

MEDICAL MADMEN IN OLDE NEW YORK

(Lecture at Columbia University Medical Center. March 13, 2013)

In 2005 I was curating an exhibition about Bergen County's medical history which was to be held in the museum that's adjacent to this old house in HoHokus, NJ. As I researched the house itself, I learned that during the Revolutionary War this estate -- then and now known as "The Hermitage" -- was owned by Colonel James Prevost, a British officer who was away at sea. His wife Theodosia, who was both charming and shrewd, was afraid their home might be confiscated by the Colonials, so she offered hospitality to General Washington and his staff who were camped in nearby Paramus -- and so for four hot summer days in 1778, The Hermitage served as George Washington's headquarters.

The General's staff included the likes of James Madison, the Marquis de Lafayette and Benedict Arnold as well as two dashing young colonels -- Alexander Hamilton and Aaron Burr. Burr was recovering from lingering effects of heat exhaustion and after the army left, he stayed on at The Hermitage for some R&R -- which included flirting with his hostess. Undeterred that she was ten years older than he, plain-looking and had five children, Burr carried on a clandestine affair with Theodosia and when her husband conveniently died of war wounds, the colonel and the widow wed at The Hermitage. Afterward, they moved to Albany where Burr began his political career which culminated in 1800 when he became Thomas Jefferson's Vice President.

Now lets fast forward four more years to 1804. On the Hudson River, two rowboats approach the Palisades shore at Weehawken, roughly opposite today's 42nd Street. Their destination is a bare area below the sheer cliffs which in those days was a popular dueling site. Although dueling was illegal, New Jersey's law was more lenient than New York's, so over many

years more than 18 so-called “affairs of honor” were settled there. (slide)
This one involved the same Aaron Burr and Alexander Hamilton, the country’s vice president and its secretary of the treasury. Without dwelling on the details, let me note that Hamilton’s gun went off prematurely and at ten paces our 3rd vice president was a more accurate shot than our 46th Veep Dick Cheney – and, as I’m sure you all know, Hamilton was fatally wounded.

The reason I begin with this story is that accompanying Hamilton in the rowboat, both over and back, and crouched in the bushes during the shooting so as not to be a witness to an illegal event, was his personal physician – David Hosack. He was a 35 year old society doctor in NYC and several days later at Hamilton’s funeral at Trinity Church, he served as a pall-bearer. A few days after that he billed the former Secretary of the Treasury’s estate \$50 for professional services rendered during what he euphemistically called “the final illness.” As we’ll see, this was vintage behavior for David Hosack -- he always knew where the money was, and how to get his share.

Again, let’s fast forward – this time some two decades to 1826 – by now The Hermitage is owned by an aging country doctor by the name of Elijah Rosencrantz whose son John is beginning his studies at the new Rutgers Medical College which is located in Lower Manhattan in what is now Tribeca. (slide) In the archives of The Hermitage, I found many letters of paternal advice from the anxious father to his son who seems to have been an indifferent student. In one letter, Elijah writes: “You will not disappoint me I hope of keeping yourself and your desires of company and the pleasures of youth under restraint.” He chides his son to respect his elders and to attend church regularly, but seems to realize that all work and no play might make John a dull boy, so the old doctor reluctantly agrees to

pay for dancing lessons – so long as the school is respectable, not too expensive and no one at home will learn of it.

Another letter which I found in the Hermitage's archive especially intrigued me. In it Dr. Rosencrantz wrote, "Return my compliments to Dr. Hossack (sic), you will be very careful and respectful of all professors, but particularly to Dr. Hossack." Apparently, this was the very same Dr. Hosack as Alexander Hamilton's physician, and this made me curious, so I decided to learn what I could about this man and why he was deserving of special respect?

Let's begin by considering the state of medical affairs in New York during Colonial times and shortly thereafter. At mid 18th century the title "doctor" wasn't even being used yet. There was no provision for education outside of apprenticeship, no professional societies, no system of licensing physicians and no hospital in the entire country – (although an almshouse of six beds had opened in 1736 which later became Bellevue Hospital.) By 1776 of about 3,500 practitioners in all of the colonies, only about 400 had medical degrees; the wealthiest and best studied in Edinburgh and when they returned home, they fiercely defended their turf against untrained doctors and charlatans: but as one commentator said, "Few physicians among us are eminent for their skill. Quacks abound like locusts in Egypt."

