

Roy D. S. Bruner



Vol. 4, No. 31

On occasion I discover a photograph and set it aside for sorting, only to have it resurface several months later. The faces stare at me as if I know each person's identity, their names, their characteristics, and personality. At times it becomes maddening when faces are recognized, and names not recalled; in reality, many photographs go unidentified.

This studio portrait taken by Francis Burnette shows a rather young Roy D. S. Bruner of Albion, NY. Inscribed on the reverse are dates, "Born March 12, 1873, Died Nov. 5, 1888." The other markings, "Class of '89, L. A. Achilles," indicate that the photograph is part of a collection of

images once belonging to Lillian Achilles of Albion. So, what can be said about this dapper young gentleman, with his brush-cut hair, rimless spectacles, and stand-up collar?

The brief story of Roy Bruner starts with his father, Henry A. Bruner, who was born October 23, 1823 at Danville, Pennsylvania. As a child his parents relocated to Yates County, New York where both passed, leaving the young man a poor orphan. He was forced to learn the trade of harness making in order to support him financially but was fortunate enough to attend a select school and several public schools in the Penn Yann area. Upon the completion of his schooling, he taught in a one-room schoolhouse for several years before finishing his education at the State Normal School in Albany in 1847. It was his reputation in this endeavor that earned him an appointment as the first school commissioner in Yates County in 1856.

In 1861, Bruner relocated to Albion and purchased a home on the northeast corner of Main Street and Bailey Street (now Rt. 31), currently the site of Advance Auto Parts. It was in January of that year that he acquired the Orleans American newspaper with his brother David S. Bruner, purchasing the business from S. A. Andrews. A successful and respected businessman who found himself influential in Republican politics, Bruner and his wife Jerusha attempted to raise a small family with the birth of their daughter Eliza in 1859 and daughter Etta in 1861. Unfortunately, Etta's life was cut short at the age of 1 on November 6, 1862 and just over two years later Jerusha passed away at Elmira, New York on February 1, 1865.

The widower remarried the following year to Sarah Standart Smith in September of 1866 and the couple welcomed a healthy baby boy, Henry Jr., on October 9, 1867. This small glimmer of happiness was quickly dashed by the passing of Henry's brother and business partner on July 9, 1868; David's death dissolved the partnership and Henry became sole owner of the Orleans American.

It appears as though very little information exists to provide a thorough account of the lives of Henry's two sons. What is known is that the two boys were stricken with typhoid fever at some point during the summer or early fall of 1888. At that time, Henry was a student at the Deaf & Mute Asylum in Rochester and was staying with his parents during his illness. Roy, who was fifteen years old at the time, also contracted the illness that produced a fever, fatigue, cough, diarrhea, and intestinal bleeding. On October 26, 1888, Henry Jr. succumbed to the illness followed by his brother Roy on November 5, 1888. The loss of two sons was devastating to the family, particularly Sarah Bruner who had lost her only children.

Funeral services for the young man were held in the Baptist Church and officiated by Dr. A. C. Osburn of Albion. One can imagine the sorrow felt by his fellow pupils in the Albion High School as the students neared graduation.