
THE ALEXANDRIA CHRONICLE



FALL 1993 Vol 1. No.3.

A "Toothful" Account of Dentistry in Early Alexandria

Anne S. Paul

*Those persons whose teeth are partially decayed,
or are encrusted with that contaminating,
destructive substance the Tartar, may have the
decay arrested and the Tartar judiciously
removed, and the teeth thereby preserved during
life.*

*This sounds like an advertisement for
tartar control Crest or Colgate toothpaste.
But it was published in 1809 by one of
Alexandria's travelling dentists.¹
Advertisements such as these are
surviving evidence of a professional
evolution in dentistry that began in this
country shortly after the American
Revolution.*

*Alexandria's mid-Atlantic coastal location
and proximity to the Capital City attracted
some of the best of the evolution's early
professionals. In identifying some of the
early travelling dentists and events
considered significant to the evolution,*

*another facet of the Town's early medical
history has emerged.*

*Most dental historians agree that prior to
the American Revolution, teeth were so
neglected they either fell out or were
extracted. The fact that George
Washington began his presidency in 1789
with only one natural tooth is not
shocking, but symptomatic of the general
situation.*

*During the 18th century and into the
middle years of the 19th century, dentistry
was considered a natural branch of every
physician's practice. With little known*

about diseases, especially of the mouth, most physicians limited their practice of dentistry to a treatment of toothaches and tooth extractions.

A good example of a physician's dental practice is Dr. James Craik's 1799 bill to George Washington for medical services from August 25, 1797 to June 14, 1799. Its only report of any dentistry is six tooth extractions. This fact is significant when it is realized that Craik's professional attentions were not limited to just the former president and his family but also included "Washington's people - a clientele of over three hundred persons."

Dentistry's evolution into a professional practice, apart from that of the physician's, began with immigrants who settled in this country immediately after the Revolutionary War. While undoubtedly some were quacks, a number were European-trained physicians who willingly made teeth their specialty. Of this latter group, the French were considered to be the most knowledgeable.

The menu of services generally offered by these men consisted of: teeth scraping, plugging of hollow/decayed teeth with lead or gold, tooth/stump extractions and tooth implantation. Quick to appreciate the additional revenue easily derived from the sale of a dentrifice, most typically marketed one of their own concoction. Many also made dentures.

George Washington's quest for adequate dental care and comfortable dentures for both Martha and himself is well

documented. Countless articles have been written, many choosing to explain why the Nation's first President never smiled, and some even reported the extraordinary lengths a few artists took to achieve acceptable immortalizations of the man.

On one occasion, Gilbert Stuart reportedly padded the President's mouth with cotton.³ On another, he provided Washington with a pair of dentures designed by James Gardette of Philadelphia...

Charles Wilson Peale devised a set of dentures for Washington made of lead and set with elks' teeth. The set weighed two pounds.⁵

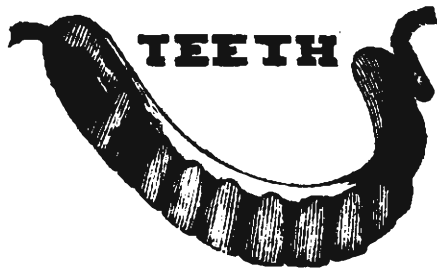
Peale later made the first set of porcelain teeth dentures ever made in this country. The Alexandria Gazette published July 15, 1826 a reprint of the Philadelphia Freeman's Journal's article which states:

He manufactures them of Porcelain, of any shape and of any tinge or color. By glazing and hardening them in the furnace, he renders them light and incorruptible.

Of the men who advertised their professional services to Alexandria in the late years of the 18th century, two had associations with the Washingtons. A third gave the profession its first credible visibility.

Jean Pierre LeMayeur (also referred to as

INCORRUPTIBLE



La Moyeur, Lemayner), a French dentist emigrated to this country circa 1780. After several years of successful practice in New York, George Washington invited him in 1783 to attend him at his headquarters in Newburgh. LeMayeur's services were employed until 1787.

