
CENTENARIES

Deweese, William Potts (1768–1841)

WILLIAM POTTS DEWEEES, an American obstetrician, was born May 5, 1768, near Pottstown, founded by his maternal grandfather, Thomas Potts. After school education, he studied medicine in the University of Pennsylvania from 1787 to 1789 and became M.D. in 1806 on the basis of his thesis *An essay on the means of lessening pain and facilitating certain cases of difficult parturition*. He began private practice in 1790.

At that time obstetrics had not received attention from the profession and the majority of deliveries were in the hands of midwives. Nor was there any formal teaching in the subject. There was a strong prejudice against 'men midwives'. Indeed Laurence Sterne's picture of Dr. Slop in *Tristram Shandy* is an index of the derision to which the man midwife was subjected. In spite of it Deweese had the courage to teach the subject and practise it. Very soon he became popular and it is said that he delivered over ten thousand women.

By and by, public opinion veered round and a professorship of obstetrics was created in Pennsylvania. But a less competent rival of Deweese was preferred. This and other disappointments shattered his health and tuberculosis developed. Hence he gave up practice and took to agriculture at Phillipsburgh. Though this venture proved a failure, he regained his health and resumed practice in 1817. He was also made additional professor in 1825. After he became chief professor in 1835 and thus realised his frustrated ambition, he developed cerebral hemorrhage and had to resign his professorship.

His chief work was *A compendious system of midwifery*, which though published posthumously, went through twelve editions. He also published volumes on gynaecology and general medicine.

Deweese died at Philadelphia May 20, 1841.

Radcliffe, William (1760–1841)

WILLIAM RADCLIFFE, a British textile inventor, was born October 17, 1760, at Mellor, Derbyshire. His father being a weaver, he learnt carding, spinning and weaving at home and began business in his own village. Later in 1801 he settled at Stockport. He opposed the export of yarn to the continent on the ground that it deprived local weavers of their vocation. On this he published in 1811 a pamphlet entitled *Exportation of cotton yarns the real cause of the distress that had fallen upon the cotton trade for a series of years past*.

With the help of one of his mechanists, he invented the 'dressing machine' by which the warp could be dressed or starched before being put into the loom. This and other inventions of his resulted in the saving of much time. But the great expense he incurred in his experiments ruined him and he became bankrupt in 1807.

With the help of some friends, he again started business; but broke down again in 1815. His life was thereafter one of adversity. In 1820 he published an account of his struggles under the title *Origin of the new system of manufacture commonly called power-loom weaving, and the purposes for which this system was invented and brought into use fully explained*. Efforts were made in 1825 to secure a parliamentary grant for him on the ground that his invention "by removing the impediments to weaving by power, may be considered as the cause of rapid and increasing growth of that system of manufacturing cotton goods". They did not then bear fruit. Several firms however gave him a royalty and ultimately a small grant of £150 was made by government. But the intimation came only three days before his death, which took place May 20, 1841.

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