

*Biographical sketch of John Frissell*  
*M.D.*

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

OF

JOHN FRISSELL, M.D.,

OF

WHEELING, W. VA.

ADVANCE SHEETS FROM

“PROMINENT MEN OF WEST VIRGINIA.”

A BOOK NOW IN PRESS.



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DAILY INTELLIGENCER STEAM BOOK AND JOB PRESS.

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## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH.

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**D**R. JOHN FRISSELL was born in Peru, Berkshire county, Mass. (the home of the Fields', the Hopkins' and the Bryant's), March 8, 1810. He was the son of Amasa Frissell, a farmer of Scotch descent; his mother was of English parentage, named Wilcox. They secured good education to their six children, four sons and two daughters. The eldest of the sons was a farmer, and the other three received collegiate educations, and represent the professions as follows: one as a lawyer and judge; another in medicine and the other in theology. The eldest of the two daughters was a missionary to the Choctaw Indians, located in Mayhew, a small Indian village, and a missionary station in the Northeastern part of the State of Mississippi; the other daughter was married and lived in New York City. The subject of this sketch in his youth worked on the farm with his father, attending the common school in the winter, from whence he was advanced to the Academy in Old Hadley. He entered Williams' College in the fall of 1827, and graduated A.B. in 1831. He commenced the study of medicine in the fall of 1831 with Dr. Ebenezer Emmons, of Williamstown, whose assistant he had been in the chemical laboratory of Williams' College for two years. In the fall of 1832 he attended lectures at Berkshire Medical College in Pittsfield.

At the invitation of Prof. Willard Parker he accompanied him to Woodstock, Vermont, in the spring of 1833, where he became demonstrator of Anatomy. He filled the same position for Prof. Parker in the Berkshire Medical School the next fall; at that period it was the duty of the demonstrator to perform the dissections for the professor and afterwards to recapitulate to the class the Professor's lecture, and to carefully superintend and instruct all those making dissections. Having continued demonstrator through the year 1834, and attended lectures, he graduated M.D. from the Berkshire College at the close of that term. In the fall of this year he received the degree of A.M. from Williams' College. He remained in Pittsfield hearing recitations and instructing students in anatomy, materia medica,

etc., during the spring and summer. In the fall and winter of 1835 he demonstrated his fourth and last course of lectures.

Dr. Frissell removed to Wheeling, Virginia, where he arrived on the 3d of June, 1836. At first practice came to him rather slowly, but he occupied his spare time profitably, in giving occasional lectures on temperance, phrenology, and physiology, in teaching botany, and lecturing on that subject in the schools of Wheeling, and rambling with classes over the hills and through the country seeking flowers and specimens with which to illustrate his lectures. He also indulged his taste for the geological and mineralogical sciences, by studying the rocks and minerals to be found in the vicinity of Wheeling, with Drs. A. S. Todd, Townsend, and others interested in these subjects. He likewise filled the position of teacher and leader of the choir of the First Presbyterian Church for fifteen years or more. But in a few years all his time was required to perform the labor of his increasing professional engagements.

He has been physician to the Convent of the Sisters of the Visitation, and the school for young ladies at Mount de Chantal, and to St. Vincent's College. He was the first surgeon in Western Virginia to avail himself of chloroform in capital operations, and although using it in thousands of cases, no untoward accident has ever occurred in his practice. He first used it in November, 1853, in an arm amputation. In a commercial and manufacturing city, such as Wheeling, laborers and mechanics are exposed to numerous accidents, so that the surgical practice is large compared with the ordinary sickness of the population. Dr. Frissell was therefore early called upon to take a prominent part in such operations, which his exact knowledge of anatomy enabled him to perform with skill and success, he early became known as one of the best surgeons and most eminent physicians in Western Virginia. In 1838 he performed his first operation for hare-lip and deformed upper jaw, and in the following year he operated on club-foot by division of tendons, and shortly after Dr. George McClellan, of Philadelphia, had performed his first operation for the same deformity, by the same method. In 1841 he commenced operating for strabismus, and has since performed repeatedly nearly all the different operations on the eye, including the extirpation of the organ, both by enucleation, or by removing with the eye a part of the tissues of the orbit. He performed in 1846 his first operation for stone in the bladder, and in 1856 his first successful operation for vesico vaginal fistula. He has operated with success for staphyloraphy, and