Now let's consider some of Hosack's predecessors, particularly Samuel Bard who would become his mentor and partner. Sam's father, Dr. John Bard (1716-1789) had moved here from Philadelphia in 1746 on the advice of Benjamin Franklin. He was talented and affable and soon developed a large practice. In 1759, along with Peter Middleton, John Bard performed the first recorded dissection in the Colonies on the cadaver of an executed murderer and later the two surgeons began giving private anatomy classes. John Bard was instrumental in starting Kings College (which opened in

1756) and he also favored forming both a medical school and a teaching hospital – both of which his son would accomplish. But John Bard was a poor businessman and ran up large debts to pay for his son's education but, as we'll see, it would pay off big time.

Samuel Bard (1742-1821) entered King's College at age 14, the same year that the college opened. At the same time he apprenticed with his father and then, after two years at Kings, he sailed to Edinburgh to pursue his medical studies. Like the letter I read before from Elijah Rosencrantz to his medical student son, John Bard's letter to Sam resembled Polonius speaking to Hamlet:

I have the greatest confidence in your piety, prudence, and honour; still a severe test of all these is now approaching, since you are going to a part of the world where you will be surrounded with allurements.....Your greatest security will lie in the choice of your company....should you suffer yourself to be captivated with the idle or the gay, so far as to give into their schemes of dissipation, you cannot tell how far the powers of your mind may become enervated and by habit lose that manly firmness which is the principle guard to a generous, virtuous and innocent life...

Nothing was said about dance lessons. On the way over, Sam's ship was captured by the French and he spent five months as a prisoner – imagine the allurements there – but Benjamin Franklin had influence and helped get him freed and eventually Sam Bard reached his destination. After five years abroad, in 1766 with diploma in hand, he returned home and spent the next three years working off his debt to his father.

Lack of a structured curriculum and of teaching hospitals was why more than a hundred young Americans went abroad, especially to Edinburgh

during the late 18th century – and to Paris early in the 19th century. In effect, idealistic men like Sam Bard and John Morgan of Philadelphia were cultural nationalists who wanted to recreate what they experienced in Edinburgh in their respective cities. They appreciated a need for a corps of young doctors trained both in scientific and ethical principles -- distinguishable from the mélange of ignorant practitioners then prevalent and, indeed, both young men did just that – Morgan in Philadelphia, Bard in New York. The professional animosity between Morgan and William Shippen in Philadelphia was as bad or even worse than here – not much brotherly love in the city which boasted of it.

During the Revolution Sam Bard was a Tory sympathizer and evacuated his wife and children to Hyde Park, their family estate in Dutchess County. For a short while they moved to Shrewsbury New Jersey on an ill-conceived venture to extract salt from marsh water. But he lost all his money and when the British recaptured NYC, he returned and resumed his practice. After the War when the newly elected President Washington settled in New York, he chose the popular young Samuel Bard to be his personal physician.

A little more than a month after Washington's inauguration, he developed a high fever which was attributed to a so-called "malignant carbuncle" on his upper thigh. Bard thought it was a cutaneous form of anthrax and feared for Washington's life. He refused to leave his patient's bedside for several days and then, assisted by his father, he performed a deep resection of the abscess. Although there was no anesthesia, reportedly Washington was "stoic and courteous." During the acute phase of the illness, the street in front of the President's home was cordoned off and carpeted with straw in order to mute sounds. The public had no idea of the gravity of the situation and in order to keep up appearances, after several weeks when Washington could be lifted into his carriage and painfully stretched out

inside, fully uniformed, he was driven around town for an hour each day to assure everyone of his vitality. His recuperation took more than three months and afterward, the Bards set a precedent by sending the country's first President a hefty bill – (that was a valuable lesson that David Hosack learned from his mentor which he would put to good use after the Hamilton affair.)

Historians disagree about whether Kings College or the College of Philadelphia was the first medical school in this country. The Medical Department of what became the University of Pennsylvania was founded in 1765 but at first it gave MB degrees; although the King's Medical College opened three years later, it was the first to confer an MD degree in 1770. Whatever -- the opening of the King's medical school in 1767 was a splendid affair, full of pomp and circumstance and of the six founding faculty members, young Sam Bard was made the Professor of Medicine. Two years later (May 16, 1769) it was he who gave the first commencement address which he called "A Discourse Upon The Duties of A Physician with Some Sentiments on the Usefulness and Necessity of a Public Hospital." It was a gem and I'd like to pause for a few moments to consider some of Dr. Bard's caveats::

This Country has ever since its Discovery and Settlement, labored under the greatest Disadvantages, from the imperfect Manner, in which Students have been instructed in the Principles of Medicine and from the Consequent prevailing Ignorance of but too many of its Professors is a Truth which cannot be contested; and of which many unhappy Families have severely felt the fatal effects.

