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The early physicians of Washington and Kent Counties

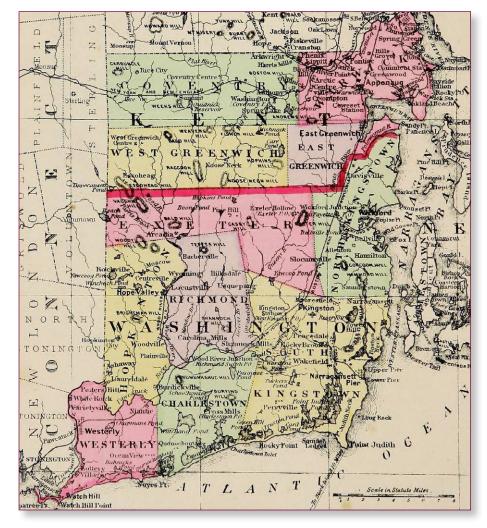
They fought in Civil War, served on Supreme Court, rounded on horseback

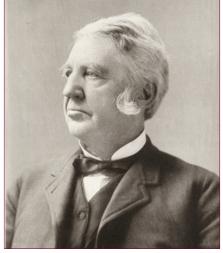
MARY KORR RIMJ MANAGING EDITOR

In 1889, two physicians, DR. JAMES H. ELDREDGE and DR. FREDERICK TITSWORTH ROGERS, who both served as presidents of the Rhode Island Medical Society during their careers, contributed to a history of Washington and Kent Counties¹ with a chapter on the medical profession.

Dr. Eldredge, who wrote the history of the physicians of Kent County, was born in East Greenwich in 1816, the son of Dr. Charles and Hannah Eldredge. He earned his medical degree at Jefferson College in Philadelphia in 1837 and returned home, where he practiced for more than 50 years.

Dr. Rogers of Westerly wrote the medical history of Washington County. He was born in New York in 1859, and moved to Westerly as a youth. An 1882 graduate of the Medical College of the University of New York, he was awarded the first honor in a class of 268. Dr. Rogers then returned to Westerly and opened a practice with a special focus on ophthalmology.





James H. Eldredge, MD



Frederick Titsworth Rogers, MD

Map from the History Of Washington And Kent Counties, Rhode Island, Including Their Early Settlement And Progress To The Present Time. (1889.)

1. JR Cole, History Of Washington And Kent Counties, Rhode Island, Including Their Early Settlement And Progress To The Present Time, 1889.

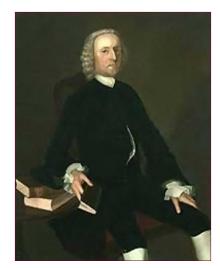
The following profiles are only a partial sampling of the early physicians of South County from their accounts.

First Westerly physician, Chief Justice, friend to Washington, Franklin

DR. JOSHUA BABCOCK (1701–1783) was the first Westerly native to practice medicine there. He was a 1724 graduate of Yale College, (the first from Rhode Island), and then studied medicine in Boston and England. He returned home in 1734 and opened a surgical practice.

He also became a well-known merchant, having established the largest general retail store between New York and Boston. Dr. Babcock later served as Associate and then Chief Justice on the Rhode Island Supreme Court [1749 to 1751 and 1763 to 1764].

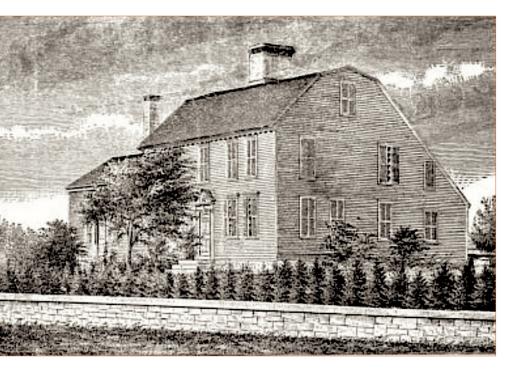
For over forty years he represented the town in the general assembly, and was a member of the state council of war at the time of the American Revolution. George Washington, Benjamin Franklin and many other noted men of that period were frequently his guests. One history recounts that Franklin attached lightening rods to Dr. Babcock's Geor-



Dr. Joshua Babcock's portrait when he served as Chief Justice of the RI Supreme Court. His home was a gathering place for state and local political leaders, and where George Washington and Benjamin Franklin were guests.

gian-style residence. A description of the home reveals it had secret closets, a deep wine cellar and carved and costly staircases, cupboards and ceiling.

