

Ellenville's "Renowned Composer": Homer N. Bartlett

by Marion M. Dumond

Former Town of Wawarsing Historian
& Ellenville Public Library Director (Retired)

The headline in the February 7, 1918, issue of *The Ellenville Journal* read, *Hunt Memorial Dedication Service*, but the subtitle referred to "a Concert Devoted to the Works of One of Ellenville's Most Famous Sons, The Renowned Composer Homer N. Bartlett."

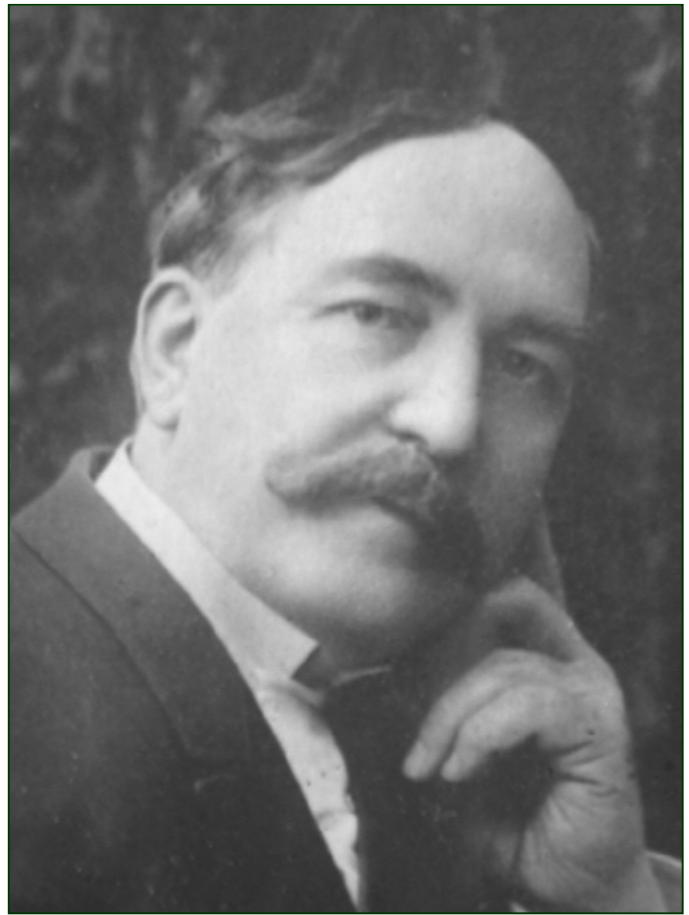
The article reported in great depth the January 31, 1918, dedication of the **Hunt Memorial Building** under the auspices of the *Ellenville WCTU*, but devoted substantial space to lauding Homer Bartlett and his music. This famous "Ellenville son" was not born in Ellenville, nor did he spend most of his life in Ellenville.

Homer Newton Bartlett was born in Olive, NY, on December 28, 1845, to Henry B. and Hannah C. Hall Bartlett. On her mother's side, Mrs. Bartlett came from the seventeenth signer of the Mayflower Compact. Her two grandfathers were with Washington at Valley Forge. According to a biographical sketch accompanying a compact disc that includes one of his compositions, Homer N. Bartlett was a descendant of the Josh Bartlett who was one of the signers of the Declaration of Independence and the first governor of New Hampshire, but that allegation is not proved. The Bartletts had five sons and one daughter.

The date of the Bartlett family move to Ellenville is not known, but *The Ellenville Journal* of November 29, 1861, says that "Mr. Bartlett has purchased of Dr. A.L. Turner the entire stock of drugs" to be operated "in all its branches with his bookstore." Presumably, Bartlett had previously operated a bookstore. Later papers carried ads for the *Union Drug and Book Store*, announcing that J. B. Bartlett dealt in drugs and medicine, paints, oils, glass, putty, English, French and American chemicals, dye stuff, pure wines and liquors for medicinal use, through patent medicines in great variety, confectionery and Yankee notions, medical prescriptions carefully put up, also a full assortment of books and stationery. Mrs. Bartlett's obituary lists John B. Bartlett as the first of the sons, so he might have been the "J.B." of the advertisement. John B. was identified in the obituary as having some years of connection with newspapers and with music.

The April 11, 1868, *Ellenville Journal* carried a notice of the death of Henry B. Bartlett, with a notation that "Messrs. Wood and Munson remain in charge of the business," so Homer's father was clearly involved with the pharmacy/book store. An August 1866 item reported that "Bartlett has taken up quarters in the new store in Terwilliger's building. No rival in Ulster County for elegance, neatness and completeness." A January 1868 ad for *Bartlett's New Wholesale and Retail Drug, Book and Music Store*, Terwilliger's Building, mentions that E.H. Munson managed the music department and L.B. Wood the book department. *Bartlett and Wood* was the new firm doing business at the old Bartlett book and drug store in July; a branch opened in Napanoch the next month.

Back to Homer, who seems to have been a child prodigy, playing piano publicly at age nine and composing at age ten. Mrs. Ben M. Taylor read a paper at a meeting of the *Ellenville Music Club* in which she said, "We are told that this small boy, at the age when other boys usually



feel most averse to whatever pertains to art, was writing violin music, piano duos, songs and vocal duets." The violin was his first instrument, but he soon progressed to piano and organ. His "Polka de Concert" was written in Ellenville when he was seventeen and was published in 1867 as the "Grande Polka de Concert," described as "a worthy essay in the brilliant Gottschalkian ballroom tradition, including the mandatory use of French on its title page." The composition was dedicated to Miss Emma L. Cornell, of New York. Homer's obituary many years later lists Emma L. Bartlett, his wife, as a survivor.

The *Ellenville Journal* of February 23, 1867, announced a "Grand Concert," by "our talented young friend and former townsman, Homer N. Bartlett," who "possesses a remarkable genius for music, which has been cultivated under the tutelage of the first artists in the country." It is known that Homer studied with S. B. Mills, Emil Guyon, Alfred Pease, O. F. Jacobsen and Max Braun. Dr. Bentley added a note to the announcement, "I happen to know that Mr. Bartlett has won for himself a most creditable reputation in art circles in New York as an instrumental performer of great skill and promise." Homer gave a "Second Grand Concert" at the end of July that same year, at which he played his Polka, as well as choice selections from Verdi, Beethoven, Rossini, and Gottschalk, with other performers, including J. B. Bartlett, tenor (his brother?). E. H. Munson, the manager of the music department at *Bartlett's*, was listed as an accompanist and participant in two duets.

Mr. Bartlett gave a concert in *Masonic Hall* in 1873; in 1874, he was soloist at the consecration of *St. John's Memorial Church*. He was honored in Cragmoor in 1976 when Robert Rogers played one of his compositions at the concert that opened the *Cragmoor Bicentennial Arts Celebration*.