Before engaging LeMayeur's professional services, however, Washington wrote Lt. Col. William Stephens Smith for his opinion of the dentist. The letter dated May 15, 1783 states:

Having some teeth which are very troublesome to me at times, and of which I wish to be eased, provided I could substitute others (not by transplantation, for this I have no idea, even with young people, and sure I am it cannot succeed with old) and gums which might be relieved by a Man of Skill...⁶

Smith replied that LeMayeur was "at the Head of his Profession and a friend to this country."⁷

Alexandrians first learned of the New York doctor's intention to visit their town from an April 15, 1784 advertisement in the Virginia Journal & Alexandria Advertiser:

Dr. Lemayner [sic], dentist, lately from New York, who transplants teeth, will be in Alexandria in a few days, where he will stay for a short time. Inquire for him at the Printing Office.

Subsequent advertisements show LeMayeur's visit lasted about five weeks - April 22 to May 26, 1784.⁸ Some modicum of success is presumed since the following ad was published three times during the visit:

Any person inclined to part with some of their Fore-Teeth, may hear of a purchaser by calling at Mr. Perrin's store. [200 block, N. Royal St.]⁹

Washington's diary indicates that while visiting at Mount Vernon during the years 1784-1787, LeMayeur also spent time in Alexandria.¹⁰ Other stops identified with his practice are New York, Philadelphia and Richmond. Naturalized in 1789, LeMayeur settled in Virginia where he died in 1806.¹¹

Dr. Benjamin Fendall, who referred to himself as an "Operator for Teeth" or "Regular Bred Surgeon Dentist" made at least four professional trips to Alexandria.¹² The date of his earliest visit is unknown, but an April 19, 1794

advertisement alludes to a sojourn in 1784 or 1786:

Having given many specimens of his abilities in performing the various operations upon the teeth some eight or ten years ago in this place •..

Alexandrian historian T. Michael Miller, in an addendum to his 1985 study, Visitors from the Past, suggests that Dr. Fendall may have been a nephew of Philip R. Fendall of Alexandria at whose house he stayed during his 1794 visit. [6140roltOco St.] This addendum also states that Fendall was born in 1753 and died in 1817.

Fendall was asked by George Washington to make a set of dentures for Mrs. Washington. After a prolonged wait no dentures were received, Washington sent him the following letter:

Mount Vernon, March 6, 1798

Sir - Mrs. Washington has been long in expectation of receiving what you took away unfinished, and was to have completed and sent to her; and prays that it may be done without further delay, as she is in want of them; and must apply elsewhere if not done. ¹³

Seventeen months passed before Washington received a reply. Writing from his home at "Cedar Hill,tl" in Charles County, Maryland on August 10,

1799, Fendall advised the former President of a "long continued and painful illness" and that use of his left arm was difficult. The note which accompanied the teeth also requested W. Washington to pay Fendall's servant twenty eight dollars.¹⁵



Dr. Benjamin Fendall

Richard Cortland Skinner was the most notable of the itinerant dentists to visit Alexandria. Trained in England by the Italian dentist, Bartolomeo Ruspini, Skinner came to America in 1788. Penniless, he wrote to Benjamin Franklin on September 29, 1788 requesting a \$20.00 loan to establish his practice in Philadelphia. Whether Franklin made the loan is not known. Skinner moved to New York circa 1791.¹⁶

like many early professionals, Skinner supplemented his regular practice with an itinerant one. His first visit to Alexandria was made in January 1796.

The January 2, 1796 advertisement in the Columbian Mirror and Alexandria Advertiser by "Dr. Skinner" contains one clue for his appropriate identification as Richard Cortland Skinner. He refers to himself as "Surgeon Dentist to the Dispensary of New York", a post to which he had been appointed in 1792.