Doctor Babcock was one of the first incorporators of Brown University and one of its Fellows. As a legislator he signed Rhode Island's state Declaration of Independence on May 4, 1776 before the national Declaration of Independence was signed on July 4, 1776.



From mill doctor to Marine Hospital

JOB KENYON, MD, (1821–1889) was born in Exeter in 1821 and in 1846 graduated from the medical department of Yale College. He began the practice of his profession at Carolina Mills, Washington County, until 1853, when he relocated to Anthony Village, Kent County.

In 1869 the doctor erected a residence at River Point in Warwick, then "unsettled and almost in a condition of primeval forest," according to the history. "Here he has since resided and continued in the practice of his profession. In 1864 he opened an office in Providence, which he still visits daily, and may be found during the morning



Job Kenyon, MD

hours. In August, 1862, he was made assistant surgeon to the Third Regiment Rhode Island Artillery, stationed at Hilton Head, South Carolina, and continued in the service until January of the following year, ill health then compelling his resignation. From 1865 until 1869 he filled by appointment the duties of physician to the Marine Hospital of that city." (The Marine Hospitals in this country were precursors to the US Public Health Service facilities.)

Dr. Kenyon was president of the Rhode Island Medical Society from 1882-1884.

According to the account, he was, "in politics a Republican, with independent views on the tariff question" and represented Coventry as state senator from 1865 to 1869, and was elected to the same office from Warwick in 1874.

Dr. Peleg Johnson's diary

'In my hand no price I bring'

— Tombstone of Dr. Johnston. buried in Old Fernwood Cemetery, South Kingston

DOCTOR PELEG JOHNSON (1791–1859) was a Charleston, RI, farmer's son who walked to Connecticut to start his medical training. According to the account of Drs. Eldredge and Rogers:

When twenty the bonds became too galling, and he left the farm with five dollars in his pocket and a well-worn suit of clothes in lieu of his father's blessing, and tramping to Mansfield, Conn., began his studies under Doctor Soule of that place. He was able, after hard years of study and economy, to graduate from Yale College in 1816.

The following excerpts from Dr. Johnson's diary included in the history offer a glimpse of the daily routine of a doctor of that era.

January 1st, 1849. — Weather cold, wind N. W. Snow and ice covers the ground and makes it good sleighing. Weeden Allen's wife was this morning delivered of three daughters.

January 2d, 1849. — Wind N.W. and extremely cold. Last evening the good people of Westerly held a fair at the new Congregational meeting house. There was about four hundred present when without warning the floor gave way and precipitated the people in the cellar below. Many received fractured limbs.

January 11th, 1849. — Last evening two prisoners escaped from jail. Wind N. W. Probably warmer tomorrow. Great excitement all over the country over the reported discovery of gold in California.

Nov. 4, 1851. Stephen Grinnell, Dr., to visit & medicine, .42 cents.

Wilkins Updike, Dr., to visit & medicine, .42 cents; to extra pills for servant, .12 cents.

Nov. 10, 1851. John Cassel, Cr. [credit], buy 1 cord wood,

Jan. 12, 1852. Town of Kingston, Dr., to physick for two prisoners, .17 cents."

Dr. Johnson often traveled by horseback and, during the final months of his life, fell from his steed and suffered a thigh and compound fracture of the leg. Several months later, according to the history, his death "occurred from apoplexy, which seized him while on his way to visit a patient."

Dr. Johnson was known as a physician who kept his "professional tariffs," as they were referred to in those days, affordable. His tombstone in the Old Fernwood Cemetery in South Kingston reads: 'In my hand no price I bring'.

Women physicians

According to the history, "DOCTOR ETTA PAYNE was the first woman who, as a regular graduate of a recognized medical college, practiced medicine in the county, and she lived in Westerly for a short time about 1870."

Thereafter, DOCTOR LUCY ALMY BABCOCK, a native of the county, according to the account, "tried and settled the mooted question, in so far as she was concerned, of a woman's availability for the medical profession. "

Born at Potter Hill in 1834, she studied medicine under Doctor Amos R. Collins and her sister, DOC-TOR P. J. B. WAITE, who practiced in New York City, and graduated from the New York Homeopathic College and Hospital for Women in 1873.

Dr. Babcock returned to Westerly to practice, and was the first woman physician to be admitted to the Rhode Island Homeopathic Society. Ill health forced her to retire about 15 years into her profession.

Dr. J. Howard Morgan was a pioneer in the use of the bicycle and used it exclusively in his professional work. Born in 1844, he studied under Dr. W. H. Wilbur of Westerly. He then interned at the New York City Lunatic Asylum and opened a practice in Westerly, specializing in the treatment of psychological disorders.



