Lorenzo Dow

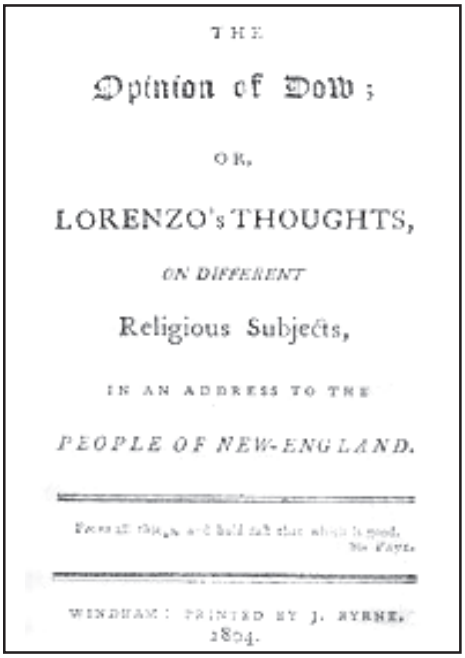
Son of Thunder and Patent Medicine Maker

By Eric McGuire

The full story of the amazing Lorenzo Dow could not be told in a short article such as this. He was analogous to today's superstars, who are always on tour, but the popular draw of his day was religion. The closest living parallel that could be drawn today may be evangelist Billy Graham in his prime years of the 1950s and 1960s. But being a "not-for-profit" preacher, Lorenzo was obligated to raise money to fund his own activities. Not much was needed since he worked alone and personally lived in virtual poverty. Aside from subsistence provided from his farm in Connecticut, he chose to sell books to support his travels, and for a short period resorted to the sale of patent medicine.

Plagued by health and emotional issues as a child, it appears that Lorenzo Dow's career path was chosen by his own wrestling with the devil. Whether by guilt over his own actions or tormenting dreams, he turned to the hope of salvation through God at a very early age. Born to Humphrey and Tabitha Dow on October 16, 1777, in Coventry, Tolland County, Connecticut, at the age of fourteen Lorenzo even considered suicide in order to put to rest the demon inside him. No doubt preaching soothed his own soul by redirecting his tormented thoughts and he did so with the conviction and determination that transcended his own existence. His religious beliefs roughly followed the Methodist teachings of John Wesley, which had recently been introduced to New England. Lorenzo applied for the right to teach Methodism in 1796, but was declined by the Connecticut Conference. He was finally accepted in 1798 and began his circuit riding duties. He once said, "*I am a Methodist chain and a Quaker filling*," when describing his religious philosophies.[1]

Against the church's directive, in 1799 Lorenzo sailed for England, where he perfected his "fire and brimstone" style of preaching and traveled to Ireland as well in a specific attempt to save its Roman Catholics from taking the wrong road. Even in his earliest days, Lorenzo was considered renegade in style and seemed to delight in shocking his audiences with his non-conforming deliveries. He quickly earned the name of "Crazy Lorenzo Dow," but called himself "Son of Thunder." Usually not invited inside, Lorenzo would seldom use a church as a venue and while in England developed the "camp method" of preaching – outdoor encampments that may last more than one day.



THE

Opinion of Dow;

OR,

LORENZO's THOUGHTS,

ON DIFFERENT

Religious Subjects,

IN AN ADDRESS TO THE

PEOPLE OF NEW-ENGLAND.

WINDHAM: PRINTED BY J. BYRNE.

1804.

One of the earlier tracts of Lorenzo Dow

Dow preaching his fire and brimstone.

Witnessing the success and excitement surrounding the outdoor encampments, but without the direct involvement of Dow, some English Methodists broke from the main church, which did not approve of the gatherings. Thus sprang the Primitive Methodist Church in 1807.

