

# MASTER SURGEONS OF AMERICA

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JOHN McLOUGHLIN

"FATHER OF OREGON"

**S**URVEYING the surgical field in America exhibits a striking picture that best reveals the history of the surgical forces that have played an important, if not controlling, part in the development of American nations.

The history of surgery in the northwest is forever linked with the growth and progress of the west. The surgeon accompanied the fur traders and were among the first to enter this vast unknown region. They witnessed the transformation of our American deserts and forests and Canadian prairies into healthful and flourishing commonwealths.

There are few chapters in the history of surgery more interesting than those which record the pioneer work done by the surgeons of all parts of America, and none more fascinating than the niche made by Dr. John McLoughlin, one of the unique characters of our great northwest.

John McLoughlin was born October 19, 1784, in Canada, about one hundred and twenty miles below Quebec. His father was John McLoughlin, a native of Ireland, who was accidently drowned, leaving seven children. John and David were the only boys. Their only maternal uncle was Samuel Fraser, M.D., who was doubtless a factor in both boys becoming interested in medicine. David loved the sea and after graduation joined the British Navy. John was educated in Canada and Scotland. He loved the woods, rivers, and rolling prairies. It was doubtless the same spirit that lured Dr. Wilfred Grenfell to a life of sacrifice in far-off Labrador. It was the same spirit that prompted Dr. William Beaumont to buy and borrow his patient, St. Martin, and travel from country to country in the interest of pure science.

Dr. McLoughlin had an impressive personality, physically perfect, his very presence blending to an atmosphere of culture, a well shaped head and face, a mouth, the mark of indomitable courage, lips that softened and whispered words of encouragement to the sick and needy. However, we are told that at Fort Vancouver, Dr. John McLoughlin lived and ruled in a manner befitting the chief of the western empire, but always with a graciousness and courtesy becoming a man of his profession and representative of the Hudson Bay Company.



He was brave and fearless and was absolute master of himself and those under him. He put a stop to the sale of liquor to the Indians. There were no Indian wars in the Oregon country during the entire period of McLoughlin's administration from 1824 to 1846. Dr. McLoughlin founded the first hospital of the great northwest. He provided food and shelter and gave surgical attention to thousands of sick and helpless. His benevolent work in this hospital was confined to no church, sect, or race of men but was as broad as suffering humanity. In one corner was a patient, a trapper, who had lived close to nature for years, hunting and fur trapping among the mountains, valleys, and streams. Recently, while on duty as a trapper and also as a soldier, protecting the settlers and immigrants from the savages, he had been wounded. His wounds were dressed and he was resting comfortably in the shed, slab covered hospital of the wilderness. In another corner was an Indian mother and by her side, her little child, the only survivors of a once populous Indian village. The recent epidemic of influenza, that brought sorrow and suffering to nearly every home, can be compared to the epidemic of 1829, according to Snowden, which, supposed to be the ague, broke out among the Indians along the Columbia and for three or four succeeding years, raged with peculiar virulence. It is reported to have been more fatal among the tribes than even the smallpox had been. During the first summer after the disease, in some of the villages there were not enough living left to bury the dead. Those already afflicted fled to the sea coast, abandoning the dead and dying to the birds and beasts of prey, some of the villages being entirely deserted. Canoes were drawn up on the shore, fishing nets were abandoned where they had been left, spread upon the trees to dry and all the houses were left tenantless. The dogs were left, but no other living thing gave evidence that the place had been inhabited. Here among the poor, the injured and afflicted with pestilence, worked John McLoughlin.

His diagnostic and surgical ability were eclipsed only by his ability as a statesman. When the bar sinister of propaganda caused discontent among the fur trading companies and disputes arose relative to the boundary line between Great Britain and the United States and war seemed inevitable, it was then that Dr. McLoughlin put out the smouldering flames of hatred, and peace was happily restored.

It was by common consent that he was the first governor of the North Pacific Coast. He endeared himself to the Indian and was always considerate of the red man's feelings and rights. He never forgot that, though the skin of the savage happened to have a tinge of copper, this did not pigment the soul. By example, patience, and kindness, he taught, above all, that he was a gentleman in whose heart was knightliness and honor.

However, as one reviews this romantic life of service and sacrifice, and gets a more vivid exhibit of the facts, it is apparent that he had his share of sorrow which



is one of the critical tests of life. It was Robertson who said, "Sorrow is not an accident occurring now and then. It is the woof which is woven into the warp of life and he who has not discerned the divine sacredness of sorrow and the profound meaning which is concealed in pain, has yet to learn what life is."

The Oregon Donation Land Law took away his land claim and left him in poverty, and he died, grief stricken, of a broken heart. Five years after he was laid in his grave an act of tardy justice was done at last to the memory of this man who went down in sorrow to his grave.

It is but a brief span of years since this intellectual giant of his time, who now sleeps where rolls the Oregon, left us with a surgical and professional heritage to which we should aspire. And what honors can we do him? We might profit by the example of the great state of Oregon, which restored the name of Mt. McLoughlin to one of its most sublime snow-capped mountains in the southern part of the state. Today we enroll him among America's greatest surgeons.

What Archbishop Ireland said of the church in the northwest might well be said of Dr. McLoughlin: "Behold the stately pine, solitary in its towering height. Its fellows that once with it beautified the forest have fallen one by one around it that the trees of later germination may measure from it to what growth they themselves should aspire."

The example given us by this pioneer surgeon, statesman, and benefactor, who was always producing something for the benefit of others, handicapped as he was by place and conditions of his time, is an inspiration to the medical student, to the young surgeon, and to ourselves. Let us keep close to the trail, lest we get lost in this modern age of commercialism and lose the scientific spirit, upon which our work depends.

Oh, great hearted fur trader, explorer, surgeon, statesman, and Father of Oregon! The immigrants and the Indians who had learned to love and trust their great white faced master, as he was known among them,—in fact the whole little nation along the Columbia wept when he died and felt that their little world was more lonesome when John McLoughlin went on his last call.

JOHN B. McNERTHNEY.