



Dr. John Frissell – *Business, Industry and Professions*

Dr. John Frissell was born in Peru, Massachusetts, on March 8, 1810, the son of Amasa and Sabra Wilcox Frissell. He worked on his father's farm and attended common schools until entering Williams College, graduating in 1831. He began the study of medicine that fall, graduating with his medical doctorate from Berkshire College in 1834.

Dr. Frissell arrived in Wheeling, Virginia, on June 3, 1836, and established his medical practice while also teaching botany in Wheeling's schools and lecturing on such topics as temperance, phrenology, physiology.

Soon after arriving in Wheeling, Frissell became noted for his surgical skill. In 1838 he performed the first operation to repair a hare-lip and deformed upper jaw, while the following year he operated on a club-foot. In 1841 Frissell completed an operation for strabismus (crossed eyes) and in 1846 the first operation for kidney stones. In 1853 he became the first surgeon in the state to use chloroform for surgical purposes.

Frissell was instrumental in the development of three hospital institutions in the city of Wheeling. The first – the Wheeling Dispensary – was established in 1845 by Frissell and three other Wheeling doctors. Later that year, Frissell and Dr. Simon Hullihen opened the Infirmary, which accommodated private patients. In March 1850, Bishop Richard V. Whelan chartered Wheeling Hospital – the first Catholic hospital in the state – with Frissell and Hullihen as surgeons and the Sisters of St. Joseph as attendants. The hospital soon outgrew its home on 15th Street in East Wheeling, at which point Whelan purchased the Michael Sweeney mansion in North Wheeling to accommodate up to 150 patients. After Hullihen's death in 1857, Frissell was given sole charge of the hospital.

With Frissell's association with Wheeling Hospital and the Diocese of Wheeling, he likewise served as the attending physician for the Sisters of St. Joseph and the Sisters of the Visitation at Mount de Chantal, as well as the students under their care.

Frissell was the attending surgeon for Union Colonel Benjamin Franklin Kelley, who had been grievously wounded at the battle of Philippi on June 3, 1861. Kelley's wound was considered mortal, but Frissell carefully nursed him back to health, with Kelley living another 30 years and receiving a promotion to Brigadier General. Soon after, Frissell received an appointment as Medical Superintendent of the military prisoners and sick soldiers in the Athenaeum Prison and Wheeling Hospital. He was also named Assistant Surgeon by the Surgeon General of the United States and served as a member of the State Board of Examiners for Surgeons entering military service during the war. He served as Marine Surgeon for the city up to the time of his death.

Frissell was a member of the Ohio County Medical Society, first president of the State Medical Society of West Virginia, and member of the American Medical Association and the International Medical Congress of 1876. In December 1850 he married Elizabeth Ann Thompson of Moundsville, with whom he had two children, Charles M. Frissell, who followed in his father's footsteps as a surgeon, and Walker I. Frissell, who was a scientist and chemist at the Wheeling Steel plant at Benwood.

Dr. John Frissell died at age 83 on Nov. 16, 1893, at his home at 54 – 14th Street and was buried in Greenwood Cemetery.