That Lorenzo Dow was eccentric is indisputable. That he was crazy is questionable. The line between eccentricity and lunacy is often difficult to define; however, much of what Lorenzo did was steeped in what is now called marketing. Eventful controversy was often used to his advantage. He recognized the importance of name recognition and was masterful in his showmanship as a method to spread his word. To be sure, he was an orator, and preferred a war of words to almost anything else. Too unique for the Methodists, that group disavowed his connection but he held a steady course. As a man without a church, he was the consummate circuit riding preacher. It has been stated that during the first eight months of his circuit riding absence from home, before leaving for his first European trip, he traveled over 4,000 miles, and over 200,000 miles during his career. Of his travels one writer attempted to sum it up in a paragraph:

> "Scarcely a neighborhood from Canada to Georgia, or from the Atlantic to the Mississippi, that has not some tradition still to relate, or some tale to tell of the visit and the preaching of Lorenzo Dow, and there is scarcely an individual in all New England that has not heard their fathers or mothers, or grandfathers and grandmothers, relate some one or more of the witty sayings, or speak of the humorous doings of this singular man." [2]

It is claimed that he was the first Protestant preacher to enter Alabama and Mississippi. He spread the word in all the then seventeen states. It was common for him to assemble crowds of two to three thousand people, and some have suggested assemblies as large as 10,000 – and without

a sound system!

Lorenzo married twice, to who had to be exceptional women. The first, Margaret "Peggy" Holcome, was born on January 5, 1780 in Granville, Massachusetts and married on September 4, 1804. They had one daughter, Letitia Johnson Dow, born September 16, 1806, in Dublin, Ireland, but who died young in Warrington, Ireland. Peggy died on January 6, 1820, in Hebron, Connecticut. Lorenzo married second to Lucy Dolbeare in Hebron, April 1820.[3] Lucy was born January 8, 1786, and died October 26, 1863, in Montville, Connecticut. Upon her death the *Willimantic Journal* published a glowing obituary for this well respected woman. The paper also included this interesting note:

> "Mrs. Dow, widow of the famous Lorenzo Dow, whose death we noticed last week, left a will, giving the whole of her estate, (some $6,000), to the town of Montville, for the purpose of building four stone arch bridges in specified places in the town. The town in public meeting on Thursday refused to accept the gift, and the amount goes to her heirs at law." [4]

Though not constant traveling companions, each of his wives accompanied Lorenzo even on some of his longest tours into and through the wilds of North America. Wild animals and vengeful Indians were not uncommon. They wrote of the perils and difficulties that often included sleeping under the stars.[5]

Known for his quick wit and prophecies, stories of Lorenzo Dow constantly peppered the printed media of the day. Even after his death, his stories lingered in the press. This quote, printed in 1840, is typical of many:

> "Happening in his travels – for he was evermore on the move – to be at Delhi, N.Y., he stopped for the night at the hotel of a Mr. Bush, the chief Bonifice of the village; a round and oily man, with ruby nose and atheistical principles. In the course of the evening, the celebrated General Root, now of the New York legislature, dropped in, and being of the same mind with Mr. Bush, they began to quiz Dow, with might and main. Finally, Gen. Root determining to give him a puzzler, said:
>
> 'You talk a good deal about Heaven: pray give Mr. Bush and myself a description of it. A man who sees it in his dreams and trances as often as you profess to do, ought to describe it perfectly.' 'Well, gentlemen,' said Dow, 'I can describe it, but I must do it briefly – Heaven embraces a vast extent of territory; the air is clear and wholesome; the country smooth and level; there isn't a Root or Bush in it, and there never will be." [6]

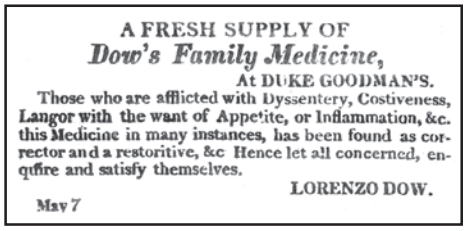
Lorenzo Dow often harangued against lawyers and doctors, for he detested big business and profit takers. He was not above the development of a business venture for the support of his own activities, however. Since his preaching brought no monetary rewards, he was forced to finance his own activities. After a few years, Lorenzo was able to publish several books, mostly about his philosophies and his travels. In fact, it is said that at one time he had the second best selling book in America, directly behind the Bible.[7] In support of his shrewd understanding of business, Lorenzo took note of the success of the earliest patent medicine men of the period. Soon after he married his second wife, Lorenzo became the owner of a *bona fide* patent medicine, as he applied for, and received a United States patent for it on November 24, 1820.

