CROWNED IN HONOR

The Life of Richard Dennis Arnold, M. D.

Linda Lee Barker
History 300
March 1, 1983

From: The Savannah Biographies, v. II.
Minis Collection, Lake Library, Armstrong
Atlantic State University, 31419-1997.
CROWNED IN HONOR

The Life of Richard Dennis Arnold, M. D.

"Crowned in life
with every honor
his fellow citizens could bestow
they erect this tribute to his memory." (1)

So reads the inscription on the monument dedicated to the memory of Richard Dennis Arnold, M. D. by the citizens of the city of Savannah, following his death on July 10, 1876. Dr. Arnold was a prominent figure in Savannah during his lifetime. Not only was he engaged in the practice of medicine, he was also involved in state and local politics. He was well-known in medical circles both in the North and the South for his studies on tropical fevers, especially yellow fever. Dr. Arnold was a dedicated man; to his family, to his profession and to the citizens of Savannah.
Richard Dennis Arnold was born August 19, 1808, in Savannah, Georgia, the third child of Joseph Arnold of Providence, Rhode Island, and Elizabeth (Eliza) Dennis of New Brunswick, New Jersey.(2) Joseph Arnold was a sailing captain prior to his move to Savannah (exact date unknown). Apparently he and Eliza lived in Providence for a time following their marriage, because they brought all their furniture with them, including the four-poster bed in which the three Arnold children were born.(3) The first Arnold child was a still-born infant of unknown sex, born August 31, 1804;(4) the second was a son, Joseph born in or around 1806(exact date unknown); the third child was Richard Dennis Arnold, born August 19, 1808. On August 28, just nine days following the birth of his second son, Joseph Arnold died of a fever at the age of 37.(5)

The family was evidently left well-provided for. Eliza Arnold retained possession of the family home, which was located at the northwest corner of State and Abercorn (Anson Ward, Lot No. 6). Little is known of the early years, except that the Arnold boys were brought up by private tutors.(6) Also, a sometime during the year 1816, Eliza Arnold took her sons to New York City, to visit relatives.(7)

Eliza, already in poor health from consumption (tuberculosis, took a turn for the worse, following her return from New York City. Early in 1818, realizing that
death was near, she made out her will. She provided for the sale of the slaves, certain items of household furniture and other property, with the money to be held at interest. This money was to be used to educate her children. Her only request was that they be "educated in the Northern States." (8) She made no provision whatsoever for guardianship. Eliza Dennis Arnold died September 7, 1818. It is not known at this time who cared for Joseph and Richard in the years following their mother's death. We can be fairly certain, however, that it was not Eliza's brother, Richard Dennis. In a letter written to the Court of the Ordinary early in 1819, (exact date unknown at this time) he implied that caring for the Arnold boys would place an excessive burden on his household. (9) In all probabilities, Joseph and Richard were most likely to have been taken in by their mother's cousin Jane Young Wilson. In a letter written to Richard October 4, 1829, she referred to him on several occasions as "my dear son" and "my boy." (10)

That Richard remained in Savannah, for at least a short time following his mother's death, is evidenced by an article in the Columbian Museum and Savannah Daily Gazette of May 3, 1819, in which he received honorable mention for excellence in his schoolwork. (11) It is believed, however, that the next school year, Richard was sent to a boarding school located near Amherst, New Jersey, where he remained until he entered the College of New Jersey (Princeton).
Richard graduated from the College of New Jersey in 1826, and entered the Medical College of the University of Pennsylvania at Philadelphia in the fall of that year. In 1828, both Richard and Joseph became seriously ill. Joseph died in Savannah on November 28, 1828. The cause of death was listed as consumption. The exact cause of Richard's illness is not known, but he was apparently on the verge of death. He seemed to have recovered very nicely, and following his graduation from the Medical College in 1830, he took the "Grand Tour" of Europe.

Upon completion of his European tour, he returned to the family home and set up his practice of medicine. In October of 1830, an outbreak of smallpox appeared in the city. Dr. Arnold was appointed public vaccinator, and within three months had vaccinated 624 persons against the dreaded disease.

In 1831, he began his political career, which lasted until his death in 1876. He served four terms as city alderman, and five terms as mayor.

