

History of Surgery

Excerpt from the Illustrated History of Surgery in the United States

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Dixi Crosby (1800–1873) earned his Doctor of Medicine degree from Dartmouth College in 1824 and served as a professor of surgery there from 1838 to 1870. In 1839, he successfully performed a major surgical procedure on a patient with an osteoma, which required amputation of the entire arm, scapula, and three-quarters of the clavicle. Notably, this remarkable operation occurred before the introduction of anesthesia in the United States and was not documented in American medical literature until 1875, when his son, Alpheus Crosby (1832–1877), recorded it. Additionally, Dixi Crosby was the first surgeon in the United States to be a defendant in a medical malpractice case. Although initially found guilty, he was later exonerated on appeal in 1854.

Willard Parker (1800–1884) studied under John Collins Warren and graduated from Harvard University in 1830. After serving for one year as a resident surgeon at Massachusetts General Hospital, he was appointed chair of anatomy at Berkshire Medical College in Pittsfield, Massachusetts. In 1836, he became chair of surgery at Ohio Medical College and later accepted a professorship at the College of Physicians and Surgeons in New York City, where he remained until his retirement. Additionally, Parker joined the medical staff at Bellevue Hospital in 1845 and New York Hospital in 1856. Although he did not publish a surgical textbook during his lifetime, his son posthumously compiled his notes and writings into the work titled "Cancer: A Study of Three Hundred and Ninety-Seven Cases of Cancer of the Female Breast" (1885).

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Figure 1 - Willard Parker (Author's personal collection).

Parker is renowned for his numerous surgical innovations, including the development of cystotomy as a treatment for irritable bladder in 1851. His notable contributions include reports on the ligation of the left subclavian artery, common carotid artery, and vertebral artery (1864), as well as recommendations for early surgical intervention in appendiceal abscesses (1867). The eponym "Parker" refers to a slanting incision made parallel to the inguinal ligament for the drainage of appendiceal abscesses.

Horace Green (1802–1866) is recognized as the father of laryngology in America, being the first physician in the United States to dedicate his entire practice to diseases of the throat. He earned his Doctor of Medicine degree from Castleton College in Vermont in 1824. After practicing general medicine in Vermont for some time, he traveled to Europe, where he developed an interest in laryngology. Between 1840 and 1843, he served as a professor of medicine at Castleton College, and in 1850, he was among the founders of the New York Medical College. He was also awarded an honorary Doctor of Medicine degree from Union College. In 1840, Green made a controversial claim regarding his ability to insert a soft-tipped probe into the larynx for the direct delivery of medication to the laryngeal mucosa, establishing him as a contentious figure in American surgical history. He engaged in vigorous debates concerning his research over the following two decades. Green authored the first American book devoted to laryngeal diseases, titled "A Treatise on Diseases of the Air Passages" (1846), and published significant works on the pathology of croup (1849), the surgical treatment of laryngeal polyps and edema of the glottis (1852), and a practical treatise on pulmonary tuberculosis (1864).

Joseph Pancoast (1805–1882) was a native of New Jersey who graduated from the University of Pennsylvania in 1828. He began his academic career by teaching practical anatomy and surgery in Philadelphia in 1831. Seven years later, he became a professor of surgery at Jefferson Medical College. In 1841, he returned to the chair of general, descriptive, and surgical anatomy, a position he held until his retirement in 1874. Pancoast authored the influential text "A Treatise on Operative Surgery" (1844), which became one of the most widely used surgical atlases in mid-nineteenth-century America. His pioneering surgical procedures included the correction of bladder exstrophy in 1859 and the resection of the second and third branches of the fifth cranial nerve at their exits from the base of the brain in 1872. Pancoast is also credited with developing a specific type of suture used in reconstructive (plastic) surgery, characterized by its tongue-and-groove technique.

Alfred Post (1805–1885), the nephew of Wright Post, completed his medical education at the College of Physicians and Surgeons in New York City in 1827. He subsequently pursued advanced studies in Berlin, Edinburgh, and Paris before returning to New York in 1829 to begin his surgical practice. Post was a founding member of the medical department at the City University of New York, where he held the chair of surgery from 1851 to 1875. His only published treatise, "Observations on the Cure of Strabismus" (1841), is notable. He was also the first surgeon in America to perform and document surgical procedures aimed at correcting eyelid abnormalities in 1842.



Figure 2 - Paul Ive (Author's personal collection).

Paul Eue (1806–1878), originally from Augusta, Georgia, earned his Doctor of Medicine degree from the University of Pennsylvania in 1828. He furthered his education in Europe for three years. Upon returning to the United States, he was appointed professor of surgery at the newly established Georgia Medical College. In 1850, he briefly transferred to the University of Louisville before moving to Nashville University. Eue served as president of the American Medical Association (AMA) in 1857. During the American Civil War, he held the position of chief surgeon of the Confederate Army. His most notable written work is "A Collection of Remarkable Cases in Surgery" (1857).

Louis Dugas (1806–1884) was a distinguished surgeon in the southern United States. After graduating from the University of Maryland in 1827, he pursued further studies in Europe for four years. Upon his return, he settled in Augusta, Georgia, where, in 1832, he co-founded the Georgia Medical College and served as a professor of theoretical and practical surgery from 1855 until 1883. His most significant paper, published in 1856, presented a clinical test for diagnosing shoulder dislocation. He noted that if the elbow joint is flexed and the hand is placed on the opposite shoulder, and the elbow cannot be brought to the chest, this indicates shoulder dislocation rather than a humeral fracture.