The Patent Act of 1790 created a system of protection that was roughly patterned after the English system, thus allowing a period of 14 years protection against direct competition for an individual who developed a new and patented invention. The 1793 Patent Act better defined a patentable item as:

> ". . . any new and useful art, machine, manufacture or composition of matter and any new and useful improvement on any art, machine, manufacture or composition of matter."

Prior to the Patent Act of July 4, 1836, patents were issued only by name and date and did not include a sequential issue number. The Patent Office had already issued nearly 10,000 patents when a fire destroyed most of the original records in December of 1836. Using private files, the office was able to restore 2,845 patents. The restored records were issued a number beginning with an "X" and are called the "X-Patents." Thus the first U.S. patent ever issued is now designated patent X1. The patents that could not be restored were cancelled. Only nine patents were resurrected for the year of 1820 and Dow's is not among those. In reality, it was a moot point, since Dow had already died and there is no evidence that his medicine was still in use by the time of the fire in 1836.

Medicine men such as Samuel Lee, Richard Lee, T.W. Dyott and Samuel Thompson were commonplace in newspaper advertisements of the day. With a traveling life, Lorenzo was able to read newspapers from all over the U.S. and quickly recognized the power this medium possessed. After his patent was registered, a few of his newspaper ads followed but never approached the advertising level of the more successful medicine vendors.


A FRESH SUPPLY OF
Dow's Family Medicine,
At DUKE GOODMAN'S.
Those who are afflicted with Dyssentery, Costiveness, Langor with the want of Appetite, or Inflammation, &c. this Medicine in many instances, has been found as corrector and a restoritive, &c Hence let all concerned, enquire and satisfy themselves.
LORENZO DOW.
May 7

Newspaper ad from *The Newport Mercury,* Newport, Rhode Island, September 1, 1827.

Lorenzo also neglected to understand the difficulties encountered as an absentee business owner. He apparently mixed batches of his medicines by himself wherever he may have been touring and probably used, or reused, bottles wherever they could be found. He certainly was familiar with glass works in his travels and it is possible that he may have had small runs of bottles made for his special medicine, but such a thing cannot yet be documented. Contained within his writings is his personal observation of the frontier town of Pittsburgh, Ohio:

> "Pittsburg has become famous in the New World, and by nature combining with art promises to be one of the great manufacturing towns in America. Seven or eight glass works in the neighborhood, and as many places of worship." [8]

Except for periodic newspaper advertisements, very little is known about his medicine man activities. The product mysteriously went unmentioned in his published diary, although that part may have been edited out by his widow when she published his memoirs.

Only one quote, which alludes to his support for the legitimacy of patent medicine, is found in his writings:

> "Dr. Rush, I think, admitted that many of the most valuable discoveries in Medicine were made by Quacks, or in some accidental way, though at first opposed, because they do not belong to common theory; but the force and

weight of truth cuts its way, and so finds admission." [9]

One important account is noted in the 1857 Richmond, Indiana, business directory:

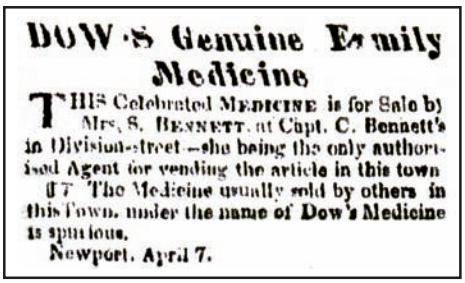
"In this connexion (sic), it may be proper to mention that in the year 1826 that eccentric preacher, Lorenzo Dow, visited Richmond, and delivered one or two sermons in the large brick meeting house of the Friends. Part of his discourse was on the reconcilability of Justice with Mercy, in the Divine Character. He put up at the house of our now aged friend, John Barnes, on Front street; this was a frame building on lot No. 15, and is now no more. Lorenzo's traveling expenses were paid in part, by the sale of a "Family Medicine," as he termed it. This consisted, as he told the writer, of Epsom salts dissolved in water, with the addition of nitric acid. It was recommended as valuable in bilious derangements. The medicine was patented; the patent having expired, he applied for an extension of the time; "for," said he, "the sale of the medicine thus far, has not enabled one hand to wash the other." [10]

Lorenzo's will, which was executed on 5 April 1825, states:

"I direct, in the first place, that all my just debts and personal charges be duly paid and discharged, and all the residue of my estate, both real and personal of every nature and kind, I give and bequeath unto my beloved wife, Lucy Dow, to be at her disposal as she may think fit, including my patent family medicine."[11]

There appears to be no mention of Lucy Dow continuing with the manufacture of sale of his family medicine. By the time of Lorenzo's death the patent had expired and the formula could be used by anyone. Of course, it wasn't the formula that had value, but the name of the preacher himself.

