

EARLY DOCTORS OF GREENVILLE COUNTY

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The First Two Centuries of South Carolina Medicine

The history of medical practice in Greenville County began, really, in Charleston when in 1670, a group of settlers from England and the Barbadoes established Charles Town. With them came, no doubt, some rudiments of British medical knowledge, although there is no suggestion that the group included a single practicing physician. Before the middle of the eighteenth century, however, there were in Charleston a group of brilliant physicians. In 1755, there was a "Faculty of Physic" in Charleston, the first effort at medical education within the colony.

Almost a century later, in 1848, the South Carolina Medical Association was organized. At the organizational meeting of the State Medical Association neither Greenville, Spartanburg, Pickens, Oconee, nor Laurens Districts were represented. At that time Pickens District had two physicians, Laurens had twenty-five, Abbeville had sixty-four, and Greenville District had only seven. It was not until 1873, well after the end of the Civil War, that delegates from Greenville County to the annual meeting of the State Association were registered, and it was eighteen years later before the Greenville County Medical Society was chartered in 1891.

The slow development of the medical profession in Greenville County when compared with some other counties was the result of a fact of history and of population growth in South Carolina which is frequently overlooked. Before the American Revolution the northwest corner of the state which now includes Greenville, Pickens, and Anderson counties was either a part of the lands of the Cherokee Nation or bordered on them. The area which now comprises Greenville County remained recognized Cherokee land until captured as part of the war effort by the state and was not opened up for settlement until 1784. Population spread in South Carolina had been by two chief routes: either by western movement inward from the coastal area, or by southward movement down from Pennsylvania through Virginia and North Carolina, into the region of the Waxhaws. Thus, Spartanburg and Laurens districts were relatively densely populated before Greenville even became a part of the state.

From American Revolution to the Civil War

Within two years after the Greenville District was opened up for settlement in 1784, practically all of the desirable land had been taken. Most of the settlers were Revolutionary War veterans "claiming out" land as the result of war-time bounty grants. What is now the city of Greenville had been, before the war, a trading post operated on land purchased from the Cherokees by Colonel Richard Pearis. After the war, this territory was secured by Lemuel J. Alston, who sold the entire one thousand and twenty-eight acres to Vardry McBee in 1815. The village, called Pleasantburg by Alston, became Greenville prior to 1807. By 1800, the population of the district had increased to 11,506. Edward Hooker, who visited the village in 1806, mentioned in his diary that, "That place is thought by many to be as healthy as any part of the United States." He said there were one or two physicians in or near the village at that time.

By 1824 Greenville had already begun to be recognized as a health resort "which appealed, [wrote the editor of *The Republican* in 1827] to our low country friends whom the fever and musquitos [sic] drove from their houses during the summer. . . . All get employment but doctors — we have little use for them."

By 1836, twenty-five years before the beginning of the Civil War, the population of the village was about 1,000 and there were five doctors in or near the town.

Medical Pioneers

Perhaps the first physician to locate within Greenville District was Dr. Robert Nelson who had served as a surgeon in the American Revolution. Before the Revolution he had lived in Tryon County, North Carolina, but through an adjustment in the boundary lines between North and South Carolina his home was taken into Spartanburg District. After the war, in 1785, he received a grant of five hundred acres of land in Greenville County on the south side of the Tyger River, an area in the neighborhood of what is now Tigerville. Dr. Nelson's will was recorded in Greenville County on May 1, 1790.

A Dr. Hunter ran for Congress from the Congressional District shortly after Hooker's visit to Greenville in 1806. Whether or not he lived in what is now Greenville County is not recorded. At

any rate, he was defeated for Congress "because he was such a good doctor."

By 1836, there were seven physicians in the district, five of whom lived in or near the town of Greenville. One of these early Greenville doctors was Dr. Richard Harrison, who came in 1831, shortly before the village became an incorporated town. Little is known of him, except that his grand nephew, Dr. James Harrison, was in Greenville in 1838. Other doctors practicing in Greenville in 1838 were Dr. Thomas Collins Austin (a grandson of Nathaniel Austin, the first permanent settler in the county), his brother Dr. William Lawrence Manning Austin, Dr. Andrew Berry Crook, Dr. Osmyn B. Irvin, and Dr. Robinson M. Earle.

Dr. Thomas C. Austin was born about 1790. After serving as a lieutenant in the War of 1812, he studied medicine at the University of Pennsylvania. He then returned to Greenville, where he practiced medicine until his death.

His brother, Dr. William L. M. Austin was born in 1803. He, too, got his M.D. degree from the University of Pennsylvania. He organized the Davis Guards (Co. F, Hampton Legion, C.S.A.), and was elected captain of the company. After the Battle of Manassas, in which he fought, he resigned his commission to become a military surgeon. His untimely death occurred in 1861. A record of the "horrors of war (as he saw them), his tender love for the youthful soldiers, his unselfish dedication of his purse to relieve their suffering" is preserved in a letter he wrote to a niece shortly before he died.