In your Behaviour to the Sick, remember always that your Patient is the Object of the tenderest Affection, to some one, or perhaps to many about him; it is therefore your Duty, not only to endeavor to

preserve his Life, but to avoid wounding the Sensibility of a tender Parent, a distressed Wife, or an Affectionate Child.

Never buoy up a dying Man with groundless Expectations of Recovery, this is at best a good natured and humane Deception, but too often it arises from the baser Motives of Lucre and Avarice: besides, it is really cruel....

The laboring Poor are allowed to be the support of the Community; their Industry enables the Rich to live in Ease and Affluence, and it from the Hands of the Manufacturer we derive, not only the Necessities, but the Superfluities of Life; whilst the poor Pittance he earns will barely supply the Necessities of Nature....how heavy a Calamity must Sickness be to such a Man, which putting it out of his Power to work, immediately deprives him and perhaps a helpless family of Bread!.....

Do not pretend to Secrets, Panacea's and Nostrums, they are illiberal, dishonest, and inconsistent with your Characters, as Gentlemen and Physicians, and with your duty as Men...

Read the writings of the wisest among the ancients, they are filled with modesty and diffidence, why then should we ascribe to them infallibility and omniscience. They doubted the assertions and controverted the opinions of the times which preceded them; why should we not doubt and controvert theirs; and leave to posterity the liberty of controverting ours.

Dr. Bard also told the students that since they would be holding people's very lives in their hands, it was their duty to always keep learning; to do less than their best would be like being an accessory to murder. He

admonished them to always behave with integrity, candor and kindness and not to disparage other physicians. In effect, it was the first American treatise on medical ethics and although delivered 244 years ago, Samuel Bard's words seem remarkably current. Of course, timeless as the general sentiments were, the scientific basis of his teaching was flawed, based mainly on archaic humoral theories.

At a dinner the evening after his memorable graduation speech, Sam Bard worked the room with a subscription list and raised nearly 1,000 pounds from the dignitaries toward building a public hospital. He argued that it would benefit the worthy poor like had been done in Europe and it also would provide the opportunity to study the effect of locality, climate, race and occupation upon disease. But before the building was completed, a fire destroyed it in 1775 and it wasn't until 1791 that the 20 bed New York Hospital finally opened. However, applicants for the costly medical degree program at Kings were few -- when the war began, the school closed (1776) and when it reopened in 1785, naturally enough it was renamed Columbia for the female symbol of the land of Columbus.

After the War, Samuel Bard was the only medical holdover from the original faculty. Not only was he instrumental in founding both a medical school and a public hospital, he also was responsible for establishing a lying-in-hospital for indigent women; and he built an extensive medical library and also a botanical garden. Moreover, he was the first physician in this country to give clinical lectures at the bedside. Bard was the first to set up a dedicated hospital unit for the insane and by 1803 the New York Hospital's lunatic asylum had "sixty separate cells." Nevertheless, Bard considered the madmen to be patients, not prisoners -- long before Phillipe Pinel's famous work in France.

Samuel Bard became a trustee of the reopened school and then its Dean, but at age 53 he was tiring of the rigors of medical practice. So in 1795 he took in a young partner -- whom as I'll soon describe, was our protagonist, David Hosack. Three years later Bard retired from practice and moved back to Hyde Park. But he remained active in many areas -- during this period he published a textbook about midwifery and another book about breeding merino sheep. Even as he led the life of a country farmer on his estate, he remained involved with the various conflicts and mergers in the city.

In 1819, when he gave the commencement speech at P&S, a "Discourse on Medical Education," it was fifty years after his memorable first graduation talk at King's. By now he was 75 and growing feeble, but in the speech he was able to favorably compare P&S with Edinburgh, Harvard, Pennsylvania and Maryland. He remained mentally vigorous, until 1821 when he and his wife abruptly developed "pleurisy" and died on the very same day and were buried in the same grave. With the death of its universally respected elder statesman, the time of troubles between New York's warring trustees, regents, politicians and professors only worsened.

