

Lucius F. C. Garvin, MD: 1876 Centennial Perspective on Life, Liberty, Longevity

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In March 1876, **LUCIUS F. C. GARVIN, MD**, presented a Centennial discourse at a meeting of the Rhode Island Medical Society, which was published in the Society's *Communications*,¹ [Image 1]. Dr. Garvin was 35-years-old and a member of the publications committee at the time he gave this address, in which he reflected on the lifespans and lifestyles of the signers of the Declaration of Independence and other notables of the era, comparing them to those of his own time 100 years later.

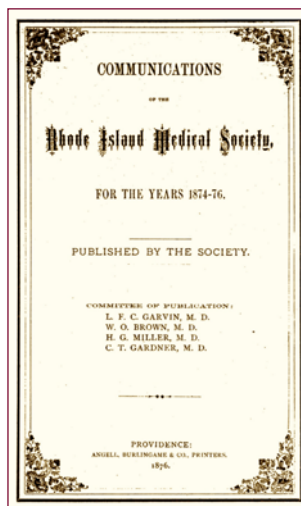


Image 1. Cover image of the *Communications of the Rhode Island Medical Society* [HAITHI TRUST1]

He began with a somber note. "The return of the historic and venerated date '76 has led to a comparison of ourselves with our ancestors, not always, it must be confessed, to our advantage. The signers of the Declaration of Independence [Image 2], almost without exception, lived to a hale old age. Of the signers from Rhode Island, **Stephen Hopkins** reached seventy-eight; the other, **William Ellery**, expired in his arm-chair, without sickness



Image 2. Portraits & autographs of the signers of the Declaration of Independence

[LIBRARY OF CONGRESS, OLE EREKSON, LITHOGRAPHER, CIRCA 1876. [HTTPS://LCCN.LOC.GOV/2003666901](https://lccn.loc.gov/2003666901)]

or pain, while engaged in reading *Cicero De Officiis*, at the age of ninety-two."

Dr. Garvin also noted that **Benjamin Franklin** was made ambassador to France at 70, governor of Pennsylvania at 79, member of the Constitutional Convention at 81, and "died in full possession of his faculties at 84." **Samuel Adams** lived to be 82, **John Adams**, 90, and **Thomas Jefferson**, 83.

In contrast, he recounted some of the recent deaths of notable persons in his day: **Andrew Johnson**, at the age of 67, **Charles Sumner** and **Henry Wilson** at 63, **Horace Greeley** at 62, **Thomas A. Jenckes** at 57, **Orris S. Ferry** at 53. "Most of these men during their later years were seriously disabled and frequently tortured by wearing chronic disease...Is such waste of the country's best material a necessity? If it can be shown that the great men of America attained a more advanced age one hundred years ago than now, will it not go far to prove the present death rate excessive and needless?"

He posited that "the disparity springs from a cause which is not beyond our discernment. We have learned to live shut up within doors more constantly and more completely than our fathers. Now a journey to Washington occupies twenty-four hours in a crowded car, by day and night alike close and abominable. When John Adams went from his farm at Braintree to Philadelphia in 1775, by open conveyance, the trip with its stops at Hartford, New York, and Trenton, was a month's vacation... Modern statesmen seem to have actually less hygienic wisdom than is contained in the old nursery rhyme:

*After breakfast, work awhile,
After dinner sit and smile,
After supper walk a mile...*

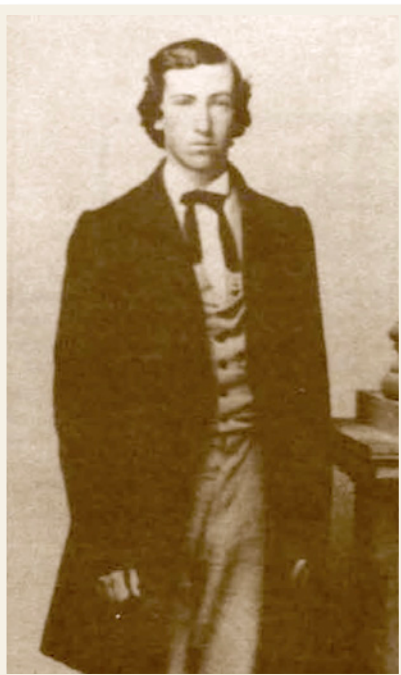


Image 3. Amherst College archival photo of **Lucius Garvin** as a student, class of 1862

[RHODE ISLAND HISTORY, MAY 1980¹]

In the essay, he eschewed that "corruption and incompetence in public life, which appears to be greater now than at any period within the history of the government, is attributable in no insignificant degree to eating and drinking, breathing and sleeping, working and playing improperly, and its remedy partially consists in a complete revolution of our every-day habits of living."

