Cincinnati Doctors Before Daniel Drake, 1788-1807
by Arthur G. King, M.D.

In a mystical way, perhaps, the heritage of Cincinnati as a medical center may have been foreshadowed by the exposure to the Aesculapian philosophy of three men connected with the founding of the city. John Filson, who did the first survey of the area, is recorded as having been a school-teacher who added to his income by part-time surveying, but there is evidence from contemporary letters that he studied medicine for over a year in New Jersey in the specific hope that he could give up teaching. Arthur St. Clair, who gave Cincinnati its name and was the first governor of the Northwest Territory, was a Scotsman who studied medicine in Edinburgh and then went to London, where he was a pupil of the great John Hunter. William Henry Harrison, the first president of the United States to come from Ohio, attended medical lectures at the University of Pennsylvania but gave up medicine in favor of an army career.

One could philosophize at great length on the connection between medicine and military activity, with some, but not all, of the reasons being very obvious. In a more practical way, however, when one considers the conditions under which a frontier is first breached and settled, a doctor could hardly expect to make a living unless he were primarily a farmer. Any physician practicing in a primitive settlement must almost of necessity have been sent there and subsidized, such as by the Army.

In 1789-1790 all of Cincinnati consisted of "11 families and 24 single men," hardly enough population to support a physician with fees, especially as these were apt to be paid in produce. At the turn of the year (1790), General Harmar moved his 300 troops from Marietta to the newly built Fort Washington, and his staff naturally included a surgeon. This was Dr. Richard Allison, the first medical man of note in Cincinnati. The official War Department publication, Medical Men in the American Revolution, lists three Allisons, all serving in Pennsylvania regiments, and it might be interesting to know if they were related by blood as well as profession. There was a Benjamin Allison, the surgeon of the first Pennsylvania battalion, 

1This paper was presented before the Cincinnati Society for the History of Medicine on May 28, 1964.
2Louis C. Duncan, Medical Men in the American Revolution, 1775-1783 (Carlisle Barracks, Pa., 1931).
who was appointed on 13 June, 1776, but resigned six months later. Francis Allison, the surgeon of the 12th Pennsylvania Regiment, was appointed on 14 October, 1776. He, too, apparently had enough of duty with troops or combat or both, and was transferred to hospital duty in December of 1776, retiring from the Army in July of 1781, at the end of the war.

The Army records show that Richard Allison was appointed Surgeon's Mate of the 5th Pennsylvania Regiment on the 15th of March, 1778. He was appointed Surgeon of the Legion in April, 1782, and was discharged from the service on the first of November, 1796. The Legion was the fighting force used to protect the frontier under the overall command of General Arthur St. Clair, with General Josiah Harmar as the Field Commander. Thus, Richard Allison was the senior medical officer of the regular Army troops in the Northwest Territory. He was a fighting Army medic, often under fire. It should be noted that in American military medical practice through the first battle of Bull Run in 1861, all medical officers attached to troops, from Corps Surgeons down, galloped right onto the field of battle and did their work on the few men they could reach. Their motto may well have been: "probe, amputate, and trephine them where they lie," with the current expression, "splint them where they lie," being the post-Civil War remnant of that accepted custom of military surgery of the 18th and early 19th centuries.

Allison accompanied General Harmar on his ill-fated 1790 expedition of mixed regulars and militia, totalling 1,450 troops, up the Miami Valley. This campaign resulted in 243 soldiers killed and 31 wounded, ample surgical work for a single doctor.

Such a defeat had to be avenged. And so, in 1791, General Arthur St. Clair personally took 1,400 soldiers up Spring Grove Avenue, through Carthage to Hamilton, where he built a fort, and then moved north to the banks of the Wabash River, where on November 4 his army was cut to pieces. Of the 1,400 troops, 630 were killed. The 289 wounded were helped to escape the massacre by being brought to Fort Hamilton in carts or on the backs of the other 500 survivors. St. Clair hastily left for Philadelphia.