By then another New York luminary also had passed from the scene -- and, although I don't have a picture of him, I should mention him because his story and that of David Hosack were closely linked. Nicholas Romaine (1756-1817) was another of Sam Bard's former students at King's College Medical School (1774.) Shortly after the Revolution broke out, he went abroad to Edinburgh, received his degree there and then spent three years studying in Leyden, Paris and London before returning to New York. In 1785 he was made a professor on Columbia's medical faculty and at the same time, conducted his own private classes. When he sought to have his private students sanctioned by Columbia, he was rebuffed and immediately resigned. Taking 35 students with him, he turned to Queens

College in New Brunswick to grant diplomas to his students, which they did in 1792 and 1793.

But at about the same time, Nicholas Romaine became involved in a land speculation scheme known as “the Blount Affair.” He and Senator William Blount of Tennessee were accused of instigating Cherokee and Creek Indians to aid the British in seizing Spanish territory in Louisiana in order to inflate land values. As a result, Senator Blount was impeached in 1797 -- the first impeachment in U.S. history – and Romaine was imprisoned briefly and then fled to England. He returned some eight years later and again set about creating mischief. When the Medical Society of New York was formed, he became its first president and the next year that organization formed the College of Physicians and Surgeons. At the opening of the 1808 term, Romaine greeted the students with these words:

Gentlemen, The Regents of the University of this State in their paternal solicitude for the advance of science have deemed it expedient to establish this College of Physicians, the immediate care of the institution is entrusted to professional gentlemen, many of whom have been distinguished for a love of knowledge and an ardent zeal for its promotion...

However, their “ardent zeal” was more for self-promotion than to promote medical knowledge per se – and by 1811 the regents were receiving complaints about abuse of power by the medical faculty – especially in setting their lecture fees. Accusations flew back and forth until in 1813, Columbia’s medical faculty merged with the younger College of Physicians. It was a forced marriage of convenience which ended Columbia’s involvement with medical training for more than 80 years (until 1891 when P&S became an integral part of Columbia University.) Although P&S had been founded and largely supported out of Dr. Romaine’s own funds, with

the merger with Columbia, there was shuffling of administrative and faculty positions and in the fray David Hosack and his cronies got the upper hand, Romaine was forced out and Sam Bard brought back to run the show. But still there were accusations of mismanagement and battles over fees and academic positions. Never one to accept defeat,

Nicholas Romaine organized a rival school and again arranged for Queens College to grant medical degrees to his students – which they did, but this arrangement lasted for only a few years. After the end of the War of 1812, there was an economic crisis and both and Columbia and Queens Colleges were in trouble. Queens suspended undergraduate classes in 1816 and with that, Romaine's school was shut out of a way of granting diplomas. Nicholas Romaine died the next year at age 61, but no official acknowledgement of his passing was made by the faculty of P&S. Still, as a colleagues (John Francis) remembered him, Dr. Romaine “was unwearied in toil and of mighty energy, dexterous in legislative bodies, and at one period in his career was vested with almost all the honors the medical profession can bestow.”

By now you should be appreciating that the medical scene in Olde New York from the end of the Revolution through the first two decades of the 19th century was chaotic – and it was about to get worse. But let me pause once more to consider some of these name changes. Of course, after the Revolution, dropping the name of the King in favor of Columbia was natural – but the narrative of Queens College was more interesting. (slide) Ten years after going belly-up, the undergraduate college reopened in 1825 thanks to the largesse of Colonel Henry Rutgers (1745-1835) who was a war hero, a wealthy landowner and a Queens College trustee. The Colonel donated a \$5,000 bond to the nearly defunct school and also a bronze bell which was hung in the belfry of the main building, and when the school reopened, the grateful Trustees renamed it after their benefactor. No doubt,

they hoped their gesture would be remembered in his will, but alas, when the bachelor Colonel died some five years later, nothing more was forthcoming for the school. To their credit, the school kept both the bell and the name.

David Hosack was born in New York City in 1769, the very same year that Samuel Bard addressed the first graduating class at King's -- and he was about a dozen years younger than Nicholas Romaine. His father was a Scotch artillery officer who came over with Lord Jeffrey Amherst for the French and Indian War, and afterward settled here. While studying at Columbia, young David decided to become a doctor and apprenticed with a prominent New York surgeon, Richard Bayley. He enrolled in Columbia College and in 1788 while studying anatomy at New York Hospital, he became involved in the infamous "Doctor's Riot" when a mob, enraged by grave robbing and alleged abuse of cadavers by medical students, ran amuck for three days. Professors and students fled for their lives; Dr. Bard's house was stormed but he faced down the mob. The militia was called out but when their leader Baron Von Steuben was struck by a rock, he ordered his men to "Fire." Five of the rioters were killed and seven or eight severely wounded. Young David Hosack was struck on the head and had to be carried away. Otherwise unscathed, he prudently transferred to the less rowdy and bucolic College of New Jersey in Princeton -- for some reason, he grumbled that Columbia was "too aristocratic." He received a bachelor's degree in Princeton in 1789 and then went on to study medicine at the University of Pennsylvania -- boarding in the home of Benjamin Rush.

