



Dr. Thomas M. Logan, a Pioneer of Many Talents

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE



By Irma West, MD

THOMAS MULDRUP LOGAN WAS the most widely known of the physicians who came to the Sacramento area during the gold rush. His voyage from New Orleans to San Francisco on a storm-tossed schooner took nine months.

He had practiced in Charleston and New Orleans after receiving his MD from the Medical College of South Carolina in 1828. He was well-traveled, fluent in French, and studied epidemics in Europe, particularly cholera. He was a member of five European medical organizations including the International Medical Congress.

While looking for gold at Coloma, Dr. Logan was drawn to Sacramento to help with the devastating cholera epidemic of October 1850. Subsequently, he became the prime mover promoting badly needed public health measures. He was active in establishing the city and the state Boards of Health and is credited with reviving the State Medical Society, becoming president in 1870.

He was appointed Secretary of the state Board of Health in 1869 and in this capacity hosted the first western meeting of the American Medical Association (AMA) in San Francisco in 1871 where the delegates arrived on the new transcontinental railroad. Dr. Logan was elected president of the AMA at its 1872 meeting when his resolution to acknowledge the right of women to study and practice medicine failed to pass. Dr. Logan was present at the first AMA meeting in 1847.

The office and residence of Dr. Logan were in the Fratt Building, which still stands at 2nd and K Streets. The first and subsequent meetings of the state Board of Health were held there until the Capitol was completed.

Dr. Logan was a prolific writer and an artist, illustrating his medical reports and providing colored engravings of California produce to advertise the State Fair. He chronicled the medical history of Sacramento in many letters and published reports. In a letter to his brother, he described the plight of the 1,300 or more physicians who were among approximately 150,000 gold seekers arriving in the Sacramento area about 1850.

All physicians, qualified and otherwise, were held in low repute primarily because charlatans were fleecing sick miners by charging exorbitant prices for fake services. The poor could not pay for medical care. Doctors could be seen working in boarding houses, monte tables, bar rooms and digging ditches to supplement their earnings.

Much of what is known about the devastating cholera epidemic of 1850 was written by Dr. Logan, who included a touching tribute to all of Sacramento's legitimate doctors who did not flee the city during the cholera epidemic but stayed to care for the victims. Seventeen physicians died in the process.

California's first meteorologist was Dr. Logan, who kept meticulous weather data for Sacramento using instruments provided by the Smithsonian Institution. His records were

accepted by the U.S. Weather Bureau when it was established in 1870.

He studied local topography. He was hoping his data would explain the causes of disease epidemics. Dr. Logan collected mortality and morbidity data for the gold rush area from physicians, undertakers and coroners, becoming the state's pioneer epidemiologist. His information was kept by the state Board of Health and initiated the state's vital statistics program.

Dr. Logan was Professor of Hygiene at the Medical Department of the University of California and held a similar position at Willamette University at Salem, Oregon.

Pneumonitis took the life of Dr. Logan in 1876, following a chill he experienced as he walked home from a Board of Health meeting. He rests in the State Plot at Sacramento's Old City Cemetery with early governors and other State officials. He was survived by his son, Thomas Logan, Jr., MD, who practiced in Columbia, Alabama, and his second wife, Mary Greely. A few years ago, two physicians married to each other visited his grave. They had discovered a common ancestor in Dr. Logan.

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