Gurdon Buck (1807–1877) also from New York, completed his education at the College of Physicians and Surgeons in 1830. He served as a resident surgeon at the City Hospital of New York for one year before pursuing further studies in Berlin, Paris, and Vienna for two years. Upon his return, he was appointed professor of surgery at New York Hospital, where he remained for the duration of his career. Buck was a skilled and renowned surgeon, authoring the seminal work "Contributions to Reparative Surgery" (1876), recognized as the first significant treatise on reconstructive and plastic surgery in America. His scholarly contributions include influential articles on the simultaneous ligation of the common and internal carotid arteries (1855) and various other ligation procedures involving the femoral and iliac arteries. Among Buck's notable achievements are the successful restoration of a knee joint fixed at a right angle (90 degrees) to a straight position in 1845, as well as performing the first external laryngeal cancer surgery in America in 1853. He also invented a device for applying traction in limb fractures in 1862, and a fascial sheath of the male genitalia, described in 1848, bears his name.

Henry Gassett Davis (1807–1896) was one of a select few American surgeons who elevated orthopedic surgery from its previously obscure status to recognition as a specialized branch of surgical science. He completed his medical education at Yale Medical School in 1839 and later practiced medicine in New York City. His most significant contribution to orthopedic surgery was the description and application of the Principle of Continuous Elastic Extension. He authored several articles on his traction system but left behind only one textbook, "Conservative Surgery, As Exhibited in Remedying Some of the Mechanical Causes that Operate Injuredly Both in Health and Disease" (1867).

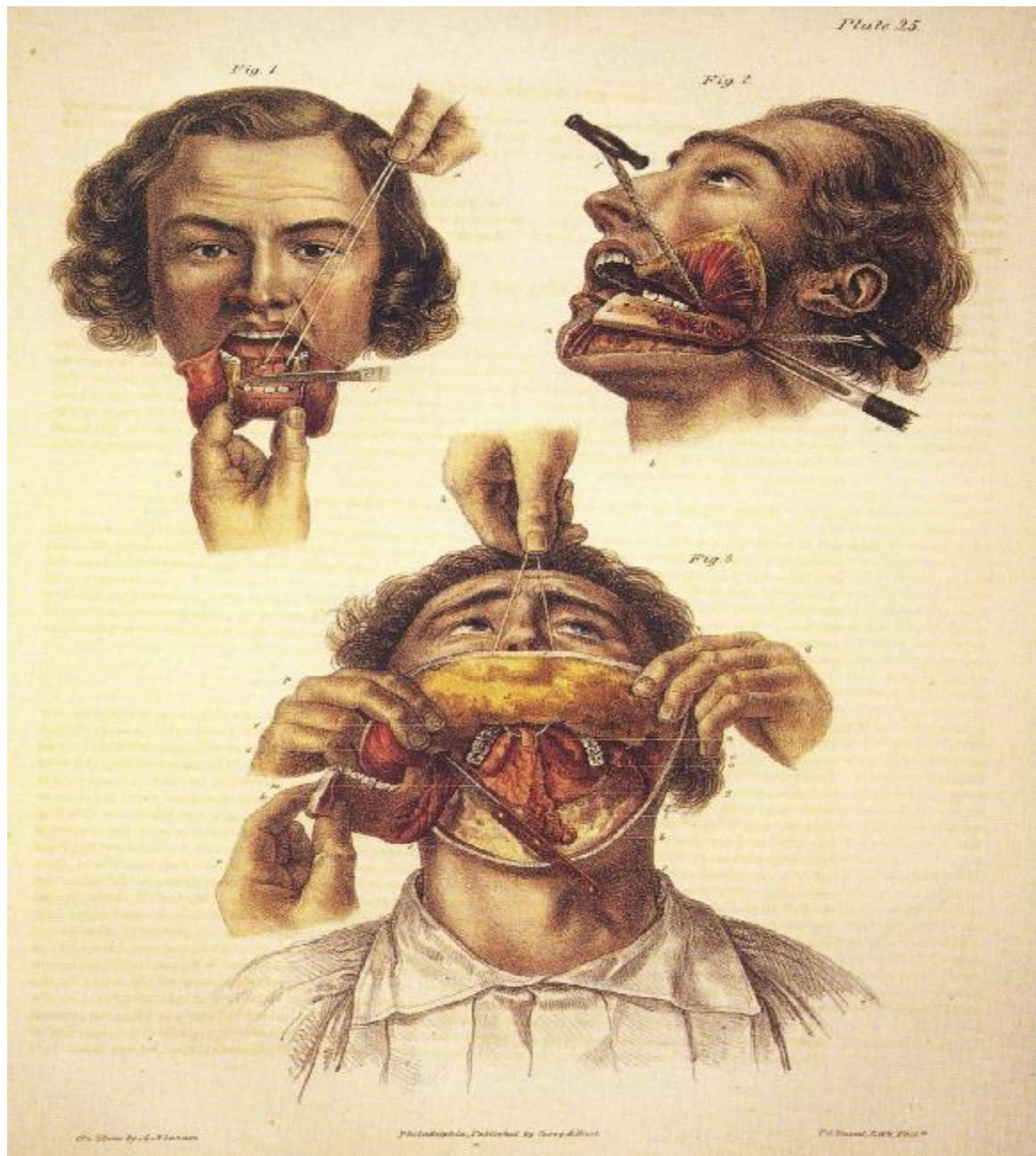


Figure 3 - An illustration of maxillofacial surgery by E. Newsham is featured in the 1844 work "A Treatise on Operative Surgery" by Pancoast. This illustration follows a longstanding tradition in surgical representation, depicting idealized patients as calm, composed, and fully conscious during surgery—an unsettling notion prior to the advent of anesthesia, which was not discovered until 1846, as documented in the historical collection of the College of Physicians of Philadelphia.

References:

1. The Illustrated History of Surgery: Haeger, Knut – Books.
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