After graduation and marriage, Hosack expected that the nation's new capital would be established in Washington so he set up practice in Alexandria, Virginia. But he was premature about the capital and when he found that his patients were slow to pay for his services, he returned to

New York City. Once back there, he realized that the wealthier citizens whom he coveted favored doctors who'd studied in Europe. So leaving wife and infant son behind, he followed the by now familiar route to Edinburgh and London, stayed there for two years and had a grand time hobnobbing with influential people. Like Sam Bard before him, he found that he was weak in botanical medicine and set out to rectify this -- so that by the time he returned to New York in 1794, he probably knew more about herbal medicine than anyone else and in 1795 he was appointed Professor of Botany at Columbia and the next year, additionally Professor of Materia Medica.

Within a year he was covering for Dr. Bard when he was out of town and after three years was taken in as a junior partner. By then Bard was 53 years and eager to spend more time in Hyde Park, so young Hosack was left the older man's lucrative society practice -- which included the likes of Hamilton, Burr, DeWitt Clinton, Robert Fulton, Samuel Morse, Robert Morris and Washington Irving. Before long David Hosack was described by a contemporary as "probably the best known, the most popular, the most accomplished and the most useful physician in New York."

Although he used Laennec's new stethoscope, generally Hosack's methods of treatment were typical for his era. In 1799 he presented two cases of tetanus to the medical society which he claimed he'd cured by "the free use of wine." During an epidemic of yellow fever, he criticized Benjamin Rush's overly aggressive use of calomel and bleeding and claimed that sudorifics (which induced sweating) were just as effective -- probably so. Several years ago (2005), a historical novel appeared which was titled "Hosack's Folly." It described the doctor's behavior during a later epidemic of yellow fever, this one in 1824 -- his so-called "folly" being that he advocated closing ports to discourage importing the infection from the Caribbean and promoted building a "fever hospital" on the grounds at

Belle Vue to quarantine patients. (Although some of this was true, the novel didn't give equal credit to John Bard for the transformation of the old alms house infirmary. In fact, John Bard had been a very early advocate for a public hospital, and had promoted the idea to his son.)

David Hosack was the first to successfully treat a hydrocele by injection and the first to ligate a femoral artery aneurysm, but he also was the first physician in New York to give up surgery in order to devote himself exclusively to the practice of physic. Like Sam Bard he had a passion for botanical medicine and although his medical colleagues supported him, the state legislature refused to provide funds. So in 1804, using his own money he purchased twenty acres of "common land" three and a half miles north of the city limits (between today's 47th and 51st Streets.) He enclosed it with a seven foot high stone wall and called the place Elgin -- after his father's Scottish hometown. He built three large greenhouses and here he cultivated some 2,000 varieties of exotic vegetation and valuable medicinal plants from seeds sent to him from all over the world -- and it was the first public botanical garden in the United States.

But all was not well at P&S -- what Hosack called this "Temple of Science." Although he was Professor of the Theory & Practice of Physic and Clinical Medicine, he had a more lucrative appointment in mind. Although he'd once said that surgical practice was unworthy of gentlemen, teaching surgery would attract more students than teaching physic. In those days students bought lecture tickets for each course directly from the professors, between \$15 and \$30 for each term, so the more students enrolled, the better the faculty would make out.

In November, 1825 when Dr. Hosack gave the introductory lecture at the opening of the fall session of the College of Physician and Surgeons, he predicted that New York City would soon surpass Philadelphia as the

country's leading medical center – it even would rival the “hallowed halls of science” at Oxford and Cambridge. He praised the P&S faculty and curriculum and his speech was so well received that a committee of students asked his permission to publish it. As they wrote to him,

The purity of the style, the force of the expression, the enlarged and comprehensive views it contained of the subjects under consideration, render it a valuable production and worthy of the perusal of the refined gentleman, the polished scholar, and enlightened physician.”

In response, their “humble servant” graciously permitted publication – at the student's expense.

