

Henry Bronson, M.D.

"By his birth, residence, historical work, life long interest and solid benefactions, Dr. Bronson belongs to Waterbury.....his name will ever be connected with the history of the town."

- Frederick J. Kingsbury

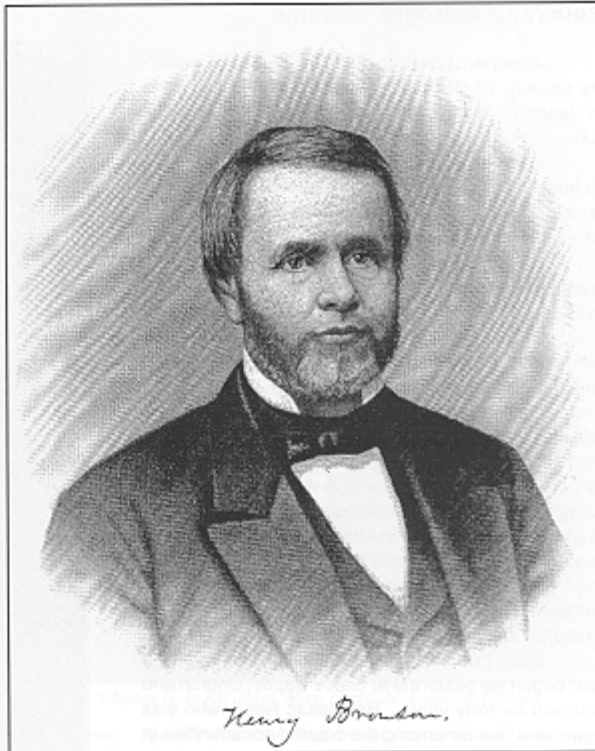
Dr. Henry Bronson was born in Waterbury on January 30, 1804. He received his Doctor of Medicine from Yale in 1827 and began practice in Massachusetts. Four years later he moved to Albany. When an epidemic of Asiatic cholera broke out in Montreal in 1832, he was commissioned to study the disease. His reports were so remarkable for exactness, profundity and scientific insight they extended his professional reputation. He became an expert on the disease and his dissertations remained the authoritative guides throughout the world.

In 1834, he returned to Waterbury where he built up what was probably the largest practice in New England. His diagnosis of cases was perceptive, logical, exhaustive, and accurate. He had a keen realization of the limits of medical science and a lack of faith in the power of drugs to cure diseases. He believed the majority of diseases came, lingered and disappeared according to natural law - if nobody interfered. Discussing medical philosophy was one of his enjoyments as he intertwined Darwin's theory of natural selection with his own views. He never advocated an exclusive system of treatment saying, "The same remedy, given apparently under the same circumstances, will not always produce the same effects."

In 1839, he went to Italy for health reasons and while there attended many lectures at the leading European hospitals. Returning home in 1842, he abandoned his medical practice after being elected professor of materia medica and therapeutics at Yale Medical School. He moved to New Haven in 1845 and for eighteen years devoted himself to teaching.

A many-faceted man, he was knowledgeable of finance, political economy, history and government. He had an original mind, a high retention of facts and a talent for investigative research. Dr. Stephen Hubbard said, "Familiar with history, theology and party politics, he had no affinities with the last two-considering them as resting upon changeable and insecure foundations, and as not essential to the highest welfare of mankind."

He contributed many articles to periodicals on medicine, history and early government in Connecticut. He wrote "An Historical Account of Connecticut Currency, Continental Money and The Finances of the Revolution," "The Money Problem", and a series of historical and biographical articles on the medical history of New Haven County and Connecticut. Francis Bacon said, "Dr. Bronson's work cheapens that



of any successor he is likely to have in the field."

Bronson had an ability to collect information and laboriously organize it. One of his major achievements for which Waterburians will forever be indebted is his History of Waterbury which details events from the areas settlement to the end of the Eighteenth Century. The 582-page book with twenty-nine engravings was considered a model of accurate and painstaking research. The reviews exulted: "It will be quoted as an authority, centuries hence" (*Bridgeport Post*), "what cannot be found of the history of Waterbury here, can be found nowhere" (*Morning News*), and it is "worthy to be preserved as an heir-loom to your descendants" (*Waterbury American*).

His masterful prose style produced elegant sentences: "One's history is written in the embryo-cell from which he springs. In no event can the stream be purer than the fountain" and "On the fact that out of a thousand persons of a given age, a certain number will die annually, in spite of the healing art, the system of life insurance is founded."

Bronson was severely injured in a runaway accident in 1891, never fully recovered, and died on November 26, 1893.