

History of Surgery

Excerpt from the Illustrated History of Surgery in the United States

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Frank Hastings Hamilton (1813–1886) completed his classical education at Union College in Schenectady, New York, prior to obtaining his Doctor of Medicine degree from the University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine in 1833. He held professorships in surgery at several prestigious institutions, including Geneva Medical College (1840), Buffalo Medical College (1846), Long Island College Hospital (1860), and the Medical College of Bellevue Hospital (1868). As a prominent mid-19th-century American surgeon, Hamilton excelled in numerous surgical disciplines and authored an extensive range of scholarly works. His notable publications include “Monograph on Strabismus” (1845), “A Practical Treatise on Fractures and Dislocations” (1860), “A Practical Treatise on Military Surgery” (1861), “A Treatise on Military Surgery and Hygiene” (1865), “The Principles and Practice of Surgery” (1872), and “Fracture of the Patella” (1880). Moreover, he edited the influential two-volume compilation “Surgical Memoirs of the War of the Rebellion: Collected and Published by the United States Sanitary Commission” (1870–1871). Among his significant contributions to medical literature were his pioneering research on the application of pedicled flaps for the treatment of chronic wounds (1854) and his investigation into abnormalities following fractures (1855). Hamilton is also associated with a condition characterized by swelling, stiffness, and redness of the subcutaneous connective tissue, which serves as a clinical indicator for the diagnosis of axillary dislocation of the shoulder.

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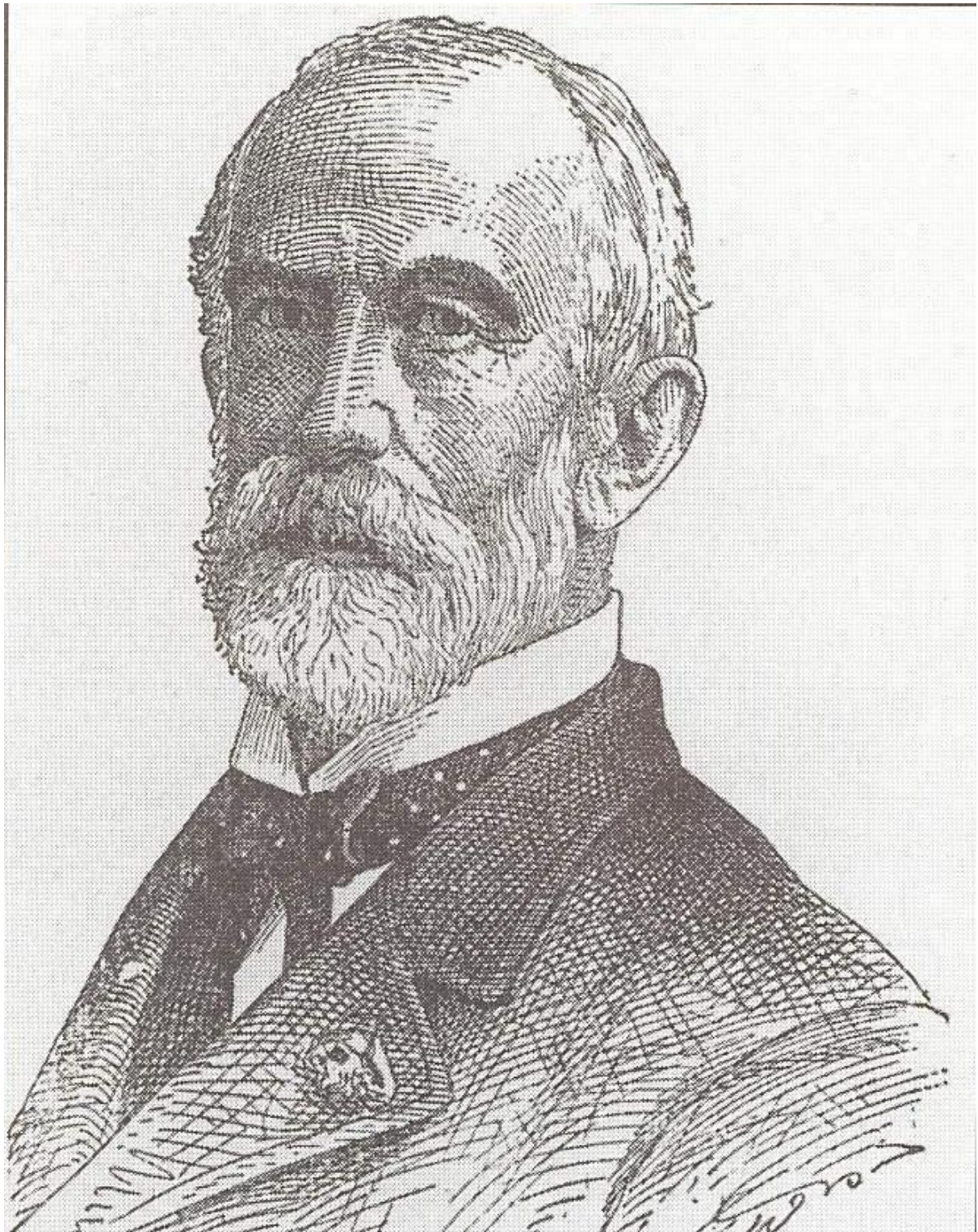


