

TWO PIONEERS FROM ROCKBRIDGE COUNTY

By Patricia Brittain Irving

Ignorance Club, Lexington, Virginia, September 1990

EPHRAIM MCDOWELL is the father of abdominal surgery. The ovariectomy he performed in his home in Danville, Kentucky, in 1809 earned for him an enduring place in medical history. His name is familiar to physicians everywhere. The name of his patient who risked her life and endured the agony of an operation without anesthesia, however, is known to fewer. She has not been accorded the prominent place in history that her courage and contribution deserve.

This is also the story of Jane Todd Crawford.

AN ANCIENT STREAM CALLED CEDAR CREEK rises in the Virginia mountains and flows south and east through the southern Shenandoah Valley to reach the James River. A few million years ago, near the end of its course, that creek carved a spectacular monument through the native limestone, a natural rock bridge more than 200 feet high. The Indians called it “The Bridge of God” and wor-

shipped it. George Washington surveyed it, climbed its walls and carved his initials there. Thomas Jefferson bought it from the British Crown and built a cabin nearby.

In the early days of Virginia, this impressive landmark was first a part of Augusta County and later of Botetourt County. Finally, in 1778, it became a part of a newly formed county which derived its name, Rockbridge, from this unique natural phenomenon. The pioneer settlers who came into this wilderness land were mostly Scotch-Irish Presbyterians from the Ulster area of Northern Ireland. Ulster, the northernmost province of Ireland, consists of nine counties. It is this locality from which the people known as the Scotch-Irish came. Early in the reign of James I, a plot to dethrone the king was discovered. King James retaliated by confiscating all the land and parceling it out among his favorites.

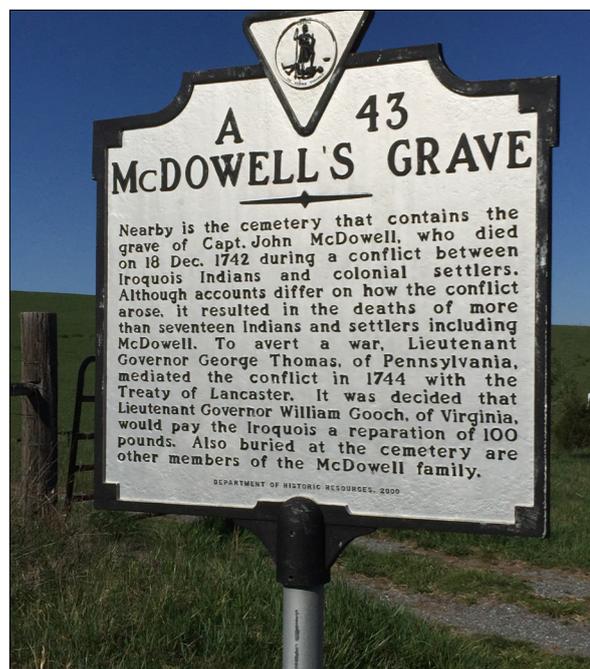
In the autumn of 1609, the first rush of people from the highlands of Scotland came to Ulster. They were described as a wild and lawless set. A few years later, a second volunteer immigration took place. This highland host took root and remained in Ulster. The relationship between the invading Scots, the trampled Irish and the dominating English king was not conducive to peace of any kind.

By 1750, about 12,000 Scotch-Irish Presbyterians were landing in America annually, fleeing both religious persecution and famine. Between 1761 and 1768, some 200,000 of them came to find new homes. (The Protestant Episcopalians did not have the same motive for emigration and the tide of Catholic emigration from Ireland did not set in until after the American Revolution.)

It is interesting to note that the first voices publicly raised in America to dissolve all connection with Great Britain came not from the Puritans of New England or the Dutch of New York or the planters of Virginia, but from the Scotch-Irish Presbyterians.

