Medical Services in Essex County

By Catherine P. DeShazo

Incidents related in this article are excerpts from a book being prepared for publication prior to the Tappahannock Tricentennial. These incidents show how medical care and services were rendered over the eighteenth, nineteenth and into the twentieth centuries in this county. No effort is made here to present complete or fully developed history but rather to use a few facts from several periods and to let these facts illustrate trends of the given periods. Many more doctors have been listed and will be printed at a later date. Any person having information on doctors is urged to contact the writer.

In the first hundred years that white man slowly settled this part of Virginia medical care was administered by the landowners, the Indian doctors and even the slaves. Epidemics struck hard, childbirth deaths were frequent for both infant and mother, and women had to produce many children in order to have a reasonable family survive.

By mid-eighteenth century young men of the area had begun to study what medicine was offered, mostly in Cambridge or Edinbergh. If a young man had a large fortune and plenty of time he should consider Cambridge; if not, he should go to Edinbergh said Samuel Johnson. He said the Scotch education was like a house built to last a lifetime, while the English was like a fortress intended to last for many ages. One young man made this sage remark: “I have only one lifetime to live. I shall go to Edinbergh.”

“Edinbergh is more noted for this science (the study of physic), yet still the morals of young gentlemen are more attended at Oxford, yet I think the morals of a well disposed youth may be preserved at Edinbergh as well as Oxford, and it is a much cheaper place, besides there cannot be a Doctor of Physics degree obtained at Oxford under fourteen years,” said Charles Gore in 1738.

Between 1749 and 1812, 139 Americans graduated from Edinbergh, 86 of whom went from the South, 65 of whom were from Virginia. Essex had its share of men attending Edinbergh. In college they learned a number of subjects and when they came back in this country the doctors were biologists, politicians, farmers, writers and leaders in all phases of life here. An example is Dr. John Mitchell who practiced out of Urbanna. He was termed an “ingenious botanist”. One theory he advanced was: “The Negro and Indian had preserved the original complexion of Noah and the white race had degenerated. The pigmentation of the Negro skin, he believed, served the useful function of protecting him from the torrid rays of the African sun”. He is quoted as having advanced this theory in 1748 according to Wyndham B. Blanton in “Medicine in Virginia”. Dr. Mitchell was also known for his maps and it was he who made the map that was used at the Peace Council at the close of the Revolutionary War.

It was not unusual for English doctors to come here to practice and later return to England. Such was the case with Dr. Marsh Catesby (1679-1749). His sister had married Dr. William Cooke of Williamsburg. While here he exchanged ideas with his friend, a Mr. Dale of Essex who was considered a skillful Apothecary and Botanist. Dr. Catesby is known to have sent Dale numbers of seeds, dried specimens and some growing plants. He offered the following prescriptions: “Use sassafras to build blood; sweetness for intermittent fever; Indian Pink for worms; ginseng to prolong life.”

By the beginning of the 1800’s doctors were turning their interest to agricultural journals because these were more read than the few existing medical journals in this country and, even then, the doctors appeared to be trying to educate the public in a primitive step toward preventative medicine. Early agricultural magazines carried articles with such titles as: “Cancer Cured By Dock Root”; “Remedy for Rheumatism”; “Remedy for Colic in Horses”; “Cure of Deafness”; “Liver Wort for Consumption”.

Other “experts” advocated such medications as: chewing ginseng for pep; taking ipecac for Bloody Flux and nausea; Jerusalem Oak for worms; Jamestown weed for use as a poultice; dogwood bark for Intermittent Feavers; turtle flesh for consumption; and using bear’s oil against bugs, mosquitoes and vermin. Later the use of sulfa springs for rheumatism became popular.

One other general practice should be mentioned, Wet nurses were used extensively. This had two major results: the mother became pregnant sooner and the poorly nourished infants died in droves.