This was a tragic and dramatic turning point in Cincinnati medical history. Dr. Allison badly needed medical assistance and hospital facilities. There is evidence that a Surgeon's Mate named John F. Carmichael, of Pennsylvania, was in the Legion, but it cannot be verified whether he was present in Fort Washington in 1790. However, Allison asked for help and had sent to him a Dr. Joseph Strong of Connecticut, a scholarly graduate of Yale University. Where he received his medical training is not known. There was also sent to
him, somewhat later, Surgeon John Elliot of New York. He had been commissioned in the 3rd New York Regiment as Surgeon's Mate on 21 November, 1776, and a year after the conclusion of the Revolutionary War and a brief fling at private practice, he rejoined the Army for four years. He again tried private practice in New York for a year and a half, but gave it up to re-join the Army on 3 March, 1791, when he was ordered to join the Legion in Cincinnati. Thus, the first of Dr. Richard Allison's urgent needs was met, namely, that of adequate medical personnel.

It may well have been the overwhelming load of wounded from St. Clair's defeat that led to the building of a hospital in the winter of 1791–92. A great deal is now known about Fort Washington, thanks to the discovery of what turned out to be its powder magazine when excavations were underway for the Western and Southern garage in 1952. This “find” stimulated considerable research, which not only proved the error in Dr. Daniel Drake’s map of Cincinnati,

---

but served to locate two plans of Fort Washington in the National Archives. The first, dated 1789, showed the Fort with a triangular extension toward Broadway, consisting of 5 rooms protected at the apex by a blockhouse, marked “For Blacksmith’s, Armorer’s, Carpenter’s, Wheelright’s, and Turner’s Shops.” The second plan, dated 1792, shows the Fort with this same addition plus a new extension to the north of two rooms on either side of a blockhouse, marked “These, with the blockhouse, the Hospital.” Thus we have evidence that in 1792 there was built the first hospital in Cincinnati. Granted, it was only two rooms, 10 feet by 10 feet with a 12-feet square two-storied blockhouse between, a total of 480 square feet of space, less than most doctors have in their private offices today. Nevertheless, it was an institution. Careful graphic reconstruction places it about 100 feet from the south edge of Fourth Street, in the yard of the Guilford School. How long it was in operation cannot be told, or to what extent the civilian population was served by it. Certainly it represented a source of medical supplies for any emergency. We know that the garrison of Fort Washington, with its surgeons, was moved from Cincinnati to Newport, Kentucky, in 1803, and by 1807 every vestige of Fort Washington was gone.

There were other doctors in Cincinnati in 1791–92. Some of these are listed as having been commissioned in the Army during the Revolution, but the dates of their discharge are not always given, so that it is difficult to know whether they were assigned to Fort Washington or came to Cincinnati as civilians after leaving the Army. One of the pioneer settlers of Cincinnati was Dr. John Hole, listed among those given land in 1789. Record shows that, although a native of Virginia, he had served in the Revolution with a Pennsylvania Regiment. He is reported to have been at Bunker Hill and also to have participated in the vain attempt of Montgomery and Benedict Arnold to capture Quebec in 1775. After the war he settled in New Jersey. He left there to go west with the Symmes party. Daniel Drake referred often to him with respect for his medical attainments and his devotion to the care of patients over a large area of the settlement (probably in Columbia). He is known to have engaged in the lumbering business which undoubtedly supported him better than the practice of medicine, and in 1797 he moved to a large farm deep in the wilderness.

Dr. William Burnet, Jr. came to Cincinnati in 1789 and apparently spent most of his time at North Bend, possibly practicing medicine. His father, Dr. William Burnet, was the famous military medical officer and at one time Surgeon-General of the Eastern Department. His two younger brothers came to Cincinnati in 1796, the
one becoming Judge Jacob Burnet, the author of the Ohio State Constitution and a leading American jurist, and the other, Isaac Burnet, rising to be the first mayor of Cincinnati as a city and one of its leading lawyers. A still younger brother, David, became famous as the first president of Texas. Young William is recorded as being a Surgeon's Mate of the 1st New Jersey Battalion in 1775–76 only, and nothing is known for certain about why he left the military service in the earliest and darkest part of the Revolution or what he did from 1776–1789. Perhaps he was the black sheep of the family. In Cincinnati annals he is memorialized chiefly for having been entrusted with the petition for the charter for the first Masonic Lodge in the area in September of 1791 and failing to deliver it. Apparently he went back to New Jersey never to return.

