

2 -

Medad Porter - Born 1802; died 1863.

Medad Porter was born January 5, 1802 at Waterford, N.Y. near Troy. His parents, Medad, a cooper, and Mary (Polly) Davis Porter, died when he was quite young and he was brought up by an aunt. He had two brothers, Asahel and Levi. (From notes of information given by his eldest child, Elizabeth Porter, to her niece, Florence Mott Bradford.)

When a half grown lad, Medad was sent to town to bring home a churn, - a dasher churn. Dusk was falling as he came through a wild, wooded section, and wolves began to pursue him. At this he would stop and work the dasher furiously and thus frighten and drive back the wolves; then he would go on rapidly until the band returned to the pursuit and he had to repeat the banging with the dasher. He finally reached home safely, - to find that he had banged the bottom out of the churn.

His marriage to Charity Dubois occurred Feb. 9, 1826.

A carpenter and a skilled cabinet maker, Medad Porter built in 1826 the house in Chittenango in which his children grew up. (The house burned down in 1901 not long after its sale.) He also taught school. Much of the family's food was produced on the homestead.

It may have been at the time of the Millerite excitement concerning the end of the world that Mr. Porter hired a man to do some farm work for him, for it was in 1843 or 1844 that many people were certain of the imminence of the end, some even making preparations for it by clothing themselves in white and stationing themselves in upper story windows all ready to be wafted to the regions of the blest.

This man whom Mr. Porter hired, whether or not Millerite, professed to know that after a certain day, material possessions would no longer concern him, so when he was offered his pay he refused it, saying that he expected to have no use for it. "If you should ever want the money," he was told by Medad, "come for it and you may have it." After the day of the end that never came, the man returned and received his pay.

A minister was once being entertained at the Porter home when some one called at the house for the church keys of which Medad Porter was custodian. The occasion was a lecture to be given at the church. The visiting clergyman, when he learned that the speaker was to be a woman, drew himself up in pompous austerity and delivered himself of his opinion of such doings in full voice: "Everything in creation, even the beasts of the field, knows its place, except the women!" The woman speaker was Susan B. Anthony.

A colored woman once came to the Porter home, a slave woman on her way to Canada. She told Medad Porter that she had come from Texas. To test her story he asked her, "Who is the governor of Texas?" She replied, "Sam Houston." After being given refreshment she was told that when darkness fell, directly after her host left by the front door, she should depart at the rear and follow him at a distance; when she should see him enter the front door of a house, she was to come to the rear door of that house, - one known to Medad Porter as a station of the underground.

Mr. Porter assisted in the investigation of a claim that one, Louis Leroy, was the "Lost Dauphin" of France.

(One, W.M. van der Weyde, an authority on New York City's history, published at one time a plausible and extremely interesting tale told him by an old resident of Greenwich Village. The account claimed that the boy Prince, after being imprisoned for several years after the execution of his parents, Marie Antoinette and Louis XVI, was smuggled from his dungeon by a ruse and brought to New York by the Swedish Count Hans Axel von Fersen. Count Fersen was a handsome man stationed at Versailles as a colonel of the Royal Régiment of Swedes, and was said to have been the Queen's lover.

Arriving in New York on a French vessel in the autumn of 1795 with the 10-year-old boy and a priest, Fersen bought a house on the northeast corner of what is now Leroy and Hudson streets, overlooking St. John's graveyard, the story relates. The two men always bared their heads in the presence of the lad, who was treated with the greatest deference.

The boy was known as Louis Leroy, a significant name, especially when coupled with the fact that the street on which he lived was later named for him. He married a society woman, supposedly stayed in the city and died about 1840. His grave in St. John's burial ground, which was destroyed in the Nineties to make way for the present Hudson Park, furnished the strongest basis for the hypothesis that the Dauphin spent most of his life in New York City.

Both Mr. van der Weyde and Charles Hemstreet, a New York historian, have spoken of seeing the tomb in their youth. Mr. Hemstreet described it as having been of marble, inscribed with the single word, "Leroy," above which was a crown. (Le Roi is, of course, French for king.) The monument was surmounted by the figure of a fish resembling a dolphin. This is also of particular interest, as the French word for dolphin is "dauphin," and a representation of this fish has been in the French heir-apparent's crest since the fourteenth century.

According to Mr. van der Weyde, the last link in the chain of circumstantial evidence was a letter written by Axel Fersen to a friend in 1809. A translation reads:

"Mr. Leroy lives unknown in New York and he writes me that he is well and that he is happy. I shall be very glad to see you next month. Yours devotedly, Axel."

Medad Porter was a Methodist and a Mason.

Medad Porter was a wise and valued counselor to his children. When they came to him, puzzled or uncertain, he would give them an impartial discussion of the problem, leaving them to make their own decisions.

Although Medad Porter's daughters were skilled in the feminine arts and crafts of their day, he felt it a great omission that they did not know how to spin, for that had been essential in his day.

Mr. Porter was never well and strong. Early in his career he contracted "fever and ague" (malaria) and always suffered more or less from its effects. An odd peculiarity of his was that when ill with fever he was prone to express himself in rhyme, as, "Come my daughter, bring some water, To put on my head while I'm in bed."

He passed away Sept. 12, 1863, at his home in Chittenango, the victim of an overdose of opium administered by the family physician.

Genealogical data in biography of Medad Porter obtained from notes taken by Florence Mott Bradford in conversation with Medad Porter's eldest child, Elizabeth Porter.

The stories are recollections of Harriet Porter Mott's children of conversations with their mother and their aunt, Elizabeth Porter.