For dentistry's evolution, this 1792 appointment was significant on two accounts: it was the first official or formal recognition of dentistry as a profession; and secondly, it represents the earliest founding of an in-hospital clinic in this country.¹¹

In 1801, the evolutionary process was further enhanced when Skinner published his Treatise on the Human Teeth. By Mue II.f-gamJlt&IISSion of the structure and appropriate care of teeth, it ranks as the first book on dental care ever published in the country.

In the 1796 advertisement, Skinner offered his professional services both as a Surgeon Dentist and as an Oculist, capable of "substituting or setting artificial eyes". Appointments were at Mr. Abert's house, near the Market House. [N.E. corner of Fairfax and Cameron St.] Besides his skills as an oculist, Skinner is reported to have also dealt with false noses, ears and legs. His services to the poor were always gratis.

Skinner made another trip to Alexandria in March 1809. "Concerns near the seat of government" were the purpose of his

intended 7 to 8 day visit. Whether this business or an active Alexandria practice detained him, Skinner extended his time in Alexandria well into the weeks of May. No offer was made of his services as an oculist. Skinner died around 1834.

T. Bruff's advertisements are among the early and more numerous 19th century ones.¹⁸ He is recognized by dental historians as having patented the first American dental instrument - a tooth extractor - which he referred to as the "Perpendicular Extractor." His patent was granted June 28, 1797. Originally from the Baltimore, Maryland area, Thomas Bruff moved to the District of Columbia about 1803.

Bruff's calls to Alexandria span the years 1800-1812. Sometime between March and July 1803, Bruff sold the exclusive rights for the extractor's use in Alexandria to Dr. Charles Douglass, an Alexandria physician and druggist.¹⁹

The transaction is evidence that some 19th century Alexandria physicians still considered dentistry part of their professional practice. Dr. William Allen Daingerfield's 1802 announcement for the opening of his practice stated he would treat "diseases of the teeth."¹⁰

In a January 7, 1804 Alexandria Gazette ad, Douglass described the extractor's merit:

By this means the long desired objects of ease and safety are now obtained in a degree beyond all

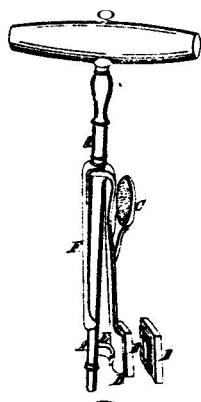
comparison.

To appreciate his opinion, it is important to understand that the most commonly used instrument for tooth extraction was the Key extractor. Even when skillfully used, more often than not, it caused some injury to the patient. Fractured jaws were not uncommon as well as damage to surrounding teeth.

T. Bruff. 8r.

Toolh ExTLt:lor.

X 17K_{fr} Pafe.nfetihme!8,17!17.



Bruffs Perpendicular Extractor

In this same ad, Douglass invited other "practioners" to use it. They were welcomed any day between the hours of 9 am and 4pm as long as he was present. His invitation was probably meant for other local physicians since most towns or cities had no resident dentists until 1830 or later.¹¹

In addition to his invention and patent of the tooth extractor, Thomas Bruff was an early advocate of dentistry for children.

Interested parents who paid a \$2.00 subscription fee could have their children regularly attended. Convincing evidence of his skill in orthodontics is found in an April 21, 1803 Gazette advertisement:

...his own daughter at seven years of age, had four front teeth growing sideways toward the front of her mouth; by proper treatment they have recovered their position in less than a year, and by further attention she will have a sound and regular set, instead of that defonnity and premature decay, which nature if left to herself, would have produced.

An idea of some early 19th century dental costs is suggested by his July 1800 advertisement. He sells tooth powder in boxes at one or two dolkus, serviceable brushes and tooth picks in ivory cases, at 25 cents. A general price list of his services is provided with the provision that:

... where an uncommon degree of attention is required, or the case remarkably bad, a little more is expected

	Dis.
Cleansing the teeth	5
Filing front teeth	1
Artificial front teeth	5
Whitening only	1&2
Inserting gold, each	
hollow	2
Extracting	1&2

Two other notable professional dentists who visited Alexandria during the first quarter of the 19th century were B. T. Longbothom and Eleazar Pannly. A third, Emile Blaise Gardette of Philadelphia was a second generation dentist.