Early in 1832, Dr. Arnold met and fell in love with eighteen-year old Margaret Baugh Stirke, the daughter of John W. Stirke and Eleanor Baugh. There are several references made to Margaret in his diary without mentioning her name. On August 13, 1832, he wrote "...were I to...analyze my thoughts toward her, I...should feel...puzzled. I am convinced of one thing. I love her." Later entries
reflect upon her beauty, his unworthiness to be considered as a serious suitor, and his fear of rejection should he propose to her. Finally, he could stand it no longer. On the evening of December 28, 1832, Dr. Arnold asked Margaret to walk with him among the trees. He began talking to her first about his feelings in general, then started working towards his proposal. She was evidently receiving his message, because, as they walked, she began leaning on him until "...she was a dead weight in my arms...."(18) To his great surprise, Margaret immediately accepted his proposal. Richard Dennis Arnold was married to Margaret Baugh Stirk on May 9, 1833, by Edward Neufville, Rector of Christ Church.(19) In his diary entry for that day, Dr. Arnold expressed his deep love for his bride, and the belief that he had chosen the right "Life Partner."(20) In fact, every reference made to Margaret in his diary reflected his great love for her.

A most important event in Dr. Arnold's life occurred eleven months later, on April 10, 1834, an event which was heralded by "...a feeble wail...", that of his one and only child, Eleanor Noel Arnold. In his diary that day, he wrote, "My first feelings were those of joy...."(21) The entry was rather long and contained reflections on his marriage, his love for Margaret, and relief that she had come through her ordeal safely.
In 1832, Dr. Arnold acquired half-ownership of a Savannah newspaper, The Georgian. He and his partner, William H. Bulloch, were joint editors and proprietors until 1835 when Mr. Bulloch bought out Dr. Arnold's interest. Early in Dr. Arnold's career as a newspaper editor, he became indirectly involved in a duel between James Jones Stark and his (Dr. Arnold's) best friend Dr. Philip Minis. Previously, Mr. Stark had issued some anti-Semitic statements against Dr. Minis which could not go unchallenged. It appears that Dr. Minis was less than enthusiastic about the duel and sent his second to call it off. Mr. Stark apparently refused and went looking for Dr. Minis, whereupon Dr. Minis shot and killed Mr. Stark.(22) Dr. Arnold kept a daily journal of the events leading up to and following the death of Mr. Stark, as they pertained to his friend.

In 1835, Dr. Arnold was appointed as one of the physicians of the Savannah poorhouse and hospital. Because of his dedicated service, he was reappointed annually for over twenty years.(23) In 1850, he received additional commendation for his service. He was presented with a rather odd looking object about four feet tall, which appears to be a combination between a candelabra and a compote. There is no reference found to it at this time. It is believed, however, that Dr. Arnold referred to it as an "apron."(24)
There is a silver plaque located at the base of the object which reads:

Presented by the managers
of the Savannah Hospital
to Richard D. Arnold, M. D., Esq.
in testimony of their grateful
sense of the patient fidelity
and skill with which he gratuitously
served the institution
as physician during an uninterrupted
period of fifteen years
MDCCCL

"I was sick and ye visited me." Matthew 6:25 (25)

On May 24, 1839, the Georgia Historical Society was founded. Those instrumental in obtaining the charter were Dr. Richard D. Arnold, Dr. William Bacon Stevens, Israel K. Tefft, A. A. Smets, and William Thorne Williams. (26)

On September 12, 1842, Dr. Arnold was elected by the Board of Aldermen to serve as mayor of the city. In March of 1843, the City Council requested that Mayor Arnold ask the United States government for a scientific officer who could survey the Savannah River from its northernmost channel between Hutchinson and Argyle Islands to Tybee Bar, and suggest improvements to allow greater access to the city. (27)
Dr. Arnold's first term as mayor ended September 11, 1843. In December of 1843, an act passed by the state legislature authorized popular elections of the mayor with elections to take place the first Monday in December.(28)

In 1846, the American Medical Association was formed. Dr. Arnold was one of the charter members and was selected to participate in the drafting of its code of ethics. He was elected to the office of vice-president in 1851.(29)

On April 21, 1850, Dr. Arnold's beloved wife Margaret died of complications from tuberculosis, a loss from which he never recovered.