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Other types of medical services gradually came across the sea. While doctors frequently acted as dentists there were those who “yanked teeth” as they rode on horseback up and down the coast. Black William who rode a black and lean horse, was one such “dentist.”

Oculists appeared. A Dr. Graham who advertised in the Williamsburg Gazette claimed to be an oculist and aurist from Philadelphia. The ad said he would spend a few days in Hobbs’s Hole. The ad also carried testimonials of his having cured blindness and deafness.

By the time of the Revolution, Virginia was able to produce 230 physicians with varying degrees of medical training ranging from college training to studying under another physician. Of these this state furnished 152 surgeons to the Army and 30 to the Navy.

From this point on let us use a few examples to outline the development of medical care over the years in Essex.

Dr. Paul Micou, a Huguenot refugee who reached this country via England, was born in France in 1658. He first settled in Richmond county but acquired large land holdings in Essex and later lived at Port Micou in upper Essex. From 1700-1720 he also served as Justice of the Peace in Essex. He is frequently referred to as Paul Micou, Mercht, showing another occupation. He married Margaret Roy and was a very close friend of Dr. Mungo Roy. When he died he left his “physick books and a gold ring” to Dr. Mungo Roy. He was buried at Port Micou and his black marble tombstone remains there until the middle of this century when the Huguenot Society moved it to Vauter’s Episcopal Church at Loretto. On that occasion Betty Page Carlton presented a comprehensive paper on Mr. Micou.

Typical of marriages of the day were the marriage of Paul Micou Jr. to Jean Roy, daughter of Dr. Mungo Roy and the marriage of Mungo Roy Jr. to Catherine Micou.

The Doctors Clements dominated the period from 1750 to the Revolution in the Tappahannock vicinity. Dr. John Clements erected the old mansion at Mt. Clement, the site of Tidewater Memorial Hospital. He owned some 900 acres of land and 40 slaves. Dr. Mace Clements lived near him at Poplar Springs, now the home of Mr. and Mrs. Tom Moore Wilson. Dr. Ewen Clements moved to Essex from Fredericksburg in 1772 but died in 1774.

Hobbs’s Hole (Tappahannock) had its share of physicians. It was founded with fifty lots in 1682. The Tri-centennial will be celebrated in just over five years. Let us recall just a few of the many doctors who settled there. By 1796 there were 100 houses in the town. One of these was occupied by Dr. John Brockenbrough, Sr., born 1744, and a signer of the Leedstown Articles. He is reported to have served as a surgeon in the Navy during the Revolution. Like other doctors he was active in several fields. He had an apothecary shop in 1769. After the War he was a Justice of the Peace for Essex County. The fact that he had a large practice is attested by an ad for an apprentice. According to the Virginia Magazine of History and Biography he died of a “violent pleursy at his seat on the banks of the Rappahannock at the age of 60, after having practiced medicine “with success” for 37 years. His son John, Jr. also became a doctor.

Although he is not known for his medical services, Thomas Ritchie attended Medical lectures in Philadelphia before teaching in Fredericksburg and opening a bookstore in Richmond. The son of Archiebald Ritchie, Thomas Ritchie went on to be the famous editor of the Richmond Enquirer and was one of three men known as the Essex Junto. The other two were Judge Spencer Roane and Dr. John Brockenbrough.

Perhaps the doctor achieving the highest recognition in the late 1700’s and early 1800’s was Dr. Alexander Somervail. Born in Scotland, he studied at Edinburgh, migrated here and is credited with identifying typhoid fever and clearly differentiating it from malaria. He was the author of “The Medical Topography and Diseases of a Section of Virginia” and “Cases Illustrative of the Use of the Muriate of Lime in Palsy” as well as a treatise on “Diseased Vertebrae”. All of these writings were printed in the Philadelphia Journal of Medicine and Physical Sciences.

In the nineteenth century medical men were numerous, many still trained by area doctors and many more attending colleges within the United States. Medicine became more of a science. Real medicines were discovered although it was left to the twentieth century to produce miracle drugs. For the purpose of this paper we shall cite only a few samples which will illustrate some of the fakes and real medicine of the era.

