

James Henry Salisbury (1823-1905)



Dr. James Salisbury was born in Scott, NY on October 13, 1823 to Nathan and Lucretia Babcock Salisbury. Like so many of his generation, he graduated from the Cortland Academy (in Homer) – “that famous institution which has many illustrious graduates to its credit.”¹ He continued his education earning a Bachelor of Natural Science from Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute in 1846; an M.D. from Albany Medical College in 1850; and an M.A. from Union College in Schenectady in 1852.

From 1849 to 1852, Salisbury also worked for the New York Geological Survey as an assistant chemist, quite likely laying some of the ground-work for his widely varied future interests.

“Salisbury began studying germs as the cause of diseases as early as 1849. Severely criticized in Europe and America, not until 1865 was he proved correct. In 1860 Salisbury began studying the origin and functions of blood, later turning to the relation of food and drink to the occurrence of disease, advocating dietary measures, including Salisbury steak, as cures. He also studied the chemical analysis of plants, spores, fungi, and parasites as causes of diseases; other interests led him to study ancient rocks and earth writings.”²

“Between 1858 and 1861, Salisbury and his older brother, Charles Babcock Salisbury, researched the earthworks and mounds of the Ohio Valley. In 1862-63, the brothers presented the American Antiquarian Society with their findings (charts, maps and sketches).”³

He served as a physician during the Civil War and treated soldiers suffering from intestinal ailments with a diet of coffee and minced beef patties, which eventually became known as “Salisbury steak”. In 1864 Salisbury moved to Cleveland, where he helped establish the Charity Hospital Medical College. He specialized in the treatment of chronic diseases, especially those previously considered fatal.⁴

"Besides being a practicing physician and an author of more than fifty books and publications, he was an authority on agriculture and plant life, geology, Indian lore, history, chemistry and philosophy; and this by no means exhausts the list of his interests."⁵

Salisbury married Clara Brasse in 1860 and had 2 children, Minnie and Trafford. He died at age 82 and was buried in Lake View Cemetery, Cleveland, OH.

DEATH LIST OF A DAY.

Dr. James H. Salisbury.

Dr. James H. Salisbury, a specialist in chronic diseases, died last night at his country home at Dobbs Ferry, after a lingering illness. Dr. Salisbury was in his eighty-second year. He was born in Cortland County, N. Y., was a graduate of the Troy Polytechnic Institute and of the Albany Medical College, and also held degrees from Union College and Amity College. He published numerous microscopical and therapeutical studies in The New York Journal of Medicine and in foreign medical reviews. He practiced in Cleveland and later in New York. He was a member of the American Antiquarian Society, the Natural History Society of Montreal, the Philosophical Society of Great Britain, and President of the Institute of Micrology.

He was the author of numerous authoritative monographs on plant anatomy and anatomical chemistry. He was a pioneer in the work of medical microscopy. He leaves two children, a daughter and a son, Trafford B. Salisbury, who is also a physician.

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1. Blodgett, Bertha E, "Stories of Cortland County" published by Cortland County Historical Society, first published 1932, reprinted 2008, page 90
2. "The Encyclopedia of Cleveland History": <http://ech.case.edu/cgi/article.pl?id=SJH2>
3. Portrait and other information found in the Ohio History Connection website- <http://www.ohiomemory.org/cdm/ref/collection/p267401coll32/id/14015>; additional information about the portrait: The engraving is an oval portrait of James Henry Salisbury...subject's signature is located at the bottom center, engraver was Samuel Sartrain, Philadelphia
4. Ibid
5. Blodgett, page 91