Lorenzo Dow died in Georgetown,



DOW'S Genuine Family Medicine

THIS Celebrated MEDICINE is for Sale by Mrs. S. BENNETT, at Capt. C. Bennett's in Division-street—she being the only authorised Agent for vending the article in this town

☞ The Medicine usually sold by others in this Town, under the name of Dow's Medicine is spurious.

Newport, April 7.

Newspaper ad from the *City Gazette and Daily Advertiser*, Charleston, S.C., May 21, 1821.

A woodcut print of Lorenzo Dow in his later years.

D.C., on February 2, 1834. The National Intelligencer of Georgetown noted:

"He was one of the most remarkable men of the ages for his zeal and labors in the course of religion . . . his eccentric dress and style of preaching attracted great attention, while his shrewdness and quick discernment of character gave him no considerable influence on the multitudes that attended his ministry. He had been a public preacher for more than 30 years. He was a Methodist, in principle, though not in connection with the society." [12]

He was interred at Holmead's Cemetery in Washington, D.C., but reinterred in April 1874 at the Oak Hill Cemetery near Georgetown, where a simple sandstone marker with his name and self-generated epitaph engraved, marks the resting place of Lorenzo Dow's earthly representation.

Some scholars have attempted to make a connection between Lorenzo Dow and the later writings of the Mormon Church. The Mormon's have avoided any reference to a potential connection, and exhibit a noticeable absence of discourse on Dow. An unusual exception, albeit a negative one, was found in an early Sunday school lesson:

"A notable preacher was Crazy Dow. Equipped with a bulging umbrella and riding a sway-backed nag, Dow offered salvation or damnation to the whole West and South. He was skinny, filthy, and unkempt, with shoulder-length red hair and a red beard that hid his chest; but he was a showman of stature and his harsh voice, portentous and coarsely comic by turns, could hypnotize an audience — and sell quantities of Dow's Family Medicine. But he wasn't just a charlatan; he made no fortune, and he drove his frail body with the zeal of a fanatic. Though the circuit rider did his share of camp-meeting shouting and sometimes mistook hysteria for spiritual rapture, his dedication to his calling was complete and unassailable. He took no heed to the morrow and made his rounds in all weather, at all seasons, praying, visiting, exhorting, with no thought of reward this side of Jordan..." [13]

No other reference has been located regarding Lorenzo selling his medicine at the gatherings he assembled for spreading his religious messages. This writer believes that he was highly disciplined and avoided debasing his prime mission in life with a sales pitch for a product, no matter how tempting the opportunity may have been. It is documented; however, that Lorenzo carried a supply of medicine with him just in case interested followers were in need of medication. The *New Bedford Mercury* noted:

"Lorenzo Dow arrived at Tuscumbie, Alabama, on the 20th ultimo, and lost no time in giving notice that he would preach the following day, that he had certain religious tracts for sale, and also, an extensive stock of Dow's family medicine." [14]

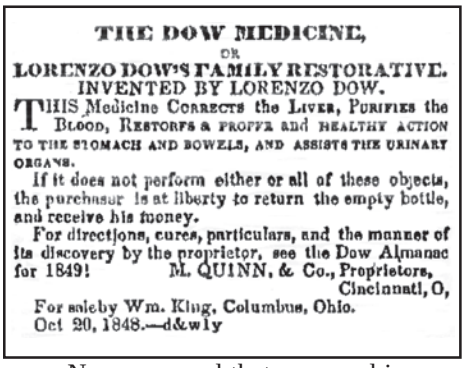
Another account quoted a notice from Lorenzo. . . *"after the services are concluded, a fresh supply of Dow's Family Medicine will be exposed to sale."* [15] No advertisements or mention of his medicine were found after 1827 and it is likely that he ceased its manufacture at least by 1830.

