

Dr. S.A. Skinner

Dr. Smith Austin (S.A.) Skinner, son of Smith Skinner and Rhoda Heaton, was born on March 15, 1824, in Thetforth, VT. His upbringing and education were heavily influenced toward the field of medicine under the tutelage of his maternal grandfather, Dr. Solomon Heaton. Skinner was related to the Quaker nature poet John Greenleaf Whittier [1807- 1892] of Massachusetts through Skinner's maternal grandmother Rhoda Whittier, who was the poet's aunt. There is no documentation indicating the two ever met.

Skinner studied medicine with his paternal uncle, Dr. Jonathan Skinner, in Brownington, VT, for several years. In November 1850, Skinner married Catherine Hinman Blake of Salem, Vt., daughter of Samuel Blake and granddaughter of Judge Timothy Hinman. Judge Hinman served as an officer during the Revolutionary War with General George Washington at Valley Forge. Skinner then enrolled in the University of Vermont, graduating in 1854. Skinner remained in Vermont for the next ten years, where he established a private practice in Bristol. In 1863, Vermont Governor Holbrook appointed him as one of the medical examiners of Vermont to examine men enrolled in the militia who applied for exemption from military duty for medical reasons.

In 1864, Skinner moved with his family to Hoosick Falls. For many years he was one of the most prominent and successful physicians and surgeons throughout Rensselaer County, and the leading practitioner in Hoosick Falls. In addition to being a charter member of the New York State Medical Association, Dr. Skinner became a member of the Rensselaer County Medical Society in 1878. He was also President of the Union Medical Society for several years and a member of the American Medical Association.

Skinner became involved in the civic medical concerns of the early Hoosick Falls community and worked with Judge Levi Chandler Ball in forming the first Board of Health in Hoosick Fall. He was also the village's first Health Officer, remaining in that position for eight years. He was instrumental in having the first water and sewage systems established in Hoosick Falls. Dr. Skinner successfully lobbied for the construction of the first streetlights in the village.

Skinner was also a consummate utilitarian and inventor in the field of medicine and otherwise. He loved to tinker with surgical instruments, splints, and equipment, and earned some patents. He also wrote many papers and monographs on various medical subjects during his expansive career, focusing on, among other topics, Diphtheria and Diphtheritic Pneumonia. Skinner also became interested in ballistics, especially rifles and ammunition, writing articles extensively for *Shooting and Fishing* magazine.

Not much is known about Skinner's death on August 15, 1905 at his home in Hoosick Falls, other than it was "sudden."