Dr. Andrew Berry Crook is, perhaps, the best known of this group of early Greenville medical pioneers as he was very prominent in the early social, professional, and political life of Greenville. Dr. Crook was born in 1802, studied medicine at Transylvania College in Lexington, Ky., and came to Greenville in 1827. Benjamin F. Perry, who came to Greenville to study law, arrived about the same time. They lived together in an excellent resort hotel, and became devoted friends, a friendship which lasted throughout their long lives. They both entered actively and enthusiastically into the social life of the community.

There is a tradition that Dr. Crook continued anatomical dissection in the early years of his career. The cadavers of executed criminals could be had in exchange for a plug of tobacco. Certain-

ly, he maintained an interest in scientific medicine and developed breadth in his clinical attainments for the *Greenville Mountaineer* of August 20, 1847, reported: "Letheon tested in Greenville. Boy ten years old operated on for cataract in both eyes while under the influence of Lethon (derived from the word lethe, meaning complete loss of memory). Administered by Dr. C. Rabe through apparatus of his own contrivance; operation skillfully performed by Dr. Crook. Insensibility to pain perfect. Felt fine after operation and declared himself ready to breathe Ether again." This use of ether for anesthesia in Greenville was five years after Dr. Crawford Long's unreported first operation under ether anesthesia and only one year after Warren's use of ether in the first public demonstration of its usefulness.

Although Dr. Crook was a greatly beloved family doctor, he found time and interest for many other pursuits. He was widely read and was quite scholarly. He wrote extensively on agriculture, medicine, and surgery. He owned a large plantation, raised fine cattle, and owned a hundred slaves. He was mayor of the town in 1853-54. He was on the Board of Trustees of Greenville Female College, now a part of Furman University. He was active in state and national politics, and worked along with Benjamin Perry to prevent nullification, first, and then secession. He was an intimate friend of John Caldwell Calhoun. Dr. Crook's manner was brusque and he made enemies. Although he never fought a duel, he was Perry's second, when his friend had to fight one and he instructed Perry in marksmanship.

Although he had strongly opposed secession, after South Carolina had withdrawn from the Union, Dr. Crook supported the Confederacy with enthusiasm. Too old for active campaigning, Dr. Crook hastened to Virginia to give medical care to a friend and protege, a Dr. Hoke, who had been wounded there. While in Virginia, he volunteered as an army surgeon, overworked himself, and returned to Greenville to die in 1862.

Dr. Robinson M. Earle was killed in 1838 by William Lowndes Yancey, later famous as a fiery politician and secessionist, who had come to Greenville from Georgia to study law in the early 1830's. Yancey was accused of the murder but after a dramatic and notorious trial, he was acquitted. Little more is known of Dr. Earle, although he undoubtedly was an early member of the Earle family, which included a number of prominent doctors.

Dr. James Harrison, a great nephew of Dr. Richard Harrison, Greenville's first physician, was born 1813. After graduating from Yale, he studied medicine and graduated in 1840 from either the Medical College of South Carolina or Jefferson Medical College in Philadelphia. He settled in Greenville, living in the house that is the present Woman's Club, still frequently referred to as the old Beattie home. He had two sons who studied medicine. One remained to practice in South Carolina, and one located in Florida. He was the grandfather of Mrs. Helen Mauldin Powe. He was a public-spirited citizen, was elected to represent Greenville District at the Secession Convention, and was one of the signers of the Ordinance of Secession in 1860. He died in 1871.

Dr. Osmyn B. Irvin was born in 1802. He was mayor of Greenville in 1846. It is said that because of his wife's ill health and his own "weak constitution," he retired from practice in early life. After his retirement, he spent his winters in Florida, where he accumulated extensive farming interests. Whether because of his early retirement or the healthful influence of Florida's mild winters, and in spite of his weak constitution, he lived to be seventy-eight years of age and died in 1880. Undoubtedly, he had retired before the tabulation of the five doctors said to have been in Greenville in 1836.

Dr. Baylis Earle was born in 1814 and died in 1867. He graduated in medicine in Philadelphia and it has been said of him that he was considered to be "the leading physician of his time. He had a fine personality and mentality."

Dr. Thomas T. Earle enlisted for service in the forces of the Confederacy when he was fifteen years of age. He studied medicine after the war at George Washington University, graduating in 1869. He was president of the South Carolina Medical Association in 1900. He was the father of Dr. Curran Earle, and an uncle of Dr. Joseph Earle. This astute and courtly physician died in 1921.

