

HIDDEN GEMS AND FORGOTTEN PEOPLE



EZEKIEL J. DONNELL (1822-1896)

Ezekiel J. Donnell was born the townland of Ballee, near Strabane in 1822 and arrived in America when he was eighteen years old, following the example of several of his brothers who had earlier made the same journey.

Donnell settled in Montgomery, Alabama, becoming a successful merchant before moving to New York in 1854 where he established himself as one of the foremost cotton merchants in the United States. In 1872 he published a *Chronological and Statistical History of Cotton* and became an acknowledged authority on the industry. Donnell believed strongly in individual freedom in trade as elsewhere in life. He was an advocate of a strong public education system that would enable individuals to contribute more effectively to the general good. Indeed, he was one of the earliest advocates of a comprehensive public education system.

Donnell was an active opponent of tariff protectionism. His views were strongly contested by many of his fellow traders and the conflict between the Free Trade advocates and the Protectionists was to be a continued feature of American political life right up to the present. Donnell claimed the right of every human being brought into the world to be educated at the public expense.

Donnell was a prominent member of the Chamber of Commerce, a founder of the Reform Club and an active participant in the Democratic Club and a number of his public addresses were published in pamphlet form. These included - *Slavery and "Protectionism" (1882): The impending Crisis (1883): Wages and Tariffs - Influence of the protective system on wages, social organisation and the distribution of wealth (1884): The True Issue - industrial depression and political corruption caused by tariff monopolies (1884): Industrial Emancipation (1886) and Outlines of a New Science (1889).*

In pursuit of his view of education as the vehicle for economic change he donated one million dollars towards building a library where young people could achieve the self-improvement that he saw as essential for the development of economy and society. This bequest was publicly if rather belatedly recognised in the opening of the Donnell Library Centre in the New York Public Library in December 1955.

Donnell died in 1896.

Patrick Devlin