

# JOHN ABNER MEAD - A Dramatic Life History

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## JOHN ABNER MEAD - A Dramatic Life History

**Dr. Mead Announces His Candidacy and His Platform - Condensed Biography of a Remarkable Character - The Story of How a Penniless Boy Rose to Become a Great Business and Political Force - An Interesting and Dramatic History.**



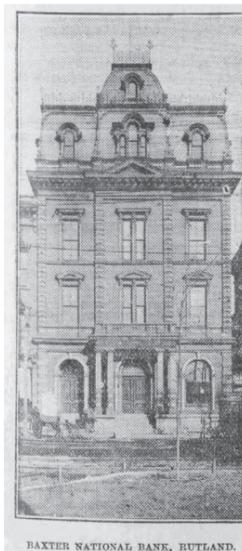
"YES, I am a candidate for promotion," said Dr. John Abner Mead of Rutland, lieutenant governor of Vermont. "I expect that my friends in Rutland city and Rutland county will present my name as a candidate for governor at the next Republican state convention."

The forgoing was in answer to a question asked by a reporter. The hour was 7:30 a.m. The scene was the office of the Howe Scale works in Rutland, and the singular combination of early hours and important political news is explained by the fact that ever since Dr. Mead came into the control of the scale works, twenty-two years ago, he has used a practice of being "on the job" as early as any employee of the company.

The extraordinary singleness of purpose, fertility of resource, courage concentration, ability, superb vitality and high personal character that have made it possible for a man of the humblest antecedents to rise from a condition of biting poverty to the control of a half dozen successful and important enterprises reads more like a storybook than a prosaic record of everyday life.

No person can read the biography of John Abner Mead without feeling the tremendously dramatic possibilities that inhere a life of fixed purpose and integrity, with an eye firmly fixed on success. From the time that Dr. Mead was left a virtual orphan he seems to have had but one object in mind, and that the fullest development of his own possibilities and powers in harmony with the welfare of those with whom he was associated and of the various enterprises with which he has been connected.

Going through college on \$425, painfully and scrupulously saved from the earnings of ungenial toil, interrupting his college course to serve as a soldier in the civil war, studying medicine and assisting in commonplace tasks about a doctor's office and finally doing manual labor of the severest type in a Rutland quarry to procure the means to secure the best medical education possible - all these point to a character of consistent and singular force.



The side lights on his college life demonstrated that he was able in those days to eliminate whatever may have stood in the way of his success, and the spectacle of this resolute, indefatigable young Vermonter, braving alike the ridicule of his companions and the humiliation of wearing old and worn clothes in order that he might receive an education, indicates a Spartan fortitude that comes very near to explaining his life's success. It is a far cry from the luxurious medical students of today, with their expensive suits of apartments, their good clothes,

their sports, their relaxations and generally easy way in which their successes are secured, to the poor, almost mean, expedients of Dr. Mead's college training and the little office in which he began to practice his profession.

Young Vermonters who are looking for an example of success by dint of willpower and applied ability will not do better than to read the story of those early days, explaining as they do the steady, uninterrupted march of prosperity which followed his ready acceptance and use of the first opportunities that fortune put in his way.

Grown men will be struck with admiration when they consider the extraordinary versatility which his professional and business life have disclosed. It is very seldom that a man, after making a measurable success in a learned profession like medicine, should be able to translate himself easily to business life and not only prove himself the peer of his associates, but demonstrate his ability to make a signal success in several diverging lines of business.

The resuscitation of the bankrupt Howe Scale company was a test for a trained executive and financier, and yet this young doctor made a success of the supposed forlorn hope.

The administration of a banking property is considered to be career enough for most men, and yet he has made it a mere detail of the day's work.

The operation of a large farm is one of the most intricate problems of the day, and yet it is one of his chief recreations to join his men in springtime, haying or harvesting and demonstrate his practical knowledge of agriculture as well as his love for the open.

The management and financing of a large business block is frequently a fair career for some men, and yet the doctor has been able to operate his large well tenanted block not only profitably, but as a mere annex to his other interests.



FIELD OF ENSILAGE CORN. [These rows are nearly half a mile long.]