Mineral springs became popular as the first steps toward hydrotherapy evolved. Here at Wood Farm in Essex Dr. William Croxton discovered mineral springs in 1829. His father, Carter Croxton of Cherry Walk, gave this place at Paul’s Cross Roads to him. He believed in the medicinal value of these waters and he began treating patients in large numbers. Due to lack of transportation and the need for continued treatment in the springs Dr. Croxton built a “hotel” in which his patients stayed throughout their treatment periods. There were 32 beds in this “hotel” and it was filled with patients seeking, primarily, a cure for the ever prevalent rheumatism which was a crippler of the age. This project may well have been the first use of any form of hydrotherapy in Essex or this part of Virginia. Today it is a vital part of care at the local hospital, only in place of the mineral springs whirlpools and other sophisticated equipment are used. Much study has gone into therapy between 1820 when Dr. Croxton initiated his new treatment and 1976.

By the time of the War Between the States ether and chloroform were in use but were very scarce items and for many wounded soldiers of that conflict a heavy shot of whiskey or rum plus the use of strong men to hold them to the operating table gave all the sedative available. Yet they survived as proven by many veterans who lived well into the 1900’s. At Locust Grove there is a bullet that was removed from the arm of Edgar Roy Micou who died in 1913.

While mid-wives remained the way of birth even into this century in rural Essex, doctors were called to the homes to deliver babies more and more frequently. Mid-wives assisted and finally had to be licensed in the twentieth century. The practice has all but disappeared in Essex today. In other parts of this nation and in other nations there is a new trend toward prop-

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erly trained mid-wives making normal deliveries in an effort to free the limited number of doctors for other more complicated work.

During the Civil War there were hospitals. The hospital beds were 52 inches wide and accommodated up to four patients at a time. Ventilation was poor. Rules of hospitals included: no cursing; no card playing; no begging. Nurses were scarce and Aides unknown. Those patients who were able to walk waited upon those who were bed-ridden. Breakfasts were served every other morning when available food was found. Molasses was considered the best food for healing the wounded. Beds were made of straw when there were beds.

We have no account of a hospital in Essex but it is recorded that Midway served as a convalescent station for soldiers during the War between the States. They were transferred from Holly Spring, the Hoskins home in King and Queen County where a hospital was maintained by the people of that neighborhood. Midway, originally a Jones place was owned by Dr. Jefferson Minor, the father of six daughters. In order to educate his own family he opened “The Midway Female Academy” in 1840 and built the school house. It was that school house which housed the soldiers during the War. Dr. Minor sold Midway in 1856 to E. M. Ware I of “Bellevue” who gave it to his daughter, Hannah Ware Hoskins and it has remained in the Hoskins family and with their descendants to the present.

After the abysmal poverty of the reconstruction prosperity began to show and the “medicine man” made his appearance. He peddled all kinds of useless bitters and medications. He would arrive at Tappahannock, spread his wares and put on a real show as he bewitched the poor people to buy his “cures”. He was a picturesque if infamous character and people flocked to him.

One of the most costly of the wares thus sold was the mad stone. Some of these were brought from China and said to have fabulous curative powers. (Some were stones picked up in Georgia and other places and traded for valuable imported mad stones.)