THE FIRST OF THE MCDOWELL LINE in America was seventy-year-old Ephraim, the great-grandfather of our Dr. McDowell. Ephraim emigrated from Ulster through Pennsylvania into Virginia in 1735 with his son, John, and John’s wife, Magdalene; their son, Samuel; John’s sister, Mary, with her husband, John Greenlee; and servant, John Rutter. The prospect of fertile land and abundant game lured the settlers westward into new and perilous frontiers.

Ms. Irving, born in Piedmont, Alabama, was a graduate of Birmingham Southern University. She was married to the Reverend D. Holmes Irving, and in 1964 the Irvings were called to Lexington, Virginia, where he became rector of R. E. Lee Memorial Episcopal Church and she became a community leader. Upon retirement, she and her husband remained in Lexington, where she died in 2013.



John McDowell and his brother-in-law John Greenlee were surveyors. Benjamin Borden offered John McDowell 1,000 acres of land of his own selection if he would survey and settle in the Borden Grant.* John selected a site ten miles north of Lexington, near Fairfield. There McDowell built a large log house, stained with red ochre paint made from a powdered material found on a bank of his land. The cabin was called the red house.

John McDowell, a captain in the local militia, was killed in a battle with the Iroquois in December 1742 at Balcony Falls, in Rockbridge County. A roadside

marker about two miles north of Timber Ridge that states: "McDowell's Grave: In this cemetery are the graves of Captain John McDowell and seven companions, who were killed by Indians near Balcony Falls, December 14, 1742. This fight began a war that lasted until 1744."[†]

John McDowell left two sons, Samuel and James, and a daughter, Martha. All three settled in 1776 near Timber Grove, now called Timber Ridge.

THE FIRST TODD of whom there seems to be a record was John, a young Scotch laird of nineteen, son of James Todd, the auld laird of Dunbar. (A laird is Scottish for lord, a wealthy landowner.) This young John Todd escaped after the Battle of Bothwell Bridge, fought between Catholics and Presbyterian Covenanters in 1679,[‡] and fled to the north of Ireland, reaching County Down. He married, reared a family, prospered, and became a man of affairs in the county. He died in 1719, and was buried in Tynan Churchyard in adjacent Armagh County. In 1737, his sons except James, the eldest, dissenters from the Church of England,

* In 1736, the governor of Virginia, in an effort to encourage settlement in the western part of the state, gave Benjamin Borden, the region's most prominent land speculator of his time, 500,000 acres in the Valley of Virginia — on the condition that Borden persuade 100 families to settle on the land before receiving title. Borden succeeded, and McDowell became one of the hundred. (Royster Lyle Jr. and Pamela Hemenway Simpson, *The Architecture of Historic Lexington*, University Press of Virginia [Charlottesville], 1977, p. 3.)

† The marker was replaced in 2000 by the one shown in the photograph.

‡ Presbyterians were coming under intensifying persecution by the Anglican monarchy, and rebellions flared up occasionally. Bothwell Bridge was one of the largest.

came to America and settled in Pennsylvania.

Jane Todd Crawford, the heroine of our story, and Mary Todd Lincoln were descended from two of these brothers who settled in Pennsylvania. It was the descendants of Jane's grandfather, Samuel Todd I, the elder of the two, who migrated from Pennsylvania to Virginia in 1754.

On May 12, 1762, Samuel Todd II received a deed to a tract of land on both sides of Whistle Creek, two miles west of Lexington in Rockbridge County. He

built a substantial home on a hill overlooking the south bank of the creek, where he raised a family. To the west, there was a fine view of House Mountain, a prominent and timeless land mark. To the east, the land cornered on the grounds of the Presbyterian Meeting House. (The Presbyterian Church was to play a great and enduring role in the life of Jane Todd Crawford and her family.)

Jane Todd was born here on December 23, 1763, a quarter-mile from the Meeting House. She was the second-eldest of six daughters; there were also two sons, John and Samuel III. Jane's mother was Jane Lowry, so the girl was often called Jenny.

Her parents owned a considerable amount of property. Her grandfather Lowry left a part of his estate to Jane's father, and in 1768, when she was four, her father built a mill down the hill from the house, on the other side of Whistle Creek. Her parents owned Negro servants sufficient to care for their lands and home; Jane later inherited several of these servants. She and her five sisters had all the educational and social advantages of young ladies of their day and locality. There was a spinet in the home, on which Jane played.