His entrance into the state political field was in its way no less remarkable, and experienced political generals say that his instinctive grasp of the principles of organization at the time when he was nominated by the Republican state convention as lieutenant governor indicated the political ability of a high order. His candidacy at this time has already required a considerable momentum and is being watched with the closest interest by all men who have made state politics a study.

### The Doctor's Platform.

When questioned as to whether he was prepared to take a stand on matters of public import, the doctor said, "Yes, I have some decided opinions in regard to public questions. Briefly, I am in favor of progress in every avenue of the state, the best business methods in the administration of its affairs and equal opportunity to every citizen of the commonwealth."

Pressed to be more explicit, the lieutenant governor submitted the following as his idea of public issues before the state:

"I am in favor of--

"First -- A business administration of state affairs on the lines of economy and efficiency that have made all business successful.

"Second -- Practical schools, with a view to developing more efficient workers -- agriculture, industrial and commercial.

"Third -- The development of the farming interests of Vermont by means of an agricultural school and model farm for introducing the most modern methods.

"Fourth -- A system of taxation that will equalize the burden, minimize double taxation and develop rather than restrict opportunity.

"Fifth -- Better roads for Vermont by the introduction of improved methods, with state supervision and aid wherever and whenever practicable.

"Sixth -- The good offices of the executive in settling disputes between labor and capital by arbitration.

"Seventh -- Fewer and more uniform laws, with no special legislation that can be covered by general statutes.

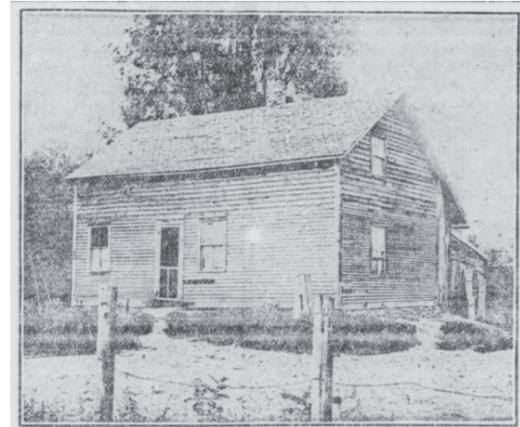
"Eighth -- (a) A system of courts that will provide cheap and speedy justice to rich and poor.

"(b) A radical reduction of court expenses by business methods of administration.

"Ninth -- A continuation and extension of the state's forestry policy for the permanent improvement of Vermont woodlands.

"Tenth -- Laws that will encourage and foster Vermont industries with the view of providing a home market for agricultural products.

"Eleventh -- Measures that will give prominence to the natural beauty and attractions of our mountains, valleys, lakes and streams, interest the vacationists and summer visitors and attract permanent residents from abroad.



BIRTHPLACE OF JOHN A. MEAD. [An Old Fashioned Vermont Farmhouse, Not Luxurious.]

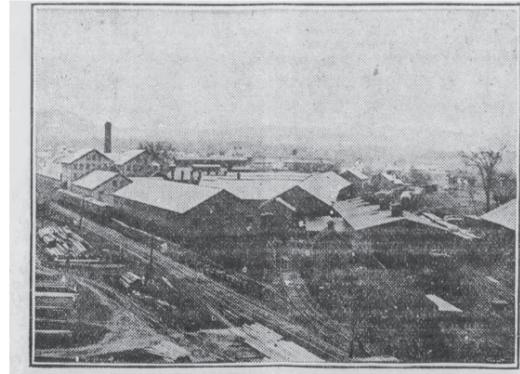
### Biography of John A. Mead.

John A. Mead was the only son of Rowley Rowley Mead, grandson of James Mead, and Lydia Ann, daughter of Eli Gorham of Rutland. James Mead was the first white man to settle in Rutland township. He bought off Nathan Stone of Winsor 7,000 acres of land, paying for the same in horses valued at \$333.33. He was a distinguished pioneer and patriot and was colonel of the Third Vermont colonial regiment.

Rowley R. Mead was born in West Rutland in a hotel which his father Abner Mead conducted. On the maternal side John Abner Mead, subject of this sketch, inherited some of the finest blood in this country. One of Lydia Ann Gorham's ancestors, John Howland, was a brave and enterprising member of the Mayflower colony, and four of them were original Pilgrims. Rowley R. Mead moved to Fair Haven in 1830 and settled on a small farm there.