In 1805 the Richmond Enquirer ran this notice: “The subscriber offers for sale the Chinese snake stone, formerly the property of Mrs. Tabb of Matthews county so famous throughout Virginia for its efficiency in extracting venom from the bite of a snake or mad dog.” The price—$2,000. Then in 1805 the same paper announced that a group of men from Essex, King and Queen, King William, Middlesex, Westmoreland, Richmond and Lancaster counties had proposed to raise the $2,000 by subscription and were forming a corporation for this purpose and would buy the mad stone. Today that mad stone is kept in the Essex County Clerk’s Office and may be seen there. It is the property of the Woman’s Club of Essex. It came to the late A. D. Latane from Dr. James Roy Micon, Jr., a professor at Washington College in Chestertown, Maryland, who requested Mr. Latane to leave it to a responsible Essex organization. He willed it to the Woman’s Club. One other mad stone is known to be in private ownership in Essex. It, too, was the property of descendants of the Micous. It was used in this cen-
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study of these services has been begun. By the time of the Tappahannock tricentennial it is hoped that this history will be presented in as complete a form as can be obtained from records and histories. But it will require the cooperation of all members of the Historical Society and others to get such a final paper. Remember, your help is solicited.

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History of Rappahannock Industrial Academy

By Marie H. Harrison

The Southside Rappahannock Baptist Association, founder of the R.I.A. (Rappahannock Industrial Academy) is an organization comprised of the Negro Baptist churches in Essex, Middlesex, and King and Queen Counties. The purpose of the association being: To promote the cause of Christ by fraternal communication, mutual counsel and fostering education and evangelical work.

One of its main concerns from the 1890's was to raise money to educate Negro students who were financially unable to pay for an education. Prior to the establishment of the Rappahannock Industrial Academy, Negro boys and girls in this area had no local high school to attend. The lack of educational facilities in the Southside was of great concern to the leaders.

Finally, it was decided by vote of the association to found a school. According to W. Edward Robinson, it was in 1897 at Calvary Baptist Church, Middlesex County that the following persons subscribed as follows: Rev. F. P. Diggs, R. E. Berkley, D. C. Winston, N. A. Wiggins, C. H. Newman, J. M. Powell, W. Thompson, $25.00 each; Thomas Wright, $2.00 each for his six sons; Rev. Thomas Harris, H. T. Hunter, $12.00 each; Miss Rebecca Page, $5.00; Mr. H. V. Washington, $10.00; J. H. Carter, $5.00; Deacon Thomas Latney, $10.00; Mrs. M. E. Reed, $1.00; Mrs. Mary Minor, $30.00. Other persons pledged smaller amounts. There is no record to indicate that all of these pledges were paid.


The Purchase Committee experienced great difficulty in securing a suitable site for the school. Trustees also had to be appointed by the court. Law Order Book 5, page 247 shows that on September 17, 1900, a Special Term of the Circuit Court of Essex County Virginia was held. D. C. Winston made application to the court for the appointment of trustees. Judges T. R. B. Wright appointed the following trustees to hold legal title to real estate for the establishment of the Rappahannock Industrial Academy: Rev. N. A. Wiggins, J. R. Ruffin, C. H. Newman, Thomas Pollard, Edward Fitzgerald and D. R. Page.

Deed Book 60 page 462 shows that on September 18, 1900 G. H. Dillard and his wife, Emma V. Dillard gave deed to the trustees of R. I. Academy a tract of land, together with (farm house) improvements, in Rappahannock Magisterial District near Cedar Fort (Ozeana) containing 150 acres, part of Mount Vista for the sum of $1,200.00.

On January 1, 1902, the doors of the old farm dwelling were opened as a temporary school house. Rev. N. A. Wiggins, who was chairman of the executive committee and treasurer, was in general charge of the school. Mr. Wiggins secured D. C. Rawley to serve as principal. In the fall of 1903, the trustee board, appointed W. O. Bundy with an A. B. Degree as principal. Bundy served one term. In 1904 W. E. Robinson, B. S., was elected principal and served until his retirement in 1933.

Deed Book 70, page 400, shows that on March 11, 1920, Julia Todd Williams, Webb Williams and others deeded the R. I. Academy trustees 1 acre in the Rappahannock Magisterial District adjoining the academy. The trustees at the time were: Robert E. Berkley, Thomas Pollard, James R. Ruffin, G. S. Bundy, Thomas Wright, and M. H. Sparks.