Longbothom visited Alexandria in December 1801. His advertisement informs the reader he had been a pupil of Mr. Whitewood of London and had enjoyed a successful practice in Jamaica. He was located at Mrs. Griffith's on King Street.

His promotion of his dentrifice is somewhat different from most. Being a superior product at the cost of 75 cents, it is only recommended to those who have been attended by a dentist or whose mouths are in a healthy state and will use it only as a cleanser.¹¹

In 1802, Longbothom published a Treatise on the Art of Dentistry which is recognized by dental historians as the second book on dentistry published in this country. Alexandrians were able to purchase the book at Dr. James Kennedy's shop on Fairfax Street for \$1.00.¹³

Perhaps the dentist who frequented Alexandria the most in a year was Mr. Pannly. He made 3 visits in 1822.¹⁴ In the mid-February announcement for his first stay, he anticipated being here about 8 days. Six additional advertisements show he remained until April 17, 1822. He stayed at Mrs. Evelith's boarding

house on Cameron Street, opposite the Market. In June, he returned for about 9 days and lodged at Mrs. Ashton's boarding house on King Street. During his last call in early December, he stayed at Mrs. Rapley's on King Street, just below Fairfax Street.

Pannly made one final trip to Alexandria in 1823. A July 1 advertisement indicates he was again at Mrs. Rapley's for five days.¹⁵

Mr. Pannly was Eleazar Pannly (1797-1874) of New York. He is responsible for the 1839 American edition of John Hunter's 1771 English work, The Natural History of the Human Teeth: Explaining Their Structure, Use, Formation, Growth and Diseases. The work which included Pannly's notations was serially published by the American Journal of Dental Science. Pannly served as the first Vice President of the newly formed American Society of Dental Surgeons in 1840.¹⁶ In 1847, he addressed the graduating class of the Baltimore College of Dental Surgery.

E. B. Gardette (c.1803-1887) made two visits to Alexandria during the 1820's. He was the son of the eminent Dr. James Gardette (1756-1831) of Philadelphia, alluded to earlier in this report as the maker of a set of dentures worn by Washington for a portrait by Gilbert Stuart.

The Gardettes were prominent dentists in Philadelphia. The father, Dr. James Gardette, had studied at the Royal

Medical School in Paris. A surgeon in the French Navy, he resigned his commission in 1778 to remain in Newport, Rhode Island. He moved to Philadelphia in 1785.

James Gardette had been the first dentist to use elastic flat gold bands or braces to attach artificial teeth to living ones. The earlier method had used threads of wire or silk tied to the natural teeth. His discovery that atmospheric pressure or suction would allow dentures to be worn naturally was a significant breakthrough. Denture makers had traditionally connected the upper set to the lower ones by spiral springs as the means of holding the upper set in place.²⁷ His "Remarks on the Diseases of the Teeth" published in May 1790 by The American Museum or Universal Magazine is regarded as the first scientific article on dentistry printed in an American periodical.²⁸

Emile Gardette came to Alexandria in November 1823 and January 1825.²⁹ On both occasions the young dentist stayed at Mrs. Jacob's boarding house on Washington Street [Lloyd's Row, 200 block]. House calls were made for ladies who preferred treatment at their own dwellings.

Until 1823, Alexandria's dental care was largely met by the combined services of a few local physicians and those of the itinerant professionals. Visits by the travelling dentists began to wane in the 1820's. In 1823, Dr. James S. Gunnell, M.D. from Washington City [the District of Columbia] inaugurated a service of

regularly scheduled visits to Alexandria. Other D.C. dentists followed with similar offers of assistance which continued until Alexandria had its own resident dentists.