### Left to Care of His Aunt.

John Abner Mead was born on April 20, 1841. His mother Lydia Ann Gorham Mead went into a decline soon afterward and died in August. The infant son was left with a family in Fair Haven to be cared for remaining with them for several years. Then Rowley Mead married again, and the boy was virtually given to an aunt, Mrs. Blanchard, who cared for him for a number of years and with whom he lived much of the time until he was sixteen years of age.



THE HOWE SCALE WORKS. [These Buildings and Yards Cover Over Sixteen Acres of Ground.]

### Struggling For an Education.

Young Mead attended the common schools at West Rutland until the spring of 1858. When he was about twelve years of age he conceived a very strong desire to obtain an education. His father was a poor man and told him that he was willing to "give him his time" and that he must make his own way as best he could.

In fact, the sole inheritance which he received from his father was a string of old fashioned sleighbells.

Then began the slow, steady saving of every possible penny with the great goal of learning as its object. He "worked out," he fished and sold his catch, did odd jobs, and often a man's work at boy's wage, until in the years of 1857 and 1858 he was made teacher of a district school for which he received \$15 per month and "boarded around," as

the custom was. When he received the \$45 for the final three months' service, he had accumulated at that time \$425. With this he started his life. As an example of patience, persistent frugality and thrift the foregoing is a particularly striking example.

At this time he had an uncle living in Malone, N.Y. who was the principal of what was then known as Franklin Academy. The boy wrote to him and was permitted to attend school there and do "chores" about the house for his board and sweep the schoolhouse and build the fires for ration and books. He had never been outside of Rutland county, and thus, at seventeen years of age, alone and considerably frightened, he started for Malone to continue his education.

### Going Through College on \$425.

There he fitted himself matriculation and entered Middlebury College in the fall of 1860. He then caught the patriotic fever of the day and served one year in the army, enlisting in August 1862, and continuing in the service until July 1863 when he returned to college and graduated in his old class of 1864. To accomplish this he worked

at haying nearly every summer and taught school every winter, studying hard meanwhile to make up his arrearages. With his original savings of \$425 he fitted himself for college and completed his course without assistance from any one but his own willing hands and busy brain.

John A. Mead "cut it pretty time." However, as at the time of his graduation he was so "hard up" that he was obliged to sell all his books, particularly the English books of the final year, that every graduate likes to keep, and so he graduates from Middlebury, square with the world financially, but nearly penniless.

### Tries Unsuccessfully to Re-enlist.

Finding nothing to do at home, he then tried to enlist in the army again going to Castleton, where it was reported two or three soldiers were required to complete their quota for that purpose. He found that the last man had just been enrolled and returned from Castleton in a gravel car. Thoroughly discouraged, this was low tide in his fortunes, however as he found a letter awaiting him from Champlain, N.Y. offering him a position as teacher in the high school for a term of four months. He started for Champlain that evening and finished the term teaching.

Immediately upon his return he began to study medicine with a professor Joseph Perkins of Castle-



THE MEAD BUILDING, RUTLAND.

from this medical institution in the spring of 1868.

### No Dress Suit to Graduate in.

He immediately received an appointment as house physician to the Kings County Hospital, where he went the next morning after graduating. An incident in connection with this graduation is the fact that out of ninety-three students he was the only one who did not possess a dress suit but was obliged to wear an old shiny black diagonal suit and as far as his finances were concerned he had religiously saved just enough money to purchase a ticket to Vermont. His bewilderment on receiving the same night during the exercise a long official envelope containing his appointment as house physician at Kings County Hospital was such that he is said to have stuck a pin into his leg fearing that he might be dreaming.

After being in the hospital about three months he was unexpectedly on a salary of \$800 a year which was wealth untold to the young fellows of that day, who were accustomed to "walk the hospital" for their board and washing.