frequently for pariphymosis and phymosis, and phymosis with adherent prepuce; not to mention his numerous operations in plastic surgery, one of which he performed in 1871 in a case wherein the chin and sternum were held nearly in contact, ranks among the most extensive and successful of the class on record. He is a member of the Ohio County Medical Society and of the State Medical Society of West Virginia, of which he was the first president, and of the American Medical Association. He is an honorary member of the Medical Society of California, and was member of the International Medical Congress of 1876. Although not much addicted to writing, his cases and operations have furnished abundant themes for valuable medical articles, insomuch that his papers dealing with the fruits of his every-day practice are too numerous to be given here even by their titles: they may be read, however, in the transactions of the West Virginia State Medical Society.

Soon after the beginning of the civil war he was appointed by Governor Pierpoint, Medical Superintendent of the military prisoners and sick soldiers of Wheeling, and was continued by the Surgeon-General of the United States at the same post as Assistant Surgeon to the close of the war. He also served as a member of the State Board of Examiners for Surgeons entering the Army during the war. For more than a third of a century he filled the position of surgeon to the marine patients at Wheeling.

Dr. Frissell since he has been in Wheeling has been connected with three institutions, organized for the benefit of the sick and afflicted; first, the Wheeling Dispensary, which was established about 1845, was conducted during the year or two of its existence, by four of the city physicians—Drs. Todd, Bates, Hildreth and Frissell. Their office and dispensary room was on the north-east corner of Twelfth and Chapline streets, where one of the four physicians would be present at a certain hour each day to prescribe for patients who might call for advice and medicine; second, the Infirmary was started by Drs. Frissell and Hullihen, in November, 1845, for the purpose of accommodating private patients. The Infirmary was entirely under their control, as they alone were the only physicians who had the right to either send or attend patients there. The first patient of the Infirmary was a young man, a patient of Dr. Frissell's, with fever, who was sent to Mrs. Barnes', then living on the alley west of where the Linsly Institute now stands. She nursed and took care of that patient so much to the satisfaction of Drs. Frissell and Hullihen

that they afterwards sent all proper patients to her; in a short time she moved to the Updegraff house near the creek on Market street, which would accommodate some ten or twelve patients, but the owners after a time wished to sell the premises and she moved to the Thompson property on Sixteenth street. Bishop Whelan understanding that more room was needed for patients, had the Wheeling Hospital chartered in March, 1850, and opened it on a small scale in the Metcalf house on Fifteenth street, and placed it in charge of the Sisters of St. Joseph, with Drs. Frissell and Hullihen as surgeons, through whose permission only applicants were admitted. The Bishop, still anxious to increase the hospital facilities, purchased the Michael Sweeney house and lot in North Wheeling, added largely to both ends and raised the whole building one story, and fitted it with accommodations for one hundred and fifty patients when closely filled, which was amply sufficient for all applications at that time. The patients then presenting themselves were sent to the new Wheeling Hospital, and the patients in the Infirmary and Metcalf house were transferred in a short time to the new hospital. The sick seamen were also taken in, where all were well attended and cared for by the Sisters. The Institution was under the charge of a Board of Directors, of which Bishop Whelan was the head, and everything moved on smoothly. The hospital accommodations were plain, and though at the present day would not be considered modern in its appointments, yet at that time the institution was considered the best in this region of country. It was with many regrets that Drs. Frissell and Hullihen gave up Mrs. Barnes, who had served them so faithfully for ten years. Dr. Hullihen died on the 27th of March, 1857. Bishop Whelan, with the approval of the Board of Directors, appointed Dr. Frissell surgeon and physician of the Wheeling Hospital and gave him the whole professional charge of the institution, and that appointment has never been changed.

During the first two years of its existence, Drs. Frissell and Hullihen alone exercised the sole prerogative as to admission of patients, etc., but subsequently this privilege was extended to all other regular practicing physicians.