Medical journey

Lucius Garvin, born in Tennessee to parents originally from New England, entered Amherst College in 1859 and graduated in

1862 [Image 3]. When the Civil War broke out, he enlisted in the Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry. The regiment was transported to North Carolina, where disease was rampant in the marshlands where they were quartered. Pvt. Garvin contracted malaria and spent months in the hospital, where he was given large doses of quinine, which impaired his hearing for the rest of his life, according to his induction bio at the RI Heritage Hall of Fame.²

During this time, he decided to pursue a career in medicine, and entered Harvard Medical School, graduating in 1867. Following an internship in Boston, he set up a private practice in Pawtucket, where he had earlier apprenticed under **SYLVANUS CLAPP, MD**.³

In 1876, the young Dr. Garvin accepted a position from the Lonsdale Company to set up a medical practice. Mills, machine shops, and blocks of workers' homes engulfed the three towns of Lincoln, Cumberland, and Pawtucket along the Blackstone River [Images 4,5,6]. As company physician, he was on call 24/7. He saw patients at his home at 577 Broad Street in Lonsdale every day for two hours, where he also performed surgery. He made house calls on foot or by horse and buggy.

In 1869, he married **LUCY WATERMAN SOUTH-MAYD, MD**, who was a graduate of the New England Female Medical College, and a physician and physiology teacher at Mount Holyoke for a time. They were the parents of three daughters, one of whom, Florence, became a well-known suffragette. Lucy Garvin died in 1898. Nine years later, he married **SARAH TOMLINSON**, who had been blind since the age of six, and attended the Perkins School for the Blind. The couple had two sons.



Image 4. Exterior view of Lonsdale Company's Bleachery in West Lonsdale

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Image 5. Group portrait of child laborers at Lonsdale Company Bleachery
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It was the plight of the mill children which led him into the political arena, and eventually to the State House, where he served as governor from 1903–1905 [Image 7]. The annals of Rhode Island history and the RI Heritage Hall of Fame capture his accomplishments, as well as an article in the November 2014 Heritage section of the *Rhode Island Medical Journal*.⁴

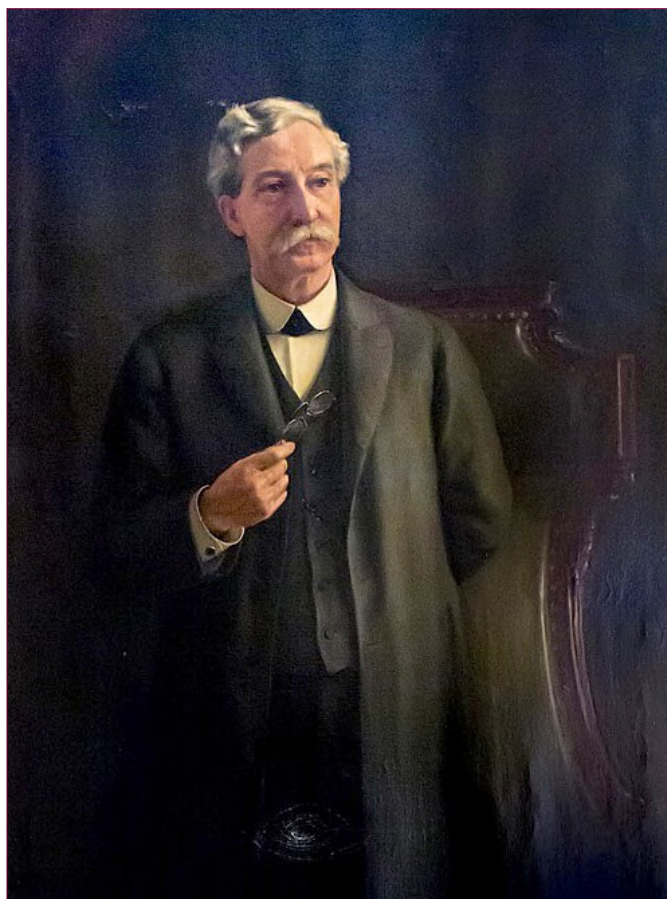


Image 7. Formal portrait of R.I. Gov. Lucius F. C. Garvin, MD, at the RI State House.

Dr. Garvin practiced medicine for more than half a century. He died suddenly at home on Oct. 2, 1922, at the age of 81, ascribed to heart disease. According to an article in the *New York Times* on his passing, he never owned an automobile and, “up to a few days ago he did his traveling by bicycle.”⁵

He, like the aforementioned signers of the Declaration, lived a long and productive life, and one could surmise, that despite his workload and political and civic endeavors, took his own advice from the rhyme he mentioned in his Centennial essay:

*After breakfast, work awhile,
After dinner sit and smile,
After supper walk a mile...* ❖



Image 6. Photo of Ann & Hope mill with railroad tracks and train station in the foreground. The mill's tower features a clock and a sign that reads “Ann & Hope 1886”.

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