### Mead Learned to Say "No."

The importance of "unconsidered trifles" in relation to this appointment is well exemplified by the fact that during his college course and about three months before graduation there was a merry party in the parlors of the hospital at which an ablebodied punch according to the customs of that time, was served. The young student had made a mental vow a short time before that thereafter he would let the other fellows do the drinking while he attended to the studying. Among the party were college friends, who jokingly pressed young Mead to join them in a jovial glass. The superintendent of the hospital afterward admitted that the ability to say "No" at this time induced him to recommend the young man as house physician. The singular part of the incident is that the superintendent himself was a convivial character not at all averse to the friendly glass of that day or a number of glasses.



OTTER CREEK STOCK FARM. [A Plain, Comfortable Farmhouse of the Better Type.]

### Doctor Mead Practices Medicine.

In the fall of 1870 he resigned his position in the hospital and came to Rutland, where he began the practice of his profession on the eighth day of December, 1870. He began in a small way with a single room and had only had enough to buy a horse and office furnishings, including a cloth lounge, on which he slept for almost two years. A box by day contained the bedclothes and was converted into an extra seat.

He served as surgeon general on the staff of Governor Redfield Proctor from 1878 to 1880 and was also a member of the staff of General Alger, who was commander of the Grand Army of the Republic. He served, too, as a member of the staff of General Veazey, also commander of the General Army. He was on the pension examining board for eight years, was physician and surgeon to the house of correction, was the first house physician, in fact, from the time it was completed until he came to the Howe Scale company.

### No Tin Soldier.

Although serving as surgeon general on the staff of Governor Redfield Proctor, as aid to General Alger and as colonel on General Veazey's staff, it is significant that the young doctor was never able to purchase a dress uniform, but did the work without attending the usual social functions that go with those complimentary and usually ornamental offices.

### Mead in Business.

In 1880 he bought the Bates House block, this being the largest transfer of real estate that had ever taken place in the town up to that time. He sold the upper portion of the block to J. M. Haven.

Two or three years afterward, on the reorganization of the Rutland railroad, he was made treasurer and transfer agent, and also treasurer, transfer agent and director of the Addison railroad. At the organization of the Clement bank and the State Trust company bank, he was made director in both and vice president of the State Trust company.

### The Howe Scale Company.

In 1888, at the reorganization of the Howe Scale company, he was elected president and general manager. This corporation had gone through bankruptcy three times and all the money that had ever been invested in the stock of said company had been lost. The business of this company has increased since August 1889 when he became active manager of its affairs from \$350,000 to \$400,000 per annum in sales to \$1,500,000 in 1907. The business thereafter paid substantial dividends semiannually, and its value then steadily increased until today it is unquestionably one of the best businesses in the state. This result was accomplished by a tremendous amount of hard work, long hours, and intense application to business.

### Mead the Farmer.

In 1901, Dr. Mead purchased the Hayward farm, now known as the Otter Creek stock farm, this estate of about 500 acres supporting 125 head of cattle and producing 300 tons of hay, as well as three large silos of ensilage. This farm is a model of its kind, having running water with a fifty foot head supplied from a spring on the hillside, which is used for all purposes and furnishes, and besides, and, besides, an ideal fire protection. There was grown on this farm last fall probably one of the largest fields of ensilage corn in the state, fifty acres in extent all growing as level and perfect as it is possible to imagine. Among the interesting

things about the farm is the fact that for about three years an acre of land has been planted with Russian seed corn, a variety that grows a large number of ears with a very small amount of stalk. This is harvested each fall and the seed sent to Washington by express for distribution or experiment.

About ten years ago Dr. Mead was made director and president of the Baxter National bank and has continued in that position ever since.

His confidence in these various institutions is shown by the fact that whenever stock was offered for sale he always purchase the same.

### Mead in Public Life.

Dr. Mead's public life includes the following: In 1892 he was state senator, in 1906 he was a member of the house of representatives, and in 1908 he was elected lieutenant governor.

In all his public life he has acquitted himself with distinct credit. Although not a seeker for the limelight or a lover of notoriety, he has made a decidedly favorable impression whenever brought into contact with public men, and should the state of Vermont see fit to advance him to the highest executive office in its gift he promises that the qualities that have made him one of the most successful businessmen of the day will be applied to the solution of state problems their economical adjustment, and a business administration of public finances.

## Mead Memorial Chapel

Lawsuit, motions, and exhibits can be found at [Meadmemorialchapel.com](http://Meadmemorialchapel.com)

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