In the rough and tumble world of New York's medical politics, Hosack was the most entrepreneurial of the gang of rivals. Power, profits, perks and personal grievances all were involved, culminating in 1825 with Hosack resigning from P&S and taking most of the faculty with him. Using their own money, the rebels purchased a building on Duane Street, near the old school and adjacent to the 400+ bed New York Hospital and opened their own school -- Hosack's parting shot was, “I can spend my time more profitably, than by teaching unproductive branches to the College of Physicians....I must not be neglected.”

Although Dr. Hosack's new school had a splendid faculty and a building, it needed the backing of a diploma-granting institution. After negotiations with Union College fell through, Hosack cast his eyes across the river to the newly reopened Rutgers College. At first their trustees were skeptical; after all, the previous arrangements between Queens and Nicholas Romaine had ended badly. But Hosack persuaded them that having a medical school would enhance their prestige and they would receive a \$3

matriculation fee and \$25 graduation fee from each student. When the College complied, critics of the merger grumbled that Queens, now Rutgers, had always been “a sickly institution” and was desperate to compete with their rivals in Princeton.

Dr. Hosack marketed his school aggressively so that when he next gave an Introductory lecture in 1826, this time to his own students, he was pleased to note that there were 152 of them compared to 90 at what he dismissively called “the old school.” (P&S) They came from fifteen states and four other countries, but of that large group, only 36 would receive degrees from Rutgers College the next spring. No matter -- their time sitting in the lecture hall could be credited toward medical licensure for in those days the usual requirement for state licensure included three years apprenticeship and two years of attending lectures but not necessarily a diploma.

David Hosack had powerful friends, but his enemies were determined and accused him of being dishonest and self-serving. In fact, he was sued for libel. A law passed in 1827 precluded using degrees from out-of-state schools for medical licensure in New York State, so the intrepid Dr. Hosack turned to Geneva College in the Finger Lakes District (which later became Hobart College.) As a result, diplomas issued in 1830 read “on the recommendation of the Geneva Medical Faculty AND Rutgers College.” This hybrid arrangement between Dr. Hosack’s school and Rutgers was short-lived and lectures were given for only four years from 1826 to 1830. Hosack carried his fight to the state’s Supreme Court and then to the legislature, but they threw out the Rutgers/Geneva collaboration. Legal battles continued for five more years until Hosack finally threw in the towel – and several months after that he died of a stroke at age 66

David Hosack married three times, each wife wealthier than the last; the third was a widow much older than he and he moved into her “country

house” in Kipps Bay while at their townhouse on Chambers Street, the Hosacks held a weekly salon. A friend (Samuel Francis) wrote that “his house was the resort of the learned and enlightened from every part of the world. No traveler from abroad rested satisfied without a personal interview with him.... “ Hosack was described as a “mover and shaker” in New York’s cultural scene. He was one of founders of the Historical Society, an officer of the American Academy of Fine Arts and of the American Philosophical Society, and a member of the Royal Society and the Linnaean Society of London. A contemporary (Samuel Francis) recalled,

it was not infrequently remarked by our citizens that Clinton, Hosack and Hobart were the tripod on which our city stood. His life was a triumph in services rendered and in honors received; his death was a loss to New York, the city of his birth...He regarded money only for what it might command. Had he possessed the wealth of John Jacob Astor, he might have died poor.

Amidst all the political intrigue, Elgin Garden fell into disrepair very early on. The legislature grudgingly came through with 300 pounds Sterling a year to offset his expenditures, but it wasn’t nearly enough. Hosack and Bard had intended it to be an educational resource and argued that the garden would serve to vault New York into contention with Philadelphia and the great European medical centers. But the students evidently found it inconvenient to travel 3.5 miles north of the city limits and it was costly for one man to keep up so after only ten years, a lottery was held to raise money for the state to buy the garden from him (1810.) The state valued the property at slightly over \$74,000 so Hosack’s net loss being about \$35,000. He and Sam Bard had argued that it was an invaluable resource for the state and city, but the legislators immediately turned it over to Columbia which, of course, lacked funds to maintain it. In fact, they felt they’d get better value if they sold off the property outright and, indeed, the money

they received from the sale probably was critical in keeping the College solvent. The most valuable medicinal plants were distributed to other gardens, many of them to Sam Bard's estate at Hyde Park.

