

# John Frederick Morse, MD (1815-1874)

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Historical Committee

John F. Morse was born in Vermont, studied medicine at the University of the City of New York and, suffering from tuberculosis, he came to California in the hope of improving his own health. He mined gold at Coloma for a short time before settling in Sacramento to practice medicine in 1849.

A man of great public spirit, Dr. Morse took an active interest in everything that affected the community, and participated in a wide variety of activities for the civic advancement of Sacramento. With Dr. Stillman, he operated the first hospital in the City built for that purpose. It was located at 3rd and K Streets (now occupied by the freeway next to Wendy's Hamburgers in Old Sacramento).

Dr. Morse gave generously of his medical services to the large number of sick and destitute, particularly during the flood and cholera epidemic of 1850. He was the first resident to promote public health measures to clean up the city.

Dr. Morse inaugurated a system of health insurance in California through the benevolent Odd Fellow's and Mason's Hospital at Sutter's Fort. For \$100 a subscriber would be entitled to free care anytime during a year. Even with his attempts to promote health insurance, he cared for so many non-paying patients that he was forced to look for other support in order to financially survive.



He entered into several real estate ventures, a medical and drug business partnership with Dr. Thomas Logan, and an unsuccessful run for public office (Clerk of the Supreme Court). Active in politics as a member of the Whig State Central Committee, Dr. Morse accepted the position of Editor of the new local paper, *The Sacramento Union*, in March 1851. He became widely known as a writer and orator. He wrote the first history of Sacramento in 1853.

In 1852 his beloved wife, Rebecca died in childbirth. Their son survived only to die four years later. In 1854 Dr. Morse married Caroline Loney.

In 1863 Dr. Morse moved to San Francisco to become Professor of Medicine at the University of the Pacific, the first medical school in

California and forerunner of Stanford University Medical School. In addition to his teaching, Dr. Morse established a successful medical practice until 1873 when his tuberculosis forced him into retirement. He died December 30, 1874 and was survived by his wife, a son who was a brilliant surgeon, and four daughters. His funeral was one of the largest ever seen in San Francisco at that time. A statue in his memory stands in Mt. Olivet Cemetery in San Mateo County. It was moved from the Old Odd Fellow's Cemetery in 1934.

In addition to the above mentioned activities, Dr. Morse's CV would have included the following activities:

1850- Member of the volunteer fire department, First Vice-president and orator for the Medico-Chirurgical Academy, Founder of the Mercantile Library Association to advance literary and social condition of Sacramento; 1851- Grand Representative to Grand Lodge of 9007; 1852- Master Mason, organized Lodge #40 in Sacramento; 1854- Helped establish the California Farmer and Journal of Useful Science, Served as Director of the Sacramento Society of California Pioneers; 1855- School Trustee for Sacramento, Second Vice president of Sacramento Medical Society; 1856- Chaired the convention to organize a State Medical Society, First Editor of the California State Medical Journal; 1862- Trustee of the California State Library, Member of the Board of the Central Pacific Railroad; 1867- President, California Prison Commission.