Two events in 1840 signify that dentistry was becoming an important medical specialty. One was the establishment of the world's first dental college, the Baltimore College of Dental Surgery, which was chartered on March 6, 1840 by the state of Maryland. The second was "the formation of the American Society of Dental Surgeons, the first national organization of dentists in the world."³⁰ Virginia formed a Virginia Society of Surgeon Dentists in Richmond in December 1842.³¹ Pennsylvania and New York formed similar associations in 1845 and 1847, respectively.³²

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**Richard J. Pollard,
SURGEON DENTIST,**

BE G S leave most respectfully to inform the citizens of this place and vicinity that he intends commencing his professional business in this place, and hopes, by close attention to business, reduced prices, and success in operating, to merit the favor of all.

R. J. P. is prepared to insert Natural, Sea-Horse, and Porcelain Teeth, of all the various shades, at the shortest notice.

He may be seen at Mr. A. O. Douglass', on King street, second door above Pitt street, north side. He will wait on persons (particularly ladies) at their dwellings.

apr 17 --d6t&2awtf 1833

ENDNOTES

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3. Malvin E. Ring, D.D.S., Dentistry. An Rlustrated History. (New York: Abradale Press, Harry N. Abrams, Inc.), 1985, p. 193.
4. William R. Vath, "Why George Washington Never Smiled," Today's Health, American Medical Association (Feb 1961), p. 40.
5. Ibid., P 40.
6. The Writings of George Washington from the Original Manuscript Sources. ed. John C. Fitzpatrick (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, July 1938), Vol. 26, p. 434.
7. 1.111/11.,,. 01.
8. Jean Pierre LeMayeur, Virginia Journal & Alexandria Advertiser, April 22, 1784, p. 3; May 13, 1784, p. 4; May 20, 1784, p. 3.
9. Ibid., May 6, 1784, p. 3; May 13, 1784 p. 4; May 20, 1784, p. 4.
10. The Papers of George Washington. eds. Donald Jackson and Dorothy Twohig (Charlottesville, University Press of Virginia, 1978), IV, pp. 195, 198; V., pp. 1, 84, 101.
11. Malvin E. Ring, D.D.S., Dentistry. An Illustrated History (New York: Abradale Press, Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1985), p. 191.
12. B. Fendall- Columbia Mirror & Alexandria Gazette, April 19, 1794, p. 4; The Times & Alexandria Advertiser, March 22, 1803, p. 3; March 9, 1810, April 16, 1810, p. 3; April 28, 1810, p. 2; May 8, 1810, p. 3.
13. John Woodforde, The Strange Story of False Teeth (London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1968) p. 93.

14. The Papers of George Washington eds. Donald Jackson and Dorothy Twohig, (Charlottesville, University Press of Virginia, 1979), VI (Jan 1790-Dec 1799), p. 272.
15. OO. cit.: p. 94.
16. Max Geshwind, D.D.S., "Historical Introduction, "A Treatise on the Human Teeth, R.C. Skinner, first published 1801 (New York, Argosy Antiquarian Ltd., 1967), pp. i, ii, iii, iv and vi.
17. Malvin E. Ring, D.D.S., Dentistry. An Illustrated History (New York: Abradale Press, Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1985), pp. 190, 191.
18. Thomas Bruff - Alexandria Advertiser Times & D.C. Daily Advertiser, July 17, 1800, p. 1; The Times & Alexandria Advertiser, March 1, 1803, p. 3; April 13, 1803, p. 3; April 21, 1803; May 4, 1807, p. 2; Alexandria Expositor, April 17, 1805, p. 4; Alexandria Gazette, July 24, 1808, p. 3; May 2, 1812, p. 3.
19. Charles Douglass moved from Leesburg, VA to Alexandria circa 1796. Newspaper advertisements show he maintained a druggist shop in addition to a medical practice that involved Smallpox inoculations, experiments with an electrifying machine and improvements to the Perpendicular Extractor. He was located at the lower end of Prince Street. He was the elected Physician of the St. Andrews Society 1802, 1807. Douglass left Alexandria 1815-1816. His Oct. 14, 1823 death in St. George's Bennuda is reported in the Alexandria Gazette, July 20, 1823, p. 3.
20. William Allen Daingerfield - The Times & Alexandria Advertiser, Oct. 25, 1802, P 3.
21. Charles Douglass - The Times & Alexandria Advertiser, January 7, 1804, p. 3.
22. B. T. Longbothom - The Times & Alexandria Advertiser, December 10, 1801, p. 1.
23. B.T. Longbothom - The Times & Alexandria Advertiser, March 26, 1802, p. 3.
24. Eleazar Pannly - Alexandria Gazette, February 12, 1822, p. 3; February 19, 1822, p. 3; February 28, 1822, p. 3; March 12, 1822, p. 3; March 21, 1822, p. 3; March 28, 1822, p. 3; April 11, 1822, p. 3; June 6, 1822, p. 2; June 11, 1822, p. 3; December 3, 1822, p. 3.
25. Ibid., July 1, 1823, p. 3.