THE MCDOWELLS lived about two miles north of the Timber Ridge Presbyterian Church, founded in 1756, which is itself about eight miles north of Lexington. Samuel McDowell married Nancy McClung, daughter of John McClung and Elizabeth Alexander, when they were both eighteen years old. A son, Ephraim, was born on November 11, 1771. He was one of the youngest of eleven children, seven sons and four daughters. Jane Todd, fifteen miles by road to the west, was six weeks from her eighth birthday at the time.



There is no evidence that these two young people ever knew one another in Virginia. Their parents, however, could scarcely have failed to have some acquaintance, since both families were early settlers, people of substance and enterprise. Samuel Todd was the sheriff of Botetourt County, of which the entire area was a part.

In 1789, the old Hall's Meeting House at the corner of the Todd property was replaced by a stone building, the New Monmouth Presbyterian Church.

Jenny did not marry until she was thirty years of age. On January 9, 1794, she was married to Thomas Crawford in a ceremony performed by the Rev. Samuel Houston. The minister had an infant cousin, also named Sam, who was then just one year old. This child, born near the Timber Ridge Church and the McDowell home, was destined to become a hero of Tennessee and Texas.

Thomas Crawford had come with his parents from Pennsylvania to Rockbridge only eight years before. The Crawfords owned 500 acres in the southern part of the county, on Buffalo Creek, not far from the Natural Bridge, and Thomas brought Jenny there to live and built her a log cabin. Their home was within ten miles of Old Oxford, one of the earliest Presbyterian churches in the county.

Their first son, James, was born ten months later. Three other children, Alice, Samuel and Thomas, were also born there in 1797, 1799, and 1803. A fifth child, a daughter, died in infancy.

MEANWHILE, THE TERRITORY OF KENTUCKY had become the new western frontier. In 1750, Dr. Thomas Walker discovered a gap in the Cumberland Mountains that permitted access from the south to the unexplored region. In 1769, Daniel Boone led a party through the Cumberland Gap and blazed a wilderness trail that would lead the settlers to Danville and other parts of central Kentucky. The following year, Colonel James Knox came with a party of forty hunters and established a camp in the plains country around the Green River in what would become Green County. Because their expedition lasted four years, they became known as the "Long Hunters." Their headquarters was named Camp Knox after their leader.

Kentucky became a colony of Virginia in 1776. By 1784, 30,000 settlers had come there, and in that year, the McDowell family migrated from Rockbridge County to Danville. Thirteen-year-old Ephraim was one of the youngest of the nine children who made the transfer. Two married daughters remained in the Timber Ridge area.

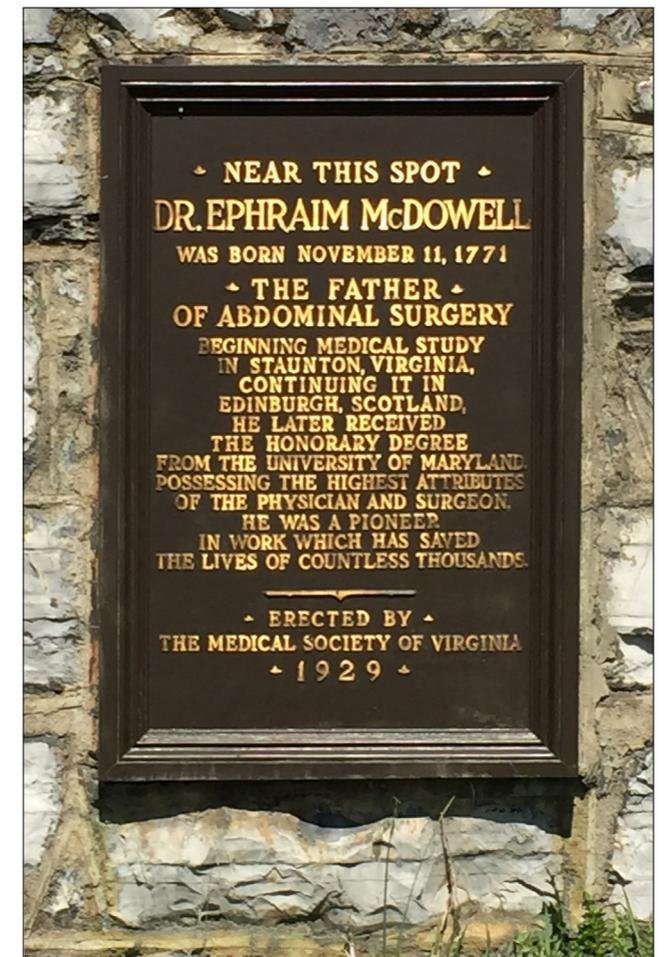
Danville had 150 inhabitants. Samuel McDowell was one of the commissioners appointed to settle land disputes. He was a district judge, a circuit judge and, later, a United States judge under the appointment of General Washington.