More than a century later, in 1924, Columbia leased what was left of the by now prime real estate to the Rockefellers to build Rockefeller Center. In 1985 Columbia was bought out for \$400 million and ten years later the Japanese real estate conglomerate Mitsubishi purchased a controlling interest in Rockefeller Center for \$834 million in cash. In 2000 a group headed by Goldman Sachs purchased it for \$1.85 billion! Today, if you look very carefully, you can find a small plaque under some low bushes which marks the location of Elgin Garden -- it's on the promenade midway between the Rockefeller Center ice-skating rink and Fifth Avenue, and it reads in part: "In memory of David Hosack...botanist, physician, man of science and Citizen of the World."

During Dr. Hosack's last years, he bought the Bard family's 540 acre Hyde Park estate and continued to pursue horticulture there just as he had at Elgin Garden. After he died in 1835, the property was sold several times, eventually to the Vanderbilts, and many years later their next door neighbor, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt designated Hosack's Farm as a national park.

After David Hosack's death, friends and colleagues spoke well of him: one of them, Samuel Francis wrote, "Let it be sufficient to remark that, distinguished beyond all his competitors in the healing art, for a long series of years, he was acknowledged by every hearer, to have been the most eloquent and impressive teacher of scientific medicine and clinical practice that this country has produced." The famous Philadelphia surgeon Samuel Gross praised Hosack as being public-spirited, eloquent and charming. He suggested that as a teacher if he had any fault "it was his

dogmatism; and yet Dr. Gross said, “it is proper that a man of his talents, experience, and position should not only have decided views upon professional matters but that he should fearlessly express them.” His surgical colleague Valentine Mott recalled “his vaired learning, his luminous writings, always plausible if not profound—and the very high standing he held, both at home and abroad, in his profession and in the estimation of the public.” Dr. Mott vividly recreated the scene when Hosack was distracted by a late arriving student:

Punctual to a moment, he was most impatient of interruption after his lecture had commenced and no one ventured to enter his room five minutes after the appointed hour, without receiving a severe and well-merited rebuke. Fixing his fierce eye sternly on the tardy student, he would invite him down lower and lower towards the desk, and then, after an awful pause, advise him to “get his buckwheat cakes a little earlier in the morning.”

Historians have been less generous. David Cowen described Hosack as being “egotistical, aggressive, extravagant, given to intrigue, frequently embroiled in acrimonious controversy and perhaps more generally disliked than liked.” But Cowen acknowledged that Hosack was “a substantial scholar, teacher, physician, and a patron of the arts and letters.” Another historian David Rogers (1960) once described the rascally Nicholas Romaine as “the stormy petrel of American medical education.” For those not nautically inclined, petrels are sea birds which when they flew in the lee of sailing ships were thought to be harbingers of coming storms. More generally, the phrase sometimes has been used to predict troubled times a-coming, or as a pejorative to describe revolutionary anarchists.

However, another historian Byron Stookey suggested that this epithet -- “stormy petrel of American medical education” – might more fittingly be

bestowed on David Hosack. Professor Cowen, also used an avian metaphor when he described the two doctors as “birds of a feather” – and he noted that “everything Romaine was, Hosack was even more so.” So you can take your pick as to who deserves the dubious title of “stormy petrel” -- Nicholas Romaine or David Hosack? Both were charismatic, competitive, ambitious -- and sometimes unscrupulous. But whichever one you prefer, I think we can all agree that those were colorful medical times, some two centuries ago in Olde New York.

EPILOGUE

While preparing for this talk, I found an obscure reference note about a diary that was written by a Rutgers medical student who attended lectures during the winter term of 1828-1829. This young man Asa Fitch (1808-1879) went on to achieve great fame, but not as a physician. His collected papers are preserved on microfilm at Yale’s Sterling Library and I arranged to have microfilm of the diary sent to my local library for me to review. They provided a first hand account of student life in the big city through the wide eyes of a country bumpkin.

Asa Fitch described how the day after he arrived by boat from Albany in November 1828, he attended the opening of classes. It was the school’s third year of operation and the six professors entered the auditorium to great applause and stamping of feet. Asa estimated that there were “at least two hundred present.” Dr. Hosack spoke first and discussed political opposition to the school. He sarcastically described how their enemies “were glad to bite, but fortunately had no teeth” and this was followed by overwhelming applause and more stamping.