There were eleven principals of the R. I. Academy during its 45 years of existence. The principals were as follows: D. C. Rawley, W. O. Bundy, W. Edward Robinson, S. P. Morton, C. I. Thurston, J. General Johnson, Marie H. Harrison, the first female principal. H. H. Hoffman, Lureatha J. Harris, the second female principal, Mr. Burress and Rev. A. D. Williams.

According to Rev. W. A. Young, Chairman of the Trustee Board and Rev. A. D. Williams the school closed at the end of the 1947 school session.

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SOURCES OF INFORMATION:

REV. W. A. YOUNG, Hustle, Virginia.
REV. A. D. WILLIAMS, Washington, D. C.

Excerpts From Minutes of Essex County Historical Society for 1976

On January 21, our first quarterly meeting, Mr. Sidney Hilton, President, asked Miss Willie T. Weathers to take the minutes in the absence of Mrs. William A. Wright, Secretary, whose mother died on January 19.

After a moment of silent prayer for Mrs. Taylor, Mr. Hilton introduced Mr. John C. DeShazo, guest speaker,
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who gave interesting personal reminiscences of his father's medical practice in Essex at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century. Dr. DeShazo was one of the many dedicated horse and buggy doctors and many were the delightful stories recalled of his experience. A business meeting followed the program.

Mr. John McManus, Mrs. Charles DeShazo, Mr. John Henderson addressed the April 21 meeting at the Court House. Mr. McManus and Mrs. DeShazo talked about plans of the County Bicentennial Committee to celebrate this historical year in Essex. Besides special programs, like the Wagon Train stopping in Essex on its way to Valley Forge in June, and other pageants on the Court Green in August, there is a Bicentennial Cookbook on sale; there will be a Roster of Revolutionary Soldiers in Essex. Also a program tracing the history of health and physicians in the County since before the Revolution. There is also research going on establishing a record of Masons in Essex since 1758.

A regional information center has been set up at Rappahannock Community College in Warsaw with a 15 minute historical lecture for each county, along with displays, brochures, books, etc. Our President, Mr. Paul S. Trible Jr., introduced three speakers, Mr. John Henderson, Director of Parks and Recreation Department of Essex County, who talked about different areas in his department which might help in preserving our history and also about several projects for which funds are being made available by the Federal Government in which we may be able to qualify for participation, and which he would be glad to help us take advantage of.

Elmwood was the site of the July meeting. This meeting at "Elmwood" had the largest attendance ever, on a lovely warm July afternoon in a beautiful setting. Elmwood is the ancestral home of Mr. and Mrs. R. H. Muscoe Garnett. The home has always been in the Garnett family.

Mr. Paul S. Trible Jr., our president, presided and expressed to the Garnetts the Society's gratitude for the opportunity to observe our Bicentennial meeting in so lovely and historically appropriate spot; this is doubly true since Elmwood was built in the 1770's and has played a very important part in our County and nation's last 200 years. The present owners have restored the house to its original eighteenth century appearance.

Mrs. William A. Wright, Secretary, introduced our guest speaker, Mr. Park Rouse Jr., noted Virginia Historian. Mr. Rouse has written many books on Virginia and for the past twenty years has served as Director of the Jamestown Foundation; he was a Director in 1957 of the 350th Anniversary Celebration and is now Chairman of the Virginia Bicentennial Commission. He has held many positions of importance in Colonial Williamsburg during this period. His talk was a mingling of historical fact and entertaining illustrations well suited to a historical society's summer afternoon.

Delicious refreshments were served before the meeting due to the heat at that hour and minutes and treas-
urer's report were dispensed with so that all members and guests would have more time to enjoy the Garnett's special invitation to tour the inside of Elmwood following the program. We had 16 new members join at this meeting. We hope that next year we will be able to duplicate this interesting and entertaining meeting at another of Essex 'County's lovely historical homes.