Twenty-one years would elapse before Thomas and Jane Crawford crossed the same Wilderness Trail. On September 3, 1805, the Crawfords deeded their homesite on the North Fork of the Buffalo Creek in Rockbridge to James Leech for \$2,333.33. In the great adventure of moving to Kentucky, they were joined by Tom's sister, Rachel, and her husband, Thomas Mitchell. The four Crawford children ranged in age from two to eleven years. In a joint venture, the Crawfords and the Mitchells purchased land near the

old Camp Knox of the Long Hunters. The two families arrived there on November 5, 1805, and the Crawfords built a log cabin on the Blue Spring Branch of Caney Fork, nine miles south of Greensburg and sixty miles from Danville. Their home, their surroundings, their whole life were typical of the pioneer backwoods: bare floors in the log cabin, open fireplaces, the clothing and bedding made by hand. The Mitchells established their home on an adjoining farm.

By the time the Crawfords and the Mitchells arrived in Kentucky in 1805, Ephraim McDowell had been practicing medicine in Danville for nine years. At the age of nineteen, he had read medicine under a preceptor, Dr. Alexander Humphreys, of Staunton, Virginia, twenty miles north of the McDowell homestead near Fairfield in Rockbridge County. Humphreys was a graduate of the University of Edinburgh, then the greatest of the European schools, and McDowell also studied in Edinburgh, in 1793 and 1794 (where he was associated with the illustrious surgeon John Bell).

When he returned to Danville in 1795, he had no formal medical degree, but was the only physician west of the Alleghenies with any real surgical training. Three years after Kentucky became the fifteenth state in 1792, Dr. Ephraim McDowell and



Dr. Adam Rankin launched a medical practice in a two-room brick building, and also had the first apothecary shop west of the Alleghanies.

In 1802, Ephraim married Sarah Hart Shelby, daughter of Isaac Shelby, the first governor of Kentucky. They had six children, but one died young. The others were Wallace, Sarah, who married David Irvin, Mary, Kate and Adaline.

As the premier surgeon, Dr. McDowell performed all the operations then known to surgery, from amputation to tracheotomy. His reputation spread rapidly through the community and several counties. He often operated to relieve strangulated hernia and was a skilled lithotomist (one who removes bladder stones). James K. Polk, a callow youth of nineteen, journeyed on horseback from his home in Columbia, Tennessee, to Danville, where McDowell removed a stone from the bladder of the future eleventh president. He did altogether thirty-two lithotomies without a death.

Before the days of stagecoaches, he made many visits within a range of 100 miles and upwards, through the trails of the forest, then alive with hostile Indians, the timber wolf, and the howl of the panther. Some of these journeys required a week or more.

THE IMPORTANT EVENTS IN OUR STORY occurred in the year 1809. By then, the population of Kentucky was close to 400,000, thanks, in part, to settlers who came down the broad Ohio River to reach the growing riverboat town of Louisville, in addition to those who traveled overland from the east and south. A gifted frontier artist named Audubon, living in Louisville, had already completed 200 drawings of American birds. On Feb. 12, 1809, in Hodgenville, scarcely thirty-five miles from the Crawford farm, a boy named Abe Lincoln was born in a log cabin similar to the Crawfords'.