The students held Dr. Hosack in awe, crowded his lectures and copied down every authoritative word in their notes, but although he had a reputation as a brilliant speaker, Hosack had a tendency to drone. Once

when he went delivered a eulogy at Gov. DeWitt Clinton's funeral, after two and a half hours many in the audience snuck out before he wound down. On New Year's Day, 1829, Hosack invited the students to his home for warm punch and cake. A servant showed them around the splendid home and the professor introduced them to his wife and daughter. But the professor was more interested in talking with Lt. Gov. Tallmadge about the prospects of the State Legislature chartering the school. He boasted that Rutgers had the largest enrollment of any school in New York and disparaged his rivals as "amateurs." Disappointed with "the cheer of the host," Asa and his friends left as soon as possible and went off to celebrate in more congenial surroundings. Like other youth of their day, they enjoyed alcohol and smoking what he called "the Indian weed" and they also inhaled nitrous oxide and ether or resorted to liberal doses of opium, as he said "to excite the ideas."

In fact, most of Asa Fitch's diary described the attractions and temptations of city life: what he saw as he walked along Broadway and the Bowery, how he ferried across the East River to visit the Brooklyn Navy Yard, how whenever a fire bell rang out, he'd dash off after the engines to watch the show. Surely the highlight of Asa's four months in New York were the dancing classes he took – some 23 of them. At first he was shy and clumsy, but as he gained confidence he became comfortable "gallanting" the city girls and leading quadrilles at cotillions. His straight-laced parents disapproved but as he wrote in his diary:

I am not prepared to renounce [dancing]...my determination at the outset was to rid myself of the extreme diffidence, timidity, tongue-tiedness...This would never do for me when I was a doctor...I was resolved to cure myself of it...I can now go into company, yes, polite company, and feel myself at home...I have danced, I have played, I have kissed rosy cheeks, I have won maidens' smiles. Yet I

do not think I have gone astray, or opened the wounds of my Saviour...or sinned against my God....And if dancing is to be condemned [because of] the vicious habits to which it leads, I can aver that I have not felt this tendency. I have not gambled. I have not squandered away money. I have had no illicit connections. I have not even had any such inclinations. Never, no never.

After his sojourn in New York, Asa Fitch returned to his home in the Albany area but rural life wasn't comparable and he was restless to strike out on his own. He completed his studies and practiced briefly in western Illinois and then back in upstate New York. But as he wrote, he developed a "cordial distaste" for the life of a country doctor. He regarded himself as too honest to compete with the many quacks and charlatans he found in the profession. In truth, Asa Fitch was less interested in people than insects! Since early childhood he habitually crawled around on hands and knees collecting all manner of creeping things – the neighbor's called him "The Bug Catcher." In 1838 he gave up medical practice for good and went on to become the country's first and most important professional entomologist.

You may recall that I began this talk by describing letters from father to son of another Rutgers medical student John Rosencrantz who attended classes for two terms. When he joined the family practice in HoHoKus, he soon found that the hours were brutal; there was no time for socializing or dancing, and the frugal Dutch farmers were reluctant to pay his fees. After his father died John wasted no time moving to Philadelphia where he married a wealthy girl and entered her family's textile business. Evidently there was a high attrition rate of young doctors in those days.

SOURCES (Incomplete)

F.H.. Garrison. Samuel Bard and the King's College School. The New York Academy of Medicine. Vol 1. No. 3, 85-91, 1925.

J. B. Langstaff. Doctor Bard of Hyde Park. New York: E.P. Dutton, 1942.

D. Humphrey. From King's College to Columbia. 1746—1800.. New York: Columbia University Press. 1976

B. Stookey. America's Two Colonial Medical Schools. Bull. N.Y.Acad.Med. (1964); 40: 269—284.

B. Stookey. Nicholas Romaine. First President of the College of Physicians and Surgeons of New York City. Bull. N.Y. Acad. Med. (1967); 43: 576-597.

L.B. Priest. David Hosack and the Rutgers Medical College. Jour. Rutgers Univ. Libraries Vol. 5, No 1 (1941) p. 10-14.

H.H. Sherk. David Hosack, MD, and Rutgers. The Politics of Medical Education in the Nineteenth Century. New Jersey Medicine (2002); 99: 17-23.

E.R. Jeffe. Hamilton's Physician: David Hosack, Renaissance Man of Early New York. N.Y. Jour. Amer. Hist. 54-58 (?year)

J.J. Walsh. History of Medicine in New York. Three Centuries of Medical Progress. New York: National Americana Society, 1919. Three Volumes.

S.Gross Autobiography

V. Mott. Introductory Address to a Course of Lectures at the College of Physicians and Surgeons, 1850. National Library of Medicine Archives.

R. Chernow. Washington. A Life. New York: The Penguin Press, 2010.