It is interesting to note that the younger brother of Brigham Young, second president of the Mormon Church, was named Lorenzo Dow Young, born in 1807, and was just one of many thousands of children named after the famed evangelist, whose name was as well known to the American populace as was George Washington a generation earlier. It is known that Brigham Young attended Lorenzo's orations and was generally unimpressed, but Brigham's parents must have encountered *The Son of Thunder* as well, since they were moved enough to name a child in his honor. Estimates of children having the first and middle name of Lorenzo Dow during the nineteenth century have ranged from 10,000 to 20,000. Can you believe that Wyatt Earp's uncle was named Lorenzo Dow Earp? And the list goes on.

Published copies of his many books, mostly reminiscences and philosophical

religious observations and teachings, are relatively plenty within the United States, but copies of his medicine bottles are, indeed, a rare commodity. It has not been possible to determine whether the bottle shown here is a production of Lorenzo Dow or made from his formula after the patent expired. It certainly exhibits all the traits of the period of the 1820s and could have been produced during that decade by him or during the 1830s, after Lorenzo's death, by an imitator who surely did not want to confront excoriating damnation showered upon him during the life of the preacher himself. I prefer to believe this example was ordered by Lorenzo Dow for his medicinal concoction and handed to a suffering soul and blessed by the powerful evangelist, with the thought that his power and presence is represented by the bottle's contents, akin to having God in a bottle – sure to heal. After the contents were consumed the owner could not bear to discard such a treasured remembrance of Lorenzo Dow and it was eventually relegated to the dusty attic along with other memory-laden mementoes.

Another likely candidate for producing the pictured bottle is M. Quinn & Co., of Cincinnati, Ohio, who advertised **LORENZO DOW'S FAMILY RESTORATIVE**, from October 1848 to July 1849 in the *Daily Ohio Statesman* of Columbus. Well after Lorenzo's death, his long arm of righteousness was, no doubt, snubbed from reprising this imitator who rode on Lorenzo's fame. Although the bottle appears to be considerably older than the late 1840s, the name of this Ohio medicine most closely fits the embossing on the bottle, with only the word *PATENT* missing.



THE DOW MEDICINE,
OR
LORENZO DOW'S FAMILY RESTORATIVE.
INVENTED BY LORENZO DOW.

THIS Medicine CORRECTS the LIVER, PURIFIES the BLOOD, RESTORES a PROPER and HEALTHY ACTION TO THE STOMACH AND BOWELS, AND ASSISTS THE URINARY ORGANS.

If it does not perform either or all of these objects, the purchaser is at liberty to return the empty bottle, and receive his money.

For directions, cures, particulars, and the manner of its discovery by the proprietor, see the Dow Almanac for 1849! M. QUINN, & Co., Proprietors, Cincinnati, O,

For sale by Wm. King, Columbus, Ohio.
Oct 20, 1848.—d&w1y

Newspaper ad that appeared in *The Ohio Statesman* (Columbus, Ohio) from October 1848 to July 1849

The pictured bottle is made of clear "flint" glass, rectangular, height 5.5", pontiled, embossed **LORENZO / DOW'S - PATENT - FAMILY - RESTORATIVE,** circa 1820 – 1850. Whether Lorenzo Dow was the proprietor of the featured bottle remains to be proven. Perhaps as historical as a medicine bottle can be, it may not rival the aesthetics of many historical and pictorial flasks of the same period but the story behind the name of Lorenzo Dow is hard to beat.

Endnotes:

[1] John H. B. Nowland, *Sketches of Prominent Citizens of 1876, with a Few of the Pioneers of the City and County Who Have Passed Away*. Indianapolis: Tilford & Carlon, Printers. 1877.

[2] Henry A. Baker, *History of Montville, Connecticut: Formerly the North Parish of New London, from 1640 to 1896.* Hartford,

Connecticut: Press of the Case, Lockwood and Brainerd Co. 1896, pg. 113.

[3] *Connecticut Current* (Hartford, CT) 18 April 1820.

[4] *Willimantic Journal* (Windham, CT) Nov 20, 1863.