James Madison became the fourth president of the United States in that year; Napoleon and his French troops occupied Vienna, where, also in 1809, Beethoven wrote his Piano Concerto No. 5 and published his Fifth and Sixth Symphonies.

Jane Todd Crawford was forty-six years old. Throughout most of her adult life she had enjoyed the best of health, but about a year earlier, she began to notice that her stomach was enlarging. This gradually increased, and became painful. Soon it assumed enormous size, until it was difficult for her to walk around and do her work. The closest doctor was called. After consultation with another physician in the community, it was decided that she was pregnant, probably with twins. After her appointed time passed, and there was no indication of relief, she and her husband became very uneasy. They heard of the brilliant young doctor in Danville, and de-

cidated that he should be called. McDowell was thirty-eight years old and had been practicing medicine for fourteen years.

After considerable delay, he came on horseback, riding through the wilderness, mostly on a creek-bed road. He arrived on December 13, 1809.

After a careful examination, Dr. McDowell told Mrs. Crawford that she was not pregnant, but that she had a large tumor. Unless it was removed, it would probably take her life. The Crawfords inquired how this could be made to happen; Dr. McDowell replied that medicine would not affect it, and there were no treatments of any form that offered relief. But he said he thought he could remove it by cutting into the stomach in a surgical operation. In reply to their asking whether this procedure had ever been performed before, he said, "No, it is in the nature of an experiment. I have all faith that it will be successful. It seems positive that unless this is done, the result will be fatal."

Naturally, the effect of this announcement was upsetting to the Crawfords. But we are told that Mrs. Crawford was a woman of unusual courage and strength of mind, and she accepted Dr. McDowell's observations with great patience and coolness. At the close of the interview, she promptly assured him that she was not only willing but ready to submit to his decision — that any mode of death, except suicide, was preferable to the ceaseless agony she was enduring. She would hazard anything that held out even the most remote prospect of relief. He wrote in a subsequent report:

Upon examination, per vaginam, I found nothing in the uterus; which induced the conclusion that it must be an enlarged ovarium. Having never seen so large a substance extracted, nor heard of an attempt, or success attending an operation, such as this required, I gave to the unhappy woman information of her dangerous situation. She appeared willing to undergo an experiment, which I promised to perform if she would come to Danville, a distance of 60 miles from her place of residence.

McDowell had much to consider in this daring undertaking, not least of which was the fact that the patient would be aware of every move, every look, every word at-



Jane Todd Crawford. Daguerreotype courtesy of McDowell Museum, Danville, Kentucky.

tending the ordeal. Muscles would twitch involuntarily, he well knew, thus endangering the work of the surgeon and the life of the patient, no matter how great the fortitude and perseverance.

There was no way to get to Danville, a backwoods country town with mud roads and frame buildings, except on foot or by horseback. Jane rode across the sixty miles of rough terrain on a side-saddle, the tumor extending out over the pommel of the saddle and resting on the side of the horse. She was obliged to ford several rivers. It is not known who accompanied her or where she stopped en route. She left her youngest son, Tommy, age six, with her relatives and neighbors, Rachel and Tom Mitchell, wondering no doubt if she would ever see him again.

On her arrival in Danville, she rested for a few days.

Dr. McDowell preferred to operate on Sundays so that the prayers of the patient and friends might guide his knife. It was also the quietest day and the one in which he had the most leisure. His granddaughter and biographer, Mary Young Ridenbaugh, wrote that he was a prayerful man and in this trying hour he appealed to God to be with him to help in this experiment. He wrote out the prayer, and placed it in his pocket. It pictures his moral and spiritual attitude toward his great experiment. The prayer in full:

Almighty God be with me, I Humbly beseech Thee, in this attendance in Thy holy hour; give me becoming awe of Thy presence, and grant me Thy direction and aid, I beseech Thee, that in confessing, I may be humble and truly penitent in prayer, serious and devout in praises, Grateful and sincere, and in hearing Thy word, attentive, willing and desirous to be instructed. Direct me, O God, in performing this operation, for I am but an instrument in Thy hands, and am but Thy servant. If it is Thy will, spare this poor afflicted woman. Oh, give me true faith in the atonement of Thy Son, Jesus Christ, or a love sufficient to procure Thy favor and blessing, that worshiping Thee in spirit and in truth, my services may be accepted through His all-sufficient merit. Amen.

