

142 DOLBEARE, BENJAMIN

Publisher

Richmond

Publisher of a small poetry book (1817) from the Richmond press of John Warrock (430).

Dolbeare was described late in his life as being "original and eccentric," as well as a skilled surgeon, and the small book he published in 1817 fits that description aptly. *The Poetical Works of Doct. Benjamin Dolbeare; Consisting of his Art of Courtship, and other pieces Amatory and Sentimental* was a self-published work issued when he was just twenty-eight years-old and not yet married. At the time, he resided in the village of Beverly, near Elkins, in Randolph County, one of several residences in his lengthy life.

Born in Connecticut, Dolbeare received a medical degree from Dartmouth College in 1812; he returned to his parent's home in Plainfield and practiced medicine there during the War of 1812. At the war's end, he relocated to Virginia's Randolph County becoming, as one nineteenth-century history claims, the first professional physician in the county. His home there was a simple log cabin visited annually by the itinerant Methodist minister Lorenzo Dow (148), who was married to Dolbeare's younger sister Lucy; not surprisingly his house is also considered the town's first church. While settling in there, Dolbeare presented his poetry at social gatherings, yielding a request to publish several in this Richmond collection. Yet it also appears that having this collection printed was problematic; Dolbeare initially entered a copyright for the work in January 1817, indicating that it had been published in December 1816 by John M. & David Burke; but that firm collapsed at about the moment the copyright was issued, and Dolbeare turned to Warrock to complete the project.

This imprint was not the end of Dolbeare's writing career, but it was his last effort for about twenty years. After his marriage in 1824, he gradually moved into Democratic politics in the county, being elected in the early 1830s to the Virginia legislature from there. In 1835, he moved his family and medical practice to Clarksburg in Harrison County where he remained until his death in 1854. Once in Clarksburg, he became a key player in promoting a patent medicine marketed by his brother in law in 1836 – "Dow's Family Medicine." But that was a short diversion from his involvement in politics. In early 1838, Dolbeare embarked on a career as either editor, owner, or financier of a series of Democratic newspapers there. The sequence of his roles is still unclear, given the scattered surviving issues of each journal, but one literary historian suggests that the lineage was the *Clarksburg Democrat* (1838-39), the *Clarksburg Virginian* (1840-41), the *Scion of Democracy* (1841-48), and the *Independent Democrat* (1848 on), with Dolbeare assuming formal editorial duties in 1838-40 and 1846-48. In his final years, he may also have been involved in founding the *Clarksburg Register*, an abolitionist journal begun in 1851.

However, the one Dolbeare imprint that has left an impression in recent scholarship is the one other book that he published in his lifetime. A fortuitous encounter in 1843 resulted in a published narrative of the Indian captivity of Dolly Webster, an expatriate Virginian held by the Comanche in the earliest 1840s. While issued from the press of McGranaghan & McCarty in Clarksburg, Dolbeare retained the work's copyright and profited handsomely.

Personal Data

Born: Oct. 28 1789 Montville, New London County. Connecticut
Married May 13 1824 Maria Marteney @ Randolph County, VA/WV
Died: June 7 1854 Clarksburg, Harrison County VA/WV
Children: Lorenzo Dow (b. 1825); Martha Jane (b. 1826).

Sources: Imprint (Shoemaker 40688); Norona & Shetler; Bosworth, *Randolph County*; Haymond; *Harrison County*; Shawkey. *West Virginia Literature*; Michno & Michno, *Indian Captivities in the West*; genealogical data from Dolbeare family charts posted on Ancestry.com (September 2012).