Not all doctors who came to live in Greenville did so to practice medicine. Of these, one of the most interesting was Dr. Burwell Chick. He came as an early physician immigrant to the relatively young frontier district of Greenville in 1825 from Newberry. Greenville was already recognized as a health resort because of its clear skies, invigorating air, and mild climate. Mineral springs throughout the county had become valued for their real or fancied

that he wrote as his graduation thesis a report based on the successful treatment of forty consecutive cases of typhoid fever. Such a record of cures was unique. His method of treatment was also unique for his day. He ordered ice cold baths to reduce the fever. He brought the ice on horseback to his patients from the ice house of John C. Calhoun. Dr. Lewis did not go to war, but rather, as it was said, he remained at home "to care for widows and orphans."

Dr. J. P. Hillhouse (1827-1872) graduated in medicine from Augusta Medical College, now the Medical College of Georgia. He is described in *Echoes and Etchings* by E. Alfred Wilkes: "Dr. Peter Hillhouse, when I knew him, was very venerable looking, though not so old. Spare made — long, white, flowing beard, walking cane — wore long dress coat and silk hat," the typical prototype of the physician of his time.

Dr. William James Dargan was the only doctor in Sumter County during the Civil War. After the war he came to Greenville because of failing health. Instead of resuming medical practice, he opened Greenville's first book store. It was said of him that he was truly a gentleman of the old school, exercising kindness itself, and filled with sympathy. He died in Anderson, where he had moved to be near a daughter.

Dr. William Henry Austin, son of William Lawrence Manning Austin, one of the seven Greenville County doctors listed in 1836, was born in 1829. He lived to be eighty-one years of age, dying in 1914. He began studying medicine under his father's tutelage when he was thirteen. He graduated from the Jefferson Medical College. Interestingly enough, he was exempted from military duty in 1860 because "he had recently married and was a physician." His father, who was fifty-seven years of age at the time, took his son's place in the service.

Dr. Thomas Blackburn Williams was a Greenville physician during the Civil War period but nothing further is known concerning him.

Dr. David Rose Anderson (1834-1888) had a classical education before beginning medicine. He practiced for half a century in the Fairview community. It was written of him by an admirer: "He loved his profession and practiced it for thirty-four years. He was recognized as one of the best diagnosticians in Greenville

County. He could tell what was wrong with a man by looking at him."

Dr. R. D. Long (1845-1886) was a surgeon in Hampton's Legion and was intendant of the Village of Greenville in 1866.

Similarly, Dr. Samuel Hunter (1830-1883) was a surgeon in the Civil War and was mayor of Greenville in 1866-67.

Dr. Benjamin Few was one of the "greats" of the Civil War doctors, both in his own right and by reason of the family which he established in Greenville County. Born in 1839, he lived to be ninety-three years of age. Members of his family came to Pennsylvania with William Penn. They were Quakers. When the Wesleys came to America to introduce Methodism, the Fews joined the movement. Dr. Few, after graduation in Charleston, began practice in Marietta. The war interrupted his practice. He became an Army surgeon and served throughout the conflict.

After the war, he settled first at Sandy Flat and then removed to Greer. For many years, he was considered to be the leading doctor of that community. A son, William P. Few, became president of Duke University. Another son studied medicine. He was practicing in Hendersonville, North Carolina, at the time of his death. All of his life Dr. Few interested himself in good works and community service. His interests lay in the realm of betterment of public health, his church, and the schools. He was always aligned with great moral and social causes. In his obituary, it was written of him that "his community, his country, and his state are richer that he lived."

Dr. J. H. Maxwell was said to have been Greenville's first gynecologist. His practice dealt chiefly with diseases peculiar to women. It was said of him that was highly accomplished in his profession, that he was a Christian gentleman of elevated character "as every gynecologist should be." He died in 1915 at the age of eighty-four.

Dr. William Pliney League, Dr. Frank Jenkins, and Dr. DuRand Wigfall Youngblood, all were of the Civil War period, and each died after the turn of the century. Each had a remarkably long life and a useful medical career.

This then, is a fleeting view of Greenville's medicine during the first century of its history and of the galaxy of doctors who

practiced medicine in Greenville from its beginning up to and through the Civil War period. There was not one of its doctors but who had a medical degree from a good medical school; not one, but who was an outstanding man in his community. Several had had a classical education before they studied medicine. The day of the medical diploma mill had not yet come. These doctors were all outstanding citizens, beloved general practitioners, men interested in politics, and civic and religious leaders. They were not adverse to social life, as was attested by a poker club, nor a social drink. They were adverse to the telephone which at times interrupted the friendly game. They were short on the science of medicine, but they understood and practiced its art. They were admired, respected, and loved by their people.

In 1882, there were fifty-one doctors registered in Greenville County. Thirty-four of these lived in the city. Half of the doctors had studied medicine at the Medical College of South Carolina, a ratio that has persisted rather uniformly up to the present time.

The first quarter of the twentieth century was to see an impetus of medical organizational growth, a trend toward hospital construction, the coming of the Age of Surgery as a speciality, provision for the medical care of the indigent, and a raising of the standards of medical education. It was a fitting prelude to World War I and to the new era in medicine which followed it.

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