

Bethinking of Old Orleans

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DR. BENJAMIN HOWES 1858 - 1946

Let me begin by relating Dr. Ben Howes to some excerpts from a 1920's essay entitled "Happiness" by William Lyon Phelps: "....if happiness truly consisted in physical ease and freedom of care, then the happiest individual would not be either a man or woman. It would be, I think, an American Cow. American cows and American dogs are ladies and gentlemen of leisure... the eyes of a cow are so beautiful that Homer gave them to the Queen of Heaven, because he could not think of any other eyes so large, so lustrous, so liquid, and so untroubled. Cows are 'never perturbed....there are no agnostic cows; no Fundamentalist or Modernist cows; cows do not worry about the income tax....a cow does not lie awake at night wondering if her son is going to the devil in some distant city...there is in their beautiful eyes no perplexity; their serene faces betray no apprehension or alarm; they are never bored.'"

"Well, since the daily life of an American cow is exactly the existence held up to us and ideal-physical comfort with no pain and no worries, who wouldn't be a cow? Very few human beings would be willing to change into cows, which must mean...Life, with all its sorrows, cares, perplexities and heartbreaks, is more interesting than bovine placidity, hence more desirable. The more interesting it is, the happier it is. And the happiest person is the person who thinks the most interesting thoughts."

So it must have been for 'Doc' Howes, The Albion Midlander reported the following in 1934: 'We know of no man, old or young, who gets any more 'kick' out of life than Dr. Benjamin Howes, prominent Orleans County veterinary.' Just mention his name to someone who knew him and see if it doesn't bring on a smile or rekindle a reminiscence.

He was born in West Gaines where he taught school for around two years before attending the Toronto University Veterinary College for three years, in 1884 he married Clara VanCamp (1862-1934) and they had two sons, Whitney and Murray. After a few years of veterinary practice in Orleans County he went to work for the U.S. Department of Agriculture as a livestock inspector. After twenty years he returned to Orleans County and re-established his practice at Carlton Station where he completed 55 years as a veterinary. He was an ardent baseball fan, cross country motorist, antique collector and horseman supreme. Once as a motorist going through Ohio he drove through a stop sign; immediately pulled over by two policemen he gave them a 'sob-story' saying with real tears, "If I ever get back to the farm I'll never leave it again". One of the officers said to the other, "Let the old guy go". Needless to say 'Doc' laughed about that for years. As an antique collector he had one of the most fabulous collections of primitive farm relics ever amassed in western New York. It unfortunately was all sold at public auction following his death. As a horseman belonging to the Orleans County Boots and Saddle Club no parade was ever complete with out 'Doc' and his splendid horse Sandy. Both are shown in the photo here taken at a parade in Brockport during the mid-1930's. With 'Doc's' varied interests from vocation to avocations I think we can reasonably assume that he must have thought some interesting thoughts which rendered to him real character and happiness.