Figure 1- Frank Hastings Hamilton (Author's personal collection)



Figure 2- Dr. J. Marion Sims, widely recognized as the first prominent gynecologist in America, is depicted adorned with medals awarded to him by European royalty. As one of the Southern physicians practicing in New York, he played a pivotal role in the establishment of the Women's Hospital in the city. Notably, Dr. Sims maintained a position of neutrality during the Civil War, continuing his medical practice in London and Paris throughout the duration of the conflict. Consequently, he became the first American surgeon to achieve international acclaim and recognition (Historical Collection of the College of Physicians of Philadelphia).

J. Marion Sims (1813–1883), born in South Carolina, received his Doctor of Medicine degree from Jefferson Medical College in 1835. His pioneering contributions significantly advanced modern gynecological surgery, establishing him as one of the foremost surgeons in America. After relocating to Alabama to practice medicine, Sims initially faced personal health challenges and uncertainties regarding his professional competencies. Nevertheless, following a series of successful surgical interventions, he developed a substantial patient base, as exemplified by his seminal 1852 article on the treatment of vesicovaginal fistulas. Despite encountering numerous challenges and a series of unsuccessful efforts since 1845, Sims ultimately succeeded in this procedure by employing silver sutures, utilizing the knee-chest position to facilitate surgical access, and designing a specialized vaginal speculum. Disheartened by his experiences in the South, Sims moved to New York City in 1853. Within two years, he secured support from various benefactors to establish a women's hospital in the region. At this institution, he collaborated with distinguished colleagues such as Edmund Peaslee (1814–1878), Thomas Addis Emmet (1828–1919), and Theodore Gilmar Thoma (1831–1903), which led to significant advancements in gynecological surgery. These developments were documented in his dissertation "Silver Sutures in Surgery" (1858) and in an article detailing a refined technique for cervical amputation (1861).

In the wake of the Civil War, Sims, disillusioned by the political unrest, departed from the United States and received a warm welcome in Europe, particularly in London and Paris. He became the first American surgeon to achieve genuine international recognition, receiving invitations to perform surgeries and provide consultations across the continent. While in Europe, Sims made significant contributions to medical literature, authoring pivotal papers such as one on vaginismus (1862) and his seminal work, "Clinical Notes on Uterine Surgery" (1866). After the Civil War ended, he returned to New York; however, due to his prolonged absence and difficulties managing the women's hospital, he encountered challenges in regaining his former prominence and reputation.

With the onset of the Franco-Prussian War, Dr. J. Marion Sims traveled to Europe to organize the Anglo-American Ambulance Corps, where he served as chief surgeon. From that time until his death, Dr. Sims divided his time between America and Europe, continuing his clinical practice and surgical contributions in each location he inhabited. In 1876, he had the honor of serving as president of the American Medical Association, and in 1880, he became president of the American Gynecological Society. While in Paris, he performed his final significant surgical procedure, an unsuccessful cholecystectomy in 1878. Dr. Sims is particularly remembered for his innovative positioning techniques that facilitated vaginal examinations, as well as for developing a type of vaginal speculum that enhanced surgical access.