26. Malvin E. Ring, D.D.S., Dentistry, An Illustrated History (New York: Abradale Press, Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1985), pp. 179, 212.
27. Emile B. Gardette, M.D., Dentist, Biographical Notice of (the late) James Gardette Surgeon Dentist, of Philadelphia, Philadelphia, written at the invitation of Dr. C. A. Harris, for a "Dental Dictionary" he is about to publish, 1847.
28. Malvin E. Ring, D.D.S., Dentistry, An Illustrated History (New York: Abradale Press, Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1985), p. 190.
29. E. B. Gardette - Alexandria Gazette, November 20, 1823, p. 3; January 25, 1825, p. 3.
30. Malvin E. Ring, D.D.S., Dentistry, An Illustrated History (New York: Abradale Press, Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1985), p. 212.
31. Wyndham B. Blanton, Medicine in Virginia in the Nineteenth Century (Richmond: Garret & Massie, Incorporated, 1933), p. 172.
32. C Copyright 1993. Alexandria Historical Society. All Rights Reserved.



I-Toothdrawing was not only a way to alleviate pain, but also a popular entertainment until the early 19th century

Elisabeth Bennion, "Teething Troubles," Country Life
June 4, 1987, p. 241.

The sleighing upon the streets of our city continues to be kept up in a spirit unparalleled in this latitude. Those who have the time and money to invest in this sport, have tried, during the "carnival," to see if they could not outvie each other in the production of the handsomest equipage and the fastest nag. Others, less ambitious, and feeling sensibly the pressure on the money market, but determined to do as they saw best fit, tried to see how unique they could make things "turn-out" appear, and as 2:40 pm., horses are not found in every stall, any kind, of horse flesh was substituted, with a considerable quantity of mUle and ox-flesh.-- King street has been converted into a race course, and many a noble animal has been made to show his "mettle" if he had any fear of the up lifted lash. The dealers in bell-metal have enjoyed a good harvest, for never has "the oldest inhabitants" heard such a jingle of bells as are sounding by day and by night allover the city. The condition of our streets is good enough at present, for sleighing purposes; but some of our citizens becoming tired of the fun on terra firma, have concluded "to take to the ice" in the river! The track that has heretofore been pursued by the steamers that float upon the broad bosom of our beautiful Potomac, is now the track of the horse and sleigh. Shades of Fulton! To what degeneracy has your great inventive genius succumbed! On Saturday, the river presented a gay appearance Several excursions were made to Washington during the day, and we have not heard of any accident resulting therefrom. We would admonish our sleighers not to venture to too great an extent. Such an amusement, as sleighing, and running horses on the Potomac River is a rare occurrence. [Alexandria Gazette: January--28, 1856]



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