In 1792 it was estimated that Columbia had about 1,100 settlers, Cincinnati about 900, and North Bend about 350. The little village of South Bend (located about where Anderson's Ferry now is) had been abandoned. The three settlements had some protection from a double ring of "stations" inaugurated by Israel Ludlow two years earlier. These were fortified clusters of cabins, often with a few soldiers attached, but so arranged that men working in the woods or on the farm had semi-military protection. They became the nucleus of some of our suburbs, the inner ring being Taylor's Creek, Cumminsville and Newtown, and the outer ring later forming Dunlap, Carthage, Pleasant Ridge, Madisonville and Terrace Park. Altogether, there were fewer than 2,500 civilians in what is now Hamilton county.

General Anthony Wayne arrived to find marked friction between the civilians and the military. The only non-military doctor was John Hole. The military surgeons, commanded by Dr. Richard Allison, consisted of Dr. Carmichael, Dr. Strong and the newly arrived Dr. John Elliot, together with Dr. John Sellman and Dr. Joseph Phillips, who accompanied General Wayne. It is inconceivable that these six military doctors failed to give whatever medical service they could to the settlers in addition to their military duties.

In 1793 the troops which Wayne had demanded poured into Cincinnati, and he bivouacked them on the high ground west of Central Avenue near Mound Street to keep them out of the city. This was fortunate, because during the summer of 1793 smallpox appeared in the town. Wayne wisely moved his troops out of the area, first to Fort Hamilton and then to Greenville where he set up his headquarters, and presumably most of his medical officers went with him. However, of the entire remaining population, both civilian and military, about one-third died of smallpox.
Wayne went on to crush the Indians at the battle of Fallen Timbers on August 20, 1794, and then returned to Greenville where he maintained his headquarters for the signing in the following year of the peace treaty which ended the Indian menace for all time. The Army was disbanded in 1794 except for garrisons, including the one at Fort Washington. Of the military surgeons, Dr. Strong resigned and returned to Philadelphia, and Dr. Phillips was transferred to a post in the east. Dr. John Elliot and Dr. John Carmichael were made Surgeon and Surgeon's Mate respectively of the Fort Washington garrison, where they remained until 1802, when the transfer of troops to Newport, Kentucky, was begun.

John Sellman, with only about a year of military service, resigned in 1794, probably right after the battle of Fallen Timbers. He went into private practice in Cincinnati on Front Street between Broadway and Sycamore. He is supposed to have been employed as a contract surgeon to the Army after the garrison moved to Newport Barracks, probably after Elliot and Carmichael retired from the service, and no Army medical officers were available. He practiced till his death in 1827.

What of Dr. Allison? In 1791 he became the owner of six lots of land that had been opened for sale in 1790, east of Lawrence Street, extending from Third Street to Fourth Street. On the first of November, 1796, he was honorably discharged from the Army and entered private practice for about two years. He then gave up medicine and tried farming on the banks of the Little Miami River, but became tired of it and returned to practice in Cincinnati at the southwest corner of Fourth and Sycamore Streets from 1805 to his death in 1816.

In the fading years of the 18th century, in the decade after the first settlement of Cincinnati, Columbia and North Bend, the only medical men known to have been available were the two military surgeons, John Elliot and John Carmichael at Fort Washington, and a few private physicians. These included Dr. John Sellman and Dr. Richard Allison. In addition, there was a Dr. Robert McClure, a Pennsylvanian who opened an office on Sycamore Street between Third and Fourth, in 1792. Daniel Drake said of him that "his success was not due to his own excellence as a physician but to the splendid attributes of his wife, a biographical fact for the younger members of the profession to treasure up." He lasted till 1801 when he returned to Pennsylvania.

A strange character who enjoyed not only a fair success but substantial fame as the author of the first real medical textbook ever published in Cincinnati, was Dr. Peter Smith. According to John
Uri Lloyd, he was a graduate of Princeton University and wandered about with his family preaching the gospel and dispensing primitive medicines. In 1794 he built a cabin on Duck Creek in Columbia, near the Hyde Park Baptist Church, and practiced there till 1804. He became known as the "Indian Doctor," and in 1812 published a volume called the *Indian Doctor's Dispensary*. It should be noted that Daniel Drake's earlier publication was not strictly medical.