Dr. James Wood (1813-1882) began his medical career as a student of Dr. David Rogers (1799-1877), a somewhat obscure yet pioneering surgeon from New York, credited with performing the first excision of the superior maxillary bone in 1824 and author of "Surgical Essays and Cases in Surgery" (1849). Dr. Wood received his medical degree from Castleton Medical College in Vermont in 1834. He subsequently practiced privately in New York City and was elected to the medical staff of Bellevue Hospital in 1847. In 1861, he played a pivotal role in the establishment of the Bellevue Hospital Medical College, where he became the inaugural professor of practical surgery and surgical pathology. A prolific writer, Dr. Wood's notable contributions include significant papers on phosphorus poisoning (1856) and a report on the ligation of the carotid artery (1859), which are considered among his most impactful works.

Dr. Louis Bauer (1814-1898), originally from Prussia, immigrated to the United States in 1853. The following year, he established the Brooklyn Orthopedic Institute, the first facility in the New York area dedicated exclusively to orthopedic surgery. Dr. Bauer played an instrumental role in founding a clinic and hospital for the German community, which eventually developed into the medical school and hospital of Long Island College. His major publications include "Lectures on

Orthopedic Surgery” (1864) and “Lectures on Cases, Pathology, and Treatment of Joint Diseases” (1868), both demonstrating his expertise in the field.

Dr. Edmund Peaslee (1814-1878) remains a largely unrecognized figure in the history of American surgery. A graduate of Yale Medical School in 1840, he furthered his studies in Europe and, in 1843, accepted an appointment as an instructor, later rising to the position of professor of anatomy and surgery at Bowdoin Medical College in Maine. In 1858, Dr. Peaslee relocated to New York City, where he spent the remainder of his professional career. He collaborated with Dr. Sims at the Women’s Hospital and held the prestigious chair of gynecology at the College of Physicians and Surgeons. As the head of one of the largest clinics in the nation, Dr. Peaslee focused on ovarian diseases and pathologies, authoring the influential work “Ovarian Tumors: Their Pathology, Diagnosis, and Treatment, Especially by Ovariectomy” (1872).

Dr. Henry Jacob Bigelow (1818-1890), born in Boston, received his medical degree from Harvard University in 1841. He spent three years in Europe, primarily studying in Paris, before returning to Boston in 1845 to serve as a lecturer in surgery at Tremont Street Medical School. The following year, he was appointed surgeon at Massachusetts General Hospital. In 1849, he was promoted to professor of surgery and clinical surgery at Harvard Medical School.

Dr. Bigelow played a pivotal role in advancing medical practice in America, particularly in orthopedic surgery. In 1845, he published the first comprehensive treatise on orthopedic surgery in the United States, entitled “Manual of Orthopedic Surgery.” By 1852, he made history as the first American surgeon to successfully amputate the head of the femur. His seminal work, “The Mechanism of Dislocation and Fracture of the Hip with the Reduction of the Dislocation by the Flexion Method” (1869), provided significant insights into the structure and function of the Y ligament (iliofemoral ligament) of the acetabulum, thereby enhancing the understanding of the pathology associated with hip dislocation. In a landmark article published in 1875, Dr. Henry Jacob Bigelow provided a detailed characterization of the calcar femorale, a critical bony projection located beneath the neck of the femur, specifically anterior and superior to the lesser trochanter. This anatomical structure serves an essential function in maintaining the structural integrity of the femoral region. Furthermore, Dr. Bigelow was the first to offer a comprehensive understanding of ether anesthesia in 1846, presenting his findings on the anesthetic effects of inhaled ether during surgical procedures. The following year, he published a series of papers exploring the discovery of both ether and chloroform, as well as their physiological implications. Among his significant contributions to lithotripsy—a technique used to fragment bladder stones—was the invention and development of large-caliber drainage tubes designed to effectively evacuate fragmented stone debris during surgery. These groundbreaking innovations considerably advanced American surgery by 1878.

