

**CENTENNIAL ANNIVERSARY OF
THE BIRTH OF EZRA CORNELL:
ADDRESSES AT THE CELEBRATION
HELD AT CORNELL UNIVERSITY,
APRIL 26, 1907**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649250400

Centennial Anniversary of the Birth of Ezra Cornell: Addresses at the Celebration Held at
Cornell University, April 26, 1907 by Ezra Cornell

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EZRA CORNELL

JANUARY 11, 1807-DECEMBER 9, 1874

This plate was made from the last photograph of the Founder, taken in the early summer of 1874, at the request of some of the students. The original is in the possession of Miss Mary E. Cornell, Ithaca.

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APRIL 26, 1907

CORNELL UNIVERSITY
ITHACA, NEW YORK
1907

PRESS OF
ANDRUS & CHURCH
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ADDRESSES

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PRESIDENT SCHURMAN: We had erected a tent for this celebration and had had benches made to accommodate an audience of 4,000 or 5,000 persons. The rain has driven us into this building which scarcely accommodates a third of that number. But our Founder was a man who was not the slave of circumstances, but master of himself. We should be animated on this occasion above all others by his spirit and, were he here, I think that, calmly and serenely, he would have said something like this: "It rains, let it rain." We also have a second disappointment. Illness has prevented Mr. Carnegie from coming here to deliver the address on Ezra Cornell. I know how much time Mr. Carnegie has devoted to the address and how thoroughly he has studied the sources. I share your regret that he could not have been here to deliver it in person. At the request of the committee in charge, Judge Blood will now read the address.

EZRA CORNELL

ANDREW CARNEGIE

THE subject of our address sprang from a sturdy race of Puritans who had been strict Quakers for generations.

The union of his parents was blest by eleven children, all of whom reached adult age, and were noted for temperance, industry and frugality,—excellent citizens. The father lived to the advanced age of ninety-one. The mother was a model of all that a noble woman should be, and the children had superb constitutions.

Ezra, our hero, the oldest, was born January 11th, 1807, at Westchester Landing, New York. He soon began to give notice to all concerned that he was no ordinary child.

Activity of both body and mind and a consuming thirst for knowledge distinguished him. The poor village school, supplemented by such instruction as his father could give, was his only University. When only sixteen, Ezra and his brother contracted for the clearing and planting of four acres of land, conditioned upon being permitted to attend school during the winter term. His chief passion was for mechanics, and every opportunity to pursue their study was eagerly embraced. Carpentry was learned while working upon a new factory his father was building, and that trade he followed for a time. His graduating thesis was the planning and erection of a new two-story frame dwelling for the family, with no aid but that of his younger brother and ordinary workmen. He was only seventeen but already a master-builder; his triumph was regarded by the whole country round as nothing less than wonderful. When a lad plays the architect, superintendent and workman combined at seventeen he becomes a marked youth. The eyes of his little world, destined to grow betimes, are already upon him.

Ambition stirred within Ezra Cornell, and at eighteen he set forth to establish himself upon an independent basis. After some trials he finally heard of Ithaca as a promising point because it was connected with the canal. There he went and, as the whole country knows, Ithaca became his home, and is destined as such to remain famous. Cornell and Ithaca are inseparable. With a few dollars in his pocket he walked from his father's home to Ithaca, forty miles distant—a second Dick Whittington, for Cornell also became the foremost citizen. Without a single introduction or certificate of character, the young man soon made his way. Although he began as a carpenter, he soon had charge of the cotton factory, and finally of the flouring and plaster mills. His fame as a millwright soon spread and he remained for twelve years in the same position, though for many of these he was really in charge of the business. There was no restricting of his field possible.

His employer, Col. Beebe, soon found that the man who could do many things, and all of them well, had at last come to relieve him. He was especially notable for the saving of labor through the mechanical substitutes he introduced. A new mill of much greater capacity was his sole work. A strange turn of fortune came in after life when he, the former employee of Col. Beebe in youth, became his employer in his old age, and in many ways was able to brighten the pathway of his declining years. He never forgot even the humblest of his friends of early days.

In 1831 he married a daughter of one who had been his father's pupil when he taught school in 1808, Mary Ann Wood, and never was marriage happier. Often has Cornell said that his chief blessing in life was his wife, "the best woman that ever lived." Until his marriage he had been a strict Quaker and always identified himself with that sect, being a regular attendant at the Friend's meetings; but there was no organization of that kind at Ithaca, and his wife was not a Quaker. Upon his return to DeRuyter, the society excommunicated him, intimating, however, that if he would apologize for having offended, and express regret for having done so, he would be reinstated. This he decidedly refused to do. No wonder, when we read of the guardian angel of a woman he loved, who lifted him upward with her; he felt, no doubt, as a friend of mine in somewhat similar circumstances, and as I hope each of you young men may be so fortunate as to feel some day about his wife. He was willing to "imperil his immortal soul" for Mary Wood—one of the very best risks I should say, and to be taken at the very lowest rates of insurance, with a rebate at that.

In Cornell's intercourse with his parents and members of the sect, he was careful at all times to use their phrases, and he remained throughout his long life a disciple.

Before Cornell had more than reached his majority he was noted as a wise and public-spirited citizen. The edu-

cation of the people even then was his first care, and through his influence a local school was established at Fall Creek, which speedily became celebrated.

Nor did national affairs escape the young man's attention. He was an ardent Whig and plunged into the 1840 campaign, in which he was prominent. Later he was a delegate to the convention at Pittsburg, which organized the Republican party (1856). No doubt I saw his tall figure among the delegates, for even while a telegraph-messenger boy I was a keen free-soiler and ever on the lookout for the celebrated delegates who were then the gods of my idolatry.

Col. Beebe had failed in the panic of 1837 and the mill was converted into a woolen factory. In 1841 trade grew dull in Ithaca. Our hero was forced to look around for a new field, which soon presented itself. He came into contact with the men who were nursing that mysterious infant, the Telegraph, much troubled to know how the stranger from a strange world was to be nursed. It was an uncanny visitor, whose evident connection with occult forces staggered those in whose charge it lay. Cornell was then in his thirty-sixth year, just in his prime.

Always interested in mechanical inventions, he purchased the patent rights, for Maine and Georgia, of an improved plow, and, visiting Maine to introduce it, he made the acquaintance of Mr. F. O. J. Smith, Member of Congress and Editor of the *Maine Farmer*. Their relations became cordial, and in 1843 Cornell again visited Maine, walking the 160 miles from Ithaca to Albany in four days, from Albany by rail to Boston, thence on foot 100 miles in two and one-half days, and all this so late as 1843. Let us pause here one moment and reflect upon the lightning speed at which the Republic has developed. No parallel exists, and what of the future, when even to-day the pace is, if anything, increased? What are we coming to? Nothing less than to be the giant nation of the earth, all others being pigmies.