Old Dr. John Hole had left in 1797 and his place had been taken by Dr. John Cranmer, who in 1798 opened an office on the north side of Second Street between Main and Walnut. He was mentioned by Drake with faint praise but he practiced with apparent success until his death from cholera in 1832.

The turn of the century was marked by the arrival of Dr. William Goforth in Cincinnati. This remarkable man was born in New York and studied there as an apprentice to European-trained doctors. But in 1787-88 he was mobbed when trying to obtain bodies for dissection, and escaped with his brother-in-law, General John Stites Gano. He went with the first party to the Cincinnati area, but when the group stopped at Maysville in June of 1788 he left them to practice medicine in the town of Washington, Kentucky, a few miles south of the Ohio River. He had made the acquaintance of Isaac Drake, the father of Daniel Drake and took a liking to the boys in the family.

Dr. Goforth was educated, urbane and adventurous. His father was a lawyer who settled in Columbia, where he became a judge and a civic leader. After 10 years in Washington and Maysville, Kentucky, he probably felt he had proved himself, and so at the age of 33 he joined his father briefly, and in 1800 came to Cincinnati proper for the practice of medicine. At once he became popular, partly for his non-medical interests and activities, but also for his approach to medical philosophy and practice which was far more sophisticated and modern than that of any of his colleagues. In 1807 his spirit of adventure, his liberal social philosophy, and Francophilia led him to desert Cincinnati for New Orleans where he distinguished himself. He returned to Cincinnati in 1817 dying of hepatitis.

Goforth's greatest contribution to Cincinnati medicine was his preceptorship of Daniel Drake. When he arrived in 1800, Dr. Richard Allison had just left the city and Goforth occupied his Peach Grove House in Lytle Park and took over Allison's extensive practice. In 1802 it was large enough for him to have an associate, a Dr. John Stites of New York, educated in the modern or William Cullen nosologic approach to medicine (rather than the Boerhaavian teachings which dominated all but the most progressive centers of medicine). Stites left after a year, and Goforth took on his pupil, Daniel Drake,
Cincinnati Doctors Dorst and Schwemlein accept plaque honoring Liberty Ship S. S. Daniel Drake, named for Cincinnati's great medical figure.

Doctors Before Daniel Drake

as a partner in 1804, and in 1805 gave Drake the first diploma in medicine issued west of the Allegheny Mountains.

Goforth taught Drake much more than medicine. He introduced him into Cincinnati society and probably gave him lessons in etiquette and self-assured good manners. He could not help but fire Drake's imagination, and did indeed take him on trips of exploration and archaeologic research, and by example proved to him that the whole world of knowledge is the province of the physician. He and Stites certainly taught Drake to approach medical problems in a scientific way, to analyze, and to treat rationally. He must have inspired him to become a public spirited citizen by his own example. It is of interest that he was himself what would correspond to a Reserve Medical or National Guard Army Officer today, with the rank of Surgeon-General of the 1st Ohio Division. Finally, Goforth preached that a physician must never stop learning, that he must not only experiment and add his contributions to the world's knowledge, but that he must keep abreast of medical advances in other places. To this end he sent Drake to Philadelphia. It was Goforth who thoroughly prepared Drake to step into his position when he left Cincinnati in 1807.

If one were to trace the origin of the Cincinnati medical mantle which Daniel Drake not only wore with distinction but embellished so magnificently, it could be said that he inherited it from Dr. William Goforth (1800–1807), who obtained it from Dr. Richard Allison (1790–1799). Prior to 1796, however, Cincinnati was served by other earnest, if less learned, physicians such as John Hole from 1789–1797, Robert McClure from 1792–1801, John Sellman from 1794–1827, and even Peter Smith from 1794–1804. One has to dismiss William Burnet (1789–1791) even though Drake mentions him, and also John Cranmer (1798–1832), as little is known of them. John Stites (1802–1803) was learned and undoubtedly a modernizing influence on both Goforth and Drake, but was in Cincinnati too short a time to be more than listed. Finally, the military surgeons who served under or succeeded Richard Allison cannot be forgotten: John Elliot (1791–1802); John Carmichael (1791–1802); Joseph Strong (1791–1794); and Joseph Phillips (1793–1794). Last of all, Cincinnati should take note of its first hospital, the 1791–1792 addition of two small rooms and a blockhouse as a northern extension of Fort Washington.