

# Ceremony to Honor Dr. Melvin Baldwin, Civil War Veteran and Early Shoreham Hero

Shoreham Country Club Memorial Day Cocktail Party

Sunday May 28, 2017



A special ceremony was held at the Shoreham Country Club Memorial Day Cocktail part on Sunday May 28, 2017. On that occasion, Dr. Melvin Baldwin was belatedly honored. Dr. Baldwin was a Civil War Veteran and hero of early Shoreham (then Wardenclyffe) who, at age 73, tragically died in the defense of Shoreham on April 28, 1901, warding off a raging brush fire that was threatening our little Village and the magnificent fruit tree orchards that he had recently planted and was nurturing.

On that occasion, we celebrated Dr. Baldwin's remarkable life and the sacrifices he made for our Country and for our Village, and we dedicated a gravestone and bronze Civil War Veteran's insignia (pictured above) that had just been placed at his previously unmarked grave by our own Tom Spier, a trustee of the Wading River Cemetery Association, who has worked tirelessly to make sure Dr. Baldwin receives his just honor.

Born in Vermont and raised in Illinois, Melvin Baldwin had been a Captain in the Union Army in the Civil War, seeing action in a number of battles. After the war, he had studied medicine

and had both a medical practice and pharmacy in Illinois, where he also served as mayor and postmaster in Elgin, Ill. His health failing, he moved to Kansas where he apparently made the acquaintance of James Warden, then in Kansas engaged in banking and investing. On the plains of Kansas, Dr. Baldwin's health was restored and he was very successful in his new endeavor as a horticulturist, laying out and cultivating healthy, productive fruit orchards.

When James Warden moved to Woodville Landing and began developing Wardencllyffe, he apparently enticed Dr. Baldwin to move east to plant and cultivate fruit orchards here, starting around 1896. (Baldwin also served as Wardencllyffe's first Postmaster.) Within 4 years, the industrious Dr. Baldwin, in spite of being in his late 60's, had remarkably laid out 4000 peach trees and an equal number of apple trees along the Woodville Valley, just south and east of the early Village.



Photo: Dr. Baldwin's apple trees in bloom where the tennis courts now stand.

But Dr. Baldwin's good works were cut short: On the evening of April 28, 1901, a raging brush fire broke out in Wading River, and threatened Wardencllyffe as it swept westward towards Rocky Point, just south of the Village and Dr. Baldwin's orchards. Though 73 years old, Dr. Baldwin led a crew of men who valiantly fought the fire all night. The fire was almost out, but then the wind suddenly shifted and the fire flared up and overtook Dr. Baldwin, who stumbled and fell trying to outrun it. By the time help came, he had succumbed to the smoke and flames.

But the Village had been saved.

Dr. Baldwin was buried in an unmarked grave at Wading River Cemetery. He had lost his 1<sup>st</sup> wife in 1890, and had just remarried about 5 years before his death. His widow, Mary Anderson Hemenway, sadly died of acute melancholia shortly after Dr. Baldwin's passing. She was from Massachusetts, where she was laid to rest.

And so, it was fitting that we honored this Civil War hero, and hero of early Shoreham. To this end, Tom Spier, in 2016, appealed to the Department of Veteran's Affairs for a gravestone to mark Dr. Baldwin's grave, and The Shoreham Village Association (TSVA) provided the funds for the placement of the gravestone, which now sits on a lovely spot up on the hill in the Wading River Cemetery among many fellow Shorehamites, many whom we ourselves may fondly remember. Please go visit it and pay your respects when you are able.

Find on the next page excerpts from an August 30, 1935 *Shoreham Scribe* article by Randall Warden, son of James Warden, the developer of Wardencllyffe (later called Shoreham.) The son, Randall, was Shoreham Village's first historian.



It was my father's plan to develop War dencllyffe into a cooperative community. Those were the early days of cooperative sharing projects. The Cooperative store developed by the Grange and profit sharing plan by which the customer shared in the profits of the concern - much like now-a-days the National Grocery Co's stores give out certificates; was making some headway. Father's idea was that each home owner should have a chance to share in the products of the land. Therefor he first built the ice plant and provided cold storage facilities to keep eggs, fruit, vegetables and meat.