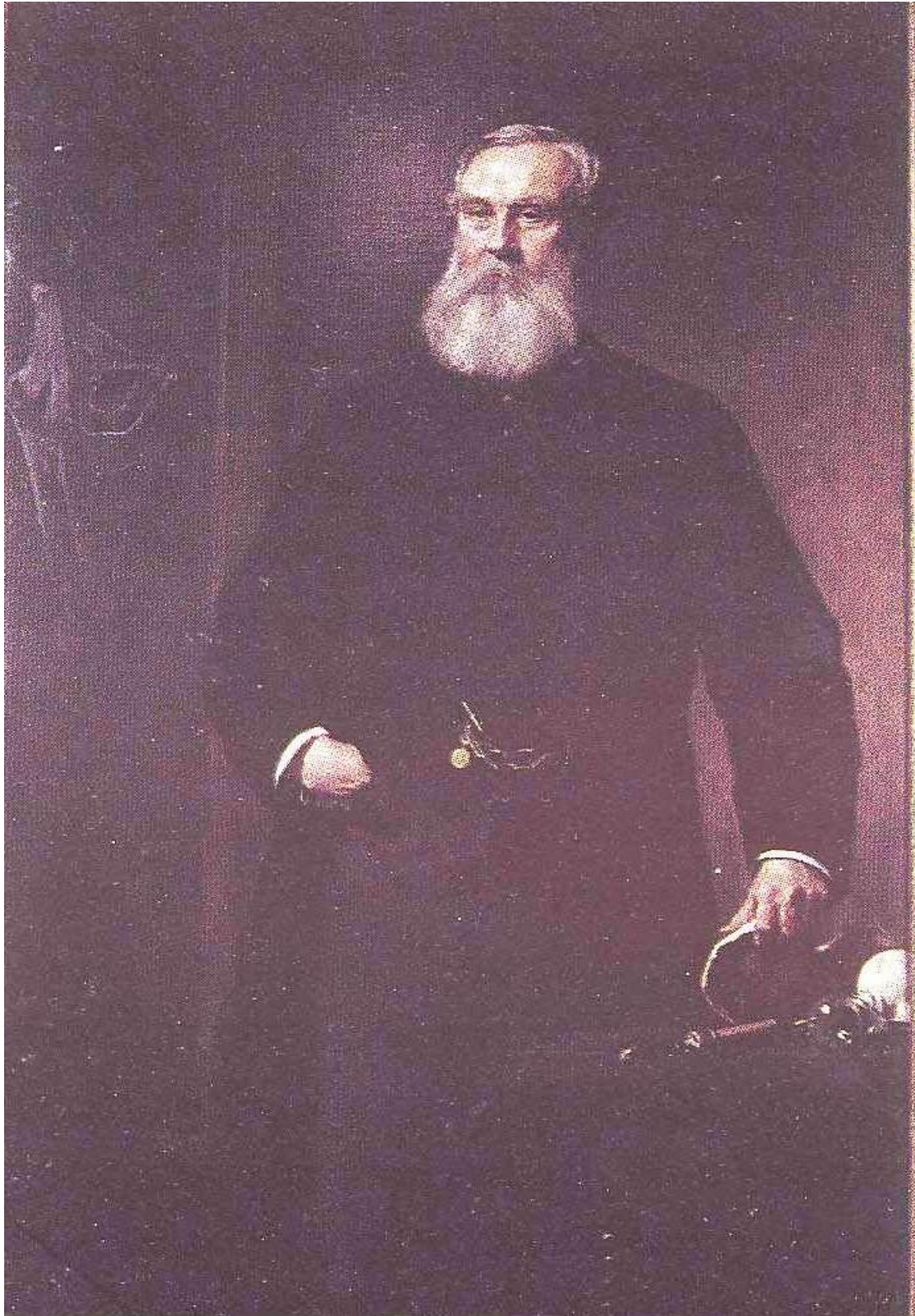


Figure 3- Henry Jacob Bigelow (Boston Medical Library)

Dr. Henry Smith (1815-1890) received his medical degree from the University of Pennsylvania in 1837 prior to furthering his education in London and Paris. As the son-in-law of the esteemed William Horner, he eventually succeeded William Gibson as a professor of surgery at his alma mater in 1855. Dr. Smith's prolific contributions to medical literature include several influential texts, among them: "Minor Surgery" (1843), "Anatomical Atlas" (1844), "A System of Operative Surgery: Based upon the Practice of Surgeons in the United States" (1852), "Syllabus of the Lectures on the Principles and Practice of Surgery" (1855), "A Treatise on the Practice of Surgery" (1856), and the two-volume work titled "The Principles and Practice of Surgery, Embracing Minor and Operative Surgery" (1863). The latter work is particularly significant in the annals of American surgery, as it not only chronicles the evolution of surgical practices in the United States but also provides a comprehensive bibliography of published works on surgery from 1783 to 1860.

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