Before anesthesia was discovered, the entire body of the patient was strapped down during amputations and other operations. Nothing was sterile, with Lister and Pasteur sixty to seventy years in the future. In McDowell's later operations, he employed opiates and alcoholic drinks for relief of pain, but no specific mention of these was made in his report on Jane Crawford, although one source said Jane was given some whisky and laudanum.

This Sunday happened to be Christmas Day, 1809. The operation, without anesthesia, lasted twenty-five minutes. According to Jane's grandson, James Crawford Brown, she repeated the Psalms and sang hymns during the procedure. The patient's condition is said to have been excellent. Silk sutures were left long, hanging

outside the abdominal incision for the purpose of drainage and early recognition of possible secondary hemorrhage. McDowell's description of the operation is as follows:

I made an incision about 3 inches from the musculus rectus abdominis, on the left side, continuing the same 9 inches in length, parallel with the fibres of the above named muscle, extending in to the cavity of the abdomen, the parietes of which were a good deal contused, which we ascribed to the resting of the tumor on the horn of the saddle during her journey. The tumor then appeared full in view, but was so large that we could not take it away entire. We put a strong ligature around the fallopian tube near to the uterus; we then cut open the tumor, which was the ovarium and fibrinous part of the fallopian tube, very much enlarged. We took out 15 lbs. of a dirty gelatinous looking substance. After which we cut through the fallopian tube and extracted the sack, which weighed 7½ lbs. As soon as the external opening was made, the intestines rushed out upon the table; so completely was the abdomen filled by the tumor, that they could not be replaced during the operation, which was terminated in about 25 minutes. We then turned her upon her left side, so as to permit the blood to escape; after which, we closed the external opening with the interrupted suture, leaving out, at the lower end of the incision, the ligature which surrounded the fallopian tube. Between every 2 stitches we put a strip of adhesive plaster, which, by keeping the parts in contact, hastened the healing of the incision. We then applied the usual dressings, put her to bed, and prescribed a strict observance of the anti-inflammation regime. In 5 days I visited her, and much to my astonishment found her engaged in making up her bed. I gave her particular caution for the future and in 25 days, she returned home as she came, in good health.

I have been reading to you from a photostatic copy of Ephraim McDowell's first published report. He had the assistance in the operation of his nephew, Dr. James McDowell.

From the day on which Mrs. Crawford left Dr. McDowell's Danville home and returned to Greensburg, there is no record of any sort of her convalescence, nor is there any statement in McDowell's later writings to indicate that she ever consulted him again.



The Ephraim McDowell house and apothecary, Danville, Kentucky. They are now a museum.



Ephraim McDowell. Portrait by Davenport, undated. Courtesy National Institutes of Health.

It is reasonable to assume that she made a complete recovery, for she lived to seventy-eight years of age, having survived the operation more than thirty-two years.

One year after the procedure, Thomas and Jane Crawford transferred to one John Motley, 490 acres of land in Green County for \$1,900 cash. It can be assumed that they moved away, but their immediate destination is unknown, and at this point the trail of the Crawford family becomes

unclear. It is thought that for the next seven years, they lived in northern Kentucky, across the Ohio River from Madison, Indiana, and that in 1817, they finally moved to a farm on the outskirts of Madison.

MCDOWELL WAITED SEVEN YEARS before reporting on his historic operation, a delay for which he has been severely criticized. In the intervening years, he performed two other ovariectomies. He wrote that he was more ready to attribute the excellent outcome of the first case to accident than to any skill or judgment. Not until he had operated successfully three times did he publish anything on the subject. He mentioned one patient's name only: "Mrs. Crawford."