He then brought in a farmer, Nathaniel Ames, to provide the food and Dr. Baldwin to grow the fruit. My story centers around old Dr. Baldwin. Dr. Baldwin was an old soldier. He had been a captain of Volunteers in the War of the Rebellion and was a great raconteur of stories about the different battles he had taken part in. He told me one time how the soldiers cooked beans. Beans and hard tack were the principal rations of the soldiers. To make the beans palatable was the endeavor of every Company Mess Sargeant. Finally his company evolved the following receipt. Take a great iron kettle such as your great grandmother used to make soap in. Soak 2 bushels of beans over night. In the morning boil the beans for  $\frac{1}{2}$  an hour, drain and add salt, a gallon of sorghum, mustard, as many onions as you can find, a whole ham, and as many pigs feet as the countryside will furnish. Meanwhile a hole in the ground has been dug and a fire built in the bottom. When a good bed of coals has been acquired lower the kettle in on the coals, cover the top with canvas, cover with boards and then fill in the hole with dirt. The next morning the beans are ready, if the sentry on duty has been a trusty man.

After the war Dr. Baldwin had studied medicine and had been a practising physician. Then his health having failed he moved to Kansas. There on that treeless prairie of the 1880's he had been most successful in planting orchards and developing fruit trees. Here in Shoreham his job was to cultivate and lay out orchards so that the cold storage plant might be filled with succulent fruit for community

consumption.

Within three years he did do wonders. Taking a hint from the success of the first Dickerson peach orchard, he set out during those years more than 4000 peach trees and as many young apple trees. Twenty acres of trees were planted east of the Brick Yard or Sill's Gully; ten acres were set to trees on the old Dickerson peach orchard site, south west of the store. The apple orchard now gone to ruin along the Woodville Road south of the store was set out by him. In the beginning he planted a peach tree between every two apple trees because peach trees only live seven years and it is about that time before apple trees begin to bear. His last orchard was the one where the trees now dead, are being taken down for the new tennis courts. Here was once a beautiful orchard that extended from Woodville Road to the Hughes road to the east and from the Briarcliff Road on the north to the Kavanagh and Hughes property to the south and then extending on beyond these places on the southern slope down to the old Company barn.

How beautiful these orchards were in their prime! How lovingly the old doctor tended each individual tree, pruning it here, shaping it there, so that the apples and peaches should grow close to the ground for easier picking and so that windfalls should not have too far to drop.

When the spring buds opened these orchards were a gorgeous sight, first the peach buds in pink and then the apple blossoms with their whiter tinge made acres of beautiful flowers. Fifty acres of Peach bloom, fifty acres of apple blossoms all growing in the valley of Woodville Landing. Why did they have to die? Why do we not have these beautiful well kept orchards now?

In the summer of 1901 we had a scourge of forest fires. Every week a fire would speing up in a new spot. No one knew what caused them although they were attributed to sparks from engines of the Long Island R.R. Father was in New York and I had gone up to visit my brothers at college in Amherst Mass. A forest fire suddenly broke out in a spot not far from where Louis Dahl's filling station now stands. Old Dr. Baldwin, he was then close to seventy years of age, called out all the available men and went to fight the fire and

protect the village, for if the fire once crossed the railroad tracks it would sweep down through the big timber and in no time there would be no peach trees, no ice plant and no Shoreham. The men scattered through the underbrush, back firing and beating out the flames. Dr. Baldwin directed the work. At last it was almost out. He sent the men around the burnt area to take a last look and make sure that all was well. Suddenly, a gust of wind fanned the flames anew. The men redoubled their efforts and finally with shovels and spades once more had the flames under control. Then they returned for further directions and found - and found the charred remains of the poor old doctor, smoldering in a smoking pile of ashes. It was supposed that when the fire broke out a second time, he had tried to fight the fire alone and in some way had been surrounded by the flames and becoming confused had stumbled and fallen and had been overcome with the smoke and fumes.

So passed a grand old man, a fighter to the last. I sometimes think that perhaps during those last unconscious moments, before his spirit left its home, the old man may have lived again the gallant charge of his brave company amid the smoke and crackle of the battle of Look Out Mountain!

With the passing of the doctor of the orchards, there seemed to be no one to carry on his work. Slowly the jungle once more claimed the soil. The cat brier, the grape vines and the poison ivy today grow where a third of a century ago a splendid promise of a prosperous and enduring enterprise made of Shoreham a place of unforgettable beauty.

It would not be hard to believe that Lord Dunsany must have had our own lovely spot in mind when he wrote:

I would I were in Shoreham  
At the setting of the sun,  
I would I were in Shoreham  
As the gloaming is begun,  
For there's peace upon the grasses  
And quiet in the lane  
That runs down to old time  
To fairy time again.

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