Admiral Thomas E. Bass, III, Superintendent of Stratford Hall Plantation addressed the Society on October 20. He told about the building and furnishings and restoration of Stratford Hall the home of the Lee family in Virginia in the early 1700's. He showed beautiful slides to illustrate his very interesting talk. We were sorry so few members were able to be there due to the inclement weather. In the absence of our president, Mrs. William A. Wright, Secretary, presided. The meeting opened with a moment of silent prayer for our Vice President, Arnold Motley, who passed away on September 13, 1976. A motion was passed that the Society prepare a Resolution honoring Arnold and in appreciation of all he did in the past to keep our Society active and in caring for all the historical data on which had been given to the Society. It was also voted that the Historical Society would pay half the cost of obtaining a copy of Jeff O'Dell's study of over 100 sites in Essex County which is being preserved by the Virginia Historic Commission. One of our members donated $25 toward this purchase and we hope more will make a donation toward this project since, as everyone knows, our treasury is poorly depleted and we need many more members if we hope to be a constructive useful Society, publishing our bulletin and continuing to take our part in the community's historic past.

Mrs. William A. Wright, Secretary

Our President Elected to the U. S. Congress

It is appropriate to proudly give recognition to the fact that our President, the Hon. Paul S. Trible, Jr., Commonwealth Attorney of Essex County for the past three years, has been elected to represent this district of Virginia in the House of Representatives of the United States Congress. This was the result of a very hard and closey fought campaign in which Mr. Trible carried his program to the people. He carried by a large majority this area, the Northern Neck and also won a majority in the heavily populated lower peninsula. This is the first time in the present century that this county has been represented in Congress by a resident and son of Essex.

Charles W. H Warner, Editor and Chairman of The Publication Committee

Bicentennial Commission Lists '76 Activities

The Essex County Bicentennial Commission has hosted the Wagon Train, presented three pageants, co-sponsored a continuing Information Center with

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Bicentennial Commission Lists ’76 Activities

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Richmond County, published the Essex Sampler and continued extensive research and writings throughout the year.

The Wagon Train under the direction of John McManus, vice chairman, attracted around 2,500 persons for the short stop at Watts’ Store at Miller’s Tavern and the over-night stay and show in Tappahannock. It was a most colorful event with an outstanding musical program. A number of local horsemen and women joined the train in Essex and accompanied it to War- saw. Local school, police and other county officials assisted.

A Fourth of July pageant depicting a scene which took place in Essex Court just prior to the Revolution was given at the Courthouse. During the August Summer Festival the Pageant based on medical services from the time of Dr. Mace ‘Clements of Mt. Clements to the erection of Tidewater Memorial Hospital on the same site was the opening event. The closing Festival function was a two scene presentation, first an Indian episode done by the Rappahannock Indians; second, a musical episode entitled “Music Transcends Time” put on by vocalists, choirs and groups from all sections of the county.

The Board of Supervisors provided funds to co-sponsor a continuing information center on the campus of the Rappahannock Community College at Warsaw. Richmond county shared equally in the cost and the College furnished the location, the labor and the technical plans. The Bicentennial Commission provided historical data and other listings,蔚 Tappahannock and Essex county attractions. This data was put on tape and pictures of some fifteen attractions of the county were taken by the Communications Department of the RCC. These were taped so that a tourist may press a button and see and hear the tapes at any time of the day including weekends or periods the college is closed. In addition a display area was constructed and pamphlets, books and magazines are displayed at all times. This will be maintained for some years.

Much research has been done including the history of old Rappahannock Academy by Mrs. Marie H. Harrison and several papers by Charles Warner and Catherine DeShazo.

Commission members have worked with the school on Bicentennial programs, given talks in several counties, taken part in nearby county Bicentennial events and spoken before civic groups when called on to do so.

A dinner is planned for all who participated in any of the Bicentennial celebration on December 9, 1976.

Catherine P. DeShazo, Chairman

In Memoriam

ARNOLD MOTLEY

March 3, 1906—September 13, 1976

Officers of the Society

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