As soon as the account reached the other side of the Atlantic, he became a target for special abuse. He was called a liar and a charlatan, scathingly and sarcastically denounced. To the critics it was beyond belief that a plain country doctor in the wilderness had been able to do something that had been undertaken by the most eminent doctors abroad amidst the most favorable circumstances, only to fail.

His critics were libelous, the criticism extreme. In January 1825, a medical review said editorially: "In spite of all that has been written respecting this cruel operation, we entirely disbelieve that it has ever been performed with success, nor do we think it ever will."

But when the accuracy and truth of the accomplishment had been established, a London editor wrote: "A back-settlement of America — Kentucky — has beaten the Mother Country, nay Europe itself, with all the boasted surgeons thereof, in the fearful and formidable operation of extraction of diseased ovaria. For the mis-

givings in our minds, for our uncharitableness, we ask pardon of God and of Dr. McDowell of Danville."

In 1822, McDowell rode from the bluegrass region of Kentucky to the bluegrass of Tennessee to operate upon a Mrs. Overton there for an ovarian tumor [Penelope Holmes Overton]. She was a very corpulent woman, the wife of General Thomas Overton, who was a friend and neighbor of General Andrew Jackson and his comrade in arms in the Creek War. Mrs. Overton, who was fifty-five at the time of the operation, lived to be seventy-seven.

When Dr. McDowell presented the check for payment that General Overton gave him to the little bank on the public square, the cashier presented McDowell with cash far in excess of his fee. McDowell, thinking there was some error, sent a horseman to the Overtons. He came back with the message that there was no mistake and that General Overton only regretted that he did not have even more to pay for the great service which had been rendered his wife. This was the largest fee ever paid in this country for a surgical operation at this time, comparable to the fee of 1,000 guineas [1,050 British pounds].

During the ovariectomy upon Mrs. Overton, her neighbor, General Jackson, is said to have held her hand and otherwise encouraged her fortitude. Dr. McDowell later visited General Jackson at the Hermitage, fourteen miles from Nashville, and at his request operated upon a Negro slave, removing a very large tumor from his neck.

The fact that Ephraim McDowell lived in the wilderness and had been referred to as a backwoods surgeon perhaps was a blessing. That he was a Surgeon of the Wilderness gave him the indomitable courage to carry out the operation. Strife with the Indian tribes that surrounded him in those tense times endowed him with an instinct for quick decision and instant action. He was unriveted from the domination of universities, from the mandates of superiors, from the precedents of colleagues. He was an independent spirit.

But for Ephraim McDowell and Jane Todd Crawford, the first ovariectomy might have been postponed fifty years. It is estimated that by 1870, 30,000 years had been added to the lives of women who had undergone the operation, to say nothing of the 1,000 years of untold agony that they would have collectively endured.

Dr. McDowell performed thirteen ovariectomies, with eight recoveries, four deaths and one case uncompleted.





Statue of Ephraim McDowell in the U.S. Capitol Visitor Center.

WHAT OF THE MAN HIMSELF? For coolness and dexterity in surgical procedures, Ephraim McDowell had no equal. He was described as handsome, with lustrous black eyes. He was the fastest foot-racer at the University of Edinburgh. He was nearly six feet tall, rather florid, and, later, somewhat inclined to corpulence. Upon occasion he would play his violin. He possessed a fine intellectual mind as well as unusual conversational powers. A temperate man, he occasionally indulged in a sip of cherry bounce, a cordial. In literature, he preferred Scott and Burns, and was a lover of fine horses. He was the father of six children. His son could not see the sight of blood without fainting. McDowell was described as one of the kindest-hearted and most amiable of men, overflowing with cheerfulness and good humor, fond of a spicy joke.

He was a co-founder, in 1819, of Centre College, in Danville. For many years, Dr. McDowell lectured to students at Transylvania University in Lexington, Kentucky, a pioneer western medical school. In 1823, the University of Maryland conferred upon him the honorary degree of Doctor of Medicine.

