

John Alexander Dowie and Ben Mac Dhui

By Barbara Bedau Brow

The Dowie family consisted of: John Alexander Dowie, his wife Jane, son A. J. Gladstone, and daughter Esther. He was the founder of the Christian Catholic Apostolic Church (now Christ Community Church) and the city of Zion, Illinois. Ben Mac Dhui was the summer home owned by the Dowie family.



Photographs by Brown Bros.

JOHN ALEXANDER DOWIE

JEANIE DOWIE

Dowie was born in Edinburgh, Scotland on 25 May 1847. He moved to Adelaide, South Australia, with his parents in 1860. Around 1868, he returned to Edinburgh to study theology. He returned to Australia and was ordained pastor of a Congregational church in Alma, South Australia in 1872. He married his cousin, Jane Dowie, on 26 May 1876, and they had three children: Gladstone (1877-1945), Jeanie (1879-1885), and Esther (1881-1902).

In 1878 he became a full-time non-denominational evangelist. In 1879 his daughter Jeanie was born but died in 1884.

In 1888 he moved to the United States, settled in California, and built up a following by performing faith healings across the state from San Diego to Oregon. In 1890 he went to Chicago for a divine healing convention before going on to England. His plans changed when he was asked to pray for a lady who was suffering from a fibroid tumor after doctors had given up on her. She was healed after Dowie prayed for her and he felt that Chicago was where God wanted him.

With the opening of the World's Fair in 1893, Dowie opened Tabernacle Number One which came to be called "The Little Wooden Hut" across the street from the Fair entrance. Since Dowie's Divine Healing Association was not recognized as being a church, he was denied a place on the Avenue of Churches at the Fair. Gradually the crowds grew and he leased one of the largest auditoriums in Chicago for six months, from October, 1895 to April, 1896. During this time Dowie organized a church passed on apostolic principles and in February, 1896, he organized the Christian Catholic Church in Zion.

In 1897 J. A. Dowie came to the town looking for property to buy. Mr. F. D. Pryor refused the \$6,500 offer for the Cook property and Mr. Gilbert was not anxious to sell Long Point at \$12,000. The "Grey Gables", better known as the "old Dalton place", was an 80 acre parcel of land with a commanding view of White Lake for the price of \$10,000. This would come to be known as "Ben Mac Dhui".

In 1900 he secretly bought ten square miles of lakefront land about 40 miles to the north of Chicago and founded Zion, Illinois. The land was surveyed, laying out lots, planning for utilities and preparing for the opening of the City. It would be a



city where his congregation could worship, work, and play free from the temptations of the world. He imported a lace mill from England as a source of employment in addition to factories for bricks, chocolate and soap, provided schools, and recreational facilities, all under the control of John A. Dowie. The land the people built their houses on was leased to them for 1,100 years. The leases specifically forbade gambling, dancing, swearing, spitting, theaters, circuses, the manufacture and sale of alcohol or tobacco, pork, oysters, doctors, politicians and tan-colored shoes. The city police carried a billy club on one hip and a Bible on the other; their helmets were adorned with a dove and the word "PATIENCE."

People would share in the profits of the industries in Zion City and the profits, tithes, and offering would be sufficient for the support of the Christian Catholic Church in Zion.



In 1901 construction of 25 room mansion known as "Shiloh House" was begun in Zion City as the main residence of John Alexander Dowie and his family – wife Jane, son A. J. Gladstone, and daughter Esther. They moved in July 1902. It is during this time that Dowie proclaimed himself "Elijah the Restorer" and began to wear High-Priestly robes.

In 1902 Dowie's daughter Esther suffered severe burns on her head and face when her hair caught fire from a gas jet. Dowie, who was not home at the time of the accident, was summoned. Upon his arrival he went to his daughter's bedside. Believing in his own teachings, a physician was not called to provide medical treatment. He did, however, allow for salve and bandages to be applied to her wounds. He then spent many hours praying over his daughter. She did not survive. She was 23 years of age and a student at the University of Chicago.

At the height of his power and influence, Dowie was worth several million dollars and claimed 50,000 followers, 6,000 of who lived in Zion City. Their savings went into the Zion bank. Dowie visited New York and went on a European tour in 1903. He traveled to New Zealand and Australia in 1904. These trips were taken using Zion bank money, even though the bankers assured him that the bank could not support the drain.

In 1905 John Alexander Dowie suffered a stroke from which he never fully recovered. He retreated to Mexico where he bought a large tract of land for a "plantation paradise." He had a second stroke which immobilized him. He was removed as the head of Zion and died a broken man at Shiloh House on March 9, 1907. At his request his grave was filled with concrete after his coffin was put inside, to stave off anyone taking his body and suggesting he had miraculously arisen. He left Ben Mac Dhui to his wife while his son was left the sum of \$10 to be paid in gold.

It was when Dowie died that the family learned the estate was bankrupt. The house and furnishings were sold. Jane and her son Gladstone spend some time in the White Lake area before reportedly moving to Oklahoma in 1914. In 1930 she and her son Rev. A. J. Gladstone, an Episcopal minister, returned to Chicago. One report stated that she stayed with friends while another said she repurchased Shiloh House. Jane died in March 1933. She is buried in Lake Mount in Zion City where her husband was buried years before. Her son Gladstone, who at one time practiced law in Whitehall from around 1908-1910, died in 1945.

A wealthy lady from Philadelphia purchased the Shiloh House and lived there until her death in 1942. The Great Lakes Bible Institute took possession of the house for a school and dormitory until 1954. The house was then purchased by Mr. & Mrs. D. C. Huntley, loyal friends of Dr. Dowie. Mr. Huntley died in 1967 and the house was again for sale. Mr. Wesley Ashland, a Zion jeweler made arrangements to purchase the house for \$18,500 for the purpose of restoring it and organizing the Zion Historical Society. Today Shiloh House has been restored to its Victorian era splendor and stands as a silent monument to Dr. Dowie, serving as the headquarters of the Zion Historical Society and the Zion Historical Museum.

Following the death of John A. Dowie, his wife Jane tried to keep up Ben Mac Dhui, but it ended up being sold around 1913. In 1915 it was announced that the Ben Mac Dhui property had been leased and a public health resort or sanatorium was being contemplated. In January 1916 Ben Mac Dhui Health Resort Company of Whitehall received its incorporation papers.

It must have proved to be an unsuccessful venture as it was reported in June 1918 that H. L. Cavanaugh of the Boston Store in Chicago had purchased the property. He was not only beautifying the ground but also adding pet stock and a poultry farm.

In 1925 saw a plot of the Dowie property with 700 feet on White Lake sold to Stephen Bull of Racine, Illinois. In 1937 Albert Pack and Mr. Dunham purchased the property but nothing was done to restore it. It also listed the Netcher Estate as owning the property at one time but it was not occupied.



In 1944 Mr. & Mrs. Adolph A. Struven purchased the Dowie Estate. At the time it consisted of 100 acres with 1,300 feet on White Lake. During the years the house stood empty vandals had broken windows, door and torn boards from the porch. Plumbing has been removed, floors torn up to remove wiring and the tiles in the master bath had been smashed. It was during the ownership of the Struven's that a fire broke out which destroyed the house on August 2, 1948.

The property was eventually purchased by Hooker Chemical Company.