Following Margaret's death, Dr. Arnold became more seriously involved with his work. He helped to organize the Savannah Medical College that year and served as professor of theory and practice of medicine.(30) The next year, on December 8, 1851, he was elected to his second term as mayor.

In October, 1859, Dr. Arnold was elected to his third term as mayor. That same month, he was charged by the city council to reorganize the police department. He appointed 41 privates and 5 sentinels in February of 1860, and eleven more in March. On June 21, 1860, Lyle Goodwin was elected as the first police chief of the new department.(31)
Dr. Arnold was elected mayor again in October of 1863, during the height of the Civil War. The city had been cut off from major supply sources, inflation had driven prices of staples sky-high and Confederate troops were confiscating available supplies for their own use. During this fourth term, he appropriated $30,500.00 to provide food for the orphans of the city, and borrowed $5,000.00 at seven per-cent interest (to be paid back after the war) in order to supply food to the people in the city. (32) In a letter to General Beauregard, written in January, 1864, Mayor Arnold wrote, "For a week, hardly a house in Savannah had a supply of grits, that article having risen as high as $16 a bushel." (33) General Beauregard evidently had not realized the seriousness of the food shortage, for in a letter to Mayor Arnold dated January 24, 1864, he wrote, "Any corn purchased in the vicinity of...the Savannah River...will not be disturbed in transit to Savannah..." (34)

Dr. Arnold served his fifth and final term as mayor from 1864-1865, during which he turned the city over to General Sherman. On December 19, 1864, Mayor Arnold was notified that Sherman's troops were advancing upon the city and that the Confederate troops were pulling out. On December 21, Brigadier-General John W. Geary of the United States Army entered the city. In a resolution formulated by Mayor Arnold and the aldermen, and voted upon by the citizens, the City of
Savannah agreed to submit to "national authority under the Constitution." (36) Richard Arnold was harshly criticized for giving up the city so easily, but in doing so probably saved it from destruction.

General Sherman entered the city on December 30, and turned over all provisions captured from the Confederacy to Mayor Arnold to feed the people. (37)

In May of 1865, the military commander in Savannah opened the public schools. The first Board of Education was set up to administer these schools. The charter members of this first board were Richard D. Arnold M. D., John Stoddard, Solomon Cohen, Henry Williams, John Villalonga, John Williamson, John C. Ferrill, and Edward C. Anderson. (38)

Richard D. Arnold was elected to serve as President of the Board, a post he held from May 13, 1866 until his death on July 10, 1876. (39)
Richard Dennis Arnold died during the yellow fever epidemic of 1876. He left behind a daughter, Eleanor Noel Arnold Cosens; son-in-law, William Champion Cosens; and three grandchildren; Margaret Arnold Cosens, Richard Arnold Cosens and George Augustus Cosens. He was mourned not only by these family members, but by every citizen of this city who knew him.
AN INTERVIEW WITH LEWIS SIMONS

Lewis Simons of Charleston, South Carolina is the great-great grandson of Richard Dennis Arnold, and I stumbled upon him quite by accident. In researching Eleanor Arnold Cosens, I discovered graves for six children, four of whom died as infants. Her daughter, Margaret Arnold Cosens, never married, and her surviving son, Richard Arnold Cosens was the only grandchild mentioned in Richard Arnold's will. I discovered that Richard Cosens died in Staten Island, New York in 1900. The only newspaper accounts of his death were just that: a death and burial notice only. No survivors were given. With time running out and a deadline staring me in the face, I pulled the newspaper accounts of Margaret Cosens' death. Not only did I find that Margaret had a surviving brother, the obituary gave me a complete listing of his children and grandchildren, all of whom lived in Charleston in 1933. However, that was fifty years ago, I said to myself. Give up. You'll never find a living descendant this way. The daughters are probably married now and the son probably has moved away. But I don't give up that easily, so I called long-distance directory assistance, patiently spelling the names I wanted. Yes, there was a listing for Lewis Simons (and I do have his permission to use his name this way). The operator gave me his number and
I called him, explaining very carefully who I was and what I wanted so I wouldn't scare him off. My tenacity paid off. Not only was he the right person, he and his wife were the family historians. He did not have the information I was seeking, but I could call back on Sunday and talk to his wife, which I did.

