mr. Bowen's life work was his *History and Genealogies of Woodstock*. The result of years of planning and unflagging research, this notable undertaking first saw the light of print in 1926, when a volume of over seven hundred pages was published, devoted solely to the History of Woodstock. Then followed at intervals the volumes devoted to the *Genealogies of Woodstock Families*, until in 1935 appeared the sixth volume, carrying the alphabet part way through the letter H, and yet covering nearly five thousand pages of family histories. Individual sketches, historical sidelights and numerous illustrations make the work of high value to the genealogist, the biographer and the historian. And above all persists the thought how one man could have accomplished so much research even in a lifetime. It is sad that Mr. Bowen could not have been spared to finish his monumental work. Although he made provision in his will for this Society to carry on the publication, it never can be done in the sumptuous way in which he did it. No town in this country has ever had so comprehensive a printed history, and probably none ever will.

Mr. Bowen was a member of many historical organizations, but in three societies he was primarily interested. He was a founder of the American Historical Association in 1884, and its treasurer from 1884 to 1917. In those thirty-three years he saw the Association grow from very small beginnings to a great national organization with widely extended activities

and influence, and to his own unselfish and efficient labors that result was in no small part due. He was president of the New York Genealogical and Biographical Society from 1907 to 1931 and was directly responsible for enlarging its funds and its influence. Even after his retirement from the presidency, he labored on his self-chosen task of procuring for the Society portraits of contemporaneous Presidents of the United States and also of individuals of importance in the city or in the Society. To the American Antiquarian Society he was elected a member in 1904, chosen to the Council in 1912, and elected a vice-president in 1920. For twenty years he was conscientious in all his connections with the Society. No member was more active in the raising of funds. When Mr. Lincoln sought in 1920 to secure funds for the addition to the building, Mr. Bowen gave liberally and aided conspicuously in enlisting the support of others, particularly of persons outside of the Society. His optimism was contagious and his faith in the future always unchanged. He frequently made gifts of books to the Library and sought to have others do so. His constant attendance at the meetings, both of the Council and of the Society, was noteworthy, and a meeting scarcely seemed complete without Mr. Bowen's presence. His bequest of \$20,000 to the Society to aid in completing his *History of Woodstock* showed his faith in our efforts; and his gifts, just before his death, of his long series of *Journals and Scrap-Books* have placed in this Library for all time an exceedingly valuable record of an interesting and varied career. This biographical collection, because of Mr. Bowen's wide associations and friendships, is virtually a social, political and literary history of the period.

Mr. Bowen was married, January 28, 1892, to Roxana Atwater Wentworth, who died July 10, 1935, survived by her husband and a daughter, Mrs. Roxana Van Rennselaer of Melton-Mowbray, Eng-

land. He was a charming host in his home, as those who visited him at "Bald Hill" in Woodstock can testify. He had known intimately so many leaders of thought and action for half a century, that his conversation was filled with highly interesting reminiscence. He had met or visited every President from Grant to Coolidge, and had refused to write for a well-known magazine a story based on this phase of his career. He was so modest about his achievements that it was almost embarrassing to offer him a compliment. He was interested in all kinds of outdoor life—golf, horseback riding, hunting and the care of his garden. But his most notable characteristic was his pertinacity. If he decided to perform a certain task, no matter how onerous or burdensome it was, he never put it off, but with a devotion and a perseverance, he persisted until he accomplished his purpose. His place in the Council of this Society will not be easily filled.

C. S. B.

REUBEN COLTON

Reuben Colton, senior member of the Society, died in Worcester, February 26, 1936. Elected to membership in 1885, he had during recent years stood second in seniority, only preceded by William Harden of Savannah. But Mr. Harden's death on January 4, 1936, made Mr. Colton for two months the Society's earliest member. He was born in Worcester, November 27, 1855, the son of Samuel Horton and Ann (King) Colton. His father was for several years publisher of the "Massachusetts Spy" and in later life was prominent in the nursery business and horticulture. After a preparatory education in Worcester schools and at the Friends School in Providence, Reuben Colton entered Haverford College, in Pennsylvania, and was graduated with the degree of A.B. in 1876. He spent a year in Europe and upon his return in 1878 became an assistant librarian at the American Anti-

Copyright of Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society is the property of American Antiquarian Society and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.