He died in 1830 in the fifty-ninth year of his age. It seems he had a severe, acute, painful abdomen with nausea, and fever that was fatal within two weeks.

In 1879, the Kentucky State Medical Society erected a granite monument to his memory. In 1929, the Medical Society of Virginia erected a small bronze tablet affixed to a limestone pedestal near his birthplace at Timber Ridge. It states: "Near this spot, Dr. Ephraim McDowell was born November 11, 1771 / The Father of Abdominal Surgery / Beginning medical study in Staunton, Virginia, continuing it in Edinburgh, Scotland. He later received the honorary degree from the University of Maryland. Possessing the highest attributes of the physician and surgeon. He was a pioneer in work which has saved the lives of countless thousands."*

Since 1929, a lifesize bronze statue has stood in the U.S. Capitol's National Statuary Collection, the gift of the state of Kentucky.

At the dedication of Dr. McDowell's restored apothecary shop in Danville on August 14, 1959, it was stated: "The spirit that makes Ephraim McDowell memorable will never be outmoded among men of aspiration and courage. His claim to greatness lies not only in a single, brilliant operation, nor even in pioneering that broader field of abdominal surgery. It lies also in his independent thought, in facing challenging circumstances, in his courage coupled with compassion."

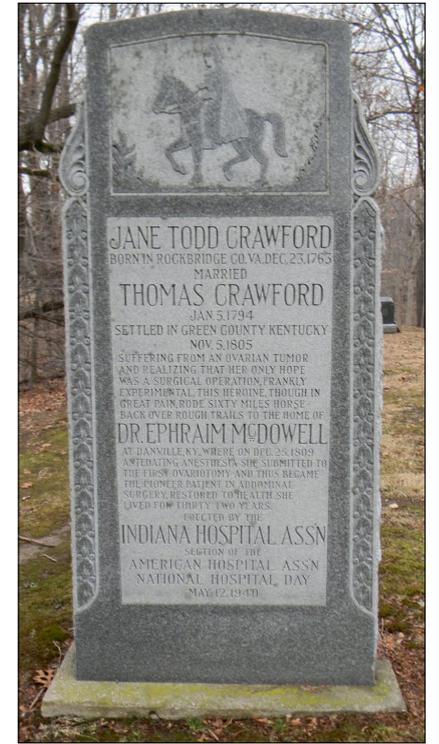
Jane Todd Crawford's eldest son, James, became a Presbyterian minister. James became well known for his missionary work among the Plains Indians, and the annals of the Presbyterian Church contain many references to him. His mother died at the age of seventy-eight in 1841 at his home in Graysville, Indiana. A simple marble slab marked her burial site with this inscription: "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord."

In 1940, a large monument showing a woman on horseback was erected there by the Indiana Hospital Association, and two years later the Kentucky senate directed the governor to proclaim December 13 each year as Jane Todd Crawford Day.

The sixty miles over which the patient rode on horseback to the surgeon's office is known as the Jane Todd Crawford Trail.

In Virginia, in her native county, the women's auxiliary to the Southern Medical Association erected a memorial marker in the Monmouth churchyard in sight of her birthplace. It states: "Jane Todd Crawford / Jane Todd, pioneer heroine of abdominal surgery was born 12-23-1763 just west of here across Whistle Creek, near Todd's Mill. She married Thomas Crawford in 1794. In 1809 she rode 60 mi. on horseback to the home of Dr. Ephraim McDowell in Danville, Ky., where she underwent the world's first ovariectomy. The ordeal lasted 25 min. without anesthesia. She recovered, lived 32 more years and died near Graysville, Indiana. The restored McDowell home is a surgical shrine."†

Jane Todd Crawford and Ephraim McDowell have come to later generations as having possessed courage, skill, determination and bravery, as well as a profound faith in God. They were willing to face death itself in order to prolong life and ease suffering, paving the way for science to save millions.



† See photo, page 2.

* See photo, page 3.