[5] See Peggy Dow, *Vicissitudes Exemplified, or The journey of Life*, New York : Printed by J.C. Totten. 1814

[6] *Freeman and Messenger* (Lodi, New York) May 14, 1840.

[7] Among his publications are: *Polemical Works* (1814); *The Stranger in Charleston, or the Trial and Confession of Lorenzo Dow* (1822); *A Short Account of a Long Travel; with Beauties of Wesley* (1823); and the *History of a Cosmopolite; or the Four Volumes of the Rev. Lorenzo Dow's Journal, concentrated in One, containing his Experience and Travels from Childhood to 1814* (1814, and many later editions); this volume also contains "*All the Polemical Works of Lorenzo*." The edition of 1854 was entitled *The Dealings of God, Man, and the Devil as exemplified in the Life, Experience and Travels of Lorenzo Dow*.

[8] *The New York Times* (New York), May 9, 1886.

[9] Lorenzo Dow, Peggy Dow and John Dowling, *The Dealings of God, Man, and the Devil: as Eemplified in the Life, Experience and Travels of Lorenzo Dow, in a Period of Over Half a Century*. Vol. 1, Middletown, Ohio: Published by Glasener and Marshall. 1849, pg. 310.

[10] Dr. John Plummer, *Reminisinces of the History of Richmond, Indiana* (included with the first Richmond City Directory in 1857).

[11] John H. Binford, *History of Hancock County, Indiana*, King & Binford, Publishers. Greenfield, Indiana: William Mitchell, Steam Book and Job Printer. 1882, pg. 140.

[12] *The National Intelligencer* (Georgetown, D.C.) February 6, 1834.

[13] Untitled, Reformed Latter Day Saints Junior Curriculum, c. 1970, p. 365, located at: http://www.solomonspalding.com/docs/ldow1804.htm.

[14] *New Bedford Mercury* (New Bedford, Massachusetts) May 18, 1827.

[15] *Middlesex Gazette* (Middletown, Connecticut) June 13, 1827.

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"The Bad Boys of Baltimore" & Monticello Rye by Jack Sullivan
Continued from page 51.

Moreover, Maryland was the only state in the Union not to pass a local enforcement law during Prohibition, giving it the nickname — "The Wettest State in the Union." Thus, Monticello Rye may have been a beneficiary of this more tolerant view of alcohol.

Figure 19: Mencken celebrating the end of Prohibition

Prohibition Goes

No one celebrated the end of Prohibition with more gusto than Mencken. A photograph on the front page of the Baltimore Sun showed him downing the first beer to be poured at Baltimore's Rennert's Hotel bar in 13 years **(Figure 19)**. "Pretty good. Not bad at all," the paper quoted him saying.

Mencken, however, came to see Repeal as a mixed blessing. He complained about paying higher prices for liquor. Now, he raged, Monticello Rye cost $3 to $3.50 a quart — not the $4 a gallon his father had paid. Even as his health began to fail at the end of his life, Mencken continued to enjoy a drink. "I drink exactly as much as I want, and one drink more," he bragged.

Once again, the Monticello Rye brand survived, at least into the 1940s, the vintage of the mini-bottle shown here **(Figure 20)**. Mencken died in 1956. In 1967, after the death of his brother left their Hollins Street house empty, Baltimore citizens interested in turning the Mencken home into a museum found numerous full bottles of whiskey and wine in the cellar, as well as a few empties. There is no written record to reveal if Monticello Rye was among them, but we may be excused for believing so.

Figure 20: Monticello mini-bottle

Notes: In addition to Mencken's own writings, a source of material for this article was the 1990 article by Jim Bready in the *Maryland Historical Magazine* entitled, "Maryland Rye: A Whiskey the Nation Long Fancied— But Now Has Let Vanish." The illustrations for Figures 4 and 20 are courtesy of Robin Preston and his website, *www.pre-pro.com.* A good new biography by Marion Elizabeth Rogers, "Mencken: The American Iconoclast**,"** provided information on the author and his views on Prohibition. Portions of this article have previously appeared in *The Pontil***,** the newsletter of the Potomac Bottle Collectors.

Henry Louis Mencken (1880-1956)