On Sunday, I received an invitation to visit their home in Charleston, at my convenience. Being so pressed for time, I took a day from work and drove up there. I was allowed to see the memorabilia they have preserved from Dr. Arnold's home. The Simons' sleep in the same four-poster bed that Dr. Arnold was born and died in. They have the traveling surgical kit he used, daguerrotypes of Richard and Joseph Arnold as young men, various silver pieces, Dr. Arnold's strong box containing his private papers, a portrait of his daughter Eleanor, with its original souvenirs of the Yankee occupation of the Arnold house (Union soldiers bayoneted the portrait), the only known picture of the Arnold house, and the strange object I described in the body of the paper. The only reason I feel free to mention these objects is that the majority of them are safely locked up in a bank vault.

I found the Simons' to be interesting and full of valuable information, some of which I used and some of which I intend to use in continuing this research at a later date.
Georgia Historical to Receive Arnold Portrait

DR. RICHARD DENNIS ARNOLD

The portrait of Dr. Arnold, distinguished Savannahian, one of the founders of the Georgia Historical Society, was painted by Emma C. Wilkins. It will be presented to the Georgia Historical Society, through the gift of Mrs. B. F. Bullard, at the February meeting. The photograph was made by Folts.

from Savannah Morning News
Jan. 22, 1933
Dr. Arnold's Strong box, which still contains many of his private papers. (In the possession of Mr. and Mrs. Lewis Simons of Charleston, S.C.)

Dr. Arnold's traveling surgical kit, containing scalpels, probes, forceps and surgical drains.
Dr. Arnold's gravesite located at Lot 34 #F, Bonaventure Cemetery

Gravesite of Margaret Arnold
Monument erected to the memory of Dr. Arnold by the citizens of Savannah

Close-up of the inscription on the monument
FEMALE ARNOLD
Wife of
WM CHAMPION COSENS
Born
Feb 4. 1834
Died
Dec 14. 1886.

Gravesite of Eleanor Arnold - Dr. Arnold's only child. The date of birth on this tombstone is incorrect. The correct date is April 10, 1834.

Eleanor's husband, William Champion Cosens
They were married Dec. 19, 1854 at Christ Church Savannah.
FOOTNOTES

(1) Quotation from the monument erected by the citizens of Savannah, Georgia. Located in the Arnold plot, Lot 34, #F, Bonaventure Cemetery, Savannah, Georgia.


(3) Interview with Lewis and Rosalie Simons, Charleston, South Carolina, February 25, 1983.

(4) Bureau of Vital Statistics, Chatham County Health Department, Savannah, Georgia.

(5) Ibid.


(7) Letter from Eliza Dennis Arnold to John C. Noel, husband of Sarah Cutter Dennis (Eliza's sister), 1816. Owned by Lewis Simons, Charleston, S. C.

(8) Will of Eliza Arnold. Probate Court, Chatham County Courthouse, Savannah, Georgia.

(9) Ibid.

(10) Letter to Richard D. Arnold, in Philadelphia; from Jane Young Wilson, Savannah, Georgia, October 4, 1829.


(13) Bureau of Vital Statistics, Chatham County Health Department, Savannah, Georgia.

(14) Letter to Richard D. Arnold from Jane Wilson, October 4, 1829.

(15) Interview with Lewis and Rosalie Simons, February 25, 1983.

(17) Diary of Richard Arnold, August 13, 1832.
(18) Ibid., December 28, 1832.
(19) Chatham County Record of Marriage Licenses, 1805-1852.
(20) Diary of Richard Arnold, May 9, 1833.
(21) Ibid., April 10, 1834.
(22) The Georgian, August 10, 1832.
(25) Ibid.
(28) Ibid., p. 5.
(29) Jones, p. 439.
(30) Ibid., p. 439.
(32) Ibid., p. 260.
(33) Ibid., p. 261.
(34) Ibid., p. 261.
(35) Ibid., p. 262.
(37) Gamble, p. 262.
(39) Ibid., p. 3.
BIBLIOGRAPHY

Arnold, Richard D. Excerpts from diary. Original at Duke University, Durham, N. C.


Otto, Albert S. The Public School System of Savannah and Chatham County. No publisher or date given.