From the commencement of the Infirmary in 1845, to the present time, about 45 years, Dr. Frissell has had the main charge of the hospital institutions of the City of Wheeling, and full charge since the death of Dr. Hullihen. Since the hospital has been completed it has fully supplied the wants of West Virginia, Western Pennsylvania and Eastern Ohio, for regular

hospital patients. Bishop Kain has made some valuable improvements, but another building is desired, with sundry improvements, to make it what it should be at the present time, as a great amount of sickness and accidents occur on account of the large number employed on bridges, tunnels and railroads, that are being constructed in and about the city at this time, and if all applicants were taken into a hospital who would like to be fed and taken care of, a building of almost any size might be kept well filled. For some years Dr. Frissell has left most of the hospital work to his son, Dr. Charles M. Frissell.

Dr. Frissell has operated many times by the lateral operation in Wheeling and surrounding country for stone in the bladder, and always with success, never having lost a patient, or had any bad results from inflammation or blood poison, using most of the time only the old antiseptics, pure water, perfect cleanliness, and good care. Of late years he has occasionally used the carbolic acid bi-chloride solutions in operations, but with no better success. The youngest of the patients operated on for stone was two years of age, the oldest was 72 years, who now keeps in Mt. Pleasant, Ohio, a candy and toy shop and is as lively as a bee. Dr. Frissell has often operated in the same way in the city and through the country for strangulated hernia, and with the same results, except when there was mortification of the bowels and the intestine could not be saved.

Two fine-looking ladies called on Dr. Frissell at separate times and from different States for examination and advice. The ladies appeared to be in good health, and every way perfect except that they had no vulva, no vagina, no uterus, and no ovaries that could be discovered. The first lady was not married and took the doctor's advice, which was to remain as the Lord had made her. The second lady, who was married, received the same advice, but in about two months she returned with her husband, determined to have some operation performed that would relieve her from her malformation, for she had become disgusted with her condition. She was sent to the hospital and soon Dr. Frissell, with two other physicians, called to examine her and perform some operation, if thought best, to please the lady and her husband. It was decided to operate, and a very respectable vulva and vagina were formed. The vagina was formed by separating the thick layer of cellular tissue between the rectum and the bladder. The lady bore the operation without chloroform and without a murmur. She was carefully attended at the hospital for over two weeks, and was furnished

with two glass dilators of different sizes such as used by Sims and Thomas. She expressed herself as well satisfied with the operation and promised to return if everything did not prove satisfactory. Dr. Frissell has not seen her since or heard from her.

Dr. Frissell has removed many uterine polypi and fibroids of various sizes and shapes, but three were remarkable in their character. One was about six inches in length and two inches in diameter or thickness, attached to mouth and neck of the uterus, and surrounding the mucous membrane of the vagina, filling the whole of the vagina and projecting a short distance at the vulva. The tumor was removed by three sections, at three different operations. The two other tumors were more like the head of a child and filled the whole vagina and lower part of the pelvis, and required to be pushed up for water or bowel discharges to pass. Large sections of the tumors were required to be cut out to diminish their size so they could be removed by the ligature or ecrasure. There was no return of the disease after those tumors were removed and their pedicels or attachments properly taken care of. Cancer is frequently a sequel of such diseases. Many persons prefer going to the larger cities for operations of this kind, being led thither by the glaring cure-all advertisements of some third-class physicians who are always on the lookout for such cases, when in the majority of instances they could be more successfully and comfortably treated at home.

Notwithstanding the success he has achieved in the medical world, Dr. Frissell is of a very modest and retiring nature. He is naturally of a pleasant and jovial disposition, which, together with his well-earned reputation as the leading surgeon of the State, makes him greatly beloved by a large circle of friends and acquaintances. He was married on the third of December, 1850, to Elizabeth Ann, daughter of Col. John Thompson, of Moundsville, W. Va. They have two sons living—the eldest a physician and surgeon, a graduate of the College of Physicians and Surgeons, of New York City, occupies his father's position, while the youngest is a scientist, and is the chief chemist in the Wheeling steel plant at Benwood.



